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OnScreen



Robyn Archer interview  
Doco Conference  
Darwin Festival  
Globalisation  
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MAAP99  
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Dennis Del Favero  
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The Mercenary  
NxT Symposium

Australia's innovative arts bi-monthly



## Cover photo: Re-make

From December Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Arts will host the exhibition *Hitchcock: Art, Cinema and...Suspense*. One component of the exhibition *Notorious* features 14 artists whose work has been inspired by Hitchcock in a variety of media (film, video, sound and photography). Artists include John Baldessari, David Reed and Cindy Sherman (USA), Victor Burgin (UK), Stan Douglas and Atom Egoyan (Canada), Matthias Muller and Christoph Giradet (Germany) and Douglas Gordon (Scotland).

Our cover photograph shows one of the featured works, Pierre Huyghe's *Re-make*, a 16mm version of *Rear Window* as a home movie with amateur actors presented as video projection with sound. In other exhibits, Scottie's bedroom from *Vertigo* is "brought to life" and a continuous projection of *Psycho* screens ultra-slow over 24 hours in the gallery. Commissioned especially for the exhibition, *The Phoenix Tapes* comprises rapid fire clips collapsed from Hitchcock's films. From the Hollywood archives come storyboard panels, sketches, graphics, posters, stills and some photographs of Alfred Hitchcock in Sydney in the 1960s.

Organised by the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford the Hitchcock exhibition includes the complementary *Moral Hallucination: Channelling Hitchcock* curated by Edward Colless and featuring works by contemporary Australian artists (including Louise

Hearman, Andrew Hurle, Anne Wallace, Rosemary Laing and Dale Frank) which "channel the corrupting spirit of Hitchcock."

From March 30 to April 2, the museum will host a 4-day festival of gallery talks, papers and performances analysing and celebrating Hitchcock's enduring legacy to contemporary culture. On January 30 there's a recreation of Hitch's courtroom drama, *The Paradine Case*.

The film program is presented in collaboration with the AFI. The following double-features will screen at The Chauvel Cinema in Paddington in December: *Notorious* (1946) and *Spellbound* (1945); *Rope* (1948) and *Vertigo* (1958); *Marnie* (1964) and *Frenzy* (1972); *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *Strangers on a Train* (1943); *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963); *The Wrong Man* (1957) and *I Confess* (1953); *Suspicion* (1941) and *North by Northwest* (1959); *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) and *Foreign Correspondent* (1940). There'll also be a series of talks on Hitchcock's films on Thursday evenings (6-8pm) at the MCA.

Hitchcock: Art, Cinema and...Suspense, *Museum of Contemporary Art, Circular Quay West; December 17 1999 - April 24 2000, www.mca.com.au.* Salute to Hitchcock, *Chauvel Cinema, Paddington Town Hall, December 11 - 20*

## Editorial

### What a year, decade, century, millennium...

So far *RealTime* has managed to resist millennial Best Of's, but 1999 certainly encourages listing the great Worst Of's—Kosovo and East Timor, the GST in and the Republic out, and Labor and the Liberals realising the dreams of One Nation as fear of a flood (always a 'flood') of refugees sweeps the nation—reminiscent of those newspaper banners of not too long ago, "Mabo, How It Will Affect You." There's also justifiable paranoia among artists as we find ourselves still in the box labelled 'elite' (bad elite as opposed to, say, good sporting or business elite). The Australia Council Saatchi & Bott roadshow tried to explain why this is so and encouraged us to be more inclusive. While there was much of interest in what they had to report, especially from the video clips of focus groups, the gig was a little too close to patronising for comfort, possibly because so many artists have tried to be inclusive for so long now, while for others art is about provocation, which can, of course, be read as elitist and exclusive. Hopefully good will come of the Saatchi & Saatchi-Australia Council 3-year strategy to promote the value of the arts to all Australians. But the way different art forms engage their audiences must surely be on the agenda rather than the blanket appeal to inclusiveness, not to mention the scale of arts companies and organisations and their access to marketing. The wine industry was offered as an instructive example, but the arts aren't one industry, they are many (and is industry the right word?). Not everyone has something to sell.

Looked at from another angle, the big question is how inclusive of the arts is the culture it inhabits. The strongest response to the briefing by Paul Costantoura, consulting strategic planner with Saatchi & Saatchi, and Jennifer Bott, General Manager of the Australia Council, was anger about the appalling decline of the arts in education. How can the arts be regarded as anything but alien and elitist when they play so insignificant a role in the everyday lives of Australian children? And what about the role of the media? *Reporting the Arts, News Coverage of Arts and Culture in America* is a research report just released by the National Arts Journalism Program (NAJP) at Columbia University. It reveals, as we would expect too from arts attendance figures in Australia, that the space allocated to the arts by newspapers and television simply does not reflect the numbers in the population for whom the arts is part of everyday life (see <http://www.najp.org> for the full report). Speaking of the media, ABC TV's *The Arts Show* sounded vaguely promising before it went to air, and the idea of a whole hour on the arts almost unbelievable (you can't possibly count the funeral Sunday afternoons on ABC TV). However, Andrea Stretton was clearly out of her depth in interviews and group discussion outside her literary interests. So, instead of finding people who could handle these formats, rare opportunities to see artists meeting and talking and being something other than an elite, they were simply abandoned for a bland magazine approach, a kind of distended *Express* (the program we used to tolerate because there was nothing else, whereas *The Arts Show* became unwatchable). The upshot? *The Arts Show* has been abandoned. A new one will replace it—at half an hour a week for, I guess, half the year. I ask you.

What about the Australian Taxation Office's understanding of the arts? With several hundred other well-behaved souls, I endured 3 hours of bullying in a seminar on the GST for cultural and charitable non-profit organisations, appropriately in a concrete bunker, the Masonic Centre, Sydney. We were treated as though intellectually challenged and were constantly asked, "Do you understand?", and immediately told to keep questions for later. The increasingly restive and thinning audience reached its apoplectic release when after fielding several questions about publishing, the more patronising of the 2 hosts declared, "Enough

about books, I thought we were here to deal with culture." The model used was a commercial gymnasium (for which our hosts apologised, kind of...) and at one stage the gym got a grant.

Publisher Katharine Brisbane has declared the Australian arts (Indigenous aside) bereft of grass roots impetus and subversiveness (1999 Frank Callaway Lecture, University of WA, October 10, edited version, *Review, The Weekend Australian*, Oct 30 -31): "...I believe that in the pursuit of quality product the orthodox art forms have incrementally gained the high ground at the expense of innovation and investment in the future. The growth and career of the artist has been left out of the equation." Brisbane wants to blame the Australia Council for this. While some of her observations hit home (especially about artists' careers), they are largely predicated on her preoccupation with theatre (at the expense of much that is innovative elsewhere), and her naive solution, a moratorium on arts funding, would, as Australia Council Chair Dr Margaret Seares retorted passionately (*The Australian*, Nov 12) be punishing for the very artists Brisbane claims to support. The Australia Council does support an enormous amount of innovative work in performance, new media, dance, music, the visual arts—not enough, and not often enough; the real issue is how much a government is willing to invest in the arts—and by promotion through its Audience and Market Development wing. The worrying thing about Brisbane's rhetoric ("a climate of dependence") is that it is so similar to that of the enemies of arts funding who rear their heads every few years and yowl "gravy train" and "elite." Let's hope they won't be unleashed again, at a time when a calm, intelligent appraisal of the relationship and the reciprocities between the community, artists and government needs to be made (the Saatchi & Saatchi strategy hopefully taking us part of the way there). It needs too, to be an assessment that goes beyond the Nugent Report ("Securing the Future") to address all the arts, not just the major performing arts organisations.

Have a Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year, millennial even, if you're so inclined. KG, VB

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Publisher	Open City Inc.
Editors	Keith Gallasch, Virginia Baxter
Assistant Editor	Kirsten Krauth 02 9283 2723
OnScreen	
Co-ordinating Editors	Annemarie Jonson, Alessio Cavallaro
OnScreen assistant	Needeya Islam
Editorial Team	NSW Annemarie Jonson, Jacqueline Millner, Virginia Baxter, John Potts, Eleanor Brickhill, Keith Gallasch, Gretchen Miller, Alex Gawronski
	VIC Anna Dzenis, Suzanne Spinner, Rachel Kent, Zsuzsanna Soboslay, Darren Tofts, Philippa Rothfield, Elizabeth Drake, Richard Murphet (Advisory Editor), Dean Kiley
	WA Sarah Miller, Terri-ann White, Josephine Wilson, Grisha Dolgoplov
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	QLD Maryanne Lynch, Toni Ross, Anthony May, Brad Haseman, Linda Carroli
	ACT Julia Postle, Naomi Black
	TAS Diana Klaosen
Advertising	Gail Priest tel/fax 02 9518 1677 email sputnik@hutch.com.au
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# A tale of two cities

Suzanne Spinner in Darwin while Dili burns

The experience of this year's Darwin Festival was inevitably and indivisibly linked with the events happening just across the water in Timor. Darwin is a garrison town masquerading as a public service town with palms; it comes into its own during wars and evacuations. In September 1999, it was the best of times and the worst of times.

The ironies of timing were rich—the night before I left Melbourne I saw the premiere of Louis Nowra's *Language of the Gods* set in the town of Makassar in the Celebes, present day Sualwesi, in the dying moments of Indonesian independence. Amongst the audience was playwright Graham Pitts and ex-Darwin actor Terry Kenwick who had created *Death at Talibo*, about the massacre of Australian journalists in Timor in 1975. Also present was John Romeril who wrote *Top End*, which conjoined the invasion of Timor and life in Darwin immediately after Cyclone Tracy, with timely reminders of the debt Australia owes the Timorese, and the corresponding support of Australian wharfies for Indonesian independence after the war. The night after I arrived, an architectural and historical icon of white settlement, The Hotel Darwin, was demolished. It had withstood the bombing of Darwin in 1942 and the fury of Cyclone Tracy. Each time it was rebuilt and its poetic blue tiled roof restored, only to fall prey to the rapacity of economic rationalism one hot and steamy night.

The times were intense enough in the arts over the 10 days I spent in Darwin, even without events in Timor. As well as the festival there was the NT Writers Festival and The Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award. But in Darwin there could be no forgetting Timor. Gertie Huddleston, a senior painter and a winner in the Art Award told me about watching the news on TV back at Ngukurr and crying for the people of Timor and how she had just spent the day painting with some of the refugees in the park beside the UN headquarters. The night before I heard the Gyuto monks from Tibet chanting a prayer for peace but hearing that drone from a distance, mistook it for the didgeridoo. The monks made a fine sand mandala in the foyer of The Supreme Court, as mobile phones went off around them. The Arafura Ensemble gave a concert there and dedicated it to the people of Timor, and at the end Karyn Sassella read a poem about letting the peace keepers in. She looked strained; she was. Sassella was doing double duty. She'd come to read at the Writers Festival from working with the Kosovars down south and ended up counselling refugees at the Tent City on the edge of town.

Everything blurred, the place is so small. The Festival Club was set up on the wharf, and to party at the club you had to pass a military checkpoint because the naval ships were parked alongside waiting for the orders to move out. Get Frocked's



Paddle dance, Trepang

Mary Lynn Griffith hoped the concrete wharf was safe and not about to succumb to the same insidious, undetectable, "concrete cancer" that had invaded the Hotel Darwin and necessitated its overnight demolition. The Fourth Estate, a blues ensemble of a dozen local journoes playing manual typewriters, bemoaned "the deadline blues" and around the town there was not a hotel bed or a roll of film to be had for love or money; the place was awash with foreign correspondents reporting from as close to the war zone as they could get.

At the daily meetings at the 'East Timorese Embassy' in Raintree Park, leaflets urged us to boycott Indonesian goods—Balinese clothing was mentioned specifically—meanwhile an exhibition at NTU, *I've Been to Bali*, celebrated the first major exchange visit of NT Fine Arts students whose course now involves an extended homestay in Ubud. And at the Mindil Beach Market we ate our satays, wore our batiks and smoked our kreteks, and watched the bloody red sunset, and heard that in Jakarta the Australian Embassy was being stoned and all over Indonesia Australians were passing themselves off as Americans.

The highlight of the Darwin Festival was *Trepang*, an Indigenous opera directed and devised by Andrish Saint Claire, which celebrated the 300 years of trade and cultural exchange between the Macassan seafarers and the Yolgnu, the Aboriginal people of SE Arnhemland. Every year with the South East trade winds the Macassans came, in their praus, and returned with their boats full of dried smoked trepang, which had been collected in the warm shallow waters by Yolgnu men and women. Trepang, bêche de mer, sea cucumber, was prized as an aphrodisiac by the Macassan Chinese masters.

On the opening night, various Aboriginal leaders welcomed the audience: Billy Risk from the Larrakia Association spoke of the Tamarind Trees the Macassans planted all along the Northern coast and welcomed the refugees from Timor; and Terry Yumbulul, artist and cultural manager for the Elcho Island people who performed the show, reminded us that this was a trading history between business partners. Marcia Langton talked of *Trepang* as being "family history", a long history of mutual respect and friendly relations between neighbours, then and now, a story of first contact and wondered, as we did, what things would have been like if this model had been our dominant image of cultural contact.

What we saw under the stars that night was a series of cultural exchanges—songs and dances performed for one group by the other to introduce and reveal themselves, and at the same time we saw what the Yolgnu made from that contact. We saw a boat built, blessed with ceremony, a sail hosted and a great voyage undertaken, we saw the arrival on a distant beach and strangers approaching strangers. We saw gifts given and received, and dances about all the new things—tobacco, cloth, knives, playing cards, dugout canoes with sails, and alcohol. A marriage ceremony between a Macassan boy and a Yolgnu girl signifying and sealing the promise of friendly relations.

The entire opera was sung in Macassarese and Yolgnu Matha, which includes a repertoire of some 450 shared words, but even to outsiders like myself the story was clear in the detailed performance; we just missed out on lots of jokes that had the large Aboriginal audience in stitches throughout. We were the strangers, the Balanda, a Yolgnu word for white people, given them by the Macassans from their word for Hollanders, the Dutch who had colonised their country.

There is a moment in *Trepang*, a very subtle moment, really an accident, a rupture in the illusion of first contact that occurred in the dance where the wearing of sarongs is introduced. The Macassans present sarongs to the Yolgnu and show them how to wear them. Everything proceeds with the pleasure of novelty and pretend naivete but one old Yolgnu man, once he'd wrapped his new sarong around himself, immediately made that unmistakable gesture of adjusting the fit and settling it on his gut by deftly rolling the top over. That small gesture revealed all. He could not dissemble, he knew he was part of Asia as only recently the rest of Australia has begun to learn and, like him, we cannot unlearn that knowing.

What a difference a year makes! Last year I came back for the premiere of my play *Silver Seafarers*, celebrating the annual Darwin to Ambon yacht race and the maritime history of the Arafura Sea, including the little known but extraordinary meeting between Matthew Flinders and the Macassan fleet off the coast of Arnhemland in 1803. The race began 28 years ago as the Darwin to Dili Dash, but in 1975 everything changed and it rerouted to Ambon. This year the race was suspended and everything has changed again.

## what's on at PICA?

exhibiting: Nov 11 - Dec 19, 1999

### Shaky Ground

1999 PICA members show

exhibiting: Jan 27 - Feb 27 2000

### Aero-Zone

artist: Rosemary Laing (NSW)  
sound design: Derek Kreckler (WA)  
as part of the Perth International Arts Festival

### Skin

artist: Michele Theunissen (WA)  
as part of the Perth International Arts Festival

January 29 & 30

### Art(iculations)

as part of the Perth International Arts Festival

image: Aero-Zone by Rosemary Laing



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Darwin Festival, September 2 - 19



# Why would she want to do *that*?

## The Robyn Archer Interview

Adelaide Festival artistic director Robyn Archer talks Adelaide 2000, life, globalism, music theatre, the Gay Games and Tasmanian arts festivals with Keith Gallasch

### I've always been a bit of a sucker for nice offers

**KG** *You started out with a double go at Adelaide and now you've got the Gay Games and the new Tasmanian festival coming up. This is clearly a career move into ongoing festival directorship.*

**RA** I really had thought that I would just fall down for a year and read a lot...and just wait. I'm a great believer in leaving a vacuum and letting what flows in flow as the best way to get the creative best out of you. But I must say that I've always been a bit of a sucker for nice offers. And to go from the experience of Adelaide into two festivals that would be clearly very different but in many ways rather similar, in that they're both reflections of communities...I did experience a few qualms about whether even I, the time management supremo, could do it. I'm the kind of person, who once I undertake a project, I don't actually need a deadline to finish it—If it's there I would rather clear it out of the brain and get it done and move on. I had a few doubts, given the pressures of Adelaide and the intensity of the last 4 and a half years, whether I might stop suddenly and just never recover and I wouldn't do anything. I know Barrie (Kosky) went through a really strange stretch after '96; he disappeared off the face of the earth for 6 months or so. I didn't feel like doing that. And in addition, I see these 2 festivals as a sort of transition back into my own work. I'm going to direct a piece next year and I think I'll be doing a big cabaret affair.

**KG** *There's no doubt that your own work has taken second place in the last 3 or 4 years*

**RA** No question about that. I've been doing concerts but only of things I already know.

**KG** *Do you miss it or is it good to have that time out?*

**RA** I actually think there is something of that in it, not wanting to crash straight back into the quite different physical demands there are on performance. Also there's no doubting that once you're in a festival structure with an enormous back-up system, going back into the kind of ratbaggy of freelance suddenly just seemed to be more than I could take. But I think the next festivals will require more than most. Particularly in the case of the Gay Games in the sense that you've got to get a really good team together. It relies a lot on volunteers.

**KG** *And you won't have the big budget.*

**RA** It's not enormous but it means you've got to assemble a team. That means passing on some of the skills learned in Canberra and Adelaide. It'll be the same in Tasmania—assembling a team, training up people...

**KG** *You won't be picking up on the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras machinery?*

**RA** We'll be working closely with them but they're a totally separate organisation. Although the Gay Games has been running, I think it's the fifth or sixth Games, and

they run every four years, they've never successfully brought off the cultural component yet. There's the Sports Director and the CEO working for 12 months whereas the cultural stuff is really late coming. I'm trying to get together really good teams so that I can start to act in much more of an advisory role about the artistic content. For Tassie, it's fantastic. The feeling in the community is wonderful. They've been wanting this for about 10 years.

**KG** *What scale do you imagine the Tasmanian festival—a similar model to Adelaide?*

**RA** No. I've put a couple of limiters on it because of budget but also because of my well known theory that festivals if they're to be worth their salt ought to diversify and not just be carbon copies. So the last thing I want to do in either the Gay Games or the Tasmanian Festival is to somehow unnaturally preserve what I've been doing in Adelaide. It's a complete turnaround which is good for the brain but good for the festivals as well. With Tasmania, for a start we're calling it "10 days on the Island." Clearly it is a festival for Tasmania but we're trying to encapsulate a different kind of experience...

**KG** *Presumably a tourism as well as cultural experience?*

**RA** I think if ever a place has had the excuse to do a tourism-culture profile, then it's that place. It won't be enormous. It will be international—interacting with other island cultures. And I keep saying to everyone, if we get desperate, there's always England and Manhattan! There are already fantastic natural connections with Japan, particularly between Hokkaido and Tasmania. And I'm looking at places like Ireland and Iceland.

**KG** *All of which are doing really well culturally.*

**RA** Really sensational stuff. So I'm even starting to think one year might be cold islands and one might be hot ones. So a trip to Cuba is definitely on the cards!

**KG** *And Timor?*

**RA** Yes, Timor and Cuba. Some incredibly interesting writing and song and music will probably come out of Timor over the next few years. I already know the community in Darwin reasonably well. And

with the Gay Games the international confederation want to apply the same principles which they've applied to sport, which are "inclusion, participation and personal best." What I'll be trying to do is get a cultural component that sits out at Homebush, right next to the sports events—participatory community stuff. Then whatever else we can afford to do in the city at the high end, we will. Clearly there's no lack of performers and companies but in particular what I'm excited about is the Sports Outreach Program. Stuart Borrie the Sports Director is an athlete himself and he's got a very genuine outreach program which will be to Asia (particularly South-East Asia), rural and indigenous Australia and South Africa. And so he's already been to Johannesburg and sent a mission to Hong Kong to get into mainland China.

The politics of it are really interesting. Basically what it's saying is that the most liberal place in the world for the tolerance of gay and lesbian community is sitting in Sydney. And with Carr's new acknowledgment of same-sex relationships, it's kind of getting better and better. And yet, there are times...It's interesting how many people have walked up to me and said, "Congratulations on Tasmania" and not mentioned the Gay Games. As if it's a slight embarrassment. As if they're thinking why would she want to do *that*? As if gayness is now passé and you don't have to do anything about it. Clearly even here that's not quite the case. And it's clearly underlined in rural and Aboriginal areas. And certainly in Africa and parts of Asia it's still life and death. So for me the opportunity to program gay and lesbian works from those places is fantastic.

### As long as my feet don't touch the ground

**KG** *So you've potentially got a nice balance of artistic directorship of festivals and re-entering the creative life, what about your everyday life?*

**RA** I keep saying to people as long as my feet don't touch the ground, I'm fine. If I don't think about it too much, I'm okay. If I stay in one place too long, it's very hard to get me out. Basically I don't really get to put my head down in the same bed more than about five or six nights in a row and it's been like that for the last 4 and a half years.

**KG** *And you've got used to that?*



Robyn Archer

**RA** I've been a gypsy artist for 20 years but it's been very intense for the last 4 years. It's been a very wild time. There is an indicator of how somehow it doesn't ever sit in the psyche properly: when I have to fill in forms I actually now get very distressed because of the question of phone number. I say what do you need it for? And my address. Booking tickets for the Eurhythms last week through Ticketek took 25 minutes because I didn't have a phone number. I'm now officially an itinerant voter. So I have to say there hasn't been much of a home life for ages and ages. Just the unpredictable nature of the schedule.

**KG** *So the network of friends is obviously global as well. Are there enough people to keep in touch with?*

**RA** There are. Although there are people in Adelaide I've been longing to spend an evening with and in 4 and a half years I haven't had time. I have a place in Adelaide as a base but when I get there it's straight into 15 hours a day. It's never let up once. It's mainly because of the amount of correspondence that comes to the office as well as the thousand speeches you have to give as well as the real job of planning it and doing all the work. But everyone wants you to open everything and, unlike being an artist, I've found myself making myself completely available because that's the way to get to the roots of the community. Every small exhibition for a school or something is that extra set of parents and their friends and their community who'll say well, she's not too big for her boots. She came down and did this for us.

### A festival that doesn't stop

**KG** *Globalism means economic controls at the highest levels, despite the rhetoric of freedom and free trade, and with nasty consequences for the local, in terms of culture, employment...But in another way there's an increasing and complex interplay of local and global cultures. In the Adelaide Festival you've set up for 2000, what's the relationship between that local festival and issues of globalism?*

**RA** For a start, I think the fact that we've got a website probably means that there'll be a parallel virtual festival for the first time. And the fact that we're going to get certain Writers Week sessions and forums and the stuff that *RealTime* will do straight onto the web. That means an enormous global reach. But physically, a good festival has always been one of the places you can interact, if it's set up in that way. If it's programmed only in such a way that people come and do their show and leave again, the possibilities aren't there. But the idea of collaboration between overseas and Australian companies is one way of making



Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Giulio Cesare, Adelaide Festival



sure that it's a bigger program with a more global-local focus. And masterclasses make it a much more interesting proposition too. I think the idea of first performances actually increases that too because it requires more than just, you know, what do you need, booking the venue blah blah blah. It means you've got to follow through with a whole lot of things. Things like *The Ecstatic Bible* bringing 2 companies together (Adelaide's Brink Theatre and England's Wrestling School.) is really good. And Peter Greenaway and Saskia Boddeke's *Letters to Vermeer* involves the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra plus 40 Adelaide extras. Geoff Cobham (the festival production manager) dropped into the

teaching institutions and has got 20 kids from the VCA working on *Mizumachi* the music theatre work from Japan. And the fact that the regional program is there as well is making it even more localised.

The example of New Moves Australia (the choreographic laboratory) is one of the most significant ones in the sense that politically I just wanted to have something about what's happening with dance. My impression is that dancers are put under too much pressure and there isn't really a meeting place for contemporary dance at all in Australia.

KG *It's small but significant in events like antistatic in Sydney and Dancers are Spaceaters in Perth.*

RA And in Canberra but because the occasions are not big deal very few independent dancers or choreographers get an opportunity to access funds to go. Whereas in Adelaide, they may have a case. We just need some travel assistance to come over and see what happens. What I like best about it is that from that notion of wondering what we could do about it, then a cup of coffee with Nikki Millican (from Glasgow's New Moves) that

eventually gets her out here, 7 choreographers get to do their thing with 6 others and a mentor in Adelaide. Then they all go to Glasgow which gets them over there to network and see other stuff. But in the process Nikki found 5 works in Australia she wanted to present as part of her festival. If you use those occasions to

put fingers into the process as well as just the presentation of works, then you're getting some real benefit out of it. I would have thought that this one, much more than any previous Adelaide festival offers the potential for ongoing networks.

KG *A festival that doesn't stop.*

Kats-Chernin) may very well get—

RA It's already got 3 seasons in Germany. Elena Kats-Chernin's music is already known there but it's another opportunity for her. *ur/Faust* directed by Benedict Andrews opened recently in Germany to a terrific response. I welcome the fact that it's a collaboration with the Sydney Theatre Company. It happened sort of accidentally but even so...

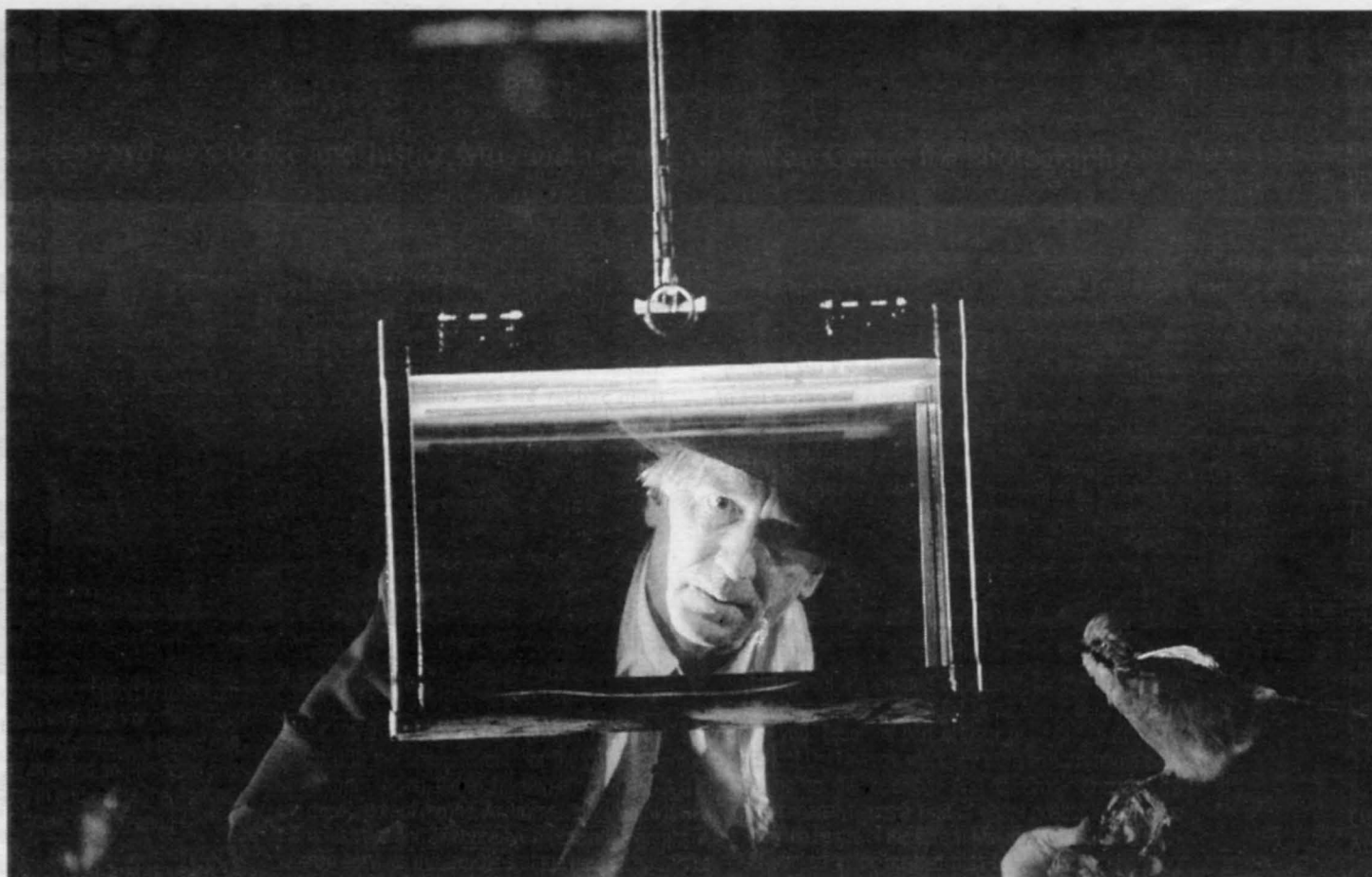
KG *The only way most state companies are ever likely to get overseas is to invest in innovation.*

RA Exactly right. The collaboration between the State Theatre Company of South Australia and Bell Shakespeare on *Dance of Death*—a collaboration with (Kyoto-based) Roger Pulvers—may well mean it gets a production in Japan.

KG *Elision is an interesting case. Yuè ling jié (Moon Spirit Feasting) is an opera. Largely they've done installation-based works, and they've made several successful forays into Europe.*

RA This is an installation anyway. It's taken from a tradition of street opera in Malaysia. So it's ideally designed for a street performance. There

continued on page 6



André Wilms, *Max Black*, Adelaide Festival



Jimmy Little, Adelaide Festival

# the ecstatic bible

by Howard Barker

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## telstra adelaide festival

3-19 march 2000



**Telstra**



## Why would she want to do that?

continued from page 5

are already people in Europe interested in that and that's because of the reputation of Elision and Liza Lim and Daryl Buckley.

I've seen around the world a real positioning of local work into the mainstream. There are two good examples. One's from overseas and that's *Giulio Cesare* by Societas Raffaello Sanzio. Working from the small town in Italy that they live in, they never use actors, they use people in the village and yet this is considered to be absolutely at the forefront of European theatre trends at the moment. There's a perfect example. Provided you have the creative genius of someone like Romeo Castellucci to push it along, and to encompass locality and make it clever, it can go all over the world. That's really splendid stuff.

Indigenous work is one of the best possible examples we have in Australia of local work acquiring a global market—quite clearly in the visual artists when you get people in terribly remote places and hungry art dealers buying up like crazy. But in something like *Essential Truths Readily to Hand* curated by Malcolm McKinnon and Reg Lynch which is part of the festival's regional program, the principle is very much that the events be owned by the community. Even though there's the Riverland Greek Festival and a big Greek community in Eyre Peninsula, I'm quite sure they didn't know about the Habibis, the Greek ensemble from Melbourne—unless they saw Ana Kokinos' film *Head On*. So we can put in these fantastic artists to serve their interests. But the Malcolm McKinnon project is saying that what the bush produces is also important. To

bring that exhibition right slap bang into the Festival Centre foyer in Adelaide is also a festival statement.

### How new the new?

KG *One of the things you were emphatic about when you first announced the festival was how the new is not an issue and a lot of the new is a reworking the old. How rhetorical were you being? A lot of the festival is made up of new works: was that a de-fusing device to allay audience fears or is it part of a philosophical position?*

RA It's really that I'm very happy to do new work because it has a political point. I believe in Australia we still suffer very broadly from a cultural cringe. Personally I think it's one of the issues in the discussion of the republic. I don't think we'll cut the cringe until we become a Republic. And nobody actually has the vision to understand that. They don't understand that the underlying business of suddenly saying "we belong to ourselves" will automatically make us re-value our culture. Everything about desperately questing for Australian identity—all that "we are wonderful Australians"... if you knew it and you were, you would never have to say it. As it is we have to keep telling everybody how wonderful we are because we're not quite sure that we are. So I am very happy to have a lot of new work and that was very much planned. I didn't know how much we'd get in but I was very happy to have it mainly because I think it will give audiences an opportunity to make up their minds for themselves.

Let's take a popular example. If you're in Britain and a new Andrew Lloyd Webber comes up it might be good or it might be bad. And across the scale, people get to think about whether they like it or not—critics, cognoscenti, the public. Here we only get the imported 'hits.' We don't get the 'dross.' And so suddenly a success in New York is considered to be the most wonderful thing on earth. Then everybody thinks that anything that comes from the West End or New York is fabulous. But New Yorkers will go and see opening night after opening night and nine out of ten will be dogs. It's the one great one that wins. So there's this false idea about things from overseas and the idea that people are not used to being able to look at things that are not as good as you expected but looking with a generous eye and saying well, it didn't quite work but this was good about it...In Europe you go to these wonderful festivals where the only thing they do is produce new work and you find people standing around saying, well I didn't like that but this bit was wonderful and I wonder what they'll do next and...

KG *A generosity and curiosity.*

RA I think our isolation and the cost of bringing things here has meant that our critical faculties are a little bit damaged. So there's the possibility that some of the new stuff will work and some won't. I hope that *Writing to Vermeer* will be sold on the basis of interest in previous work and an inherent interest in Peter Greenaway. It's a good example because whether you like his films or not—and some don't—he's a terribly interesting character. A lot of what we've got will be sold on curiosity and the rest will be sold or not on the word of mouth when we get there.

KG *The dance program is really strong—Les Ballets C de la B, 3 works by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker, Mathilde Monnier... A few people I know are wondering whether to throw in their jobs to get there.*

RA I'm detecting in the first few days of the program being announced, something like the old feeling before there was the competition from other festivals when coming to Adelaide was a biennial pilgrimage from other states. A lot of people who are saying, I haven't been to an Adelaide Festival in 6 years or I've never got to an Adelaide Festival. People are getting into the gangs of 10 so they can get a group discount and so on. I keep recounting that wonderful year that *The Mahabharata* happened when some people from Sydney all got on a bus and travelled over a day and a half, went to the production that night, got on the bus and came home again, so they never had to pay for accommodation. So, anticipation all the way across the desert and analysis on the way home.

However, about the new works, and this only came about by asking artists what they wanted to do, literally 95% of these are taking their cue from some ancient work. And that's where the discussion of the new gets interesting. I had to say to myself what's new about anything? What could we ever really say is new in the arts?

KG *Aren't you in danger of getting into spiralling relativism?*

RA Well exactly. But in all this new work, there's almost nothing in the festival that you would say is coming from simply somebody sitting down and having an idea about a show.

KG *But something like Ballet C de la B you would say the performative content is quite new.*

RA Utterly. But the music? Bach. It's what I've been saying about de Keersmaeker dancing to Steve Reich's *Drumming*. People had given minimalism up for dead but now when you re-listen you're hearing something completely different because there have been so many popular borrowings from it.

KG *Reich has recently been re-mixed by New York DJs.*

RA To see *Drumming* or her other work *Fase* (Reich's *Piano phase*, *Come Out*, *Violin Phase*, *Clapping Music*. Eds) which de Keersmaeker herself performs with Michèle Anne De Mey, it's the movement that helps you interpret the music. It's the best possible result.

### Music oils the machine

KG *In this festival there is a strong emphasis on music theatre even in pieces like the large scale street work Mizumachi from Japan.*

RA The performance has music utterly integrated. There's almost no moment that is not musical. There's a tiny bit of dialogue but mostly it's these huge mobs of kids coming on stage singing this syllabic gibberish which takes its origins from an argot of Osakan street language. *Mizumachi* is very spectacular, sort of indescribable. You mostly go there for the spectacle—sets the size of which you've never seen in your life. And it's very committed, almost like getting disco kids to do a big collaborative opera together. Great music and interesting stories. *Mizumachi* is a quite accurate historical documentation of what Osaka was like in the early days, so it's got that 'back to the future' sense. It's futuristic but documenting a past age through music.

At the one end of our program you've got Jonathan Mill's *The Ghost Wife* in the chamber opera tradition, but then you've got Crying in Public Places in *Skin* having a go at stringing a narrative with John Romeril through songs. And a singer-



Jan Oarberek, Adelaide Festival

songwriter like Andrea Rieniets revving up to her first piece. And in *Max Black*, we have composer Heiner Goebbels mixing the soundtrack live on stage.

KG *He ran a great open discussion-demonstration last festival.*

RA There are 41 masterclasses, including the conferences. A lot of them allow a \$5 ticket for observation.

KG *What is it about music theatre? A lot of artists are moving into it.*

RA I don't think there's any doubt that the timing is at a moment when grand opera is under question yet again. I get the feeling that vast numbers of artists, composers in particular, and librettists as well, who may have at some time subconsciously thought I will end up in grand opera, have all said bugger it, we just better get on with what we do 'cause we're never gonna get a gig there. They've just branched off and said well, we're gonna take all those things—in the end that wonderful Latin word opera—and do "the works". It's clearly what stimulates a Barrie Kosky or a Peter Sellars about directing in that mode. You get every resource under the sun and because of the status of the genre you usually get more production money than you get anywhere else. But for those artists who don't make it into that very small niche, I think there's still a lot who get immense pleasure out of taking on so many different forms. That's now being added to with filmic, screen work, digital stuff as well—increasingly choreography is employed. It's just spreading its net...I suspect that artists are discovering that music oils the machine. It adds this totally other dimension which is otherwise hard to the ear or hard to the imagination.

KG *It has a synthesizing power.*

RA It's like a beautiful veil that you throw over the rest of the production. And I imagine that more and more Australian artists have been exposed to this. It's interesting that in the program we get to do the *Der Lindberghflug* of Kurt Weill and that great master is acknowledged, but in Australia the movement into music theatre may well hark right back to the work that Wal Cherry (the first professor of drama at Flinders University, Adelaide) was doing through his politics and his dramaturgy to introduce onto the stage the work of Brecht and Weill. In the 70s Music South Australia started in a front room. And Lyndon Terracini was singing a lot, Gerald English was singing. Maybe now 35 years later, that initial interest in small scale chamber opera is really starting to pay off in a breed of people who feel quite naturally at home in the medium.

## THE 2000 NATIONAL PLAYWRIGHTS' CONFERENCE



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Lisa Moore, Adelaide Festival

KG What about your own role in this history?

RA Clearly it's a form that is not always satisfactory and we long for a better term than music theatre, but there you have it. I guess it's always been immensely satisfying to me and I was very lucky the Brecht-Weill combination was the first real art I confronted. I guess that what I found immediately was the very powerful communication of ideas, not in any way soft-soaped. Tough ideas, well written but with immaculate tunes. I was really lucky to step straight into that instead of into an operatic form where music always takes precedence over text. Or into musicals which is where I was destined because I grew up learning them from my Dad. He sings songs from *Oklahoma* and *West Side Story*; they were the first things we had in the house. So I was really destined through the club scene and vaudeville to become a musicals singer. I was plunged straight into a form where the words would always be as

important as the music. And that just might be the defining difference between opera, operetta, musicals and music theatre. That word "theatre" is very important and it means the composer must be at pains to make sure that he or she is serving the text.

KG What about the politics?

RA Brecht and Weill were able to take advantage of a cabaret tradition that had begun in Paris in the 1880s, had flourished in Vienna and had gone on to its zenith in the 20s and 30s in Berlin. They were absorbing some sort of popular scene that allowed for political songs and activism and I accidentally ran into their work after my early adolescent period of being a folk singer in which the top of the pops were songs about the black rights movement in America—that's what you sang in your gigs. It seemed a fairly fatal combination. I guess I've always enjoyed a medium for the communication of political ideas. It's certainly obvious that when artists decide to work in the music theatre form it

does seem to be able to carry every level of their political or social commentary. Whereas in opera and the musical you feel that the object at the end is to achieve something rather different. In opera it's that thrill in the bum you get, particularly the big aria when despite everything you believe, you think oh, there we go! My feeling is that the best of the musicals have always had a slightly political bent. On the other hand, you know that you can't basically do a musical unless you've got the few toe-tapping tunes. So in both of those media you're serving a different kind of master. Whereas in music theatre it does seem you're able to communicate whatever you wish to communicate.

Adelaide Festival, March 3 - 9, 2000;  
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## 2000 Adelaide Festival: Where to start?

It's a big one, so decision-making is going to be tough. Because there are so many new works there's also less reviewer back-up for your choices. It'll be an exploratory adventure. One to be embraced. A way of life for 2 weeks, day and night.

Music theatre alone, in its many manifestations from opera to installation, could keep you ecstatically occupied during the 2000 Adelaide Festival. Peter Greenaway and one of the Netherlands' great contemporary composers, Louis Andriessen have created an opera premiered only recently in Europe and presented here by de Nederlandse Opera, *Writing to Vermeer*. Also high on the list of must-sees is Heiner Goebbels' *Max Black* presented by Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne—the composers' *Black on White* was one of the hits of the 1998 festival. Australian composer Elena Kats Chernin's eagerly awaited *Barbara/O, The Strozzi Project*, about a composer contemporary of Monteverdi, is directed by Robert Wilson's assistant director Ann-Christin Rommen with choreography by Michaela Isabel. Crying in Public Places, Melbourne's highly theatrical a capella group, do *Skin*, their first go at musical narrative, aided by John Romeril. Brisbane's innovative new music-installation producers Elision with composer Liza Lim and writer Beth Yahp do a Chinese ritual street opera, *Yuè Ling Jié*, directed by Michael Kantor. Elision are also presenting John Rodgers' *Inferno*, a site specific work, in Port Adelaide. Composer Jonathan Mills and poet-librettist Dorothy Porter collaborate on the powerful chamber opera *The Ghost Wife* (see page 34). In a Music Theatre Sydney production, composer Andrew Ford and librettist Margaret Moran re-create Freud's last days in *Night and Dreams*, the old man dying of cancer, his jaw wired up. Freud is played by Gerald English who performs to a prepared tape.

