30

RealTime

free

April – May 1999
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OnScreen

5th birthday edition

GROTOWSKI
James Waites

FESTIVALS
Perth
Mardi Gras
Lake George/
Weereewa

PHOTOGRAPHY
Alasdair Foster
ACP
Ella Dreyfus
STILLS

NEW YORK
Dance
Meredith Monk
Performance

ONSCREEN
Stelarc
Adrian Martin
Future Suture
Peter Callas
MCA Cinematheque

DANCE
Javier de Frutos
Melbourne works

MUSIC
Andrée Greenwell
The opera Project
Denmark

HYPERFICTIONS
Making the connections
writesites

Cover photo: outrageous opera(tion)

The opera Project's *Tristan* premieres at The Performance Space

It's all stops out for the already outrageous opera Project (small 'o' opera, but big 'P' agenda) in their latest work, *Tristan*. Over-excited at the very idea of the feminised, wounded hero in 19th century opera (a landscape otherwise packed with bloodied heroines), the Project has gone at the example par excellence, Tristan in Wagner's marvel of music and misery (read 'love') *Tristan and Isolde*.

More than a man in love, Tristan is positively suicidal, tearing the bandage from a potentially fatal wound by way of greeting his beloved. But the Project doesn't 'do' the opera, it works through and around it, drags in related tunes and images from all over the culture shop. There's not a few who think that *T&I* kickstarts the 20th century, not only with 'that' chord, but with chronic individualism and fatalism to boot, no respect for time, or much else.

In this *Tristan*, the hero (Nigel Kellaway), barge-bound, adrift in limbo, doped and delirious, and not as dead as he'd like to be, floats into a song recital delivered by a majestic no-bullshit-please soprano (Annette Tesoriero) whom he mistakes for Isolde. She's got her own agenda, transcendence through song, not romance, please, next chakra up. Keeping things in a demented kind of perspective is Tristan's minder (Jai McHenry), a doctor of philosophy, medicine and everything else, with the deathwish of Schopenhauer, the murderous inclination of Dr Miracle, the demeanour of Dr Caligari and the optimism of Spengler. Then there's an apparition (Xu Fengsham)–is he/she the real (dead) Isolde? It's a fun team, and an eerie, dangerous one.

If you suspect music theatre is not for you, think again. You don't have to know the Wagner...you'll get the drift. If you've seen the opera Project at work in *Choux Choux Baguette*, *This Most Wicked Body*, *The Berlioz: Our Vampires Ourselves* and *The Terror of Tosca*, you'll know you're in for a sensual, visceral, hilarious and deliciously black night out. You get great singing close up like you've never experienced plus grand piano ...music that will enter and stay with you. The opera Project offers a glorious synthesis of opera and contemporary performance. Offer yourself up to some of the most provocative and entertaining theatre around. RT

The opera Project, Tristan, T*he Performance Space* May 14 - 29. See advertisement this page 39 for booking information.

cover photo: Heidrun Löhr
performers: Nigel Kellaway, Annette Tesoriero, Jai McHenry

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The Studio opens

Keith Gallasch at the launch of the Sydney Opera House's contemporary arts venue

Machine for Making Sense

Glorious sounds launched the Sydney Opera House's The Studio, a venue in warm reds and fair timbers dedicated to new music and the contemporary arts (see *RealTime 29* for the full story). Sprung Percussion blessed the acoustic in conventional concert setting with guest Daryl Pratt in a sublime rendition of the ever unconventional, Steve Reich's *Sextet*. Outside, Joan Grounds' projections cast great waves across the Opera House shells as individual members of The Machine For Making Sense solo-ed exquisitely out over the harbour while crowds below gazed up from their champagnes and red canapés and past a pair of the latest Lexus parked on the walkway (a different gesture about the new from The Studio's sponsor). Inside the long, new foyer, at last linking the Drama Theatre, The Studio and the Playhouse, the audience played with the mixing panel installation that drove sounds from the ceiling into new permutations. Programs Manager Elizabeth Walsh told me at the dance initiation of The Studio (Russell Dumas' Dance Exchange in *Cassandra's Dance*) that the installation had been so successful with audiences and general visitors to the House during its 2 weeks, that the temptation to commission installations quarterly was strong.

Back inside The Studio, the seating had been rolled away and the space dramatically opened out to allow the 4 members of Machine performing spaces facing each other (plus a mixing desk in the middle of the floor) and room for the audience to move freely between and around them—an echo of those great black and white TV studio jazz programs from the 50s featuring Miles, Monk et al—save for the absence of skeins of tobacco smoke. Machine's mix of amplified acoustic and electronic sound filled the space as clearly, cleanly and warmly as had Sprung Percussion's mostly acoustic Reich. Opinion on the night and over the next week of new music concerts was pretty much that The Studio offers a vibrant, bright sound, a very intimate one, and, on occasions, one to test the vulnerability of musicians to the critically acute ear.

There were speeches from Michael Lynch, the Opera House's General Manager, and Opera House Trust member Dennis Watkins, who had been a tour guide in the House in the 70s. Lynch spoke of the commitment of the Trust to the venue and its dedication to the new. Watkins entertained with an account of the history of this part of the building and its various, faltering flirtations with the new until the present moment: "So in a way the engine room Utzon intended to be here has been turned on, the stage machinery replaced with Machines for Making Sense. The heart of the building has been returned to the service of performers and artists and audiences and the heartbeat will be the sounds of the future." Watkins noted too that "The design of the foyer...is an interim solution awaiting Utzon's input to the master plan and the adoption of the final Conservation plan." It looks like we can expect more change for the good as past desires become current and, sooner or later, realities.

Completing the opening week and a bit of celebratory performances, The New Music Network presented a forum appropriately focusing on the challenges for new music. While it seemed to seek answers to everything and got few practical responses to anything, the forum nonetheless suggested the potential of the venue for conferences and public debate (speakers hardly needed their microphones), and showed the very real need for ongoing discussion about new music that goes beyond apparent fundamentals. There were moments of frustration and humour, pertinent anecdotes from Vincent Plush and Andrew Ford, valuable perspectives from Roland Peelman, Richard Toop, John Crawford and John Davis, and a fine polemic from Moya Henderson. Despite the luxury and substantial encouragement of The Studio, some felt the state of new music parlous (under-funded, directionless), while others reflected on the long road it had come—proud of the achievements that the venue acknowledges and engenders.

I felt at home in The Studio. I hope that the commitment with which it has been launched is maintained, and, along with other key arts venues in Sydney, like Artspace, The Australian Centre for Photography and The Performance Space, it becomes a centre for the realisation of art and the talk that should go with it—something more than a venue for hire.

Swelter

A program of site-specific works by some of Sydney's foremost artists will be launched on 22 May by the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust. Over the following 8 months the multimedia series entitled *Swelter* will be installed in the Palm House adjacent to the First Farm display in the Botanic Gardens.

Curator Michael Goldberg who organised the successful Artists in the House series at Elizabeth Bay House in 1997 looks this time at the historical and aesthetic features of the Botanic Gardens and the Palm House, believed to be the oldest surviving public glasshouse in New South Wales. Built in 1876 by colonial architect James Barnet, it once displayed a variety of tropical plants which could not survive outdoors.

In 1788 convicts cleared 9 acres of land to establish a government farm. The area was ultimately found to be unsuitable for cultivation. Unlike the Guringai people who used the area effectively for food gathering, the first colonial farmers waged a constant battle against the elements eventually capitulating and shifting the farm to what is now


Parramatta. The original site of the first farm is maintained by the Gardens as an historical feature.

Jackie Dunn, the first of seven artists exhibiting in the series, references this display as well as the historical and traditional functions of the Greenhouse. Her focus is on the links between colonisation and domestication. The origins of the glasshouse as a spectacular showcase for the exotic and the foreign are played out against ideas of home, territoriality and trespass.

Other artists in the program which runs until January 2000 are Anne Graham, Tom Arthur, Debra Phillips, Martin Sims, Nigel Helyer, and Joan Grounds with Sherre DeLys.

Enquiries Michael Goldberg Tel 02 93805212 or Rachel Hurford 02 92318119

Editorial

Celebrations

RealTime is celebrating 5 years of distinctive arts writing—in print, online and onsite at festivals and conferences here and overseas. Our 30th edition is exemplary of the range and depth of coverage of the arts in Australia, and beyond, that we aim to provide readers right across the country, in capital cities and many regional centres. Our ongoing and extensive festival reports this time include the Festival of Perth, Sydney's Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras and a celebration of a body of water, Weereewa/Lake George in the ACT, that otherwise you probably wouldn't have heard about. With a memoir from guest contributor, theatre critic James Waites, we celebrate too a great artist who inspired a generation of theatre and performance practitioners, including many Australians, Jerzy Grotowski.

On the political front there's not a lot to celebrate, but the nerve has to be steeled, the spirit roused. Our UK correspondent, Aleks Sierz looks at the ups (a new Live Art Agency in London) and the downs (the devolution of funds to the regions); Diana Klaosen surveys the state of the arts in Tasmania; Zane Trow...lets rip.

RealTime is very much about artists writing about the arts—we celebrate that with Benedict Andrews and Zsuzsanna Soboslay reporting what inspired them in recent New York visits.

The Sydney Opera House's The Studio, a venue dedicated to the contemporary arts, is now open and well worth celebrating, as are the distinctive musical creations of Andrée Greenwell (interviewed by Gretchen Miller). Andree and collaborator Kathleen Mary Fallon's *Laquiem* is soon to premiere at The Studio. So too we can celebrate The opera Project (see cover and page 2) with the premiere of *Tristan*, the final part of a trilogy tearing at the 19th century roots of 20th century performance.

In dance, the range and richness of the Melbourne scene is in evidence. In visual arts, a new era for the ACP (Australian Centre for Photography) is celebrated in Jacqueline Millner's interview with the centre's new director, Alasdair Foster. In OnScreen, the first showing of dLux media arts' major Peter Callas retrospective (including other works curated by Callas) at PICA for the Festival of Perth, is due praise for a leading Australian artist.

However hard the times get, however censorious and tight fisted, Australian artists persist with energy, commitment, vision and perserverance. This we celebrate.

AFC

Documentary and short and experimental filmmakers are anxious about an Australian Film Commission draft budget proposing the re-directing of some $1m (Sydney Morning Herald, 12/2/99) towards project and script development for feature films. In terms of last year's budget, says Sydney film/video maker Janet Merewether, that would leave a mere $750,000 for other forms. Merewether fears the draft budget signals a turning away from the principles that have made the AFC a major supporter of innovation. She has written to filmmakers urging them to respond to the draft proposal and to attend the AFC's industry consultation sessions hosted by AFC Executive Director Cathy Robinson, who is surveying the funding issue with organisations and artists across the country. *OnScreen* will speak with the AFC and report in more detail on developments in forthcoming editions of *RealTime*.

Five funerals and a birthday.

As we celebrate our 5th birthday, we also lament the passing and praise the legacies of 5 great contributors to the arts—Jerzy Grotowski, Jacques Lecoq, Stanley Kubrick, Don Dunstan and British playwright Sarah Kane.

Next

RealTime 31 features *antistatic*, the contemporary dance event at Sydney's The Performance Space with performances and workshops from US guests Jennifer Monson, Ishmael Houston Jones and Lisa Nelson, and Australian artists performing: Russell Dumas' Dance Exchange, Trotman and Morrish, Ros Warby, Rosalind Crisp, Helen Herbertson and Ben Cobham, Jude Walton, DeQuincey/Lynch, Alan Schacher, Jeff Stein, Yumi Umiumare and Tony Yapp; with installations by Margie Medlin, Stephen Bram, Ben Anderson, Jacqueline Everitt and Adrienne Doig. Also in *RealTime* 31, Robyn Archer reviews Hans Eisler's *The Hollywood Songbook* on CD.

Sport

TOOTH AND CLAW

With Jack Rufus

The recent heavyweight title fight in New York proved once and for all who is the biggest star in world sport: Don King. We already knew his wide range of skills: verbal dexterity, audacity, bluff and hucksterism—no-one comes close to the Don in these categories. But when he moved into the more difficult disciplines of economics, linguistics, philosophy and dramaturgy, the world could only gasp in amazement.

Don set the tone early by introducing the Holyfield-Lewis bout as the "undisputed, unadulterated and unmitigated" unification event, 4 times bigger, "money-wise", than any previous fight (inflation-adjusted, presumably). Staring down the camera, Don announced that the fight was "brought to you by the great impressario Don King, and I humbly submit to you, I love each and every one of you." Who else could move so seamlessly from third person to first, taking in self-aggrandisement, humility and universal love along the way?

But Don saved his best for last. With the whole sporting world in uproar over the farcical decision, reporters dared suggest that as impressario he was to blame for the debacle. But Don disarmed them all with one simple statement: "Perception is reality," he remarked, displaying a grasp of phenomenology that scuppered his critics. Then, when asked if he would promote a re-match, Don replied: "As the genius William Shakespeare said in his great play Macbeth, 'to be or not to be'." And so it seems that the Don, not content with all his other achievements, has now decided to re-write the Bard's plays.

Vivienne Inch is still shopping in Lausanne.

Contents

5 Happy Birthday

ABC RADIO

RADIO NATIONAL
radio eye

the Listening Room

ABC RADIO DRAMA

ABC Audio Arts salutes your achievements over five years and beyond.

Adelaide Festival of Arts

Hey you guys hap.peee birthday. We'll see you in Adelaide in Y2K! – Robyn Archer and the Festival team

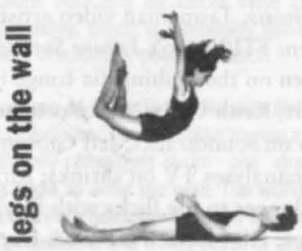
Currency Press

Ausdance

RealTime, dance your way through celebration! Ausdance dances with you.

parallelo

good reading...
good debate ... hbrt



STALKER
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pica
Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts

Congratulations and thanks for all your continued support.

Congratulations on the 5th year of RealTime, still the only genuine forum for passionate and divisive debate about the Arts in Australia. I hope the next five years provide Australia with more stimulating fodder.
Barrie Kosky

eaf.

Happy Five from the **Experimental Art Foundation**

Congratulations on 5 years of RealTime. Perhaps a mark of your success is that it's almost impossible to remember, let alone imagine, what it was like B.R.T. (Before RealTime). Even 5 years of RealTime become unreal time when it becomes memory. You've given us space to think and contemplate and listen to and keep up with each other. You've brought the farflung Australian performing community together. Thank you for that. And of course for your hard work in support of *Performing the Unnameable*. Good luck for the next 5 years! All the best,
Richard James Allen and **Karen Pearlman**

new music network

Congrats! And thanks for your support.

RealTime, a beautiful & healthy 5 year old...you give us hope.
Machine for Making Sense

SIDETRACK

RealTime

"Assuming that his (sic) talent can avoid the strain, there is one scarcely avoidable danger that lies ahead of the pupil on his road to mastery...the danger of getting stuck in his achievement, which is confirmed by his success and magnified by his renown: in other words, of behaving as if the artistic existence were a form of life that bore witness to its own validity." (Herrigel). Through 5 years of ceaseless self-critique, RealTime has constantly managed to head this danger off at the pass and along the way has rescued us time and again from our own personal mires of self satisfaction. Congratulations and long life to it.

Jenny Kemp and Richard Murphet

RealTime is 5

Preambling

Thirty issues ago. The City was Open. The Time was Real. The editors were ready to Manage. The Board was, well, A Board. Now. Here. Today. As You read this. In Real Time. The City is still the Open City of lore and legend. The Time is just as you experience it—Real Time. And well, we're still A Board. A little older, somewhat the wiser. And the Editors? Still Managing. Managing to keep the pressures rolling, deferring this, festivalling that, pumping it up, punching it out, working in two dimensions, no in four.

RealTime: Festivals, the Net, the Web, the nightly feed of performance, hot, cold. Lukewarm sometimes (that's the truth). But you read about it here, now. In Real Time. The performative world in words & pix. Across the nation, around the world, keeping you In Touch. In Tune. In the Know.

RealTime: Australian Tabloid, polyphonic, multimedia, hypertextual. OK. Let's drop the tabloid. Let's take a gamble on an amble. How about this:

Five years ago, with hope in the Australia Council, with no money in the bank, our Editors, and Board, recognising the diversity of performative practices in Australia, did bring forth *RealTime*.

Printed on newsprint, in but one colour or maybe two, it was envisaged as a journal for all the people, wherever they may be, and from whatever background they may come be they women, or even men, or undecided: if they but share an interest in the Contemporary Arts. Real Time was conceived for them. And so that all could have access, be they Rich or Poor, dependent upon Funding or working in large Institutions, or simply Parasites on the Body Politic, *RealTime* was made Free.

And the Editors had a vision, of a journal not bound, but folded. (Sorry, you'll have to read that again). And the Editors had a vision of a journal not bound by Media or Medium, a journal that did, in itself, reflect the theories of Convergence, and a journal in which all forms of Performative practice would be covered with equal dignity. In RT, no single Aesthetic, Ideology or Fashion would prevail (well, not a lot of the time). So was born not only writing on Dance, Performance & Theatre, but also OnScreen, and Hypertext; And the Act of Critical Writing was itself made Performative, at the Adelaide Festival, at LIFT, at Conferences and Seminars and Meetings of all kinds. All of this within the Open City, in Real Time.

Tony MacGregor, Chairman of the Board of Open City, publisher of RealTime

Board Members: Gretchen Miller, John Davis, Hunter Cordaiy, Angharad Wynne Jones, Virginia Baxter, Keith Gallasch, Peter Giles

Constituting

The City of Sydney is feeling especially open right now. In the hysterical run up to the Olympics—sorry, building boom, as you see in the photograph above—Pitt Street is reduced to a drain as opposite our office Multiplex sculpts another monster. Some days the gaping holes, the noise and dust, the detours drive you to distraction. In the midst of it all, in a building full of diamond and opal traders, Open City chips out bi-monthly issues of *RealTime*.

Before we moved here, we used to cook the paper up in our kitchen. Editorial teams raided the cupboards and when we launched each issue with yet another party we had to put the cat out. In 1996 when (with a little help from Jobstart) we were able to employ David Varga and our first editorial assistant arrived bright-eyed at 9 am to find us in pyjamas—we decided we needed an office.

Keith Gallasch, Gail Priest, Kirsten Krauth, Virginia Baxter — Sandy Edwards

It all began in 1993 when in the spaces between Open City performances (in a parallel universe the managing editors are writer-performers), we lamented the diminishing national arts coverage. *The Australian*'s arts pages had been reduced to one day (Friday) and capital city newspapers covered less and less. So many important artists never made it into newspapers, or if they did they were lucky to find a critic sympathetic to the work. For 10 years Open City had created collaborative performance works. We decided to carry this interest into print with a focus on the proliferation of hybrid and new media works across the country. In 1994 we applied for $15,000 seeding grant from the Australia Council to trial an arts paper. We got it.

We chose a model of consultative editors and state editorial teams working with a (very) small business structure with managing editors, a part-time editorial assistant (Kirsten Krauth took over from David in 1998) and one part-time advertising sales manager (successively Michelle Telfer-Smith, Sally Thompson, Sari Järvenpää, and now Gail Priest). Bi-monthly layout was initially done by Gregory Harvey (who had cut his teeth on the literary publication, *Editions*) followed by Graeme Smith, Paul Saint and now Gail Priest. Our managers have included Judy Annear, Susan Charlton and Lynne Mitchell. The first editorial team included Gregory Harvey, Annemarie Jonson, Catharine Lumby, John Potts, Michael George Smith and Linda Wallace with contributions from Colin Hood. We wanted our reach to be as wide as possible and decided on the street paper model plus a mailed regional distribution starting out at 16,000 copies increasing incremently over the years, now averaging at 30,000 for the print publication—with an increasing www readership. Funding from the Australia Council is now triennial (allowing the managers to work fulltime on the publication 1998-2000) via the New Media Arts Fund. We also receive funding from the NSW Ministry for the Arts, the NSW Film and TV Office and substantial support from the AFC towards *OnScreen*, as well as our many loyal advertisers and subscribers.

RealTime was never meant to be a journalistic exercise. As well as providing information it's about writing about the arts, finding the best and varied ways to respond to the art work. *RealTime* is largely written by practicising artists, along with academics, curators and people with specialist knowledge of artforms. Each issue we now commission around 40 writers drawn from an ever expanding list of adventurous and knowledgeable practitioners. We cover works across the contemporary spectrum within Australia and we draw on the experiences of artists travelling overseas. We also have 2 London correspondents, Aleks Sierz (theatre, performance) and Sophie Hansen (dance) and we're seeking others—in Asia, the USA and Europe.

We can't say of the first edition that it seems just like yesterday, but the recollection is still pretty vivid. The trial Issue (February 1994) featured Heidrun Löhr's cover girl shot of Angharad Wynne-Jones, then new director of The Performance Space (now with Chunky Move). Our launch was simultaneous with the re-shaped *Arts Today* on Radio National and the formation of the Hybrid Arts committee in the Australia Council. SBS' *Imagine* was up and running. It was an optimistic moment, although as new media/hybrid/image-based work proliferated there was a good deal of anxiety about its "taking over" conventional practices—fears unfortunately still with us. The old Melbourne-Sydney tensions also endure instead of celebrating the huge range of work being made in all the cities around Australia and still too rarely seen by each other. The first RT editorial spoke of "opening up the possibilities for writers and artists everywhere in Australia to contribute to the spread of information and ideas across art forms and distance." We had a riotous launch with performances including a Tupperware demonstration. A door was kicked in by the team from *Dripping With Ennui*, which shows what happens if you rehearse in a gymnasium. Stevie Wishart and Jim Denley from the Machine for Making Sense created a sublime piece entitled *realtime* which the packed audience talked through. On the musicians' behalf, avant garde violinist and sound artist Jon Rose justifiably gave us an earful. The first edition worked. It was read, talked about. We sold advertising, made a tiny profit, enough to embolden us to go at it bi-monthly. In our second edition we ran a feature on dyke performance that got us our first subscription from a jail inmate, shortly after revoked by the authorities. We were on our way.

Gradually we formed consultative editorial teams in all states, key issues emerged and preoccupations unfurled. Over the years we critiqued reports by Gonski and Mansfield, tore into Creative Nation and the restructuring of the Australia Council, screamed arts murder in the wake of the Howard election, and considered the Wik debate and its cultural ramifications. And we covered more contemporary art than you could poke a stick at. At the launch of the New Media Arts Fund in Melbourne in 1998, Fund Chair John Rimmer said of *RealTime* that though it was not necessarily always the bearer of good tidings, it was essential reading.

Sensing the growing fascination with new media and the enduring love of film among our readers (we did a survey), we embarked on *OnScreen* under the editorship of Annemarie Jonson (soon joined by Alessio Cavallaro). The birth of the supplement caused a few flurries in the ranks. "Privileging screen arts *again*!" was one quite understandable line. The other from the screen sector "Oh no, not film in an *arts* magazine!" was more revealing and a bit sad. The reservations quickly faded and *OnScreen* has gone on to provide some of the most potent coverage of screen culture issues in the country.

The ranks of consultative editors grew steadily: Colin Hood, Richard Harris, Jacqueline Millner, Nicholas Gebhardt (NSW); Rachel Fensham, Natalie King. Richard Murphet, Vikki Riley (VIC); Sarah Miller, Tony Osborne, Barbara Bolt, Katie Lavers, Peter Mudie (WA); Linda Marie Walker, Diana Weekes, John McConnchie (SA), Suzanne Spunner (NT); Julia Postle, Maryanne Lynch, Peter Anderson (QLD). With them grew the number of writers and the range of events covered. Having started at 24 pages (16,000 copies) we quickly expanded to 36 (25,000 copies per edition). After that, page numbers increased by unsymmetrical increments—our biggest 56 pages (35,000 copies). Now we try to steady at 44 to 48 pages (30,000 copies) in the interests of workload and sanity. Editors came and went, though many are still with us, the costs of frequent contact greatly reduced by the wonder of email, the ease of communication a boon to running a national paper. The gossip is good. On page 2 of this edition you can read the current list of tireless contributing editors.

Ever restless and in search of new experiences and new readers, we set up a website in 1996 and at the same time embarked on *RealTime* onsite. At Barrie Kosky's 1996 Adelaide Festival we produced in a delirium of pleasure 4 mini editions of *RealTime* every 4 days in print and online responding immediately to festival shows and themes. It worked and we were snapped up by LIFT 97 (London International Festival of Theatre) with a writing ensemble of 6 Australian and 3 British writers. We returned to Adelaide for Robyn Archer's festival in 1998, and have guested at other festivals and conferences including Melbourne's MAP (Movement and Performance 1998), the Head to Head Circus & Physical Theatre Conference (Sydney Opera House, 1998) and the Arhus Festival, Denmark (VisionLines conference 1998). More of these writing adventures are currently being negotiated.

And here we are at edition 30, a mature publication still co-ordinated and produced by a small team (see above) along with the *OnScreen* editors—Annemarie Jonson, Alessio Cavallaro and Needeya Islam. Still preoccupied with national coverage of the innovative arts. Still promoting those artists and companies who will only slowly find their way into newspapers, or the unsung artists who represent Australia at festivals of arts and film overseas. Still encouraging writing that conveys the experience of the art work rather than displaying the rush to judgment. Writing that engages accessibly with theory, unleashes poetry and reverie, and is not wary of the subjective response. It's still a pleasure. Our thanks to the many, many consulting editors, writers and artists behind the editorial and production team. Our thanks to our interstate distributors and the many institutions and venues who give space to *RealTime*. Thanks too to all our birthday well-wishers, our advertisers and especially the growing numbers of loyal *RealTime* readers.

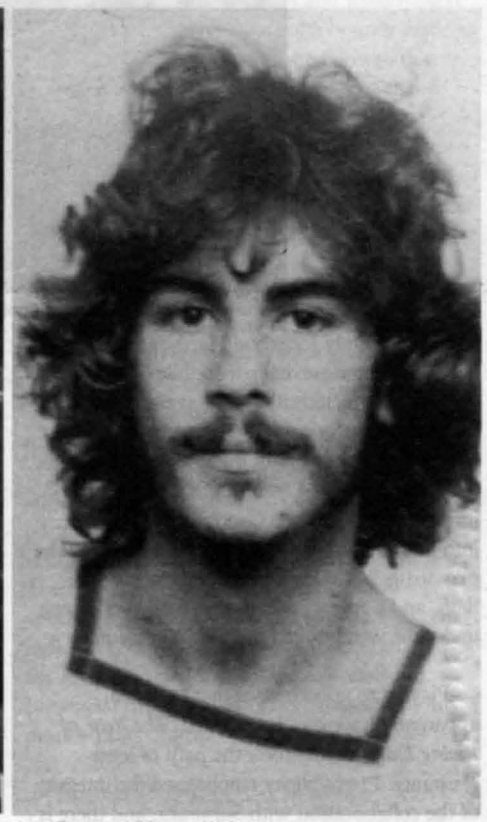
There are millions of stories in the Open City. This has been one of them. KG & VB

Potato country

On the occasion of the death of the master, James Waites recalls his adventures with Jerzy Grotowski

The great Polish theatre director and teacher Jerzy Grotowski, who inspired a generation of performers in the 70s, many of whom, Australians included, sought him out in Poland, died in January this year. His focus on the actor's body and spirit, and on the actor-audience relationship, celebrated a poor theatre. "The acceptance of poverty in theatre, stripped of all that is not essential to it, revealed to us not only the backbone of the medium, but also deep riches which lie in the very nature of the art-form" (Towards A Poor Theatre, 1968). In 1974, Mike Mullins, later the founder of The Performance Space in Sydney, was intrumental in bringing Grotowski to Australia. Theatre reviewer James Waites, then a student, recalls his encounter with the great man. (Eds)

the young Jerzy Grotowski



the 17 year old James Waites

I was 19 years old and in second-year Drama at the University of NSW when the Grotowski caravan arrived in town. Back in 1974 Grotowksi was at the peak of his reputation. To attend one of his plays was to sit at the fountain of theatrical truth, as it was then understood to be. For young drama students it was as if God had come to visit us. We all dutifully filed into the Chapter Hall next to St Mary's Cathedral—only 30 at a time—sitting piously in a circle to watch his art unfold. It was like nothing else we had seen, not that we'd seen much. *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* was spare and powerful: the actors and their craft hammered into shape on the anvil that was Grotowski's unsparing mind.

Afterwards, wannabes could hang around for an exercise that was also an audition. Grotowski had 3 projects on offer: one for professional actors, one that involved a large group, and another more mysterious one. We had to run around the room and try to fly, I mean really fly. And we had to write down on paper the one question we would ask God if we met him (her/it). I wish I could remember what I wrote because it clearly attracted his attention.

A few days later I was contacted. Grotowski wanted to meet me at home. He arrived with a few others, pretending to speak no English. I lived with other hippie students in a terrace in Glebe. I offered the visitors herbal tea, dried figs and bananas.

Grotowski was a wizened wintry branch of a man, with thick-lensed heavily-framed glasses, a bird's nose and a weedy long beard. He wanted me to come away for 10 days—it was the mystery project. The destination would not be revealed, and I was not to tell anyone that I was going.

I arrived at a room in the Koala Motor Inn in Oxford Street, with my warm clothing and sleeping bag, to find a note. I have it somewhere still. I could take a walk in the street but contact no one I knew. I was to catch a train that night to Armidale. The letter was signed "We".

On arrival the next morning I was taken to a motel. Later I was taken out to the closest bush and asked to find materials to make a musical instrument. Back in the hotel room I carved this thing into shape. I was allowed to buy a couple of guitar strings for my object, zither-like, along which I slid a found jawbone (I imagined of an ass) to make strangely compelling noises. Grotowski later asked if he could take my instrument with him back to Poland; I was sad to let it go.

We took a trip to a supermarket where supplies were purchased for the secret location. It was stunning to watch these renegade artists from the other side of the Iron Curtain stack several trolleys with luxury goods: cartons of cigarettes, coffee, chocolates, biscuits. All courtesy of the large government grant bankrolling the visit.

I was driven to a lonely farm. I walked into the kitchen. There was a young Australian woman, my own age, standing there. She asked: did I speak English? She had been there a few days already, others had been and gone. I was the last to join the experiment.

That first night, a group of Grotowski's actors and peasant-sturdy worker drones (who helped in the actors' training) put us through our paces. We were nearly always naked, and the work was done in silence. We might walk into a room and it glowed with heat and warmth, or climb into wine kegs full of cold water, lined at the bottom with bristling pineapple heads. We ran around chasing each other; blindfolded we might be led outside into the winter dark. I can remember very little of the detail. The emphasis was on sensation and, on reflection, testing one's self in untried or unfamiliar physical and emotional environments.

A journey of discovery into the self via the senses had begun, activated by what were essentially 'dramatic' devices.

Around dawn we were allowed to sleep. In the afternoon we were interrogated by Grotowski about our dreams. After much prodding I told him I had dreamt of the grounds of a castle (we had been rehearsing Strindberg's *A Dream Play* back at university—it was that castle). Men and women were dancing in the garden.

Where was I? Was I dancing too? he prodded. I felt ashamed; I was reluctant to answer. No. I was watching them, I was an observer. I get no pleasure in being involved. The years have revealed this to be something truly characteristic of my adult temperament.

From the next night we went on separate journeys. The girl's dreams had, no doubt, been different. The journey got darker for me. I can only remember fragments. I remember them putting their hands all over my naked body; I can still feel the warmth. They carried me outside and raised my body to the winter moon.

One day, an old farmer arrived with a tractor to dig up some of the yard. I was to translate Grotowski's instructions. After going over the ground once, Grotowski wanted the task repeated, to break up the clods some more. The old farmer was resistant: he had not brought the right equipment. Anyway, he asked, what the hell are these people doing? I told him it was an agricultural experiment. He told me that this was potato country and it was the wrong time for planting potatoes.

It started getting nasty as Grotowski insisted the farmer do it again. In the end I refused to play a part. I felt the farmer was being brutalised. One of Grotowski's worker bees came over and asked me what the problem was. I said I had grown up in a house full of arguments, and I hated them. Grotowski got his way with the farmer and the tractor was bogged many times.

That night I was dragged through that earth like a human plough. As a boy who had spent years at a Catholic boarding school, who lived pretty much entirely in the head, it was a forceful and immediate confrontation. The sacred earth!

After we had done several hours' work, most of it less challenging, we were resting in a room full of warmth from a fire. Nearby rested a large laundry-tub full of quietly rising dough. The same female worker bee motioned for me to get up. In front of the others she started hitting me. It became clear that she would stop only after I hit her back with enough force to be meaningful. I refused. She could not make me do it. In the end they gave up and took me out to one of the full-sized wine kegs. It was full of icy cold water. We both climbed in—Armidale in the winter! In the end they had to give up, a draw declared.

This incident helps me understand the Grotowski experiment. At first I thought he was merely creating situations for me to 'discover' aspects of myself. But after these events, I came to suspect that he actually had an agenda: there was something 'primitive' in all of us that the dramatic experience might be able to liberate.

On the last night, the girl and I swapped over. With horror, she found herself being dragged through the soil (something, despite a few scratches, I quite understood, if not enjoyed). I found myself being battered with raw eggs and smeared with yolk. While this had made her laugh, I found it absolutely repugnant.

On the last day, Grotowski said he had planted a seed in us that would only grow if we never discussed our experience. To attempt to use words would kill his gift. For a long time I told no one.

That night we shared a train back to Sydney, a carriage to ourselves, both as high as kites. It might have been relief at having survived the mad professor's castle. But I do believe there was more to it. We had each been taken on a remarkable, mysterious journey into ourselves. I don't know what the gift was, but I sense it still inside me.

We heard later that he had loved working with the Australians, and found us surprisingly hardy. What he learnt from us I have no idea. I do believe we were fodder for an experiment, and it's all written up somewhere.

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Perth Festival

DANGEROUS TIMING

Josephine Wilson on the uses and abuses of history in the Festival of Perth

It is difficult to know what to do with the past.

Clifford Geertz

History has a way of refusing us access to its most intimate truths. It sits stubborn and mute, a winking gargoyle high upon an edifice, and in this year's Festival of Perth several performances sought to tease the little beast down onto centre stage.

Kaos Theatre's *The Fantastical Adventures of Leonardo da Vinci* set out to dramatise the machinations of Renaissance Florence, in a style that junks historical authenticity in favour of the contemporary. In *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Anglo-Australian correspondent Guy Hamilton is ensnared yet again in events leading up to the overthrow of Sukarno in 1965. In *Humains, Dîtes-Vous!* 16th Century religious wars are a pre-text for an exploration of the flayed and persecuted body of pre-modern European fields of war and painting. In *Cruel Wild Woman*, we follow Noongar couple Ethel and Charlie in their struggle to come to terms with the unwelcome incursion of that Woman in Red into the local landscape.

Leonardo da Vinci is a disappointing production from local group Kaos Theatre. Having received generous funding from the Festival of Perth in an innovative and brave initiative to promote local work, Kaos was under a great deal of pressure to come up with the goods. Unfortunately, a young cast struggled under poor direction, burdened by a script that wandered aimlessly across competing registers—pseudo-historical, didactic, vernacular.

Framed as contemporary performance—sparse set, strange contemporary costume, digital projections—the form of *Leonardo* was at odds with its self-conscious performance aesthetic. Linear and episodic in form, the audience muddled along with Leonardo in his imbrications with Machiavelli, Lorenzo, Savonarola, Catherine di Medici et al, none of whom managed to rise to the occasion. Our new model Leonardo, clad in a midriff lycra T-shirt and a towel, had alas spent far too much time on his pectorals and not enough on his performance! Having seen an earlier much longer version of *Leonardo* 6 months ago, in which the problems with casting, staging and script were very evident, it was depressing to see a pared-back production that had salvaged nothing worth saving from the first performance, and substantively added only expensive and ill-conceived multimedia elements.

The choice of Leonardo Da Vinci as the subject of contemporary performance suggests spectacular resonances in the late 20th century—the myth of genius, the role of science, the growth of secular society, humanism, individualism, corruption, hubris; the daunting list goes on. But the director managed neither to tease out these contemporary resonances, nor to make us inquire into or care one bit for the life of Leonardo, let alone his contemporary clone.

In the Black Swan adaptation of Christopher Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1978), Guy Hamilton (Kim de Lury) struggles with his fatal flaw, watched by adoring Billy Kwan (Michael Denkha). The set groaned under the weight of a gamelan orchestra and the Wayang Kulit master puppeteer, all mounted on a rotating platform. Authentic fabrics, rickshaws and bicycles were wheeled in and out—not to mention a thankfully brief appearance by a fake dwarf with shoes stuck to his knees.

So much was going on, so little was happening. Only Jonathon Hardy, as the aging degenerate homosexual/paedophile (in an offensive characterisation that again shows the book/play's historical limitations), and Indonesian actors Utami Budiati and Landung Simatupang (who, I read in the program, has just translated Clifford Geertz' *After the Fact* into Indonesian) had faith in their utterings. The play struggled to keep music, image, surtitle, flags, and puppetry afloat, eventually collapsing under the weight of its multiple confusions.

Humains, dîtes Vous!, Centre Choreographique Nationales de Nantes Laurent Phillippe

Playing to good houses that emerged apparently happy and contented, *The Year of Living Dangerously* took the path of least resistance. Pre-publicity emphasised the integrity of the collaboration with Surabaya, and there is no doubt the exchange was a fantastic process for all involved. However, it is interesting to register the energy that went into authenticating the production, establishing its "extraordinary parallels to recent political events" (Festival of Perth Program, 1999) and to wonder how this functions in the production itself. Before the season began, newspaper articles spoke of the eye-opening experience of the Australian actors in Indonesia, and during the show an exhibition in the foyer of the Playhouse reproduced Frances Andrijich's black and white photographs, largely of poor and rural Indonesians. Unfortunately, "I have been there" does not necessarily translate into an invigorated performance. These documentary photographs re-appeared in the play as the images of Billy Kwan's insightful if ultimately deluded organising eye, further collapsing the distinctions between the setting of the book/play (1965) and local Indonesian reality circa 1998.

It might purport to be about contemporary Indonesia, but there was no doubt that the real story belonged to good-looking Guy—another well-built young man miscast in the wrong era—and that the essential narrative drive was the old motor of love. Love flourished and died against a backdrop of tumultuous historical events, in which Indonesian actors were cast—with the exception of a brief appearance by President Sukarno—as background musicians, servants, prostitutes and assistants to the central narrative. Structurally, we are delivered the message that while history belongs in Australia, myth belongs in Indonesia, a country trapped, like the puppeteer, on an interminable revolving rostra of tyranny and corruption, in which 1965 is the same as 1998, in which Sukarno and Suharto are interchangeable, and in which poor old Billy Kwan, narrator, half-caste, misfit, dwarf, must die so that blond Adonis Guy, having survived the arc of transformation and awakened anew to the old reality of full characterisation, can live on in Perth, the city of rewrites.

History threatens to repeat itself in Yirra Yaakins' production *Cruel Wild Woman*. Ethel (Lynette Narkle) is worried about Wik, she's worried about the 10 point plan, and she's worried about her husband Charlie (Kelton Pell), who can't let go of the form guide, and whom she suspects of pawning the vacuum cleaner at Cash and Carry. And then there's that Woman in Red, Pauline Hanson, who keeps popping up everywhere—on the television, in *New Idea*—and who Charlie (who must have a will to die) let's slip is a bit of a looker. ("Red", Ethel scoffs, peering at Pauline in her dress, "is a black woman's colour!")

Charlie's mate, Tom, has had his eyes on Ethel ever since the NAIDOC Ball years ago when Charlie out-samba-ed his way into Ethel's heart. Now Charlie's having a hard time convincing Ethel that an intruder stole the old vacuum cleaner. He talks Tom into donning a white sheet with 2 black eyeholes and pretending to prowl around the house so that he, Charlie can rush out, fight him off, and win back Ethel's heart. Of course, since this is comedy, Ethel takes up the broom and beats the masked intruder to a pulp. She returns onstage shaken but not stirred. "It's just like *Mississippi Burning*," she says.

Cruel Wild Woman manages to parody both paranoid politics and complacent responses to contemporary Aboriginal-Australian relations in a situational comedy in which the 'local situation' counts for everything, and in which politics is enmeshed in the domestic drama of everyday married life. It is gentle satire, uneven at times, and yet manages to satisfy in its clever manipulation of a popular genre. Ethel has a nightmare in which Captain Cook, with Charlie as his ship's boy, lands to reclaim Australia. Ethel drives him out singlehandedly, and wakes up relieved that it was just a dream. Charlie dreams he is playing *Wheel of Fortune*, with lovely Pauline in that red dress spinning the wheel in which a tiny sliver is black, the rest white. "Choose!" exhorts Tilly Ozsdolay in drag. Each time Charlie chooses black and each time he loses. In this lounge room, history is the place of bad dreams, from which we wake, thankful.

The story climaxes at an anti-Hanson rally in which Tom's recalcitrant dog finally sees red. And of course, once they've dealt with the dog and the cops, Charlie and Ethel are reunited, go to the ball, and they all live happily ever after. Which is not how it happened in history, but it's not a bad ending, is it.

Of *Humains, Dites-Vous!* (Humans, tell us about them!), choreographer Claude Brumarchon writes "The 16th Century body—I feel it strict, erect, tense, almost cramped. It smells of slaughter and blood." This remarkable exploration of the body manages to inaugurate a dialogue between History and histories, between the remembered and the forgotten. The static drama of tableau re-presents the canonical paintings of Michelangelo, Veronese, Titian, Durer, countered within the ensemble by nameless human bodies that punish and are punished in acts of subjection, and in moments of penance and mortification performed in small dark pits of dirt on the edges of the theatrical frame. Bodies tend to sculptural form, bodies tend to mass damnation, lit from above on a dark stage resonant with the sound of dragging metal chains. The vision was dark and unrelenting, dance at its most deathly, history at its most specific, in which the perfect body of the dancer was staged not as an object of desire, but an object of pity. This was sin and its wages in the most European, most Christian of vocabularies, yet the performance managed to allegorise Christian versus Protestant hatred into an eschatological vision fit for the end of any century.

