Amplification, Philip Adams, by Philip Adams. According to Judith Butler, although we tend to think of bodies as being formed over their heads, sometimes not, duos and trios created a highly dynamic interchange. What was distinctive about the performative realm as that space wherein bodies enact their being. Phillip Adams’ choreography in the context of this work produces a certain kind of body: one which hovers between life and death. His characteristic choreography—purportedly set from Sutton Gallery—was a feature of the performance, a work whose serial effect was to present and perform bodies on the edge of life and death. 

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Educating Professionals, Applying Knowledge, Serving the Community

Cover image: RealTime 32 was Kate Beynon, Intrinsic Defense (1998), courtesy of Sutton Gallery.
The recent appointment of Fiona Winning as the new artistic director of The Performance Space has inspired confidence in the Sydney performance scene. Zane Trow's short tenure before he moved on became the director of Powerhouse, and TPS has long been a sit of great invention, a multitude of one-off works, evolving bodies of work from solo and collective artists, events, conferences and celebrations led by talented artistic directors and general managers.

However, after the mid 90s it was evident that performance was changing—companies dissolved, funding was frequent and less sustainable, and there was a dispersal of creativity and energy into other forms—physical theatre, music theatre, spectacles, community theatre, youth theatre, work with new media, and numerous artists were now working interstate and overseas. At the same time, Sidetrack Performance Group found it increasingly difficult to sustain an ensemble and eventually its Contemporary Performance Week too disappeared. What once felt like a performance community with countless collaborative permutations across the years now seemed to have evaporated. The sense of a centre (or two) had gone, and this despite the continuing excellent work of performers in PACT, Urban Theatre Projects, the opera project, ventures by individual artists like Nicky Haywood, Playwork's increasing attention to writing for performance, the emergence of RealTime, and the celebration of nearly 2 decades of writing for performance in Karen Pearlman and Richard Allen's Performing the Unnameable. As with the drift of artists, Playwork's RealTime and Performing the Unnameable addressed themselves to performance across the nation. But still there was that nagging sense of something lost, the depression at watching the wheel endlessly reinvented at various open performance seasons, TPS as mere venue for hire, and especially the lack of extended training and discussion opportunities.

Fiona Winning came from Queensland where she worked in community theatre. She's been in Sydney for a decade. After a brief stint at the Australian Council working on the 1990 Art and Working Life Conference (Melbourne), she became artistic director of Death Defying Theatre at the end of its memorable years. The company was reshaped, moved to western Sydney, adhered to its principles of making accessible work in and for the community, but expanded not to include the interests of recent migrant groups. The company settled in Auburn with its significant Turkish, Arab and Vietnamese communities. However, Winning was keen to shift away from the celebratory, participatory model of community theatre—"we could go on telling endless stories." Although still seeing stores-telling as pivotal, she was attracted to other ways of exploring experience—through the body, gesture, a sense of space, other ways of understanding people, making up a dialogue without story as the starting point—and she had been seeing shows consistently at The Performance Space. Consequently she set up a dialogue with artists not usually associated with community theatre. Working across a range of languages was not always easy, Winning says, and her early work was successful, but most of the work was extremely well-received. She's argued that John Bayles, formerly of Sydney Front (once closely identified with TPS), is now artistic director of Urban Theatre Projects (formerly DIT) and she's artistic director of TPS. Bayles and Winning co-directed Trackworks for UTP.

Next on the career path, Winning became artistic director of Playworks, the national organisation promoting writing by women for theatre and performance. Before joining the organisation, she had seen Playworks "as the only place for professional development and providing a broad network of practitioners," especially as her own interest in writing was growing. She seized the opportunities to do the Jenny Kemp and Deborah Levy workshops. Although her creative time has been limited in recent years, she directed the Maryanne Lynch-Shane Rowslands' What ever happened to Baby Jane in Brisbane last year, workshopped her own Out of Memory (a moving, un-literal account of the deeply subjective effect of a mother with Alzheimer's Disease on the daughter looking after her). She's currently co-directing, with Celis White, a work for an Indigenous theatre company in Newcastle.

What Fiona Winning will bring to TPS is the very sense of community that it needs. She plans to meet established and emerging artists to discuss what they want to create. She's alert to how performance has changed in recent years, and therefore the need for TPS to be more than a venue for productions. That means an investigation into the state of performance in Sydney, in Australia, in the world. She acknowledges the valuable dispersal of performers into other forms that they are enacting, but she says, "dispersal can mean alienation from one's community." She's concerned that individual artists need spaces to meet and talk, something more than works-in-progress and productions. Like a lot of us, she says she was holding her breath when TPS advertised for a new director, little suspecting that eventually she would prompt the sigh of relief that many of us are feeling.

— www.performance-space.com.au

Editorial

The once and future Performance Space

The recent appointment of Fiona Winning as the new artistic director of The Performance Space has inspired confidence in the Sydney performance scene. Zane Trow's short tenure before he moved on became the director of Powerhouse, and TPS has long been a sit of great invention, a multitude of one-off works, evolving bodies of work from solo and collective artists, events, conferences and celebrations led by talented artistic directors and general managers.

However, after the mid 90s it was evident that performance was changing—companies dissolved, funding was frequent and less sustainable, and there was a dispersal of creativity and energy into other forms—physical theatre, music theatre, spectacles, community theatre, youth theatre, work with new media, and numerous artists were now working interstate and overseas. At the same time, Sidetrack Performance Group found it increasingly difficult to sustain an ensemble and eventually its Contemporary Performance Week too disappeared. What once felt like a performance community with countless collaborative permutations across the years now seemed to have evaporated. The sense of a centre (or two) had gone, and this despite the continuing excellent work of performers in PACT, Urban Theatre Projects, the opera project, ventures by individual artists like Nicky Haywood, Playwork's increasing attention to writing for performance, the emergence of RealTime, and the celebration of nearly 2 decades of writing for performance in Karen Pearlman and Richard Allen's Performing the Unnameable. As with the drift of artists, Playwork's RealTime and Performing the Unnameable addressed themselves to performance across the nation. But still there was that nagging sense of something lost, the depression at watching the wheel endlessly reinvented at various open performance seasons, TPS as mere venue for hire, and especially the lack of extended training and discussion opportunities.

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— www.performance-space.com.au
Robyn Archer announces the second instalment of her 2000 Adelaide Festival

In 1990, I went to an all-Belgian night at Théâtre de la Bastille, a kind of upmarket Performance Space (great seats, a flyover) in Rue de la Roquette, Paris. The opening ‘act’ was (once started up) a self-driven installation that rhythmically emptied itself of sand and water using buckets and pulleys. Another act was Wim Vanderkeybus, one of the most influential dancer-chorégraphers in Europe (see Aleks Sierz, page 6), with a small group of male dancers. One boiled an egg and then all of them danced with it in turn as long as they could hold it. Having passed it on, they hung in the air from straps...another test, another suspension.

I’d heard long ago about Belgium’s company but had almost given up hope of ever seeing them—until the 1998 Adelaide Festival. In the 80s I used to greedily read every word and remember every picture in the impressive arts year books that the Flemsh Belgians put out. Something was happening in Belgium and it still is.

Robyn Archer has done something very brave and necessary—she’s brought back a 1998 success, Les Balletts C de la B into her 2000 program. With their La Tristeza Complice, the company was one of the hits of the ‘98 festival. In September of the same year Archer and I were in Denmark at the Aarhus Festival with a group of Australian composers and music artists for a conference on festivals, music theatre and new music. One night we all went to see iets op bach Ballets C de la B’s latest work, possibly their last. After the show, director Alain Patrel commented wryly, “the critics like us now. Perhaps it’s time to stop.” That’s one good reason why it’s necessary to see this show. You might never see Ballets C de la B again.

iets op bach is another sublime work—its beauty is terrifying. La Tristeza... portrayed a frightening life without community in a grey terminal, a point of transition with nowhere to go, and yet, against the almost overwhelming grimness suggested opportunities for touch and compassion, and a unity through music and dance, momentary as they were. iets op bach, on the other hand, immediately suggests community—a rooftop on a hot summer’s day populated by the building’s inhabitants. There’s daring entertainment, very young children at play, wandering, watching; there’s everyday grooming, little romances, dance, more dance it seemed than in La Tristeza...and more fun, more communal dance at that. But there’s also tension, outbursts, violence, negotiations, unbearable suspense as any sense of tolerance and compassion seems forever threatened. This time the musicians, an ensemble of players and 3 singers performing Bach gloriously, are much closer to the action—and sometimes in it—than the Purcell-playing accordion orchestra above the action (save for their molested singer) in La Tristeza... The sense of community in iets op bach is exhilarating, though some of my fellow Australians found this the darker of the 2 works—perhaps because more was at stake. The festival promotion for Ballets C de la B is under the heading of dance but, as Archer has said, this work is everything—great dance, theatre, music, design, total performance, astonishing ensemble work—this is the future.

Another Belgian great, and another I’d almost despair of ever seeing having missed her Perth visit festivals ago, is Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and her company Rosas. Not since the Pina Bausch visit for Jim Sharman’s groundbreaking 1982 Adelaide Festival, is there so much cause for dance excitement. Bausch presented 3 major works in 3 separate groups of performances. It was an experience still widely talked about, etched even more deeply into the brain by William Yang’s marvellous photographs of Bausch’s company. De Keersmaeker is also presenting 3 major works. In faze she and Michèle Anne De Mey dance for 90 minutes—one performance only. In the second program, in a work created in 1998, the company perform to Steve Reich’s Drumming (a 2 night season). In the third, for 2 and a half uninterrupted hours, the company performs its latest work, i said i, dance with text (from Austrian playwright Peter Handke’s Self-accusation) and live music (from the ICTUS ensemble playing Brahms, Zimmerman, Berio etc, joined by scratch artist dj Grazzhopper and saxophonist Fabrizio Cassol). Two performances only. A necessary experience. A great companion piece for iets op bach.

Already announced earlier this year, from Belgium’s neighbour, is de Nederlanse Opera doing the Peter Greenaway-Louis Andriessen collaboration Writing to Vermeer. Europe beckons in this festival with works that pay homage to the past and address the future. In a few weeks, Robyn Archer will announce the rest of her program. We wait to see how Australian artists (and which ones) will speak to us of ourselves and the world.
Digital choreographies

Sophie Hansen travels through Japan's new media Intercommunication Centre, ICC

The ICC, Intercommunication Centre, in Tokyo is every new media enthusiast's dream. This sophisticated venue offers a fantastic selection of experiences and resources in a context that blends the natural and the technological, the idea and entertainment of new media work, and all around the whole place wafts the sweet perfume of money. There are no scale measures at the ICC, and what a refreshing, rare moment for new work this provides. By cutting out edge, esoteric art in such a high quality context, the current and nascent approach of the ICC is as powerfully inspirational as the works themselves.

Launched in 1997, with a speech—by Director Kaneko Takashi—which remains as the centre's mission (www.timeofthe21stcentury.or.jp), the centre's objectives are clear: "Intercommunication means communication for creation through mutual exchange and fusion. Contemporary society needs to break free from the dichotomy of technology and art and bring together diverse concerns, transcending the barriers of cultures and systems." Giving concrete form to this idealistic vision of future synthetic media, ICC is in the heart of a prosperous business complex in central Tokyo, which also houses the National Opera. Gliding past business men gathered around a giant Anthony Caro, one silently ascends to the 3rd floor of the ICC, where reasonable entry prices, good design and friendly staff make even the entry process a novelty.

Abundance is key to the ICC's success, for not only does it house a permanent exhibition of the best of international new media, but it also presents visiting exhibitions, films, discussions and lectures, commissions new work, supports artists in residence and offers an unparalleled information resource of activity in this field.

Most visitors to the ICC come to see the permanent collection, which reads like a role call of the most successful international art and technology teams of recent years. Eleven numbered installations lead the visitor through a panorama of diverse approaches to interactivity.

The first exhibit is the most accessible, offering an overview of the nature of the interaction which enables the visitor to relate to the level where play and can begin, Iwao Tadao's Seven Memories of Media Technology consists of boxes each containing a media-related object such as a camera or television. Only the image of the body are amplified till they fill the interface, which is the interface. To echo this group disorientation there is an equally challenging individual immersion provided in Mikami Seiko’s off-putting titled World, Membrane and the Dismembered Body installation. Seated on a medical styled chair, the sounds of the body are amplified till they fill the dark, anechoic room and create a "perception-driven architecture." This, the most true-park styled event within the exhibition, is balanced by the more intellectual engagement required by Shu Lea Cheang’s Boy One Get One computer-in-a-lunch-box installation, which invites the visitor on a world tour of the artist's life through ideas and images. The interface is familiar but the anarchy of the content is as thrilling as the most impressive exhibits and disruptive ideas force their way through the familiar mouse and browser connections straight to the visitor's feelings.

Located next to the Art and Science Chronology permanent exhibits, Cheang's piece offers a detour into the more theoretical aspects of the ICC's collections, taking the visitor from the active engagements of the permanent exhibition into the second circle of experiences which broadens the context of the work. The Chronology is a walk-over line of glass cases containing media artefacts of the 20th century representing movements, personalities and events in a sequence which emphasises relationships and connecting influences more than linear progression. Educational yet entertaining is also the theme of the theatre programme which screens a series of original documentaries, with titles such as Travels in Art and Science—A Collection of Wonders.

In this theatre, resident international artists, such as current occupants Do-Ho Shu and York des Knofel, are given a forum to present their research. Symposiums and lectures are only part of a well-resource program of academic activity building real weight to the ICC's mission statement. The curation of the visiting exhibitions also aims to represent the latest discoveries in the field. Contextualised for the visitor by the highly produced work within the permanent exhibition, these shows make the link between high-end research, creative experimentation and outcome in the form of whether they be artistic or commercial.

Recently the ICC exhibited the work of graduates of international new media courses in Digital Bauhaus. The International Academy of Media Arts and Sciences and the Inter Medium Institute Graduate School in Japan, The Kunsthochschule fur Medien in Germany, and Le Fresnoy in France presented CD-ROMs, installations and screen-based art in this substantial overview of current directions. The diversity of the formats employed was as fascinating as the range of concerns addressed; there were as many cultural crossovers as there were glaring omissions and much of the experience was disappointing and frustrating. In this confusion of new work you felt the doubts and faults inherent in much artistic engagement with technology as you stumbled with the interfaces and lost interest in the content. And yet following the steady pleasures and inspirations of the permanent exhibition, these failures appear crucial; only from such abundant confusion can real discoveries emerge.

It is in this clear-sighted, inclusive approach to new media work that the ICC distinguishes itself from centres sharing liberal aims. Generous with the visitor, the permanent exhibition is full of gratification and delight. The sense that art offers new experiences is hammered home with each perfectly tuned exhibit. The guiding principle of excellence, consistently maintained throughout the centre underlines the links between the worlds of art and business, science and technology. The visitor is brought into the heart of the equation by the engagement of their creative participation in personal, relevant ways. It is an unstrummed pleasure to roam around the ICC, discovering the many textures of creative involvement with technology.

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Take me dancing

Philipa Rothfield in London

Hovering between sea and land, the Royal Naval College was the site of many a surging adventure, including the launch of the British assault on the Spanish Armada. Henry VIII was born here, as were his daughters, Elizabeth and Mary. What better place, then, to launch a 3-part performance epic, serially staged along the banks of the Thames River. Take Me to the River, by Rosemary Lee, an established choreographer known for her site specific work with people of all ages.

Lee chose to place her work, The Banquet Dances, in The Painted Hall of the Royal Naval College. Three hideously long dinner tables flanked a meticulously over-garnished hall; cherubs, angels, semi-nude women, kings and queens. If we were to believe the trompe-l’oeil imagery of the paintings, Thornhill, we would be agog at the “splendid illusion of a ceiling opening on heaven.” As it was, the audience preferred instead to watch progressive waves of movement, executed by a large cast of angels and devils under the rule of an iron-fisted Vandekeybus corn on, eyelids and a drooping head. But, although it’s lethargy and energy, Vandekeybus one hot August night in Italy. Directed by Wim Vandekeybus; Castello, London, 20th July 1999.

A place where the child in us dreams can also mean a parade. Ulrima Vez’s dancers undertook the strangest of tasks, bent into the strangest shapes. Dreams can also mean play. Ulrima Vez’s dancers explored the surreal, the delirious, the derangement, the exuberance of the new right, and is dedicated to the tragedy of Czech puppeteers living under Nazism. Burkett felt that 30 years ago he could have been one of these unfortunate, a fear I have always harboured between comedy and politics, criticism and satire, script and improvisation, and wood and flesh are rendered fluid. This in the end was Burkett’s radical gesture, one which unravelled to reveal a human embodiment of hope, 2 hours straight. The audience clapped so long Burkett told everyone to go home.

And so we did.


The body rests, the dream is frantic

Wim Vandekeybus unsettles Aleks Sierz in Italy

Examining sleep too closely in the theatre is risky—it can lead to shallow breathing, heavy eyelids and a drooping head. But, although it’s inspired by the idea of sleeping as a state of being, it’s no danger to the audience. “Sleeping” is a key word during In Spite of Wishing and Wanting, which I saw one hot August night in Italy. Directed by Wim Vandekeybus for Ultima Vez, the dance explores the process of falling asleep, the unnatural movements, the unrelenting hopelessness of the piece was difficult to hold emotionally. The end of the work, involving all the dancers in a group movement, was not structurally integrated. This is a young artist’s work, and, as the years go by, wallace will create better and more powerful pieces. Flashback to a young woman, suitcase in hand, recently arrived from perhaps Jamaica—full of hope. Her past betrays her, her present is unbearable, her only future with the angels.

Wallace will create better and more powerful pieces. Flashback to a young woman, suitcase in hand, recently arrived from perhaps Jamaica—full of hope. Her past betrays her, her present is unbearable, her only future is a medley of Marais’ early music, dancing to silence, not dancing to the music, which was a medley of Marius’ early music performed live. 13 Different Keys was meant to be a promenade piece but sadly the audience refused to budge on its ridge purchase.

A different note, I managed to see Canadian Ronnie Burkett’s marionette play, Tinka’s New Dress. This piece was motivated by political concerns regarding the emergence of the new right, and is dedicated to the courage and tragedy of Czech puppeteers living under Nazis. Burkett felt that 30 years ago he could have been one of these unfortunate, a fear I have always harboured as an Australian Jew. But then, we don’t have to think back 50 years to find a place where we could be summarily put to death.

Burkett’s puppets lead a double life. By day, their antics amuse the young. By night, they don a more political garb. These larger (or smaller) than life icons voice (the most daring) of critical perspectives whilst tossoing off a litany of bottom jokes and sexual references. The more repressive the regime, the more the need to fudge these 2 functions and purport a singular intent. Because of its historical juxtaposition of contemporary fundamentalism, as it exists within liberal democracy (the new right), and Nazi totalitarianism (the old right), Tinka’s New Dress slide between a commentary on the politics of consensus on the one hand, and, on repression on the other; some of its concerns speak to the production of consensus—how to resist the ‘manufacture of consent’ within Western democracy—and some speak to the perils of living under overt totalitarianism.

The radicalism of Burkett’s work is in his performative style as manifested in the characters of his play within a play: Franz and Schnitzel and his inimitable “Madame.” Burkett spent a year improving a 2-hour show in preparation for this part of the work; the result, a truly hysterical bantam between these 3 characters, composed of local political references, sexual innuendo, stand-up comedy and the like, are now always available. Here, the boundaries between comedy and politics, criticism and satire, script and improvisation, and wood and flesh are rendered fluid. This in the end was Burkett’s radical gesture, one which unravelled to reveal a human embodiment of hope, 2 hours straight. The audience clapped so long Burkett told everyone to go home.

