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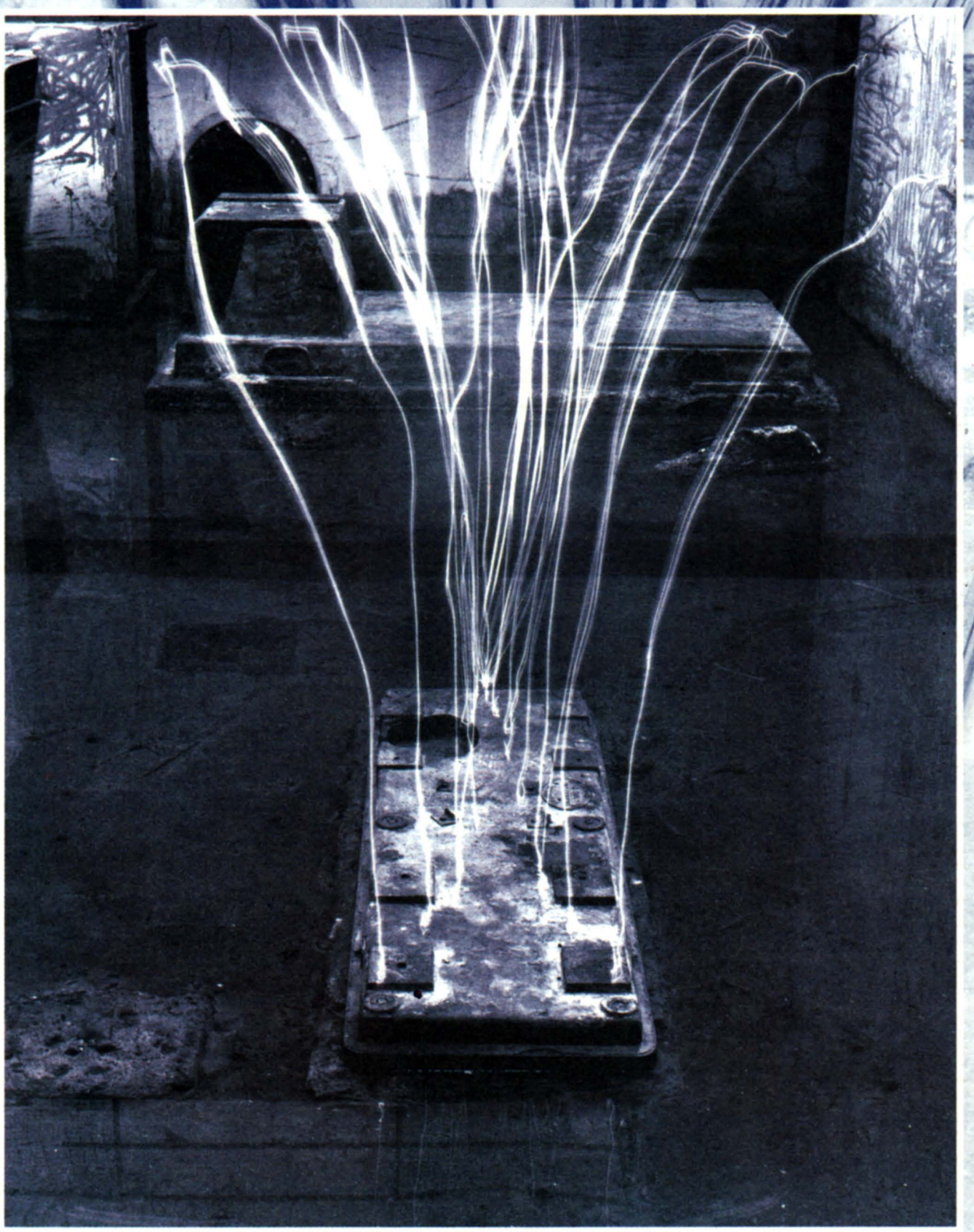
+ OnScreen



OnScreen

Catherine Breillat
Adrian Martin on the pre-Romance movies

Get Seen or Die
Clare Stewart analyses an Australian film crisis

Tropfest
Hypefest or the real thing asks Simon Enticknap

AOL-Time Warner
Ashley Crawford rounds up opinion on the consequences

Into the Future
Darren Tofts on the Experimenta quest

RT

Adelaide Festival excels 8 page feature liftout
John Rodgers Composer in the Inferno
Helen Herbertson The place where things slip
Festivals Next Wave, Mardi Gras, Perth
Suspense Hitchcock at The Performance Space

You need to know about GST!

The GST and changes to the current taxation system have serious ramifications for film industry practitioners. You cannot afford to bury your head in the sand and ignore these changes – they WILL affect you!

A series of FREE GST information seminars, tailored specifically for the film industry, will be conducted throughout Australia in April and May. The seminars will be presented by industry expert Jane Corden and tax specialist Maria Benardis from Moneypenny Services.

GST key dates

GST commences on 1 July. You need to apply for your Australian Business Number (ABN) by 31 May to be GST ready at 1 July.

Who should attend?

The seminars are vital for ALL practitioners across the industry, from producers, directors, writers and composers to technicians, actors and funding bodies.

Contacts

Web
http://www.afc.gov.au/resources/online/gst/
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Sydney (02) 9321 6444
Toll Free 1800 226 615
Melbourne (03) 9279 3400
Toll Free 1800 338 430

Registration for GST Seminars

Name

Organisation/Company

Email address

Phone Fax

Mobile

Address

Suburb State P/Code

Seminar Location

Seminars Selected
(insert seminar number)

Industry Sector

(for example, producer, technician, small business enterprise, sales agent. This information will be used for mail outs of FACT sheets over the next few months)

Complete the registration form and post it to:
GST Seminars, Australian Film Commission
GPO Box 3984, Sydney NSW 2001
or via fax: (02) 9357 3737

Seminar schedule and registration

● **HOBART: HOBART FUNCTION & CONFERENCE CENTRE, ELIZABETH STREET PIER, HOBART 7000**
1 **Wednesday, 5 April.** 9–12 midday. **GST Overview.** All.
2 **Wednesday, 5 April.** 1–2pm. **PAYG.** All.
3 **Wednesday, 5 April.** 2–4pm. **Compliance.** All.
5 **Thursday, 6 April.** 9–11am. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
4 **Thursday, 6 April.** 11–12pm, 1–3pm. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.

● **BRISBANE: COUNTRY COMFORT LENNONS HOTEL, 66-76 QUEEN STREET, BRISBANE 4000**
48 **Saturday, 8 April.** 9–10am. **GST Overview.** All.
49 **Saturday, 8 April.** 10–11am. **PAYG.** All.
50 **Saturday, 8 April.** 11–12midday. **Compliance.** All.
52 **Saturday, 8 April.** 1–3pm. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
51 **Saturday, 8 April.** 3–5pm. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.
43 **Wednesday, 10 May.** 9.30–12.30. **GST Overview.** All.
44 **Wednesday, 10 May.** 1.30–2.30. **PAYG.** All.
45 **Wednesday, 10 May.** 2.30–4.30. **Compliance.** All.
47 **Thursday, 11 May.** 9.30–12.30. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
46 **Thursday, 11 May.** 1.30–3.30. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.

● **DARWIN: MGM GRAND, GILRUTH AVENUE, THE GARDENS, DARWIN 0800**
6 **Wednesday, 12 April.** 9am–12 midday. **GST Overview.** All.
7 **Wednesday, 12 April.** 1–2pm. **PAYG.** All.
8 **Wednesday, 12 April.** 2–4pm. **Compliance.** All.
10 **Thursday, 13 April.** 9–11am. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
9 **Thursday, 13 April.** 11–12pm, 1–3pm. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.

● **CAIRNS: CAIRNS CITY COUNCIL, SPENCE STREET, CAIRNS 4870**
11 **Wednesday, 19 April.** 9am–12 midday. **GST Overview.** All.
12 **Wednesday, 19 April.** 1–2pm. **PAYG.** All.
13 **Wednesday, 19 April.** 2–4pm. **Compliance.** All.
15 **Thursday, 20 April.** 9–11am. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
14 **Thursday, 20 April.** 11–12pm, 1–3pm. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.

● **PERTH: FTI, 92 ADELAIDE STREET, FREMANTLE 6160**
16 **Wednesday, 26 April.** 8.30–11.30am. **GST Overview.** All.
17 **Wednesday, 26 April.** 11.30–12.30pm. **PAYG.** All.
18 **Wednesday, 26 April.** 1.30–3.30pm. **Compliance.** All.
20 **Thursday, 27 April.** 8.30–10.30am. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
19 **Thursday, 27 April.** 10.30–12, 1.00–2.30pm. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.

● **ADELAIDE: MERCURY THEATRE, 13 MORPHETT STREET, ADELAIDE 5000**
21 **Saturday, 29 April.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** All.
22 **Saturday, 29 April.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** All.
23 **Saturday, 29 April.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** All.
25 **Sunday, 30 April.** 9.30–11.30am. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
24 **Sunday, 30 April.** 11.30–12.30, 1.30–3.30pm. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.

● **SYDNEY: THE MASONIC CENTRE, corner of GOULBURN & CASTLEREAGH STREETS, SYDNEY 2000**
81 **Monday, 1 May.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** Technicians, Sole Traders, Small–Medium Business Enterprises.
82 **Monday, 1 May.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** Technicians, Sole Traders, Small–Medium Business Enterprises.
83 **Monday, 1 May.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** Technicians, Sole Traders, Small–Medium Business Enterprises.
34 **Tuesday, 2 May.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** Writers, Directors, Composers.
35 **Tuesday, 2 May.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** Writers, Directors, Composers.
36 **Tuesday, 2 May.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** Writers, Directors, Composers.
26 **Wednesday, 3 May.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** Producers, Production Managers, Production Accountants.
27 **Wednesday, 3 May.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** Producers, Production Managers, Production Accountants.
28 **Wednesday, 3 May.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** Producers, Production Managers, Production Accountants.
30 **Thursday, 4 May.** 9.30–11.30am. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
29 **Thursday, 4 May.** 11.30–12.30, 1.30–3.30pm. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.
37 **Friday, 5 May.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** Actors.
38 **Friday, 5 May.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** Actors.
39 **Friday, 5 May.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** Actors.
40 **Saturday, 6 May.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** All.
41 **Saturday, 6 May.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** All.
42 **Saturday, 6 May.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** All.
59 **Saturday, 20 May.** 9.30–11.30am. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
58 **Saturday, 20 May.** 11.30–12.30, 1.30–3.30. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.

● **BYRON BAY: BYRON BAY BEACH CLUB, BAYSHORE DRIVE, BYRON BAY 2481**
53 **Wednesday, 17 May.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** All.
54 **Wednesday, 17 May.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** All.
55 **Wednesday, 17 May.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** All.
57 **Thursday, 18 May.** 9.30–11.30am. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
56 **Thursday, 18 May.** 11.30–12.30, 1.30–3.30. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.

● **MELBOURNE: RMIT, STOREY HALL, BUILDING 16, 342 SWANSON STREET, MELBOURNE 3000**
85 **Monday, 22 May.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** Technicians, Sole Traders, Small–Medium Business Enterprises.
86 **Monday, 22 May.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** Technicians, Sole Traders, Small–Medium Business Enterprises.
87 **Monday, 22 May.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** Technicians, Sole Traders, Small–Medium Business Enterprises.
68 **Tuesday, 23 May.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** Writers, Directors, Composers.
69 **Tuesday, 23 May.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** Writers, Directors, Composers.
70 **Tuesday, 23 May.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** Writers, Directors, Composers.
60 **Wednesday, 24 May.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** Producer, Production Manager, Production Accountant.
61 **Wednesday, 24 May.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** Producer, Production Manager, Production Accountant.
62 **Wednesday, 24 May.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** Producer, Production Manager, Production Accountant.
64 **Thursday, 25 May.** 9.30–11.30am. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
63 **Thursday, 25 May.** 11.30–12.30, 1.30–3.30. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.
71 **Friday, 26 May.** 9.30–12.30pm. **GST Overview.** Actors.
72 **Friday, 26 May.** 1.30–2.30pm. **PAYG.** Actors.
73 **Friday, 26 May.** 2.30–4.30pm. **Compliance.** Actors.
74 **Saturday, 27 May.** 9–10am. **GST Overview.** All.
75 **Saturday, 27 May.** 10–11am. **PAYG.** All.
76 **Saturday, 27 May.** 11–12midday. **Compliance.** All.
78 **Saturday, 27 May.** 1–3pm. **Contracting.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies, Lawyers.
77 **Saturday, 27 May.** 3–5pm. **Production.** Prod, Prod. Managers, Prod. Accountants, Funding Bodies.

AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION
REPRESENTING & SUPPORTING THE SCREEN INDUSTRY

GST Start-Up Assistance Office

The GST Startup Office has provided funding to the AFC to deliver the major information program to the film industry about the GST.

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Editorial

Hairdressing Series November - December 1999 photo Roslyn Sharp

This is the short back and sides editorial. Well, it's short. After an exhilarating Adelaide festival (see pages 19-26) we hit the ground running, straight into hosting and performing in *Performing Hitch* for the Performance Space (see page 38) and then onto *RealTime*#36 which, miraculously, you see before you. So there's been no time to sum up, to look at the big arts picture. Instead we give you a photograph. A few months back we were excited to see exhibited in the salon of a well-known Darlinghurst hairdresser, a string of photos (stylishly pegged on 2 wires across the wall) taken by Australian Roslyn Sharp in US hairdressing salons. There's another featured with the Junk column on page 32. Enough said as we extricate ourself from an intensive festival season and lean back in the barber's chair. But before we rest up, congratulations to **Zane Trow** and his team and to the Brisbane City Council for their magnificent investment in the **Brisbane Powerhouse Live Arts Centre**. At last we have a purpose-designed centre for performance and related innovations in the arts, recognition not only of the significant work long evolving in Brisbane but also around the country. And congratulations too to **Robyn Archer** for 2 inspiring Adelaide Festivals that will stay with us for years to come and which have set new levels of expectation for the involvement of Australian artists in our international arts festivals. It's high time the festivals of Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth followed suit. KG & VB

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Cover Image: Marian Drew—from photographs of the Brisbane Powerhouse before construction of the Centre for Live Arts began. "The response to a chosen site and introduced objects is recorded through long exposures with varied light sources." Exhibition, Brisbane Powerhouse, May 6 - June 20.

Zane Trow lights up Brisbane's Powerhouse

Keith Gallasch

Let's talk about your vision as Artistic Director of the Powerhouse in terms of the building and then your program.

When I arrived here almost a year ago what I inherited was massive feasibility reports which had been generated by Brisbane City Council and a consultative consortium called Positive Solutions. The kind of information that had been gathered from the arts industry locally here in Brisbane, nationally and, in some cases internationally, identified the need for a medium scale contemporary venue that focussed very much on contemporary culture and performance. That was heartening. The second thing was to realise that Brisbane City Council, whose project the renovation of the building is, had listened and taken that on board. Some of the driving forces in the Council, people who have been driving the renovation of this building, have been involved in community theatre, community arts and in Pauline Peel's case, physical theatre and circus in Brisbane, for a very long time. They maintained the rage if you know what I mean...

So there's a real passion there?.

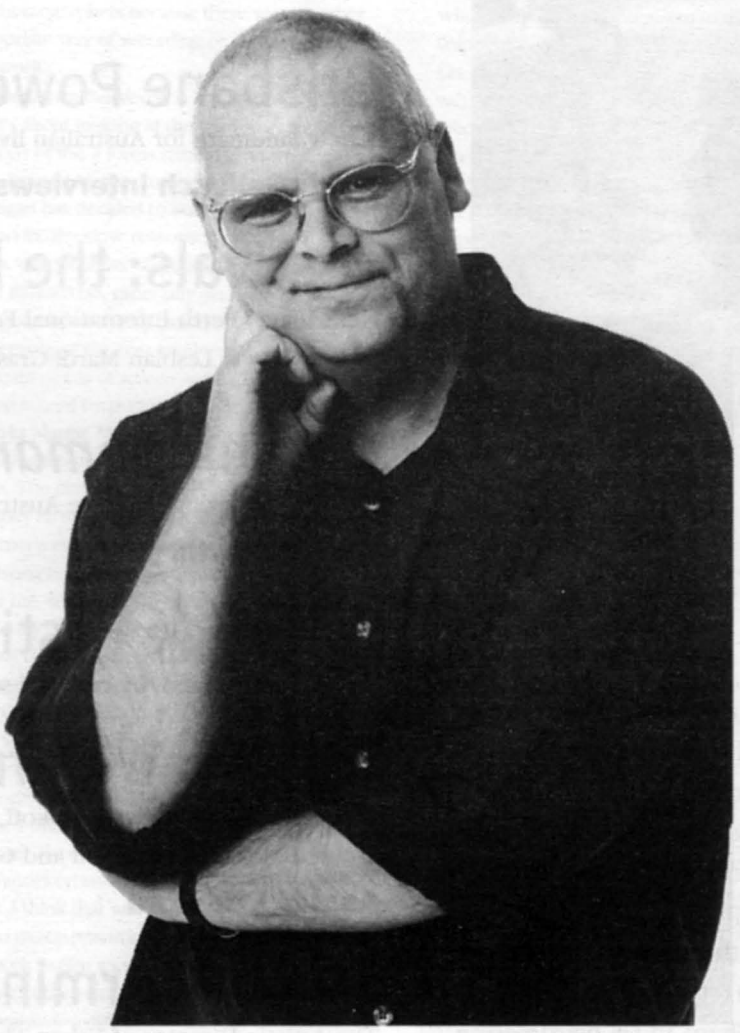
Yes. Pauline is a senior bureaucrat now but she's been working away in Brisbane for many years. She was a founder of Street Arts which led to Rock'n'Roll Circus and Arterial, an interesting multimedia group. What I was able to do was to take those hints in the feasibility study and consolidate them around a developing artistic program that would influence—re-influence if you like—the design of the building. The other great asset, then Project Manager for Council and now General Manager of the Powerhouse, is Chris Bowen, who's also been working in multicultural arts in Brisbane for a long time. Chris made the strategic decision to move out of the council offices and base the operations of the Powerhouse on the building site. So we've actually been sharing our office with the architects. It's allowed us to have a very close dialogue about the nature of the work that will be performed in the theatre and that has allowed the design to be influenced in a positive way.

So these are very practical things to do with space and flexibility?

Exactly. Things like rigging lights, infrastructure for projections, data cabling, just simply where the loading docks should most usefully be. Really basic stuff, combined with an understanding that what we're dealing with here is a contemporary performance space and not a theatre. What we've ended up with, as the main space in the building takes on its character, is a space that's not unlike the Merlyn at the Malthouse in feel but larger and more flexible. So this building has retained a lot of its industrial character. There's no carpet and chrome. We've retained the graffiti inside the building that's accumulated over years of misuse. If something is being built out of concrete, we've left it as concrete. So it has a real 'found' aesthetic which the architect Peter Roy talks about a lot. What we've done is build steel structures within it which facilitate the 3 main performance spaces in the main building—a 400-seater, a 200-seater and an open atrium performance space.

So this is a great opportunity to do something which is rarely done in Australia, to establish a performance space from scratch as opposed to a theatre space.

Yes. And I think the program we've just launched as well hints at that direction. It says that our focus is the body, not the word...in a sense. There are plenty of arts centres all over Australia that focus on the well-made play, the opera and the ballet. We are not a great icon of culture like the Adelaide Festival Centre or the Queensland Performing Arts Trust. We're not as big. We're medium scale. We're dedicated to new work. That led me to defining what we do as live arts, appropriating that term from its use in Europe and defining that as being a very broad church of performance. In the current program, the local second tier theatre company La Bôite and later in the year Expressions Dance Company are probably as close to mainstream as we go. That's where we start and we move to the left from there. And there are other events in the program like *l'attitude 27.5°* which we'll do every year. It acknowledges events like *Antistatic* (Sydney) and *Dancers are Space Eaters* (Perth). It's within that kind of parameter, an event for independent dancers, for new work each year (see *Bonemap* p35).



Zane Trow photo: Stefan Jannides

The diversity of Brisbane's contemporary culture is spreading across the city. There's a chance in Brisbane for some considered audience development for contemporary work. What we're discovering, having just launched the program and having spent some time thinking about marketing strategies, is that there's an audience here that really want to see this stuff. It's not a subscriber base. It's a different kind of audience. It's younger. There's an audience here who are staying in Brisbane that 10 years ago might have left. And there's a whole range of arts workers coming back to Brisbane.

And you're giving the work a focus, giving it a home.

We're certainly giving a number of things a focus that have existed within the cultural fabric of Brisbane. The Powerhouse and, in 18 months or so, the Empire Building with which the IMA, Rock'n'Roll Circus and Elision are involved, are happening at the right moment. One development has been a physical theatre culture. The other is the vibrant history of community theatre. And the other is emerging technologies.

And how are you handling that at the Powerhouse?

Three ways—initially in collaboration with Multimedia Australia Asia Pacific who are moving their offices to our centre. We see that as an opportunity to work with MAAP closely in terms of introducing a performance aesthetic into the event over a 3-5 year period.

The second area will be strong and developing links with Queensland University of Technology, with their Academy of the Arts. We are working closely with them to look at research and development projects in performance technologies primarily through residencies where we'd be inviting local, national and international artists into a partnership between the Powerhouse as a public presenter and developer of work and the Academy as a research site. We think in the second year in 2001 we can begin a process that would involve 2 residencies a year with one specifically in new media and another one in dance and/or music.

The Brisbane City Council is incredibly supportive of community access to technology and is driving that harder than other local governments I've come across. And we have a state government that keeps talking about innovation, innovation, innovation. Within this is a nexus of research and development and project funding that can assist us. I'm also looking at international sources of funding and partnerships. One that's fruitful at the moment is our relationship with *New Moves: New Territories* with Nikki Millican in Glasgow. We're hoping to develop an exchange program with her not only in dance but also in live arts.

Again through the Brisbane City Council, we'll be working closely with one of our cultural tenants here, Access Arts, in thinking about technological arts and people with disability. We think we can develop a range of projects that speak directly to various disadvantaged groups through that partnership. And again, we would probably use a residency style program to do it. ANAT's event is a good example—for *Alchemy* (May-June) they'll be bringing out Mongrel from the UK. While working here at the Powerhouse, Mongrel will go out into the Aboriginal community through the DÄR Festival which is run by Brisbane City Council's Aboriginal Arts officers. They'll be running workshops in everything from web design to game design to performance with the Murri community here. That sets up a model as to what kind of artists you might invite in. They'd probably be artists a little more left field than normal and you'd be inviting artists in who had an interest both in research and development in performance as well as in political activism and community arts development.

There's a national dimension to your program with the inclusion of William Yang's Blood Links ***and Donna Jackson's*** Car Maintenance, Explosives & Love.

We're discovering that what we offer in the large performance space at the Powerhouse is a venue that hasn't existed in Brisbane before. This flexible medium-scale venue means that a range of performance companies that haven't performed in Brisbane for many years—and some never—now not only have a space that suits their work but also a partner in terms of marketing and aesthetically representing their work.

Quite clearly you want an audience and you're going to get them in by multiple means.

In the first 3 years we have to establish an audience that likes us and wants to come more than once, an audience that thinks about the Brisbane Powerhouse as another option. We're in the New Farm area which is constantly developing around us—it's not quite West End yet in terms of Brisbane culture—but it's getting there. That's the beauty of this atrium performance space which is right next to the bar. We can do a range of stuff with djs, music and keep the bar open late. If you're in Brisbane, you might think about going to the Powerhouse at 10.00 at night as much as you might think of going there at 7.30. That's important that we create this experience and identity in the city.

The irony of all this is, of course, that this is the building and the resource that The Performance Space in Sydney needs. What has amazed me here is the will, particularly of this local government, to do it and to spend the money. In terms of its artists and its relationship with PICA and other contemporary performance spaces across the country, The Performance Space is very important to us here. We're already talking about ways and means of getting a range of Sydney performance people into Brisbane. There's a role for us in cultural and political terms to prove we can get the audience, that we can operate at this level, that you can have an arts centre in Australia, similar in scale to the Malthouse or the Wharf, but which is dedicated to this kind of work. That's the challenge.

For the complete interview visit
www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

Brisbane Powerhouse opening weekend celebrations are on May 6 & 7, 119 Lamington Street, New Farm. tel 07 3254 4518
www.brisbanepowerhouse.org

Next Wave is ready-to-roll

Keith Gallasch

Next Wave is in pre-launch mode. The 2000 festival is to be announced in April for a May season. Artistic Director Campion Decent talks about the kind of program he has created and how.

What drives your festival?

We're dealing with an organisation that's been around since 1985 when it started as a young people's festival. It's been forced over the years to broaden its focus to embrace contemporary art-making and the whole notion of the young and the emerging artist—these aren't always the same. It's about distilling what we want the organisation to be about, to acknowledge the changing landscape and to just re-focus slightly, not revolutionise. One of the things we want to do is make sure we're capturing a new generation of art-makers and that we're not, to put it bluntly, running the risk of growing old as an organisation. So we've gone on a bit of a hunt in the last 18 months to make sure that we have quite a few unfamiliar names.

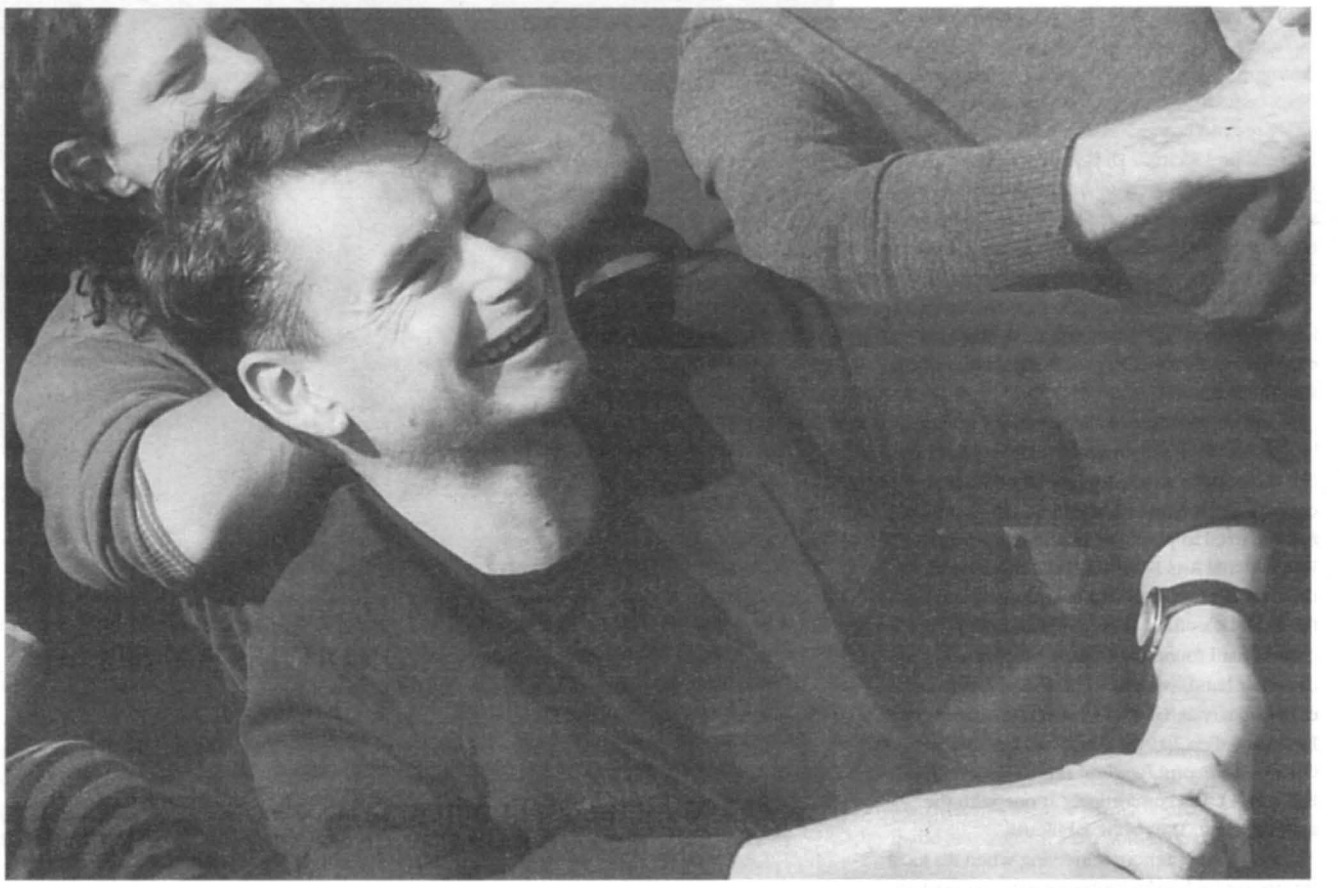
Do you have an advisory panel to help you with this detective work?