Kaos Theatre, The Fantastical Adventures of Leonardo Da Vinci, *writer Xavier Leret, director Phil Morle, Playhouse Theatre, Feb 10 - 14, 16 - 20; Black Swan Theatre Company,* The Year of Living Dangerously, *adapted by Dicken Oxenburgh from the novel by Christopher Koch, Playhouse Theatre, Feb 26 - 28, March 2 - 6, 9 - 14; Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre,* Cruel Wild Woman, *writers Sally Morgan and David Milroy, Subiaco Theatre Centre, Feb 10 - 13, 16 - 20, 23 - 27; Centre Choreographique National de Nantes,* Humains, Dîtes-Vous!, *choreographer Claude Brumachon, Burswood Theatre, February 24 - 27; Festival of Perth 1999, Feb 12 - May 7*

UNFOLDING FROM THE MARGINS

Andrew Nicholls looks at insights offered by visual arts in the Festival of Perth

What are the repercussions for an international arts festival in the context of a city (and state) attempting to foster stronger links with Asia, whilst simultaneously trying to reconcile a particularly turbulent racial history? While it goes without saying that this agenda is not appropriate to all visual arts exhibitions in the Festival of Perth, I would like to examine those that did deal with race, marginalisation and cross-cultural awareness in some depth.

Foldings, at Gallery East, an ongoing initiative of the Textile Exchange Project, brought together work by 50 Japanese and 15 West Australian textiles artists. Exhibitors were asked to submit sculptures "informed by cross-cultural references and differences" and the final exhibition was a remarkably coherent collection of works. I could distinguish no particular 'style' specific to either country, rather the overriding theme seemed to be 'body'; be it a contained body, as in Annette Seaman's *Boxed In* (a wooden box crammed with folded lead and silk), a body opening up (Kiyonori Shimada's vagina-like *Flower*), or a body literally 'unfolding' as in Moira Duropoulos' *Punctuated Sequence* and Hiroko Ote's *Cloth—Across*: 2 works which stood out as being simultaneously unique yet very similar, hinting that our 2 cultures have more in common than we may realise.

Cultural exchange of a different nature inspired George Gittoes' harrowing exhibition of paintings at Greenhill Galleries. Inspired by his visits to war-torn and poverty-stricken countries from Cambodia to Northern Ireland, his huge apocalyptic canvases were often difficult to view, at times surreal, and at others, incredibly beautiful. I preferred the more intimate pages from his travel diaries, containing spontaneous sketches and background information on the people and events that influenced the finished paintings.

Obviously, in relation to encouraging cultural exchange, a vital component in any Australian arts festival is a focus on work by Aboriginal and Torres-Strait Islanders. The highlight of this year's festival was the stunning exhibition of recent works by Butcher Cherel Janangoo, Julie Gough and Julie Dowling at Artplace: one of the most powerful exhibitions of contemporary Aboriginal art I have seen. Both Gough and Dowling use kitsch to symbolise the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of Western culture, our obsessive orientalism in portraying Aboriginals as exotic 'other'. Dowling's family portraits are aboriginalised byzantian icons, in which the soullessness of western trash (plastic crucifixes and fake jewels) are transformed into ornate borders of great beauty, whilst in *Magnum as Cook in the Space/Time Continuum*, a mix of precious family memories and 'exotic' tourist-stand trash, Gough casts TV's Magnum PI as James Cook, and takes playful revenge by having him devoured by the shark from *Jaws*.

Butcher's paintings, by far the most traditional of the threesome, portray his mother's country, currently under threat by the proposed damming of the Fitzroy. I am always slightly uncomfortable viewing more traditional Aboriginal art, knowing that I can never understand the symbolism unique and private to each region, and was grateful that Butcher had

Julie Gough, *Magnum as Cook in the Space/Time Continuum* (detail)

included accompanying text with each work—a remarkably generous gesture on behalf of the artist, allowing me as a white Australian far greater insight into the works.

Despite the histories of pain and anger that have obviously influenced this exhibition, there is an incredible generosity on the part of each artist—Butcher's accompanying Dreamtime stories, the deeply personal family histories of Dowling's portraits and an extremely accessible artist's statement from Gough. Such openness and trust suggest a cultural dialogue may be emerging that could eventually lead to some form of understanding and reconciliation.

Similarly, *Listen to the Land*, an exhibition of Aboriginal art from the collection of Edith Cowan University at the Aboriginal Advancement Council, was just as generous in its curation with accompanying references, maps and artists' statements, covering the spectrum of Aboriginal art practice, both contemporary (including another painting by Dowling) and traditional, to reveal the "richness and strength of Aboriginal culture…"

The primary link for all these works, the Land (be it the physical mapping depicted in traditional Arnhem Land aerial views, or the ambiguous cultural landscape inhabited by the part-Aboriginal, part-white Dowling) was also the basis for *Fighting for Culture* at The Mossenson Gallery, contrasting work by leading male artists from 2 different communities, Yuendumu in the central NT and Maningrida in Arnhem Land. After viewing these 3 exhibitions, I hope that non-Aboriginal West Australian artists can respond with equal trust and generosity. PICA's *Artists Against Racism* show last year, although problematic, was a highly commendable initiative. Obviously I do not wish to suggest that all art should be overtly political, and in a sense it is problematic (if not carnivalesque) that it takes an international arts festival for these "marginal" works to reach so wide an audience, but overall, the visual arts component of the 1999 Festival of Perth should be remembered as evidence of a growing will-to-know between cultures, a generosity in shared knowledge, and an eagerness to partake in cultural exchange.

Listen to the Land, *Aboriginal Advancement Council, Feb 13 - March 31; Butcher, Julie Gough, Julie Dowling, Artplace, Feb 10 - March 7;* Fighting for Culture, *Indigenart, The Mossenson Gallery, Feb 9 - March 7.*

LAMENT OF DESIRE

Elision shifts Roxanne Mary Della-Bosca out of her comfort zone

Six white squares like gigantic footprints of our history, screen-savers whose subtle flickering transfixes our gaze. The soundscape of a computer animated world (like popular Jurassic Park exhibitions in museums) blurs the expression of the musicians, the melodicization of noise struggling against anarchy, a pretend shadow over music's eroticism.

Sound encloses our imaginations, compressing our head space, but then the masochistic climax of repression is subverted by a visual contradiction.

Those quivering images, unidentifiable corpses and places, and that primordial, pre-orgasmic sound (amplified to touch our erogenous zones through the seating), like masturbation lack context, their implications unclear. Only the subversion of direction, of closure, only an open-ness is apparent.

The multi-dimensional sound world which tricks our sense of aural space, irritates our trained desire to sit politely in a tidy cage whilst pondering the meaning of the skylights above (even our view of paradise up there involves boxes).

The half-Butoh figure of a man in a white shirt (it is left to the audience to define the space) slowly strings together 2 diagonally placed celestial images. The people on the opposite wall seem further away now. My visual space and aural space are mutually exclusive. The human closeness of the narrator/singer on the opposite wall feels untouchable. In the darkness, is she really there? Can I go there? Am I ALLOWED to go there? I venture into the space on the other side of the room. Strangely, I'm out of my comfort zone.

There she is! She walks right in front of me. She goes to the opposite wall. I feel betrayed—she belongs over here!

She avoids people. They ignore her anyway. They are mainly turned on to those screen-savers that put their experience on hold.

Can I provoke her? I look at her up close. Her Asian features are sweaty, like a plastic mask in the real humidity of real air in a real world. She cannot be a figure of the Netherworld, yet as a human figure, who is she? She is not depressed for she moves and sings and sweats the toil of her body, yet she is not social either. Her vocal nuance and diction tell no secrets, the intonation of her melody placing her nowhere. Her presumed grief can not touch us for she has no identity.

Brown legs of dead bodies, like seaweed, creep onto the screen. Legs and nameless navels mean nothing to me. Mourning for lost loves? No. Grief has names. Where are their names? The blur of masculine torsos seems only to suggest an exploitation of their naked helplessness, powerlessness, an orgy of necrophilia…Her melancholy is bullshit.

Without cadence, the 6 squares of light recapitulate. The 6 white squares again, the thankful silence save the breathing of the building and its heavy equipment.

Oh, it's the end.

Elision Ensemble with Timothy O'Dwyer (composer /saxophonist) and Araya Rasdjarmreansook (installation artist and projections), Fremantle Prison, Perth, Feb 23 - 27

CONFRONTING, INSPIRING AND UMM…

The Festival of Perth offers Sarah Miller Shakespeare, Shakespeare and something more

Shakespeare, it seems, is all pervasive. Not just a playwright for all seasons but, apparently, for all nationalities. In Australia, he even has his very own company. Another dead artist missing out on the royalties—so sad. Still in this constantly recurring Shakespearian moment, it is perhaps not surprising that the Festival of Perth should present 3 productions by the bard, encompassing on the one hand, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Richard III* from the English Shakespeare Company, and from the Japan Foundation's Asia Centre, *Lear*. Guess which one was really worth seeing! Well perhaps that's not fair. I didn't see *Antony and Cleo* but boy did I hear about it. I did see *Richard III* and whilst I am aware that some people adored it, I cannot tell a lie, I haaaated it! If there's anything worse than actors pretending to be children and speaking in cutsie, squeaky voices…

From grown up kiddie-widdies galloping around the stage making horsie worsie noises, snorting through their nostrils and whinnying (I kid you not), to the erection of a bouncy castle as the symbol of Richard's ill gotten power, this sniggering, Enid Blyton approach—to what conventional wisdom teaches us are the 'universal' themes of absolute power and corruption—was utterly trivialising. Maybe it was the school kids that loved it but I do wonder about the ethics of 'revitalising' "Shakespeare's bloodiest play" by turning it into a saccharine romp. I thought it was television's role to desensitise us to gross acts of violence and theatre's role to confront, inspire and umm…

Lear, on the other hand, was utterly invigorating, understanding from the outset that any production of Shakespeare today must address the utterly changed cultural, social and political contexts that we variously inhabit. This is not simply a matter of nationality or ethnicity. The tragedy of Lear in this production is less a concern for the tragically flawed individual who fails to live up to his own moral standards, than the revelation that Lear inhabits a world of (im)moral order that does not have him or his destiny at its centre.

Director Ong Keng Sen, in working with Japanese writer Rio Kishida on the themes of the play, notes that he was "particularly interested in looking at new Asia as it grapples with its history." He is also committed to moving beyond the dichotomy of the traditional and the modern, preferring to articulate it as a continuum; "Night becomes day when dawn approaches." Consequently, it is the position of the older daughter, Goneril, trapped by patriarchy, that is central. It is for the love of power that Goneril betrays her father and sister, believing in the capacity of a new era to transcend the past. It is implied that the child that kills her father will one day become the father to be betrayed in her turn.

In pursuing the continuum between tradition and modernity, Ong worked with a multiplicity of performance styles and traditions even including the Indonesian martial arts form, Minangkabau. Starting with the Singaporean director and Japanese writer, other creative personnel were drawn from Singapore, Java, Sumatra, Malaysia, Thailand and China. This radical investment in an exploration of theatrical form was particularly satisfying. Singaporean actors, Indonesian dancers, Malaysian and Indonesian choreographers and Gamelan musicians among others, contributed to an amazing cast. Particularly exciting was the work of Jiang Qihu, a member of the highly prestigious China National Beijing Opera Company, holding the title of National Artist, First rank. He invested the role of the older daughter (his first female role) with enormous power and ambiguity. Equally extraordinary was the performance by Naohiko Umewaka, a Kanze-school Noh actor born into a famous family of Noh actors, and Japanese actress Hairi Katagiri playing the Fool.

Whilst *Lear* was definitely more than the sum of its parts, it resisted the temptation to homogenise, allowing the diverse forms their own integrity. As Taiwanese film director Ang Lee has been able to utilise his cultural distance to great effect in films like *Sense and Sensibility* and *Ice Storm*, it takes artists like Ong Keng Sen and Rio Kushida to transform and revitalise *King Lear*, giving us a production of enormous theatricality and contemporary relevance.

Following *Lear*, it was great to slip into the relaxed, witty and equally culturally diverse *Paradis* by the French Compagnie Montalvo and Hervieu. *Paradis* was a playful and satisfyingly unselfconscious cocktail of dance styles: African dance, European contemporary and classical, hip hop and dance indigenous to The Antilles (in the French Caribbean). I fell in love with the Caribbean dancer who had a smile to die for and the most articulate and flamboyant butt I've ever seen. The deceptively simple integration of video into the performance was particularly and unusually successful. Bodies shot on video appeared and disappeared on 2 giant screens at the back of the stage. A continuous interactive game was established between the dancers on the stage and their doubles on the screen. Zebras, puppies, Spanish stallions, various wild beasts, grandmothers and children appeared and disappeared, mingling with the cast and their doubles. A taste for the heterogeneous, the art of collage and the influence of Dada and Surrealism could be detected in *Paradis* as in the work of another French company, Compagnie Castafiore with their *Almanac Bruitax* (Almanac of Noises).

Equally charming but never twee, *Almanac Bruitax* was inspired, of course, by the almanac, those fragmented and often curious and encyclopedic collections of incongruous images and headings. Against a free standing backdrop—a curved wall suggesting the shape of a page, covered in shag pile carpet—5 dancers come and go creating myriad absurd sketches, reference points and connections. Collections of objects are moved on and off stage creating and recreating assemblages of images in which references to pop culture, the museum, the falsely scientific, the mysterious and the absurd combine and recombine. The choreography works closely to the soundtrack created by Karl Biscuit, which—in a distant echo of the planet—mixes fragments of shortwave and intermediate frequency radiophonic broadcasts, samples, loops and 'mix' technology.

Infinitely more intense was the work of the Centre Choreographique National de Nantes with 2 productions, *Humains, dites-vous* (see Josephine Wilson's review opposite) and *Icarus*, a solo by Benjamin Lamarche. *Icarus*, choreographed by Claude Brumachon, was an outstanding solo work that concerned itself less with the myth of Icarus, the "illustration of the impossible", than with a rigorous and demanding exploration of space; a search for meaning; a man confronting himself alone on the stage. A simple set with only some parallel bars and a suit, Lamarche's performance was simply outstanding.

Richard III, *adapted and directed by Malachi Bogdanov, English Shakespeare Company, New Fortune Theatre, February 23 - March 6;* Lear, *writer Rio Kishida, director Ong Keng Sen, Japan Foundation Asia Centre, His Majesty's Theatre, Feb 13, 15 - 18;* Paradis, *Compagnie Montalvo and Hervieu, choreography Jose Montalvo, Burswood Theatre, Feb 17 - 20;* Almanac Bruitax, *choreography Marcia Barcellos, music & sound Karl Biscuit, Burswood Theatre, March 3 - 6;* Icarus, *a solo for Benjamin Lamarche, choreography Claude Brumachon, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, March 2 - 4*

See Onscreen for Perth Festival's Peter Callas retropsective and Future Suture.


Montalvo and Hervieu's *Paradis* at the Festival of Perth Laurent Philippe

Clear and muddy waters

Elizabeth Paterson on the shore of *The Universal Lake*, part of Weereewa—a Festival of Lake George, in the ACT

The performance started up the hill from the lake. We sat on the sloping edge of an old dam, the Prologue enacted in front of us using all the levels of the dam to great advantage—its rim like a near horizon, with the lake and far hills forming an astonishing backdrop. The performers appeared as if suspended in the landscape.

The Prologue established the players and central narrative, a story of Everyman who unwittingly destroys the land he is trying to tame, until tragedy hits and he realises he has to change. His progress is witnessed by the world of spirit as he intrudes on and violates its realm. The Storyteller entertainingly guided us through the narrative. After the Prologue we walked down to the lake's shore, where the performance continued in 3 consecutive sites.

The journey of the Mortals encompassed some inventive interpretations of experiences in the history of white settlement. For instance, Everyman, standing on the rim of the dam, eloquently expressed his struggle to relate to his new environment through a dance using the deep pockets of his shorts. And it was exhilarating when the Mortals really interacted with their environment, as when they suddenly scattered, running out into the long grass, falling over and vanishing from view.

In each site, alongside Everyman's journey, was the portrayal of the spirit world. This representation of the natural forces of the lake environs, though it contained a few strong moments, such as the keening of the Moon, and the ochre painted arms of the Sun dancing against the pure blue of the sky, in the end left me none the wiser about the nature of this place. The Indian influence in the choreography and costume of the Sun, though a minor element, helped point to what I felt was a major flaw. Obviously the company had looked to the ways in which various cultural traditions have expressed the spiritual dimension of their environments. But why did they only adopt the bloodless and ethereal aspects of these traditions? Where were the negative and violent, humorous and tricky dimensions? Surely, to touch the mythic power of the spirit world in human form, one must embrace the breadth of human virtue and vice so that the full power and complexity of the natural forces around us can be expressed. Maybe the choice to impersonate the spirits wasn't the best form to serve the production's intentions.

Another minor element which raised questions was the slight hint of New Age aesthetics and ideals (like the wafty costumes and choreography of the Spirits). Why a negative? Because it suggests good intentions, longings and sentimentality, rather than lived experience?

There were many strong elements—terrific ensemble (such a joy to see really good older dancers performing!), fabulous setting, good unobtrusive organisation, great moments...and this exasperating irony that the very element that should have provided sustenance left me feeling hungry. In this sense I found the show immensely stimulating; I was bursting to know WHY.

Cheryl Heazlewood, Fiona Watson, Hezar Blue, Vivienne Rogischeck, Emma Strapps in *The Universal Lake*

At the very end the wind turned. The pong of the muddy lake edge wafted our way, a pungent reminder of the everchanging nature of the lake itself. May its muddy waters continue to inspire the development of its evocation.

The Universal Lake, *part of Weereewa—a Festival of Lake George; artistic director Elizabeth Cameron Dalman; performers included Elizabeth Cameron Dalman, Cheryl Heazlewood, Patrick Harding-Irmer, David Branson, Aron Munozz, Luke O'Neill; director of CanBelto Vocal Group Moya Simpson; Mirramu Creative Arts Centre, Lake Road, Bungendore, February 12 - 14, 19 & 20*

Elizabeth Paterson has worked as a freelance actor, maker and theatre designer as well as creating solo performances, exhibitions and directing her own work. In 1998 she was an ACT Creative Arts Fellow.

Dancer and choreographer Elizabeth Cameron Dalman was the founder of Adelaide's ADT (Australian Dance Theatre).

Looking after country

Hilary Hoolihan traces the still waters of Lake George and the *Weereewa Ngunnawal* mural at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space

For Aboriginal people much of the Australian continent is, or used to be, overlain by pathways or Dreaming tracks—mythic pathways that connect places over vast distances. Canberra means "meeting place"; for Aboriginal people it continues to be. Even in modern times Aboriginal people have continued to come here.

Canberra is seen as just as important today as before occupation when the Ngunnawal and Wiradjuri people performed ceremonies around Lake George and the sites of New Parliament House, Mt Ainslie, the Bogong Moth Festival, Jedbinbilla (Tidbinbilla), Blacks Hill Camp (Black Mountain) and Namadgi National Park. It was also used as a trade route where Aboriginal people traded tools. Today Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have lived, protested here and almost come to terms with the plasticity of the city arising from European settlement. It is seen as where the government of the day makes decisions that affect the outcome of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people's lives and is the home of the Ngunnawal people.

It is now a 3 hour trip on the improved road from Sydney to Canberra. A freeway of 4 lanes mostly, it is 3 hours neat unless one stops at Macka's drive-through, and the engine coasts easily, on the gentle descent from the beautiful Southern Highlands. (Fire trails, bushfire country; Moreton National Park, Kangaroo Valley has a plateau, a ridge that reminds me of a greener version of Obir rock in the Top End.) Time can be made up on the downhill run and, after Goulburn (keep the windows up, it's always cold), only 40 minutes to the nation's capital. Once you hit Lake George you're almost there. But I never felt easy driving along the edge of this still expanse of water.

Jim (Boza) Williams, section, *Weereewa Ngunnawal*

I wasn't even sure if it was water that was flickering under the many full moons on my pilgrimages back and forth. Such contrast between the 2, one full-on, sprawling seething mass of humanity in concrete and glass, with public litter, public signage advertising and public arts, lots of it, and the other de-populated, bare, no signage, advertising forbidden and no public art but national monuments, national architecture and national memorials. Lake George has apparently fixed up though accidents seem to be drawn like magnets to this mystifying spot. I'm in the habit of turning down the loud music here partly out of respect for the hidden Dreaming path that one knows must still be here. Today there is certainly lots of mystery surrounding the Lake and different meanings from the Ngunnawal and Wiradjuri people of this region; some say that Weereewa means 'a lot of water' or 'Nerran Nerran when it was dry'; another means 'fire', not in the literal sense but rather fire in the sense of danger or bad.

The main artist who coordinated the mural has his own interpretation of Weereewa, and believes that his people would have never touched that water with their hands and feet. They would only have entered on canoe. The Bunyip legend which has been popularised in non-Indigenous culture may have come from the Wiradjuri belief that there was something unexplainable in the water, akin to a spirit. Or is it the home of Rainbow Serpent, lying dormant under the lake; or is it linking all the underground river and channel systems within Australia; and is that why the water mysteriously vanishes and appears; or is it the mystery that surrounds the boatload of missing boy scouts and their bodies which were never found?

The *Weereewa Ngunnawal* mural has been painted on the back wall of the Canberra Contemporary Art Space and is not a permanent fixture; it will only be exhibited for the time of the exhibition. The work was initiated by Ngunnawal artist Jimmy (Boza) Williams who collaborated with Barry O'Brien, Lyn Duncan, John Johnson and Andy Britten. The *Weereewa Ngunnawal* mural sees a group of artists now engaged in this process. If one way of looking after our country is by painting it, then this mural may also be seen in this light. The mural is pictorial map painted by Jimmy and those artists who collaborated with him of places that are of significance in and round Canberra such as Lake George, Molonglo River, Black Mountain, the Brindabellas, New Parliament House, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. It is also depicting an extensive range of bird and animal life in and around Canberra before and after European settlement.

If one way is to paint in such a fashion with no outside influence from other areas of Aboriginal Australia then this mural is a start for the Ngunnawal people. To develop and evolve with modern times and to still be expressive in their own Aboriginality without having to think consciously of putting a dot or cross-hatch (mark) to confirm it.

It is art which tells an important story which is pleasing to the eye.

Weereewa Ngunnawal, *large mural painting designed and painted by Jim (Boza) Williams (Ngunnawal), assisted by Barry O'Brien (Wiradjuri), Lyn Duncan (Aboriginal ancestry unknown), John Johnson (Warramunga), Andy Britten (mixed rellies), Canberra Contemporary Art Space, February 20 - March 20*

Hilary Hoolihan currently works at Studio One where she organises print workshops (incorporating lithography and digital imaging) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the Canberra region. She hopes to organise further workshops with communities from the north and south coast; and exhibit/tour the artworks in 1999.

A queer mob

RealTime at the 1999 Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras festival

For the outsider with an anthropological eye to detail, there appear to be rituals at the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. A single male arrives for PACT's *Sexing the Gap* and is introduced by a friend to a stranger. He kisses him on the cheek and says "Happy Mardi Gras", and you think, "like Xmas, or a birthday, and why not." But it's the collective nature of the audiences that is most intriguing, often surprisingly unanimous in appearance and demeanour, or broken into discrete groupings.

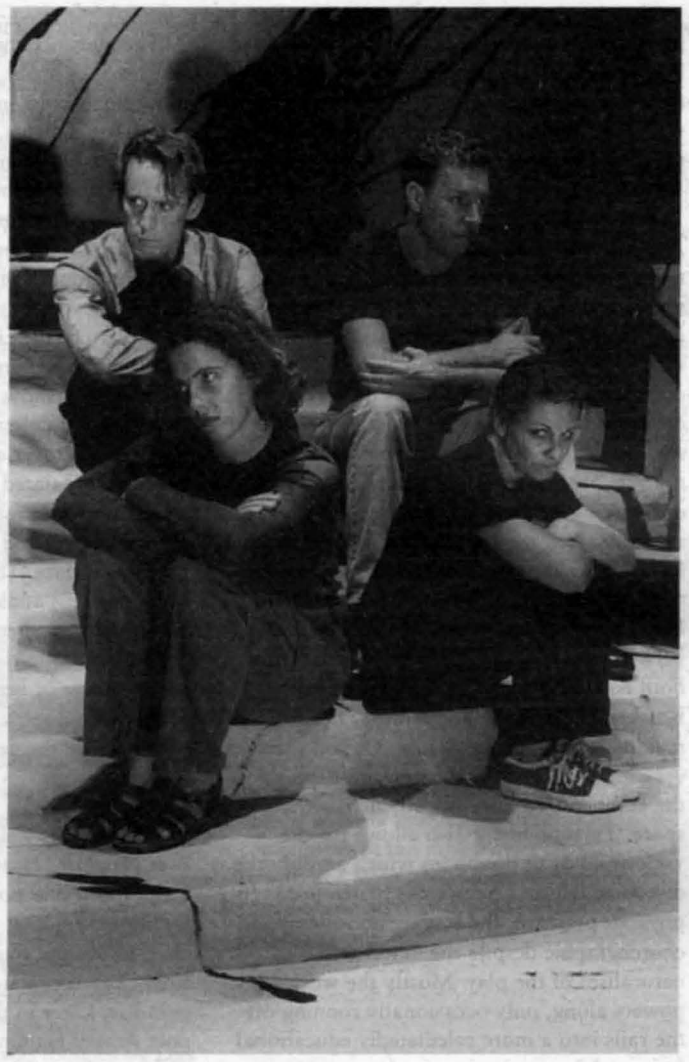
Native American Jewelle Gomez, the only female of the *Sista City Acts* from San Francisco's Yerba Beuna Centre for the Arts looks distinctly uncomfortable reading her love poems to almost exclusive rows of paired moustaches. Julian Chin starts out with a cosy monologue of Asian-American experience striking matches in the dark, stops when he realises he's mixing up his own life with *The Joy Luck Club*, then moves on to more gut-wrenching tales of desire while grinding a light globe into his palm. Keith Hennessy is the surprise of the night, deconstructing the world of a deranged dancer. With a head full of things personal and political breaking through his body, he eventually mounts an assault on the audience directing all manner of anxious questions at us. He begins to implicate us in his salvation, starts channelling our feelings. "Do you think this breathing is coming between us? This is not the music of international finance." Nearing the climax of his act, he attempts to run a 3-way rhythm through his body. We applaud. Damn! He loses it. Starts again. Working for all of us, he does it. Slowly the tension drains from his body, he has removed the garish costume and make up, wig, shoes, the credit cards attached to his nipples. Together we have released him from the torment of performance. Bob Ostertag's sonic improvisation quiets the audience, leads us into another curious headspace. Here is a gay artist creating a difficult work apparently without any audible gay agenda. The audience of men listen respectfully and attentively. Maybe none of this is what they were expecting, but hey this is Mardi Gras.

Javier de Frutos, one of the highlights of the festival, tried with difficulty to fly his exotic *Hypochondriac Bird* for an opening night audience which seemed almost entirely male couples, which you would think would make sense for a work of great intimacy *about* a male couple. However, audience reaction on this night and apparently throughout the season was less than enthusiastic which is a puzzle for this was an entirely distinctive work of great beauty and skill. Two bodies (Javier de Frutos and Jamie Watton)—one dark, shaved, fluid, flamboyant in long skirt; the other short, cropped in white suit and blue ruffled shirt; one flowing; the other articulating tiny moves from the hip; one distracted by the audience, by his own body, constantly checking for signs of disease, the other fixed, almost stiffly formal; 2 dancers totally familiar with each other's bodies, exposing themselves in all of their skittish, nervousness, then in all of their languid, rapacious sexuality. A beautiful, fragile couple. Remember Paul Keating's flip answer to Ray Martin in the "Great Debate"—Gay marriages are OK but you can't build a society on them? The lovers stir themselves from their variegated horizontal couplings and slip into glaringly awkward personas, doomed to the vertical world. In response to the generosity of the performance the audience is half-hearted.

Sexing the Gap at PACT Youth Theatre is one of a number of mixed gender works of the festival and notably attracts an audience to match. The 12 performers ranging in age from 80 to 18 certainly have stories to tell and in the case of the older performers there's a sense of having lived with them for a while. An old man speaks about a sexual encounter with a boy when he was young. He puts the experience aside, marries, has children and in his 80s comes out. He reads a letter from his 40 year old son cautioning his father about safe sex. "It appears you are enjoying your new lease on life so why not extend that lease a bit further?" Working as a physiotherapist in a health centre introduced a middle-aged woman to a whole gay community. Tonight she indulges her passion for acrobatics. Another woman describes in gripping detail how a friend misconstrued her love for violence and placed a restraining order on her. Compared to all this, the younger performers lack a certain weight. Directed by Christopher Ryan and Victoria Spence *Sexing the Gap* is a little uneven, sometimes ungainly but it has a lightness of touch, a certain charm—even if the gap between age groups isn't exactly bridged (was it simply circumstantial that there was no instance of a relationship between a younger and an older person?) it offers more possibilities than you see on most stages.

There's something of the "family" feel in the audience at Belvoir Street—parents and young teenagers—for Ursula Martinez' *Family Outing* and again it's the ease of the older performers—in this case, Martinez' own parents—that surprises. This is not "self-conscious" postmodernism (*The Australian*) but postmodern fun for a popular audience as the lesbian daughter cajoles her parents into playing out her version of the family. The publicity shows the family naked but this turns out to be a very 'British' show. Unlike *Sexing the Gap* we can only sense what's under all the clothes. The fact that Ursula Martinez got her parents to agree to doing the show reveals more than the material of the show itself. Her mother Mila says of all the silly things she's done in her life, this is the best. But towards the end of the show, when Martinez asks her parents about what they think of her sexuality and the "cutting edge" performance she makes, she has them revert to the script. You wonder sometimes why she wastes the chance to get these 2 very willing people to reveal a little more of themselves. What was behind their 14 year separation and what brought them back together? Why did they agree to do the show? How does a former language teacher feel about dancing to *I Will Survive* or Arthur Lea her physics teacher father taking off his clothes for the publicity T-shirt? At the beginning of the show, Ursula Martinez places a number of objects on the stage—a doll, an old newspaper—then asks a member of the audience to help her place the couch on top of them. At the end of the night, we're laughing but the secrets stay well out of sight. The "family" audience is engaged, amused, their belief in the family's capacity to accept 'aberrance' extended with a smile on that stiff upper lip.

Barbara Karpinski appeared on the set of the critically-savaged-but-popular-success *Making Porn* at the Seymour Centre to welcome the 98% female audience for the reading of her play *I'm Too Beautiful to be a Lesbian* with "Welcome lesbian fagfuckers, chicks with dicks, cocks in frocks, pretty boys, pretty babies, butch dykes, butch dagger dykes, lipstick and lavender lesbians, flanelette lesbians, male lesbians, boof boys, bootgirls, go-go girls, perverse playthings, cigar torturers, rough trade, drag trade and hardcore homosexual hypocrites." Bitch is a sex worker with a habit for Baby Dyke, a bisexual leather girl. Bunny Boy used to turn tricks for Big Daddy, a drag queen and Bitch's best friend dying of AIDS. An Angry Gay Man persistently rings Radio Grunge to complain about Mardi Gras—the trashy lip-synch acts brought at huge expense from overseas etc. The full-house lapped up Karpinski's witty, streetsmart satire. Director Tanya Denny made a pretty good fist of the low life Bitch but it really needed someone like Tallulah Bankhead— "Aren't you Tallulah Bankhead?" said a fresh faced fan encountering the star slumped across some bar "What's left of her" said Tallulah.



Theatre of the Deaf, *The Language of One* Tracey Schramm

Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love turns out to be another girls' night and afterwards 3 of us get into an interesting discussion in the car about whether Donna Jackson got a bit too close to the bloke while playing around with the bloke-in-her. We've heard she drives a Cadillac and covers her dashboard with roses. Her father was a transport contractor (NEVER say truckie!) who taught her about cars (having to replace your engine is an expensive way to learn to check your oil and water) and tools (NEVER lend your tools!!) and a mother who told her if everything that she didn't like in the world stayed that way it was because she, Donna, hadn't done enough to change it. Which is probably why, in her problematic alliance with the middle class sheila who drove an EJ and gasbagged all night to her feminist friends about the state of the patriarchy, Donna's solution? Blow it up. She did a TAFE course in the safe handling of explosives with a one-legged guy called Fast Eddie. Donna Jackson is a genuine Aussie original like Diesel or Hung Le. A blast of blonde hair, mechanic's overalls pulled down at the top to reveal black bra, taut tummy, strong arms and legs, a shocking temper by the looks, and a totally disarming way of talking straight to the audience. We wanted more of that and a bit less of the yelling and hurling of objects that got a bit too close to macho, for a boy-girl. We also decided the rope work was a bit tame for the founder of the Women's Circus. Apparently when she first did this show it was in a huge freezing cold space in Melbourne with a table full of tools and real cars and plenty of room to swing. Here in the sweltering Performance Space with only a bonnet and a boot and a solitary rope, Donna Jackson seems constrained, and, outside the tantalising tete-a-tetes, the audience a little too close for comfort.

In *Razor Baby* Club Swing cuts up several genres and wildly throws the audience the bits. For all its inventiveness and the power of its images, the show too often locks into routines—the promise of quirky narrative vanishes and the appeal of isolated theatrics (especially pouting Pussy Galores pointing plastic water pistols) loosely framing the routines begins to fade. However, inside the audience (largely female but with a solid section of middle-aged theatre-going hetero couples), you sense a unanimous desire to see displays of physical strength from the women (and one man dressed as a woman) on the stage. On arriving we are hyped to party, offered sweets, invited to dance to the a great live band with DJ Barbara Clare. *Razor Baby* also plays with a sci fi scenario within the dance party frame. Sometimes the party is literally invoked—the stage fills with discarded water bottles, the leather set puts in an (oddly unglamorous) appearance—and at other times is more loosely embraced to take in the worlds of Manga comics, action films, video game heroines. We witness recurrent gender battles in the guise of acrobatic routines—some beautifully executed (Jeremy Smith's web performance is astonishly fluid). More often, given the nature of the machinery, the setting up of routines and the comings and goings of stage hands, *Razor Baby* is the kind of show which oscillates between action and set up with longeurs filled with music and some spectacular lighting from Margie Medlin. Occasionally it cooks, the atmosphere charges, the cello and multi-tracked Liberty Kerr music pumps, the truly amazing rig

(the star of the show) rises into the ceiling of the Everest Theatre, the performers clamber up and for a moment we glimpse the fantastic party in which the vertical takes over from the usual plane of dancing the horizontal.

Hearing members of the audience for *Language of One*, the impressive offering from Australia's Theatre of the Deaf, found themselves in a very different world and not just onstage as excited gestures signalled their way through the auditorium before and during the play. Julia Cotton's dexterous direction of an interesting American play is a small triumph, especially the performance of the acts of translation, as much the subject of the work as the deaf, gay, Jewish Albert and his search for self. Each of the actors has a translator-alter ego who travels alongside them, pushing them forward, pulling them back. Throughout, audience attention shifts between the translator and the signing actor, both equally interesting. The discourse between people with and without hearing making it rich in observation. Cotton uses very few set and prop devices and deploys the actors non-naturalistically across the space. This treatment also allows for the various kinds of doublings which amplify the discourse issues. Characters are delineated by physical presence, the staging non-literal and choreographic despite the inherent naturalism of the play. Mostly the work powers along, only occasionally running off the rails into a more calculatedly educational format. As narrative it veers from moments of great emotional insight to soap opera brevities. And the ending is a problem. Albert's hard won right to a relationship with a hearing person, non-Jewish and male, is abandoned in the interests of selfhood which leaves us with the final image of Albert disappearing through a creaky hole in the backdrop into what looks like just another ghetto...or heaven. Oddities aside, it's a witty play and the production very much appreciated by the lively audience who, of course, signed their applause with waving as we clapped.

The audience for *Taboo Parlour* at The Performance Space, like much of the work on show, appears to emanate from discrete tribes. For 4 nights, The Performance Space is gussied up like some elaborate gothic lounge, the audience rakishly lolling on bleachers covered in parachute silk, dressed to kill. There are projections on the walls, eyes on the proscenium. This is a silken bower where performance is relished as opposed to the upfrontery of the cLUB bENT format, which according to the organisers "had become a bit of a freak show." On the Toxic Blue night (each show is colour coded), performances began in the foyer and the bar with semi-naked staff painted blue serving blue cocktails, mine hosts Victoria Spence in periwinkle wig and Groovii Biscuit in transparent lace. There's a great sense of occasion. This audience draws on friends of performers but there's also a big crowd of regulars. Among the gay and lesbian crowd are the queer or bent or plain hetero or people who don't know where they stand but who share in the proceedings and support the tradition.

The word is well represented in the Soul Blue program. Heather Grace-Jones delivers an eloquent and powerfully poetic text about family dysfunction while suspended on a chair above the stage. Overlapping, Anna Kortschak speculates on the limits of paradise. Later in the evening, performance poet Amatil Hammond stands on a podium and complete with gestures and escalating tone delivers a speech which sounds like Christian Republican verities cut with ironical slashes which she never dwells on or overstates. You'd expect some risky dancing in a taboo parlour. First a trio performing a rather too easy menage a trois in a wading pool and small tub: it was difficult to know what the work was conveying aside from some care, sensual intimacy and a sense of understated rivalry or aggression.

Altogether more interesting were a pair of works entitled *Retro Muscle Song* which dancer Dean Walsh describes as "elongated, muscular, sex-ridden and sweaty." These were serious, sustained pieces requiring more of the audience than the quick-to-amuse quotient of "acts" that often fill these kinds of seasons. Walsh appears naked except for apron, wig and high heels. He's a man at an ironing board playing at being a woman, restraining his tendency to campery. He recites a text about the power of a female eagle in contradistinction to the domestic stage fantasy of his dress. His gestures are sometimes literal (arms unfolding outstretched turning miraculously at shoulder, elbow and wrist). He then takes the movements to the ironing board where they take over from the text until a dance emerges in which gestures of power and fluidity meld with images of depression and despair. In the second piece, appearing in the same outfit, he makes a set of calculated gaffs about the sexuality he is about to convey—transsexual, homosexual, heterosexual. Assuming that other states of being are like surfaces that can be taken away, he creates a remarkable dance, his upper body working strongly—as in the first piece, swooping, one arm leading, slapping one side of his body, an arm extend to the foot angling the body chest to thigh, forehead to ankle, fingering the ankle. Moments of shimmering, hair shaking, a blur followed by jerky moments of a body assembling, deconstructing, wondering what if.

No taboo parlour would be complete without the eccentric and the incomplete. On this night Annette Tesoriero's dangerous diva made an appearance (after wowing them with Choux Choux Baguette at the Seymour Centre), this time with helium filled balloons attached to her breasts. When the promised cement mixer prop failed to materialise, she shovelled sand into the only easily available orifice she could find—a naked man's rear. And the evening's piece de resistance? A couple of naked feral females in apparent agony are revitalised and dance on each other's buttocks to throbbing African drums. Definitely educational. This was a night when you could sense different sections of the audience as communities, responsive to their icons, and so it was across the festival—no monolithic gay & lesbian & queer mob, but pretty much, and more, as so wickedly invoked by Barbara Karpinski.

On the music front, Marshall Maguire curated a bold one-day program of new music, *Burns Like Fire*, including Colin Bright's *The Wild Boys*, a work deserving many hearings (and a CD track) and only enjoying its second outing ever, brilliantly realised by the ubiquitous Sprung Percussion and the recorded voice of William Burroughs. San Franciscan Bob Ostertag made his second festival appearance, building small sound samples into magisterial works, one from a child's grief over a father's murder in Latin America, the other, *Burns Like Fire*, from a gay riot in San Francisco, both works performed by Ostertag weaving his 'wands' at a small electronic box on a stand. Magic.

Hypochondriac Bird, *choreography Javier de Frutos, dancers Javier de Frutos and Jamie Watton, Seymour Centre, February 10;* Sexing the Gap, *directed by Chris Ryan and Victoria Spence, PACT Youth Theatre February 11;* Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love, *Donna Jackson, directed by Andrea Lemon, The Performance Space, February 12;* A Family Outing, *Belvoir Street Theatre;* Razor Baby, *Club Swing, directed by Gail Kelly, York Theatre, Seymour Centre;* Taboo Parlour, *The Performance Space, February 24; 1999 Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras.*

More Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras

Erin Brannigan interviews UK-Brazilian dancer-choreographer Xavier de Frutos (page 29), Needeya Islam interviews Christos Tsioklas about novels adapted for the screen (OnScreen page 19).

Beyond frippery

Jacqueline Millner ponders Mardi Gras exhibitions

No matter what we know about the problematics of documentary photography, its power remains. Its claim on veracity might have been exposed as ideology, its avowed purchase on the real battered and torn, but still, in some senses, it never says die. Like the photographs gathered together in *Positive Lives* depicting the impact of AIDS on a variety of communities worldwide.

Amongst the frippery of parade fever and tiresome attempts to pump sex into every publicity blurb, this exhibition struck a sober and reflective note. Not that the images were necessarily solemn. Indeed, the mundane quality, the everydayness of the effects of AIDS was what proved most alarming here. And what proved most affecting, the humanity of those who care for the ailing, the marginalised and stigmatised. The doctor at the only treatment centre for children suffering from AIDS in New York is an enduring character who emerges from these photos, stoic and practical in the face of his daily tasks, but at the same time philosophical and tender beyond the call of duty. As memorable is the figure of the good person of Bangladesh who, apparently motivated by nothing other than compassion, offers shelter and solace to those who have been banished by their families and communities on account of their illness. The beaming faces of lovers, friends and parents at the bedside, subtle caresses that melt the sterility of the clinical environment clean away: these very traditional black and white photos capture the conflicting emotions succinctly and with grace.