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The body rests, the dream is frantic

Wim Vandekeybus & Ultima Vez in In Spite of Wishing and Wanting

Bruno Vandermeulen

Sleep has its own aesthetic tradition—from the paintings of Horace Bocage to symbolist and surrealist poetry. As its best, In Spite of Wishing and Wanting powerfully suggests a world where the body could break loose from its physical limitations and twist and turn into serpentine forms and regular dislocations, where reason has to face irrational fears and deep, dreamy desires. A place where the child in us sleeps next to the adult, a show which awakes our perceptions. Ultima Vez, In Spite of Wishing and Wanting, directed by Wim Vandekeybus; Castello Frascati, Tuscania, Aug 10

http://www.ultimavez.com
Motion picture mission

Dance Screen in Europe captures Erin Brannigan

Travelling the world watching dance films and videos, the trek culminating in an event when you actually get to be watching it. The film component of the stage production The Last Words figured as the collective dream of the 11 men on-stage. Based on a story by Joel Cortaza, the narrative is set in a universal mythology; the prophet, the monarch, revolution, execution and miracles all made an appearance. As in Vandekeybus’ other films, La Maturi (1992) and Elba and Frederico (1993), the bodies tell the tale; actions, gestures and postures speak louder than words. In The Last Words, palaces official scurry around the throne on their haunches and a wife rolls away from her husband in what looks like the warmer bed. In La Maturi, an old man boils an egg, taking us through the ritual with a running commentary and then we are with him at bedtime, right until he flicks off the torch. In Elba and Frederico, the cross-over time in the morning between a night-worker and his day-working partner is multiplied in a montage of movements, the characters repeating actions that have as many variations as there are days in a lifetime. The common element of sleep across these weeks seemed to take us back to the body as a home for the imagination that runs rife in the rest of Vandekeybus’ work—both the pause and the flow.

One of the most epic encounters of the trip was discovering that French choreographers Josse Bouvier and Rémi Obadia, who have made some of the most successful short dance films, actually behave like movie stars and that Ralph Fiennes doesn’t behave like one at all...Sorry, did I drop a name somewhere? ( Doesn’t everyone want their piece of the movies?)

The Performance Space

The Performance Space is a dynamic contemporary arts centre where artists explore, exhibit, analyse and perform new works across all media, encouraging hybrid work that questions established conventions, representations and processes.

TPS presents performances, installations, critical forums, on and off site events. If this is what you are doing, TPS wants to hear from you.

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Address proposals to the new Director, Fiona Winning by close of business on November 1st 1999.

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Life's a festival!...?@!*!

Sarah Miller rears under the onslaught of WA festival fever.

Droll Thing Life is...that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose.

Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness (1902)

To the north are Indonesia and East Timor. To the south—well, Australia, according to the statistics—is in festival mode. What do I do with this information? Robyn Archer, speaking recently on The Arts Show (ABC TV), suggested that the number of festivals taking place nationwide over the past few years, has increased from something like 1300 to 2500. How do we define a festival? Who are they for? What do they mean in a world oscillating wildly between futility and catastrophe?

Of course, Western Australia, the Texas of the south, is not immune to this incredible explosion of cultural and community activity. There are at least 6 festivals taking place in Perth and Fremantle between now and January 2000, and that's not even taking into account the millennium celebrations. There could be more. The best way to know about include the DADA Festival, Orbit, and the Fremantle Festival.

In Perth there is the Lesbian & Gay Pride Festival opening on September 24, the Armenia International Festival, administered by the Perth Festival Fringe Society, opening on October 1; PICAs third biennial Dancers are Space eaters festival opens on October 23; and, Awesome, the Perth International Children's Festival, on November 7.

There is more! We no longer have the Festival of Perth, we have the Perth International Arts Festival (already known as PIAF or Artist Edith and the house I live in, let's get down to the nitty gritty of what's actually going on here. You may have noticed already that with the running of Fremantle and the new Fringe Festival, most of these festivals target specific interest and/or community groups. And I'm prepared to urge that they do fulfil a purpose and function even if they are a larger scheme of things—it's hard to remember that the most merciless logic of it all is that the sun still shines even as the world is falling apart. I don't defend it. I imply note it.

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No more lap lap and spear

Suzanne Spunner at the 1999 Indigenous Arts Festival

We Iris We Homeborn, the 1999 Indigenous Arts Festival hosted by the City of Port Phillip, showcased some new work by a range of Aboriginal artists in film, theatre, music and visual arts around St Kilda with the National Theatre as the main venue.

Festival Co-ordinator and Koori Arts Officer Kim Kruger spoke of "giving a focus to South East Australian Indigenous art" to show that "Aboriginal art is not just created in the desert or from the north, but that it has its place here in Melbourne." Issues of identity were a primary focus, and artists tackled them in many different ways. Koori Aboriginality is fluid, multifaceted, negotiable and often problematic and this was reflected in the works presented.

Glen Shea's debut play Possession set up a complicated and strangely dislocated lens to reframe the issues of the Stolen Generation and Aboriginal genocide. His family drama had more in common with Tennesse Williams' steamy south than anywhere in Australia. The story revolved around incest and retribution for steamy outh and it was unclear if the father character's whiteness was any more negotiable and often problematic and this was reflected in the works presented.

In contrast, Maryanne Sam's Casting Doubts, also a first play, was presented as a reading and tackled the issue head on in a clever and witty way. Set in an Aboriginal casting agency it follows the trials and tribulations of 5 struggling Indigenous actors who are caught between "no more lap lap and spear" and not looking Aboriginal enough. It uses the minstrel show format with white gloves and lots of sung interludes to punctuate the episodes. It was both very funny and confronting. Producers and directors acknowledge "she's a good little actor but she doesn't look Aboriginal enough" and so, "how will our audience know she's Aboriginal?".

A film director scrabbles "we can't bloody see him, now he's green we're losing his features, he's just a silhouette." The search for the New Age Jedda is relentless. Another Aboriginal actor looks right and has a "strong stage presence" but is directed to "lower your eyes, lower your voice, bunch your shoulders, a little less attitude, please." Sam manages to throw up all the contradictions including the desire of many Aboriginal actors not to be cast only as Aboriginal. Casting Doubts deserves further development and should be toured to schools as it raises the core issue of Aboriginality in a way that invites discussion and analysis of the larger inherent issues.

The film program, Black Looks, premiered Ivan Sen's Wind and Richard Frankland's Harry's War. The latter tells the true story of Frankland's uncle Harry Saunders who enlisted in WW2 and died in Papua New Guinea. Frankland describes it as a story "about matricide that transcends race and colour" and it focuses on Harry Saunders and his Aussie mate who survives him. Harry's glorious expectations of equality when the war is over are punctured by the prescient words of his young wife. David Ngoombajarra as Harry and Peter Docker as his mate give finely felt and detailed performances, but Kylie Belling as Harry's policeman boss as they pursue an Aboriginal murderer. In contrast with Frankland's film, Sen's is more palette, the story told by a superb cast including Bradley Byuar and Ralph Cotterill, with virtually no words. It is all in the performances, the barely perceptible registering of looks, as feelings are written on the faces and in the atmospheres of sound and visuals. It is a strong and powerful film in the territory of Kooroawa where the landscape itself is a protagonist.

In discussion with Rachel Perkins after the screening, Sen talked about his desire to deliberately challenge an audience's expectations of what Aboriginal culture is and how it raises the core issue of Aboriginality.

In the visual arts, Oldies but Goodies at Linden Gallery presented the more established artists. Photographer Destiny Deacon's work stood out, in 3 portraits of Ms Ella Pitt, an Erub Mer and Kuku woman, and former nightclub singer, who is recognised as an Elder in the Melbourne community. What I loved about these images was the wonderful melange of cultures presented. Alongside tortoise shells, Torres Strait carvings and seashell artefacts, Ms Pitt has her other trophies—black dolls, Buddha, stuffed cobras —and she is resplendent in an ocelot patterned leisure suit. Among the emerging artists at Dream Girls (Jackman Gallery), Leanne Edwards' paintings of scenes from her family's history were lovingly detailed narratives of life long gone for Aboriginal people. They have the same immediate appeal of Ian Abdullah's work, taking you right into a particular moment in time.

We Iris We Homeborn, St Kilda, July 2 - 25.

Harry's War and Wind are touring as part of the AFI's Crossing Tracks program: State Library, Brisbane, October 7 & 9; Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, October 16; Cinema Paradiso, Perth, October 14 - 20; State Cinema, Hobart, October 23.

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**Cyberistic power and human frailty**

Eleanor Brickhill joins the dots in new works from Shelley Lasica and Chunky Move

Despite their different backgrounds, choreographers Shelley Lasica, Lucy Guerin and Gideon Obarzunek seem to have encapsulated if not the actual spirit of the 90s, then some manifestation which is traceable through their works, reflecting a particular cyberistic quality in our aesthetic culture.

I read the program notes for Shelley Lasica's action situation with a quiver of doubt at what seemed like overly formal theorising of the work, in the "diffused spectatorship", "mixed sourcing" and the "tension between the illusionistic space and time of narrative and the 'presentess' of physical actions unfolding through real time and space."

As it turned out, there was a beautifully unexpected and really satisfying irony in action situation which undercut such dryness. All of the above indications might well be present in the work, but Lasica's wit, in the stage and costume designs particularly, created a drama of small events, a soap opera of moves and relationships to rival Neighbours.

Squares of dressing room lights to the front and side of the stage form the shape of mirrors in which the dancers might watch themselves performing this drama. Their actions seem at first totally unmotivated, with 3 rangey women on stage apparently either getting together or not, sidling around, looking askance at each other, organising their spatial and intentional relationships with all the human doubt, wise and surprise one might reserve for emotional bonds.

The costumes too are out there, the epitome of 90s irony. The look is poor-girl schizoid, clothes which seem to have been pinned on by someone very young, who would rather be seen as proudly enslaved to the necessities of poverty than the trivialities of fashion. Sleeves are all odd lengths, fabric is draped in neither skirts nor pants, but something more indeterminate. They have hoods too, a signature of cred. Perhaps it's the fact that action situation's often graphic, created a drama of small events, a soap opera of moves and relationships to rival Neighbours.

That same gauche, patched-together quality was also evident in Lucy Guerin's work, Zero, performed by dancers from Melbourne-based Chunky Move, although there was a further choreographic complexity here which created a different sort of pattern. In the tradition of Bladerunner, Zero brought into clearer focus those cyberisthic currents running through our visual/emotional culture. In any event, the movement style has become recognisable; a human body might be an invaded thing, having a kind of disembodied action, its own initiative almost annulled, in a fusion of fragile flesh with an inhuman and indescribable will. There is so much sex in the dancers' doll-like actions, their bodies so much a collection of will-less animated limbs, their stance speaking of brutalised naivety.

I don't think this is entirely what Zero is about, but it is what has stayed with me. The women often stand splay-footed and stiff-kneed, pigeon-toed, pelvis thrust forward, arms back, fingers held and open like a doll. There are tightly bound sequences, legs turned out in wide fourths, crossed wrists like bondage, movements repeated on-off, like faulty electrical wiring, arms which gesture to classical ports de bras in the same way as a 4 year old child's might. There is an ethic being aped here, a culture being canibalised. It is really this child-like capacity to take in, adapt and survive with whatever is at hand which seems to be indicated, and comes across in the end.

**Behind the eye**

Sandra Parker talks about her new collaboration with Margie Medlin

Ever found yourself wondering just what is going on behind the eyes of dancers as they sway, mumble and smile? In Dance Works' new show in the heart of the eye choreographer Sandra Parker, lighting and projection designer Margie Medlin, composer Elizabeth Drake and dancers Belinda Cooper, Jo Lloyd, Carlee Mellow, Olivia Millard and Michael O'Donoghue go to an awful lot of trouble to show you some possibilities.

The team aims to create a new choreographic vocabulary based on the relationship between live choreography, the dancer in space and the interplay with choreographic material on film. Sandra Parker says, "I guess it's about the interplay and the connections between them and I suppose the idea of a new vocabulary is that they're each dependent on each other." The filmic component doesn't run all the way through the piece but "it's there to make sense of what's happening around it in the live performance. The dancers appear on film along with other imagery, including images of the body."

Dancers dance with themselves and in counterpart with spaces outside the performance space. "This piece is about trying to get inside the dancer's head, trying to use film to take the audience into the performer and into another space." The work builds on an idea that Parker and Medlin have explored previously where film takes on another sense of time. "This time it's also taking up another sense of space, another time and place through using a lot of point-of-view focusing for each dancer, Margie's taken the idea a little bit further so that the POV gets blown out to take in other imagery." Margie Medlin (who incidentally has recently received a Bruce Award in New York for her lighting design) shot a lot of the film for the piece at the Magistrates Court in Melbourne and did post-production as part of her residency at ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany.

As you'd expect, offering the audience this unique viewpoint is not simple. Parker says, "We've tried to keep really clear what the physical relationship is between the movement and what you might imagine in the rhythm of walking and what you can see when you're walking. When the choreography gets very complex it gets really difficult—even for me—to follow the point of view of the dancer. It moves too fast, becomes the camera's point of view."

For Parker this work continues a preoccupation with the embodiment of the self. "I feel like it's really in there in the movement and I'm interested in finding ways to bring that out."

Similarly, in All The Better To Eat You With, Gideon Obarzunek uses elements of Little Red Riding Hood to examine some fragments of intertwined fantasies which hang around this story and give it power. Rape and murder, or at least brutalisation and the death of innocence, become lessons for a child to learn through the monstrous toys and other fantasy characters that inhabit her life. The opening scene shows a naked woman lying on the floor, and a suited man backing away, his spastic actions reflecting a kind of unspeakable horror at whatever act he has just committed. The accompanying sound collage featured both a child speaking the familiar lines, "Grandma, what big eyes you have...what big teeth you have...", and a melody from Amazing Grace, "...was blind but now I see." This man comes back soon as the Wolf to seduce the child away from her toys and her grandma.

There are other fantasies, too. The grandmother figure is killed many times over, and then magicked back to life by the child's spells; there is also a scene of sexual fantasy, grandma dreaming, the wolf stripping her of her clothes. At times we wonder just whose fantasy is being played out, Grandma's, the Wolf's or Little Red Riding Hood's. In any case, the child in the tiny red polka dot frock finally makes an effort to preserve her innocence, fights and overpower the Wolf, but at a cost. The closing scene shows her back in the same fallen position on the floor, perhaps not dead, but certainly no longer innocent. "I cannot feel, I cannot feel..." repeated over and over again gives us the sense that while brutalisation has occurred and she is left insensitive, she is nevertheless alive, if unable to respond. She is reminded strongly of that same expression of cyberistic power and human frailty that permeates our culture, simultaneously protective and exploitative, a fusion of will and terminal weakness.

**Zero, Chunky Move, Body Parts: Lucy Guerin, Zero, Gideon Obarzunek, All the Better to Eat You With, Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House, August 31 - September 4**

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Tony Osborne's POV on a new approach to new dance

Have you ever been in a theatre foyer after a show and noticed large parts of the audience articulating the verbal language of pleasure whilst everything else in the body language is saying disappointment? At the post-performance discussion of Rachael Whitworth's work-in-progress, P.O.V. there seemed to be an inversion of this going on. The work was of a very high standard—complete at times—but what I found intriguing was the disparity between experience and expression in the audience. The strange thing about the post-performance discussions was that no-one really said how they felt about the performance.

The studio showings of P.O.V. at The King Street Arts Centre affected us all profoundly and yet on both nights after the performance the invited audience was struggling to verbalise its obvious pleasure. Both the audience and the artists found themselves awash in a baral Q & A session that undermined the spirit and energy created by this fine work. Questions from the partisan audience expressed great interest in the obvious pleasure.

Speaking to Eric Attrill, Artistic Director of Omeo Dance Studio, at the second showing.

The dancers reported that theatre-director Sally Richardson had raised their consciousness—their reading of their own performance was now more analytically focused. They had made a conscious attempt to articulate their practice in a more linear manner. Their work presented was the result of a 4-month collaborative process. This involved the creation of an initial piece in collaboration with the company, and then that piece being used as a basis for discussion and exploration.

The discussion of Rachael Whitworth's work-in-progress was quite a revelation. The structure of the first section shared similar intentions to Contact (pure movement, refusing a theatrical front and showing dancers in 360° space). I find it rare for choreographed bodily contact to express anything more profound or interesting than another part of the dancer's technique but in part one of P.O.V. intimate moments and small gestures were seen and often flourished into larger full-bodied and aerial expressions of sensitivity and fragility.

There were many magic theatrical moments over the evening and the influence of the 2 experienced directors on Rachael Whitworth's intelligent approach to the material made her choreography exciting and the dancing extremely engaging. Like seeing performance without the trimmings and I think it's a measure of this group's achievement that their collaboration produced such engaging work without sophisticated production values. So my heart sank a little when Rachael Whitworth suggested that a new phase would be entered into to produce the work into a "presentable" format. P.O.V. went beyond the normal expectations of a development project and its components were more than adequate to move and provoke an audience. It will be a challenging task to retain the powerful performer relations created in the studio when the piece moves into a theatre. What a Faustian arrangement artists have with their funders and what a shame that the logic of developing ideas is to solely make a commodity. In the case of P.O.V. I was entirely satisfied by developments so far but with Sally Richardson and Sue Peacock aboard, this team could probably take their work to even greater heights.

P.O.V. a work-in-progress, concept by Rachael Whitworth, collaboration with Sue Peacock, Sally Richardson, Paul O'Sullivan & Robert Griffin, King St. Arts Centre, Perth, July 17-18

Neither awake nor asleep

Philipa Rodfield enter's Helen Herbertson's Delirium

A sticker of light, under cover of darkness—an uncertain chiaroscuro—figures emerge from the ambiguity of night in order to move so strangely it feels like Norwegian is about. Helen Herbertson's new work, Delirium, explores and presents that state which is in between, neither awake nor asleep, a state represented very differently by Kubrick in Eyes Wide Shut. This is less a landscape of fantasy than a strange land inhabited by strange creatures. These figures wear translucent black and move in a very odd manner. Their hands recite a mantra of weird and woolly ideas, within a precise groove, turning and rotating their figures wear translucent black and move in a very odd manner. Their hands recite a mantra of weird and woolly ideas, within a precise groove, turning and rotating their ideas, representing movement which is almost palpated. It is all in reverse? Moments of Delirium pass like those tiny notes in sheet music which you play as quickly as you can. This piece is not like others. Philippa Rodfield

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Delirium, conceived by Helen Herbertson, realised by Jenny Kemp, Trevor Patrick, Ben Cobham and Simon Bailey, performed by Herbertson and Patrick, National Theatre, Melbourne, August 19 - 27

Robert Griffin, Paul O'Sullivan & Rachael Whitworth, P.O.V.

Robert Griffin, Paul O'Sullivan & Rachael Whitworth, P.O.V.
The enemy/other within

Jonathan Marshall at the Mixed Metaphor season at Dancehouse

Watching Mixed Metaphor, the image of John Travolta and Nicholas Cage from Face/Off staring at each other over their guns, haunted my memory. The dyadic relation of protagonist and nemesis replays the metaphor enacted by Hamlet to Lucian, but also with an unworldly twist to Otho, of the individual to its reflection, nearer as a taint of perfection/death throughout culture. As in Orpheus, the pathway to the afterlife is the mirror, where the doppelganger merges with the subject in an ecstatic act of annihilation. The disporry between self and Other bleeds out of the tissues of dance. The body in the performance is forever denied the perfection of Michelangelo’s David: no body is at ease, powerful or erotic. In Mixed Metaphor, these fuses coned even in most passionate modern dance become the subject of the work. The body is not only anatomised, it is refilled.

In Forensike we see not a body, but bodies. Three figures do not touch, they scarcely relate. In the far corner, a woman (Julia West) seeks, but for what? One man (Dean Linguey) moves slowly forward towards her, surfactant-style. We hear him whisper: “Don’t be afraid.” The distant point he tries to ready near us, in the foreground we see an even more frenetic explosion of movement. Dressed in a giant nappy, this over-sized baby (Ben Rogan) (red)discovers the body. He leaps, grapples, moves in every possible way, his hand constantly returning to his groin in an attempt to ground the body in something: phalus, desire, anatomy. This is Kaspar Hauser in reverse, not a man who is drowning in a flood of words, but the pre-cultural body overwhelmmed with sensation and possibility. Too many movements, too many bodies yet at all the same body, the “we-which-is-not-Ieast”. West’s eyes search all around, Liguesy moves while his gaze, while Rogan on his back is poured into a literally historical journey which ends with the 2 men exchanging positions and roles in a way that confrates earlier differences. Active becomes passive, passive becomes central, and Rogan into Liguesy’s light as both men walk back away from us. Birth and death are smushed into the same psycho-kinetic space as Rogan’s skull peaks out from under his tightly ached skin: the self-reflexive self as male.

