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29

February – March 1999

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Editorial

Welcome to 1999

The welter of festivals persists: the Sydney Festival has just finished, Sydney Fringe is under way, the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras program is about to commence and the Festival of Perth looms just over the horizon. In this edition we look back to the distinctive and increasing popular Pacific Wave festival and Darwin's unique 'village' approach to its last festival. We sample the Sydney Festival in a collection of reviews and interview Canadian Daniel MacIvor, performer of one of the festival hits, da da kamera's *Monster*. Canada figured significantly in the festival—MacIvor, Cirque du Soleil, Kerry Shale, Holly Cole—but because there is no forum component to the festival, their collective presence and the chance for a bit of cultural exchange was ignored.

Leo Schofield's mixed bag 1999 Sydney Festival aroused mixed responses, generated a slightly larger audience than usual for its larger program, and failed at the box office, incurring a loss of some \$700,000 at last report. \$320,000 of that loss is attributed to poor sales for The Netherlands Opera's superb production of Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses*. Had Schofield not scathingly attacked Barrie Kosky for his 1996 Adelaide Festival losses, had he not condemned other artistic directors for risk-taking experimentalism, he might have been spared some of the bitterness now directed at him, especially since he undertook some creditable risks himself—on the works we focus on in our coverage, *Monster*, *Ulysses* and *Woyzeck*. As Zane Trow of The Performance pointed out on ABC TV news, Schofield's expectations of getting an audience to an opera outside of the Opera

House were unrealistic. This is not opera from the standard repertoire and the home of the excellent Lyric Theatre is Star City—the Sydney casino. The largely conservative repertoire of Opera Australia does nothing to encourage a wider response to opera and the Lyric has yet to be promoted as a serious arts venue, which it could be in a city desperate for theatres with excellent stages. Another problem for Schofield was the absence of the 22 hour Chinese opera, *The Peony Pavilion*, the set of which the Chinese government prevented at the last minute from leaving the country for the US and Australia, declaring the work a perversion of a classic. Schofield himself pointed out that the success of Cirque du Soleil, the Canadian circus company coming in under aegis of but not invested in by the festival, had probably detracted from other events. The circus took \$6m dollars in January and still has February to run before touring Australia.

More to the point is the cost of tickets, \$42 for each of the 4 one man shows for example, adult circus tickets ranging from \$35 to \$75, children \$25 to \$49; and the timing of the festival. Anthony Steel's Sydney Festivals on their modest budget exploited the difficult time of year with a sense of a public, outdoor event, some of which Schofield has maintained. However, the Sydney Festival now looks like the Melbourne and Brisbane Festivals at the wrong time of the year. It is not a festival, given the volume of shows and the cost of tickets so close to Xmas, that is manageable in January. May, for example, bearer of some of the best Sydney weather, would be ideal. However the dream of the City Fathers of boosting shopping sales in January seems to unwisely persist. Schofield is stuck with it for 2000 and 2001. Rumoured nominees for the 2002 festival—Rhoda Roberts, Robyn Archer and David Freeman—should be thinking not only about how to live with a January festival, or how to shift it, but also how to make their festival so distinctive that it doesn't blur into the already dense Sydney January arts program.

The Studio up, the MCA down

The good news is that there's a new deal for new music in Sydney in the form of The Studio, the refurbished Broadwalk Studio in the Sydney Opera House, a new venue with a brief to promote contemporary music of all kinds. This is a major development which will not only benefit composers, musicians and a range of other performers, but will change the way audiences regard the Opera House and respond to new work. The sad news is that the Museum of Contemporary art, just across the Quay, has had its worst financial year on record, lost its artistic director and is to restructure ie sack six full-time staff members and 6 part-timers, lose 3 through natural attrition, create 4 new positions and reclassify 7. Staff who are striking and whom the MCA Board refuse to meet reckon on larger sackings (19). Grim news of all is that one of the "redundancies" is the Cinematheque coordinator. Although progress has been slowed on the Cinematheque by the federal government refusing it support from the Federation Fund, hopes have been high in Sydney that sooner or later this important development will be realised. *The Sydney Morning Herald* report is interesting. Read between these lines: "The MCA spokeswoman said most of the \$9.5 million raised for the Cinematheque was in pledges and had not been received. The money raised had been for Stage II of the MCA's development, of which the Cinematheque was the largest part. Stage II included refurbishment and expansion of the exhibition space, and money received would go towards this, she said" (*SMH*, Jan 29, p11). Yet another post-Gonski body blow to Australian screen culture?

cover: For information on The Studio, see advertisement on page 9 and interview on page 44

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Sport

with "Mad Dog" Riley

international, gender or race relations. Bigger inspiration. Bigger language. Bigger thought. Bigger the big picture! Tubby Taylor made more runs than Don Bradman. Ergo—Australian of the Year. Bigger it! Vivienne Inch is on holidays.

with Jack Rufus

Who can forget that great moment in the 70s when Dennis Lillee strode to the wicket with his aluminium bat? And who can forget his look of disgust when the authorities refused to let him use it? Enraged, he threw that aluminium bat into the air: it twirled, it glinted in the sun, then it fell to the ground and was carried off, never to be seen again. But now is the time for it to make a comeback; now it can herald cricket's technological future. The aluminium bat will take cricket into the 21st century.

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Feb 13 & 14

At Museums and Galleries throughout Perth and Fremantle: artists' talks, forums and lectures.

Featuring international artists and curators: Peter Callas (AUS), Colin Gray (UK) & Toshio Shimizu (Japan) speaking at PICA on February 13 and 14. For anyone entertained by ideas and excited by art, this is an event not to be missed.

Kumano, 1998 by Manko MORI from the exhibition *Shoot at the Chaos*

The Parents Colin Gray

Initialising History Peter Callas

Bilkool Curator: Louise Paramor (VIC.)

Future Suture Curator: Derek Kreckler

Hull Under Water, by Colin Gray from the exhibition *The Parents*.

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RealTime OnLine

http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencty

Complete David Chesworth Interview
Complete Visionlines Conference report from Denmark

Online Articles from Feb 8:

Parts 1 and 2 of the RealTime report on The 2nd National Circus &

A quick guide to some serious fun

RT surveys the performance program of the 1999 Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival Event

This year's Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival Event combines some serious agendas with a familiar flair for revealing and celebratory theatre. The lineup of performance offerings is intriguing and impressive, a mix of new works and those already tried and acclaimed from across Australia and around the globe. A nice change after the Sydney Festival's narrow band of contemporary performance.

Passionately awaited is *Razor Baby*, the latest in innovative aerial theatre from sexy Australian physical theatre virtuosos, Club Swing (Anni Davey, Kathryn Niesche, Simone O'Brien, Celia White) whose airborne erotics of eating in *Appetite* a few years ago went on to win international plaudits. This time the company is joined by Kareena Oates and a man (in drag), Jeremy Smith, and supported by a 7-piece all-woman big band (composers Clare de Bruin and Chris Falk). Directed by Gail Kelly and Robin Laurie and with choreography by Kate Champion, *Razor Baby* presents "six gender warriors using their bodies as weapons and their flesh as armour." And where better to explode gender stereotypes than in the strobe light of a dance party? *Razor Baby* has just opened to ecstatic reviews in Melbourne. If you miss it, you'll be sorry. York Theatre, Seymour Centre February 17 - 26.

In *A Family Outing* British cabaret artist, comedienne and filmmaker Ursula Martinez taps into the collective lust for revenge by inviting her real parents on stage for a candid chat about how they embarrassed her as a child. Her sister appears on video. "A show like this appeals to our inherent curiosity about other people's families", says Martinez. For those considering something similar, Ursula's mother Mila, 62, a former language teacher says "I am happy to play myself because you can't go wrong." "It's all a bit too revealing if you ask me," adds her 75 year old Dad, Arthur, an ex-physics teacher, "I must be off my rocker." Take your family to Belvoir Street Theatre, February 16-26.

Life and art also rub shoulders in *The Hypochondriac Bird* devised and performed by the UK's Javier de Frutos with Jamie Watton. When he started work on this piece, the dancer thought "I'll be 35 soon...and for some reason this age is quite mythical among dancers." Working on it, he became "terribly aware of my physical condition" (which looks just fine to us). "The work encapsulates my fear of death and makes it tangible." Everest Theatre, Seymour Centre February 16 - 26.

More on the dance front...well, maybe. Aussie drag makes a desperate grab for legitimacy in Vanessa (of the Vanessa & Jamie parties and regular on Triple J) Wagner's "historical/hysterical", Aaah! Rated *History of Dance*—"Think Tharp, Bausch, Graham and Cunningham and anything in between." The show features variety, chat, sexual health research, guests, dancing and plenty of wigs, frocks and feathers at the Everest Theatre, Seymour Centre February 17 - 26.

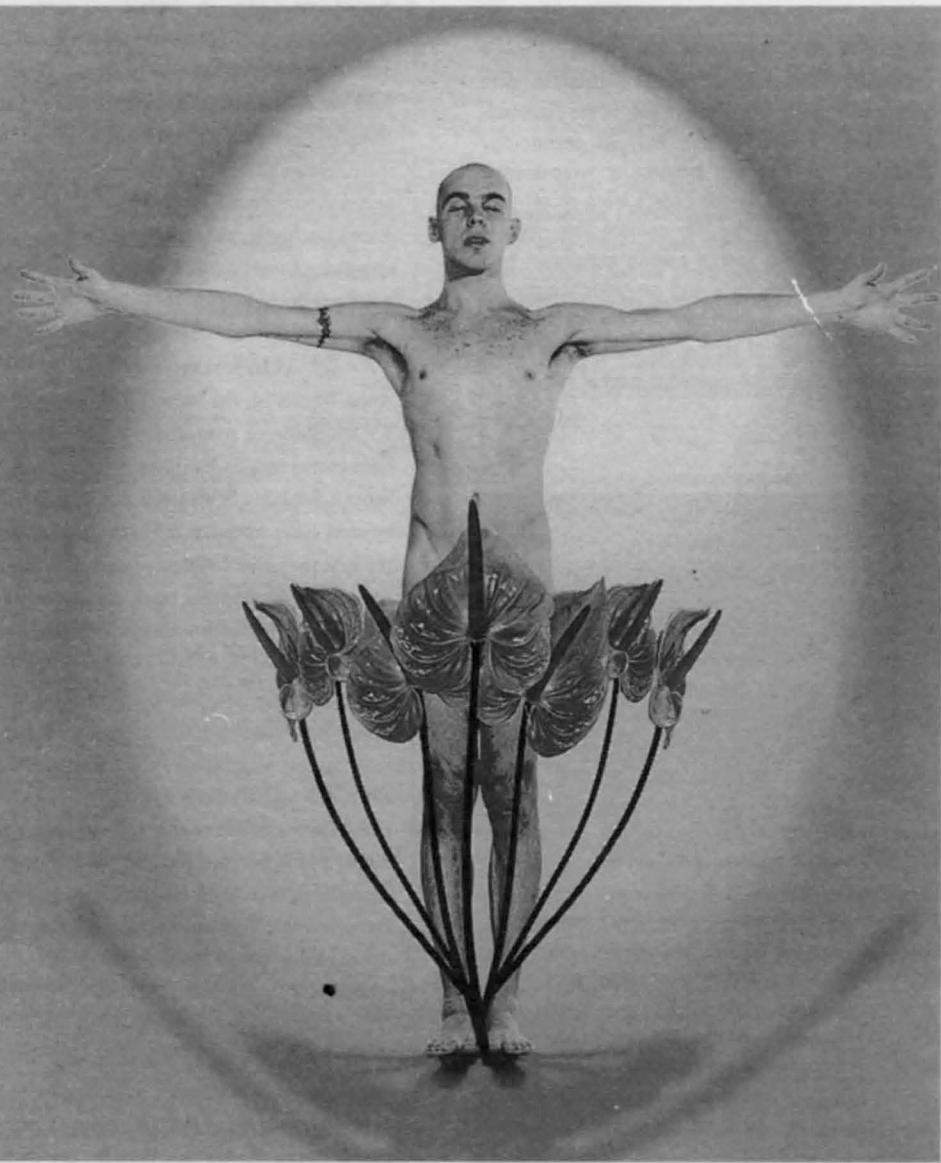
As part of an ongoing artist exchange between Sydney and San Francisco, Sista City Showcase features artists from the West Coast of the USA in collaboration with San Francisco's major contemporary arts centre, Yerba Buena Centre for the Arts. Artists include composer-performer Bob Ostertag; interdisciplinary dance artist Keith Hennessey in *Cosmo*; poet and performer Jewelle Gomez performing *Gilda Sings*; and performance artist Justin Chin in *Holy Spook*. See them for one night only at The Performance Space, February 9.



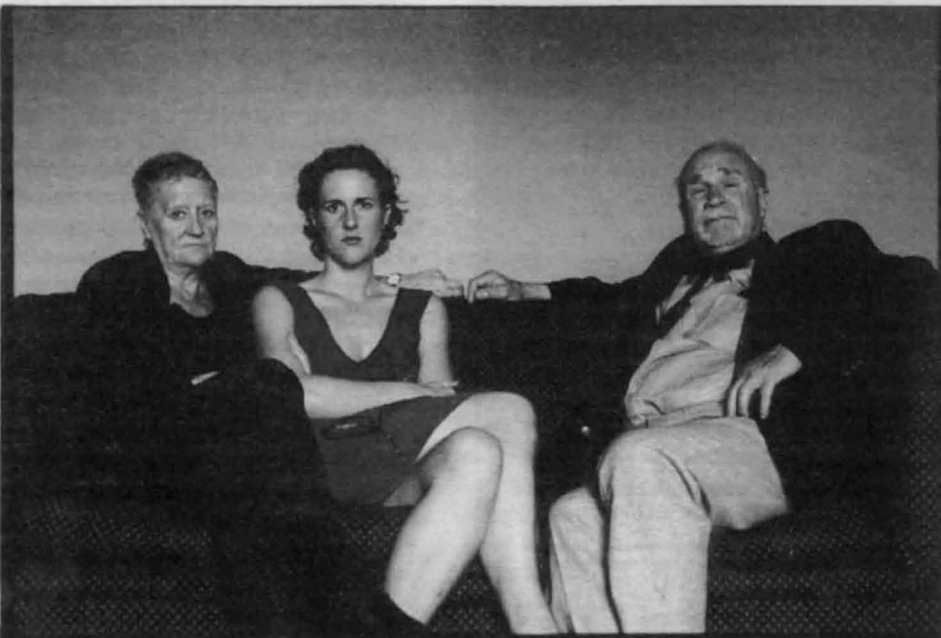
Razor Baby



Sista City Acts



The Hypochondriac Bird



A Family Outing

Malcolm Cochrane

Australia's Theatre of the Deaf accents the individual in their production of *The Language of One* in which the layered identity of a deaf, gay, Jewish man slowly unravels. This play by Americans Drew Emery and Louis Merkin is directed by Julia Cotton and features in the lead role of Albert Rose TOD's director Mike Canfield and a cast of 8 hearing and non-hearing actors. At the Newtown Theatre, February 11 - 20.

Also keenly awaited is *Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love* written and performed by Donna Jackson (founder of the Melbourne Women's Circus) and directed by Andrea Lemon which premiered at the 1997 Adelaide Fringe and has since toured to London and Edinburgh to acclaim. "An hour and a quarter of flashes, bangs and acrobatics that somehow takes your breath away...a story about class and love and the political impulse that also educates you in the proper use of a spanner...sexy and full of midnight humour" (*The Guardian*, 1998). You can catch all that and more at The Performance Space, February 6 - 7, 9 - 14, 16 - 17.

PACT Youth Theatre whose *Heterosoced Youth* hit the button at last year's Mardi Gras, this year presents *Sexing the Gap*, another group-devised work this time on the inter-generational gap, directed and facilitated by Victoria Spence and Christopher Ryan with additional writing by Alex Harding. The PACT press release seduces with a couple of quotations which we excerpt in part here. A 40 year old son to his father: "The two topics I choose to harass you about are 'safe sex' and 'protective behaviour.' You may feel that, at 80, you have little to fear: but it appears that you are enjoying your new lease of life, so why not extend that lease a little further." And: "I want a girl who's a real daddy, you know, the kind of girl that let's you wear stilettos in the shower." (Techa, 19) "You mean someone you can fuck and not talk about politics?" (Jen, 50).

Sexing the Gap is the outcome of "two groups of gays, lesbians and queers—aged 25 and under; and 50 and over—coming together as we attempt to 'sex' the gap. What's the gap? The generation gap, perhaps, or the gap between individuals; the gap between intention and expression, between words and experience. Maybe the gap between discrete categories of identity." While promising wit, poetry, music, nudity, clichés and irony, PACT has some serious questions to pose. "Do young people feel any kinship at all with young gays and lesbians of previous decades? To what extent is there a sense of sharing, mentorship and mutual support operating in these communities? *Sexing the Gap* doesn't promise to deliver any answers but it does acknowledge that perhaps these issues are sometimes swept aside or forgotten in 'mainstream gay and lesbian' forums. Does gay culture cling to eternal youth, with its senior citizens being second class citizens." February 10-20 at PACT Theatre, Erskineville.

If you enjoyed Daniel MacIvor's performance in *Monster* at the Sydney Festival, don't miss his hilarious verité diary of infidelity, *Until I hear from You* screening at the Mardi Gras Film Festival in February.

For more information on the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival Event call 02 9549 2138 or check the website www.mardigras.com.au

PS On February 13 Playworks is hosting a free public reading of Barbara Karpinski's *I'm Too Beautiful to be a Lesbian in the Downstairs Theatre, Seymour Centre*. This performance began as a one off for cLUB bENT and is on its way to becoming a full-length satire on gay identity politics. Call Playworks 02-9264 8414

A taste of the possible

RealTime samples the 1999 Sydney Festival

In programming Daniel MacIvor and Daniel Brooks' *Monster*, the Netherlands Opera account of Monteverdi's *The Return of Ulysses*, and the Centre Chorégraphique National d'Orléans *Woyzeck*, along with David Benson's *Nothing But Pleasure* and Danny Hoch's *Jails, Hospitals & Hip-Hop*, Sydney Festival artistic director Leo Schofield showed an unexpected taste for the kind of work he's hitherto mocked as belonging to the playpen of experimentalism and festival fiscal irresponsibility. *Monster* and *Woyzeck* tested audience sensibilities with shows that would have been more obviously at home in an Adelaide Festival. However, save for Meryl Tankard's impressive but flawed *Possessed*, premiered at the 1998 Adelaide Festival, and skadada's *Electronic Big Top*, Schofield otherwise maintained his lack of interest in Australian performance. Fortunately, running parallel to the festival was Gravity Feed's mighty *Host*, a work of great architectural power, physical and sonic presence showing just what the locals are capable of, and offering festival-goers a very different sense of what it means to be an audience.

Daniel MacIvor, *Monster*
Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House,
Jan 4 - 9

Monster offered the pleasures of being kept in the dark—the eerie delights of horror in a cleverly and minimally lit show and the careful and lateral unfolding of a narrative that threatens always to disappear. The first sound is "Sh!" Followed by "Shut up asshole, the movie's started!" MacIvor is initially that voice in the dark, his tone aggressive stand-up comic with a bone to pick with someone...in the audience. You're on edge. When you can see it's not easy to make him out, a prelude to the physical and facial transformations that ensue. The frame is tightened even more by MacIvor standing on one spot for most of the 80 minutes of his performance, relying on gestures, a lift or a dip of the head with a change of lighting to offer another face. The humour comes, the frame is set, the audience is ready to laugh, and there are plenty of opportunities, but the material runs deeper, into a truly grotesque murder recounted with ironic detachment, stifling the will to laugh. MacIvor as a young boy tells it his way, the kiddie clichés perfectly pitched to portray an innocent obsessively caught up in moral horror and on his way to suicide on a freeway—a single light globe (as car headlights) frighteningly arcs down across the stage just missing MacIvor. He then takes us to another time, another place, to a strange family, an awkward romance, a junkie, a ripped-off apocalyptic screenplay, a reformed film director (no more screen violence from him), and right back into murder. But back in with a relentless narrational logic (of the foetus that will become B-Boy Boyle who will murder his father, cut him up while feeding him spaghetti to the strains of "Raindrops keep falling on my head") and a philosophical web (in the visually

and morally darkest moment of the work) that you're still caught up in the next day, like a bad dream that won't leave. Speculation on the work's images and meanings stays with its door open, looking into the dark. (See the interview with Daniel MacIvor on page 7).

Keith Gallasch, Virginia Baxter

Centre Chorégraphique National d'Orléans, *Woyzeck*
Everest Theatre, Seymour Centre,
Jan 19 - 22

It was also out of a sense of restraint that 2 of the festival's other sublime offerings emerged with their riches, and their demands. On page 6 Nigel Kellaway and Annette Tesoriero discuss their responses to De Nederlandse Opera's *The Return of Ulysses*, an unhurried, beautifully articulated performance rich in tableaux (and near tableaux) counterpointed with bursts of intense emotion and occasional action (not unlike the Peter Sellars' approach to Handel), perfectly set in the Star City Casino's Lyric Theatre, with its large stage, and tall, intimate auditorium. At the Everest Theatre, the smaller of the Seymour Centre's 2 theatres, the Centre Chorégraphique National d'Orléans' *Woyzeck Or The Hint of Vertigo* threatened to disappear if you were too far from the stage. This exquisitely detailed and bizarrely conceived middle-European variation on Buchner's *Woyzeck* (most of the company including the Yugoslav born director Josef Nadj have come from or have worked and trained in Budapest) elaborates the world of the protagonist's suffering rather than telling the (albeit incomplete) Buchner story, so much so that it takes quite a while before you're sure which of the characters is *Woyzeck* and which way this version of the tale will resolve itself. For those unfamiliar with the Buchner and with performance worlds that others know from the works of Kantor, Bausch and Wilson and their Australian brethren, this was a taxing and restless night out. For those engrossed in its genius (the mix of actors and dancers crowded into the tiny 'box' set, emerging from statue-stillness, being passed about, experimented on, pissing peas, assaulted, trying to put broken eggs back together [one successfully!], slicing bits of body from others and selves), *Woyzeck* was a revelation in the intricacy of its detailing—but you needed to be close—and the broad rhythm of its moments of pictorial stillness in the near silences that punctuated its unnerving way forward. Not surprisingly the company is going into rehearsals of a Kafka work in February. Like *Monster*, *Woyzeck* is a horror story of a kind, a work of discomforting beauty and discipline. KG

Company B, *The Judas Kiss*
Belvoir St Theatre, Jan 6 - Feb 14

David Hare's *The Judas Kiss*, directed by Neil Armfield, was widely declared a festival



Danny Hoch, *Jails, Hospitals and Hip-Hop*

success, even *the* festival success by one rhapsodising critic, but not everyone was seduced. Bille Brown's performance as Oscar Wilde was virtuosic, certainly in the play's second half for which Wilde is mostly seated, physically and emotionally locked in his chair while his world comes apart around him in Naples. And the other 2 performances—by Malcolm Kennard as Bosie and Glenn Hazeldine as Robert Ross—that complete the triangle of the play's dynamic, are very good. The diffuse first half, not helped by a tacky stage design, is a kind of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, overburdened with class conscious prattle, a standard set of tired old Wilde bon mots, and opening with a gratuitous heterosexual oral sex scene (doubtless a didactic touch to clear the way for all the non-gratuitous male genitalia swinging their way through the evening). It would be lovely to know what Wilde would have made of *Judas Kiss*. If, as Hare has him say in the second act when he surmises that his fault all along has been to be the foreigner, Irish, then Wilde would probably say that this is a very, very British play, a terribly moral and pragmatic worrying at *who* is to blame for his fall, and an attempt to humanise someone who, when he was alive, gave bourgeois humanism a very hard time. Not such a bad chappie after all. The play is at its best when Wilde is at his most obtuse, especially in his refusal to communicate with his wife, his argument so precious, so selfish, so viciously logical. *Judas Kiss* left me feeling grumpy and uncomfortable, but not for the right reasons. Yes, the injustice done Wilde by British society and the complexities of his own response had been bared, *again*, but the form of his restitution has been performed in the cosy naturalism that reclaims Wilde not as gay and transgressive, but as British, a theatrical object removed from his own temperament and aesthetic. In London's West End there is now a statue of Wilde, you've perhaps seen it on TV when Stephen Fry unveiled it. Not inappropriately it's fashioned as a seat, and, yes, you can sit on Oscar's lap. KG

Danny Hoch, *Jail, Hospitals and Hip-Hop*
Playhouse, Sydney Opera House,
Jan 16 - 23

"Peace to my audience", Danny Hoch exclaims as he cusses so profusely that the refined theatre-goers duped by the dubious programming of a hip-hop artist at the Opera House at \$42 a ticket are compelled to leave. Hoch rails and rhymes his way through an opening sequence of hip-hop jargon jive that sums up the America of the oppressed—my country tis of thee: the white boy from Montana desperate to be a black hip-hop star—sweet land of liberty: the inmate imprisoned for selling Bart & OJ Simpson T-shirts without a licence—the land of the free: the HIV positive inmate let out on parole to work in MacDonalds who prefers to go back to gaol because he receives better health care in the prison system—home of the brave: the Puerto Rican boy shot in the back by the police who wants to join the airforce to defend his country. Hoch slides between dialects and

physicalities with economy and precision, his characters growing out of the darkness at the back of the stage with assistance from a baseball cap here, a broom there. He speaks to us, as himself, describing how he was sacked from *Seinfeld* for refusing to play the poolguy as Hispanic. He even speaks to us in Spanish for an entire monologue. He works hard, we work hard to understand the new Englishes/Americanisms that we experience. He speaks to us of a world that seems so familiar, live via satellite, but is not in fact our reality or (I question) his. He empathises, he realises, but most of all he romanticises in a cool-black dude kind of way. And with a Ginsbergian howl he justifies his preoccupation with the hip hop generation—"Thug life is far more attractive than business college life. It's just cooler to be the oppressed, than the oppressor."

Gail Priest

skadada, *Electronic Big Top*
Everest Theatre, Seymour Centre,
Jan 13 - 17

Most of the talk around this work of great promise and hope, was, sadly, how did it go wrong, and whatever happened to the interplay between body and technology that marked the great potential of skadada's earlier work. A lot of average dance and especially dull aerial work, with flashes of brilliance, filled and flattened out the show. Troy Innocent's occasional animations projected onto a huge scrim looked less than interesting (the scrim's transparency diluting their intensity) and were ignored by the performers, and Pablo Percusso got to briefly beat at laser beams (an interesting look). This was a show that was routine-bound, like a circus in format, but without the payoffs, without the escalation of tensions. Too, too cool. The singer's introductions to the acts were poorly written and promised more than we ever saw. Comic routines with promise (the vacuum cleaner slowly snaking about the stage, the almost dancing mop) ran out of puff. The beginning signalled adventure as dark-coat-and-hatted men poured out of a central black box (shades of Philippe Genty, and Alex Proyas' *Dark City*), finding themselves in a strange space, one of them triggering a switch that plunges them into a circus cum cabaret world (above the stage, inverted transparent cones full of smoke evoke an upside-down circus tent). But once inside this world, the narrative of these men is lost...they become glorified stage hands, clunkily harnessing and clipping in the aerialists, covering entrances, managing props...and the magic evaporates, the promise of some bizarre narrative or part narrative or some kind of scenario, anything, gone. There's some great singing of some terrible lyrics ("it's your dark side pulls you to me"), some fine instrumental sax-led work from musicians (whom we never really see) as they alternate with recorded tracks. And the space, when it first opens out to reveal the singer-m.c. high up at the back of the stage, generates some feel for the potential of the disparate design. The strength of *Electronic Big Top* resides in the confidence and skills of its performers, at ease on the floor and in the air; a pity then that the material they have to realise is so insubstantial,



Centre Chorégraphique National d'Orléans, *Woyzeck*

Realtime at Sydney Festival

• from page 5

the interplay of forms and genres so unproductive. It might be antithetical to their collaborative approach, but isn't it time that skadada invested in a writer or director or dramaturg to help shape their vision. KG

The Young Vic Company, *Grimm Tales*
York Theatre, Seymour Centre, Jan 9 - 24
Kerry Shale,
The Prince of West End Avenue
Playhouse, Sydney Opera House,
Jan 5 - 14

London's Young Vic Company performed their faithful adaptations of the Grimm Fairy Tales in *Grimm Tales*, one of the popular showings in the 1996 Adelaide Festival. Expertly performed and with some very simple stage magic, and a splash of gore (the Ugly Sisters not only cut off toes and heels to squeeze into that slipper but are both nastily blinded as punishment for their sins), this was another British night out, a curious cross between vigorous T.I.E and Theatre de Complicité, and not really a remarkable theatrical experience. Canadian Kerry Shale, who works mostly in the UK delivered his one man *The Prince of West End Avenue* (a *Hamlet* in a Jewish retirement home in New York) to rapturous reviewers (mostly) and divided audiences. It was sluggish, over elaborated, the transformations into all 18 of his characters (count 'em, we did) heavily signalled, the aged inmates all uniformly slow and all the women silly. KG

ACO, Sydney Town Hall, Jan 21
Holly Cole, State Theatre, Jan 22, 23

On the music front, aside from *Ulysses*, time only allowed a few glimpses, a few hearings. Word got around quickly about the excellence of the Galina Gorchakova and Andreas Scholl recitals, Philippe Cassard's all day complete Debussy piano works, another great pianist, Jennifer MacGregor, playing Gershwin and Lou Harrison, and the 'Cezanne recitals' at the Art Gallery of NSW. We caught the Australian Chamber Orchestra at the Proms, playing with precision and passion, and considerable power, Bernard Herrmann's scores for *Psycho* and *Fahrenheit 451*, Takemitsu's elegy for Tarkovsky and pieces from Walton's score for *Henry IV*. Dame Susanna Walton and John Bell performed Walton and Dame Edith Sitwell's *Façade* (1922) with tongue-twisting speed and accuracy with a small ensemble that evoked a remarkable range of influences and not a few prescient sounds (especially from saxophone and percussion) anticipating, amidst the twee and the droll, the darker forces of political cabaret to come. But it was the movie music that stayed. Canadian Holly Cole at the State Theatre excelled with her jazz-inflected (but not styled) interpretations of songs by Tom Waits, the Beatles, Joni Mitchell and others. Ranging from deep mezzo, to delicate falsetto, to raunchy rock, Cole also whipped through a quickfire, jazzy *Tea for Two* and a wild *Que Sera, Sera*. The first encore, prayed for and delivered, was Mitchell's *The River*, which Cole, wiping away a tear, then spoke of as "the saddest, truest song of escape I know." KG

David Benson, *Nothing But Pleasure*
Playhouse, Sydney Opera House,
Jan 18 -23

Feeling queasy after an accidental holiday encounter with Roberto Benigni's nauseating movie *Life is Beautiful*, I ease past chuckling Holocaust survivors reminiscing about all those lovable loners who rose above the crowd and hurry to *Nothing but Pleasure*, hungry for something half plausible. No sooner seated, I have to stand for a couple of indignant English roses who find David Benson's dish on the death of Diana too biting for their taste ("You don't represent the UK at all!") and flounce out. "Good on you" whispers a woman in J23, staying firmly put. "I'm not talking about the death of Diana. I'm talking about what it did to us", says a bemused Benson. The nervous rendition of "Stardust" out of the way, ten minutes into his sharp monologue my stomach settles. *Nothing but Pleasure* is just what the doctor ordered. David Benson is a satirist with a touch of the camp music hall persona and his clever monologue on the subject of us is surprisingly serious, pleasingly imperfect. He's relatively sparing with the double entendre (difficult for a man who's just performed a monologue about Kenneth Williams). He'd never performed outside the UK until he was snapped up by Leo Schofield, slumming at the Edinburgh Fringe. Not that it matters much to us. I cringe at how easily I recognise the subjects of the impersonations he uses by way of introduction—Ronnie Barker, John Le Mesurier, the Goons. But his sharply funny observations

on the hypocrisy surrounding the funeral of the century hit home—the Queen Mother picking fishbones from her teeth as she revels in the spectacle ("Like a return to our pre-Reformation past"); the mawkish sentiments of the crowd ("William and Harry, don't forget to cry"); the pragmatism of politicians (Margaret Thatcher wheezing "Lucky sod" at Tony Blair in the pulpit); the parade of celebrity guests ("Richard Branson—the people's capitalist"). I smile as he unsettles me. What did you think, I ask a young colleague. I liked the way he held his ground, he says, but who's Kenneth Williams? Doesn't he know it's his ABC too? Summing up for us in his SMH festival roundup Sebastian Smee says *Nothing but Pleasure* "fell flat". Evan Williams in *The Australian* gave four stars to *Life is Beautiful*. VB

Bill Viola, *The Messenger*
Art Gallery of NSW, to January 26

A video miracle, the history of 20th century western art unfolding, a peering through surfaces, of light and water transmuted into liquid opalescent glass wrapping round a body, a descent into the heavens, a watching from the surface as the messenger sinks, but sinking and hearing with his ears, a waiting for his return, it's what video does to colour, does to the real. The festival ends as reverie. KG

Sydney Festival 99, January 2 -26

The triumph of poise and stillness

The opera Project's Annette Tesoriero and Nigel Kellaway relish The Netherlands Opera's *The Return of Ulysses*

AT I think I could safely say that I was excited, exhilarated and inspired by the production.

NK Hmm, yes, you may feel safe but I felt too safe. It was all too beautiful, too elegant, utterly ungrubby...there was no danger, everything was so controlled.

AT O God, Nigel, that's what made the vocal performances so fantastic. The singing by most of the cast was so clean, so in tune, so unforced, understated almost, and that is exactly what (musical director) Glen Wilson had set out to do. Our aural expectations of opera, even Baroque opera, were thrown over by the fact that the singers were largely accompanied by only the continuo section—4 instruments only. The balance was delicate, playful, but never precious; it was above all scaled to human proportions. This delicacy of sound, the intimacy of the timbre of the voices would have been lost in the Opera House. In fact I thought the Lyric Theatre passed with flying colours. I hope it is used more often for acoustic concert work.

NK It looks like it has an enormous stage, which was certainly handled fabulously. What a design! Bold, simple and contemporary—not a plaster Corinthian pillar in sight! The openness of the design allowed for all the entrances and exits to be, in a sense, strongly heralded. Performers took forever to arrive centre stage and then exit. We could follow the journeys on and off stage. In fact, this added to the sense that there was little surprise. You always knew who was to be in the next scene because you could see them coming. Then again, perhaps this suits the inevitability of a classic drama—everyone is assumed to know the story.

AT I bet you were surprised by the moving rock.

NK The enormity of that rock was Baroque extravagance itself and, yes, its elegant movement and the timing of it when Ulysses greets his long lost son truly delighted me.

Where I lost that delight was in those instances where surprise and a sense of danger was "indicated", but lacking theatrically. For instance, I thought the eagle under-utilized, the fire perfunctory.

AT Yes, I must admit that I was disappointed in both those elements, and I wonder if our expectations were raised by the pre-publicity. The media made much of the fire and the eagle, so that when they did happen, we were left wanting more. But I suspect that there was something lacking in the theatrical placement of these 2 elements.

NK I definitely think there was a lack of tension in the build up to the appearance of both. The scenes were extremely beautiful, the lights on the bird's wings, the heat of the flames—these were wonderful experiences in themselves but dramatically I felt they lacked "punch." This dynamic isn't provided that strongly by the music, therefore it wanted greater nurturing by the theatrical direction—balancing the musical forces with the enormous physical dimensions of the stage and "joining the dots" more thoroughly in these moments.

AT Given that the focus of the work, for me anyway, was on the text and the poise of the delivery of the text, do you think that this could have been a deliberate ploy on the part of the director?

NK Yes, that is possible. We are drawn in, and very much so, by the declamatory nature of the delivery, the disciplined and finely tuned nature of the vocal performances and any large dramatic outbursts on stage would threaten that fine thread that the music and the singing have created. It is hard work, for an audience used to the "normal" production conventions of opera today, to remain attentive to a production where the drama is contained within the text and the vocal delivery and that vocal delivery is not peppered with stupendous arias and vocal fireworks. Given that it requires such focus from the audience, I would think it unwise to relinquish that strong aural hold on the audience by deploying too unexpected



Nederlandse Opera, *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*

visual challenges. Mind you, it is not what I would prefer personally. I would prefer the challenge to getting the audience back after the explosion.

AT One of the reasons I found the production so exciting was its ability to create this aural hold on the audience. And in a way it shares something with The opera Project in that we are constantly investigating the place of the sung voice on stage. The performers themselves seemed almost ego-less. What was foremost was the rigour of their art in a very un-selfconscious way. Their whole being for the most part had an over-riding sense of poise and stillness, something that I often find far too lacking in conventional opera productions.

NK Yes, that's true, but even though there was great physical discipline on stage, my expectations raised by the highly contemporary set and lighting led me to wish for even more physical rigour. I wanted to see a dancer's precision on that stage. This type of stage design is more often seen in dance, rather than opera, at least in this country. I'm not complaining, it's just that we as an audience are so conditioned to expect certain things from the

various art forms, and it often jars the senses to see not quite perfect physical discipline within such a meticulous stage setting.

AT Could it be that the "auteurs' vision", that of the director, designer, musical director, is betrayed by the limitations of the singers' bodies?

NK Indeed, but that raises the question of how implausible the notion of an auteur's absolute vision is in the theatre. This production celebrates the singers' bodies and voices, with all their associated glories and short-comings.

AT But perhaps the production displays too much control to tolerate its inevitable imperfections.

NK Yes, and that is half its charm—and I trust that director Pierre Audi particularly relishes the minor ineptitudes of this astonishing production.

Monteverdi, *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, De Nederlandse Opera, Lyric Theatre, Sydney Festival, January 3, 5, 6, 8, & 9

The feeling in the room

RT talks to Canadian Daniel MacIvor the man beneath *Monster* at the Sydney Festival

RT Tell us about your company Da Da Kamera.

DM We're a group of people who self-produce. Working inside traditional theatres the roles tend to be set out: the writer does this, the director does this. And those ideas fight the sense of collaboration we're trying to develop in that everyone has an emotional investment in the work. That's why we want to maintain control. We're trying to re-define process. In Canada there's a traditional system of 3 week rehearsal, 3 week run maybe extending to 5 but that's about it and then it's like, let's move on to the next piece now. Sherrie Johnson (producer) and I both realised the problems with that in trying to develop new work, especially work that was very much about the audience and the feeling in the room. None of the performance time was ever considered developmental.

RT So the work you create has a long life and the process continues while it's in production?

DM The work continues to evolve. With *Monster* we started about half way through the last solo show called *Here Lies Henry*. I was always billed as the writer and Daniel Brooks as the director but we found that because I was the writer-performer, people weren't understanding his place in the process. That's when we decided to call ourselves "creators." As for the way it works—well, I come in with notes and bits and an idea and I start to improvise and he guides me in directions that he finds interesting. Daniel and I share a lot of ideas. We call ourselves "essentialists."

RT Why?

DM Just desperate to call ourselves something I guess. No, ultimately what is essential is the space; the stage is a set already. So anything that comes into the space—for example in *Monster* it's a glass of water—we set limitations in terms of what's essential. I had decided almost before we began working on *Monster* I wanted to stand still. I mean, there's movement but I wanted to stand on a one and a half foot square spot. These kind of things we impose in order to force ourselves into the work as opposed to avoiding the difficulty of facing the work by getting stuff—objects or ideas that are outside it.

RT How does lighting fit?

DM It's almost like costuming the way light affects me in the space. It's not just about lighting the performer or creating a well-lit space. In this show, Daniel's idea was the battle between light and dark and shadow. So in the last segment it's so dark that if you were to step into the space in that moment you wouldn't be able to see me. You can only see me because you've been led to that moment—that's a lighting state that is constantly in motion.

RT The show gives the audience an experience of the dark, an emotional experience in itself.

DM We want the audience to have an experience. So we're experiential essentialists.

RT At the last Adelaide Festival we saw the Needcompany from Belgium doing Snakesong. In that you sit in the absolute pitch dark for the first 15 minutes and then you gradually make out what looks like a couple grappling sexually, obscenely and when the lights come up you see a tall, near naked blonde woman with half a dummy and you realise how much you've been misled. It's the same with your work—the audience is in a very manipulable space.

DM But at the same time we ride the line. I think all of us within the company agree that

we are entertainers and that the cardinal sin of performance is to bore the audience. Daniel always says "Don't let the audience think about things they don't need to be thinking about." So it's always about just riding the line of pushing them too far—and I am interested in subverting their expectations.

RT The stand-up frame is subverted throughout the work. It starts out like contemporary stand-up but it's often not funny. You can feel the audience wanting to laugh, but not sure...

DM A young theatre graduate after the show last night said, at first I thought it was a stand-up thing and then I realised it wasn't and I didn't have to laugh to make you feel comfortable. That's interesting to me. Sometimes it feels like a war and that we're on opposite sides. But of course, people for the most part want to have a good experience. You forget that sometimes when you're up there by yourself.

RT A lot of people don't go to the theatre because they're afraid that something will go horribly wrong.

DM I don't go to the theatre—very seldom. For the most part, I feel that most of the work I see lacks rigour. It's always getting away with something. I think, oh, if that idea had been thought through one more moment, or if we'd been able to sustain that feeling a bit longer...so it's often a frustrating experience for me. I have seen work that's really excited me but I don't feel it's a relaxing thing.

RT We just missed meeting Daniel Brooks. Tell us more about the way you work together.

DM Daniel is an intellectual but very connected emotionally as well. He had a very liberal Jewish upbringing, was sent to private school. I was raised in a very working class environment on the east coast of Canada. Very depressed economy there. So we come from very different places and I think we bring those experiences to the work and that's what makes us work well together. He's very slow and nothing is ever enough for him, nothing's ever right. And for me, it's let's move on...

RT The writing is very finely crafted. Are you changing the script as you work with it?

DM We've been doing this for about a year and a half. It takes us probably about a year of performance to settle on it. Daniel never says try saying this, but he will say this is not quite right, and I'd say 95% of the time I agree. I feel that the work knows more than the creator of the work; it has a life outside of me. There are things that I don't understand about myself, things that have happened to me that I don't remember, things that I can't necessarily see. If I try and define it then I'm immediately cutting off the potential for it to reach people in ways that I can't understand. So we very seldom talk about what the work "means." We accept that we know when it's meaning something but we don't try to define what that is.

RT How does the script emerge?

DM As a transcript. Having been performed it becomes a script and only out of necessity. It's a very scary moment for me when I have to commit it to paper because I'm afraid it's going to stop growing or something. I used to listen to it on tape some time after but now usually, while it's still fresh in my mind, I just sort of perform it with my fingers on the keyboard. But I'd very seldom read it again or refer to the paper. I'd struggle to dig it up from memory. There's something about the paper that's fixed and...

RT Structurally the piece is interesting in that it begins in the stand-up frame addressing the audience. Then it's about the murder and the child's recounting of the event. Then it seems to go a long way off and you think, oh, it's going to be an evening of sketches. It goes right away before it comes back. That's quite a big risk you take.

DM Exactly. And you know at a certain point in the piece where the addict is talking, maybe 5 or 7 minutes in you can feel between 50 and 70% of the room thinking, oh, it's an evening of sketches. And I get such glee from that because I know there's more and it does come together. It's such a wonderful thing to feel that there is a movement of thought together in the room.

RT It does complete itself but the next morning we were still putting the puzzle together.

DM I've had returns and you can tell where they are because they're laughing at things they shouldn't be.

RT We wanted to read the script.

DM It will be published in the Spring in Canada.

RT Can we talk about the context for this work. Over here we hear something of Canadian culture, though not a lot. Robert LePage has been a couple of times...Brad Fraser's *Love and Human Remains* has been quite successful...You talk about your work as being in opposition to theatre in some ways, setting up a different model. Do you feel that as well as working with Daniel Brooks, you have other allies?

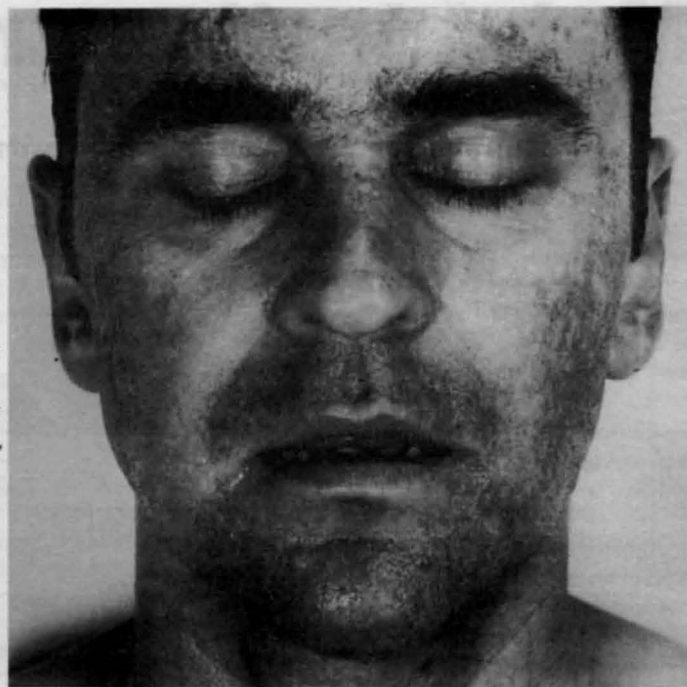
DM When we started working maybe 12 years ago, it was a very fruitful time. There was a lot of government money available to artists so at the time around 72 small theatre companies were doing new work including collective creations. There are now only a handful of companies left.

RT What happened to them all?

DM Sometimes people would become very successful and then they'd start dealing with the business of the work and the work of the work would stop. But there's a small group of people who continue to do work. It's interesting to contrast it with what happens in the United States where there's the very traditional well-made play and then the very experimental work which for some people is a little inaccessible. In Canada, we still have this grey area, this place in between. Also when you talk about Canadian work, there's French speaking work from Quebec which is very different from English speaking Canadian work.

RT Is there a sense of milieu about this much whittled away group of companies you mentioned?

DM There was more feeling of a scene 5 years ago. I work with students a lot and I keep telling them, do it yourself. That's the only way it's going to happen. But there is a community. There's Hillar Liitoja, a Canadian-Estonian who does some interesting work—Richard Foremanesque; there's a company called Bald Ego that does a kind of Wooster Group in a way but a bit more vaudeville; there's a few other companies. For the



Daniel MacIvor, *Monster*

most part, we're pretty much the alternative which is unfortunate. You can go much farther than us but that work doesn't seem to be able to sustain itself right now in Canada. What we're trying to do is to work towards becoming some kind of hybrid between independent and commercial. We want to be able to support ourselves.

RT So touring is crucial?

DM Very important. But what's really exciting is that like here at the Sydney Festival, we've had over 400 people each night and they're almost all young. That's really exciting—they do want to come to the theatre; they are interested and they're engaged.

RT Finally we wanted to ask you about the Canadian imagination. We're fond of film makers like David Cronenberg and Atom Egoyan...We don't know what your other works are like but certainly *Monster* is a very dark, serious work. In a way, it occupies a similar territory.

DM In Canada we are so close to the United States, so frighteningly close, physically, geographically and that makes our quest for identity...almost hysterical. Atom cuts that and that's why there's so much space in his films. It's like he's holding the hysteria out just at the edge of the frame or something. We're all affected by that proximity. We're lodged between the Eagle and the Queen somehow and there we sit and more and more it feels like there's a crucial need to define ourselves culturally and artistically in terms of the work we do and how we think about it because there's the threat of being entirely overtaken by American work. It could happen so easily.

RT This work seems darker in some ways and more idiosyncratic than anything coming out of America at the moment.

DM Americans are really ironically challenged and very political. Even the most enlightened American still becomes teary at the sight of the flag and the sound of the anthem. When they go to school their first history lessons are about the Civil War and winning the country. In Canada we're taught about the French and the English coming over and stealing the land from the natives. I was saying to someone the other day that what makes Australians and Canadians similar is that we are both so different from Americans. I don't want to diss them entirely but...

RT Fuel for the fire.

DM That's right but if you had to live as close to them as we do, oh my goodness!

Monster, performed by Daniel MacIvor, Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House January 4 - 9 as part of the Sydney Festival. His film Until I Hear From You will be screened as part of The Mardi Gras Film Festival in February 1999.

