October – November 1999

RealTime

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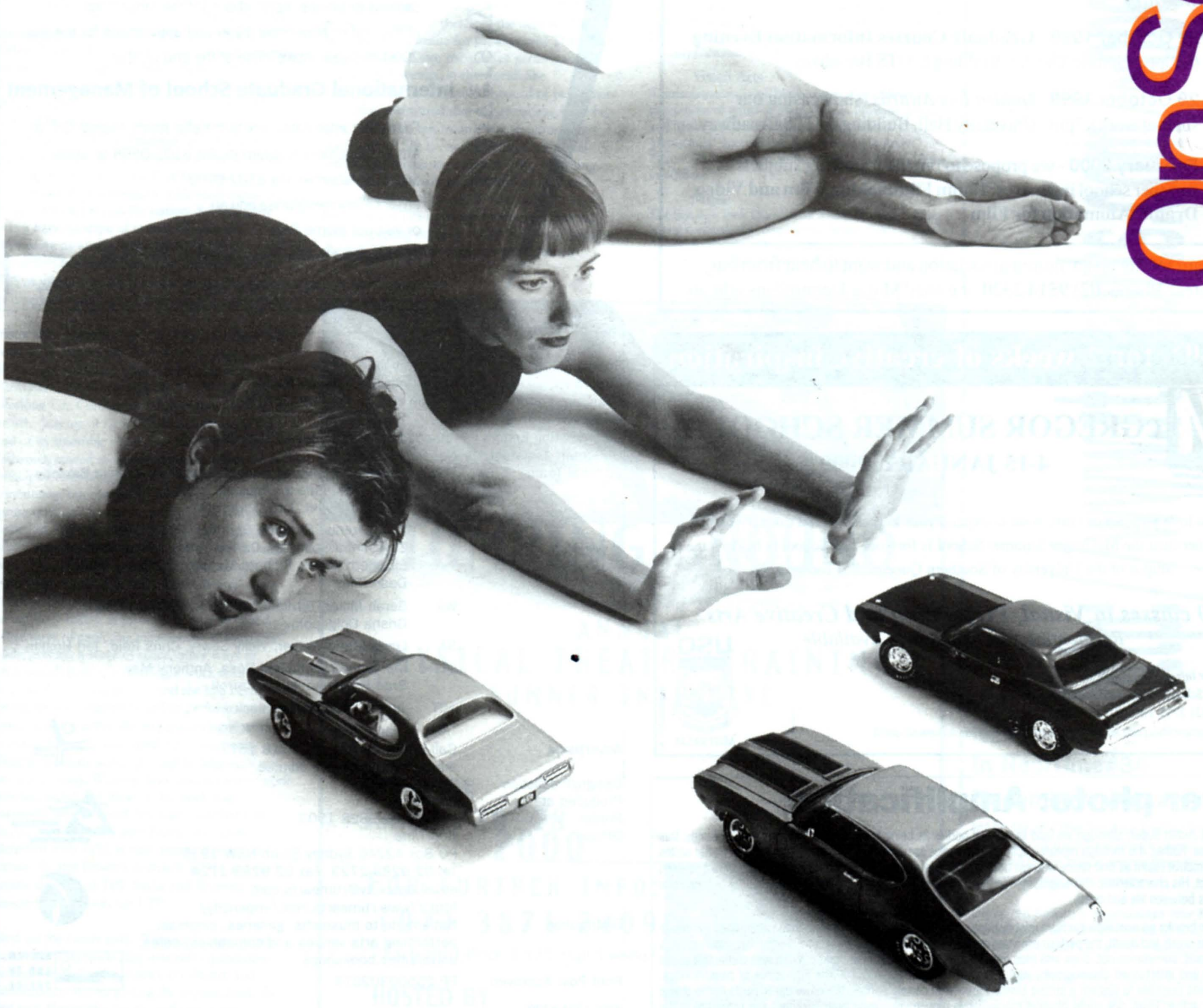

Australia's innovative arts bi-monthly

Cover photo: Amplification

According to Judith Butler, although we tend to think of bodies as being formed from some material essence, this is not the case. Rather, it is through repeated actions that bodies assume the character which they do. Butler writes of the performative realm as that space wherein bodies enact their being. Phillip Adams' *Amplification* can be seen in such a light. His characteristic choreography—in the context of this work—produces a certain kind of body; one which hovers between life and death.

Amplification brooks no nostaligia for humanist notions of the body. Purportedly set in those attenuated moments between a car crash and death, the performers flung and were flung in hyperreal fashion. Sometimes wearing bags over their heads, sometimes not, duos and trios created a highly dynamic interchange. What was distinctive about this intricate and intertwined choreography was that the movements did not divide into active or passive roles. Although it was possible to discern a strong kinetic input from certain parties, the other participants in the dance were equally active. Thus, one could observe manipulative movements being both accepted and replied to in the one moment.

The work as a whole consisted of short scenes whose serial effect was to present and perform bodies on the edge of life. Biologists have long pondered the definition and essence of life. Adams' work provided a minimalistic conception of living corporeality–active but not affective, interactive yet strangely mute—his final moment, a tableau vivant of naked flesh. One could be forgiven for thinking his dancers lacked the trappings of conventional personality but for that final moment. For it's in nakedness that one sees very quickly the vast difference between life and death.

Philipa Rothfield

Amplification, *by Phillip Adams; performed by Geordie Browning, Shona Erskine, Michelle Heaven, Stephanie Lake and Gerard Van Dyck; turntable composition, Lynton Carr; Athenaeum II, Melbourne, September 9 - 19, 1999. Cover photograph by Jeff Busby. L to R Stephanie Lake, Shona Erskine*

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Cover Image RealTime 32 was Kate Beynon, *Intrinsic Defense* (1998), courtesy of Sutton Gallery.

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 to become the director of Brisbane's Powerhouse (opening in 2000) was not long enough for him to realise his vision of TPS as a laboratory as well as a production venue for new work. TPS has long been a site of great invention, a multitude of one-off works, evolving bodies of works 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 less frequent and less sustaining, and there was a dispersal of creativity and energy into other forms—physical theatre, music theatre, spectacle, 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 Nikki Heywood, 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, Playworks, *RealTime* and *Performing the Unnameable* addressed themselves to performance across the nation. But still there was a 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 Australia Council working on the 1990 Art and Working Life Conference (Melbourne), she became artistic director of Death Defying Theatre at the end of its ensemble years. The company was reshaped, moved to western Sydney, adhered to its principles of making accessible work in and for the community, but expanded its brief 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 story-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 a work 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 not every work was successful, but most of the work was extremely well-received. She's amused that John Baylis, formerly of Sydney Front (once closely identified with TPS), is now artistic director of Urban Theatre Projects (formerly DDT) and she's artistic director of TPS. Baylis 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 Rowlands' *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 Celia White, a work for an Indigenous theatre company in Newcastle.

Fiona Winning photo: M. Donnelly

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 want they want of the space, what stake they want in it. She is 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 enriching, but, she says, "dispersal can mean alienation from one's community." She is 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.

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Les Balletts C de la B, *iets op bach*

In 1990, I went to an all-Belgian night at Théâtre de la Bastille, a kind of upmarket Performance Space (great seats, a flytower) 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-choreographers 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 Needcompany 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 Flemish Belgiums 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 Århus 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* Balletts C de la B's latest work, possibly their last. After the show, director Alain Platel commented wrily, "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.

Rosas, *i said i*

Another Belgian great, and another I'd almost despaired 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 ground-breaking 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 *fase* 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-accustation*) 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. KG

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 fantasy selection of experiences and resources in a context of optimistic engagement with the ideas and entertainments of new media work, and around the whole place wafts the sweet perfume of money. There are no half measures at the ICC, and what a refreshing environment for new work this provides. By putting cutting edge, esoteric art in such a high quality context, the curatorial and cultural 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.nttticc.or.jp/icc*), 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 syntheses, the ICC is located in an extremely 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 3 floors 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 art, 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 a degree of familiarity in the content and the nature of the interaction which enables the visitor to relax to the level where pleasure and play can begin. Iwai Toshio'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 object, projected onto the glass lid, is available for manipulation. Material objects are divorced from their functions by immaterial images, and a whole range of new interactions with familiar apparatus is solicited. Simply by making sounds and lovely light effects, the visitor feels a fresh enthusiasm for the most basic of technologies.

This principle of delight is maintained in Gregory Barsamian's *Juggler* installation which uses strobes and sculptures to recreate the child-like thrill of animation. Similarly, Heri Dono's *Gamelan of Nommunication* encloses startling new ideas in playful, appealing forms. Dono's arrangement of Heath Robinson-style instruments liberates a joyful cacophony of sound and motion with its own uncanny, almost indecipherable coherence. With the same easy balance of fun and thought, Luc Courchesne's *Landscape One* engages visitors in a muddle of screen-based narratives where ideas about chance, society and control emerge through novel interactions.

In Karl Sims' *Galapagos* installation, the relationship between visitor and artwork also hovers curiously between the personal and public, as one visitor at a time steps onto sensor-equipped footpads to manipulate a world of abstract organisms held on a bank of 12 monitors. Complex Darwinian ideas merge with gorgeous, colourful forms and child-like choreography to create a quickstep which is observed by others, impatiently awaiting their turn.

Another work which engages a similar self-choreography of the participant is the Dumbtype Installation *OR*, which is a version of a theatrical performance of the same name. Video images of Dumbtype's performers are captured within long slabs of glass laid on a white carpet and surrounded by sensors which react to the perusing visitor. In this chillingly clinical space, the vulnerability of the prone bodies elicits uncommon physical reactions, as visitors perform duets and solos around the panels.

The same inventiveness of movement could well be happening in Maebayashi Akitsugu's *Audible Distance*, but one has no way of knowing, for visitors are enclosed in head mounted sensor systems which leave them stumbling around in the dark with only the audible pulses and visible globular shapes of the computer graphics to alert them to the proximity of others. The disorientating disjunction of physical and virtual space recreates a thrilling trippy experience which, even with all its important ideas, is still great fun.

And so is the *Life Spacies* installation of Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau. On the screens in their 2 rooms, virtual organisms appear and grow in response to the movement of visitors. Email messages are incorporated from the internet as are the interacting images of the separated visitors who become active creators of this teeming new world. Reaching out for a purple bug which swipes across the image of the other startled participant before bursting into a reproductive frenzy creates strange sensations in the participants and their observers.

This collective interaction is taken through another prism in *ConFIGURING the Cave*, a collaboration between Agnes Hegedus, Jeffrey Shaw, Bernd Lintermann and Leslie Stuck. In this work, groups gather for each timed immersion into a virtual world where the astonishing 3-dimensional environments break disconcertingly over the heads of visitors as they in turn manipulate the large wooden puppet which is the interface.

To echo this group disorientation there is an equally challenging individual immersion provided in Mikami Seiko's off-puttingly 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 theme-park styled event within the exhibition, is balanced by the more intellectual engagement required by Shu Lea Cheang's *Buy 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 immersive 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 exhibit, Cheang's piece offers a transition into the more theoretical aspects of the ICC's collection, taking the visitor from the active engagements of the permanent exhibition into the second circle of experiences which broaden 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.*

Mikami Seiko *World, Membrane and the Dismembered Body*

In this theatre, resident international artists, such as current occupants Do-Ho Shu and York der Knoefel, are given a forum to present their research. Symposia and lectures are only part of a well-resourced program of academic activity lending 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 products, 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 ready 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 response to new media work that the ICC distinguishes itself from centres sharing its 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 untrammelled pleasure to roam around the ICC, discovering the many textures of creative involvement with technology.

Take me dancing

Philipa Rothfield in London

Hovering between sea and land, the Royal Naval College was the site of many a seafaring 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* began with a piece 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)painted hall; cherubs, angels, semi-nude women, kings and queens. If we were to believe the tromp-l'oeil imagery of the painter, 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 mortals. Led by 2 elderly women, the children spoke of time and space, indices of our mortal coil. Young dancers lapped the limits of the room, whilst the many others seated themselves at the tables, examining anatomy charts, bodies and maps. This work had moments of otherworldly beauty punctuated by the thunder of big and little feet. The untrained but nevertheless very focused cast did not always replicate the rarefied aesthetics which produced the surrounds for this performance.

Next, the entire audience was transported by boat to Canary Wharf, a Monopoly town circa Thatcher's England, recently bombed by the IRA. This was the choice of Wendy Houstoun (ex-DV8) for her work, *Fêted*. Upon arrival, the passengers were ushered through a suitably deserted landscape—very Jeffrey Smart—into a tiny, manicured park. Houstoun played some famous nobody, flanked by bodyguards, giving speeches over the microphone whilst her official staff tussled and rolled over each other on the lawn. As time went by, the woman's facade shifted from posh to dishevelled until, in her bra and nickers, she pleaded with her retreating audience, muttering platitudes about love and life. *Fêted* had elements of parody and social satire mixed in with energetic dancing which nevertheless maintained a naturalistic façade. A slightly slight piece, *Fêted* was about the right level for its sterile surrounds. As in DV8's work, Houstoun allows her dancing to emerge from the everyday.

Finally, we were shipped to London, to an open-air stage at the Royal Festival Hall for Noel Wallace's piece, *Inside Out*. This was a very sad and serious dance about migration, racism and institutionalised cruelty. A giant suitcase dwarfs the stage. A woman is constrained by her hospital bed. She thrashes about but none of the staff understands her. 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 with the angels. Although the movement was interesting, 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. He is willing to grapple with painful, political themes which are clearly pertinent for the dance scene as well as its greater social context.

What I did miss in all these pieces was a sustained presentation of really interesting movement. Happily, I managed to see Siobhan Davies' *13 Different Keys*. In terms of kinaesthetic imagination and finesse, this piece bore no comparison to *Take Me to the River*. Publicised as a meld of classical and contemporary dance (involving a collaboration between the Royal Ballet and Davies' own company), *13 Different Keys* was a site specific work made for a huge gallery space in Brick Lane, East London. The stage consisted of an elevated cross, whose meeting point along one line was smooth, along the other, broken. The dancers utilised that break in their movement, jumping, hopping and bridging its abyss. They also worked the edge of the stage, hugging its corners, slinking onto the floor, transgressing its raised surface.

Five dancers, each distinctively adept, performed duets, solos, trios and double duets. Their movements were obviously designed in collaboration for there wasn't a sense that the one choreographer was imposing moves on other bodies. The performers themselves were really strong dancers, including Deborah Bull (Royal Ballet) and Gill Clarke who performed a beautiful duet. The movements were surprising, involving changes of direction, level, shifts of weight and velocity, although there were the satisfactions of repeated sections throughout the piece. The dancers stayed onstage, resting at times, dancing to silence, not dancing to the music, which was a medley of Marais' early music performed live. *13 Different Keys* was meant to be a promenade piece but sadly the audience refused to budge on its ringside purchase.

On 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 Nazism. Burkett felt that 50 years ago he could have been one of these unfortunates, 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 vehiculate the most bitter of critical perspectives whilst tossing 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* slides between a commentary on the politics of consensus on the one hand, and of 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 improvising a 2-hour show in preparation for this part of the work; the result, a truly hysterical banter between these 3 characters, composed of local political references, sexual innuendo, stand-up comedy and improvisation. Burkett's manipulations are always visible. 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. And so we did.

Take Me to the River: *Rosemary Lee*, The Banquet Dances, *Wendy Houston*, Fêted, *Noel Wallace*, Inside Out, *Greenwich, Canary Wharf and The South Bank, London, July 10 - 18;* Thirteen Different Keys, *Deborah Bull, Gill Clarke, Siobhan Davies, The Atlantis Building, Brick Lane, London, July 15 - 19;* Tinka's New Dress, *Ronnie Burkett, The Pit, Barbican Centre, London, June 23 - July 10*

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, there's no danger of dropping off 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 paradoxes of that place where we spend a third of our lives, contrasting the body's rest and the mind's frantic dreaming; the relaxation of the muscles and their involuntary movements; lethargy and energy. *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* may be inspired by the paradoxical qualities of sleep, but the experience of watching it is as lively as a chase dream and as unsettling as a nightmare.

It begins quietly, with a bare stage and the cast strolling around the wings, banging boxes and kicking trunks. Vandekeybus comes on, prancing. He paws the ground, neighs and raises his head like a horse. For a moment, we're back in the playground with horsey. Then, under the stony gaze of a grim task-master, the music suddenly kicks in and the dancing begins. For the next 2 hours, the fast-moving dance first raises the temperature, then winds down as one of the dancers comes to the front and talks directly to the audience in Italian, French or English. You begin to chill out, then the frenzy begins again. The music, by David Byrne (once of Talking Heads), is meta-rock. Yes, it makes you stamp your foot, but it also reminds you of world music, jazz, even classical melody. The mix of music and the theme of sleep gives the show an ambitious feel: with an all-male cast of about 10, Ultima Vez reaches out for the big questions: how can we go beyond clichéd conceptions of the male body? Can the crisis of masculinity be expressed through childhood scenes? Do lads dream of testosterone sheep?

Near the beginning of the show, the softness of sleep is subverted by a joke. A large, white cuddly pillow is cradled and handed around. In the middle of the stage, it looks innocent, peaceful, safe. Then it explodes, throwing up a huge cloud of down. Feathers flutter everywhere—for a moment it looks like a winter wonderland. During the rest of the evening, the down is trampled by a dozen male boots. Dreams can mean mystery and pleasure. At one point the dancers hold up lanterns in the dark. Dreams can also mean pain. Ultima Vez's dancers convey mania and derangement by becoming animals, throwing themselves around, barking mad and hectic. All the time I'm struck by their utter commitment: these boys really mean it. But if some sequences are full-on, aggressive and disturbing, others are much more tender and humorous. A dancer stands still and puts one hand to the side of his face as if resting his head on a pillow; his other hand is between his thighs, vulnerable. But dreaming can also be wild: a series of awkward contortions, with the dancers off-balance and falling with a thump, reminding us of how sleep pulls the body around and how we sometimes wake up with twisted sheets or bent into the strangest shapes.

Wim Vandekeybus & Ultima Vez *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* Bruno Vandermeulen

My only doubts about *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* come from the universality of its theme: after all, almost anything can be seen as a dream. And the show does sag at times, especially when the 2 short films are projected. At first, film seemed like a good idea, another way of opening out the stage, a further glimpse beyond the mundane. But during each filmed short, I felt the cool, distracted daze typical of passive viewing—how different from the heat and amazement of live dance. Both films are magic-realist fairy stories about dreams and riches and symbols and last words, populated by characters such as the Scream Seller and the Bungle Tyrant, hooded executioners and fey women. Their brightly lit colours and outdated hippie feel clashed with the greyer stage world and its pulsating life.

Sleep has its own aesthetic tradition—from the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch to symbolist and surrealist poetry. At 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 angular 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 shakes awake our perceptions.

Ultima Vez, In Spite of Wishing and Wanting, *directed by Wim Vandekeybus; Castello Pasquini, Tuscany, 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 where 219 are being watched on 30 monitors by 250 people over 5 days, should bring some clarity to the whole question of what a dance film might be. But the subject of the dance screen events that are proliferating in Europe, both in conjunction with dance festivals and as independent events, had me heading back to the past...and the drawing board. This historically rich and potentially radical interdisciplinary form is in danger of being cornered by commercial success and market demands which have led to the creation of a generic formula for 'short dance films.' Some of the clichés of this form are: one sustained physical joke, limitless natural landscapes populated by wild women with long hair and men in shirt sleeves kicking up dirt, figures bombarded with water/wind/fire or lost in desolate warehouse spaces. Arnd Wesemann, writing of this tendency in a special dance screen issue of *Ballett International*, declares that "the dance film keeps to itself" behaving "like a closed society."

