

# RealTime

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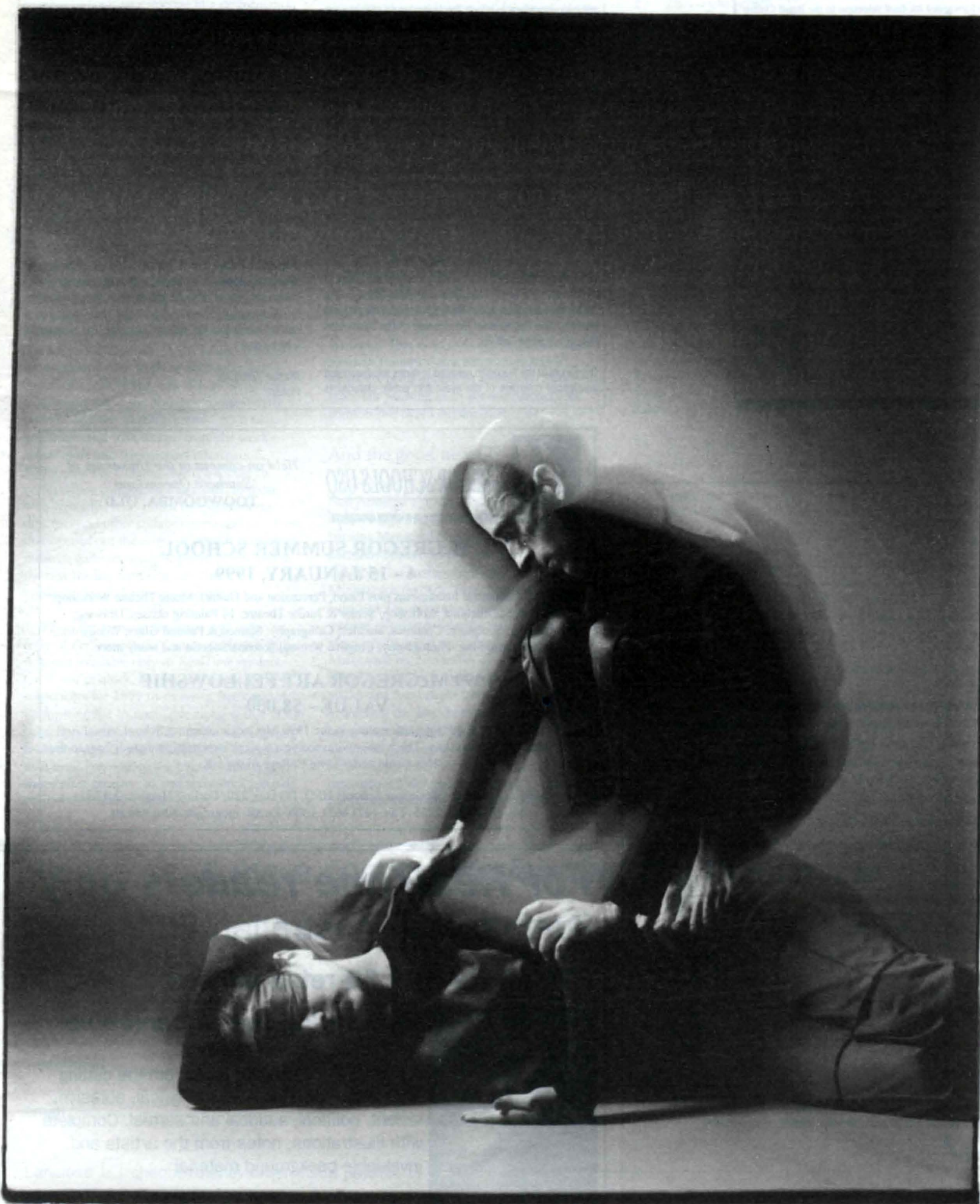
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December 1998-January 1999

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Feature: Performing the Unnameable

Physical Theatre  
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Amanda Stewart  
skadada  
Gravity Feed  
Brisbane Festival  
The Truman Show  
Lucy Guerin  
ARX5 Singapore  
New media in Finland  
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Terror of Tosca  
Sounds Australia Music  
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# A U S T R A L I A C O U N C I L

## NEW MEDIA ARTS FUND

### International Residencies BANFF CENTRE FOR THE ARTS 1 March 1999

The New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council, in collaboration with Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada has developed the opportunity for artists to participate in a short term residency through the Visual Arts and Media Thematic Residency Program at Banff.

Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta, Canada is an organisation dedicated to lifelong learning and professional career development in the arts, advocating interaction and stimulation for artists in a unique, multidisciplinary environment.

The first residency will take place from 4 October 1999. The successful applicant will be involved in a program over 10 weeks with up to 30 artists from around the world.

The deadline for applications is COB Monday 1 March 1999. A short list of applications made to the New Media Arts Fund will be forwarded for final selection to the Banff Centre for the Arts.

For guidelines and application forms please contact Geoffrey Taylor, Program Officer, New Media Arts Fund, on phone (02) 9950 9132, fax (02) 9950 9111, email g.taylor@ozco.gov.au

### Art and Industry Placements CSIRO RESIDENCY 1 March 1999

The New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council, in collaboration with CSIRO, has established an artist-in-residency program with CSIRO Mathematical and Information Sciences. The Division is actively promoting the collaboration and convergence of science and the arts including information technology, communications, film and design.

We are seeking expressions of interest from practising professional artists in all artforms. Priority will be given to artists who can demonstrate that their practice will be of benefit to the host organisation and that the placement will provide timely development for their career.

The placement may be based in Canberra, Sydney or Melbourne and CSIRO, through the Fund, will provide a stipend of \$35,000 per annum. Expressions of interest are to be submitted for projects which should be able to commence on 1 June 1999.

The deadline for applications is COB Monday 1 March 1999.

For guidelines and application forms please contact Geoffrey Taylor, Program Officer, New Media Arts Fund, on phone (02) 9950 9132, fax (02) 9950 9111, email g.taylor@ozco.gov.au

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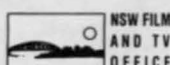


**cover image:** Lucy Guerin's *Heavy*, November 1998

**Dancers:** Trevor Patrick and Rebecca Hilton

**Photo:** Ross Bird Photography

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## Letter

Dear Editors

It was good that Diane Klaosen assessed, in the August/September issue of *RealTime*, the forum that was held in the Republic Bar & Cafe in June of this year on the artistic future of Tasmania. She concluded her estimate of the value of such a meeting by asking where are the working parties and follow-up meetings that ought to have eventuated. The answer is that the desire for such meetings has been expressed to me. Follow up activities will be held later this year especially with the aim of forcing the political parties to take the arts in Tasmania more seriously, to appropriately recognise the contribution they are making to the Tasmanian economy. But activity for the sake of activity is ludicrous. Each step that is taken has to be thought through.

To work constructively for the future requires lots of patience and energy. In writing of politics, that great sociologist, Max Weber, wrote of the slow boring march of democracy. To turn Tasmania's economic demise around, to reinvigorate the city of Hobart and the state of Tasmania will take considerable effort. The forum was a step in such a campaign. Other events and meetings will take place as part of this program.

The forum had some very constructive results. It meant that the idea of the establishment of a Museum of Modern Art in Hobart was raised in a public space away from the art school and with people supporting such a museum who are not employed by the art school. Prior to this the idea had been raised by the art critic and member of the teaching staff of the Hunter Street campus of the Tasmanian School of Art, Peter Hill, in the Spring 1993 issue of *C.A.S.T. News*, the magazine of Contemporary Art Services Tasmania, a magazine that unfortunately is no longer in existence, and in a page length article in the *Mercury* in March 1997. A public meeting regarding such a museum had been held at Hunter Street on 20 April 1998. People attending this meeting included the leader of the Greens Party in Tasmania, Christine Milne, John White, the Australian Labor Party spokesman for arts and tourism, and Pat Sabine, the director of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

The forum at the Republic resulted in radio, television and newspaper coverage of the event and public statements

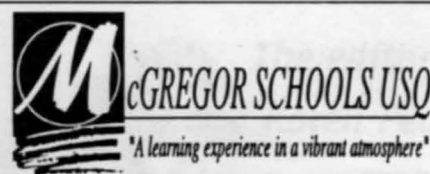
were made following it by members of the committee (which includes Bob Jenyns, senior lecturer in sculpture at the Tasmanian School of Art, the artist Greg Hind, and the accountant Ian Ross, who represents a number of artists in Tasmania) that has been formed to work towards the establishment of a Museum of Contemporary Art in Tasmania. The desire by this committee to establish such a museum in Hobart resulted in significant action by both the Lord Mayor, Dr John Freeman, and the director of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Pat Sabine, who have submitted an application, under Federation funding, to extend the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Such action is badly needed. The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery has stagnated for a considerable period of time despite strong criticism it has received for this inaction. At a meeting on September 20 1990 of what was described as the New Art Gallery for Tasmania Interim Subscriber Group John Freeman said that a brief for an art gallery "should get under way as soon as possible." Despite being a capital city Hobart still does not have a State Art Gallery, even if a statute has already created one, with the arrangement that exists now a subsidiary of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Klaosen asked, in her article, why the Franklins were mentioned in connection with the forum at the Republic. For a period, during the time they spent in Van Diemen's Land, there was a major flourishing of culture. Lady Jane Franklin had a vision of Hobart as a polis, a city of cultural achievement and learning, constructing her temple called Ancanthe near Hobart. In 1845 the first art exhibition was held. Thomas Bock and Benjamin Duterrau assisted in the formation of a local school of professional painters. Louisa Anne Meredith was impressed that "landscape and water colour fever was raging with extraordinary vehemence...in Hobart." (Peter Bolger, *Hobart Town*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1973). A city that had not yet reached a population of 25,000 offered "cosmopolitan learning and company." (Bolger)

Properly focused, much can be achieved in the arts in Tasmania. Hobart in particular is the right size for a city. If enough people of good will can be brought together to work constructively and critically, there could be a real flourishing in the arts in Tasmania. The time could well be ripe.

Michael Denholm  
Hobart



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# Editorial

## Performing the Unnameable

*RealTime* 28 celebrates a major event in arts publishing: the first collection of Australian performance texts. Edited by Karen Pearlman and Richard James Allen and published by Currency Press in association with *RealTime*, the provocatively titled *Performing the Unnameable* pays homage to some 2 decades of significant and innovative engagements between performers and the idea of theatre that have yielded an open-ended form often simply called performance. These works radically juxtapose a range of media, they evolve collaboratively, incorporate audiences into performances and, if they use language, test the limits of the word. The latter is what *Performing the Unnameable* is all about, writing for performance, though it acknowledges in the very layout of the book that text too is an open-ended term, that a number of languages operate in a performance, visual, musical, physical etc. There's some exquisite writing in *Performing the Unnameable*. Because it hasn't had to obey the dictum of art that requires the burying of theme in plot, characters etc, performance and its texts have managed to range from the brutally direct (what we are doing is what it's about, it's unfolding in real time, it's not a fiction) to the poetry of reverie with a singular freedom and without the constraints of requiring immediate intelligibility. *Performing the Unnameable* is a rich repository of the ways that performance texts work: through sets of directions, intense poetry, cut-up, the reproduction of verbatim voices, choral delivery, voice and action out of kilter, repetition and variation, multilingual interplay, and borrowing from other performance modes—the lecture, stand up comedy and the rhythms of everyday conversation. Then there's the subject matter, the frankest you're likely to encounter in the Australian performing arts, rich in everything from the erotic to the domestic to the overtly political and the surreally cosmic. It's a rich, accessible read with images from the works, artists' note and background information. *Performing the Unnameable* is a tribute to performance companies and artists, to those who wrote the texts (often the performers, directors and other collaborators) and to a form that opened out the range of what is possible in theatres, galleries, studios, public places and in the new media, venturing into the unnameable...and refusing to name it.

Fill in the form on this page and order a copy of *Performing the Unnameable* at a 20% discount available only to *RealTime* readers. Or, if you're quick, be one of the first 10 new subscribers for 1999 to receive a free copy of *Performing the Unnameable* along with a 20% subscription discount. Fill out the subscription form on page 22 and mail/fax it to us asap. Or wait until *Performing the Unnameable* is in the shops after January 16 and invest in a piece of current Australian culture.

## Arts Mayhem

First there's the WA ruckus over Arts Minister Peter Foss' attempted imperial takeover of 'his' domain (we know 'arm's length is shortening but this is ridiculous) by proposing to appoint a director-general of the arts ministry who would assume much of the authority currently held by the chief executives and board members of arts companies. Then, speaking of empires, there's the astonishing news that the Australian Dance Theatre Board has invited Ross Stretton, Artistic Director of the Australian Ballet, to set up the next version of the ADT and, though this was vaguer, to consider a merger with the 'financially troubled WA Ballet.' What are they thinking in SA? What exactly do they think that ballet and contemporary dance really have in common? Arts Minister Di Laidlaw's announcement of the Stretton engagement turned out to be a tad preliminary, the AB Board haven't yet decided if they'd like Stretton to take up this interesting little diversion across borders. We wait. Even darker clouds gather with the more than rumoured, impending federal government review of major arts organisations, the opera, the ballet, the galleries and the Australia Council's Major Organisations Fund flock. In its current mood, offering the income from the GST to seduce the states into independence in matters of health and education, what little more might it take, like devolution of Australia Council funds, for the government to make the states think seriously about looking after their major organisations themselves? And what happens then to the clients of the Funds, the small arts organisations and companies and individual artists? Do you keep the Australia Council open for them? This is an over the top, worst-case-scenario rumour doing the rounds and is doubtless being spread by left-wing Labor arts types not wanting us to get too relaxed and comfortable over Christmas. Isn't it?

## And the good news...?

Company B Belvoir Street's Artistic Director Neil Armfield got stuck into the Prime Minister in no uncertain terms in the annual Philip Parsons Memorial Lecture for abandoning bipartisan support for the arts and not providing the moral leadership the nation needs. Federal Minister for the Arts, Peter McGuaran, launched The Australia Council's *fuel4arts* website ([www.fuel4arts.com](http://www.fuel4arts.com)) for artists to glean inspiration for arts marketing. In Melbourne on November 27, McGuaran launched a video featuring "a range of prominent Australians from all walks of life" promoting the arts, including Ernie Dingo, John Laws, Lisa McCune, Max Walker and David Campese. Get merry. We look forward to reporting on the innovative arts across Australia throughout 1999 and celebrating 5 years of publication with our April-May edition.

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Parts 1 and 2 of the RealTime report on The 2nd National Circus & Physical Theatre Conference at the Sydney Opera House

Gravity Feed:

Review:

the complete interview with Alan Schacher about the Sydney-based performance company and his own work  
Josephine Wilson's *Customs* performed by Theatre of Desire



# Words beyond words

An interview with Richard James Allen and Karen Pearlman, editors of *Performing the Unnameable*, the first collection of Australian performance texts

The 7 Stages of Grieving was recently knocked back at a playwriting competition. One reason offered up informally was that it was not a play text but more an artefact of performance; not about meaning through the text as it was on the page but a thing awarded greater and significant meaning when experienced in performance. This was seen as not the realm of a playwriting competition and the award was offered up to a text more fitting the definition of a play. On hearing this explanation, I quietly celebrated our loss and our gain.

Wesley Enoch, Artist's Statement, *Performing the Unnameable*

January 16, 1999 will be a significant day for performance in this country. It will see the launch of the first ever collection of Australian performance texts—scripts, scores, performance strategies, documentation, artists' statements, manifestos. Rightly regarded as a difficult form to document, the editors, Richard James Allen and Karen Pearlman, have wisely focussed on the performance text in its various manifestations—as poem, aphorism, directions, monologue, dialogue with other media, adaptation and deconstruction. It's a relatively large format book which allows for the proper layout of the texts which sometimes do look like scores suggesting performance strategies. Pearlman and Allen have worked at this collection for some 5 years, an intensive labour of love with a skerrick of financial reward. In the same period they have worked with 2 dance companies and had 2 children.

The introduction to *Performing the Unnameable* vividly describes the process of research and detective work and the emerging criteria of selection in putting the collection together, a truly enormous task given the volume of performance works over the last 20 years. While not a history and focussing primarily on the relationship of text to performance, *Performing the Unnameable* is nonetheless a first major step in acknowledging Australian innovation in performance as part of our recent cultural history. The artists and companies documented in the collection are well-travelled nationally and internationally. Their work criss-crosses the boundaries between dance, music theatre, physical theatre, community theatre, film, sound and music yielding significant hybrids in which writing may not play the major role but a more significant one than many of us would have thought given performance's love affair with the body and image. The collection includes work by Richard Murphet, Josephine Wilson and Erin Hefferon, the Ex-Stasis Theatre Collective, The Sydney Front, Kinetic Energy, Entr'acte, Open City, Margaret Cameron, Lyndal Jones, the All Out Ensemble, Legs on the Wall, Jenny Kemp, Kooemba Jdarra, Tasdance/That Was Fast, The Party Line and Sidetrack Performance Group. Richard and Karen are to be congratulated on their commitment to the field, for their determination in seeking out scripts and persuading artists to participate and to reflect on their intentions. Congratulations to Currency Press (with gratitude to the late Sandra Gorman) for their adventurousness in publishing this most open-ended form. *RealTime* is proud to be associated with Currency Press and the editors in this benchmark venture.

RT Why this book, in terms of the field and your personal interests?

RA The field and the personal are mixed up in this because I had been publishing in poetry books the texts which we used as performance texts in our work. I looked around and thought there's a lot of exciting work going on in performance in Australia, and it's not being recognised, it's not being offered the solidity that publication gives and not being given a

chance to work as literature on the page. I'd been in touch with Currency Press in the early 90s about publishing some stuff. They always thought it was way too weird. So at one point I said to them, look it's not just me. I am not alone. And that appealed to Sandra Gorman at Currency.

KP The idea of performance as a platform for new kinds of writing became a sort of thesis of the book.

RT A film script is not as interesting to read as seeing the film. It's even more so with, say, an opera libretto. Play scripts can read quite well but a lot of people find them difficult. What is it about performance writing that makes it interesting or possibly a literature that can stand on its own?

KP It doesn't sit on the page the way a play or film script might. It tends to float. Each text has its own body and shape and that makes for more interesting reading. It takes on its own life rather than being a blueprint like a film script.

RA All the works in *Performing the Unnameable* are different in form. So the architecture of the work on the page is individual and exciting. Then there's the writing which is so different from what you get in film scripts or plays which are often heavily based on narrative, character, psychology...

KP There's also the relationship of words to other media that are used in a performance and how that can be expressed on the page. If you read, for example, the text for Legs on the Wall's *All of Me*, you find descriptions of physical action—very spare and quite eloquent. Then there are Mary Morris' little poetic texts almost floating within those descriptions. If you look at Jenny Kemp's *Call of the Wild* you have quite dense poetic writing. Richard Murphet in *Quick Death* expresses the form of the work in the form of the writing—three columns running down the page with a cross-referencing of action, intention and spoken word.

RA Kooemba Jdarra's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, about Indigenous loss, is very moving and thoughtful; Sidetrack's *Nobody's Daughter*, a kind of metaphysical thriller, is very funny, quite spiky; All Out Ensemble's *Situation Normal...Cut Up* is in-your-face political polemic. Each has a different density and quality. We asked each contributor to introduce their text with an artistic statement which gives you a sense of how the text worked in relation to other equally important aspects of the performance—like movement, projections, design, music and sound. You get a strong sense of how the performance worked. When you then read the text you are playing, you have a performance going on in your mind. It becomes a creative act for the reader.

KP One of our objectives is to open up space. You find that people who identify themselves as interested in literature may never have seen something called "performance"; but if we can identify this as a form of literature it creates a possibility for them to have a look at it and maybe have a look at performance. Certainly people who are already interested in, studying or teaching it will get a lot out of the collection.

RT Although not chronological, and primarily about writing in performance, the collection does invaluable span performance history in Australia from the early 80s, with All Out Ensemble's *Situation Normal*, right up to recent work like Josephine Wilson and Erin Hefferon's *The Geography of Haunted Places*.

RA There's no point in people looking, it as a history book. They'll be disappointed. It's more a series of moments and inspirations across the field as opposed to a narrative. Also

we were trying to work with the medium of the book. This is a book and this collection is a performance of its own, an artwork of its own. That leaves room for someone else to concentrate on another aspect of the work, and on many works that don't involve writing, in another form like a CD-ROM or a book of photographs.

RT The title is intriguing, "Performing the Unnameable". When we talk about music or the visual arts or physical performance we often say they're transcendent because they express things that words can't express. This must come as a shock to poets and others who believe that language can be just as transcendent as anything else and for whom the body can be as tyrannical as language. What is this unnameable that these artists are performing?

RA At the end of *The Divine Comedy* Dante reaches the point where he sees God and he says this is the point where he can no longer describe...and God is what you can no longer describe. So there's a point of ineffability at the moment between where the text and the other media relate in performance. The ineffable is the space outside the text and outside the other medium when they connect.

KP The title lightly makes reference to the unmentionable which might be a source of a lot of inspiration for performance—tackling themes, forms, structures that are not regarded as mentionable in polite society.

RT One strand that's particularly striking is female sexuality, in the works by Jenny Kemp, Margaret Cameron, Lyndal Jones and others. I can't think of any equivalent in conventional Australian theatre or dance.

KP When you name something, you limit it. Plenty of people will say this is a play and that is not a play, because they know the rules, whereas what we've collected is a set of performance scripts. But that doesn't mean that something else isn't or might not have been included if we had unlimited space. In the introduction we have listed some of the attributes of these particular texts in performance but there could be many other attributes. We've named it unnameable in order to say that although we are publishing them we are not establishing a canon, we are not creating the agenda, we are not setting the limits by naming them.

RA Performance is an open form and I guess while we've selected from the first 20 or so years of this work in Australia, we're not saying "that was the metaphysical period" or "see that was the beginning and that's over now." Rather we're saying this is really exciting work which deserves a space. We're trying to open a space for the future. I was listening to David Malouf's Boyer Lectures on the radio and thinking about Australian work and what's interesting about it. We take so many things from different places and put them together in bizarre new mixes without rules and create strange hybrid flowers. The traditions that are interesting in Australia to me are the ones like circus where we're reinventing the traditions and making something fresh. The traditions that are less interesting but have most of the money and the power are the ones where we are doing credible imitations of inherited forms. So we want to say, hold on, we have another tradition and it's more vibrant and exciting than the ones that re-establish themselves more easily through a



Karen Pearlman & Richard James Allen

Heidrun Löhr

chain of funding and power. Performance is a more unsettled tradition. And maybe this is at the centre of the continual debate about Australian identity. We're always trying to name our identity but I think that possibly what's interesting about our identity is that it's unnameable. Every day in Australia we are performing the unnameable. We're inventing ourselves and it's a continually evolving character and nature that we have here. That's what's interesting about living here.

RT There's some powerful cross-cultural experiences to be had in reading *Performing the Unnameable* whether it's in Lyndal Jones comparing Anglo and Mediterranean sexual passions in *Spitfire 1,2,3*, or *Doppio Teatro* with its Greek and Italian accounts of immigrant culture, or *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. When *7 Stages... was at the London International Festival of Theatre in 1997*, we spoke to director and co-writer Wesley Enoch about it as a performance work. Many of its attributes are true to performance's preoccupations—real tears, real fire, real earth, the set as installation, the interplay of biography and fiction. He said, it's just theatre. But it's interesting when Wesley writes about the work in his introduction to the excerpts in your book, he says that the performative power of the work comes from Murri tradition, where forms of expression are mixed together as a matter of course. So for him, that show is an extension of his culture, only incidentally paralleling postmodern performance.

RA I remember when I first saw *The 7 Stages of Grieving* I was beaming with excitement. It was the first piece I've seen that crossed the great divide, the idea that we can never mix the ancient Indigenous culture and the contemporary. In *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, those sensibilities connect. That's why it's such an important work. *7 Stages...* means that there's a possible connection between our unnameable present and our unnameable deep past and it binds the circle of an evolving, dynamic identity for us here.

Richard James Allen and Karen Pearlman have been acclaimed for the text and dance-driven performance and film/video works collaboratively created and presented across the US, UK, Europe and Australia since 1985. They are co-artistic directors of their own company, *That Was Fast*, and formerly of *Tasdance in Launceston*. Richard has published 8 books as a poet and performance writer; Karen is an arts essayist and journalist for publications including *RealTime*, *Performance Research* and *Independent Filmmaker*, and a volume of essays on dance, *New Life on the 2nd Floor*. They are currently developing the *Physical TV* project with ABC Television.

Richard James Allen and Karen Pearlman eds, *Performing the Unnameable*, Currency Press in association with *RealTime*, Sydney, 1999

*Performing the Unnameable* will be launched Saturday January 16 6pm as part of At the Brink, the Third National Performance Conference, Sydney Festival, The Wharf, January 15 - 17 1999.



# Melbourne Festival of the Arts

## Reaching the limits

*RealTime* writers at the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts found much to enjoy in a feast of performances and exhibitions. We present their responses to a selection of works. Elizabeth Drake is impressed by the festival's continuing celebration of Percy Grainger and by Domenico de Clario's performance with piano and family at *Remanence*, the visual arts exhibition which Rachel Kent found expertly curated and movingly effective in its Court and Watchhouse setting. Philipa Rothfield is struck by dance companies with a preoccupation with limits, yielding pleasures and possibilities but revealing just as many limitations of form and vision. Zsuzsanna Soboslay Moore finds Ballet Preljocaj's *Romeo et Juliette* falls short of Shakespeare but she is liberated by the Elision ensemble concerts. Suzanne Spinner is impressed by Arena Theatre's *Panacea* even if concerned about the reach of its vision on the subject of drugs. Contrary to those who found Wesley Enoch's production of *Stolen* (Playbox) a moving experience and innovative production, Spinner finds the work well produced but under-developed, in need of a firmer writer's hand, the kind of strength she saw in Leah Purcell's *Box the Pony*. Richard Murphet also enjoyed particular works but was less certain of the overall picture and worries at the festival's capacity to produce a great program on an annual basis: not an isolated example in a country awash with arts festivals. Read on.

## (IN) THE PRESENCE OF GHOSTS

Electric-Eye, a 60th anniversary celebration of sonic and visual experiments in the spirit of Percy Grainger, Percy Grainger Museum, October 18; Rachmaninoff All-night Vigil Op. 37 (Vespers), Melbourne Chorale Symphonic Choir, conductor Simon Halsey, mezzo-soprano Sally-Anne Russell, tenor Michael Terry, saxophones Tim O'Dwyer, percussion Peter Neville, St Patrick's Cathedral, October 23; *Remanence*, exhibition of installation and performance works, the former Magistrates' Court and City Watch House, Melbourne Festival, October 17 - November 1

The strange insect-like contraption, the Electric-Eye Tone-Tool, invented and built by Percy Grainger the year before he died, stands beside the theremins in the museum dedicated to his memory and vision. To make it sound, you beam light through photo-cells via graphs drawn on a revolving plastic sheet. Percy Grainger had a vision of 'free music' which went beyond the possibilities of the technology of his time. His was an other-worldly vision. A free spirit dreaming of free music. Haunted by the sound of the wind in the rigging of his yacht on Albert Park lake.

The theremin, invented in 1919 by the Russian inventor Leon Theremin, came closest to Grainger's idea of an instrument that could produce his free music—the early theremin resembling something in-between a writing desk and a radio, the modern theremin a thin black box. Grainger wrote 3 sophisticated compositions for multi-theremins. *Free Music 1 for Four Theremins*, *Free Music 2 for Six Theremins* and *Beatless Music for Six Theremins*. The graph-paper score, a colour coded series of waving lines, has been reconstructed and redrawn by Ros Bandt, drawing on her experience of transcribing early music manuscripts.

Jon Drummond stands on the roof of the Percy Grainger Museum at night, playing the theremin. Like a ghost. Hands weaving (waving) in the air around the silver attachments that generate the electro-magnetic fields controlling pitch and volume. Like a magician, standing in front of his black box, performing magic in the air.

It is a strange night, windy and cold. "You wake into the Melbourne of the night..." poet Pamela Brown wrote. We are in the open. Pale faces, overcoats. Hovering in the sky hang 2 white helium balloons, separate at first then joined by 3 ghostly sheets hanging like washing on the line. They drift about in the wind and



Jon Drummond, The Percy Grainger Museum

Ponch Hawkes

change colour, as lights are beamed up from the courtyard below.

While the taped music is playing, the theremin sheet music is flapping in the wind. Somehow it remains attached to the music stand. There is no-one there. The white music flapping in the wind makes it really spooky. Pages turning in the wind. Tonight he is there, in spirit, hovering over the proceedings.

I didn't really think he was there but back in 1967 she (Ella) did really think he was there. In 1967 I had the privilege of performing a piano recital at the Grainger Museum in the presence of Ella Grainger. After the concert she insisted on being locked inside the museum for the whole night in order to "commune" with him, she said. An all-night vigil.

Now in 1998, we hear 20 commissioned electro-acoustic works, using technology he could only have dreamed of, composed in the spirit of his free music. We hear gliding tones, beatless music. The most real presence is that of he who is most assuredly absent. His continued presence assured by the myriad signifiers floating through the space, repeated in the music.

The *Rachmaninoff All-Night Vigil (Vespers)* was performed to a packed audience at St Patrick's Cathedral, by the Melbourne Chorale with guest conductor, Simon Halsey. Though set in the cathedral, it was not the Rachmaninoff which drew me to contemplate the idea of religiosity and mysticism in music. This music did not invoke the gods, the presence of god (for me). Neither a Catholic nor a Russian Orthodox god. This music was of this world, life-affirming, strangely unmoving. Though much of the music is based on plainchant, sacred chant, this is a concert work, an (almost) secular work.

Rather the interludes performed by Peter Neville and Tim O'Dwyer seem more to suggest the presence of (a) god. With their improvisations, they reintroduce the liturgical elements (loosely), as they appear in the Russian Orthodox service. The invocation to prayer. The Russian bells performed on bell-plates of metal, brake drums, circular saw blades, and traditional gongs and tam-tams. The invisible performer playing for 15 minutes before the choir enters. The saxophone player perched like an angel on the balcony at the back of the cathedral, playing from vertiginous heights.

The Rachmaninoff is named an all-night vigil, and I was prepared for just that. So I was surprised to be spilling out of the cathedral at about 1am, just 2 hours after the performance had begun. The all-night vigil belongs to the Russian Orthodox service. The Rachmaninoff music itself takes just 1 hour. It was not an all-night vigil though the mezzo-soprano did need her coat. It seemed a long wait for her, for her curtain call.

The former Magistrate's Court was the setting for *Remanence*, a complex visual art installation and performance exhibition, the work of 14 internationally renowned artists. Coming off the street into the main building of the former Magistrate's Court I follow the passage ways inside the building, inside the body. A series of internal passages. Cells. Once inside it's hard to imagine the city outside.

I enter the inner sanctum of Courtroom 1, where Domenico de Clario is seated blindfolded at a 9 foot concert grand piano, surrounded by his family. Or rather 4 empty chairs allocated to his mother, father, sister and himself. Later they will come in, and sit blindfolded in their chairs. Their talk will replace the sound of the piano. They will talk in their own dialect. The court will become a place of origins, of generations.

The sound of the piano transforms this court into an intimate space. The tensions of the court transformed by the presence of the piano. I am being played to, alone in the space with the figure playing the piano. It is like being read to. A kind of intimacy, unlikely in this setting. Unlikely too for a family to be seated here like this, talking in their own intimate language. A private conversation.

The music is intuitive, modal, direct. There is an almost uncanny quiet. It is the music which suggests a silence. I become aware of a strange thumping. It is probably the sound of the pedal, small sounds made huge by the stillness in the room. An intrusion. A material response to this terrible confining.

I remember the death of the Aboriginal boy, in an adjacent cell, spoken about by Rea in her work *My BLAK (h)Art*, where there are candles lit to his

(and others') memory, transformed into an all-night vigil. We hear a cacophony of voices from within the silence. "A silence turned inside out." (Walter Benjamin).

Elizabeth Drake

## THE LIMITS OF LIMITS

Streb, October 15 - 19; *Trompe l'Oeil*, Nederlands Dans Theater III, October 23 - 25; *Romeo et Juliette*, Ballet Preljocaj, October 19 - November 1, all at State Theatre; *Fleshmeet*, *Chunky Move*, Malthouse, October 21 - 31; *Trial by Video*, *Company in Space*, former Melbourne Magistrates Court, October 22 - 31

Why is it that so many dance works in this year's Melbourne Festival concerned themselves with limits? Streb played with the limits of a body in space, Nederlands Dans Theater III stretched the age limit of the dancing body, Ballet Preljocaj represented the limits of the totalitarian state, *Chunky Move* toyed with the limits of a physical body, and *Company in Space* explored the limits of the flesh/video interface. There is no intrinsic merit to be found in exploring a limit for its own sake. Try bashing your head against a brick wall (QED). No, the exploration of limits must offer something more, some insights regarding its approach.

I think that Streb's performance aspires to greater limits than it goes anywhere near achieving. In a circus-like stream of acrobatic body slams, wall flings, and mattress thumps, 10 or so lycra-wrapped bodies yelled commands, syncopated near-misses, hurled themselves against surfaces and, in the ultimate drama, dived through a sheet of plate glass. In her company manifesto, Elizabeth Streb writes that "Streb isolates the basic principles of time, space and human movement potential" (program notes). Yet the works themselves very quickly coalesced around self-imposed limitations. The speed of the movement was homogeneous, the tension consistent, beginnings and endings arbitrary. Even though we were "introduced" to each dancer by name, age and weight (racetrack data), it was very hard to differentiate their movement qualities. Little challenge was meted out to our conventional sense of a body in space and time. Two pieces call for recognition: *Little Ease* (1985) consisted of a coffin sized box, requiring the dancer to occupy its numerous denominations (this was Elizabeth Streb's signature solo). It reminded me of Nietzsche's remark about our dancing in chains, the point being that strict limitations can be productive. The other piece, *Up* (1995), really did live up to the artistic hopes of its creator. Working on a trampoline, members of the company bounced and caught themselves on high ceiling bars, launched themselves from side platforms and returned to the platforms horizontally, bounced onto the ubiquitous floor mats, and ducked and wove through each other. The timing was magnificent and the sense of up definitely and delightfully achieved.

The appeal of Nederlands Dans Theater III was the age factor: all dancers over 40 and, in one case, 62. Their wit, sense of time and precise interactions gave great pleasure. What was less pleasurable was the superficiality of the works. The brilliance of the vignettes in *Trompe l'Oeil*

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## Realtime at Melbourne Festival

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was tantalising but I refuse to believe that the plethora of sketches was a virtue and not a vice. *Compass* had a metal ball orbit the stage in a circular motion. Sadly, the movement of the ball was more interesting than the dancing within its circuit. *A Way A Lone* rescued the night somewhat. A video screen occupied half the stage, re-presenting the live movement but staggered in time and distorted in terms of speed. This work was dedicated "to somebody no longer here." The question of death inevitably dogs a company of aging dancers. I'm not sure whether the attraction of Nederlands Dans Theater III is that they seem to defy mortality or approach it with grace.

Ballet Preljocaj's *Romeo et Juliette* offered much more straightforward limits, the transgression of which threatened disaster, and ultimately produced the famed tragedy of bungled messages and crushed love. Yet however straightforward totalitarian rule may be, its evocation cannot avoid eliciting fear and discomfort. Although not everyone experienced this work as menacing, I found the set, a Dystopian vision from *Dune*, the not-so secret police, and the concentration camp perimeter with matching German Shepherd, scary. We don't have to go all that far—to East Timor in fact—to reach a comparable regime of intimidation. Angelin Preljocaj's imaginary premise was that the social order excised "the freedom to love", thereby creating a very 20th century setting for this fable of forbidden love and caste war. Not surprisingly, this work has provoked recollections of Nazism, the Balkans, and recently, a remembrance of Pinochet's terror. Oddly enough, and I don't really know why, love did not seem too out of place here.

Chunky Move is renowned for its choreographic vigour and full-on dancing. Its typical audience has many more body piercings per square metre than most other social spaces. How appropriate then that Paul Norton's *The Rogue Tool* used long metal props to support and limit the boundaries of a body. Gideon Obarzanek's *C.O.R.R.U.P.T.E.D. 2* also availed itself of the limit in terms of a stunning, revolving metal shape rather like a satellite dish gone wrong. I was rather disappointed that more wasn't made of the spatial impact of its rotation. The dancers mainly ducked under it when it approached, merely to continue their dazzling kinetic play as if nothing had happened. However, I did very much like the short piece, *Special Combination*, performed repeatedly in a little box-like space in a room not much bigger. A naked body, inscribed by moving projections described lines in space with the surface and volume of her body.

Perhaps Company in Space least merits a discussion in terms of limits. If there is a limit to their work, it is the shifting sands of contemporary video, music and computer technologies. Nor does the company fetishise technology, a project rejected by video artist Bill Viola as doomed to bore. *A Trial by Video* purported to put on trial a number of axes of domination (racism, sexism, political power). Where better to stage such an evaluation than that Gothic meeting place, the former Melbourne Magistrate's Court. Not that questions of domination have ever been of concern to our legal system. Most of the members of the court—Speech, Dissent, Case, Diplomacy and Trial—appeared in person. Incommunicado appeared from outside the court, from London in fact, juxtaposed against live-video images of the local dancers. An odd interaction, yet one more touching than the stiffly orchestrated series of corporate handshakes (Diplomacy) we witnessed in the flesh. But this is a work which interrogates and challenges such assumptions concerning the dominance of flesh over film, of presence over absence.

Must a work of artistic significance always extend or transgress limits? Traditional conceptions of the avant-garde might suggest that great art requires the breakdown of barriers. Yet whether one is inside or outside a limit matters less than the substance of the work and its potential to inform.

Philipa Rothfield

## FULL THROATED EASE

*Ballet Preljocaj, Romeo et Juliette, State Theatre, October 3; A Matter of Breath, soloists of Elision Ensemble, Iwaki Auditorium, ABC, Southbank, October 31; Elision Ensemble, Into The Volcano, conductor Sandro Gorli, Iwaki Auditorium, November 1*

We are not just here, we are before, and after. We are not just now, we are once and future time. Touch me on the skin, backwards, touch only in the now, and I will shrink with you into the smaller time I so crave to be out of. Touch me small, and I will gripe, I will harbour and wallow, call me small, and I will tell you something's wrong. Call me large, into the fullest of extension, and I will dance with you over that tightrope that casts itself into the ocean, and love you for being a small part of the largeness, calling.

Remind me I am small. Preljocaj's beautiful bodies, glossy linen boys, nipple-silk girls, leathered Capulet thugs with biceps from a Darlinghurst gym. They push and shove like starlets do: with a makeup lady's grimace, fakely, thinly, we've seen this before. Oh, not that touch. Please, not that touch. This Bad Boy of Ballet, *Il epare les bourgeois, non?* Melbourne's monsieurs et desdemoiselles fail to clap at peak moments, and I think it's not their fault. Tho' Juliet is vulnerably stunning, Romeo thrusts his body over her like a street-scum rapist in a play by Edward Bond. Those so-close-to-erectile tissues that we are meant to think sex. We are meant to think, *stylish grunge*. Not only do this ballet's moves and turns repeat themselves on old corps de ballet gridlines, but the borrowings are thick (and therefore thin). This is bonking ballet, Aaron Spelling does Bernstein with *Miami Vice* thrown in. Two weeks later on ABC TV, I see Michael Bogdanov's London housing estate cast (*Shakespeare on the Estate*) render Lady Macbeth churning with ambition to escape her ruins, Caliban sipping beer, charting the loss of his hopes, his island dreams, a black Juliet accepting the clumsy whiteboy's proposal in the pub and her dad going apeshit at her in their crowded flat. Outside, he prunes the rose bush as if it was her life. The fierceness of their disappointments and wiry loves. Preljocaj's touch has no love—in fact, no hate. Capulet = Montague. The "let's walk" dance during Prokofiev's strident masked ball segment becomes an Easter hat parade. Shakespeare is larger than this because *we* are larger (and not the other way round).

Oh, there is a nice, a beautiful swing, where Juliet leaps into Romeo's twirling arms. They go so fast, so fast, that their turning smashes the air, the smell of roses breaks, it's a long time before they slow. This captures the once and future time that happens in that awesome moment of love before family clips your edges and you break down. The heavens may smile with lovers, but the earth's crust shrinks when a cliché assaults you. Did I actually hate this show? Perhaps. Perhaps that night, this life, I can't bear to be smalled down.

This is to the point, to talk of consummation, the feared-or-revered instance of being subsumed. But consummation, perhaps, reawakens the accompaniment always about your skin. (When one hand claps, the other silent fingers also drum.)

When you sing, in tune, more than one voice sings in you. When you growl (as Caliban does on his rocky shores), the landscape also growls. There is not just a clarinet, not just a saxophone: even in a solo work, a single note (as when Rosman played Formosa's *Domino*, in Elision's second concert), there is an ensemble playing.

And in *All About* (Manca's 1996 trio dedicated to Mark Rothko), there is not one piccolo, one clarinet, one violin, not these only, or the relationships between each (this is visible, obvious), but each has its own otherness: its about-to-be and what-has-been; its being-in- and out-of-time. A note, a song, slips in from all time (if the note is true). These dimensions are held within a weaving, adjusting tensions, teasing at edges like insects in a web. The tangible geometry of it. This is why I



Romeo et Juliette

Laurent Philippe

can't agree with someone in the audience (Elision, *A Matter of Breath*), complaining Elision should be playing Perezani's joke to us. He wants histrionics, a little, light show. I don't think that's the point: the joke is in the music, the colour is already in the sound. (Remember Synergy in *Matsuri* Mark II in Sydney, where sophisticated slides of the earth's globe turning killed the magnanimous, multitudinous, at times more delicate associations of the sound.) Rather, the matter with the *Breath* concert to me lies elsewhere.

Each piece is progressively less focused on the amassing of statements than on lipping the edges (skin to wood/brass/string; thought to breath) from where sound comes. But such focus perhaps needs more physical intimacy than the Iwaki Auditorium allows. Elision's previous installation works in derelict buildings, old churches, railway yards (Lim/de Clario's *Bar-do-i-thos-grol*; Barrett/Crow's *Opening of the Mouth*) stretched our receptors to sound—mid-night, pre-dawn, brick kiln, underground, making us listen blind, listen tired. Although *Breath*'s pieces asked me to receive small timbres, textures, virtuosités (inherent in even the largest works I've heard Elision play), the podium feels more and more aloof, the lights keep bowing in and out as if the musicians are actors awkwardly teasing us with bows.

It is not my problem with Sunday's *Into The Volcano* at all. From the opening note, solo and ensemble work have consistent hold. The young guest composer Giorgio Netti's *note all'Empedocle* is a modestly magnificent piece by a composer whose knowing marks him as much older. Again and again the ear is led back into a work of quietly astonishing structure, tracking instruments that move through each other as the eye and hand takes in a piece of crystal. Meticulous yet liberating: somehow, suddenly, you are placed half-way down the volcano. Within the complexity lies an intimacy of inclusion. Shape has a pulse, and span-in-time. At one point, Elizabeth Drake and I find our hands conducting in synch, as if we share an arm. These players, strangers, are as close as my breathing allows.

Liza Lim's *The Heart's Ear* stretches and flattens the tuning of notes in a way that slices historical time: windows of different tenses slide in and out over the length of a bar. A sure touch in instrumental combinations, valves pumping and speeding, mellifluous strings with rasping winds. And then, 4 chambers pulse. How is this achieved? A 6 year old in the audience is on the edge of her seat, conducting, eyes a gleam. This concert understands something of the geometry of our listening, being.

I am touched, because touching meets my ear. I can listen (like Keats to the thrush) with full-throated ease. Perhaps this respect is all I ask for the effort of my listening.

Zsuzsanna Soboslay Moore

## BEYOND THE RATE OF NATURAL REPLENISHMENT?

The sheer lack of particularly exciting material in the performance area of the 1998 Melbourne International Festival of the Arts provoked a

number of nagging questions. First: Do we need an annual festival? As with fish in the ocean, surely if we keep pulling out the stock of 'world-class', 'festival-type' theatre, we will reach a stage that is beyond the rate of natural replenishment—at least within the confines of what seems to be the festival circuit. If this happens either time has to be given for new stock to grow, or old stock has to be dug up (as with the remounting of *Einstein on the Beach* a few years ago), or a festival has to get itself off the "international" circuit and look to alternative sources, as the London International Festival (LIFT) has done with its emphasis on some less well-mined theatre cultures, or Utrecht's Festival a de Werf does in focusing on theatre from 'second' cities, or the various Biennales do through highlighting performance work outside the arena of dramatic theatre.

Personally, I am finding the yearly cultural engorgement harder and harder to bear. MIFA should alternate years with the Adelaide Festival and give itself time to plan ahead and the city time to build up some sort of real need. Barely had this year's festival ended than the director Sue Nattrass was off overseas to select work for 1999's feast. The spectacle of a growing band of festival directors crossing one another in the air and meeting in the same foyers around the world is becoming increasingly bizarre. Ms Nattrass is no fool. She needs time and money and a charter to discover the works that will illuminate the world for us and to develop works from Australia that otherwise wouldn't see the light of day. The latter is becoming a vital role for Australia's festivals as other funding sources dry up. This was made clear to me when I attended a showing of various works in progress to a range of Australasian festival directors, organised by Robyn Archer and held in Adelaide.