Metal turtles and fire-breathing fish

Kathy Cleland samples the cultural waters of Sydney's *Pacific Wave* festival

We don't often think of Australia as a Pacific island. Unlike New Zealand whose national culture and identity is firmly anchored in the Pacific, Australia stands at some distance from its neighbours in terms of its cultural identity. Admittedly, over the last few decades Australia has turned its international focus more to the Asia-Pacific region but this is primarily economic rather than cultural. The *Pacific Wave* festival in Sydney is helping to change all that.

Although Auckland is still the largest Polynesian city in the world (followed by Los Angeles), Polynesian and Pacific Islander communities have an increasingly visible presence in Sydney and indeed Sydney may overtake Auckland as the city with the largest Pacific Islander population in the next few decades.

The second *Pacific Wave* festival broke on the shores of Sydney in November, making a splash in the local arts scene with cultural eddies and currents impacting across the cities of Sydney in a huge variety of venues. Primary *Pacific Wave* partners who established the festival in 1996, (Casula Powerhouse, The Performance Space and Bondi Pavilion), were joined in 1998 by, among others, Hogarth Galleries, Mori Gallery, Museum of Sydney, Australian Museum, Walkabout Gallery, Bangarra Studio, Australian Centre for Photography, NSW Writers' Centre, Elizabeth Farm and the Palladium. With so many events on offer it was virtually impossible to visit everything so this report is a subjective sampling of some of the festival highlights.

The festival's pin-up girls were definitely Pacific Sisters, a collective of Maori and Polynesian artists and performers from Auckland, Aotearoa. Their performance *Tribe Vibe* at The Performance Space was a funky blend of streetwise urban Polynesian culture, fusing elements of traditional Pacific Island culture with contemporary urban influences. Combining performance art, fashion, DJs, live music and dance, the sisters (and a few brothers) gave a lush, spunky and outrageous performance that was political, ironic, erotic and provocative. Costumes and jewellery are a central feature of the performance incorporating traditional and contemporary materials and fashion styles. Modelling highlights included homeboy street wear complete with lava lavas (sarongs), urban technoferal leather nightclub wear exposing spectacular spiral buttock tattoos and the finale, "Freestyle Frock Action", which included a number of outfits far surpassing anything the Queen of the Desert could ever dream up!

Bondi Pavilion hosted the hugely successful *Big Sunday*, a festival of performances from across the Pacific, and *Fa'a Pasefika*, a night of R&B, reggae, folk music and DJs as well as exhibitions and screenings. Michel Tuffery's exhibition of spectacular, animated metal turtles at Hogarth Galleries was another highlight. The opening night of Tuffery's exhibition *O Le Vasa Loloto Ma Le Loloa* (the wide and deep ocean) featured a live performance of the giant pneumatic turtles lumbering down a laneway in Paddington accompanied by a Samoan fire dancer and Tuffery's fire-breathing fish.

Auckland-based filmmaker and multimedia artist Lisa Reihana was here-there-and-everywhere. *Fluffy Fings*, an installation of delicate feathery forms

animated by small fans, was an enchanting offering to unsuspecting pedestrians passing the Downing Centre showcase windows in Elizabeth Street. At the Australian Centre for Photography was the pop video art fashion piece *Hyper Girls*

(a collaborative video piece with Ani O'Neill). In Mori Gallery, her work *Te Wao O Tane* (1996), a woven wall piece made out of velvet, satin and feathers,

was part of a group exhibition *Fisi—the blossoming of the waves* curated by Fiona MacDonald and Luke Parker, which also included work by Fiona MacDonald, Sofia Tekela, Shane Cotton, Tina Wirihana, Judy Watson, Estelle Mueller and Alicia Courtney. Across the city in Newtown was Arini Poutu's exhibition *Tauira* (design) at Walkabout Gallery which incorporated photography, text, painting, weaving and carving with traditional Maori design.

Western art and ethnographic practice (the cultural wing of colonisation) has a long history of appropriating Indigenous art forms and casting Indigenous people as exotic, strange and primitive subjects for the Western gaze. Pacific Island artists are now re-appropriating these artforms and asserting their own cultural identities in a sophisticated re-working of traditional and contemporary practices. These themes and issues were discussed as part of the symposium *Oceans and Others* held at the Museum of Sydney and for me were exemplified in Fiona MacDonald's *Field Sports* (1998), part of the exhibition at Mori Gallery. MacDonald's work used as source material a series of ethnographic engravings

by an unknown colonial artist with titles such as "Warriors of New South Wales", "Hunting the Kangaroo" and "Throwing the Spear." The artist has re-worked these

engravings, slicing them into long strips and re-constructing them in a series of intricately woven bags.

Weaving was also the focus of *Weave*, curated by Keren Ruki and co-organised by Kathleen Caper, which brought together weavers from across the Pacific: Mary Jack (Papua New Guinea/NSW), Yvonne Koolmatie (Ngarrindjeri/SA), Tina Wirihana (New Zealand), Ahitautama Makaea-Cross (Niue) and Virginia Kaiser (NSW) for a residency program, workshops and exhibition at Casula Powerhouse. The awesome technical skill and complexity of the pieces included a blend of traditional and contemporary weaving practices and incorporated materials as diverse as flax, wool, possum skin, pine needles, paperbark, sedge grass and shells. All of the pieces, which included baskets, bilums (open weave string bags), food traps and contemporary sculptural forms, had a story to tell incorporating traditional and personal narratives.

Living up to its title, *Furious* at Casula Powerhouse was the culmination of a residency program by New Zealand born Samoan artist Andy Lelei and Aboriginal artist Gordon Hookey. Also part of the resulting exhibition were paintings produced by young people from local Polynesian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities from Western Sydney who took part in a series of workshops with the 2 artists. Hookey's paintings are angry

political satires of white Australian racism and greed and a guerilla call to arms to Aboriginal communities. *Terra-ism* (depicting an armed kangaroo in combat fatigues with bullets sporting the Aboriginal flag) is an image crying out for mass distribution as a poster or postcard (somehow not a move I can see SOCOG embracing as part of the Cultural Olympiad!).

Lelei's work is a powerful exploration of contemporary issues of domestic violence, cultural displacement, youth suicide, racism, institutional abuse and exploitation. Lelei's iconoclastic

painting *Honest to God!* is a strong attack on the abuse of power by Samoan-born Christian ministers. As the Church plays an important role as a cultural nexus and source of family and community values, the inclusion of this painting nearly resulted in a boycott of the exhibition by the local Samoan and other Polynesian communities. A compromise was reached by Casula Powerhouse staff, the artist and community religious elders—the exhibition was roped off during the festival's official opening performance of *Angels from the Heavens* by choirs and community groups from Aotearoa, Western Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands. This crisis highlighted some of the complex issues faced by Pacific Island artists who challenge traditional religious and community values. The overtly sexual nature of a number of the items in Pacific Sisters' *Tribe Vibe*, including pieces celebrating gay sexuality and cross-dressing, also caused controversy in the local Pacific Island communities.

Artistic Directors Con Gouriotis (Casula Powerhouse) and Julianne Pierce (The Performance Space) and Festival Coordinator Maud Page are to be congratulated for bringing together a celebration of diverse traditional and contemporary cultural forms from local and international artists, communities and organisations across the Pacific region. What is particularly exciting about the festival is the way it showcases the living, vibrant, evolving cultures of the Pacific rather than tired tokenistic tourist images or culturally fossilised ethnographic museum pieces.

For audiences drawn from Pacific Island communities living in Sydney, *Pacific Wave* plays an important role in the affirmation of community, giving artists and communities the opportunity to celebrate and showcase their art and culture. The appreciative reception of *Pacific Wave* by white audiences is a step towards a more mature appreciation of Pacific Island art—going beyond the fascination with the (to white eyes) exoticism of Pacific Island culture. For a blend of cultural diversity, passion, politics and sheer enjoyment *Pacific Wave 1998* was hard to beat. With the cultural wing of the Sydney 2000 Olympics becoming increasingly more like a tourist campaign than a cultural event, I can't help feeling it will be the *Pacific Wave 2000* festival that will be where the real action is.



Gordon Hookey, *Furious* 1998
Top: Michel Tuffery, *O Le Laumei A Tigi Upa*, 1997, aluminium, copper, tin, rubber and rivets

Pacific Wave: festival of contemporary Pacific arts, Sydney, November 13 - 29

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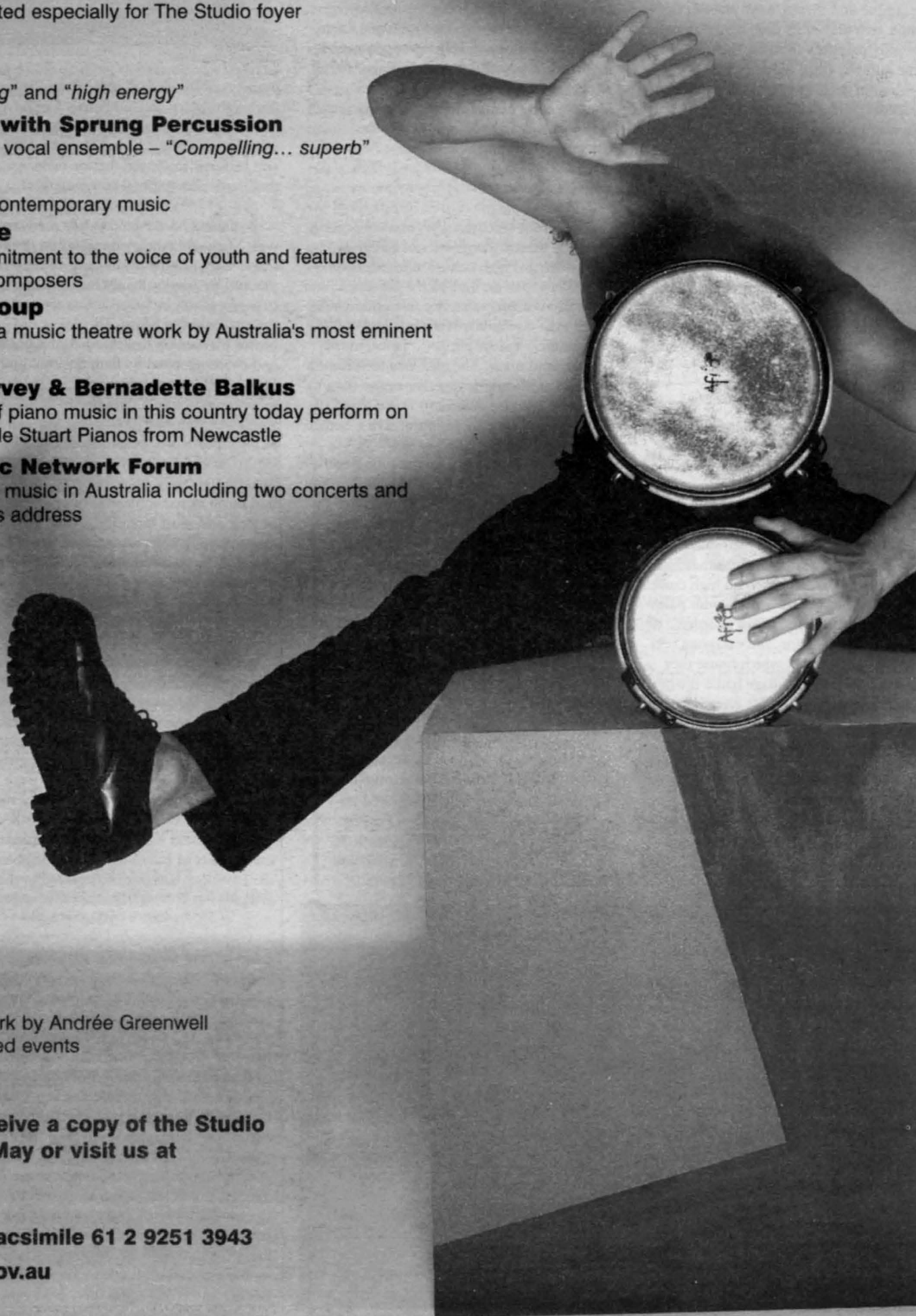
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Festival of the never never

Suzanne Spinner at the 1998 Festival of Darwin

Over 2 weeks in late September the Festival of Darwin again celebrated the unique cultural diversity of the capital of the never never state. The focus of the festival was the Asia Pacific Cultural Village, a cluster of shelter structures made from bush timber, bamboo and woven palm leaf and situated in open woodland behind Mindil Beach. The 8 traditional houses of the village were arranged in a semi-circle facing into a common public area and looking toward a performance stage. Under the direction of artist Tachy Mesaro they were built by community groups from the region—Maori, Lombok, Torres Strait, Pacific Islands, Phillipines, PNG, Thailand and East Timor—and functioned variously as living spaces and places where traditional crafts were made by 'villagers.'

During the festival, performances of dance, music and theatre took place in the common area and every evening a different community prepared food for the villagers and the visitors; every night became a celebration in itself. By day school groups and tourists came to look and learn. The village was a massive logistical and cultural diplomacy exercise undertaken over the previous year. The structures themselves were made off-site in the festival workshop where the Grand Parade floats are usually made, so they had to be capable of being knocked down and transported to Mindil Beach. Each house was different in structure and style but the village had an aesthetic and functional unity in its commonality of materials and social purpose, and it served as an instant introduction to the repertoire of building techniques and climatically appropriate tropical design.

There are few things quite as compelling as being invited to stare at other people's houses and everyone had their favourites: the tall Lombok house with its little hut atop a tower and, underneath, chooks in a bamboo pen; the Kowe Kara, Hut of Friendship, made by people from New Caledonia, Samoa, Tahiti and Kirabati, a large open rotunda, its powerful high conical roof made of bush poles and coconut palm fronds. Carved totemic figures guarded doorways and roof hips, and everyone indulged in fantasies of which house they wanted to live in. The village had a life of its own and all the communities were reluctant to leave their 'house' and return to brick and fibro homes in the suburbs of Darwin; everyone had plans for recreating the village at another time.

Campur Campuran, presented by Tunas Mekar, was the major performance held onstage at the Village. Tunas Mekar is based in Darwin and directed by Darwin producer

and director Peter Stretton and his wife Desak Putu Warti, a classically trained Balinese dancer from the artists' village of Pengosekan close to Ubud. *Campur Campuran*, which means mixed up/mixed together, was a cross cultural performance reflecting on the relationship between Bali and Australia. It brought together Darwin performer Tania Lieman and composer-musician Michael Havir, who had previously worked on theatre, dance and music projects all over the Territory with Balinese artists—including Putu's sister, dancer I Made Mundra and brother, gamelan player I Ketut Partha, as well as other prominent Balinese dancers and musicians.

The project involved a 3 week cultural exchange residency in Pengosekan culminating in 2 performances—the first in Pengosekan in the Balai Banjar for the locals and then at the prestigious Agung Rai Museum of Art on the outdoor Open Stage. Immediately afterwards the group returned to Darwin for a season at the Village. Three weeks is a short time to make any new improvised work, let alone a cross cultural performance. The success of *Campur Campuran* was a tribute to Tunas Mekar's careful selection of artists of such high calibre and cultural adaptability.

The results were manifest in a collection of highly theatrical vignettes of Balinese village life and high culture, comments on Australian tourists, and on the Balinese perception of Australia, not to mention a clever take on Pauline Hanson all mixed in with mime, shadow puppets, dance, music, comedy and mask. The idea was to present a synthesis and coming together rather than to transport Balinese culture to Darwin and the result was an exciting fusion of styles. Some of the highlights included a mad disorganised gamelan orchestra who never quite got it together; a Wayang Kulit shadow play about a vain kangaroo who wanted to be as beautiful as a Balinese princess but learnt that it was better to be herself; an hilarious shadow play of village dogs fighting and bonking like mad. The show culminated in an over-eager Australian tourist photographing a traditional Legong dance and getting so close to the entranced kris dancers that he stabbed himself with his monstrous telephoto lens, much to the delight of everyone.

Last year the highlight of the festival was the Tracks Dance show *Four Wheel Drive, Sweat Dust and Romance* at the Botanic Gardens. This year they also created an outdoor work *The Land, The Cross and The Lotus* for the Jingli Water Gardens. It brought together the Tiwi, Christian and Buddhist communities to tell 3 parallel



Campur Campuran

Therese Ritchie

journeys of Purukapali, the Tiwi ancestor, the Virgin Mary and Siddharta. Conceived and directed by Tim Newth, each journey was choreographed by a different person and featured soloists alongside members of that particular spiritual community.

Beginning on the land beside the water with Michael Leslie's interpretation of the tragic story of how death came to the Tiwi (danced by Stanley Stanislaus) it then moved to a procession by barge across the water of the apparition of Mary, Theotokos or God bearer (danced by Rukshana Ramachandran and choreographed by Beth Shelton) and finished with a contemporary reinterpretation of Siddharta (by Kai Tai Chan and danced by David McMicken) who in his final form appeared to walk on water. Choosing between each piece was as invidious as choosing a spiritual way. Each had much to recommend it but perhaps the boldest and most interesting, both as choreography and performance, was *The Lotus*. All were profoundly moving and utilised the potential of movement, sound, light and water in various and sumptuous ways.

Reconciliation was the other major theme and it was heralded by the installation of The Sea of Hands on the Esplanade looking out towards the Cox Peninsula, the site of the Larrakia Kenbi Land Claim which yet again was in court in Darwin. The Larrakia took charge of the hands and they were arranged to represent a dugong and a turtle under the direction of leader Billy Risk. Elder and artist Koolpinayah Richard Barnes made 2 sets of burial markers remembering the Larrakia dead; one was placed in the grounds of the Museum, the other at NTU.

Larrakia singer/songwriter June Mills created *Blackout*, a one woman show staged at Browns Mart. June is an exceptionally talented performer with a commanding presence, one cheeky woman who has always been unafraid to tell it like it is. *Blackout* was about Mills' life as a Larrakia woman in Darwin: the Kenbi Land Claim, her kids, hassles with the Housing Commissions, with side swipes at the notorious Mandatory Sentencing Act and Zero Tolerance policing policies of the NT government. Fishin' and huntin' singin' and dancin', it was all there conveyed with a sharpness and exuberance and from her string bag Mrs Larrakia, as she dubbed herself, pulled wooden clapping sticks and a mobile phone. Alongside moments of great hilarity and biting satire there were other extraordinarily moving passages. Against a

backdrop of projected portrait images of the Larrakia recorded in the 1870s by the Territory's police chief and official photographer Paul Foelsche, June sang, "When I die care for my children/Wrap my naked body in a paperbark sheet" and against video projections of open sea, we saw her miming fishing in the old way, casting the net out over the audience.

From Alice Springs came *Dream of Reconciliation* music dance and storytelling featuring a mix of Centralian locals, black and white, musicians and dancers brought together by Bob Randall, the singer and writer of the hymn to the Stolen Generation, *Brown Skin Baby*. While the spirit of reconciliation was evident in the generosity of the performers, it was a bit too feel good folksy and generalised for my taste.

I arrived after the opening weekend and everyone I met told me I had missed the best bit of all, the performance of *Luuli*, a collaboration from Townsville between Dance North and the Mornington Island Dancers, which was apparently startling and powerful for the way it combined the greatest artistry of traditional Aboriginal and European dance with dancers moving between cultures. Two years in the making it was said to far surpass anything seen previously by Darwin people. The whole time I was there people were telling me about it, and they all wondered why it wasn't touring the nation.

The festival closed with *Journey to the Mythical Place* by Darwin's Arafura Ensemble, presented in the grand marble foyer of The Supreme Court with barefoot musicians standing on the glass mosaic Milky Way Dreaming. It combined performance poetry by Karyn Sasella with works by Peter Sculthorpe, Ross Edwards and Romano Crivici. Crivici is director of the Elektra String Quartet in Sydney and he returned to Darwin to conduct and perform in the premiere of his new work *As Night Follows Day*.

As Karyn Sasella says—"you won't find another place/you won't find another sea/this place is going to follow you"—and it does and so I go back.

Festival of Darwin 98, Darwin, September 12 - 21

Suzanne Spinner travelled to Darwin for the festival on her own initiative utilising Frequent Flyer points accrued in all her previous trips back.



Rukshana Ramachandran, *The Land, The Cross and The Lotus*

Therese Ritchie

The Danish connection

Part 1 of Keith Gallasch's report on a significant visit to Denmark by Australian artists

In September 1998, a group of Australian artists was invited to the Århus Festival to participate in *Visionlines*, a 3 day exchange between Danes, Australians and others on festivals, music theatre and new music. The Australians were Robyn Archer (writer-performer, artistic director Adelaide Festival), Roland Peelman (conductor, artistic director, the Song Company), David Young (composer, curator Aphids Events), Andrée Greenwell (composer), Daryl Buckley (artistic director, Elision), and myself. Other Australians at the conference were Xenia Hanusiak (composer, member David Chesworth Ensemble) and Kirsty Beilharz (composer, Mackerras Fellowship).

The full report on the conference can be read on the RealTime website <http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/>

'What's in it for the Danes? They seem to be putting a lot of energy into the Denmark-Australia cultural connection.' This was a recurrent, faintly incredulous query on my return from Denmark in September 1998 after a fascinating, informative and often inspiring 2 week visit, made all the more pleasurable by the incredible generosity of our hosts, the Danish Cultural Institute, the Århus Festival, and especially the Danish Music Information Centre through staff members Jens Rossel and Svend Ravnkilde. Rossel (with Ingrid Valentin of the Cultural Institute) coordinated the conference, and all of us, with ease and patience, and Ravnkilde proved to be the consummate social companion, guiding us on walks and gallery visits and providing a wealth of information ranging from the Queen of Denmark's embroidery skills and passion for the arts, to the history of the Danish visual arts and much about Danish music.

I stayed on after the conference in order to take in as much as I could of the festival in Århus, Copenhagen's cultural rival, some 3 hours by train from the capital, to visit performance venues in Copenhagen and to savour a very attractive cultural life in this intimate harbour city. The seductive cafe culture I was told arrived in the mid 70s, specifically in the form of the cafe directly opposite Den Anden Opera (The Other Opera), the adventurous and successful music theatre venue (officially opened in 1995), right in the centre of the city's winding shopping precinct. I was challenged by speeding bicycles and perambulators at every point and developed the requisite peripheral vision. And I got a taste of an older Copenhagen when Stuart Lynch, of the DeQuincey-Lynch performance partnership who divides his time between Australia and Denmark, took me to a tiny, boozy bodega by the railway station for a beer and some music from an eccentric little combo whom we were almost sitting on. Like Paris, Copenhagen is a city proud of itself and its history, and keeps itself in good shape. Stuart was able to brief me about the other side of the cultural life, the performance scene, its venues and personalities. As we walked through the very neat red light district he pointed out a club where he and fellow performers had recently become strippers in a 2 night performance event.

For me, the context of this visit was the success of Denmark's Hotel Pro Forma with *Operation Orfeo* at the 1996 Adelaide Festival, followed by that company's return in 1997 as part of a larger touring contingent including dance, jazz, literature and a forum with Australian artists on contemporary music theatre at the Sydney Opera House. What struck me then was how well the Danish speakers promoted their arts, their

successes, the commitment of their Danish audience and their government. Facts and figures and visions tumbled forth. The Australian speakers were in a less certain mood, less visibly prepared, not armed with facts and figures, more politically preoccupied; after all we were meeting the Danes at a defensive moment—a federal government narrowing arts funding, the corporate reframing of the Australia Council and the diminishing quality of arts journalism—the focus of opera and theatre director Barrie Kosky's angry assault on a recent Melbourne Age editorial extolling the virtues of market-driven arts. While the rest of the Western world seemed to be happily cutting away at arts funding, Denmark appeared, relatively speaking, a haven of security, vision and confidence, a good basis for the hard-sell. At the 1998 Visionlines Conference in Århus, the Australians spoke with greater certainty, providing an excellent and detailed overview of their fields, but without any diminution of aesthetic and political concerns about form and sites, about funding, about the place and influence of Indigenous arts, about the status of the artist. The Danes' passion was focused very directly on their art, while the Australians constantly placed their art in its cultural and political context. The difference inevitably became the subject of discussion as the conference neared its end.

The Danes certainly have something to sell—new music and music theatre in particular. Clearly the growing success of Hotel Pro Forma is a spur to an international push, and there's other innovative music theatre in Denmark likely to travel sooner or



Opera Nord, Gudrun's 4th Song

later. But why to Australia? Danish music via CD has been part of the international success story in recent years of Nordic music (see Volume One of *Gramophone's* excellent *exploration* series). Japan has been particularly responsive with a Scandinavian Centre in Tokyo and the Nordic Music Centre in Hiroshima. Australia represents a much smaller market. However the success of Hotel Pro Forma's *Operation Orfeo* at the Adelaide Festival has played a significant role in promoting the company's reputation on the international festival circuit. Visits to 2 Australian festivals with works from the company's impressive repertoire are rumoured for 2000. Australia is a significant market on the festival circuit and, with a population over 3 times as big as Denmark, a potential market for much else.

Much more strongly conveyed than market interest was the Danes' curiosity about Australian culture. The 3-day conference allowed very detailed exchange of information and ideas. There was certainly a sense of kinship, a number of locals commenting that they felt an easy rapport with Australians. Some Danes ironically describe themselves as the Italians of northern Europe—effusive when compared with the Germans, Swedes and Norwegians—some finding a stronger affinity with the laid-back Australian character. The connections with Percy Grainger, who lived in Denmark for a period and married a Danish woman, and with Utzon, architect of the Sydney Opera House, are keenly felt.

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The Danish connection

• from page 11

There's much to envy and admire in and learn from a culture so patently dedicated to the arts in a population of 5 million people. Copenhagen has one million people (the same as Adelaide), Århus 250,000, and both have large arts programs and very good facilities. As well as a conventional opera house and other theatres, Copenhagen has excellent performance (Kanonhallen), music theatre (Den Anden Opera) and contemporary dance (Dance Scenen) venues. Århus has a large performing arts centre (to which a large art gallery is about to be added) which is the focus of its annual festival, and there's intense discussion about transforming the country's second opera company (Den Jyske Opera, the National, based in Århus) into a large scale company dedicated to new work. If Denmark sees Australia as a market for its arts, then Australian artists should see Denmark as a part of Europe seriously warranting their attention, as the Elision ensemble and the Song Company have already discovered.

More Danish work will inevitably come to Australia but will we be sending a contingent of Australian work in the near future to Denmark as we did in response to an

demanding new work." Unfortunately, he remarked, most funding still goes to major arts institutions, perpetuating "a vicious cycle of dullness", whereas, he claimed, "it's festivals that can change, that can surprise and which are one of the few contexts left for the showing of innovation."

For his 1999 program, Seeberg forecast an Eastern European program and the extension of his collaboration with Hamburg and Gothenberg to Avignon (Cultural Capital of Europe in the year 2000). Robyn Archer, tracing in detail the history of the Adelaide Festival and its move away from the Edinburgh model, praised the significant role played by Englishman Anthony Steel (whose influential equivalent in Denmark is Trevor Davies), concurred on the role of festivals in nurturing new work as other arts institutions neglected innovation, and extolled co-production collaborations between festivals—encouraging an Århus-Adelaide connection. She applauded too the high turnover of artistic directors in the Adelaide model as presenting "a constant flood of new ideas and visions." Adelaide, she noted, was critical in Australia for the development of cultural tourism, other cities following suit, and accumulating festival data encouraging the decision to mount *The Ring Cycle* in 1999 in Adelaide. (Interestingly, Århus staged a very successful *Ring* in the 80s and revived it in the 90s. It's a production it is proud of

branch had been badly received. On a more positive note, Schmelter described how cultural exchange best works: the Goethe Institut is not an instrument of cultural policy, but rather the promoter of dialogue, not a sponsor, but a partner in arts and other events, one that "respects the autonomy of the cultural work", for example in its participation in Playbox's production of *Stolen* and other Indigenous performances in the 1998 Melbourne Festival.

My own contribution to this session was an attempt to describe, in a grimly comic Australian manner, the recurring Australian inclination to return to a monolithic, monocultural body, more stereotype than archetype, male, Anglo-Australian, a denial of the complexities of Australian culture, of its many bodies and of the 30 year emergence of an idiosyncratic and diverse arts milieu. Against this inclination I describe those Australian arts festivals—The Festival of the Dreaming, Next Wave, the former Brisbane Music Biennale, the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras and others—that resonate with the complexities of Australian culture, noting that the most satisfying festivals for me have been those directed by artists (Sharman, Kosky, Archer), where Australian content is promoted in an international context and festival themes are presented and publicly debated, where ideas are welcome. It's not that Australia is struggling to find its identity, we have a complex, shifting one, but there are many who don't like it and are, simply, in denial. The increasing number of conventional, formulaic arts festivals in which Australia figures in a minor way, represents an implicit cultural policy of rejection that happens to coincide with government arts funding restraint and an emerging hostility towards artists.

Roland Geyer from Vienna directs 4 annual festivals (including Osterklang and Klangbogen Festivals) with astonishing programs sometimes up against Viennese conservatism and with only one program focused on contemporary work. The search for a young audience was one of his themes which generated much discussion later. Taking up the theme of exchange, Geyer described the festivals as political and cultural instruments from an economic perspective, but also as programs dedicated to "the reduction of distances." His festivals are defined by theme. Unfortunately a 1998 program titled "On the Fringe of Europe" antagonised some artists and some countries not happy to see Vienna as the centre and themselves as the fringe. One Danish artist retorted by forwarding his submission in Danish. Uwe Schmelter argued that "the centre is where I am...the world is a bowl...you have to fight against the idea of a centre."

Attracting young audiences through the declaration of festival themes, through



Copenhagen dock site for Gurdun's 4th Song

cultural diversity, through "making the music visible", was seen as worth pursuing. Geyer added a sculpture program to a Sibelius season in 1994 with some success. Skoog reported a good response from a young audience in Stockholm to a Schnittke program (as opposed to offering them a 'light program'). Schmelter thought young Danish audiences more curious about the new than young Germans. Lars Seeberg, whose festival enjoys strong patronage from a young audience (Århus is also a university town), commented, "You know when you have a young audience—there are only bicycles outside the theatre."

In the context of globalisation it was fascinating to hear very local festival histories, to discuss the potential and actuality of festival co-productions (of innovative works that might not otherwise be realised), and to hear resistance to the idea of 'the centre' (heightened doubtless by Adelaide and Århus being small cities with influential festivals). The overall tone was optimistic—cultural policy predicated on sharing and exchange is possible, is actual; co-production of new work is likely to grow. The question of new audiences was more problematic, with no easy answers in sight. And it wasn't until the next day that the hard reality of income came up, with some intriguing figures that certainly tested the Australian idea of box office success for new work.

In RealTime 30, Keith Gallasch continues his Visionlines Conference report, this time on music theatre and new music, interviews artists from Danish music theatre, and offers some glimpses of the Århus Festival. Australian participants were assisted by Danish Cultural Institute, the Danish Music Information Centre, the Århus Festival, the Australian Music Centre and, especially, the Australia Council.



Danish National Opera, Strauss, *Elektra*

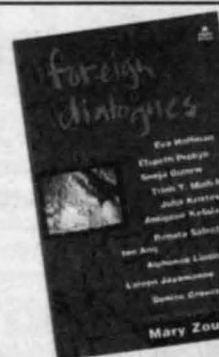
invitation from LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) in 1997? That aside, there's much to learn from Denmark: my visit included interviews with Jesper Lützhøft of Den Anden Opera, Jakob Schockling of the music theatre company Holland House, and Irene Møller of Kanonhallen. These will appear in RealTime 30.

The Conference: VisionLines Day 1: Cultural festivals

The first day was devoted to the issue of "cultural festivals as an instrument of cultural policy". Lars Seeberg, the genial Secretary General of the Århus Festival, kicking off with a provocative reverie of what Århus would be like without its festival (like his current home town, Odense, he said bleakly), described its emergence as coming "primarily out of an inferiority complex, Århus having fought Copenhagen for centuries." The result had been the introduction of "innovative artists of high intellectual standards like William Forsythe, the Wooster Group and Saburo Teshigawara" to Danish audiences as part of a program in collaboration with other European festivals through the 10 year old IETM (Informal European Theatre Meeting). This, he said, had taken a step further in the collaboration between 3 festivals (Gothenberg, Hamburg and Århus), "each inspiring the other", and "improving the ability to commission innovative artists, providing them with conditions with which to take risks and creating an audience

and is preserved on CD and video). Archer regretted the demise of the Brisbane Biennial of Music and the National Theatre Festival in Canberra, both initiated by Steel. The Brisbane event has been replaced by a standard formula festival; had it been allowed to develop across a decade, said Archer, it would have been a major event, challenging the uniformity of arts festivals. Although more and more Asian and Indigenous Australian content was to be found in our festivals, Archer thought it sad that we face the prospect of a Cultural Olympiad in 2000 with largely imported work instead of a celebration of our own; she suspects that there is "still a belief that we are wanting"—the infamous "cultural cringe" haunts us. Governments and artistic directors, she argued, "can't distinguish between art and entertainment", with the major arts companies persisting with traditional fare.

The theme of cooperation was continued in the second session on cultural festivals, when Bengt Skoog, Culture Director of Kultur Malmö and Kulturbro 2000, described a metaphor becoming a reality: a bridge between Sweden and Denmark to be completed in 2000 and celebrated with a huge festival including the generation of many "dream projects." Uwe Schmelter, director of the Goethe Institut, however, lamented the diminution of international exchange in the closure of 6 Instituts and the opening of only 2 (28 have been closed over recent years). The closure of the Århus



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Tongue ties

Jacqueline Millner reviews Mary Zournazi's *Foreign Dialogues: Memories, translations, conversations*

Eva Hoffman says that your first language is attached to identity with a kind of absoluteness, a stranglehold that will not ease up, however neglected it might become over passing years. Even now at times my tongue feels fat with Spanish (though I speak it poorly), swollen beyond control so the desired crisp English blurs out all wrong. At such times, the child I was when I was forced to abandon Spanish and embrace English is suddenly palpable, with her limited vocabulary, naivete, her fear and anger at being violently stripped of the power to communicate. I'm mortified someone might notice, demote me for my non-native grasp. And yet the fact that generally nobody notices that English is not my mother tongue, for I have no discernible foreign accent and no patent physical trait that will betray my other than Anglo origins, has its own difficulties, something to do with the authenticity of my 'migrant experience.' Reading this book disturbed these often suppressed anxieties. I could feel the mid-summer heat of playground asphalt, the sting of exclusion, the poking finger, the cacophony of indecipherable vocal assaults. I suspect my personal response is one Zournazi fully intended, for her writing approach seeks to fold the personal with the academic, the intimate with scholarly distance, to both efface the authority of the text and so allow entry to one's own narrative, but also to affirm the incommensurability of certain experiences.

Foreign Dialogues comprises a collection of conversations, self-consciously poised between narratives and interviews, with women (bar one) writers and public intellectuals on foreignness and identity. It is an uneven collection; too often the interviewees stray off the subject of foreignness and identity to discuss pet topics or latest projects, so the discussion becomes overly general and loses its poignancy. At other times, familiar takes on migration are replayed without sufficiently fresh insight. However, the book is redeemed by the candid, provocative, even poetic observations of some of its contributors. Zournazi's strategy of bringing academics, with their more theoretical inflections, and writers together does distinguish this collection, if at times the marriage is uneasy. Undoubtedly it is the more generous and open observations which captivate and move, such as Eva Hoffman's recollections of postwar Canada, Ian Ang's reflections on her mother, and Antigone Kefala's experiences as a Greek poet in Australia. The self-consciousness of Zournazi's approach—her narratives/interviews/translations are consistently intercut with acknowledgment of the politics of this very process—generally acts as subtle tool to breach the gap between scholarly distance and personal memory (although it also reaches precious extremes at times, as in Trinh T. Minh-Ha's surgical exposition of the politics of the interview, or Zournazi's exhaustive explanation of the tortuous route to Julia Kristeva's contribution).

Most of the familiar themes around migration and foreignness appear, but the interviews are most compelling when they hit that vertiginous territory where the line between sensitivity and racism blurs, such as the issue of authenticity. Who are you when you're neither Australian nor the genuine migrant article, proffering stereotypical physical peculiarities and harrowing tales? What is your status when you're on the wrong side of the ideological claim to sympathy and understanding: the

white South African, the Chilean whose family is fleeing not Pinochet but Allende? What happens when you do not correspond to clichéd perceptions, when you 'look' Chinese but do not speak the language, an experience wittily and poignantly described by Ian Ang? What if despite your origins you feel more a product of white culture, as with the Aboriginal artists Denise Groves discusses? What happens to your identity when you're 'ethnic but not authentic'? Outside the easy moralising, many observations here are refreshingly provocative.

One of the key questions subtending these discussions is the tension between the need to recognise cultural difference and the need to establish some kind of universal or common ground as a base for communication, that is, how to reconcile otherness with some sense of cohesion. This debate is granted immediacy not only by the virulent nationalisms unleashed by the fall of the Berlin Wall, but also by the now familiar leftist academic strategy of deconstructing identity and undermining claims to universality. Hoffman talks about her concern at cultural fragmentation occurring in the US today, "you need the notion of the universal somewhere, the notion of common humanity or some common ground", while emphasising that a certain distance from yourself is necessary for this common ground to appear. Kefala admits she tries to encompass a universality of issues in her writing, to communicate some common migrant experience, some essence. Kristeva, in exalting the French experience of immigration which assumes a universality of human values over the Anglo-Saxon approach of 'keeping cultures separate', emphasises the need to affirm a kind of social unity. Those who are unable to *be*, whose *being* is denied, are the ones who desperately seek an identity, and generally find it in a dangerous form of nationalism: I *am* not, but I am one of *them*, I belong. Kristeva warns against the leftist tendency to undermine the notion of identity as a political gesture, especially national identity, for "we need to reassure this need for identity, and only once there's reassurance can we open out towards the other." Renata Salecl, however, writing from her experience in Slovenia, sounds a warning against assuming an easy opposition between universality and particularity, for indeed what is universal is contested territory. Moreover, she makes the point that the leftist sentiment to affirm cultural difference at the expense of universal human rights can be easily coopted for unsavoury ends as exemplified by multinational corporations which stand over nation states, pleading cultural tolerance so as to avoid introducing First World working conditions in Third World countries.

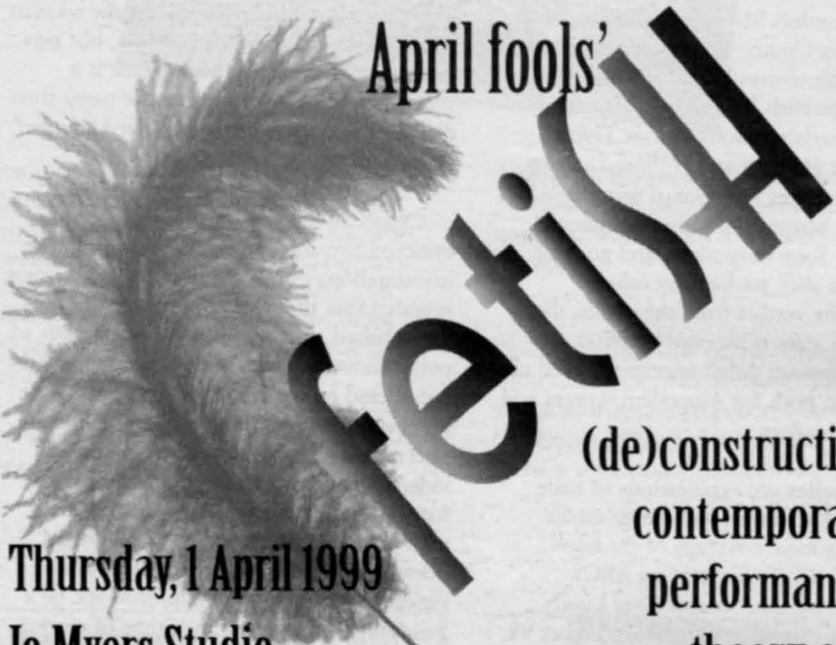
Along with these conundrums around what foreignness constitutes, and how it can be ethically recognised, the contributors here also aver to what Zournazi dubs the "art of foreignness", or strategic ways of being foreign. A number of these women, such as Sneja Gunew, emphasise the productiveness of exclusion, of never belonging, the tremendous power of the scepticism of the outsider. For Minh-ha, foreignness is "a space of confinement and a space of non-conformity." Psychoanalytically, of course, Kristeva stretches the metaphor to women as a sex. To her, "women who don't believe but

who function" provide an example of an attitude of demystification which opens up new forms of freedom. On a more prosaic level, other writers enjoy the creative possibilities of being multilingual, how it necessarily makes one relative and compels one to recognise that language is constantly being reworked. And yet despite these optimistic notes, one senses a certain lethargy, the impasse of now familiar strategies for "writing otherwise", that is, seeking the cracks and slippages in the dominant language, aiming to "pollute" or "corrupt" (Minh-ha) existing systems. Or perhaps even more of a throwback is Kristeva's suggestion that psychoanalysis serves as the only possibility of a "culture of revolt": something like the late 60s "communism of the mind"?

I enjoyed the personal engagement these

essays invited, and the attempt Zournazi makes to highlight the intimacy between the lived migrant experience and theories of post-colonialism from predominantly Australian and female perspectives. The emphasis on the incommensurability of certain experiences, texts, conversations, may at times be laboured, but it grants many of the essays here a lightness of touch or ephemeral quality that is most welcome when dealing with such a ponderous subject as the status of multiculturalism today.

Mary Zournazi (ed), *Foreign Dialogues: Memories, translations, conversations*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1998. See page 15 for details of the Radio Eye program based on this book.



April fools' fetiSH

(de)constructing contemporary performance, theory and text(s)

Thursday, 1 April 1999

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Lesley Stern, author of *The Scorsese Connection*

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New home for cult literati

Julia Postle welcomes a new publisher, Canberra-based merge media

"merge media: Proleptic. Professional. Cult Fiction Publisher." Well that's the introductory synopsis in the press kit. merge media is actually 2 young women, Felicity Loughrey and Mariem Omari, with a passion for the written word and all of its combinations and permutations. I spoke with Omari about their beginnings and the possibilities for the future.

merge began by asserting their intention to transcend traditional boundaries, fuse high and low culture, the local and global, the off-beat and the middle of the road. And they were full-on from the start, calling for manuscripts by using a somewhat controversial image on their free postcards of 2 wiggled-up girls, one lighting the other's cigarette. "No deadlines. No boundaries. Only merge" the selling line.

And the response was considerable. "We received countless MA theses and works of fiction," says Omari. Their first project was working with writers Phil Doyle and Joel Spencer to publish 2 novellas in one book last year: Doyle's *A Book About Things That Didn't Happen* and *Hollow Days* by Spencer. Loughrey and Omari were hailed as the "young literati" by some, including *Cream* and *Soup* magazines, and good at producing a slick package by others. Whatever the verdict from the critics, they had made a statement: established publishing houses didn't necessarily hold all the answers, both for Australian writers and Australian readers.

The novellas are explorations of male identity and sexuality, and merge media achieved national coverage of the book, including a significant stint on ABC's *Recovery* program. Senator Kate Lundy launched the book in style in September 98, and Christos Tsiolkas was there to support the merge media cause. Not bad for 2 University of Canberra BA Communications graduates who blew their personal savings to get the company started.

Omari admits their beginnings were humble, including distributing the book around Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney "literally out the back of a car", plastering

posters around city streets and cold-calling bookshops around the country trying to get their name—and their book—out there. She also confesses to not going anywhere without her *Independent Publisher* magazine from the US, and speaks in a slightly jaded tone about the plight of the Australian independent in contrast to their US counterparts. "Australia just doesn't have the population to support independents." She is surprised that people can survive in the industry considering the costs involved, particularly in distributing across such a vast country.

The courageous pair find the idea of paying themselves for their work as directors of merge media a complete novelty. Loughrey has a journalism background and works for the Eros Foundation. Omari is a former publicist for the recently collapsed Skylark company, and she now waitresses. She still admits being tempted by the security and income of a full-time position, but says that dedication to the creative task is a stronger force. However both are using their degrees to do some consulting for a number of clients.

Omari also expressed a fair degree of cynicism towards government funding. Her investigations into Australia Council funding revealed that the smaller publishing houses are required to build up a back catalogue of publications—at least 5—before they will be considered for support. While the rationale for this is in some ways understandable, it also makes it undeniably difficult for independents to establish themselves in the market. Publishing the novellas from their own pockets made Loughrey and Omari acutely aware of the distinct limits to self-funding. Sponsorship could, however, be a possibility. Broadening the range of work published is another. "As independent publishers we will need a strong non-fiction arm to survive," Omari says. And so to their next project.

A Sydney journalist—name withheld for the moment—has written a series of essays on film, "very cutting edge, very contemporary", asserts Omari. The book will be a combination of strong visual



Felicity Loughrey and Mariem Omari

images and solid text, with both essays and interviews, and will examine the medium in new and interesting ways. It should serve as a valuable text for students in particular.

The second publication in the pipeline this year will be a novel by Melbourne writer Garth Madsen, known predominantly for his short stories. Madsen has written an absolute page-turner, according to Omari. It's a mystery set at Armidale Uni, and although the author isn't easily categorised as a 'young literati' himself (he's a 40-something), Omari considers his work to be well within the demographic that merge media is appealing to.

Omari was surprised that Madsen chose their company over the major publishers, but put it down to their accessibility as independents and their commitment to the work (Omari and Loughrey worked with writers Doyle and Spencer for 6 months, refining the novellas). Both women also embrace work that challenges tradition and the sometimes associated "established stables of staid writers and predictable plot twists and turns." They're also risk-takers—they haven't exactly opted for a particularly safe venture for first time business partners and company directors. The combination of these traits may well be their biggest

advantage in securing writers to the merge media name.

But ultimately, where does this leave independent publishers like merge media in the context of the Australian industry and the domination of the publishing 'heavies'? Hopefully, filling the gap and presenting a more liberal, exploratory form. Omari and Loughrey are good at what they do—their first publication was a well-packaged achievement—and they are learning fast. They are aware of the pitfalls and advantages to marketing, and they also recognise the benefits of publishing both fiction and non-fiction. With funding and/or sponsorship, they could give us more publications that succeed in interrogating the role of the author, the nature of the novel, and providing a forum for the publication of significant academic works. I'll be following their progress with interest.

merge media are considering submissions of novels and novellas. Send your manuscript, synopsis and bio to merge media, GPO Box 1143, Canberra, ACT 2601; tel 02 6262 7072; email merge@mergemedia.com.au; online at www.mergemedia.com.au. See page 15 for Kirsten Krauth's review of merge media's first publication.

Reading hearing

Dylan Everett breathes between the lines

Listening to another read we become engaged with the presence of language, caught up in its rhythms and contours as words cease to approach us from the page and now meet us through the voice. There is an intimacy in this, the other's words touching us through the ear, they enter us from their bodies as we hear the sounds they make.

The eye remains involved in other ways, it allows new elements into the reading of the work—the ambience of the space, that which immediately surrounds us. Lounge chairs, almost-orange lights that float on walls and the other listeners filling the room. In the reading of a text to an audience there is a movement in 2 directions; the text infuses everything as the eye moves over the scene. The scene too alters the text, acting back upon it, colliding with it.

More than this the text seems to overwhelm the body of the one speaking it;

the writing and the writer give birth to a vocal body. Limbs as words that reach out into the space touching everyone in the room, mouthing sounds that transfer meanings like trees of syllables. Words enter the audience at almost the instant that they enter the body of the reader. There is something acutely bare in this on behalf of both involved. The writing becomes more than something we can simply look away from, I give that determination over to another. The one reading now defines the language that will enter me, taking part in the making of my present and future moments. The space between us begins to collapse with the resonance of the vocal body.

Two types of writing emerge though—those that edge toward an awareness of the content in the text, be that personal, social or political. And others that are more concerned with the medium itself—with language as a content in itself.

All writers operate on both sides to varying degrees, temperatures; they move back and forth over a line that can't be seen. This divergence within and between writers gives to the readings a fluctuating quality; they seem to rise and fall in depth and tone as the voice does, or the breath. Each reader requiring subtle changes to the ear of the listener, changes in listening.

