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In the desert,
in the city

La Ribot
The naked
hard sell

Lisa O'Neill
Stomping to
Glasgow

Music Theatre
Dorothy Porter
& *The Ghost Wife*

Tess de Quincey
Triple Alice,
desert poetics

Mardi Gras
Jonathan Parsons
interview

OnScreen

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- **Internet Censorship** What's the state of play?
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PICA's ongoing programs are primarily supported by an investment from the State of WA through Arts WA, assistance from the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body and sponsorship by Healthway to promote Family Planning's "Play it Safe" message.



Welcome to change. After nearly 6 years of *RealTime* increasingly crowded with copy from across the country and overseas, we're embarking on a new, more spacious design, partly for our own sanity, more for greater readability and pleasure for you. While this re-shaping does require some space-saving, it in no way means diminished coverage of the arts. It means our website will play a greater role and it too will be re-designed in the course of the year. Beginning this month it will feature the uncut version of the edited interviews from the print edition of *RealTime*, as well as reports and responses to work in all art forms. Excerpts from the articles will encourage you to visit our website for the full picture. Let us know how you feel about the new design: opencity@rttimearts.com

Since 1996 our website has played a crucial role in our onsite reporting of arts events and festivals from Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and London. As part of the Telstra Adelaide Festival 2000 program, *RealTime* will produce 4 print and website editions of responses to this unique event. As well, a *RealTime* first, we'll be producing a videozine where we talk to artists before and after they've shared their work, as well as to our writers and festival audiences. The videozine will appear on monitors scattered through the Adelaide Festival Centre and, all being well as we grapple with newer and newer technology, broadcast online via mini-satellite. If you can't get to the festival in the flesh, enter your virtual visit in your diary now, for Tuesday March 7 when our first edition goes online.

We've had good news from the South Australian Department of the Arts. *RealTime* has secured some modest but very helpful funding towards writers' fees for 2000. Magazine publishing is a fraught business, especially when you're a street paper with a large print run and a costly national distribution network, so any help towards improving state coverage is welcome. Similarly, a funding increase from the NSW Ministry for the Arts will allow us to move towards wider distribution in Sydney's west.

Change is also taking place in our editorial teams. One of the longest standing members of the Sydney editorial team and founding editor of *OnScreen*, Annemarie Jonson, has decided to stand down. Our gratitude to Annemarie for her editorial skills and her dedication is boundless. Alessio Cavallaro, co-editor of *OnScreen* is also standing down to focus his considerable energies on directing dLux Media Arts which he has transformed into a major force in new media. For several years he has added his invaluable expertise to shaping the pages of *OnScreen*. Annemarie and Alessio have accepted our invitation to be Consultative Editors. The new *OnScreen* Editor is Kirsten Krauth, assistant editor of *RealTime*, a perceptive film and new media writer (her WriteSites column has an international readership). This is her first edition of *OnScreen* and you'll notice some of the new directions she's taking it. New, additional *OnScreen* editorial team members will be announced soon.

Also leaving *RealTime* is Jacqueline Millner, one of our visual arts editors. Like Annemarie, Jacqueline has been with us since 1994. Her writing is impressive and widely admired, and her editing of our 1997 and 1999 *Perspecta* features won much praise. Vivienne Inch and Jack Rufus, our intrepid sports commentators, have also decided to put away their laptops to spend more time with their eyes on the ball. We're scouting for new columnists in any field.

The Director and the Project Coordinator of the Australian Film Commission's Industry and Cultural Development division, Kate Ingham and Julie Regan respectively, are leaving their positions. We wish them both well and thank them for their support, advice and welcome criticisms of *OnScreen* in our attempts to provide serious commentary on Australian screen culture.

The contents of *RealTime*#35 speak for themselves. However, it is a relief to note that on Friday January 28, the ban on Catherine Breillat's feature film *Romance* was lifted. There was a sense of victory that the protest against the banning had been so voluble and the reversal relatively prompt. However, things are a little more complicated, especially when it comes to internet censorship. We recommend that you read Linda Carroll's entertaining and meticulous account of the variables in the new net censorship scenario (page 20). The full version is on our website. In our next edition we'll be looking closely at the ramifications of the Nugent Report (Securing the Future, Major Performing Arts Inquiry) for the arts in general.

Welcome to *RealTime* 2000, in print, online and onsite. See you at the Adelaide Festival.

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<http://www.rttimearts.com.au/opencity/>

cover image: Nura Ward, *Ochre and Dust*, photo Heidrun Löhner see page 34

The naked hard sell

Erin Brannigan

Spanish performer La Ribot is a London-based solo artist who I encountered at the Montpellier International Danse Festival in France last year. Her performance on a sweltering summer night in the 'alternative' theatre space, with her charming Spanish-inflected English, drastic costume changes, matter-of-fact nudity and shocking red hair, won her many fans, not least of all Robyn Archer. Archer purchased one of the several 'distinguished pieces' that make up *Mas Distinguidas*, each being between 5 and 10 minutes in duration and ranging in content from a kind of montage self-portrait using a polaroid camera, to an opera diva cut off just as she's ready to roar, to a mini ballet with a salsa rhythm performed through hand gestures.

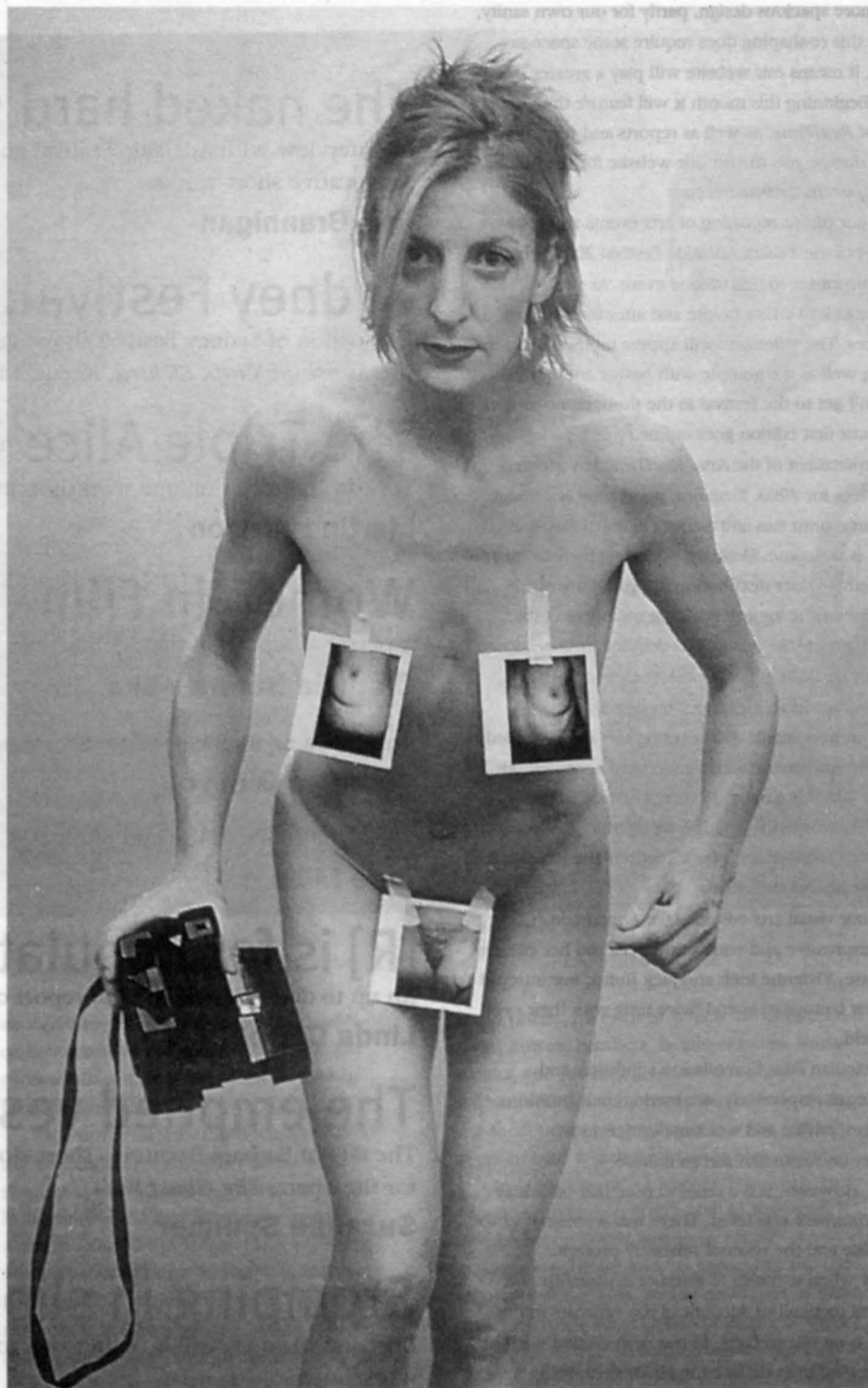
How did you arrive at doing solo performance?

I was working with Blanca Calvo, a Spanish choreographer in Bocanada Danza, a company that we founded together in 1986. After 3 years working together with 8 dancers, original music and all of these things, we split in 1989/90. Then I tried to set up another similar company, but it didn't work for me. Then I decided to start again from the beginning in the summer of 1993—alone, naked, in silence and without money, only with the support of the University of Salamanca who gave me accommodation in an amazing empty exhibition space and provided me with meals. There I started the *Distinguisbed* project and I am still involved in it.

Do you always work with this format—small pieces pulled together to make up an entire performance?

With the *Distinguisbed* project I was working from 1993 until 1999 almost alone, but I also did some projects with other people during these years. I worked with Juan Lorient, a Spanish actor, creating 2 performances; *Los Trancos del Avestruz* (1993/94) and *Ob! Sole* (1995). After that I worked in collaboration with Gilles Jobin, my husband who is a Swiss choreographer, in a site specific piece—*Dip Me in the Water*—at the South Bank Centre in London in the summer of 1997. And in May 1999 I premiered my first long performance with dancers since 1991 in London, *El Gran Game*; 3 dancers, 7 extras and me. That was a fantastic experience I want to repeat soon, probably after the third series of *Distinguisbed* pieces, *Still Distinguisbed*, that I am planning to do in 2000.

The *Distinguisbed* project is always the accumulation of small pieces pulled together. They are 'tableaux vivants' which we can see in an exhibition all together; despite the fact that they ask similar questions and are based around a general concept, they are independent. Actually I have 2 series: *13 Piezas Distinguidas* (1993/94) and *Mas Distinguidas* (1997). That equals 26 distinguished pieces altogether. In January 2000 I will start with *Still Distinguisbed*. My aim is to do 100 *Distinguisbed* Pieces in my life.



La Ribot

Where did the idea of selling your short pieces come from?

In that period I didn't have a lot of institutional or private support. I was in Salamanca thinking how to look for help and one day I realised that I could work as painters or sculptors do, selling each piece of work, of life, separately. I proposed the idea and it started to work very slowly; first my father and after that my friend,

and then some other friends and more people until now that I have 19 'Distinguished Proprietors' in the first 2 series and 4 commissions for the next one. I never thought it would be such a successful idea! At the beginning it was almost a joke, a 'try', a 'beat' ('apuesta' in Spanish)—something that would give me the chance to work by moments, instants, short periods...pieces. Something that would give me the

possibility to start, more than something to finish. That's why I want to do 100—to have the possibility in front of me all the time. If I find a new 'Distinguished Proprietor', I have found the possibility for the next one, the next distinguished piece, and if I sell one piece I can do another.

You have moved from Spain to London—how do you find the situation there?

I like London. There are opportunities to work, to develop ideas, to think of an artistic future, structure, aim, personality. You feel that you are not the only one, that there are a lot of people working with enthusiasm and commitment in a lot of different fields. Gilles and myself moved here at a very good time. I had been invited to present *13 Piezas Distinguidas* at the ICA in 1995. London is now, for me, the best place to develop my art. I love this city that accepted us very quickly and kindly.

Your 'band ballet' is very special—have you ever been a ballerina?

Never, but I studied ballet a lot. I like classical dance very much. I started studying classical dance and dreamed of being a ballerina—but dreams change a lot!!

Your Distinguished Pieces have very theatrical references; slapstick, opera, melodrama, ballet... What appeals to you about these things in comparison with contemporary dance?

I think they also have visual art references that, for me, are very relevant and important, but probably also other things such as mime. I've just won a prize in a Mime Festival in France...last century! Dance is my main background, but I didn't have a main school or master or director to follow. Dance was the main support, and now dance is in my body memory—an immense concept to understand. I am absolutely self-taught. Maybe it is because of this that my references are very close to my life—that means everything I read, hear or see, is a potential reference. I try to work with concepts more than with disciplines.

What is so appealing about your performance is that you engage us but we don't feel terribly necessary. How do you think about or conceptualise your audience?

I don't know if I understand the question. I work with an idea that interests me for any reason. I try to present it to the audience, conceptualised as a distinguished piece. I try to work only with the concept; my body is its material support. I try to forget about representation or interpretation. I present each piece to the audience as it was conceived and that's it. I need the audience exactly as somebody need somebody's eyes to talk to. That means I don't have to over explain, or the opposite. The effort is to find a constant unbalance between the concept and its live presentation through various ways, meanings, senses, and this work is for both of us—for the audience and for myself.

La Ribot, Mas Distinguidas (Most Distinguisbed Pieces), Telstra Adelaide Festival 2000, Space Theatre, March 8-11

go to the Adelaide Festival with RealTime
Telstra Adelaide Festival, March 3 - 19

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First RealTime-Adelaide Festival print and online edition Tuesday March 7
<http://www.rtimearts.com.au/~opencity/>

Jonathan Parsons and the Mardi Gras challenge

Keith Gallasch

This is your fourth festival as artistic director—so you've grown old in the job?

That's why I thought I'd get out before I go completely grey! Doing a year to year festival, I don't think anyone can sustain that for too long.

Looking through your program, it is clear that collaborations are important. You're working with the Roslyn Oxley9 gallery, for example: "Powerless Structures Fig.99 the latest in a series of site-specific works by Nordic artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset. The work recreates the set of a gay pornographic film. By placing the structure within a gallery and inviting the audience to enter, they literally become 'part' of the film."

And we have an association with the Australian Museum's adults-only *Body Art* show.

"An exhibition exploring tattooing, piercing, scarification, body modification and body painting. Personal stories and photographs will be complemented by live demonstrations."

Body Art has quite a lot of gay and lesbian content. I said I'd like to see how we could add things of particular interest to the Mardi Gras audience. That's how the Ron Athey lecture happened

"PLEADING IN THE BLOOD, a lecture on how his performances contextualise piercing, branding, scarification, mummification and flogging within an apocalyptic landscape. The talk will be highlighted with video selected from eight years of performances."

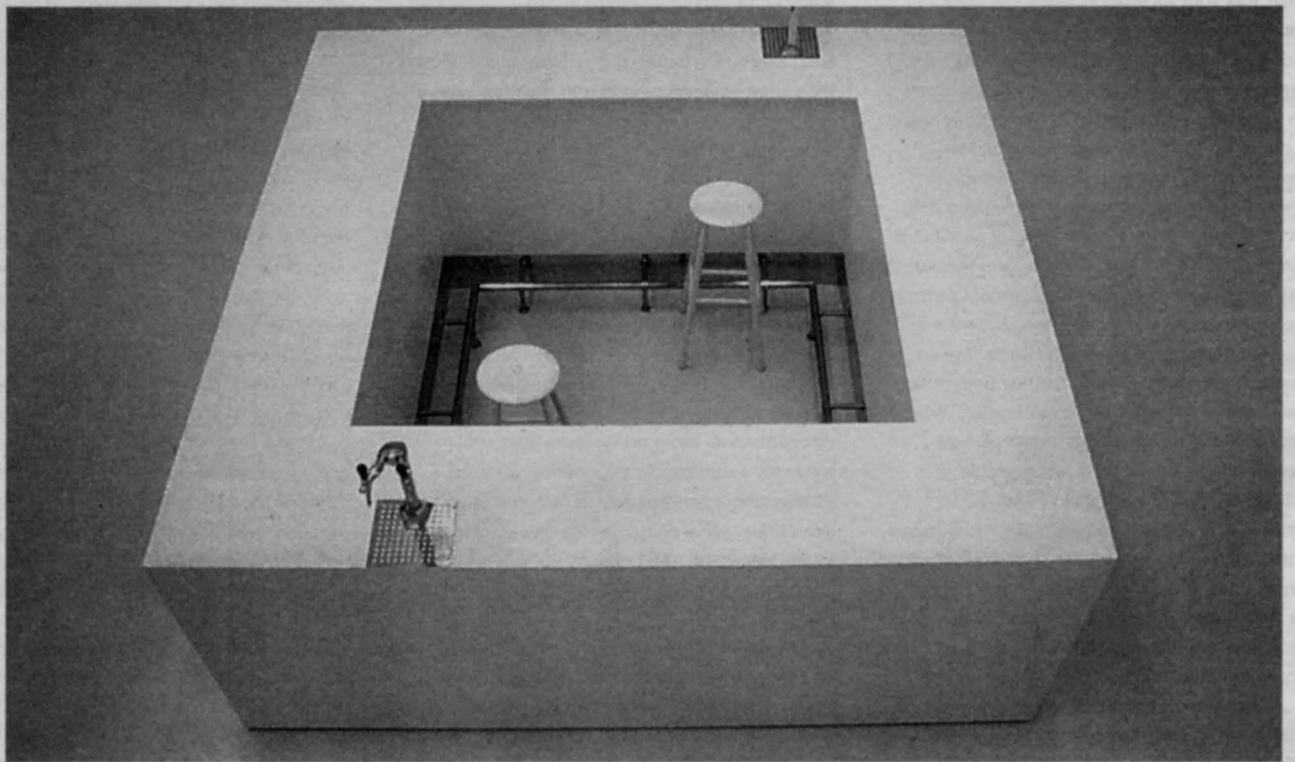
Ron's from LA but most of the time his work is presented in Europe. You can really see how his work's a reaction to that conservatism in America. He had a very religious upbringing and he's also reacting to that. It's very ritualistic and because he's HIV+ he also deals with issues around blood and infection.

In performance there's *(un)Becomings*, a collaboration between, PACT Youth Theatre and The Performance Space. Six young performers working with mentors. I've always felt that developmental stuff should be part of the role of the Mardi Gras Festival. Some of these artists may get support in other places but many of them won't.

Having Patty Chang, an American performance artist who's into sexuality and food, is a continuation of what we've done before in having a good balance of Australian and international work particularly from women. Moira Finucane (*drag, strange and sensuous stories, fantastic surreal characters and physical performance: "a tasty and terrifying treat" according to Melbourne's Star Observer*) is doing *The Saucy Cantina* which is very different territory but also dealing with food. She's on in the same week as Chang so I hope people will see both of them. Two years ago we had Holly Hughes and Nao Bustamante from the US and Groovii Biscuit from Sydney. Again it's to do with a developmental aspect—I've tried to develop these networks nationally and internationally.

In the dance program Four Some you've got Phillip Adams, Trevor Patrick, Dean Walsh and Brian Carbee.

Both Brian and Phillip's pieces have come through our development funding. This is something that Champion Decent started when he was festival director and it was a visionary thing to do. It's a very small amount of money but it's



Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, *Queer Bar/Powerless Structures* Courtesy of Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

more about the confidence that it instils in people. For me this show is like balancing the local with last year's international visit from Javier de Frutos.

We loved that show but it still got a lot of flak critically and from the Mardi Gras audience.

The thing I've found really frustrating—and it's probably one of the hardest things to break with Mardi Gras—is that a lot of reviewers in particular, and I'm sure some audience members too, put on these blinkers about what they should be seeing at a Mardi Gras event. For some people I suppose it's the "Priscilla" factor. It's a particular stereotyped view of what gay and lesbian culture *should* be. It can't be too serious. It's got to be camp. All those clichés... I'd say that's probably been one of the hardest things in this job—trying to push those boundaries.

Plays always seem a popular part of the festival.

The gay and lesbian community is as diverse as the rest of the community. So there's definitely an audience for mainstage theatre productions. The main challenge for us has been again in the developmental area—about having sufficient resources to realise those productions. Australian premieres are bloody expensive and the reality, unfortunately, is that in many cases it's going to be cheaper bringing something from overseas. Having said that, I and the organisation have been absolutely committed with the resources that we have to keep up that Australian content.

In Champion Decent's play, Baby X, "Georgie and Evelyn are a lesbian couple searching for a gay sperm donor. Enter Adam and Baby X is conceived."

It's very funny with some wild theatrical moments and a series of bizarre locations so while there's certainly a naturalistic element running through it, Decent twists that naturalism, really plays with it.

Two Canadian artists, Shauna Dempsey and Lorri Millan are presenting Dykes in the Wild—Lesbian National Parks and Services and

A Day in the Life of a Bull-Dyke. One is on the streets, looking at the ecology of lesbian life, the other is a video and gallery work.

Both the Lesbian National Parks and Services and Osadia, the Barcelona performance company (*they seek volunteers to take a seat in the barber's chair and let the artists create imaginative, daring and original bead sculptures.*) are about bringing something other than visual arts into the public art domain and they fit in with *Queer Reflections* which is part of our collaboration on public art works with Sydney City Council. To be effective Mardi Gras has to adopt a whole range of political strategies. The ones that were effective in the late 70s and 80s—the simple march down the street—are less so now. What's interesting about Osadia and *Dykes in the Wild* is that there's nothing obviously confrontational about the way they interact with the general public. It's a very seductive process.

"In A Day in the life of a Bull-Dyke, on video we follow the bulldagger (played softly by the dark-eyed Millan). Both the public and private lives of this 'strange animal' are documented with the same mix of reverence and glee found in the exposés they mock."

It's a video installation and they've also produced a *Life* magazine. They play with what's real and what's not.

I'm pleased to see that Voiceworks are doing Translucence, UK composer Donna McKeivitt's work based on the poetry of Derek Jarman. That's the sort of thing you think you're never going to hear in Australia. And the Sydney Symphony Orchestra is doing Michael Daugherty's Le Tombeau de Liberaace and John Adams' Naïve and Sentimental Music.

I think we've finally fixed up the music program. Marshall McGuire and I worked together so that it's now ranging from cabaret, choirs, classical contemporary to pop music.

At the end of your time as director of the festival, it's quite clear that you would have liked a bigger organisational structure to work with...

And a bigger budget! I think the biggest

frustration has been the development of new Australian work. Even though we've managed to put *Baby X* on in this festival and there was the *Burlesque Tour* with Paul Capsis and Barrie Kosky in 1998, we've only managed to do that by calling on favours. We can only afford to really support one major show a year. Another is to do with the major cultural institutions in Sydney, especially in the visual arts. What's happened in the past with big exhibitions like the Keith Haring is that they were already programmed by the institution and happened to suit us at the time. I think it's time for an exhibition to come through one of those institutions that is about the artists and the issues that are here. The advantage that we have over many other cultural organisations is that we know we can deliver an audience and a substantial one. But we'd still need development funding for bigger exhibitions.

I am pleased with the level of Australian content we have achieved but the only way we're going to keep things happening is through collaborations. That's what makes me so excited about what Peter Sellars is going to do in Adelaide (Parsons has been appointed an associate director of the 2002 Sellars' festival with Angharad Wynne-Jones, Ed.). I think what he's trying to put in place is a contemporary structure for festivals. Mardi Gras and the Asia-Pacific Triennial are the only others that are operating with a similar structure.

The APT has a large group of curators and what you're getting with each curator is expertise in each culture they address.

APT3 must be the most progressive exhibition in Australia over the last 10 years...and it's no accident that it's come out of a particular structure. It's obviously reflected in the programming and if you're serious about diversity issues, which the APT is, and Mardi Gras is, then that has to be implicit in the structure. No one person's going to be able to cover diversity—it just doesn't work.

Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival, February 11 - March 4. For complete program: www.mardigras.com.au

Sydney Festival: the high points

The festive season this year was millennial, if that was your inclination, but for Sydney Festival it was business as usual, a button-down festival of the Sydney-Melbourne-Brisbane variety playing squarely to the middle-ground, nothing too Australian or innovative to frighten the suits: an opera, an Irish play, a symphony or two, chamber music concerts, some contemporary dance plus a quirky accessory—this year a flea circus. If you itch for a celebration of new possibilities, then it's Adelaide for you, or if you like it both ways, Perth combines the standard formula (including shared shows with Sydney) with an edge of international adventurousness. In Leo Schofield's festivals, outside the tidy budget, it's often hard to tell what we're celebrating. When you get over your disappointment and hear enough people saying how "manageable" it is and "sensible" given Schofield's large-ish Olympic Arts Festival, you settle into the routine of this "unfestive" festival. Freed of perplexing connections, themes or debate—not for Sydney the daily artist forums and conferences of Adelaide—you discover that show by show, there's much to enjoy.

There were a couple of fortuitous centennial links—from early last century Mahler's 9th Symphony and Strauss' *Elektra* juxtaposed in superb performances, signalling ends and beginnings that still intrigue and amaze, their impact far from exhausted. Dutch cellist Pieter Wispelwey gave shape to the program too by appearing in 3 events—the Britten cello suites, *Bach 6 x 6* (he played the 6th Suite, the first 5 were played by Australian cellists), and as onstage soloist (to a Brett Dean soundtrack) in the Netherlands Dance Company's *One of a Kind*. Wispelwey's virtuosic performances, enlarged by an air of possession, ranged across classical and modern repertoires with a unifying force. Here are our responses to a selection of Sydney Festival works with comments from guest artist-writers. For more go to our website.

Richard Strauss: *Elektra*

I've seen *Elektra* before, I've listened to it often enough, and always I've been wary of its almost hysterical intensity. But the combination of Simone Young's conducting of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Deborah Polaski's performance in the lead role gave me a new experience of the work which will stay with me for a very long time. Young maintained the intensity that drives *Elektra*'s passion for vengeance but also gloriously opened out the passages of reflection and fantasy that amplify *Elektra*'s interiority—the state that largely governs her, even when she is viciously berating her mother or elaborately exhorting her brother and sister to murder. In Polaski's performance this is musically reinforced by the facility to move effortlessly from passages of great force to moments of finely nuanced quiet that can always be heard.

Physically it is realised by *Elektra*'s refusal to address her relatives face to face. They hear her, but she looks into the distance. In fact she is looking inward, addressing the imaginary figures she has so often confronted in her endless rehearsals of vengeance (in this, she is, as is often pointed out, a significant variation on Hamlet). The stage direction even has the mother, Klytemnestra, become aware that she is not being addressed directly, nervously circling her static daughter until *Elektra* finally charges. Similarly, on the return of her brother Orest, *Elektra* leans with him against a wall, again talking without looking—until the moment she speaks of her own state and what she has lost. With Chrysothemis she is more direct, but in this rather de-eroticised version of seduction into murder, she and her sister end sitting on the floor, back to back.

This focus on interiority made great sense, especially given Polaski's magisterial presence

and altogether healthy appearance, and gave some credibility to an emotional exhaustion that will finally kill *Elektra*. Noticeably Katharina Lang's direction balks at anything so specific as the dance of death inscribed in the composition and libretto. Instead, a few large victorious gestures aside (already seen earlier in *Elektra*'s fantasizing), the end comes in a kind of languor, a fading, a sinking exhaustion. Otherwise, the stage direction was disappointing. Aegisth's murder messily conducted in too cramped a space, the household unconvincingly waving knives, some awkward comings and goings, and the set design looking more conveniently tourable than anything else. But, Polaski, an actor-singer at her peak, Young and the SSO, and the best of the direction in its focus on *Elektra*'s interiority, made for a remarkable experience. Like the Philharmonia performance of Mahler's 9th Symphony, we were reminded of a key moment in the history of 20th century music—not that Strauss was to build on it himself. **KG**

More on *Elektra*

I was amazed at the ease of Deborah Polaski's vocal production and at just how integrated her vocal style was with her physical presence. There was no separation between body and voice, which in opera singers is quite rare. She could easily manage the emotional extremes of the role and this was reflected in her vocal capacity. This is the first time I've seen *Elektra* and I was struck by the moments of stillness, with Polaski and conductor Simone Young focusing on every phrase for what it was, and not just the hysteria of the drama. **Annette Tesoriero**

Mahler's 9th Symphony

This was exhausting, an emotional drama operatic in its scale and intensity, in its restless and violent shifts of mood, and in the London Philharmonia's full-bodied voicing of the work under the baton of Vladimir Ashkenazy whose conducting was not a little evocative of the caricatures, silhouettes and stories of Mahler's own animated and passionate conducting. **KG** (For the full review of this remarkable concert visit our website.)

Keene/Taylor Project

In *Kaddish*, Robin Cuming plays an aging man who has lost his beloved wife to a painful death—"I'd comfort her and all the rest of it. It's the life she had." He doesn't speak to us directly about this, nor is he quite talking to himself. The tone and the choice of words is initially stoic. Soon, however, despair takes over, the voice louder, a cry demanding to be gutted, to scream like a pig being butchered in a public place. He is still. Perhaps dead. Cuming gives one of the great performances of the night with some of the best writing in its economy and its terrible, brief momentum, where the feeling of the moment utterly usurps reflection. This is a dark 'prayer' for the dead that becomes an explicit death-wish.

In *Glass of Twilight*, a secret, awkward world of homosexual courtship exists utterly outside a confident, worldly gay culture, represented here by two silver-haired older men ballroom dancing in tails, elegantly, openly. The near paths of a travelling salesman disparate for friendship ("If you had a choice would you let me touch you?") and an unemployed man who will prostitute himself if he needs the money is subverted by their eventual willingness to open up to each other, to struggle to speak what they fear and believe. These men know just enough to prompt intimacy and a relationship. Greg Stone as the salesman gives another of the night's best performances, his rhythms immaculately in tune with Keene's, his softness

and determination moving, while Paul English gives off just enough aggression to be a little frightening before showing vulnerability.

Daniel Spielman in *Untitled Monologue* is expert at suggesting an alert consciousness, the young country boy unemployed in the city, painfully sensitive to his own depredations and the absence of a father's love, but insensitive to his growing capacity for psychotic violence directed at women. In *Night, a wall, two men*, Greg Stone (another finely articulated performance, this time of a limited intelligence at work) and Malcolm Robertson are two men who live on the streets exchanging stories and philosophies on their odd encounters, and making sudden demands. The *Waiting for Godot*-ish image of life as a mere drop from the womb to the grave gets two obvious outings here and the shape of the play is also less satisfying than the others; a dead dog story feels extraneous, and the older man's sudden plea for sex seems insufficiently motivated. But there are some great moments, one about a recipe for Sailor's Stew, where speech rhythms are thoroughly musical; and the older man's fears of thinking add poignancy.

Ariette Taylor directs well, giving physical dimensions to the spare dramaturgy of the scripts. Sometimes the strategies work, sometimes they don't. The male dancers in *Glass of Twilight* are effective if obvious counterpoints to the story, the boy singer with candle in *Night, a wall, two men* seems a sentimental addition. The lighting and groupings in *Violin* are as quaint and stiff as the writing. The sudden shifts in mood in *Kaddish* are amplified by some clever, lateral blocking.

An unfortunate photograph in *The Sydney Morning Herald* had Keene slumped in an abandoned armchair in a Kings Cross back street reflecting on social tragedy. There's little in the Keene/Taylor Project seen at this festival to suggest an acute social analysis or the representation of 'real people' on the streets. No doubt Keene feels for and understands these people, and can write about them well, and with some insight, but these works seem more about states of knowing and not-knowing (the woman played by Helen Morse in *Rain* is barely capable of understanding that she has witnessed part of the Holocaust horror), the limits of empathy, and are populated with characters who can be stupid, then momentarily wise, kind or cruelly obtuse. It's the wisdom we look out for, the moment of truth they might utter, and forget in the next moment. In other words, by dealing with people in existentially and socially tight situations, Keene can use his characters and their stripped back world as metaphors for experiences that many of us might just recognise. Not exactly the standby 'human condition' so beloved of reviewers—we are not these people—but certainly this writing sits firmly in the humanist and romantic tradition where the hopeless offer us epiphanies, and it proved a nice companion piece to a less convincing set of stories in that other festival piece, *The Weir*. **KG** (A longer version of this review appears on our website.)