At the big event, the IMZ Dance Screen 99 in Cologne, a very good dance filmmaker, Laura Taler (whose documentary on Canadian dancemaker Bill Coleman is a real redefinition of such work) spoke of Bob Lockyer (the undisputed 'father' of dance screen who programs dance for the BBC) as travelling the world "spawning" short, made-for-television dance/video collaborations that provide bite-sized chunks of contemporary dance for the masses. The other formula popular with television broadcasters is the recorded version of famous choreographic works—for example Petipa's *Le Corsaire* and Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, screenings of which were given the red carpet treatment in Cologne.

This is a new development in dance film work. Look through any dance video collection in the world and you'll find an institutionalised lineage that includes video experimentation, animation and film essays on motion in all its forms. The New York Public Library Dance Collection (which claims to be the largest in the world and which also has the tightest security), includes works by Hilary Harris, Norman McLaren, Nam June Paik and Ed Emshwiller and at the Cinémateque de la Danse in Paris, Ferdinand Leger and Rene Clair provide another history. Look to the periphery—and the real heart—of the dance screen culture and you'll find a continuation of this more heterogeneous approach.

Ironically, the works which claim the prize-money are the product of contemporary dance and filmmakers' commitment to a truly interdisciplinary practice. *Dust* by Anthony Atanasio and Miriam King and *Contrecoup* by Pascal Magnin and Alias Compagnie shared two-thirds of the prize-money at Dance Screen and a common, intensely cinematic aesthetic. Both Atanasio and Magnin are established directors who have taken on dance for what it can offer their craft. (The other successful approach seems to come from dancemakers who have taken on film in a similar way such as Wim Vandekeybus.) *Dust* is as glossy as an alcohol ad but its images of the body jar—a face framed by a swimming cap and goggles and sporting false eyelashes blinks through sand; a swimsuit clad body floats up out of inky black water. *Contrecoup* begins on the street with the gestures of a sharply dressed guy becoming a dance of yelled abuse. The fine line between gesture and dance continues throughout the film and Magnin's resulting newly formulated 'musical' is affective and strong. Both would work well on television which is clearly a plus at an event where half of those attending are producers.

Other brave but less network-friendly submissions include *Allee der Kosmonauten* by Sasha Waltz, which features a surreal, 'universal' family in a home environment that is never physically stable; Les Ballets C de la B's *Eyes on the Back* (dir. Yves Opstaele), a pseudo-documentary with dancers on tour amusing themselves in their hotel rooms in increasingly disturbing but oddly familiar ways; and *The Way of the Weed* featuring the dancers of the Ballett Frankfurt, a sci-fi epic charting an investigative journey to another planet where human movement studies are taking place. Special mention should be made of Australian Michelle Mahrer's finely crafted documentary on the Page brothers, *Urban Clan*, which won Best Documentary.

Il Coreografo Elettronico in Naples went crazy, awarding first prize to *Lourdes Las Vegas (Bernadetje)* by Arne Sierens, Alain Platel and Giovanni Cioni. The Italian festival was small and intimate and there was a Neopolitan anarchy and real pleasure to the proceedings and consequent decision-making. *Lourdes...* is a rambling mystery of a film, cutting between fun fair shots and quiet moments where individuals share comments or a performance with the camera. The dance is in the film's telling, not the participants.

At Montpellier Danse 99 in southern France, cinema's influence on contemporary dance became the main manifestation of the theme, "Image and Dance." Surrounding the main performance programme were screenings in 5 venues, a video-based installation and "Vitrines video danse"—screenings in shops and cafes. One cinema was devoted to the video and film work of participating choreographers while another screened feature films presented by those same choreographers. Directors chosen included Pasolini, Denis, Fassbinder, Lynch, Kurosawa, Cassavetes, Tarkovski, Jarmusch and Godard...this is not any old cinema and the 'dance' implicit in these films tells us more about the actual possibilities for dance and film than the TV snippets promoted as the archetype of the form. On top of this, open forums included "Choreography, essential component of cinema?" and "Film Loving Choreographers."

Even more telling were the various manifestations of the cinematic in the performance work. Obviously chosen for their relevance to the festival theme, I believe these works do, however, outline specific but widespread tendencies within dance for a generation of choreographers whose primary culture has been one of the screen rather than the stage. The Alwin Nikolais retrospective paid tribute to a peer of Merce Cunningham whose experiments in the 50s with light and soundscapes and video collaborations in the 60s with Ed Emshwiller were technically and aesthetically groundbreaking. Nikolais was invited to Montpellier by French choreographer Philippe Decouflé who reproduced film effects on stage in *Triton* and *Shazam!*, continuing his role as the magician of French contemporary dance to the point of duplicating his film *Abracadabra* in the latter work. His obsession with trickery and turn-of-the-century entertainments connect him to the earliest cinema and the spectacles that were its currency.

UK-based French choreographer Gilles Jobim's exploration of the body as subject in *A+B=X* saw the 3 dancers' upturned rumps and backs transformed into screens onto which the face of Franko B was projected. The naked, sculptural, physical presence of the dancers was upstaged by the face-pulling, absent performance artist who also had the last say in the piece, both as a voice-over and on screen, displaying his self-mutilations that were somehow rendered poetic on film. Nasser Martin-Gousset's *Solarium* heralded its cinematic intentions with projected 'titles' and 'credits.' Populated by cinematic archetypes—the stripper, the cowboy, the spy, the transvestite, the doctor—and featuring a suitcase swapping sequence, chase scene (the danger element being Nasser's white stilettos) and drugging, *Solarium* plundered film and pop music for its fragmentary and refreshingly raw end result. Charles Creange aimed straight, but not necessarily clear, with his new work, *Movies*, which shared the themes of "time, space and substance" with its namesake but also the empty gloss of a certain type of flick.

Pascal Magnin *Contrecoup*

Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus' *In Spite of Wishing and Wanting* and accompanying film programme left the most lasting impression on this 'motion' picture mission. (See Alex Sierz page 6.)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 Julio Cortazar, the narrative unfolded as a universal mythology; the prophet, the monarch, revolution, execution and miracles all made an appearance. As in Vandekeybus' other films, *La Mentira* (1992) and *Elba and Frederico* (1993), the bodies tell the tale; actions, gestures and postures speak louder than words. In *The Last Words*, palace officials scurry around the throne on their haunches and a wife rolls away from her husband in what looks like the warmest bed. In *La Mentira*, 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 his 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 mornings, the characters repeating actions that have as many variations as there are days in a lifetime. The common element of sleep across these works 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 scary encounters of the trip was discovering that French choreographers Joelle Bouvier and Régis 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?)

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

Sarah Miller reels 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 millennial celebrations. There could be more. The ones I know about include the DADAA Festival, *Orbit*, and the Fremantle Festival. In Perth there is the Lesbian & Gay Pride Festival opening on September 25; the *Artrage* festival, administered by the Perth Festival Fringe Society, opening on October 1; PICA's third biennial *Dancers are space eaters* festival opens on October 21; 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 Auntie Edith and more of that anon), and as if running one festival wasn't enough, new director Sean Doran has initiated a fringe festival to run in tandem. This has led to a bit of argie bargie in the press (lowering standards, my turf, your turf kind of stuff) between what was the Fringe Festival (now *Artrage*) and what is now the Fringe Festival as initiated and supported by PIAF.

Anyway, now that you, dear reader, are in a position to realise just what a terrifically creative and dynamic festive state we 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 exception of *Artrage* and the new Fringe Festival, most of these festivals target specific interest and/or community groups. And I'm prepared to argue that they do fulfil a purpose and function even if—in the larger scheme of things—it's hard to remember that the most merciless logic of all is that the sun still shines even as the world is falling apart. I don't defend it. I simply note it.

And DADAA (WA) is a truly important organisation focusing on arts and cultural activities for and by people with disabilities. This year's *Orbit* is the culmination of 5 years of dedicated work by an amazing bunch of people whose talent, humour and tenacity have—despite the odds—contributed greatly to the broader community. *Orbit* (September 15—October 2) opened with a dazzling Lantern Parade through Cappuccino Strip in Fremantle, complete with pyrotechnics, fireworks, performances, live music and paper lanterns. Hundreds of people turned out for this opening event despite a truly miserable, freezing, wet and windy day and strangely enough, the rain stopped and the wind dropped for the parade. It was pretty special.

The program itself looks hip and covers all art forms. The emphasis is on popular culture and it's pretty out there—in orbit perhaps. I really want to see Loose Teeth (great name), a unique percussion group and *Future Shock*, directed by the seriously talented Elizabeth Navratil. The latter, a look at cheesy television is "a seriously funny offering of the dreams, desires, horrors of the performers and the soaps that have shaped them." Sharing the same bill is *Float*, a dance performance directed by Sete Tele put together after more than 6 months of dance workshops with DADAA members. These performances not only share a program but also strange frequency modulations created by Cosmatronic, makers of unique technology based sound design. Beyond which there is film, *Digital Daze* (a play I think) and digital visions (photographs and a whole bunch of other stuff). Highly recommended.

Moving right along we have *Artrage* which opens with a bang, no doubt, on October 1. This festival has been around for yonks and in 1999 nearly 50 performances will take place in what is described as an "action packed three weeks that also includes theatre, dance, film, poetry, music, comedy, visual art and street theatre." The emphasis is on giving local 'yoof' the opportunity to strut their stuff and it looks like there will be some pretty happening events throughout the program. If you are in any doubt that we inhabit a media saturated society, then this festival will convince you. Most of the performances and exhibitions are concerned with exploring, critiquing, adoring and/or exploiting 'the media' in one form or another, followed by that other favourite festival theme—lurve, sex and relationships, in endless permutations.

The Village Idiot Company will be presenting *Flat*, a play written by Emma Mildern from Innaloo (a Perth suburb), that explores the polarised worlds of city and country, sex and the 'L' word and finding ecstasy in death and not in some school girl's knickers. In *Features of Blown Youth* by Raimondo Cortese, produced by Artefact Theatre, the action moves from a flat to a share house, to examine the passions and frustrations of a group of young Australians. Moving along from the domestic and the local, from sex and lurve (although not completely), White Crow Productions presents *Bombs and Suitcases*, an 'explosive' black comedy about the Balkans, the media (of course), love, revenge and dirty potatoes. It's devised by Grisha Dolgopolov (who writes for this very broadsheet), Nino Danko and Ivan Salmin. *Autogeddon,* written by the UK's Heathcote Williams, directed by Tim Burns and adapted by and starring Lindzee Smith, gives the slightly older artistes an opportunity to put it out there. *Autogeddon: the ride* is a pre-millennial assemblage about the automobile apocalypse. Then there is Felicity Bott and David Fussell's *Belle Grave—Baby be Brave*: a solo dance performance/installation at the Jacksue Gallery. "Belle Grave, the clown daughter of late capitalism, sometimes anarchist, sometimes super hero, sometimes seductress, sometimes earth mother, sometimes spy...she inhabits an installation that is her schizoidal mind-set made manifest." Beyond which, if you ain't doing the media you're being the media which brings me to Town TV, a new *Artrage* initiative which will broadcast a cinema-size projection throughout the Perth Cultural Centre documenting the daily life and ritual of Northbridge.

The Lesbian & Gay Pride Festival is celebrating its 10th birthday this year and is making a serious attempt to develop an arts program beyond the more celebratory and familiar parade, party, and fair day. Critical to that mission is an exhibition curated by Andrew Nicholls entitled *Queer'dom* which looks at the work of emerging queer artists. There will be a small performing arts program with play readings, performance and dance, late night cabaret, not to mention an Arts Ball at the Art Gallery of WA featuring Robyn Archer and Vanessa Wagner (what a team)!

PICA—where I work—is implicated one way or another, in most of these events, greedy pigs that we are. We've got our own project going with the third biennial *Dancers are space eaters* festival. We're pretty happy with this program which features international artist Wendy Houstoun (UK) with 2 fabulous solo shows: *Haunted Daunted & Flaunted* last seen in the 1998 Adelaide Festival; as well as a site specific work called *Happy Hour* which takes place at Fuel, PICA's utterly hip bar and cafe. Grisha Coleman from the New York based performance sensation Hot Mouth will be seen in Australia for the first time with a work-in-progress whilst Trotman & Morrish, "beloved in Melbourne for their ability to poke sharp but gentle fun at everything through movement", will be following their huge success at The Performance Space's *antistatic* dance event with their first appearance in Perth.

Space eaters '99 focuses on the integration of spoken and sung text into dance and movement-based performance work so both Houstoun and Coleman will be running week-long workshops. There will be an intense weekend-long film program at the LUNA Cinemas, showcasing works made specifically for the screen by more than 20 international choreographers and artists, including from the UK works by DV8, the Featherstonehaughs and Cholmondeleys, France's Daniel L'Equisse and Jean Claude Gallota, and Australia's Gravity Feed and Tracie Mitchell. There will be a forum, "Finding a Voice", and of course there will be performances by local dance artists, including a very special mini-retrospective evening created by respected WA artists, Alice Cummins and Tony Osborne.

The *Awesome* Festival features some truly exciting work from Australia and overseas including Doppio Parrallelo's *Tracking Time*, directed by Theresa Crea, which will take place at Perth Railway Station. This hybrid and site specific work was first presented at the Telstra Adelaide Festival and is a very special experience. From South Africa comes *Golden Gloves* by Bachaki Theatre. This is not a story about boxing but rather, the name of a bogus insurance firm based in Soweto that lies in wait for the unwary job-seeker in these days of high prices and higher unemployment. It's a mix of gumboot dancing, music, song and satirical comedy. *The Poe Project*, directed by Michael Lindsay Simpson with a cast of young WA performers and designers, takes Edgar Allen's Poe's poems *Silence* and *The Bells* and adapts them for the stage while *Coquecigrues* (in old French—a very rare unimaginable animal—probably a mixture of many species) is presented by French company Pictofacto. Five such rare and unbelievable creatures will be released in the Stirling Gardens for the pleasure of 4 to 9 year olds. Beyond which, Forrest Place in the CBD will be turned into a regional arts village. There will be street theatre, film workshops, a film festival and site specific artworks and it's all for kids (of any age).

Wendy Houstoun *Happy Hour* Chris Nash

So, a fun packed few months with heaps of theatre, exhibitions, dance, partying and so on. And every night we can all go home to our television sets and watch the world fall apart in East Timor. Is something wrong with this picture?

Orbit, *DADAA WA Inc: September 15 - October 2, ph: 08 9430 6616;* Artrage*: October 1 - 23, ph: 08 9227 6186; Lesbian & Gay Pride Festival: September 26 - October 30; ph: 08 9227 1767; PICA's* Dancers are space eaters, *September 21 - November 6; ph: 08 9227 6144 (contact Sharon Flindell);* Awesome, *International Children's Festival: November 7 - 14; ph: 9485 0560*

No more lap lap and spear

Suzanne Spunner at the 1999 Indigenous Arts Festival

We Iri 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 refract the issues of the Stolen Generation and Aboriginal genocide. His family drama had more in common with Tennessee Williams' steamy south than anywhere in Australia. The story revolved around incest and retribution for the sins of the father and it was unclear if the father character's whiteness was any more relevant than the children's Aboriginality. It was primarily a generic ghost story with universal references to the abandonment of children and the rapacity of the adults, and its Gothic horror tended to swamp a more subtle reading of its metaphors.

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 screeches "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, hunch 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, *Blak 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 mateship 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 Ngoombujarra as Harry and Peter Docker as his mate give finely felt and detailed performances, but Kylie Belling as Harry's wife is constrained by having to carry the message of the film. *Harry's War* is a clear, well constructed narrative film without any distinctive cinematic embellishment.

Bradley Byquar, Ralph Cotterill in Ivan Sen's *Wind*

Ivan Sen's *Wind* is set last century on the frontier in NSW and examines in extreme close-up the problematic relationship between a young Black Tracker and his policeman boss as they pursue an Aboriginal murderer. In contrast with Frankland's film, Sen's vision is utterly cinematic, the story told by superb actors including Bradley Byquar 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 atmospherics of sound and visuals. It is a strong and powerful film in the territory of Kurosawa where the landscape itself is a protagonist.

In discussion with Rachel Perkins after the screening, Sen talked about his desire to be a filmmaker who can tackle any subject whereas Richard Frankland has clearly set himself an Aboriginal agenda with this film and his earlier *No Way to Forget*.

Watching Jimmy Little perform upstairs at The Kulin Chillin Club was another insight into contemporary Aboriginality. Little was, as always, in that fine voice which recalls Roy Orbison and spans more than 40 years—from the days of *Royal Telephone* and the 1959 film *Shadow of the Boomerang* to today when he calls himself proudly a Yorta Yorta man, and records on his new album *Messenger* songs by Paul Kelly, Nick Cave and Neil Finn. In the trajectory of Little's career, you can see many of the dilemmas and contradictions raised in *Casting Doubts*.

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, Buddhas, stuffed cobras —and she is resplendent in an ocelot patterned leisure suit. Among the emerging artists at *Dream Girls* (Jackman Gallery), Leann 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 Iri 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.*

Cyberistic power and human frailty

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

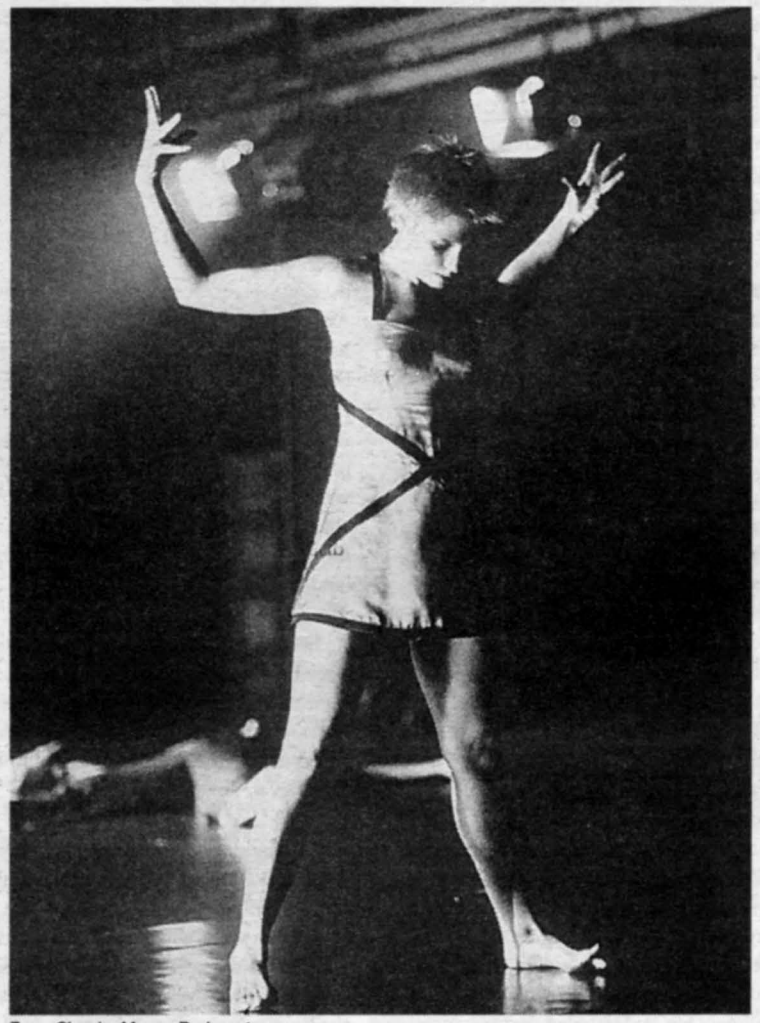
Despite their different backgrounds, choreographers Shelley Lasica, Lucy Guerin and Gideon Obarzanek seem to have encapsulated if not the actual spirit of the 90s, then one manifestation which is traceable through their works, reflecting a particular cyberistic quality in our aesthetic culture.