Here was a group of intelligent men and women, most of them artists as well as arts bureaucrats, holding in their hands a powerful financial tool, an alternative to the normal channels of state and federal funding. It is only through this source, it would seem, that independent works of some degree of magnitude and artistic risk can be mounted. It's a hot chalice they hold. The second question is becoming a chestnut these days: What is it that makes a festival show? Or to put it another way: What is it that the festival phenomenon is doing to our apprehension of theatre? One show after another with hardly a break, no time to absorb and reflect. I was struggling to retain the remnants of *Disco Pigs* (a show by 2 young Irish performers I enjoyed and wanted to dream about) by the time I had seen the other Irish entry, *The Secret Life of Constance Wilde* (a show I disliked on all fronts) 2 weeks later.

Moreover what is it that 'lifts' a show from fringe level to the main festival? The most dynamic show I saw in the whole festival period was legitimately part of the fringe—*Infectious* by Maude Davey and Marcia Ferguson. In its strange mix of cabaret, musical, surrealist dream and political tract it worked gloriously in challenging aesthetic, intellectual, generic and politics norms. It was perfectly placed within the fringe context, and yet that very placement can be a marginalising constraint to those concerned, constantly struggling



Bruce Gladwin & Genevieve Morris in Arena Theatre's *Panacea*

Jeff Busby

for a voice at the big end. At the big end, Sue Nattrass had this year a commendable policy of supporting shows previously from the Fringe, or otherwise destined for it. And it has to be said that these small cast plays with limited parameters were the most rewarding of the performances on show—*Disco Pigs*, *Red*, *Odyssey*, *Box the Pony*. Compared to their bravery of performance and single-minded obsession about the public and private justices and injustices of life, the Abbey Theatre's *Constance Wilde* stank with pretension, wallowed in maudlin melodrama, shook with its need to impress and drowned in unbelievable histrionics—and Gesher Theatre's play on the early years of the state of Israel (which I had seen in London last year and enjoyed) seemed, well, plain tired and, well, plain. Even so as I watched some of these upgraded fringe-dwellers, I wondered what they were sacrificing to justify the attention.

*Red* is a show that I have watched in wonder as it developed from student project to Melbourne Fringe, to Adelaide Fringe and finally to MIFA. The participants have kept working on it, taking the opportunity of each rebirth to metamorphose the show. Its final transformation at MIFA was beautiful. Director Rachel Spiers has a fine eye for theatrical image and the performative energy and delight in her audience displayed by Lucy Taylor have been mentioned in all reviews. But somehow for me something had been lost in the upgrade. The details of lighting, props, sound and, yes, performance, added in with the extra funding and the development of the content in ways that made more sense of the whole were the very elements that had begun to add a self-consciousness that undermined the sheer existential necessity of performance that had so charged the play in its earlier forms. I grant that this is likely a prejudiced reception. But I couldn't help sensing even in the undeniable force of the 2 performers in *Disco Pigs*, lashing out against the world as they headed towards a personal showdown at the cusp of adulthood, a dislocation from origin that tends to make a mockery of the creative spirit that is at heart of such works.

And from here I spiral right out into, yet again, the purpose of such international festivals, with their culture-hungry consumerist drive. One of the subthemes of the 1998 MIFA was the question of postcolonial power. But surely festivals are one such confused symptom of our fraught relationship with other cultures. I do want them in some form (I'm caught up in this)—I love to know what's going on around the world. But we need to keep questioning the unspoken assumptions festivals carry and to seek ways of breaking their cultural bind at the same time as we rejoice in their encouragement of the weird, wild, wonderful and the brave.

Richard Murphat

## FORMS AND CONTRADICTIONS

Arena Theatre, *Panacea*, devised by Rosemary Myers & Bruce Gladwin, director Rosemary Myers, writers Julianne O'Brien & David Carlin, *The Former Police Garage*, Russell Street, Oct 16 - Nov 1; *Stolen*, devised by Jane Harrison, director Wesley Enoch, *Playbox*, *The Malthouse*, Oct 21 - Nov 30; Leah Purcell, *Box the Pony*, devised by

Scott Rankin, director Sean Mee, *The George Fairfax Studio*, Victorian Arts Centre Oct 20 - 24; *Red*, devised by Lucy Taylor, Rachel Spiers, Mark Shamon, director Rachel Spiers, *Red Fish Theatre Company*, *The George Fairfax Studio*, Victorian Arts Centre, Oct 28 - 31

*Panacea* promised and offered much—a thoughtful and well written script of ideas and issues and fully articulated characters to carry them, original and exciting live music/soundscape, taut and pacy direction, good multimedia design and an excellent ensemble of performers. It had it all but I couldn't help going away concerned that it had evaded the real issue. It was all very clear about the horrendous effects of performance enhancing drugs in sport and in particular their effects on young still developing bodies, but it confined that critique to Eastern Bloc countries and in the second half it was savagely satirical about the marketing of the Sports Celebrity in Australia today (viz the remaking of Lucy Tyler-Sharman—"High Voltage Cyclist Peddles New Image"). Largely these issues were the soft targets and they were demolished, but there was another major issue caught up amongst it all, designer drugs and recreational drug use amongst young people; on that it was strangely silent. All I could deduce was that it feared alienating its intended audience. I was disturbed by what was implicitly endorsed rather than pleased at what was exposed and knocked down. By employing all the resources of, and utilising the aesthetics of techno, it ignored any other way of being contemporary; the form endorsed the content it was claiming to critique. It was all a rave and the baddies were the East Germans and Big Business, so let's party on!

The premiere of *Stolen* and the first Melbourne performances of Leah Purcell's *Box the Pony* and Deborah Cheetham's *White Baptist Abba Fan* provided an opportunity to compare and contrast contemporary Indigenous theatre. *Stolen* has had a phenomenal success at the box office, testimony to the interest in the issue it tackles. Despite the emotional and social potency of the issue I found it diffusely sentimental and oddly unaffectionate. The script and many of the performances lacked specificity and depth; perhaps *Stolen* tried to cover too many stories to get deeply into any one of them. It felt like it had been written to satisfy a committee, to represent ideas and interests rather than embody them and it lacked the writer's individual take on the issue. The design and direction were stylish, sophisticated and seamless; they created an almost impenetrable surface concealing a hollowness of meaning and contact. The effect of *Stolen* was more in terms of the knowledge one brought to it than the insights and emotional experience one got from it. The testimonies in the Report on the Stolen Generation have moved all Australians who have read them, yet *Stolen* did not move me as I expected it could.

A work like Leah Purcell's *Box the Pony* is absolutely a piece of theatre made by an actor with a writer and a director. It is Purcell's story but with the collaboration of writer Scott Rankin and director Sean Mee they have made art, powerful theatre from her life in a complex and confronting tour de force. Purcell's performance is so exceptional in its physical grace, the wit and

timing of her transformation from one character to another, the virtuosity of her acting, it is difficult to imagine the show without her. Yet, *Box the Pony* could be done and done well by say Deborah Mailman or Ningali Lawford, which testifies to its power as a dramatic monologue, separate from its undeniable power as a one woman show. Purcell is an extraordinary actor, utterly in command of herself and her performance at every moment. I found a comment in one review which referred to her as a "phenomenal mimic" quite offensive in its devaluation of her craft as an actor. It was by turns hilarious, tragic, deeply spiritual without ever being precious, serious but never earnest, and fantastically complex in its articulation of the pushes and pulls of growing up as a young Aboriginal woman. It sparkles with the veracity of lived and reflected-on experience. I can't wait to see more of her—she could do anything; she already has.

*Red* was first seen at the Melbourne Fringe last year, where it was awarded "best original new work" before touring to the Adelaide Fringe this year. I wish I had seen the original version to capture the raw talent of young performer Lucy Taylor rather than noticing the flimsiness and banality of the ideas. It was one of those works that deserved to be in and win the Fringe award but was done a disservice by transferring to the mainstream. It's become overblown and over inflated and can't sustain the context it was placed in at The Fairfax. Lucy Taylor's performance is as wonderful as no doubt it first was, but it is so heavily buttressed by so much else that it is superfluous—indifferent slides, a whole gaggle of musicians and a couple of unnecessary male performers. It is short and runs out of heat because it tries to carry so much else. To have left it with Taylor, a soundtrack and just the superb lighting and costuming would have been enough. Unfortunately what was fresh and exciting now seems arch and overworked, losing its wit and playfulness. Some things are better left, to free the creators to move on to new work.

Suzanne Spinner

## MEMORABLE UNEASE

*Remanence*, Visual Arts Program, former Melbourne Magistrates' Court and City Watch House, Melbourne, October 17 - November 1

Traditionally the visual arts have been a somewhat neglected area in the Melbourne Festival program. Maudie Palmer's appointment as curator of the program brings new life to the 1998 festival, however, and establishes the visual arts as a key feature within it. Comprising the group exhibition *Remanence*, a major display of Bill Viola's video installation *The Messenger*, a public lecture series (see Kevin Murray on the Bill Viola lecture, page 23) and associated exhibitions program, Palmer's visual arts program brought together a diverse array of exhibitions and events at venues across Melbourne during October.

*Remanence* was the key feature in the program. Curated by Palmer and comprising works by 14 leading Australian and international artists, the exhibition was situated in the former Melbourne Magistrates' Court and City Watch House. De-commissioned in mid 1995 and now a part of RMIT's city campus, these venues provided a potent environment in which to display works. Artists responded directly to the site, producing 2 and 3 dimensional works that addressed the authoritarian architecture of the buildings and their former purpose as places where justice was dispensed.

Themes relating to power and control, alienation and intimidation, and visual and sensory deprivation were explored by some artists while others addressed Australia's colonial/convict history. Several participating Indigenous artists addressed issues relating to Aboriginal imprisonment, deaths in custody and racial abuse, while Australia's migrant history and cultures formed a focus for other artists. Situated within the empty offices and sentencing chambers of the court, and in the disused cell blocks and exercise yards of the watch house, the exhibition's overall effect was of fascination coupled with unease. Added to this, the lack of light, the stale smell, and the oppressiveness of bars and padlocked metal doors all conspired to make *Remanence* a

disturbing and memorable experience. Graffiti on cell doors and walls—including one unforgettable, scrawled description of a cell as "the love shack"—added a particularly macabre note. On viewing this, I was reminded of a friend who, after being locked up in the Watch House overnight some years ago, vowed never to fall foul of the law again in light of the appalling conditions and potential physical threat posed to him.

Given the very powerful nature of the Court and Watch House, both architecturally and psychologically, some works were less successful than others on visual and conceptual levels. Such was the case with installations by Imants Tillers and Mladen Stilinovic, both of which were located in disused office spaces in the court house. Cai Guo-Qiang's video projections of gunpowder explosions and fireworks, although spectacular, also looked slightly lost within the commanding space of the court room in which they were situated. Other works responded to the sites with great success however, combining sensitivity and pathos, grimness and bleak humour. Aleks Danko's performance and installation piece, *Songs of Australia Vol.5—Life Sentence*, involved the artist writing one sentence over and over again in chalk upon the floor of the cell block as a punitive act, each day, for the duration of the exhibition. Commencing with the statement "This punishment is not boring and pointless" on the first day of the exhibition and culminating, at its conclusion, with "I will not waste chalk", the piece emphasised the futility and monotony of confinement through ironic wit. A padded cell formed a second component of the work, Danko's presence suggestive of the archetypal 'madman' let loose from his confinement.

A performance piece by international participant Marina Abramovic similarly dealt with issues of confinement, while introducing elements of sensory deprivation and physical restraint. Located in the former women's exercise yard of the watch house, Abramovic's *Escape*, like earlier pieces by the artist, drew upon the voluntary participation of viewers in its realisation. Volunteers were strapped into upright metal restraints by uniformed 'escape guards' for 15-minute periods, their experience of physical confinement and isolation intensified by wearing ear muffs. Devoid of movement and sound, obliged to contemplate their incapacitation, participants experienced a voluntary solitary confinement accompanied by sensations of fear, loneliness, claustrophobia and boredom.

Elizabeth Gertsakis focused upon the migrant experience in Australia, drawing metaphoric parallels between the migrant and the outsider, alien or criminal. A large wall-text by the artist, overlaid with a map of Australia, referenced this country's colonial past while highlighting entrenched racism and xenophobia amongst sections of the community today. Rea's installation in 3 disused remand rooms also focused on issues of race and Aboriginal deaths in custody, an altar of burning candles symbolising both remembrance and extinguished lives. A weathered sign above the door—"city morgue"—evoked grim mental images while the narrow proportions of the space discouraged prolonged contemplation.

On a more restorative note was John Young's installation, also within the Watch House, titled *I Global Sanctuary*, *2 Night Room*, *3 Day Room*. Young's piece comprised a photo-realistic painting of a mountainous waterfall set into a niche in a purpose-built circular room. Described by Young as presenting "a short, concentrated moment of rest, where the body is suspended within (a) space that is static", the work offered a rare moment of calm and beauty towards the conclusion of the exhibition. Another sanctuary was offered by Domenico de Clario who performed, blindfolded, on a piano daily during the exhibition.

In its scope and scale, *Remanence* represents an ambitious achievement for Palmer and the Melbourne Festival. Other components in the visual arts program—notably Viola's video installation at the nearby Old Melbourne Gaol, and the public lectures program—were similarly successful. *Remanence* is accompanied by a substantial catalogue publication, documenting works and performances by the participating artists.

Rachel Kent



# Brisbane Festival of the Arts

## A tough fit

*RealTime* writers Maryanne Lynch, Kerrie Schaefer and Andy Arthurs take us on an incisive, whirlwind tour of the 1998 Brisbane Festival, discovering works that engaged them and raising some key issues about performance, audiences and festival programming. Maryanne Lynch kicks off with virtuoso violinist-composer-improviser John Rodgers, admires IHOS Opera's visual and technical ingenuity, with reservations, and takes in video and sound installations, visual arts exhibitions and lectures, enjoying the contagion of the festival despite the unevenness of the works. Andy Arthurs focuses on both the pleasures of the music program (The Steve Martland Band, Michael Kieran Harvey, Linsey Pollak, composer Thomas Adès on piano) and its limitations—the narrow band of music presented. Kerrie Schaefer is impressed with a range of works offering rich themes and strong performance imagery including *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*, Shared Experience Theatre's *Anna Karenina*, Kooemba Jdarra's *Black Shorts* and Mathilde Monnier's dance work *Arrêtez, Arrêtons, Arrête*. Lynch and Arthurs both wonder about the range and categorising of events—the continuing problem of isolating innovative work in the ironically titled and sometimes underpublicised 'Public Program'. This is, as Lynch puts it: "a place where all the works that don't seem to 'fit' into traditional categories reside."

## A FEVERISH IMPULSE

John Rodgers *Quartet*, *Tattersalls Club*, September 8; IHOS Opera, *The Divine Kiss*, QUT Theatre, Gardens Point, Sept 16 - 19; Streb, *Suncorp Theatre*, Sept 15 - 19; Richard Vella, *Body Songs*, Tivoli Theatre, Sept 10 - 12; Arterial, *Dust*, Brunswick St, Fortitude Valley, Sept 9 - 13; Kooemba Jdarra, *Black Shorts*, Metro Arts Theatre, Aug 28 - Sept 5; Theatre UpNorth, Ozone, Cremorne Theatre, Sept 8 - 12; Swarm, *Institute of Modern Art*, Sept 12 - 19; Griller Girls, *Institute of Modern Art*, Sept 12 - 19; Pushing the Imagination, *Merivale St Studio*, Sept 17 - 20; New Landscapes, *State Library Theatre*, Sept 16 - 17; The Impossible Promise of Protection, *Brisbane City Hall Foyer*, Sept 14 - 18

It was at my very first festival show that I began to think about audiences. John Rodgers, a local composer-musician, was having a recital, if I can put so formal a name to it, in a place definitely deserving of the term. The Tattersalls Club is one of those mysterious institutions where you have to do a secret handshake to get in; a 'club' hidden behind the detritus of several decades and against which I've previously only pressed my figurative nose. On this occasion we were allowed inside, past the reception desk, through the hallways with their walls groaning with photos of long-dead dignitaries, and into an art-deco salon where Rodgers and his colleagues played us a program of composed and improvised music.

As I looked around, I spotted a lot of faces I didn't know but recognised as 'musos' or musophiles. In a city of 1.5 million, audiences are always of interest and especially so at the experimental end of things. In a festival context, this interest is all the more absorbing in terms of seeing what the 'net' pulls in. I was in for some surprises and some disappointments over the course of the next 3 weeks. Meanwhile, the John Rodgers Quartet played its little heart out in a jazz-influenced, hot-to-trot style.

At the other end of the Brisbane Festival was *The Divine Kiss*, the latest work by IHOS Opera. Tableaux filled with lush imagery and surprisingly sparse sound loosely tracked the 7 virtues in an unfinished work that shows the influence of 'European' theatre artists such as Robert Wilson. Each virtue explored the dualism inherent to it, with the 7 parts punctuated by miniature triplanes, wingtips lit, rising and falling as morse code beat out urgent messages. The staccato sound found resonance in the stave-like shadows, created by the plane wings, in the curtainfolds of this university

theatre space. Meanwhile, men pissed, women played ping-pong, and a dress unfolded itself to make a flower-edged pathway.

I must confess that I tired at one point of yet another display of technical ingenuity, and wanted more from the aural composition, but I suspect that these issues will dissipate when the work is fully formed. *The Divine Kiss* was the closest thing I saw to a 'festival show' and, interestingly, the audience was the most diverse, with buns, bobby socks and Blundstones. A strong choice from one of the strongest components of the festival: the so-called Public Program—a place where all the works that don't seem to 'fit' into traditional categories reside.

At *Streb*, an evening of works by the American dance company of the same name, the high-voltage publicity had done the job of collecting a young crowd. The whambam style—bodies wallowing flat on the ground, accompanied by loud and grating industrial sound—explores the laws of physics, especially the tension between fall and flight. The audience on opening night loved it and enthusiastically joined in the 'interactive' exercise run by founder Elizabeth Streb at the end of the show. "Stand up straight", she instructed, and they did. I, however, wanted this exploration to find more textures and rhythms. Although Elizabeth Streb has talked at length about her interest in sport, and its relationship to art, by the end of the night I couldn't help thinking that she was only into American football in its fiercest definition. Similarly, her work on muscular, rather than skeletal, movement is fascinating and gives the works a potency that is physically felt. But I didn't see enough layers of bodily and/or artistic exploration, although there were moments...that first shocking fall...a woman trapped in a box, her useless blows reverberating through the space in a truly cyberhuman moment...the sheer courage of the 8 dancers. There's unfinished business here.

So too with *Bodysongs*, a new 'operatic' work by Melbourne company Theatreworks. Staged in the Tivoli Theatre, a space that plainly didn't suit it, a space moreover that its likely audience of hip young things doesn't frequent, this ambitious piece came across as underdone. Composer Richard Vella, librettist Humphery Bower and director Rob Meldrum have an interesting if well-worn concept—body image—but were still making the show when I saw it. The lusty 'fat man' of the title sang songs of lament and lard-stricken anguish, accompanied by a band straight from a B-grade movie and with tongues firmly in cheeks, to a solid but unspectacular mix of 'music people' and the odd interested other. The audience responded with graceful yet obvious surprise to the show's incomplete form—a grab-bag of woolly singing and musical influences that didn't go far enough to anywhere. This kindness seemed appreciated.

Other works, like Arterial's *Dust*, Kooemba Jdarra's *Black Shorts* and Theatre UpNorth's *Ozone*, also felt prematurely produced—a common lament at Australian arts festivals. The most successful, *Dust*, featured wall-high projections (reminiscent of Ian de Gruchy's work) and video installations in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane's 'Sin City', a place that's seen it all. Old diggers, Indigenous 'aunties' and a cool young Chinese-Australian woman were among the many who recounted stories of the past and present in videoed snippets projected over stills mapping future plans for the suburb. The technologies entailed were a logistic nightmare, and this limited their potential interaction. Nonetheless, *Dust* was a project that drew together the curious passersby, the arts audience and assorted others—and, to my mind, in so doing worked a treat. For this piece, at any rate.

I fell in love with Ed Osbourne's *Swarm*, a sound installation at the Institute of Modern Art. A gentle Cage-like work comprising miniature electric fans sensitive to movement, which in turn activated constructed sounds, this was a space in which to stand silently among tiny shifts in aural



Streb

architecture. Between the colour and fury of much of the festival fare, such meditation was a welcome interlude. Upstairs, *Griller Girls* disappointed me with its unreconstructed 70s feminism cast in 90s technology. Employing digital, video, CD-ROM and photographic means, most of the works played it safe ('Girls are good') and left it there. It seemed a popular show.

The innovative international symposium on aesthetic education, *Pushing the Imagination*, together with the Visual Art Program's (VOLT) 2 afternoons of discussion, *New Landscapes*, reminded me of the importance of debate in a festival context. *Pushing the Imagination* again raised the issue of audiences, seeking to explore the relationships between art, education and society in a 'live' context by way of 3 festival works. Meanwhile, Jay Younger's *The Impossible Promise of Protection* suggested that when it comes down to it, all we can say is that we're up to our necks in it, her video installation projecting viewers' heads onto a gorgeous mound of pink poo, or flummery if you're an optimist. This type of work has a long legacy, which speaks for itself.

I sat, walked and slept through 22 shows in 24 days. I didn't see the same faces very often, and indeed usually felt as if I was entering a new colony of spectators with each show. And as I sat in a *New Landscapes* session, listening to a man with a long and distinguished history in Australian performance speaking to only a handful of people in the State Library Theatre, I wondered afresh about the nature of audiences and ideas, about whether a cross-pollination of audience members was more or less desirable than specific audiences for specific events, and what the function of festivals is in all of this. What has remained with me, so perhaps it's some sort of response to myself, is the inspiration I gleaned from engaging with a diversity of practitioners, despite the uneven quality of the works. Some may call this sentiment mere flummery, but I prefer to think of it as festival fever. And I hope it's contagious!

Maryanne Lynch

## THE SAFE AND THE BRAVE

Michael Kieran Harvey *Recital*, Customs House, September 10; Thomas Adès *Recital*, Customs House, September 9; Thomas Adès *Powder Her Face*, Masonic Temple, September 8, 10 & 12; Steve Martland Band, *Suncorp Theatre*, September 7 & 9; IHOS Opera, *The Divine Kiss*, QUT Theatre, September 16 - 19; Treble Clef Cafe, *Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra*, City Hall, September 5; *The Academy of St Martin in the Fields*, Concert Hall, August, 28, 29 & September 1

Nowhere is the high art/low art divide more

entrenched than in the music disciplines. At least 95% of the music-going population find meaning in a music which is dismissed by the other 5%. And yet when it comes to most festivals it's mainly this 5% that gets all the attention. And apart from a few exceptions, Brisbane Festival did little to heal this separation.

In addition, musically this was a festival that followed rather than led. There were many items of interest by way of being innovative. But in terms of publicity they were stifled by the weight of museum music, self-importantly described as "fine music." The unofficial theme seemed to be "From England" even if in one case they were playing much 19th century German repertoire. This was the visit by the Academy of St Martins in the Fields. True, a few students of the Conservatorium were able to get valuable experience working with the orchestra, but for what was rumoured to cost around \$1m you'd expect some benefit. We could have paid for all the students to fly to the UK for a more authentic experience.

There were 3 festival programs (apart from the *Out of the Box* children's program), which were roughly divided according to class, first being mainly the overseas events and the third being the (great unwashed) "Public Program." The third was the group which received the crumbs of publicity. Why does all this bother me? Because in such a festival I'd hoped to proudly celebrate the sheer weight of creation locally and around Australia.

Steve Martland (England) did fulfil all his promise. Too brash for the 'elite' and too 'arty' for the commercial world he won over a dedicated group of supporters who returned to see him again on night 2 at the Suncorp Theatre. His sound is up front. The Steve Martland Band is a group of 11 musicians playing metronomic, minimalist and yet curiously sometimes militaristic sounding music. But Martland's commitment to left wing politics would certainly not see him being a guest at the Tattoo! Martland is a great communicator and he left the city with many converts.

Also from England was the enigmatic Thomas Adès. His opera *Powder Her Face* was briefly on at the Conservatorium owing to a mix up of venues. It was a good but slight piece, postmodernist in concept but mostly musically modernist in style. Dubbed as the next Benjamin Britten, he sounded more like his brother than his son. Adès lives in his own verbally inarticulate rarefied atmosphere and the subject matter of an aristocrat down on her luck was also remote. However his solo piano playing at the Customs House was a highlight of the festival. Adès possesses a delicacy of touch in his interpretations that were almost sacred.



The *Treble Clef Café* in the City Hall hosted 4 new orchestral works by Australian composers. It started with Sculthorpe's *Sonata No. 3 (Jabiru Dreaming)*—a well crafted work but not great Sculthorpe. This was followed by Julian Yu's *Concerto for Marimba and Small Orchestra*. This must be music that is easier to compose than to play. There were beautiful sonorous moments in the second movement, but overall it was a little fragmented. The only work which really came to life orchestrally was Robert Davidson's *Strata*. No gimmicks and disarmingly simple, it was a beautiful slowly unfolding piece influenced by Indian music. The evening ended with the first performance of *trance...DAKAR* by Gerard Brophy. A piece of vitality and energy, it was popular with the audience, featuring Evelyn Glennie on percussion. Brophy is of his time and personifies the crisis in orchestral music. Here he was composing grooves performed by musical 'squares' who missed the point. He needs to make the jump and form his own band or ensemble, like Steve Martland or Robert Davidson with Topology. His current ideas will be catered for better in that more appropriate forum.

IHOS Opera Experimental Theatre Troupe performed at the QUT Theatre, Gardens Point. It was a collaboration between IHOS director Constantine Koukias and Access Arts. *The Divine Kiss* is an ambitious and sensitively constructed work. Billed as "an Opera in Seven Parts" it explored the imagery associated with the Seven Saving Virtues (as opposed to the Deadly Sins). Unfortunately the end result was a series of tableaux that seemed to speak more for the technology supporting them than for the work itself. I became punch drunk with special effects, and confess to leaving the theatre at the end wondering what was the point of the work. Technology is a dangerous thing when it takes over the humans involved.

Pianist Michael Kieran Harvey gave a stunning and virtuosic piano recital at the Customs House and was joined by Liam Viney at the Conservatorium for a performance of *Mantra* for 2 ring modulated pianos, a relatively early electroacoustic work of Stockhausen (1970). It was strange to hear the unpredictable results of ring modulation again.

The public program had much to offer. Linsey Pollak's *Bim Bamboo* in the City Botanical gardens was very well attended and well received. As a performer in it I can only speak subjectively when I say that Pollak is one of Australia's finest creators who can move across styles and genres without losing his essential quality. He has stuck to the pathways he chooses to tread and his work keeps getting better.

The festival offered a very wide range of events—too wide perhaps. There was little to focus on and the timetabling was impossible, bringing new meaning to the phrase 'non-linear.' Much was buried in one of the 3 programs, and many missed events because of this confusion. For instance I chaired a forum on "Culture and the Community—A Contradiction in Terms", where the panel members outnumbered the audience.

Unlike Adelaide, there was little sense of it being a festival time. And Queensland's Woodford Festival is more festive. It seems that the word is now used for any groupings of events. Certainly there was no binding cultural, spiritual or political reason for the Brisbane Festival to exist.

Andy Arthurs

## INTERSECTING PERFORMANCE PATHS

Queensland Theatre Company, Beaumarchais, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Optus Playhouse*, Sept 3 - 19; *Shared Experience Theatre*, *Anna Karenina*, *Suncorp Theatre*, Aug 28-Sept 6; *A Beautiful Life*, *La Boite Theatre*, Aug 28-Sept 12; *Kooemba Jdarra*, *Black Shorts*, *Metro Arts Theatre*, Aug 28 - Sept 5; *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*, *Institute of Modern Art*, Sept 1 - 6; *Expressions Dance Company and Hong Kong City Contemporary Dance Company*, *Attitude*, *Conservatorium Theatre*, Aug 28 & 29, Sept 1-5; *Streb*, *Suncorp Theatre*, Sept 15-19; *Mathilde Monnier company*, *Arrêtez Arrêtons Arrête*, *Conservatorium Theatre*, Sept 11 - 16;

In a long rectangular space, 3 white squares are arranged into the shape of a pyramid—one square in front and 2 behind. The shrill hum of cicadas and the squawking of crickets occupies the aural space. One of the white squares is filled with sand and a body is buried underneath, resting in a supine pose, an upside down bucket covering the head and neck. Only the feet and lower arms are visible. As the hiss of insects increases in volume, the foot slowly begins to move. It repeatedly flexes and curls in slow luxurious movements. The foot lifts and the leg emerges from the sand. It curls, writhes and twists like the body of a snake. The foot, the snake's head, darts from side to side. It moves to strike. The space is transformed into a hostile environment simulating, perhaps, the hot summer's day that the Beaumont children disappeared.

Did a snake in the grass take the Beaumont children? Or was it a freak wave that carried them far out to sea? An arresting piece of performance in the Brisbane Festival VOLT program, *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* co-written by Maryanne Lynch and Shane Rowlands and directed by Fiona Winning, did not provide easy answers. Rather, it examined the urban myth that has grown up around the disappearance of the 3 children from a popular Adelaide beach in the middle of summer. Written for solo female performer, Rebecca Murray, *Baby Jane* brings together 2 stories of 2 people living 30 years apart (1966/1996) who are equally obsessed with the children's disappearance.

At one moment Murray plays a 9 year old girl negotiating the boiling hot beach sand or getting dumped by a huge wave. The next she is transformed into a 39 year old woman in a sheer white dress and red shoes, standing on the porch waving goodbye to family or friends. The girl wonders how many buckets of sea water she can swallow in case her pet dog is taken by a freak wave. She practices her speech to strange men who may want to entice her into a car with boiled lollies. The woman, we discover, lives in the Beaumont house and spends her time scouring the place for traces of the missing children. She toys with height markings etched into a wall in red pen. She finds 3 embroidered hankies in a crack in the wall, each a different pattern indicating the distinct personalities of the owners. Her phone rings but there is no one on the other end. The woman takes this, together with the traces she has uncovered, as a sign that the children are still present. She explains her theory over the phone to the host of a talkback radio show.

The poetry of the text was enhanced by the design of the performance space and by Rodolphe Blois' soundscape. The final sound-image of a giant wave crashing over the audience, left us with an accretion of images (debris) to pick through and make sense of. In this way, *Baby Jane* explored the poetics of urban myth making.

Headlining the festival's theatre program were a new adaptation by Neil Armfield and Geoffrey Rush of Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro* for the QTC, and an adaptation by Helen Edmundson of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* for the UK's Shared Experience Theatre. While both productions were outstanding, it was Shared Experience's physical style of performance that stole the limelight. Edmundson's text juxtaposed the stories of Anna and Levin. Present on stage for much of the performance, their clipped responses to each other's questions served to set the scene and create a fluid, fast moving performance. The semi-circular set with a sliding central panel made for a flexible performance space. With the panel fixed in the middle, the performers sometimes played out 2 different scenes simultaneously. In one scene, Anna, centre stage, carried on a dialogue with both Vronsky and Karenin, who entered and exited through separate doors created on either side of the sliding panel. Anna being sandwiched between the 2 men, gave concrete form to her growing distress.

The performance also put many sequences of stylised movement and repetitive gesture to good effect. For instance, in the racing scene Vronsky is placed amongst the race crowd. His mount is played by Anna and as the crowd watches the race we see Vronsky ride Anna into the ground. The train that Anna falls under is a line of chorus actors performing a choreographed dance. At the height of her fever, a chorus actor personifying death covers Anna. She has to struggle with the

actor before she can regain her health. Frustrated in love, Levin shovels sand over and over into a suitcase while extolling the virtues of work. Unable to be with the man she loves, Anna repeatedly knocks back vials of morphine signalling her spiralling addiction to the drug.

La Boite's *A Beautiful Life* by Michael Futcher and Helen Howard was based on the Iranian embassy riot in Canberra in 1992 and the ensuing court case. In an attempt to speak back to calls for refugees to assimilate into Australian society, the writers interrogate the way in which culture indelibly inscribes the citizen's body, particularly through imprisonment and torture. They argue that it isn't possible to simply shrug off one set of cultural inscriptions, values and experiences and to assume another. Given the importance of such a project, the script for *A Beautiful Life* still needs further refinement. The focus for the performance should have remained, as it began, on the son of adults arrested in the riot. Born in Iran and brought up in Australia, he acts as a point of translation between 2 very different and distinct cultures. His struggle to understand his parents' and his own position within Australian society would have provided a better treatment of the dramatic idea than the long exposition of the family's life in Iran or the lawyer's slow dawning realisation of the links between justice, economics, trade and diplomacy.

A strong tradition of storytelling continues to be nurtured by Brisbane's Kooemba Jdarra. The company's festival piece, *Black Shorts*, presented 3 short plays by new Indigenous playwrights from around Australia. Glen Shea's *Possession* (dir. Lafe Charlton), Jadah Milroy's *Jidja* (dir. Margaret Harvey) and Ray Kelley's *Beyond the Castle* (dir. Lafe Charlton) represented a range of Indigenous experiences and perspectives and, in the diversity of stories told, engaged a broad audience.

*Possession* is a clever piece of writing that unravels to reveal a particularly shocking incident, which scarred the members of one family. The play explores the impact of incest (father-son) on the lives of 3 siblings, 2 brothers and one sister. It delivers a jolt to the audience's sensibilities as we are forced to witness the elder brother's fierce anger, the younger brother's utter shame and humiliation and their sister's desperate attempt to hold onto some semblance of a vital, young life in the making. Towards the end of the play, even this possibility is foreclosed as we learn that the characters inhabit the spirit world, having been hung for the murder of their father.

A devastating performance by Margaret Harvey as the sister in *Possession* was followed by her directorial debut in *Jidja*, a compact piece of writing, weaving a number of stories into the tapestry of an old, Aboriginal woman's life. From a chair centre stage in a house bordering the Catholic home she was sent to as a child, an old woman (played by the accomplished Roxanne McDonald) tells her life story directly to the audience as if we are old, intimate friends. She remembers her happy early years, living together with her sister, bought up by their grandmother. She recounts her grandmother's death, the girls' placement in a Catholic home, and her life long search for the sister she was separated from when she was adopted out to a white family. In this piece it was the performer's warmth and friendly intimacy as she related what was a tragic, yet not uncommon story, that I found disarming and extremely upsetting.

*Attitude* by Expressions Dance Company and Hong Kong City Contemporary Dance Company, *Streb* by the Elizabeth Streb Company and *Arrêtez Arrêtons Arrête* by the Mathilde Monnier company were major works included in the festival Dance program. Of the 3, the French production, created for the 1997 Montpellier International dance festival, was the most engaging and exciting. Elizabeth Streb's choreography lacked the texture that Streb claimed for her work when she said that it investigates "the tension between volition and gravity imposed by structures which are at once physically



Roxanne McDonald in *Jidja* (Black Shorts)

Melanie Gray

confining and liberating." *Attitude*, choreographed by Maggi Sietsma, explored images and vignettes taken from the different cultural histories of her dancers through a combination of sound (music by Abel Vallis), image (video projections by Randall Wood), and dance. Sietsma used the space creatively, choreographing the dancers on multiple stages. But she was unable in the end to meld her ideas and these different performance media into an integrated dance work or to achieve the audience interaction that the opening scene—a 'Simon says' routine—attempted. Integration was one of the main strengths of *Arrêtez, Arrêtons, Arrête*.

Mathilde Monnier's choreography for 8 dancers was accompanied by a live monologue written by Christine Angot (an English translation was provided in the program), performed by a comedian. The text addressed the difference between the beauty and balance of dance and the ugly, obsessive discipline of the dancer. Set in the round, the dancers and comedian performed in close proximity to the audience creating a continuous space between performer and spectator. The comedian spoke in an intimate tone and addressed the audience directly. The performers also interacted with the set itself, a simple steel frame held together with suspension cables which made it an extremely flexible structure that moved with their bodies as they pushed or crashed against it. Monnier's choreography consisted of a series of singular repetitive gestures, which signified individual everyday obsessions. Through this the dancers suddenly found openings into more expansive movements, usually performed in pairs. With the tension between the opposed pairs of light and shadow, text and movement/gesture, space and set, performer/dancer and audience, Monnier and her company created a complex and confronting work that addressed the inner struggle to move through self-imposed confines.

Kerrie Schaefer



Shared Experience Theatre, *Anna Karenina*



# Opportunities for immersion

RealTime makes its selection from the 1999 Sydney Festival program

Two works in Leo Schofield's second Sydney Festival will immediately grab the attention of those interested in the limits of contemporary performance. Joseph Nadj, the Lebanese born director of the Centre Choréographique National d'Orléans is bringing his adaptation of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*. Originally a series of dramatic fragments *Woyzeck* (1836) has been interpreted in many different ways including Berg's opera and transported into a South African setting in a disturbing puppet version with film animation by William Kentridge at the 1996 Adelaide Festival. The festival publicity declares that Nadj's interpretation "defies categorisation. To some it may seem like a movement piece, to others a work of physical theatre. At times, it could pass as an art installation, at other times for a highly formalised piece of mime." Apparently, Nadj is admired by Pina Bausch who invited him and his company to participate in her own company's 25th anniversary celebrations in Wuppertal in October this year.

The Netherlands Opera Company is performing the 1640 Monteverdi opera *The Return of Ulysses* in a production which has yielded praise in Europe and across the US for its potent minimalism, its expressiveness and the ways forward it shows for opera in the 21st century. Director Pierre Audi's approach is determinedly experimentalist. He is quoted in the press release as saying, "Opera is really a very free form, but it's been hijacked by convention and tradition and packaged into this iconographic art form which is a vehicle for stars and so on. I decided to approach it from an opera way, with the question why do I love opera and what makes opera vital to a young audience today." At the same time Audi links hands with tradition: "What we're doing is very close to what it was like originally, an event without a conductor, a very small orchestra and the singers' personalities as the prime movers of the whole thing."

One of the big successes of the 1996 Sydney Festival were the pageant performances with fireworks on the Opera House Forecourt by the remarkable Els Comedians who led a riotous march through the thousands who attended and danced (when there was room) with fire-breathing dragons and demons and giant phalluses. For 1999 the company will parade from The Rocks to the Opera House in *Jauja Mediterranea*. Again fireworks and explosions and live music will feature as will an adventurous audience encouraged to wear old clothing that protects head and body from sparks. This time the theme is marine, an evocation of ocean-going and underwater adventures with pirates and sea monsters with 50 local performers joining the company. If past experience is anything to go by, try to attend as early as possible in the season before the crowds swell up over the 8,000 mark.

Also on the performance front a rare Australian contribution, Perth's skadada with *Electronic Big Top* (see interview page 11), a techno-circus of new media and physical feats. Also bridging contemporary performance forms, Meryl Tankard's Australian Dance Theatre mixes aerial physical theatre with dance in *Possessed*, one of the crowd grabbers at this year's Adelaide Festival (*RealTime* 24, "Various Gravities", page 33). This is dance as exhilarating spectacle together with live music from the powerfully amplified Balanescu Quartet perched on giant metallic wine vats, in a work "inspired by the 1936 Berlin Olympics and Leni Riefenstahl's photographs of the event."

RealTimers will not want to miss video pioneer Bill Viola's *The Messenger* at the Art

Gallery of NSW. Commissioned by Durham Cathedral, this is a giant projection of a continuous video loop of 28 minutes that "traces the slow surfacing and sinking of a nude man in the water." Hopefully the gallery will provide enough space for the contemplation such a work requires and that a church encourages. Viola's work was seen in the recent Melbourne Festival where he also spoke (see page 23). Water is one of Viola's key artistic themes. Dare we say it, perhaps a watery theme for the festival, almost, in *The Return of Ulysses*, *Jauja Mediterranea* and *The Messenger*.

On the subject of immersion, this festival offers some unique opportunities and like the Monteverdi, probably a once in a lifetime occasion. The French pianist Philippe Cassard will perform all Claude Debussy's piano works in one day for over 6 hours. Cassard says "it takes time to enter (Debussy's) world. This is exactly the reason I play everything in one day."

Schofield's love of opera and singers is well-known and celebrated not only with the visit of the Netherlands Opera Company, the first by an international opera company since World War II, but also in featuring some of the giants of the form in bass baritone Bryn Terfel and soprano Galina Gorchakova in solo recitals. Also singing in concert are Andreas Scholl, one of the most acclaimed of counter-tenors, Salsa queen Celia Cruz from Cuba, Broadway star Patti LuPone and pop-jazz star Holly Cole whose repertoire includes jazz standards, Tom Waits and Joni Mitchell songs and who is hilariously billed courtesy of a Canadian newspaper review as "part-seductress, part schoolgirl." Whatever, she's a fine singer certainly worth seeing and hearing.

The music program also features one of the UK's leading exponents of 20th century piano music, Joanna MacGregor. With the "young and vigorous" (according to the *LA Times*) SSO, MacGregor will play Duke Ellington's *Harlem*, his *Black brown and beige suite* and both the Gershwin and Lou Harrison piano concertos. This concert is part of the \$10 Proms and also includes Denmark's Peter Doerge leading The New Jungle Orchestra, a big band with jazz foundations but inflected with a remarkable range of world musics, especially from China as on a recent CD (and in his exquisite compositions for Hotel Pro Forma's latest, *The Chinese Compass*). Other Prom events include Ensemble Bash, a highly regarded UK percussion group in works ranging from Corea, Skempton, Fitkin to Senegalese ritual drumming; The Dufay Collective playing music from the middle ages; and the Australian Chamber Orchestra presenting William Walton's *Façaade* performed by the composer's widow, Lady Susana Walton, and John Bell narrating the Edith Sitwell poems. And on the same program, Bernard Hermann's music from *Psycho* and *Fahrenheit 451*, Takemitsu's score for Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* and pieces by Walton from the film of *Henry V*. Hopefully this more adventurous programming of the Proms (and some much more aggressive publicity) will attract the audiences it warrants.

One of the festival's major events is the visit by the London Symphony Chorus conducted by one of the great orchestral and choral conductors, Richard Hickox in Walton's mighty *Belshazzar's Feast*. From the epic to the intimate: Marshall Maguire has curated a series of recitals from Cézanne's favourite composers. This chamber music series will play nightly at twilight in the context of the Cézanne exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW. Also on the music program, more aggressively, The



Nederlands Opera, *The Return of Ulysses*

Gogmagogs in *Gigagain* feature 7 string musicians in "a spicy mixture of styles and traditions from Arabic improvisation to Western electro-acoustic and big band blues, collaborating with composers from Madagascar, Iceland, US and UK. One of the show's highlights will be Mike Westbrook's *Cable Street Blues* where the players, watching an imaginary screen, register the peaks, troughs and nerve-jangling horrors of the film." Director and deviser Lucy Bailey asks in the press release, "why are classical musicians so often detached and seemingly unwilling to take responsibility for communicating with the audience? If this real connection between performer and spectator is possible in the theatre and in pop music, it must be possible in contemporary music." Also exploiting the physical and the theatrical is percussion group Taikoz playing Japanese drums and shakuhachi featuring members of Synergy and Pablo Percusso, and Riley Lee plus lighting designer Damian Cooper, sound designer Phil Murphy and O-Daiko, a 300 kilogram Japanese drum that can yield vast sounds both awesome and meditative.

On the theatre front one of the great successes of the 1996 Adelaide Festival, the Young Vic Company's *Grimm Tales* presents a collection of stories by the Brothers Grimm which apparently makes none of the concessions of George Miller's revised and tamed *Pig in the City*. This production designed for children and adults alike gets back to the horrors of the original Grimm tales. Company

B Belvoir will present UK playwright David Hare's work about Oscar Wilde, *The Judas Kiss*, directed by Neil Armfield; and 4 international one-man shows will explore the limits of the craft ranging through tales of murder (Daniel MacIvor's *Monster*), a royal funeral (David Benson's *Nothing but Pleasure*), low-life in New York (Danny Hotch's *Jails, Hospitals & Hip-Hop*) and a retirement home *Hamlet* (Kerry Shale's *The Prince of West End Avenue*). Several hundred Australian performers from theatre, film and performance will gather for 2 days *At the Brink*, The Third National Performance Conference, to discuss issues aesthetic and economic, to workshop with new technology at Fox Studios, and extend their craft.

There's much more to the festival—Canada's Cirque du Soleil, a Warhol show at the MCA, international furniture design from 1850 to the present at the new Customs House and public sculpture at the Botanic Gardens. In this Sydney Festival, Schofield casts his net typically wide. While still sidestepping ideas and themes and studiously ignoring local talent, this festival is certainly more adventurous on the performance and music fronts than his Melbourne festivals or first Sydney venture.

1999 Sydney Festival January 2 - 26, Festival Ticketek 02-92664111, www.ticketek.com.au



# The circus upside down and back to front

skadada to premiere festival commission, *Electronic Big Top*, in Sydney and Perth

Katie Lavers, skadada co-director, in an email interview with RealTime outlines the company's vision for their new work in terms of physical theatre, design and new media.

RT *Electronic Big Top* represents a significant expansion of resources for skadada. Why such a big leap from soloduo live performer(s) interacting with sound and visual technologies?

KL *Electronic Big Top* is an extension of previous work, a continuation of skadada's interest in multi-artform work and collaboration. It combines dance, circus, live music, computer manipulated and generated sound, songs, computer animations, interactive elements and stories in the same way that our previous show *boop!* did. The only new element in this show is the inclusion of some puppetry. The change of scale and the inclusion of more performers is possible because this show is a commission from the Festival of Perth and the Sydney Festival.

KG We associate skadada with dance as a primary element. Why now the shift to the circus/physical theatre terrain?