I thought of Luce Irigaray and her words on this, how to listen requires a silence, "almost absolute silence"; one that precedes hearing. I thought of the spaces given between our words, and of quiet as a gift to the other, a gift that allows them entry, voice.

One writer gave me her notes when I asked for a copy of her text, the ones she had been reading from. Between the paragraphs there were handwritten reminders: 'BREATHE.' Something we can forget, that is primary to reading or writing,

or hearing another's voice. Hearing something other than ourselves that we are still approaching.

The Lee Marvin Readings, *Supermild*, 182 Hindley Street, Adelaide: Nov 18 – Linda Marie Walker, Cath Kenneally, Neil Paech, Simon Robb, Eva Sallis; Dec 16 – Kerry Goldsworthy, Mike Ladd, Ken Bolton, Jyanni Steffensen, Teri Hoskin; Jan 20 – Noel Purdon, Jyanni Steffensen, Brad Spalding, Wendy Write, Linda Marie Walker; Feb 17 – Michael Meehan, Corrie Hosking, Cath Kenneally, Ken Bolton, Douglas Mackay

Dylan Everett is a writer and artist working in Adelaide. A solo exhibition of his work will be shown at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia in March/April.

Windscreen views

2 novellas from merge media take Kirsten Krauth on the road

I learnt early that you had to have a stock response ready when people asked you what you wanted to do. I loved to look at maps so I told people I wanted to be a map maker, a cartographer. I was plied with information and feigned enthusiasm for something I couldn't have cared less about. It was the maps, what they represented, the substance. They represented travel, and places I could only imagine. Places that weren't Lee Street, Werrington. They were the windscreen view and solitude.

Phil Doyle, *A Book About Things That Didn't Happen*

The inexpensive design and feel of merge media's first publication, the little margins, faded type, different fonts, all contribute to the feeling you're reading something fresh off the street and subversive. Putting 2 novellas back to back, topsy turvy, head to toe, means they must be compared and they do complement each other. Both fictions (Phil Doyle's *A Book About Things That Didn't Happen* and Joel Spencer's *Hollow Days*) are tragedies about a central male character as hollow vessel, experiences poured through and sifted, spat out the other end, small amounts of left-over residue making up their wor(l)ds.

The central character of *A Book* experiences flashbacks as he lies dying in a paid-for hotel room, a "silent frozen disco" in Spencer Street, Melbourne. Under neon light flashing redblueredblue, he contemplates a halfpack of cigarettes, survival and the 20 bucks in his pocket. Under the cadence of blueredbluered neon he experiences a final fear, a lasting fear: of being helpless, of being damned, of there being no escape from who he is. But he has tried. The novella tracks his escapes. Penrith. Armidale. Adelaide. Canberra. Sydney. His words and body become a stumbling, ferocious part of the streets:

Central Station stands like a beacon. Lost in the skyscrapers it cries with surprise. And Broadway is proof that nothing is certain, and the tunnel beneath it is painted with lies.

Hollow Days, too, is about being on the road, drifting between different cities. This may be a defining experience of the 20-something generation, that they constantly move for a different view; that they fear being suburban, settling down, giving in to the daily grind. In Canberra it means going to work stoned, working for the weekend, being university educated but bored, looking to alcohol as the gelling force.

Spencer's writing is descriptive, atmospheric and funny, and he is equally understanding of his male and female characters. Cinematic too. You can see these people moving, imagine their homes, how they fit in to their environments.

Like Bernard Cohen, Phil Doyle has an eye for the fine details, pulling apart the everyday frustrations of dealing with bureaucracy. *A Book* becomes a scathing attack on middle class left wingers and the shallowness of Labor politics. Doyle's protagonist is a beggar and on the streets because he is honest, not a hypocrite. He asks, is it not better to beg than steal? He operates outside of the law. Drives without a licence. Never had one. There is a certain kind of short-lived freedom in his existence. The fiction attempts to expose a structured hierarchy of the underclass, demolishing stereotypes that people on the streets are uneducated, without prior interests, histories, families.

Spencer also has good insight into how unemployed people feel, how it gets to your self esteem; it's not about bludging, it's about performance, pretending you're OK. He observes the fine points, how time takes on a new dimension:

And tonight, when they asked: "So what did you do today Sarah?" she would look serious, maybe a little tired, and say:

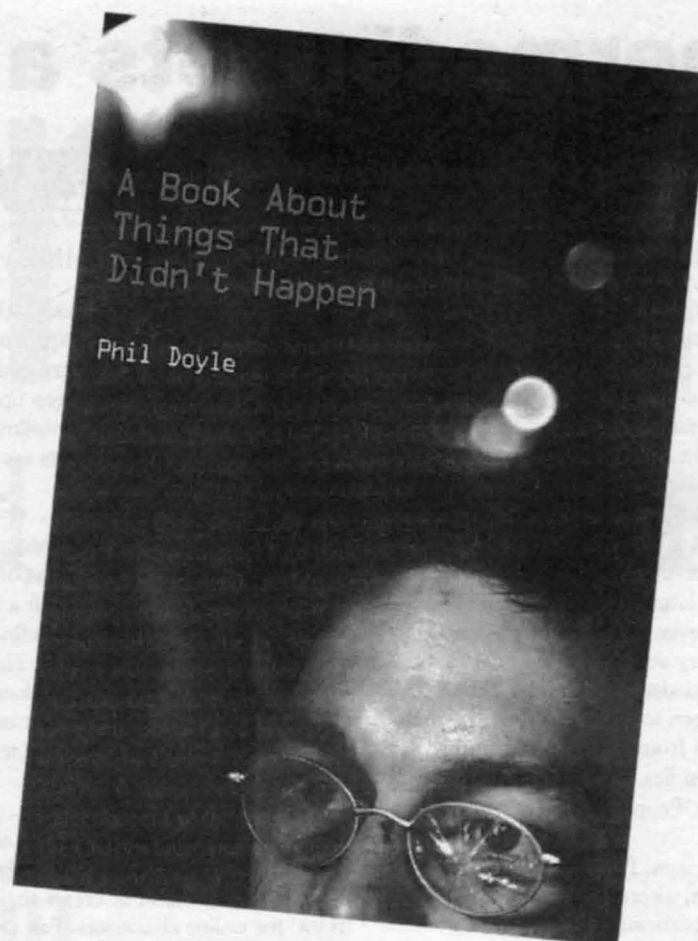
"Well, first I went to Tony's and did some gardening and had lunch, and then I wrote a letter to" well, whoever she ends up writing the letter to.

And they would be impressed.

At the back of her head, and in the delicate corners of her eyes, she wondered how she could say: "I sat in my box bored shitless all day and when I couldn't stand it anymore I decided to come down here and get pissed."

Useless

Both fictions are brutal in their experience of relationships. Doyle's protagonist is regularly beaten up by his brother and friends, fresh out of *The Boys*, menacing in their ordinariness. Trapped by fear, a victim of domestic violence, he cannot leave. His contact with women is about need and survival rather than love. Joe, the central character in *Hollow Days*, becomes more scared of caring than death (so he says) because, like Doyle's protagonist, he thinks loving relationships mean some kind of defeat. Sarah and Joe dance the lovers' prelude, the bar mating ritual; the plainness of Spencer's language makes his seduction scenes erotic. Stark. Tender moments. And the writing moves



away from stereotypes. Tony, gay, shocks Sarah (safe in her knowledge of him as confidante) by telling her he sleeps with women. Like in *Chasing Amy*, people's sexual identities become complex and shifting, offering new and unbalanced possibilities, where a word or look can change the tone.

The Canberra weather in *Hollow Days* starts off cool at dawn with "the

dangerous bass note of impending heat", paralleling the men's momentum in both novellas, working up to violence and tragedy.

Phil Doyle, *A Book About Things That Didn't Happen*; Joel Spencer, *Hollow Days*, merge media, cult fiction publisher, Canberra, 1998. To read further excerpts go to www.merge-media.com.au

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The Foreign Dialogues radio series premieres Sunday evening, February 7, on ABC Radio National's *Radio Eye*. Based on Mary Zournazi's recently published book (see Jacqueline Millner's review page 13), the series will explore the "experience of being foreign...in a world increasingly shaped by diaspora, exile, postcolonialism and the politics of identity", with "Australian and international writers, intellectuals and filmmakers drawing on their experiences of migration, exile, travel and translation to reflect on the aesthetics and politics of their work."

For 8 weeks, each 30 minute episode consists of a reading from the book and a conversation with Zournazi "dwelling on questions of love, loss and betrayal, distance and proximity, longing and belonging, nostalgia, remembering and forgetting." Participants include Eva Hoffman (speaking on *Life in a New Language*); Antigone Kefala (By the Roadside); Ien Ang (Out of Bounds); Renata Salecl (Spoils of Freedom); Julia Kristeva (Senses of Revolt); Sneja Gunew (Reinventing Selves); Trinh T. Minh-ha (Scent, Sound and Cinema); Alphonso Lingis (Foreign Bodies).

foreign dialogues

Eva Hoffman
Elisbeth Probyn
Sneja Gunew
Trinh T. Minh-ha
Julia Kristeva
Antigone Kefala
Renata Salecl
Ien Ang
Alphonso Lingis
Laleen Jayamanne
Denise Groves
Mary Zournazi

Hypermedia gets a joystick and goes gun crazy

Alex Hutchinson interacts with the text/art world in online video games

And then Princess Di is barreling towards me, head down, Uzi cocked, the veil of her coronation dress streaming back from her face like a dirty grey curtain. There is death in her pixelated eyes. And I know: She's gonna wax my republican ass. So I panic. I'm not afraid to admit it. I slap the keyboard, switching from a pistol to something with a little more visceral kick: something involving missiles. I punch the space bar. The launcher exhales. But Di is too close, and even as she detonates (tiara spitting jewellery and giblets in equal amounts) my modem disconnects. I'm dead. (Again). I've been soundly thrashed by some 10 year old kid from Arizona. (Again). My only satisfaction lies in the thought that at least I took the 'People's Princess' with me.

It's about 5 a.m. I've been online for almost 3 hours, alternately trudging through the occasionally (read: hardly ever) interesting Australian arm of Ultima Underworld online and slaughtering foreigners with portable artillery in Quake 2. To most people, no part of those last 3 hours had anything to do with hypermedia, the arts, or (worse) self-expression. To me, electronic entertainment is as valid as any other art. To a trained psychologist, thundering about a 3D maze dressed up as a deceased member of the royal family has a lot to say about that 10 year old kid from Arizona.

The idea that hypermedia is limited to extensions of the (more) traditional arts is to limit an already excruciatingly misunderstood idea. Hypermedia as an 'interactive' medium which offers the reader/user pathways as opposed to linear narrative should be more than a series of static pages connected like a Choose Your Own Adventure novella. Add pictures and we still haven't gone very far. Even a Quicktime movie and a soundtrack are nothing but bells and whistles on what is essentially still a piece of 'straight' fiction with pretensions.

Hypermedia should give the user a new way of interacting, not merely a new way of reading.

Note: This is not a complicated way of redefining the question so that I can shoehorn video games into a discussion of hypermedia. I can do that easily enough under current definitions. Here goes: Online capabilities in video games are fast becoming standard on the PC, even beginning to bleed over into the lower-end game systems. Sega's upcoming 128 bit console, the Dreamcast, will have in-built online capabilities allowing users to network and play anywhere in the world.

An important thing to remember is that video games were born on, and exist only on, computers. Unlike pure text, they are the rightful heirs of the digital age, not its bastard children. The 'links' between text fragments become the doorways between rooms rendered in 3D. The text ceases to describe or refer to the image, and begins interacting with it, fleshing it out, giving it greater depth. Your average game player becomes blind to the fact that s/he is making choices between fragments, and their reinterpretation of the game becomes fluid. S/he ceases to be an external force acting on the text and becomes another facet of it.

Moreover, unlike hypertext, more than one user can be involved in the same piece at one

time. The user passes other users. Their experience is altered by the experiences of others, the 'text' moves in more than one direction at one time. The screen updates—unlike new 'scenes' created by following links—are invisible, and choices are made on the fly.

To an extent, video games become more hyper than hypertext. As well as offering users the chance to interact with a text/art 'world', they allow them to redefine themselves and re-experience it. That kid from Arizona may go for a mock-up of Prince Charles next time. He not only chooses how to interact with the text, but who interacts with the text.

Note 2: Most new first-person shooters (Unreal, Syn, Dark Forces 2, Quake 2) allow the user to download or create their own 'skins' for online characters. Fan sites offer homebrew characters for other players to use. (I once saw a naked man streak past me, weapon at the ready. I once saw Gandhi.) These alterations come complete with changing in-game perspective, weapons and sound effects. A selling point of these games has become their flexibility and user definability.

However this choice of personal representation can become far more complex than what 'skin' to use. Ultima Online, although flawed, expensive and generally tedious, is a prime example. It allows players to create a character and then 'live' it for as long as possible, in real time. The world inside their computer progresses, unlike

traditional role-playing games, at the same pace as our own. If you don't go online for a month, you'll miss a month of activities. Your house could be burned to the ground by brigands. Your pewter Royal Wedding souvenir mug stolen. The attractive element of the exercise is that you don't have to follow traditional role-playing staples. You don't have to be a 'thief' or a 'brigand.' You could play as a farmer. You would have to buy seed, plant crops, work the field, harvest them, and then find a real person to buy your food. All in real time. Hopefully someone else has chosen to run a shop.

Ultima Online has been heralded as the first of a new generation of games, but it isn't. It's really only a step up from the MUDs (Multi-User-Domains) of yesteryear, in much the same way that hypertext is a step away from pure text. MUDs were/are text based adventures which allowed players to move freely, with other users, through a world based around blurb-style descriptions of places and events. Like Ultima Online, there are people, 'Avatars', whose job it is to make sure that people a) play in character and b) don't play like jerks unless (of course) their character class was 'jerk', in which case they have to make certain that they play like jerks.

To that extent, MUDs can also be seen as among the earliest and best exercises in hypertext. Their stories are alive, active, and involve hundreds of other players concurrently. I had friends who disappeared into the weird innards and politics of MUDs, never to return. Testament to their addictive qualities and, better yet, to how

real a few lines of fictional text (when typed by some 'real' kid in Arizona) can become.

Video games in hypertext, like genre fiction in mainstream literature, will probably always be a little uncomfortable. More people may use them and they may often do a better job than their bigger brothers, but that same popular appeal means they're unlikely to be acknowledged. Perhaps hypermedia, populated as it is by the (hopefully) techno-literate, will take the opportunity that any discussion of 'new media' brings, go have a look at their kids playing Nintendo in the basement, and see it as something that could be a little more than a drain on the Christmas budget.

I'm back online. I've been doing finger weights. I've had a lot of sleep. There are 3 empty coffee mugs beside the monitor. Out of the corner of my eye I see the Queen Mother. She has an anti-tank launcher taped to the crossbar of her walking frame. A bald globe swings back and forth overhead. She looks left and right down a deserted intersection, undecided. The chrome on her walking frame catches the light. She hasn't seen me. I swing around behind.

The Ultima Online website can be visited at: <http://www.owo.com/>. There are a slew of online gaming sites; one of the best, Heat Net, can be salivated over at: <http://www.heat.net/>. Get yourself some new skins, mod files (levels) and patches for your favourite games at <http://www.fortunecity.com/underworld/quake/370/filez.html> (for Quake 2) and <http://www.geocities.com/Area51/Dunes/6250/downloads/index.html> (for Dark Forces 2).

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Writesites

Kirsten Krauth looks at writing on the net

West Ryde. Sydney. Australia. Noon.

Through rented white lace to a clumsy rusted clothes line. Dark colours in a harsh New Year's light. Petunias fighting with weeds. A roaring herb garden, salad smells, lemon balm, Vietnamese mint, laksa dreams, pennyroyal. Green tomatoes staked yesterday and zucchinis big enough to kill. Milka's beans snaking through from next door. Our garage roller door is shut. Hiding unused, secretive, bought-on-a-whim things. A brick barbie covered in Wandering Jew, native trees—bottlebrush and banksia—give no shade. Green lawn as long as a terrier's fringe. Still. Waiting for cool change.

The Noon Quilt trace online writing community, (<http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/quilt/info.html>) is a java patchwork of time impressions, a delirium of techno-hippiedom, the irresistible idea of words and moments linked around the globe. Singapore. Brisbane. Arizona. Paris. Brazil. Japan. Manchester. I am touched and transfixed at noon on this hot day.

A world view made of little windows: Trevor Lockwood sees a "fat publisher" who confronts writers at the end of his driveway, begging to be seen in print. Simon Mills writes from the basement. No windows. About his cat who fell off the window ledge. Fell a few storeys, "landed unscathed yet embarrassed." Val Seddon sees the bench on the patio, where her father used to sit, "lit and warmed by memories that are my protection too." The

teenager forgets to do his English homework and creates a funny and dark view. Phil Pemberton feels like a detective, "Marlowe-like observing the crowds but never getting no closer to the girl."

There are many women contributors; quilting was always women's work and there is thought in these patches, a binding of stories, of light and dark shades. I am careful unravelling this hand-me-down, slowly savouring the stitches of time and memory

Helen Flint. Bournemouth. UK. Noon.

At exactly noon, Bournemouth this Seagarden Paradise is upright, shadowless; my front Boycemont Ericstatue and goldeneyed fishpond proscenium the porch I sit on, ten doors from the Channel between fuschia chapters I have just written. And parading past me go paleskin families or solitary on-the-prowl bods dragging huge inflatable plastic moulded floats; oh, 4 hours later they will much slower return floating back up my road, their angry red skin deflating and scorching them.

Some writers, like me, take the view literally, wanting to preserve my frame, where I am right now, my nondescript backyard. Others move cleverly to other frames, the television set, the photograph, a computer screen or a fictional window onto other lives. People use constricting wall views to leap off into imaginative air. Sue



Thomas constructs her view in a LambdaMOO, floating "adrift in the endlessly shifting landscapes of a thousand virtual imaginations."

Characters emerge and re-emerge. An old man drags his feet. Drags cartons of beer. Drags a trolley loaded with corrugated iron and timber. Where is he going? JD Keith finds "empty buildings, idle trucks, and peopleless homes indicat[ing] the Exodus." Where have they gone? There are unresolved narratives...and notes of new beginnings.

Riel Miller. Paris. France. Noon.

At noon I see tomorrow forming, a tear drop shaking its way down, nourishing the earth, feeding the sky, rushing along twisted pipes, quenching desire, a trickle of satisfaction.

The Noon Quilt trace online writing community, <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/quilt/info.html> For more writing sites, see the RealTime links page at <http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity>. If you have come across any innovative, experimental writing/hyperfiction on the net, please email URL to Kirsten at opencity@rtimearts.com

OnScreen

film, media and techno-arts

Feature

Telling it again and again

Anna Dzenis on the not-so-recent phenomenon of TV-to-film adaptations

The simple preconception that cinema is art while television is mindless fodder for the masses still holds sway in many imaginations. And yet there are some things that cinema does surprisingly badly and television does very well. The recent release of the film version of the cult television classic *The Avengers* (1998) and the networks' test screenings of the television spin-off series *La Femme Nikita* (1990) and *The Net* (1994) have focused my attention yet again on the rivalry between film and television.

The Avengers (1998) takes its place in a very long lineage of television series which have been adapted into films. The success of *The Untouchables* (1987) seemed to begin a trend which subsequently has been followed by an avalanche that includes *The Addams Family* (1991), *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1993), *Maverick* (1994), *The Flintstones* (1994), *The Fugitive* (1993), *Dennis the Menace* (1993), *Sgt Bilko* (1996), *Flipper* (1996), *George of the Jungle* (1997), *McHale's Navy* (1997), *Lost in Space* (1998), and *Mission Impossible* (1996), to name just a few. And it doesn't look like it's ever going to be over—*Gilligan's Island*, *Green Acres*, *Inspector Gadget*, *My Favorite Martian* and *The A-team* are in the pipeline, slated for our screens later this year.

Yet for those who regard this phenomenon as something new, you only have to look at the history of film and television to see that they have always been in a symbiotic relationship, feeding off each other since the arrival of television in the 50s. In fact what we are seeing now is nothing more than a return to an old and sometimes forgotten approach. In the early days of television, networks commissioned non-serial teleplays—52 minute, commercially segmented mini-dramas from such writers as Paddy Chayefsky, Rod Serling and Gore Vidal. Directors like as Ida Lupino, Sidney Lumet, John Frankenheimer and Arthur Penn moved effortlessly between film and television work. And in the mid-60s sitcom adaptations of feature films became common practice—*Gidget* (1965), *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*



Peta Wilson, *La Femme Nikita*

(1965) and *The Ghost and Mrs Muir* (1968) are some examples. The 2 most successful adaptations in terms of ratings were *M*A*S*H* which ran for 9 seasons and *Alice* (from *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*) which ran for 8 seasons. *La Femme Nikita* and *The Net* are recent examples of television spin-offs from moderately successful films, and they share the summer schedule with other serialisations such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

So what are some of the differences between a film and a television series? Are these cinematic versions of popular television series homages or just plain theft? Is a film version of a television series anything more than just another episode in an ongoing narrative? And why, apart from *Mission Impossible* (1996), has every cinematic adaptation of a television series been greeted with critical derision, accusations of misunderstanding and misappropriation, and despair at what is frequently regarded to be downright, flagrant butchery of the beloved original? *The Avengers* is a useful case in point.

Along with many others, I waited for a long time to see *The Avengers* on the big screen. I wanted to believe that this would be a film adaptation that was going to work. Tantalising images of Uma Thurman in a new-age version of the infamous 'emmapeelers' outfit were everywhere—a particularly spectacular trailer graced our



cinema screens for most of the year. The additional prospect of Ralph Fiennes as Steed and Sean Connery as one of the villains suggested that the casting was nothing short of perfect. And then I saw the film. The op-art credits and the playful opening sequence were suitably irreverent and seductive. And then, the film fell apart—had it fallen under the sway of the wizardry of special effects or was it unable to live up to its origins?

The answer seems to lie in a combination of these factors. The first problem was always how to be true to the television series—to understand what it was doing, and then endeavour to tell it in a way that was both old and new—to be true to it and to reinvent it. And of course it was important to consider the 2 audiences—those who were familiar with the original series, and those who knew nothing about it. The motivation of scriptwriter Don Macpherson—an *Avengers* fan from way back—was to write the best possible *Avengers* episode ever—a combination of all the greatest elements. This involved trying to preserve the wit, the style, the irony, the lunacy, the tongue-in-cheek Britishness and the strange terror of the original, as well as trying to recreate the odd couple combination and the frisson between working partners. Macpherson wanted "what Patrick Macnee calls a Grimm's fairy-tale terror...and a plot which was a combination of *Alice in Wonderland* and

The Tempest." Adding to this in an interview, Ralph Fiennes described the style of *The Avengers* as "something like Noel Coward meets *The Twilight Zone*." Perhaps herein lies one of the problems—how on earth was such a combination of elements possible? Added to which is a very real question about what "being true to the original series" actually means.

It has been said that what a film of a television series does, at its best, is create a place to enter another universe, somewhere once visited often, to which we can nostalgically return and reminisce. The film is the vehicle to the old show's 'cosmological space', recreated with all of the CGI effects that the 90s will allow. And so with *The Avengers* we find ourselves no longer in the Swinging 60s but the Millennial 90s, in a surreal, de-populated London with very few billboards, cars or signs of life. Some of the more bizarre set-pieces involve De Wynter's (Connery) co-conspirators dressed in teddy-bear costumes in order to avoid being recognised, and a pursuit involving his overgrown mechanised attack bees. One critic described the look of the film as "Magritte in Noddyland"—an abstract painting full of toys. But while the pop-art plasticity remains true to the cool artifice of the original series, something is also missing.

What the film finally presents to us as an *Avengers* story—an apparent combination of all the best parts—is odd and unsatisfying to say the least. The plot revolves around a failed weather project called Prospero which the esteemed scientist Mrs Peel was working on for the government. When this particular project gets blown up, British Ministry Agent John Steed, under directions from "Mother", joins Peel in tracking down the problem which turns out to be an evil scheme to rule the world orchestrated by the megalomaniac De Wynter. He has a machine which can control the weather, and if he doesn't get his way the world will be at his mercy. In a sideline story, De Wynter is also obsessed with Mrs Peel and keeps her portrait in his room. An island fortress serves as de Wynter's base of operations, and to underline the

Telling it again and again

• from page 17

strangeness of it all, there is a hole in the earth through which Mrs Peel falls only to land into this villain's lair. But a little bit of 'far-fetchedness' isn't the only problem here and has never been the key downfall of a film.

What the film of *The Avengers* is unable to do—something television is so good at—is the plotting of multiple story-lines, long term character development and the underestimated ability to tell a good story—made possible by the hours and hours of a series' life. The trajectory of *La Femme Nikita*, by comparison, is all about the possibilities of complicating a character. It began with Luc Besson's cult film *Nikita* (1990), a highly stylised thriller which launched Annie Parillaud's career. Parillaud played Nikita, a drug-addict who kills a policeman in a failed bust and is given the choice of the death penalty or becoming an assassin for a secret government organisation. She is locked up and trained as a killer for several years before she is set free to do the state's work. Back in the 'real' world, a romantic entanglement creates complications with her duties, and leads to an explosive conclusion. Besson apparently supported the sentimental Hollywood remake *The Point of No Return* (aka *The Assassin*, 1993) starring Bridget Fonda and directed by John Badham. There is also a Hong Kong/Taiwanese remake called *The Black Cat*.

The televisual spin-off originated on cable television's USA Network and headlines Australia's Peta Wilson as *La Femme Nikita*. The series takes the original story of the beautiful but very lost street kid Nikita and in the first episode pretty much dispenses with the 'assassin training' sessions. For those who suspect that the story of a trained hit woman may have a limited number of narrative permutations, this so far has not proven to be the case. Nikita not only recreates herself in new identities for various assignments, but she is also considered dispensable enough for the organisation to expose her to some sado-masochistic game play. Nikita also interacts in different ways with the stable of characters who are all part of the mysterious government agency referred to as Section One. The episodes work like pieces of jigsaw puzzles offering different fragments of everyone's past as we gradually come to learn about the

motivations of these intersecting lives. Executive consultant Joel Surnow (of *Miami Vice* fame) oversees a stylish look, but one which always undercuts its excesses of style. In an episode titled "Friend", an indulgent music video sequence in which Nikita and her childhood friend play dress-ups is immediately revealed to be frivolous and deceptively playful by the twists of the narrative.

In the television spin-off of the 1995 film *The Net*, Brooke Langton replaces Sandra Bullock as Angela Bennett, the computer programmer whose identity is erased because she inadvertently accesses secret information. This is a similar storyline to *The Fugitive*—in this case Bennett is endeavouring to reclaim her life, uncover government conspiracies and find her father. She is always 'nearly caught' by the agents of the mysterious Praetorian Guard only to escape into further uncertainty. Her encounters with other characters in each episode are usually temporary, as she continues her life on the run. Her sole ally is a voice-activated mentor known as The Sorcerer she accesses through email. Interestingly, the televisual drama is far more compelling than that of the original film. This is partly because of the ways in which the layering of conspiracy makes the world a paranoid, often unfathomable milieu, as well as the fascination that is to be found in the endless multiplication of plot-lines.

In our multimedia world, any popular narrative is destined to have many lives. Speculation is currently rife about who will play *Tomb Raiders* heroine Lara Croft in the upcoming film version of the video game. *Tomb Raiders* follows *Super Mario Brothers* and *Mortal Kombat* in the electronic game-to-the-cinema circuit. And, as with everything else, it also goes the other way. Luc Besson's *Fifth Element* has just been launched as an N-64 game—it follows the enormously successful *Golden Eye* and *Mission Impossible*. As the number of cable channels increase and cinema screens in multiplexes multiply there is a voracious need for more product—the takeover by films of television and television of films is just one instance of the desperate search for raw materials. Curiously, and somewhat surprisingly, when it comes to telling stories, television seems to be doing a better job.

Global limits on local projections

Anthony May at the *National Cinemas: Sites of Resistance?* conference

From November 28 to 30 last year, Brisbane was host to the 9th Australian and New Zealand History and Film Conference, *National Cinemas: Sites of Resistance?* It was a mark of the conference's success that the question raised in the title was never answered. Instead, over the 3 days of papers, panels and screenings, new depths to the question were revealed.

It should be said at the outset, however, that this brief report cannot do justice to the diversity of the conference and some excellent papers have gone unreported in my attempt to present the wide range of concerns that filled the 3 days.

The keynote session set in place 2 ways of addressing the question from the start. On the one hand, there was a focus on resistance. Keynote speaker film historian Geoffrey Nowell-Smith took an historical view which outlined the dissolution of state film bodies as countries reassessed their geopolitical allegiances. Using the example of the British cinema, he also questioned the effectiveness of national cinemas as a bastion against US domination, 'the Disneyfication of reality' as he termed it, when they did have some efficacy.

On the other hand, keynote respondent Tom O'Regan, an expert on Australian national film culture, questioned the basis of national opposition as an organising frame within the debate. Stressing the importance of a sense of cultural exchange and transfer within the film industries, he raised the question of whether there ever had been an autonomous local industry in cinema. Most of all he stressed the role of the US industry as the great importer of cultural difference, building its strength through absorbing global difference into its operating modes and growing precisely because it did not hamper itself with reflective notions of the national.

For a small conference, these battlelines would have been sufficient. But the picture became more complex and more interesting as the conference continued. Stepping around the terms of debate set up by the keynote session, the issue of Indigenous cinema introduced different priorities, particularly through a session screening films by Canadian First Nations' filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin and Australian Indigenous filmmaker Chris Peacock. The conference screened Obomsawin's most recent film, *Spudwrench: Kahnawake Man*, the third in her series of films based on the events of the 1990 Mohawk uprising in Kahensatake and Oka. But it was the documentary *My Name is Kahentioista*, the second in the series, that raised more significantly the issue of the integrity of Indigenous and other groups within the national framework.

With a different emphasis, the assemblage of film screened by Chris Peacock highlighted the importance of cinema both within communities, existing solely for the community, and as a medium working across communities that can bypass the constraints of the national.

Both screenings refreshed the notion of resistance although not a resistance to global Hollywood.

The question of resisting the degradation of local cultures was also highlighted in the conference's address to documentary filmmaking on both sides of the Tasman and the possibility of cinema discourse in journals within Australia. In an important session reviewing the recent history of Australian film journals, the precarious state of small press publishing was rehearsed once more. With representatives present from academic and trade journals and the popular press, the discussion overcame the persistent problem of finance to reveal once more the question of the national in local discourse. With *Continuum* constructing itself as an international media journal that is based in Australia, with *Cinema Papers* reliant on Leonardo diCaprio's face to sell copies, and with the only new journal represented, *Screening The Past*, locating itself in the international zone of the web, Australian cinematic discourse cannot conceive of itself as inward looking any longer.

But the session on documentary cinema did maintain a local emphasis, reviewing the state of documentary production in Australia since the mid-1980s. Unsurprisingly, the diminished state of funding featured prominently. But the ogre of the shrinking dollar was overcome to address the implications of a wider range of issues, such as the relation of documentary to television scheduling, documentary's proximity to popular entertainments and questions of access to the tools of documentary production. In effect, these questions responded to others raised in the keynote session, particularly those concerned with the efficacy of local production as a national cinema.

Finally, the conference included an extremely informative session devoted to the web presence of Australian cinema with representatives from the National Film and Sound Archive, the Australian Film Institute and and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Perhaps, however, this should have been linked to the discussion of journals and infrastructure. It was one of the few sites within the conference that demonstrated a genuine optimism.

The next 2 conferences will be held in New Zealand (2000) and Adelaide (2002).

National Cinemas: Sites of Resistance?, 9th Australian and New Zealand History and Film Conference, South Bank, Brisbane, November 27 - 30; online information at www.slq.qld.gov.au/confhisfilm.htm

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Report

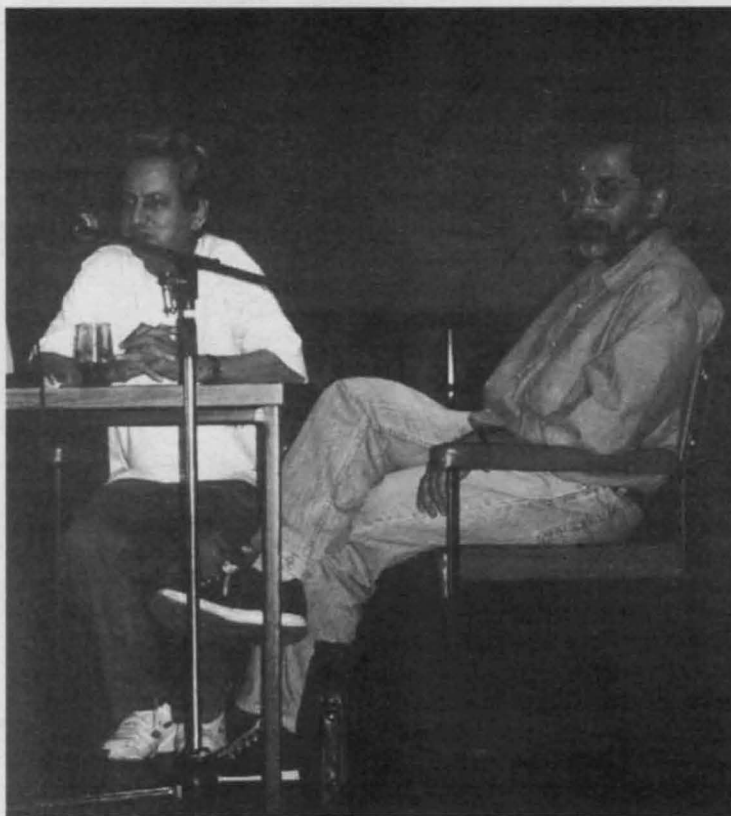
Analyses in flames

Edward Scheer responds to the mysterious in a conference on cinema and the senses

Was it just the timing of this blast of theorised affect at the end of an enervating semester that made this event seem so energising? That's how it felt to me, in the strict sense of an enhanced capacity to do work. I should perhaps end personal reflections there, bearing in mind what Janet Wolff says about Walter Benjamin, "where the personal is valuable in laying bare the structures and prejudices of cultural work, it does not necessarily provide the route to 'better' cultural history, unless we can be of a moment" ("Memoirs and Micrologies: Walter Benjamin, Feminism and Cultural Analysis", *New Formations* #20, 1993). It is however arguable that the reconciliation of the memories of a personal experience with a public event is precisely the job of the film critic (which I am not, though thankfully Laleen Jayamanne is and so is Adrian Martin just to name 2 of those who fessed up). Film criticism loomed large as a topic in this conference with its focus on how the senses respond to cinematic experience.

To do justice to an event on this theme one could be tempted to begin a discussion in the context of the conference dinner where the entire 'synaesthetic system' is activated but that would be unfair to the speakers, some of whom were probably not at their best at that time. Nevertheless the reinvention of the 'synaesthetic system' (where external sense perceptions come together with the internal images of memory and anticipation) as the basis for analysis of aesthetic experience was one of the fundamental motifs of the event. Tara Forrest's paper traced some trajectories from the primary articulation of this notion in Susan Buck-Morss' essay "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered" from 1992, which calls for 'aisthesis' or the sensory experience of perception to be restored to the field of aesthetics. This paper, as did others (such as Anne Rutherford's excellent discussion of visual kinaesthesia and embodied affect), registered this rethinking of the aesthetic dimension as a 'discourse of the body' and noted that while the body's experience of cinema is often anaesthetised, the instinctual power of the body's senses can also be restored through the experience of cinema.

The latter potential of the cinematic image to reactivate the senses was one of the things that resonated throughout Adrian Martin's presentation. The combined effect of his infectious enthusiasm, a quirky but informed scholarship, some vivid turns of phrase (of the opening sequence of Leos Carax's film *Les Amants du pont Neuf*: "the cars take us into the narrative and leave us rudely there") and a commitment to what Einstein once said was the most beautiful experience we can have, the mysterious, produced as pleasurable an experience of academic conferenceville as I've had. And it was an experience which could not be matched by the reading of the paper though I hope it (and many others) will be published. His reading took us through the "mystery", "mood" and "sensuality" of cinema beginning with beginnings such as those found in Victor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (19 minutes to establish narrative) and Sam Fuller's *Pickup on South Street* from 20 years before, (a sequence which ends with the exchange "What just happened?" "I'm not sure yet"),



Kumar Shahani and Ashish Rajadhyaksha at the final panel debate

words which Martin raises to emblematic status. For Martin, questions of intersubjective relations are central to the experience of narrative cinema, as are questions of community.

Meaghan Morris made this latter question the focus of her paper on Cynthia Rothrock's opus of martial arts cinema and even answered the age old question so beloved of Freudians, 'What does a woman want?' with 'What a woman wants is a better job'; subsequently restyling the question in a manner more appropriate to her subject, 'What can a woman do?' Morris noted the community—building functions of this genre for those overlooked in the drive to globalisation. This paper was also notable for its insistence on Adrian Martin's critique of the negative impact of 'excessive' cinema theory in shrinking legitimate topics for cinema criticism to 'a gothic handful.' By the final session this had become a sub-theme of the conference.

Ross Gibson's aleatory presentation seemed to reinforce what John Cage said in his 1949 "Lecture on Nothing": "I have nothing to say and I'm saying it and that is poetry..." This was perhaps a deceptively slight piece, largely improvised, but which provoked in the audience a thought about the opening shot of John Ford's *The Searchers*, that it made the spectator "feel like a cabin." Therese Davis (whose paper on *Eddie Mabo. Life of an Island Man* was genuinely inspiring) made the comment at another paper on *Trainspotting* that the shooting scenes made her feel not like the characters in the film but like the heroin surging through their veins. Comments such as these were seized upon by Adrian Martin in the final panel discussion to indicate a newer freedom of critical discourse, less rigorous perhaps but truer to the experience of the writer/speaker. He added that, say 10 years previously, discussions around Raymond Bellour and even Manny Farber would have been unthinkable in this type of academic critical context.

Listening to the final panel debate (Ashish Rajadhyaksha vs Patrice Petro and Adrian Martin), provided evidence not so

much of some epochal shift away from discourses which denied the body, but certainly a pluralisation of discourse to include the body's own story and to bring to this discussion a concern with the theoretical complexities of, for example, time and movement images in Deleuze (Bill Schaffer's reading of this material is

exemplary), and with producing something which George Kouvaros, quoting Serge Daney, describes as the movement "to displace the givens of knowledge rather than to regulate them." Petro summed up the mood generated by Morris and Martin by observing that too much time has been spent on philosophical intertexts and not enough on one's own discipline.

Perhaps what Morris and Martin were doing was not some theoretical *autos da fe* but simply an attempt to prevent the burning of books by burning them themselves, as in the living books at the end of Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*. It certainly seemed as though they were protesting too much about theory, given they are such eloquent critical readers of theoretical material and have been on a journey through this material from which others can also benefit. Yet it seemed to me that these reflections might have been more than strictly personal and in Wolff's sense, constituted "a moment", marking a return to Benjamin, the memoiristic—which we've seen elsewhere in significant cultural texts in this country recently, for instance Stephen Muecke's *No Road* from 1997—and finally a return to the 'synaesthetic system', to the discourses of the body as the ground upon which all our aesthetic reflections are constituted.

Cinema and the Senses: Visual culture and spectatorship a conference organised by the School of Theatre, Film and Dance, UNSW and the Department of Art History and Theory, University of Sydney, Nov 13 - 15

Jodi Brooks and George Kouvaros are co-editing a collection of papers from the conference. This collection, to be published by Power Publications, should be available in 2000.

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Emerging entities, difficult syntheses

John Potts reviews *Immersive Conditions*, part of dLux media arts' *futureScreen*

The last decade has been marked by the convergence of many things, but one of the most interesting has been the convergence of art and digital technology. Artists working with new technologies have sought to familiarise themselves not just with the technical apparatus but with scientific theory as well. More generally, the explosion of interest in popularised science—including evolutionary theory, physics, neuroscience, chaos/complexity—has intensified awareness within the humanities of recent developments in science and technology. While academic post-structuralism now seems dated, lacking the persuasive power to reach a broader community, many non-science-based readers have at least a passing knowledge of debates within the scientific community on the nature of consciousness, or of time.

Various organisations have sought to facilitate the interaction of artists, theorists, scientists and technicians. Conference events such as the International Symposiums on Electronic Arts (ISEA) and Ars Electronica have drawn exponents together to show work and discuss ideas; in Australia, smaller-scale groups such as the Sydney-based New Media Forum have attempted a similar synthesis of art, theory and technology. In all these instances, ambition has been high, expectation even higher...and the realisation often not quite as elevated.

Perhaps the project has been simply too ambitious, or perhaps there exists a gulf between the artistic and scientific community that will never be breached (Einstein much preferred the music of Mozart to that of his Modernist peers Schoenberg and Stravinsky, while Cage, who dared to play dice with the musical universe, must have been a big no-no). Whatever the reason, none of the broad-based forums could be called an unqualified success, although they can produce stimulating, even exhilarating moments (ISEA's best year was probably the Third International Symposium, TISEA, in 1992 in Sydney). Often the problem is that the open-minded approach of humanities exponents is not matched by the scientists, whose disciplines tend to be more narrowly defined.

A recent attempt at the art/technology synthesis was made by dLux media arts in the *Immersive Conditions* forum, held at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, in November. As part of dLux's larger *futureScreen* program, which included exhibitions of new media works, this one-day forum concentrated on immersive technologies: virtual reality, artificial life, and various forms of interactive technology. The scope of the forum was admirably ambitious, bringing together artists, scientists, theorists and educationalists. Although virtual technologies no longer claim the media spotlight (now well and truly switched to the internet), there has been a long and fruitful intersection of artists and scientists in the field of computer-generated 3D technologies. *Immersive Conditions* was a successful attempt, for the most part, to illuminate the important aspects of this intersection.



Viewers at the WEDGE, Australia's first walk-in VR theatre

A great strength of this forum was its structure. The proceedings took their cue from opening address by Dr Darren Tofts, Chair of Media and Communications at Swinburne University. Tofts' presentation was that rare thing: a discussion of contemporary technologies within a historical and philosophical context. Moving from the familiar metaphor of Plato's cave, Tofts traced an intellectual history of eidetic spaces, expressed in the mental constructions of the Roman *ars memoria*, and the inner spaces of memory related by St Augustine. This long theoretical tradition left Tofts impatient for a more fully realised immersive experience than the often clunky VR technology can generate; the goal is "the immediacy of the experience without the boredom of the conveyance" (Valery). Looking ahead, he advocated the pursuit of more elegant solutions to technological problems, with the fictional vaporware of "The Wire" in Kathryn Bigelow's film *Strange Days* as a useful heuristic device; in theoretical terms he took a lead from the breakdown of the spectator/spectacle binary in quantum physics.

This presentation was an excellent opener for a forum of this kind, attentive to technology and aesthetics, machines and philosophy. Its hybrid approach embodied the potential of this convergent area. Almost as an aside, Tofts also questioned the helpfulness of the term "virtual reality", suggesting as an alternative "apparent reality": the substitute term embraces the sensation of presence, while acknowledging the awareness of "a here and there."

Multimedia artist Justine Cooper followed with a discussion of her work within the theoretical context outlined by Tofts. *Rapt* comprises a virtual body generated by Magnetic Resonance Imaging, a technique which represents

the body as axial slices (see RealTime 26, page 27). The various formats of *Rapt* (an installation version was exhibited at Artspace) allow the virtual body to be experienced both internally and externally. Cooper provided a useful interrogation of her work's relation to contemporary medical science and technology, while positioning the objectification of the body within an historical framework (the mirror is a technology 5,000 years old).

The middle section of the forum was devoted to the benefits of research into computer-based technology. Dr Henry Gardner from the Computer Science department at ANU spoke wittily and enthusiastically about the "hot area" of immersive technologies, showcasing the WEDGE, Australia's first walk-in VR theatre, installed for *futureScreen* in the Powerhouse. Sean Hart, on behalf of Professor Paula Swatman, represented RMIT's I-cubed (the Interactive Information Institute), which pursues research projects in partnership with commercial ventures. While this presentation held limited interest for a general audience, it provided valuable information for artists working in multimedia and immersive technologies.

One such artist was Troy Innocent, who gave an enlightening account of his latest interactive work *ICONICA*. This work attracted much attention when exhibited at Artspace, although few users would have grasped its complexity. Innocent revealed some of that complexity, describing the work's basis in artificial life research: the constructed world of *ICONICA* builds entities like DNA strings, comprising specific languages or codes. Intriguingly, users can ask these lifeforms what they are made of, and the creatures are only too happy to reply.

Not everything in *Immersive*

Conditions gelled with the overall format. Dr Anna Cicognani from Sydney University missed an opportunity to develop the notion of cyberspace as a linguistic construct, which would have resonated with Troy Innocent's work. However, dLux media arts director Alessio Cavallaro ended the forum on a high note, introducing fly-through video documentations of the Canadian artist Char Davies' works *Osmose* and *Éphémère*. Davies' sophisticated immersive virtual environments are probably the most celebrated achievements of this emerging art form; the insight into the recent *Éphémère* was particularly appreciated by the audience.

Immersive Conditions was a rewarding forum, certainly more successful than most attempts at the art/science synthesis. It also served to highlight the impressive level of achievement by Australian artists and scientists in this exciting field.

Immersive Conditions forum, presented in conjunction with the Powerhouse Museum, November 21; *ICONICA*, Troy Innocent, Artspace, Nov 12 - 28; part of *futureScreen*, organised by dLux media arts, Nov 12 - 28, 1998

Report

Digging up gems

R E Farley sees performing poodles and buried bones at the 2nd Brisbane Animation Festival

In 1996, Queensland Animators hosted the first Brisbane Animation Festival which attracted more than 700 patrons over 2 days, impressed all comers and garnered enthusiastic reviews throughout the industry. In the retrospective light of the second festival, however, the first show suddenly looks downright amateur.

BAF 2 was bigger, gutsier and an entirely more sophisticated affair than its predecessor. One of its most appealing features was the doggy theme which provided coherence and a thread of gentle humour: prizewinners, for example, were awarded Bones in shiny, engraved dog dishes.

One of the most important features of BAF 2 was the inaugural international competition. Close to 100 films were entered, so the jury—Brisbane animators Max Bannah and Erik Roberts, Sydney animator Lee Whitmore, film writer/director Jonathan Dawson, and media researcher Wendy S. Keys of Griffith University—had a tough job. The categories themselves were devised in order to allow judges to reward a range of film types.

The Debut Prize went to *Sientje*, a film for the child in all of us by Holland's Christa Moesker. Canadian Richard Reeves won the Jury Award (creative and artistic merit) for his cameraless animation, *Linear Dreams*, an elegant, abstract film. At the other end of the narrative spectrum was Dylan Crooke's "super-ocker" *Macca Stewth* which took Bones for the Underdog and the People's Choice (voted on the night). An extra jury consisting of *The Courier-Mail's* Des Partridge, Andrew Urban and Richard Kuipers from SBS TV, awarded the Critic's Prize to Dennis Tupicoff's thought-provoking *His Mother's Voice*, which also won the Grand Prize.



Bill Plympton's *I Married a Strange Person*

After the award-ceremony/screening, opened by a troupe of performing poodles (yes, really), animators, industry representatives and animation buffs crammed themselves into the foyer for the celebrations.

Standout programs included "Show Champions"—winners from a decade of the Dresden Film Festival—and "Wagging the Tales", Queensland Animators' international selection. Nearly 75 films screened altogether, with France's *The Monk and The Fish* and Australia's *Essence of Terror* proving audience favourites.

Another sign of the BAF's growing sophistication was the presence of

Estonian animator Priit Parn, the festival's guest of honour. After Brisbane, a feature-length compilation from the festival toured Darwin, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide with Parn, who led one-day workshops in most cities. The Darwin audience proved the most enthusiastic, evidence that the Australian Film Commission's support for touring programs is money well spent.

Kudos must go to Festival Director Peter Moyes, who cut his teeth on the first festival and saw the potential for BAF to become a major cultural event. His goal, of slotting Brisbane into the international animation festival circuit behind Zagreb, Annecy, Cardiff and Hiroshima, is quite clearly achievable and something for Australian audiences to look forward to.