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 'presentness' 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 unco, with 3 rangy 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, wile 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 audiences don't often get to witness the ironies of contemporary behavioural ethics and demeanour in dancing which provides the humour.



Zero, Chunky Move, *Bodyparts*

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 cyberistic 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 renounced, in a fusion of fragile flesh with an inhuman and indestructible 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's. 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 cannibalised. 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.

Similarly, in *All The Better To Eat You With*, Gideon Obarzanek uses elements of *Little Red Riding Hood* to examine some fragments of interweaving fantasies which hang around this story and give it power. Here, 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 ears 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 overpowers 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. I was 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.

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action situation, *Shelley Lasica, The Performance Space, August 24 - 28; Chunky Move,* Body Parts*: Lucy Guerin,* Zero, *Gideon Obarzanek,* All the Better to Eat You With, *Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House, August 31 - September 4*

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 spin and shimmy? 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 counterpoint 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 an 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 Bessie 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 say 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."

Belinda Cooper & Carlee Mellow, *in the heart of the eye*

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."

One for all dance enthusiasts, experimental film freaks and multimedia afficionados. Go see! RT

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in the heart of the eye, *Dance Works, Athenaeum II, Melbourne, November 18 - 27. Information Tel 03-96961702*

No vacancy

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.

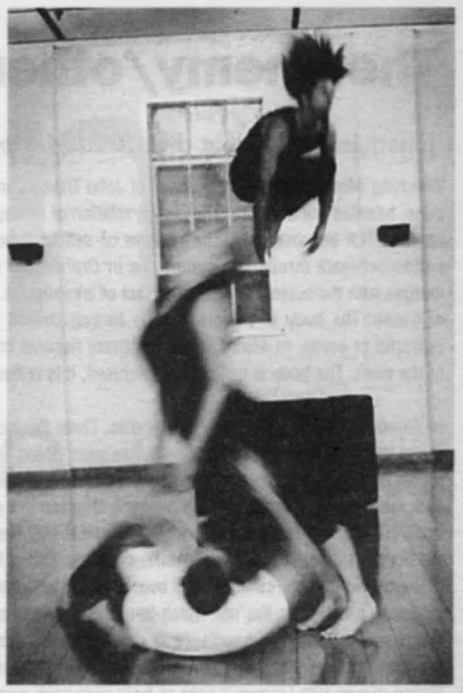
The studio showings of *P.O.V.* at The King Street Arts Centre affected us all profoundly and yet on both nights after the performance the invited audience was struggling to verbalise its obvious pleasure. Both the audience and the artists found themselves awash in a banal Q & A session that undermined the spirit and energy created by this fine work. Questions from the partisan audience expressed great interest in the narrative and technical anecdotes about the dancemaking process but missed the effect on those present which had been expressed so well on both evenings in rapturous applause. It wasn't simply a case of stroking your mates' egos, we had been moved by something powerful and tangible which resided very clearly within the movement material—it was reproduced perfectly at the second showing.

So where did the material come from? The 3 dancers (Rachael Whitworth, Robert Griffin and Paul O'Sullivan) made movement phrases and videoed them. Over a couple of weeks Sue Peacock, Sally Richardson and Rachael Whitworth then made a selection from the material and worked through their interpretation of particular phrases to produce 3 different pieces. Only the dancers knew that all 3 were coincidently utilising the same phrases. Although the evening was constructed as 3 discrete pieces, even on the first viewing I read 3 clear chapters of one story, as if a subterranean narrative had been set deeply in the bodies of the dancers.

P.O.V. was a rare dancerly view, an insight into something beyond the eyes and, paradoxically, involving the whole body (dance training is no guarantee of engagement with the corporeal) and a dramaturgical awareness rarely expressed through a dancer's eyes where the norm is vacancy. But it wasn't just that the dancers were facially articulate, they moved their bodies in a way that went beyond skill and training and into an exciting realm of meaning.

The dancers reported that theatre-director Sally Richardson had raised their consciousness—the putative notion of "pure movement" displaced or augmented by emotive and psychological imperatives. This led to a discussion about the merits and deficiencies inherent in dancer and actor training. For there was much talk in the post-performance forums about the different ways in which dance and theatre are approached. It's an odd (Platonic) thing in Western cultures that the 2 processes have been separated which probably has some connection to the mind-body split in the audience reactions described above.

The visible influence of a theatre-director on Rachael Whitworth's version (part one) was very interesting because although there was no overtly dramatic material, the dancers related to each other with uncharacteristic intimacy. Their bodies, and most importantly their eyes, were engaged with one another at a level that gave trios and duets a spirit and beauty that was never blemished by anachronistic or inappropriate displays of agility (even though the dancers 'flew' around each other at times).



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

The structure of the first section shared similar imperatives to Contact Improvisation, 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. I 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 Rothfield enter's Helen Herbertson's *Delirium*

A flicker 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 Nosferatu is afoot. 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 wonderful shapes. Herbertson performs a dance in a square space, lowering herself to the ground whilst mobile slits of dusky smoke appear then disappear. The movement of the 2 performers—Herbertson and the versatile, nay virtuosic, Patrick—is revealed and concealed by myriad lighting gestures; a shuttered square of black, a layer of darkness which is peeled away, rippled flesh partly revealed and partly concealed. Patrick performs his movements with fluid precision and a temporality which is other-wordly.

Delirium is a collaborative piece, theatrical (Jenny Kemp), physically complex (Simon Barley), lit by the mind's eye (Ben Cobham), buoyed by sounds both surreal and ordinary (Livia Ruzic). It sustains itself within a precise groove, turning and rotating its ideas, representing movement which is almost pixilated. Is it 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. Philipa Rothfield

Helen Herbertson, *Delirium* Jeff Busby

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

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 model enunciated by Hamlet to Laertes: "I'll be your foil." The relation of self to Other, of the individual to its reflection, recurs as a talisman of perfection/death throughout culture. As in *Orphée*, the gateway to the afterlife is the mirror, where the doppelganger merges with the subject in an ecstatic act of annihilation. The disparity between self and Other bleeds out of the fissures of dance. The body in performance is forever denied the perfection of Michelangelo's *David*; no body is as sleek, powerful or erotic. In *Mixed Metaphor*, these fissures concealed even in much postmodern dance become the subject of the work. The body is not only anatomised, it is reified.

In *Foretaste* we see not a body, but bodies. Three figures do not touch; they scarcely relate. In the far corner, a woman (Julia West) searches, but for what? One man (Dean Linguey) moves slowly forward towards us, *suriashi*-style. We hardly notice his approach as his fierce focus on a distant point leads him to nearly weep. In the foreground we see an ever more frenetic explosion of movement. Dressed in a giant nappy, this over-sized baby (Ben Rogan) (re)discovers the body. He leaps, gyrates, moves in every possible way, his hand constantly returning to his groin in an attempt to ground the body in something: phallus, desire, anatomy. This is Kaspar Hauser in reverse: not a man who is drowning in a flood of words, but the pre-cultural body overwhelmed with sensation and possibility. Too many movements, too many bodies yet all the same body, the 'me-which-is-not-me.' West's eyes search all about, Linguey moves after his gaze, while Rogan searches physically. The audience is drawn into a literally hysterical journey which ends with the 2 men exchanging positions and roles in a way that conflates earlier differences. Active becomes passive, peripheral becomes central, and Rogan moves into Linguey's light as both men back away from us. Birth and death are smashed into the same psycho-kinetic space as Rogan's skull peeks out from under his tightly stretched skin: the self-reflexive self as mad.

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 bilateral symmetry, strong and powerful with hair like a Greek god. Hanging from one shoulder where there should be a second powerful arm, however, dangles a deflated husk, a spidery 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. His body is visibly divided, his smaller arm a sign of his brush with death on a motorcycle. Cunningham's once near perfect body is not only present as archive though. It is both literally and more ambiguously present in the form of a life-sized mannequin. Cunningham dances a melancholy *pas de deux* with this 'lost body', which ends with the flesh/not-flesh hand of the doll guiding his gaze away from itself. 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 undifferentiated self of the child in the womb.

In Stephanie Glickman's *Tall* the Other lies within. Here is a body internally psychically divided. The Other rubs against the actual, creating friction, un/pleasure and desire. Glickman's legs strive to perform as would the tall, idealised body of classicism, but they cannot achieve this mastery. A phantom body overlays the movement and butts against it. Glickman struggles to reconcile these bodies. The *barre* is performed on the ground, translating the verticality of ballet into a ground-based, horizontal aesthetic favourable for *this* body. Glickman moves in and out of an open-faced cube like an insect from an Escher study, placing her body into a space simultaneously inside and outside. Here the self can gaze at itself. Legs, arms and torsos may be compared to the ideal: they are at once 'me-and-not-me.' Finally, the actual body is allowed its way, the Other becoming a memory layered onto the experiential. Through erotics, Glickman achieves a fusion in which bent legs and abdominal contortions reinvigorate the body and brush away the need to conform to Michelangelo's aesthetics. The (self-) desiring body celebrates self-scrutiny. Other bodies, other times, echo throughout the theatre.

Mixed Metaphor: Foretaste, *deviser-performers Ben Rogan, Dean Linguey, performer Julia West, sound production Matt Fenton.* Body in Question, *Igneous Inc, deviser-performer James Cunningham, deviser-director-visuals Suzon Fuks, music Lee McIver, video animation Alex Clarke, non-linear video editing Daryl Davies, lighting Iain Court.* Tall, *choreographer-performer Stephanie Glickman, sound Trish Anderson, costume Ruth Singer, Dancehouse, Melbourne, July 22 - Aug 1*

Jonathan Marshall tutors in performance at the University of Melbourne, and is currently researching a PhD on the dramaturgy of French fin-de-siècle neurology.

Dance fix

Keith Gallasch at Nepean Dance's *Cynosure*

Talk of a crisis in the Australian film industry is rampant. What about dance in Sydney? Compared with my memory of it in the 80s and early 90s the place is utterly dance-starved. It's enough to make me go out dancing; enough to send me back to the Sydney Dance Company (encouraged by unusally good word of mouth for Murphy's latest) or to the Australian Ballet (especially now that Stretton is seriously developing the company's contemporary repertoire). I'm immediately investing in tickets for Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Les Ballets C de la B at the 2000 Adelaide festival. Save occasional showings at Ros Crisp's Omeo Studio, where in Sydney is the flow of ideas and risks? It's a trickle.

Driven, I pack my bags and go on the long haul west, through rain and open paddocks (I kid you not—signage please!) to Nepean Dance's *Cynosure* program, a celebration of the forthcoming graduation of Third Year BA University of Western Sydney students. I'm also keen to see the new Centre for Contemporary Performance in operation. The main studio space is impressive, very big, but still intimate (like new generation cinemas), and it can hold plenty of dancers in an ambitious, and what must have been an exhausting program for a number of the dancers, and a very steep learning curve for stage management.

Despite a near overdose of Massive Attack backing the works of student and teacher choreographies, the program revealed enough inventiveness to keep the audience engrossed or at least curious and me happy. The works ranged from not-too-abstract modernist to Indigenous-lyrical to contemporary performance and permutations thereof. Jan Pinkertons' *Chain of Life* demanded group precision in its interweavings and regroupings and some strong solo work (notably from Brooke Clayton working on the floor, a counterpoint of seizure). Bernadette Walong in *Push, pull* encouraged the giving way that allows a wave to seem to ripple through the bodies of her dancers, though her material seemed a bit too familiar. Dean Walsh multiplied some of his solo work into a group piece. Instead of one Dean in blonde wig, one high heel shoe, an apron and nothing else—save an ironing board and some exquisite text of his own doing—we had 8 female dancers with same, save the nakedness (some horrible undergarment instead) and silent. No reversals, no inversions, no disturbing erotics (in the way Dean consistently transcends camp). Expertly put together as it was, and thematically consistent, and developed in collaboration with the dancers, there was something missing. However, by Scene 3 things had picked up with Gabriela Horvath Von Castello, Margaret McGillon and Julie Payne inhabiting a bizarre world almost straight out of burlesque (without the tassles!) but with the eerie charm and grace (although not at all imitative) of Pina Bausch dancers, nicely off-centre choreography, and bravely danced. As a bonus, a different group of students altogether performed visiting South African choreographer Sylvia Glasser's *Rhythmical Ritual-Resounding Rocks*, a disciplined and lyrical shaping of lines and circles to the clapping of rocks by all the dancers and performed with apparent commitment and pleasure. I'm really glad I made the trip.

Nepean Dance, Cynosure, *Studio 1, Centre for Contemporary Performance, Uinversity of Western Sydney, September 23 - 25.*

WriteSites

Dean Kiley interviews Hazel Smith and Roger Dean about their *Intertwingling*

'Intertwingling' is, first, hypertext pioneer Theodore Nelson's coinage for the combinatory and path-based (intertextual, twisting, mingling, etc) processes of hypertext and its experience for the user. It's also an extensive, immersive hyperfictive piece devised by Hazel Smith and Roger Dean with streaming soundtrack from the austraLYSIS Electroband (Roger Dean with Greg White and Sandy Evans) now set up at the *overland express* site.

Having been somewhat disappointed by the coldly self-reflexive Swatch-watch clunkiness of other web-based fiction purporting to dramatise the experience of hypertext, I was delighted by the narrative drive and zippy, lyrical speculation of *Intertwingling*. It's minimalist in design (few pretty jpgs and no swfs: this is 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 trancy soundtrack.

DK Why and how? Does analysis always happen at the cost of story?

HS Hypertext's the perfect medium for me because I'm very interested in the tension between narrative and anti-narrative, in crossing genres, mediating between poetry, prose, performance, theory and intermedia work. This kind of heterogeneity works extremely well in hypertext and creates the kinds of tensions you describe. I think hypertext also brought out a different sensibility in me which resulted in a lot of satirical aphorism. I wanted to adapt my writing so that each "screenful" would make an immediate impact. I knew that readers would be impatient and would cycle through the text at break neck-speed!

DK No need to be static or distanced even when mixing modes and minus graphics?

HS You can be as intense or emotional in writing hypertext as you might be in any other medium. But hypermedia is at a very early stage of its history: there is a lot of scope for development of the form.

Much work for the web is very image-based and we wanted to concentrate on the visual possibilities of the words. Also there seem to be new possibilities here: writers have not engaged much with colour historically, even visual poetry has been largely a black and white affair. I wanted to create an aesthetic of cybercolour which engaged with the heterogeneity of the text through a multiplicitous and open use of colour.

RD The web similarly underemphasises sound. This is why we chose to make available a lot of different sounds in *Wordstuffs*. These sounds challenge the text, the animations, and each other. The screener can play 3 pieces of midi-based music at once, drive them to any point, and hear them all in reverse; or play an assembly of body- and city-related sounds.

DK But in Intertwingling *it's more soundtrack than DIY.*

RD Sound is still much less than ideal on the web, because of limitations of bandwidth [speed at which data can flow to the screener-listener]. This means that audio files have to be highly compressed [ie degraded]. On the other hand midi files mainly play preformed 'instruments' resident in the user's computer, which have a limited sonic range, and, as yet, alternative midi-drivable sounds are not widespread and are still limited. So the musical action (as opposed to the sonic structure) has to be the primary feature. In *Intertwingling* I made a sound work of about 7 minutes from a live performance of the piece by austraLYSIS and compressed it into only a couple of megabytes of RealAudio data. It involved computer manipulations which drastically modified the timbres, so that the loss of fidelity in the subsequent compression was no longer overly problematic.

DK Um. Ah. Right. Your technical expertise sounds as extensive as your combined teaching, performing, writing and art experience. There's not a helluva lot of grounded critical work on hypermedia available in an Australian context from mature practitioners, or not that goes beyond catalogue-essay or site-specific blurb, but you've written a substantial book. What's it like in less than 50 words?

HS-RD *Improvisation, Hypermedia and the Arts since 1945* (Harwood 1997) theorises and analyses improvisation and discusses developments across the arts since 1945. It also analyses the relevance of improvisation to hypermedia work.

DK Great title, to which the book lives up. What's next?

HS-RD We're currently working on a piece which combines hypertext and performance called *The Erotics of Gossip*.

An earlier Smith, Dean and austraLYSIS collaboration, the award-winning Wordstuffs: The City and the Body, *is at* http://stuff-art.abc.net.au/stuff98/10.htm

Intertwinglings *is a work in progress and will be available for online viewing soon.*

OnScreen

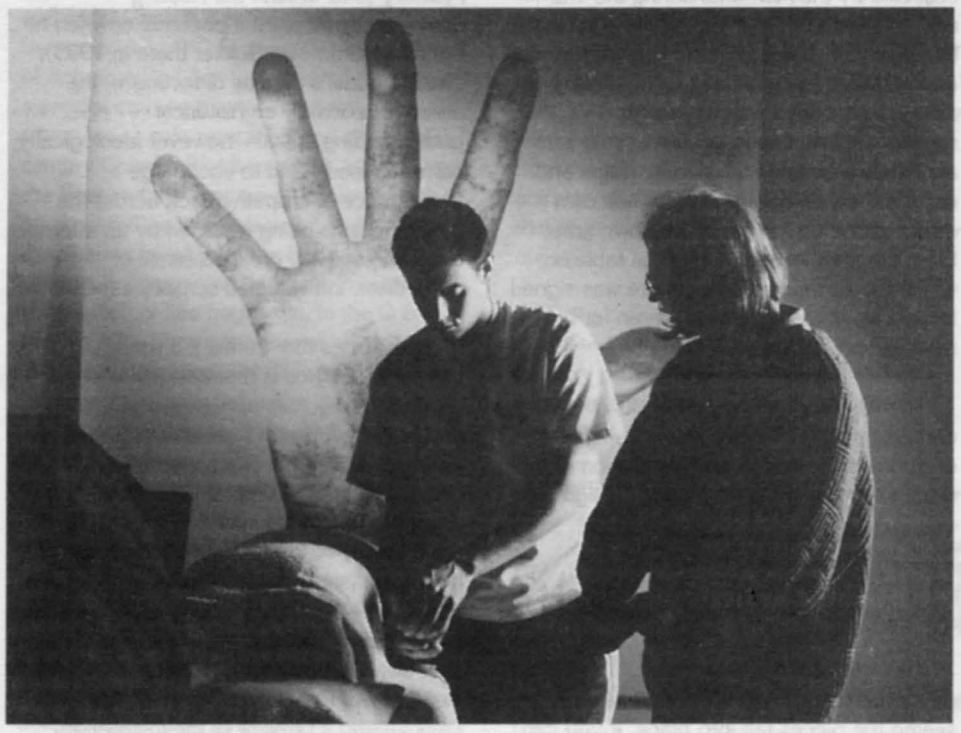
film, media and techno-arts

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 seems strangely appropriate. The film, which O'Brien describes as a drama about ethics and karma, centres around 2 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.*



John O'Brien (right) directing *Masseur*

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 postproduction funding (the funding bodies 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 lithe blonde doll. There was good blue rabbit work in there as well by a stuffed blue rabbit. *Pact*, 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 realised 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 started 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 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 Benjamin or because they're 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 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.