Music theatre is realised on a larger scale and in the open air—in the tradition of Indonesia's Wayang Kulit—in *The Theft of Sita*. It's a

contemporary shadow play created by director Nigel Jamieson, composer Paul Grabowsky and Balinese master puppeteer Wayan Wija, with Mambo's Reg Mombassa, Skylark's Peter Wilson, visual artist Heri Dono and British theatre designer Julian Crouch. On a bigger scale and again outdoors, from Japan, the Osaka-based Ishina company's *Mizumachi*—a huge cast of young people build and inhabit buildings for 4 weeks in Adelaide, working with local art students, and then perform a work about old Osaka in an invented language in the director Yukichi Matsumoto's self-styled Jan Jan Opera.

There's also music through-written by the composer-playwright Christine Evans in Vitalstatistix' acclaimed production of the play *My Vicious Angel*. Belgium's theaterMalpertuis collaborates with Australians Boris Kelly (director), writer (Richard Murphet) and composer (Stevie Wishart) on *Slow Love*, a remarkable work in 187 brief scenes. Doppio Para/elo will present the club culture-inspired *The Last Child...Flight of the Swallows* from a text by Linda Marie Walker, with sound design by Claudio Pompili.

If it's theatre you're after, you shouldn't neglect the music theatre program listed above. On the must-see list will be a couple of Shakespeare cut ups: Singapore's TheatreWorks doing *Desdemona* (their *Lear* was the hit of the 1998 Perth Festival) and the international festival circuit's number one ticket Societas Raffaello Sanzio doing *Giulio Cesare* with an amateur cast from an Italian village. Adelaide's Brink will combine with Britain's Wrestling Room for the 6-hour Howard Barker *The Ecstatic Bible*, described as "a testament for the millennium." Super-realist playwright Raimondo Cortese and Ranters Theatre Company present 8 thirty-minute plays set in Melbourne. Theatergroep Hollandia perform a Pier Paolo Pasolini text. Benedict Andrews directs *ur/Faust*, a re-working of Goethe's first go at *Faust* (see interview page 25). Kyoto-based writer-director Roger Pulvers directs Strindberg's *Dance of Death*

with John Bell, Anna Volska and William Zappa, for the State Theatre Company of South Australia and the Bell Shakespeare Company. Arena Theatre Company from Melbourne look at wards of the state in a high tech surveillance culture, and playwright Scott Rankin and Big hART are in residence, providing live-in space for street kids during a season of works created around the problematic lives of young people. There's a big bonus in the addition of the National Playwrights' Conference and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Playwrights' Conference. This promises that there'll be even more artists in Adelaide for the festival than ever. Add to that dance workshops and over 40 masterclasses.

If it's just music you're after, there's enough for every night of the festival. Notable presences include saxophonist Jan Gabarek (with virtuoso bassist Eberhard Weber), the Goldner Quartet taking you on a journey through the major string quartets of the 20th century from Ravel and Schoenberg to Adams and Pärt in 10 one hour concerts. Lisa Moore, an Australian team member of NY's Bang on a Can, does a solo concert of rare contemporary piano music (including Rzewski). Le Nouvel Ensemble Modern Montreal perform a contemporary program that includes Australian Mary Finsterer's *Pascal's Sphere*. Le NEM will also publicly rehearse 4 new works by young international composers climaxing in concert premieres. The Kurt Weill-Bertolt Brecht cantata *Der Lindberghflug* and Aaron Copland's oratorio *The Second Hurricane* are rare offerings, a great opportunity to catch up and an added bonus to the music theatre program. One of the most exciting concerts is bound to be the Tasmanian Symphony's Orchestra's *Soviet and Beyond* program with works by a remarkable collection of composers: Elena Firsova, Alfred Schnittke, Sofia Gubaidulina and Giya Kancheli. A rare and passionate treat. Three late nights of improvisation featuring leaders in the field (Oren Ambarchi, Jim Denley, Stevie Wishart, curator David Moss and many others) is a real festival first.

Dance is given an extra boost by the presence of Glasgow's International Choreographic Lab with *New Moves*, an intensive workshop starting out in Adelaide and moving onto Glasgow. The selected Australian participants are Elizabeth Cameron Dalman, Natasha Rolfe, Arun Munoz, Tuula Roppola, Brian Lucas, Rosalind Crisp and John Utans. Look out for the open sessions. See *RealTime*#33 for accounts of the works of festival giants, the Belgian Les Ballets C de la B and Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker & Rosas, and the French Compagnie Mathilde Monnier. Their generous programs are likely to fill early. *lets op Bach* is not to be missed. *Cool Heat Urban Beat* from the US celebrates black street dancing. la ribot, a solo performance artist whose "body is a canvas for art", creates small provocative works. Lucy Guerin, an Australian who has worked successfully in the US, presents *Heavy and Robbery Waitress on Bail*. ADT's new artistic director Garry Stewart kickstarts his Adelaide career with *Birdbrain*.

Indigenous artists will contribute to the festival in many ways, through visual arts (in the Brenda L Croft-curated Biennial of Contemporary Australian Art), music (Jimmy Little and a number of bands), theatre (the Noel Tovey-directed *Spirit, Time and Place*, plays by Merrill Bray and Ray Kelly) and in *Ochre and Dust*, a performance-installation created in collaboration by director Aku Kadoga, artist Fiona Foley, photographer Heidrun Löhr and 2 Anangu-Pitjantjatjara story-tellers.

And there's Artists Week, and Writers week, and a hypertext event, *verve—the other writing* (Contemporary Art Centre of SA), and the welcome return to Australia of digital media artist Bill Seaman, also with a work about writing, *Red Dice*. This festival is going to be hard work but with great rewards. *RealTime* will be there responding on the run in print, online and with video interviews with artists, writers and audiences.

RT

ishinhā presents

# mizumachi

[the water city] - once upon a time in osaka

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# Art and the city

Julia Postle and Naomi Black swing into FoCA, Canberra's Festival of Contemporary Arts

## Gender dancing

FoCA has certainly grown since it last materialised in 1997. A biennial affair, this time under the direction of the intrepid Roland Manderson, FoCA has benefited from his involvement. The 1999 festival has been infused with Roland's enthusiasm for Canberra's creative scene which he gave pride of place in a program with public art to the fore. I went along to quite a few FoCA events, but choose here to focus on 3 of them.

Gender is a subject that has become a tad clichéd as a focus of performance. Two of the dance works I witnessed at FoCA managed to communicate the inherent complexity of gender roles and labels in pretty novel ways and through very different choreographic processes, revealing personal truths rather than seeking to tackle a philosophy of gender. In *bittersweet*, Tuula Roppola explores her own and, to some extent, all women's experience of personal knowledges and the often curious realm of women's relationships with each other. She does so through movement that evokes both childhood naivete and adult emotion and sensitivity. *bittersweet* exposes the manipulative and the tender, the cruel and the kind—all facets of human nature, but wrought here through the female. There is something funny about the 4 women wearing short pleated skirts and vests that almost look like a school uniform. It characterises the whole work really, as these 4 adults play childish games with and against each other, and pull petulant faces when things aren't going their way. But there is a tenderness portrayed as well, conveyed through a touch, a gentle gesture, and the use of controlled weight-sharing. There are moments that linger with me even now, like Zoe Barry playing her own composition on the cello while lying flat on her back, the sound seeming to unfold and stretch to every corner, almost elastic in quality. Or the performers sitting together, gently jostling each other for space on the seat, the movement developing into a major effort to keep one woman off.

For an exploration of the male, I turned to *Roughcuts*, the result of a week-long workshop with young men and boys from the ACT in movement-making and gender. Ruth Osborne from the Choreographic Centre and Philip Piggin from Ausdance ACT coordinated the experience for some 50 young guys, bursting with energy and enthusiasm for what I presume was for many their introduction to dance.

There was the standard cheeky sense of humour that you see at most dance eisteddfods, but there was also honesty. From simple movement-based manipulations of sporting gestures and actions to more complex contact improvisation sequences, *Roughcuts* managed to involve young men aged 7 to 26 and give them the opportunity to investigate and challenge social values and gender stereotypes.

Another particularly engaging FoCA performance work was *Drums Around the World*, the Canberra School of Music Percussion Ensemble performing alongside New York musician, Arthur Lipner. Under Gary France's energetic direction, the Ensemble performed some particularly interesting works. Of note was *Ogoun Badagris*, composed by Christopher Rouse and inspired by Haitian drumming patterns and using traditional customs to give the work its structure; for instance, playing the cabassa is intended to evoke the ceremonial opening of the Juba dance, ever increasing the pace to suggest the point of demonic possession. Moving to the music of Trinidad were *Some Uptown Hip Hop*, *Lime Juice* and *City SOCA*, all by Arthur Lipner, a performer of the New York ilk, complete with the witty—if not a little frenzied—narrative at either end of his highly

disciplined performances. Lipner plays the marimba and vibraphone with such energy, throwing out sounds and not letting you sit on a single moment, but somehow evoking the tropical paradise of Trinidad. Pass the daiquiri please! I was captivated by Lipner's music and his performance—a wonderful blend of improvisation and carefully crafted percussive sequences.

JP

## Talking of big

The Festival of Contemporary Arts seeped into the bricks and mortar of Canberra city in a take-art-to-the-streets project exploring "everyday life and peculiarities". Works by 60 artists made up the *Secret Life of Canberra*, designed to be toured using a guide map, a highlight being *Green Seat*, a giant *fauteuil* made of grass with an 18 foot matching reading lamp sculpted by Tony Steel, in front of the Canberra Theatre Centre.

Talking of big: the festival saw the launch of a new 20 foot projection screen in Garema Place where the first film shown was Susan Davis' lighthearted *Meet Me in Garema* at the opening of FoCA. Garema Place is central to city life in Canberra and was the site of many FoCA events such as *Mini Epic*, a large scale spectacle by Odd Productions.

The very ground of Garema was alive with art as *Gutter Gush*, a sound installation by Frances Dyson, told stories—from underground in drains—of Canberra as the first postmodern city in Australia. Atop Mount Ainslie—a central point in Walter Burley Griffin's vision of Canberra—*Adding qi to Canberra* was enacted by Chinese artist Zhang Ji whose body became the canvas for 7 Canberra artists "to describe the relationship between the people and the land." From all reports this performance, also a part of *Secret Life*, was a moving experience, the sense of mysticism being enhanced by Canberra's noontide mountain mist.

I began the biennial FoCA with 3 consecutive nights of film during *In The Can*, presented by Reel Art, in the intimate wood-panelled theatre of ScreenSound Australia. My personal favourites on the first night, the Women on Women Film Festival, included *Above The Dust Level* with its rich colours and funny script, directed by Carla Drago, and the Japanese language *Flowergirl* set in Bondi, directed by Cate Shortland.

The second night I was propelled into Bill Plympton's extraordinary and wonderful animation *I Married a Strange Person*. That people walked out of this film showed its capacity to offend yet I found this the key to its hilarity. An overflowing house eagerly took in Tropfest 99 Finalists on the third night with an obvious favourite being a local production, *Never Too Latte*, directed by Serge Ou with music by Antonio Gambale.

Flamboyant costume designer Matthew Aberline is a well known figure around the Canberra arts scene. He teamed up with writer-director Catherine Jean-Kristais to create what is said to be Aberline's final production, *Synchronised Drowning*. As part of the Currong Contemporary Arts Theatre's New Erektions season and FoCA, *Synchronised Drowning*, although criticised as being off-the-mark, was a series of beautiful images evoking a simple but meaningful narrative with water as a central theme.

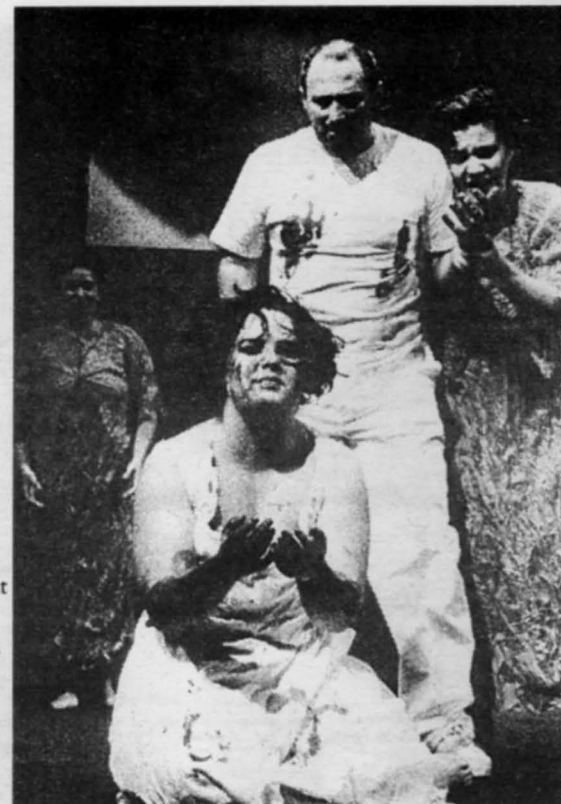
*Miss Julie*, directed by Eulea Kiraly, with Christos Tsiolkas' *Elektra a.d.*, formed a double bill season at the Street. Seeing the 2 shows in one night was exhausting. *Elektra a.d.* was

Tsiolkas' contemporary adaptation of the Greek tale, a dark exploration of the experience of migration and issues of identity set in the transition from war in the old country to peace in the new. The dominating figure of Elektra was played by Louise Morris who conveyed a brooding, dispossessed woman in turmoil seeking retribution for the death of her father, at the same time lashing out at Australian complacency.

The intensity continued. The next night I saw *Agamemnon* presented by Melbourne's Johakyu Orchestra, in which ghost characters emerged from under dirt to tell their tales with grotesque and fiercely concentrated movement. The delivery sticks in my mind; the players produced great glistening trails of saliva and spat as they spoke. The effect was severe and conveyed the venomous emotions felt by the mythical characters.

Not surprisingly, audiences turned out in droves in support of the Canberra Youth Theatre production, *Youth's Eye View*. This was held at one of Canberra's attractions—ScreenSound Australia—with the audience taken on a theatrical tour into the bowels of the building for a 90 minute walk through the millennium in gesture, song, dance, photography and poetry delivered from staircases, balconies, gardens, everywhere.

Not all audiences were large but news travels fast in Canberra's close knit arts community. *Pink and Blue*, a 2-night show imported from Lismore (from Cardboard Cut-out Productions),



Elektra a.d.

pling

was politely dissed after its first night and I was one of only 4 people at the second night: 3 of whom were scribbling in notepads, obviously reviewing. But I liked this honest and drily humorous multimedia production. Canberra audiences should have given it a go.

This years FoCA was bigger and better than its 1997 predecessor. Bigger in terms of the range and involvement of artists in its 65 events and better in quality and choices offered audiences. FoCA gives Canberra a chance to gorge itself in a fortnight long celebration of the city's creativity.

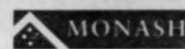
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Festival of Contemporary Arts, artistic director  
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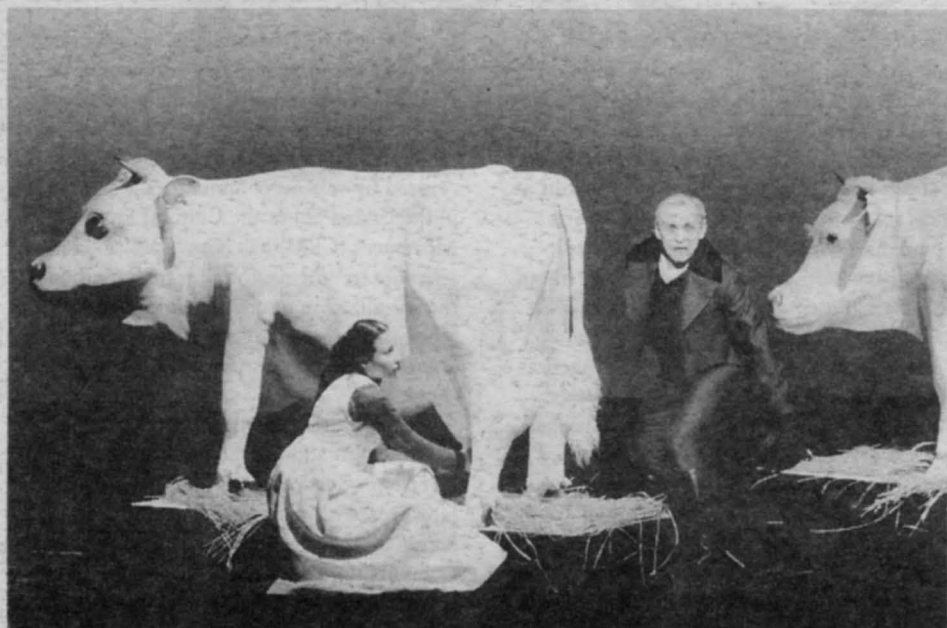
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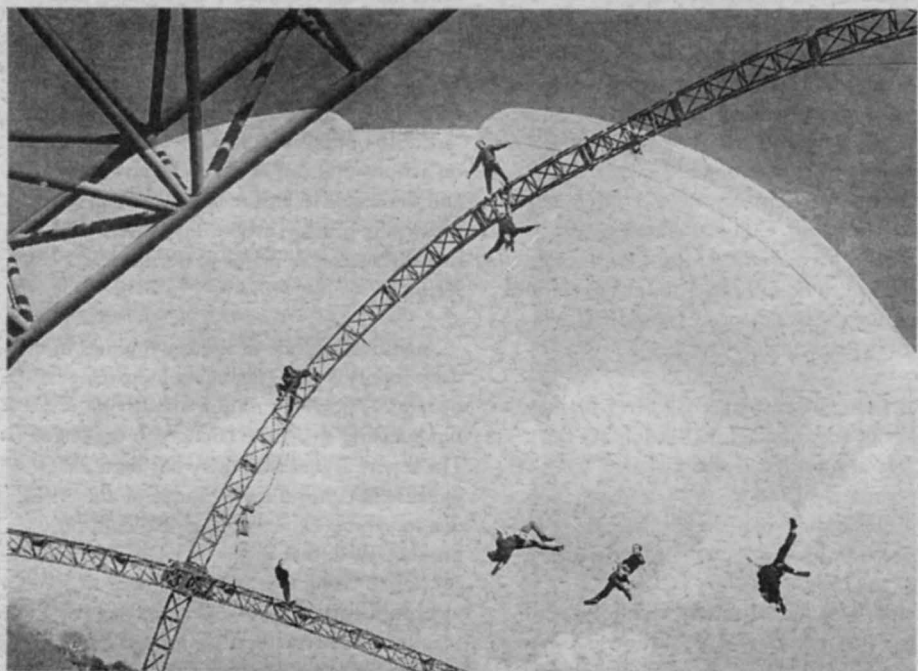


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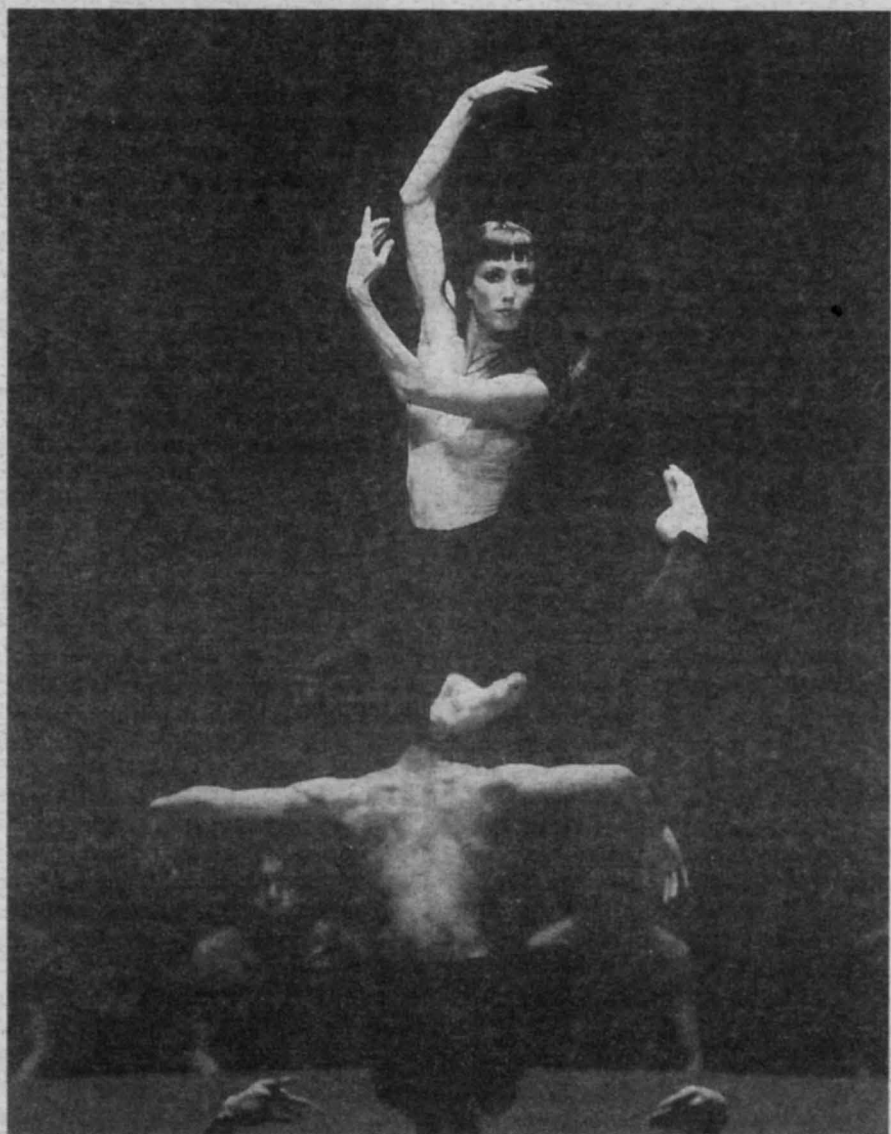
Images from the Perth and Olympic Arts Festivals 2000



Robert Wilson, Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, Perth International Arts Festival, Feb 5 - 8, 2000 Lesley Leslie Spinks



Les Arts Sautes, *Kayassine*, Perth International Arts Festival, Feb 5 - 19, 2000



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## HITCHCOCK

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# Circling the global

Anita Gardiner on globalisation and the performing arts

Paul Monaghan and Paul Jackson introduce the first of 3 essays they have commissioned for publication in RealTime for ipf (Independent Performance Forums)

In a 1991 essay ("The Public Intellectual", Meanjin 4/1991) that preceded Mr Bligh's Bad Language (Cambridge University Press, 1992), Greg Denning notes that "Ultimately living is a conversation. That is why we make theatre of it so easily." Making conversation of theatre would at first glance appear to be as intuitive. However, if we attempt such a conversation across discursive boundaries, we find ourselves all too readily in a terra incognita. Independent Performance Forums were an attempt to explore just such a terrain. The premises were as follows: to create a space in which the work of performance practitioners was taken seriously; to facilitate a discussion that was neither primarily 'theoretical' nor as pragmatic as the standard media review/interview (ie to avoid privileging any existing discourse); and to investigate the idea of a performing arts community and its various means of articulating itself. Each forum was, necessarily, a communal improvisation. Initiated by NYID performance group and Theatreworks, the discussions were held over an 18 month period (August 1997 - November 1998) and assisted by the Myer Foundation.

Each discussion had a topic as point of departure, and 4 speakers would open with short, often provocative, statements. Conversation was then opened to the floor. The discussions were recorded and archived. "Reconciliation and the Performing Arts" has already been reported in RealTime (RT#27 page 16), and other topics have been represented in various media. The other topics were: "The well made play is dead", "Political theatre is bad theatre", "The impact of the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment)", and "That's not what I meant: performance and collaboration."

The following essay is neither a conversation nor a transcript, rather it is a commissioned piece. It is both a form of closure and a new trajectory. The written word is fixed, however provisional, and the essays, of which there are 2 more to follow, mark the end of this ipf project. But the impetus is to extend dialogue, reflection and the serious consideration of the states and meanings of performing arts practice into a wider arena.

If one of the ongoing desires of ipf was the investigation of communities and their discourses, then the commissioning of the following essay, as an opening to the series, represents an attenuation of those soundings. The recent Victorian election results, the Timor crisis and the referendum on constitutional structures point to a process of evaluating communal affiliations with reference to local, regional and historical dimensions. The catch all term 'globalization' effaces myriad renegotiations, conflicts and debates that are constantly occurring at the level of the symbolic as well as the 'economic' and/or the socio-political.

Independent Performance Forums were facilitated by Paul Jackson and Paul Monaghan. Access to recordings is available on request and the tapes will be offered to Melbourne's Performing Arts Museum. The tapes, however, are artefacts already.

\* \* \*

On January 7 1999, Cirque du Soleil premiered *Saltimbanco* under the Grand Chapiteau in Moore Park, Sydney. The first 3 weeks of this season were sold out before

opening night. On January 29 1999, it was reported in the press that "Canadian circus juggernaut Cirque du Soleil—rumoured to have taken more than \$6 million since pitching its tent in Sydney earlier this month ahead of a nine-month national tour—has been seen as another major factor affecting the (Sydney) Festival's fortunes this year" (*The Australian Financial Review*). The festival finished with a \$740,000 deficit in 1999 which they confidently intend to trade out of the deficit with a smaller 2000 Sydney Festival. Here we see local cultural events and companies in competition with global cultural corporations. (The Sydney Festival hosted but did not invest in *Saltimbanco*. Eds.)

With an acute consciousness of the changing global competition for audiences, Circus Oz and the Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies at Monash University made a joint application to Arts Victoria for funding in 1998 for a seminar on globalisation and the live performing arts. This original idea is now to culminate in a day and half conference on globalisation and the live performing arts in Melbourne in February next year. (See advertisement page 8.) The aim of the conference is to achieve greater understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon, commonly labelled as globalisation, within the performing arts industry. As a precursor to the conference, this paper comes out of the ongoing research and discussions taking place in the development of the program.

Cultural exchanges between countries and communities, such as Cirque du Soleil's tour of Australia, are not new. Indeed many types of cultural exchange are beneficial to artists and the development of particular artforms, and need to be encouraged and supported. However, what are the broader implications for the local live performing arts when competing with international acts either overseas or in Australia? Particularly given that out of the rapidly changing context and uncertain future of these exchanges, there is emerging a new (dis)order—economic and political—centred on the idea of globalisation.

Global warming (environment), the global village (media) and the global economy (multinational capital) have all become common phrases. There are many facets to globalisation including international trade, investment and the expansion of capitalism; inter-culturalism, migration and postmodernity; mass telecommunications and technological developments; liberal democratisation and the role of government policy and the nation state; and social and intellectual property rights. There are also differing views about the benefits or otherwise that each brings. Given the many different potential meanings and applications of the word globalisation, it is important to be clear and particular about its use.

The cultural critic Fredric Jameson argues in *Cultures of Globalization*, that "globalization is a communicational concept, which alternately masks and transmits cultural or economic meanings." Within the context of speaking about the live performing arts, this definition is a useful starting point, as it acknowledges the dialectical relationship between culture and economics. Cultural practices inform economic arrangements, just as economic practices inform cultural expressions. For example, as Mike Featherstone points out in *Undoing Culture*, when we buy and eat a McDonald's burger it is "not only consumed

physically as material substance, but is consumed culturally as an image and an icon of a particular way of life." Similarly, if we buy a ticket to see Black Swan and Company B Belvoir's co-produced *Cloudstreet*, we are not only experiencing a local work about a local history, we are also supporting arts companies who are part of an industry presenting cultural products that contribute to national identity formation.

Globalisation is widely acknowledged as fundamental to the economic conditions Australia experiences today. John Wiseman, author of *Global Nation?* and conference guest, argues that while globalisation should not be seen as inevitable, "Australian economic relationships have indeed been profoundly altered by a dramatic increase in the speed and scope of flows of capital, goods, services and information made possible by the availability of new transport and communications technologies." Significantly, these rapidly increasing transactions are taking place in a context where international trade agreements are constantly being negotiated by nation states, with the a World Trade Organization (WTO)'s forum for economic negotiations, dubbed the "Millennium Round", in Seattle on November 30. Cultural matters are included in these negotiations. Performing artists need to be informed about the cultural rights at stake in this process, and this will be a topic for conference debate.

According to historian Geoffrey Blainey, periods of economic globalisation are not new. He argues that it was last seen from approximately 1840 to 1910, and it has always been the wide-spread use and introduction of new technologies that have driven the change. As one aspect of contemporary globalisation, technology in the arts is another example of how culture and economics are intertwined. In *RealTime*, the global connections and consciousness of many artists is frequently reported and celebrated (see Robyn Archer interview pages 4 - 7).

Culturally, globalisation of the live performing arts is also linked to broader debates about postmodernism. Socio-cultural conditions have changed; as Philip Auslander notes in *From Acting to Performance*, "if there is a crisis in the theory and practice of political art under postmodernism—and there clearly is—it is a historical crisis brought about by uncertainty as to just how to describe our cultural condition under multinational capitalism." Indeed, Auslander responds to Jameson by highlighting the interdependence of cultural practices and economic conditions for the production of performance and its critical value within the current context. He writes "conflation of the cultural and the economic renders 'critical distance' impossible—the cultural can no longer presume to stand back from the economic/political and comment on it from without."

Globalisation and postmodernity have also highlighted differences and the plurality within, and of, cultures. Many cultural groups have increased contact and dialogue with each other through the migrations of people and mass telecommunications. This interaction across cultural spheres raises issues for nation states conceived of as discrete entities. As Nikos Papastergiadis writes in *Art & Design* No 43, "From Brussels to Buenos Aires, Melbourne to Montreal, bureaucrats and politicians are attempting to incorporate the amoeba-like concepts of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism within the framework of

# ipf

Independent Performance Forums

the nation state." Meanwhile, transnational corporations market global products to a world with converging consumer preferences. Both the nation state and the transnationalist's attempts to homogenise cultures are being resisted by various communities. For example, in the United States the Cultural Environment Movement (CEM) has been established in response to "the profound transformation in the socialization of children and the telling of all stories as mostly mass-produced by a few global conglomerates that have much to sell."

In Australia, government policy has attempted to address the need for local and diverse production of cultural expressions. However, with the current review of the national broadcasting laws by the Productivity Commission, the question in Australia has become clearly focused on whether the cultural markets should receive any more protection from global competition than any other market. For the live performing arts, this debate forms the background to the Nugent Inquiry's draft report *Securing the Future* (AGPS, 1999). Established by the federal government, the inquiry was to "identify options and make recommendations on actions that can be taken by governments and the sector to ensure that Australia has a financially healthy, artistically vibrant and broadly accessible major performing arts sector."

Significantly, one of the key findings in the draft report is that "changing industry dynamics and globalisation are driving fundamental structural changes in the sector." The report argues that there has been an increase in cultural expectations of audiences, due to greater exposure to global cultural product. And, that this is happening in the context of rising costs from the need to incorporate new technologies, and to accommodate structural changes in the industry, and from greater competition through more diverse local companies and increases in international touring. Clearly the live performing arts are subject to, and part of, the phenomena of globalisation. While the report understandably focuses on the question of economic success, accessibility and diversity, the issue of globalisation and the live performing arts also raises fundamental questions about the future of cultural practices in Australia. For instance international festivals in Australia are clearly already part of this global market. Professor Ric Knowles, from the University of Guelph in Canada, is currently conducting research on international festivals and their impacts on local performing arts, and will be presenting some of these findings at the conference.

Performing artists need to be clear about what the economic and cultural benefits of globalisation are. For this to happen, the question of what globalisation is, and how it directly affects the performing arts needs further investigation and discussion. The conference, February 13 - 15 at Monash University will be one such place where many of these issues can be discussed broadly by the industry. Perhaps it is through such forums that we can begin to address Wiseman's question, "how do we find new ways of acting on myriad stages with an ever expanding cast of actors while remaining connected to our own place and our own time?"

AG

ipf acknowledges the support and assistance of La Mama Theatre, Trades Hall (Melbourne) and Melbourne Workers' Theatre.



# OnScreen

## film, media and techno-arts

Report

### Digital p/reservations

Kirsten Krauth reports from the Australian International Documentary Conference in Adelaide

A child's painting hangs in the window of the local corner store. A riot of purples and reds, the teacher's text caption reads "My mum is special because she always tells me stories." This was the tone, too, of the recent doco conference in Adelaide (last held 2 years ago in Brisbane). For US guest directors Albert Maysles and Jennifer Fox, and locals like Trevor Graham, story and narrative still remain central. Many in the audience started getting twitchy as soon as digital media was mentioned. The conference, in its various competing forums, focused on 3 major themes: globalism, ethics, and the impact of digital technologies. Keynote speakers, in particular Peter Sellars (future director, Adelaide Festival) and Dr Margaret Somerville (Professor of Law and Medicine, active in worldwide development of bioethics), were provocative, formidable and downright inspirational. It was an exciting idea to choose a number of keynote speakers outside the documentary framework. However, it was the discussion of possibilities for documentary on both the internet and CD/DVD-ROM (both stand alone and extensions of film work) which opened up interesting ideas and opportunities for exchange between creators and audience. With wheelers-and-dealers firmly planted, mobile to ear, in the chandeliered foyer of the Adelaide Hilton, the screenings at Her Majesty's offered a respite (often nearly empty) from the shoulder pads, and a chance to meet the filmmakers.

Any session with SEX in the title was guaranteed a full house. The opening night screening, *Sex: The Annabel Chong Story* (Gough Lewis, USA/Canada), despite early titillating potential, turned out to be a complex and confronting film. By night, Annabel, popular porn star, most famous for her world record of sleeping with 251 men in 10 hours. By day, Grace, student of gender politics and anthropology at a Californian University. Like *Female Perversions* and *Under the Skin*, this doco explores female sexuality, performance, power and the body. Grace, from a middle class, Singaporean "good girl" background, struggles with a mind/body divide, her head chockablock with feminism and its openings. She asks some good questions: why can't she be a "stud" and sleep with as many men as she can?; she's doing it anyway, why not get paid for it? At university she wears a T-shirt with "slut" emblazoned on her chest and she goes full throttle to reclaim this label, seeking power in the ownership of usually derogatory language, turning it on its head. The doco's impact comes from revealing Grace's fascinating contradictions: by



AN  
american  
LOVE  
STORY

FROM THEN TO NOW - AN AMERICAN LOVE STORY, Jennifer Fox's 10-hour real-life documentary series about a New York interracial couple and their two daughters, debuts Sunday, September 12, and airs consecutive nights through Thursday, September 16 from 9 to 11 p.m. ET on PBS (check local listings). (Top) NIGHT FOUR: KAREN WILSON (left) and husband BILL SIMS (right) celebrate daughter CICILY's (center) graduation from Colgate University. (Bottom) NIGHT FIVE: KAREN and BILL, seen here in their high school yearbook photos, return to their native Ohio for Karen's 25<sup>th</sup> high school reunion.

intellectualising her participation in porn and situating 'pleasure' in a feminist framework, she's actually in denial. Her background is one of dependence, fragility and tragedy. The audience moves from disbelieving laughter to mute repulsion as we meet the porn sleazeballs who rip her off; this is no *Boogie Nights* happy family.

Whether *Annabel Chong* gets to Australian screens is another story and an issue discussed at length in the panel "Getting It Up (If Your Doco's About Sex)". Doug Stewart, SBS classification manager, revealed some alarming details on free-to-air TV: heavy handed regulation means we can't see good docos rated R which screen in Europe; with the

morally conservative government setting the tone, the move is to place uniform codes on TV, using the commercial standards (different from SBS and ABC) as a guide, where even programs rated MA in the cinemas are rarely shown uncensored. (The commercial codes often re-classify programs normally rated M as MA. Nipple sucking, for example, is not permissible!). Jacqui Lawrence, deputy commissioning editor of independent film and video, Channel 4 (UK), highlighted the importance of being creative within guidelines, and the arbitrariness (and just plain silliness) of many standards (such as the Mull of Kintyre principle: less than 45 degrees erect OK, including dildos, which can be problematic). David Haugland, president,

International Documentary Association, spoke of the schizophrenic state of sexual issues in the US where people talk all the time but reveal nothing. He cited the example of gay relationships and sexuality in sitcoms. You can be gay as long as there's not another person in the frame who you're having a meaningful relationship/sleeping with. Ellen was taken off air after she came out; Ally McBeal can kiss another woman because it's one of her many infuriating fantasies.

A highlight of the screenings was Jennifer Fox's epic series *An American Love Story*. Originally produced for PBS, the series has provoked great interest and debate in the US due to its depiction of an inter-racial family: Karen (white), Bill (African-American) and their 2 daughters Chaney and Cicily. Fox slept on the family's floor for 2 years, shooting 1000 hours of footage. But it is the paring down into 10 hour-long episodes revolving around a theme, the downbeat, laid back style, and accompanying soundtrack by Bill, a blues musician, which pulls the filmmaking above most 'real life' episodes. Everyday family situations—first date, college graduation, Christmas with the rels—become imbued with a wider significance. Throughout, race relations in the US are revealed to be more problematic than ever—the experience of Cicily at Colgate University (white, healthy and sparkling clean it sure is) highlighting the difficulties of identifying with both black and white communities, but fitting snugly into neither. In a heartbreaking revelation, she admits to never being asked out on a date at college, the white boys dating only white girls and the black boys, well, dating only white girls.

The *American Love Story* website ([www.pbs.org/weblab/lovestories/tvseries/](http://www.pbs.org/weblab/lovestories/tvseries/)) has become a form of documentary in itself. Originally a promotional vehicle for the series, it has moved into the role of preserving culture, recording stories about couples whose relationships cross religious, ethnic, age and geographical boundaries. Submitted by viewers during the series, live dialogues debate the issues screened, many sympathising with Cicily's "white-black girl" struggles. The importance of language and who owns it crops up repeatedly: the white sorority girls ask Cicily if it's OK to say "homegirl"; Afro-American women online argue that when they speak English "properly" it is seen as "acting white."

continued page 12



# Digital p/reservations

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Simon Pockley, creator of online documentary *The Flight of Ducks* ([www.cinemedia.net/~FOD/](http://www.cinemedia.net/~FOD/)), gave an interesting insight into the online documentary process in the session titled "Design, Technology and Documentary Form." Created 5 years ago, *The Flight of Ducks* was produced with zero budget and unlimited time, and has had a constantly changing audience of up to 6,000 people a week. Created originally as an endeavour to preserve his father's writings and documents from travels in Central Australia, the site is now a mixture of creative fiction, history, reference work, film, journal, poetry, and audience email response. The site has been subject to censorship and deleted from the server ("culturally sensitive material"), captured for other sites, and harvested around the world.

Defying the most common critique of CD-ROMs (that they date too quickly), the design of *Mabo* ensures a long life with plans to have a website, hosted by the University of South Australia's Indigenous Online Unit, which will house a database that readers can contribute to. This online input will make the *Mabo* project one of the most historically significant, continually evolving, archives in the country. Trevor Graham (also a contributing writer) mentioned that without this project, all the valuable material and resources he collected during the filming would have been thrown away. Documentary filmmakers have opportunities to use the web for more than marketing their films. Virtual storage. Extending the life of their work.

Overall, screenings curator Paul Byrnes (film writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald*)



The *Mabo* CD-ROM Online Project

Documentaries on CD-ROM came under fire from Simon Wilmot in his paper "Trying to Re-purpose Grierson: Mismatching Documentary with the Future of Digital Technology." Wilmot argued that "re-purposing" (using existing images and sound as the basis for CD-ROM content) can be a frustrating experience because CD-ROMs take fundamental actions—cut, copy, paste—away from the user. Sure, turning a computer screen into a film strip where the desktop disappears and the credits start to roll, can be an aimless, alienating experience but the possibilities for CD-ROM and, more importantly, DVD-ROM, as a way to play with the documentary form are great if creators think beyond the limits of narrative.

A good example is the *Mabo* Project. Produced by Film Australia and soon to be released after 3 years in development, the CD-ROM (and later, website) consists of re-purposed footage from Trevor Graham's 2 documentaries on Eddie Mabo and doco archives (including information about the Mabo Case, the term *terra nullius*, Murray Island culture, how to make an application for Native Title, newspaper articles sourced nationally, links to websites, clips from ABC news and current affairs). The user can either search the database or be led through mini-narratives on particular topics, narrated by Christine Anu and Bob Maza. Aven Noah, spokesman for the Murray Island community and consultant on the project, sees the CD-ROM as a valuable resource, educating the wider community about Eddie Mabo (and why he is central to this debate), and welcomed non-Indigenous readers learning more about Murray Island culture.

and former director of the Sydney Film Festival) chose documentaries that were surprisingly traditional in style with a US/European focus. There were few which blurred boundaries or subverted genre (a disappointment after the critical perspective sessions/papers on mock documentaries, real life and personal narrative, documentary drama, and architecture and space). Missing were films from Asia (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia). Most Australian (and more innovative) docos were relegated to the tiny theatre tucked away in the hotel, depriving the filmmakers of a potentially large and international audience.

Time to make some predictions before millennium fever dies. The next AIDC will focus more on documentaries which take risks in style and content. There will be a greater emphasis on Asian films, and more speakers from non-English speaking backgrounds. All panels will be accessible live via the internet.

*Australian International Documentary Conference; screenings Her Majesty's Theatre; forums Hilton Hotel, Adelaide, November 2 - 6*

# WriteStuff

## Hunter Cordaay finds the screenwriter in a lonely place

The rarely asked question in the Australian film industry is not where are the new actors, directors or producers going to be found, not even what sort of films will we be making at the new glossy studios, but where are the scripts coming from and who will be writing them?

How does a writer become a screenwriter? Can screenwriting be taught and inspired by experts at seminars and weekend workshops? Or is screenwriting, like poetry, an organic talent which, nourished by a supportive or conducive cultural climate, naturally rises?