For James Cunningham in Body in Question the space between the Other and the subject in performance is both more visible and less distinct. Cunningham’s body is a symphony of balancing act, strong and powerful with hair like a Greek god. Hanging from one shoulder where there should be a second powerful arrow, however, dangles a deflated husk, a spindly weight that slips effortlessly into space by merit of its ‘imperfection’. The Cunningham we see in the archival video projected during the performance is gone. A different body, a different individual, is present. It is both literally and more ambiguously present in the form of a life-sized mannequin.

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In Stephanie Glickman’s Jall the Other lies within. Here is a body internally psychologically divided. The Other rubs against the arch, unrecognised by the self, unrecogizable. Glickman achieves a fusion in which these two figures are not only present simultaneously but and more ambigously present in the form of a life-sized mannequin. Cunningham dances a melancholy pas de deux with this “lost body”, which ends with the fleshless-flesh hand of the doll guiding his gaze away from himself. He must give up his former self and move beyond narcissistic mourning. The arm remains; only in death will his body regain its unity, returning to the unfettered different self of the child in the womb.

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Having been somewhat disappointed by the coldly self-reflexive Swatch-watch clumsiness of other web-based fiction purporting to dramatise the experience of hypertext, I was delighted by the narrative drive and zippy, lyrical speculation of Interweaving. It’s mysterious, in design (few page-turners and no swfs is this not about illustration or simulation, not another game-derivative series of tableaux), just coloured text precisely positioned, so narration and voice provide the hook, and performativity (plus curiosity and fast-track links) the impetus. Mood courtesy the track, soundtrack.

‘Interweaving’ is, first, hypertext pioneer Theodore Neilson’s coinage for the combinatory and narrative-anti-narrative interwovenness (interweaving, mingling, etc) processes of hypertext and its experience for the user. It’s also an extensive, immersive hyperactive piece devised by Hazel Schmitz and Dean Linguey, with soundtrack from the ausfyalYSSEElectronbod (Roger Dean with Greg White and Sandy Evans) now set up at the overland express site.

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Interview

Original blasts

John O’Brien speaks to Needeya Islam about A Wreck A Tangle, other film projects and the screenwriter’s vision

It is odd and somewhat limiting to speak to a filmmaker about a film that you haven’t seen, but given that John O’Brien won the 1999 Australian Writers’ Guild Award for best feature screenplay for his first film A Wreck A Tangle, to have only read the screenplay prior to this interview is strangely appropriate. The film, which O’Brien describes as a drama about ethics and karma, comes to audiences with youngish couples—one relatively wealthy and stable, the other living on their wits—and how their lives and desires slowly intertwine. It reads as a gripping and bleak exploration of human nature. To underscore the significance of words alone, this interview was conducted via email.

NI Can you tell me a little bit about your short films and background as a filmmaker?

JO Let’s see. At uni, I co-wrote and directed what I think was John Polson’s first short film appearance, called Mish Van Mosh. After that I struggled by doing various things and then got interested in scriptwriting again when I was on the big overseas trip, you know, 3 years away from the family, travelling through Europe, working, doing whatever I could. I came back with 5 short film scripts and my friend Scott Patterson decided he liked one of them, Lessons in the Language of Love, enough to put his own money into it. It got produced and we did an overseas tour (the figure very big in my career) and went to Cannes in the Un Certain Regard section.

Lessons basically follows a relationship from go to whoa through a dozen language lessons (Getting Acquainted, At the Pub, Some Handy Don’ts, Wild Sex, Revision, etc). Then came a monologue, Security. Same director. This was part of an ABC project, Close Ups, and it starred Ben Mendelsohn as a security guard in a toyshop with some dark secrets that gradually come out as he talks to us and plays with the toys. It contained some reasonably raunchy sex scenes between the Banana Brothers and a little blonde doll. There was good blue rabbit work in there as well by a stuffed blue rabbit. Fact, same director, has been travelling round the film festival world for ages. It’s the story of a suicide pact that goes horribly wrong.

I finally got the chance to direct—I must say that I see myself as a writer first—with Masseur (see Kirsten Krauth page 23), which is about touch and grief. An old man receives his first massage in years. I was seeing a chiropractor one day—got this dicky neck you see—and I realized that this particular place tended to treat older women. I could hear their voices in the next room and I imagined what it would be like if that were your only experience of touch once a spouse had died. My father died a couple of years ago, at about the same time that the Young Filmmakers Fund staged at the NSW Film and Television Office, so I put an application in with my girlfriend, the producer Donna Cavanough, and it’s done quite well too. It’s a sad film.

Meanwhile, for 3 years I lived on funding for drafts of A Wreck A Tangle, also directed by Scott Patterson. It’s paid the rent and, you know, kept me going. It is just about finished. My next project is a TV series for Robyn Kershaw Films, Bondi Banquet, a drama masquerading as a cooking program in 7 half hours. Which is something else again, quite a daring concept but it’s going ahead now and will be out in the first half of next year.

NI You’ve worked with the same director on a number of projects so the idea of creative collaboration is obviously important for you as a filmmaker and screenwriter. How does this work in relation to other collaborators such as performers for example?

JO Creative collaboration is essential. I’ve had fantastic script editors, but it doesn’t stop there. There’s always intimate involvement with directors (well, so far I’ve only worked with Scott and he’s a good friend and so maybe I’ve been lucky). But almost everyone brings something to a project; sometimes it’s to kind of help realise the dream, sometimes it’s to focus and shift the dream a bit, from the actors to the sound designers. And as soon as you get investors aboard, they want to throw their 10 cents worth in. This means of course that you have to find collaborators who share the vision and are clever and competent enough for you to trust them. One of my most essential collaborators is Donna, whose opinion I really do put bulk weight on.

So far I haven’t worked on anything that wasn’t my original idea, but lately I’ve been talking to people about writing for their TV series. So I wonder what that will be like? One of my aims as a writer is to give performers material that will stretch them. I want them to get into the work, so I think the work needs to be worthy of them. We ran lots of readings during the writing of A Wreck A Tangle, and while they only have a limited value, they do help the written word to come alive.

NI What sort of ideas were you trying to explore specifically through the narrative and structure?

JO It’s a funny question, the idea of exploring ideas. A film is a story and my basic aim is to give good story. In some ways the ideas are only there to enhance the tale I’m telling. But what I liked about A Wreck was that because there were 4 main points of view, I could chart 4 outcomes. The starting point was a collision: Two couples collide. What happens then? Well nothing in most worlds, but Orson and Rita decide to go round the block. That’s fatal. Do they do it because they feel sorry for Max and Rita? Yes, possibly excited by Benjamin’s raves? Who knows? The point is once they made that decision their lives were changed. And once together everyone tries on each other’s clothes. It’s a film about the glamour of the Other Side, of the home and steadiness, of the street and heroin.

NI You mentioned ethics as a thematic concern, and particularly scientific ethics. Science also seems to serve as an emblematic function within the screenplay, as a reduction of the idea of cause and effect. These both strike me as unusual preoccupations for a contemporary Australian film. Did they arise out of the narrative or were they things you wanted to explore primarily?

JO The little bits of scientific video that pop in and out through the film are a kind of game for me. They raise the possibility that humans behave according to certain laws. That’s a question writers have to pose all the time: how would someone behave in this situation? And stories face the same dilemma. What’s the rule here? What’s the hypothesis?

Science can be about extraordinary destruction and extraordinary beauty, and so can films. In fact they’re usually about both simultaneously. The funny thing is, even though the story twists and turns gently and sometimes surprisingly, the ending is almost entirely predictable. It’s well it’s karmic. Is science karmic? I don’t know. Probably.

And it’s weird but for all the ideas in A Wreck, and for all of its holding together really solidly, I’m not sure whether it actually has any conclusions to draw. Maybe it’s one of those films that throws up ideas and leaves it to you to work out.

NI I’m interested in the reasons why each person in Interleave makes films—is it something intrinsic about cinema itself, is it a need to tell a story, explore an idea, is it the collaborative process? You’ve said that you see yourself as a writer primarily, even though you directed Masseur, so what do you continue on page 14
Costing 5 million dollars, The Australian War Memorial's new WWII galleries were opened in March this year after a 2 and a half year development period. A venerable display which had been there since 1971 was replaced, and attendance has reportedly increased by 35%.

The Memorial's original function was to show grieving relatives the experiences their loved ones had overseas; to allow mates to remember mates; and to tell the story of a nation and its historical destiny. However, recent audience research indicated that its audience and therefore its function, has changed. Visitors now come to the Memorial from widely dispersed trajectories. Only 10% of visitors are old enough to have lived through WWII, and the ethnic composition of Australia has radically globalised in the 50 years since it was at war.

The purpose of the new display is no longer to reconnect relatives and friends, revive memories, and explain national destiny, but must now create experiences, generate memories and tell subjective stories. The Memorial is no longer the geologically hulking edifice at the bedrock of our common national identity, it is now one institutional attraction competing with others for audience share. The display therefore incorporates a much broader selection of artefacts and information, foregrounding a wider range of personal experiences from the War. And it also relies on multimedia and immersive technology to enable—deploying over 100 audio, video and sensory devices. The objective of these technologies is, in John Howard's opening words, to create "a very moving experience...to reach out to younger generations."

Approaching the WWII galleries you hear a cacophonous roar, a bit like a shopping mall on a Saturday morning. Entering the galleries there's a sense of bombardment: sound leaks out from a multitude of hidden speakers and bounces from the many hard objects-­‐the problem is addressed.) Ambient lighting is low and the objects on display are individually picked out by spotlights giving a visually fragmented, dislocated feel to the display. Although there is an attempt to create quieter contemplative 'pavilions' and chapel-­‐like spaces within the display, generally these cannot withstand the barrage.

The core of the display are the artefacts collected during the Memorial during the War and donated since. As always these provide the indexical charge; but they are surrounded and harassed by technology. The display cases are crowded with flat-screen TVs showing newswire footage. Data projectors are extensively used to animate maps and models. Few objects are left to their own devices, to mute exist in their own time. Even the dark wooden top of the table on which the surrender of Singapore was signed is used as an inappropriately screen for a newswire projection.

The War Memorial produced its own content, using audience focus groups, but outsourced the design and installation of the displays to Cunningham Martyn Design, Australian Business Theatre and multimedia consultant Gary Warner. Previously the memorial was a special experience for visitors; its unique model dromas and uncanny, sepulchral atmosphere permanently marked many a childhood psyche. This new display is brighter and livelier certainly, but it also conforms to a standard corporate display style—the plate glass, steel rod look—that exists in any number of shops and museums. There is now a bigger phenomenological gap for visitors to cross between these didactic history displays and the sacred mnemonic heart of the Memorial—the cloisters and the Hall of Memory (into which Paul Keating conveniently inserted a pacemaker when he buried an Unknown Soldier there in 1993). The Memorial's original didacticism, the attempt to convey an historical understanding of war—however ideologically compromised—and to encourage a transference of empathy back across the generations, is being replaced by an attempt to technologically create a sense of immediate, individuated sensory experience.

Sometimes this works, if a sense of temporal distance is maintained, as in the disembodied voices of Australian POWs telling their tales in a reenactment of an empty movie set. But sometimes it doesn't. The most problematic part of the display is a simulation of a bombing run over Germany in which the floor shakes as though by the airplane's engines and we look down through the bomb bay doors at WWII Europe sliding below. This recreates the fear of being shot down felt by young Australian airforce servicemen. Reportedly, returned WWII air crew visiting a preview of the installation found it so affecting they had leave. Certainly the kids love it. But they love their experience of it in the present. I didn't see any emotional transference to, or identification with, the senior Weir's film shot against blue screen, that the sense of fear which this 'ride' was meant to commemorate. It was ironic, too, that the aspect of War chosen for the most 'realistic' simulation was the one where the original experience was already most virtual, remote, and technologically mediated.

For me a more successful use of technology is in the new Orientation Gallery where a large, looped, digital video of spectacular diggers coming ashore at Gallipoli and fading into History to the thud of sniper bullets, which is projected behind an actual Gallipoli landing boat, creating a suggestive atmosphere rather than a descriptive experience. It let the landing boat exist in its own historical time, rather than be dragged into a perpetual present of technological performance. To lose of Digger ghosts (played by keen Memorial staff in costume shot against blue screen, then digitally montaged over video of the actual Gallipoli landing place by the Sydney film (Audience Motivation) grow from an evolving, long standing, visual tradition of ANZAC memory—for instance the freeze frame in War's film Gallipoli and William Longstaff's creepy Minin Gates painting.

Clearly the displays of national museums do need to change as audiences change. Technologies of video, projection and simulation must inevitably play a major part in these changes. Particularly as so much of our past is known to us through film and video anyway, and technologies have always been excellent at producing phantasmagoric spectacles and virtual spectres. Yet technology must still be made to do what it has only partially done at the War Memorial: create historical knowledge, not just immediate experience; and leave a space for viewers to imaginatively leap and project themselves into time, rather than be the passive screens for a dislocated series of projections from the past.

Martyn Jolly is Head of Photomedia at the ANU Canberra School of Art

More Screen Culture: Sophie Hansen visits the ICC New Media Centre in Tokyo on page 5
Erin Brannigan on film and dance in Europe on page 7
Dean Kiley interviews Roger Dean and Hazel Smith about their new website on page 13
Suzanne Spunner sees film at the 1999 Indigenous Arts Festival on page 9
Shane Parker: dance film and self on page 10
**Lessons in listening**

Ana Dzenis finds *Cinesonic 2* an ear-opener

"Film is not a visual medium." This was the polemical banner under which Randy Thom launched the opening night of Cinesonic 2.

When are filmmakers going to learn, and when will some of them remember, that filmmaking and all of its crafts are really all one craft? Each craft should be encouraged to inform and influence every other craft, and be open to influence from other crafts. She has a claim on the "most oppressed" title; this is the reason. The work we do in sound is influenced by virtually every other craft: writing, acting, directing, cinematography, production design, set decoration, editing, costumes, etc. But sound is almost never given the opportunity to influence any of those other crafts.

Last year's inaugural Cinesonic conference was such a creatively curated and innovating experience, it was hard to imagine that it could get any better. It established a place where theorists and practitioners could come together and their work, analyses and language intersect, cross over and create a new dialogue.

This year, the second Cinesonic conference not only consolidated this dynamic vibe, but to actively expand it. Once again the evenings foregrounded spectacular audio-visual presentations from cutting-edge practitioners, while the days featured writers and their research on those far-too-frequently marginalised but dominant aspects of the cinematic experience: sound and music. In the kind of lateral movement for which he is famous, conference convenor Philip Brophy invited a number of specialist music writers to turn their attentions to sound, even though some of them had not actively written about it before. This proved to be yet another of Cinesonic's inspired precedents. From the mercantile and sonorous tones of Randy Thom's opening address to the launch of AFTRS's publication _Celebrated for Their Visual Stylisation Were Now Offering Diverse Analytical Approaches to the Cinematic Experience: Sound and Music_. In the day sessions were equally creative, especially committed to bringing sampling collage and the whole collage into live performance which he demonstrated with his awesome presentations of film fragments. In a session after, Sheen's analysis of his approach to collage, sampling and reinvention was truly inspiring, traversing the entire spectrum of contemporary arts practice.

The writers who presented their research in the day sessions were equally creative, offering diverse analytical approaches to the practice of sound and music. Directors once celebrated for their visual stylisation were now examining for their "sound style." Adrian Martin engagingly disagreed Fritz Lang's claim that he had "no ear for sound" and, through an engaging and illuminating homage to the Hong Kong cinema, accompanied by an oft-fragmented commentary of film fragments, he demonstrated that music videos are not only interesting, but can be seeing things differently, insinuating, beyond the edge of live performance which he demonstrated with his awesome presentations of film fragments. In a session after, Sheen's analysis of his approach to collage, sampling and reinvention was truly inspiring, traversing the entire spectrum of contemporary arts practice.

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Sound. The very mention of the word should send shivers down the spines of the unconscious: you know I'm talking about terror, the kind of terror which you pay neither heed nor attention. So circumscribed is sound by our desire to ignore it, that few of us even realize how much we curtail its occupancy of our conscious experiential terrain. In psychoacoustics, "perceptual masking" refers to our ability to filter unwanted frequencies so as to focus on those we wish to selectively register (say, ignoring the din of restaurant chatter while we listen to the single voice of a friend). The unaccounted reflex of this phenomenon is that we may be now less engaged in active listening and more committed to suppressing the sound around us. This is the crux of why sound is so ignored—not because the visual is so dominant an ingredient of the mind, but because we spend so much neural energy trying to become unconscious of unwanted sound.

But why the desire to silence? We were never silent. We were never in silence. The world rings, hums, intones, vibrates—not in any geographical way (as proposed by so much voguish scientific wondering by sound artists, composers and architects alike), but in a swirling and shifting sonic-symphonic chart which documents less the cosmos and more our banal existence. To rephrase Alvin Lucier, a room is sitting in me. The low hum of a fridge on wooden floorboards; the soft chorale of blow wave heaters; the high climb of a distant septic tank. I'm doing nothing; I think I'm being quiet, but my externalised, extemporised self is cooling food, getting warm, emptying body wastes. I am my environment in the most subliminal way, and nothing in me is doing anything to pretend I am neither present nor actively producing sound.

In fact the modern age is one of terrible ambience where acoustic mass is deafening not in volume but in its very diffusion. Those who have consciously criticised noise—music in shops, unattended car alarms, truck routes near houses, etc.—have focused (far too obliquely) on rupturing sonic incursions, yet no one is venting rage against a ir

should keep digital nerds and interior decorators moist for 28 days and audiences distracted for 28 seconds, but the role of the sound in this film amplifies much about the way we perceive and/or ignore the insignificance of acoustic cues. For as baroque as the visual design in the film is (and believe me, it makes Disneyland's Haunted Mansion look like a shopping trolley at K-Mart), its ocular loudness is no match for the way the sound design forces its way through our optical agle and pierces our carefully guarded aural consciousness.

An early moment in The Haunting touches this taut gauze stretched between sound and image. Eleanor (Lili Taylor) is wakened by 3 soft off-screen thumps, which she dozily presumes to be her new-departed ill mother banging the wall for some aid. Three more bangs, and we audit those bangs as unreal and unearthly. Then 3 more bangs which shame the cinema auditorium to the point of collapse: both Eleanor and the audience know something exists beyond the sonic. Those 3 layers of big bangs illustrate what could be posited as 3 levels of aural consciousness: the displaced referential (all the sound we don't listen to); the forced ethanol (that same corpus of sound rendered noticeable); and the invented inescapable (the realisation that we might not be able to ever unlisten to sound). Illogically vacillating between a nothingness.

The Haunting, director Jan du Bont's House in Jan du Bont's Cinesonics

Phillip Brophy spooked by The Haunting acoustics

The FTO's Young Filmmakers Fund and SBS Independent are pleased to announce the second round DITYFY, a NSW-based television initiative to produce a 4 x half-hour low-budget, scripted television programs, each conceived and produced by independent creative teams in NSW.

We want to surprise audiences and renew their enthusiasm for television. We want inventive and playful fictional material for adult television audiences which exploits, subverts and reinvents the language of television.

We want to support ideas which are expressed in ways that could only be delivered through the medium of television and capture the sense of what it is to live in Australia at the start of the 21st century.

DITYFY FORUM & SNEAK PREVIEW
John Safran, television renegade, will reveal how he has broken the rules of television at a free DITYFY forum. The makers of the first 2 seasons of the highly popular SBS Independent are please to announce three further杨 films, each conceived and produced by independent creative teams in NSW.