I have just 2 criticisms of the festival. Australians don't get much opportunity to see films by deranged American legend Bill Plympton, and while it is undeniably a thrill to see anything he does, features (*I Married A Strange Person* screened in a late-night slot) are not his strong point.

Secondly, the last day's screenings were disappointingly anti-climactic, especially the "Bad Dog!" session which, without commentary, was all but meaningless. The Priit Parn retrospective, too, was frustrating in that, lacking the appropriate cultural context, it was very difficult to know what was being satirised, how or why. For those of us up the back who could not hear Parn's soft-spoken commentary, nor the question-and-answers that followed each film, the films themselves seemed a meaningless concatenation of images.

One of the most satisfying programs, then, was "Buried in Our Backyard", which featured Queensland productions introduced by their creators. At last the audience had the opportunity to find out just what each animator was getting at, how they achieved it, what they felt about the finished product and so on. We even had the chance to see Milkana Kirova's remake of her award-winning *Rendez-vous*.

But these are small quibbles in the face of what was, overall, a stunning cultural feat. The tour, the competition, sessions, plus the prospect of future guests of Parn's undisputed calibre, make the Brisbane Animation Festival an event of international significance which brings the rich pleasures of animation to Australian audiences.

The Second Brisbane Animation Festival, Queensland Animators Group, Dendy Cinema, Brisbane, October 22 - 25

R E Farley wrote her Honours dissertation on Australia's animation industry in 1992, followed by a Master's thesis on animation practice, and has edited the Queensland Animators' newsletter since 1995.

Column

Telediction

Sue Best finds pearls in South Park poo

An adult cartoon about school children seems an unlikely candidate for cult status yet this is what *South Park* is rapidly achieving. You might think there is nothing much new here, that *The Simpsons* has already broken this ground of the quirky cult cartoon. But *The Simpsons* is somewhat different. Its early evening time slot, 6 or sometimes 7ish (well before bedtime, in any case) announces *The Simpsons* as a children's program, albeit one that has considerable appeal for adults. *South Park* with its so-called 'adult themes' is screened at 9.30, thus signalling that it is (at least in programming theory) out of the temporal grasp of most children.

Despite the late-ish time slot, and the presence of adult themes, the program has a distinctly juvenile flavour. It is not just the cartoon genre, the overly simplified forms of the program's graphics or the bright kindergarten colours; mostly it is the humour that is the source of this strong juvenile feel. The cartoon within a cartoon that the *South Park* children watch, *The Terrance and Phillip Show*, represents the extreme end of children's toilet humour: 2 figures literally crack up—the lower parts of their jaws

completely part company with their upper faces—whenever a character farts. The farting occurs a lot. Indeed, farting is absolutely central to the program, it is the major source of humour; each emission provokes the kind of hysterical laughter that notoriously couples small boys and bodily functions.

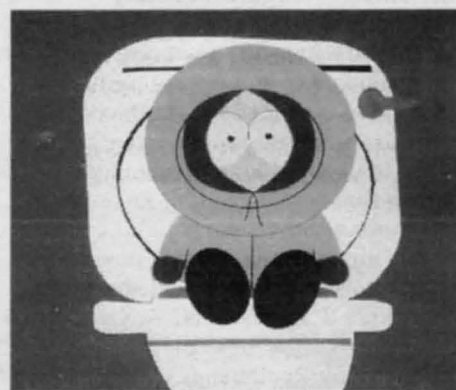
Bodily functions, or their seizure, are central to the humour of the main, or framing cartoon, *South Park* too. There is the callous slapstick humour about the weekly death of the orange anorak called Kenny. In a strange inversion of the laws of cartoon savagery, where animals such as Sylvester or the Coyote suffer incredible bodily damage to no evident or lasting effect, Kenny actually dies on screen, often with profuse showings of blood, guts and other appropriate splattered body parts or fluids. While the signs of his demise are all too graphically represented, in true toon fashion he is resurrected without rhyme, reason, or report for the following episode.

Other bodily fluids are just as mercilessly displayed. Vomit is a particular favourite. Stan, in real boy fashion, is profoundly unsettled when his emotions are stirred. The

mere sight of his adoring girlfriend Wendy, or the very sexy Sigourney Weaver-style relief teacher, are more than sufficient to induce a flood of vomit. Indeed he produces this fluid so effortlessly and in such mammoth proportions that the *South Park* merchandising department have enshrined his talent in a baseball cap: Stan stands on the crown of the cap producing a mighty muddy torrent that reaches right to the edge of the peak.

Blood, guts, vomit, farting...what is missing here in a boy's taxonomy of amusing bodily substances? Shit of course, and what better bodily substance to do a star turn in the recent Christmas special. Kyle, who it turns out is Jewish and hence beyond the purview of Saint Nicholas and associated Christian paraphernalia, is visited by a non-denominational holiday character called Mr Hanky the Christmas Poo. This figure comes out of the toilet at year's end to see if good girls and boys have eaten plenty of fibre. Mr Hanky, the singing and dancing poo, becomes the town's solution to a non-discriminatory "holiday figure."

Here we are beginning to move from the juvenile bottom humour of small boys to the promised adult themes. In this particular episode, there are twinned adult themes. First, there is the very adult obsession with adequate fibre intake—such earnest dietary fussings seem to only come with full knowledge of one's mortality and thus



Kenny in *South Park*

undeniably signal age or maturity. This mature theme is effortlessly entwined with another serious adult theme, namely the pressing concern about the incorporation of racial and cultural differences. Herein lies the source of *South Park's* cult status. The wonderfully wicked combination of anarchic juvenile humour and clever send-ups of serious themes is an unbeatable combination. The sacred cows of political correctness are not so much attacked here, as simply bowled over. This is not then an overturning of the social order, it is more like a very satisfying sideswipe which makes things reel, teeter, and tip over. In other words, a good biff is what the boys would recommend to energise a tired post-postmodern world. Out of the mouths (and bums) of babes, perhaps...

South Park screens Monday nights at 9.30pm, on SBS. Repeats on Foxtel.

Cinesonic

Philip Brophy's cheap and deep swipes at songs in the movies: 1998

Having just listened to the new *For Films Vol. 3* (1998), I am overcome by a familiar wave of nausea—the same pasty acrid ambience that irritates the soft hairs of my inner ear when I hear attempts to compose/produce 'music for films.' Twenty years after Brian Eno released an LP of the same name (which rehashed pleasing atmospheric doodles developed in Cologne and Dusseldorf by the likes of Cluster, Harmonia and Neu at least 5 years earlier), the film and recording industries worldwide still think that what has since been termed 'ambient' emits a 'soundtrack-like quality.' To my ear, I've heard nothing but 2 decades of what at best evokes some of the better moments of Eno's *Another Green World* (1975) and at worst sounds like instrumental versions of John Denver's *Rocky Mountain High* (the ideal theme music for American indie Sundance-friendly thirtysomething relationship flicks).

Granted, there have been many attempts to side-step the orchestra—but the reasons for doing so are usually suspect. Rather than rejecting the orchestra as a universal/neutral/qualitative norm for sounding the film score, most indie/new-ager/Europhile/personal-cinema/arthouse movies eschew the symphonic as a stance against sonic bombast, favouring instead cheesy string synthesizers (a contradiction in terms), acoustic guitars (oh-so-natural) and solo violins (so frail, so feminine, so fuckable). And if you want to go ethnic, throw in a piano accordion (instant pre-fab gypsy/peasant connotations) or a pan pipe (for that 'soaring of the human spirit' effect audiences love so much).

Technology has a lot to answer for, also. The abject lack of imagination and technological nous in the *For Films* series of CDs is grounds to ban home MIDI studios worldwide. Factory samples, pre-set effects, and ambient/trip-hop/d&b textbook compositional structures are perfectly logged and tabulated across the 3 CDs in the series. Their pallid contents also reflect the kind of luridly beautiful coating that serves the lazy knee-jerk humanism which 'short films' (especially animated shorts) now seem to uniformly express. Are all short filmmakers Scientologists? Are their 'composer friends' bass players in Christian Soft Rock bands? Do they really have to use those CDR libraries and SYSEX data dumps leftover from the music they did for a series of EST/Forum/Amway motivational tapes? Does what I'm saying make any sense to you reading this? Maybe not. Most people—especially the intelligentsia—are happy with music on the grounds of its soulful/mystical/emotional/natural evocation (which marks them intellectually below the mythical housewife who weeps during *The Bold and the Beautiful*). Film directors and producers are probably even dumber than the dumb masses in this regard: they actually think those CDs they play at dinner parties (*Betty Blue*, *The Mission*, *Cinema Paradiso*, *Paris Texas*, *Proof*, anything by Enya, Dead Can Dance or Deep Forrest) are signs of their sophisticated taste in music.

Enough cheap swipes at aesthetic

retardation. Playing *For Films* urged me to remember that 1998 was in fact a very healthy year for the use of songs in movies. There were of course also some good examples of the most clichéd use of songs: *The Acid House* and *Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels* best exemplifying a dated trend at being hip (go, UK!) which should provide an unhealthy influence on present and past VCA/AFTRS graduates for the next 5 years. The inventive, interesting and imaginative examples of song selection of 1998 avoided the pitfalls of regurgitating ambient stylings (eg *Kissed*), affecting a sallow, hip demeanour (eg. aka π), or bothering to consult with A&R people in major recording/distribution companies (eg *Godzilla*).

P.T. Anderson's *Boogie Nights* set the agenda for how songs can be used to culturally locate a story rather than perfunctorily slot it into a radiophonic histogram. While the film charts the messy ejaculation of the porn industry at the end of the 70s (read Bill Landis & Jim McDonough's tracts in the now-defunct early 80s *Sleazoid Express* for key source material which this film relates to), the music peels back the scab of collective forgetfulness to prod the fetid sono-semiotics of songs like Apollo 100's *Joy*, Nina's *99 Luft Balloons* and our own Rick Springfield's *Jesse's Girl*. But not a smidgen of camp is to be found, so forget Sontag when journeying through the wood-grained multitrack mixing consoles which blanket the texture of the film's soundtrack with the grain of late-70s/early-80s pop/rock. P.T. Anderson deftly employs songs like aural production design, matching ARP synths to wallpaper, Ibanez fuzz-wahs to the lighting in convenience stores, and compressed snare thuds to ritzy cowboy boots. Most fascinating—and the modus operandi behind the film's weaving of genuine emotional warmth amidst its decidedly retro iconography—is Anderson's placement of songs in mismatched settings. He does so often by starting a song in one scene and then allowing it time and space to flow into the next scene. The resultant effect imbues the song with a disturbing ambivalence that simultaneously drains it of an 'event' status and displaces it into the amorphous background of the film's psychological ambience.

Meanwhile in Australia, we think it's 'hip' to make fun of Barry White and the theme from *Shaft*. Surprisingly, one Australian film (and I do emphasise the 'one' as in, like, 'one a decade') opted to absolutely ignore the last quarter of a century of tizzy, queeny, Whitlamesque, theatre-company-funded, PC, subtle-as-a-sledgehammer mockery of the working class (which is still alive and kicking today as it was back then). Rowan Woods' decision to get The Necks to provide a score for *The Boys* shows that Australians can think beyond Baz Luhrmann excesses, Jenny Kee cockatoos and John Singleton mimicry. Arty but not alienating, the distinctive brooding tone of *The Boys* is enriched by the pregnant spatialisation of The Necks' slowed-down lounge music. 'Lounge' as in Ken Bruce has gone mad decor: all chipboard, glue guns and leather with a 30 day guarantee. The

oppressive outer-suburbanism screams through the empty inner-spaces created by The Necks (and some occasional passages of Alan Lamb's telegraph wire drones). Hopefully it won't be a decade before the next Australian feature film does something interesting with its soundtrack.

One thing rarely mentioned when discussing the Farrelly Brothers' *There's Something About Mary* was the use of Jonathan Richman to provide the meta-narrative voice for the gag-mystery central to the film's enigmatic key figure, Mary. The pure and simple playfulness of visually including Richman as the nerd troubadour replete with retardo drummer imbued the film with a charm that evokes the more complex strains of humanism found in the 80s cycle of teen movies. The complexity is in the modulation of the narrative irony—mostly a neurotic reflex to wise-acre anything within shot—with an awkward suppression of positivity. The Farrelly Brothers are masters of this, exhibiting a strange duality in their savage lambasting of human inadequacy while celebrating the centrality of hopelessness which many people learn to accept in order to save themselves from going around the bend. We're all losers in one way or another, and films like *There's Something About Mary* provide a manual on how to deal with it—in preference to hugging Richard Simmons or watching *Family Circle TV*. Jonathan Richman—the loser supreme before nerd became a clinical term for people who think the internet is 'cool'—has for over 20 years dealt with emotional fissures and social shortcomings with verve, conviction, fluidity and ambiguity all at once. No one else could have been so appropriately layered into *There's Something About Mary*.

Cool cineastes—who listen to exciting youth radio stations like Triple J—thought John Carpenter's *Vampires* was not 'in your face.' Such naive comments from wannabe critics who've probably never seen *Last House on the Left*, *Suspiria*, *I Spit On Your Grave* or *Shocking Asia* but think Tarantino is 'edgy.' *Vampires* is certainly not a redefinition of the cine-vampire mythology, but it is a breath of fresh air to watch and hear a film that is committed to its generic underpinning instead of frigging around with being smart-arse (and misinformed) about the genre's conventions. Best of all, the score by John Carpenter (list the directors who score their own films) cruises down a highway well away from the concert hall, tuned to crackling radio broadcasts of Stax singles. For *Vampires*, Carpenter plays guitar alongside Donald "Duck" Dunn and Steve Cropper—legendary hard-nosed bassist and guitarist of Booker T & The MGs and innumerable Stax recordings from the mid-60s through to the mid-70s. Once again, *grain* comes to the front, as the studio performance of non-cinematic musicians is grafted onto the soundtrack when they play song-structured cues in place of script-dictated 'music cues.' The Carpenter/Dunn/Cropper jams exude a laidback haze of heat which slowly sizzles and perfectly complements the terror-beneath-the-surface that erupts in



Jonathan Richman, *There's Something About Mary*

the film's violent showcases. Just the alcohol-soaked antidote one needs to wash out Wenders' angst-ridden corruption of Ry Cooder's gentle slide guitar washes in *Paris, Texas*.

There are 2 Enos. One puts out portentous diaries, behaves like a technological sage, fawns over well-designed objects, loves Fellini and espouses the most ignorant altruisms about film music I've ever heard. The other was with Roxy Music for their first 2 LPs, then released 2 solo LPs: *Here Come the Warm Jets* (1973) and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* (1974). When the opening credits to *Velvet Goldmine* burst with the atonal postmodern melee of a time-warped Phil Spector which defines Eno's first LP, I remember once again that cinema hasn't even begun to tap into all the remarkable recordings of pop music which could invigorate the film soundtrack and jettison it into transhistorical metasonic realms of audiovisuality. The song in question—*Needle In The Camel's Eye*—is as weird today as it was back then. The colour of hair and the sound of song drive *Velvet Goldmine*. It rings with the nasal whistle that breathes the aural aura of Glam, combining not only crucial anthems but also obscure tracks by Cockney Rebel and early Roxy Music (and only Bowie fans will know the reference behind the film's title). The strength of Eno and Bowie—sometimes dormant, sometimes irrationally exposed—lies in the gorgeous fakeness of their artsy gestures. A heady, gaudy form of pop gout which consumes their artistry and transforms it into a spectacle of devalued sentimentality and violent theatricality—anti-matter versions of Dylan, Morrison, et al. Todd Haynes knows Glam well enough to embrace this, and to consciously pervert its hyperbolic hyper-bucolic history into a cris-crossed qualudian reverse-history that pinpoints Queer before it became politique, Bi before it became unacceptable.

1998: *Boogie Nights*, *The Boys*, *There's Something About Mary*, *Vampires*, *Velvet Goldmine*. My ears were very happy indeed.

Review

The personal and the perverse

Kirsten Krauth and Needeya Islam in the *Super 8s*

On the first night...

My family still sits in the dark in front of a white sheet to watch a procession of flared trousers, dumped boyfriends, amateur sporting events, endless constructions of buildings and too-dark interior shots where you can just make out the candles on the cake. It is a feeling of shared history—apprehension, the cringe-factor, expectation, the sound of whirring—that watching Super 8 evokes and video does not. At the MCA exhibition launch of *Super 8s*, Mark Titmarsh, the "godfather" of the Super 8 scene, spoke of the times as an almost mythical extended family environment where personal journeys were recorded, the compact camera able to shoot a film over the weekend; to cross borders. Catherine Lowing remembers a scene which incorporated more than film—parties, drugs and AIDS—with a tragic undercurrent of young people dying.

In the Museum of Sydney foyer you can walk over sheets of glass which reveal underground layers of rock: "statisgraph: a vertical slice made by archaeologists to record layers of use over time; each layer a time capsule and sandwiched record between past, present and future." In the Museum's screening room we are slicing into the 80s, 10 years of films about movement: you'd think the wheel had just been invented, cars, driving, lots of shots through windscreens, the road as metaphor for individual freedom, all-consuming and unapologetic. Private universes: Nick Meyers' hilarious *Caramba*, a 2 minute "musical travelogue" featuring a man dancing madly to hokey music in front of the Golden Gate Bridge, the Grand Canyon, the James-Dean-New-York scene, forms an uproarious, pantomimish living postcard, taking the piss; the Australian abroad. Stephen Harrop's *Square Bashing*, sampled directly from TV, the "repository of all things" (Andrew Frost), pumping pistons of heroes and icons, soldier boy/girl blue, religious chanting, disembodied faces, cigarette-lipped lust, as "the Rhythm beats everything out of my head." Rowan Woods' witty *Suspect Filmmaker* where, in a bad German accent, his interrogation—Have you been to the 4th dimension? Have you been where no-one's been before?—becomes a questioning of the cultural construct of filmmakers as renegades, a sly satire on how budding filmmakers see themselves; a blend of pretension, insecurity and endearing aspirations: "as a filmmaker I don't like myself."



Stephen Harrop's *Square Bashing*

On the night there was a feeling (as Adrian Martin put it in his catalogue intro) that you "had to be there." Unlike the original screenings, described as the "Theatre of Cruelty", I was surrounded by the giggles—furtive, guilty, uncontrollable, infectious—of once intimate friends; of forgotten in-jokes. The films themselves, unlike popular short films nowadays, seem whimsical, memorable but not marketable, driven by interiority and self-exploration rather than punchy realism or cheap laughs. But, as Bill Mousoulis observes, the Super 8s may be over but Super 8 as a film gauge is thriving: "the true 'Super 8 phenomenon' is probably happening right now, in the hyper-spaced late 90s: in Melbourne, more Super 8 films are being made than ever before."

On the second night...

If by way of Hal Hartley we can understand "amateur" to mean one who engages in something for love or pleasure rather than profession, then the Australian Super 8 scene of the 80s was an example of amateur filmmaking at its most giddy and optimistic. To make sense of it, one needs to understand the impulse behind it, as much as view the films themselves. Members of this scene have certainly gone on to mainstream and critical success (Rowan Woods and Nick Meyers as director and editor respectively of *The Boys* for example) and organisations such as dLux media arts arose from it, indicating that all was not as random and solipsistic as it might seem. However, this retrospective fixes on an

historical moment when ideas—no matter how inchoate, self-referential or silly—and the thrill of collaboration were paramount.

This is why despite the slightness or opacity of a lot of the films, they are still interesting to watch, particularly in succession. From a film depicting the rockabilly sub-culture of the 80s with a dance music soundtrack, to a mockumentary in-joke about the Marine Biologists' "film collective", to parodies of the affluent suburbia of Chatswood and genre films, these shorts are somehow fascinating in their self-indulgence and

variety. Informed by the DIY approach of punk, they reflect the belief that anyone could make a film. And occasionally, with as little fanfare as the most incidental filmic musing, a real gem is revealed. Stephen Harrop's black and white accompaniment to a Hopalong Cassidy record *Down Diablo Way*, is as inventive, witty and artful as any short film I've seen. Working with a few actors, a couple of hats, some guns and a great wig, the creative possibilities of Super 8 are fully and hilariously played out. The central joke is the knowledge of the limits of the medium and marvelling at how large an imaginative world can be drawn within it.

It was also somehow fitting that the films were screened out of program order, and then with complete disregard for the published program entirely. If the point was to convey a sense of the serendipitous logic of the time, then this was a successful endeavour as the brief, bashful introductions to their films by whichever filmmaker happened to be in the audience were illuminating. The technical problems and shouting out to one another in order to solve them only compounded the sense of community. Of course any scene almost by definition has its problems; mainly that of who and what it excludes. However, these filmmakers seemed to have a sincere belief in what they were doing and in the possibilities of the medium, even if it was purely to amuse their friends. In the late 90s, when everyone appears to just want to make a buck, this pursuit seems somehow noble.

The Super 8s. A retrospective of Australian Super 8 cinema, curated by Sean O'Brien; exhibition: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Nov 14, Dec 3; film screenings: Museum of Sydney, Nov 27 & 28.

dLux media|arts

innovative film, video, new media and sound arts

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Australia's internationally renowned cyber performance artist discusses his recent projects.
Includes panel discussion by prominent cultural theorists on robotics | the post-human art | bio-ethics.

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\$10 full / \$8 conc / \$6 dLux members

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commissioned by dLux media arts, a three-component program centred around and curated by Peter Callas, one of Australia's most internationally-acclaimed electronic media artists.

- Initialising History, a full-career retrospective of Peter Callas' influential work
- Peripheral Visions, specially curated program of recent international video and television art and computer animation
- An Eccentric Orbit: video art in Australia 1980 - 1994

premieres at Articulations, Festival of Perth, wednesday 10 february PICA
presented in Perth in association with PICA (Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts)
Sydney premiere in april, then tours inter/nationally; venues and dates tba

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computer animation program from the world-renowned annual digital art festival
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tuesday 16 and wednesday 17 march 5.50pm Chauvel Cinemas Paddington
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D.art 99 - call for entries

closing date friday 9 april
please refer to separate notice in this issue

for further information please contact

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dLux media arts is a member of ASCIA (Australian Screen Culture Industry Association) and SCAN (Sydney Contemporary Arts Network).

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innovative film, video, new media and sound arts

D.art 99 call for entries

D.art, dLux media arts' acclaimed annual event, is Australia's premier showcase of inter/national experimental digital film, digital video, cd-rom and computer animation art.

D.art will once again screen to capacity audiences at the prestigious Sydney Film Festival in June. The program will then tour inter/nationally.

D.art 99 will also feature a forum on topical issues in digital media art, plus other activities.

for entry forms, membership details and further information please contact

martha ansara, administrator, dLux media arts

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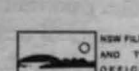
D.art conditions of entry

- entry open to all Australian and international screen artists
- works should be innovative/experimental; preferably non-narrative
- works must have been produced either entirely or primarily within the digital domain, or, in the case of video and film (Super 8, 16mm, 35mm), involve some form of digital production/manipulation
- works must have been completed within the past 12 months
- works should be a maximum of 10 minutes duration (does not apply to cd-roms)
- please submit preview tape/s in ONE of the following formats:
SP Betacam PAL only, VHS PAL or VHS NTSC; cd-rom, Mac or PC
- entry fee AUD25 per work, or free to current members of dLux media arts
- artists whose work is selected for exhibition will be paid a fee of AUD250
- closing date for entries: Friday 9 April 1999

space:lab design 0412 000 590



dLux media arts is a member of ASCIA (Australian Screen Culture Industry Association) and SCAN (Sydney Contemporary Arts Network).



space:lab design 0412 000 590

A techno-booster nano manifesto

Rowan Wilken reviews Neil Spiller's *Digital Dreams*

A popular means of grasping life online has been via the lexicon of architecture. Given the overwhelming presence of architectural metaphors in describing cyberspace, it is inevitable that architectural critics should in turn reflect on the extent to which cyberspace is transforming architecture and its relationship to the human body. *Digital Dreams* by Neil Spiller (1998) is one of a growing number of architectural texts that maps this change.

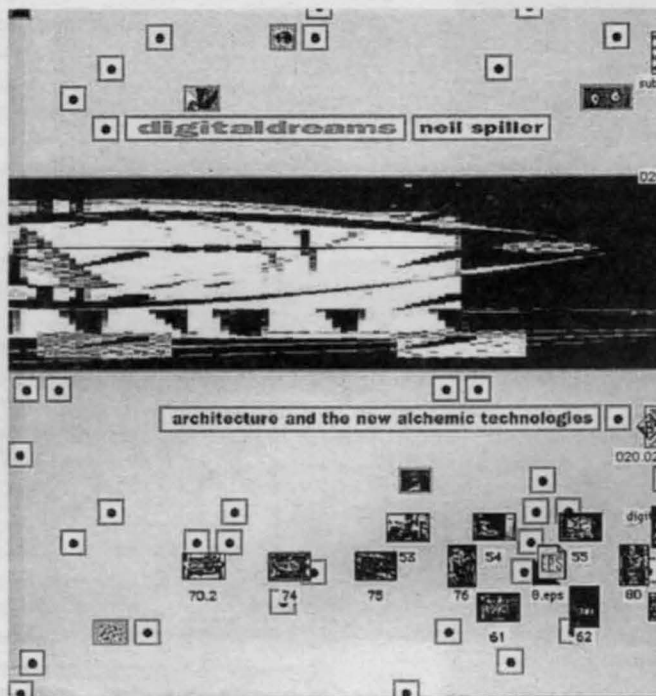
Spiller is unequivocal in his assessment of this change. The architectural profession, he argues, is facing a future in which "advanced technologies, such as cyberspace, molecular and tissue engineering, genetics and the theories of complex systems, will drastically change our environment—and therefore our architecture." However, unlike more skeptical architectural critics, such as M Christine Boyer, who regard this future as something of a crisis for architecture, Spiller embraces it as an "opening-up of a series of new spatial frontiers." Moreover, in sketching these frontiers, Spiller foresees a range of metaphysical philosophies as the keys to building a future 'online.'

Digital Dreams is Spiller's 'laboratory', a textual space in which to examine this technologised future. Yet, like so many books purporting to chart a future in which "technological advances are currently contorting space beyond all recognisable limits", *Digital Dreams* must first come to terms with the technologised space of the book.

Digital Dreams is structured in a 'dialogic' format with intersecting textual strands. The intention is a symbiotic relationship between the textual strands, with the meaning of one strand informed by a reading of the other. Unfortunately, though, for the most part the dialogic structure of the book does little in the way of "blurring the conceptual boundary between the two texts", as is the stated intention. Even the overlaid titles sometimes read like naff Gen-X anti-advertising slogans—"Meaning in architecture is dead."

The images that accompany the text are more successful. While primarily architectural in content, stylistically these images approximate digitally created Manga illustrations. This correlation is interesting in the light of Steven Johnson's observation that computer games (and here one can add Anime) are where the future of virtual reality technologies are located. Whether or not this affiliation was a conscious design choice, the result is suggestive of Spiller's greater comic book vision—the convergence of the technological and the biological in a future world, however absurd this vision might be ("nanotechnology will be able to produce Spidey and the Hulk for real").

Like the formal aspects of the book, the content of *Digital Dreams* offers the reader a similarly mixed bag. As a commentary on future challenges to existing tenets of architectural theory and practice, *Digital Dreams* offers much that is thought provoking and fresh. For example, Spiller claims that the architect's ability to "morph, mutate and hybridise" three-dimensional representational images in the 'cyberspace' of computer software



renders obsolete the 'form follows function' dictum of architecture.

A second, equally charged suggestion is that emergent spatial environments (and architectures) will ultimately explode the classical notion of the Vitruvian ideal of the body. "Architecture as we know it is to a large extent influenced by the scale of our bodies," he writes. "In the future this scale will not remain consistent."

While the challenges faced by architecture in a technologised future are ostensibly the topic of the book (and one that, for the most part, is competently handled), the real theme is actually the technologised future itself. *Digital Dreams* is in equal parts a prediction of the manifold and untold ways in which 'advanced technologies' will transform the future, and a celebration of these changes. Unfortunately, however, it is as a soothsayer of a technologised, cyberspatial future that Spiller is at his least convincing. Spiller's position on spirituality and cyberspace is a revealing example.

It is a curious irony of the computer age—an age closely aligned with postmodern philosophies that blithely proclaim the 'death of (Enlightenment) God'—that so much attention should be paid to defining some sort of metaphysical, or spiritual dimension to cyberspace. Much recent work explicitly examines this, including critiques by Barry Sherman and Phil Judkins, Michael Heim, David Whittle, Douglas Rushkoff, and the more traditional Douglas Groothuis. Add to these Spiller's *Digital Dreams*.

The (non)place of traditional, Western religion in a post-human digital future forms a leitmotif in *Digital Dreams*. "As the body changes, so will religion", Spiller claims. In rejecting traditional, organised Western religion, Spiller (after Rushkoff) suggests that the best (spiritual) guide to cyberspace is nevertheless one who is fully immersed in some sort of transcendental aesthetic. Unfortunately, however, all that Spiller can offer as a religious alternative amounts to little more than a cobbled-together amalgam of voodoo, shamanistic teaching, Aboriginal Dreamtime mythology, and alchemy. As a paradigm for a new metaphysics (read religion) of cyberspace, it is ill conceived and unconvincing—little more than a

high-gloss, repackaged form of pop religious pluralism. For a new and uniquely 'cyberspatial' religion, we are still waiting.

Moreover, Spiller merely pays lip service to the aforementioned philosophies. The true religion of *Digital Dreams* is Spiller's unabashed 'techno-boosterism' (to borrow Steven Johnson's phrase). And, if techno-boosterism is the religion, then nanotechnology is the church, Eric Drexler the prophet, and Drexler's Engines of Creation the bible through which Spiller divines the future. Spiller believes that when it comes to the future of architecture and humanity "Nano holds the key."

Indeed, the second half of *Digital Dreams* reads like a veritable nano manifesto in which Spiller extols the virtues of nanotechnology for shaping the future. "We are on the cusp of the Nanolithic Age: at the beginning of Nanotime." The transformative potential of this technology reaches its apotheosis in the end-time—what Spiller terms the Protoplasmic Age, a Promethean vision: "when virtual reality becomes real, the liberation of the bit is complete."

Spiller's 'digital dreams' openly embrace the possibility of a post-human, cyborgian future—even to the point of describing those who balk at some advances in surgery and robotics as 'flesh chauvinists' and 'flesh Luddites.' Needless to say, according to Spiller such a post-human future will only be possible if we are prepared to participate in "visceral escapology"—escape from the prison of the flesh.

Digital Dreams is not short on dogma or polemic. While certain minor qualifications are made, the fiercely techno-boosterist line that is pushed in *Digital Dreams* leaves little room for critical evaluation or circumspection; it is this lack of critical distance that is the book's main weakness. As an architectural text, *Digital Dreams* offers much; as a blueprint for the future, it leaves a lot to be desired.

Neil Spiller, *Digital Dreams: architecture and the new alchemic technologies*, Ellipsis, London, 1998

Rowan Wilken is a Masters student and sessional lecturer and tutor at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne.



Andrew Nelson, *And Or as Box*

And Or as Box

is the second exhibition at Silicon Pulp, Australia's first fine art gallery devoted exclusively to animation art located in Stanmore, in the inner west of Sydney. Opening on February 16 the exhibition features works by Melbourne multimedia artist Andrew Nelson, including a series of digital prints on canvas and an interactive ("Digital Video Well"), as well as an installation piece. All 3 elements combine to form aspects of each other reflected in the interactive animation

sequences contained in the DV well. An artist with a keen interest in pushing the frontiers of digital media and interactive design, Andrew Nelson believes "Interactive digital training should demonstrate a creativity and ease of use that belies its complexity, thereby placing the true power of information technologies at the fingertips of the user."

Directors Jan Begg and Steve Lucas have big plans for Silicon Pulp. This year's exhibition program features animation art in all its forms—from traditional drawings and hand painted cels through to work like Andrew Nelson's. The gallery also collects, documents and restores material from the design and production process and exhibits and offers artwork for sale to collectors worldwide. Forthcoming exhibitions will showcase contemporary works from individual artists and independent commercial studios as well as major studio productions. Says Lucas "This is not about nostalgia or memorabilia. This is to do with a long neglected and overlooked art form. We want to establish its legitimacy. Our policy will be to show no prejudice, and to focus on the quality and diversity of this wonderful field of art."

Following *And Or as Box* which runs throughout March, in April *Toxic Vengeance* exhibits some of the 1500 woodblock prints from Michael Hill's *Toxic Fish* and work from Wendy Chandler's 1998 AFI Award winning animation *Vengeance*. In May, screenings at The Globe Cinema of Bruce Petty's new film, *Money*, and Jill Carter-Hansen's *Songs of the Immigrant Bride*, will coincide with the exhibition of paintings and images from both films at the gallery.

Silicon Pulp Animation Gallery, 176 Parramatta Road, Stanmore
Tel/Fax 02 95609176 anigal@siliconpulp.com.au. Website: www.siliconpulp.com.au

Achieving madness

Edward Scheer reviews a new book about a classic film: *Performance*

Colin McCabe opens his account of *Performance* with an anecdote about how knocked out he was by his first viewing of it "the weekend it opened in London in January 1971." He has never recovered and this is both the strength and the weakness of his account of the film. It is inclined to hyperbole: "the greatest British film ever made", and some unfortunately trippy purple prose: "By the time their conversation is finished the lawyer is a man working on autopilot shocked right out of his social existence by the naked violence which Chas embodies." This is also the source of the strength of this volume. It is a passionate and extreme defence of an extreme film which set out not to explore but to embody the excesses of London circa 1968, suffused in post-imperial disillusionment and torpor on the one hand, and thrown into chaos by the vigour of youth culture and the new multiracial society on the other.

Social formations and individual behaviours which had been impossible previously, came into being throughout the 60s and emerged starkly at the end of the decade. The film, made by maverick writer-directors Donald Cammell and Nicolas Roeg for a Warner Bros which was also in transition at the time, doesn't 'capture' any of this; it re-releases it and serves to accelerate the process. In this sense the film is in every sense a performance and it is this aspect, its

performing of a time in or at the end of a particular history of English life and culture, that McCabe is so sensitive to in his BFI Classic. At the end there is no question that this is a landmark film.

On the way McCabe takes us through the characters and experiences of the film's own performative moment, the legendary shoot itself. The image we get of the world of the Krays and the Stones amounts to something like a psychedelic 'London Open City.' The casting of Mick Jagger as Turner the rock star was necessary in order to get the thing made but some other casting decisions were even more colourful. Prominent East End identity Johnny Shannon as Harry Flowers



and lifelong crim John Bindon as Moody gave the film genuine street cred as did the connection with dialogue coach and technical advisor David Litvinoff, a business associate of Reggie and Ronnie Kray. For McCabe this approach was designed to authenticate the action of the film in the manner of Artaud, "an indirect influence on both directors."

It's hard not to view the new British film *Lock, Stock & Two Smoking Barrels* as a pale reflection of this, particularly in the character of Barry the Baptist as played by Lenny Maclean, undefeated in over 1000 bare knuckle fights and a truly scary hardman from the East End (and the subject of a forthcoming biopic with the title *The Guv'n'r*). The differences between these 2 films are many but could be centred on the treatment of violence, slackly portrayed in the latter, but in *Performance* the way into the heart of the film. Chas, played by James Fox, is described as a "performer" due to his abilities as a headkicker. As he shoots Joey Maddocks in an early scene he says "I am a bullet" emphasising Cammell's description of him in a draft of the script as something out of Genet's *The Thief's Journal*: "Genet takes for granted the essence of Chas; which is, not to be violent, but to be violence." McCabe shows that this is indicative of the kind of thinking which gave rise to the film and which explains its subject.

Fox, like McCabe, was never the same after his encounter with this film, particularly his training for the role in the sickeningly violent world of the Krays and their associates. He disappeared from films for 2 decades after shooting was



Nicholas Roeg's *Performance*

completed. But he has some of the most memorable lines including one bit of dialogue directed at Turner (Jagger): "Comical little geezer, you'll look funny when you're fifty." He didn't know how funny. By way of explanation, Nic Roeg said recently to the critic Ian Penman, who has also hailed *Performance* as a modern classic, "How mistaken we are about everybody's identity." Turner puts it another way, "The only performance that makes it, that really makes it, that makes it all the way, is the one that achieves madness. Right? You got it? You wiv' me?" In this context, McCabe's restraint should be seen as exemplary.

Colin McCabe, *Performance*, BFI Classics, BFI London, 1998, Australian distributor Peribo, rrp \$26.95

Labyrinth of peep shows

Caroline Farmer tastes *Forgotten Fruit*

Forgotten Fruit is the first exhibited work in a project that has been evolving for at least a decade. Artist/filmmakers Margaret Dodd and Jennifer Hughes began collecting newspaper clippings in 1986 when the intention to close the Adelaide Fruit and Produce Exchange and the East End Markets first became public. The markets closed in September 1988. Over the final 2 days and nights of its operation, the artists began to put together their own visual archive of the market. Over the next 10 years they continued to document on video the demolition and excavation of the east end of Rundle Street, and its redevelopment into the up-market housing, shopping and restaurant precinct it has now become.

To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the closing of the market, the artists installed a maze of empty fruit and vegetable boxes in the old stable, the only part of the original East End Market to remain intact. Within the stacks of cardboard boxes they placed 12 video monitors bearing images, testimonies and dreamlike sequences (several hours of footage edited into 50 short films) of the intervening decade. The monitors could be viewed from various angles through the hand and ventilation holes in the boxes, creating a labyrinth of peep shows. The displacement of lived experience into a kaleidoscope of memories and fictions, distanced by time, is made containable but unstable.

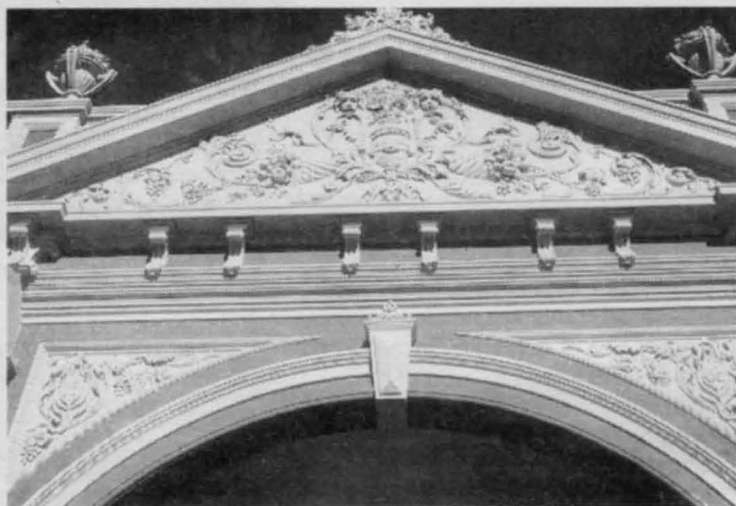
The first monitor encountered on entering the space took the viewer back to the precolonial use of the land. In the story of Invaritji (the last surviving full blood member of the Kaurna people) whose great grandfather had been present at the first meal prepared by white settlers for elders of the local tribes, the viewer was introduced to several themes that recurred throughout the installation. The significance of food in the assertion of a culture. The link between food and the organisation of land. The relationship between food and architecture, between the law and the organisation of space and the demarcation of territories. And the way that food can be a link between the known and the forgotten. Inherent in much of the work was a sense of grief for the loss of those traces of history that were written on the environment, whether natural—the foods lost to the Indigenous people—or architectural—dents worn into the floor by horses' hooves, the amber-tinted light of sun shining through old rusted skylights, the mews of cottages revealed by archeologists in the initial stages of demolition and filled in by developers—things which cannot be re-presented.

Under a skylight, in a central open area of the installation, was an altar-like structure on which a computer had been placed which showed close-up images of the 2 elaborately decorated gables above the main gates to the market. The detail

above the southern gate referred to the Christian beliefs of the market founders, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof", while above the eastern gate, images of gargoyles clenching cornucopia between their fangs appeared to make reference to more ancient beliefs.

This evocation of a temple was intended to refer to the influence on the installation of ancient Greek and Roman practices that used architecture (temples, houses, official structures) in the development of artificial memory systems. Through the imaginary attachment of particular ideas or elements of a story to specific images or simulacra located in particular spaces, a complex system of mnemonic imagery was built up to assist the rhetorician with the learning of complex stories or speeches (the artists point to the detailed exploration of the development of this practice in Frances Yates' *The Art of Memory*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1966).

Influenced by this idea, the stacks of boxes were arranged to recreate the layout of the actual markets, the monitors bearing images and stories that related to



Margaret Dodd & Jennifer Hughes, video installation, *Forbidden Fruit* 1998

the particular location in the market represented by their position. In this way the installation became like a physical representation of such a memory system.

Collaboration in creative endeavours is an interesting process, familiar to filmmakers but often fraught with anxieties and conflicts when 2 creative personalities with strong visions attempt a single outcome. In this sense the project was a successful first step on the way to developing the intended end point, a feature film that will incorporate the documentation of lived experience into a fictional structure exploring the imaginings induced in the 2 artists by changes to an environment that held deep significance for them both.

Forgotten Fruit, artists Margaret Dodd and Jennifer Hughes, the old stable, Stag Lane, Adelaide, Sept 30 - Oct 11, 1998

Review

Die, Trekkie, die

Phil 'unenlightened' Brophy disputes digital at Ian Haig's *Web Devolution*

No matter how hard one tries to ridicule multimedia, interactivity and online presence, there are trillions of real estate agents, CompSci students, *Star Trek* fans, cyberpunks, digital artists and *WIRED* subscribers to whom such sarcastic folly falls on deaf ears. To the list of Christians, parents and junkies, we now must add 'digitalists' as yet another sub-species of rabid, compulsive fundamentalists whose enlightened state is "I just don't understand." Like, if I don't believe in God, how can I understand Christianity? If I haven't had a kid, how can I really speak about social concern? If I haven't taken smack, how can I say it's bad?

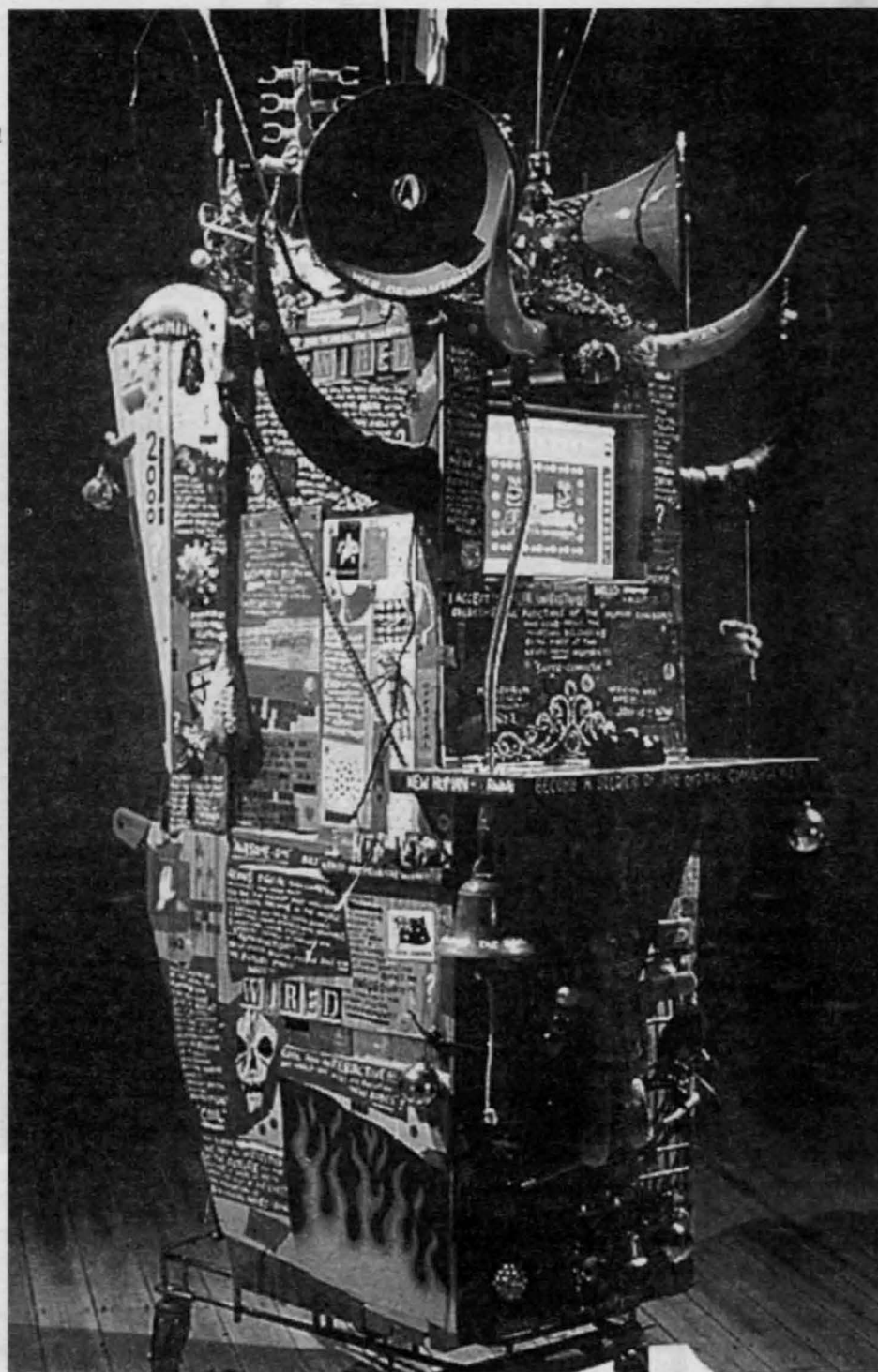
Ian Haig's *Web Devolution*—subtitled a "Digital Evangelist Web Cult Project"—firmly and deftly targets this incredulous mania of belief which has caused otherwise rational persons to make the most outrageous, extravagant and embarrassing claims for 'new technologies.' Presented as an installation, *Web Devolution* set itself up as a crackpot media station positioned in the centre of the gallery. Its ugly vertical assemblage resembled a mutation between a monstrously customised ghetto-blast, a Santiero altar, a Christian zealot's placard and a homeless person's commandeered shopping trolley. Cheap loudspeakers played a barrage of digitally processed noise (expertly crafted by electroacoustic composer Philip Samartzis) which served to intensify the effect of the station being a broadcast beacon desperately drawing all toward its higher cause of cyberbabble. Festooned with graffitied slogans and scraps of logo images, this was less an art object offered to further creativity in new technologies and more a piece of junk vomited forth from the overproduction of crappy new media art.

The actual online project lay buried in a maze of frantically flashing links displayed on a monitor nestled amongst this noisy pile of garbage. Once online, one truly gets lost in a world of sloganeering that evokes the balderdash of everyone from Negroponte to Stelarc to Leary to Lucas. The targets are obvious—*Star Wars*, *Heaven's Gate*,

Mastercard, Yahoo—but it truly is fun to know that when you click on a link labelled "Chewbacca" that right there is the punch line. You either get it or you don't. Similar dumb jokes are embedded in the visual/iconic/linguistic hyper-narrative of the project: links go nowhere, images are grunge-res, mystical passwords are void, pull down menus give absurd options, animated GIFs flash their nothingness. All these non-sequitur pathways constitute a colon of digital Babel which is less concerned with contemplating the higher states of consciousness achieved by online/interactive exchange and more intent on reflecting the deluded aimlessness so typical of web navigation. Referencing Devo's theory of devolution and its sardonic reflection of cultural exchange, *Web Devolution* celebrates the retrogressive puerility which lies at the heart of the nerdy ponderousness we call 'being digital.'

But don't miss the point here. Like anyone who has looked realistically at the digital and/or online technologies we have used for at least 8 years (and sound people have the jump on all you eyeballers), Haig is not a Neo-Luddite. Technology is all around us. Plumbing, road maintenance and air travel are complex marvels of human ingenuity and chaotic organisation—but I ain't signing up for a 3-day conference on radical re-inventions of S-bends. Whereas so much New Media Art quite pathetically imports some 'heavy concept' via a few scanned images and hypertext links with hot buttons (take your pick of 'hot topics': surveillance, the body, medical science, glitches, crash, viruses, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, the city, consumerism, corporate control, ecology, etc), *Web Devolution* astutely probes the hysterical and frighteningly uncritical support of the most banal effects of new technologies.