Indeed, the most conventional of approaches suited this heterogenous subject best, the 'frozen moment' or stolen glance, the narrative series. More stylised approaches, as when short testimonials (to the abject discrimination PWAs and those in same-sex relationships experience in India) accompanied closely cropped images of the subjects' eyes, lacked some impact.

For all the sobriety of this exhibition, comprising as it did brief texts reminding us of the immensity of AIDS especially outside the First World experience of sophisticated drug treatments and safe sex campaigns, it rarely slumped into the earnestness which so often alienates the visually literate audience of socially-concerned photography. The tone was sufficiently modulated through coverage of a wide variety of experience and the inclusion of many different photographers. Moreover, the finger is never unilaterally pointed; the emphasis is not on blame but on strategies for caring and surviving.

Documentary also insidiously stole the show at the Australian Centre for Photography's Mardi Gras offering. Featuring the work of Canadian photographer Evergon, the exhibition comprised a series of over-sized and over-coded cibachromes of Bacchanalian cliches plus a 'gee-whiz' factor in the form of 3 large holograms of similar imagery. In this context, the smaller, black and white depictions of beats from around the world, bereft of their passionate occupants, made the most powerful aesthetic and conceptual statement. Evergon's vision has infused these secret and marginal places with a mystique verging on nobility, although his sensibility also communicates an overwhelming loneliness.

From sobriety to flippancy—that's Mardi Gras! *Puppy Love*, an installation by emerging Australian artists Dean Simpson and Catherine Oddie, does not appear to claim any high ground, but is decidedly engaged with the low. A wall is covered floor to ceiling with a colourful grid-like arrangement of plastic wrapped and tagged dog toys, designed to be chewed to smithereens but currently quarantined from use. A collection of sculptural forms reminiscent of Moore or Hepworth turn out to be nothing but dog bones. An exuberant pageant of dog paraphernalia, not only did this exhibition assert the aesthetic value of the cheap and nasty, but it also managed to poke fun at the conventions of museum display and art-making. Yes, it is a familiar enough theme, but rarely done with such inclusive humour and graphic aplomb. Into the bargain as well is sheer pleasure in camp and the scurrilous self-deprecation which often accompanies it.

Also relying on an accumulation of mass produced goods but to different effect is the work of Douglas McManus, included in the Mardi Gras show at Object Gallery, the corporate-slick new space for the Centre for Contemporary Craft in Customs House in Circular Quay. In a clever appropriation of the obligatory accessory of glass-tower 'suits' who frequent this newly refurbished city precinct—the neck-tie—McManus' installation wittily comments on the absurd limitations on what it is to be properly masculine.

The Mardi Gras visual arts program always suffers from a certain unevenness, and indeed it appears to play poor cousin to the performing arts component of the festival. Yet with *Positive Lives*, Evergon's chilling but seductive landscapes, and the crafty contributions of McManus and Oddie/Simpson, the program proved its continued vibrancy.

Positive Lives, Eugene Edwards, Network Photographer

Positive Lives, *ASN Gallery, The Rocks, February 4 - March 5;* Age and Consent, *artists Mark Stewart, Douglas McManus, Nathan Waters, Object Galleries, Customs House, February 13 - March 14;* Puppy Love, *artists Dean Simpson, Catherine Oddie, The Performance Space, February 2 - 20;* Evergon, *Australian Centre for Photography, February 12 - March 14*

Like dogs over a bone

Aleks Sierz on funding devolution and the fate of live art in Britain

What's the future of live art in Britain? Since 1997, most arts funding has been gradually devolved from a central Arts Council to 10 regional arts boards (RABs), plus bodies for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and fears are growing that live art will lose out. Within the Arts Council, officers who deal with live art are fighting hard to maintain the institution's commitment to experiment and innovation in the face of the Labour government's new buzzwords of excellence, education and access. The ongoing internal reform (which will halve the staff) has also raised hackles since one of the plans involves the abolition of its Combined Arts Department. Many live art practitioners are worried that this would put funding back 10 years. No one wants to see live art become a small section of, say, a visual art department. Nor are many keen on Labour's audience-led populism.

Devolution of funding may spell the end of many regional theatres. Having washed its hands of responsibility, the Arts Council has nothing to say about RABs closing their local theatre or not supporting experimental work. But while some Arts Council clients are being devolved, others (such as the Right Size, the People Show) remain funded from the centre. This provides fertile ground for anomalies. Eminent figures—such as director Peter Hall—are protesting loudly. Quoting the Independent Theatre Council's estimate that 55% of small to mid-scale theatre companies are entering the fifth or sixth year of standstill funding, Hall says, "It seems to be Arts Council policy to provoke the end of many small theatres so that resources can be concentrated on the big boys."

Because policy is unclear, devolution is a bag of worms. In the regions, the clients of RABs are, in the words of cultural commentator Robert Hewison, "squabbling like dogs over a bone" as local authorities try to cut back their arts funding. Although the RABs are free to decide who to fund, the Arts Council remains officially in charge of a unified national policy. The trouble is, it has allowed each region to organise its RAB in its own way. So far, devolution has created disparities.

One RAB, Northern Arts, based in Newcastle, has a reputation for best practice. Instead of departments which deal with individual art forms, it is organised under headings: Access, Education, Production and Distribution, and Investment in Artists. Its grant from the Arts Council is £8 million and will rise to £12 million by 2002. It also bids for money from the European Union. Happy clients include Dance City, which performs in hairdressing salons and shop windows. With its bid to become the European City of Culture in 2008, Newcastle keeps all the arts high on its agenda. Other areas have poorer reputations. Southern Arts, based in Winchester, has a Combined Arts Department, but it deals with community issues such as arts centres, disability and homeless groups rather than cutting edge experimental acts. When I phoned and asked them to name a live art client, they couldn't. In Sheffield, Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment has "mixed feelings" about devolution. Cutting-edge groups like his have become adept at finding allies both at the centre and locally. He says: "If you have a good RAB with an advanced policy, you're OK—but some regions don't." A lot "is down to individual arts officers", the "problem then becomes consistency." Some RABs have a live arts officer, others don't.

If the Arts Council loses its Combined Arts Department, says Etchells, "it will be hard to know who to go to at the centre if you want to fund, say, a CD-ROM project." And with no central funding body, it becomes "hard to know who to lobby." How would he describe the nationwide funding structure? "Chaos." In addition, Britain's National Lottery funding has been tied by law to creating new buildings rather than supporting artists. The result in the regions is bright new theatres with no money to put on interesting work.

In London, The London Arts Board—the devolved body for the capital—gives out annual grants worth £15 million and has clients with high profiles. These include Battersea Arts Centre and the International Mime Festival. But the future is uncertain because the new institution of mayor—due to be elected in May 2000—means the arrival of another player with his/her own cultural policy.

One of the London Arts Board's new projects has been to set up the Live Art Development Agency, launched in January. Dedicated to championing high-risk performance in London, it was founded by Lois Keidan and Catherine Ugwu, who once worked at the ICA. With the ICA scaling down its development work with artists, LADA has stepped in to fill the gap. "A lot of our work will be similar to what we were doing behind the scenes at the ICA," says Ugwu, "but we're also responding to the increase in the amount of artists involved in live art." In the past, much funding was product-led and "not enough was directed at the individual artists and the development of their ideas."

LADA aims "to negotiate the complexities of this area", helping not only individual artists but also those institutions willing to give longer-term support to live art practices. "Our project ranges from basic advocacy to working in partnership with a whole heap of organisations, whether in the higher education sector, helping artists who are coming out of college, or working with existing institutions who feel they don't know enough about live art," says Ugwu.

Matching audiences to work is one important element of LADA's work. "The one thing we don't do is programme artists into seasons," she says. LADA also hosts various forums and will be offering bursaries to individual artists. It also hopes to do something with LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) this summer. "The most important thing about LADA is that it recognises the area we represent, the fact that a lot of artists are turning to work in this area and that the complexities of this area require support structures." With government backing off, the future of live art may depend on independent bodies like this.

RealTime *co-editor Keith Gallasch has accepted an invitation to join the international advisory board of the Live Art Development Agency.*

Undermining the uncontroversial

Zane Trow interviews Zane Trow

The National Performance Conference, At the Brink *(The Wharf, Sydney, Jan 15 -16) inspired Zane Trow, artistic director of The Performance Space, to chat with himself himself about his vision for TPS, the state of state arts funding and the value of the Nugent Major Arts Organisations enquiry.*

At the National Performance Conference there was some contemporary performance. And presenting a paper in the New Australian Work forum alongside Ms Meryl Tankard got me thinking. And then going to John Baylis' session on the "avant guard of Sydney" also got me thinking. And then being part of the *Performing the Unnameable* launch also got me...and then reading interviews Mike Mullins had done with himself in the TPS archives...and so here...Zane Trow is interviewed by Zane Trow.

You've been working at TPS for well over a year now...how's it going?

Well it's been tough...and most of my time and energy has been sorting out structures of one kind or another.

You mean administration and management things?

Yeah...then again maybe it was all a misunderstanding on my part... (laughs)... anyhow I felt I had to re-invent them. The Board encouraged me to do that. And of course that caused some trouble and pain and uncertainty amongst those within the culture. But it seems better now, especially since Bronte Morris arrived in the new General Manager position. We all work a little better together I think, and I think the marketing looks and feels better and the audiences have been consistently increasing...and in one sense that's the main thing...and not the main thing at all.

You are a bit of a one for structure are you?

Yes...I think it's only when you have one that works that you can break it or stand outside it...but that's a debatable position I guess. The best arts structure is an organised chaos. Some people think you can't "legislate for that" but I believe you can...and while trying to make things clear here I've also tried to loosen them up.

What about the journey from Melbourne to Sydney, are there really all those differences between the 2 cities?

Well obviously the TPS Board had seriously taken on the opportunity for change in a big way. I'm the first person for some time that has run this place and not ever been professionally located in Sydney. I think that's fantastic and that the next AD should come from Brisbane or WA or even (shock horror) from overseas, like the ACP [Australian Centre for Photography; see interview page 41] have just done. Great, really grown up. And that grown upness seems to be the main issue. This place has a fantastic community of artists and sub-cultures who really support and make TPS a living space. In other Australian cities it is highly regarded by artists; many younger artists want to perform here; it means something.

I've also been overseas twice on behalf of the organisation, to Europe and North America, and everywhere I go they know TPS and know the work. Currently we have a whole swag of exchange projects happening with Asia as well. TPS is also really well supported by the Australia Council now, gawd bless 'em, and that's crucial because local and state government don't appear to care. That was the real surprise for me. I would have thought they'd be proud of all that ground-breaking work that's gone on...work that's grown absolutely out of the commitment of Sydney arts communities. I would have thought the State would support us, like, match federal support as a bit of a contemporary feather in their cap. But, I mean, we pay more rent that the Sydney Theatre Company does for the Wharf! I mean that's just madness.

I say steady on...you'll get in trouble for that sort of talk.

Yeah...I already am...but then I'm following in the footsteps of successive artists and Directors of The Performance Space. The Performance Space never achieved anything by being polite. There's certainly no arts policies of any real description in NSW that I can make out. If there is, they wouldn't think of The Performance Space as being important enough to be consulted about the development of any policy anyway. It all just happens on whims and political expediency as far as I can make out. This is a real shame because there's an ALP government in charge, so I really felt what Sir Wayne Harrison said at the conference key note was right on, "no informed advice getting to State Government"...and having come from a State where you can't move for arts policy, like you can't 'do' anything because it's not in Arts Victoria 2525, or whatever the latest version is...well that seems to me to be the real difference...one city has too much structure and one has none at all!

Yes, but the art...what about the art?

Oh that...sorry...yes it's very good. Some great artists who really know what they are doing. That's why I liked Baylis' session...I could feel the importance of the early work in Sydney and I can really see the progression. Sometimes I think I see it a little better than if I'd been here the whole time. The absolute commitment again...artists that have been working away for years at their craft. And it is only what I call "cultural status" that is stopping them moving on. At TPS I think we need to support the senior artists better...and seek out the younger ones...the balance between development and presentation is the challenge.

So I've tried to be more available to the senior artists and not be ashamed of that. I'm really proud to have brokered Dance Exchange into the new Studio program of the Opera House for our antistatic 99. Like Russell Dumas was saying, he was in the first ever dance work at the Opera House, and now he's the first contemporary dance work in the Studio...that makes sense to me. And I am proud to have artists who have worked here for so long...still working here...still popping in for a chat...so I want to get their audiences up and get them a bit of decent national press...and help push the work into the world. And I think as an organisation we are really well placed to do that.

What do you mean by "cultural status"?

In terms of policy and political process what status is awarded to the work? At the launch of *Performing the Unnameable* you had a great sense of achievement in the air, a sense of a job well done. But where will all that work take us...really. Nick Tsoutas [formerly director All Out Ensemble, currently director Artspace] said, again in the Baylis session, that he thought there was so little critical investigation into the work. I think he meant this "contemporary art movement"—that we are all part of in one way or another—has had no impact into the critical infrastructure of the nation. Where in other countries an art movement might be recognised, studied and learnt from, here it is still largely ignored or at best, tolerated.

At the moment the so called "future of the performing arts in Australia" is under Federal Government review. And I would contend that the "future" has nothing whatsoever to do with

Out of the dark

Diana Klaosen is cautiously optimistic in her overview of the arts in Tasmania

This February, the Salamanca Arts Centre, one of Tasmania's major arts promotions organisations, hosted an Arts Forum at the Centre's intimate Peacock Theatre. Chaired by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra's Julie Warn, the forum "explored the creative partnership between the arts and government in Tasmania" with the Tasmanian Premier and Minister for State Development, Jim Bacon, "in the spotlight answering those burning questions you've always wanted to ask, but never had the chance..."

The forum did not set out to resolve all the problems besetting the arts in Tasmania (think of the difficulties facing the arts anywhere and multiply them). However, the audience—representatives of arts organisations, individual practising artists and performers, interested observers and the local media—agreed that a major psychological boost was the Labor Premier's clear commitment to the arts and his evident goodwill and acknowledgement of the importance of the arts to the state and its image. The Premier went on record declaring the arts vital to Tasmania's future, promising that government funding and support would be as generous as possible—within the constraints of Tasmania's struggling economy.

Various committees are already reviewing aspects—problems, strengths, possibilities—of all the arts in Tasmania including the feasibility of establishing some kind of Museum of Contemporary Art, the particular project of the evocatively named "Out of the Dark" working party, whose prime movers are local arts specialist Anna Pafitis and School of Art lecturer Bob Jenyns. But besides the ideas and aspirations there are plenty of success stories up and running.

Tasmania's only permanent, professional dance company, TasDance, has weathered administrative storms in recent years, though, for a while, audiences stayed away in droves. Under current artistic director Annie Grieg, the company is consolidating its considerable potential and has commissioned new works from major Australian choreographers including Gideon Obarzanek. For 1999 the company has a commitment of $238,000 from the State Government and has engaged a full-time rehearsal director, Fiona Reilly.

TasDance and Reilly intend to "provide professional development for young Tasmanian dancers and to have a significant impact on the development of the artform in the state." A performance program of new work is in place, through to January 2000. Other smaller dance companies and collectives such as the new intermedia performance group Avanti (see *RealTime*28) have surfaced lately and presented work of some originality and professionalism.

Music plays a large part in Tasmanian culture, but only classical music is in an assured position vis a vis audiences, funding and venues. A state of the art waterfront concert hall has been planned for the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, although many locals are dubious about its suitability for an area already desecrated by inappropriate development. Performers of contemporary music can now undertake studies at the Tasmanian Conservatorium, but actual performance venues for rock bands are becoming fewer and it is largely the covers-style bands which obtain the work.

Rafaele Marcellino, lecturer at the Conservatorium observes, "The single most pressing difficulty for Tasmanian musicians, particularly young musicians, is the dearth of musical diversity. There is only one organisation that regularly employs musicians. There are few clubs, recording sessions, theatre shows or other commercial work that in bigger centres provide the bread and butter employment for musicians. Without a diverse musical culture there is a danger of feeling isolated and unable to place oneself in a context with other musicians. Yes, I know this is a symptom of a small population base, however, without diversity there is a tendency towards the middle ground and a scarcity of independent, creative music-making. Tasmanian musicians have to work hard to maintain their skills and creativity in spite of these difficulties."

Jazz and experimental music are popular but, again, performance opportunities are limited and some bands fail to apprehend and maximise those openings that do exist. One of the few Tasmanian companies to have had real impact interstate is the innovative IHOS Opera Company whose ambitious productions have been enthusiastically received by mainland audiences and critics. IHOS is in an enviable position, with a committed company of talented professionals and an established reputation. Director Constantine Koukias observes, however, that when publicising interstate, the company generally faces the demeaning prospect of being advised to play down—or even conceal—its Tasmanian origins.

There is currently no full-time adult-oriented, professional theatre company in the state since the demise, over a year ago, of Zootango, a company that had a fine track record but increasingly lost audiences and credibility. Its ill-advised final offering, *Transylvania*, a rambling 4-hour historically-based production was, unfortunately, the final nail in the company's coffin, rather than the shot in the arm that was intended.

Terrrapin Puppet Theatre's *The BFG*

Still, there are many theatre groups operating part-time and, with breathtakingly diverse levels of talent and expertise, offering everything from musicals to experimental and original works. Most aspiring actors have to leave Tasmania to study or to seek that 'big break'; very few return. There are only a handful of performers in regular work: actor/director Robert Jarman, Petr Divis and character actor John Xintavelonis spring to mind. An exception to the rule that Tasmanian theatre can't do well interstate is Andreas Litras' one-man show *Odyssey*, which is currently in return season statewide after critical acclaim at the Melbourne International Festival. It is telling, however, that excited coverage in the local media takes the tone that such interstate success somehow defies belief!

Other credible local theatre-based companies include Terrapin Puppet Theatre with a busy schedule that includes international touring. (Director Annette Downs was Tasmania's 1998 Businesswoman of the Year). The well regarded Salamanca Theatre Company targets both adult and school audiences in projects such as its current *Still Life*, a collaboration between Salamanca, Hobart multimedia artists and the community of Oatlands. Director Deborah Pollard observes, "Tasmania has the most extraordinary locations for large-scale arts events...a unique opportunity for cultural and creative exchange between artists, community and, ultimately, a much wider audience." Smaller, amateur groups like Pivot, Mainstage, Old Nick and PLOT also stage exciting events from time to time.

As for the visual arts, dedicated practitioners struggle on but certainly the bottom has dropped out of the local art market. Contemporary Art Services Tasmania (CAST) has made the move to stylish new premises in North Hobart and has an innovative program planned for 1999 including a new techno-arts gallery space. CAST is supportive of emerging artists and curators and, like the Centre for the Arts' Plimsoll Gallery, presents some of the most intelligent and challenging exhibitions of contemporary art to be seen in Tasmania, showcasing local, national and international artists. CAST is about to upgrade its regular news-sheet, a welcome move as the state currently has no specialist arts press or comprehensive "what's on" listing.

CAST Director Sean Kelly is excited about forthcoming events: "One of the biggest new media events ever to take place in Tasmania will be the ANAT/CAST Curators School in New Media, *media et*, between March 28 and April 10, considering areas like technology in exhibition spaces, practical instructions for new technologies in the computer lab and the opportunity to work with artists in configuring display methodologies...To coincide, the University's Centre for the Arts will present *Immediate*, a new media focused show specifically developed for the occasion by Leigh Hobba. Another key project between March and May is a residency by Joyce Hinterding and David Haines at South Bruny Light on Bruny Island, south of Hobart. The artists will take up residence at the light where they will set up an aerial and begin tracking satellites and presenting the outcomes as sound and projections within the light itself. During the run of the project, a website will be developed as well as an audio link with the Bauhaus in Germany.

The experimental artspace Dunce Gallery has disappeared for the moment, but may re-surface in a new location. The Foyer installation space, within a cafe in the Salamanca Centre, has just received significant Arts Council funding. Empire Studios, the high-tech/performance group co-ordinated by several emerging artists including the ubiquitous Matt Warren, constantly works on challenging new events. To its credit, the group has a commitment to taking techno-oriented arts projects to isolated communities which usually have almost no exposure to the arts in any form.

The arts in Tasmania are surviving and the determination to continue is strong. Hopefully, any current downturn is temporary. To my mind, the area that really needs improvement is the administrative and entrepreneurial side of the arts scene. Lack of professionalism besets many groups staging arts events in Tasmania. The state needs to wake up to this problem and to stop hoping for imported solutions. Most artworkers here are aware of the difficulties; that is certainly the first step to remedying them.

See Diana Klaosen's report on the Hobart Fringe Festival's Multimedia Mini-Festival in OnScreen, page 25 and Martin Walch's profile of Matt Warren on page 23

Undermining the uncontroversial

continued from page 13

the so-called "major organisations" but rather with small companies, individual artists and the medium scale contemporary arts organisations? This contemporary infrastructure is one that is actually workable and affordable in a geography and population base like Australia. But of course the art cultures that this contemporary infrastructure represents are excluded from the review. So the review is just a complete and utter waste of time, energy and money.

And what of your own work?

Hmmm...yes. Perhaps stupidly I had thought that being an artist and based at The Performance Space I might be able to do some. Haven't had the time yet, apart from a small performative moment at the book launch (laughs). Maybe later this year I will, in the follow up to our 1998 "Autopsy" event. Pigs occasionally do fly.

So what are your thoughts on the conference overall?

Good value. Well worth the effort. I enjoyed the Aboriginal session the best, 30 odd years of Indigenous performance culture sitting have a chat with us...very much like the heritage represented by the *Unnameable* launch really. The next stage will be to get both happening in the same room. When Johnny Harding said "Italians don't come to Australia for the opera, and Russians don't come for the ballet, they come for the landscape and the Indigenous culture", I thought we need to say that all the time now, to whoever will listen; and that the recognition of Australia's contemporary culture is deeply linked with Reconciliation and Australia growing up and leaving the safe colonial home that is represented by what Tankard called "Ministers of the Crown".

The National Performance Conference, At the Brink, *The Wharf, Sydney, Jan 15 -16*

Net hopes

Kirsten Krauth interviews RealTime*'s new hyperfiction editorial team Teri Hoskin, Terri-ann White, Linda Carroli and Dean Kiley about defining, creating and reading hypertext. This is an edited article; for the extended mix visit the* RealTime *website* www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

KK When did your interest in hypertext begin?

TH If hypertext is related specifically to writing practices online, about 1996 with the Tableau project for EWRE (electronic writing research ensemble). My art practise has always been text based…there has always been an interest in experimental writing that seeks to 'worry' given notions of how we make meaning. So this 'hypertext' is a word that snuck up on me. The work of some of the poststructuralists, like Derrida and Kristeva on language, Barthes on Death Of the Author, Cixous' 'ecriture feminine', have signalled for some time the possibilities of deconstructive/generative writing practices. Digital environments present possible spaces for this to play out.

TW I came to hypertext with my work in an entirely opportunistic way when I was invited to apply for an ANAT (Australian Network Arts Technology) residency. That encounter helped me to move along a whole range of concerns about form in a writing project I had been immersed in for 3 years…it liberated me off the A4 white page and into extensions: ways to look at and consider my set of interests and characters and stories in the 'family saga' I was writing. I learnt about my original project and why I was doing it by embarking into this concertina-shaped space of hypertext.

LC Hypertext contains everything that I have done before—broadcasting, writing, conversation, visual art, video, curating, graphic design—and poses a new question or possibility in terms of my practice/s and its multi/hyper/inter/media. In 1997, an essay I wrote about online collaboration was published in *leonardo* and the IMA recommended me to ANAT for the **water* residency. That experience consolidated my thinking and my practice, gave me the space and time and reason to interrogate in a research/writing oriented way and to do it with a writer as special as Josephine Wilson.

DK I suppose (he says, settling into the couch, trying to appear relaxed), like most such problems, it began with my Mother. She could only ever conceptualise university work as a series of breathlessly-researched high-school essays strung together on a word processor. Then there was my honours supervisor, who had roughly the equivalent view of How A Real Thesis Should Work. My thesis looked at the construction of Elizabeth Jolley and I wanted some way of analysing (& doing diagrams of) but also demonstrating (& doing working-models of) the range of media and discourses around a given writer, and lo! My early nerdy interest in HyperCard (in the baby versions bundled with early Macs) redirected me to the later versions, at once a filing/referencing system, a slide-show with special effects, a graphics program in which to stage animations of various theoretical models, a commentary toolbox for footnotes and footnotes on footnotes, a concordance for correlating quotes from Jolley and her critics/reviewers, a studio for my voice-over soundtrack, and a searchable textual database.

My supervisor delighted in playing with the end result, but thought of it as some kind of quirky bloated screen-saver, with no relevance to the thesis. It was, in fact, intrinsic to my analysis of literary criticism as a cybernetic and hypertextual process. I had to re-do and re-submit the whole bloody thesis but I had also realised the possibilities of the medium, and—more importantly—that you didn't have to be an overtrained tech-head to allow critical understanding to be generated from a conversation with an interface (rather than the memorisation of a manual).

KK There have been many attempts to define and categorise hypertext. Mark Bernstein in "Patterns of Hypertext" says the problem is not that hypertext lacks structure but that we lack the words to describe/criticise hypertext. Do you see such definitions as crucial? What are the differences between hypertext/hyperfiction/hypermedia?

TH I have some problems with this word hypertext. It tends to collapse all forms of writing into one—as long as there are links, something is hypertext…it doesn't acknowledge a continuum, that there has been multi-layered, fragmentary writing that resists closure, that works across mediums for quite some time. The digital environment presents fabulous opportunities to develop these forms of writing. But often 'hypertext' means the writer will just pop in a few links to perk up a fairly standard unchallenging narrative. To consider and acknowledge differences between writing practices on the net is crucial, perhaps then we can get rid of the 'hyper'.

TW While I am excited by what is possible in new paradigms like the activity on the web, I always want to broaden the discussion beyond the medium. That gives me more patience for the less satisfactory attention to the text-bit, to the writing, by many hypertext writers whose work is currently available.

LC The problem with Western culture is that it demands and expects and imposes structure where none exists or is needed. Yes, our [critical] languages for chaos and complexity are ineffectual, worrisome and anxious, although we are also developing tools and modes of thinking which do accommodate that: deconstruction, feminism, postcolonialism. This fragmentation is telling us that we don't necessarily need definitions (the meta-) and that there are myriad ways of looking at, experiencing or knowing. Personally, I don't see such definitions as crucial or necessary, but as a critical writer they are useful and have value in terms of discourse.

DK The emphasis on definition encourages the schizoid split between the 2 main, equally-dangerous inflations of rhetorical bombast: cyberhype and cyberdebunking, which could be summarised by the catchphrases 'The book is dead' and 'You can't take a laptop to the beach', both of which are wrong…What often gets lost in this emphasis on the product ('what is a hypertext?' 'how do you know a piece of hypermedia when you see it?') is the crux: not product but process—hypertextual ways of reading and writing, designing and experiencing. I'd agree with Bernstein about the lack of good close, focused analysis and criticism, but not because we haven't generated a full set of Lego jargon terms, or decided on the 'proper' academic idiom, but because academics are generally too busy processing hypertexts through 'legitimating' disciplines, neologising cute new buzzwords, and constructing unsustainable, mass-produced-plastic comparisons and contrasts.

KK Carolyn Guertin comments on the ability of hypertext to privilege multiple voices. How does hyperfiction invite collaboration?

LC Working together is always going to be about having a relationship and all the things that entails. Josephine [Wilson] and I enter into our work with a real commitment to process, in the spirit of friendship and with a great respect for each other's work, input and ideas. Everything is always open to negotiation; some of that touchy-feely stuff has to come into play because a computer can't make a collaboration possible in an emotive sense, in a personality sense. We rely on IRC and email to talk; the computer mediates that. It requires a great deal of work. You have to compensate for what the computer can't do—for example I don't know if Josephine is sobbing or scowling. After a year of working together we have begun to develop a shared language; it does contain cues. I suspect it's a mode of communication that would not work if we were face to face.

Working across distance is an interesting thing—we live in 2 time zones, 2 climates, 2 households. In a practical sense we resolve conceptual and structural issues and then set ourselves tasks and give each other enough scope to pursue tangents and be experimental and then we swap notes. It's always hard opening your work up to scrutiny, but I believe that collaboration produces something that would not have been produced otherwise. Neither of us is so conceited that we believe in myths of creative/individual genius. Hyperfiction/text does accommodate multiple voices…voices can switch in really subtle ways…layering and texturing a work to create interest.

KK What programs do you use when constructing hypertext? StorySpace, software that allows writers to create a visual map of a story's links and pathways, is being used by many university writing classes. Do you think such programs restrict creativity? Make output homogenous? How does technology limit/extend the writer's imagination?

TH I use a text editor, Photoshop and Illustrator and a couple of great programmer's references. I prefer to work this way because it gives me more control over how a page will perform/look. Writing html is meditative and as a writing practice rather odd. There are 2 results: the immediate text before your eyes and the delayed text, the objects the code builds. Like any technique one can become 'stuck' in a certain way of working. I guess it's up to the writer/artist to work out a way to shift sideways, to keep the work challenging.

TW I'm a dag who has no experience of programs beyond PageMill. I'm reliably informed that I'm at the same level as early high school students.

LC We use wysiwyg software with html editors to construct pages and then plot the links and flows in our heads or on scraps of paper. We have considered storyboarding and think that would be a really useful way to construct hypertexts; my way of storyboarding is scraps of paper blu-tacked to the wall with scrawling notes. All computer technology has limitations in the sense that there are things it can't do. Writers have to make decisions about how they use a computer for hypertext: what audiences they will cut out when they load up on special effects…I prefer a more democratic response which privileges accessibility, entails faster download, minimal plugins, text-based—it's kinder to the reader on a chuggy little machine.

DK If it's stand-alone hypertext I would normally work in StorySpace and if necessary export the results to html format so I can make a website. If intended for online consumption, I use a digital camera, scanner, PhotoShop, PhotoDraw and Paint Shop Pro for the imagery, CoolEdit for the sounds, WWW Gif Animator and Animagic for the simpler animations, Director for sophisticated animations and interactive components, Netscape Composer for draft web documents, and then Notepad to edit and add html code.

On the basis of 3 years of using Netscape and StorySpace in teaching, [these programs] certainly don't result in homogenous output. Quite the reverse. StorySpace extends the writer's imagination to the extent that a whole range of possibilities for representing, modelling and simulating reading and performance experiences are opened up; it can be an immediate aid to brainstorming, plotting, structuring, scene construction, and developing multiple voices; it encourages play, experimentation and risky writing; and—even if the final result is still a story-on-the-page—it stimulates writers into editing and re-editing and redrafting rather than placing trust in a quickly-fiddled-with second draft. It almost demands a design ethic that is more visual and focused; and enables a more intense mixture of formats, modes and genres.

KK There appears to be more critical theory on hypertext than actual examples of hyperfiction. Competitions held by Salt Hill Journal and trAce online are encouraging new works. Are Australian writers in general slow to catch on to these opening possibilities for innovative writing?

TH Australian artists/writers lead in this area. In digital environments we have to consider writing as a coalescence of image, sound, word and design. As a filterer for the trAce alt-x hypertext competition I found the entries from Australia to be on the whole the most sophisticated conceptually and technologically, the most willing to experiment with design, to move across registers/genres/discourses.

TW I don't think it's just a matter of Australian writers being slow. Most of the good work is in critical theory. Much of the hyperfiction is not invested well enough in the writing yet…people are dazzled by what they can make and the writing lags behind. My list of good, interesting work from Australia would be fairly small and covered already by you: Josephine Wilson, Teri Hoskin.

LC Online writing (hyperfiction and hypertext) as a defined practice (and there's that problem of definition) is kind of marginalised and nebulous even though there is heaps of locally produced web-based artwork (eg Di Ball *www.thehub.com.au/dibbles* and Tracey Benson *www.thehub.com.au/~traceyb*) and a really positive exchange between artwork and writing. Positive things happen through events like MAAP and volt: they start to generate interest

Net hopes cont...

and focus and curators like Beth Jackson (who initiated and worked on wonderful projects like *shoreline http://www.maap.org.au/shoreline*). There's a lot of energy and interest which is kind of diffused, sporadic and hidden; other Queensland content includes cyberpoet komninos and sound artists low key and nude (who did a beautiful sound and spoken word piece with alt x). The web and hypermedia/hypertext introduces so many possibilities that people are kind of in a bind about what to do with it: is it a tool, a medium, a genre? Is it writing, visual culture, screen culture? What all that means to me is 'experiment'; let the work make the definitions, not the critics.

DK The short answer (to are Oz writers slow to catch on) would be: how would we ever know? The number of venues for onscreen narratives (in any format) to be published/displayed is: very small, for "official" venues with some literary legitimation; or quite small, and dispersed and hard to find, for zine-y venues. It's mostly the latter where really-engaging-experimental hyperfiction happens, where the dimensions and capabilities of the medium are exploited rather than merely demonstrated. Writers have been slow to take up the new possibilities, but editors have been appalling, and often either conservatively repetitive or plain luddite and reactive. Some of the best hypertextual narratives being produced in Oz at the moment are in print zines and occasionally as anarchic pockets of university student magazines, and in the student galleries of Creative writing/Multimedia courses at universities...work which remains plaintively dispersed and un-findable, never further developed for, or even submitted for, publication.

KK Finally, do you enjoy reading hyperfiction? What are your favourite hypertext works?

TW I enjoy reading hyperfiction just as I enjoy reading other fiction and poetry: the writing has to engage me and will if it has a clarity...uses language in an exciting way...has an integrity to its project of making something. There are more writers following traditional modes (on paper) producing more exciting writing than I've found on the web. But that can change.

LC I am a regular visitor to mark amerika's AltX and Gregory Ulmer's site, and I really enjoy some of the works on 'mystory', trAce and the EWRE (a really important Australian-based initiative...the work that's been done is really defining in terms of an approach, an ethic and an interpretation; a starting point).

DK The pieces I've responded to most passionately are one-off works appearing in web journals, that disappear within 6 months: ones that refract every design element through the narrative, without resorting to an often-clumsy single central literal metaphor. Philip Salom and his partner Meredith Kidby have managed some terrific, compact hypertexts based around narrative poetry *(http://www.netspace.com.au/~psalom/mmm.html)* and Meredith has produced eclectically enjoyable material available on CD ROM [There's also] *Wishing* by Gregory Ulmer and Linda Marie Walker for the startling electrical quality of the writing; and, finally, of course, mark amerika's *Grammatron* opus, for its verbal exuberance, self-conscious eccentricities, sheer scope, and good ol' yankee audacity at presuming itself the first and biggest and best.

Current projects: Teri Hoskin's meme_shift, *a consideration of how Western and Japanese cultures construct each other as Other, will be published on the trAce site; Terri-ann White is completing a novel; Linda Carroli is collaborating with Josephine Wilson on a new work* cipher *(work in progress* http://ensemble.va.com.au/cipher*) addressing the performativity of writing online; Dean Kiley is the editor of* eXtra, *a web journal associated with* Overland.

WriteSites

Kirsten Krauth looks at hypermedia fiction on the net

Adrienne Greenheart's *Six Sex Scenes www.altx.com/hyperx/sss/index.htm* announces itself as "a novella in hypertext" (why do online writers feel the need to state the obvious? Is it because they are insecure about the *value* of fiction on the internet?). It traces a woman's brutal childhood and its effects on her current relationships. It works as a journal, the sometimes stodgy writing of personal memoir. Oral sex (a curious rendition by the Yeastie Girls), lesbianism (to be or not to be), Jewish identity, incest; they are all covered. Negotiating the spaces of most couples, and with a spiralling devotion to Sylvia Plath, the hypertext structure is simple. Links at the bottom of the page branch out, gradually sinking deeper into the character's obsessions, building on our friendship.

Gradually her skewered reality is revealed. The family's power struggle is brilliantly conveyed in the descriptions of game playing. Strategies of Scrabble. The art of letting your parents win. In her childhood she asks for a chair so she can sit near the window to look out on the street all afternoon. Her parents send her to a psychiatrist. In her teens she plucks her eyebrows and goes to school with bloody holes and scabs. In her 20s she attends a poetry reading and, with Dorothy Porter-esque cynicism, stabs at the "god-of-all-liberated males" who gets off on reading poems about battered women (with proceeds of his book going to a women's shelter); he is not the only one who eroticises violence.

Like films such as *Female Perversions* and *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *Six Sex Scenes* is uncompromising in its exploration of what it means to grow up female, a site worth sticking with for the complex way it treats sexual abuse and incest.

Where the Sea Stands Still www.illumin.co.uk/ica/wsss/ is, in contrast, a minimalist hypertext based on a highly structured poetic sequence by Yang Lian (cybertext transformation by John Cayley, English translation by Brian Holton). Lian aims to translate his Chinese characters to the screen, investigating the creation of meaning through visual arts, space, and cross-cultural representation.

The mahjong tiles—blue pixellated waves, calligraphy characters, black and white rooftops—dump text deposits onto my screen, "lust's blank water on noon's black bed sheet/the further from blood ties the brighter it is", a flotsam and jetsam of the shore, the contracting line between nature and city. A series of snapshots where we are constructed, erected, opened up to Peter Greenaway decay, where we become "kids sliced by long dead light."

New River http://ebbs.english.vt.edu/olp/newriver continues the watery theme, an excellent hyperfiction/media journal, offering a small but innovative selection created purely for the web, and a good introduction to how hypertext has evolved in the last few years. Back issues feature Stuart Moulthrop's *Hegirascope 2* ("what if the word will not be still") and Edward Thacker's *fleshthresholdnarrative*. In the latest edition Curtis Harrell's hypermedia poem *Nightmare Wonders Father's Song* successfully takes on a "dream logic." Sitting in the dark with a pitch black screen, there are no words, and as you move flashes of story, images, come out of the night and disappear. You are, as in dreams, attracted by the light, this night-poem delicate, childlike, grasping, feeling its way, blind at times, evoking death and dragons, fairytales and lost child(hood). At a page titled *Quick* I play hide and seek with words that tease and taunt (trying to catch them with my mouse) and become the predator, entering the city at night, an architecture of rhythm and fear: "In their sleek cars, people/Are migrating/from anger to homicide."

If you have seen any sites featuring innovative writing, or if you are working on a hyperfiction, please email URLs to Kirsten for possible review: opencity@rtimearts.com. *The* RealTime *links page* www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/ *has a wide variety of hyperfiction links, including sites reviewed in earlier issues.*

Playing trains

***RealTime* is transported by two recent visual arts projects**

If you've ever found yourself searching for meaning in the KFC ad as you wait for the 3.52 from Town Hall, you'll be relieved to hear that thanks to some heavy engineering by a small community arts organisation a number of contemporary artists have been commissioned to produce works for display on railway stations round Sydney and environs. *Tracking Art* is a project of the Fairfield Community Arts Network who last year gave us alternative views of Western Sydney in video and mural works. *Tracking Art* sees the work of 19 emerging artists prominently displayed on 660 billboard posters placed throughout Sydney stations.

FCAN is always on the lookout for innovative projects to promote the ideas of artists in the wider public arena. This one has taken two years. After securing sponsorship for the free billboard space from Australian Posters as well as reduced printing costs from Britescreen, the Network entered a partnership with Garage Graphix and were successful in obtaining the remaining necessary funds from the Australia Council. Project officer Samiramis Ziyeh sees *Tracking Art* as "an excellent example of cultural tourism and audience development."

Following another train, Margaret Roberts' installation entitled *Horizon*, premiered in March, documents the "landscape drawing" made across south-eastern Australia by the rail lines from Brisbane to Melbourne and Broken Hill to Bondi, lines that meet at Sydney's Central Station, close to South Gallery in Surrey Hills where the work was installed.

The exhibition comprises a video record of the horizon lines visible from trains travelling along parts of each of these rail lines. Though the train may be missing from the image, it is present through the multiple voices and sounds of the carriage and the movement of the hand-held camera recorded through the window. Viewers sat on cushions to watch the 4 video monitors, one each for the North, South, East and Western lines. Phil Spark's simple drawing instruments allowed them to draw the horizon on the walls of the gallery.

courtesy of Britescreen

Countrylink have offered their general support for the project and Margaret Roberts hopes to develop the installation for other locations "especially where three lines meet, such as in Goulburn, Orange, Maitland (where there are also regional galleries), Junee, Werris Creek and Casino. There's also the possibility of re-making a 2 line version for Condobolin which could also be developed for any other location on a train line." She says, "It's the relationship between the large drawing that you know in your mind, and the immediate experience of that bit of this bigger pattern that you currently occupy that I am interested in looking at. It's like intense map reading or orienteering."

Margaret Roberts is on a roll—or a rail. "The actual videos are also full of interesting things such as the way the foreground and background go in opposite directions when the train is making a curve, and the way that things very close, such as oncoming trains, randomly edit the landscape. The relationship of the sound to the image and the interaction of the 4 videos going at once is also an important part of the work. It may even be interesting to try a number of videos going at once as a musical instrument, along with other musical instruments... "

Tracking Art, Fairfield Community Arts Network, showing throughout 1999; Margaret Roberts *Horizon*, South Gallery, Surry Hills, Sydney, March 2 - 13

OnScreen

film, media and techno-arts

Comment

Sydney screen culture—mission impossible?

Jack Andrus on the grim implications of the retrenchment of the MCA's Cinematheque coordinator

The last few months have witnessed crisis and disillusionment at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art since the resignation of one of its founding lights, Bernice Murphy. With the MCA in financial difficulty (less than 10% of its revenue comes from Government), Executive Chair John Kaldor plus a small executive elite embarked on a bout of retrenchments, which included the long-standing co-ordinator of the Cinematheque project, David Watson. The dismissal of Watson amounts to more than a single retrenchment—it represents an excision of a strand crucial to the MCA's future.