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DIITYFY FORUM
2.00pm sharp - 6.00pm
Friday 20 November
Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTERS)
Corner Balalaca and Epping Roads North Ryde

Admission is free to the Forum but RSVP is essential as numbers are strictly limited.

To obtain DITYFY Guidelines and Application Form or to RSVP to the Forum:

Jerome Rice
YFF Coordinator
New South Wales Film and Television Office
157 Liverpool Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Telephone: 02 9244 6400
Facsimile: 02 9244 4388

Web: www.fosyd.nsw.gov.au
Email: nswfo@fosyd.nsw.gov.au

More importantly, the complexity by which a film these days must achieve such results has little to do with earlier constructs and paradigms of sound design. From the searing silence of Jack Clayton's The Innocents (1960) to the claustrophobic quietness of William Friedkin's The Exorcist (1971), spooky sound design has hitherto been based on drastic binairets of the paths to be taken in order to reinvent the cinema with the power to make us psycho-acoustically cognisant of the comforts we find in our aural purgatory. The Haunting, director Jan du Bont, screening nationally.
Sound is arguably one of the least developed areas of intermedia art practice. There are positive signs of development, though, as artists explore the ecological dimension of sound and acoustic space as things in themselves and not mere adjuncts to visual space. In Dodg’em, Martine Corompt and Philip Samartzis have created an inventive installation that configures the physical space of the gallery as a portal to a richly designed sonic world. The idea of an invisible environment, suggested by the resonances of an ambient soundscape, is a fascinating one that Corompt and Samartzis have explored before, and to very impressive effect, in their 1997 installation (with Ian Haig) Trick or Treat. As you sit in your dinky, excitingly chunky pedal cars in Dodg’em you are faced with Peter Brook’s “open space”, in which any and every movement elicits suggestions of place, action and drama.

Dodg’em cannily explores some of the first principles of intermedia, navigation and interface. The materiality of squeezing into the modular pedal cars is one kind of interface, in that it relates us to space and the bound environment of the gallery in particular ways. So too is the act of driving (or pedalling) itself, which allows us to perceive an environment and make sense of it. This is relevant to the idea of navigation. The installation consists of 2 fibreless pedal cars (designed by Corompt) that participants drive in an unadorned, spartan exhibition space. The movement of the cars, which are colour-coded, is tracked by a sensoring device that is linked to a computer and amplification system and triggers particular sound events. Forget the idea of the gallery as a space of contemplation; in Dodg’em it is a space of acceleration, well, sort of anyway.

In this space of apparent absence, an unknown world is constantly suggesting itself with every movement. The activity of moving through the gallery is likened by Corompt and Samartzis to that of a tourist in a foreign place. Navigation becomes a “cognitive interface”, a means of conceiving a place, of bringing a world to mind. Memory, too, is important as part of the navigation process, as there is no visual record of the zones through which one has travelled. Memory contributes to the formation of an internal map of these zones and their thematic and narrative contexts. The print map that accompanies the exhibition is more indext than projection, and Shiralee Saul’s elusive and allusive essay is an appropriate baedeker to this strange land.

Suggestion (and, indeed, suggestibility) is a potent stimulant to the senses and the effect of Dodg’em is to create an inner world that one ‘sees’ through the deferral of acoustic information into visual imagination. In conceiving of this imaginative, suggestive world prompted by the sound sculpture, Corompt and Samartzis have constructed a manifold domain that links the actual and the virtual in very intimate ways. The parallel experience of physically pedalling through the actual gallery space and at the same time travelling through “that ‘other’ place” is cleverly exploited in the minimalism of the installation. The nod in the direction of cyberspace is helpful here as it identifies the synchronicity of the actual and the virtual realms. In this sense, pedalling and travelling are 2 very different activities; the former a locomotive act that moves you through the finite space of the gallery, the latter an expansive, imaginative topology that brings to mind a sense of place. Consistent with the dynamics of synaesthesia, listening to the complex, sonic narrative of a high-speed freeway chase, or an injured cyclist on the side of the road, stimulates the finer acuity of virtual sight.

The mise-en-scene of Dodg’em is in the strictest sense a digital space, with discrete sound sequences being triggered by the particular colour of the 2 cars (orange or blue). As in all digital environments, the patterns and arrangements of detail ensuing from this binary interchange are rich and varied. In his construction of the soundscape, Philip Samartzis has certainly allowed the street to be the starting point for its own uses for things. It is a fascinating mix of topical (to do with driving), thematic (suggestive of the specific zones) and found, aleatoric sounds (shouts and cheering sampled from a football crowd).

Dodg’em is a fascinating work that extends an intriguing area of production in intermedia. It is also great fun. Keep an eye and ear out for when it is appearing in your town. Here comes the speedway. Incolour!

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international experimental digital film, video and computer animation art
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and Mistress Eve, Bondage & Discipline Professional
sat 6 + sun 7 Nov, Powerhouse Museum
registration essential tel (02) 9380 4255

D.LUX media arts is a member of ASCA (Australian Screen Culture Industry Association) and SCAN (Sydney Contemporary Arts Network)
New media hum

Mike Leggett enters the hive of international digital media/web artists David Blair and Jane Prophet

Whereabouts at a film festival would you find “a chatterbox road-movie without the car and without the conversation”? Well, clearly not anywhere near the hype of Hollywood nor the profundity of a weekend conference, but actually in Wax, located in the bowels of the Melbourne Town Hall.

David Blair’s theatrically-distributed electronic 90-minute feature WAX or the discovery of telelalon among the bees (1992) was shown as an Australian premiere during the Third International Symposium of Electronic Art (TISEA) in 1992. Waxweb, a “hypermedia” version of that work, then passed through various pupations including a version seen on the Burning the Interface International Artists’ CD-ROM during 1996/7.

Now in its final form, the principle of the piece is straightforward enough—“the first time user can watch the movie play from beginning to end. Then or later, any of WAX’s 1600 shots can be clicked, leading the viewer into a 25-section matrix unique to each shot. There, similar pictures, descriptive text, and moving 3D images interweave, coherently leading the viewer from one media to the next, within and between shots, always moving in and out of the time of the movie… All the perceived boundaries between the movie and the surrounding composition will dissolve, sending the movie into extended and apparently endless time, as if it were a temporary, grotesque world.”

Now that the work is described as a “micro-fiche lithograph on CD-ROM”, Blair sees other authors of the fantastic (Borges, Rimbaud) as his precursors who worked with words and to which, as a “micro-fiche lithograph on CD-ROM”, Blair identifies the bensai, or narrator-lecturer present at the screenings of silent films in Japan until the 1930s, as the proto-interactive interface designer. Over the last few years, The Telepathic Motion Picture of The Lost Tribes and Jesus in Space have been in initial development (mostly in Japan during a 2 year stay), and having secured completion funding, will become more resolutely a “unified cross-media project” encompassing DVD and website elements.

David Blair, an American in Paris, was a guest of The Bug, a title given to a series of events hosted by Cinemada and the Melbourne International Film Festival during July and August, a chrysalis within the buzzing halls of Swanson Street, attached precariously to a basement room used as the Nokia Festival Club.

The parent informed about the progress of its progeny through a pretty grim daily round relieved only, it seems, by reproductive encounters, eating, combat and finally death.

Jane Prophet graduated in the mid-80s in performance-based art before completing a theory-based doctorate: “I’ve always thought of myself as a visual artist but at this stage of Technosphere the experience on the net was not a very satisfying visual experience. However, in terms of receiving feedback about my work it has been phenomenal.”

Custom-coded software was developed by Prophet’s collaborators Dr Gordon Selley and Dr Richard Hawkes as there was no money to buy anything off the shelf—proprietary software at least avoids the headaches of commercial upgrades.” It handles the multifarious commands generated by the site and results in the despatch of 20-30,000 email messages a day.

“In 1995 when we were applying for funding, there was really nothing like it, as art or as AL on the web, and we didn’t know if it would be interesting. In fact it was terrifyingly interesting to people, which is why it is still going, even though it’s ancient in terms of the net world. A month ago we had our millionth creature made now that we’re up to 70,80-000 hits a day—we shift about 2 gigabytes of data a day and replace a hard drive every 6 months—it’s a really busy site still…"

“Probably the most interesting thing about the project is its anthropological/sociological elements and how that has made all of us working on Technosphere think more about work on the net. For instance, whenever the site is closed for short periods regular users get very upset. Or if the site crashes and a backup version has to be restored, we get emails asking about the apparent resurrection of creatures who the system had notified ‘parents’ had perished!”

The current online version that appeared in 1997 actually responded very much to our users, the suggestions and ideas they had about the site. One of its options provides statistics about the creatures. The direction we’d like to go is more towards the provision of a social space—that spaces— that currently people find elsewhere, tracing our way through the directory of users on the site. Users have developed their own networks, have even met one another for sex, and discussion of their AL proary.”

Like Waxweb, Technosphere has become an evolving project. Commencing in the early 90s as an excursion into the sublime and the picturesque of a landscape piece, its latest manifestation has become a real-time rendered, 3D animation which enables the ‘critters’ to be individually tracked through the terrain in which their ‘parents’ have placed them. Based on a modest PC platform, the new version is a permanent installation at the National Museum of Photography in Bradford, England, but still seeks the cash and in-kind investment to become a fully distributable AL artwork.

In Cyborg, as for Waxweb and many storytelling interactions, because what we encounter is fragmented, we have little to go on but the experience of interaction, reflecting, maybe interpreting, but within the flux of possibilities of interactive multimedia, assessing the shards of image and word collisions, and creating a linear whole, out of which a geographical space emerges in plan form that connects what took place on screen.

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FTO SCREEN CULTURE GRANTS 1999/2000

The FTO recognises the critical relationship between a healthy screen culture environment and the development of the film, television and new media industry in NSW.

Funding is provided in support of projects and organisations which assist in the development of the screen culture environment in NSW. Some funds have been allocated specifically to the development of new media screen culture activity.

Grants are provided for activities that come under the categories of Cultural Development, Industry Development and Industry Support.

The FTO's Screen Culture Guidelines contain information on the FTO's screen culture objectives, details on the above funding categories, and information on application and assessment procedures.

A copy of the Guidelines and an Application Form should be obtained from the FTO before submitting an application for funds.

Two assessment rounds are held each year. The closing date for applications for the next round is Friday 12 November 1999.

For further information contact David Watson at the NSW Film and Television Office.

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**Review**

**Conomos and the anti-uncanny**

Edward Scheer turns the pages of *Album Leaves* at the Art Gallery of NSW

Australia has always had an uncomfortable relationship with Surrealism being no doubt of an anglophobic suspicion of continental excess and a pragmatism which designates play as a juvenile luxury. We either darken its palette in a patriotic light or make it or make it so insignificant that anything wacky passes as Surrealist, as in the Manchurian connection in *The Revolution* by Night show at AGNSW a few years back or the discussion of Surrealism in Adrian Martin's book *Phantasmagoria*. What a relief then to see some coherent cinematic imagery, as in QPIX, through a process of Surrealist collage to explore in a serious and intelligent way the making of meaning, memory and the image in late 20th century Australia.

In *Album Leaves* by John Conomos, 3 video-monitors play a montage combining elements of the personal history of Conomos—images of his son, his father and brother in the milk bar in Tempe, images of Kythnos, the Greek island from where his family came, a graveyard sequence searching out #19, his father's grave—and a history (a particular history) of cinema in images from The Bicycle Thieves, La Jetée, Orphée, Peeping Tom, Fahrenheit 451 and 400 Blows. There are also references to Man Ray's portrait of Breton and Cartier-Bresson's image of Matisse both re-enacted by Conomos whose appearance belies any suggestion of 'acting.' There is no dialogue and John Conomos unconventionally as himself as he talks with a Buster Keaton puppet or engages in a comic shoot out. He doesn't so much move into the image, as the dialogue notes suggest, as the image moves into him, producing a kind of anti-uncanny displacement of the familiar into the even more familiar. But there is nothing banal about this process, it's just that, as Chris Marker says in the catalogue (recalling Lacan), "the images have taken the place of my memories." Throughout the voiceover, on 2 of the video programs, this point is underscored in a series of meditations on himself: the 'hypotenosed being' of the imagemaker; his old family, their embrace of the abundance of post-war Australia; and his son. All this takes place beneath a pink neon sign, Cain et Abel, recalling both Godard's Säure qua qui la vie/Every man for himself and Conomos' creations for the neon sign in his father's Tempe milk bar.

At the end of his book *Comductive Beauty*, Hal Foster evokes Breton's definition of Surrealist juxtaposition as a "shit in time" that produces an 'illusion of true recognition...where former lives, actual lives, future lives melt together in one life." This bringing together in one optic of a range of fragmented visions and revisions is precisely the kind of technique of collage which Conomos puts to work in *Album Leaves*. But Foster goes on to argue that Surrealism always falters at this point because "it seeks to redeem what can only be re-mer- at least at the level of the individual, which is where Surrealism, for all its ambition, mostly remained." Foster's own task here is to explore in a serious and intelligent way the relationship with Surrealism through its often awkward connections with, for example, popular workers' movements; but his book is full of references which reveal the tension that always existed between these aspects of the Surrealist project, the struggle, as James Clifford puts it in *On Ethnographic Surrealism*, "against opposition of individual and social knowledge."

A struggle which provided so much of Surrealism's energy and which re-emerges in Conomos' reference to 'binary blindness' in the soundtrack and throughout the critical montage of the videos with their distorted but recognisable quotations of cinema texts and subject positions.

For Conomos these images are treated like so many objects trouvées, found objects or re-emerges, just as the urinal was for Duchamp, though unlike Duchamp the signature he leaves is anything but ambiguous. The readymade functions as talisman for the object which is always lost to time, standing in place of the things that time steels. Conomos is sensitive to these displacements but doesn't protect the integrity of these found objects. He gleefully mops them into each other and into his own personal image bank, linking quotation with reflection, Proust with the smell of woodglue. (The other thing about Surrealist juxtaposition is its humour, a quality not lacking in *Album Leaves*.) As Chris Marker says, "I claim for the image the humility and the powers of a madeleine." ([http://co.art.mmi.edu.au/ Marker](http://co.art.mmi.edu.au/ Marker))

For Hal Foster, the readymade is of central importance to Surrealism where the auralic space of outsourced images, objects, gestures and behaviours takes on a significant contemporary critical resonance.

The Surrealist concern with the marvellous and the uncanny, with the return of familiar images made strange by repression, is related to the Marxian concern with the outmoded and the nonsynchronous, with the persistence of old cultural forms in the uneven development of productive modes and social formations; more, that the first supplies what the second cannot do without: its subjective dimension.

Conomos is a contemporary Surrealist in exactly this sense, restoring a powerful and thoughtful 'subjective dimension' to this beautifully finished arrangement of auralic images and spaces and dreaming up new connections with some of the outsourced forms of image-making.

*Album Leaves*, John Conomos, Art Gallery of NSW, May 9 - June 20

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**Report**

**QPIX and the art of resource maintenance**

Anthony May profiles Queensland's screen resource centre

In recent months the mantle of leadership changed at Queensland's screen resource centre, QPIX, as inaugural director Stuart Gaver handed over to current director, Kerry O'Rourke. I had the opportunity to speak to both Gaver and O'Rourke and they kindly helped to develop a picture of the organisation as it moves through what is only its second year of operations.

While QPIX was incorporated in May 1997 as a not-for-profit company, there have been attempts to start screen resource organisations in Queensland since the 1970s. During the 1980s it fell to smaller groups such as Brisbane Independent Filmmakers (later SOTA—State of the Art), Women in Film and Television Queensland Cinemateque to fill that role. Eventually, following a succession of reports on the establishment of a screen resource organisation, Arts Queensland at the time, discussions with the AFC in 1996 towards establishing what would become QPIX.

According to Glover, the immediate issues, as QPIX took up residence with its constituent organisations at its present Woolloomooloo location, were those of establishing its company practices and embedding itself into the local film culture. As a created body with no natural constituency or power base within the industry, that meant establishing relations with the Pacific Film and Television Commission, who had inherited QPIX from Arts Queensland, and its constituent organisations who saw themselves as being defunded in favour of QPIX.

The relationship with PFTC centred in the early days around the lack of definition of the activities of both QPIX and PFTC. The first half of 1998 was caught up in resolving these issues. Whilst from the outside the PFTC and AFC screen resource centres were characterised by their role in information and cultural services, QPIX saw itself as providing services in the role of the PFTC, but at the low and local end of production development. That redefinition of activities only began to be resolved as the QPIX programs came into their own and the distinct fields of activity could be recognised.

The relationship with the member organisations were resolved by the specific structure that Glover proposed for QPIX that saw it develop differently to similar organisations in other states. In SA, NSW, VIC and WA, the organisations tend to be either limited by guarantee or incorporated as associations with individual members who are industry practitioners. Glover proposed the scheme that industry organisations should be members of QPIX. As such their power is to vote on the board and that effectively makes them owners of QPIX. Whilst membership has been opened to 18 organisations, there are 8 key groups who are QPIX partner organisations. They are ASDA, SPAQ, Queensland Animators, Women in Film and Television (Qld), Australian Writers Guild (Qld), Australian Cinematographers Society (Qld), Queensland Documentary Association (QDOX), and PFTC.

As is clear from discussing these issues with Kerry O'Rourke, the negotiations of this early period have been subsumed under a concerted attempt to develop what he calls a mood and intent that educates screen practitioners in the realities of the market. What that translates into is a concern to establish workshops and other learning programs which assist filmmakers with not just understanding funding but also to function and position themselves in a realistic approach to the current market and facilitate their activities in that market.

This practical application to constraints and opportunities of the current market has forced a recognition of wider changes that have impacted on the role of the screen resource centre. Whereas screen culture generally used to be taken as film screenings, those activities have clearly been taken up, to varying levels of success, by bodies such as Brisbane International Film Festival, SBS, cable television and the move of the majors into the more lucrative end of the independent and niche markets. For small organisations such as QPIX, exhibition programs are very risky financial propositions these days. Instead QPIX stands as a bridge between government agencies, the market and the education sector. A sometimes shaky but very necessary bridge.

The first fruit of this new imperative is the "First Film" project that is currently in action. Ten young filmmakers have been funded, either financially or with in-kind services by a joint program of QPIX, PFTC and Queensland Performing Arts Trust (QPAT). At this stage, 7 shoots are complete and editing has begun in the QPIX facilities. In early December, they will have their short films screened alongside the work of the PFTC's "First Film" project and so the young filmmakers will screen in the context of more midcareer practitioners.

Along with script development workshops at QPAT, QPIX is focused on developing synergies of this sort across the local and national screen environments. After a slow start it looks as though QPIX's very practical approach to screen resources has a chance of bearing fruit.
Rounding up the Scots

John Sutton surveys the Edinburgh Film Festival

Suddenly, again, there is nothing to do in Edinburgh. Only my blurry sense of loss, on these soft autumn days, re-embodies the recent frenzy. The 130-odd films of the Edinburgh Film Festival competed, over 200 breathless weeks, with over 1,500 shows and events at the Fringe, International, and Book Festivals. With no subscription tickets, and with single films at 7 pounds (about $18), not that many sessions were full, and there is no unique elect group who endure the whole vast spectacle: instead, the lovely Edinburgh Filmhouse gathers overlapping sets of enthusiasts, some hooked into the retrospectives (Bresson, Kiyoshi Kurosaya), some following special events such as an interview with David Mamet about his new film The Winslow Boy, French band Air appearing with director Mike Mills, and Hitchcock's silent thriller The Lodger with live performance, with Bobo Tjalbo of The Divine Comedy.

The audience favourite was, surprisingly, Wenders' Buena Vista Social Club, ahead of new films by Almodovar and Epygon. East is East, a striking Pakistani-English comedy written and directed by Alan-bang, and, A Room For Romeo Brass, Sheane Meadows' top twenty-Four Seven, were the most popular English films. In this context the Australian films, screened under the auspices of the Australian Film Commission and with help from the Queensland government (of which this was selected for repeat in the Best of the Festival programme) came across as exotic, hot blasts from a quite alien culture.