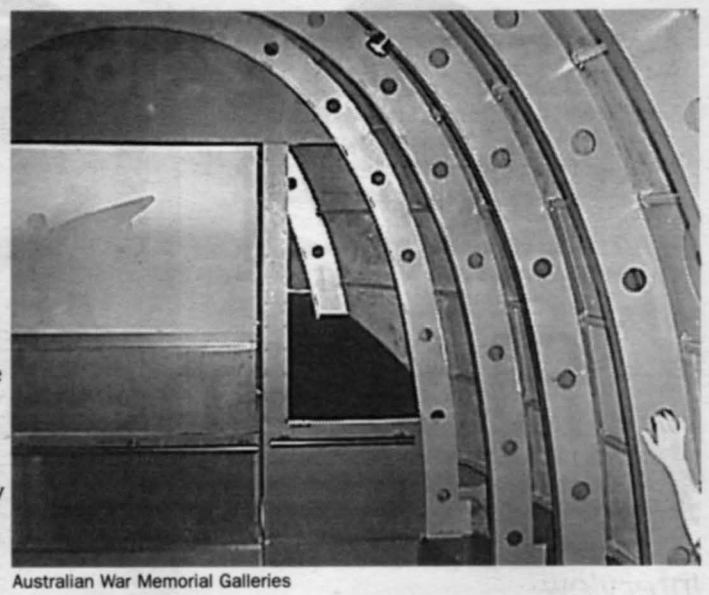
NI I'm interested in the reasons why each person I interview makes films—is it something intrinsic about cinema itself, is it a need to tell a story, explore an idea, is it the collaborative process? You've said that you see yourself as a writer primarily, even though you directed Masseur, *so what do*

continued on page 14

Report

Past projections

Martyn Jolly on multimedia in the new Australian War Memorial Galleries



Australian War Memorial Galleries

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 lost 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; it 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 technologies as never before—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 surfaces. (This problem is now being addressed.) Ambient lighting is low and the objects on display are individually picked out by spotlights giving a visually fragmented, subjectively 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 by 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 newsreel footage. Data projectors are extensively used to animate maps and models. Few objects are left to their own devices, to mutely 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 inappropriate screen for a newsreel 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 dioramas 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 stories in a reconstruction of an empty sleeping hut. 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 servicemen's 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 spectral 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. The use 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 firm Audience Motivation) grows from an evolving, long standing, visual tradition of ANZAC memory—for instance the freeze frame in Weir's film *Gallipoli* and William Longstaff's creepy *Menin 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 make an imaginative 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

Original blasts

continued from page 13

you think it is about cinema particularly (editing, framing, mise-en scene, sound etc) that enables you to tell the stories you want to tell in a way that prose may not?

JO What is it about cinema itself? It's a whole bunch of things. I remember when I was making shorts at uni how unutterably exciting it all was. Every day you're shooting, and you don't know whether the shot will turn out all right until you see the rushes. And then there's the thrill—and I love this—when you walk through a set and you see things you've half imagined THERE on the set itself. Hey, you think, I wrote for that to be there. It would be a god-like feeling if it wasn't always so surprising. (I can't imagine God ever surprising himself/herself, can you?)

Then there's the kind of all-in-this-together feeling, which culminates in the cast and crew screening or the wrap party. And then there's that hard-day-at-the-office feeling, where you work over and over a scene, shooting it from all angles, making it happen, completing it, making it work. When we were shooting the tango scene in *A Wreck* the day just went on and on. I mean this was a 6 minute scene on paper (probably 3-4 in the final version) and we had to get it finished. So we gradually made our way through, while these 4 actors danced and danced all day. We had to go an hour overtime in the end, but it was worth it.

If that all sounds weird for a writer to say (given that I'm not directing or acting or shooting, I'm on set by courtesy of the production) in a way, it's not. It's about seeing the pieces fall into place. If you can imagine filmmaking as Professional Team Jigsaw Solving, with enormous time and financial pressures, that's the gear here. And that happens in the writing as well. Someone, and it's sometimes me, makes a suggestion about the script, and suddenly another piece falls into place. In *A Wreck* there's a moment about halfway through, maybe a bit more, where Rita reveals something very important. At the time she's engaged in an even more dramatic situation, and the effect is heightened by the revelation. That was a suggestion of Scott's during the writing phase, a great one. I won't spoil the whole film by saying what it is, of course.

It's easy to think that a script is an isolated thing, like a piece of literature. But it's not, of course. Every change to the script is a change to the film. I know that's obvious. And yet it's a key thing when you're trying to stay excited by something you've lived with for months or years.

I'll tell you what else I love about cinema. That blast of originality that you sometimes come across. That thing that comes from nowhere. One of my aims in writing for the moving pictures is to do New Things. I couldn't bear going over the same old ground, I want people to have new experiences, or to re-experience things they know, but in a new way. The heightened, flattened world of film can do that, if you just try. Then people can have new eyes.

A Wreck, A Tangle *will be released 2000*

More Screen Culture:

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Report

Lessons in listening

Anna 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 thing, one process. Each craft should be encouraged to inform and influence every other craft, and be open to influence from others. If sound 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 invigorating 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 interact, cross over and create a new dialogue.

This year, the second *Cinesonic* conference not only sought to consolidate this dialogue, 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 move for which he is famous, conference convenor Philip Brophy invited a number of specialist music writers to turn their attention to film, 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 mercurial and sonorous tones of Randy Thom's opening address to the launch of AFTRS's publication of last year's proceedings, *Cinesonic 2* kept coming at you with new and inventive ways to think, imagine and listen.

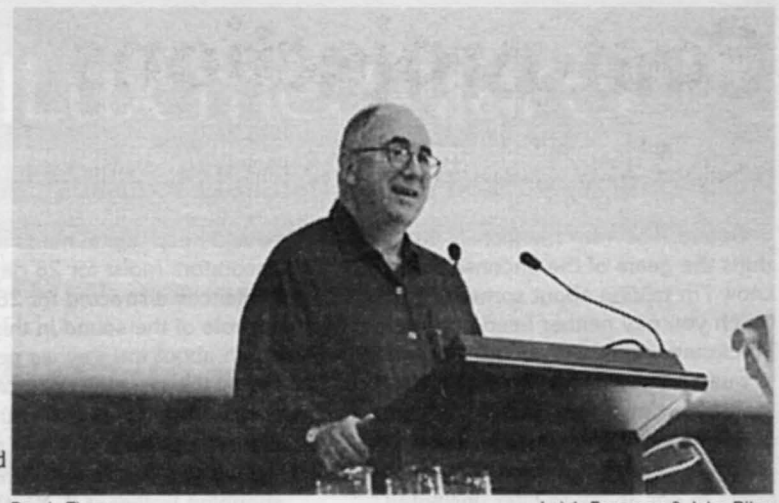
It was both a privilege and a pleasure to have Randy Thom open *Cinesonic 2*. Thom's credits include *Apocalypse Now*, *The Right Stuff* (for which he won an Oscar), *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Return of the Jedi*, *Wild at Heart*, *Forrest Gump*, *Mars Attacks*, *Starship Troopers* and *Contact*, to name just a few. A polemicist for sound designers being involved from the earliest stages of the creative process, Thom's provocative address was titled "Designing a movie for sound". Some of the ways to do this, he explained, were to focus on listening and listeners, point of view, camera movement and dark and ambiguous spaces. He even suggested that dialogue-driven films tended to limit the sound designer, although he did observe that human vocalisation was itself a vast unexplored sound palette. Reflecting on current production practices, he declared that it was a miracle that film music is as good as it is, given that composers were often expected to create 90 minutes of music in just the last 4 weeks of production.

If Thom gave a detailed and anecdotal sense of what it was like to be working both in the centre and on the fringes of New Hollywood, the deferential Francois Musy spoke of his collaborative experiences with the inimitable Jean-Luc Godard. Musy has designed, edited and mixed most of Godard's films since his pioneering work on *Passion* in 1983. His many credits include *Hail Mary*, *Detective*, *Alas Pour Moi* and *Nouvelle Vague*. Musy not only offered a number of voyeuristic insights into Godard's preferred method of recording sound on location, something he also described as a particularly French practice, he also revealed that he was more than just a technician. His creative work with Godard can be heard in its sonic purity on the *Nouvelle Vague* soundtrack; the entire 100 minutes was released as a double CD complete with dialogue, music and ambient sounds.

The final evening session featured a revelatory musical performance of 'reinvented film scores' by the remarkable David Shea. A composer from the East Village, Knitting Factory music scene, Shea is working in similar ways to John Zorn. Drawing upon sounds created by a large body of new music and jazz musicians, as well as collaging samples from film soundtracks and lounge LPs, Shea's work has been described as "soundtracks for surreal daydreaming." He is especially committed to bringing sampling and collage into live performance which he demonstrated with his awesome presentations of *Satyricon* and *Screwy Squirrel*, a tribute to surrealist cartoon master Tex Avery. *The Red Chamber*—a solo sampler based on the 16th century Chinese Buddhist novel *Journey to the West* and the later novel *Tower of Myriad Mirrors* —offered an energising and illuminating homage to the Hong Kong cinema, accompanied by an oft-frenetic compilation of film fragments. In the Q & A session after, Shea'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 examined for their 'sound style.' Adrian Martin engagingly disrespected Fritz Lang's claim that he had "no ear for sound" and, through detailed close analysis of *Scarlet Street* and *M*, demonstrated what was distinctive about the Lang sound event. Francois Thomas traced Welles' shift from live recording to obsessive post-synchronisation, illustrating his talk with many subtle and not-so-subtle variants of Welles' vocal lexicon. For other writers it was the way that music was activated in different genres and national cinemas that motivated their presentations. For John Conomos, it was jazz that resonated as deeply as the chiaroscuro lighting and iconography in film noirs as mysterious and compelling as *Force of Evil* and *Laura*. For Roger Hillman it was classical music, impregnated and over-coded with history, that created a simultaneously ponderous and ethereal diegetic space in German and post-war Italian cinema. For Philip Brophy there were a number of examples of folk and Indigenous music which get appropriated in unsettling ways—sometimes intentionally and at other times with screamingly aberrant effects. For Claudia Gorbman there was that very familiar sound of Hollywood's tom-toms which so frequently stereotyped the pre-war Indian as an obstacle to overcome. She traced the way this musical coding had shifted in a number of recent "liberal Westerns" as efforts to humanise the Indians had taken prominence.

But music is larger than the screen, larger than the cinema—macrocosmic—and it was because of their inventive attention to music that another group of writers were brought to the conference. Evan Eisenberg's early book *The Recording Angel* had paid groundbreaking attention to the phenomenology of listening to recorded music, and he extended his inquiry into those moments in cinema when music, dancing and nature come into coincidence. Joseph Lanza's book *Elevator Music* is interested in the muzak that spills over into so many aspects of our life: in elevators, supermarkets, dentists' waiting rooms, on factory floors and in aeroplanes. Lanza's provocation was to bring what is always in the background into the foreground as he argued for a re-elevated status of this frequently maligned form of music. Kodwo Eshun's book *More Beautiful than the Sun* has been described as a hybridic interface between science-fiction and black music, or sonic fiction. This liminal status was also evident in a talk more like a performance than a conference paper. Eshun's monologue on the music videos of Hype Williams—in particular his work with hiphop stars Missy Elliott and Busta Rhymes—surged around a maelstrom of perceptual, sonic, tactile and optical ideas from the microrhythmic to the animatographic, suggestively demonstrating that music videos are at the avant-garde of our age.



Randy Thom

Leigh Ferguson & John Bilan

Last year's conference participants expressed a desire for increased Australian industry presence, so the final day of the conference hosted 2 local industry panels. One panel showcased Martin Armiger, Burkhard Dallwitz and Paul Grabowsky sharing their experiences on composing music for film. The other panel featured sound designers Craig Carter, Sam Petty and Gareth Vanderhope discussing their thoughts on the current state of the industry. In stories that were reminiscent of those told by Thom and Musy, these sound artists shared the strategies and production methods they devised when faced with economic and creative constraints. There was also an abundance of stories about their collaborations with directors such as George Miller, Jane Campion and Phil Noyce.

When Kodwo Eshun got up to speak he said that it had been a revelation to listen to the way others had listened—to realise that there was such difference. The privilege and potency of *Cinesonic* is in how it enables us to listen.

Cinesonic 2: Cinema and the Sound of Music, *second international conference on film scores and sound design, Storey Hall, RMIT University, Melbourne, July 8 - 11.*
http://media-arts.rmit.edu.au/Phil.Brophy/cinesonic99.html

Column

Cinesonics

Phillip Brophy spooked by *The Haunting* acoustics

Sound. The very mention of the word shifts the gears of the unconscious: you know I'm talking about something to which you pay neither heed nor attention. So circumscribed is sound by our desire to mute its neumonic life, we do not 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 incursion 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 para-mystical way (as proposed by so much voguish scientific wondering by sound artists, composers and architects alike), but in a swirling and shifting sono-synoptic 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 I do everything in my power 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 obviously) on rupturing sonic incidents, yet no one is venting rage against air conditioning, hard drives, exhaust fans or numerous other layerings of pink noise which we tune-out as background texture to our urban toil. Ironically, just as sound art installations veer toward the amorphous and the immersive as a tactic to make one 'aware' of the pleasure of sound, so does art culture contribute to the same creeping engulfment of beds, sheets and curtains of noise which decorously coat the architecture of our domesticity. Wake up, people. Sound no longer bombards us with detonated bursts and shards: it slowly infects us with its acoustic patina of unassuming nothingness.

In this sense, the domus need not be rendered Gothic, baroque or ornate to conjure a sense of dread. Spooky movies about haunted mansions essentially invert the somnambulistic state in which we habituate our personal spaces. If we were suddenly made aware of all the tones and tunings which comprise the residue of our everyday activities, we would find our tremulous homes as terrifying as Hill House in Jan du Bont's *The Haunting* (1999). Here is another nightmarishly over-designed special-effects movie which 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 auras. 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 algae 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 now-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 shake 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 ethereal (that same corpus of sound rendered noticeable); and the inverted inescapable (the realisation that we might not be able to ever unlisten to sound). Illogically vacillating between a fear of silence or a dread of deafness: that is truly spooky. Time and again, I pictured myself in *The Haunting*, quivering inside Hill House's labyrinth of colonic chambers as monstrously invisible presences resonate its EC comic architecture and rattle its Escher-like architraves. Time and again, I imagined myself trapped in that state of being unable to not listen to everything which I selectively filter so as to focus, concentrate, be at ease, remain sane.

When the evil Ukraine (who possesses the house) first marks his presence, the off-screen pounding I swear rattled the light fittings and air-conditioning ducts of the cinema. Granted that Gary Rydstrom's sound design went for the now-prerequisite subsonic rumbles, his orchestration of sound effects was nonetheless masterly in its precision of frequency and its intent to make the sound bigger than either screen or auditorium might handle. This hyper-fantastic aesthetic is ultimately ironic, in that on numerous occasions, characters in the film ask "Didn't you hear that noise?"—which occurred at deafening decibels in the very next room. All rhetoric of plausibility fades as the sonic purpose of the film is not to describe a reality or portray a psychological state, but to unnerve the audience—to go beyond the screen and into us. To transgress the sanctity of our deliberate nerve deafness.

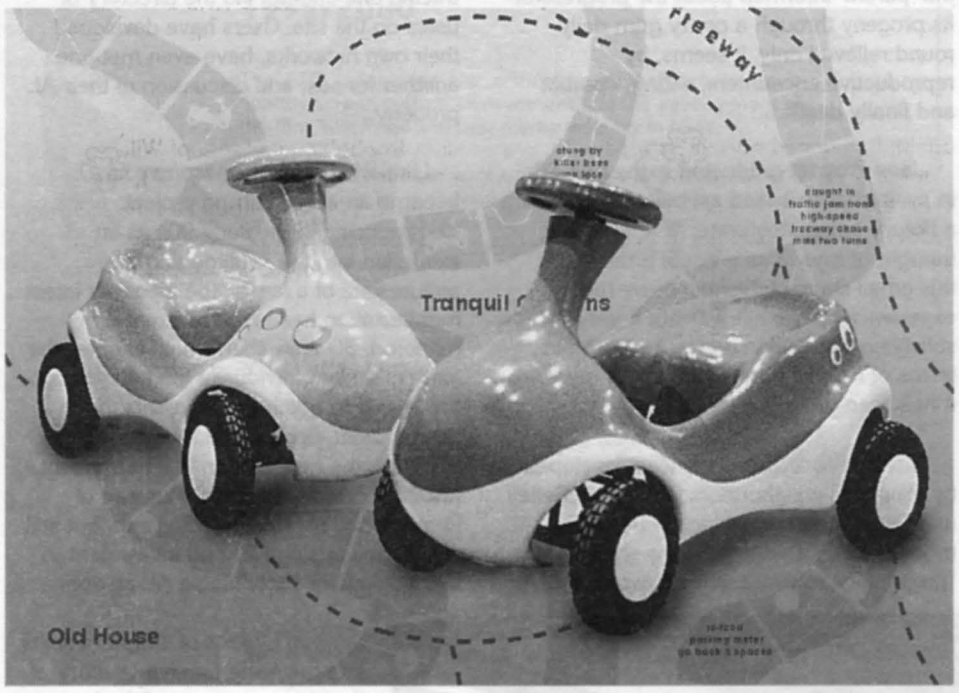
More importantly, the complexity by which a film these days must achieve such results has little to do with earlier constructs and paradigms of sound design. From the searing silence of Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1960) to the claustrophobic quietness of William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1971), spooky sound design has hitherto been based on drastic binaries of silence/noise. *The Innocents* is an unapproached landmark in this regard, where the most disquieting moments occur in a silence which replicates a disequilibrium of the senses—of hearing nothing as one verges on the brink of trauma. Conversely, *The Exorcist* uses harsh sound editing to render the domestic environment as a potential hell before any satanic forces become manifest, demonstrating great skill in foregrounding aural manipulation to prepare the way for the visual outrage to follow. But in a contemporary climate where a million pink noises colour the world a fleshy body of heaving ambience, the on-off tricks of sound editing fast lose their power in the cinematic realm. *The Haunting* signposts the paths to be taken in order to reinvest the cinema with the power to make us psycho-acoustically cogniscent of the comforts we find in own aural purgatory.

The Haunting, *director Jan de Bont, screening nationally.*

Review

Driving into the interior

Darren Tofts at the wheel of Martine Corompt and Philip Samartzis' *Dodg'em*



Dodg'em

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 media. 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 fibreglass 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 (how fast can a pedal car go?).

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 index 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 inner 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 soundsculpture, Philip Samartzis has certainly allowed the street to find 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. In colour!

Dodg'em, *a driveable surround-sound space, Martine Corompt (concept, design & direction) & Philip Samartzis (soundscape), Gallery 101, Melbourne, June 24 - July 1 1999*

Report

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 television among the bees* (1991) was seen previously in Australia 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 shot matrices, always moving in and out of the time of the movie...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, with words, he adds the "gathered material" of photograph, movie and sound; and employs hyperlinking software to enable through "micro-compositions" the free association of "storyettes" and the fabrication of a "story or writing machine." A brief engagement with collaborative writing approaches, through the *Waxweb* website in the mid-90s, was abandoned in favour of the principles of the auteur.

"The viewer need only watch the movie, or click a few times. To completely support this activity, the author has created more than 1 million picture, hypertext, and 3D links; the animated 3D scenes would play 40 hours if placed end to end. But this is not a database...It is a movie composition, made for many sorts of viewer pleasure."

Waxweb resists any sense of immersion in the labyrinth that might be expected of a neo-symbolist work. It is "a composition" with a foundation of words and word play that, combined with the "faux documentary" of the *Wax* movie, barely suppresses the absurd and the ironic. The frames launched by the browser become like postage stamps lined up within the pages of an album, providing pathway options a plenty, and eye-watering dismantlement of the girders, struts, plates and rivets of Blair's composition, each one indexing a virtual point in film time.

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 *Jews 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 Cinemedia and the Melbourne International Film Festival during July and August, a chrysalis within the buzzing halls of Swanston Street, attached precariously to a basement room used as the Nokia Festival Club.

Jane Prophet *The Internal Organs of a Cyborg*

Kevin Murray selected 13 interactive CD-ROM works for the now fashionable exhibition element of the film festival, the budget also funding another overseas artist, London's Jane Prophet, to talk about her work, both guests later giving similar presentations at Artspace, Sydney.