Complicity

This is a fascinating exhibition at the Australian Centre for Photography with a subtle provocation/invitation to its audience to look more closely at the contract between photographer and subject and beyond that, I'd say, to their own part in the deal. **VB** (For the full review visit our website.)

Taikoz

If we can delight in Japanese surfers at Bondi Beach, we can also take pleasure in seeing Australian drummers playing big Japanese drums in the Opera House. I loved the energy,

the vitality and the incredible discipline in the performance which partly comes from a rigorous exercise program that yields a great physicality. Even so, it was the Ishii composition for the small drums that I enjoyed most, and I think I would like to hear the bigger drums in an orchestral setting, working with other instruments. But it is a music in its own right and I thrill to seeing Australians doing it. I think the Australians add a sense of theatricality too that is not always there in Japanese taiko performances. **Robert Lloyd**

(For another, longer review of this concert visit our website.)

The Weir

Yes, we know it's a big hit in London and New York and that most Sydney critics thought it worthy but really, *The Weir* is an over-written, poorly constructed, Irish charmer with a predictable comfy lilt and fake pearls of folksy wisdom... **KG** (For the full review of *The Weir* visit our website.)

Cardoso Flea Circus

My first experience of theatrical fleas was at an early age when my parents took me to see comic pianist Victor Borge, and the seats at the old Capitol were infested. I would like to think that perhaps these fleas were runaways from the circuses of the old vaudeville days. I doubt that Maria Fernando Cardoso's fleas have any cause to run away. She feeds them on her own blood after all. In her opening 'lecture' Cardoso tells us that training fleas is a mixture of science and patience—a patience that is not easily found in this modern world. However, it is the technology of custom-designed, ultra-magnified live video projections that make it possible for today's audience to be enthralled by creatures less than 2 millimetres long. And good god, they really are live fleas!

Cardoso, replete with gigantic magnifying goggles and a sheer lime green ringmaster's jacket, gently guides us through the art of training fleas—a lengthy, but entertaining and educational summary of her research. Did you know that fleas copulate for 8 hours, male fleas have 2 penises, and that female fleas are better jumpers and are used exclusively in the circus—the male fleas being retained to keep the girls happy? Then she puts them through their tricks. Being so totally amazed that they actually were real fleas, seeing their little legs wriggling on the video screens, I forgot to watch for exactly how Cardoso gets them to do the high dive, walk a tightrope, sword fight and climb Mount Everest. (The cynic in me suspects fleas are just doing what fleas do—if placed in precarious positions, they hang on and try to get to the other side or gravitate to the warm furry thing.) Her underplayed ironic delivery and little asides when things went wrong, such as taking the flea that was dropped by her trapeze partner to the women's shelter, make Cardoso a very beguiling ringmaster.

The *Cardoso Flea Circus* is a lecture, a demonstration, it's performative but not quite a performance, a recreation, a friendly farm where you can go up to the enclosures at the end of the show and watch the ballerina fleas keep dancing. It's a genuine sideshow attraction at our very own home of vaudeville, the Sydney Opera House. I still find myself stuttering out "They really are live fleas!" **Gail Priest**

The Sunshine Club

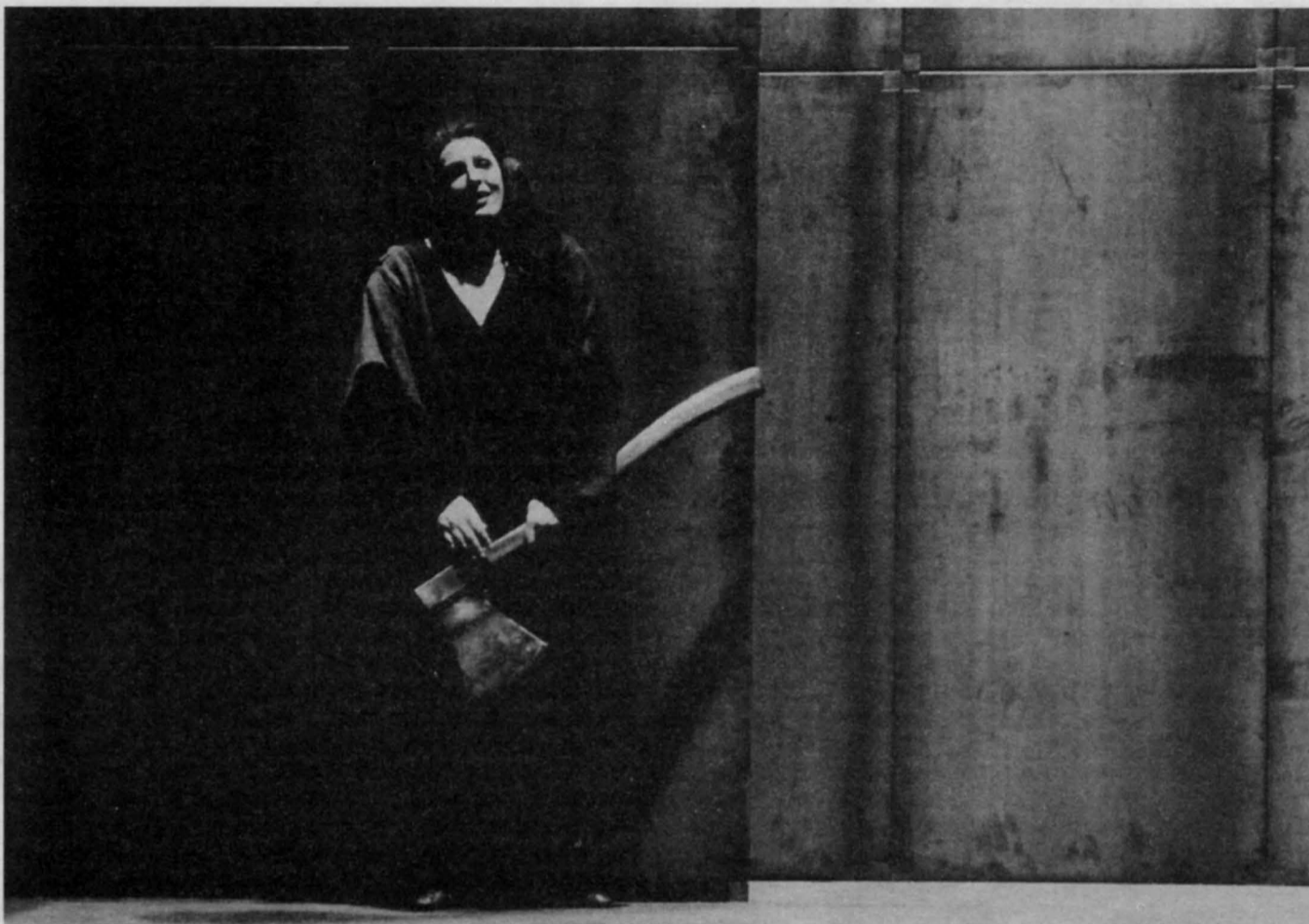
Although cast in the mould of the classic Broadway musical with simple story-telling, broadly-brushed characters, frustrated lovers, sage elders, an emotional pull right on the edge of the sentimental and familiar musical formulae, Wesley Enoch and John Rodger's *The Sunshine*

Club politicises the form with wit and subversive complexity, makes marvellous demands on its singers and gives its musicians moments of the avant garde abandon Rodgers is famous for. And that's right from the beginning as the didgeridoo is pitched against a wild jazz ensemble that soon settles into the local band in an Aboriginal-managed dance club in late 40s Brisbane.

The club is set up by Frank and friends after he has been refused entry to a white club where a white childhood friend and lover-to-be is to sing. Optimistic about the freedom he has fought for, Frank has returned home from fighting for Australia in World War II, something he refuses to speak about until it is unleashed with anger and pain after his prospects for love and work have been irrevocably ruined by racism. In a show with many fine songs, this is one of the best, as if leaping impassioned out of everyday speech.

The shape of the work is in this shift from simple optimism to complex despair and finally to a tempered hopefulness, the spare text and lyrics making great and powerful play with the words 'charity', 'pity', 'help', the haunting recurrence of 'shadow' in various contexts ("I want to be safe here, even in the shadows") and the shifts in the value and meaning of 'friend', 'brother' and 'sister.' Enoch directs his cast with an excellent eye for emotional and comic detail—there's always an exciting depth of field to the direction, always some other detail, some other little drama happening that enlarges our experience of the work. The performers are uniformly talented with standout performances from Laurence Clifford as Frank, so benign that his turn to anger is frightening; Wayne Blair, a brilliant comic, as his friend Dave; Ursula Yovich as Frank's tough but vulnerable sister Pearl, and Margaret Harvey as Auntie Faith, a realist about black-white relations and still in touch with her spirit world. The dancing is not ambitious but the small cast fills the stage with it, combining it with powerful choruses that are nothing short of rousing.

The excellent book by Enoch has only one significant fault, felt at the end of the first act where Frank and his beloved look set to be united forever, until her father, the Reverend Morris, calls out "Rose!" Blackout. Act Two begins, Rose is preparing to travel to London to pursue her singing career. Her father thanks her for not going back to the dance hall, for not seeing Frank again. This quietly expository beginning to the second act left me feeling cheated, as if a scene had gone missing, that we had been denied seeing all of Act One. Perhaps Enoch wanted to avoid a melodramatic conclusion, but the admonitory "Rose!" is simply inadequate. So much is invested in the optimism of Act One that its decimation in a word needs more weight, more brutal impact. But *The Sunsbine Club* is never short of impact anywhere else. It is another sign that the musical, so long denied to be a natural, or indigneous Australian artform, has proved itself in its Indigenous manifestation, here and in a very different way in its precursors, Jimmy Chi's *Bran Nue Dae* and *Corrugation Road*. Enoch and Rodgers, howev-



Deborah Polaski, Elektra

er, take on Broadway, and while exploiting the song forms of the era in jazz, blues, swing and samba they venture into Sondheim territory with some complex and ambitious scoring. At the same time, and with wicked good humour, jokes, witticisms and ironies tumble about in the darkest of political circumstances with lines like "I'd vote for you, if we had a vote" in "Sit down Mr Menzies. I've got a song to share." *The Sunsbine Club* is political music theatre driven by a disturbing dialectic of hope and despair, of the fantasy that is the musical and the real that is the history it elaborates in such loving and telling detail. **KG**

Twilight Chamber Concerts, Burton & Corea, *Koyaanisquatsi*

If audiences came to be pleased rather than challenged by music in this tightly programmed, well-attended festival, there was often just enough of a twist in the fare to keep things interesting. This was most evident in the series of Twilight Chamber concerts curated by Marshall McGuire at the Art Gallery of NSW and presented in association with the Michelangelo to Matisse exhibition of drawings.

In concerts performed by The Song Company and Guitar Trek there was a sprinkling of the contemporary and the adventurous. The Song Company squeezed in an intriguing work by Frank Nuyts, based on a text by Voltaire, while Stephen Cronin and Anna Pimakhova provided daring arrangements of the Broadway standard *Body and Soul*. The Song Company used renditions of this song as a framing device in connecting their concert to the exhibition. The audience was most pleased by the Company's 1930s style rendering of *Body and Soul*, yet this was the weakest of the 3 versions. While the singers' expertise is undoubted, they couldn't muster the old-fashioned swing necessary to carry the song's rhythms; they were more successful on the versions which stretched the song to breaking-point.

The highlights of this concert, however, were the Company's sublime performances of 16th and 17th century songs. There were some startling moments—the words of Dominique Phinot's *Lynote* could have been written by Artaud—while Orlande de Lassus' musical discourse on the nose was given lively treatment.

Robert Ramsey's *Sleep, flesbly birth* was a suitably spiritual finale.

The 4-piece Guitar Trek presented a wildly diverse concert: Elizabethan tunes, Ravel, Shostakovich, 2 contemporary Australian works, Gershwin, Led Zeppelin and the Beatles—all in one hour! There was something for almost everyone here, plus the added attraction of specially designed instruments forming a 4-part guitar family. The 'soprano' guitar was particularly fluid on several of these works, while the 'bass' acted as a sturdy anchor. Of the contemporary compositions, Richard Charlton's *Dance for the Rainbow Serpent* was an arresting piece in 5 short movements, making effective use of harmonic notes. It won over the audience, at first instinctively restless at the prospect of a 'modern' work; Graham Koehne's *To His Servant Bach...* was likewise well received. As a reward, the audience was treated to every teenager's bedroom guitar classic, *Stairway To Heaven*. But the arrangement of this song, as with the encore *Eleanor Rigby* was unadventurous. More entertaining was a sprightly performance of a polka by Shostakovich.

The Macquarie Trio was less eclectic in their concert: two piano trios by Brahms. Yet the energy of their performance was invigorating. Brahms' Op. 8 was re-written by the composer 30 years later, the melodies of his youth re-shaped by the old master. The Macquarie Trio's playing had such dynamic range that the quiet opening to the 3rd Movement carved a space for itself; its simplicity seemed to lean into the late 20th century.

Two masters of jazz resumed their long acquaintance at the Sydney Festival: Chick Corea and Gary Burton. Having played together over so many years, their piano and vibes have fused into one instrument—which is both their strength and their weakness. Both men are virtuoso instrumentalists, both reel off glittering solos at will. Yet there is sometimes not enough difference between Burton's cascading vibraphone runs and Corea's dazzling right hand adventures. This was emphasised by the treble-oriented mix which filled the Opera House Concert Hall: the glittering runs at times simply passed from one instrument to the other (though the start of one solo was sometimes drowned out by the audience applause for the preceding one).

The concert's first half, mostly drawn from

the duo's latest album, *Native Sense: New Duets*, proceeded along these lines. Things opened up in the second half, though, when the music was given more room to breathe. Their reading of Ellington's *Sophisticated Lady* was the most rewarding performance of the night: spacious and measured, offering contrasts of texture. Here, and on Monk's *Four in One*, instrumental brilliance was offset by restraint, allowing for a greater complexity of mood.

Finally, in a festival which featured grand scale productions of Mahler and Strauss, mention should be made of another big scale performance (at least in sound): Philip Glass' *Koyaanisquatsi*. Performed by the Philip Glass Ensemble in the Opera House Concert Hall, the musicians were dwarfed by the screen images, yet the electronic score is the driving force of the film.

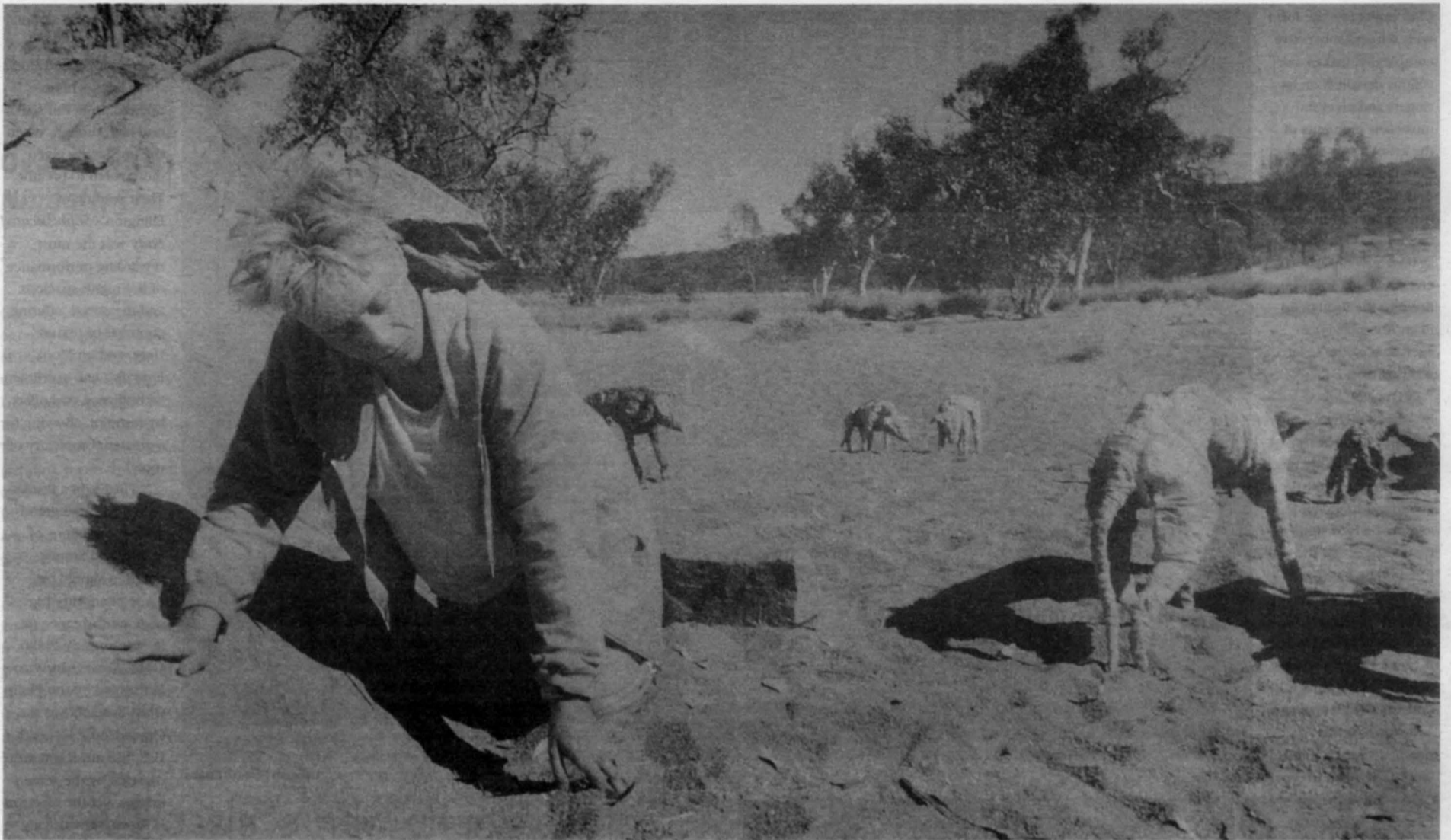
Expertly conducted by Michael Riesman, the small Ensemble generated great power, most notably in the climactic section, *The Grid*. The sudden finish to this section left the Concert Hall soaked in reverb, which gave a clue to the depth of sound produced by such a small group of musicians. Philip Glass has made something of a mini-career of performing live to film screenings. In a way this is a revisiting of early pre-talkie cinema, when musical accompaniment would fill the theatre. This performance of *Koyaanisquatsi* left no-one in any doubt as to the power of music in driving audio-visual forms. **John Potts**

Sydney Festival: *Complicity*, curator Alasdair Foster, Australian Centre for Photography, Jan 7 - Feb 6; *Gustav Mahler, Symphony no. 9*, London Philharmonia, Sydney Opera House, Jan 21; *Chick Corea & Gary Burton, Opera House, Jan 19 & 20; Taiko with Eitetsu Hayashi, Opera House, Jan 8 & 10; Richard Strauss, Elektra, Opera Australia, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Staatsoper Unter Den Linden, Berlin, Capitol Theatre, Jan 5 - 16; Conor McPherson, The Weir, Royal Court Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, Theatre Royal, Jan 10 - 29; Cardoso Flea Circus, Opera House, Jan 12 - 25; Keene/Taylor Theatre Project, Opera House, Jan 12 - 22; Wispelwey/Britten, City Recital Hall, Angel Place, Jan 18; Wesley Enoch & John Rodgers, The Sunshine Club, Sydney Theatre Company, Opera House, Jan 10 - Feb 26; Philip Glass Ensemble, Koyaanisquatsi Live, Opera House, Jan 12 - 15; *Twilight Chamber Music*, Art Gallery of NSW, Jan 11 - 21*

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For brief reviews of Stevie Wishart in the Twilight Chamber Music series, Pieter Wispelwey playing Britten's cello suites; and the full reviews of Mahler's 9th Symphony, Conor McPherson's *The Weir*; the Keene/Taylor Theatre Project; Taiko; and *Complicity*

www.rtimearts.com.au/~opencity



Tess de Quincey in collaboration with Pamela Lofts

photo Juno Gemes

Edge, desert, reticulation, information

Martin Harrison

The idea of representation (whether classically defined or ironised in a postmodern sense) is not what the Triple Alice project is about.

Certainly, it is an event which is taking place 'at the centre'—literally so, outside Alice Springs—and which thematically, too, is centred within a set of convergences and overlaps between disciplines, artforms, individuals and languages. In October 1999, it brought together Tess de Quincey's Body Weather workshop, a group of writers and critics, a large number of painters from Alice Springs, botanists, environmentalists and Indigenous artists together with a program of visiting speakers, politicians, musicians, all of whom were connected with and committed to the day-to-day affairs of the Northern Territory. But even with such a multi-form set of activities, criss-crossing over 3 weeks—all roughly related on a theme to do with local place and local environment—there was no intention to set up a representative 'space' in which the immediacy of locale could, or should, be embodied. If the experimental practice of the event was definitely locative, *Triple Alice's* understanding of locus was not, first off, about the representability of place, nor about its cultural appropriation and exclusiveness.

It's important to make that distinction. So much work that 'goes to' and 'comes from' the centre is about representation—about land, about race, about what constitutes a voice or a presence within evolving notions of country. Of course, the first, and highly tentative, attempt to mount *Triple Alice* links with these ideas. Yet if you were asked to provide some key terms for the event, then a suggestion would be that a series like *edge, desert, reticulation and information* provides better means for describing the intentions and the outcome of *Triple Alice* than any discussion of centre and margin could do. In this regard, there was no specific agenda for what could or might have occurred at

Hamilton Downs. The aim was to create an information site for participants—sure, a space for interaction. But it was also a means for acquiring knowledge about ground and landform and the body's integration with them in the context of a post-industrial analysis of the nature of extremely arid country and the integration of technology with that country.

The terms just mentioned were, in other words, not just arbitrarily poetic. The *Triple Alice* experiment grows from sustained discussions among a variety of artists and writers, with performer/choreographer Tess de Quincey and her work with Body Weather playing a leading role. The aim, expressed in those discussions, was to imagine an experimental event which would act as a 'think tank', a database and a rich and ongoing informatic process. What is an aesthetics, or more accurately a poetics, which responds to locale in Australia? What's a useful and productive notion of exchange and collaboration in the context of information technologies? What is 'thinking' and 'practice' at a moment when thought is (to borrow Gregory Ulmer's terms) conductive and associative and

Each workshop was a mini-history of the senses...each participant was conscious of his or her position, autobiographical, intimate, externalised inward.

when the "writing of space" is the primary and yet necessarily inconclusive medium for expression? Ulmer's claim that contemporary legibility is a legibility "beyond representation"—in short, a category of the ontologically unspoken—was a powerful provocation in this first stage.

A Body Weather workshop—a workshop in which the intentionality of body position and movement are read in relation to land form, to earth, to stones, to heat, to wind—was the locus for many of the 50 or so participants. Each workshop was a mini-history of the senses, checked out in meditative and poised relationships not literally related to a dry creekbed or the caterpillar dreaming of the Chewing Ranges visible in the site's background, but where each participant was conscious of his or her position, autobiographical, intimate, externalised and inward.

The events were photographed and documented as part of a research project conducted through Ian Maxwell at Sydney University's Centre for Performance Studies. Other writers, artists and photographers intervened in and interacted with the event—photographer Juno Gemes, for example, writer and installation artist Kim Mahood, Alice Springs based artist Pamela Lofts. But there were many other visiting artists who observed or contributed, or simply made new work which criss-crossed with the site and the environment. Some like Ann Mosey or Rod Moss presented and talked about their work. Dorothy Napangardi and Polly Napangardi Watson painted with various members of the group.

Participants were also asked to post statements, texts and journal entries on the *Triple Alice* website. At the same time, this website was receiving information from writers and artists not at Hamilton Downs but who knew of *Triple Alice*. It was a first attempt at tracing an interactive history of the senses. There was no

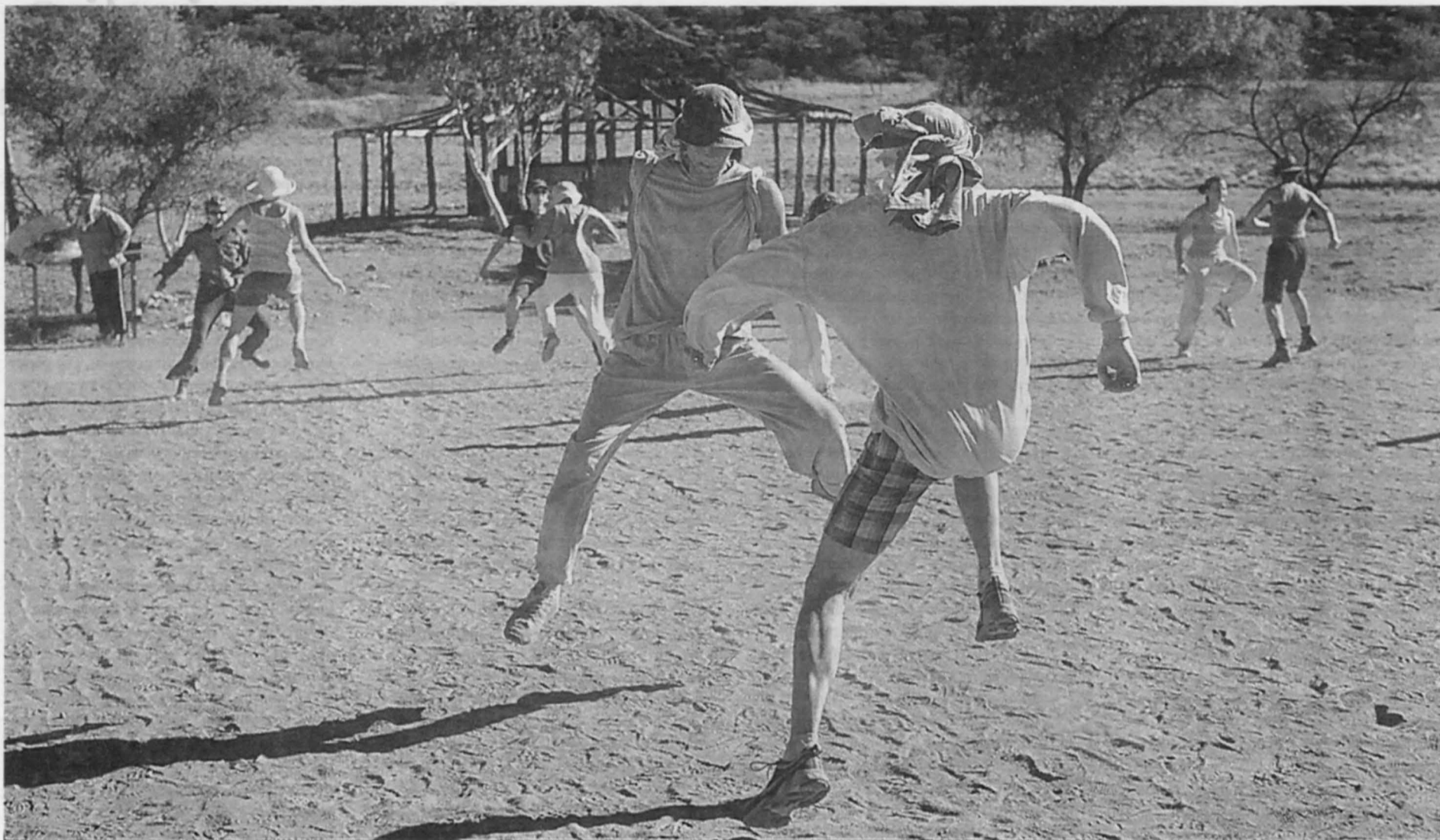
'theme' but there was a version, enormously dispersed and many-sided, of a living 'topo-analysis' occurring.

As a third element, a small group came together in short seminars focused on current discourses of Australian place. Again there was a wish to keep the edges open in these discussions so that we could include discussion about performance theory, Bachelard's poetics, the work of intellectual historian Edward Casey, Gregory Ulmer's work in heuristics and the theorisation of desert, space and sense in J-L Nancy.

The dynamics—and installation of the necessary resource base—for such an event were obviously complex. The location itself, a drive 110 kilometres north-west of Alice, made sure of that. No-one knew if the open-ended terms—*edge, desert, reticulation and information*—would act as sufficient markers for the trajectory. Would we simply lose our way in the desert, in that place where, according to Jean-Luc Nancy (*The Sense of the World*, Uni Minnesota Press, 1997) there is "the end of sources, the beginning of the dry excess of sense?" In fact, *Triple Alice* was immensely information rich and 'sense' rich. It seems already to have become productive ground for a series of collaborative and individual projects which are occurring through this year. *Triple Alice 2000* will refine the interactive model of 'sites' within a site: performance, visual art, writing and the internet. And the collaborative excitement of working with local artists from the centre will continue.

Triple Alice, Hamilton Downs, September 20 - October 10 1999.

Martin Harrison is currently working on a new collection of poetry, Summer and a collection of critical essays.



Triple Alice 1999, Body Weather Laboratory

photo Garry Seabrook

Triple Alice: catching the weather

Keith Gallasch talks with Tess de Quincey

Did the event meet your expectations?

I've always thought it would be a burning point and it did prove itself as that, the sense of what that land gives off and the kind of energy it seems to produce in people. Financially, the whole thing was carried by the workshop. We had about 45-50 people regularly throughout the 3 weeks. Then we had another crew on top of that of about 14 people and writers, theorists and then local artists who joined us for different periods. The workshop was fabulous. We had a lot of people coming from Europe and some from Japan. There was a good mixture of people from all over Australia, not just the capital cities but really from all over.

What was a working day like?

Breakfast was at 6. We had a cooking team led by a wonderful macrobiotic cook and then we started training at 8, which we changed to 7.30 because it was just getting too hot. Whew! Sun! Boiler! Sweat! Drip! Dust! Within the first half hour the dust level was just massive and we were thick with this heat. Body weather is a literal workout, working up a sweat, working through different areas of the body. There are a lot of aspects to do with co-ordination, plus group body and individual body, timing and that sort of thing. But the actual sense of working outside is always an enormous thing in terms of what it does to focus and perspective. To have to generate the energy to meet that environment, it's very big.

How do you establish the participants' relationship with the landscape?

Basically by asking them to use their focus in different ways. Asking, for instance

that the head travel and take in different relationships, to gauge what the eye is seeing without necessarily using point focus, to encourage a sense of scanning which is also to do with nomadic vision. Hunter-gatherers scan landscapes.

Then we'd move into manipulations, opening out and stretching and aligning the body. You're in couples working with breath, weight and alignment in a quite fixed series of forms, gradually learning to gauge different parameters of the body and how to change and push border lines. That's a much softer, quieter thing. So where the workout focuses and pulls in the body and contracts the muscles to a certain degree, this opens out the muscles and the borders. Then a lunch break and a rest in the heat of the middle of the day, to zonk out. But most people didn't sleep. They slowed down, wrote a lot of notes, did their logs on the bank of computers, because I wanted to look at how the experience could exist on the net through the performers responding to a set of questions.

The afternoon was what I call ground-work which is more to do with basically opening up sensitivity to different speeds, practising how perception is altered working with mimetic relation to trees, grass, stalks, different elements of the rocks.

What do you mean by mimetic here?

Taking the body of the tree into your own body in an empathetic sense, trying to take the imagination of the molecules of that object and transferring that so that one gauges a different sense of being.