Katherine Boyle, courtesy of Red Tape

Since opening in 1991 the MCA's screenings and moving-image based exhibitions have signalled its desire to fully embrace a new moving-image dimension for Australian art museums, along the lines of the celebrated MOMA model in New York. Its diverse curated international seasons and exhibitions have spanned the uncharted territories and delights of early cinema, animation, television and experimental film to CD-ROM and virtuality.

The Cinematheque was always seen as a major project, critical to the vitality of Sydney, Australia and the Museum itself. It was to entail the construction of a striking extension to the existing building with dedicated cinemas and exhibition space for new media. Filmmaker Dr George Miller has publicly supported the project with an enormous monetary pledge but to date no capital funding has been forthcoming from State or Federal governments—despite the fact that $9 million was on offer via private and corporate donors, and the NSW Government had offered the valuable Circular Quay site at a peppercorn rent.

Given the significance attached to the Cinematheque concept from the start, and its very substantial financial support, it is more than a little surprising that the current MCA regime is happy to cut the Cinematheque loose without proper consultation or assessment. Perhaps this is indicative of a general lack of interest and knowledge among the Chairman and Board members as to what this project entailed.

The recent MCA saga is, however, only the 90s chapter in a 40-year history of failed aspirations and erratic attempts to build some variation of a Cinematheque model as a major front for film culture in Australia.

In the late 1960s, the National Film Theatre of Australia (NFTA) emerged via grass roots activity across the country, with strong links to the film society movement. Its heyday was the mid-70s, and it embraced a successful national network programmed from the Sydney central office. At the end of the 1970s, a 'merger' was engineered with the AFI (the Australian Film Institute, which had aspired to become a significant national film organisation with some of the aura and functions of Britain's BFI). Over the past 20 years, the AFI has toyed with elements of the Cinematheque model after relinquishing the old NFTA programming format within a couple of years. But it has failed to grasp the expertise and commitment required to realise such a model.

Thus the early history was very much tied to the formation of exclusively film culture institutions. But during the 1980s the pure and committed notions of a Cinematheque became progressively lost in a pot-pourri of screening obligations and formats. The AFI's Sydney base passed to a commercial exhibitor from 1993.

The MCA chapter of the 90s was one of genuine aspiration towards a Cinematheque ideal, but it was only able to demonstrate intermittent screening gestures in a temporary and ultimately unsatisfactory venue. Nevertheless it did offer the insulation of an art museum from the zephyrs of commercial compromise.

The MCA's engagement with the Cinematheque model had virtues and defects. Virtues—in that it promised the possibility of a site for conscientious and researched curatorship, as well as the hope of an attractive and permanently equipped venue for a plethora of contextual screenings. Defects—in the failure to pursue a Cinematheque as phased project (ie to create an interim venue of professional standard) moving progressively towards the ultimate goal, and a lack of urgency in marking out a Cinematheque as a top priority alongside the MCA's art exhibition agendas.

The notion of a Cinematheque on the cusp of the millennium can no longer be seen in simple straightforward terms as a grand site to screen the masterworks of cinema history. A Cinematheque must assert a model of cultural difference in the exhibition sector which bolsters (and even showcases) areas of cultural marginality (especially the lineage of avant-garde practice) as well as (re-)presenting broader revisionary notions of cinema history. It must also innovatively and intelligently embrace new media forms in a messy contemporary cultural landscape given over to the vagaries of fashion and an ever-widening array of leisure activities, technologies, and promotional seduction.

A Cinematheque must provide access to global film scholarship and evolving screen horizons. In a world of converging media it has a duty to examine the moving image as contemporary visual culture. It should cement and encourage an active and critical screen culture in the public sphere as a complement and antidote to the normal commercial imperatives of the film industry. It requires conviction and appropriate subsidy levels.

As long as the Cinematheque remains notional and rhetorical, the youthful public has little awareness of what is missing in the local film culturescape. Without access to the subtleties and rewards of history and context, our young filmmakers will remain obsessed with opportunism and paths to success. In Sydney today there is far more attention paid to cosmetic film happenings as media events than to developing serious support structures for substantive ongoing and culturally resonant activities. Innovation, exploration, rigour and wonder are in short supply. We seem too ready to applaud the slight and the mediocre. Films are short—particularly on ideas.

Audiences for specialist screen culture activities (such as a Cinematheque) must be carefully developed, with regular and clear-sighted programming. Since 1991 the MCA's strategic moving-image seeding work has borne healthy fruit (eg *The Dawn of Cinema* and *Burning the Interface* were benchmark projects for this country, with international impact). However, though generously supported by the AFC for almost a decade, the creation of a fully fledged Cinematheque venue has been dogged by endless and extraneous impediments. Not the least of these has been the precarious and deteriorating financial position of the MCA itself. The jettisoning of key dedicated staff—jeopardising carefully nurtured home-grown projects for the future—may signal the final curtain.

There are over 100 cinematheques in 55 countries worldwide—some established since the 1930s. No sophisticated cultural capital is without one.

In Melbourne, Cinemedia proceeds apace, its tenacity for 13 years of diligent development and political work about to be vindicated on Federation Square.

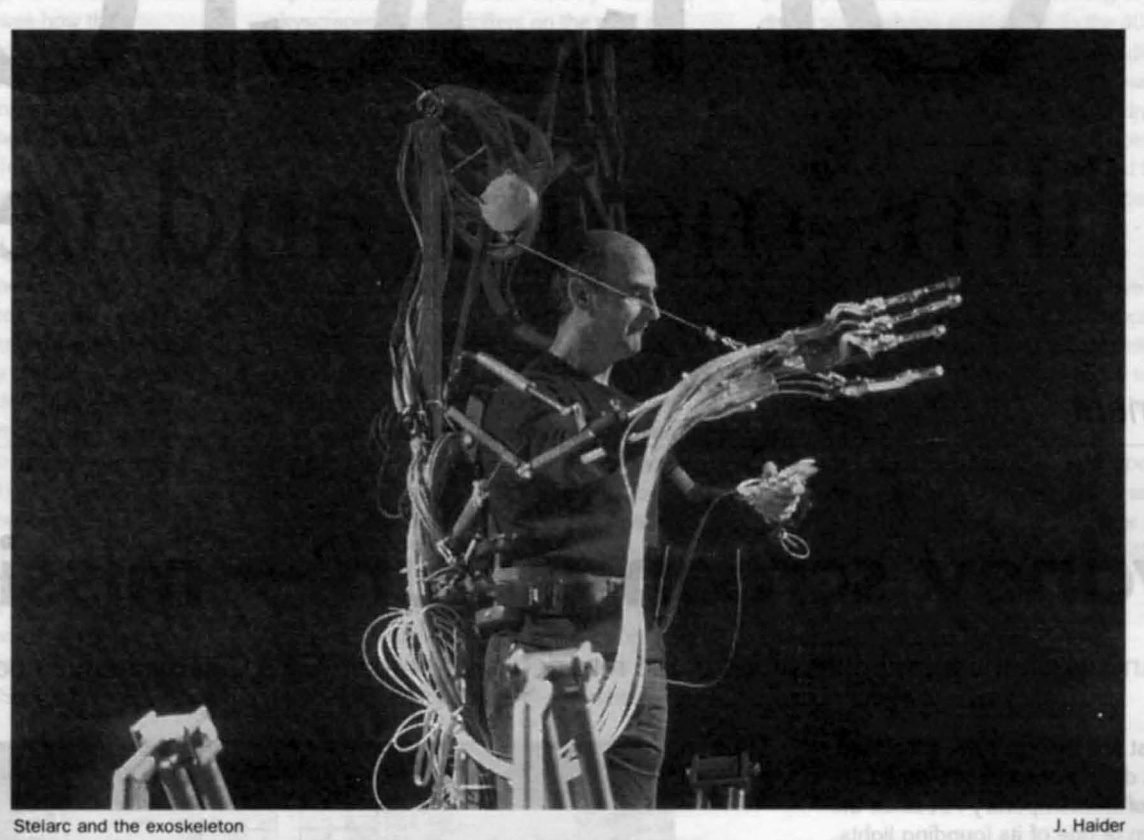
Sydney remains in dire need of a meaningful site for the moving image.

Report

The smart body laughs

Edward Scheer on the Stelarc phenomenon

The laugh starts somewhere deep in the body and you can hear it on its journey through the chest and throat before it bursts out of the mouth of the artist like an alien creature. Then it vanishes and you wait for it to re-appear. The famous laugh of Stelarc has a life and reputation of its own, paralleling that of the artist himself. It seems natural enough but can he produce it at will? Is it the body's natural expression surfacing or a performative behaviour designed to counter the expectations of a contemporary audience desiring outrage, extreme technical detail, physically dangerous actions and any of the other provocations associated with Stelarc's work over the last 20 years. These questions of the performative are repeatedly raised in his work and they surfaced again at his presentation to the recent *dLuxevent* at the Museum of Sydney where Stelarc presented elements of his most recent work and offered the assembled a reading of it in his offhand, almost apologetic way (maybe it's because he knows that the laugh is imminent...).



Stelarc and the exoskeleton J. Haider

Despite such a distinctive laugh, Stelarc always depersonalises the experience of his body; he always refers to it as "The body" rather than "My body" and this is consistent with his sense of it as an organisation of structural components infused with intelligence, a smart machine. But what separates his thesis from, say the discourse of VW Kombi owners, is the idea that the body is not simply a vehicle to transport a disembodied consciousness through space/time. As Stelarc said, "We've always been these zombies behaving involuntarily" and this is partly why we have such endemic fears about the discourse of the body that his work opens up as it exposes the primal fear of the zombie, bodies animated by a distant alien intelligence (Descartes for example) in our imagining of the body and its function. On the other hand he raises the anxiety of the cyborg, for instance in his most recent explorations of the physical system in his *Exoskeleton* project which features "a pneumatically powered six-legged walking machine actuated by arm gestures." The clumsy but alarmingly sudden movements of the machine compose the sounds it makes with those of the body into a kind of live soundtrack. This merging of the body's sounds with those of the mechanical milieu into an 'accompaniment' to the performance is a signature element of Stelarc's aesthetics in recent years and underscores his interest in the cybernetic potentials of art and behaviour.

One of the topics raised in the panel discussion (Chris Fleming, UTS; Jane Goodall, UWS; Vicki Kirby, UNSW; Gary Warner, CDP Media) following Stelarc's presentation centred on the anxiety his work seems to provoke in audiences. Both the figure of the zombie and that of the cyborg disturb insofar as they seem to displace our sense of the humanistic self. Stelarc relentlessly pushes this concept to the margins and the space he opens in the field of body imaging and performance is breathtaking and a little scary for humanists because it is a field of future possibility and becoming rather than being and nostalgia.

Stelarc's ideas were presented to his usual packed house—no doubt attributable to a combination of his appeal and the dLux organisational flair—who were shown video footage of recent and projected future work including *Extra Ear*. Much more will be said of this extremely controversial project which involves the 'prosthetic augmentation' of the human head (Stelarc's) to fit another ear which could speak as well as listen by re-broadcasting audio signals, or just "whisper sweet nothings to the other ear" as Stelarc said so disarmingly. His other work-in-progress is the *Movatar* project which is an attempt to extend the use of digital avatars (virtual semi-autonomous bodies) to access the physical body (Stelarc's) to perform actions in the real world. In this event, the body itself would become the prosthetic device. Yet none of this would be the same without the presence of the artist himself, with the big charming smile and booming laugh, animating a discussion which is sometimes too close to a tech-head's wet dream. There is a necessary embodiment here of which Stelarc, as a performer, is acutely aware: "These ideas emanate from the performances. Anyone can come up with the ideas but unless you physically realise them and go through those experiences of new interfaces and new symbioses with technology and information, then it's not interesting for me." For Stelarc it is the task of physical actions to authenticate the ideas.

In her excellent and encyclopaedic study of contemporary performance art in Australia, *Body and Self (OUP)*, Anne Marsh situates Stelarc in the recent history of the body in Australian performance in terms of a deconstructive journey from the opposition of body as truth/body as artefact, based on a dichotomy separating the natural from the cultural, to the place where these boundaries blur. From catharsis to abreactive process, from technophobia to the cyborg. In fact Stelarc is emblematic in this trajectory. Yet he has been widely misunderstood and misrecognised: as an uber shaman, who talks of the end of the organic body while performing elaborate rituals of pain and transgression of pain on the body in his 25 body suspension events ("with insertions into the skin") of the 70s and 80s; a kind of electric butoh practitioner in his *Fractal Flesh* and *Ping Body* events; and more recently a "nervous Wizard of Oz strapped into the centre of a mass of wires and moving machinery." (*The Age*, January 1 1999)

Stelarc has consistently challenged the way our culture has imagined the body, whether it is seen as a sacred object, a fetish of the natural, an organic unity...and the culture hasn't always kept pace with him. Marsh's book is also guilty of this as it attempts to situate Stelarc in terms of an enunciation of a particular subjectivity rather than reading it in its own terms. While Stelarc is certainly of the generation of major artists who have used the body as the work of art itself (Jill Orr, Mike Parr), manipulated it as an artefact rather than as a biological given (and therefore a kind of destiny) he is more concerned with the cybernetic body than with subjectivity, and more involved with pluralising and problematising the ways we speak of bodies and imagine them, and how we get them to do things and how they might move differently.

But I wanted to ask Stelarc and the panelists about what animates us? What of the emotive as well as the locomotive? These are questions of affect and energy which this type of work cannot really address and maybe we shouldn't insist that it does because in so many other ways it is pushing us into new territory. Instead Jane Goodall raised the notion of motivation in relation to movement and suggested that Stelarc disconnects the links between them, so that motion becomes mechanical rather than psychological and does not reflect the motivation of the mover. A manifestation, she said, of the unravelling of evolutionary thinking.

So is Stelarc a post-evolutionary thinker? Well perhaps he is a post-evolutionary artist...As he is fond of saying, Stelarc is interested in finding ways for the human system to interact more effectively with the increasingly denaturalised environment this system finds itself in, and extending the body's capacities for useful (and useless) action. And don't forget this latter point. It's easy to get caught up in Stelarc's spiel, brilliant and provocative as it is; it is nonetheless an artist's statement and the suggestive utility of much of his thinking should not stop us enjoying the spectacle of a genuinely creative mind at work and a laugh which is so richly suggestive of Stelarc's profoundly ambiguous view of the world.

The laugh returns us to the basic contradiction of all Stelarc's actions in their return to the image of the artist's body in a way which reinforces the effect of its presence and its adaptive capacities. If the body really were obsolete, Stelarc would be of no greater ongoing cultural relevance than Mr. Potato Head. Adaptivity is the real message but Stelarc knows that obsolescence is a better long term sales strategy.

Stelarc: extra ear | exoskeleton | avatars, *presented by dLux media arts and Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Museum of Sydney, February 20*

Edward Scheer lectures in performance studies at UNSW in the School of Theatre, Film and Dance. He has been teaching Stelarc's work in this context for several years.

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

Interview

Screen mutations

In an interview with Needeya Islam, Christos Tsiolkas celebrates the adapatation of novel to film

The Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Film Festival forum From Paper to Celluloid *produced a very engaging and insightful discussion about what could have been a rather tired topic, that of screen adaptations of novels and short stories. Thankfully, all the cliched generalisations were given short shrift by the panel (Tony Ayres, Mira Robertson, Christos Tsiolkas and Peter Wells) and, rather, the very specific nature of a difficult task was addressed.*

I took this opportunity to quiz Christos Tsiolkas because of his interesting position as a cineaste in the old fashioned sense, whose first novel, Loaded, *was adapted into a successful film,* Head On, *by Ana Kokkinos, Mira Robertson and Andrew Bovell.*

NI Given your intense interest in film, did you ever at any point want to be more involved in the process of making Head On*? For example, would you have considered writing the screenplay?*

CT It was really clear in my head that I'd constructed *Loaded* as a book. Because it was a first novel it was a difficult book to write and I didn't want to go back to that terrain, and so when Ana optioned it I was just excited about it being made into a film. Also, I'm an immense lover of film and do see it as a very different medium. I've got very firm ideas about the films I want to make, and they take priority. It wasn't like saying "well I can either write *Loaded* as a book or a film and see which one comes up best". It was very much a definite idea that this was a novel, and the films I want to do are quite different.

NI Can you elaborate on how they are different?

CT I really do love the possibility of utilising the idea of an essay in filmic terms. My favourite directors are Pasolini, Godard, Chris Marker; people from that era, who made particular kinds of films that were as rich and as dense and as critical as the best kinds of philosophical writing. That's what attracts me to cinema. That's not to say that I don't love Hollywood genre classics, but I also know that they're not the kinds of film I could make. You need to be quite passionate to go through the level of industry involved; you have to be a business person. I wouldn't have the passion to make that kind of film. But the idea of an essay film is something I definitely want to explore.

NI You mentioned in the forum that Orson Welles' The Trial *was an adaptation that you think worked; that through specifically visual components such as mise-en-scene and the use of black and white film, a profoundly effective dystopia was rendered. What other adaptations do you feel have been successful?*

CT In a way I kept thinking about all of Shakespeare's work—there are so many great films that have been made from Shakespeare. Tony Ayres raised that thing which I think has become a cliche, that the best film adaptations are made from second or third rate work. That's why I brought up Welles' *The Trial*, which is a flawed film, but a really beautiful and quite interesting one. Another is Godard's *Contempt*, based on the Moravia story.

Christos Tsiolkas

They're such different works and I think that Godard, because he's a fucking genius, was able to actually translate in filmic terms some of the philosophical concerns about writing in Moravia's text.

In terms of Hollywood adaptations I respect, some of the work that Philip Kaufman has done springs to mind. *The Right Stuff* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, which I actually prefer to the novel; it affected me a lot more. So I do think it's possible to make really good films from really good books.

NI And what would you say is common to all the films you've mentioned? Why do you think these filmmakers have succeeded?

CT What the filmmaker requires is firstly a passion for the work, and secondly not to feel constrained by fidelity. Bertolucci's second feature, *Before the Revolution*, was loosely based on Stendahl's *Charter House of Palma*, but moved into a contemporary context. This is a film that is powerful and uses the themes that Stendahl is concerned with, but isn't faithful to the work—and I don't think it needs to be because what sparks off an imaginative idea is all a filmmaker needs to run with.

NI The question of limits came up in the forum. There was a sense in which the film was positioned as limited and the novel more open-ended in terms of what each could convey, particularly in terms of interiority.

CT I guess the difference with film for me is the economics. A concern I have is that we have become more conservative in terms of what we expect from cinema. We talked in the forum about creating an interior character on the screen. Bergman's *Persona* is a film that does that incredibly well, but the reality is that filmmakers today don't go to the AFC with an idea like *Persona*. They don't work collaboratively with a group of actors, they're not part of a cultural milieu that makes that kind of cinema. More and more the idea is that there is a global expansive market and you have to sell your film to Hollywood or Miramax. I don't think it's an accident that some of the most interesting films I've seen over the last 6 years come from Iran. What you get there is a culture that is interested in supporting a national cinema. I guess we're a bit trapped because English is the dominant language here and we have access to the world's largest markets. But I wish we could look to the Iranian example. Films like *A Taste of Cherries* are so important in terms of looking at the relationship between filmmakers, cinema and audience.

NI I guess what you're saying is that through this very local and culturally specific angle, and perhaps because of it, something universal and fundamental about the nature of cinema in general is being explored. That reminds me of something Laleen Jayamanne once said along the lines of there being a perception that "Indians make films about India, the Japanese make films about Japan, and Americans make films about the world."

CT There is a great quote from Godard which I'm paraphrasing here: the thing with the cinema of the West is that we are overfed with images, and the problem of the cinema for the Third World is that they are underfed.

NI I wonder when he said that?

CT Sometime around 1973. When he was a Maoist!

Paper to Celluloid/Script to Screen *forum, presented by QueerScreen as part of the 1999 Mardi Gras Film Festival, Pitt Centre, Sydney, February 21*

Christos Tsiolkas' new novel The Jesus Man *will be published by Random House later this year. Tsiolkas is currently working on a video/Super 8 adaptation of a Harold Pinter play.*

Report

Bad men and worse women

Adrian Martin glimpses gaps and longings in the cultural fabric of the 28th International Film Festival Rotterdam 1999

In Raul Ruiz's *Shattered Image*, a highlight of the 28th International Film Festival Rotterdam, a book cover is glimpsed bearing the splendid, parodic title: "Men Are Bad—But Women Are Worse." The sentiment covered many of the films on offer this year in Rotterdam. In a festival noted for its innovative, radical edge, the cinematic forms were sometimes challenging, but the contents displayed some strangely old-fashioned, ultra-personalised preoccupations—particularly where the relationships between men and women were concerned.

Let's start with the bad men: a quiet, suburban family man in Todd Solondz's *Happiness* who secretly sodomizes the local friends of his small son; a sick, old cop (unforgettably incarnated by Claude Brasseur) forcing himself upon the dissatisfied wife of his young partner in Catherine Breillat's *Sale Comme Un Ange* (1991); Vincent Gallo bullying Christina Ricci into sweet submission in his semi-autobiographical *Buffalo '66*; a bunch of alienated, suburban, Australian blokes channelling their free-floating, pent-up aggression into an act of sexual murder in Rowan Woods' *The Boys*; a demented serial killer roaming the French countryside in Philippe Grandrieux's astonishing *Sombre*, exercising a sadistic, psychological hold over his female victims which seems almost Satanic.

These characters are (to varying degrees) presented by the filmmakers as animals, brute forces, rapacious beasts. Defined exclusively in terms of the energy of their violent sexuality, they are aligned with nature—human nature as much as (especially in *Sombre*) the landscapes and primal elements of the natural world. In *Bullet Ballet* Shinya Tsukamoto, true to the vivid logic proposed by his cult *Tetsuo* movies, ties this primal force of masculinity to the industrialised, urban world of technology.

The women in these scenarios tend to be victims—either mournful, doe-eyed, voluptuous and ever-sweet (a principle taken to an extreme in Amos Kollek's memorable *Sue*), or wasted, punk masochists, as in *Bullet Ballet*. But elsewhere on screen in Rotterdam, bad girls far outfoxed the guys with their sexual stratagems. Anne Parillaud in *Shattered Image* and Karin Cartlidge in the woeful *Claire Dolan* moved through bleak, menacing, male-constructed worlds like spiritual sisters of Hitchcock's Marnie, turning tricks and turning tables with their phantom-like intensity. But this vengeful trend was clearest in the Breillat retrospective—a fascinating glimpse at a singular career too little known beyond France, save for her wonderfully tough teen movie *36 Fillette* (1987).

There is more than a touch of Camille Paglia's "sexual personae" in Catherine Breillat's world-view: in her florid, sometimes spooky melodramas of sex and gender, men square off against women, Eros jostles Thanatos, images of birth are conjoined with images of destruction, and desire never reaches a point of happy equilibrium or fulfilment. Breillat's lead women—particularly in *Tapage Nocture* (1979), *Parfait Amour!* (1996) and her latest, *Romance*—literally devastate men with the voraciousness of their libido, a force that both drives them on and hollows them out. Again, these flaming, fearsome creatures are presented as beacons of nature: oscillating (as the director avows in the excellent accompanying booklet) between sublimity and depravity, they are 'dirty angels', whorish and radiant, going to the bitter end of their biological destiny. This image of the dirty angel also informed Arturo Ripstein's Buñuelian satire of Spanish religious mania, *El Evangelio De Las Maravillas*.

At the tip of the millennium, this all adds up to an odd, undeniably compelling picture of humanity which movies of artistic ambition are asking us to consider—disturbing and disconcerting on many levels, not least of which is the fundamentally apolitical cast of this picture. These films express a defiantly 'existential' mode of self-questioning and self-representation (supremely so in the case of Alexander Sokurov, whose video epic *Confession* screened)—not to mention an assertion of 'eternal' heterosexual issues and a primal conception of the relation of the sexes—which can easily be mistaken for a conservative backlash following the excesses of 'political correctness' in the arts and elsewhere.

However, I believe that these films, whatever their varying qualities, can be more sympathetically considered as representing an intriguing failure of the political imagination at the end of the 90s: neither the 70s agenda of race, class and power, nor the more lyrical 80s themes of history, memory and exile, not even the 'identity politics' foregrounded in recent years by queer theory, seem to answer any longer the thirst of artists looking to fill their films with forceful drama, meaningful resonance and cinematic sensation. These films point to embarrassing gaps, and urgent longings, in our contemporary cultural fabric. Nanni Moretti's somewhat disappointing *Aprile*—best appreciated as a postscript or footnote to his groundbreaking *Caro Diario* (1994)—symbolised for me the abiding problems of radical art today: its aspiration to be a political chronicle of contemporary Italian life just never comes alive, while its only charm rests in its tender depictions of family experience and airy, personal whim.

Of course, not every film about love, sex and relationships shown in Rotterdam fitted the gothic, nihilistic or despairing picture painted by Breillat and those with some affinity with her. Some of the central men—like the indecisive, twentysomething hero of Neil Mansfield's *Fresh Air* or the brilliant, bumbling kid in Wes Anderson's lovely *Rushmore*—were more like nerds in desperate search of a little emotional sensitivity. The shadowy woman at the heart of Chris Petit's intricately constructed, digital video piece *The Falconer* hesitated at the brink of becoming yet another stylish, punk masochist caught in the web of a vicious male fantasy, but instead became one of those stubborn, questioning, elusive, quietly resistant gals who have populated the landscape of independent film since around 1975.

Wong Kar-Wai managed to boil down his distinctively modern, liberatingly weightless view of the game of love into a 3-minute commercial for mobile phones in the hilariously droll *Motorola*. Olivier Assayas, in an unexpectedly gentle and optimistic mood after the jagged perversity of *Irma Vep* (1996), gave us a moving mosaic of intimate relations in *Late August, Early September*. And for a more familiar, solidly political view of power relationships placed squarely within a social context, there was Hou Hsiao-hsien's masterful *Flowers of Shanghai*.

Philip Seymour Hoffman, Lara Flynn Boyle *Happiness*

Festival commentaries routinely create fictions from invented 'themes' to cohere and interrelate the heterogeneous work on display. This year's Rotterdam event proposed many centres of interest and, as always, invited its spectators to find their own paths through the very full and extremely well organised program. The sessions ranged from commercial fare such as *A Bug's Life* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* to the latest pieces by Robert Kramer and Jon Jost; offerings from the past included a program of exquisite avant garde pieces by Robert Beavers and Gregory Markopoulos and—in uncanny sync with that undercurrent of gothic sexual menace raging everywhere—the new, improved version of Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958), whose immaculately creepy, baroque vortex engulfed everyone who saw it on the huge Pathe screen.

Finally, the Rotterdam Festival matters most for the formal innovations and explorations it showcases. The mounting, mesmerising rhythm and intensity of *Flowers of Shanghai*, guaranteed by Hou's precisely controlled, minimalist choices; the fragmented patterns and sensations of *Bullet Ballet*, and, above all, the remarkable work on lighting, focus and sound in *Sombre*—these registered as lasting and deep experiences, providing what Warren Oates in *Two Lane Black Top* (1971) once called a "permanent set of emotions."

IFFR January 27 - February 7

Adrian Martin travelled to the International Film Festival Rotterdam with the assistance of the Australian Film Commission.

The DNA Doll in the phonebox

Samara Mitchell enters the wild world of Sam Oster's online comic *DNA Doll*

If we follow the path of least resistance, our cultural understanding of Western comics begins and ends with the Golden Age of American comics, just prior to the advent of the Second World War. The cauterising intensity of the 4-colour separation process, used to overcome the jaundice of poor quality newsprint, has embedded modern mythology with iconic colour codes that are still in circulation today (Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, Kitchen Sink Press, MA, 1993).

Superheroes clad in garish sprays of printing primaries flooded the pages of American comics, in a brassy display of patriotism and propaganda. This early colour technology had a profound impact upon both the production values and the narrative structure of comics emerging from this moment of American comic history. Poor print definition meant that artists had to invent simple and easily recognisable devices to evoke the imaginary closure of space and time. Fine print smudged too easily, so comics could not afford to be too wordy. Panels and speech bubbles were the economic motifs employed by early comic artists, to convey the qualitative essence of thoughts, conversations and movement through time and space.

An increasing dexterity in desktop publishing software has pushed a graceful shard of high-calibre comics and graphic novels into the comic arena, revealing different facets within the definition of the medium (see Dave McKean and Neil Gaiman's *Mr Punch*, London, VG Graphics, 1994). The internet presents yet another paradigm-shift for the aesthetic of comics. Adelaide based artist and writer Sam Oster has recently released issue 0 of her web-based photographic comic *DNA Doll*. With playful B-grade narration, we follow Hydra, the main character, as she makes a pivotal discovery that derails her life from daily suburban routine into a solipsistic fable of mad science and fantasy. It is at this point of the story—consciously or inadvertently—Oster pays homage to one of the most readily recognised icons of transformation within comic history—the telephone box.

DNA Doll is a hypermedia extravaganza, voluptuous with surreal Quicktime movie snippets, cinematic stills and the exquisite compositions of Adelaide sound artist, Jason Sweeney. It has a simple plot that would border on naive if one were to scan only the text. Oster's cleverly directed sequential presentation of images, video, sound and animation avoids the amateurish over-use of available media. A simple adoption of mouse roll-overs reveals loops and links to pockets of hidden extras, lending torsion to the traditionally static comic page.

If you're looking for a little escapism, there can be nothing more frustrating than getting stuck chasing an endless horizon of hypertext. Oster has kept the interactive components of her work to a minimum, using only what is necessary to activate the fleshier parts of the story. The site is well indexed and contains a concise site map, so viewers can easily bookmark a chapter and return to it later. I would encourage readers to dedicate at least an hour of net-time, to download some of the weightier video files (which lag at times) and to take in the details.

Oster bequeaths web-denizens and comic devotees a thoughtful and exploratory tale that strikes a gas lamp for the aesthetic of online storytelling. As a comic *DNA Doll* would operate more efficiently on CD-ROM. Its online format, however, provides a collaborative platform upon which remote publishers, writers and artists can continue their exploration into the synergism of printed comics and electronic media.

DNA DOLL, *creator Sam Oster, sound designer Jason Sweeney*, www.mouthful.on.net/DNA

Samara Mitchell is an Adelaide-based writer, artist and curator.

Report

Moving images *etc*

Clare Stewart on new media and museum culture in Europe and the ramifications for Australian ventures

Subject: *etc*

As I have noted elsewhere: "Screen Culture—the nomenclature is out there. A conjugation designed to expand the parameters of moving image organisations and their exhibition practices to incorporate multimedia and the digital arts and to encompass the output of all practitioners 'working within the screen frame.'" I confess to an unhealthy predilection for creating and dissecting definitions. Seeking out 'screen' in a (generally less preferred) lexicon, I read: "a smooth surface, such as a canvas or a curtain, on which moving images etc may be shown." I become obsessed with the idea that the subject of my current project is this 'etcetera'. It troubles me, I lose sleep over it. I consider that Funk and Wagnalls may have put the etc in the wrong place. It is my goal to reposition it. So, I've packed up my theoretical premise and hit the road. I have named my axiom expandingscreen and I've just spent 30 hours on the way to Helsinki cleaving the title.

Subject: Muu, Helsinki; Date: Oct 17, 1998

Happy to discover that my visit coincides with Helsinki's annual herring festival, I cross the marketplace each morning on my trek from Katajanokka island to Kiasma for the MuuMedia Festival (*www.av-arkki.fi/mmf*).

Muu ('other' or 'something else') is staged by AV-arkki, an organisation which provides facilities for Finnish media artists and represents their work. The event began a decade ago with the Kuopio Video Festival in eastern Finland and has developed into one of the largest events of its kind in the Nordic countries. Like many organisations and festivals originally intended to represent video art, MuuMedia and AV-arkki are in the process of expanding their program in order to accommodate web art, CD-ROMs and interactive media installations. The necessity of creating appropriate exhibition environments is accentuated by the location of the festival within several spatial realms: museum space (Kiasma: Museum of Contemporary Art), gallery space (Otso), collective art space (Cable Factory) and continuously contested urban space (Mobile Zones). The special focus of MuuMedia 1998 is 'global and indigenous' a framework addressing issues of globalisation, indigenous culture, power and networked information.

The prominent and dynamic architectural design of the newly opened Kiasma *(www.fng.fi)* provides the festival with its centre. A contemporary art museum, purpose-built in an age where exhibition practice is undergoing considerable transformation, Kiasma attempts to reorder art and information hierarchies by creating a responsive, anticipatory space for the reception of art in all its forms. The emphasis on communication flow and active or dynamic reception is conceptually expressed in the name itself which has its roots in chiasm: the intersection of 2 chromosomes resulting in the blending and possible crossing over at points of contact and also the X-like commissure which unites the optic nerve at the base of the brain. Despite its desire to embody these forward thinking principles, Kiasma in operation is not proving adequately equipped as the site for the screening component and the digital gallery. Dreadful acoustics (which equally impact on the media art in the permanent collection), bad projection design and handling, and an under-informed staff are resulting in loss of audience—the hundreds of visitors drawn to the building each day are not made properly aware of the festival and the committed audience are battling through a haze of interruptions and cancellations.

The Mobile Zones project is proving to be the most successful component of the festival. Curated by Heidi Tikka, the various works explore the possibilities of art as activism, examining the urban landscape and its transformations. Helsinki is busy with preparations for 2000 when it will simultaneously celebrate its 450th anniversary and its reign as European capital. Nick Crowe's deliberately lo-fi community web project *A Ten Point Plan for a Better Helsinki* (find link at Kiasma site) required the participation of citizens who contributed proposals for the redesign of a controversial public space near Kiasma, while Adam Page and Eva Hertzsch investigated anxiety zones in urban space with their demonstrations of Securoprods, a transfunctional security gate/revolving door.

Subject: ZKM, Karlsruhe; Date: Nov 8, 1998

Three hours in the gardens surrounding Karlsruhe's Schlossplatz (the only site to recommend the town aside from ZKM and a temporary beer exhibition) and I am still scrawling notes on Pavel Smetana's *The Room of Desires*. Images in a darkened room are generated in response to information received from sensors bound to my wrists and forehead. Something allows me to recognise the constructedness of it, but this just serves to increase my anxiety at seeing my 'psyche' projected. Though private, the zone has the potential to become public, and the sense of surveillance is heightened by those white-coat clad attendants who swabbed me and taped me up.

The Room of Desires is one among many interactive installations that comprise the temporary exhibition *Surrogate*, the first showing in situ of work by artists in residence at ZKM's Institute for Visual Media. The ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie | Centre for Art and Media, *www.zkm.de*) is the realisation of an 8-year development project whose premises in a transformed munitions factory were opened in 1997. Consisting of 2 exhibition departments (the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Media Museum), 2 production and development annexes (the Institute for Visual Media, the Institute for Music and Acoustics) and an integrated research and information facility (the Mediathek), ZKM adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the presentation, development and research of visual arts, music and electronic media. Ex-Melburnian, artist and director of the Institute for Visual Media, Jeffrey Shaw, tells me that the departmental proximity "creates an environment where the museums reflect an ongoing, inhouse creative identity", a dynamism enhanced by the potential for "the production zone to be transformed into a public space."

I find pleasure in the Mediathek, a veritable treasure chest for an archive rat. A centralised database establishes instant access to 1,100 video art titles, 12,000 music titles (with an emphasis on the electroacoustic) and a comprehensive collection of 20th century art and theory literature. Download from what is probably the world's largest CD-ROM jukebox system (soon to be converted to DVD) and receive at any of the 12 viewing stations (designed by French-Canadian media artist Luc Courchesne) or the 5 historically significant listening booths designed for Documenta 8 in 1987 by Professor Dieter Mankin. After indulging myself on a self-programmed Bill Viola, Tony Oursler, Gary Hill retrospective, I took some literary time out to read Donald Crimp's *On the Museum's Ruin*. In a study of Marcel Broodthaer's *Musee d'Art Modern* series of installations/exhibitions which radically investigate the position of the museum, Daniel Buren is cited as claiming, "Analysis of the art system must inevitably be undertaken in terms of the studio as the unique space of production, and the museum as the unique space of reception." ZKM is an institution formally enacting this kind of analysis.

Subject: AEC, Linz; Date: Nov 17, 1998

Watching snow fall on the not-so-blue Danube from the offices of ARS Electronica Center in Linz (*www.aec.at*). Spent the train trip from Karlsruhe to Salzburg reading Derek Jarman's (sort-of) autobiography, *Kicking the Pricks* (Vintage 1996). Speeding through the Black Forest on his accounts of making-out at the old Biograph watching German soft core featuring semi-clad damens running through said geographical terrain. In 1987 Jarman says: "the Cinema is finished, it's a dodo, kissed to death by economics—the last rare examples get too much attention. The cinema is to the 20th century what the Diorama was to the 19th. Endangered species are always elevated, put in glass cases. The cinema has graduated to the museum, the archive, the collegiate theatre..."

Jarman argues the case for the cheapness and immediacy of video. What strikes me, is the degree to which the moving image has impacted on the tenets of museology in the decade since Jarman establishes the museum as a static place. Paradoxically, the contemporary art museum is precisely the location of video art and media installations, and (in most cases) instead of the museum subduing media art, the development of new technological forms has necessitated a vast rethinking of the museum as a space of reception.

ARS Electronica Center is conceived and operates as the antithesis of Jarman's museum. It services local and global industries, artists and educational institutions in addition to presenting and maintaining a museum space designed to anticipate the future of what commentators (and I guess that includes me) like to call "the information age." Its integrated approach, which actualises the whole concept of convergence, produces an environment where the application of everything from virtual reality through computer animation to video-conferencing is applied in all disciplines in a manner that promotes practical and theoretical discourse between commerce, media art and education. Co-director of this 'Museum of the Future', Gerfried Stocker, tells me that the emphasis here is on process and "how to give things a value without a history."

This radically challenges traditional systems of value and analysis in a manner that is arguably appropriate to the rapidity with which new technologies emerge. I find it difficult to assess a lot of high-end media art, and this has never been more the case than both here and at ZKM where the technology is so impressive in itself that the core elements of a work may indeed be the science of its construction rather than its artistic endeavour. I still favour works which don't foreground the technological achievements over content. At ARS Electronica, a work like *World Skin* (winner of the 1998 Golden Nica for Interactive Art in the Prix ARS Electronica) by Maurice Benayoun and Jean-Baptiste Barriere will endure the potential redundancy of the environment within which it is conceived and produced. Enter the *CAVE* (AEC's permanent 3-walled virtual reality environment) armed with a stills camera and move through a virtual landscape—a photo-real collage of images from different wars. Start to 'shoot', take images with the camera like a 'tourist of death' and you (visually) tear the skin off this world. It transforms into a white void, only shadow traces like cardboard cutouts remain. The experience is strangely connected to and distant from the bloody (non-virtual) reality of war.

Subject: etc; Date: Dec 6, 1998

I am allowing myself to be in process. There are not yet conclusions to be drawn. Perhaps the etc would be better positioned after "or a curtain." Halfway through my research tour and I am suffering from the desire to see the debate which should be surrounding the planning of 2 moving image centres in Australia (Cinemedia at Federation Square, Melbourne, and the Australian Cinematheque at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney) become more urgent and more public. In the meantime, I am expanding my waistline on gluhwien, cheese and root vegetables.

Clare Stewart is Exhibition Co-ordinator, Australian Film Institute. *Expandingscreen has been enabled by funds from the Queens Trust For Young Australians, the Australian Film Commission, Cinemedia and the Australian Film Institute.*

Of related interest, see "Finnish shortcuts", Melinda Burgess, RealTime /OnScreen, *issue no. 28, December 1998 - January 1999.*

Review

Memory, debris and ecstasy

Ned Rossiter on Peter Callas and video art at the Festival of Perth

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx spoke famously of the "tradition of all the dead generations weigh[ing] like a nightmare on the brain of the living." Similarly, there is an overwhelming sense in which the video works of Peter Callas possess an electro-organic force, one so imbued with the archive of mediatised debris of geo-political and popular culture that the ecstasy of an encounter with his video works might lead to meteoric apoplexy in perception on the part of the viewer. This, if you will, is but one constellation of a dialectical imaginary that negotiates the complexities between the premodern and the (post)modern in Callas' *topo-videographic* lessons on history.

Peter Callas: Initialising History is a 3-component national touring project centred around Peter Callas, electronic media artist and curator. Produced by dLux media arts, the project features *Initialising History*, comprising 12 of Callas' video works 1980–1999; *Peripheral Visions*, a selection by Callas of contemporary international video art and computer animation; and *An Eccentric Orbit*, a 3-part survey of Australian video art made during the 1980s and early 90s, curated by Callas and produced by Ross Harley and touring internationally since its launch in 1994 at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Peter Callas, *Lost in Translation*

The short black & white video *Singing Stone* (1980) holds a curious pivotal position as the opening piece in the Callas retrospective. Prior to embarking into the world of video art, Callas trained at the ABC as an assistant film and then sound editor for TV news and current affairs programs. He then studied printmaking and sculpture at art school in Sydney. *Singing Stone* seems to translate some of the technical and ideological properties of these otherwise distinct media into the poetics of video art. For almost the entire duration of this work, we hear a harsh scraping discord as we see a hand brushing a stone in a circular motion. The image of the hand and stone literally disintegrates, recomposing as a mutable collage of imaginary terrains anchored by noise which eventually folds over the obliterated image to include a veritable murmur of voices and honking traffic intruding from the street. At least that's how I heard it.

The layered dimensions of sound and imagery in *Singing Stone* are made possible by the unstable nature of magnetic tape as a recording surface, yet one assumes these layers are the result of the place of a kinaesthetic between the hand and the stone. As such, a metaphor is created on the dialectic between inscription (or representation) and the contingencies of history. In yet another way, the work can be seen to refuse the fragmented spectacle of TV news images held together in a universal order by the voice-over of a news reader or reporter. The referent seems to speak itself.