Film festival director Lizzie Francke could easily have chosen Bill Forsyth's My Life in Ruins, a challenging sequel to 1981's Gregory's Girl, as the first Scots film to open the festival for 15 years. Instead she picked the magnificent Ratatouille by Lynne Ramsey. Early in a long 1970s Glasgow summer, as a binnem's strike leaves rotting bags of rubbish to mount in the close behind the tenement, a boy fails to prevent the accidental drowning of his friend in the canal. Ramsey carefully exploits the heightened sensitivity to natural signs which develops after the 12-year-old somehow doesn't get round to a confession. Because the boy, Janie, arrives to catch a morbid strangeness in the most ordinary violations of his friends, we are allowed to share his epiphany, hyper-real perception.

Childhood time stretches in the unlikely, stinking heat, and on solitary bus trips James finds the ideal home half-built at the edge of the city, an escape from which he can dream of solving the family's anguishes. But the drunken rage of Scots fathers is built into his: awkward, edgy and cheeky and caring girls around James are learning the role of sustaining their men's delusions.

Ramsey's cast, including her own niece, make the most of a spiky and humorous script, which offsets the bleak wonder of her vision. It's an unsettling and beautiful first feature, a kinder picture of hopeless Glasgow youth than that of Gillies Mackinnon's Small Face. It is an exercise in the frustration Ramsey's ability, evident in shorts such as the admired Giasman, to combine urban realism with a tolerance of everyday mysteries, and to find the vast and adventurous sympathies are only a little compromised by an easy ending which allows the protagonist 2 incompatible futures. It's thrilling to learn that Ramsey is now working on an adaptation of Alan Warner's first novel Monarch Callar, an awesome and perverse tale of death and dance.

An adaptation brought the biggest hype of the festival, the presence of Tim Roth for the UK premiere of his reductive version of Alexander Stuart's The War Zone. At the Q&A session, in front of his remarkable cast and crew, Roth's confidence that his film depicts the only emotional truth about incest and abuse was disconcerting. After Stuart, whose diary of the screenplay's history is a fascinating addendum to the new edition of his book, had carefully praised the film's simplicity, Roth repeated his charge that the novelist had "got some things wrong", since "after all, Alex, you'd just never been abused, had you?" In eliminating the multiplicity of Stuart's rich, psychological plot, Roth has brought the film's focus to bear on one dimension alone so admirably that its initial screenings on general release in Edinburgh later this year are to be followed by discussion sessions on counselling survivors.

Opinions were divided over Wonderland, a three-sisters tale set in London which is Michael Winterbottom's first film since Welcome to Sarajevo. Some were charmed by the immediacy of the hand-held camera, and by the attempt to catch the separate but interconnected emotional confusions of a whole family. For me, despite memorable performances by Gina McKee as the disappointed, sassy middle sister, and Kika Markham as the furious, trapped mother, the film is as sentimentally sensational as his last, and of the terrible humour with which Mike Leigh might face the pain of such a lost city tribe, Winterbottom's experiments with improvisation leaves us with a twee and bulging plot designed for maximal moral coincidence. When youngest sister's sad, lonely son briefly escapes the loose care of his estranged, sissy-waify father in order to see the fireworks he's been promised, he must be mugged. And when eldest sister is abandoned by her angsty-ridden man days before her child is due, he must be paid back with a gory motorbike accident, and then after surgery be wheeled by chance down the same hospital corridor as the new baby (yes, really).

Massive Attack's album Mezzanine has just become one of the most over-used soundtracks of the decade, its pulses of beauty and danger appearing not just in Doug Liman's popular Go but also in BBC Scotland's weekly roundup of Scots politics. But its use in Wonderland is particularly unhappy: only the 2 black characters are lucky enough to be allowed it, while everyone else seems to be roaming London in the desperate but vain hope of escaping the ghastly Michael Nyman soundtrack. Winterbottom gives Nyman's unusually anodyne, soaring flights to accompany his paced and isolated characters, often slowing their pace to accelerate the bustling urban surroundings in the manner of Luke Losey's 1996 video with Tilda Swinton for Orbital's The Box.

A fine set of figures—winners

David Baker reports on the 8th Brisbane International Film Festival

Every year the temptation arises to proclaim BIFF '99 as quite simply a film festival of truly "international significance." It remains unlikely that Brisbane's film-going public, with its self-conscious and cosmopolitanism, will rush to endorse such a declaration. By a number of yard-sticks however, the 1999 festival can easily be called a success: it drew the largest patronage in its history (26,000 seats were filled over the course of 10 days), was managed professionally and efficiently, screened an interesting and varied program of over 100 features and more than 50 shorts, and included a series of seminars and lectures on diverse topics.

As well as showcasing new features, shorts, animation, experimental film and documentaries from all round the world, the festival ran an interesting series of specialist screenings and seminars. This year's seminars included a focus on the work of Larry Cohen, a retrospective of surrealist cinema from the 1920s to the present, as well as a couple of seminars by US feminist film scholar B. Ruby Rich.

Tear sheets (with a one to five scale) were distributed at the beginning of each film. The Festival 'top five ' calculated were distributed at the beginning of each film.

One criticism has been made over the over and over to the conference organisers. Given the extremely close connection between film culture in Brisbane and the 3 major tertiary education institutions, it is quite absurd that the festival is scheduled early in the semester two. No adequate explanation has ever been given why it is not scheduled a month earlier when the significant tertiary education population is free to attend.

BIFF '99 has left 2 enduring memories. The last few days of the festival coincided with the first few days of the Brisbane Exhibition. Due to fire restrictions, festival patrons were asked to wait outside the cinema. Folk from the country who had come into town for the exhibition, unaware of the film festival, stood bemused by the spectacle of long lines of fashionably dressed people (most in various shades of black) in Queen Street. The second enduring memory is that while festival screenings took place in Cinemas 1, 3 and 4 of the Hoyts Regent, for the duration of the festival, quietly playing in Cinema 2 and standing as an enduring monument to motion pictures, was Gone With the Wind.

8th Brisbane International Film Festival, July 29 to August 8 1999

David Baker teaches in the School of Film, Media and Cultural Studies at Griffith University
Melbourne, mavericks, memories and millennial mystification

Adrian Danks covers the Melbourne International Film Festival

I have intentionally waited some time to write this review because I don't want to forget and let settle the rush of images and sounds—many not so good, some unsettling, others bleed one into the other—that constitute the hard work of film festival attendance. I also want to be able to put into perspective the compulsiveness of such an event and let the day-through-night rush of images rush one rushes to see, that one can't miss, but which pass by almost without interest when seen on SBS a few weeks later. The festival has grown, in terms of coverage, from last few years to a size where it is virtually impossible to see the majority of films on show (and of course this, in many ways, a good thing, particularly as it allows you to avoid all American independent films).

Although the festival can still constitute a journey of discovery, strategic negotiation of the screening schedule (and the ticketing system) means that the festival feels somewhat pre-digested. You can, at times, lack a sense of openness, a willingness to delve into unknown territory and play things by ear. This openness (often to distraction) can sometimes be indicated by the number of films you walk out on. In 1999, sadly, this was a very short list: Sadie Benning's Flat Is Beautiful, Wonderland, and Sono's Peace. To that list has been added those films I wish I'd walked out on, but should I think about, such as veteran Iranian director Dariush Mehrjui's turbulent and somewhat embarrassing writer's block movie The Pear Tree. I initially thought this way, also, about Alexander Sokurov's Moloch. But retrospectively, the strange banality and weird sometimes embarrassing writer's block movies (the greatest weakness of recent fiction) can sometimes be indicated by ear. This openness (often to distraction) means that the festival feels palpable, but often quite pleasing, slowness (a contemplativeness counter to the actual activity that a film festival often requires).

Eventually, and I want to be positive here, what stood out in the festival were particular techniques, specific narratives, and the lingering look that offers palatable, but often quite pleasing, slowness (a contemplativeness counter to the actual activity that a film festival often requires). The greatest experiences were found in those films which took their time, and which let images and scenarios unfold and linger. The most sustained, controlled and beautiful film of the festival was Hou Hsiao-Hsien's Flowers of Shanghai. Composed entirely, in my memory at least, of single takes of varied lengths each of which fades to black, the film offers a set of lush, dense and contemplative scenes. This may make the film sound overly formal, and it is, but there is much tension in the organisation of characters and objects in space, the subtle tracking of the camera, and the suspense determined by the endlessly varied length of each take. The camera's distance from its 'subject', the richness of individual compositions, and the sense of witnessing the end of things through a kind of opium haze presented a much more evocative sense of the end of an era than any of the trumped-up films in the "2000 Seen by..." spotlight. This sense of melancholy and gentle finality was only matched by the beautiful final scenes, especially the vaudeville dances of Eric Rohmer's Autumn Tale.
Reviews

Old heads, young bodies

Kirsten Krauth tests the virtues of the new generation short at NSWFTO screenings

How in its second year, The Young Filmmakers Fund Film Festival (organised by the NSW Film and Television Office) recently showcased the work of 15 filmmakers. The funding initiative, established in 1996, has enabled NSW-based filmmakers between the ages of 18 and 35 to receive grants for the (post-)production of short films in any format—fiction, documentary, experimental—and even low budget features are considered. A distinct feature is that team members must include at least one person (usually the director or producer) who has little or no experience in film or television. A glance at the collective experience of the participating filmmakers makes you wonder to what extent this is the case.

The Sydney scene is clogged with filmmakers eager to write and direct short films. The Metro Production Group’s regular meetings and increasingly large network of writers, directors and crew eager to swap their work, should help these filmmakers. Films that aren’t purely short films but hints at a change in attitude of budding filmmakers and audience alike. Unlike the fun, zany, hyper-podic arthouse of the Super 80s collective and their ilk, many of these shorts attempt at spectacle to prove this. More should aim for titles of more than one word.

Nadia Tass gave a hard-nosed sermon on film about inner city struggling artsits / wankers. Grisha Dolgopolov swans with celebs at the WA Screen Art Awards Spring. John O’Brien’s Masseur appeared to be little more than swoon appeal. Perhaps this reflects a closeness to grandparental and the inevitable grief of losing them (it’s often said that people who console themselves that they grew older, especially men, and they are more likely to begin recounting memories, opening up to their grandchildren rather than their sons and daughters), or a more cynical response would be that these films are more marketable to film festival audiences and the broader community.

Heaven on the Fourth Floor, I Was Robert Mitchum, Masseur and Tullp all focus, sometimes sentimentally, on ageing, death, grief and nostalgia.

I Was Robert Mitchum starts with a close-up of a golden chandelier and soft voices from the screen, iconic frames and old time movies. If you love Robert Mitchum, who’s not, you won’t lose a second. As a boy, he sat in the cinema for hours, experiencing “the excitement of not knowing whether [he] would be thrown into romance or danger.” In his bed, in a house behind the cinema, the voices of his favourite actors drifted over him. What holds this film together, and distinguishes it in theme from films like Cinema Paradiso, is that the central character has gone blind and his voiceover (Grey White’s seductive composition/sound design) becomes as much about the cinema experience, the “elegant and lonely” who inhabit the dark cavern, as about the films. Shot from the screen looking into the cinema, small narratives emerge, emotic and enveloping. When Allen returns to the cinema for the first time after losing his sight (he felt he no longer belonged), his memories and feelings are heightened as he hears the sounds on next (next to him too, as couples make love, and have clandestine affairs) and becomes Robert Mitchum, embodying his power and tenderness. “This is my film, my moment,” he says. “I was Robert Mitchum” invites repeated viewings for its lyrical hints of memory, love of the cinema, and sense of rebirth.

Masseur, too, is a meditative experience about healing hands and the importance of touch, and the flimsy notion of a body being able to just evaporate (see the interview with the film’s director John O’Brien on page 13). An old man has a massage. Filmed in red earth and blue tones, framed by a huge palm (its leaves seem to grow along the wall), a man strips tentatively to his underpants. As the masseur kneads, the camera lovingly traces strong knuckles, fingertips over sunspotted flesh. Silence...except for slapping and pummelling and the sudden words from the old man’s mouth, scattered and machine gun like. The younger man’s touch pushes his deep-blue grief up from the belly and spine through stiff joints into safe space: “You’ve got good hands mate.”

Dealing with a similar topic but in a sentimental and clichéd way is Rachel Griffith’s Tullip. Elegantly filmed with good production design, Tullip looks like an extended milk commercial. Milk. Getting any? Milk. Legendary stuff. A real crowd pleaser. Opening, kookaburras go off and currawongs gurgle. Nice kindly old lady milks cow (Tulp, a genuinely surprisingly Brahman). At any moment I expect the quintessential loveable fair skin Aussie actor to come in and kiss his wife, and lo and behold, there’s Bud Tingwell. A friend described this film as quaint, and there’s really no other word: nice old ladies do grieving husband’s washing and put brassied steak in the fridge for his dinner; shary 50s automobiles disappear into the kash green countryside; Bud sits on his perfect languorous verandah; give me a home among the gum trees, etc. Tullp puts in a spirited performance and, in a nice touch, Bud dresses in his wife’s clothes, ostensibly to trick the cow so he can milk her (oh Tullp, I thought you’d be smarter than that) but more to reclaim his connection with her spirit, to recognise what she has that he’s lost.

I want to be wrapped up in film too, become Robert Mitchum or Bud Tingwell, but I can’t when I hear currawongs. They remind me too much of Neighbours, and who wants to feel safe in the cinema.

Young Filmmakers Fund Festival, Chauvel Cinema, Sydney, July 24 - 25. Made, director Andrew Murray; Heaven, on the Fourth Floor, director Mark Bellamy; I Was Robert Mitchum, writer-director Tim SImde, Lulu Awaiting, writer-director Andrew Sou Masseur, writer-director John O'Brien; The Piano Bomb Detective's Last Case, writer Adrian Van der Velde, director Adam Blaklock; Tullp, writer-director Rachel Griffiths. Other films screened: An Irishman Walks into a Pub, Bloodbord, Burnout, Don't Try This At Home (The Signal Box). Dust to Dust, Fast Buck, My Sister the Tree, Recycled, The Man in the Iron Mask, and War Story.

Taking the Children.

Swooning with Diver Dan

Grisha Dolgopolov swans with celebs at the WA Screen Art Awards

Screen culture is alive and well in WA. The 13th Western Australian Screen Art Awards were an attempt at spectacle to prove this and give the WA screen industry a national profile. David Bridie’s was the highest profile film to appear for to be little more than swoon appeal. Rosemary Bight returned to her home state to lend some low-budget production cred with an inspiring presentation of the scope of the process of making Fresh Air—a film poem about inner city struggling artists/wankers. Nadia Tass gave a hard-nosed sermon on film facts and fictions, while Peter Castaldi had some witty and yet disarmingly opening-night banter.

The awards were an attempt to examine the WA screen industry and celebrate screen culture; and a chance for the modest film industry to mingle and swan around cinematic foyers. Ample viewing opportunities ranged from documentary to experimental films and even commercials. A taste of the St Kilda and Swanbourne media festivals was on offer. There were workshops and interesting discussions.

The awards ceremony was appropriately located at the State Cinema. I Promised, a 13 minute classic chamber piece with 2 actors in 3 scenes exploring fragile and flexible. Had this been a hard-core film night, Martin Wilson won two awards for Best Director and Adrian Mulraney won the Acting and Writing awards. I Promised is a very good film that should be seen next. Taking the Children writer-director Chris Webster’s beautifully shot Pilbara Pear picked up a couple as did Amy McDowell for Aunt Nancy and the Easy Play—a parochially quirky domestic drama about mania. Thankfully, there were not too many parochially quirky shorts. The amazing 6-part History: Wildlife of the Malaysian Rainforest won the Documentary category, although there were a number of strong contenders including Andrew William’s and Anna Haebech’s potent poetic essay, Taking the Children. This was a film document about WA’s stolen children that explained and contextualised some of the history and policies of the day. It was full of memorable details. There was a plethora of films to be seen and I only wish that there was a law for short films to put a budget tag at the end of the credits to make evaluation a little easier.

The awards are an important event for WA filmmakers who works in conditions of low public entrenchment (surprisingly not everyone wants to be a filmmaker in WA), the allure of more work in the east and the lack of exposure to a broader forum. Yet, this year they threatened to descend to celebrity festivities and an obsessive obsession to the East Coast due to some odd structural perceptions. This was epitomised in the Great State Debate where an artificial contrivance was devised between continued on page 24.
Pulsing chiascuro, palpable decay
Grisha Dolgopolov on Anemone and the second wave of digital image-making

Anemone is a collection of 14 Australian digital video and animation works by 14 artists and directors presented at a film festival. The works are accompanied by an essay from Grisha Dolgopolov. The essay is a reflection on the second wave of digital image-making and its implications for contemporary art.

The curator, Cameron Pak, and Ross Mason, compare the onemone with modern imagemakers who are inundated in a sea of information, but who pick and choose from this galaxy of possibilities in a process re-signification, re-decoding and re-assembling.

The works distinguish themselves by vibrant combinations of the trauma of things past, present and future. The works explore themes such as global warming, consumerism, and the relationship between the individual and the collective.

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Alicia Talbot talks about principles and process in The Cement Garage project in Sydney's west

Alicia Talbot, a performer, devisor and director in contemporary performance, is passionate about her performance work with young homeless people. It's unusual in several ways—the homeless won't be performing it and it's not based directly on their stories, but they are, in various ways, its authors and they get to play dramaturg, advising on action, text and ideas.

Harris Park is the site, says Talbot, for the only youth centre in the enormous distance between Camperdown and Penrith in Sydney's west. After the Burdekin report, the centre has a multidisciplinary team comprising an artist as well as education, medical, health promotion and crisis workers responding to the needs of the 12 - 25-year-old homeless (or those at risk). Health is the focus of the centre, given that these young people are not likely to access mainstream medical services. Prior to Alicia's arrival the centre had a visual artist working through drawing, ink screening and comics.

Now there's been a shift to performance and the writing and visual and aural components that go with it. However, Talbot is emphatic that she is not using the traditional community theatre model. Nor is it easy to do so under circumstances where participants are more worried about where they're going to sleep, get their next hit from, or whether or not they'll be in jail. Different ways of working have to be found that don't rely on the workshop concept.

Talbot's principle is to "work with a team of professional artists in consultation with young people. The young people become the experts, the authors, and we pay them for their valued expertise. We work from their material to produce a performance event."

Another departure from the conventional model is in not working from the personal stories of these young people. "Working from stories can be exploitative. It can appear to us as the centre of their work, but it's not, or only as a by-product. Do these people want to see their lives turning up on stage now or in a few years' time? You have to be respectful. But you don't want massive drug rave stories, you don't want them to pathologise their problems. So the process, through informal contact, is to discuss concepts like belonging and not belonging, safety and choice. Of course, stories come out of the process, but they're not the starting point."

From the discussions, ideas and stories are passed on to the performers, "for example about feeling safe in the lock up after being arrested and before being jailed", and these are improvised on "with the kids watching and a 'consult'." What's happening between these 2?...Why are you picking up that jacket...it's someone else's.' They're offering dramaturgical advice.

"We use the centre itself as an impetus, for example the 8 page referral form as a prompt, interviewing the performers as an improvisation and listening to the kids' responses to it. It tells us too how workers in this service relate. Other staff have a look and book in to sessions."

How does it all go? "Smoothly—rule with a bit of an iron hand. We offer respect, confidentiality and everyone's getting paid. You work for 2 hours or not. You have to book in. Payment means you value something. At $20 per hour it's token but when you're living on $140 per fortnight..."

"Given the nature of the lives of these people, how do you get continuity in the process? There are 8-10 young people in a 'consult', 3 or 4 attend all the sessions. The same people start coming. There's food, showers, a laundry and a drop-in every afternoon. The rehearsal is onsite and they peek in or are invited to come in."