KL Dance is still a pivotal part of *Electronic Big Top* and in this show there is much less text, the performance is primarily physical. I suppose you could say that we are interested in the convergence of different media and the collapse of previously distinct boundaries between disciplines. This also applies within the realm of physical skills. It is very exciting to see trained dancers start to be able to work in a different spatial dimension—Meryl Tankard has been incorporating flying into dance pieces for over 5 years now, Chrissie Parrott has used flying in a number of pieces including her wonderful *Terra*, and there are I'm sure numerous other examples of companies expanding their movement vocabulary both in Australia and overseas.

We are also working with an amazing aerialist, Hélène Embling, who is from France and has worked with circuses throughout Europe. She has been living in Perth for the last 7 years. She has taught the dancers all their aerial skills and is also performing in *Electronic Big Top*. Jon Burt is working with Hélène to draw on her circus training and skills to develop the movement choreographically. Her circus skills are being extended to incorporate some of the features associated with dance.

KG The Sydney Festival press release quotes Jon as saying the show "uses high voltage physical performance to explore the extraordinary dark and dangerous world of dreams."

KL We were interested in exploring the space of a surreal dream circus. I think in many ways there is an interesting parallel between the position of traditional circus in relation to conventional society and the space that dreams occupy in relation to the quotidian, for example the space of the excluded, the excitement and adrenalin of the forbidden and a space for black and dangerous humour.

KG What is it about the circus metaphor that appeals? Will the design and performing space echo the circus/technology conceit? What will be the audience's relationship to the performance?

KL In *Electronic Big Top* we are, as you say, playing with a conceit of circus so we are referencing the tradition and idea of circus rather than trying to create an actual circus. In the design we have tried to reference a notion of evolved and mutated



Chris Rickson, Margrete Helgeby & Claudia Alessi, skadada, *Electronic Big Top*

Philip Paratore

circus through an aesthetic of inversion. In the development of the set design by Andrew Carter we looked at old photographs of the insides of traditional Big Tops which often had ribbed structures creating shapes like pinnacles and domes within the tent. Andrew took these and inverted them to create sculptural shapes which jut from the roof of the theatre down into the performance space. These forms are transparent and will become visible only when filled with dry ice which will then drift down into the space through holes in the tips of the forms. The entire grid over the stage is covered with lights in different configurations that will light up like a Big Top around these inverted shapes.

Ideas for the staging of the show developed through conversations with Hélène Embling and Mark Howett, the lighting designer, and draw specifically on Hélène's experience in circus. She said that watching circus people working and pulling ropes was for her as much a part of the excitement of circus as watching the performers. Through conversation with Mark Howett, the idea for incorporating this into the lighting design has led to an approach to staging where all the 'magic' happens at the back of the stage.

The normal convention of the theatrical space where all the business and mechanics of theatre happens unseen at the back of the space while the 'magic' happens at the front has been inverted in this production. At the front of the stage the mechanics involved in flying people will be seen, as will the dresser helping people in and out of costumes. You can also see the grid above the stage with all the technicians in it. The traditional circus apparatus used in the show is pushed up front, near the audience, so you can see the effort and the sweat involved in the intense physicality of the work, while the traditional theatre 'magic' happens in the middle and at the back of the space.

RT What about your own role? Can you describe it in some detail in terms of collaborator, co-director and especially the technological challenges and thrills—the creation and triggering of visual elements and their relationship with sound.

KL Jon and I worked together to develop the concept and structure of the show. This was the hardest part of all—it may sound simple now but it involved weeks and weeks of intense discussion and writing. The next thing that had to be done was to create the publicity for the festival brochures and TV ads. I had to pull together a team of people to do this, working from what we had developed so far, which at that stage was quite limited—creating marketing materials for a show which we had not yet made!

The approach to making work that skadada has developed asks for intense involvement at all sorts of levels. In this show we have worked with electronics engineers to develop laser percussion and a new, more responsive interface for our interactive body suits. We have decided to limit the interactive technology to triggering sound and maybe some lights this time round. Interactive technology can be really time-consuming and we wanted to concentrate more fully on other aspects of the show.

With the live music component, we decided that we would like a small combo that played tangos and sambas throughout the show. This involved writing the songs. I wrote the lyrics and then worked with Jon and the musicians Cathie Travers, Lindsay Vickery and Rachael Guy to develop a structure for the songs which would work with the performance elements. This process was fun, we all really enjoyed it. The musicians are really pleased with the songs and we would all like to create some more songs and put out a CD. Jon and I both worked with the percussionists to develop live percussion that would enhance the performance and with John Patterson to develop the computer sound for the show. We also worked with Andrew Carter to develop the set design.

We were lucky enough throughout the year to have several sessions with Mark Howett in the theatre at the WA Academy of Performing Arts to experiment with different ways of getting video projections into the theatrical space. Our involvement with WAAPA as Artists-in-Residence will enable

us to spend 3 weeks in the WAAPA Theatre in December developing the lighting in situ with Mark. This is a unique opportunity as usually a lighting designer has to draw on productions they have lit before, design the show on paper and then put it together in the space in a few hours in the bump-in.

I have also spent time developing costumes with designer Karen Keeley, experimenting with different shapes developed from the idea of corsets—we were interested in the idea of the ropes in corsets and the way they mirror the ropes in the set. The look of the costumes allude to a disintegrating technological future (cf *La Jetée*, *Brazil*, *Twelve Monkeys* and *Dark City*) but also references the strange silhouettes of figures in big hats and coats that can be seen in a lot of the old photographs of circuses that Andrew Carter found.

I've worked with Troy Innocent on the development and look of the computer animations and with Peter Wilson on the puppetry sections. I also go as often as I can into the studio to work with Jon on the movement material which I really enjoy. When I can't get into the studio I look at the material done in the studio on video in the evenings. As you can see it is pretty full-on, but it is really rewarding.

skadada, *Electronic Big Top*, Sydney Festival, Everest Theatre, Seymour Centre, January 13 - 16; Perth Festival, Regal Theatre, February 24 - 27, 1999

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# Rich mix

RealTime surveys David Blenkinsop's final Perth Festival 1999

It's been wild in the west this month with West Australian Arts Minister Peter Foss and retiring festival director David Blenkinsop shooting it out in the newspapers. "He had a tinpot little festival before we gave him an extra million bucks" said the gracious Foss, as reported in *The Australian*. The minister is accused of attempting to usurp the power of arts agency boards with new legislation related to the creation of a "super ministry" for culture and the arts. Respected Perth arts patrons have gone public with their concerns that "the proposed plan would rob the various entities of their independence and individuality." Foss has countered with "The only thing that I do that they don't like is that, if they muck up their budget, I give them hell." (*The Australian*)

Despite his beef with Blenkinsop, Foss has announced that he will be attending the festival ("I go for the art, not the director"). Let's hope he makes it to KAOS Theatre's *The Fantastical Adventures of Leonardo da Vinci*, a work about artistic vision in the context of the Medici's economic power.

A flip through the Festival brochure sees Blenkinsop's usual generosity, a smattering of commissions, adaptations aplenty and some interesting collaborative and cross-cultural projects. Singapore's Ong Keng Sen brings his production of *Lear*, a "revisiting of Shakespeare's play from the female perspective" by Japanese playwright Rio Kishida. The cast includes a Japanese Noh actor as the king, a Beijing Opera star as the elder daughter and a team of actors each performing in their native tongue with the classical Indonesian music of Rahayu Supanggah and the synthesised music of Mark Chen underscoring the work. Meanwhile Black Swan presents Dickon Oxenbold's adaptation of Christopher Koch's novel *The Year of Living Dangerously*, a collaboration between Australian and Indonesian artists combining theatre, photography, Wayang Kulit and a fusion of Australian and Indonesian music.

The English Shakespeare Company is bringing Michael Bogdanov's adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* with Tim Woodward and Cathy Tyson in the leads and Malachi Bogdanov's physical interpretation of Shakespeare's *Richard III* starring a "bald, fat and three months old Richard with an army of teddy bears....who chews his way through this bloody production armed with a plastic sword." Not to be outdone, Perth Theatre Company offers their production of Anthony Neilson's sexually explicit West End hit *The Censor*. There's a rare opportunity to see Neelam Mansingh Chowdry and her highly praised Company Chandigarh with their production of Lorca's *Yerma* featuring Punjabi actress Ramanjit as Yerma and music by B. V. Karanth.

Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre will premiere *Cruel Wild Woman* a play about contemporary Australian politics by Sally Morgan and David Milroy with Lynette Narkle heading the cast. Leah Purcell's *Box the Pony*, initially commissioned for The Festival of the Dreaming, is now a well-travelled success and will be performed here prior to its season at Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney in May.

Germany's Heribert Esser will conduct *Tannhauser* with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra and Andras Ligeti Berlioz' *The Damnation of Faust* with soloists Markella Hatziano, Heikki Siukola and David Wilson-Johnston and the Prague Festival Choir. The Choir will also perform Dvorak's "Mass in D" as well as two contemporary Czech works and *Cantata Davidica*, commissioned from Australian composer Gordon Kerry.

The West Australian Opera production of *The Threepenny Opera* featuring Robyn Archer, John O'May and Lyndon Terracini, conducted by Richard Mills and directed by Gregori Ditiakouski of Russia's Maly Drama Theatre is a must-see (5 performances only).

Choose an up night to catch *Lament of Desire* in which "readings from traditional Thai literature together with projections of bodies in death onto pools of water, oil and ash frame a silent, poetic communication with the dead." Musicians from Elision improvise with the sounds, texts and silences of Thai installation artist Araya Rasdjarmreansook in Fremantle Prison. Elision's ensemble, collaborative and site-specific work, with original compositions and improvised music, is earning them a growing international reputation. Blenkinsop's continued support for the ensemble's site work should be taken up by other Australian festival directors (see Zsuzsaana Soboslay Moore "full throated ease", page 6)

Spanish pianist Joaquín Achúcarro plays Albeniz, Falla and Granados among the Chopin and Debussy. Unusual interpretations of the baroque are played on valiha, kabossy, guitar and percussion by Madagascar's Justin Vali Quartet and the Terem Quartet from St Petersburg specialise in something called "music sans frontières". World Music Weekend features Yungchen Lhamo (Tibet); César Strosio Trio (Argentina); Baaba Maal (Senegal); the celtic Iarla O'Loaírd and an all-girl septet from Cuba, Las Perlas del Son.

There's a flotilla of French artists coming for the festival. Along with big daddy Michel Legrand, French music is celebrated in performances of Poulenc, Ravel, Satie and Chabrier by the great Pascal Rogé and the Moragues Wind Quintet.



KAOS Theatre, *The Fantastical Adventures of Leonardo da Vinci*

Kevin Obrien

On the dance front, The Centre Choréographique National de Nantes presents *Humains, dites-vous!* (Humans—tell us about them!) choreographed by Claude Brumachon who takes as his subject matter the religious wars of the 16th century. *Icarus* is a solo work by Benjamin Lamarche. *Almanach Bruitax* (Almanac of Noises) by Compagnie Castafiore features dancers on an ever-changing graphic set with choreography by Marcia Barcellos, music and sound by Karl Biscuit. Compagnie Montalvo and Hervieu combine classical, contemporary, hip-hop, African and belly dancing in *Paradis*.

The West Australian Ballet pays tribute to the Ballet Russes in *The Source* staged in the Quarry Amphitheatre and including works by Krzysztof Pastor (Poland), Ted Brandsen as well as Chrissie Parrott's new media *Sheherazade* choreographed in collaboration with composer Cathie Travers. On the new media front, there's also skadada's eagerly awaited new work, *Electronic Big Top* (see page 11)

The Company Chandigarh production of *Yerma* features one of India's most celebrated dancers, Sonal Mansingh, who will also perform her solo work *Draupadi* in which she traces the life of the central female character in *The Mahabharata*.

These days, festivals offer a spectacular variety of experience to the mass audience for outdoor theatre. In Perth, festival stalwarts Strange Fruit perform *Flight* on flexible poles which hover above the audience's heads; Monsieur Hotrod (Frank Baruk) takes to the malls and pavements of Perth on nine wheels at 33 km/h with his *Géométrie Variable*; Compagnie Rasposo's "magical" *Triptyque* populates its mediaeval world with acrobats, jugglers, trapeze artists and mythical animals; Stalker's *Blood Vessel* features a towering ship with performers falling, flying, lurching and deftly conquering the structure's looming architecture; in *Herbert's Dream* from France's Inko' Nlto and Compagnie Quidams, 5 enormous earthbound giants are internally lit for a night procession; *Mephistomania* from Friches Théâtre Urbain follows the hair-raising journey of Faust performed by 5 exotically costumed characters on

stilts with hellish fireworks and music; Christophe Berthonneau and his Groupe F uncover the works of fireworks in their fearsome, operatic outdoor spectacular *A Little More Light*. We saw Berthonneau's apocalyptic fireworks (and we mean fire) at the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT 97)—not to be missed.

The festival visual arts program features mixed exhibitions at all major galleries including artwork and carvings by leading male artists from Yuendumu and Maningrida at Indigenart Gallery. *Foldings* is an exhibition at Gallery East and Kidogo Arthouse in Fremantle featuring 50 Japanese artists from Kyoto Contemporary Textile Centre along with 20 Western Australian artists of the Textile Exchange Project. Craftwest Gallery presents works in timber, text and mixed media by Bo Schmitt. Exhibitions at Perth's Institute of Contemporary Arts include *The Parents*, Colin Gray's 15 year project documenting his aging parents in burlesque narrative images; *Future Suture* curated by Derek Kreckler using the web as the principal vehicle for disseminating the ideas of the artists involved; *Initialising History* a project centring around the work of one of Australia's leading electronic media artists, Peter Callas including a retrospective of his work plus a selection of new international video art and a comprehensive survey of work produced in Australia between 1980 and 1994. *Art(iculations) 99*, again at PICA, features 2 days of artists talks and lectures encompassing the entire festival visual arts program.

The popular outdoor film program includes an impressive if largely international selection (Rolf de Heer and Lynn-Maree Danzey seem to be the only Australian inclusions) plus a Taviani Brothers retrospective and screenings of two 60s classics, Jean-Luc Godard's elegy to a lost cinema, *Contempt* (1963) in a new 35mm print preceded by Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962). RT

Festival of Perth February 12 - March 7 1999.  
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# Taking it to the streets

Terri-ann White marches in Perth's Lesbian & Gay Pride parade

A palpable pleasure principle. In a very short time, the Lesbian and Gay Pride movement with a parade, 2 big annual dance parties and a month-long festival has taken off in li'l old Perth, a million miles from anywhere, including Sin-City. (We suffer, somewhat, from our *feeling* of isolation, and of thinking we are still a big country town.) I remember the public image of Pride 10 years ago, right at the start, the hand-over from the era of the Campaign Against Moral Persecution. Slow to start its flamboyant dance, things were pretty stern back then, with a narrowness about identifications and recognitions of difference, about how it could all be accommodated. Legacies abound: the necessity for earnest politics was understandable, historically, if a little hard to identify with. Ultimately, it was full of angst and anti-style, so I'm not surprised that flocks of gay people with an interest in the way that things looked, or interested in the deft hand of humour, were not interested in this model for getting political. The march around the streets of Northbridge, by the mid 1980s, was rather higgledy-piggledy, held

back perhaps by that word *moral*. I remember it as dark and silently defiant.

Anyway, much has changed and this year's Pride, the 9th one, has just finished. The festival program expands each year, and so does the parade, which makes a statement or two through the streets of the city. With wit and politics. In recent years there have been extraordinary floats: one involved the sexiest bunch of girls in shimmering swimming costumes and a cute Esther Williams synchronised routine. All year now a group of men work out extra hard in the gym to get to the fitness levels and shapeliness required to take up the role of the Marching Boys. It's a long march. The music helps: loud and compelling, and so does the clever choreography. It always seems to inspire male couples to keep kissing in the streets long after the parade is over which is, anywhere, still, a risky act.

This year, a group of dykes rose to the challenge of Richard Court's response to police marching in Sydney's Mardi Gras (which was to

say, "Our police would never do that.") They tricked me at first: a uniformed regiment of Blue Heelers, the Hackett Drive division for those in the know, and I thought "Wow, the Police!" A sharp little twist, with triangles worn proudly on the sleeve, and the target of the gesture clearly identified. It was full of spirit and humour: a battalion of wide smiles on female faces in a police state.

The Pride program carried events in cabaret, music, theatre, visual arts, a big outdoor fair day complete with dog show. It's an interesting mix of alternative arts practice moving right into the heart of the mainstream. And a dance party to follow the Saturday night parade. The party has become a much anticipated fixture, so good they started a mid-year one a couple of years ago. This year was highly successful—a bit too much so, with more heat from bodies sweating on the dance floor than my poor old lungs could cope with.

After the marathon of the night, I walk home with sunglasses protecting my delicate eyes, and



The Pride Parade

Duncan Barnes

then jump into bed and dream in extraordinary style, dreaming so crammed with images and colour and riddles that I wake with a smile on my face and an idea that a good community *might just* sustain us. Anthems played as promises to strengthen structures that contain comfort and pride, even those anthems sung by Kylie Minogue. I need such talismen these days. When the ship is sinking, stabilities can take strange forms. And Pride offered one such stable block of a month.

Lesbian and Gay Pride Festival, Perth, October 31





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# Head to head, heart to heart

In the first of 2 reports Keith Gallasch relives *Head to Head*, the 2nd National Circus & Physical Theatre Conference

An unedited version of the complete report, parts 1 and 2, can be read on the RealTime website <http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/> from December 8.

*Head to Head* was 3 days of vigorous conferencing by a mix of young artists, mid-career 'elders' and intrigued observers. In the context of the Sydney Opera House's own celebrations, here was physical theatre celebrating 25 years of frequently acclaimed activity, querying its identity and sense of community, arguing its infrastructural and educational needs, and envisaging its various futures and the constraints on them. I had the great pleasure of acting as daily facilitator of the event, chairing all sessions and keeping track of speakers, themes and time—so this is a report from the inside. It's not a comprehensive account, and not always chronological, rather it's a thematic journey, focusing on some individual speakers and a few collective moments rather than on the panel sessions into which the event was divided (I think the organising committee's selection of speakers a good one, certainly great to work with). I can't vouch for the accuracy of the detail or all the quotations—I was in a double delirium of chairing and taking notes. So, here goes.

Physical theatre around and across the Opera House the day before had played to a massive audience, giving the conference a confident beginning and a sense of unanimity. That unanimity stayed the course of the conference, even if its romantic edge was blunted here and there. As someone noted half way through the event, physical theatre was behaving now as had community theatre in the 80s and alternative theatre in the 70s, seeing itself as political saviour, theatrical innovator and social rebel. Every now and then someone from the floor would exclaim the superiority of physical theatre, its fundamental honesty, its freedom from the tyranny of language, the body as incapable of the lie, even the greatness of circus and physical theatre residing in not requiring the suspension of disbelief!

The other side to this sometimes exhilarating, sometimes debilitating celebratory romance, was evident not only in the calls for pragmatic approaches to working conditions, safety and training needs, but in the anecdotal accounts of artists' lives and company histories, in fact the complex interplay of vision and pragmatism.

It was not surprising then that Circus Oz co-founder Jon Hawkes, like a grumpy old prophet come out of the wilderness (he left the circus in the early 80s) and with a talk titled "Beware the poisoned chalice—temptations to avoid", was greeted with hallelujahs on the one hand and a gnashing of teeth on the other. Hawkes railed drolly against conferences ("a wank", "there should be a national circus barbecue"), skills ("not fundamental, ideas and theatrical imagination are more important"), performers' industrial rights ("we got into circus *not* to be in an industry", "look at the alienated labour in the STC and the SSO") and any doubts about identity ("in our muscles we know we have to slide down a pole"). He approved of the current Circus Oz, "feral again" and blessed with "presence" ("it's not teachable—we found it by accident"). And looking the congregation in the eye and with relentless wit, he reminded those that gathered there "we are ratbags, the circus runs on cocaine", and asked them to look at themselves, their tattoos, their metal ware, their hair: "you're marginal", he railed, "you're outsiders" in "performer-based work." And they laughed and said yea and knew they were the keepers of the faith and would not be diverted from their vision and if they "needed money", as said the Prophet, "they could go out and get a scabby job."

She's been in the physical theatre business a long time and before that in youth and other theatres. Gail Kelly is an almost elder

statesperson of physical theatre; certainly a mid-career artist who cares passionately for the form and with fellow artists suffers the frustrations of current limits on funding. Her talk, which opened the first session of the conference with Hawkes on "artistic direction", was unashamedly polemical and industrial and no doubt stirred the Prophet to greater doomsaying. Kelly declared the fundamental right of artists to funding; deplored the effect of stop-start funding on physical theatre artists' work (where continuity is critical to the body and skill maintenance); demanded the setting up of a Physical Theatre Fund within the Australia Council; applauded the projected National Institute of Circus Arts and its potential to nurture the next generation of physical theatre artists; and left us in no doubt that physical theatre is radical, is capable "of venturing into unfamiliar worlds." She illustrated her own physical theatre life in her association on the one hand with the provocatively entertaining Club Swing and on the other with The Party Line, committed to exploring the relationship between theory and performance, and in both instances in a physical theatre that is female and lesbian. It would be wrong to say that Kelly and Hawkes presented utterly contrary positions. Although they differed radically and quite critically in the details, both represented physical theatre as political, working from the margins, and as an act of the imagination. But the tone was set for many in the audience, the Prophet and the Pragmatist had spoken, even if both celebrated an unfettered physical theatre as Visionary.

Stalker's Rachel Swain kept the issue of vision alive, kicking and critical. "What does the fact that there's so much physical theatre tell us about Australian culture?" (This subject was tossed around eagerly late the next day when the cultural connection with sport was briefly worried at.) Her challenge to the assembly was to ask themselves what role physical theatre has to play in developing Australian culture, especially interculturally and in the process of reconciliation. For Swain taking her metaphorical cue from writer Paul Carter (*The Road to Botany Bay*), it's a matter of stopping ourselves from "flatten(ing) out the land", refusing to map out others' reality, defying the black box by playing outdoors, collaborating cross-culturally, not bowing to the domination of the word, creating performance scores instead of scripts, "grounding" the practice of physical theatre. Training was also subject to scrutiny, with Swain advocating the softening of "narrow, hard circus and Suzuki skills" with lessons to be learnt from contemporary dance and "working from different parts of the body", a challenge Stalker had set themselves, including their most recent work where they have stopped working with the stilts that brought them to fame. Rachel declared physical theatre "a field of intersections, still arriving", "it needs to grow up." This alarmed those who thought physical theatre had in fact arrived, but for those committed to its political potential and the continual evolution of its form(s), these were fighting words, practical and metaphysical and, for me, another reminder how seriously the profession takes itself.

The audience was now resolutely visionary but uncertain of whether they had achieved collective maturity...or were still kids (or needed to get back some of that feral kid spirit). Nigel Jamieson came to the rescue and avuncularly reminded them just how much had been achieved in 25 years, recalling his first sighting of Circus Oz in the 70s in London at The Roundhouse and what a revolutionary experience that had been, yielding a sense of "a culture, a generation, a humour." "Yes, circus had been tampered with before, but here it had been reinvented." Other circuses in other countries, he reminded us, had followed in the wake of Circus Oz and then the Flying Fruit Flies: "Australian physical theatre leads the world. It is not a teenager." Jamieson, however,

was not going to let celebration sink into mere sentiment: "Yes, physical theatre is anti-establishment, but Jonno is wrong. It needs infrastructure." "What", he demanded to know, "is this Australian myopia about what is on its doorstep?" What is this culture that denies sufficient funding and puts performers at physical risk? The dynamic of vision and pragmatism already driving the conference was deepening, posing the dialectical coexistence of idealism and practicality, the balancing act had begun, and precarious it was.

Sue Broadway momentarily deflected these epic issues and, in a witty but determined semantic turn, went for something fundamental: identity and naming. After all the talk about physical theatre, she thundered at the shamed throng: "Are we ashamed of the word circus? The term is accepted overseas, why not here?" She declared the label physical theatre "clumsy, inaccurate." She saw circus "legitimised by the addition of other forms...as having its own meanings, its own aesthetics", and as accessible, with a populist tradition, playing to a wide-ranging audience. This was not only a reminder of origins but also a plea for continuity, for tradition, a place in the broader community and unanimity in a field of diverse practices. Although Broadway didn't provoke major debate, the issue of name and form persisted randomly across the conference either as affirmation (an idealised circus culture—marginal, popular, real, familial, ancient) or as denial ("we don't come from the circus", "we don't look after our own kind", "not all physical theatre is circus-based"). Certainly 'physical theatre' seems here to stay, but so does 'circus', as we were to hear later in an account of the projected NICA (National Institute of Circus Arts). Again we were left with a sense of unease, of potential loss (not merely of a name, but a way of being) to add to the threats arising out of limited arts funding and a maturing art form without even the most basic infrastructure to sustain itself—no association, no formal network, no affiliation with the union (MEAA), no collective policy on safety or on training...not even a website! Talk about flying without a safety net.

Pretty soon we moved on to the various practicalities of infrastructure but thankfully without ever leaving the big picture. Mike Finch (Artistic Director, Circus Oz) invoked both Meyerhold and Permaculture in his envisaging of an ideal model for the internal workings of a circus, ensuring that craft (skills training), as well as art (performances) and business (management), has a significant and enduring role in the life of the organisation. In this way, he argued, the organisation "resists becoming a theatre company", ie a mere producer of performances. For an artistic director, then, scheduling ("like a score with a set of modules") becomes one of the most important parts of his or her role and suggests the need for a 'third' person in the company to maintain that third element, craft, against the demands of product and management. Finch also saw this craft component as a laboratory space for the development of performative possibilities not tied to product, something explored by Zane Trow (Artistic Director, The Performance Space) outside the framework of a company. Seducing us with embracing jazz tracks by Charlie Parker and Don Cherry, Trow approached the subject laterally, querying this community's openness to improvisation, to the realities of the laboratory. He then announced that The Performance Space was offering itself as a laboratory for physical theatre in collaboration with other artists—first up Sue Broadway with the Sydney-based international sound and text ensemble The Machine For Making Sense in 1999. There was a double purpose to Trow's invocation of jazz; it is a culture "which unashamedly forged a position in the market place" and it is music which is "risk." He also reminded the community of its achievement by congratulating Circus Oz for its elevation to the Major

Organisations Fund of the Australia Council (The Big Top?), "a major event."

Responses to the US dance company Streb (dance with a strong physical theatre dimension) at the Brisbane and Melbourne festivals might have been mixed (see pages 5 and 8), but Elizabeth Streb herself proved an inspiration at *Head to Head*. Mike Finch had earlier mentioned that a director's job in physical theatre and circus is to see the performer as a living script which the director can "cut and paste" into a work, remaining true to the performer's skills. The great thing about Streb was that she reminded us, as had Jon Hawkes and Gail Kelly, that these scripts are about imagination, not just about skills. With a Laurie Anderson-ish economy and wit, Streb recalled the first seduction as a child, "The smell of the circus, and only after that its sense of freedom": the sound of motorcycles" and later an infatuation with riding and owning them. Most remarkable was her account of her father, the stonemason—"I didn't like the guy"—whose work she only came to appreciate later, and who once asked her to hold up a ceiling while he went in search of some nails...and he didn't come back...for an hour.

That taught her something about the body, about the shoulders. "Why should I look perfectly formed. I'll leave them up. It looks cool." She rode a motorcycle from New York to San Francisco, inadvertently via New Orleans, when she was 17. "I'm still vibrating from that ride." She watched a Korean performance artist—"I didn't like what he did at the time but I stayed"—whose work taught her about meaning and process. He spent a year getting out from under a big rock. He spent a year being woken on the hour, 24 hours a day to punch a timeclock and she would see him on his way to the timeclock and hope he was going to make it. The lesson there was of openness—responsiveness to one's own experiences and to the work of others, no matter how strange it seems, how inappropriate to one's own work, and how useless, "like Herzog's conquistadors dragging a boat over a mountain in order to build an opera house on the Amazon." At this stage of her life she worked for 15 years as a cook so she could run a studio at a time of "laboratory ferment at The Kitchen, PS21..." But she also took us back over her engagement with dance, the shape and freedoms it offered and some hilarious querying of dance conventions, like the one on everyone's lips, what are dancers *really* doing when they run off into the wings...and then re-enter?

True to the conference, Streb asked big questions, about power, gravity, risk—"Why camouflage gravity?"—and made some big declarations—"I'm only interested in the extreme act." "I'm interested in turbulent universes." "This work is a zone of transgression." Streb's mid-conference interplay of the personal and the formal, between the everyday and the metaphysical was an entertaining and provocative prelude to equally diverting and thoughtful reflections from the likes of Debra Batton and Sarah Cathcart and others as the conference dialogued its way towards resolution. More of that in *RealTime* 29.

*Head to Head, The 2nd National Circus and Physical Theatre Conference, Sydney Opera House, October 5 - 7*

Part 2 of this report on the Head to Head Conference will be published in *RealTime* 29, February-March 1999, or you can read the full, un-edited version at: <http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/>



# Young (elongated) dogs

Kirsten Krauth at the National Young Writers Festival in Newcastle

Yearly visits to Grandma and Pop's fibro. Swinging around the pole on their concrete verandah. Eggs from the chook pen. I wanna be a star, a BMX star. Long nights full of Irish singing. Saturday arvo at the pokies, lunch with buttered white bread, special occasions at The Chinese with honey prawns on the lazy susan. A house always hot with the iron stove. Hot, crowded beaches: Caves or the alluring Redhead. Hiding in dark corners trying to read books. Fast driving. Early nights out on the town, a friend who won't dance, unwanted advances. Bad TV reception. Newcastle.

*The art of being a writer*

The Wintergarden café was the setting for hour-long, hourly talks where writers, including John Birmingham, James Bradley, Jessica Adams and Bernard Cohen, chose to read chapters from their latest or past novels. I love being read to (like Morris Gleitzman I believe it's almost better than sex) but whole chapters, with no audience interaction or analysis, can be stupefyingly dull. Initial sound problems via blaring local radio meant John Birmingham's Tasmanian Babes were dancing to Foreigner's *I've been waiting for a girl* like you and by the *I've got the hots for what's in the box* Domino ad, I felt like I was lost in a Phil Brophy Cinesonics column. Although John Birmingham did talk about "cocks in socks" so there was a kind of poetic parallel happening. Highlights included Bernard reading *The Blindman's Hat* from the point of view of Muffy the dog, a tailwagging and challenging performance (Bernard barked a lot during the conference) and Dean Kiley, who gave a well measured and entertaining session which incorporated tragedy, treating the audience as participants (intriguing concept), a coming out story, and healthy bitchiness, as well as solid good advice. His realisation that readers come to see writers, in the flesh, as performers who enact their texts was particularly timely and his devastating short story about self destructive love involving "slo-mo suicide re-runs" where "others don't see the ladders of scars" was both gut-churningly brutal and heart-achingly tender.

Muffy claims that "people are like elongated dogs only friendlier" and this appeared to be the case in the Newcastle forums where good will, in general, took over. I liked the subtle tensions in *Being a Writer* starring Emma Tom, Bernard Cohen again, James Bradley and McKenzie Wark: the pitting of Emma's pragmatism against James' romanticism; how being a capital W writer and writing are very different things; how contracts have publicity clauses where writers sign away to ride on the publicity machine; how Bernard's marketing people put his head onto a friend's body for the cover sleeve shot. Most revealing of all were the quick fix-its and advice: ways to procrastinate ("balancing pens on my nose and scratching my balls"—James); ways to overcome writer's block (a couple of years' depression seems to fix it—Bernard); ways to succeed in fiction (have a perfect thing in your head then fuck it up by writing it—James).

**8x5x6 on the 3x3 in a 4x4**

**Line after line passing in front of my eyes  
On the road and with the stereo up  
Jack would have written this on a newspaper  
Whilst listening to some beatnik jazz  
But I'm not him so Leonard will do**

**The never-ending horizon stops me from  
road hypnotism  
I have to reach for another cigarette  
companion  
Hunter would've seen the swooping bats  
by now  
And the car dash would be 50% ether  
But instead of the fumes we have smoke**

**If only this road was a large river**

**The water would stop the car from  
swerving  
Mr Conrad's dark heart would agree  
"That no matter the journey you take  
you're constantly searching for your  
ultimate true you"  
There are no rock spires on the Nullabor  
No tall cliffs to drive the car off  
As you and your fellow passenger hold  
hands  
Making an ultimate defying feminist  
statement  
All I have is a radio and kangaroos**

**I'm fortunate I make this trip by car  
Lucky I'm not a gay narcoleptic hitch-  
hiker  
Looking at the horizon for means of  
transport  
to the next blow job for fifty bucks,  
so that I can eat something more  
substantial**

**Why is it that we consider road trips  
as a spiritual event of insightful self  
jabberings?  
Is it the isolation? Or just an excuse;  
to kid ourselves there is surely more than  
this?  
ROAD-TRIP; parable of the body and mind  
travel.**

Tyson McMillan

*Adolescence is not a dirty word*

One of the most interesting slants of the festival was the focus on zines. Zines, on the street and online, are a way for writers/producers/artists to have control over content and get distributed and published outside mainstream media. They have a variety of functions: bringing together politically active voices, venting frustrations, making a space for people on the margins, subverting traditional media and commercial enterprise using humour, anger and pastiche. Zines are a popular forum for young writers because everyone is welcome to contribute, collaboration is encouraged, and copyright and censorship ignored. Some of the best cut'n'paste zines use material from magazines and other sources to form new works. Zines are not precious; they want to be spread around.

Kirsty Leishmann, doing her Masters thesis on zines and zine culture in Australia, compared zine makers to the central character in Christos Tsolkias' *Loaded* (and the film version *Head On*). Like Ari, zinesters are negotiating identity in a variety of communities, often conflicting rather than harmonious. She sees zines as an adolescent medium, a place where it is safe to be subjective, a place to try on identities, a place where you can avoid judgement or refuse to conform: an ideal world for writing.

*Grrrl Power*

Brought up, like most of us, on a diet of *Dolly* and *Cleo* (and now *Barbie* magazine!) most of the participants in the *Girly Mags: feminism, DIY Culture and grrl zines* forum came out of the Riot Grrrl tradition of women making music and being heard, of "putting the yell on paper" as participant Marta Jary put it. The names alone are enough to make you curious: Pungent, Cat Pounce, Thunderpussy, Blemish. Although nowadays the idea of being a bitch is cool (think Courtney Love), the forum grrls were more interested in creating a sense of unity, developing a community of producers who encourage each other, and newcomers, to write, draw, and play music. Thunderpussy started her zine to explore the gaps in women's history and culture, to find 'sheroes' and establish a place where women can express themselves away from "girly pulp for corporate men."

Hymn

**Hail  
Barbie.  
Goddess  
of my cellophane world.  
Hairfree and carefree  
I lay myself at your altar.**

**Praise  
Barbie.  
For your tiny roman nose  
and itsy, bitsy, tiptoe feet.  
A stiletto heaven.  
For neon bright teeth  
And a smile that is the smile of a  
thousand empty minds.  
Forced down the throats of a million  
young girls  
Gagging and choking  
On Melrose and the Nanny.**

**Smile like Coca Cola  
Smile like Pepsi  
Smile like McDonald's**

**Smile like the bile  
In the throats of the faithful  
Who carve themselves in your image.**

**Praise  
Barbie.  
Let me bask in the glow of your golden  
tan  
I know that for all your baking you will  
never end up small and  
Wrinkled.**

**Praise  
Barbie.  
For your pink dream house  
Church of my religion.  
For your jag, jetski, motorhome, pony,  
rollerblades, sidesaddle,  
Kitchen, spa.  
For having 50 different wedding dresses  
And only one man.**

Kristy Jay

*Bar Room Blitz*

The Post Hoc Performing Word Company poets down the local pub were full of force with a nice dialogue between group and individual delivery, some belting it out like Mike Tyson, others with the quietness of pent-up anger. Surrounded by pokies and working class noise, there was a brilliant interplay between poems about being in a bar and real life drunks reeling through the audience. Pots, pot-belly poems and the real thing to rest your pint on. This was a poetry troupe of the everyday, of a desperate artistic life eked out on the Gold Coast, of sex, graffiti, pizza delivery, revenge and coloured pencils.

**Ever Had The Feeling That Yr Heard It All  
Before?**

**At the deep boothed end of a crowded  
blues bar  
slumped a sorry drunk mumbling into the  
tumbler  
that he held to his spit-stringed lips,  
'How well do yr realise,' he was slurring,  
'How well do yr realise that yr could come  
from any  
boddle or label, brother. In wha'eva  
quality or %.  
In as many connotations as we'd like  
t'magine, but brother,  
how well do yr know that we'd be nuthin  
but drunk!'  
And looking wild he caught a horse-eyed  
glimpse of his  
soused reflection in a punched and  
polished steel-wall  
and sneering, then eye-balling again, he  
took a bead on the  
dinted delineation of the down and out  
dancefloor where**

**contorted colours ached like a myriad of  
damp imago  
pumping their soft wings hard for flight.  
'All stoopid to light,' he grumbled and  
stomped his foot as he  
scholled his drink, then demanded, 'Rum!'  
before a short  
shudder shook him and suddenly his glass  
was refilled with a  
good mouthful of vomit.  
'Cancel!' he spat, 'I'm still on one.'  
And he sipped as he watched the  
deranged winging of a moth  
cross under one bright can and through  
the blues bar haze to land  
barefoot in the booth behind him.  
And the moth spoke: 'You look kinda sick.  
Are you alright?'  
'No,' he splubbed, one eye twisting  
wrong in his dislocated head.  
Then, raising his tumbler to the dusty  
flutterings beside him, he  
slurred,  
'Ye-blace-er-mine?'**

John Latimore

*Teen Shirty Over Row*

The National Young Writers Festival expanded its interests beyond 'reading and writing' to explore ideas of what literacy means in contemporary Australian culture: incorporating computers and technology (hands-on workshops), understanding the media and its (often destructive) role in constructing 'youth', and the role of DIY publishing in giving young people a voice. Matthew Thompson, in *Cultural Terrorism & Media Pranks*, took us on an expedition into the black hole of media ethics. When Matthew was 21 he invented the group Young People Against Heavy Metal T-shirts (YPAHMTS) and took the media on an exhilarating joy ride, exposing their lack of research skills and internal hypocrisies, surprised even himself at their complete lack of credibility. Inspired by Alan Jones and talkback radio, he became their 'ideal', writing a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* decrying heavy metal T-shirts as symptomatic of a moral decline in youth culture. The next day the phone started ringing. Good Morning Australia. Derryn Hinch. *Who* magazine. 2BL with Peter Luck. Triple J. The Couchman Show.

Matthew began fabricating a history. He produced and backdated newsletters and filled them with 30s propaganda, talked of recent youth rallies, of the ideals of order, strength and discipline. He spoke of the plans to hold youth camps in the desert. At Hinch's request he was filmed in a "typical group meeting" where he invited some friends to fit certain media stereotypes: the woman against misogyny, the 'ethnic', the reformed (he *used* to wear heavy metal T-shirts). On the Couchman show he was pitted against a group of men in black T-shirts, of course. The ABC wanted to see sparks fly. Instead, Thompson concentrated on Couchman himself, asking why he wore that suit. Couchman was speechless, blushed, then laughed awkwardly; "that's a good question" he said, and did not (and could not) give an answer. Not surprisingly, an update about being duped has never made it onto primetime television...

Marcus Westbury, "professional token youth", organised the inaugural National Young Writers Festival from his bedroom. He had a computer, contacts and \$6,000. The result? Three days of forums, hands-on workshops, readings and a zine conference, a friendly inclusive atmosphere, the opportunity to see Helen Darville and Shane Paxton at the same gig (sorry, I've been sworn to secrecy) and, by the way, every event was free.

*National Young Writers Festival, various venues around Newcastle, co-ordinator Marcus Westbury and volunteers, September 25 - 27.*

*Poems featured originally published in Post Hoc, used with permission of Post Hoc Performing Word Company, a group of 20 students from the Department of Creative Arts, Griffith University Gold Coast, online at <http://www.ins.gu.edu.au/BACA/FRINGE/post.htm>*



# Perfect Diary

Kirsten Krauth



December 29

*Everything you see I owe to spaghetti*

Sophia Loren

It's that time of year again. Time to find the perfect diary. One that fits in your bag. One that has lots of places to note ideas down for short story/film/script/novel/review. One that comes with a good pen. One that has pink post-it notes! The Perfect Diary has the right name and a great background, being the only diary that supports Australian artists, poets and writers. Full of artistic contributions, this essential item also has the obligatory quote and trivia, and Australian arts festivals, listed each week. The week of my birthday features the Japanese Phallus Festival, *Swimming the Sky* (a poem by Gina Mercer), Kowmung Music Festival in Oberon, John O'Brien Bush Festival in Narrandera, Word Festival in Canberra, Australian Festival for Young People in Adelaide and the Autumn Equinox (11.46am

EST). It is also the week Bob Hawke once wept on television. Where else could you find such topical and relevant information? Come on, you know you want it. The Perfect Diary is also looking for contributors (poems, stories, artworks) for the year 2000. For more details, you'll have to head downtown and buy a copy.

August 21

*We of the FBI are powerless to act in cases of oral-genital intimacy, unless it has in some way obstructed interstate commerce.*

J Edgar Hoover

*The Perfect Diary. Inquiries, fax 02 9212 1716, contempa@peg.apc.org or go online at [www.bigstick.com.au](http://www.bigstick.com.au)*

# Writesites

Kirsten Krauth looks at hyperfiction on the net

*You give and give and give, and so take all I have.*

Paul Kelly, *Generous Lover*

<http://members.xoom.com/olande/callahan2/index.html>

*My Father's Father's House* (writer Terry Callahan, designer Jamie Kane) uses frames and simple diagrammatic plans to navigate a couple's relationship breakdown and the negotiation, renovation, of space and desire. The house on the street. What the neighbours see. The cars that cruise by on Sunday morning. Click on the picket fence to delve deeper into the black and white sketch. What's going on inside; isolation on a busy road. As we enter the gate, we cross the border between public and private space. A house, made up of squares, built with his father's father's hands, a house where his wife crosses boundaries many times.

A couple with no children, resigned bitterness like dust in the air. As we click on hallway, verandah, bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, the house itself becomes a character; occupied, wooden, threatened and old but still more alive than their slowly disintegrating love:

*The house breathes, aches, lives. Cracks its joints. The still supple timber adjusts to the shifting balance of my wife and I, the furniture. For all its plumb squareness and dead levels, there is a reassuring give, a making of allowances.*

His wife, an engineer who "can talk stressors and turning movements until [his] head hurts", demolishes and renovates, threatening his

identity and connections with the past:

Handed down by the words of fathers.  
Expectation.  
Nails in.  
A portrait on the wall. Still  
Grasping at something intangible.  
A child's bedroom.  
Hammering it home.

We gradually move inside the house, into the subconscious, into the world of unrealised dreams. His wife becomes radical. She has layers of plans with pent-up meanings. She becomes eroticised by change, she seduces him, she wants to knock down walls: "Her timing was impeccable. Three o'clock when all my defences are down and her feather fingers on my right buttock. I didn't hesitate." Who's in control now? as he listens to her movements in the house, tracking his lover by creaks and sighs

They wear each other down, sawdusting away intimacy, erecting new traps for entanglement; she wants one room to be a rectangle. She wins arguments by agreeing with him, her needs escalate, he becomes displaced: "But we don't need it. Not anymore. You sleep with me now, remember?"

Like the house, he can adjust to her rhythm, straining and giving, bathing in the warmth and lingering light of her handiwork. Like the house, he can learn to become exposed.

*If you come across any innovative writing/hyperfiction on the internet please email URL to Kirsten:*

*opencity@rttimearts.com. For links to a range of writing sites go to the RealTime links page:*

*<http://www.rttimearts.com/~opencity/realink.html>*

## PICA

Director: Sarah Miller

< exhibiting: december >

**The Photography Gallery of WA at PICA**

< december / january >

Three studio based artist in residence pro

**pvi collective**

**turner & greeuw**

**mick hender**

Members of the public, artists and friends are welcome to visit, during construction and completion of the work.

< exhibiting: january 14 - 31 >

**Reversing The Gaze**

presented by D.A.D.A.A. (W.A.).

*Reversing The Gaze* is an exhibition of photographic and digital media works by seventeen members of DADAA(WA). The exhibition explores the disabled gaze, through a combination of image, text and digital manipulation. *Reversing The Gaze* offers audiences a challenge to existing notions of disability culture.

image: pvi collective

**Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts**

gallery hours: Tuesday - Sunday 11am - 8pm

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The quarterly magazine published by the *Ambitious Friends* collective has a brand new website. It's an informative and cleanly designed site with synopses of each issue back to the inaugural edition in 1994, background material, information on subscription and an invitation to contributors. The links section needs a little work—no *RealTime*!



As well as regular features, poetry and creative writing, each issue of *Ambitious Friends* has an expansive theme—the issue on Families and Tradition includes a piece by Cheryl Yin-Lo on the Chinese custom of visiting the graves of dead relatives and a profile on Deborah Leiser-Moore on women and religious practice in Jewish culture with reference to her performance work *Hungry*. The Summer edition focuses on sex and sexuality covering a broad range of gender issues including fetishes and women in the sex industry.

*Ambitious Friends* is a significant venture set up in 1993 by women at the Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre in Sydney's west with the aim to give women of non-English speaking backgrounds an outlet for their creative writing but also the opportunity to develop skills in all aspects of small publication including advertising, computer technology, layout and design. The website is the logical and important extension of the print publication.