I'm a firm believer that the very hierarchical model of artistic director on top of a triangular structure choosing every piece of work is not the right way to go any more, particularly when you're working with something as complex and various as youth culture—which is not just one thing. You need to plug into a network of people and what we set up was a curatorial advisory committee from within Victoria but outside of the organisation. It includes Angharad Wynne Jones from Chunky Move, David Chisholm who runs big party events in Melbourne, Timothy O'Dwyer who is a musician, Kate Daw (in the past visual arts coordinator and international events programmer for Next Wave) and Craig Garrett, an editor at *Voiceworks*. It's been a fantastic experience working with strongly opinionated people. Our initial work was then handed over to staff coordinators in visual arts, text, performance and digital media, an area we're focusing on.

How extensively?

There are 2 ways we've come at it. One is the creation of digital works. We're showing these in a gallery context, but we're also trying to get them out of the gallery onto the big TV screen in the city on the corner of Swanston and Bourke Streets. We'll also be putting a lot of this work on our redeveloped website. The other way we're working is to enter a partnership that will put the festival on the web, like a net radio station, and that will be updated daily.

Focusing on good sound rather than the difficulty of conveying images online?



Campion Decent photo Angela Bailey

That's right. It's an exciting partnership with RMIT and its radio students, and is run in conjunction with the ABC-Cinemedia Multi-Media Production Accord. This will take some of the work and the artists to a much larger audience in Victoria and nationally.

What's the focus of your live performance program?

There's a wide range of formal styles, many with a decentering of the text. There's still a lot of text-based work in Melbourne and a couple of these have been included in the festival—others we felt lacked vigour. So there's circus-based, physical-based works and also Nikki Heywood's *Burn Sonata*. In the case of *Burn Sonata*, we're placing the work of more experienced artists next to less experienced, but that's one of the roles of Next Wave, to provide a context and models for artists wanting to work in similar ways.

What's the range of participation in Next Wave?

We're trying to broaden it out to include young people who are not solely from an artistic background, that is they do not define themselves as young arts workers. A project that's active in Victoria is Anglicare Victoria's *Tess*, for young women who are homeless. Anglicare want their young women to have access to an arts festival and to participate in it: "Can you include us where we can tell our story?" There'll be a performed element based on workshops. We helped them put their grant application together to the Australia Council, which was successful.

From the Northern Territory we have *Ending Offending—Our Message* which predominantly involves Indigenous offenders making largely web-based art work. We're bringing the project to Melbourne with the permission of the NT Correctional Services. The artists are creating new works for Next Wave and with each there'll be an artist's statement. For our participants and audiences this is an important work about art and context. There's about half a dozen of these kinds of work like *Tess* and *Ending Offending—Our Message* in Next Wave—every program coordinator has something like that in their area.

Is there an active centre to Next Wave?

The Lounge in Swanston Street will be the site of the festival club. It's easily accessible by public transport. In Lower Town Hall there will be a sound and text program. There's a major partnership with the Victorian Arts Centre, including use of the Black Box—the former Performing Arts Museum. And there'll be activity radiating out from the city through the remarkable network of Melbourne galleries. There's a small regional program but we can reach more people through the net.

What's the strength of Next Wave from your point of view?

Because we're not focused on a single art form or on community arts alone we have an opportunity to throw works together and out of that create a real dialogue.

Perth Festival: the trouble with angels

Sarah Miller

The Perth International Arts Festival, 2000: a new director, a new name, a new club, new dates and new themes.

The Peony Pavilion photo Stephanie Berger

For 2000 the theme was water and so it proved as the average rainfall for January multiplied itself 20 times on the opening weekend of the festival dumping 180 mm of rain on the outdoor Philip Glass concerts. New director, Sean Doran, was wryly resigned and jokes about a hotline to the heavens proliferated. These too turned out to be surprisingly apt, given an abundance of angels and the emergence, artwise, of what is sometimes described as the new spirituality. A millennial shift? Rather than art as an essential palliative for the failure of religious ideology, we seem to have art recreating various spiritually inspired experiences for the alienated communities of the third millennium.

And on the topic of alienation, it's no fun being part of a small group of people who don't like the popular successes (not all of them of course). Still it happens often enough for me to feel the need to point out that in this Perth International Arts Festival (PIAF), there were those works that were either extremely successful at the box-office or very successful with the critics, that I found particularly problematic. On the other hand, when it came to Les Arts Sauts' extraordinary aerial circus ballet, *Kayassine* (The Esplanade, Feb 2-19), or the fabulous Chinese Opera, *The Peony Pavilion* (Perth Concert Hall, Feb 4-13), I was comfortingly at one with the majority view. They were fabulous!

Still, it's even more unnerving when it's local theatre you're having problems with, particularly when it achieves good support from the community, when it is created with the best of intentions and when you know just how difficult the conditions for production are in this country—particularly when juxtaposed against the infinitely more expensive, more highly resourced spectaculars that have had the benefit of extensive rehearsals, extended touring and a rigorous working over in an international context. And of course, it *may* be the clunky, relatively naive but also culturally and/or politically ambitious works that are the ones that in the end push us out of our respective comfort zones and take us somewhere else. Something is struggling to emerge and nowhere is this more obvious than in the area of locally produced theatre.

Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre's *Solid* (Subiaco Theatre, Feb 1-19), created by Black N'2 Productions, is utterly grounded in the experience of engaging with different Aboriginal cultures and seeks to challenge the idea that for most non-indigenous Australians, all blackfellas are the same. Ningali Lawford, Kelton Pell and Phil Thomson are the creative team behind this production which seeks to create an authentic voice and to make theatre in "a proper blackfella way." At this point in *Solid*'s development, they have yet to create a consistently potent theatrical experience and ironically this is largely because *Solid* rarely manages to escape the confines of a fairly conventional TIE style of play. I hope *Solid* is given the opportunity to more rigorously pursue a distinctive theatrical form but that probably necessitates getting rid of some of the hand-me-down theatrical ideas and taking a few more risks both formally and conceptually.

Deckchair Theatre's *Jimmy & Pat Meet the Queen* (Victoria Hall, Feb 10-19) is adapted from the book of the same name written by Pat Lowe and illustrated by Jimmy Pike. Adapted for the stage by Mary Morris and with beautiful painted sets by Jimmy Pike, this is a fantastic idea that takes the concept of crown land and imagines the Queen of England confronted with the traditional owners in their own country. What would happen should the Queen of England go camping with Jimmy and his wife? What about the corgis? Throw in a brash young goanna and a crusty old bush dog and the stage is set for a wonderfully satirical exploration of some of the ridiculous contradictions that hold this country of ours in a strange thrall. Whilst all the elements are there, the work never quite gels, relying a little too heavily on burlesque, although the puppets (usually anathema to me) are great.

How do you know that Adam & Eve is a whitefella story—not a blackfella story?

'cause Eve would've eaten the snake not the apple!

I just wish I'd heard that joke (a Kunwinku one from Western Arnhem land) before I went to see Black Swan Theatre's *Plainsong* (University WA, Feb 2-19). *Plainsong*, subtitled Mysteries and Miracles for the Millennium, described by writer David Britton as "a contemporary theatre event which builds on and incorporates some of the Mystery plays (Christian ritual dramas) presented in Europe from the 13th to 16th centuries." Originally performed in monasteries and later town squares, in *Plainsong* this transmogrifies into a promenade through the beautiful grounds and well endowed buildings of the University of Western Australia, whilst the Mystery plays themselves are translated into various forms of vernacular theatre, from vaudeville to cabaret—a biblical pastiche.

Plainsong begins with God's creation of the world, in which God bears a strong resemblance to a survivor from a Bachelors & Spinsters Ball and concludes with the 'Final Reckoning'—a foregone conclusion apparently. In the Garden of Eden, Adam is performed by young Indigenous actor Trevor Jamieson and Eve by Fiona Choi, putting a whole new spin on their expulsion from paradise—I always knew it was *their* fault. The audience is whipped through select stories from Genesis and around the campus at a relentless pace, ending up in the New Testament after interval. I'm sure I don't need to run you through the story from the Immaculate Conception (on a trapeze), to the Crucifixion and the Resurrection—unless of course you didn't have the benefit of a Christian upbringing—in which case you'll go to hell anyway; hence the importance of missionaries in the evangelical scheme of things.

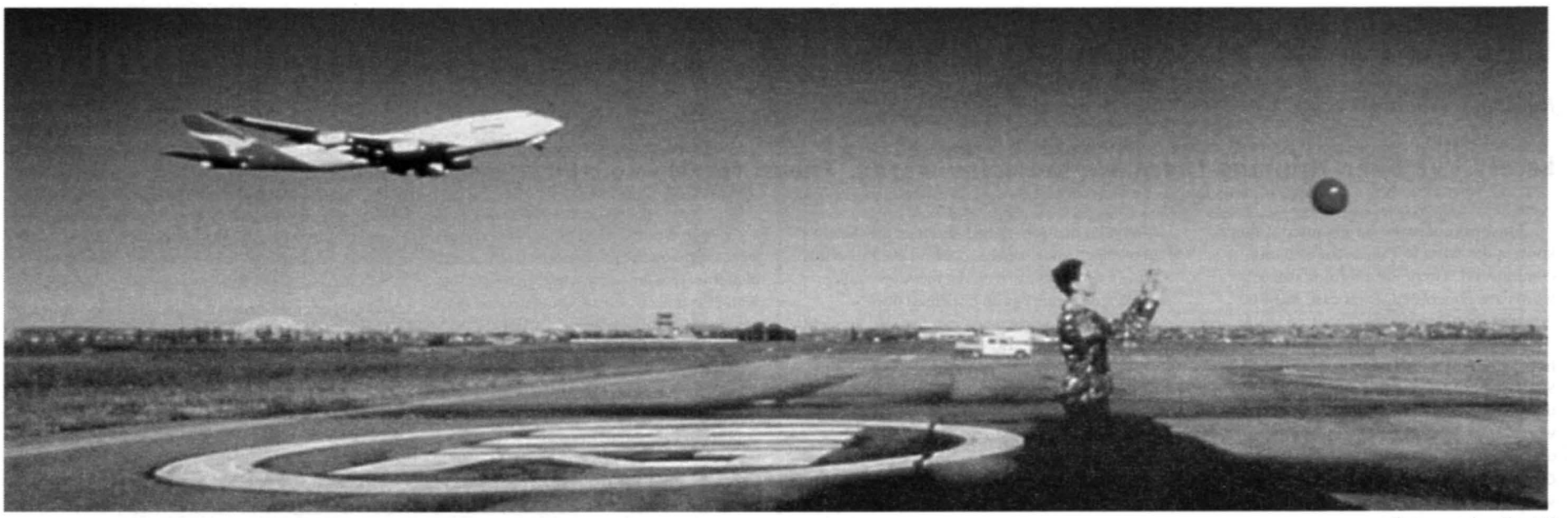
In fact if *Plainsong* reminded me of anything, it was those proselytising missionaries, with their simplistic bible stories and moral parables, striving—as Barbara Kingsolver (*The Poisonwood Bible*) describes it—"to have dominion over the whole of the earth." Yet nowhere in this production is the hugely complex and often catastrophic relationship between Christianity and its forcibly colonised congregations so much as suggested. Audiences were huge for *Plainsong*—it was an undisputed box-office success.

This ahistorical, apolitical and nostalgic approach perhaps explains why I also had problems with *The Angel Project*—definitely a critical if not precisely popular success. *The Angel Project* (Jan 27-Feb18), first created in a single high rise office block in London, was recreated by British theatre director Deborah Warner, using 13 sites in Perth, which is a little short on highrise. Audience members undertook a solitary walk along St Georges Terrace, the dead heart of Perth's CBD, in order to experience their own epiphanies, to find their own angels.

There's been a lot of work that has sought to reconnect audiences to site and location through research and careful attention to the often previously unarticulated histories of various locales. *The Angel Project* was not, however, one of these. It preferred to suggest that paradise and consequently angels are both universal and ubiquitous—even in this most unlikely of corporate situs. This seems a bizarrely adolescent fantasy, however much it relied on Milton's *Paradise Lost* for inspiration. Much more problematic, however, was the glossing over of local histories. What am I supposed to make of the top floor of Bank West—beyond the fabulous and panoramic view—when on the one hand its perimeter is occupied by office chairs, each with its own Gideon bible, whilst on the other, the office kitchenette is occupied by a dead or sleeping angel as the tap is left to run—and this in a particularly water poor environment. Is it yuppie heaven I'm supposed to have achieved upon discovering an angel in the bathtub and another in the closet of a show apartment in the Kingsgate Building? And what am I supposed to make of the fact that most of the angels were black and of course beautiful although not Aboriginal?

Perhaps that explains why I loved the celebrated and controversial *The Peony Pavilion* so much. Although I was (unfortunately) only able to attend 3 out of the 6 episodes, its cultural specificity and astonishing vitality, not to mention the extraordinary performances by both actors and musicians, made this an outstanding theatrical event on a multiplicity of levels. Performed at the Perth Concert Hall, the production included a moat complete with quacking ducks, koi carp and water lilies, singing canaries, extraordinary sets and an onstage Chinese pavilion, built by 12 master carpenters, using the woodcarving and joinery techniques of classical Chinese architecture. And the costumes! Brilliantly beautiful and painstakingly hand-embroidered, made by more than 400 elderly women from the villages surrounding Suzhou, a city famous for its embroidery.

Written by Tang Xianzu (1550-1616), renowned as a brilliant intellectual, outstanding thinker and literary critic, this contemporary incarnation of *The Peony Pavilion* (conceived and directed by Chen Shi Zheng) is impossible to briefly summarise. It traces the fantastical and satirical story of the love of Beautiful Du for a handsome and brilliant young scholar: "Dreaming of a lover, she fell sick and once sick, she became ever worse; and finally after painting her own portrait as a legacy to the world, she died. Dead for 3 years, still she was able to live again when in the dark underworld her quest for the object of her dream was fulfilled" (Tang Xianzu from the 1958 preface to *The Peony Pavilion*). The subtitling was brilliant; it never felt reductive and managed to convey a delicacy of language, a sophisticated poetic, as effectively as the very funny albeit very silly sexual puns and burlesque happenings. As dream plays go (Tang Xianzu wrote 4 great legends that share the theme of dreams), you can forget Strindberg's northern European miseries, however beautifully visualised by Robert Wilson. *The Peony Pavilion* is one dream play you would want to experience!



Rosemary Laing, *Airport #2*

Perth Festival: breaking surfaces

Bec Dean

Swathed in a cocoon of sweat after negotiating scant patches of shade in near 40-degree heat, I arrive at each of my widely dispersed destinations feeling the funk, as only sticky, white migrant Australians can.

From this state, I am ideally placed: vulnerable, small, abject, to be directed from darkness to light, to be led to precipices, bombarded with sound and, gradually drawn through the delicate machinations of each carefully constructed image.

Shuffling through the woody odours and subdued natural light of St George's Cathedral, I move towards the pulpit as *The Messenger*, to the right of various ornamented vestiges, rises to a watery surface, and draws an elongated breath. A man descends into inky blue water, his image shrinks, refracts whilst the sounds of his ascent, his breath, resonate within the body of the church. The work is replete with symbolic intentions, from emulating the body of Christ, to describing eastern religious and scientific notions of the expansion and contraction of the universe. In this Cathedral, projected alongside the gilded commemorative plaques of fallen soldiers, *The Messenger* gathers yet another meaning; Bill Viola is an artist cognisant of the effects of structure, of architecture upon religiosity throughout history. The work achieves an almost sermonic position, installed entirely unencumbered by the sounds or visual interference of other contemporary practices. Visitors sit in the pews and watch quietly.

Through muffled sound and darkness this time to *The Interval* installed at the John Curtin Gallery. A work once-removed from the white cube, a room within a room where the dichotomy of chaos and order is played out between 2 opposing figures. A third figure, the viewer, processes the shift between these 2 as the images cut from one to the other at a gradual, exponential rate. A naked man who washes himself calmly in a bathroom projected on one side of the cube is larger than life. It is impossible to view his entire image, the bathroom and then the torrents of fire and water that beleaguer the frantic figure facing him.

As my eyes dart from screen to screen, others squat in corners of the room as the video and its sharply cut intervals and sound force them back from any attempt at a dominant viewing perspective. There is no place for voyeurs here, you will be moved. Viola's paring-back of visual clutter leaves only the figure and the bare bones of pictorial convention, symmetry and Renaissance perspective. With these we are familiar, and the construction or manipulation of environments through which his works are viewed can force the body into feeling. Physicality succumbs to the movement of the eyes, and to the senses.

A twinge of nausea as I move towards a still, luscious panoramic perspective of the interior of an aircraft. The image fills the peripheries of my vision, and my body momentarily captured in the moment, baulks at the dislocation. Rosemary Laing's digital photographs cover the walls of the entire ground floor of PICA. *Aero-zone,* the culmination of 3 bodies of work, depicts visual extremes of height, breadth, expanse and the ultimate technologies of traversing space in time. An overwhelming sense of smallness in the face of nature and technology is almost impossible to shake as these representations draw the viewer into their realm.

Laing, who stops airport traffic to choreograph her photographs, uses the figure as a playful foil against her awesome landscapes and technological interiors. Part of the Greenwork series, *Airport 2* shows a female figure throwing a red ball into the air as a demonstration of simple physics, juxtaposed against the powerful force of a jumbo jet's aerodynamics and mechanical engineering as it takes off nearby. In the *Spin* series a bride hovers in mid-air above the vista of a mountainous horizon, trampolining on a precipice with all the frivolity her costume allows. The video component of *Spin* takes the formal, interior perspectives of Brownwork to the sky as a camera clipped to the wing of a stunt plane captures a revolving forest, wispy clouds and the disappearing horizon.

Weary now and discomfort settles in the humidity and darkness of PICA's West End gallery as *Skinned*, two large scale videos by Michelle Theunissen, play on a continuous loop. The disembodied, opalescent lips of a narrator speak about a point of awakening from a world of apartheid and the social niceties of segregation, like racism over tea and biscuits. Theunissen's memoirs are coloured by the dramatic language of pulp fiction through an increasingly grotesque, painted mouth. A close-up of the lumbering skin of an elephant plays and repeats alongside, like the persistence of memory. After the acuity and precision of the work of Viola and Laing, and their command of visual and physical responses to their work, I force myself to sit through *Skinned*, its position and its politics unclear, shifting. At one point the narrator slips up and cuts to another take, "hold me in your arms, big, black mama", as if she can hardly bring herself to say the words. Meanwhile my body screams for me to leave and eventually I do.

Beneath The Surface: The Video of Bill Viola, *a co-presentation by Perth International Arts Festival and John Curtin Gallery:* The Messenger, *St George's Cathedral, Jan 24 - Feb 19;* Interval and other works, *John Curtin Gallery, Feb 4 - March 29.* Aero-zone, *Rosemary Laing, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Jan 27 - Feb 27;* Skinned, *Michelle Theunissen, PICA, Jan 27 - Feb 27*

Bec Dean works in video, installation and performance at jacksue Gallery and studios and is an arts writer for Mu *magazine and other publications.*

Perth Festival: a thing or two about words

Josephine Wilson

Lately I've been thinking there are too many words. Then I think—no, there are not enough.

I just cannot make up my mind. I don't know quite what to think. The situation is complicated. There are no rules where words are concerned. Each case must be assessed on its merit.

Take the following events in the Perth International Arts Festival 2000. In Ralf Ralf's *The Summit* there are very few words but a lot of things are said. Philip Glass does not use many words, and if he does he says them over and over, like a mantra. Societa Raffaello Sanzio's *Giulio Cesare* is full of words, but they are misspelt and fractured, frozen stiff like a bad stutter. The characters in *The Weir* never stop talking, but when the curtain drops it is hard to remember what they were saying.

I recently read that Robert Wilson has become increasingly interested in words. Well, there's lots of words in *A Dream Play*—but is Robert Wilson interested in them? I just don't know. The words are all Swedish. They are cool and exact, clearly articulated, with nice lines, like a Bang and Olufsen stereo. The English words are silent. They appear on electronic displays far away from the stage. They go on and on and look boring. You watch the Swedish mouths make Swedish words and then turn to see the zeros and ones make English words. After a while the words hurt your neck. You stop worrying about words and just watch and listen. You see an ice blue stage, cold and stark like a deciduous tree, with hard black edges. It looks like a beautiful world. It looks so neat, like the lines made by a steel ruler. It looks like someone else's dream. You think it is strange that a dream could become such a technical thing. How does Wilson do that with lights? And then the dream gets longer, and it begins to sound like the words are not dreamwords at all but messagewords, dated little summings-up dispensed from Strindberg's old-fashioned box of words. Enough! You want the words to stop.

Tod Browning's *Dracula* is not a silent film. At first you wish it were, so that you could focus on Glass's score. And then you begin to observe Bela Lugosi and grow to want him more and more. You wish that the orchestra would retire so that you could just watch and hear the words come out the actors' mouths. Clear and sharp with hard black edges. At the end nobody in the audience is absolutely happy. Everyone leaves a little disgruntled.

There are no real words in *The Summit*, just the insistent sounds of what words set out to do. All is effect and persuasion. Two performers trapped in the mirror, summoning up the rhetorical ghosts of speech-acts we have seen and heard a million times before: the Detente, the Stand-off, Bluff and Counter-bluff. I dare you! I raise you! I love you! I hate you! I damn you! No! Yes! Realpolitik, says Ralf Ralf, has no need of real words. Instead, it uses the lingua franca of appearances. It is the theatre of empty rhetoric. Robbed of the contrary body that makes them live, words become mere costume for a Clausewitzian drama of Cold War binarism. (*Binarism*—is there such a word? Does it matter?) Touche! In *The Summit* each man's word is a weapon that must be met by at least a word of equal weight—the misguided logic of national security, the arms race and high school debating teams.

Giulio Cesare breaks words in two and leaves them on the ground. The cast is assembled from broken words and damaged actors with little holes in them. Sometimes the words get lodged in these holes, like a chicken bone in the throat or a large breech baby. Sometimes the words haemorrhage, making a mess of everything. The performers have problems with their orifices, especially their mouths. One actor appears to have a tracheotomy. A pair of anorexic girls move about like stick insects, jerky, strangely constipated, stranded on the other side of bulimia. A very fat actor just sits there, draped in a toga. A plaster horse, a fragment of statuary—an arm? A leg? Classical theatres' mortuary. Props reduced to words.

The rhetorical flourish joins propaganda and dramatic art/The art of persuasion/Technologies of speech/The rhetorical empire/Rhetoric reveals the corruption of the theatre…the true face of the theatre is falsehood.

These fragments are from the very wordy program. In the program however, words are not broken. *Giulio Cesare* needs the unbroken program to supplement its broken back, just in case the production can't sit up by itself. The program notes are like a brace. A propping up. A wordy prop.

The Weir puts all its wordy props up front, on the stage, and then pretends they are not words at all, but real things. *Interior, typical Irish country pub, Guinness on tap*. We are in for a good yarn—and what's wrong with that? The words go on and on, meandering about as if they had plenty of time to just be words. How they dissemble! It is all so familiar—if this play was Australian we might say the words were giving us characters who were 'stereotypes,' or 'export cliches.' But these kinds of words can be entertaining. Fun. A few good stories, a few good Irish laughs. But it is not enough for art to just be fun. There has to be More to this story. And there is. The only woman in the play has a dark secret—something unsaid, something to be revealed, to unsettle the audience—perhaps even rip a hole in the fun-text! But before you can say HolyMaryMotherofJesus the woman speaks the unspeakable and the words rush right in and stop up the little hole. Nothing escapes, nothing is lost. The unspoken was not a rip or a tear or a wound or anything vaguely threatening or interesting, but a round hole designed with the word-plug in mind. *The Weir* is a play with a big plug, like a bathtub—safe, warm, full to the brim with comfortable words, and guaranteed not to leak.

At the end of *The Weir* I long for dry land. The Netherlands Dance Theatre. Eddie Palmieri. Rhumba. Samba. Salsa. Etc. Etc. Wordless pleasures.

I binge. I purge. I just don't know what to think.

Perth International Festival of the Arts: A *Stockholm City Theatre,* Dream Play, *Burswood Theatre Feb 5-8;* Ralf Ralf, *New Fortune Theatre, Feb 14-19;* Giulio Cesare, *Regal Theatre Feb 2-6; Royal Court Theatre,* The Weir, *His Majesty's Theatre, Feb 3-19.*

Sampling the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras

Keith Gallasch & Virginia Baxter

Osadia

Osadia (Alex Rendon, Fafa Franco) is my kind of street art—the kind to make you wonder whether you really need to be at that other place quite as soon as you thought. The appeal of the act of these two wild-haired artists from Barcelona ostensibly makes no sense at all—they set up a couple of hairdressing chairs on a little platform in the street, blast out some operatic re-mixes and quietly invite members of the crowd to let them have their way with them—or with their hair. The gathering crowd is drawn into a kind of thrall, watching in quiet fascination as ordinary citizens subject themselves to scissors, clippers and spray cans and beyond this to elaborate headdresses with doll's bodies and barbed wire tiaras. Though I didn't volunteer (no time, no really), what struck me as I watched was just how close to the surface of our everyday reality lurk those little dreams of transgression. VB

Lesbian National Parks and Services

In the Studio we pick up *Lesbian National Parks and Services Dives into Australia*, a helpful brochure from Canadian artists (Shawna Dempsey, Lorri Millan) urging us as we go about our busy day, to take a moment to question the heterosexual model. "Ask yourself, what is nature and what is natural? Conduct your own research. Experiment. Experience". Being careful "not to tread on the lesbians"—not easy at a jam-packed Mardi Gras gig—we move inside the theatre for ***unBecomings*** and take out our Junior Woodchuck notebooks. VB

unBecomings

In her work with Playworks and now as Director of Performance Space, Fiona Winning is strongly committed to growing new work. "It fits into a broader strategy to support the development of emerging performance makers, not just by giving them space but also offering artistic support so they can develop their own work." Jonathan Parsons, director of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras has the same commitment. Over 3 Mardi Gras now PACT Youth Theatre has each time successfully presented a large scale work involving young, queer performance makers. There's a group of talented people there who are now in the upper age of PACT's charter but who are not necessarily able to simply create places for their own work. *unBecomings* is a joint project of all 3 organisations.The 6 works presented were chosen from 20 submitted. Says PACT Artistic Director Caitlin Newton-Broad, "Each of these young artists has a body of work, a place they are heading and a clear desire to develop their practice." Their ideas and performance forms were matched with established practitioners who supplied dramaturgical, motivational and emotional support in the development of what was very much the young people's own work. Within the production are the signs of a process which is clearly paying off. There's a confidence in the performances and the material and, for Fiona Winning, "a greater depth. Rather than sliding across the surface, I had a sense they were diving deeper."