Their work was linked, so to speak, by the honey bees' hexagonal cell. *Swarm*, an installation and interactive website by Prophet, offered visitors an immersive entry into crowd consciousness. Using the metaphor of the hive to collect and relate stories, and the simulation of bees on a large projection screen that responded to the presence of visitors by mapping movement around a mat in front of the screen, the experience of telekinesis and noisy play between visitors using the installation contrasted with the quiet area behind the screen in which the collected stories were related.

Technosphere also explored artificial life (AL) paradigms through one of the earliest examples of website interactivity that enabled participants to design their very own 'critter', its appearance, its eating habits and demeanour, and then to receive on a regular basis email messages that kept 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 email 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—chat spaces—which currently people find elsewhere, tracing one another via 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 progeny..."

Like *Waxweb*, *Technosphere* has become an ever-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.

Internal Organs of a Cyborg shifts into the more familiar territory of the strip cartoon, and the less familiar tribulations of a 12 year-old substance abuser and implant junkie. The paranoid obsessiveness of this interactive futurzine has us traipsing through framings of hospital corridors, film noir streets, the streak and blur of paramedics and emergency vehicles. As the mouse rolls over parts of these images, as images and sounds morph and cut to exquisite medico/scientific 3D animations of, kinda, body and machines, we struggle to build the meta-narrative from the fragments through which we stumble, refracted like William Burroughs' words and Linda Dement's images.

Working with interactives on screen, the user struggles to construct within their head frame a sense of the space in which this piece is operating physically. This is not narrative cinema, where we have become accustomed to fragmentation and seek to link the end of one storyette with the beginning of the next, to create a linear whole, out of which a geographical space emerges in plan form that connects what took place on screen.

In *Cyborg*, as for *Waxweb* and many storytelling interactives, because what we encounter is fragmented, we have little to go on for the purposes of reconstruction, or rather mental synthesis. We are not sited in the comfortable immersive space of the cinema experience, observing, reflecting, maybe interpreting, but within the flux of possibilities of interactive multimedia, assessing the shards of image and word collisions, and creating meanings and connections that interrogate, like the rhythms and cycles of a mantra, the lived experience of the subject.

Visit the websites of David Blair: www.telepathic-movie.org; www.waxweb.org; *and Jane Prophet's* Technosphere: www.technosphere.org.uk

Mike Leggett acknowledges the assistance of the NSW Film and TV Office in the preparation of this article.

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Review

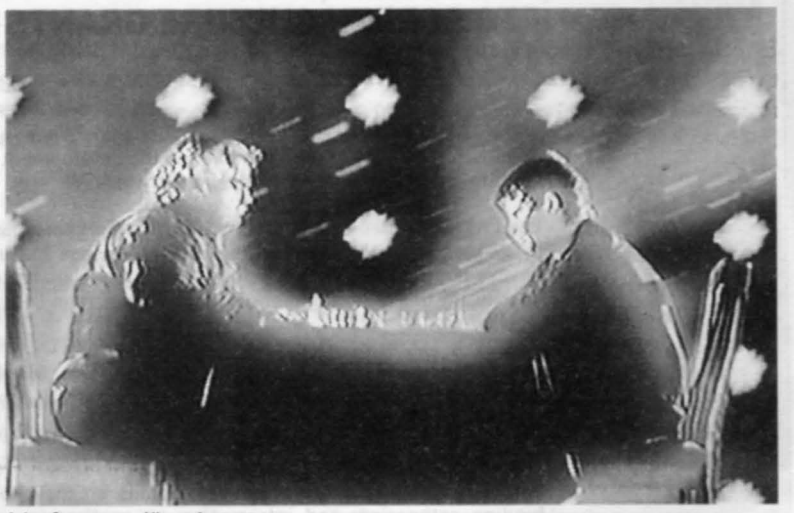
Conomos and the anti-uncanny

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

Australia has always had an uncomfortable relationship with Surrealism born no doubt of an anglocentric suspicion of continental excess and a pragmatism which denigrates play as a juvenile luxury. We either darken its palette in a pathological night as in James Gleeson's imagery or make it so insubstantial that anything wacky passes as Surrealist, as in the Mambo connexion in the *Revolution by Night* show at AGNSW a few years back or the discussion of Surrealism in Adrian Martin's book *Phantasms*. What a relief then to see some contemporary installation which works 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 Kythera, the Greek island from where his family came, a graveyard sequence searching out #919, 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 dissimulation here, John Conomos is unmistakably 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 catalogue 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 *Sans Soleil* (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 'hyphenated 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 *Sauve qui peut la vie/Every man for himself* and Conomos' childhood beneath the neon sign in his father's Tempe milk bar.

At the end of his book *Compulsive Beauty*, Hal Foster evokes Breton's definition of Surrealist juxtaposition as a "'slit 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 optique 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 riven—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 regenerate an image of revolutionary 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 insisted between these aspects of the Surrealist project, the struggle, as James Clifford puts it in *On Ethnographic Surrealism*, "against the 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.



John Conomos, *Album Leaves*

For Conomos these images are treated like so many objets trouvées, found objects or readymades, 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 steals. Conomos is sensitive to these displacements but doesn't protect the integrity of these found objects. He gleefully morphs 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://cs.art.rmit.edu.au/Marker)

For Hal Foster, the readymade is of central importance to Surrealism where the auratic space of outmoded 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 auratic images and spaces and dreaming up new connections with some of the outmoded forms of image-making.

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

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 Glover handed over to current director, Kerry O'Rourke. I had the opportunity to speak to both Glover 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 and Queensland Cinematheque to fill that role. Eventually, following a succession of reports on the establishment of a screen resource organisation, Arts Queensland began 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 Woolloongabba 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 complementary services to 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 play and 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, SPAA, 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 forums which assist filmmakers with not just understanding funding but also to function and position themselves in a realistic appraisal of 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 "Fast 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.

Reviews

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 2 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 are 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 Kuriyama), 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 of a new score by Joby Talbot of The Divine Comedy.

The audience favourite was, surprisingly, Wenders' *Buena Vista Social Club*, ahead of new films by Almodovar and Egoyan. *East is East*, a striking Pakistani-English comedy written by Ayub Khan-Din, and *A Room for Romeo Brass*, Shane Meadows' follow-up to *Twenty-Four Seven*, were the most popular English films. In this context the Australian films *Siam Sunset* and *Praise* (which was selected for repeat in the Best of the Festival programme) came across as exotic, hot blasts from a quite alien culture.

Festival director Lizzie Francke could easily have chosen Bill Forsyth's *Gregory's Two Girls*, a challenging sequel to 1981's iconic *Gregory's Girl*, as the first Scots film to open the festival for 15 years. Instead she picked the magnificent *Ratcatcher* by Lynne Ramsey. Early in a long 1970s Glasgow summer, as a binmen'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, James, comes to catch a morbid strangeness in the most ordinary violences of his friends, we are allowed to share his epiphanic, 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 salving the family's anguishes. But the drunken rage of Scots fathers is built in with the brickwork, and even the few 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 Faces*, yet just as edgy; and it brings to fruition Ramsey's ability, evident in shorts such as the admired *Gasman*, to combine urban realism with a tolerance of everyday mysteries. *Ratcatcher*'s 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 *Morvern Callar*, an awesome and perverse tale of death and dance.

Ratcatcher

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. Instead of the terrible humour with which Mike Leigh might lace 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, scallywag father in order to see the fireworks he's been promised, he must be mugged. And when eldest sister is abandoned by her angst-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 fast 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 us Nyman's unusually anodyne, soaring flights to accompany his pained and isolated characters, often slowing their pace to accelerate the bustling urban surrounds in the manner of Luke Losey's 1996 video with Tilda Swinton for Orbital's *The Box*.

A fine set of figures—and winners

David Baker reports on the 8th Brisbane International Film Festival

Every year the temptation arises to proclaim that BIFF has finally become a film festival of truly "international significance." It remains unlikely that Brisbane's film-going public, with its self-consciously ironic mix of provincialism 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 around the world, the festival ran an interesting series of specialist screenings and seminars. This year's sessions included a focus on the cinema 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 as a result of this exercise was: 1.*Sadness*, William Yang's moving Australian documentary on grief, love and AIDS; 2. *Windhorse*, Paul Wagner's feature debut from the US exploring social and political tensions in modern Tibet; 3. *Punitive Damage*, Annie Goldson's documentary from New Zealand on the Dili Massacre and its aftermath; 4. *Forever Fever*, Glen Goei's delightful feature from Singapore set in the 1970s celebrating all things disco; and 5. *Playing by Heart*, Willard Carroll's ensemble dramatic comedy starring Sean Connery and Gillian Anderson. Three films I found particularly outstanding which didn't make the top five were Alexander Payne's High School flick *Election* starring Reese Witherspoon and Matthew Broderick, Kore-Eda Hirokazu's eccentric Japanese film *After Life*, set in an oddly bureaucratised limbo, and Jason Freeland's noirish debut feature *Brown's Requiem*, adapted from James Ellroy's first novel.

Shorts I particularly liked included Kalliope Legaki's *Desires on Hot Sands* (Greece), Joe Hamersky's *Gopher* (US), Andrew Murray's *Gristle* (Australia), Laurie Colbert's *Below the Belt* (Canada) and Hayley Cloake's *Taken* (Australia). The official festival wooden spoon went to a US film called *Dresden* which, fortunately, I did not see. It had a run for its money from the obscure and pretentious German film translated as *Hick's Dream* which, unfortunately, I did.

Siam Sunset

One criticism has been made over and over to the conference organisers. Given that there is an 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 semester two. No adequate explanation has ever been given why it is not scheduled a month earlier when the significant tertiary education population are free to attend.

BIFF 1999 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

Review

Melbourne, mavericks, memories and millennial mystification

Adrian Danks covers the Melbourne International Film Festival

I have intentionally waited some time to write this review; to forget and let settle the rush of images and sounds—many not so good, some unsettling, others bleeding 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 lie those films which one rushes to see, that one can't miss, but which pass by almost without interest when screened on SBS a few weeks later. The festival has grown, in terms of features, in the last few years to a size where it is virtually impossible to see the majority of films on show (and of course this is, 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 kind of openness, a willingness to delve into unknown territory and play things by ear. This openness (often to disappointment) 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 *Samurai Fiction*. To this list should be added those films I wish I'd walked out on but thought I should stay, such as veteran Iranian director Dariush Mehrjui's turgid and sometimes 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 otherworldliness of the film, alongside its palpable sense of isolation, holds much fascination. Hating things with a passion (as well as its flipside) and walking out on films are integral parts of the festival experience.

Probably the greatest weakness of recent festivals has been their retrospective programs. This was accentuated this year. The various spotlights ranged from the half-baked and piecemeal to the difficult to fathom. For example, 3 films directed by George Cukor, including 2 prints which screen quite regularly in Melbourne, do not constitute a retrospective (or a useful showcase). The individual screenings of *The Stain* and Frank Hurley's *South* constituted useful 'revivals' but the screening of *The Importance of Being Earnest* seemed to lack purpose (other than to match it to *An Ideal Husband* and showcase its recent BFI restoration). The "Mavericks: Bad Boys of Cinema" spotlight brought together several masterpieces of 60s and 70s American cinema such as *The Long Goodbye*, *Minnie and Moskowitz*, and *Two-Lane Blacktop*, but lacked the breadth, context and promotional language to produce a conceptual framework through which the films could be read. I recognise that this is often the most difficult component of the festival, both in terms of attendances and marketing, but it is also the section which most clearly contributes to the development of an on-going audience interested in something more than just new releases (and, in general, I'd like to see more attempts to nurture an ongoing screen culture in and around the festival rather than the inclusive showcase or fool's paradise that the festival program is often touted as being).

Despite the frustrations of the retrospective programs there were several pleasing showcases on display (including one unofficially devoted to new French cinema). Particularly significant, considering the dearth of such material in many festivals these days, was *Captured*, 3 experimental film programs curated by Clare Stewart, highlighting aspects and uses of performance, formalism, materiality and technology in recent avant-garde cinema. The highlight was the found footage program featuring new work by Gustav Deutsch and Martin Arnold. Despite being indicative of the festival's tendency to try to reinvent the wheel (Iranian cinema has featured regularly in festivals during the 90s, and there was a special spotlight at the 1993 Festival) the "Journey to Iran" component was a useful opportunity to see a collection of Iranian films, *en masse*. This was more informative than a great viewing experience. Once you move past the key directors of that cinema, Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf (father and daughter), the quality and interest of the films appears to drop away and the huge shadow that these directors cast becomes evident. There appears to be too many ersatz Kiarostamis and Makhamlbafs out there. Nevertheless the Kiarostami-like tracking shots and self-reflexiveness of *Paper Airplanes* still offered some nice moments.

Eventually, and I want to be positive here, what stood out in the festival were particular techniques, specific narrative conceits and a palpable, but often quite pleasing, slowness (a contemplativeness counter to the actual activity that a film festival often requires). Despite the millenarian rush that the "2000 Seen by..." spotlight promised, 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 glances, farewells and valedictory dances of Eric Rohmer's *Autumn Tale*. This studiedness (at times manic) and contemplativeness could also be glimpsed in less inviting and enveloping films, such as the explicitly and/or suggestively violent French films *I Stand Alone* and *Sombre* (with its beautiful, half-lit, fragile imagery).

In the end it is particular images, sequences and sounds which stand out from the festival and that I long to see again: the frozen face of the butcher as he fails to smile in Gaspar Noé's *I Stand Alone*; the breathtaking opening montage and audio assault of the same film; the Paradjanov-like tracking shots of Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *The Silence*; the staccato playfulness, melancholy good humour and revelatory recontextualisation of Martin Arnold's *Alone. Life Wastes Andy Hardy*; Elliott Gould's late-night search for the favourite food for his understandably finicky cat that opens *The Long Goodbye*; the

Flowers of Shanghai

castle wall callisthenics of Eva Braun in *Moloch*; the old lady arranging acorns before her in Hirokazu Kore-eda's gentle, poetic and deeply humanist *After Life*; Warren Oates' valedictory aphorism, and here I'm quoting from memory, in *Two-Lane Blacktop*, "It'll give you a set of experiences that'll stay with you...period." Next time let's hope that Oates' benediction provides a more fitting epithet for the overall experience of the festival.

Melbourne International Film Festival, July 22 - August 4

Adrian Danks lectures in cinema studies and cultural studies at RMIT University (Media Studies), and is president and co-curator of The Melbourne Cinemathèque. He is currently completing a dissertation on the relationships between domestic photography and cinema.

Reviews

Old heads, young bodies

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

Now in its second year, The Young Filmmaker's Fund Film Festival (organised by the NSW Film and Television Office) recently showcased the work of 18 filmmakers. The funding initiative, established in 1996, has enabled NSW-based filmsters 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 weekends for unpaid film work, highlights a change in attitude of budding filmmakers and audience alike. Unlike the fun, zany, hodge podge antics of the Super 80s collective and their output, short films are now a serious business, well planned with a full crew organised months in advance (often the credits are as long as the film itself), hoping to do the festival circuit. With the influence of independent filmmakers like Vincent Gallo and the Coen brothers, the go is being a writer-director, keeping control of the ideas and process, often resulting in bloated scripts rushed into production. Many shorts just re-hash themes already re-worked years ago and difficult (though not impossible) to add new dimensions to: quirky situations involving animals, doomed relationships, crimes gone wrong, blow up dolls. Most lack passion and innovation, especially stylistically. The short seems a great opportunity to tackle documentary and fiction by experimenting with editing, lighting and sound but most go for plodding narrative and try to cram in too much. More should aim for titles of more than one word.

The NSWFTO screenings offered pet horrors (Matt Day hysterics and pooch panic in *Fetch*; he's nobody's Moggie now in *Gristle*), well-keyed artistic tension (*The Piano Bomb Detective's Last Case*), and finely serrated teen angst, calligraphied with Chinese Opera and gay politics in the exquisite *Lieu Awaiting Spring*. Most striking was the choice, by young filmmakers, to tackle older characters and ageing (both in writing and directing), hinting at levels of nostalgia for a future not yet experienced, rather than the past. This is intriguing as many of the films seemed more comfortable from the perspective of pensioners than the filmmakers' own generation. Perhaps this reflects a closeness to grandparents and the inevitable grief of losing them (it's often said that people mellow as they grow 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 *Tulip* 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're a Sydney film-goer, you know instantly where you are. The State Theatre, in its grandeur and lushness, is the setting for this documentary about Allen, a film buff who loses and regains love, and the ability to see. 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 (Greg 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, erotic 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 screen (next to him too, as couples make love, and have clandestine affairs) and becomes Robert Mitchum, embodying his power and tenderness—"I felt this film wrapping around me." *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 frailty of contact in old age; it can 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 lines indicating long travelled roads), the man strips tentatively to his undies. 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."

John O'Brien's *Masseur*

Dealing with a similar topic but in a sentimental and clichéd way is Rachel Griffith's *Tulip*. Elegantly filmed with good production design, *Tulip* 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 (Tulip, a genuinely spunky Brahman). At any moment I expect the quintessential loveable fair dinkum 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 braised steak in the fridge for his dinner; shiny 50s automobiles disappear into the lush green countryside; Bud sits on his perfect langourous verandah; give me a home among the gum trees, etc. Tulip 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 Tulip, 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. David Bridie's music (usually incredibly intense) overpowers, bulldozing the potentially touching moments, injecting a now-this-is-a-sad-bit theme at odds with the mood of the film. And those currawongs, they're beautiful to hear in Sydney in the morning because they come with early morning light, and the fresh smell of mowed grass and jasmine.

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; Fetch, *writer Judi McCrossin, director Lynn Maree Danzey;* Gristle, *writer/director Andrew Murray;* Heaven on the Fourth Floor, *writer/director Mark Bellamy;* I Was Robert Mitchum, *writer-director Tim Slade,* Liu Awaiting Spring, *writer-director Andrew Soo;* Masseur, *writer-director John O'Brien;* The Piano Bomb Detective's Last Case, *writer Adrian Van de Velde, director Adam Blaiklock;* Tulip, *writer/director Rachel Griffiths. Other films screened:* An Irishman Walks into a Pub, Bloodlock, Burnout, Don't Try This At Home (The Signal Box), Dust to Dust, Fast Buck, My Sister the Tree, Recycled, The Man in the Irony Mask, *and* War Story.

Fetch *featured in the 1998 Cannes Film Festival Official Selection.* Liu Awaiting Spring *was judged Best Gay/Lesbian Short Film at the 1999 Berlin Film Festival. For more information about the Young Filmmakers Fund, go online:* www.ftosyd.nsw.gov.au

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 Wenham was trucked in for what appeared to be little more than swoon appeal. Rosemary Blight returned to her home state to lend some low-budget production cred with an inspiring presentation on the agonising 9-year 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 provided some witty and yet smarmy opening-night buffoonery.

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 cinema foyers. Ample viewing opportunities ranged from documentary to experimental films and even commercials. A taste of the St Kilda and Sundance Film Festivals was on offer. There were workshops and interesting discussions.

The awards ceremony was appropriately loose and lively. *I Promise*, a curious, enigmatic 13 minute chamber piece with 2 actors in 3 scenes exploring fragile and flexible relationships, scooped the night. Martin Wilson won two awards for Best Director and Adrian Mulraney won the Acting and Writing awards. *I Promise* is a very good film that should be seen nationally. Christopher Watson's beautifully shot *Pilbara Pearl* picked up a couple as did Amy McDowall 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 *Hutan: Wildlife of the Malaysian Rainforest* won the Documentary category, although there were a number of strong contenders including Andrea William's and Anna Haebich'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 work in conditions of low public enchantment (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 fetishisation and an obsessive obeisance to the East Coast due to some odd structural perceptions. This was epitomised in the Great State Debate where an artificial conflict was devised between

Taking the Children

continued on page 24

Reviews

Pulsing chiaroscuro, 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 shorts curated by Imago and screened at FTI. These are no TropFest gag flicks but an interconnected series of experimental works that seek to explore the possibilities of a variety of mediums under digital transformation. The digital diversion is combined with traditional methods of video art, 3D animation, music clips and AV-essayism. The alterations enhance the originals while preserving their mutation. The works have a pervasive texture of pulsing chiaroscuro, fragmentation, darkness and decay. This texturedness is the most striking common element. Unlike much recent digital art that can alienate with its sweeping surfaces and impossibly lush wallpapering, these works are gritty, itchy and touchable. This is the "second wave" of digital imagemaking that has tilled the surface and re-sown the loam. Video becomes a claggy scrapbook of memories. A glimpse of ideas, bits, bytes and hints. Recycled carbon from the photocopy bin. The flattened dynamic range, while annoying with some dull soundscapes, allows for a collation of consciousness and a stream of materiality in the visual text. Hence the title, *Anemone*—the windflower of the sea gathers sustenance from the currents that ebb over its domain.