Until the boom in the American creative writing college industry, all forms of writing were viewed as 'natural', and importantly, it was understood they came from the same source. Thus, F Scott Fitzgerald was taken in by Hollywood studios who assumed he would be able to write film scripts because he wrote successful prose. This was not the case, though others, such as Ben Hecht, made the transition from theatre to film more easily.

In today's industry the situation is remarkably different, with writers crossing over from fiction to screen and back again, often adapting their own novels whilst others move seamlessly from writing to directing.

Why is this? One perhaps contentious answer is because the art and craft of screenwriting is a more natural and accessible practice than ever before—the script itself might now be the dominant literary form in our culture. We think more in shots and scenes than in paragraphs and pages, and literary professionalism is led by what we could now call a script culture.

In overseas film industries the writer is a more valued partner in the production process, and the script is treated as very valuable property. Figures reported in American magazines such as *SCR(I)PT* and *Written By* list script sales regularly in mid to high 6 figure sums, with some well over \$500,000.

These same magazines, and associated websites, also list a variety of courses and software programs designed to train the aspiring screenwriter. In this sense the hottest property is not the script but the key to screenwriting, the secret of the process that will, when unlocked, bring wealth and industry power. One program, boasting endorsements from Tom Hanks and Oliver Stone, uses the tag line "if it were any easier the script would write itself."

In practical terms the heart of the screenwriting question is how to get the

money to the writer, and then seeing the money on the screen. And in this process it is not clear if the Australian screenwriter is the originator or a collaborator.

When the AFC recently announced a major increase in funding project development, which seemed to include new money for scripts, the hope was that much of the recent criticism of some feature films—that the scripts were not developed and edited to the highest stage—would be remedied.

In an ideal world this funding would generate creative teams—writers, producers, directors—who would join forces to develop film or TV projects that have a strong chance of success. The team approach, which favours early and mutual commitment, is most likely to get the money onto the screen in the Australian context. Unfortunately it appears that the new funding structures are producer driven, with 'development' rather than 'script development' being the priority. This guarantees that more projects will be started but not that the scripts will be funded through the number of drafts required, or with the level of team involvement that will fully integrate the story into the development process.

In this new landscape, there are no new training courses for screenwriters, no provisions or structures which place the writer at the centre and acknowledge their role as originator (perhaps a better word than author in the current climate).

The Australian screenwriter is in a lonely place. No wonder so many want to be directors, and others deliberately initiate projects and produce their own work. That phenomenon has as much to do with a sense of control as it does with monetary return. Today, ownership and the sharing of development resources are the central issues for all screenwriters.

With over a third of the Australian Writers' Guild membership listed as working in feature film, and the industry now likely to concentrate more around higher budget studio-based projects, the position of writers needs to be enhanced rather than merely protected. The desired result should be that Australian films are promoted the way *Notting Hill* was recently, as "from the same writer as *Four Weddings & a Funeral*."

*This is the first in a series of columns on writing for the screen by Hunter Cordaay.*

*Hunter Cordaay is a film writer and teacher of Screen Studies at University of Western Sydney, Macarthur.*

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International Index to Film/TV, FIAF Periodical Indexing Project,

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APAIS, National Bibliographic publications, National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT, Australia 2600





# One day all headstones will be electronic

Edward Scheer in the dark corridors of *Voiceovers*

Black and white video images of an old woman in an uncertain landscape. She wears the standard peasant dress with the scarf worn as a shroud. Close-ups of her eyes mingle with land and water, tears, younger women. Are these images from memory, herself as a younger woman? Is it a testimony to un-lived lives?

I don't know if the old woman played by Joyce Rankin in Louise Drinkwater's moving electronic remembrance is the real subject of this piece but in a way it's not the point. It is a piece which generates effects of memory and maybe even a bit of nostalgia and, not surprisingly, made me think of my own grandmother, long gone.

*This is a Recording* is a votive machine repairing "the web of time" as Chris Marker says in *Sans Soleil*. It is also a deserving winner of the 5th Guinness Contemporary Art Prize for tertiary art students. The Sydney College of the Arts should be congratulated for producing student work of this quality and maturity.

*Iconographics: Antidotes to compassion fatigue*

The video installations of the 5th Guinness Contemporary Art Project show how powerful good video art can be when it is presented properly. The curatorial focus and integrity of vision here are everywhere in evidence in *Voiceovers* which presents the work of 4 prominent figures in contemporary video art and suggests that this kind of art has the potential to effect the rescue of our tired media and our exhausted senses and re-humanise aesthetics as an experience of the body.

Nalini Malani's *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* uses a triptych of video projections showing images of the atomic bomb blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki—the last orgasmic scenes in the final act of mass slaughter which closed WWII—framed by videos of 2 women holding ends of the same sari. In front is a grid of steel trunks containing bolts of cloth and small video monitors showing amongst other things images of the clear blue sky and the act of giving birth. The voiceover mentions bombs called 'Fat man' and 'Little boy' and the obscene 'humanisation' of nuclear war. Malani also notes that 'Shakti' (living energy or life force) was the name given to the Indian atomic bomb tests in the 1970s. Her point is, as the voiceover says, that in "using language as an anaesthetic, feeling dies."

This installation is designed to counter this loss of feeling, to resist the anaesthesia which alienation induces and to act against the destruction which the dominance of military aesthetics (cf. Virilio) renders banal in our culture. The Benjamin resonance is unmistakable. In Walter Benjamin's classic essay of 1936, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility", he attempts the rescue of both technology and the senses from the fascist aestheticisation of politics and its spectacles of seductive power. He calls for a critical use of technology to counter the crippling "self-alienation" of mankind which he says has "reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an



Nalini Malani, India, born 1946, *Remembering Toba Tek Singh*, 1998 (detail), video installation

aesthetic pleasure of the first order." As the smart missiles with cameras attached rained down on Belgrade, who has not participated in this thrill of the destruction of bodies?

But Malani's polemic is also gendered and after spending any time with her installation the feeling is that the very existence of these weapons is a persuasive argument for feminism, a point underscored in Shirin Neshat's *Turbulent*, a critique of the compulsory silence of women in public space in Muslim societies. A simple opposition is generated with the 2 large screens en face. One contains the image of a man singing to an all male audience and then looking across the space at the image of a woman wrapped in a chador, who sings in turn. But her song is incomprehensible, a vocalisation of the body or a kind of semiotic chora. She performs a presymbolic message, running beneath and counter to the male dominated system of generating cultural meaning. For the detail of this piece I recommend the catalogue text by curator, Victoria Lynn, which places the question of the cultural emplacement of women's voices "at the heart of *Voiceovers*."

The pop star of contemporary video art, Mariko Mori, does her own less visceral performance for video. *Kumano* generates an auratic distance between the audience and the personae she presents. These pieces, like much of her work in video and photography, play with iconographies and project a simulated sense of the sacred, eg in the pastiche of the cybernetic tea ceremony. In a sense she is updating the imagery of the spiritual with the cyber-chick at the centre. And why not? Her task is made easier by her telegenic presence and the skill of the armies of assistants who produce exquisite images. Ken Ikeda's ambient music score for *Kumano* establishes the mood of contemplation

while we watch this cheeky play of cyborg signifiers.

Lin Li's voiceover to the video *Soul Flight* reassures the viewer about the images we see. Her naked body prostrate on a mountain top while vultures tear at piles of blood and meat which cover her is explained as the performance of the sky burial. This is a remarkable piece of intense performance making for video and a powerful re-enactment of a liminal ritual: in between death and rebirth, sky and land, soul and body. The piece is, if anything, too short. We move from the images of the body, flesh and birds to 'Afterwards we had a cup of tea' all in a few minutes. It is a mild but pleasant shock and another example of what critic Susan Buck-Morss says is crucial to Benjamin's enterprise, the restoration of the sensory experience of perception to the field of Aesthetics so that the construction of the modern human as "an asensual, anaesthetic protuberance" may begin to be undone. This is a theme of the work presented in *Voiceovers* which makes it surely one of the most important recent exhibitions of video art seen in this country.

*Voiceovers*, The 5th Guinness Contemporary Art Project, curator Victoria Lynn, Art Gallery of NSW, Oct 8 - Nov 14

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# Diving into the virtual

Kathy Cleland immersed in the translucent worlds of Char Davies

Based in Montreal, Canada, Char Davies is best known for her acclaimed immersive virtual environments *Osmose* (1995) and more recently *Éphémère* (1998). The works are notable not only for their exquisite translucent visuals and evocative soundscapes but also for their creative interface. In her immersive environments, the user, or more accurately, the 'immersant', does not just manipulate a mouse or joystick or touch and point with a dataglove, they are immersed in a virtual world where the body is the navigational interface. Immersants are strapped into a motion tracking harness and breathing and balance determine their movement within the worlds. There is a paradoxical freedom from the physical limits of the body as you float through the world on a meditative journey but this is coupled with an intense awareness of the body anchored by the breath. The works are both literally and figuratively captivating.

Char Davies likens this experience to the bodily immersion of scuba diving where the diver also navigates through body and breath control and the works certainly do share some of the characteristics of a fluid underwater environment. But there are also surreal, otherworldly aspects to the work which induce altered states of consciousness that are more evocative of dream states or the experience of meditation. The environments of *Osmose* and *Éphémère* are alternate realities, worlds of the imagination which follow the logic of dreams rather than the rules of real world physics. In real life you can't float up into the sky or down through the earth. In *Osmose* and *Éphémère* you can do both.

*Osmose* is structured into a series of translucent shimmering world spaces but as well as its startling beauty, the work is also conceptually sophisticated and self-referential. The first virtual space experienced is a 3 dimensional Cartesian grid which dissolves to a clearing as the immersant starts to orient themselves with their first breaths. From the clearing the

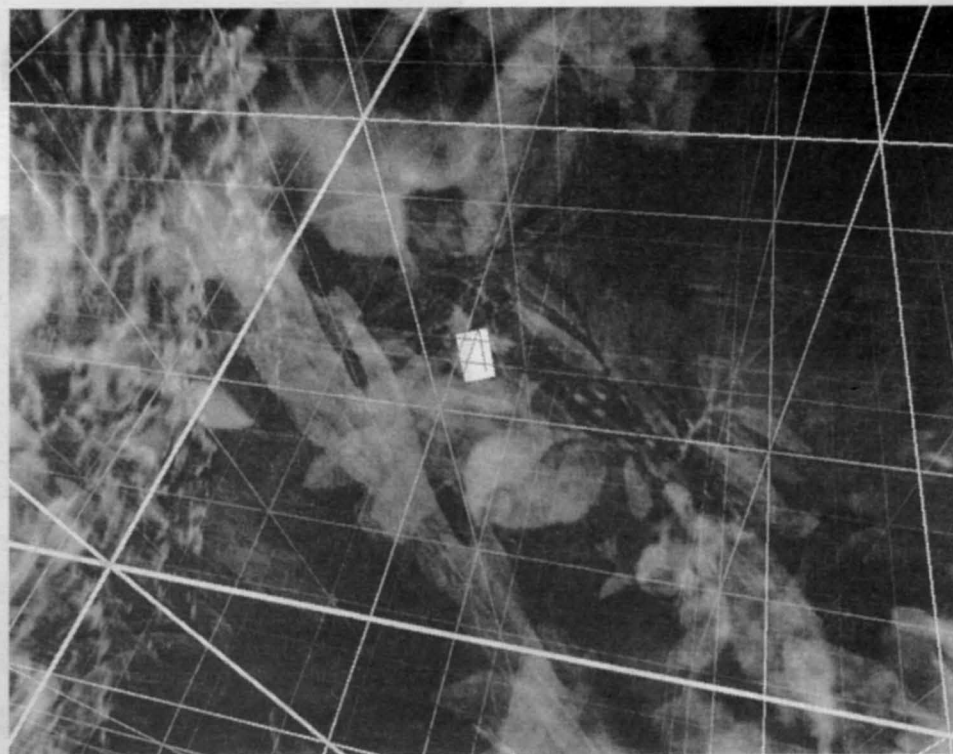
immersant can journey to a variety of world spaces including Forest, Tree, Leaf, Pond, Earth, Cloud, Abyss and Lifeworld. Underlying these worlds is an area of computer code and there is another upper level or layer of quoted texts which comment on nature, the body and technology.

Although her artistic iconography is drawn from nature and natural processes, Davies presents us with more than a virtual reality representation of nature; her work is a reconstruction of nature, a second nature, where we can see through the underlying grid and code that the environment is based on, and the conceptual overlaying of culture in the upper level of texts to the translucent visuals that explore the inner workings of natural forces and processes.

Like *Osmose*, *Éphémère* includes archetypal elements of nature (earth, rock, tree, river) but in this work the metaphor is extended to include bodily organs, blood vessels and bones. The work is structured vertically into 3 levels: landscape, earth, and interior body—each level moves through transformative cycles of germination, growth, decay and death and immersants can also 'cross' from underground river to bodily artery/vein. Each journey through *Éphémère* is different and, like *Osmose*, the experience is determined by the immersant's breathing and balance.

In her online documentation of *Osmose*, Davies introduces her work with a quotation from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*. "By changing space, by leaving the space of one's usual sensibilities one enters into communication with a space that is psychically innovating. For we do not change place, we change our nature."

In documentary footage of *Osmose*, the effects of this 'psychically innovating' experience is evident on the faces of people taking off their head-mounted displays at the end of their immersive experience. The



Char Davies, *Forest and Grid*, real-time frame capture from *Osmose* (1995)

common facial denominator is wide-eyed dreamlike wonder, some are moved close to tears. Most of them are almost speechless after the experience, those who could string a few words together beyond 'wow, that was amazing' compare the experience to meditation or to a religious experience. The phenomenological experience of the work appears to induce a contemplative meditative state which blurs the boundaries between inner/outer and mind/body. "The experience of seeing and floating through things, along with the work's reliance on breath and balance as well as on solitary immersion, causes many participants to relinquish desire for active 'doing' in favour of contemplative 'being'" (Char Davies, "Changing Space: Virtual Reality as an Arena of Being" in *The Virtual Dimension: Architecture, Representation and Crash Culture*, ed. John Beckman, Boston: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).

The introduction via the means of virtual reality of new experiential spaces opens up the possibility not only of new experiences but new modes of experience with the potential to change human nature itself. Comments Davies, "Such environments can provide a new kind of 'place' through which our minds may float among three-dimensionally extended forms in a

paradoxical combination of the ephemerally immaterial with what is perceived and bodily felt to be real" (ibid). Although science fiction literature and film has started to sketch out this terrain, in the real world we are just starting to glimpse some of the possibilities of these new technologies. Exactly what the long-term ramifications of this will be for human nature is a topic that will be of increasing importance as we move into the virtual reality domains of the 21st century.

Char Davies' visit to Australia in June-July 1999 was hosted by Cyber Dreaming, an Aboriginal multimedia production company based in Queensland. In Sydney, dLux media arts presented Davies' keynote address at Flashpoint 99 architecture and design conference, University of NSW, July 12. More information about Char Davies' work can be found at <http://www.immersence.com/>

Kathy Cleland is a curator, writer and educator based in Sydney. She lectures in Communications and Multimedia at Central Queensland University, Sydney International Campus and is currently curating a new Cyber Cultures exhibition for the year 2000.

## Review

# Blood on the keys

Joni Taylor enters Linda Dement's *In My Gash* CD-ROM

Interacting with a CD-ROM is, at its most basic, an inane exploration of someone else's digitally constructed space. In Linda Dement's CD-ROM *In My Gash*, the process of navigation is as penetrative and confronting as the work itself. The user, and it is definitely a user here, has a sense of control that borders on sadism, voyeurism and rape. Each click of the mouse leads to a further wound, slit or cut in a virtual skin. The breaking or intentional rupturing of this pristine surface transgresses a natural boundary between the fluids of our bodies and the outside world. In this work there's almost blood on the keyboard.

Incorporating chilling sounds, bits of video footage, photography and extremely beautiful animation, the work is a direct confrontation with female disembodiment and sexual horror. The point of entry is the "Gash", slang terminology for vagina, but also

representative of a bleeding slit or wound. The user explores the "narratives" of the character LYING UGLY MESS BITCH by entering 4 different Gashes. The directions are simple: "Go Left", "Go Right" and "Go In". The process of entering this gaping, bleeding Gash is not an easy one. It reveals fragments of memory, of the pain and the horror contained within. She's a young girl. A Dirty Whore. A Junkie Masochist. You journey, as if by internal camera probe, through the landscape of the Gash, triggering images and sounds. Flowers, syringes, cigarettes and metal spikes fade in and out of the screen. The sounds are of severing and tearing, desperate pantings and blood tingling wails. The video sequences are evocative of surveillance footage and clandestine filming. Encounters with a bad cop, trashy hotels, stabbing rages and blood drenched bathrooms.



Linda Dement, *In My Gash*

As in a razor blade to the flesh, Dement seems to slice through the physical boundary existing between the screen and the self. Using the sterile mathematical coding of computer software, she has managed to create a totally visceral, 'wet' interior realm. The surfaces are slimy and shiny. Sometimes bleeding, sometimes not, there's a sense of a never-ending secretion. She overturns notions of a 'nice' cyberfeminism; being explicitly female but overtly non-erotic, *The Gash* has been dismembered from the female body. It is now a portal of memory. And it has reclaimed the corporeal.

*In My Gash* is not easily accessible. Currently awaiting classification, and with the recent draconian net laws, Dement's work

would find it hard to exist on a local server. Sold, with an R-rating, it would fail to work as a satisfactory form of porn. However, *In My Gash* is a phenomenal piece of digital art. It may soon exist in a gallery space as her previous *Cyber Flesh Girl Monster* and *Tales of Typhoid Mary* have. But the real interest lies in whether it's actually taken home and played along with the not so life-like Lara Croft.

*In My Gash* was produced in association with the Australian Film Commission. The CD-ROM launch was presented by dLux media arts at the Museum of Sydney, August 29.

Joni Taylor is a Sydney-based freelance writer. She currently edits and writes art and music reviews for the Sydney City Hub.



# Screen capture

Needeya Islam reviews essays on cinema and performance in *Falling For You*

Like much of its content, the title of this book itself performs. It addresses the reader directly, and as if this weren't enough, it announces that it has already been won over. But by whom or what? Coupled with any notion of performance is some sense of who is being performed to, the audience which brings performance into being. This collection of essays addresses this audience, and acknowledges the often perplexing but crucial nature of this particular position.

In their lively introduction Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros outline their originating intention to expand the ambit of traditional discussions about performance in cinema within the discipline of film theory and criticism. Generally these models have revolved around a somewhat narrow set of articulations—explorations of acting in the cinema and the star system for example. Stern and Kouvaros argue that while these studies may be rich and insightful in their own right (their endnotes contain a useful list of some of the more noteworthy examples), cinematic performance is in fact both more complex and expansive than this. It intersects and is pressured by everything from the body to the cinematic apparatus itself; from persona to privileged historical moments. Stern and Kouvaros identify the reason why, given its potential, the area has remained so relatively undertheorised, and again it is something which cuts across cinema studies in general—the difficulty of writing about a primarily visual medium that has a temporal dimension; the impossibility of translating what has been seen into words.

In taking on this problematic (which they view as a practical rather than constitutive one), they not only confront the particular predicament of

the audience or reader, but go some way towards exploring ways of making it useful. For example, the idea that a certain self-consciousness about the limits of the discipline might allow for a more speculative approach. Stern and Kouvaros gesture towards an encounter between the methods of performance studies (with its emphasis on the body and description) and film theory as being one juncture through which to gain some degree of mastery over the slippery terrain of cinematic performance. It is this kind of possibility that resonates throughout the essays in this book.

Ross Gibson's "Acting and Breathing" explores directly the relation between corporeal presence on screen and the body of the viewer. Using Welles' shark monologue from *Lady From Shanghai*, his essay concerns itself with the affective transfer between performing and viewing bodies, and in so doing underscores the way in which descriptive writing is almost always circuitous; rarely transparent or disinterested. Lisa Trahair's essay "Fool's Gold: Metamorphosis in Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr*" approaches Keaton through Baudrillard's logic of the object as opposed to the subject. This highlights again the fundamental connection between the performing body in its mechanical manifestations and early comedy.

Other essays directly address the question of the relationship between the performer and audience. Chris Berry's "Where is the Love?: The Paradox of Performing Loneliness in Ts'ai Ming Liang's *Vive L'Amour*" examines, among other things, the false sense of omniscience that viewers can possess when watching classic realist cinema, through the reading of a film where the illusion of the solitariness of the

characters is crucial. Through this, the complicity between the viewer and cinematic text is also looked at.

In Lesley Stern's "Acting Out of Character: *The King of Comedy* as Histrionic Text", the mobilisation of histrionics as a "loopy system" or circuit between actor, film and viewer enables an understanding of performance as occurring through various points of the body and therefore allowing for a more diverse range of readings than those based on the more common psychological models of identification in cinema. Pamela Robertson Wojcik's essay "A Star is Born Again or How Streisand Recycles Garland" looks at the play between performer, persona and the performance of celebrity. The productive dimension of the audience; the idea that it is the performance of an audience as an audience which allows for celebrity to exist is also touched upon. Sophie Wise's "What I Like About Hal Hartley, or rather, What Hal Hartley Likes About Me: the Performance of the (Spect)actor" takes this one step further by arguing that Hartley's viewers are themselves "displaced into the film" and are put to work in the service of the films as critical readers, in order to render them sensible.

The breadth of this collection encourages a re-assessment of not only the films discussed, but how we watch films in general; which aspects we are attentive to and which we take as givens. And, while the essays all have something specific and significant to add to the discussion, those that explore modes of performance produced by the technology of cinema are the most engaging.

In his paper "Improvisation and the Operatic: Cassavetes' *A Woman Under the Influence*", George Kouvaros counters readings of the director's films as capturing random moments of improvisation by exploring the specificity of Cassavetes' filmic practice and the way in which it allows for cinematic performance to be understood as productive rather than reproductive. Following Jean-Louis Comolli's observation, "cinema is the motor", he discusses the way in which Cassavetes' overshooting "opens up the film to points of view that cannot

be contained by narrative" and what happens to a performance before and after a scene passes. He focuses on what is precisely cinematic about Cassavetes' work. Jodi Brooks offers a reading of Cassavetes' *Love Streams* in "Crisis and the Everyday: Some Thoughts on Gesture and Crisis in Cassavetes and Benjamin" as a film "written through by crisis" on every level, and suggests that it is through this that the film's gestural practice develops. In locating both crisis and gesture historically through the work of Benjamin, the way in which performance and narrative in *Love Streams* is brought into being through the ordering of time and the body by the experience of cinema itself, is explored. Beginning with the conjecture that "the slapstick bodies of American cinema may be taken as allegorical of film's relationship to modernity", Laleen Jayamanne artfully examines the temporal, historical and mimetic constitution of the slapstick gag through the figure of Chaplin, in whom "modernity and mimesis fatally collide." The weaving together of often disparate ideas is at once playful and scholarly; an at times dizzying re-reading of a familiar figure.

Each of the essays in *Falling For You* obviously works through much more than has been briefly outlined above. As a collection however, the book is centred on the idea that writing about film, and particularly descriptive writing, engages with the affective dimension of cinema; with memory and emotion as much as the object itself (and, that what makes us laugh in cinema is as fascinating as what makes us cry or think). It looks not only at the ways in which cinematic bodies perform to create affect, and the interplay between screen performance and viewer, but also at how writing itself becomes performative, gestural, in its insistent efforts to capture a retrospective experience. The existence of this book points towards a kind of critical renewal for writing about cinema, brought about by the unwieldiness of description itself.

*Falling For You: Essays on Cinema and Performance*, edited by Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros, Power Publications, Sydney 1999

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# Open visions

Tina Kauffman profile's OPENChannel, Victoria's screen resource centre

OPENChannel is a direct descendant of one of the first local video access centres set up by the Whitlam government in the early 70s to help community groups across Australia gain access to the means of production. For over 20 years it has had an eventful, continuous history of activism and involvement as part of Melbourne's independent production community. Located in a cultural precinct in Fitzroy that also includes the Melbourne International Film Festival and 3RRR, OPENChannel today is a membership-based resource organisation that provides much-needed support for an exciting range of film, video and new media production, while assisting in the training and development of, and communication with, practitioners in screen media.

The centre provides substantial production and post production facilities and equipment (including studios, high end on- and off-line edit suites, a multimedia lab, and production offices), and maintains an involvement with the wider screen community through seminars, forums and other events. It also houses a number of industry organisations, including the Melbourne offices of the Australian Screen Directors' Association and *if* (independent filmmakers) magazine.

## Developing new players

Helen Bowman is OPENChannel's Executive Director, following in the notable footsteps of previous directors who include

current Australian Film Commission head Kim Dalton and producer Bob Weis. She sees that OPENChannel has a pivotal role to play in providing training and development opportunities in film, video and new media by offering numerous short courses (ranging from editing and documentary writing to web design) and 2 accredited courses (a certificate of video production, and a certificate of arts/interactive multimedia). The centre is also currently running 2 specialist projects with a skills development component for emerging Indigenous new media makers: Koories On-line On-trak (entry level) and Koories Blak-on-Trak (web design and CD-ROM production).

OPENChannel's production arm, OCP Limited, makes high quality innovative programs, as well as co-productions with independent film and video makers, ranging from documentaries, drama, and television series, to corporate and training videos. Assistance is offered to emerging practitioners for their professional development. A range of subsidies in-kind have been created, including desk and phone access, studio and editing time, and support for projects on which OPENChannel may act as executive producer. Currently in development under the OPENChannel umbrella are several documentaries and a low budget feature film, while consultant John Pierce is exploring opportunities for multimedia production.

A program of community events brings large audiences into the OPENChannel's Fitzroy premises. Programs include 2 popular open screening nights each year, at which members show their latest work,

and screenings and discussions by filmmakers that are held in conjunction with ASDA. An ambitious joint project with *if* magazine, The Lowdown Live seminar, is planned for March 2000, and will provide info on independent production from those who actually do it, including how to source alternative funding, improve scripts, learn to budget, find a producer and a creative team, identify the market, find a mentor, become self sufficient and learn about distribution and marketing. Also scheduled in March is a joint event with Experimenta, a kind of post mortem into Y2K and what did or didn't happen, while a conference is planned for August which will address issues of surveillance, privacy and moral responsibility, and the way artists are using surveillance as a theme in their work.

## Artist in residence

This has been the first year for a new project for OPENChannel, an artist-in-residence program. Tina Gonsalves has been in residence since July, and she is very enthusiastic about the experiment. "It's been a fantastic time. They have a great technical set up here, and they've given me access to everything, from the multimedia suites, Media 100 suites, to a mastering suite, digital video cameras, studio—it's a great process. When I'm creating new work, if I need some more footage, I can go straight into the studio, shoot it on the blue screen with digital video, then digitise it into the computer—a very organic process."

For the last 2 years OPENChannel had been supporting Gonsalves' short animation and video pieces, so she was the natural choice for the centre's inaugural residency scheme. "I know it's something that they would like to take further, with a more formal selection process, so I guess I'm here to see if it can work. It seems to be very positive. I've been working on 4 different projects. One animation, *wounded*, won best

animation at the F1 digital Arts Festival. I've also been part of MAAAP's (Multimedia Art Asia Pacific) online artist-in-residency program, working with artists in Korea, Beijing, and Perth, and trying to get my own website online—which should be finished soon ([www.tinagonsalves.com](http://www.tinagonsalves.com)).

## A united front

At a time of decreasing government funding overall, and increasing pressure from the mainstream production industry for available funding to be dedicated to development and production, there has been great stress on the screen culture sector to which OPENChannel has traditionally belonged, and especially on its main funding mechanism, the Industry and Cultural Development (ICD) branch of the AFC. Revised ICD guidelines were approved at the AFC Board meeting in November and now state: "the objective of the Industry and Cultural Development funding program is to encourage a vigorous and diverse screen industry and culture in Australia. To do this, funds are invested with screen organisations, companies, individual practitioners, industry guilds and associations. Support is through recurrent funding to major screen organisations and events and through project funding for one-off events and development activities."

Identifying the necessity for a united front, and emphasising links with the spectrum of Australian screen production, the national network of screen resource organisations established in mid-1999 a new association, Screen Development Australia (SDA), to provide a formal model through which the network would continue developing, delivering and promoting Australia-wide initiatives underpinned by best practice methodologies.

OPENChannel and SDA's other member organisations (Film & Television Institute in Perth, Media Resource Centre in Adelaide, Metro Screen in Sydney, and QPix in Brisbane) play a key role in providing early to mid-career film and multimedia makers across Australia with affordable access to production equipment and advice, subsidy programs, professional development and accredited training, exhibition and a range of special projects. SDA is committed to: the development of a greater number of highly skilled film, video and new media makers; actively engage with the production, economic and aesthetic issues facing the industry; the development of complementary and diverse pathways into the industry; increased audiences for Australian films and new media works; and ensuring access and equity in program delivery. SDA will enter into a range of partnerships in order to maximise the production resources available in its member organisations, share financial responsibility for program delivery within an environment of tight constraints, deliver both national and state-based outcomes, and ensure that a "many doors" approach is maintained.

Helen Bowman comments that the screen resource organisations are now in a great position to continue to support the development of production at a local level whilst together providing a strategic national infrastructure. "Our role is very much about innovation and leadership, providing a broad range of people with the opportunity to realise their creative voices in film and digital media."

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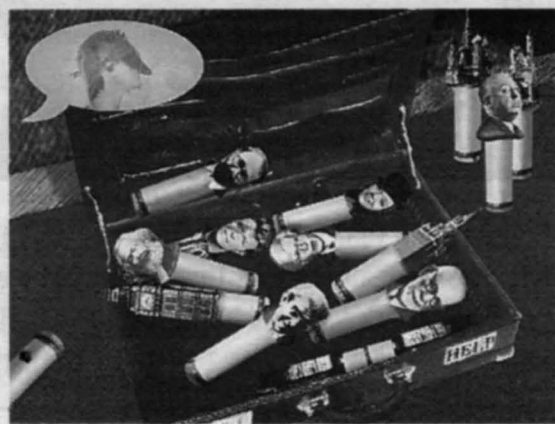
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Brisbane's Institute of Modern Art received a deluge of entries for its National Digital Art Awards. Judges Justine Cooper (1998 1st prize winner), Amanda McDonald Crowley (director, ANAT) and David Broker (deputy director, Institute of Modern Art) chose 14 finalists and eventually narrowed it down to the winners who were announced by Wayne Goss on October 14. Martine Corompt and Philip Samartzis won 1st prize for their interactive sound sculpture *Dodg'em*, "an inventive installation that configures the physical space of the gallery as a portal to a richly designed sonic world" (Darren Tofts, *RealTime* 33). Melinda Rackham's *Carrier* ([www.subtle.net/carrier](http://www.subtle.net/carrier)), "an experimental website investigating viral symbiosis in the virtual and biological domains" (Melinda Rackham, *Working the Screen*, *RealTime* 30), came in 2nd and 3rd place went to Suzanne Treister's interactive CD-ROM *No other symptoms: Time travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*, where Rosalind makes her fortune designing and manufacturing vibrators which look and talk like famous people throughout history. The Tertiary prize went to *Amor Veneris A*, an installation by Mari Velonaki where "a woman's face is viewed through a magnifying glass...the spectator can activate her by blowing against her face using the breath switch" (Mari Velonaki, *Working the Screen*) and All Hallows School student Van Le won the Secondary prize with digitally enhanced photographs in *Dream Focus Envision*.

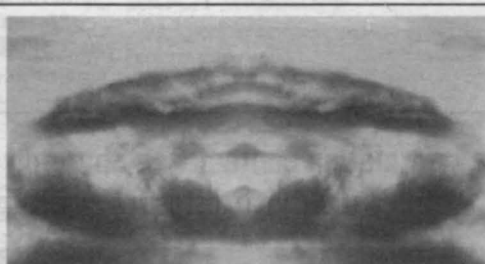
National Digital Art Awards, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, October 14.



Suzanne Treister, *No other symptoms: Time travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*, interactive CD-ROM

Expect the unexpected. For audiences at the Village Cinema in Hobart who have been scratching their heads over that enigmatic and anonymous little 30-second trailer screening at their cinema since November, wonder no more. Although the work is screened without a title, the Bulgarian-born multimedia artist Antoanetta Ivanova refers to the project as *Homo Genesis* reflecting the concerns that motivated it. "*Homo Genesis* is a mysterious visual unfolding of natural forces with a rapid-fire mix of traditional and urban sounds...It challenges our perceptions of art and the media and the detached way we view the uninterrupted flow of images and information on screen. It catches the audience off guard in order to provoke a more primal, unprepared response, and to encourage a multiplicity of readings." Based in Hobart for the past 3 years, Antoanetta's last public work *Deluge* was a large billboard image located at a busy traffic intersection.

*Homo Genesis* screens at the Village Cinema, Hobart, 18 November - 16 December. [aivanova@uts.edu.au](mailto:aivanova@uts.edu.au)





# Hands-off credentials

Dean Kiley at Bendigo Art Gallery's *Byte Me*

An atavistic shudder went through the suddenly-silent crowd. We 'knew', of course, we all 'knew', the same way everyone always knew already about *The Crying Game*. But now someone had come out with it and it was discomforting.

We'd done the rounds of the exhibition space and chuckled knowingly at how the art (full of sound and furious interactive multimedia) was so loud we couldn't properly hear the artists and commentators talking about the art. We'd been patient through the setting up of laptops and the inevitable irruptions of screensavers into Powerpoint presentations. We'd heard some data-packed, sardonic, erudite, passionate, whimsical, burnt-out and solipsistic presentations from artists and critics, and been given a pragmatic info-bite and pitch by Cinemedia on funding practices and venture capital.

And, then, this accidental, or blasé, revelation. "Someone in a car yard in Richmond," I think it went.

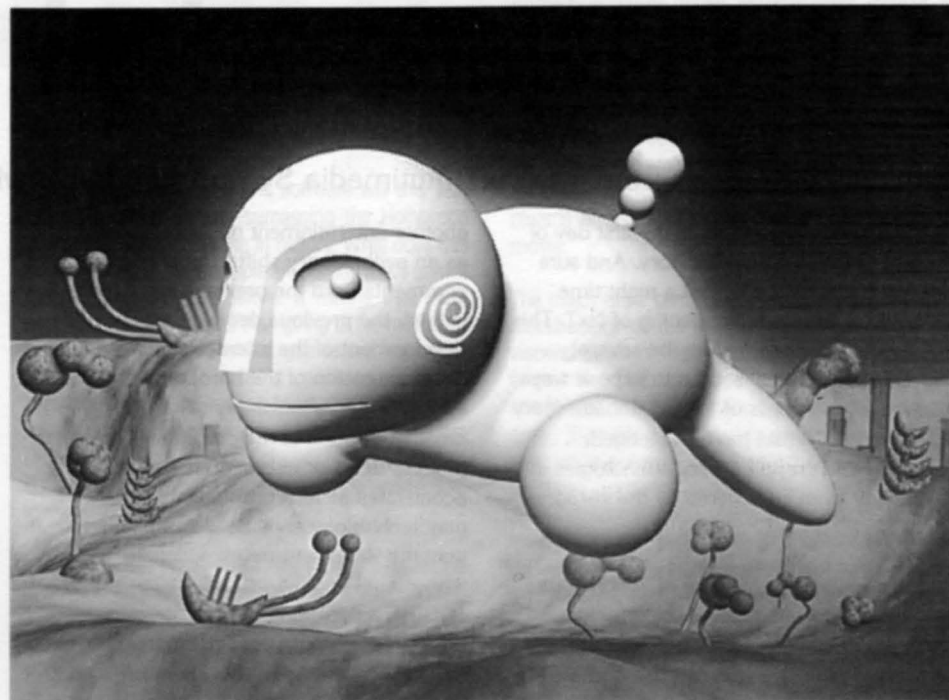
"Fashion designers do it too", someone said dismissively afterwards, picking over the fallout at a natty Bendigo pub. What crap. Did you see what Jon McCormack did? He's not a natural nerd you know, he had to teach himself the code and put it all together himself, came up with the algorithms to make it work. And Troy Innocent, making up his own complex comprehensive iconic language and idiom with which his artificial creatures and their human watchers can communicate. For my money and long car ride, he'd obsessively ex nihilo created one of the most inventive and engaging of the exhibits dealing with the widest repertoire of issues in the most concentrated space.

Anyway, we'd had Darren Tofts being Darren Tofts, doing laser-scalpel analyses of

the experiential (is it like a TV-flow? what's 'intermedia'? are artists outstripping critical idiom?) side of new media, with its recombinant formats dramatising the techno-human interface with a poetics of uncanny, defamiliarising constructivism via bricolage with found object metaphors. In one of the most useful analogies, he phrased the symbiosis of visual/aural and textual as working like the wave and particle theories of light. And Jon McCormack critiquing technology as utopian dream with his pseudo-realist burlesque on the function and idea of the scientific/museum diorama as didactic cinematic spectacle (Julius Sumner-Miller does 3D) taken over by multimedia as the prime, hyped, 'natural' successor to olde-educational spectacle.

And Peter Hennessey, who satirised the Oedipal identity crisis of 'new' media, dubbing it 'pubescent', sending-up the endless search for provenance or paternity among 'old' media, deflecting legitimation onto context, reflexivity and simulation, bemoaning prescriptive formulae and—gossip-wise a great step sideways—announcing the irrelevance of 'authenticity' as criterion. Kevin Murray spoke on insects and cyborgs as design allegories of social trends, over-generalised psychology, economic rationalism, privatisation, political amnesia and civil anomie. And James Verdon on the recursive DNA-looping of memory, narrative, memorial and camera/monitors by which artwork can respond to your movements.

But it was Patricia Piccinini who came out with it. After an amusing discussion of her work, including the 'car nuggets' (miniaturised offcuts from automobile iconography, smoothly sculpted and shiny), a Coca-Cola-ish bubbling-spring animation and a video installation of rust-done-to-look-like-a-world-globe, someone asked how she did it. Apparently the nuggets are done by



Troy Innocent, *Iconica*, *Byte Me*

carpenters and spray-painted by someone in a Richmond car yard. The moving images are by Drome.

Now, without wanting to get all Giles-Auty on you, isn't there a teensy issue here to do with credit, acknowledgement and transparent processes (to say nothing of authenticity or intellectual property, which is always a good idea in such pro-pomo but ethically-fraught circumstances)? No mention of Richmond spraypainters on the gallery wall, or in the forum paper. If someone hadn't asked, would we ever have known? Should we? Of course you've got the Koons defense, the canned-Warhol argument about artists who conceptualise but don't do. It's an argument that joins the dot-points: artisanship, craftsmanship, corporate-art delegation, design and directing. That's 'directing' as in 'storyboarding' videos/animations and 'blocking out' sculptures/installations with 'plans' (*trans.* sketched outlines for someone else to actually construct). Kevin Murray pointed out that Piccinini's sketches were beautifully done, artworks in themselves.

So, yes, a bit like a fashion designer,

though those are usually ex-draftspeople who have apprenticed themselves in most areas of craft before they become hands-off designers (and some never do). Also a bit like Darren in *Bewitched*. Or Samantha, for that matter.

And disturbing, like the other issues deftly raised at the forum. I'm still arguing about it.

*Byte Me*, curator Anonda Bell, Bendigo Art Gallery, Forum, Saturday 24 July 1999.

Just as with the *NXT* event in Darwin (see page 18), and *MAAP99* (see pages 20-24), so Bendigo Art Gallery's *Byte Me* is an important addition to a developing regional awareness of and participation in new media nationally and internationally. Here the key participants were Melbourne artists and commentators in exhibition and forum. *Esta Milne* comments in *experimenta's* online periodical *MESH* on the same issue raised here by Dean Kiley in her article "Nameless things and thingless names: A review of the *Byte Me* Forum." *MESH* 13: Cyberbully. [http://www.experimenta.org/mesh/article9\\_frame.html](http://www.experimenta.org/mesh/article9_frame.html) Eds.

## Organ(ic)s: real and metaphorical

Mitchell Whitelaw explores the Dead Centre of Norie Neumark's latest collaboration

A travelling resonant hum, skittering tongue sounds, voices speaking, slowed clunking loops, an accordion chord. Amanda Stewart orbits the room, darting behind translucent printed hangings, through reflected shafts of dataprojection, then approaches the double-miked stand in the centre of the space. She scatters streams of sibilant, half-voiced words and word fragments around; with a small sideways head-movement across the microphones her voice pans across the room. The clusters of humming and flickering sound continue, shifting steadily, and Stewart improvises a counterpoint with them; at one point the live voice is absorbed into its recorded double, indistinguishable, before the textural clusters change again. She swivels a nearby monitor, showing animated sequences of figures, lines of text, abstract diagrams which match the projections bounced around the walls. The odd word is spoken whole, or repeated—"the liver", "nineteenth century"—then dissolves again into fragments of mouth sound. Stewart leaves the mikes and circles the room once more, then slips silently out the curtained doorway; her audience murmurs, and disperses to inspect the installation.