In the context of a selected retrospective, *Singing Stone* can perhaps more crucially be approached as anticipating some of the recurring stylistic motifs and critical concerns Callas' later works present. First, there is a recognition of the instability of representation: Callas shows that even images unfolding in real-time—that supposedly 'unmediated' time not subject to the intervention of the 'edit'—are, however, subject to the peculiarities of a communication technology and the way historicity is attributed to cultural phenomena. Secondly, is the way a grid of *manga* warriors or shifting troupe of dancers appears to emerge in the regenerating images of *Singing Stone*. (Callas himself hinted as much in his introduction to *Initialising History* at the Festival of Perth's ART(iculations) symposium, and revealed in the discussion after the screenings that he sees the bearded face of a Chinese man.) An apocryphal dimension attends such a readerly desire to enact order out of chaos. Indeed, *Singing Stone* invites uncertainty, or rather the certainty of differentiated perception —for both operate as a dialectical trope across the Callas oeuvre.

Callas' 'singular style' developed while living in Tokyo during the 'bubble economy' of the mid 80s. In this harmonious correlation between cultural production and imagined economies, video artists were commissioned by department stores, with electronic billboards and shop display windows operating as potential conduits out of urban environments for the passer-by. The staple icon articulating the animated brilliance of Callas' multi-dimensional work from this period is derived or, as Scott McQuire aptly puts it, "mined" from the ubiquity of *manga* culture in Japan. The use of techno-hybrids of traditional and popular music as an editing strategy is predominant in these signatory video works. As Callas commented during the Perth screening of *Initialising History*, the structure of music dictates the editing of images; what distinguishes these works from pop music video clips is the situated resonance of history reconfigured. Callas alleviates a possibile rigidity in the dialectical image by deploying sound to create a fluid dimension for political expression.

Bilderbuch für Ernst Will (Ernst Will's Picture Book): A Euro Rebus is one of Callas' last works produced using the Fairlight CVI (Computer Video Instrument)—the primary tool through which Callas honed the complexity of fusing disparate cultural histories into topo-videographic arrangements. Made in Sydney and Tokyo from 1990 to 1993, *Bilderbuch für Ernst Will* follows Callas' earlier work and doesn't conform to any apparent narrative structure. Instead, as Rudolf Frieling suggests, *Bilderbuch...* is a work of "possible logics of construction and perception that need to be explored through multiple viewings". Herein lies a paradox of Callas' video art: while these texts can be seen as a highly aestheticised and at times horrific and sublime pastiche of images referencing a mass of art historical, pop culture, and what Ross Harley astutely calls "ideogrammic objects" of US mediatised culture (*Art & Text* 28 (1988), p. 78), his texts nonetheless resist the easy digestibility of aesthetics we often associate with recent digital and photomedia artworks. Within this tension between familiarity and abstruse syncretism, the problematic of history and memory is once again foregrounded as a politicised terrain. Moreover, Callas contributes to cultural debate the importance of reconsidering the critical place of aesthetics. And he's been doing this for some time now.

An attempt to unravel the encyclopedic histories intricated throughout the video work by Callas can only be an interminable one. And herein lies the pleasure of his work. In any case, the program notes by Rachel Kent, read in conjunction with the essays by McQuire and Frieling in the forthcoming monograph, have to be commended for their critical acumen.

I'd like to finish by turning to Callas' current work in progress, *Lost in Translation*. During the ART(iculations) symposium, Callas made frequent mention of what he observes as the institutional and commercial outmoding of video art by digital media in many contemporary art festivals. A pressing concern for Callas involves the cultural, social, and memorial implications that come with the excision of one communication technology as it is replaced by another. A fundamental question emerges: what happens when the communicative forms of cultural articulation are 'exiled' through instituted means? What is lost (and what is found) within new terrains of expression?

The syncopated "architectronics" emblemised in Callas' CVI work are extended in *Lost in Translation*, where smooth transitions in 3-dimensional space envelop 2-dimensional planar images. A considerably slower pulse tracks a refiguring of 'magic realism' usually attributed to Latin American writers and photographers—the labyrinthine tales of Borges, epic parables of García Márquez and poignant images of Alvarez Bravo spring most immediately to mind. With claims nowadays that the novel is long dead, and the reality-effect of photography no longer tenable, it is perhaps no surpise that Callas' translation of Brazillian history through and within the spatio-temporality of digital media evokes questions of 'truth' as it pertains to the mode of representation and the position of the observer.

Lost in Translation is by definition a work in progress, as it will always be. This is not to say this current project will remain incomplete. Rather, its purpose is the creation of a fractal universe in which the singularity of the event is registered in the multiple dimensions of a history on Latin America in which the perception of the viewer is folded into its topology.

Peter Callas: Initialising History, *commissioned and produced by dLux media arts in association with Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), Festival of Perth, PICA, February 10 – March 7. Program touring nationally: ACCA (Australian Centre for Contemporary Art), Melbourne until May 2, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, from May 27.*

Ned Rossiter teaches mass communications at Monash University and theory and history of architecture at RMIT University, Melbourne. He is co-editor (with Allen Chun and Brian Shoesmith) of Pop Music in Asia: Cultural Values and Cultural Capital *(Curzon/Hawaii University Press, forthcoming).*

Review

TechGnosis — a secret history

Ashley Crawford in conversation with author Erik Davis

A major aspect of technoculture comes from "mystical impulses behind our obsession with information technology." That, in essence, is the central thesis of an ambitious tome entitled *TechGnosis* by San Francisco writer Erik Davis. Davis has written numerous snappy articles in this field for *Wired*, *The Village Voice*, *Rolling Stone*, *21 C*, *Lingua Franca* and *The Nation*. However in *TechGnosis* he attempts to touch upon the entire history that connects the spiritual imagination to technological development, from the printing press to the internet, from the telegraph to the world wide web.

In the process Davis discusses in detail myriad cultural and religious figures and movements, from Plato to Marshall McLuhan, from Jesus Christ and Buddhism to Timothy Leary and Scientology, from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to William Gibson. What is surprising is that, despite the density of ideas in this tome, it is always readable, inspiring *The Hacker Crackdown* author Bruce Sterling to comment that "There's never been a more lucid analysis of the goofy, muddled, superstition-riddled human mind, struggling to come to terms with high technology."

According to Davis, "TechGnosis is a secret history because we are not used to dealing with technology in mythological and religious terms. The stories we use to organize the history of technology are generally rationalistic and utilitarian, and even when they are cultural, they are rarely framed in terms of the religious imagination."

On a general level, says Davis, this has to do with modernity's "ultimately misguided habit of treating religious or spiritual forces solely in terms of the conservative tendencies of various institutions, rather than as an ongoing, irreducible, and indeed, irrepressible dimension of human cultural experience, one that has liberatory or avant-garde tendencies as well as reactionary ones."

Davis' ability to shift from popular culture to historical fact peppered with pop terminology fits an intriguing trend in cultural studies. *TechGnosis* sits comfortably alongside such books as Greil Marcus' *Lipstick Traces*, Mark Dery's *Escape Velocity*, Mike Davis' *City of Quartz*, Andrew Ross' *Strange Weather* and Darren Tofts' *Memory Trade*. In this regard *TechGnosis* narrowly escapes the categorisation of being a book about 'spirituality.'

"Although I deal more sympathetically with religious material and ideas than most of those authors, I feel far more affinity with their approach than with more self-consciously 'spiritual' books, which tend to deny the role of historical, economic, and political forces", says Davis. "I just happen to be drawn to that peculiar interzone between popular culture and the religious imagination."

That interzone inevitably draws Davis towards some dangerous realms where 'popular culture' and 'imagination' are all too prevalent. While Davis carefully explores the genesis of such movements as Scientology or the Extropian movement and points out the totally bizarre substance (or lack) of both, he manages to avoid the pitfall of making harsh value judgments. "When I embarked on this project, I decided that developing a cogent critique of spirituality would add yet another layer of complication to an already dense investigation", he says. "Confronted with a curious belief system, I am more interested in how it works than I am in criticizing it; I wanted to allow the power of the various world views to arise as fictions.

"It's like camera filters: what does the world look like if you momentarily wear the lenses of a conspiracy theorist, a UFO fanatic, a conservative Catholic? By allowing eccentrics and extremists their own voice, I hoped to lend *TechGnosis* a kind of imaginative force that more explicitly critical works lack."

In the burgeoning world of 'secret histories', the shadowy figure of 'sci-fi' author Philip K. Dick looms as a major influence. Dick's work, riddled as it is with visionary belief systems tinged with perpetual paranoia, never sat comfortably in the cliche-ridden world of pure science fiction. "I emphasize the visionary acuity of his works, which have influenced me as much as McLuhan or Michel Serres or James Hillman", says Davis. "I am especially drawn to his ability to treat religious ideas and experiences in the context of late capitalism and our insanely commodified social environments."

Similarly, McLuhan is a "complex figure, full of bluster and brilliance", says Davis. "He deserves a complex engagement, and I certainly distinguish myself from *Wired*'s simplistic recuperation of McLuhan, which turns on the same sort of selective sampling of his work, only in reverse. For one thing, McLuhan nursed vastly darker views about electronic civilization than most people believe—his global village is an anxious place. But unlike most of today's media thinkers, he considered himself an exegete rather than a critic or theorist. That is, he wanted to uncover the spirit of electronic media rather than provide the kind of structural political critique that people are more comfortable with these days. To do that, he used the imagination of a profoundly literate (and religious) man, allowing analogies as much as analysis to lead him forward. He read technology, whereas most critics describe or deconstruct it. And though he said a lot of stupid stuff, and participated too willingly in his own celebrity, he laid the groundwork for our engagement with the psycho-social dimension of new media."

The power of the word runs throughout *TechGnosis*—from Guttenberg's printed Bible to the study of the Kaballah, from Gibson's *Neuromancer* to the use of hypertext on the net.

"A troubling aspect of the new technologies of the word is the invasion of technological standardisation into the production of writing", says Davis. "Behind this problem lies an even larger one: the invisibility of the technical structures that increasingly shape art and communication. As we use more computerized tools, we necessarily engage the structures and designs that programmers have invested in those tools. Then there is the issue of the internet; an immense writing machine that, for all its creative power, encourages sound-bite prose, superficial linkages, and the confusion of data and knowledge. The Gutenberg galaxy is finally imploding, and we have yet to come to terms with the psychic and cultural consequences of our new network thinking.

"Of course, invisible structures have always been shaping thought and expression, in one form or another. The trick now is to explore ways to let the creative, recombinant and poetic dimension of language express itself in an electronic environment where the monocultural logic of a Microsoft can hold such enormous sway. I still think that hypertext and collaborative writing technologies have enormous potential, but in the short term I see a rather disturbing dominance of standardisation, as American English continues to transform itself into an imperial language of pure instrumentality.

"It's my hope that the net will enable us to move through the gaudy circus of superficial relativism into a more serious engagement with the ways that different institutions, practices, and cultural histories shape a truth that nonetheless hovers beyond all our easy frameworks", says Davis. "The way ahead, to my mind, involves the synthesis or integration of many different, sometimes contradictory ways of looking at and experiencing the world. The endless fragmentation of (post)modernism is boring: we ourselves are compositions of the cosmos, a cosmos we share in a manner more interdependent than we can imagine, and that cosmos calls us to construct new universals. Perhaps they will be universals of practice rather than theory; if you do certain things, certain things will happen. A new pragmatism. If we need religious forces to bloom in order to feel our way through this highly networked world, so be it."

Erik Davis, Techngosis, *Harmony Books (Grove Press), 1999*

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Tracing the departed

Martin Walch profiles Samstag winner, Tasmanian video artist Matt Warren

Pink Floyd, God Flesh, The Beach Boys, Canadians David Cronenberg and comic book artists Seth, Chester Brown and Joe Matt. This strange alliance of music and cinematics is typical of the diversity of works that inspire Tasmanian video artist Matt Warren.

His most recent piece is a video installation titled *I Still Miss You*, which has only recently finished showing in the new gallery belonging to CAST (Contemporary Art Services Tasmania). The work occupied a corner of the main gallery as part of the exhibition *Transmission*, curated by Jennifer Spinks, featuring the work of Sarah Ryan, Troy Ruffels, Leigh Burnett, Matt Calvert, Kate Warnock and Warren.

Within a screened-off section of the gallery, a suspended video projector beamed deep into a darkened 4 by 6 metre space carpeted with road metal an inch thick. A step onto the heavy gravel, and I was confronted by the amplified crunchings of my footfalls issuing from speakers in the ceiling. Here I stopped, turning my attention to the pool of flickering images on the wall.

Backed by a deep thrumming chord with an almost metallic edge which completely filled the space, the video unfolded as a series of impassioned monologues enacted by a man and a woman in a car in heavy rain. We see them from a distance at night, and yet cannot hear their dialogue. While the camera position remains stationary, the view closes in to focus on each face, sometimes pleading, sometimes ranting, while all the time washed by red and yellow sheets of light sprayed from the night traffic spilling past, periodically punctuated by a convulsive strobe that lit up the cockpit of the car like the wing of an aircraft.

A series of hypnotic sequences evolve that explore the dynamics of what seems like a relationship break down, all held in the tight confines of the steamy domestic sedan. The entire drama is seen through a foreground of luminous waves animated by the sweeping pulses of the wiper blades across an incandescent ocean that is the fish shop window of the windscreen.

A central thematic of Matt Warren's's work is an investigation of his own experiences of absence and loss, through a subtle and confident manipulation of his medium. Both of the characters occupy the driver's seat in the argument (physically and metaphorically), and this device is used to explore a series of alternative developments of the conflict. The viewer realises the arbitrariness of his/her own narrative assumptions, and this results in a process of reflection upon one's own existence, and beyond to the link between Warren's own work and the autobiographical montage of the comic artists mentioned earlier.

Warren has been working with video and sound composition since he taught himself to edit with 2 VCRs while at Hellyer College in Burnie, and his qualifications now include a BFA in Painting and a Graduate Diploma in Video, both from the University of Tasmania. Warren has just been offered a Samstag Scholarship to undertake postgraduate study overseas, and he is currently negotiating with Simon Fraser University in Vancouver to pursue an MFA in Interdisciplinary Practice, beginning late 1999. I have no doubt the Samstag Scholarship and associated travel experience will add to Warren's eclectic nature, and I'll be very keen to see how new influences enhance the elegant processes of layering and synaesthesia that characterise his work.

See page 25 for a review of Matt Warren's short film Phonecall *which screened as part of the recent Multimedia Mini-Festival in Tasmania,*

Strange interlude: a stitch in time

Grisha Dolgopolov enjoys being propelled towards new horizons at PICA's *Future Suture*

The only living life is in the past and the future...the present is an interlude...[a] strange interlude in which we call on past and future to bear witness we are living.
Eugene O'Neill, *Strange Interlude*, 1928

In the 1970s, "Suture" was a popular term for procedures by means of which cinematic texts would confer subjectivity upon their viewers. Not only a medical process, it was also a way for thinking through constant audience reactivation through sequences of interlocking shots. Although no one doubts the capacity of new media art to activate an audience, that activation has all too frequently been one-dimensional: either cool data processing or hot-palmed mouse clicking. The *Future Suture* exhibition at PICA (Perth Institute for Contemporary Arts) for the Festival of Perth was surprisingly different. This engaging, difficult and exciting web art installation by 4 Perth artist collectives took an unexpected turn into humour. Clearly that is their bandage for the haemorrhaging hubris of our strange interlude.

Future Suture is no eye candy, but hard chew multi-grain mind cookies. Audiences had to work hard and fast to make sense of and gain enjoyment from the work that was interlocking the old into the new. With imaginative stitching all 4 installations explored ways of sewing previous subjectivities to the gash opened by the technological transformations of future horizons.

Horizons (*http://www.imago.com.au/horizons*) was minimalist in terms of room decoration, but big on intertextuality and cultural resonances. Malcolm Riddoch, one of the artists, explained that "the site's basically a self-reflexive boys'n'their toys kind of thing, linking militarism with a specular approach to knowing and perception through a games interface, but fully web functional." The project works on a number of levels and has some fascinating things to say about time, indiscriminate targets and horizon theory. On one level this is a simulated geo-scopic rocket launching game resplendent with nasty voiced instructions for nose-coned views of hyper-intertextual destructive scopophilia—part Operation Desert Storm with hay-wire meteorology, and part firecracker home video—with a fair whack of Heideggerian theory as payload. Yet this rocket game also resonates with the naturalised absurdity of scud missile video playback and so-called radar targets that are in fact schools. Participants select a site on mainland Australia and launch a rocket at it gaining a view of the world from the rocket's nose cone at 500m. The indeterminacy of the target acquisition is sublime. The program blurb proclaims, "Horizons is a non-profit public service funded by the Federal Government of Australia and freely available to all Internet citizens world-wide." This is satanically perceptive. The Federal Government does in a sense facilitate the technology for launching attacks on Australia from anywhere in the world. But of course we can now stand proud that the attacks are self-inflicted and that our technology still calls Australia home.

Retarded Eye Team (Vikki Wilson and Cam Merton), *Radium City: Harvesting the Afterlife*

In contrast, *Radium City* (*www.imago.com.au/radium_city*) by the Retarded Eye collective achieved a funky juxtaposition between installation and screen. The setting was welcoming techno-boudoir baroque. In one corner sat a little Mac storyteller, the rest was dominated by an enormous Italianate bed with mirror and 2 TV monitors showing male and female soap stars getting deep, while below them the electronic bedspread pool was swelling with aerial urban images stitched through with endless binaries. The project sought to position the viewer as a sleepwalking flaneur via science fiction scenarios of the virtual future city that continually re-wrote themselves via a digital process of automatic writing. Here new technologies were mixing it with old techniques on a constantly refurbished palimpsest. The ideas were a heady mix. The pull of binaries was a buzz. The bed and the multi-plot storybook became 2 magnets. The interlude between was strange, but the text kept rewriting itself, mutating over time.

Of all the installations, *Project Otto* (*http://www.imago.com.au/otto*) was the most dependent on physical presence and manipulation of the environment. This huge and hungry hardware project was a dynamic bandaging of an unusual combination of old and new technologies. The networking interactions spiralled through radio, image, sounds, web and the tactile stimuli of a metal trolley on a rough-hewn floor. The stunning images of bodily close-ups sprawled across the wall like a Persian rug were activated by a mobile antenna trolley that picked up different radio frequency emissions from seven overhead disks that in turn generated sequences of deeply textured soundscapes. The images could be further engaged via a Dr Who-like console box. This was a good sweaty interactive space. It was damn sexy the way the installation totally activated a tactile, aural and intimate subjectivity that stimulated the imagination. The mix of radio and web, the old and the new, people in the gallery space and the site on the web, was tangible. As is the enormous potential of this project.

Tetragenia is aptly described as a "trojan web site that accumulates consumer profiles under the guise of 'caring'. Participants are harassed in a prolonged, strategic email campaign." Our hell is excess data, corporate-speak, dietary ethics, common sense advice for life, electronic surveillance and technological abuse. *Tetragenia* turns this into an art—ridiculing the new human face of corporations, the wealth of waste and electronic intrusions. At the same time, it offers eminently reasonable nutritional and ethical suggestions that loop in on themselves showing something a little less benign. It's a call to the consumers of the world to unite to promote ethical trade practice; and it cuts a fine line between a new seriousness and a classic piss-take. This absurdist installation tests the limits of the traditional ethics of privacy and marketing with harassing emails and data-frenzy. It is exciting to finally come across web art that not only engages with the contemporary info-excess but also does so with great comic timing. However, the timing of constant server breakdowns was deeply aggravating but, as Marshall McLuhan once said, "If it works, it's obsolete."

When it comes to imaging future horizons, as Malcolm Riddoch ruminated, the "horizon is the rocket eye view of the world. The spatial limits of the horizon is carried with us so that the horizon can never be reached." This can be seen as a cautionary metaphor for rocketing into future shock. But if we consider that by looking back, the past becomes another horizon—does this mean that we can never remember the point at which we were, or at which the horizons looked broad and welcoming? Or that history's horizons are carried with us but cannot be seen from the present and can never be reached in the future? This made me wonder, what's the big deal of getting to the horizon? Then again no one is happy to stick around in the strange interlude of the present. The problem is that if the future is not sutured to past horizons, sun-blindness is inevitable. *Future Suture*'s solution is to bandage these wounds with some serious humour.

Future Suture, *curator Derek Kreckler, joint initiative between FTI (The Film and Television Institute) & IMAGO Multimedia Centre Arts Program, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, February 11 - March 7; links to 4 projects at*
http//www.imago.com.au/future_suture

Grisha Dolgopolov teaches Television and Popular Culture at Murdoch University. His current research is on Russian junk TV - especially game shows.

Report

New media moves in Tasmania

Diana Klaosen looks at film, video and new media on the Hobart Fringe

The Hobart Fringe Festival was set up several summers ago as a means for performers and practitioners in the experimental and non-mainstream arts to gain greater exposure. Tasmania has a rich vein of talent, across all the arts, but rather too few opportunities for these talents to be showcased. This goes for the experimental arts in particular. The entire Fringe Festival functions on a lot of enthusiasm and goodwill and a limited budget. Happily, the organisers are able to bring together a variety of smaller arts events, some of which would be taking place in any case, giving them a wider profile by including them within the Fringe, which runs for 2 weekends and the intervening week.

One of the best resolved and most professional events within this year's Fringe Festival was the Multimedia Mini-Festival, curated by local video and performance artist and musician Matt Warren. Warren, current recipient of a Samstag Scholarship, will soon undertake MFA studies in Canada. Over the past few years he has been very active, statewide, in presenting individual, collaborative and specially-commissioned innovative public arts events combining elements of performance, sound, video and installation.

With few film events currently being held on any regular basis in Tasmania, the Mini-Festival was a terrific opportunity for artist-exhibitors and audiences alike. We have only limited opportunities to study film and video making in any depth—and professional openings are rare—so the existence of an enthusiastic culture of film and video artmaking and appreciation is doubly impressive.

One of the highlights was *Film & Video on the Fringe*, a well balanced evening screening of short films and videos, by mostly local artists, held at the theatre at the Hobart School of Art. (At the School of Art itself, the popular and well equipped Video Department, run by highly regarded video artist and musician Leigh Hobba, has been for some time teetering on the brink of threatened closure, ill-advised and unpopular though such a move would be.)

The stand-out works included the video *Where Sleeping Dogs Lay* by Peter Creek, looking at the consequences of domestic violence. Its absorbing 2-hander dialogue format is jeopardised by a tacked-on bit of drama, designed (probably) to provide some visual variety and 'action', but not a total success. Tony Thorne's amusing animation *Serving Suggestion* is a subversive piece about consumerism and physical stereotypes. Its humour is from the *South Park* bodily fluids and functions school of wit, but it manages to present its own, original take on this well-worn theme. The closing credits are amongst the most fascinating and well executed I've seen.

Prominent emerging local filmmaker Sean Byrne's *Love Buzz* takes a familiar if far-fetched plot device and makes it fresh and credible. There is some interesting—and deliberately self-conscious—dialogue, marred, however, by the technical limitations of the soundtrack. Dianna Graf's short (3 min) video-collage of still photographic images is a simple idea seductively brought to fruition. But perhaps the most engaging work is Matt Warren's short video, *Phonecall*, another very simple concept actualised, in this case, into something Kafkaesque in its disturbing unreadability.

Matt Warren, *I Still Love You*

It is night and a pyjama-clad Warren has clearly been woken from sleep by the ringing phone. The audience then simply listens as he responds; warily, laconically, impatiently and so on, to whatever is on the other end of the phone (which is never revealed). Something a bit suspect seems to be being discussed, but we can never quite tell; nothing is spelt out or explained. As in a genuine phonecall, there is no concession made for eavesdroppers; we get this tantalising, one-sided conversation. a monologue in effect, delivered by Warren in exasperated tones that hit just the right subtle comic note. The work is at once cryptic (in its spoken content) and familiar (the scenario of being summoned to the phone at an inappropriate moment, or for an unwelcome encounter). A minor masterpiece of observation and commentary.

Another interesting festival event was the setting-up at Contemporary Art Services Tasmania of a small video/digital art space, to remain in place after the festival, with a changing program of high-tech work. For the Mini-Festival, this multimedia room presented interactives and a quicktime movie along with examples of websites, all by local artists. For artlovers less than familiar with new media, this engaging program was a good introduction to the web and to computer-generated and interactive works. It is pleasing that CAST has taken the initiative to provide permanent exhibition space for this popular artform which is rarely shown at commercial or major public galleries. In its main gallery, CAST featured a challenging group show, *Transmission*, with the high-tech arts represented by Matt Warren's hypnotically atmospheric video, *I Still Miss You*, minimalist digital prints by Troy Ruffels and intriguing lenticular photography from Sarah Ryan.

Arc Up, a rave party featuring a multimedia presentation *It felt like love* (music and film projection by Stuart Thorne and Glenn Dickson, with animations by Mark Cornelius and ambient video by Matt Warren) completed the main Multimedia Mini-Festival, but a Super 8 Film Competition and the event *Celluloid Wax*, held at the quirky cabaret-style venue Mona Lisa's, also helped ensure that media arts had a high profile as an important component of the Hobart Fringe Festival.

Festival curator Warren observes, "I jumped at the chance when I was asked to curate the multimedia segment of the 1999 Hobart Fringe Festival because it's my area of expertise and I thought it would allow me to check out lots of new stuff I hadn't seen before. This new work needs to be seen and a festival is the ideal way to draw attention to it. The Film and Video on the Fringe screening attracted a full house and the Mini-Festival at CAST had a steady stream of visitors, so I believe my area of the festival—like the Fringe overall—was a success."

Despite the difficulties confronting new media in Tasmania, the outlook is encouraging: connoisseurs can look forward to the Australian Network for Art and Technology's 2-week masterclass/seminar in new media curating and theory to be held in Hobart in April. A highlight will be the associated exhibition of work by up-and-coming Tasmanian multimedia artists curated by Leigh Hobba, for the Plimsoll Gallery at the Centre for the Arts.

Film and Video on the Fringe: *The Fringe Multimedia Mini-Festival, curated by Matt Warren, various venues around Hobart, January 30 - February 7.*

For a profile of the work of Matt Warren see page 23 and for an overview of the Tasmanina arts scene see page 14

Review

A cinema of sonic possibilities

Keith Gallasch responds to recent books on sound and music in cinema

Coyle, Rebecca ed., *Screen Scores, Studies in Contemporary Australian Film Music*, AFTRS, Sydney 1998 distrib Allen & Unwin ISBN 1 876 35100 4

Lack, Russell, *Twenty Four Frames Under, A Buried History of Film Music*, Quartet Books, London 1997 ISBN 0 7043 8045 5

The romantic ideal of the composer alone, whose musical signature acts as an analogue to the individual heroics of the classical dramatic protagonist, is now severely compromised. The musical mind is no longer an autonomous site of invention, but a conductor of various sonic possibilities unleashed by technology.

Russell Lack

I'm a left brain film listener, one of that breed who for the most part consciously hears and enjoys film music while watching movies. It started in the early 50s when the local record shop had a sale and I picked up a 78rpm recording of Miklos Rozsa's melancholy main themes for the maudlin Christians-to-the-lions epic, *Quo Vadis* (1951). I haven't stopped paying attention. I'm not a collector, though looking through ageing LPs I do see Ry Cooder's soundtrack to Wim Wenders' *Paris Texas* (admonitions from Philip Brophy and Vikki Riley notwithstanding), the Jerry Goldsmith soundtrack for *Under Fire* (guitarist and sometime film composer Pat Metheny fronting the orchestra), Goldsmith's remarkable, spare score for Polanski's *Chinatown* with its plucked piano strings and noir trumpet, Howard Shore's *Naked Lunch* score for David Cronenberg (Ornette Coleman mixed into a ravishing orchestral noir-orientalist cross) and the same composer's *Crash*, again for Cronenberg, this time an exquisite chamber grouping of electric guitars. I also have the Michael Nyman works for Peter Greenaway, *Drowning by Numbers* the favourite. Mychael Danna's score from Atom Egoyan's *Exotica* (dance tracks mixed with Eastern instruments and voices recorded in part in Bombay) is a special favourite, though it's not quite the same without Steven Munro's sound design which has a near subliminal life of its own in the film (I'm looking years ahead to my own DVD copy).

The other night I was watching *The French Connection* on cable and was surprised by Don Ellis' spare, edgy almost atonal score, as if I'd never heard it before—it sounded adventurous by contemporary commercial movie standards. Bill Collins (on Foxtel) recollected the film's editor telling him that director William Friedkin had cut the car chase sequence not to Ellis' music, but to Santana's *Black Magic Woman*. Now there could be a good reason for that, the Hollywood production line tradition of the film score often only being ready by or even after the editing stage. Greenaway, on the other hand, would often film and edit to Nyman's scores. Cooder, however, created the score for *Paris Texas* after the editing and in a mere 3 days. Russell Lack, in his anecdotally and analytically deft *Twenty Four Frames Under*, reports Wenders' account: "When we finally recorded the music, Ry Cooder was standing with his guitar in front of the screen playing directly to the images. It felt like in a strange way he was reshooting the picture and like his guitar was somehow related to our camera."

The film composer's dream of playing an artistically integral role and an influential one in the audience's experience of a film underlies the history of filmmaking from the (none too) silents to the very loud present, whatever his or her (or the film theorists') belief in the 'audibility' of their art, ie the audience's consciousness or not of the music. It's not always a happy history, sometimes more complex than collaborations in opera or the musical. It's one that grows more complex as new technology comes into play, and always prone to commercial pressure and the final authority of the producer, let alone the pressure of many collaborators—orchestrators (once forced on composers as Rozsa recounts in Lack, and indifferent to individual style), sound editors, FX experts, sound designers, and those selectors of pop and rock tracks who now get billing of their own. A would-be film composer reading both Lack (for an accessible history of the form and of related issues, with brisk accounts of Bernard Herrman, Jerry Goldsmith, Ennio Morricone and others, including avant gardists, at work and in conflict) and Rebecca Coyle's *Screen Scores*, a collection of academic essays on Australian film music, could well be, and quite sensibly, deterred from taking on the art.

Given the paucity of serious theoretical work on the soundtrack (a bare handful of seminal works aside), and especially on Australian film music and sound design, Coyle's volume is an important initiative. It covers a lot of ground, offering a cultural studies account of the significance of soundtracks (violence, aboriginality, camp, ethnicity), engaging with film theory issues (auteurship, taxonomies of the function of the soundtrack, narrativity), the plain facts on copyright (a scary chapter for all its reassuring words), and an invaluable discography.

Coyle offers essays dealing directly with the film composer's experience. Jan Preston ("Some of my best music has been for sex scenes") does a good job of detailing the stages of the scoring process, emphasising the importance of knowing your director and their musical tastes and describing an unnerving but successful venture into improvisation on Tom Zybrycki's *Homelands*. Michael Hannan and Jude Magee deliver an instructive account of composer Martin Armiger's attitudes to film composition drawn from considerable experience and introducing even more variables into the collaborative picture. Armiger believes that because the composer usually comes late to the production process, in a tight schedule, often with the director burnt out, and because there is little in the way of a common language between composer and the other collaborators, he or she faces very particular problems. He's had good experiences (Jane Campion on *Sweetie* rates well), but elaborates usefully on the problems of the insertion of pop songs and the pros and cons of new technology: "...the beauty of writing for the orchestra, or for a group of players, is that you write it and then record it, and it's done. With MIDI, it's never done. You kind of never finish, because you keep changing it." Or, directors keep insisting on changes because they know they can be done quickly. Worse, compromises come from the use of popular songs, often at the composer's expense. These tunes can also eat up the sound budget. Classical grabs can also be problematic—the Beethoven inserts that composer Bruce Smeaton only heard at the final mix of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

Armiger and Preston worry about directors who don't know what they want. As Preston puts it: "They know what they don't want, and that's just what you wrote for them." In the course of their use of Peter Weir's soundtracks to illustrate his demise as an auteur, Bruce Johnson and Gaye Poole implicitly detail the challenges for the composer when faced with a director who does know what he wants, sooner or later. Coyle's own piece on the films of Yahoo Serious offers a disturbing picture of the triumphs, innovations and defeats Armiger experienced with an auteur (or a commercially minded pragmatist)—a complex of new technology, several composers, sound effects and endless permutations thereof, as well as a director who is a musician.

Other essays (deserving more attention than I can offer here) also turn an ear to the relationship between sound and image in ways valuable for the working or would-be film composer to reflect on, but also offer insights for understanding the role that music in particular generates meanings and experiences in the cinema. Films and their soundtracks covered include *Romper Stomper* (Toby Miller), the *Mad Max* Trilogy (Ross Harley), *The Piano* (Theo van Leeuwen), *Priscilla Queen of the Desert* and *Muriel's Wedding* (Catharine Lumby). Tony Mitchell, on Italo-Australian film and with a rare sense of style in this often dry as dust volume, is one of the best. The worst is Fiona Magowan's bizarre paean to *Shine* ("a maze of narratives...a labyrinth of musical narratives...*Shine* uses music in specific ways to question the construction of an Australian nationalism...*Shine* does not need to sell itself with some inherent Australian identity") and, bizarrely, includes a detailed defence of David Helfgott as musician. It adds nothing to the issues addressed by the volume.

It's interesting that the subtitles for both books cite 'film music' as their subject, when in fact they address the whole range of sound in film—'cinesonics', as Philip Brophy labels the terrain. And it's not simply a modern techno-phenomenon as Lack's account of Jean Vigo's 1933 classic *L'Atalante* illustrates. It's a pity that Brophy hasn't a piece in *Screen Scores*, doubtless because his attention is usually on American film as in his *RealTime* column, *Cinesonic*. Brophy's ability to write evocatively of the listening experience, and with an ear to detail that escapes many of us would have added much to the volume about *ways of writing* about cinema sonics. Obviously there was nothing available on Australian film. Instead Brophy as filmmaker and composer is selected to represent the avant garde (though an artist with strong if critical mainstream interests, hence the title of the essay, "Avant Garde Meets Mainstream"). One of his closest collaborators, Philip Samartzis, offers a vividly detailed technical, ideological and aural account of the making of Brophy's scores for his own and other's films (Ana Kokkinos' *Only the Brave* and Marie Craven's *Maidenhead*).

Coyle gives us ample and generous content with which to begin to think about sound in Australian film. Lack provides the bigger historical picture of film history since its inception (with scant attention to Australia save *Strictly Ballroom*, and Maurice Jarre intriguingly at work on Peter Weir's *Witness* with a chamber ensemble of 'synthesists'). Read together, these books are a good introduction for the general reader and the composer ready to engage with sonic complexities that go well beyond the romance of solo composition. In Coyle, Preston and Armiger even air their thoughts about 'an Australian style' of film composition, denying it, seeing instead the positive and negative effects of low budgets and spare orchestration, and a rich inventiveness and keen, if problematic, engagement with new technologies. Now I'd like to read about the remarkable sound in the music-less *Kiss or Kill*, and I'd like to know why Shostakovich's Chamber Symphony found its way onto the soundtrack of *In The Winter Dark*, otherwise moodily scored by Peter Cobbin (for an otherwise less than interesting film). And, in *Doing Time for Patsy Cline*, how did composer Peter Best work with director Chris Kennedy and the film's editor on cutting whole scenes to country tunes? The appetite is whetted, the ears sharpened.

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Philip Brophy's Cinesonic column will return in RealTime 31.

Column

Telediction

Jeff Gibson on the dynamics of Shrink age and TV addiction

While developing his techniques of free association, Freud would lay his patients down upon a comfortable couch in a softly-lit room, a situation conducive to the trance-like state he felt they needed to achieve in order to reconcile pathogenic memory with rational thought. Having virtually given up on hypnosis as an effective cure, since its revelations remained essentially inaccessible to the subject, Freud believed that all manner of behavioural disorders might be set right if dark traumatic occurrences could simply be brought into the light of conscious awareness. And so amongst his many achievements, Freud, in championing the sofa as a site of healing and catharsis, might also be credited with foreshadowing the condition of TV reverie, that corrective state of wilful suspension we couch-potatoes know so well.

Fact and phantasm coalesce in the twilight zone of deep TV. Lulled into a condition of mild alterity, the viewer drifts passively between the crosscurrents of a self-contained symbolic order and a commercially oriented imaginary. Thanks to Hollywood demography, television knows—and is happy to exploit—our deepest secret fears, salving yet perpetuating rote insecurities with banal platitudes and insincere reassurance. To the addict, TV is a psychic sedative, a welcome dose of distraction underwritten by a complex of ideologies, that enables the anxious subject to feel both discrete and connected. Yet just as pop therapists caution parents against an over-reliance on pacifiers, too much television will limit your sociability. An intense desire for television, then, might be thought of as a nostalgia for an impossible state of pre-linguistic oblivion. Then again, some addicts are just bone-lazy slobs.

Whatever way you slice it, TV is a normalising institution. There is a dialectical engagement with a collective unconscious that draws you in, whether by sympathy or dissent, to a pluralistic social quorum. We surf this public psyche in search of things which clarify our identities, things which enable us to discharge our angst, or which stimulate and empower our sexualities. In effect, television does our dreaming for us, weaving tangled narratives from our most conflicted desires. And in placating and reorienting the troubled beast with tales of revenge, resolution, and redemption, TV serves a very similar purpose to Freudian psychoanalysis.

Yet TV and psychiatry have had an uneasy relationship over the years. First generation media culture reflected an early mistrust of Freudianism, which still persists amongst the more obstinately deluded. The common wisdom, to which TV became quickly integral, was that since psychiatry seemed to be based upon intangible hypotheses—the stuff of college educated intellectuals with too much time on their hands—it must therefore be a high class con job, a cynical ruse designed to extract money from the unsuspecting by preying on, and prolonging, the emotional frailty of the socially challenged. Of course, Freudianism also posed a threat to the old patriarchal regimes which hinged upon the severe repression of emotion, the very knot that Freud was so keen to undo.

Though psychology—the poor person's psychiatry—is now factored into all aspects of good social behaviour, the class chip concerning private therapy persists. At best, shrinks are portrayed as sentimental 'care professionals' whose job it is to restore normality and moral certainty, and even then there is often an implication of sinister, exploitative intention. At worst, they are portrayed as greedy vainglorious fools scamming the public with bogus notions of oedipal contestation. In such narratives it usually transpires that the good doctor is the biggest screw-up of all, a convenient rationalisation for the failings of a lazy, or limited, mass consciousness. Dr Marvin Monroe of *The Simpsons* spoofs the former model—the self-appointed popular authority—while the brilliantly scripted *Frasier* pits one against the other—low brow phone-in therapist (Frasier) versus exclusive high brow professional (Niles). Of the 2, Niles is seen to be more neurotic, and hence less credible given the nature of the profession, while Frasier is portrayed as more democratic and down to earth, though no less upper crust. He is an intellectual to whom the working classes can grudgingly relate. Don't forget, this character did originate on *Cheers*.

For the definitive mistrustful portrayal, though, it's hard to top the Frank Oz directed *What About Bob?* In a triumph of pop cultural affirmation, Bill Murray plays the lovable low class lunatic to Richard Dreyfuss' loathsome psychiatrist. A career self-help author and practitioner, Dreyfuss is clearly more concerned with his egotistic empire-building than the welfare of his clientele. "Baby-stepping" Bill Murray unwittingly pushes him to the brink, causing the pompous professional to expose his callous charlatanry to the world via, guess what: television. (Please permit me to say that for this and *Groundhog Day*, Bill Murray deserves a thousand Oscars.) And what about Ally McBeal. Shrinkage is the very fabric of her morality. Indeed, undergoing analysis is so much a part of the new urban ethos, not to mention the amended American dream—get married, get divorced, get therapy—that no one any longer bats an eye at the need to reach out and unload.

Speaking of reaching, Woody Allen, voicepiece of the self-dismantling me-generation, and the world's worst advertisement for psycho-therapy, has managed to institute neuroses as a basic human right. In fact, every conceivable angle regarding the psyche has been worked in recent years. (Witness De Niro and Crystal's current hysterical satire, *Analyze This.*) Shrinks get good and bad raps on sit-coms, drama series, and chat shows. Yet even though we may have moved beyond paranoid tales of loopy Viennese doctors, there is still an undercurrent of suspicion concerning the profession, if not so much the practice, of psychiatry. And it must be said that these feelings of mistrust are mutual. Psychiatry has been dragging TV through the mud for decades, blaming it for everything from anorexia, bulimia, and obsessive compulsion disorders to murderous fantasies and psychotic episodes.

Kelsey Grammer in *Frasier*

While television may well be a sugar-coated dummy stuffed in the mouth of many a needy being, holding it accountable for individual or collective pathologies only deflects our attention from the root of the problem. Just the same, it certainly has much to answer for in terms of social responsibility. TV is like the doting uncle undermining parental authority with extravagant gifts and baseless flattery (a classic family fable beautifully redeemed by John Candy's soul-searching *Uncle Buck*). Television is thus bad-parent and quack-psychologist—quick-fix pretenders who will massage your emotions, if only to soften you up and fuck you over.

Report

Not quite transforming

Kirsten Krauth goes to the pictures with David Malouf

David Malouf—in the inaugural Transformations lecture *It's the Movies, Stupid!*—spoke to a near-full house with nostalgia about the golden age of Hollywood film and its impact on his childhood/culture in smalltown Brisbane. A cinematic writer whose characters—Ashley in *Fly Away Peter*, Gemmy in *Remembering Babylon*—confront turning points in Australian history, Malouf explored, and avoided, the shapes films made on his/story in the 40s and 50s.