The curators, Cam Merton and Rick Mason, compare the anemone with modern imagemakers who are inundated in a sea of information, but who pick and choose from this galaxy of possibilities in an attempt to produce something new before relaunching it back into the miasma. These works distinguish themselves by virulent combinations of the trauma of things past. Difference is transmuted into convergence. But unlike other new media shows with their radiant future gleam, the *Anemone* works are generally bleak and mystical, driven by fragmentation and a palpable sense decay. Vikki Wilson's darkly mesmeric *March-Riever* draws on *Beowulf* to forage in the shadows of monsters on the boundaries of time. She rebuilds the narrative through shreds and scurrying repetitions. Likewise, Kim McGlynn's *Eulogy*, Justine Cooper's *Rapt* and Vicky Smith's *Rash* are, in different modes, corporeal shards and spirals that interrogate the body's memory and offer distorted, subjective and painful reconstructions. Out of the disturbed pixilation of white noise come recognisable images and personalised ghosts.

In Dominic Redfern's *Please Wait Here* we disappear into the private pixels of daytime TV. The ascent into the void of drifting colours is so laconic, so opposed to video's temporal thrust that the screen transforms into a cozy fireplace before tilting back into the beguiling pulse of daytime channel surfing. As the image speed increases, movement decreases to patchwork quiescence in the alluring *Rhythmus 99*, Sam Landel's cityscape animation essay, while in Marcus Canning's *Sumpbapschism* movement flows and washes through the surveillance static. Paul Capon's *Digital Decay* degrades through feed-back reprocessing the once recognisable body in a box. The junkyard appropriations of the remote surveillance probe draw on the clutter of private eye traces in the uncanny animation world of Peter Circuitt's *Post*. Drome toys with genetic transmogrification in the witty *LUMPs: Museum of Failures* while George Stajsic in *Weary Sons of Freud* conjures a sequence of sexually charged images hiding within the fur of teddies and bears. The sharp *Cheap Blonde* by Janet Merewether is a cascading word rearrangement of a famous filmmaker's twelve poignant words, "cinema is the history of men filming women" against a disquietingly lurid Norsca-blonde foreground. Against this video grain slithers Andree Greenwell's sumptuous *Medusahead, Confessions of a Decapitated Soprano*, a beautiful opera clip with striking 3D animation and a potent sound text.

Anemone is a challenging experience. It is a vigorous appropriation of past images fertilised by the prevailing winds.

Anemone, *premiere screening, Film and Television Institute, Fremantle, July 9.* www.imago.com.au/anemone.

Dylan Yeo's *Mozzie*, AFTRS Digital Media Studio

Boys will be girls

Mark Stephens on a recent documentary on Fa'afafines in Samoa

Heather Croall was first introduced to the Fa'afafine way of life while filming her 1995 educational documentary *When I Grow Up*, which looked at youth suicide in Western Samoa. She returned some years later with a film crew to further explore the complexities of life for the Fa'afafines in contemporary Samoan society. The result is a piece of solid and compelling storytelling in *Paradise Bent: Boys will be Girls in Samoa*. The film premiered on August 6 at the Mercury Cinema in Adelaide at a screening presented by Feast in association with the Media Resource Centre.

Fa'afafine literally means "in the manner of a woman" and is a term used by Samoan people to describe men who traditionally take on the domestic duties performed by women around the home. Historically, the Fa'afafine have been active members of Samoan family life, taking on the responsibilities of raising the children, caring for the elderly and bringing the family together.

Over the last century Samoan culture has seen the emergence of a new type of Fa'afafine, modelled after the Drag Queen, familiar in much of western society. Tosi and the central character, Cindy, represent the modern city-dwelling variety of Fa'afafine and colour the film with their insights and hilarious camp repartee. Heather draws upon the universally expressed tensions between generations of people living in different social and moral climates.

We are first introduced to Blondie, Mishie and Haci in their family homes. Blondie is one of 3 Fa'afafine living in a family of 15 children, 7 boys and 8 girls. There is some discrepancy between Blondie and her mother as to which category the Fa'afafine fit into. Mishie also comes from a large family (14 children in total); 8, or is that 5, of the siblings being girls.

Mishie, Blondie and Haci represent a generation of Fa'afafines who have not only retained their traditional roles within the Samoan community but have also embraced modern expressions of the Fa'afafine identity.

Through their eyes we come to realise this film is not so much about the specific conflicts brought about in Samoan culture through the colonial projects of anthropology and the Christian missionaries, as about individual choices and the liberty which comes through self-determination.

Since forming Re Angle Pictures, Heather Croall has proven herself to be a passionate and humane filmmaker, dealing with a wide range of socially taboo (and for this reason often invisible) subjects. Her ability to generate a visible place in her documentary work for what is otherwise largely unsayable is commendable. *Paradise Bent* offers its western audiences a warm and humorous insight into the uniquely Samoan way of considering sexuality as well as creating a more general space for reflection upon our own prejudices concerning diversities in human sexuality.

Fa'afafines backstage, *Paradise Bent*

For our Fa'afafine friends—well who can say what they received in turn? Perhaps the long overdue recognition and affirmation they deserve? And I'm quite sure the international exposure won't hurt their careers any, either.

And as for me, I was left wondering what all the strapping Samoan lads thought…

Paradise Bent: Boys will be Girls in Samoa, *Re Angle Pictures Pty Ltd, produced and directed by Heather Croall, world premiere: Mercury Cinema, August 6. This documentary recently screened on SBS and was developed with assistance from The South Australian Film Corporation and The Australian Film Commission.*

Mark Stephens is an Adelaide-based artist and writer. He has written for Broadsheet, Artlink *and* Art Monthly.

Intimate and robust

Kirsten Krauth on female desire in new Australian films

Feeling Sexy
Writer/director Davida Allen,
Maverick Films, December release
http://feelingsexy.binnaburrafilm.com

Strange Fits of Passion
Writer/director Elise McCredie
Beyond Films, November release
Official selection Cannes Film Festival 1999

Feeling Sexy and *Strange Fits of Passion* tackle that subversive (in the cinema), wily, mythological beast of a subject, female desire. And it can be a beast, driving you on and under. In *Hurlyburly*, Chaz laments "I don't have the code" as he pushes knowingly dishevelled Meg Ryan out of a moving vehicle. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, Tom doesn't get to hold hands with the 6 foot alien in mask and thong because he doesn't know the password; there is no password. These films, even though they centre on male characters, portray men as outsiders; consummation of desire is unattainable. In *Feeling Sexy* and *Strange Fits of Passion*, women get to have their cake and eat it too as desire is negotiated, claimed, and thrust back where it belongs; into the head, and the land of temptation.

Ben Stiller, in *There's Something About Mary*, yelps plaintively to his dodgy mate, "I've been walking around with a loaded gun", and Vicki, the central character in *Feeling Sexy*, knows this feeling all too well. Dabbling in a Queenslander in the 70s, Vicki, a painter, in the good ol' Aussie tradition, marries young, choofs out a few kids quick-fast, and expresses her frustration at being alone, and home all day, in green velvet-lined panel-vanned sex with a quick learner. Time to implement the blue room containment policy. Helped by production designer Hillary M Austin and DOP Garry Phillips, Davida Allen (an Archibald prize winner whose paintings usually concentrate on women and domestic life), creates beauty out of the mundane, reclaiming ordinary stories as significant, and female desire as both potentially obliterating and a positive force. Allen captures an essence of relationships that Kubrick manages to obscure: "I wanted to tell a story that had an answer…it is hard to keep novelty in your life. What is the spice of life? How do you keep feeling alive, when every day can be the same? How can two people within marriage keep feeling like they did when they first met each other? The newness, the exhilaration of new love? It is hard to keep everything new and shiny. Everything grows old and dull. I wanted to disguise a recipe for keeping a marriage alive…" (Davida Allen, interviewed by Maureen Gourlay, program notes)

Strange Fits of Passion borrows its title from a Wordsworth poem and is so much an expression of my own headspace when I was at uni I feared someone had, *Dark-City*-like, stolen my dreams and memories. Melancholy, hilarious and just plain weird, we travel with She, out to lose her virginity, encountering the best and worst of Melbourne: pretentious skinny pseudo-feminist (when it suits them) university boy poets who like the idea of being a writer more than writing; Spanish machismo language teachers with classes of women looking for Antonio Banderas and desperate to tango; and a secondhand bookstore run by Barry Dickins, which works as a cross-roads to the fulfilment of desire, pointing in the right and wrong directions.

Feeling Sexy and *Strange Fits of Passion* are intimate, well crafted gems, interior and robust and complex enough if you fight below the surface. *Strange Fits*, in particular, never takes the easy way out, manoeuvring within scenes to pack a punch by retreating, or settling up-close-and-personal under the doona:

Strange Fits of Passion have I known:/And I will dare to tell./But in the Lover's ear alone./What once to me befell.

The digi-buds bloom

Simon Enticknap on films from the AFTRS Digital Media Studio
Dylan Yeo, Mozzie; *Tim Richter*, Steeling the Skies; *Armagan Ballantyne*, Little Echo Lost; *Michaela French*, Flux; *Jonathan Hairman*, Satellite; *Niki Bern*, Midas; *Aaron Rogers*, Project Vlad
Academy Twin Cinema, July 28

Digi-buds starting to bloom, prototypical nodes where new worlds intersect, blur, dissolve, do a quick morph and then, blip, disappear again before you can hit Save. It's all gossamer against my eyeballs, no grit, no grain, although bits of grunge stick here and there.

Mozzie, an everyday story of 2 mozzies, one man; a comic romance which swoops up, down and all round the on-going antagonism between humans and nature. It's a laugh alright, but humans generally don't fare too well in this digital milieu. In *Steeling the Skies*, a downtrodden figure wanders through a *Blade Runner*-esque city, searching for a human touch among buildings-become-words (Sydney 2000?). A high tech/low tech faultline opens up here which runs through other works too; old technology gets swallowed up and regurgitated as content—ferris wheels, musical boxes, old radios and tellies.

Little Echo Lost is another fabulous dreamscape, gorgeous rock-like skin or skin-like rock, it looks like a surreal super 8. *Flux* is the most self-consciously arty and impressionistic, more shapes and swirls, layers drifting and dissolving, a great build of sound and rhythm (the sound is strong throughout this program). Then in *Satellite*, we encounter human dialogue again and it's quite disconcerting, as are the figures, unnerving synth-skin and big watery eyes like marbles. *Midas* is the clearest example of effect as content: King Midas transforms surface textures at the touch of a finger and then it's a quick Command-Z undo…everything is reversible here.

Paint, filter, fill, render—it's so wondrous and dazzling but there's no bottom to it—we could sink down and down, never hitting anything solid. Intoxication and paranoia are the twin poles of this byte-sized domain—look what we can do, isn't it fantastic/awful?—drawing a direct line to the dreamworld. Anything is possible in this medium but that's what we've come to expect.

There's a lot of work in these works, so much number crunching, as painstaking as medieval manuscript illumination. Perhaps, though, *Project Vlad* gives the best summation of the moment: in the end, we're all just monkeys sitting in space, fiddling at our computer consoles while waiting for word to arrive from ground control.

Swooning

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the invited guests from the (evil) east and WA's Marie O'Donovan, Annie Murtagh-Monks and Sue Taylor on the subject of "Studios are the Death of Independent Film", with the locals arguing in the negative. The debate was witty and insightful and a credit to the participants for not going down the AFL fault line. However, given that there are no studios in Perth, it would appear that the debate was wishful thinking from both sides. WA independent filmmakers are safe from studio domination for the time being, although it felt like some would rather not be.

During the festival the Film and Television Institute was jam-packed with discussions and a 36 hour film fest, as well as some people who just felt good about being in the same room as Diver Dan for a couple of hours. It would be good if next year's festival was more confident about local product, more ambitious, more aggressive in garnering new audiences and more active in organising a national tour of WA screen product. While there may be only a modest industry here, some of the local product is very good. Independence breeds content.

13th Western Australian Screen Art Awards, Film and Television Institute, Perth, Ju;y 15 - 18

Streetwise dramaturgs

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 project 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. Set up 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, silk 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 be therapeutic, but it's not, or only is 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 commenting. '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—I 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 seating), 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 Ertler and Nik Wishart. Caitlin 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. KG

The project is supported by the Australia Council Theatre Fund, NSW Ministry for the Arts, High St Youth Health Service, part of Western Sydney Area Health.

The Cement Garage, *artistic director Alicia Talbot, High Street Youth Health Service, 65 High St Harris Park (near Parramatta, 2 minutes from Harris Park Railway Station). October 21 - 23, 28 - 30, 3pm and 7pm. Limited seating—please book. tel 9687 2544*

Xu Fengshan, Rolando Ramos

Urban Theatre Projects' latest, *The Query*, a 2-hander and a nice change from the company's environmental epics, drips with potential. The charisma and skill of its performers, Rolando Ramos and Xu Fengshan, are never in doubt, the fundamental premise of the show (Merlinda Bobis) is exciting, the sheer wit of the direction (Nigel Kellaway and John Baylis) is evident and the video material (Nik Wishart, Rolando Ramos) is hilarious, well-crafted and admirably integrated. Much of the show is spoken in Cantonese and Spanish (with the Chilean born Ramos providing enough English to keep us in touch). Interpreting, reading gesture and noting code-switching become quickly fundamental to the audience experience. It's not hard work and at its best the show is very funny.

The Query should be a success, it should be touring the country displaying the great talents of its performers and demolishing the ahistorical, freemarket mythologies of globalism that increasingly impinge on us. Sadly, it's doubtful it can do any of these and even if it got an offer it needs serious re-thinking. Moment by moment, scene by scene, *The Query* mostly makes sense, but overall it falls apart, grows increasingly opaque, and after the initial excitement you can feel yourself and the audience recede into the middle distance. There are some very obvious reasons—except for a couple of promising skirmishes over property and racism, the characters are never allowed a dynamic with which to really encounter each other, to tear at the global veneer they have assumed. They are well and truly globalised.

The performance opens powerfully with the tension of the alternating audition/interrogations which gain the two TWLPs (Third World-looking people) entry into *Transnationalia*, a TV game show of a world. How to read each other's behaviour in this new world is wittily tackled ("this is how *we* think", says one of them putting on a thoughtful face) and the ahistorical thrill of adopting identities is embraced with gusto in one of the show's video highlights—Woody Allens' Zelig meets Forrest Gump as Fengshan and Ramos shake hands with or embrace the famous across the century and *become* Ghandi, Stalin, the Kennedys, Mandela. After that, things flatten out. The fundamental difference embodied in 2 mis-connecting languages seems to become less and less important, potential disharmonies evaporate as the characters settle into a nostalgia for the success of *Transnationalia*. Things don't add up, the satire thins out just when we expect specificity (we are surrounded with things global impinging on us blatantly and subtly, in what we hear, see, eat, the jobs we lose...) and an air of naivety and abstraction begins to stifle.

Of course, the writer and directors probably didn't want to descend to the world of ordinary satire, but a greater degree of literalness would have allowed the audience in instead of assuming they're all in the know too. Nonetheless *The Query* has its moments of great beauty—our 2 hosts playing angels on glittering swings high above beautiful A-Bomb blooms on a multitude of TV monitors (another lost opportunity for reference to specific global tensions)—and humour, even if it is never as wicked or tough or accessible as you'd hope for, resting too often on the broad sweep of "poverty is banned", "unhappiness is a crime." But, to their great credit, Fengshan and Ramos heroically give as much life to the scenario, the script and the inventive direction as they can, and as many an audience member after the show declared and queried, "What a great double act! What can they do next?" A vigorously re-worked *The Query* could be it. Keith Gallasch

Urban Theatre Projects, The Query, *The Performance Space, September 9 - 26*

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 moister than most. A town of many rivers. The local Bundjalung people call it the place of many ways. Recently, 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 Euripides and Homer's tale from *The Odyssey* into a modern Australian outdoor spectacle. A truck is Odysseus' ship, performers play sheep, there is shearing, 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 tripod balancing a truss to which an iron eyeball is attached. The roving Cyclopean's singular point of view is projected onto the side of the truck.

The Eye, a free family show, opens to a swollen Lismore crowd of local parents and children at the respectable hour of 7.30pm. Selenus, a shepherd satyr adorned with a large black swinging penis, suffers from satyriasis—excessive male sexual desire. As he shears the Cyclops' sheep he buggers them a little. All is well and the children laugh. Odysseus and company arrive. They want to fix their truck. Needing some respite from the road, Odysseus 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 exacts payment by eating a human. With pleas of mercy falling on deaf ears and the truck still on the blink, Odysseus concocts an escape. Blackmailing a hung-over Selenus upon pain of death, Odysseus and Co. prepare a feast for the tyrant. The Eye is wined and dined until it is groaning in carnal cavort with Selenus. Odysseus and his men use the moment to poke a burning stake through its pupil. As the orb spurts liquid flame the Cyclops cries blue murder. They escape in their truck. The little man inside the Eye tumbles from his mobile media machine humbled and bloody as a couple of sheep skitter happily around him...and the show closes at 8.39. Ostensibly, all is still well.

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 tight-knit communities. Was it the large black swinging schlong of the satyr? Or the simulated cannibalism? In an era when technology is religion, representing the Cyclops as a megalomanic 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 '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 Toowoomba. 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.

Theatre Kantanka *The Eye*, Stage One Photography, Lismore

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.

Adelaide's Benedict Andrews is having a great theatre adventure. Not only has he been appointed a resident director (with Wesley Enoch) of Robyn Nevin's Sydney Theatre Company, but, thanks to a joint commission from Weimar 99 (Cultural Capital of Europe) and Robyn Archer's 2000 Adelaide Festival (with Performing Lines as producer), he's directing *Ur/faust*, his interpretation of the first version of Goethe's *Faust* as a part of the celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the great man's birth.

Rebecca Havey & Jed Kurzel, *Ur/faust* Heidrun Lohr

After workshopping the performance earlier in the year at the Sydney Theatre Company, Andrews subsequently rehearsed it with his cast at Belvoir's Wilson St, gave one showing to an invited audience and left for Weimar for more rehearsals and the opening. Although the text, pretty much left intact (says Andrews), is definitely more curio than classic, he and his cast invest it with a contemporary mix of passion and languor, sex and cigarettes, live electric guitar and ominous soundscape, flat forestaging and a big depth of field, and a theatrical vocabulary drawing on contemporary performance practices from across the last 2 decades. This is not, however, the time to review *Ur/faust* 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 Timberlake Wertenbaker translation of Pierre Merivaux's *La Dispute* in the Sydney Theatre Company's 2000 season, which also impressively features directors Jenny Kemp, Lindy Davies, Wesley Enoch and Barrie Kosky (doing the Ted Hughes/Seneca *Oedipus* no less) *La Dispute* is not exactly a classic, but is certainly more than curio. It will be seriously interesting too to see what Enoch and Andrews get up to with the STC's alternative program, The Directory (including, hopefully, changing its name).

