

August – September 1999

# RealTime

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the digital impact



Working the Screen

AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTA 99

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The Faulding Award for Multimedia is proudly sponsored by the South Australian Government through Arts SA and F H Faulding & Co Limited.



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## Chunky news

You can count on an evening of discombobulation when Chunky Move come to town with their suitcases full of *Bodyparts*, their new dance season at the Drama Theatre in August-September.

Gideon Obarzanek gets his teeth stuck into Little Red in *All the Better to Eat You With* exploring "the complexities of power and abuse beneath the familiar fairytale" Yeh, yeh but we know it's the "psychotic beauty and seriously sensual" stuff we wanna see, "the surrealist tea party cum serial killer pantomime." Yes! "A delectable fairytale fit for the new millennium" says *The Melbourne Times*, to which we say, yum-yum.



Gideon Obarzanek

There's more discomfort in Lucy Guerin's *Zero* described by the choreographer as "an uneasy work that continually censors itself, reinventing its structural identity and the individuals within it." Using techniques of film camera operation and playback translated into a real time situation, her choreography with Darrin Verhagen's electronic soundtrack creates close-ups, jump cuts and extreme shifts in focus.

See it on a dark night.

*Bodyparts*, The Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House, August 31 - September 4. Information [www.soh.nsw.gov.au](http://www.soh.nsw.gov.au)

## Sport

### TOOTH & CLAW

with Jack Rufus

As we contemplate 21st century sport, we can be sure that technology will play a major role—and perhaps a clue can be found in the recent cricket World Cup. Tournament officials were shocked to learn that Hansie Cronje, the dour South African captain, was receiving radio instructions from his coach via a poorly-concealed ear-piece. The technology was promptly banned—but why shouldn't transmitters and ear-pieces become part of sport, for all competitors?

Just think of the potential for sabotage, which would open whole new tactical possibilities. Transmissions could be jammed, or replaced with signals to send competitors mad, such as music by Rolf Harris or The Carpenters. Or the messages could be: "Lie down now!" or "Tie your shoe-laces together!"

Sports psychologists could be let loose to mess with the heads of opponents. "You've never been any good," they could whisper into those ear-pieces, "you're going to fail and everyone will laugh at you." Sporting success is 90% mental, we're always being told, so why not test the theory? Let loose the demons of doubt and fear, and see how long those highly paid champions last!

### TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

Though they sneered at it, I have always had a suspicion that Malcolm Fraser's "Life wasn't meant to be easy" was seen as not too far off course by many Australians. Witness the graceless outcry as Kosovo refugees dared to question the cold charity of an army barracks in mid-winter Singleton. It occurred to me as I teed off at Carnoustie in Scotland last month that this might explain our presence in such numbers at this year's British Open. Hordes of Aussies sniggered into their hands as international pros chopped and hacked their way around unforgiving greens. They howled and pointed when the Frenchman rolled up his trousers and waded into the water trap. Giggling loudest was Olympics Minister Michael Knight as he toured the formidable bunkers and knee-high roughs. "I'll give 'em a bike track!" he muttered, referring to the tour of Bankstown he recently tried to pass off as an international cycling circuit. Later in the clubhouse I spotted Mike swapping yarns with R & A Championship chairman Hugh Campbell who described his course as "not life-threatening, so get on with it." Cheering words for Knight whose mind is occupied these days with just how to enhance the Olympics experience for the international tourist when what he's basically got, outside a bloody great big stadium, is State Rail's western line, Parramatta Road, the M4 and environs. "Bugger 'em" he shouted from the bar, "Let them come to Carnoustie!"

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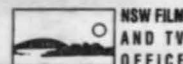
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# Editorial

Australian Perspecta 99, MAAP 99 and APT3 are all eagerly anticipated in this edition of *RealTime*. Jacqueline Millner and Alex Gawronski have commissioned a set of essays to explore the already contentious (as you'll soon read) theme of Perspecta 99—"living in the here and now: arts and politics." It would be heartening if Perspecta 99 triggered ongoing debate about art and politics in Australia. Artspace director Nicholas Tsoutas is keen to ensure that it does with a widely distributed provocation (see page 7 and interview page 9).

MAAP 99 is the innovative Brisbane-based Multimedia Art Asia Pacific festival that links the region online but also has a strong physical presence with a range of quirky and immersive events and a significant conference (See page 24). MAAP 99 overlaps with another Brisbane-based event, a major visual arts celebration, APT3 (Asia Pacific Triennial), which shares some events and a strong regional interest with MAAP. A feature of APT this year is its Virtual Triennial website (See page 38). For MAAP it's their second festival, a unique venture which should attract a big audience online and on the ground. APT's reputation is considerable, preferred by many over the Sydney and (the new) Melbourne visual art biennials, and should attract a large interstate audience including many artists. Brisbane will be the place to be in the first 2 weeks of September.

Thanks to an initiative of the Australian Film Commission (with the funds to realise it) and a sponsorship from Online Australia, we have great pleasure in bringing you *Working the Screen*, a 20 page *RealTime* liftout reporting on 60 digital media works in progress, many of them online, from across Australia and including essays on developments and issues in the nurturing, funding, display and celebration of digital media. As our *Working the Screen* editorial reports, the response from artists was overwhelming, encouraging us to

think about another edition. A problem for audiences of the digital media area is how to find out what work is being done—we hope we're helping here—and then how and where to experience it. Not surprisingly at Online Australia's Project 1 forum (the complete *RealTime* report is on our website), the effectiveness of lists, filters, portals, gateways and the Australian Cultural Network was much discussed. The Digital Artstore (see pages 2 & 7 of *Working the Screen*), a promising AFC initiative operated by 3V Media Distribution, will be up and running in December, assisting both artists and audiences.

Also in this edition is our annual look at academic issues. The academy is ever awash with an amazing mix of exciting developments (new campus galleries, digital studios, performance centres) and horror stories. We survey the challenges and the considerable costs of teaching new media; visit an impressive new performing arts complex at University of Western Sydney; review a new collection of essays in performance studies; and interview electro-acoustic composer and teacher Tim Kreger.

The Sydney Film Festival is sizeably featured in *OnScreen* with a special focus on the John Cassavetes retrospective and the D.art 99 program, along with surveys of the rest of the festival's program. The Cassavetes screenings attracted a substantial audience of older devotees and the curious young—many soon to become converts. It was a bracing experience to see again, on the big screen, film narrative addressed with such (carefully crafted) rough verve, such extremes of anger and laughter, and great ensemble performances that put you right on edge.

This edition of *RealTime* should last you a good 2 months. All being well, we hope to travel north to savour the pleasures of MAAP 99 and APT3. See you there.

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A 20 page liftout detailing 60 digital media works-in-progress; plus essays on the state of the new media arts



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# Introducing the issues: Perspecta 99

## Living Here Now: Art and Politics

Jacqueline Millner introduces the *RealTime* prelude to Perspecta 99—a collection of essays and interviews she commissioned with Alex Gawronski

This year, the contemporary arts event Perspecta is again framed by a big issue. From Art and Nature we have moved to Art and Politics. For some, the choice of theme from one of the givens of art practice, ie art's political implications, is a misguided representation of art and politics as the flavour of the month, as disposable as any other fashionable curatorial aegis. But for others, the theme provides a welcome opportunity to focus on and debate this persistently important conjunction.

These essays were commissioned to contextualise Perspecta events broadly and, as is evident, they predate the exhibition proper, responding to the theme rather than to individual works or projects. Catriona Moore writes with an eye to recent developments in Queensland politics which have alarmed the nation, to comment poignantly on the need to "exhume some of the daggy, discomfiting debates about community, art and (non)working life", in order for art to become meaningful again to a broader public. Don

Miller also focuses on community, with a whimsical but at the same time acute reminder of the art and politics of the everyday, particularly as inherent in the performance of neighbourly rites. Alex Gawronski brings us closer to specific issues around the connection between art and public space, with a spirited analysis of recent public art projects in Sydney in the run up to the Olympics, works which act as morality tales about the urgent need for us to reclaim our public culture. Adam Geczy takes a more historical approach, arguing that

indeed 'art and politics' is tantamount as a phrase to 'art and art' given that all western art at least since the French Revolution has been political. Finally, my essay touches on some of the many attempts made this century to theorise how art effects social change, so as to devise strategies for artists to make a real difference at the level of the social.

*Artworks reproduced here are part of Perspecta 99.*

## Art and politics: a tautology

Adam Geczy tests Perspecta 99's theme against history

The choice of art and politics as the theme for this year's Perspecta is both long overdue and embarrassingly redundant. The conjunction of art and politics sits rather clumsily simply because it is taken for granted in the art of many other countries. The fact that politics is set up here as a theme will do little to redress the lack of political commitment in a great deal of Australian art of the past decades; it may even perpetuate a persistent dearth of content and political responsibility in criticism to date. Perspecta appears to hold up politics as one theme among many, implying that next year another theme, a different exigency will require our attention.

Although the curatorial aegis may be well-intentioned, proposing politics as the latest main event betrays a myopia not unlike that which has tainted official responses to the 'Aboriginal issue' in this country. The error is to think of the Aboriginal issue as a syndrome which can be cured and then forgotten, rather than as a matter which requires the institution of an ongoing and pervasive consciousness of dignity and respect. Perspecta 1999 must wrestle with an analogous error, namely that focusing on the relationship between art and politics will suddenly rouse consciousness of the ways in which art penetrates the spheres of cultural instrumentality, ethics and change. The theme of Perspecta 1999 is flawed in that it appears to elide the argument that all art in the western tradition at least since the mid 18th century has been political. Indeed, 'art and politics' may well be as tautological as 'art and art.'

Let me put an historical gloss on this. It was the events preceding and during the French Revolution that made the use of art for political purposes so conspicuous for the first time in western art. Previously, political content was either confined to the overt gestures of pamphlets and caricatures and therefore considered marginal, or it was deployed in the form of sanctifying members of the clergy or the aristocracy, hence covert. But during the French Revolution, images, at least in name, became the property of the people. Paintings were now used to celebrate revolutionary moments or to create people's heroes, such as David's painting of the revolutionary Marat executed in his bath. Napoleon then put art in the service of the people's state, with innumerable portraits of himself and his generals in their endless possibilities of self; one was after all no longer answerable to the king for one's identity.

Hegel, in his philosophy of self-realisation, characterised art as a crucial part of the process in which pure spirit, as he called it, revealed itself. Art had undergone progressive stages of self-knowledge, and was moving inexorably toward its own end, when its mission of

revelation would be complete and it would no longer be necessary. Hegel understood art as serving the goals of the common good and truth. In this he was not so far removed from those Romantics from whom he wished to distinguish himself, who also argued that there was no distinction between art and philosophy. No matter where one turned, art had a political register, it had a purpose. Indeed, both Hegel and the Romantics believed that frivolous 'art' did not merit the name.

And what of Courbet's Realism? By definition, the themes of Courbet's painting do not have the same political currency today as they had in their time. For to desire that art be Real was to desire that art have direct relevance to its immediate public and to the matters of the day. Courbet for instance was the first artist to deal with manual labour in art as manual labour and nothing else. What many in Courbet's time saw as the artist's indifference to beauty was actually his desire to focus on the worth of everyday things and occurrences. Realism—and Realism in literature such as Zola's—meant for art to have currency, to reflect the present accurately and to have some influence on it.

It is with Courbet that we see the emergence of the avant-garde which is, after all, a term borrowed from the military to describe troops who went ahead of the main battalion to scout for trouble. Indeed to trace the tribulations of the avant-garde since the middle of the 19th century is also to trace the transmutations of socialism. For example, it is frequently forgotten that Surrealism was originally conceived as a great deal more than a stylistic movement; it was to be a revolution. According to its most ardent advocates, Surrealism was intended to liberate the inner drives, to free the unconscious and thereby bring about the downfall of rational capitalism.

Even though its revolutionary aspirations remained but a pipe-dream, Surrealism crossed the Atlantic with those artists who managed to escape Europe in the 30s, and substantially inflected Abstract Expressionism before this style ossified into the essence of art for art's sake in the 50s and 60s. The notorious advocate for Abstract Expressionism, the critic Clement Greenberg, was a Marxist. And while many Abstract Expressionists kept to themselves (already a political act, whether one likes it or not), others plainly stated their utopian dreams. Barnett Newman's paintings for example appear at first to have no political intent at all. To a lay viewer, his monochrome fields punctuated with one or several vertical lines may look odd, perhaps even obtuse or pretentious. But in the physical presence of these works, one feels an equally odd sense of mystical wonderment. For Newman, who wrote "Instead of making

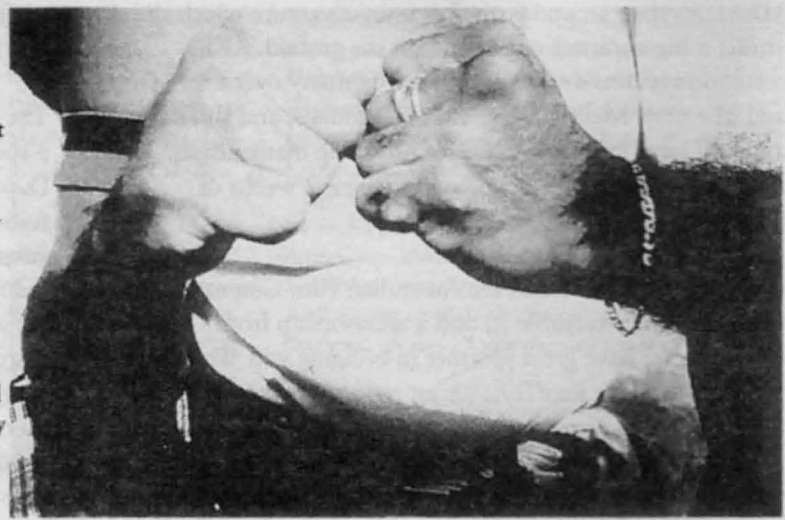
cathedrals of Christ, man or life, we are making them out of ourselves, out of our feelings", art was to be all-encompassing and salvational. Those who are reluctant to see the connection between this and politics have only to turn to the beginning of western

philosophy, to Plato's Republic, and remember that Plato wanted poets and artists excluded from his ideal state, because art was considered to be deception and imitation. In effect what Newman was saying was that art had succeeded where the politics of the 1950s had failed.

What becomes clearer looking at these examples, but some among many, is that art and politics are not connected, but rather that art is a crucial component of the political. (Art is political but the aestheticisation of politics is haunted by the spectre of Nazism.) In wanting to rid the state of artists, Plato inadvertently recognised art's otherness from the state, while at the same time asserting the state's dependence on art and aesthetic judgement to determine the ethics of political life.

To question the theme of Art and Politics in this year's Perspecta is not to say that we have a poor handle on the history of political philosophy or art, but to lament the lack of political sophistication among many of our cultural producers and commentators. Australia may well be the sole western country that has not experienced a reformation, a revolution, a war economy or an immense war on its own soil, nor as yet, republicanism. Its collective unconscious is arguably still scarred by Gallipoli, in contrast to the losses which have marked the history of France, Germany and Russia this century. Quite simply, a work of art, especially in the western tradition, is not read politically in Australia, which is to say rarely are works read comprehensively. One example is the Australian response to Minimalism.

Minimalism was highly political. Not only did it attack the brazen subjectivism of Abstract Expressionism, but the repetition of beautiful, radically simplified objects focused attention on the context in which these objects were positioned, namely the architecture and the institutional framework of the museum. That is, Minimalism foregrounded the politics of art production and exhibition. The Australian response, largely by way of the artists associated with The Field exhibition of 1968, remained decorative and inert,



Destiny Deacon, *Knuckle Sandwich* 1998,

courtesy Gabrielle Pizzi Gallery

and failed to grasp the motivation and conviction of Minimalism. Yet despite its superficiality, the Australian take on Minimalism has left a long legacy in the welter of non-objective art produced in Melbourne and Sydney over the last decades: art which persists with the bogus ideal of pure visuality, although this is more often an inability to commit to a position, art which celebrates its right to communicate absolutely nothing, and for this reason cannot be brought to task. Safe art, dead art.

But, one may protest, the age of the avant-garde is over, post- or post-post-modernism has us in its grip and positions are no longer tenable. A proclamation of political intent in this country is taken as a confession, and one is too often branded a literalist or a reactionary, instead of being seen as devoted to an ideal and the potential of that idea on the viewer. In contrast, to declare oneself political in a country such as Germany is simply to give assurance of one's consciousness of the present and the past. We forget that art is about giving recognition to a sensibility, that it is about ownership of a history—although Aboriginal art in general is highly cognisant of this. Art is about resistance, it salvages something that would otherwise have gone unnoticed or forgotten. At its best art is reprieve from bigotry and boredom. My real concern with the theme for this year's Perspecta is that it reflects the torpid face of Australia's arch-liberalism (attacks on the present government notwithstanding), for it turns politics into an option, instead of the epicentre of art's vitality.

One may protest that there are no beliefs any more, that art is wayward. But art is always the scapegoat for contemporary malaise (when has there been a time when people have not bemoaned contemporary art?). In some way, glaring or subtle, art penetrates family, the legal system, interpersonal relations, education, class, religion, individual rights, duties and obligations, the environment, everything that goes to make up the political. Never the twain shall part.

*Adam Geczy is an artist and writer who teaches at the Australian Catholic University.*



# The arts, community and the decline in social capital



Catriona Moore in Queensland details a political context for Perspecta 99's *Living Here Now*

The curatorial chestnut of personal ethics and political engagement accompanies the last survey of contemporary Australian art of this century. Unfurling the banner of *Living Here Now: Art and Politics, Perspecta 1999* will canvass artistic responses to the interwoven issues of racial and cultural diversity, love, sexuality and anticolonialism, and our changing experience of the private and the public domains, the personal and the political.

The feminist slogan 'the personal is political' (and vice versa) remains useful. Thirty years after its formulation as a struggle-chant of Women's Liberation, the personal still feels political, while the political itself has become far more privatised than anyone had thought possible. The prophetic social analyses of feminism and related New Left social movements have been fairly accurate; however, private life has been shaped more by the 'invisible hand' of electronic media markets than by the long arm of the State. Nonetheless, the politics of the New Left informed the most socially and aesthetically speculative aspects of postmodern art. Today we see their offspring on the web, on the airwaves and on the walls at the AGNSW, the National Trust's S H Ervin Gallery, the Casula Powerhouse, Artspace and other Perspecta venues.

The exhibition's decentralised format welcomes a relative diversity of audiences. This is a distant echo of an earlier search for new audiences by feminist and conceptual art, trade union and community arts projects. That leap outside the comfort zones of high culture led to an explosive experiment with new art forms, processes and materials, and an acknowledgement of links with the electronic media, all of which caused quite a few ripples in the artworld. The ex-director of the Community Cultural Development Unit of the Australia Council, Deborah Mills, recalls the cracks which quickly appeared in the Council's charter by the early 1980s. Until then, the central paradox of Access and Excellence had been resolved through understanding cultural difference as cultural deprivation, and so Musica Viva toured the regions, writers' workshops went to Wagga Wagga and muralists painted prison exercise yards. Under pressure, our flagship institutions were forced to let go of the idea of a single dominant culture: "One culture became many. The task became one of creating the conditions in which these cultures could flourish... Community development became both an objective and a methodology and was understood to mean a collective, communal process of political, social and cultural change." (Deborah Mills, "Changing Face of Community Culture", *Media Culture Review*, No. 1, May 1999. See also Gay Hawkins, *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras: Constructing Community Arts*, Allen & Unwin, 1993.)

*Living Here Now* revives aspects of that brief challenge. In today's high-cultural deep-sleep,

where so many political and aesthetic experiments are denigrated as 'PC' and hence rendered as suspect, any move towards new audiences and renewed civic dialogue is welcome.

Since the 1830s, when the French utopian socialist Henri de St Simon first coined the term avant-garde, artists have always staffed the speculative arm of civic life. St Simon had a vision of artists taking their place in the vanguard, alongside scientists and progressive industrialists, to form an elite leadership of the new social order. In an imaginary dialogue between an artist and a scientist, St Simon has his artist character proclaim that:

*It is we artists who will serve you as avant-garde...the power of the arts is in fact most immediate and most rapid: when we wish to spread new ideas among men, we inscribe them on marble or on canvas...What a magnificent destiny for the arts is that of exercising a positive power over society, a true priestly function, and of marching forcefully in the van of all the intellectual faculties!*

cited Linda Nochlin, *Essays on 19th Century Art and Society*, Harper & Row, 1989

In different ways, postmodernism and Pauline Hanson have stripped this priestly mantle from our once-broad artistic shoulders by forcing more realistic reassessments of art's "positive power", along with that of other social elites. We can, however, still learn much from St Simon about the need for real or imaginary dialogues outside the art world. For instance, I find I can learn more about 'living here now' from a short trip to the Office of the Government Printer than from the 'back to the Modern Masters' columnist's vision of our cultural mandarins. The latter have become the guardians of yesterday's Culture, and have absented themselves from the coalface of civic life.

Artists and audiences are possibly better served by talking with today's version of St Simon's "scientists and industrialists"—our progressive civil servants. Just what can artists learn from the bureaucrats? For a start, it's worth remembering how both Labor and Liberal governments used to talk about the State as a mirror, reflecting and serving the needs of the community. Now the cleverer ones acknowledge that this fabled community no longer exists, if it ever really did. Up here in Queensland, for instance, civil servants and ALP hucksters alike doubt the value of yet another government restructure or backroom deal with the AWU when so many people feel disenfranchised, powerless and alienated from any form of 'professional politics.'

Less than 25% of Australians trust governments, according to Queensland's most senior civil servant, Dr Glyn Davis, addressing a forum of greysuits with the gloomy observation that it was difficult for governments to re-

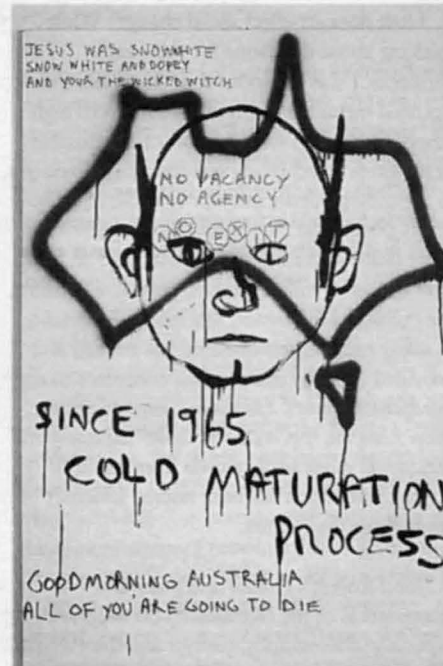
structure and reform their administrations when the communities which they purportedly serve were themselves hopelessly fractured. Australian civic life has sharply declined over the last few decades, as elsewhere. We are less likely to take up voluntary work in the community or become active in local issues. We no longer go to church, send the kids to Scouts, show up at working bees, join a union or sports club, participate in the Red Cross, and we've left our local political party branches in droves.

The loss of community life has meant a loss of political awareness. Not surprisingly, this decline in 'social capital' has been closely correlated to the new gratifications of television, the internet and video games. The Orwellian stereotype of community life replaced by an archipelago of cable-connected homes, apparently self-sufficient yet fundamentally isolated, has wreaked havoc on civic life in very real ways. When we withdraw from community networks we lose our links to the wider world. When all news comes from television programs (and I don't necessarily mean news programmes), we no longer have the competence to engage in public life. The success of One Nation in Queensland's last state election indicates this lack of engagement and its concomitant culture of complaint, a sense that everything is out of one's control and that other people are to blame: "A population ill-informed about political events and unused to compromise with others is more likely to adopt extreme views", argued Dr Davis. No wonder governments have given up pretending to be mirrors reflecting our needs; our desperate civil servants now openly talk of reinventing government in order to actively frame our splintered and shrinking 'communities' in a non-paternalistic way.

Without wishing to embrace the voluntarism that plagues much current social theory of this kind (cultural togetherness is no alternative to a decent job), it is interesting to witness this turnaround in government rhetoric, especially as it echoes, amongst other things, the half-forgotten tenets of community arts. More broadly, the choice between the mirror and the frame has see-sawed through the history of modernism, and in times of cultural crisis, even frames have not been enough—recall John Grierson, the Ben Chifley of British documentary, thundering "Art is not a mirror but a hammer" for the antifascist cause.

Governments today are also facing an increasingly polarised population, and wish to re-frame protest into dialogue. Witness Queensland's grass-roots 'community cabinet meetings', where the Beattie Labor government and senior administrators spend one weekend a month travelling the State attending community question-and-answer sessions. The process looks, and feels, like a community arts project.

Who goes to these meetings? In your typical



Adam Cullen, *The Man in White*, courtesy Yuill Crowley

Queensland One Nation electorate, such as Mulgrave in the southern suburbs of Cairns, the several hundred participants were those who already possessed social capital. Despite the Mulgrave Football Club venue, the offer of a free cup of tea and a chance to talk turkey with the Premier, locals from the nearby housing estate stayed away in droves: "It appeared people from One Nation were too alienated, too distrustful or simply too disengaged to walk down the road to participate", the Courier-Mail reported. It is precisely these people that Beattie desperately needs to engage, but in this case, the image of open government on your doorstep did not work. Governments have learned the hard way that there is no one way to build community life. A whole menu of participation opportunities is needed, they say. If one form of consultation does not work, another might. It is perhaps ironic that Pauline Hanson's old stomping-ground of Ipswich hosts the new arts centre, Global Arts Link, a successful menu of high art, new technologies and community arts which is busy fostering social capital from the ground up. In clapped-out, post-industrial Ipswich, art has regained its civic responsibility and place 'in the van of all the intellectual faculties.'

The press releases for *Living Here Now* likewise promise a smorgasbord of ethno-poetic options. Its Rainbow Coalition flavours are derived from Indigenous, feminist, multicultural, postcolonial, ecological and queer aspects of postmodern thinking. In the current climate, we would also do well to exhume some of those daggy, discomforting debates about community, art and (non)working life. For an increasing proportion of marginalised Australians, that's what *Living Here Now* is all about.

Catriona Moore is a Visiting Fellow in the Art History Department, University of Queensland.

## Into the spider web

A participating artist in Perspecta 99, Aleks Danko is interviewed by Alex Gawronski

AG Could you briefly describe your work for Perspecta?

AD The work is a continuation of my *Songs of Australia* series. It represents volume 4, though in a scaled-up version. Essentially it consists of 2 large peg doll figures. The first stands at around 3.2 metres whilst the second is roughly 2.8 metres. In a way they represent folk art objects. They are figures of a partially humorous domestic nightmare. Around them in the gallery are panels indicating false doors and windows. In the centre of the room is a baby's playpen, also oversized. The playpen holds the model of an

impenetrable house devoid of entrances or exits.

AG In what ways do political ideas function in your work given Perspecta's subtitle, Art and Politics?

AD The easiest way to answer this question would be to refer to two previous subtitles of my *Songs of Australia* series. The first, exhibited initially at Melbourne's Sutton Gallery, was called, *Caring/Comfortable/Relaxed*. These were the words John Howard used in his election victory to describe his vision of Australia under the Liberal government. Of course the antithesis



Aleks Danko, *Songs of Australia Vol.4, Danko The Art Of Living* courtesy Sutton Gallery

is true. The second title relates to volume 8 of the series. This installation is currently showing at the Ballarat Mining Exchange. The title of the work is even more direct, it is called *We Don't Apologise Do We John?* and refers obviously to the Howard government's outlook on Aboriginal issues. In fact I'm very interested to gauge the Indigenous response to my work particularly as my peg dolls will appear alongside the contemporary totems of Pedro Wonaemirri.

AG On the topic of cultural heritage, in what ways do you think your Ukrainian background affects the political thought in your work?

AD I couldn't say it affected it in any definitive or immediately apparent way although I have made specific references to my Russian schooling in past work. In many ways my cultural background underlies the *continued on page 6*





# Elusive exigencies: art and social change

Jacqueline Millner surveys ways of looking at the relationship between art and social change

How does art effect social change? While thinking about the theme for this year's *Perspecta*, I was reminded that this question has troubled me much of my adult life. From high school fascination with the role of the Russian avant-garde in achieving revolutionary objectives, to an undergraduate attempt to understand how it was possible to stretch Marxism to allow for other than economic determinism, and on to later concerns with feminism, post structuralism, the politics of difference, and lately community, in many respects this question has framed and provided an often unconscious coherence to my intellectual inquiry. I am sure I am not alone here. After all, this is one of those 'big questions' which will never really recede from cultural debate, and which has been argued furiously throughout the century.

John Robert's erudite and polemical examination of the relationship between art, especially photography, realism and the everyday, *The Art of Interruption* (Manchester 1988, Manchester University Press), recently placed some of my early frustrating attempts to understand how politics and art were connected in context. I recall on several instances trying to argue for a particular understanding of the Marxist notion of ideology which allowed this component 'relative autonomy' from the economic conditions of a society, so as to theoretically wangle a central position for artists and cultural critics. Roberts reminded me that these indeed invoked 'the Althusserian breakthrough' which British cultural critic John Tagg hailed as "making cultural politics possible" (cited in Roberts).

My attraction to poststructuralism and its critiques of representation, as well as my enduring love-hate relationship with documentary photography and its realist attempts to enlighten, are also caught in Roberts' historical sweep. From the government sponsored photographs of the American dispossessed of the 30s, to the complex image-text collaborations of John Berger and Jean Mohr, to Nan Goldin's warts and all identity politics, documentary photography has continued its attempts to negotiate a bridge between art and politics. More traditional documentary approaches however receded from the limelight with the embrace of the politics of representation à la Foucault. With representation now as the locus of reality-creation, artists took centre stage, effectively becoming guerrillas at the level of the sign. *The History of Sexuality Part I* became an unlikely manifesto for cultural activists, an essential accoutrement reportedly often spied in the hip pockets of New York AIDS activists

## Into the Spiderweb

continued from page 7

politics of my work in the sense that I, like many other Australian artists of mixed parentage, experienced prejudice as a result of the White Australia trends of the 50s and 60s. It was during this very time that my grandmother sent me to the local Orthodox school to learn Russian. I remember that this seemed strange to me because as a Ukrainian she had quite a distinct cultural and political outlook.

AG In the work to which you have just referred, you reconstructed your old classroom, 'museum-ising' it in the process. Do you think it's possible to make politically effective art in a museum like the Art Gallery of NSW?

AD Of course! Australian artists of the 30s and 40s, like The Angry Penguins, were highly politicised. They also happened to exhibit at the Art Gallery of NSW. I suppose ultimately I am interested in the degree to which my work has the capacity to subvert pre-existing meanings while avoiding being absorbed entirely by the institution. I think such a

associated with ACT UP, and arguably key to understanding the workings of much prominent art of the 80s and early 90s such as Barbara Kruger's billboards or Jenny Holzer's LEDs.

And yet, it is possible to contextualise the search for a meaningful model of the relationship between art and social change more broadly still (as Roberts also does), for arguably cultural politics were not in effect enabled in the 1960s with Althusser but much earlier. Frederic Jameson, in his afterword to a collection of writings from the 1920s and 30s entitled *Aesthetics and Politics*, notes the enduring relevance, if under different inflections, of the realism/modernism debate which was concerned with this very search. It was a debate perhaps best articulated in the exchanges between 2 giants of German art and political philosophy, Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukacs, although in Australia the debate was also passionately argued between the social realist painters, such as Noel Counihan and the group of expressionists associated with the Angry Penguins, such as Albert Tucker.

Lukacs insisted on the fundamental importance of culture to revolutionary politics, developing a theory designed to reveal the ideological content of what had to that point appeared to be purely formal aesthetic phenomena. Moreover, he argued that in the practice of realism, as opposed to avant-garde modernism, there existed the possibility of some complete or truthful representation of reality, not captive to false consciousness but rather free of ideology and emancipatory: the credo of the traditional documentary photographer.

Brecht on the other hand sought to restore to realistic art that "principle of play and genuine aesthetic gratification which the relatively more passive and cognitive aesthetic of Lukacs had seemed to replace with the grim duty of a proper reflection of the world" (Jameson). Moreover, Brecht's principle of 'alienation', whereby the historical contingency of various aesthetic phenomena are foregrounded, provided a crucial point of reference for much political art since his time.

As for the Australian response to these debates, Brecht and modernism appear to have won out, for who became the undoubted heroes of Australian painting but those who sought to express their politics through 'radical', modernist form, the likes of Arthur Boyd and Albert Tucker. As Jameson points out, political art of the social realist type is often assimilated to

question refers as much to the curator's responsibility, which in this case I believe to be utterly clear, as well as the responsibility of the artist.

AG Do you think you have any political responsibility as an artist?

AD Once again I think that political responsibility is a necessary precondition of being an artist today. However I believe the question is far too complex to ever be clear-cut. In my own work I seek to address the political through creating dichotomies of meaning and avoiding either/or approaches to art making. Through doing so I hope to allow viewers a sense of participation and authorship. Humour and satire are also indispensable components of my practice. It is primarily through these that I hope to entice viewers. Of course it is always a different question once the viewer's attention has been captured and they've entered the work. Here they enter a spider's web. It's only at the moment of this realisation that the viewer wonders what to do and what questions are actually being asked. It's then that they enter the political dimension of my work with all its associated ironies.

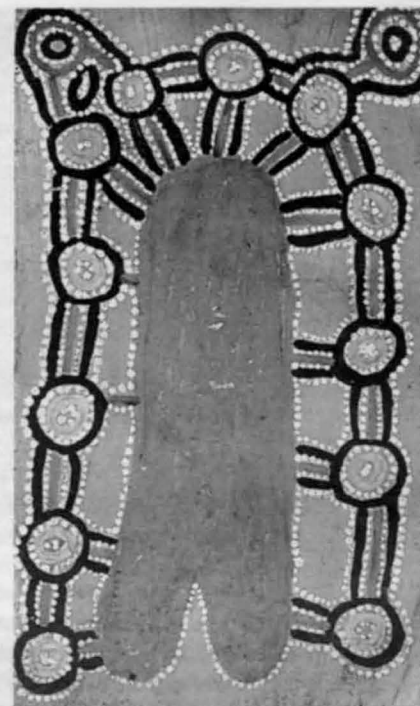
classical ideologies of representation, while even bourgeois modernism is said to be revolutionary precisely to the degree that it questions old formal values. Charles Merewether has remarked on the relative institutional indifference to the Australian social realists, compared to the status granted the expressionists of the period. Ultimately, it seems, the radicality of the world-view and political commitment of the artists are rendered redundant in favour of experiments in modernism's formal language; in a not unfamiliar scenario, the so-called autonomy of art triumphed over grass-roots involvement in workers' struggles and marginalised communities (activities which characterised the social realist approach).

Indeed it is a scenario which plays itself out again and again, including much later in the community arts and art in working life projects of the 1970s, where aesthetics were consciously sacrificed for the sake of participation, where decision-making was decentralised often to the point of obliterating the artist altogether, where the emphasis was on process and not on finished product. Institutional memory is impatient with such strategies, so that other than documentation as social history, little survives of such experiments in art and politics, let alone much positive assessment of its impact and legacy. Emblematic of this might be the example of Ian Burn, who despite his complex and wide-ranging involvement with such strategies is remembered best for his early conceptual art and collaborations with *Art & Language*.

History is inevitably mobilised by the proposal of art and politics as the theme for a festival of contemporary art at the fin de siècle. Indeed, this is perhaps the most productive outcome of such a choice. Because the relationship between art and politics, including the elusive explanation of how one is harnessed to affect the other, is a perennial issue without likelihood of resolution, cultural practitioners of necessity redeploy older strategies, recombining and decontextualising in order to think through the exigencies of their present.

One surprisingly stalwart strategic and aesthetic category in this thinking through is realism, which is again at the forefront with the resurgence of the documentary form in Australian contemporary art. (This resurgence has also been evident internationally over the past few years, and not only in the visual arts; this year's Avignon's Festival of Theatre, for example, is marked by the preponderance of performances interpreting not established texts but workshopped from eyewitness accounts, with the tragedy of the Balkans as frequent point of departure.) Jameson claims that the originality of realism lies in its claim to both aesthetic and cognitive status, that is, its claim to have privileged access both to the real itself, that realm traditionally disassociated from the 'disinterestedness' of aesthetics, and the 'sheer appearance' of the aesthetic realm. Jameson doubts that realism can do justice to both these claims, that it risks swinging from naive denial of the fictive character of artistic discourse, to transforming its 'reality' into an illusion or effect. Nonetheless, it is this inherent contradiction that arguably has granted realism its resilience and continued currency. For by way of this contradiction it has persisted as a pebble in the shoe of its critics, to the point that, with the ebbing of the most extreme assertions of the disconnection of signifier and referent that proposed that reality was nothing but the product of representation, realism is still around to provoke further debate about what happens when we look at art.

It is Roberts' proposition, for example, that experiencing art is less about decoding, a process which relies on learnt codes of communication, than about "ordinary human cognition." He goes on: "Interpreting pictures is not just a



Uta Uta Jangala, *Testicles Going Walkabout* 1971, courtesy Beverly & Anthony Knight private collection, Melbourne

matter of recognising or internalising 'loss' or 'lack', but of extending our understanding and representational control of the world, something that was taken for granted in the early documentary tradition. This is a far more 'democratic' and open way of judging perceptual skill than assuming that the image always defeats our understanding." (Roberts)

What Roberts appears to argue for is a sense of some common cognitive parameters that, especially as regards pictorial representation, allows art to engage with a non-specialist audience, a key requirement of an art for social change. His examples of the photography of artists such as Jeff Wall and Jo Spence bolster his position that the complexity, 'artifice', authorship of a work of art need not be compromised in its appeal to 'realism' as a means of engagement.

A useful model to describe the way that art might foment social change remains as elusive as ever, but the historical consideration of this problem is a rich source of ideas for contemporary practitioners. What I think we must be thankful for to *Perspecta* 1999 is the opportunity to focus on this problematic, which, on account of its very ubiquity, is often nebulous to the point of invisibility.

## Radio art and politics in Australian *Perspecta* 99

*Bringing them Home*, the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Children from their Families took evidence from more than 535 Indigenous people throughout Australia. *I Walked Into My Mother* (August 30) by composer Moya Henderson with Kevin Smith and Pamela Young is a musical setting of the evidence presented by one witness. "It recognises the anguish suffered by a child whose only meeting with his mother was brief and tantalising, the memory of it fills him with yearning."

Henderson's work is one of 4 radio compositions to be presented by *The Listening Room* on ABC Classic FM during *Perspecta* 99.

Robert Iolini's *Marking Time* (August 23) uses directed musical improvisations to explore "the anguish and banality of millennial thinking." The work includes performances by Jim Denley, Phillip Ma, Michelle Morgan and Amanda Stewart. Stay tuned for Amanda Stewart's *The War Poem*, sound and sense, n.aim on the same night.

In *Revolutions in the Sun* (September 6) Ion Pearce ironically invokes past revolutionary art "to pose a serious question about artistic life and practice under a regime of economic rationalists."

Cathy Peters' *The 20th Century and the Dream* (September 13) is "a musical weave of recorded actuality from the dreams and nightmares of our century."