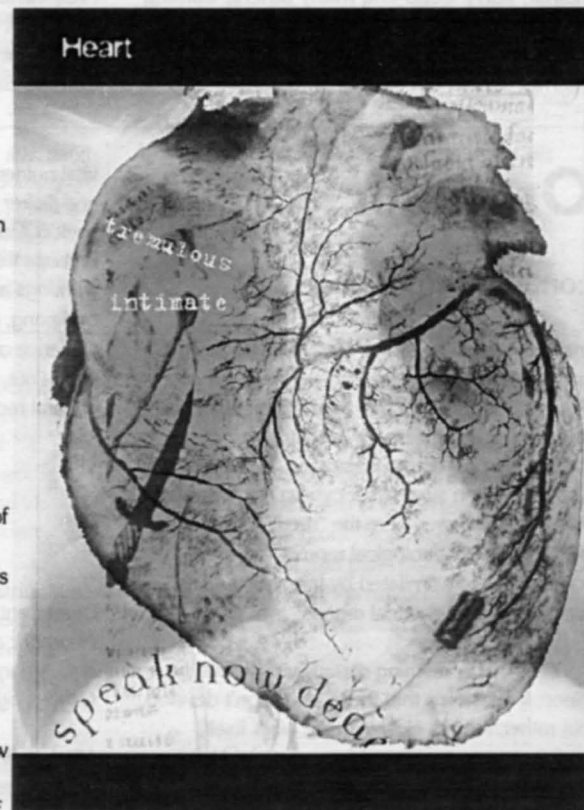
The physical components of the installation form another mass of overlapping fragments; Maria Miranda's dense, fleshy layerings of anatomical diagrams and circuit boards hang in transparent sheets at either end of the space. A bank of mirrors breaks the computer projection into reflected, twisted strips which intersect with the transparent hangings and form fuzzy mosaics on the walls—a nice change from the normally monolithic new media screen. The animated material, also by Miranda, mixes lush paint or pastel textures (like those that gave Neumark's interactive *Shock in the Ear* its distinctive visual style) with more hard-edged, machine-like flickerings. Taken in installation mode, the textural, multi-channel soundtrack gels well with the visual stimulus; things begin to link up with the spoken phrases and their discussions of the cultural specificities of bodily organs. Stand on the large plastic pad in the room's "dead centre"—where Stewart performed—and a steady throbbing grows and seems to advance along the space. Precise sound reinforcement makes a difference here—the depth and spatial clarity of the soundtrack is a pleasure to hear. It integrates the room enough that it feels like a kind of

scattered exo-body, one whose organs constantly shift and reform themselves, but still hangs together.

Of course it is organs, real and metaphorical, which are Neumark's interest here, and organs of digestion in particular. At the core of the work is a correspondence that is only suggested in the installation: a notion of the computer as a digestive organ, a kind of prosthetic informational bowel (rather than a cyborg brain) that we use for processing email, images, sounds. The metaphor extends outwards into the work's collaborative form: Neumark describes it as a kind of collective co-digestion, as Stewart's vocal material trickles into Greg White's low-end pulses, and Neumark's soundtrack is redigested in Miranda's visuals.

A likeable metaphor, and a continuation of a project close to the heart (so to speak) of much recent new media work—to reinvest mainstream cyberculture with the blood and guts of

continued on page 18



Norie Neumark & Maria Miranda *Dead Centre*: the body with organs



# The Wetware season

Mike Leggett reports from The NxT Multimedia Symposium in Darwin

The first day of October is the first day of The Wet in the Northern Territory. And sure enough, Darwin experienced a night time shower after the evening opening of NxT. This multimedia symposium, like the several before in other states, set out to expose ways in which, in the words of the coordinator Mary Jane Overall, "artists have challenged, examined and grappled with technologies in ways never even considered by the corporate world."

Hosted by the local office of QANTM (the Brisbane-based cooperative multimedia centre—CMC) in close collaboration with Geraldine Tyson of 24HR Art, this complex event involved many more sponsors and partners than the similar events organised by the Australian Film Commission (primary financial assistance for NxT was provided by the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council), and gave an overview of much that has occurred in Australia amongst those working with interactive multimedia and also single-channel multimedia.

Like a croc in the Harbour, Darwin bobs out of the waters of the Arafura Sea just enough to focus on the task ahead. It faces outwards—to the bush and to the ocean—and as entrepreneurial trader and fixer, responds selectively to the needs and aspirations of the scattered Territorians. The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, built on the foreshore, is a microcosm of the local diversity with stunning artefacts exhibited within its walls (happily the fantastic annual National ATSI Awards coincided with the NxT event) and outside under the breezy palms and fig trees, the Ski Club on one side and the weekly market and citizens gathering at Mindil Beach on the other. In the clammy air, close to the water and with The Wet due, Darwin epitomised the flux of events, both natural and human. Like the best conferences, the setting invigorated and the talking took off...

Inevitably, with so many artists from interstate and overseas who have been practising in the area of media arts for 10 years and more, history was the other setting. Paul Brown's personal history included works by filmmakers Jordan Belson and the Whitney brothers, ex-painter Harold Cohen, Nancy Burson, Edward Ihnatowicz, Vera Molnar, Larry Cuba and many others. Coming up to the present he repeated the prediction that is now being heard more widely, that the internet should not simply be regarded as

another entertainment medium but distinctly as an evolutionary shift. Amplifying Stelarc's comments from the previous night (and indeed, the previous decade), the development of the internet can be seen as a direct extension of the human cerebral cortex and will lead us inevitably toward a prostheticisation of the corporeal frame, a process that began centuries ago and accelerates as telecommunications and nanotechnology entwine with the human genome—the wetware evolutionary phase.

Such a migration of consciousness translates for some politicians present, and Sally Pryor, as a need "for humans to control the computers." In the CD-ROM, *Postcard from Tunis*, she developed a means of referencing another culture without it becoming a cross-cultural enterprise requiring open collaboration. Such a thread was a strong feature of the NxT symposium and was paramount at the Resistant Media space (programmed by Australian Network for Art and Technology) in the Ski Club premises, where a battery of online computers enabled the conference and visitors to continue to grow the cortex. Shuddhabrata Sengupta explained that in the context of the border war with Pakistan, the net offered access to discussion denied in the public spaces of India and, "like modern ley lines across the map", used anonymity, or the threat of anonymity, as a telling component of contemporary culture effected by warfare. At the same panel session, Geert Lovink reminded us of the part the net played in the wars in the Balkans, relaying closed radio stations, establishing list syndicates and using the range of media in a tactical manner. If it's possible to view wars on television from the comfort of your armchair, is it becoming possible to actually participate in violent struggle from the comfort of your own workstation? He maintains a distinction between net activism rather than net alternatives. Communication networks must respond to need and develop a political aesthetic. This is the site of engagement and intervention rather than that of an outsider logging-on to passively read the electronic newspapers.

Meanwhile, just across the sea in East Timor, the United Nations were mopping-up the militias, and Sue McCauley referred to the Free Timor website and others that had a large part to play in keeping exiles and the rest of the world directly linked to events. Sam de Silva emphasised the need for more

vital nutrient? The metaphors pulse and grumble and flicker richly, but they stay indistinct—only spelt out in Neumark's written statement. Perhaps this is only fitting since our own internal workings are just as elusive, offering us only the odd pang, gurgle or spontaneous emission as evidence of their operation. As *Dead Centre* points out, this leaves them open to personal and cultural reconfiguration—shifty, slippery innards.

*Dead Centre: the body with organs, Norie Neumark and Maria Miranda, with Greg White and Amanda Stewart, The Performance Space Gallery, Sydney, July 9-22*

*Mitchell Whitelaw is a new media theorist, artist and educator based in Sydney. He is currently completing a doctoral thesis on artificial life in new media art.*



East Timorese participants at NxT Symposium

tactical alliances between artists and campaigns, for websites to provide information countering the claims of corporate interests, and acting as communication points for popular campaigns such as Jabiluka.

Peter Callas showed an early 2-screen video work which, utilising footage from the Vietnam War, demonstrated the subtleties of irony in relation to race and the culture of militarism. The survey of his work fleshed out the complex ways in which the modern electronic cultures of the Japan he encountered inexorably plotted the advances of cybernetic prostheses. He had created electronic horizons in cities like Tokyo where the landscape horizon had long been obscured.

"The computer as an intelligence amplifier" was how Jon McCormack characterised the human evolutionary stage, though his own work concentrates on a move away from carbon-based life forms to those based on the life-synthesising silicon chip. In the pursuit of complexity from simplicity, he demonstrated the 'Evolve' interface he has developed which may become a market item offering the experienced user ability to create Artificial Intelligence environments through this code-writing software.

Josephine Wilson described online writing communities, including *Cipher* ([www.ensemble.va.com.au](http://www.ensemble.va.com.au)), her recent online project collaboration with Linda Carroli. Josephine Starrs previewed the new CD-ROM she produced with Leon Cmielewski: *Dream Kitchen* takes the Doom gaming conventions into the kitchen where, equipped with egg flips and other utensils, various 3D animation horrors are dealt with in hilarious style.

"The updated version of Cyberfeminism is more about networking, webgrrls, geek girls, FACES, OBN, online publishing, career prospects, list servers and international conferences," stated Julianne Pierce in surveying the work of VNS Matrix, "...to get ahead you must control the commodity. Information is political, it's a weapon, and the more knowledge we have, the more powerful we are" ([www.sysx.org/~jules](http://www.sysx.org/~jules)).

Yolgnu knowledge, from NE Arnhemland, has been the longtime study of Michael Christie. He described the issues surrounding the work at Northern Territory University "to incorporate Yolgnu theories of language, identity, intellectual property and the negotiation of knowledges into the university teaching structure." This has been pursued through a number of multimedia projects aimed at producing study materials.

Such cross-cultural projects have been a success. In the words of Kathy Mills, the prominent Aboriginal spokeswoman,

songwriter and poet of "greetings, respect and language": "Balanda (white fellas) don't listen carefully or respond with appropriate structures..." Her work has been concerned with addressing such shortcomings in the health industry.

Staff from Batchelor College discussed and showed work derived from the adaptation of electronic technologies into the Indigenous education environment of that campus, in particular, digital archiving approaches to stories from the communities.

East Timorese refugees in Darwin were hosted throughout the symposium, utilising the online facilities and, during the final emotional session, immersing themselves in Michael Buckley's CD-ROM collaboratively made with the Melbourne Timorese community. *East Timor, Culture, Resistance and Dreams of Return* allows a "rich plurality of voices" in a "social interactive documentary" in which the developer had more of a curatorial role in the design and production rather than being its author or director.

The plurality of voices online and in other public spaces was celebrated throughout the NxT event in a spirit of mutual respect for language and cultural difference. However, the impetus of rapid advances into digital culture during the decade by Australian artists is in danger of dissipation through reductions in levels of infrastructure support. The increasing babble from websites is daunting to most potential audiences. Whole areas of research as well as artefact are denied beneath the weight of Microsoft-style marketing. The wetware alliances between artists, scientists and technologists, well established overseas, are hardly heard of here. Indeed, is there a place in evolution for 3D animation?

The NxT symposium showcased a significant national record and described innovation in The Top End setting. The next event needs to be more risky and project into the future with an image of multimedia arts as a form of ubiquitous social interaction.

*NxT Northern Territory Xposure Multimedia Symposium, Darwin, September 30 - October 4.*

Mike Leggett ([legart@ozemail.com.au](mailto:legart@ozemail.com.au)) gave a talk at the symposium on his curatorial research recently undertaken in the USA, Brazil and Europe, supported by the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council.

## Organ(ic)s...

continued from page 17

material things. In games like *Doom* bodies get splattered into an homogeneous pixelated goo; Neumark reminds us of bodies' differentiations, and of their entanglement in cultural structures (hence the play on the Australian "dead centre"). The installation suggests a cyborg body, but not the dystopian one where the "meat" is nothing but a site for technological renovation. Here, the machines are assimilated by the body and its wandering metaphorical organs.

If there is something dissatisfying about the piece, it's perhaps that these ideas don't develop, but rather, remain elusive in the work itself, broken into metaphorical fragments and left for the visitor to reassemble. If a computer is a digestive organ, what value does it extract from its fodder? How do we tell an excretion from a



# WriteSites

Kirsten Krauth reviews *Patchwork Girl* and speaks to Eva Gold about the first-time inclusion of hypertext into high school curriculum

*The Board of Studies of NSW recently incorporated Patchwork Girl and other hypertext works into the new Advanced English curriculum for Year 12 for 2000-1. I spoke to Eva Gold from the Board about the implications of this decision.*

**KK** Why did you decide to include hypertext? Is this decision a world first?

**EG** The new English HSC courses have a much broader definition of 'text' to include texts other than print texts. This allows students to study film, television and multimedia texts such as CD-ROMs, websites and other forms of hypertext. This change is in recognition of the pervasive influence of the visual and the electronic on our modes of communication and ways of thinking.

Hypertext is seen as particularly important because of its non-linear structure and the reader's control of the directions of the reading experience. This makes students aware of their own reading and writing practices of more conventional types of texts. For this reason, hypertext is also helpful in introducing students to the more theoretical aspects of the nature of reading and writing and so provides a sound basis for the more abstract elements of Advanced English and for further study in the subject.

I have been told by several people that this is a 'world first' and that the effect of hypertext in the curriculum will be viewed with interest by various educational institutions around the world.

**KK** What in particular appealed to you about *Patchwork Girl* and *Samplers*? Did you consider other hypertexts as well?

**EG** The committee did consider a range of hypertext fictions but the appeal of these 2 lay in their accessibility to HSC students. The text selection working party considered many hypertexts too difficult or sophisticated for HSC students. They were clearly directed at an adult audience or at university students. *Samplers* [Deena Larsen] was considered valuable as it played with notions of short story structures in an amusing way. *Patchwork Girl* is well regarded as a rewriting of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a text that has worked well with students in the past. The committee believed that this connection with what is known by teachers through familiarity and students through popular culture would assist in the introduction of a new form.

**KK** Also on the curriculum is Manguel's non-fiction *A History of Reading* and Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. Are there connections made between these texts and hypertext fiction? Calvino's book seems a very useful and sophisticated example of playing with, and subverting, narrative structure, of a text that reveals itself as a constructed object and acknowledges the reader, something that most hypertexts self-consciously do...Are these links explored with students?

**EG** Yes. The elective in which these texts are found provides students with the opportunity to "explore the ways in which different assumptions about reading and writing affect the language of texts...and consider how language shapes the relationships between readers, writers and texts."

**KK** In terms of responding to these works, do



Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*

students submit an essay? Are they encouraged to experiment with the way they hand in work, eg creating a website or putting their essay on disk and adding hyperlinks? How would this affect teachers' marking, if students moved beyond the traditional essay and into multimedia themselves?

**EG** Students compose spoken, written and visual texts in a range of genres and media. This means that while the essay is an important form for responding to texts, it is far from the only one. There are many opportunities for students to develop their skills of composition using computers and blending the verbal with the visual in as many ways as the medium offers.

The new HSC is outcomes-based and assessment is based on the extent to which students achieve the course outcomes whatever the content or medium through which they do so. Students are encouraged to compose in a range of modes and media. To ensure this, there is an outcome that states: "A student assesses the appropriateness of a range of processes and technologies in the investigation and organisation of information and ideas." This outcome can be achieved through work with hypertext.

Of course, this does not change the fact that teachers' marking is affected with every change of question. Different criteria are applied to assess the learning outcomes depending on the demands of the question.

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*I think I've created a monster...*

As I insert Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* into the drive, it's the first time I've experienced hypertext on disk rather than on-line and I'm in an unfamiliar iconic landscape, Storyspace. I have 2 new things to read, the programming tools and the work itself. Reluctant to read the Help menu, I start to explore: 'Tree map: her.' 'Chart View of Patchwork Girl.' Design and structure. Grid-like maps. Writers as construction workers. A graphical interface dissecting "a modern monster."

*Patchwork Girl* looks at the act of writing as much as text itself, "tiny black letters blurred into stitches", as a creation process not full of Mastery; this is a woman making a monster, this is Mary/Shelley. The metaphors of quilting and patchwork have been consistently used for hypertext writing (eg TrAce's *Noon Quilt* project), sewing together nodes, acknowledging the process as much as the outcome, its made-ness. At times, *Patchwork Girl* seems overwritten, full of *churning* and *astonishment*, but perhaps this is to reclaim the monster, to re-

## Junk

Alex Hutchinson on the game

Sales of home consoles and software will this year break 20 billion dollars, surpassing the Hollywood box office for the first time in history. What does this mean? It means more people are playing more games more often than ever before. It means that more people are playing games than going to the movies or reading books. It means that games are now quite probably the single most popular form of entertainment on the planet. Most alarming of all, it means that people will soon be forced to acknowledge (at least the possibility) that digital entertainment has finally crossed the line from spotty boy's wasted time to viable art form.

In October Sega launched its new 128-bit 'Dreamcast' console in Australia after selling over a million units in 2 scant months overseas. Not to be outdone, Nintendo and Sony have both announced new systems, pitched (as they always are) as more powerful than their predecessors, capable of dragging twice as much eye candy around your TV screen at twice the speed in half the time. It is doubtful whether this alone will entice reluctant gamers into the fold or convince anybody that games are a serious artistic rival to books or cinema.

The potentially revolutionary aspect of these new systems is hidden in the way their manufacturers (especially Sony) are describing them. If the hype is to be believed, we are on the threshold of a new entertainment age. Sony is calling the processor at the heart of its new system a 'motion Engine.' That might be a ridiculous moniker for an inanimate hunk of metal and plastic, but it marks a fundamental shift in the way games are approached by developers and the way consumers are willing to accept them.

But comparisons between video games and other arts are nothing new. In video game circles the term interactive movie has been an oxymoron for years. In the past, the outcome was invariably an unplayable series of set pieces interrupted by simplistic choices leading to fragmented (and badly acted) sequences involving B-grade actors and ex-porn stars. Games developers would benefit from dropping the movie tag altogether and following industry leaders like Square whose *Final Fantasy* series has long been pushing the boundaries in digital storytelling.

Progressive games developers are already beginning to look for ways to tell better stories and communicate ideas in a non-linear fashion. Game levels are being replaced by game environments, single task orientated goals are being fleshed out with multiple side quests which (in the best examples) actually affect the main storyline depending on what angle the player chooses. New software titles coming soon for the discerning player include *Vampire: The Masquerade* from Nihilistic Software which allows one player to change the game on the fly, throwing enemies, puzzles and situations into the path of other players at will. Or the recently announced *Republic* from Elixir which boasts a million unique characters and an infinite polygon engine in its simulation of (wait for it) an entire Eastern European country. If that doesn't impress you, remember that the game's detail level is rock solid right down to individual flower petals and autumn leaves.

Whether either game turns out to be any good doesn't matter right now. What is worth focusing on is how markedly different their approach to software development is to the practices of the past. These games exhibit traits more often associated with movies than entertainment software, providing

outfit her in emotions that fit. Mary's stitched creation does not resemble her. Fragile yet independent. Strong. Beyond her control: "I crave her company; I crave even the danger." Exploring what it's like to be freakish and monstrous—something most teens can relate to—there's an uneasiness in the text, an eroticism: does Mary desire her own creation? Our monster has on the surface what most of us carry inside, scars, finely stitched, criss-crossed evidence of her making, which "not only make a cut, they also commemorate a joining."

If this were a film my eyes would be shut. The text becomes grotesque. We slice off, and into, bodies. A pre-cyborg experience. Vines and grafting. Bedroom operations and surgery as

immersive, story driven entertainment instead of attempting to graft a game onto a film like the interactive movies of yesteryear. *Vampire* aims to allow players to basically script their own adventure movie as it's being enjoyed, wresting control away from formulaic computer AI and handing it back to the user. These are software tools more than games as they are traditionally understood, closer (in cinema terms) to a movie camera than a finished movie.

The major draw card for games is interactivity. The blockbusters of the new millennium offer all the visceral thrills of film and schlock novels and then some. If more developers follow the lead of companies like Nihilistic and Elixir (which seems likely) then the gaming community 10 years from now will be a very different place. Imagine being able to create scenarios instead of linear plot threads, world environments instead of single scenes. Imagine taking your friends through a custom designed adventure which you could manipulate to their tastes every time someone seemed bored. The possibilities are immense and their exploitation may eventually make games a serious artistic player.

But first things first. The second crucial ingredient in the equation following the types of games made, are how these software toys are delivered and used. Multiplayer games are the catch cry of the late 90s and Sega has recognised this by including a modem as standard with its new Dreamcast and allowing owners of its console access not only to other players around the world, but to email and net access through their TVs without an expensive PC.

On a very basic level this means more human contact. The PC online world is (at present) a frag fest of *Quake* death matches and *Half-Life* mods. Players run around a maze, players shoot each other, players start again. Not exactly advanced characterisation or emotional interaction. But other sites like *Ultima On-Line* offer at least a small step forward, allowing a reasonably detailed world for dedicated roleplayers to muck about in, filled with literally thousands of other human players and overseen by a simulated economy.

The combination of the 2, providing realistic and detailed environments with the ability to link to other human players in scenarios which offer more than the usual kill-or-be-killed mentality is where the potential to revolutionise entertainment lies. True virtual reality doesn't need to strap a black plastic box to the top half of your head, it just has to allow you to interact with real people in a world which allows you to make different and realistic decisions.

Primary conclusion. Will this new game depth devour the arts as we know it? Of course not. If you need proof, notice that film did not kill books and TV did not kill film despite various doomsday prophecies. However it does mark the emergence of a new form which is in direct competition with mainstream media. Secondary conclusion. But is it the death of the Hollywood blockbuster and the schlock novel? You never know. How many times can your average 14 year old kid get excited at a larger, more realistically executed explosion? And how many times must Bruce Willis save the world before we can all sleep at night? Because personally I'm doing okay already.

*This is the first column in a series on trash and pop culture by Alex Hutchinson*

Alex Hutchinson is a Melbourne based writer. His work has appeared in magazines like *Overland*, *Siglo*, *Metro*, *Dialogue* and *RealTime*. He was also runner-up in the *HQ/Flamingo* short story competition in 1998. AlexH@bigpond.com

control. *Patchwork Girl* becomes about losing that thing you desire/fear most, a must-read for all parents: "Far from sentimental, we were both testy in the knowledge that we would soon be parted; seeing each other still nearby stuck us both with an ugly shock, like a foolish anachronism in a novel that makes you distrust the author, and regret the time already invested in a world gone paper-thin."

Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*, Eastgate Systems, USA. For more information email info@eastgate.com or visit the website at www.eastgate.com



# Feature: RT @ APT3 & MAAP99

The Asia Pacific Triennial, at the Queensland Art Gallery, has become one of Australia's most successful innovative visual art events. Each APT is eagerly awaited and the contact with artists through collaboration and discussion is a critical component. Unlikely supporters include John MacDonald (curator, Australian Art, National Gallery of Australia) who liked the works and unlikely opponents include Benjamin Genocchio (visual arts critic for *The Australian*) who judged APT3 artistically weak and politically compromised because of its selection process. On the ground, there was enormous support for the quality of the event and an acknowledgment of the overt politics of many of the works. Occasionally, you'd hear something like "It's not as political as APT2", and the conference component was widely regarded as disappointing save collective concern voiced through it for the plight of the East Timorese. Given the emergence of the digital arts, MAAP 99 (Multimedia+Australia+Asia+Pacific) made a perfect collaborator for APT, offering its own workshops, screening exhibitions, a conference and partnering APT3 in its Virtual Triennial. MAAP is a seriously growing concern, reached by many through the web and offering a rare celebration of emerging art forms. Thanks to sponsorship from OnLine Australia through APT3 and MAAP99, *RealTime* was able to be on-site, in print and on-line for three mini editions surveying both events. A small selection of articles is reproduced here. For the full *RealTime* report on APT3 and MAAP99 visit our website: <http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/>

## Location location location

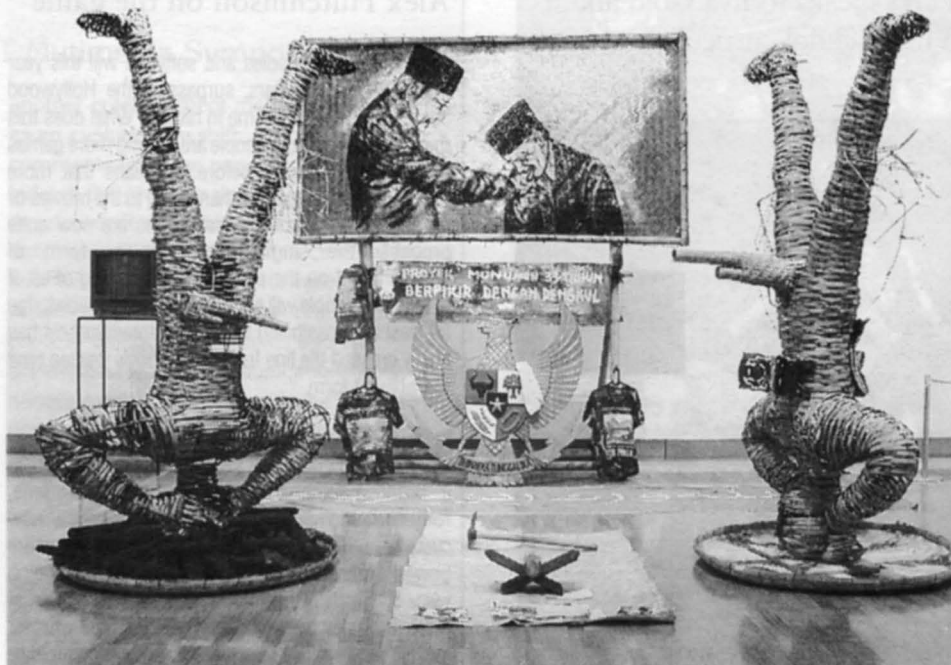
MAAP 99 Launch, Upper Stage, Queen Street Mall, Brisbane, September 3; Official Opening *Double Happiness 2\_nations* Global Arts Link, Ipswich, September 4; Artists Club @ The Zoo, Sunday September 5

Driving through the Moorooka Magic Mile of Motors on our way to Global Arts Link at Ipswich for the launch of the *Double Happiness 2\_nations* website, Beth Jackson (Director, Griffith Artworks) is telling us how academic colleagues were surprised to see her in the Queen Street Mall on Thursday night spruiking with Festival Director Kim Machan and Sein Chew (Macromedia Asia-Pacific), throwing T-shirts to the crowd and cracking jokes to officially open MAAP99. What did one science fiction writer say to the other? The future's not what it used to be. Real or virtual, places do things to you.

Just last week in Sydney I saw Komninos at the Poets Festival calling in the hollows of the Balmain Town Hall for some new discussions of place that have nothing to do with the well-turned topic of landscape—places beyond addresses, places of the mind, of memory, states of being. Komninos calls himself a cyberpoet these days but for the opening of MAAP99, he's back on the street and literally a driven man, his programmed video poetry threatening sometimes to run him down. Images from his family album are montaged, magnified and left open to the brisk Friday night Mall traffic. Intimate word pictures of a childhood in Richmond and his grandmother's undies, cosier online, here die of exposure. More at home is his shout to exorcise the 60s from the collective imagination, "The Beatles is dead! DEAD!"

As Komninos calls up the Richmond streetscape, coloured words duck and weave across the screen—"Cars CAAAAAARS." Gail Priest thinks Sesame Street and Maryanne Lynch wonders if he knows that until the 60s a tramline ran through the Queen Street Mall and, indeed, through the very spot on which he's standing. Me, I'm searching for a place in my memory bank for "international virtual pop star" Diki conceived in Japan, now living in Korea. Gail says "Imagine if you could do anything you wanted with technology and your fantasy was that!" A pale, gawky teenage girl in big black bloomers dancing on lolly legs perilously close to the edge of some pier. The clip is intercut with vision of the remarkably Diki-like male (?) artist weaving his spell in some late-night media lab. Weird city.

At the Valley Corner Restaurant the new tastes good—shallot pancakes and deep-fried broccoli leaves with shredded sea scallops. On one side of the table a couple of web designers on laptops point with chopsticks at their wares. Artist Richard Grayson's projections have tonight failed to materialise on the walls of the Performing Arts Complex. He whispers to us across the crispy flounder what



Tisna Sanjaya, Indonesia, *Thinking with the knee* 1998-98, installation, collection the artist

the building should be saying to drivers crossing the Victoria Bridge. It sounds like "Slowly you are coming closer to the speed of light."

For now, websites are still launched by a gathering of people in one place. At Global Arts Link in Ipswich for the opening of *Double Happiness 2\_nations* we are doubly welcomed by Aboriginal dancers in body paint playing with fire and pale Chinese dancers in pink pantsuits waving fans. The mayor of Ipswich speaks warmly of technology while the head of the Australia-China Friendship Society gestures in the direction of the IMAC console and declares the site "launched or ...open". Director Louise Denoon shows us through the space opened in May this year for a sneak preview of *The Road to Cherbourg*, a remarkable exhibition of paintings by Queenslander Vincent Serico about mission life and life beyond the mission. Global's vision ("Linking people to place through the visual arts, social history and new technology") maps Global as a kind of future place and again, not the future we expected. The heritage Ipswich Town Hall provides the framework for the multiple spaces within it. This is a comfortable place, its spaces adaptable. Near Vincent Serico's painted didgeridoos, Louise points to a hole in the floor and the space below it to take cabling as required. The ground floor interactives offer individual spoken memories of this place—"Talk the talk, not the technology" says curator Frank Chalmers. Upstairs a substantial space is allocated for children to paint with computers and draw with pencils.

After a weekend of screenings, our bodies spinning with visions, we dive back into the Valley. Sunday night at the Artists Club@The Zoo Ed Kuepper unleashes a mean version of "Fever" and is joined for "The Way I Make You Feel" by Jimmy Little who these days has moved from "Royal Telephone" to "Quasimodo's Dream." For his encore, "Cottonfields", a didgeridoo player springs out of nowhere and plays up a storm.

MAAP99 may be a festival to experience online but there's still a lot to be said for being here on the ground Virginia Baxter

## Missile: CONTACT

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

CONTACT *Unstable Fields of Power* is a brilliant piece of cross-cultural melange. Four artists from Bandung (Indonesia) and four from Perth collaborated on a project that is both an experimental artists' exchange, conducted online, and an exhibition of new media works. Rick Verney sets the tone and scares luddite internet users with laptop meltdown as his screen interface goes crazy.

The Indonesian artists are really strong on image, composition and colour in more traditional works adapted for exhibition on the web. Their artworks are bulging with meaning and narrative and are replete with theatrical grotesquerie that is finding explicitly modern forms. Rikrik Kusmara presents four compelling wooden sculptural installations that have a forceful sense of space and colour. Diyato's dramatic works are visually amazing—although they could make better viewing in the canvas. The web hosts these artists' usual projects and biogs, but where are their online works?

Now if you are not a net-fool like me you will get through to the online works straight away rather than thinking that the Indonesians were given a raw deal. When you do, you will find that there are some intriguing experimentations that betray a wicked sense of humour. Diyato's little film is an allegoric transformation by fire. While W. Christiawan gets right into funny animal noises, his "postcards from the edge" and "throwing hopes" are intense evocations of how contemporary Indonesian political life pervades the everyday. These are strong, simple applications of the web to represent personal experiences.

Krisna Murti appropriates and responds to the new social stimuli in a more engaged way. She says that "in the last one decade, Indonesian TV's commercial advertisements have radically pushed a social change, breaking the ethic value." The lack of warning and the pervasiveness of tampons ads on Indonesia TV prompted Murti to respond with a provocative anti-ad where she re-interprets a tampon commercial in order to show how the tampon can be used for other domestic applications. She also presents an interactive with useful instructions for transforming the tampon into a teabag or a cold compress for use by men to cool their brains.

In fact there was a fair bit of humour in this exhibition, particularly from the female artists. This seems to be something of a prevailing trend in Perth. Amanda Alderson presents a remarkably accurate anthropological study in game format of going out on a Saturday night south of the river in Perth with the scuzzy males that inhabit the region. This interactive and the associated artwork spill out of the ubiquitous and terrifying symbols of suburbia—the big green rubbish bins.

The adventure starts from the invite on the mobile on Saturday afternoon and goes through all the painful rites of choice from brand of bloke to drinks, pick-up lines, cars, clothes, choice phrases and puke places that can be had on the night. At every point there is a choice but the range of choices is hilariously dispiriting. The selection of guys to go out with is big but believe me, after this night, you will never go out with that type again. It is a cringingly correct representation of the Saturday night party scene with superb sound bytes to accompany the decisions that you make. They capture all the proudly nasal mono-syllabic beauty of the Aussie bloke. I went through the ordeal a couple of times to try my luck with different guys. This is potentially precise contemporary anthropology (she must be an insider) sprinkled with colourful linguistic and cultural particularities of Perthlings. It's a classic! I was wondering what the Indonesians made of this piece.

The exhibition is a powerful venture into new territory. It would have been good to see even more cross-cultural experimentation along the lines of Christiawan and Kathy Barber's collaboration. We can only hope that this program continues and develops in the future. Exciting stuff.

The artists are: Krisna Murti, Rikrik Kusmara and W. Christiawan of Bandung, Indonesia and Kathy Barber, Matthew Hunt, Amanda Alderson and Rick Verney of Perth.

Grisha Dolgoplov

## Missile: Shanghai N.2

<http://www.shanghart.com/chenzhen/1.htm>

A horrifying account of a city. Disturbing(ly), beautiful. Irony: it radiates from my screen. User: outside/r. Sights seen: commerce, religion, prayer, culture/social life, sex/sleaze, citizen, politik, food, poverty. Framed against Shanghai skyline. 1-68.htm images. My choice of image. A tour at my 'disgression.' Like a touch screen (almost). To go here. And next. There. Each image, some broken links, a kind of prayer or chant. To walk through, (un)knowing. And how did I acquire this privilege of choice? To enter this simple, elegant image-album of a city. And (reading) language, defined, drawn upon and against the images. French, Chinese, English. Subtitles, translations, parodies of speech and the written word. Many altars, trade, coloured and overloaded. With meaning. Or the extraction of (its) history. To trust the document. To bear witness to an investigation. A circular reference, the recurring picture, assemblage and juxtaposition. Against a glowing (white) background. Empty fallen landscapes, villages, houses in ruin. "Three generations of architecture" (52.htm). A silent photo-file. Statements, too, of possible beginnings, endings, a hope (even lovers walk here), maybe faith, signs of friendship, icons in isolation, little devils appear, unmoveable objects, they pose for the camera (what are the symbols? which way to go? do I go on?). Scene: street market, the people of a city, there is life, daylight, a morning, immersed in it. Beyond, go further, in detail. Out of a dust-storm. A city in destruction, layers of a new structure, a blanket over the past. Villages of poverty slammed against some kind of fragmented future. "This whole city is a workshop" (28.htm). Again, a document. Where to next? This is easy/hard to look at. The neon of Shanghai, yes, everywhere, in photo form (remember) and people, dark nights, crowds glued into a commodified system of progress. Not unfamiliar. Could tell you things. And questions: who tore this all apart and who are the new builders? The reds, the lights, the ancient to the plastic reality of pop culture. Trade offs. "Fashion of evening life" (41.htm). What prayer? Earth and heaven, in denial. Body to the ground. Concrete. The spectators gather, no room to breathe. It's about filling space. Moving between gaps. Taking a snapshot. Ghosts and cries, remains of a former city. Here, now: bulldozers, construction sites, forbidden (policed) zones of the next stage...Forthcoming city divisions and 'self-colonised' sectors, the seepages occur: "...a continuous influx of franciscan influence" (45.htm). Franchised worlds. This investigation circles the city and reports back fear. Loss, deletion, awaiting the upset, upheaval, transgression. Replacement and renewal, removal. 68 essays, clouded by grey dust, stirred foundations and missing persons. Returns to the start. Shanghai N.2 makes no claims yet screams the loudest. The photographer (seemingly) unidentified [Chen Zhen .Ed] but like a guide clock, (ac)counts (for) each step.

Jason Sweeney

## Hong Kong—rebuilding on disappearance

*Self-Made Cinemas*, curator Jo Law

State Library Theatre, September 4, MAAP

Hong Kong has not disappeared. It has rebuilt. It has rebuilt on disappearance. It has replaced utility with images. Images are now the utility. Images in frames and covered in layers that disappear in a layer of images compressed in frames.

*Self-Made Cinemas* is a one of these layers. It is a program of ten independent screen works from Hong-Kong curated by Jo Law and currently touring Australia. These dynamic and diverse videos are united by a common city rhythm and a fascination with HK's multiple layers of change. In her curator's notes, Law says that the actual experience of a Hong Kong no longer recognised by its inhabitants is disappearing. She claims that "visual images have lost their ability to represent. They have become mere mis-connected signs pointing to a mirage."

Perhaps this is why these independent video makers try to capture the images of their city to stop its disappearance. But these images are not archives, or documents. They are highly personalised video essays that present the vagaries of remembrance in different forms. In these *Self-Made* works, HK is not a mirage or a ghost but a colourful, pulsing, busy shawl woven of different threads that are connected by their disconnectedness to stasis.

These videos were made either before or after the 'hand over'. In some ways, this theme is pervasive, if not in the films then in the way in which we will watch and make sense of them. The granite gray skies of that wet July day in 1997 may have replaced the enduring images of exotic hybrids, British imperial jewels and martial art films, but it is images that shuffle off and disappear, not cities. These works reveal HK transforming through the rainbow of



memory and the exigency of speed and need. They are ephemeral, personal paintings in time with little attempt to capture the whole.

*Mr Salmon* is a dazzling animated symphony of salmon swimming up river and across sushi bars. It is vibrantly textural and colourful. It could be an urban metaphor for swimming against the flow of history as a vital death impulse only to become an appetizing visual delight for video voyeurs.

The ingredients of Hong Kong's cultural hybridity are far more potent than just Western modernism or traditional Chinese narratives. The vitality of HK is the piquancy of innumerable cultural influences. Fuelled by hyper internationalism, it resists homogenisation in the drive for new taste experiences.

Exquisite video techniques are common to all these works. This manifests the "survival myth" of Hong Kong: life springs from hybrid fusion. Dave Hung's *Love* entrances with modern primitivist images set to the incredible driving rhythm of the Balinese ketjak chant. Traditional grotesque hybrids flicker in a ceaseless dance of erotic transformation in this sublime appropriation of the trance chant.

Urban repulsion is combined with morbid fascination with the city. This makes for an uncanny contemplation in the video format. There is an obsession with motion and different forms of communication and transportation along roads, footpaths, depoliticised landscapes, internet sites and city sights. The new flaneur in HK experiences detached contemplation at high speed.

"The road is the same every day. But could I still recognize it tomorrow?"

The drive time of Makin Fung's *Hong Kong Road Movie* was exhilarating—my personal favourite. It combined a roaming road video with a memorial to the personalised passage of time in HK, global internet and email interfaces and non-stop textuality. This delicate diary with endless road signs and screen directions about movement, roads, politics and change was incredibly inventive. A virtuoso display of the potential of the screen—split and layered in amazing configurations with a ceaseless polyphony of motion. Any stillness was surprising. The personal became vital. The work was rhythmic and tactile. This was total screen art and a tiger's leap into the future.

In Frederic Lichstein's *One Minute Project* an agitated eye peers through its veiny membrane at us. A disturbing offer. A different way of looking—both for the eye looking out and for us looking in on the eye. The challenge for us is to look at this eye with disinterest. To look at HK and not see a reflection of our cities in its myriad mirrored skyscrapers. To see something new and as yet unnamed.

All of the *Self-Made* films are startling in their originality of vision and readiness to use the video medium in fresh and unpredictable ways. They explode the potential for re-viewing screen space and the texture of editing. The excess of speed, information and image flows did not create a sense of clutter. These works present a completely different cognition of space and pictorial organisations of the moving image. It must be the rhythm of moving freely in small ever-changing spaces. Discordant frames within frames, layers across frames in perpetual motion create an unpredictable harmony of vision. Their highly personalised essayism reveals new ways of seeing that will not disappear in the future rebuilding.

Grisha Dolgopopolov

## Small worlds

Opening event, Asia Pacific Triennial

Artists Talks: Tisna Sanjaya, Han Myung-Ok

*A one night stand*, Michel Tuffery and Patrice Kaikilekole, September 10, APT3

APT3 opened on Thursday night with an estimated throng of 3000 at the QAG variously engaging with the art. The cushions that form part of Kim Soo-Ja's subtle statement are moved to make way for speeches. Before Shi Yong's satirical instructions for international communication, the crowd performs its own rituals, circling, murmuring gossip, kissing cheeks and licking lips. Ceremonial alcohol is offered and food—alas of the bland 'Asian-style' served from a barrage of bain-maries rather than anything like the authentic tastes of the region.

Welcomed by Indigenous dancers stamping on concrete (ouch!), cleansed by ceremonial smoke, we make the pilgrimage to the Victoria Bridge and just miss seeing Cai Guo Qiang's 99 small fiery boats sink beneath the weight of expectations at 9 pm on the 9th day of the 9th month 1999. Such is the

nature of crowds that we had to wait for email the next day to hear that Robyn Archer had broken into a spontaneous yodel to dispel any bad omens.

Which is just as well since APT3 is much loved here by the locals and everyone else involved in the arts in Australia who all seem to be here. The entire gallery (save the Australian collection) is given over to the exhibition. Minister for the Arts, Matt Foley sees APT as providing an intimate place to say things that can't be said outside it. Some acts performed here are impossible in their countries of origin. To quote a colleague on the strength of the APT, "regions can do things that centres can't."

For the huge number of artists involved and the estimated 200,000 visitors APT attracts, it offers another kind of geography. On Friday morning after the launch, kids trooping through the gallery in uniformed groups are diverted by the chance to wind strips of cane into wild geometries. Throughout the gallery, small room-sized installations invite entry. Seats placed in front of many encourage loitering. Each day we stumble on something we're sure wasn't there yesterday. Meanwhile, the works make their own connections. Gordon Bennett's powerful totems glance sidelong at Jun-Jieh Wang's pink *Neon Urlaub*. Within the sites of Katsushige Nakahashi's crashed fighter plane made of 10,000 photographs, Xu Bing's silkworms slowly spin.

Then again, we never leave the real world here—so much of the work speaks of trouble in paradise. At his artist's talk on Friday, installation-performance artist, Tisna Sanjaya from Bandung stands on his head to demonstrate what is meant by the "thinking with the knee" so pervasive in his country—initially exhilarating but held too long affecting the brain's function. On the lawns outside, Dadang Christanto burns one of his 47 gold papered effigies in a meditative act of anti-militarism. We watch as the flames lay waste, leaving a bodiless head. Tonight he will burn all 46 of them and Lee Wen (*Journey of the Yellow Man*) will protest by painting himself black.