In *Showcase* Diorama Queens Emma Price and Técha Noble work with Celia White to produce a series of rolling magic acts throughout the evening. Members of the Herringbone artist collective, these two students from the College of Fine Arts specialise in the "exaggerated duo, the flipside persona, the gigantic and the fantastic upon a stage of nostalgia." The personae are great, the tricks goodish, the unfolding of the gags thin, the potential terrific.

The Diamond Nipple Affair is written and performed by Shelly O'Donnell working with mentor Chris Ryan. Shelley has been a strong presence in PACT's recent work notably in Caitlin Newton-Broad's *The Dark Room* last year. This is a homage to the lesbian detective with some nice writing that ventures too far into over-ripe satire: it lacks the specificity that grabs. It's at its lateral best as she begins to divest herself of the tacky trappings and reveal the spikey persona ("too Butch for Fem") beneath. Looking somewhere between a Newtown lesbian and Isabella Rossellini, O'Donnell fixes us in her gaze as she reaches between her legs and then runs her fingers through her hair till it stands on end and strides from the stage to audible sighs of approval in the audience.

Garth Bolwell, *Creamy* in *unBecomings* photo: Chris Verheyde

In the spirit of the evening, *The First Rice Club* is a supreme act of unbecoming. Phu Nguyen and Karl Velasco reveal themselves in everything from scenarios of growing-up-Asian-in-Oz suburbs to surreal adventures in the skin trade of gender and racial stereotypes. In a madly witty and seductive performance (mentored by Celia White) these two take us on a roller coaster from Western Sydney family life to a tryst in a hotel room with a GI who reads *Apocalypse Now* chopper blades into a ceiling fan and a Vietnamese fresh off the boat into a streetwise Fillipino. Kung fu and cooking demonstrations reach justifiable hysteria levels. The crowd cheers for the wigged-up, lip-synching finale of *You don't own me* but these two had won us over way before that.

If anyone needed evidence that contemporary performance ideas expand on the limitations of theatre, *Creamy* was it. Moving through the stages of grieving for a lost love, the piece mixed wistful nostalgia with vile hatred for the object of desire. In this performance (mentored by Damien Millar) instead of a stool, a spot and a microphone, Garth Bolwell delivers helpings of self-confessed pathos ("It's important you get something out of this") while a couple of onstage hands hurl big globs of whipped cream at him. Covered in the stuff, he keeps the outpouring up until eventually he hoists himself to the ceiling on a rope and hangs crucified by love—and still the cream keeps coming. It's a wonderfully sustained piece and against the odds it works because the form exposes the tedium, the pain of it all and at the same time the ambivalence of the audience-as-witness, waiting between hurtful revelations about love and its clichés for the next gooey missile to hit the performer-love addict right between the eyes.

In *Cracked* written and directed by Rosie Dennis, mentored by Annette Tesoriero, Johanna De Ruyter and Sarah Rodigari perform a strange little scenario of 2 women in a difficult relationship. With physical elegance and a kind of Sitwellian literary wit, the two layer a veneer of calm over the hurt, the distance between them amplified by a lack of eye contact, and by speech that suggests that they could be talking about someone else quite other than the one they are sharing the stage with. Perhaps they were.

Peter Ranuyck Krushing is written and performed by the altogether engaging Brian Fuata (mentored by Chris Ryan). His is a tale of crushes on fellow schoolboys and on Angela Davis whose physical appearance he emulates with a wig. Fuata writes well using some of the familiar patterns and theatrics of performance poetry, but at other times relaxes into altogether stranger rhythms. His performance style is minimal but he draws the audience into his languid, hypnotic ambit. The only problem is that work seems too short for the intensity it has built and the personality you want more of.

The whole show is held together with some inventive staging by design team Chris Fox and Anne O'Sullivan, mentored by Anthony Babicci. The steeply raked flats, one offering a delicate texture, the other massive spikes, are repositioned quickly to evoke new spaces. *unBecomings* has set a new benchmark for young performers in the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras arts festival. VB. KG

Baby X

Campion Decent's widely applauded play is polished and deftly directed (David Fenton) account of the trials of a gay man fathering a child for a lesbian couple and trying to gain his hostile father's understanding. It's a comedy. It's attraction is initially in encountering such rare material on the stage, a surprising reminder that even in Sydney you're unlikely to see much about gay life on the stage between one year's Mardi Gras and next. Its strength also lies in the distribution of empathy—it's as much about the women as the man. In fact they garner more interest because they are played more 3-dimensionally, as much as the script will allow. The writing and especially the direction yield a high theatricality, bigger than life, and played often directly to the audience. Consequently scenes often feel too insistently like comedy sketches or something illustrative from theatre-in-education. The set, which is cleverly constructed and expertly lit, evokes a disco world, a visual metaphor which doesn't always fit, again when used so insistently (by now I was suffering lip-sync burn-out into the bargain). It's a relief when the set magically opens out to the night skies when father and son go camping.

My disappointment with *Baby X* is that while it carefully maps out the 9 months drama of the negotations, the pregnancy and the birth, and peppers it with humorous insights about gay culture and politics, about the fears of same gender parenting, and of suburban normality, the play simply doesn't deliver the goods on an issue it goes to great trouble to set up. Month by month, our hero constantly delays entering a legal contract with the 2 women. Somewhere around 6 months it becomes a null issue, apparently a kind of abdication on his part, and presumably a loss of interest on the part of the women. But why? Unless I missed something. Instead we got a an over-long, testy office scene about a cake with a new set of characters, which the audience enjoyed, but which I would have willingly traded for something that would have completed the picture of this unique experience of incipient parenthood rather than take me away from it. I'm sure *Baby X* could have handled the weight of the issue with its proven sense of humour—ranging from dry wit to the father's quizzing his son about "sowing his wild oats among the lesbians." KG

Translucence

British composer Donna McKevitt's song setting of poems by the late Derek Jarman was a festival highlight, lucid in every respect, beautifully sung and played by Voiceworks' singers and instrumentalists. The music is reflective, pulses gently but without a minimalist insistence and refrains from dramatising Jarman's texts. The tone is almost conversational, certainly intimate. I hope that *Translucence* is fixed in the Voiceworks repertoire and is presented again soon. Britten's *On this island* was musically the ideal companion piece, if a little over-projected. Let's hope too that under the new Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras directorship (David Fenton who directed *Baby X*) that the innovative music programming that Jonathon Parsons enouraged from Marshall Maguire is continued. KG

Four Some

In this One Extra dance program from Philip Adams, Dean Walsh, Trevor Patrick and Brian Carbee, theatricality rules, most convincingly in Walsh's *Retro Musclesong*, now almost at the apotheosis of its steady evolution, and *Gloryholy!* with its eerie interplay of Carbee's voice and Drew Crawford's sound track in a claustrophobic setting. See Eleanor Brickhill's report on our website.

Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival: Osadia, *February 28 - March 3, Customs House Square;* Lesbian National Parks and Services, *The Performance Space and various locations, February 20 - 27;* unBecomings, *The Performance Space, February 23 -26;* Baby X, *Belvoir St, February 23 - March 5;* Translucence, *The Stud io, Sydney Opera. House, February 24*

The anniversary of the death of Sarah Kane

Aleks Sierz

The most shocking event in British theatre last year was not a new sex-fest, but the suicide, at the age of 28, of playwright Sarah Kane.

She was, says writer Mark Ravenhill, "a contemporary writer with a classical sensibility who created a theatre of great moments of beauty and cruelty, a theatre to which it was only possible to respond with a sense of awe." Within a year of her death, on 20 February 1999, academics already recognised her importance. For example, Dan Rebellato, of London University, says that despite her small output—"five slim, unflinchingly pared-down pieces of writing"—Kane "enriched British playwriting more powerfully and enduringly than any other writer of her generation."

Although her public career lasted barely 5 years, the notoriety of her 1995 debut *Blasted*—denounced hysterically by critics for its scenes of sex and violence—meant that her shocking stage images obscured the depth of her writing talent. Not only are her plays—*Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love*, *Cleansed*, *Crave* and *4:48 Psychosis* (which will premiere in June 2000)—among the best-written, most deeply felt of the 1990s, but Kane also pioneered a form of experiential theatre, which gave audiences a powerful sense of having lived through the events shown on stage, and tackled the large issues of love and war, identity, insanity and desire.

Graham Whybrow, literary manager of the Royal Court (which put on most of her work), says: "Sarah Kane was head and shoulders above other young writers in her uncompromising vision and her precocity. Her plays are tough in conception and terse in writing." Aware of theatrical traditions (she had a First Class Honours degree in drama) but "not slavishly tied to them", she dealt with raw atrocities but "showed a great deal of compassion." Each of her plays was a new experiment in form and an exploration of theatrical possibility. Says Whybrow, "Her plays aren't troubled by awkward local references or contemporary detail in a way that would date them—they will endure."

Had it not been for *Blasted*, the explosion of 1990s in-yer-face theatre—from Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* to Jez Butterworth's *Mojo*—would not have had the impact that it did. But Kane was much more than a leader of a brat pack of avant-garde provocateurs. As James Macdonald, who directed *Blasted* and *Cleansed*, says: "The media painted her as a wild axe-girl, but actually she was far more theatre-literate than most writers of her age." What was her role in new writing? "To shake it up a bit—with an ambition and urgency and passion that's often lacking," says Macdonald. "She wasn't just symptomatic of the 1990s—what was refreshing was that she was up to something different from most of her generation. She was writing about politics in her own way. Her gods were Beckett, Pinter, Bond, Barker."

Kane's agent, Mel Kenyon, also stresses her individuality, although she sees Kane as typical of the 1990s "in her desire to fragment form, to blow apart old forms" as well as in her anger. "The stage is one of the last places one can be genuinely angry. In comparison, screen violence tends to be overstylised and anodyne, distant and unreal." And Kane "was the angriest of the lot". But stage violence "is also an expression of despair. People will look at her work and admire the boldness of it, the starkness of the images and she will probably encourage people to be courageously theatrical." But, says Kenyon, "I also hope that her death gives the lie to the notion that this generation doesn't care." And that it "reminds people that theatre is still a serious platform for debate. If her legacy does both these things, it will have been great."

If it is too early to see her influence on young British writers, her effect on European writers is clear. David Tushingham, dramaturg and translator, says that "in Germany, she is regarded as one of the most significant authors of the decade. Their view of British theatre as very direct, very brutal and very in-yer-face comes from *Blasted* and *Shopping and Fucking*." German writers such as Marius von Mayenburg, David Gieselmann, Katharina Gericke and Melanie Gieschen were directly influenced by Kane, who also worked in the USA, Netherlands, Bulgaria and Spain. But her legacy also has a dangerous side, says Kenyon. "Because of her death, some young people might think they have to live in despair to be proper writers. And that you have to kill yourself to become profound." Instead, perhaps they should learn from Kane's generosity and imaginative flair, from her life rather than from her death.

There is a chapter on Sarah Kane in Aleks Sierz's In Yer-Face Theatre, *published by Faber later this year.*

Go www.rtimearts.com/~opencity

for Eleanor Brickhill's report on the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival dance show *Four Some*, with works by Phillip Adams, Trevor Patrick, Dean Walsh and Brian Carbee, Seymour Theatre Centre, Downstairs, February 15

Pitching product

Susan Strano

A performing arts market is an efficient and stimulating model for establishing overseas (and Australian regional) markets for finished 'product.' However, the notion of shopping for shows drew a fair bit of criticism and some artists were annoyed at the prospect of having to second-guess what was going to make them more attractive to buyers. Another criticism was that the integrity of the work could be compromised by having to conform to 25 minute showcase slots. The fact remains, however, that companies and artists are making the work they want to make and want it to get seen. It is about continuing the life of a work, taking it to new audiences. It won't happen for everyone who deserves it, but that's how markets work.

A research and development element could, however, enhance the whole process: developing relationships for collaborative opportunities that may lay the groundwork for future touring works, audience development and creative possibilities. I suspect that it is between markets, and afterwards in the follow-up, that most of the real work in this area is done. Strategic matchmaking. Market development. The question is whether it would be approached formally or informally during future Performing Arts Market sessions.

Briefing sessions comprised panels of artists, managers and various presenters offering insights and experiences of international touring and developing the relationships that will (hopefully) lead to touring, but I was disappointed that none of the Asia delegates were presenting (except Geoff Street, from Esplanade Theatres in Singapore, who moved there from Melbourne in September 1999). The session on International Perspectives seemed a perfect opportunity to have someone like Benny Chia, Director of the Hong Kong Fringe, to offer his perspective, especially since he has been instrumental in bringing Australian performing arts to Hong Kong.

The inadvertent message was that we turn to the British, Europeans or Americans for their expertise but we do not need to hear an Asian perspective. Cynics may also argue that Euro/America is still the only highly profitable market so there is little point in encouraging voices from our region. The Australia Council's intention is to develop the Market into a regional event and, for the first time, Creative New Zealand was invited to participate in the market and showcase 3 companies. All the more reason to invite greater participation from delegates in Asia at future markets.

To say the Performing Arts Market is about export is to sell it short for it implies "product earning foreign exchange" (Lloyd Downey, Austrade), meaning dollars. Unlike a manufactured item, performing arts 'product' is living, breathing, constantly growing, and has the capacity to interact with like creatures and communities. And it comes back, often altered from the experience. The need for export cannot be purely monetary, especially when one considers the expense and non-profit motive of most Australian performing arts. Artists and companies want to take their work to the world for many reasons, not the least being to communicate and develop new relationships.

The 4th Australian Performing Arts Market was a fabulous opportunity to see work from around the country, talk to artists about their work and interests in working nationally and internationally. The 5 day event was abuzz with 125 international presenters, producers and festival organisers from 27 different countries; artists from 52 spotlight performances and another couple of hundred Australian delegates from around the country. Apart from the obvious and considerable economic benefit to Australia that the market will have generated over the coming years, I feel certain that the real and less quantifiable worth of such an event cannot be underestimated.

The Australia Council's 4th Australian Performing Arts Market, Adelaide, February 28 - March 3

Susan Strano is the Performing Arts Project Officer at the Asialink Centre, University of Melbourne.

Writesites

Writesite returns in *RealTime* 37. In the meantime turn to page 24 for Kirsten Krauth's account of *VERVE: the other writing* at the Adelaide Festival.

Go www.rtimearts.com/~opencity

For Sue Thomas, Artistic Director of the UK site trAce visiting the Adelaide Festival, writing about VERVE and the special role of Adelaide in developing hypertext writing. RT Festival Edition #4

OnScreen
film digital media screen culture

Fire and ice: the cinema of Catherine Breillat

Adrian Martin

French artist Catherine Breillat, whose brilliant, often controversial career began at the age of 19 with her erotic novel *L'Homme facile* (1967), likes to intermingle her media: prose, poetry, essays, cinema, even interviews.

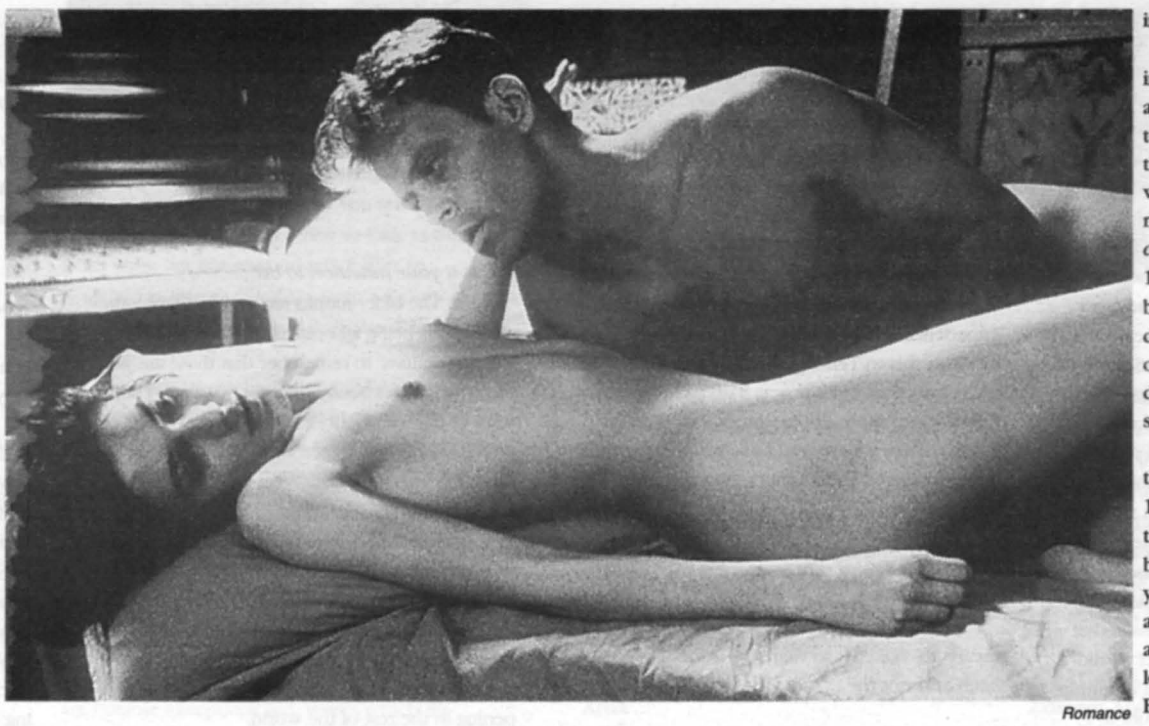
As well as adapting films from her own books, she has, like Marguerite Duras, simultaneously produced certain works in 2 forms, 2 'versions', for the printed page and the screen.

There is an intensive circulation between the elements of all these texts by Breillat—transpositions that call into question not only the boundaries but the very status of different modes of fiction and creation. Where does a coherent story end and a wayward thought begin? Is there a 'natural' limit to what a character's dialogue or voice-over narration can cite or express? What realms can the dreams and desires of imaginary beings open up for exploration?

An example. In "One Day I Saw *Baby Doll*…", an inspired reflection on Elia Kazan's 1956 film written for the magazine *Positif* and translated in *Projections* (1995), Breillat insists on the movie's harsh truths about sexuality, its lessons about men and women, boys and girls: "Shame is what drives the girl towards Man as much as attraction. She is also sufficiently egocentric to realise that beauty must be her domain. Beauty is her prerogative, the tribute she pays to the Beast."

What are these words, exactly—urgent, personal thoughts; analytical observations; script notes? Breillat tells us that the day she was first "transported" by *Baby Doll* made her instantly "determined to write *36 Fillette* (1987) as if the film I had just seen had given me the password." Seeing Kazan's movie again some years later ("I watched the tape 4 times, just as I had watched the film in the cinema") returns her to its texture, its profound and shocking insights: "In love, the respect of a man is the worst humiliation a girl could experience."

But what is Kazan's and what is Breillat's in this swirl of films and texts, thoughts and memories? Whose 'truths' are these, and in what film do they reside—in *Baby Doll*, in *36 Fillette*? When does the memory or analysis of a film go beyond appreciation or homage into full-blown re-creation, into the imagining of a new work? Breillat finds herself, before Kazan's film, both 'transported', transformed, and also confirmed, taken into her deepest self. And the circulation of elements does not stop with that essay: in 1999, Breillat tells a *Cineaste* interviewer that women filmmakers "add the point of view of shame" to the screen's depiction of sexuality—and she places those lines about Beauty and the Beast almost verbatim into the mouth of Robert (François Berléand) in *Romance* (1999).



Romance

The general response to *Romance* among Australian reviewers has been, on the whole, rather dim. (I place to one side here the press coverage of the film's adventures at the Office of Film and Literature Classification, to which the new, Melbourne-based internet journal *Senses of Cinema* [www.sensesofcinema.com.au] has devoted an invaluable dossier.) Reviews harped on the supposed unlikeableness of the heroine, Marie (Caroline Ducey), and the implausibility or thinness of her psychology. What's her 'journey' and where is its third act resolution?

The heavy-duty voice-over narration also caused much discomfort—occasioning the usual trite, dismissive, defensive gags about how 'very French' is all this existential angst and ennui. (It's just as well the media press kit didn't brandish the respectful, deft summation of Breillat's preferred subject matter offered by French critic-filmmaker Luc Moullet: "Objectivity, existentialism, behaviourism, the absurd, incommunicability.") One reviewer complained that Breillat was transparently putting her own words and thoughts (about men, love, sex) into the heroine's mouth. And the film's general, defining, resolutely ambiguous mixture of ritualistic solemnity, droll perversity and hallucinatory, escalating intensity obviously short-circuited more than a few local minds.

Why was such a vast, uncomprehending blank drawn on *Romance*?

Primarily because, quite simply, we do not see many French movies like this on our arthouse and film festival circuits these days. Everyone remembers the French New Wave but, it seems, few understand its living legacy. That's perhaps understandable (if not forgivable), given that the successive post-New Wave transformations in French cinema—the work associated with names including Philippe Garrel, Daniéle Dubroux and Jacques Rozier—have basically never been allowed in by our film culture gatekeepers.

As a result, *Romance* is judged against models of narrative and arthouse cinema to which it bears little relation—and is, of course, found terribly wanting. Yet the necessary reference points for an appreciation of Breillat's native 'tradition' can be cobbled together from local viewing experience, at least if we use our collective memories and imagination. Think of the free, interpolated voice-overs in Godard and Truffaut, yoked to the Cassavetes-like emotional intensity of Maurice Pialat's films (*Loulou*, *Van Gogh*), assembled according to a formal, Rivette-style dialectic of 'real time' flows broken by disconcerting ellipses, and an 'internal journey' narrative, grounded in restless, corrosive desire, that draws its sly, subtle dream logic from the cinema of Vigo, Bunuel and Oshima…

Breillat's films draw their special tension from the pull of opposing impulses—hers is a cinema of fire and ice. "Cinema is a mode of expression that allows you to express all the nuances of a thing while including its opposites. There are things that can't be quantified mentally; yet they can exist and be juxtaposed. That may seem very contradictory. Cinema allows you to film these contradictions" (*Cineaste*, Vol 25 No 1, 1999). The affinity between *Romance* and other outstanding, recent films about sexual desire and its vicissitudes—Cronenberg's *Crash* and Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* in particular—comes from the adoption of a still, hushed, 'glacial' style that is new to her work.

Those who have seen *36 Fillette* (the only previous Breillat film to appear here) are likely to remember its raw, provocative, deliberately vulgar evocation of impatient, frustrated, confused teen libido. The strong elements of her early cinematic work in the 70s (*Une vraie jeune fille*) and 80s (*Tapage nocturne*) were dually derived from the grand, lost era of 'art porn' (movies by Serge Gainsbourg, Walerian Borowczyk, Miklos Jancso, Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses*), and the fiery, violent, 'exacerbated naturalism' of Pialat. At the same time, overlaid on this combo was Breillat's rich and multiple literary mode: according to Luc Moullet, a juxtaposition of "traditional poetic vocabulary with geographic, scientific, geometric and medical vocabularies, as well as pornographic, scatological and advertising terminologies" (*Trafic*, no. 2, 1992).

36 Fillette marked a breakthrough in Breillat's film work because (Moullet again) an "excess of the clinical seems to create a sort of superior lyricism"—the inaugural, successful meeting of fire with ice. But her first masterpiece, to my mind, came a little later, with *Sale comme un ange* (Dirty Like an Angel, 1991)—an utterly unique film that begins as an urban cop thriller and suddenly becomes a bruisingly intimate tale of transgressive *amour fou*, going the distance where Pialat's *Police* (1986), scripted by Breillat, fell short.

Breillat's other outstanding film of the 90s, *Parfait Amour!* (*Perfect Love*, 1997) likewise starts in one mode—a true-life docu-drama about the fatal affair between a middle-class woman and a younger, streetwise guy—and spins into an almost metaphysical account of the alienation, miscommunication and violence that pertains between the sexes. Breillat's philosophical debt to Bataille and Lacan is evident in the bleakness of this face-off. In interviews she happily expounds her theories of female shame and debasement (sometimes reaching the other side of liberation and self-worth) as opposed to the possessive male need for control and violation—and women as beings who can be 'transfigured' by sex in contrast with men whose 'mundane' orgasms never allow them to leave the dull earth.

In *36 Fillette*, the drama of adolescence already proceeds on these fiercely divided gender lines: at puberty, "boys are simple, no longer whole, not knowing what they are, but knowing what they don't want", whereas "a girl exists only to stop existing. She is a being who commits suicide, who passes from a future where everything is possible to probable banality once her destiny has been sealed" (*Projections*).

The remarkable fusion of such musings with those mysterious flesh-and-blood incarnations called characters and the strange fantasy-romance known as a plot indicates that, in Breillat's films, we move close to Pier Pasolini's dream of a cinema of poetry that would speak and visualise itself in a 'free indirect discourse.' Here, fictional characters and their worlds become vehicle or pretext or launch-pad for the passage of some other consciousness: not the auteur's mind, solely or necessarily, but certainly some thinking-feeling organism that grows and recreates the world in its own impossible image.

Another, related way to conceive of *Romance* is as a special kind of 'essay film'—not the 'discursive' essay film pioneered by Chris Marker and bludgeoned to death by his army of pale imitators, but a dramatic essay film, an essayistic fiction in which words, images, characters, stories follow a line of inexorable mutation as they express thoughts, ideas, sensations, perceptions. "I create a film that surprises me because its meaning has escaped me", remarks Breillat—and her movies bear witness to that extraordinary, enigmatic, transformative power.

World Cup soccer and Tibetan Buddhism

Veronica Gleeson

There are a few reasons that *The Cup* will garner a good deal of cursory press attention when it is released here in April. The most obvious is that its writer-director, H E Dzongar Jamyang Khyenste Rinpoche—or Khyenste Norbu—is a Buddhist monk. In fact he's one of the most important incarnate lamas in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition today, and he just happens to be responsible for an exquisitely balanced, gentle and witty piece of filmmaking.

Set in an exiled Tibetan monastery overrun with World Cup Final fever, *The Cup* was filmed on location in India. None of the actors were professional, the bulk of the cast being drawn from Chokling Monastery, the Himalayan refugee settlement. Few spoke English and most rose at 4am each morning to pray, after which they'd receive scripts and briefing for the day's shooting; none were privy to scripted action in advance. The traditional Buddhist practice of "mo" formed the basis for decision-making, and Norbu sponsored several rituals necessary for the generation of auspicious circumstance.