The Listening Room is broadcast Mondays, 9 pm on Classic FM. For further information visit The Space [www.abc.net.au/arts](http://www.abc.net.au/arts)



ARTSPACE  
PROJECT  
2-25 SEPT

AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTA 99



# THE POLITICS OF EVERYDAY FEAR or The Order of Things or YOU WANNA GET OUTTA HERE, YOU TALK TO ME or THE AESTHETICS OF DISAPPEARANCE or

We live in strange times. We live in an age of anxiety and a world in constant crisis. Ideology seems to be evaporating before our very eyes. Culture is in crisis and political systems seem to be in a state of permanent flux. In the 90s we cannot seem to rely on old political values, old ideologies & old systems of class structure. The political conditions of the 90s are unstable, and are impacting on and transforming every aspect of contemporary culture. Art after postmodernity also appears to be in a state of unconditional and nervous crisis. All art has been fragmented, deconstructed and post-postmodernised. Nothing is stable. Everything is indeterminate. All ideology seems to have been effaced, neutralised and made impossible. In the new world orders of globalisation, structures themselves, along with national borders, ecologies and economies, are balanced precariously. When the history of critical thought so incessantly urges the debunking of illusions and simultaneously elevates the simulacra, we are forced all the more to consider the locations of where power and authority rest. Where are the centres and frontlines which appear to surround us? Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish this capitalist epoch... yet the ruling ideas of each age have always been the ideas of its ruling class. As we approach the end of this millennium at a frighteningly accelerated speed, there seems to be no signposts left as we are inevitably driven not just 'forward', but also apart. What are the forces and positions which define the space of contest when the avant-garde has lost its manifesto? There is an urgent need to critically and theoretically interrogate the culture industry in relation to these collapsing ideologies. The strategy of preaching oppositionality against established canons is no longer appropriate, subversive or viable. It is clear that what little resistance is evident in the academy is but the last gasp of exhausted authority. The old hierarchies have shifted and the forms of opposition have altered. We live in an age already saturated by the politics of transnational capitalism or insulated by a form of repressive tolerance. Politics is everywhere but nowhere. The culture of revolt has been turned into a culture of spectacle: a culture of hope and profound imagination into a culture of management and fear... the worst of both worlds, a schizophrenia of unconstrained market forces combined with ideological fundamentalism. Politics of the new millenium demands of us a reinvention of a way out of the vicious circle of capitalism.

The object of this political event is to critically rethink the very substance of contemporary art in relation to the contradictions and the oppositionality of conflicting ideologies. Can art be political? How do you construct a political work of art? What constitutes the political in art? Does art have a transformative function? Who consigns art to be political? Who authorises art? Is political art a contradiction of impossible oppositions? What are the conditions that precipitate a political art – What are the political conditions of art? What is the nature of crisis in contemporary culture? Is it possible or desirable to mount yet another intervention against the changing paradigms of postmodernity? What is the role of belief? When boredom becomes anxiety, can art provide radical, subversive and alternative strategies for contesting the future? Can art in fact be radical? Does art have a political agency? What is art in relation to ideology? What is at stake for art in relation to political, ideological, social and economic debates? How can art operate in a trans-national corporate global future? What are the ideological conditions which construct the art debate and does it have a capacity for resistance? What are the philosophical and pragmatic assumptions for art in relation to developing strategies for and functioning within the next millennium? Can art redress the impasse and argue for new positions and directions, albeit, even if they are contradictory and in conflict with current sensibilities. The intention is to problematise, interrogate and renegotiate the gestures of thought, and the meanings which inform the debates on art, ideology and politics. It is further intended to approach these difficult subjects from affirmative positions of optimism and critique the 'endisms' that have pervaded much late twentieth century thought.

The Politics of Everyday Fear... To construct a totally open, inclusive and discursive event which generates energy, thought and positions in relation to contemporary visual culture. The project aims to reflect/refract the multiplicity of voices, hopes and fears in a sustained cumulative interrogation of the mechanisms and institutions of art, and provide a framework for an active debate on visual culture. The project is a political discourse, a political event, an act of extreme democracy, a distraction/a meditation on the relationship between language, bodies, political ideologies and art. You can respond by letter, fax, email, phone, image or in person. There will be no limits. All responses will be included. You can make a response to Artspace. Artspace The Gunnery 43-51 Cowper Wharf Road Woolloomooloo NSW 2011 Australia ph +612 9368 1899 fax +612 9368 1705 email [artspace@artspace.org.au](mailto:artspace@artspace.org.au) <http://www.artspace.org.au>

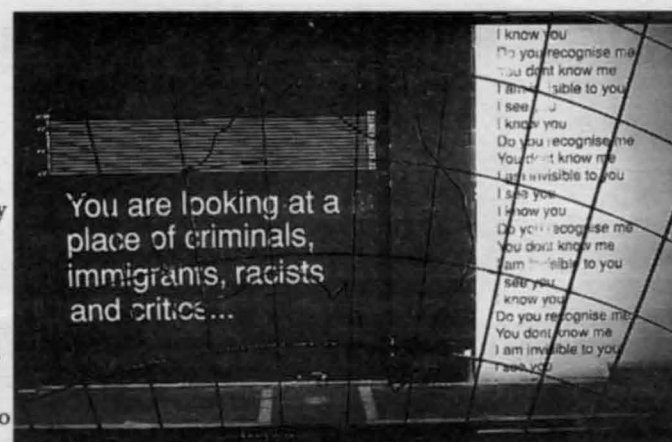


## Don Miller argues that gossip is art and politics

Don't be misled by the apparent grandeur of

But neighbourhood gossip can also be described as politics. A steady coalition or temporary alliance may be forged when the chatter between 2 'parties' is at the cost of a third. Any relationship appears of necessity an exclusive relationship. Its very form becomes its content as much as any story it may circulate.

Not that the art of gossip (let alone its politics) is High Art. Besides, that dualistic distinction has long been undermined if not rejected. The 20th century in particular has liberated and lifted the 'trivial' from its allocated base position in life. Low Art has been knighted.



Elizabeth Gertsakis

Some people still insist we should rigorously distinguish politics from art from ethics, from life itself. Their thoughts have been blown away (*souffle*) by words.

*Don Miller is a Senior Associate in the Political Science Department, Melbourne University. His writings include The Reason of Metaphor: a Study in Politics (Sage, Delhi, 1992) and he was Guest Editor, "Beyond the Rushdie Affair" (Special Issue, Third Text, 11, 1990). His latest book is Neighbours and Strangers. Rainbow. Delhi, 1999.*

Perspecta 99 artist Elizabeth Gertsakis interviewed by Alex Gawronski

AG *Recently I read a short story of yours*

EG Yes. Memory is a form of knowledge. Like knowledge, memories can suffer from inaccuracies. Memory is constantly being applied to things as well as situations. This is the political aspect of memory, it changes our experiences of places and objects, making them our own. Experiences then assume a unique relation to the subject. In my work I hope to encourage—through the overall ambience of my installations—spaces that are obviously encoded with knowledge yet which remain open to the individual. Then the individual is able to respond emotionally and to later recall the tone of the work as they experienced it. It is never a simple A to B proposition. Memory's political side exists in this instance as an escape from any narrowly instrumental or confining knowledge.



# Reconfiguring absence

The politics of public space envelops Alex Gawronski



Sydney is currently undergoing a rapid transformation. The redevelopment of the city raises a multitude of often alarming questions that remain unanswered. Many of these questions concern attitudes to the city's least fortunate inhabitants, the homeless and destitute whose public appearance for city planners is becoming increasingly an issue of embarrassment. Other groups affected by rapidly changing trends in the use of public space include artists. As volunteer operated gallery spaces continue to decline, other artists seize the opportunity to involve themselves in millennial endorsements. The result is often a confounding conundrum of public and private interests. Furthermore the visibility of corporate influence is helping reshape Sydney in the guise of a multi-million dollar playground—from this there emerge questions of public identity as well as endlessly cited economic stability. The Olympics, whose spectre lurks behind much of Sydney's mutation, is publicised as being unquestionably 'good for everyone.' This assumption of the total compliance of the city's occupants is most disturbing. It is an assumption around which the most flagrant and visible transgressions of public space are executed. The degree to which one is inclined to believe stories of nocturnal demolition and 'accidental' immolation of public buildings represents also the degree to which an individual is likely to subscribe to the Games' homogenising influence. At present the passing of redevelopment proposals would appear to far exceed their rejection.

One of the most visible of the city's recent redevelopments is the reshaping of the Central bus terminal. Here flying angular planes of glass that provide little real shelter from the elements are surmounted by the spikily kitsch neo-Gothic fantasy of the creative team. The massively phallogocentric totems are designed to designate Sydney's centre from afar. It is ironic then to consider that for many years the city's 'central' location, in the eyes of many Sydneysiders, is in fact the vicinity around Town Hall station. This site is notable for the historic Town Hall and Queen Victoria buildings representing alternately the city's traditional public meeting place as well as its centre of trade and consumerism. With this in mind, Central's development functions on the level of a superimposed narrative of centrality enhanced by the construction's sheer scale. Its distancing effect is magnified through the slick deployment of modernist combinations of glass and steel. [Overall design, Noel Bell, Ridley Smith Architects; urban design, Margaret Petrykowski; tower ribbon concept in collaboration with Marilyn Fairskye. Fairskye's

principal contribution was to the digitally produced artworks in the pedestrian tunnel and on the shelter walls not discussed here. eds]

Superficially the structure references, through its dissecting fragmentation, certain deconstructionist tendencies in architecture as championed by the philosopher Jacques Derrida and architects like Peter Eisenman and Bernhard Tschumi. Though when compared with the work of these architects, the Sydney site lacks any sense of specificity or of a discursive unravelling of place. The central redevelopment tells us nothing about the site historically. Instead the bus terminal becomes a mere testament to corporate interest and an instance of physical domination. The totems are likewise notable for their sameness, a sameness overlaid with the most innocuous of possible new age symbolism, that of the elements. Even the universalism of such discourse is undermined through the simplistic identification of each element by a colour. Given the limitations of this symbolism, the site could have been marked by the use of light as a spectral and evanescent phenomenon sensitive to atmospheric alterations. Instead the work appears rigid, atrophied and cold. The incorporation of stainless steel bar seats upon which to lean and upon which vagrants have no hope of bedding down, serves only to compound an uncomplementary combination of the transitory and the immovable. In this case notions of shelter are undermined by an emphatic encouragement of the sheltered to move on. Here Sydney proclaims its identity as a city of and for tourists.

Nearby, another of Sydney's public artist-run exhibition venues, South, comes to an end, temporarily or not. Distinguished by its dedication to inclusiveness, South was a venue where the most vital contemporary art could be seen. Such organisations function on the innate narrative possibilities of a site, providing a much needed arena for the presentation of otherwise dormant ideas. The physical location of South gallery, tucked away on the 6th floor of a building largely dedicated to the area's clothing manufacturing industry, meant visitors had to consciously seek it out. This encouraged loyalty amongst guests and exhibitors that, rather than contributing to the formation of a self-regulatory clique, offered instead a sense of community and belonging.

In the past under similar circumstances, a gallery had the option to move on to new premises, vaguely secure in the knowledge that there was something else 'out there.' Today however the situation is more anxious. The

principle of natural attrition is becoming—through lack of suitable space and significantly increased rents—a question of whether such institutions remain viable. Vacated gallery space is more than likely transformed into 'permanent' living quarters for prospective tenants. The apparent shoring-up of the possibilities offered by artist-run spaces not only alters the practices that occur within spaces but conceptions of the value of private versus public space. An alternative for venues such as South would be to relocate to the city's peripheries, accelerating the perceived marginalisation of contemporary visual practices, undermining the morale of those willing to invest their time and energy establishing public venues and, in the eyes of the public, to de-siting contemporary practices so they appear merely marginal and ultimately expendable.

Between the flagrantly corporate and the community conscious are visual practices that seek to utilise millennial potential for their own ends. The benefits for the visual artist in this respect are manifold: a large audience is assured, monetary gain is likewise guaranteed. An artist working in the business dimensions of art knows full well how to operate in the spaces of business. By appearing to take control of public space the artist hopes for increased professional credibility as well as general public acceptance. Herein lie problems relating to overexposure as well as to the de-politicising of art's potential through catering to the demands of powerful intermediaries.

In her multi-site project, *Quivering Dawn Streets*, Sydney artist Lisa Anderson has disseminated a poem throughout the city. It has appeared in bus shelters and on billboards. A series of silk-lined matchbooks was also issued bearing the work's title. These separate manifestations were harnessed in anticipation of Anderson's major work, a large pink neon text, once again bearing the work's title, mounted at the intersection of George and Market streets in the vicinity of the Town Hall and the Queen Victoria building. Above this sign on a large billboard the remainder of the text is mounted. Indeed for an artist there could not be a more visible 'point of sale.' Yet what does this text tell us, on what level does it function? The answer is, the most populist. The text weaves itself as an indeterminate tribute to the city as a site of dreams, purely in terms of the known: a poetic cliché. While the poetic has an inherent political dimension inasmuch as it has the potential to ignite individual imagination, Anderson's sign appeared a sign amongst signs, eloquent on that level. Its conceptual invisibility served as an ironic counterpart to the undistinguished gloominess of



Central bus terminal, Sydney

Alex Gawronski

her city posters. The matches were as disposable as their use suggested, their metaphoric content as predictable as their function. In the instance of Anderson's work, public space becomes a space of the ever transparent, the invisible. At the same time her professional confidence appears consummate and heightened.

On the one hand the pure visibility of public presentability is underwritten by a largely invisible private and multi-national sector. On the other hand the individual as the site of difference and subjectivity is encouraged to read changes within the city as necessarily being for the best. All of a sudden gone are the dirty disused warehouses. Facades are fetishised as the face of a privileged national heritage stripped of its spatial dimension. Sites like the prodigiously cluttered Darling Harbour compete for the prestige of market success. Every available space is filled to the brim, every surface offers readings and counter readings in a dissimulation and excess.

Empty space has become a threat, as have spaces between things that grant sites their discursive dimension. Empty space has become wasted space. The development adjoining the Sydney Opera House has replaced the emotional exhilaration of the vista for the economically useful compression of the market place. The point here is not to argue for blind preservation, an ultimate conservatism, but to expose the conservatism of much redevelopment and the philosophies that underlie it. For example the entropic potential of Sydney's mass reshaping has been ultimately ignored. What happens to that which is demolished; where is the waste headed? Empty space is the space of thought without which engagement with a metropolis becomes strained, requiring vigilance. For an artist today, riding the lucrative wave occasioned by Sydney's metamorphosis offers as many potential pitfalls as conceding to the possible triumph of private sector domination. The challenge for the artist is to rethink strategies and modes of operating while remaining committed to the preservation of practices designed to challenge dominant discourse. Exactly how this is done is a question being answered now.

## You can respond

Nicholas Tsoutas interviewed

The day before I speak with Nicholas Tsoutas at Artspace, some 15,000 workers march through Sydney demanding maintenance of workers' compensation rights. An earlier demonstration seeks justice for miners whose \$6m of entitlements accrued over decades of hard work has been lost by their bosses. After protracted public discussion, Premier Bob Carr announces Sydney's first official shooting gallery for heroin addicts (with Jeff Kennett looking set to follow suit). Public debate about the health system rages—many letters to editors urging a small rise in the Medicare Levy rather than the application of means testing and up-front payments US style. They propose an increase in taxation in order to get decent services at the very same time the federal government talks tax cuts (while contrarily subjecting us to a GST). There's a palpable shift in mood, a move to action. But can it be sustained? How visible is it? How audible? How thought out? Or is it ultimately powerless

against capitalism's ever increasing capacity to absorb and neutralise opposition? And what about the arts, where in recent years artists have been forced onto the back foot, defending hard won territory, rarely espousing vision or calls to collective action?

Nicholas Tsoutas is feeling consternation over *Perspecta 99's* art and politics theme and it's driven him to action. "The more I thought about it, the more impossible it became to curate something labelled as a political project. So I undermined the very process of curation for Artspace and constructed a statement (see page 7) with a certain political merit which anybody and everybody can respond to. We'll put all the responses into the space here—faxes, email printouts, letters—and on the website where more discussion can go on. Then we can see if there is a debate happening about art and politics in our culture and, in its absence, if it can be provoked.

"It's not just a matter of arguing but of discussing how we value cultural ideas and how we debate them and how they work in the

cultural domain. There's still the feeling in Australia that art isn't part of the political domain, especially in the visual arts—unfortunately the brand of 80s postmodernity that survived in Australia was a very reactionary one. We can't sustain a culture that doesn't understand its political imperatives; we can't dialogue something if there's nothing to dialogue." If we don't dialogue, says Tsoutas, "We constantly absent ourselves from responsibility. It feels as if culture sits on the precarious edge of total disappearance."

This is a disappearance too of opposition: "Capitalism has proven itself to be avant garde and highly adaptable; it creates its own space for ideas and absorbs them. It becomes almost too difficult to think of a space of opposition." Tsoutas says that we have to ask ourselves what constitutes 'the political' and 'opposition' "at the end of a century in which art was seen as inherently radical, a re-thinking of forms and ideas. We have to renegotiate the terms of reference and that's where this project is placed. I'm not arguing for a return to 70s radicality but I'd like to think that art still has the capacity to be radical, even though I've got

this feeling that it hasn't now." He makes it clear that he's not arguing for overtly political works, but ones informed by a knowledge of the workings of ideology and ones that are open to discussion, rather than to being exhibited, forgotten, made invisible.

As for 'opposition', "the left seems to have collapsed. It's unfashionable to have left views. Should we even be thinking in those right/left polarities? What will we mean by 'politics' in 2000?" The question is not just of opposition but of how to open up a space for it. Where do the ideas that fuel discussion and opposition come from in the arts? From arts practice, from the works, says Tsoutas, often in what is left over from the work once it has been experienced, what he calls 'residual'—the ideas a work provokes and that live on. Tsoutas feels that in a market-driven arts culture there is little space for the residual. He asks, "What mediates ideas, how do they travel, how do they leave something that we can then operate with?" KG

The Order of Things, Artspace, Australian *Perspecta 99 Project*, September 2 - 25. See Page 7



# A dangerous course?

Hunter Cordaïy on the challenges of teaching new media in universities

*The conceptual challenges and energy surrounding new media translate into a vibrant academic environment. Both students and staff sense this—there is a distinct energy associated with teaching new media.*

Megan Heyward

*The university sector is in a financially unsustainable situation and is being propelled toward bankruptcy at an ever accelerating speed, with the assistance of new media and a conservative government. Who will be left to teach new media in Australia when a flood of new media savvy staff move out of the university sector and into working for vastly improved salaries in industry? Will the next generation of new media students need to move offshore to study in the future?*

Phil George

Of all the major shifts in the tertiary landscape in the last 5 years, the presence and development of new media is the area which has brought the most fundamental changes. What was once seen as a technological fashion is now a central and indispensable part of university curriculum. And because new media is an encompassing discipline, the impact of its presence on campus has been more fundamentally transforming than, say, the arrival of film studies in the humanities in the 1970s.

New media has become central to the teaching of film and video, design, communications, architecture, and now some areas of business and law studies, especially where globalisation and copyright is concerned.

There has been a gold rush which has affected University departments across enrolments, curriculum development, teaching resources and budgets. For a university not to have new media as part of its educational palette is now clearly to be Jurassic. To have it only partially is even worse...there is no halfway house on the road to digital qualifications.

No change on this scale comes without practical problems and a quick survey of colleagues teaching in the field reveals that the difficulties begin with a major realignment of curriculum, especially in the traditional arts school environment. New media represents the most fundamental challenge to the hold of the 19th century on teaching and curriculum that has ever been issued to the areas of painting, drawing, printmaking, and recently, creative arts including writing and film.

Because new media appears to absorb and embrace all these previously separate skills, it is seen as a threat to traditional areas of art education, and a panacea to other problems of perceived vocational relevance. In the marketplace for tertiary students potential 'clients' of universities now see new media knowledge as essential to possible future employment.

Courses need to be re-written, partially or more, to accommodate the technology and its potential in both output and conceptual terms. The extent of the change is such that entire university departments are now devoted to teaching courses which

have new media at their core. Across the sector the departmental name changes over the last 5 years denote the new direction: Media Arts and Production at UTS (University of Technology Sydney) and Visual and Media Arts at UWS (University of Western Sydney) are two examples. At UWS there is also a Centre for Digital Media, a commercial arm of the Visual Communications Degree, based in an expensive new complex serving both undergraduate and graduate students as well as providing facilities for industry training.

Down the corridor in the same building the change is even more profound—the Department of Visual and Media Arts has installed its new media technology in what was once the Life Drawing room...the classical skills have necessarily become sidelined by what is seen as an all encompassing platform of skills provided by technology.

The question must now be asked: is this the death of the art school or merely another evolutionary moment in its development? The most likely answer is that the traditional skills in visual arts (and even film production) are now peripheral to a practical understanding of new media in terms of the creation of art/cultural objects and their positioning within the cultural landscape.

The effects on teachers and teaching are variously described as "challenging", a "crisis" or "a realignment of educational knowledge." The result is that university programs have become reactive to the pace of technological development, rather than driving and informing that change. Teachers, as well as their students, have to be up to speed with both hardware and software which, each year, dramatically changes and often converges. Last year's lectures are useless in many cases because students want to study Version NEXT of a particular program.

*There is no doubt that it is extremely challenging teaching new media. This is due not only to the constant changes to and upgrades in software, but also due to the conceptual challenges—finding ways of imparting professional skills at the same time as recognising that new media is still developing its own voice, its own conventions. You must remain open to the possibilities of experimentation.*

Megan Heyward

This requires a fundamentally new teacher open to both technical and conceptual changes in their subject and a degree of professional awareness unlike anything a university has required of its teachers since the boom in nuclear physics and maths after 1945. New media knowledge is not absorbed by osmosis the way annual and subtle developments in particular subjects or genres used to occur—instead a steep hierarchy of knowledge has been created, supported by an ever-increasing number of "workshops" to retrain teachers in the new technologies.

These teachers are better placed, however, to pursue their own creative explorations of new media than their colleagues, and there has emerged a new set of digital works by teachers who, inadvertently, are re-establishing the university as a production centre for the creative arts.

*On the staff level we have many multimedia projects to our credit. The works of Norie Neumark and Megan Heyward have both been richly awarded. Kate Richards and Ross Gibson are involved in a number of AFC-funded new media projects [and Ross is now director of Cinemedia's Platform 1.0 in Melbourne's Federation Square; see Working the Screen]. Andrew Jacobowicz (Making Multicultural Australia) and Chris Nash (The Tumbalong Project) have been involved successfully in the area too.*

Gillian Leahy

The new media curriculum and its expensive hardware comes to universities at a time of dramatic budget shrinkage and a fundamental change in the way universities finance their programs. This is both unfortunate and a rare opportunity for some lateral managerial responses.

Most departments that I know of are in acute financial crisis, and redundancies are widespread. How can a university realistically respond to new media when its basic hardware costs compared, for example, to a new literature or history course, are astronomical? How does a Dean or Head of Department decide on buying \$500,000 worth of computers, sacking fulltime staff or abandoning entire subjects within existing degrees to pay for the required hardware? And, almost more importantly, having bought the hardware, it is mandatory to employ or retrain staff to service it on a daily basis. Their skills and salary requirements are quite different from those of a studio assistant in the traditional arts program.

*A huge amount of time was spent by many of us in the department and among the faculty's support staff researching the best way for us to go in digital editing, and comparing systems in relation to our purposes. These have been huge costs and it is hard to justify them in a climate of cutbacks to education. Media students cost a great deal per head therefore to teach and we are constantly having to investigate more cost efficient ways to teach, and other ways of finding income for the faculty.*

Gillian Leahy

The pace of this change and the ruthlessness of these decisions are changing universities in a profound way, largely because of student demand for new media subjects. The drift away from courses which do not have a new media component is becoming obvious, threatening the viability of those (often traditional) subjects whilst at the same time confirming the decision to invest in new technologies.

New media courses are perceived by students as 'hot', fuelled by the perception that to be without these skills makes a graduate unemployable. This means the university's priority mission is suddenly transformed into providing vocational based education in the new technologies across a variety of disciplines.

*Phil George is an artist and lecturer in digital media, UWS (Macarthur); Gillian Leahy is a filmmaker and Head of Department, Media Arts and Production, UTS, Sydney; Megan Heyward is a media artist and lectures in multimedia at UTS.*

*Hunter Cordaïy is a writer and lecturer in screen studies, UWS (Macarthur).*

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# Tough buildings in a big landscape.

Virginia Baxter goes west to see a new contemporary performance centre

"Have you seen the new Centre for Contemporary Performance at UWS?" asks a prominent Sydney performance artist. "It's magnificent—all we need to do is put it on wheels and transport it to Sydney!" I see what she means as I tour the new complex in June with the proud architects from Bligh Voller Nield and Gordon Beattie, senior lecturer and co-ordinator of the Theatre, Theory & Practice Degree at the School of Contemporary Arts. Located on Orchard Hills at the Werrington South Campus of the University of Western Sydney, the Centre comprises 9 studios of various sizes. There's one very grand space for large scale theatre and performance works, a spacious dance studio with an adjacent one equipped for yoga. There's still work to be done on the multimedia centre which will eventually be used in the creation of music, design, animation and performance. The rest are tutorial rooms linked by walkways and courtyard areas which can also be adapted for outdoor performances.

A good deal of thought has gone into making the spaces flexible as well as acknowledging their place in the landscape. Instead of air-conditioning there's a natural ventilation system. As we walk around the complex, we look across to the School of Design built in 1994 and hear about landscape designer Gillian Smart's plans to bring buildings and environment into even closer relationship within the School of Contemporary Arts. The architects speak of the complex as "a set of tough buildings in a big landscape."

The University of Western Sydney has invested over 12 million dollars in the Centre which has taken 5 years to build. It's an optimistic sign at a time of budget cuts and spending redirections in the heavily contested area of the humanities.

Gordon Beattie is pleased that the building finally allows for the teaching of contemporary performance concepts in the same space as their practical application in live performance and interaction with audiences. Previously these disciplines had been housed 20 kilometres apart at separate campuses.

He sees the convergence of disciplines in teaching strategies as an evolving process. "The School of Contemporary Arts offers degrees in

Music, Theatre, Acting, Dance and Fine Arts. Fine Arts and Music have facilities on the Kingswood campus, and Theatre and Dance have the new centre for Contemporary Performance at the Werrington Campus. In 1999 for the first time, 2 common subjects are being offered across all the degrees—Contemporary Arts 1 and 2. The subject is taught through a series of lectures and practical workshops. As well as these common subjects, there is also the potential for elective subjects open to students from across the school. The development of 'specialist subjects' is also possible with specific interdisciplinary practical projects open to all upper level students in the school."

The theatre space (Studio 1) is black, but box doesn't do it justice. Someone called it "Elizabethan." Built on a grand scale, around 14 metres high with 3 balconies, it has flexible seating for round 200 and a grid that allows for conversion of the space for everything from sophisticated physical and contemporary performance to intimate theatre. Beattie has worked closely with the architects all the way through the project. "I wanted people to look at the building and say, how can we use it?", he says. I wondered about the teaching of physical theatre skills (trapeze etc) in a venue so clearly suited to it. Gordon Beattie says such teaching, if it happens, "will be contained within specific practical projects. This is not to say that it might not be developed in the future. We have also had discussions with a number of people about running intensive summer schools etc in response to practitioners' needs. We are open to suggestions." The Senior Lecturer in Dance, Jacquie Simmonds, is equally taken with the building's qualities of light and space and the possibilities the new proximity with performance offers dancers.

But is it in the wrong place? Well, given Sydney's poverty of venues and the precarious relationship which entities like The Performance Space have with their venues, it's hard not to envy the west this impressive new complex.

Gordon Beattie says, "What is important to keep in mind is that this is a teaching and performance research centre. As such we are attracting postgraduate students from the contemporary performance community and we

are particularly interested in the development of new works. I would anticipate that as more people become familiar with the spaces and realise their potential there'll be a demand. Of course, if people have the mindset that it's a long way to travel, we should remind them that it is only 50 minutes from the city. If a project is unique, people will want to come and see it. Rather than a great space in the wrong place, what better place could there be for working in the dynamic of growth and change in the outer cities of Sydney".

UWS already has an extensive performance program in the third year *Playbill* which has developed a significant local audience at the Playhouse on the Kingswood campus. Coming up are Alma de Groen's *The Rivers Of China* and Stephen Sewell's *Sisters*. At the same time, the School of Contemporary Performance is building links with organisations as diverse as Casula Powerhouse, Railway Street Theatre and the Museum of Fire in Penrith, as well as the Department of School Education. Lecturer Bruce Keller sees the Centre as also fitting into the milieu which includes contemporary performance companies like Urban Theatre Projects at Bankstown, Powerhouse Youth Theatre at Casula and Citymoon, the Vietnamese-Australian Contemporary Theatre Company, currently working in Liverpool.

David Hull, Head of the School of Contemporary Arts is also interested in making international links. Media artist Dennis Del Favero has developed a 3 year collaborative project researching "Spatial Culture." This project links the School of Contemporary Arts, the College of Fine Arts at UNSW and ZKM, the leading European research centre and museum for new media arts located in Karlsruhe in Germany. The new centre is also home to UWS' impressive interdisciplinary arts magazine *Postwest* edited by Benjamin Genocchio who sees the role of the journal as maintaining traditional links with Western Sydney, "but its scope will not be limited by bald geographical designations. Nor will the content conform to rigid disciplinary guidelines..." (Editorial, *Postwest*). The latest issue (# 14) includes a CD, *Space, Time and the Roaring Silence*, with tracks by Australian artists Donna Hewitt, Rik Rue and Jim Franklin and the collective Social Interiors along with Canadian environmental sound artist Hildegard Westerkamp.

As for connections with the broader community of performance artists and audiences the centre is again "open to suggestions." A



series of residencies is planned in which artists are invited to run projects with some of the 300 students currently enrolled. These may be intensive projects during the summer and winter breaks or projects that run for an entire semester. Next semester, for example, Sue Broadway will be running *The DADA Cabaret* project. The centre has already been approached by a number of groups to develop work in the new spaces.

UWS has produced an interesting group of theatre graduates over the years, among them actors Steve Rogers, Liz Falkland and David Wenham, writer Nick Meenahan, comedian Jacquie Loeb, contemporary performance artist Alicia Talbot and a strong physical performance contingent which includes David Collins and Shane Dundas (the Umbilical Brothers). Many recent UWS graduates have joined companies such as Legs on the Wall, Chrome, Acrobat, Ricochet, Pork Chop, Brink, Urban Theatre Projects, PACT and Sydney Art Theatre. Companies like David Williams' and Jane Parkin's version 1.0, Nerve Shell (Gail Priest co-director) and Tropfest winner Craig Anderson's Fibre Cement Company are now appearing at city performance venues.

It's good to see universities acknowledging the importance of creative spaces in the teaching of contemporary performance. In Sydney, as well as having the Io Myer Theatre, the University of NSW has recently built two new studio spaces which will eventually showcase some of the work emerging from the Theatre, Film and Dance Department. Students are also exposed to the work of artists rehearsing in the studios. The well-equipped Rex Cramphorn Studio at the Centre for Performance Studies at Sydney University brings the documentation, study and practice of contemporary performance together in all sorts of innovative and intimate connections. In the scale and sophistication of its spaces and the scope of its plans, the new Centre for Contemporary Performance at UWS adds some exciting possibilities to the landscape.

## The Bobbies

Helpmann Academy grants get students moving

You could do worse than call these grants Bobbies, after Sir Robert Helpmann, Adelaide boy wonder and eternal enfant terrible, dancer, choreographer, short-term pop star, nurturer of the Australian arts, subject of Tyler Coppin's play, *Lyrebird*, and namesake of the academy. Sir Robert would have been only too happy about the following: thanks to a Helpmann Academy grant, third year actors and second year design students from Adelaide's Centre for the Performing Arts will take a production of a new Stephen Sewell play on tour to Alice Springs Aboriginal communities and to Melbourne in September; and 6 students from the Drama Centre at Flinders University will participate in an international Shakespeare workshop in Meiningen, Germany. National and international experience for tertiary students, especially undergraduates, is rare enough these days: these grants are an admirable investment in the arts.

In the academy's first grants round for this year, 16 performing and visual artists projects from members of the Academy's partners received assistance. In music Conservatorium performance student Prue Hompas will tour New Zealand with the National Youth Choir and oboist Sally Dean will take up a 2 year post-graduate Performance diploma with the Royal Academy of Music in London. Elder Conservatorium also received a grant to finance the residency of Michael McCarthy, an expert in the field of Aural Training choral work and the Kodaly system of music education. Nicholas Braithwaite, Graham Abbot and Nicholas Milton will conduct a series of student concerts with the Elder Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra. Funding has also been granted for residencies by accompanist Helen B Yorke and guitarist Geoffrey Morris at Flinders Street School of Music in August. Eight students from the school were able to attend the Australian Composers Workshop at the International Guitar Festival in Darwin in July and a series of workshops and demonstrations by sitar musician Dr Chandrakant Sardeshmukh was also funded.

The 6 successful visual arts projects include: a residency and series of workshops at the SA School of Art next semester by New Zealand jeweller Brian Adam "whose spectacle designs have revolutionised eyewear"; a series of 4 artist forums entitled *Bringing the Asia-Pacific Triennial Down South*. Earlier this year lectures and seminars by noted Malaysian artists at SA art schools received assistance, along with two exhibitions of the work of SA art school students. Installation artist Kirsten Faith travelled to Perth to install her work for the national graduate show. RT

The final round for Helpmann Academy Grants which are available to students, recent graduates and staff of Helpmann Academy partners closes 13 August. Information: 08 8303 3250 or [www.adelaide.com.au/helpmann](http://www.adelaide.com.au/helpmann)

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# Integration/disintegration

Edward Scheer on the (dis)orientations of a new collection of essays on intercultural performance

NY based director Anne Bogart was a revelation at the ADSA conference in Melbourne in 1997 (the essays in this collection were selected from presentations given at the conference). Her address, reprinted here, in itself justifies the price of the book and recalls the experience of what she said and the unprepossessing but still engaging way she said it. She spoke of 6 things, the first 4 being: 1) the need to maintain one's own interest in whatever one is doing even if it changes and suddenly takes you in a different direction; 2) the need to embrace violence the way Artaud said, to oppose the self censorship that stifles creative energy; 3) learning to listen produces unforeseen results; 4) to get closer you must get further away. She talked about working in Japan with Tadashi Suzuki, a very different type of director and how this made her more aware of what she was bringing to her own work. Her words on rehearsal were especially illuminating: "There is that saying 'you can't look directly at the sun'" in a rehearsal, or in an intercultural experience, you cannot focus directly on the thing because it changes it.

To me this says that there is a need to allow room for transformation by not locking in an experience of a person or a culture before the encounter with them has taken place. This transformation is something that an insistence on identity does not allow for. If theatre is fundamentally an encounter, of people with themselves and with other people and cultures, then it should be free to not know in advance where it is going, not to be mapped but to be lost in the excess that identity politics ignores or cannot deal with. At this conference such exercises in ethical and cultural cartographies seemed almost compulsory activities for researchers interested in interactions with Asian theatre practices but it didn't always make for interesting research. As Bogart said in her last

2 points: 5) "every creative act involves a leap" and 6) "truth happens in opposition."

This timely collection of essays mostly avoids prescriptive mapmaking exercises. It attempts to counter the various orientalisms to which intercultural discourses and practices are sometimes liable, while shifting debates concerning the Asian-ness of some theatre work to include the atypical, the non-essential, the hybrid. In their introduction the editors affirm "dislocation, contradiction and a proliferation of alternatives; but also with a sense of the discoveries that might be made when artists find reinvigoration in confusion and when nations and cultures undergo rapid change." This is not always in evidence viz the discussion of Una Chaudhuri's version of the experience of theatre as "pedagogical unpleasure of urgent ideological instruction," which seems a bit overbearing and makes theatre sound like a bootcamp for moral pygmies rather than a sensorial factory for dreaming new radical relations with the world.

The editors make the point about "disintegration" as a critical cultural practice and situate it in opposition to a smug and chummy "integration" favoured by certain interculturalists; an approach which masks all kinds of sleazy legerdemain, oily universality and grubby appropriation. We are encouraged repeatedly in this volume to think of Brook and Mnouchkine in this context as in Bill Peterson's excellent study of Singaporean experiences with Georges Bigot from *Le Théâtre du Soleil* (oui c'est 'Bigot') "guiding Singaporeans back to their Asian roots", thereby enabling the others to 'otherise' themselves! Peterson's reading animates the "montage of deviance" the editors allude to in their introduction, generating a friction with normative meanings in a way which is clearly expressed in the

cover image by Hou Leong. This image suggests the kinds of disorientations the book is advocating with its superimposition of the artist's own Asian image onto Paul Hogan's face in the publicity shot for *Crocodile Dundee*.

But not all the contributors seem to have joined the program. David George's discussion of his project *The Tempest* in Bali is surely one of the least convincing uses of the intercultural approach imaginable. This is Western Theatre practice situating itself within an Asian aesthetic to make George's own production of Shakespeare with the Murdoch Performance Group appear more sexy and relevant. Nothing wrong with doing *The Tempest* in this way but let's not call it interculturalism. Let's call it neo-colonialism with a tinge of patronising Arnoldesque cultural snobbery. Without a trace of irony, George compares himself favourably with Brook and Grotowski, who unlike his own twilight zone company, never had the guts to take their productions back to the cultures which inspired them.

The reader gets a mini-guided tour of David George's East where "To Buddhist eyes everything is performance" whereas "Western philosophy" relegates performance to a "land of shadows." Or in short, Buddhism can handle presences, bodies and actions and Western thought can't. To quote British playwright Mark Ravenhill from Glen D'Cruz's essay in this volume: "I would say: 'Bollocks.'" No examples are given, no substance is generated and we are left with an East/West once again in need of disorientation. Despite all this there's something charming about George's naive gestures towards an "ontology of the possible" recalling the always charming Roland Barthes in *Empire of Signs* where he says that the Japanese approach the "nullity

of meaning." Ergo: Zen Buddhism = Meaning degree zero = Japan. Thanks Roland. Thanks David George, and as we say here in NSW, "May the lotuses in your moat always be open."

For a really intriguing and genuinely hybridised account of what is at stake in disorientating theatre, Tadashi Uchino's amazing ramble through *Brave New World*, Heiner Muller and contemporary Japanese avant-garde performance constructs a beautifully succinct portrait of a failed project in pure national self realisation. Uchino is an important advocate of radical new theatre in Japan and his discussion of Gekidan Kaitaisha (Theatre of Deconstruction) and Dumb Type is entertaining and probably essential reading for artists and theorists in Australia seeking seeds for similar projects in this country. Uchino is absolutely clear about the kind of theatre he is advocating. It is as he says: "theatre as cultural intervention not as dream machine which reflects our unconscious fears and escapist desires, to come up with some kind of performative way to deal with our political reality." It's worth noting that one of the editors of *Disorientations*, Peter Eckersall, has studied with Uchino in Japan and will be working with Kaitaisha later this year in collaboration with NYID (Not Yet It's Difficult), a Melbourne based theatre collective which can genuinely claim to be working in this way. The volume Eckersall has co-edited with Rachel Fensham of Monash University is an uneven but significant and fascinating contribution to understanding what is at stake in just these sorts of collaborations.

*Dis/Orientations: Cultural Praxis in Theatre: Asia, Pacific, Australia*, edited by Rachel Fensham and Peter Eckersall, Monash Theatre papers 1, Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies, Monash University 1999.

## Making machines behave

Naomi Black talks with electroacoustic artist Tim Kreger at the Australian Centre for the Arts and Technology

There is as much interesting computer music happening in Australia as there is anywhere else in the world. Just ask Tim Kreger, Lecturer in Electroacoustic Composition at the Australian Centre for the Arts and Technology (ACAT). Kreger spoke with me recently about his 10 year career as a computer music artist, touching upon the nature of improvisation in computer music and true experimentation in performance today.

ACAT comprises one third of the Australian National University Institute of the Arts, sitting between the Canberra School of Music and the Canberra School of Art. The Centre provides, it says, a "unique environment for the teaching, research, recording, publishing and performance of time-based arts made with new technology; computer and electroacoustic music, computer animation and interactive multimedia." Its graduate electronic arts courses, especially the music streams, are respected for their focus on experimentation.