See RealTime *#34 (December-January) for a full length interview with Benedict Andrews.*

Dystopia in Paradise

Eve Stafford finds epiphanies in *Stratus999*

It's amazing how infants make wholes of the world around them based on such limited experience. And adults in this postmodern period, when faced with non-linear arts, still seem to hanker 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 blitz 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 'Tardis' before it closes to be gutted for backpacker accommodation in this tourist town. "Oh yes", she gushed, "it's about the Holocaust!"

I can see her point. *Stratus 999* is a dystopic site-specific performance in Bodyweather, a more universal contemporary derivative of post-WW2 Japanese Butoh, with movement based on the impulse of internal images. Each spectator makes their own sense from audio and visual stimuli provided by the artists, Marnie Orr and Leah Grycewicz, with the added international exponent, Lenni de Vries, musicians and other media. Out of the multimedia confusion come moments of personal transport, when all the sensate elements coalesce into an epiphany.

Stratus 999 opens with a compliant audience repeatedly ordered by disembodied voices to sit on the stage facing towards the cinema projection box. A foyer light clicks on-off like a cold street neon. Claustrophobia follows the stale-air darkness as the door shuts. Electronic music and projection open a plethora of references to the cinema venue as place of light, dreams, ghosts, danger, ethereal sounds and flickering images.

Balloons appearing between seats rise with song, internally lit and weightless, 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-humanised automatons, signalling foreboding. There is a chase of the hunted in the dark, punctuated with torchlight in an underground cavern, with smoke filtering the light. There are many layers at once, 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 projectionist 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 partly demolished former restaurant space, there are the dark forces of urban oppression, something totalitarian, the audience and robotic performers alike trapped and ordered to move about, get out of the way or get slammed. We the coerced are obedient, watching the 'real' victims writhing while collected bodily onto a scaffold by reapers.

The giant fans appear as a softening point to let the audience sigh. They dance like butterfly wings, like courting birds.

Stratus 999—peel back the unconscious, *Marnie Orr, Leah Grycewicz, Lenni de Vries Marion Conrow, Dino Ranel, Shakimra, Hans Jurss, Mark Edwards, Stephen Greenleaf, Aymeric 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 (FNCIA)*

Untried symbols, unanticipated meanings

Brad Haseman sees Kooemba Jdarra's *Goin' to the Island*

Oodgeroo Noonuccal's poem to her angry and confrontational son Denis sets the pretext for this new work by Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts.

My son, your troubled eyes search mine,
Puzzled and hurt by colour line.
Your black skin soft as velvet shine;
What can I tell you, son of mine?

Goin' to the Island peers deep 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.

Lafe Charlton, Roxanne McDonald, Rochelle Watson, Andrew Beckett & Kirk Page in *Goin' to the Island*

In writing this piece, Therese Collie (who has given us the superb *Out of the Blue* and *Murri Time*), has placed the art of storytelling at the heart of her dramatic structure. The action weaves in and around stories told with such energy and good-heart by the performers that they reassure us all. They transcend boundaries—those lines that divide generations, city and country, water and land, the living and the dead. They succeed in elaborating themes which first-time director Nadine McDonald believes to be "universal for Indigenous Australians."

All 5 performers are versatile and engaging, adroitly handling multiple roles and easily swapping naturalism for song and dance and then back again. All are gripping storytellers but it is Roxanne McDonald as the indomitable Gran Eileen who most easily wins our affection as her slight frame towers over her family and gently draws TJ ever closer to their hearts. Nadine McDonald's deft, well-formed action emerges, dissolves and reforms in Delores McDonald's design which saturates the stage with projected images. These shifting reflections constantly surprise as they change.

In fact this is the appeal of the piece. Things are often more than they appear: a wall of the set becomes the drawbridge of the Straddie barge; 'violent love' is declared; TJ's focused young sister who has it all together smokes dope; dead ancestors offer advice; distraught whites rush into the bush to die when separated from their home. These paradoxes perplex and unsettle as they jangle the expected with the unexpected to create untried symbols and unanticipated meanings.

Oodgeroo too signals the ending. Her solution is to avoid bitterness, "a maggot in the mind", and to "educate—don't hate". This is the heartfelt cry of *Goin' to the Island* and it almost brings it off, it almost creates a model of reconciliation by establishing sympathies and alliances between the audience and performers.

But the ending doesn't convince. While the play's narrative form demands resolution, TJ's story resists resolution and in the move to closure the defiant struggle for survival and recognition dulls into a mere celebration of optimism. Will TJ's sister really stop smoking dope as she suddenly promises? Will TJ really prosper on the mainland as the play implies? Finally these hopes seems contrived, cosy but celebrating the end of the play rather than the ongoing complexities and ironies of victory and defeat. After 5 years of destructive, mean-spirited public policy and apology-less regret, this ending seems to belong to another age, one whose time is yet to come.

Goin' To The Island, *Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts, Merrivale Street Studio, Brisbane, September 7 - 18*

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 Centre and Alice Springs for her tireless championing of Aboriginal rights, especially land and other rights for Warlpiri people. Bureaucrats and police in Alice Springs feared and disliked her. Most long-term residents of the town have 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 completed formal qualifications. Working in the Tanami, she is said to have persisted in wearing the full Edwardian regalia: long skirts, starched shirt-fronts, poke-bonnet and pink parasol.

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 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. She was the first white person the local people had ever seen. David and Tim Newth, director and visual artist who works primarily in dance, have overseen the animation and movement aspect of the production. Tim also came across stories about Miss Pink while working in the Tanami. He quotes one Aboriginal man, Jerry Jangala Patrick, as saying "What was wrong with this woman, I couldn't work it out! Then I realised, I felt sorry for her, her skin, she must be like a snake, her skin so tender and pink, she had just shed her old skin."

Sculptor Gay Hawkes also heard about Miss Pink at Lajamanu. Like Miss Pink, Gay came from Tasmania. Her contribution to the production is to 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 persona. 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 camel. All the props used—a tent, a number of puppets—were multi-purposed.

Darwin musician Claire Kilgariff grew up across the Todd River in Alice Springs from Miss Pink, who left Claire's mother a collection of 19th century drawing-room songs. These form the basis for the music in the production, though it also develops into a more surreal soundscape.

Stephen Carleton, a Darwin playwright, who 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 develop their own parts 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. Glossing through the *Weekend Australian* several months ago, I glimpsed an article surveying the leisure time of school-age children. It uncovered an increasing trend amongst middle and higher income parents to over-commit the spare time of their children to a range of extra-curricular activities; spending titanic amounts of money and energy diarising the lives of their children with jazz-piano lessons, under-water polo and martial arts training. Whilst organised activities are important in developing social relationships, aspects of western lifestyle have become exceedingly preoccupied with 'visible engagement' on a social level. This emphasis on the development of external identity leaves little room for the private meditation necessary, if we are 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 technologies to broker the inclusion of both a linear narrative and the eventual interaction of remotely located audiences. It draws upon the research project *Broken Spaces*, a collaboration between Doppio Parallelo, Rosebud (the Ngapartji Narrative and Interactive Research Project), the Media Resource Centre and the Australian Network for Art and Technology. Correlating with the theme of ethnic identity in the initial performance script by Melina Marchetta, it has been the objective of the *Broken Spaces* research 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 solipsistic woman, indulging in the wistful reverie of a lost friend. Her angry childhood friend Marco is the interlocutor between Francesca's past and future self, trying desperately to interrupt her mindless re-enactment 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 flanking the performance arena. I found the presence of these terminals confusing and unnecessary as props, given that the audience could not use them to affect the outcome of the performance. Nor did they offer any random contributions to the shape of the performance that an interface with an online environment would tend to indicate.

A simple element within the performance that did work rather effectively was the use of a series of conversations between Francesca and Marco that had been pre-recorded on video and re-projected as a backdrop behind the main performance area. Timed and spliced to suture with the real-time conversations of the performers, it had the curious quality of a magic mirror, yet at times looked more like low resolution teleconferencing through a wormhole of space and time.

Lynne Sanderson

Considering the emphasis of the research, it was somewhat disappointing that none of the basic internet tools designed for their interactive capabilities were implemented to encourage the participation of an online audience. Nor did the dialogue between performers Rebecca Occhiuto (Francesca) and Antonio Gorgone (Marco) perforate the liminal space between performance and audience. The silent swathes of dance and movement (choreographed by guest director Sally Chance) layered by the soundscapes of Adelaide musician and sound artist Jason Sweeney introduced an allegory of reflective separation from the ruthlessness of Francesca and Marcos' conversation that normally situated both characters within the present moment. The imbroglio of ancestral voices dogging Francesca in both Italian and English, however, shattered any opportunity for the audience to immerse in reverie long enough for the movement to reach its maximum effect.

The logistics of hosting any performance that attempts to mesh an interactive net presence with 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, permeates these mythical boundaries, where the promise of metamorphosis resides.

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

Second sightings

A new work by Nikki Heywood is worth waiting for and recently we've seen 2 pieces from this remarkable artist, one a full-length version of *no place. like home* created originally for PACT Youth Theatre's *Dark Room* season last year; the other revisiting an earlier work *Burn Sonata* (1997-98) in a creative development project entitled *Inland Sea*, recently given a showing at the Io Myer Theatre at the University of NSW.

The no place of *no place. like home* this time took on more literal shape in a clever stage house designed by Samuel James. Given the nature of youth theatre, it was inevitable that there'd be new performers but it was disappoining that the inventive work begun by the first ensemble didn't get a chance to develop. Nevertheless, this new version retained a lot of the power of the first. The work is generated from the performers' own childhood recollections and Nikki Heywood's eye is again sharply evident in the shaping of space and time. Whereas we're used to watching young performers projecting their adult personas, this work requires them to articulate recent memories. Though they're closer to them, young people still struggle to articulate the power of sensations they evoke. Strongest in this work is the powerful way it conveys a sense of memory as spatial and physical, its elusive attachment to objects, and the way it flows from individual to collective.

Burn Sonata is one of my all time favourite performance works. It has already seen a couple of incarnations. The first focused on patterns of patriarchal power and female complicity within a family. In version 2 for the 1998 Adelaide Festival, the same tension pulsed through the entire fractured unit, bounced off the walls. In the explorations Nikki Heywood and company have begun in *Inland Sea* the same family (Clare Grant, Tony Osborne, Claire Hague, Dean Walsh, Martin del Amo) is joined by an Aboriginal woman (Rachael Woods) who watches and moves through the house, only occasionally engaging directly with the family. And this time we have a sense of the outside stretching beyond the dark corridor leading to that squeaky kitchen door. The back wall of the closed room has become a screen for Heidrun Löhr's projections of rural landscapes and buildings. In one scene Clare Grant utters a set of instructions to the family from behind it ("Girl, make a list of all the things you should have done"). The ambiguous light from the TV in the corner is replaced with more images of the outside. The floor of the house is covered in rocks. The household is held in the same introverted suspension, its melancholy seeping into the earth beneath the floorboards, tension tripping on stones. Most cryptically at this stage, the family, like a lizard, slowly takes in the presence of the Aboriginal woman. We await developments. Virginia Baxter

no place. like home *PACT Youth Theatre Aug 5 - 22,* Inland Sea, *Io Myer Theatre, September 23*

Agitated rotations

Kathryn Favelle profiles Kenneth Spiteri, from *A Streetcar Named Datsun 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 Datsun 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.

Maybe I'm harping on the thumb but it seems to sum up Spiteri's approach to his craft which has always been based on the physical. Well, at least since 1992 when he appeared in a production of Dylan Thomas' *Under Milkwood* at Canberra Repertory Society. It was, as Spiteri says, "a very physical piece of theatre" that drew on the talents of a creative team that included director Ross McGregor, dancer/choreographer Aida Amirkhanian and composer Jim Cotter. Movement, music and Thomas' words transported audiences into the lives and dreams of the people of Milkwood in a production that marked a high point for many Canberra performers and theatre lovers.

That experience was a "huge shifting point" for the young Spiteri, who was then still at school. So huge that it probably destroyed any possible future career in soap opera or musical comedy. And it almost certainly contributed to his early departure from the Western Australian Academy of the Performing Arts. "I just didn't get it," Spiteri says now of the 6 months he spent there. "I knew it wasn't how I defined theatre."

Since then he has travelled widely, pursuing training opportunities that have seen him work in Paris, London, Malta and New Zealand, as well as Canberra. 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.

Kenneth Spiteri 'pling

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 worked 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 shifting point. 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 members working to create individual physical scores within a common space. Although the training became frustrating after a while—"you have to move into the world or you're wasting your time"—Spiteri also discovered that members, while working individually, were starting to develop a shared vocabulary, sensing each other's rhythms and movement patterns.

Recently, Spiteri has been exploring movement and process further through a professional development grant he has received from the Australia Council's Emerging Artists Initiative. Based at The Choreographic Centre in Canberra, Spiteri has worked with the Centre's director Mark Gordon, artist Anna Hueneke, photographer 'pling, and Jungian analyst Glenda Cloughley, to analyse and document his own work processes. And once again, he is surrounded by dancers.

"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 readable?"

If the audience response in Canberra is any indication, then Spiteri's Rex is definitely readable. Juxtaposed with Mary Rachel Brown's Tracey, another character living in the shadows of suburbia, Rex is definitely on the edge...of society, violence and his own mind. It's an intriguing, physical performance. And it leaves me amazed by how much can be conveyed in the rotation of a thumb.

A Streetcar Named Datsun 120Y, *Company B Belvoir B Sharp season, September 14 - October 3; North Melbourne Town Hall, October 12 - 18, Melbourne Fringe*. www.datsun120y.tourguide.net

Kathryn Favelle is a Canberra-based writer and editor. She is currently Deputy Editor of Muse, *Canberra's monthly arts magazine.*

Flight Path Daze

"Life here is intermittent; we live between noise events," says Sidetrack Performance Group Artistic Director, Don Mamouney. If you have to live with 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, Effy Alexakis, Cory Ancone) have created *Flight Path Daze, more low flying acts from the makers of Plane Truth*. The show promises to express "with irony the presence within our lives of the aircraft that daily fly over our heads, a common experience despite our diversity, and the sense of cultural giddiness which the living amongst such extraordinary diversity can give rise to." Sidetrack, October 28 - November 14 8pm, Sundays 6pm. Bookings 9560 1255

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 Artstart 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 Newtown for 2 weeks from October 30. Eclectic art fills shop windows: take a stroll and take in photographs, ceramics, sculptures and installations as you browse the bookstores and munch your way down the street. The contemporary art reflects and celebrates Sydney's youth culture. The launch will be celebrated with a street party on October 30 featuring music, street performers, dancers and singers. For more information, or if you'd like to help out, contact KANCAM: tel 02 9550 4156, fax 02 9550 5957, email *artfeats@ar.com.au*

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 (APT3) 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, performance, artist book-publishing. That milieu of ephemerality was my kicking-off point. It wasn't a big jump from working in music to using sound as a sculptural element and, from that, into installation, incorporating ideas from visual practice, collaborations with visual artists, extending things back and forwards across 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 disintegrating because it's physically unstable. Events in those days were always characterised by the presence of a video or movie camera. Flashbulbs going off in performances 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 reinforcement of 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 focus on artists from traditional media who'd taken up technologically-based media, which was what happened in 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 Artspace 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 a white nothingness: 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 Fireworks Gallery, Brisbane. It has very simple elements—two rocks from the Finke 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, summarises 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 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 APT3 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.

Leigh Hobba, *The Blues*

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 read 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 sash 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 'material facts' 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 spattered floor of the gallery. Reminiscent of Michele De Lucci's Memphis design, and with titles such as *stoolish* and *fiddlesticks*, the objects aimed to work at the level of the visual riddle. However, there was a literalness about the work and its titles which defied the playfulness claimed for it. In his essay, Andrew McNamara suggests that, "(t)he objects look like assemblages from furniture kits that have been arranged with mischievous intent." On the contrary, the work, like the catalogue essay, took itself far too seriously and took no account of where it was or what potential the space offered. There was no "errant playfulness", just some very well crafted objects. Not that I mind that. There is a great deal of pleasure to be gained from a well-crafted work.

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 Rodchenko), I 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 maelstrom 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 Cobain in the gallery space is significant. He says:

Firstly, Cobain is signified as a unified totality—the sculptural forms and gestalt principles of American-style late modernism deployed but equally cancelled out as Redford overlays it with pop sentiments. From this centre, Redford then refracts that sense of completeness, not only in the dissembled identical form in the adjacent spaces in the gallery but by a poster…that has been distributed throughout Brisbane.

Scott Redford, *We are the Language*

The text left me a bit breathless. I went back to the work, to see if it really did all this. How much can you ask of a work of art?

I agree with Rex Butler when he suggests that Redford's work is at its best when he subjects his material to the rigours of formal manipulation and control. The exhibition achieves that well. But the claims that Schubert makes are just not evident in the work itself. Schubert appears to take the tendency to interpret visual images as signs to the extreme (perhaps he should read James Elkin's recent book *On pictures and the words that fail them*). In this manoeuvre, sign gives way to sign ad infinitum and the referent (ie the artwork) gets lost altogether.

The dilemma is that once an exhibition is over and the work itself has been dismantled, it is the catalogue essay that survives, enters our cultural dialogue and produces art. Art is a collaborative act. Art writers—whether they be essayists or critics—make art, not just artists. In taking on this responsibility, it behoves the writer to do it well. Art writing needs to remain connected to what the work in an exhibition is actually doing. The ideas need to fit the material facts.

It was in the final exhibition of the series, with 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, collographic 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 busiest 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.

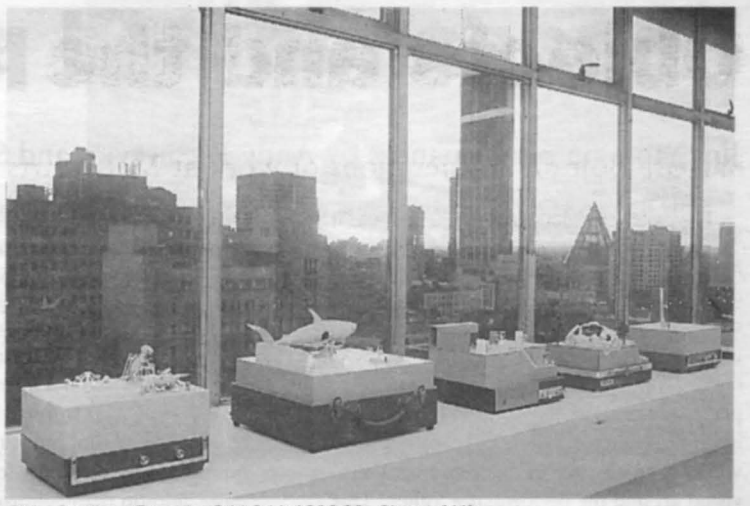
For 1999, the artist chosen to represent Australia was Melbourne's painter of suburbia, Howard Arkley. This turned out to be a wonderful choice because Arkley's vivid colour and regional intensity reverberated across the biennale and provided a humorous counterpoint to much that was earnest and dour. 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, perched rather awkwardly and apologetically at the edge of 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 premised on the Venice model, having a core exhibition supplemented by national pavilions. This is Juliana Engberg'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 promulgation 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—where 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 Katsalidis. 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.



Ricky Swallow, *Even the Odd Orbit* 1998-99, *Signs of Life*, Melbourne International Biennial 1999

This was an extremely ambitious program, in terms of actuality 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 lively future. Swallow's subsequent recognition, as recipient of the prestigious *Contempora5 1999* national art award, is 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.rtimearts.com/~opencity/* for a detailed report on the Third Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane. Eds.]