Duration becomes very important...

A whole set of durational relationships

are established and worked through. One thing I wanted to do which I've never done before is to work 20 minutes regularly every day with slow movement, varying between one millimetre all the way up to 10 centimetres per second. I did that every day at about 2pm. I wanted to see what the effect would be.

We also did a lot of blind work and then, finally, the culmination of the workshop was in 2 elements. Firstly I asked people to put together small solos. They chose a particular place and they put together something that had a relationship to what they'd been doing over the 3 weeks. I let that stand as their individual investigation to get a relationship to the land. The other aspect was that I choreographed a series of exercises together, the effect of which was in a sense like a 20 minute performance. I was really happy with this because when I looked at it I thought, "Ah, we've caught the weather of the place! I had a really nice feeling about it. It felt absolutely, "ah yes, we got hold of it."

You had Indigenous people coming by. How did they respond to what you were doing?

It had been planned that we'd have 13 women from Yuendumu who were due to come but there were 2 deaths so there was sorry business and they just couldn't come at the last minute. I knew this might happen. So it was okay. We had a lot of discussions over the phone and so there's a movement forward, and they've now invited me to go hunting with them. The 2 women who did come out—very interesting artists based in Alice Springs—had a fantastic time. They had their kids out with them. They taught us

how to do some dot paintings and we did a communal painting together. It was more to do with talking. We set up social situations with the local artists, they came and visited mainly in the evenings and then they'd do slide showings of their work and we had a lot of poetry readings. We also had people who came as speakers—ethno-botanists, politicians, meteorologists, historians who know that area.

A lot of the local artists came and joined us which was very nice. The workshop was open to them if they wanted to join in. Some did and some stayed longer than others and were more engrossed in it. Then we did some collaborations. Watch this Space, the local artist-run co-operative in Alice Springs, were a major partner. A lot of their artists came up. They brought some of their installation materials and put them out in the land and then I concocted various relationships that the participants could enter into.

So what happens in stage 2?

We're holding on to the core of the local artists and then inviting interstate artists to come and collaborate. In the main we're looking at visual artists and particularly artists interested to work with the website. I won't do a public workshop. I just want to work with a smaller group of people who are doing a higher level of research at a more professional level. And I'd really like to move into another level entirely on the web to see what can happen with Triple Alice in this place and in virtual space.

Triple Alice, Hamilton Downs, September 20 - October 10, 1999. www.triplealice.net

Jonathon Marshall

Introduction

If, as Wittgenstein noted in *Philosophical Investigations*, the limits of our language are the limits of our world, the problem is always to consider how that world and language can change, grow and develop. How do we push the boundaries, how do we accomplish anything except a "butting of our heads against the parameters"? The problem is in many ways a red herring, for world and word are the same, not discrete entities with one preceding the other, but rather a dynamic whole, produced in a single gesture.

The struggle of words and world, the reach towards a new articulation was a common experience of the Independent Performance Forums (IPF)—if, as has been mentioned, each was a communal improvisation, then every forum was also a communal struggle, a collective butting of heads. What was produced can only be assessed in the long term, but IPFs were a response to a need to push harder, to work towards opening something new.

Perhaps, as Jonathan Marshall observes in the following essay, our discourses and reflections can only ever sit alongside our practices, can never really touch them, contain them, or even adequately delineate them: "One thinks one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it." But this is not a defeat, not a call to silence, but rather the trajectory of a new, more complex understanding: that our discussions are themselves performances, that we are changed by the struggle of articulation itself, rather than by the adequacy or success of the discourses we produce. Again, the question of community...

Art that is grounded in the presence of people to each other can never be reduced to propositional content; if it could we would just write essays. Rather, the complex realities produced by the provisional community that is an audience in relationship to a performance (or a group of people reflecting on what Wittgenstein would call their "form of life") will always escape containment. Again, this is not an abandonment of critique, theory or reflection, but rather an acknowledgement of boundaries, of parameters.

Marshall is interested in the absences which language conceals, the abyss beneath representation from which our various linguistic competencies protect us. At the same time, it could be noted that often our linguistic competencies distract us from the presence of each other as well. *Paul Jackson and Paul Monaghan.*

Chaos theory tells us that the distance between any 2 points is infinitely divisible, the length of any coastline cannot be measured if one includes every curve, crack and crevice. Two objects cannot therefore ever touch in actuality—a space remains between them, no matter how close they draw together. Language cannot therefore ever touch anything but itself, its existential status relies on a mutuality which conceals that which supposedly lies behind it. Performance would therefore seem to forever elide criticism, the written word sitting alongside the performing body, only touching it via an 'absence.' One cannot however take refuge in the physical experiential as an unmediated place beyond language. As Judith Butler observes, materiality itself—the suggestion that one can lift the immaterial 'flesh' of language from the bony armature of the material body—is itself a linguistic concept. (*Bodies that Matter*, Routledge 1993).

In this way the 'material' of the body can only ever be said to exist in its materialisation and sedimentation through language and performativity. The body does not exist outside of the

word, nor is it simply 'parallel' to it. Rather the very substance of the body is permeated by language and socially mediated ways of thinking about corporeality. The kidneys process and materialise language, turning the body into a factory for the production of fleshy signs. Like the mutant amphibians of David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, pulsating organic matter becomes a clue with which to orientate oneself in the universe—phallus or vagina, long hair or short. The body is enveloped in the teknos of language, and there is no independently verifiable reason why the skeleton of a salamander cannot be reinterpreted as the body of a gun. The relation of language to performance is therefore one of infinite regression and multiple allusion. The hand of the critic, authored on the page, does not so much touch the visage of the performer—one's gaze does not so much strike the side of the performer's face—as it reaches within, past and through the body. The virtual hand of the critic spectrally passes into the substance of the body, while nevertheless inhabiting a different conceptual realm to that of flesh made flesh through performance.

Language caresses the body in virtual space, while a thin film of distance remains between the two. This confusing inter-weaving and layering of the immaterial—language, thought, description, meaning—and the material—body, flesh, viscera, sensorium—is perhaps best thought of by reinjecting materiality into the act of writing. The flickering of dots on the computer screen gives one the false impression that the hands below are uninvolved. The extrusion of the space of the screen about the head of the writer conceals the way the head remains experientially linked to the body in both real and virtual space (Kurt Vonnegut noted that the major evolutionary flaw of humanity is the existence of a neck, which deceptively suggests that the mind rises above the body [*Galapagos*, Delacorte Press, 1985]).

If one thinks in terms of a fountain pen though, the physicality of writing becomes inescapable. This graceful—or graceless—painting and scraping of an inky nib across the soft surface of the interleaved page and blotting paper has an overtly sensual quality. Writing becomes palpably a product of bodily action and performance. Renaissance writers knew this when they described their work as a "corpus", a phenomenologically literal body composed of mutually dependent parts. If one writes through and of the body, the question becomes how does the performance of the writer meet with that of the actor or dancer; how do these performances relate?

One possible answer is that both materialise language. Rod Serling proposed the Twilight

Zone as a space that "lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge", an emotionally charged realm that exists as part of a continuous slope between a mountain of control and its negative imprint in the form of an excavation, emptied of substance to furnish the raw material for this alp of mastery. The pivotal nature of this space, its existence at the juncture between the mutually defined co-ordinates of up and down, gives it its affective power. From here one can either climb or fall—or more confusingly, one can move horizontally, neither flying nor falling. This is the space defined by vertigo. It exists at the moment when the individual who has leapt off the cliff is neither dropping nor rising. Both potentials are embodied at this point—falling becomes flying, charged with a perpetual ambivalence which could at any moment tip, causing one to plummet to one's death or soar to ever greater heights.

This is the realm represented in *Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey*: the 2 are falling through blackness, screaming and waving their arms. They stop for a moment, look at each other, and one observes: "Dude, this is a really deep hole." "Yeah," the other replies, before resuming their terrified descent. Falling forever is indistinguishable from infinite ascent—it is just a question of perspective. The experience of vertigo is highly physical, its kinaesthetics deeply marked by night-terrors and moments of fright experienced at great height. Recall swimming in water so clear that it resembled fluid air, or walking on a glass floor in a skyscraper, and one's physical being is flooded with the exhilarating horrors of vertigo, of the hope for flight and the fear of falling all at once. It is an emotion of dreams and nightmares, a psychokinesis indivisibly linked to abstract and minimalist art.

Vertigo thus lies at the place where slippage occurs, where two universes elide each other through the horizontal action of the landslide. It exists at the fault-line between language and the body, up and down. Vertigo is defined by a spatial conundrum, a disruption of gravity and its affects on the body through the twisting of dimensional coordinates. It is engendered by the earthquake that occurs when one moves from one universe to another. It is significant that the first physical constraint to be violated by the awareness of *The Matrix* is that of gravity. Leaping impossibly from building to building, the willing suspension of gravitational disbelief, marks vertigo as a sign of the breakdown in the materialisation of the body and space through language. Vertigo is engendered when the characters of *eXistenZ* move from one game-environment to another, a moment of disorientation as they adjust to a new materialisation of the body

in relation to that which it exists in and through. The fault-lines between the act of representation—performance, kinaesthetics—and that which is alluded to by representation—meaning, depth—become visible where the body performs nothing but itself.

When the experiential becomes the focus of the work, when how one thinks in and of the body is realised and visibly enacted through performance, the act of performance becomes a form of criticism and vertigo ensues. The performative body collapses the space between criticism and its object, critiquing itself kinaesthetically, and turning written criticism into a form of metacriticism. The non-linguistic material evaporates, leaving the body without fixed orientation. The floor beneath the feet of the dancer—and representation itself—drops away, leaving one with the possibility that nothing lies beyond language.

Three examples. *Proximity*. Rosalind Crisp measures herself and the space in which she moves, her sensorium generated through her gaze and gesture from moment to moment. *The Situation Pieces*. The mute, rhetorical signification of Shelley Lasica's choreography overwhelms the thinking body, while the narratives and scripts from which the movement was originally generated are deliberately withheld from the audience. The language of the movement spirals in on itself, endlessly coiling like a kundali around the possibility that a void lies underneath this surface—or alternately that another, entirely separate world of infinite depth is deferentially realised through the choreography. *Company in Space's Escape Velocity*. Bodies travel into and out of the screen—affectively dissonant figures flopping and collapsing under their own weight in real space, while their dopelgangers soar and spin amongst the projected text. Mute physicality and physical transcendence graphically meet and intersect.

In these examples, the minimalistic abstraction of the work, its strong, internalised focus on itself, leaves one with little other than kinaesthesia. One watches the body find itself and its sensory intelligence. As the body explores itself, a chasm opens up beneath the dancer, an absence which language would otherwise conceal, while the dancer's concentration prevents a fall into nothingness. Instead the body—like criticism itself—moves towards the vacuum that lies beneath language without ever touching it, an endless regression haunted by the spectre of finitude or a total lack of meaning. The never ending quality of this progression towards nothingness in turn engenders the sense of an infinite richness of kinaesthetic possibilities. The body of both performance and the critical text glide vertiginously into unco-ordinated space.

go More arts issues on the web...

Lisanne Gibson reports from Brisbane on *Without Walls? Cultural Organisations Beyond the Millennium* (State Library, November 3, 1999), a provocative conference examining the impact of digital technologies on cultural organisations. Speakers included Gary Brennan, Paul Brown and John Rimmer. "Rimmer, Chair of the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council and Director of Acuity Consulting...argued that cultural organisations are currently framed by industrial age ideas and structures. They are based on paternalistic notions of 'betterment' where the product is provided by a 'tank and funnel' mode of distribution. These organisations are specialised and are loath to broaden their function. This dichotomy is characteristic of

the types of rhetoric which have greeted all new technologies of communication."

Amanda Lawrence reports from the Asian Australian Identities Conference (Australian National University, Canberra, September 27-29 1999)

"Presentations were given by some of the brightest stars of the Asian-Australian academic scene—len Ang, Dean Chan, Ghassan Hage, Suvendrini Perera, John Docker and Audrey Yue to name a few—discussing issues such as the concept of hybridity in contemporary theory, Asian homosexuality, Chinese Australian literature and Asian Australian women's literature, sport and identity, Chinese bushrangers, curatorial politics in

the visual arts and topics on music, theatre, film and television. Scattered throughout the stimulating panel sessions were creative responses to the Asian Australian diasporic experience: performers such as Le Quy Duong presenting his play *Meat Party* and Anna Yen's *Chinese Take Away*; filmmaker Tony Ayres screening his documentary of William Yang's *Sadness* and Danny Loong's film *Universal Blues*; writers Merlinda Bobis and Simone Lazaroo reading their work; a calligraphy exhibition curated by Bronwen van Leeuwen, an explanation of Greg Leong's textile work *Remembering Chinese...*"

<http://www.rtimearts.com.au/~opencity/>

Spontaneous filmmaking and documenting survival in East Timor

Carmela Baranowska

Louis Malle's *Phantom India* is an extreme, powerful and audacious work; I have always found it particularly inspiring and unforgettable. A documentary epic, *Phantom India* begins with a succession of Indian academics interviewed face to camera. After a few minutes of their expert pronouncements Malle's disaffection with their routine answers forces him to shift his focus entirely. He leaves the city and enters rural India. The next 8 hours of screen time is an "ordeal of contact" (to borrow Dennis O'Rourke's term) between Malle and the phantom that is India.

Phantom India was screened in hourly blocks over 8 weeks in France 30 years ago. Unfortunately it is woefully neglected in an Australian screen culture that rarely programs or acknowledges such documentaries; indeed, where the word 'documentary' is too often associated with instantly packaged and consumed 'television documentaries' and where 'documentary filmmaking' is an oxymoron. Malle's work is an example of a spontaneous filmmaking practice, an approach which holds little favour with current Australian documentary funding structures.

I know this at first hand, having recently worked largely outside documentary funding bodies. When I first travelled to East Timor in March 1999 I had no official funding nor television interest. As a recent film school graduate I was considered neither 'experienced' enough to film overseas nor had I made the requisite 3 documentaries in Australia which would have qualified me for funding. However, I knew that I had persistence and stamina. While physically I am not that strong I knew that I was psychologically and emotionally prepared to live in East Timor and film the last year of the Indonesian occupation. I arrived with a second

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Carmela Baranowska, Scenes from an occupation

hand digital video camera and by the time I was forced to evacuate the UN compound in Dili in September, I had filmed over 50 hours of footage. During the 4 months that I filmed in East Timor I documented the rise of militia and Indonesian military violence, the holding of the UN supervised ballot and the Indonesian military's violent response to the independence victory.

Even now I am still amazed that I was the only filmmaker to have documented this period despite the fact that there were 600 journalists in East Timor during the UN referendum in August. However, very early on in my filming I decided on a different filmmaking strategy. I would not interview East Timorese; I would simply try and place myself in the middle of any given situation and follow what was going on by observing different 'scenes.' As I always filmed by myself, both camera operating and sound recording, I often found that the events, whether highly dramatic, tragic or humorous, would unfold before me. I tried to film from the East Timorese point of view. Interviewing participants would have been a rude interruption, almost a Western form of imposition.

Scenes from an occupation is subtitle-driven (6 languages are spoken in the program) and based on a linear chronology. My voice-over narration is minimal and attempts to link the different scenes. The 67 minute documentary comprises 2 reports first broadcast on SBS-TV's *Dateline* in June and October. One of the assumptions I wanted to challenge in the current affairs genre was the *boy's own dangerzone* school of filmmaking. I am always suspicious when the journalist places him/herself in the middle of the action. Of course sometimes this is inevitable; however the 'macho' school of filmmaking tends to leave me cold. In the late 20th century there are only a few occupations where the male can be a hero: racing car driver, secret agent and foreign correspondent. After the gunfire stops it is the women and children in any conflict who are usually viewed as 'secondary.' But in East Timor it is the survivors who are the women and children. It was the young men who were targeted, injured or killed by the militias and Indonesian military. The women were left to pick up the pieces. For

example, it was the nuns at the Motael Clinic in April who, after a militia rampage, refused to shut down the only Timorese run clinic in Dili despite the urgings of Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop Belo.

One evening in mid-March I was filming at the Motael Clinic. The clinic provided both medical and psychological help. The East Timorese have never trusted the Indonesian hospital system. A young girl was brought to the clinic from the countryside by her guardians. She had been injured by Indonesian military-supported militia who had entered her house and shot dead her 2 young brothers. There was no motive. Esmina, the little girl, was severely traumatised. She lay quietly on the bed as the nuns and her guardians discussed the events which led to the killings. "They killed a child," one of her guardians says. "The adults came out of their houses and said, kill us, not innocent children." They came out, praying and shouting. That's when they machine gunned the adults."

This is a profound moral and philosophical moment. In order to save the children it is the adults who are prepared to die. As I was filming I remember the stillness of that moment. It is this intimacy between East Timorese living their lives under the Indonesian occupation that I wanted to document. The conflict was wider than the standard news reporting could possibly allow. While the sound of gunfire and the never-ending body count continued, the East Timorese people's determination for independence rarely wavered. After 24 years of brutalisation the East Timorese still understood the power of the eyewitness testimony. "We may all die," a Timorese woman says at the UN Compound in Dili, "but if one is left, he will tell the story." It is this compulsion to document that is the greatest gift the East Timorese can give to any documentary filmmaker.

Carmela Baranowska is the recipient of the 1999 Women in Film and Television Lottie Lyell New Player Award. Scenes from an occupation is in competition at FIPA-Biarritz 2000. Baranowska is attending the competition with AFC support. For distribution details contact viagemfilms@hotmail.com or PO Box 5068 Laburnun 3130 Victoria.

OnScreen

film
digital media
screen culture

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It takes more than a few films to alter history

Eddy Jokovich

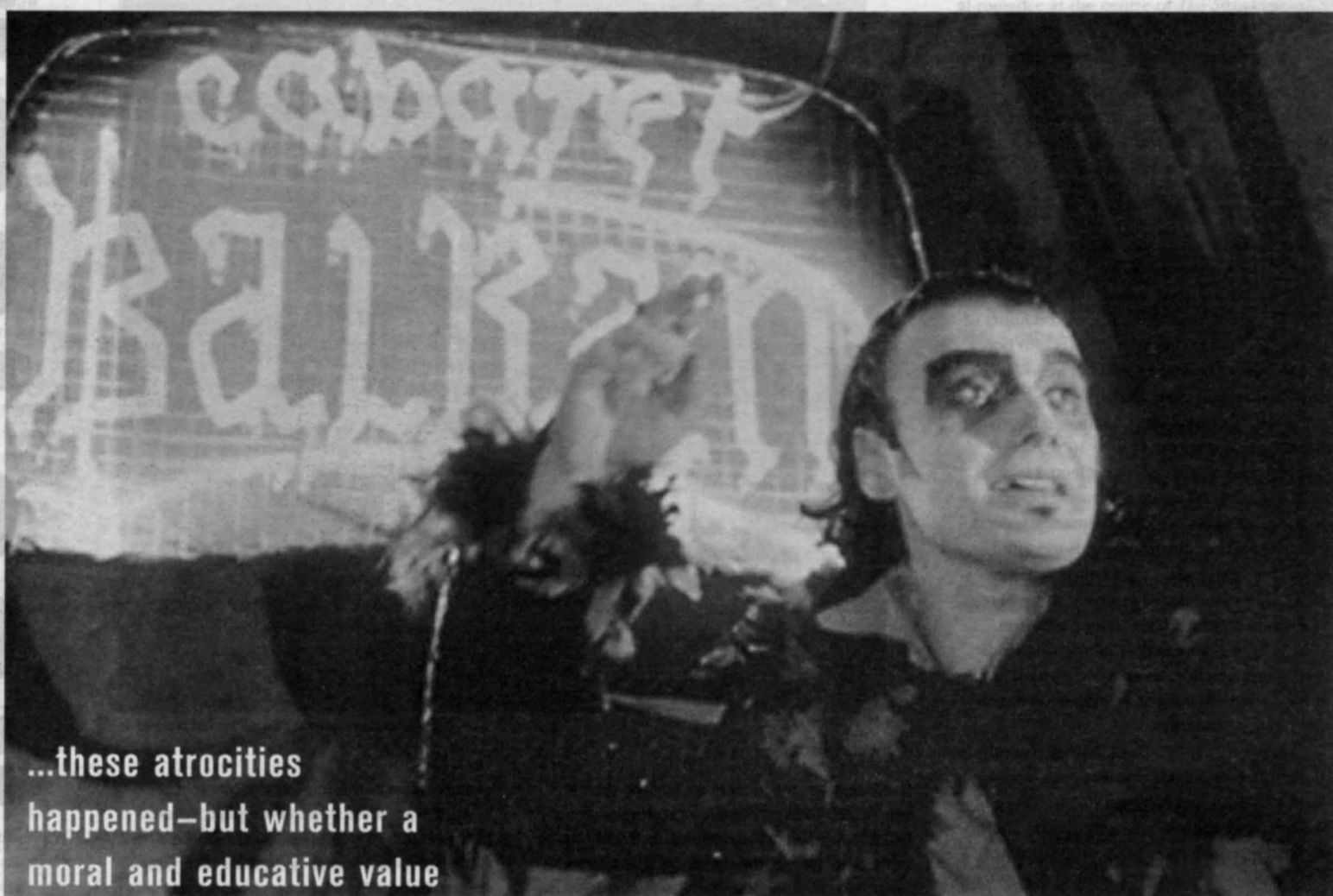
In *International Crisis and Conflict* (Macmillan 1993), a classic analysis of why communities wage war against each other, Richard Clutterbuck states succinctly that "war is mass lunacy." Indeed it is, and while 20th century warfare developed into an exchange between killing machines and civilians, the seeds of the Balkan wars in the 1990s were predominantly sown by the cool hands of the propagandists and assorted spin-doctors, awaiting their opportunity to achieve political control at all cost.

One such opportunity arrived in 1987 when a little-known Communist apparatchik, Slobodan Milosevic, witnessed a skirmish between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo's capital Pristinë and proclaimed that "no Serb need to live in terror, they [the Albanians] will not hit you any more." Whether Serbs were being attacked by anybody is questionable. However, the subsequent broadcast of this speech on Yugoslav television did much to unravel the precarious balance between Yugoslavia's national groups and springboarded Milosevic into the leadership of the Yugoslav Communist Party and towards a political strategy that would inevitably lead Serbia into wars with the Slovenes, Croats, Bosnians and the Kosovar Albanians.

Thirteen years on, the Serbs must be wondering about the rhetoric of Milosevic's words and actions—the promise of a unified Serbia was never a realistic possibility, the economy is now suffering from massive hyper inflation, the country remains isolated and its once great cities lie in ruins after the NATO-led bombardment in 1999.

Goran Paskaljevic uses these themes in *Cabaret Balkan*. He portrays post-war Belgrade and the effects of years of psychological trauma via 3 avenues: the post-Communist police state rivalling that of the Soviet KGB and Romania's despicable *securitate*; war psychosis; and isolation from the international community. Belgrade was one of the great European cities, at the heart of Yugoslav philosophy, architecture, education and the arts—now, as *Cabaret Balkan* shows, it is a reconstituted criminal-controlled metropolis, a place where "those who are lucky enough have escaped this lousy country."

Cabaret Balkan commences with the 'cabaret', where a comper introduces the evening by claiming that he's "going to screw with your minds." From there, the film presents an interplay between characters in a series of short stories based in contemporary Belgrade—a Bosnian academic who now drives buses; a taxi driver made impotent after a police interrogation; life-long friends exchanging old secrets of wife-swapping exploits; a drug-crazed youth who hijacks a bus; a Muslim kid involved in the illicit trade of alcohol and cigarettes. These interplays attempt to illustrate the 'madness' of a city after years of warfare and illusions of the unified 'promised' land.



...these atrocities happened—but whether a moral and educative value

exists in the depiction of this or whether it is simply insatiating an appetite for cinematic violence is debatable.

Recent Balkan cinema has habitually used stereotypes to support the debauched, chauvinistic and maniacal perceptions of Slavic cultures—conveniently developed and applied by Serbia's political enemies—and Paskaljevic does little to allay these. However, remove the sparse references to the brinkmanship between Milosevic's regime and the European Union in late 1998 and *Cabaret Balkan* and its characters could easily be transported to any contemporary setting outside of Serbia.

While Paskaljevic uses Belgrade to signify the social and economic decline of the city and other Communist states since 1989, *Savior* offers a direct and shocking reminder of the ethnic violence, fear and personal vendettas that occurred during the Bosnian wars. Directed by Petar Antonijevic and produced by Oliver Stone, *Savior* takes us back to Bosnia in 1993, where a 3-way war is being waged between Serbs, Croats and Muslims and, sometimes, any 2 of these in collusion against the other.

After witnessing the murder of his wife and son by Muslim extremists, Joshua Rose aka 'Guy' (Dennis Quaid), becomes a mercenary fighter with the Bosnian Serbs, killing Bosnian Muslims to avenge the murder of his family. As the film progresses, 'Guy' begins to understand the consequences of his actions, and realises that his quest for retribution—his personal 'holy' war—is no dif-

ferent to that of his Muslim enemies. He rescues a Serbian woman from near-murder, after it is discovered that she has been impregnated by a Muslim soldier, proceeds to assist her during the birth of her child and attempts to take the child into safer territory. In the context of the Bosnian wars, a minor event, but indicative of the many unreported heroic acts that were performed amidst the surrounding brutality and cruelty.

While *Cabaret Balkan* offers parody and metaphors, often descending into farce, *Savior* presents the blunt terror of the Bosnian wars—the killing of children, the finger and head-lobbing, pogroms, the psycho-terror of today's civilian or military partner being tomorrow's murderer.

Following in the footsteps of *Saving Private Ryan*, Antonijevic takes the depiction of warfare into a terrible and shocking realm. While *Savior* may seem superreal, unfortunately, rampaging militias *did* attack civilians with assorted mallets, spanners and golf clubs. Scores of civilians and children were needlessly massacred, sometimes mistakenly. Captured soldiers were impaled in the memory of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, during Serbia's greatest battle loss. Certainly, as can be attested by the reams of UN investigative documentation and independent analysis, these atrocities happened—but whether a moral and educative value exists in the depiction of this or whether it is simply insatiating an appetite for cinematic violence is debatable.

Both *Cabaret Balkan* and *Savior* revolve around brutalism and violence, but offer little to suggest why this has been so prevalent in the Balkans over the past decade. Why, for example, did the Western powers engage in the horseplay of Bosnian intervention for so long? Why was Milosevic's regime strongly supported by the

Western powers and capitalist interests prior to the break-up of Yugoslavia? Why were known war criminals invited to the table of the Dayton peace negotiations in 1995?

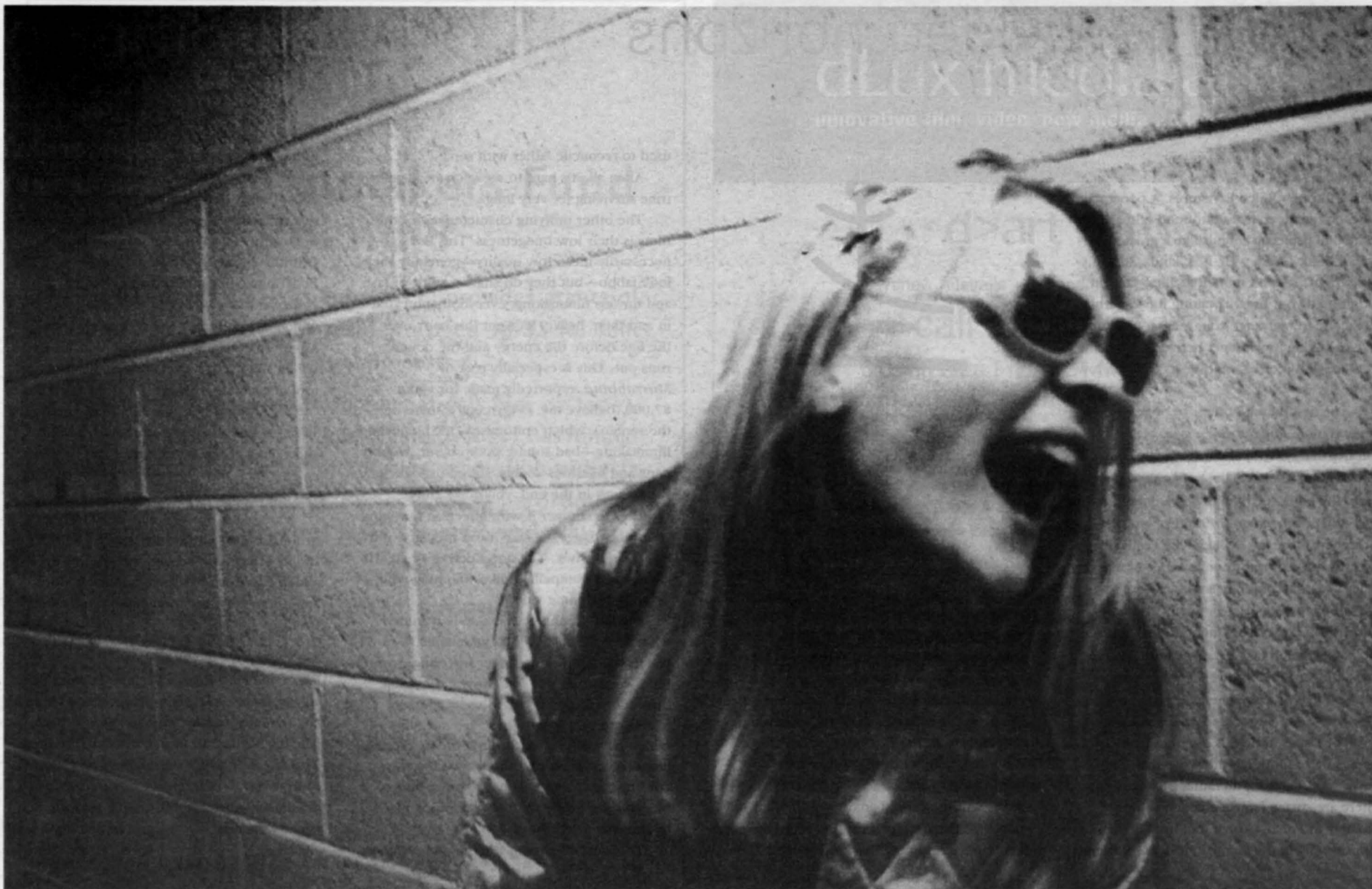
In a *Variety* interview, Dennis Quaid (Joshua Rose aka 'Guy'), comments that "if a movie can raise awareness in even a few people, then it's worthwhile." Of course, it takes more than a few films to alter history, and recent events in the Balkans offer mixed prospects for the future. In the Croatian elections following the death of President Franjo Tudjman, an alliance of moderate centre-left, humanist and democratic organisations easily won power from Tudjman's hardline HDZ party.

Across the border in Serbia, the government has cracked down on perceived 'anti-state enemies', including non-government organisations, Albanians, independent journalists, homosexuals, opposition political groups, and peace activists. Its erstwhile partner, Montenegro, has had enough and wants to leave Serbia on its own within the Yugoslav federation. Perhaps the game is up for Slobodan Milosevic. Hardliners never determine their expiry of term or whether their thirst for power has been fully quenched but, determined as he is, even he should be able to realise when his pyrrhic victory has been achieved.

Cabaret Balkan (1999), director Goran Paskaljevic, writer Dejan Dukovski, distributor Paramount Classics; *Savior* (1998), directors Peter Antonijevic & Ian Wilson, writer Robert Orr, distributor Budua Productions

Eddy Jokovich is the director of Australia Region Media, an independent media research and production unit.