Kreger has worked with ACAT for 9 of its 10 years. In his graduating year of a Bachelor of Music at the Canberra School of Music, he received the 1990 Harold Wesley Allen award for composition and in 1994 was conferred the Highest Award for the collaborative work *Bifurcate* at the Contours

of the Mind exhibition. He attends annual computer music festivals and conferences in Australia and around the world in an attempt to see and hear as much as possible and to perform his own compositions.

*Dark Fires: Music with Images* is the most recent in a long succession of performances for Kreger. During a 5 month residency at the Bregman Studios, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, USA, last year Kreger worked with Larry Polansky to conceive, conjure and evolve pieces which would make their way to a Canberra presentation earlier this year.

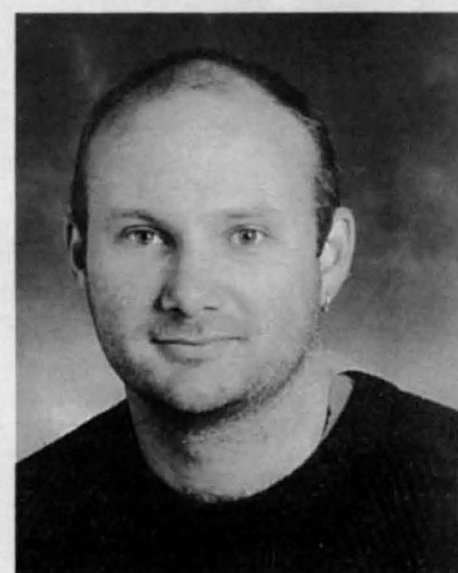
Two streams are utilised by Kreger to present his music: studio based tape pieces made for listening on multiple speaker projection systems; and performance, half of which he does outside Canberra and is mostly, he says, "improvisory."

"There is a lot of experimentation required when you're working with interactive technology," says Kreger, "It takes a long time to get a machine to behave in a semi-intelligent fashion so that there is logic behind what it is doing." The improvisation processes Kreger has developed means he must constantly adjust his strategies on stage in accordance with the unpredictability of his machines. The

performances, while utilising consistent conceptual themes, are therefore ever-changing creations. At *The Reflective Space* festival in Melbourne in 1996, Kreger created sound by feeding a microphone back into the speakers. Although it was completely controlled and produced "quite beautiful tones and resonances", Kreger knew that it could be "psychologically scary" for the audience to see what he intended to do.

This approach is similar to that used in the award-winning *Biofocate* which I saw performed in *Dark Fires* accompanied by a computer animation sequence by Mike Nicholls. *Biofocate* is controlled mathematically to accept one note in and spit 2 notes out while the whole system feeds back onto itself. To Kreger this reflects an interesting parallel with the concept of population growth.

In public presentations of computer music Kreger feels that it is not enough to simply have strong ideas, you must also correctly realise them. "I've sat through many hideous performances where people are basically running an experiment on the audience. What they should be doing is presenting the fruits of the experimentation of the preceding months or even years."



Tim Kreger

This is one reason ACAT students are encouraged to explore their technology. Process first, public later. "We have less of an attitude of making high art and more about developing our students' ability to think," says Kreger. "The area we work hardest at is in maintaining the level of imagination and the ability to solve problems in order to realise that imagination." The greatest impact a Centre like ACAT can have on influencing a country's cultural diversity is to turn out musicians with an ear for depth in sound and, more importantly, thinkers.

*Dark Fires*, Canberra School of Music, Institute of the Arts, May 6. Further information on ACAT at <http://online.anu.edu.au/ITA/ACAT>



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# WriteSites

Kirsten Krauth explores hypermedia on the web

alotronic (<http://users.dbworld.net.au/~allen/aloxoom/alocore4.htm>) is an example of what can be achieved by a personal website with a bit of creative flair. Part promotion, part experiment, Allen O'Leary's interest in theatre and information technologies informs his hypermedia work *The Casino Project*. A groovy JPEG of a man running helter skelter entices you to join the pace of the site which is flashy and fast. Although a work in progress (60% complete), it is conceptually sophisticated, using frames to flesh out the inner workings of a man "jagged around the edges", dealing with a relationship breakdown in the Melbourne Casino surrounds, "a beast with ten thousand eyes." He drives to "her river", contemplating ownership and borders, the need to claim spots as lovers' spaces, as if you're the first to discover them. Relationship breakdowns are a common theme in hyperfiction (*My Father's Father's House, Six Sex Scenes*), frames embodying in neat visual form the fractured, dislocated identity/emotions suddenly-singles experience post-love. The razzle dazzle of the Casino, "it's two blocks long and one year old", and dark murky depths of the Yarra, loom.

Using pixilated locations like the Crown carpark at 9.45pm, O'Leary entices you into a world of online gambling and really, all cruising, both in love and on the web, is a risk. Do you choose to look or buy? Surveillance translates well too. Men and women watch from behind cameras behind closed doors. Seductive and hesitant, like Matthew Condon's novel *The Pillow Fight* (also uncovers the inner worlds of a casino/couple), *The Casino Project* is so far an exploration of male identity, anger and (loss of) control, which drills into the psyche.

Simpler in design, but crafty and intriguing in action, is *Tulse Luper 92 suitcases* ([www.zen.co.uk/home/pagew/paul.m/tlhome/html](http://www.zen.co.uk/home/pagew/paul.m/tlhome/html)). It's a mouthful but what do you expect from a site rumoured to be filled in around the edges by Peter Greenaway. Confusing graphics of desktop meta-images—folders belonging to Greenaway, David Hockney—lead to small suitcase icons filled with the unimaginable and notions of the authentic. The Luggage Rack has bags added regularly. Stuffed and enticing, the contents are worth persevering for: little jigsaw puzzle pieces, unlabelled portraits, curiouser and curiouser. Click on screens and nothing happens. Numberly fun: letters from PG about Bacon numbers, "a measure of how closely an actor/actress is related to Kevin

Bacon", obsessions with statistics, a 30cm ruler (one foot). The writing crosses all genres but has a detective slant. Who is Tulse Luper? Where are the rest of his suitcases? Which are the real/fake ones? It's possible to place clues and forge notes. Secret compartments lead to an unmade film about Tristram Shandy, mathematics and fly collecting, translation as art, road kill and buzzards, suitcases filled, as the intro reveals, with deaths, sounds, letters and stolen notices. Check out the feedback form for wry humour, Brit style.

Continuing with the abstract expression, extensive hypermedia works by Miekal And (<http://www.net22.com/gazingulazal/joglars/index.html>) focus on the textu(r)al and tactile: a ticking-over-word-puzzle tribute to intermedia composer Dick Higgins (*Mesosistics for dick higgins*); a typo-city font voyage (*after emmett*) where letters become characters (weren't they always), exploring text-based design as language. *spidertangle wordround* is a hypertext workshop and playspace for creators to muck about in. Some of the works are cold and alienating at first: *LogoKons* plays with visual noise machines, black and white iconic windmills (or "fans for cows" as a young observer once said) that generate creaks and the spaces between that words create. The most interesting is *Ubutronic Audio Faucet + Brainwave Seducer*, a concentrated mix of sound, hypertext and graphics, atonal and resonant mouthmusic, building new noise rhythms according to the words you click on. Stumpsitter: a chorus of frogs and swamp boogie. A voice and harmonies appear out of nowhere. Close your eyes and it becomes trancelike, you're a composer, making your own poem-song. Open up both Internet Explorer and Netscape browsers at the same time for the stereo mix...and my computer has a panic attack...

If you come across any innovative hypermedia works on the web, please email the URL to Kirsten: [opencity@rttimearts.com](mailto:opencity@rttimearts.com)

For a comprehensive list of hypertext links (and other WriteSites articles) visit the RealTime website at [www.rttimearts.com/~opencity/](http://www.rttimearts.com/~opencity/)

## Providing viable illusions: the word is...?

Richard James Allen introduces The 1999 Australian Poetry Festival

Growing up as a poet in Australia in the 70s was a bit like growing up in a war zone. Poetic shells flying overhead, everywhere one stepped a minefield. It was fine for people to have different points of view. All the better, more interesting, more colourful; but the pleasures and intrigues were more engaging in the work than in the dogma around it.

Perhaps, in terms of the big split between the so-called "generation of 68" and the "conservatives", the way forward was not to join any school; whatever the detriment "politically." Rather, to recognise that while the changes to our perceptions of language and meaning brought by postmodernism could not be ignored, we nevertheless had to build from those fragments and ironies some kind of meaning that would make our experiences worthwhile. A human space, however transitory and contingent, however linguistically fabricated and compromised, nevertheless had to be constructed, and indeed this was the function of the imagination and of art—to provide viable illusions.

The 1999 Festival of Australian Poetry is about bringing these principles into a wider context. It's a place where poets of many different methods, beliefs and persuasions can come together and listen to each other. And where audiences can not only listen but participate in a dialogue about who we are as expressed with the word.

Presented by the Poets Union in the Balmain Town Hall from Friday night August 27 to Sunday August 28, the festival is a weekend of immersion in the word as written, spoken or screened by some of Australia's finest poets, on themes from love to politics, sex to spirituality, home to humour, wild to the future.

*Stylistic Collisions* is a gala opening (Friday from 6pm) with a tasting of all of our festival topics and a piece of the Poets Union birthday cake (we're turning 22). Saturday night is the *Great Love Poetry Reading* to tie in with the ABC's theme for this year's National Poetry Day. Saturday and Sunday sessions feature responses to the implied question in *the word is...* In each session, 3 distinguished poets read from their works on the topic of the hour (*the word is...* funny/political/the future/narrative/spiritual/place/ism/growing). A moderator teases out connections and contentions with the panel of poets. And there's a chance for a newcomer to read their best poem (pre-selected by a

panel of Poets Union judges) on the topic in question. (Send up to 3 poems by 20th August: Poem of the Festival Award, PO Box 237, Annandale 2038.)

Running throughout is The Hard Poet Cafe—the participatory wing of the festival—a venue where punters and poets can talk and browse between sessions, featuring special one-on-one booths designed for professional development sessions.

The Hard Poet Cafe includes *The Editor is In*: a table where a rotating series of poetry editors take on customers at a rate of 4 dollars for 10 minutes, reading, critiquing and discussing their poems. *The Well-Read Poem* is another table, this time with a coach for poets wanting to learn techniques for reading their own poems more effectively. We'll also feature an array of visual art interfaces with the word, a Cafe, a Bookstall and Signing Table, information desks, and *The Word on TV*, a monitor continuously playing poetry videos and poetry TV shows.

There are special events sprinkled throughout the festival, but rather than lay them out here, perhaps a few less words about words:

### CREDO

*I feel no need / to describe the world as we see it. / It is easily recorded / through more accurate technologies than words. / Language has needs of its own. / It is like a new species / we human beings have spawned / and live with symbiotically. / Our task is to nurture it, / to give it room to flourish, / to heal it when it is wounded. / It is like a broken nightingale, / whose care may be our reason for being, / whose voice may be heard / in all those places / that we call the heart.*

All comers are invited to a weekend of poetry and poetics to answer for themselves—what's the word?

The 1999 Australian Poetry Festival, Balmain Town Hall, Friday, August 27 - Sunday, August 28. Tel 9818 6966

Richard James Allen is Artistic Director of the Australia-wide Poets Union Inc. and Director of the 1999 Australian Poetry Festival. His 7th book of poetry, *Thursdays Fictions*, published by Five Islands Press, will be launched during the Festival in the Balmain Town Hall on Saturday August 28 at 5pm.

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34. the word, Col  
she'll be here soon

35. the... word,  
of a taboo word  
for recession).

36. word for word

37. word if I

38. word per  
complete

39

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# OnScreen

## film, media and techno-arts

Sydney Film Festival

## Giving us back the everyday...starting from scratch

Needeeya Islam interviews George Kouvaros about the Sydney Film Festival's John Cassavetes retrospective

John Cassavetes occupies a unique position within cinema history. He negotiated the spaces between Hollywood and independent American cinema traditions, creating a body of work that is often difficult but has had a lasting influence on the way in which independent filmmaking is conceived of and discussed.

Much has been made of Cassavetes as a biographical figure; his memorable acting roles and labelling as a 'maverick' director (who usually worked with the same troupe of actors which included his wife Gena Rowlands, Peter Falk, Ben Gazzara and Seymour Cassel) have perhaps generated as much interest in Cassavetes himself as in his films. American academic Ray Carney for example, who introduced the retrospective at the 1999 Sydney Film Festival, engaged the festival audience with numerous personal anecdotes and reflections. [Carney is the author of several publications on Cassavetes including *The Films of John Cassavetes: Pragmatism, Modernism and the Movies*, Cambridge University Press 1992]

This focus, however, leaves a number of the more complex issues surrounding Cassavetes' often opaque work at the margins of the discussion. With rare public screenings of all but 2 of Cassavetes' films in Sydney and Melbourne in June, it seems timely to return to some of the ideas generated by his work about how we understand cinema; ideas that we can find traces of across a range of contemporary work.

I spoke to George Kouvaros, who has taught and written extensively on the work of Cassavetes, about the nature of performance, the preoccupation with the everyday and the rendering of the cinematic object itself in Cassavetes work.

NI Why do you think there has been a renewed interest in critical discussion of Cassavetes' films over the past decade?

GK The first thing to note is that nearly all the films are now available on video. For a long time, the only films available were *A Child is Waiting* [1963], *Gloria* [1980], *Love Streams* [1984] and *Big Trouble* (a film Cassavetes actually disowned). In the early 90s a 'Cassavetes collection' became



*The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*

available in France, the US and Great Britain made up of *Shadows* [1959], *Faces* [1968], *A Woman Under the Influence* [1974], *Opening Night* [1977] and *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* [1978]. The British critic Richard Coombs, who, along with Tom Milne and Jonathan Rosenbaum, was one of the few English language critics to pay close attention to Cassavetes' films during the 70s, wrote a very interesting short article celebrating the release of the films on video in *Sight and Sound* and since then there has been a trickle rather than a flood of critical interest.

But that doesn't tell us the full story of course. An important but more complicated factor in the reappraisal of Cassavetes' films is that the study of film has changed and so too have the concerns of a number of key film journals. To tell this story properly, however, would take much more space than we have here.

NI At first glance Cassavetes' films don't seem to lend themselves to being written about. What kind of pressures and challenges do his films pose for critical interpretation?

GK I think it is true to say that his films demand a different set of analytical and descriptive skills to those most film students, or my generation of film students

at least, cut their teeth on at university. Rather than concentrating on obvious formal manipulations in terms of point of view, editing structures, narrative patterns and relating these to broader ideological structures, with Cassavetes' work our attention has to be on a shifting surface of bodily gesture, human relation and emotional interplay. I think Kent Jones articulated this shift of attention very nicely in a recent issue of *Film Quarterly*. He makes the point that in *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* the way the "Chinese bookie closes his eyes and mouth tightly, tilts his chin and shakes his head...just before he is shot by Ben Gazzara is as much a structural event as a change of angle in Hitchcock." ("Movie Mutations: Letters from (and to) Some Children of 1960", *Film Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 1, Fall 1998)

To get back to your original question, another reason why there has been a renewed interest in Cassavetes is because film studies has found itself coming back to the question of formal description via a renewed interest in mise-en-scene—that somewhat elusive term which calls our attention back to the materiality of the filmic image and the way in which human figures are brought into being, positioned and put under pressure through the process of filming.

NI I have this sense of each of Cassavetes' films being an exploration of a particular cinematic world, despite the spilling over of each film into another through the ongoing exploration of character. I'm interested in what is suggested by his almost Hawksian shifts from one generic space to another, from the screwball comedy to the family melodrama to the gangster film etc.

GK Perhaps what these generic shifts highlight is that his antipathy to Hollywood narrative has been overplayed. I think that as a set of narrative scenarios and archetypes, Hollywood is too much a part of Cassavetes' experience for it to simply be renounced. (I am thinking here of the influence of Don Siegel who served as something of a mentor figure for Cassavetes in his early encounters with Hollywood bureaucracy). And this can be seen in the way he takes up certain genres, like the gangster film in *Killing of a Chinese Bookie*. But at the same time that he takes up these genres he is interested in what happens when they are subjected to a different kind of performative rhythm and narrative logic. For instance, in *Bookie*, it is those detours, obstacles and stumbles on the way to the hit that are made central. The encounters Cosmo has as he's trying to get to the house are given as much play and time as what happens when he gets there. So this continual process of taking up and detouring is crucial to Cassavetes' work. In *Minnie and Moskowitz* we find the emotions and basic tenets of the screwball comedy opened up to all sorts of uncertainties. So the relation to genre in Cassavetes' films is very much about emotional expansion and transformation. And, importantly, the passage for this transformation is an acute attention to the dynamics of acting and the always unstable relation between performer and role.

NI Cassavetes seems to have been positioned outside of any cinematic tradition, as though his methods emerged without a history and he worked with his ensemble in a vacuum. What other influences played a part in the formulation of Cassavetes' approach to cinema?

GK A key influence (one that Cassavetes himself acknowledged many times) is the work of Shirley Clarke, continued on page 18



# Giving us back the everyday

cont from page 17

who along with Lionel Rogosin, formed part of a maverick strand of American direct cinema that was concerned with exploring the slippery line between fiction and documentary styles and the figurative capacities of the cinema. This was particularly the case with Shirley Clarke's films *The Cool World*, *The Connection* and *Portrait of Jason*. In each of these films the camera is never just a recording device, it is a provocateur, a catalyst, working on the performers, provoking them, engaging them but also being affected by them. This is the other side of the question of what happens to Cassavetes' camera, what it does. It isn't just an instrument working on the performers, it too is open to a passage of affect that is drawn out of the situation. It can take on an uncertainty, almost an intoxication at times. In Cassavetes' films the dramatic scenario is always constituted around the highly charged and mysterious flows of energy and emotion that pass between the characters and between camera and actor.

In terms of influences on Cassavetes' work, it's also worth thinking about his relation to the tradition of American experimental cinema. We have to be careful about locating Cassavetes' work within this tradition because of his falling out with the Jonas Mekas and *Film Culture* in the late 50s and also because of Cassavetes' much greater investment in narrative. It is well known that Mekas branded the second version of *Shadows* "a bad Hollywood film." The standard line for so long has been to oppose Cassavetes to the work of American experimental cinema—thus replaying the same logic of oppositions that positions Cassavetes at odds with Hollywood. I think it's more productive to see that Cassavetes may have also been influenced by filmmakers like Stan Brakhage, Robert Frank, Jonas Mekas in this concern with creating an affective space between camera and subject.

*NI* Could you talk a little more about the particular understanding of performance in Cassavetes' films? It seems that what is being marked out in his work is a situation where performance is not just a matter of re-production of a script or predetermined character but serves to generate its own meanings and affects.

*GK* Olivier Assayas recently put it very well when he wrote: "Films take their meaning suddenly. At a given moment, one understands that one has accomplished

what one wanted, that is, the concrete elements transcend and reveal something which is a little indescribable, that one could not formulate for oneself, but which is, suddenly, what one was looking for from the very beginning." (Olivier Assayas, "Apropos of Maggie", *Metro*, 113/114, 1998) Like Assayas—who admires Cassavetes' films very much—Cassavetes is interested in the unstable factors and experiences that surround and feed into a performance via the actor.

Interestingly, both directors talk about the actor as a generator of a sovereign meaning that only arises or comes forth through the work of fiction-making and performance. Hence the importance Cassavetes placed on allowing the actor a certain degree of freedom in terms of their movements and blocking and also in terms of their responses in a scene. But this freedom places the pressure back on the actor to endure and be able to respond to a situation that may not be predetermined. In *Faces* and *A Woman Under the Influence* this pressure is manifested through the use of 2 cameras filming the same scene from different positions, the preference for long takes and the interest in capturing those gestures and expressions that float uncertainly within a situation. So we see not only the most obvious dramatic events and gestures but those expressions and gestures that may be to the side of what would normally be considered the dramatic action of a scene. This strategy is crucial to situating the everyday within a different kind of dramatic space open to ambiguity and the most subtle nuances of meaning.

There is a sense of a cinematic world continually being re-made. Human figures, situations and emotions in his films are continually undergoing a kind of transformation. This is not about a simple process of improvisation. A script is in place. There might even be a generic framework. But these structures and generic frameworks are subject to the same kinds of transformative processes that arise through Cassavetes' attention to the way in which the camera works upon the body, the way light falls on and caresses a face, the sounds that speech makes when it is not in the service of dialogue, the textures that the voice makes when there is uncertainty about which direction to take. Adrian Martin has put this point beautifully when he described Cassavetes' work as a "cinema which is a kind of documentary event where the energies of bodily performance,

of gesture and utterance and movement collide willynilly in ways not always foreseen or proscribed, with the dynamic, formal, figurative work of shooting, framing, cutting, sound recording."

In each case, what is valued is the performative quality that is part of that moment of enunciation, that moment when cinema gives the impression of watching itself coming into being. There is a kind of attentiveness at work within the film by the filmmaker, the cameraman, the performers that requires from the audience an equal measure of attention to those gestures that in other films may seem marginal but in Cassavetes' work are absolutely central.

*NI* Critical discussions of Cassavetes' films keep coming back to his concern with everyday people and situations. It seems to me that his films treat the everyday in a particular way that encourages the viewer to look for subtleties and nuances that somehow embellish or complicate it.

*GK* While we certainly can say that Cassavetes' work is about the emotional life of the everyday it is an everyday rendered dramatic through the act of filming. The mundanities and mysteries of day-to-day life (in *A Woman Under the Influence*, for example, a spaghetti breakfast, a children's party, a day at the beach) become subject to a process of amplification and transformation that opens up these events (spatially and temporally) and subjects them to a process of crisis whereby we are no longer sure how things come together or what the proper order of things is. And the instigator for this crisis is an explicit engagement—on both formal and thematic levels—with the issue of performance. In terms of their narratives, his films continually return to the question of how to act, the question of what is the appropriate way to perform a certain role when the old ways of doing things are no longer viable. Performance serves as a way of unleashing a figurative energy specific to cinema that



Gena Rowlands & John Marley, *Faces*

renders the everyday larger than life or operatic.

To come at this from another angle, Cassavetes' films not only give us back the everyday but set about to constantly reinvent it through the act of cinema. Each film seems to mark a process of starting from scratch. The camera looks for the possibility of something never seen before but which emerges with striking clarity through the act of cinema. Each film serves as testimony to the plasticity and fundamental mystery of human emotions as they engage and are provoked into being by the cinema.

*The John Cassavetes retrospective screened as part of the Sydney Film Festival programme, State Theatre, Dendy Martin Place & Academy Twin, June 11 - 23*

*George Kouvaros teaches in the School of Theatre, Film and Dance, University of NSW. He has published on Cassavetes in Screen, Post Script and Metro (forthcoming). Along with Lesley Stern he edited the anthology Falling For You: Essays on Cinema and Performance (Power Publications, 1999).*

*[For an interesting approach to Cassavetes through his dialogue, see Todd Berliner, "Hollywood Movie Dialogue and the 'Real Realism' of John Cassavetes," Film Quarterly, Vol 52, No 3, Spring 1999. Eds.]*

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## Sydney Film Festival

## Digital rules!

Michael Hill is engaged by D.art 99 at the Sydney Film Festival

D.art 99 is a gallery exhibition of CD-ROMs and a cinema screening of linear video "made by artists who use digital processes", both programmed by dLux media arts. The screening was presented as part of the 46th Sydney Film Festival; the CD-ROMs were exhibited at Artspace from June 10 to July 3. D.art will soon tour nationally. The opening also included a performance by Wade Marynowsky and launch of the remarkable CD-ROM *Basilisk & a universe of dirt* by Wayne Stamp, Lloyd Sharp and Panos Couros.

We haven't yet reached the point on the curve of increasing bandwidth that will make many of the more interesting forms of digital art easier to distribute, so opportunities to view international works locally are still rare. At D.art 99, CD-ROMs and videos from the US, England, Spain, Brazil, the Netherlands, Finland and Canada were shown alongside work from Australia. It is heartening to recognise that media artists all over the world are striving (not always successfully) to make sensible use of digital tools beyond their preset effects. dLux media arts should be commended for continuing to program international pieces—a practice first tested at D.art 98. It seems obvious that exhibiting the best international pieces benefits local production and critical practice, in much the same way that the major film festivals have offered film practitioners an international context for their efforts. Once the relevant funding organisation emerges from the Hall of Mirrors it may be encouraged to support the exhibition of international digital media art locally.

One of the highlights of the video program was Peter Callas' work-in-progress *Lost in Translation*—part 1: *Plus Ultra*, his first piece since moving his production process out of the video studio and onto the desktop. You have to admire anyone who will learn Unix for their art, and the result of his extensive re-skilling in SoftImage is shown in this piece which seems to offer an expanded dimension to his previous efforts in the essentially 2D world of the Fairlight video synthesiser. While still using 2D sources—images and drawings from the heroic period of Portuguese exploration and consequent non-heroic period of South American colonisation—Callas has managed to manipulate them (figures especially) in a manner which suggests a life in 3 dimensions. In one sequence a Prince-Henry-the-Navigator type of figure is seen hunched over a map and continues to draw and redraw the edges of the world. In another a bed-ridden figure cut from what looks like a Goya is made to buckle in spasms from some deep sickness of the soul. The new tools have allowed for a

greater depth of texture and mood. Callas' new work is more poetic. *Lost in Translation* seems to escape some of the comic harshness provided by the saturated colours of his early work, while pleasingly retaining the psychotic repetitive actions of the figures and his political concerns, and remains unmistakably a video by Peter Callas.

Michaela French's *Flux* is also a beauty, or is beauty. A richly layered and textured series of visually poetic fragments carefully sewn together in the edit suite. It makes you think of all sorts of things—love, loss, longing, ferris wheels, Christ how did they do that and what is that a picture of? We are finally starting to see some spirited use of Adobe After Effects which proves that all those bank commercials with their gliding logos haven't ruined it for everyone.

Ian Haig's 2 minute blurt *Trick or Treat* "ghouls, zombies, bloodsuckers, freaks and demons are brought back from the dead", looked like 16 different personalities vying for control of the body of Edvard Munch as it squeezed through a sphincter in the space-time continuum. It was comically unnerving in a Tobe Hooper sort of way. But it ended just as its visceral effects (significantly augmented by Philip Samartzis' soundtrack) were starting to be felt. Hopefully, Haig will turn it into an endurance piece for those people who can't get enough of his sort of madness.

Tina Gonsalves' *Swelling* was another substantial piece in a generally high quality video program that suffered only a couple of lapses.

New media curators always have to grapple with the problem of exhibiting interactive digital media art (CD-ROMs and websites) and linear digital media art (video) in the same program. Recent attempts by film festivals to incorporate both have usually resulted in a batch of PCs with CD-ROM drives sitting in the foyer of the cinema. dLux have gone the more sensible route and put a batch of PCs in the foyer of an art gallery, allowing for a longer exhibition window. The set-up at Artspace was pretty perfunctory—4 Macs on 2 trestle tables with headphones to stop the sound spill and a bunch of chairs scattered around. It looked like one of those laundromats in Chinatown which also offers net access. But the event had people queuing up every day to see the exhibition, and with a lot of people around the unfussy approach worked well.

Someone always seemed to be interacting with Spaniard Cristina Casanova's *Vamos a Contar Mentiras* (Let's Tell Lies)—a popular piece. Through a menu made of happy chocolate-box cherubs, the user was able to gain access to a series of animations which told oblique stories, ostensibly about a group of school friends. It was fun and flirty and always entertaining, but had one of those confusing interfaces which, if you didn't have a good memory, had you by mistake returning to areas already explored.

A notable tendency within D.art 99 was an emphasis on

sound. Visual artists who have taken up video and digital media at art school have not always embraced sound production, especially when taught by other visual artists. There is an old rule of thumb handed down from video artist to video artist that says sound is 10% of the effect and 90% of the trouble. Chris Henschke's *Orchestra of Rust* and Michael Buckley's *The Good Cook* showed that with CD-ROM production it might still be 90% of the trouble, but you get full value for your effort. Likewise, Panos Couros' soundtrack for *Basilisk & a universe of dirt* works effectively with Wayne Stamp and Lloyd Sharp's bacteriological, alchemical, ahistorical, and proctological imagery.

Chris Hales is an English artist who has long worked with his own brand of interactive movie—poetic (and sometimes comic) linear videos into which he has set hotspots for the audience to select. These provide jumping off points for other scenes or other narratives. *The Tallinn People's Orchestra* is a slightly different work in that it uses sound as a basis for its development. A simple locked-off shot of a square in the Estonian capital shows at various points different figures walking into the shot in the foreground, middle ground and background. Planes, pigeons, people all have a separate sound figure and can be turned off or ordered differently to evolve the soundscape. It is not as immediately fulfilling as his previous *The Twelve Loveliest Things I Know* and others, but still an interesting example of the development of interactivity with linear video streams. Chris Hales remains one of the few artists worldwide who is interested in this area which seems rich with possibility and may reach its height with the spread of DVD-ROM.

Wade Marynowsky's *Diaspora 2000* was both a performance and CD-ROM. The performance was held in the vestibule at Artspace after the opening speeches and during everyone's second beer. The speakers were cranked up and the video projector above Marynowsky's head was pumping out a stream of media against the universe. The music was a reasonable sort of bland techno filth thing. It was kind of okay in performance and the energy was up but at times it looked like another virtual anorak going through the motions.

The CD-ROM version of *Diaspora 2000* (made in Director) even though the same, is another thing entirely. The user is given a very simple keyboard layout to learn and then get started. By selecting different keys, you can call up different sound samples coupled with images. Some are drum loops, some melodic sequences and some short samples. Not only can you overlay sounds over each other, but the images coupled to the sounds flash alternately, creating a sort of epilepsy-inducing oscillation between images. Eisenstein would have liked the way the images evoke different meanings when placed in proximity with each other, but the broad themes of the piece make you think of the 4 horsemen of Sydney's Apocalypse—greed, envy, lust and the Olympics. You can build up quite complex layers of sound and image, and experiment with turning layers on and off.



Cristina Casanova's *Vamos a Contar Mentiras* (Let's Tell Lies)

After about half an hour of playing with this thing, you get that sweaty overstimulated feeling you get from video games or loud music and which is strangely satisfying to the adolescent in you. You begin to realise that this program was what Wade was interacting with to make the audio and video streams for his performance on opening night which you previously thought was a bit ho hum. What makes it so different? Why was the linear version a bit familiar, but the act of interacting with the same material so exciting and so fun? Maybe we are starting to see what interactive media is going to be able to give audiences that linear media can't. Interactive media's offer not of control but of play as an antidote to the didacticism of linear media will win every time.

With this event, dLux have gone out on a limb by concentrating primarily on the exhibition of digital works, a move which remains unpopular with many camera-using filmmakers. D.art 99, however, must be described as a successful event. It had a focus which its predecessor, *Matinaze* (1991–97), always lacked, and a breadth, through the programming of CD-ROMs, which D.art 98 couldn't achieve. With the possible inclusion of a sound component next year, D.art seems to be morphing into a separate event altogether. And now that other film festivals are sweeping up all those pesky short dramas, dLux can concentrate on exhibiting digital media art in all its forms. And this is a prospect which is not at all unpleasant.

D.art 99 screenings, produced and presented by dLux media arts at the 46th Sydney Film Festival, Palace Academy Twin, June 18; CD-ROM exhibition, Artspace, June 10 - July 3; D.art 99 will tour nationally and internationally

Michael Hill was Multimedia Project Coordinator at the AFC and is now Senior Producer at CDP Media in Sydney. mhill@cdpmedia.com.au



Wade Marynowsky's *Diaspora 2000*



# Dream lovers and objects of desire

Kirsten Krauth in the schtick of things at this year's Dendys

While the themes of last year's awards were isolation and antagonism between men and women and men and men, this year's Dendys are about the search—through tragedy, humour and moving between shores—for identity, for a place to fit in, continuing the cultural and gender crossovers negotiated last year. Outsiders are in: Kath Duncan (*My One Legged Dream Lover*) explores America positioning herself as the object of desire, while wanker-artist Bob Fischer graces our shores in *Original Schtick*, revealing cringemaking art dealers desperate for the big buck. Dendy fiction has moved beyond the gag film and homogenous Tropfest finals product with a focus on minorities—gay and lesbian (*Two Girls and a Baby*, *Above the Dust Level*, *Reunion*), Japanese (*Flowergirl*), youth culture (*Your Turn*)—and grrrls' perspectives. All 6 entries in the under and over 15 minutes categories are directed by women. The Beach is still a focus of cultural identity and Cate Shortland looks like a new filmmaking force to be reckoned with, winning both fiction categories with 2 exquisitely different and sophisticated works: *Flowergirl* and the evocatively titled *Pentuphouse*.

## Squirts of Shortland shorts:

*Flowergirl* is Bondi Japanese style, reminiscent of Wong Kar Wai's *Chungking Express* with funky short-haired Hana and romantic male Diasuke, spare aesthetic and synthetic music, vivid blues, reds and pinks and a tourist's pace. Sydney beach culture looks and smells different through the camera. What Diasuke likes about Australia is the colour of the bricks, deep and rich. Returning to Japan to work in his father's butcher shop (a vegetarian, he remembers burning rancid carcasses) he videos Hana/flowergirl secretly, a memento of Bondi. They watch porn together; "that girl is so noisy", she says. He expresses his love by describing the way she

smells at different times of the day, her "refusal to be packaged".

*Pentuphouse* begins in a seedy 70s unit, smash up derby racing on TV. Della and Dale: green light, pink satin dressing gown, blood nose. *Got any money?* Taxis and tunnels. No kissing on the mouth. Cocktail bar fantasies in the fake orange glow of advertising sunsets and slippery surfaces, shiny, reflective. *Got any smokes?* Della escapes through moving mirror doors. Singin' in a lounge, microphone dreams. The wider picture: gnarled hands on flashing pokies, her voice struggling above the jingle of coins, whoops and sirens of the machines.

## Object/s of desire:

Kath Duncan is used to being different, the stares, the thinly veiled fear. In her 30s, she no longer wears a prosthetic arm, determined to be accepted as an amputee. In the opening shot, she swims, limbs large and white, her stumps confronting yet graceful. By repeating the same scene at the end, *My One Legged Dream Lover* shows the nature of our reactions to people who are physically different. We are challenged at first but, by getting to know Kath inside-out, we become more intrigued than confronted. We feel the desire to know, to look, to touch. An exciting exploration of disability, this doco runs with themes of fetishism and embodied power; the relationship between looking and being looked at. Meeting American "amputee devotees" Mike and Don in the flesh is an ambivalent experience for Kath when she learns that devotees still have all the other (old) hangups: sure, women can be amputees but they shouldn't be fat!

In a fit of defiance, Kath tries on skimpy wild lingerie—"it's decent enough to wear out"—and pretty soon the camera becomes

more than an observer. In an intimate, beautifully crafted scene, Kath asks the only really attractive devotee (well, from where I'm looking from anyway!) what he would do if the camera wasn't there...the audience becomes seduced by his words and the sexual tension is palpable. The doco is given extra spice by its humorous exploration of the nature of normality: at the beginning of the film, a woman asks Kath if she is a circus lady; at the hotel Kath becomes sidetracked by a Star Trek convention, where a bunch of fanatics stroll around in crazy sci-fi costumes, making the amputees look, well...

## And speaking of freaks...

*Original Schtick*, winner of the doco section, is a crafty, well-edited and revelatory film about (bullshit) artist Bob Fischer, wheeler-and-dealer, who tells the Aussie art world he's famous and they believe it. Believing success is about "who you know and who you blow", he embarks on cultural collaborations like The Stick Project where he hires a young artist to paint the sticks he collects. Bob is the perfect documentary subject: articulate, assertive, disarmingly dishonest with an ego the size of Texas, a "one man soapie", who will use any lever to raise himself above the rest. He functions as a litmus test, revealing the poor judgement of the Melbourne art crowd, and their lack of research skills (his resume, and grandiose claims, turns out to be completely made up).

The documentary is elegantly handled, clever and bizarre enough to keep you guessing as to whether it's been constructed from the outset. Towards the end, the camera becomes malicious, as do most of the audience. When told to stop filming it moves, surreptitious, and keeps on recording. In a strangely intimate scene—the only one where



Cate Shortland's *Pentuphouse*

Bob appears vulnerable—he is re-born, naked, from a body cast to reveal a statue with enormous erect penis. But, he needs more than a strap on dildo to preserve his sense of self.

## And speaking of erections...

In *Edithvale* good girl Edith ("thirty years I've been on my own" says mother with her daughter in the room) moulds a man out of sand and seaweed, her own Greek god who transforms, and caters for, her rescue fantasies in a love shack of pussy willows and sensual fur. Fuelled by desire and her sister's postcards (statues of David), femme-frankenstein Edith escapes her White Sauce confines and feeds off her lustrous creation, carefully arranging him/her in poses and positions, the screen as artificial and voluptuous, gold and velvet lined, as the State Theatre itself.

1999 Dendy Awards for Australian short films, State Theatre, Sydney, June 11. Winners: documentary: *Original Schtick*, director Maciej Wszelaki; fiction over 15 mins: *Flowergirl*, writer/director Cate Shortland, co-writer Jun Tagami; fiction under 15 mins: *Pentuphouse*, writer/director Cate Shortland; general: *Love Song*, writer/director Bruce Currie; 13th Yoram Gross Animation Award: Darwin's *Evolutionary Stakes*, director Andrew Horne, writer Alan Pentland; 8th EAC Award: *Your Turn*, writer/director Greg Woodland. Others mentioned: *My One Legged Dream Lover*, director/producers Penny Fowler-Smith & Chris Olsen, writer Kath Duncan; *Edithvale*, writer/director Clare Madsen.

# (Not) testing the limits

Needeya Islam on some Sydney Film Festival documentaries

While all Sydney Film Festival subscribers can be certain, at some point, of having to eat the bad, overpriced food and catching a respiratory illness, if not on Day 2 like myself, then certainly by the second week, the experience is otherwise rarely the same for 2 people. The number of films and parallel programming mean that for each viewer the festival has a logic and emphasis that is unique, almost personalised. Each little detour, taken for particular reasons and often because of the most mundane contingencies, can allow for strange connections between films; often those with apparently nothing in common but their production date can throw strange light upon one another. Concentrating on one aspect of the festival such as the Cassavetes retrospective this year meant that many of the features screening at the State Theatre had to be missed. However I did manage to see a number of documentaries that are worth mentioning.

Among them, and largely because it was potentially so interesting, was *Brakhage*, Jim Shedden's film about influential experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage. It turned out to be a particularly conventional documentary;

surprising given the reverential tone it adopts towards its subject's approach to filmmaking. Using a mixture of archival footage, sequences from Brakhage's films, and direct interviews, Shedden constructs a portrait in which there is a lot of assumed knowledge about Brakhage. And yet one imagines that for those who are familiar with Brakhage as a figure as well as his work, nothing particularly new or interesting is revealed. The historical significance of Brakhage's oeuvre is referred to a number of times by the interviewees, including George Kuchar and P. Adams Sitney, but the uninventive way in which this is conveyed means it always remains at the level of statement—there is little evidence within the film which renders these comments particularly compelling. It seems unfortunate that this portrait of such a groundbreaking filmmaker was so unengaging.

Two documentaries about the relationship between people and the urban environment were like opposite sides of a coin and evinced the at once utopian/dystopian connotations of the words 'urban' and 'globalisation.' Christopher Tuckfield's *Renzo Piano*, about the Italian architect, focuses on Piano's buildings

in cities around the world and engages with the theoretical framework behind his work. It considers how a sense of harmony can be brought to the contemporary urban experience by thinking through how a city is used by its inhabitants and how it engages with its history (as with the project to rebuild Potsdamer Platz in Berlin). It is of course a rarefied experience—the film's sense of order and precision, enhanced by Richard Vella's score, complements the architect's utopian vision and experience of the contemporary city.