Appropriately, the current edition takes as its theme Women and Technology and includes profiles on Rea and her work with digital photography, the *geekgirl* zine, Dr Sadie Plant on cyber feminism and a report on a video project involving young Koori women in western Sydney.



# OnScreen

## film, media and techno-arts

Review

### Future (in)human: becoming third nature

McKenzie Wark reviews Darren Tofts and Murray McKeich's *Memory Trade: A Prehistory of Cyberculture*

There is hype and there is cyberhype: what distinguishes the latter from the former is its exponential quality. It is hype about hype itself, and it ramped up so fast in the 80s and 90s that it ended up pointing straight up, like a giddy soundbite version of John Glenn's space shuttle launch.

Cyberhype, as Darren Tofts writes, was the consensual cliché of the times. Everything was digital, hyper, info, multi, techno, cyber, as if the whole world was about to go through some kind of gestalt-snapping paradigm shift right before our eyes. But as Michel Foucault once reminded us: perhaps we are not really living through revolutionary times. Perhaps this moment is just a coffee break in history—and a decaf coffee break at that.

As challenging as it may seem, this is one way to read Darren Tofts and Murray McKeich's *Memory Trade: A Prehistory of Cyberculture*. McKeich's Photoshop art, in particular, gives a somewhat scary flavour to the notion that the transformative power of technology, to remake who we think we are and can be, has always been part of what it is to be human. Or in other words it is the inhuman in us that makes us human—our capacity to become otherwise makes us always other than ourselves. If this is so, then the hubris of cyberhype gives way to something darker, to technofear. If this is not the first and only great revolution in our being, that we can't really be sure who or what we are, going in to this next transformation.

Tofts argues that there are silent antecedents for the information revolution. He wants to map a possible history of what came before it. Or rather, a prehistory: "histories record: prehistories invent." It's a matter of assembling, out of unlikely elements, a working model for history itself.

Central to Tofts' prehistory is the concept of cyberspace, which he calls "a tantalising abstraction, the state of incorporeality, of disembodied immersion in a 'space' that has no coordinates in actual space." William Gibson named it 'cyberspace', and imagined how it might look 15 minutes into the future. Tofts asks rather about its 2,500 year past.

It's a widespread perception that "community no longer conforms to the classical notion of a group of people living in a fixed location." But did it ever? The idea

that, as I've put it before, "we no longer have roots, we have aerials" and that "we no longer have origins we have terminals", may in a sense have always been true. We can read in books or on websites about mythical, organic communities that existed always in some once-upon-a-time, but the very act of reading about such a world is the mark of our distance from it.

That there was always and already a 'cyberspace', without which there is no concept of history, is, as Tofts says, "a dizzying abstraction to grasp." The trouble is that we humans are so embedded in communication technologies that they seem like second nature to us. Or perhaps they seem, to use a term of mine that Tofts borrows: a third nature. Humans build a physical environment more hospitable to them, and this becomes a second nature. Humans build an information environment more hospitable too, and this becomes a third nature. Only these new worlds don't just make our old selves more comfortable, they transform what it means to be human.



Murray McKeich, *Memory Trade*

A characteristic of cyberhype is the idea that the old communication technologies are alienating, but the new ones will restore us to a whole and organic way of life—what Marshall McLuhan called the global village. From Tofts' point of view, this fantasy starts to look like exactly that. There is no Adamic pre-communicational world to return to. There is no millennial transformation in the offing. Rather, the relationship between culture and communication is a matter of permanent revolution.

Tofts is also sceptical about all of those books that announce the end of the book, and all the cyberhype about hypertext, as if clicking a few buttons on the screen could revolutionise the act of reading or writing. Reading is always hypertextual. This is obvious to anyone who has ever picked up a nonfiction book, scanned the index and the contents page, and then accessed the information in the order of their choice. Only fools with brains addled by an unrelieved diet of novels could ever fall for this nonsense

about the book being 'linear' and computer based hypertext 'nonlinear' or 'multilinear.'

To dispel some of the cyberhype, Tofts embarks on a prehistory of cyberspace that looks at 3 of its dimensions. He examines the history of writing, the construction of abstract spaces, and the invention of technologies of memory.

Writing is a technology. The way people who use this technology think and feel is just not natural. Tofts acknowledges the hostility of some of the more hide-bound lit-crit crowd to thinking deeply about this, but really writing is just one of a series of technologies that have transformed how humans think and feel, and transformed what it means to be human.

There is something inhuman about writing. The act of externalising sense, making it something cold and hard and apart from a human body, is downright weird. For Tofts, writing is where cyberspace begins. With writing, it is possible to detach human thoughts, feelings, expressions, from the time and place of their creation, and transport them to another time and place.

Even stranger, writing does not just externalise something human into something inhuman. It also does the reverse. Strange gaggles of abstract signs, little squiggles marked on a surface of stone or wood or paper, suddenly speak to us in our heads, addressing us and making us pay heed. How strange this is! A human who may be miles away, or may even have been dead for years, is making meaning inside me. Writing, in short, implicates any reading human in an inhuman world, a world where stones and leaves speak to us in our own language.

One of the reasons what were loosely called 'poststructuralist' theories of writing aroused so much misunderstanding is that they were often very much about this strangely inhuman side of the way writing works to make meaning. But this is really not a new concern. Tofts revisits Plato's *Phaedrus*, one of the first texts in the western canon to express an intimation of technofear, the disquiet caused by the inhuman side of technology. The irony is that while Socrates and his mates appear to discuss things like writing as a matter of conversation between humans, it is through the inhuman form of Plato's written text that they 'speak' to us.



## Review

## Future (in)human

• from page 17

What is this strange space within which the dead and distant can communicate with us? It is cyberspace—and we're already in it. As Tofts writes: "Literacy involved a series of subliminal acts that invoked a virtual space of shared meanings and understandings, the ambience otherwise known as communication."

Following Derrida, Tofts argues that anything that can be the object of perception in this internal space is 'virtual'. "The virtual is the link or bond that unifies our experience of the world and our conceptual understanding of that experience." I think this is rather too restricted an understanding of the virtual, a reduction of a more sublime phenomenon to a special case. In Deleuze's understanding, virtuality is a much broader category of radical possibility.

All the same, there is plenty to think about in terms of the radical possibility for otherness in human existence that Tofts assembles in his prehistory. Writing is just one instance of a technology, or group of technologies, that provide for an encoding of information in a more or less permanent and stable form, external to the body, which creates a time and space of sense making beyond the scope of the body, and which in turn invades and transforms the body, making it over into a machine for producing and reproducing communication.

While cyberhype wrongly sees the current crop of technologies as something more than an incremental development, it would also be an error to dismiss the current moment of extension and transformation of cyberspace altogether. Tofts identifies one particular key change: "The shift, within technologies and economies of memory, from the specific location that contains a finite archive of knowledge, to decentred networks of ambient information, requires a new metaphor to facilitate social orientation to the changing role of memory and memory trade within the information economy." A new metaphor, or perhaps a new practice of thinking, both within and about the communication process.

Tofts stresses that the act of making meaning always takes place somewhere. This, for him, is the significance of Plato's cave: representation always unfolds within a space. The space he proposes for rethinking the current state of third nature is James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, a text notable for its "ecology of sense" of the media world. Following Beckett, Tofts sees *Wake* as a writing that is not about something, it is that something.

A great one liner: "the pun is the nanotechnology of literature." It sums up what it is about *Wake* that makes it such a radically virtual space. In Joyce's book as in Murray McKeich's art, anything and everything can be transformed into anything and everything whatever. Here is that space Burroughs announced, where "everything is permitted and nothing is true." I think *Finnegans Wake* is less a metaphor for cyberspace in the 20th century, than a metonymic part of it. It is a richly complex part of a space in which humans find themselves, immersed in the noise of what Joyce called the "bairdboard bombardment" by the "faroscope" of TV.

Tofts is here sufficiently past the now unworkable orthodoxies of structural and poststructural semiotics to show why those theories have now to be surpassed. "To be immersed in information is to be information, not a sender or receiver of it." The 'linguistic turn' posited a separate world of signification, which represented a world of things external to it. Poststructuralism undid the assumptions of such an epistemology

from the inside. But it's time to move on, and one of the joys of Tofts' prehistory of cyberspace is that it lays some conceptual and historical groundwork for thinking media theory free from the limiting assumptions of poststructural dogmas. But it does so by pursuing poststructuralism to its limit, rather than by retreating from it.

"Any use of technology modifies what it means to be human", Tofts writes—in full recognition that the technology of writing in which this expression appears is also included within its scope. It's not enough to write about the technology of writing, or of communication in general, as if from without.

Writing is the key to Tofts' prehistory of cyberspace. Cyberspace "continues the ancient project that began with the introduction of writing, whereby proximity was no longer a defining characteristic of communication between human beings." He is aware that architecture and transport also play a role in this transformation of the relation between near and far, living and dead, but I think there is more to be said about this vectorial side of the prehistory of cyberspace. Tofts has more to say about the codes of encryption than the vectors of distribution of the memory trade, and these are I think complementary areas of research in contemporary media theory.

Murray McKeich, *Memory Trade*

Cyberspace is an ongoing revolution, not one that restores a lost world, but rather one that carries us further and further from ourselves, differentiating the future human from the past human by inhuman means. Cyberspace "threatens to transform human life in ways that, at the moment, are still the province of science fiction." But, increasingly, also the province of media theory.

What I think distinguishes contemporary media theory from, say, poststructuralism, is a much more critical relation to the means of communication within which theory itself forms and disseminates. As such, Darren Tofts and Murray McKeich have made a valuable contribution to an emergent field. The irony of course is that rather than recycle outdated ideas in fancy computer hypertext, they have come up with an original way of thinking and writing the world in the familiar form of the book.

Darren Tofts and Murray McKeich, *Memory Trade: A Prehistory of Cyberculture*, 210C/Interface Books, Sydney, 1998

McKenzie Wark's latest book, *Celebrity, Culture and Cyberspace*, will be published by Pluto Press Australia.

## Letters

## Net-art and the argument for critical decompression

Dear Editors

In the introduction to his review of the Australian Film Commission's exhibition *stuff.art* (RealTime 27, "Unstuffed", page 21), Kevin Murray aims to set up a way of thinking about and writing about net-art. Criticism, he claims, is new to this medium "so we need to do some ground work." I agree. The questions he sets out are useful ones. In thinking through the problem, he ponders on the limits of applying a gallery model of exhibitions, curators and reviews to net-art. He then asks, how in a post-critical environment do we cast a critical eye over net-art? "(D)o we forgo aesthetics in the process? Do we end up with just a bunch of stuff?"

How can we decompress this 'stuff' so that we can develop a dialogue with it? Murray's response is a curious one. Having questioned the value of the 'traditional' gallery model as a basis for structuring net-art, Murray looks to the 'tradition' of conventional criticism as a place to start thinking about what 'criticism' might look like in this new environment. He bemoans the loss of "objectivity" claiming that much of what passes as criticism is often partisan—an act of advocacy that champions the political and ignores the aesthetic. In such an environment, he argues, "it is difficult to locate oneself in the neutral position required by conventional criticism." He continues: "newspapers and their indentured critics provide some guarantee of independence." This astounds me. Since when have indentured critics provided any guarantee of independence? Can an act of criticism ever be neutral? Having cut my teeth on Donna Haraway's critique of 'objective' knowledge and her work on situated knowledges, I find Murray's pre-occupation with 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' mystifying. No act of criticism is neutral, not even an act of classification. I think he has missed the point and the opportunity.

I would argue that the architecture of the internet provides an opportunity to think differently about what criticism may become, what form it may take and who may speak. Instead of a single voice, there is the possibility for a multiplicity of voices to contribute to a critical dialogue. First we need a space and secondly we need the critical tools to promote such a dialogue.

It strikes me that the bee-hive provides the ideal virtual space for the development of a dialogic model of criticism. It allows for multiple voices, the juxtaposition of image and word and the development of a history of net-art. New software packages, such as The Virtual Gallery being developed by Jillian Duffield at The University of Queensland, mean we are no longer limited to mailing lists or the fixed medium of print. There aren't obstacles. There is potential.

The question of the tools of criticism, is a more complex one. Murray's 'neutral' act of classification may be a starting point, but what do you do once you have categorised sites into box sites/windows and beehive sites? Murray's 'critique' of *stuff.art* demonstrates the limits of the categorisation process. Having established that the 8 works for *stuff.art* are mostly box sites, he proceeds to focus on content and only superficially deal with the way the works operate. For example in discussing Gary Zebington's *Repossessed*, what does it mean when Murray claims "(t)he 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?" What is impressive? What is clumsy? What does

he mean by "omnipotent digital consciousness"? On what authority and with what tools can he make these judgements? Murray ends up sounding like the omnipotent indentured art critic of newspaper fame. He doesn't open up dialogue. He passes judgement and there is no transparency.

I agree with Kevin Murray that since criticism is new to net-art, we do need to do ground work, but I don't think we need to look over our shoulders. Art criticism needs to take a different trajectory. The sites and spaces are in place, but now the task is to develop sets of tools that will allow for a dialogic criticism, not a monologic one. I believe the question is how to decompress stuff, not compress it.

Barbara Bolt  
Sunshine Coast University  
November 22

## Kevin Murray replies:

Dear Editors

I am grateful to Barbara Bolt for airing my prejudices, which I am happy to defend. The crux of her argument seems to be that my review of *stuff.art* maintains traditional assumptions of criticism. She implies that I view critics as independent arbiters of aesthetic value. I admit that this is an outmoded concept. However, in the case of web-art I think there's a use in applying an anachronistic framework—a kind of critical 'mis-reading' if you will.

Criticism native to the web is proceeding as we speak. Your inbox is now filling up with email from various lists announcing new sites and appending theoretical expositions. Anyone can participate and any subject is permissible. Despite this abundance, it will be rare to find in these mailing lists the traditional currency of superlatives, like the 'impressive' and 'clumsy' that was spotted in my review. I honestly don't think I could fully explain exactly what I mean by these labels. Evaluative criticism has a kind of mystique that invites readers to examine their own responses to the work. If I seem out of touch with how others feel about these sites, in ways that aren't interesting (I rarely agree with Adrian Martin's evaluations of film, but appreciate where he is coming from) then I hope my critical capital will decline to the point that I am no longer read, or invited to respond.

While an arbitrary system, the point of categorising the *stuff.art* works as 'box-sites' was to point out the inherent formalism in the way the competition was set up. It would take a different kind of program to encourage 'hive-sites' and 'window-sites' that were mere containers of material coming from elsewhere. The worth of these sites is difficult to predict in advance of their life online. Yet it is these forms that seem to hold most promise for net art.

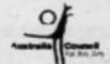
The funding and official support for new media is currently hugely out of proportion to the kind of critical culture that has developed around it. Apart from *RealTime*, there is virtually nothing in print that takes a regular interest in the way Australian artists are using new technologies. Perhaps a few subjective, idiosyncratic and biased comments might help address that imbalance.

Kevin Murray

The OnScreen supplement of RealTime is funded by the Australia Council, the federal government's arts advisory body, the Australian Film Commission and the NSW Film & Television Office.

OnScreen is submitted to the following for indexing:

Film Literature Index, Film and TV Center, State University of New York at Albany, Richardson 390C, 1400 Washington Ave, Albany NY 1222 USA;  
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A surreal triptych by Irvine "Trainspotting" Welsh.

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## Report

## Finnish shortcuts

Melinda Burgess—new media tourist in Finland

Driving through the postcard perfect Finnish countryside, I was mystified by the profusion of large roadside signage with the Apple Macintosh Command symbol and an arrow pointing down nondescript intersections. Keyboard shortcut this way?

It turns out that this is a Gaelic symbol for heritage and the sign for museum in Finland, which has the highest ratio of museums to citizens in the world. As they also have one of the world's highest levels of technological advancement, I assumed that digital art would be very well represented in myriad Finnish museums. Not so.

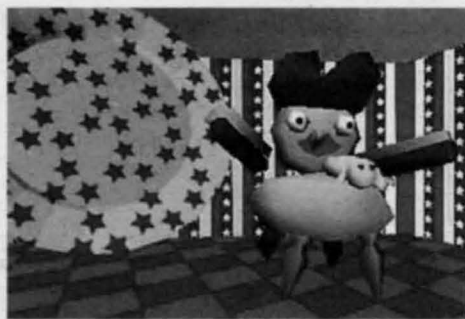
For all its eclectic and funky cultural exports, ranging from the traditional favourite Santa Claus, the explicit adventures of Tom of Finland; Aki Kaurismäki's legendary *Leningrad Cowboys*, retro-dysfunctional objects from Bonk (<http://194.251.183.27:81/bonk>), or multimedia pioneer Marita Liulia's *Ambitious Bitch*, there is surprisingly little understanding and acceptance of New Media as an art form by the general Finnish public. As in most countries, the older established cultural institutions which do not support new art forms receive the majority of government funding and public and media attention; and with a population of 11 million, there is only a small dedicated national audience for hybrid arts.

Visiting Kiasma, the new Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, I expected this lack of new media presence would be redressed. The just opened and highly praised steel clad building is one of architectural flows, multilevel spaces, and wall touchscreen information interfaces. Kiasma is impressive, but unfortunately provides few adequate environments to show contemporary digital works—including the 4,000 video and four web works in its collection. The exhibition spaces, designed to be contiguous to encourage contextual viewing of traditional sedentary artforms, ignores the discrete pretext of much new media work which provides its own context and environment.

Eija-Liisa Ahtila's sensitive multiple screen installation *Tanään/Today*—in which each character addresses the audience with a narrative that centres around the consequences of the death of her grandfather—could not command the attention it deserved with sound bleeding from installations on either side and a steady flow of visitor traffic wandering through the viewing space. The VRML avatar worlds of *Conversations with Angels* (<http://angels.kiasma.fng.fi>) by Andy Best and Martja Puustinen of meetfactory.com, was not available for viewing at all. This work, also at ISEA in September in the UK, had been presented on individual podium terminals dotted around the galleries but were knocked over and broken when viewers leant heavily on them. I was relieved to find the children's educational room, with comfortable lounges and sturdy monitors, in which to view classics including Bill Seaman's *Shivers* and Eric Lanz's *Manuscript*.

The most encouraging arena for presenting hybrid work at Kiasma seems to be over the net. Perttu Rastas, curator of Media Art, is importing ambitious projects into these ill-planned "walls that speak" having already hosted *Triad Netdance*, a semiotic convergence of dance, image and new media, which took place in June simultaneously in Helsinki, Tokyo and New York, with the images of dancers performing in each location mixed with electronic

backgrounds and fed back onto the net. The updating Hyperdance netsite (<http://triad.kiasma.fng.fi>) allows the post-event net viewer (with Netscape 4, RealPlayer and high bandwidth) to move through virtual spaces and re-combine choreographic and audio visual elements of the event. Rastas has a very practical philosophy: if adequate hardspace is not available, build audiences by utilising virtual space.



Conversations with Angels

I spoke at length about the incongruities in the presentation of Finnish media art with artist and critic Tapio Mäkelä at *E Polar Circuit*, the New Media Conference and Workshop which spans 6 weeks each northern summer at the College of Art and Media and the University of Lapland in north western Finland (<http://media.urova.fi/polar2>). According to Mäkelä, Modernism didn't ever get a chance to die in Finland. One factor contributing to the dismal dynamic in digital art theory and practice is that the educational institutions, which house the majority of sophisticated hard and software, are heavily focused on the practicalities of Design rather than the experimentation and process of Art. Additionally, there is only one Finnish Art print publication which is firmly centred around established practice, resulting in narrowcasting of new media arts. Projects like *E.Polar Circuit* which he initiated in 1997—involving both international and Finnish artists and students in an environment of healthy feedback, processes, problem solving and collaboration—provide one solution to access equipment and to broaden concepts and networks for hybrid art production.

Both Mäkelä and Rastas, like most people instrumental in new media presentation in Finland, have been extensively involved with Muu Media Base (<http://muu.autono.net>), perhaps the best known independent Finnish cultural organisation. Muu (the other) was formed in 1987 with Avi/Arkki as an artist-run media centre, creating a base for experimental works in the fields of video performance, sound, light, environment and city projects, multimedia and net art. Muu produces groupware for cultural programs, and encourages hybrid projects which attempt to involve a wider art audience, like *Mental Metro*, an underground railway station event involving performance, dance, video, sound works, net hookups, and a site linked to a similar project in Moscow; and *Ambient City Radio*, which created interdisciplinary environments where architects constructed works with sound.

Membership of Muu (for the equivalent of \$AUD50 per annum) provides access to a Mac lab and net facilities in central Helsinki. Muu also exhibits international work: the gallery show in August incorporated mixed media, installation and performance from Indonesia, and in October, it hosted the 4th Muu Media Festival ([www.av-arkki.fi/mmf](http://www.av-arkki.fi/mmf)) which was open to international application. Another key organisation in Helsinki is the Nordic Institute of Contemporary Art

([www.nifca.org](http://www.nifca.org)) where curator Kati Åberg (ex-Muu) can quickly orient visiting artists to the Finnish new media scene. NIFCA offers a short, 3 to 4 day international artist residency program at its centre on the fortress island of Suomenlinna, 10 minutes ferry ride from the lively city centre.

Outside Helsinki there are few places to access interesting work besides artist-run initiatives like Rajatila in Tampere, and Titanik, located along the canal with a great adjoining cafe, in the ancient Finnish capital Turku. Ars Nova, also in Turku, has a standard range of sedentary work, but included two installation pieces in its Biennaali: a sound installation from Simo Alitalo, and Jan-Erik Andersson's sculpture incorporating digital imaging and fibre optics. Twelve hundred kilometres north at Inari in the Arctic Circle is the Sami Museum which presents a perspective on Sami culture. The Sami are the original reindeer herders of Lapland, crossing the borders of Norway, Finland and Russia, whose territories and lifestyle, although partially maintained, have been compromised by the settlement and religion from of south. Although the museum is oriented more to passing tourism than critical enquiry, it does have 2 galleries dedicated to traditional and contemporary Sami art and object design.

It is evident that Finnish new media practice suffers from isolation even though geographically close to the larger European centres. The positive attitude and energy within the digital community generates prolific and challenging hybrid works.



Conversations with Angels

However, the infrastructure for presentation is still lagging. As in Australia, the obstacle of large geographical distances separating a relatively small population, means that communications networks are vital for this arts sector's survival and growth. The similarities run deeper, with Finnish government funding policy favouring hybrid and collaborative work, and also recognising the need for international input to diversify new media practice. Independent cultural organisations are situated at the forefront of presentation and promotion and artists themselves are utilising the virtual space of the net as an avenue for exploration, collaboration and accessing new audiences.

Melinda Burgess' research in Finland and attendance at E Polar Circuit was assisted by a Development Grant from the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council, and a Conference and Workshop Grant from the Australian Network for Art and Technology. Her site, a.land—voyage around beauty, developed from this research, can be found at <http://www.subtle.net/aland>

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# New hierarchies, new colonies

Linda Carroli and JM John Armstrong look at MAAPing in Brisbane's new multimedia festival

The inaugural Brisbane-based Multimedia Arts Asia Pacific 98 Festival, directed by Kim Machan, puts Brisbane once more in the regional 'hood. As the locus for the Asia-Pacific Triennial and with a run of cultural and artistic exchange projects and events, Brisbane is emerging as not just a port-of-call, but a site of connectivity. In its first incarnation, MAAP 98 aimed to create the infrastructure and provide scope to accommodate technology-based artworks, exhibitions and projects from the region.

The web provided the necessary 'links' which 'maaped' the Asia-Pacific in a series of flows: images, sounds, commentary and texts. Further engagements and interactions with online, screened, exhibited and performed work and texts provided us with the hyper- and inter-textual awareness that helps us understand this region as fragmented complexity. The harddrive grinds as it struggles to download sites and plug-ins. Perusing loses that luxuriant, ambling quality. We wait rather than take our time as sites download in random splinters. Hitting a site scripted with Java... "System Error 11—Restart." Even so, these works are worth the wait.

You have to wonder, if we're having trouble (albeit on an older Mac) in a city in a country that has consistently prioritised telecommunications, how do you manage in downtown Kendari (given the west's penchant for 'dumping' outdated technology)? Perhaps this will be addressed in future MAAPs whose vision is also to create a nexus between community, artform and the multimedia industries. Perhaps as

well, these questions may be contextualised by the Australian Network for Art and Technology as it develops and re-negotiates strategies for its 1999 program focus, Digital Region. Certainly, these (and other) concerns and ideas were discussed by various speakers at the festival's Think Tank forum.

As these speakers pointed out, electronic media are capable of carrying many messages, in many ways and to many audiences. Clearly, information technology is located differently across cultures inspiring suspicion and wariness in some contexts. However, for most Australian practitioners, this technology is generally perceived as capable of providing the context for new possibilities, exchanges and

are being established or what new colonisations or postcolonialisms are sweeping through the region when a significant proportion of it has been declared 'developing nation' (and with that, there is most likely disproportionate representation in the ranks of the 'information poor'). For all the talk about new media providing a new horizon for democracy, as a transference of hope, it is nevertheless a democracy with steep entry levels. But what has this to do with MAAP 98? Perhaps nothing, perhaps everything. At the core of such political dilemmas is the question, 'who speaks for whom?' However, in video works sourced from Malaysia, Japan and Hong Kong those speaking positions and their differentiated voices and contexts are made explicitly clear.



Lehan Ramsay & Hiroshi Yasukawa, *Resonance* (detail), *Shoreline* exhibition, 1998

meanings. It is this capability which locks us into the myth about a box from antiquity which stores hope. For example, Brisbane school children participate in environmental awareness-raising through video and performance, conveying their concern about pollution levels in the air we breathe. Working with George Pinn and Jeremy Hynes, these students give form to *SMOG*. The open-air presentation of this work, after a number of speeches, formed the opening night event. The festival's impressive list of sponsors bodes well for new media arts securing support from the corporate sector. Or, does it merely reflect that multimedia industries know the value of audience development as a factor in demand creation and parts of the Asia-Pacific are demand waiting to happen?

So really, you *do* have to wonder. You have to wonder what kinds of hierarchies

The digital domain seems partly surrounded by a permeable membrane that, while defining its territoriality, underscores the commonality and almost ubiquity of creative endeavour. Despite these flows, the imposition of the rectangular frame around these images and concerns is a continuation of the traditions we love and loathe. In MAAP 98 we are presented with a range of collaborative works—interchanges back and forth—such as *Resonance* in *Shoreline: Particles and Waves* <http://www.maap.org.au/shoreline> curated by Beth Jackson. As a virtual gallery, *Shoreline* presented seven works by nine artists from Australia, Japan, Hong Kong and New Zealand. Utilising the metaphors of the littoral, these works operate at the limit of the virtual ocean, testing seemingly given notions about art as it moves with the tides of interactivity, information and multimedia.

Equally we are witness to idiosyncratic



Lucy Francis, *Virgin with Hard Drive*

(almost demagogic) posturing and preening in the Eurocentric tradition with some of the 160 exhibited entries to the National Digital Art Awards organised by and presented at the Institute of Modern Art. Yet counter to this, and within the same show, are spectacular advances in visualisation, and the overall winner, Justine Cooper's video, *Rapt* (see *RealTime* 27, Colin Hood, "Between professional diagnosis and dumb fascination"), using medical imaging technology, takes the human corpus as site and perhaps uses as a currency for the region, corporeality of endeavour. Other place takers were John Tonkin's web based artworks <<http://207.225.33.116>> and Norie Neumark and Maria Miranda's *Shock in the Ear*. Despite the significance of this event in terms of promoting new media arts, its scheduling saw it competing with the rugby league grand final, resulting in a city-wide shortage of electronic equipment. While the IMA gathered whatever was available at short notice, there were varying degrees of success in terms of technological reliability; no wide screens and no instant replays.

Not having much luck with machines, we ventured towards less technologically contingent works and environments. At the Brisbane City Council Gallery, an exhibition of photographic and digital images by Robyn Stacey, curated by Frank McBride, provided close and closer scrutiny of flora in a series of optical illusions and manipulations. It is another overture by which we 'know' and reveal nature via technological means. A multimedia installation, *Virgin with Hard Drive* by Lucy Francis at Metro Arts, revealed a story set in the future exploring art, the artefact, conservation and decay.

Culture is notional, flowing across the nations of the region. Taking the fragrance or stink out of the locality means we are able to enjoy tourism of the highest order. You can stay at home and, server willing, it all comes to you. However, this is not passive; this is not broadcasting. A different mode of engagement is demanded as the work whispers or screams into your ears and eyes; there is no false sense of security when a system or an economy crashes. IT is other: IT is heaps and heaps of others and you are both component and resident of this Tower of Babel, adding your voice to the many as the cacophony catches just long enough to allow a double click to next frame.

Multimedia Arts Asia Pacific Festival 98, Brisbane, September 18–26, online at <http://www.maap.com.au>

Linda Carroli is a writer, visual artist and curator. JM John Armstrong is a visual artist and Head of Visual Arts at QUT.

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## Report

## Shows and sideshows in the new museum

Mike Leggett moves through site-time-media-space at a Museum of Sydney seminar

Touring the globe in search of the ingredients for the cultural pie that is the modern city's festival of arts, balances personal influence with the grind of corporate travel. Our very own Robyn Archer exposed some of the vices in this inexorable progress recently at the Museum of Sydney. In between the streaming succession of meetings, performances and phone calls, she escapes to, well, the local museum. Whether Mexico, Bolivia, Sweden, Austria, Holland or Taiwan, assemblages of humanity's artefacts can be found that go far beyond being "merely entertainment." Such institutions and theme parks she felt, "will have their day."

The spectre of the museum as a sculptural shell into which the musty remnants of earlier ages are placed was in question here. *Site-Time-Media-Space* were the sectors of 'the museum context' explored by a range of speakers assembled by the creative director of CDP Media and prime media designer for the venue itself, Gary Warner, "...to stake a claim for the exploration of poetics and design, the advocacy of play, curiosity and wonder..." The experiences of museum specialists who work with media technologies (and the research of artists who produce content with them) formed the substance of the seminar.

*SITE ...we enter its walls leaving the everyday behind to enter a microverse of contrived tableaux, of intellectual conceits and the frisson of play between certainty and ambiguity, credulity and propaganda...*

Susan Alexis Collins, from the Slade School in London, demonstrated the webspace interventions that she makes into street life, ranging from sound and imagescapes in a tunnel under the Thames, to a moving mouth on the pavement of a city street. Linked to a website ([www.street/gallery](http://www.street/gallery)), internet surfers are invited to select mouth movements and spoken phrases to be delivered to passers-by on the other side of the world/road. The sense that these become intrusions into streetlife (observed and measured by a hidden surveillance camera) exemplified the confrontational, and attenuated her attempt at communication of a most basic kind, a prerequisite for even the most experiential museum.

"Garrulous media installations..." were far from Ian Wedde's mind when as Concept Curator Humanities for the recently opened Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongerewa, he was part of the large team who sought to "find, win and grow a new audience" for *Our Place* where the collections were to be utilised as a unified resource. The 'Disneyfication' criticisms and the demonstrations around the *Condom Madonna* (part of the Pax Britannica exhibition that stopped off in Wellington after leaving the MCA in Sydney) were enough to attract the crowds in numbers that far surpassed original estimates.

*Facing It* is the section of Te Papa that commissioned media art from around the world. In a series of extended apologies to potential Australian contributors whose email had gone unanswered, Wedde outlined the rollercoaster he had ridden for the past years around "the rocks of management." The curator as heroic figure emerged, as contracts were issued to the lucky few "to extend artists' practice and placing risk-management at the feet of the institution". The risks paid off and the work of Lisa Reihana among many others, for modest cost, resulted in a photo-based exhibit using historical and contemporary photographic

images made in Samoa. The response? The Samoan community are each day encamped within the exhibit.

*SITE ...Display Technology is becoming a material that can be used to directly address the environs outside the gallery walls...Digital media systems will be devised to react to vectors such as crowd movement, meteorological conditions or the sound of traffic and so become dynamic, destabilising and revelatory...*

The complex issue of resourcing specific media projects emerged. Bricks, concrete and salaries are less of a problem than accessing the technology and project budgets. Wedde advocated "relationship brokerage" as the method by which artists, institution and sponsor could collaborate to produce museum outcomes. The issue of curatorial objectivity and discretion was left to another time.

*TIME ...rituals of delay can be quite pleasurable, or, at the very least build anticipation and create the conditions for narrative, drama, comedy and insight...*

Installation artist Maria Fernanda Cardoso has reintroduced the tradition of the live interactive booth to the museums of Europe and America with *The Cardoso Flea Circus*. In this 'side-show' concept complete with tent and circus mistress Cardoso, nothing is virtual, all is real, including the feeding of the fleas on the proprietor's arm.

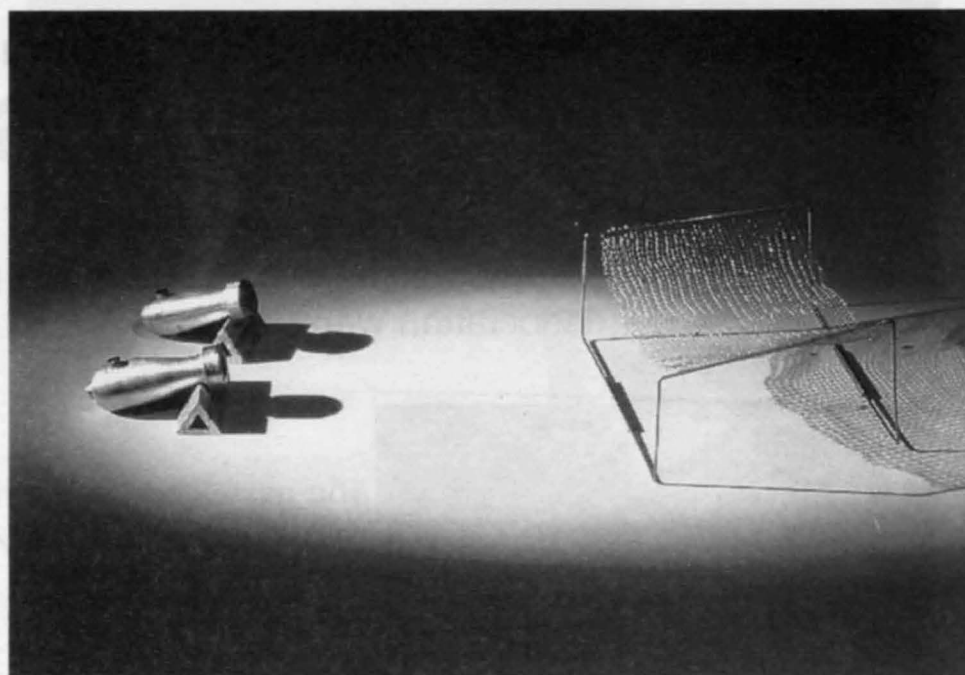
Touching steel, steering a submersible, and feeling the roar of an oil platform through your feet was the tangible introduction to the Oil Museum in Scotland, one of several new museums in Europe described by Stephen Ryan. *The Creation of the World* exhibit at the Natural History Museum in London was an example, of how—not surprisingly—a big budget and too many hi-tech resources can lead to lack of clarity and excessive maintenance costs. Avoidance of disruption is thus another measure of design success.

*MEDIA ...the creation of memorable media experiences, the crucible of memory being the experience of difference...*

Jon McCormack's long-term project with The Museum of Artificial Ecologies will become a public museum with a collection 'comprised only of software'. In tracing toward such a place we were led past the reputable (celebrated) *Osmose* by the Canadian Char Davies and McCormack's own artificial life projects, and through the many intrigues and ironies of 'escaping the container' of the frame and the glass cabinet found in so many museums and theme parks, and were entreated to agree that object-based museums obscure asking the questions "Who are we?", "What are we?"

*SPACE ...cumulative spatial mapping—the gradual understanding of the often complex spatial relationships that grows out of exposure to a variety of orientation inputs, some planned many unplanned—graphical, sensorium, aural...*

Matters of the spirit were raised by Paula Dawson for St Brigid's Church, Coogee, Sydney. The Shrine of the Sacred Heart was opened a year ago as a three-dimensional space within which holographic images are sited. Developed during a research period spent in part at MIT Media Lab, the copper vapour laser transmission holograph enables the parishioner to place their hands in prayer into the image space that simulates 3 visions associated with the Christ figure.

Maria Fernanda Cardoso, *The Cardoso Flea Circus*

Dawson's superbly delivered and illustrated presentation allowed for the patent irony of a non-believer becoming the re-inventor and interpreter of spiritual and devotional practice, re-exploring the smoke and mirrors of inclusive performance in the service of belief. A project involving advanced technology, this was the best example in the seminar of the kind of quantum leap that museological circles need to make, to

recapture the imagination and the passion of museum audiences in the service of meaning and knowledge.

*Site-Time-Media-Space—New Media in Museums*, a seminar, convenor, Gary Warner, Museum of Sydney, October 17–18. Full program details at [www.mos.nsw.gov.au](http://www.mos.nsw.gov.au)

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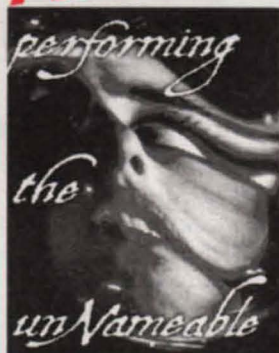
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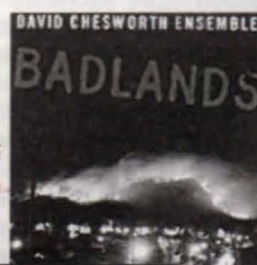


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## Report

# The artist falls

Kevin Murray hears US video artist Bill Viola speak at the Melbourne Festival

Saturday evening at RMIT's Storey Hall. A capacity crowd awaits the revered US video artist for his only public appearance in Australia. A late start, and successive introductions of introducers, heightens our expectations. When Bill Viola finally makes it to the lectern, it takes just one sentence for our high hopes to go into tailspin. "Okayee, hello, it's great to be here!" Oh, dear. Enthusiasm doesn't register well with a Melbourne audience. Rather, we prefer a cool, understated approach; it grants us a little more space for thought. Audience participation is our principle phobia.

This is unfortunate, as Viola proceeded to deliver a most generous lecture about the profound concerns that underlie his art. But all I could hear were contradictions—the three most serious of which I list below. Anyone more positively disposed is welcome to read a coherent artistic project between the lines.

The first contradiction concerned technology. Viola's talk began with the miraculous advance of the camera in our time. Viola's way of telling this story was to make dramatic comparisons: the first video recorders cost \$200,000 and were as big as a fridge, but today...And thanks to portable video cameras, artists are now able to give expression to their creativity that is relevant to our time. This sounded more like a sales pitch.

At the same time as eulogising technology, Viola pressed home the human dimension arguing that media such as television accelerate time to a point where they leave the orbit of human concerns. Yet the progress that Viola derides is the very same force that provides artists with their means of existence in the modern era.

This contradiction housed a deeper problem in Viola's argument. His critique of contemporary culture is based on a fundamentalist belief in the body as the true measure of "absolute time and space." Alluding to authors such as Arnheim, he claimed that architecture was now beginning to recognise that its basic tenets can be derived not from art history, but from an understanding of the human body. Likewise, Viola could base his own work on an understanding of the universal human experience of time.

The anthropocentrism of this reduction is nothing surprising. Much American popular culture is about uncovering the human presence 'out there'—reducing the strange to the familiar. Viola boldly undermined his own humanism, however, by claiming the necessity for a "dark place", where secrets can occur. Such a space is where he chooses to situate his installations. Yet to hold with the existence of shadows, it is necessary to believe in something beyond human consciousness. I don't mean ghosts or ETs. The structures of language that enable consciousness are enough of a mystery. The way video distorts images provides some means of representing that mediation. Yet driven to touch human emotions directly, Viola seems blind to the message of his medium.

Scheduled to open in Sydney's inner west in December, the **Silicon Pulp Animation Gallery** will exhibit original artwork, designs and storyboards from the history of Australian animation production. Not only will this gallery collect these treasures of film but it will also restore, preserve and exhibit them to the public. The venture is the result of a partnership between two animation fans. Jan Begg has a strong background in art conservation and collection, and musician Steve Lucas a commitment to collecting and preservation animation drawings particularly from the process stage of production such as the character designs.

The first exhibition *Moving Ideas* opens December 1



Bill Viola, *The Messenger*, video/sound installation, 1996

The final contradiction dealt with progress. The rising intonation in Viola's sentences was focused on the great leaps forward in human history. One of the greatest of these was the ascension of the artist, rising out of the ranks of mere "craftspeople" to join the elites of the Renaissance, along with poets and military leaders. However, Viola ended his lecture on a contrary note. His last sentence evoked the *Remanence* theme of the visual arts program of which his installation is a part: "It's all about what has been left behind." It's as though Viola wants to be both master and slave, technocrat and poet, Bill Gates and John Ruskin, American and Australian.

Bill Viola appears to be travelling along what Jacques Lacan described as the "American way"—the way of promising everything to everyone. Perhaps Melbourne audiences are more elitist. We need to see others fall by the wayside to be sure we are travelling in the right direction.

Still, there was much to celebrate. Our presence in such number acknowledged the captivating series of installations at the Old Magistrate's Court that formed the *Remanence* program. The event itself was smoothly organised by the local art temples (CCP, 200GS, ACCA). Viola spoke for nearly two hours, answered questions at length, and showed Christian patience to the one heckler. His videos and aphorisms touched on profound dimensions of human experience. But it was a Reagan-esque world of homespun pathos, far from today's 'hard edge' culture of *South Park*, Nike and Viagra. Too sweet.

Sorry Bill. You needed to tell us where you are coming from, because it's not where we are. At least, not yet.

*Bill Viola lecture, part of Videor for the 1998 Melbourne Festival, presented by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 200 Gertrude Street and Centre for Contemporary Photography, Storey Hall RMIT, Melbourne, October 17.*

*Bill Viola's installation The Messenger will be a part of the 1999 Sydney Festival at The Art Gallery of NSW, January 2 - 26*

and will include cells and backgrounds from *King Arthur* and the *Square Knights of the Round Table* and the wave sequence from the Eric Porter production *The Adventures of Marco Polo Junior*. The name of the gallery, Silicon Pulp, refers the silicon chips of computer animation and the pulp of disposable entertainment, the fate of many early animation cels and drawings which were trashed rather than preserved. Silicon Pulp Gallery intends to reverse the process and elevate the status of this perceived low art to its rightful position as a valuable part of Australian culture.

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## Report

# Collision courses

Esta Milne negotiates maps and other metaphors in *Viruses and Mutations*

Honest to God, if I hear the 'm' word one more time, I'm going to have a cartographic seizure. Since the early 80s when Fredric Jameson conflated pomo angst with an inability to represent the reconfiguration of spatiality, cultural production has remained in the thrall of the map. The 'will to cartography' describes the dominant critical stance informing a broad range of cultural practices, aesthetic commentaries and emergent social sites. One thinks immediately, of course, of all those energetic efforts to map, navigate and chart the spaces of post-corporeal digital existence. Yet it has to be admitted that there are some environments where a spot of mapping comes in handy: bioethics, new reproductive technologies and the Human Genome Project. A preoccupation with the logic of maps reflects our current fascination with borders and boundaries, interface and intersection. What constitutes the inside and outside of the body has become increasingly problematic for cultural commentators, scientists, media theorists and artists. And what might be the consequences of transgressing or mutating these limits was the subject of a recent Experimenta Media Arts event held in Melbourne, *Viruses and Mutations*.

Curated by Keely Macarow, the event brought together a diverse group of academics, genetic scientists, bioethicists and artists. Produced with the assistance of Cinemedia, *Viruses and Mutations* was part of the Melbourne Festival Visual Arts Program and consisted of three interrelated projects: a one-day cultural symposium, an exhibition—with works from digital artists and medical industry professionals—and a website. These three elements offered a way to critique and represent the issues that are generated when aesthetics, science and technology clash.

Indeed, a number of the contributors to the exhibition seemed quite keen on collision narratives. One of the most intriguing, albeit disquieting, installations imagined biotechnology as an aircraft crash. Called *Cotis Movie* ('Cult of the Insertor Seat' and 'Mechanism of Viral Infection Entry') this digital sound installation, by the international artist collective KIT, used medical scanning apparatus as a metaphor to trace all kinds of worrying links between bodies, technology and virology. Activated by one's own body—you had to get up on a little stage and sit in a simulated aircraft seat to start the show—*Cotis Movie* constructed an environment of uncomfortable immersion and somatic pain. I mean this quite literally. The sound sculpture created by the three speakers surrounding the aircraft seat, reverberated in a way almost too painful to bear. A frantic voice screeches "we're going down". Seated in front of a

screen you read that the *Cotis Movie* scanner has, apparently, located your vulnerable point in order to implant a virus. A tad apocalyptic? Well, yes. And this is what makes *Cotis Movie* a troubling encounter. If mapping has captured the cultural imagination, then the millennial discourse of the virus is no slouch either. While tropes of infection and viral transmission are made to stand for a plethora of cultural phenomena or transformations (malfunctions in computer software, popularity of theory in literature departments and so on) those with actual, material bodies infected by viruses continue to suffer. We ought to be a little cautious when the representation of illness appears to articulate a kind of techno-sublime: "the intended outcome of the *Cotis Movie* is an aircraft crash—which in this case suggests a mutated body—a body fused between technology."