Cabaret Balkan



Deborah Clay in Cate Shortland's *Joy*

photo Jum Tagami

Winning in style: Cate Shortland, filmmaker

Veronica Gleeson

While perhaps it's a little early to discern what an era that ended with 7 million dollars worth of gunpowder rigged to the Harbour Bridge was all about (what exactly does it mean when a culture actually gets a big baroque bang for its buck?), a few things have emerged. One of them is the fact that short film has never been a hotter sub-cultural commodity, and not just in Australia. Read: it's also a prime target for trivialisation—both from the makers and for the made. The rhetoric is painfully easy to observe, and even easier to lampoon...Live performance? Literature? The academy? Screw all that; let's just make a short film instead. But what about the cash? The audience (as if there were only one)? Distribution deals? Making a film is an expensive business—most of us are aware of how the money pit informs the medium—hence the fact that a lot of filmmakers' primary focus is how to get the bloody thing up and out there. Attend a screening of AFTRS or VCA graduate films and you may find yourself negotiating the bleakly etched intersection between the films loyal to an ideal regarding the means of expression and those that tend toward being an entrepreneurial calling card for the director/writer on the make. It's tempting to suggest that Australian screen culture is indulged by anti-intellectualism at both an educational and funding body level. Watch a couple of films by award-winning AFTRS graduate student Cate Shortland, however, and the raptures in that level of criticism start to appear.

Shortland has been making films (so far) that are exercises in style. She readily admits to being a fan of New York-based photographer Nan Goldin, filmmaker Wong Kar Wai and artist-sloganeer Barbara Kruger, and she studied (alongside history and film theory) fine art at

Sydney University. But scratch the surface of her work and there's a lot more than simple homage, and Shortland is bemused by those who don't see it.

I think there's a fear in Australia of looking as though you're engaged with your film on a theoretical level, because people will think you're a wanker. Whereas in somebhere like France, it's integral to the work...And even if you look at the early work of Gus Van Sant or Todd Haynes, they're drawing on other creative disciplines.

The pleasures to be had from watching Shortland's work are multifarious, revealing themselves via cunningly designed sound, a studied juxtaposition of extraneous media (digicam, smash-up derby footage from the TV, freeze-frame technology) not to mention a fearless embracing of film theory, which, she says simply, she "enjoys." The approach, very much an open and collaborative one (Shortland consistently pre-fixes her answers with a "we"), works to extend her films outward, toward an ever-increasing range of audiences. For people who like to watch, there's a plenitude of beautifully saturated, thoughtfully composed images. And it's hard not to notice the sophistication in the writing.

In *Flowergirl*, a fully subtitled short about a techno-voyeur (Diasuke) with a digital video camera, the object of desire, Hana, is a doppelganger for Jean Seaberg in *Breathless*, only she has her bottom lip pierced, and she's Japanese. Shortland is in no way taking Godard for granted, but she is having an informed amount of fun with the legacy of French New Wave, with a bit of a nod in the direction of Laura Mulvey and Jacques Derrida. Hana does a 180 degree turn at the end of *Flowergirl*, claiming for herself both the technology that

has been used to objectify her (she doesn't want to kiss Diasuke, but she films herself getting undressed with his digicam in the knowledge that he'll be playing with it), and the narrative—the film ends with Hana's erotic capitulation, not with Diasuke's memories.

The message here isn't bodily as much as it is digital, and *Flowergirl* isn't a film about being disenfranchised by technology; in fact, it seems to enable the characters. There's a charmingly stylish blend of no-tech environment (Hana lives with a couple of bleached blonde Japanese surfers in a grungy flat in Bondi) and hi-tech ennui—no-one gets intimidated by the sexy little digicam, and even the porn playing on TV sends the household into dope-induced slumber. On set the technology entered the fluidity of human interaction as well; the D.O.P. letting everyone—cast and crew—play with the camera and film something. Shortland was also inspired by the films made by Japanese teenagers (she and her partner saw them at the Japanese Film Festival in Tokyo): "They were taking these handycams everywhere, filming whatever they wanted." She also dipped into pop culture with a critical eye as to what not to do:

We [writer, cinematographer and CS] watched this American film with Winona Ryder where she was videotaping something and they kept cutting back to her holding the camera. We decided not to do that after establishing it. Sam Petty did the sound design and he designed this very thin, stripped back sound for the video footage, but I really wanted it to look as though the camera was his [Diasuke's] eyes, in a sense. He was still objectifying her.

The result—to the film's credit—is a subtle distinction between what Diasuke's eyes see and what camera is doing. And in *Pentuphouse*, an earlier piece detailing frag-

ments of a doomed relationship, Shortland uses a similar kind of narrative and visual economy. Time jumps forward, characters serve their purpose without need of clunky introduction, the smash-up derby racing on TV is juxtaposed with shambling protagonists Della and Dale's barely articulated emotional crash and burn. And throughout both films we're neither lost in space nor suspended in a contemporary Australian cliché. Bondi in *Flowergirl* looks like Kings Cross on a quiet night, and Della and Dale's lifestyle doesn't demand shots of people queuing for unemployment benefits for us to know exactly where they are. The focus is tight and the reference point exact. Says Shortland on *Flowergirl* "Right from the start I knew the question was how to frame out Bondi...I wanted to show a dirty, urban reality, rather than the sunny blue clichéd look."

Shortland isn't aggressively pursuing the oft aspired-to trajectory of short film to feature. Her latest film, *Joy*, is her shortest work yet—it's about a 15 year-old girl and her parents who, thanks to a bit of messing with the freeze-frame and clever sound design are heard, but not seen. Busy wrapping up the film at AFTRS, Shortland's looking for inspiration, wherever it may appear. All in sunny, blue Bondi...

Flowergirl and *Pentuphouse* won both fiction categories at the 1999 Dendy Awards. At the Flickerfest 2000 awards, Shortland won the Australian Screen Directors Association Award for Best Direction, and Sam Petty the Audio Loc Sound Design Award for Best Achievement in Sound for *Flowergirl*. *Joy* will appear on the festival circuit in March. Veronica Gleeson is a Sydney-based freelance film writer and reviewer.

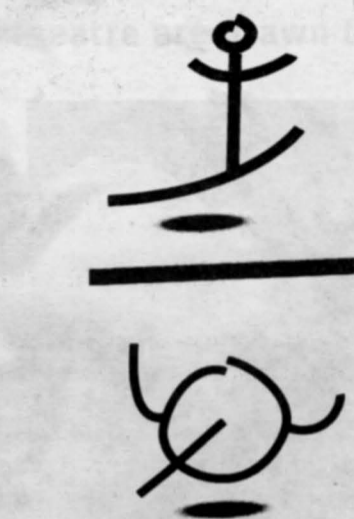
tribe's new video horizons

Simon Enticknap

Tribe First Rites is a collection of Australian debut films being distributed on video through Video Ezy stores. A percentage of each rental fee is used to fund other first-time film projects. Sounds like a great idea, you'd think... And, well, it is, kinda, sort of, itzawright... I don't mind it at all so far, but don't hold your breath waiting for something, someone to rearrange your mental furniture. We're talking low budget here and, for some reason, all too often, that seems to mean low horizons as well.

The first bunch of films to be released is an odd mob. *Powder Burn* is an action chase thriller thingy with, ahem, a blackly comic touch (and, I believe, the only one to make it onto the big screen, following a limited release last year). *Somewhere in the Darkness* (which screened at the last Sydney Film Festival) is a worthy attempt to present a series of morality tales in a contemporary setting. There's a clutch of coming-of-age comedy dramas—*Waste*, *The Big Night Out* and *Murrabinna*—and a collection of Australian short films and animation. There's a diversity of sorts here which nevertheless, when viewed as a tribe, starts to feel a tad too consanguineous.

For a start, if there's one thing which unites these films, it's the sense that, right now, right here, it's all rather blokey. True, there are strong female characters, most notably in *Powder Burn*, but usually they appear only in the familiar guise of girlfriends,



wives and mothers. Hello? Where are we? *Waste*, *The Big Night Out* and *Murrabinna* traverse somewhat similar territory of boys-being-boys and boys-becoming-men, albeit by taking different routes which no doubt reflect the personal experiences of the filmmakers. *Somewhere in the Darkness* strikes all the right chords in terms of positive messages reinforcing tolerance and equality between sexes, but the central anxiety of the film still concerns the transference of wisdom from elders to boys, and how this knowledge can be

used to reconcile father with son.

All in all, it's hard to see such an all-male tribe surviving for very long.

The other unifying characteristic of these films is their low budgetness. This doesn't necessarily mean low quality—generally they look fabbo—but they do share a spirit of fast and furious filmmaking, everybody mucking in and then, heave, let's get this baby over the line before the energy and the dough runs out. This is especially true of *Murrabinna*, reportedly made for about \$7,000 (believe me, every cent is there on the screen), which epitomises DIY homespun filmmaking—bad sound, poor colour, wobbly pans and hilarious zooms, stilted dialogue and lame jokes; in the end, you don't know whether to shower it with affection for being so lovably daggy, or take it out the back and hit it with a stick. The unrefined finished article is oddly compelling, like watching your neighbour's home videos.

Ultimately, this lets-just-do-it attitude is what makes *First Rites* so watchable. You watch them with one finger hovering over the Eject button but somehow get carried through to the end, just to see if they do manage to pull it off. These are not films which have been put through the marketing blender, test-screened and sieved for easy consumption; they still have all the lumpy bits and the funny taste of something made by humans, not robots.

The most successful video in the collec-

tion is *Australian All Shorts*, a gathering of recent shorts, animation bursts and digital film clips. Like a show reel for new filmmakers, this collection is evidence of the variety and originality of local output, ranging from Rachel Griffiths' hugely professional *Tulip* which stars Bud Tingwell in a dress, to the bizarre *Testament* by Che Baker, a strange concoction which mixes Hong Kong action movies with American conspiracy paranoia, plus dialogue which sounds like it was recorded at the bottom of a laundry basket.

These short cuts may be the way to go for Tribe, if it means that a sample of the best short films produced each year can be given an extended shelf life beyond the usual festivals and competitions.

One more tip: you may need to hunt around a bit if you want to try these films at home—they ain't so ezy to find. Not every Video Ezy store has them and each store requires a separate membership, so check first.

The Tribe First Rites collection: Powder Burn, writer/director Stephen Prime, Somewhere in the Darkness, writer/director Paul Fenech, The Big Night Out, writer/director/producer Tim Boyle, Waste, director Tony de Pasquale, Murrabinna, writer/producer/director Justin Schneider, Australian All Shorts, various. See www.tribe.com.au for more information and trailers.

Documenting religious zeal and media vultures

Anthony May

It has been said, and sometimes you have to take it seriously, that all cinema aspires to the art of the Western. Take this story: 2 young Brisbane filmmakers are preparing a documentary about people and places for an SBS series. They go into a Queensland country town with their cameras to see what drives a group of religious communarians: how they live, what they have learnt. Before the first set of camera batteries are flat, they are in the midst of a community conflict with the lines drawn and roles assigned. There are no Indians to come howling down from the plains but, of course, the national media are ready to fill that role.

The story, without the Western frame, is that of Anthony Mullins and Kris Kneen. Around March last year they put together a proposal to make a documentary about the Magnificat Meal Movement, a religious group that has settled in Helidon, outside of Toowoomba in Queensland. The problems they anticipated were problems of access.

Like most young filmmakers, Mullins and Kneen were sensitive to the protocols of ethnographic filmmaking. The Movement too was sensitive to the ways in which they could be presented to the wider community. So Mullins and Kneen found their way in. Scott and Bernadette, with their young baby, were a family about to move into Helidon to take up the religious life in all earnestness. They agreed to let Mullins and Kneen follow this transition.

In August 1999, they filmed Scott and Bernadette's move from Toowoomba to Helidon, just 30 kilometres away. What they found in Helidon was not a settled community. The Movement and the townspeople were not at peace. And the question of access was made

more difficult as the townspeople, like the Movement, had become sensitised (by bad media coverage) to anyone with a camera. Time had to be spent establishing trust across the spectrum of allegiances that existed in Helidon.

The sides were clear. On the one hand there was the old town of Helidon, in part organised around the Roman Catholic church of Saint Joseph's, ministered by Fr Ryan. On the other the newcomers, the Magnificat Meal Movement, led by Debra Giesky (Debra of Australia), committed to their own ecumenical worship through the honour of Mary, Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix of all Graces, and Advocate for All Nations. And, with time, Mullins and Kneen established a sense of trust with both groups.

But this was in the relatively calm month of August. September 1999 brought the media

storm. There had been word that 9.9.99 would bring some disaster to the Movement and Debra of Australia. The word was not clear but the Movement had heard it, the townspeople had heard it and, to the consternation of all, the national press had heard it. And on the 8th of September the storm was upon them. News crews arrived in 4 wheel drives and helicopters landed on the football field. The press had descended.

They took up their post outside the perimeter of the old convent which had become the Movement's Shrine, and they waited. For Mullins and Kneen, the story of the new community within the old had transformed. Their response was to split the cameras into 2 groups, one to stay with the Shrine and the Movement and one to follow the press. And as the next 36 hours

passed, the tension within the Shrine grew.

But I can't tell you the end of the story. The film isn't finished. I know that the press came and went. I know that Scott and Bernadette had a difficult transition. Maybe it would have been easier if the Movement had settled in Western Australia. Imagine trying to change your life by just moving down the road. But the story isn't over. Maybe Helidon is big enough for both the townspeople and the Movement but we know that Westerns don't normally end like this.

Anthony Mullins and Kris Kneen are making Two Roads to Helidon as a 30 minute documentary for SBS's Space Stories series. The documentary has been co-financed by SBS and the Pacific Film and Television Commission.

DOCOnews

Film Australia has recently commissioned 3 new docos under its National Interest Program which will screen on ABC: *Thomson of Arnhem Land* (writer Michael Cummins, director John Moore) tells the story of anthropologist Donald Thomson who went to live in Yirrkala in the NT to prevent conflicts (and research Indigenous culture) after 5 Japanese fishermen and 3 whites were killed by Aboriginal clansmen in 1933; *City of Dreams* (writer/director Belinda Mason, writer Gaby Mason) reveals the contributions of architects Walter Burley and Marion Mahoney Griffin to Australian culture and the complexities of their artistic collabo-

ration; and *Steel City* (writer/director Catherine Marciniak) traces the final weeks before the closure of BHP steelworks in Newcastle.

Discovery Channel received 166 submissions for its new First Time Filmmakers initiative, designed to extend the opportunity and experience of filmmakers who have never produced work aired outside of Australia. Six half hour programs (stories that offer a view of Australia as it moves into 2000, capitalising on the interest in Sydney during the Olympics) will be commissioned to appear on Discovery Channel throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Asia Pacific Region. Final selections will be made at the end of February with productions screening

by the end of the year. For more information, contact Discovery Channel, tel 02 9280 1677.

Australian documentary filmmakers will be highlighted at HOT DOCS 2000, a Spotlight on Australia program at the Canadian International Documentary Festival in Toronto in May. The AFC is inviting proposals from producers and directors interested in participating in the Australian delegation. Deadline is February 4. Contact David Noakes, AFC, tel 02 9321 6444. HOT DOCS will also launch the Toronto Documentary forum which is a pitching event to commissioning editors from around the globe. Interested producers need to apply before Feb 17. Guidelines and application forms available at www.hotdocs.com.

fto

Young Filmmakers Fund Round 8

The Young Filmmakers Fund (YFF) provides grants of up to \$25,000 to NSW residents aged 18-35 for film production or post-production costs.

There is no restriction on format (eg film or tape), subject matter, genre or type of film. The YFF has funded short drama films, documentaries, animation projects and experimental films. Projects must be produced entirely in NSW using NSW-based personnel and facilities.

Applications to Round 8 close **Monday 3 April**. Applicants should read the YFF Guidelines before submitting an application. You can download guidelines and application forms from www.fto.nsw.gov.au or contact Jeremy Rice, YFF Coordinator on 02 9264 6400 or email jeremy.rice@fto.nsw.gov.au.

New South Wales Film and Television Office

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- works will be selected by a panel of representatives from the screen/audio arts sector
- closing date for entries is Friday 31 March 2000

d>art 00 entry forms + dLux membership details

+ further information about dLux events please contact

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Women filmmakers mainstreamed

Jane Mills

Last year the Australian Film Commission abandoned its Women's Program so quietly that few noticed; fewer protested. Those who did were fobbed off with the inelegant euphemism of these economic rationalistic times: "mainstreaming", a word which would be a useful addition to the Monty Python vocabulary should they ever do a remake of their "Dead Parrot" sketch.

In 1990 the AFC set up the Women's Program to replace the Women's Film Fund. This marked a shift in emphasis from direct investment in production to support for professional development, including research and policy development, aimed at enhancing women's participation and career advancement in the screen industries.

The ex-Women's Program does not appear to be much mourned. Its final death rattle, *Shared Visions: Women in Television* (Annette Blonski ed, AFC, Sydney, 1999) offers some clues as to why. While this slim collection of contributions from women who have made it in the television industry may provide some women starting out with a glimpse of some positive role models, it certainly doesn't live up to its claim to be a "major new book on Australian television." Apart from a lively interview with Rachel Perkins, the tone is self-congratulatory and complacent.

It's a long, long way from the feisty, politically aware *Don't Shoot Darling!* (Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg



Film director Clara Law

eds, Greenhouse Publications, 1987) which, published with the assistance of the AFC's Women's Film Fund, demanded women both behind and in front of the camera be taken seriously (and demonstrated why).

The Australian screen industry has been described as 'woman-friendly.' Few national cinemas can offer as many internationally acclaimed top-ranking women of the calibre of directors Jane Campion and Gillian Armstrong, actors Nicole Kidman, Cate Blanchett and Toni Collette, screenwriter Laura Jones, editor Jill Bilcock, and costume designer Lizzie Gardiner (to select a few names at random).

The industry also produces a fairly constant number of women-oriented narratives with films ranging from *My Brilliant Career* (Gillian Armstrong, 1979), *Muriel's Wedding* (PJ Hogan, 1994) and the recent *Holy Smoke* (Jane Campion, 1999). While it is most certainly true that male-oriented narratives still predominate (*Romper Stomper*, *The Boys*, *Praise*, *Two Hands*), many of these contain strong female roles, or ones which the female actors have made memorable. A film like the otherwise admirable *Erskineville Kings* in

which the female role looks as if it was added on at the last moment, suffers at the box office partly because of its gender imbalance. (It would be interesting to speculate why neither Shirley Barratt's *Love Serenade* nor Clara Law's *Floating Life* feel imbalanced even though neither has strong male roles.)

Australian women critics and theorists are also impressively represented. Meaghan Morris, Sylvia Lawson, Liz Jacka, Susan Dermody, Barbara Creed and Lesley Stern, for example, all have significant reputations as world players in this aspect of screen culture. Two recently published books suggest there are even more lining up: *Twin Peeks: Australian and New Zealand Feature Films* (Damned Publishing, 1999) edited by Deb Voerhoven, and Felicity Collins' *The Films of Gillian Armstrong* (Atom, 1999) are important contributions to our understanding of screen language precisely because gender is an undeniable part of the way they analyse the screen.

All this distaff activity may suggest to some that the AFC's decision to 'mainstream' the activities of a Women's Program is yet another indicator of the healthy position of

women in the Australian screen industry, however anyone who believes women no longer need to campaign for equality in terms of work, salary and status should read Julie James Bailey's *Reel Women: Working in Film and Television* (Sydney, AFTRS, 1999). This paints a much more realistic picture of an industry which badly needs continuing investigation and reform.

Women In Film and Television (WIFT) suggests the inadequacy of the now deceased Women's Program may be responsible for the lack of any outcry about its demise. Many WIFT members are very much aware of a glass ceiling in an industry which fails to make gender equality a priority (or even acknowledge the need). They are also aware of women activists who have become burnt out by the huge effort required to juggle careers with family commitments as well as organising effective protest campaigns and education programs.

What they are arguing for is not the old, irrelevant Women's Program (which, in addition to pedestrian pamphlets, comprised little more than hosting expensive breakfasts and running short television training workshops open only to women nominated and paid for by the networks) but one which is politically informed and prepared to speak out on behalf of women.

The AFC once helped lead the way, allowing women in the industry to get on with their work. Other minority or disadvantaged groups should be wary. To be sure the AFC, like all federally-funded screen institutions, has suffered from cuts imposed by the Howard Government; but it's a matter of priorities. Last year the AFC also attempted to mainstream their Indigenous Program. After loud complaint, however, it suddenly discovered that it had the money after all. All society would benefit from a screen culture to which women contributed equally. As in any situation of inequality, only those on top believe they have anything to lose from change. They're wrong.

Jane Mills is Head of Screen Studies at The Australian Film, Television & Radio School and film writer for The Eye magazine. She is a member of WIFT.



Aardman studios, *Rex the Runt: A Marathon*

The Brisbane International Animation Festival (BIAF), the only festival in Australia dedicated exclusively to animation, will again be held in April. The festival aims to increase the profile of Australia's animation industry and entice new audiences with its combination of experimentation and popular content.

International guest and Academy Award winner Ray Harryhausen will feature, hosting seminars on stop-motion puppet work, pre-production design, and animation models. Ray is a pioneer in animation, best known for his work on the dinosaurs in *One Million Years BC*, the battling skeleton armies in *Jason and the Argonauts*, creature features including Cyclops from *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* and the six armed Kali in *Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, as well as adding his touch to a number of Hollywood sci fi and horror films including *Evil Dead 3*.

BIAF 2000's program is propelled by diversity and innovation with screenings of early German animation 1920-1960; the first ever collection of gay and lesbian themes in animation, *Animated Closet*; the latest by kinky creators Aardman Animations, *Rex the Runt*; along with the usual Australian retrospective, Queensland showcase, and international competitions of short films and commercials. Award winning entries will tour to Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin and Cairns through April/May.

Brisbane International Animation Festival, Dendy Cinemas, Brisbane, April 5 - 9. For more information contact the BIAF office on tel 07 3392 2307, email info@biaf.com.au or visit the website www.biaf.com.au

FILMnews

Eastern Connection II (ec2), a national touring program of contemporary Asian cinema, will be launched on Feb 17 at Adelaide's Mercury Cinema with *Love Will Tear Us Apart* (Hong Kong director Yu Lik Wai). *ec2* will screen a collection of independent features, shorts and docs from Hong Kong, China, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and Thailand including *Neon Goddesses*, *Xiao Wu*, *Dreamtrips* and the documentary on Japanese cult Aum, *A*. Festival guests Jimmy Choi and Kal Ng will meet with local filmmakers and tour with the program. AFI Conversations on Film events will coincide with the program in Sydney (Feb 24) and Melbourne (Feb 25). Touring dates and venues: Adelaide, Mercury Cinema, Feb 17 - 20; Perth, FTI, Feb 21 - Mar 7; Alice Springs, Araluen Centre, Feb 22 - Mar 19; Sydney, Chauvel, Feb 24 - Mar 3; Melbourne, Cinemedia,

Feb 25 - 29. For more information contact Ruth Cross, Media Resource Centre, tel 08 8410 0979, ruth@mrc.org.au

Censorship reared its ugly head again with the banning of Catherine Breillat's *Romance* by the Office of Film and Literature Classification on the grounds that it shows real, not simulated, sex. Debates have raged in the press, online and on radio talkback, with the usual "I have not seen the film but..." approach, but it is becoming more obvious that conservative politics is having insidious consequences when an art film, described by Breillat as an attempt to reclaim sexual imagery, "to film the invisible" (*SHM*, Jan 22), is judged too hot for Australian audiences to handle (even though it screened recently as part of the Melbourne Film Festival). Watch on Censorship (an organisation whose object is to protect and promote the rights of adult Australians to freedom of expression and speech in all media) has argued against the banning,

and called for revisions of the classification system, due to the OLFC's failure to adequately publicise its decisions and reasons. The decision has now been reversed. Breillat's earlier *36 Fillette*, an adventurous take on girls and sexuality is available in the foreign/cult section at most video stores.

Yet another round of depressing, but predictable, statistics about Australians giving local films a miss for US features. In 1999, only 3% of box office takings were for Australian films (*Two Hands* the most successful) with the top 5 overall being *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, *The Sixth Sense*, *Austin Powers 2*, *The Matrix* and *Notting Hill*. In a climate where direct competition with blockbusters appears impossible, hopefully producers, directors and screenwriters will choose innovative and experimental approaches to filmmaking in 2000, rather than bland and cheap facsimiles of Hollywood.

The pressures to succeed

Mike Walsh

The most encouraging thing about the **ZOOM! South Australian ShortsFest '99** awards is that it represents a new level of co-operation between 3 bodies involved in localised production: the South Australian Film Corporation, the Media Resource Centre, and the SA Young Filmmakers' Festival.

If the awards are emblematic of a co-ordinated policy to nurture filmmaking talent through different career phases, this is to be applauded. Coming after the SA Screen Showcase in 1998 and the *Frames* awards in years prior to that, *ZOOM!* needs to be given time to consolidate and build awareness in the local community.

The impetus for the festival was the decision by the SAFC to increase the profile of its development funding by creating 2 super prizes: the Filmmaker of the Future, and an Encouragement Award, valued at \$50,000 and \$15,000 respectively, so that more eggs could be more prominently placed in fewer baskets.

Historians of Australian cinema might be reminded of the 1927 Royal Commission into the film industry. That commission's major recommendation to nurture local production was the establishment of a small system of prizes. The logic is to choose an individual to symbolise the industry, and then to help that individual. Giving prizes rewards achievement, involves the film community in barracking for its favourites, and gets pictures in the newspapers. On the other hand, the attempt to consolidate a local production industry through a limited, top-down system runs the risk of ignoring structural problems at the base, if it is seen as a solution in its own right. We can expect lively debate over these issues in the coming year.

The system produced some anomalies with the MRC limiting its awards to 7 craft prizes in areas such as script, cinematography, performance, and design. The Filmmaker of the Future awards, judged by a completely different panel, rewarded a more vaguely defined set of criteria based on directorial talent or potential, and not on the technical accomplishment of the winning film. While the division between the technical and the more purely aesthetic is one of political convenience in divvying up the territory, it pushes convenience about as far as it can go. And as the judges themselves pointed out, no one seems sure where documentary fits into all this.

The inaugural Filmmaker of the Future prize went to Matthew Phipps for his film *Poh-Ling*. Phipps made the film as part of his degree in Screen Studies at Flinders University. Given that I teach in that department, these comments may lack the distanced, critical objectivity that none of us are supposed to believe in anymore anyway.

The film deals with the experiences of a Singaporean student in Australia intent on dispelling racial stereotypes and settling some paternal scores at the same time by flunking out. It is an attempt to combine a subject matter which has immediate social relevance with a bold visual style which calls attention to itself through wide angle distortions and jump cuts. Phipps uses these devices to produce a sense of estrangement, which combines with the character's detached voiceover narration to suggest the distancing effect of being a stranger in a land that needs to be more strange. For all of its strategies of defamiliarisation, *Poh-Ling's* sleepy memories of a young skateboarder suggest an emotional resonance that keeps us involved with her. A tricky balancing act.

While the award put Phipps' photo in the paper, and money into his bank account, it also puts the onus on him to produce work this year which will validate the awards system. I suppose the moral is that if you're daunted by the pressure to succeed, you've got no business wanting to be a filmmaker in the first place.



Eileen Darley, *Eternity Now* photo Ian Routledge

The previous night's MRC Craft Awards, which were accompanied by a day of sound and camera workshops, produced a lot to think about concerning the state of play in the state.

Eternity Now directed by Matthew Bate, won Best Cinematography by Andrew Commis. The film certainly provides us with a complex visual imagination. There is an attempt to do something with every image, through layered compositions or manipulations of light or focus. The care devoted to the image engages with the theme of photography's function as a means of preserving life in the face of death. *Eternity Now* was shot on black and white film, though the post-production on videotape and the ungentle nature of theatre video projection obscured some of the value of the cinematography. With Creative Development budgets being pared back, however, we should expect this to be the face of the future.

Phyllis Burford won Best Performance in

Julie Byrne's *The Sweeper*, a worthy but stylistically conservative film about an Alzheimers sufferer. While this was one of the few films based around an extended performance by a single actor, it didn't do much with the character. One leaves the film without having any preconceptions revised. *A Classroom in Tberestenstadt* (which won the Best Editing award for Megan Harding) was also an attempt to have us contemplate small marvels within a dark subject. Directed by Sandra Lepore and produced by the Sydney Jewish Museum, the film deals with artworks by children who were victims of the Holocaust. It is a film with strong subject matter, the power of its simplicity diluted by an elaborate hand motif.

In another context, I might have been outraged by the racial and ethnic stereotyping of Matthew Holmes' *The Scam*, a mixture of computer animation and claymation (which won Best Sound Design/Composition for Sean Timms)

SHORTSnews

On Jan 17, QPIX (Queensland's screen resource centre) launched the Silver Halide project, a new initiative designed to increase the number of short films made in Queensland, by making celluloid affordable to young filmmakers. Under the guidelines, KODAK, ATLAB, CAMERAQUIP, BEEPS and QPIX will provide all the services and equipment necessary for the film to be made along with technical expertise and support. The project could see as many as 7 new short films this year in addition to the current slate of productions. Filmmakers interested in submitting their ideas can contact QPIX, tel 07 3392 2633 or email qpix@qpix.org.au.

SBS and the AFC recently announced a new initiative to commission distinctive work from animators working at an advanced level. *Home Movies* will feature 12 short films for adults, screening on SBS in 2001 as 3 half hour programs. Bridget Ikin, General Manager of SBS Independent, commented "we want to build on the success of *Swimming Outside the Flags...Home Movies* is designed to attract highly personal material and give expression to feelings which are contradictory, untidy or sometimes overlooked." Deadline is April 3. For more information, contact the AFC, tel 02 9321 6455.

but the energy of the enterprise complemented the seriousness of the occasion. It is a spoof of Warners' films of the 1930s, but this is the George Lucas version of nostalgia, which claims to be looking backwards at the same time as it flaunts its mastery of new technologies.

Finally, the Best Animation award went to *The Bookkeeper*, directed by Michael Cusack, who won the same category for *The Rocket* at last year's SASS awards. (*The Bookkeeper* was also awarded the prize for Production Design to Deane Taylor.) Cusack works out of Anifex Films, and the assurance of his film demonstrates the benefits of working in an on-going commercial production environment. While we are all quick to look for art-cinema auteurs, I came away from the evening thinking about the maintenance of local production quotas in preserving a commercials industry. Preserving a healthy base of continuing production is also an effective way of producing filmmakers of the future.

ZOOM! SA ShortsFest '99: SA Young Filmmaker of the Future, Academy Cinema's December 11; Young Filmmaker Awards, Mercury Cinema December 3 & 5; MRC Craft Awards, Mercury Cinema, December 10.

Mike Walsh lectures in Screen Studies at Flinders University in Adelaide.

Y2K - a post-mortem

Experimenta Media Arts and Open Channel present the first in this year's series of three forums.

The global impact of the *Millenium Bug* runs deep in the commercial and cultural community. Y2K offered a sense of ending but also a future based on mythologies of millennial promise.

What were the official responses? What was the effect on the public imagination and the personal psyche of the electronic age?