An interesting contrast is Michael Glawogger's *Megacities*, a confronting, at times horrifying, but also extremely humane film about life in New York, Bombay, Mexico City and Moscow, cities where people vastly outnumber buildings and indeed space. In a series of vignettes which construct a certain intimacy and empathy with his subjects, the filmmaker addresses the minutiae of the life of the majority of inhabitants of cities that are out of control. A street hustler in New York, factory workers in Bombay, a sex worker and her family in Mexico City and alcoholic men in Moscow. One of the most memorable sequences involves a man in a dye factory in Bombay. Like some kind of magical creature he sifts dye, and out of a mesmerising puff of



Michael Glawogger's *Megacities* 12 stories of survival

colour, emerges as, in turn, a blue, then yellow, then red, then green man. This image is transfixing but then he speaks. He says that he works for hours a day for nearly nothing, that his body aches and finally, simply, that he is unhappy. In these moments, a rare subjectivity is conferred upon people, who are all too often depicted as the substance of urban chaos, rather than products or victims of it. Glawogger's style is artful, considered and tendentious. It raises questions about the nature of what we think of as documentary, through a bold testing of its limits and possibilities.

Brakhage (Canada), writer/director Jim Shedden; *Renzo Piano—Piece by Piece* (Australia), director Christopher Tuckfield; *Megacities* (Austria/Switzerland), writer/director Michael Glawogger, Sydney Film Festival, June 11 - 23



## Sydney Film Festival

## In search of The Thing

Simon Enticknap fights a battle of engagement with the Sydney Film Festival

So much searching, searching, searching for The Thing—identity, truth, love, belonging, revenge, shoes...which makes Laila Pakalnina's *The Shoe* apposite and appealing in the context of this festival. Three soldiers and a dog go searching for the owner of a shoe but for a long time we see them only in the distance, hear the crunch of boots, follow shadows. The film is built around such subtle resistances, refusing to take its own premise and run with it; we are told little about the soldiers, only what we can pick up by eavesdropping, no drama develops as a result of character 'flaws', and there is no great tragedy or triumph, only tiredness. We are forced to look and listen, to question what it is that we are supposed to see, hear, feel; an invitation to speculate on the spectacle. Slowly, people, places and objects become more familiar—it is a film about cognition and re-cognition—and we start to map the site, fill in the blanks, without it ever leading us anywhere.

Then the next day it starts all over again.

Every day is like dipping into a global melting plot (with the exceptional exception of the Cassavetes retrospective which arrives as if from a different filmmaking planet), blurred visions filtered through a film treatment plant for daily consumption by the story-bored.

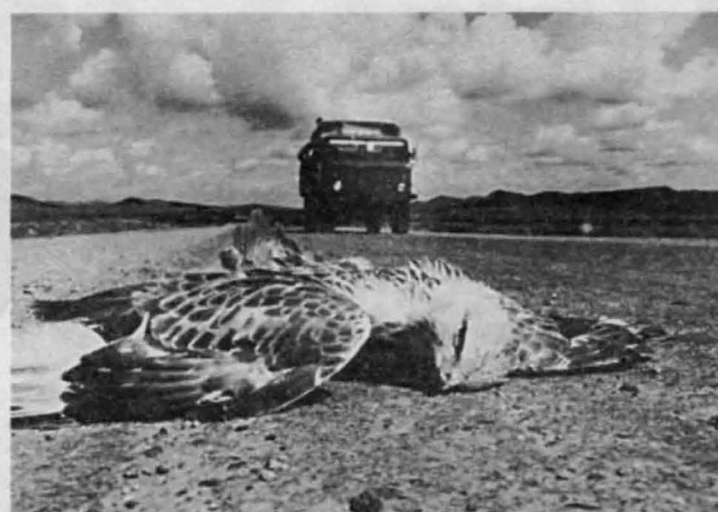
Early on, the festival favourite *Children of Heaven* gives us a warm 'n' fuzzy, especially when little Ali breaks the tape and wins, even though that means he misses out on winning The Thing (more shoes, more sole-searching). Everybody applauds anyway because we still want to believe that people are rewarded for winning. Majid Majidi shows us the pressure/pleasure of having to stave off the latent threat of authority (Ali's Father, the school) but he also demonstrates that the real cause of Ali's troubles is class inequality—his family's poverty, the rich kids Ali must overcome in order to win/lose.

Strange coincidences emerge: a sheep and a goat are killed in the same way in 2 contrasting documentaries about Central Asia, *Genghis Blues* (another crowd-pleaser) and *State of Dogs* (an elusive, slippery story of displacement and return). In *Genghis Blues*, the sheep's death marks the arrival of a group of Americans in Tuva, a symbolic moment in a film which deals with Western society's search for place, and the random means by which this place can be found—a signal picked up on late night radio, the memory of an exotic stamp. *State of Dogs*, an oblique, sometimes bleak look at modern Mongolia, works hard to avoid this outsider's perspective, mixing myth and a dash of anthropomorphism to throw us off the scent.

Onward through the festival and I'm still searching for That Thing, sitting nearer and nearer to the screen, creeping forward a couple of rows every now and again, and then sitting at an angle, as if trying to find a position from which to watch these films, to get close or take them aside.

My notes become a list of tribal banalities: WOW—Americans have such material wealth (after watching Neil Jordan's *In Dreams*, easily the most cynical button-pushing exercise of the festival). Do the French have a thing about incest? (after the hysteria of *I Stand Alone* and *More than Yesterday*). What big helicopters they have in Greenland (all the better for filming in *Heart of Light*).

My gaze drifts to the edges, grazes on backgrounds, examines the extras, then slides to the ceiling of the State, onto the silvery faces of my fellow film followers. It's a war of engagement—which is what the films demand—but they want it all on their own terms (which are often too obvious, too lazy, too self-conscious, too too...). Near the end



State of Dogs

now, and fittingly the festival cruises to a rousing finale with *Soft Fruit* and *Two Hands*. Hey, if filmmaking is going to be all about story-telling then they might as well be our stories, and these 2 do it better than most. Still, I reckon I'd swap it all for a glimpse of Gena Rowlands waiting for a bus, Peter Falk running helter-skelter down a hill, or Ben Gazzara crossing a road and disappearing into the night.

*The Shoe* (Latvia/Germany), writer/director Laila Pakalnina; *Children of Heaven* (Iran), writer/director Majid Majidi; *Genghis Blues* (USA), writer/director Roko Belic; *State of Dogs* (Belgium/Mongolia), writer/directors Peter Brosens & Dorijkhandyn Turmunkh; Sydney Film Festival, June 11 - 23

## Longing, plumbing and the afterlife

Kirsten Krauth picks favourites at the Sydney Film Festival

A quick confession: after the Sydney Film Festival, after *Shadows*, *Faces*, *Husbands*, *A Woman Under the Influence*, *Gloria*, *Mike* and *Nicky*, *Minnie and Moskowitz*, I'm obsessed and in love. Gena Rowlands. (She's not in all of these films but she lingers.) Has there ever been a more dynamic, sexy, strong, berserk, intriguing actress in cinema? And the best thing, she's still on screen, she's survived. Cassavetes' films have unforgettable moments. *Gestures*. Gena's twitching nose, splurts and expressive thumbs in *A Woman*; Lelia's veiled eyes after she hits the sack with a cad in *Shadows*; the hilarious horsey physical interplay between Falk, Gazzara and Cassavetes throughout *Husbands*; the naked 6 year-old boy in a double bed asking wise-gal Gloria about love; the staircase at the end of *Faces* where a couple's marriage breakdown is finally played out by still shots negotiating emptiness and powerlessness.

Apart from the Cassavetes retrospective, Gayle Lake's choice of features reflected a move into the next millennium: slow, full of longing, about preserving cultural identity and survival, many films conveying through image and ritual rather than dialogue. *Ikinai* and *After Life*, an elegant Japanese duet, would have worked well as a double feature, one the perfect follow-on to the other. Both were character ensembles with sparse and off-centred design, tackling big questions in subtle and innovative ways. In *Ikinai* (debut feature of Hiroshi Shimizu who worked as assistant director to Takeshi Kitano on films including *Hana-bi*) we climb aboard Sunshine Tours, a bus of 13 passengers knowingly moving towards death, the suicide-run given added sparkle by tacky touristy diversionary tactics along the way. A moral nuance is added when a young girl joins the tour unaware of the destination. She hasn't made the choice to die and her signature karaoke tune, "the only song she knows", is a happy life-affirming jaunt, setting in motion a gently humorous, at

times profound exploration of existentialism, collective guilt and responsibility.

I've never been a fan of the what-happens-when-you-die genre (either in Hollywood or European evocation) but *After Life* made me a believer. At a bureaucratic station, the first stop after death, travellers are given 3 days to choose a memory, the one moment of their lives that made them feel joyous and complete. They must choose carefully because this memory will be recreated and recaptured on film. During the screening, the memory holder is transported into the afterlife, the film's frame, living eternally in the chosen moment.

Director Kore-eda Hirokazu has made a number of films dealing with memory and loss, inspired by his grandfather who experienced the onset of Alzheimer's when Hirokazu was a child: "One day, he no longer recognised our faces. Finally, he could not recognise his own." (Hirokazu's notes on *After Life*, quoted in Maria Garcia, "After Life", *Film Review Archive*, [www.filmjournal.com/reviews/html/as\\_16.htm](http://www.filmjournal.com/reviews/html/as_16.htm)). Over 500 subjects were interviewed during pre-production and the cast includes professional and non-actors. Some interviews were incorporated and others later scripted. The resulting recollections are a sensual delight—ladled soups, bamboo forests, a red dress for dancing, wind on a train—and characters intersect and fail to conform—the punky and vital 21 year-old who refuses to choose a memory; the counsellor at the way-station who becomes terrified of always being forgotten...I watched in a semi-conscious, sidetracked reverie, searching for my own slice of constructed heaven. *After Life* becomes a luscious and precious experiment, exploring memory, recollection, the magic of movie making and light...how it falls, what it illuminates. The workers erect a fake and beautiful moon each night for the characters to contemplate.

Petr Lutsik's debut *Outskirts* (Russia) and Taiwan director Tsai Ming Liang's *The Hole* couldn't be more different in setting—freezing expanses of the Ural Steppes; tiny apartments in the monstrous city of Taipei—but they are both tense and claustrophobic films about dislocation, the search for connection despite spiritual abandonment and dis-ease, and intensely sensual experiences. In one of many innovative torture scenes in the sumptuous silver spaces of *Outskirts*, a man is dragged onto the ice with bare feet and dunked by the hair into the frozen lake and my body turns to stone, numb with cold. Log cabin interiors, immobile faces, lost innocence, and vast imposing horizons are reminiscent of Ford Westerns, especially *The Searchers*; men living and working on the frontier turning to savagery to preserve their land and a collective sense of identity, galloping horses replaced with an old motorcycle which manages to pack on 4 men and lots of alcohol. Beneath the novel twists and unexpected violence lies a brutal and brooding humour: the director announces before the screening at 10am, "it's too early to watch films...may God see you through to the end."

*The Hole*, originally commissioned by French cable channel Arte as one of 10 films on the millennium incorporating the date December 31 1999 (Pierre Henrotte, "The Hole", *World Cinema Review*, [www.tcf.ua.edu/wlrf/wcr/reviews/hole.html](http://www.tcf.ua.edu/wlrf/wcr/reviews/hole.html)), creates an atmospheric fable about survival and loneliness in a city-gone-mad overcome by cockroaches and torrential rain. With virtually no dialogue or exteriors, we are cramped in relentless, flooded, wet and humid apartments where 2 characters live above/below each other, increasingly dependent on streams and flows, joined by a hole in her ceiling/his floor which becomes a focus for connection, shared space and burgeoning sexuality. She sits on the toilet, white undies around her ankles, green plastic bowl on her head catching the drips. Pipes.



Outskirts

Plumbing. Orifices. Bodily fluids. The Hole becomes a character in itself, watching and listening, an opening for the erotic. He peeps. She imagines a phone call. She drags around a huge sopping soft toy. He pushes a closed umbrella through the gap in his floor, opens it, knocks out the ceiling into the umbrella, closes it and pulls it back up so the gradual widening is almost imperceptible to her. He fills the hole with various limbs, testing the boundaries of himself. At what point does he connect with her? This sense of the absurd is a relief, his dangling leg withdrawing slowly, the foot of an upside-down synchronised swimmer, when she returns to the room.

Her escape comes through Singing-Detective-style 50s fantasies which gradually incorporate the idea of love. Director Ming-liang uses the stylistic device of the musical to "confront the environment at the end of the millennium...towards the end of the century a lot of qualities—such as passionate desire, naive simplicity—have been suppressed. The musicals contain those qualities. It's something that I use psychologically to confront the world." (David Walsh, interview with Tsai Ming-liang, *World Socialist Website*, 1998, [www.wsus.org/arts/1998/oct1998](http://www.wsus.org/arts/1998/oct1998)).

*Ikinai* (Japan), director Hiroshi Shimizu, writer Dankan; *After Life* (Japan), writer/director/editor Kore-eda Hirokazu; *Outskirts* (Russia), writer/director Petr Lutsik, co-writer Alexei Samorjadov; *The Hole* (Taiwan/France), writer/director Tsai Ming-liang; Sydney Film Festival, June 11 - 23



ART AND  
LIVING HERE NO  
POLITICS

# AUSTRALIAN

20 AUGUST – 26 SEPTEMBER



Australian Perspecta 1999 is a city-wide Australian contemporary arts event with the theme *Living Here Now—Art and Politics*. In response to the reassessments of national life that are occurring as we approach the new millennium, Australian Perspecta considers our contemporary experience of politics and political agency.

In the spirit of collaboration that marks Australian Perspecta, *Living Here Now* presents conferences, performances, radio broadcasts and internet actions alongside visual arts exhibitions. Twelve organisations will jointly present the work of over 60 artists, 15 curators and 30 speakers.

#### ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

##### Talkback

20 August–26 September

Kate Beynon, Aleks Danko, Destiny Deacon, Raquel Ormella, Scott Redford, Michael Riley, Darren Siwes, Pedro Wonaeamirri

#### ARTSPACE

The Politics of Everyday Fear or The Order of Things or You Wanna Get Outta Here, You Talk to Me or The Aesthetics of Disappearance or...

2–25 September

#### ABC RADIO THE LISTENING ROOM

##### This Time

23 August–13 September, Mondays 9pm

ABC Classic FM (92.9FM)

Moya Henderson, Robert Iolini, Ion Pearce, Cathy Peters, Gregory Whitehead

#### AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

##### Agency

20 August–25 September

Joy Hardman, Joseph Mallard, Sandy Nicholson, Deborah Ostrow, Elvis Richardson, Justene Williams, Judith Wright

#### AUSTRALIAN NETWORK FOR ART AND TECHNOLOGY (ANAT)

##### Resistant Media

[www.anat.org.au/resistant-media](http://www.anat.org.au/resistant-media)

20 August–4 October

- *Refused Classification* <http://autonomous.org/refused/>
- *Ausländer Micro* [www.toysatellite.com.au/auslander/micro](http://www.toysatellite.com.au/auslander/micro)
- *Bio-Tek Kitchen*

[www.anat.org.au/resistant-media/Bio-Tek](http://www.anat.org.au/resistant-media/Bio-Tek)

- *Antimedia* [www.antimedia.net/](http://www.antimedia.net/)
- *Dollspace* [www.thing.net/~dollyoko](http://www.thing.net/~dollyoko)
- *Contact—unstable fields of power*

[www.curtin.edu.au/curtin/dept/art/ITBX](http://www.curtin.edu.au/curtin/dept/art/ITBX)

- *Resistant Media* listserv:

[owner-resistant-media@autonomous.org](mailto:owner-resistant-media@autonomous.org)

Andrew Garton, Scot McPhee, Melinda Rackham, Francesca da Rimini, Sam de Silva, Josephine Starrs, Rick Vermey

#### CASULA POWERHOUSE ARTS CENTRE

##### Y2K:6—Six Systems for Protecting Your Future

1 September–3 October

Brenda L. Croft, Alice Hinton-Bateup, Gerardo Rodriguez-Bruzzesi, Keren Ruki, Khaled Sabsabi, Tex Skuthorpe

#### GALLERY 4A

##### Different Worlds

15 September–9 October

My Lee Thi, Ruth Watson

#### IVAN DOUGHERTY GALLERY

##### Living Here Now

20 August–18 September

Judith Ahern, John E. Hughes, Steven Lojewski, Harriet McKern

#### MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

##### Preambles

20 August–17 October

Gordon Bennett, Adam Cullen, Derek Kreckler, Elizabeth Gertsakis, Tony Schwensen

#### MUSEUM OF SYDNEY

##### Living Here Now

20 August–26 September

Simryn Gill, Emil Goh, Robyn Stacey

#### THE NATIONAL TRUST S.H. ERVIN GALLERY

##### Love Magic: Erotics, Politics and Indigenous Art

20 August–3 October

Brook Andrew, Eddie Blitner, Djambu Burra Burra, Karen Casey, Robert Ambrose Cole, Karla Dickens, Duwun, Ted Jangala Egan, Lorna Napurrurla Fencer, Fiona Foley, Bill Harney, Kitty Kantilla, Gary Lee, Roque Lee, Wally Mandarrk, Andrea Nungarrayi Martin, Nakarra McKenzie, Arone Meeks, Tracey Moffatt, Rex Murray, Paddy Compass Namatbara, Nyurpayia Nampitjinpa (Mrs Bennett), Trevor Nickolls, Jeffrey Samuels, Uta Uta Tjagala, Samuel Wagbara, Paddy Fordham Wainburranga, Judy Watson

#### THE PERFORMANCE SPACE

Gallery: 21 August–11 September

David Cross *Viscous*, DeeJ Fabyc *Continuous Circumstance*

Theatre: 20–28 August

Shelley Lasica *Action Situation*

#### SYMPOSIUM

##### LIVING HERE NOW: ART AND POLITICS

10–5pm Friday 20 August

University of New South Wales, College of Fine Arts.

Speakers include Benjamin Genocchio, Elizabeth Gertsakis, Charles Green, Ian Howard, Gary Lee, Catharine Lumby, Tony McGregor, Harriet McKern, Ian McLean, Pauline Pantsdown and MacKenzie Wark.

## A city-wide Australian contemporary arts event

managed by the Art Gallery of New South Wales

# PERSPECTA 99



AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTA 99

This project has been assisted by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body.

#### Art Gallery of New South Wales

Art Gallery Rd The Domain  
Sydney 2000  
ph: 9225 1744 fax: 9221 6226  
email: [artmail@ag.nsw.gov.au](mailto:artmail@ag.nsw.gov.au)  
website: [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au)  
10am–6pm daily

#### Artspace

Ground Floor, The Gunner, 43–51 Cowper Wharf Rd Wollomoolloo 2011  
ph: 9368 1899 fax: 9368 1705  
email: [artspace@artspace.org.au](mailto:artspace@artspace.org.au)  
website: [www.artspace.org.au](http://www.artspace.org.au)  
11am–6pm Monday–Saturday

#### ABC Radio The Listening Room

ABC Classic FM Radio (92.9 FM)  
9pm Mondays  
ph: 9333 1500 fax: 9333 2828  
website: [www.abc.net.au/classic](http://www.abc.net.au/classic)

#### Australian Centre for Photography

257 Oxford St Paddington 2021  
ph: 9332 1455 fax: 9331 6887  
email: [info@acp.au.com](mailto:info@acp.au.com)  
program@acp.au.com  
website: [www.acp.au.com](http://www.acp.au.com)  
11am–6pm, Tuesday–Sunday

#### Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT)

PO Box 8029 Hindley Street Adelaide SA 5000  
ph: 08 8231 9037 fax: 08 8211 7323  
email: [anat@anat.org.au](mailto:anat@anat.org.au)  
website: [www.anat.org.au](http://www.anat.org.au)

#### Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre

1 Casula Rd, Casula 2170  
ph: 9824 1121 fax: 9821 4273  
email: [caspower@flex.mail.com.au](mailto:caspower@flex.mail.com.au)  
10am–4pm daily

#### Gallery 4A

Level 3, 53–55 Liverpool St Sydney 2000  
ph: 9283 1750 fax: 9283 1750  
email: [gallery4a@one.net.au](mailto:gallery4a@one.net.au)  
12–6pm Wednesday–Saturday

#### Ivan Dougherty Gallery

UNSW College of Fine Arts Selwyn St Paddington 2021  
ph: 9385 0726 fax: 9385 0603  
email: [ldg@unsw.edu.au](mailto:ldg@unsw.edu.au)  
10am–6pm Monday–Friday  
1–5pm Saturday

#### Museum of Contemporary Art

Circular Quay West The Rocks Sydney 2000  
ph: 9252 4033  
fax: 9252 4361, 9252 4062  
email: [haha@mpx.com.au](mailto:haha@mpx.com.au)  
website: [www.mca.com.au](http://www.mca.com.au)  
10am–6pm daily  
Admission \$9/\$6, members free

#### Museum of Sydney

37 Phillip St Sydney 2000  
ph: 9251 5988 fax: 9251 5966  
email: [info@mos.nsw.gov.au](mailto:info@mos.nsw.gov.au)  
website: [www.mos.nsw.gov.au](http://www.mos.nsw.gov.au)  
10am–6pm daily  
Admission \$6/\$4, family \$15

#### The National Trust

S.H. Ervin Gallery Watson Rd, Observatory Hill Sydney 2000  
ph: 9258 0123 fax: 9251 4355  
email: [shervingallery@nsw.nationaltrust.org.au](mailto:shervingallery@nsw.nationaltrust.org.au)  
website: [www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au](http://www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au)  
11am–6pm Tuesday–Friday  
12–5pm Saturday–Sunday  
Admission \$5/\$3

#### The Performance Space

199 Cleveland St Redfern 2016  
ph: 9698 7235 fax: 9699 1503  
email: [tps@culture.com.au](mailto:tps@culture.com.au)  
website: [www.sydneyarts.net/tps](http://www.sydneyarts.net/tps)  
12–6pm Wednesday–Friday  
12–5pm Saturday

#### University of New South Wales,

College of Fine Arts Selwyn St Paddington 2021  
ph: 9385 0726 fax: 9385 0603



# The real/digital festival

RealTime previews MAAP99's impressive program of digital media works and online cross-cultural collaborations

## Satisfying physical and cyber-needs

Talk about working the screen! By the time MAAP99 (Multimedia Arts Asia Pacific) Festival hits Brisbane and the Asia Pacific region from September 3 - 12 the organisers will have considered over 180 proposals (quadruple last year's content) for more than 50 projects showcasing the latest in digital arts in the Asia-Pacific region. From over 60 submissions from Australia alone, the curatorial team selected 4 artists who have been supplied with Macromedia and Metacreations software valued at nearly \$10,000. MAAP will bring the artists to Brisbane to participate in the festival.

The work in MAAP99 covers a range of art forms and practices with an emphasis on interactive multimedia, web, video, animation and projects integrating new media. It encompasses a range of public events, online projects, cinema screenings and exhibitions both on-site and online and forums addressing issues of audience awareness and critical engagement with artists working with technologies and screen-based media. MAAP99 is the ultimate co-mingling of the real and the digital, satisfying both physical and cyber-needs.

As you'd expect, such an ambitious project requires major support and MAAP99 has this from Online Australia, an initiative of the National Office for the Information Economy (NOIE) promoting the development of information technology throughout Australia. They're also partnering the Third Asia Pacific Triennial's *Virtual Triennial* exhibition which will be APT3's official online art content and screen culture provider. Macromedia is again a major sponsor making available just about every tool they produce including *Generator*. With help from Firmware's *Generator* server, live image and text updates to the web will be used extensively during the month-long online festival.

## SEE, SEEK and SPEAK

The program has 3 streams. SEE is the national and international screening program at The State Library Cinema, September 4, and Queensland Art Gallery, September 5. It includes recent works from Korea, Malaysia, China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Feng Mengbo from Beijing will present recent video and web interactive works. *Videotage* features the One Minute Video Festival, a selection of works from China curated by the Hong Kong Video and New Media co-operative. *D.art* is the annual showcase of experimental film, digital video and computer animation from dLux media arts in Sydney. Visual artists are creating short works for television to be broadcast in *Art Rage*. The *Art Rage For Kids* edition is available to schools as an introduction to creative uses of new technologies. The Samsung Project from Korean artist Young-Hae Chang will feature in a narrative program session titled *Strange Stories; Self-Made Cinema*. It incorporates recent works from Hong Kong curated and presented by Jo Law and will be toured by the West Australian Film and Television Institute. *Digital Degrees* features showreels of current digitally produced projects by



Feng Mengbo, Q3, 1999, digital video

multimedia and design students from Singapore, New Zealand and Australia.

SEEK is the interactive exhibition program including gallery, public spaces and online exhibitions. *net.works/MAAP99 Australia/Asia Artists Exchange* is an online residency project aimed at generating dialogue, exchange, and collaboration between Australia and the Asia Pacific. Rather than run 'real' residencies which result in artists making works for the web, *net.works/...* is a habitation of the web, where the internet is used as a beginning point, a space from which to proceed, to commence a dialogue, to speak an idea, to live and work. It's hosted by Multimedia Art Asia Pacific for the MAAP99 Festival and funded by the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council. Feng Mengbo (Beijing); Young-Hae Chang (Seoul); Rick Vermey (Perth); Tina Gonsalves (Melbourne) are partnered to interactively create joint on-line work.

*Xi'an/Ipswich: Double Happiness* is a unique cross-cultural internet exchange program with young web explorers from Australia and China. The project involves the joint design and construction of a website that will help create a link across cyberspace and between cultures. The project is managed by Arterial and Global Arts Link in association with the Bremer TAFE and the Xi'an Translators College with software support from Macromedia.

SPEAK comprises a conference, forum and training program. Presented by MAAP99 in association with ANAT and the Queensland Art Gallery, the conference *Collapsing Geographies* will take place at the Brisbane Exhibition Hall and Convention Centre on Saturday September 11. The focus will be on 3 artist exchange projects involving over 15 web artists from the region. MAAP is sponsoring international guest speaker Naranjan Rajah (Malaysia) at a forum discussing current and future strategies for digital art networks. This is part of the Asia Pacific Triennial Conference, *Beyond the Future*. As well, at the 30th World Congress of INSEA (International Society of Art Educators) MAAP will present an address and series of workshops to highlight the uses of technology for arts educators.

## A real/digital night out

Opening night is Friday September 3 where special guests and late night shoppers will mingle in the Queen Street Mall in Brisbane's CBD. The program includes large projections and a special opening program netcast live on the web. Melbourne curators Shiralee Saul and Helen Stuckey will present *Pre Fab: Invisible Cities and Photon Palaces* comparing and contrasting the digital architectural practices currently being developed by Australian artists and architects with those of their Asian peers. This virtual architecture exhibition will be projected onto buildings in the mall area. Cyberpoet Komninos will perform and project his poetry onto the main wall of the Queensland Performing Arts Trust. This will be netcast on the web. There'll be computer games for those wanting to test their motor coordination. MAAP has also been trying to lure an international pop-star to Brisbane for this high-tech evening. "Diki", the virtual pop star (originally

from Korea, but often holidays in Japan) has promised a new world release for the MAAP 99 opening!

## Stay online

Events physically held in Brisbane and in other parts of the region will be available to view from any location with a series of netcasts on the internet. Forums, artists' live performances and intimate interviews will stream through the MAAP99 festival site to achieve a web festival experience. Each day of MAAP Month an online art project will be launched onto the MAAP website. Thirty online projects have been selected to enliven the web festival experience.

Fame too is on offer with The National Digital Art Awards staged at the Institute of Modern Art. And participation: a "People's Choice" page will be housed on the MAAP website for judging the best Artist's Website. These awards are open to all computer artists working in any digital format. Submit entries to the IMA.

MAAP99 is the perfect stay-at-home festival for the avid onliner but it's also a seductive program for see-ers, seekers and speakers who want that special in-the-body festive experience. RT

MAAP99, Multimedia Arts Asia Pacific Festival, Director, Kim Machan. Brisbane and online <http://www.maap.org.au/>, September 3 - 12. Enquiries [info@maap.org.au](mailto:info@maap.org.au)

## Venus becomes Lottie

Training and prizes from WIFT in Victoria

WIFT (Women in Film & Television, Victoria), founded in 1988 as a networking association and now with over 400 members is organising 2 forthcoming events: *Our Brilliant Careers*, a training program, to be held on October 8 and 9, and the Lottie Lyell Awards shortly after.

*Our Brilliant Careers* is designed for women at varying stages of their careers, from school leavers considering entering the screen-based industries, to those who are well established. This program will see the revival of *Women in Motion*, a film forum for school leavers held successfully in Melbourne for 7 years. Sessions will take the form of classes, panel discussions and Q & A sessions.

Through the national Lottie Lyell Awards for women in film, television and multimedia, WIFT recognises the role women have played and continue to play in the screen industries. Customarily women have had to challenge social boundaries in order to participate.

"For too long Lottie Lyell has meant less to Australians than her American contemporary Mary Pickford. Yet in the treble capacity of star, filmmaker and pioneer of popular screen images and Australian dreams, Lottie is the outstanding Australian personality of early film. Her work as director, producer, editor and screenplay writer proves that heroines existed on both sides of the camera, and that from the first, women were able to make an important contribution in an exciting new medium although their work was seldom fully recognised." (Andree Wright, *Brilliant Careers*)

The successful inaugural event, known as the Venus Awards, was held in Sydney in 1997. The Venus Award was presented to the late Joan Long by Gillian Armstrong. The Lottie Lyell Awards have been re-named to give them a distinctly Australian identity.

These WIFT events are sponsored by Cinemedia. For further information, contact the WIFT office on 03 9525 4922 or visit [www.cinemedia.net/wift/](http://www.cinemedia.net/wift/)



# Cinesonic

## Philip Brophy hears film at the Melbourne Film Festival

In the infamous shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), the 'stabbing' violins perform a psycho-musical function which—if it had not been articulated clearly enough before—stamped the film soundtrack as a postmodern plane upon which the multiplicity of the self is repeatedly decimated, reconstituted and expelled to form a constellation of disembodied and decentred 'selves.'

Let's take that again one step at a time. The inherent romanticism of film music is based on clarity of emotional synchronisation—primarily through a matching of musical codes and references to character traits and conventions: appearance of sad person = cause to announce sad music; announcement of sad music = cause for sad person to appear; etc. Characters and narrators—following many a grand literary tradition—act as conductors and navigators for the placement and intensity of musical presence, creating a whole catalogue of 'motivational strategies' for film scoring (when to cue, for how long, etc). The shower scene from *Psycho* (as with most of the 20 odd musical passages which comprise Bernard Herrmann's score) never adheres to this easy logic. For the shower scene cue is a depiction (not an illustration or justification) simultaneously of 2 liminal characters: Marion (Janet Leigh) and the shadowy 'mother' figure (Anthony Perkins)—as well as a conflation of 2 subliminal figures—Norman Bates and his dead/mummified mother (both Anthony Perkins in dress and voice). However, the 'cue' does not simply emote something about 'people' on the screen. Herrmann's music performs as a sono-simulacrum which conducts the physiological performance of the on-screen bodily states.

The cue in question can be broken down into 3 parts, each component not only longer in duration, but also lower in pitch, and less rhythmically defined: 1. The high pitched ZGRIK! ZGRIK! ZGRIK! ZGRIK! ZGRIK! etc; 2. The full frequenced BA-BOOOOMMMMM (...). BA-BOOOOMMMMM (...); 3. The low frequency RRNNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN which grows longer with each occurrence.

For Marion, the cue is her body thus: 1. Standing: shocked by Norman/mother's attack, her heart beats at an excessively fast rate, fuelled by an adrenalin rush, causing her to breathe and scream in a series of short gulps and gasps as she fends off the knife; 2. Sliding: her body opened by numerous wounds, blood pours forth in series of expulsions, as her heart beat slows down due to the diminishing level of blood circulating through her body; 3. Lying: drained of muscular energy due to the loss of blood and the heart's inability to further power the body, her physical presence contracts to breath alone, as she heaves with increasingly finality until all inhalation ceases.

For the Norman/mother combine, the cue is their body thus: 1. Thrusting: stabbing Marion's corpus in series of jolting penile penetrations; 2. Spurring: having climaxed, the orgasm peaks in a series of arrhythmic pulsations; 3. Breathing: the trauma of erotic detonation now past, the body repairs itself, checking itself in a series of deep breaths, returning oxygen to the blood flow just as the runner's body recovers after an exhausting marathon.

Not only is Herrmann's work remarkable in its sensitivity to the biorhythms of drama—marking him perfect for projecting psychological states through the audibility of on-screen bodies—but it is also unerring in its fusion of the psychological states of both killer and victim, of conflating terror and delight in direct opposition to the classical strictures which accord them

their difference within motivational humanist drama.

With such ground-breaking and mind-fucking work done almost 40 years ago by a guy who was 49 at the time, it should come as no surprise that I am unimpressed by the soundtrack to a current 'end-of-the-millennium' film directed and co-composed by a guy in his 20s: Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (1998), playing in this year's Melbourne International Film Festival. Many films have effectively employed the clock-tick effect as a dramatic and thematic tension device: Ralph Nelson's *Tick...Tick...Tick* (1970); Robert Aldrich's *Twilight's Last Gleaming* (1976); John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* (1981); Phil Joanou's *3 O'Clock High* (1987); John Badham's *Nick of Time* (1995). *Run Lola Run* uses huge dollops of trance-pop music (a la the use of early 90s tracks by UK rock-dance combo Underworld in that 'with-it' movie *Trainspotting*) in a way that poorly mimics late-80s/early-90s ads for Nike/Pepsi/Gatorade/etc.

In fact, *Run Lola Run* is decidedly un-innovative in its use of music. Just because some tacky breakbeat samples, the occasionally fuzzed acid line and swirling analogue synths throb on a movie soundtrack at the end of the 90s is no cause to celebrate anything new. More importantly, there is an absence of depth in the linking of such music and cueing either to the film's 'game' narrative, or to the physiological performance of the on-screen bodies. I'm being overly harsh on what is nonetheless a well-crafted and enjoyable film—but only in proportion to the laziness which allows this kind of film to float on a presumed hipness. Despite all the ham-fisted digital effects, pyrotechnic camera tracks, drug references and Love Parade streetwear, the film tellingly hits its fundamental pitch when all music abates to leave us with a triptych of 'Men-Are-From-Mars-Women-Are-From-Venus' bedroom babble worthy of a pathetic Woody Allen flick. *Run Lola Run* is desperately about centering the self—a pathologically gendered one—while its depiction of death is a far cry from the posthuman paraphilia (the confounding yet arousing identification with the abject body) unleashed in *Psycho*'s murderous set pieces.

Another film in the festival has a similar surface of shallow hipness, yet it manages to generate a resonant depth *Lola* cannot sound. Gaspar Noé's *I Stand Alone* (1998) has existential angst carved into its textuality—flip arthouse marketing would say *Reservoir Dogs* meets *Benny's Video* but with one grumpy old man—but its audiovisual nous saves it from being a protracted exercise in stylish bleakness. The film exudes a stagnant aura of inertia: unsited voice-over narration spits across numerous still images of violently ugly and banal domestic environs (the MIFF catalogue embarrassingly likens these images to the baroque excesses of Joel Peter Witkin!), creating an intense claustrophobia as we remain trapped in the Euro-macho head of a 50 year old loser (played by Philippe Nahon), fucked over by life and clinging to his limp cock with one hand and French patriotism with the other. Little moves on the grainy pornographic screen—especially the lead actor's eyes which resemble those of a fish in the supermarket freezer—but the soundtrack energises and even terrifies the blank world depicted. Music appears at the beginning and close of the film like mouldy red velvet curtains as a corny old anthem played by a dying brass band. Elsewhere, a single orchestral note is struck sparsely—maybe 10 times; no other music occurs. Yet repeatedly, the loud sound of a compressed, fat gunshot is synced to sudden lurches in the digital editing (hyper-speed jump-tracks which reposition a mid-shot frame into a

close-up across 12 frames).

These sonic moments initially appear gratuitous, again recalling the in-your-face basketball pounds of late-80s/early-90s Nike/Pepsi/Gatorade/etc ads. (The subtext of the sound of basketball on the contemporary film soundtrack is another story altogether.) What becomes apparent is the tension created in the spaces *between* these highly stylised POWs which violently rupture the polished naturalism of the film's 16mm grain: before long, one is psycho-acoustically primed to anticipate a bang, or to actually witness rather than audit a horrific act (which you will in the film's final 15 minutes). True to this logic, when the pounds occur while on screen violence is most manifest, the mix pushes the gun shot effects into the background; the vision becomes deafening. Just as an extreme tension is maintained by opposing non-natural sound design to naturalistic visuals and performances, so too does a consonant tension hum throughout the film, representing the sexual and emotional constipation of the film's lead psychopath. In fact at the film's climax, an audible vocal humming rains uncontrollably from his mouth, as if he is trying to block out the chorus of aberrant voices which articulate his turmoil as he falls prey to the ultimate transgression of incest.

The sonic punches which periodically and perniciously drill holes into *I Stand Alone*'s soundtrack function as shocks which gradually destabilise the lead character's head-set. It's like the sonic version of the famous image of George Sanders' thinking of a brick wall in Wolf Rilla's *Village of the Damned* (1960) as the children try to penetrate his thoughts and control his mind. Eventually, the wall inside Sanders' head crumbles; he dies as the bomb



*I Stand Alone*

he has been hiding from the children explodes. In *I Stand Alone*, the gun shots are not merely sonicons of violence, but a string of detonations which reduce social conditioning to the state of postwar rubble—the definitive picture of the modern European landscape. With all psycho-familial architecture blown apart, the film's 50 year old loser stands alone as a repositioned self, ready to act out his own Marco Ferrari-style narrative (a la *Theroc*, 1971). This is the male core at so much Euro angst: dumb, blank, unforgiving, unremitting. Not liberated but unleashed; not resolved but evoked. A common social core, traumatised by shocks as symbolised by the soundtrack's percussive violence, yet revealed as an unavoidably natural and dramatically inevitable figure—like the bare location sound of a street at the outer ring of Paris' industrial zones which closes the film. No operatic catharsis as in the glorified finale(s) of *Run Lola Run*; merely the respite from noise which hollows out the head of the psychologically scarred and the socially dispossessed. *I Stand Alone* is a thankful return to the incisive violence which gave life to Herrmann's score to *Psycho*, and which—if things turn out well—the next millennium will neither avoid nor smother with stylish excess.

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# Millennial maverick

Ashley Crawford talks to Mark Dery about the gothic, the grotesque, ideas vs theory, and America

Mark Dery has built a remarkable reputation as one of America's leading cultural critics. With a vocabulary that would terrify Barry Jones, Dery happily dives into realms that most critics avoid like the plague. He roams the cultural landscape like a geigercounter searching for radioactive material. As J.G. Ballard has put it, "the ever growing pathologies of millennial America show up clearly on the X-ray screen of his penetrating analysis."