Unsurprisingly the film bears all the hallmarks of an approach informed by discipline. What's arresting is the way in which themes of exile, change and the inherently contradictory nature of devoted life are sublimely interwoven. It's also a compellingly simple demystification of monastic life. To put it crassly, *The Cup* makes Scorsese's *Kundun* look like an overblown, polemical tribute to the aesthetics and recent history of Tibetan Buddhism. It's possible to interpret the film as bearing witness to a generational quarrel between an exiled people, or as an even-handed allegory about humanism in a climate of technological change. Ask him about it, however, and Khenste Norbu will insist that he has simply made a film about soccer: "I didn't set forth with a political or spiritual intention in that regard, but if people get that from it, I will take it as a bonus."

Tenzin was in India at the time of this interview, preparing to fly to Paris for the film's French premiere. The form of the phoner was strange and technologically encumbered; there were frequent points at which the line would simply go silent, making it difficult to discern whether Tenzin was patiently navigating his way through the international connection drop-outs or giving consideration before a response. And having phone-jacked my dictaphone to the receiver for the purposes of recording the discussion, I discovered that it had recorded only my voice, forcing me to replay my own questions over and over in order to salvage his answers. Ample opportunity to infer some kind of spiritual mystique (informed by all manner of Western misreadings of Buddhism) into the experience. If I ever have the opportunity to mention this to Tenzin, I'm fairly sure he'd simply tell me that the line was bad, and to test my dictaphone before phone interviews. The following, then, is best read as a sketch comprised of remembered long-distance dialogue and recovered notes.

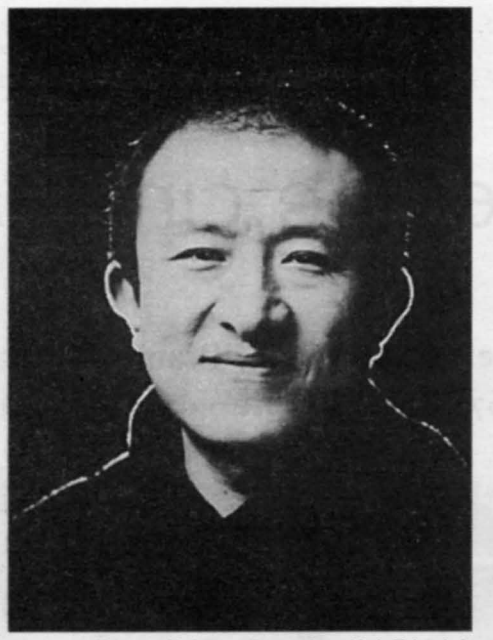
Ideas are such a material precept! [You] really have to have to get beyond them. They can be very limiting...

How long did it take to write the screenplay?

Three years. But then I didn't have the means to make it, so that was good. I got to go back and rewrite.

Are you viewed as being a radical by the older monks?

Yes.



Kyhentse Norbu photo: Linda Tokarchuk

Is it your intention to be?

No. The older monks are very hesitant—they see films as being associated with sex and violence. You have to remember that these are people who haven't been home for 40 years. They're wary of the telephone, the fax, TV and cinema. I would do a film with sex and violence though, if the script was good.

Are there any filmmakers who inspire you at the moment?

I think the Iranian films are very good, they're a very sophisticated country, which some people might find surprising considering what's going on there. They're very aware of what's happening in the rest of the world.

A friend of mine posited the idea that cultures that enjoy international sports like soccer perhaps grow attuned to having in their minds at least the notion of differently oriented cultures—whereas in America, with college football and national sports, that focus is narrower.

It's possible. And with no disrespect intended toward my American friends, America can be very inward-looking. It's interesting...the response to the film has been far greater in Europe than in America.

What are you doing next?

I'm taking care of 2 refugees at the moment, and I'm teaching and looking after my monasteries. I would like to make perhaps 2 or 3 more films and then stop. I'm writing a film about where I come from, about Bhutan.

There's something very ingenious about the way you've crafted the ending—can you talk about that a bit?

Well, when a director runs out of ideas, you know, he starts to philosophise, and to tease the audience a bit. Also Buddhism teaches us to examine beginnings and endings...

Is that where philosophy begins then? Where 'ideas' run out?

Ideas are such a material precept! [You] really have to have to get beyond them. They can be very limiting...

The Cup made its informal Australian debut at the Frame-by-Frame session of the Flickerfest short film festival (held in January this year) when D.O.P Paul Warren talked extensively about his work during the filming. Primary to his experience was the prohibitive—and in some ways emancipatory—fact that rushes couldn't be viewed until some weeks after shooting. Warren spoke of the ritual and very audible prayers conducted between virtually every moment of shooting and the constant threat of power outages. He claimed the shoot as being one of the most valuable and moving experiences of his career. It's not difficult to see why.

eXistenZ: David Cronenberg's evil genius

Philipa Rothfield

I will suppose then...that some malignant demon, who is at once exceedingly potent and deceitful, has employed all his artifice to deceive me; I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colour, figures, sounds, and all external things, are nothing better than the illusions of dreams...

René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

As part of his philosophical quest, Descartes would have us suppose that an evil genius is afoot. This master of deception is so clever, what we call reality is none other than induced hallucination. Many films are premised on the notion of massive deception, for example *Soylent Green*, *Total Recall*, *The Matrix*. David Cronenberg's film, *eXistenZ*, also has an evil genius. It is a game.

The film begins with a test launch of a new game (eXistenZ), and its accompanying technology. Originating in a foetus-like pod (the game controls), eXistenZ passes into the human imagination via an artificial umbilicus which inserts into the body. In order to play, people must have a hole (bioport) drilled into their spines. The game feeds upon each player's individuality, providing givens (scenarios, characters, settings) which become refracted through the player's personality and ensuing behaviours. The pod and cord are made from biological matter (fish eggs) which have been genetically mutated.

eXistenZ transports game players into a virtual world almost indistinguishable from this one. As the plot progresses, the dividing line between virtual and real becomes less and less clear until we are confronted with "reality bleed-through effects", such that the game enters the real world. That is, until we discover that the real is in fact no more than a game. Didn't someone famous once say that the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players?

Virtual realists are sometimes denounced for their representations of VR as some abstracted, disembodied Utopia. Cronenberg could not be accused of leaving the body out of the virtual picture. First, the corporeal doorway: Ted Pikul (Jude Law) is terrified of getting a bioport made. When Pikul is taken to a petrol station to get a bootleg orifice, Gas (Willem Defoe) uses a stud-finder to position the relevant vertebrae, and a huge caulking gun to create the fissure. Lubricant is smeared and tongues are inserted into that highly charged hole. Second, the controls: when fondled by its celebrated inventor, Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason Leigh), the eXistenZ game pod writhes in simulated ecstasy; a grotesque foetus comes to life. And finally, the mutant: Cronenberg seems fascinated with the boundaries of identity, in particular the boundary between the human and non-human (*The Fly*), and between species and their mutations. *eXistenZ* pulsates with graphic details of mutant bugs, dissected fish, vivisectionist technicians, and the like.

Although Cronenberg is certainly graphically corporeal, some might argue that the kind of body celebrated in *eXistenZ* is thoroughly abject. The design's gothic, the pod's freakish, the bioport's alarming, mutant amphibians grace dinner plates, and human teeth are used as bullets in bone-made guns. However, I think Cronenberg is frying bigger fish than the abject body. Descartes' triumph over his evil genius ultimately led him to assert one of western philosophy's most enduring structures, mind/body dualism. Unlike Descartes, Cronenberg never dismisses his evil genius, and herein lies his strength. *eXistenZ* is a sustained meditation on our inability to police the boundaries between such oppositions as real and imaginary, self and world, mind and body.

On the one hand, the division between opposites is meant to endure: reality and fantasy must be distinguishable. A war is raged within the film, between game exponents and the enemies of the imaginary (dubbed realists). And yet, what madness is it that thinks we can clearly separate the imaginary component of experience from its basis in fact? What confidence can we have in the stable identities of biology in the face of so much mutation? How troubling then to appreciate that even our own bodies can melt and reform, solid one moment, orifice another. It's that reality bleed-through effect, the menstrual nightmare, a rent in the fabric of reality. By traversing the game and returning to the real, we see that the 2 realms are not 2 countries but somehow one inside the other. By creating a corporeal doorway through which *eXistenZ* enters our lives, we have to rethink the boundaries of the body. These are the means by which Cronenberg undermines the stability of the dualist's inventory.

The evil genius of David Cronenberg lies in his ability to play with the nuances of (un)reality. Although *eXistenZ* unfolds in dichotomous terms—game/reality—the intrusion of an unstable body into the picture thrusts us into a world which was always already virtual.

eXistenZ, *written and directed by David Cronenberg, distributor Miramax, currently on video release*

Tropfest: the hype test

Simon Enticknap

Tropfest...just keeps on getting bigger and BIGGER (weeeeeehhheeeh)...

And, of course, many of the finalists have gone on to have careers in FILM & TELEVISION (woohoooooo)...And this year *Tropfest* is being transmitted all around the WORLD (yeeeeaaaaarrh)...Give everybody a great big round of APPLAUSE...

Tropfest continues to blow along on the winds of hype, breaking all records, defining the moment by sheer weight of numbers. You don't argue with *Tropfest*, stand in the way of a techno-built, sponsor-laden juggernaut with media mileage, particularly one which is giving local filmmakers a chance to strut their stuff before an estimated worldwide international celebrity audience of...I don't know what the number is but it must be a helluva lot.

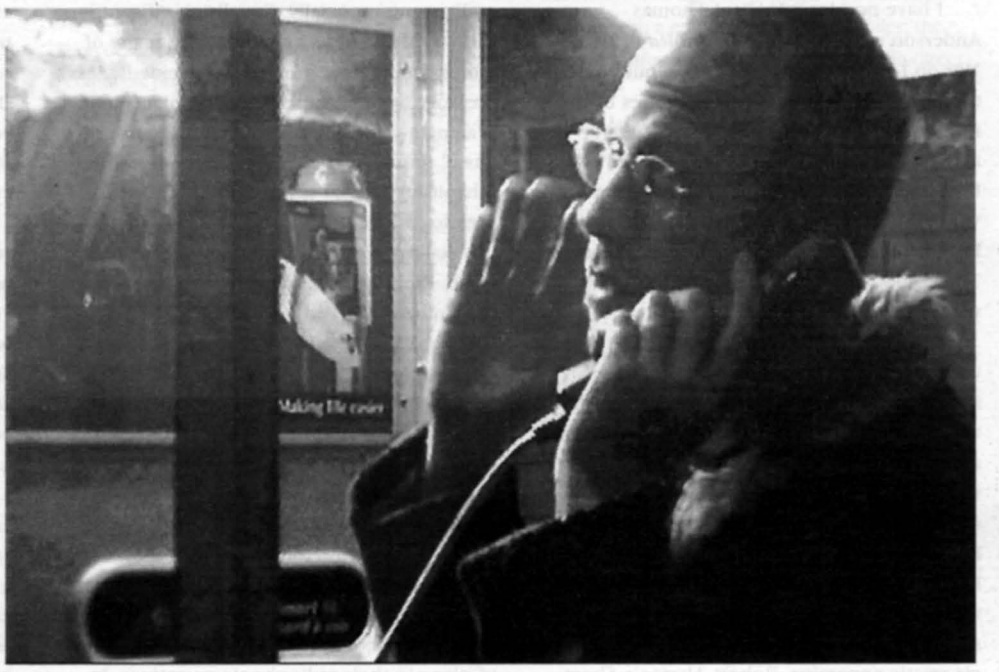
Tropfest is successful because it turns filmmaking into a participatory spectator sport: these filmmakers could be YOU, they may be sitting next to YOU, YOU can do it TOO, let's hear it for them/YOU—and so the rave gets picked up by the stage mikes and fed out through the sound system, thereby closing the loop. Hear yerself cheer yerself. All of which makes *Tropfest*...a marketeer's heaven-on-earth with its mass audience of the young-and-mobile-and-affluent (it seems like every other person is attached to a phone—"Can you see me now? I'm wearing a brown shirt...") in a highly receptive state, a cool narcissistic buzz—so many sexy people, says the MC, and it's true, we love ourselves for being here—and everything is free! The filmmakers do it for nothing! Brilliant.

AND...

...then (finally) there are the films. This was the year when *Tropfest* was going to become more than just a Gagfest. There was 'serious' drama too. Weighty stuff. Not such a laugh. But can the funny man change his spots, can the Fool play a King? The gag tag is not so easily thrown off and, true enough, several films this year went straight for the belly-laugh button. It's not so surprising given that, in the middle of a park, on a big screen, watched by thousands (millions and millions probably), visual comedy always comes across strongest, leaps into the audience and does a pratfall (waaaayheeeeyyy). It's much harder to generate and sustain dramatic tension in this amphitheatre, especially when anything more than a few lines of dialogue (particularly if delivered sotto voce) ends up as mummberumbrrwumderumfl...

So there's a-film-about-a-man-who...does a triple jump, a-film-about-a-man-who...gets stuck in his sleeping bag, a-film-about-a-man-who...likes to walk around in his underpants, a-film-about-a-man-who...gives himself a job, a-film-about-a-man-who...sees an image of the Virgin Mary in his bathtub. Can you see a pattern emerging here? This is fine so long as the jokes work but not so good when they're stretched as thin as clingfilm. Even a short tale can grow too tall, be bigger than *Ben Hur* (or longer anyway).

Tropfest...is the best advertisement yet for the need for affirmative action in the film industry, especially as the explicit message of the festival is that ANYBODY can make a film about ANYTHING—look, everybody can have a go, all you need is an idea and some energy and puff puff puff...and what do we get? A bunch of audition tapes for *The Footy Show*. Blokes being dags, blokes being dopes, blokes being blokey in that disarmingly blokey way. This is what happens when you laissez-faire it. Of course, there are notable exceptions too, works which disprove the rule, such as *Desy* by Heather-Jean Moyes, which shows what can really be accomplished with short drama, or *Noise* by Chris Bence, which shows what can be achieved collectively.



Noise

The gender imbalance in *Tropfest* and the sub-conscious slippage, which happens all too often, whereby the words 'best', 'new', and 'talent' invariably become linked with 'young', gives the festival a skewed focus and a depressingly narrow vision. It's not so much a showcase as a sideshow.

AND...

...so to the winner of *Tropfest* 2000...a-film-about-a-man-who...memorises an eye-sight chart in order to keep his driving licence. There, that's it, now you know, in case you didn't already, hadn't picked it up subliminally over the airwaves, like the winner of the Archibald Prize or the Melbourne Cup; in one year and out the other. *Tropfest* will be back next year, of course, providing the organisers can find a universe big enough to hold it in.

Tropfest, *director John Polson, The Domain, Sydney, and other venues around Australia, and internationally on the web, February 27*

Cult offerings

Michelle Glaser

The recent *REVelation* Independent Film Festival, held in Perth, offered an iconoclastic 2 weeks of screenings.

Little seen beatnik flicks such as *Pull My Daisy* (dir: Alfred Leslie/Robert Franks, written and narrated by Jack Kerouac), took festival director Richard Sowada 12 months to source. These jostled alongside a range of shorts, documentaries and independent features, films old and films new.

REVelation is now in its third year with an audience that has doubled in size. In the face of diminishing funds for screen culture, *REVelation* borrows the spirit of independent filmmaking to put on a festival with a budget that finds only 10% of its total from Australian government sources. In fact, Sowada commented that more money was available from the US government who provided support as part of an initiative designed to promote US filmmakers overseas. Sowada is optimistic about the direction that this has allowed *REVelation* to take—he doesn't have to compromise programming and doesn't structure around funding guidelines.

Revealing a love of pop culture, *REVelation* emphasises fun as well as inventive filmmaking, with an eclectic mix reflecting Sowada's own personality and politics. This is a festival season watermarked with 'cult', giving a context to each film that is derived from a passion for the medium, an imaginative approach to both content and financing that is necessity driven.

Inclusion this year in the Perth International Arts Festival lineup has lent *REVelation* credibility, with media previews better attended than in previous years. *Sex: The Annabel Chong Story* (dir: Hugh F Curray/David Whitten) and *Wadd: The Life and Times of John C Holmes* (dir Cass Paley) predictably excited interest from local media and punters alike with the promise of lewd sex.

The season opened with *Clutch*, a Canadian black comedy directed by Chris Grismer. The comic book plot features a life-altering book that is thrown into the hands of an inadvertent and intellectual criminal, a female mechanic, a crime boss and others. Like many plots based on a gimmick, *Clutch* fails to make good on its opening gambit but is winning enough to keep the audience onside.

On the Ropes is a startling documentary centred on Harlem's New-Bed-Stuy-Boxing-Center and follows a number of key characters as they attempt to box their way out of poverty and the limited prospects offered to inhabitants of the New York housing projects. *On the Ropes* emphasises the drama surrounding each amateur match, and the characters' struggles to train and stay focused in spite of other events that are playing out in their lives. It is greatly strengthened by the presence of boxers of both genders who have privileged filmmakers Nanette Morgan and Brett Bernstein with a high degree of access into their lives.

There's a Strong Wind in Beijing (dir: Ju An Qi) had its world premiere at REVelation. Made out of any and all available 16mm film stock, this documentary has its crew wandering in unannounced to beauty parlours, toilets, schools, to ask "is there a strong wind blowing in Beijing?"

Unexpected pleasure was to be found in the films that may not have been the main drawcards. Audiences were treated to a number of shorts at each screening. Gems included Hideo Aoshima's beautiful video work *Scherzo*, which used the human face as subject, digitally distressing the surface of the image to add a complexity to the emotions acted by a series of participants. Appropriately, *Scherzo* accompanied the documentary *Brakhage*, exploring the life and work of underground filmmaker Stan Brakhage.

Richard Sowada wants to change the way people look at the industry, throwing a gauntlet down to newcomers wishing to enter the filmmaking fray. He claims that Australians aren't as hooked into independent exhibition opportunities as they might be. Media releases for *REVelation* garnered 80 submissions from around the world, with only 2 or 3 films entered from Australian producers. The growing corporatisation of the festival scene has seen distributors use the bigger festivals as launch pads for many 'off-beat' productions. With titles slipping from festivals to mainstream screens in a matter of minutes, Sowada insists that the value of a smaller festival such as *REVelation* lies in its independence and 'death or glory' approach to exhibition and filmmaking.

REVelation *Independent Film Festival, coordinated by Richard Sowada (Dakota Films), presented by Planet Video in association with the Perth International Arts Festival, venues: Luna Cinemas, Luna on SX, Film and Television Institute, Mojo's Bar, Perth, February 3-13; New Zealand, Feb 20-March 20,* www.omen.net.au/~dakota/riff.htm.

Michelle Glaser is an independent writer/producer working with linear and interactive media.

Cinesonic: Magnolia

Philip Brophy

Part 1: Singing a new species of film narrative

I have no idea why Paul Thomas Anderson's film is called *Magnolia* (1999). Nor do I particularly care. This is but one of the near-countless incidental beauties of the film. I have a lot to say, but maybe you've already heard all that needs to be said. Pompous. Pretentious. Preposterous. Long-winded. Cold-hearted. An ensemble cast like Robert Altman. Tracking shots like Scorsese. Three goddamn hours long. Simply, what you've heard is wrong.

Scorsese's *GoodFellas* (1992) is undoubtedly a masterpiece, whether I wish it to be or not. It is a carbon-compacted diamond of modern film narrative, compressing a century of story-telling into an adrenalin vocal stream of violent drama, not unlike the steaming spittle direct from Scorsese's own bearded mouth. It is the end of a genetic line of narrative that draws with incredible skill on just about every key mechanism that safe critical orthodoxy deems integral to the cinematic apparatus. Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993) is not a masterpiece as such because the grand mantle of modernist narrative is not the spectacular crown it seeks. If Scorsese is the talker, Altman is the listener: he takes in all and allows all to be said. As a 'good ear', he stands in stark contrast to Scorsese who flits like a caffeinated psychologist playing back his patients' taped neuroses in fast-forward. *Short Cuts* is an attempt to listen to the noise of social dysfunction while retaining the integrity of its pain. When that ringing sound overcomes Christopher Penn in a moment of murderous rage, Altman does not merely tape: he induces feedback as a profound statement on the looping inevitability of actions which decimate all that we—as subjects and writers of our own fiction—wish to control.

Scorsese is about voice; about the pace of its delivery, the heightened points of its enunciation and all the tragi-comic collapses which follow its peppered emissions. Altman is about time and space; about the way in which a zone is fixed, locked and delineated to ensnare all within its resonating psychological perimeters. His camera work is the tracing of flow lines between radio-miked performers improvising in real time. It is a televisual effect and actually shares little with the relentless scopic 'proscenia' of cinema's fractured denouement—which Scorsese both destroys and regales in the operatic shock waves that define his giddy camera work. The tracking shot of the opening to *The Player* is not the tracking shot of the rear entrance nightclub scene in *GoodFellas*. Nor is it the tracking shots at the poolside party of *Boogie Nights* (1997) or in the TV station of *Magnolia*. P T Anderson's tracking shots are dictated not by location value, character insight, plot machination or wannabe auteurism, but by music. I contend that P T Anderson is about *song*—and as such is virtually a new species of narrative when compared to the likes of Scorsese and Altman.

Lili Zanuck's *Rush* (1991), Ulu Grosbard's *Georgia* (1995), Spike Lee's *Clockers* (1995) and *Girl 6* (1996), Alison Anders & Kurt Voss' *Grace Of My Heart* (1996) and *Sugartown* (1998), The Coen Brothers' *The Big Lebowski* (1998), Todd Haynes' *Velvet Goldmine* (1998)—all critically declaimed films of the 90s; all films which aspire to the condition of music generally, song especially. Equally significant is the way these films employ songs, many of which would have yielded me decidedly less pleasure beyond their cinematic placement. Waging a critical battle against my sense of 'taste' in music, these films uncomfortably inhabit my mental space despite my measures to reduce them into a wobbly chimera of what my cinematic mind imagines them to be. From Lee's fundamental reliance on the r'n'b/soul ballad, to Zanuck and Grosbard's retrieval of the 'singer-songwriter' stigma free of the dogma which stifles its historicist rock journo flatulence, to the Coen's uncompromising eclecticism, to Haynes, Anders & Voss' sincerity in re-evaluating the lost repositories of the neo-decadent lines between Glam and New Romanticism, these directors (and their composers and music supervisors) innately and personally know the power of song. And they have accordingly allowed song primacy of place in their radiophonic narratives. In an era where directors have proven themselves to be absolute retards when it comes to pop music, their cinema is sonically intelligent and musically literate.

Only a fool would still refute that the most ungainly and septic pop song is incongruously capable of sublime and transcendental expressions of irrational emotional fluxes and states. You can import every post-Adorno treatise on the bankruptcy of the pop machine to fend off the power of the song, but it will be to no avail. And to surrender to this is a lesson not only in how the significance and persuasiveness of the pop song can embody one in its aural aura, but also how its signage and effects result from dense, modular and multi-layered striations which literature will never shape in a the span of two-and-a-half minutes. For the pop song is dimensional: it engulfs you in the fantasy terrain of its own imagined social space; sometimes courting, other times repelling, always affecting you.

A bar scene in *Magnolia*. Ex-quiz kid Donnie Smith (William H Macy) bursts through the padded door into its red leather interior. One of those clean, dark-but-bright, oppressive bars like in *Cheers*. He sits down and orders Diet Pepsi. The music is Supertramp's *Goodbye Stranger*. The song is one of a few hits from their successful *Breakfast In America* LP from 1979—a melodious monstrosity of corporate rock from a dinosaurian era. It harbours something more than 'bad taste'. Like all corporate radiophonic diaspora, it recalls every social environment it has stained. The aura is deafening: a flood of all public space where that song played comes back to haunt you as you sit there overwhelmed by memories of every tiled surface, sticky carpet, flocked-wallpaper and buzzing fluoro light which has shaped your phenomenological make-up. It's personal because of its ability to jettison you back to those dimensions *all at once*. Stomaching this song is meant to be emotionally visceral. It is not about deftly choosing an emotional state and sound to synchronise dramatic energy (as is the case with Scorsese's canny use of Nilsson's 1973 song *Jump Into The Fire* as a coked-up Johnny [Ray Liotta] does a drug run near the climax of *GoodFellas*). P T Anderson's use of *Goodbye Stranger* is meant to create a psycho-sonic space wherein we become ensnared by both the song and the cruel tragedy which unfurls around Donnie as the song reaches its own gaudy epiphany. Donnie is of course oblivious to the song, yet we share his trauma by having it *amplified* for us by a song to which he is indifferent.

That is what P T Anderson can do with songs. It is a device, an art, even, which he has been doggedly honing since *Hard Eight* (1997) and *Boogie Nights*. Don't take my word for it. In the liner notes to the *Magnolia* CD he writes: "Like one would adapt a book for the screen, I had the concept of adapting Aimee (Mann's) songs into a screenplay." I picked this up the first time I saw *Magnolia*. It became even more apparent on second viewing, so reading this quote afterwards was gratifying and inspiring. This guy *knows* song. If you think you 'know' cinema, then you probably will not like *Magnolia*. It is working beyond your ontological schema of conditional cinema; it is working in the dense fibrous sonorum of pop music, record production, and the strikingly ambivalent evocation specific to lyric writing. And if you don't know song—its flirtatious socio-cultural pomp and circumstance—then you will likely have difficulty in comprehending the grain of *Magnolia*'s narrational voice and how it speaks the evaporative dance of sound waves and song lines which define its story. *Magnolia* reaches new heights of 'vertical narration', where everything is told—as songs do—'all at once'. Despite all the claims to its liberating play with the imagination, literature is comparatively burdened by its own linearity, so when P T Anderson chose *not* to adapt a book for the screen and chose a set of songs by Aimee Mann instead, his resulting mode of narration only laterally connects to those narrative forms we expect from cinema. *Magnolia* is thus a *timbrel* text which must be listened to in order to be read.

People who reductively and programmatically think filmmaking is about 'telling stories' really should just roll over and die. They say they want storytelling as if it were some universal essential act, when what they invariably seek is a bourgeois mish-mash of classical Greek theatrical dogma, countless Judeo-Christian hang-ups about authorship, stains left over from Joseph Campbell's limp leaking dick, and a PDF file downloaded from a Sid Fields fanboy site. All this fretting over plot, character, motivation, structure, truth, honesty, meaning—all dished out in mean-spirited, narrow-minded terms of condition. Territorialised, categorised, rationalised, franchised; all in the name of a cheap mimetic humanism which even dogs would find suspicious and unconvincing. Notably, *Magnolia* fails abysmally under such strictures. Following the surreal 'preface' to the film, the introductory character-based movement to *Magnolia* unfolds. It fucks with your aural consciousness so deeply it's like being shot at close-range and not feeling the pain until the paramedics shove a needle into you. It tells you so much and with such an excess of simultaneity you lose sense of narrative linkage and progression. Deliberately so. *Magnolia* is not about biblical resonances, chance occurrences, fatalistic arcs and other linear logic which it sardonically quotes. It is about the dissolution of narrativity in the confluence of multitudinous potentiality which vibrates like a chorus of narrational pulsars in harmony with the songs on its soundtrack. This is how you can start to classify *Magnolia* as a 'new species of narrative'.