Ian Haig, *Web Devolution*, game theory, *Experimenta*, Span Galleries, Melbourne, July 6 - 18, 1998



Ian Haig, *Web Devolution* 1998

Hypercompetition for beginners

RT previews interaction at The Performance Space

If you worry that attending performances might mean cutting back on your fitness schedule, your worries are over.

For two nights only (Friday and Saturday March 12-13) at The Performance Space the Austrian group TIME'S UP (www.timesup.org) will present its unique machines, devices and instruments based on absurd fitness bicycles and video arcade games, inviting the audience to carry out a variety of experiments based on perception and control. These devices form part of a hypercompetitive fitness studio developed at the TIME'S UP laboratories in Europe, simultaneously offering the client Hypercompetitive Edutainment and collecting data of the responses of various population groups to the situations presented.

The fitness studio cross-field research station has been successfully deployed over the past few years in Linz, Munich, Paris, Rotterdam and Ljubljana where experimental observations have been collected. Investigations in the southern hemisphere will involve (amongst other experiments) the effects of contrary rotation and collaborative pedalling.

TIME'S UP was founded by Tim Boykett, an Australian artist (wouldn't you know it) now resident in Linz, and Austrian artist Just Merritt to create, "...a modest offering for the improvement of the theatre of everyday life." Tina Auer joined the group in 1997 interested in their crucial work: "...not the pure experiment for art's sake, but an urge to find out the answers to the questions about the human species that haven't even been properly asked yet."

The group consists of artists, mathematicians, pseudoscientists, smiths and smitheries who work from a laboratory in Linz, Austria. Their common goal "...a certain lack of understanding for the usual careers of getting a job, raising kids and washing cars, mixed in with a blend of fascination for advancing one's own capabilities, be it in the techno nerd or the popular science field."

The TIME'S UP visit to Australia is part of BIOMACHINES, a collaborative project developed by The Performance Space and Casula Powerhouse. Curated by Tim Boykett, David Cranswick and Julianne Pierce.

TIME'S UP, *The Performance Space*, March 12 - 13; information and bookings tel 02 9698 7235



Ian Haig, *Web Devolution* 1998

Reviews

The Sugar Factory
written & directed by Robert Carter
distributor Globe Film Co
February release

Thud. Thud. Thud. Black and white. Means flashback. Thud. Memories. Thud. Boy breaking stones in cellar. Thud. Arguments upstairs. Thud. Cut to colour.

The Sugar Factory opens with a suggestion of a whimsical *Ferris Bueller* foray into too-familiar territory. Coming of age. Erections in class. Boyzone adventure. Harris Berne (Matt Day), a 17 year old with a bad case of the Mrs Robinsons, goes looking for love. In all the wrong places.

Set in some strange middle class suburban Australian 50s time warp where mums are mums and dads are dads and secrets hang in wardrobes and people mow each other's lawns and girls *live* to be married (just like Muriel. And Lizzie. Can we have an Oz comedy without a wedding?), *The Sugar Factory* is Tennessee Williams without the tension. The trouble is, the film is contemporary. (Harris mentions "techno" at one point although Peter Best's score is music box. You know, when the little girl opens the box and the plastic ballerina starts spinning around.)

The strange (and best) thing about *The Sugar Factory* is its sudden lapses into sheer hell: babysitting, Harris veges on the couch watching music videos; he has no sense of time and neither do we. A minute? An hour? A sense of doom as he begins a macabre game of hide and seek with 2 year old Clementine (Eliza O'Donoghue) and 6 year old Julius (Eliot Paton), a game frozen in time, for him and you. When he finds his long-lost sister, she plays her own child/adult games, interpreting his narrative through the only language she understands. She can be the schoolgirl he desires: You want me to be the older sister, she says resignedly, "I knew it". Haunted by small girls as apparitions, Harris is punished for *not* looking, for not seeking, for not playing the game...

Harris carries a bolt for comfort. He becomes in the institution, the "nut with the bolt". It helps him hear what adults are saying, make a connection with the outside world. A tenuous link to sanity. Cut to black and white. Flashback. Memories. Thud. Thud. Thud. Kirsten Krauth

Men With Guns
written & directed by John Sayles
distributor Palace Films
February release

I didn't know jackshit about John Sayles or what to expect from *Men With Guns*. But *tabula rasa* don't stay blank for long when handed media kits. Reading Sayles' CV while waiting for the screening, it was clear he was a celebrated independent American filmmaker. Director of *Passion Fish*, *The Secret of Roan Inish* and *Lone Star*. None of which I've seen. He was made meaningful to me as the guy who wrote the screenplay for *Clan of the Cave Bear* (with Darryl Hannah as a blonde Xena), director of *Lianna* (a 70s style lesbian coming out story), *Brother From Another Planet* (cult movie about a black alien in a potplant in New York) and numerous Bruce Springsteen videos. All of which I'd hired from Wagga video stores in the early 80s. Personal histories will always collude and coalesce with any information.



Kevin Spacey and Anna Paquin, *Hurly Burly*

I wasn't sure if this ad hoc genealogy of mine was relevant, as *Men With Guns* had all the signifiers of cultural and political credibility. It is a story set in Latin America which looks at the effects of civil war in remote Indian villages, and the journey of a doctor from the city as he traverses the blindspots of his own complicity. Dr Fuentes' usual patients are rich Spanish-speaking women—"My kidneys are bothering me when I drink red wine. The more expensive the wine the sharper the pain." As if he intuitively knows that there must be more to malady, he packs his patrician's bag and sets off for the remote rural villages to find the 7 students he trained to take part in an Indigenous health program.

Like a silver haired Johnny Depp in a landcruiser, the doctor's journey is one of a 'dead man.' Ignorant of his country's political turmoil, his illusions are stripped away as he uncovers the fate of his students. One is selling drugs on the black market. In the next village he finds that the intern has been executed and his medical instruments have been co-opted as tools of torture. In another village the doctor's surgery has become a hairdressing salon, as a less problematic use is found for stainless steel scissors.

The movie looks at the impasse between broad humanitarian principles and regional contexts. It is most interesting not in its rather straight narrative, but in its examination of metaphors of medicine, violence and the culturally specific roles of doctors and priests. Keri Glastonbury

Redball
written & directed by Jon Hewitt
distributor Palace Films
March release

A load of old cop
cop cop cop cop cop cop cop lotsa cops fightin
drinkin smokin shoutin fartin swearin fukkity fuk
fukin cops as lads cops as crims cops as dogs cops
as fresh-faced doe-eyed cops who are about to realise
that the Law is not simply blind and thoughtless but
positively vindictive, nasty, cruel...and it's been that
way now for longer than the medium cares to
remember...cops beatin suspects poppin pills
shootin crims turnin a blind eye a bunch of really bad
lootens workin homicide (it's murder) cops gettin
emotional and losin it cops gettin analysed cops
turnin in their badge goin it alone...cops cops cops
cops coppity cop cop cops sloppin around in the
sleazy street slang chickenhawk floater redball lovin
the lingo the authentic argot of copspeak which tells
us that these are actors playin cops playin actors
playin cops sayin things like we nailed that bastard
and lovin it bein caught on video handheld grainy cop
footage tv reality cops movieworld cops low budget
trashy shock cops in cop shocker and yet and
yet...loveable cops because predictable cops with
nothin new to say cops friendly familiar line-worn
cops doin the things we expect and desire of cops
havin lost the plot but clingin to the character until
finally there's a bit of detectin and it's cop against cop
runnin cops guns pointin cop to cop just like reservoir
cops and it's hard to believe that anybody thought
they could still get away with it. SE

Simon Enticknap is a Sydney-based writer whose endless online road novel, Dead Real, can be found at www.deadreal.com.au



Redball

Hurly Burly
director Anthony Drazan
screenplay by David Rabe from
his stage play
A New Vision Release
February release

This is the most talkative, most engrossing Hollywood movie I've heard in years, with all the edginess and humour and depths of a Cassavetes and showing up the slightness of Cassavetes jr's entertaining and quirky *She's So Lovely*. Not surprisingly, it's come from a stage play, David Rabe's adaptation of his own, which Sean Penn starred in at the Westwood Playhouse in 1988 under the playwright's direction. Mike Nichols (one of the executive producers of the movie) subsequently directed the play on Broadway with a young Kevin Spacey understudying all the roles—until Ron Silver got another job and Spacey had a long stint as Mickey, the helpless ironist he gently plays to perfection in the film. Drazan's direction, Rabe's adaptation, Gu Chang Wei's cinematography and the actors' understanding of the differences between screen and stage acting keep *Hurly Burly* well clear of the dangers of stage-to-screen in this account of the neurotic, closed world of casting agents, their narrow circle of friends, cocaine and mobile phones. Key scenes, almost first and

last in the film, display hilariously (and sadly as communication cracks and crumbles) sustained, brilliantly edited conversations—face to face, on their mobiles, in their separate cars, in the office—between Penn and Spacey. These people dare not stop speaking...but when the speaking stops...*Hurly Burly* is about the end of relationships, between men and women, but particularly between men. While the men attempt to communicate with women (Penn and Robin Penn Wright engage in a comic, post-coital, cliché-ridden struggle to connect) or talk about them to each other (especially Chaz Palminteri's dangerous not-too-bright Phil, an unemployed 'background actor'), it's men's love for each other for which they have no vocabulary. It's this failure that drives them collectively towards escalating misogyny and Phil, whose naive metaphysical leanings the others mock brutally, to tragedy. Ironically, it's the cocaine addled, love-loser Eddie (Penn), who understands so little of himself but sees what has happened to Phil. The women's roles are significant. They define and redefine our attitude to the men, but they also stand on their own. Robin Penn Wright plays Eddie's girlfriend Darlene moving from indifferent lover to someone strong enough to know what she's gotten into; Meg Ryan is a sexually casual friend, an art dancer with balloons, whom the men exploit all too easily but knows more than they suspect; and Anna Paquin is a 16 year old street kid who slips into the lives of the men (delivered by Gary Shandling, a creepy producer, as "a care package"), and their beds, initially someone else to exploit but finally someone who has to be accepted. *Hurly Burly* is excellent cinema, its narrative nervy and unpredictable, the performances complex (and often funny), the writing exquisite and tightly thematic, the view through Gu Chang Wei's camera a closed Malibu cosmos. As their relationship fails at the film's end, Penn and Penn Wright step out of their car on an LA hillside against a sudden night sky: the world opens up vertiginously.

Keith Gallasch

Moving and surviving

Erin Brannigan interviews *antistatic* guest Lisa Nelson by email

EB *Through your experience travelling and collaborating with people around the world, how do your experiences in Australia differ? In your Writings On Dance article (Issue #14), you talk about travel as an opportunity to test the flexibility of your perception. What "new muscles" of perception did you have to flex here?*

LN My work explores how we use our senses, how we have built our survival skills, how these habits influence and underlie our movement, our dancing, our appetite for moving, for being seen dancing, and how we develop our opinions, what we like to see and do, how we compose our realities. In the exotic (to me) dance subcultures that I've had the good fortune to share this questioning with, this dialogue has been met with enthusiasm. I'm always fascinated when there appears to be a consensus of desire or opinion in a temporary, incidental group of dancers.

For the most part I dare not make comparisons, for each gathering is so context-laden. Yet I can't help but notice...One thought I had on my return trips to Australia was how a people who perceive themselves as living in a relatively isolated culture make a lot out of a little. I've run into that cultural self-image in various parts of the world, in Hungary and East Germany shortly after the walls came down, in the Midwest and rural US, in Argentina and mainland China just last year.

We can imagine that 'having little' can lead to a habit of mining a deep mine, going way behind or beyond the surface of things. And it can provide a vast, blank canvas for the imagination. I found that willingness to dig and the facility to imagine striking in the students I worked with in Australia each time, in 1985, in 93, and 97. This was a great pleasure. As was speaking English to English speakers for a change.

EB *I'm particularly interested in your thoughts on performance—the engagement between performer and audience. How did you feel this engagement differed, if at all, in Australia?*

LN My visits have been very short, and until last year I'd had little exposure to performance work down under, other than

the work of Russell Dumas who I first met in Europe in the early 80s. I have seen his work on 3 continents and think of him, most certainly, as a dance artist with a thoroughly international perspective. I was curious, in 1997, to see how the perceptual flexibility and imagination I enjoyed so much in the workshops would manifest in performance, and I got my chance during the Festival of the Dreaming and Sidetrack's Contemporary Performance Week in 1997. However, in this first exposure, I found it hard to look beyond my own familiar Western references and sources—which is not a surprise—but I am curious to see more...to begin to perceive the character, direction and purpose of Australian dance and audience behaviour in relation to its own history.

EB *We recently had a conference in Melbourne where the hegemony of ballet in this country was discussed—a notion that makes Writings on Dance and antistatic rare public forums for discussing 'alternative' dance practices in Australia. Did you have any sense of this situation during your visits here?*

LN A quick note about dance thinking and support for the arts: I've been co-editing and publishing an alternative dance journal, *Contact Quarterly*, out of the US for 22 years now. The writings all come from dancers and movement artists themselves, and except for a very few years, the readership is the sole support for the magazine. The labour for producing it has almost been entirely volunteer and it seems to sustain itself by the unflagging need for dialogue outside of the institutions.

I always have my eye out for writings by dancers and have been reading *Writings on Dance* (WOD) probably since the first issues when one of its editors, dancer Libby Dempster, whom I met in the mid 70s in England, sent me one. I've found it to be a remarkable archive of analysis of the new dance practices which have been, and continue to be, extremely marginal, and at the same time significantly influential to the mainstream Western dance over the last 20 years or so. In WOD, it has struck me, that often (not always) the source or tools of analysis are semiotics and feminist criticism, both academic approaches and somehow a



Lisa Nelson

Giovane Aguiar

very narrow base when applied to dance. I often wondered why this emphasis and yearned for more personal and wider sources in this elegant publication. I gathered on my last visit how much dance comes out of the university system in Australia, and that dancers learn to validate their work based on these systems of analysis. I imagine, somehow, this dominant way of thinking enters the work they make. Yet there is also something that has come through WOD's effort to put dance in print that is helping to create a body of thought and stimulate the field beyond the continent of Australia.

I read *RealTime* for the first time on my last visit and noticed a similar language in much of the writing, however I was thrilled by the range of voices and sheer volume of activity and desire to be heard. These are precious publications, evidence of passion, discipline,

self-criticism, and practice "in the face of..." It seems that personal voices and developments in dance, theatre and performance in the West have demonstrably not developed through institutionalised training and support.

Young artists usually have enough fuel to push through lack of support. The tragedy comes when artists have to quit before developing into maturity, leaving few models, few inspirations, and all that implies for the culture. We try to survive the same stupidity in the US.

antistatic

The biennial antistatic dance festival will be held March 24-April 11 at The Performance Space and is curated this year by Sue-ellen Kohler, Ros Crisp and Zane Trow.

antistatic 99 aims to foster critical debate and enquiry into contemporary dance practice in Australia. In particular it looks at differences between practices and the values that underpin them. What kinds of work do dancers and choreographers want to make and why? And what is the cultural, historical and international context of their work?

Artists presenting work at the event include Trotman & Morish, Helen Herbertson, Jude Walton, Rose Warby, Alan Schacher, Rosalind Crisp, DeQuincy/Lynch, Jeff Stein, Tony Yap, Yumi Umiumare, Susie Fraser, Julie Humphreys and Helen Clarke-Lapin. International guest artists Jennifer Monson, Ishmael Houston-Jones and Lisa Nelson will all present workshops and performances. *The Oaks Cafe/Cassandra's Dance*, a new work by Russell Dumas' Dance Exchange kicks off the festival at The Studio, Sydney Opera House.

Forum talks will be presented by artists, writers and academics including Sally Gardiner, Susan Leigh Foster, Julie-Anne Long and Virginia Baxter, Anne Thompson, Eleanor Brickhill. There are also installations and screenings from Margie Medlin, Adrienne Doig, Tracie Mitchell and others.

Enquiries: The Performance Space 02 9698 7235

It was another strange Canberra summer's evening. The sun was hanging low in the sky and there was a strong cooling wind as we drove along the lane to the Old Canberra Brickworks. We were given a map and a torch for our journey, and so set off to experience *Spices*—the latest project for Clare Dyson and Rachel Jennings. It began with sustained stillness. Five individuals sat, backs to us, on an old pergola-like structure; their visual backdrop the trees and their aural backdrop the rustling leaves and bird calls prompted by the setting sun. Beneath them: still water and a line of brick stepping stones through the pool. When movement began, it was slow and gentle—rolling, torsos hanging over the edge, a lifting of legs. Then one of the more resonant motifs of the work—the kicking and dropping of stones into the pool below. From here, the work heightened our awareness of the workings of our senses and the relationship between sense and memory. We later moved through a brick passageway and passed by a series of isolated vignettes: a representation of lust and desire, with a blindfolded woman caressed and whispered to by 2 others; a woman sucking from passionfruit, spitting the luscious flesh onto her thigh and then smearing it over her skin. It is the communication between artist and audience that is so well-developed in *Spices*. The use of water and fire, the fresh smells of passionfruit and lemons, and the placement of voice and song, light and darkness. Our journey is a completely sensory one. It is Dyson and Jennings' keen awareness of the power of detail through these elements that connects with their audience. With its combination of superb design by Jennings—so well-placed in this setting—and Dyson's interrogation of movement and gesture, *Spices* has a deeper, more personal connection. This is soul food.

Julia Postle

Spices, created and directed by Clare Dyson and Rachel Jennings, a choreographic fellowship with the Choreographic Centre, old Canberra Brickworks, Yarralumla, Dec 9 - 13, 15 - 17

online at www.spices.effect.net.au



Megan Millband, *Spices*

Mark Gordon

Dancing otherwise

Philipa Rothfield on experiencing the teachings and works of Deborah Hay

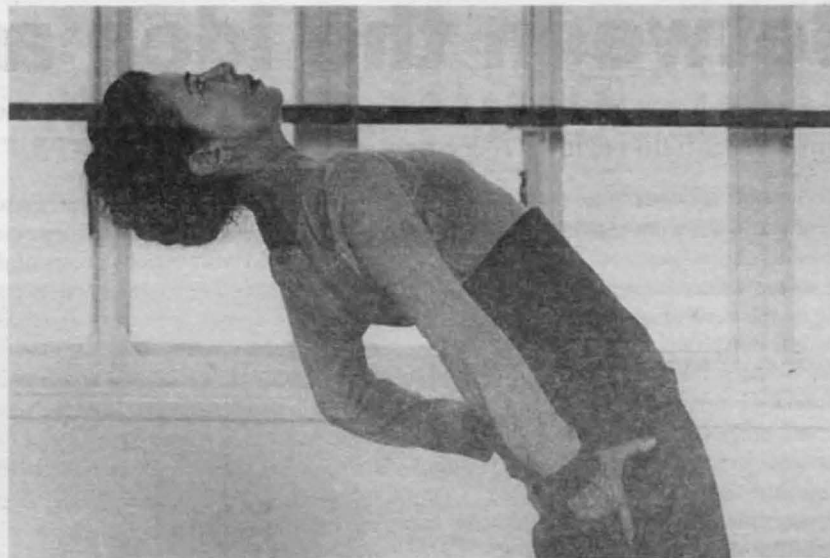
There are those who have seen Deborah Hay perform and wondered why others in the audience seem to be getting something they do not. A recent review of Hay's solo, *O; The Other Side of O*, noted that "Australia's numerous devotees appreciate her ability to be absolutely present in a theatrical moment" (Kim Dunphy, *The Age*, December 8, 1998). Even though I would count myself as one of these "numerous devotees", I do understand why her work leaves some people unmoved. I have, at times, been unmoved. It has to do with looking, how one looks, and what one looks for. We watchers of the dance are used to the corporeal delights of kinetic display. Dance is, more or less, a kind of physical action, a nuanced flow of bodies in movement. What, then, are we to make of a performance which offers so few physical tidbits to its audience?

Hay's performance work is totally stripped of dancerly display because she wants something else to shine through. That something is the bodily manifestation of an intense form of perceptual practice. Although some people might call it a play of consciousness, I think this detracts from the bodily aspect of her work. The meditational quality of her perception and the mantra-like status of her utterances should not lead one to think her work is not in and of the body. The title of Hay's forthcoming book, *My Body the Buddhist*, gives an indication of the sense in which the body is seen to be the ground and

source of her work. But it is in the context of her teaching that these matters attain clarity.

Whilst Hay is utterly committed to the experiment of her own learning, it is her teaching which has made the greater mark in the world. This is partly because of her own immersion in the practice that she tries to convey. She is not someone who knows so much as someone who tries and is willing to share in that trying. Over the years, she has worked with and on certain epithets—the body as 53 trillion cells at once perceiving; the whole body as the teacher; invite being seen; now is here is harmony. Whatever constitutes her own practice is offered to her students. In turn, they attempt to make sense of these thoughts *in action*. One of the features of her workshops is the effect of working in a group. Her community dances are often very large, and the experience of working with so many people creates a certain energy. Added to this is Hay's exhortation to observe others as if they are similarly committed to the work.

This leads me to another issue: the question of truth. Hay does not claim that her utterances are ultimate verities. Rather they are strategic puzzles which may or not be productive. This rather postmodern approach—that practice is strategic rather than representing some essence—nevertheless aims towards particular goals with rigour. It is not a case of anything goes. Rather, that which is aimed at is a quality of



Deborah Hay

Phyllis Liedeker

perceptual engagement within movement (and utterance). There is an attempt to de-centre subjectivity (imagine your body is 53 trillion cells changing all the time), to multiply the number of perspectives which may attend movement, and to be utterly present, focused and open to inspiration wherever it may come from. Of course, no one manages this all the time. There are frustrations, disappointments, at best an intermittent focus. Hay herself claims there is nothing (no-thing) to "get." Rather, we are all students of this kinaesthetic form.

That said, Deborah Hay does seem to maintain her own focus more often than not. Her dancing often inspires others, and the workshop sessions can become very charged. It is not particularly easy to keep with one's movements, not to daydream, fantasize, let alone remain open to change at any point, whether initiated from the multiple sources in the self or inspired from

beyond. Nevertheless, this is what she attempts in her solo work. No attempt is made to distract her audience from the perceptual, kinaesthetic, focal nature of the work, resonating Yvonne Rainer's "No to spectacle no to virtuosity...no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer" (*TDR*, T30). Having cleared the space of these expectations, Hay hopes to be seen dancing to another tune.

Deborah Hay Returning, *A series of workshops held in and around Melbourne, including The Art of the Solo, Zen Imagery Exercises, Conscious Community Dance and Choreographic Theatre, October - November 1998*

Philipa Rothfield has participated in Deborah Hay's workshops held in 1986, 1996 and 1998.

Barmaid rhythms

Erin Brannigan drinks in Wendy Houston's *Happy Hour* in London

Viewing a lot of dance videos while in London recently, I decided that solo dance on film was my favourite. The intimacy specific to the camera is best employed dealing with these discrete subjects, who may not have spatial relations to anything but the camera (become its very own creature). Seeing Wendy Houston perform her new show, *Maid to Drink presents Happy Hour*, first at Jackson's Lane and then at the Purcell Room at Royal Festival Hall in London, I realised that solo dance itself is the intriguing thing, with or without the camera. A spoken monologue on film or stage has words hanging in the space-between; the solo dancer, particularly the performer/choreographer, invites you in closer to where, in the best examples, the body cannot lie. By the end of the show, I had Houston's particular physicality tucked away as if we had actually spent endless nights making the most of *Happy Hour*. She had become my very own creature.

Houston had me peering through the dark, straining to close up the space in an effort to catch every nuance of her intricate dance. As has happened before, my eyeballs dried out with looking. Choosing the theme of drinking, she is able to explore a range of movement that is located beyond normal motor-sensory activity. A technically virtuosic performance, Houston recovers and plays with action from the place beyond physical control.

What is also remarkable about *Happy Hour* is that the spoken word dances as well, has the same qualities—half-formed, murmured, lost phrases and words, carefully chosen and deployed. When

Houston invites us into the piece—"what'll it be...what's your poison...?"—her eccentric barmaid gestures swing and bounce along to the rhythm set by her words. These same gestures repeated with different dialogue become, not the habits of work, but a struggle; the 'job' becoming a problem under the weight of new discordant words. At another time, the precarious joke-telling skills of the inebriated give Houston a spoken rhythm of joke fragments that accompany her hysterical poses—"no...wait...wait...wait", "this one's going to kill you", "what do you get...", "this one will make you scream." The failing, senseless joke 'bits' create a tragic pattern, an eternal parade of misplaced punchlines accompanied by desperate postures.

Like alcohol, Houston mutates from seductress to mate, from abuser to comforter, from sentimental to political. This happens as quickly as a drunk can 'turn', but it's never as simple as this either. It's always the transitory moment, the where-did-that-drink-go moment when logic dissolves and anything is possible. The improvisatory nature of the show heightens this giddy feeling. In *Happy Hour*, inebriation provides a model condition in which to move between these various states. Houston's physical mastery recreates the malleable moment between confusion and realisation. A sentimental Houston builds up her friend—"you're so lucky, you've got everything"—falling to pieces herself as she works through the list. A dance sequence with accompanying bites of conversation is repeated with reducing facility, Houston never losing control of her movement but the character losing a grip on her life.

In one of the final scenes, humanity's ambiguous relationship to alcohol is given a striking image. Houston bounces herself out of the bar—"who do I think I am", "if I knew what was good for me I'd head out that door right now", "what do I think I'm looking at?", "I'm not going to tell myself again." At the Purcell Room, this scene was stretched to the limit, as was the joke scene, the discomfiting pathos becoming painful in the way only a drunk can be.

The observational backbone and kind of realism that this brings to *Happy Hour* is shunted sideways by the sophisticated and intricate use of movement and text I've described. But, while the spoken word intrigues, it is Houston's movement that seduces. The loose, malleable body of the drunk is combined with a skilful crafting of each 'character' that creates an uncanny effect—lost and found all at once. The peculiarities of Houston's physicality carried across the work make this a journey and it's our increasing familiarity with, and investment in, this particular way of moving that takes us with her. A delicate and minimal Hawaiian dance with a gentle rocking rhythm and repeated, intricate gestures that swing softly now, unlike her rather frantic barmaid dance, is dropped into this 'bar scene', as a quiet oasis. There is also a disturbingly lonely disco dance at the periphery of a spotlight.

When Houston announces that the bar's closing and we have to leave, no-one wants to for fear of missing something. I've never felt an audience so caught in indecision. Should I stay or should I go? Maybe just one more for the road.

Maid To Drink presents *Happy Hour*, created and performed by Wendy Houston. Royal Festival Hall, London, September 28 - 29. Invitation-only performance, One Extra Dance Company, Ice Box, Sydney Jan 23.

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Between the idea and the act

Philipa Rothfield reviews risky new dance in *Bodyworks* '98

Bodyworks is Dancehouse's annual curated event, a 3-week season of works by established choreographers. The content of each season ensues from a set of choices made on the basis of applications, many of the works not yet made. As such, *Bodyworks* has the ability to take risks, and the works themselves the opportunity to achieve a range of outcomes. There are many ways to look at a work and the notion of outcome—the work as a completed entity—is only one of them. I found that some of the works this year invited a perspective more related to their sense of project than of outcome.

The Castle of Nothingness, by Zjamal Xanitha was one such work. Coming from a deep place, both personal and spiritual, this piece attempted to convey the profound nature of ritual, quest and journey. The dilemma that the piece faced was how to achieve such a goal: whether to give the audience an experience or description of such matters. Zjamal's intentions seemed to waver between these 2 poles. In experiential terms, this work tended to leave its audience behind. I don't think people actually felt they were taken on a journey. There was, however, a certain richness which came from observing Zjamal's own journey. In the end, the work was the journey of making a work, one both heartfelt and revealing.

The other piece which communicated itself most strongly in terms of its endeavour was *Negative Space* by Deanne Butterworth and Alicia Moran. The title derives from the visual arts, where negative space is the field which surrounds a drawn subject. In this work, negative space was the space not occupied by the simultaneous performance of 2 solos. The aim of the work was to somehow transform our sense of negative space in virtue of that which is performed within, as it were, positive space. An alluring idea, a great deal of effort was required of the audience in order to comply with the intentions of the piece. There was, by and large, a lack of synergy between the 2 solos, leaving the viewer to do the sums to work out the negative space. More time and direction could develop a piece yet in its infancy into something quite remarkable.

The last piece which suggested itself as a project was Rosalind Crisp and Ion Pierce's *Proximity*. Emerging from a sustained period of improvisation, *Proximity* purported to play between proximal (near)

and distal (far) forms of motion. *Proximity* consisted of a series of kinaesthetic essays which played with various points of the body compass. For example, one section involved rotations around a spinal axis, ending with a meditation upon the peripheral play of fingers. The proximal or distal character of the various body parts was partially conveyed by the dancer's facial forms. This led me to wonder whether the head itself is considered distal, away from the trunk, or proximal, a centre of movement. Our head is so central to where, how and who we are, not to mention its housing for the brain. Yet, nowhere is the entire body more a multiplicity of centres than in dance.

The Long March, by Sally Smith, juxtaposed the uniformity of a calisthenics team with the conformity and dissent of a singular body. These Foucauldian, docile bodies were both hilarious and fascinating. I found myself drawn to one member of the team who kept looking at the audience when all but she looked straight ahead. Such inadvertent non-conformity was even more intriguing than Sally's own conscious departure from the group because it challenged the apparent stability of calisthenics' universal sameness from within.

Watershed by Sue Peacock and Bill Handley was a polished, entertaining duet on and around a bed. Its most exciting moment was at the start when a film projection of Handley was superimposed upon his actual body; a virtual Doppelgänger sprung from loins made of flesh. What followed was a series of carefully crafted, beautifully timed and danced interactions. *Plots, Quartered and Suspended* was a group work (Whittington, Santos, Davey, McLeod, Papas and Corbet). This was a landscape of simultaneous performances, each interpreting "plot" in its own fashion. On a pleasant stroll around the space, between the works, moving on at will, the audience itself was given a great freedom to make choices about viewing, walking, resting and chatting. Finally, *Silent Truth*, a posthumous exhibition of the life's work of Jack Linou who died of AIDS, curated by his brother, Christos Linou. Paintings, video clips, even a notebook placed under perspex, the pages turned daily. What to make of a life lost, of the remnants of creativity, frustration and despair?

Dance works generally invite viewing



Zjamal Xanitha, *The Castle of Nothingness*

Asa Le Tourneau

somewhere towards the end of their lives. Or at least that is what the idea of the work as a product would lead us to believe. Some works, however, convey a sense of not yet being fully developed. Others look like they have changed pathways from different modes of presentation, perhaps more improvisational. On the one hand, performance is a finality, a presentation but, on the other, as a representation, it is just one facet, whether in the lifework of its maker(s) or in the more complex setting of danced culture.

Bodyworks 98: Festival of Moving Arts: O and The Other Side of O, Deborah Hay; The Castle of Nothingness, Zjamal

Xanitha; Watershed, Sue Peacock, Bill Handley with Graeme McLeod; Negative Space, Deanne Butterworth with Alicia Moran; Plots, Quartered & Suspended, Cherie Whittington, Tim Davey, Nick Papas, Shaun McLeod; The Hard March, Sally Smith; Silent Truth, Jack Linou, Christos Linou, Dancehouse, Melbourne, Nov 26 - 29, Dec 3 - 6, Dec 10 - 13. Submissions for 1999 are now being sought, deadline April 30.

Philipa Rothfield is an editor of the journal, Hysteric, Body, Medicine, Text, a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at La Trobe University and a member of Dancehouse's Committee of Management.

Kinetic alchemies

Philipa Rothfield on dance and the camera in *Dance Lumière*

You could never envisage all the camera has seen, countless images scattered at random in time and space like the fragments of a vast and ancient mosaic...you will never comprehend the totality of such a fabulous and excessive montage...

Scott McQuire, *Visions of Modernity*, Sage Publications, London, 1998.

It is hard to think of this year's *Dance Lumière* program as a totality. So different were these shorts that I started to wonder what it is that characterises the "dance film." This year's curator, Erin Brannigan, spoke briefly before the showing, delineating 2 forms of classification. One of the categories is a performance which has been filmed, a dance documentation. Many of the films in this category were reminiscent of those Royal Shakespeare Company films of

plays staged on sets. The setting is usually the original performance space, the staging the same as that for the performance. An exception to this was *Scenes in a Prison* (Jim Hughes, Graeme McLeod). This work was (re)located in a prison, admitting a plurality of perspectives upon the unrelenting nastiness committed by its "inmates." Another notable exception to the staged paradigm was *Falling* (Mahalya Middlemist and Sue-ellen Kohler) which played with the temporality of the movement, turning the work into something quite different from live performance. *Falling* comprised a sepia tinted fractal of movement, progressing as if frame-by-frame, the fluidity of movement reduced to staccato images. What I loved about this film was the space for thought created in its snail-like progress. The rest of the filmed performances—*Elegy, Body in*

Question, and *Subtle Jetlag*—were interesting because the performances looked interesting, not because of their being films.

The other espoused form of classification was the "Dance Film", that is, a film specifically made with dance. One would expect these films to offer more in terms of a cinematic aesthetic. Perhaps so, but they certainly did not ascribe to the same cinematic values nor to the same interpretation of dance. Some of the films shared a sense of dancerly composition: *Sure* (Tracie Mitchell, Mark Pugh) showed a beautiful warp and weft of dancing bodies, and *Dadance* (Horsley, Wheadon, and Elmaz) a surreal 1930s play between visual art and dance. But others, such as *Hands* (Jonathan Burrows, Adam Roberts) and *Greedy Jane* (Miranda Pennell), involved urbane forms of movement which were carefully crafted and represented.

What is it that film brings to dance? Film can do things performance cannot. The

perspectival nature of the camera, the suture of film montage, the reduction to black and white (*Sure*), the enhancement of particular colours (*Greedy Jane*), the distortion of time and motion (*Falling, Dividing Loops*) are specific features of the filmed image. Added to this is the fact that we are viewing a conjunction of dance and film. Perhaps alchemy is a better word, for it suggests that a transformation has taken place. Film is not merely the camera 'recording' dance. As a medium, it has its own character, its own form of corporeality, texture and temporality. It is out of this body, the body of the film, that the more familiar dancing body emerges—perhaps defamiliarised, transfigured, hopefully enriched.

Dance Lumière, Luminous Movement: Dance Created for the Camera, curated by Erin Brannigan, Dancehouse, Melbourne, Dec 12, 1998

The DJ versus Live Art

Aleks Sierz calculates the odds for and against performance in the UK

As the cultural countdown for the millennium begins, there are disturbing signs that, even in the field of live art, the DJ—an iconic figure that has provided the soundtrack for the past 50 years—is muscling in on the artist. You can even imagine a time when admitting you're an artist will be the apogee of old-fashioned modernism.

At London's Millennium Dome, a white elephant which sucks money from more deserving artistic causes, one of the plans is for a Ministry of Sound zone, where the government's favourite DJs will spin the discs to see in the new year. A desperate attempt to interest "yoof" and clubbers in official culture, the venture is doomed to be as naff as the images of New Labour politicians bopping at their victory party in May 1997. Even at the ICA—legendary home of Britain's avant-garde—you are now more likely to bump into a DJ hosting a tribute band than to see serious or difficult work about the body or racial identity. In 1998 the bar events at this hip venue included a Ziggy Stardust lookalike, a tribute to the Smiths, plus assorted punk rock reincarnations. The ICA proudly told me it had often been voted "club of the week" by *Time Out*, the London listings magazine.

If experiment has drifted away from the ICA, it is looking for a home on the margins, at the BAC (Battersea Arts Centre) in South London, and in studio theatres attached to venues such as Lyric Hammersmith or the Young Vic. In such locations, devised pieces—for example, *In Close Relation* by louder than words—explore difficult subjects such as incest and child abuse on woefully small budgets. One trend that remains a hardy perennial is the adaptation and deconstruction of classic texts. Volcano took apart Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* for *The Town That Went*

Mad, Kaos have reworked *The Master and Margarita*. Even text-based authors such as Mark Ravenhill interrogate the canon—his Handbag revisits Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In Glasgow, Jon Pope's lurid adaptation of Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* had its tongue firmly in its cheek, a posture more populist than experimental.

More interesting has been the continued search by site-specific work for locations that add new shades of meaning to classics, whether literary or visual. The Young Vic's version of Henry James' ambiguous ghost story, *The Turn of the Screw*, was set in the House of Detention, an old prison building in London's Clerkenwell. Director Kate Raper found this obscure location's gloomy corridors and dank cells ideally creepy. Meanwhile, Neil Bartlett staged *The Seven Sacraments of Nicolas Poussin* in the depths of the London Hospital, using the inevitable feelings of mortality inspired by the place to enhance his meditation on life and death. Site-specific work had its most radical redefinition in Blast Theory's *Kidnap* (see *RealTime* 27, page 30), which also subverted the role of the audience. Only 2 people could participate (as kidnap victims) and spectators could only hear about their progress through the press or live on the internet. Hello new tech, bye bye theatre buildings.

Although *Kidnap* was a metropolitan event, it was closely followed on the net at The Green Room in Manchester, which later also screened a video of the event. Simpler uses of new tech include Fecund Theatre's video screens and music in their *Fascinations from the Crowd*. Tours by young groups such as Desperate Optimists—and work by national players such as Artangel—create a system where venues and festivals sustain each other. At Bristol's Arncliffe, for example, the Microbe FX season explored the theme of the body and technology. In

The Smallest Room Becky Edmunds reworked a performance first given at the Brighton Corn Exchange. Among the most versatile companies of 1998 was Improbable Theatre, which did both text-based work and impro. Two of its members—Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch—collaborated with the Tiger Lillies to produce *Shockheaded Peter*, which revelled in the cautionary tales of Struwwelpeter. Improbable also produced *Lifegame*, which improvised around the real-life stories of specially invited personalities, and ended the year with Angela Carter's *Cinderella*, a marriage of cult writer with tacky panto.

Few words in the live art lexicon are more likely to get a negative response than 'puppetry.' But now there are signs that puppetry—call it animation or object theatre—is breaking out of the nursery. Companies such as Faulty Optic (with its haunting, moon-faced marionettes in scenes from concentration-camp life in *Tunnel Vision*), Green Ginger (the Welsh micro-theatre whose *Slaphead* was based on *Sweeney Todd*) and DNA Cabaret (whose visual theatre show ranges from a shadow play of an Edgar Allan Poe poem to a piece of surveillance video footage shot from a toy council flat) have been redefining puppetry.

Their work was seen at the British Festival of Visual Theatre at BAC in October. In fact, BAC has had a very good year with its *Playing in the Dark* season (see *RealTime* 26, page 37), which explored the possibilities of putting on an amazing variety of works—from classical Greek tragedy to recorded radio shows—in a completely dark auditorium.

The greatest anxiety remains funding. With the reorganisation of the Arts Council and the abolition of its Combined Arts Department (a kind of hybrid arts fund—eds), amid greater devolution of funding to regional arts boards, there are fears about which individuals or companies might lose out. At local level there may be an increase of new money for small-scale projects (under £15,000) but the morphing of the Arts Council from

funder into "strategic spokesperson" for the arts worries many. With no Department at the centre, the combined arts have a weakened place in the national funding system and an unclear future. Creating or curating work which crosses artform boundaries will be much more difficult.

The Arts Council also uses its power to aid the drift back to the text, putting pressure on live art groups to use writers. For example, Frantic Assembly's *Sell Out*, with its thumping bass and breathtaking movement, told the story of 4 partner-swapping 20-somethings. It was the result of a collaboration with writer Michael Wynne. At the Nottingham Urban Hymns symposium (November), other problems surfaced. Coco Fusco criticised the lack of confidence among students of contemporary art to talk about ideas. Preferring to "hide" behind visual imagery, youth appear to prefer a zippy approach to live art with minimal text. This may be a reaction by young practitioners to a perceived pressure to show off a grasp of critical theory in their work. Peter Sellars (opera and theatre director and prospective director of the 2002 Adelaide Festival—eds.) went further by saying that critical art theory not only destroys the capacity to think among young artists but also alienates them from the population at large. Another problem raised was that of young artists having to "grow up" in public. To get funding, you have to have a track record. To get the gig, you might have to put on unfinished work.

The National Review of Live Art at the Arches in Glasgow (October) suffered financial constraints, which shrunk the event from 5 days to 3. But it still premiered new work from Bobby Baker and others, as well as hosting the launch of RoseLee Goldberg's picture book *Performance: Live Art Since the 60s*. This event suffered one hiccup: she lost her voice—a moment of metaphorical significance for her critics. But despite the constraints of funding, let's make sure that in 1999 British live art continues to speak in many varied voices.

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PS

Ten memos on performance studies in Australia from Edward Scheer

1. In some ways the recent history of performance studies (PS) is something like the MTV claymation segment called *Celebrity Deathmatch* in which 2 celebrity caricatures beat each other to death. A recent match featured Courtney Love versus Tyra Banks, but think of Richard Schechner versus Michel Foucault and you'll get the idea, though the appearance of these 2 names in one sentence has been just about unthinkable lately—feel free to substitute the proper name of a French theorist according to your taste. And just as the unthinkable became Foucault's subject, so PS needs to grapple with the question of the conceptual limit, and this

doesn't mean that it needs to get involved in some kind of territorial squabble but rather that it might allow for transformative becomings, moving through the possible and the quotidian. The latter are the substrata of good cultural criticism but not necessarily the stuff of good performance. To permit the emergence of transformative becomings in the field of PS itself, that is, in the people involved with it, the students, thinkers and artists, and the interactions between cultural criticism and performance, PS needs to 'become what it is', not by endlessly extending the examination of its own conditions of possibility but by working with the

impossible, that is, by beginning to perform itself. The idea of the impossible needs to be raised to avoid the very real risk of boredom and, as Les Murray says, it is "the only door that opens."

2. PS began as a way of charting the proliferating theatricalisation of the world. Yet the godfather Richard Schechner is as suspicious of text-orientated theory as old time literary pros used to be, but it's not that the world did not include the textual rather than he was trying to individuate a discipline. Perhaps he knows it's time to get over that. In a recently published book directed at the future of the field (*The Ends Of Performance*, NYU Press, 1998) he says that performance studies is "inherently 'in between'." He says PS is "unstable", "interdisciplinary", "intercultural" and that it "resists or rejects definition...because it transgresses boundaries." "Remember the future," as Peggy Phelan says. (continued p32)

Push-pull

Maryanne Lynch on the brink of new theatre in Brisbane

Over the last few years Brink Visual Theatre, a company based in Brisbane, has been excavating the white occupation of Australia. *Brittle*, their latest work, continues this project, but, sadly, without much development of the idea or its dramatic realisation.

But first, to what does work. Let me give you an image. A woman hangs upside down from the springs of an elevated matrimonial bed while leaves rain down and the sound of something wildly indeterminate spins through the air. The woman struggles, she moans; something is going wrong and we are waiting, wanting, for it to happen. Here is that visual potency that characterises Brink's work, often presented in a complex relationship of puppetry, projection, soundscape, gadgetry, performers and space.

This technical knowhow is itself featured by way of, usually, a series of logistical feats that take place one after another without pause, each 'trick' trumping the one before it. The company's last show, *Under the Big Sky* (1997), for example, was produced on a cliff-face adjacent to the Brisbane River, the site allowing large-scale transformations of perspective by way of projection and performer, which in turn gave a proportionate sense of the relationship of European values to an ancient land. Who can forget that female figure struggling to climb up the rugged rocks, clad in a white gown and clutching a parasol for dear life, only to find that the surface on which she is treading has transformed itself under her feet? In *Brittle* the concert hall of the Old Queensland Museum serves atypically as more of a shell; it is inside its walls that we witness these constant changes of time and mood and landscape. The result is still impressive if we are to measure it by difficulties overcome and impossibilities boldly rendered possible.

So...A man tiptoes across the mouths of bottles and then squats on them in unconscious imitation of the kitsch Indigenous figurine beside him. Next minute there's a backyard shed lifting itself up off the ground and someone inside of it, a creek, a miniature car revving its way through the garden, a boat, a bin, a fight between fear and desire on the part of the suburban couple who are the way into Brink's conceptual exploration.



Lynne Kent, Giuliano Perez Reyes and Matt Wilson, *Brittle*

Sam Charlton

But amid all this ingenuity there's not much room for the performers to take centre stage. And yet they struggle to become just another element, for the work revolves around them. Giuliano Perez Reyes, Lynne Kent and Matt Wilson perform ably but are constantly seesawing between the 2 possibilities...as is the piece itself. Is *Brittle* a traditional theatre work that happens to use technology or is it a piece in which each element is essential to the telling of the tale? Another way to put this is to ask what embodies the white psyche: the performers qua characters or the multiple means by which this particular suburban story is told? The answer is unclear. I know that I'm not alone in

wishing for a little less whizbangery and a little more focus. And more time to stay with one of the many wonderful moments that suggest so much more...such as the teeth-chattering clattering of a cup in its saucer way past the duration of 'a nice cup of tea' as the vast wilderness overcomes, or seduces, the woman.

One of the strongest aspects of *Brittle* is its depiction of this push-pull of emotions in relation to the contemporary white settlers. The work exposes, for instance, the mutable boundaries of 'savagery' as Australia's own Brad and Janet encounter "strange neighbours, busybodies, the mortgage and reclaimed land that refuses to yield to

human intervention." Composer Rodolphe Blois' soundscapes track the collapse of definition in their sly movements between speakers and their suggestive patterns. At one point there is even the hint of a backyard 'corroboree' as noises combine into a wailing, singing sonic mass. In another moment a mock flamenco is prefigured by a swathe of sound across the space, which then moves itself here and there, from speaker to speaker, and level to level. Not a note of *Carmen* lyricism, ironic or otherwise, to be heard but dead straight in its aim at the whites' 'unruly passions.'

Meanwhile, Kent and Perez Reyes progressively come undone. Neat gestures are repeated until they are suspect. Banal outbursts of movement or temper betray the something else lurking underneath. The woman (of course) eventually goes troppo; the man joins her in desperate sympathy. After all, what whitefella can bear to be alone here?

But Brink lets this strength become depleted by its confused stylistics. *Brittle* veers between the broad brushstroke of Disney cartoons, Philippe Genty-influenced pathos, the exaggerated barbarism of films like *Emoh Ruo*, and an occasional moment of magic realism. This mix could have been used to build the structure of the piece, and the thematic; instead it feels as if too many ideas and influences have been put in the pot and left there. The result is confusion for the audience about the work's, and the company's, intentions. Are we meant to be having a good belly laugh or reflecting on issues that define us? These choices don't need to be mutually exclusive but I experienced them as such.

Brink is an ambitious company, and its vision praiseworthy. What seems to be lacking is a strong directorial or dramaturgical eye, or a structure that pushes through the complexities of the concept without reducing it, or visual theatre, to a caricature of itself.

Brittle, Brink Visual Theatre, directed & designed by Jessica Wilson & Ainsley Burdell; composer Rodolphe Blois; filmmakers Randall Wood, Scott Walton & Paul Butler; performers Giuliano Perez Reyes, Lynne Kent & Matt Wilson, Old Museum Concert Hall, Brisbane, December 1 - 12, 1998

PS

• from page 31

3. Phelan also says in the same book that "a discipline devoted to live artistic human exchange could easily be taken up by the universities in the 80s precisely because its power as a vital form of culture exchange had been dissipated." So if performance is dead then is the study of it just a postscript...PS? Her critique is addressed to the question of the disciplinisation of the field but it would be naive to suggest that this automatically compromises the research in a particular field, even one which is essentially the name of a prolix set of topics relating to cultural process, ritual, interpretation, representation, phenomenologies of perception and so on: moving through forms...per-forming. Might it be more effective for PS—as the study of performance and performativity—to move through disciplines, in between them, constructing affective continuities across the disciplines but also disrupting them, reminding them of their foundations in 'twice behaved' experience (all pedagogy is performative behaviour. Discuss)? As Phelan points out, it involves "transpositions, transcriptions, transfigurations" of disciplines such as theatre studies and anthropology and she suggests that this is something like the parasitism of J.L. Austin's linguistic performative, that it is a possibility of every act and utterance.