His first book, *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century* remains a watershed work and one of the only 'cyber' texts to retain its relevance as the seconds tick by to the end of the millennium. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Wired*, *21°C*, *World Art*, *Suck*, *The Village Voice* and *Rolling Stone* and his latest offering *The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium, American Culture on the Brink* (Grove Press) is a tome of collected and reworked magazine essays. Its bizarre meanderings have caused a storm of debate. He has been both savaged and lauded with many mainstream critics obviously left wondering where the hell he is coming from or going to. Meanwhile Howard Rheingold, Andrew Ross, J G Ballard and Bruce Sterling have lined up alongside Dery, with Sterling writing in *Bookforum* that, "Given its utterly bizarre terrain, this is a very lucid book—I can only imagine the effect of these essays on, say, some bright but sheltered 17-year-old male Southern Baptist. It would likely cause the kid's skull to spontaneously rupture. The book is also extremely funny. Mark Dery has a hammerlock on the Zeitgeist. He may be the best cultural critic alive."

There is no doubt however that the range is bizarre; from cloning to clowns, from degeneration to digerati. There is a distinct aesthetic running through these subjects and it is decidedly morbid. According to Dery, he is "using millennial memes like the psycho killer clown, disposable archetypes like Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, and media mythologies such as the horror stories about flesh-eating bacteria and 'hot' viruses as prisms to refract the social, economic, and philosophical trends that are shafting through American culture at the fin-de-millennium."

Talking to Dery is spell-binding. His vocabulary is no affectation, just the expression of an individual who truly loves words and ideas. However his ideas are far from average.

"I chose the exhibits in my postmodern Odditorium (P.T. Barnum's name for his famous museum of monsters, marvels, and patent fabrications) because they seemed like the best examples of the media freakery, postmodern fakery, tabloid grotesquerie, and increasingly gothic social conditions all around me, here in the Evil Empire," says Dery. "For example, Damien Hirst's cut-up meat animals, floating in formaldehyde, seem to embody our ambivalent attitude, a sort of contemptuous nostalgia, toward the melancholy 'meat', as the body is derisively known in our ever more virtual world. Of course, Hirst is British, so his pickled cows can't help but remind us, as well, of mad-cow disease, the Cronenbergian horror that has become cultural shorthand for all our dearest fears of airborne pathogens and invisible contaminants in our age of product tampering and toxic Coke, multiple-chemical sensitivity and anti-bacterial scrubs." More and more, says Dery, public space, from our drinking water to pay telephones, "teems with microbial menaces in the paranoid imagination. At the same time, the body itself is increasingly seen as a septic nightmare, its unseen contaminants exorcised through the New Age ritual of colonic cleaning. On my

dissecting table, Hirst's pickled animals become a way of talking about these things.

"As for the 'morbid' aesthetic you mention, it's a conjunction of individual temperament and Zeitgeist, I suppose. We live in gothic times, as Mark Edmundson points out in his marvellous book, *Nightmare on Main Street: Angels, Sadoomasochism, and the Culture of Gothic*. He sees American culture as fraught with Gothic assumptions, Gothic characters and plots, from *The X-Files* to the O.J. Simpson trial, recovered memories of satanic ritual abuse to right-wing conspiracy theories. I'd add that we're also witnessing the resurrection of the Gothic's conjoined twin, the grotesque. The grotesque is the Gothic with a sense of humour. We see the grotesque in the carnival-midway mix of horror and hilarity that is a personality trait of the late 20th century—the endless replaying of R Budd Dwyer's on-camera gunshot suicide for laughs on the web, for example."

In an era when New York City has gone from Gotham to glisten, when President Clinton gets away with personal mayhem and announces the healthiest economy for many a year, Dery's position, if anything, has become more extreme. It is not difficult to perceive Dery's cultural reading in part as a reaction to political correctness.

"Don't you mean a reaction to political incorrectness?" says Dery in response. "Namely, New York mayor Rudy Giuliani's ongoing transformation of the 'mongrel metropolis' into a gated community for the mega-rich, a police state ruled by Michael Eisner, while quietly shipping the homeless off to suburban holding pens, turning a blind eye on police brutality, and cutting tax breaks for the real-estate barons pricing the lower classes out of Manhattan?"

"As for the 'extremism' of my critique, what's the alternative? A playful slap on the wrist for a nation rotten with power and bloated with wealth that prizes B-2 bombers over prenatal care, corporate welfare over public education? A homily from William Bennett's *Book of Virtues* for a country that subverts democratically elected governments and coddles dictators, rewarding the nightstick justice meted out by pariah governments like the Suharto regime with arms shipments, the better to drive striking sweatshop workers back to their posts? I may be an egg-eating rat gnawing on the tail of a Tyrannosaurus, but as a politically engaged intellectual, speaking truth to power is part of my job description."

Dery's approach to cultural criticism is remarkably inclusive. He scans popular culture as comfortably as high brow theory, from Disneyland to Deleuze. In this he shares a



number of qualities with such writers as Mike Davis in *City of Quartz*, Greil Marcus in *Lipstick Traces*, Erik Davis in *Techgnosis* and McKenzie Wark in *Virtual Geography*.

"I think we're beginning to see the faint footprints, in mainstream and alternative journalism, of the first few graduating classes to cut their intellectual teeth on postmodern philosophers like Baudrillard, Foucault and Deleuze," says Dery. "Erik Davis is an exemplar of these smart, young, incurably informed academy hackers. McKenzie Wark, who began as a rock critic and is now a card-carrying member of the professoriate, represents the trajectory from the opposite direction, namely academics who stage-dive into the mosh pit of popular culture and media exposure."

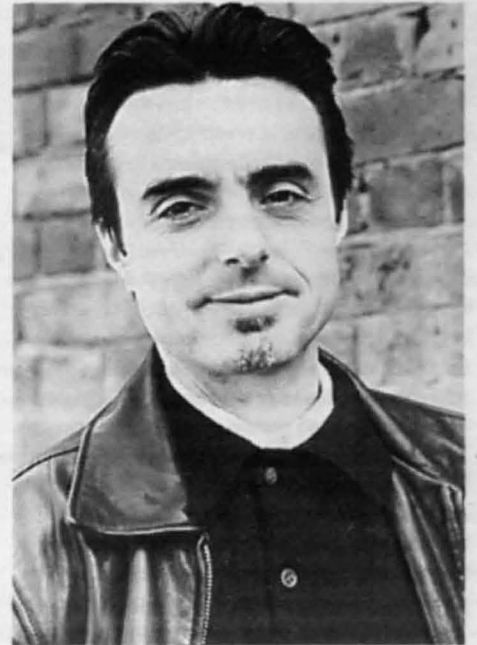
There's a precedent for this trend, says Dery, in 60s pop intellectuals such as McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Susan Sontag, Norman O. Brown, RD Laing, Leslie Fiedler and Herbert Marcuse, "all of whose stock-in-trade was typically ideas, not theory, as Andrew Ross points out in *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture*. (Interesting to recall a time, not so long ago, when the "critical theory" trust didn't have a Microsoft tm monopoly on the operating system for intellectual discourse!) I think this sort of mental miscegenation is all to the good. Inbreeding, whether literal or intellectual, is a recipe for monstrosities."

Dery comfortably hops around the cultural terrain, jumping from comparatively 'mainstream' subjects as the Unabomber and Heaven's Gate to the far less publicised Mutter Museum and the grotesque comic books of Renee French.

"I've always been interested in unnatural history and unpopular culture," says Dery. "It's an obsession that springs, I suppose, from the implicitly political assumption that what's removed from the official version, the eloquent holes left by the censor's scissors, is more informative than what's left in. I'm interested in the repressed truths, whether visceral or political, buried in the Freudian boiler room of mass culture: the unconsidered, like the 'Doll Hour' on the Home Shopping Network; the unspeakable, like the wax models of venereal horrors in medical museums; the unacceptable, like the statistics about runaway personal bankruptcies and credit-card debt downplayed by the media, lest these sour notes clash with the received truth that we're all rewarded by the Long Boom, not just the top 20% of American families."

Dery begins *Insanitarium* with the brilliant metaphor of crumbling Coney Island. It is incredibly apt for millennial culture. However one could argue in the opposite direction, that rather than the lights going out and a healthy rot setting in we are seeing the creation of soulless citadels; the cleanliness of New York, the puritanical vigilantism of Los Angeles, the plastic re-make of Singapore. It is impossible to escape the gigantic hamburger M almost anywhere on the planet and if anything the lights seem to be going on, making the ghosts and freaks scuttle away so the tourists are safe.

"Well, as your comments imply, the waking nightmare of America, late in the 20th century, with its media feeding frenzies and its copycat killings, its urban pathologies and its exurban desolation—what James Howard Kunstler calls our strip-mall, convenience-store 'geography of nowhere'—can be every bit as scary as the night terrors of the Gothic imagination. Baudrillard hints at this in *America*, in his ontological vertigo in an air-conditioned Hell that



Mark Dery

exults in 'the liquidation of all culture' and rejoices in 'the consecration of indifference', an Audio-Animatronic dreamland so ghastly that even 'dreams of death and murder, of suicide motels, of orgies and cannibalism' offer blessed relief. Baudrillard's fits of the vapours are a little hard to take, sometimes, but he's hilariously on target when he suggests that nothing is spookier than the hysterical fear of nature and the body, the mysophobic sterilisation of the unconscious symbolised by the Disneyfication of public space and the creeping corporate monoculture you mention.

"I chose Coney Island at the turn of the last century as my master metaphor because it's a janiform symbol, embodying the dualisms that are a hallmark of fin-de-siecle moments such as ours. As I note in the book's opening essay, turn-of-the-century Coney was 20th century America in miniature, a carnival of chaos whose trademark blend of infernal fun and mass madness, technology and pathology was quintessentially American. It was transgressive, a mad, Dionysian whirl of emotional abandon and exposed flesh, speed and sensory overload that mocked the hidebound proprieties of the vanishing Victorian era and signalled the rise of a new mass culture no longer deferential to genteel tastes and values. Steeplechase, Dreamland, and Luna Park were, in today's parlance, 'temporary autonomous zones' where genders, classes, and ethnicities commingled more freely than they did outside its gates.

"At the same time, Coney was also a machine for mass-producing masses—the workers and consumers of the coming age of mass media and mass consumption. Like today's Disneyworld, the Burning Man festival, and body piercing, it was a safety valve for proletarian energies that might have been channelled into less playful, more political outlets. It instructed the immigrant working class in the machine-age pleasures of conspicuous consumption, guilt-free waste, gadget worship, and the push-button gratification of infantile desires. This is the 'Coney Island of the Mind' that inspired Henry Miller's literate, liberal shudder of revulsion, the peeling pasteboard temple of cheap thrills and vulgarian pleasures. So there was a Foucauldian mechanics of transgression and repression at work in Coney that is still in effect in the millennial America it helped beget, a pyrotechnic insanitarium torn between escapist simulation and social reality, democratic promise and corporate oligarchy, the restless rabble and the power elite."

Mark Dery, *The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium, American Culture on the Brink*, Grove Press, USA, 1999



# Challenging the seer

John Schwartz tests the vision of McKenzie Wark's *Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace*

McKenzie Wark's ongoing contribution to a contemporary understanding of Australia's social and cultural condition cannot be underestimated. His third book, as its title indicates, paints a huge canvas and like most of his astute commentary in newspapers, academic journals and magazines, seeks to provoke reaction and stimulate further debate.

An amazing array of what at first appear to be unrelated topics make up this impressively researched opus. Both individually and collectively, the topics formulate important questions. There is suggestive analysis of the meanings generated by the likes of Kylie Minogue, Nick Cave, Peter Garrett, the Kellys (Ned and the 2 Pauls) and Natalie Imbruglia. There's also an assessment of the "post broadcasting" era we are fast approaching, which forcefully challenges the dominance of suburban myths and values.

At the core of these matters lies Wark's chief concern: that the ALP today has lost touch with what its constituents actually desire from everyday life. The answer lies, he argues, in an awareness and understanding of popular media-generated images through which people formulate ideas and aspirations.

Here indeed is a thinker who uses very broad brushstrokes in his view of the big picture. He examines the way new media technologies are embraced by a growing proportion of Australians as we approach the new millennium. Wark argues that being both more aware of and comfortable with cyberspace allows for a new way of seeing as well as providing newer forms of information. Yet to argue that this constitutes an end to the broadcasting age and presumably to the end of mass media is highly contentious.

There is little evidence presented here to

suggest that the birth of new media automatically assumes the death or even the steady demise of old media. The internet, pay-TV and the phenomena of niche and narrowcasting may well mean that there are more choices than ever before. Yet this does not preclude the possibility that most of us will still get the majority of our news and information from traditional media sources. As he cites more and more examples of celebrity culture on mainstream TV networks, newspaper and magazine chains, Wark perhaps inadvertently proves that we are not in a post-broadcasting age.

His argument goes deeper when he proposes that those who inhabit and embrace "fortress suburbia" are largely resistant to social change in general and to new flows of information from cyberspace in particular. These citizens, he argues, are essentially inward looking, fearful of the massive changes which globalisation has brought and generally intolerant of difference. Meanwhile, those who dwell in inner city developments represent a new urban and outward looking generation who are much more adaptable to all forms of the massive changes occurring around them.

The problem with this analysis is twofold. There is no evidence presented which supports such generalisations about community attitudes, let alone usage of new media forms. A recent Rural Industries Corporation report notes that at least 20% of Australia's regional farming community is currently online (and for longer periods of time) while the national average is 18%.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has indicated that generation Xers are leading the way in taking up rates and overall usage of the net. Wark seems to be suggesting that the propensity to embrace new media technologies

results in new and dynamic flows of information which, in turn, allows forward, adaptive and more creative thought processes. Yet in very recent Newspoll findings these same 18-24 year olds are increasingly more fervent in their support of Prime Minister Howard. If he represents the most exciting and forward thinking federal politician to the most switched on media savvy generation ever known, Wark's overall argument loses some momentum.

There is no strong evidence to suggest that spending more time with new forms of information and entertainment correlates in any consistent way with specific attitudes or behaviour patterns to do with social, political and/or economic issues. Indeed an overview of many of the most popular chat-sites around the web reveals an amazing lack of tolerance, goodwill and openness to new agendas.

I remain unconvinced that place of abode, propensity to go online or indeed age—another of Wark's apparent obsessions (shared with Mark Davis)—have much on their own to do with the way we feel or behave. There are far too many other variables which come into play here.

Finally it is the political implications of Wark's acceptance of many of young ALP maverick Mark Latham's so called "third way" approaches which I find most troublesome. Much of the current economic orthodoxy shared by both major political parties is supported by Latham who goes further to urge continuous anticipation and positive adaptation to the ongoing changes brought upon us by the "natural" forces of globalisation.

These changes are somehow seen as inevitable, as consequences of the forces of nature. Those who oppose these seemingly gravitational movements are quite clearly naïve

## celebrities, culture and cyberspace

The light on the hill in a postmodern world



in clinging to tired, out-of-date social principles once endorsed by the Labor Party.

This brings us back to the question of how we relate to the celebrities we encounter in all vectors. Wark argues that the Labor Party must come to understand the needs and wants of its constituents by coming to terms with the meanings and messages we receive from our celebrities. But how all of this is supposed to connect to future ALP policy formation remains rather problematic.

Throughout his book Wark remains optimistic about the sweeping changes we are all experiencing. "I write for dancers not mourners", he stated in a recent *Age* interview. Clearly there are many of us who remain more sceptical about the directions we are heading in. Yet while we can disagree with and be puzzled by some of Wark's arguments, he has raised and made readily accessible many pertinent questions about crucial issues which affect us all.

McKenzie Wark, *Celebrities, Culture and Cyberspace: The Light on the Hill in a Postmodern world*, Pluto Press 1999

John Schwartz is a lecturer in Media Studies at Swinburne University of Technology. He teaches Popular Culture and is a regular media commentator on ABC radio.

## Column

# Telediction

Are Beats just value-added slackers, asks Jeff Gibson

When Bob Denver of Gilligan and Maynard fame got busted for pot possession last year it felt like a massive act of confirmation. It seemed to authenticate Maynard's character while explaining Gilligan's bumbling ineptitude and tireless good cheer. And was it fact or urban myth that Dawn Wells who played Mary Ann—the most kind-hearted and level-headed of all the castaways—sent our little buddy his homegrown contraband through the mail? Gilligan always did have a weakness for Mary Ann's coconut cream pies.

There is something so affirming when reality rushes up to meet mass fiction. It's like a dream come true. We feel that much closer to our idols and that much more a member of the human race (*work with me here!*). And in this instance the fantasies are so rich with escapist projection. I mean, who wouldn't have traded their school uniform for Maynard's deadbeat threads, or ditched classes to lounge in the South Pacific with scientists, millionaires, farm girls, and movie stars.

Beach burns and beatniks made very appealing TV in the 60s and 70s, a period of great confidence and bravado for America, and a downhill run for Hollywood. Though Beats were quickly stereotyped and routinely satirised, sometimes with affection (think of, or imagine if

you have to, Beany and Cecil's Go Man Van Gogh—with thanks to the Craig Elliott Archive), they have come to embody a figure of unrestrained freedom and creativity. The beatnik, as a cultural type, is free-floating and irresponsible, adrift in a pantheistic lacunae, like a castaway skinny-dipping in Gilligan's lagoon.

But ultimately, network TV (read: straightsville) just can't swallow the 'slackness', choosing to either trivialise Beats for comic relief, or airbrush them in the direction of James Dean, creating character foils for soap operas and teen ensemble dramas. Where would Aaron Spelling be without passionate, drug-addled, creative types? It's a far cry from the original, but an echo nonetheless. In fact, right around the time I stopped watching *90210* with any sort of regularity—just too many travesties—Dylan and Brandon debated the virtues, or not, of Kerouac, before setting off on a motorcycling odyssey across America. (If only they'd taken a 3 hour cruise.) Brando thought *On the Road* and *Dharma Bums* sucked, leaving Dylan, predictably, to claim the whole territory. But alas, they resolve their differences along the way; undergoing a spiritual awakening in a shamanistic native-American ritual—like I said, just too many travesties. But it's not all bad. Beat culture gets plenty of props from within. Mike Myers, for instance, pays tender homage to beat poetry in the box office flop/masterpiece, *So I Married an Axe Murderer*. Playing an understated hipster caught in a web of desire and paranoia, Myers' simple, reflective neo-beat performances punctuate the plot line and drive home the characters' shifting existential crises.

Whether dissed or deified, the beat goes on. Maynard's parasitic caricature endures. But he was never alone. As far as TV is concerned Beats are just value-added slackers and there have been plenty of them mooching around the fringes of TV history. Lazy good-for-nothin' crows and drunken Mexican mice dot the cartoon annals, while Barney and Otto from *The Simpsons* keep the legend alive. Lenny and Squiggy (Laverne & Shirley) qualify in their own pathetic way, and Shaggy and Scooby Doo are absolutely central to the image of 90s slackerdom (Mike Myers is currently talking about doing a movie based around Shaggy). Then there's Kramer. Ahh Kramer. Kramer does Maynard proud. In fact Kramer kills Maynard; just like Seinfeld kills Dobie Gillis. At least Jerry *knows* he's repressed!

Because of Maynard, Bob Denver washed up on the shores of Gilligan's Island with just the right kind of baggage. Maynard's philosophical detachment stood him in good stead for an exile in paradise. The 2 characters are fundamentally the same: goofy, unambitious, a little thick, and happy to, like, just be, man. Gilligan is simply Maynard without the artistic attitude. The characterisation of the Gilligan fable is well known—Sherwood Schwartz based each of the cast on one of the 7 deadly sins: Gilligan sloth, the Skipper anger, Mr Howell greed, Mrs Howell vanity, Ginger lust, Mary Ann envy, the Professor pride—but it was the setting that did it for me. With the help of television, the Pacific, already installed as a traditional image of exotica within Western art and literature, became ever more crucial to the escapist imagination. As American Edenic ideal, and Australian front yard, the Pacific

dreamscape was intensified, and further eroticised by media-driven mythologies surrounding the war with Japan. Having chased the serpent out of the garden, America now felt a special kind of dominion in the area. *McHale's Navy* milked this new sense of ownership for all it was worth, his drunken hoard of horny sailors marking out their gendered turf with an inexhaustible grab-bag of comball nautical hi-jinx.

As any lounge-hound will tell you, there is something so naturally and culturally cool about the Pacific. Indeed the centrality of things Hawaiian, via Vegas, to the resurgence of cocktail music is living proof of the desert island scenario's enduring 'hedenic' appeal. Such iconography represents a kind of knowing, yet good-faith kitsch, sacred to decadents, dandies, melancholics, fantasists, and culture nuts. In fact, the attraction is almost TV-universal. What is the first vision of supreme relaxation that comes to mind? Do you picture yourself snoozing in a hammock in a bamboo hut, nursing a coconut shell full of fruit punch? There it is, the icon for deep leisure: *Gilligan's Island*. Bob and Sherwood really hit home with this one. It was all just so inviting, so gratifying, and so good to decompress by after school.

They say your actions on a desert island bespeak your outlook on life. If you strive to get off, you're a go-getter; if you set up camp, you're a survivor; if you content yourself with a daily meal, you're a philosopher. Gilligan just couldn't seem to concentrate and/or didn't care. Bong on little buddy.



## Report

# The rise of digital exhibition in the UK

Sophie Hansen reports on northern England's Arc—"one of the first venues in the UK to place new media arts in a mainstream context"

Arc in Stockton-on-Tees in northern England is a new arts centre, a key promoter and commissioner of local, national and international contemporary artists, and a state-of-the-art digital media centre. Arc is also an example of the regions of England doing it for themselves in these times of confusion in national cultural policy-making. The Arts Council of England (ACE), the English equivalent of The Australia Council, is currently restructuring its relationship with the Regional Arts Boards (RABs), the equivalent of Australia's state bodies. A policy of devolution of means and methodologies to the RABs has been ACE's response to criticism of its increasing irrelevancy to and isolation from regional constituencies. The RABs, all operating divergently according to the varying prerogatives of their region, remain mostly undecided upon their interpretation of devolution.

Northern Arts Board, however, with typical Northern gusto, has wasted no time. With perhaps the most to gain from distancing itself from the London-centric policies of ACE, NAB has finished its consultation with regional stakeholders ahead of its fellow RABs and will distribute its funds through regional promoters, rather than directly to organisations in 1999.

Arc is a regional promoter with strong credentials, taking over from the small scale Dovecot Arts Centre, which for 25 years battled to provide for Stockton. Looking like a UFO in its chrome and steel incongruence with this drab, post-industrial city, Arc is one of the first wave of major capital developments funded by the National Lottery. It may have opened several months behind schedule, and over budget, but it has opened on this side of the millennium and that is a triumph for the North, as other beleaguered projects, such as the Royal Opera House in London, sink ever deeper into compromise.

With the ambition which has characterised the Stockton International Festival, also directed by Arc's Chief Executive, Frank Wilson, Arc has set its world class standards, with an inspirational programme to match its superb facilities. Arc's curving circumference contains a theatre, a music, comedy and cabaret venue, a cinema, a studio theatre, dance studio and recording studio for community and education use, 3 bars and a health club. Most importantly, Arc boasts a digital editing suite and all the equipment needed for the production and distribution of video and multimedia arts throughout the building. These facilities distinguish Arc as one of the first venues in the UK to place new media arts in a mainstream context, and the *Mirror Images* programme which opened the venue in January 1999, proudly celebrated the central role of digital arts within the organisation.

The season took its name from Richard Land's interactive video installation, which was commissioned by Arc to showcase the potential of its facilities. Triggered into action by the images of passing viewers on a monitor screen, the installation evolved over time as ghost images of previous visitors accumulated. Architect Richard Wilson's intervention into Arc's facade, *Over Easy*, was another example of the playful nature of the opening commissions. Wilson's first permanent installation in the UK revolves in Arc's glass frontage, inviting visitors to sample the non-stop artistic activity within. Again employing ideas of access and community, Arc commissioned Danish group Hotel Pro Forma to work with local people to create imagery and sounds for the audio visual spectacular *Tall Storeys High* which illuminated the building over its opening week. Marcel Li Anthunez from Barcelona performed his *Epizoo* mechanical masterpiece of Stelarc-like physical manipulation; Motherboard from Norway presented *Maggie's Love Bytes*, an internet link up with remote

international participants; and British multimedia collective Black Box set up an exhibition of interactive sound and video work in the studio. Random Dance Company presented the world premiere of their new dance and digital media production *Sulphur16*, featuring graphic animation and film edited in Arc's virgin studios.

Complementing the digital season, Arc's inaugural programme features exciting new work in more conventional media: *Jumping the Waves* was commissioned from local playwright Gordon Steel; The Gandini Juggling Project premiere their new piece *Remembering Rastelli*; amongst several visiting national touring companies, Union Dance and Northern Broadsides Theatre present *Dance Tek Warriors* and *Twelfth Night* respectively; there is an extensive music programme and the comedy, club and cinema calendars are full of events likely to bring mainstream audiences into contact with new media work. Arc's commissions will tour internationally and artists everywhere will benefit from this pioneering approach to new media programming. Symbolism aside, Arc seems set to play an inspirational regional, national and international role.

New centres for digital arts mean new opportunities for media artists to create and present their work in conditions conducive to their appreciation. Funding from the National Lottery has significantly improved audio and video technologies in auditoria and public spaces across the UK, and in several cases, such as Arc, included digital production facilities for the creation of work on-site.



Arc, Stockton-on-Tees

Chris Lutherland

The facilitation of digital arts creation is happening across the board, in venues large and small. In 1998, The Junction, a small arts centre in Cambridge, reopened with an impressive international digital programme. The new Sadlers Wells in London included a multimedia screen and an interactive installation in its foyer and is planning a digital programme for its studio Bayliss Theatre. In March 1999, The Lowry Centre in Salford Quays opened its doors to artists from MIT Media Lab, with a programme of residencies developed in conjunction with the commercial Digital World Centre next door. Future openings, such as The Baltic Flour Mills in Newcastle or the new Tate Gallery in London promise great opportunities for digital artists, with better residencies, showcases and schemes for audience development and marketing of media arts. Existing organisations, such as arts festivals, are catching the new media wave and offering commissions to performance and visual artists to create site specific interventions, often employing the digital media they have also acquired from smaller National Lottery capital applications. There is much to excite the British media artist at the moment, and more to come.

## Review

## Traces of the (in)visible and uncanny

Elizabeth Drake is immersed in a sound/cinema work by Philip Samartzis

Philip Samartzis must have been nurturing this idea for a long time. To mount a festival of electro-acoustic works, record them onto 35mm film and project them through a Dolby sound system operating in a cinema near you. The cinema, a ready-made venue, with Dolby 5.1 in situ.

Electro-acoustic works rely for their integrity on the absence of the visual, on the notion of the acousmatic. The acousmatic, 'sans voir', odd in a cinema. The story of Pythagoras, giving his lecture from behind a curtain, hidden from view. I close my eyes. I enter a space behind my eyelids. Behind my eyelids I am somewhere else.

The idea of immersion.  
Fully immersed in water.  
Lost in an invisible world.

To be fully immersed in water gives rise to the possibility of drowning or of breathing underwater. Immersion to the point of danger. Flashpoint, I am drowning. I cannot breathe underwater. Surrounded there is no escape.

A castration of sorts, the wide open white empty screen, robbed of its image. Currents of air, still, something exposed in this cinema when not wrapped in (the) darkness. This cinema about as empty as John Cage's silence. Not unlike that image of the cinema audience wearing 3D glasses on the cover of *Society of the*

*Spectacle* (Guy Debord). The view from behind the 3D glasses, a vastly different experience from the image one observes from without. Viewing from behind the gaze. Confronted with a series of anomalies, I begin to think it a very strange environment. Strange to be without sight when at the same time being continually reminded of it.

Sound presents itself as the trace of what was (once) visible. The trace of something that belongs to another place another time. A memory of past events. Pre-recorded. Sounds hovering above our heads, or landing within our bodies, a direct experience. The idea that sound can actually occupy this space, like a body can. It is a vastly different experience depending on your position, your seat in the cinema.

Almost all the composers attend the sessions, anxious to hear their work in this unfamiliar setting. Some have not heard their works like this before, the results are still unpredictable despite the advances of technology. Many are from overseas flown in for the conference. It was gratifying to hear so many women composers.

The Uncanny, according to Freud, is not simply the unfamiliar, the unhomely, the disruption. The uncanny retains some element of the familiar, the homely. A trace of a familiar or accessible place. The uncanny, where the familiar and the unfamiliar exist simultaneously or more precisely in our case, where the familiar

is made unfamiliar through computer processing and altered spaces. Meanings circulate through each other. One has the experience of being in place and 'out of place' simultaneously.

Those moments of fear, when you might actually feel that you are there and not here, a sense of disorientation.

Ann Sophie-Brabant's *The space between*, the soundtrack of a film that won't take place. We hear snatches of conversation, made unfamiliar, torn into pieces, made indecipherable, fast, quick gating. The female voice fragmented and re-examined as body. The voice marking the space between body and language. As language is fragmented, so too is the body. Her idea of (re)constructing the body through composition.

Line Tjornhoj-Thomson has for many years explored the limits of the voice through multiphonics and other extended vocal techniques. The sounds of crying and laughter are extended through the computer processes over impossible time frames.

In *Humming*, by Isabelle de Mullenheim, we hear the gentle murmurings of a child and the voice of the mother, intermingling. Infantile bliss held in a lullaby. The maternal voice which can both envelop and entrap a young infant. The irresistible sound of a baby's voice, reduced at one point to a single cry from centre front. Voices

stretched, altered, distorted, made dangerous.

Cecile de Prado, with her husband at the computer, presented the third and final pre-session talk. *The Triangle of Uncertainty* is an installation developed from sounds recorded at wild and remote coastlines. Images: 3 lighthouses. Desolate lonely beacons in a wild terrain. Her intervention into alien and remote territory. The treacheries of the ocean, debris washed up onto the beach, reminding you of previous calamities. Stormy landscapes, a bruised night sky, rolling yellow and grey over our heads.

The space within a space within a space. The microphone, the computer, the cinema.

That eerie trace, a mark, a footstep, of someone we don't know, walking out of time. Christian Zanesi's *Public Garden*. Sounds taken from the streets of Marseilles. His footstep, the single step of a woman, is given a rhythm that is impossible to 'do.' Too slow and then too close together. Disturbing, this distortion of narrative, especially when birds are singing in this hollow echoey space.

The uncanny nature of sound, like a memory you can't quite grasp yet you know is there. The nature of reality is blurred, like physics. You are losing your bearings.

Immersion: a celebration of sound moving through a cinematic space, co-ordinator and curator Philip Samartzis, State Cinema, Melbourne, June 11 - 13



## Report

# The fantastic adventures of Ling Change

Maryanne Lynch investigates the multimedia possibilities of *Transit Lounge* with digital artist Keith Armstrong

Foyer: a place of impermanence, change, transition. Right now I need a coffee to settle my stomach. Black cushions, black cave; crawl into Saturday morning. Recovery via Art. Glossy fake turf; two screens beaming out licorice colours. Someone sticks their head around a temporary wall: "Excuse me, can you please tell me where the workshop...?" De-dede-de-de makes a happy kitsch-pop tune. Multimedia artist Keith Armstrong and I meet and greet each other.

We are in a space within the space of the Metro Arts foyer, Edward Street, CBD of Brisbane, an artificial space constituted by an installation of sound, vision, dance, 3D animation and captioning. The 2 of us begin to chat while lolling on cushions in the surrounds of this thing called the *Transit Lounge*: a world of many worlds and crazy characters. Keith: originator, digital video artist and artistic director.

*Ling Change*: a strong young woman who commands attention and investigates other worlds and ways of doing things.

What was the impetus for the project? I was on a Metro residency in 1998-99 and at the same time participating in the Jabiluka protests. In both instances I came face to face with the question of change, ie what are the conditions in which individuals or organisations can flourish and how are these conditions realized? This question's also a bit of a follow-on from my previous project, *Public Relations* [from the IMA's *Art on Line* series]; I'm interested in how systems lock together and influence their constituent parts and vice versa.

So, in the residency I wanted to look at how the tenants of Metro Arts might interact with the greater environment within which they operate so as to achieve a dynamic between diversity and equilibrium. I went around and spoke to tenants asking them open-ended stuff like, "How do your private ethics impact on your organisational management?" and "Do you play games?"

*The Humatix*: unemployed cleaners who live in decommissioned toilet blocks and dance to any available audience in the hope of picking up a tip

How did you focus this? Originally I was going to use the whole building as an installation but narrowed it down to the foyer, which allowed external traffic as well. And I conceived of the installation as a nonlinear world which would be affected by audience activity. So I've located it in an area where the environment is always changing and yet people have some ownership, however abstract, of the space.

*The Cock Blockies*: mummylike characters permanently coiled in lotus position in the tunnels of the honeycomb plateau

What was the authoring process? I wrote a script, with Lisa O'Neill (choreographer-dancer) in mind, and together we began to build storyboards. The script had the fundamental idea of a series of different worlds, with a description of each one. There were some adventures but it was a totally absurd piece. Some people asked me if I'd been on acid when I wrote it!

Lisa was very instrumental in the characterisation of the inhabitants of the worlds. She took it in directions I didn't anticipate, such as giving a cartoonlike quality to the characters. We shot her in a TV studio, putting the 3D camera in the same spot it'd be in in the animated world.

I sketched the environments and then Sean Young, Andrew Goode and Ross Anderson [3D modelling animators] developed the Y-frames in 3D. It was at a later stage that we decided to render them in a cartoonish style. This wasn't only because of Lisa's work but also because I wanted something of that quality that *The Simpsons* and *South Park* have and, again, the 'reality' factor of the original renderings somehow flattened out the narrative.

*Young Macduffles*: suave salesmen who are

forever seeking new opportunities to sell their product, the honey drink 'Core'

Why did you develop a narrative? I wanted to play around on the boundaries of artistic and commercial design and to create an installation that had a broad appeal. Given the conceptual underpinnings, I wanted people to engage with the 'artwork', not just look at it. Of course, the narrative isn't linear; this would've been contrary to my interest in change and how it is measured. I'd like, ultimately, to make a play station.

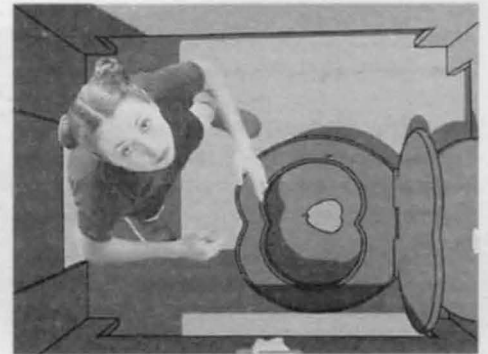
*Old Macduffles*: slaves who package 'Core' in the niche markets

What was the role of sound? Guy Webster [composer] came in to the project at a later point—mostly due to money or the lack of it! (We all contributed hours of unpaid labour and got a lot of in-kind support from the likes of Q&T and Apple.) He basically had a responsive role although he contributed lots of great ideas. We decided that we'd go for a 'music' rather than 'sound' style, a soundtrack, this year's model so to speak. He worked with miniatures of the animations and with Lisa.

*Rinston, Bruce Canon & Dogs*: preoccupied, unaware and insular neighbours of *Ling Change*

How did you structure the space? Originally I'd wanted to use the whole foyer. However, once you bring in the screens, you have a problem with light so Callum Lui [installation designer] created this cavelike structure we're sitting in. These cushions invite people to relax and not have an us/artwork dichotomy. I'd intended a walkthrough space but this is contingent on the door at the far end being left open by Metro! The space is more enclosed than I'd originally envisaged; hence the turf as one way of bringing different environments together.

The large screen hanging above us shows the narrative as it unfolds, detours and so on. The



*Transit Lounge* Keith Armstrong/Ross Anderson

smaller screen set up like a TV gives background information about the worlds and the characters, and the captioned thoughts of the main character *Ling Change*. It also includes a digital garden, the state of which is affected by the audience, and which in turn affects the narrative journey. So movement, temperature, sound and light make the flowers bloom or wither away, and these changes influence the adventures of *Ling Change*. The interactive code was created by Gavin Sade [interactive designer] on a Director [multimedia authoring] system, and the engine of it all is in the basement below the foyer.

*The Fiscalities*: narrow minded empirebuilders who restrict others but themselves get stuck on the honeycomb plateau.

Our conversation dwindles to its end. Keith and I sit there, watch the flowers grow, see the *Humatix* do their dancing-girls routine once again in sexy short uniforms and brassy wigs, give each a goodbye after a short black, and go our separate ways. In transit: on the go, between destinations, journeying into the...

*Ling Change* Thinks: line dancing is so passe

*Transit Lounge*, Keith Armstrong, Lisa O'Neill, Guy Webster, Callum Lui, Sean Young, Ross Anderson, Andrew Goode, Gavin Sade, Nat Abood, Raniah Haydar, Metro Arts (foyer), Brisbane, May 26 - June 19

## Report

## Diversion vs identity

Anthony May reports on *Selo! Selo! Bigfala Canoe*, an Australian documentary in the Pacific

*Selo! Selo!* is the story of a big day on Epi, an island community in Vanuatu. In July 1998 over 1000 passengers disembarked from the P&O liner *Fair Princess* for 8 hours in a tropical paradise. Randall Wood was there with a documentary crew to catch the fun and anything else that might happen. Paradise, like anywhere else, has its good days and bad ones.

Produced under an SBS accord on a \$60,000 budget, *Selo! Selo! Bigfala Canoe* was broadcast on SBS on May 17. I spoke to the film's director Randall Wood and second unit director Jan Cattoni in Brisbane recently. While the budget was small, they explained, it was funded within 3 weeks of application which allowed the film to catch the events on Epi when the calendar was always working against them. From the first idea for the documentary to the day of principal photography, Wood, and producer Gabrielle Jones, had only from February to July to bring this project together.

The opportunity for the documentary came about in the most fortuitous circumstance. Wood and Cattoni were working with others on another

documentary in Vanuatu, a long project called *Kilim Taem*. During a break, Wood took a vacation on the island of Epi on the advice of co-worker, Sam Obed. Obed was also involved on *Selo! Selo!* as a translator and editor. On arrival at Epi in February 1998, he learned of the immanent arrival of the *Fair Princess* in July. The idea presented itself as the meeting of distinctly different communities, the people of Epi and the tourists from the boat; it wasn't destined to fall out in such a neat fashion.

Part of what made *Selo! Selo!* possible was the fact that Wood was already familiar with the protocols of making documentary in Melanesia. *Kilim Taem* had been in production for 2 years and involved extensive collaboration with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre. Dealing with the sensitive issues of training Pacific youth in filmmaking and consciousness raising, the film had up to 15 young people actively involved, and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre had final decision making powers over the documentary as a whole.

Such elaborate avenues of consultation were

among the first things to come into conflict with the corporate speed of P&O's decision-making process. As the film shows, and as Wood and Cattoni elaborated for me, the months of community discussion involving thousands of people across the island (regarding the events during the day of the visit) were rapidly overturned by the arrival of Massimo Soprano, P&O's manager of Operation Services. Within minutes the 15 dance sites, representing the 15 different communities on Epi, were reduced to 3. The requirements of holiday diversion met cultural representation head on and division within the island was immediate.

Central to Epi's preparation for the visit were Tasso Wellawo, manager of Paradise Sunset Bungalow (where Wood's initial script was thrashed out) and Markin Valia, principal of Epi High School. Recognising the cash value of the visit (to a community that has difficulty raising the fees to maintain its high school) the balance between reward and cultural destruction was difficult. Significantly the Epi community were sensitive to the importance of the film's documentation in maintaining their profile throughout the process. One result has been the limiting of the cruise ship's visits. P&O originally wanted 26 visits each year. The people of Epi have decided that 3 is enough.

Both Wood and Cattoni are pleased that the film could contribute to this outcome. Sensitive to the apprehensions of the island community—



Tasso Wellawo & Markin Valia of Epi, *Selo! Selo!*

their appearance to the documentary's wider audience—*Selo! Selo!* seems to have created an opportunity to develop stronger ties between Pacific and Australian filmmaking. Hopefully *Kilim Taem*, which SBS plans to broadcast, will build on those bonds.