Speakers

- Peter Petherbridge
Consulting Director eMERGE
- Dr Dominic Pettman
writer, lecturer, cultural critic
- Felicity Colman
writer, lecturer Swinburne University

Thursday 30th March 2000

opens 7.15pm for 7.30pm

OPENChannel

13 Victoria Street Fitzroy 3065

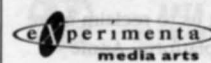
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openchannel@openchannel.org

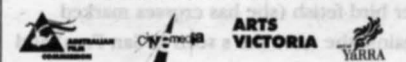
experimenta@experimenta.org

live webcast from 7.30pm and
papers online from 4th April at

www.experimenta.org



Convergence is funded by the Australian Film Commission, Cinamedia, Arts Victoria and the City of Yarra



Convergence a series of forums exploring art, culture and technology

Cinesonics: dinosaur sounds

Philip Brophy

Ever since Mickey Mouse turned the tail of a cow to generate music like an organ grinder in numerous silent *Silly Symphonies* (1921-23), animated imagery of animals melded with forced musicalisation of their movement has proved a crux of audiovisuality in the cinema. The intense hybridisation of inappropriate matchings of sono-musical moments with squiggles which reference iconic ideograms of nature has consistently presented us with a complex accounting of how we choose to reconcile the synchronism of sound with image. Each strike of a cow-bell when Mickey dongs the head of a cow is a testimony of our belief in Euclidean physics and its time-space fixity. Each throb of Mickey bobbing up and down to a boogie-woogie piano is a doctrine on physical entrainment and our susceptibility to bodily coercion. And each blink of Mickey's eye timed to the clonk of a xylophone is a statement of our inability to accept a non-human logic of audiovisuality which governs nature. All those cute animals are that which we wish to control. And all the music and sound we synchronise to them is the means by which we compose that control.

Conservatism in audiovisual media is rooted in this unspoken desire to link sound to image so as to grant us the power of the snake charmer, the siren, the ventriloquist, the svengali, the demigod.

In short, all depictions of nature—all the renderings of its surfaces, the capturing of its movement, the recording of its emissions—are feeble attempts to impose a specious logic of 'how the world is' upon an artificially constructed environment. And the more you align yourself with 'nature', the more bankrupt your depictions are bound to be. Paint an oil landscape to justify your perspective of land. Compose a pastoral symphony to prove your relation to air. Sample a pygmy to locate your presence on the globe. Or produce a documentary about dinosaurs compositing hi-end computer graphics into filmed locations to substantiate your concept of the evolution of life.

The BBC's *Walking With Dinosaurs* (screened late 1999 and now available on sell-thru video) is a marvellous document of such bankrupt mimeticism. Lauded for its evocative power ('those dinosaurs are so real') and praised for its educational value ('our little Johnny now actually uses the Encyclopedia Britannica on CDR we bought 3 years ago'), the series is perversely antithetical to nearly all accepted norms of documentary form. Far from being a 'document' of any sort, it lives a shadowy narrative life

The gross beauty of the series lies in the dumbness of its speculative historical-realist project: to make you feel like you are 'walking with dinosaurs.'

as a phantasmagorical mockumentary, pock-marked and pancaked with a thousand and one layers of a mortician's audiovisuality. Composited, edited, transformed, rendered, morphed, cross-faded, filtered, panned, encoded, mapped and mixed into a virtual miasma of tricked-up conjecture and insidious persuasiveness.

Far be it from me to disprove anything claimed by *Walking With Dinosaurs* (I for one don't give a damn where 'we' came from or where 'we' are going). I remain amazed by the blatant yet powerful multi-levelled distractions which operate subliminally, phenomenally and psycho-acoustically in such media. While each episode flaunted its digital machinations, it did not celebrate the mythical 'hyper' so celebrated by digitalists the globe over, as much as it revealed its inability to homogenise all the reproductive processes central to its creation. In other words, every visual moment was formally, stylistically and technically in conflict with every sonic moment, creating less a sensory overload and more a synaesthetic black hole. For it is in the conflation, contradiction and cancellation of audiovisual *modes* (approaches to combining sound and image) with audiovisual *codes* (doctrines of combining sound and image) that one can perceive the irreconcilable differences which define our senses. By this I mean that for every instance where sound 'should' do this or that with/to an image, (a) the relevant convention was historically spawned by an invention which broke preceding conventions, and (b) the very attempt to abide by a perceived convention inevitably contradicts issues of phenomenological reality through attempting to generate a sense of 'realism.'

All audiovisual media is snared by these fatal flaws enacted by reproduction. Wherever one resorts to a convention to convey a sense of sight, one is likely to inventively convey a sense of hearing which could not possibly co-inhabit the one physical subject. How we hear *while* we see is never captured in any audiovisual medium. How we hear while we see that which is and would be impossible to see: that is what makes *Walking With Dinosaurs* hallucinatory. The

gross beauty of the series lies in the dumbness of its speculative historical-realist project: to make you feel like you are 'walking with dinosaurs'. Like, wouldn't they crush us anyway? Or eat us? Of course, it would be ridiculous for me to pose such questions—but it remains equally ridiculous to bother pondering what it would be like to walk with dinosaurs. The preposterous impossibility of this supposedly imaginative exercise cannot help but collapse under its own Jurassic weight, giving us a document better suited for pondering the materiality of filmmaking than suppositions of evolution.

Yet the BBC has quietly promoted audiovisual deceit for over 20 years, consequently determining many codes of laying sound against image in order to actualise, authenticate and animate. *Walking With Dinosaurs* draws well upon this lineage. The classic BBC documentary lie comes when you see the flickering footage of turn-of-the-century silent film—combined incongruously with the sound of a projector *and* the sound of the scene originally filmed...bizarre logic, indeed. My favourites are shots from WWII bomber planes as bombs drop from the plane and detonate on the ground below. The guy who held the microphone through that trap door is a legend. And the guy who recorded all those atomic bomb blasts really deserves a medal. Then there is the dilemma of how you site the quotation on non-English letters and other correspondence on the soundtrack. Well, if you're the BBC, you get in pommy actors to fake German and French accents, and have them over-act the content of the letters. Perfect dramatic naturalism for documentaries. Now, if I wanted to overlay tractor sounds for a busy urban street scene, and have the voice-over narration of a young girl remembering her past in that city portrayed by a 50 year old Turkish woman, I would be laughed at. But even as I wrote those words, I could see more potential dramatic plausibility in a Robbe-Grillet and Duras tradition of psychological resonance than I can accept sound effects libraries and paid voice-over actors clogging up a documentary soundtrack in the name of veracity. It is no surprise that these type of produc-

tions are now aligned with the term 'Natural History', because the only truth they impart is the conditions of their Unnatural Present.

One of the BBC's sublime sonic defects (foregrounded throughout *Walking With Dinosaurs*) is the foley performance and recording of sounds which clearly were not or could not be documented synchronously on location (eg underwater occurrences, microscopic activity, telescopic events—or even close-miked sounds of tigers or pterodactyls who would kill a sound recordist so near). People little realise how performative foley is, whereas all foley artists are well aware of the character of footwear, the personality of weight, the mood of fabric, the psyche of space. Performing foley is like drumming in an improvised fashion in direct response to another performer (your on-screen 'other'), but with a totally re-invented drum kit: a sheet of aluminium, a leather jacket, a ring of keys. The foley-trained ear can spot these performative tropes a mile away, and while these sounds can imbue drama with a deepened acoustic dimension, in documentaries they constitute a 'faux-coustica.' The sound field of their mismatched minutiae not only seems 'unnatural' (which of course is never a bad thing in itself), but one gets the sense that the on-screen bodies are puppets to an unseen master. The foley activity is like sonic string, tied to controlled machinations beyond the visual plane. For deaf and dumb optical folk who read books and watch movies, this is never a problem. For anyone with ears, it forges yet another unsettling schism in the supposed sanctity of the realist/naturalist audiovisual text book.

Walking With Dinosaurs is the most hollowed-out, decimated, collapsed text book on audiovisuality to date, resplendent in its digital sleight-of-hand, musical mush, flagrant 'fauxcoustica' and benevolent sage voice-over narration. Ultimately, it is a testament to the delusion of synaesthesia which seems to be terminally in vogue: that archly romantic dream that for every encoding of one sense there is a conciliatory encoding of another sense, so that one might make the penultimate symphony of the senses. The sad reality is that to embrace that dream is to desire to be a demigod of reproduction: to control, compose and orchestrate audiovisuality, tactility, psychotropicality and whatever else into a thin and withered piece of digital video that pathetically tries to convince me that 'I am there' in your world. The happy reality is: no, thankfully, I am not there.

Mardi Gras sightings

Kirsten Krauth

In Monika Treut's documentary *Gendernauts* (Germany 1999) we head to San Francisco, "sex capital of the entire planet", and track down, in a meandering kind of way, a community bent on challenging perceptions of male/female: Sandy Stone, cyberdiva, speaks of wanting her mind to head off into the endlessness of netspace while her physical being stays firmly planted in the Bay Area. In a series of straight to camera, intense monologues she considers the art of gender as performance, urging us to reclaim more space, to demand our platform. Annie Sprinkle, ultra femme sex artist with Mona Lisa stretched across her breasts, speaks of her bird fetish (she has crosses marked against the ones she's seen in San Fran) and the limitless dimensions of gender; she has,

after all, had a lover with both sets of genitalia. Doctors at the first clinic in San Fran to specialise in M to F and F to M transmo-grifications talk of hormone injections and bonding with clients. But the focus is on women becoming men, through operations and testosterone injections, and those refusing either gender, preferring to stay in the middle and let others work it out. Most interesting are those using their gender as performance/art like Texas Tomboy and Jordy Jones, manipulating their "stretch of flesh" like plastic in physical and cyber ways, software and hardware the tools for endless permutations.

What links our transgender guides, apart from their love of the beauty and freedom of San Francisco, is Club Confidential, a riotous

and tacky performance space—the "American millennial version of Berlin in the 20s"—where self expression knows no limits. The documentary, while conventional in form despite its content, works well in its depiction of networking space, as each genderbender introduces the filmmaker to the next, echoing the patterns of friendships emerging and forming, and broadening the definition of gender from two to infinite.

Gendernauts will screen as part of the 2000 Mardi Gras Film Festival. Other highlights include Pedro Almodovar's *All About My Mother* (which won him Best Director at Cannes), a series of films focusing on teens, including the excellent *Fucking Amal*, which screened at last year's Sydney Film Festival, and closing night's *But I'm a Cheerleader*,

featuring the delectable Julie Delpy. Anyone who saw Daniel McIvor in *Monster* at the 1999 Sydney Festival won't want to miss *Beefcake*, an experimental homage to the muscle boys of 1950s magazines, starring McIvor and intercut with the likes of Joe Dallesandro. If you're feeling super energetic, hang in for *Queer as Folk*, the UK Channel 4 series about 3 gay men in Manchester (considered too hot for Australian television) which will screen 8 half hour episodes in one marathon session.

2000 Mardi Gras Film Festival, Y2Queer, presented by Queer Screen, Palace Academy Twin, Darlinghurst and Roxy Parramatta, Sydney, Feb 16 - 27. www.queerscreen.com.au

WriteStuff: DIY screenwriting guides

Hunter Cordaiy

A recent inquiry on an internet search engine under the word *screenwriting* produced over 27,000 references. These were either courses, books, software programs, links, discussion groups or script assessment and sales sites. Another inquiry at a local book store produced over 400 titles under the same category.

The 2 common principles found in all these listings is firstly the keywords which occur in the blurbs—bible, deal, secret, success—and secondly that the secret of this success is available to all.

Screenwriting can be done by anyone, like DIY interior decorating, psychological self-help or personal fitness. The secret, when revealed, will unlock the creative persona within each of us, and in a world which largely offers unfulfilling jobs, or no jobs at all, the unleashing of personal creativity is an offer hard to resist.

But honesty says there is a more profound layer of reasoning operating here—the lust generated by the movie business which is now part of the psyche of our times.

What all the books, seminars and software programs are selling is the secret of how to write a successful, highly paid screenplay. And inevitably the proponents of this DIY industry have become the new gurus in Babylon, promising that "success starts here" once you open their book or click on their website.

Viki King promises to teach the Inner Movie Method (*How to write a movie in 21 days*). Starting with 10 pages on day 1, 30 pages on day 2 and so on until by the 21st day the monster is in the box and ready for shipment to producers and directors for immediate acceptance.

Any writer would be attracted by this, knowing the struggle and the anguish that a screenplay causes. Why struggle for 12 or 21

months when the whole process can be over in 3 weeks?

Syd Field's *Screenplay (The Foundations of Screenwriting)* is one of the most successful DIY books, teaching the basic 3 act (one act every 30 pages and 2 turning points) structure. The introduction to his book says that "a screenplay is a story told in pictures" and there are chapters on character, setups, scenes, sequences and formats. This book has now become a software program and an instructional video.

The plethora of script books has been augmented by 'deeper' texts which explore the story rather than the screenplay itself. Two of the most influential books in this field are Robert McKee's *Story*, and Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey*. What these books promise is the secret of formula storytelling much like Jung offering a set of universal dream symbols. Vogler's book is seen as an essential read by any aspiring screenwriter today, especially those wishing to work with Spielberg or Lucas, and it is likely that his ideas on the mythic structure of stories will continue to appear on a screen near you for years to come.

Screenwriting software programs were initially based on the idea of reformatting word processing programs into screenplay layout. They then progressed to copying the different formats required by studios or TV networks, and now provide a complete and sophisticated package of programs that will analyse characters and plot, format the screenplay, include storyboard drawings, connect to budget and scheduling programs for production purposes, and the newer versions also prepare contracts and other legal documents.

What these represent is a more powerful and practical tool for the screenwriter than the 'guru books' because they literally are a com-

plete production office on a set of disks enabling the writer to be more independent in the production process.

And now for the bad news. Having sweated for 21 days or 21 months over the screenplay comes the awful truth; it has to be pitched to a producer in a process that is aptly described in Robert Altman's film *The Player*...25 words or less, 3 minutes maximum.

There is no more cruel process and while each writer hopes the producer shares the same belief in mythic story structure, the *secret* might be elsewhere and that creates a frenzied edge to the act of pitching—wanting certainty in a completely uncertain world, where ultimately the industry executives try to out-guess

the public's decision on the success or failure of each film released.

With the latest statistics on Australian cinema admissions revealing that market share of local films has fallen to 3%, 2 salient books are worth re-reading: William Goldman's *Adventures in the Screen Trade* and Michael Moorcock's *Letters from Hollywood*. Both bring a cool breeze to the flames of ambition and suggest a sceptical and selective use of guru books could be a wise professional decision.

For more advice: www.screenstyle.com; www.hcdonline.com; www.inhollywood.com

go **Adelaide Festival's *Biomachines***

Julianne Pierce tells Kirsten Krauth about *Biomachines* (see the full interview on our website).

The inspiration for *Biomachines* was a couple of events in Ars Electronica (Linz, Austria). They were both organised by the Linz based group Time's Up. One was called *Contained*, and was a gathering of around 20 different artists and artist groups who worked with machines and robotics...The other event was a sort of performance games arcade created by Time's Up. It was set in an old warehouse, and again was an assortment of different machines, devices and games centred around the idea of 'hyperfitness.' It was very physical, and you moved your way around the maze, having to interact with a whole lot of re-configured computer games, bicycles and moving objects. This really is what is behind the *Biomachines* concept—the interaction of the body with machines, altering physicality through mechanics and robotics, the machine imitating the body etc. I met Tim Boykett (an Australian living in Linz) at this event. He's a member of Time's Up and we discussed the idea of doing something similar in Australia.

Why did you choose the Port Adelaide docklands as a site for the premiere of the work?

Tim Boykett actually found the site on one of his trips to Australia. We had decided that we wanted to locate *Biomachines* in an industrial environment. The artists we were wanting to invite all integrated an industrial, machine, noise/sound element in their work, so we wanted to present the work within this framework.

The idea is to create a space which the artists can adapt and work within without feeling too precious about the venue. It's also about creating an unusual space for the audience, something which is unexpected, with a post-industrial almost carnivalesque feel to it.

Described as part factory/club/performance space, how will the audience be able to interact with the performers/environment/technology?

The idea is to create an informal environment in which to experience a range of different artworks. Most will be interactive, for example Matt Heckert from San Francisco is bringing a series of resonators. The audience sit in lounge chairs, while sonic reverberations pass over different parts of the body. It's a sound piece, which you feel much more than hear. The space will be set up so that the audience can meander around the works, then every hour there will be a performance or demonstration. We will have a bar and food in an 'industrial lounge room' type setting, so the aim is to make it quite sociable. The event lasts for 4 hours, but people can wander in whenever they want and stay for as long as they like. Of course, we encourage the audience to stay for the whole evening to see everything that's on.

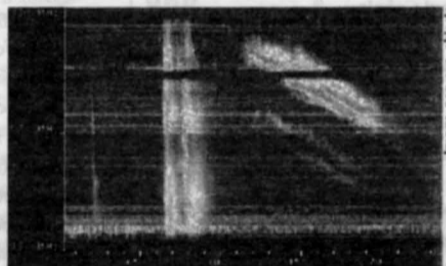

The Performance Space, Casula Powerhouse, Biomachines: post industrial carnival meltdown, Telstra Adelaide Festival 2000, Old Hart Mill, cnr Nile St & Mundy Sts, Port Adelaide, March 9-12, open 8pm-midnight.

www.rtimearts.com.au/~opencity/

alchemy
international masterclass for new media artists and curators

The Australian Network for Art and Technology
in association with the Powerhouse Live Arts Complex, will hold an International Masterclass for New Media Art Curation and Theory for six weeks in May/ June 2000.

ANAT has pioneered intensive skilling programs for artists through annual National Summer Schools in computer media since 1989. The Schools have operated as masterclasses for artists working across all artform disciplines, providing a deeply immersive learning environment. In 2000 this project will be extended to include international participation.




The masterclass will have several different strands, incorporating elements of art and science collaborations; Indigenous artists' needs; issues pertinent to Asia and the Pacific regions; curatorial issues for new media practices; artistic practice and the internet; and a particular focus on performance and hybrid art practice.

The intention is to provide an opportunity for artists and arts practitioners from across Australia and around the world to network, develop new work and devise new forms of collaboration. Satellite events, combining fora with open days will be held, giving the public an opportunity to view the work-in-progress produced by participants.

Closing date for applications: 18 February, 2000.

Realised with the financial assistance of the Daniel Langlois Foundation; the Young and Emerging Artists Initiative, an initiative of the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council, the federal government's arts funding and advisory body; Arts Queensland and additional support from Arts Tasmania, ARTSA and the NSW Ministry for the Arts.

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[R] is for Regulation: cleaning up the net universe

Linda Carroli

[CHAOS]

Since April last year a steady stream of emails with subject headings like 'censorship' and 'refused classification' have been coming in. On the art and culture list, *Recode*, there's debate, resistance and running commentary among its subscriber base of artists, activists and academics about the *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Bill 1999* which was passed in May and effective from January 1 2000. As it passed through parliament, Minister for Communications, Information Technology and Arts, Senator Richard Alston's 1998 speech (*Hansard*, May 28) echoed loud and clear: "I do not think that anyone in this country wants to see an electronic Sodom and Gomorrah. It is unedifying and debasing and we will take action to...ensure that it does not occur" (www.dcta.gov.au).

Among the responses to the legislation is a protest by Sydney-based ISP, Autonomous Organisation (autonomous.org) which hosts a number of artist sites and artworks. Autonomous Organisation has 'Refused Classification' and in a statement published on *Recode* said, "most of the material published here by artists is relatively innocuous, however, we refuse to deny that existing material and future work...will ever be amongst material which could generally be considered R or X or even RC rated on television."

As in the arts community, there is speculation in other communities. Opponents include the CSIRO, Electronic Frontier Australia, Civil Liberties Groups and Lawyers, Australian Council for Lesbian and Gay Rights and the Eros Foundation, variously labelling the exercise as unwieldy, contradictory, moralistic, unworkable and an infringement of rights. Author of the ACLGR submission to the Select Senate Committee, Paul Canning (www.rainbow.net.au/~canning) anticipates that the legislation will devastate the Australian lesbian and gay online community with filtering and classification provisions inhibiting access to gay and lesbian sites.

[FREEDOM]

In Electronic Frontier Australia's Senate submission on the *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Bill 1999*, John Howard is quoted as saying that as an effect of his government, Australians feel more comfortable speaking their opinions and sentiments freely. Howard is referring to the tongue-biting scourge of 'political correctness' described in McKenzie Wark's *Virtual Republic* (Allen and Unwin, 1997) as possibly "more fantasy than fact." Using this power of exaggerated myth, quixotic conservatives asserted that the community was held to ideological ransom, censored by some imagined authority in the guise of multiculturalism, feminism and ATSC. Sure, it's a whole other story, but as EFA points out, such a statement indicates that 'freedom of expression' must be a value of the government. Nevertheless, as the bill was introduced into Parliament, it was described as 'Draconian' and more rigid than its Singaporean or Malaysian counterparts.

Chair of the Australia Council's New Media Arts Fund, John Rimmer also sits on the Board of the Australian Broadcasting Authority. He explained that during its passage through Parliament, the bill was vigorously debated: "You shouldn't assume that the legislation is as 'Draconian' as it appeared when first introduced, as a number of amendments have been made." Accordingly, the provisions of the *Act* will be clarified by the Internet Industry Association Code of Practice and as the first complaints are processed.

[CODE]

On December 16, the ABA registered 3 codes of practice outlining the obligations of ISPs and ICHs in relation to internet content.

"Basically, I've got no truck with the legislation whatsoever. If we are forced to shut down servers for our clients, I'll set up a VA mirror in the States and put the sites there instead."

Virtual Artists

Developed by the Internet Industry Association (www.iiia.net.au) for implementation with the *Act* from January 1, the codes are integral to the co-regulatory scheme established through the legislation. They will operate in conjunction with the ABA's complaints investigation procedures.

The codes outline the rights and responsibilities of clients, ISPs and ICHs including: customer advice and content management; the requirement for parental permission for children's internet accounts as well as parental supervision of child internet access; complaint procedures; informing producers of legal responsibilities for content; and making provision for the use of approved client and server side filters for overseas content.

According to Canning, filters indiscriminately restrict content and he cites the example of a Melbourne scientist working at St Vincent's Hospital unable to access a HIV/AIDS website, receiving the message, "access denied: unsuitable content: full nudity, sexual acts/text, gross depictions/text." This indicates the possibility that art sites with such depictions or texts could also be filtered. He anticipates increased self-censorship among artists as well as reduced accessibility to gay and lesbian artwork due to the imposition of film classifications which he claims are more severe than literature classifications. Rimmer says this is a matter of opinion. "The OFLC interpretations may not in fact be more stringent in the context of artworks. *Scenario Urbano* (Denis del Favero et al) have managed quite a lot in their video installations."

On behalf of Adelaide-based arts ISP, Virtual Artists (va.com.au), artist Jesse Reynolds said that while he was wary of any internet regulation, the codes seemed useful for ISPs. "I think the codes are a positive step away from the complete nightmares of the new legislation. I certainly intend to steadfastly ignore the new legislation until such point as someone forces me to do something, then it will be kick up a stink time. Basically, I've got no truck with the legislation whatsoever. If we are forced to shut down servers for our clients, I'll set up a VA mirror in the States and put the sites there instead."

[INTENT]

According to John Rimmer, artistic context will be considered should complaints about online artwork be lodged with the ABA. "The classification process takes into account a range of matters and is required to look at literary or artistic merit as well as the intended audience. I personally find it hard to see that this sort of [artistic] activity is likely to be of great concern."

[PROTECTION]

The *Act* seeks to restrict children's access to explicit material by introducing a system for dealing with complaints from the public as well as for removing 'offending' content. Subsequently, material which is currently legal and available in other formats will be banned on the web. For Canning, the issue of protecting children is something of a furphy given that laws banning material such as child porn already exist. "I would say that it was a response to a media-induced moral panic about child safety online, a 'beat-up' in other words. But Senator Alston ran

with that and made the law far harsher by, for example, using the film rather than literature classifications."

In *Bad Girls: the media, sex and feminism in the 90s* (Allen and Unwin, 1997), Catharine Lumby argues that children's interaction with virtual and real communities should be treated the same way. Rather than be excluded, children should receive warnings and be supervised: "adults have to work with children and help them negotiate unfamiliar information, situations and people."

John Rimmer is particularly concerned about those aspects of the internet he describes as "in your face", especially the ease with which users can unwittingly access pornography or email users can harass with or forward unsolicited material. Describing the intent of the legislation, he said it provides the community with an opportunity to complain about material they do not want available to children. "Its highest priority is sensible oversight of contexts in which material comes into contact with children. However, in itself, it does not replace the supervision of children while using the internet."

[FEAR]

When Senator Alston said in an ABC interview that he aims to filter the web to create a "clean universe", you have to wonder whether pornography is the target or the excuse, especially considering that the legislation was drafted to placate Brian Harradine, thus securing his Senate vote for the GST. There's clearly a degree of fear and anxiety at play: anxiety about new technologies, fears for children and the risk of exposing them to adult sexuality, 'moral panic' about society as a whole. Catharine Lumby sees such fears as "unavoidably bound up with broader anxieties about the potential new media has to change people and traditional social and power structures and values."

Describing a possible effect of this anxiety, Electronic Writing Research Ensemble Site Editor, Teri Hoskin, is concerned about the reliance that newcomers to digital technology will and do place on corporate entities, such as Ninemsn, to 'guide' them through the internet. "Playing on unfounded fears isn't going to generate an environment of invention and experimentation. What we are increasingly seeing is the one-application-that-does-it-all syndrome, instead of an empowerment that relies on the agency of the user in forming networks and making accidental discoveries along the way. Perhaps (and with hope) this technophobia will die out as the kids of today gain more access to decision-making. They've grown up with a keyboard and screen."

[ART]

The issue for the arts community is any possibility that this legislation will be applied to all internet content. Hoskin is tempering confidence with caution. "I really cannot see [a fuss] happening with art sites unless someone got a bee in their bonnet and wanted a scapegoat or wanted to test the scope of the law. Even though the legislation targets other types of content, I'm not convinced it's in

anyone's best interests and I am wary of the potential for dangerous, unintended effects."

The legislation seems to result in a community 'dragnet', with content, as distinct from entire websites, receiving Office of Film and Literature Classification ratings and regulation on a complaint basis. The prospect of restrictions on any explicit material including artworks, sexuality and health information looks real enough. Pursuant to the Act, R, RC or X rated content must be removed by order of the ABA. However, R rated content can remain if an Adult Verification Scheme (AVS) is in place. According to Canning, there are problems with the AVS which have resulted in reduced site visits. Search engines do not list sites using them and visitors are duly worried about privacy. Accessing art sites may not evoke the same privacy issues, but the obstacle of finding those sites remains.

While there are some generous considerations for artwork in the ABA's deliberations, these are not absolute. The ABA determines the nature and context of the work, meaning that the demeanour of an artwork would be interpreted quite differently from pornography. According to John Rimmer, an internet porn site is obviously and inherently different in its character and intention from an artwork, even an artwork that appropriates porn.

Rimmer advised that the ABA applies administrative priorities in its processing of complaints. "The intention of the legislation is to obstruct access to pornographic material. Therefore, the ABA is more likely to address complaints about material of broader and more immediate concern, such as child pornography, than complaints about work produced for a consciously artistic context."

[HACKED]

The ABA's website was hacked on December 9, 1999. The following message appeared on its home page: "YOU CANT FUCKING CENSOR ME... if a message wants to get out..it will..leave it up to the au gov to make sure we stay in te dark ages... people only now can get connectivity USA has enjoyed for years...and now one of te greatest resources we gave for free speech and afree learning will be stifled by a vocal minority with no understanding of the underlying technology stand up now..and fight for your rights..if you want to be able to decide for YOURSELF what you can and cant read... i say once again.....LOUD and clear.. the internet is NOT a babysitter.. wou wouldnt let them roam the streets... dont let them roam the world... dont let your bad parenting spoil it for others... go buy a fucking clue.. ——— greetz and respect to the usuals.kat.etc.analognet. and barry heh...and a big FUCK YOU CNUTSUCKING SMEGWHORES to au gov.. clueless fucks... i digress.. adios... Ned R ——— p.s. admin.. dont bother..you wont trace me... and im not coming back here.. my point is made..if i get time one day ill secure it for you...luv and kisses.. Ned R— pp.s My spelling sucked real bad cos i was high on methylidioxymethamphetamines and crack..."

DIGITALnews

Move over Stelarc...in New York a vision impaired man can now navigate and read with the first working artificial eye, wired directly to the brain to produce vision. As reported in Associated Press and *SMH*, he doesn't see an image but "perceives up to 100 specks of light appearing and disappearing as his field of vision shifts." Scientists are working on the software which will in the future allow people who are visually impaired to do complicated visual tasks.

Playing virtual dress-ups

Mitchell Whitelaw

dLux media arts' annual *futureScreen* event sets out to explore new media hotspots formed at the intersections of art practice, cultural theory and new technologies. 1998's inaugural event, *Immersive Conditions*, considered virtual space; last year, *Avatars / phantom agents* took on virtual identity through the figure of the avatar, the placeholder for the self in online virtual environments.

Jeffrey Cook opened proceedings with a paper offering a useful prehistory for the notion of the avatar—a corrective, as Cook noted, to the tendency for new media discourse to naively overestimate its own "newness." In fact "avatar" is an ancient Sanskrit word—literally meaning "descent"—which referred to the embodiment or manifestation of a god on the earthly plane. As Cook explained, this original usage also suggests a kind of divine multiplicity, a single perfect identity manifest in multiple earthly aspects. However the term's contemporary meaning, Cook suggested, is also shaped by the more troubled figure of the Golem—in Jewish mythology, an artificial being with a crude clay body brought to life by a heretical cleric. The Golem is thoroughly imperfect, a kludgy construction, a product of fallible technology and human hubris, but it's magically autonomous—clay with a spark of the divine.

If the avatar is, as Cook suggested, a mixture of god and Golem, at *Avatars* the Golems had the numbers, at least initially. The technology was as fallible as ever, and the online virtual worlds and their avatar inhabitants were weighed down by the kludgy clay of crude 3D geometry and slow net connections. Merryn Neilson and Dave Rasmussen, virtual world designers, were to play host to the remote presence of Bruce Damer, cyberculture's most prominent avatar evangelist. Neither Damer nor his avatar could be found: we waited, and waited, passing the time zooming through some airy virtual architecture and watching the assembled avatars run through their preset repertoire of kung-fu and ballet moves. Finally Damer appeared in the form of a giant, beaming sphinx-head which spoke in that tinny, choppy stutter of real-time internet audio. "Hello", it said, "can you hear me?" We switched virtual environments in order to see a webcam image of Damer waving hello once again. These tortuous negotiations with the medium left no time, or energy, for actual "content"—and gave a decidedly underwhelming impression of life as an avatar.

Next Fletcher Andersen, another builder of virtual worlds, introduced his *Pollen* environment and his avatar persona, Factor Pollen, before giving a clear-headed comparative outline of online environments such as ActiveWorlds and EverQuest. Andersen reported the startling statistic that EverQuest, essentially a giant networked role-playing game, has some 150,000 subscribers who pay \$US10 per month in order to keep playing. Welcome to the new economy of online identity. While open about the limitations of these systems and the restrictions which they place on their avatars, Andersen expressed a hope that with technological advances we might soon be able to experience "a true existence within virtual worlds." Miriam English, another Australian world-builder, anticipated a similar technological progression, culminating in the eventual dominance of virtual worlds over film as a fictional medium.

These presentations represent a "head-on" approach to avatars and virtual worlds; following a conventional VR paradigm, they pursue an ideal of immediacy and immersion which involves pushing against stubborn technological and representational obstacles. Happily, other presenters took on avatars in more tan-



The Men Who Knew Too Much, *Virtual Humanoids*

genial and strategic ways. Keynote speaker Adriene Jenik led a performance of a brief excerpt from her *Santaman's Harvest*, a chat-room morality play on the evils of genetically-modified food. While it too was fully-laden with technological and representational kludge, some striking and funny theatrical moments filtered through the graphic chat-space which it inhabited. An international ensemble of avatar-actors joined Jenik's own avatar, the "Prof", in a loose, haphazard narrative which staked out a performance-space in a cyberspatial public plaza; the finest moments came as an innocent member of the online public stumbled in, blithely looking for someone in her home town to chat to. In the process of striving to maintain a sense of drama, or convey topical content in a normally vacuous virtual space, Jenik's work develops a keen sense of the social and institutional dynamics which shape those spaces and their avatars.