The finished work, The Cement Garage, will also be performed at the centre. "I want to work with the site in a bare way as opposed to turning it into a mini-theatre. There'll be raw action and sound, the garage, the roller door, the car park (with lounge eating), the train station in the background, and a platform with 2 sound artists on it. The performers are Carlos Russell, Morgan Lewis, Bernadette Regan, Rose Entler and Nik Wishart. Cainlin Newton-Broad [artistic director PACT Youth Theatre] is advising and Sam James is working with found lighting. The audience will be the homeless, groups from refuges, detox units, artists and other members of the public."

The Cement Garage is, like Urban Theatre Projects, another example in the west of the continuing involvement of members of Sydney's performance community working innovatively within the broader community.

The project is supported by the Australia Council Theatre Fund, NSW Ministry for the Arts, St. Georges Youth Health Service, part of Western Sydney Area Health.
Don't feel the animals

Adam Broinowski on Kantanka's brush with the politics of censorship in Lismore

Lismore—where the tree roots hang from their trunks like clusters of penises and the soil is moistest in most. A town of many rivers. The local Bundjalung people call it the place of many ways. It was there a show called The Eye by Theatre Kantanka was performed on Magellan Street in the centre of Lismore for the year-round Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA) festival.

The Eye is an all ages show which translates a combination of The Cyclops by Escher, Homer's tale from The Odyssey into a modern Australian outdoor spectacle. A truck is Odyssey's ship, providing sheep, the icon barby, fake grass, wine casks of cab sav, and the iconic barby. The Cyclops himself, once known as the terrible giant Polyphemus, has been re-configured into a great metal clown is an all ages show which translates a combination of The Cyclops by Escher, Homer's tale from The Odyssey into a modern Australian outdoor spectacle. A truck is Odyssey's ship, providing sheep, the icon barby, fake grass, wine casks of cab sav, and the iconic barby. The Cyclops himself, once known as the terrible giant Polyphemus, has been re-configured into a great metal clown.

The Eye, a free family show, opens to a swelling crowd of local parents and children at the respectable hour of 7.30pm. Selenus, a shepherd satyry adorned with a large black swinging penis, suffers from an excesive male sexual desire. As he shears the Cyclops' sheep he buggers them a little. All is well and the children laugh. Odyssey and company arrive. They want to fix their truck. Needing some respite from the road, Odyssey swaps Selenus some cab sav for a fluffy sheep which he cooks with his mates on the barby. Selenus gets happily off his face. No problem. Suddenly the Eye appears. Discovering one of his lovelies has been eaten he reacts payment by eating a

human. With pleas of mercy falling on deaf ears and the truck still on the blink, Odyssey concocts an escape. Blackmailing a hung-over Selenus upon pain of death, Odyssey and Co, prepare a feast for the tyrant. The Eye is wined and dined until it is groaning in carnal covet with Selenus. Odyssey and his men use the moment to poke a burning stake through its pupil. As the oar surfs liquid flame the Cyclops cries blue murder. They escape in their truck. The little man inside the Eye tumbles from his mobile media machine. A he hear the Cyclops ' heep he...

But someone complains the show is obscene. What was obscene? The unmistakable tune of carnal knowledge groaned by the Cyclops? Simulations of sex can rouse excited feelings of irresponsible lust in audiences, threatening the security and health of light-knit communities. Was it the large black swinging schlong of the satyry? Or the simulated cannibalism? In an era when technology is religion, representing the Cyclops as a megalomaniacal media magnate who eats people is saying God is a cannibal. That's blasphemy. What about bestiality? Buggery, whether simulated or not makes Australians uncomfortable. The love of sheep runs deep in the Australian psyche, so performers impersonating sheep being buggered is downright depraved. Perhaps that was it.

 Apparently, the complainant thought the show obscene because it depicted bestiality to an audience of children. When a show is deemed to be obscene it is closed down and the person responsible, in this case NORPA artistic director, Lyndon Terracini, arrested. However, the policemen who responded to the complaint appeared to enjoy The Eye. No one was arrested and there were no more complaints. However, an article in The Northern Star appeared stating that The Eye had been changed upon police request and that an organisation sponsoring NORPA would require the screening of scripts before supporting projects in the future. Both of these claims by the newspaper were untrue. It's interesting that all of this was happening in the context of a mayoral election. The current Mayor was "won" by 700 votes, but in fact, lost on preferences to a right wing candidate. It has been said the Bible Belt runs from Lismore to Tweed Heads. However, despite the fundamentalists, The Eye was a success, said Lyndon Terracini, attracting an audience of 3,000, one of the best turnouts for an event of this kind.

There are more reasons than are immediately obvious for an obscenity complaint. Unsuitability for children is a tool which can be used to censor outdoor productions and call for greater censorship in general. The term Rural Australia, touted by politicians as the place for political and economic reform, is not a homogenous mass. It is as factionalised as anywhere else in Australia, a place of many ways. Speaking of obscenity, members of a certain right wing group from Lismore are said to have shot a Santa Claus dummy in front of children to prove to them Santa wasn't real—or is that just hearsay?

The Eye, Theatre Kantanka, NORPA festival, September 2-4

Adam Broinowski is a playwright and performer.

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Dystopia in Paradise

Eve Stafford finds epiphanies in Stratus 999

It's interesting how infants make whole the world around them based on such limited experience. And adults in this postmodern period, when faced with non-linear arts, still seem to hunger for narrative.

"I'm not sure how the giant fans fit," said the stranger next to me towards the end of the performance. "I venture. "So you know what the rest is?" This, after a bit of light and sound that echoed the broken nature of the old Palace Cinema venue in the Cairns CBD, a final live event in the "lardis" before it closes to be gutted for backpacker accommodation in this tourist town. "Oh yes," she pushed. "It's about the Holocaust!"

I can see her point. Stratus 999 is a dystopic site-specific performance in Bodywather, a more universal contemporary derivative of post-WW2 Japanese Butoh, with movement based on the impulse of internal images. Each maker's own sense from audio and visual stimuli provided by the artists, Marinie Orr and Leah Grycewicz, with the added international exponent, Lenis de Vries, musicians and other media. Out of the multimedia confusion comes moments of transportation, when all the elements coalesce into an epiphan.

Stratus 999 opens with a complaints about the fact that the performance is of the presentation in La Merria's La Stratus in the Sydney Theatre Company's 2000 season, which also impressively features directors Jenny Kemp, Lindy Davies, Wesley Enoch and Barry Kosky (doing the Ted Hughes/Seneca Oedipus no less). La Stratus is not exactly a classic, but is certainly more than curious. It will be seriously interesting to see what Enoch and Andrews get up to with the STC's triumphant, and a audience of children.

The stage is a deeply underground cavern, and a vast space, floating up in visually pleasing ellipses, seemingly pulling their bearers up and out of their seats. Voices whisper like memory, including a child's, but quickly compress to the digitised repetitive text of de-humanisated automatons, signalling foreboding. There is a chase of the hunted in the dark, punctuated with touchlight in an underground cavern, where artefacts and light layer across time, while other movement sequences are barren, predictable as a metronome, as these pale, zombie women roll forward over the seats towards us. A time-lord figure emerges in a kimono embossed with projected images, like a dreamweaver, or perhaps the ghost of the dead projectorist in the program dedication. His celluloid sleeves reflect images and he is magnified, too big for the space, too tall on stilts for the tiny door. He acts as a pied piper but blocks the narrow, airless corridor with his impromptu performance, some in the crowd panic. This is a postmodern reminder that we are not actually between venues, but all within the performance, participants together.

In the next party demolished former restaurant space, there are the dark forces of urban oppression, some totallitarian, the audience and robotic performers alike trapped and ordered to move about, get out of the way or get slammed. We the crowd are obedient, watching the 'real' victims within while collected deadly onto a scaffold by reapers. The giant fans appear as a sniffing point to let the audience sigh. They dance like butterfly wings, like courting birds.

Stratus 999—peet back the unconscious, Marini Orr, Leah Grycewicz, Lenis de Vries Martin Crowne, Oino Ranel, Shaktima, Hans Jurs, Mark Edwards, Stephen Greenleaf, Dymphie Ebrard, Old Palace Cinema, Cairns, August 20

Eve Stafford is the editor of Arts Nexus magazine for arts and cultural development in Far North Queensland, and president of the Far North Cultural Industry Association (FNCA)

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Adelaide's Benedict Andrews is having a great theatre adventure. Not only has he brought an extraordinary touch as a resident director (with Wesley Enoch) of Robin Nevin's Sydney Theatre Company, but, thanks to a joint commission from Weimar 99 (Cultural Capital of Europe) and Riby &80's 2000 Adelaide Festival (with Performing Lines as producer), he is directing UrFaust, a world premiere of the first version of Goethe's Faust as a part of the celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the great man's birth.

After workshops the performance earlier in the year at the Sydney Theatre Company, Andrews subsequently returned with it cast his Belvoir's Wilton St, gave one showing to an invited audience and left it for more rehearsals and the opening. Although the text, pretty much left intact (says Andrews), is definitely more curious than before and his cast invest it with a contemporary mix of passion and languor, sex and cigarettes, live electric guitar and ominous soundscapes that forestalling and a depth of field, and a theatrical vocabulary drawing on contemporary performance practices from across the last 50 years.

This is not, however, the time to review UrFaust given that what we saw was not public, was still taking shape and was without the lighting and sound systems that will be added in Weimar and Adelaide. It will be intriguing to see Andrews' account of the Timbuktu premiere, a presentation of Pierre Merivall's La Stratus in the Sydney Theatre Company's 2000 season, which also impressively features directors Jenny Kemp, Lindy Davies, Wesley Enoch and Barry Kosky (doing the Ted Hughes/Seneca Oedipus no less). La Stratus is not exactly a classic, but is certainly more than curious. It will be seriously interesting to see what Enoch and Andrews get up to with the STC's triumphant, and a audience of children.

Stratus 999 opens with a complaint about the performance's repetitiveness as I, a spectator, with disembodied voices sitting to sit on the stage facing towards the cinema projection box. A layer of light lights off onto light One Photography, Usmore

See RealTime #34 (December-January) for a full length interview with Benedict Andrews.
Untried symbols, unanticipated meanings

Brad Haseman sees Koome Jdraara Goiir to the Island

Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s poem to her angry and confrontational son set the piece for this new work by Koome J德拉拉 Indigenous Performing Arts.

My son, your troubled eyes search mine, Puzzled and hurt by colour line.

You are a peculiar mixture of two minds.

What can I tell you, son of mine?

Goiir to the Island peeps deeply into the troubled eyes of a young Murri hothead and attempts to answer Oodgeroo’s painful question. This Murri, TJ, returns to his birthplace, the beautiful island Minjerribah or Stradbroke Island. TJ has been away for 7 years and in this homecoming he needs answers, to hear stories of identity, family, culture, spirituality—of his place in the world. Angry and bewildered, TJ cannot dance, neither his tribal dances nor the Pride of Erin.

In writing this piece, Thesee Collie (who has given us the superb Out of the Blue and Emmett Times) has placed the art of storytelling at the heart of her dramatic structure. The action weaves in and around stories of identity, family, spirituality, and good- and bad-trips. She followed her triumphs in developing social relationships, aspects of western history, and personal experiences with with visible engagement on a social level. This emphasis on the development of external identity leaves little room for an internal meditation, which is why we need to internalise the wisdom of the culture and the communities to which we belong.

States of Kinship is a performance that embodies a contemporary exploration of multiple perceptions of identity through the experiences of a character named Francesca. The producers have taken on the complex task of incorporating online and interactive technology to further the interaction of the audience with the narrative and the eventual interaction of remotely located audiences. It uses the research project ‘Digital: Collaborative Narratives’ (led by Bill Perrett and Parallelo, Rosebud (the Nipparty) Narrative and Interactive Digital Research Project) at the National Centre and the Australian Network for Art and Technology. Correlating with the theme of identity, the narrative is performed live by Melissa Marcella, it has been the objective of the Broken Spaces research project to expand the technical and conceptual knowledge of the production team, in order to support an interactive performance occurring simultaneously across the web and in physical space.

Francesca comes across as a volatile and solitary woman, often ‘lost in the wind’. Her wild and eccentric character is familiar to many viewers. Her angry childhood friend Marco is the interlocutor between Francesca’s past and future self, trying desperately to interrupt her mindlessness re-fashioning of the past. In the vacant ground floor of the EDS complex, a small environment in a tapered corridor of electronic screens displayed a range of animated images archived on a website especially designed by artist Lynne Sanderson for the States of Kinship event. During the event the screens were activated intermittently as the performers moved away from the main stage to attend to the computer terminals, before moving again to the presence of these terminals confusing and unnecessary as props, given that the audience could not use them to affect the development of the performance. Did they offer any random contributions to the shape of the performance that an interactive with an online environment would tend to indicate. A simple element within the performance that did not.

The Pink legend

Bill Perrett investigates a work-in-progress on the NT’s infamous Miss Olive Pink

Miss Olive Pink was a formidable woman. She was well known in the Territory and especially in the Central Desert for her work as a witness for indigenous rights, especially land and other rights for Warlpiri people. Bureaucrats and police in Alice Springs feared and disliked her. Most residents of the town have the Miss Pink stories to tell; she lived there in the 30s, spent the early 40s in the Western Tanami Desert and returned to the Alice to live until her death in 1975. She worked as an anthropologist and botanist, although she never internalised the formal qualifications she was awarded by the Tanami, she said she had been forced to wear the full Edwardian regalia: long skirts, starched shirts—like a bride.

The Miss Pink story is currently the subject of a collaborative work-in-progress by 5 Darwin artists who found they had common interests in her life. They have applied to the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council for support for developmental work towards a production based around her, entitled Shades of Pink Director, dancer and co-founder of Tracks Dance, David McMicken became interested in Miss Pink during his time at Lajamanu Aboriginal Community, near where Miss Pink pitched her tent. He was the first white person the local people had ever seen. David and Tim Newth, director and visual artist, both of whom have focused on the animation and movement aspect of the production. Tim also came across stories about Miss Pink during his childhood in the Northern Territory. He remembers that his Aboriginal uncle, Jerry Jingala Patrick, as saying “What was wrong with this woman, I couldn’t work it out! She was telling the truth about her life, her skin, she must be a snake, her skin so tender and pink, she had just shed her old skin.”

Skulptur Gaye Hawkies also heard about Miss Pink at Lajamanu. Like Miss Pink, Gaye came from Tasmania. Her contribution to the production is in its visual shape; she designed hoods for the actors (who were also the 5 designers) that enabled them to represent different aspects of Miss Pink’s personas. She also designed furniture, including a cupboard which in turn, and with additions, represents Miss Pink’s only love (she never married), a young man who was killed at Gallipoli, and, as well, a cameo. All the props used—a tent, a number of puppets—were multi-purpose.

Darwin musician Claire Kilgariff grew up across the Todd River in Alice Springs from Miss Pink, who is her godmother. Todd River was a collection of 1800s drawing-room songs. These form the basis for the music in the production, though it also develops in a more modern sense and a dance escape.

Stephen Carlston, a Darwin playwright, recently contributed a piece to the suite Block, was responsible for scripting, some of the text taken from over 4,000 letters Miss Pink sent to various bureaucrats. Stephen may develop the work-in-progress material into a fuller script.

All the designers were struck by the cross-genre elements of the work—dancers involved with sculpture, visual artists with dance. They now intend to collaborate even further, and there are also plans to work on a ‘bush opera’ version which would be staged in Alice Springs with substantial input from the local community, many of whom continue to be fascinated by the Pink legend.

Circuits broken

Samara Mitchell on the promise of Doppio Parallelo’s States of Kinship

Privacy is the wonderful privilege of choosing the time, place and method by which to be alone. Discussed in relation to the weekend Aboriginal. A few months after, I glammed an article surveying the leisure time of school-age children. It un covered an increasing loss of contact with nature, as home parents to over-commit the spare time of their children to a range of extra-curricular activities; spending titanic amounts of money and energy clarifying the lives of their children with jazz-ploto lessons, under-water polo and martial arts training. Whilst organised activities are necessary, there is a need in developing social relationships, aspects of western history, and personal experiences with with visible engagement on a social level. This emphasis on the development of external identity leaves little room for an internal meditation, which is why we need to internalise the wisdom of the culture and the communities to which we belong.

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The logistics of hosting any performance that attempted to go beyond the parameters of any form of narrative is enormously challenging from the outset. It has been hard work for the States of Kinship crew who will continue to develop the valuable resources necessary for touring a revision of the original performance and producing resource kits for regional schools to participate online. Interaction in the corporeal sense binds us to the threshold of real and imagined realms. The ritual separation of mind and body, through the medium of performance and storytelling, permits these myths real grounds, where the promise of metamorphosis resides.

States of Kinship, Doppio Parallelo, Ground Floor EDS Building, Adelaide, July 26 - August 6

27—RealTime 33—October – November 1999
Agitated rotations

Kathryn Favelle profiles Kenneth Spiteri, from A Streetcar Named Datsum 120Y

Actor Kenneth Spiteri appears at the back of the stage, framed by an open doorway that exposes Canberra's streetscape. As he strides towards the audience, the muscles in his bare chest twitching, I'm mesmerised by the agitated rotations of his left thumb.

Spiteri is revisiting Rex, the character he created early last year for Elbow Theatre's premiere production of Mary Rachel Brown's A Streetcar Named Datsum 120Y. Although Rex is still "mad, bad and dangerous to know", the slapstick comedy of eating live goldfish and naked guitar playing has disappeared. In its place is a barely controlled, ever present violence, most of which is conveyed by that rotating thumb.

"Mark has been able to put me into a context by speaking a lot about different dance forms and the way different choreographers work. And it's very interesting to watch the dance process... It's so different from watching the acting process. The problems are different but there's still that constant fear: are people going to get what I'm doing, is it being conveyed by that rotating thumb.

"I was another rotating thumb. We were honing a particular style. Again it was all text-based but we were working from physical images. There was the excitement of working on something new. Something where there were no codes and the language of the process was still being defined."

The process of creating a character or a performance is at the forefront of Spiteri's mind at the moment. A visit to family last year led to an opportunity to work with Malta's Group for Human Encounter. Again, it was physically-based theatre, with performers working to create individual physical scores within a common space.

Invariably, he has found himself working from a physical basis and often with dancers. This was certainly the case when he went to study with Pan Theatre in Paris.

Most of the people doing the course were dancers but the course was more about the awareness of physical choreography in space, Spiteri says. "We worked a lot on delving into different layers of meaning in text. And the vocal work was very physical. Everything was working on exercising the imagination." After the course ended he moved to London, working for 3 months with a group of dancers at Sadlers Wells before returning to Paris to work some more with people he had met at Pan Theatre. Eventually, that led to a 3 month tour of New Zealand.

"It was another rotating thumb. We were honing a particular style. Again it was all text-based but we were working from physical images. There was the excitement of working on something new. Something where there were no codes and the language of the process was still being defined."

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Switch curated by Katie Major
Kathy Salmon, Brogna Isaacs, Kate McMillan, Xavier Platon, Natalie Pickles & Tom Kent

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Queerdont curated by Andrew Nicholls
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Flight Path Daze
"Life here is intermittent; we live between noise and quiet events," says Sidetrack Performance Group Artistic Director, Don Mamouney. If you have live to all those aeroplanes in the Marrickville flight path, why not make art out of it. So Mamouney, 3 professional performers, 10 performers from the community, and 3 great photographers (Emmanuel Angelicas, Efthy Alexakis, Cannes Arcony) have created Flight Path Daze, more low flying acts from the makers of Plane Daze, more low flying acts from the makers of Plane Daze.