But even Freud knew that to be a parasite is the only way to guarantee longevity (human germ cells outlive the host organism) and in a sense this is one way to move beyond 'the time of

diagnosis' for PS and into the 'time of the cure', to stop talking only about PS and to begin to use the ideas it has already generated, in the true sense of the performative: having consequences in the world, "disrupting the business as usual" as Heiner Muller said. To pluralise the ways of thinking of performance, to assume that we are beginning from a position of knowledge and can take race, gender, class identity and the specific histories of theatre and anthropological studies as a frame for a discussion which is free to go utterly elsewhere, even into performance art.

4. Marina Abramovic, in her presentation at the MCA in Sydney early in 1998, showed a video of Pope John Paul II on American TV and said it was the best example of performance that she could think of. It showed the Pope sitting on stage surrounded by cardinals receiving the loud acclamation of the audience with ironic detachment. He made little whooping sounds and gestures with his hands and continued them long after it was time for his speech. After some time and much background scurrying around to reveal the growing concern of the cardinals, the Pope announced rather elliptically that he was going to stop the broadcast whereupon the screen went dead. The piece mixed performativity (the elaborately codified behaviour of crowd and cardinals, exhibition of power relations etc) with some of the essential elements of good performance: timing; the assertion of non-verbal and non-linguistic signification as a primary means of communication; and the interruption of the 'business as usual', the smooth transmission of

content, by addressing the formal structure of the event, the broadcast. Phelan calls this kind of recognition of the repetitions and rhythms of behaviour "reading the performative."

5. In *Tradition and the individual talent*, T.S. Eliot said that the new slightly alters the "ideal order" of "existing monuments" and complements the old. Eliot was a traditionalist and like all trads he was a traitor (among other things, a traitor to himself and a good friend of Oswald Moseley, the Fuhrer of the British Fascist Party, and consequently a traitor to everyone else as well). In any case the Latin 'tradere' means to hand on, to hand over, to deliver and to betray.

6. But can we speak of traditions in performance? Cage and Artaud are hardly traditionalists though Richard Schechner certainly is. Traditions see themselves as keepers of a sacred eternal flame, some essentialised elemental thing which cannot be mixed with any other element. Custodians of the flame only hand it on to select persons in the manner of Olympic torch bearers. But I liken performers to those students who, in 1956 for the Melbourne games, lit their own torch some blocks away from the town hall and sent one of their number to pass the flame to the Lord Mayor who, in the tumult, didn't notice anything was awry until the silver paint came off on his hands. Ron Clarke was still a couple of miles away. The students lit their own flame, as they always do, and then appropriated a major event and made it new, at least for them. Not custodians of the flame but pyromaniacs. (continued p34)

The hard way forward

Murray Bramwell surveys the triumphs and trials of Adelaide theatre in 1998

It is now more than a year since the Day of the Long Knives. Well, it seemed like that when, in mid-October 1997, it was announced that the Australia Council was withdrawing triennial funding for a number of Adelaide's long established theatre companies. Carouselle, the talented puppet group was one, Junction Theatre another, Magpie2, the newly badged youth wing of State Theatre got clipped after only one year's operation and, perhaps most disturbing, the highly regarded Red Shed Company closed its heavy old roller door after 10 year's effort.

It is true that Junction and the Red Shed had not been producing their best work—although Junction had presented a new play by Stephen Sewell and the Red Shed was continuing to expand its fruitful and very significant association with Daniel Keene. But whatever the arguments, as these double jeopardies work, the withdrawal of Council funds then triggered a tailing off of State support as well, meaning that a slew of experienced and recognised companies were folding—and soon.

To be fair, these closures prompted a determined effort by Arts SA to encourage, from the ashes, a phoenix or 2. Funds were earmarked and expressions of interest called for to enable the rapid establishment of a new company to lead the second tier revival.

By July last year it was announced that the cigar would go to Brink Productions, a self-managing ensemble, whose first work for the 1994 Adelaide Fringe, *Wounds to the Face*, directed by Benedict Andrews, established a continuing association with the works of English playwright Howard Barker. Andrews led Magpie2 for its brief and interesting one year season and former Red Shed director, Tim Maddock, has directed subsequent Brink seasons of Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya* in late 1996 and *The Europeans* in November last year. *Vanya* had very good outing at Belvoir Street, as did Benedict Andrews' 1998 Fringe production of Jez Butterworth's lock, stock and smoking Brit crime thriller, *Mojo*, and another Barker, *The Europeans* at The Wharf Studio at the end of '98.

Brink's work has been notable for its depth of preparation and the intelligence and flair with which difficult texts such as Barker's are made accessible to the younger demographic to whom the company is pitched. Not everything has been a winner, though. Tim Maddock and Victoria Hill's redrafting of *The Misanthrope* giddily missed its mark and made for a jittery opening to their high profile season in September. *The Europeans* more than put them back on track, however, and, as we go to press, Brink has announced a joint venture for the 2000 Adelaide Festival for *The Ecstatic Bible*, a new 12 hour millennium epic from Barker and his London company, The Wrestling School.

The continuity of funding for Brink—and the group's adept administrative and publicity skills—is the most promising indication that Adelaide is managing to maintain signature work of high calibre which can also travel successfully to the Eastern seaboard.

Another company which has enjoyed success is Vitalstatistix, now subtitled National Women's Theatre. A standout production of the new work, *My Vicious Angel* by Christine Evans, opened in July.

Well crafted and beautifully directed by Rosalba Clemente it was one of the highlights of the year. Another new solo piece, *Spooltime* by Alana Valentine, featuring a performance from the highly versatile Clemente played in November.

1998 was the first year of a revamped State Theatre under the direction of Rodney Fisher. After a ravishing revival of his production of *Master Class* and a likeable production of Williamson's *The Department*, the company's work proved disappointing. A production of the Scottish Play was dismally conceived and performed and a staging of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* failed to spark theatrically. Apart from the Performing Lines visiting productions, State's best work last year's season was the ubiquitous Rosalba Clemente's stylish production of Brad Fraser's *Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love*.

And then there are the projects. Much is made of the economies of one-off project funding but I suspect it is a short lived benefit. Gradually the expertise will dwindle as those who gained experience with formerly continuously-funded companies disperse and relocate in other cities. At the moment, though, they are still productive. Geoff Crowhurst, from Junction, staged the community musical project *Scam*, and continues his association with Not So Straight, whose main writer, Stephen House, is still producing new work, if not yet a true successor to his well-received *Go By Night*.

Theatre Praxis mounted a new play, *Morde* by Paul Rees, based on the Israeli nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu. The production, which featured Brink regular Syd Brisbane, still needs some reworking but could well have more legs. It would be good to see it picked up again; Rees is an able writer and a tireless promoter of home grown theatre. Another company to watch is Double Bind, whose staging of David Mamet's *Oleanna*, directed by and featuring Michael Hill with Eliza Lovell, and niftily designed by Nic Hurcombe, was work of high quality. Double Bind certainly deserves something more than hand to mouth production funding and it is a short sighted policy to expect theatre workers to maintain commitment when they have to make such extended personal sacrifice to put work in front of audiences.

So, the news from Adelaide is hopeful. Despite a mixed year and reduced repertoire from State Theatre, despite the damage to the city's credibility with the Meryl Tankard fiasco, and despite a shaky audience base which, particularly among the unemployed under 30s, is even more broke than in other cities. The 1998 Festival was an important fillup—especially with the personal energy and leadership of Robyn Archer and productions such as Belgium's Needcompany and Les Ballets C de la B. Such works and such a festival leaves us with after-images which serve to pry back open the minds and imaginations of artists and audiences alike.

And we need that. Adelaide's rust-belt woes are very evident at the moment—politically, socially and culturally. Despite the conscientious efforts of Arts Minister, Di Laidlaw, the State Government has no real notion of its artistic brief and how much Adelaide's once-strong reputation has been squandered. For these reasons the



William Alert and Syd Brisbane, *The Europeans*

David Wilson

commitment and persistence of our theatre workers is not just admirable but heroic. That so much work of quality continues to be produced is splendid, almost unfathomable. But it can't be counted on for very much longer without real funding commitment and infrastructure support. Otherwise, those Darwinian monetarist,

freemarket notions that frugality and struggle are essentials to creative process will be revealed not only as foolishly wrong but permanently damaging.

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Head to head, heart to heart

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

The complete report can be read on the RealTime website
http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

The French artist, Henri Gavot Lavalée, formerly of Royal de Luxe (*Le Peplum*, Sydney Festival 1996) and now director of Monique, an outdoor performance company, has been working in Sydney with Theatre Kantanka. He was introduced by that company's director Michael Cohen who also acted as interpreter. Not exactly involved in the physical theatre realm, nonetheless Lavalée occupies a space of spectacle and, sometimes, risk. His company are explosives experts as well as performers and creators of the machines at work in his shows. And they often work in French movies blowing things up. Henri's site-specific work and its commercial origins (he's not government funded—Streb by the way is but, exhausted from writing thank you notes, hopes to be financially independent as soon as possible) were of particular interest. A bank in one French city commissioned him to spectacularly launch three branches (here perhaps someone could be paid to blow them up as they are vacated). In one he contrived a fire—real flames; in another fake flames of ribbon; in another a car crashing out of a second storey window after the driver had been distracted by a hunter pursuing a duck through the streets. These action-cum-sculptural outdoor performances are collaboratively invented and a director is hired only late in the process to finally shape the work. Other works included a Nutella machine (looking not unlike the pornographic couch-machine in one of Edward Gorey's stories) and another with a chicken (puppet) living in a very tall tree, getting up, bathing, catching 'the lift' down, joining a dance and then getting roasted.

Debra Batton (*Legs on the Wall*), like Elizabeth Streb, unfolded the script of her body, a body at once personal and performative, and, again like Streb, acknowledged the importance of other forms in the development of the artist. If Sue Broadway had focused longingly on the word 'circus', Batton's text for the day was 'physicality'. Hers has been a life of a changing body and a changing identity and an engagement with different physical art forms. She described her transgression when she "snuck into dance" during her physical education training, encountering a new way of dealing with physicality. Dance offered movement not predicated on tricks or feats. But female dancers could not catch a man, or support their own body weight. She joined a circus and was confronted with whether she was a real/not real circus person. She discovered in circus that you learn a lot on the road. She was inspired

by DV8 a UK dance-theatre company. She moved on to *Legs on the Wall*. She is still committed to the relationship between feminism and physicality. She enjoyed working with choreographer Kate Champion as director in a physical theatre show, *Leg's Under the Influence*, where she performed late into her pregnancy. She read to us from Dr Seuss' *If I Ran The Circus*.

After the intimacy of Streb and Batton and the line they drew strongly between the personal and the performer, between the imagination and skill, Judy Pippin took us to another plane—"You are living the new biology." In an account of the reasons for the bad image of the body, inherited from the mind-body split ("Damn you, Descartes. I do physical theatre therefore I am"), Pippin demolished the semantics of the mechanical body as 'instrument', 'system', and 'circuits.' Instead she asked, "We are living in a dance but what are the words that keep it going?" In search of a better language for comprehending and living the body, Pippin reported from her research that the nervous system thrives on trust and that the ramifications of this have yet to be embraced.

Appropriately, in the discussion that followed, several speakers from the floor argued that physical theatre had failed to take advantage of developments in biomechanics, that gymnastics were way ahead in this area and that circus was backward in ways of learning skills. The question was asked, are circus and physical theatre artists distrustful of science? If this distrust is real, you could ask is it part of the romance of physical theatre? One performer pointed out that in opera, seasons are constructed to protect singers' voices, but in physical theatre and circus no such protection is offered artists' bodies, performing up to 6 nights a week, sometimes week after week. Because physical theatre has been so focused for so long on young bodies in a "she'll be right" culture, it's only been major injuries, like broken backs, that have attracted attention, and then not in terms of health, but in terms of the drama of risk. Again we were confronted, if briefly, by the tension between romance and reality, surely a topic requiring prolonged discussion at the next circus and physical theatre conference, not just a lone panel session on biomechanics, health and training.

Already wickedly invoked as part of circus culture, drugs and their role in performance were met with Batton's rebuke, one of the funniest of the conference, that she only knew of physical theatre artists taking "performance de-enhancing drugs."

Sarah Cathcart, of the Women's Circus in Melbourne, traced her personal history as a writer-performer moving into circus as a director, in terms of the role of theatre and direction. She started with the experience of working at the Mill Theatre with James McCaughey "using the actors' bodies to create images" and exploring the relationship between language and action. Her self-devised work with director Andrea Lemon involved research through interviews and a testing of her cultural preconceptions (in Nicaragua for instance), an issue invoked earlier by Rachel Swain referring to Stalker's experiences in the Northern Territory. When Cathcart joined the Women's Circus she wanted to expand the circus skills of the women, but, again like Swain, "wanted to find a softness in the muscles." She also wanted "to explore language to strengthen narrative." Work in voice and singing became important and a focusing on the body—acrobatic and balance skills but no fire and no juggling. Taking Jon Hawkes to task, Cathcart also argued (as had Judy Pippin) that performance presence can be taught, that performers can "allow themselves to be seen without the trick." She paid tribute to Al Wonder and Lindy Davies for teaching "how to stand in your stillness and wait for the impulse that moves you", how to find this in relationship to each other as performers and find the flow between routines and the story line. Cathcart also affirmed the possibilities of improvisation (as opposed to the strictures of routines) in performance. She spoke about the function of voice and text in *Pope Joan* (1997), her first production for the Women's Circus, in which the performers were relieved of some of the stress of voice and body work by pre-recording some text to be played in juxtaposition with the performance. A video recording revealed considerable dexterity in performance from people working gradually and very part-time over a year to create a major work.

Working from the power of voice, something in its infancy in Australian physical theatre, Bert van Dijk (PANTHEATRE Poneke, NZ) too argued for training, for the capacity to learn presence, "a quality of being, to be centrally alive in the moment, all senses awake." Van Dijk showed excerpts from *The Butterfly's Evil Spell*, actor-dancers responding to light with movement and powerful voices in a collaboration with a lighting designer and a member of DV8. For van Dijk, circus is theatre and theatre, although it's lost its way in literature and psychology in the West, is primarily physical, and the voice is physical. Consequently he has discarded words and focused on vocal sounds with movement as an act of recovering theatre. Cathcart and van Dijk powerfully relocated physical theatre in

the tradition of theatre, drawing it somewhat away from but not denying its affinity with circus (to van Dijk another form of theatre).

Jerry Boland (Charles Sturt University, Bathurst), in an account of the politics of popular performance, argued for research into how audiences think and feel, as a testing of one's own preconceptions and as the first step towards not silencing one's audience by patronising them or bluntly rejecting their values without entering into dialogue. Boland described his students' performative engagement with the Bathurst 1000 crowds, an admirable exercise in cabaret and street theatre risk-taking, requiring knowledge about cars and the essentially masculine culture of the event. Boland and his collaborators are inspired by Paolo Freire's 'theory of dialogic action.' It would be great to have access to a fuller account of the training of the students in the Charles Sturt University course having heard something in the coffee break of the process of audition, initiation and practice, and noting the number of graduates working in physical theatre.

Also from Bathurst, Bill Blaikie invoked his Permaculture model for performance, least input for maximum yield, proposing a relaxed, gentle form, "not bunched, tight, clenched...or based on sport and work"—a relative of the softness called for several times already in various ways. Blaikie reminded us of the value of physical theatre in its inheritance from circus—starting out with minimal skills and learning on the job, learning one trick at a time, sharing skills, resources, playing a musical instrument, taking on less demanding tasks as age demands. Physical theatre he argued can still be modular, made up of a mix of skills woven into a show, whether it's circus or Archaos with its mix of "the industrial and the carnivalesque."

This sense of tertiary education in physical (and related) performance as a laboratory was compounded by Gordon Beattie of Theatre Nepean, University of Western Sydney offering (as had Zane Trow before him in a different context) laboratory experience in the university's new performing arts complex. It comprises 4 dance studios, an experimental theatre laboratory, a black box theatre and new technology facilities. This is a considerable achievement to even make this offer, to convince bureaucracy that there is a place for the artist as artist in the university and that artistic research is legitimate activity.

Anni Davey hosted an hilarious 'fashion parade' by way of introduction to organisational models and their rationales—

PS

• from page 32

7. Or maybe tradition is not what it used to be. It might be that ex-tradition is a more useful term. Ex-tradition is the route to the new, handing things from one culture to another. It has certainly renewed performance in this country since Nigel Kellaway first went to Japan to study with Suzuki Tadashi, the man who was making it new so powerfully in the avant-garde theatre in that nation of extreme traditions. In his case by reinventing the performance traditions of Noh and Kabuki and then using them to reinvent the Western Dramatic canon. Many important Australian performers have followed in Kellaway's steps seeking to renew themselves and their art. There are too many to mention but Tess de Quincey merits attention as someone who also travelled to Japan but took a different and no less rigorous route. It's interesting that the tradition of renewal through the experience of the Orient is still current though thankfully it's no longer done in the blatantly orientalist mode favoured by Artaud (pace Peter Eckersall).

8. Intercultural exchange is an important means of disrupting the 'business as usual' of any practice, where acculturated behaviours take on a harshly performative light and you realise in your own body the full power of tradition, to identify, to constrain and to delimit. Your body and your behaviour give you away as I

discovered so many times in Japan where this is being written. To communicate the value of ex-tradition as practiced by Kellaway and co. is surely a key role for PS in Australia at the end of the millennium: moving things around to bring them into focus, crossing boundaries of culture and behaviour, and also showing that we don't need custodians of the sacred flame as much as we need pyromaniacs. As Gaston Bachelard says: "the Prometheus complex is the Oedipus complex of the life of the intellect." (*The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, 1938)

9. "Often too it is good to set fire to a sterile field and to deliver the light stubble to the crackling flame." Virgil. At the ADSA conference in 1997 at Monash there were calls for what amounted to the isolation of the discipline (here Drama but let X = X) from 'other' forms of research and modes of inquiry. PS people can be equally protective of their discipline but while it is true that performance is epistemologically distinct from, for example, electronic paradigms of knowledge as storable/retrievable information, as Phelan points out, the kind of isolationist thinking exhibited at ADSA is counterproductive in the extreme. It reveals both the potential for traditionalism within disciplines and the need for crossing these artificial barriers between thought and practice.

10. This is why Australia needs to develop a more systematic approach to the organised interaction of performance practitioners and teachers working both here and elsewhere. This might involve a more frequent and systematic exchange between staff at universities where drama, theatre, dance and related programs are taught. This is not to disparage extant efforts in the field; for example, the Centre for Performance Studies at Sydney University usually has an excellent and interesting program of events though they tend to be rather secretive about it. One way to proceed might be to set up an Australian chapter of the PSI, Pyromaniac/Performance Studies International, and host the annual conference, which this year takes place in Wales, the first time it has travelled beyond the USA...Maybe the year 2000 would be appropriate for a performance studies event? Though hopefully not in Sydney, unless we can arrange for alternative transmissions of the flame...Bachelard again: "to be aware that one is burning is to grow cold, to feel an intensity is to diminish it; it is necessary to be an intensity without realising it. Such is the bitter law of man's activity."

Edward Scheer is a lecturer in Theatre and Film Studies, University of New South Wales

including "look fabulous, it's always effective", "withhold nothing", "blame everyone—staff, performers, government", "be bitter." She advocated resource sharing (horizontal and vertical), a more realistic attitude to the idea of the "supremacy of the performer" (this, she said had not been achieved, performers are the first to be knocked off, contracts aren't worked out etc). Davey also predicted a paradigm shift in funding, partly already with us, where artists will not be able to rely on government funding in the future. This was tart advice with some practical sweeteners. Roderick Poole of the globe-trotting Strange Fruit got down to the nitty-gritty of a functioning company surviving by only performing one to 2 weeks in Australia, touring overseas 24 weeks of the year with 8 performers and a production and a tour manager, and rehearsing and training for 8 weeks. Poole thinks the Australia Council marketing model is not relevant for small companies. He deals directly with travel and insurance agents rather than have someone on the staff to manage this—1% of the company's budget is spent on marketing. His advice, use the knowledge and the expertise that is already out there, especially in a time of economic rationalism with its lean and mean necessities. He also spoke briefly about safety, saying that after a particular accident, the company created an invaluable safety bible (perhaps a model for what was called for in the course of the conference). Bob Burton (Primate Productions) also advocated the uncovering and use of existing resources, this time in the touring of regional areas. The demographic data is there, he said, in arts councils, unions, school systems and social clubs. He reminded us that the circus used to have an advance man, who would go ahead to drum up business and that audiences still need to be prepared. Information seeking and sharing, the exploitation of existing resources and the knowledge and experience of agencies, and adaptive models of marketing indicated the kinds of pragmatism needed to keep artistic vision alive and travelling. On a collective front, MEAA officer Megan Elliot recommended the formation of a circus and physical theatre affiliation with the union, as dance had effectively done in recent times. Audience response to this was hesitant, perhaps thinking it might eclipse the formation of an association united more by artistic vision than by un-romantic bread and butter issues. Elliot battled bravely on listing the advantages and offering the field an economic and political voice. We were to come back to this.

Kim Walker (artistic director, The Flying Fruit Fly Circus) spoke eloquently and sadly of artists trained from 10 to 18 years of age only to be lost to the profession because there is nowhere for them to go immediately. This he described as "a loss of investment." Despite lack of guaranteed government funding, Walker is committed to a graduate trainee program including work on how to make shows, working backstage, and furthering existing skills. There is also, he said, a serious regional problem of access to the arts at an age when these young people need to broaden their knowledge. Above all, he emphasised the uniqueness of the school, and its need for recognition in the same way as NIDA and the Australian Ballet School. Doubtless Jane Mullet and Kim Walker have a lot to talk about. Mullet, appearing on the same panel with Walker, is a driving force behind the setting up of NICA (National Institute of Circus Arts). She opened by observing that "everyone speaks as if NICA exists and they all have their own NICAs." Mullet put us right in a pretty optimistic account where NICA will be located (Prahan Campus, Swinburne University), when it will start (a 6 month high profile project in 1999, first intake 2000). She sees as important that NICA make use of existing facilities like the university's costume-making department, the small theatre company and community theatre course, the International Industrial

Research Institute, the design centre, and video facilities. Entry to the courses will be by audition, with generalist and specialist strands (the Fruit Flies for example could enter at the specialist level). Mullet showed a model displaying circus (skills), theatre (the realm of the imagination) and theory intersecting with productions as the result. Mullet's audience were keen to hear that Yoga, Feldenkrais, Suzuki etc would be available, not only to students, but to practising artists. There was also concern that there be a place for the eccentric, the clown, the circus musician, in other words that NICA would not rigidify into conventionally accreditable courses. There was no doubting it, the conference want NICA to happen, as an acknowledgment of what has been achieved and was now being celebrated, and as a way into the future, a first major circus-physical theatre infrastructural gesture.

I can't pretend to have grasped all the significant issues Yana Taylor (University of Western Sydney) mused over briefly in one of the late talks (I hope it will soon become a *RealTime* article). Yana had been paying close attention to the semantics and tensions of the conference. She took us back into the terrain of what kind of culture physical theatre occupies and generates, something that Rachel Swain had asked about performance's contribution to Australian culture. It's the training, said Yana, not just the finished work which is "culture-making." "Training proposes ways of being...not just skills." She also raised the issue of the tension between conservatism and conservation—something central to the conference dynamic between the terminologies of circus and physical theatre, and between traditional and contemporary skills. In this respect she spoke of the value of "trainings that jostle each other, rub up against each other", and yield fusions, "forms which are not one thing, like opera or Beijing opera." "(P)hysical languages", she argued, "do get exchanged, become pidgins and creoles." What is needed, Taylor thinks, is to acknowledge this and to find ways to let it happen. The most valuable dimension of her address was the suggestion that we need to reflect on Australian physical theatre and circus training, look at its cycles ("adoption, adaptation, adeptness", I think she said) and its sites—she amusingly but relevantly tagged as "Shed Training Culture."

I didn't take notes in the final stages of the conference, which was a mix of hard-nosed practicalities and the occasional melee. Significantly, tension persisted between the romance of an artform feeling itself free of bureaucratic constraints and the very real needs for infrastructural support of the most fundamental kind. Speakers from the floor, from dance, music, performance and literature, and government, along with some like-minded New Zealanders, encouraged the artform to develop a voice and argued that the formation of an association would not spell the decay of vision or the diversity of practices. Street theatre performers spoke passionately about the value of their website and the international connections it offered them. Circus Oz volunteered to be the base for an artform website. Someone in Sydney volunteered to initiate some vertical resourcing—the use of the Stalker-Legs on the Wall 'Shed' for training and practice for independent artists. Stacey Callaghan and others reminded us in the often company-driven discussion of the significance of independents. Sue Broadway volunteered the current conference committee as the foundation group for a circus and physical theatre association. And a host of artists amassed to volunteer to coordinate the 1999 conference, which Bob Burton announced would be hosted by the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts. This rash of escalating agreement and volunteerism happened late in the proceedings signalling a sense of unanimity and a happy ending to

the conference.

Resistance to infrastructure development was, I suspect, not merely the product of the drama of the conference's opening binary of vision and pragmatism, but the tension within a form which is both mature and young. The artform might be celebrating 25 years of achievements, but a number of artists and companies, including Stalker, were celebrating a decade's work. And there were many in the audience much younger, some just starting out, for whom talk of associations and infrastructure must have seemed empty. An interesting example of this occurred when a speaker from the floor said that if you were not making it in the city, just hit the road, or if a skill wasn't in demand take up another one. Anni Davey rightly retorted, "The industry is holistic, but that doesn't mean that every artist or company has to be", explaining that for many an artist the skill they have is something they've developed over a long time.

Whichever way you look at it, an artform as substantial as circus and physical theatre, even given its diversity of practices, and one that has 25 years of experience and knowledge behind it needs more than vision: it needs everything that can sustain, develop and open out that vision. The likely progress of NICA to fruition and the expanding vision of The Flying Fruit Flies offer some significant infrastructural potential. The training possibilities at Charles Sturt University, the laboratory experiences on offer at the University of Western Sydney and The Performance Space are indicative of other areas of support for practice and innovation. As well, for a gathering of artists committed to the body, the conference was never short on ideas and the need to engage

with science, with theory and language, and with big questions about what kind of performance and training cultures the artform is making and contributing to the national culture.

Although the tensions between tradition and innovation, between the terms 'circus' and 'physical theatre', between vision and pragmatism, between 'artform' and 'industry' are not likely to go away, and that's not a bad thing, there was a strong sense that these can now be left aside for a while as infrastructural needs are acknowledged and met. More specific issues now need to be discussed—understanding the training culture (raised by Yana Taylor), the relationship between developments in biomechanics and skill training (raised by Debra Batton and others), the relationship between the performer's body and new biology (Judy Pippin), the development of safety codes (within physical theatre but also for other artforms, like dance, as they increasingly engage with circus-based skills) and a closer, more practical look at the relationship between physical theatre and directors, writers and dramaturgs (not addressed in this conference but worried at nervously here and there) in a 'performer-centred' artform. Just how 'performer-centred' might make for a good central subject, a hook on which to hang these topics of training and practice and culture.

Head to Head, Second National Circus and Physical Theatre Conference, Sydney Opera House, October 5 - 7, 1998. Part 1 of this report appears in *RealTime* 28. The complete report can be read at *RealTime* online www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

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Filling a gap, opening a space

Chris Reid reports on an significant development for performance in Adelaide

Open Space is a major innovation mounted by the Adelaide Festival Centre to foster new artists and emerging ideas and develop new audiences. A mini-festival of young talent, involving 120 performers in 26 productions ran over 5 nights in the Space Theatre. Ensembles were invited to submit proposals to stage single, 20-minute performances—with little screening the resulting bag was mixed. Each night saw 3 or 4 performances of music, dance, theatre, some combining disciplines. There was also foyer entertainment before and after—readings, street theatre, drawing, a DJ, an art exhibition.

The outstanding theatre piece was *Mnemosyne*, staged by Netta Yashchin's ensemble (see Linda Marie Walker, "to understand a little", page 37), an absurdist work using song, dance, drama, juxtaposing wonderfully silly ideas. This was consummate comic satire by a professional troupe. Zip Antics Theatre Co-op's *Crescendo* depicted cafe/club culture but in an asylum setting, exploring public persona and private fears in a sexually engulfed world. Unfortunately the text was somewhat crass and overplayed. The power of Fragments Theatre Company's *Klytemnestra* came from strong performances and sparse design focusing the audience on the rich classic Greek story, in contrast to the profuse staging of some other productions.

Dance featured strongly in *Open Space*. SA Independent Dance Collective's *Siren Serenade* was the most delightful and technically assured dance piece, with effective use of a puppet and a strong narrative thread. Fish Kiss' *Trees I'm Climbing* involved 7 dancers, a monologue by the lead dancer and projected photos.



Richard Seidel, Chris Shepherd and Aidan Kane Munn, *Da Whyze Guize*

Matt Nettheim

The choreography and an affecting text carried this work. In *Love Handle*, solo dancer-choreographer Adam Horton performed brilliantly with a folding bed (minus its mattress), using the prop mimetically and athletically to create extraordinary metaphors.

Spoken word also featured strongly. *Wasabi* (Japanese horseradish) was a poetry reading. Seated in armchairs, Georgia and Georgie gave articulate, highly personal but objective accounts of the female condition complemented by strong projected images. The soliloquy was the foundation for performances such as *Funktion*, a rap with photo projections and dance music, *The Infinity Asylum* with a

speaker at a lectern augmented by taped voice and FX, and the cacophonous and aptly-titled *You Can Never Sleep Again*, for tape. Some of these texts were interesting but the performing and visual components didn't gel in this venue.

Musical events were included. *Horny Strings* involved a string quartet alternating with a jazz trio, but the styles didn't suit a theatre setting, as was the case with Liz Hennessy and Narissa Pierce presenting a Bach partita for solo flute and a Muczynski flute sonata however well they played it.

An ambitious multimedia piece was Heliograph Productions' *Heliograph* (V3),

entailing movement, a voice-tape and projected images including a video rendition of the dance, but lacked resolution. Slack Taxi's more ambitious *High Rollers*—*World View* was a comic come to life, with 4 superheroes swooping down to battle the ravages of Western economics—great acrobatics, good design, and a solid message. *High Rollers* could benefit from more workshopping, the live music not quite fitting the concept. But Slack Taxi used the Space Theatre innovatively and powerfully.

In CycloHexanone #02's *D-contamination*, large metal drums were used by 6 drummer/dancers clad in post-apocalyptic industrial s&cm outfits, a video showing the performers 'decontaminating' a subject/victim. The piece ranged across disciplines but, lacking punch, the noir erotica became farce.

The most effective crossover was Da Whyze Guise staging of *When I Was Crazy*—3 male dancers enacted a drama whose design was heightened by, rather than based on, dance/movement. This articulate play about insanity was written with passion and perception by a former asylum inmate. Performers Aidan Kane Munn, Chris Shepherd and Richard Seidel enthralled, maintaining timing and tension.

Good support from Festival Centre staff made it possible to turn around 20 or so performances over 5 nights. There is a need for a flexible venue to sponsor the development of such exciting new work. Even one night's attendance gave audiences a wide range of sensations and ideas. Accessible prices of \$8 and \$5 ensured full houses. With the obvious depth of new ideas available, future *Open Spaces* should be as successful.

Open Space, Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre, December 1 - 5

On the street where they live

Keith Gallasch walks Urban Theatre Project's *Speed Street*

Speed Street, Liverpool, deep in Sydney's west is one of those streets, a street with a reputation for drugs, violence etc, densely and 'multiculturally' populated, built up with blocks of flats but still blessed with a few single-standing homes, an elegant older stone house, some all-timber gems and no shortage of trees. The sound of nearby trains washes up from behind one side of the street, a reminder of Urban Theatre Project's last 'environmental' opus, *Trackwork*. *Speed Street* is a darker, less celebratory, less surreal work, a problem play, didactic in a way that *Trackwork* was not. No surprise, since it soon emerges that it's very much about the conflicting feelings the inhabitants have about their street as community. As the sun dips, the street quickly lives up to its reputation: the artistic director of UTP welcomes us, a speeding car crashes into a parked car behind him, a man runs from an apartment block in his dressing gown...we're all moved on. For most of the performance a tall tower holding amplifiers, speakers, lights and video projector acts as a centre, slowly moving the length of the street as we are guided into properties (a lineup of supermarket trolley dancers in a back yard) and empty lots (where a recurring couple of chardonnay sipping, quality-coffee seekers set up table and chairs) and an

underground car park. Our attention is directed elsewhere to conversations between flats, to a man leaping from a large garbage bin to address us, our passage is interrupted by 2 men fighting over an armchair, or by a street argument as numerous voices fly from our midst defending or damning life on Speed Street.

One of the most disturbing scenes, one blessed with a specificity in the writing and eeriness lacking elsewhere, is of a nervous woman moving restlessly about us loudly describing the terror of being stalked...but there's a grim reversal of expectation: have we been listening to a killer? The armchair battle also has moments of strangeness and pathos that evoke dispossession and desperation, though it's too loosely scripted and resolved to complete its impact. And that's true of a lot of the writing and many of the scenes; great ideas, great images trickle away, good writing alternates with bad, the crowd moves on, puzzled. Tony Abbott would have just loved the satirised chardonnay-sippers; pity they didn't chatter. The conversation between apartment windows looks good, but there's nothing to it. The videos in the carpark tell some other story. Whose? The street debate is argument by numbers and rhythmically flat, neat turning-taking, no sense of passion, of voice over voice, of melee...no sense other

than yes it's a good street, no it's bad. The shopping trolley street dance is woolly...and why is it there...to give young performers something to do? The principal roles are largely taken by professional actors. I would have liked to have seen something like *Trackwork*'s young guides back with us, dealing with us in smaller groups instead of the crawling blob we became, telling us more about inhabitants and houses and histories and placing us firmly in the frame of the performance instead of half in, half out.

Yes, *Speed Street* is ambitious, yes it has some exuberant and chilling moments from director Rolando Ramos and his performers, but it doesn't add up—you know little more than when you arrived, feel no more or less complexly about this street. I've been watching these kinds of performances since the happenings of the 60s through to Welfare State, through to Angharad Wynne Jones, and however good they get, however successful, it's always like the wheel has to be re-invented. The variables of site are unpredictable, directing energy is diverted into production logistics and community relations, performer audibility is always a problem if you insist on working with speech, and audience patience is critical. That's



Speed Street

Heidrun Lohr

probably why the closed spaces of trains and train stations in *Trackwork*, and the divvying up of the audience, helped that show work more effectively.

One image has really stayed with me from *Speed Street*, one which gave the work some kind of frame. As we watch, we are watched. A South American Indian, an older man in traditional dress observes us from a distance, his presence not highlighted. As the tower moves down the street, a video of him running is projected massively against the red brick walls of apartment blocks. Again, he watches from a distance, moving with us. Later, you find out that an entrepreneur brought a group of these people to Australia in the 50s to farm alpaca, went bust...and the Indians stayed.

Speed Street, Urban Theatre Projects, Liverpool, December 5 - 6, 12 - 13, 1998

To understand a little

Linda Marie Walker encounters a different theatre in the work of the Yashchin Ensemble

There's something wonderful about being truly surprised, especially when it's to do with the arts. A trite comment, I guess. But I was surprised, and excited. A different type of 'theatre' doesn't seem to happen often (now) in Adelaide.

I don't mean 'performance' or 'multimedia/cross-discipline' productions. I mean theatre: actors, texts, voices, costumes, props, etc—all live and bare and tense. Of course we see it during festivals, expect (demand) it—a type of physical, language-based, music-driven, high energy, beautiful, spare (yet intense) theatre. (I'm thinking of Les Ballets C de la B's *La Tristeza Complice*, and Needcompany's *Snakesong*, at the last Adelaide Festival.)

So, it *was* exciting to, out of the blue, see a theatre-work that was 'different.' This 'different' doesn't mean 'alternative.' Something else was going on, something absurd, surreal, broken, and at the same time, oddly chaotic, with a hint of improvisation (but only as 'theatre': that is, one felt improvised moments, but I don't think they were, they seemed more deliberate [which I liked]).

Where to begin, when it appears that a theatre-work begins in the middle, or just begins, as if it could have begun anywhere. And then it stops as if it could have gone on forever. I recall Hans Peter Kuhn saying of his collaboration with Junko Wada, and the resultant dance-work, *Who's Afraid Of Anything*, at the 1998 Adelaide Festival, that it was finished, the making of it, when there was no time left.

Netta Yashchin is the Director/Facilitator of The Yashchin Ensemble, formed in May last year, and the work I'm writing about, *Mnemosyne*, was the first production. It was part of *The Open Space Project* (see Chris Reid, page 36) at The Space, the most intimate venue at the Festival Centre.

It was clear, almost immediately, but not quite, that some way of working with and from the body was privileged here—not physically (via the surface of the body) or loudly (via the hysteria of the body), but, rather, deeply—as if the bodies were being subtly pulled, through language, into other psychological and emotional shapes.

The relationship between text, voice, and movement was not just 'human' (a he/she speaking spoken fleshy thingness), but was human through a sort of soul-searching ordinary passion for otherness, while being oneself. The 'singer' didn't merely drape herself over the top of the piano to sing her sensual seducing song, she became both song and piano, she turned inside-out with the pleasure of this (which was funny and appalling: heartbreaking). The piano-player was the 'entertainer', he'd become the dumb acceptance (the outside-in) of this—he would smile at us, his audience, no matter what. And the 'bride' with her bunch of carrots...well, her despair, hope, anger, dissolution was manifest in the contortion of her body, her lower torso thrust forward, as if detached and available.

I talked to Netta Yashchin about the faith needed to allow fragments—in this case bits of literary texts chosen by the actors (from

for instance, *The Little Prince*, *Sexing The Cherry*, *The Service Of Clouds*)—to lay beside one another, believing they will reach and extend each other, unpredictably. She agreed that there is something altogether unknown that comes from this 'play' with and exchange between 'unrelated' partial 'things.' Faith, here, lies in accepting simultaneous tension and release without resolution; and, also, in crediting the texts to be performative and evocative. Netta Yashchin first came to Adelaide in February 1998 (for the festival) as a member of The Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv—Itim Ensemble (*Va Yomer Va Yelech*). Soon after she returned to live here. She gathered a small group of actors, and over several months, and without a permanent base, produced *Mnemosyne*. This style (what does one call 'mode' or 'intention') of "making" theatre relies on faith in language itself, that the fragments of language, the time and space that an extract (or a phrase: "with its sharp edges and broken character like a block to which nothing seems able to attach") can "touch", will be other than a communicative/enunciative act, will be, instead, infinitely "available" as material, wanton and willing, for "use", for new expressions (Maurice Blanchot, "The Fragment Word", *The Infinite Conversation*).

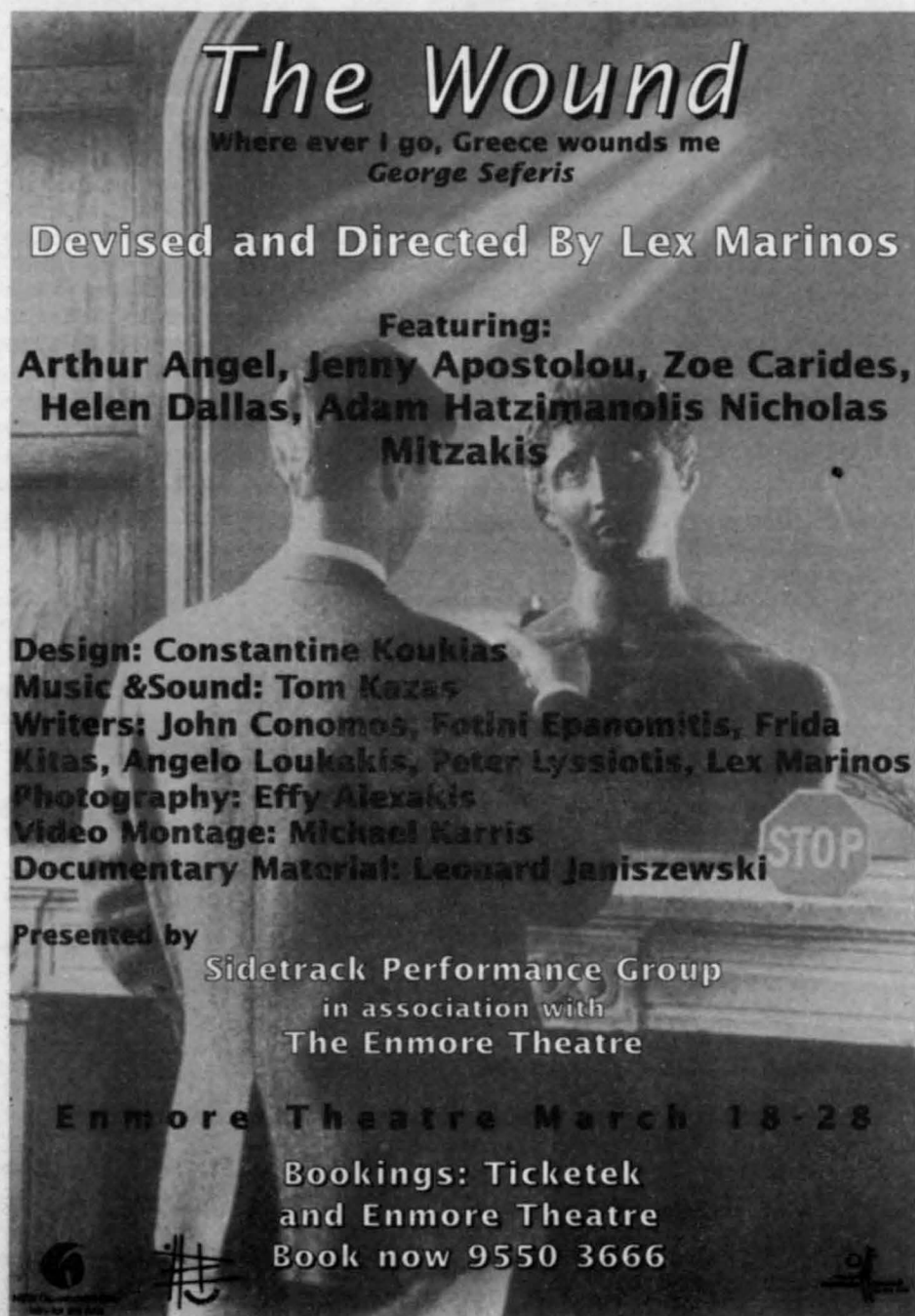
Blanchot on the fragmentary poetry of René Char: "A new kind of arrangement not entailing harmony, concordance, or reconciliation, but that accepts disjunction or divergence as the infinite center from out of which, through speech, relation is to be created: an arrangement that does not

compose but juxtaposes, that is to say, leaves each of the terms that come into relation outside one another, respecting and preserving this exteriority and this distance as the principle."

A bodily relation to writing, or a writerly relation to body, was evident in *Mnemosyne*, or so it seemed. As, the speech which came from the actors was 'embodied'; that is, the body wasn't just the voice's vehicle, it was the voice. And this, as one watched and listened, opened out the work beyond 'content' to ideas of excess and polyphony. No (taught) morals, no (pivot) points, no (character) lines. Madness, unfolded, inside language and memory. Here (in this madness), this intensity of memory, is 'the' aspect of memory which in the first instance is an ecology in and for itself. Remembering, not for, or in favour of, the being it is formed by, but for and of the world it is passing through—this is memory's heart.

What am I saying...I'm not sure. Something like: *Mnemosyne* (goddess of memory, remember) had a poetic that was generous and processional. See: Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis, an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*: "[Subjectivity] is not a natural given any more than air or water. How do we produce it, capture it, enrich it, and permanently reinvent it in a way that renders it compatible with Universes of mutant values? How do we work for its liberation, that is, for its resingularisation?" Or like: "... one has to understand reading as something other than decipherment. Rather, as touching, as being touched. Writing, reading: matters of tact..." (Jean-Luc Nancy, "Corpus", *The Birth to Presence*)

Yashchin Ensemble, Mnemosyne, Space Theatre, Festival Centre, Adelaide, December 1998



The Wound
Where ever I go, Greece wounds me
George Seferis

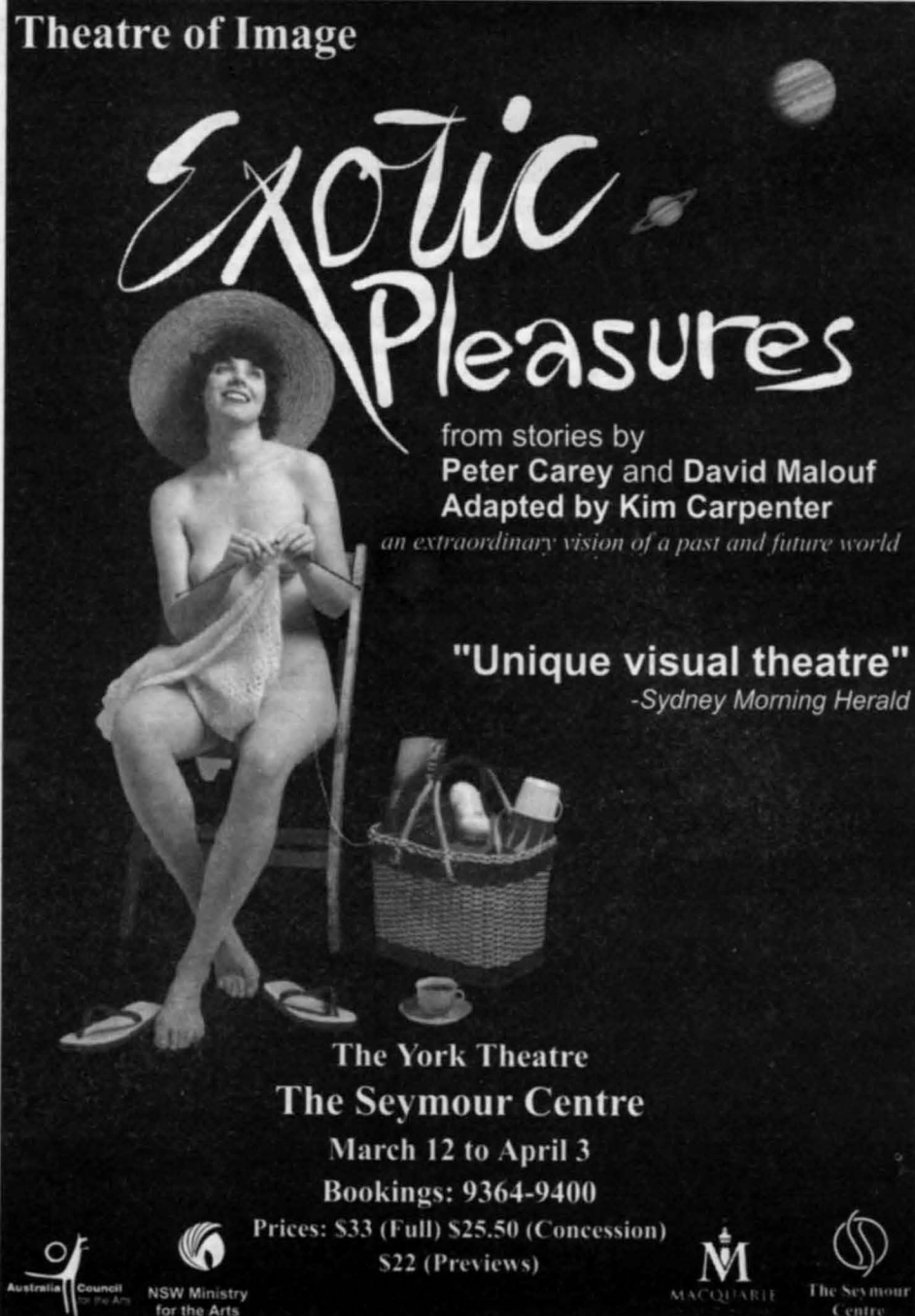
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Helen Dallas, Adam Hatzimanolis Nicholas
Mitzakis**

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Music & Sound: Tom Kazas
Writers: John Conomos, Fotini Epanomitis, Frida Kitas, Angelo Loukakakis, Peter Lyssiotis, Lex Marinos
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Skin lines

Julie Goodall at the boundaries, *Listening to Skin*

Skin—where the body touches air, earth, water. And where the body touches other bodies. Is skin the boundary between oneself and the rest of the world?