Others offered a more personal perspective on virtual identity. Bondage mistress and sex industry activist Mistress Eve Black (herself presenting through an "avatar" stand-in) made a clear argument for the value of sexual role-play and identity-shifting. Role-play is ubiquitous, she reminded us—to a greater or lesser

Interestingly the web, which can be both private and public, contained and open, seems to offer an ideal medium for these split selves: each subdirectory can house another past life or lover, neatly enclosed but easily navigated and unpacked.

extent, we take on socially-prescribed identities in everyday life. Black warned that the current wave of censorship, which has attacked the non-prescribed roles of B&D, involves a narrowing of options for identity-formation and sexual expression. Moving back online, local artist Graham Crawford gave a candid guided tour of his own avatar-selves, "fractal personalities" woven into a hypernetwork of lavish animation. Interestingly the web, which can be both private and public, contained and open, seems to offer an ideal medium for these split selves: each subdirectory can house another past life or lover, neatly enclosed but easily navigated and unpacked. As well these selves are mobile and replicable: a portion of Crawford's site had recently been mirrored on an overseas server, moving beyond the control of its original "host" to become an autonomous part-self.

Dr Jyanni Steffensen presented another case study in labyrinthine identity, discussing Suzanne Treister's CD-ROM *No Other Symptoms: Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky* (see Joni Taylor's review, page 22). Here Brodsky, both "virtual subject" and alter ego for Treister, is the central figure in a dense fantasy world which mingles personal and public histories and fictions, rewriting Freud, Lacan and Kristeva. As in Crawford's work, complex virtual identities are constructed, explored and exploited through interactive forms—the conventional VR "avatar" is nowhere to be seen. That figure has its uses, though, as Simon Hill and Adam Nash showed. The wooden, "salaryman" personas of their performance art troupe *The Men Who Knew Too Much* are ideally suited to translation into VR—and their work *Virtual Humanoids* promises to give virtuality the absurdist send-up it so badly needs.

Finally Stelarc, virtually present via prerecorded video, presented the concept for *Movatar*, an "inverse avatar" that extends his work with corporeal remote-control. As planned, *Movatar* describes a tight engagement between avatar and physical body: the performer ("the human") wears a motion-control prosthesis, a pneumatically-actuated exoframe which moves its host's limbs like a puppet. This prosthesis is controlled by an autonomous virtual entity, the "digital Movatar." In an elegant circuit, the digital

Movatar is fed sound from the motion of its pneumatic "muscles"; it is "startled", and changes its behaviour in response. The human body is caught in a feedback loop between the disembodied autonomous entity and its physical machinery, possessed by an unstable avatar.

Movatar raises the close coupling of avatar and host, and of reality and virtuality, in a quite confronting way. It recalled an image that Jeffrey Cook had earlier borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari, of the wasp and the orchid co-forming each other, co-evolving in a double spiral of imitation. Our avatars, Cook proposed, might relate to us in the same way: not as simple projections or representations, but as artificial entities which inflect their creators, "both shaped and shaping." Cook's notion was borne out by the more interesting work presented at this forum: rather than an idealised virtual presence, this avatar is used knowingly and experimentally in a game of virtual dress-ups with a serious agenda: the transformation of the self.

dLux media arts, *futureScreen 99*:
Avatars / phantom agents, *Powerhouse Museum*, Sydney, November 6 - 7, 1999.

the BUNKER project

In 2000 Linden Arts Centre and Gallery in collaboration with Experimenta Media Arts is presenting a program of small scale media arts based installations by Australian artists in a dedicated gallery space.

Mediums include film, video, CD-ROM and other digital media. Preference is given to artworks that extend the conceptual framework of media arts and screen culture practice.

Artists will receive an artists' fee based on Australia Council rates.

Selection and curation will be conducted by Linden's Director, Ann Harris and Experimenta's Artistic Director, Keely Macarow.

For project guidelines send a stamped self address envelope to Bunker Project, Linden arts centre and gallery, 26 Acland St, St Kilda, 3182 or go to www.experimenta.org (see Events Calendar). Information can also be collected in person from Linden Gallery.

Entries close 29th February 2000

experimenta
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Linden arts centre & gallery is owned and operated by the CITY OF PORT PHILLIP

This project has been assisted by the City Of Port Phillip Cultural Programs Board through its Cultural Development Fund.

Time travel is your only means of escape

Joni Taylor

Rosalind Brodsky could very well be the alter ego of artist Suzanne Treister who bears strange similarities to this time travelling scientist, tracing her European Jewish ancestry while still engaging in a plethora of eccentric occupations and activities.

These change from psychoanalytical sessions with deceased therapists to preparing traditional German dishes, to performing in her psychedelic rock band, to developing a range of designer vibrators. The recommended viewing time for this CD-ROM is 3 hours, the amount of time necessary to fully explore and participate in her time travelling tales.

The date is 2058, the year of Brodsky's death and the setting is the Institute of Miltronics and Advanced Time Interventionality, where Brodsky conducted her research and still lingers. The virtual space is more digital collage than animation. Brightly coloured juxtapositions of furniture, wall hangings and retro sci-fi machines. As in a computer game simulation, you travel through the space by a few clicks of the mouse. Like a virtual tour there are characteristics such as a map, a guide and various info areas. Once in Brodsky's study you can time travel to her home in Bavaria, modelled on Koenigsschloss Neuschwanstein, the original home of the "mad" King Ludwig, and more recently to neo-Nazi squatters. There are also options to explore her diary, or go down a level to the clinics where Brodsky regularly received counselling by Freud, Jung, Klein, Lacan and Kristeva. Inside the institute you are informed by the Introscon TV Corporation that a group of armed academics are demonstrating outside, and time travel is the only means of

escape. As in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the closet leads on to other destinations, not Narnia, but the very 20th century cultures of the Russian Revolution, the Holocaust and swinging 60s London.

A quicktime movie shows a haunting dual image of the train tracks leading to Auschwitz. A recurring theme is Brodsky's attempts to rescue her grandparents from World War 2. She is the silver clad futuristic time-traveller, superimposed over black and white footage of war-torn Europe. At other times she is part of a Monty Python-esque collage, posing next to key figures from cult films such as Norman Bates and Mary Poppins. Also in the wardrobe are Brodsky's attache cases. In order to fund her projects, Brodsky appears to have developed a range of designer vibrators. These range from the architectural variety, such as the Kremlin and the "double sided" London Bridge, to key political figures like Marx and Lenin and pop culture icons Emma Peel and David Bowie. By clicking on the speech bubble, each sex aid literally "speaks" for itself. Sexy science seems to be the name of the game and food is a constant delight on the journey.

Some startling new developments have enabled the Nutragenetica Corporation to begin harvesting chicken legs on human torsos, and Brodsky, like any traditional Jewish hostess, seems right at home with these new condi-



No Other Symptoms. Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky

ments. A TV in the bedroom plays snippets from her cooking show, as well as the music videos Brodsky made with her band, Rosalind Brodsky and the Satellites of Lvov. The remake of Lou Reed's *Satellite of Lvov* is a trippy track involving sci-fi theremin sounds and Glam rock beats. It regularly comes bleeping through the castle corridors.

Travelling further, you become familiar with the interactive vocabulary of Brodsky's

creation. Big buttons need to be pushed, cursor "R" turns to cursor "B" at select moments, rollovers light up and footstep sounds signify you've arrived.

When the final destination is reached—satellite probe (a Christo wrapped Reichstag)—it appears that Brodsky in her old age transformed most of her archival research into a painting game, a virtual kinetic colouring-in book, where multiplying vibrators can be placed over varying backgrounds, such as Mars and Shinjuku, Tokyo. It gets more bizarre as the final choice on the tour is to return to the Castle music room, and play some more, or get dropped off in the Australian mining town of Coober Pedy!

Despite the idea of transcending time, the work has a set narrative with pre-determined choices and specific geographical locations that lead onto the next stage. At one point, Brodsky describes herself as a "necrophiliac invader of spaces containing the deaths of her ancestors, through the privileged violence of technology." Using this violence of technology, Treister has enabled us to invade many facets of her anthropological history. And what a ride it is.

Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky, Suzanne Treister, Black Dog Publishing Limited, UK. For more information email info@bdp.demon.com.uk

Junk

Alex Hutchinson

In an industry where newer, faster and more powerful are usually synonymous with quality it is surprising to find a mini-boom in software that is slower, graphically inferior and borderline obsolete.

This is because computers and computer software have always been considered functional objects. They did things. Performed tasks. And when a newer version of a program came along which performed the same task faster or more efficiently, the old version was straight into the bin.

Even games were victims of this staged obsolescence. The buying public want the new games. The new games looked and sounded better therefore they were better therefore you may as well throw out that copy of Mario Brothers because here comes Super Mario Brothers. Historically, graphics have always been able to sell a game. Gameplay is more difficult. Consumers have often found it difficult to see past a dated surface to the game inside.

But things are changing. A recent boom in emulation has (in a physical sense) made old software accessible to more people than ever before and (in a theoretical sense) given us yet another example of the slow maturation of entertainment software. Put simply, emulation allows owners of high end PCs to run software designed for foreign formats. That means old Nintendo games, old Atari 2600 games, old Amiga games, and a slew of different arcade boards. And we're not talking the half-baked arcade conversions ported to PCs in years past, we're talking perfect arcade/system replicas. Consider it a gaming renaissance.

Software that you thought had died with

systems you owned in the 80s can be resurrected on your brand new Pentium or iMac. Games that are no longer for sale and no longer available at any price, games that your mother threw out, games that rotted in your closet, games that died in the sun, all of them can be played afresh. And this is what lies at the heart of emulation: preservation. There is also no money involved. Emulators are (for the main) freeware, designed by enthusiasts for enthusiasts. In other words emulators appeal to those who appreciate the subtle art of gameplay regardless of its age. People who understand that newer isn't always better, faster isn't always more enjoyable, and that there are few things as enjoyable in life as bouncing a tiny green bubble-blowing dragon around a 16 colour, single screen maze in Taito's 1986 classic *Bubble Bobble*.

At ground level people are taking games seriously. This is not an argument foisted on people by academics or cultural observers. In fact, most cultural observers couldn't care less about games, the ubiquitous and only passably entertaining *Tomb Raider* series and Douglas Coupland aside. This is a grass roots revival which is showing us that games are no longer the disposable tissues of the entertainment world.

Legally, emulators exist in a grey area. The programs themselves are perfectly legal so long as certain reverse engineering techniques are avoided. This has been true since Atari lost

its suit against Colecovision in the early 80s for marketing the 'Atari 2600 expansion kit' which allowed users to play Atari 2600 games on their Colecovision. However the situation regarding games is a little hazier. If you own the actual game you are allowed to own the copy of the game on your PC. If you don't, you can't. A fact which of course hasn't stopped anybody or escaped the notice of the copyright holders. But that isn't the issue here. Morally, most emulators occupy the high ground. They emulate systems which are no longer available for sale, often by companies which went belly up over a decade ago. They allow people to play games they could not buy at any price.

Why is this important? To those who have never had an interest in games, well, probably it isn't. But to those of us who grew up in front of their trusty Amiga 500, it means a hell of a lot. A chance to relive classic gaming moments and a chance to realise that games are a powerful and different medium.

What were old games? Think of them as genre fiction. They were fun. People enjoyed them and happily spent money on them. Some of them had great depth and intelligence. Most of them didn't. But they allowed game companies to grow fat enough to put together the millions of dollars that modern games require. Think of them as analogous with the populist origins of other artforms.

For home game systems, it all really start-

ed in the 80s. Earlier systems had done well but it was the original Nintendo (NES) which boomed and found a place beneath 90% of American family TVs. Many more systems followed, but it was the PlayStation which was the spiritual follow up to the NES in 1995, again selling in ridiculous numbers but this time bringing a level of sophistication most people hadn't realised was possible.

What has this created? A culture of game players.

The major emulation sites have all topped 20 million hits and growing. There is a massive and varied audience who not only enjoyed playing games in their youth, but who are waiting for the next step. There will be a time soon when players demand more from their software—the signs are already there—and game companies are forced to begin looking at what they are communicating and how they're doing it. Whether they use this to make a play for 'art' status will make interesting viewing.

But while you're waiting, join the classic gaming fraternity in a celebration of the old and pixelated by checking out these sites for pure gaming history: start at the source, the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator (MAME) site at www.mame.net then check out Retrogames at www.retrogames.com or the good folk at the site formerly known as Dave's Classics at www.vintagegaming.com. They should have links to all the files and instructions you need.

WriteSites

Kirsten Krauth

Josephine Wilson and Linda Carroli's latest collaboration *cipber* (ensemble.va.com.au/cipber) is a work in progress sharing similar themes with their award winning hyperfiction *water* "always writes in plural, and starts from the traditional, "the book is open." A kaleidoscope of scenes and settings—pages from a book, shelves, a comfortable armchair, a computer screen—place you from the start and demand a response: are you alone? You have new mail, and are suddenly manipulated, part of the detective work, controlled by the text. Older modes of communication—love letters—take on new forms. Electronic casanovas. We search, via M, for love and red blooded passion through "the spaces created by the interplay of writing and the surfaces of the world."

The masses are skittled, and buddle in tiny groups in isolated bunkers, tuning their VCR's and pressing their mute button.

Television and its impact on our history and vice versa—see the walls coming down, see communities obliterated—is filtered via satellite and modem. You either wear red or you don't. It doesn't suit me but I go for "jealous red lipstick." Sexy communist cartoons. A landscape of interior decorating—delicate hands folding paper, Tarot cards featuring the fool, beads to peer through—where I become Alice in Wonderland. We are looking for answers and head off to Amerika where "bodies are redundant", treated like "junk."

I find a new word, one that fits me well—steganography: the art and science of communicating in a way which hides the existence of the communication. Messages hidden within messages. Penetrating space. M is learning to write.

I find a new word, one that fits me well—steganography: the art and science of communicating in a way which hides the existence of the communication.

She is hunting for C. She loves and fears the alphabet as it begins to shape her. This is not the story of O (although her sleazy French teacher wishes it was). Chaos or control? The choice is yours.

Xander Mellish's integration of short stories and cartoons (www.xmel.com) began 6 years ago in New York as a series of posters plastered around the city, with the beginnings of a short story and a phone number inviting readers to find out the ending. After speaking to callers and spying on readers, Xander jumped online. With strong black and white graphics alongside a collection of satirical stories based on New York obsessions and conventions, the site is funny and sharp. It could be even better with a sense of connection between image and text, a reworking so that the graphics become more than just illustrative.

In "The Big Money" Mellish uses her knack for picking out others' insecurities, and twisting them, to good effect:

Billy Dose was wondering if the baseball cap he was wearing to hide his hair loss was, in fact, making his hair fall out faster. He was also worrying that it made him look dimwitted, like the type of man who might actually care about baseball... "How are the Yankees doing this year?" she asked. "The Yankees?" "Your cap," she said.

The central character, Veda Bierce, a hungry

and homeless woman who gatecrashes the same party, moves on to Hollywood...well actually California...where she becomes an actor with regular court appearances, specialising in "on-the-job accidents, all unprovable soft-tissue injuries." Other site highlights include "Matchmaking Creeps" where an ex-flight attendant uses software programs to wreak havoc on former lovers, reaching almost *American Psycho* proportions; and "Joel Faure, The Melancholy Male Model", which takes self-obsession to new depths, tracing the vacuous thoughts of a solipsistic cartoon hunk, a series of vignettes proving that "beautiful people have terrible love lives": Joel on the catwalk in Paris dreams of the violinist he can never have; Joel searches for enlightenment and gets centred: *The Buddha turned to page 168 of that month's Vogue, which had me next to a Lamborghini. You exalt in your apartness, he said.*

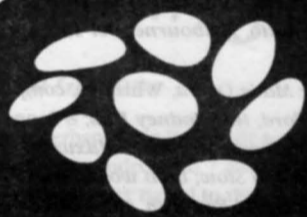
Karen Hudes' exquisite graphic narrative *Dot Cum* (www.dot-cum.com) features intersections with a number of digital artists—Susan Hudes, Ethan Cornell, Anu Schwartz, Miguel Heredia, Kartini Tanoto, Kat Kinsman—with an engaging opener: *Unlike the human kinds we know, synthetic personalities may take eons to decompose.* So we sniff out traces of Dot, who works in Cyberdello, where she records visitors' profiles. Sleeping in halfway stations, she becomes adrift and isolated, in a floating world

where faces disintegrate and worlds collide; a graveyard for avatars. There's Musk, trapped between the walls, "his link back to cloud-covered terra firma had snapped in silent hands." The virtual imaginations of writer/artists run riot to produce elegant combinations—Japanese prints, Gothic, sci-fi, corrupt cities, scratched surfaces, black and white ink drawings, organic, sprouting photography, erotic delicate objects—and dreamlike spaces where every click is a treat. Dot thrives and mutates, into a new sphere—the cyberafterlife, "perhaps made of paper." But there are hints of closer worlds: *You have an outside here, don't you? Of course, dear, where else would everyone smoke.*

If you've come across any innovative creative writing on the net, email URL to Kirsten at RealTime: opencity@rttimearts.com. For links to the above writing sites and many others, visit our website at www.rttimearts.com/~opencity/realink.html

trAce onliner goes live with VERVE

Sue Thomas, director of trAce, a major online writing community, is visiting Australia in March. trAce is based at the University of Nottingham, UK. Writers-in-residence have included Australians Terri-ann White and Bernard Cohen. Thomas will be speaking at VERVE: *The Other Writing*, an Adelaide Festival program curated by Teri Hoskin and located at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia. The VERVE conference is to be held at Ngapartji, March 9.



incubation

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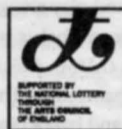
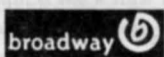
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The trAce Online Writing Community connects writers around the world in real and virtual space

<http://trace.ntu.ac.uk>



trace@ntu.ac.uk

Maintaining vertical hold

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

Operatic madness—passions, poisons, and turret-falls. Like its traditional antecedents, contemporary Australian opera and music theatre are drawn to the lunatic.

Losing it, it seems, is a big-voice thing. But having tripped on the carpet of madness, called down rings from the moon, shred and shed my skin (and been called back, caressed back, named normal by people who've also, once or twice, lost their vertical hold), I feel discomfort at recent works which examine madness but keep us from its lick. What are they seeking to do?

Deleuze and Guattari (after Foucault) reason that the ley-lines of madness are placed outside of what holds our cultural architectures down. Thus the hysteric, the eccentric, are held aloof from those 'in form.' But madmen speak the cracks in the fabric of our world—shake our buildings (like the Turkish earthquake revealing hurried masonry), give vent to experiences that in ordered streets have nowhere to go.

Barbara Baynton's bush-wife (in the short story on which the Mills/Porter/Cook production *The Ghost Wife* is based) is hysterical with good cause. She is not just violated bodily by the intruder, but already shredded in a culture that refuses to heed her intuition, will not protect the child. Disempowered of desire, the protective skin of mothering already flayed from her bones, she is in the opera given a classic misrepresentation of hysteria, clutching at her teapot whilst a wandering rogue phallus lurks outside. There is no sense of the forces at play making her actions reasonable. Rather—as in most kitchen dramas—the violent, neglectful, climaxing world is maintained.

Pristine images (shiny makeup, clean clothes, a set which undergoes a very tidy collapse) and the music's highly generalised emotions leave us with a sense of a tragic bush yarn from another time. There is no learning, just another death; nothing is undone. My sense is of a work which never examines its own cracks of subject or form. What if the settler's hut as instrument (creaking boards, footfalls, storms) and not music were made the starting-point for all the piece's sound? The idea is inventive and



Michael Edward-Stevens, *8 Songs for a Mad King*

photo Jeff Busby

strong, but only cursorily examined here. Perhaps then we would have been forced to bear the heartbeat [sic] and Baynton's central metaphor.

Andrew Ford's *Whispers* began as a conceit to examine the life of conductor/composer Sir Eugene Goossens (Gerald English), who suffered greatly under the pressure of a McCarthyist persecution in the 50s. His back to the audience as he conducts, English's distracted face, wavering in doubt, is projected

onto his shirtback, like a flag between conducting arms. He turns to the room, addressing memories and phantoms, rehearsal interrupted countless times. Taped soundgrabs snatch the room—an amazing feat of concentration for the performer to conduct, sing, interrupt, carry on. What troubles me, though, is how regular the bar-measure is kept, and even at his most disturbed, how 'in good voice' the singer, how melodic the song. The net effect is quite strongly of a

lieder recital in good flow, the audience observant but undisturbed.

Composer Maxwell Davies' programme notes for *8 Songs for a Mad King* imply that each orchestral member is one of the bullfinches George III tried to teach to sing. Thus, he chases, cajoles, or snatches something through the bars behind which each player sits. If this is so, then Chamber Made Opera confuses the issue with the musicians playing madmen of their own, losing the terrific irony of the audience seeing someone separate from though supposedly in the king's control. Director Douglas Horton does the piece a disservice with his musicians' twee wandering or chasing onto the stage, as if this were musical chairs. The piece needs enclosure, not wandering, as it examines what incarcerates the mind. Michael Edward-Stevens honours this incisive and compassionate work in a self-searching, generously vulnerable, and achingly humane performance so powerful that we weep with this rasp-voiced, bathtubbed king. His voice breaks into chords, clothes from his body, he smashes someone's violin. It is truly shocking, alarming, and convincing. This is a breaking and perhaps remaking of how we listen to and watch the world.

Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, *The Ghost Wife*, composer Jonathon Mills, librettist Dorothy Porter, George Fairfax Studio, Melbourne, Oct 15.

Chamber Made Opera, *Whispers*, composer Andrew Ford, text Rodney Hall; *8 Songs for a Mad King*, composer Peter Maxwell Davies, text Randolph Stow; both works music director Roland Peelman, stage director Douglas Horton, *The Assembly Hall*, Melbourne, November 26.

Chamber Made Opera, *8 Songs for a Mad King*, Union Hall Adelaide University, March 1 - 4

What is music: acoustic, electronic, minimal, maximal

caleb k

The 90s saw improvised music appear above ground becoming pals with the post-dance electronic music world (labels such as Mego and Touch are releasing the evidence). Sydney has been, and still is, a centre for experimental music having a history of musicians, composers, forums and events which set it apart. Maybe due to the current lack of venues, the experimental scene has gone underground with little in the way of live music despite a very active scene.

Oren Ambarchi and Robbie Avenaim direct the Australian experimental music festival *What is Music?*. The festival has become a regular outlet for new music since it began in 1994. The 2 have recently released a CD on John Zorn's Tzadik label and this year Ambarchi has released a solo CD titled *Insulation* on British label Touch. The former is full of noise, explorative electronics and acoustics, blistering drums and wrenched guitars—extreme to say the least, while *Insulation* sees Ambarchi playing out subtle electronics with only the input of a guitar. If

the source is at the centre of recent crackle, electronica then Ambarchi has stayed close to home.

The *What is Music?* festival allows music that is unheard, especially live in Australia, to be heard. Well knowns such as Rik Rue, Amanda Stewart, Jim Denley, Jon Rose play next to relatively unknown and rarely heard artists such as Pimmon, Dworzec, D.Haines, Rosy Parlane and Minit. Australian performers will collaborate with and play alongside international artists from the Mego label as well as the likes of Keith Rowe (AMM), Chicks on Speed, Gate and Simon Wickham-Smith. The aim is that the festival be "vital and happening."

"The nights are not a smooth progression," says Ambarchi, as in typical rock gigs where supports lead up to the main act. The festival is based around a diverse set of performers and styles. "I want the audience to be made uncomfortable by the bills, I want to be uncomfortable."

"We are interested in all kinds of under-

ground fringe/outsider activity; be it acoustic, electronic, minimal, maximal. We strive to present diverse, cutting edge sounds that are rarely heard in Australia.

"I believe it is definitely easier for experimental artists to perform/create/survive overseas (just look at how depressing our live scene is here), however there are many artists in Australia creating works that are innovative and just as interesting as anything recorded overseas. A number of Australian artists associated with *What is Music?* are either releasing their works independently or getting their projects released in Europe and Japan."

Noise will be screaming from the PA. In past years this noise focus has been centred on the Japanese scene with the likes of The Boredoms, Masonna and MSBR. This time round the focus shifts to Austrian label Mego. The musicians make 'music' under the guise of Fennesz, Pita, General Magic, Farmers Manual, Rehberg & Bauer and Skot, and have caused many to ask if it is music at all. Expect to see

the Mego crew sitting behind their laptops spewing out difficult noise/music/sound.

And the Big Day Out? Asked "Do you think people will walk in, hear Rehberg and Bauer playing noisy computer driven music, and simply walk straight out?", Ambarchi replies "I'm sure some will do just that but others hear something they haven't and walk in to hear more..."

This festival has never been and will never be easy.

What is Music? festival, *Revolver nightclub*, Melbourne, Feb 2 - 5; *Palladium*, Sydney, Feb 7 - 10. For more info visit the website www.whatismusic.com. All What is Music? shows start at 8pm and tickets are available at the door. Selections will be broadcast on 2SER FM. For information call 02 9514 9546 or email nicholas.gebbardt@uts.edu.au

caleb k is doctoral candidate at UTS writing on contemporary electronic(a) disturbances in music/noise/sound.

The vessel emptied

Suzanne Spinner

Jonathan Mills and Dorothy Porter's opera *The Ghost Wife* is promoted as "based on Barbara Baynton's short story *The Chosen Vessel*" however, as Keith Gallasch suggested in *RealTime* 34, "the connection with the original is, in many ways, only important as an impulse." I want to tease out the connection with the original story that in turn inspired it, Henry Lawson's *The Drover's Wife* which was written in 1892, four years before Baynton submitted her first and shorter version under the title *What the Curlew Cried* but published by A. G. Stephens in *The Bulletin* as *The Tramp*.

Baynton's earlier version focused, as *The Ghost Wife* does, on an unequal contest, the woman alone with her baby preyed upon by a passing tramp or swaggie. By the time the final version was published in *Bush Studies* in 1902 under the title *The Chosen Vessel*, Baynton had added a final section with 4 new characters: a horseman riding by who ignores her cries for help, believing instead that he has seen a vision of the Virgin Mary, which frightens him; his mother from whom he is in flight; a priest in a nearby town to whom he confides his sighting of the Virgin; and a luckless boundary rider who comes across the dead woman and her child the next morning.

Effectively Mills and Porter have pared Baynton's story back to its first version (*The Tramp*) for reasons presumably of clarity, focus and stageability. They have also changed elements and motifs and imported other images, a number of which oddly echo *The Drover's Wife*. Many of these changes and additions are powerful and effective, in particular the Mills/Porter resolution which sees the return of the wife as a ghost to haunt her unfeeling husband. However, other changes make images which were subtle, powerfully poetic and dreadfully menacing, crude and overplayed.

For Baynton, the organising image is the indivisible duo of mother and baby and its paradoxical apotheosis as the Virgin and child abandoned and ignored in their hour of dire need. Baynton carefully sets this up in the opening paragraphs. The woman is vulnerable, not because she is a woman per se, but because she is a mother, a woman with a baby. Baynton identifies the woman and her baby with the cow and calf and later the ewe and lamb, and their predators form a corresponding sequence of images—dingoes, crows and dogs who prey on the weak who are weakened further by their strong defence of the even weaker, their young. Baynton even gives the swaggie a dog who kills sheep while his master kills the woman. The final

...the particular strength of *The Chosen Vessel* as an innovative piece of writing was not even explored in *The Ghost Wife*. The strength of the story is its complexity and tautness which it achieves with a limited number of tightly orchestrated metaphors and some startling changes of perspective. It is acutely cinematic...

moment of the story has the swaggie desperately trying to wash the sheep's blood off the dog's mouth "for the sight of blood made the man tremble."

By jettisoning this entire sequence of images, *The Ghost Wife* fails to fully animate and make palpable the relationship between the mother and child, yet it is the raison d'être of her character, the absolute locus of her vulnerability. She must always think how to protect herself without waking the baby. To fill the metaphoric holes Porter is forced to import other images—black snakes, black spiders and dark horses. There are no snakes or spiders in Baynton though a snake features prominently in *The Drover's Wife*. For Porter the snakes are aligned with the men—the swaggie who rapes her and her husband who leaves her alone—and the crudity of the sexual implication is breathtaking in its obviousness. In Lawson, the wife kills the snake; in *The Ghost Wife*, the trouser snake wins. The black spider, which becomes a black widow spider, and hence the ghost wife who returns to haunt her husband, works better but only in relation to the wife; it separates her from and ignores her relationship with her baby, leaving it quite unsupported. The dark horse is indeed a strange one, a mysterious import; for Porter it represents the night and somehow becomes an image of repressed female sexuality, whereas for Baynton, the horseman was her nemesis. Another apparently minor change surprised me. In *The Ghost Wife* the woman leaves a teapot on the table with some food, hoping the swaggie will take them and leave her alone. In *The Chosen Vessel*, the woman leaves a brooch that had belonged to her mother. A brooch is an intimate, personal object, bodily related to the essence of the woman's sexuality and her

femininity, aligned to her heart, her breasts and her throat, the parts of her body most vulnerable in Baynton's schema, since it is ultimately her throat which is cut. The teapot is a poor substitute; it denotes a whole other raft of images that desexualise and diminish her individuality.

In *The Ghost Wife* the bush hut is the most powerful image and not only another instrument in the music, but almost another character in the drama. In Baynton it is allied to the woman's body, and Baynton dramatises the swaggie's attempts to penetrate the hut through the cracks as he slowly circles its outside walls in a sequence that has a masturbatory quality; the woman can only see and feel him as a moving dark shadow outside. The metaphorical rape is climaxed not by the swaggie finally breaking into the hut, as he does in *The Ghost Wife*, but by the woman unbolting the doors and running out into the darkness when she hears the sounds of a horseman riding by. This is infinitely more surprising and dramatic because it gives her the apparent initiative and then tragically and horribly turns it against her, when she runs straight into the waiting arms of her murderer.

The rape in *The Ghost Wife* is explicit and ugly and takes place on stage, whereas in Baynton what happens to the woman is dreadfully suggested, anticipated by the reader but never made explicit. What Baynton describes is infinitely more powerful than seeing the wife anally raped on the kitchen table. We are with her as she escapes the house, the fortress that was too flimsy to protect her and has become a trap. In *The Ghost Wife* the woman puts her baby under the table for protection. In *The Drover's Wife* the woman puts her children to bed on the table

for protection (from the snake). In *The Chosen Vessel* the woman never lets go of the baby, running out with it in her arms, holding on until the very end. One of the most awful and memorable images in *The Chosen Vessel* is the woman's hand frozen in death still holding onto her baby's nightdress.

Interestingly, the particular strength of *The Chosen Vessel* as an innovative piece of writing was not even explored in *The Ghost Wife*. The strength of the story is its complexity and tautness which it achieves with a limited number of tightly orchestrated metaphors and some startling changes of perspective. It is acutely cinematic in these jump cut shots of points of view, which is why it reads today as a modern text. Baynton literally cuts on the moment of greatest impact and the narrative progresses by montage.

See the opera by all means, as it works on its own terms, but do go back and read the story. It was an important "impulse."