Randall Wood is presently negotiating distribution rights for *Selo! Selo!* and thinking of a return to the island in maybe 2 years time. His current projects include *Shelter*, a global investigation of Indigenous architectural design and building that attempts to negotiate rather than impose itself on the environment. He is also involved in *Marine*, a soundscape in collaboration with Brisbane-based composer Rodolphe Blois.

Jan Cattoni is heading back to work once more with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre to produce a series of community films around the issues of reproductive health.



## Review

## Pixelvisions

Steven Ball inspired by the Melbourne International Film Festival's Captured

In her introduction to *Captured*, curator Clare Stewart describes Experimental Cinema as "a contested and elastic term" tracing the parameters of her definition from Bruce Conner to Jim Jarmusch, including the Cantrills, Warhol and Len Lye, while stretching the term to suggest work produced beyond cinema, video and multimedia.

The historical relationship between experimental film and video and digital media practice, the real or potential intersection between them, has often been ignored as experimental work has become redefined in the spectacle of the digital media showcase. *Captured* goes some way to redress this in favour of work which does not trumpet its media novelty over other concerns.

Stewart's elasticity is actually less than genre-busting and the works don't exactly stretch definitions. Why not, for example, programme websites, or even a camera obscura for that matter? The programmes are also largely US dominated with a European coda. However such questions are somewhat churlish as *Captured* follows a distinctive and necessarily partial course, gathering some of the dominant strands of experimental film and video of the last 10 years or so with deftly imaginative programming.

It is an inspired decision to programme a mini Sadie Benning retrospective (*Pixilated: The Oblique Vision of Sadie Benning*). Benning's early work with the Fisher-Price Pixelvision toy camera resembles the intimate, small scale personal documentary/drama that one

encounters these days on websites using QuickCams. This teenage lesbian grrrl shot to recognition in the late 80s, the usual adolescent rites of passage skewed through a queer filter in suburban Milwaukee. From the bricolage bedroom video *A New Year* through to the 'road movie' *It Wasn't Love* and the women's health education, animated/live action hybrid of *The Judy Spots*, *Pixilated* tracks the development of a style as sophisticated as her older sisters' (such as Su Friedrich, Greta Snider, etc). The new *Flat is Beautiful* consolidates this: a wry, affecting film about growing up queer in the 80s combines sharp takes on cod-pop psychology with some quite audacious character masks, as Benning transplants Chantal Akerman's 'flat' approach into the ordinary flux of smalltown middle America.

The *Ways of Being* programme concentrates on the convergence of performance and video and the appropriation of popular forms. Joe Gibbons' *Multiple Barbie* extends the pop-psychological theme in a Pixelvision therapy session framing an exorcism of a Barbie doll's multiple personalities; a neat parody of tabloid obsession. The Halfifers' *Actions in Actions* turns material-action performance into slapstick, or vice versa, the properties of certain foodstuffs taking on a new, metaphysical significance. *One with Everything* by Daniel Reeves is a technically polished 'mockumentary'; a fast, iconoclastic 'deconstruction' of popular Buddhism. Zen-inspired punning culminates in the 'punchline' title. Anne McGuire's *I am Crazy and You're Not Wrong*, spoofing a desperate cabaret singer, drips with deadpan irony and pathos. Singing "a song for all of you who don't

fit in" (introducing *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*), she could be Cindy Sherman doing stand-up. The threads of barely suppressed tension and humour that entwine *Ways of Being* are intensified by the hallucinatory

psychological landscape of *Nocturne*, the latest in Peggy Ahwesh's series on sexuality, violence, nature and mortality. The promiscuous Pixelvision is again used as a formal/narrative device, its high-contrast providing occasional noir-esque intensity.

*Recycled: Old, Used and Abused*, consisting of work from Vienna, surely the European capital of Experimental Cinema, begins with *Alone. Life Wastes Andy Harvey* by Martin Arnold. Arnold, a virtuoso of the optical printer, takes fractions of old Hollywood movies through extraordinarily controlled repetitive forward and reverse reprinting; microscopic moments become tics, stuttering and breathy gasps. *Alone....* follows his earlier work in the exploration of the perceptual possibilities of this technique. The extended song, utterances and exhalations of the triangle of Fay Holden, Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney become oedipal erotic tension in a distillation of structuralist aesthetics; a sinister reconstructive revisionism of cinematic language. *Film Ist* by Gustav Deutsch reworks a staggering catalogue of found footage into a lexicon of cinematic technological form and function; choreographed concrete construction transcends its research-based premise as an

Sadie Benning, *Flat is Beautiful* 1998

elegant post-humanist poetic essay. The final film of the programme, Lisl Ponger's *déjà vu*, frames old super 8 holiday movies from 'exotic' locations with voice-over tourist stories. Accidental and naive complicity imbues the problematised relationship of the post-colonial 'gaze' with subtle nuanced reflexivity.

It is a credit to the Melbourne International Film Festival and the Australian Film Institute that they are respectively premiering and touring *Captured*; an altogether considered, coherent and accessible package, serving both as a progress report and captivating introduction to a rich seam of experimental cinema.

*Captured*, curator Clare Stewart, Melbourne International Film Festival, Treasury Theatre, Melbourne, July 28 & 30, Aug 3 & 7; Perth: Film & Television Institute, Aug 13 - 14; Adelaide: Media Resource Centre, Aug 21 - 22: *The Art of the Improbable* (forum + local experimental films), speakers: Edwin Daughtry, Margaret Haselgrove, Janet Merewether, Clare Stewart; Sydney: Chauvel Cinemas, Sept 2 & 3

## Interview

## Mature punk chick sensibility

Daniel Francis Cardone profiles independent Adelaide filmmaker Sue Brown

Sue Brown's on the phone to her partner John Martin, who is currently sequestered in Sydney, finishing the documentary *Moana: A Moshumentary* for SBS television. I sit in her kitchen, trying not to listen in, which is hard, as Sue's strong Canadian accent travels rather well. Instead, I flick through the press-kit on her work: producer of *Moana*, director of 2 well-received shorts *Grunt* and *Snoop*, and currently working as dialogue coach for the television series *Chuck Finn*, as well as completing her self-funded feature film *Getting The Dirt On Trish* (aka *Dirty Laundry*), an ambitious venture begun in 1997. "I always wanted to make a feature by the time I was 35", Sue tells me when she returns to the table. "I started making it when I was 34, so I guess I achieved that goal, but by the time I get a release print of it, I'll probably be 38!"

Having studied art, music and literature in her home city of Montreal, Sue found the medium that combined all these elements was film. "Rick Schmidt's *How To Make A Feature At Used Car Prices* was the book I picked up in a second hand book store about 10 years ago, just before I started film school. But I never thought, 'Oh, I'm going to get someone to pay me to do this'. So I guess it just must have been an expensive hobby. Sometimes I feel like it still is", she adds. Being a gregarious creature, another aspect of filmmaking Sue found attractive was the social side, both in the making and viewing of cinema. "I love

Caroline Farmer, *Getting the Dirt on Trish*

collaborating with people. I love doing things with people other than just going to the pub on Saturday night. That's why most of my friends are in *Trish*. It helped that most of them were into film, anyway, but there's only one actor as

such. And we all became better friends from the experience of making a film."

I'm treated to a preview of *Trish*, albeit without sound. Sue speaks all the dialogue for me, in time with the actors' lip movements. The absence of soundtrack places emphasis on the visuals—high contrast black and white, tight, economical shots, fast pacing. I'm instantly drawn into the story of two-timing, manipulative Trish. Sue elaborates on the genesis of the plot; "It's my French-Canadian-ness in there, my experiences of being in Australia, my relationships with my sisters, and I've also brought in the kind of subculture I've been involved in for years, which is all kinds of musicians and artists."

*Trish* is somewhat ragged around the edges, but to say it's only because of the low budget is a fallacy—it's an aesthetic decision as much as an economical one. *Trish* owes a sizeable debt to No Wave cinema which emerged from New York's art scene in the 70s and early 80s—films such as Bette Gordon's *Variety* and Susan Siedelman's *Smithereens*. Conceptually and stylistically innovative, these films featured plot lines which were heavily location-specific and steeped in exploratory sexuality, incorporating aspects of French New Wave Cinema and documentaries by the likes of Frederick Wiseman. "I just wanted to make that kind of film", says Sue, also citing Canadian filmmaker Bruce Macdonald's

*Roadkill* as a prime, and not disparate, influence. "Trish was motivated by a genuine love of films which have that no-budget quality and spirit to them. I like seeing films that are a little bit raw, rough around the edges. The goal wasn't to make something slick and polished—it's about the spirit, and the feeling that comes out when you're actually watching them."

Sue refers to herself as an "ageing punk chick", and it's easy to see this sensibility in *Trish*—a do-it-yourself resourcefulness coupled with the embracing of a grungy milieu. But the aggression and rebelliousness of youth is replaced by a different struggle, against maturity, against an acceptance of adult responsibilities that are perhaps inevitable. "It may be inevitable, but it doesn't have to be boring", says Sue. "I want an extraordinary life. I constantly push myself to have different experiences, to do things I'm scared of doing. Maybe it's a fear of mediocrity. I don't want to wind up sitting at home, talking about my mortgage."

Daniel Francis Cardone, at a supple 27 years of age, has written and produced 4 short films, and is currently developing 3 feature film scripts. He recently curated the film festival Barking at the Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, and makes a cameo appearance in Sue Brown's *Getting The Dirt On Trish*.

For more on film see Julia Postle talking to playwright David Atfield about an Australian who was a Hollywood star and filmmaker in the 20s—"Looking for Louise Lovely." Page 34



# Pixelated privates

Ivana Caprice and partner Art sample porn on the internet before the censor drops

Art and I sit down to sample the delicacies of the internet. We are on a mission. Open up Copernic, a groovy little download which manoeuvres through all the search engines at once, and enter the exact phrase "Australian porn." Hotbot. Excite. Altavista baby. We're on the path to fulfilling desire...

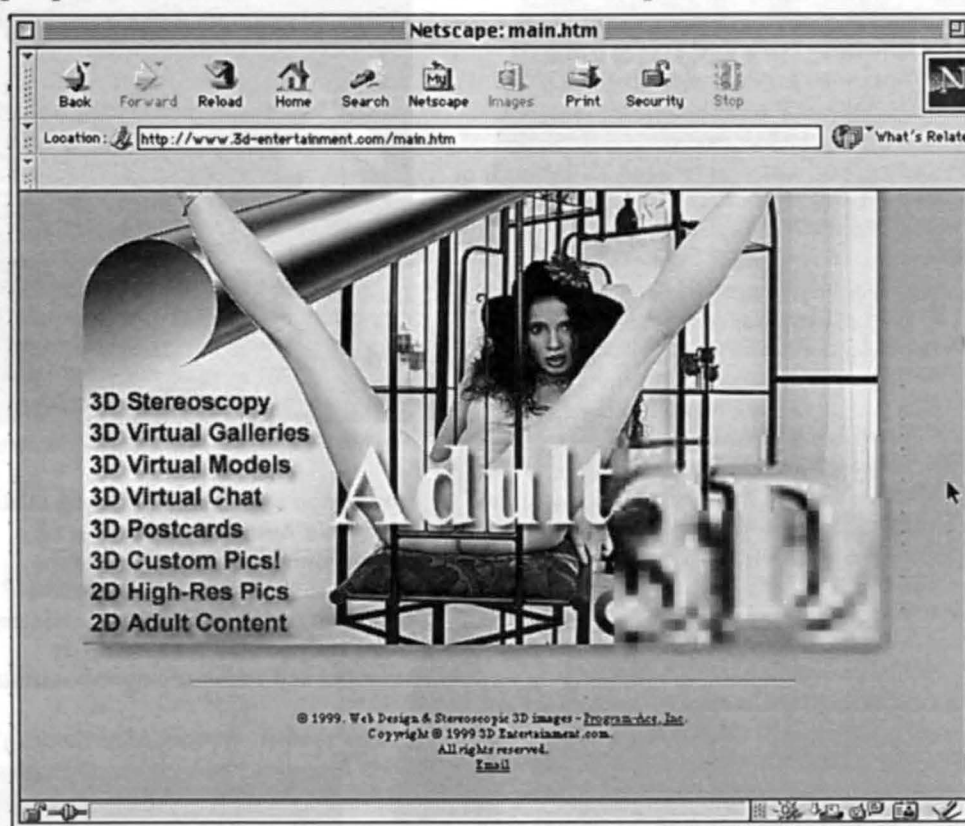
1. <http://www.erotic-movies.ahost.net/index.html>.

Free Nude Teen Thumbnail Galleries. This is first on the list, and I'm trying to imagine the appeal of looking at grotty adolescent fingernails. *My own are raggedy around the edges—must book in with Carmel, my nail technician.* Click here for more porn than you can shake a dick at. The technological sophistication is astounding. Click on the butt—FUCK my Ass is revealed bottom left of screen. Calling all BUTTmen—some sort of extra terrestrial lifeform perhaps? That's a banana, Art cries accusingly. This site promotes teen sex which means teen girls having sex for the very first time apparently. While promoted as being very young and all virgins, the disclaimer at the bottom maintains that all models are 18 years or over. Almost teens. Net Nanny software links mean cruising fathers can feel assured that their precious teenage girls are safe.

The women look like aliens. They have strange black blobby shapes over their bodies. Pixelated pussies. Live pornpourri. FREE to all members. We eagerly click on How To Join. Receive FREE newsletter: Sex Files. We enter the required information. Name. Email address. Birthdate. Password. Member name. joblow15 is ready to rock and roll. Other porn sites keep flashing up. Close a window, a new site jumps in the fray. Cafe Flesh. XXX world. Virgin sluts. Jesus Christ, Art keeps exclaiming, they're popping up from everywhere, his fingers juddering crazily on the mouse. We're now one step away from seeing live teen sex, but what's this? Credit card details for legal age verification. Oh, Art moans. *He's never let us have a credit card. Always insists on paying everything in cash. He likes to keep control of our budget and expenditure and you know what women are like with plastic!* We can't get to the tele-fucking level but we can get free XXX pics delivered to our email box. We set up a hotmail account and joblow15 gets delivered. Who can resist the promised land: potty shots—hidden cameras reveal young girls going to the bathroom (a blonde sits on tiles, next to the loo, legs spreadeagled, looking straight at us!). Va Va Voom.

2 <http://www.alsscan.com/>

Warning, warning, warning. Stop. Do not access. You must be 21 years or over: "if you are accessing from any country where adult material is specifically prohibited by law, go no further." All these reminders are a bit of a dampener to the drive, darling. I sign a form stating that I am not a US postal officer or law enforcement agent and will



not use information as evidence for prosecution of individuals or for the purpose of entrapment. *Well, it all depends, really. I started hiring a private detective to follow Art when I found various items of my lace underwear missing.* I am visitor number 31,759,980, part of an intimate club almost twice the population of Australia.

Art tries to download Jessica's shoot right to our computer. Here's Amy, "wild crazy...watch her lean back and piss into a glass bowl." Look at the quality of that scan, Art cries, zooming into a pierced nipple. They use digital cameras, the site says proudly, giving a quick plug to the Sony VX 1000. See pissing, fisting, bottle and veggie insertions, and a speculum. *Which reminds me, I must book in for that pap smear which I've been putting off for years. Those blasted ads on TV make me feel guilty. If I do get cervical cancer, apparently I won't have an excuse if I don't go every 18 months.* I have to certify that "anal sex, urination, vegetable and bottle penetration and fisting, do not violate the community standards of [my] street, village, city, town, country, state, province or country." I am nervous about this. Perhaps we should do a quick survey of Hope Street, Art suggests. *Mmmm Hope Street. I always suspected he had a bit on the side with that tart who lives opposite the RSL, the fake blonde with the German accent and red stilettos. Aaaaah, ooooooooh, 2 girls are engaged in a lip pulling contest and then there's the carrots. Eggplants. Zucchini. Squash. Art reckons this site's so hot he's going to cook a stir fry tonight.*

3. *Video licking free XXXX SheMales*

We want to watch Pammy and Tommy's home video, see live video channels, find out more about that blonde bombshell lying in a fog filter with a finger placed delicately in

her mouth, and look at those millions of hidden cameras: inside toilets, under desks, in the tip of a dildo. But that blasted credit card screen comes up every time. (Meanwhile, Tina Tripoli has delivered our bi-weekly Sex Files newsletter and we reply to receive pics.) Butts, boobs, beavers and more pop ups, "perverse and on the fringe of decadence." Cheri in The House of the Rising Cum. Teenfacials and tittycities. A flash tour of booptropolis. Use your powers of deduction to select the natural redhead (it's not as easy as it sounds).

4.

<http://rosie.ozsex.com/australiaeborry305/porn.html>

At last some Oz porn (which was what we were looking for in the first place but it's so hard to find). A definite Oz flavour with "stacks of real life roots." Suck for free samples, lick my whip, and I'm transported back into Penthouseville, circa 1982, with the reader's input: 1st prize winner goes to Pantyhose vs Stockings where a man seduces a woman in a library who "has A format beautiful breasts." *So that's why Art spends so much time at the State Library. I always thought he went there to take notes for his Business Management course.* We find other Aussie links: Urination nation; Transvestites, "yes, that is both pieces Tackle and Snatch"; and Pregnant women. Adult Check. Age Check. Ishield. Adult Age. Christ, what happened to the age of instant gratification, Art cries, scrummaging in the drawer for his cheque book.

5. <http://www.3d-entertainment.com/>

Art says he wants to see more multimedia, audio and video. The use of sound has been most disappointing. I guess gasps of pleasure are more intrusive than photos of a woman chained naked to cane furniture, dog-collar-linked to her terrier. So we visit a site which has porn in Stereoscopia and Virtual Reality: "A review of images in stereo format allows us to look at the even common things from a new perspective and get quite different kicks. Especially it refers to Erotica. The sense of reality makes them especially Piquant.[sic/k]" Art immediately perks up and puts on his blue and red glasses, saved from the *Three Stooges* TV special a few decades ago. The 3D effect reveals a girl tied to a boat backdrop by a beautiful deep blue sky. She looks cold, her goosebumps through the glasses big bright boils. Click to Enlarge. Every man's dream.

She has pubic hair. Art recoils, and it is a bit of a shock after the shiny, sanded and polished pubises of the American teens, as denuded as the Daintree after a bulldozer has torn through. The Virtual chat room is unfortunately out of order, but a new nude avatar world is on its way. You no longer need to go to Gentleman's clubs or Woody's car wash to ogle topless women. *That's good news for Art, who pretends he's going to the TAB, but I've seen photos of him at Hooters. He's gone now...up the street to pick up a few vegies.*

*Ivana Caprice works as a private consultant to the Senate on internet issues. Art never returned from the greengrocer's. Police are continuing their investigations*

## Remember, you want to go Asia

An important reminder. Asialink Artist Residencies close in September.

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"Many times I've squealed or oohhhed with delight while viewing these offerings...Ones and zeros occur as a motif...Interactivity is a large factor in several projects. Others address the topic of time more playfully or personally...I hope viewers enjoy this showing and are stimulated to think of matters calendrical."  
Christy Sheffield Sanford, trAce virtual writer in residence

trAce online writing community recently launched *My Millennium*, an online anthology investigating time and the digital revolution. Focusing on a centrepiece by Australian web artist Mez KoDe Dis.pensa 4 the DataH Inphoenium, which curator Christy says "captures the religious fervour often encountered on the web at its sexual and commercial roots", the anthology features an impressive array of international contributors including Tom Bell, David Knoebel, Jennifer Ley and Talan Memmott from the US, Raoul Ferrera-Balanquet from Mexico, JeanNet and Catherine McGovern from Canada, and Olia Lialina from Russia.

For more info, visit My Millennium on the trAce website  
[http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/writers/sandford/my\\_millennium/presents.html](http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/writers/sandford/my_millennium/presents.html)



# Open door madness

Grisha Dolgoplov jumps into PICA's *Putting On An Act*

In its 6th big year at PICA, *Putting on an Act* (PoaA) is a festival of open-access, short works by self-producing artists from a diversity of disciplines (or lack thereof) pumping out material over 5 jam-packed nights. The focus was on "contemporary performance encompassing dance, written works, physical theatre, live art, new music, sound and hybrid forms." There was all that and more with a bizarre oscillation between retro-topias and future-philiias—an exciting permutation of all types of performance. Short films are all the rage now, but there is a need for more venues for the espresso buzz of short performance works in a supportive but critical context. The benefit of brevity is that crotch works are short and it's not a long wait for the next blinder. It also teaches performers the golden rule of timing, compactness and knowing when to end.

One of the problems of an open access season is that the good comes up hard against the sad and the really bad. PICA director, Sarah Miller, makes no apologies for this. That's the risk. Although she worries about the open format and its limitations every year, there is clearly great demand and a respect for this type of showcase. I loved the mad mix of the 30 plus works. There were some terrific innovations in performance language and form with one gem for every 4 crappy ones. That's a damned good average that pricked hard-nosed debates and conflicting tastes.

We don't often see 'community' style theatre in contemporary arts spaces and as such it was a pleasure to experience the fresh and uninhibited *Womumsun* by Jennifer Catalano and Clelia Tedeschi and their 2 sons at play. In the middle of the frivolity Catalano intoned, "I've gotta save my own soul/I've gotta lot to give/I've gotta guide him as well/I've just always gotta believe." For all its clunkiness this uncanny performance cut through the contemporary smugness with a genially heartfelt comment on the relationship of mothers and their sons.

In contrast, the discovery of last year's PoaA, the PVI Collective presented a cavalier technological extravaganza—a playful video projection of a "twisted game of trust between a human and a jive talkin' computer." This piece was bulging with potential as Buddi, a kind of strap-on techno-transgressor took the hominid for a walk in the Friday night riot zone outside PICA. However, the potential soon blew out into ennui with Buddi's jiving going

nowhere. There was a lot of technical virtuosity at the expense of content. A number of audience members found the work uncomfortably misogynist, under theorised, and the gendered embodiment of the avatar/cyber-character quite regressive and somewhat old fashioned.

At the other end of antediluvian performance was Mar Bucknell's poised conceptual construction of a string house in real time to the accompaniment of bit-poetry and black paint. *Interior Design* resonated with high-strung real estate obsession and the isolation and transparency of shelter. This project tested the boundaries of audience fortitude for old-style performance art and yet for some this was an introduction to the simplicity and candour of the form. I only wish the text was sharper and that Bucknell had transformed the string house into something else with a yo-yo-like trick to rock the cradle around the world.

PoaA usually attracts a strong dance component and some of the most compelling pieces were movement based. The physicality of *Sharky's 2nd Day* by Tara Bollard was inspired by the American choreographer Trisha Brown and perhaps a revision of the Just Jeans mud-up ad with its mix of structured form and clubby attitude. Apart from the unimaginative musical choices, the 3 young dancers worked with an original movement vocabulary that created a strong visual texture with beautiful robust images. Rakini and Paul O'Sullivan, 2 of the more experienced contributors, presented a persuasive modern-traditional piece with a number of curious discoveries and fascinating rhythmic work but no real spark. Somehow, the form dulled the concept's edge despite the dancer's highly assured presence and sense of timing.

Notwithstanding the plunge into indulging private agony that had somehow become the unofficial theme of the festival, Shanti Sherson's movement integrated well with Melanie Robinson's lonely cello in *Flying Accusations*. The musical component of many works saved them from a collapse into inanity. For some silence was golden. Grant Kingston blew beautiful coloured balloons into projection light where Kathryn Puie stirred in the silence that jolted the audience when it burst.

Slicing semiotics into cultural histories, Eena Sharifah merged the Balinese Legong with an attempt to re-narrativise tradition. She infused the legong dance with the



Jonathon Sinatra, Nigel Luck, Chris Williams, *Vertical Hold*

Sanja Arambasic

gesture and movement of a young urban Malaysian-Australian embarking on a similar journey to the heroine of the original story. This was a compelling performance that held sufficient mystery to create the potential for some fuzzy semiotics and audience cultural confusion.

I particularly enjoyed Alice Cummin's *Light Moments*, one of the most impressive pieces. In torchlight and total silence, she presented 5 mesmerizing body isolations: writhing hands, lashing tongue, kneading feet, a falling flank and a perfectly placed bouncing ball bare back. This was an intense, sexy and subtly funny dance drama. It cut a swathe through the techno-videological fetishisation, setting the standard with marvellous minimalism.

*S/Heroes salute to your organs!* was in the hard action comedy style that proved to be an audience favourite. These female super heroes started big on laughs, great get-ups and sassy shaggadella, but ran out of idea steam mid flight. They certainly were Hot Grrrl Aktion and they exploited their weapons. But it was never clear what these gadget girls of the peace corps were fighting for apart from camp laughs. This piece promised much more. Only Felicity Bott's powerful stage presence saved the sheroics. The boys of *Vertical Hold* dived into a parody of corporate identities and sublimated homoeroticism with verve. They were clearly enjoying themselves. The subject matter was neither new, nor their approach fresh (I must have seen a dozen dance works on corporate blokes falling apart) but their hard work and passionate performance gave the audience the horn. Petro Vouris' metronome and cigar soundscape provided swinging jockstrap texture to a piece that left everyone talking.

The juxtaposition of performance with video/slide projections was instructive: all too often, the latter were far stronger than the former. Clearly, the mix between the 2 requires greater integration and, at the very least, stronger performances. The liquid images of Ilya Nikkolai and the Mayakovsky-inspired swirling-and-throbbing-revolutionary montage by Vicki Wilson were sublime works that surpassed the clutter of their accompanying wetware. In contrast, Sete Tele & Rob Griffin's video projections enhanced their mix of serious and fun-chi variations on the Aikido form. Their dance flowed through a number of unpredictable variations that wove homage to tradition with outlandish, unpredictable moves that brought the house down.

PoaA regular David Fussell again bemused the audience with his perfectly timed awkwardness. Was he just a shy boy on stage, lost and confused or was this a sly Benny Hill pretense, a dirty little sniggering seduction? Uncontrollable giggling followed the uncertain entrance of

this oddfellow. Was this it? It became a play with audience suspicion and complicity. It was uncomfortable because we didn't know if he was for real, but his timing was good, perhaps too good. Then again he's been doing this type of performance for ages and it would be a pleasure to see something new.

Ashley J Higgs and his collectives bored and aggravated the audience 2 nights in a row in "rehearsals for a performance that would never take place." Yet their mix of hyperbole and conceit expertly tested the limits of performance (again?!) or how much can an audience take sitting down. Their pretentious impro madness stupid-arse crap show proclaimed that there is no such thing as irony, that they are anti-narrative, anti-chaos and anti-audience, yet they were quick to point out that their show does not call for audience participation. Perhaps they were scared to unleash the Dionysian passions of the audience who poised to tear them apart.

*Putting on an Act* is such a good idea. It works in Perth because otherwise there seems to be a paucity of experimental performance around the place (even though on Friday night with the opening of ARX5 at PICA at the same time, the place was jumping with experimentalmania). It's risky and unpredictable. As writer Josephine Wilson expressed it, "I think that the standard was pretty good this year. And as for the open-door policy the problem with more fences to jump is that someone has to mark the bar on the fence." What would be great is if there were sufficient funds to keep the open door madness and establish another annual event which would allow performers the opportunity to develop their work further but still within the productive constraints of short, pioneering works. Every town needs such an invigorating, experimental, low-fi, high intensity performance forum. There also needs to be more no-holds-barred audience and performer interactions. If passions get violent, that's an occupational hazard. There need to be more private inhibitions, bizarre quirks, silly sounds, bodily functions, fears, agonies and weird stories brought out into the public sphere—it will be good for law and order and the zeitgeist. There's got to be more of this free access performance, a lot more.

*Putting on an Act, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth, July 6 - 10*

*Grisha Dolgoplov is a writer, lecturer and director based in Perth.*

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# Timewarps: culture, nostalgia and renewal

## Urban Theatre Project, *Subtopia*

The strongest experience in the Urban Theatre Project's *Subtopia*, beyond being thoughtfully and vigorously entertained, is a sensation of displacement, of being time-warped, and not just because I'm led through a set of site-specific performances in a maze of a western Sydney suburban centre I'm not familiar with, though that's important. It's to do with what is sometimes casually labelled a postmodern phenomenon—the coexistence of subcultural styles that rely for their imagery on earlier cultural movements. I grew up in the 50s and 60s in a bleakly uniform culture. In those decades and in the 70s and 80s, new cultures emerged consecutively and in revolt against uniformity—rock'n'roll, hippie, various feminist and gay cultures, punk, gothic, rave, rap and hip-hop. *Subtopia* reveals the coexistence and insistence of versions of these cultures in a suburban setting, sometimes convincingly, sometimes not, but mostly with verve and passion and with a large team of directors, performers, crew and guides. The question you want to ask at the end of the guided tour is have you merely been entertained by these subcultural gestures or have you experienced something more palpable, contents behind the forms?

Adding to the sense of constant displacement is the renewal this part of Bankstown around the railway station is going through. The performances take place in empty shops and offices, half-deserted arcades, a freshly renovated 'piazza', a back lane, a carpark, and we pass the local chess players immersed in their games on a patch of uninviting dirt while they wait for an improved site. A huge crowd gathers for *Subtopia* in the early afternoon winter cool, is broken into colour-coded groups and led away by elegant guides who might burst into song or melodiously pluck a Southeast Asian stringed instrument as we journey.

Our first stop is a rave club with a hippie complexion—a pied piper guide, a fairy on stilts extolling "music as energy...a tool for transformation", it could be 1968, a bank of sculpted mushrooms fronting the turntables, pulsing lights, paintings lining the walls. There's a crowd already dancing and half our group join in immediately, arms waving up and forward, while the rest of us prowl like gallery-goers peering at the paintings of, yes, eyes, the mushrooms, the turntables, the dancers, the floor, the ceiling. Three cool, dark young men arrive late, look on critically, but, on the beat, simultaneously click into the dancing, arms up, but the rest of their bodies moving with a heightened articulation that hints at hip-hop.

Our guides take us out squinting into the sunlight, down winding streets, through a carpark and into a lane, where we pace about and make small talk before being admitted to the central stairwell of an arcade of small shops and offices. Band equipment sits at ground level in front of several screens onto which are projected large images of band equipment in a home, tea cups, punk posters. We climb the stairs. We hear "Saturday night is the loneliest night of the week" coolly drifting through the space. We see above us 3 sets of suited legs in step with the tune, soap bubbles drift and fall, the band members descend and introduce themselves, led by 'Joseph Cool', announcing the years they were born (the very years of punk peaking circa 1980), a curiously cool prelude to a punk-inspired performance of a kind of Sex Pistols-Clash amalgam that shakes the arcade. At the end, the members of the band line up at the exit and thank us for coming. They

look cool, they play punk, perfect gentlemen. What kind of stylistic criss-cross...?

Next stop is another back lane venture, punk poets and artists working from a garage. While the poets vent their spleen with occasional stabs of wit and wisdom and thicken up the sound with percussive effects from grinders and beer bottles, visual artists are working on canvases spread on the road and are painting, yes, eyes (the finished works adorning the walls of the building are quite good as eye paintings go). One covers herself in paint and does a bit of action work, which the crowd enjoys and a few of us get to wield a brush. One of the poets invites us to smash a television. I haven't seen anyone do this since the early 70s, when it was de rigeur in performance art, but this doesn't have the requisite seriousness, or vomiting; how could it? Irony is everywhere and the man next to me mutters as if cheated, "They're not from here. They're Newtown." Again, it's a funny mix, not straight punk poet, it's touched with romantic gothic (an Asrael poem), with Beat (one smokes a pipe while performing), and with distance—"I've been a punk since I was 16, now I'm 32" intones one while playing a wok, and, as they finish, "this lull means we're sick of entertaining you. And don't steal our marijuana plants!"

It's down another back lane to find a couple of rockers/bodgies inspecting a car engine, while the girls look on, bored. A bit of tension ensues as some other boys show up and the competition's on. It's a bit of soap from a professional rock'n'roll dance academy in which the skilled dancing—wild but shaped—and the excellent band impress more than the theatrics.

Next we're all gathered back in the piazza to be entertained and provoked by rap artists whose vocal styles range from mock American to distinctly contemporary Australian, cross-cultural suburban, and the politics gets tougher with the local tongue. The crowd begins to sway, by-passers draw near to watch. This is where culture feels most palpable, present tense, unfettered. And then it's on to another site.

This time it's not sub-cultural, as far as we can see—there are no representative nerds or cyberheads to greet us. It's some kind of techno-fantasy where we climb stairs into a small office block, garb ourselves in yellow plastic coveralls and recline with the aid of little headrests, put on fake headsets and stare up at the ceiling where impressive computer animated projections and soundtrack do an IMAX on us. It's a funny little immersive work, a mix of the paranoia and pleasure associated with the new technologies. We stagger to our feet after this welcome cinematic rest and are led up and up to a carpark rooftop with a 360 degree view of Bankstown and circling aeroplanes and a bizarre stage before us (like a full scale child's cut-out/pop-up theatre from the 18th century). Here Toy Death (a culture unto themselves), in their most sophisticated manifestation yet (that I've seen, the costumes are exquisite, the faces pure mask) play electronic toy musical instruments and gadgets and manage to parody...everything.

The performers and associated artists from the various scenarios across the afternoon party in front of the stage while we look on from the other side of a white picket fence. Surreal. I don't know what it all added up to, or what Toy Death had to do with the groups displaying themselves as cultural artefacts, but I did feel I'd been somewhere. And then someone told me that I'd

missed the Goths, and that the Goths were the best, and that not every group got to see everything. Damn. I'd like to have seen the Goths. Bankstown, May 22, 23, 29 & 30. KG

## version 1.0, *Where the Garment Gapes*

In *Where the Garment Gapes*, a performance critique of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* from a scenario by David Williams, the black pit of the PACT Theatre is shrouded in calico, the actors dressed in suits with pink and blue ribbons identifying them as the characters from the opera. This is a playful performance event, mostly witty and only occasionally heavy-handed in its commentary on what the company sees as "an unsettling opera...overtly misogynist". Male/female roles are interchangeable—at one stage, the male lovers are swapped for a couple of pot plants and no-one spots the difference—and anything or anyone can be positioned as the object of desire. It's a confident first outing from the version 1.0 team (Jane Parkin, David Williams, Damon Young, Keith Kempis, Angel Macnevin, Chenoeh Miller, Craig Anderson) many of whom are University of Western Sydney graduates. The company positions itself "stylistically somewhere between Frumpus and The opera Project." Some performers have extensive musical training, all are passable vocalists and the performances—especially Williams and Chenoeh Miller who plays a wonderfully louche and lewd Don Alfonso—satisfy one of the company's primary aims in "giving the audience pleasure." PACT Theatre, June 4 - 6. VB

## Samuel James, *Space 1999*

One of the immediate pleasures of walking into *Space 99* was to see the line-up of technicians and artists immediately to the front of the audience, between us and the performing space, at work, ready for the show to start. The second pleasure was the proliferation of screens across the space, some transparent, others angled, turning, reflective. Television cameras also inhabited the space, multiplying the performers on the screen, another (we didn't know about until later) watching the audience, relaying our image to a small screen on the front wall of The Performance Space. There was a sense of excitement here about multimedia possibilities so often promised but only partly realised in performance. *Space 99* went some way to fulfilling these, always interesting to look at as images were refracted and layered across the space in new permutations and changes in detail and colouration. In a fantasy of endlessly shifting relationships fuelled by a plenitude of movie images of great movie lovers on the screens and by a couple of persistently returned to film classic narratives, like *Sabrina* (the original was directed by Billy Wilder), 3 performers act out arch, cut and paste dialogue. If writer-director Sam James and his formidable team of collaborators had a good handle on their media, his grasp of his performers as they slipped in and out of their transparent changing room and op-shop costumes and funny voices was not so certain, nor was his sense of structure, which plateaued out too early on. Nonetheless, *Space 1999* was an ambitious work and made me momentarily nostalgic for the golden years of The Performance Space when the performance scene was thriving and new works seemed a constant. It'll be good to see what James and company do next. KG

## Stuart Lynch, *24hr Performance*

At the *antistatic* dance event at The Performance Space in April, Stuart Lynch impressed everyone with his dark

reverie on that other Lynch's *Lost Highway*. For those of us expecting to see Lynch sink into one of his states of being, eyes rolling up, and explore it with measured Butoh intensity, this was a very different experience, one in which his states shifted quickly and his persona seemed to go through various transformations. Not exactly acting. No obvious character. Or trajectory. But some near resolution (will the broken glass slice into the throat...probably not). Lynch ascribes the capacity to transform without abandoning the Body Weather discipline that sustains him to CST (Cyclic State Training)—"a rotationally structured psycho-physical development process...a method I have developed to invoke different changes of state that can be utilised for theatre, dance or general living conditions." He writes that, "The form of the cycle can range from days to less than a minute, or, as in this case"—the 24hr Performance at Artspace—"repetitive stations of five minutes."

In the largest Artspace gallery, 12 performers from various backgrounds, and, from time to time Lynch himself, created 5 minute improvisations over the 24 hours to specific sets of instructions, soloing, working as a mass, in teams, echoing each other visually (relying largely on peripheral vision and heightening intuition as the hours passed) and sometimes vocally. The performers were 'cycled' through different stations (based on states from Buddhist Pali texts) in the space. These included a sound desk where the performers had turns at selecting tracks—sometimes fascinating in itself and its odd conjunctions with the performances, a computer (for recording responses) and several devices and installations to interact with (a pendulum sculpture, a plinth, a grappling chain, a small trampoline...) and video camera/screen spaces. Within this tight framework and over such a long period the improvisations seemed minimal and often interior, odd bursts of great energy, inventiveness and wit erupting now and then.

As an audience member for 6 of the 24hrs (I did it in 3 x 2hr visits) it was an interesting experience, more clinical than anything and that was probably something to do with the set-up of the space. Although close to the performers, we were pretty much the other side of the 4th wall. We couldn't move around the periphery of the performance, couldn't see the computer jottings, the collection of CDs. I found this frustrating. Then again it wasn't for me, it was essentially for the performers. There were occasional open dialogues in the next space at the same time, but they were too far removed from the action and didn't emerge as an integral part of the event. Here and there in my 6hrs there were some remarkable moments that fed my audience desire, but I think the best thing to do about *24hr Performance* is to ask the performers what it did for them. Which I will. Did they reach that point where, as Lynch writes in his program note, "There can be a fluid and open technique which works over and above pain, martyrdom and will." As the 24 hours drew to a close the audience grew rapidly (as it had at several other times), mostly fellow artists come to see their peers triumph over time and body: the sense of celebration palpable. These experiments and trainings are vital to performance. *24hr Performance* was a reminder of what we need though it's rarely on offer these days. Artspace May 8-9. KG

## Sydney Art Theatre, Wilkacy's, *The Mother*

Bogdan Koca, playwright, actor and director has just been awarded the \$15,000 Rex Cramphorn Fellowship. continued on page 35

**no place. like home**

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# Body-theatrics versus vagrant ideas

Peta Tait sees the Amanda Owen-Donna Jackson collaboration at La Mama

In *Body—Celebration of the Machine* Amanda Owen's comic persona-as-body delivers a series of cute, teasing body acts—for adults who like to play and remember childhood 'theatrics.' This solo show, directed and co-devised by Donna Jackson, verbally explains the autobiographical and genealogical origins of its acrobatic body. The visual text is framed with a descriptive slideshow of body theory slogans and rhetorical labels about biological functions—set designed by Lin Tobias with music and arrangements by Kim Baston. The female body breathes, yawns, eats, simulates sex, shows pain and emotions and so does the slide screen; they refer to the pleasure machine and the vulnerable machine.