Dancer Rebecca Youdell's collaborative project, *Listening to Skin*, went touching, caressing, shaking and rattling boundaries in many senses...the boundaries of dance, of performance, and of each of the artforms involved: movement, music, film, photography. It also explored boundaries in the sense of our relationship with landscape: the film and photographs featured the wide open spaces around Croydon in the Gulf of Carpentaria; a claustrophobic Spanish villa, Paronella Park, in the rainforest outside Innisfail; and the boundary formed by the sea near Cairns, where Youdell seemed to be drowning, not so much overwhelmed by the water as by the incongruity of skin, sun and shipwreck.

A word to describe the quality of the performer's movement might be "nervous"—twitchy, unsettled, excitable. On film she staggered up the stone steps of Paronella Park as if unable to control her stilettos. On stage her performance was interrupted by a silent

thought, as if she wondered if she'd left milk for the cat. This gave me pause to consider my relationship to this performance, to being in a theatre, lights dimmed, watching. (Did I leave out milk for the cat?)

The other performer, Russell Milledge, traversed the stage, taking a seeming eternity, first to examine little dead things, insect carcasses, a bird. The second time, he trailed behind him a strangely beautiful heap of bones, including a human skull. I experienced revulsion and fear. Why, I wondered. Death is experienced daily. Little insects. Birds. Human loved ones. Interestingly, there was a dignity about the performer's consideration of these timeless things.

Unsettling, twitchy, saddening.

Despite the collaborative nature of the project, there was a sense of aloneness in the work. Youdell was always photographed alone. The performers on stage were alone. One "came into this world alone", as Youdell was 'born' out of a tutu. And one "left this world alone", as Milledge departed with his human remains.

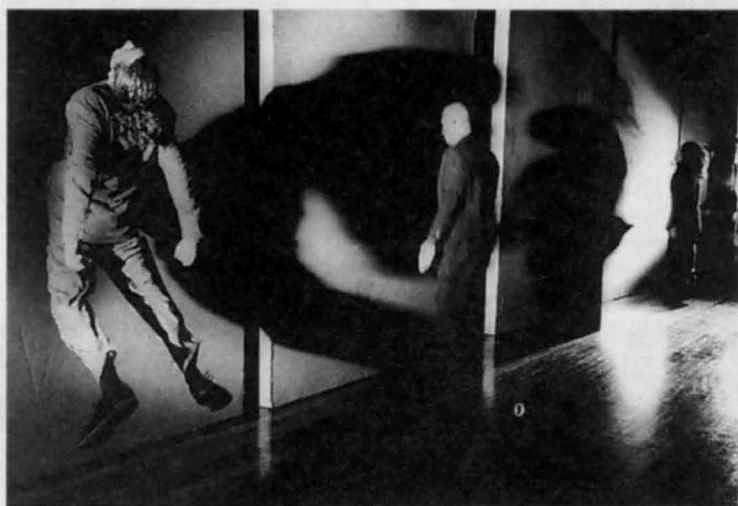


Listening to Skin

Where is the joining? Is all of life about pushing up against boundaries? Or is this it, the pushing is the joining, our boundaries so intricately illuminated for us in art?

Listening to Skin, choreographic photography, Glen O'Malley, Rebecca Youdell; film, Eden Flesh Against Earth, Leah Grycewicz, Rebecca

Youdell and Randall Einhorn: dance performance Russell Milledge and Rebecca Youdell; original sound composition Michael Whiticker and Paul Lawrence of Silent Beat; performance, Rondo Theatre, Cairns, December 2 - 4, Umbrella Studio, Townsville, Dec 18; exhibition, Kick Arts Gallery, Cairns, Dec 7 - 14, Perc Tucker Gallery, Townsville, December 18 - Jan 3



Gravity Feed, Host

Heidrun Löhr

As a child I had a habit of losing myself. Apparently, it runs in the family—"Quiet!" my mother would say, "I can't hear myself think," as if to cut out one world for another. Though I never went far from home I could be gone for hours. Confined to quarters, I simply dreamed up other ways to do it, repeatedly placing my hand through a wire fence and pulling it back so that the bangle on my wrist slid into the long grass. It was the

feeling of letting loose from one world and entering another that I liked. Forty years later I still crave that sense, so hard to find in a city. At Gravity Feed's *Host* it began to come back. Here in the company of 75 others but still inside something outside myself like Zazie in the Metro, I am loosed in a room full of huge tetradecahedron cardboard structures that are the matter of *Host*. Horst Kiechle's built environment is home to the 6 men who inhabit the space—the city fathers, keepers of the city who've misplaced the keys; curators of objects they can barely control.

We are led by Carlos Russell to the back of the Newtown Theatre, up fire stairs, left standing outside, then shuffled into corridors of cardboard, waiting, tempted by whispers coming from the cracks. Placing my ear to William McClure's urgently whispering mouth, I hear something about an outbreak of passion, a murder was it? These were last words. Once inside the cardboard jungle, I left the world of words to enter the powerful presence of things.

At first the monoliths appeared to shift only slightly, changing the space imperceptibly. At one point, relieved to be at last let inside, we turned a corner to find ourselves confined in another identically claustrophobic space. But finally a curling line leads us inwards and we breathe again, inside the city with the 6 men in suits doing battle with themselves and the structures, attempting to hold their ground as the shapes threaten to flatten them, confine them, scurrying through the city, hurling their bodies against it, losing patience with each other, fighting like men in cities. Ari Ehrlich and Denis Beaubois perform a circling dance of mutual throttling. The shapes begin to tip and turn, the ambience of the space amplified by Rik Rue's constantly changing sound scape, more ethereal than some of his other work with Gravity Feed, sometimes like dance music. Adults and small children begin to sway, then spin, then slip into club dancing. From inside one of the structures sounds float out as if from an alien music box. Sometimes the men leave us to our own devices, disappearing to rest somewhere, though where I wonder. Then they're back in some new configuration, agitated, in a line wildly jumping against impossible walls as if to mount them, then back to the gliding tetradecahedron structures that slide and tip and lift and hide and seek and watch and give shape to the bodies between them.

This was theatre for an adventurous audience—if you weren't feeling that way when you arrived, here was a space to transform you, if you let it. At one stage, I follow Alan Schacher's path, moving at his speed. I stand as close to Jeff Stein as I dare and use my peripheral vision to predict his next move. Some people use the space to speak though that seems to miss the point. Some are made reflective. Sometimes nothing happens. Then the men gather the monoliths in the middle and silently usher us in. Two members of the audience find themselves isolated inside a small wedge. One says "I think we're on our own" The other, "I think at this point we're responsible for our own narrative." Two little girls squeal and spin around, lift up their dresses. The performance is not highly formalised but there is still a sense of ritual that comes with the challenged curatorship of these men. We could be inside a maze or at Stonehenge or Uluru. If Gravity Feed's last show, *Gravity of the Situation* showed us the tabernacle, then here was the temple. We were inside an idea made flesh and board and sound and shadow and light, inside the belly of the beast and if we listened we could hear ourselves think. In *Host*, Gravity Feed created an unforgettable place which made us feel we had been somewhere and left us with a strong desire to return. Virginia Baxter

Gravity Feed, Host; performers Alan Schacher, Ari Ehrlich, Jeff Stein, Denis Beaubois, Olivier Sidore, Tim Rushton, with Carlos Russell; direction William McClure; artistic director Alan Schacher; design & fabrication Horst Kiechle, sound Rik Rue, lighting, Simon Wise; Newtown Theatre, Sydney, January 15 - 31.

It's time for some very adult pleasures from a theatrical illusionist who has created many works for younger audiences. Kim Carpenter conjures more of his magical visions in Theatre of Image's new multimedia work *eXotic Pleasures* adapted by him from 2 short stories by David Malouf ("The Empty Lunch-tin" from *Antipodes*) and Peter Carey ("eXotic Pleasures" from *The Fat Man in History*). It's the "distinctive and contrasting views of Australia which these stories dramatically present"



Miles Jackson and Simone Baker from the film in *Exotic Pleasures*

that caught Carpenter's eye. In the Malouf story set in the 1950s, a woman's closed, cosy world is unlocked by the mysterious appearance of a stranger on the lawn. A sound score by Sarah de Jong enhances the unleashing of nostalgia, dream and memory. Carey's story projects a vision of the future. It's a road story, we're told, experienced at dangerously exhilarating speed. It's also triggered by an event, this time the purchase of an exotic bird. Film-maker Michelle Mahrer whose very accomplished documentary on the Page Brothers (*Urban Clan*) was shown recently on ABC TV joins Theatre of Image for *eXotic Pleasures*. High contrast black and white film is used in one story and high key colour in the other to evoke 2 very different worlds. Dancers Rosetta Cook and Kym Wallace join performers Jeanette Cronin and Toni Poli. Julia Cotton directs the movement and Peter Dasent (*Heavenly Creatures*) also composes.

Theatre of Image, eXotic Pleasures, devised, directed and designed by Kim Carpenter, The Seymour Centre, Sydney, March 12 - April 3.

The Women's Jail Project, to be performed in The Women's Refractory (adjacent to the grounds of the 19th century Sunbury Lunatic Asylum), traces the lives of women forced to endure imprisonment (and often death) in the asylum. Within the Refractory's decaying walls, the performance addresses the concept of badness=madness and how this perception relates to women throughout history. Many of the women who inhabited the Refractory were not criminally insane. The majority were Irish, outspoken and irreverent, doomed never to leave the institution.

Writer/director Karen Martin has worked extensively with the Women's Circus and the *Jail Project* incorporates physical theatre, storytelling, multimedia, trapeze/rope work and the words of Virginia Woolf and Cassandra, Priestess of Troy into a series of installations: an exhibition of historical research, anecdotes and artwork; and 3 performances exploring the history of the Refractory, definitions of madness and truth, and the women's stories. Karen plans to tour *The Women's Jail Project* to similar historical sites nationally and to Ireland and Britain.



The Women's Jail Project, concept, text and direction by Karen Martin; performers Ruth Bauer, Sara Cooper, Margot Knight, Lydia Faranda & Jude Roberts; The Women's Refractory (adjacent to the Sunbury Campus, Victoria University, The Avenue, Sunbury, Feb 18 - 20 & 25 - 27

Precarious beauties

Sarah Miller looks at exhibitions and the interplay of art and commerce in Tokyo

In mid-September I arrived in Tokyo—in the less than desirable company of typhoon number 7—to undertake an 11 week residency at the Spiral/Wacoal Art Centre. I love Tokyo. Endlessly fascinating, utterly contemporary and home to 37 million people, it's hard not to be overwhelmed by just how much of everything there is: people, art, neon, shops (shopping is the national pastime), restaurants, museums, theatres, buildings, bicycles, umbrellas, cars, trains, electronics—and all of it perched precariously on one of the most earthquake prone archipelagos in the world. It looks and feels like chaos.

And yet, the trains are always on time—to the second. There is little theft, violent crime is rare, road rage is unknown, no-one loses their temper—or not visibly—and despite the impossibly crowded conditions, the streets are clean. People are friendly, polite, generous and even salarymen on a bender, whilst drinking with incredible focus and determination, just get red and shiny, louder and more giggly and vomit, BUT they don't get aggro or become punchy. It makes this utterly dense, fast moving city, surprisingly relaxed.

There are also millions of comics. One of the most common sights travelling round Tokyo by train and subway is of everyone (or almost everyone) reading *manga*. In 1995, an average of 15 comic books and magazines were purchased by every man woman and child on the Japanese archipelago. It is an utterly Japanese phenomenon, catering to a diverse readership, and manga artists (*manga-ka*) have originated subtle approaches to narrative seldom seen outside Japan.

So it was fantastic to be able to attend the survey exhibition, *The Manga Age*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo (MOT). Compiled by curatorial staff at MOT and Hiroshima's Museum of Contemporary Art, the show was a spectacular but somewhat daunting who's who of comic characters and their creators, particularly for someone who, sadly, neither speaks nor reads Japanese.

Even from my outsider perspective, it is clear that *manga*, in many instances, brings us directly into the imagination of the particular artist. Whether romantic (*shojo manga*), tragic, brutal or absurd, Japanese *manga* are a sublimely subjective experience and unlike their western counterparts, who tend to be part of a team, *manga-ka* maintain almost complete control over creative content, sometimes attaining celebrity status.

Of all the *manga-ka* stars, the one whose work (if not his name) is perhaps best known to western audiences is Osamu Tezuka, often referred to as "The God of Manga". He was the creator of some of manga's most beloved characters including Atom Taishi—also known as Atom or Astro Boy and Jungle Emperor, serialised for US Television as *Kimba the White Lion*. A section of this comprehensive and impeccably installed exhibition was dedicated to contemporary artists whose works strongly reflect the influence of *manga*, notably, Yoshitomo Nara, Mariko Mori and Takashi Murakami.

Whilst contemporary art in Japan—as everywhere in the world—is relatively unsupported, sheer critical mass makes an enormous difference and when artists are supported (usually institutionally—there is no government funding), it's at a level and on a scale quite unknown in this country. The number of museums, galleries, theatres etc is phenomenal and the facilities that exist in

many of them are enough to make this particular contemporary art space director turn sickly green with envy. This is not to say that it's easy. Artists and art professionals work enormously long and hard; the concept of a 'private life' is practically unknown; and in Japan, as elsewhere, the contemporary arts are at the bottom of the cultural heap when it comes to popular recognition and kudos. Certainly everyone I spoke to talked of the effects of the recession on support for the arts. There are cutbacks everywhere and for curators and producers used to working with generous budgets, the effects are depressing and damaging. Still, from my fiscal perspective, if that's a recession, I wouldn't mind one just like it!

Electronics, not surprisingly, are very visible in Japanese contemporary art practice. Tokyo is electronic city and its neon heart is in Akihabara. One of the key institutions providing support for artists working in electronic media is Canon Artlab (<http://www.canon.co.jp/cast/>). This project-based organisation provides significant financial and technical support for artists working with digital media. The Artlab Original Exhibition is held annually. Canon's computer engineers develop original software programs to assist artists in the realisation of their ideas. Exhibitions are held after about a year of collaboration between artists and engineers. Perhaps the most radical thing about this program is that it also supports further upgrades and developments of the created works as well as tours of the work in Japan and overseas. Having been initially supported to develop a new project or exhibition, artists have further opportunities to refine and develop their usually quite experimental works. It is not assumed that the work is finished (sic) on its first outing.

For 1998, Canon Artlab's considerable financial and technical resources went into the development of *SoundCreatures* by young Japanese media artist Kouichirou Eto, presented at Hillside Plaza in glamorous Daikanyama. The work consisted of 10 cute little robots moving with purposeless intent within a carefully demarcated installation space (or field). Sound patterns are created from visual patterns that participants input onto internet web pages. Every time a pattern is created, the sound automatically registers on one of the linked robots at the site and the robot moves around repeating the sound pattern through its speaker. As the robots come close to each other, they exchange certain elements of their sound data and after several exchanges the sound slowly begins to change. There are also 2 'infection zones' where visitors can register a mechanism to change the sound elements by operating the input console in the infection zone.

And really, that's all you can do with this work—describe it. Canon Artlab has supported some outstanding artists and projects in the past and their sophisticated experimentation with technologies has not precluded either poetics and/or meaning. The late Teiji Furuhashi's outstanding installation work *Lovers* comes to mind, as does *Virtual Cage* by German artist Christian Moller. In the case of *SoundCreatures*, it can only be hoped that Eto, having the opportunity to develop the project beyond this first stage, does so.

conFIGURING the CAVE, a collaborative work by Jeffrey Shaw, Agnes Hegedus, Bernd Lintermann and Lesley Stuck, and part of the permanent collection at ICC Museum, is the antithesis of *SoundCreatures*, being practically impossible to describe. It just has to be experienced. In this work of virtual

reality, the interface is an almost life size wooden marionette manipulated by one of the ICC staff. By playing the puppet, visitors in 3D glasses are immersed in a series of 7 worlds, filled with sound, light, 3D imagery and language. It is extraordinary.

ICC Museum (NTT's Intercommunication Centre) was established in April 1997 by NTT in commemoration of 100 years of telephone services in Japan. I love this museum in the heart of Tokyo's Opera City with its small but excellent permanent collection encompassing some favourite artists and their works: dumbtype's *OR*, Toshio Iwai's wonderful and witty *Seven Memories of Media Technology*, Luc Courchesne's *Landscape One* and, as already mentioned, Jeffrey Shaw. It also runs a temporary exhibition program and the 2 exhibitions I managed to see are perhaps indicative of the scope and range of ICC's interests.

The Library of Babel: Characters, Books and Media was an attempt to adapt Jorge Luis Borges' metaphor of a library of infinite possibilities to encompass the contemporary world of information networks alongside traditional media (books, handcut woodblock characters and sculpture).

The Second was in fact the second exhibition of time-based art from the Netherlands to be held at ICC. There was some great work in this show curated by Rene Coelho (previously director of MonteVideo/TBA, the Netherlands Media Art Institute) including works by Jaap de Jonge, Bert Schutter, Bill Spinhoven, Fiona Tan and Steina Vasulka. Perhaps what was most striking about *The Second* was its emphasis on changing perceptions of time as both a highly subjective experience but also as closely linked to differing disciplines (astronomy, biology, history) and articulated through the technologies that allow us to quantify and organise it. Peter Bogers' *Heaven*, was for me the highlight of this exhibition. In a grey installation room, 17 small black and white monitors are suspended at differing heights and levels, each displaying one second video loops. Together, these apparently haphazard fragments



Mariko Mori, *Kumano* 1998 from the exhibition *Shoot at the Chaos*

suggested a domestic microcosm: the pulse in someone's throat, a cat asleep, a suckling baby, curtains moving in the wind, a cup of coffee being stirred and a fragment of an image registered in a studio during the Kobe earthquake.

Tokyo is not all slick museum presentation either. Artist run spaces whilst the size of your average Japanese shoebox are producing some notable and exciting work. The tiny Command N gallery in Tokyo is run by a committed group of young artists and curators whose program includes monthly "pow wows" (artists' talks). Patricia Piccinnini, the then resident of the Australia Council Studio, gave her usual articulate and interesting presentation there. Co-Exist is a multi-function rental space in Omotesando whose *Megademo Real* project provided a salon style environment in which to present digitally generated art in a way that allowed artists to openly present and discuss their work.

Which brings me to the Spiral/Wacoal Art Centre, who were my utterly generous, professional and charming hosts. This extraordinary organisation with its purpose designed building in the heart of Tokyo's fashionable Aoyama shopping district, was established in 1986 by the Wacoal Corporation, a leading manufacturer of lingerie, bed and bath linens. Its history has been distinguished by a commitment to function as a testing ground for the future—exemplified through its current long term program, *Art/Life 21*, and its operations are consequently a remarkable mix of retail,

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This is their way

Julie Goodall celebrates Torres Strait art and culture in Cairns

"Ilan Pasin". Island...passin'...? Island passing? It sounds sad. Is something gone now? Just the opposite. *Ilan Pasin* is a vibrant and intriguing exhibition of art from the Torres Strait; art contemporary, art traditional and art from in between. Turtle shell, palm frond, paint on wood, water colour on paper, an installation of sand and marble, a series of canvases featuring plastic toy cowboys. The diversity is fantastic.

The exhibition grew out of an idea by young Torres Strait artist Brian Robinson, then a student at the local TAFE in Cairns. With suggestions from Brian's teachers, art conservationist Tom Mosby, also an Islander, was drawn in to add his knowledge of traditional Torres Strait art—and of the locations of many of the pieces around the world. Mosby became curator as well as editor of the superb exhibition catalogue, with Brian Robinson as assistant curator, and *Ilan Pasin* came into being after 4 years of work.

Brian Robinson's print *Journey* features in the contemporary section, along with Melbourne-based Clinton Nain's *Play set* (the canvases with the toy cowboys) and Ellen Jose's *R.I.P. Terra Nullius*, an installation which features a magnificent marble headstone with those words engraved in gold, sitting on a grave site made of sand: a sobering yet uplifting response to the 'landmark' Mabo decision.

The traditional section of *Ilan Pasin* includes masks and figurines and the

wonderful 'dance machines', headdresses with moving parts operated by the dancer during a performance. There is a splendid dance machine of a hammerhead shark made by contemporary artist Ken Thaiday snr, who is also a performer. And one of an American bomber plane, from the days when the islands in the Torres Strait were used strategically in World War Two, made by James Eseli of Badu (Mulgrave) Island. A delicate headdress of feathers and string has been brought back from the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge for the exhibition. It arrived in England about 100 years ago when Alfred Haddon returned from his anthropological excursion to the Torres Strait in 1898.

Traditional works from the 19th century, works in the traditional style created in the present day, present day Torres Strait artists living elsewhere, exploring new forms of visual representation...a wonderful mix of old and new, of home and away.

There is a third dimension to *Ilan Pasin* which relates to the influence of Christianity in the Torres Strait. The first missionaries came to Erub (Darnley Island) in 1871 and the arrival is celebrated today by Island Christians as "The Coming of the Light". Artworks in the time of the missionaries used western materials and narrative styles, and so in the exhibition we see water colours depicting mythical figures, as a European might paint pictures of an Island man, a pelican, a dugong. These treasures, used as illustrations in

Margaret Lawrie's *Myths and Legends of the Torres Strait*, published in 1970, were found in the John Oxley section of Brisbane's State Library.

The works are displayed on 2 floors of the Cairns Regional Gallery, a refurbished 19th century building of what were originally magistrates' rooms in the centre of town, one block from the waterfront, complete with porticos and columns. Above and around the gallery entrance hangs an enormous stylized 'headdress', painted in the Island colours of blue, green and white, so that visitors seem to enter 'the mind of the culture' as they pass within.

The exhibition opening day was marked by performances by Torres Strait dancers and musicians, mostly resident in Cairns, a celebration, like the exhibition itself, of a living culture which reveres and delights in its traditions while embracing its own fresh contemporary responses. Island "sitting" songs and dances by children from the local Parramatta Park primary school; rock 'n' roll by young music students at the TAFE; fine traditional dancing by teenage students from islands all over the Torres Strait, who teach each other while boarding at the Wangetti Education Centre just north of Cairns; the fiery drums and leaping style of Edrick Tabuai and the Shooting Star Dancers, originally from Saibai Island, just off the coast of 'apua' New Guinea...a richness unimagined by the casual visitor to these parts, and perhaps, by the rest of Australia.

The title, *Ilan Pasin*, translates as "This is Our Way", an assertion of the uniqueness of Torres Strait culture, but also of its difference from the other Indigenous—Aboriginal—culture, for which Australia is better known.



Ken Thaiday Sr, Beizam (hammerhead shark) dance mask 1994

The exhibition tours major galleries around Australia this year and next. Happily, now there will be more to our idea of the Torres Strait than Thursday Island, Christine Anu and pearly shells.

Ilan Pasin, Cairns Regional Gallery, Nov 6 — Jan 3; Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, Aug 6 — Sept 12, 1999; University of Melbourne Gallery, Oct 27 — Dec 5; Tandanya: National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, Dec 17 — Feb 27, 2000; Australian Contemporary Craft Centre, Sydney, Mar 10 — April 2 2000; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, April 20 — June 12, 2000; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, June 28 — August 18, 2000

Precarious beauties

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marketing, restaurants, cafes and contemporary art across a diverse spectrum of media and forms.

Art/Life 21 is an annual series of events designed to focus on new expressions and forms for the 21st century. It assumes that multimedia and communications are transforming not only creative activities but also world wide systems and lifestyles. Spiral believes that artists have a particular role to play in this transformative moment and to that end has been working to develop a "new relationship to art, accessible anywhere, anytime." Utopian perhaps, but this level of commitment made a pleasant change from the grinding sense of ennui and futility that characterises so many western arts institutions and events.

The 2 *Art/Life 21* events that took place during my stay were the Goethe Institut supported digital concert: *Experimental Express* with Berlin based techno sound artists such as the aforementioned Thomas Koner and Porter Ricks, noto a.k.a. Carsten Nicolai with electronic visualiser, Ritchie Reidinger, Oval & Christophe Charles and from Japan, dumbtype's Ryoji Ikeda; and the video/ electronic media exhibition, *Shoot at the Chaos*, curated by Toshio Shimizu. *Shoot at the Chaos* included Japanese artists Yutaka Sone and Mariko Mori; from China, Feng Mengbo; South African William Kentridge; Pipilotti Rist from Switzerland and from France Sandrine Vivier.

In *Shoot at the Chaos*, presentation was critical to the reception of the work. The viewer was able to request any work s/he

wanted to see on VOD (video on demand) format, not only on the huge projection screen behind the cafe and on monitors placed throughout Spiral Garden itself but also via ISDN video streaming. The kinds of issues explored both conceptually and logistically in *Shoot at the Chaos* will be further developed in the ambitious *Spiral-TV* program, which seeks to exploit state of the art telecommunications (cable TV, internet, videophones etc) to broadcast artists' works not only throughout the Spiral building but directly into people's homes.

It's impossible to encompass 3 months worth of art and cultural activities in Japan. I haven't even touched on the International Art Critics Conference or Spiral's international artists in residence program, ARCUS, or *Gasoline Cruising* with sound artists Yukihisa Nakase and Yasuhiko Hamachi in their modified Citroen through Osaka by night or the experimentation of ATR—Advanced Technological Research—where Australian composer Rodney Berry will take up a 6 month residency this year; or the wonderful work of Takuro Osaka, winner of the 1998 L'Oreal Art and Science award or the funky and site specific *+echno +herapy* curated by Yasumasa Morimura or the extraordinary *Woyzeck* presented by Black Tent Theatre or hip young dance company The Idevian Crew or...

Sarah Miller was the inaugural recipient of an AJAN placement. AJAN, the Australia-Japan Arts Network, is an initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The Australia Council and the Australia-Japan Foundation have joined DFAT in the program, which is administered by Asialink, to enable senior Arts Managers to spend up to 3 months in Japan. Sarah Miller wishes to acknowledge their generous support.



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Irony-ing out the outrage

Sarah Stratton at Metro Arts' *Fuzz Factor*

Fuzz Factor 5, curated by Beth Jackson and Jay Younger, is structured by the discourse of identity politics. In the antagonistic catalogue essay, co-authors Jackson and Younger construct a struggle between the forces of transgression and liberation on the one hand—youth, sexuality, identity—and on the other, the authoritarian forces of culture and politics—government, media stereotypes, the institutional artworld, Queensland rednecks and censorship. This rhetoric of us and them is further emphasised by the promotion of “critical” art that incorporates photomedia, video and installation as opposed to the traditional “decorative” painting and sculpture produced by art world “arse lickers.”

This adversarial set up is carried into the show with its obligatory warning that some of the work may offend and in the catalogue which cites evidence of past government censorship of the arts, the prime examples being Mapplethorpe and Serrano. While the curators are practically begging us to be shocked by the sexual content of the exhibition and daring the agents of censorship to be stirred into action, the exhibition has failed to generate the desired outcry. It seems that shocking the audience is not as formulaic as the catalogue suggests.

Fuzz Factor 5 does deliver on the curators' claims of offering a range of sexual and social identities that question or at least complicate common assumptions of sexuality and gender. For example Gia Mitchell's



Gia Mitchell, untitled from *Mutton dressed up as Lamb, The Journey of the Pineapple Princess*

Untitled installation of photographs on a kitsch 50s sideboard imitates a proud mother's mementos of her daughter winning the 'Pineapple Princess' title at a country show. Adorned with her crown and blue ribbon, Gia poses before the rump of a prize winning bull; 2 grinning cowboys beside her complete the scene. It is only with the knowledge provided in the catalogue that Gia used to be a boy and was raised in the rural heartland of Queensland that the full weight of the work's irony is felt.

In a selection of large format photographs from the series *Control*

Yourself, Angela Blakely expresses a more dangerous and self-destructive preoccupation with identity and contemporary notions of female beauty. The images document the story of 'Jenny' and her intimate struggle with self-loathing and mutilation. Jenny's body—we never see her face—bear the marks of anorexia, self-mutilation and obsessive self-surveillance.

The mutilated, goo-coated fluffy toys of Tori Boucher's *Toys*, although obviously indebted to the work of Mike Kelley, create perhaps the most disturbing installation of the exhibition. Defiled and grotesque, these

pathetic objects are stained, according to the curators, by the “suffocating silence of child abuse and domestic violence.”

The political climate “of escalating censorship” that the curators describe and which informs the rationale for *Fuzz Factor 5* seems overly exaggerated, and as Peter Anderson has pointed out, on occasion, Jackson and Younger find censorship and controversy where there was none. In his review of *Fuzz Factor 5*, Anderson informs us that contrary to the curators' claims, the Mapplethorpe show at the IMA (Brisbane) in 1984 was neither censored nor controversial (Peter Anderson, “Art of Seduction”, *Courier Mail*, November 21 1998).

An overstepping of the delicate line between being critical and a juvenile obsession with things naughty leaves a confusing tone to the catalogue essay. Nevertheless, some works included in the show exhibit a degree of wit and arch parody. Others disturb the comfort zone of the viewer by highlighting how identities don't always fall into familiar patterns, thereby undermining the oppositional logic that informs the curators' rhetoric.

Fuzz Factor 5, curators, Beth Jackson & Jay Younger; artists, Feona Doherty, Angela Blakely, Gia Mitchell, Jann Manser, Nat Paton, Elvira Gonzalez Lopez, Marco Masci, Anthony McClean, George Pinn, Tori Boulter; Metro Arts, Brisbane, Nov 18 - Dec 9, 1998

Sarah Stratton has completed a Visual Arts degree at the Queensland College of Art and is currently a postgraduate in Art History at the University of Queensland.

Twinnings

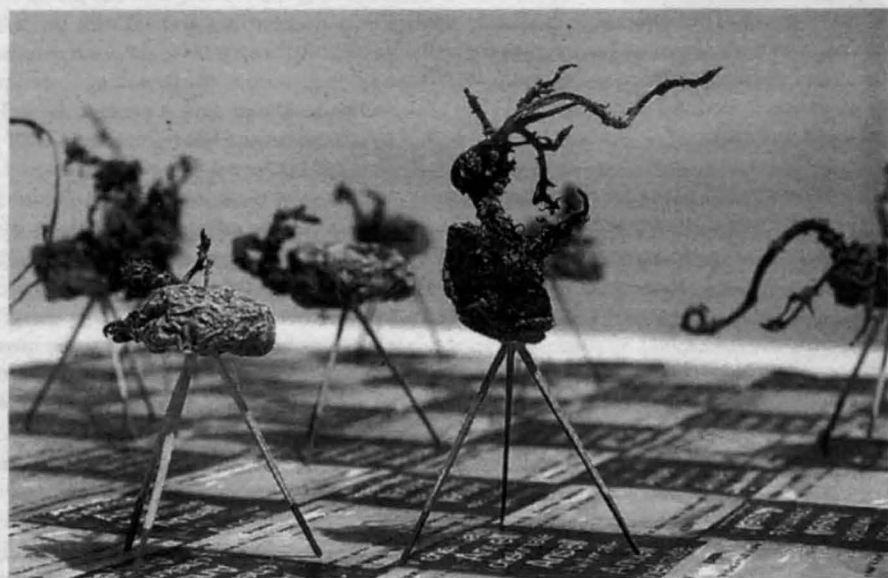
Ruth Fazakerley looks at artist relationships in *twins* at CACSA

Three pairs of Adelaide artists were asked by curator Joanne Harris to collaborate in the presentation of new work. Pairs of individual works are shown in separate rooms, individually titled and occupying discrete spaces, doing away with the otherwise inevitable “who did what bit”. Instead, given the assumption present in the title, *twins*, that there is a natural connection (real or invented) between the paired artists or their work, attention shifts to other concerns, to relationships of intent or interest, of process, materials or form, and to the artists themselves (ages, education, social relations).

Enter Michael Newall's *Two Round Paintings with Sparkling Cachou*: 2 large round white canvases, stretched over board, and propped up against the wall. Nestling together they support a tiny silver cachou in their embrace (or rather cleavage). Nearby, Katie Moore's delicate investigations of everyday materials and material processes become a gentle appreciation of colour, shape and gravity in *Oranges*: a white supermarket plastic bag of oranges, sitting low on the floor against the wall, its lower half encased in slumped grey plaster. At the other end of the room, force and direction are also in operation—horizontally, lightly, in Moore's *Butter Square*, and vertically in *Up* (butter, crackers, paper towelling and wooden dowels). Newall's *Standing Painting*, a table tennis green canvas also leaning up against the wall, provides other hints of correlation between the artists. Mouse-hole cutouts in the canvas at floor level suggest putt-putt golf, or somewhere just to stand and edge one's feet into. A game to be played in any case, requiring participant investment in time and process.

In the back room of the gallery, the Dean Whitehorn and Angela Valamanesh works offer an apparent visual unity. Delicate black on white. Whitehorn's *Psychic Excretions* presents a pattern of inked and folded small paper squares, a Rorschach blot (tendrils, synapse) of Rorschach blots, folded in to the corner of the gallery, and repeated in the neighbouring corner. Two rows of large scale, enamelled white, ceramic teeth (the jaw dissected), and a framed page of watercolour or ink drawings of ambiguous forms comprise Angela Valamanesh's *For a long while there were only plants*. They reinforce the sense of a joint interest in the organic, in relationships between human and plant life, interior and exterior, macro and micro worlds—and in drawing too. They share a considered, distantly scientific, diagrammatic approach.

In a move from formal simplicity towards visual and spatial density, Alison Main's *Simultaneous Translation* and Alice Vivian's *Pare* inject a tone of warm correspondence. Main's domestic tableaux of lampstand, stool, cabinet, ash tray and television monitor echoes the endless succession of video images fading over each other on the screen. The “stuff” of memories, display shelves and the backs of drawers and cupboards, pass in and out of a dimly lit world accompanied by a voice-over of almost understood words and conversations. Other peoples' mementoes...The actors in Vivian's drama comprise stained paper covered in a layer of gauze, pins covered in cotton wool, condoms stretched into impossible positions on the wall and tracing a trajectory towards a decaying orange peel



Alice Vivian, installation detail

Stephen Gray

lying on the floor. A fold-up table sits beneath a staggered line of hanging, varnished and printed (fly-)papers. Small figures of decaying, sprouting potatoes battle for position on the Ansell-blue and white chequered table cloth cum chess board.

In some senses the artworks appear without contextualisation—the catalogue essay to tell you what they ‘mean.’ Does a ‘theme’, the adoption of which the curator Joanne Harris identifies as potentially problematic, focus attention on or away from the ideas of the works themselves? For the audience, the interaction of pairs of artworks, here by virtue of the curatorial context and their physical juxtaposition, prompts the speculative investigation of relationships, the construction of (possibly fantastic) narratives of personal lives, past events, of likes, dislikes...a focus on connections that encourages lingering consideration. For the artists involved, I suspect the curatorial project has served them with an opportunity to focus attention on their own processes and to highlight the

existence of connections—systems of communication, shared working practices and interests. (Collaboration, broadly speaking, is probably the norm of practice in the visual arts, rather than an oddity.)

The exhibition, supported by Peter Harding and Paul McCann's essay, thoughtfully highlights issues of collaboration, influence, and the circulation of ideas within artistic practice. It raises questions of curatorship in a self-reflexive way. The artists have an opportunity too, perhaps, to tell new kinds of stories about their work through the collaborative process of selection and presentation.

twins, curator Joanne Harris, artists: Katie Moore and Michael Newall, Angela Valamanesh and Dean Whitehorn, Alison Main and Alice Vivian; writers: Peter Harding and Paul McCann; Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, November 6 - 29, 1998

Ruth Fazakerley is a visual artist based in Adelaide.

Game to play

Keith Gallasch interviews David Chesworth about his ensemble's new CD, *Badlands*, and his Olympic Games commission

David Chesworth is a Melbourne-based composer who worked with the legendary group Essendon Airport, became a sound engineer, composed for Chamber Made Opera (including Lacuna source of the suite on his ensemble's new CD), formed The David Chesworth Ensemble in 1994, was commissioned to write an opera for Opera Australia with Tony MacGregor as librettist, and commissioned to create an open air sound design at the Olympic Games site in Homebush. A longer version of the interview appears on the RealTime website in which Chesworth discusses the following in more detail and the Melbourne experimental and classical milieu that helped generate his work.

KG How often does the ensemble play together?

DC We get together twice a year. Though this next year's looking a bit more dense with a lot of possibilities. A lot of the musicians play in other groups so it's a co-ordinating nightmare—all ensembles have that. But when we get together it's very focused. They're so efficient. I used to play in rock type bands and there you'd spend all afternoon figuring out one part of a song, drinking coffee and generally mucking around having a great time. With this group we'd probably have completely worked out and rehearsed 4 or 5 pieces from start to finish in the same time. This year I've got to write some more material for the ensemble. Indeed, we've been commissioned to write a series of pieces. The response to *Badlands* has been so overwhelming for me that my focus has shifted to take the ensemble a lot more seriously because the audience is taking it seriously.

KG You wrote *Lacuna* for Chamber Made Opera. Did you write for that particular combination of instruments in the first place?

DC *Lacuna* had a very strange arrangement of instruments. It had 2 percussion which is not so strange except this was all encompassing—everything from steel drums to marimbas and vibes. Then trombone and piano and cello. It was an odd combination I was interested in playing with. I liked the trombonist and I'd never worked with cello before. Because this body of work was written for that combination, it transposed easily into the full ensemble and I ended up re-orchestrating it for the additional violin and bass. What it's given me are 3 sustaining lyrical melodic instruments in the extremes of trombone and cello and violin. Pretty wild things to have on stage together. We have to do things like amplify the violin a bit in order to balance it out with the trombone.

KG Do you feel you might exhaust the possibilities of this combination?

DC Probably the thing that interests me about the ensemble is that all the instruments are very rich resonators and they're all quite distinctive whereas a string quartet, even an orchestra, all kind of fit together, they're all known to belong. These don't belong and you can play with the different resonances. Melody and rhythm, sure, they're part of that but they're the vehicles that let these strange objects resonate.

KG Why the Carl Orff?

DC This was music that Orff wrote as a

teaching tool for children yet here it was being used in this strange film, Terence Malick's *Badlands*, about innocence and guilt. And this innocent music took on a kind of guilty edge too. There's so much discipline in it. When you hear Orff music played by German schoolchildren it's like listening to junior Kraftwerk. Again, it's another kind of resonance, this time a kind of resonance between intention and meaning, I suppose. Hearing the music used the way Malick used it I thought, yes I'd like to go back to the source and see what I can do with that. Because the music is scored for children, there's a whole selection of instruments that are specially made, cut down versions of marimbas and vibes, even a cut down cello and bells. It's a jumble of percussion. It was very similar to what I have in my group. I like simple melodies, not just simple melodies, but there was something about his kind of rhythmic insistence that was able to support quite simple repeating melodies. I thought this was a good starting point for that kind of music, a kind of churning away. I write with phrases that interlock and churn away with different rhythms against each other. And he was doing similar things.

KG You also do a mix of one of the Orff pieces too which is like a reverie.

DC A friend of mine Robert Goodge who I worked with in the group Essendon Airport years ago has done a lot of re-mixes including some work with the group called Filthy Lucre who did the Yothu Yindi *Treaty* re-mix. Robert came to me with this idea of applying some of his re-mixing techniques to some music that wasn't necessarily rock or electronic music. I gave him the CD of *Badlands* before it was released and he really liked one of the tunes and he turned it into this 28 minute re-mix and I thought we could put it out as a separate disc. So on one disc you've got something quite organic and musician-based and on the other something electronic and quite severe, not the music but the temporal nature of it, the way the music flows. A lot of the tracks on *Badlands* are quite short and the re-mix happens to be quite long but with minimalist tendencies, with echoes of Steve Reich as well.

KG The *Lacuna* Suite is very engaging. You've spoken about the interlocking rhythms—I enjoy slipping into that mode. It has that insistence and a shifting of gear, a sort of reverie but a dynamic at the same time. What for you is significant in the writing of *Lacuna*?

DC I really enjoy the act of writing and of having a finished object. I think compositions are rather like buildings in that you've made this structure that never existed before. In *Lacuna* I was able to experiment a bit with certain melodic material that was composed with computer algorithms and others that were composed from the head. See, often I do lots and lots of writing and then I live with things and sort of filter it all down until I've got these essences. I find focus comes after you've done lots and lots of work. In *Lacuna* I was trying to—going right outside my capabilities, but this is the kind of thing you do—I was trying to write this music that represented all these different facets of a society, a kingdom in this case. An ecclesiastical music and a kind of a folk or more spontaneous music and a kind of military, government sort of music. Those elements are all there which is why in *Lacuna Suite* there's a lot of contrasts. One song stops and another quite different one



David Chesworth

Ross Bird

starts up. The traditional way of writing in a classical sense is that you start with your 3 notes, in Beethoven's case, and you build the whole piece out of that. I tend to surround myself with many options and then filter them back and start to form relationships with that sound, that melody line, that rhythm and see how they can inter-relate. You start to find the connections and you develop those.

KG So your approach is not chance-driven but there is an element of putting things together to see what happens. What about the algorithmic side?

DC It was simply a matter of developing lots of rhythmic and pitch material. Simple stuff and then getting rid of most of it. Doing so much listening to it. It's funny. The human brain wants to make meaning out of everything it sees and hears. So a lot of this music was notes but they were doing various patterned things and I started to hear the patterns because the algorithms seemed to be pitting notes at certain times over so many melodies or generating some little game where some notes were turning up more than others. I'd start to hear the patterns and I'd really like what was happening. It was simply a way of generating material that didn't have my initial physical strokes on them...I could have ironed them out but I kept them in because what amused me was that here's something we expect and then there's that shift, and then we're back to that thing that we expect. That's what creates music, of course, the things you don't expect. It's all about expectation, tension and release and rhythms shifting and your brain having to play catch-up and then sort it out. So that way of writing I always use. I use several. I can write melodies and do all that but I always like to have stuff coming in.

KG How does the Olympic commission work as composition?

DC That's more an installation. It has to be finished by June this year. It's an idea that's going to take a bit of pulling off. But I've got to take the risk. Four and a half hectares of sound. It's a malleable object. All computerised. There are a lot of speakers. But they shouldn't call too much attention to themselves. It's made up of vocal sounds, the sounds of effort and exclamation of the human body. There's no text or language, just the signatures of the body through expressions of effort. Some sounds are easier to get than others. There's collecting the sounds, then manipulating them by extending them—I don't want to change them in any other way. So that the moments that gave rise to those expressions are somehow frozen in space and you can walk through them, these body cavities. It's all off a computer hard disk. Lots and lots of files. So it is ambitious. The technology has to go in first. In a sense it's an opera, it's theatre, it's playing with resonance again.

KG Do you feel now that as a composer you have an audience?

DC The *Badlands* album has given me a much broader audience. The producers, W. Minc, have presented it back to the broader culture whereas the ensemble has really been more of a classical thing. Now it is what it is in itself. It doesn't have to be popular or classical. W. Minc have said come and listen to this. There were 400 people at the launch and they sold lots of CDs. So I'm not doing too badly. I do have more stresses. We're a company (with his partner Sonia Leber—eds) and there are all these reports and insurances and book work and you're thinking are we being artists here and basically the answer is, well join the club.

see CD reviews on page 47 for a review of *Badlands*



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Can Wagner cause conjunctivitis?

Noel Purdon sees proof of Wagner's dramatic genius in Adelaide's *Ring Cycle*

In common with many protean artists, among them Aeschylus and Shakespeare, Wagner's works are fundamentally altered by the country, date and direction of their performance. Interpretations of them can (and have) run the gamut of the political, sexual and psychological spectrum. It's necessary to state that clearly at the beginning of any discussion of this production. Wagner is still near to us in time and cultural mood; the recent history of Germany and the possession of his music by a dynasty of ideological dogmatists have almost fixed it in a kind of National Socialist cement. Moreover an immense amount is known about his personal life, which isn't overwhelmingly sympathetic.

But I wonder what audiences would make of productions of Shakespeare which connected the sparse historical records of his violence and grain-hoarding with his depictions of Jews, blacks and the rural poor. Even more so in the case of Aeschylus, the historical distance and lack of biography leaves the way clear for a reading of *The Oresteia* as a justification of the subjection of women and the totalitarian right of Attic supremacy.

Obviously a director would have to ignore those parts of the texts which, in each case, demonstrate a profound unease and a sympathy with views that are completely opposite. *Coriolanus*, however, works perfectly well as a Fascist or Communist experience without changing a word. And there can be no doubt of the value of *Henry V* as British propaganda with the effect of a cruise missile in time of war.

With Wagner, the received idea is more

readily at hand. Hitler stamped him with the Reich's approval, and the Bayreuth Wagners of the 30s and 40s were inexcusable Nazis. I must confess that these partially irrational connections have determined my own preference for performances of Verdi, despite a furtively ecstatic love of the music for *Parsifal* and *The Ring*. It's rather like stubbornly drinking chianti when there's an excellent riesling maturing in the cellar.

Pierre Strosser's production has changed all that forever. Despite my admiration for Patrice Chereau's subversion in his own bolshie attack at Bayreuth, I never expect to see again such a brilliant, complex and intellectually coherent account of the *Cycle* as this one. From the first alluring bars of the prelude to *Das Rheingold*, the augmented ASO plays like a dream. If the horns occasionally wobbled, it's understandable that some players following Jeffrey Tate's conducting by monitor in the huge pit must have found the intricate cues exhausting. Generally the sound is a miracle, every harp glissando and thundering percussion glittering like electricity in the theatre's new acoustic. Then there's Strosser's pitilessly slate-grey set, a distant vision of the overcast Rhine beckoning the cast upstage, immaculately transported from the Theatre du Chatelet to a stage revamped with equal attention to lighting and space.

But the great surprise is the characterization of these gods, giants, dwarves, virgin warriors and human lovers, and the ability of the singers to act. Just as he pared down the panoply of props and special effects, this consummate director has given each singer tragically confined movements and gestures which only

the music can unbutton. Wotan (John Wegner), in his caped surcoat, might be Wagner himself icily ordering the construction of Wahnfried as his personal Valhalla. Fafner (David Hibbard) and Fasolt (Warwick Frye) are Masterbuilders who match him as bullies, as ruthless in plundering gold from the Rhine as the Nibelung smiths. Malcolm Donnelly, Richard Berkeley-Steele and especially Peter Keller as Loge give these figures a dignity of their own, far removed from anti-Semitic caricatures.

The women are the greatest surprise. By the second act of *Die Walkure* the audience is beginning to understand why Wotan's wife Fricka (Elizabeth Campbell) is so sour, and why his daughter Brunnhilde (Janis Martin) will tear the house down at his summons. We could be watching Strindberg or Ibsen. In their dull winter Victorian clothes, female passions can only be hinted at in recitatives. But the motifs in the engulfing music scream and moan with their frustrated eroticism. Adultery, jealousy and full-blown incest charge the air. There can be few sadder moments in drama than when Wotan sentences his daughter to her cruel fate and they finally, desperately embrace.

By contrast, the human lovers seem to be given no access to their unconscious. Siegmund is outwitted by everyone else onstage. Siegfried is no Aryan hero, but a great lummo of foolhardy youth, and Sieglinde is a dumb victim. *Siegfried*, perhaps because Wagner kept on having to patch it up with repetitious narrative, is the least successful of the tetralogy. I think it was during these long romantic aeons that I caught conjunctivitis from the sneezing Seal from Seattle behind me.

It is in *Gotterdamerrung* that the music drama again flares into life before its conflagration. In keeping with his stern representation, Strosser does away with any ominous business of the Norns as mystic fates. Erda (Liane Keegan) is a bag-lady on a park bench, and she warns Wotan of doom like someone encountered at the demolition of the Wall between East and West Germany. In fact, that's how the production completes its initial metaphors. The Bridge to Valhalla is a catastrophe. Whether it is the literal Wall, or a wall between the desires of people and their fulfilment, it will bring neither love nor power. Like the golden ring, it best belongs in the river of the unconscious, and there it must return until it is understood. Wotan, who seeks both power and love, is a bringer of disaster.