Walking the Street

For those readers unfamiliar with Sydney, Newtown is a cultural hub lined with great cafes, small galleries, secondhand bookstores and funky clothes. Think Brunswick in Melbourne, or Fortitude Valley in Brisbane. KANCAM—Kids Activities Newtown, Community Arts Marrickville—organise a range of youth arts events and exhibitions including the recent ArtLab 99, a 2 week NSW-wide festival which gave contemporary artists access to facilities, resources and training they otherwise couldn't afford. Collaborative ventures were encouraged, resulting in over 15 events including video screenings at the Museum of Sydney, performances at Sidetrack Theatre, photographic exhibitions and radio broadcasts, DJ dance parties, website design and comic book displays. KANCAM's popular Walking the Street project again takes over King St Street from 2 weeks for October 30 featuring music, street performers, dancers and singers. For more information, or if you'd like to help out, contact KANCAM: 92 9500 4156, fax 92 9500 5967, art@kancam.com.au

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Red, white and the blues

Diana Klaosen interviews artist Leigh Hobba

Leigh Hobba heads the Tasmanian School of Arts Video Studio, a facility that, despite its popularity, has operated under threat of closure for the past year. Hobba's cross-media practice is internationally recognised and he has a history of national and international exhibitions, residencies and awards. I spoke to him on his return from the Third Asia Pacific Triennial (AFT3) and MAAP99 (Multimedia Australia Asia Pacific) in Brisbane in September.

LH My practice has always been concerned with temporality, coming from a formal music training [clarinet] with interests in performance and electronic music. I was caught by the interdisciplinary ideas of the early 70s and I was fortunate to be in Adelaide where there were lots of crossovers with post-object or conceptual art, intermixing of art practices between temporal and 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional artmaking. The things we might call ephemeral—installed work with regard for a location or a time—soundworks, performances, artist books—had all started to come into installation, incorporating ideas from visual practice, collaborations with visual artists, extending things into the realm of more cross-disciplines.

So I left a more formal musicality and moved into a wider art practice.

DK You’ve done some very distinctive curatorial projects. How do the two areas reflect each other?

LH I’ve seen the curatorial aspects of what I do as an extension of my art practice, not a separate element. My recent concerns have been with the material that so informed me in the mid 70s... knowing it hadn’t been conserved in any methodical way. So much material sitting in artists’ drawers, or even sideways on the floor, is physically unstable. Events in those days were always characterised by the presence of a video or movie camera. Flashbulbs going off in performance were like articulators of time. I wondered where all that stuff was, because it was such a rich store—and through teaching I realised that younger artists had no access to, or real knowledge of, that history.

DK That’s paradoxical, when the works and performances were so specifically documented and preserved.

LH Yes...so as students begin working with digital media it’s in isolation from the history of the moving image and time-based media. I found a lot of re-invention of the wheel in their work, albeit with different tools, because that history had disappeared. As a teacher and practitioner, I wanted to bring it back. Recollection, revisiting and reinventing that work has influenced 3 shows here at the Centre for the Arts. The most significant, Pulse Friction, surveyed art and attitudes that affect media practice, with the emphasis on its existence from traditional media—who’d taken it up technologically-based media, which was what happened during the 1970s. Artists adopted modes of temporal expression that coincided with increased access to the new technologies, plus the proliferation of television. How this all informed their practice seemed to me a good benchmark as a refresher for new media artists today to take on that history.

DK And very worthwhile to safeguard those resources for the future. Your own current work, in particular, the Red, White and the Blues project—where does that fit into the spectrum?

LH It’s coming together as a triptych, though it didn’t necessarily start that way. The “White” component, shown at Armpace and Monash earlier this year, was to do with experiencing extreme landscape during an ice-storm in Montreal, the situation where you’re locked in by some extreme condition—physical or emotional. The “white” was the blank canvas of the physical landscape of the storm, or the blank canvas of one’s emotional being, which is heightened by being in a new country and trying to put the whole experience together. From this blank canvas, this frozen landscape, I began to overlay perceptions of things around me, both virtually and actually, starting in Canada, ending in Florida and resolved in Australia.

DK No small undertaking.

LH It brought me to a temporal regard for the digital print, working into it with elements of drawing and collage. It was like trying to pull a moment from an experience and freeze it as a digital print, from a zoom through white earphones at what point do you find that mode of rest? And when you do find it, it’s only part of the story; it’s just a middle ground of a whole spectrum, physically and emotionally, but it’s frozen somewhere...

Looking for a turning point tipped me into other works where I wanted to operate more interactively and with the precision of computer-controlled technology to affect the installation space. That led to the second piece, “Red”, which I’ve just installed in prototype at Firework's Gallery, Brisbane. It has very simple elements—two rocks from the Finkie River, said to be the oldest river in the world—350,000,000 years old—set up with a simple computer-activated trigger. At the moment it’s a sound piece, but it was the result of a journey from the periphery to the Centre, Brisbane to Alice, looking for some kind of emotional centre. It’s a work in progress, supported by an Australia Council development grant.

“The Blues”, I guess, summaries landing back in Australia and finding they’d ripped the insides out of the video department here.

DK And there wasn’t much meaningful support from School of Art administrators or academic staff...

LH They’d actually had a recommendation to close it, along with my relationship with the school. That’s since been pulled back a bit. But in having to deal with that, and feeling the isolation from colleagues and practice that such things bring on you, I’ve needed to move to a more communicating mode of practice. This coincided with an offer to transfer the balance of my position to the Art School position to the Conservatorium, plus a desire to return to playing music and to get involved in a larger spirit of celebration about art practice and creative concerns. It coincides too with my elder son’s developing interest in music and I wanted to travel that journey with him, too. It’s all those things together.

DK You made some very optimistic observations about ideas that flowed from AFT3 and MAAP 99, too.

LH I was up there putting work into Fireworks Gallery, which was showing Lin Onus and Michael Nelson Jagamara. I’d been into the desert and met Michael Nelson there on my last trip and we’d made some videos to do with his new gestural painting, so it was good to bring that video back and drop it into his work and conceptualise it.

The APT is always interesting: it’s essentially Indigenous and there’s a conference around it. One of the thoughts I brought away with me, that gives me courage in my own practice, was from a discussion by a speaker from the Museum of Oceania about an exhibition of skulls he was curating. He focused on the cultural object, how these skulls were art objects or very strong cultural signifiers—reading culture from the object.

He was followed by Michael Mel from PNG who refuted this and talked about reading culture from a spirit of celebration and ritual, that the objects in the APT should essentially be seen as signposts to rituals and to celebration; that’s what these cultures brought to their art objects. I thought that was a very good send-off into the next millennium as an optimistic way for artists to be working with the objects of their creative output—an engagement in the celebration of culture as ritual and as community.
Objects and the words that fail them

Barbara Bolt on 3 generations of work at Metro Arts

The gallery at Metro Arts in Brisbane is hard to exhibit in. A large rough space with curved walls, barred but large old fashioned mesh windows and an uneven unpolished wooden floor, the gallery asserts its own identity loudly. Artwork exhibited here needs to be assertive to overcome the power of the space itself. This gallery formed the backdrop for 3 successive "conceptually" driven exhibitions by Brisbane artists of different generations: David Akenson, Scott Redford and Madonna Staunton.

I say conceptually driven, for each exhibition was supported by an extensive catalogue essay that aimed to provide the context for the work. Andrew McNamara wrote the essay for David Akenson's Game, Robert Schubert for Scott Redford's We are the language (Kurt) and Rex Butler for Madonna Staunton's exhibition. It was these essays, rather than the gallery space, that "framed" the work, and endure long after the exhibitions are forgotten.

The success of these exhibitions as "ideas' and 'themes' seemed to be in conflict, particularly in the work of David Akenson and Scott Redford.

Akenson's meticulously crafted objects were certainly misfits on the rough and paint splattered floor of the gallery. Reminiscent of Michele De Lucchi's Memphis design, and with titles such as sticko and fiddlesticks, the objects aimed to work at the level of the visual riddle. A number of floor assemblages of heavy steel plates cut into shapes and spraypainted with whole and part letters were scattered around the gallery. In some I could make out the word "Kurt." Apart from an enjoyment of the formal organisation of the letterforms (I kept thinking of Rockcheko), it could make no sense of his language and would have made none without reference to the catalogue essay. Pay 2 dollars for a catalogue and the world will be revealed to you.

In his essay Robert Schubert reveals that the exhibition is dedicated to the pop personality, Kurt Cobain, or rather not to "Cobain the man, but the malstrom of conflicting cultural forces that constitute his cultural value." He claims that in this exhibition, "Kurt Cobain is figured not as an object of blind worship but as an oddly shaped and unstable set of conflicting cultural and personal desires." Redford, he argues, has drawn the parallel between Kurt Cobain and the avant-garde, with their endemic loss of idealism in the face of capitalism's voracious exploitation of avant-garde ideas. For Schubert, the way Redford has represented the exhibition, "Kurt Cobain is figured as a unified totality—the sculptural forms and gestalt principles of American-style late modernism deployed but equally cancelled out as Redford overplays it with pop sentiments.

Scott Redford's exhibition offered quite a different dilemma. On initial viewing it was so obscure as to defy any logic. A number of floor assemblages of heavy steel plates cut into shapes and spraypainted with whole and part letters were scattered around the gallery. In some I could make out the word "Kurt." Apart from an enjoyment of the formal organisation of the letterforms (I kept thinking of Rockcheko), it could make no sense of his language and would have made none without reference to the catalogue essay.

It was in the final exhibition of the series, the coupling of Madonna Staunton and Rex Butler, that the ideas met material fact. In his essay Butler attempts to create this "fit" in a way that connected Staunton's approach and techniques with ideas about the making of images. Beginning with the way the first human images were made, Butler weaves an elegant argument using CS Peirce's notion of the icon (where a sign relates to its object by virtue of resemblance) and the index (where a sign has a direct physical relationship to the thing represented). His essay demonstrates how Staunton's work negotiated this terrain in her monotypes, collagraph and relief prints. It is an essay that is invaluable for students of art as well as being comprehensible to people with little grounding in art theory. It is worth the 2 dollars.

3 exhibitions featuring different generations of Brisbane artists: David Akenson (February 10 - March 20), Scott Redford (March 31 - May 8) and Madonna Staunton (May 19 - June 26), Metro Arts, Brisbane
Australia at two biennales

Simeon Kronenberg checks the Australian pulse in Venice and Melbourne

The Venice Biennale is a spectacle. Set in beautiful gardens a 10 minute walk from the boastful part of Venice and in the Arsenale, a magnificent historic site, it is a very special event, attracting many thousands of visitors and the work of the best artists in the world. It is of course the oldest of such events—and the one with the greatest reputation throughout the international art community.

For 1999, the artist chosen to represent Australia was Melbourne’s painter of suburbia, Howard Arkley. This turned out to be a wonderful choice because Arkley’s vivid colour and regional intensity reverberated across the biennale and provided a humorous counterpart to much that was earnest and dour. The Arkley exhibition was bolstered by marvellous public relations material—a very engaging ‘show bag’, substantial catalogue and bright posters which were displayed all over the city.

The Arkley work is probably as good as it gets in the Australian Pavilion, which is domestic in scale and embarrassingly small. It is clearly time that the Australia Council rethink the conditions in which Australian art is exhibited in this extremely important, competitive and international context. Compared with the beautiful British, American and French pavilions, all nearby, the Australian pavilion is a joke: a self-conscious parody of a beach house, with a small canal. Surely we can do better than this. Other relatively small countries, like Denmark, Belgium and even Egypt, have superior spaces. Something has to be done! Despite the inadequacies of the pavilion itself, Howard Arkley’s work looks strong and has proven to be compelling. It is a great sadness that Howard is not around to savour the ongoing and extraordinary success of his work internationally.

The Melbourne International Biennial is the new kid on the block. Its structure is loosely modelled on the Venice model, having a core exhibition supplemented by national pavilions. This is JulianaEngberg’s brave attempt to assert a significant art presence in a city with no museum of scale dedicated solely to contemporary art (like the MCA in Sydney). This has long been a problem for Melbourne and indeed for the promotion of contemporary art in Australia. The Melbourne Biennial is a welcome and overdue addition.

The core exhibition, Signs of Life, was housed in a disused office building in central Melbourne. This was a wonderful choice of venue, the building itself offering a kind of ironic comment on the close of the century—emptied spaces and rough interiors bespoke much about changes to modernist urban fabric and lost lives. Interestingly, the building is about to be renovated into swish apartments by the king of Melbourne’s younger architects, Nonda Kamaliidis. The modernist building will live again through postmodern re-design.

The Biennial’s administrative structure was supported by The Ian Potter Museum of Art, a museum clearly generous in spirit and dedicated to the promotion of the best in contemporary art in Melbourne. This support allowed resources to be utilised in the most effective way—but even so, there was probably not sufficient funding despite the very best intentions of the Melbourne City Council and the Victorian government, which backed the project.

This was an extremely ambitious program, in terms of activity and potential for placing Melbourne on the international biennale map. More than 50 artists participated in the Signs of Life exhibition and many more in the national pavilions, billeted throughout Melbourne’s commercial and public galleries (including The Potter) in the inner city.

This inaugural event was about life and art at the close of the century. Thankfully there was not too much guff about the millennium, but there was a great deal of well selected and exciting art from predominantly younger practitioners, intent on seducing us through works of energy and verve.

A selected group of Australian artists stacked up wonderfully against their international counterparts. Notable amongst these were Patricia Piccinini, David Noonan, Brenda L Croft, Ricky Swallow and Lyndal Jones, who offered sophisticated, moving and evocative work that should make us well pleased with the condition of contemporary art at the close of the century in this country. In fact, all of the Australian artists selected promised much for a very special national biennale award, particularly auspicious.

Amongst the international contingent were Robert Gober, with a beautiful and poetic piece submerged below the floor of the building, Louise Bourgeois and Cornelia Parker. Next time, however, I would like to see more representation from Asian artists. Their contribution in Venice was extremely important, providing some of the best work. Australia is in a great position to represent the most interesting of our entire region and should be leading the field in this regard. [Isn’t it? See http://www.rimarts.com/opencyc for a detailed report on the Third Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane.]

In her introduction to the Signs of Life exhibition catalogue, Juliana Engberg writes that art is “one of the most effective and meaningful measurements of the pulse of life.” She is right, and the inaugural Melbourne International Biennial proved it.

1999 Melbourne International Biennial, Signs of Life exhibition, one Russell and Little Collins Streets and other venues, May 14 – June 27. www.mib.edu.au
Popaganda and postnatalism

Jim Moss on performances by Andy Petruvics and Susie Fraser

Andy Petruvics' "Not Post Anything and Susie Fraser's Stories from the interior..." Throbd is indicative of the hybrid currents flowing in that area we once so unhistorically called the visual arts, a term that is now more accurately descriptive of the sexual constitutions of postmodern art. While performance is an oeuvre of longstanding hybridity, what is apparent in these works is an absence of difference between visual art and the performance 'other.' This now seamless flow of texts is as much a function of increased visibility in general as it is an initiative of progressive public art spaces in particular. However, there is another discursive element at play—the radical, cutural conjuction of 2 ostensibly different works.

Petruvics' Konstruktivn work is a critical repositioning of the art-world, for it is hyper, wound-up readings of the business of politics—framed by a media hysteria built on individual statements as particular. As a particularly extended game show—that have the effect of highlighting how media representations of politics flicker on the walls of the average consumer's cave.

This work deliberately plays within the collapsed space 'between' style and meaning, mixing the claims of Franciscan flanions of the media while utilising a retro high-modernist look that both acknowledges and flies in the face of deadpan appropriation and paradigm; sandwiching it between the hole to dialectic and irony. The retro quotient in Petruvics' work has another function adjacent to pure style— it speaks about art, and in so doing, about politics.

Andy Petruvics has sustained a post-industrial agitprop that continues to parade the political reaction and regressive capitalist opportunism that has enveloped this country, taking as its targets those Falstaffs who think 'good' government indistinguishable from good business. This blend of ideology and style is more agitprop than agitprop (pijopopaganda minus the revolutionary t), although comparisons can also be drawn with the 1930s montages of John Heartfield, stylistically and contextually, as Heartfield was an artist in disent with post-revolutionary reaction and big-business driven conservatism.

Petruvics' pleasure in the play of cutting edge imagery and clunky retro modernism was evident in his third offering, Action Type 4, in which the artist's desktop was projected as an image onto the wall, and, in a couple of instances, the audience were over a choreography of boss and worker analogous to the base/superstructure model of industrial capitalism. This conjunction of opposites read initially as a discrepancy but, in retrospect, there's a history lesson here—that of the history of signified, by an image of industrial deregulation diffused in the play of digital light.

Stories from the Interior... Threshold is a monologue, first-hand, authentic, impressive, theatrical in structure. As the text infers, it had a long gestation. There is little in the way of artefact evident in this work; Fraser performs her writing with a minimum of corporeal or visual cues. Some slides anticipates the family things, points of reference, evidence and acknowledgement: "The emphasis has been on finding solutions that retain control in the performer's hands, and that has essentially been low tech solutions"; and "A body is what is read in performance."

As a result, Threshold is disconcertingly authentic in respect of both art and life. While Fraser's presence is tangible at a number of levels, she disappears into a sea of subjectivity only to re-emerge again struggling to keep her head above water, sometimes floating...

What is increasingly evident over 3 longish performances is exposure to a mode of language that is distinctly unambiguous, language from the opposite pole to rhetoric, from the interior; the 'real' special effects are in the minds of the audience.

This roller-coaster narrative of coming to terms with the love and pain, and the whole interfacing of having to be reborn in the wake of the birth of one's children, dredges up an often forgotten dimension of how we perceive of the political, where a pin-point of anonymity in the suburbs can in fact have all the makings of a spectacle, providing you have some control of the code. It's not all catharsis as the work is too diverse and sustained for that and, though Susie Fraser has a lot to say, it's far from indulgent: this is work you'd be crazy not to do in some form or other. In the brave new world of identity politics Threshold is an instant classic.

Performance residencies: Andy Petruvics, Not Post Anything, Susie Fraser; Stories from the interior... Threshold, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide.

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Tokyo Vogue

Exhibiting more than 30 garments on loan from the National Gallery of Australia, Sydney's Powerhouse Museum, designers, and private collections, Tokyo Vogue asks, "Are fashion garments examples of art?" Is haute de Paris the antithesis of haute couture? Is simply a brilliant fashion designer who incorporates artistic elements within his work? Four of the world's leading fashion designers—Miyake, Rei Kawakubo, Yosh Yamamoto, and 1999 Australian Designer of the Year, Annette Street—will be featured in an exhibition that will promote fashion as art and fashion designers as artists.

Bonnie English, the curator of the exhibition and Senior Lecturer in Art and Design Theory at Griffith University's Queensland College of Art, says "an important feature of the exhibition will be to illustrate the strong cultural ties that exist between Japan and Australia, and the influence Japanese designers have had on their Australian counterparts. The exhibition will feature the works of Australians who have similar philosophies to the leading Japanese designers and have studied and adapted Japanese clothing construction methods and traditional design techniques. Australian designers Easton Pearson, Megan Salmon and Rebecca Paterson of Sppspo!, Lynh Godard, Kaye Pye, Suze Cherney, and Patricia Black, who will all be featured in the exhibition, have achieved significant success by adopting the techniques of the Japanese.

Photography, a huge screen shows the double projections of CROSS CURRENTS (in ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany, one visitor enters the space at a time, their movements activating the images). The deeply disturbing photographs and texts of Motel Vila Una are on show in the ACPS small gallery. The CD-ROM of the work can be viewed at the Paddocks Library in the Town Hall. As D'Alpuget commented, this is work of beauty about pain, and that's partly what makes it so disturbing. It encourages reflection more than alarm. Don't miss it.