Malouf grew up seeing 8 films a week, recreating dialogue and the "pleasure of a new possibility of being" in the schoolyard, sitting in the darkness at local cinema palaces with names as evocative as "castles on the Rhine." He argued that Hollywood film—the sensuousness of light, the focus on parts of the body that audiences had never really noticed before—shaped a hidden (personal) history, changing even the nature of sexual response, multiplying what could turn you on: the shape, for example, of Rita Hayworth's arm inside a long svelte glove during a strip tease, where she took nearly nothing off. What was missing from Malouf's account was how this fetishisation of body parts, this new eroticism, translated into action in everyday teenage life. With a title such as Transformations, I wanted to unearth buried longings...I wanted to penetrate the personal (even a fictionalised account would have done).

He shut me out. He concentrated on the popular culture phenomenon, widely discussed, of what makes a 'star'. He discussed his favourite flicks, the usual suspects (many my faves too): *Bringing Up Baby*, *Casablanca*, *His Girl Friday*, *Some Like it Hot*—movies where men could be feminine and women could have shape ("jello on legs", as Jack Lemmon famously said). He spoke of the curious 20th century phenomenon of growing up with the stars—in my era it went from cutiepie to sexkitten, Drew Barrymore; from superhero to wheelchair voyeur, Christopher Reeve. And then, the more frightening phenomenon of actresses who don't transform at all—Faye Dunaway, Sophia Loren—trapped in tense magnificence into their 60s and beyond.

Examining intertwining notions of Australian history and Hollywood film brought up an interesting idea: that Brisbanites saw the representations of the 20th century—the city, skyscrapers, traffic, drifters on the road and women who talked back—before the modern age arrived here; that Hollywood film prepared Australians, was a training ground, for technological change. Again, when the American troops landed on Brisbane's shores in 1941, Malouf (strolling along the docks with his father) had been there done that, joyously swept along by bell-bottoms and short-back-and-sides from his silver screen memories.

As for contemporary film, in his reading of *The Truman Show*, Malouf expressed regret for an audience too in-the-know, too conscious of their cannibalisation, too aware of their part in the cultural/economic pleasure exchange; but surely part of the joy of film watching (he mentions this earlier in relation to the stars) is an awareness of the self-consciousness of Hollywood film, is to let the cinematic apparatus gradually reveal itself, to be winked at by the filmmakers, to be acknowledged as part of the process (eg the feelgood end of *There's Something About Mary* where all the characters dag on and sing to camera; or the manipulation of genre/rules in *Scream*, all the more pleasurable for horror flick fanatics).

It's the Movies, Stupid brought up well worn ideas of Hollywood cinema as low culture for the popular masses. Although this high/low divide was perhaps appropriate to the 40s when he was first immersed in film, he didn't really explore the idea of 'trash' at all—were all Hollywood films seen as trash? Why didn't his parents like the same films? At what point did he start liking Bergman? Are Hollywood films still as alluring? Or, especially, what impact did his passion for popular film have on his decision to be a writer, on his loves, his landscapes? Malouf's lecture would have had greater impact if he'd screened his favourite scenes. I wanted to see sailors sing, Marilyn walk, Marlene blink. There was a sense too that Malouf could not apply his own criteria to films made today, that he was no longer so passionate about the 'popular'; *Shakespeare in Love* was judged as worthy because it was "so well written". What about *Wild Things* or *Con Air*...now there's some good (white) Hollywood trash.

David Malouf, It's the Movies, Stupid!, *Transformations Public Lecture Series, Seymour Centre, Sydney, March 8*

Review

Praise
director John Curran
writer Andrew McGahan
distributor Globe Film Co
April release

Like the current Australian release *The Sugar Factory*, *Praise* started off as a novel (Andrew McGahan's Vogel award winner) and hinges on the voiceover of a loner. From an elegantly elusive start (a calendar with blue-eyed, blue-checked honey-blonde American girl opens to reveal dirt road dreams, the glossy silver of the inner-wheel), Gordon's world spins without him (in an inspired downbeat performance by Peter Fenton, lead singer of Crow) until he is thrust into the itchy company of Cynthia (Sacha Horler), desperate, fragile, sexually aggressive and allergic to everything.

As a contemporary look at sexuality, *Praise* redefines male/female roles in the hetero couple. Gordon is not interested in sex; only drugs make kissing erotic. Cynthia, covered in welts from eczema, demands sex every day, to remind her that she's alive. After making love her body bleeds. Her outer skin becomes her enemy, diseased, alien, but it is her pursuit of gratification at all costs which destroys her relationship with Gordon (and severs the viewer too). Horler's performance melts and screams off the screen, obliterating desire, Betty Blue-like in intensity and destruction. "Don't lose me yet", she says to Gordon, the phrasing turning her into a jewel and the responsibility for action, for splitting her and them apart, onto him. At the airport, when she leaves, he looks out onto empty luggage trolleys being wheeled away...

When Cynthia meets Rachel (Marta Dusseldorp), Gordon's dream woman from the dirt-road past, she is at her most vulnerable. "You're not even real" she accuses, and when Gordon finally gets the chance to express his tenderly held desire, Rachel proves (as Cynthia instinctively knew) to be as unreachable as an angel. The repetition of Gordon's words and the physical emphasis, *my hand is on Rachel's breast*, transforms the language of fantasy, the moment (in your mind) into the moment (in the flesh). Gordon survives on a lifetime of imaginings.

Director of photography Dion Beebe (*Floating Life*) and production designer Michael Philips (*The Well*) create a maze of moods in *Praise*. The run-down boarding house where Gordon lives is a sombre Gothic burrow of weary men: masturbating in the showers, dancing with old loves, arguing in dark corners; the suffused Brisbane light a soft underbelly of broken memories, the soundtrack a constant drone of TV snippets and alcoholic mutterings and gentle Western drawls from The Dirty Three.

The relentless, dreary, angry, drudgery of McGahan's novel is lifted by Fenton's performance. Bringing his pop-star persona to the role inevitably means Gordon finds charisma. However the film's focus is still on a man who, trapped by inertia, needs other characters to propel the narrative, reluctantly dragged by the force of their personalities. When Gordon visits dirt-road home, director John Curran highlights a scene—the family cricket match—that says it all: sporting beer in hand and floppy Christmas hat, Gordon sits limply on the oval outer, alone in shot, and when the ball is struck past him he lolls to the side in a vague drunken attempt to reach it. Another family member runs past him to grab the ball before it reaches the boundary.

Kirsten Krauth

Peter Fenton & Sascha Horler in *Praise*

Happiness
writer-director Todd Solondz
distributor Dendy Films
March release

In the first instance, Todd Solondz' *Happiness* looks generic enough: an independent black comedy from the director of *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (another independent black comedy). But somehow, just as it seems appropriate to sink into the cinema seat, complacent in the belief that "hilarity will ensue", there is a need to sit upright again and start thinking. How annoying. In its complete refusal to guide the viewers' response, *Happiness*, rather surprisingly, unravels relentlessly into something outside easy description.

The narrative is linked by 3 sisters living in New Jersey and the various people whose lives interconnect with theirs. Trish (Cynthia Stevens) is a housewife who believes she "has it all", Helen (Lara Flynn Boyle) is a successful yet dissatisfied writer and Joy (Jane Adams) is the sensitive loser. The film proceeds on a confronting trajectory as it scratches the surface of their seemingly banal worlds. Yet any attempt to relate the film in this way misses the point, as its uniqueness lies in the way it plays with tone. It is held together by the underscoring of the often brave performances with close-ups and long-takes; by uncovering an impolite impulse to stare.

In terms of a genre connection, it follows the logic of the horror film if anything, where producing a certain discomfort in the audience is an integral component. However, what it most closely resembles (and the publicity poster is a clue) is the world of underground comics. The ensemble of actors are Daniel Clowes (*Eightball*) characters come to life. The restrained, deadpan performances only add to this sense. Their initial familiarity is in their cartoony quality; they have a connection to generic characters which is tangible, but they are fundamentally different in kind. This inflection allows Solondz to explore the terrain of that medium—the truncated narrative, the sense of locality and the parochial, the distantly connected recurring characters, all leading towards a *sui generis* world view. The film's humour also derives from the distance Solondz has been willing to go to explore the idea of interior worlds. Rarely has such an ironic title been so poignant or such a deadly serious film so funny.

Needeya Islam

Love and Death on Long Island
writer-director Richard Kwietniowski
distributor Maverick Films/Niche Pictures
April release

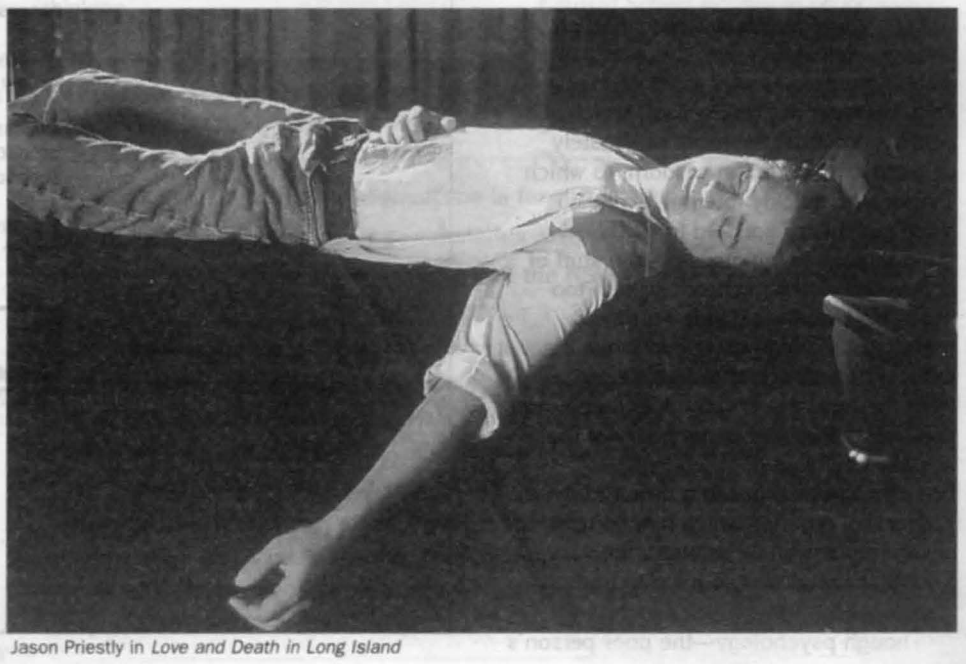
Reptilian-faced wealthy widower Giles De'Ath (John Hurt) is an English writer untainted by the modern technological world, until he sees an American teen movie by accident and falls obsessively in love with a youth in a bit part. The teen star is Ronnie Bostock (Jason Priestley), who in a revelatory scene in *Hotpants College 2*, lies on the counter of a pizza restaurant with tomato ketchup stains on his crotch and chest. De'Ath sees a sacrificial pre-Raphaelite painting and the allure of dead pretty boys.

This is the cinematic equivalent of a Scott Redford exhibition. Redford often depicts the latent homoeroticism in relationship to River Phoenix and Kurt Cobain framed in the gallery context. The genre makes you wish you'd kept those Scott Baio scrapbooks. With an adolescence of idols behind us, a woman's gaze can be just as queer. Interestingly this film is not overtly about "gayness" so much as abject desire.

Ostensibly set in 1996, the film has more of an 80s feel—maybe in the 80s Priestley would have been convincingly under 30 and postmodernism was yet to define the collision of high and low culture. This is all succinctly parodied—the pedagogue Giles inserts Walt Whitman lines for Ronnie to deliver in *Hotpants College 3*. Overall the film begs the viewer to trace a lineage between *Death in Venice*, *Lolita* and the fan letter.

Gilbert Adair's *Love and Death on Long Island* is one of my favourite books. Ultimately filmmakers aren't as cynical as English novelists like Adair and his contemporaries such as Will Self. Neither are actors; for Hurt the film is about "the passionate pursuit of beauty, in a place where one would not expect to find it, leading to a discovery of love and life".

Keri Glastonbury

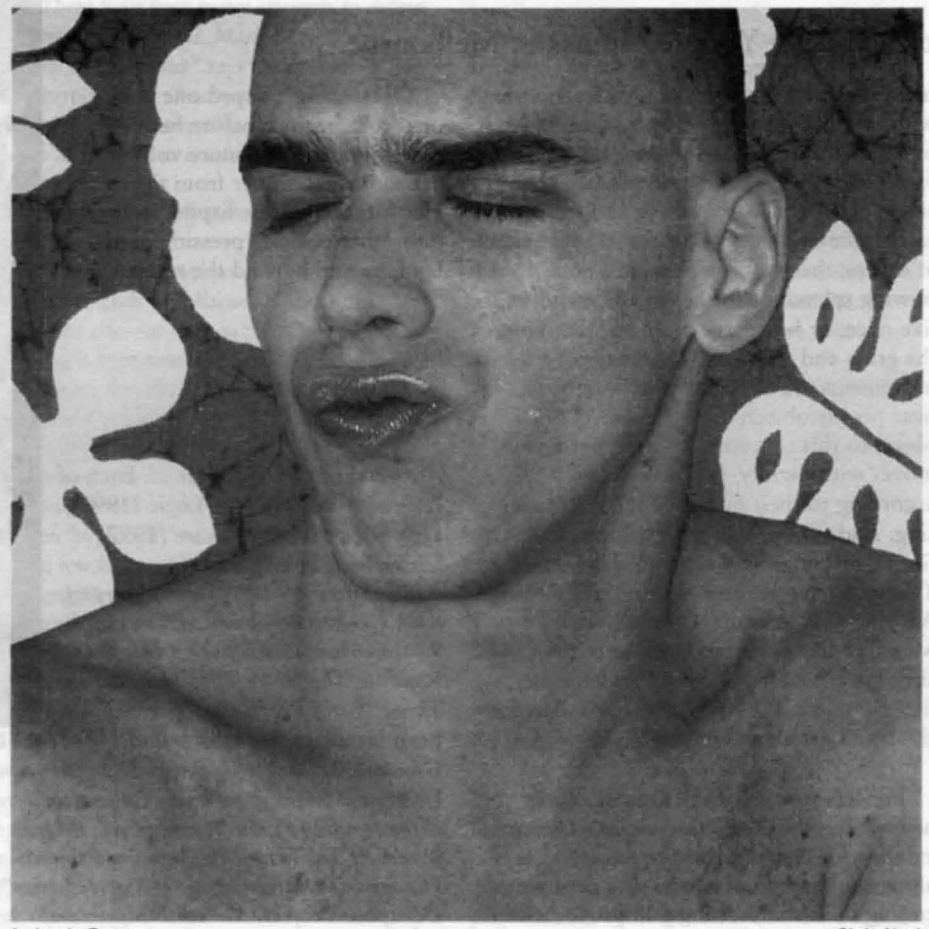


Jason Priestly in *Love and Death in Long Island*

Cold climate conflict

Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras guest, dancer and choreographer Javier De Frutos, talks to Erin Brannigan

When I spoke to Javier De Frutos he had just finished his season of The Hypochondriac Bird *which was part of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival. Our discussion covered the production itself, his career as a London-based artist with Venezuelan origins and seemed to constantly veer back to what he sees as a crisis in dance at the end of the millennium.*



Javier de Frutos Chris Nash

Geography—Community

A lot of people who see my work find it difficult to place as a product that has come out of England. Although I am an unequivocal member of the British community I am an outsider—all communities have outsiders and all immigrants, no matter how hard they try, are always outsiders. Countries need that. I don't know if it's an outside perspective—I never pass judgement on the things that I am experiencing. I'm very direct so I'm always at odds with 'Englishness', yet I think that is the very reason why I have remained in England, even while not liking it—the confrontational nature of my work and people who cannot deal with it.

I think I understand the pace of a country like Australia that has more beneficial weather. I've never produced my work in Venezuela, my native country—always in cold countries and I think that conflict shaped the work. The tension works because the work is so autobiographical. I'm not very happy about sharing happy things but dealing with more anguished moments. Then somehow the work becomes an outlet. Happy moments are so few I don't know if I would share those.

In the context of Mardi Gras I'm becoming more aware of how diverse as a community we are. I had a great big sense of pride when I came—I caught the launch at the Opera House and I was surprised at how political it was and how attentive and interested those 20,000 people were. I am also surprised at how—mainstream is not the right word—it is a major festival in this city.

The Hypochondriac Bird

I'm actually sorry that it was the first example of my work here because it comes without any preparation. It's probably the least direct work that I have produced. But there's a line in the work that deals with the absolute boredom of a long term relationship. As Wendy Houstoun commented, it really looks like the 2 of us had different books of instructions for this relationship and suddenly, having read the books, we realise we're not even in the same library, the same bookshop.

I think there is a threshold of pain in (the sex scene) that one has to go through because we [De Frutos and Jamie Watton], as performers, go through that in the work. The more we did the sex scene the more bored we were with it and we started to match the way the audience felt. The audience is a very contagious source of energy. Together, we had to reach that level where nothing is happening any more, which happens to relationships when they are on their way out. Someone commented on the structure of the piece where the climax of the work is not a climax, or such a long climax that it stops being a climax and becomes an anti-climax. It introduces a new sense of structure. So the work starts as representational, becomes high melodrama, then the 'installation', then the drama again. That meant you had to pace yourself which caused problems with the audience.

It's also quite brutal and realistic—when you look at the vocabulary we had to go for a more realistic range and it's tough because it doesn't necessarily satisfy dance-goers. And it goes back to the whole question of what is dance anyway? This is probably one of the most danced works I have ever done. From beginning to end it's non-stop dancing. It might not be recognisable as that qualified thing that we know as 'dance', which is frightening in itself—that we cannot move on.

I think there was a mistake in the Mardi Gras' publicity. I never did a version of *Swan Lake*—it was a piece that used *Swan Lake*'s score because those ballet references are close to me—the sound. Music is very much like perfume. My mother used to wear Yves Saint Laurent Rive Gauche in the beginning of the 70s, and when I smell it my mind just goes back—I see the bottle, I see the bedroom...the music does that to me. What does it do for the audience? If you have a sound that is immediately recognisable like *Swan Lake* you go for the narrative you know and the layers start—you try to match what you see with what you think you know—and it becomes an interesting exercise for those who allow it to happen. The Mardi Gras adds another layer——the choreographer is gay and what you're seeing is a gay love story. So you go to the theatre with all that information—perhaps too much.

Design

The Hypochondriac Bird was the first time I was working in a very clean, clear looking space—I always work in very black spaces. My partner, an Australian Terry Warner, is the set and costume designer and Michael Mannion is the lighting designer. They are the oldest members of the company and it was something we wanted to work on. When you work in a black space you have the possibility of making the space smaller or bigger with lights—the magic of the black box. When you work on a white space you never forget how large the space is and psychologically it gives it a grander context, emphasising how irrelevant to the order of the world the lives of these 2 people are.

The point with the design (a aquare of illuminated clear plastic pillows) was to make things that could be everything and nothing and it was up to the audience to decide what they were seeing. I realised that the works I had done in the past had a sort of half-finished architecture. (I studied architecture for about a year and abandoned it.) There are always marks on the floor that could be a laid out plan. The original design was a half-finished house—every clear plastic pillow becomes a brick.

Movement and Meaning

I'm a great believer in first of all creating an atmosphere—the movement can be quite unimportant but if the atmosphere is right then the movement can be right. In a workshop years ago this playwright got this actress to do the same scene, peeling potatoes, in many different places in the house. It became so clear. Dancers say 'my character wouldn't move that way' or 'that movement doesn't mean anything, doesn't signify'—like 32 fouettes signifies a lot anyway—like, 'thank god for the 32 fouettes, now I get it, now I know what she's feeling!' So suddenly it was clear to me that the movement wasn't important but the context of the movement and the intention of how you did the movement. So describing it means nothing—she's peeling potatoes—and suddenly the physical action changes in her muscles and peeling potatoes becomes the medium to express something else—she could be stabbing someone in the stomach. I can't bear the idea of trying to find a movement that's going to mean something. What's the point of looking for something that's going to look like a kiss when the kiss is such an effective thing to do?

Dance

This piece has been a major turning point for me in regard to the effectiveness of dance. At one point we have to stop looking at the museum pieces and the function of the body. I'm so terrified now that most dancers I know are concerned about whether their lower back is aligned with their neck and there's nothing else. Something that was only meant to be a tool for you to feel better physically suddenly became an aesthetic goal. It seems to be the only branch of the arts that doesn't want to suffer. If you're really worried about a healthy body and healthy mind you're not an artist any more—just let it go. Go and teach aerobics or something, but you can't just go on stage and tell me how aligned you are because I'm not going to connect with you at all—certainly not with my own alignment.

What happened with the underground scene—it's just completely gone. Some of the so-called underground productions that are happening in London are frighteningly similar to commercial productions but with less money so they don't look as good. Does anyone have anything to say for themselves any more? Who wants to be second best? Is it some kind of millennium bug that suddenly we have to go into more direct ways of communicating, that dance is starting to lose its touch? People don't read poetry any more, they read newspapers.

The Hypochondriac Bird, *choreographer, dancer and music Javier De Frutos, dancer Jamie Watton, music Eric Hine, lighting design Michael Mannion, set and costume design Terry Warner; The Seymour Theatre Centre, Sydney, February 10 - 14*

Stored roots, stacked histories (everybody loves their Mama)

Zsuzsanna Soboslay travels from Monk in New York to Dumas in Melbourne

New York, New York. So new, so not: thanks to our global televisual mind, Manhattan seems as familiar to me as Sydney. Just how new can my travelling eyes be?

The hugeness of America—its landscape, language, art collections. Bigness is big here. And still, a baby flirting on the underground turns smiles; or, crawling minute amongst a room of huge Hopper canvases (sole people in desolate places), she is hailed as a work of art. This big and little place.

I leave my regards in Broadway as we sprint past its success and neon signs. Winds peeling off our caps, yester-snows melting into sludge, ice-air making us cry. Head to smaller venues: the Joyce (200 seats) celebrating *Altogether Different*, the Danspace its 25 years. Little is big, but here too the new is so old you wonder how new new can be. This is where much modern dance kicked its own arse into gear, and the bruise of this pleasure shows. *Like an echo in the bone of old sorrow, the arc of an arm splaying old joy*. Do we break all the ice in new dancing? But I ask the wrong question: we move not just in the moment, but within all time. Sometimes, we glimpse the future.

Sean Curran, Irishman, older than his troupe, dancing perhaps so he and another man can kiss, dancing perhaps so that his feet and mind can talk to each other. Whose Irish jig is this? I've had it with you, Paddy (and Michael), the riverdance broken by a boy skitting stones across the water, water heading towards the falls. Curran is an imp, a questioner, a choreographer who in ensemble can make his dancers meet Brahmakrishna as much as Flatley (via Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane); a soloist who can strip back his mask (and fooling) to lay open the doubts of his mind: *If I move like this, if I make my body thus follow my mind, what does my mind follow?* A sudden vista of Tibetan calligraphy projected huge across the back wall folds him bare…whilst still, the feet patter, the torso erects, the arms fling. This is Irish, and not Irish—melded with the histories of his suffering, his addictions, his loves, his training-grounds. Eclectic, mad, tender, nuggetty and vulnerable; he is crying and laughing.

Kevin Wynn is arcing limbs, Alvin Ailey, white and black American history. His dancers wear sexy leotards and spread their thighs. He renders a 20-strong ensemble as individual yet complexly cohesive as a grand railway clock. I am tired in the complexity of the watching. I am invigorated as well, exercised as in a class. His beauties are only "viscious" [the work is titled *Viscious Beauties*], perhaps, if you watch from the viewpoint of classical ballet, but they're strong, quirky, eruptive, their organs (lungs, livers, spleens) dance. To the live jazz band, their feet tamp ground. And then, in the solo, quiet—because you have to stop the music to hear old scream. The black dancer spirals out, a yearning colonial dream played out on husks of corn. Protest breaks into grace; the vigour of the body breaks a new world.

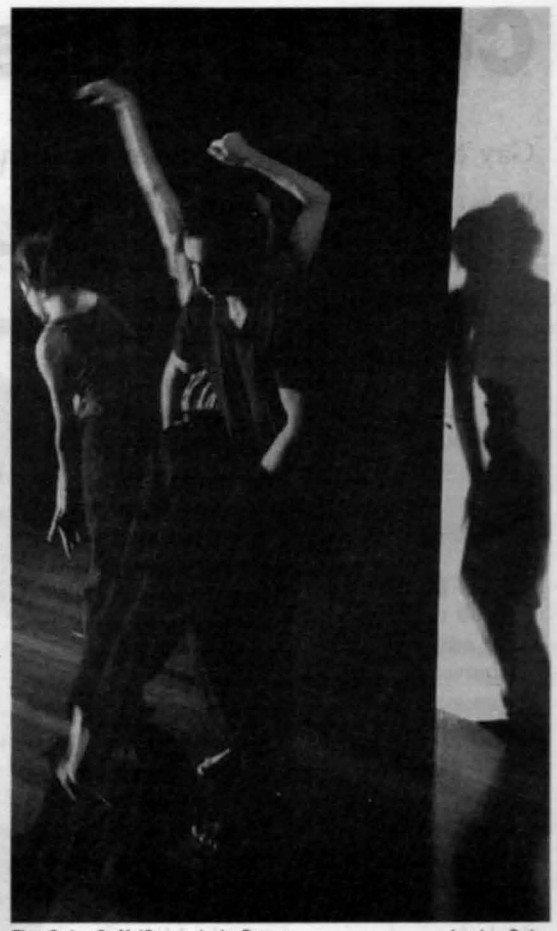
Meredith Monk's *Celebration Dance* leaps back to what harvest ritual might have been before New Age sacred niceness took its hold. Extracts of songs and music from various Monk works is interspersed with an eclectic range of texts from Basho to Rumi and tribal and initiation songs. Here, and always beneath our feet, what sacredness. Sometimes I hear and see the earth splintering open, turning on its axis; at others, the performers enact a soft bowing splendour to the soil. They fidget, like mice, or horses, or children, thanking the grass and the stars. The physical movements are so simple that I actually hear people objecting to the dance. But I object to this objecting, as each performer moves with dignity, and unselfconsciously according to their means. They do, move, sing. And till the soil, with the minimal finesse but huge skill that soil-tillers use. This is sharing harvest, not watching form. And the audience adores it, adores Meredith, roars her in, because of the sheer and audacious joy with which she fills the space. She told me she wondered if she could get away with it, but she did.

In Melbourne, Russell Dumas' brave new work *Oaks Cafe/Cassandra's Dance* exhibits his characteristic virtuosity alongside the awkwardness of a new world cutting in. It's interesting and provocative that Russell chose to work this time with actors as well as dancers from his familiar stable. What I see is a difference in their feeling about dancing, an intensity with more emotion from the actors (how grim that turn, how self-amazing that supporting action) to a kind of perspex translucency from those of dancer-background. A difference of the colour of their histories. In the moves of greater virtuosity, perhaps the dancers fare better; but Russell tells me afterwards that virtuosity requires amnesia—a forgetting of how they got there. We do not share their sweat. Perhaps for an actor it is harder to forget: memory is a part of their technique. The actor's Method: Who is it, what is it, where is it, when is it, why is it: the quintrivium of questions that perhaps never can quite leave your dancing mind.

So, we have some re-membering, some forgetting, hearts on their sleeves or transferred to the space between limbs. But there is also another membering here: Dumas examining his own making, a history of his works in continuous enlarged projection, beyond the back of the stage visible through a door into the next room. Glimpses of old moves, echoed or ignored in the dance of bodies on the floor. This is unprecious history, giving a freedom to our looking. So, too, in the open side door and unshuttered windows, letting the late afternoon light in, letting it sink, letting our watching roll over into night. Night watching, the time of thinking about the dance, after the dance, here becoming the same moment with the dance. This is a gift of time. And the audience is full of children, perhaps watching something they already recognise. (There were no children in the New York halls. Are they risk? They might have fuzzed the edges of the made.)

In that struggle with our memory, that edge between re-membering, dis-membering, letting the past fall into death or stay honoured in the colour of how we move, lies the turning over into the terrible possible world. Being has teeth. The awesome contradiction of it: inheritance cuts its edge in every mouth and helps the young tear into new food. And words, form, quickly follow on. Like Cassandra, talking (in)to the future—but perhaps this time being heard.

("Danthing", lisped one young one from behind, before her repetitions became more voluble and her mother took her from the room. Her futures, seeing, lisping, wriggling into other pushing pressing needs, lay here and beyond the room.)



The Oaks Café/Casandra's Dance Lesley Solar

Altogether Different Festival: Each of Both *(1998)*, Symbolic Logic *(1999)*, Folk Dance for the Future *(1997) [ensemble]*; Five Points of Articulation *(1994-5) [solo excerpts], Sean Curran Company, choreography Sean Curran, visual design Mark Randall, The Joyce Theatre, Jan 5; Three World Premieres:* Viscious Beauties, Black Borealis *(solo: Giovanni Sollima)*, To Repel The Daemons, *The Kevin Wynn Collection, choreography Kevin Wynn, music Peter Jones, Phillip Hamilton, lighting Roma Flowers, David Grill, Jan 7.* "Silver Series", *Danspace Project, Meredith Monk and vocal ensemble,* A Celebration Service, *conceived, directed & composed by Meredith Monk, texts compiled by Pablo Vela, Jan 9, Joyce Theatre, Soho, NY.* The Oaks Café/Cassandra's Dance, *director, principal choreographer Russell Dumas, performed & co-choreographed by Danielle von der Borch, Sally Gardner, Keith March, Trevor Patrick, Colin Sneesby, Cath Stewart and Kerry Woodward, Dancehouse, Melbourne, Feb 7*

Townsville site for turning points

Ausdance's Naomi Black previews the 1999 Australian Youth Dance Festival

How did you define yourself when you were starting out in dance? What points of reference did you use? Who was there to help you with your next move? There can be significant turning points for young dancers which either assist to transform them into professional dance practitioners or help them to realise a life of dance may not be quite what they had expected. Ausdance responded to these issues in youth dance in 1997 with the inaugural Australian Youth Dance Festival.

Creating the right environment for the facilitation of creative development is an important emphasis of the Australian Youth Dance Festival which this year is being held in Townsville, Queensland from June 27 to July 2. The initiative brings together youth interested in or already practising dance to gain further knowledge and to formulate networks of peers across Australia. The program is based on workshops, forums, discussions and performance.

Catering for all levels of dance, the festival has 3 major strands; one for young dancers who are still students, one for new dance graduates and independent artists, and one for youth dance leaders and teachers. Youth, for the purpose of the festival, is defined as being anyone from 10 to 30 years of age.

Festival tutors have been selected firstly for their specialised knowledge in a certain field and secondly for their ability to work with people of differing age groups and dance knowledge. Students who have had little dance experience will be able to participate and enjoy the festival equally with those who have studied dance technique intensively. Technique sessions will be available every day in many different dance styles.

Some of the festival's scheduled workshops cover dance education for teachers; skills development for young dance writers and youth dance leaders; and choreographic, film and new technology workshops for independent choreographers and dancers. Panel discussions and forums will be presented by emerging artists on such topics as the processes behind choreography; how cross cultural works fit into the landscape of Australian dance; gender in dance; the moving body in relation to film; the importance of dance research; the relationship between traditional and contemporary dance practices; and dance and meaning. As well as emerging artists, more established artists such as Chrissie Parrott will deal with topics like Motion Capture and the use of technology in dance.

To play host to a major national youth dance event is an exciting prospect for the Townsville dance community. For this reason the Festival's performance component has been integrated into the local community as much as possible.

Local residents and the many tourists in the region will be able to enjoy free lunchtime outdoor performances presented by young people, in the centre of the town throughout the week. The Townsville Civic Centre will host 2 large public performances on June 28 and 29 featuring the Festival's resident professional dance company, Dance North and its youth counterpart, Extensions Youth Dance Company and international and interstate dance groups like Steps Youth Dance Company from Perth. A range of new work by independent choreographers will be presented on a daily basis.

Young dance students (10 to 15) will be involved in a special component of the program, the Community Dance Project which will focus particularly on dance and art making processes. Victorian choreographer Beth Shelton and visual artist from Tracks Dance in the Northern Territory, Tim Newth, will lead this project with the participation of the Mornington Island Dancers. Beth and Tim have previously worked together on large-scale community projects with young people and are able to work with students at many skill levels. Other dancers and visual artists will assist them in making the work, which will be shown on Magnetic Island on the last afternoon of the Festival, Friday July 2.

For more information visit Ausdance's AYDF website at http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/ausdance/youth *or contact the National Project Officer, Ausdance National Secretariat, PO Box 45, Braddon ACT 2612. Tel 612 62488992 or Fax 612 6247 4701*
ausdance.national.anu.edu.au

Streets of dancing

One Extra and Dance Week 99

As its contribution to the celebrations for Dance Week 99, One Extra Dance presents *Inhabitation II* directed by Tess de Quincey with sound design by Panos Couros. This is a work for a company of young performers, in which "the environment of the body negotiates and uncovers the structure and sensibility of the site, investigates a sensory level of existence." It has grown from de Quincey's investigations into the process called Body Weather which she is exploring with the group in a series of workshops organised by One Extra in partnership with the Seymour Centre. For DeQuincey, the project builds on the 12 hour performance, *Epilogue and Compression* with Stuart Lynch at the 1996 Copenhagen International Dance Festival and her choreography for 24 dancers on the chalk cliff coastline south of Copenhagen as part of *Transform 97*, a festival of site specific dance works. The performance of *Inhabitation II* is a free event and will be held in the Seymour Centre Courtyard, corner City Road and Cleveland Streets, Chippendale on Saturday and Sunday May 1 - 2 at 6.30 pm each evening.

Dance Week (organised each year by Ausdance) grew from a celebration of International Dance Day observed throughout the world on April 29. Other highlights of this year's event in NSW include the outdoor dancing extravaganza *Streets of Dance* in which 100 tertiary dance students join professional artists in an "audacious outdoor program." Another 200 will take to the football field for the Sydney Swans home game. There's lunchtime dancing in Martin Place and a Festival of Dance at Darling Harbour. All the major companies will be contributing works and the ever expanding *Bodies* program kicks off on April 28 with work from contemporary and classical contemporary choreographers as well as a week dedicated to Youthdance. The Australian Institute of Eastern Music's 3 day Festival of Asian Music and Dance at the Tom Mann Theatre (April 22 - 24) includes eminent South Indian dance specialist Dhamayanthy Balaraju performing for the first time in Australia.

RT

Dance Week 99, Sydney, April 24 - May 2. For further information on Dance Week activities in your state contact Ausdance.

One Extra Dance, workshop

Between freedom and anticipation

Philipa Rothfield makes her way through original home

A trio of objects begins the piece, their arbitrary motions engendered by some offstage intentionality. An oval stone rolls onstage, wobbles, rolls, wobbles and finally rests. Quiet reigns. The passage and beauty of the stone's journey says it all about this piece, wherein a setting was created which made space for the contemplation of this simple, moving object. We slowly meet the protagonists in this medley of objects, both animate and inanimate.

original home is improvised. It has movement, objects and sound; 3 people and many artefacts, both natural and constructed. Graeme Leak is credited with the sound objects but all the performers use them. Ros Warby stood on a weathered stone, a limpet extending her limbs against a white canvas. Shona Innes wielded enormous seed pods, ridiculous weapons in a comic duet. The objects made music but they also sang their own presence. I almost felt the plethora of objects was too much—transported on and off stage—they tended to break with the chaste atmosphere of the space. But then I decided that their transport was like a Brechtian device intended to mark the boundaries between particular sections of the work, and to allow the performers to be their ordinary selves.

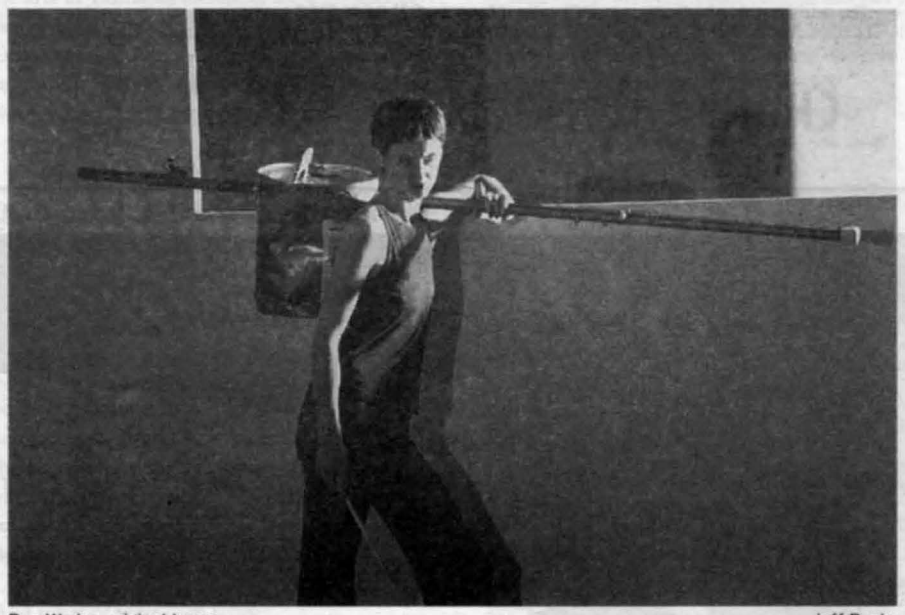
The performance space had been reconstructed for the event, an interior layer of walls, gaps, pleats, and a wide rectangular window at the back from which spilled darkness and light. Warby stood against the window, not doing all that much. So much is conveyed in-between. Leak's sense of musical timing was voluminous, allowing for an interweaving of kinaesthetic content.

The 3 performers made duets and trios, showing their year's work together. Yet they didn't blend into one another. At one point, Warby and Innes were bent over, each with one arm up. One arm so different from the other, animated according to 2 distinct corporealities. Innes' opportunistic humour—lapping up the possibilities of the moment—was not mimicked by anyone else. The performers coalesced in the space of a single performance whilst listening to their own muse.

The trace of Deborah Hay's recent visit was manifest here: no rush to get anywhere, always already there. Although it could be argued that all dance is a form of improvised movement, when you watch an 'improvised work' there is a sense of something over and above established choreography. Perhaps the difference lies in the observer. But the felt quality is of indeterminacy, a lack of predetermination, of multiple and not singular pathways. The point at which this is conveyed is when nothing is happening—for in that moment there is a vacillation between freedom and anticipation, between future and past, a pair of extremes which is only ever resolved in the present.

original home, (returning to it), *director Ros Warby, choreography/composition/performance Ros Warby, Shona Innes and Graeme Leak, lighting design Margie Medlin, design Ros Warby, Margie Medlin; Dancehouse, Melbourne, February 5 - 14*

See Elizabeth Drake on sound in original home page 37



Ros Warby, *original home* Jeff Busby

A differential tale

Philipa Rothfield unearths *Action Situation*

Ideas are multiplicities: every idea is a multiplicity or a variety...multiplicity must not designate a combination of the many and the one, but rather an organisation belonging to the many as such, which has no need whatsoever of unity in order to form a system.

Gilles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference*, Athlone Press, London

Action Situation, Deanne Butterworth, Kylie Walters, Jo Lloyd Kate Gollings

I cannot tell you what this piece is about. I can only write and in so doing produce another text: a re-iteration destined to become something other than the work itself. *Action Situation* foregrounds the fact that repetition becomes, inevitably, a moment of difference. Not only was there little replication between the 3 performing bodies, but the work itself highlighted the gap that lies between different, yet related, artforms.

Action Situation is an assemblage of music, script, movement, lighting and space. Each of these forms retained an integrity such that they did not blend into homogeneity. Not only was the music, for example, a distinct yet influential strain but the script also held its own character quite apart from the movement. In other words, Lasica does not choreograph to the 'beat' of the music, nor is her movement a mime of an underlying narrative. And yet, the differential participation of these elements did not lead to cacophony. There was a certain cohabitation between sound and movement. Similarly, there was a sense that some kind of narrative was manifest in the dance.

Were we archaeologists, we might be able to unearth the original script that instituted the narrative structure of the work. The ordinary viewer, however, is offered little by way of clues or references. No Rosetta stone is offered to translate from the hieroglyphs of moved interactions into some sense of the everyday. For example, there were times when one, sometimes 2, of the performers trod on the prone mass of the third. Was this a gesture of dominance, aggression, dependence or something else entirely? We will never know. Similarly, movements were performed under the watchful eye of one or other of the performers. There was a sense of bearing witness to an activity, that the performers shared a world, but what that world consists of is anybody's guess. The only signification I can be certain of was when the 3 held hands during the curtain call. That gesture of naked camaraderie contrasted with the complex, interesting, detail of movement and interaction which comprised the substance. As far as movement is concerned, this is a very dense and satisfying work.

Although there were a variety of actions which could be interpreted as derived from some human strain of interaction, the work had an anti-humanist character, almost post-human. Rather than inhuman, it did not subscribe to any lyricism nor make reference to an instantly recognisable world. Although the audience has to work hard to take the work in (like looking at abstract painting), this is also its strength. Were there to be obvious references to 'relationships' or 'communication', the central premise would be lost, for *Situation Live* is about the abyss which lies between different modes. The music interacts with the movement; it does not mirror it. By the same token, narrative is not something to be illustrated by dance. Dance is able to form its own narrative, to be both inspired by the script, but not a servant to it.

Mimesis presupposes a sameness across forms. *Action Situation* is about difference. Even the language we use to speak of it becomes alien to the work itself. It cannot emulsify the disparate elements. Rather, the textuality of the written or spoken word can only add another layer to this already complex work.

Action Situation, *directed and choreographed by Shelley Lasica, performers Deanne Butterworth, Jo Lloyd and Kylie Walters, music Francois Tetaz, script Robyn McKenzie, lighting design John Ford, costume design Kara Baker; Immigration Museum, Melbourne, February 12 - 20*

In the design

Wendy Lasica looks for clean lines in Chunky Move's Melbourne Fashion Festival showing

For Chunky Move's contribution to the Woolmark 1999 Melbourne Fashion Festival Lucy Guerin's group work, *Zero*, is a sophisticated and daring piece. Made for the entire company, it is an episodic but not literal progression of large and small group and solo sections, comprising a work that makes for compelling viewing. Guerin has set up a formal but abstract structure that defies our expectations. There are continual surprises—your attention is drawn from one part of the space to another, from big movements to tiny details. Sometimes a trio in a downstage corner is mirrored in the opposite corner upstage. Sometimes the ensemble work is crisp and tight, other times it is looser.