Theorising the body as a site for technological intervention—as collision, fusion, transgression or intersection—concerns a number of the other works in the exhibition. Justine Cooper's digital video, *Rapt*, for example, imaged the artist's own body to explore the effects of biomedical technology on corporeal understandings of time and space. *The Tissue Culture & Art Project* (reviewed in the Oct/Nov issue of *RealTime*) by Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr used living tissue to 'grow' a conceit about the relation between process and product—life and artificiality, art and science. *The Love Machine*, an installation by Michele Barker and Anna Munster, aimed to "represent the hybridity which computer imaging makes possible between technology and flesh." This exhibit mimed the logic of a photo booth; that is, it simulated a particular kind of photo booth that the artists discovered in Japan and Hong Kong which takes a photograph of a couple and then digitally predicts and delivers a picture of the offspring. For Barker and Munster the structure provided a way to speculate about notions of definitive biological origin, ambiguous identity, authenticity and digital modes of reproduction.

In this regard *The Love Machine* dealt with what a number of commentators identify as a deeply significant paradigmatic alliance of the second half of this century: genetics and cybernetics. From the 1950s, information theory and cybernetics began to inform the knowledge production and scientific practices of molecular biology. Heredity was to be understood in terms of information, data, sequence and code. So organisms became informational patterns, data transmitting devices, nodes of input and output, modes of retrieval and archival. Fahhhbulously sexy and no wet patch. The disappearing material body, notions of genetic determinism, post-



Michele Barker & Anna Munster, *The Love Machine*

human subjectivity and a realignment of the mind/body dichotomy, can be seen as a function of the relations between genetic research, information theory and cybernetics. These developments have, of course, been well theorised by a range of quite different thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Arthur Kroker (natch) and Jean Baudrillard. What's interesting about *The Love Machine* is the way it reinvests the argument with a lesbian polemic, questioning the technological essentialism of the body-as-information trope.

I read a comment that encapsulates a key theme of the one-day symposium. When asked about the ethical implications of genetic engineering, Francis Crick (who, with James Watson, discovered the double helical structure of DNA) is supposed to have remarked something along the lines of 'social concerns are quite nice but let's worry about them after we've made the scientific discoveries.' (Or, to borrow that god-awful Kevin Costner line, "if you build it he will come.") While the conference provided a forum for interdisciplinary rapport between scientists, cultural commentators and artists, there was little movement around or departure from some fairly traditional theoretical positions: those of the 'Crick school' and those opposed. One of the most interesting exchanges occurred during question time between feminist lawyer and publisher, Dr Jocelynn Scutt, and Professor Grant Sutherland head of the Department of Cytogenetics and Molecular Genetics at Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital. Sutherland felt it was 'up to the community' to decide about the applications of new genetic engineering technology while Scutt urged scientists to locate themselves more self-consciously within these techno-scientific discourses.

Along with issues of technological determinism, key areas of debate concerned the ethical, social and political implications of

gene patents and the Human Diversity Project, gene therapy, genetically engineered foodstuffs, detection of the so-called gay gene, in-vitro fertilisation, and genetic screening. This last point was discussed by a number of the speakers. Both Bob Phelps (director of the GeneEthics Network) and Dr Udo Schuklenk (Monash University's Centre for Human Bioethics) spoke passionately and eloquently about the degree to which the ability to predict or detect genetic based disease could witness institutional discrimination across the fields of education, employment, insurance and health care. Universal health care was seen as a crucial issue because those who are identified as 'at risk' for certain genetic conditions might be unable to secure private health insurance.

It's become almost commonplace to characterise our cultural moment as one preoccupied with the signifier over the signified, with the medium over the message, the map over the terrain. *Viruses and Mutation* sought to be situated somewhere within this pattern of signification. Both the conference and exhibition were very much concerned with exploring the tropes and iconography of biotechnological research, while emphasising the interdependence of the material and the semiotic, metaphor and literal. The exhibition was, after all, held in a conference centre called The Aikenhead.

*Experimenta Media Arts, Viruses and Mutations*, curator Keely Macarow; exhibition, Aikenhead Conference Centre, St Vincent's Hospital, Fitzroy, October 19-31; symposium, State Film Theatre, East Melbourne, October 24; website: [www.experimenta.org](http://www.experimenta.org)

Esta Milne is a PhD student at Melbourne University researching the history of electronic mail. She also tutors in Literature and Media at Swinburne University of Technology.

## a young filmmakers fund

The state government has established a fund for the encouragement of **young filmmakers**. Eligible projects will be mainly **short fiction films**, **documentaries or experimental films**. The fund is administered by the New South Wales Film & Television Office.

- The Fund is open to **individuals** or **teams of individuals** between the ages of **18** and **35** years who are **NSW residents**
- The Fund will make direct grants towards **production and post production costs only**
- Projects must demonstrate **cultural and economic benefit to NSW** and be entirely produced in NSW using NSW based service providers
- Each project's principal photography must begin within six months of approval
- There is **no restriction** on the format [film or tape], subject matter or type of film
- The maximum grant will be in the range of **\$20,000-\$25,000**, but the assessment committee may recommend a larger grant for a proposal of exceptional merit
- The closing date for the next round is **19 February 1999**

Guidelines and applications for the Young Filmmakers Fund must be used and are now available from: **New South Wales Film & Television Office**  
Level 6, 1-15 Francis Street East Sydney NSW 2010  
Phone [02] 9380 5599 Fax [02] 9360 1090 [www.ftosyd.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ftosyd.nsw.gov.au)



## Column

## Telediction

## Jeff Gibson on Dope

Amidst the advertising word-plays and snappy one-liners littering the New York subway this summer, there was one campaign that shone with an illuminating candour. Promoting ABC entertainment media, the minimally designed call-and-response-style ad simply read "don't just sit there...okay, just sit there." Bang goes the compensatory rhetoric of extreme sports, "life be in it" moralising, and overachieving archetypes. As with any opiate, the litmus test for successful entertainment is not so much inspirational motivation, as totally engrossing inactivity. After all, in the argot of the dope fiend, a good hit is one that "sits you down."

And when it comes to transfixing effects, nothing stupefies like stupidity. Moronic behaviour is an old standard when playing to the stalls, but in recent years Hollywood has left no stone or trick unturned in its efforts to up the affective ante, distilling that time-honoured essence of comedic performance into a state of pure haplessness. Whether factual (*Funniest Home Videos*, *World's Worst Drivers*), factionalised (*Dumb and Dumber*, Leslie Nielsen's late filmography), or abstracted (*Ren and Stimpy*, Homer Simpson), imbecilic pratfalls, along with an equally infantile eruption of bodily effluvia, have reached new heights, or depths, of liberatory delirium.

As *Ren and Stimpy* creator, John Kricfalusi, has often stated, the undisputed kings of cretinous calamity would have to be *The Three Stooges*, with Lou Costello and Jerry Lewis the immediate heirs apparent. The original nuk-nuk-knuckleheads, Larry, Moe and Curly's petulant cruelty, madcap antics and skull cracking sound effects reverberate through the annals of TV buffoonery. Contemporary classics like *Get Smart* and *Gilligan's Island* owe much to these pioneers of ineptitude, not to mention the vast catalogue of animated halfwits and sidekicks—eg Disney's Goofy, Brains from *Top Cat*, Mugsy the Warner Brothers gangster, Mr Magoo (an unfortunately squandered opportunity for Leslie Nielsen)—whose intellectual failure we find so amusing a distraction from our own inadequacies.

However, with this decade's virtual glasnost on self-censorship, we have witnessed the establishment of a whole new set of benchmarks. Jim Carrey's talking asshole and Ben Stiller's zippered scrotum take the cake in the gross-out stakes, while Beavis and Butthead would have to be the undisputed juveniles of postmodern media. Then there is David Zucker's new sports-jock parody, *Basketball*, a riotously irreverent two hours of shattered social protocol. Zucker, the creator of the 1980 record-taboo-breaking spoof, *Airport*, has conspired here with *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone (who also star in the film) to take physical culture into a whole new realm of brainlessness. Yet *Basketball* bombed completely in the US, which just goes to show that goofing off is all about timing. The current glut of stoopid shit and sticky stuff is such that whatever psychic surplus idiocy and transgression might

gratefully discharge, has been well and truly vented. Whether based upon repressive convention, malicious intent, or straight up neotony, foolishness is generally only amusing as a short, sharp, expulsive digression.

And then there's the Gump effect. You know, "stupid is as stupid..." As much a mass cinematic and literary standard (*Of Mice and Men*, *Gilbert Grape*, *Slingblade*) as a low-brow comedic device (Kramer's unwitting post-Novocain shenanigans, Sam Raimi's baccy-spittin, hillbilly lunkheads) the representation of the intellectually challenged oscillates between transcendent emotionalism and wickedly patronising condescension. While the teary sentimentality attending the former raises issues too serious and sensitive to be subject to superficial cultural trends, the latter also enjoys a certain perennial appeal, perhaps exemplifying the very sublimated nastiness underpinning much popular wit and comedy.

Whatever the impetus, foolishness is undoubtedly a cornerstone of popular entertainment. Clowning and slapstick—mucking up and falling down—are the purest forms of theatre, poking fun at common experience and exploding the delusional pretence of social climbing. On this score, no-one falls down as well or as often as *Seinfeld*'s Kramer (although Matthew on *News Radio* gives him a pretty amusing run for his money). In marrying the detached outsider wisdom and sexual allure of the contemporary urban bohemian to the choreographed clumsiness of the circus clown (remember Elaine once tagged him a "hipster doofus"), Michael Richards has created a lovably

ridiculous figure, morally and financially adrift, upon whom we can project and purge a whole range of conflicting emotions and aspirations.

Kramer lovers should check out Michael Richards' hilarious performance as a simple-minded janitor-cum-kid's show host in *Weird Al Yankovic's Vidiot from UHF* (1989), a cable-culture classic, presaging the likes of *Wayne's World* and the now commonplace casualness of video-jock, sofa-style presentations.

And while you're digging through the bargain bins at your local video store, keep an eye out for Bobcat Goldthwait's tragicomic *Shakes the Clown* (1991) which, despite Leonard Maltin's complete dismissal, still ranks for me as one of the most profound enquiries into the psychology of comedy ever enacted. A hard-core mime-hating alcoholic misanthrope, Goldthwait's Shakes (presumably a semi-autobiographical character given the generally drug-fucked nature of most of his repertoire) pukes, bumbles, and fumbles his way toward sobriety and emotional salvation. Obviously inspirational for a legion of misfits and nincompoops, *Shakes* has spawned several devotional websites (see in particular <http://weber.u.washington.edu/~aith/shakes/shakes.html>). For those identifying with Goldthwait's cynical and jaundiced worldview, it is clear that humour is just the other side of sorrow, wit the product of anger, and wanton stupidity the negation of civilised behaviour.

Jeff Gibson is an artist who is currently working as production manager for Artforum International, New York.

## Report

## Looking for engagement

Anne V McGravie-Wright tracks a multimedia forum for the cultural industries

How do we map the future interactive path between museums and the world wide web? Will the cultural and physical thresholds of the museum world be extended for the online visitor? Does the web create a new sense of community and continuity for the digital audience? Can we begin to define the new 'Questers'...and where do we find them? Are the new digital audiences different from the traditional patrons of past cultural events? These were the primary questions addressed by the Australian and international speakers at *Culture Track 98*, an initiative of ArtVicMM.

*Where is the Audience in the Digital World* was a challenging, one-day symposium, held on October 30 during the *Interact 98 Asia Pacific Multimedia Festival* at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre. The opening keynote address by Kevin Kelly, executive editor of *Wired* magazine, began by sketching a global vision for the future of multimedia and cultural industries. He highlighted the current online trends which are assisting in the blurring of cultural boundaries: "Follow the free...Know thy customer, for those with the smartest customers wins...Gaining true focus and audience attention will be the new currency and online wealth."

Other presenters such as Clare Byrnes from ABC Arts and Culture On Line, Angharad Wynne-Jones from Chunky Move, and Therese van Maanen from eMERGE presented specific case studies of online projects they have produced in Australia which sought new ways of facilitating a sense of connection between current offline cultural programs, new technologies and the live audience. All speakers voiced concern that their online programs should do more than inform, rather aim to stimulate people currently engaged in diverse creative activities and seeking a new

level of experience. They wanted to offer their Questers an experience that was fluid, convergent in media disciplines and viewed as alternative and/or experimental.

McKenzie Wark from Macquarie University drew our attention to the importance of the physical context in which we receive, experience and interact with varied forms of media. He reiterated the need for meaningful research into new media studies and associated human behaviour, and suggested further studies which would clarify online audience trends and define the often "unexpected patterns of interaction." Although Wark's current interests and research have been aimed at private space experiences, he acknowledged the need for research in public space experiences, specific kinds of learning environments, and studying which ones are the most effective.

Judging from the *Culture Track 98* audience responses, it seemed that many attending were curious about online developments but remained unsure as to the validity of multimedia and online programs for cultural organisations.

Perhaps our greatest hope for the future vibrancy of Australia's cultural industries lies in the new technology's tremendous potential to dissolve the boundaries between traditional cultural institutions, centres for learning and online information providers. Those cultural organisations large and small, which can survive the mind-shift, will successfully begin to work collaboratively at identifying, addressing and building their digital audiences. In the process of redefining themselves, they will also be building a loyal virtual community, which has the added advantage of supporting the more traditional inhouse programs as well as helping to push the boundaries.

Examples such as the pilot *USEUM* website ([www.useum.org.au](http://www.useum.org.au)), funded by Multimedia Victoria and managed by eMERGE, inspire us to do more, proving the point that an experimental cultural site can set a creative precedent for collaborative online projects utilising more than one collection. The challenge now is to proceed from here in an informed manner.

...I was told I should look at my audience as not necessarily knowledgeable, but as intelligent, curious and ready to be excited. At university, for very good reasons, you're inclined to look at your audience as needing to be taught. We the general public, however don't want to be taught—we want to be excited to learn. It's very different.

Robert Dessaix, "Averting The Gaze", *Secrets*, Pan Macmillan, 1997

"Where is the Audience in the Digital World", Culture Track 98, Melbourne Exhibition Centre, October 30. Further details and papers presented at Culture Track: <http://www.interact98.com.au/inter.htm>

Anne V. McGravie-Wright has worked for many years within the visual arts industries in the areas of Exhibition Management and Conservation of Contemporary Works of Art. She was a Mellon Fellow at the Museum of Modern Art, MOMA and NYC, New York undertaking research into multimedia works. She is currently finishing a Masters in Communications and Media at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne.

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## Column

## Cinesonics

Philip Brophy listens to *The Truman Show* and asks can music lie

Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* is one of those films that is very easy to praise and just as easy to damn. Any film that is marketed by 5 star quotes from *TIME* and *Newsweek* (arm-chair tabloid bibles for concerned fathers of today) has to be so safely full of altruisms and fey shared warmth that its emotional machinations are sure to smart. And if you hate Jim Carrey—especially because he has become so famous and popular for extending the Jerry Lewis tradition of rubbery slapstick—then you can vent your rage against him by blaming him for the movie's manipulative gyrations.

But Jim Carrey is fascinating in the film. Like all slippery comedians, his performance mode—and its self-crystallising and re-liquefying manifestations that flicker between warm irony and savage humour—is hard to contain, harder to frame. He is perfectly cast in a vehicle custom-made for such a flesh-icon of comedy. And while the film is utterly repugnant in its media moralism (more on that in a minute), the performance by Ed Harris is a harsh reflector board held at odd angles to Jim Carrey's gangly body at every moment. If Carrey is the cartoon made flesh, Harris embodies the heartless core of an omnipotent god-being. Set against each other—allowed contact only through cinematic edits and a final voice-over dialogue at the film's closure—their relationship is at once a corny Biblical saga (pick any father-son line from either Testament) and an unresolved debacle of parental over-concern.

Any film which attempts to take the media to task is prone to embarrassing failure. If Pop Art—particularly as generated through Andy Warhol—taught intellectuals anything, it's that critique is most vibrant when spoken in any voice but its own. To love or hate Pop—you simply be Pop. You surrender all intellectual property and submerge your critical voice. You have to be perverse (to embark on the seemingly negative), experimental (to wish to gauge the effects of your absence) and amorphous (so as to disintegrate into the larger cultural mass that frames your critique). The media works in entirely similar ways. You want to make fun of it? It will make fun of itself next week even more savagely. You want to 'work from the inside' and 'subvert things'? No problem—just send in your resume; there's always a vacancy. You think you're

'irreverent', 'cutting' and 'pull-no-punches'? Go direct to the ABC.

But still, people insist on critical distance, authorial separation, that sly wink to the audience. This is media romanticism at its most banal—the half-formed idea that one can be 'other than the media.' In fact, it's a para-mystical delusion—the notion that one can levitate, freeze tape time, walk on televisual water in the act of addressing the media while avoiding its core grammatological grain which codes your voice with the biting sibilance of compressed broadcast transmission. This mystical media romanticisation has grown unabated, cross-pollinated by everyone from Ralph Nader to Timothy Leary, from Noam Chomsky to Nicholas Negroponte. All those throbbing brains and popping veins—and probably no one could say anything vaguely stimulating at an intellectual level about *Josie and Pussycats*, WWF Wrestling or Michael Jackson.

*The Truman Show* 'addresses' things many wannabe-media-critics think need addressing—but which I personally couldn't care less about it. Easy targets like 'Hollywood', 'product placement', 'truthful depiction' and 'mass media effects.' I can just hear the sweat sizzling inside the cotton trousers and skirts of media teachers as they watch this movie, getting excited about all the ways they could use this film as a 'topic' for discussion in their 'media class.' (Little do they realise that they had their chance to do that with the most dismissed and best film of last year—*Starship Troopers*.) Not surprisingly, *The Truman Show* ends up caving in on itself to a degree. Some people wanted more of a cathartic explosion of Jim Carrey at the end. Others wanted less of a parable-toned ending and more of a clear assault of the media's monolithic power. (Such befuddled braying are typical of the way most people simply can't handle the end to any movie purely because the film finishes: they deny the pornographic vicarious pleasure that sustained them once the post-coital reality of their own pleasure zone faces them.)

But there are specific cracks in the geodesic domed world of *The Truman Show*—and no amount of dated pseudo-postmodern posing and smarmy East Coast winks-and-nods can hide these cracks. For

through these cracks comes yet again the surfeit of image, the weight of space, the aura of audiovisuality: that unstoppable diaspora from the land of image called 'music.'

*The Truman Show* features a patchwork score: the occasional Light Classical work threaded together by some tasteful Contemporary AOR by Burkhard Dallwitz and some brief but noticeable snatches of Philip Glass' distinctive 'hysterical minimalism.' The soundtrack CD testifies to this tri-cocktail of orchestral erogenous zones—each marked by an excess of emotionalism, scarred by cliché, and dripping with heroic signage. All the music I find in its own way utterly theatrical—far from operative as 'truthful' as per the film's general aim—and resonating more through archetype and accrued musical grammar than a distinctive sono-acoustic character. The Light Classical numbers have been elsewhere so over-used they function as filler; Dallwitz's music is reminiscent of all ad jingles these days which attempt to humanise the world and our future generations while scoring the sound of a washing machine; and Philip Glass bellows with harmonic bombast in a way that inverts the music into a spiralling High Art canon of artifice.

Leaving aside the inclusion of (usually diegetically sourced) Light Classical, an interesting opposition is struck between Dallwitz and Glass: the former being no doubt more palatable to most people despite its anonymity and pedestrian harmonic/sonic palette, the latter being irritating and obtrusive to many due to the severity of its minimalist tenure. To some extent, director Weir may have been searching for a balance between artifice and artistry in the difficult task of selecting a theme for a show based on deception which is at the centre of a film based on exposing deception. So, a musical sleight of hand is performed when at one point, a Dallwitz cue rises (it has been swelling at other points prior) and Ed Harris orders "fade up cue music." We all smile knowingly: yes, that is manipulative music right there. But then later, the same music rises—uncued or undirected by Harris—and I'm certain most people would find the music 'works' there despite it being invisibly—insidiously, even—manipulative to an even greater degree.

Yet I would still have to relent and say that all the music 'works' well in the film. Which gives rise to an interesting possibility: that music cannot help but 'tell the truth.' Or: can music 'lie'? *The Truman Show* is so contrived with its earnest hand-wringing about the dissolution of 'truth' in 'the media' (like, der)—but while the film is thematically full of sanctimonious bullshit, social reductivism and

self-contradiction, the music is never tainted by such themes, purposes or prejudices. When Truman realises he has some ineffable power over forces around him and he starts controlling the traffic, his transformative naivete is perfectly balanced by a cloying yet effective cue by Dallwitz. When Ed Harris' world starts to fall apart as Truman embarks on his oceanic escape, Glass' overstated musical apocalypse purposefully wills the world to not be rendered apart while accepting its finality as a means of resolution.

*The Truman Show* is the kind of film I want to trash mercilessly because of its irresponsible myth-making about 'media untruth' when the search for truth is such a tacky heroic grand narrative we could do well without. Yet it is a great movie that either intentionally or unintentionally (I don't care how) reveals the complexity of music's 'multi-complicity'—that is, its capacity to be all that contradicts with full effect. It has none of the harmonic-emotional sophistication of Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995; his placement of Moby's "God Moving Over The Face Of The Waters" at the film's end is sublime). Nor does it have any of the unerring self-exposure which typifies Ulu Grosbard's *Georgia* (1996) as the only film I know of which portrays the idea of 'soul' in music as nothing but a pure and beguiling effect of emotional empathy. Yet, a deeper pondering of the role music plays in *The Truman Show* grants the film a greater exploration of 'truth' through actively dissolving the cine-formal distinctions between artifice and reality—a project which the film wills thematically but fails in realising at that level. (See *Pee Wee's Big Adventure*—Tim Burton, 1985—for that.)

In the opening of *Romy and Michelle's High School Reunion* (1997)—one of hundreds of Hollywood movies about truth and deception (like, does Hollywood not make movies about this theme?)—the two girls sit watching Garry Marshall's *Pretty Woman* (1990; another film about, etc.). Both are enraptured; then one bags the manipulative emotional music "that's meant to make us feel, y'know, real sad and stuff." They laugh—and then they stop laughing. Teary-eyed, she says: "But, um, it's really sad." Images are always safe because they can only ever lie. Only fools think otherwise. Music is most dangerous—and most thrillingly powerful—because it can do anything but lie. And the biggest fool is the one who actually believes there is such a thing as 'fake music.'

*The Truman Show*, director Peter Weir, writer Andrew Niccol, music Burkhard Dallwitz, additional music Philip Glass, distributor UIP

## Review

## Old binarisms, new media

Cate Jones treads carefully in Naomi Herzog's *Mined Fields* at Ngapartji

Naomi Herzog's *Mined Fields* CD is the fourth in the series of Ngapartji Multimedia Centre's exhibition *CDWomen*. The work is an enigmatically playful exploration of the problematic nature of gender relationships, essentially constructed around the Jungian theory of male (animus)/female (anima) archetypes.

Herzog's imagery focuses on heads. The CD opens with the androgynous shaved and ashen head of a female, out of which emanates its male familiar. The two heads, appearing at first as cognate and homogeneous, soon reveal themselves as divided as their differences become distinctly unambiguous. At the end of this sequence the female's head is crowned by forks that, one by one, literally ping onto the screen. Trapped by the half-circle of forks, her face contorts and writhes with irritated, impotent frustration. Her expressions are too cute—if the circle of forks represents those tormenting aspects of relationships, then she is too helpless, imposed upon, and reactive.

The transition between sequences is smooth and the design of the navigational devices compelling. In one sequence a grid, with a paragraph of text below, appears on the screen. As squares inside the grid are clicked-on, male and female voices speak each word of the text. Herzog creates a tension between the viewer's desire to rearrange and experiment with the voices and the text, and her need to decode the order.

Herzog draws on imagery from Mike Nichol's film version of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) to describe sexual archetypes, and invites the viewer to explore the mounting tension and conflict between the characters. There is a linear order to this sequence that became clear as I uncovered the narrative. Short clips reveal two women, a wife and her friend, sitting together on a sofa laughing. The wife (Elizabeth Taylor) is savagely mocking her husband (Richard Burton), who lurks in the background behind the sofa. As the hysterical edge

to the laughter accelerates, the husband becomes more and more murderous. He goes for his gun, walks back into the room, stands behind the women and takes aim. The wife's spiteful, goading laughter reverberates as the camera zooms in on her friend who, horrified and silent, has turned to face the husband and the rifle. She screams. A gun blast ends the sequence.

While the sense of malice and repressed violence is potent in these short clips and is certainly engaging on an interactive level, I am uncomfortable with Herzog's message—perhaps I just don't get it. *Mined Fields* representation of woman as goading hysteric or, as in earlier sequences, cute shaved babe, lacks resolution. Both women end-up being helpless victims, one of a vicious fork attack and the other a maniacal



Mined Fields

gunman. The representation of man as pitiable victimiser is possibly more extreme.

Naomi Herzog is a Melbourne-based artist who has worked in the visual and performing arts. She is now involved primarily in film and interactive multimedia.

*Mined Fields*, Naomi Herzog, 4th exhibition in the series *CDWomen*, Ngapartji Multimedia Centre, Adelaide, October 1998.



## Essay

# Their image masked

In response to John Conomos' video *Autumn Song* and the *In their Own Image, Greek Australians* exhibition, Alexandra Pitsis reflects on second generation migrant identity

To get to the *In their Own Image, Greek Australians* exhibition I had to walk through *Dare to Know*, an exhibition about the history and impact of European, that is mainly British and French, activity on Australia and the Pacific. The use of the word European also describes me, but I don't feel a rapport with these adventurous souls who wiped out indigenous people around the globe. The Greeks did this kind of thing much earlier, so that distance of time allows us to romanticise the bloodthirsty activities of the ancients.

Once I arrived at *In Their Own Image*, I drifted past a sea of Greek faces, fixed in photographs; I was moved to tears. After two hours of looking at the devastation and pleasures of migration and what it means in particular to be of Greek heritage in Australia, I was emotionally exhausted.

The Greek exhibition made me feel unique but also part of a nameless flock of faces. My sister called to tell me: "I was looking at the book of the exhibition and it opened up at page 127 to a bride ship, the Begona in 1957, and there's Mum." This photograph has hundreds of nameless women (and a few children and men). By the 50s the gender balance was so out of proportion, the Australian Government had to create social policy to bring more Greek women here to marry the Greek male population.

Asking my mother about the information drive in Greece at the time, trying to determine whether the women were informed they were voyaging on a bride ship, she said she knew nothing about it. She had no intention to get married, but with that kind of social policy you can only resist the forces for a limited time. There are 5 children from a union driven by social forces beyond our control. To be born out of this and then into another set of processes of inclusion and exclusion... I can't help but agree with the main character in the recent film by Ana Kokkinos, *Head On*, when asked whether he is proud to be Greek: "Proud? I had nothing to do with it." After all, these boats carried many different people on an unknown journey; brought to Australia many hopeful people to serve a country which would never fully accept them and in turn their children. People who came here believed in hope, to an extent that most would never understand. The exhibition is a testament to this.

The migration of Greeks to Australia goes back to the early 1800s. In 1829 seven Greek convicts were transported here for piracy. When pardoned seven years later, two of them stayed to become settlers. Greece, throughout most of its history, has been a pretty devastating place to

live in, but the culture of pain and poverty in Australia surpasses the poverty of displacement. The exhibition records the story of Greeks who lived through violent racist attacks and large scale race riots in Sydney in 1915, Kalgoorlie and Boulder in 1916, and again during Australia Day celebrations of 1934. Half a century later, in 1986, shop proprietor George Gabriel, is quoted in the exhibition catalogue: "Naturalisation—I wouldn't naturalise my dog." A sentiment which is instilled in some, but not most Greeks. Having been born here and never having lived in another country, I still can't say I have found a home.

This theme is explored in John Conomos' video work *Autumn Song*. In a stream of poetic morphs/images, there is a deep sense of 'I am at home nowhere, in no house and no country.'

A visually intoxicating scene in the video remains with me, where a group of people wearing masks are dancing to a mutated melody in a type of Halloween ritual. The use of these masks interests me because it serves to elaborate on the series of complexities about migration. Firstly, to describe Conomos' existence as a Greek boy growing up in a milk bar; this alone is steeped in a collision of historic tragedies both social and personal. The mask is an embodiment of pain and a way of hiding it. The mask is also a metaphor for the poetic intricacies of the migratory process. Children of migrants are the vestibules of psychic torment that centres on wars, poverty and hardship.

The masks used in *Autumn Song* show up the inherent dualities in our kind of existence. If you ask me what home is, all I can say is it's a sense of place with another person, a family member, a friend, a lover or a stranger. This is the great heritage of a societal masking process which has kept me from knowing a real sense of place or identity.

The migratory mask is a face frozen in time...it's a mirror forever splitting into future possibilities, lost even before their formation. Some like to lose themselves in their art, some in their work, some in senseless activities...but most second generation children of migrants strive hard to avoid the social hardship that their parents transversed. The Centre for Urban Population in Melbourne has done a study which indicates that children of migrants are high achievers across many professional fields. I would rather call it the bottomless pit syndrome.

In *Autumn Song*, Uncle Manolis is the antithesis of this well honed work ethic. Conomos uses this character to highlight the high achiever/bottomless pit syndrome. Uncle Manolis is described as a lazy misanthrope who liked to



Bill Florence (Vasilios Florias) being welcomed to Australia in 1922 photo courtesy S. Raftopoulos

play cards. He would have been a terrifying figure to haunt the second generation child. The terrifying aspect is not the Uncle himself, who emerges as a poetic soul, but all the aspirations and emotional and psychic investments migrants make and instil in their children.

Conomos' video is an elaborate mask in itself, that tells a highly textured, rich story full of angst and tragedy. The mask is also that which is frozen, like the migration of people from one terrain to another—a long journey into night. The culture left behind, with its infrastructures, both societal and ethereal, supports the people in the land in which they are born. To be transplanted elsewhere, even to a land as comparatively bountiful and generous as Australia, still leaves us open to a barrenness and a void which is never quite filled or understood easily, even by us. These infrastructures which are translocated, form a distortion of identity which takes form in unfamiliar terrain.

This is the migratory mask—the only visible means of seeing two separate time periods collide. The mask in itself distorts and erodes. But then, measured against time and against its original source of morphology, it creates what Conomos describes in his video: "Caught between two languages, two worlds, I was forced to read between the lines, to scramble the codes, gestures and masks in order to survive."

In one scene Conomos quotes Michel Serres, in an endless stream of words he describes passages of the world: "The North-West Passage allows the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans to communicate within the frigid environment of the grand Canadian North, it opens and closes, twists itself throughout the huge archipelago along an incredibly complex Daedalus of gulfs and channels, pools and sounds, between Baffin and Banks...distribution and strong, regular constraints, disorder and law, to enter through the Davis Sound ending in the...Sea, from there run over Northern Alaska towards the Aleutians, deliberate, you end up on the name of peace. For

30 years I have been navigating among these waters, they are almost deserted, forgotten as if forbidden, 2 cultures are juxtaposed, two families, 2 collectivities speaking 2 different tongues." The nomenclature of the unbound world out there serves as a relief map. In terms of subjectivity I blend into nothing but the tiniest pigment that makes up this imaginary world, the world that has been named, the world which is unnameable. You can trace your finger, God-like, over the path that I cross and the path that I have lost. This relief map is not a reference point but yet another mask.

In *Autumn Song*, the mask becomes a covert form of suffering and then perpetuates a hypercultural state of being—not knowing where you come from and not knowing where you belong. This is the predicament of second generation children of migrants, they turn to the mirror/mask and it comes in many guises. The story of relatives, the reflections and comparisons with a distorted poesis that travels across ocean, always looming, about to swallow our souls. These are the seeds of sadness that feed off the full brunt of history.

I have grown up with the tragic stories, where the personal meets the social, and stories of war, death and severance of heart from family and country. Conomos' video and the Greek Exhibition makes us look into our own and our parents' faces. We see a mask inscribed with every trace that history has made and yet we are oblivious to this. The mask becomes the sum of its traces and covers the supposed reality from view. Becomes a reality in itself and tells another mythical story, embedded in the terrain left behind and the terrain ahead.

*Autumn Song*, video work by John Conomos (1996); *In their Own Image, Greek Australians*, State Library of New South Wales, exhibiting until January 10, 1999

Alexandra Pitsis is currently working on a novel about aesthetics and science



Anna Sabiel, *contain.her*

*contain.her* is part of the enterprising Performance Space-Metro Screen *New Narratives* project (see *RealTime* 25, "Vertical Hold", p13) and it's the most engaging and convincing of the three experiments, regardless of some inevitable work-in-progress awkwardness. Being so used to seeing Anna Sabiel suspended by wires in great, darkened spaces, triggering sonic compositions with delicate counter-weighted moves, it was odd to see her earthed, mapping out a grid with a plumb line on The Performance Space floor against an exquisite triptych of large glowing container walls with embedded screens. But Sabiel has the beginnings of a potent movement vocabulary (the show aspires to "journey from the central notion of the body as container through the realm of exchange and to the sea"), just as there is the first stage of a relationship between her and onstage collaborator Heather Grace Jones who speaks her own text (live, recorded, both or triggered by slaps to the body). Jones poignantly evokes a maritime-worker father in text and, through the other media of the work, reaches out from the personal, to the mythic to the blunt political reality of recent maritime union and stevedoring industry disputes (images of the handshake, the voices of unionists and politicians).

From the beginning of the performance, footage of a working dock (and the sonic rhythms of its labours) alternates regularly with live images of the audience on the outer screens. The result is mesmeric—like being absorbed into the repeated rhythms of a labourer—mysterious but also quite concrete in Sabiel's hauling and laying out of rope (I wanted thicker, heavier rope) and in the engagement with his body. Jones' text refers to the father's back at one point and immediately on the centre screen we see Sabiel's naked back in a simple but evocative recurrent action, the arm swung out and reaching behind to slap the shoulder blade. There are other images and lines of development and overlaps (the rope image is onstage-real but also flickers tautly across screen images and texts). One image merges traditional shadow play and computer animation. Sabiel rolls under the central container wall to reappear as a distant shadow moving towards us, almost fills the screen and suddenly falls; soon she is joined on the screen by an animated naked female figure slipping out of sync with a green-line grid of herself and somersaulting into her own fall. In a strange moment 3D animation and 2D shadow dance together while a spooky little ostinato works its way into the space *contain.her* is a wonderful

reverie, a net of recurrent images and moves and their transformations—the formal opening gridding of the floor, for example, becomes in the end an outsize plumb weight, a cone swinging across the stage pouring out a thin line of sand in free lines, circles, curves and slashes. The images that run parallel and in counterpoint to and into the performances are by digital media designer Sarah Waterson (an almost on-stage presence working in view of the audience) with the aid of the invaluable programming lingo provided by collaborator Brad Miller. Thankfully, *contain.her* doesn't take the notion of 'narrative' too literally, and opens up a space for its audience, for reflection and visual pleasure, and for the enjoyment of the musicality of its shape and the rhythms of the bodies it invokes, for the intimate poetry they speak and the sharp reminder of the changing politics of the workplace. KG

*contain.her*, digital media design Sarah Waterson; performance Anna Sabiel; text and performance Heather Grace Jones; director lingo Brad Miller; lighting design Shane Stevens; movement consultation Nikki Heywood; *New Narratives*, The Performance Space, Oct 2 & 3



## Reviews

**Love is the Devil**  
written & directed by John Maybury  
BBC Films/BFI  
distributor Sharmill Films  
December release

This is not a film to meet realist biographical expectations: character is broadly brushed in, images prevail over naturalistic story-telling, immediate consequences of events are ignored, an intense subjectivity is realised and the demons of artist and lover are evoked with a peculiarly Baconian surreality. Not to say that the filmmaking imitates Francis Bacon's art directly but there are times when it gets eerily close.

There are several visual realms in *Love is the Devil* which make it absorbingly, even frighteningly intense as it returns to each with an oppressive persistence. There's an almost-but-not-quite fish-eye lens social world that blurs at the edges, preserved for the queer pub, the Colony Room, mater-ed over by Muriel Belcher (a vicious surprise of a performance from a well known screen name), and with its faces initially distorted through glasses and jugs. There's the starkly shot claustrophobic Bacon studio, where he first encounters his burglar-lover-to-be, returned to at various angles, full-on, through doors, almost around corners. There's the bathroom, shot at right angles, directly above, and through a mirror: scene of some of the most anxious and intimate exchanges. There's Bacon's spiral staircase nightmare, there's lover-Dyer's blood-and-faeces beast of a man about to go over the edge (Blake's on-all-fours abject Nebuchadnezzar made real). There are various other frames but these are indexical and you learn to inhabit and to fear them. They include the artist's eye, especially in the kitchen, where Bacon's attention to his own face, his lover's body—and the hands of that obsessive-compulsive—demand extreme close-up (aurally too). As does the raw photographic material that Bacon returns to for inspiration including footage and stills from Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin*. There are more palpably Baconian visions—a head shifts sharply, the film holds, the face smears across the screen, like one of the artist's many half-and-more-erased subjects.

The glimpses of Bacon and Dyer coupling are like fumbling action barely caught. Even stronger is the recreation of Bacon's sense of theatre: Dyer close to emotional extinction coils within a tight spotlight on bare floorboards as the camera-eye (and all of Bacon's sympathy) withdraws miles and miles away in a moment of appalling cinematic virtuosity. And finally, when Dyer is dead and Bacon conjures him up for a moment, the realistic hotel bathroom transforms into the red skeleton of a room against an abysmal black.

This is rigorous filmmaking about incomplete love, closed personalities, private pain, gaps between class and intelligence—unsentimental, finely performed and, portentous rumblings aside, with an evocative score by Ryuichi Sakamoto, reinforcing *Love is the Devil's* mix of painterly distance and visionary interiority.

Keith Gallasch

**Velvet Goldmine**  
written & directed by Todd Haynes  
distributor Globe Films  
November release

Frank Zappa once facetiously said of rock journalists that they are people who can't write writing about people who can't play for people who can't read. Odd then, it would seem that Todd Haynes has chosen precisely this particular figure as the emotional and narrative core of *Velvet Goldmine*, his latest exploration of the pop cultural Zeitgeist. Following on from *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*, *Poison*, and *Safe* (what was self-help in the 80s if not a pop cultural phenomenon?), *Velvet Goldmine* recreates the world of Glam rock; a privileged, largely British moment of androgyny, excess and spectacle. What is most interesting about Haynes' self-conscious restoration of this ephemera is not so much the subject itself, but the very impulse to reanimate it. This is not only acknowledged, but artfully played out in the narrative through the character of the journalist Arthur Stuart (Christian Bale).

Asked to write an article for the 10th anniversary of the faked on-stage death and disappearance of British Glam rock legend Brian Slade (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), Stuart is drawn in, not only by the mystery and the recollections of the significant players such as Curt Wilde (Ewan McGregor) and Mandy Slade (Toni Collette), but also by the interweaving of the preoccupations of the era with an exploration of his own history. As a result, Haynes' revisitation of Glam rock is impressionistic, non-linear and personal; governed less by actual events than by the imaginative ardour of its audience.

It becomes apparent amidst the film's visual hyperbole



Toni Collette in *Velvet Goldmine*

that while the stars themselves may have been an amalgam of artifice, myth, cynicism and romantic frenzy, finding the depth or truth behind them is largely impossible and irrelevant. What was meaningful about the spectacle was the varied connections that fans made with it, and their responses to it. Through the recreation of this era by a fan like Todd Haynes, complete with lives shaped by it as well as historical antecedents, something characteristically superficial and arch is given a lasting and human dimension.

Needeya Islam

**The Acid House**  
director Paul McGuigan  
writer Irvine Welsh  
distributor New Vision  
January release

Irvine Welsh, anointed by British style bible *The Face* as the "poet laureate of the chemical generation", is definitely flavour of the moment. Following the cult success of *Trainspotting* (1996), a new film based on 3 stories from his collection *The Acid House* will be released in Australia early next year. It takes a satirical knife to the themes of love and betrayal, marriage, babies, chemical abuse, football and religion. While each of the stories is self-contained, characters overlap, building up a composite picture of the out of control, drug-inflected lives of the marginalised working class inhabitants of Edinburgh housing estates. First-time feature director Paul McGuigan blends gritty realism with surreal fantasy and humour, the cinematography and montages taking on a drug rush rhythm to the accompaniment of music by Primal Scream, Nick Cave, Oasis and The Verve among others.

Memorable characters combine with a wildly bizarre series of plot events. In the first story, "The Granton Star Cause", a vengeful God straight out of the Old Testament appears in a pub wreaking retribution on an unredeemed humanity by turning one of its



Ewan Brenner in *The Acid House*

representatives, the hapless Boab, into a fly. In "A Soft Touch", Gary McCormack (ex-member of punk band The Exploited) plays a psychopathic drug crazed neighbour shattering Johnny's (*Trainspotting's* Kevin McKidd) dreams of wedded family bliss. In the last story, "The Acid House", the drug-wasted protagonist Coco Bryce (Ewen Bremner, Spud from *Trainspotting*), is hit by lightning and swaps identities with a new born baby. *The Acid House* is definitely not for the faint-hearted, but if you like your humour laced with abrasive social realism, surreal fantasy and liberal doses of substance abuse, this one's for you.

Kathy Cleland

**Occasional Coarse Language**  
written & directed by Brad Hayward  
distributor Roadshow  
November release

Titles like this one beg to be lampooned, so I'll get it out of the way and say that this film should have been called "Constant Grating Whingeing". Set in and around inner-city Sydney, *Occasional Coarse Language* aims to be a contemporary comedy about the predicaments of a 20-ish woman and her various relationships with friends, flatmates and family (via mobile phone). While the director seems to have a real flair for broad visual comedy, these moments are overwhelmed by underdeveloped characters and an unengaging plot which seems rather like a long, clumsy afterthought holding the gags together.

Some of the humour is reminiscent of *Muriel's Wedding*, especially the caricatured group of high school friends. That film, however, effectively blended visual comedy with a dark, complex exploration of the compulsion to reinvent oneself, and each aspect of the film worked in the service of the other. There was a sense that *Muriel's Wedding* had something singular to explore, which was comic as well as bleak and affecting. In *Occasional Coarse Language* what may have worked as a tightly edited short comedy, is dragged down by the un compelling nature of the narrative, repetitive dialogue ("tell me about it!") and cloying, simplistic efforts to explore female friendship. The only insight we do gain into the 2 main characters is through their high-pitched complaints to one other.

It is admirable that the film was made at all, given the tiny budget, and it is refreshing to see a film about Sydney which doesn't rely on endless shots of the beach to convey a sense of place. However, nothing is said in *Occasional Coarse Language* which hasn't been said before, more sharply, more loudly and more rudely.

Needeya Islam

## Newsreel

**Australia Council announces new media grants**

More than \$660,000 has been awarded to contemporary artists to extend the boundaries of art practice through 21 new media grants. Three Fellowships totalling \$40,000 per annum over 2 years will allow the following artists to create substantial works: Francesca da Rimini will create *soft accidents*, an internet narrative, in affiliation with trAce International Online Writing

Community and Shake Co-operative Sociale, a media group in Italy. Sally Pryor will extend her exploration of writing and the human-computer interface with *Palimpsest* and develop an interface for kids at a residency in a San Jose Museum. John Tonkin will explore the subjective nature of scientific theories in *A Grand Unified Theory of Self*, a web performance involving the analysis of personal data linked to external global events, and *Personal Eugenics* which explores body and identity where users can evolve their own face in the pursuit of social change.

**Australian feature film and TV drama production figures 97/98**

Including the big-budget feature *Babe*, the total value of Australian feature films and independent TV drama produced in 1997-98 reached an all-time high of \$421 million, results revealed recently in the Australian Film Commission's National Production Survey. However, without the presence of *Babe*, an overseas backed film, the total value of local feature film production would have been low compared with the previous 2 years. The total number of features was up slightly on 96-97 (from 39 to 41), reflecting a continuing trend towards budgets of less than \$1 million. Foreign investment jumped to a very high \$185 million (45 titles) with a substantial rise in investment in TV drama (from \$52 million to \$76 million).

**Sydney Film Festival—New Director**

Gayle Lake was recently appointed the new director of the Sydney Film Festival. Gayle began her career at the Sydney Filmmaker's Co-op in 1979 and has since been National Exhibitions Manager at the AFI and General Manager of Ronin Films. In 1997-98 Gayle was Programming Director for the Mardi Gras Film Festival. She hit the road in November to visit the London Film Festival.

**AFI Awards**

The 1998 Australian Film Institute Awards were held at the Sydney Convention Centre on November 7. The major winners were: Best Achievement in Editing, Jill Birkbeck, *Head On*; Best Foreign Film, *LA Confidential*; Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role, Toni Collette, *The Boys*; Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role, John Polson, *The Boys*; Best Achievement in Cinematography, Geoffrey Simpson ACS, *Oscar and Lucinda*; Best Adapted Screenplay, Stephen Sewell, *The Boys*; Best Original Screenplay, Craig Monahan, Gordon Davie, *The Interview*; Best Achievement in Direction, Rowan Woods, *The Boys*; Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role, Hugo Weaving, *The Interview*; Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role, Deborah Mailman, *Radiance*; and Best Film, *The Interview*. A special congratulations to Kriv Stenders for winning Best Short Fiction Film for *Twa/Out*.

**WOW Film Festival 1998**

The Women on Women Film Festival, presented by WIFT (Women in Film and Television) was held November 25 - 27. The festival opened with *Radiance*, introduced by director Rachel Perkins and actor Trisha Morton-Thomas. Winner of the Best Film Award was *Relative Strangers*, a documentary by Rosemary Hesp.