The *Ghost Wife*, composer Jonathan Mills, librettist Dorothy Porter, Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, George Fairfax Studio, Victorian Arts Centre, October 15, 16, 19, 20, 1999; Odeon Theatre, Norwood, March 15, 17, 18, 19, Telstra Adelaide Festival 2000.

go More music theatre: opera for children

Theatre of Image's *Grandma's Shoes* (with Opera Australia, Seymour Centre, Sydney, January 7) is an operatic journey into a children's picture book. It's a big book and it dominates the stage and, when opened, a stage within a page is revealed and characters appear and leap out of it. The same page is also a screen displaying hauntingly beautiful animated landscapes of rain and water and journeys through outer space, adding visual depth and magical story-telling possibilities...*Grandma's Shoes* is a visual and, for the most part, musical success. In the animation especially and in the design of the puppets, Carpenter excels, surpassing the quaintness of the rest of his conventional storybook realisation. Keith Gallasch

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More Murri than Broadway

Eve Stafford

The first Queensland Theatre Company out-of-Brisbane try-out was launched with flair in Cairns with *The Sunshine Club*. This is the second reconciliation show in a row for QTC. Earlier I caught Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in Brisbane, transposed to an island populated by the Indigenous spirits of the Jagera Jarjum troupe. But here the storyteller Wesley Enoch is an Indigenous person telling a Murri story to a largely mainstream audience in an Anglo form—the musical. Like Jimmy Chi's *Bran Nue Dae* from Broome, this creative team proves that Murri stories can fit the genre like a glove. But, through ironic laughter owing more to a Murri sense of humour than Broadway, the audience digests the bitter pill of the unfolding injustices of barred entry, legislated discrimination in rights of access, passage, association and assembly. These are counterpointed with such celebratory lyrics as "shoulder to shoulder with all the human race," and "Lest we forget what we were fighting for..."

A uniformed World War II soldier opens the show on a didgeridoo (not a bugle) followed by the song *Bring Them Home*, with



Queensland Theatre Company, *The Sunshine Club* photo Rob MacColl

great harmonising from a chorus of 5 white and black women waiting in hats and gloves. The excitement of homecoming follows but the colour bar, absent while serving overseas,

hasn't changed at home. As a neutral place for black and white to mix freely, and to get close to his white childhood sweetheart Rose, Frank starts a social dance club. In the 1950s no

happy ending was possible for the cross-cultural romance at the centre of *The Sunshine Club*, or indeed for Aboriginal people. But the clever ending vaults us into the present to view a rehearsal for this show. Has anything changed, asks 'Rose'? Yes, says 'Frank', now it's me offering you a job in my show. Changed? Yes, for some.

The story unfolds in a torrent of poignant songs, a minimum of linking dialogue, and lively dancing to truly memorable music from an exuberant on-stage band. The set, the tight ensemble, Christen O'Leary's total abandon in the lead role as Rose, and the sharp writing of 'our' shared Australian stories make for welcome contemporary theatre.

The Sunshine Club, writer/director Wesley Enoch, musical director John Rodgers, choreographer Stephen Page; Queensland Theatre Company, premiered at Cairns Civic Theatre, November 3 1999; The Sydney Theatre Company, Sydney Opera House until February 26. See Sydney Festival review page 6.

Was that the *fin de siècle*?

Chris Reid

As a statement marking the turn of the century, this was the event to remember. *En Masse*, a collaboration between Australian Dance Theatre, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and the Adelaide Festival Centre, was staged in the Playhouse theatre, an intimate space of several hundred seats. The program mused on the 20th century—4 pieces of music by living composers, young and old, and 3 modern dance sequences couldn't, of course, do justice to the scope and scale of the culture of the epoch, but gave some big hints.

The program commenced with US composer Michael Daugherty's *Bizarro*, a bouncy, jazz-influenced piece, using repeating forms, arranged for percussion, wind, brass and synthesiser. The work drew upon many elements of Western popular and serious music, standing out amongst the other compositions in exemplifying the century's music. It was the only work not accompanied by dance, though one could easily visualise a dance piece to go with it, perhaps with performers in nightclub attire.

The second work, with its own title of *Deadly Beautiful*, choreographed by Csaba Buday, was the outstanding element of the program. Adelaide composer John Polglase's short, intense work for strings, *Burn*, provided the perfect foil for a dance which was richly evocative, suggesting the primal forces that underlie the restless, chaotic drama of human interaction. The dancers, especially Chylie Cooper, gave a virtuosic performance pitched at the limit of physical capacity, and the blending of sound and music was superb. This was a performance that must be repeated.

ADT Artistic Director Bill Pengelly's piece followed, accompanied by Henryk Gorecki's *Concerto for Piano and String Orchestra*, op 40, of about 9 minutes in length. The striking two-movement work, originally scored for harpsichord and orchestra, was well handled by pianist Gabriella Smart and the ASO strings. The dance comprised a set of regimented, gymnastic movements, including trampolining, cleverly coordinated and wonderfully delivered, mimick-

ing the relentless, minimalist motifs of the music and evoking mechanistic 20th century Western society and its concern with PT, pairings and mass production and consumption. The choreography's somewhat humorous sensibility didn't match the moody intensity of Gorecki's work, however, nor acknowledge his political or musical concerns.

The final work was choreographer Alfred Taahi's dance for venerable US composer Lou Harrison's gracious *Mass to St Anthony* of 1980. The ASO was complemented by a 17-voice choir, garbed deliciously in red robes, who moved about the stage almost as part of the dance itself, suggesting something like a Greek chorus centre-stage. ADT lead dancer Daryl Brandwood convincingly rendered the trials of the founder of Christian monasticism and was well supported by the ADT cast. The music is unsurpassed, but in this context it was a longish work. Two simultaneous narratives, one aural and one visual, strained the attention, unless one shifted focus more to the music and found the metre of Harrison's medi-

tative form. Taahi's choreography had a classical feel and an episodic structure, but the idea might have been rendered more effective using excerpts from Harrison with a more abstract drama. As the evening's finale, the work did serve to remind us of the events that have kept us counting to 2000.

The whole program, performed without interval, was a high class effort performed with energy and enthusiasm, and it is regrettable that, for whatever reason, audience numbers were not strong. People missed a great show! The performances were excellent, the venue ideal and the whole concept was generally well thought out and well delivered. Despite some imbalances in the sound amplification, the orchestra worked well, conductor Timothy Sexton adroitly holding the proceedings together. The combining of the ASO and ADT should be pursued further.

En Masse, Australian Dance Theatre & Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre, December 3 - 8 1999.

Arvo Pärt: listening to the inner self

Robert Lloyd

One of the most interesting trends in new music since the 40s is the use of silence. From the Zen inspired prepared piano work of John Cage we started to value silence and space as an integral part of a musical composition. Much like blank space in a Chinese landscape painting it offers a space for us to enter.

This trend has continued as composers including Arvo Pärt find ways to merge Western linearity with the cyclic and static states of much Asian music. The success of Pärt validates the notion that the aural beauty of acoustic instruments, silence, simplicity and a strong personal style are highly valued in the world of new music.

In *Alina*, Pärt and producer Manfred

Eicher have put together a concept CD using only 2 works, *Fur Alina* and *Speigel im Speigel*. Three versions of *Speigel im Speigel* are separated by 2 versions of *Fur Alina*. *Speigel im Speigel* (Mirror in the Mirror) was the last piece Pärt wrote before leaving his native Estonia and settling in Berlin. Written in the composer's now well-known tintinnabula style it is scored for violin and piano with version 2 here played on cello an octave lower. This mesmeric work is based around the tonal centre of F with both parts creating an additive melodic sequence around it.

For *Fur Alina* Pärt has taken an hour-long "improvisation" of pianist Alexander Malter's version of the two-minute work, cut out 2 phases and inserted them

between the 3 versions of *Speigel im Speigel*. This tender solo piano work is regarded as Pärt's first piece in his new tintinnabula style and we hear his characteristic low drones with triadic harmonies floating in the high register in free time.

The music on this CD although written more than a decade ago is a new departure for Pärt, and has a strong affinity with much ambient music like Brian Eno's *Music for Airports*—the compositional devices are different but simple tonal music of great beauty results.

From repeated listenings I got a sense of looking at a beautiful sculpture from 3 different angles and Satie's *Trois Gymnopédies*, using 3 versions of similar material, came to

mind. All the playing here has a kind of detached passion, a quiet containment. The playing direction for *Fur Alina* is marked "calm, exalted, listening to one's inner self."

Arvo Pärt, Alina, The Music is the Space between the Notes, ECM 1591

Robert Lloyd is a Sydney composer whose latest work for chamber orchestra and 4 voices *Time being time had its world premiere in Darwin with the Arafura Ensemble in 1999. He is currently writing new vocal music for the German ensemble Trio a Due and a new orchestral composition for the Goethe-Institut (Sydney) for their 2000 Olympics celebrations.*

The wordless voice, the beginning of drama

Gretchen Miller

There is a moment in *Island of the Dying Donkeys* by Arsenije Jovanovic when the listener becomes aware that a voice has become present in the soundscape. Crickets and wind, and other ambivalent sounds, which could be frogs, or hooves on cobblestones, fade in and out with a synthesised, long decaying sound which could stem from any pitched source.

The listener becomes aware of the voice when it begins to sob and emerge slowly from this background.

The wordless voice being both not quite absent, but barely present, is a moment of subtle but significant drama. Something happens to the listener and their awareness makes a small shift—but one that changes the horizon of the listening—to a piece of mourning, a threnody for donkeys.

Despite a long and distinguished career as a film, television and theatre director, when Arsenije Jovanovic uses voice in radio he prefers to strip it of semantic meaning. His radiophonic work is "untrained" and he came to it after his career in other areas was well under way. But he recalls spending an intense few days in his student years listening to the music concrete of Pierre Shaeffer—before going on to work in the theatre.

Jovanovic was in Sydney last October to spend a month as a guest of the University of Technology Sydney and the ABC's Audio Arts department, where he began work on a piece called *Opera Balcanica*. During this time he had several meetings with students and radio practitioners, and the following is taken from both private conversations and larger group discussions.

The textless narrative of *Island of the Dying Donkeys* originates from Jovanovic's experiences as a sailor of the seas near his homeland—although he says it is not necessary to know this background, of which the work is like a "distant echo."

In coming across an island, he hears a wailing, and on sailing closer, finds a desperate donkey, which, seeing him across the waves, hoped for salvation. On the Mediterranean a donkey might live and work with several generations of a family and for 40 years do many times the work of a tractor. So when it is unfit for work, killing this member of the family is too emotionally difficult. Instead the donkey is taken to an island where, without water or food, it dies a lingering death. Jovanovic had come across this place of death inadvertently and the acute distress of the discovery became the radio work.

So the presence of the voice, despite its wordlessness, is the beginning of a dramatic narrative. Jovanovic describes it as like the moment when sailing on the Mediterranean with a friend there was nothing around them but clear blue sky, nothing on the horizon but ocean. And then a bird arrives.

"In one moment comes the bird and the shadow of the bird...you feel at this moment something is happening...in one moment from the universe, a small bird came out of the sky and sat on the wire...and fell asleep. I could touch her," he says. This bird's arrival brings with it an instant metaphor and "is the moment when drama starts."

"I found it was most strange and most symbolic—there was the war...I was cut off

from Belgrade. I was living in a summer house, 23 metres from the sea. Being cut from my home. The war starts. The bird's coming from the sky and falling asleep. I suddenly put this in a certain relationship...you can go on—she had trouble, I was in trouble and the universe around us..."

The "forgotten" experience of listening intensely to Shaeffer, however, is a clear influence on the European modernist, highly structured-sounding style Jovanovic's work exhibits. The "environmental" sounds he works with are often heavily manipulated in the studio, but still maintain a connection as an expression of a place, a soul—they are abstract, but not abstracted from human experience. But unlike the structural regimentation of the modernist composers, Jovanovic works "instinctively", not only with the sounds he uses but the musicians and actors he directs. A thread between them has to be created, a certain mind-reading must go on—an instinctual understanding.

You must create a space, he says, "create an atmosphere from the silence in which a small happening can be very different. You must prepare the space for the bird coming."

I am still thinking about the voice and its function in *The Island of the Dying Donkeys*. I hear the voice as a wailing, keening, donkey channelling—a donkey's flashback. This wordless language is both a donkey parroting the voices of its working life, compressed through time, and a speaking to itself and other donkey ghosts of confusion and loss...Mercifully for me as a listener, the keening starts to sound like donkey souls departing—relief at last, at least for the donkeys.

(No absolution for the listener though, as donkey hooves on cobblestones at the end of the piece begin sounding like frogs...and then separate out into the staccato memory of cruelty, exploitation and then abandonment that resonate for a long time after the piece is finished.)

This voice has an openness—without semantic meaning it is completely flexible, says Jovanovic. And certain instruments also provide this clarity, within a very particular approach. Imitation is a sailing into the "shallow waters of realism", he says, but instruments can also channel an intention, become the "thing" they also represent. And some instruments provide the same transparency and link to that "thing" as a voice without words.

We debate which instrument could also play a part in *Island of the Dying Donkeys*. What would you use, he says, a piano? And we both shake our heads. Why not? A piano brings its own space. A concert space, an abstract space, without connection to the body—and it is played held away from the body, from the breath. It is not embraced and it doesn't respond so well to the every tremble of the player's psyche.

But the flute? Yes. Why? "It is the wind, and the breath," he says. It is historically connected with the environment and manual work within that environment, across many cultures—it's the instrument of the shepherd.

"You don't necessarily want someone to say 'that is a flute'...instead it is there to be something...the feeling in that moment, or the voice of the dying bird or dying donkey—the flute disappears as a flute and plays the role with other sounds, to achieve certain poetical meaning. In fact what I'm doing is trying to destroy the semantic elements—of words, of the flute. The flute as a representation of itself is missed and you instead connect directly as a person/listener...to the open space."

Island of the Dying Donkeys is an earlier work by Arsenije Jovanovic. His latest work, Opera Balcanica, will be broadcast February 7 on The Listening Room, ABC Classic FM.

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New Music Notes

The **New Music Network** is about telling audiences and performers where and when you can hear the best in new music performance around Australia.

RealTime has given us this space in each issue so we can let you all know who's doing what, with whom, where and when...

Australia's most adventurous experimental music festival is back! The **WHAT IS MUSIC?** festival showcases musicians and mutants from all over the globe that come together to improvise, theorise, create new instruments and explore new technologies from the most basic to the most sophisticated. Madness, magic and mayhem. Among the Australian groups performing at WHAT IS MUSIC? are NMN members **Roger Dean** and Machine for Making Sense's **Jim Denley**—on Monday 7th February @ The Palladium, Roslyn St Kings Cross, Dr. **Metagroove**, an incarnation of Dean's **australYSIS**, presents computer-mediated, bent drum and bass, with sonic perturbations.

On Fri 4th Feb @ Revolver, 229 Chapel St, Prahran, Wed 9th @ Palladium, Roslyn St Kings Cross, and Fri 12th @ La Bar, 231 Oxford St Darlinghurst, **Jim Denley** joins his European cohorts in **LINES**, for their first Australian gigs of "exactitude, precision; delicacy, detail; timbre, texture. An exquisite corpus..." (*John Corbett, Chicago*). Joining Jim (on flutes, altosax), will be **Axel Doerner** (trumpet), **Phil Wachsmann** (violin, electronics), **Marcio Mattos** (double bass, cello, electronics), and **Martin Blume** (percussions). In March, co-Machine for Making Sense-member **Stevie Wishart** joins Denley at the Adelaide Festival as part of **Improvising the Future** for ABC Classic FM's weekly show **New Music Australia**. Three nights of improvised music performance – March 16-18 at the Madley Dance Space.

Whilst in Adelaide, Stevie will create the music for **Slow Love**, a Richard Muphet play recreated by **Boris Kelly** and Belgian company **theaterMalpertuis** March 11 - 14. Also taking a trip to Adelaide in March are Queensland based **ELISION Ensemble**, one of our most accomplished contemporary music ensembles. On March 10 and 11 ELISION will take on composer **John Rodgers' Inferno**, a nightmarish aural cartography of Dante's vision. Fourteen members of the ELISION Ensemble will take on the personalities of various denizens of hell in a complex and radical exploration of the physicality of performance. Elision will also present **Liza Lim's Yué Ling jé** (Moon Spirit Feasting), a street opera, 15 - 18 March on the banks of the Torrens.

On Thursday February 24th, **Voiceworks Vocal Ensemble** present **Translucence** for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. A new song cycle for three soprano voices, counter tenor, viola and cello, composed by the UK's Donna McKeivitt to poetry by Derek Jarman...and while on sublime voices, **The Song Company** are joined by **Alison Eddington** on percussion for **Fin de Siecle** at the Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art, February 28 and 29, an amazing program comprising **Kaija Saariaho, Saldah Rastam, Elena Kats-Chemin, Mary Finsterer, Andrew Ford** and **Anna Pimakhova**.

Watch this space for more info on the New Music Network's Annual Forum to take place later in the year...For more info on times, prices and venues visit our website: <http://www.nmn.org.au>



The event of forgetting

Linda Marie Walker

The Yashchin Ensemble's theatre-work explores a poetic logic, in a full-blooded style where restraint is shown only nano-seconds before the 'fall'—which often makes watching tense.

It could be summed up in the phrase "it's like this...", a phrase which runs through one strand/slice of the performance *Mnemosyne*. That is, nothing ever is 'like this'. In the saying of the phrase, the very impossibility of 'clarity' is revealed. The strength of the ensemble appears related to the idea of the impossible, and to a particular way of witnessing and reporting 'excess' (with an intensity meant to give you a glimmer of what 'like this' is). An excess that is crafted, and at all moments acts upon and from the bodily presence of the actors. This physicality is also voiced. There was no point in the performance where both were not either absolutely 'on stage' together, or in the process of coming to it, as if from a minor detour.

Mnemosyne is composed of a set of movements, or fragments. It's not unlike vaudeville, where 'acts' come out and do a 'turn.' The use of music and song also gives that feel. The fragments are incongruous, they follow one another seamlessly, as if they are part of a continuous fabric (a group of ancient well-to-doers stuck in their formulaic speech habits is followed by a lost-soul monologue, with fish on head, pleading for acceptance of the deformed). And so one, as viewer, enters into a mayhem, and has no trouble making leaps. There are motifs, small things (topics, eg planets, flowers) that return, and the actors return too. One sees them doing different 'turns', being someone/thing else, and so in the Brechtian sense one is never merely watching a story unfold, one is watching people act, sing, dance, cry, laugh, and be silly, angry, dumb, funny, hurt—and, all in all, ruled by memory: "You will be moving from one planet to the other, watching people searching for their life, like in a dream...Some are learning how to trust and all of them are trying to remember and all of them are trying to forget." (Director's program notes)

I was lucky the night I went (the last night). The director Netta Yashchin was filling in for someone who was ill. I mean 'lucky' in the sense of never having seen Netta perform before. It was a clue to the overall atmosphere of the ensemble, as she 'was', or embodied, the stretch (the pushing out of edges to where they might crack), the interweave, of body and voice. She claims to own the stars, they are hers because she's been the first to say so (and she is exasperated that this is not understood). And that's that, clear as a bell. At the end of this (episode), or another, she says something like "for the peace of a cup of tea"—community is, grief and loss are, a search for "the peace of a cup of tea...and



Stephen Noonan *Mnemosyne* Yashchin Ensemble photo David Wilson

isn't that 'interesting.' A cup of tea, for god's sake."

Mnemosyne began with the performers behind the audience, singing; as if calling us and them to attention, to the present, to the exactness of hearing, and the illusion of seeing. What were we supposed to do, turn around, watch them, or continue watching the stage? How does one define, or converse with, this theatre-work. It edges towards, or reaches from, a fatal desire: to tell another what one 'sees' or doesn't 'see.' Do I turn and watch, tell you how they arranged themselves around us like a chain, trapping us inside their stage, or do I try and tell you of their sound, of being touched, saturated, by the 'gradual' raising of the voices, until they were loudly over us (chain to net)?

"Forgetting is the primordial divinity, the venerable ancestor and first presence of what, in a later generation, will give rise to Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses. The essence of memory is

therefore forgetting: the forgetfulness of which one must drink in order to die...Forgetting is the very vigilance of memory, the guardian force thanks to which the hidden of things is preserved, and thanks to which mortal men...rest in what of themselves is hidden." (Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*). It is fitting to honour Mnemosyne with fullness, as already too much has faded away; what remains—ruins, shards, crumbs, ash—can bear the temper of vaudeville, carnival, especially when it is not presented as such, but takes one to, touches the memory of, forms of awful humour and tragedy.

The Yashchin Ensemble's theatre-work is close to a form of music—the 'gradual' (which might suffice as the name of a poetic logic). (I also think of hip-hop/rap, the use of didactic texts as lyrics—one squirms, yet one is agreeing or disagreeing, knowing crying [of inner self] is going on.) The gradual is an antiphon, a sentence sung by a choir in response to another choir,

sung between the Epistle and the Gospel at the Eucharist—it's like an approach, like the steps to the altar. The gradual is also a book which works like a set of replies, a 'religious' way of making text (Derrida does this, for example). The performance of *Mnemosyne* relentlessly carried out a semblance of 'gradual' (calling)—and, in effect, nothing could end because, simply, memory refuses to stop, shut up shop, leave: "it's like this...a cup of tea." The sadness in this statement is also laughter, absurdity, and yet is real too, a real image. "It's so interesting", she says (Netta), "a cup of tea. My god, where are you, I miss you."

If this theatre touches the sacred—and it shows no fear of either the heart or the mind—then it is as vulnerable and tender as one's own skin.

Mnemosyne, director Netta Yashchin. *The Parks Theatre, Adelaide, December 1999.*



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Strindberg: human misery, divine mystery

Noel Purdon

Director Benedict Andrews was clearly both overwhelmed and disconcerted by the packed audience which viewed the last night of Brink's production at the Odeon Theatre. Instead of 4 dutiful critics, he had hundreds flowing into the ancient cinema which has successively been home to B-grade movies, the South Australian Film Corporation's pick-up studio, and youth theatre education. What they were about to see, he insisted, was a rehearsal in progress, a workshop.

He needn't have worried. The audience, most of whom had neither seen nor read *A Dream Play*, was riveted. As tragic and passionate as late Ibsen, Strindberg's agony about the mystery of the divine and the misery of the human resounded through the stripped black space with hints of Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* and Strosser's iconoclastic SA Opera's production of *The Ring*. May-Brit Akerholt's adaptation is admirable. Splicing the original Swedish with the company's search to find their own interpretation, she has helped create a performance text that condenses the play in duration and expands it in intimacy.

Now that Schnitzler, Wedekind, Nietzsche and Freud are enjoying a re-evaluation which bypasses the analyses of tamely 'progressive' thought, the play, perhaps for the first time, is allowed to shift its action between characters by a montage of attractions and defiant mockery. Clearly the company has intelligently studied Strindberg's biography, his victimised misogyny, his confused occultism. The result is a participation in his fragmented grief about marriage, law, academia, entertainment, religion, madness and cruelty. These emotions flow through the cast like free associations which dissolve from obscurantism into poetry. How strikingly that verse emerges. From hollyhocks, fishing-nets, stitching clothes and houses, its imagery passes through doors and mirrors that open onto skerries of plague and quarantine, or castles of love and joy.

It would be hard to single out the actors' performances as they shift from the opera, the lawyer, the goddess and the coastal resort, because all 7 move through each other like a single train of persecuted, obsessive thought. There are many criticisms which could be made about this enterprise in its present state. Technically, light, sound and ensemble acting are already there. Sharp focus is still to come and the props, minimal as they are, need even more concentrated economy. The actors are still 'on the book' for the segments which are read across the simple round table which contains Strindberg's stage directions like a seance.

Early modernist playwrights who designated pages of impossible staging tended, like Wagner, Ibsen, Shaw and Strindberg's ultimate imitator Eugene O'Neill, to ask for the expanse traditionally accorded a novel. What soon condensed their mise-en-scene was, of course, the cinema. But they were still essentially writing for the theatre, and of all of them, it was Strindberg who was on the brink. The divine descends to survey the human, and the human can only be discerned through the clouds of its own intermittent visibility. Compassion is intensified by the interaction between groups of those humans sharing a real communal space. As influenced by the techniques and routines of cinema as it is, right down to Broadway



Brink Productions, *A Dream Play* photo David Wilson

breaks, Brink is recharging the impact of the theatre. I say keep it like that. This production is already on its feet. Let it fly.

Robert Wilson's production of Strindberg's *A Dream Play* is part of the Perth Festival (see RealTime#36), and Roger Pulvers' production of the same playwright's earlier

work, *The Dance of Death*, is on the program of the Adelaide Festival.

A Dream Play, by August Strindberg, director/designer Benedict Andrews, Brink Productions, Odeon Norwood, Adelaide December 9 - 11 1999

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Little black princess

Maryanne Lynch

Over the last few years there's been a rush of solo shows by Indigenous female performers including *Ningali*, *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, *White Baptist Abba Fan* and *Box the Pony*.

These shows have assumed different positions on what is essentially a foray into autobiography as performance, whether it be the Murgon to Double Bay journey of Leah Purcell or the white girl in black body confusion of Deborah Cheetham. *Bedtime Stories* by Aunty Dee, written and performed by Queenslander Dee Murphy, is another addition to the field. A gripping piece structured around Murphy at ages 7, 17 and 27, *Bedtime Stories* borrows from European fairy tales to trace with grace and lashings of good humour her painful growth to womanhood.

Murphy grew up in Brisbane, the second of 4 children. Her mother was from the well-known Cherbourg Mission and her father from Stradbroke Island, just off Brisbane's coast. Her mother died tragically while Murphy was still a child, and she was brought up by her beloved Nan. In between was further tragedy, including the deaths of a broth-

er and a sister. These days Murphy is raising 2 children of her own and lives mainly in the Cairns district.

An untrained yet natural performer, Murphy puts flesh on the bones of her life—goosepimpled flesh, weeping flesh, babysoft flesh—and in so doing makes this *ber* story rather than one 'representative' of Indigenous Australians. It is this that gives the work its power—aided by Murphy's feisty charm and Suellen Maunder's sympathetic direction.

Using a simple set comprising a rock (which serves variously as a horse, a dwelling, a bed among other things), 5 wooden poles and a bottle of Johnson & Johnson's Baby Powder, Murphy takes us through the life of the "Little Black Princess." But this is no Disney fantasy. Circles of talc mark pivotal moments for the young Dee as well as serving as a metaphor for the recurrence of trouble, the "vicious circle", confining her and

her kin to ever more worries—Murphy faces the truth of sexual abuse, domestic violence and suicide in her family. The circles also act as talismans; footprints mark the way through the worst moments as well as signifying the presence of those who love and are loved by this princess gone wrong.

Along the way there are loads of laughs, a bundle of poems and an ironic acknowledgement of the gap between traditional rites of passage and the bumbling and stumbling of Murphy's own journey. Indeed, this latter concept is humorously set up in the 7-year-old Dee sequence, where "Once upon a time" is accompanied by the sound of a didge until Murphy dismisses it with the line "not in the Dreamtime unfortunately." Such self-reflexive gestures punctuate the show, jabbing at both actor and audience without any loss of mood or connection. They also magnify the resonances between Murphy's life and

the larger autobiography of the Australian "nation", again without losing the particularity of this tale.

Bedtime Stories may be the rawest one-woman show of what is rapidly becoming a sub-genre of Australian performance, but it is also the most direct. No punches are pulled by the terrific Aunty Dee. Small wonder the work has travelled well to several Murri (and other) communities in Queensland—including one audience of 250 adolescent boys! As Murphy's alter ego says, "Pretty deadly, eh?"

Bedtime Stories by Aunty Dee, *Just Us Theatre Ensemble*, writer/performer Dee Murphy, director/dramaturg Suellen Maunder, Cairns Civic Theatre, Cairns, September 16-18, Newboards Festival, La Boite Theatre, Brisbane, October, 24-30 and assorted performances in Murri (and other) communities of Queensland

A new Russia, a new cherry orchard

Grisba Dolgopolov

It is no longer a wealthy estate with a cherry orchard but an attic with a scrawny cherry tree root that serves as the metaphor for a transforming Russia. "This is where we spent our youth. This is where we played. In this attic we dreamt of our future." But then there is continuous speculation whether this attic/country will be knocked down or renovated. Russia is always being rebuilt, knocked down and rebuilt again in a permanent revolution-renovation. That's the way it is. So why the strange nostalgia for the past? Perhaps it is the West's imaginary of Russia's past, because predictably the play's attic is knocked down at the end. Could it have been any other way?

The Little Cherry Orchard by Alexei Slapovsky is a play of reminiscences and discussions of renovations. It is a homage to Chekhov, drawing on audience knowledge of the romanticised 19th century Russian soul but updated for a newly mythologised brut-capitalist age. The play introduces filthy rich New Russians, opportunists, friends-cum-traitors, mafiosi millionaires and the usual web of lovers. This is meant to be the New Russia where everyone is desperately trying either to get pissed, get rich, or get out. Yet it is a play that fuels a Western audience's self-satisfaction and the need for a laugh at Russia's expense, casting it as the misguided, bastard other. It plays the same tune as the parodic mainstream depiction of Russians as drunks, brutes or hapless dupes.

Set in the early 90s with a wedding as the focal point, this is a play that aspires to reconcile the past with attempts to move into a future. But as Nietzsche proclaimed, the only way to move forward is to destroy the past. Otherwise a nation will be forever burdened with eating its own excrement. *The Little Cherry Orchard* makes no attempts to imagine a different future as it sifts through the detritus of the attic's memories. It privileges old forms and offers no possibilities in a carnival of scatophagia. How could a Russian wedding not explode into a fight? There are some solid social

observations ("all these great things we did during our youth—we did them out of boredom") but never enough for a production that seeks to fly with metaphors but instead sags with nostalgic pastiche shovelled on with a komsomol trowel.

There is a glimmer of hope that the loop of the past will be broken by chance with the continuous repetition of the enigmatic phrase, "jokers wild", by the flower planting 'Uncle Vanya.' But in this production, there are not enough dynamics to let chance reign, and no surprises. Tendentious declamation of positions and moral assertions destroy any relationship drama. There is no subtext, no character interplay and no soul. Too much of the performance is taken up with establishing the set-up and not nearly enough devoted to developing the action. Excessive pillaging of quotations and fluffy irony kill any potential dynamism. Unlike Chekhov, Slapovsky feels the need for establishing the fine workings of human relationships through sermons and an overwrought plot that lacks passion or engagement. Yet it is unclear if it is the script or the production which is most stilted, perhaps both. The terrific actors are not given the emotional space in which to live and develop. Despite the hamstrung direction, they did create a few thrilling moments in the last quarter when action takes over from monologues and play supersedes social commentary.

Clunky ironic pastiche is a symptom of millennial malaise. In *The Little Cherry Orchard* there is no search for new forms only a backward-looking heavy-going homage to Chekhov that mixes too many seagulls, uncles and cherry orchards into sour overcooked compote. Let us move forward to an era that is beyond sad-eyed, flabby irony.

The Little Cherry Orchard, writer Alexei Slapovsky, director Anatoly Frusin, Company B Belvoir, Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney, November 10 - December 17 1999



Gravity Feed and Urban Theatre Projects, *Tabernacle*

Tonight I'm looking forward to another meditative reverie with those architectonic performance marvels, Gravity Feed. Under a luminous deep blue summer sky on the roof of the Marrickville railway station carpark, Gravity Feed with their hosts, Urban Theatre Projects, have created a massive, glowing, red mecca. Sorry, tabernacle. Fine red fabric walls on thin metal frames are brilliantly engineered to turn in any direction splitting the whole into a maze of minor tabernacles that house or exclude us, or seamlessly angle diagonally into deep corridors where we promenade. Occasionally the performers erupt into contorted movements, sudden climbing, Godot-ish duos battling over items of clothing. The play of inside and out, of light and dark, of ambling freely and being herded to Rik Rue's mood-changing sound score is finally over. We are all outside a set of neat, closed, darkened, smaller tabernacles. It's odd to feel that a carpark has been made sacred. But tonight the reverie has been broken from time to time.