The work subtly builds to its conclusion when Phillip Adams and Luke Smiles perform a virtuosic duet. Adams manipulates Smiles, asserting his power by containing and constricting Smiles' movement. They remain physically connected and confined to a tight square of light centre stage. The dependency play is riveting and one of the more obvious emotionally charged moments.

It is clear in *Zero* that Guerin's decision to work without a theme has actually freed her to make more potent choreographic decisions than in her last work, *Heavy* (1998). However, I was acutely aware of every lighting cue and change in the soundtrack tempo, which I found distracting.

In complete contrast to Guerin's abstraction and clarity comes Gideon Obarzanek's *All The Better To Eat You With*, a late 20th century panto-style presentation of Little Red Riding Hood. Dancers sporting exaggerated character costumes recreate the narrative through mime and rather hackneyed interpretive movement sequences. Given the desensitisation of us all (children included) to violence and death through accessible popular culture forms, this interpretation of what is a scary children's story goes no further than the basic expectations of how this story could be read in current cultural context.

It is literal and simplistic in its storytelling and lacks the dynamic movement vocabulary we have seen in some of Obarzanek's previous works eg Bonehead (1997) and C.O.R.R.U.P.T.E.D.2 (1998) The set, however, is stunning. Also designed by the choreographer, it is a series of simple, stylish aquarium-like installations, that bubble, slosh, reflect and absorb light, complemented by a large pool table-sized slab of light—sometimes used as a screen and perpendicular to the floor, sometimes horizontal, hovering above. It tilts, turns and creates a fascinating diversion to the live performances happening around it.

Obarzanek's effective design for *That's Not My Movement, But this One Is* (a short work with Guerin) also provides much of the interest for that work. Small, candle-lit perspex boxes clustering near the 2 dancers, but gently swaying, exude a warmth that does not exist in the unsatisfying solos these choreographers have created for each other. The sense of incompleteness leaves me wondering why the clarity of the design is not as apparent in the movement.

There were some breathtaking and believable performances, especially from Fiona Cameron, Luke Smiles and Phillip Adams in *Zero*, but I missed the worldly understanding inherent in the performances of Obarzanek's first Chunky Move ensemble. The loss of key performers like Narelle Benjamin and Brett Daffy, who have been replaced by some technically able but less experienced performers, has created a less individualistic approach to the performers' interpretation of the work. The strength of Chunky Move in the past has been this sense of the personal within an ensemble setting.

Chunky Move, Bodyparts, *choreographers Gideon Obarzanek and Lucy Guerin; performers Luke Smiles, Lisa Griffiths, Phillip Adams, David Tyndall, Byron Perry, Fiona Cameron and Kirstie McCracken; collaborators Damien Cooper, lighting designer Audra Cornish, fashion designer Peter Haren@TDM, composer Darrin Verhagen, costume designers Laurel Frank, David Anderson; Merlyn Theatre, CUB Malthouse, Melbourne, February 16 - 27*

Based in Melbourne, Wendy Lasica works as an independent producer of music and dance events. Most recently she project-managed Shelley Lasica's Action Situation *in Melbourne and is currently arranging a northern European tour for music ensemble Jouissance in August 1999. She was the Director of the 1998 Next Wave Festival.*

Falling slowly...

Trotman and Morrish are like those old couples who have cohabited for decades—they know how to share a bed (read stage). Although they are very different performers, they slip in and out of each other's narratives with ease, turning the tables and reversing predicaments. Each successive performance extends the work of the previous night (the season runs to 6 performances). The spoken commentary by Morrish proceeds like the automatic writing of the Surrealists, uncensored, and full of free associations. Morrish happily assumes maniacal, arch and eccentric characters and does so in this somewhat apocalyptic piece. By contrast, Trotman's guileless persona creates trouble and amusement only indirectly. His speedy movement is light and elfin, his little looks to camera are wide-eyed and open.

Avalanche has much more 'dancing' than their last piece, *The Charlatan's Web*, perhaps because there is greater usage of music. Trotman and Morrish are not trained dancers but they move with commitment and personal style. In fact, their lack of training produces a certain sort of critique of masculine ways of moving—they are not sporty men, they are not men 'doing' dance, they are happy to be laughed at, and they cover space in unusual ways, neither seeking nor rejecting grace. The effect is of seeing men work together and co-operate with a mind to the work at hand. *Avalanche* will be shown as part of Sydney's *antistatic* dance event this year.

Philipa Rothfield

Avalanche, *Peter Trotman and Andrew Morrish, Dancehouse, Melbourne, March 5 - 14;* antistatic, *The Performance Space, Thursday March 25, 8pm. Enquiries 02 9698 7235*

Peter Trotman and Andrew Morrish, Avalanche — Neil Thomas

continued from page 34

trailing, uncertain "or..."; and while Father orders Son to ask him anything, his replies seldom relate to the questions. All the exchanges use a similar affectless inflection, a sort of anti-Mamet naturalism like strangers eavesdropping on strangers, conversations in a void. Behind these facades is a distillation of the empty rituals of family life, of trying to be together and raising a son. The most practical instruction from the Father is a pathetic lesson in how to shoot a bow and arrow but even this will backfire.

Mike occasionally interrupts to describe his dramatic raison d'être—"I tell you now, I'm looking for the guy who killed my brother and get revenge for my brother's killing." It turns out this guy is the Father. Mike tells the wife that her husband took many lives, committed many atrocities for the government. He kills the Father. The violence is stupid, clumsy and comic, but also horrific with its hard, barebones punches, kicks and holds, executed in a detached, formal manner. After the Father lies dead on the floor, Son returns and tries to kill Mike with his toy bow and arrow. He misses and Mike also disposes of him. These denouements are all the more shocking for their undramatic playing. The Wife left in the room with the bodies of her family, unsure of what has happened or what she might do ("I've never seen this/Have you ever seen this?" she sings) and is sung a love song by Mike ("Baby, when I look in your eyes/I get high/Could it be that maybe tonite/You and I/ Will fly?").

During the play, each of the characters sings one of these pop songs over cheesy, 80s power-rock chords. They press Play on a hand-held cassette recorder and lo-fi heavy metal provides their backup music. Maxwell jokes that he likes to call his plays musicals "just to piss people off." In these segues into flatly sung tunes, however, he captures a private, very tender moment for each of the characters. It is a formal game in the play's structure which only allows the characters to express themselves via a mass commodified medium as if singing along to the AM radio we might reveal our secret selves. It is a beautiful irony in a simple, powerful chamber play for late capitalist America.

The Father's song to his Son sums it up: "I remember dis one place/It was like a Ye Olde Town/But they had a new Concert Hall/Concert Hall slash Sports Facility/They had Grandstand and new seats that rock/People screaming out and running around/Think about this place when you decide/Where you want to live when you decide/I saw White Snake/Play with Motorhead/Saw Kenny Rogers/Play with Sawyer Brown/Saw Moody Blues/Play with Blue Oyster Cult/I saw Hockey der/And Opera too/Think about this place when you decide."

My initial question was of course an impossibility; a fiction dependent on conversions of time and place. Unfortunately I was unable to see new works by other exciting young companies such as Elevator Repair Service or the multimedia Builder's Association. I did, however, see a video of *The Law of Remains* by the late Reza Abdoh which proved that his early death robbed contemporary theatre of one of its loudest, bravest voices. His frantic, violent theatre was an urgent, confrontational exchange. *The Law of Remains* staged in several areas of a disused hotel in New York (and various found sites in Europe) montaged theatre, dance, and multimedia to imagine Jeffrey Dahmer starring in a film made by Andy Warhol. Artaud's impossible theatre on fast forward to the apocalypse.

I was also lucky enough to see several of Abdoh's former actors (Juliana Francis, Tom Pearl, and Tony Torn) in Richard Foreman's latest piece, *Paradise Hotel*. This insane, psychosexual burlesque begins with an announcement that the play we are about to see entitled *Paradise Hotel* is actually a far more dangerous and possibly subversive play entitled "Hotel Fuck" which threatens to be replaced by yet another play entitled "Hotel Beautiful Roses."

New York was a fat smorgasbord. I saw mad hip hop jams; postmodern European dance—Frankfurt Ballet and Meg Stuart's *Damaged Goods*; Fosse extravaganzas—Ute Lemper in *Chicago* and *Cabaret* at Studio 54; as well as galleries galore and uptown, downtown ramblings.

Yes too much is good enuff.

Benedict Andrews is a freelance theatre director. He has produced works for Magpie2, Brink, Blueprint and Sydney Theatre Company's Directory programme.

Looking for elsewhere

Benedict Andrews sees contemporary performance in New York

I am currently travelling on a Gloria Payten and Gloria Dawn Fellowship. This theatrical odyssey allows me to visit companies in New York, Brussels, Berlin, Paris and London. While in New York I attempted to find out what cutting edge theatre was being made by young artists. Here are 2 possibilities.

Richard Maxwell's *Missing House*

Adrift in the perspective plane *Tilly Losch* is a dreamy visual theatre piece conceived, directed and designed by 28 year old director Michael Counts for his young company GAle GAtes et al. Counts' work blends visual arts and performance to create highly realised collage spectacles. In the last 4 years he has made site specific performances and installations in diverse locations including the 51st floor of a Manhattan skyscraper, the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, on 30 acres of Pennsylvanian farm, the streets of Prague, and Min Tanaka´s Body Weather farm in rural Japan.

GAle GAtes now have a more permanent home, a 40,000 square foot warehouse in the Brooklyn area known as DUMBO (Directly Under Manhattan Bridge Overpass). This grainy, industrial precinct is a giant noir set nestled between the spans of the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges. In a city where the fearsome price of real estate forces small, independent companies to share tiny, black-painted basements and storefronts, the GAle GAtes warehouse is a fairytale. The size of the space complements Counts´ vision and ambition. Last year he presented the multimedia promenade spectacle *The Field of Mars* based on Tacitus´ account of the burning of Rome. The segments which I watched on video were loud, fragmented and baroque. The audience roamed through the vast space watching tableaux, dances, dumbshows and large metamorphosing installations.

Tilly Losch (which I saw in December) is a very different work in that the audience is seated and the predominant tone is more meditative. It is the first part in a trilogy Counts is developing which he describes as a dreaming of the 20th century (Part II *1839* will premiere in April 1999; Part III *So Long Ago I Can't Remember* in Spring 2000). *Tilly Losch* is a "panoramic triptych inspired by the works of Joseph Cornell, Andrew Wyeth and the film *Casablanca*." Accordingly the style is both extremely painterly (much like early Robert Wilson) and cinematic, often employing techniques of closeup, longshot, dissolves, soundscapes and voiceover. The audience are seated on a long, narrow bank of plush, red seats facing a miniature proscenium arch set in a massive wall of black fabric. Counts uses this gap as a frame and screen to play with scale and perspective. It is a magic box and tunnel of illusion. Counts is like a child playing in a giant toy theatre re-arranging his puppets, sceneries and backdrops, making objects appear and disappear. Hypnotic images recede and transform. Drama is replaced by mosaic, tragedy by melancholy and characters by figments in a series of shifting associative patterns.

Initially the space is closed down into a small chamber by a scrim covered in layers of graffiti (part NYC street, part Middle Eastern iconography). It glows ghostly and incandescent. Two women dressed in red fezes and weird white spherical dresses float in from the wings. In their leading hands they each carry a small black gadget. When they press it, a tiny LED light blinks and triggers ambient electronic chimes in the air. The scene is an invocation of wonder, but also a *Tin Tin* cartoon of cyber Sufis. Into this fragile world track 2 women dressed as French Foreign Legionaires (replete with the requisite pencil moustaches) seated at a table playing chess. A 1940s military radio flies in. They play a bizarre ritualistic, flirtatious game across the chess board and with the radio dials—Piaf sings, voices hiss through static, planes fly over. The scene flaunts its artificiality as genre, as romantic colonial North Africa via Hollywood. When the scene has evaporated, the back wall is swung open and from the deepest recesses of the space shines a bright, flickering white light down the tunnel and into the audience's eyes. It is the mystical 'light at the end of the tunnel' and the eternal beam of the film projector—we have become the screen.

A pastiche of scenes from *Casablanca* are lipsynched. Passports are checked, lovelorn Yanks wait in foreign bars, Sam plays that song again. The guard tries to stop the plane and is shot, falling centre stage trailing a long, stretchy phone chord connected to the proscenium. She plays at being dead, later she will return and perform an awkward striptease substituting her male uniform for a plush red 18th century dress and powder makeup. She is one of the figures who wanders through the piece looking for elsewhere. A man lies on an island reading a book and drifts away through the mist; a ghost audience tracks past on a never-ending row of red plush chairs at the far end of the tunnel, our phantom, nostalgic mirror; women in evening dress play violins in a woodland; people float a few feet above the floor; the hot air balloon from Cornell's assemblage "Tilly Losch" flies over a mountain landscape. In a stunning painterly quotation, a scale replica of Andrew Wyeth's pastoral *Christina's World* appears. We watch the sun rise over a miniature farmhouse in a wheatfield. The lights in the house turn on, cicadas chirp, clouds pass by, and a woman dressed as Christina drags herself on from the wings and takes her place in the 'painting'. She looks back at the clouds, the house, the balloon passes across the sky. She is composed, part of a composition.

The most breathtaking and fully realised sequence in *Tilly Losch* also quotes 20th century American painting. A tableau of the exterior of an apartment building recalls Hopper's views into melancholy, inner city windows. The cross section of the apartment is set midway in the tunnel. As across a Downtown street, we spy into other people's lives as they drift around their rooms. It is naturalism made anonymous by voyeurism, the strange intimacy of watching windows. We glimpse gestures and make up our own stories. A couple returns home in one apartment and a domestic scene is enacted, while next door a man returns home; he removes his jacket and pants, disappears into another room, but returns with a record which he lovingly removes from its sleeve and places on a turntable. When he opens his window, we hear muted strains of jazz over the city traffic hum below. As he sits on his sill smoking and gazing out (presumably into the opposite apartment) the music slowly builds until Nina Simone is singing *Love Me or Leave Me Or Let Me Be Lonely* loudly over the house speakers. Suddenly, 2 light boxes snap on in the downstage black of the proscenium: in one a couple savagely kiss; in the other a man scrutinises his face as if the frame were a mirror. It is a clever overlay of longshot (the apartment) and extreme closeup (the lightboxes) which captures a sweet, sad collage of public and private lives in this big city.

Such dynamism is often rare, however, in *Tilly Losch*'s opiate driftings. It is a nice place to spend some time, a pleasant diversion, but somehow lacking core. Counts abandons narrative in favour of a shifting spectacle through which he leaves threads which an audience can choose to follow. He wants his theatre to inspire a childlike wonder, to flex the audience's imaginative muscle. If so, it is a gentle workout like lying in a field and watching patterns in the clouds. There is no anarchy in this world, no neuroses or blood or hunger. Despite its technical perfections and elegance, sometimes *Tilly Losch* feels like that 19th century hot air balloon, a flight of fancy for a leisure class.

Missing House, written and directed by 31 year old Richard Maxwell at PS122, is the polar opposite of *Tilly Losch*. It is a downbeat, fucked-up family psychodrama played out in a deadpan anti-style. Where *Tilly Losch* is a silent movie and gallery of frames within frames, *House* is a minimalist staging of American suburbia as total wasteland. These characters have been consumed, replayed and shutdown, but behind their numbed exteriors search for contact, community and maybe even love. It might all be a lost hope, like a fable passed down from ancestors, but they need to still try. Richard Maxwell was a founding member of the celebrated Cook County Theatre Department in Chicago. His work in New York includes *Flight Courier Service*, *Ute Mnos Vs Crazy Liquors*, and *Burger King*. Currently, he is co-writing *Cowboys and Indians* with former Wooster Group writer Jin Strahrs. If Michael Counts' work bears traces of Wilson's theatre of images, then Maxwell belongs to a history of American wordplay which includes Sam Shepard's most splintered narratives, and Richard Foreman's reconfigured everyday languages.

The story (as such) of *House* concerns a dysfunctional family, government corruption, murder, and flight from an assassin. These pulp riffs, however, are embedded within a style which is as removed as a blank stare. Maxwell calls it an attempt "to come as close to neutrality as you can" both in terms of staging, writing and delivery. The result is like hearing the thoughts of the subjects of Richard Avedon's portrait series *The West*. The work is funny in the deadest pan, but also contains a cumulative sadness in its broken missing conversations. The set is an exact replication (right down to scuff marks on the walls) of the company's rehearsal space in Manhattan. Set inside the larger basement room of PS122, it is a flat shallow slice of a room, anonymous but damaged from habitation—like a prison waiting room, or a dirty underground gallery, or one of Beckett's chambers as found object. It is empty except for a payphone on the wall with take away pizza menus plastered on it, exposed pipes and one small side window. Eight fluoro lights hang above the room and are the only lights used in the show. There are no possibilities for decoration or naturalism here.

The lights flick on and 4 people file on—2 men, a woman and a 10 year old boy; They are Mike (Yehuda Duenyas), Father (Gary Wilmes), Wife (Laurena Allen) and Son (John Becker). They stare uncomfortably and self consciously out at the audience. Mike stands over by the phone (where he will remain, mostly silent for much of the performance) and the family stand together. They fidget, stare, wait for something to happen. Their postures are naturally gangly and their costumes recycled leftovers from some late 80s suburbia—a bad suit, an apricot felt tracksuit, a Dolphins jacket, a T-shirt with kittens on it. The Son wears a black T-shirt with 'survival gear' printed on it, tucked into stonewash jeans. His hair is parted and his eyes have a haunted, hollow look like he got old too quickly.

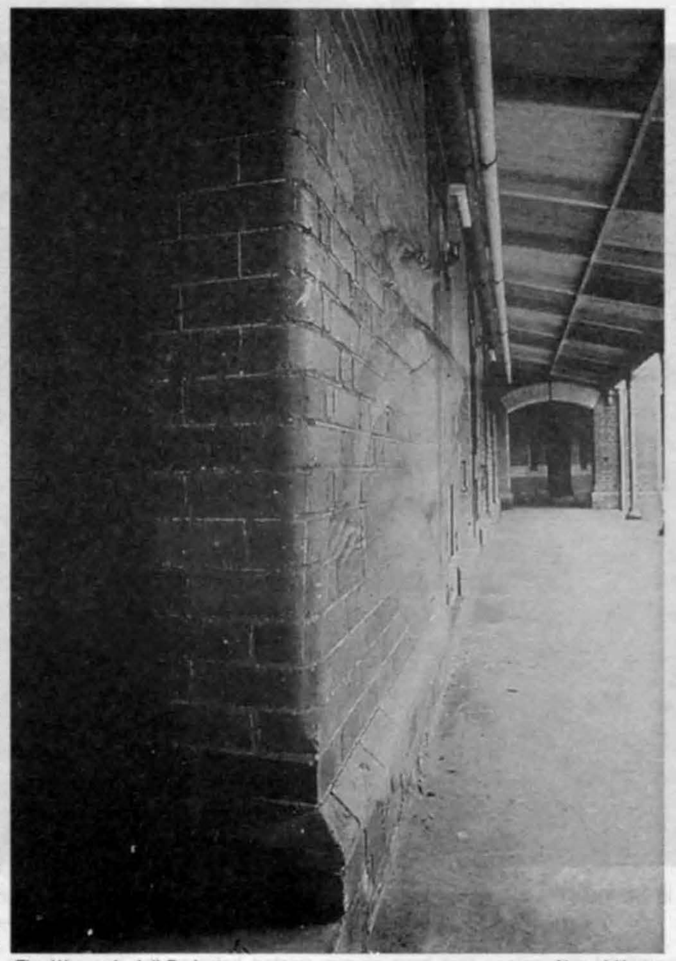
After a time, Mom fetches a plate of toast and offers each of her family a slice. Meals have been reduced to this empty ritual. Their conversation is fractured—a mix of non-sequiturs, broken phrases, half questions, rambling self obsessive descriptions and silences. Meaning and tension are in the gaps between unfinished sentences which reveal dreams and longings—the impossible distance and strangeness of the family, and an unfulfilled wish to belong to a community when not even family exists. The law of the father holds sway. He speaks with a thick European accent of things he has seen, theories of cities, and cars, his musical tastes etc. The Son does not know what the Father does, and the Wife isn't really sure either. She usually ends her sentences with a **continued on page 33**

Translating despair

Mary-Ann Robinson locks into *The Women's Jail Project*

Driving from the present, too fast along the freeway, to the past up on the hill: Women's Refractory, Ward Seven, Sunbury lunatic asylum.

On arrival, we are greeted by Matron (Judy Roberts) and invited to view the Refractory's outer wall as, "a physical translation of that which is evoked from this site." Building plans, photographs and canvas restraint-clothing on the wall lead to wooden mask/faces with wire-stitched eyes or mouths, an image of a body prone and dangling with a sort of smear, a fluid washing over it, 'Despair'. An iron bed. Women's stories on stained paper are pasted—name, age, date of admission, diagnosis, frequently death, sometimes discharge. To face away from the wall is to confront dark pines topping this exposed hill, night sky and stars. Wild. No translation needed.



The Women's Jail Project Naomi Herzog

We were keen to be allowed inside the building. Others were never let out. But inside the building is outside again. A bricked courtyard under that same sky, surrounded by multiple cells forming a wall of doors around the perimeter. None lead out. One cell is padded with straw bursting through canvas. Others are just small, cold, empty. There is time to wander and peer, in between 3 simultaneous performances that occur 3 times. Half-heard voices echo through the courtyard from elsewhere.

This work avoids romanticising madness. I feared flowing hair, long dresses, possibly Frances Farmer, screaming in towers. Instead, vulnerable and generous performers emerge from the walls to which they return at the end. Brickwork marks their semi-nakedness. Performance styles vary from strong, physical rope work (Ruth Bauer) and verbal barrage littered with mythical and literary references (Lydia Faranda) to emotional intensity built through singing and repetitive washing (Margot Knight). These are voices, stories and bodies of "those less fortunate", enduring punishments that are treatments that are cruelties that are protections—plunge baths, seclusion, denial of food, hobbling restraint in canvas webbed trousers. Talk of the cold and desperation for physical warmth invokes visceral fear of having a soft body exposed in a world where rape is warmth, briefly.

Nurse (Sara Cooper) does her rounds offering diagnoses, "reasonable" accounts of these women: disturbed by childbirth; menopause; stripping in public; killing her child; infected with VD; murderous rage. Nurse beats herself, describing traditional medical dogma around problematic female bodies. Anxious about body smells, she explains the art of nursing without touching. In the end, Nurse disrobes. Her body, scarred with brickwork, enters the wall.

This site-specific work is part of a larger research project undertaken by director Karen Martin towards a PhD. Much rests on concrete objects and ambience. Complexity of contemporary theory and feminist insights, interesting as they are, sit uneasily in the text. References to signifier/signified, public/private and "othering" of women hang in the air, words unattached to place, a theoretical framework superimposed upon what we already see/feel. Performance spoke—powerful, thoughtful, embodied and affecting. No translation needed.

Looking into the abyss makes the present a bright and shiny place to drive home to, light against the dark. Don't relax. Madness has moved into a flat with low ceilings, stained carpet, a community treatment order on the table and 'chemical restraint' in white plastic bottles.

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*

Mary-Ann Robinson is a graduate of the VCA Drama School and is currently writing a PhD which looks at disability and contemporary issues around women's health and fertility.

Triple Alice

A major movement training and site experience in Central Australia

Body Weather workshop, Lake Mungo, 1992. Liz Dale

Tess de Quincey is a choreographer and dancer who has worked extensively in Europe, Japan and Australia as solo performer, teacher and director. The strongest influence on her performance came from her work over 6 years (1985-91) with Butoh dancer Min Tanaka and his Mai-Juku Company. Tanaka founded the term and philosophical basis for Body Weather, a broad-based and comprehensive training that embraces and builds on concepts of environment. Body Weather proposes a philosophical but also practical strategy to the mind and the body that is not just for 'professional' dancers or performance practitioners but is an open investigation that can be relevant for anyone interested in exploring the body. Drawing on elements of both eastern and western dance, sports training, martial arts and theatre practice, it is a discipline that develops a conscious relation without conforming to specific form. In solo and group works as well as her work with sculptor-dancer Stuart Lynch, Tess de Quincey proposes this practice within a contemporary western perspective as a training that can be applied as a pure body/mind research or aligned to dance and/or performance training.

De Quincey's major solo productions, *Movement on the Edge*, *Another Dust* and *is.2* have toured extensively in Europe and Australia and among her group pieces, *Square of Infinity*, a film and large-scale performance work, was the culmination of reflections on the specific time and space of the dry lake bed of Lake Mungo in the ACT. De Quincey/Lynch's recent site-specific and time-based works include *The Durational Trilogy*, a series of pieces lasting 6, 12 and 24 hours) and *Compression 100*, a series of collaborative performances in and around Sydney.

Currently recipient of the Australia Council's Choreographic Fellowship (1998-99), Tess de Quincey has initiated another large scale project focused this time in Australia's Central Desert. The Triple Alice Project in partnership with Desart, the Centre for Performance Studies (Sydney University) and The Performance Space spans 3 years (1999-2001). It involves a forum as well as 3 live, site- and temporally-specific laboratories staged over 3 weeks of each year. The forum and laboratories are accessible through an interactive website, *www.triplealice.net* which is formative of and integral to the event.

Triple Alice 1 (September 20-October 10 1999) is a laboratory focusing on contemporary arts practices of the Central Desert and brings together Indigenous and non-indigenous artists from the Northern Territory and local guest speakers to contextualise the site. It includes a 3-week intensive Body Weather workshop in which participants will make sensory and experiential mappings of space—in this case, the landscape 100 kms north west of Alice Springs at Hamilton Downs in the MacDonnell Ranges. "The workshop involves some strenuous workouts to develop strength, flexibility and a strong physical grounding. The ground work provides insight into the different speeds of the body and the function of time. These practices also aim to sharpen sensorial focus, spatial awareness and coordinative perspectives", says de Quincey. The workshop will be joined by a dance-performance unit and theorists and writers will maintain an onsite theoretical debate. The website will transmit the laboratory and invite remote participation—a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary meeting of theory and practice.

Triple Alice 2 in 2000 will involve a number of collaborative artists creating performance for web and screen. This second laboratory will build on the experience and language developed in the first and invite a wider range of responses, particularly from new media artists through physical attendance at the lab as well as remote interactive networking with it. Participation from remote sites will include live interstate linkups with art venues in the major cities. The emphasis will be on performance and art works specifically designed for electronic media.

Triple Alice 3 (2001) is an online international laboratory, seminar and festival. This event will correlate ideas of space and time in the different traditions of artistic practice and performance work with those of other disciplines including astrophysics, philosophy, astronomy, military research and navigation. In parallel with this exchange, live online performance and artworks will synthesise the results of the first 2 labs.

For more information on the Body Weather Workshop Tel 02 93515738, Fax 02 93515675 email info@bodyweather.net or www.bodyweather.net.

Cinema simulacra

In the premiere of a performance/installation entitled *Space 1999* at Sydney's The Performance Space, readily available movie software is used to simulate the infiltrations of cinema culture in daily life. Three performers (Chantel Munro, Damon Young and Marion Jardine) inhabit an anthropomorphic chamber of image and cinema text, a space which creates and projects images of themselves. The space of the performer and the audience is incorporated via live surveillance systems; digital cameras track performance designed for screen acting and dual projections with live, mixed after-effects are housed in a translucent hall of prismatic reflection. Could this be a user-friendly version of *The Cube*? The performance text references some of the great films of the 20th century with a primary focus on screen romance—'Casanova meets Femme Fatale.'

Damon Young in *Space 1999*

And what to wear? Well, something suitable for "a space which appears to have no hard edges—a futuristic environment constructed from images to affect you both psychologically and sensually." The project began with an interest in "the artificial dimensions that have always existed between the human being and nature, now so vividly represented by the myths of cinema. These are our simulacra, the technology that is landscape, the spaces redefined historically by technology and the myths we have chosen to create within them. It is a simulacra that is manufactured by celluloid memories, the history-making images of media."

Space 1999, *direction and design Samuel James, multimedia Zina Kaye, photographic performance/installation Denis Beaubois, sound Nicholas Wishart. Performances for 5 nights only, The Performance Space, April 16 - 21; installation viewing, April 14 - 21, 2 - 5pm, Bookings 02 9698 7235. Enquiries:* roseturtle@hotmail.com

Where sea meets sand

Angela Betzien is cast adrift in La Bôite's *First Asylum*

La Bôite Theatre's first production in its 1999 season, Phillip Dean's *First Asylum*, highlights the politics of both language and landscape and the divisions these impel in a play focused on Australia's immigration policy. The play traces the predicament of Clare, an immigration officer who finds on her doorstep Wei, a Vietnamese refugee. In her efforts to help Wei gain freedom in an unfamiliar landscape and language, Clare's journey becomes a struggle of conscience.

One of the most interesting aspects of the play and a refreshing reminder of the possibilities of theatre is the use of a theatrical device which enables the audience to participate in the pretence that the Vietnamese character is speaking in her own language, though we hear her in English. This device provides the possibility for striking a balance in cultural perspectives. However, the production's treatment of this device finally demonstrates a lack of faith. Despite the fact that she is speaking in her own tongue, Wei's language is unnecessarily affected. Her understanding of the politics of her country is simplistic and her personal insights contrast greatly with the Australian characters who dominate.

First Asylum, Hsiao-Ling Tang, Ken Porter, Barbara Lowing Melanie Gray

The set of *First Asylum*, made up of 4 islands—a hut, a beach, a government office and a bar—divided by an intense blue, signifying the sea, is perhaps the production's most powerful representation of the politics of landscape and territory which in essence construct the concept of a nation's immigration policy. Clare's comment near the play's end, that she could have kept walking right off the edge of the continent, becomes bitterly ironic. Phillip Dean's scenario demonstrates that for some there is a barbed wire fence tracing the edge where sea meets sand.

First Asylum, *director Lewis Jones, writer Phillip Dean; cast Paul Denny, Michael Futcher, Sarah Kennedy, Barbara Lowing, Ken Porter, Hsiao-Ling Tang; design Noelene King, lighting Adam White, composer David Pickvance; La Bôite Theatre, Brisbane, February 4 - 27.*

Angela Betzien is a Brisbane playwright. Her play Dog Wins Lotto *was produced by QTC in* OZ Shorts *(1997). She recently wrote and performed in a piece for La Bôite's Newboards season.*

Sound as body, body as composer

Elizabeth Drake on the objects of sound in a Ros Warby-Graeme Leak collaboration

original home is the second in a series of works by Ros Warby, exploring the possibilities that lie within (or between) music and dance.

At first there is the question of how to begin. A double question. How to begin to make the work and how to begin the work. When neither sound nor movement are privileged, nor developed separately. Right from the beginning they are allowed to interact and to cause events to happen, crossing over from one discipline to another. A kind of cross-stitching.

The rhythms and ph(r)ased collisions of sound and bodies, are both decidedly musical and intensely human. There is an interchange of impulses. We meet the body as composer in its purest sense.

There is a question of how to begin and there is a question of how to proceed. It begins quietly, or at least the space is quiet, or at least empty. There are sounds coming up from underneath the floor, underneath the seating. Instruments warming up, air being forced down a long tube. This is theatrical. Someone is waiting in the wings. We fall silent.

And then a rock rolls across the floor. This rolling stone (rock) is awkward, unsymmetrical, noisy. There is a certain rhythm. Its trajectory is unpredictable. The rolling of the rock gives us a direction as to how to enter the work. The haphazard movement of the rock suggests that anything might happen, where one sound or movement does not predict the next and cannot be fixed. A work premised very much on receptivity.

The dancers are placing objects against the side wall. These objects are treasures. They have a history, detailed histories of their own. A seed pod was found in the Queensland Botanical Gardens and brought to Melbourne. The seed pods with their promise of new life, dried and clattery on the wooden floor. There is on old drum, and the head of another old and broken drum. Some of these objects have been waiting for repair for years, broken and (apparently) of no use. They have been broken and taken apart. Other instruments have been built out of them and these bits of wood are the offcuts.

The objects (instruments) are brought in without caution. The dancers are dropping things, without reference to the sound they make. Without reference or reverence or caution.

Objects remain on the floor where they have landed, silent now. Once or twice they are kicked out of the way. The debris on the floor is never really abandoned. But it is nevertheless scattered, dropped, strewn across the empty floor. The objects are treated with a certain carelessness, something (very) difficult to achieve.

One of the dancers lies on the floor, alongside the (other) objects. She becomes one link in a chain (of objects). Bodies and objects are transferable. I remember standing next to the sculptures of Louise Bourgeois, at an exhibition in Perth. I was tempted to talk to them, such was their human presence.

Drum sticks fall like fiddlesticks onto the wooden floor. Dancers step in between the sticks, careful not to cause movement, careful not to allow a stick to move. Just as in the game, you can remove the sticks so long as others do not move. In this case if one stick were to move it would betray itself. By making a noise.

She moves along a straight line, her footsteps are marked, in time, by the sound of two pieces of wood being struck. The spinning ring, like a small miracle, grows louder as it comes closer to the floor. It makes a kind of crescendo before it lands, stops, falls silent. The whining of the bowed metal plate, reminding us of Pierre Henri's saw. Its weary lament.

Ros Warby & Graeme Leak, *original home* Jeff Busby

The rock is one brought back from Europe in a suitcase. "Has this got rocks in it?" There is a question of weight.

I am thinking about contact dancing, only here it is to do with things, or more exactly the sound(s) of things. Contact dancing involves the shifting of weight from one body to another, sharing the weight and moving according to the shifts between these two bodies. In *original home*, the sound, as body, could be imagined as the other partner, whose materiality could be trusted and lent on as the body of another. Sound as body, body as composer. This play between sound and body points to the weight of sound just as did the weight of the rock. The rock rolls for a second time. It makes a(n unintended) direct line for the back wall and crashes into it. Again it takes forever to settle. A kind of balancing and falling at the same time.

There is a stillness as one of the dancers perches on the rock. Her stillness is allowed to crack and she falls and moves on. Against the back wall she balances on a disk. This back wall is miked. She whips the wall with an electric extension cord given her by the composer. Slapping the electric cord against the wall. She lifts the rock steadily while balancing on an hour glass shaped drum. As she stands up the objects fall over, knocked over in her carelessness. There are abrupt endings and unexpected linkages. Objects, like ideas are dropped when no longer useful, and without ceremony, you move on.

The final image is one of breath. At first we hear a long drawn out blurt, a kind of Tibetan blasphemy. The breath is being forced through a long metal tube. We see the man lifting a made-up instrument of 3 pieces, almost too long to hold, almost out of reach. With the introduction of some small valve or flute into the core of the tube, the sound transforms into a fragile, wavering, sliding, musical line. We hear the frail wanderings of the breath, as the lights die down.

We are reminded (again) of the fragility of being human, of the body, of our closeness to death. We feel the frailty of the human body, with all its limitations and fallibilities.

Imagine that, still alive, after all these years.

Ros Warby, original home, *performers Ros Warby, Shona Innes, Graeme Leak; sound objects, Graeme Leak; Dancehouse, Feb 5 - 14*

The composer out of the box

Gretchen Miller talks with composer Andrée Greenwell about the premiere of Laquiem, *a collaboration with writer Kathleen Mary Fallon, premiering at The Studio*

In *Laquiem*, Andrée Greenwell's setting of texts by Kathleen Mary Fallon, the children hear their mother "wail in the winds of the world," and they turn in their sleep. The texts are rich with vocal imagery, the words roll off the tongue, like "Mozarchopintchaikovsky" echoing through piano strings.

In talking one evening about her practice, and the way she worked with *Laquiem*, Greenwell declares that she loves the voice. And the voice in this work is paramount—the rich, gravelly quality of Clare Grant's reading of the spoken text, the seductive, gentle tones of Greenwell's "untrained" voice, the luscious flexibility and expressiveness of Karen Cummings' soprano.

Laquiem is Greenwell's first work in which she has truly begun to use various vocal styles exactly as she wishes—in combination in the same work. In her opera *Sweet Death* [Chamber Made Opera, 1991], she explored the territory of the operatic voice. She has worked with the Song Company's specific aesthetic and sound on *Songs with a Few Words* and has also written song cycles for trained operatic voices. "In those works I was dealing with certain vocal technologies, vocal production within certain historical parameters—and I'm quite interested in breaking down those boundaries a little bit so that it's not so boxed in, or intangible. My tastes are very eclectic and I'm just drawing that together in my work more and more."

Taking her inspiration from the likes of Laurie Anderson and Meredith Monk, Greenwell says in *Laquiem* she was looking for a similar musical use of spoken language, within a composed accompaniment. It is part of an ongoing concern with text, vocal timbre, and what is to be communicated musically. "By combining those very different approaches, which are musical in their own right, you actually end up with a very rich timbrel and dynamic depth…so it's very useful."

Laquiem has been a 2 year project, and embodies Greenwell's recent musical approaches. She approached Fallon specifically because the writer's work resonated with aspects of her own composition. "She writes in forms that make you make connections—lots of juxtapositions of different writing styles and forms. I like that because I like switching forms and content all the time in my own work. So I rang her and asked if she had anything I could look at to work on—she said send me some of your music and after looking at that she sent me a work in progress, *The Mourning of the Lac Women*."

The piece is about grieving. Greenwell extracted several threads from 60 pages of writing, choosing work that would function in juxtaposition with music. "There's space in the work for certain kinds of emotions that aren't given much credence I think in contemporary new music. I'd say that the breadth of the emotional dynamic in it is probably what is most confronting. But at the same time there's a sense of wit and irony and playfulness in there too.

"I think her use of language is inherently musical and it celebrates many things about contemporary Australian language—not only in a vulgar way which she's fantastic at—she can be brutal and vulgar and witty; but then she can turn her hand and be very sensual and incredibly sensitive at the same time. She's able to traverse a lot of territory in language but there's something about it that does celebrate Australian language too…it's very visceral.

"I like seeing both sides of the coin really, I like things that to me sound beautiful but I can't help myself undercutting things and having a sense of laughter or play at the same time," she says.

But Greenwell's most recent passion has been film/video. After the great success of an AFTRS project, the 5 minute *Medusahead*, which has toured various international film festivals, she now wants to set parts of *Laquiem* to video or film. "It's still very new for me I must say. But in the end it's the same, it's exploring relationships between image, music, text and performance. I suppose a lot of the ideas I have when it comes down to a musical piece are extra-musical anyway. I'm always thinking about other things with music.

"Video work is intense, it can be very expensive depending on how you go about it; it's very exciting. And by virtue of the medium you're working with it can be very easily transported by mail…which is good," she says, laughing. "I can't live by concert platform work. I love the concert, I love performances, but it's just not enough in a country like Australia to be the end result for the reception of the work. Composing can be a very labour intensive and expensive task and I'm looking for other options for people to hear my work."

Given the limited numbers of Australians attending contemporary music performances, and the difficulties of disseminating work, has Greenwell ever thought of moving overseas? "I think about that a lot but at the same time you can walk many sides of the fence at once in Australia. I can try out new musical personalities here and I love that. Whereas I just sense overseas I'd have to really specialise."

Initially *Laquiem* was to be performed with projections, "...but then I was finding that the relationship between the music and the text was so strong and rich it wasn't necessary to have the screen projections. There's a strong element of theatre between the music and the text, which is always what I'm interested in…my work is inherently theatrical."

Laquiem is to be performed at the new music performance space, the Studio, at the Sydney Opera House in May. But the theatrical nature of her work generally finds Greenwell favouring alternative venues to the concert platform. "I'm not sure what is it that makes me think of putting my pieces in a more theatrical context. Even if *Laquiem* wasn't on there I would consider a small proscenium arch theatre—something intimate, with a sense of occasion. Where you go into a space to listen—not with the same preciousness that I experience with the standard contemporary concert platform, which I just find sterile. I'm sure there are certainly elements of preciousness that surround *Laquiem*—I can't help that—but I just like people to have a sense of occasion and celebration."

Greenwell writes quickly, often reworking her writing for different contexts. "I did a puppetry piece in 5 weeks once and that was 90 minutes produced to tape...instruments and some voiceover. But the orchestral piece was a totally different kettle of fish, that took me 3 months to do 10 minutes. If there's a deadline coming up, for instance if we're going into rehearsal it's like okay, I have to write 5 minutes a week for the next how many weeks, and then I've got to do all the parts. I do schedule everything. Part of that is just having to work to deadlines for theatre or film.

"I keep all my junk and I keep the things that I like and then I recompose them. I rearrange ideas and develop them into other pieces. Let's face it, in contemporary music you put so much labour into it, not many people hear it, and I think if I come up with a really good idea I transfer it from time to time."

Working primarily with MIDI and keyboards, Greenwell writes for text simply sitting at the piano and singing. "Of course I play and improvise and record things and then tease it out. I'll notate it through MIDI and I'll work and change it and, look, I labour over durations of notes, phrases—it's very old fashioned but I do."

As for her positioning in relationship to her own work, Greenwell slips between anxiety and excitement. "Before I make it, I'm terrified, but can't wait to make it at the same time. I'm always worried, there's always that certain element of worry—is it going to work, will it be good, can I write anything again…can I *possibly* come up with another musical idea that people will be interested in at the same time," she says, laughing with irony at her position. "But on the other side of that coin is the absolute excitement, the urge to make the piece and finish it. Then once I'm away it actually takes me a good week, at least a week to get inside any piece that I'm working on, and when I feel inside a piece I walk around thinking about it all the time, and I have lots of ideas, not necessarily in front of the computer. I'm naturally quite obsessive.