At the other end of the gallery, Han Myung-Ok has created a set of fragile islands from a single ball of white silk thread. The work is the result of a week spent in this room, a time when she felt that outside it was a good deal of anxiety and stress. Since 1986 Myung-Ok has lived in Paris. She has 24 hours a day to fill and makes art, she says, for fear of boredom. Listening to her speak in the quiet calm of this room, I hold in my head this morning's frightened faces from BBC World.

The extraordinary *one night stand* performance by Michel Tuffery and Patrice Kaikilekole and company on Friday evening reminds me of a quote from Michael Eather in his catalogue essay on Vincent Serico's *Road to Cherbourg* (Global Arts Link, Ipswich), "Artists like Vincent Serico work on the principle that if the dreaming has been interrupted (in the process of coexistence) the 'interruptions' become part of the dreaming." Who knows what order of interruption to the lives of these Pacific Island communities (Polynesia and French Polynesia) gave rise to this wild contemporary ritual but it sure helped to shake some of the week's fearful demons.

We hang around for the sort of time that makes you wonder whether you should go or stay. As we wait, small fires are lit in tin cans around the cyclone fenced rectangular perimeter of the QAG plaza. Suddenly there's an explosion from a line of small metal bulls inside the fence where a row of men hold blow-torches to the backsides of the bulls and bangs belch

from their mouths. Eventually the big bulls arrive, 3 of them, a metre tall, pushed along on wheels by teams of handsome young Polynesians. They enter the arena to the rattle of a rocking tin can band. The company divides into camps, at one end young men in sarongs and singlets, at the other, a mixed group in rapper gear (trakkies and runners), their red sarongs tied casually round their waists. What follows is like some mad battle of the bands. Tuffery in the middle in jeans and tattooed to the waist controls the action with a whistle and a set of gestures. At his signal the bulls, now flaming red and breathing smoke from the fires in their bellies, are pushed towards one another followed by groups of male and female dancers in outbursts of energetic movement. Meanwhile the mini bulls keep up their belching explosions from the sidelines. Two pale and watchful QAG workers hover with fire extinguishers. The performance proceeds with variations on this theme until some kind of resolution appears to be reached. Then it winds its way down with more conciliatory dances and a lot of bowing and back slapping. Inside this stark enclosure we've witnessed a fabulous hybrid that's managed, for now, to scramble ancient rituals of war into one joyous mess of meanings.

Virginia Baxter

## Notes and imprints

Some notes from a participating filmmaker on MAAP Screenings, *Self-Made Cinema*, *Sick and Dizzy* and *Dart99*, State Library Theatre, September 4; *Anemone* and *Strange Stories*, Queensland Art Gallery Lecture Theatre, September 5

*Sick and Dizzy*: "I love my country's sky"—bleached by overexposure, *Love* a video by Dave Keung Hung, at first practices facetious facials of 'give us a kiss'. Through pure persistence he breaks down spectator resistance and breaks you up through the jingoistic fervor of the soundtrack's loop. Faces out of whack dissolve to others equally engaged in this 'little bit we know about love.'

*Self-Made Cinema*: Mark Chan's *Happy Valley* recalls the multiple screens and extradiegetic voice of Godard's TV and questions of love and identity in Resnais and Duras *Hiroshima mon Amour*. It's a bit-tersweet critique of 'real estate' life in the city through the affectionate perspective of Calvino's *Invisible Cities*.

In *Differences do Matter* Anson Mak pans her singing voice from her speaking voice through separate channels. Via technology she re-presents herself in the metaphors of linguistic differences and their concomitant constructs of identity.

*Hong Kong Road Movie* by Makin Fung is a series of shifting terrains to the throb of a slow flute on soundtrack—landscape whitens on the road going back/going to. The past tense 'does anyone remember...' folds over the present tense 'it's my birthday...' over the future tense 'next week?' The tension of these troubled times is wrapped up in signs of prohibition and electronic mail two.system@one.country

dLux media arts' collection *D.art* projects heterotopias of multimedia practice. In Isabelle Hayeur's *Si jamais la mer* digital fx take on biblical proportions in the parting of the sea. A bird's-eye-view tracks receding shorelines in this time of global warming. 'If ever the sea' floods the memory with wasted lands—a memento mori for a global warning on a world at war with itself. As if a scriptural omen on 'the fire next time', Hayeur's work fits with the crackle of *D.art*'s logo flickering between the works.



Michel Tuffery & Patrice Kaikilekole *Povi tau vaga (The Challenge)* 1999, performance

The *Anemone* collection from Imago ripples its interstices with reflective light. The closing days of the 20th century are marked by an acuteness of vision, melancholic humour, and dark beauty. This 'post' age of the circuitry of the 'client' meets its match in Peter Circuit's *Post*, an animated assemblage of cheap photocopied identities and remaindered yet feisty robots who get in each other's way. It's the old private eye routine but this entropic parody has the worldweariness you get from being trapped in the shutters where film noir's shades clank like worn out projectors.

*Rapt* is a wrap-up of body bits in virtual space (like 'Eve', the homeless woman whose body's been digitally spliced in service of USA scientific data). Both rapturous and fraught with anonymity Justine Cooper's imaging scans oscillate with a magnetic resonance between a heaven's gate spirituality and the black hole of the Despot.

The *Anemone* collection has many moments of persuasive beauty—from Kim McGlynn's full-bloom 'through-the-flower' sensibility in *Eulogy* (post debts to Judy Chicago /Georgia O'Keefe) to Dominic Redfern's *Please Wait Here* his wandering camera eye searching for something exquisite at the margins of TV's dross chirpiness "I know how tiring it can be". Vikki Wilson's work *March-Riever* recalls Kristeva's notion of 'thetis'—the traversal of borders, and the abject (examined by Barbara Creed in *Screen* on 'The Monstrous Feminine' via Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*). Moods of negativity are privileged in dark-stained poetic abstractions of image and readings from Beowulf and Lautreamont transcending time and space. Such a 'flick' renders the legitimacy of film problematic, tracing the defacing mark, scratching the surface of the symbolic's material real.

In *Strange Stories* curated by Kim Machan David Cox's *Other Zone* and Feng Mengbo's *Q3* sit edgily alongside my own film *Happiness* where the belly of the artist's gut instinct hangs out in virtual space waiting for alternative developments in the contaminated architecture of screen culture; a waiting room evocatively entered by Joyce Campbell's *Bloom*.

*Q3* by Feng Mengbo (China) opens with plain-song of Gregorian chant and afterfx simulating B&W scratch film that sets a mood of artificiality and plaintive beauty, a beauty abruptly terminated as *Q3* launches into the speed-of-light Sim Life whose POV is down a gunbarrel playing merry hell through the heavenly boys' own world of GI Joes and Bombay Bandits. Cox's *Other Zone* counteracts such wishful Neuromancers with his Molly-type heroine who passes through red silk interfaces to commune with Mother Moon—in the process getting waylaid by the prosthetic Master Stelarc a wannabe Gary Oldman lost in space. From Korea, Young-Hae Chang's *The Samsung Project* (Samsung means to come) succeeds simply through text to convey the erotic and comic moments in mother-in-law's kitchen to a soundtrack that's jazz!

Julianne Sumich

## The speed of zen

*Artificial Thought*, Andrew Kettle, part of *The Turing Test*, The Zoo, September 7, MAAP

I have always had a problem with appropriated 'zen' performance (my facetious term for performance where not much happens over quite a long period of time). I have no problem with the concept, just with the practice. "When...when will something happen?", I constantly ask myself. I like children's cartoons, I like things fast and loud. *Artificial Thought* showed me a new 'zen'—the fast, loud variety.

*Artificial Thought* is sound installation consisting of 8 individually tuned electric organs placed at the points of the compass: the Towers (N, S, E, W); and the Stations (NW, SW, SE, NE). The performance begins as Andrew Kettle places a weight on one of the organ keys. He then proceeds, at a brisk walk, in a counter-clockwise direction, placing a weight on the first key of each organ. As he completes a cycle he moves the weights one by one up the keyboards creating an ever changing ascending chord.

It is the power of that escalating chord that astounds me. Kettle states that drones "cleanse the area and purify the suspended audience in preparation to spiritual ascendancy." I found it was the physical manifestation of my question "when...?" As he runs around the space, a video documenter in tow, another video documenter filming the documenter filming the performer, a wave of potential builds and builds, creating the sensation of an event always almost about to happen.

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## APT3 & MAAP99

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It is a work that requires the audience to actively engage with it. From afar, the visual impact of so many different electronic organs was very powerful, however the instruments were even more beautiful when viewed individually, especially the organ which had its intricate web of circuitry exposed offering us a glimpse of its electrical secrets. There was a scattering of people around the Zoo, drinking and playing pool, and I couldn't help thinking that their experience of it must have been quite impoverished. The work literally vibrates and you have to move around within the oscillating area. I found circling in the opposite direction to the performer to be most beneficial. Parts of the room were louder, the dominance of particular notes and timbres constantly shifting, no part of the listening experience repeatable.

Time is my enemy, I move fast to beat it. It is only when I slow down that I notice it passing. *Artificial Thought* not only kept me moving, it kept me ascending...which is as close to 'zen' as I may ever get.

Gail Priest

## Never such a thing as silence

*Sonorous Bodies*, Elision Ensemble, Judith Wright (video installation) and Liza Lim (composer), Satsuki Odamura (koto), Brisbane City Hall, September 8 - 14, APT3

Step into the passage of darkness and adjust. Outstretched hands ahead—the blackened world still pitches without horizon.

Deep in a chamber in this burrow, Satsuki Odamura caresses, plucks, scours and attacks the 14 pieces for koto by Liza Lim. Turn corners and count 8 floating video screens then settle in a place where 4, and Odamura, are all visible at varying distance in the passageways—like bright planets whose orbits are not travelling but whose surfaces are never still.

The silence between and after Odamura's playing is no absence at all. Just as the screens appear to spawn rather than spurn the surrounding darkness, Liza Lim's temperamental string songs arrange themselves out of silence. Her music is a summons and the performance is a bewitching drama of player, instrument and invisible antagonists. The fingers of the player and the strings of the koto are ears as well as tongues.

Listen to the koto and remember the falsely deaf moment which precedes a scratch at the door, the quickening inside a shell, the gasp beneath a bolted lid, and realise there was never any such thing as silence.

Judith Wright's projections are vivid with arousal. Submerged flesh, silk flesh, fruit flesh, exhaling flesh, connecting flesh and conspiring, fleshless shadow. Bamboo, stone, flame, water, air, grease and suds graft in the eye's fingers like touch memories.

The effect travels further than the erotic but it's not unlike feeling the heartbeat of a lover's note, attuning to the race of nib-scratch with the eye, and tasting sex salt at the first word of touch.

Stephen Armstrong

## It's the fridge calling

*Sci-Art 99*, Queensland Science Centre  
September 8 - 19, MAAP

Spiraling down the search tree we go Asia Pacific Triennial (APT3), Multimedia Art Asia Pacific 99 (MAAP99) then *Sci-Art 99*, "an exhibition of work by artists who are using scientific ideas or methodologies and by scientists who are creating visual artefacts as a part of their work." *Sci-Art 99* is curated by Paul Brown, the only person I've met with a domain name: paul-brown.com. Of course soon everything will have a domain name. Then the fridge can tell us there's a rotten tomato stuck in the frost at the back. A future of inescapable home truths. The phone will ring "Who is it?" "It's the fridge."

*Sci-Art 99* has both static and dynamic works, works to engage with, works to look at and works that you'd love to play with but can't. In this last category are Adam Donovan's refugee prostheses from a Jules Verne novel, an update and improvement of experiments in perception that invert the visual field using prisms. Donovan's work improves on this by extending perception rather than just changing it. Can our brain cope with being able to see forwards and backwards at the same time? We can't use the pieces to find out, but I wish we could.

Justine Cooper has bartered her skills to gain access to MRI medical imaging equipment. Her medi-

tative video animates various transverse slices through her body, as in the Visible Human project ([www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible\\_human.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/research/visible/visible_human.html)). Another work shows a set of horizontal sections through the head imprinted onto a stack of glass plates. We can see that the inside of the head is represented, but we can't get to the representations. There's an element of frustration here that medical imaging was designed to relieve.

Rodney Berry and Troy Innocent both produced Artificial-life pieces, works that simulate evolutionary processes. In Berry's work, cubes containing pitch sequences wander above a grid, eat rhythms and occasionally have sex. Recombinations occur, progeny develop, but significant structure does not emerge. The piece is fairly joyless, and I'd give this life a C-minus rather than an A, but simulated lifeforms/environments have a lot of potential and this is early days. Troy Innocent's work is simpler, game-like and more fun. The A-lives have a bit of personality, they're cute little biomorphs that make sounds when you put them on stage. They have funky sex lives. In our evolution we have developed to recognise, remember, and attach emotions to certain types of appearances. By making the constituent units of his simulation recognisable and cute, Innocent exploits our evolutionary history to show us his.

Here's a question. The answer reveals your personality and will be used against you by any marketing company I can sell it to. What's better, standing up listening to music on headphones in a gallery, or listening to music at home? If you answered "headphones at the gallery" then the CD-ROMS are for you. I can't get into terminal-based work in a gallery setting. Some of the work was glitchy, some was interesting, some was like a multimedia encyclopedia of weird facts and bad philosophy.

Of the other works I found David Malik's astronomical photographs quite beautiful. They can only exist within a history of science, one endpoint to the labour of thousands of people over hundreds of years. In other static images we get a rare insider's view from Isabelle Delmotte's stills from a program exploring her experiences returning to consciousness after epileptic seizures.

Butterflies form the centre of two works, a display from the Mount Glorious Biological Centre and a video by Alex Gillespie and Kathryn Brazier. This work is akin to D'Arcy Thompson's *On Growth and Form* published earlier this century.

Mary Lou Pavlovic creates her own space with a piece I'd like to see in a commercial photocopying centre or library. Mari Velonaki's piece is voyeuristic but not completely successful for me, a sense of intimacy (shame/intrigue?) is not easy to create in a gallery. Tracy Benson puts you into the space of her work courtesy of chroma-keying. Unfortunately the piece was not working so no trip to the country for me.

Most of the work in *Sci-Art 99* could only be produced at this end of history. Works like the astronomical photographs, the medical images, the A-life programs, and the perceptual extensions require a history of science to exist. Many of the works are suited to a more personal setting or use than the gallery can offer. CD-ROMS in the home, streaming video etc. And for me, I'd love to see Donovan's devices for perceptual extension in plastic and sold over the net.

Greg Hooper

## Life beyond capture

*Screen\_Imag(in)ings: Towards a Digital Aesthetic Conference, A Screen\_Image Event* ([http://artweb.imago.com.au/screen\\_image](http://artweb.imago.com.au/screen_image))  
University of the Sunshine Coast, September 8, MAAP

*Screen\_Image*, an exhibition currently on show at the University of the Sunshine Coast (till October 10), was developed around the idea of the screen dump or screen capture. At its simplest, the screen dump 'captures' everything on the interface and saves it as a file. Using this feature of the computer, the artists have created a series of complex images that work with and manipulate the potential of the 'screen dump'.

On the screen, the image is 'alive', still open to endless possibilities for manipulation. The print-out of a screen dump, on the other hand, bears resemblance to a 'film still,' one frame, frozen in time, taken and presented as a work away from the context of the film. Both the film still and the screen dump have a life beyond the frame/capture we are viewing.

However, even in the printed form, there is a key difference between the film still and the screen dump. Whereas the film still betrays no trace of its source, the screen dump does. In the 'capture' all the traces

of the interface—the cursor, the desktop—are maintained and become part of the work. These features 'frame' the work and become integral to a reading of it. Thus Margaret Turner's *fingers* is built around and works with the structure of her computer's interface—the multiple files through which she cycled, the tool bars and layers of Photoshop. Her inclusion of the imported Yellow Pages slogan 'let your fingers do the walking', refers back to the most erotic tool of the Photoshop repertoire, the smudge tool.

But what of life beyond the capture? The exhibition suggested a momentary closure, but as Margaret Turner points out, "the undo command can suspend forever the closure of a work. No decision need ever be final." What we saw on the walls of the gallery was a moment, a snapshot if you like. Nevertheless, in selecting a particular 'screen dump', decisions and judgements were made. Why this moment and not that? How can we talk about this 'stuff'? On what basis do we give value to it? How is our collective experience of aesthetics and space restructured by the communicational architecture of screen-based imagery? My sense in looking at the work in the exhibition is that many of the artists hadn't thought these questions through. It appeared that many were using the same criteria they would use if they were exhibiting a drawing, a painting, a print or a photograph. It just happened to be framed by the interface. It raised the question: is there a distinctly digital aesthetic, and if so how do we begin to define it and work with it?

In her paper "Distinctly Digital" Turner suggested that digital aesthetics are not just about artwork, but about the place of the digital in all areas of our lives. She argued "the digital is a place where individuals are seeking to create new structures with which to navigate the whirlpools of change."

The new structures or 'syntax' (undo, redo, zoom, resolution, link, node and distributed structure) Turner identified in her paper have been borrowed directly from the digital realm and are put to use in a pragmatic and enabling way. Thus taking the analogy of the undo and redo commands, she suggests that as humans we should recognize that "we keep revisiting the stage of our own dramas, repeating our mistakes, and...(that we) should learn to reuse or redo, rather than flee or panic." While at the global level we may be "an insignificant pixel in a huge, moving, uncoordinated and undirected, interactive movie...there is also the zoom tool." She suggests "at the level of the detail of our lives, that is also where the action is." This emphasis on a micro-politics is further supported by her discussion on connectivity and the network as a distributed system. Turner claims:

*Our lives, like digital stories on the web, appear to drift or meander between nodes of attraction. The meaning is not given to us but is ours to collect and construct following a path of our own making. It is mercurial and evanescent, a playful space akin to an improvisatory performance involving the whole world. And we all end up in different places.*

In the tradition of aesthetics, value has been accorded in terms of 'taste.' For Turner aesthetics can no longer be framed in terms of taste, but rather in terms of its resonance with the conditions of living and vice versa. In this rethinking, questions of connectivity and affinity become central to the value of a work, as do questions of forgiveness. While the consequences of action in real life may be unforgiving, in the virtual world there is always the possibility of "reprieve in the form of the undo command." Would that life could be so forgiving?

*Screen\_Image was initiated by the techno-reading group Terminus= and was first exhibited at PICA in Perth in February 1999. Thanks to Margaret Turner for allowing me access to the text of "Distinctly Digital."*

Barbara Bolt

## To touch memory

*Maryanne Lynch interviews Amanda Heng*  
APT Performances/Talks  
Queensland Art Gallery, September 9

*In 1993 the Singapore Government passed a law forbidding the practice of performance art without a licence. This licence cost \$10,000, far beyond most artists' reach, so new terms of self-description were found to avoid the cost.*

Amanda Heng is describing to me one aspect of the culture in which she practises her work as we stand in front of *Narrating bodies*, her installation of photographs, mirrors and manipulated objects. Later I will see her standing in various stages of undress and at different points in relation to the work; for one long period with a pair of red synthetic women's underpants on her head, covering

her face, glasses neatly placed over them, staring blindly at a mirror.

*My project is to understand who I am. I reconstruct memories, and re-present them. As a Singaporean of Chinese descent, I'm marked by 2 cultures, East and West, and am struggling to reconcile myself. People say we're not affected by colonial rule, but after 150 years of it how can we not be? On the other hand there is much that is Chinese. Including, perhaps, this official response to the same struggle in a broader context.*

There are many photographs of her mother and herself: together, apart, past lives, present moments, bits and pieces. Including two small frames, one containing grey curls and the other strong black locks, their status ambiguous. Amanda points to a cut-off image of her seated mother's arm with her own child arm pressing against it from an upright position.

*Touch has been an important part of my search. In Chinese culture body contact is very rare. We don't talk about it either. There are no words for 'I love you.' When I began working with my mother in 1995, one of the first things we did was to strip naked and embrace each other. I want to find these unsaid/undone things.*

Amanda has worked as a performance artist for several years, and before that as a printmaker. In recent years she has pursued a photographic study of her relationship with her mother, which began when her mother asked her to organise her funeral portrait. (In Chinese culture such a portrait is displayed at the funeral of the deceased and, like the purchasing of graves in Australia, people prepare themselves for their death well before the event.) From this beginning Amanda and her mother have discovered new dimensions to their relationship and, for the artist, new responses to who she is.

*Part of my questioning has been to go back to my mother. 'Mother' is a fundamental beginning. To go back to her is reconciling myself. But it involves her receiving me, my touch. At first she couldn't. She was brought up in China and has different ways. But now we make work without me needing to discuss or explain its rationale. She trusts what I'm doing. In turn I've discovered my assumptions about my mother and about me as a daughter, and about each of us as a person.*

This emphasis on touch is extended into the body as a whole. As with some traditions of performance art (and traces of influences are evident), the body is a site of interrogation for Amanda Heng. She seems to hold two views.

*The body, whether you're Eastern or Western, is there. (And...) I want to focus on the body as a site for cultural markings—how changes in the cultural context are reflected in the body.*

The obvious cultural markers, such as the cheongsam glimpsed in several of the images, is not where I see this latter intention. Instead it's in the assemblage of fragmented images, and their installation in the style of a formal portrait gallery where the prepared passage of the eye creates surprising resonances between images. A girl's schooldress becomes a mother's print apron; permed hair vs bob; two pairs of feet. Inheritance becomes concrete but the symmetries only show up the questions I begin to ask myself about what forms each of us, and what we share as well as what distinguishes us.

*The beautiful part is discovering these questions. I don't think answers are so important.*

Postscript: After talking to Amanda Heng, I wandered up to a talk by Katsushige Nakahashi in front of his crashed kamikaze installation. Again here was an artist asking questions about the past, and about his relationship with a parent, in order to understand the present. People listened quietly and respectfully; several older Anglo-Australian women nodding their heads in agreement as Katsushige spoke of the ambivalent legacy of war. Then he described his father as a young man, innocently marvelling at the beautiful pinks and purples and blues of the sky as he watched the bomb drop on Nagasaki.



## Going global

APT 3: Beyond the Future,  
Queensland Art Gallery

A zeppelin anchored at the portals of the art gallery is now a ubiquitous art hieroglyph, announcing and summarising the exhibition's theme. These airy creations are provenanced to Kids Kastle, Claes Oldenburg and King Kong, with a footnote to the exhortatory plaster tympanums and colonnades of 19th century Universal Exhibitions. The imaginary entry-point of APT3: Beyond the Future is *Hua Biao*, A Chinese Totem. This pair of inflatable red pillars is modelled on those guarding the entrance to the Forbidden City, facing Tiananmen Square. Shaped in the form of a dagger-axe, with guard-dogs atop, the originals have witnessed imperial comings and goings over 500 years. Originally direction markers for marching armies, these signs became an architectural fixture to remind the emperor of the responsibilities of state, and later became a symbol of a new secular empire. Today it remains a debased yet still tradeable statist symbol of plump new China. Other recent artistic inflations like Maria Kozic's bouncy *Blue Boy* aloft for Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art and Choi Jeong Hwa's *Super Flower* for APT2 certainly had more in common with the decorative humanism of these world art events and with QAG's municipal modern architecture.

What makes Sang Ye and Geremie Barmé's *Hua Biao* more rewarding than a clever gag is not only its send-up of pop triumphalism, but its scholarly archival component inside the gallery, which works as an extended wall-label accompanied by a laughingly compressed history of 20th century China video loop. In fact, this 'visitor information' and accompanying jolly red behemoth carries much of the APT's intellectual work. *Hua Biao* is the APT's emblem of that curious re-separation of form and content, spectacle and information that characterises many contemporary art events. Without the history we are left with spectacle. As the Warlpiri APT participant Michael Nelson Jagamara has declared of his gelato-coloured painting-signs, "without the story, the work is nothing."

The APT's democratic tenor provides artists with rich critical contrasts and entertaining encounters: Jun-Jieh Wang's global-life travel agency *Neon Urlaub* advertises tours from Hong Kong to Balkan war zones while, in a similar darkly comic vein, Tatsuo Miyajima's *Running Time* collides and re-circulates unseen dodgem cars illuminated with LED count-down numbers. Heisenberg and Einstein are brought together in one small, darkened, battery-powered technology clinic, and theories of time and space are cut to artistic cloth. At the art cornucopia a spectator can move from the macro to the micro in the space of a few metres, for across the court Alfredo and Isabel Aquiliza's *Project Be-longing #2* is a museum installation of everything you never thought you wanted to know about the ethnography of Brisbane's Philipino community, courtesy of the artists' cousins.

Not all works are equally favoured in this context. Easily overlooked though poor positioning, Tissa de Alwis's *Yellow Set*, *Blue Set*, *Green Set* of plasticine armies, was a marvel of this genre. While colonial museology demanded instructive 'types' representative of caste, class and occupation, these quaint Lilliputians, however, make an intimate connection between the artist's studio and nearby Sri Lankan battlefields. The history of the Universal Exhibition is ironically repeated, with an assortment of mechanical wonders, scientific speculations, fine art and handicrafted objects assembled under the imaginary crystal palace of art.

APT3 artists show a renewed concern for globalisation and cultural commodification (the aphorism "global" was frequently invoked). Some directly address this issue, such as Vong Phaophanit's *Untitled* neon, which renders Laotian script sculptural (to non-Laotian eyes) but remains resistant and untranslated. Other projects maintain built-in 'ceci n'est pas un empty spectacle' devices. *Tulana Mahu* (*Shrine to Abundance*), the cargo container contributed by the Tahiono Arts Collective from Niue, and work performed over several days by Lawrence Purtang and artists from New Ireland province were good examples of art forcing the spectator to see them in their own terms. Curator Michael Mel's great throwaway line when introducing the work, "I've just got a few housekeeping points to make," neatly positioned potent tradition against grey clichés.

That is not to say that artworks should not look spectacular. *Bilong of Meri* (literally translated as "belonging to the women") is a continuous woven bilum by Ruth Sari and the Aketauka Sori Mama group from the outskirts of Goroka. It was suspended upside-down, halfway up a dark and narrow dis-

abled access ramp. There was no opportunity for close viewing. This collaborative work needed a spectacular hang to do justice to the complex issues of traditional creativity, women's status in PNG society and culture, and the topical question of cultural/linguistic diversity within national unity which the work seeks to both convey and symbolise. Museum architecture has always privileged Big Things over Big Concepts.

Artists in APT3 are cautiously re-writing the Universal Exhibition's legacy of an idealist (though historically imperialist) space of communication across cultures. Are there many conversations? The established Central Desert and Yogyakarta workshops, Utopia Batik and Brahma Tirta Sari Studio, provided an exemplary instance of regional dialogue based on specialist technical knowledge. More importantly, the resulting exquisite (though again badly-lit) collaborative batiks were enabled because both workshops recognised conceptual parallels. As Anmatyerr artist Gloria Angal explains in the exhibition catalogue, "Their *caps* [copper stamps] have Law, and they have Law, in the same way that Aboriginal people have Law." Both workshops are motivated to continue their longstanding collaboration through a mutual desire to maintain tradition and wider cultural respect.

Rummana Hussain's hospital-mosque room also seeks an ethics of communication across ethnic, cultural and religious divides. A *space for healing*, Hussain's last project before her death, is "a metaphoric healing space that is a 'hospital' for the body and a 'mosque' for the soul," as Gulammohammed Shiekh puts it. A leading artist-activist, Hussain's fight against fundamentalism has inspired many. A convivial yet equally contemplative meeting space is provided by Sonabai, an artist from the Rajwar community of Sarguja, Bihar who generously recreates her everyday cosmology.

*Crossing Borders* is a new and welcome curatorial category in this APT, a device to break down 'national' presentations. This timely inclusion of artists living and working outside their country of origin opens the field to inclusions such as New York-based Shahzia Sikander, whose sensual, delicately-layered derivations from miniature-painting would not be easily shown in her home country of Pakistan. A more literal crossing is the popular bamboo bridge designed by US-based Chinese artist Cai Guo Qiang. *Bridge Crossing* provides a passage across the gallery watercourse folly and metaphorically bridges anything the participant imagines.

The communication theme has its lighter side in the interactive-intensive Kids' APT section (thronged by all ages). Slow down. Learn New English Calligraphy with Xu Bing. Build your own model bridge. Sketch goldfish in Surasi Kusolwong's studio-lounge redolent of ancient Ayutthaya. Fill out a questionnaire for Durriya Kazi and David Alesworth about your own home *Sweet Medina*. Try Masato Nakamura's translation exercise. Write a letter and lodge it in one of Lee Mingwei's 3 poste-restante booths. Read others' private mail. Visit the APT3 web-site on the computers. Eat kangaroo meat and frogs' legs from Mella Jaarsma's culturally elegant mobile kitchen. Attend the conference. Sign petitions calling for an immediate UN peace-keeping force in East Timor.

Interactivity is no model for activism, however. The least 'interactive' work in the APT are the Indonesian installations which deal with organised violence and militarism. Indeed, an expressionist aesthetic based on the body in *extremis* has characterised selected Indonesian work through all 3 APTs, as representing a banned, progressive tendency in Indonesian art during the 33 years of Soeharto's New Order regime. The legacy continues in Tisna Sanjaya's *Thinking With The Knee*, which assembles the debris of an agit-prop procession in downtown Bandung. Individual elements within the installation worked well, such as the military camouflage T-shirts printed with an Esperanto of paradise gardens: 'Visit Timor.' Against the artists' intentions, however, the installation signified museological commodification not political agency. Despite an accompanying video, this work intensified an unease about works not being in their right place, sometimes a problem of removing objects from their performative context.

More successful was the Darwin-based Dadang Christanto's remembrance of the May 1998 massacre of Chinese Indonesians, titled *Fire in May*, an outdoor installation of 47 lifesize papier-mache figures, painted in suggested gold-leaf and roughly trussed in black plastic hoods. The artist systematically burnt each one on the second day of the exhibition, leaving unburnt heads on poles. This act was given added potency and was perhaps prompted by reports coming in of a massacre in a church in East Timor by the same military.



Sang Ye and Geremie Barmé *Hua Biao*, A Chinese Totem

The exhibition proved far more rewarding and informative than the conference proceedings, which made the latter's prohibitive cost particularly galling. It put attendance beyond the reach of most artists, freelancers and students. More importantly, perhaps, participants could have taken the cue from Christanto's action and called for artists to veil their sculptures and turn their paintings to the wall. Closing the APT down, at least temporarily, would have registered as a proper form of international diplomatic pressure. The general feeling of helplessness regarding East Timor that periodically washed over the exhibition and conference seems in immediate retrospect to be extraordinarily timid. These international art events have traditionally served as political ambassadors, and while the APT is not APEC, it is an important state agency. This APT is long on artistic creativity, but short on political imagination. By failing to substantiate the art gallery's claims to be a powerful independent forum, APT3 unintentionally looked more to past inter-colonial display and largesse than "Beyond the Future."

Jo Holder and Catriona Moore

## Bang Pop!

Rick Vermey talks to fellow MAAP99 *net.works!* artist Feng Mengbo

RV It has been a truly hectic schedule for us this week, what with both the MAAP activities and workshoping ideas for our *net.works!* collaborative site and all...so this seems like a rare, quiet moment. Let's talk!

FM Yeah, sure...you want to ask me question?

RV OK. Your movie Q3 reflects some sophisticated insider knowledge of complex video gaming environments—particularly *Quake III*. It's sited firmly in the terrain of a violently anarchic virtual community where the common law dictates a "point and kill" culture of killing to "win." Could you expand on your fascination for violent video games.

FM You know, most of my artworks are based on video games—*Doom* and *Quake II*, till the newest *Quake III Arena*. Actually I am big fan of such violent shooting games. After I spent hundreds of hours to play *Quake III*, nobody believed it is only a game. Shooting each other, then chat a little bit, join teams or just kill around, will drive you crazy and can not give it up...just like a drug. My wife she's asking, "You finish your movie one month ago, why you still do this?" Video game is not only a kind of game for kids, but also a great point which I can start to think about my artworks—it is made for fun, action, a strong AV shock, much chaos and what's important is "much ado about nothing"—just like art.

Video game is the source of arts for our generation—very important for the popular art. Like in the USA 30 years ago, pop artists got something for their art from the popular cultures. I trying to get the good feeling of the contemporary culture—rock and techno—into my works. Maybe not very original, but I can still give the people a little bit of the feeling from my heart.

RV What about the violence?

FM Oh yes...I know. Q3 is not only a most violent game on internet but also a great chance to test everybody in the gamezone. Although there is only nickname in your head, but people still like to make team by country and area...no rules...although there is a question mark up on you to maintain the others

don't kill me when I chat, but who cares, will kill me still. They will go back to shoot on your body again, even if you're already dead...but the real life is ten time violent than a game. Violence is from terror. I try to make this work like a movie.

RV You also make interactive artworks, right? Like the CD-ROM projects and installation, Taking Mt Doom by Strategy. What is your feeling now about digital interactive artforms?

FM It is maybe the first media for artist can really create artwork interaction with audience...the computer based digital artworks such as website and CD-ROMs. Tech is progressing, we will get more medias very soon—3D realtime rendering, VR, interactive more than mouse, glasses instead, monitors...anyway the more tech we can use, the more possibility we have. Everything will be available.

Internet is the great chance for artists. Not only it is the most interactive media today, but also the media which will shock system of arts. I believe the museum/gallery/artist/critic system will exist long time, but it will be a lot of young artists move to internet. There will be questions come with this, such as "what is art?"

RV Good question...

## Nicely displaced: APT3 and the senses

Tatsuo Miyajima, Sang Ye and Geremie Barmé, Li Yang Bin, Elision, Nasato Nakamura, Kim Young-Jin, APT3

I lean into a large black pit populated with the random traffic of bright LED numbers, a small buzzing swarm of techno-fireflies. The numbers cut in and out, are mounted on unseen battery-powered cars, thump into walls, sense each other, change course, lock into a neurotic circuit in a corner or traverse the whole space boldly. Patterns emerge, events recur, or seem to: it's Chaos down there and it's a giddy pleasure to survey, a satisfying pointlessness or the potency of possibilities—someone says, you could bet on this. Pick a number. (Tatsuo Miyajima, *Running time*)

It seems already that my first day at APT3 will consistently push and pull at the senses. A ring of video monitors displaying hugely popular western-style ballroom dancing in China envelops me, the sweep of the dancers magnified in the swirl of dresses and the play between 2 kinds of video. The first, of competition dancing is from television and, location aside, is so saturated with convention it could have been shot almost any time anywhere in the last 40 years. The other seems to have been recorded in a studio, the clothes are street-modern, mobile phones and keyrings on the male hips, sensual fabrics swinging out from the women. We mostly see bodies only from chest to knee, no focus on faces (unlike the locked-in, uneasy ecstasy of the competition dancers), except for occasional cutaways to an aerial view of all the dancers moving through pools of light in a darkened studio. There is a stylish everydayness, even erotic charm, to this, amplified by occasional slow motion, a lingering over the pleasure of fabrics and touch.

As well as being absorbed into the movement of cameras and dancers, and being displaced between contemporaneous old ballroom and modern,

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## APT3 & MAAP99

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between formal and casual, there is a cultural question mark tugging at me, wanting answers. Why this Chinese preoccupation? Why my discomfort with the competition dancing, something so archaic, so imported? How long has this been going on, how long tolerated? Why my pleasure with the coolly framed alternative, which could also be anywhere, just as bereft of cultural specifics, so obviously staged but feeling more real, done for pleasure not for prize, comforting, but, a step back, just as strange? The questions break up the rhythm, I look for help, I leave the elevated dance floor to these cultural spirits.

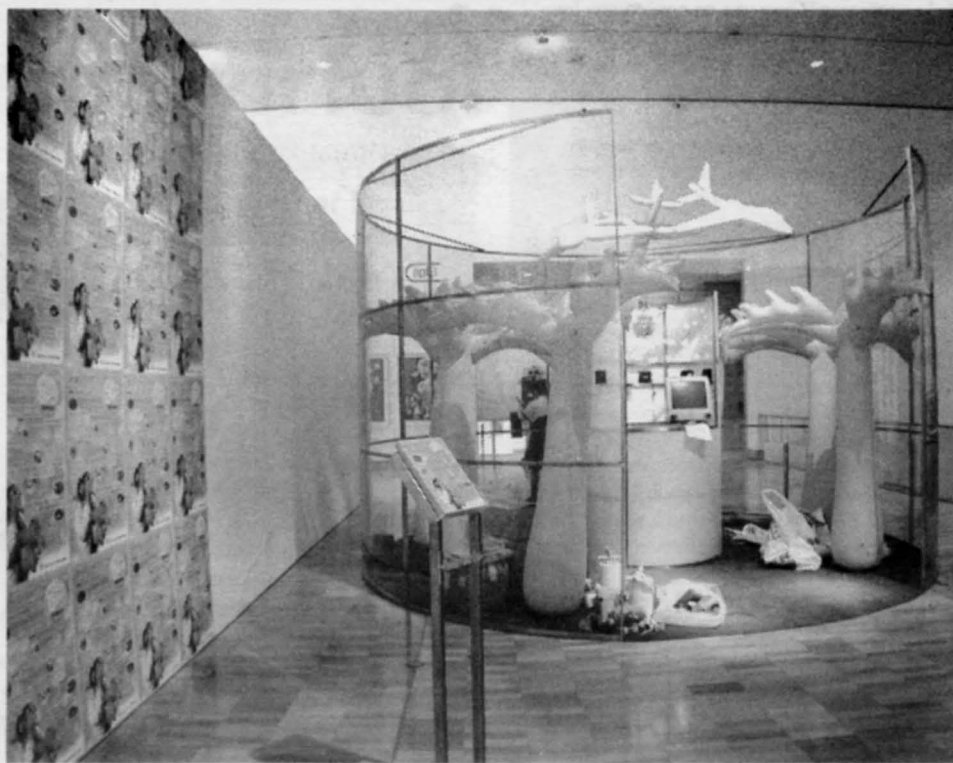
I need a seat, but for my next long encounter one is not to be had. Sang Ye and Geremie Barmé's *Hua Biao*, a Chinese Totem is a more cerebral experience, a cultural studies adventure via video, a strip of printed information on the wall, and three Hau Biao axes (precursors to the Tiananmen Square monuments)—and the huge inflatable versions that frame the gallery entrance. It seems that these 'dagger-axes' were once used as road markers, indicating direction. Later, large scale, sculpted versions were used for the posting of public complaint, the writers free of the possibility of prosecution...until tyrants decided otherwise and the Hua Biao became indicators of a ruler's supreme authority. Aspects of these icons also reminded an emperor of his responsibilities—to look out to the world from his palace and, when away, to be mindful of home. The video is the centrepiece of this educational installation, and it's a dizzyingly potted history of a couple of thousand years of Chinese culture and politics, nicely crafted but too sketchy to be informative, too dry to be entertaining (despite the variety of footage and the odd irony—Mao's slip-of-the-tongue declaration of "The People's Democratic Republic of China"), pumping out the facts, empires, rulers, the mega-deaths, the curiosities ("the rich to their frustration found driving not as fast as walking"). Best are the brief approaches to visitors to Tiananmen Square and Mao's burial place, who, like us, have no idea when asked what the Hua Biao are. Finally we are struck by the larger irony of their continued presence. This is one of those works that, if you've got the patience, adds up, stays with you, even if it never escapes its pedagogic impulse.

Li Yangbin's *Face I*, *Face II*, *Face III* places me inside 3 screens onto which are rear-projected the artist's face in distorted permutations. The rhythms of each projection are quite different—in one his face is morphed in alternation with an older woman's at a steady beat, creating a single, orange, sweating, fearful visage of ghostly uncertainty. On another screen, the movement rarely perceptible, the lower part of the artist's face is stable, but from the nose up the blue head swells gigantically with a spot of white light emanating from its core (an effect achieved apparently from reflection of the artist's face in a heated plastic mirror). On the third screen, pulsing furiously, is the artist's face reflected in black calligraphic ink, the face only visible from time to time as its image distorts into a sudden white blooms and bulges like a sheet caught by the wind. This is a haunting trilogy of self-portraits rich in psychological suggestiveness and technical prowess. It drew me in. It drew me back. It reminded me of works seen in recent years where real time video portraiture works a painterly magic and goes beyond.

Elision's *sonorous bodies* (Brisbane City Gallery) is another space to lose myself in, a dark catacomb glowing here and there with Judith Wright's video images of intimate bodies, light, surfaces, and aurally shaped by Liza Lim's calligraphic score for koto player Satsuki Odamura. On a screen behind the musician, a hand paints ideograms on an open palm. You choose where to place yourself, stretched out on the carpeted floor, taking in 2 or 3 screens, fusing with the gentle rhythms of the images and the bending koto notes that reach around catacomb corners. This is a purely sensual experience, liquid and complete.

Curiously, back at the APT3, a silent room in the Queensland Art Gallery offers an uneasy totality. In Masato Nakamura's *mm* the light is an embracing yellow, until you detect a subtle purple and revel in the blend. But a sensual experience is rendered odd by the major light source—2 giant McDonald's Ms cast the colours that saturate the room and those who enter it. The work, from Japan is sponsored by, amongst others, McDonalds and the Kirin Brewery, and the Ms come directly from McDonalds. If you can put aside all that, it's a nice space to be in, to analyse the colour, to watch its effects on skin and possessions, to feel the absence of an outside, as if you were in a room in a 2001 space station awaiting transportation...or rebirth...or to be processed.

Of rooms, finally, Kim-Young-Jin's *Walking on a*



Jun-Jieh Wang *Neon Urlaub*—Agency version 1997-99

*balance beam* is one of the most satisfying, disorienting and interactive of all the installations. It's a bizarre language lesson, a series of rapidly projected facial images and ideograms with matching sounds, all triggered by the movements of viewers. Escalate your moves and the single sounds accumulate and become densely choral and the still images of the speaker aggregate into a stream of facial expressions. I felt like a happily mad conductor eliciting a great performance. APT3 generously offers sensual spaces that take me deep inside myself...and well outside, in a series of benign displacements without ever leaving cultural difference out of the picture, sometimes placing it centre stage, not necessarily as an issue, but as a sound, a look, a touch, a colour.