Across that opening survey of all the film's characters, Aimee Mann's cover version of Harry Nilsson's *One* occupies both screen and auditorium in a radical way. It is the nearest American cinema has come to the work of Jean Luc Godard and his sound designer Francois Musy in films like *Detective* (1982), *Hail Mary* (1985), *Soigne Ta Droite* (1986) and *Nouvelle Vague* (1990). Yet whereas the Godard/Musy sono-musical collages take on a fractal complexity in their horizontality via their dramatic cut-and-splicing, P T Anderson's mix of Aimee Mann's cover version (produced and performed by the film's composer Jon Brion) throws us into an equally complex verticality. In concert with the like-minded mind-boggling sound design by Richard King, the *One* sequence ducks and weaves all its soundtrack elements within and without the architecsonic domain of the song *One*. What is most amazing is the flagrant disregard for formal hierarchical logic in the sound design: Aimee Mann's 'lead vocals' ride atop for most of the time (panned hard right in the mix to leave dialogue in the centre), yet at times even her voice is clouded by the film's dialogue and the song's own baroque vocal arrangements.

A vocal schizophrenia is thus orchestrated, typical of the pleasurably perplexing arrangements of Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks to which Jon Brion stylistically bows. This chorus of expressive utterances breathes in a continually morphing sonorum which is, literally, breath-taking.

Magnolia, *Part 2, "Out of breath" will appear in* RealTime#37*; read the whole essay at* www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

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Mixing with the whatsisnames at Popcorn Taxi

Kirsten Krauth

It's the morning after the Oscars and Russell Crowe's on TV: "It wasn't as trying as I thought it would be." You've got to admire the guy's honesty. Was he having a bad hair day? He didn't have a smile planted every time Billy Crystal threw the cameras in his direction. He didn't swan down the red carpet. He looked so very…alone. Where was Al? The cheersquad? Of course, I don't watch the Oscars for the stars. I don't give a stuff who wears Versace—giggle…giggle…Drew…my gown was made for me…designer…giggle…Cameron…giggle…cleavage…blush—no, I'm there for the little guy, the whatsisname, the bespectacled baldy who won for *The Matrix*, the ageing hippies doing their bit for social justice in the short doco category, the Aussies who never get a chance to grab the mike off their Yank counterparts, the speeches not in English like Wajda's (or in a garbled mix a la Almodovar) that are always the best.

Which brings me to Popcorn Taxi, a weekly event in Sydney where behind-the-scenes becomes front-of-stage, a mix of short films, features and introductions. Cinematographers, producers, editors, directors, writers (and the occasional actor) come in for a fireside chat and Q and A with an ideal, highly film literate audience (see Clare Stewart, page 18). Dion Beebe popped in last week and Susie Porter drops by tomorrow. Recent guests have included Wim Wenders, Alex Proyas, Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez, Bruce Beresford, John Seale and Bryan Brown, along with the premiere of a new independent film *Four Jacks*.

After Dion begins to relay his lensed f-stop adventures, I realise he's filmed some strikingly contrasting visions of Australian landscapes including a few of my favourites—*Floating Life*, *Praise*, *Holy Smoke*—you can almost smell these films. They linger. Chatting to John Curran (director, *Praise*), it's apparent that Dion knows how to stamp his creativity on any project he's involved with. He is an improviser who aspires to making it up "as you go along", happiest when capturing the "essence of what a moment needs."

In *Floating Life*, Clara Law's cringe-inducing perception of harsh, glaring suburbia translated into overexposing 2 stops on everything, a radical process creating a burnt-out urban landscape. *Holy Smoke* was shot in the Flinders Ranges (SA) where the landscape was "seductive but hard", the "cutting" sun a challenge compared with the diffused (polluted) light in Europe and the USA. Dion describes how Jane Campion gave him a big scrapbook prior to the filming, full of random references—fabrics, text, colours, photos—which helped him assemble the film's style and colour palette, the rich pinks and greens and coloured glass of the hut where Harvey and Kate are captured, the way the light plays inside as a series of fluid layers which work inside to a darker core. About *Praise*, he talks of the importance of "picking up the mood of the day" when you're stuck in a small studio with a couple of actors and not much room to move. Smoke became the key, creating a tobacco-stained environment for the characters to play out their dissolving worlds. Both John and Dion agreed that the cinematography would counter the grunge element of the text, maintaining a sense of control and composition, revealing the beauty in decadence.

John describes Dion as "unflappable" and "slow" and I like his unwillingness to compromise, his refusal to be rushed, even when speaking to an audience. This too seems to fit into the Australian landscape and adds a counterpoint to the Hollywood egos he manages: the star in a Stetson with a gun collection in his trailer, the star who refuses to have his face filmed in direct sunlight.

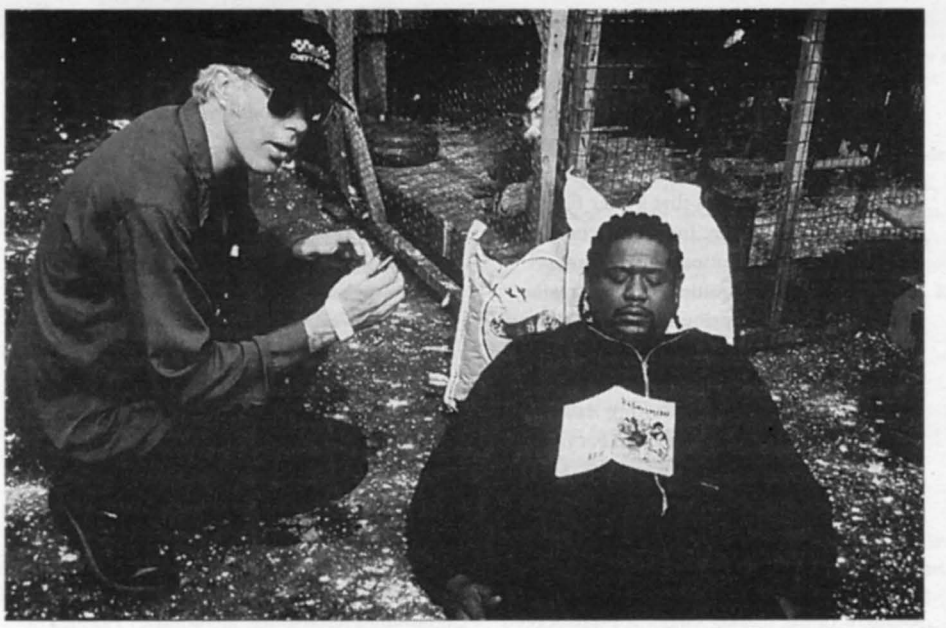
If you want more than gossip, Popcorn Taxi is the putty. It fills the gaps between the films and the hype, a rare chance to hear Australian filmmakers talk about their practice in detailed and practical terms outside the film festival circuit. It is expansionist and inclusive in its screenings of (often excellent) short films. It puts faces to names. Most importantly, it happens every week, fostering a sense of community and ongoing dialogue, and offering recognition for names not so well known. It's what the Australian film industry needs right now.

Popcorn Taxi *is an initiative of filmmakers Gary Doust & Matt Wheeldon, Wednesdays, 8pm, Valhalla Cinema, Sydney.*
www.popcorntaxi.com.au

Film reviews

Ghost Dog

writer-director Jim Jarmusch
distributor New Vision
April release



Jim Jarmusch & Forrest Whitaker, *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*

Fly into New Jersey on the wings of a bird. Overcast. Groovy soundtrack to help us settle in. Cool smooth. Jarmusch seems to take pleasure from such simple things, like sitting in the park or driving around the city at night in a flash car. Forest Whitaker looks suitably unimpressed. There's some syncopated killing, slow, slow, quick-quick slooow. Very good on tribal rites, how they clash and cross-fertilise: it's an Eastern Western, gangsta v gangster, the way of the samurai pitted against the traditions of the Cosa Nostra.

More cool music. Such interesting faces too. There's much to enjoy here, including: a reading list, texts circulating as carriers of cultural signifiers; one or two great sight gags (the mobster who likes to rap—public enemy becomes Public Enemy); the anxieties of mistaken identity (Ghost Dog—that's like an American Indian name, isn't it?); and a friendship which is lost and found in mis-translation. Jarmusch is so adept at switching tack, shifting and blending emotional registers which might seem at odds, mixing menace with buffoonery while also enjoying the mundane.

And it's enjoyable because Jarmusch doesn't present the standard hired-killer-betrayed-by-bosses-seeks-revenge plot as a metaphor—one man's struggle to overcome the forces of blah blah blah—but rather unveils it for what it is: a playing out of codes. Ghost Dog surrenders himself to the code, accepts it totally and unquestionably as a way of living even though he is, in fact, already dead to the world, simultaneously killed and resurrected at the moment he assumes his own non-existence. Like an Eastwood vigilante, he is back from the grave, an empty space, a ghost.

With his old-fashioned sense of propriety, elaborate hiding places, ability to steal any car he fancies and then 'dissolve into the night', Ghost Dog is the perfect comic book tragic hero (he's kind to children and animals too) in a world where life imitates cartoons. What makes him unique, 'alive', is the fact that there is no life beyond this role (the loving wife and family tragically killed…) to which he can return or reconcile with through death. And that's why a successful film like this will be *seen* as a failure ('We never really get to know Ghost Dog…') while other films of this genre which 'succeed' in humanising the hero, ultimately fail.

Simon Enticknap

My Mother Frank

writer-director Mark Lamprell
distributor Beyond Films
May release

My mother says you can't be everything for everyone! Mark Lamprell's new film *My Mother Frank* might not have heard this advice. The story seems simple enough. Frank (played by Irish actress Sinead Cusack) decides to attend the same university as her son David (Matthew Newton). There are the usual mutual friend scenarios, embarrassing nights out and the stealing of essays. But throw in a debilitating disease, some good old fashioned Catholic motifs and a few lawn bowl luncheons, and the film transmutes from genre to genre. Widow Frank is alone and bored, doted on by her daughter/socialite (played by Sacha Horler) and 2 dear old nuns. Her story runs parallel with David's, which involves surfing, girls and wet dreams. The characters are like caricatures of the odder elements of Australian Culture. They are slightly alien, neither overtly familiar nor fascinatingly different. Frank herself is filled with sadness and eccentricity, mysteriously storing tinned pineapples which explode sporadically. Sam Neill is perhaps the most realistic character, playing the cold Professor from Hell. (But these academic types are always so predictable anyway.)

It's about 'old money', ugly dark sprawling colonial mansions, and social functions all in white. There is an obvious attempt at symbolism here—dark interiors at the film's beginning transform into bright and sunny landscapes as the characters 'come of age' and grow. And there are no surprises. The ending is of course a happy one There are downfalls, disappointments but everyone pulls through in the end. The professor softens up. David gets the girl. Frank graduates. It's too happy to be a black comedy but too dire to be a fulfilling feelgood. Like life really.

Joni Taylor

The audience is out there, but...

Clare Stewart

In Mel Brooks' *The Producers*, there is a fabulous line where Kenneth Mars, the writer of *Springtime For Hitler*, disagrees with an audience member about the quality of a performance: "You are the audience. I am the author. I outrank you." In Tim Burton's *Ed Wood*, the worst director of all time asks the worst financier and distributor of all time, Georgie Weiss, "Is there a script?" Georgie replies, "Fuck no. But there's a poster." What both these comic moments lampoon are the communication breaches between those who produce, those who disseminate and those who receive. The Australian cinema industry cannot currently afford the luxury of this humour. While Australian cinema audiences are growing, the audience for Australian and other non-US cinema is steadily decreasing.

In December 1999, results of an Australian Bureau of Statistics survey showed that 85% of Australians attended cultural activities in the previous 12 months and 67% had been to the movies at least once. This figure indicates that 28.9% more people frequent the cinema than the next most popular cultural activity, visiting a library. It also shows that the audience for cinema has expanded by 4.9% since 1995. In April 1999, results of the Sweeney Arts Report indicated that 85% of Australians went to the movies, with cinema's closest rival being live music at 50%. While differing methodology produced inconsistent figures (ABS surveyed 25,000 people in both rural and urban areas, while the Sweeney Arts Report surveyed 1,500 people in mainland urban centres) both outcomes point to a burgeoning market.

The Australian media presented these outcomes with predictable recourse to cinema's cultural legitimacy, evoking that exhausted divide between high and populist forms. *The Australian* snubbed it: "not everyone might agree with the Australian Bureau of Statistics' opinion that a trip to the movies is a cultural activity..." (*The Australian*, December 14 1999); while the *Herald Sun* embraced the Sweeney results with an article titled "Films, pub rock beat the elite arts" which saluted the victory in the most hallowed of national terms: "if the arts had their own Olympics, the silver screen would win the gold..." (*Herald Sun*, Melbourne, April 23 1999).

The glamour of this mobility cloaks a much darker trend. The Film Finance Corporation and the Australian Film Commission recently confirmed that the box office share for local films in 1999 was 3%, down from 4% the previous year, while Australian box office recorded an 11.9% growth in revenue ($704 million) and a 10% growth in attendances (88 million) according to the Motion Picture Distributors' Association of Australia. The AFC's recent report *Distributing Australian Films* acknowledges the downturn in Australia's domestic box office share as a result echoed in most large territories around the world. However, the report did not indicate that larger territories—USA, India and Hong Kong—already sustain a healthy domestic gross box office while France, with its rigorous market regulations, has a substantial 30% share.

The ideal audience, the audience that eludes Australian films and films from cultures other than the USA, is a cinema literate audience

The crisis facing our screen industry is that the distance between the culture of local production and the culture of consumption/ reception is becoming increasingly wide. The audience is out there, but how do we motivate them to view more broadly? The recent restructure at the AFC reflects this uncertainty. Policy changes demonstrate an increased commitment to production development, particularly script writing, premised on the notion that better films will find a bigger audience. Increased consultation with the distribution sector suggests that the current inequities between major and independent distributors and exhibitors will also necessitate an increase in support for this sector if the situation is to be substantially improved (*Distributing Australian Films—a survey of current market conditions and distributors' perceptions*, Mary Anne Reid for the Australian Film Commission, August 1999). What the changes in policy have yet to reflect is that the intelligence of the audience is also a vital element of the market chain. A more screen literate audience is likely to make better informed choices and choose to support, with their box office dollars, product that due to inequities in the distribution and exhibition sector, is disappearing from the cinema screens.

The number of Australian screens has doubled since the beginning of the decade, from 851 in 1990 to 1748 in 1999 with the rapid expansion of multiplex and megaplex venues (*www.afc.gov.au* Fast Facts 2000). That figure is not mirrored by a corresponding increase in the variety of product. Of the 258 films released last year, 68% were American and they accounted for an 84% share of total box office while 13% were films from non-English speaking territories accounting for 3.4% of the box share (*www.afc.gov.au* Australian Films—1999 Box Office Share). This hardly reflects Australia's multicultural make-up. The fact that there are markets for other cultural product is indicated by the Australian Film Institute's recent Hong Kong Film Festival, which saw a 200% increase in box office returns over the previous year, tapping a large Asian audience base.

The ideal audience, the audience that eludes Australian films and films from cultures other than America, is a cinema literate audience: an audience whose "lifestyles...conjunctions of habit, desires, accident and necessity" (Colin Mercer, cited in Deborah Stevenson: *Art and Organisation: Making Australian Cultural Policy*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2000) are geared towards more global, less Americanised, rhythms of consumption.

Deb Verhoeven, in her discussion of Scott Murray's *Centenary of Cinema* trailer, acknowledges the function of his compilation of Australia's cinema history. It serves as a reminder to the audience "that they are in a sense what the films have 'missed'—an audience that is anything more than an 'ideal'." (Deb Verhoeven: "Introduction: (pre) facing the nation", *Twin Peaks: Australian and New Zealand feature films*, Damned Publishing, Melbourne, 1999). The Victorian state agency Cinemedia, in the development of Federation Square, continually acknowledges the market and cultural value of a well-educated audience. This value was reiterated by producer-turned screen culture advocate Sir David Puttnam in his recent lecture: *Screen Literacy and Cultural Morality in the Digital Age*. Puttnam delivered the first Greirson lecture to be presented by Cinemedia in a decade, and the event represented a public commitment by Cinemedia and the Victorian State Government to the importance of an educated audience. It is also a concern shared by distributors. In the AFC report, Frank Cox, director of NewVision Films, claims that "the biggest change is in people's viewing habits, what kind of films they want to see. We don't find the same level of support for specialist or arthouse films as we did a decade ago...I think it's purely an audience thing." State government agencies, commercial distributors and cultural commentators are recognising the value in developing the literacy of filmgoers. Federal policy must follow suit.

In her survey of recent Australian cultural policy, *Art and Organisation*, Deborah Stevenson refers to Simon Malloy's examination of the arguments for the value of government arts funding. Malloy claims that lobbying strategies are predicated on the belief that "the benefits which emanate from 'cultural activities...*are not recognised by markets*' [and so] governments have a responsibility to recognise the 'market failure' and subsidise their production."

Inherent in this belief system, is a hierarchy which elevates the intelligence of producers/authors above the intelligence of the market/audience. Fine arts policy, particularly since Keating's *Creative Nation*, has become increasingly aware that this hierarchy is neither culturally nor commercially viable. There has been a broad policy shift which recognises the need to develop audiences through snappier marketing and through education, reducing the distance between the art providers and the end users. Australian film policy has lagged noticeably behind and the gap between development funding for production, and development funding for consumption and reception continues to widen. The government must recognise the market failure and implement policy to address it. It must also implement policy to develop the market by informing an ever expanding audience about the value of participating in a diverse cinema culture.

Clare Stewart is Screen Events Officer for the Australian Film Institute

filmSHORTS

Eight new Queensland-initiated film and TV programs are set to be produced in the next 12 months in deals involving the Pacific Film and Television Commission (PCTV). The projects include a doco about truck drivers, 2 short films, 3 TV dramas and a full length horror movie (continuing current trend in Australian film) to be directed by Murray Fahey—*The Third Circle* is about 2 children who move to Brisbane and become "possessed by the evil forces that inhabit their derelict cubby-house." The AFC has announced a long term commitment to Queensland by appointing a Brisbane-based project manager for the next 3 years, and has confirmed support for *Pyjama Girl* (the first Queensland short film to be fully funded by AFC), from writer-director Maryanne Lynch (a *RealTime* Queensland editorial team member) and producer Gabrielle Jones. *Pyjama Girl* is currently in pre-production.

The South Australian Film Commission (SAFC) has also announced the upcoming production of 4 low budget flicks to be produced in SA. The films include *Tempe Tip* and 3 horror flicks aimed at the youth market (straight to video): *Scratch* (young doco makers drawn into a deadly game with their subject), *Moloch* (an outback town whose residents have mutated due to a nearby toxic dump) and *Bodyjackers* (the horrific implications of residents of an outback town coming face to face with their clones). The films will offer local crews and actors 40-50 weeks of work. For more information, contact Victoria Goodyear at SAFC, tel 08 8348 9336.

The Melbourne Super 8 Film Group presents its Open Screening on the second Tuesday of every month. The screenings are open to all members of the public; just bring along your super 8 footage. Recent events have involved live soundscapes and the group just toured Darwin. There are plans for Sydney and New Zealand screenings. Tel 03 9417 3402, *super8@netspace.net.au* or visit *www.cinemedia.net/super8*

FTO (New South Wales Film & Television Office) has published a guide to help young filmmakers market their films. The YFF Marketing Guide provides a contact list, detailed analysis of the requirements of various festivals and broadcasters, and information on how to prepare a budget. Drama, documentary, short films and animation are covered separately. To get a copy, contact FTO on tel 02 9264 6400 or *www.fto.nsw.gov.au*.

A sad farewell to *Cantrills Filmnotes*, the long-running publication on independent cinema and video, edited by Arthur and Corinne Cantrill, which folded recently, due to withdrawal of AFC funding. Grab hold of the last copy to read a thoughtful editorial on the state of play of film culture in Australia.

tvSHORTS

The AFC has just announced an initiative for Australian TV where the revenue generated by its management of copyright from certain TV projects will be reinvested in a new Producer Package Program. This Program will assist the creation of new TV programs by supporting independent producers working in adult and children's drama, and documentary projects, providing for advances of between $20,000 - $50,000 to assist producers to develop a slate of two or more projects. The closing date for applications is May 31. For more information, contact the Australian Film Commission in your state.

RealTime @ the Adelaide Festival

telstra adelaide festival
3–19 march 2000

Government of South Australia
Telstra

Editorial

At almost two and a half weeks, the Adelaide Festival was an epic of invention, a celebration of overseas and Australian works, a debate over ideas about art, spirit and community. Not everything worked, a few shows simply didn't seem ready (including Theatreworks' *Desdemona*), but in a festival rich in commissions it was deeply satisfying to encounter new Australian works (competing as ever against the overseas polished and true) that look destined for long lives. They are not perfect, but the vision that informs them, the inventiveness that enriches them and the performances that sustain them confirm that Robyn Archer was right to invest significantly in new work. Of course the works are vulnerable in something as competitive as an international arts festival, but where else would they they get such support and such visibility in the current funding climate and with the conservatism of the major performing arts organisations? Barrie Kosky in his 1996 festival and Archer in 1998 and especially 2000 have shown that an Australian arts festival can feature Australian work and build an audience that will embrace it, not always evenly—the sell-out *urfaust* versus the poorly attended *Slow Love*—but they will, as Archer hoped, give it a go.

At the end of the festival and on return to Sydney, everyone wants to know your list of favorites. Les Ballets C de la B's *Iets Op Bach* aside, it got pretty personal this time round. I don't think I've been involved in so many heated discussions, especially given the age-old Adelaide penchant for the brusque take-no-prisoners dismissal. For the record, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's *I Said I*, a massive dance theatre realisation of Peter Handke's classic theatre text *Self Accusation*, ranked highest for me. Sadly, not a lot of people saw it (surprising given the large turnout for de Keersmaeker's other shows), probably scared off by the length, words like 'provocative' and 'dj.' In fact, many who revelled in *Iets Op Bach* would have loved it, given the similar sense of a community coming to life before your eyes, of performers collaborating intensely, and of a unique theatre-dance-music hybrid.

Howard Barker's *The Ecstatic Bible*, occupying some 7 hours of stage time, has proved one of my most memorable festival experiences. A co-production between The Wrestling Room, a UK company dedicated to Barker's works and currently directed by him, and Adelaide's Brink Theatre (Tim Maddocks co-directing with Barker), *The Ecstatic Bible* was a rich and fruitful collaboration, an idiosyncratic re-writing of human history and morality, stunningly designed by Mary Moore and with a memorable Michael Smetanin score played live. (The review of the production appears in Edition#1 of our festival coverage. A transcription of the RTV video interview with Barker appears in Edition#3.)

Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *Giulio Cesare* was a remarkable experience of a different kind, the strongest one for me in the festival. It is a work that draws the visual, sound and theatre arts into a disturbing interpretation of a classic play and 2 historical moments—then and now. The Greenaway-Andriessen-Boddeke *Writing to Vermeer* was furiously debated, but despite mixed word of mouth, it still sold out—it simply had to be seen to be believed—and remains a potent and moving visual and aural memory. Elision contemporary music ensemble's opera *Yuè Ling Jié* was high on my list of favourites, wild, rude, eerie and sad, a rich musical, sonic and theatrical experience. It needs some serious editing and, like music theatre throughout the festival, needs to address making the libretto more clearly audible or available to its audience. The Australian-Indonesian collaboration, *The Theft of Sita*, despite needing some radical surgery and re-writing in its last third, proved itself a work of great popular potential with a seamless melding of traditional and contemporary musics and puppetries. Along with *The Ghost Wife*—an expertly realised and powerful, if problematic chamber opera premiered at the last Melbourne International Festival and seen here in its second season—*Yuè Ling Jié* and *The Theft of Sita* show that Archer's confidence in Australian music theatre is not misplaced.

Given the volume and density of the performance program, I got to hear little of the festival's music outside of music theatre. But I did take in 6 of the 10 twilight concerts from Sydney's Goldner Quartet as they pulled off one of the festival's major achievements with aplomb, passion and sheer expertise—a select history of 20th century string quartets. Very late in the festival, I squeezed in one of the 3 nights of *Improvising the Future*. Curated by international singer and musician David Moss, the program brought together some great talent, in solos, duos and, on this night, a veritable orchestra of improvisational power and delicacy—a great way to end the festival.

The 2000 Telstra Adelaide Festival was an engrossing experience, full of risky but worthwhile programming, and more than ever proved that it is the only Australian arts festival where talk and debate are important, in crowded lunchtime forums (though it's time for that often fragmentary model to be seriously looked at), the excellent architecture series, and *From Appreciation to Appropriation* (about Indigenous art) amongst others. Seguing into these was a huge masterclass series which we simply haven't had the space to report.

Incoming festival director Peter Sellars spoke a number of times during the festival, establishing his presence with carefully crafted speeches (without notes) and a string of political and artistic provocations from the outsider looking in on a culture at a critical moment—asking us what are we going to do about it, as artists and audiences...and, presumably, for his festival in 2002. Robyn Archer has left Sellars with a firm and rich foundation for even greater adventures.

What follows is a very small selection from the 4 Adelaide Festival editions of *RealTime*. For our complete coverage visit our website. You'll find that our writers' favorites also included La Ribot, big hArt, Anne Teresa de Keermaeker & Rosas' *Fase* and *Drumming*, Lisa Moore, *Mizumachi*, Lucy Guerin and many others. KG

Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker and Rosas, *Fase*

I Said I said it all

Virginia Baxter, Keith Gallasch
Fase, Drumming, I Said I
Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker and Rosas
Adelaide Festival Theatre
March 14 - 18

Conservative programming in Australia that denies us the work of major contemporary artists is tragic. One visit from Pina Bausch to the 1982 Adelaide Festival has kept us going for decades—it's taken an Olympics to get her back. The Wooster Group—once. Mabou Mines—once. Jan Fabre—once. Jan Lauwers—once. William Forsythe—once. And all at Adelaide festivals. We've been waiting to see Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker for too long now. She brought her company Rosas once to Perth in the 1990s while the rest of us made do with pitifully brief dispatches. On the law of averages that should have been that, but Robyn Archer thankfully brought us de Keersmaeker in triplicate this Adelaide Festival.

It was in 1981 that de Keersmaeker collaborated with members of the Steve Reich ensemble to create *Fase*. Fortunately for us, de Keersmaeker believes in revivals. Watching the same two bodies who danced it then (de Keersmaeker herself and Michèle Anne De Mey) dance it 19 years down the track is pleasure indeed. In *Piano Phase* the dancers spin hypnotically against a wide screen. Between them is the shadow they jointly create, two nearly identical dancers making seemingly identical, seemingly simple movements. We watch as the inevitable variations of breath, blood, the velocity of hair, the kinetics and speed of singular bodies move them ever so slightly in and out of phase. As their shadows play with parallax, ergonomics, air and light, the music moves in and out of ever more complex synchronicities. The patterns of movement vary in each of the sections that follow (*Come out*, *Violin Phase* and *Clapping Music*) but the same geometrical attention to space, light and short choreographed sentences is repeated. What it adds up to is a synaesthetic experience of music and movement. A composer friend said she longed for live musicians—imagining that was almost too much. As it was, the beauty of this work left me breathless. VB

Drumming is like watching Chaos Theory in action as the dancers move in and out of sync with Steve Reich's score and with each other. Dance often likes to explore the relationship between the individual and the group (de Keersmaeker's *I Said I* being a potent example entering new territory), sometimes to the point of cliché, but in *Drumming* social complexity is evoked. The power of the work resides in the relationship between the one, the several and the many. Initially, an individual in a strip of light moves freely with the quality of improvisation, stop-starting her way into fluidity. Forward of her, in the dark we see a man enter, imitate her, slightly behind, suddenly totally in sync. Other dancers enter informally from the wings where they've been standing. Soon there's a swirling cosmos of atoms, sudden pairings, and trios striding together. In the middle a woman pushes into the back of a man, the first touch, which triggers others. Dancers fly dangerously close to each other. They acknowledge each other, a smile, a touch, making space, moving fast into a huge unit (here and there sudden partnerships you might miss if looking the wrong way). But there are limits, a change in the Reichian pulse and suddenly the edge of the stage becomes an invisible wall which pushes the dancer away, suddenly another dancer is another such a wall. But the swirling never ceases, the brief duos and trios recur, this looks like chaos but it's not, it's chancy but meaningful, and beautiful and recognisable. KG

Peter Handke's *Self-Accusation* is to dance for—the perfect text for choreographers we decide and Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's *I Said I* the perfect spoken word dance. The 12 members of the company wear head microphones and deliver Handke's text to perfection (allowing the words to work their way through the bodies to the audience, never over-inflecting them but allowing emotion to believably build of its own accord). The text is also projected on a screen above their heads and the production is "driven" from a desk at the front of the auditorium. Since the 90s de Keersmaeker has worked increasingly with live music. As we enter the theatre, the dancers await us on the stage flanked by musicians—on one side, a saxophonist and a scratch dj; on the other a piano trio. We're often sold the idea of the journey in theatre and short-changed with hops to the corner shop. At the end of *I Said I* we feel like we've *really* been somewhere. Over two and a half hours (no interval) we re-live practically all we ever knew about getting along with other people—that vast vocabulary of interpersonal behaviours learned in all its traumatic detail, all its cultural complexity from ages nil to 7, modified from 9 to 12, rebelled against from 13 to 16 and still only occasionally perfect in adult life.