**Charles 'Bud' Tingwell on the web**

AFI Research and Information has made Charles Tingwell (this year's recipient of the AFI's Raymond Longford Award for contribution to the Australian Film Industry) the subject of its latest BIBLIOZ, a bi-monthly web bibliography intended to stimulate research on Australian screen topics. The Tingwell BIBLIOZ covers his film and television career from 1947 to 1998 and can be viewed online at <http://www.cinemedia.net/AFI/biblioz/bud.html>



# Tran's Emporium opens up

Jo Law on the art of representing identity in cultural exchange

In the last issue of *RealTime*, Philip Brophy in his *Cinesonic* column discussed misrepresentation in the film *Armageddon*. His criticism of this film's "narcissistic, feel good image of globalism" raises many issues about the process of misrepresentation and misrecognition in the more local context of defining of cultural identity in Australia.

Images such as those in the global advertising campaigns of Nescafé, Microsoft, and McDonalds give rise to imagined identities that misrepresent the actual. Two poverty-stricken people happily watch television in their empty apartment, a gay footballer kisses his coach on the forehead, 2 old folks play chess on the beach, a backpacker makes his way through paddy-fields, an architect shares his opinions with a building labourer across the common fence... These images bring us into a world of

links with the region. It is not unreasonable to claim that there was an intention to employ the arts as ambassadors to prepare the way for expansion of our economic front into the Asia-Pacific region. In these 'cross-cultural' exchanges cultural identity becomes a valued currency.

Conjure up another image: the Tran family in Northbridge came to Australia at the end of the Vietnam War and now own an import and retailing business, appropriately named Tran's Emporium. Like many other Asian grocery stores, the shelves in Tran's Emporium are jam-packed with a wide range of exotic foods and kitchen ware. The shop is literally a manifestation of cultural exchange.

It is undeniable that identity is much more complex than the packaged food in Asian

all into palatable artforms with a touch of orientalism. In producing this work the artists speak for the local culture without first considering and stating their own position, perspective, and experience in the context of their exchange. This practice of 'turning native' perpetuates an unthinking form of cultural appropriation and colonialism that only allows us to see what we desire.

At the other end of the equation we prefer our imported art to be attractive, compelling and yet easy to digest. Exhibitions arrive like a packaged tour with a dash of tradition, a splash of radicalism, and a pinch of hybridisation giving a comprehensive view of a culture struggling with the blandly familiar polarities of old and modern, self and the collective, East and West. A walk around the airconditioned gallery is like being immersed in the glossy kaleidoscopic images of the Nescafé advertisement with its sensuous and hypnotic sound track.

Showcase exhibitions are often predetermined in their representation of identities and reinforce our assumptions about other cultures. The works may be entertaining, they may make us feel good, but they seldom bring up difficult issues such as the dynamics of power relations in the process of cultural exchange. For instance, how the works are selected, who makes the decisions, who speaks, who doesn't speak, and for whom the works are displayed.

Doubtless, cross-cultural activities are invaluable in many ways, but it is important to establish a structure that will allow us to benefit from interacting and learning from different ways of life. The process of cross-cultural reading and practice needs to be more autonomous, more democratic and less institutionalised; independent initiatives should be welcomed and supported. Furthermore, the very notion of cultural exchange should be interrogated and this process should be a central objective in such activities.

There have been efforts to counter the tendency to merely import and export formulaic packages. I recently participated in the exhibition *Bad Rice* curated by Hiram To. One of the rationales behind showing the works in Melbourne and Sydney is to debunk the notion of fixed identity, primarily in the context of cultural exchanges. In part, the exhibition is also a response to the standardised images of Hong Kong that have been so frequently paraded in the cross-cultural arena, particularly in relation to Hong Kong's change of sovereignty. I noticed, however, when reviewing the works some writers are only too happy to rely on

labelling and assumption. For example, a number of reviewers claimed the only non-Chinese artist in the exhibition was also the only Australian (permanent resident) amongst the participating artists. They were obviously quite unaware that I can be Hong Kong Chinese and an Australian citizen at the same time. A question then springs to mind: if it is understood that the exhibition intends to challenge the concept of constructed identity, then have these reviewers missed the point?

Perhaps some notions of racial, cultural, and social definitions are far too ingrained to be rid of entirely. However, that is not to say that we should be content with being fed a polystyrene-packaged meal of culture and an instant coffee version of social identity. In recognising the fluid, evolving and multiple nature of identity, the question of representation becomes a central issue. The pressing problem facing us in contemporary culture is how to recognise the actual situation beyond the enticing misrepresentations of social, sexual, cultural, and racial identity.

Bad Rice, Next Wave, Span Gallery, Melbourne, May 5 - 23; The Performance Space, Sydney, July 10 - August 7. The exhibition opens at 1a Space in Hong Kong on December 11.

Jo Law is based in Perth and her work encompasses writing, photography, installation, film, and video.



Tran's Emporium, Perth

Jo Law

fantasy where the ugliness of racial, economic, and sexual discrimination does not exist because we have 'opened up.' In their misrepresentation of actuality, alluring and comforting images urge us to relax, have a cup of coffee and everything will be alright. But the coffee is spiked, and a seductive hallucinogenic mirage appears before us as we begin to misrecognise our world.

Locally, facing forces in recent years that blatantly support discrimination in this country, many people would much rather look at something prettier. This has allowed advertising and public relations campaigns to cash in on the feel good multiculturalism of contemporary Australian culture. Advertisements for "Northbridge Live" in Perth, for example, use ethnicity to sell this "uniquely diverse cultured niche." Yet, all the while, gentrification proceeds, creating a compacted 'federation' suburbia. I have been asked on a number of occasions to speak about my Asian, migrant, female, youth experience, or participate in activities in which I would be asked to bear the proud title of ethnic Australian. A producer of one such campaign said to me, "Send a photograph of yourself first, that's most important." What this kind of mentality achieves is an illusory projection of cultural diversity and harmony that decidedly ignores the actual situation regarding race, ethnicity, gender, and class.

Bearing this in mind, let us examine the representation of identity in the context of cultural exchange programs. If we briefly look at the history of cultural exchange in Australia, we will find a strong link between these activities and trade. The push for our economy to increase ties with the Asian economy at the close of last decade coincided with increased advocacy for developing cultural and artistic

supermarkets, or the beautiful, cute, and colourful characters in Nescafé advertisements. But are the identities exchanged between Australia and Asia so dissimilar to these images? Are we trading identities like the goods in the bustling bazaar of Tran's Emporium; identities which are then consumed like a tastefully presented combination platter?

At one end of the equation it's not uncommon for artists, who have opportunities to travel and work in a different country, to produce quaintly hybrid art. The rhetoric of cultural exchange allows them to innocently re-fashion curious raw material they discover in the markets, kitsch objects they find in the streets, and culturally specific rituals they witness being performed,

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# Building bridges, breaking down cultural fortresses

Bruce Keller reports intensive activity in Vietnamese-Australian performance

In a Newtown foyer, I was conversing with a fellow contemporary performance practitioner. I happened to mention that I was currently working with a group of Vietnamese Australian young people at Bankstown. "How interesting," he said warmly, "Are they street kids or druggies?"

The group was Citymoon Youth Theatre, and we were preparing to present *Dat Nuoc: Earth/Water (Country)* at PACT Theatre. They were 12 ordinary Australian kids, who happened to come from a Vietnamese background.

This is a dilemma when working with (or being) Australian performers from a migrant background—there is a perception that your community is in crisis and your art product should reflect the *problem* of being from that background. There is a valuable place for such theatre processes, of course, but other forms of theatrical expression and collaboration are also to be encouraged. Initially, this can be difficult, especially if from a non-Anglo Celtic, non-English speaking background. First generation artists arrive and cannot earn a living from their artform, while the next generation are discouraged from entering such an irregular and financially unrewarding profession.

The Vietnamese have been one of the largest and most recent migrant communities. Increasingly, artists are emerging from that community to express the Vietnamese experience to a wider audience, exploring new collaborations of artists and artforms, and reshaping Australian cultural identity to include a Vietnamese presence.

At this point I should state my own interest in this subject. Since 1991, I have been forging cultural links with South East Asia, especially Vietnam. Over 6 cultural visits, I have directed a contemporary movement piece in Hanoi, taught at the major drama schools in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and been an English language editor for a foreign language publishing house. Here in Australia, my links with the Vietnamese community and culture have been mainly through the activities of Citymoon (the Vietnamese Australian Contemporary Theatre Company), established with Ta Duy Binh in 1996.

Citymoon aims to establish a cultural bridge between the Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese Australian communities through the presentation of exciting contemporary performance to both communities, and the artistic collaboration of practitioners from various cultural backgrounds. Citymoon's inaugural production *Conversations with Charlie* (which told of a young migrant to Australia who conjures up Charlie Chaplin and the Spirit of the Land as his mentors) included performers from Aboriginal, Vietnamese and Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. The team for the recent creative development project *The Monkey Mother* (which it is hoped will receive full production for *Carnivale* in 1999) included Vietnamese, Philippino, Indonesian and Anglo-Celtic participants. While always searching for new artistic collaborators, Citymoon is also establishing a "stable" of artists, especially from a Vietnamese background. The developing Citymoon style is strongly influenced by the contributions of colleagues such as composer Hoang Ngoc Tuan, performer Eliane Anh-Xuan Morel and photographer Tiet Ho.

Citymoon is also dedicated to the professional theatre training of young Vietnamese Australians, and since 1996 has been running workshops in Bankstown with Citymoon Youth Theatre. As mentioned, its most recent production was *Dat Nuoc* at at



Denise Kickett & Ta Duy Binh in *Conversations With Charlie*

Bob Seary

PACT Theatre. In Vietnamese, "dat" means "earth" and "nuoc" means "water"—but placed together the meaning becomes "country" or "nation". The performance was a non-verbal movement work about the question of identity, supported by the haunting music of Hoang Ngoc Tuan, and a soundtrack consisting of the fragments of the young participants' dreams, collated over 10 months by the keeping of dream diaries.

Movement is a strong feature in all of Citymoon's work. Ta Duy Binh trained in mime, traditional dance (tuong) and theatre in Hanoi, and since coming to Australia has trained and performed with companies such as Entr'acte, and in Indonesia with W. S. Rendra. In Australia, he has continued to train in martial arts—especially in a type of kung fu based on the Shao Lin school. Binh is passionate about the work of Citymoon, because of the perceived need for a clear Vietnamese voice and presence within Australian culture, and for the opportunity the company provides to explore and consolidate new movement languages. With each production, the company continues to explore the nexus points between martial arts and various traditional and contemporary movement styles, and to stretch the boundaries into new forms of expression.

Meanwhile, in Melbourne, Tony Le Nguyen (best known for his role in the film *Romper Stomper*) has for several years been running Vietnamese Youth Theatre, based at the Footscray Community Arts Centre. Always an artistically diverse, dynamic and fluid group with a concentration on youth culture and empowerment, in December 1997 Vietnamese Youth Theatre metamorphosed into Vietnamese Youth Media. The name change was indicative of a conceptual shift away from being "a small group who met to put on plays", away from the insularity of being "community based", towards acknowledging contemporary youth and society and the realisation of a grander vision through modern technology. At present, the group consists of about 30 young people aged between 15 and 25, focused on exploring and developing skills in a variety of media, including drama, photography and video making.

Activity at the Footscray Community Arts Centre has always been a team effort—the contribution of others towards Vietnamese Youth Theatre always created a synergy, and Vietnamese Youth Media is no exception. Tony leads the course along with Yen Le, a photography student from Melbourne University and Huu Tran, a media student at Deakin University. A dynamic feature of Vietnamese Youth Media is its Lieu Mang evenings (loosely translated as "life risk"), performance-dance-party events where members present to an audience an evening of performance, dance and

song, before the line between performer and audience blurs and dissolves into the fun and celebration of a dance party.

Another Vietnamese Australian artist who is moving away from live performance and into the exploration of technology is David Phu An Chiem, who studied acting at the University of Western Sydney (Nepean), and performed with groups such as One Extra Dance Company, but has moved into the world of film producing. He knew from an early age that his long term goal was to direct, but knew that a director who understood acting would be a better director, and his current experience of producing is a valuable foundation for future film directing. He has set up his own company Tu Do (Freedom) Films with links in Australia, Vietnam and the USA, and is currently in Vietnam working as the producer on a film directed by David Ellick. Entitled *Vietnam Vietnam*, it traces the experiences of a Vietnamese woman during what the Vietnamese refer to as "the American War." In David's opinion, there have been many films about the Vietnam/American War, but always from the American point of view. This film will address the balance by relating the war from the Vietnamese point of view.

Another passionate artist who is forging links between nations is Le Quy Duong, who in Vietnam was a projects officer and International Relations officer with the Ministry of Culture & Information, as well as a successful and well known playwright. Since coming to Australia in 1994, he has rapidly established himself as an emerging artist and cultural diplomat. His play *Market of Lives*, first performed in Hanoi in 1990, was produced this year in a partnership between the

University of Wollongong and Theatre South, and performed in Wollongong and at Belvoir St Theatre. In 1997, he was awarded the New South Wales Writer's Fellowship, for which he wrote his new play *Meat Party*, which was received with much acclaim at the 1998 Australian National Playwrights' Conference in Canberra. He is currently completing the Directors Course at NIDA. Assisted by an Australia Council Literature grant, he is writing *The Motherland of the Foreign Son* and the comedy *Last Dreamers of the Century*, which explores the transformation of human relationships as technology forces the world to find new ways of living in harmony. He has also been commissioned by Chamber Made Opera to write the libretto for an opera based on the period 1954 to 1975 in Vietnam, to be composed by Frenchman Dominique Probst and directed by Douglas Horton.

A man of boundless energy and grand vision, Duong has not limited his cultural contribution to the Australian art scene. He has extended that community's contact with Vietnam. In 1996, he established the Vietnamese Arts Culture Exchange Projects Company (VACEP) to extend and promote professional links between Australia and Vietnam in all aspects of culture and the arts, as well as here in Australia to produce theatre and film that reflect the rich diversity of contemporary Australian culture. Under the umbrella of VACEP he has translated into Vietnamese David Williamson's *Travelling North* and Stephen Sewell's *The Blind Giant is Dancing*.

Significantly, he has also translated Alma de Groen's *The Girl Who Saw Everything* and Stephen Sewell's *The Garden of Granddaughters*, and recently organized for them to be produced in Vietnam. These performances—one in Ho Chi Minh city and the other in Hanoi—were part of festivities organised to celebrate the arrival and welcoming of an Australian delegation of artists and arts politicians, organised by VACEP to meet with their Vietnamese counterparts. This meeting was envisioned as the first of several over the next few years, as closer and stronger cultural bonds are forged between Australia and Vietnam.

Both within Australia and between nations, Vietnamese Australian artists are beginning to build cultural bridges across communities. Old patterns of thought and expression are being challenged and re-invigorated. It is no longer necessarily a "problem" to come from this migrant community. Indeed, in many cases its artists are bringing new energy and artistic refreshment to Australian culture. In the words of Le Quy Duong, as we all strive to find a new way to live together, perhaps we are all equally "the last dreamers of the century".

Performer and playwright Bruce Keller is currently lecturing in performance at the School of Contemporary Arts, University of Western Sydney Nepean and, with Citymoon, is about to begin a creative development project *The Three Cornered Room*.

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**urban theatre projects**



# Hot house conditions

Margaret Moore reports on controversy and cross cultural achievement at ARX 5 in Singapore

Transforming the Australian based Artist's Regional Exchange (ARX) into an offshore-led project was always an ambitious, although essential proposition. This had been an aim, long held by all the ARX management committees and staff since the project's inception in the mid 1980s. The importance of dispersing the activity and sharing 'ownership' became increasingly evident throughout the 4 previous events in Perth, all of which encompassed large numbers of artists, writers, curators and administrators from, collectively, some 8 countries in the region. It seemed imperative that all artists experience and share in the complexities of territorial, physical and conceptual displacement in a real rather than hypothetical, abstract or one-sided manner. The previous ARX events, while highly successful in many ways, privileged the Australian participants and an undercurrent of cultural curiosity was perpetuated, in spite of a genuine will to disarm such attitudes, and in spite of the fact that some exceptionally rewarding cross cultural alliances did prosper and sustain.

With the formal establishment of partnerships with Singapore and Hong Kong in 1997, this ambition has been finally realised. The recent launch of ARX 5 in Singapore reinvigorated ARX as a model for fostering cross-cultural exchange. It reaffirmed its relevance as a meaningful, contemporary event that actively and demonstrably interrogates the very notion of cultural exchange. To critically review the Singapore exhibition as a closed chapter would be inadequate, as ramifications continue and the Singapore experience forms only the initial stage in an ongoing project over the next 12 months. However, some speculation on the nature and impact of this offshore beginning is warranted.

The Singapore launch proved to be testing, enlightening, sobering and exhilarating, and is anything but final. It represents a start of another rite of passage for intercultural relations and has been both tumultuous and triumphant. Before joining the opening celebrations in Singapore, faxes and phone calls advised an apparent impasse in the presentation of work at the Singapore Art Museum. The work of Hong Kong artist Zunzi Wong was under question for its possible transgression of cultural sensitivity. Working in the convention of the political cartoon, Zunzi produced an installation of computer generated imagery and text that appeared to some quite benign but to others inflammatory. Its depiction of Lee Kuan Yew and Prime Minister Goh was offensive to Singaporean authorities. After lengthy discussion and negotiation between members of the newly formed partnership, a series of concerns emerged of varying consequence as interpreted for the local climate and local conditions by the Singapore Art Museum.

Certain other works operated with similar innuendo; however the issue of representative identification delineated Zunzi's work and rendered it unsuitable for presentation. The artists from Hong Kong were clearly absorbed by the changing political contexts of their country, and its proximity to Singapore. Yet, whether the provocations of Zunzi's work were produced knowingly or unknowingly was hardly the issue, and a quest to assess intent of cultural insensitivity frankly futile. Cross cultural contractual agreements can soon appear paper thin across a negotiating table that brings together management and curatorial representatives of a national institution from Singapore, a director of a Contemporary Art Centre from Hong Kong, staff and honorary representatives of the amorphous and non-institutionalised ARX from Australia, and artists from each of the 3 countries.

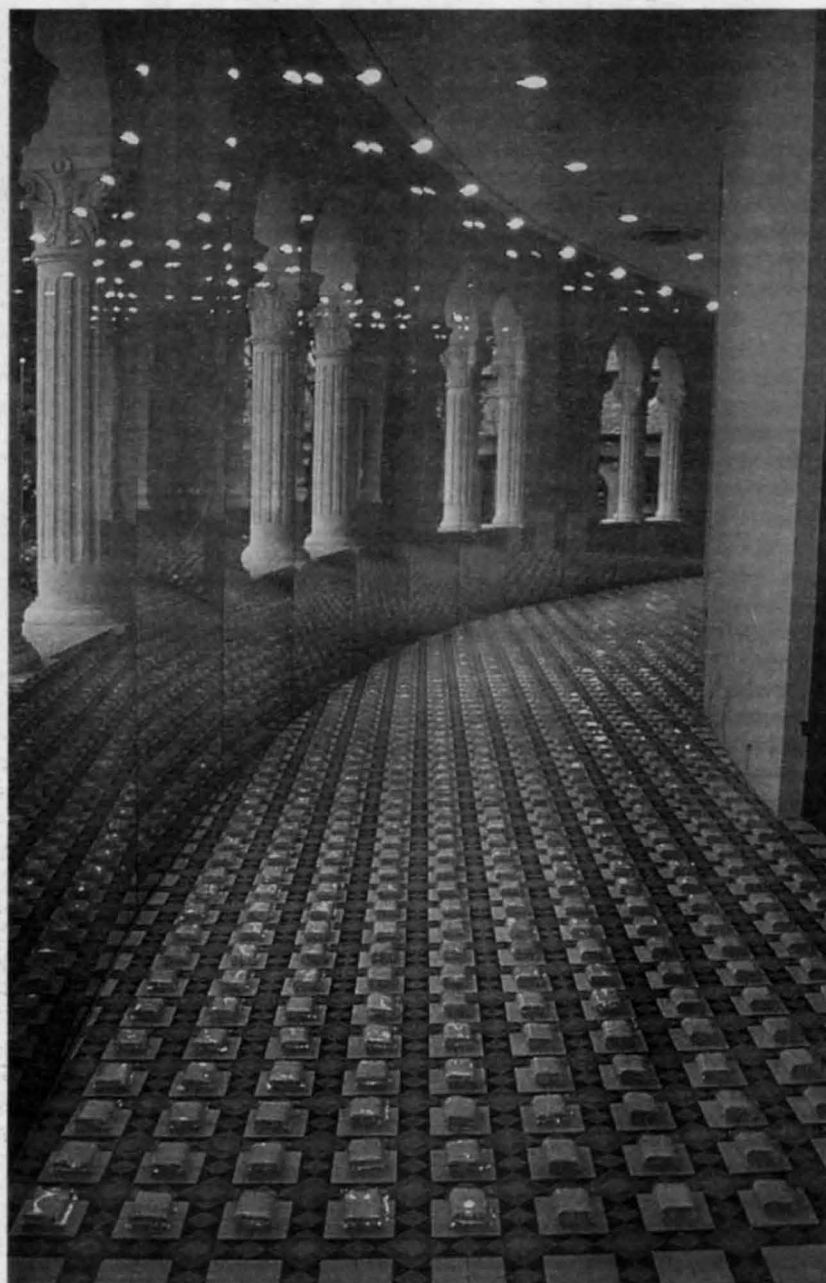
The removal of Zunzi's work caused the

artists to unite in principle as a group for the first time. Curatorial and administrative representatives also aligned in resolution attempts. Gradually bridges were built between all, although the foundations were to crumble later when various parties questioned the positive or exploitative nature of motives. Everyone was immersed and enmeshed in an unplanned, progressive and fortuitous cross cultural forum. Participants and organisers were working together with all that truly entails—sharing, disagreeing, conferring, negotiating and fracturing—at times mindful of and at times disregarding perceived seniorities, institutional infrastructures or hierarchies. Ever the renegade, the new ARX partnership was both an agent of provocation and mediation.

As events have since continued to unravel and all players have communicated and digested their roles, one could be forgiven for thinking that little else was produced by way of art in the Singapore event, aside from the absent Zunzi work. All artists did produce a body of work with varying degrees of satisfaction for the *Processes* exhibition. Lucas Ilhein managed enterprise and topicality in his installation of books published in Singapore, recording diaristic notes, doodles and observations. The 1,000 books on shelves were accompanied by a collection box and do-it-yourself receipting system with unambiguous references to honour and to the GST. The book is titled *My typewriter only speaks English. Your honesty is appreciated.* Installations by Anthony Leung and John Low, adjacent in the gallery, proved an interesting juxtaposition of commentary upon nationalist emblems and the generating of national pride and identities. Leung (Hong Kong) reconstructed an image of the Chinese flag flying in a red and white room with emotive words quoted from Anson Chan Fang On-sang, The Chief Secretary for Administration Hong Kong SAR, The Peoples Republic of China, and she invited visitors to make their own mark of identity. Low created a maze of boxes, branded with 'Singapore' and referencing the fabrication of tourism logos, the configuration impeding the viewer.

A number of the artists including John Wong, Jane Finlay, Cedric Chan, Suzann Victor and Joan Grounds worked off or with the imposing school architecture and landscaping of the original Catholic boys' school in which the museum resides. Finlay filled archways with drinking straws in brilliant blue and gold that subtly referenced a combination of sources including Australian painting history, religious and architectural symbolism, made more resonant by the ARX context and the building. In the glass encasement around the cloisters, Victor placed water (in which she later performed an act of displacement using her own body) while she distributed small boats bearing the faces of children—a response to the practice of releasing foetuses into drains. Finlay and Victor also collaborated on a quiet and elegant insertion of bonsai trees in niches painted in gold in the walls. In the ecclesiastical atmosphere of the space their work appeared shrine-like and making analogies to social engineering via the cultivated trees. John Wong embellished the mosaic floors of the upstairs balcony with a parade of transparent, plastic sushi containers holding copies of rules and regulations.

In the museum's forecourt Khiew Huey Chian threaded an elegant web of coloured strings between the perimeter of trees, and in the internal courtyard Joan Grounds pierced palms with fluorescent plastic ties. An exquisite gold-plated palm leaf and a bell-like bag of ties graced the opposing walls as if to underline the oppositions of nature and culture in contemporary industrialised societies. Performances also flourished around the



John Wong Chi Wai (Hong Kong), *How Far I Can Go*, Singapore Art Museum

Jane Finlay

opening weekend with Erin Hefferon and Cedric Chan enthralled audiences with pieces in voice. Destiny Deacon produced a series of laser copy prints, one a tableau montaged to give an Australian take on the Singapore Maid agencies, motivated by Deacon perusing ad columns in the local press. Jeremy Hiah brought together an array of exuberant kiddie ride toys supplemented with a video tributing the pleasures and innocence of childhood, and Jason Lim provided a biographical reference to his relationships with food and mother in the form of an organic, bloated sculpture. Fiona Wong presented a material and aesthetic environment incorporating the fragrances and textures of anchovies, ceramic and pig skin. Other collaborations resulted in videos and in one instance, a production of missing persons T-shirts with a fax line into the museum should anyone sight the person. The image was a composite of 2 of the artists.

Some of the work appeared superficial and other works surprisingly resolved for having been produced in the hot house conditions of a week long orientation residency. One of the pleasures of this long-term ARX project will be to see the development of ideas and relationships as the troupe moves across cultures and come to know each other. Above all, the beginning of ARX 5 brought into focus how some action may appear quite innocuous and yet be potentially destabilising, how the primary obsession of one artist might be dislike of the humidity or local food while for another, genuine fear for their future employment.

Compared to many of its counterparts with focused curatorial agendas, the ARX 5 attempt at "cultural exchange" was not so much about the niceties or abstracts of a pursuit of similarities (or of working together in prescribed or sanitised conditions), but rather a celebration of convergence and collision of

cultural difference which while unsettling, and even bewildering at times, has been overwhelmingly positive on many fronts.

ARX remains a model that is primarily artist-driven and still outside the mainstream. It was therefore adventurous, and possibly canny from an Australian perspective, to engage with a national museum to launch the project. It was equally adventurous of the museum to take on ARX and for the Hong Kong artists to come for the ride. All are to be commended and should take heart, and a deep breath, and look forward to a continuing vital program in Hong Kong and Perth in 1999. ARX has highlighted again that art is a powerful conduit in cultural and political growth and transaction.

*ARX 5 Processes, a residency and exhibition project for 15 selected artists, 5 each from Singapore (Jeremy Hiah, Khiew Huey Chan, Jason Lim, John Low and Suzann Victor), Hong Kong (Anthony Leung, Cedric Chan Ho Fung, Fiona Wong Lai Ching, John Wong Chi Wai and Zunzi Wong Ki Kwan) and Australia (Joan Grounds, Destiny Deacon, Jane Finlay, Lucas Ilhein and Erin Hefferon); Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, October 2 - November 1. The artists will make a reconnaissance visit to Hong Kong in March 1999, complete the residency in Australia in Perth in July and return to Hong Kong in November for the final stage of the project.*

Margaret Moore is an independent curator/writer based in Perth. She is the current chair of the ARX Management Committee.



# Men and membranes

Alan Schacher of the performance group Gravity Feed sets the scene for a major new work in January

*This is an excerpt from a long interview detailing Alan's artistic history and the origins and early works of Gravity Feed. It can be read on the RealTime website <http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity> from December 8. It also includes his work in Germany with composer Rik Rue earlier this year on an artistic residency in an industrial environment funded by the Siemens Corporation.*

Gravity Feed have created an impressive body of haunting work that warrants a large audience. In the House of Skin (1996), a delicately choreographed engagement between a group of men and the heavy doors that they embrace and are oppressed by, suggested themes metaphysical and masculine, while The Gravity of the Situation (1998), set in a tunnel with a huge box on wheels served by a group of men, evoked ritual and the fatalism behind religion. In these works, composer Rik Rue plays a key role, wrapping performers and audience in sonic fields. Schacher's key influences include dance, a period in Japan working with Mini Tanaka (1989-91) and an education in visual arts. His fellow performers also have strong backgrounds in performance with a strong physical orientation. Design and exploitation of site have been central to Gravity Feed's work including outdoor performances with ice and fire, space and sound. The materiality of the elements performed with (heavy timber, or cotton sheets in Stool Pigeon [1997], or cardboard in current work) and within the performance space is part of the essence of Gravity Feed.

KG In The Gravity of the Situation you were working with light material—a huge box on wheels that looked heavy but was walled with cardboard. This was your first cardboard venture. It shared the attributes of both the doors and the sheets.

AS The cardboard was both an afterthought and a forethought—towards the project we're about to enter. It allowed me to subtly introduce Gravity Feed to VisyBoard, the industry who will be a major sponsor of this next event. Because we wanted to burn and carry very large objects—the box walls were 3 metres square—cardboard seemed an appropriate material. The box embodied the notion of the Tabernacle, entering both the domain of the nomad and the religious icon, such as the Ark of the Covenant.

KG The object that has to be moved about, supported, appears to be dismantled but remains whole, is lit but refuses to burn, absorbs people, runs over them...quite complex imagery.

AS My initial concept was something like a tent in the desert and also a kind of Dr Who Tardis. A time machine. They were the original notions and that this thing could arrive any place, anywhere and the men were caretakers who had no control over where they would arrive. There was also something

about the emptiness of their task. The idea was that because what it concealed was unknowable it should resist revelation. And a kind of magic. Without involving high tech video work or projections; there are limits to what magic you can represent physically.

KG Even though we were indoors, there was a feeling of being outdoors, larger space, at some kind of ritual with people scaling walls and handing candles and flame very carefully and delicately.

AS I'd describe it as space within space, space as container.

KG The new work takes up some of the same architectural concerns, the space within space, the cardboard and its malleability and weight.

AS In those formal ways, perhaps yes. In other ways not because we'll be getting rid of the geometric form. That's the primary difference. That's the designer, Horst Kiechle's project in architecture, "to eliminate the straitjacket of rectilinearity." But yes, this will be a space within a space which can be moved around by performers, that can weave a dance around the audience and can create spaces within which some of the audience may be. The original concept was to have the audience on 10 sets of mobile rostra which would have been part of the set and there would have been quite a dance between the audience and the set being moved around. The audience will be mobile and discovering the space and at some stage the space will encroach on them. I think the set will range from small objects to objects of 5 metres and it's being designed around the architecture of the Newtown Theatre where we'll be performing.

KG In developing the show do you physically respond to the architectural shapes to see what is possible or do you start with a particular scenario?

AS At one level the media being used by Horst is very high tech virtual reality computing. It's like the mind of god up there looking down on us, the little creatures, or it could be a host-parasite relationship and we're not sure which way that relationship goes—probably both ways. And we are the servants of the design. Initially, our task is to move the objects around as if our tasks have been totally pre-ordained by Horst and the computer. The pieces would have had to move in a certain sequence and to certain locations. But this will change. At this stage, we know we will be inhabiting a landscape but we don't entirely know what kind of landscape.

KG How will you rehearse this?

AS We'll build a rehearsal set of objects. Most of them will have at least 3 surfaces they can present and will be able to fall and each be carried, ideally, by one person; some will fold and unfold or open out. The task will be to discover what we can do with our bodies in relation to these objects and I would say the subject is skin. Each of the performers will have their own interpretation but mine so far is the notion of architectural skin as membrane and an attempt to perform with the skin. That's my choreographic impulse. Also we've never really indulged in human contact in Gravity Feed. We've carried people but we've never really indulged in any onstage relationship between people. That's another way it might go. I don't quite know. Tim Rushton is talking a lot about Giordano Bruno at the moment. We're struggling with that. Olivier Sidore is one of the performers. He's a Frenchman



In the House of Skin, Gravity Feed, 1996

Dave V.

who's done a lot of Suzuki work and he's also introduced a French philosophy which William McClure is very much at home with. Olivier has been quoting Artaud. Jeff Stein quotes film more than anything, especially popular film. He introduced Dark City which is very appropriate.

KG Alex Proyas directing. A terrific film.

AS The space in that film is a totally changing one and one notion of our cardboard world is that it is a city.

KG Implicating the audience is something I'd like to go back to. There was a moment at the end of House of Skin when a great door hovering just above the audience's heads suddenly swings down. You realise that you've been aware of it but have stopped thinking about it and then it swoops down, thankfully stopping before it does any damage. In The Gravity of the Situation there's a sense in the dimly lit space that this huge structure could get out of control and run you down, which it does in a symbolic way to the performers. There is a palpable feeling of being inside a very tactile space of strange proportions.

AS I call that an edge of safe danger. As an audience in Sydney we became part of it when the Spanish group La Furas dels Baus performed. That was a more grungy, rock kind of event. As a visual artist who performs I'd say my interest is in the audience becoming surrogate performers and therefore watchable by other audience members.

KG How do you manage the costs of the new media design component?

AS Over and above our Australia Council funding, this project would not have been realisable if we'd had to pay for the computer time—that's come from VisLab and CSIRO where Horst Kiechle has been working (see article this page 33). VisyBoard will be providing computer cutting time in their factory. The material is cheap. Our priorities fall between dance theatre, performance art and new media technologies, and we don't locate ourselves in any one of those things particularly. So we're very lucky to straddle several areas.

KG Your early work was influenced by Butoh amongst other things, but that has been pretty much absorbed into the company style.

AS There was a very slow process of exorcising Butoh even though I hadn't such a long exposure to it. I think at first there was an attempt to make an Australian Butoh and I would say, for myself anyway, that now I'm thinking it's an attempt to look at a kind of existential identity crisis that for me might come of living in the city, sheltering on the edge of the vast Australian continent and of being a child of Holocaust survivors and within a very nuclear family with no other

relatives in Australia. Gravity Feed is not a Butoh company by any means. It's a sort of running joke in the company actually. One thing I'm quite pleased about is that we've gotten away with being an all-male ensemble. We've never had any flak about it. It was my choice and I think if the ensemble were to grow any more it would have to be open to female members. My thoughts at the time were that we needed a consolidated 'neutral' body with which to face the collective body of the audience. I didn't want any overt sexual connotations between the performers to be there. People might have thought it was an all homosexual ensemble but nobody ever assumed that. And strangely I think it gave us to some extent a more 'universal' quality.

Host by Gravity Feed at the Newtown Theatre, 345 King Street, Newtown January 13-31 1999



The University of Sydney

## Project Coordinator (Half-Time)

Centre for Performance Studies

Reference No. B46/15

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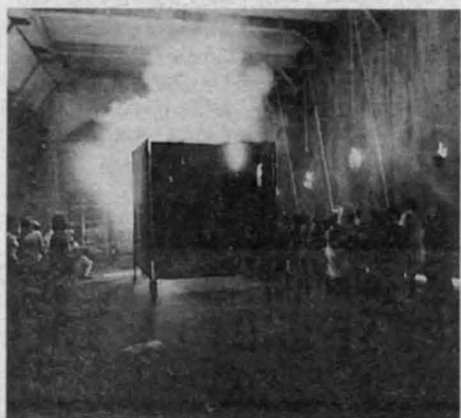
The successful applicant should possess good communication skills and be able to develop and extend the present collaborative relations between the Centre and Sydney region theatre artists. Experience with theatre administration - budgeting, contracts, casting, stage management in professional theatre is also essential. The successful applicant will be literate with Macintosh computers and software.

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Gravity Feed, The Gravity of the Situation Heidrun Lohr



# The cardboard path to the digital performing space

Horst Kiechle discusses real and virtual materials in a prelude to working with performance group Gravity Feed

**KG** What attracted you to working with cardboard?

**HK** While still in New Zealand I started to develop a computer program which assisted me in producing intricate reliefs from folded paper. During my studies at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW, I developed the program further to allow for free-standing sculptural objects. Having the desire to experience some of these sculptural spaces from the inside, a simple scale factor on the computer, I decided to simply enlarge the entire design and try to construct it from corrugated cardboard. Although corrugated cardboard is a logical extension from paper, it was always more important to me to develop my program to cater for other building materials as well which generally come in sheet form: sheet metal, MDF board, plywood, plaster board, perspex etc. All these materials can be cut with computer-controlled cutting processes. Out of the sheet materials cardboard is obviously the cheapest and most sympathetic to work with and has the added bonus of being recyclable after the realisation/performance of a design.

**KG** What kind of work have you done with cardboard and who with?

**HK** Looking to purchase corrugated cardboard I came across Gordon Scholes from Visy Displays, Sydney, who sold me the first load of cardboard for a project executed at the College of Fine Arts over the New Year 1994-95 break. During the last 4 years various divisions within Visy Industries have supported my projects with materials and, more importantly, access to their plotters for computer controlled creasing and cutting. The collaboration culminated with the *Folded Bodies* project, supported by an Arts-Design-Industry grant from the Visual Arts & Crafts Program of the NSW Ministry for the Arts. July and August of this year were spent experimenting with the design of 3D body shapes in the Virtual Workbench of the ACSYS CRC in Canberra. These were then processed with special software at Sydney VisLab and eventually cut and assembled at Visy Display's factory in Smithfield.

Whilst all the individual steps would have been possible with traditional designer software, the increase in speed is at least a factor of 10. More importantly the intuitive design process with which the prototypes can be designed within the 3D virtual environment allows for a confident design process where it is no longer necessary to wait and see whether the manufactured prototype has all the bumps in the right places. Obviously the cost of virtual

reality equipment and the fact that the assembly process of these highly irregular designs is not yet fully optimised mean that it has not become an everyday commercial reality yet. But the project gave a first idea how the designs of packaging, point of purchase etc. might change. This will be the 3D equivalent to the impact that digital image manipulation had on the printing industry.

**KG** Is architecture a key issue in your work or just in this project? Alan Schacher mentioned the idea of creating an architecture within an architecture for the performance so that the 'set' moves around the audience in various ways.

**HK** As an artist who is not satisfied with producing 'art objects' and not overly optimistic about the ability of 'high art' to communicate certain concerns to a broader public, I have consciously looked for areas where my relatively unique combination of scientific and artistic background might affect people's views. Somehow I feel that architecture, performance and new media art forms have a greater potential than traditional art forms.

The benefit of performance is that human presence and actions will always be more complex and intriguing than any object. The potential of new media is that, theoretically, it can get to people rather than an interested few taking a pilgrimage to the one object in a museum. Whereas architecture or the built environment in general has an unconscious but strong effect on the world view of people, I think that performance and new media art can have a more sudden but just as strong effect.

Sympathising with the notion that "square walls produce square minds", or formulated more positively, "Someone who grew up in the tents of nomads will have a different world view", it has always puzzled me why architecture hasn't produced the sensuously curved shape options seen in nature or industrial designs for products that interact with nature, cars, ships, tool handles etc. Being stimulated by architectural theory and deeply disappointed by architectural design software, where the Platonic primitive is king and creativity is automated, I try to show prototypical possibilities that include complex shape options which, in this digital age, can be manufactured just as easily as the traditional box. In other words: "influenced by the forces of intuition and irregularity [I] intend to demonstrate how a combination of virtual reality and automated manufacturing could free architecture from the reductivist geometry

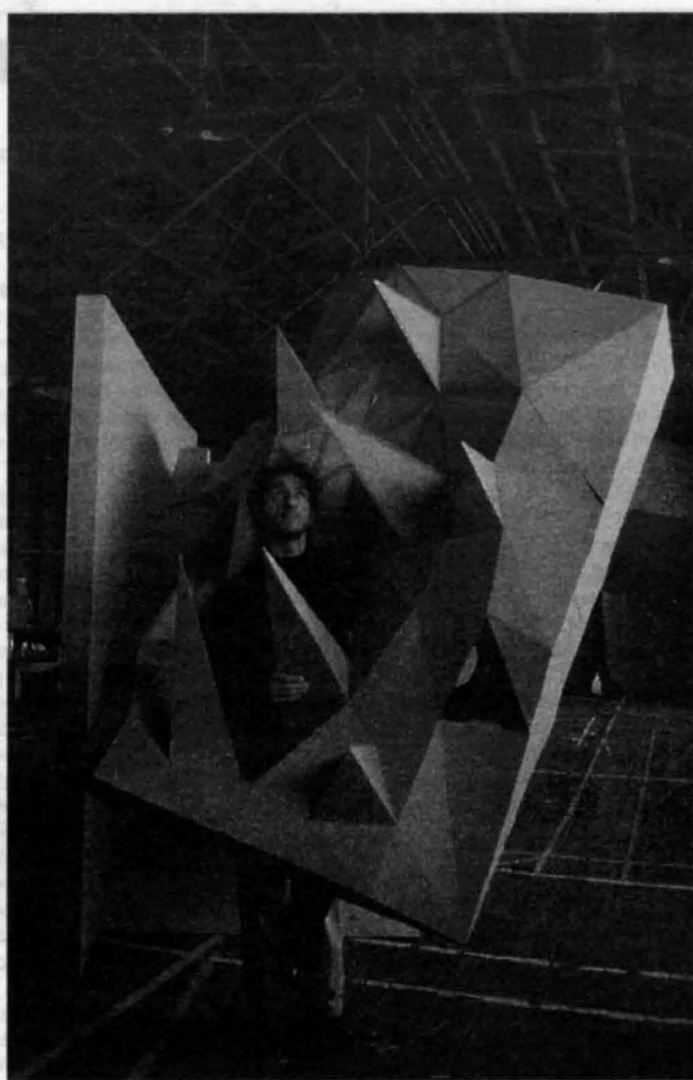
of the Age of Lego". (Horst Kiechle in Davina Jackson, "Other Geometries", *Architecture Australia*, March/April 1997)

With respect to what Alan mentioned there is another, basically parasitic, motivation. Being of a generation which has witnessed the oil-shock and the subsequent breakthrough of 'green ideas', I have always been interested in thinking about the way in which the boring glass boxes of CBDs everywhere could be recycled. Thus I came up with an idea somewhere between Gordon Matta-Clark's incisions into buildings and the growth process of the fungus tunnelling through blue vein cheeses, ie let a growth process produce the incisions and envelope for a sculptural space within the matrix of an existing, rectilinear building. An example is the "Eisenman Re-visited" project from 1995-96. The concept does not really suit The Newtown Theatre, the venue for this Gravity Feed performance in Sydney, but the 'set' will certainly have some relationship to the original architecture and alter the audience's traditional relationship to it.

**KG** What interests you in working with a performance company with a strong visual-physical orientation?

**HK** The reasons are numerous and quite varied. Alan Schacher had been one of the first artists I ran into when I came to Sydney 6 years ago. Since then I've been to many performances by him and/or Gravity Feed. Most of them I find intriguingly complex, yet with a 'clear' message which I never manage to describe or analyse. It has always interested me and quite often triggers goosebumps.

Apart from the content issue there are a number of benefits in working with performers. Virtual reality in the shape of virtual sets for TV or a planning tool for film shoots or theatre is slowly but certainly evolving. There is also my personal belief that architecture, as shelter around us but also as organisation of the space which guides our



Alan Schacher with a Horst Kiechle construction

Horst Kiechle

movement within and through it, should be designed through the moving body. And latest developments in Virtual Reality aiming at utilising CAVE technology for design—not only for display purposes—will soon enable the generation and modification of complex architectural shapes by the designer/performer in real time on a 1 to 1 scale. I am convinced that such a technology would overcome the anecdotal preference by architects for a 6B pencil—which clearly hints at his/her desire to create with a simple tool, but with plenty of movement rather than positioning a variety of primitives on a relatively small-scale computer monitor with a fiddly little input device.

Horst Kiechle completed a Masters Degree in Geomechanics in Germany in 1988, migrated to New Zealand and to Australia in 1992. From 1995 to 1997 he was Artist in Residence, Sydney VisLab, gained a Master of Fine Arts, College of Fine Arts, UNSW in 1997; was Artist in Residence, CSIRO, Canberra 1997-98; and received an Arts-Design-Industry grant from the NSW Ministry for the Arts hosted by Visy Displays, Sydney in 1998. This year he has had a guest research position with GMD in Germany, and in 1999 he will be Artist in Residence, Malmö University, Sweden.

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# Howling for the moon

Maryanne Lynch on the fusion of poetry and performance in Experimento's *Barking Dogs*

There's a moment in *Barking Dogs* when I hear a pin drop. It's the pin inside Patricia's head, and now she's about to explode. Patricia is one of 3 sisters, a pill-swilling nervous sort, the type of woman you don't sit next to at bus stops. So what's this family like? Perhaps it's time to have a chat with Monnie, a woman who drinks it straight from the bottle thank you very much. Prone to long rants, or is that a philosophical reflection? It's hard to say. Or what about Helen, the dark horse of the family? What's her problem? Does she even have one? Yep, and it's a big 'un.

But *Barking Dogs* isn't really about character, or even families. Well, it is and it isn't. The deliciously colloquial poetry of Norman Price's writing takes us into the worlds of these sisters but it's Markus Wessendorf's direction and the performances of, especially, Dawn Abinger as Patricia and Katrina Devery as Monnie that illuminate the heart of things. *It glows, it sparkles, it slides down down down... Spit it out now!!* Character becomes subordinate to the inner rhythms of thought and memory but, in this, is writ large. *And reduced to nothing more than an ABC test pattern.*

More accurately, it's the careful choreography of space, bodies, sound, word and light that gives back to the text its deeper intention—an interrogation of identity, or how we make (and remake) sense of ourselves. *For example:* Three dogs—a chorus of 3 men—howl out the sisters' rehearsed pain as they one-step, two-step their way around the fears and the backyard. They're not going anywhere but that's not the point. *For example:* Patricia does her dash by making a dash along a spotlight circuit of unspecified dimensions. *Watch me now! Are you looking? I'm gonna kill myself. I am! I really am! Spilling herself; pillling herself; once there were 3 little girls and*

a father. And now... And again. Again. Again.