"Then I ask: 'why am I stressing out about this, it's only another piece of music in the universe that's so full of lots of music and lots of wonderful music and lots of music that's made easier than the process I choose to make'…Although perhaps that's not true, I think all good music takes time.

"Then you finish the piece and in one sense there's a sense of it's over. But between realisation—whether that be studio realisation or performance—the piece will change. What you hear is always slightly different…and the music does take on its own life…and then that requires a distancing, which happens at that point. And then you reclaim the piece."

Meanwhile, the move to Sydney from Melbourne 4 years ago has given her plenty of new ways of looking at things. "This is the first major piece of mine that's been performed here. So that's significant for me. And I like to make pieces that belong to where I come from or where I live. And I still have a couple of projects that are completely Australian history-based and I want to make them here."

Andrée Greenwell

Greenwell's music is playful, left of field, and not remotely like traditional conservatorium-style, modernist music. She sees it as falling between stylistic cracks. But she also desires it to be accessible. "Some people hate that and they'll say 'oh, she's a populist'. It doesn't mean that it's not challenging, and it doesn't mean it lacks communicating something that's contemporary. But I have to be honest to myself. I have to make music I want to make, that I'm passionate about—otherwise why bother? And then hopefully somebody will respond to something that I'm interested in. I often say my work falls in the cracks and some people have problems with that, how to define what I do. Well, I'm interested in pushing boundaries in collaboration. I'm interested in exploring relationships of hierarchy and function and pushing those. And sometimes the result isn't 'oh that's a…a suite or a song cycle'. It's not quite that, it takes elements of that but it becomes something new…"

And then she whispers to the tape recorder—"can you say that without saying the word postmodern? It sounds like I'm still a Catholic or something."

Laquiem, *The Studio, Sydney Opera House, May 12 - 15, tickets: $30/$20. Available on CD from the Australian Music Centre or from Synaesthesia records.* (atomic@mail.vicnet.net.au). *Griffin Theatre Co,* Ship of Fools *by Andrew Bovell, (for which Greenwell is writing the score), The Stables, April 8 - May 9.*

Evolving digital sentience

Pascal Wunsch explores sound installations at CACSA

The live auditory excursions of *ovalmaschine* and eset {} greeted me as I approached the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia's *eq* interactive media installation. Five multimedia artists collaborated to present an immersive environment utilising a broad spectrum of technological curiosities. As I lifted the heavy curtain separating me from the gallery's interior, I had a real sense of moving into some form of organically decentralised information matrix, a point reinforced by the first of the pieces presented to the listener on arrival.

Transception by Adelaide-based sound artist Matthew Thomas engendered a feeling of isolation, almost as if the listener were searching the airwaves for some form of intelligence or humanity. The effect strongly reminded me of Laurie Anderson's work *Paranormal radio voices, voices without origin* from her album *Big Science*. Its random quality resonated with Matthew's work, as pre-tweaked material combined with random airwave vibration along with audio feed from the other 3 sound artists, transmitted through antiquated technology and subsequently remixed by the listener. The unpredictability of result, from delicacy to arbitrary walls of noise, seemed to reflect the randomness of city life, an accessible link for communication with the electrostatic rush. By choosing such a minimalist theatre of communication he illustrated the continual relevance and immediacy of the precursors of internet methodology in today's post-informative culture, investing his piece with a spontaneity born of inspired structural innovation.

Redundant Noise represented the concept of the technological device performing strangely with the use of a Macintosh SE-30. Proving that this perceived has-been of the computing world still has more to offer, Elendil's piece beguiled us with simplicity only to draw us deeper into an interactive minefield of calculated unpredictability. Presented with a screen containing a panel of radio buttons and mouse cursor, we are left to discover what we can for ourselves. Through the actions of dragging, clicking on or off, or passing the mouse through the fields surrounding each button, the listener spontaneously creates minimalist sound structures of varying subtlety and complexity.

The underlying rhythmic fields of improbability stirred, amused and inspired the participant, evoking a sympathetic vibration with the idea of encumbered robots playing table-tennis in a gravity well. The machine seemed tenacious, refusing to be consigned to the hardware disassembly heap; it was refreshing to engage with such modesty as it responded with charm and wit to the probing mind.

Continuing the idea of perceived entropy in the primitive techno aesthetic was *Vision System*, supplied by the truly virtual presence of zzkt. Slide projector simplicity combined with the amorphous blending of industrial imagery in decay, presenting us with manifestations of Deus-Ex-Machina as liminal entity. Source material from zzkt was sent from Hamburg, Germany via internet to be photographed in Adelaide by r a d i o q u a l i a using slide film, while the recombination of elements and subsequent mixing of light and environment was undertaken by Nick Mollison, to whom the continuity of the exhibition's atmosphere can be safely attributed.

The *ovalmaschine* presented a global audience for the listener to interact with, emitting net.audio streams from convex tv (Berlin, Germany), *(in)teemingfluxvoidsect* (Hamburg, Germany & Australia), *Rotor* (Auckland, New Zealand) & r a d i o q u a l i a (Adelaide). The internet provided the platform from which to launch whimsicalities of customised soundscaping. The presence of a greater audience inspired a feeling of progression into the underlying foundations of integrationary likelihoods.

As a fitting counterpoint, Greg Peterkin's *Ephemera* described its sphere as an embryonic fun park of tactility, eschewing the purely cerebral in favour of a fully immersive 3 dimensional sensorial arena. Sensor arrays triggered various audio/visual vignettes which responded in real time, thereby challenging the audience to extend and integrate into the physical realm, ensuring the inseparability of rhythm, movement sound and continuity. The kinetically driven touch, motion and proximity devices excited the imagination to explore further the fusion of dance and music within a technological framework.

The exhibition's greatest strength lay in its selection of contrasting technological platforms, the combination investing the event with a maturity and subtlety belied by a rich sense of the absurd, a balance achieved between the resurrection of older tech styles by playing deliberately on the (dis)function of randomness and the options offered by state of the art programming. The exhibition forced us to re-evaluate the way in which we define multimedia, by pointing out that creative output is not dependent on hardware capacity. While these works stand alone as examples of remixed audio archaeology it must be remembered that this platform is dependent on human interaction for achieving significance, and so as we excavate these electro-reliquaries we must not only provide a context for meaning, but exercise our responsibility of artificial selection in choosing the evolutionary direction of digital sentience.

Greg Peterkin's *Ephemera*, 97-99

ovalmaschine, *r a d i o q u a l i a*, http://www./radioqualia.va.com.au, *online audio project (nucleus Honor Harger & Adam Hyde)*; vision system, *zzkt; net radio transmissions: convex tv, radio, sound and media art collective, audio primarily constructed by Chris Flor,* http://www.art-bag.net/convextv; (in)teemingfluxvoidsect *(Austria/Australia), audio collaboration between teeming void (Australia) and zzkt (Hamburg / Vienna)*; Rotor *(Auckland, New Zealand),* http://www./radioqualia.va.com.au/artician, *sound project of Leyton Leyton, New Zealand; CACSA, January 24 - 31; e Q documentation CD will be available* http://www./radioqualia.va.com.au/eq

Pascal Wunsch is an Adelaide based writer and format artist who has been associated with the (in)sect22 and mindflux collectives. He is currently composing material for the bergbau *series at Adelaide's Iris cinema.*

Viewing and hearing

The Song Company's artistic director Roland Peelman describes selecting the works chosen for the *Viewing* program as a desire to fit in with a retrospective of Australian photography at the ACP, creating a vocal music retrospective, in turn, of Australian works written for the company. As well as featuring established composers (including Stephen Cronin, Andrée Greenwell, Nigel Butterley), young composers will also figure—Dominic Karski for Queensland and Jirrah Walker from Victoria. Peelman adds that "very new" composers will also be represented, their works selected from an intensive workshop to be held at the University of Western Sydney during May. The workshop will be conducted by Peelman and the company's composer-in-residence, Anna Pimakhova, drawing on the talents of some 53 composition students. The Song Company will respond to works in various stages of composition, from sketches to complete works, and then make an initial selection and develop the chosen works. Peelman enjoys the process. The company did it a few years back at the Sydney Conservatorium with composer-in-residence Michael Smetanin and 2 years ago in Singapore.

On a subject worthy of a long interview, and the topic of a brief article in the forthcoming edition of *Sounds Australian*, Peelman speaks eloquently about the peculiar challenges of writing for voice. He declares bluntly that there are no rules, there is no theory, it's trial and error, and that working with composers is the way to open the company up to new singing experiences. He writes "We...know that Stockhausen used his own voice to devise the magic vowel-square for *Stimmung*, thus establishing a phonetically linked system for producing vocal overtones." He emphasises, however, that the composer doesn't have to be radical to make new demands on the singers; what is important, he argues, is an absence of preconceptions. In their different ways, he says, Stephen Cronin, Andrew Ford and Andrée Greenwell have extended the company's range. He's looking forward to The Song Company working with the distinctive young Melbourne composer David Young in the near future. There's more from Roland Peelman in The Danish Connection II, page 40. KG

The Song Company, Viewing, *Casula Powerhouse, Saturday May 29, 2pm; Australian Centre for Photography, Sunday May 30, 6pm.*

The Danish Connection II

Part 2 of Keith Gallasch's report on a visit to Denmark by Australian artists for the Visionlines conference on festivals, music theatre and new music

In September 1998, a group of Australian artists were invited to the Århus Festival in Denmark to participate in Visionlines, a 3 day exchange on festivals, music theatre and new music. This is an edited account of the second day of the conference: the complete version can be read on the RealTime *website.*

Day 2: New Music Theatre

Kasper Holten, talented freelance director and Artistic Director of the Århus Summer Opera, observed that there had been 9 premieres of new operas in Denmark in 1998, a rare likelihood even a few years ago, and coming from a population of mere 5 million. "There has been the opportunity to develop an artistic language of opera. The challenge is now how to hold on to it." Holten described a milieu in which artists were experimenting and learning from each other, being allowed "big feelings and big narratives", as opposed to the 'pure' operas of the 80s...the courage for opera to be opera."

However, Holten argued, the Royal Opera House (Copenhagen) represented in this rich scenario "an absent centre", becoming "more and more international...reducing the number of Danish artists involved...not commissioning new operas", or when they do the occasional one (Poul Ruders for 2000), not having the mechanism with which to develop artists entering this challenging field. Holten's vision is fixed on the Danish National Opera in Århus. Currently presenting a classic, an operetta, a large scale work and a new work each year, Holten envisages the company becoming totally committed to contemporary work. If given the means, "it could become Denmark's second opera house and focussed on the new." Holten described a situation in which "there is enormous pressure to recognise new opera." Den Anden Opera (The Other Opera), he said, is small but established and the Summer Opera, also small, has secured significant funding per year. The government puts aside several million Kroner every year for music theatre, including independent groups like Holland House, Operanord and, "on the verge of opera", Hotel Pro Forma.

Roland Peelman, artistic director of Australia's Song Company and conductor of many new music theatre works, spoke of the remarkable development of opera and theatre in Australia, about how 'Australian' and how young it is, that so much work has emerged since World War II and accelerated in recent years, and was blessed with not having been immersed in impressionism, expressionism and serialism (something the Danes said too of their musical culture)—"except as a nostalgia." Much of the work, he said, has been "novel and daring" and with Australia producing an enormous number of singers. Peelman focussed on Chamber Made Opera, Sydney Metropolitan Opera (now New Music Theatre Sydney) and Tasmania's IHOS Opera. He reckoned that it will take another 10 years of committed funding to allow these companies larger output. Opera Australia (formerly The Australian Opera), he thinks (echoing Kasper Holten's remarks), "doesn't know the language of music theatre" and finds it hard to come to terms with it, with how to help young composers, musicians and librettists, consequently leaving new work in the 'too hard basket.' Ironically, he reminded us of Opera Australia's first manager was a Dane who proposed the idea of presenting Patrick White's novel *Voss* as an opera ("a landmark, whatever you think of it").

Since the 60s, Peelman noted, "Australian theatre had enjoyed heady development and been accepted into the m[illegible]am", but not so Australian music theatre. As well music theatre itself was slow to embrace Indigenous culture. The success of something like *Black River* as staged opera and as film was "thought impossible in the mid 80s", the belief being "that there were no black singers...Australians are still coming to terms with our cultural i-d: a nation of immigrants facing a centuries old Indigenous culture that we haven't come to terms with politically or artistically. But there had been an extraordinary pace of change."

Peelman singled out 4 areas of concern requiring development: (1) the need to break out of traditional forms and to see music theatre as a hybrid form, daring and not easy to define; (2) the need to break free of the proscenium arch, using smaller venues, different audience-performer relationships, and sites specific to works; (3) a break from Anglo-Saxon culture, as evident in the work of IHOS Opera (Greek influences), the Polish-Jewish influenced work of Barrie Kosky's Gilgul Theatre; the Asian-Australian compositions of Julian Yu and Liza Lim, and the range of other cultural influences evident in the names of composers, including Smetanin, Kats-Chernin and Finsterer; and (4) to quest for a repertoire that includes Indigenous Australia.

Louise Beck is the director of Operanord, a Danish site specific music theatre company whose *Gudrun's 4th Song* has achieved great success (the CD of Icelandic composer Haukur Tómasson's score is now available: BIS-CD-908). An early morning screening of a video of the work performed on an unused dock 10m below water level in Copenhagen gave us an impressive glimpse of the work. Beck was drawn to "the brutality of the space, the silence of the space, that it was in the middle of Copenhagen, a sealed off space, a 300 year old dock. It reminded me of Iceland, the granite...a big body lying there not being used. It brought me into Nordic mythology, the Edda poems, old Nordic poems used in Wagner's *Ring*. I looked at the same section of the poems that inspired him. It seemed at first untouchable, that it had been done a 100 years ago. But we did it."

Beck, a designer (*not* a composer, librettist or conductor), starts with "virgin territory...somewhere an audience has never been before...an audience that has no expectations...Space dictates the shape of the work" and it is created collaboratively by a team with each artist "starting simultaneously, with no hanging around waiting for the music or the libretto...working in parallel to create a score." Although "exciting, the process can be awkward sometimes, not just working in parallel but mixing and clashing." Once created, declared Beck, the work "cannot be shown again." Given its scale and expense, she said, a second production would be a different work, especially if in a new site. *Gudrun* evolved over 3 years with workshops, with the costs of providing electricity to a site that did not have it, and cost 10 million Kroner, "a lot for a single project." What Beck got from the space was the sense of a big landscape into which she introduced 'closeups' through video projections. She mixed actors and actor-singers and a sinfonietta. At first she didn't know what to call the work—opera, performance, theatre. "We didn't call it opera then, but we do now." She showed us segments of the video of *Gudrun*: a mass of water breaks into the dock, a performer breast deep in the torrent—"at the end you had to run for your life, which I think is good for opera audiences to do."

In the afternoon session Robyn Archer began her talk with a focus on Australian Indigenous arts, telling of its big reach, the significant role of women, its connection with sport (as in football matches featuring bands), and how the musical has become a chosen form, particularly out of the old pearling and fishing town of Broome in far north-western Australia—the result, a naturally occurring Japanese-Australian-Polynesian hybrid, very theatrical, very rock'n'roll in the works of Jimmy Chi. She declared an Australian pride in our "mongrel culture", observing that music theatre has a fantastic future. Like the US, she said, Australia is rich in cultural diversity, with artists coming from many different music theatre and operatic backgrounds in other cultures. She also thought Americans and Australians don't automatically incline to the closed-in spaces of the European tradition, allowing a flexibility in performance spaces and sites. The overall development of music theatre is small, she said, but important and has been supported by new funding alternatives (the ABC's video opera MDTV commissions, the Rio Tinto awards, and the Major Festivals Initiative Fund encouraging festivals to collaborate in their commissionings).

Mozart, *Titus*, Århus Summer Opera

Jesper Lützhøft, artistic director of Den Anden Opera (the 'other opera', but he didn't want 'other' read simply as 'alternative') said that his company took 6 years to get really started, though it had been operating solidly for 4. The company had emerged from a summer festival of 5 operas. The participants then thought that they wanted to do this the rest of their lives. Copenhagen being European cultural capital in 1996 gave additional financial thrust to government funding. The artists found "a good spot, a bad house, a black box, very narrow, very European" and opened it "with a guest performance by Holland House and gained a lot of press from having the main figure a rock'n'roll singer and a lot of characters as Barbie Dolls." This was followed by their own success, *Last Virtuoso*. Lützhøft declared that Den Anden opera "has to show courage now...it is in danger of becoming an institution, having become very settled over the last 3 years. There is a need to look at what is happening in Denmark now and at what we want to happen."

Roland Geyer described the astonishing density of Viennese arts life, with 8 traditional opera houses and numerous other venues including 2 music theatre venues and a population of 8 million who believe that if "culture is in your blood, then you have to have subscription." The Vienna State Opera accounts for 80% of the total audience (500,000 people). Over the last 7-8 years, the independent or 'private' opera groups doing 20th century repertoire have uneasily coalesced to form a loosely stuctured association with 5 - 6 groups driven by younger artists, directors and conductors. These companies benefit from festivals giving them a wider audience. Geyer's impulse has been to seek younger subscribers not used to traditional opera by placing works in 3 or 4 venues that are not black box theatres. The figures sound considerable compared with the Australian experience— "normally an audience for 10 performances of a new work will be 2,000 - 3,000; for a big success, 5000." For Geyer himself, the latter figure does not represent a success. (It was pointed out in the discussion that followed that Operanord's *Gudrun's 4th Song* had sold 12,000 tickets.)

This second day of the conference had been crammed with ideas and information. The Danish music theatre scene presented itself as rich in vision and determination. The very existence of Den Anden Opera as a home for new works in Copenhagen was enviable, there is no Australian equivalent. However the Australians themselves argued for escape from the confines of the black box—Operanord's site works echoing Australian preoccupations. The prospect of a second major opera company in Denmark focused on new work also looked attractive when compared with Ozopera (the travelling and education wing of Opera Australia) and the conservative state operas. However, the Australians seemed less comfortable with this idea; fine for Denmark but not for Australia where the best work (even if under-funded) is likely to be generated outside large institutional structures. In each country it was agreed that the major state opera company with its focus on 19th century repertoire was not in a position to properly develop new works and artists in opera and music theatre. Clearest of all was that both countries are producing significant volumes of work, that it is diverse in form, site and, especially in Australia, cultural complexity. The future of the work outside its respective countries was less certain. Hotel Pro Forma have initiated the possibility for Denmark, but in each country there's more work to be done, Kasper Holten suggesting the Danes need to focus more on marketing themselves to the rest of Europe, Roland Peelman suggesting that in Australia long term funding commitment from governments will need to sustain companies as they develop their potential.

The full version of this report, including Day 3 on new music, can be read on the RealTime website http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

Australian participants were assisted by the Danish Cultural Institute, the Danish Music Information Centre, the Arhus Festival, the Australian Music Centre and, especially, the Australia Council.

Kaye Mortley

Aural wedding snaps on *The Listening Room*

The Wedding Photograph is a playful radiophonic work made during a workshop held with renowned Australian radiophonic artist, the Paris-based Kaye Mortley last December. Participants included 7 ABC and non-ABC radio producers, performers, students and sound engineers. Starting from scratch, recordings were gathered on location and in the studio, over 2 weeks. The result is an aural portrait of the ambivalences of the wedding that often show through in the looks on the faces of the participants, despite the common presence of frock, cake, flowers...In the background, an Italian wedding echoes through the aural space.

The Wedding Photo *will be broadcast on May 24 at 9pm on* The Listening Room, *ABC Classic FM, 92.9 FM. See* RealTime *31 (June/July) for a report on* The Wedding *workshop preparations.*

Easy to get into and difficult to get out of

Jacqueline Millner interviews Alasdair Foster, formerly director of the international Fotofeis biennale, now the director of the Australian Centre for Photography

JM What were you doing before you became Director of the ACP in May last year?

AF I have a very unusual and hybrid background. I was trained as a physicist before joining Films in Scotland in Edinburgh, an organisation involved in producing short documentaries for the cinema. It was only later that I picked up the camera. I began showing my work in late 70s, and worked through the 80s and early 90s primarily as a commercial photographer, but also curating, exhibiting and writing about photography, with an emphasis on photography as either pop culture or historical litmus paper. While working freelance I was drawn into a Scottish group planning an international photo biennale, and I became aware of the possibility of doing something quite fundamental, beyond just showing photography, to counter the disturbing trend in the late 80s throughout Western countries of art pulling away from culture generally to become either the plaything of intellectuals or the commodity of the rich. I believe art is something that should enrich everybody's life. And Fotofeis [the Edinburgh-based photography biennale] became a way to address these concerns.

JM Tell us a little about Fotofeis.

AF Fotofeis was set up in rural and suburban locations as well as in cities, and included a whole range of participants and spaces, such as community groups and outdoor projects. Fotofeis was the only festival of contemporary photography not based upon metropolitan supremacy, reliant instead on a network created through similarities based on being peripheral. The original Fotofeis was held in 1993. I stayed on as director for 2 more festivals often using humanistic themes appreciated by a wide audience, such as 'family', to tie different levels together. In my view, art should be easy to get into and difficult to get out of.

JM Given the media-specificity of Fotofeis and of the ACP, what is your definition of photography?

AF I see photography as a useful and inaccurate term for things that have their antecedents in photography. Photography includes electronic media where it's non-narrative; it even includes things that move when it's non-narrative. In general the public appreciate that photography isn't always works on paper, nor always flat. I'm interested in 19th century photography, where the boundaries of the medium were still up for grabs, where we had yet to learn the supposedly God-given idea of the photograph as a mirror or a window.

JM How do you see the place of documentary in current photo-media practice?

AF Documentary photography is in resurgence, a development evident in Europe over the last few years, and currently in Australia. I think this resurgence relates to the rediscovery of the snapshot. Because snapshots are indiscriminate in the way they collect information, they are incredibly rich as historical documents. Today documentary is not about the master craftsman who can somehow excise the true meaning of the moment from a continuing happening. It is rather a conscious borrowing and using which relies on the serendipity of the snapshot, often dressed in the trappings of grunge to distinguish it from the fine print tradition. So, documentary is coming back because there is a place for it in a postmodern sensibility, but it comes back with a different kind of authority.

JM And yet despite running the postmodern gauntlet, documentary photography still retains some authority.

AF But I don't think people view it as and of itself the truth. Rather, they look at it as information, and that's different. We're not 'going back' to doco photography; we're going forward. Certain things in the recipe mix may be coming back, but the recipe's different and so is the product. Photography as a whole is now central to the visual arts as a whole. It's been brought in to give vigour to other forms of beaux arts, and it maintains that vigour by keeping one foot in popular culture and one foot in high culture.

JM What differences do you perceive between the artworld in the UK and here?

AF One thing that surprised me was that underlying the surface self-confidence in art here, because of distance, Australian art is not better known overseas. Distance is a real problem, and there is in Australia a slight insecurity about art. In terms of exhibition spaces and funding, structures are very similar to those in the UK and Canada: a mix between national and state/regional, museum/white box and community structures.

JM What about the level of corporate sponsorship and private patronage for contemporary art?

AF About the same here as there. I quite like corporate sponsorship because it's a business deal. It's very clear: they know what they want and you know what you've got. But benefaction is not very well developed in the UK; we've had a highly subsided system for a long time, in contrast to the US where there are highly formalised systems of benefaction in a context of withering public support. As they say, in the US you pay to get on the Board, while in the UK you go on the Board so you don't have to pay. But I'm looking at developing a familial relationship with people who may then wish to support the gallery. Here it seems possible in a way that would be difficult in Scotland. Although the ACP, despite its great capital reserves [the organisation owns its premises in Paddington] is still largely dependent on public funding.

JM What is the current structure of the ACP?

AF The ACP is a very unusual institution, in that it manages the 3 functions of exhibition, publication and education together. If art is to have meaning you have to get beyond the artefact, and understand it as a process. To know that in the same building we exhibit we also teach the craft is really important, and I'm looking at ways to integrate the functions more closely.

JM So the workshop and public access are ongoing. What about Photofile*?*

AF The magazine was re-launched just before I came. Both its sales and advertising are going up, and it remains the main tool for promoting the centre overseas. Currently, it is going to go through a change of staff, with both managing editor and general editor outgoing. Over the next year, my intention is to have 3 separate editors, to spread a wider net over how the magazine treats photography, and to look at developing international markets. I would like to slightly reshape the magazine to prepare it. And since it is the only magazine in Australia which focuses on photomedia, it would be fairly irresponsible to reshape it more as an organ of the ACP than to guard its independent editorship. At the same time it won't necessarily be focusing on digital media. I think *Photofile* has to reflect what's happening, including the way more traditional formats re-position themselves with the development of new technologies.

JM How do you view the role of ACP vis a vis other similar spaces?

AF It's great that in this city there is a strong commercial gallery sector and collecting institutions. This relieves us both of the need to collect, and to operate within the star making system. Our role is to explore what's happening in photography in the broader sense and to bring unusual mixes of artists' work together so you can see it in new and fresh ways.

JM What are some of your specific curatorial interests?

AF I see the role of director as different to that of curator. Certainly it is not about expressing my taste but about fulfilling my professional relationship to our audience. It's more like being an entrepreneur, knowing how to bring things together. Fotofeis was not an auteur festival, but a space where many dialogues were held together. I bring a similar spirit to my role as ACP director, I manage a team, I gather information.

JM While the role of director is distinct from curator, what are some of your specific interests?

AF They are pretty eclectic. I like 19th century work, and I like looking at photography as used as ephemera in WWII. As Fotofeis director, my susceptibilities had to be open.

JM What are some of your plans for the upcoming program?

AF One thing I would like to do is disrupt the slightly plodding 4 weeks schedule, for example with interim performance pieces, and short sharp shows. In terms of media, I would like to juxtapose a range to encourage a broader audience of regulars, to foster the ability to have different tastes concurrently. Some of our upcoming shows are easy to get into and difficult to get out of. Others are difficult in themselves, and we are developing strategies to make them more accessible. An example is Denis del Favero's new work, the last of a trilogy on the moral decline of eastern Europe. We will be re-viewing the first 2 shows, one in the local church and another on CD ROM in the local library, to encourage the audience to give the work time. I would also like to develop mixed media approaches. Once I've sorted out the acoustics a bit, I'd like to think about music and performance curated specifically for photography.

Alasdair Foster Mark Rodgers

JM Are there any emerging Australian photomedia artists who have sparked your interest recently?

AF Patricia Piccinini I find very interesting, yet I would hesitate to call her emerging. Her work has an interesting grasp on how art works as high art but is extremely comfortable within a popular culture reading. Also Natalie Paton, who handles her personal concerns in a way which allows them to flow outwards rather than remaining inscrutably inward. However I will confess that the job has tied me to my desk too much till now, so I still need to get out a bit, and see who the new people are.

The Song Company will be performing Viewing *at the ACP Sunday May 30,* *see page 39*

A legend...or two

Samantha Small departs and arrives at *Goldcard 1*

Like Matthew Bradley, I too remember TAA. I remember the single line from their television jingle. I remember the kid in grade 3 with the authorised TAA schoolbag—and I remember that it was flying TAA that Wonderwoman lost her bosom. Bradley's associations, however, move far beyond these. Unlike me, he had, as a child, used TAA as a means of transport. A means of going from here to there to do this or that. Between 2 things, Bradley was up in the air.

Physically, object-ively, Bradley grounds this middle space. The gallery is transformed into what feels like somewhere between Departures and Arrivals. He uses 3 tools: a lightbox, a winged staff and an air hostess.

On opening night all eyes rested on the hostess. Beautiful and beautifully she stood tall upon a shallow platform. She wore sky blue and appeared to be looking through us. Our hostess was Bradley's *Nola Rose Candidate*. She seemed proud yet displaced. Perhaps, temporally, lost in space. In reality Nola Rose was the promotional face of TAA and had smiled for an entire generation of Australians. This wannabe Nola was far too distant to smile. She appeared to be searching. For something. Maybe her own past and her own memories. Time here is confused, as is place.

Arrival. Departure. Departure. Arrival.

Like the real Nola Rose, Bradley's candidate arrived and departed. Her (unfair) substitute was a store mannequin with smaller feet than her own. I too arrived and departed. (I wasn't replaced.) Historically, it could be said, TAA—The Airline, arrived and departed.

In restoring the legend of TAA, Bradley constructs a metaphor. Air travel here represents a more profound transference. Coming and going, moving in and through time and space, you arrive one day and depart the next.

Opposite Bradley, at the far end of the gallery, Hayley Arjona raises the pitch. As artist and subject she performs for her audience. Both engaged and engaging, her painted self-portraits stand bigger than you. In Arjona's world, size always counts.

In earlier work Arjona has appeared armed and dangerous. As a suburban revolutionary she held you at gunpoint and launched a Molotov into the street. In these 3 new paintings, all large works on canvas, Arjona assumes a different posture. She is pacified, objectified and, in one instance, very nearly dead. But she doesn't need your sympathy. Mimicking the Cindy Crawford milk-job Arjona turns pink all over. Down on all fours, she dares you to try it. Even taking a bullet on 110th Street, Arjona manages to pull off a striking pose. She *looks* like a star.

With an unflinching Pop attitude, Arjona socks it to ya. Like candy from a stranger, you take it. The surfaces are so bright. They're so sticky. They even sparkle. But this is not a lolly. It's a painting.

In the face of the work, Arjona's personal aspiration to real-life 'stardom' is irrelevant. For contained in the frames she has constructed herself, a universe where she can be centre. As I picture this thought my eye travels to the bottom left corner of Arjona's strawberry milk fantasy—a glittering sunset captured in a bubble.

Matthew Bradley and Hayley Arjona appeared in Gold Card 1*; curated by EAF director Christopher Chapman, this was the first of 2 exhibitions showcasing the work of South Australian emerging artists; Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, Jan 28 - Feb 21;* Gold Card II *featured new works by Sally-Ann Rowland, Stephen Tarr and Michael Wolff, Feb 25 - March 21*

Hayley Arjona, *Untitled 1999*

Samantha Small is an Adelaide-based artist. In 1998 she received the Faulding Travel Award and plans to take up residency in the Netherlands for one year from August 1999.

Cultural pace and individual acceleration

Lara Travis gears into the Korean *Slowness of Speed* at the NGV

Slowness of Speed introduces 7 contemporary Korean artists—Kim Soo-Ja, Kim Young-Jin, Bae Bien-U, Yook Keun-Byung, Choi Jeong-Hwa, Park Hong-Chun and Lee Bul—to Australian audiences. The exhibition is part of an exchange between the National Gallery of Victoria and the Artsonje Centre, Seoul, reciprocating the *Unhomely* exhibition of Australian artists in Korea during 1998.

Curated by Kim Sun-Jung, the exhibition runs the gamut of aesthetics, from Pop to Feminist, Naturalist and Cyber. This diverse selection is united by the umbrella concept of the *Slowness of Speed*, which allows for exploration of the notion of speed in terms of the individual and the creative process, in the sense of global acceleration and the Korean predicament of dealing with rapid change brought on by the influx of Western culture. Sun-Jung introduces these ideas in her catalogue essay, which is thoroughly disserviced either by a lack of editing or poor translation.

Viewing *Slowness of Speed* in the National Gallery of Victoria's Access Gallery was not unlike touring a theme park, continually emerging from one dramatic, transporting show to enter the next. The works were united more by a common monumentality than by style. Three video/projected works were housed in large dark separate rooms making the viewing process somewhat fragmented. The Access Gallery was darker than usual, with individual works spot-lit, making the transition from the projection rooms to the rest of the exhibition easier than it might have otherwise been.

Bae Bien-U, *Sonamu*, series B 1992 - 97

At the funky, pop end of the aesthetic spectrum, Choi Jeong-Hwa's *About Being Irritated—The Death of a Robot* (1995) was a large, tangerine, inflated 70s TV superhero-style robot. It had that nostalgic, goin' nowhere appeal of redundant technologies, as it repeatedly tried and failed to stand up. Likewise, Lee Bul's *Cyborg Red* (work in progress) and *Cyborg Blue* (work in progress) played with frustrating the aesthetics of futurism. Bul's female Cyborgs have all the potential of a Frankenstein creation still on the slab, but locked in cables, supported with frames and limbless, they inhibit the positivist impetus of the cyber utopia.

Paradoxically, Kim Soo-Ja's *Cities on the Move—2727 Km Bottari Truck* conveyed a more mobile temporality, through a less futuristic style. The video continued her interest in wrapping and stitching as metaphors for the containment and extension of self through movement. The video depicts the artist sitting atop a large bundle of her wrapped cloths on the back of a truck as they travel a forest-lined road.

Park Hong-Chun's 9 Ilffocrome photographs, *To Alise*, evince only the milky traces of the crowds in a theme park. Timing each exposure at 30 minutes, Hong-Chung's technique operates in one sense as a comment on vision, speed and memory. A sense that speed (in this case the slow speed of the shutter) directly influences the ability to recall. The ability of the paper to "remember" the crowds is determined by the speed of the exposure. Taken more literally, the photographs suggest that imported Western culture is an engaging facade and that focusing on it results in the invisibility of local movement.

Bae Bien-U's black and white photographs of a native Korean forest, *Sonamu* (series A and series B), also play on the relationships between time and light. However, in contrast to Park Hong Chun's work, Bien U's photographs represent Koreanness as innate, continually changing and enduring.

Also focusing on nature, this time more obviously manipulated, Kim Young-Jin's *Fluids—Two Types of Viscosity* consists of a large projection of drops of water onto a stone and another projection of fluid continually accumulating, to be swiped away. The artwork, though less spectacular than some of his other fluid projections, plays effectively on water as both transient and enduring.

One of the most successful works is Yook Keun-Byung's *The Sound of Landscape + Eye For Field*, which consists of 2 videos of daybreak. Keun-Byung's conviction that "art begins in nature" is provocative in an historical sense. By communicating this through a gradually revealing, real-time experience, his videos demand a level of engagement rarely given works of art and, for that matter, the world around us.

It is a relief to visit an exhibition of contemporary Korean art and not be bombarded with rhetoric about cultural exchange and the diaspora, which has surrounded so many Asian art exhibitions and has, through overuse, acquired a diplomatic tone too expedient to be fully credible. *Slowness of Speed* makes cultural exchange more an implicit goal than an over-determined raison d'être and as a result is better equipped to offer Australian audiences an insight into Korean contemporary art.

Slowness of Speed, *National Gallery of Victoria (touring), Nov 13 1998 - Feb 22 1999*

Fluid significances

Sandra Selig explores the East-West dynamics of the work of Kate Beynon

Kate Beynon's recent show at Bellas Gallery bears the title *Hope/Wish*. The 11 felt pen drawings executed in Beynon's familiar graphic style could be read as an installed comic strip that introduces us to the action-character of a pregnant woman. This woman presumably has some link to the artist, who is due to give birth by the end of the exhibition. This is a personal story, told in the highly generic idiom of the comic strip, infiltrated by broader socio-cultural issues.

The exhibition consists of 3 small (38 x 28cm) and 8 large (78 x 56cm) drawings. They make up a narrative that is read from left to right around the walls. The first frames depict the child in the womb and the final frames picture the child in a more extrinsic relationship to the mother character. Each drawing has a similar background which consists of ray-like lines, interspersed with blue 'cloud' shapes, much like one might find on a 60s psychedelic rock poster although the colours are pastel blue, purple and grey hues.

Each work contains Chinese text and symbols that variously signify 'hope', 'happy', 'wish', 'pregnant', 'mother', 'father', 'child', 'heart', 'to protect', 'body', 'breathing' and 2 good-luck charms. Beynon's drawing finesse produces a seamless intersection of particular Eastern and Western graphic styles while retaining a stylistic incompatibility or difference. Given that Beynon was born in Hong Kong and has lived for some time in Melbourne, the Chinese symbols of hope and good luck indicate more than the usual physical and psychical anxieties associated with pregnancy. Perhaps the intersection of Eastern and Western styles metaphorically indicates the anxiety that an inter-racial family might experience with the expectation of a child into an Australian society that still gives voice to ethnic and cultural intolerance.

The style in which the Chinese symbols are drawn is not the typical calligraphic line associated with traditional Chinese characters. The signalling of Eastern tradition via the line of Chinese calligraphy is undermined by the way in which Beynon 'staggers' the line in a distinctively graphic and animated technique, invoking certain styles of Western street art or graffiti. Like some of Beynon's previous works where Chinese lettering is rendered in chenille stick (pipe cleaners) the symbolic meaning of the text in *Hope/Wish* is interrupted by its materiality. The reader is prompted to focus not only on the text's meaning, but also on the substance and style of its articulation. The blue cloud forms also have a number of levels of meaning. They inscribe a traditional Chinese water-colour idiom through their light blue hue and distinctive shape, but it

Kate Beynon, *Expecting*

is an idiom here interrupted by the thick felt pen outline of the 'clouds' instead of a more stylistically traditional lightly brushed line. This points to seemingly contradictory signs in the 'cloud' shapes which, along with the Chinese associations, again indicate Western popular culture styles such as graffiti.

The articulation of Eastern and Western differences in the work, signalled via the various layering of form, texture and colour, operate so that as soon as a signifier is laid down, it is destabilised by another. In a broader sense, this may be a reference to the Hong Kong/British cultural dichotomy of Beynon's birth place, where the Western influence is often referred to by Chinese people as cultural and spiritual 'pollution.' But more specifically, here it points to the socio-cultural destabilisation of the supposedly personal meaning of Beynon's pregnancy.

The pregnant character in *Hope/Wish* is presented as a comic-book or computer-game character. Her background of radiating lines (and front-on 'warrior girl' stance typical of contemporary amazons such as Xena) adds a particularly unique image to our culture's many depictions of maternity. Although 'action mum' radiates strength, confidence and power, she also appears in some frames with her womb and child exposed in an x-ray view. This suggests the moral vulnerability of both the mother and the unborn child to contradictions of Eastern and Western judgement. Chinese text which indicates such sentiments as 'hope' and 'wish' at times operates as a protective device for this vulnerability. Additionally, the red colour of the text perhaps points to the traditional Chinese belief that evil spirits are repelled by it, a belief practised in China every day through the writing of notes to loved ones or family members on red paper. But once again, there is a destabilisation of this meaning, via the specifically Western outline of this text. Beynon's mother and child 'character' must certainly be resolute in the face of such fluid significances. 'Good luck,' Kate Beynon.

Kate Beynon, Hope/Wish, *Bellas Gallery, Brisbane, Feb/March 1999.*

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Age and Consent

From *Age and Consent II*, Ella Dreyfus,

There's more than a set of photographs in the room for Stills Gallery's latest exhibition, *Age and Consent*. Ella Dreyfus' work provokes strong opinion. Her *Pregnancy Series* shown at Stills in 1992 was critically acclaimed but also troubled some who saw it as stepping too close to the line between human interest and shock factor. What confronts in her work is the fact that here in the 20th Century pictures of ordinary bodies are still surprisingly unfamiliar.

The large opening night crowd for her new show marked its significance. A variety of opinions bounced off the walls between the stark black and white photographs in the main gallery: some had not expected to be so moved; an older woman near me didn't like the unremitting gaze on the one kind of body. "It's depressing to see them all together like this." Many stood back from the work; some wanted to cry; some did; "Way too arty" said one man; others moved closer. "That's great," said a young girl, locking her gaze on one of the show's starkest photographs, a naked older woman with a walking stick photographed from waist to mid thigh.

Sensing the importance of the occasion, William Yang is doing his own documenting. Some of Ella Dreyfus' subjects circulate. I move towards them because, I'll be honest, I'm finding these photographs hitting nerves surprisingly near the surface. I know "we live in a culture in denial about old age" (Lewis Kaplan from the Council on the Ageing). I understand too well how older women are deemed undesirable and made invisible. I know that. But I find myself heading for the smaller gallery upstairs.

Watching the video documentation I'm relieved to hear some of the women talking about the experience of being photographed by Ella Dreyfus, to know that she's mostly asked friends or at least people she knows. Is it the issue of context that's worrying me, I wonder. I relax knowing that the women are happy with their portraits. One says that she's always liked being looked at. At 17 she'd offered to pose for her art class but had been rejected. I relax with these smaller portraits where the women are photographed twice, in underwear and out of it, where I can read small changes over time, signs of character in the way, in their nakedness, they face the camera.

Making the opening speech, writer Dorothy McRae MacMahon says we're more used to seeing the faces and hands of old people and asks, "what about everything else?" I return to everything else. These are the bodies where gravity has had its way, where scars and deformity are in evidence. These are fine but not by their nature "beautiful" photographs. Not all of them. Flesh can be ugly and this stark black and white sharpens the bodies' textures. They are larger than life, sometimes clinical and for reasons of anonymity—or art—they're cropped, headless.

In the photographs taken by Ella Dreyfus in aged care institutions, a woman in a wheelchair adrift in Dreyfus' calico landscape catches my eye. Next to her is a photograph of her signature. Someone near me wonders whether signing your name constitutes consent if you're suffering dementia. *Is* she suffering dementia? It worries me more that for reasons of her position in society, this woman has somehow become the locus for my own troubled relationship with mortality. Perhaps it's the statement on the wall. "I cannot deny that the old person will be myself, but that means death, so I avert my gaze from the old person, or treat him as a child, and want to leave his presence as soon as possible." (Iris Marion Young, 1990). Why do I suddenly recall a picture in the next room in which a woman lies on a bed with her face turned away, a circle drawn on one breast—a picture of passive consent for what might be either essential or invasive surgery. Days later, I still feel the push and the pull of *Age and Consent* in my own aging body and for this discomfort I thank Ella Dreyfus and her powerful if (for me) problematic images and especially her subjects for the generosity of their consent

Virginia Baxter

Age and Consent, *Ella Dreyfus, Stills Gallery, 36 Gosbell Street Paddington, March 17 - April 17*

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