Each of the sentences is short, recited at fairly cracking pace; if someone makes a mistake, another corrects them. The music (both formally constructed and improvised) and the movement (eruptions of dance amidst patterns of everyday movement) builds step by step on the ideas embodied in the total work. Each dancer at some time becomes the individual learning to be part of the social corpus while the others team up or gang up to accept or reject. Everything is running smoothly until one of the performers decides to play 'blind' or accusative or demanding. Like the attention to the onstage infant in Les Ballet C de la B's *Iets Op*

Bach, the others peripherally guide the one who is different. There's a revealing scene about blame and ostracism in which the many become the few and the one. It ends with everyone pointing accusingly at everyone else. The rebellious one walks into the audience to borrow a coat, eventually she'll take up the tarquette. Though it's rumoured to be a difficult work, we saw only 3 people walk out, leaving the rest of us to roar our appreciation.

At this year's Sydney Festival we had one of the relatively regular visits from choreographer Jiri Kylian and the Nederlands Dans Theater. The season of 2 works attracted justifiably large audiences but troubling responses from some of the critics. In particular, *The Australian*'s dance writer used her appreciation of this work of 'pure' dance as a stick to beat Australian contemporary dance practitioners whom she believed should all go back to their studios and start again. But Kylian's choreography, however expert its execution, has none of the communicating power of a work such as *I Said I* which revels in its hybridity; relishes words as well as a full repertoire of movement; is serious, yet playful. We hope the Herbertsons, Waltons, Carbees, Stewarts, Guerins, Adams, Walshes, O'Neills, Parkers, Patricks, Kohlers, Lasicas, Obarzaneks and others continue to defy antagonism to the postmodern in Australian dance. We wish them the critical climate that nurtured the perfection of a work like *I Said I*

The spirit in the body of the festival

Zsuzsanna Sobolsay

Architectural Forum: Peter Sellars and Ken Latona, Fezbah, March 17; Light Houses, Plaza, Adelaide Festival Centre; *The Theft of Sita*, Botanic Park, March 17; *Lakshminarayan Subramaniam*, Adelaide Town Hall, March18

How many angels dance on the head of a pin? Something approaching thousands, I suppose: a teetering, overpopulated image which has never enhanced my spirituality. And what can an angel do with a sewing pin? Peter Sellars tells us, however, that Buddhist fathers count infinity at everybody's fingertips. Now *this* is exciting. Here is a difference not just of mathematics, but of relationship between body and ethereal substance, and a huge gap in attitude to where the beatific sits in our lives.

I've been stretched a lot at this festival: into hope, out of despair, into wondering about possible worlds, alongside worrying about existing ones. Grotowski says our bodies are *organon*, or instruments of thought: if so, then we've been given quite a workout.

In this forum, Sellars waxes lyrical about the upward curve of Thai temple roofs and recalls in ecstasy (standing outside his body?) how he saw Australian architect Ken Latona's children feeding kangaroos in their kitchen. Or is that kangaroos feeding human children? The dialogue is a highlight of hopefulness and soul-feeding in a way that would have sated *Yue Ling Jie*'s hungry ghost, but also sets up a yearning: for how many people is this a real possibility to incorporate in their daily lives?

The Light House structures are responsive, responsible and give respite from the psychically and ecologically destructive urban habitats most of us live in. Idealistic, in a way, as certainly none of the designs deal with the need to develop high or even medium-density low-cost housing, but are one-off projects for single clients in ideal and isolated habitats. But all luck to them, for they are what we might dream to live in, and even "real" dreams like these buildings are important places to figure out design and construction methodologies with a kind of purity that can all too easily be compromised by conservative councils and town planners. As Latona said, you go bush where no-one can argue with you or stall your processes.

The Theft of Sita passes from dream into nightmare, from a blessed rainforest landscape into a sordid and corrupt vision of urban (and First World) take-over. Sita, the stolen spirit of the land, even appears as a prostitute, so degraded in function and self-image is she. Is all such debasement of habitat a prostitution? Does such loss of soul and (pro)creativity always lead to the brothel? *Theft* at times becomes ham-fisted with its analogies, naive in its politicising, and plays on guilts and questions of responsibilities in unhelpful ways.

The city is ugly and evil and almost in itself causes riots; Suharto and the rainforest-culling toilet-paper habits of Australian are held up as effigies ready to burn. The problem with such literalised dialectical approaches is that it becomes too easy to say "but I buy recycled toilet-paper and would never ride fake rapids which steal water from the rice-fields." I suspect the Ramayanan mythic realm functions as most myths do: to hold conscious and unconscious torments and battles in a larger symbolic form from which it is much harder to escape (much as one can't quite escape the symbols in one's own dreams). Mythic figures appeal to the good and evil in all of us, dealing with the capacity for the infinite and guttural in our very bones.

The compassion aroused in the earlier puppetry and animations of the funny, feral, wild forest world and the shock of its brutalisation is enough to elicit a call to arms. Surely it is the poignancy of this loss we need to retain. The full "work-out" here adds a heaviness that risks a psychological and intellectual paralysing, and my *organon* is just about ready to collapse (or worse, argue back). Interestingly, the loss of mythological string is paralleled, perhaps even driven, by the movement into more free-jazz structures in the music, thick blasts on psychic overload. What is the intention here?

I am wondering why Lakshminarayan Subramaniam's concert doesn't leave me jammed. Quite the contrary: for over 2 hours I am given the gift of being held equivalent to this music's complexity. Stated themes (*ragas*) are announced and explored in variations that not only stretch tonality but halve and double the tempos of the original, alongside rhythmic patterns that both sustain and pleasurably torment the rhythmic cycle (*tala*). My organicity is called to meet it. This music mightn't solve specific atrocities of our world, but it throws up a rich and provocative vision of the comprehension of which we are capable.

Designer standards, mission accomplished

Diana Weekes

Robyn Archer, Paul Grabowsky, *Keep up your standards*, Adelaide Town Hall, March 19

There could have been no more fitting finish to Adelaide Festival 2000 than the Archer-Grabowsky fun concert, *Keep up your Standards*. Playing to a packed house, 5 very fine musicians—Paul Grabowsky (piano), Nick Schauble (drums), Mark Knoop (bass), Gary Costello (accordion) and the totally inimitable John Rodgers (fiddle and guitar)—warm up comfortably with a Miles Davis tune. But when Robyn Archer strides out to join them on stage the audience goes wild. This is clearly a good idea: Festival Director reappears to strut her stuff in the concert hall, and festival fans return to show their (two-fold) appreciation. It is a curious mix of personal and public performance and participation, both on stage and in the auditorium. In fact the warmth of this reception falls just short of the hysteria associated with a cult following.

There is no doubt about Archer's credibility as a performer. Despite the harrowing schedule of the previous fortnight (during which she planned to see every main festival event), there is not the slightest indication that she is tired, out of form or under-rehearsed. Right from the start her masterful delivery of *Stormy Weather* commands immediate respect and establishes an elegant, yet informal atmosphere of nostalgic celebration. "Thank you for giving me such a warm welcome in your wonderful city of Adelaide" (or words to that effect). The humour is gentle, the sentiments genuine. "This is not a case of the new out of the old, but of the old out of the old".... and so it goes on.

Combining those two hallmarks of all great entertainers, stamina and style, Archer romps through American jazz standards, European song sets and more, all casually connected by conversational patter in English, French and German with the occasional glaring accent in Strine. Whatever the language, diction is never a problem. Whether she is singing or speaking, you always hear what Robyn Archer has to say. For the finale she offers a brilliantly constructed country and western medley in which *China Doll* becomes the catalyst for various other songs including (if you can imagine this) cleverly commercial versions of Puccini's *Nessun dorma* and *Vesti la giubba*. And then there's the slap-stick routine—the band is now way out of control, she's lost her place. Precision yodelling "this late in the evening" becomes a tantalizing high-wire circus act. But she gets there, eventually. And the audience loves every minute of it.

In this performance, generosity of spirit goes hand in hand with successful artistry. And because of this, we are treated to a final encore in which Paul Grabowsky, alone with his soloist, provides an astonishingly beautiful accompaniment to a simple, lyrical song. For me it was the highlight of the evening—the associate artist redefined, impeccable teamwork. In retrospect, that's probably what this festival was all about.

Opera by immersion

Keith Gallasch

***Writing to Vermeer*, The Netherlands Opera Festival Theatre, March 2**

This vast reverie of an opera is driven by a small set of familiar tranquil paintings of domestic scenes (women reading, writing, pregnant, occasionally looking out at us, ordered, calm), a set of fictional letters to the absent artist from his wife, his mother-in-law and a model (these are being writ large by hand as we enter the theatre, later they are projected and sung), and a set of reverie-rupturing, disastrous historical events that cut across the domestic world, eventually destroying it with an emotionally wrenching but plainly stated finality. This play of paintings, letters, the everyday and history generates an engrossing world, another culture another time, richly and precisely coloured, costumed and lit, directed with an artist's eye, written with restraint and composed with a glorious minimalist pulse (echoing visual recurrences and personal preoccupations) soon overlayed with and transformed into rich, romantic arcs and sweeps, converting simple handwritten observations into moments of sheer longing, love, anger and pain. The greater world interrupts the reverie from time to time with harsh electronics—explosions, wrenchings, the cracking of bones.

Everywhere there is multiplication. Projected paintings are realised on stage. One woman in yellow becomes 3 (Saskia the model), writing with her huge quill, travelling with her suitcase, falling. She is 3 women wading deeper into water. She is one huge screen image, a singing face. On another screen she stumbles and falls over and over. Nor is there the realism of one small household—the stage is a world of women (save when drawbridges lower and the world promenades through, or armies march in battle on screens), many women, backs arched in a dance of pregnant discomfort, or fussing over a child who has swallowed varnish. Everywhere there is amplification. To show just how big and how consuming the everyday is, the moment of the child's drinking of the varnish is spectacle, no longer a simple detached hand-written text but a flood of liquid crashing onto the child's head, over a face we have grown familiar with in close-up in her party hat. She grins at us like a divine fool and her birthday is celebrated by many women with many cakes and candles, the multiplication and amplification of pleasure and relief that the one born is still alive. The 'historical' interruptions are big, brutal, intrusive…but they pass. They are not mentioned in letters, they are not sung, they are disturbing images and factual texts that scroll across the world, they are noise and crowds and blood, and finally a flood, as the Dutch sacrifice themselves, letting in the sea to keep out the French. The cumulative weight of these historical moments drowns the women isolated on their island stage. Water and other liquids accumulate as the opera unfolds into a grim apocalyptic rush of water down the steep rake and pours from above.

This is opera by immersion with its fluid interplay of sets of small narratives, the multiplication of characters (on stage, on screens) and the domestic milieu, the surge of water, of light, of music. Eye and ear sink into the everyday moment and revel in it. This fluidity (water, varnish, paint, milk, ink, menses and the blood of violence) recurs in the flow of screens—huge ones back and forward of the stage, smaller ones flying in and out. The forward scrim takes us close to a face while a woman flies behind. Or porcelain shatters before us while in the distance a massive fire rages. On smaller screens there are paintings, details of paintings, film of a woman tumbling down stairs over and over, a pen scratching at a letter (the very sound that begins the opera).

I was immersed (and still am) in *Writing to Vermeer*. I re-read the libretto (invaluably reproduced in the program) and librettist Greenaway's note. I long for the CD. Like many others in the audience, I wish there'd been surtitles to help sustain the reverie. I wish too I'd known that the libretto was available to read. That aside, the Andriessen-Greenaway-Boddeke opera is no mere work of beauty. Nor is it simply gloriously sung and played. In its deepening multiplications and permutations, its brutal intersection of the eternal everyday and the cruelties of history, in its acceptance of all that flows (so curious to witness in a male vision, and so powerfully realised by director Saskia Boddeke) *Writing to Vermeer* is a unique and wondrous operatic experience.

Art in the age of mechanical production

Peter Eckersall

Mizumachi, Ishinha
Torrens Parade Ground, March 2

At the first weekend of the Adelaide Festival one sees a preoccupation with water and/in set design as a performance modality in its own right. Louis Andriessen and Peter Greenaway's *Writing to Vermeer*, Theatre Kantanka's *The Eye* and Ishinha's *Mizumachi* (Water City) are three examples of works opening the festival that exhibit massive technical and mechanical feats of production. A whole visual dynamics of stage design and mechanisms that would make Piscator proud are on display and actors' bodies and narrative are straining to keep up with the pace.

One reading of Ishinha's epic scale history of early modern Osaka, as seen through the eyes of recent immigrant labourers from the Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa) and Korea, is of a theatre wherein the dystopian aesthetics of industrial capitalism (symbolic of a political critique of modernity) are the primary organising elements of production.

Ishinha was established by Matsumoto Yukichi and others in 1970; since the 1980s they have specialised in large scale outdoor works featuring huge constructions, human powered stage machinery and large casts of young performers. *Mizumachi* is no exception. A huge pool of water built on the Torrens Parade Ground contains 3 and sometimes 4 paths along which modules containing shanty towns, belching industrial smoke stacks, and barges are pushed by a bevy of worker-like actors and technicians. The opening scene depicts an Industrial exposition held in Osaka in 1905 where some booths contained 'real' people seemingly transported from their everyday life into the anthropological theatrics of early modern voyeuristic museum and exhibition culture. The scale of the Adelaide performance takes its cue from these environmental replications. The supposed euphoria of Japanese modernity, symbolised by Japan's victory in the Russo-Japan war of 1903-5 which the exhibition celebrates, is contrasted in the next scene with the daily lives of immigrant labourers in the water-town. These are young men and women (*Shonen* and *Shojo*) carting coal and other industrial consumables, living and working on the fringes of capitalism's ascendancy.

Also in this scene the character of Takeru is introduced; the young man who rescues Kana when she falls into the Osaka canal. This is a supernatural or mythological reference. In the ancient chronicles of Japan, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shiki* Takeru is a prince dispossessed by his father the emperor, who is jealous of his son's increasing power. As with many celebrated figures from Japanese classical history, Takeru is a melancholy anti-hero exemplifying what classical Japanese scholar Ivan Morris calls "the nobility of failure". Takeru died alone in the Eastern provinces of Japan. This perhaps suggests a commentary on Japan's decline from industrial capitalism into military colonialism, the ultimate failure of Japan's colonisation project in the East. In *Mizumachi*, Takeru seems to be an ambivalent figure; a kind of hero helping those in need but unaware of Japan's spiral into the Armageddon-like images of war and catastrophe that dominate the landscape of many of the later scenes.

Jan Jan Opera is the self styled performance aesthetic of *Mizumachi*, a style that can be traced to Ishinha's 1991 production of *Jan Jan Opera: Shonengai* (Jan Jan Opera: young men). This is not a traditional Japanese performance aesthetic. As the highly regarded Japanese critics Senda Akihiko and Ozasa Yoshio noted in the Playworks seminar presentation at the festival, Jan Jan Opera is unique. A combination of Osaka dialect and dialect mixed-in from other regions forms the basis of a kind of pat-

ois, cleverly compared to rap music by Ozasa (which is a popular subcultural form of expression among young Japanese). Matusmoto's texts are in any case quite abstract, often comprising lists of objects, place names or commodities associated with a particular era, location or event. These are rhythmically scored and spoken in chorus. Repetitious and mechanical choreography is also characteristic of the form, as is a kind of industrial strength mutant characterisation. In *Mizumachi* nightmarish over-ripe pregnant girls, crowds of drunken gangs with sake bottles wrapped around their heads, and decayed pseudo-Victorians promenading replay in my mind as a kind of mutant Takarakuza.

The final scenes of *Mizumachi* depict Japan's destruction and post-war reconstruction. Unlike Sondheim's bathetic and paranoid concluding song 'Next' in his *Pacific Overtures*, however, there is nothing driving or relentless about Japan's post-war progression in this piece. Rather an ambience of melancholy permeates the by now waterlogged mechanics of the set. In the final scene, the stage is suddenly still and Takeru stands alone, holding a model battleship, looking back at the past. Fleeting images of characters from the previous scenes float before him. This is an empty and vacuous nostalgia. Perhaps it is a moment and a history lost to the disruptive and incomplete project of modernity.

Ishinha, *Mizumachi* photo Lisa Tomasetti

Touching lightly

Virginia Baxter

***Light/House*, Adelaide Festival Centre Plaza; *Red Dice*, Bill Seaman, Contemporary Art Centre of SA, March 7; Conversation with the Architect, Glen Murcutt with Robyn Archer, Adelaide Festival Piano Bar, March 7; *Robbery Waitress on Bail*, Lucy Guerin, Space Theatre, March 5**

On the Adelaide Festival plaza there's a display of lightweight structures—light houses. Architect Glenn Murcutt in a conversational forum with Robyn Archer refers to buildings as needing to have a level of transparency allowing legibility of landscape. He cites a knowledge of morphology, typology, scale and materiality as necessary for the architect wishing to touch lightly on the land.

Bill Seaman's *Red Dice* (part of *Verve: The Other Writing*) is installed in a cool, darkened room at the Contemporary Art Centre of SA where there are cushions to lie, look and listen. It's a beautifully complex work. A factory loom is explored in loving detail until it practically pulses its mechanical heart. The film moves back and forth from lingering close-ups of machinery parts to languorous views through leafy windows, to waterfalls, birds in flight and eventually to a hand throwing dice. The editing a friend describes as "liquid". The voices (Seaman's own in English and another in French) are mellifluous. They remind me of other soft male voices of contemporary art like Robert Ashley's. Sentences sidestep closure, dissolving into the next discrete utterance. The work is a response to a Mallarmé poem and this version part of a larger work in which sentences and images are interactively woven by the viewer to create what Bill Seaman describes in another festival forum as "fields of meaning."

For touching lightly on the land, my feather goes to Lucy Guerin's cap for the unforgettable *Robbery Waitress on Bail*. A small clipping from a newspaper has clearly caught the choreographer's eye. A waitress who assisted her boyfriend to rob the all night restaurant where she worked is out on bail. For her part in the crime in which she pretended to be the hostage, she was sentenced to two years in jail. Now she's out. The story of the crime is revealed in 3 small sections from the clipping on illuminated panels above the heads of the dancers (Guerin and Ros Warby). Having given us the story, Guerin (with music by Jad McAdam) proceeds to explore the material of the rest—place, character, the state of being. It's all done economically in a set of often mirrored movements between the dancers who swagger and strut with a shifting sense of bravado, indolence and fear. It's totally engrossing and I know I wasn't the only one in the audience who would have traded the experience of the second piece on the program (the more densely choreographed, less successful *Heavy*) for an instant replay of the first.

Unruly force

Erin Brannigan

***Le Siècle Des Fous, (The Century of Fools)*, Company Salia Nï Seydou, Space Theatre, March 7**

I could be dancing with Seydou Boro right now at the Spiegeltent but no, here I am wondering what I've missed out on...Boro, who appeared in Mathilde Monnier's production, *Pour Antigone*, created *Le Siècle Des Fous* with Salia Sanou. It's a one-off within the festival, an elegant work that Boro informs me has been around for a while, and it provides a nice reference point for the Monnier work, giving an independent voice to her African collaborators.

The simple set of a wide ladder centre upstage and drums set at opposite corners downstage creates anticipation as the instruments remain unused and silent in the unfolding work, their purpose suspended. Percussion is created instead by the bodies of the dancers; they shake their hands so that their fingers slap together, hit their faces against their shoulders, smack their mouths so that they pop, stamp, hit the ground with the length of their bodies. But the rhythm is bigger than this—there is a staccato play of action and stillness that reminds me of the startling beats of Zani Diabaté's drumming in *Pour Antigone*, the blinks of anticipation it caused. The waiting-for-something-to-happen is diffused here beyond any dramatic function that drives toward a climax, consisting instead of micro-dramas within the rhythm of the work. The whole piece is defined by an unruly force that seems to kick it all along, stop go go go stop go, manifesting in a frenzy of swinging limbs, then a quiet moment of mouth-popping. When the drums do come to life, they too seem governed by an alien force, finally jumping out of Sanou's hands altogether.

This all amounts to an improvised feel throughout the piece, although it is simultaneously apparent that this is not how the work is structured. It is this sense of something-happening-as-we-watch, bearing witness, that gets so lost in contemporary dance, the choreography 'taking the stage' so to speak. These bodies seem to be very much in the process of doing rather than thinking 2 steps ahead or operating from a distance through muscle-memory. And this isn't a type of dramatic expressionism either. It's as if the effort to articulate through movement can be seen, witnessed, and becomes intricately tied up with what is trying to be said. These faces don't speak for the body but with it.

Le Siècle is about a century of war and the violent oscillations from action to stillness, and the visible effort to speak through the body perfectly evokes what must be a constant struggle between despair and hope for Africans. What is also striking is the interaction between the 2 performers which also evokes war, running the gamut from tenderness to slapstick; one awkwardly carries the other, wipes his brow, knocks him on the head, checks out his foot. Companionship, worthlessness, tragedy and pathos are all evoked in these moments that really make up the bulk of the action. Dancing is isolated into formal segments that suddenly burst open into joy and an undeniable life force. A very special performance...

Crying in public toilets

Gail Priest

***Skin*, Crying in Public Places, Space Theatre, March 4**

There is honest and then there is earnest. In the effort to avoid being earnest, it is very easy to cease being honest. It is a difficult balance to strike, but one that Crying in Public Places' *Skin* masters with the ease of an acrobat.

Maybe it's 3rd day festival blues. I remember I got it last time after watching Ballet C de la B's *La Tristeza Complice*. I am fine, I am together, then a simple word or tone or gesture has me in the toilet, wailing into the wall and blowing my nose on toilet paper. I sat watching *Skin*, chanting my mantra—that 60s classic "I will not, I will not be moved"—but nothing was going to save me from the seductive blend of intimate a cappella, quirky stories, and questionings of the very essence of being a woman.

Following the narrative of Maude Davey's encounter with Everline— a woman so beautiful it is assumed she has been given the world, yet in fact has nothing except her optimism—the show elucidates the question of "being" and how that being may have been affected by different choices, how there may be another being, being the you that made a different choice at some point. Fully utilising the "twinness" of the Davey sisters, they play out a parallel life ending in domestic disaster in Melton, with the very catchy song "My Melton house just melted." Their twinness is also used to amplify the question of identity, the difficulty of differentiating yourself from those closest to you. "I am here. You are there. Why do you always have to be where I am?"

The text is insightful, self-reflective but never self-indulgent. Thanks to the dramaturgy of John Romeril, the show seamlessly flows through various textual devices: direct address to the audience, storytelling, and more stylised episodes—the performers speaking their lines in the third person, "The woman at the front is at a loss", "The woman behind the woman at the front scratches her head."

The main strength of the text is in its asides and self referential moments. As certain scenes and themes are repeated, the performers stop and Anni Davey intones "Didn't I, didn't I didn't I didn't I already say that." In the middle of a story 2 of the characters take time out to discuss the finer points of what it means to be a winner or a loser—are you a winner even if you think you are a loser but perceived to be a winner? It is these conversational moments (often labelled "*Seinfeld* moments" even though we were all having them before we'd ever heard of Jerry) that create the wit and humour that gives the work warmth and honesty and save it from becoming earnest.

The music is catchy, songs take surprising melodic shifts and the harmonies are liquid and sweet and suit the blend of voices. They seem dedicated to keeping the volume levels quite low, keeping intimacy of tone (something also insisted upon by Louis Andriessen through the use of microphones in *Writing to Vermeer*). Maybe the big belt is out.

Despite all this I refused to be moved...until the last line of the last song, when I looked at the exuberance on their faces, the glow that says "goddamn I love what I do and I'm pretty happy with who I am" and I let the grip go on my cynical Sydney self and let rip with a darn good bawl that has probably increased the level of the flood waters in northern Australia.

After this attempt to explain it I still don't know why. Maybe it's a woman's thing.

PS. I apologise for the earnestness of this article.

A rare and delicious treat

Chris Reid

***The Pear Orchard Opera*, Han Teng Yuefu Adelaide Town Hall, March 5**

Nanguan is an ancient form of Chinese chamber music, essentially music theatre. Much research has gone into the origins of nanguan to record and preserve it. This enchanting performance by the 10 member Han Teng Yuefu ensemble showcases a sophisticated and unique art.

Dance and story are the foundation of this exquisite dramatic form. The principal instrument is something like a lute, and its player sings, as narrator of a tale. The dance is minutely choreographed and very restrained, based on symbolic gestures through delicate movement of fingers, hands, limbs and head at a contemplative pace. There is a flavour of mime, the form falling between dance and theatre.

Of the work's 6 elements, the most captivating are the 4th and 5th. In the 4th, the singer, seated by a candle, provides a long introduction; a dancer then enters, initially hooded, carrying a stick, perhaps a sceptre. The slow dance which unfolds suggests a universal power over life and death. In the 5th, 6 unaccompanied dancers hold in each hand a pair of small wooden clapsticks, making gentle, synchronised rattling movements (evoking the buzzing of insects), punctuated by louder claps, the dance's orderliness and development perhaps attesting life's inevitable cycle.

The setting is minimal, the costumes simple though elegant. Sadly, the program does not identify the elements of the work, translate the text or describe the instruments. Neither is the cavernous Adelaide Town Hall ideal for this ensemble, which needs an intimate space like a small theatre.

Linking out

Virginia Baxter

Festival Forums: Politics and Art—inspirer, inhibitor or accelerator, March 9; Cutting Edge—where community art is taking us, March 10; *Essential Truths Readily to Hand* Festival Foyer; *Verve: the other writing*, Ngapartji Multimedia Centre, March 9; *Iets Op Bach*, Les Ballets C de la B, Festival Theatre, March 10; *Mas Distinguidas*, La Ribot, The Space, March 8

By all accounts, instead of a bunny some dusty roadkill was let out of the hat in the discussion of community art at the Festival Forum thanks to Scott Rankin (*Big hArt works*) and Malcolm McKinnon (*Essential Truths Readily to Hand*) tak-

ing a few blind punches at "arts wankers". This brought on the depressingly tired argument about "elite" art versus the "art of the people." A paragraph from an essay on Bill Seaman's work was thrown to the crowd and duly savaged. To his credit, chair Michael Cathcart gave right of reply to Seaman who with customary courtesy made a simple plea for plurality. Harley Stumm from Urban Theatre Projects in Western Sydney urged more vehemently for community artists to embrace the new or lose touch altogether with their communities. Rumour has it that this speech earned Harley a post-forum hug from shockheaded Peter Sellars.