There's a table, and 3 chairs, and 3 kennels disguised as chairs (*let's pretend*). A space full of 'stuff', and every element—alive or dead—in it also a space full of 'stuff.' Here, psychology is not privileged though the result is a sharp-as-a-knife profile of a family that doesn't know what to make of itself. Or knows only too well: *Stuff it!* A meditation on the self without one Freudian slip.

Wessendorf acknowledges his debt to the Wooster Group, Richard Foreman, Heiner Müller and other US/European performance luminaries in the program notes, and these influences are obvious. (And make me sigh about the incestuous limitations of the Australian performance world.) But in between the bursts of Kraut rock and the stylised gestures is the smell of a Sunday roast. The work in all its parts has found the rhythms of Price's text and magnified them so that the slow, hot afternoons of baking biscuits and getting tanked is caught, like the sisters are caught, and turned on us, the audience, like a blowtorch. Which seems to capture the intent of such influences, beyond national boundaries and yet honing in on meaning-making particularities. I don't know if Price consciously shared this endeavour; perhaps it was imposed on him; but, even if so, Wessendorf seems to have remained true to the work's own narrative... of a place where nothing and everything sit side by side at the kitchen table...

*Barking Dogs*, director, Markus Wessendorf; writer/dramaturg, Norman Price; designer, Kate Stewart; cast, Katrina Devery, Dawn Abinger, Gabriella di Labio, Alex Lazic, Darren Schnase, Matthew Tappin; producer, Experimento; Metro Arts Theatre, Brisbane, September 16 - October 3

Two companies from South Australia open in Sydney in November. Brink returns with another Howard Barker play, *The Europeans*. "It is 1683 and Europe has narrowly survived the onslaught of the Turkish empire. Barker's menagerie of fractured characters move through a demolished landscape bearing the scars of catastrophe and the insights of experience." Brink's very accomplished production of Howard Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya* at Belvoir Street last year was an impressive entree and they followed up with sell-out seasons of Jez Butterworth's *Mojo* and an all female version of Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*. The company now has secure funding from Arts SA and the fine ensemble, directed by Tim Maddock is joined for this production by designer Mary Moore. For two weeks only at Wharf 2 Theatre at Walsh Bay November 27 - December 12. (The Adelaide season of *The Europeans* was to be reviewed in this edition of *RealTime* but has unfortunately been held over because of illness.)

At the other end of town Rawkus Productions presents *Often I find That I am Naked* by Fiona Sprott

which had a promising premiere at this year's Adelaide Festival in a season entitled *Foreplay*. The company stopped off for performances at the Melbourne Fringe on the way to Sydney. Sprott is also co-founder of the adventurous Safe Chamber, another Adelaide company presenting new performance by local writers. She describes this work as "a darkly comic exploration of loneliness". Jezebel (really?) played by Jacqueline Linke and her counterpart males (fingers crossed, all played by Keith Agius) inhabit an uncertain world of sexual ambivalence, economic instability and political cynicism. If you think you know what happens next, director Eva Hamburg gives an assurance that this is "by no means a conventional piece... (but) a mixture of monologue, stand-up, vignette performed in an intimate cabaret setting" using video projection, live soundscape and musical underscoring by Ian Moorhead and choreography by Penny Thomas. The cast is well-credentialed and suitably multi-skilled and you can catch them at The Stables Theatre, Kings Cross November 27- December 19 RT

Once upon a time there were three little girls who went to a police academy. They were not in Frumpus.

Frumpus originated in 1994 as a side project for the Post Arrivist girls. Since then Frumpus has gone through many line up changes (I myself have donned the red tracksuit for special guest appearances) and grown into a multi-layered, multi-headed monster. The Frumpus oeuvre consists of red tracksuits, Bonds full brief Cottontails, every conceivable prop purchased from a \$2 shop, a bit of fake blood, iconic video and sound grabs and a choreographic collage that (arguably) makes the antics of a 14 year old girl dancing in her lounge room into an artform. Oscillating between exaggerated frumpishness and extreme feminine stereotypes, Frumpus sucks up every last drop of the popular culture of the 70s, 80s and 90s and (often literally) spits it back out, pre-masticated and easy to swallow. Frequently performing their 10 minutes of fame at events such as cLUB bENT, Spicy Friday and Klub Kooky, Frumpus are the darlings of the queer/bent nightclub scene. But the Frumpus girls are growing restless and they want more, so they are taking over The Performance Space for *Strumpet*, three nights of extended frumpishness, with additional assistance from other performance-pop artists such as Extra Bimbo, Trash Vaudeville, Jeff Stein, Scott Gordon and Mad Red (Lee Wilson and Mirabelle Wouter, Belgium). This is retro-obsessed, generation X, "trash" performance, at its peak, in its natural habitat. Gail Priest



Frumpus

Phillipa C.

*Frumpus presents Strumpet, The Performance Space, Sydney, December 10 - 12, 8pm. Bookings tel 9698 7235*

# The developing image

Impressive visions from PACT's *Darkroom*

In addition to the "three striking visions" promoted in PACT's new season of works by three women directors Caitlin Newton-Broad, Victoria Spence, Nikki Heywood, is the impact of the space itself. The black box is white. And the commitment extends to a little manifesto in the program about it "revealing architectural detail and providing a canvas on which the three territories (outer, urban and home) can create their own distinct imagery", so let's hope this means there's even more of PACT Youth Theatre's subversion of the black box to come.

Another welcome departure was the format. Instead of the full-length production with the massed cast of youths, the sometimes unwieldy burden often borne creatively by intrepid PACT artistic director Chris Ryan, here were 3 works given just enough stage time (around 40 minutes each) to develop ideas and for performers to come to grips with their roles and shine individually in smaller, more focussed ensembles. Performers were invited to attend workshops with each of the directors and offered their choice of the projected works, each triggered broadly by the concept of the Darkroom.

*Darkroom 1* directed by Caitlin Newton-Broad was the one in which the idea of the photograph featured most strongly. Frock-coated ushers with stylized bows and gestures show us into the theatre. On the way we pass the striking image of a woman in black (Shelley O'Donnell) framed in a glass fronted box. As she sits smoking, a photographer hovers with a Polaroid camera.

The starting point for this performance was an essay on the skull of Charlotte Corday by Leslie Dick "who traces the history of Corday's famously extracted head, as a photographic document, phrenological evidence, fetish item, curioso and formerly the skull containing the active mind of a female assassin".... "By focusing on Corday" says the program note, "we have taken an extreme act which was meticulously prepared. It is the abrupt story of someone who sat on the outside of history, stitching together an opportunity to make a delirious entrance."

The performance offers a gothic rendition of a late 18th century historical moment (and its subsequent resonances) and weaves its narrative from a set of subtle and striking images. Actions and performers are framed and reframed by light, by sound, by the space, its entrances and exits—a roller door rattles open (a PACT favourite re-worked) revealing a young woman framed by the night-time reality of Railway Parade; in a simultaneous image a man struggles with himself, his jumper covering his head distorting his body; a chair is hurled into a pool of light; a woman in a black plastic dress with bustle (great costumes by Lisa Mimmocchie) turns away, on the back of her head a death mask, faces us, addresses us; a door swings relentlessly in a suspenseful build of comings and goings.

Several hands contributed to the writing and this, together with the fragmentation inherent in the concept, made meaning sometimes elusive. This is definitely one to see a second time—there's a project for PACT: be the first venue to offer a concession price for repeat viewings. This aside, *Darkroom 1* had an acute power achieved in the careful patterning of the performers voices, the savvy exploitation of a mix of means (including film and live music), deft manipulation and execution of some powerful images and especially a stylish and thoroughly inventive use of the space. Caitlin Newton-Broad's debut in Sydney after training at the VCA, directing for St Martins, and assisting Michael Kantor on Company B's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, marks her as a director to watch.

There's a brief sequence in *Darkroom III* directed by Nikki Heywood in which the cast create the saccharine closing tableau of Johnny Young's *Young Talent Time*. The vision is bland and temporary (fortunately) and contrasts sharply with the wildly inventive, and frightening world of children otherwise captured in this work. This one started with familiar territory for Nikki Heywood (creator of *Burn Sonata*): "If the architectural



Shelley O'Donnell, *Darkroom 1*

Heidrun Löhr

blueprint of the childhood home still exists in memory, what other blueprints were laid down in our cells?" Though it appears on the surface a familiar take on the dark room of dreams and nightmares, *Darkroom III* turns into something altogether memorable. Performers transform through play and especially dressing up from a costume cupboard full of clothes. As in *Darkroom I* there is a strong focus on image. A circle of light illuminates a small green object. A young woman approaches tentatively, lies down on the floor, reaches for it. She unwraps the binding of blue green gauze to reveal a tiny chair. She replaces it in the light and trails the unwound fabric across the floor. The importance of objects, the totally absorbed concentration in game-playing, the hierarchies of role play ("You be a leech. You be the princess with the salt"); the perversity of the imagination ("Over the rainbow? No I wanna go to the Bermuda Triangle"); the way ideas are prone to disruption; and how impersonations of wizards can interrupt terrifying games of molestation. In carefully shaped sequences, the "children" move from the pleasures and anxieties of private play into group improvisations. These disperse as easily as they cohere. At intervals a girl screams through the house and infects everyone with her fear. Heywood directs with the assuredness and imagination we have come to expect, but here with a surprising lightness of touch side by side with a dark humour, most potently realised in the performance by Karen Therese in a strong ensemble including some of PACT's most experienced performers.

Directed by Victoria Spence (co-director with Chris Ryan of PACT's much praised *Heterosoced Youth*, here working with dramaturg Manuela Macri), *Darkroom II* is more discursive and bound to suffer in comparison with the two tightly woven, powerfully imagistic works either side of it. It features here and there some impressive writing from the ensemble and some memorable sequences—a young woman in a blindfold faces the audience as a Super 8 film of her toddler self splashes around in a kiddie pool. She recounts the film in detail. She knows it backwards. As the film flickers to a close she says, without anguish but thoughtfully, "That's the end of the Super 8. That's the end of my childhood." Spatially this one deals with a more literal reflection of street or urban landscape interpreted with slides by Sam James projected along one long wall. This *Darkroom* emerged, said the program note, from "discreet forays into significant places, interpersonal, transitory and unoccupied urban space." What is presented is "a collage of images, fragments, snapshots of journeys begun, memories, texts and gestures," and its looseness of form makes it somewhat less engaging than the other *Darkrooms* despite moments of intimacy, sharpness of image, and ensemble unity.

*The Darkroom* is an exhilarating experience, *Darkrooms I and III* warranting return productions and further development, and all the works indicating the strengths of small ensemble work for PACT's directors, performers and host of other collaborators. Sydney readers have a few days left to enter *The Darkroom* VB, KG

The *Darkroom*, PACT Youth Theatre. 107 Railway Parade, Erskineville, Sydney, November 25 - December 6 Tel 9550 2744

Let's go to *Speed Street*. *Speed Street*, Liverpool is the real world setting for Urban Theatre Project's latest incursion into the performative opening out of public space. It's also the title of a work billed as "intimate spectacle, a world in a block", and UTP means it. This humble suburban street near the Liverpool CBD is also the site of social intersections between numerous cultures in Western Sydney which UTP describes as "a world where haka meets hip hop, where the RSL club is next door to the Mosque, where art happens in theatres and galleries but also on the street, on the train, in jails, in garages and on the web." *Speed Street* promises performances, sound and video that will take us along the street into public halls, vacant lots, apartment balconies and

overheard conversations, into a marketplace where, says UTP, "exotic bazaar meets car-boot sale, where you can buy cosmetic and chemical weapons, used furniture and second hand ideologies." Director of *Speed Street* is that great performer Rolando Ramos, formerly of the Sidetrack Performance Ensemble, assisted by UTP Artistic Director John Baylis, with writer Rose Nakad, designer Martha Jabour and video artist Farzin Yekta. *Speed Street* should not be missed. It's playing four times only over 2 weekends.

*Urban Theatre Projects, Speed Street, begins at the corner of Speed and Pirie Streets (a short walk from Liverpool Station), Saturdays and Sundays, December 5 & 6, 12 & 13 at 7.45. Bookings 9601 8011*



# Twice round the circle and travelling north

Michael Kantor's brave new Brecht at Belvoir Street, Kosky does Marlowe doing *Lear* for Bell

The 4 of us are sitting down front to the right in a position we're not unfamiliar with at Belvoir Street. Quarter of the way into Michael Kantor's production of Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, at a key moment in the spectacular first half, the bridge that Grusha (Julie Forsyth) is traversing breaks and one half swings out towards the audience. On this night it doesn't stop moving at the end of its runner and lurches off to an angle not quite over the audience and jams. An early interval is announced in which we are told that staff can't get the set to function safely so we'll have to come back another time. Although this is utterly frustrating, a theatricus-interruptus of a kind only wished for in other performances attended out of loyalty or by mistake, we go home and finish off the bottle of birthday Wirra Wirra Church Block and talk about art instead, curious on the evidence we have seen so far about the considerable praise for Michael Kantor's production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Yes, its opening moments are impressive—a brown paper floored, walled, costumed invocation of an expressionist framework (that is soon ripped away) rather than of classic low church Brecht, Julie Forsyth in fine sweet, grainy form, the movement rigorously choreographed, and a powerful Dessau-Grandage score already evident. But other things don't seem right. Paul Capsis as narrator appears to have emerged from some other idiom altogether in his curious cowboy outfit. And the night-time escape scenes with Julie Forsyth are glo-colour-Russian-futurist. Even to our hardened 60s ears, the volume is bone-shaking and while Jim Daly is a visually amusing Stalin type his speech is unintelligible.



Julie Forsyth, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*

On re-booking we ask for centre block seats several rows from the back. The difference is unusually and radically different for a Belvoir Street show where position is rarely an issue. This is a work that requires the audience to embrace Dorotka Sapinska's design, to absorb its complex choreography of movement, sound and light (Nigel Levings). The deployment of the set, the boldness of the production's vision, the scale of its sound benefit from a certain distance. The sound is sometimes a little close for comfort—a heartbeat (motif for the threatened child) seemingly pulses from under our seats and is absorbed by body rather than ears (reminiscent of the experience of the soundtrack for Kosky's *Mourning Becomes Elektra*). Also from here composer Iain Grandage is visible and we can see the array of simple instrumentation he's using to such good effect and later in the show watch as he transforms into an accordion-playing Lenin and enters the action.

On this second viewing and from a more encompassing perspective the first part of the play fairly breezes by. Capsis' role in the overall frame is more lucid, his cabaret-style narrator more palpably hosting us through the melodrama and mayhem from vantage points around the auditorium. The world of the second half though is very different. The stage is open. The fast pacing of the first half gives way to longer scenes with more long-winded stuff—amusingly rustic peasants, courtroom shenanigans, farcically grotesque priests—and Capsis gets to play another role. Jacek Koman as Azdak roams the stage addressing the audience directly and on all sides of the theatre as only Capsis has done up to now. Save for some critical moments, there's less sense of choreography and more of rough farce in the second half. This is not to say that the farce is without justice, its effect is brutally distancing. The ending is a return to form and the formalistic. Talking to others about this production, it was remarkable how often they referred to it in halves. One thought the first half contained everything she hated about the theatre and the second half everything she loved. Others thought that it got off to a good start in the first half but lost it in a more conventional second.

For the 4 of us who saw one quarter of it twice, (and the whole show the second time) Kantor's *Circle* fuses a classic Brechtian aesthetic with the expressionism and cabaret from which Brecht in part emerged, yielding both moments of power and insight and of theatrical excess (something at which Kantor, like Kosky, is deliciously expert). For those for whom this mix adds up, the yoking of the gross and the delicate, the formal and the

furious, the sentimental and the farcical, this is an invigorating Brecht, still respectful, if sometimes too brutally thinning the weight of minor characters, but at long last allowed vigorous reinterpretation, rendered strange again. And too real. The news that night on SBS about Kosovo had been stomach churning, enough to keep you at home...the stage revolve turns relentlessly beneath Grusha's feet as she tries desperately to persuade the peasant couple to take the baby as the murderers approach...The baby is a prop, a box of light in a deep night of aberrantly rich colour, not a toy, not a doll, and all the more poignant for being something that could be snuffed out.

Much has already been written about Barrie Kosky's *Lear* for the Bell Shakespeare Company. It's a staggering experience even if in danger of reducing itself to a monstrous parable, as if Christopher Marlowe had lived to adapt Shakespeare to his own ends, this nowhere more evident than towards the end with the erotically heightened demise of Edmund, Goneril and Regan presented as a near tableau of bloody satiation—evoking recollections of the physically cruel conclusions of *Faustus* and *Edward II*. In the interest of over-arching impact, as with Kantor's Brecht, there's sometimes a flattening of immediate psychological affect, in this case with Cordelia especially (largely edited anyway). But nothing dints Bell's *Lear*, the actor managing to inhabit both a traditional performance mode and the demands of this grotesque, mock Russian empire out of Josef von Sternberg—eastern potentates, thick furs, crystal crowns and ice queens—and music hall, Kosky in fez at the almost out of tune piano stage left, the Fool, (Louise Fox) legs locked in a Shirley Temple totter, belting out "My heart belongs to daddy." As with the Brecht (out of the corner of my mind I dimly recall Bertolt had a go at Marlowe's *Edward II*), the juxtaposing of performance conceits can add up to a frightening whole that manages to invoke the histories of theatre and the visual arts as well as focusing the actors' performances through their bodies as much as their voices in a distinctly non-naturalistic tradition out of Germany, eastern Europe and Russia.

Melita Jurisic has become the Kosky performer par excellence, in *Lear* her Goneril's relentless determination dressed in an eerily languorous elegance, the words intoned as if the speaker is possessed. Julie Forsyth and Aron Blabey in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* also bring the right sense of mask and tone to their roles with carefully shaped vocal rhythms that can easily step into song, as Forsyth does so brilliantly. In both the Kosky and the Kantor, bearers of a distinctly Melbourne theatre tradition



John Bell & Deborah Mailman in *King Lear*

Jeff Busby

travelling north (Kosky is moving to Sydney in 1999), ensemble is everything. These works dance, they sing, thrive on sudden transformations, demanding of the performers the virtuosic capacity to collectively step out of themselves as well as burrow in individually. For Sydney audiences these 2 works have generated excitement and talk rarely heard, and they've generated a clearly younger audience (aided by a sensible ticketing policy from the Bell company). For all their referencing of tradition, Kantor and Kosky have a strong sense of the contemporary, nowhere more evident than when *Lear* enters an anonymous transport terminal, all plastic chairs and isolated individuals (including huge-headed figures, like leftovers from the king's Boschian mad scene), drawn as much from Les Ballet C de la B's *La Tristezza Complice* as from immediate reality. Cinema and sound also have a critical role in this sense of the contemporary: this is theatre of the close-up. Both directors use head mikes to varying degrees, carefully mixed so that you still sense the voice coming from the actor's body, sharply focussed lighting (a vertiginous spin spot, head shot only for a Bell-*Lear* soliloquy on the forestage) and through-composed sound and music scores both live and recorded, loud and subliminal (worthy of a *RealTime* article soon), declaring that theirs is theatre which confronts and seduces. KG, VB

*Belvoir St Company B, Bertolt Brecht, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, director Michael Kantor, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sept 16 - Oct 25; The Bell Shakespeare Company, William Shakespeare, King Lear, director Barrie Kosky, Sydney Opera House, from Oct 14*

## Spiralling force

Martin Walch sees Avanti, Hobart's new intermedia performance group

Hobart's new performance group Avanti describes its debut production *Par Avion* as "a multimedia navigation of three passengers suspended in flight." It is an ambitious production which attempts to make "big screen video projection and live contemporary dance performance blend together..."

The work explores on screen and on stage the briefly parallel trajectories of 3 people seated together on a flight from Melbourne to Hobart; at the same time it endeavours to fuse video and dance into a unified form of communication and reflection. Franc Raschella has a good eye for composition and montage; at times the beautifully

shot video imagery functions to background the subtext of dance and motion, whilst at others it leads the story very clearly. The choreography is driven by a turbulent and spiralling force which maintains the primary characters in a state of either colliding or slip-streaming, thereby demanding a precise and very physical performance which Joanna Pollitt, Michael O'Donoghue and Kylie Tonellato deliver with accomplishment.

In its best moments the production succeeds in achieving a sensation of intimate intersection between the world represented by the video narrative, and the physical world of the live



Joanna Pollitt *Par Avion*

James Kerr

photo courtesy of The Mercury

dancers and audience. Unfortunately there were also times when the video narrative was overly complex, and subsequently the visual disparity between the 2 channels of the performance meant it became difficult to follow. Blending video and dance is a difficult balancing act to maintain, and

it is a credit to Avanti that it has the vision and courage to do so.

*Avanti, Par Avion, devised, produced and directed by Joanna Pollitt and Franc Raschella; performed by Joanna Pollitt, Michael O'Donoghue and Kylie Tonellato, director of photography Franc Raschella, choreography Joanna Pollitt in collaboration with Michael O'Donoghue and Kylie Tonellato, music composed and performed by Imogen Lidgett, Peacock Theatre, Hobart, Nov 12 - 15*

*Martin Walch is a Hobart based artist and writer. He works in digital and analogue media and has recently completed a Master of Fine Arts Degree by Research which investigates the impact of digital stereoscopic imaging on the representation of landscape space. He is currently developing a multimedia artwork which explores the hidden spaces of underground mining in Western Tasmania.*



# A dance place for the future

Sophie Hansen traces the history of an astonishing London contemporary dance institution

In May 1998 The Place theatre closed for renovations. Thirty years after it opened, this national powerhouse for contemporary dance takes a breather from the headlong growth which has kept it at the forefront of developments in this comparatively young art-form. While the history of The Place traces a rather ad hoc, opportunistic growth pattern, it is fair to say that in these harsh times for the independent arts in Britain its role as a beacon for innovation has never been more solid.

Practically every dance artist in the UK has passed through the swing doors of the old school building in Euston. Even those in far-flung corners of Scotland and Wales, loath as they are to recognise the benefits of the capital's concentration of talent, will have made the trip to catch one of the world-class performers which this unpretentious stage attracts.

An award of £5.081 million from the National Lottery will transform The Place without changing its role or raison d'être. While the battles to raise the necessary £1.7 million in matching funds rage in campaigns of seat-selling and corporate events, the everyday life of the building races along with its usual erratic energies.

As a National Dance Agency, The Place has both a national and regional role. Arts Council funding for the network of NDAs supplements regional funding to encourage diversity and distribution of dance across the country. As the big brother of the newer NDAs and regional dance agencies, The Place tends to pioneer schemes which are then replicated at a regional level.

The Associate Artists scheme is such an example of best practice. Two part-time administrators manage a pool of emerging artists from well-equipped offices at The Place. Providing a liaison, as much moral as practical, these professionals support the inevitable self-management of young, under-funded artists. Office equipment is supplied free of charge and the artists are also able to draw upon the pool of experience located in the management of the resident companies in the building.

While VTol, Second Stride, The Cholmondleys and the Featherstonehaughs may have gone, Random, Bi Ma and Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company all remain and Richard Alston, artistic director of the School runs his highly successful middle scale company from The Place. Resident artists teach at the school, contribute to special projects and perform in the theatre, generally adding to the sense of The Place as a home for dance artists at every stage of their career.

In the theatre office, director John Ashford heads a team of resourceful managers in the programming of the varied seasons by which The



The Place, London

Place stimulates London's dance audiences. Evolving over time, these initiatives remain fresh through Ashford's international contacts, which enable him to confidently experiment with his programming. *The Turning World*, the annual showcase for non-British work, has introduced now familiar names like Vicente Saez, and continues to provoke with cutting-edge artists from across the world. While larger companies such as Les Ballets C de la B perform at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, The Place's excellent 300 seat theatre provides an intimate setting for artists such as Sacha Waltz.

International artists return to The Place on 2 more occasions in the year. In the autumn *Dance Umbrella*, London's largest dance festival programs the Place, alongside Sadler's Wells, the Southbank Centre and Riverside Studios. *Dance Umbrella* also features British artists and The Place runs a complementary *Dance on Screen* festival for work on film during this period. Since 1994, The Place has simultaneously played host to the *Digital Dancing* festival of dance and technology experimentation, providing a venue for telepresence events such as Susan Kozel's *Angels and Astronauts* 1997 performance across remote spaces.

In *Re:Orient*, The Place programs a week of Asian dance, presenting companies from across the region alongside British artists with Asian roots. This ambitious venture struggles annually to survive, but remains a source of singular pleasures, with productions from artists such as Japanese Kim Itoh selling out year on year.

The *Spring Loaded* festival, again in partnership with the Southbank Centre, presents the best of new British work at the middle scale. A balance between established companies such as Yolande Snaitheatre and lesser known companies such as Bedlam is carefully struck to give a unique snapshot of the current state of the artform in Britain. Every effort is made to include companies from the regions and the event is a highlight for regional promoters who often fill their seasons from Ashford's selections.

Before *Spring Loaded* comes *Resolution!* the forum for new work, which is open to those with no professional experience and encourages experimental, mixed media work as long as movement is a major component. *Resolution!* operates a box-office split for the 3 companies performing each night and supplies technical and promotional support to the fledgling artists. A real mixed bag, *Resolution!* is nevertheless renowned for its rollercoaster extremes. Highs and lows. Recently the season has been broadened to include 2 new and complementary strands. *Evolution* features companies returning from earlier seasons and *Aerowaves* presents international work of a comparable standard. Mixing the 3 strands into each evening builds audiences by spreading the risk of what is always an intriguing gamble.

Alongside all this performance, The Place supports the creation of new work. Studios are hired to artists and projects such as the annual *Choreodrome* offer space at a reduced rate as well as mentoring and documentation of the creative process to selected artists through an application process. Workshops run on an ad hoc basis, with recent offers including video production with Elliot Caplan, independent US filmmaker of Cunningham fame.

Dance Services, which manages projects for professionals at The Place, operates a membership system which provides a monthly news magazine, *Juice*, an enquiry service for funding and performance opportunities, a library of periodicals and reference material, and advice surgeries for artists and administrators alike. In conjunction with Dance Services, the Video Place keeps an archive of work on film and records every performance at The Place as well as offering reduced rate recording services.

The London Contemporary Dance School keeps the cafe smoky and loud as students from all over the world work hard in intensive terms, benefiting from the teaching of Richard Alston and professional guest teachers. LCDS provides a 3 year full-time vocational training in contemporary dance and has nearly 170 students in diploma,

ee and postgraduate courses. 4D, the graduate performance group of the school charges students to four tailor-made work by a range of choreographers, gaining a sort of apprenticeship to the professional life.

Education and Community Projects is a small unit which offers high quality teaching and special projects to schools across London. Operating a database of contacts for the sector, E&CP is a state-of-the-art resource to the community and produces videos, teachers' packs and support material for dance in the curriculum. Special needs groups are serviced by experts and projects—such as the recent *White Out* initiative with over 200 boys from London schools—are unprecedented examples of the ambition of the unit. The Evening School offers classes at various entry levels to the general public, regardless of age or experience. Each year, 13,000 individuals attend classes at The Place and 31,000 attended performances in the theatre in 1997. The Young Place offers an early introduction to dance training and the Youth company for 13-18 year olds meets twice weekly to make performance works.

The Place has come a long way since philanthropist Robin Howard bought the old schoolhouse in 1969 and invited Robert Cohan of the Martha Graham Dance Company to set up the London School of Contemporary Dance, from which emerged London Contemporary Dance Theatre. Artists such as Siobhan Davies, Rosemary Butcher and Ian Spink launched their careers to small and excitable audiences at The Place, then and now, the only theatre in England dedicated year-round to the presentation of dance. With the extended studio space, new catering and administrative facilities and enlarged stage, the Place looks set to take the millennium in its stride, slotting back into the changing dance provision of the capital without missing a beat.

Changes are afoot due to the national Lottery as venues line up to grab the fast dwindling cash for capital. This Autumn the new Sadler's Wells opens with a fanfare program of greats, the Laban Centre begins its refurbishments and Greenwich Dance Agency puts in its bid for growth. A new rehearsal venue comes online at The Jerwood Space and Siobhan Davies Dance Company evaluates its lottery-funded feasibility study into the acquisition of a purpose built rehearsal and office space. The Peacock Theatre continues to program commercial dance and The Barbican nurtures its developing relationship with dance with an invitation to Merce Cunningham's company. As debate rages over the Royal Opera House and the future home of the Royal Ballet, the precariousness of The Place's ambitious target for matching funds seems pleasantly achievable and quite in context with a tradition of upheaval and innovation.

*Sophie Hansen is a writer and dance manager working in London with Random Dance Company. Sophie has a particular interest in new media performance work and is currently investigating opportunities for Anglo-Australian collaborations in this field.*

## Piece for the wicked

Tony Osborne seduced by the intimacy of Sue Peacock and Bill Handley's *Watershed* at Artrage

Sue Peacock enters the space. A fantastic journey begins with the daylight seemingly fading behind the Gasworks deco factory windows. It's confusing, I cannot remember what time it was when I came in. From the first moment of *Watershed* Jeremy Nottle's lighting design transports me to an otherworld. Illusion, beauty, a red floor, yes, a space I haven't been to before yet so familiar, erotic, sexy even, how could it not be? A man, a woman and a bed! A piece "for anyone who has ever shared a bed."

A sleeping man and a silence laden with potential. She sits on the bed, tenuously, looking, "will this be the same as last night", she seems to wonder. Her presence stirs him. There's magic here. Just as I wonder about

the grainy bed the man's image rolls away from his visceral body—the illusion is so effective it takes my breath away—his phantom moves and returns and his body appears upright. Now she is sleeping. I know this scenario. Then the dissolve (from the phantom dancers to a kind of psychedelic patterning) which is arrestingly close to what I see when I close my eyes.

The woman is intense. When she dances her eyes penetrate the space and I feel sympathy for her stage-partner (Bill Handley). This woman is demanding. She demands an intimacy and is not amused by his comic attempts at seduction, belly-dancing in the middle of the night? You disturbed my beautiful dream! Please give me access to my slumber. Je suis fatigué. Yet they

leap like a 'flying' nightmare, nowhere to land, nowhere to lay their heads. They exit 'real' space to enter filmic dream-space—content at last to escape the discomfort of the corporeal—we witness illusion, perfect dramatic irony, the poetics of the unspoken, the drift of the sleeping soul. Insomnia; beds and companions; dreams and lovers—I just want to sleep, to dream, to die etc etc. Give me a break, give me an inch so you can take a yard, just whose bed is this? Nocturnal violence erupts, the horror of a bed dismantled by an angry lover falling off the edge of rationality ("there's only room in this bed for one of us") and the dawn still hours away.

The silence in *Watershed* makes the moments of sound all the sweeter, life's like that. At other times *Watershed* explodes into frenetic choreography, the lovers leaping over and across the re/de/constructed bed in a full-bodied musical chairs. Graeme McLeod's video realisations suggest insights into these restless protagonists and make *Watershed* a delicious conjunction of dancing, video-

images and comedy, a mix bound by the intimacy of the action. There's a lot of beauty in *Watershed* and a lot of fun too. I have shared a bed with lovers; with young kicking offspring; the occasional friend. I've been here before and I literally return—I had to see this piece a second time. It's enthralling being around this sort of maturity in a dance-work—so many dancers devastate my interest through the lack of exchange in the earnest pursuit of pure aesthetic. What a pleasure! Dance-theatre that resonates with the everyday but which is fantastic in its presence, a presence constantly foregrounding the unconscious, the id, the tired.

*Watershed, devised and performed by Sue Peacock and Bill Handley in collaboration with Graeme MacLeod and Jeremy Nottle, video, lighting and sound, Artrage Festival, Gasworks, Perth, October 6 - 17; bodyworks '98: festival of moving arts, Dancehouse, Melbourne, December 3 - 6*



# Shakespeare's pillowslips

Philipa Rothfield and Zsuzsanna Soboslay Moore turn Lucy Guerin's *Heavy* inside-out

*Philipa Rothfield: From the outside*

A woman is sitting centre-stage, her back to us. She sidles, slips to her side—prone. She sleeps perchance to dream. Through windows we see 3 sleeping figures line the back of the stage. As a polygraph print-out falls from the ceiling, 3 dancers move from left to right, right to left, their actions as abstract as the graphical representation of sleep. Brainwaves, twitching movements, whole bodies function as a means of dream signification. The abstraction of dance itself is without characters or narrative. Four figures, moving complexities, grouping and regrouping, dissolving into sleep, jerking out of it.

How do we see sleep from the outside in?

**BRAIN.** Perhaps it is an action of the brain—"delta waves, sleep spindles, REM", (*Heavy* program notes). At times the choreography lent itself to such a neuro-physiological explanation. Bodies performed staccato actions, almost surreal, yet doggedly mathematical. The music formed and deformed, oscillating between samples, tracks, voices and evocations. Partners supported weight, shifted mass, turned, and reversed.

**MIND.** Perhaps the psyche exceeds gray matter—the mind is full of images, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. As Freud illustrated so well, dreams are illogical, disturbing, mysterious experiences, drawing on an unconscious which knows neither order, logic nor the ordered procession of time. The dancers work and rework a little narrative which is (re)played at a variety of speeds: a story which is surreal at any speed. David sleeps, dreams, and wakes up as Ros and Trevor gesture concern, then impishly prance around his body. The men perform a duet, Incubus perching on the sleeping body, summoning dreams.

**MOVEMENT.** This is a dance, after all. Four bodies in motion, lying in a long diagonal, twitching. They move towards the back corner, in pairs, then a foursome, then a threesome with an odd-woman out. The movements themselves are sweeping, graceful, Zombie-like, sharp, upper body,

lower body, and complex combinations, sometimes chiming in with the music, sometimes not. The dancers themselves are stunning, precise to the choreography yet themselves. Rebecca throws herself into a flurry of fast and furious action, David does a confined dance of grace and shifting weight, Trevor rolls his head and body along the back wall, curved spheres translate into 2 dimensions, appreciating each moment of movement, Ros, covering space in a flash, a sprite skipping across the floor, she and Rebecca look out at us: who are they? Are they the dream, the dreamers, the images of a dream, the waves of a brain?

*Heavy* does not resolve into a final position but our initial sleeper takes her position again, lays herself down to sleep, her back to us, back to front, prone again.

*Zsuzsanna Soboslay Moore: From the inside*

Those background windowed figures, upright, so we can see. Subjects wired to the dream. The artifice of charting: long polygraph falls, computer spitting out its peaks and dips. This is not how I dream, from outside in. We are the stuffings of sleep, Shakespeare's pillowslips. Dreams are made of this:

Touch me with silk, I will chant you my palaces. Dip me in quicksilver, I will chart you my night escapades. Knights and dreams and flossy places. I know exactly where I don't know where I am.

Those thousand and one Arabian nights are tales spun in a heart oscillating with fear. This is the human underface of it. Dreams deal with the puzzles and horrors of life in their sweet/cloying way. Watching *Heavy* dance, you forget the science of it, the opening night crowd of it; you see patterns (e)merge, patterns of people and patterns of pattern: pairings, shiftings, allegiances that betray you or stay loyal. They are our sanity, these repatternings, as limbs stretch and reclimb the vine and beanstalk that's been commanded to regrow.

This work, not quite the territory of

fairytale, operates in the plane where you might begin to tell a tale. Feel the itch at the edge of a tongue about to speak, story about to be told.

Like spectres, 4 slink in; disappear. Then her breathing back: a thin red peel, silk separating look and blink. She sits like Christine in Hopper's painting looking across grassy plains; rolls sideways, walking fingers slip us into dream.

Three bodies

patterning, one alone. He slips through doors: visits another's body, climbs in. Against a reflective wall, one smashes sleep; perhaps his Doppelganger breaks free...Twitches, falling faces, touches of Magritte; a Bermuda silliness replayed at double speed and slow-mo.

I remember, a bug-eyed insomniac lurched about by another, playing his wakeful mind; and Rebecca, breaking into jazz, but as if underwater, turning to catch out her shadows. I re-member: Rebecca's foot-jerks, Trevor's helpless wrists, David's pigeon-flying, Ros' spindly hips. Sometimes, a luna park smile in sinister bones.

And always, the EEG spitting out cocktail limbs.

I remember, it is hard to remember: the



Trevor Patrick and Rebecca Hilton in Lucy Guerin's *Heavy*

Ross Bird

territory they dance is largely forming, not formed. A major work which, intriguingly, did not give me dreams, nor make me crave them, but reflected on how they might happen as they are happening. And if nostalgia has a future tense, this might be it.

*Heavy, a dance inspired by sleep stages one to four, REM, disorders and dreams; choreographer, Lucy Guerin; dancers, Rebecca Hilton, Trevor Patrick, David Tyndall, Ros Warby; sleepers, Nina Rubinstein, Chris White, Kuntamari Crofts; live music mix, Jad McAdam; lighting design, Damien Cooper; costumes, Anna Tregloan; set Christopher Bruce; Athenaeum II, Melbourne, November 7 - 15*

As artforms hybridise and electronic media offer ghostly new ways of being and speaking in performance, you're not always sure what preconceptions to pack before setting out in your nonetheless open-minded best for another night at the...the theatre...or whatever. Even knowing One Extra's innovative if interrupted but unique history in dance theatre in this country, expectations now seem to be that you're about to see another dance work, something reinforced by the first few showings under Janet Robertson's One Extra directorship. But in *Territory*, Robertson's own first work for the company, we're definitely in performance territory. In *Territory* dance is just one ingredient, as greedy as it makes you for more, and I did like Sue Healey's three propelled women, arms spinning, driven but finally in control. The dance is repeated towards the end of the performance, a singular pleasure, the rare luxury of return and contemplation, but suggestive surely of its possibilities elsewhere in the work, possibilities for a deeper weaving-in and integration with other interesting movement patterns. As performance *Territory* typically juxtaposes dance, spoken text, sculptural design, lighting, music and projection. There are 3 women, an Indigenous consultant (Marilyn Miller—serious subjects dealt with chatty aplomb in direct address to the audience), Lily (a recent immigrant who sings and dances and cooks for us with a passion to belong—Angeline Lai) and a 19th century woman on the land (Lisa French, isolated, stiff-upper-lipped searcher for meaning, early on perched in a little room high above foreign soil). Their lives unfold in images sometimes in parallel, a mix of the opaque and the literal, most obviously shared in the response to a choreography of being fenced in (moveable fences as much natural as human constructs, part of Eammon



Lisa French, *Territory*

Heidrun Löhr

D'Arcy and Damien Cooper's richly ochred, moody, shifting spaces and Jad McAdam's aural realms) and in response to the weather; first its oppressiveness, then the release of its coming. There's much else, but *Territory* inclines a bit too much to opacity and too little to development, too little to what imagined contact between these women across history might actually be like—instead of the abstraction of mere parallels and difference which dominates. Five weeks (so the program note tells us) is too brief a time to realise a work like this, the result is fragmentary and too familiarly of the conventional juxtaposings of an era of performance fast slipping by. That's not to deny the promise of *Territory*, but to hope for more development, a greater interplay of elements and...some magical dramaturgy.

Keith Gallasch

*One Extra Dance, Territory, director Janet Robertson, choreographic consultant Sue Healey, set design Eammon D'Arcy, costumes Julia Christie, sound design Jad McAdam, performers Lisa French, Angeline Lai, Marilyn Miller, The Seymour Centre, Sydney, October 8 - 25*

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# Routine and reverie

Jacqueline Millner on the pleasures and problems of *Everyday*, the 11th Biennale of Sydney

This year the Biennale issued a passport to Sydney, both to its institutions—the Art Gallery of NSW, the Museum of Contemporary Art and principal contemporary art spaces—and to sites temporarily claimed by art—including, notably, the disused industrial pier at Walsh Bay. While some have complained about this literal conflation of tourism and art, the sprawling nature of the exhibition, and particularly its use of hitherto ignored locations, was one of its most appealing features. Goat Island, for example, with its intriguing colonial history, was discovered by many who had never suspected its existence. Similarly, looking for art granted a unique alertness to walks through more familiar territory such as the Opera House forecourt, the Botanical Gardens and the Government House lawns. And indeed, this merging of diurnal activities such as walking with art was precisely one of the objectives of the artistic director, Jonathan Watkins. Many of the more successful works hit their mark in this articulation of space and place, such as Martin Creed's (UK) balloon-filled house, Ann Veronica Janssens' (Belgium) installation with

fog and sound, and Ariane Epars' (Switzerland) brilliantine green harbour specks underfoot. However, this is not to say that both the curatorial frame and some individual works failed to live up to the expectations around Sydney's bi-annual international art show.

*Everyday*, in some respects, might appear to be a response to its maligned predecessor, *Jurassic Technologies Revenant*, a much smaller, narrowly focused exhibition which with its title alone sent many reaching for their dictionaries. Jonathan Watkins played up his attempt to dumb down this festival of contemporary art: art is easy to make and easy to understand, with neither mystique nor special status, an everyday activity which artists have increasingly reclaimed from high-falutin' postmodernist over-theorisation. Yet, paradoxically, Watkins' attempt to promote accessibility may have backfired. Despite a concerted emphasis on entertaining, interactive work—including Surasi Kusolwong's (Thailand) popular market stall, Patrick Killoran's (US) outdoor viewing plank and Guy Bar-Amotz's (Israel) karaoke machine—the

public stayed away in droves from the major institutions, a common complaint being that too many of the works were so completely indistinct from everyday objects as render redundant a visit to the temple of fine art. Indeed, some works appear to have disappointed to the point of outrage, Ceal Floyer's (UK) supermarket receipt, Tadashi Kawamata's (Japan) garden sheds and Clay Ketter's

Sarah Blee (Sweden) Ikea shelves

cases in point. Has the (unassisted) readymade finally exhausted its possibilities? Is there a renewed demand for the mark of the artist's intervention, commitment even, with the public and art aficionados alike?

Along with those projects which play with space and place, it is conceptual works etched with personal experience rather than removed from expression altogether whose impact endures. In *I went* (1 July 1968 - 31 Dec 1968) and *I met* (1 July 1968 - 31 Dec 1968), On Kawara (US/Japan) poignantly traces the markers of his existence, recording his movements on a map and listing the names of those he has encountered. In a related gesture, Gavin Hopkins (New Zealand) homes in on the minutiae of his domestic surroundings, finding aesthetic pleasure in artful configurations of snapshots of light-switches, toilet-rolls, dried fruit. The photos reveal an intimate view of the artist, without relying on overdetermined modes of self-portraiture. So too does Joel Bartolomeo (France) reveal himself from behind his camera, although his objects of study are not things but people, namely his family, whom he records warts and all in a series of mundane yet charged situations. These home-videos take on a special allure in the gallery. Amongst some of the most accessible works given their documentary style and resonance with common experiences of family life, they nonetheless focus attention on the relative power of filmmaker and filmed, on the ethics of turning another's private moments into art, and on the voyeurism inherent in looking at art.

Also marking time and space from a personal perspective, and invoking the private lives of others, is Canadian artist Germaine Koh. Koh weaves an infinite tapestry from the unravelled garments of acquaintances and strangers. She painstakingly records the provenance of these clothes, before picking them apart, obliterating their independent

existence and incorporating them into a larger, multi-coloured and textured entity. Enhanced by the artist's performance of her laborious task in situ, this is a poetic work whose subtle element of collaboration begs questions about community and communication. These themes are also evident in Joseph Grigely's work, which focuses our attention on the nuances and codes of the spoken word, the importance of ellipses, cut-off remarks and the half-said in creating meaning. These are nuances to which, as a deaf person, Grigely has no access. Few works in this exhibition could shake our assumptions as simply and poignantly as Grigely's accounts of negotiating the world through visual codes alone, underlining the perplexing irony that it takes an exhibition of visual art for Grigely to find a voice. We read his stories to take account of the exclusion he daily endures, and it is in what we consider to be the unimportant, the not-worth-recording, that we find the greatest repository of intimacy.

The everyday has been a perennial theme for artists, especially since the onset of modernity. It still provides substantial points of engagement for contemporary art. Perhaps, however, gestures associated with the unaltered everyday industrial/commercial object exhibited as art no longer confound and compel. Rather, beyond calling attention to institutional issues, the artist's personal and even collective engagement (in almost a nostalgic mode), are increasingly important.

Thomas Struth, whose mesmerising videos of ordinary people staring at the viewer remains one of the Biennale's most powerful images, captures this sense succinctly: "How we live, how I live, how humans live together—human collectivity. That is my core value."

11th Biennale of Sydney, 101 artists from 28 countries, Art Gallery of NSW, Museum of Contemporary Art, Pier 2/3, Goat Island, Botanical Gardens, Government House, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Australian Centre for Photography, Artspace, public sites in the city, selected taxis throughout Sydney, September 18 - November 8



Ann Veronica Janssens, fog & sound installation

## Artist's bluff

Katie Moore enjoys seeing through *Fine Lies*

As a practitioner I notice Joanne Harris curates exhibitions that encourage the development of studio processes. They provide a framework for the participating artists to reflect on methods of generating work. *Fine Lies* asks 6 artists, who also work as writers, to relearn by pilfering from both streams of their practice some self-taught lessons on how to overcome the anxiety of production. In particular Harris recommends a take on the dictum "20 lines a day, genius or not" as received from Stendhal via Harry Matthews. (Joanne Harris, *Fine Lies* catalogue: Harry Matthews, "Preface", *20 Lines a Day*, Dalkey Archive Press, Illinois, 1998)

This focus on process may be problematic for unprimed audiences who walk up cold to the final exhibited product with only a curatorial blurb in hand for guidance. However, I optimistically regard such projects as illuminating, to consumers and practitioners alike, on how work gets done. Or at least, the artists can bluff, and we can have fun deciding whether to believe them. After all, the exhibition is called *Fine Lies*.