Keith Gallasch

### Art patron as lucky winner

*Neon Urlaub*—Agency version, Jun-Jieh Wang, APT3

A vertical cylinder booth of polished stainless steel houses a red i-Mac computer. Halogen lights illuminate the scene. The setup evokes immediately the type of promotional stand used in shopping malls and in tourist traps like Surfers Paradise and Noosa.

LCD monitors embedded in its exterior display ads for goods and services like travel and luxury cars in garish colours on tiny screens, each no bigger than a cigarette packet. Surrounding the kiosk installation are 8 foot high bright pink inflatable palm trees and surrounding them yet more promotional mini-architecture—thin display board walls which umbrella-like assemble into a fully surrounding display enclosure.

A picture perfect hostess in shiny metallic silver padded space costume presents handouts, moving in affected slow motion like one of those mime artists in malls who pretend to be (yawn) statues or robots.

Artist Jun-Jieh Wang gets the website up on the i-Mac again (it's been crashing due to the gallery not having its machines wired directly to the net). The irony is you need to be outside the gallery to access the full site. Don't tell me—security, concerns? Or more likely contemporary galleries don't have it together to make sure internet installations are properly connected for artists who use the net. The EFTPOS and Visa connections always seem to work OK in the gallery bookshop and bistro though, I notice. In an exhibit which is so self-consciously about connections, not having adequate technical support is pretty lame...

Anyway, you kids at home surf to:

[www.icf.de/neonurlaub](http://www.icf.de/neonurlaub)

The opening screen reads:

Welcome to *Neon Urlaub*, the world's largest, best chain travel agency. "Neon Urlaub" this season proudly presents the *Neon Holiday Delight Super Combination Series*. All tours are fabulous beyond belief. Enjoy a total experience you have never known. If you make reservations now, all the gifts are yours to take home!

Oh, I get it. It's a parody of travel agency culture—a culture jammed tourist kiosk which so resembles its real life counterpart in parts of Queensland that I'm fooled into thinking the place is real, the promotions for free cars are real (the

exhibition does have a competition which is real, however.) Only the gallery setting indicates the work's status as knowing 'assimilation' (in the words of the artist) of the mediascape's lust for cute, for day-glo dazzle, and forms to fill in including name, address, credit card number and card expiry date. But looking around the website I notice that the tours advertised here are to war zones. The Balkan Peninsula. The Taiwan Strait. You are expected to fill in the competition forms on the website and the installation, or by not doing so, at least be made aware of what that actually means—to tell strangers everything about who you are and what you desire.

Herein lies the not so subtle venom of the work—with Taiwan and China most likely about to go to war soon over territorial claims, and with the globe divided to this day into pro and anti market force economics, the language and syntax of the promotional advertising culture of global e-commerce are being used in the *Neon Urlaub* to defamiliarise the glitz and the glamour most associated with it.

As Guy Debord wrote (and put to film) in *Society of the Spectacle*:

*Tourism, human circulation considered as consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities, is fundamentally nothing more than the leisure of going to see what has become banal. The economic organisation of visits to different places is already in itself the guarantee of their equivalence. The same modernisation that removed time from the voyage also removed from it the reality of space.*

The removal of the reality of space and time from global economics, militarism and marketing is what *Neon Urlaub* is all about. It is the mixing up of all that technology, all that glamour with what really, truly makes it all happen. Guns, police and men in uniform.

The right to autonomy, for Taiwan at least, is the right to reinforce itself as a site of marketing, promotion, manufacturing and global commerce. Its value to the west as well as to itself is through manufacturing, technology, trade and commerce. These are the official monetary values which it is willing to hold proudly like a moral shield when the time comes to confront China with real guns and real artillery.

To treat the world as a site for play and for recreation is for the average tourist seldom linked to the realpolitik which underpins the global economy. Few international tourists in Bali know of that island (or this island of Australia for that matter) as a training site for the Indonesian military who have applied their deadly skills in subordinating East Timor for 25 years. Thus in reality as in fine art, tourism is, even though masked, linked directly to war—"holidays in other people's misery" as the Situationists would say. "Belsen is a Gas," to quote the Sex Pistols.

I'm reminded in *Neon Urlaub* of Melbourne artist Troy Innocent and also the work of Patricia Piccinini. It shares with that Melbourne mid-90s techno school of design art a similarly garish, cartoony iconography appropriating the hyperbole and breathless optimism of advertising. That's Mel-

bourne these days for you.

Like Innocent's work, there is little overt or direct criticism of the society of the spectacle, rather a kind of bittersweet postmodern fascination with its modes of operation. The pink inflatable trees of *Neon Urlaub*'s installation are Jeff Koons-like—a similar and playful pomo kitsch-writ-large. They say "This is your/our cute commercial world, only by being bigger and more obvious, it is now a subject for informed consideration."

Inflatable art is popular these days. Like television jingles, and the theme songs to 70s sitcoms, inflatable art connotes retail, point of sale, promotional ersatz instantaneousness and the provisional display stand culture of the suburbs. It is a place we all know about if we are from the 'burbs in Australia because we were probably at the mall when we were not around the suburban dinner table. It is what McKenzie Wark calls "third nature." The media as a real and self-defining space of the imagination and shared, collective identity. It is real, but not really. It's all hot air. It looks like computer graphics and shares with it a provisional kind of geospatial temporariness. If postmodernism were a product, it would be simultaneously virtual, online, inflatable and on the Toys R Us shelf.

This is possibly why 2 giant inflatable tethered red columns bounce around outside the entrance to the gallery. The stoic classicism of state led institutions has been pumped up good and proper, but you know a good pin prick would make the whole thing flatten out in minutes. Play and politics meet here between these blow-up columns—this is APEC summit held in a bouncy castle.

The politics of PR seldom go questioned in our increasingly global economic society—the sheer amount of data able to be collected from ordinary and usually unwitting people filling in questionnaires, answering phone polls, and otherwise handing over personal details for the purposes of someone else's not so secret trade in market demographics.

Both police and admen need the same type of data to do their jobs. Processing people as machine parts in social organisation is a neverending task.

The real menace is that the information used by PR and advertising people in global settings where tourism and marketing are controlled and buttressed by the military has a potentially lethal role to play in dubious notions of "national security" and "sovereignty." These vague catch-all phrases are so often the justification for acts of terror and barbarism as has been seen so blatantly this week in the post-East Timor ballot orgy of death, a mere 2 hours north of Darwin. 'Them' knowing who you are suddenly can mean you go from a cheerful competition entrant to a death list entry.

Despite the rarefied and slightly trade showy feel to this year's Asia Pacific Triennial, the *Neon Urlaub* installation/performance/display succeeds in problematising the commercial sheen of the military entertainment complex.

Debord again:

*When art becomes independent, depicts its world in dazzling colours, a moment of life has grown old and it cannot be rejuvenated with dazzling colours. It can only be evoked as a memory. The greatness of art begins to appear only at the dusk of life.*

David Cox

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# Languages of fascination

Keith Gallasch talks to Benedict Andrews, resident director Sydney Theatre Company, and director *ur/Faust*, Adelaide Festival 2000

KG How do you feel about joining a state theatre company?

BA I've done 3 projects with the Sydney Theatre Company. And when I did I purposely chose pieces which couldn't be seen as auditions for the main stage. Marivaux's *La Dispute* is such a miniature and such an obscure piece, but the company put it in the main program and said we could do the *ur/Faust* workshop. The first piece I did was *Attempts on her Life—12 scenarios for the theatre*. It's all about a woman who doesn't exist called Anne. It's a bit similar in style to what we were doing with *ur/Faust* with mikes and we had a DJ and did it downstairs in Wilson Street. But there are no characters, just dashes on a page, so again it's outside the mainframe. I like being there and I like the idea of having a home. I've also been associated with the State Theatre Company in Adelaide over the past 4 years as Assistant Director, with Magpie and directing Patrick Marber's *Closer* just before I came here. Part of me kind of likes the idea of working within a bigger company and still getting to explore diversity in my work.

KG You don't want to be locked into a conventional program?

BA No and from the first discussions I had with Robyn Nevin I don't think she's at all interested in that and Wesley Enoch (the other resident director at STC) has obviously got very specific interests. She's interested in us articulating not just what we might bring to the company but what we might learn from the company. I quite like being in one space for a time and actually having longer development time on ideas outside of rehearsal as well. And also just getting to know a community of performers up here. It's a good opportunity.

KG It can be pretty bleak outside the large companies. The diminishing frequency of grants means that quite significant artists are lucky to get money to do one show every 2 years.

BA I believe really strongly in the place of state theatres. Certainly when I first graduated (from Flinders University) I felt I was working in opposition to the state company system. That was really important. I don't feel that so much any more. But even looking at the big European companies as the model, I think you have to have those big well-funded companies who often do really polished work and often have too much in the way of resources. I'd like to think that there can be a change within them, that the answer to getting audiences is not always rampant conservatism. I'm still perversely fascinated with seeing if you can actually push it further so that there'll be more and more people who'll get more and more excited by it.

KG Current marketing models, unfortunately, are based on appealing to an audience who knows what it wants rather than creating one from the appeal and challenge of the work.

BA I think Robyn has very strong ideas about giving space for artists within the company again. And if you're going to make that decision, then you have to take the responsibility to let them take risks too.

KG You direct play scripts, but in *ur/Faust* you're clearly working in a tradition which I'd call contemporary performance. Its kinship is with Robert Wilson, the Wooster Group etc and that kind of tradition which has been very strong in Sydney since the early 80s in its own distinctive ways. In *ur/Faust*, you have enormous licence. The constraints are in the material and in the strength of your performers but really you're free to cut and paste, to create images and whatever. When you get to do something like the Marivaux or Marber, are they different worlds for you or do you see them as part of a continuum, or do you feel a certain kind of constraining responsibility when you get on to

that mainstage playing to that subscription audience?

BA Not with the Marivaux. Having done the workshop on it, you can play with the frames around it really strongly and you have to because *La Dispute* is a bit of a freak in the Marivaux catalogue. It's the weird one he left in the bottom drawer. It's a beautiful little fable that you need to play with. It almost had a Lecoq feel about it in workshop—really little to really big and little animals playing with each other and a journey from being little children playing round in a sandbox touching each other's genitals to growing up and being these *Dangerous Liaisons* characters. With the Patrick Marber, it was so minimalist, and self-conscious in terms of set and costume choices that the job there was not to embellish at all but to keep stripping right back. And to do it you have to believe in what the writer's doing, you have to like the text and then like the blood and guts behind the text. There it was about stripping back and playing with secrets passing between the performers. I was thinking this morning that this idea, this continuity between things may be invisible, because what a huge contrast *Closer* is with *ur/Faust*! I don't think it's even the contexts necessarily. Although opening *ur/Faust* in Weimar frees me up a bit from knowing I was opening here...but knowing that you're taking Goethe to the Germans! When I took on the job, it was part of the brief from the people in Weimar. They wanted a loud, iconoclastic production. In *Closer* the emotions aren't clean but it's clean, direct, simple...

KG You don't feel governed by naturalism when you're doing that or feel that's your first obligation?

BA Sure. I like naturalism too. But I think there's a form of naturalism that's a cliché, that's just another performance genre. A friend came along (to see *Closer*) who doesn't go to the theatre and said, gee it's sort of like Cassavetes. Someone else said it looked like Abel Ferrara. That was a form of, I don't know, psychological realism or heightened realism but everything within that naturalism was very beautiful and composed and almost like it was out of the pages of an *i-D* magazine or a Prada ad—we actually used those really composed Prada ads with the white backgrounds and a lot of photography like Wolfgang Tillmans, Jürgen Keller and a lot of that contemporary photography from London. So everything was really stylised but we were still after emotional truth—whatever that is—in the performance. This naturalism for me is in most theatre I do—every gesture is really composed. Even in *ur/Faust* where you know it's choreographed. Nevertheless, it's got to look unique and invented and like it's never happened before. But actually the same gesture's happening every time. I like it then—if we call *Closer* naturalism—that we take a seemingly ordinary exchange between 2 strangers all about desire and break it down into tiny, tiny components over and over again, so that it can't be called naturalism any more. When you break it down into these molecular things then put it together again, there's something about looking at it from so many angles.

KG What about vision? You're still relatively early in your career, working with a diverse group of plays without any sense of conflict. You're addressing them in a similar way. Do you feel a sense of unfolding vision or unfolding desire of the work you want to create. Is *ur/Faust* indicative of the direction you want to go?

BA I kind of like to stumble from fascination to fascination. I knew right from the first workshop that *ur/Faust* would use the microphones but beyond that the style kept evolving. It could have been a whole series of different things. I probably always thought that what I'm doing with *ur/Faust* is more where I'd prefer my work to go and where certain strands

of it have always been heading. But I think it's then really nice to cross over to a completely different type of thing.

KG I'm not just thinking about style or technique. What do you think you're about? Even if you haven't sorted it out yet, even if it's fascination, what's the key thing that drives you? Earlier in this conversation you mentioned the audience. What is it about the relationship with the audience?

BA I'm interested in how people watch and why they watch and voyeurism in an audience and an awareness and turning that watching back. I also love getting people my own age who don't go to the theatre to come along and enjoy this as much as I do. I used to play around much more with the ways we watch, literally. The grid in *ur/Faust* is something about breaking up that watching.

KG The depth of field.

BA Perspective.

KG That's something I thought you could probably have exploited more in the work. Having set it up, most of the playing happens virtually forward of the grid which defeats a certain expectation. It's certainly something you notice when you watch European theatre, that depth of field can be astonishing and not just as naturalistic perspective. You realise how two dimensional most English-Australian theatre is. Only very occasionally someone breaks that frame, so it's really interesting to see you try it.

BA When we do it in Weimar, there's another platform up the back in the area where the water bottles and the punching bag are. There's actually a different traffic going this way that I think you actually need to be further away than you are able to be in Wilson Street. There's a kind of choice in making a lot of it very flat—that's what that table's about. Trying to make the composition really, really flat.

On vision, I used to enjoy making big sweeping statements about vision in my work but I'm actually very suspicious of myself doing it now.

KG So we've sorted out the naturalism on the one hand and a more symbolic performance realm on the other and you're not seeing those as particularly separate. There's a strong emphasis on image and gesture and recurrence in the way you talk about the Marber and *ur/Faust*. A lot of directors would, in the end, see image as secondary, as background that informs the action. But the idea that the design is image driving the performance is fairly rare here.

BA Even when I used to do a show with \$200, I couldn't really perceive of theatre without thinking in terms of dimensionality. Even when doing something where a bunch of people are sitting around a table drinking tea and coffee, that whole compositional element is very important to me. And then the politics of bodies running round in space. And the impact of things on the body. It's one of the most important things to me, that the body becomes vulnerable out there and that we're aware of it splitting up in front of us. I sort of use a lot of Freudian stuff—not in the rehearsal room—in looking at those relationships you can see in something like *ur/Faust* with people throwing objects away and bringing them back and the little video camera as a mirror that you can't actually really see yourself in. There are all these little Freudian scribbles all the way through. That and the idea of theatre as a dream or an hallucination. That interests me. That's its special place. Then the idea I've taken from reading and made it mean something completely different to myself, like you do, with Foucault's notion of the heterotopia. That became really important to me in trying to work out what theatre was about. The idea



Benedict Andrews

Tracey Schramm

that it's a place that exists and doesn't exist, where you take things from the rest of the world, from daily reality and they become warped or distorted in there and therefore reveal more about it. A special other place, a hidden place, a hidden landscape. So that's the crossover with naturalism, that's what pushes the naturalism into something else. I guess also in my training I was very influenced by Brecht and that idea of causing us to see things in another way. To push that across into hallucination I think is interesting.

KG The other thing about vision is that an artist be allowed to work consistently with the same materials and resources, most important of all in theatre and performance an ensemble or at least a reasonably recurrent group of performers and other collaborators. I've watched some of Australia's most promising young directors over the last 30 years or so and seen most come to nothing. They don't work with the same performers, the same writers. It's the performers who co-invent or learn the language you as director evolve. I saw an un-lit dress rehearsal of *ur/Faust*, so it's not fair to comment too critically, and I look forward to seeing the finished work in Adelaide after its German showings. I could see what you were doing with the bodies and the gestures, but I could not quite see the bodies connecting, I couldn't see the 'choreography' implicit in the bodies of the performers.

BA I've worked with all of the actors except one at least once before, some as many as 4 times before and couldn't do the type of work I do without the shorthand language that we have. I don't actually feel that the choreography is imposed on them in *ur/Faust* because it was developed by them with me over the process.

KG I wasn't saying it was imposed. I'm saying I can't really see it. Maybe I'm used to seeing people trained in Butoh or Suzuki and so on, so when they do things like that line moving towards the audience they do it with such power. I felt your performers were on the edge of that but they haven't quite connected. Perhaps that happens when you don't have the luxury of enormous creation time.

BA One problem is literally training with them with their bodies. We're only able to do about an hour's training every day. Another one is trying to get them to throw a lot of it away. There are times when they move into stuff which is more Butoh-esque if you like. I'm not interested in that at all. I'm not interested in any of the choreography looking like choreography. Part of the point is that there are these bodies that are often really sloppy and really different, really idiosyncratic bodies that will then hit these tiny little things and throw them away. I can't choreograph at all in a postmodern ballet way—as much as I'm interested in that. I can't do it because my body can't do it. But I am very interested in private little choreographies, so I'm starting to play using my own little languages of fascination. So in the simple act of crashing into the table, I make sure that it's not a dancey fall. We're trying to keep that looseness out there too.

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# Here Be Dragons: keynote provocations

Glenn d'Cruz reports on the 5th Performance Studies Conference in Wales

The picturesque Welsh town of Aberystwyth lies at the end of a railway line. It is not an easy place to get to as many of the delegates to the 5th Performance Studies (PSS) Conference will attest. The journey to Aberystwyth from almost every international airport in the UK is nothing short of arduous (my 7 hour journey from Heathrow was particularly fatiguing thanks to a couple of skinheads who kindly offered to put me on the first plane back "to wherever the fuck I came from"). However, over 400 delegates, a few from distant, exotic lands like Australia, made the pilgrimage to Wales, enduring the hazards posed by jet-lag and the United Kingdom's privatised railroad system, to pay homage to something called Performance Studies.

While not exactly far from the metropolitan centre, Aberystwyth, to paraphrase the words of conference director Richard Gough, stands on the edge of Europe, looking west across the vast expanse of the cold Irish sea. For Gough, the town's geographical location 'on the edge' made it a particularly suitable venue for a conference that aimed to map the boundaries and unexplored hinterlands of performance studies. Jointly sponsored by the Centre for Performance Studies at the University of Wales and Performance Studies International, it was titled *Here Be Dragons*. This phrase was commonly used by medieval cartographers when they reached the limits of their knowledge concerning the territory they were mapping. So, PSS (aka *Here Be Dragons*) was ostensibly about the limits of knowledge, transgression and innovation. Unfortunately, I found no dragons, metaphorical or literal, in Aberystwyth (although one of the barman at the Arts Centre came pretty close). This is not to say that the current crop of performance studies cartographers are actually comfortable with the present maps of their territory. Indeed, many delegates expressed various anxieties about the state of the discipline: is performance studies a distinct academic discipline? How does performance studies differ from other academic disciplines like cultural studies? Given the size of the conference, it is highly probable that individual responses to PSS will differ markedly. Bearing this in mind, what follows is a critical description of the first plenary session. According to the conference organisers this session was intended to set the agenda for the conference by issuing a series of stimulating provocations.

The first plenary session foregrounded the united colours of performance studies. Speakers of various hues and nationalities problematised the discipline's "international" pretensions in a bid to avoid the pitfalls of opening proceedings with a single, univocal keynote address. Guillermo Gómez-Pena, the "world renowned" Chicano experimentalist, began with a witty diatribe against academic critics. Describing himself as "the Mariachi with the big mouth", Gómez-Pena posed a series of provocative questions: what is the responsibility of the critic in relation to the artist? How can the artist respond to the critic? As a performer, Gómez-Pena felt particularly peeved by the fact that critics rarely interact or directly converse with the objects of their analyses. The performance studies analyst, according to the self-styled motor-mouth, interprets performance from

the position of a spectator, rarely making the effort to actually engage performers in conversation. "I feel a nostalgia for colonial anthropology," Gómez-Pena declared, "because at least the anthropologists sat around the campfire and drank with us."

Gómez-Pena also expressed concern about the paucity of serious academic criticism dealing with performance events that take place outside the theatre world's major metropolitan centres (London, New York, Paris, Berlin). Why is this work ignored, he asks? What forums do marginalised, non-metropolitan artists have for "writing back" to the centre? Not content with rallying against the elitist, ethnocentric perspective of academic critics, Gómez-Pena also took a swipe at "fashionable theory", arguing that its criteria for establishing aesthetic excellence generally depends on the pronouncements of various "in-vogue" Gallic theorists. "I suggest", he said, tongue planted firmly in cheek, "that artists form a review board to monitor the ethical behaviour of theoreticians."

Having castigated academics and theoreticians Gómez-Pena then berated anti-intellectual performers. "Can we bridge the gap between unintelligible theory and anti-intellectual art," he mused? Finally, he rallied against what he called "Discovery Channel Multiculturalism" and posed a further question: "what does it mean to be radical when television has commodified radical action?"

Gómez-Pena's engaging address was a hard act to follow, a fact immediately acknowledged by the following speaker, Susan Melrose. Melrose, a highly respected academic in both the UK and Australia, was surprisingly sympathetic towards Gómez-Pena's critical assessment of academic criticism. As a lecturer in an actor training institution, Rose Bruford College, Melrose confessed she was troubled by her 'past' as an advocate of theory. More specifically, she expressed various anxieties about the relationship between performance studies and theory. "Performance studies", she argued, "draws on an eclectic set of discourses to produce more discourse, or performance practices that are prescribed in advance by the discourses they employ." In other words, scholastic performance studies produces theory or "theoretically correct" performance practices which are of little interest to those situated beyond the narrow confines of the academy. Observing that the discursive norms of the university are not universal, Melrose assumes that theory does not circulate outside the university. The disturbing corollary of this position implies that performances staged within an academic context are qualitatively different from those enacted in the 'professional' world. I have seen too many dismal professional theatre productions to fully accept Melrose's thesis. Further, I think it can be convincingly argued that 'theory' has contaminated many different forms of cultural production. For example, references to postmodernism and academic stars like Michel Foucault can be found in contemporary cinema (witness Lisa Cholodenko's *High Art* and Todd Haynes' paean to glam rock, *Velvet Goldmine* — while promoting the film, Haynes actually made several references to his background as a student

of film theory and semiotics).

Melrose went on to accuse the academy of hypocrisy because it generally accepts more students than can ever make a living out of making performance. While this is certainly true, her critique promotes a utilitarian pedagogy that measures 'success' in terms of a narrow set of quantifiable outcomes. Indeed, Melrose argued that performance studies in its current incarnation, and I assume that she was referring to her own institution's articulation of the discipline, is little more than a school for spectators. In short, performance studies possesses little use-value; while fascinated by the performer, performance studies cannot, Melrose believes, actually tell us *how* to produce a performer who possesses the requisite skills to succeed in the industry. Once again, I feel Melrose underestimates the intelligence of professional actors, many of whom comfortably straddle the worlds of theory and practice. You cannot assume that professional actors, particularly those with a university education, are ignorant or of indifferent towards theory. In short, Melrose's map of performance studies has rigid borders which do not reflect the diverse terrain of the discipline.

Melrose's recantation of theory was followed by an impromptu presentation by Abu Elgassin Gor from the Sudan Centre of Theatre Research. Unlike his predecessors, who were visibly armed with pages of written notes, Gor approached the podium with a small scrap of paper which he held up to the audience, who responded with enthusiastic applause. Gor began with an anecdote about disorientation and cross-cultural misunderstanding. Evidently, Gor's journey to Aberystwyth was hampered by immigration bureaucrats who refused to grant him a visa to the UK. As a result of this unhappy encounter with officialdom, he arrived at the conference feeling especially tired and disoriented, a feeling that was exacerbated when he could not find his room. This "disorientating" experience was compounded by a subsequent dream he had about dragons. Gor confessed that he believed dragons to be real creatures until he was enlightened by a cook at breakfast the next morning. After indicating that he did not want to sample any dragon meat, the cook told Gor that dragons were mythological creatures. In its own way, this amusing story underscored the fact that Western discourses do not always translate across cultures. No one had bothered to tell Gor that dragons did not really exist because they assumed, quite incorrectly as it turned out, that he knew about dragons. In short, Gor problematised the word "international" in "Performance Studies International" by posing the following questions: What can I, as a theatre studies worker, do for my people? To what extent are Western theatre concepts relevant to African society?

These questions were also taken up by the following speaker, Anjum Katyal from the Seagull Foundation for the Arts in Calcutta. After noting that metaphors of journey and border crossings were central to the conference, Katyal asked how we avoid the dangers of cultural appropriation and colonisation? She then went on to briefly outline 2 possible solutions. First, Western critics need to humbly acknowledge that the non-Western terrain has always existed. It is not something that is "waiting to be discovered." Second, Katyal advocated what she called a "betweenness", an equal exchange of ideas between 'East and West' that is enriching for both parties. While these are fine sentiments, they are also pretty glib. Surely, establishing ethical exchange of ideas and performance practices across cultures involves more than mouthing the rhetoric of mutual respect and good will?

The session concluded with an interrogation of performance studies as a specific "knowledge formation" by one of the discipline's most respected scholars, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett

from New York University. She argued that performance studies, as a scholarly enterprise, is unique because its objects of analyses are performative practices. Consequently, performance theory emerges from practice. In other words, performance studies does not trade in theoretical models which put the cart before the horse; its theory is generated by and through practice. But how exceptional is this relationship between object and field? Is there not a sense in which most academic disciplines generate theory from material, everyday practices? You could argue that, say, the buying and selling of goods, an everyday performance, and the organisation of relationships between capital and labour generate theories of political economy.

Nonetheless, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett attributes the unusual theory/practice relationship in performance studies to its disciplinary genealogy, which has its roots in avant-garde theatre practice. "Everything looks different after experimental performance art," she claims. This is because performance art supposedly carries its theoretical possibilities within itself. While I found this reification of the avant-garde difficult to accept without reservation, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is correct in pointing out that most incarnations of performance studies owe a considerable debt to the avant-garde. For example, performance studies at NYU is basically what she describes as a "theatre plus" model. That is, theatrical practices are studied alongside other modes of performance: sport, ritual, carnival and so on. However, avant-garde theatre practice is a privileged form of performance because it attempts to break down the distinction between art and life, aesthetics and politics.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett made 2 further points about performance studies. The first concerned performance pedagogy. In case we might have forgotten, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett reminded her audience that performance studies academics "perform" in the classroom, and that the discipline needs to be more aware of this fact, and develop distinctive pedagogical strategies. Her second observation concerned performance studies as a "knowledge tradition." She argued that the discipline uses performance as an organising concept to make sense of a variety of events as performance events. However, we need to constantly ask ourselves whether it is useful or interesting to use the idea of performance. Finally, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett brought proceedings to a conclusion by asking her audience to focus on their individual intellectual histories in order to more effectively chart the ways in which performance studies develops in different ways in different contexts.

Judging from the anxieties expressed by the various speakers whose presentations I have described, the map of performance studies is in a state of flux. The major issues raised by the session centred on the ethical and methodological problems posed by the following binary relationships: theory and practice, actor and audience, centre and margin, East and West. So, how provocative were these provocations? Well, my experience of the rest of the conference was highly disappointing. Far from engaging with what I will call the ethics of alterity, most of the sessions I attended reinforced the hegemony of the American (read the NYU) model of performance studies. For the most part, the conference was dominated by North Atlantic academics, who demonstrated little interest in the work of people located outside the major metropolitan centres. As an Australian conference participant, Peter Eckersall, remarked, a more apt title for the conference might have been "Here Be Americans".

*5th Performance Studies Conference, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, April 9-12 1999*

*Glenn D'Cruz teaches English and Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne.*

## Languages of fascination

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KG *There's a difference between that and the focus of the performer's body. I thought, at this stage, your performers' bodies were not as focused as they could be and nor was the overall performative language. But if you can keep working together...*

BA *We're very different but very close. There's a wonderful sense of family. At the same time, I could never want to close off an ensemble—to miss the pleasure I get from then working with a 65 year old actor who I've never met and don't*

know how to work with. Some of my best experiences have been on the first day of a workshop or rehearsal when we don't know how to talk and it's either going to end up a really bad conversation or we'll discover different things on the road. I love that challenge.

*ur/Faust, director Benedict Andrews, Adelaide Festival, Queens Theatre, March 6 - 11 2000; Pierre Marivaux, La Dispute, director Benedict Andrews, Sydney Theatre Company, The Wharf May 5 - July 8 2000*



# Who's afraid of the new media?

Melbourne Workers Theatre journeys into the dark of heartlessness

At the Melbourne Showgrounds, the power of Melbourne's Crown Casino is countered with another spectacle—the Melbourne Workers Theatre's *Tower of Light*. This is, at first sight, a theatre of inversion, of carnival, a savaging of the casino's exploitation of the gambling impulse. Instead of the dream of winning, we are shown (and kind of participate in) a nightmare of infinite loss in the shape of a relentless morality play on a miracle play scale—but, oddly, with no promise of grace. After some initial fun, it's hell all the way. It's a descent into damnation, through a sparkling TV game-show studio (smelling appropriately bovine in Cattle Pavilion 1) into purgatory—the losing couple in a vicious battle in a circus ring sandpit—into further temptation (he gambles her away), damnation (they are driven away in a white van) and hell fire—a large puppet version of a loser is burned while a sax-led band raunches away. This is no literal representation of a casino, but of our culture as a futuristic game show, winning in terms of happiness credits, and all of it dominated by one man, ever present big-brother Kevin Kurtz (a kind of Kennett) who only appears on screens mouthing platitudes. This is a culture for winners, not losers, but it needs losers so that it can function. Melbourne Workers Theatre cites John Ralston Saul from *The Doubter's Companion*: "From the moment a government encourages its citizenry to finance the state by gambling—which means by dreaming—instead of through creativity, work and productivity that state is in an unacknowledged crisis."

As in carnival there is a sense of celebration and occasion in *Tower of Light*, a pageant of vices replete with community brass band and choir, other participating groups, impressive big sets (especially the sweeping, curved wall of the game show studio) and props, a circus ring, a monster, a giant puppet, plus big screen video projections, some of them computer-generated. But there's not much joy, and little revolt in this carnival. This is about losers losing all. The woman, the initial winner in the game, is increasingly hesitant, then withdraws; the husband, initially wary, surrenders totally to impulse, gambling away home and finally wife. Other than a group of protesting Vietnamese-Australian youngsters, there is little else to this drama than the blunt ironies that the dialogue and projected texts pump out. The wife's resistance is hopeless, largely wordless, reduced to a wrestling match with the man—we become the circus audience to this spectacle of punishment and betrayal. It's all very illustrative, but not much more than that.

As we watch the couple fight on and on to no avail, we become aware of something else outside the circus ring, a figure suspended horizontally in the near distance, gurgling and muttering, lit red, tilting down towards the vertical, a half-man, torso in a suit, the whole of him encased in plastics fed by liquids through tubes. He's in a kind of heaven, rattling off a reverie of his credos and achievements, a stream of semi-conscious ramblings, wickedly funny (though like the couple's fight desperately in need of editing and shaping). It's the *real* Kurtz. This Frankenstein's-monster-cum-devil has the best writing—a rich expression of his mad hubris, achievements and doubts.

The nature of gambling, its hold on the psyche, the drives it unleashes, don't get a look in; its embodiment in the couple is simple to the point of simplistic. What we witness is the fall of the sinner and those they take with them, and the Horror as the pair meet the literally in-human Kurtz. But they have been given neither language nor personalities. Initially this works well in the way the woman is introduced into the production, simply as a naive member of the audience—it takes us a while to register that she



*Tower of Light*

Ponch Hawkes

is a performer. Against the smiling hard sell of the compères, the relative innocence and gullibility of the couple is convincing, but thereafter their portrayal is narrow, the work's moral impulse overriding any possibility of complexity.

*Tower of Light* is a labour intensive multimedia work, sometimes entertaining, sometimes impressive (as the wall of the studio set opens up and we are led through a heavenly gate framed by a choir and into purgatory), sometimes problematic. Kurtz first appears to us in a giant projection outside the studio where we wait to enter, entertained by a brass band, a few of us selected for high seats on wheels and champagne viewing. He appears again on screen inside, mouthing platitudes of self-help and hostility to losers. Digital read out and projected phrases saturate us with the ideology of the prevailing culture ("there is only chaos...embrace it...the new religion of the millennium...risk all). There are amusing touches operated by a big media-adept crew—a direct video line from the box office—the night's door take for the Melbourne Workers Theatre is up for a bet; pre-taped satirical testimonials from Tim Costello, Ron Barassi and others; contestants drawn from the audience are multiplied across the space on screens. Once the couple are fully implicated in the game, a camera pries into their household, assaying what can be gambled away. So far, so good. A sense of high-tech studio is palpably generated and Kurtz established before we see the monster behind the electronic mask.

However, despite the futuristic setting and the multimedia investment, the presentation of the game is curiously old fashioned. In an increasingly bizarre pick-a-box routine, the game pivots on an endlessly splitting cube; large onstage black cubes open to reveal smaller glittering multiple cubes, open further to strings of tiny cubes, and resolve in a handful of glitter thrown in the air, with the gambler guessing against impossible odds, which is *the* box. Certainly there's an ugly wit in all this clunky old showbizness and it does generate a sense of an infinite capacity to lose. But, simultaneously, a fascinating computer-generated version of this endlessly splitting cube is projected as a kind of illustrative backdrop...and ignored. This looked like a lost opportunity. I would have loved to see the screen cube as the centre of the game and the players interacting with it. The studio setting and the scale of the sets and the techno-buzz of the event seemed to demand it—something more than video projections and digital readouts. Instead we are given a lo-tech guessing game, again side-stepping a complex issue, the appeal and range of gambling possibilities and what they involve—skills, strategies, the interplay of

logic and intuition. Of course, this lowest common denominator of compulsion serves the morality play model well...save that there's no way out, and we end on another visual doubling. The man loses to the final temptation, gambles away his wife and condemns them both to damnation. A white van rolls beneath Kurtz into the pavilion and takes the couple away. On a screen outside we watch big video images of them travelling who knows where. We turn to see a big puppet, masterfully manipulated and labelled "loser", staggering about, burning to the ground—the old carnival and the new media duplicate the message, the crowd roars its

appreciation, the moral complete. Susie Dee's direction of *Up the Ladder* (with Wesley Enoch as co-director for the 1997 Festival of the Dreaming version) was a more engaging example of a theatre of involvement, doubtless to do with the intimacy of its boxing tent, a sharper sense of humour, a little less blunt moralising, more subtle performances and a little more subtle characterisation, and a better awareness of its audience. In the true spirit of carnival, a more subversive approach to *Tower of Light* might have seen a dinkum battle between good and evil, room for effective collective action. Instead we are offered a fatalism denying the possibilities of redemption, reform, action. Kennett-Kurtz lives. But as a number of people told me, "It was fun. It was great fun." Sometimes, but otherwise it was thin, heavy-handed, under-written and over-written, the performances good and bad. The design, the lighting, the sound, the music, the marshalling of technology and community forces were impressive, but this was a dark journey into heartlessness and hopelessness—the losers deserve a better deal. KG

Melbourne Workers Theatre, *Tower of Light*, created by the Institute of Complex Entertainment, director Susie Dee, writer Wayne Macauley, designer Ian Bracegirdle, composer Michael Haur, lighting Nathan Thompson, visual media designer Chris Harris, Cattle Pavilion 1, Melbourne Festival, Royal Melbourne Showgrounds, October 17 - 21, 26 - 30.

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# Lost in the in-between

Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch are confronted by issues of exploration and construction in 3 new works in Sydney

## The earth is the centre of the universe. We know that.

During the pre-show set-up for Thwack's new work *Plastic Space*—texts about plagues and devils accompanied by ominous rumblings—the crowd at the Parramatta Riverside is humming. Choreographer Garry Stewart describes this new work as "exploratory...attempting to position a rationale for the human belief in aliens, UFOs and 'life out there.'" (Program note). The woman next to us reads the screen, "The earth is the centre of the universe." "We know that", she says.

The dancers arrive, stop, and blankly address us, their striking bodies in underwear, dispassionately taking in our average, well covered ones. A large sack drops their costumes and they shimmy into matching fatigues. Some great dancers (Claudia Alessi, Craig Barry, Raewyn Hill, Sarah-Jane Howard, Kate Levy, Ryan Lowe, Angelo Tsakalos) perform reactions to alien possession and invasion. (Projection: "They talk with their eyes.")

One dancer makes a gesture at another who involuntarily repeats it. The first, surely an alien, moves in, stands over his subject, gesturing rapidly and exits. The victim is momentarily still...and then erupts with the imposed moves. Exit. We're enjoying this but with an uneasy sense of sequences ending a mite too peremptorily. A massive lighting rig descends à la *Close Encounters*. Then it's pretty much ignored. Short, high powered little narratives remain illustrative rather than exploratory—no particular intelligence resides in them. This is the kind of thing you can enjoy at a literal level—and we do. Twitching turns deftly to solo. Dancers are possessed in pairs. There's beauty in possession. We're engrossed—for a time. There's some nice play with a head-camera—one dancer watching through an alien eye as another is apparently abducted in an offstage corridor. This captures us, but then, like the device, frees us too quickly.

The ominous second and very different act is more conventional in its dancery abstraction, reverently and occasionally lyrically acknowledging the dual demigods of Paul Davies and Carl Sagan. Certainly, the first act *Plastic Space* is powerfully illustrative of a condition which is either actual or psychological and somatic, but can *Plastic Space* really lay claim to exploration?

In his engrossing *Fire in the Brain*, (Plume, Penguin Books USA, 1993), Ronald K Siegel recounts clinical tales of hallucination, including UFO sightings and experiences with aliens ("They drained me...They took my fuckin' memories!"). Siegel focusses in particular on hypnagogia, the state between waking and sleeping, when susceptibility to hallucination is most likely (shadows take on active human form—little grey men) and when we can be overcome with a sense of paralysis. *Plastic Space* is desperately in need of some counter theories; it is too believing, there is no dialectic beyond 'I believe it, they don't', the projected texts for the most part supporting the case for belief and echoing *X-Files* paranoia ('the government is hiding the truth from us').

For years we wondered what dancers were going through, feeling perhaps that we were not supposed to be reading bodies or detecting thoughts. These taboos have been broken as dancers speak, address us with their eyes, their faces, with projected text. More than ever we are being invited beyond the secret language to enter the physical intelligence of dancing. As audiences we're eager to be jointly provoked by the matter of the work and of the dance itself. *Plastic Space* only takes us part of the way there.

*Thwack*, *Plastic Space*, choreography Garry Stewart, dramaturgy David Bonney, lighting Damien Cooper, visual media design Tim Gruchy, costumes Bruce McKinven, sound score Jad McAdam, Riverside Theatres, Parramatta, October 21 - 23. Presented by Made to Move

## Notes from the western world

In the "screen-play" *Western* at The Performance Space, writer-director Mark Rogers gives us a few stock characters. Billy, the lone cowboy with his guitar (Peter Fenton), Kitty the good woman (Felicity Price) and Rebecca the bad (Natalie Novikova). The woman who has betrayed the cowboy is foreign, dark-haired, this time out of Bosnia, who leaves him because he can't "get it up." Meanwhile Kitty the sweet blonde who has the hots for Billy is a free spirit who's run

away on her wedding day. Billy wants friendship and intimacy because he's a classic wounded male (psychologically, but we first see him after he's been beaten up), a man without a gun (read penis). If this was a real western, the cowboy would have to kill someone. But though they quote Jim Kitses, Mark Rogers and co-writer Tara Jakszewicz refuse narrative in favour of icons. Redemption comes in the form of a woman and it comes quietly in a rainstorm (laconic narrator Tony Barry says "If you're feeling good, nature seems good"). There's no catharsis, no shoot out. When it ends we feel like we're leaving the theatre before the movie's finished.

This is about the fourth incarnation of *Western* which began at Open Week at The Performance Space a couple of years ago. It's clear in the way this version is produced and narrated (and the hip film audience it attracted the night we saw it) that *Western* is on the way to becoming a hybrid of Australian-American western-cum-road movie. As a piece of performance, the work showed some strengths as well as glaring weaknesses.

It's meant to be like a movie with a kind of deadpan Hal Hartley feel—hard to pull off in a conventional theatre set-up with actors projecting and no possibility for closeups. Unlike Sam James' clever play with cameras in *Space 1999* at TPS earlier this year, in *Western* there's no live camera and hence no interplay between live performance and video closeup which might have made something of the playing. The actors could also have benefitted from radio miking à la Kosky's ground breaking (literally) *Mourning Becomes Electra* at STC last year in which the stage voices were more than a match for the portentous rumblings of the sound track. Scott Horscroft's sound design for *Western* is elaborate, interesting, and portentous, but simply too competitive when pitched against the actors' voices.

What *Western* does offer is some very powerful imagery (Mark Rogers), an inventive use of lighting (Mark Mitchell) and especially screens (technical conceptual design Tim Gruchy, set design Lyssa Thompson). Layering 35mm slide projections with Super8 (or are they 16mm) black and white projections allows for simultaneous flashbacks and some spectacular scene setting. The screens are mobile, opening and closing forward and back; with these and the addition of textured scrims an illusion of depth is given to some lush panoramas.