I've seen no more affecting depiction of community than in the new work by Les Ballet C de la B, *Iets Op Bach*. On behalf of the artists Robyn Archer dedicated the opening night performance to the late Dame Roma Mitchell who had expressed a strong desire to see this work. This is the company who rattled and seduced us at the last festival with *La Tristeza Complice*. In *Iets Op Bach* we observe a community in all its poignancy and resilience. The work mixes contemporary dance, performance and circus tricks and by juxtaposition returns the music of Bach to "the people". The classical music is ignored, silently contemplated and occasionally blissfuly danced to. It comforts and stirs. This work about people living on the edge of heaven and hell, is in turn created from the observations and experiences of a close community of performers working with director Alain Platel. To discern the matter of this work we watch the body in its full stretch, length, see its capacity for endurance, balance, watchfulness, its peripheral consciousness. We observe edginess alongside indolence, madness and serenity, an adolescent observer watches an adult exhibitionist. A small child wanders the stage and at one time or another is calmly attended to by all the cast.

Unlike the transient population of *La Tristeza*, in *Iets Op Bach* people who live in one place gather in communal space, the roof of their apartment block. Throughout this work we hear the burble of human talk, the little girl cries, women shout slogans, musicians chat between sets. An air-conditioning duct interrupts the action and the glorious renditions of Bach by musicians and singers. There are arguments, outbursts, groups synch into choreography, some mimic moves for a time, then abandon them. What slowly unfolds is the coherence that emerges despite difference and just as often because of it. There's no resolution and more catharsis than a fireworks night. In one sequence a girl dressed in white takes confidently to the stage and then discovers there's blood all over her dress. At first she's embarrassed then defiant, then she wildly flaunts her condition. The others ignore her, a couple try to hide her, to help her remove the soiled clothes eventually torn from her while a man shouts "Dirty bitch." Like many other sequences in the work this one extends long past our sense of predictable stage time. It never really finishes; there's no line between that and the next when something equally captivating happens. This a sublime hybrid performance. "It was worth being alive to see it," said a friend.

As I watch La Ribot performing her *Mas Distinguidas*, I'm thinking about the 25 Years of Performance Art Conference at Sydney's Performance Space in 1995, in which Noel Sheridan and Mike Parr had hissy fits about the incursion into the pure form of performance art by people with more theatrical intentions. I suspect Maria Ribot would turn their ears pink. I've heard her referred to as (finally!) a performance artist with a sense of humour (yeh, yeh). But it's not that simple. Though she clearly knows her way around a port de bras (high art/classical dance) her pieces eschew expertise (postmodern performance) or obvious displays of artfulness (performance art). Performing naked with only a little dye for comfort (performance art) she sometimes looks like Buster Keaton (pop culture/high art) but without the virtuosity (performance art); one minute she's in an intimate relationship with the audience, timing us as we successfully achieve one minute of reflection, contemplation, meditation and silence in real time (contemporary performance). "Very well done" she says. Next she is a demonstration model attempting a set of difficult instructions in her see-through suit or a grunge angel with foam rubber wings running on the spot (theatre). La Ribot also casts aside purist notions of ephemerality. In a nifty model of artistic enterprise she has hit upon the idea of selling her distinguished performances (commercial artist). Peter Sellars says money is like sausage, you shouldn't spend too much time thinking about where it comes from, but for La Ribot her distinguished proprietors propel the work and are free to attend any performance anywhere in the world. In the end it's the brave presence of this artist shifting across a minefield of definitions that holds my attention during her performance. She reminds me of an exotic bird caught inside the confines of the Space looking for a way to get out.

Another day, another forum on community and Robyn Archer deflects a poison dart from Michael Cathcart about artists as people in black who only talk to each other and refer to French theory. She believes in finding ways to take difficult or challenging work to the community. However, for her it is just as important for artists to talk to one another—it makes for more and maybe better art. The Adelaide Festival is, after all, a major meeting place for a community of artists. After the forum I talk to a performer/writer/community arts worker who tells me about the man who came up to her after a performance and told her he had a polaroid of her vagina on his notice board. She did vagina pieces for a while she said. He wanted her to autograph it: "To Eddie". This festival, she's signed up for a workshop at the Playwrights Conference. Next week she'll be talking about working with kids at risk in her community project in Western Sydney.

Art is about "not knowing," says Howard Barker; about "living the new life," says Sue Thomas, who runs an online community writing project (trAce) at Nottingham University (Verve Forum). Bill Seaman "encourages us to think beyond what we know." For photographer Bronwyn Wright, (*Essential Truths Readily to Hand)* "Each mark is layed over by others. My marks cross bird tracks, marks made by water, the incised paw marks of my dogs and the bare footprints of Maningrida women who walk beyond the lines of mangroves in search of crabs. Their marks will cross mine."

In the spirit of recombination I offer my own little contribution to community improvement. What say we re-program all the poker machines along the lines of Bill Seaman's world generator. Oranges and lemons will be replaced by small fragments from Mallarmé and Gregory Ulmer and cryptic DVD clips from Les Ballets C de la B. With all the time in the world punters become posers (pokie users) who set about mapping the patterns of human thought. Each machine will be linked to every other one in the room and jackpots will go to La Ribot to create even more distinguished pieces.

Oratory and suicide

Keith Gallasch

***Giulio Cesare*, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Playhouse, March 9**

This is a work of great beauty and ugliness, of simplicity and complexity at once. Like The Needcompany's *Snakesong Trilogy* in the 1998 Festival, it creates a theatre that repels some and embraces many with its mix of the literal and the mysterious, like the Duchamp and Magritte it admires. It is massively a work of visual art, and aural art, where one's attention is not always on the actor or what is to happen next, but on light, or sound, or a piece of ordinary furniture that suddenly behaves, or the art of the taxidermist. It can require the patience of the gallery-goer, it can make time stand almost still.

Oratory

But it is still a play. A play about language and power, about Brutus and Cassius, the key plotters in the assassination of Julius Caesar whose tyranny threatened the democratic dimensions of the Republic of Rome. It is, as director Romeo Castelluci explains in his program note, a play about rhetoric and oratory, as is Shakespeare's, but here in other ways. When Brutus addresses the crowd, justifying the murder of Caesar, he places himself safely within a revolving sculpture. He has with him a gas bottle from which he pumps helium into his mouth yielding a high pitched voice. Each time the pitch drops he pumps more gas. He gives himself a voice that will grab attention, that will reach out to the crowd, but he is short on rhetoric, not convincing however true to his convictions. Soon he sounds like an angry Donald Duck. A loud duck soundtrack takes over and Brutus collapses; it is the beginning of the end for him.

Antonius (Mark Antony) enters. He is a man without a voice, but he does have rhetoric and determination. The performer (and Antonius) speaks through a perforation in his neck. We hear his speech, barely vocalised, we hear his breathing. Brutus inhales to speak. Antonius exhales. Antonius wins the day, his sustained speech demanding our attention, our curiosity, as he stands atop a marble plinth labelled ARS, as he comes to the forestage before the curtain, creating the space he needs, and the intimacy without ever raising his voice. Brutus cannot step outside of the revolving sculpture, all he does is raise his voice until it becomes unintelligible duck rant.

Subjectivity

This is a play about Brutus and Cassius, especially Brutus whose doubts about Caesar allow him to be prompted to murder by that 'lean and hungry man' Cassius. We watch the seduction, the sound of speeding trains rushing across the space (displacing us between Ancient Rome and when–the 1940s?), dogs barking, distant screams, and sudden, densely compacted bursts of crowd noise, like gunshots as Caesar is hailed by the populace. Our first look at Caesar is a shock—he's a little old man, no signs of power, only helplessness and impotency, hardly the tyrant Brutus has conjured up.

Caesar holds a gun limply by his side. Brutus takes it gently from him, removes his red gown, bathes him with water from a small tub to the sound of flies buzzing as if over decaying meat. Ceasar is naked and vulnerable, his hair is combed. Brutus holds a long wig to the side of his head, bends down, and, with no particular care, imitates Mary drying the feet of Jesus with her hair. The immobile dictator accepts this impassively. Can this be a tyrant? He croaks, 'Veni, vidi, vici.'

Brutus and Cassius murder Caesar. The way they do it evokes Swift's Lilliputians capturing Gulliver. There is no resistance. They tie him with thin ropes, ease him gently almost lovingly, cushioning his head, as they bind him to the floor. Then the coup de grace: they sprinkle him with confetti. He is dead. They have acted honourably; this is not a matter of violence or blood spilled.

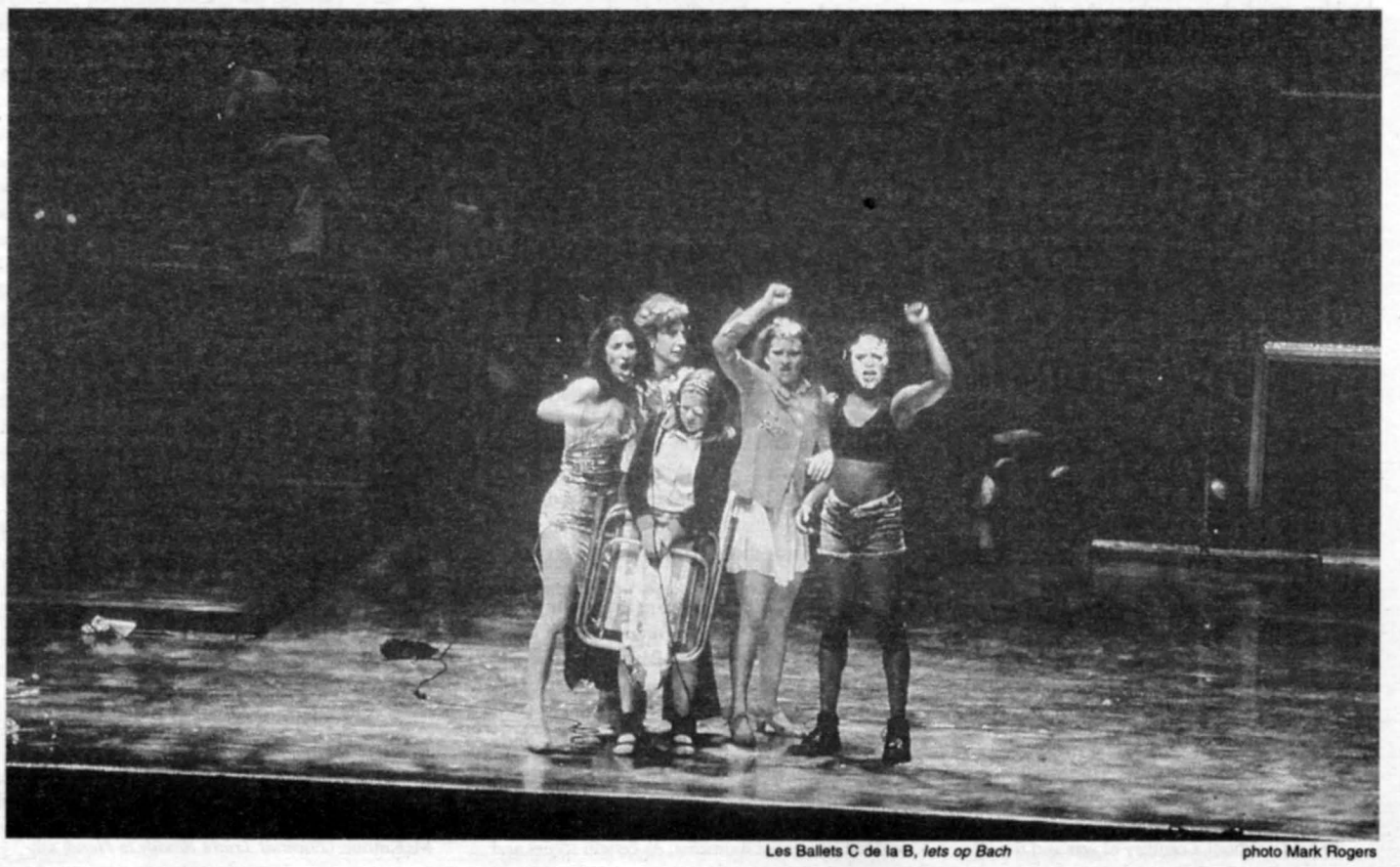
When Brutus knows he is failing, the sword he holds bleeds. Astonished, he wipes the blood across his face. The act has caught up with him. Later, before he leaves the crowd, Antonius finds Caesar's blood and with a sponge, wipes it across his face. He knows that Caesar's death is to his advantage, that he is quietly complicitous. He points to the word ARS as he leaves.

Act One is finished. I have not written yet about the battering ram that thrusts at the audience from behind the curtain, nor the stage/Rome as a giant translucent, golden box which comes apart—curtains ripped down—as the Republic begins to falter, nor Cicero the fat-man-oracle like something out of Fellini's *Satyricon*, or Caesar's arrival coloured like a Caravaggio…

Suicide

In Howard Barker's *The Ecstatic Bible*, Varilio tries to kill himself many times without success, at one point with an ugly device on which he has hung himself upside down. In *Giulio Cesare*, Act 2 is about Brutus and Cassius in defeat. The stage is a vast wreck of metal and mess and stuffed animals, and flickering oxy-acetylene and the sweep of searchlights, and the drone of war. Brutus and Cassius are now played by women, Cassius by someone who looks distinctly anorexic, lean and (not) hungry. Compared with Act 1 and its spare telling of the murder of Caesar and its immediate consequences, Act 2 is a long, visual reverie, initiated by the battering ram pointing down, crashing into the earth, off kilter.

In defeat, Cassius dies and Brutus tries to suicide. In Shakespeare's play Brutus has to ask a servant to hold the sword so that he can fall onto it. Here, the servant is unwilling. Another character enters, persuades the servant to do it, to him. The servant shoots this character, but then he runs away. Brutus is left alone, unable to kill himself. The end. Except that Cassius rises up, but as the actress, not as Cassius, and calls the actress playing Brutus away ("it's beautiful here")…they begin to exit. That's about something else (see Castelluci's



Les Ballets C de la B, *Iets op Bach* photo Mark Rogers

program note), but what sticks is Brutus being unable to do the honourable thing, his defeat is total. He/she bows, follows 'Cassius', the play ends.

Giulio Cesare is an unforgettable experience, my simple readings of it the first stage of a continuing fascination, the stage images indelibly etched into my memory for instant retrieval. Someone said to me, "This is anti-theatre. I can take love-hate, but not hate-hate." For me, like *Iets Op Bach*, *Giulio Cesare* is a marvellous hybrid, demanding in very different ways, a challenge to theatre but unable to live without it.

Heaven reopens

Chris Reid

***Soviet and Beyond*, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Adelaide Town Hall, March 3**

Post-Glasnost, Russian composers experience a freedom never known in Russia, even before 1917. This concert of the work of "ex-Soviet" composers acknowledges this transition to a new state.

Elena Firsova's programmatic work *Cassandra* of 1992 speaks of a doom which awaits the world. The rising pitch of the opening bars asks a question, and begins a conversation between instruments, sometimes rowdy and angry, sometimes dreamy and distracted, sometimes tortured. Individual voicing by the orchestra clearly articulates each character in Firsova's drama. Does the gentle finale suggest resolution?

Giya Kancheli's *Diplipito* of 1997 includes bongo drums in the orchestration to represent the *diplipito* drums of his native Georgia, though the bongos don't appear until late in this enchanting 30 minute work, and then only in cameo. Kancheli's is a unique musical language, with references to many styles. The work commences with the note *A* sounded loudly and repeatedly by the piano, calling the orchestra to order. But order is soon lost, as Kancheli has ingeniously scored a work which seems to comprise disparate individual voices, incoherently self-absorbed, yet combining to produce a dramatic ensemble effect, like a dream. The music moves from gracious statement to dramatic interruption, from tonality to atonality, occasional crescendi punctuating the play. There is programmatic statement, pure music and parody of film music. The countertenor sings nonsense words, reminding us that speech is also musical, then at the finale whispers 'diplipito' repeatedly. The piece is totally convincing, leaving the listener wondering what other music is really about.

In his *Four Aphorisms* of 1988, Alfred Schnittke subdues his earlier polystylism and establishes a simpler language. Short and intense, this fine work comprises 4 dramatic and contrasting movements. A dialogue develops between the strings and other sections of the orchestra, rising and falling in energy, reaching a long, cathartic crescendo before a brief harpsichord flourish completes and musically resolves the work.

Sofia Gubaidulina's *Detto II* foregrounds the cello in an ethereal work for an ensemble comprising strings, winds, percussion and celeste. David Pereira's performance is engrossing, his cello bespeaking a spirit or soul in transition. Written in 1972, before Shostakovich's death and while 'decadent' composition was still out of favour, the work is ambitious and contemporary, and reflects Gubaidulina's religious convictions.

The final work is Tashkent-born Australian Elena Kats-Chernin's *Heaven is Closed*, a rollicking work with a rich vein of wry humour. Her orchestral writing is strong and colourful although the delivery of her message is slightly protracted.

This well-planned concert showcases the extraordinary talent to emerge from the USSR. The TSO's playing is beautiful and splendidly unified, David Porcelijn's exacting direction drawing the best from these complex and varying scores.

From the cutting room floor

Virginia Baxter, Keith Gallasch

***Slow Love*, Scott Theatre, March 11**

Some people love *Slow Love*. Some people do not. Why is that?

Surfacing. If postmodernism has taught us anything, it is that there is depth in surface/"Below the glorious surface patina lies some out-dated ideas and a second rate text delivered by uninvolved actors." (*Adelaide Advertiser*)/"Just because we have eyes doesn't mean we know how to see."

Nura Ward and Nelly Patterson, *Ochre & Dust* photo Lisa Tomasetti

Ochre & Dust, a "performance" by Nura Ward and Nelly Patterson directed by Aku Kadogo within an "installation" by Fiona Foley. From a large central mound of red earth the women tell their stories. Alongside is a scatter of shiny white bone-like sculptures and behind, a set of 5 elliptical screens projecting Heidrun Löhr's atmospheric projections of the desert (many in black and white subvert the postcard familiarity of locations like Uluru). The power of this story of enforced departure and fragmentation in the community of Maralinga holds in their spare telling in Pitjantjatjara language "translated" by Ruth Anangka. Two strong women speak quietly and seriously in turn ("I'll let this lady speak now"), eyes downcast, tapping lightly at the earth with spindly sticks. They sing with sadness about a community disabled by one thieving act that saw families split, relocated in country for which they had no language.

(Peter Greenaway)/Overheard after de Keersmaeker's *Fase*: Man: I like something to be *happening* on stage; Woman: The dancers' concentration, getting all those moves right—isn't that *something*?/*Slow Love* is pure surface, its figures are iconic./When the actors become real we lose depth./One of the actors threatens to turn into a character./*Slow Love* is a sumptuous, widescreen, intensely coloured surface, the Godard of *Pierrot Le Fou*./*Slow Love* has too many surfaces, too many images./Too many surfaces thins the attention to surfaces./Too many roses./The fight is too real./The fight surprises, it breaks the surface. It must./There is lovemaking that looks like fighting./I wait for surfaces to break.

Screening. *Slow Love* is hundreds of stage moves, hundreds of lighting states./Watching *Slow Love* is like watching the film as well as bits from the cutting room floor and *Last Year at Marienbad*./The blackouts are edits, the punctuation for replays, jumpcuts./"It's sheer panic up there." Ivan Pecnik, actor,*Slow Love*./*Slow Love* is fast—light on-light off, like walking repeatedly into a darkened room with the fear of what is lurking there. A different fear (or desire) is realised every time./*Slow Love* is not fast enough. In the age of Virilio, the theorist of speed, and the video clip, the blackout seems inadequate./20-something conversation after *Slow Love*: "How about leaving out the still bits and show us the actors running around the set changing costume or maybe the whole thing in 10 minutes!"

Embodying. "The body itself is a psychic accident." *Slow Love*./The visual language of desire is limited. She undoes her bra, light fades. He takes off his clothes, looks in the mirror, blackout. /Young woman in audience: "The moves are more like poses. The action (man-woman + woman-woman + man-man = stalemate) is predictable. This and the video makes it all feel like an extended mix of a Hugo Boss commercial."/There is a Hugo Boss commercial in *Slow Love*. Is this Hugo Boss' *Slow Love*?

Love is... "Love is interrogation." (Milan Kundera)/*Slow Love* is the world in a room and love holding hands with death./*Slow Love* plays in the shadows of narrative, my erogenous zone./I love *Slow Love*./Afterwards I remembered following a lover's every move, watching him through a window walking to work, disappearing into doorways and when I couldn't see him, wondering what he was doing. I lost my own life altogether.

The woman. In my notebook I write over a page of writing. All I can make out is the word "Woman."/*Slow Love* begins with a woman thinking she has so much inside trying to get out. Then she slaps his face. He arrives and arrives and arrives. I love this. /"You see it before it happens." (Lyndal Jones, *Prediction Pieces*)/She instigates but rarely controls or carries out the action./Where is the equivalent between the women of the fight between the men./Middle-aged woman in the audience: "The libidinal climate has changed since 1983."/In internet chat rooms where gender is a moveable concept, more people identify themselves as female so others will talk to them. (*Verve: the new writing*)/In *Slow Love*, is bi-sexuality ever a *real* possibility? I do not love *Slow Love*./A man twirls a black umbrella, "Singin' in the Rain", following in the footsteps of Gene Kelly. The women jostle on the bed at the back. A man sits moodily downstage hatching aggression. When the fight erupts the women stand with their arms folded across their bellies and watch./"She drove an ambulance in wartime; in peacetime she couldn't even drive a car." (*Slow Love*)/Why doesn't she attack the other woman, confide in her, wear the man's clothes, lose herself in action, talk, yell ...? Why is she lost in sultry leaning, falling, giving in, looking out? A film noir woman held in a genre-lock. Why this woman now?

Biomachine. *Slow Love* is a biomachine./4 performers, like a machine, like a string quartet, generate infinite possibilities from a small set of passions and permutations./The emotional matter of *Slow Love* is *in* the action of the bodies./Its glowing perspex box pulses like a performative amoeba, the humans inside like smaller organisms./We imagine, *Slow Love* at one end of the *Biomachines* warehouse in Port Adelaide with Anna Sabiel at the other end making strange mechanical musics improvising with Stevie Wishart as she slowly transfers her weight to 44 gallon drums.

After the affair. *Slow Love* is an Australian classic though most Australians wouldn't know it. People who saw the productions by Jean-Pierre Mignon in 1983 in Melbourne and Kerry Dwyer in 1987 in Sydney say it changed the way they saw theatre...and desire./Dream after *Slow Love*: I am scolded by theatre ushers for reading the signs on the walls instead of watching the performance on stage./ Nightmare: the ushers turn to nurses who read every action on my part as a sign of transgression (*Rebecca*, *Gaslight*, *Suspicion*)./"I got here but I don't remember how." (*Slow Love*)/"A work is never closed." Bill Seaman (*Red Dice*), Festival Forum./*Slow Love* is a text in which the world is larger than words.

This is not a writing

Linda Marie Walker

***Slow Love*, Theatre Malpertuis, Scott Theatre, March 11-12; *Giulio Cesare*, Societas Raffaello Sanzio, Playhouse, March 9-12**

There are sound-works everywhere this festival, in the performing arts; it's as if the festival is corralled by composers, musicians and instruments. This was so last festival (as I recall), perhaps I'm tuned differently this time. And of course it's to be expected, music being a strength of Robyn Archer's. These sound-works are substantial and integral to the 'theatre' they are found within.

Okay, maybe I'm wrong. Perhaps I should take this, sound I mean, for granted. But, but…there is Stevie Wishart playing her music for slow-love, music for characters whose slowness (about love) is maddening, letting it pass by, turn ugly, stupid, sad, etc. And the music plays on. The film will never end—are we still posing, hopefully/lessly, framed by cranks, the ones who wrote 'those' romantic books ("and when he drew her close to him, when they danced, his eyes…"), made those Hollywood 'pictures', sang those songs…Anyway, the speedy, exhausting action of *Slow Love* (an exhaustion in rapturous pursuit of itself) is precise, and often renders the rushed body languid and annoyingly dramatic. But, that's also the aesthetic, one of visual resolve, well-lit intention. What gives the work its dynamic, its sense of having come the-distance (from 1983 to 2000) is the sound-work. I can't imagine that the funny-edges Wishart brought to the performance were evident back then. Except for the loud, didactic passages (partitions) that were meant to anchor/unanchor me (perhaps; tell me where I was, theoretically), the music swept along, crackling now and then. Not sure if 'crackling' was sound or sound-system. It didn't matter. I liked watching Stevie Wishart. I wished she'd glowed brightly, on stage (like Alexandre Meyer in *les lieux de là*). Still, her constant presence was a resting point amidst the turmoil of the characters. It's wonderful when art forms sit on the verge of each,

happy to be in the mix. Not in a confused way, but as if about to shatter intended sense. Stevie Wishart composed the music, played violin, hurdy-gurdy, and electronics, and sang.

This atmosphere that music 'becomes'—not an atmosphere that is 'provided' by sound, as if part of the set, or of the conditioning which implies (implores) emotion, time, tense, etc—is here central to both works. And it is about the music 'becoming' itself, and making itself separate, to be considered as language. (In the case of *Giulio Cesare*, as rhetoric, as speech, and conversation, and demand, and statement, and declaration.) This sound is not A Scape, thankfully. Instead it's a world, transitory, restless, repetitive, forceful (violent).

The two 'scores' are not equational, although they both work a language, or make a language workable or active, impossible too—they are that sort of matter or material. Each, a rich 'thing'; sound as a-thing, sonorous, crossing the space of seeing. A, and the, voice of 'everything'—and because it can't be single, being made-up of vibrations, it is already of the 'unlikely'. Romeo Castellucci writes in the program for *GC*: "It (awareness) is an awareness that borders on instinct (and inevitably ends up in tragedy…). It is being aware of lifting the language game to the unlikely, increasing the stakes to the limit of chaos, probably." Yes, and so it happens in the sound, even though it is composed, produced, timed. If Duchamp's *The Large Glass* was sound, it might sound like Castellucci's composition: a condensed poetic language (the thing about this thing is that it is a thing, and cannot be attended only via evocation—it's like the metal chair on stage which walks around, it is evocation (let's pretend) of 'nothing'—just itself). What (feeling, desire, love) comes about then is a need to consider (make-up) a language with which to talk of a sound-thing, specifically this *GC* one. As it is spatial, like a room or a road or a desert or 'history' (as text). But not analogous, this is its trouble, and a good-trouble in this work.