Christopher Dean makes the first bluff. A scattering of large pastel paper flowers greet the visitor as they enter the gallery, each one proffering, in centred lettering, an anecdote on noted Australian artists. (I should have thought to count them. Were there 20? An anecdote a day...) Amusing, insightful, insider information; one has to decide at which point

one's leg is being pulled. The confetti-like flowers at the threshold imply an induction into nose tapping, who's who-ing of Australian art history.

A detail of Teri Hoskin's *Thread* presents a horizontal band of text shimmering down the wall. The black and blue characters appear to be sieved out of conventional position by a process of disintegration by gravity, with an implication of the distilling of content. Elsewhere, A4 sheets with immaculate parabolic drawings are adhered along one edge to the wall, post-it-note style, or like leaves in a book, translating the entire gallery wall into an apposing page and potential site for inscription.

Michael Newall produces an earnestly amusing representation of the energies put into writing. In a diagrammatic manner, a square painting is balanced high along a diagonal length of dowel, see-saw style, against the weight of a black circular canvas. Inside the square is a cartoon kid, pudgy hand furiously scribbling, the forcefulness of activity alleviating the oppression of the big black full stop.

In the rear gallery, Anne Oom's *14 Rooms* provides a direct example of art by accumulation, or the rephrasing of ideas. Drawings of interiors peopled by curious objects come across as diagrams for potential or discarded artworks. Catherine Brennan is



Michael Newall, Untitled 1998

represented by a plaque detailing the absence of her work due to unexpected circumstances, which I chose to take on face value. Across the

room, Shane Breynard in the dim light has mushrooms growing, their pearly luminescence against the dark earth a delightful relief for the frustrated writer who believes there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

*Fine Lies*, curator Joanne Harris, catalogue essays by Joanne Harris and Alison Main: artists: Catherine Brennan, Shane Breynard, Christopher Dean, Teri Hoskin, Michael Newall, Anne Ooms, The Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, September 4 - 27

Katie Moore is an Adelaide-based visual artist

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# Doesn't she know she's Sophie Calle?

Virginia Baxter sees another dimension to a favourite artist in the Sydney Biennale's *Widescreen*

It's complicated. The second time conceptual artist Sophie Calle and American art dealer Gregory Shepard met was in Paris, I think. They met for the first time somewhere in America I believe. Introductions were no sooner out of the way than he handed her the keys to his apartment. They arranged a future meeting at Orly Airport. She showed up, he didn't. Instead, he rang her from the airport precisely one year later. Calle decided that here was a man who could speak to her. For the restless Shepard here was a woman who could teach him something about transformation.

They decided that they would travel across America together and make a video diary of the experience. He'd organise the car. She'd take care of expenses. The journey begins with Sophie paying homage to a friend who's died of AIDS. She telephones so she can hear his answering machine voice one last time. Since their first meeting Shepard has thrown in his job. The unreliable Cadillac convertible he's organised for the trip provides a major focus for *double-blind (no sex last night)* their 76 minute video work shown as part of *Widescreen*, a program of shorts and feature films made largely by visual artists screened as part of the Biennale of Sydney.

Correcting the lone handycam's egocentric POV, in *double-blind* there are two video cameras, three subjects and three genders: he, she and 'it'—the couple. Calle is recording her diary and Shepard his. It's often hard to tell just whose we're sharing as we veer between them. It's more Calle's film because she's more communicative than Shepard. And because, well she's Sophie Calle and sometimes it's hard to see, beyond his moody good looks, what she sees in Shepard who says things like, "She's got those amazing eyes and then *that* nose, incredible mouth, no chin." "What are you thinking?", she says. "Nothing" he says. At one point she confronts him with her camera to find him staring back from his. Like the car, the relationship is off the road a lot. He thinks she's judgmental. She can't believe how unprepared he is. Theirs is a conversation full of longeurs—on the road, in diners and especially in and outside garages waiting for the car. Each day ends with the unmade motel bed they've shared and a desultory voice-over from Calle: "No sex last night."

There are few diversions for the conceptual couple: some potentially threatening men, a woman obsessed with Picasso, a hitch-hiker with bad body odour, Shepard's family for whom Sophie refuses to perform. Two thirds of the way through the film she reminds him that their arrangement includes a Las Vegas marriage. He was hoping she'd forgotten. They cruise round looking for a honeymoon hotel. If he says yes, they'll stay at Circus, a pink-striped palace full of gooey paintings of clowns. Surprisingly, he finally agrees and they decide on a drive-in wedding in the Cadillac. And what do you know? Suddenly Greg is overcome with romantic fervour for the little woman lying beside him, the wife he can "take" at will. Has he forgotten she's Sophie Calle, I'm thinking. Has *she*? Sophie's happy. There's lots of sex. Her art has merged blissfully with the everyday. She can't wait to tell her mother she's finally married. Of course, it can't last. She's forgotten her task as artist is to puncture the everyday. A month later she finds a letter he's written to another woman saying that he'll be free once the trial 3 months of the marriage is over and that's that. For Sophie the film ends with the death of another male friend, a bullfighter, that takes her to Spain.

On the surface the film is interesting enough with some nice editing and camera angles but in keeping with the theme of the Biennale its fascination lies elsewhere. Like other films in the program, it plays with time and the subjective camera. This is Sophie Calle's first video but it has the elegance of her other visual works which combine photographs with ambiguous little narratives like:

*It was my bed. The one in which I slept until I was seventeen. Then my mother put it in a room she rented out. On 7th October 1979, the tenant lay down on it and set himself on fire. The firemen threw the bed out the window. It was there, in the courtyard of the building, for nine days.*

*Autobiographical Stories: The Bed, 1989 in NINETY, 1992*

Sophie Calle defines herself as a "narrative artist" and her material as the private life—her own and other people's. *double blind* was made in 1992 and continues some of the concerns of works like *The Sleepers* (1979) in which she asked strangers to sleep in her bed or *Venetian Suite* (1980) where she followed a stranger and documented their crossing and missing paths. In 1981 in *L'Hôtel* she took a job as a chambermaid so she could photograph the evidence of temporary habitation in hotel rooms.

Having seen up to now only the distillation of her various projects it's fascinating to witness Sophie Calle in action, to watch how she performs her strange life story and the way she handles her collaborators over time. At a number of points in *double blind* she comes close to transgression with Shepard—she'd like to be told when he's going to ring his friend Kate; she films him peeing beside the car; he confides to his camera that he knows though he freely offered her the keys to his apartment he never expected her to read all of his private papers. Why not, I wondered. She's Sophie Calle.

According to the program, the works in *Widescreen* "go against the established grain of traditional film history and film-making with its storyboards, dialogue, casting, mythical actors." Like director Jonathan Watkins with

the Biennale program, curator Jérôme Sans insists "This is not to proclaim a new genre or school, but is the result of individual attitudes emerging across the board. Initiated by the Biennale, the project will be screened internationally, revised, actualised and adapted to technical possibilities." All of the film makers appear to be French or living in Paris.

While *double blind* was for me the outstanding film in the program, Didier Bay's *Wet Dreams* conveyed another haunting view of America. The work composed of still video frames of outdoor scenes which the artist shot on a trip he made across the US in 1993 is interspersed with an unfolding series of stills of a woman undressing and dressing in yet another motel room. The narration begins with a whispered reading of the documents required for a short-term visitors visa to enter the US. Over its 46 minutes I watched, mused, gazed distractedly, intently, drifted, wondered about the woman and eventually sank into Bay's intense vision.

The remainder of the program suffered somewhat under the punishing screening conditions. In the icy Domain Theatre, films ran back to back with no information on the artists and no intervals. Two and a half hours in, it was difficult to give full attention to Pierre Huyghe's variously dull and engaging *Les Incivils* (1995, 40 mins) a homage to Pasolini's *Uccellacci e Uccellini* beginning with the auditioning of the actors and including the film-maker's distractions and multiple interpretations of scenes as he made the film. Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's 35mm *Ile de Beauté*, (70 mins, seen here in its video version) was a lush and demanding work assembled from a collection of short moving and still moments filmed on a journey between the islands of Corsica and Japan. Marie Legros' *Marcher sur les choses*

(Walking on things, 6 mins), took a banal if bizarre action—a woman's legs in heeled shoes stepping a circuit of cushions, desks and plastic buckets—and filmed it twice or was it three times. Similarly, Georges Tony Stoll's *Le jour ou j'ai décidé de me peindre les mains en bleu* (The day I decided to paint my hands blue, 10 mins). *Vincinato* (16mm, 12 minutes), a film about the interaction between three friends, was inspired by a conversation, written in English then translated into Italian with an equal number of words allocated to each of the characters then filmed in black and white by Philippe Parreno, Carsten Holler and Rirkrit Tiravanija, the three artists who'd begun the conversation. Markus Hansen's *Falling Angel* presented a complete scenario in 45 seconds which arrived unannounced and finished without titles. His film was conceived to occupy the space between advertisements before the "big feature". Rainer Oldendorf offered a four minute homespun history of the Free Cinema, an alternative cine-club in Lorrach, Germany which opened in 1972 and is still running today.

I'm a fan of Sophie Calle's conceptual photographic works. The chance to see another dimension in *double blind* was a real pleasure. By the end of the program, watching with the tired eyes that are the subject of *Ile de Beauté* I began to think about other possibilities for works on film by visual artists. Some suggest a different gaze, a wider view in places to come and go, stand and sit, observe over time in close-up and from further away.

*Widescreen screened at the Art Gallery of NSW, September - November*



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# Seeing a shift

Joanne Harris takes to the *Expanse* thesis at the new University of South Australia Art Museum

Regardless of worldwide awareness and embrace of environmental issues, "landscape" and "nature" are somewhat unfashionable terms in contemporary art. Provocatively proposing that "our survival is grounded in nature", curator Ian North suggests in his fine catalogue essay that a shift in Australian art is occurring, informed fundamentally by "thousands of years of Aboriginal culture."

In this exhibition North posits the notion that this shift is especially signalled by the work of his selected Australian artists—Jon Cattapan, Rosalie Gascoigne, Antony Hamilton, Kathleen Petyarre and Imants Tillers (with the inclusion of John D Moore's painting *Sydney Harbour* (1936) as "a wild-card from the past")—whose work, seen together, "cuts across the details and debates of recent Australian art history to indicate productive new ways of being in Australia."

*Expanse: Aboriginalities, spatialities and the politics of ecstasy*, the Art Museum's inaugural exhibition in its newly opened North Terrace premises, is a large, ambitious, and multi-layered exposition of its extended title.

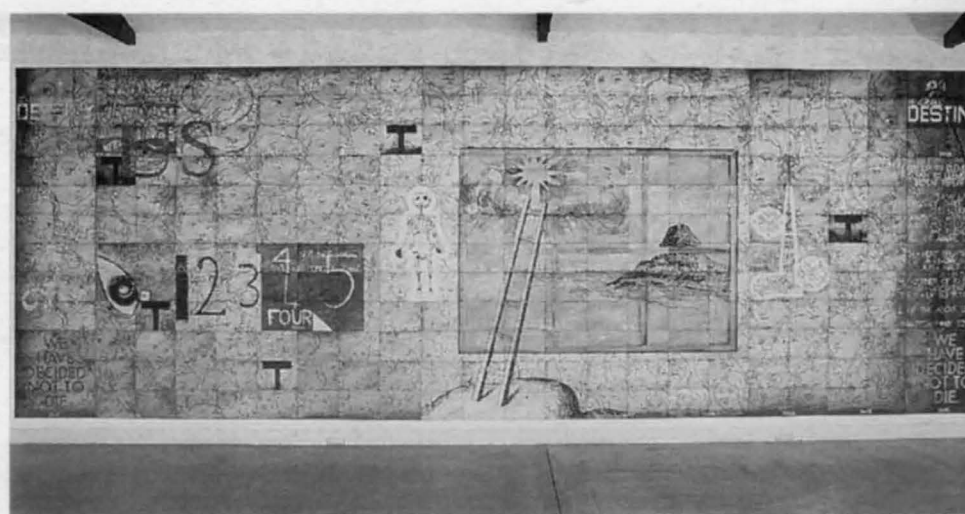
North's scholarly and refreshingly imaginative essay explores a sense of "landscape" and "locality" in the context of a universality of concerns including post colonial discourse, the nature/culture debate, Aboriginality, appropriation,

spirituality, pragmatism, religion, The Human Genome Project, Popism, virtual reality and cyberspace (the list continues). North suggests that the artists in this exhibition "respond to, or in Petyarre's case help constitute, the central feature of Australian art today, namely the ascendancy of Aboriginal art...All of the work stems at least partly from the artists' grounded sense of being within, rather than alienated from, their localities, whether urban, rural or outback, while remaining open to connections both global or metaphysical."

Two striking key works by Petyarre, the delicate, shimmering *My Country* (*Bush Seeds*) and *Mountain Devil Lizard* *Dreaming* fuse pragmatism and spirituality while providing formal and conceptual ties between surrounding works.

Cattapan presents a fragmented "body" of mixed media objects (painting, collage, photocopy): a conglomerate of "quasi-Aboriginal" segments and details submerged within intensely coloured hues (favouring red and black), evoking a seductive yet toxic skyscraper cityscape or wasteland in relation to and as an extension of the body.

Gascoigne bestows her recognisably elegant touch on found pieces of corrugated iron—the most Australian of manufactured material—and buckled sheets of plywood rescued from Australia's outback regions. Bush mythologies and



Imants Tillers, *Monaro* 1998

histories are addressed by Hamilton, calling up the Nullabor Nymph and the Azaria Chamberlain disappearance to present an embryonic form smothered within a clear plastic pram apron, comprising a raw muslin cloth patterned by fine blonde dingo hair.

*Monaro* a large, multi-layered painting in soft pinks, greys and bronze metallic glints on his signature multiple canvas boards, is the final piece in Tillers' 5 part *Diaspora* series. Intertwining a distanced interpretation around notions of locality, originality, chance, and identity, Tillers cryptically cites various fragments of text and imagery which include Colin McCahon's "numbers and 'T' forms", Sigmar Polke's "de-capped mountain", Philipp Otto Runge's cherubs, and the volcanic cones known as The Three Brothers south-east of Cooma (a country town outside Canberra where Tillers has lived since 1996).

At times *Expanse* suffers from the dry academic constraints of hosting a museum standard exhibition, somewhat removed from the free-flying, provocative, exciting and imaginative mapping of ideas and possibilities embedded in North's essay. Yet *Expanse's* significance as a major exhibition defines the potential offered by the University Art Museum in its new premises, and hopefully stamps the benchmark for things to come.

*Expanse: Aboriginalities, spatialities and the politics of ecstasy*, curator, Ian North, University of South Australia Art Museum, Adelaide, September 4 - October 3

Joanne Harris is an Adelaide artist and writer

# Go looking

Diana Klaosen in a *blind spot*

The creators of this unusual site-specific installation, Jessica Ball, Sarah Ryan and John Vella, are all current postgraduate candidates at Hobart's Centre for the Arts.

Jessica Ball's photography challenges ideas of the content and "readability" of the photographic image. She presents her work in a variety of unexpected sculptural and installation formats. Sarah Ryan is researching the potential of computer-manipulated image-making and 3D imaging, and John Vella explores painting and installation, "reorganising the object mechanism", as he puts it, blurring the boundaries between the painted image and its referent object.

*blind spot* consists of works made individually and collectively. It had a short season in an empty commercial property in Hobart's CBD, a venue originally built as a fundamentalist chapel, but in recent years the location of several short-lived businesses, including a pizza restaurant. The show is one of the first, of late, to exploit empty premises in this way, although this kind of "art in public spaces" initiative was fashionable here several years ago.

The building's eccentric architecture, with hidden nooks and crannies, reflects the show's title, *blind spot*, chosen for its multiplicity of connotations, literal and metaphorical. A "blind spot" is the area of the retina insensitive to light, and also refers to the point at which one's judgement, good sense or appreciation fails. It suggests deception, including self-deception, ambiguity, the unexpected, even the somewhat sinister unknown.

The artists worked with unconventional materials (neon, Post-it notes, a baby monitor) and also extended more usual media and techniques (eg lenticular and 3D photography). The interior of the venue became an artwork which the viewer entered, engaged with, explored and viewed from many vantage points.

Very little of the work is encountered directly; the object or image is hidden or obscured, or can only be discovered in reflected form, or—like the 3D images—can only be viewed in a specific way. The work encompasses the secret contents of fortune cookies, invitingly piled, transitory slide projections, as well as hints and traces of past presences—departed Chapel worshippers, absent art-makers, the site of the former kitchen...Vella's paintings capitalise on this; one canvas covers the old commercial stove—and is simultaneously a depiction of it.

The major collaborative work, the centrepiece of the show, is an artfully arranged installation comprising a television covered in white fabric (Vella), a custom-built fishtank, complete with live fish (Ball) and Ryan's neon sign displaying the emotive word *alibi*. The piece is strikingly elegant and seductive in its simplicity, but ultimately cryptic and tantalising in its capacity to suggest—and hide—its meaning. Significantly, each of the artists had input into every aspect of this work.

The show challenges and subverts the idea of art-making and the kind of work usually seen in the more conventional gallery space. I, for one, hope that there can be a resurgence of these interesting art "happenings" in public or commercial spaces, to enliven the Hobart scene, and look forward to viewing the ongoing endeavours of these 3 adventurous artists.

*blind spot*, Jessica Ball, Sarah Ryan & John Vella, 180 Collins St Hobart CBD, September 21-26

Jeannie Baker  
Gordon Bennett  
Anthony Chan  
Brenda Croft  
Augustus Earle  
Peter Kingston  
Conrad Martens  
David McDiarmid  
Tracey Moffatt  
Clinton Nain  
Trevor Nickolls  
Michael Riley  
Charles Rodius  
Martin Sharp  
Peter Tully  
Brett Whiteley  
William Yang

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Bungaree, a native chief of New South Wales (detail), Augustus Earle, c1828  
Courtesy of the Rex Nan Kwei Collection, National Library of Australia



# The Terror of Tosca in oneiric semiosis

John Glynn traces the experience of The opera Project's latest challenge

When the doors are finally flung open to allow the milling spectators into Sydney's Performance Space, The opera Project's expectant patrons step right into the minimal set. To reach the banks of 3-tiered seats on either side of the auditorium, they pass within arm's reach of 2 silent performers, Nigel Kellaway and Jai McHenry, cloaked and seated at either end of a long table. Authority is intimidated by the cloaks and the performers' long-suffering demeanour. A few paces further and the stream of spectators respectfully forks, to her back and his gaze. They trace trajectories through the scenographic space, parallel to the table. Seated they are close together. Close to the performers. Boundaries blur. Sitting passively and laterally denotes "auditorium". Is the space one? Is there safety in numbers? Spectators settle into relative dimness. Performers loom larger, closer in their light.

A confluence of trajectories and spaces. Confrontation? Conventions withdrawn. Yet to be drawn. An uneasy anticipation. Suspense. Beyond one bank of seats, in lateral view, a piano. Beyond the other, a podium. Between them a long ascending ramp. A chapel is Santa Maria della Valle from *Tosca*, Act I? The ramparts of Castel Sant' Angelo, Act III? The seated, cloaked figures? Scarpia's apartment in the Palazzo Farnese, Act II? The opening of *The Terror of Tosca* being drawn from *Tosca*, Act II? Interpolation. An ungendered Scarpia? Two of them? Mirroring? Fragmenting?

The authoritative dialogue that opens between Kellaway and McHenry focuses on a multifaceted Tosca. The name on everybody's lips. The woman on everyone's lips. The role. The tradition. Multiple voices, spectators, actors, critics reverberate within the dialogue. Further interpolation. And who is to play what role? Faint echoes of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*.

Kellaway asserts that he has "the fan". Iago's handkerchief. He will play Scarpia. Goes to the piano. Regina Heilmann and Dean Walsh are flying up the ramp, a duo of besuited Marios. McHenry removes her cloak and then there are three. Conventionalising the signs: dark cloak/Scarpia; grey suit/Mario; red

dress/Tosca. Walsh is assigned the role of Angelotti and in an intense moment of homoeroticism is given a red dress by Scarpia/Mario. Camouflage, cross-dressing, mirroring. "I know you are Angelotti but you could be Mario. Tosca would like that."

From off-stage, Mario's aria, from Annette Tesoriero. He tries on the dress. Leaves. Kellaway/Mario goes to the piano and heralds Tosca's entrance. "Tosca, the door is open." A trinity of Toscas. The 3 females burst in; 3 more red dresses. "Non la sospiri", sung to Mario in *Tosca* in anticipation of the night's assignation is now addressed to Walsh, as Mario. Walsh in the other red dress. Formerly grey-suited but assigned Angelotti's role, now in hiding, in the fourth red dress. Further gender blurring. Further role fragmentation. Role replication. Promiscuous polysemy. Vestigial connotations fluidly disperse across performers and roles. Blurring and fluidity.

Scarpia's entrance provides another trinity. The cloaked figures of McHenry, Kellaway and Xu Fengshan appear on the ramp. Multilingual conversation ensues. Mandarin, English, Italian. Fluency, fluidity, flux. Fragmentation, replication, interpolation. Boundary blurring. The stuff of dreams; and of challenging theatre. Transformation before your eyes. Meraviglia. "... We also draw upon the Mediaeval Christian notion of meraviglia in which the line between art and reality, or fantasy and verisimilitude, is not clearly defined." (Program notes)

The processes of fragmentation and replication enable assembling and disassembling of action on diverse sites. Mirroring and reversal. In Act II of *The Terror of Tosca*, when the 3 Toscas move about, spectators engage in a ceaseless shifting of their gaze. Kellaway is at the piano. Tesoriero is seated at the table. Heilmann is behind her with Walsh/Mario pinned to the wall of her chamber, tantalised, tortured. McHenry seated naked on a chair near the podium engages in mimed dialogue with the standing figure of Xu. Their cocktail party patter in gesture and proxemics is hilarious. A different suspense attaches to Xu's presence. His particular performance skills—yet further interpolation to come?



Dean Walsh & Regina Heilmann, *The Terror of Tosca*

Heidrun Löhr

Tesoriero, a constant Tosca, aware of the torture of her Mario, in flight from Scarpia's attentions, steps up on to the podium. With iconic posturing and suitably blue cape she is the Madonna. Theatre in the church; church in the theatre. Tosca, virgin, whore. Is it Magdalena or Madonna that Mario paints in the chapel? Podium connoted as chapel pedestal, Tesoriero descends. Xu of the mimed cocktail patter persuades the naked McHenry to take up the Madonna's cape and pedestal. Under the meticulous and humorous stage management of the cloaked figure of Xu, the naked but caped figure of McHenry becomes an iconically more perfect Madonna. With short-coming for the perfectionist Xu. He replaces her on the pedestal, draping himself in the blue cape. Xu/Scarpia transformed by associations through virgin/whore to blue caped iconic perfection. But wait. He sings from the pedestal. Statuesque. "Vissi d'arte" in classical Peking Opera soprano. Tesoriero/Tosca, taking on the Madonna's gestures, responds from the table with her soprano.

In this work, fidelity to narrative detail of

that other work *Tosca* is not a concern for The opera Project. The themes here revitalised, of republican, anti-church and irreligious sentiment are presented with enormous energy. Intellectualising may extrapolate interesting meta-theatrical discourses from the complexities of this performance. However, the action, energy, spectacle and humour of it provide for a very timely return of lyric opera to popular theatre. The stultifying 19th century conventions are here irredeemably lost. The sense of spontaneity and improvisation achieved through the rehearsal processes euthanases melodrama and reinvigorates opera. The illusory anarchy is tightly underpinned by the evident discipline and virtuosity of the performers.

*The opera Project, The Terror of Tosca, performers Nigel Kellaway, Annette Tesoriero, Jai McHenry, Xu Fengshan, Regina Heilmann; music by Giacomo Puccini and Nigel Kellaway, embedded by Peter Wells; costumes Annemarie Dalziel; lighting Simon Wise; The Performance Space, Sydney, October 16 - 31*

## Disembowelled nostalgia

Francis Boyle bridges the body/mind divide at Brisbane's MEME

To those of us experiencing an excess of pre-millennial tension this exhibition/performance offers an agreeably low-tech antidote to fears of our digitally-encoded souls being stolen away to the perfect ideality that is cyberspace.

Using technology teetering on the edge of extinction—audio tape, movie film, x-ray images, vinyl records—the artists explore ideas of evolution, chaos, embodiment and abstraction. Freed of requirement to function as veridical data carriers these media become a means by which the hidden complexity of the world can be made to inform the deceptive purity of the ideal.

In *Running Down* by Robert Davidson and Linda Dennis a tape-machine and projector are disembowelled alive, their plastic intestines drawn out and made to traverse the gallery wall where they undergo a slow process of degradation (or enhancement) the results of which we watch and hear as it happens.

*Reflect* by Linda Dennis, a series of elegantly suggestive x-ray images of various items of food, neatly ties together the conceptual concerns of the exhibition. Food becomes

body/masquerades as body parts/is transformed in being viewed by the machine.

Performances on view ranged from a classically minimalist work by Steve Reich dating from the 60s (*Pendulum Music*) to a collaborative piece echoing the body-centric 90s in which sounds are generated by electrodes rubbed across dampened skin (*Ghost in the Machine*).

This is the avant-garde as nostalgia, an affectionately ironic homage to the conceptual art of the second half of our now-moribund century and an affirmation of the continuing possibilities for bridging the mind/body divide.

MEME, Machines, Processes and Transmissions, artists: Ian Thompson, Linda Dennis, Scotia Monkevitch, Takefumi Nagamura, Robert Davidson with special guest Tam, Metro Arts Gallery, Brisbane, October 16 - 18

Francis Boyle is a poet, sculptor and graphic designer. He is interested in issues of philosophy, science and culture.



Linda Dennis, *Reflect* (artichoke) 1998



# The new music hook

The Sounds Australian 1998 Awards celebrate innovation and virtuosity

There was a moment just before he began the business of announcing the awards and before he moved to settle a few political scores, when NSW Premier Bob Carr confessed more than a liking for John Adams' *Nixon in China*. A pleasantly surprised grin rippled across the considerable crowd and you could tell that some wanted to applaud, but no-one did. They did though when he said, pointing 41 floors below to the Conservatorium of Music and its controversial renovations, that the sight of musicians hurrying with their instruments to rehearsal should be part of the life of every city.

In his welcoming speech, the amiable Andrew Ford (out of hiding in the Peggy Glanville Hicks home as resident composer, and then dragged out again a week or so later to receive the Geraldine Pascall Prize for arts journalism) reported that when approached to cover the awards, a journalist had said that, unlike the *Arias*, contemporary classical music awards were "not sexy." The comment provided a nifty hook for journalists and speakers throughout the event. Prize for the sexiest innuendo went to Nicolette Fraillon (Canberra School of Music) who started it and cellist David Pereira who clinched it with, "Awarding me the prize is like awarding the sexual organ for a great sex act."

But the question left begging was what's sex go to do with it anyway? This was a celebration of music and musicians by their peers. What may have been missing in glamour was compensated by a genuine pleasure from the crowd in the impressive diversity of work in Australia and the considerable experience of so many contemporary music artists and the networks that support them.

The presentation of speeches and awards was interspersed with live performances from Claire

Edwardes on vibraphone playing Gerard Brophy's *Coil*, Satsuki Odamura playing sections of Tony Lewis' *Alien Moon* and Marshall McGuire with two movements from *Sonata for Harp* by Peggy Glanville-Hicks—which should always be played as the sun sets over the Premier's 180 degree view of Sydney Harbour.

In the State Awards category for best performances of an Australian composition or best composition by an Australian composer in 1997: the South Australian award went to pianist Gabriella Smart for her performance of *Sonata* by John Polglase; Victorian composer Chris Dench won with his *Propriocepts—Symphony #4*; in Queensland Elision ensemble won with their performance of David Young's *Rent*; and the National and NSW State Award for the Most Distinguished Contribution to the Presentation of Australian Music went to koto virtuoso, Satsuki Odamura (NSW) for her CD *Burning House* (Vox Australis).

Another National Award went to the Australian Women's Music Festival and Conference (Most Distinguished Contribution to the presentation of Australian Music by an Organisation). Held in Sydney in September-October last year and co-ordinated by Sally Macarthur and Cate Poynton, the most recent of these festivals presented 200 performances by over 60 Australian women composers including 40 world premieres.

Youth Music Australia won the Most Distinguished Contribution to the Presentation of Australian Music in Education for *The Great Exchange*, a project that brought together 37 young Australian musicians with the equivalent ensemble from Scotland for tours in both countries as part of the British Council's newIMAGES program.

Martin Wesley-Smith was honoured for long-term contribution to the advancement of Australian music over more than 20 years as composer, scriptwriter, children's songwriter, lecturer in and speaker on composition and electronic music.

The Australian Music Centre initiated these awards in 1988 to recognise achievements in contemporary classical Australian composition, performance and promotion. For the Centre's director, John Davis, the awards acknowledge personal achievements as well as collective ones. In accepting the award for Best Performance of an Australian Composition for his performance of the aria for cello and orchestra, *Garden of Earthly Delights* with the Australian Youth Orchestra, soloist David Pereira cited a longstanding association with composer David Lumsdaine and acknowledged the contribution of Belinda Webster (Tall Poppies CDs).

Best Composition by an Australian Composer went to Paul Sarcich for his *Matters Arising* which the judges described as "an original, exciting, tonally and rhythmically challenging musical argument, a novel sound world created by an unusual combination of instruments. The title *Matters Arising* comes not only from the progression of saxophones from high to low and the creation of the musical discussion from a few seminal chords and one scale, but the sort of discussion for which committees are renowned".

The achievements of the immediate musical past were doubly rewarded by Bob Carr's announcement of the forthcoming re-opening of The Broadwalk Theatre as The Studio in Sydney's Opera House early in 1999, a venue long dark and which was pencilled in for a theatre museum but is now, thanks to his intervention, set to



Claire Edwardes, Bob Carr at the Sounds Australian Awards 1998  
Russell Kirby

become an accessible venue for new Australian music with significant rental subsidies for artists (see *RealTime* 29 February-March, 1999).

The Sounds Australian 1998 Awards was a memorable twilight gathering and proof of the accelerating power of contemporary music, ranging across forms, embracing the accessible and the challenging, and rewarding the virtuosi who can meet that music's demands. Paul Sarcich's *Matters Arising*, which the composer humbly described as not exactly typical of his work, is exemplary in its generous instrumental offerings for saxophones, string and percussion, its long-lined melodic sinuousness and almost film score momentum, and its quite un-literal but powerful jazz evocations. It's accessible, it's rewarding, moody, very alive and even frightening, deserving of a concert hall and CD life. And it's sexy.

RT

## Drawing in air

The Listening Room celebrates the work of Kaye Mortley

Over the summer ABC Classic FM's *The Listening Room* will showcase the work of Kaye Mortley, an Australian living in Paris who has maintained a close creative association with the ABC where she began her radio career as a writer-producer. Kaye Mortley creates intimate works of sensual sound; her programs are elegantly composed and finely produced. She has won the Prix Futura 3 times, twice with productions for the ABC. A freelance maker of documentary features of the most varied kind, she takes as her subject matter "the elements of 'un-reality' or subjectivity engendered by real situations." (EAR Magazine) In 1998 she won the Prix Europa for Best European Radio Documentary for *Struthof: the French Camp* a program about the concentration camp on French soil during the Second World War.

On the documentary form she says, "You are watching people in the street but you never just see that. What you see is more or less overlaid by the influence of what you were doing the night before, the year before, by memories of other streets, other places, your mood etc and these elements work together, can be worked together to make a sort of 'fiction': a free zone in which one can wander, alongside the more important 'subject' (of a program for instance). (I make) a conscious attempt to explode documentary reality which is neither reality, nor documentary." (EAR Magazine)

The Kaye Mortley series (*Drawing in Air*) will be played over 6 nights beginning December 21 with *It is the Day's*, Lucy's "a reflection on light, seeing and creation; on destruction, not seeing and darkness": a prelude to Christmas recorded on Saint Lucy's Day 1989 in Stockholm. It will be followed on December 28 by *Blue, White and Red* recorded in Paris during the Bicentenary of the Revolution which explores the contradictory meanings of concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity as experienced by those on the margins of contemporary French society. On the same program is *Do you remember Jogjakarta?* a reconstruction of sound memory from a radio producer who always travels with a microphone, but not on this trip. On January 11 *The Lady and the Unicorn* is an attempt to create acoustically the six tapestries made

by unknown weavers in 15th century France. "The weavings seem to consider all of the senses, plus something more." Recorded in the Cluny Museum in Paris where a curator, museum visitors, a museum guard and a team of archaeologists "try to embrace, explain, encompass the mystery, try to weave sense with words." January 18 features *On Naxos* where the local inhabitants are wary of the visitor with the microphone who asks, "What is this island of abandoned love...Is it an island of the mind for those who have never been there as much as for those who have?" For January 25 *Questions* is a work which began in a meeting between Mortley and Minyawn, a Walpiri man from Arnhem Land participating in *The Dream and the Real* exhibition during the Paris Autumn Festival of 1983. *Questions* won the Prix Futura in 1987. Following this broadcast keep listening for *The Moon in front of the Window*, in which writer and radio maker Virginia Madsen talks to Kaye Mortley about silence, documentary making and the archaeology of the tape recording. Final in the series on February 1 is *How far is it to Babylon?* (or 13 easy pieces), a speculative feature revisiting the animal and human world of the circus and including location recordings in the Paris Circus Museum and at the exhibition *Once there was the travelling circus* at La Vilette.

While she's in Australia Kaye Mortley will be making a new program and conducting a feature-making workshop with participants such as Sophea Lerner who has just completed her 1998 *Listening Room* residency and Gretchen Miller, the 1999 winner. Sophea Lerner's virtuosic piece *The Glass Bell* will be broadcast on *The Listening Room* on December 14. Tune in also on December 6 for Andrew McLennan's *All Ears: Sound Impressions from a Symposium on Listening*, an account of the four-day event hosted by Hessischer Rundfunk, as part of Documenta X, Germany 1997.

RT

*The Listening Room* ABC Classic FM Mondays, 9 pm

## Sport TOOTH & CLAW

With Jack Rufus

Of all the recent developments in Australian cricket, the most nauseating is the elevation of captain Mark "Tubby" Taylor to sainthood. Only a year or so ago, Tubby was down and almost out: he couldn't bat, he tortured himself in press conferences, each excuse he made was more bizarre than the last. Commentators declared him "mentally unfit" to be captain and sharpened their knives.

Then he went to Pakistan and batted on a pitch so placid it played like a giant naan stretched out for 22 yards. Somehow Tubby managed 334 runs, which put him on a level with Bradman—he became Saint Tubby overnight. The first cricketer on the cover of *TIME*, a *This Is Your Life*, a special dinner hosted by the Prime Minister. The PM's transparent attempt to see himself reflected in the new saint was even too much for Tubby, who rightly dismissed his devotee as a "cricket tragic". But the sainthood proceeded nevertheless, with word that Channel 9 is grooming Tubby to be its new voice of cricket.

This is disturbing news for anyone who has heard Tubby speak. He is incapable of saying the word "Australian", which comes out as "Strayn", while the second syllable of "cricket" is hopelessly mangled in Tubby's maw. Are we doomed to decades of Saint Tubby mumbling, "It's good for crick, it's good for Strayn crick, and it's good for Mark Taylor"? Twenty-first century cricket may well be good for Mark Taylor, but it looks like being a living hell for the rest of us.

## TEE OFF With Vivienne Inch

Golfers are a pragmatic lot. Unlike cricketers and fencers they are not much given to whimsy or depression. I believe it has to do with our connection to the earth. Which is why I have surprised myself with a bout of anxiety nearing existential proportions induced, I think, by my neighbours. And I thought if it's OK for Leo Schofield to talk about dog shit in the SMH, RT might permit me a few column inches to air my own troubles at home. These people have been installed for a number of years but to the neighbourhood remain enigmas. They look like locals but they may as well be androids. They do not speak. They issue statements. Though they live only in the public eye, travel by taxi, smoke in the street and speak only on mobile phones, they appear secretive. Their relationships are insecure. They speak to strangers. They do not recycle. Delegations of friends and colleagues arrive at their door and stay the night. Next morning they are publicly farewelled and never seen again. They arrived with a menagerie of ugly mascots which upset children. They are at home but appear to enjoy none of the pleasures of the domestic environment. They smile a greeting but do not wait for a response. They touch base. All that is heard from the house is the sound of descending staircases and banging doors. These are people who live by Knight. Their celebrations are non-events. They must be seen to be believed. What was eating me was the profession. Counterfeiters? Outworkers? Then teeing off at Royal Sydney, where I always follow Peter Smith's advice and "look at the greens of neighbouring holes as you are passing and note the pin positions" (*How to Play Par 3s*), it hit me like a Lithgow Flash—SOCOG executives!



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## The word turns

### Virginia Baxter after Amanda Stewart

The The The "The idea of the 'voice'—who speaks, who controls discourse, who is heard—has important implications for the Australian context..." \*

Shit, eh?

"...If we are to speak of cultural identities it is necessary to know how they are articulated, not just what is being said." \*

Sh! It. It. A. A.

Plosives. Glottal stops. Sighs. Breathings. Things "Things will be things" \*\* she says, singing with herself. Chorus of selves. Calm eruption. And who would have thought, all in a word.

"Dad the verb was white, succinct and done un like blackmumfella verb doing singing us together doing..." \*\*\*

Hisses, mutterings, burlingsong. Suckling sounded a note which became a word and the word turns in on itself and blow me down, everything turns on a word. The world in a word explodes. Sentences safely packed away arrive in bits.

"Amanda Stewart's performances not only break down the idea of the performance as faithful adaptation of the text, they also deconstruct the idea of the poet as literary guru. She becomes what she has called 'a bit of a parrot.'" \*\*

Bird of Paradise.

She says: "I compose a text in which the word order is set but the performance of these words is to be spontaneously manipulated by the voice according to specific oral modes of articulation." \*\*

Voice sings into speech slides into chant into drone into struggle to speak. "It's amaaaaaaazing." Gossip to whimper to something forced down your throat. Splutter. Sounds of the liquid world before we walked. Or air world. Like bugs tracking language or beetles speaking or girls tickling your ears with whisper. Breathing poems. Word splay.

I shared a podium with Amanda Stewart recently at the Sydney Spring Writers Festival and she spontaneously erupted phrases like "IT'S OUTRAGE/US I MEAN/WITH ALL THIS WITH ALL THIS I MEAN" and "The mechanics of. The." and "Things'll be things" and "all we are saying is all we are saying." \*\*

Though I've admired her performances behind the microphone with Machine for Making Sense this was the first time I'd been this close, and the thing is...The thing is...Shh!

Shivering jaw, lip music, tooth tones, throat sounds. The harp in the mouth. Epiglottis poems. Shh!

"In performance she creates a multiplicity of voices including her own (unmistakably Australian and female) which is both agent and synthesiser of other voices." \*\*

The thing is...

Fragments from the sound world skedaddle across the speakers. Technical production by John Jacobs is sublime. Describing one poem she said: "I record the first performance onto the left channel and then record a second text on the right channel which overhears, comments on and interjects over the first. The third and fourth layers are stereo vocal improvisations which make occasional comments." \*\*\*

Try this. Scan the radio dial. Fast. Faster. Speak fragments of sound. Mix equally with fear and fury. Remember something. Something else. Now speak. As you speak, listen. What do you hear?

Hive of Bs? Pulse of Kookaburras? Throat frogs? Mouth fright? Orgasm grunts? A bit of shush. Among the sobs, birds, tongue hinge, slogans, cautions, instructions, interruptions in the flow, rhetoric, popular songs, can you isolate a resigned syllable? A howl of protest?

"The Liberated Showroom. This piece is for a performance comprising whistling, thinking and silence. The title and the names of each section are spoken aloud as words. The piece is otherwise whistled." \*\*

The thing about Amanda Stewart, when you sit beside her or listen to her closely on this CD and read her poetry, the thing is she is one powerful presence and whatever the medium, it is her whole body that speaks.

She struggles with the words "twentieth century" and "narrative". Can't say a thing. Words implode then explode in stutters, spitting chips. A blizzard in her mouth. Teeth chatter outrage.

For those of you who know her and who've been wondering for years WHY DOESN'T SOMEBODY PRODUCE ON CD THE WORK OF THIS HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT ARTIST? the answer is she hasn't felt the need till now. So there. If you've never heard of Amanda Stewart, here's the word. Get hold of this beautifully recorded and produced box set of CD and printed poetry. Listen to the CD. Read the book. Listen again. Read again. And again. Come to know a voice.

\* from Hazel Smith, "The transformation of the word: text and performance in the work of Ania Walwicz and Amanda

Stewart", Patrick Fuery, editor, Representation, discourse & desire: Essays on contemporary Australian culture and critical theory, Longman Cheshire, 1994

\*\* Amanda Stewart, I/T: Selected Poems 1980-1996, Here and There Books, 1998

\*\*\* Amanda Stewart, Playing With Time, Playworks, 1996

Amanda Stewart, I/T: Selected Poems 1980-1996, Here and There Books, distributed by SPLIT Records, PO Box 445 Potts Point NSW 2011 Australia. Tel/fax 61-2-93577723 splitrec@ozemail.com.au The recording is performed and produced by Amanda Stewart with technical production by John Jacobs.

## Review

**Bare**  
various artists  
curator/producer Debra Petrovitch  
CD  
distribution, petrovitch\_d@hotmail.com

The centre line of John Gillies' *Prehistory* is a winding rasping medial drone like taut fence wire sounding in the wind, or a guttural jaw harp, soon earthed by bass'n'drums and then overlaid with staccato techno-chords that grow reedy, pipe-like and then organ-like, and dance across the unfolding landscape with an *X-Files* like eeriness, alternating with the drone which grows its way into industrial didgeridoo flourishes and decay. *Prehistory* engagingly sets some of the parameters for *Bare*, an album full of sonic adventures with enough integral pulse and dance energy to hook the curious who might not be familiar with the outer limits of sound composition. Mathew Johnstone on the second track provides even rawer sounds, this time it seems from the electronic ether, and a collection of intersecting and halting beats. Debra Petrovitch's triptych, *Why*, is initially that, a distant male voice sometimes alone sometimes multiplied, intoning the word "Why" against some furious drumming before disappearing into a looping Frippian universe introduced by a soprano. The drumming breaks back in over another rhythm, a machine scrape of metal surfaces, which finally stands bleakly on its own. Alex Davies' *X01101*, like the Johnstone track, seems to spacially gather its static and rumble from sound detritus and sound turning in on itself in its generation of a distinctive realm of various rhythms and sound features, including something oddly like voices, always moving forward and deeper into a sense of pure otherness. Jasmine Gifford's *untitled*, returns us to rhythmic insistence. It rumbles and growls from the outset, counterpointed by aerial wheezes, rattles and techno-pops; a couple of ultra-brief interludes momentarily accelerate the pace with a didgeridoo-ish ostinato, as if a giant techno-creature gasping across space had been interrupted by some other breath. Nick Wishart chimes in with a brisker beat of factory proportions, metallic ringing, beating, and some of the deepest rumbling on the CD and at just past the 3 minute mark, some suddenly very real metal shards of higher pitch breaking in, followed by a plethora of voices and...bird squawk, or something stranger...and a slow burbling decline and a single metallic beat. Finish. You feel like you've been somewhere. The kind of narrative you have when you're not having one. Wade Marynowsky's *ode to the carp* generates a big cosmic wave plus bass'n'drum drive and a scrawny half-tune keyed in and out: it's aggressive—carp like?—and awesomely rough and slick. Nick Littlemore's *dam phreak noise funk* puts us back in the Johnstone-Davies' space of brute sonic ambience, but the field opens into quieter realms, like various rooms glimpsed, a distant 'drum' rattles, a synthed voice (is it? what code? what language?), a tender, floating exit. Petrovitch's *preparation for war* vibrates the furniture, the bones, with a fast, deep pulse (and I mean pulse) while at the other end of the scale gentle half-melodies, something out of Asia, float regardless...until another insistent layer enters the middle ground—a mechanical-aggressive sound drags itself in, erasing the sweet wires and gongs, but it fades...the sweet chimes live on, though a strange whirr uneasily (prophetically?) accompanies them. Wade Marynowsky's *noise nazi* is something of a companion piece with its deep rapid speed beat, but with none of the musical dialectic of Petrovitch's more reflective piece. Appropriately *noise nazi* is on the edge of aural nightmare in its persistence—and the title fits, it's out to tyrannise. Even given its moments of reprieve, it's the most alarming in-your-ear machine creation of all these *Bare* tracks. After these two, John Murphy's *Blood and Iron* starts out more seductively with a distant orchestral chord overlaid with sustained gongs and voices, its pulse steady. But the anxiety quotient builds in a vast aggregate of sirens, orchestra, gongs, beats, voices, forever ascending, as if never to resolve...in a word, apocalyptic...and epic...and don't try dancing. A dance of death perhaps. *Bare* is not always as raw as the title suggests, and there's some sophisticated absorption of and play with contemporary dance and ambient and not a few admiring glances back to sonic heroes of many decades. For me, the tracks that gripped and stayed were those where the sonic realm danced or achieved a more fluid musical structure than anticipated without losing any exploratory power—Gillies, Wishart and especially Petrovitch's impressive *Preparations for War*, the album highlight. This is not to discredit the other composers, who play with rhythm in their inventive ways, albeit in more familiar territory. KG

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**Friday 18 at 8PM — Imaging Sound.** Includes hypermedia performance piece by austrALYSIS; a sound-image work by Tony Gorman and Andy Tamand and austrALYSIS Electroband.

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# performing

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