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Yugoslavian War Trilogy

Denis Del Favero's trilogy, to be discussed at length in RealTime #34, has to be seen, not only for the unsettlingly (in)evitable comparisons between the Bosnian/Kosovo and East Timor, but also for its brooding intensity, eye to eye with pain and loss, and for its ability to remind us of which history was being written and installed by the artist and his collaborators to take back their vision. Field, a wistful view of a white 3D room/screen is in the Uniting Church of Australia, Paddington where Blanche D'Alpuget emotionally launched the exhibition, haltingly recalling the story of a woman she met from a rape camp. Just down the road in the Australian Centre for

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Andy Arturghs attends the inaugural 1999 Queensland Biennial Festival

In Queensland it is hard to separate politics from art. As a result, it has never settled down in regard to festivals. A brief history of the festivals: the Brisbane Biennial arose early in the Goss government’s time (1990). It was a festival of high art experimental music. Additionally, this existed the more general and community-based annual Warana Festival. In time these were both combined by the Coalition government into one festival: “Visually Brisbane” which downplayed the community nature of the Warana Festival and pulled back from the edge of the Brisbane Biennial. The music component was “First Music” (budget in excess of $1.2m) and “Contemporary Music” (budget around $100,000). Change of government, change of festival; this year saw the inaugural Queensland Biennial. This currently operates on alternate years to the Brisbane Festival (maybe watch this space for changes after the next election). The result didn’t really have a main theme—or perhaps it had 3 minor themes. There was a certain Russian emphasis, with Skryabin and Prokofiev given prominence; there was attention given to works of percussion; there was a mystical strain running through some evenings (Skryabin again). Sometimes these motifs came together—often did not: what is most important is this festival offered a feast of stimulating music.

The music and the performers certainly deserved bigger audiences than turned up, especially to the concerts held in the Opera House Studio. Are music lovers still scared of contemporary music? There was nothing “alienating” or even “difficult” about many of these concerts indeed, what could be more accessible than the works of Steve Reich or Arvo Part?

The recent Reich Re-Mixed CD signals the debt the contemporary DJ culture to Reich’s pioneering works; lovers of “beats” and mixology would have found inspiration in the concert by Sprung Percussion. Commencing with the 1970s Reich work Music For Pieces Of Wood, the group then explored the subtle dynamics of compositions by Maki Ishii and Per Norgaard. The interplay of lutes and lineages of tone colour required by these works was expertly handled by the ensemble. It was in the concluding Steve Reich Sextet, however, that the concert really came alive.

Reich will possibly go down as the 20th century composer who most evocatively captured the interlocking rhythms of industrial and post-industrial life. On record his longer, more elaborate compositions suggest cybernetic (self-regulating) machines of the type so beloved of cultural theorists. So it’s revealing to experience a work like Sextet performed live by real musicians—there are humans driving the machine! And Sprung Percussion enjoyed themselves immensely, attacking their instruments with glee while attending to the work’s frequent switching of rhythmic patterns. Their sheer enthusiasm made for an invigorating night.

The integration of community with music making was for once not lip service but a genuine commitment to encourage the growth of homegrown product. Linsey Pollak is a fine example, a musician who has thrown off high or low art definitions to create his own stimulating sound pieces. Similarly, Graeme Leak from Victoria integrated the every day with mechanical and electronic invention to create performance music of interest.

Time is money and there was precious little for the Biennial teams. Most of the set main venues were already booked out by the time the festival was announced. However they turned adversity into advantage, bringing the performances back into the community by using a variety of spaces, for instance St Mary’s Church, The Conran International Hotel Atrium, and various bike tracks around the state. These venues were an interesting idea but were not always well suited to the works. St Mary’s Church worked against audience involvement for West African drummer Epizo Bangoura; the Atrium was not to the liking of the Goldner String Quartet playing all the Schubert quartets. They were moved at the last minute to an environment where they felt more secure, a concert hall.

Perhaps the part that stood out the most was the overall ethos of the festival was the classical paradigm, though not because of the choice of acts and music in itself. Indeed there were some fine performances such as Susan Bickley and Firework. These forms of music historically have not usually emerged from the populace but have more often been imposed on them from a ruling elite—a different thing altogether.

Mackay, being a smaller city, the impact of the 1999 Queensland Biennial Festival appeared greater. It occupied a larger part of the city’s consciousness. However, the same philosophy was applied to all 3 festival centres. A community music conference had been organised by Helen Lancaster (head of the Central Queensland Conservatorium of Music) and Dick Lets (head of the Music Council of Australia).

Here the ideas that were being put into practice across the state were discussed by community musicians—indeed over Australia, and even one group from UK. It was a stimulating event with deep commitment from all participants. Out of it grew a confidence and camaraderie that I have rarely found in the professional world. It was entirely appropriate for this festival.

Perhaps the most inspiring event I witnessed here was the day long Journey in Time, “expressing the journeys of Mackay’s cultures through the eyes of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander communities.”

Duged by bad weather and subsequent logistical problems, this event was nevertheless a moving moment of Australian life. It was completed by a magnificent outdoor display by the Drummers of Burndy playing on a hilltop as the sun dropped below the horizon.

Of course we cannot live on a cultural island, and to experience all musics can, by definition, only broaden us. But when the budget is limited I have realised more and more that music that is nurtured from within a community is of paramount importance to our growth.

1999 Queensland Biennial Festival, Brisbane, Mackay or Townsville, July 15-25

Forces and spirits: 20th century music

John Potts at the Sydney Spring New Music Festival

The 10th Sydney Spring Festival of New Music at the Sydney Opera House was a two week, 40 part program with emerging and established work’s frequent switching of rhythmic patterns. Their hecr enthusiasm made for an invigorating night.

The 4 works by Ian Shanahan, performed by The Australian Music Centre Orchestra, presented a more uniform aesthetic. With titles like Dimensions Paradisi and Zodiac: Crystal Orbit Improvisations, these works exhibited a mesmerising bent, drawing upon concepts of number and vibration.

However, the arcane referencing—“cryptical encoding” of names and epigrams into the music—suggested a hyper-active musical intelligence that did not always communicate itself to the audience. It’s true that mystical pursuits tend to the complex and the arcane, but it’s also true that successful cosmologies, whether mythologies or works of art, condense their elements into simpler, more graspable wholes.

This is emphatically the tenor of those East European mystics Part, Gorecki and Tavener (the latter an Englishman of Orthodox faith).

Their works were beautifully performed in a candle-lit chapel by the six-member Aurora Ensemble in the festival’s final concert. The intimate acoustic seemed to make these plaintive compositions glow; the high point was reached when the Arcadia Ensemble in the festival’s final concert.

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\[10th Sydney Spring International Festival of New Music, Artistic Director Roger Woodward, August 28 - September 15.\]

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The envelope, please...

Congratulations to the winners of the Australian Music Centre Awards 1999, announced on 20 September at the Sydney Opera House: Michael Kieran Harvey, Philippa Paige, Marina Marsden, Synergy, Lawrence Whiffin and New Music Australia were all winners. For full details, take a look at our website.

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Connecting the world with Australian Music
Orchestral manoeuvres

Harriet Cunningham interviews composers Stephen Stanfield and Jim Ledger after the Australian Composers Orchestral Forum

This July, 6 composers became the latest participants in the 21st annual Australian Composers Orchestral Forum (ACOF). It’s one of the few opportunities in Australia for emerging composers to try out their skills on a professional orchestra. Six participants are selected to each write a 10 minute work which is rehearsed, recorded, criticised, revised, reinvented and, eventually, performed at a public concert. I talked to 2 of the composers a month after their first run through with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and discovered some mixed feelings.

Until recently, Stephen Stanfield was a full-time lecturer in composition at the Central Queensland Conservatorium of Music in Mackay. When I spoke to him, he was busy packing up his household in preparation for a move to the Sunshine Coast. I asked him how he felt about the ACOF experience and he summed it up in one word: disturbing.

Stephen confesses that it is something of an accidental orchestral composer: his first orchestral work was written in 1994 for the NationalOrchestral Composers School, the predecessor to ACOF. An ABC competition resulted in another 3 minute piece. Then in 1999, the ACOF program seemed like a great opportunity to test his formal study, a masters degree in composition. However, producing a major work at the same time as holding down a full-time job and raising a family was hard, and in fact precipitated his decision to leave Central Queensland Con in order to concentrate on music making and composition.

Jim Ledger, a composer and one-time horn player based in Western Australia, is much more upbeat. “Overall, it was an excellent experience”, he says. Having only written for youth orchestras previously, he was keen to hear what a professional orchestra would do: “When things go wrong with a work for a youth orchestra you assume it’s the players. With the TSO you know what they’re playing is what’s written on the page.”

As a seasoned orchestral player, Jim was prepared for criticism from the musicians: “Whereas ACOF is a calendar highlight for me, it’s a calendar lowlight for them—maximum effort, minimum reward.” As a result, one of his main objections to his work, Airman, practical. “Composers think they have to make it difficult, think that’s the way to get accepted into the academic world. But that’s crap. We’re going to give you for the result you want in the most economical way.”

Stephen agrees. His take on the orchestra (said with a chuckle): “As the composer, you are the scum of the earth.” He goes on, “My composing intention was not as pure as it has been in the past. I was specifically writing go through.” But surely such pragmatism has implications for the composer’s creative integrity? Stephen has now revised his work and, as a result, is not expecting a performance from the TSO.

“Now it is more what I want.”

Do composers and orchestras have incompatible expectations? Is writing for an orchestra a waste of creative energy? In the light of the major award winner Michael Smetanin’s recent critical comments at the Paul Lowin Prizes, it seems that the relationship between composer and orchestra has never been worse.

Jim Ledger is not giving up on the institution, just yet. “I love writing for orchestra. It’s the ultimate challenge.” Stephen is less gung-ho. Maybe, he suggests, it is his lack of experience, but he would prefer to write for an ensemble. “There’s a barrier between the composer and the orchestra. It’s very hierarchical, all channelled through the conductor. An ensemble work can be more substantial, creatively.”

So is ACOF a waste of time? Both composers are adamant that such opportunities should be maintained.

“Composing must go on. It will go on,” says Stephen, but adds, with a wicked grin, “it certainly feeds the argument that the orchestra is archaic.” Jim, self-confessed orchestral nut, adds, “I personally love the orchestra. But I find it hard to justify why I should be paid to write for them. It’s pure concert hall music—it has no other function, and, let’s face it, CDs are cheaper than concert tickets.”

The verdict? Thumbs up for ACOF, and musicians live on, but no ruling yet on the fate of the orchestra. For their sake let’s hope that the jury is not stacked with composers. If it is, their sentence could be harsh.

The Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, performed at a public concert. I talked to 2 emerging composers: one of their last to enter the space find ourselves in the front row for the final piece. We focus on 4 percussionists and a bass recorder player. We witness a new work unfold. Twice as it happens.

The apology and the fresh start galvanises the audience, sharpening our listening to hear the differences, picking up the moments of synchronisation that had gone awry. I found myself interested in the discontinuity between the players. Each player seemed to play in their own world, their own time frame, rhythmic phrases appearing isolated, separate from what else is happening. Richard Rijnvos has studied with the UK’s Brian Ferneyhough.

“The new complexity” is evident in the work and in the faces of the performers.

The central focal point, in our new attention, is a row of chains hanging in a frame. Each chain folds in on itself as it hits the wooden floor, loud. On either side, the 2 thundersheets, hanging ceiling to floor. A mirror image of the 2 scrin at the other end of the hall. Intertextuality, “a circular memory. Which is what the inter-text is”, according to Roland Barthes.

Words and music are so utterly non-reflective.

Radio 1, an Aphiess event, John Cage: Five Octaves.

James Young: Val Canomia: pieces 1, II, III; Samuel Beckett: Radio 1 (Esquisses radiophoniques); Richard Rijnvos: Zalgirmenis: whose number is twenty-three and who kills in an unnatural fashion by Richard Rijnvos. We turn our chairs away from the radio. Those of us who were the last to last to enter the space find ourselves in the front row for the final piece. We focus on 4 percussionists and a bass recorder player. We witness the new work unfold. Twice as it happens.

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The sound of winning

It’s a good feeling when a couple of your favorite composers, Michael Smetanin and Raffaele Marcolino, take out the big prizes. The frustration is in not being able to immediately hear the music. The Paul Lowin Prizes for Composition for 1999 were announced at the Sydney Opera House on September 20, Michael Smetanin, long time critic of Australian funding and orchestras, is having a good year, adding to his 2 year $80,000 Australia Council fellowship the $25,000 Lowin Orchestral Prize for his Shape of Things to Pass, a 12 and a half minute work commissioned by the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Gerard Brophy’s Mercury was Highly Commended in this category. The Song Cycle Prize went to Raffaele Marcolino for Ganzfreud. It’s great to see that the young David Young (leader of Aphiess, see RealTime 31, page 41) was Highly Commended for his Thousand of Bastard Straw V. We can see and hear other work of Young-Aphiess on tour, it would be a pleasure to be able to hear the winning and recommended works as soon as the award announcements as possible—perhaps it won’t be that long, bandwidth permitting, before the winning works are audio streamed to our homes on the net, providing someone had the foresight to record them in the first place.

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Words and music and the spaces in between

Elizabeth Drake listens to Aphiess radio in the front/back seat

“Of course I agree with your idea. It seems very elegant,” writes John Cage when approached by Richard Rijnvos for permission to use his voice, pre-recorded (and edited) from a composition workshop, as ‘words’ for the radio piece radio 1 by Samuel Beckett.

radio 1 was the sketch which led to the later play words and music. The words and music were never provided by Beckett, they remain the unwritten characters, part of the spaces and pauses left open in the script. Intended only for the radio, it was a departure from the script to mount a visual production of the work.

We read in the programme that we are to turn our seats around for the final piece. This instruction leaves the audience floating in the space. There is a symmetry of design at the 2 ends of the hall. The 2 scrin at one end, the 2 thundersheets at the other. We focus on the old valve radio plum centre-stage between the 2 blue-light scrin. Later the words ‘words’ and ‘music’ will appear in light on these scrin. The 2 sides of the stage barely lit, the spaces in between 2 blue-lit scrims. Later the words and music: “down a little wood, loud. On either side, the 2 thundersheets, hanging ceiling to floor. A mirror image of the 2 scrin at the other end of the hall. Intertextuality, "a circular memory. Which is what the inter-text is" , according to Roland Barthes.

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Taking liberties

Colin Duckworth queries directorial licence in the OA's interpretation of a seminal 20th century opera

Pelléas et Mélisande (1902) is possibly the most ambitious and influential 20th century theatrical works. The original Manetteville production was a sublime anti-realist vei of which Beckett's poetic plain-prose Waiting for Godot is a notable illustration. Debussy's musical setting sounded the death-knell for declaratory, aria-ritten opera in which there was (as he complained) "too much singing", and was a pathfinder for Rilke, Wilde, Stravinsky and their peers. Janacek...Both Maurice Maeterlink and Claude Debussy rejected the naturalism of Zola, with his coal mines, engine sheds and stream laundries, to explore reality's interiority, its inner dimensions: mystery forests, romantic seasapes, moonlit terraces, dank medieval ghosts, and shadows in crumbling castles.

In recent years (and notably in the production discussed here) some directors of Pelléas et Mélisande have repurposed the story's mythic and symbolic epicure with esoteric obscurantism, in specific, modern, unrealistic (ie inappropriate) settings: one American director set it in a Malibu beach house: a French one had the entire action taking place inside a kind of baronial hall. Symbolism has often been weighed down with pseudo-scholarly portentousness, insomuch as to undermine and demolish authorial intentions.

The action, as written, takes place in inegorous times. Ill-starred boy and girl, naïvely drift into love, inadvertently fall foul of husband's jealous rage, and die with their innocence unsullied. Exposition remains a mystery where did Mélisande come from? What is she doing alone in the depths of the forest? Why is she weeping? What is the horror she has endured in some other unknown, unnamed place?

At curtain up, as the major characters drift about somnambulistically, the oneric atmosphere is silently established. In this surrealistic world a dysfunctional royal family from another age lives in a modern house, isolated from a starving society. Vagae, distant rumblings of war and discontent are suggested, as in Oreste's Théâtre—or several parts of the present-day world. So far, so good.

In accordance with Mallarme's injunction never to mention "the Thing" itself, nothing is what we want: we can readily accept that the modern domestic setting is symbolic of something else. But where are the walls almost all of glass? This is an isolated place, yet open for all to see into, a hothouse both claustrophobic and oppressive: the amateurs and musicians (wheras, textually) it should be a dark old windowless castle, shut off from society. So what does it symbolise? If nothing, it is spurious, with no more raison d'être than La Bohème set in a forest, or Rosenkavalier in a suburban terrace house.

At the beginning of scene one, Golaud says Mélisande is weeping by a spring in a forest; but she is, here, sitting on a chair in a large, modern room. There is a square hole in the floor (the spring) beside which she could be sitting. Why

they're not valid if they need laborious explanation. There were good points in this production, and very sensitive parts-operations by the principal singers. John Fiore produced a wonderfully lush, sonorous, sensuous sound. The bel canto voices and orchestra was beautifully balanced.

The program opens with an ensemble work, "music that becomes not even music but pure ambrosial utterances". From the muddy, beating heart of Beckett's poetic verse, we are given the opening of an American composer Martin Mackerras presents a 5 city tour intense, inward looking verse grappling with a new dimension to the meaning of the original. Pelléas et Mélisande is too delicate and subtle to warrant such heavy-handed treatment. It is a tribute to the singers and orchestra that this was a haunting and unforgettable performance.

Pelléas et Mélisande, Opera Australia, Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne, April 1999.

Colin Duckworth is Emeritus Professor and Professional Fellow of French at Melbourne University specialising in modern French theatre, and has directed many productions in English and French in London, Auckland and Melbourne. He has just completed his 3rd novel, a sequel to his High Garden.

Longing for less

Harriet Cunningham on the New Music Lighthouse experience at The Studio

The hype precedes the concert. "Sydney audiences will benefit from this collaboration between Sydney and Michael Keiran Harvey, issuing a challenge from his new home, Melbourne. With an ambitious masterplan, composer Martin Mackerras presents a 5 city tour intense, inward looking verse grappling with a new dimension to the meaning of the original. Pelléas et Mélisande is too delicate and subtle to warrant such heavy-handed treatment. It is a tribute to the singers and orchestra that this was a haunting and unforgettable performance.

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Sport

TOOTH & CLAW
with Jack Rufus
With the Olympics only a year away now, people are projecting furiously: what will the weather/traffic/hailstones be like? Improvements have been planned, such as earlier daylight saving, which will please the people who really matter: the American networks. More daylight, less time difference, more programming compatibility.

But why stop there? We still have a year to go: why not shift the time back by one hour every month, until we’re perfectly in sync with our American friends? We could eliminate their unseemly broadcast hours, not to mention jet lag, if we simply set our time to match US Central Time. Of course, noon would be rather dark, but we could find ways to explain that: “heavy cloud cover today”; “it’s that eclipse again”; “must get my eyes checked.”

Technology could make the transition complete. We could build a gigantic artificial sun to bathe the Olympic city in daylight; we could bring down huge shutters when it’s supposed to be dark. With no time difference at all, the Americans will be happy, and we’ll have done our bit for international cooperation. Surely it’s the least we can do.

TEE OFF
with Vivienne Inch
Wherever I have teed off this month, the unsettling matter of mergers has been on my mind and what we might be in for at the end of the path to total convergence. On the bright side I suppose you’d have to count the hybrid art experience of the rugby league grand final last month. There were predictable pieces from Futurist sports writers but something Baroque in the photographs of naked footballers cradling infants, and matching commentary: “Little Logan Anscough won’t remember the 1999 rugby league but one day his dad will be able to tell him he was there when history was made” (Sunday Telegraph). Only an Expressionist could have brought together a football team and a weather pattern to create Melbourne Storm. On the day, averring Minimalism, Lazarus raised his whole team from the dead at half-time. Dadaists shouted ‘ceci n’est pas une goal’ from the Dragon camp at the penalty try and later we watched a Symbolist outburst of blubbing from the losers on the lawn. Lazarus holding aloft the three dimensional object took a postmodern cut-up approach in his victory speech, referring to our boys in Timor while reserving the catch in the throat for the wife and kids. Dragons captain Paul McGregor called the loss ‘Surreal’. Meanwhile, in another of his unconvincing ‘Man of the People’ performance pieces, John Howard on the winner’s dais you’d have to say was entirely Conceptual.

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These clothes are as much a statement of philosophy as they are of design

This exciting exhibition, an initiative of the Queensland College of Art, is one of the outcomes of the joint management agreement that exists between Griffith University and Brisbane City Gallery. Students studying at the Queensland College of Art are offered a diversity of courses ranging from design, fine art, photography to film and animation. In the visual arts, there are no boundaries.

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