Is this a portrayal of Hitlerian ideology? I think not. The Nietzsche-Wagner-Hitler axis so facily constructed owes a lot to bad courses in postmodernism (which fail, of course, to explain the philosopher's sheer nationalist hatred of the composer, let alone the Fuhrer's real preference for Lehar), and even more to the confluences of history. I might as well blame Wagner for giving me conjunctivitis. Strosser, Tate, the aesthetically attuned Bill Gillespie, and the shrewd management of Stephen Phillips have achieved a magnificent event, and in the process restored an artist's complexity. Here he is seen, as he wished to be seen, as a dramatist of genius.

The Ring Cycle, Adelaide State Opera, November 18 - December 12, 1998.

Underwater archaeology of the unutterable

Gretchen Miller interviews *The Listening Room* artist-in-residence Sophea Lerner

A bell, intended for a small Finnish village church, is carried on a boat across a lake, sometime back in the village's past. But the bell doesn't make it—on the way it sinks below the surface, where it remains to this day.

The Glass Bell is the result of Sophea Lerner's 1998 Australia Council New Media Arts residency at *The Listening Room*, ABC Classic FM. It is a work of fiction, based on family stories, many of which were told to Lerner by her maternal grandmother, whose first language is one the artist does not speak. There are rhythms, resonances from childhood, that have surfaced in a work that has been 4 years in the conception.

"I like the idea that there were different perceptions about the place, that people inhabit it in different ways—there was story and there was place but the relationship between the two wasn't totally clear," Lerner says.

"I found this story metaphorically rich with that whole nexus between told and untold stories...it's an exploration of how told stories are like place holders for the unutterable. Certain stories are told again and again, and the unutterable finds voice through those things, they're things that can't be told but which over time are understood—so it's a kind of underwater archaeology in that sense."

The Glass Bell was proposed to the New Media Arts Fund as an installation work with a radio component. Lerner envisaged a large touch screen over which the participant would move their hand...the interaction would become like a dance.

"I'm still researching how to do it. But basically through the process of the residency I realised it was going to take a lot more time and a lot more money than I optimistically planned and actually Robyn (Ravlich) and Jane (Ulman) (of ABC Audio Arts) were very instrumental in encouraging me to use the time to think rather than pump out a number of finished pieces," she says.

"At a certain point in the residency I thought: 'OK I'm going to stop playing with the technology and I'm going to just work on the content, the sounds, building up the sounds', because I can get really sucked into the techy stuff...The radio program is modular—if you like it is a non-interactive, non-functional prototype for the audio installation."

While radio is often text-driven, Lerner was acutely aware that using sound to unfold a narrative does different things with the way time is perceived, and almost half the work is without text. Music composed for cello, viola and percussion was woven with location recordings and studio-created sound effects in a texture which did not function as interludes but had equal status through the work.

The script was written, and voices recorded, with a flexible duration work in mind. But work for broadcast is fixed and Lerner had to deal with 2 kinaesthetically different spaces. "When I was writing the script I wrote swathes more narrative material than I ended up using, because I wanted to have that to cover me for the radio program as a linear work," she says.

There were 3 different scripts used concurrently in the work. "I had script one which were first person stories—some of them were summarised from stories that my mother and grandmother had told me on tape and some were my own interventions into those. Then there was script 2, which was the second person script, cutting across those narratives with other layers of things which weren't said, and may not be the slightest bit true, but they become those stories that interpolated some sort of fictional archaeology into those stories. Then I had a script 3, which was more fragmented again and which I had translated into Finnish as well. So I had 3 scripts which were concurrent, and which roughly broke down into the different sections of the work and I had all the performers read all the scripts in both languages where appropriate. So I've got lots and lots and lots of script. Which will be useful for the interactive version."

The structure has barely changed for Lerner since the piece was first conceived. It functions more as a metaphorical structure than a linear one, which she used as a coathanger for the different elements. "There's the lake space—there's under the lake, there's the surface of the lake, there's the edge of the lake; there's a house, there's a facade of the house and there's the interior of the house, there's a stairwell; there's a forest space and a sky space. And none of them are in any sense literally representing spaces but they all encompass the different sort of frames, the different flavours, zones if you like."

It was through the residency that Lerner has had the uninterrupted time necessary to

complete the piece. Like most practicing artists in the time-poor 1990s she had been spending much of her time chasing the next income source—an exhausting and sometimes demoralising experience.

"It was blissful," she says. "It was a huge shock to me to realise how much energy I had been spending, there's always a zillion little things to be done (to find work)." But during the residency, "I was working really hard and putting in long hours, but I still had more time off than I ever had in my life. It enabled me to process on another level and I found myself really using that down-time creatively as well. In a sense when you're not actually working on the project 8, 9 hours a day, if you're taking a weekend walk on the beach you're doing more for the project than if you're hassling round on the phone to find out if you've got any work the following month...so I felt it spoiled me a bit actually."

Structuring her week to contain normal working hours quickly became obvious to prevent burn out, Lerner says. "I've tended to work really intensely and manically on things for 20 hours a day over a 3 week period. I realised straight up that I couldn't work that way or I'd burn out, so I basically started out with a 9 to 5 routine and I found that going to work every day was very important. The hours inevitably stretched because I was having fun."

Gretchen Miller is a composer, writer and journalist and the Australia Council New Media Arts Fund/The Listening Room artist-in-residence in 1999. Her work will be a song cycle for radio, telling stories from inland Australia.

The Opera House's new deal for new music

Elizabeth Walsh and Fiona Allan talk to Keith Gallasch about The Studio at the Sydney Opera House

The Sydney Opera House is involved in an increasing amount of entrepreneurial activity. It's also opening up the House to the public (Sundays 'Round the House, improving the weekend markets, and a host of other activities) and reaching out to a wider, younger audience. Much of the change is attributed to Joseph Skrzyński's chairmanship (recently renewed), the brief residency of Tim Jacobs as General Manager, the employment of Barbara Tiernan, Elizabeth Walsh, Fiona Allan, and, in tune with the mood, the appointment of Michael Lynch as Jacob's replacement. A major development is the refurbishing of the long closed Broadwalk Studio into The Studio, the first Opera House venue with a specific artistic programming policy, one dedicated to new music in the broadest sense but with a special place for innovative and challenging new musics. Thanks to a considerable investment by the NSW Government in the rebuilding and in the subsidising of New Music Network artists to help meet hiring costs, and to the Opera House's commitment, specific staffing, resources and potential for some co-productions, The Studio looks set to become a focus for innovation and new audiences in what has mostly been a traditional arts venue. A new foyer connecting The Studio, The Playhouse and The Drama Theatre will add to the sense of sharing and choice vital to the success of the new venue. As Elizabeth Walsh, former administrator with the Flying Fruit Fly Circus and production manager with Anthony Steel's Sydney Festivals, says, "We've just got to get the coffee right and we'll be fine." The following are responses to questions I asked at this visionary and energetic pair, in separate meetings, at the end of one of those days, so I've let the answers speak for themselves.

Elizabeth Walsh, Programs Manager

I'd like to think of it as a collaboration between the organisation—Fiona Allan, myself, Barbara Tiernan and Michael Lynch—and the artistic community. What's been wonderful about this process is that people have been very generous and open and forthcoming with ideas. From my perspective, it's about engaging in a wider dialogue with the community. That's the important thing that this venue can do. Our job is to work out how we can put everything together into a program that's cohesive but also supports the audience in being able to enjoy and to be led through various kinds of concert experiences. How do we group things that will best support that audience development for the companies? There's a lot of work that happens out there but in isolation. We're able in this environment to possibly place it in a context that I hope is exciting and invigorating not only for the artists but for the audience.

In terms of hiring, I don't think we want to be in a position where we say to companies you have this venue every year for this time for the next 5 years. We want to avoid that kind of locking in. But, for instance in the first 3 months, we've struck a 3-way collaboration between ourselves, The Performance Space as the event organisers of the *antistatic* dance event and Russell Dumas and Dance Exchange who'll perform the opening piece here at The Studio. This is a terrific opportunity to introduce a whole range of audiences. I've been talking a great deal with Russell about how we might be able to extend the dance program without necessarily having to have people on the floor. It may be some kind of video collaboration or whatever. That's a little way down the road. We've also been talking to multimedia artists about doing 2 or 1 week seasons. All of these, of course, are dependent on Australia Council funding for most groups. That forces you into a situation where you can't program 6 months in advance because you don't know what the funding outcome's going to be.



Artist's impression of The Studio

Optimistically The Studio will seat 360. But you couldn't stage a piece of theatre in that configuration. So you're looking more like 240. That's not a lot of seats. It's about what's going to work best in that venue. Also we have a responsibility as an organisation to advise people and say, look this isn't a great place for you to be. Same as Pearl Jam in the concert hall doesn't work. You have to be honest about the limitations of the venue, for example the car parking might be too expensive for some audiences.

The other part to it is the recording facilities in the venue which have a commercial aspect. But having them there in combination with the venue means there's a whole range of possibilities for what can happen inside. You can fit a full orchestra inside The Studio. So the opportunity is there for recording film scores, a whole range of applications which will hopefully support the commercial viability of the space.

It's my perception that there are a range of audiences, who want to engage, who are excited by the opportunity to sample a whole lot of things and who simply need the right kinds of invitations. We have to make that as easy as possible. The Opera House Trust has committed resources to making this happen. We are buying performances from some people and presenting work, entering into co-production arrangements with others. It's fantastic that the organisation wants to put those resources into contemporary work. It's a good investment. I went to the *At the Brink* National Performance Conference and Mike Mullins was talking about investment and how he viewed The Performance Space as a 100 year investment. That's a wonderful notion. The Studio will be devoted to the future.

Fiona Allan, Programming Coordinator (Music and Music Theatre)

I'm a clarinetist with a music degree from Sydney University. In my last couple of years at university I got involved with the Experimental Sound Studio with Ian Fredericks and working with Martin Wesley-Smith doing concerts for about 6 years. And with electronic performance with Ohm. We worked here for about 5 years and also did concerts in Melbourne and Canberra. I actually hope to be able to do more for contemporary music from this end than I would as a practitioner.

Initially I imagine we'll be working hard to get 200 people in The Studio. We hope to be able to get the venue known as the contemporary music and contemporary arts place, to develop an audience, to have crossover audiences, to build audiences that will have trust in the venue and the product that's put on there. So people might be willing

to take a risk in not knowing quite what the performance is that they're going to see but knowing that they like the venue and they've liked other performances that they've seen there and they're willing to give it a go. We're taking a fairly broad definition of contemporary music to include jazz, world music, even acoustic popular music—musicians like David Bridie. When you stretch it that far, there's actually tons.

Obviously I'm really keen to see as much Australian content as possible so there are a lot of works by Australian composers as well as Australian premieres of international works, and that includes works that have only ever been performed once. The New Music Network were also the ones lobbying the State Government in order to get funding for a dedicated venue and they've been identified as the preferred hirers of the space. But if you put on all the concerts that all those groups do in a year, you're still only filling 60 nights in the hall. That's why we've opened up the definition. Also it's valid that when we're not putting on contemporary music here, we can do other contemporary arts. We're planning seasons of cabaret, Russell Dumas will be coming in with the opening event of The Performance Space's *antistatic* season. We've got a couple of performance related conferences coming in. We're talking to the Melbourne Comedy Festival about bringing some of the highlights up here. So the broader criteria of contemporary music in all its guises is our primary interest but a secondary interest is all other forms of contemporary art. There's a lot of synergy between those different audiences, whether they know it or not.

With the New Music Network season there'll be 2 days of debate and seminars on issues that relate back to the entire opening season. Similarly we're working with the Australian Music Centre to have the International Alliance of Music Information Centres (IAMIC) Conference here this year. I'm working with a number of organisations at the moment to program evening concerts focusing on works from different nations during that time. Obviously the conference delegates will be interested in that but hopefully it will draw other contemporary music audiences.

In the first 3 months, we have, amongst others, a series of concerts over 4 Sundays in which we're looking at non-traditional use of stringed instruments. I think most people would associate stringed instruments in the Sydney Opera House with orchestral or chamber music. And so there are 4 groups that play string based instruments but do completely different things with them. Fourplay is a rock string quartet which is more often heard at The Basement. They're about to go on a big international tour. Coda is one of the groups that tours with Musica Viva. The Transylvaniacs do gypsy music and The Martinez Brothers are a latin guitar trio. I'm working with Peter Rechniewski to develop something with Sydney Improvised Music Association (SIMA) trying to get 4 things as different as possible but still reflecting the nature of contemporary improvisation. Then you'll see that the venue will be used for some of the *Sundays Round the House* concerts. We're working in 3 month blocks at the moment. In terms of promotion. The Studio will have its own diary separate from the Opera House's calendar and it'll appear 4 times a year.

The bulk of the work I'm doing is setting up this premiere season and all the music events in the first 3 months and then future planning. The Studio is my focus. That's why I started working here. For years and years I've been wanting to see a venue that pulled together all the different groups and became the place to see contemporary music performance. It's about to happen.

See The Studio advertisement on page 9 for program details:

New Music Forum

One of the premiere events in the season of premieres at The Studio will be the New Music Forum on the weekend of March 13 - 14 presented by the New Music Network in association with the Sydney Opera House Trust and ABC Classic FM. On the agenda are questions about some of the driving forces behind new music. To what extent does the way our composers think reflect the infrastructure that supports them? Is there a distinction between artist and industry? What criteria are artistic directors employing to make value-based decisions? What influences and pressures does the composer, performer, audience, box office and availability of funding, exert in this process? How do you define quality under the saturation of quantity? Where is new music today and where will it be tomorrow? Will the broader social changes occurring as we approach the new millennium see a renaissance or the end of the art music tradition?

Formulating the topics for discussion, composer Damien Ricketson says, "Hopefully they will be relevant across the spectrum of composers, performers, presenters, promoters and audience, and reflect particularly concerns of NMN members. I wished to avoid both 'art of composition' issues and technical problems, and also performance marketing and selling issues...Personally, as a young artist, I am thirsty for a new philosophy, a new driving force. A search for meaning and value to steer through the bewildering mass of information and expression."

The forum will conclude with a Sunday night concert in The Studio which in its former life as The Broadwalk in the 1970s and 80s was home to many new music performances. A number of artists involved in the early days are being invited back onto the stage to participate in the forum and some of the pieces which were first performed on this stage will be revisited. Prior to the Sunday afternoon concert, the inaugural Peggy Glanville-Hicks Lecture will be given by legendary concert organiser and archivist James Murdoch. If you'd like more information or to contribute to the forum online before it moves into The Studio in March contact the New Music Network on www.nmn.org.au or tel 02-9990.5149 or email: scout@chilli.net.au

Sound shape-shifting

Honor Harger enters Adelaide's sound underground in *Throw Down A Shape*

In Adelaide a quiet revolution is taking place. Over the past years a small group of sound artists and musicians has overcome the city's (sub)cultural inertia to produce some of the most uncompromising and enduring live performances the city's underground has seen. The problem is the city hasn't really heard these performances. The micro-scale of the events, exemplified by the mesm.eon performances staged by Matthew Thomas and dj yzxx, the fledgling a p h a. S i a events, and isolated live episodes such as those organised by Zonar Recordings to coincide with the Adelaide Festival, has rendered this tide of activity largely invisible. However in recent months this defiantly experimental subculture has begun to emerge from its place under the rock of Adelaide culture, with established arts institutions such as the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, the Media Resource Centre and the Australian Network for Art and Technology lending some much needed support.

Sound sampling, a process that enables a sound or group of sounds to be digitally recorded and altered in numerous ways, allows for sound to be culturally "referential" as well as culturally transgressive or re-creative. Technologically empowered recombination, enables new forms of juxtaposition and relative abstraction of sonic material brought about through direct user/listener interaction.

Bill Seaman

Increased accessibility of digital sound technologies and the proliferation of domestic sound production softwares, has led to an explosion in the popularity of sound as a mode of expression and transgression in the late 90s. Perhaps reflecting art culture's need to observe a genre in hyper-acceleration, the late 90s has also seen a profusion of international festivals exploring, presenting and exploiting sound art and experimental music. In a culture of fragmentation, decontextualization and "recombination", sound is a recognised zone of innovation and experimentation within art and popular cultural contexts.

In a reversal of the orthodox metaphor of the 'experimental fringe', the innovations of sound culture could be analysed as coming from the 'heart' of the genre. The paradoxical inconspicuousness of the speed with which people at the centre of things move, is often lost on the more traditional perimeters. The explosions, implosions, mutations and moultings which occur at the nucleus of a culture often cool, pacify, and are normalised before they reach the outer edges (the mainstream). Many reflections of the violent psychic upheavals induced by our fast changing culture are homogenised into self-repeating, innocuous loops before they reach the mainstream. (Take the trite, angst-by-numbers antics of current pop darling Ozzy Osbourne/Iggy Pop facsimile, Marilyn Manson, for instance.)

The ability of sound to morph and mutate at the pace of technological and cultural evolution, is reflected in the increasingly erudite proclamations of the genre's more celebrated exponents.

...Tom Jenkinson (aka Squarepusher) recognises a piece by Iannis Xenakis in the middle of other pieces by Throbbing Gristle, Prince, Alec Empire...Bjork 'engages' with the ideas of Stockhausen. I wonder if this is somehow new or different. Or is this just how it is, like a painter engaging in the ideas of Greenberg while being able to recognise work by Pollock and Rothko...

Caleb K, pfe 14

In an attempt to illustrate a regional

variation on these trends, a number of events exploring the physicality and discord of sound took place in Adelaide late last year. Notable among these was *Throw Down A Shape*, presented by the Contemporary Arts Centre of South Australia (CACSA), at new lounge club Supermild, and broadcast on the internet by r a d i o q u a l i a.

Curated by Linda Marie Walker, director of the CACSA, the evening was about creating contexts for synthesis: synthesis between artforms which have been engendered through particular aesthetic and social contexts, as belonging to specific genres and styles. In an intermingling of traditional music forms, such as live jazz performance, with experiments by DJs and digital sound musicians, *Throw Down A Shape* juxtaposed a milieu of different musics and art cultures in one creative space allowing for drift to take place from one form to another.

After preliminary aural ambience by local artist Anton Hart, the evening, MC'ed by the jocular Andrew Petrusovics (aka AndyPC), began with a compelling sound performance by Dancing Bear (aka elendil). Collating found urban detritus into a low dirge, the restrained roar of the engine of the city, invisible yet tactile, revealed manifold automobile, jet and rail turbines colliding in a thick molten hum. Reflecting the entropic nature of urban culture, the performance was a static chicane of whispers and asphyxiated rumbles, embracing the sable hiss of nightmare abstraction and dead vibrations.

Michael Grimm followed in an altogether different vein, with an airing of his wittily titled, *Theme music for two arts organisations in ecstatic battle*. The piece comprised sampled telephone messages intercepted from the answer machines of local contemporary arts organisations, the Experimental Art Foundation and CACSA, during their annual ritual of preparing applications for funding from local authority ArtSA. Consummately irreverent, intelligent and supremely entertaining, this was another triumph from this unusually insightful and underrated sound artist.

By this point in the evening, Supermild's volume restrictions were heightening the collision of different attitudes toward sound and music making, drawing mixed reactions from the sizeable audience. In a rarity for live performance, *Throw Down A Shape* stayed under 100 decibels for the duration of the event, a move lauded by the gallery crowd, while at the same time alienating others, prompting remarks that the intricacies of the performances were barely audible over the exuberant socialising of the crowd.

Local artist Suzanne Triester, unceasingly immersed in the hypermedia tale of Rosalind Brodsky and her complex adventures through time and space, appeared briefly to premiere the latest component of this story, 2 thoroughly catchy pop tunes written with her band, The Satellites of Lvov (aka The Miltons). Easily capable of being chart hits, *Spy in the House of Lvov* and *Satellite of Lvov* (the latter a cover of the Lou Reed song of the same name), are seductive melodies delivered with svelte chic.

Suave filmic music by local agent of agitprop art, AndyPC, continued the languid atmosphere. AndyPC's whimsically titled *New millennium cafe noir music for relaxed republicans* stylishly complemented the debonair and unashamedly retro decor of Supermild. His accompanying video, screened on small monitors reminiscent of security consoles, was a monochromatic excursion through a shadowy urban cinemascap.

A live performance by digital sound artist, eset {} (aka Adam Hyde), followed. A slippery film of noise coating rich and seductive rhythms, *Doppler Effect v1.0* was a tranquil embrace which slid over the skin in a glimmering serenade. It quivered, ambiguously, trembling and murmuring, until a reverberating diversion swayed the piece into sonic eddy spinning at a mesmerising rate. Then quavering again, it dissolved into gentle shards of resonance.

Borrowing its title from UK based jazz outfit Fila Brazillia, *Throw Down A Shape* would not have been complete without an injection of jazz. Local musicians Libby O'Donovan, Jullian Ferrarretto, Shaun Doddy and Paul Jancovisc comprise Brewed, a live jazz/funk ensemble. In a jolt of raw energy, Brewed gave a spirited performance articulating the strange spaces between pain and desire, through subtle jangling rhythms, intricate needlework and mellow acoustic mechanics.

To me the DJ is the cybernetic inheritor of the jazz tradition of improvisation.

DJ Spooky

As if to prove this adage, *Throw Down A Shape* arranged for dj Klangen to join Brewed for their final piece, instilling a fresh, almost industrial aesthetic, and drawing threads of chaos and improvisation out of the band. Afterward he and fellow djs, Forrest and Josh Williams, closed the evening with treble shocks, midi splinters and bass assaults, a culmination of their astute interjections of complex electronica throughout the evening.

Like many of the micro-events punctuating Adelaide's often sleepy nightlife, *Throw Down A Shape* was a small step toward developing a new aesthetic of listening and participation in a culture more used to appreciating traditional forms of music and performance. It revealed a transparency, an intelligence, and a departure from the gimmicky interfaces often present in more orthodox live and dj events. Adelaide's continued position as a zone of innovation within this context depends on the continuation and viability of these performances.

Sound in Adelaide has then, hopefully, begun a process of reflecting the permanent flux of culture in the late 90s. It fights, perhaps successfully, perhaps unsuccessfully, for a self-recognition. But sound, perpetually dissipating, is only momentarily exploded, partly from discoveries made through symptomatic repetitions or, by subterfuge, in the findings of artists.

Throw Down a Shape, Contemporary Art Centre of SA, curator Linda Marie Walker, Supermild, Adelaide, November 4; Sound-related sites online at: <http://www.radioqualia.va.com.au/live/archive.html>; CACSA: <http://www.cacsa.org.au/cacsa>; AndyPC: <http://dove.net.au/~andypc/>; Michael Grimm: http://www.va.com.au/parallel/x1/gallery/michael_grimm/; Suzanne Triester: <http://www.ensemble.va.com.au/tableau/suzy/index.html>; pfe: <http://laudanum.net/pfe/>; r a d i o q u a l i a: <http://www.radioqualia.va.com.au/mesm.eon>; <http://torschach.test.at/mesm.eon/>

Honor Harger is a format artist, writer, and technocultural pointcaster who has edited and designed publications, curated sound art events, and worked within independent radio. She is presently engaged with the Australian Network for Art and Technology, and is one of the coordinators of internet audio project, r a d i o q u a l i a.



eset {}, *Throwing Down a Shape*

Honor Harger

Letter to the Editors

Dear RealTime Editors

I refer to Vikki Riley's review of my album *Electro-Lollipop-Explosion* in *RealTime* 27—which has only now just been (belatedly) pointed out to me!

It doesn't bother me that Vikki doesn't like the music—a matter of personal taste after all (although most of the 'review' was not about music). I am chuffed to say, however, every review to date (from *Rolling Stone* to the national street press) except Vikki's has been positive, and everyone else has picked up on the heavy ironies (a release by 'Artificial' which is 'culturally inauthentic'? you're kidding!?).

What does annoy me is that Vikki has felt free to imply that artists like me in the Australian electronic underground are somehow 'selling out' for vast sums of money (without checking her facts) and make assumptions about my feminist politics (without bothering to find anything out about me or my history in the industry).

Anyone who knows anything at all about the Australian underground electronic music industry (which Vikki doesn't) knows that the vast majority of artists are making less than minimum wages from gigging and album releases. My album was NOT released through Mushroom Records for a million dollar deal (as she so ludicrously implies!!!!), but by a collective of excellent but struggling local electronic labels (If, Seraphic and Angel's Trumpet, known as the Melbourne Underground Consortium) and distributed via local independent company Shock. Although sales have been good, we will be lucky to break even on the release in Australia. This is the fate of all innovative local electronica in this country.

Vikki also draws the incredible conclusion that I am some kind of bimbo into 'dumbing down' the feminist cause. Again, if Vikki had bothered to speak to me or anyone at all in the electronic music industry, the first thing she would have found out is that me and my colleague Kate Crawford (in our project B(if)tek) have been on the public record for years for speaking out on feminist issues and perspectives in the music industry and the totally male dominated electronica scene. More than that, I have put my money where my mouth is and done countless benefits and other activities to raise money for various girl-causes over the years. And anyone who has seen my press shots will observe I seem to be cultivating a closer resemblance to Graham Garden from *The Goodies* than Barbie (then again, I always thought Graham was the sexy one).

I would encourage *RealTime* to ensure that contributors check their facts before submitting material in the interests of maintaining standards for your excellent publication. Boogie on beautiful people!

synthetically yours

Nicole Skeltys
Artificial

PS It IS true there are 'no nutrients' in my CD.

On the bank of a river

Elizabeth Drake intersected by the sound lines of Nigel Frayne at Melbourne's Southgate

Nigel Frayne has been responsible for the latest version of the Soundscape at Southgate in Melbourne. There are approximately 200 small speakers welded into the fence along the walkway separating the restaurants and wine bars from the river. From these speakers are piped, if that is the right word, myriad sounds from Frayne's personal archives. The sounds in the speakers creep up on you. So...

Standing on the bank of the river
with a friend who has perfect pitch
the sounds in the speakers
pose (us) a riddle
Are we seeing what we are hearing?
Are we hearing what we are seeing?

We bend over the speakers. I ask her, what is the pitch of the crickets? She says, A flat, then not wanting to be seen as having anything other than *perfect* pitch, she says, well a flattened A flat. Yes, and what is the pitch of *these* crickets? I point to the tree over there. The same, she says, and I too can hear the unison. We are (all) in tune.

We perform a translation. We see a train pulling into Flinders Street Station. The strange rhythmic sound in the speakers draws quietly to a close as the train stops. It is magical but not (quite) real. Sounds are appearing mysteriously, unnaturally, which is what I love. We will attempt the impossible. We will attempt a correlation. We are human. We try to match sound with sight, with movement, with direction. We adore synchronicity. We adore correspondences. We hear things we never normally hear. "Sound presents itself as the distilled spirit of the real—its vibration, its invisible presence." (Virginia Madsen)

Sound travels through the air. Along straight lines which intersect in me, in my body. They

cross each other relentlessly at the point of my standing. These lines of flight, these intersections, shift as I move. Drawing a geometry in the air.

Causing me to go deeper, under the city. Topography is on the surface but pointing to what is underneath.

'Topography: detailed description, presentation on a map etc of natural and artificial features of a town, district. Anatomy: mapping of surface of body with reference to parts underneath.'

The Underworld. The room under the city, where the sounds from the original recordings are programmed on the computer, and re-directed to the 4 zones of speakers up on the surface. The Underground. The underworld setting takes to an extreme the displacement of the natural environment by a technological environment. In the speakers there are pulsings, the sound of a city, its urban infrastructure brought to the surface. An infrastructure which implies work underground.

A world, a city, built upon layers of history. The wall of the underground is peeling away, peeling away the walls of the past. The horse-drawn carriages cross Princes Bridge. There is the sound of the horses' hooves on the hard road. Like rain, uneven. Walking, then trotting, out of step with each other. Out of sync. With time. This is not the 19th century, but it was once. And horses did cross that bridge.

The changing face of a city. It is far more than the nature/culture dichotomy. We produce ourselves in relation to the different environments we inhabit. The land lies way beneath us.

An email exchange with Nigel Frayne:

ED I have been asked to write a short article about the soundscape you have installed at Southgate. I went down there at dusk last week and there was plenty of sonic activity, birds, crickets, boats, trains. But I had to bend to mix in the sounds from the installation speakers.

What are the sources of the sounds I am listening to? Is this important?

NF Some recordings from my library—water, Melbourne Festival opening crowds, habitat recordings from various places. The bell sounds are recordings from Nervi Italy which have been heavily processed through a computer.

ED Were some of the sound sources from this exact site? (I know now that none of the sounds are being transmitted directly through hidden microphones. Something I had thought possible.)

NF You are correct—there are no microphones, it is all pre-recorded and converted into audio data files streamed off hard disc.

ED Where are other sites you have recorded?

NF I travel a lot, and always with my DAT machine hence I have recordings of all sorts of weird stuff from around the world. The most extraordinary for me are the habitat recordings in particular, some from Irian Jaya.

ED What is the philosophy or artistic concerns behind the selection and recording of the sounds?

NF Philosophy, hmmm okay, but not artistic since I do not consider myself an artist. I am a designer creating a soundscape which will,

hopefully, function for a particular space. For Southgate there are a number of dimensions to consider—what the people are doing there, how the management of Southgate perceive their precinct, my personal agenda of evangelising on the topic of acoustic ecology.

Somehow from this is distilled a set of practical and technical parameters which help to inform the program—choice of material (challenging or transparent), frequency of sound events (micro and macro time functions), textural considerations (filtering and layering), and volume levels. Hopefully none of this is particularly evident to the listener.

ED What do you understand by acoustic ecology?

NF Well there is a world body still arguing (friendly) about the various definitions that can be considered. For me it is about the relationship between living organisms and their environment as expressed or perceived through sound. It is important for me that this is inclusive of all organisms not just the human perspective. So it is as much the knowledge and experience or awareness that I have developed for the soundscape around my home as it is about the fascinating communications between whales across thousands of miles of ocean.

ED What was the philosophy or artistic concerns in programming the sounds for this installation?

NF This particular programme is but one in a new life for the system, which will hopefully involve other people and composers in time. Over the past months it has been modified in a number of ways but there is a thread running through each—certain sounds re-claiming a space. For the birds and frogs it is a claim for the nature lost to the city and the church bells seem to sound a warning on some occasions and rejoice on others—depending on how you feel at the time...

Soundscape by Nigel Frayne, Southgate Promenade, Melbourne, from Nov 12 1998

Review

Aurally pleased
Keith Gallasch at australYSIS'
Acousmatic Meets Technodrama

I'm late, I'm late. The Intermedia Juke box is playing in the foyer when I arrive, and impressing its interactors, but I'm late and I don't get a go. Some other time. Into the theatre, into subdued lighting and intense aural pleasures. Slowing down, tuning in, first to Lawrence Harvey's *eX* for double bass, electronics and computer tape, Roger Dean bassing with and against Harvey's blips, dots, waves of particles and broken pulse in a moody sonic/music interplay, ending spare, cello-ish, retro-angsty. Did bass and electronics talk to or simply at each other? Mike Vaughan's *Crosstalk* is on tape. I close my eyes and *Crosstalk* really opens my ears, with its otherworldly, pristine sounds, its forward thrust, bubblings and cosmic choppers, as it devours and transforms its flute and harpsichord sources, and never turns back. Dean plays a tape of his *Percy's Centrifuge*, working from Percy Grainger principles. I'm with it moment by moment, but it doesn't add up. My problem. Have to hear it again. Eyes open to see Sandy Evans appear with her sax, Greg White on sound control, Roger Dean at the keyboard, and I don't pay attention to what is said, but I think we're getting an as yet untitled work, algorithmically-based (see the David Chesworth interview on page 42 for more on this topic). This time the interplay between components convinces, embraces, Evans' gradual shift from breath to voice to rich, sustained notes is dramatic in itself, especially when played against transmuted bells, clangs, heavy steps and bass walks, and glides, escalates into a heavenly siren...That's what I think I heard. I know, I've deleted the predictable bebop flurries from an otherwise distinctive piece.

For the second half of the show I'm looking forward to the entrance of words as of part the electro-musical experience. *Returning the Angles* is a spoken performance by Hazel Smith with Dean at the keyboards and manipulating large screen projections of visual and text material from his laptop. The work is described as techno-drama, and while the balance between voice and sound is not always good for Smith, the work has dramatic potential. What is impressive is the greater vocal range Hazel Smith is producing these days, the best moments delivered with precise gearshifts of pace and pitch, with a greater sense of voice as instrument, not just as intoner of text. Dean provides a strong keyboard partnership and excels in his solo passage. The text (described in the program notes as "part narrative, part poetry, part satire") is so banal it can only be assumed that its account of an English migrant's return home is intended to be bitterly ironic—but it doesn't come across that way. Too often it's simply mundane, short on the specificities that will generate a palpable persona, lacking its own dynamic with which to locate itself against the sound score. Dean's visual score is looser in its proliferation of images and their timing than Smith's tighter scripting. The result is distracting rather than enhancing, despite the occasional connections between vocal performance and image, and the mix of images banal and beautiful confuses. Although this is a work Smith and Dean have done before for *The Listening Room*, and one which is aurally powerful, as a staged multimedia presentation it needs work. Still, I leave The Performance Space aurally pleased, head full of strange sounds and patterns, and recalling clearly the moments when Smith's voice really leapt into techno-drama. Don't miss australYSIS at The Studio, Sydney Opera House, May 28.

Acousmatic Meets Technodrama, *australYSIS*, *Sound Vision Week*, *The Performance Space*, December 18, 1998. In a program of improvisation, *australYSIS* can next be experienced at *The Studio*, Sydney Opera House, Friday May 28. 8.30 pm. tickets \$20/\$16.

CD Reviews

brighttracks
Brenton Broadstock
various musicians
MOVE, MD3204

This 2 CD (generously for the price of one) set represents a significant proportion of a leading Australian composer's chamber music output of over more than 20 years. There's a lot of pleasing and intimate listening and it's an education in style and development, the composing voice growing clearer and more resolute, and more open, over the years. It's music to listen to on its own, as I first did, or to appreciate in its metaphysical and social contexts, respectively the light/dark dualism of the CD's title and one of its most exciting tracks, and the composer's political and environmental concerns. Bridging the 2 realms is a family trauma demanding hope and vision, realised in the music without sentimentality. Linda Kouvaras' detailed and sympathetic booklet notes intelligently elaborate these contexts and their interplay. The booklet, like most CD texts, requires more than a bit of squint but is well laid out and includes readable texts by Dylan Thomas, Ivor Gurney and the composer. While the String Quartet sounds of an era and *Aureole 4* is emotionally brittle (both works recorded in 1985 and presented as bonus tracks, like any good pop CD), the rest suggest a coherent voice, reflective, unfolding (rarely hurried, a real pleasure), capable of great intensity (but mostly finding a firm and gentle way out of the drama), sometimes meditative (the play of ostinatos against other instrumental voices nearly but definitely not minimalist), and very, very, late, late romantic—the melodies, as spare as they are, are there, but the spaces between the notes are wider, the aversion to minor key theatrics resolute. They open out time, creating a space for the listener, each allowing a thought, an emotion to be lived.

This is most potent in the duets: *Clear Flame Within's*

unfurling, gentle dialogue between piano and cello, releasing the spark of the philosopher's stone, and then returning to an even stronger marriage; *Aureole 3's* playful recorder and harpsichord duet, fast, arcing across each other, playing their depths and heights, standing defiantly on their own, innocence versus sophistication; *At the going Down of the Sun*, organ and trumpet, a potent classical combination, immediately ethereal, gloriously recorded, a sunset with the power of sunrise, trumpet rising slowly, sun-like out of the organ's multiple lines, soon a sudden heralding ascent against a deepening organ, tense, but with a final affirmation, almost impossible; *Beast From Air*, a more troubled, less than reflective work, trombone and percussion in a narrative of (nuclear) destruction.

The solo piano offers the most seductive way into this CD set. Linda Kouvaras plays *In the Silence of Night*—spacious, shades of Janacek, Medtner without the density, Keith Jarrett even (yes), open, subtly shifting, thoughtful, bordering on melancholy but refusing its comforts. In *Dying of the Light* the piano is almost lush, slowly building into waves of sound, a simple melody retextured over and over, anxious without surrender, epic in its short space.

A highlight is soprano Meryl Quafe's account of *Bright Tracks*, a gradual, frightening surrender to the anguish the other Broadstock works threaten, the texts here from World War I poet Ivor Gurney, suffering schizophrenia. The work is operatic, with great emotional range and clarity (much more than the composer's music theatre *Fahrenheit 451*). Violin, viola and cello gently glide and drone with and against the voice's optimism in the first verse; the soprano echoes the strings, sinking. "might be worse, might be worse" in the second verse..."worssssse", she sings/speaks; the third is addressed to God with rapid song and speech intersection, a strange mix of the sensual and the anxious exploiting the full theatrical and song range of the voice, resolving into an apparently calm descent into defeat; and in the fourth stanza, a calm

repeat of the first—initially unaccompanied but then joined quietly, harmoniously by the strings—Broadstock's vision, though surely not Gurney's, is briefly, serenely, of hope.

brighttracks, the album, is not my usual fare; there's something resolutely old-fashioned about the works, but as with much music now that stands outside the constraints and clichés of academic modernism, we can sense another tradition that has survived and moves forward on its own terms. Recurrent listenings drew me in, growing familiar with a voice, with instrumental juxtapositions (the glorious organ and trumpet of *At the going down of the sun*, the near-Eastern flute, clarinet, piano of *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, the soprano sax and piano of *I touched your glistening tears*), and the distinctive shape of argument and emotional quest. KG

The Australia Council has announced that Brenton Broadstock is the recipient of the \$60,000, 1999 Don Banks Music Award

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This 1998 release has been in the player often enough, but I've only just come to write about it, no easy task in that *Dissect the Body* never becomes that familiar, such is the potency for surprise everytime from its quickfire vocal, instrumental and electronic jabberings, squeals and toots as they cut across memorable cooler lines from koto, hurdy gurdy and Amanda Stewart's mellower texts. The art work on cover and disk is of portions of a body, a human body, but an odd one; you can only surmise what the portions represent, slices perhaps from a hybrid, the flesh folding at one point to suggest barely formed female genitals. It doesn't look like a body you can put back together again. The titles of the tracks are 1. *Dissect 2. the body 3. and 4. there is 5. no body 6. only 7. the dissection*. Dissect the hybrid body of Machine's music and you'll have meaningless slices of bebop, high modernism, electronics, Japanese shakuhachi, mediaeval hurdy

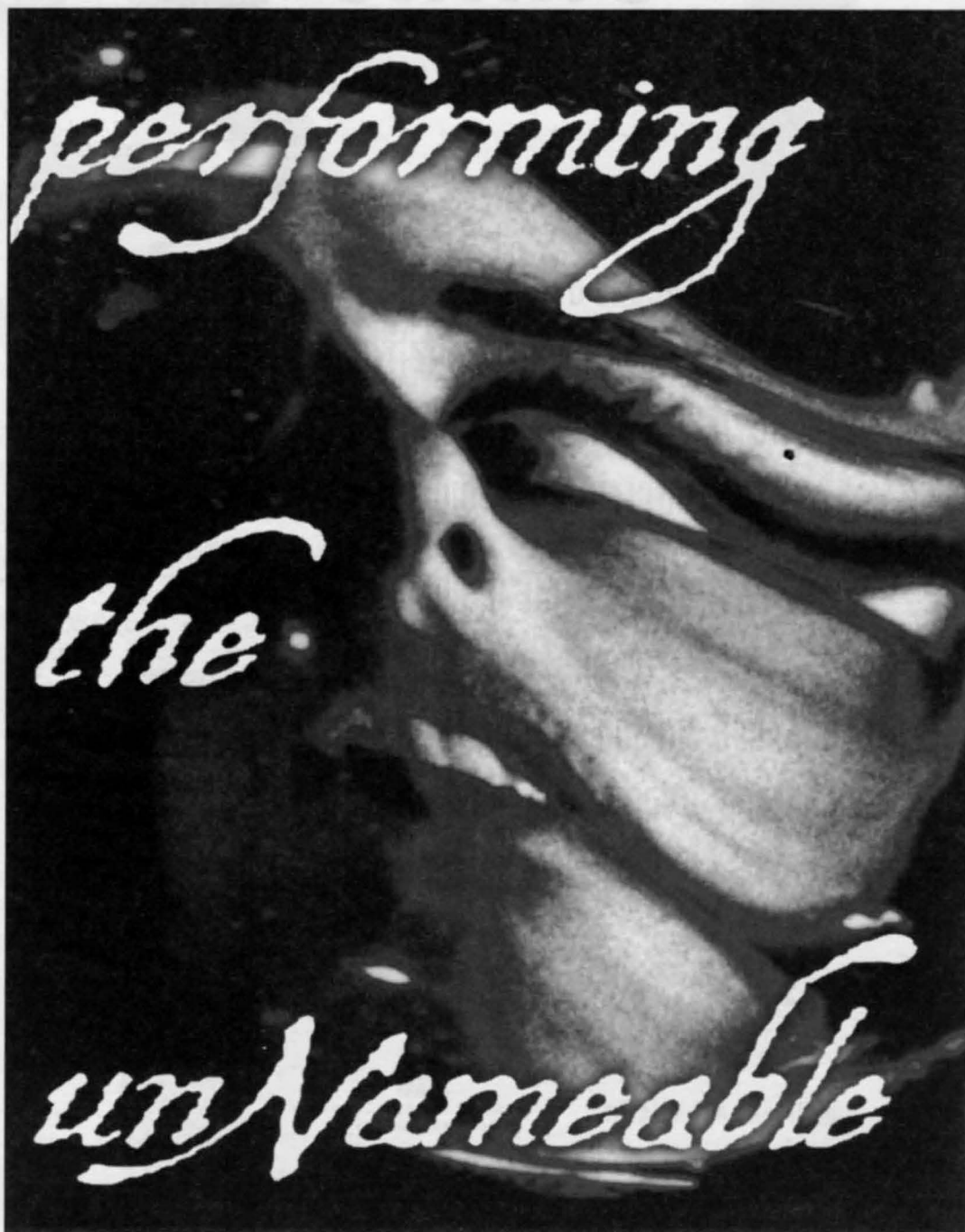
gurdy. Together the parts constitute a recognisable Machine language, familiar but surprising, even frightening. Adding koto player Satsuki Odamura to the ensemble for this recording amplifies the Japanese connection and opens occasional spaces for greater than expected lyricism, as does a soaring soft female voice, both of these together in Track 1. Then a door creaks, the shakuhachi breathes, abstract text is rendered poetic, the hurdy gurdy winds up against the 'shakuhachi' (flute in the style of?) filling the space with an electric guitar amplex, a single drum beat pushing forward, car-like purrs buzz by, the hurdy gurdy chord breaks up; all this between the 8th and the 11th minutes of the 15 minute opening track, an embracing compositional unit before the track heads off in another powerful direction. I like that unit, that section. I haven't sliced it out, I just hear it as organic, as it happens, unfolding, seductive. It holds me. Track 2 (2.37) is *body* and sounds like it, starting with quiet sucks and gulps, koto twists, vinyl scratches, grunts, farts and belches, slaps and, to the end of the brief track, huge in-your-ear cries and screams, and quick pulse vocals that are neither words nor tunes, as if sounds voluntary and in- are being forced and released from the body. It's a tough little track with a biting coherency. 5. *no body* (8.21), like track 1, is of epic proportion, opening with real/not real breathing against brief restrained notes from violin and wind instruments, a meandering sax taking over, a moment of silence, a cry, a slap, a machine buzz, drum beat, silence, mm mm, footsteps, sax, water drops, multi-track koto plucking, a rushing murmur, warbling flute, more koto filling out the space against air-rush and stomach-rumbles, bird twitters, the koto multiplies, that voice, as if out of the middle ages, soars again, another voice, foreign, a culture shift, voices multiply, the pulse the same, a huge guitar and drum sound washing over everything, soon layered over with high flutings and rumbling bass; cut to a child singing in French for a few seconds. *no body* is a great track, the one I've grown closest to, that grows in me with its inexorable logic. The final track, *Dissection*, has its curiously organic pleasures too, but raw, like *Psycho*, like some monstrous parody of Tom Waits, in its screams and guttural groanings. It builds out of a little jungle of noises, a sudden recurrent cry, slips into koto yearnings, a morose

bass, lip puckers, a Noh "Yo!", purrs, screams...calm, a low gurgling...and explodes into shards of noise and voice...a passage of serene beauty at 4.20 broken by sudden, final, brief, unintelligible abuse. In *Dissecting the Body*, Machine (Stevie Wishart, Jim Denley, Amanda Stewart, Rik Rue and guests Satsuki Odamura, Trey Spruance and Jamie Ludbrook) are in excellent form, refusing dissection, and the recording is blessed with a frightening aliveness, that dissolves your body into its own. Keith Gallasch

Badlands
David Chesworth Ensemble
W. Minc Productions
W.MINC008
Distributed by Festival

The first four tracks by Carl Orff celebrate David Chesworth's admiration for one of the fathers of Minimalism ('proto-minimalist', Paul Griffiths calls Orff's innovations in *Modern Music and After*, OUP, 1995). The liner notes tell us that on hearing a recording of German school children singing Orff's *Schulwerk*, Chesworth "loved the uncomplicated nature of the repeated motifs and a certain unnerving quality that reminded him, in some ways, of his own music." Taken from *Musica Poetica* (which Chesworth first heard in Terence Malick's film *Badlands*) and *Das Schulwerk*, the Orff pieces are given a strongly contemporary feel by the Chesworth ensemble's distinctive lineup, violin, cello, keyboards, 'odd sounds' (electronics), piano, percussion, bass and trombone—the latter giving the group a powerful other dimension, sometimes dramatically raw, often mellifluous and drawing all parts into an orchestral empathy and force. Whether pulsing dynamically through the first of the *Musica Poetica* pieces or 'singing' the yearning themes of the others against insistent minimalist lines of shifting complexity, the ensemble plays with commitment and precision, with Orff, like Chesworth in the accompanying *Lacuna* tracks of his own, avoiding a strictly minimalist agenda. The second *Musica Poetica* piece offers a plaintive string melody against single marimba notes over an emerging electronic landscape, the cello darkening the mood, piano entering, darker again, strings and bass chugging against the yearning string

voice, followed by the surprise of a decisive loud brass entry, rasping, primal, militant turning yearning into something more aggressive, before an eerily ambient reprieve and a final wild trombone led march to the end. The 2 *Musica Poetica* tracks are a great way into the CD, showing the ensemble at its best in the interplay of delicate detail and sheer power. Chesworth's *Lacuna* comes from his music theatre work of the same name for Chamber Made Opera. The 14 brief *Lacuna* tracks stand on their own, though there were times (tracks running at one to 2, sometimes 3 minutes) when I wished for a 'unified' suite to fill the gaps and join the dots and to offer the duration that helps minimalist-inspired work cast their spell. It's not surprising then that the longest track, *Bells of Leipzig* (5.39), essentially a sonic composition, is one of the most engaging. A disturbing oceanic electronic space opens out, a distant choir is fleetingly heard, vibes ring, a cello sings a half-melody over and over, distant bells are heard, theremin-ish warblings, that male choir again, a kind of bubbling of activity fills out the space, the melody and the world fade. The minimalist latin beat of the following track (*Cunning strategy and delicate execution*, 4.23) is one to dance to as marimba and trombone unite, only to be recurrently cut across by a flurry of notes of an altogether different order, and both are interrupted by a lyrical string refrain akin to the melancholy Orff pieces and Chesworth's *Natural Causes* and *Retrospectively yours*, before returning to the initial alternating patterns, the trombone now raspingly muted, very Perez Prado. *This is nothing new* (3.00) echoes in form the Orff *Musica Poetica* track 1 with its drum-led drive and some of the latin impulse of *Cunning strategy*... and closes spectacularly. There's much else to enjoy, like the clock-work intricacy of *King's Arrival* and the grand, funereal, suspended *Time*, and, of course, the overall accrual of themes and motifs cutting across tracks, staying with you. It all adds up and is impressively realised by the ensemble. The accompanying CD is a remix by Robert Goodge and Chesworth of the Orff *Das Schulwerk IV*. It's an inventive bonus (28 minutes) and, thankfully, for the most part doesn't stray too far from the textures and spirit of the Chesworth Ensemble performance. The same treatment might have been applied to several of the *Lacuna* tracks to savour at greater length. KG



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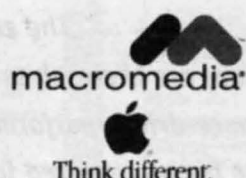
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