The screen projections, like their location above the performer, float unconnected to the body-text. In physical theatre, body surfaces do not reveal the psyche or impressions of inner being (even a notion of one in process) and the spoken text is scripted as conversation rather than inferring languages of the unconscious. The body-text does not appear like an idea of a machine or even an idea of itself. This show is most appropriately located in culture's discursive tradition of representing and staging physicality, that is, in theatre. With *Body—Celebration of the Machine* we find Meyerhold's theory of biomechanics receding backwards through constructivist aesthetics to its fairground booth origins.

A 'Punch' (puppet) show is literally illustrated on parts of the performer's skin that protrude through peep-holes cut in a

screen to tell a story about lung specialist George (his face sketched on Amanda's stomach) drowning and saved by Mary (Amanda's bare breasts presented as Mary's eyes). At one point both characters protrude through a hole in the screen as one leg, each wearing a different shoe. The show has sleight of hand tricks; the unborn baby ringing like a telephone and body piercing with a long needle and a skin sewing sequence. The performer goes verbally shopping for spare body parts including a different clitoris for horse-riding and a penis for unspecified purposes. There are shadow puppets on a screen depicting a mother as a horizontal skeleton undergoing a hip operation with the gigantic saw of Miss Veneer, the surgeon who has had a sex-change operation. The comic sequence on bodily emissions is danced and whispered with quivering (fish-like) hands up and down the body.

I found pleasure in watching the lithe performing body intermittently doing somersaults and one-arm balances; these dismiss the show's singular visual premise that the body is comparable to a mechanical machine. The body word is used frequently, noticeably at odds with the theatre maxim that what is shown does not need to be said. This show belongs within a recent trend in physical theatre to include spoken text, probably directly influenced by British-trained performers whose tradition is noticeably more verbal than Australia's circus-derived physical theatre. This is apparent in works like the forthcoming *Adam's Apple* at La Mama and past shows by Legs on the Wall and

Kate Champion. (Perhaps writers might be included in such projects in the future.)

*Body—Celebration of the Machine's* pleasure machine consists of acrobatically signed movements of the sex act rather than erotic seduction. This is followed quickly by pain as grimace and contraction, as evidence of an injury to the arm, the leg. "How 'much' are emotions a product of our biology?" is asked with gestures of excitement, anger and laughter. Unquestionably our culture formulates emotions and makes them readable but, as Catherine Lutz argues, they are unnatural. This is a show that denotes the body as extraordinary by conceiving of it as a natural machine. It conveys that we try to make some mechanical machines like cranes function in our image. The moments of understated emotion that hint at the inexplicable are most engaging: the casual remarks about a hole in the heart at 8 and, in a time of crisis, an absent grandmother's "breath around her wrist like smoke from a match."

*Body—Celebration of the Machine, Donna Jackson & Amanda Owen, La Mama Theatre, Melbourne, June 23*



Amanda Owen, *Body—Celebration of the Machine*

Ponch Hawkes

Peta Tait is a senior lecturer at the Department of Theatre and Drama at La Trobe University and writes with *The Party Line*.

## Looking for Louise Lovely

Julia Postle on writer-director David Atfield's play about an Australian silent film star

David Atfield had been a silent film fan for quite a while, but it was the life of Louise Lovely—Australia's first Hollywood star—that really got him excited about this distinctive period. So excited in fact, that her story inspired him to write the latest production by BITS Theatre Company, *Lovely Louise*. The play is the result of more than two years of research by the writer into the fascinating story of a woman who, although historically significant to Australian cinema, has been little documented. It's a story of a woman who was a star of her time, but whose success and happiness were hindered by a series of bad choices and decisions.

Louise Lovely's testimony to the 1927 Royal Commission into the film industry was a starting point for Atfield. "An inspirational plea for government funding", the testimony revealed the promise of Louise Lovely as a filmmaker. Unfortunately, only traces of her film life remain; most silent films were either destroyed by the major film companies to make way for the 'talkies' or have decayed over time. The fact that Louise had no children made it even more difficult for Atfield to gain a sense of the woman, the actor and the filmmaker.

However he was able to access Louise Lovely's will, which led him to 3 named beneficiaries: Maisie Axford who lived with Louise and second husband Bert in the 1930s; Nora Rainer, Louise's neighbour in Hobart; and Peter Dransfield, a friend of Louise in her later years. Atfield was able to interview each of them, and his interview

with Axford is now held in the permanent collection of ScreenSound Australia. Through a silent film site on the internet, Atfield also contacted Leatrice Gilbert Fountain, the daughter of another Hollywood silent film star, Leatrice Joy. Fountain gave Atfield an insight to Joy's character which informed her role in his play. Louise Lovely also conducted 3 interviews in the 1970s and one in the 1960s focusing for the most part on her career and giving little information about her personal life. Through these primary sources, Atfield was able to create a sketchy framework of Louise Lovely's life and his scriptwriting began.

The play in its original form was workshopped with 3 actors, and in 1998 was accepted for a 2-week workshop at the National Playwrights' Conference. At this stage, Atfield was rewriting a complete draft of the play every second day. "It was a very gruelling process. I was made to justify everything," he recalls. (The play, as it was presented as part of Canberra's 1999 Season at the Street, is the 15th reworked draft of *Lovely Louise*.)

With funding from the Australia Council, dramaturg Campion Decent came on board and the play's evolution continued. Decent influenced the structure of the play, suggesting flashbacks to create a more memory-like quality. Decent's frankness also gave Atfield a real focus for the play. "He asked me what it was actually about—failure? And I knew I couldn't write this play about success." Louise Lovely's life may

have been inspiring for Atfield, but it was also a tragic tale of an artist forced to leave her art, relatively early in her career.

Throughout the play, Atfield has threaded the rare film footage from Lovely's stardom, including a fragment from her directorial work, *Jewelled Nights*. "I thought it was important that we all saw her at the peak of her career." Of Louise Lovely's films, the 2 with ScreenSound Australia—although fabulous resources—are not particularly good examples of her work. Another is in London and 4 are in the Library of Congress in Washington.

For the characters in the play—Louise Lovely, first husband Wilton Welch, mother Madame Carbasse-Alberti, second husband Bert Cowen, friend and confidante Simon Reid, and film stars Leatrice Joy and Ramon Novarro—Atfield wanted to evoke an emotional reality, rather than trying to recreate personalities in an imitative style. For instance, Jonathan Gavin's superb portrayal of Ramon Novarro was developed as a positive gay character to contrast Barry Pearce's repressed Wilton Welch. And while Novarro was indeed a major star of both silent films and the first wave of talkies, his friendship with Louise Lovely was something Atfield invented as a creative mechanism.

Strategies of the writer/director aside,



Jonathan Gavin with silent film footage of Louise Lovely

*Lovely Louise* is a unique historical work which also manages to examine some issues that confront us all, including the difficult choices we face between career and personal life. Atfield sums it up nicely really, "It's about going for it."

BITS Theatre Company, *Lovely Louise*, writer/director David Atfield, puppetry director Peter Wilson, performers Anna Lee, Helen Vaughan-Roberts, Leanne Sills, Ian Croker, Barry Pearce, Matthew McCoy, Jonathan Gavin. Street Theatre, Canberra, April 22 - May 8  
ScreenSound Australia [www.nfsa.gov.au](http://www.nfsa.gov.au)



# Darwin as transit lounge

Bill Perrett looks in on lives in the *Block*

The 4 plays which make up *Block* are what regional theatre should be. They reflect what is distinctive about the place in which they situate themselves, they don't feel constrained by any set of dramatic manners, they are insistently local.

Though just what 'local' means in the case of Darwin is not always uncomplicated. One broad theme which unites these pieces—apart from the fact that they are set in a block of 4 flats—is a sense of the transitory, of people on the way to somewhere else, of relationships which are fragile, of visitors who will never be entirely localised.

Marian Devitt's *in terms of your life* starts with Irene, an Aboriginal woman (played with finely controlled anger by Tessa Rose), resolutely packing her bags. Her gormless 'boyfriend' Vince (Joe Clements) manages in the end (and clearly not for the first time) to revive their shaky partnership, but there is an overwhelming sense that moving somewhere else isn't going to fix things. Darwin as destination, Darwin as

transit lounge; it turns from one to the other as people realise that it can't provide a solution. So it is with Kez (Gail Evans) and Kyle (Joe Clements) in Evans' *rut*. The widening of the gap between their very different expectations of their relationship is barely and temporarily stabilised by co-dependency, and the fantasy that going to live in Kyle's home town will solve matters.

Rowena Ivers' *scratch* is a much lighter treatment of the place, concentrating on the swarming local fauna which inhabit the bedroom (and bed) of newcomers Mel (Saraid Doherty) and Michael (Malcolm Beattie). The pest man cometh in the morning, but he may well be a cure worse than the disease.

*trade secrets*, by Stephen Carleton, is a touching and very funny rendition of the problems confronting a gay man looking for a serious relationship in a small town. Callum (Stephen Carleton) invites 2 different prospectives back to his flat. Again, he seems doomed to make choices of possible partners who are just passing through, but a strong

and humorous sense of self-irony ensures that he never gives up hope.

To those of us who have looked to local theatre to speak of the local, *Block* is a real sign of hope. Knock-em-down Theatre is to be commended for an entertaining production which looks good and clearly delighted the first-night audience. There have been discussions about taking the show on the road; if they come to fruition, audiences south of the Berrimah Line will get a chance to see a Top End somewhat different from the version in travel shows and advertisements.

The sets by Tom Pauling are minimal and suggestive, easily recognisable to Top End residents. Direction is by Tessa Pauling and Ken Conway, well known to Darwin theatregoers.

*Block*, Knock-em-down Theatre, Brown's Mart, Darwin, July 14 - 17, 21- 24

Bill Perrett teaches Media and Cultural Studies at Northern Territory University.



Joe Clements & Gail Evans in *Rut*

The Playworks newsletter, Vol 6, No 3 features articles by and interviews with Darwin writers, directors and performers. [playwks@ozemail.com.au](mailto:playwks@ozemail.com.au)

## Hope springs eternal

Maryanne Lynch at Rock'n'Roll Circus' *Lovestunts*

Welcome to the Hope Springs Eternal Hotel/Motel, says the man, and in we go to a Magritte-like room of 3 doors, one light and many lost souls. Welcome to *Lovestunts*, Rock'n'Roll Circus's first show under the new artistic team of Yaron Lifschitz and Thor Blomfield.

We are gathered in a bend of the Brisbane River, peering into the Hollywood-fake hotel/motel. Behind it looms the Gothic suggestiveness of the old Powerhouse; behind us is the wild darkness of the night. This is a place of surfaces and secrets. This is a place for lonely hearts. This is Orpheus' underworld turned into a cheap B-grade movie.

### Enter a sad sack

We are watching a life unravel from an already frayed beginning. A man (Derek Ives) is looking for love in all the wrong places. Even a flower makes him weep. But this is no ordinary flower. He passes it to the concierge (Andrew Bray): more tears. The concierge passes it back: tears again. And again. An old gag given a poetic facelift, each character desperate in his neediness for a little bit of lovin'.

### Enter a fantasy

We are met by 2 spirits of desire and destiny (Kate Reid and Andrew Bright). Clad in unforgiving white, they spring tricks on us and on the hotel/motel inhabitants. They play the slapstick trick of entry and exit with the 3 doors, leaving Mr A-Room-for-the-Night with nowhere to go. And then they vanish again.

### Enter a problem

We are wanting to be seduced by the Rock'n'Roll magic; we are waiting for the sex and the sassiness to claim its own ground. We get what we want from the wild wandering-hands soundscapes (Brett Jones) and from such brief moments as when the 2 Andrews dance a tango of disintegrating limbs 'til passion do them part. But this underworld is strangely dead, its ghosts lifeless instead of possessed. There's a curious bias towards conventional theatrics and aerial performers playing grounded actors. This show is well-travelled, having toured regionally, but it doesn't feel well-shod.

### Enter an audience

We are disappointed, bored and déjà-vued but hopeful this is only temporary. We have lived the life of this company and can spot an old dog even when it's disguised as a new trick. The performers are working hard; injury has laid siege to several of them (notably Azaria Universe, who makes a brief appearance). And every now and then a liberated body soaring through the sky (Bright) in contradistinction to the baggage-laden body below (Ives) suggests the possibilities in this retelling of an ancient story of lost love.

### Enter a company

Welcome to a troupe in transition. A move that has been taking place for a couple of years now and is still very much in evidence. Moving from a collective to an artistic directorship has meant a changing of the guard in performers, and new ambitions in the marriage of theatre and circus. Welcome to a not-yet-there vision.

*Lovestunts*, Rock'n'Roll Circus, artistic director Yaron Lifschitz, performers Andrew Bray, Andrew Bright, Derek Ives, Kate Reid, Ryan Taplin, Azaria Universe, musical director Brett Parker. Powerhouse, Brisbane, June 15 - 26

## Timewarps...

continued from page 33

Like Nigel Kellway and others before him, it's a richly deserved, and doubtlessly much needed, reward for his devotion to theatre, particularly in maintaining links with his Polish parent culture and a European theatre tradition which we experience all too rarely. Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy) is a Polish great of the early 20th century who stands alongside Gombrowicz and Bruno Schulz and shares some of the idiosyncrasy of their vision and a sharp, if quite lateral, sometimes radical social critique. It's often said that his plays appear to be precursors to the Theatre of the Absurd (true enough), but that's to imagine Witkacy to be a one-off instead of part of a tradition quite foreign to our Anglo-Saxon pragmatism, a tradition allowing the artist to be in touch with the unconscious through vivid fantasy, to embrace disruptive notions of time and identity, and bravely, if despairingly play the seer. The son in *The Mother* is a would-be-seer, dependent on his mother's knitting sales, repelling her, but forever attached, replacing her (much to his own surprise) with a younger woman when she dies. But this is no piece of neat narrative naturalism. What begins with the mother's quietly rambling, half tipsy, homey complaints gradually degenerates into a grim fantasy belonging to either son or mother...actually both. Jennifer Claire and Rostislav Orel are excellent as mother and son, the one emotionally restless and morally righteous (and increasingly alcoholic) on her couch, the other a creature of nervous energy and incompleteness. Koca's direction is just right in a show on a shoe-string budget in the tiny Pilgrim Theatre just across the road from the RealTime office. This was a rare opportunity. Some of Witkacy's plays were performed in 1985 in Australia to an alert few to celebrate the centenary of his birth.

Congratulations to Bogdan Koca for his Rex Cramphorn Fellowship and for bringing us *The Mother*. Pilgrim House, Sydney from July 6. KG

## Triple Alice 1

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# Performance priorities

New works and events in Sydney and Melbourne



Andreas Litras, *Odyssey*

Ilana Rose

Andreas Litras, *Odyssey*, Carnivale

Andreas Litras' bilingual solo work *Odyssey* premiered at Hobart's Estia Greek Festival last year and went on to enjoy unanimous critical success at the Melbourne Festival last October. Interlinked with his personal view of post-war Australia is the mythological world of Homer's *Odyssey*. This intimate-epic was produced by Melbourne-based Anthos Theatre, the company formed by Andreas Litras with Brianne Cuthbert in 1998. The work is performed and devised by Litras (born in Ballarat to Greek migrants), a skilled actor and "natural clown" according to his teacher John Bolton who co-devised and directed the work. Design is by Constantine Koukias (IHOS Opera, Tasmania). Helen

Thomson in *The Age* praises *Odyssey* copiously for its skill and humour but also for the way it captures "a complex dual identity." She also sees the work as providing "an individual story that situates what we might have thought of as a minority group firmly within the mainstream of our complex national identity." Says Litras, "As a nation, we're now prepared to hear these stories... There's a generational change which is leaving behind the Australia Pauline Hanson has been trying to recapture..." He's hoping the second generation Greek community embraces the show—and brings their parents along.

*Odyssey* is one of over 200 arts events taking place in Sydney and across NSW for Carnivale Multicultural Arts Festival, September 11 - October 4. For more information and the complete program freecall 1800 064 534 or email: [carnivale@carnivale.com.au](mailto:carnivale@carnivale.com.au)

PACT & Nikki Heywood,  
*no place. like home*

The original version of *no place. like home* appeared in PACT's innovative *The Dark Room* trilogy in 1998. Devised by PACT performers and directed by Nikki Heywood (*Burn Sonata*), *no place. like home* has been expanded into a full length performance, doubtless going off in altogether new directions while retaining the intensity, humour and fearfulness of the child's utterly focused, wildly distracted and fantasised vision of everyday objects each other that made the show such a powerful experience. PACT, 107 Railway Parade, Erskineville, Sydney. August 6 - 22. Tel 9550 2744

Performing the  
*Unnameable* at the  
Melbourne Writer's  
Festival

An opportunity for Melbourne to celebrate writing for performance and the first major collection of Australian performance texts. A panel discussion between artists whose works are in the anthology: writer-director Jenny Kemp, writer-performer Margaret Cameron, cross-genre performance artist-writer Lyndal Jones, and chairperson Richard Allen (poet, theatre and dance practitioner). This occasions the Melbourne launch of *Performing the Unnameable: An anthology of Australian Performance Texts*, edited by Richard James Allen and Karen Pearlman, published by Currency Press in association with *RealTime*. Sunday, August 22 6pm The Bagging Room, The CUB Malthouse, 113 Sturt St, Southbank.

Urban Theatre Projects, *The Query*

A new work from a potent creative team working a bizarre scenario and with more than an opinion or two. As UTP tell it: "Two buffoons are cranking up their karaoke machine, fondly reliving the glorious highlights of their wonderful show, *The Twentieth Century* (1,000 Great Moments to Perform in the Privacy of Your Own Home). Embracing Mandela. Sharing a joke with Stalin. Taking a stroll with Neil Armstrong. A private moment for the camera. Welcome to Transnationalia, a (fantasy) world without borders, without conflict, freed of the chains



*no place. like home*

Heldrun Löhr

of history, where all difference is accepted and celebrated." "Interrogating notions of civilisation, culture, and globalisation...and swatting a few millennium bugs along the way", *The Query* is a collaboration between writer Merlinda Bobis, directors Nigel Kellaway and John Baylis, and performers Rolando Ramos and Xu Fengshan. Sound and images by Nik Wishart. The Performance Space with new, comfortable seating, September 9 - 26, Wed - Sat 8pm, Sun 5pm. Bookings tel 9698 7235. Urban Theatre Projects Tel 9707 2111



*The Query*

Roslyn Oades, Moira Hunt, *Glitz Dies!*

"Inspired by the aftermath of Princess Di's death, this 2 woman show comprises TV vignettes linked by news of a pop icon's death." Originally part of Open 98 and the Newtown Festival, *Glitz Dies!* has been developed into a full length work with the assistance of The Performance Space's Emerging Artists in Residence Program. Creator-performers Oades and Hunt use text, puppetry, movement and music to explore public obsession with celebrities. Original music by TJ Eckleberg sung live by Angela Morosin with musician Didi Mudigo. Watch *Glitz Dies!* evolve—see the work-in-progress showing on Sunday, October 3, 5pm (free admission) and then the complete performance November 17 - 21, both at The Performance Space, Sydney. tel 9698 7235

*B-Grade Performance 2:*  
*Schlock Tactics*

Gravity Feeder, solo artiste and bag snatcher (in his recent *antistatic* incarnation), Jeff Stein curates a welcome season from the outer limits and the up and coming of the Sydney performance scene. It'll be good to see the return to TPS of well-travelled hip-hopper Hot Banana Morgan performing solo and with MetaBass'n'Breath; the always welcome and hugely talented Katia Molina (with friends); plus a lineup that includes notables Erth, Sam James, Gail Priest, Frumpus, Martin Ng, Rose Turtle, Alicia Talbot, Extra-Bimbo and Stein himself with Veron Grigorov. Mysterious others evoke an evening in the mosh pit: Peeled Hearts, Menstruation Sisters and Strangely Brown. The Performance Space, Sydney, August 12 - 15, 8pm. \$8/night. Bookings 9698 7235 RT

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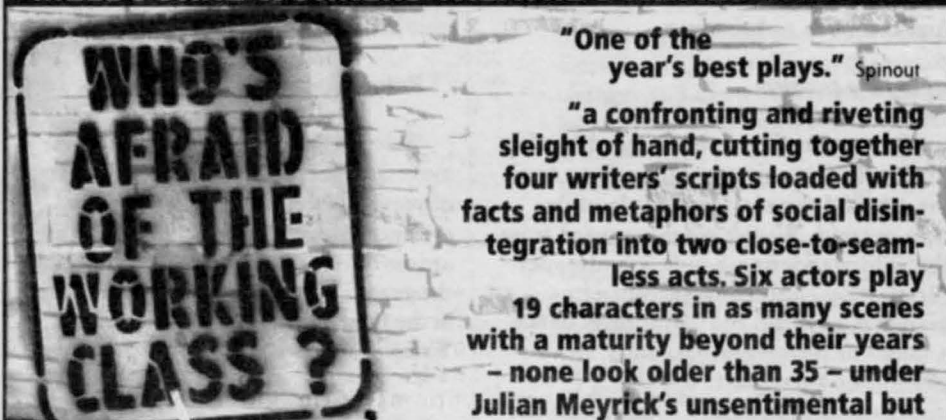
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# Queerly constrained

Stephen Armstrong finds *CAB/SAV II* occasionally heady, but not full-bodied

In recent years, Brisbane's been long on shorts. Diverse events have been memorably programmed by Metro Arts, Kooemba Jdarra, Renegade, the brilliant if defunct Crab Room, Cherry Herring, Zoo, LIVID and more. Director Lucinda Shaw marks the territory of *CAB/SAV II* as "a group of queer-aligned performing artists into difference, making unconstrained theatre that celebrates full humanity and expresses and transcends sexuality." In the context of what else is around, this sense of unconstrained difference just never materialised—even if the final triptych was worth the wait.

The Lisa O'Neill choreographed *Lino Cuts*, performed by Caroline Dunphy and Christina Koch, opened the show with something less than a fanfare. Intensely gestural and ritualistic, O'Neill's choreography usually works its way beneath the skin but this piece seemed blunt and incomplete—an anxious duet for competing ids, *Lino Cuts* was well performed but too long, or perhaps not long enough, to reinforce and work its themes.

Beneath a projection of Lucinda Shaw's tidal film *Shells*, Jem Coones recites his poem "Postcard From a Butcher's Window" accompanied, and finally silenced by, cellist David Sills (playing the

Wesley-Smiths' *White Knight*) who in turn is silenced by a kiss. Coones himself, lolling about in a hunky, singled kind of way inside the image of a projected shell, may have provided just one allusion too many, sentimentalising what might have been a memorable telling of sexual initiation where "the ocean's hush spoke like a foul-mouthed poet." A multimedia concoction rather than reconstitution.

Singer/pianist Barb Daveson, accompanied by Sills, performed a charming lament of longing and leaving from her *Highways And Hangovers* but was poorly programmed in the middle of a set. Daveson was followed by the Babel-esque confusion of *Untitled Spoken Word* by poetess (sic) Jess Godfrey whose energised performance was full of self-obsessing verve (self/alienation/self/representation/self) and included a memorable moment of retort with her own projected image.

The second half momentarily stalled with *Remembering Eve*, a terminal film memory by Kris Kneen, but was finally hot-wired by Lucinda Shaw performing "Everywhere I Go Someone's Reading Poetry." Sharp, witty, monumentally present, Shaw's gothic take on the insouciance of art and its paradoxical

capacity for banality and pain was a much needed creative call to arms.

The tragi-comic fable of porn hero Joey Stefano (sex, drugs, sex, love, loss, drugs, death) in *Psycho The/Rapist #2 Joey Stefano* introduced a welcome queer physis. Conceived and performed by Brian Lucas, this is the second in a series of 3 works by an accomplished storyteller whose body is as eloquent as his clever use of prologue, snatch-narrative and sound-bite.

*CAB/SAV II* concluded with Lisa O'Neill's powerful *Oily Nights In Strathcliffe* performed with intensity by O'Neill and Caroline Dunphy (with a soundtrack by Tom Waits, Beck and powermad). Ritual, and the ritual of performance itself, is at the heart of O'Neill's work. She and Dunphy perform like giants behind miniature picket fences, isolated and out of reach of each other's screams, playing out rites of desperation and arousal to escape the rites of emotional atrophy. In *Oily Nights In Strathcliffe* performance and conceptual intelligence come together—O'Neill's choreography lures, suspends, creeps and catapults.

*CAB/SAV II* promised queer concentrate but



Caroline Dunphy & Lisa O'Neill, *Oily Nights in Strathcliffe*

never turned itself over to queerness as an event. The conscious rejection of format, the allusion to and rejection of cabaret, caused its own problems of flagging energy, restless un-anticipation, no sense of celebration or commentary and problems with set ups which a ce n'est pas CABaret attitude might have subverted with fun and SAVvy.

*CAB/SAV II*, a season of short works for the 1999 Pride Festival, Director Lucinda Shaw, Metro Arts Theatre, June 30 - July 3

Stephen Armstrong is a Brisbane-based writer and General Manager of the Queensland Theatre Company

## A plenitude of Cinderellas

Eleanor Brickhill digs in the ashes for *Young Woman Glass Soul*

Two long-legged bodies lie, hips curving under dappled light, rolling gently together; a face appears, up high to the side, like a phantom, disembodied and peculiar. It takes a while before I realise that this man, Joseph Stanaway, is producing most of the overpowering, long resonant drone and harmonics we hear. It goes on and on, the dancers' soft movements rippling underneath like snakes at the mercy of an almost impenetrable sound.

*Young Woman Glass Soul* is a work of contrasts: piercing, immediate imagery alongside movement material that seems stuck resolutely in some other mindset, loaded and unrecognised. Even so, the dancers, Georgia Carter and Jennifer Newman-Preston, move well together with meticulous grace and an unforced unity of stature and timing. But because there is such polish and completeness in the production you get the sense that there is nowhere else for this work to go, as it is. It's a full piece, seemingly crammed into a finite stage belying the complexity of the subject matter and giving it hardly any space to breathe.

A multitude of Cinderella stories, from ancient Brazilian to comic Disney, have been researched and pored-over for this production. Newman-Preston wants to unearth the richness of pagan symbolism where ashes stand for cleanliness and purification; whereas the cinders of Charles Perrault's story in the time of Louis XIV are dirty and polluting, and only fit to be touched by those of low birth. The search for the mysterious woman who fits the glass slipper turns out to be the Ash Girl's search for herself, her own innate wisdom.

The symbol of the serpent in the story is not so well known to us, but provides rich imagery for the dance work. With perfect grace and timing, Newman-Preston herself suddenly appears in a remarkable and insinuatingly beautiful dance, long-legged, in black high heels, bare back arching, her arms dancing lithe and intricate steps as she sidles on all fours up to a comic and cowering Cinders, rubbing her feet ecstatically in ashes.

Another striking image: a woman-serpent half climbs and half falls, a step at a time, down a diagonally pitched and precarious ladder, her looping heavy limbs



Jennifer Newman-Preston, *Young Woman Glass Soul* Andrzej Liguz

dropping suddenly like the coils of a snake from a tree, and, like a snake, supporting itself by a fierce, unseen muscular grip wedged in the angled branches.

The most beautiful of all images depicts the fairy godmother, with her small white mask/face and beckoning arm, shrouded in a dark blue cape of sleep, tall and hovering over the sleeping Cinderella. A simple puppet brings an unearthly magical reality to the character.

Outside in the foyer, there are drawings by Vinn Pitcher on the wall—seen as slides in the work itself—and texts of some of the different Cinderella stories giving a stability and depth to the performance. There may be more, possibly 350, all versions of the same story: a woman's search for strength and inner wisdom. The illustrations seem comic sometimes, trying to incorporate both the spiritual richness of the pagan cultures and our own mass market mentality and material desires. A well-edited collection of these stories and drawings would be perfect for audiences to take home.

*Young Woman Glass Soul*, choreography Jennifer Newman-Preston, music Alexander Nettelbeck, performers Georgia Carter & Jennifer Newman-Preston, vocal harmonics Joseph Stanaway, word Victoria Doidge, lighting Tim Preston, images Vinn Pitcher, projections Tim Gruchy, videographer Jo Griffin, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Sydney, July 1 - 10



Helen Herbertson, Trevor Patrick, *Delirium* Jeff Busby

Helen Herbertson's new dance theatre work, *Delirium* explores the schism between the worlds of sleep and waking. "The disciplines of dance, improvisation, theatre, music, visual arts and film inform Herbertson's work. However the language she creates", says her press release, "is something quite unlike any of the original stimuli. It's a personal approach, deeply embedded conceptually in an emotional and physical world and brought to the surface via a delicate interaction and collaboration with several other artists." In this case the collaborating team includes some of the best in the country—performer Trevor Patrick, writer-director Jenny Kemp, optical illusionist Ben Cobham and composer Livia Ruzic.

Experience *Delirium* at the National Theatre, St Kilda, August 19 - 27.

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# Future multiplicities

RT previews the widely anticipated Third Asia-Pacific Triennial

In a relatively short time the Asia-Pacific Triennial has established itself as one of Australia's prime contemporary art events and the Queensland Art Gallery as an important site for exhibition, research and collection of the art of Asia and the Pacific. The third Asia-Pacific Triennial (APT3) opens September 9 with a celebratory program of events over five days. The exhibition runs until January 2000.

Consultation and research on APT3 over the past year has involved 150 international and Australian curators, writers and scholars in the selection of over 75 artists from the region. For the first time, APT3 will include artists from Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Pacific Islands of Wallis, Futuna and Niue. The globally mobile are also well represented—“born Wimbledon, lives and works in Karachi”; “born Singapore lives and works in Sydney”; “born China lives and works in Paris, France, New York.”



Jun-Jieh Wang, *I want my neon Urlaub*

The media multiplicity we've come to expect is here in profusion—photography, video, CD-ROM, internet, painting, textiles, ceramics, sculpture, installation and performance. And yes, many works offer opportunities for audience interaction. Engagement with Tasmanian artist Karen Casey's *Water Chamber*, for instance, evokes “the comfort that children find in cubby houses, teenagers seek out in darkened bars and philosophers used to find in the inner recesses of caves—a kind of ‘walk-in’ art.” Casey is among the strong representation of Australian artists at APT3. Others are Gordon Bennett, Michael Nelson Jagamara, members of the Utopia Collective, Guan Wei, Tim Johnson and Helga Groves.

Senior curators for APT3 are Dr. Caroline Turner (East Asia), Julie Ewington (Southeast Asia), Dr. Michael Brand (South Asia), Margo Neale (Pacific & Australia) with Tim Morrell (New Zealand) and Doug Hall (“Crossing Borders”). The First APT took as its theme “Tradition and Change” (Can anything be done to stop the contagious spread of these universalising themes? Perhaps some more lateral ones—“Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep” (Philip K Dick)—might do the trick). The curators see this year's theme “Beyond the Future” as “returning full circle to issues raised in the first (see!) to do with “the place of tradition and the past in contemporary art and society.” A futurological conference will be held at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre (10-12 September) and features over 50 international and Australian speakers. The event includes daily performances and talks by artists and curators.

On the digital media front, collaborations and interdisciplinary approaches abound—visual arts and music, popular culture, screen culture and new technology. In partnership with Multimedia Art Asia Pacific (MAAP99, see page 24), the Virtual Triennial ([www.ap3.net](http://www.ap3.net)) will showcase work by artists from the region who use the internet in the

creation and presentation of their work. Setting up the Virtual Triennial has involved extensive partnerships, international co-curatorship and inter-cultural collaborations as well as a raft of local sponsorships including QANTM, Apple and the Sydney Organising Committee of the Olympic Games Art Festivals Program. Significantly, the Virtual Triennial is marketed as “a peak event” of Online Australia, a Commonwealth Government initiative of the National Office for the Information Economy.

Discussion by artists has become a very popular part of the experience at contemporary arts events. In 1997, in Germany, at DocumentaX's impressive *100 Days 100 Guests* program, each talk was recorded on video in its entirety and transmitted live over the internet. The recordings were also digitally archived so that visitors could recall them on computer terminals in the Documenta Hall at their convenience. Two years later, special features of the APT3 website include profiles on participating artists, an email forum discussing issues relating to contemporary art and culture, an exhibition of online artworks plus a Kids APT online—interactive artworks and projects developed for children 3 - 12 years. Access is available to performances and lecture extracts, educational material and conference papers. APT3 information will be available in 8 languages.

Access to the Virtual Triennial and video documentation of artists' talks and performances will also be available in the APT Lounge, a dedicated space in the Gallery where you can catch up on current journals, publications and resources on contemporary Asian and Pacific artists.

Artists in the Virtual Triennial include Wang Jun-Jieh from Taipei, “a pioneer of the use of multimedia in Taiwan whose work crosses the boundaries of what is seen as consumable culture and the role of technology and the media.” Wang's questions to his audience—“Who are the real masters? Who is Who?”—critically echo Microsoft's “Where do you want to go today?” In *Neon Urlaub* Wang reinvents himself as a travel agent offering his ‘customers’ virtual trips to real places. These adventures only exist in cyberspace but the artist will install his travel agency in the Queensland Art Gallery, complete with plastic palm trees and access to his booking service.

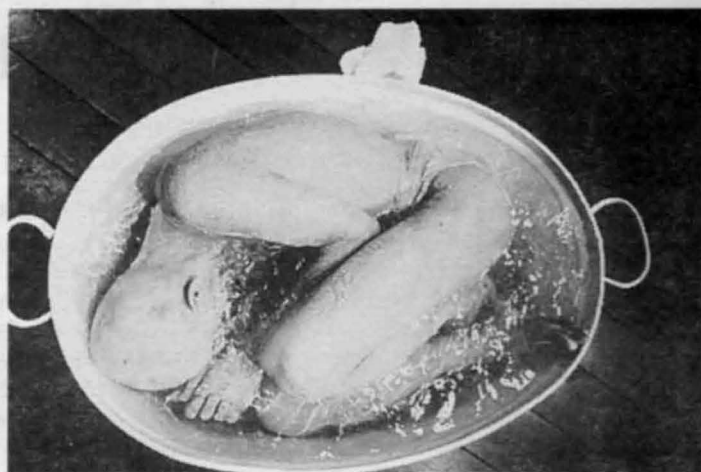
Born in South Korea in 1953, Choi Jae-Eun's training included Japanese ikebana from which she developed a range of work from video installations to monumental public sculptures. Her recent interest has focused on ecological cycles and the effects of time. Since 1986, Choi Jae-Eun has experimented with a ‘World Underground Project’ where paper is buried in the earth for several years before being excavated and placed in an incubator. When a portion of paper is magnified under a microscope, the artist captures, through the technology of CD-ROM and laser printed images, a complex ecosystem. “Fantastic forms emerge from this miniature portion of the natural world which are not normally visible to us”, says the artist who sees these experiments as “exemplifying chaos and it is this chaos, not the balance and stability of the ecosystem, which is at the core of our universe.”

Building on a previous collaboration Australian writer Geremie Barmé and oral

historian Sang Ye will install *Totems Poles Apart* for APT3. This work consists of two 13 metre high inflatable red Hua Biao (decorated columns) from Wang Fu Jing, the shopping epicentre of Beijing. A mock-museum exhibit illustrates the symbolic history of the Hua Biao, the original marble versions of which have stood in Tiananmen Square for 500 years. Video interviews with witnesses to the Hua Biao both in Beijing and Brisbane “construct a dialogue with these silent and silenced icons.”

Shi Yong is part of a generation of young artists interpreting the ‘new’ China. He is concerned with “image, marketing, popular culture and the idea of ‘Made in China’.” *The New Image of Shanghai Today* asks viewers to choose from hairstyles and clothes to create the ‘look’ for this new China. Shi Yong's work “operates on the way we see ourselves, and how the media re-presents us.” He questions the kinds of new images which might play a role on the stage of international communications and its medium, the internet.

CD-ROM and online projects from the Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, University Malaysia Sarawak, curated by Niranjana Rajah, will also be exhibited. On the performance front, a collaboration which sounds intriguing is the one between Brisbane-based contemporary music ensemble Elision, Heri Dono from Jogjakarta and Queensland artist Judith Wright.



Lee Wen, *Journey of a yellow man no 11: multiculturalism*

Jeremy Hiah

In the gallery throughout APT3, there'll be a curated program of short films, animation and video works by contemporary artists and producers from the region.

There's a strong emphasis in APT3 on art that crosses between traditional and contemporary. The “Beyond the Future” theme takes account of “the concern of many artists in the region today about positively contributing through their creativity to their communities surviving the present and constructing new futures...For Indigenous peoples in particular, their past is their future. Jonathon Mane-Wheoki has observed for Maori, ‘The future is behind us, the past is in front of us.’”

RT

*The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, September 9 1999 - January 26, 2000. For further information Tel 61 (0)7 3840 7333 Fax 61 (0)7 3844.8865. [qag@qcc.qld.gov.au](mailto:qag@qcc.qld.gov.au); The Virtual Triennial (information and online art) <http://www.ap3.net>*

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Rosemary Laing, *airport # 2, 1997*

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# The lessons of censorship and collaboration

Dean Chan compiles ARX 5 forum artist comments

*The Artists' Regional Exchange (ARX) forum in Perth saw protracted discussion of an event which occurred during the first stage of the tripartite ARX 5 project in Singapore in September last year.*

*Artists who were part of the ARX residency and exchange program spoke about the removal of Zunzi Wong's work—which a Singaporean curator described as "lampooning" local political leaders—from the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) half an hour before the exhibition opening.*

Fiona Wong: "The response to Zunzi's incident among the 15 ARX artists varied from vigorous to indifferent. Although different ideas from us came up, the criticism of the poor management by SAM was supported by most artists. Interesting issues such as the role of the curator, the relationship between institutions and artists, were brought up. Things changed dramatically however after the residency in Singapore. The Hong Kong media was blamed for reporting the incident in an over-prolonged and exaggerated way. This is totally irrelevant to the discussion before. It is quite obvious that the tension is being shifted on purpose so that the sensitive discussion would no longer carry on. I believe that artists are important in improving or changing the art scene of their own country, which in a way reflects its social and political situation. But only if they want to."

Zunzi Wong: "The incident made a lot of interest for all the parties; and it's better that my work in SAM made some progress and open up the art scene, or do some help for people's thinking about what art is or what the limitations are. [But] I think I would [rather] do it in China because China has more problems than in Singapore. As a Chinese, I would rather do something for my country than doing it in Singapore in that sense...I think there are still a lot of things to talk about—not because I am involved in it, but as an example of how an institute, how a gallery, and how power works. These are things that artists should be aware of no matter where you are—and that might happen in Hong Kong or in other places."

(Zunzi Wong in his statement, quoted in *ARTAsiaPacific*: "Why did the incident happen? Because the Singapore authorities misunderstood what art is. If I knew what would happen before that, would I still do the same thing? No, I'd rather do it in China.")

## On artistic collaboration:

Lucas Ihlein: "We went through a process of questioning how we might want to collaborate with one another during this particular residency. We began by thinking we might want to do a single collaboration among us, all fifteen artists. We kept that open as a possibility, laying out different models within which that could work. The difficulty, as I can see it, came from how we could give our energies to that project, but still retain a sense of individuality and not just become cogs in a big wheel. And who would be driving that wheel anyway? As it turned out, the energy sort of flowed away from that into a more organic way of working where individuals went off and did their own projects. There were some [smaller scale] collaborations that happened. I think that it was interesting to enter that 'trial' to see whether the big collaboration could be possible. It's probably good to remember that rather than to forget it ever happened at all. It was an interesting failure."