On the downside, direction is very literal including bits of bad mime and wretchedly unnecessary comings and goings on and off stage in blackout. Even conventional theatre copes fairly easily with the cross-fade. The projections offered possibilities for smooth shifts in space and mood but instead we got a clunky, old-fashioned theatricality. A set of brief scenes meant to be movie-like read instead as incomplete theatrical scenes. There were some attempts to break the physical staging with shadow play and with cinematic devices eg when the lovers grapple with each other's bodies and emotions, their actions and voices are delivered in slow-mo. This potentially effective sequence was seen as funny by the audience, probably because there was nothing to prepare us for it in the otherwise conventional and languidly paced direction. The poetic-philosophical dialogue, on the other hand, aimed to avoid the conventional, yielding a kind of subconscious realism, the self-conscious writing associated with that genre projected on the screens—"Those first crazy bouts of passion...Her breasts under soft fabric" Get the picture?

Like all mythical forms, working with genres is inexhaustible. Again, it's what's being explored and how it's conveyed which is critical. *Western* posits a non-sexual masculinity, a wounded male who wants to enter into a relationship without sex. In attempting to subvert a genre (well and truly subverted since the 60s) where men tend to be tough, violent and involved in cathartic action, the risk is stepping right into the cowpat of genre clichés, western and road movie—the good-bad woman, the romance of being on the move, the necessary motel sequence...and not making much out of them.

*Western* is a hit and miss experience. A classic case of language taking over from action and the dynamic lost in the in-between. The performers are good but let down by some bad writing and direction. Tony Barry certainly has presence and a great voice but did we really need someone to read aloud snippets of the screenplay lit by a hurricane lamp ("Motel room Interior. Night"). We know that. The ending is all



Bernadette Regan and Morgan Lewis, *Cement Garage*

abstraction—a flurry of words we barely get a handle on as they fly between the lovers. Will we ever know what they really want? At a desperate attempt at depth, Billy shouts, "Fuck Kitty, tell me who you are!"

*Western*, direction, photography, film Mark Rogers, script Mark Rogers and Tara Jakszewicz. The Performance Space, November 5 - 13

## "One of the first things you learn to draw as a kid is a house"

We arrive at the High Street Youth Health Service at Harris Park in Sydney's west for *Cement Garage* and after a quick tour of the impressive facility which offers all kinds of assistance (medical, emotional, educational) to young people in trouble, we're ushered to a back lane where the neighbours come and go and cars cruise by, to be seated on bleachers facing a garage door. It reminds us of putting on plays for the family in the garage. All night we half-expect to be sent away when Dad comes home with the car—"Get out of the way, you kids."

But this garage is no home: *Cement Garage* is a serious evocation of homelessness. In the tradition of companies like Urban Theatre Project in Bankstown and PACT Youth Theatre at Erskineville, director Alicia Talbot and performers (Carlos Russell, Morgan Lewis and Bernadette Regan) use contemporary performance principles to invigorate a community theatre model.

The door-curtain unrolls apocalyptically revealing an empty garage made starker by fluoro strip lighting which flattens the concrete and brick (production Sam James), the atmosphere enhanced by Nik Wishart and Rose Turtle's brooding soundscore. A performer climbs across the next-door fence, finds her way into the garage and laying down a few magazines from her backpack, beds down for the night. The rest unfolds in a series of loosely-linked incidents. This is not a play though it flirts with the conventions often enough. There aren't a lot of clues, just the basic information—3 homeless people.

There are good ideas in *Cement Garage* and a sense that we're watching the product of a complex process of creation (see interview with Alicia Talbot in *RealTime*#33, page 25, 'Streetwise dramaturgs'). Inevitably in works about young people and/or homelessness, there's a predictable escalation towards violence. This is no exception. One of the best and most sustained moments in the work begins with a tennis ball being bounced against the wall. The scene shifts edgily back and forth, the sound of the ball enhanced by the sound design, the odd snap of sarcasm hurled. Like the Belgian Ballet C de la B's *La Tristeza Complice*, there's a sense of impending violence and contained energy though there's less compassion here, plaintive songs of suicide instead of Purcell. More damage maybe. There is a rare sense of completion in this scene. Like the rest of the work, it's partly improvised but the structure is evident and it's handled with wit.

Other scenes feel frustratingly incomplete and there are infuriating gaps. We're not hankering for cause and effect but why is the girl's obvious pregnancy largely unacknowledged? How come we find out only in passing that Carlos is an older man with a family? Why introduce Morgan as a rapper (in one of his 2

sustained monologues) and then abandon rap altogether in favour of an air guitar band doing heavy metal?

In terms of character, the most vocal (Morgan) appears the most complete. Performer Morgan Lewis is a confident improviser. He does physical turns including a sustained piece balancing a pram on the ceiling. He does chin-ups to keep in trim. He is at turns endearing and, increasingly, very nasty. Carlos Russell brings an ominous quality to his character but is under-defined—and, oddly, his considerable movement skills are underused. Similarly Bernadette Regan (ex-Legs on the Wall) as the girl pumps out a lot of energy but it hits the wall and bounces back at her, leaving the audience out of the loop. The shifting of her allegiance between the men is an empty marker. *Cement Garage* had no writer, relying on the advice, in part, of its subjects, and it suffers the lack of coherence. Too many scenes feel shakily improvised.

There are great moments of tedium and tension in which 'nothing happens.' The everyday of homelessness is acutely conveyed through stillness, in the repeated references to the practicalities of life on the streets—makeshift beds, the frantic attachment to the trappings of "your stuff", the complicated bartering and scoring of limited resources, food and drugs. At other times, the work is scarily reminiscent of theatre-in-education—there must be more to say by now about the frustrations of Centrelink than is revealed here in a perfunctorily choreographed Q&A sequence on 3 chairs.

*The Cement Garage* is awkwardly positioned between evoking the state of being of the homeless (which it often does well in terms of space, duration and unpredictable interaction) and a literal theatricality (the setting up of conventional narrative expectations, moments of lumpy realism, character clues, the contrived ending, with the trio uniting in their fantasy band, brimming with unintended pathos). Consequently we are offered frustratingly edited glimpses into these lives, at the problems of sharing, of dealing with others always as potential threat. The only interior world we glimpse is Morgan's in his 2 monologues, and only the second of those is pertinent—a wild pop star career fantasy taking him to the US and Japan, but finally back to Westfield Shopping Centre... "because that's what it's all about." Carlos and Bernie remain enigmatic.

We heard from the performers that the young people who worked as dramaturgs on *Cement Garage* suggested neat endings—the girl gets into a group house, the boy ends up in an institution. "Is it really like that? Do you really want that?" the team asked. Well, maybe not but what the open-ended structure offers over the confines of closure and realism is the possibility for more exploration and elaboration than was on offer. That Alicia Talbot bravely takes performance principles rather than tired theatrical conventions to new participants and new audiences, is, however, commendable. *Cement Garage* opens out time and space to represent a particular experience and make the moments of tedium, tension and un-stated despair powerfully palpable.

HSYHS, The Cement Garage, director Alicia Talbot, dramaturg Caitlin Newton-Broad, High Street Youth Health Service Harris Park, October 21 -30



## Sad protest

For all its noise, outbursts and raucous skits, Sidetrack's discursive epic about the history and impact of flight paths over Sydney is melancholic, the mood signalled by a recorded string orchestra work from a Taverner or a Vasks (the meditative New Melancholia which so soothes our end-of-century angsts), a sadly harmonious prelude as the performers settle on chairs before us against a backdrop of 4 screens largely displaying throughout the performance an innocent world of domestic objects and gardens in their simple beauty.

Crushing these stillnesses, these evocations of silence, is the scream of aeroplanes—recorded and actual in this flight path performance (with sound levels seemingly set in the theatre for the benefit of the hearing-impaired). In solos and duos and an escalation into group scenes, the performers give voice to and re-enact the agonies of the nervous breakdowns, family schisms (over protest involvement), loss of homes, inadequate and tardy compensation, and with satirical venom perform a surreal naturalisation ceremony which smugly welcomes its new citizens to a free society that squashes democratic rights in favour of airlines and tourism. A grim scenario emerges of empty suburbs and houses sold to new, unsuspecting migrants by devious real estate agents; a geranium plant is threatened with a chain saw when its perfume is seen as a threat to the controls of incoming planes.

Threaded between these episodes is the whole, massive, ugly story delivered matter-of-factly by 4 secondary school age readers, who also participate in the larger action. From most of the principal performers there is some excellent work, some of it bitterly funny (the smoker who lights up at the sound of an approaching plane—"the protestation of a melancholic man"—finally perches resignedly on his chair his mouth stuffed, fuming with cigarettes, as the planes flood in), some of it an exhausting riff of catch 22's that spook us across the show. There is much that is moving, infuriating, inexplicable, cruel. But behind the outbursts of anger and

the surreal projections of a nightmare day and night flight schedule up to and beyond the Olympics, there is the feeling of defeat, of a story finished, a reminder, analogously, that for every scam that SOCOG has been caught at, there are many other brutalities, like the long term closing down of Bondi Beach for Olympic volleyball competition, that will be let pass. Melancholy and its likely companion, cynicism, slump hand in hand. Helplessness rules.

But, it's important that Sidetrack tell this story, refusing to let it finish, and playing to a big audience who relished and recognised the telling. For me it was punishing for reasons other than the pain and sadness portrayed—the unwieldy construction of the work, the less than coherent plethora of performance devices and styles, great writing and bad side by side, and the laborious historical reporting (tough on its young deliverers, surely editable for greater impact). As always there's the issue of how to review these kind of works (you can never get it right) where there's community involvement and where varying levels of competence are displayed (as it is in the Urban Theatre Project and with PACT's work with young performers) and it's up to the director to integrate them as best as he/she can and the reviewer to understand where the work is coming from. It reminded me of the story of the *Los Angeles Times* theatre critic who gave Peter Sellars (the great American director of opera and other works and the next AD of the Adelaide Festival) a vicious review for his production of Genet's *The Screens*, refusing to put the work in its Hispanic community theatre context (DJ Hopkins, "Misunderstanding *Los Biombos*", *Theatre Forum*, Summer/Fall 1998 No 13). In the case of *Flight Path Daze*, in the end, perhaps it wasn't the variable quality of the performances and the writing (not credited), and the mismatching of revue skits and high performance, so much as the huge volume of material performed and read—like the flights passing overhead, the show sometimes seemed like it didn't know when to stop. I left in a melancholic, if thoughtful, daze. KG

Sidetrack Performance Group, *Flight Path Daze*, director Don Mamouny, Sidetrack Theatre, October 28 - November 14

## Marrickville maelstrom

As a professional community theatre company, Urban Theatre Projects are not so much interested in burns on seats but more in engaging with their western Sydney audience in ever more inventive locations. In recent UTP outings we've been bundled onto trains (*TrackWork*, 1997), let loose amongst other people's neighbours (*Speed Street*, 1998) and taken on tours of Bankstown's subcultures (*subtopia*, 1999). For their next event, *Tabernacle*, a collaboration with the performance ensemble Gravity Feed, the location is "a hole in the urban fabric" or more particularly, the rooftop carpark at Marrickville Railway Station and the instructions "wear sensible shoes (not sandals or Gravity Feed & Urban Theatre Projects, *Tabernacle*)" and be prepared to work up a sweat as you're swept from place to place into a paranoid and obsessive world."



In *Tabernacle* "the set is the theatre: a huge system of shifting panels which enclose, divide and catalogue both performers and audience. There's beauty in the geometry and functionality but the set is at once violent and irresistible. It's a polyester maelstrom, constantly changing shape as doors open and walls close, with the huge panels sweeping the audience to newly created places, or suddenly releasing them into calm and open vistas.... It unfolds as a series of small revelations, enactments, confessions, recollections, distillations of the lived moment."

What better preparation for the Christmas holiday lock-up with the relatives?

Seriously, this will be huge. Don't miss it. VB

*Tabernacle* runs for two weeks only from December 1 playing Wednesday to Sunday at 8.30 pm. For bookings or information call 02-9707 2111. For safety reasons, children under ten will not be admitted.

Those of you who get enough of this at home may be wary but anyone who's experienced one of Gravity Feed's intensely atmospheric, site-based spectacles—*In the House of Skin* (1996); *Stool Pigeons* (1997); *The Gravity of the Situation* (1998) and the apocalyptic *HOST* (1999)—will waste no time in hotfooting it to Marrickville for another hit.

This time the G-men (Denis Beauvois, Ari Ehrlich, William McClure, Tim Rushton, Carlos Russell, Alan Schacher, Olivier Sidore and Jeff Stein with sound design by Rik Rue) will be joined in doing battle with the forces of natural order by UTP's new ensemble of artists based in Western Sydney (Woodhy Chamron, Claudia Chidiac, Khoa Do, Bao Khanh, Ned Matijasevic, Anna Nguyen, Tona Nguyen, Sean O'Brien, Cicily Ponnor, Edwina Smith, ensemble co-ordinated by John Baylis).

Playwright Daniel Keene and director Ariette Taylor continue their innovative Keene/Taylor Theatre Project with *The Ninth Moon*, a curious cross between a nativity play and *Romeo and Juliet* in a contemporary urban setting. There are excellent performances from Dan Spielman and Chloe Armstrong as the teenage runaways and Marco Chiappi, Robert Menzies and Stewart Morrit as the 3 building site workers who, with humour and not a little sarcasm, become the Wise Men protectors of the couple with child. The performers savour Keene's deft dialogue, where a fluent naturalism can turn poetic without discomfort and where the youngsters can slip poetic quotations into their exchanges with ease—it doesn't take long to realise that these homeless are not working class. Taylor's direction is good, exploiting the scaffolding set (Adrienne Chisholm) and lighting (Shane Grant) that provide deft shifts in point of view and location. Spielman lives up to his reputation, with a screen actor's easy presence that manages nonetheless to project itself amply in the theatre, and a striking grace in the moments where he has to display physical

dexterity. Keene's play, however brilliant at first, runs out of its narrative and thematic promise, the final scenes feeling like set pieces rather than the outcomes of the tension within the couple, especially as embodied in Spielman's character—the disturbing way that once he has set up his love nest he near abandons it. Sydney Festival goers should not take this lapse in any way as a disincentive to seeing the Keene/Taylor Theatre Project, *The Best of Seasons 1 - 6* in the Sydney Festival. These 2 programs reveal Keene at his most economical and precise (see Suzanne Spinner, *RealTime* #31 page 31). It's a rare occasion when an Australian playwright can be so well served. KG

Keene/Taylor Theatre Project, *The Ninth Moon*, Melbourne Festival, *The Beckett*, CUB Malthouse, October 16 - 31; *The Best of Seasons 1 - 6*, Sydney Festival, Playhouse, Sydney Opera House, Program 1 (one hour), Jan 12 - 22, 6.30pm; Program 2 (2 hours) Jan 12 - 22 8.30pm (no performance Jan 16 either program). Festival Ticketek 02 9266 4020

## Papal passions

Maryanne Lynch sees the secular spectacle of *Livid 99*

Do you know Pope Alice? A luminary of Brisbane's artworld, she and her longtime companion Luke Roberts have spent the past 25 or so years pontificating on the spectacle of desire. (And related matters.) On occasion Pope Alice makes an appearance amid the masses, clad in her papal robes and waving one white-gloved hand in holy style. This year she and Luke paid a visit to the *Livid* Festival, moving through the crowd on the back of the Popemobile ute, dispensing religious relics while protected by a plastic dome from the danger of fuelled passions.



Pope Alice Divine Intervention, *Livid '99* Grant Heaton

Yet this was not protection enough. Pope Alice and Luke Roberts were overcome by their own entrance. Outdone in fact by the scale of spectacular desire created by *Livid*. "It was just a sea of hands", reflected Luke. "All pulling at Alice; kinda scary too..." This was, it seems, a moment when the simulacra swallowed up the simulation and Alice/Luke found themselves immersed in the very 'reality' they've spent so many years constructing.

This year's *Livid* was like that all round. The festival (like many others) has moved towards being an 'experience' rather than merely a music event, and its recent relocation to the RNA Showgrounds in many ways clinched this. What better place than a showground for the mother of all shows. Especially one concocted from a mix of illusion, fantasy and Alice's wonderland.

The *Livid* brains have not only realised this but embellished it. Although artforms other than music have long been given a serious place in the programme, my last *Livid* foray was marked by an uneasy relationship between the punters and the artists (including the likes of Sidetrack Theatre and the Hereford Sisters—a young women's physical theatre troupe). This time artists appeared to have been given the brief of responding to the showgrounds' environs and the many milling bodies. There was sideshow-style signage (Mia Kempel), text installations mimicking those signs used to control crowds or traffic (Craig Walsh, Richard Grayson, Lisa Mills, Ian Thompson, Matt Stein, E.C. Brown) and looping video (David Granato) reminiscent of footage seen on club walls.

*Art Rage*, short screen works created for TV (curator/producer Kim Machan), played in a room underneath the main grandstand in what might have been a chill-out zone save for the narrow wooden benches. People wandered in from the glare, and wandered out again. Similarly, soundwork (John Cordas) was situated in wheeled bins throughout the festival site, and utilised everyday sources such as cars in an understated way. Walking past, it was possible to imagine that you were hearing things!

Bands like Mercury Rev subtly stretched themselves beyond the bounds of a traditional set. This is something that contemporary musicians are increasingly attempting, abetted by visual design, projection and the return of theatricality—and here manifest in a diversity of styles. In turn, the *Livid* punters demonstrated their sonic literacy in the specificity of their responses; they also showed their (sub)cultural nous in easily navigating the different spaces in which all *Livid* events were placed or placed themselves. And I'm not only talking geography here.

While most present-day music festivals have shown a desire to break out of categories and into sensory overload, *Livid 99* did it in bucketloads—and with a papal blessing to boot.

*Livid 99*, arts curator-coordinator Craig Walsh, RNA Showgrounds, Brisbane, October 2

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Playwright Daniel Keene and director Ariette Taylor continue their innovative Keene/Taylor Theatre Project with *The Ninth Moon*, a curious cross between a nativity play and *Romeo and Juliet* in a contemporary urban setting. There are excellent performances from Dan Spielman and Chloe Armstrong as the teenage runaways and Marco Chiappi, Robert Menzies and Stewart Morrit as the 3 building site workers who, with humour and not a little sarcasm, become the Wise Men protectors of the couple with child. The performers savour Keene's deft dialogue, where a fluent naturalism can turn poetic without discomfort and where the youngsters can slip poetic quotations into their exchanges with ease—it doesn't take long to realise that these homeless are not working class. Taylor's direction is good, exploiting the scaffolding set (Adrienne Chisholm) and lighting (Shane Grant) that provide deft shifts in point of view and location. Spielman lives up to his reputation, with a screen actor's easy presence that manages nonetheless to project itself amply in the theatre, and a striking grace in the moments where he has to display physical

dexterity. Keene's play, however brilliant at first, runs out of its narrative and thematic promise, the final scenes feeling like set pieces rather than the outcomes of the tension within the couple, especially as embodied in Spielman's character—the disturbing way that once he has set up his love nest he near abandons it. Sydney Festival goers should not take this lapse in any way as a disincentive to seeing the Keene/Taylor Theatre Project, *The Best of Seasons 1 - 6* in the Sydney Festival. These 2 programs reveal Keene at his most economical and precise (see Suzanne Spinner, *RealTime* #31 page 31). It's a rare occasion when an Australian playwright can be so well served. KG

Keene/Taylor Theatre Project, *The Ninth Moon*, Melbourne Festival, *The Beckett*, CUB Malthouse, October 16 - 31; *The Best of Seasons 1 - 6*, Sydney Festival, Playhouse, Sydney Opera House, Program 1 (one hour), Jan 12 - 22, 6.30pm; Program 2 (2 hours) Jan 12 - 22 8.30pm (no performance Jan 16 either program). Festival Ticketek 02 9266 4020

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# Positioning passions

Erin Brannigan interviews Wayne McGregor about Chunky Move's Choreolab

Wayne McGregor is a London-based choreographer and performer whose company, Random Dance Co, has a residency at The Place. He has been commissioned to create works by companies as diverse as Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company and the Birmingham Royal Ballet and has also done extensive choreographic work for theatre companies, film and advertising. He was one of 2 choreographers (the other being John Jasperse from the US) conducting workshops last July in Melbourne for Chunky Move's Choreolab. The project attracted a broad range of participants including Michelle Heaven, Shaun McLeod, Kate Denborough, Alan Schacher, Sarah Neville and Fiona Cameron. I spoke to Wayne MacGregor halfway through his workshop.

**EB** *How does the Choreolab model for this type of workshop compare with others you have been involved with overseas?*

**WM** There are very diverse choreographic laboratory schemes in Europe. For example, a mentor might come in and work with choreographers and set tasks, and then they work with a group of dancers and that is evaluated—that's quite a traditional model. Then there might be a mentor who works with a composer and you, as the participating choreographer, have to work with their kind of collaborative choreographic processes. Because I knew it was going to be quite a diverse group of choreographers here in Melbourne, I thought I needed to hone in on principles I work with which still give them enough scope to apply to their own work—a sketch of ideas that they can then take and develop in their own choreography. Some of those principles have just been movement-based interventions generating language and content for dance, and some have been formal concerns—how is it that you structure your vocabulary into a coherent language that communicates with an audience? And we've worked with technological interventions that are either computer, video or film-based to give a different perspective on 'action' and then develop that choreographically. For example, I have a 3D animation programme called *Poser* which I've used to create some choreography on the computer that has then become a resource for stimulating other choreography. We've also worked with digital film to look at the possibility of genuine retrograde—filming something and then looking back at it in slow-motion reverse and re-learning it, but still maintaining the original kinetic information.

**EB** *How did you find the participants' contributions to the workshop?*

**WM** One of the reasons I like doing these workshops is because I'm not like this great choreographic master coming around and telling everybody how to do it, but because it's a genuine dialogue you always learn from. For instance I might set a choreographic task or idea, and the participants' practical solution to the question is completely different to mine. And I've really found that with this group which has been interesting for my choreographic development.

**EB** *These types of workshops are still very rare in Australia—we don't have a great tradition*

*of choreographic workshoping or mentoring. How important do you think this sort of thing is for choreographers?*

**WM** I think they're completely vital. I don't think it matters what stage of choreographic practice you are at, if you're really experienced or haven't done very much; an opportunity to research and develop outside your own practice is completely critical and that's why I still keep doing them. I've recently done a choreographic workshop with Bob Cohan in London where he mentored me for 2 weeks. You have to choose the right time to do it for yourself—in the middle of creating a new work may not be the right time to do a choreographic research project with someone else, although sometimes it might be. If you don't have opportunities to extend your process you become very myopic in your approach, and your work becomes very habitual.

**EB** *Is there any difference that you found here in Australia—any qualities that seem unique?*

**WM** There is definitely a hunger for the information and for giving things a go—a really positive attitude to that. I think it's also clear that the people hadn't really done that many choreographic workshops because the kind of analysis—the ways in which you talk about, evaluate and positively criticise the work—perhaps wasn't as forthcoming as in other places where they've had a lot of experience at doing that. I think it's a very hard thing—not only talking about your own work but somebody else's in that kind of context. And I think the more we go on this week the more vocal they are becoming. Lots of people position themselves in relation to work and say they either like it or don't, but this is about looking at the work in relation to the task and to see how far we've gone in fulfilling it.

**EB** *How did you learn your choreographic skills?*

**WM** I did a 3-year dance degree which was primarily focused on choreography and it really was a kind of 'craft' approach. So it wasn't so much about innovation in relation to language but about the difference between form and content and how you structure language; a formal approach. It was almost like music training—a technical approach like music—where once you've got all that ammunition you can really subvert it and explode it. So, I did that and then I was at the José Limon School in New York and while I was there I was able to participate in a range of choreographic workshops with a lot of very different choreographers working in New York. I think the best way to learn about choreography is by doing it and that's what Forsythe has written—that the only way to master choreography is through practice.

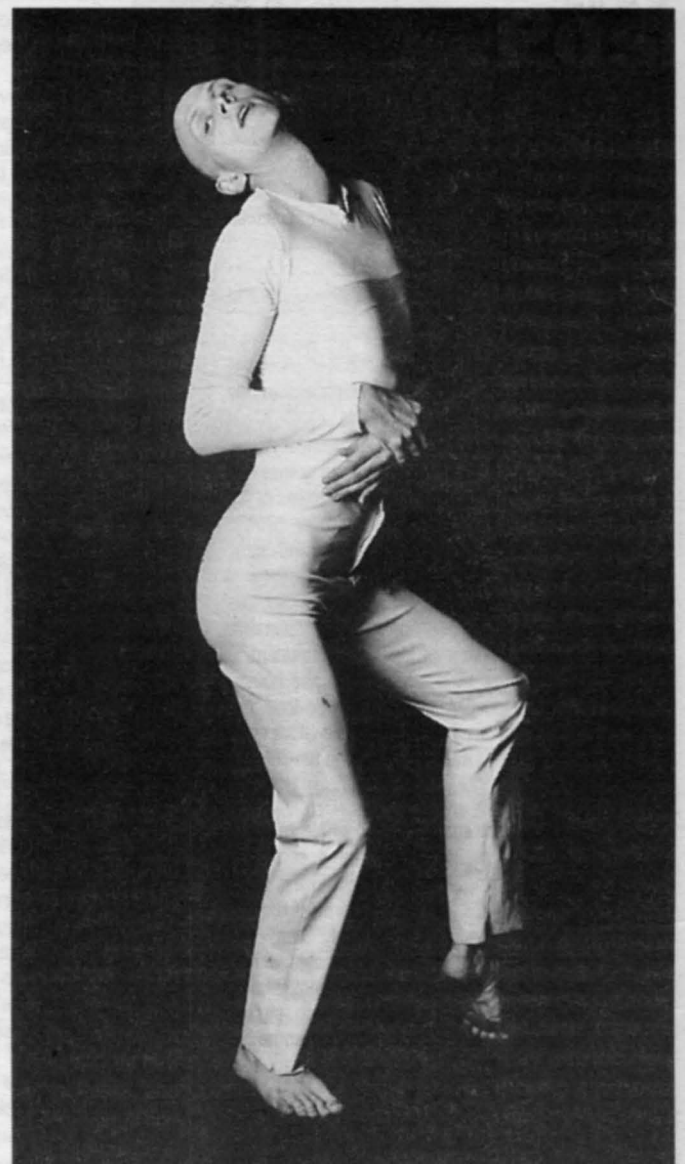
**EB** *But here there is the economic problem of affording the bodies to work on and the space to work in; the opportunities to choreograph are few and far between for a lot of practitioners.*

**WM** It's interesting...in England a lot of young choreographers, and I'm not just saying they do this for experience, they work in community centres or with young people, and that's in no

way a compromise. It's actually testing choreographic ideas in a very valid way. And I still do a lot of that work myself—we have a large educational and community program and that's not to get funding to do other work, it's actually an opportunity for choreographic investigation. And it may not be—technically—what you are after, but choreographically I'm able to test something new every time. I find the more I do that, the more it's informed my work.

**EB** *One of the big problems we have here is dancers making the transition to choreography without any real incentive beyond that of creating opportunities to perform. This seems to be due to the small amount of company positions for dancers in relation to the number of dance graduates.*

**WM** I'm sure that's a problem. In England there are 400 dance companies so a professional dancer has the opportunity to work with a range of very good choreographers, so I guess that's a big difference. I think it's a really hard transition and, as a choreographer, you really have to have something to say. For a lot of dancers it's just the idea of being a choreographer that's appealing, and that's not an idea in itself. There has to be a real burning passion to communicate. I do know a lot of dancers who've gone through that transition and worked really hard at it and produced not such great work in the beginning, but through real tenacity and work have been able to develop good choreography. But I think dancers can leave companies too early; they think it would be much better to be the figurehead, but it's a completely different job. A choreographic workshop like this is a great opportunity for young dancers to try it out and get new perspectives and information and openings without exposing themselves to audiences and critics.



Wayne McGregor, Random Dance Co

Michael Taylor

**EB** *What was your knowledge of the Australian dance scene before you came over?*

**WM** I didn't know much—I'd done some work with Company in Space and had really loved that—their use of new technology and development of new software and ideas of presence are really exciting. And my development director, Sophie Hansen, used to live in Melbourne so she gave me a lot of information about the scene here. But we don't get to see a lot of Australian work in London—the last thing I saw was Meryl Tankard. I think our assumptions are that it's very American post-modern, quite traditional in its form. Or we know the real flashy companies like Sydney Dance Company. But it's been a real eye-opener being here, seeing some of Gideon's work on video, talking to people and seeing that really innovative things are happening here. The profile isn't massive but the work is here.

*Choreolab 1999, presented by Chunky Move, July 26 - August 6*

The crowd at Whyalla's Middleback Theatre was buzzing as a warm wash of lights filled the stage and fell on the closed forms of 3 dancers. The heavy bass of a rhythm and blues track vibrated through my ribcage. In a prelude to the main performance of the evening, 4 short dance pieces introduced themes of cultural diversity and turned the audience onto the physical dynamism of D-Faces of Youth Arts, a company integrating performers with and without disabilities. I broke into a sweat just watching the dancers warm up.

D-Faces began their piece with a maze of movement, image, soundscape—sensations of a bustling urban landscape; kids rollerblading, skating, running, playing, traffic blaring. Into this were woven heartfelt narratives of the kind of isolation that sits heavily in your chest and the relief that comes with friendship and acceptance. Schoolyard scenes were re-created, gangs exchanged confidences and angry insults. It is here, within the schoolyard, that young people explore the politics of culture and identity.

Directed by Sasha Zahra, *Beautiful People* suggested that occupying a polarised position of self-definition is a confined place to be. A warm and wild samba made light of racial debates; in a satire of the mantra of "them" and "us", D-Faces reminded us that between either end of a social strata lies a dance of engagement and self-definition.

Anna Hickey



*Beautiful People*

*Beautiful People D-Faces of Youth Arts, Middleback Theatre, Whyalla, South Australia, November 6*

**IGNEOUS**, an integrated dance company based in Lismore, recently gave previews of their movement and multimedia performance installations, *Manipulations* and *Hands* (works in progress), where the audience were encouraged to move through the space and survey the interaction of drama, dance, video, slides, soundscapes, live music, puppetry and sketching. Directed by Suzon Fuks, choreographed by James Cunningham and created in collaboration with the cast, the works explore the ways we use our hands to express, to threaten, to love and to create. Kath Duncan, star of the documentary *My One-Legged Dream Lover*, contributed text about hands: "You can't have a one-armed flower girl. What would people think!" Formed by Cunningham and Fuks 5 years ago, IGNEOUS features adults and children (in the 4 adults there are only 6 functioning arms) and focuses on the interaction of performance and projected image. Possibilities come to life when physical difference and the beauty of awkwardness join forces.

*Manipulations & Hands, Northern Rivers Conservatorium, Lismore, October 30-31. For more information, call 02 6682 4015, fax 02 6682 5691, email igneous\_inc@yahoo.com.*



# Who said?

## Grisha Dolgoplov at PICA's *Dancers are Space Eaters* festival

There is an Old Law (God knows where it comes from) that says genres cannot be mixed. Yet, it would seem that the post-*Star Wars* audience demands that genres be mixed in a big way. So why is there so much policing of the boundaries in foyers around the land? Why is there always a little panic when dancers begin to speak? Perhaps it is something about the limitless intelligibility of rhythm and the abstraction of dance that sits as a burnishing trace element in the minds of the punters and irks them when genres are mixed. But genres need to be mixed. To know the law, we need to test the limit of the law.

*Dancers are Space Eaters*, the third biennial festival of contemporary dance at PICA, tested a whole clump of limits. Despite the attention to the issue, dancers using spoken text was not really a point of anxiety for this well-balanced festival. There was a strong blend of dance films, forums, performances, Q&A sessions, informal drinks, workshops, overseas guests and local artists with good attendance that created a buzz. A healthy blend of brilliant, promising, stupid, boring, inspiring, witty and contemplative work challenged established orthodoxy. One of the biggest challenges to dance earnestness came in the form of the new genre of stand-up-dance routines.

Grisha Coleman (a former member of the Urban Bush Women) one of the workshop teachers, volunteered a cheeky work-in-progress from NY called *Modern Love*. This was apparently a selection of scraps and vestiges from her a cappella group's performances which are terrific, I am sure. This solo performance, however, did not amount to much more than bits of 'choreographed music', pseudo-sci-fi-mic jabber, a bit of cello, a pinch of Cab Calloway and a tantalising refusal to dance. However,

Grisha did advance the dull dance/text debate by theorising the possibility of incorporating movement, music and song in an integrated whole—I only wish I'd seen it in practice.

Rakini's *R.E.M* (Rapid Eye Mudras) were by turn titillating, captivating, thought provoking and yes, she did dance, and I thought how much can be said with just one swirling hand. Yet it was her text that made this a very funny performance. Indeed, if a common theme did emerge in the 3 weeks of this festival, it was the place of stand-up, shimmy-down, movement-comedy in postmodern dance. It all went beyond burlesque and into off-the-cuff, witty soft-shoe one-liners. There was no need for the safety of parody. Strange Arrangements and Sete Tele & Rob Griffin were hilarious. But Wendy Houston is the Woody Allen and Dawn French of solo movement theatre.

*Happy Hour* was an incredibly exciting stand-up site specific performance at the Fuel Bar. Houston became barmaid then barfly, bouncer then blousey raconteur in a precise observation of the narrative arc of a drinking session. *Happy Hour* is made up of all those meaningless fragments of bar room crapola—it is an essay on loneliness, petty stupidities, and poignant clichés. "The artist who wrote this song is a fucking genius" is repeated again and again, spilling the uncanny madness of drinking intimacies across the sodden floor. "It's just rubbish!" says Houston in her perfectly pitched quiet voice (that insinuates this is not a performance), as she points to an ashtray or the performance or what we may think of her performance. Her twisted idioms brim with double shots of humour that gradually transform into strangely insightful mini-tragedies as the perspiration drops slide down the glass. Here there are no questions about the text/movement brew—it's a heady mix.

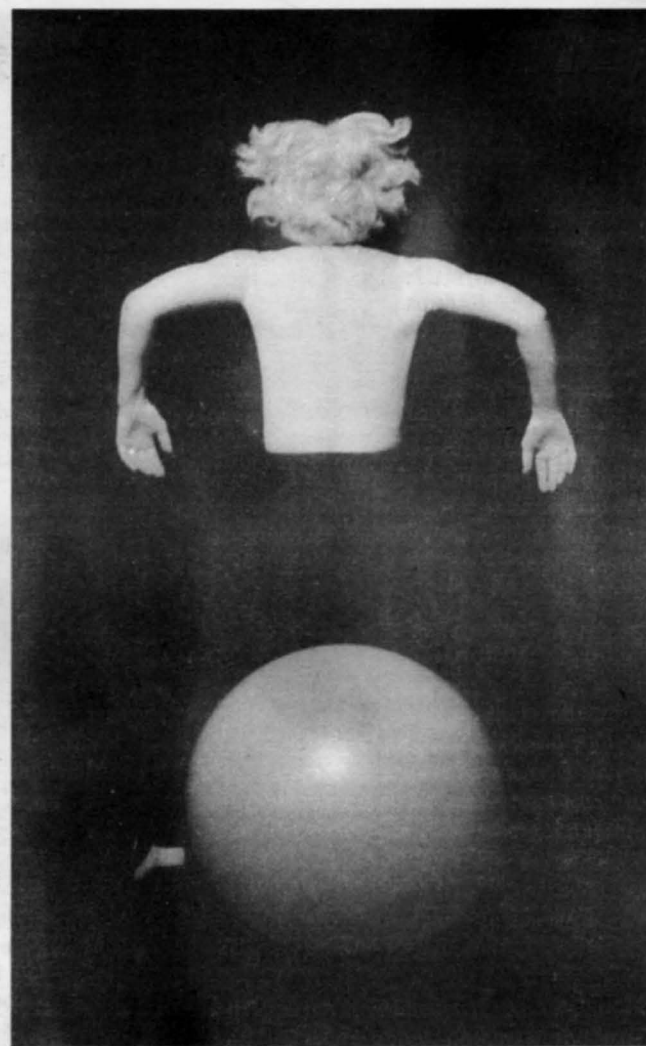
It is performance at the limits. The audience didn't know these limits or where the end was—well it was at a Peter Stuyvesant after unceasing applause.

Melbourne's Trotman & Morrish gave us *Avalanche*, for the first 10 minutes a sublime dream of cardboard box minimalism taped with pregnant poignancy. Beautiful boxes. Great lighting. Unfortunately, the sublime dripped into the soporific and then into a yawning disappointment. Although along with Morrish, I too fetishise cardboard boxes, his stand-up box-kissing routine did not explore the full eroticism of a big, clean, hard cardboard box. The movement caused no groundswells and did not articulate anything new or old or witty or scopophilic.

Alice Cummins and Tony Osborne's *No Fixed Point* was just that, an endless slippery chain of moments, movements, phrases, fragments, passages, blurbs, bits and jokes. I have never before seen so sumptuous a performance retrospective. This was a tantalising journey exploring the artists' favourite fragments from their solo and collaborative works over the last 9 years that for me have set the standard (but not the limit) for the genre. The chronological segments of the 7 works slid into a cohesive, dynamic unity and allowed an insight into 2 extraordinary performance careers. The extracts from *No Fixed Point* (1991) at the beginning of the evening looped piquantly with the new work *The Perfect Couple* (1999) devised specifically for the festival. The measured mad chase, passion and release of the first piece flowed into the desperate possessiveness of the last. Both performers displayed exceptional simplicity and pure madcap. For both the devoted audience and the performers it was a highly emotional evening, rare in this unsentimental city. It may have been prophetic that in tackling the difficulty of recreating old works, Cummins and Osborne signalled new beginnings. (And have left Perth for Sydney. Eds).

A weekend of 20 or more dance films and videos was an excellent and rare introduction to contemporary choreographers, many outside Australia—where this genre is more common. It's hard to tell in what order these video performances were made—stage and then video or self-sufficient films with movement. Probably a healthy confusion. My favourites included the 2 sexy and robust pieces by Cholmondeleys and the Featherstonehaughs, *Cross Channel* and *Perfect Moment* (great art direction); Gravity Feed's strangely affecting *Bridge of Hesitation* and The Welsh Men of Canmore's inspiring *Men*, filmed in the Rockies with old fellas shaking more than their tail feathers.

But the 2 most powerful, voluptuous and mesmeric films were DV8's *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (UK 1989) and Iztok Kovac's *Vertigo Bird* (Slovenia 1996). They were erotic in wildly different ways but both focused on the rough trade flat out cool passion of the scrambling escape from concrete spaces. A pregnant woman dancing hard on harder tiles and men hitting hard dance club walls even harder. These were visceral, explosive, full-contact ruminations into social spheres and hard body politics that left me screaming for more. They were even better on second viewing.



Alice Cummins, *No Fixed Point*

Andrew Beck, *X-Events*

*Dancers are Space Eaters* is a vital, edgy festival of contemporary genre-busting that rocked my boundaries.

*Dancers are Space Eaters*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, October 18 - November 6

Grisha Dolgoplov is a lecturer, performer and director. He has just completed the premier season of his new performance *Bombs & Suitcases*.

## Dance on wheels

### Kat Worth reports on integrated dance in LA

Integrated Dance is at last being taken seriously by promoters, reviewers and by the dancers themselves. The form is not a new one but is often perceived as a community sport. I have recently returned from the Art & Soul Festival of Disability Art and Culture in Los Angeles where though viewpoints differed, dance was given high profile in the program of performing, visual and literary arts.

With great reverence to the dance pioneers who paved the way for integrated dance, the international festival did not display an abundance of new work. The most striking new dance came from Producciones La Manga. Their work, *CRANK La Cultura del Safo*, was described as a "Wheelchair Dancing Investigation Project". Ten performers from Mexico City with and without wheelchairs powered their teen version La Fura Dels Baus. Delivered with such extraordinary attitude and energy, the work was hard and fast, using effective off-stage dialogue and action. Street fights, rock/paper/scissors images and bullying were running themes for this on-the-pulse representation of Mexican youth street culture.

It is not always the disabled body which makes integrated/disability dance interesting, it is how the performer and/or the choreographer work with that body. The choreography from Gabriela Medina was clever and inclusive and it was often impossible to distinguish who really needed their wheelchairs. They

carried each other around the stage and the company's use of floor rolling and body jumping dramatically demonstrated their strength and endurance. Despite its serious need of a trim, the company performed some of the most abstract and exciting wheelchair dancing I have seen to date.

Artistic Coordinator, Mario Villa, explained that the piece simply came from a workshop project that developed into a full work. The group have been working together and receiving various grants and awards since 1995 and are currently working on a new investigation project. I hope we see them soon in Australia.

*CRANK La Cultura del Safo*, Producciones La Manga, Art & Soul International Festival of Disability Art and Culture, The Los Angeles Western Bonaventure Hotel, May 28 - June 2 1999. For further info, contact VSA at <http://www.vsaarts.org/>

Kat Worth has a lectures in *Choreography and Contemporary Dance* at the Northern Rivers Conservatorium Arts Centre Inc. in Lismore. She has recently returned from a NSW Ministry for the Arts and British Government funded exchange to Rubicon Dance in Cardiff, Wales and travelled to the Art & Soul festival as part of a development grant from the Australia Council to research and document integrated dance.



Producciones La Manga, *CRANK La Cultura del Safo*

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# Did we dream this?

Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter examine crime scenes at Sydney's Police and Justice Museum and the Australian Centre for Photography

## Prelude: an opening

At the crowded opening of *Crime Scene* (curators Ross Gibson and Kate Richards, Police and Justice Museum), we move slowly through the key room of the exhibition, curious about the shots of empty streetscapes where murders, rapes and accidents have taken place and been duly documented by police photographers whose constant practice yields a certain eerie artistry. The titles are perfunctory. But there's still a chill, as if the photographs were records of hauntings—for barely a second your brain involuntarily fills in the fallen bicycle and the body of the 7 year old next to it. Ghosts. Further along the exhibition room, no imagining is required. Or it's of a different order.