The audience has been frisky, even pushy, sometimes intimidating, occasionally on the edge of stampede, opening and closing walls ahead of the performers, outdoing the Gravity Feed men and their brave UTP trainees in spinning the huge walls in 360 revolutions. Word gets around that someone was nabbed applying a match to the fabric. I see a girl taking twine from her handbag with which she begins to meticulously secure a latch. The crowd surges, a wall looms, I'm pushed away, I don't see if she succeeds. There are moments of beauty—four walls close around two men from the audience. They embrace, they kiss. A long kiss. Pause. Applause. The soundtrack trips into dance, promenaders do a little hip line dance.

Gravity Feed already specialise in the unpredictable, so another layer of suspense is not always welcome, it's a kind of blasphemy. Still, it's not surprising that work demanding a physically responsive audience might trip into unanticipated participation—reminding me of the young men who returned to La Furas dels Baus performances in Sydney in the late 80s to enter into the flour and meat hurling provocations of the performers.

Despite the odds, Gravity Feed still worked much of their magic and the UTP ensemble entered the off-the-wall performance mode with occasional virtuosity. However the monumental ambition of creating big manipulable spaces (here brilliantly engineered by Joey Ruigrok Van der Werven) seems to have got in the way of any development in Gravity Feed's performance vocabulary. The energy and precision devoted to the opening and closing of these great walls-cum-doors seemed almost all-consuming. As ever with Gravity Feed, you dream of another season of *Tabernacle*, one where they might, in this case, dance through as many doors as they open.

Keith Gallasch

Urban Theatre Projects-Gravity Feed, *Tabernacle*, Marrickville, Sydney, December 1-14 1999



Lisa O'Neill

I thought to myself I would do anything to be a really good performer—I would go through anything...do that stomp every day for 10 years so I can stand there on stage and look fucking amazing.

Stomping in slippers to Nirvana

Sbaaron Boughen

Lisa O'Neill leaves her backyard in Brisbane for "the UK's hottest international contemporary dance festival." *New Moves (New Territories) 2000* in Glasgow is hosting a radical exchange of work with some of Australia's most exciting contemporary choreographers—Sue Healey and Phillip Adams, Lucy Guerin, Trevor Patrick, Dean Walsh and Lisa herself.

"When I saw these people I was performing with I did a bit of homework and found out that they're all in the limelight, but they'll be there with their work and I'll be there with my slippers, stomping to Nirvana, and I just laughed."

Nikki Milican, the Festival's Artistic Director, travelled to Brisbane to see local work and responded to O'Neill's uniqueness with a request for a 20 minute work to go into the New Moves Australia component of the festival. This is the first time her work has been seen outside Brisbane despite the choreographer having a solid repertoire of 16 works.

"I love what I do so much I've never taken the time to promote myself or push my work into anyone's face. I would not work anywhere else but up here. I can isolate myself and there are no trends to follow."

O'Neill's earlier reference to slippers and stomping indicates her close connection to the Suzuki actor-training method which has heavily influenced her development as a contemporary dance choreographer. She has trained 3 days a week for the last 6 years under Jacqui Carroll's guidance with Frank Productions Austral-Asian Performance Ensemble. O'Neill first came into contact with Carroll in her teens at the Queensland Dance School of Excellence and then at Queensland University of Technology as a student.

"I believe in having a teacher—you always need someone with their eyes on you con-

stantly and Jacqui has...She's incredibly articulate and she really knows my body—she's been teaching me since I was 14 years old. That's a really long relationship. She's watching me always, suggesting things all the time so I feel safe knowing that someone's working on me."

O'Neill is developing a work titled *Sweet Yeti* for Glasgow which draws on 3 separate solos made for 3 different venues over the last 3 years! "I've called the piece *Sweet Yeti* 'cause I've been working with this Yeti character for a couple of years. I've chosen movement material from *Yeti in e minor* which I did in 1996 at The Cherry Herring, a solo piece from *Marble* which I did as part of the Brisbane Festival in 1997 and another short solo which I did for The Cherry Herring's *Cityscapes* in 1999. All of those works centred around a particular character—myself, my stage persona. Also all of those pieces were actually done in completely different environments and were quite site-specific; *Yeti in e minor* was created in a cage, *Marble* was done up against a wall and the *Cityscapes* piece was in an outdoor environment against a wall of glass. I've got these 3 solos done against a wall but they're very different emotionally and in content because of the environment I was in at the time. So I'll be developing all those solos up against the one wall for the theatre in Glasgow."

There is an overt fascination with walls here which O'Neill readily acknowledges. She

uses walls in her work as points of departure, support structures, forces of captivity to define spatial qualities, old friends or simply for their visual and architectural stature. It may have something to do with another obsession—her desire for structure both in her work and her working environment.

"I've always had a full-on thing about structure. I've always structured things. The movement vocab may have been different but I always had a set structure for it to take place in...The Crabroom and The Cherry Herring were a godsend for me. A place to create in. The Crabroom (The Cherry's predecessor) was where I first started *Yeti* and I was terrified—I'd never done a solo before but from there I did 3 more and 2 for The Cherry Herring who have always been supportive. I enjoy being in Frank because there is the structure—training every week. I don't know what I'd do without it. I haven't done a dance class in 5 years. I'm just training in another way now. Because I have that structure I feel confident independently."

O'Neill has a busy year ahead. Alongside Glasgow, she has a choreographic commission for L'Attitude 27.5, Brisbane's new Powerhouse program for independent artists, a collaboration on a laser show, *MYRRHA*, with Diane Cilento as director, the remounting of *Transit Lounge* with Keith Armstrong (a multimedia adaptive technology animation set-up), a programme of new work by 3 Frank women, and Frank Production's own *Hamlet*

in Japan at the Shizuoka International Arts Festival.

"Even though I started out wanting to be a famous Australian dancer in a big company, that never happened and that's okay. I thought to myself I would do anything to be a really good performer—I would go through anything...do that stomp every day for 10 years so I can stand there on stage and look fucking amazing. That's what the stomp is for—the stomp is just to find stillness."

When asked about future directions for her choreographic work, O'Neill replied "I think my work is becoming more simplified. Every piece seems to have less vocab in it. It's getting more streamlined. But besides choreographing and creating works I'm trying to improve myself as a performer which I do through the Suzuki training. That's my main objective—to be able to stand in front of an audience one day and not do anything and have it work."

New Moves (new territories) 2000 will be held in Glasgow, Scotland, March 13 - 25 2000. The International Choreographic Laboratory will be held in Adelaide as part of the Telstra Adelaide Festival, February 28 - March 11 2000, and in Glasgow.

Sbaaron Boughen is a lecturer in Dance at QUT and her work Bleeding-A-Part will premiere at the Powerhouse, Brisbane in 2000.

Star turns: watching Stella b.

Erin Brannigan

Rosalind Crisp has spoken at length about studio-based practice; a collective of artists based around a studio, aligned with the particular type of dance practice which that studio represents. With this *Stella b.* series, along with the studio showings I have seen over the past 3 years at her Omeo Studios in Newtown, Crisp has achieved exactly this—a distinctive, productive centre of activity that comprises an important part of the rather dislocated dance activity in Sydney.

I saw *Stella b.* in the second and last weeks of the month-long development. The piece shown, which culminated in a reworking for Artspace in January (*The View from Here*), consists of a series of repetitions performed solo by dancer Gabrielle Adamik at the front corner of the performance space with duos, trios and quartets by Crisp and the other dancers (Nalina Wait, Lizzie Thomson and Katy Macdonald) unfolding on a plane behind her. The set of column supports run-

ning down the performance space of the studio, cutting the space by two thirds, becomes a margin for play with entrances and exits marked by the passage through this architectural feature.

Adamik's repetitions perform a function similar to James McAllister's performance in this same space in *Six Variations on a Lie*; a kind of bass note marking the progression of the work. The gentle, moderate and measured movements characterised by a swinging rhythm and a delicacy of touch, slowly revolve so that each movement is seen from several angles...like a turn-of-the-century study of human motion, but the 'model' here occupies a place between going *through* the motion and being immersed in it with ease.

Behind this, the groupings progress slowly along the floor, burst into the space with bold walks and swinging turns or hesitate with minute foot manipulations at the threshold of the space. Set against the steadiness of

Adamik, the variations in energy and intention on this other plane are very satisfying, breaking the moderation just when it is required.

The intensity, detail, stillness and assuredness are all still here from Crisp's solo work, as are the trademark elastic-ricocheting joints which a friend put her finger on. But with this group work, the edgy immediacy has been replaced with something much more ordered. The unpredictability is still there—perfectly-timed bolts with 4 dancers changing instantaneously from stop to go, or one dancer following a large, reaching gesture with a toe flick—and this is a real achievement. But the group work has obviously necessitated a huge shift—aesthetically and tonally—and it's a very different experience to the solo Crisp we've come to know. The young dancers Crisp is working with have brought a lightness, clarity and ease to the work. It's a new aesthetic chord in the work

that signals a change for Crisp.

Importantly, Ion Pearce's live sound work seemed to progress in tandem with the performance, being very different on the 2 occasions I attended the showings. The spaces in the score and diversity of sounds—electronic bleeps, percussive elements, music recordings—had an unpredictable quality that perfectly matched the performance.

Rosalind Crisp has been awarded a two-year Fellowship by the Dance Fund of the Australia Council and is one of the choreographer-dancers selected for the New Moves (New Territories) dance workshop at the Telstra Adelaide Festival 2000.

Stella b., choreographer Rosalind Crisp, sound by Ion Pearce: Omeo Dance Studio, Sydney, Fridays in November 1999

Live Acts #4: steady boppin', ass droppin'

Jonathan Marshall

Immersing myself in Philip Brophy's Sound Punch releases before I went out to Chunky Move's *Live Acts #4* has done something to my brain. I miss the first act...s'okay, I've seen it before. Two women rise, feet skywards, from Kate Denborough's decapitating boxes, restlessly fidgeting with clothing—an inverted, Dali-esque can-can.

In the heady atmosphere of the club, things are getting fuzzy. Video projection warns of impending lift-off before Frances d'Ath's *Pirn* morphs on stage. The characteristic Melbourne/Chunky Move fleshy machines are here. D'Ath gives this a computerised clicking—head turns pre-empt torsos and shoulders ("head boppin', ass droppin'")—Ice Cube). Memories of *Live Acts #1-3* leak through. Arms between partner's legs, leading to interlocking twists, recall Shelley Lasica's *Restricted Situation* from *LA #1*. Twister for intellectuals. All the works have

this quality. On this small stage, multiple bodies occupy mutual space. Voiteck's sharp, gritty techno fuzz clears the air for the performers, placing them in a clean yet distorted machine.

Elvis (Shirley Billings) is in the house, but not looking too good. *Viva Las Vegas* is low on "viva", despite 'Hunka-hunka' being flanked by the Chunky Move fly-girls. Deadpan cabaret. I miss Martine Corompt's anime pet installation and John Meade's smoking, muppet volcano from earlier *LAs*. Tonight dark oils hide in the shadows. So much for art. Back to the band!

The design of Byron Perry's operating theatre drama—*Hayflick Limit*—recalls *Reanimator*, but the movement and sound (Aphex Twin's *Nannou*) has an almost Renaissance, clockwork feel. The realtime projection of alternative views has cleaned up since *Pirn* (does this make the earlier,

pleasingly viral static 'not part of the show?'). Two women manipulate a man to the whoops of the crowd. A smirk hides under Fiona Cameron's lips all night.

Cross-fertilisation between Lucy Guerin and Chunky Move has highlighted the anatomising quality of both, while bringing Guerin towards Gideon Obarzanek's pantodrama. With *Gift*, Guerin takes this elsewhere: poppy abstraction, accessible dreams of dancers licked to death like lollipops, or playing with others' limbs like Christmas treats. Brophy's masterer—Franc Tetaz—opens up the gorgeous, flowing comedy of the piece with some swinging, French funk ("head boppin', ass droppin').

Then there's Obarzanek's *Disco.Very* and its mish-mash of disco phrases. Where Ransom's score pounds one 70s classic into another, even using Hendrix riffs to segue between sources, Obarzanek's choreography

is a more subtle melding. I close my stoner eyes and let the turntables dance. Then the dancers double-take and misfire. We see choreographic effort. Even so, Ransom leaves them for dead.

After the packed concentration of the first half, the room becomes a vortical lacuna of movement and sound. Perry's surgical bed becomes a console table with steady boppin' DJs behind it. I recall earlier *LAs* where Obarzanek and Phillip Adams danced spastically to crunchy noise (why is so much techno un-funky?). Professional dancers look weird on the dance floor. Production folk are the real party animals—techie Ruth Bauer is there, bouncing in clogs. Is she performing? Am I?

Live Acts #4 Chunky Move, Revolver Night Club, Melbourne, December 16 - 17.

Bodyworks: the politics of the embrace

Jonathan Marshall

Is there a psycho-kinetic space between the blow and the caress, or is the touch of flesh on flesh always a sadomasochistic enactment of power which both stimulates and contains desire and unpleasure? Melbourne has become *the* dance performance site for the painful sublime, populated by anatomic, deconstructed bodies from Lucy Guerin, Phillip Adams, Brett Daffy and Gideon Obarzanek. *Bodyworks* presented a suitably eclectic selection, but the most compelling was that which aroused such Artaudian and Foucauldian ideals.

Russell Dumas is stylistically and geographically removed from these approaches. His work is characterised by a gentle yet controlled ascension of everyday movement into the rigours of formal dance. It represents an aestheticisation of the commonplace, not a Dadaesque challenge to such terms. Nevertheless the depth of his execution and

that of Collin Sneesby in *Post Larret 99* paradoxically gives them an unmannered ease which problematises their status as 'performers.' The embrace however reveals the underlying violence of Dumas' choreography. Dumas guides and positions his companion, shaping and modifying the latter's gestures. Despite Dumas' sensual, soft touch, there is an inherent cruelty in this friendly meeting of flesh. Dumas moves his subject, curtailing Sneesby's freedom. The aesthetics of ballet is reinscribed through the embrace.

Brett Daffy's lonely body is not subjected to the literal imposition of another's power. This is a body that embraces itself in a violent concatenation of disparate body-parts. It is "meat", smashed against itself under the gaze of the audience. In *Human meat processing works*, the spectators act as wall-flowers at a nightclub, probing the body visually in a search for sexual arousal. It is not only the observer who enacts

this harsh embrace of flesh by the eye though. Like the denizens of the nightclub, Daffy has internalised this gaze; he scrutinises himself. Violent self-regulation is physicalised in a painful, contorted touching of the self which rips apart and meshes together the fragments which meet. Even alone, the sensual violence of the (self-) embrace remains.

Gekidan Kaitaisha's *Into the Century of Degeneration* begins with an unmotivated woman, wandering into 3 men who at her touch lift her by the waist, shake her, and drop her. They seize her as though life depended on it. She struggles to escape while one holds her back—protecting her from herself? Each embrace mingles affection, self-hatred, and loathing of the other. One in a dog collar with eyes heavy with unspeakable sadness manipulates his subject as though trying to save her, hoping to agitate her out of her benumbed reverie. A bully-boy with eyes that

bore through walls thrashes her about as though wreaking his havoc on the world. The third reacts instinctively, his sensations dulled but his reactions angry. For all 3, the embrace inflicts pain with a loving cruelty, using an aggressive physicality for salvation and damnation, containment and liberation. The uneven pacing of the embrace, its slow, subtle arousal and whip-lashes of fearsome energy, reveals the anger and love that underlies the meeting of flesh. The body and my jaded eyes emerge scarred yet reinvigorated.

Bodyworks 99: Post Larret 99, director/performer Russell Dumas, performer Collin Sneesby & various guests; Ward: Human meat processing works, choreographer/performer Brett Daffy; Into the Century of Degeneration, by Gekidan Kaitaisha, director Sbinjin Shimizu, Dancehouse, Melbourne, Nov 24 - Dec 7 1999

Inside the dancer, in the heart of the eye

Erin Brannigan

Dance Lumiere 99 was a very different affair to the *Dance Lumiere I* curated in 98. Moved to a cinema venue—Cinemedia—and spread over 3 days with 5 themed sessions, curator Tracie Mitchell and her team created a stylish dance screen event as part of the Dancehouse *Bodyworks* season. With a week-end-long film program as part of Perth's *Dancers Are Space Eaters* in 1999, an Adelaide dance film screening in November last year, and One Extra Company's dance screen event scheduled for May this year, substantial attention is turning towards this interdisciplinary form.

Mitchell's opening night double bill of *Revolver*, a short British film featuring a very young Liam Neeson, and Milos Forman's 1979 musical *Hair* featuring the choreography of Twyla Tharp, was a bold move, but an interesting one that illustrated filmmaker Lawrence Johnstone's keynote address. Johnstone gave a neat history of dance and film stressing the significance of the musical which too often gets shrugged off like an embarrassing relative. Placing *Revolver*, a windswept, magical, 'rondo' style tale of car problems, a wandering bride and lust beside a highway, against a 70s musical about the 60s that's as densely worked as a paisley shirt, demonstrated Lawrence's comments on the diversity of the form. *Hair* was hysterical—it was great to see it for the first time on film and it warmed up a crowd that appeared to return for other programmes throughout the weekend.

Mitchell chose some very safe, beautiful international work which was a smart move for the festival's big leap from the \$5-a-seat-in-the-studio model, screening works by Laura Taler, Pascal Magnin, Philippe Decouffé and de Keersmaeker; all award-winning dance filmmakers. All have created distinct oeuvres within the form; Taler's cheeky sentimentalism, Magnin's cinematic romances, Decouffé's homages to early cinema, Rosas' epic masterpieces (De Keersmaeker's film shown here, *Rosa*, was directed by Peter Greenaway).

The Australian programme was more of a mixture of low budget, experimental work, well-crafted explorations which had some funding, and glossy packages that had a lot of experience and support behind them. It included work by Christos Linou, Cordelia Beresford, Michelle Heaven, Clair Dyson, Justine Spicer, Morag Brownlie (NZ) and Mitchell herself. Linou's *Fiddle Di Die* which I first saw as part of his stage work of the same name is a staccato Super 8 film, the highlight being a series of jumps filmed to create a jerky levitation. Heaven's collaboration with Jessica Wallace is an interesting first exploration of the film medium

for this exquisite performer and the care taken with the resources at hand result in a curious and delicate film.

Beresford's *Restoration* with choreography and performance by Narelle Benjamin is an amazing graduation short and a good investigation of that awkward place where narrative moves into dance. It's the type of dance-film performance that has given an international leg-up for companies such as DV8 and La La La Human Steps.

A real thrill was seeing Margie Medlin and Sandra Parker's collaboration for Danceworks, *In the Heart of the Eye*. Seen in the same week-end as *Dance Lumiere*, this work seemed like an exciting jump sideways with its beautifully incorporated film and live work—a rare and remarkable success story. The elegance of the choreography—all fine lines, sharp angles and a lot of beauty—never became cold which I attribute to the 'dance-cam' work that placed the audience in the dancer's head. As the film image on the back wall of screens traces a passage through a classic interior—all wood panelling



Belinda Cooper, Michael O'Donoghue, *In the Heart of the Eye* photo Rachel Roberts

and stained glass—a dancer in front on the stage marks out the movements that have created the moving image. As she turns abruptly a quick pan occurs. As she swings to and fro in position, in a movement echo, the camera oscillates from side to side. *In the Heart of the Eye* takes us into a bizarre space between our observations of the dance on stage and the visual experience of the dancer on screen—a heart with no sole (so to speak). Like a strange voyeuristic kinaesthetics, the space or gap at the heart of the relation gives the work a haunted aspect that I found oddly disarming, allowing me to be taken in.

Some black and white footage of the

dancers is repeated on the screens like a round (there is usually more than one projection happening at once), the movements falling after each other like ghost-dancers. Other shots were achingly gorgeous, like the falling snow which seemed to freeze/burn into the cinematic image.

Dance Lumiere, curator Tracie Mitchell, Cinemedia at Treasury Theatre, Melbourne, November 18 - 20; *In the Heart of the Eye*, choreography Sandra Parker, filmmaker/lighting Margie Medlin; *Athenaeum II*, Melbourne, November 19 - 28, 1999

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Rosas is supported by The Ministry of the Flemish Community-Administration for the Arts and the National Lottery.

Festival Theatre



RealTime 35 February - March 2000

Living the red desert: Fiona Foley interview

Jacqueline Millner

Tell us about your part in the new work Ochre and Dust, to be performed at this year's Adelaide and Perth Festivals.

My latest project is a collaboration with Aku Kadogo, an African-American choreographer who has been living in Australia for the last 20 years or so. Aku has been a colleague of mine since 1985, and as an admirer of my work, she was keen to work with me.

Ochre and Dust derives directly from the lives of women in certain Indigenous communities, such as Urnabella in South Australia, in Pitjinjara country, which is renowned for its batik and dyeing. We travelled there last year and stayed for a week, meeting the women, sharing their community, and experiencing the desert country, which is very different from mine in Queensland. The women here come from a strong cultural background; they are accomplished not only as singers and dancers, but also as cattle-women. Also, many are active in grass-roots politics, especially in advocacy on issues such as health. So there was a lot of diverse experience to draw from for the designs.

Tell us about the actual design.

Red desert sand, which comes from each of the regions represented in the story, covers the stage. Larger than life snake bones are strewn off to one side. Then 5 silver screens, described by a colleague as 'vulvamorphic', about 2.5 metres high, are erected around the stage. Onto these will be projected colour and black and white images of scenes from the communities, both of landscapes and of the women themselves.

You've worked in set design before?

Yes, the first work I did was for Stephen Page's *Alchemy*, by Bangarra Dance Company. And I will be working on his upcoming production for the Olympic Arts Festival in Sydney. The work is to be divided into 2 sections, one representing women, the other, men. My brief is to design the 4 sets for the women's dance. When working with Stephen, maybe the best way to describe my role is to say that I visualise his ideas in physical space. He knows what he wants, and gives me key clues, for example, "I want something to do with lily pads." From there, I can run with the idea. I have spent a lot of time watching Bangarra performances and know many of the dancers well—I've shared houses with some of them—and this intimacy gives me a good understanding of what is needed in a set from the perspective of the dancers themselves.

What was it like working with the communities from which you and Aku developed Ochre and Dust?

Working in desert country was at times quite confronting. I was struck by a sense of general malaise, especially among the youth, and young men in particular, who appear to have too much time on their hands. While this is also evident in my country around Hervey Bay, it seems more noticeable in the desert.

You have been involved in a variety of community-based projects, from working as



Nelli Petterson and Aku Kadogo

photo Heidrun Löhr

an artist-in-residence to executing public commissions in collaboration with local communities. Can you describe some of your experiences?

One of my earliest experiences of working in community arts was when I was employed as a silkscreen printer in Maningrida and Ramingining in Central Arnhem Land in the 1980s. I did workshops with the local women in drawing and printing. The most important part of working in this way is building up one-on-one relationships with people. You necessarily remain an outsider, as you are not related by blood, and you are not connected with that particular country. And imparting skills is only a fraction of what you do. Rather, what an artist working like this may provide is a creative outlet for members of that community at a particular point in time.

What about your involvement in public projects?

One of the greatest challenges about making public art is negotiating the project with local communities, and getting their backing. The first time a project I was involved in got stymied was in Townsville. The project was initiated by Townsville City Council as part of a broader initiative to 'beautify the shoreline.' The council invited 6 Queensland artists to submit designs, but mine was the only one which dealt with Indigenous issues. Now, Townsville is the subject of a contested Native Title claim, with 2 different landowner groups involved, and my proposal, which was for a soundscape featuring local flora and fauna, got completely entangled in that dispute and could not go ahead.

Some of my other public works include *The Lie of the Land* (1997), a collaboration with Chris Knowles, designed for the front of the Melbourne Town Hall for the occasion of the National Reconciliation Conference. (You may recall this was when John Howard refused to apologise to Indigenous Australians for the official treatment of the Stolen Generation.) The work comprised 7 sand-

stone pillars, on each of which are depicted flour, knives, blankets, beads, scissors, tomahawks, and looking glasses—the objects which John Batman attempted to trade with the local people in exchange for the 600,000 acres of land which now cover Melbourne.

In 1999 I made another public work, this time for the Queen Street Mall in Brisbane. It was based on South East Queensland Indigenous culture and, in particular, the use of plants in the area, including the Kauri pine and the Bunya nut. I stylised designs of these plants, and these were then sandblasted in granite and installed in the pavement of the mall. These sorts of commissions are more likely now with the 2% policy document introduced by the Queensland Labor Government, which requires 2% of the budget for new building developments to be devoted to an artistic component.

The public work is probably one of the 2 main strands of my practice now, the other being the set design, although I still do studio-based work for galleries. In fact this year I have 3 shows in Queensland in 6 months, at the Queensland Art Gallery, Bundaberg Arts Centre and Redback Gallery in Brisbane.

Place appears to be very important to your work.

Yes. My people are the Badtjala, from Fraser Island. I moved back to Hervey Bay a couple of years ago, from Sydney, so that I could be closer to my country. [Foley was born on the mainland in 1964 and lived with her parents at Hervey Bay, then Mt Isa, and later in Sydney, where she studied art and helped set up Boomalli Aboriginal Arts Cooperative in 1988—ed; source: Djon Mundine, in *Eye of the Storm*, catalogue, NGA, 1997]. My family has a Native Title claim on Fraser Island, in which I wanted to participate, although it's a very slow process. I have to travel outside my community for work, but I love the lifestyle. I have the freedom to go to the beach, for instance, and in general things are more relaxed. Everyday I wake up to a view of Fraser Island, from my

half acre where I live on my own. One of the reasons I so enjoy living here, is that here I am not put on a pedestal, that I am just ordinary Fiona, and not aware of the hype of the art world. I can live a normal life.

You have done a number of overseas residencies. How do these compare to working at home?

I recently did a 2 week workshop in Modinagar, an industrial town outside of Delhi which suffers from high unemployment and all the social problems associated with the departure of industries off-shore. I was invited along with 23 other artists from around the world to participate in KHOJ 1999, an annual event which aims to revitalise disadvantaged communities through art.

Here I constructed a huge geometric design on a concrete floor, comprising 36 kg of chillies and 18 kg of turmeric. I found working in a Third World country challenging in some respects, in that for example, I had to learn to be patient about accessing the materials I needed, but on the other hand, the level of intellectual discussion tended to be much more satisfying than it is in Australia.

My next overseas project is to be in Japan this year. I have been invited, as one of 140 international artists, to make a public artwork around the region of Niigata, another disadvantaged area which suffers from depopulation. The project involves working with the local community, and requires that the artwork be left for the community to use in the future. One artist is constructing a herb garden; another, a dream house and dream-book where the people of Niigata can record their dreams. My idea is to construct two boats which can be left on a pond for the public to use.

You have worked not only as an artist, but also as a curator, for example through your involvement with Boomalli and also at the MCA in its early days. Is that a role you still play?

I don't work as a curator any more. My goal as a curator was to take work to the Havana Biennale, and I achieved that. Similarly, with Boomalli, when we first set it up it had very different goals and aspirations to those it has today. One of the main things we set out to achieve was for our work, as Indigenous artists living in the city, to be seen as part of the mainstream of art-making, and we achieved that. I could have become more involved in curating and administration, but I prefer to be an artist.

Ochre & Dust, director Aku Kadogo, design Fiona Foley, photography Heidrun Löhr, Anangu-Pitjanjatjara story-tellers Nura Ward and Nelli Petterson, Art Gallery of South Australia Auditorium, March 3, 4, 6, 6.30pm, March 5, 2pm, Telstra Adelaide Festival 2000. Skin, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Olympic Arts Festival, Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House, September 19 - 30

Motel artists

Julia Postle

I'd never been to the Canberra City Motor Inn but had noticed it as I'd driven by—stark, dated, and yet always commanding my attention with its air of faded glamour.

The idea behind *Motel* was for 10 artists to take up 'residence' at the Motor Inn for a weekend. An emerging-artist initiative of the Australia Council the event was also supported by the Canberra Contemporary Art Space and the Canberra City Motor Inn who provided the 10 artists with a room to use as the focus of their creative endeavours.

It was all pretty other-worldly when I arrived to see a crowd of people milling in the courtyard, wandering from room to room and chatting on the first floor walkways, with a sausage sizzle going on next to the daggy little swimming pool. Obviously not a regular scene. *Motel* delved deep into the rich history, atmosphere and stories of this establishment—or at least those the artists conjured up for us.

And so we joined the crowd shuffling from room to room, raising the curiosities of those people actually staying at the Motor Inn who stood in the doorways, watching us warily.

And yes, it was a strange experience. Stepping into rooms faded and scarred by so many before us. In Waratah Lahy's Room 113 for instance, there are "traces of former occupants"—a dirty coffee cup, an open sugar sachet—creating a reality that is totally unreal, making us think about the resident of the room

who was never there in the first place.

We entered Juliana Wong's Room 114 and found a collection of beautiful shoes covering every surface and tied with little tags, each bearing a quotation in response to the question "What goes through your mind when you enter the room that has been paid for?" Cleanliness, ambience, whether there's a spa or not, any champagne, the feel of the bed—all common things on the respondents' wishlists and an effective way of involving us in the work.

Room 213 was the site for "Ted" David Nugent's depiction of a fictional resident suffering from antloomania—an obsession with floods. With every piece of the furniture raised, this quirky piece was right out of left field, and managed to strike a chord with most visitors.

Damien Veal took a seedier line—"A motel is a metaphor for the humble porno mag"—and ran with it. His *Good Heads* had Room 209 filled with kitschy framed portraits of individuals: mouths opened or pouting sexily (or maybe not) in ecstasy (or maybe anguish, who can tell).

Other *Motel* artists were Alison Munro, Ben



Damien Veal, *Good Heads Room 209*

Backhouse, Lionel Bawden, Hayley Hillis, Emma Jean and Fiona Sivyer—who all contributed engaging variations on a wonderful theme. *Motel* may not have had the spa bath or the champagne, but it had a sausage sizzle, and some stimulating art and that's all that mattered to this patron.

Motel, curated by Paul McInnes and David Sequeira, Canberra City Motor Inn, November 27 & 28 1999.

In RealTime #36

April-May

- Reports: Adelaide and Perth Festivals
- The Asian influence on Australian performance
- The body in Cronenberg's *Existenz*
- Hitchcock at the MCA and The Performance Space
- A new venue for the contemporary arts: Brisbane's Powerhouse
- Darren Tofts on experimental
- Nerve Shell's rooftop White Collar Project
- Revelation Film Festival, WA
- Anni Davey—the other Melbourne theatre

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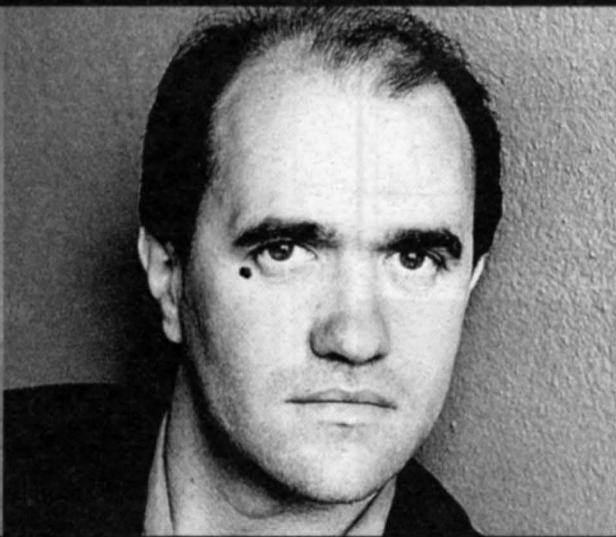
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