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, cnr 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 Petrusevics and Susie Fraser

Andy Petrusevics' *Not Post Anything* and Susie Fraser's *Stories from the interior...Threshold* are indicative of the hybrid currents flowing in that area we once so unhesitatingly called the visual arts, a term that is a now less accurate descriptor of the textual constituents of postmodern art. While performance is an oeuvre of longstanding hybrid credentials, 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 hyperreality in general as it is an initiative of progressive public art spaces in particular. However, there is another discursive element at play—the radical, curatorial conjunction of 2 ostensibly different works.

Petrusevics' Konstruktivist approach has consistently engaged with a range of 2D, 3D, performance, video and more recently, computer graphics to fabricate a hybrid theatre of the absurd in the tradition of the avant-garde's disregard for good taste and high art ideals.

Much of Petrusevics' Konstrukto work is a critique of bourgeois politics, yet it is his hyper, wound-up renderings of the business of politics—framed by a media hysteria built on infotainment (politics 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, mimicking that ambiguous flattened space of the media while utilising a retro high-modernist look that both acknowledges and flies in the face of deadpan appropriation and paradox; simultaneously tipping its hat to dialectic and irony. The retro quotient in Petrusevics' work has another function adjacent to pure style—it speaks about art, and in so doing, about politics.

Andy Petrusevics has sustained a post-industrial agitprop that continues to parody 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 agitpop than agitprop (p[r]opaganda minus the revolutionary r), although comparisons can also be drawn with the 1930s montages of John Heartfeld, stylistically and contextually, as Heartfeld was an artist in dissent with post-revolutionary reaction and big-business driven conservatism.

Petrusevics' 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, superimposed over a minimalist 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 end of history, 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, impressionistic, theatrical in structure. As the text infers, it had a long gestation. There is little in the way of artifice evident in this work; Fraser performs her writing with a minimum of accompaniment, some slides and sounds of 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."

Andy Petrusevics, performance, *Not Post Anything* Stephen Gray

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 damn thing of having to be reborn in the wake of the birth of one's children, dredges up an oft 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 Petrusevics,* Not Post Anything, *Susie Fraser,* Stories from the interior...Threshold, *Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide.*

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 Issey Miyake really the Picasso of Fashion or is he simply a brilliant fashion designer who incorporates artistic elements within his work?" Four of the world's leading fashion designers—Miyake, Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto, and 1999 Australian Designer of the Year Akira Isogawa—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 Spppssssp!, Lynda Jackson, Katie Pye, SIX, Barbara Rogers and Patricia Black, who will all be featured in the exhibition, have achieved significant success by adopting the techniques of the Japanese."

Australian textile artists such as Rogers and Black of Sydney have studied the ancient art of shibori, a Japanese dying technique. Fashion designer Rebecca Patterson of Perth's Spppssssp! Label has studied under the supervision of Junichi Arai, one of Japan's leading textile designers. Although born in Japan, Akira Isogawa is a permanent resident of Australia who has studied fashion and completed his designs in his adopted home town of Sydney, often using the patterns of antique kimono fabric he imports from Kyoto.

But it's the claim for designers as artists that seems to sit at the centre of this exhibition—and the criteria appear to be, one, having a philosophy and, two, defying the establishment. English says of the designers exhibited that "their garments are as much a statement of philosophy as they are of design...Miyake, Yamamoto and Kawakubo have been internationally recognised for designing garments that defy haute couture. Their garments typically have no hems or finished edges and are anti-sexual, anti-glamour, anti-aesthetic, and anti-status." If you've got cable TV and you're addicted to the fashion shows, you'll find this left of Lenin claim more than a bit hard to take. *Tokyo Vogue* should provoke some hot debate over some great frocks. Displaying them, though, will be the real test. And the best test is the body, not the dummy.

Griffith University, Tokyo Vogue, *Brisbane City Gallery, October 28 - December 4.*

Yugoslavian War Trilogy

Denis Del Favero's trilogy, to be discussed at length in *RealTime* #34, has to be seen, not only for the urgency of its topicality (inevitable comparisons between Bosnia/Kosovo and East Timor), but also for its brooding intensity, eye to eye with pain and loss, and for the dexterity with which the work is designed and installed by the artist and his collaborators to take you into their vision. *Pietà*, a vertiginous 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 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 Vilina Vlas* are on show in the ACP's small gallery. The CD-ROM of the work can be viewed at the Paddington 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.

Denis Del Favero, Yugoslavian War Trilogy, *ACP, 257 Oxford St, Paddington, October 1 - 24, Tuesday - Sunday 11 - 6pm. Tel 9332 1455*

Integrating musics and communities

Andy Arthurs 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 90s festivals: the Brisbane Biennial arose early in the Goss government's time (1990). It was a festival of high art experimental music. Alongside this existed the more general and community-based annual Warana Festival. In time these were both combined by the Coalition government into one festival, a two-yearly Brisbane Festival, which downplayed the community nature of the Warana Festival and pulled back from the edge of the Brisbane Biennial. The music component was 'Fine Music' (budget in excess of $1.5 m) 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 of all this means that Brisbane now has a low budget music festival (around $1m), and a much higher budget Brisbane Festival.

The philosophical underpinning of the Queensland Biennial is a festival from the Queensland community that interacts with the rest of Australia and the world. It attempts to break down the class barriers between high and low art, and to seek other communalities to music making. The opening concert was entitled "Queensland to the World", indicating the overconfident exterior of a state that has not yet quite thrown off its feeling of cultural insecurity. Its director was Simone DeHaan, a tough operator with a sensitive artistic mission. The challenges he faced were immense, trying on an unfeasibly low budget to put on a festival based in 3 centres, Brisbane, Mackay and Townsville, with some travelling shows reaching much further. For many of the artists it was a gruelling festival, travelling between centres to set up again and present their work.

Simone is a sponge for ideas, soaking up all suggestions and wringing out a pool of events that, providing the government sticks with it, has initiated a festival with a strong ethos—a basis for true growth. Despite the ridiculously short time line (9 months) an inadequate budget and inevitable patchiness, much was achieved.

I was able to visit 2 of the centres, Brisbane and Mackay. I didn't see the Townsville component or the Jazz train or "Rock on the Back of a Truck", which toured through the state, with Longreach as its final destination.

Brisbane undulates from enthusiastic importer of musicals to generator of original work emerging from a community of contemporary thinkers. Including a fair smattering of new work, there were 3 musical seams running through the festival program: an emphasis on music emerging from the local community (new or not), importations of music from other local communities around the world (such as the magical Tuvan throat singers, Huun Huur Tu), and a 'classical' music programme mainly from Europe and the US.

The integration of community with music making was for once not lip service but a genuine commitment to encourage the growth of home grown 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 team. Most of the main venues in town 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 Conrad 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 Sculthorpe quartets. They were moved at the last minute to an environment where they felt more secure, a concert hall.

Perhaps the part that fitted least into the overall ethos of the festival was the classical program, though not because of the choice of acts and music in itself. Indeed there were some fine performers such as Susan Bickley and Fretwork. 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 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 Letts (head of the Music Council of Australia). Here the ideas that were being put into practice across the state were discussed by community musicians from all 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 *Journeys in Time*, "expressing the journeys of Mackay's cultures through the eyes of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander communities." Dogged 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 Burundi 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 & 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 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, most often they 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 owed by 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 early 70s Reich work *Music For Pieces of Wood*, the group then explored the subtler dynamics of compositions by Maki Ishii and Per Norgard. The intricacies and range 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 rhyhmic patterns. Their sheer enthusiasm made for an invigorating night.

Percussion was also to the forefront in Maximum Legroom's performance, although in a different context. They presented a music theatre work entitled *Acceptable Behaviour*, based on the little work avoidance rituals we all indulge in. The performers took this unassuming premise and exploited its rhythmic potential with great ingenuity. Everyday office utensils were put to percussive use: pens, pencils, desks, spoons, water coolers. One superb sequence built syncopated rhythms from 3 people sitting at 3 miked wooden desks. At its peak, the performance incorporated the tiniest movements—tapping feet, the tearing of paper into strips—into elaborate rhythmic structures. And there were 2 witty showstoppers: a fantasy sequence of tap dancing on strips of bubble-wrap (and aren't we all hard-wired to enjoy the popping of those plastic bubbles?) and the playing of an amplified indoor cactus as if it were a very small and very prickly harp.

Concerts given by the ensembles Topology and austraLYSIS both featured ambitious programs of recent Australian compositions. Topology performed, among other pieces, 2 works by their bass player Robert Davidson. Davidson foregrounded his robust physical approach to the bass most effectively on *Exterior*. While these compositions had their share of arresting moments, their rapid jumping between atonal bursts and lyrical flights created a bits-and-pieces effect.

The 4 works by Ian Shanahan, performed by austraLYSIS, presented a more uniform aesthetic. With titles like *Dimensiones Paradisi* and *Zodiac: Crystal Orbit Improvisations*, these works exhibited a mystical bent, drawing on 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 in Tavener's *Svyati*, based on the Russian Orthodox funeral service. The ensemble was supplemented most effectively on this piece by the low breathy drone of a didgeridu. A haunting concert and a suitable end to this festival. All that can be asked for next year is bigger audiences!

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

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 he is something of an accidental orchestral composer: his first orchestral work was written in 1994 for the National Orchestral Composers School, the predecessor to ACOF. An ABC competition resulted in another 3 minute piece. Then in 1999, the ACOF program seemed like a good addition to 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 objectives was to make 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. With an orchestra you go 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 to get 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 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 toybox." 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 junkie, 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,world premiere of Jim Ledger's Airman, *October 13, Hobart; broadcast, New Music Australia, ABC Classic FM, sometime in 2000.*

Words and music and the spaces in between

Elizabeth Drake listens to Aphids 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 scrims at one end, the 2 thunder sheets at the other. We focus on the old valve radio plum centre-stage between the 2 blue-lit scrims. Later the words 'words' and 'music' will appear in light on these scrims. The 2 sides of the stage barely lit, set for a dialogue.

Who is 'he'?

Is he in the radio station alone? Is he recording the play? Could it be a live recording, interrupted. We are left to form our own scenarios.

'He' is alone in the studio,
at night,
after hours.
There is the solitude,
the empty corridors,
the microphone,
his access to the world.

'She' enters,
not via the radio,
nor fantasy,
nor even the telephone,
as in talk back radio,
when,
late at night,
the lost ones ring in,
with stories of,
rejection and abuse.

She comes really,
in the flesh,
to play her part.
There is a script,
which she follows.
She has come to hear the radio,
to hear words and music.

We see the actors,
behind their desks,
playing their parts.

Then he is alone,
words and music,
are together
like one.
Together as one,
then fading out,
they are ending this morning.
The doctor is unavailable, he cannot attend.
Once 'she' is gone,
he is left with the telephone for contact with the outside world. His world is crumbling,
words and music are falling apart.

Ian Scott/'he' tells me he has written a text,
in the place of every pause,
which he 'thinks' in its entirety before he 'speaks' the words of 'he'. A silent text.
Silent too the final words of the other play,
words and music: "down a little way
through the trash
to where—towards where

to where one glimpse
of that wellhead."

Tonight we are left with music. *Zahgurim 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 amongst the 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, sharpens our listening to hear the differences, to pick the moments of synchronisation that had gone awry. I found myself interested in the discontinuity between the players. Each player seemingly performing 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 scrims 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 Aphids event, John Cage:* FIVE; *David Young: Val Camonica pieces:* stile 1, II, III; *Samuel Beckett:* Radio 1 *(Esquisse radiophonic); Richard Rijnvos:* Zahgurim whose number is twenty-three and who kills in an unnatural fashion, *North Melbourne Town Hall, July 22. For details of Aphids* Ricefields *tour see page 35*

The sound of winning

It's a good feeling when a couple of your favorite composers, Michael Smetanin and Raffaele Marcellino, 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 bodies 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 *The Shape of Things to Pass*, a 12 and a half minute work commissioned by the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Gerard Brophy's *Merge* was Highly Commended in this category. The Song Cycle Prize went to Raffaele Marcellino for *Canticle*. It's great to see that the young David Young (leader of Aphids, see RealTime 31, page 41) was Highly Commended for his *Thousands of Bundled Straw V*. While we can see and hear other work of Young-Aphids on tour, it would be a pleasure to be able to hear the winning and recommended works as soon after the award announcements as possible—perhaps it wont 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.

KG

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 influential of all 20th century theatrical works. The original Maeterlink play opened a subtle anti-realist vein of which Beckett's poetic plain-prose *Waiting for Godot* is a notable illustration. Debussy's musical setting sounded the death-knell for declamatory, aria-ridden opera in which there was (as he complained) "too much singing", and was a pathfinder for Ravel, Wozzeck, Stravinsky, Bartok, Janacek…Both Maurice Maeterlink and Claude Debussy rejected the naturalism of Zola, with his coal mines, engine sheds and steam laundries, to escape from social reality into remote fairy-tale settings: misty forests, romantic seascapes, moonlit terraces, dank medieval vaults, ghosts and shadows in crumbling castles.

In recent years (and notably in the production discussed here) some directors of *Pelléas et Mélisande* have replaced the original atmospheric mystery 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-surrealism, with incongruous postmodern juxtaposition as its hallmark. When a director and set designer impose themselves on a theatrical work, without reference to or (at worst) respect for the author's intentions, the critic is entitled to come to the defence of the hapless primary producer.

Intrusive directorial innovation can be justified, but it must add new levels and dimensions of meaning; otherwise it is just a gratuitous attempt at novelty for its own sake. My reaction to 2 viewings of this OA production evolved from disappointment and disbelief to indignation and derision, for it seemed to be a deliberate attempt by set designer Stefanos Lazaridis and director Patrick Nolan to undermine and demolish authorial intentions. Their variants have implications for both work and audience that may not have occurred to them. They may have had their reasons, but they're not valid if they need laborious explanation. There were good points in this production, and very sensitive performances by the principal singers. John Fiore produced a wonderfully lush, sonorous, sensuous sound. The blend of voices and orchestra was beautifully balanced.

The action, as written, takes place in legendary 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 oneiric atmosphere is immediately established. In this surrealistic world a dysfunctional royal family from another age lives in a modern house, isolated from a starving society. Vague, distant rumblings of war and discontent are suggested, as in Orestes' Thebes—or several parts of the present-day world. So far, so good.

In accordance with Mallarmé's injunction never to mention "the Thing" itself, nothing is what it seems; we can readily accept that the modern domestic setting is symbolic of something else. But why are the vast walls almost all of glass? This is an isolated place, yet open for all to see into, a hothouse both claustrophobic and panoptic, admitting maximum light, whereas (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 isn't she? The suspicion that blocking had not been carefully thought through was already sown. This was the first of several examples of disparity between what the characters do and what they say they are doing. For instance, the passionate love scene in which Mélisande lets down her hair for Pelléas from her tower window, takes place solely on ground level, with Mélisande eventually walking over to an armchair to let her tresses (mysteriously much longer and luxuriant than before) drape down the chairback. Yes, theatrical tradition allows for a chair to represent a tower—in a minimalist production— but the style here is not minimalist: there is a lot of complex stage machinery. Furthermore, for the first half of the scene the lovers are separated by a whole stage width, and when Mélisande says, "I'm leaning out as far as I can" to reach Pelléas, she's doing nothing of the sort.

Kirsty Harms, *Pelleas et Melisande*, Opera Australia

Just in case anyone theorises that this is a dream world in which lovers might fantasise that their lounge-room romantic scene is taking place in Arthurian times, please note that it's jealous husband Golaud who warns her not to lean so far out of the window. No fantasy here.

Golaud, his suspicions gnawing at him, orders his young son Yniold to spy on Mélisande up in her tower. Instead of lifting him up he whisks the boy aloft on one of those contraptions that hoist bricks on building sites. That is ludicrous enough, but Golaud then goads the boy with his sword, and finally leaves him stranded aloft—a gross distortion of Golaud's character. Certainly, he is violently cruel to suspect wife and half-brother later when crazy with jealous rage, but making him maltreat his innocent, beloved son turns him into a sadistic monster.

Pelléas and Golaud climb up from the castle vaults; it is noon, and yet an enormous moon rises in a black sky. We know the general atmosphere is psychologically dark, but not at this moment: it is a hot summer's day, with a fresh breeze, bells ringing, happy children playing on the beach.

When Golaud drags Mélisande about by the hair, the only other person present should be blind old Arkel. But Genevieve, Yniold and Pelléas were on stage! A whole generation of spectators thus think Pelléas is a spineless wimp who remains passive when the girl he loves is being maltreated.

The boy, Yniold, is in the park "attempting to lift a boulder" and retrieve his golden ball. He hears a flock of unruly sheep approaching. The shepherd tells him they are now silent because they know they are not going to the sheep-pen. The boy wonders where they're going to sleep—presumably he doesn't understand they are going to be slaughtered. The scene, although staged in the dining room with no reference to the text, could be a powerful parable of the family's disintegration, but its impact was undermined completely because the boy, desperately tidying up the older generation's mess, is upstaged throughout by the stage crew furniture-removing.

Finally, what was the dead Pelléas doing lurking at the window in the final scene? Many spectators were utterly confused, not knowing if he was alive or not.

Is it good enough that some people weren't worried by the modern domestic setting and the inconsequential, enigmatic consequences, or didn't notice them, or got used to them? No. Innovations as intrusive as these have to add some 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 Steps to the High Garden.

Longing for less

Harriet Cunningham on the New Music Lighthouse experience at The Studio

The hype precedes the concert. "Sydney audiences will hate it" says lapsed Sydneysider Michael Keiran Harvey, issuing a challenge from his new home, Melbourne. With an ambitious masterplan, composer Martin Mackerras presents a 5 city tour for a 2-and-a-half-hour program of challenging new music, written primarily by himself. Call it dedication, or call it arrogance. Is this the work of a self-indulgent egotist or a ingenue genius?

The program opens with an ensemble work, *Sulphurous Dreamscapes and Obscure Lunar Conundrums*. Like most of the works in the program, sounds are enriched by words, in this case *The Ghost's Leave* by Emily Dickinson, read by Helen Morse. The orchestral textures capture the contrast between "meat and potato words" and "ambrosial utterances", from the muddy, beating quarter tones in the wind, to the bright strings. Bending, resonating, decaying harmonics focus the ear on the physics of the sound.

The Waves was written for Michael Keiran Harvey. A phenomenal pianist and champion of new music, this work is a showcase for his power. Mackerras, in his program note, speaks of "total energy" music, "music that becomes not even music but pure energy" and *The Waves* is given over to exploring this energy. In spite of the obvious intensity of the writing, however, Mackerras seemed more at home with a range of instrumental timbres: his piano writing resorts to cycling through a series of extremes, which establish themselves but do not develop or, for that matter, interact.

As all the heavens were a bell is Mackerras' latest major work, and at 45 minutes long is a big commitment from composer, ensemble and audience. Again, the point of departure is an Emily Dickinson poem, *I felt a Funeral, in my Brain*, an intense, inward looking verse grappling with a moment of extreme awareness. Again, Mackerras homes in on extremes, the epiphany, the "total energy." His clarinet improvisation in the third section of the work is a frenzied vault at the physical extremes of the instrument, reaching out to a higher consciousness.

Does he get there? All in all, the 45 minutes of music are a dazzling display of ensemble playing and individual virtuosity, but this is not a finely crafted work. Rough as guts and twice as chewy, this work makes heavy demands on everyone in the room. One senses that it could give back plenty, and I'd like to hear more, but not tonight, Martin.

One segment of the evening is given over to other voices: Mackerras approached fellow composers to develop 2-3 minute works, as a foil to his own. The program didn't make it clear whose works were whose, but these unique miniatures stood out in an evening otherwise dominated by one man's sound world.

In fact, I'd like to hear Mackerras write a miniature. He has a good ear for orchestration and an untrammelled desire to move. For his next trick, I'd like to see whether he can find the intensity burning in his soul within the brevity of a haiku.

New Music Lighthouse, The Studio, Sydney Opera House, August 18

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 co-operation. 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 totál 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 Ainscough 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.