Some of the opening-nighters turn away. Others move in, peering—are we seeing this? A murdered mother and son neatly placed beneath the frame of a bed, posed almost as if in prayer. This is almost too much. How can this be shared with those pressing in around you? You move on. An empty kitchen, mess, a solitary high heeled shoe. Rape scene. It's a chilling celebration, this opening. A few days later in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, John McPhee reviewing *Crime Scene*, worries at what he sees as inadequate notification at the entrance to the exhibition of what it contains (*Warning. Some of the images in this exhibition may cause distress.*). "No warning can discourage the voyeurs, but what chance is there of a surviving victim or a relative recognising a place that would bring back horrific memories? Do we have the right to use such images to make an exhibition?" (John McPhee, "Still life captures death's essence", *SMH* Nov 24). It's not inconceivable—most of the photographs are from 1945-1960. With the review are 2 photographs, one of a badly dented car chassis (Bondi car accident circa 1956), the other, a full size reproduction of a photograph of murdered man in a Balmain living room, 1956, and what looks like blood on the walls. Who might open the *Herald* and recognise a face, the body, the room...

*Crime Scene* is fascinating and is about more than its set of carefully selected photographs; it is about crime, about photography, documentation and forensics, and cultural history. Interviews, computer-stored information and on-the-wall documentation open out the exhibition. Nonetheless, the photographs, in their simplicity and their immediacy, are scanned onto your wetware and over the coming days they're impossible to delete. An uneasy feeling follows you about, like the day after you dream that perhaps you've murdered someone, that somehow you've been implicated...you are complicit.

## Act one: Another opening

As openings go, Dennis Del Favero's *Yugoslavian War Trilogy* exhibition at the Australian Centre for Photography last month is a memorable one. Blanche D'Alpuget speaks emotionally about her meeting with a woman who had survived the Bosnian rape camps and how despite her efforts to contain it, the pain of her experience seeped into the detail of her daily life. The speech comes after we've viewed the first part of the exhibition, *Pietà*, in Eamon D'Arcy's rude structure in St John's Uniting Church. Inside this room within a room, our perceptions vertiginously up-ended, we watch projections onto a bed on the wall in front of us, and a chair, and a fan, a clock...all white. Tony MacGregor's soundscape evokes the racking grind of helicopters, surveillance, a sense of urgency, like a song you can't get out of your head. The images are equally disturbing, especially as their significance unfolds in the narrative loop—a mother tries to trace her murdered son whose body has been used by soldiers for target practice. She wants to bury him. A hospital mends its war victims only to release them to certain death, the murderers await them in the street. Unlike the rest of the trilogy, this footage is raw, the bandages, the blood, the wound, the aerial view of pleasant farms and forests barbarised. It's good to get out of this sensurround murder scene, though you've probably watched it three times before you've registered the loop. The nightmare recurs, already.

Outside the room, we're offered incongruous glasses of champagne. We take them and move through the candle-lit vestry and out into the night where we have the sort of conversations you have at any opening though this time they all begin with D'Alpuget's speech and how it somehow stilled us. This time there are not too many of us. There's enough quiet to reflect. Reflection: *Pietà* is a loaded gun (small dark claustrophobic room, within a church, a vertigo-

inducing room, a soundtrack that won't let you alone, images that are fuzzy, breaking up, but too real). Is someone trying to put the smoking gun in your hand? No. *Pietà* simply puts you in the picture, or above it; you're up there, looking down like...God? or the Serbian airforce...?

## Act 2: Deeper in

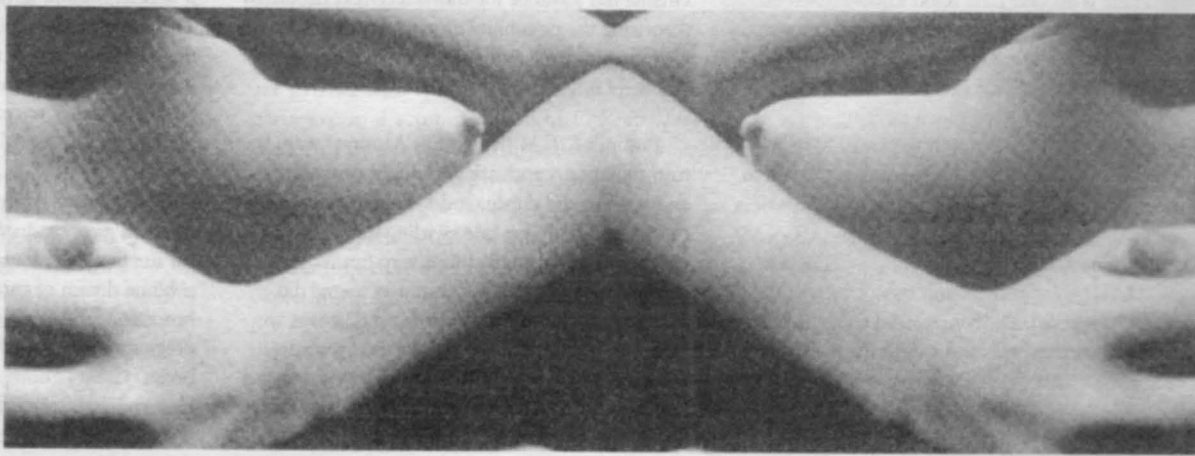
We're thankful for the time it takes to walk down Oxford Street to the gallery for part 2, *Cross Currents*. Inside the main gallery of the Australian Centre for Photography our field of vision is filled with huge black and white split-screen images of cities, male and female body parts, landscapes, forests, all stretched across the space, doubled and reversed and Rohrschach Test-like folding in and out of themselves, taking our eyes with them, drawing us in and in.

The disturbing effect of *Pietà* is at first doubled in *Cross Currents* by the scale and the device and again, the sound. But this time the view is eye level. We're on the ground. In a train. In a hotel room. Closer. The black and white photography and the artifice of its showing, however, are a little distancing, this is not as literal as *Pietà*. The narrative, as you piece it together, seems at first banal. "*Cross Currents* looks at...(the) aftermath (of the war) through a narrative dealing with the relationship between a young mail-order bride who has fled from Croatia and the Serbian body-guard hired to 'protect' her after she is forced into prostitution in Berlin" (Del Favero, CD-ROM booklet). And it's like a movie, the scale, the black and white evoking an earlier generation of war films; drab landscapes rattles by, soldiers walk ruined streets. But it's a narrative you piece together and therefore invest in—fleshing out dialogues that speak of emptiness, imagining the relationship between these naked bodies in this neat Berlin hotel room. You watch over and over until it makes some kind of sense. Because you are not given the narrative in a straight line, you feel like an outsider, but out of the banalities you build an enormity. You know what happened, that war, you try to connect it with what you hear and see now...you try to make sense of this aftermath...which never stops.

At home, on the CD-ROM you can worry at it, over and over, discovering new details, new evidence. You start to see the faces of the players, glimpsed in a mirror, or their heads straining back away from their naked bodies. This is a worrying curiosity machine. The devil is in the detail. It takes you in. When you first open it, a widescreen image of a hotel room rotates on the horizontal and your arrow transforms to a viewfinder, on the window, the mirror, the TV and at several points on the bed. You open up slices of narrative voiced over the same imploding doublings you saw in the gallery. You go back to the scenes of the crimes. You know too much, but you never know enough.

Dennis Del Favero tells us later that in the installation of this work at ZKM in Karlsruhe, the lone viewer entered a room with a severely tilted and wedge-shaped floor. Interacting with the viewer's movements the split-screen video projection beamed onto two intersecting walls of the room—rather than the flat screen at the ACP. The sense of being drawn in, dragged in, implicated, would have been even greater. The triggering of spaces and bodies more alarmingly involuntary.

If *Pietà* was brutal, and by now it feels like it was, *Cross Currents* is so darkly melancholic you could drown in it—the size of the images, the depth of the sound, the forever folding images, like currents cutting across each other into nothing (but an invisible force, yes, a black hole). There's sadness in the telling made moreso by the wavering drone underscoring the dialogue, broken only by a sudden orgasmic groan, an inexplicable burst of children's play, a woman's cry, scary male laughter breaking into the room. Of course, when you open the door, the window, the TV, the bed...sound rushes in, the wailing of a high speed train or, quiet again, the simple untheatrical dialogue of the 'couple', the clink of glass, ice...The limited lexicon of sounds locks you in.



Dennis Del Favero, *Cross Currents*

## Act 3: Too deep

*Motel Vilina Vlas* is the third part of the trilogy and installed in the smallest room of the gallery. Another small room. Again, the frightening effect is doubled in the duplication of means. An horrific story unfolds in a blameless text and a set of cibachrome photographs. A woman survives the atrocities of the rape camps and a soldier who refused to take part is in turn murdered by his own family. After everything else, this, the most detached of tellings has the most murderous effect. It is silent.

## Act 4: Penetration

The specificity of the stories, the ever increasing detail you find in the images, the links you make between these and what you already know about the Bosnian war and the eternal question, 'how could they do it?' (not quite yet 'how could we?'—that's something to wake up to at 3 in the morning), this is the work of the Trilogy. You are implicated by being put in the story/experience, by being told it (that can be enough—D'Alpuget's story or *Motel Vilina Vlas*), or by allowing it in—eye, ear, the stomach it hits—and out again—I will tell you what I saw, heard, felt...*The Yugoslav War Trilogy* is penetrating. Nikos Papastergiadis declares in the essay accompanying the CD-ROM that the works are "more like meditations on the nightmares of modernity rather than they are declarations of abuse and injustice in a specific place." It's always good to claim some universality for a work of art, it's a kind of relief and an elevation of the work as art, and they *aren't* accusatory, but the devil is in the detail, and Del Favero and collaborators' arsenal of devices are too potent, too penetrating, too specific, to induce meditation. Fear comes first, and disbelief, and anxiety that stays.

## Act 5: The interpretation of dreams

*Although passed over in the general coverage of the hostilities, these events involving genocide, rape camps and sexual slavery are in many ways defining symbols of a war which consciously used sex as a cultural and military weapon.*

Denis Del Favero,  
*The Yugoslavian War Trilogy* CD-ROM booklet

This is a visceral work. It gets inside you and it's hard to get it out, as if it's attached itself to your organs. And to your brain—it's psychological, not in the sense that

characters are created with depth or that a narrator explains himself, but in the sense that it does its work on you, becomes part of your psychology. Knowing this of Del Favero's work, we were anxious about even going to the opening. And in *Cross Currents* it's psychoanalytic, as a kind of visual poetic, intended or not, the centre of the screen (where everything doubled is sucked in or pushed out) becoming an engulfing (war) wound, where tangled trees resolve into sudden pudenda, limbs and armpit hair condense into a groin, two breasts merge into one primal one, 2 brows (are they?) fuse into something anal, an eye is fish-eye lensed and doubled into a monstrous animal, that glowers at your voyeurism, but, look, there are tears waiting to fall...every orifice is open, forced or waiting.

Like a dream *Cross Currents* falls apart, starts up again, is remembered in fragments, is observed, is participated in, is triggered. Like a neurosis, that most waking of dreams, it is something to go over and over, opening the CD-ROM, entering the hotel room, clicking on the door, the window, the TV, the bed, the bed, the bed...

Meditation's not the right word, the works are too urgent for that, too keen for you to feel their pain, too eager to implicate, to place you at this crime scene and to get you coming back and back...though not quite to pin the crime on you. They are too often noisy, too sudden for reflection. But melancholy, there's something in that, later on, on the way home, the next day, a week later, a feeling, rather than an idea...the sad narrative of *Cross Currents*, the sense of aftermath, of unresolvable loss, the nostalgic wartime black and white, that drone, bodies folding into themselves, the sound of children's play. It was once hoped that the evils of the first half of the century had been conquered, but they have come back and back, slaughters and genocides, astonishing inequities. Our anger and melancholy sit side by side, just barring the way to the black hole.

Dennis Del Favero, *Yugoslavian War Trilogy*, sound design Tony MacGregor, produced at the Institute for Visual Media (ZKM), Karlsruhe, Germany, 1999. Australian Centre for Photography October 1 - 24

*Cross Currents*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, August 27 - September 25

*Crime Scene*, Police and Justice Museum, Sydney, November 13 1999 - October 2 2000

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# Through song darkly

NORPA premieres the Grabowsky-Balodis opera *The Mercenary*

In 1877 the Marquis de Rays advertised for settlers to found a new colony, La Nouvelle France, to the north east of Australia, near Rabaul, at a cost of 1800 francs for each 20 acre allotment and a 4 room house. Three hundred and forty people, including a group of farmers from Italy's Veneto region, set out in 1880 for their new home. There were deaths on the difficult voyage and the colonists arrived to find no fertile land, no houses, and 5 months of death and disease before they left, on another tragic sea voyage, some to seek asylum in NSW, granted them in 1881. Eventually the Veneti came together again, some 50 kilometres from Lismore and established a prosperous community—New Italy. Librettist Janis Balodis builds a potent fiction on this piece of history, illuminating the complex origins of Australian culture (not long before the monocultural mythos of the 1890s was applied with a heavy hand) and etching in the agonies of personal guilt (including an incipient atheism that can never leave God alone).

To get his 1800 francs, the Mercenary of the work's title has to kill a man in Italy, something his wife never forgives him for, and which troubles him the rest of his life, especially when, in the employ of a Cattle King politician, he murders again—this time Aboriginals. In a 20th century music theatre tradition of monodrama that goes back to Schönberg's *Ewartung*, this is another journey through the dark night of the soul, with another murder, but painted from an overtly social and political palette. This is a musical monologue at the end of a man's life, an act of sensitive and intelligent reflection from someone who has hitherto set aside moral complexities. It's also a moment when he suddenly discerns shapes and patterns in his life, when he is struck by ironies and synchronicities—

the likeness between the first murder and the moment when he himself is almost knifed by a jealous husband; the courting of his wife and the moment of her death—"All that last long night touching only her fingertips" drawing us back to "...for one whole night I touched only her fingertips, for one night touched only her dark hair, one night touched only her ruby lips."

Balodis' libretto is short on the page, but rich with this kind of detail, with just enough repetition and variation—and in an integral relationship with Paul Grabowsky's music—to haunt the listener, to yield something more than pathos, something on the edge of tragic insight—"How do we die?/Who holds the knife for me?" Only occasionally does it slip into abstraction and a certain literariness that doesn't fit the Mercenary ("He had his own face again, without the mask of suffering") and a rare infelicity like "I was standing in the quicksand at the edge of the abyss." Thankfully, Balodis doesn't attempt an Italo-Australian English. The Mercenary speaks and sings with a well-sustained simplicity and occasional and appropriate syntactic naivety ("Maria cradled him and rocked him in time to the sea's moans/She had promised him no devil's fishes would bite his skin") that does the job without belying the man's intelligence, and also makes it believable that the Mercenary can change his name to Jack Stephens later in life and father, a politician, son and grandson. It is a plain language but one rich in metaphor and observation: "Hearts torn by misery and scarred by life's sorrows/were stitched up and pushed back inside our shirts"; and "When eighty barrels of spoiled meat were cast overboard/people prayed that God's taste for flesh was satisfied..."

Teresa Crea's direction also works powerfully



Lyndon Terracini, *The Mercenary* at NORPA

through repetition and variation, exploiting a set of performance principles that evoke states of mind rather than narrative causality, true to the Mercenary's attempts to make sense of his life and impending death. Lyndon Terracini as the Mercenary works with a set of devices in varying permutations that, like the words, haunt as they come back to us with new meanings—a coffin borne as perpetual burden, a child's coffin within, a cloth, small crosses, a hat, a knife. The power of these is amplified by recurrent musical associations and by lighting designer John Rayment's transformations of them and the Mercenary's compulsive repetitions of actions into visual epiphanies in golds and purples.

Similarly, Eamon D'Arcy's magnificent set resonates not only with the sound of the singer and instrumentalists that inhabit it (the latter 5 form a broad semi-circle around Terracini) but with possible denotations—the belly of a ship, "This circle of trees could be the pillars of some ancient temple where nobody worships any more. Blackmen walked here but left no footmarks", a school map of the world—or connotations—Jonah in the belly of the whale, a sacred site, an evocation of the consciousness of one man with a set of haunting memorabilia—coffins, crosses and the knife which he obsessively plays with.

Paul Grabowsky's score, which he conducts himself from the forestage and slightly out of the semi-circle of musicians, is rich, dense and fundamentally melancholic, appealing most when spare and opening out the space for Terracini to be heard (a real problem on opening night in the first 3 scenes—where it is tough to be denied key information—and recurring elsewhere). The music oscillates between demanding and accessible, and has a pervasive modernist seriousness which surprised me (was I hearing an academic inclination or was it a bebop influence). The moments where it slips into an evocation of Italian folk music, or in the Cattle King episode, a witty and beguiling interplay between Italian and Australian traditions, are powerful and not just illustrative. Most embracing are the lyrical, emotional high points, securely in the tradition of a refrain from an aria or even a theme from a musical, working closely and effectively with the libretto. Having only heard the score once makes it difficult to comment in any thorough way, and not enough to say whether I heard a really distinctive compositional voice. There were certainly times when I felt restraint would have benefited the singer and the libretto (and the audience), but this is not to deny the often sublime combinations of instruments (viola, bass clarinet, piano accordion, guitar, percussion) in an excellent and really distinctive ensemble. Their onstage presence, not theatricalised, was a key visual component. The writing for Terracini is fine, testing his range (taking it to an affecting falsetto over the child's coffin), maximising dramatic effect, mostly keeping the words clear, and shifting nicely between heightened operatic delivery and plain speech (and, in between, a less comfortable kind of *Sprechstimme* that felt out of place). In the end it's the lyrical passages of the score that stay, that work so well with Balodis' libretto, less so the moments of great passion where voice and ensemble lock in something less definitive (but a better sound balance could change my mind).

*The Mercenary* is a notable achievement and deserves a long life, but it will have a better one if its creators address a number of issues beyond the relationship between voice and instruments (both in terms of sound balance and composition). In terms of direction, Crea's focus on the relationship between Terracini and his death-fetishes is admirably restrained and creatively productive, but, towards the end, is too restrained, as if there is nothing else to say through them, nothing to finally let this man face his own imminent death at a symbolic level, to enter, say, after this confession, the coffin, to await the judgment he doubts will come. The power of the objects is not fully exploited, not matching the musical and psychological intensity of the ending. Also to be addressed are those moments when the ensemble takes over and the Mercenary is still and silent—too many of these looked like Terracini at a loose end. The age of the Mercenary seems physically neglected (Terracini still conveys a youthful strength), not that he should play old, but a certain physical gravity was missing on opening night. The libretto is one of rare quality in Australian opera and music theatre (and is helpfully reproduced in the program) but, even if the sound balance were to be better for the first 3 scenes, there is a sense in which the scenes still make considerable demands on the listener too early on—they are discursive preludes to the narrative, the first 2 setting the scene in different ways, the third a recollection of a pig killing ritual (its imagery not as well integrated into the whole as others). I recollect these scenes as vocally and instrumentally big—I could be wrong—but I do recall the struggle to find my way into the work. Lastly, for a monodrama it is a long work, too long when one voice has so much to tell. There is certainly room in the score and the libretto for productive editing if the work is to have a longer life and be something more than very, very good.

I'm not making any particular claims for tunes, for narrative, for catharsis, for brevity for brevity's sake, but my dramaturgical instincts tell me that, as good as it is, like a lot of Australian music theatre this is yet another incomplete work and one in which certain impulses already in the work need to be followed through. It would only benefit the work to open it out vocally, to tighten it up narratively, to focus its compositional voice, extend its performance principles more rigorously. If, as a result, it becomes more accessible, shorter and to the point, all the better. It has an excellent libretto, a potent score beautifully arranged, fine direction and a great performance; it's more adventurous than the Jonathan Mills-Dorothy Porter *The Ghost Wife* (premiered in the same week and with a much more judicious relationship between voice and instruments) and, like that work, should find a long life in the Australian music theatre repertoire. KG

Northern Rivers Performing Arts, *The Mercenary*, composer Paul Grabowsky, librettist Janis Balodis, director Teresa Crea, designer Eamon D'Arcy, lighting John Rayment, bass clarinet Anthony Burr, guitar Doug De Vries, piano accordion Mark Knoop, percussion Peter Neville, viola Patricia Pollett; commissioned and performed by Lyndon Terracini; Star Court Theatre, Lismore, NSW, October 13, 15, 16

## Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

to January 29

### AWAS! Recent art from Indonesia

Nindityo Adipurnomo, Arahmayani, Ari Diyanto, Heri Dono, S. Teddy D., Eddie Hara, Hanura Hosea, Samuel Indratma, Bunga Jeruk, Agung Kurniawan, Krisna Murti, Tisna Sanjaya, Agus Suwage, Tri Wahyudi (Popok)

Curators: Dr M. Dwi Marianto and Mella Jaarsma, Indonesia; Alexandra Kuss, Germany; Damon Moon, Australia



Krisna Murti, *The President's Grand Party Line*, 1999

## ACCA Public Events

Saturday 4 December 2 pm presented in conjunction with Dancehouse

**Queering Choreography** Judith Butler claims that there are no pre-cultural, objective bodies and that it is through corporeal practices that bodies take shape. These bodily thoughts will be situated and assessed in relation to performance, virtuality and choreography. Forum co-ordinated and introduced by Philippa Rothfield. With Anna Munster, Jill Orr, Suszanna Soboslay, Libby Dempster and Sally Gardner. Admission is Free Bookings 9654 6422

Thursday 16 December 6.30pm presented in conjunction with Monash University

**Ihab Hassan lecture** Vilas Research Professor of English and Comparative Literature at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Hassan is one of the world's pre-eminent commentators on post-colonial and post-modern cultures. Professor Hassan will discuss the central cultural and technological trends of our moment, and ask what might millennial awareness be; whatever happened to 1984 and *The Brave New World*? Tickets \$5 and \$3 conc (+ACCA members) Bookings 9654 6422

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# Resonating pain, percussive destruction

The Melbourne Festival premieres the Jonathan Mills-Dorothy Porter opera, *The Ghost Wife*

Composer Jonathan Mills and librettist Dorothy Porter have created a brooding, sometimes harrowing opera out of *The Chosen Vessel* by Barbara Baynton (1857-1929). The short story has been adapted here sometimes with acuity, more often loosely (incorporating other significant influences and sources) and, inevitably in the dramatisation, without the strikingly cool, third person detachment of the original, an account of a woman alone in a bush hut with her baby. Her callous husband is away shearing. A swagman breaks through the palings of the hut. She runs outside for help, hearing a horse nearby. Her plight is ignored. She is raped and murdered. What melodrama there is in Baynton's short story is saved for the other half of her plot, that which doesn't appear in the opera—the man on horseback who witnesses the moment before the murder of the woman and thinks he has seen a vision of Virgin and Child, only to be disabused by a priest at the story's end. Mills and Porter, and director Adam Cook, just keep the lid on the melodrama they have created with tight scoring, a carefully iterated set of physical actions and verbal motifs, and the amplification of emotion through Ben Cobham's light shafting between the planks of designer Stephen Curtis' claustrophobic but all too vulnerable timber hut, and in the percussionists' use of the hut as instrument (acoustic designer Neil McLachlan). The woman's interior world of fear resonates visually and aurally throughout the theatre.

For all this escalating theatricality, including adding to the story the return of the murdered wife as ghost to haunt her cruel husband, there is a Noh-play intensity to the work; an unhurried unfolding, alternations of passion and reflection, aspects of the composition and the ghost's appearance making the Noh connection certain. In the collaborators' conversation in the program notes, Benjamin Britten is cited as a key influence in their exploration of the relationship between score and libretto. Of course, the Noh play was a considerable influence on Britten's operas. In fact, *The Ghost Wife's* kinship with the Britten oeuvre is marked, making it a satisfying if, these days, somewhat conventional chamber opera experience with straightforward narrative, clearly etched characters without too much complexity. Instead, it aims quite rightly for an emotional and visceral intensity in the elaboration of fear,

suspense and remorse. Cook's direction has the woman several times bent over her kitchen table visibly racked with fear of intruders in the very position she will soon be raped by a swagman—a fatalistic somatic foretelling.

In fact there is a frighteningly neurotic intensity to the opera at every level, going beyond anything in Baynton's telling. Whether or not "the intensity of (the woman's) imagination...presents a metaphysical dimension to the work" (program note), is debatable. Baynton's victim (the sad antithesis of Lawson's heroic drover's wife) is not neurotic, but in the Porter-Mills-Cook realisation, the elaboration of her fear writ through voice and body and the surrounding space feels uncomfortably so. The onstage rape and the build up to the offstage murder are elaborate compared with Baynton's few words. Porter's use of language, of lists, of words that strike fear, is almost incantatory, the words finding their way from mouth to mouth, with Mills driving their compulsiveness home. (Towards the end, you can hear the words coming, suggesting perhaps that Porter restrained her lexicon just that little too much.)

Able performances from the 3 singers, fine small ensemble playing (percussion, viola, double bass, flutes, French horn, cello, clarinets, violin conducted by Richard Gill), and the positioning of the musicians in a semi-circle just forward of the performance area, all add to the sense of a focussed, intimate, interior work. Stephen Curtis' set is made entirely of rough timber planking constituting 2 walls of the hut and a roof (not the galvanised iron of the story). Another wall of palings rises from behind, high above the house, suggesting that, for the woman, nature is just as closed and constraining as her cage of a home. It was around the time of this production that, sadly, the visual artist Rosalie Gascoigne died. I sensed a likeness to her work in Curtis' design, the timber looks found, the colouring familiarly aged, and there's a simple horizontal and vertical play of blunt juxtaposition and fragile integration suggestive of the ghost wife's man-made world. Gascoigne's is an art of transformation and release. In Curtis' design its initial cool indifference eventually becomes, with Cobham's mobile lighting, another amplification of a state of near hysteria.

*The Ghost Wife* is an engrossing creation, occasionally losing shape (in the central solo passage from the wife), balancing at times awkwardly between emotional restraint and excess. It is finely composed and tautly written—economy is everything, multiplying meanings and effects from small but rich resources right across the hour. The music is best when spare, distinctive in its composition for percussion, and effective with many touches that heighten not only the drama but underscore the work's fundamental interiority—a pizzicato nervousness when faced with the swagman tenor's pulsing insistence, the husband's braying domineering baritone, a shakuhachi-like breathlessness against a heavy-breathing bass, gongs against low sustained strings, the sharp clack of stones and the climactic percussive destruction of the house. What it all adds up to, beyond giving new life to one of the more frequently anthologised, though less than famous Australian short stories, I'm not sure. One thing is certain, the collaborators have made Baynton's story so much their own and absorbed so much else into it, that the connection with the original is, in many ways, only important as an impulse. Suzanne Spinner will take a closer look at this issue in *RealTime*#35. In the meantime, Australian music theatre is blessed with a substantial new work, finely crafted and faithfully realised, provocative in its portrayal at every level of the production of the pitiless terrorising of a woman and the



Kanen Breen & Dimity Shepherd, *The Ghost Wife*

Jeff Busby

implicit evocation of a culture that would allow it.

KG

Melbourne Festival, *The Ghost Wife*, composer Jonathan Mills, librettist Dorothy Porter music director Richard Gill, director Adam Cook, designer Stephen Curtis, lighting Ben Cobham, costumes Jodie Fried, acoustic designer Neil McLachlan; the woman Dimity Shepherd, the husband Grant Smith, the swagman Kanen Breen; percussion Craig Beard, viola Jason Bunn, double bass Bill Cawte, flutes Kaye Duffell, French horn Jules Evans, cello Leah Hooper, clarinets Lisa Jennings, violin Suanee Ng; George Fairfax Studio, Victorian Arts Centre, October 15, 16, 19, 20, 8.30pm

## An eye on the ear

Aphids in *Ricefields* at The Performance Space

There's a pervasive 20th century history of inventive ways of performing and producing music and sound in concert, in galleries and studios, on-site, on record, with tape and CD and now in newer media in various combinations with the above. Musical performance is placed in a dynamic relationship with another art form, medium or space. Juliana Hodkinson, a British composer working in Denmark and currently collaborating with Aphids on their new work *Maps*, writes aptly on the dialectic in her *Ricefields* program note:

[The] switching of perceptual modes between looking and listening, and the kind of fusion that comes of grasping both what you hear and what you see together was an integral part of my experience of *Ricefields*. I felt drawn into the visual materials as an aid to hearing more closely, while the sounds seemed in turn to point in reference to their origins outside of themselves. Rather like watching a game or sport of which you know enough of the rules to be able to sense some causality between actions, yet which constantly surprises by turning and turning again all the possible outcomes, so that nothing is predictable at all.

Recently in Australia, audience access to music as performance and/or installation has increased, most notably through the work of Brisbane's Elision (see

page 22), and now Melbourne's Aphids (the same city's Contemporary Music Events has also played an important role in this development). Both companies tour here and overseas and run increasingly higher public profiles. Both have formed international collaborations. The hybrids they create are no mere promotional exercises for music or composer. Although the composer plays a central role (you don't think of Elision without thinking of Richard Barrett or especially Liza Lim), the interplay of composer, instrumentalists, visual and other artists are attracting new and growing audiences (eg for Elision's *transmisi* in the vast innards of an old power station at the Third Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane recently) to hear music they might otherwise not encounter (or find immediately appealing).

*Ricefields* is a seductively reflective experience, especially in Sydney where many of the audience found themselves on cushions on the floor of The Performance Space. The listening and seeing that is *Ricefields* is gently cumulative: the placement of rocks, wordless song, bottles engraved with parts of the score (held by audience members), the musical rustle of plastic bags; moments of performer isolation and others of intense collaboration (the musicians huddled together); small, delicately decorated sponges, hand painted tents glow like lanterns. There's a restrained theatricality (needing

yet to overcome awkwardness), and a sense of score as written, sculpted, transparent, erasable, fixed yet improvised, readable everywhere in the installation, a set of endlessly interpretable codes, architectural and ethereal. The meditative whole is not a little Japanese in spirit—the starting point of David Young's composition/conceptualisation and the group's collaboration with violinist Yasutaka Hemmi was in Japan. *Ricefields* is a memorable experience and confirmation of a significant development in Australian musical performance, not at all without precedent but with confidence, vision and, already,

the capacity to tour nationally and work internationally.

KG

*Aphids, Ricefields*, composition David Young, installation Sarah Pirrie & Rosemary Joy, sound design Michael Hewes, lighting Lisa Trewin, musicians Deborah Kayser (soprano), Natasha Anderson (recorder), Yasutaka Hemmi (violin), Peter Humble (percussion); The Performance Space, Sydney, October 19-21. [www.bigfoot.com/~aphids](http://www.bigfoot.com/~aphids)



Peter Humble, Yasutaka Hemmi, Natasha Anderson & Deborah Kayser, *Ricefields*

Rosemary Joy



# The future makers

Chris Reid assays some of Adelaide's musical riches

Just when you thought new music meant a Sculthorpe, Conyngham or Khoene work to kick off a symphony subscription concert, Adelaide abounds with composers and ensembles as lively as they are diverse.

Pianist Gabriella Smart is a gifted and committed protagonist of 12th century music, appearing in concert and on radio. Her ensemble Soundstream features work by Adelaide composers, including The Firm, as well as major international composers. Many SA ensembles rely on a core group of players—Soundstream variously includes Australian String Quartet violinist James Cuddeford, percussionist Ryzard Pusz and Adelaide Symphony Orchestra members. As well as works by Carl Vine and Margaret Sutherland, Smart's 1999 solo CD *Platinum* includes works by Adelaide's John Polglase, Melita White and Tristram Cary.

ACME New Music Co, led by the energetic David Harris, composition lecturer at Flinders Street School of Music, is an umbrella organisation centred on past and present composition students. The prolific ACME gave 10 concerts in 1999 with broad programming. Their successful recent staging of the Amicus String Quartet featured non-ACME composers David Kotlowy and UK-based Wendy Hiscocks, as well as ACME composers. Recently, Cuddeford presented solo violin works by the typically experimental ACME composers and by Xenakis, Donatoni and Cage at the ABC's Studio.

ACME gets considerable support from the ABC in staging concerts. A 1998 direct broadcast in John Crawford's *New Music Australia* gave student works outstanding national coverage. An ACME CD has been released and there are plans for an annual release.

Flinders Street students won the semi-final of the ABC's 1999 Improvisation Competition,

Jeremy Rowney composed for 2 Brink Theatre Company productions, and Flinders St composers attended the 1999 Composers' Workshop at the Darwin International Guitar Festival, a second year student winning a commission.

The Auricle ensemble, led by composer and flautist Melita White, has given 12 concerts over 4 years, helping young composers and musicians establish themselves in new music. White's engaging, lyrical work was included in the 1997 Australian Women's Music Festival. SAYAB (SA Youth Arts Board) and Arts SA funding have been essential. Though not unhappy with the SA environment, White is contemplating moving East; opportunities in Adelaide are not unlimited.

The Performing Arts Technology Unit at the University of Adelaide is dedicated to training and hosting performances by local, interstate and overseas artists. Earlier this year, PATU Director Stephen Whittington gave a memorable performance of Morton Feldman's *For Bunita Marcus* and accompanied violinist Anna McMichael in a sensational recital of works by Sciarrino, Isang Yun, Satie and Mauricio Kagel. In September, internationally renowned pianist Ortwim Sturmer performed Radulescu, Rzewski and Stephen Ingham. PATU then hosted the Clocked-Out Trio, a San Diego-based improvisation ensemble which includes prominent Adelaide percussionist and doctoral candidate Vanessa Tomlinson. Montreal-based composer and electric guitarist Tim Brady performed and gave a workshop. France's Triton 2 also performed. PATU's role is significant, giving new music unparalleled exposure, promoting new material in any media, offering new media courses, and using a virtual studio to teach off-campus.

This year's Barossa Music Festival offered much new music, including Richard Meale (composer-in-residence), Soundstream, Lights

Ensemble and the recently-formed Adelaide ensembles Stella and Jo Dudley's Maximum Legroom. International ensembles Contrechamps and Triton 2 performed local and overseas contemporary work.

Works by The Firm—established composers Quentin Grant, Raymond Chapman-Smith, Polglase and Kotlowy—are regularly presented by prominent Adelaide musicians, especially ASO members, and were included in a recent Seraphim Trio program of Australian new music. With the ABC's support, The Firm is recording 3 CDs. Anna McMichael will feature, as will soprano Tessa Miller (Stella), and pianists Stephen Whittington (PATU) and Anna Goldsworthy (Seraphim).

ASO, Arts SA and ABC support have been essential to The Firm and to other Adelaide composers and ensembles. The eclectic Quentin Grant, who recently completed a 10 month residency at the ASO, believes Adelaide is a good environment for composers. ABC radio regularly broadcasts their works, principally through *New Music Australia*, and SUV and 5MBS also carry local work.

New ideas abound. Ensembles such as Stella and Maximum Legroom combine music, theatre and dance. Tristram Cary pioneered the use of tape and electronic media in music and continues to use these successfully. Electronic media ensemble radioqualia perform via the internet and in venues such as art galleries. There is much experimentation in Adelaide new music, especially amongst younger composers, though not all succeeds. Some performances show mature use of media, others beg more considered development. Innovation alone is insufficient, and conceptual resolution and aesthetic appeal, as well as performance quality, are essential. The best new music can dazzle when rendered by devoted experts such as Soundstream, McMichael,

Whittington and Seraphim. However, Grant feels that musical experimentation may be giving way to a few major forms. Timeclocks are becoming less common. Cage's influence is still strong at ACME, less so amongst more established composers.

Despite the number and quality of ensembles, composers and ideas, greater momentum and critical support are needed. Outside drawcard events like the Barossa Festival and the Adelaide Festival of Arts, composers and musicians generally must promote and manage their own performances. New music composition and performance necessarily depend partly on grants, but advertising and sponsorship are also vital. Gabriella Smart believes that Adelaide needs substantial audience development to maintain a healthy music culture. Broad programming helps—Adelaide Chamber Singers' programming, and excellence in all genres, ensures good audiences who are exposed to the contemporary elements in their concerts.

Critical feedback comes from within the new music community and from the press whose coverage is good but can't cover all the territory. The ASO's recent performance of a Padma Newsome composition won critical acclaim. But the extended critical dialogue composers need is not always available. "People don't discuss aesthetics, but form", says Quentin Grant. This is not unique to Australia. The multiplicity of musical directions makes defining standards difficult, leaving composers, musicians and audiences able to do little besides declaring likes and dislikes.

Adelaide has breadth and depth, some excellent composers and musicians, offers aesthetic freedom and the opportunity to perform and to experiment. It deserves a wider press more focused on such music, comparable with the visual art press, and a stronger promotional and managerial support network.

Director and designer Kim Carpenter is in a 3 month pre-production period for *Grandma's Shoes*, an opera by composer Graeme Koehne and librettist Libby Hathorn. This will be followed by a 3 week rehearsal to realise the one hour work. Several years ago a successful workshop showed the potential of *Grandma's Shoes*. Nine years ago, Hathorn, a well-known writer for children, had seen Theatre of Image's first production, *Hansel and Gretel, A Tale of Our Times*. She approached Carpenter with an unpublished story about an 8 year-old girl coming to grips with her story-teller grandmother's death. Hathorn read the story to Carpenter: "I was very moved and it stayed with me." As a story, though, it was essentially an interior account. Carpenter imagined the girl's psychological journey populated with other characters, and this was the direction that he and Hathorn took, she with support from an Australia Council Literature Fund commission grant. Carpenter also thought that the poetic quality in the writing might not suit actors. Hathorn was inclined to opera, Opera Australia joined the quest to realise the work, and Graeme Koehne was commissioned to write the score with help from the Music Fund. For the production Opera Australia is providing 6 singers and a 12 piece orchestra and music staff. Theatre of Image provides Carpenter, 3 dancer-puppeteers, conductor Mark Summerbell, choreographer Julie Anne Long, and animators. Carpenter is happy with the evolution of the work, with the libretto, the accessible, tuneful Koehne score ("simple, lyrical, but not writing down to the audience, never simplistic"), and the work's portability. He points out that this new work is the first opera created for young audiences in Sydney since Simone Young conducted Anne Boyd's *The Little Mermaid* at the Sydney Opera House in 1985. Carpenter directed and designed that work which, he regrets, had no workshoping and a chorus of 40—the result was neither perfect nor tourable. For *Grandma's Shoes*, continuity has been everything (even half the singers were involved in the "terrific workshop that made everyone sit up and notice"). There was also a sad sense of unity, most of the key collaborators lost someone in their families as the work evolved. The work's resolution of grief was affirming, says Carpenter, as the girl ventures into



The Monkey King, *Grandma's Shoes*

imaginary worlds and returns to step into her *Grandma's shoes* as the new teller of inherited stories. Design is central to Carpenter's work. In the workshop he had NIDA craft students on hand to help outline a design for the opera using paper and scissors to generate Matisse-like cutouts. From this came the idea of having the puppets emerge from a giant book. Inside the same book is a window through which an animated world is seen. For this, Carpenter created a story board in coloured pencil and which the animators from Macquarie University imitated using a paint software program but, he emphasises, avoiding a computer-generated look. Carpenter says that *Grandma's Shoes* is for children 5 - 12 years and family audiences. Musically, he declares, it's for everyone. RT

Theatre of Image and Opera Australia, *Grandma's Shoes*, composer Graeme Koehne, libretto Libby Hathorn, director and designer Kim Carpenter, musical director Mark Summerbell, the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra, Everest Theatre, The Seymour Centre, Jan 18 7.30pm, Wed 19 - Sat 29 2pm & 7.30pm (no performance Australia Day).

## SPORT TOOTH & CLAW With Jack Rufus

The Australian cricket team, we're always being told, is the best in the world—and it's easy to see why. While other national teams get by with 11 players plus a 12th man, our team is much, much bigger. Only recently, two off-duty Aussie umpires did their bit for the cause, accusing Pakistan's strike bowler of an illegal action before the Test series had even begun—that's teamwork.

Now we need to bend the rules so that even more Aussies can get in on the action. Say an opposing batsman hits a six, and an Aussie in the crowd catches the ball: that should be out, bowled Warne caught fan. Tony Greig should be allowed to do his pitch report while the opposing team is in, unnerving the batsmen with his innane chatter as he prods anxiously at the wicket.

Streakers should be encouraged to run onto the field just as the enemy is about to take a catch. And let's not forget our proud Australian fauna. Patriotic dingoes could be let loose to terrorise the batsmen, while sulphur crested cockatoos swoop and divebomb about their heads. "Marvellous shot, that," Richie Benaud could intone, as the foreign batsman wipes galah droppings from his visor and shakes the blue heeler off his ankle. Now that's teamwork!

## Tee off With Vivienne Inch

I'm going into a bunker for my final column for the millennium, against the grain of public opinion. Is it just me or is the daily media biff with SOCOG going on a bit? As readers of my little column will attest I have dissed my fair share but like the ABA enquiry that turned into the Cash for Comment mini-series with its daily page 2 in the SMH and regular spot on the news each night....I mean (aside from slow-learner Laws) I think we get the picture. Do we need the thousand words? Every day? The Olympics is an open book. It's *Heart of Darkness*. We know that. But in the hands of Knight, Richo, Hollway and Gosper, it's The Secret 7 and they've got 300 days to sail their leaky old bathtub to Homebush Bay. Bags we stop playing spot-the-mistake from the sidelines and see if they can turn this buggers' muddle into something approximating an international event. Enough of the nitpicky press at every bureaucratic oversight. A big shush to the talk back on insults to "ornery Strayns." Leave them to the logistics of 6 million tourists and 300 portaloos in the CBD. Let's turn the heel of the sock and find out what's happening in the Great Elsewhere! And if we can't think of something nice to say, let's not say it. Maybe it's time for me to closet my clubs but I've had it with devil's advocates and combat-journos. Hello World! Write to me c/o Harry Miller. Merry Christmas.



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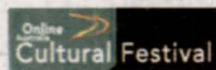
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