## On the ARX 5 project and cultural exchange:

Khiew Huey Chian: "For myself, ARX 5 so far has given me a wonderful opportunity to be part of an amazing experience. Amazingly difficult, amazingly intense, amazingly challenging, and the list could go on. But underlying all this tension appears this familiar and yet not quite familiar sincerity to learn, to understand, to interact at different levels. At least this is how I feel though at times things turn bad due to misunderstanding or misinterpretation of certain visual or verbal language. I began to realise I could not set a common standard on them, constantly allowing whatever happened to justify itself through other actions or interactions to take place..."

Cedric Chan: "In these [project] meetings I saw a lot of differences among us. These differences cause a lot of trouble in communication. For example, language, knowledge, interest, habit, maturity, taste, age, cultural differences, personalities, intentions of participating in and curating this project, honesty. These differences allow me to question what is cultural exchange, how it can be like, and why we should have it. I cannot come up with an answer at this moment. It is a good chance for me to think about it."



John Wong Chi Wai, Yes

Suzann Victor: "I want to reiterate [forum presenter Suhanya Raffel's point] that to have engaged would be much better than not to have engaged at all."

Zunzi Wong: "In this kind of cultural exchange program, I find I learn more through contact with each other—by seeing how people react to each other, how as a group we separate and combine together. That is more interesting than the artwork actually."

## More on the incident in Singapore:

Suzann Victor: "With regard to the notion of censorship in Singapore—it being

totalitarian, and [other] such entrenched notions of Singapore—I think that as practitioners in the Singapore context, the fact that we were able to make a decision and be expressly visible in that decision to rally around Zunzi as a group of artists, says something beyond such oversimplification of Singapore."

ARX 5 Forum, WA School of Art, Design and Media, Jul 10; Exhibition, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Jul 10 — Aug 1. ARX 5 is a tripartite residency and exchange project involving artists from Singapore (Suzann Victor, Khiew Huey Chian, Jason Lim, John Low, Jeremy Hiah), Hong Kong (Zunzi Wong, Fiona Wong, Cedric Chan, Anthony Leong, John Wong), and Australia (Lucas Ihlein, Destiny Deacon, Joan Grounds, Erin Hefferon, Jane Findlay). The project continues in Hong Kong in October.

*This article is a selected transcript of comments by some of the artists who issued statements, and who spoke, at the public forum. There are minor editorial modifications, mainly to do with 'translating' from spoken word to printed text. The thematic sub-headings accompanying the comments are of my devising.*

Dr Dean Chan is a performance artist and a lecturer in visual art theory at Edith Cowan University.



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# Artificial blooms: animated stills

Jacqueline Millner sees Robyn Stacey's *Blue Narcissus*

Within the petals of flowers inheres a complex weave of symbolism: the flower as the incarnation of sexual reproduction, as ostentatious seduction; the flower as arcane repository of powers of healing, poison and extraordinary vision; the flower as benign decoration, as simple celebration of *joie de vivre*; the flower as secret flesh-eating life form, with the potential for vengeance and evil (as imagined by John Wyndham among many). A complex weave of symbolism which after some time starts to reveal a familiar pattern: the conflation of flowers with archetypes of femininity is after all a persistent theme in western culture.

Perhaps for this reason, let alone on account of their metaphorical and literal over-exposure, flowers as contemporary artistic subject matter are dangerously laden and hence avoided. Their archetypal power was tapped with dubious degrees of success by the central core iconography associated with some 1970s feminist art. More latterly, we've witnessed the erotic mises-en-scene of Mapplethorpe and the anthropomorphic fashion shoots of Irving Penn. However, outside this generally overdetermined language of canonised commercial beauty, few contemporary artists have met the brief with any conviction.

One exception is Robyn Stacey, whose current exhibition continues her subtle yet striking photographic exploration of flowers in the various stages of their life cycle. *Blue Narcissus* features a number of older works, including the heady *Pollen Patch* (1996)—a wall-sized configuration of panels of individual red, yellow and orange poppies in the prime of life—and the nostalgic *Everlasting* (1996)—the very same poppies captured several months later, now flaccid, sapped of colour and decaying, in an image scratched and handled as if it were a valuable keepsake. Also contextualising the newer works is an intimate version of *Great Big Piece of Turf* (1997), which Stacey exhibited as a billboard for Perspecta 1997 and which reads like a digital take on traditional Flemish vanitas painting.

Stacey's new works synthesise and extend the themes proposed in these earlier images. For not only are her digital photographs now tending more towards abstraction, but the artist has also brought another technological innovation to her subject, namely the lenticular process. This entails the layering of fragments of an image on several planes by means of a screen comprising an agglomeration of microscopic lenses. The result is a fascinating instance of animation that depends on the movement of the viewer.

Stacey's flowers appear to seethe with life as one walks by, unfurling from closed buds to reveal a community of living cells, reproducing, growing, pulsating. *Radiant* (1998) for instance could be a differentiating zygote as much as a glistening corolla, while *Surface Tension* (1998) recalls a tiny creature being nurtured in the womb.

Stacey's images captivate partly by dint of their homage to traditional aesthetics. These flowers insist on their beauty, and are represented so as to heighten their allure. In works such as *Narcissus* (1999), *Tulip* (1998) and *Red Rim* (1999), the flowers' symmetry, pliancy and sensual colour are unremittingly celebrated. But Stacey embraces the complexity inherent in beauty. She handles the flowers in various stages of decay, once they have shed their petals, retaining nothing more than bristles and desiccated stalks but still gracious, poised and compelling. Moreover, Stacey evinces this complexity in that she focuses our attention on the relationship between beauty, life and death, a complexity which is mirrored and underlined in the indeterminate status of the life forms her images evoke.

Stacey's images are digitally manipulated, abstracted from the 'natural' to varying but unspicifiable degrees. While



Robyn Stacey, *Tulip*

recognisable as flowers, these images may well have been entirely generated by a computer programme (although we are told in Stacey's production notes that many derive from the scanning of actual flowers). The animation of her creations by means of lenticular screens further complicates the distinction between the natural and the artificial, the living and the dead.

Within the sensuous register of the beautiful, Stacey is thus able to invoke some complex questions, about the relationship of representation to lived experience, about the way visuality determines our understanding of the world, and about the increasingly unclear distinction between so-called natural and artificial life-forms. Importantly, Stacey's work raises these questions not in lugubrious or apocalyptic tones, but in a powerfully affirmative mode.

*Blue Narcissus*, Robyn Stacey, *Stills Gallery*, Sydney, April 21 - May 22

## Falling into silken kisses

Zsuzsanna Soboslay on icons and sensations in works by Marine Ky, Sue Anderson and Stuart James

I remember a poet friend being told by Les Murray that he had used the wrong kind of cow. Murray, the king of the vernacular (if that is not a contradiction) as both writer and occasional teacher is always clear about what constitutes a particular kind of Australianness and what needs to be excluded from it. His exclusions come with ease. I like his nuggets of language, the vapours in his skies, the weight of shit in his cowbellies. I have also always slightly disagreed with him, perhaps most where there is poignancy, doubt and contradiction in the living experiences which stretch, sometimes tear at our identities.

In the past month, Australian Galleries has shown works pushing at how we

recognise our landscapes. Sue Anderson paints the rhythm of urban versus rural (pre)occupations: bands of housing, yellow wheatfields, thin skylines, a quilt of cars. Proportion of field to urban edge might be ten-to-one, yet it's ambiguous whether the housescape encroaches or whether the rural holds its ground. The paintings encapsulate a contemporary spatial dreaming of the forces pushing at our habitats by a painter watching her homeplace change.

Stuart James takes to the seashore with his republic of gulls. His enamelled, riveted-copper birds perch on jetty plinths amongst shells and ring-pulls. A lighthouse on the surface; a lost gold ring between a deep-sea crab's claws. Nostalgia, desire,

and near-revulsion play equal here: a seaside holiday removed (as icons often are) from daily grind.

The rivets remind the eye of how we construct our icons (rather than presuming they are innate or nature-made). There's a serious prank in the mounted laundry-tub full of fish and beer. The disjuncture of whimsy with this crafting creates space to both accept and reject the identities prescribed. In another country the equivalent might be a cherub fountain, which remains a vibrant (not nostalgic) iconic marker for some (immigrant) Australians I know here. James' skill leaves a lot of room for the viewer's personal contradictions of memory and background.

Marine Ky's soft-ground etchings salvage her diverse histories (Cambodia, Portugal, France, Australia) in a mix of refinements and urbanities: fine silks and lace, kimonos, crocheted curtains, jeans. The complex surfaces ask questions with a fine translucency, layers lifted and lifted and lifted across different skins. Where is what's left of this silken kiss? I do not ask, where has this been, but where have I been to meet this surface? Where am I, when I have kissed? Does the kiss stay in Paris, or on the inside of my lips? There is my heart fallen in the pit of my womb; there the silk that last summer grew too old. Ky says the fabric and the etching plate also kiss. She likes the ambiguity of which is which.

And beneath the lace, a bodyshape, beneath which the hollow that the lace holds. For me, these *yoni* echo the hollows carved in rock by Aneesh Kapoor (the hollow in the very substance of our core).



Marine Ky, *Marine en Dentelle*

Ky tells me that in Paris Kapoor's enormous works had to be guarded to stop people falling in. Her own work also makes me fall. I am profoundly emptied by these prints. It is like meeting a stranger, myself, quietly, intimately. *Kiss. Where is out and in? Surfaces kiss, and fold in.* This is my country. Reams of folded skin.

*Marine Ky, Works on Paper (La Dernière Mode—Soieries et Dentelles)*, May 18 - June 12; *Sue Anderson, Recent Works*, June 22 - July 17; *Stuart James, Republican Icons No's 7-15*, June 22 - July 17, *Australian Galleries*, Melbourne

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UNIVERSE



# Black plastic dreams

Diana Klaosen peers into *Video-Case*

The New Fine Arts Gallery is a small purpose-built exhibition space on the main Hobart campus of the University of Tasmania. With the university's Centre for the Arts/School of Art campus several kilometres away, the gallery is intended to bring a visual arts presence to the larger university audience. But with a severely limited budget, its shows are usually interesting but low-key ventures from Art School students and some staff members.

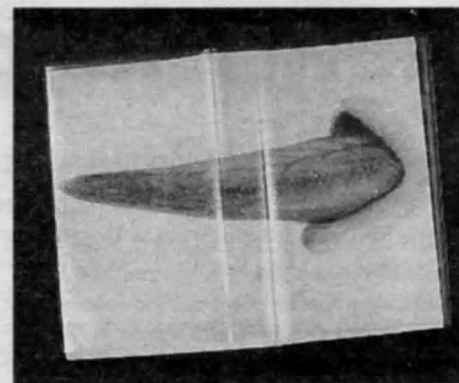
A recent offering, *The Video-Case Show*, was deliberately more ambitious and consequently more resonant, thanks largely to the enthusiasm of its 3 co-organisers, senior undergraduate students working in a range of media, Fran Bradley, Craig Ball and Nenad Alempijevic. Addressing the smallish size of the NFAG, along with a desire to include as many participants as possible, the 3 came up with the theme of working with—and in

and around—the form and medium of that ubiquitous contemporary commodity, the video box; the universally familiar, humble black plastic case itself, in all its ordinariness—something that every potential participant could access as an art material. The resulting show, it was hoped, might be able to capitalise on Alempijevic's international connections and tour to Europe, specifically Belgrade, inspiring in turn some kind of reciprocal, return tour to Australia of European works made as a response to the Tasmanian show.

The egalitarian nature and lateral thinking of the show's theme prompted well over 100 Art School personnel to submit artworks; not only undergraduate and post-grad students, but lecturers and even administrative and support staff with limited previous exhibiting experience. A multi-faceted presentation, the show was densely installed on purpose-built shelving,

a colourful and spirited whole that not only had instant visual impact, but quickly seduced the viewer into exploring at length the quirky, witty, individual exhibits. The works explore the usual gamut of personal and political preoccupations, with feminist issues, individual identity and non-violence perhaps the most common themes.

There is much humour, some of it directed at local arts identities and politicians. Suan Payne's fabric piece, *Lipeze*, with its nod to Mae West and Dali champions freedom of expression. Johannes Timmers' *Gorgeous Red Dots* is a clever visual pun: the exterior of the videocase covered in Timmers' current idiosyncratic "organic meets high-tech" imagery—inside the case, the artist simultaneously displays the actual paint-splattered palette used to create the work. The collaborative pseudo-postcard by Kate Duggan, Tiffany Winterbottom and Trevor Smith, *Welcome to Tassie*, a collaged vision of photograph and fur, claims "We have many nudie days around Tassie" (!), while *Mangle*, Pat Brassington's inkjet print plus human hair is a disturbing manifestation of the abject.

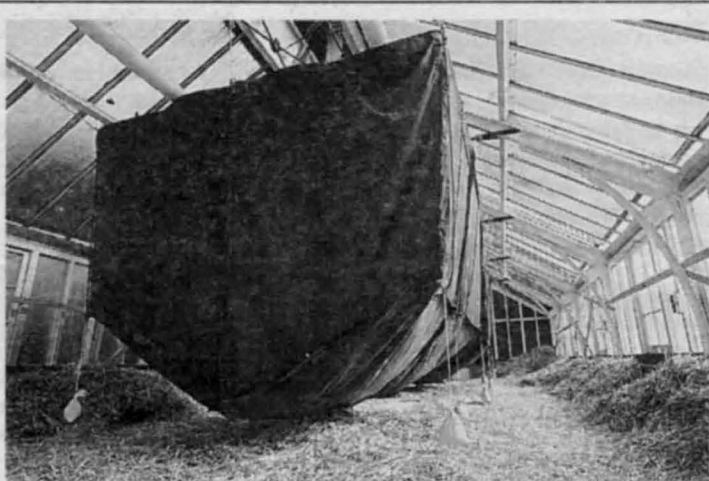


Pat Brassington, *Mangle*

The show's travel plans are going ahead, though the hostilities in Belgrade necessitated a modified itinerary. Interest has been expressed from several art colleges across Europe—Scandinavia in particular. Whatever form the tour—and any reciprocal European-initiated venture—eventually takes, it will have been an imaginative and idealistic undertaking, skilfully realised.

The Video-Case Show, *The New Fine Arts Gallery, University of Tasmania, Sandy Bay, May 1999.*

The view from outside the Palm House through a half open door entices with a world upside down. An inverted green army tent hovers over a straw-strewn floor. You enter, drawn by the odours of hay and canvas, by sudden memories of farms and camping, by merging images of agriculture and war—as in the Kosovo countryside. You see 2 tents almost filling the small building, their peaks touching the floor, their bases close to the ceiling, their form held taut by small sandbags on rope. You peer through their flaps and windows, run a finger across the rough surface, inspect the various stains. Just as the touch of vertigo passes, the floor demands attention and draws you down. It extends the military connection—striped army sheeting and grey blankets are embedded in the straw, either flatly, or, more curiously, in little cusps or burrows, as if to warm the heads of sleeping men...or small animals. The ups and downs and upside-down-ness of Jackie Dunn's installation are richly suggestive, especially as framed by the Palm House (19th century imperial home to displaced plants, the foreign and the exotic, as the artist's note points out). But now the contents are not exotic, they are literal images of power and the domestic (we are a few steps away from the First Farm), reconsidered by turning us on our heads and alerting our senses. KG



Jackie Dunn

Jackie Dunn, *Palm House, Botanic Gardens Sydney, May 22 - June 20, Swelter, curator, Michael Goldberg. Other artists in the Swelter series, see page 39*

## Suspension

continued from page 43

dexterity, performance requires extreme musicality, or it would become pointlessly showy. In the right hands it lives, with its expressiveness and allusions to earlier forms.

Isang Yun was Korea's major composer, a Taoist humanitarian caught up in his country's politics, his imprisonment affecting his musical sensibility. His work attempts to meld traditional Korean forms and the forms of his adopted Europe. His solo violin work *Kontraste*, written at 70 in 1987, begins with a slow pizzicato marked *ffff*—pluck the string as hard as you can without breaking it. These notes suggest the monk's wooden gong, demanding order. The extended pizzicato introduction evokes players slowly marching onto a stage. When the bow is introduced it evokes the drone of religious chant. The music unfolds in dramatic gestures and melodic beginnings punctuated by dramatic trills. Every expressive nuance is pulled out of the violin, but not in an overtly Romantic way. The gestures have an Eastern feel. Pizzicati return periodically to give pause. The moody pensiveness of the work suggests it's the composer's memoir, ending with a single, plucked, full stop.

Whittington rejoined McMichael for the

final work, Mauricio Kagel's *Klangwolfe* (Wolf Notes) of 1978-9. Based in Germany, Argentinian Kagel is a leader in contemporary music, film and, especially, music-theatre genres. The violin must carry a 'hotel' mute, a chunk of chrome that smothers its bridge and reduces both tonal range and loudness. The whole piece is 'muted', the pianist applying the soft-pedal throughout and keeping the lid closed. From within this confine the music emerges with a remote, slightly industrial feel, and its sober sensibility creates a mood of oppressive distance.

McMichael and Whittington worked well together. This recital covered an extraordinary musical range and showcased McMichael's technique and her grasp of contemporary form and intent.

Stephen Whittington performed Morton Feldman's *For Bunita Marcus* at the Performing Arts Technology Unit, Adelaide, May 31. Anna McMichael, accompanied by Whittington, gave a recital entitled *The Contemporary Violin at PATU on July 2*

Chris Reid is an educational administrator and freelance writer.

As you enter the intimate gallery space of Room 35 at the Gitte Weisse Gallery, Oxford Street Sydney, a female voice backed by a jazzy little jingle, asks, "How do I look?" Let's see. Inside are rows of tantalising female hygiene products: "navel picks", "finger ticklers" and "snail trail styling gels." All are displayed beside their discrete brown paper packages. Further in, an enticing array of subtle sex aids: "pleasure balls", "nipple bandits", "erotic indicators" and the piece de resistance, "the pleasure pouffe", an oval seat with a small pool of water at its centre. A steal at \$185. "Does it come with goldfish?" we enquire.

Suzanne Buljan and Prudence Murphy were awarded the 1999 NAVA Marketing Grant and this collaboration is just the kind of artistic response to marketing we like to see—imaginatively lateral, sexy enough to make you reach for



Prudence Murphy & Suzanne Buljan *Finger Ticklers*

the metaphorical wallet and disturbing enough to make you worry why. At one end of Room 35 is clear evidence of the artists' business plan—a stack of small boxes, orders for "pubic wallpaper" and "smile enhancers"—all wrapped up and ready to go. VB

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# New music on the road

Melbourne's New Music Lighthouse Ensemble on a 7 city tour: Keith Gallasch talks with artistic director and composer Martin Mackerras

In a statement of his philosophy, New Music Lighthouse Ensemble director Martin Mackerras (recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship that took him to New York's Juilliard School of Music in 1996) writes of the "specific intent to keep Australian new music alive through the creation of innovative music and energetic, exciting performance." He's not alone in this in a rapidly growing and innovative new music scene. The impulse to theatricalise music performance has accelerated over recent years (and has a provocative international history reaching back across the century). Increasingly it is no mere dressing up or illustrating of a composer's work but a collaboration across artforms yielding installation and/or performance (eg Elision, Aphid Events) indicative of the emergence of hybrids that are attracting new audiences. Mackerras has incorporated poetry into part of the ensemble's Playing Australia tour (in the Sydney and Melbourne concerts Helen Morse intones Emily Dickinson's *As All the Heavens Were a Bell* to a Mackerras composition of the same name). In a telephone interview, Mackerras says that he's been working with sound designer Michael Hewes on the amplification, "disembodying" and "grounding" of the music for performance in the larger venues in the tour. Otherwise, he says, the effects will be subtle, involving lighting and even a touch of dry ice. "The Dickinson poem suggest worlds within and I want to take my listeners there with me. I'm a great lover of popular culture, I'm involved in it, and I'll use it in performing avant garde works."

He writes that he's as interested in "the

space music occupies in the social consciousness" as in the spatial arrangements in which audiences engage with new music. The issue of social and spiritual responsibility is not always consistently audible from the musical avant garde these days (with some notable exceptions like David Young's Aphid Events). Mackerras writes, "One of the key roles of new music is to offer an alternative to the dominance of the consumerist values that determine so much of today's music programming. New forms and approaches to artistic expression are about the advancement of culture; I believe they provide us with the opportunity to more deeply explore dimensions of Australian spirituality and identity."

In a program largely made up of premieres, 8 Australian composers have been invited to respond with quite short works to *Seven Songs from a Journey*, poems by Judith Wright. The composers are James Wilkinson, Newton Armstrong, Adam Yee, Amelia Barden, Kate Neal, Adrian Sheriff, Ben Marks and Peter Humble. "These are people I know, friends, all interesting composers who come from very different places in music. Some are 'composer-composers', like Adam Sheriff and Ben Marks; Amelia Barden comes from an electronic background; Peter Humble and James Wilkinson from improvisation. So the works are in variety of styles and approaches. They're quite short—miniatures really—and the poems that inspired them are short. I heard the poems on Radio National's *Poetica* read beautifully by Helen Morse, but this was followed by sung versions. My response was, 'Leave the poetry alone'. As well I'd been inspired by Barrie

Kosky's *Voice Jam & Videotape* (RealTime 24, "In the mix", page 46) where he'd tried different combinations of composer-filmmaker collaborations. One of the composers for *Seven Songs from a Journey* didn't even like the Wright poems, but his work is a valid response nonetheless."

Mackerras' own full length works *Sulphurous Dreamscapes* and *Obscure Lunar Conundrums* and *As All The Heavens Were a Bell* are also featured. In Sydney and Melbourne only, his 30 minute solo piano work *The Waves* will be premiered by Michael Kieran Harvey. "Michael was a lecturer when I was at the VCA and was interested in my early pieces and in doing something by me. I went to the US where I concentrated on the clarinet and I didn't compose for 2 years. To get a commission from Michael through the Music Fund of the Australia Council was a great way to launch back into composing. It's a big piece."

Asked if there's a tension between playing clarinet and composing, Mackerras is firm: "They inspire each other. I can't do one and not the other. I like to write music I can play and my motivation is always to explore new territory on the instrument."



Martin Mackerras

Dominic O'Brien

New Music Lighthouse Ensemble features an impressive lineup of musicians committed to playing new music. It's taken Mackerras a year and a half of preparation to set up an ambitious tour and *New Music Microscope*, workshops which will be conducted in secondary and tertiary educational institutions to promote "creative listening."

*New Music Lighthouse Ensemble: Martin Mackerras, clarinet; Liz Barcan, flute; Matthew Tighe, oboe; Zoe Black, violin; Diedre Dowling, viola; Rosemary Weber, bass; James Wilkinson, trombone; Geoffrey Morris, electric guitar; Vanessa Tomlinson, percussion; Mark Knoop, conductor.*

*As All the Heavens Were a Bell tour: Melbourne, August 2 & 8; Adelaide, August 11; Hobart, August 12; Canberra, August 14; Wollongong, August 16; Sydney, August 18; Brisbane, August 23. See page 43 for tour details.*

## A second coming in Hobart

Filomena Coppola takes a taxi to *Rapture*

Constantine Koukias has taken the successful Angharad Wynne-Jones *Sonic Taxi* concept and added contemporary opera, ensuring the production is distinctly IHOS. Wynne-Jones with her company Cake Eaters Productions in Sydney performed *In Sea and Air* in 1991. During IHOS's *Rapture* performance audience members are blindfolded and driven to each of the 3 locations by taxi. Similar to the religious notion of "the Rapture" (visions of Bernini's St Theresa in Ecstasy), the audience is physically transported and places their faith not in religion but in IHOS.

*Rapture* explores the notion of the second coming of Christ within the context of the approaching millennium. It is a narrative, but not necessarily linear opera, staged over three sites in and around the Hobart business district. The second and third sites, a shed and a disused warehouse, have a very distinct and comfortable IHOS feel. Beautiful installations of set and performers evoke the major warehouse productions which have become IHOS's trademark. A sizeable cast, including the *Rapture* chorus, provides strong vocal performances which at these 2 sites evoke a gospel feel.

At the first venue IHOS presents the audience with an exciting performance which is dynamic in its use and transformation of the space. Entering the room the audience is overwhelmed by the smell of chlorine and confronted by a small steaming swimming pool. Ushered in to seats along the length of the pool, we watch a man swimming breaststroke lengths, back and forth, back and forth; it is not easy for him. We hear his erratic breathing and the splash of the water. At one end of the pool his wife, reclining on a banana lounge, reads her book. Tea is steeping in the pot and she is waiting for him to join her. He wants to discuss his thoughts on religion and the second coming while continuing his laps. She, the dutiful wife, half listens/half reads her book, and at one point walks to the other side of the room to the dresser and applies perfume. What was once a sport centre has become a domestic scene; he could be mowing the lawn or watching the sport on TV and she in the kitchen painting her nails.

The transformation of the swimming pool site into a domestic theatre space represents the continuation and development of IHOS and the demands they place on their audience. However, the audience does remain within the comfort zone of 'viewers' of a theatre production. It would be interesting to see IHOS confront the audience by making them an integral part of the performance, thereby encouraging them to interact with the specificity of each site.

IHOS have consistently crossed boundaries, combining opera, theatre, music and installation to present a performance which challenges traditional art forms. *Rapture*, brings together a talented group of individuals who have produced a work distinctly IHOS and refreshingly innovative.

*Rapture*—A Sonic Taxi Performance, IHOS Experimental Theatre Troupe, devised by Mary Burgess & Constantine Koukias, performers Colin Dean, Penelope Bruce, Andrew Short, Petr Davis, Debra Pridgeon, Matt Skinner, Callum Doyle-Scott, Chorus Allison Farrow, Caroline Kirk, Karissa Lane, Kathleen Stephen, Cleve Schupp, Darren Sangwell, Zulya Kamalova; departure from Salamanca Place, Hobart, May 16 - 18



IHOS Opera, *Sonic Taxi*

Lucia Rossi

## Laquiem

Andrée Greenwell's *Laquiem* in concert and on CD

A few months have passed since the premiere of *Laquiem* at the Sydney Opera House's The Studio, but this beautifully recorded CD (released at the opening) is a vivid reminder of the intimacy and intensity of an event simply staged, evocatively lit by Neil Simpson and featuring 3 women (Karen Cummings, Greenwell herself and Clare Grant) with a small orchestra in settings of Kathleen Mary Fallon's dynamically delicate and abrasive texts. The concert was given a distinctive music theatre weight by shifts in light, voice and orchestral textures, the recurrence of motifs musical and verbal, and especially the mix of expressive soprano, Greenwell's sweet, pop-jazz lyricism and Grant's dark, unaffected spoken word.

In the delivery of text in new music there's been a 30 year tradition of 'the cool' (doubtless inherited from the Beats and encouraged by minimalists), developed and maintained by Robert Ashley, Laurie Anderson, and, one recent example, Gavin Bryars in his *Man in a Room Gambling*. Greenwell frames the spoken word of *Laquiem* in this tradition but is not afraid to let go. Grant is allowed affecting moments of grief, anger and fear, but these are always anchored in Greenwell's rhythms and a prevalent distance from open emotion in the spoken text. There is no fear of the dramatic: this is another element adding to the music theatre intensity of the work.

Fallon's texts (as selected by Greenwell) threaten to add up (but never totally) to a grim domestic tale of endless abortions, enemas, injections, the focus often on a suffering child, and of love and despair ("I have scrubbed out my body/no lover can read it/can't read a blessed thing in it") located in a Serepax here and now and a France of some indeterminate time ago. It's an horrific world Fallon evokes where a woman is "skin hungry for affection", of "a little girl who had been knocked about enough", but Greenwell largely avoids illustration, working rather by a kind of counterpoint. Typically then, the final song soars and pulses with an optimistic "there's a very large day ahead" but leaves the darkness of "its jaws will open" to the text alone: the voice doesn't sing of anxiety.

Musically, *Laquiem* has the feel of maturity and completeness, and a distinctive, recognizable composer's voice. The pairing of the sung voices of Cummings and Greenwell works powerfully (reminiscent in spirit at times of the marvellous nuptial celebration trio of Marie Angel, Ute Lemper and Deborah Conway in Nyman's score for Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*) and the orchestrations are a joy. *Laquiem* in concert is worthy of return seasons. The CD is invaluable evidence of how spoken word, sung voices and instruments working in a variety of ways with a rich text can fuse into a singular experience. Not recommended for classicists, high modernists and the new complexity school, but marvellous for everyone else. KG

For a detailed response to the *Laquiem* CD, see Linda Kouvaras, Sounds Australian, No. 54, 1999. For CD contact Australian Music Centre



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# Suspension of (old) belief

Chris Reid treasures rare performances of new music by Stephen Whittington and Anna McMichael in Adelaide

Quality performances of music by world-class contemporary composers are rare in Australia and especially in Adelaide. Two extraordinary recitals at the Performing Arts Technology Unit in the University of Adelaide signal a new era. The 50 seat PATU Studio, with muted lights, mauve sound baffles scudding under a white ceiling, and the city nightscape beyond the wide fifth floor window, is a perfect setting for intimate, thoughtful new music.

Morton Feldman's music probably wouldn't benefit from frequent hearing, its rarity making it more precious. On May 31 PATU Director Stephen Whittington gave us New York composer Feldman's *For Bunita Marcus*, a late work, written in 1985, 3 years before the composer's death at 62. The extended length of Feldman's late works placed new demands on the audience. He governed the performer with more conventional notation rather than his earlier graphic scores. *For Bunita Marcus* is formidably notated, requiring great concentration and technical facility of the performer over its 2 hours. Comprising brief, simple motifs, played pianissimo, it will only succeed in accomplished hands like Whittington's. It is sparse music, the spaces between the notes, as they say, as important as the notes themselves. These interstices parallel the infinitesimal spaces between thoughts, which, now prised apart, admit new thoughts.

There is a grid of time signatures—3/8, 5/16, 2/2—the musical figures crossing bar lines. This asymmetry poses immense difficulties for the pianist, who must

continuously count semi-quavers to keep the meter. The sustain pedal is used virtually throughout, capturing the softest intonation of the piano. Twice, after a key is silently depressed, the pedal is lifted momentarily, then re-engaged to emit the sound. Often a key is depressed only half way and then, when the note is required, pushed home, defeating the piano's natural percussiveness. Sounds do not commence but seem always to have existed.

In the absence of conventional melodic or dynamic development, the music is given form by subtle changes, in harmonics, meter, perhaps a shift in octave. Frequently repeated motifs feel different every time, each unique, like drifting clouds gently changing shape in an azure sky. They are iconic rather than narrative. And as in classical Japanese forms, the *isness* of each note is revealed.

But the form is subsidiary to the music itself. Much contemporary music (and art) emphasises form over aesthetics. Feldman's music is beautiful, sublime, even if emotional closure is suspended. "Time is measured not by the numerals on a clock face but by the incidence of our apprehended possibilities." (John Berger G, 1972). The 'moment' elongates to span the work's 2-hour duration. Awareness is heightened. The paradoxical notion of infinity in a moment is understood, even attained.

On July 2 Adelaide-born European resident, Anna McMichael, gave a dazzling account of new musical works from 4 major 20th century composers. A specialist in contemporary

repertoire, McMichael's interests and virtuosity have firmly established her in the European new music scene. Whittington joined McMichael for Erik Satie's only work for piano & violin, *Things seen from the right and left (without glasses)* of 1914. In 3 movements (*Choral Hypocrite*, *Fugue a Tatons (the Groping Fugue)* and *Fantasie Musculaire*) the work derives from the composer's mid-career, middle-aged attempts to learn counterpoint. These humorous little pieces betray counterpoint, and also take 20th century modernism a step further. Thematic developments remain unresolved, breaking off abruptly, sometimes mockingly, perhaps with a quirky gesture.

Salvatore Sciarrino's absorbing *Six Caprices* of 1976 reveals a distinct realm in contemporary repertoire. This half-hour solo violin work requires Paganini-like virtuosity to produce swirling cascades of glissandi and harmonics, slurs running fast the length of the violin's neck. Often the bow's touch is so light and fast the violin sounds like a breathy, trilling flute. Though lacking key signatures, the music sometimes moves towards melodic resolution then darts away. Fully notated hemi-demi-semiquavers map the impossible score.

Sciarrino has developed a language, ethereal and impressionistic. If more conventional music is like a passing flock of birds, Sciarrino's is the dizzy dance of a cloud of brilliant butterflies, each a speck of massless colour, the whole moving forward imperceptibly, so dense it masks each individual's apparently directionless progress. At the edge of continued on page 41

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Features the music of Carl Orff and Chesworth himself in memorable and dynamic interpretations, with a bonus CD moody remix of the Orff. If you like Reich, Glass, Nyman and Balanescu, but you're ready for an exciting new direction, you'll love *Badlands*. W Minc Label, through Festival.

#### Brenton Broadstock, *bright tracks*

A double CD from MOVE of contemporary chamber music, accessible, rich and varied, with works of delicate ease and powerful drama from one of Australia's leading composers.

#### Tim O'Dwyer, *Solo Sax Show*

Wild is the word as Dwyer saxes and vocalises with bebop intensity, pace and eery layering of gasps, sighs and cries. But among these provocative aural adventures there are also the intimate, smokey, meandering bass clarinet number *Song for Kellie O*, the sombre *for Alto* and the evocative *Underwater Sax Show*. Adventurous playing for adventurous listeners. On the VOXAUSTRALIS label.



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Four Gleebook Vouchers valued at \$50 each

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## THE REALTIME PERSONALITY

### 1. Why do you read RealTime?

(TICK ONE BOX OR RANK YOUR TOP 5.)

- ☐ It's the only publication that reports comprehensively on innovation in the arts
- ☐ For its new approaches to arts writing
- ☐ For its national perspective
- ☐ For its growing international coverage
- ☐ For its focus on emerging artists and their work
- ☐ Because it appeals to my intelligence
- ☐ Because it acts as a guide to my activities
- ☐ It tickles my hybrid sensibilities
- ☐ I like the idea of looking at artforms in the context of others
- ☐ To be first with the latest on the new
- ☐ Because it gives me ideas
- ☐ Other .....

### 2. Do you see yourself as...

- arty? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- part of the chardonnay-sipping arts elite? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- the chattering classes? ☐ Yes ☐ No

### 3. How many of the following acronyms can you decode?

ANAT, CACSA, CAST, EAF, ANZAC, IMA, ISEA, MAAP, RSPCA, MRC, NOIE, PICA, SIGGRAPH, TPS, AFC All ☐ Some ☐ None ☐

### 4. Please tick one. Are you:

- ☐ A rationalist with an affection for pavement press?
- ☐ An old leftie with a finger on the pulse?
- ☐ Under 25 with an ear to the ground?
- ☐ Other .....

### 5. Do you wish you had a better handle on theory? ☐ Yes ☐ No

### 6. Unlike Giles Auty do you spend no time at all wondering whether Kandinsky was any good? (Trick question?)

☐ Yes ☐ No

### 7. Is there something missing from RealTime?

- A Horoscope? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- A Lifestyle liftout? ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Lists like "Best 100 conceptual artworks of the 20th century?" ☐ Yes ☐ No
- Other .....

### 8. How many years have you been addicted to RealTime ☐

### 9. Where do you pick it up? (TICK MAIN ONE OR TWO).

- ☐ cafe ☐ bookshop ☐ library ☐ cinema
- ☐ tertiary educational institution ☐ subscription ☐ theatre
- ☐ gallery ☐ other .....

### 10. Does the *Working the Screen* liftout in this edition help ease you into a digital future?

☐ Yes ☐ No

### Or are you already there?

☐ Yes ☐ No

PLEASE COMMENT .....

### 11. Are you promiscuous with your copy of RealTime? How many readers do you share it with? ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ More

### 12. How long do you spend rapt in RealTime?

- ☐ 1/2-1 hour ☐ 1-2 hours ☐ 2 hours +

### 13. When you've finished reading it, do you

- ☐ keep it for reference ☐ give it to a friend
- ☐ recycle it ☐ fold it into origami

### 14. Do you use the paper as a resource for your own work?

☐ Yes ☐ No

How? .....

### 15. Has reading RealTime ever convinced you to fork out for:

- ☐ CDs ☐ Books ☐ Films ☐ Festivals ☐ Concerts ☐ Artworks

### 16. Do you sometimes have difficulty picking up RealTime?

☐ Yes ☐ No

### Why? .....

### 17. Do you know of other locations where we could send it?

#### For example: .....

### 18. Can you think of one good reason to subscribe? ☐ Yes ☐ No

### 19. If YES, why haven't you? .....

If you ticked most of the boxes in 1. and YES on many of the others (with a few telling exceptions) and read RT for more than an hour (or in cumulative bursts), and you're sensitive to the subscription push in the last 5 questions, then we're happy to have you as a reader. Well done. We can't wait to profile you.

## REALTIME ONLINERS

### 20. Have you visited the RealTime website?

☐ Yes ☐ No

### 21. How long did you spend there?

- ☐ Under 1/2 hour ☐ 1/2-1 hour
- ☐ 1-2 hours ☐ 2 hours

### 22. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the website

- ☐ in terms of content. ☐ in terms of design

### 23. Can you suggest improvements? .....

### 24. Do you print it out to read? ☐ Yes ☐ No

### 25. Where else do you look for arts information on the net?

- ☐ ACN (Australian Cultural Network)
- ☐ Commercial search engines
- ☐ Other .....

## SERIOUSLY...

### 26. Are you male or female?

- ☐ Male ☐ Female

### 27. How old are you?

- ☐ Under 25 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55+

### 28. What is your postcode?

### 29. Your occupation(s)? .....

### 30. Are you currently:

- ☐ Employed full-time ☐ Student ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Employed part-time ☐ Struggling creative type

### 31. Income range for last financial year:

- ☐ 0-\$10K ☐ \$10K-30K ☐ \$30K-\$60K ☐ \$60K+

### 32. What is your education level

- ☐ Secondary ☐ Tertiary ☐ Post-graduate

### 33. Which areas of the arts interest you in particular?

(RANK YOUR TOP 5)

- ☐ Dance ☐ Performance and Theatre
- ☐ Feature film ☐ Experimental film and video
- ☐ Digital arts ☐ Arts politics ☐ Arts news
- ☐ Visual arts ☐ Music ☐ Sound arts
- ☐ Popular culture ☐ Festivals ☐ Hypertext media
- ☐ Photography ☐ Books ☐ Multimedia

### 34. Which of these artforms would you like to see more of in RealTime? .....

## COLD HARD CONSUMPTION FACTS

### 35. Do you own a computer?

- ☐ MAC ☐ PC

### 36. How many hours per week do you spend on the net?

- ☐ Up to 5 hours ☐ Up to 10 hours ☐ More than 10 hours

### 37. How much is work-related? How much for pleasure?

- ☐ (hrs) Work ☐ (hrs) Pleasure

### 38. How many magazines do you buy each month? ☐

### 39. Which artform magazines do you buy

- ☐ Visual Art ☐ Craft ☐ Theatre
- ☐ Fashion ☐ Film ☐ Music
- ☐ Photography ☐ Digital arts ☐ Martial

### 40. Where else do you go for arts information?

- ☐ TV—Free to air ☐ TV—Cable ☐ Radio
- ☐ Newspapers ☐ Online ☐ Magazines
- ☐ Other street papers

### 41. How many times per month do you attend

- ☐ live performances ☐ films ☐ art galleries

### 42. How often per month do you eat out? ☐ times

### 43. How many times annually do you travel interstate/overseas for ☐ arts festivals ☐ conferences?

### 44. How do you travel interstate? ☐ Car ☐ Train ☐ Plane

### 45. Where do you stay when you travel interstate?

- ☐ Friends ☐ Hotel ☐ Motel

Any favorites? .....

### 46. Do you consume...

- ☐ Spirits ☐ Beer ☐ Quality Waters ☐ Wine\*

\*Exactly how much is chardonnay—let's get this sorted out once and for all.

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