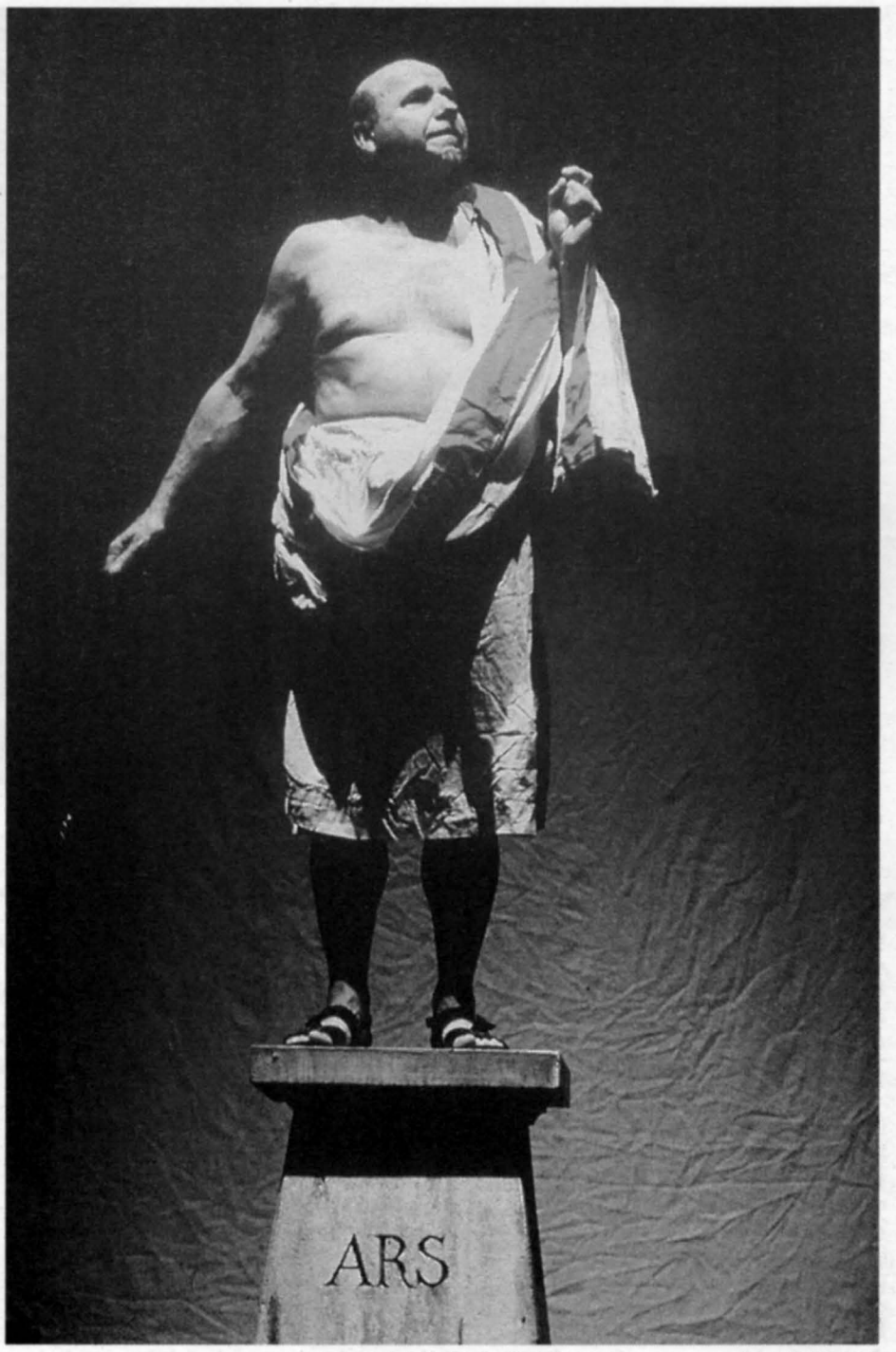
(The live music of Stevie Wishart is more easily witnessed as sound-track, less object-like, but is nevertheless a form of sound-thing—a work in parallel with another, creating a resonant 'between-ness'.)

I'm sure Castellucci has read all of Duchamp's notes. Duchamp wrote: "One could find a whole series of things to be heard (or listened to) with a single ear." With a single ear…what does he mean? And yet…I thought I heard a voice, so I came this way. (I was touched by Stevie Wishart's voice. It was, almost, the only live voice in *Slow Love*.) The voice comes from inside, like a fluid; each voice its own voice, each a voice of possible voices—I answer the phone, hello, and someone says, is that you, yes, it doesn't sound like you ... are you alright? The voice makes speech (and this was part of the ruin of *GC*, more ruined than the 'landscape'—and maybe only audible by a single ear; as if there are two (ears), then it was necessary to listen elsewhere with the other (with one ear to the ground, for example). Voice is shared, and this sharing is not about meaning. It's 'thing.'

It might be that the sound for *GC* was the voice of invisible matter, or of matter long lost, of nerves stretched and broken, and memories ages old—just the voice of contractions unwilling to rest (like bad death; and death everywhere on the stage: stuffed animals, murder, decay, suicide). Sounds all mixed up (in me): trains (many), cries, flies buzzing, music, singing, crowds, banging. I thought several times during the performance that the sound-'thing' was the sound of mind itself/themselves, that what we were hearing was the minds of the not-actors, as the 'characters' of the performance. That this was what they were hearing inside, as the incoming of the outside, and the endless passing-by of the inside-past (trains).

You can sense what has happened. Sound, the thing of sound, has made me a 'bit' mad, because my favourite philosopher reckons voice is not a 'thing', yet I feel voice, as if reached/felt by it (like Wishart's voice—no other voice in *Slow Love* touched me, they were posed/clarified voices: this was their purpose.

GC was 'all-about' voice/sound, and the thingness of things. If a chair walks and a cat's head spins and shards of *The Large Glass* appear (and explode) then sound/voice is 'thing' (calling another sound/voice to 'speak'). *GC* was one long interval: "That's when everything happens." (Castellucci)



Societas Raffaello Sanzio, *Giulio Cesare* photo Lisa Tomasetti

We are one but we are many
Stephanie Radok
***Beyond the Pale*, 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia**

Who are these people?
From which direction have they come?
And how shall we know them?

Beyond the Pale means outside the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Historically, the Pale refers to Calais when under English jurisdiction; or an area of Ireland under English jurisdiction; or the areas of Russia to which Jewish residence was restricted. It is a phrase related to restrictions and authority, borders and discrimination. The reference to the pale in the 6th Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art has many links: there is a paling fence made by Ian Abdullah who also includes a milk pail in his work; there is pale skin painted by Julie Dowling, pale skin which is still Aboriginal skin; there are confronting works by Gordon Hookey who does a lot of swearing and paints a piggy John Howard humping Australia.

Brenda L Croft ends her catalogue essay: "Don't fence them (Indigenous people) out."

Well, Aboriginal artists are certainly not fenced out of the gallery. Much of their artwork is about their culture, their history, their contemporary context, thus it has a strong didactic level as well as humour, such as Destiny Deacon's dolls and gollies. Photographs show Darren Siwes as a ghostly presence in various locations in Adelaide; Michael Riley considers the arrival of Christianity; Rea's work replicates the aura of a museum display, Aboriginal people as targets of both ethnography and rifleography. Through their artwork, the artists, communities and experiences come into the gallery and into the consciousness of the people who see the work and understand that Australia, the continent, the country, the nation, the land, holds all these experiences. The work also says a lot about the people living on the land, their history and social present.

How long have I been looking at Aboriginal art?

My knowledge stretches back to 1972, when I was lucky enough to be shown cave paintings on islands near Gruyt Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Respect, wonder, fascination were my responses. I remember travelling in a slow boat through a world of islands, the clear sea, tropical rain, and a small shark following us in the shallows, stones like turtles on top of other stones. We fished, we cooked fish, we ate fish, saw frill-necked lizards and watched out for crocodiles. We visited Maningrida by light aircraft and bought baskets. I became aware of behaviour regulations when a man could not travel with or speak to or even look at his mother-in-law. There was segregation. I saw Third World living conditions. There was knowledge and revelation, power and powerlessness. I took away and kept with me the notion of another country, another prior country in Australia, very different from the country I knew but occupying the same ground.

Contemporary, modern, traditional, folk, critical, tourist, kitsch, naïve, Aboriginal art mixes categories and crosses boundaries. Work that can be categorised under all these headings appear in this Biennial.

In 1997 Howard Morphy curated an exhibition for the Museum of Modern Art at Oxford. The exhibition was called *In Place (Out of Time): Contemporary Art in Australia*. It included artworks by Gordon Bennett, Tom Djumburrpurr, Fiona Foley, Rosalie Gascoigne, Philip Gudthaykudthay, John Mawurndjul, George Milpurrurru, Eubena Nampitjin, Mike Parr, Imants Tillers, Judy Watson and Clara Wubugwubug. In the essay Morphy argued that "The category 'contemporary Aboriginal art' poses a problem precisely because, since it is defined only on ethnic grounds, it is extremely heterogeneous and eclectic. While some works in the category are readily identified on formal grounds as 'Aboriginal', many others are indistinguishable in formal terms from paintings produced by contemporary artists of European descent. Through its diversity, 'Aboriginal Art' as a category challenges the traditional boundaries of the Western art world. It represents the diversity of world art without the categorical subdivisons; it is a denial of traditional art-history. The global significance of the category 'Aboriginal art' as presently constituted is that it includes, in an ethnically defined category, works that would equally fit into that dominant unmarked category 'contemporary fine art.'"

I pulled out this quotation from Morphy because he goes on to argue for the removal of boundaries between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal art.

On coming down the stairs to the Biennial the first work that you see is Fiona Hall's *Occupied Territory* (1995) (which is not really part of the Biennial), a marvellous work, a work of marvel, in which small glass beads and wire form the shapes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous plants: fig, pear, angophora, acacia, oak, banksia and Norfolk Island pine. The next thing you see is the sister baskets made by Aboriginal women in missions in the 30s. Links and interlockings. The strong Adelaide Biennial that I see, perhaps for 2002, does not divide Australian art into Indigenous and non-Indigenous but mixes them together. Clinton Nain's spurts of bleach connect with those of Dale Frank, Matthys Gerber and Adam Cullen upstairs in the Male Painting Gallery. Hey.

How do we evaluate artworks, decide what we like and why? How do we sense sincerity and urgency, passion and justness in paint and canvas? If I am told there is meaning in a work, will I find it there? Or do I need to feel it against my own senses, my own experience?

To my mind the most outstanding works in the Biennial are by Long Tom Tjapanangka. These paintings vibrate with vitality as do those of Mitjili Naparrula. Kitty Kantilla and Lena Nyadbi also show strong works. Gertie Huddleston's essentially naïve paintings are delightfully embroidered with detail. Then there is Destiny Deacon and Michael Riley's No Shame Productions video, *I don't want to be a bludger*.

This Adelaide Biennial of Contemporary Art provides a portrait of a people, a nation, diverse, wide-flung, capturing tradition, striking out into the future.

Who is the audience for the Adelaide Biennial?
And how shall we know them?

Dismantling chance
Kirsten Krauth
***Verve: the Other Writing*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, March 3 - 10**

Desire
Want to do something; Do it
Do something without wanting to
Do something wanting not to
Be done to
Be done

Cornelius Cardew
Schooltime compositions, 1967

I'm cooking with Rosalind Brodsky. We're dismantling a cake. First we remove the cherries, "scrape off the butter cream", disassemble, separate the filling until we're left with nothing, as the video plays backwards. I'm in the reading room at CACSA, navigating through Suzanne Treister's eccentric CD-Rom *Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*, in a zen-inspired luminous space with Japanese furniture to sit or lie on and an unfolding optical screen giving privacy. Set up with videos to watch, books to read and computers to play with, it's hard to move. A visual arts program dedicated to writing which encourages you to browse is inspiring and it's a tribute to CACSA that this space is inviting enough to sit for hours.

As you walk into *Verve*, a number of texts frame the walls and are enclosed in glass, reminders that texts too can be captured and preserved. Valuable. Many of the works are not new but they are co-ordinated to help you reflect on language

and how it's evolved. I wish Albert M Fine's *Piece for Fluxorchestra* (1966) had been performed at the *Verve* forum last week. A set of instructions for 24 orchestra members (anonymously sitting in the audience) who play words as instruments. Each performer has a number and text and timing is everything. For Fluxperformer number 8, it's "Stand up and announce to the audience: 'I was planted here as part of the performance, and as such, I refuse to perform.' Then sit down. Get up and walk out." Andy Kaufman would have loved this, a piece orchestrated to confuse and prey on and confound audience expectations.

In Australia there is a popular artform called 'timing'. It pervades everything from horse racing to bushfires. Chris Mann, *The Rationales*

I start to investigate the reading room shelves. Black folders. It feels like research. There are witty diatribes, background to other artworks around the space, notes from handwriting experts, and the Mallarmé poem on which Bill Seaman's *Red Dice* is based. Translated here as *Dice Thrown Never Will Annul Chance* was written in the late 19th century and is sophisticated in its playful use of language, spacing, voice and fonts. Teri Hoskin, curator of *Verve*, comments that it's "important to trace a lineage" in terms of hypertext, to help people realise that although it's a new form, it's one that works back to old traditions of playing with logic and chance. I begin to read…Chris Mann's *The Rationales* is worth investigating. Witty and sardonic, Mann examines Oz culture and myth and arts politics in a series of *Rationales For:* Australian Experimental Arts Group; Composer and Writer Apprenticeships; Deployment of Gossips; Getting up the morning; Mirrors; Eggs for breakfast; Habits; A Relationship Between Artists and Community: "'so what' is post-modern 'know how'." The book of dedications, too, is a collection of those pages which often intrigue, start off the wondering about connections, before the novel is even begun. One that inspires the imagination is "For SMUDGE, my silent one-eyed critic, who helped me more than I can say." A family pet? A slip of the finger on the pen?

I knew that's where I belonged because that's where I wanted to be. Sadie Benning, *girlpower*

The video collection curated by Adele Hann (manager Mercury Cinema)—*White Noise, Making Out in Japan, Here I Sit, girlpower, Subterranean Homesick Blues*—traces a line through experimental film, an interweaving of voice, comic and text. Film and video works rarely figure in discussions of writing and there's a strong focus here; the relationships between editing and hypertext, the possibilities of jumping off into new directions, revealing and concealing, are made clear.

Sadie Benning's *girlpower*, made when she was 19, is a hand drawn zine-like diary, the narrative of a girl out-of-place, which samples TV shows, grrrl bands like Bikini Kill, and pop culture references. Her voiceover narration is strong and cool—"In my dreams I could never fly fast enough"—as is her cross-gender identity. She wanted to take her shirt off and look like Matt Dillon. She wanted to ride a bike like Erik Estrada. The film heads off into fantasy exploring the importance of space in the mind for take-off, that place so important for writers: "When I sang I became every member of the Go Gos, Blondie, Joan Jett…I did it all."

Alyson Bell's *Here I Sit* also exquisitely explores imaginative space. It starts off with layers of diagrams—Fig 1, Fig 2—over time lapse photography of a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, its beauty and precision reminiscent of early Greenaway, composing a visual poem via stylised text, and a woman who appears softly, submerged, eyes haunted, the same still expression: "I sit where life becomes a burden." Diagrammatic and mapped spheres turn inside out, fire and water burn, blur and fizzle, reminiscent of Tarkovsky's *The Mirror*. Only at the end is the film given extra emotional impact when you realise it is based on *Poems from the Madhouse*, a collection of texts written by Sandy Jeffs, who has been battling schizophrenia. I rewind the tape to begin again, knowing this perspective. Don't miss it.

I'm listening to *Catchphrase* as I write. A series of strange phrases joined and punctuated by voice—Poppycock, Burrito—in the game show format. It reminds me of Seaman's *Red Dice*, a revolution of surfaces and textures played out on a floor to ceiling screen in French and English. Like the powerful stage language of *Mizumachi*, it works on the combinations and cumulative effect of verbalising strings of objects and terms while watching sets of sensual processes. Machinery. Weaving. Factory. Code. Assembly. Industry. Seaman is obviously engaged in a love affair with language and his film is incredibly seductive, "an authored engine of desire", entwining us in its folds of meaning via shafts and spinning wheels, tongues and mechanics, slippage and sentences suspended. Although there are no people in these films, bodies are implied in the way the machines work, invisible operators, biomachinists navigating the "intermingled voice of chance."

In *Verve*, Teri Hoskin offers the chance to "brush up against other writing", arguing that "Verve operates from the places where writing intersects with visual arts, music, performance and current digital practices." The exhibition is an imaginative, generous, philosophical and often funny one, with seemingly incongruous elements gradually falling into place. Other hands-on aspects like calligraphy and hieroglyphics workshops and artists' readings give a texture to the text, acknowledging the sensual nature of construction tools of pen, paper and performance. Of course, an exhibition on hypertextual writing wouldn't be complete without a chance to contribute words of your own. You can log onto *Pricklings* (ensemble.va.com.au/pricklings.html) and write 100 words about what 'other writing' means to you. *Pricklings* will, in turn, "make a pattern or a design based on a number of variables including time of submission and the number of words." As Sandie Benning scrawls in childish handwriting at the end of *girlpower*, "this has been a continuing work in progress."

Sita triumphant

Keith Gallasch

***The Theft of Sita*, Botanic Park, March 15**

Am I turning into an arts version of Norman May? By midnight March 15 I felt like yelling 'Gold! Gold! Gold! 2 Golds for Australia!' For over 2 weeks there has been considerable pressure on new Australian works to rival established overseas works or to at least reach the levels of expectation that Robyn Archer had shown in committing herself to them through commissions and programming. I saw *The Theft of Sita* (a collaboration between Australian and Indonesian artists led by Nigel Jamieson) and Elision contemporary music ensemble's *Yuè Ling Jié* on the same night. For both, I sat beneath the stars in Adelaide parks. Both are ambitious music theatre works by significant Australian composers, both with strong, inventive directors. Both are richly cross cultural collaborations. Both seem to me, a few significant misgivings aside, destined for great success.

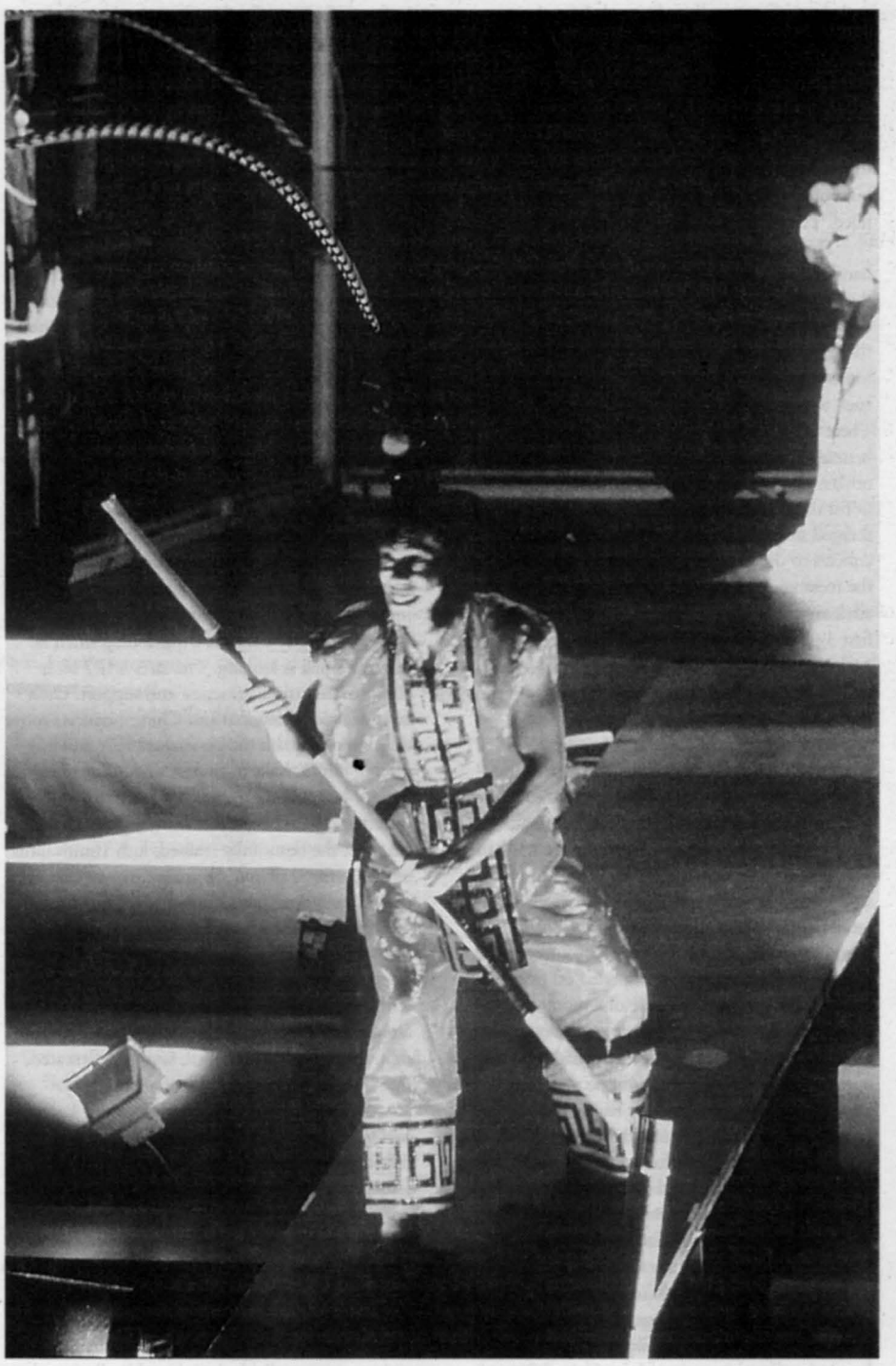
The setting for *The Theft of Sita* is in a triangle of 3 huge trees in Botanic Park framing the stage, quietly evoking an Indonesian rain forest. When the performance begins, the musicians play what sounds like a traditional Indonesian composition, but scored for trombone and other western instruments as well as Indonesian instruments without ever losing the sense of what they are working with. This is the beginning of a dramatic interplay between musical cultures. Sitting forward on the floor of the stage are a group of men and a woman, similarly costumed to the musicians in deep blues and traditional caps. One lights a fire, illuminating a screen that suddenly appears behind them and behind the orchestra, casting the shadows of these puppeteers and the first Wayang Kulit puppets that they will expertly manipulate for the rest of the performance. Shortly a small screen is hoisted between them and us, and soon, dropping the full width of the stage, a giant screen on which most of the action will take place.

This series of 'screenings' is a seductive passage into an ancient form, allowing the audience to take in the musicians and puppeteers, establishing the conventions for a western audience. The transparency of the forward screen also means that from time to time you can see the artists at work behind it, or a ghostly action takes place—a Suharto figure conjuring a glassy skyscraper. And occasionally it disappears and the small screen re-appears for a specific episode, or a whole cut-out city appears, glowing across the stage. There is a sense of endless transformation and perpetual inventiveness that comes from the interplay and coalescence of musics, the shifting frames of the action, and especially the genius of the puppetry supported by computer and graphic animation. The puppetry too operates in traditional and modern forms, Wayang Kulit gods and clowns from The Ramayana side by side with surreal guitar-cows farting musical notes and rain-forest-devouring monsters collaged from factories, cranes and industrial jaws. The detail and volume of action in the puppetry is sometimes astonishing. As well as representing Sita's ordered, if tough world it is also a near parody of TV nature documentaries, with various genital sniffings, rampant humpings, sometimes across species, and cartoony escapes.

One of the many pleasures of the T*he Theft of Sita* is that Paul Grabowsky and I Wayan Gde Yudane's music exists both in its own right and also marvellously as a dramatic score faultlessly synchronised with the on-screen action, often with an animated cartoon intensity and virtuosity. It's funny sometimes, explosive at others as we pass from the old world of The Ramayana to modern, industrial, polluted, dictatorial and then revolutionary modern Indonesian.

Although the narrative force of *The Theft of Sita* slows and drops riskily away as the comic father and son supporters of Rama head to the modern city, and more broadly visual components take over (with heavy duty musical support), and although Sita and Rama become less and less interesting and minor to the plot (until the final battle with Rawanna), nonetheless, the work continues to engage. However, some serious editing is needed. For all its seriousness *The Theft of Sita* is a work of good humour. One of the funniest scenes has father and son in a valley caught in the path of tourist white water rafters, then a golfer and, suddenly, a surfer ahead of a massive wave. Father and son help the local villagers who are deprived of water for irrigation (the water's needed for the rafters) by blocking the river. The black and white valley fills with colour as life is restored. This is an exceptional festival production filled with talent, adventurous music (I'm sure many of the audience would be surprised by it if they heard it outside of the performance), brilliant puppeteering (in the making and the performing) and fine direction.

The full version of this response can be read on www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/



Elision New Music Ensemble, *Yuè Ling Jié* *photo Bill Green*

A true feast

Keith Gallasch

***Yuè Ling Jié*, Elision New Music Ensemble, River Torrens, March 15**

The cool night air is filled with sweet, swirling incense from giant joss sticks. Vertical, pink fluorescent light tubes line the path to the ritual site of *Yuè Ling Jié* (Moon Spirit Feasting) where we sit on a grassy slope peering into the night at a barge on the River Torrens with a darkened stage and waiting musicians dressed in yellow like temple attendants. A delicate, reflective, sometimes gently soaring Er-hu solo provides the meditative calm before *Yuè Ling Jié* erupts into being and a triumphant first performance.

The fictional occasion is the Chinese Hungry Ghost Festival, "an annual month-long festival during which the Gates of Hell are opened and ghosts and spirits roam freely upon the earth" (program note). At the top of the slope, behind us, a table is elaborately set for a meal, and a fire burns in a large brass pot. The table and the stage below are where the ghosts of abandoned spirits "with no descendants to look after or feed them" will be entertained and feasted.

Soon, story-telling and spectacle flood from the tiny stage. Dorotka Sapinska's set (with director Michael Kantor's lighting) is framed by 2 flickering dragon poles and is entered via a path running down the slope linking the feast table to the stage, an avenue on which the Queen Mother of the West and the Monkey King travel, tumble and wrestle. Melissa Madden Gray and Orren Tanabe as this pair of competing narrators (and other characters) are magnificent, physically deft and vocally powerful, shifting from falsetto to guttural exclamation with ease and great humour, evoking both traditional Chinese opera and a show-bizzy Asian contemporaneity, given extra edge by the Queen's glittering, high-heeled, red-wigged, high-feathered, leggy showgirl costume. Composer Liza Lim has excelled herself with a marvellous sense of theatricality (matched and amplified by Kantor's direction and Sapinska's design), evoking a world that is both funny and very scary, but also sad in the soaring beauty of Chang-O's final song. Deborah Kayser plays Chang-O, the Moon Goddess, with commitment and a fine soaring voice, but also with deep growls and sharp snarls when required. She is, however, less intelligible than the other performers, her attention to consonants appears minimal, perhaps in part to do with the demands of the writing.

Yuè Ling Jié is not easy to follow with its 2 narrators, character doublings, and the demands of the instrumental music on the voices, and the mix of English, colloquial Malay-English, Mandarin and Cantonese. Surtitles seem a must and would surely be used inventively by such a creative team. What we hear of Beth Yahp's libretto, witty, raw and ethereal, suggests that it deserves more of our attention than we are allowed. Even so, *Yuè Ling Jié* is always so inventive, so funny, frightening and sublimely excessive that it never loses our attention. Composer Lim, librettist Yahp and director Kantor have fused old East and new East, and East and West into a riveting hybrid whole.

There are many striking and sometimes provocative scenes as the plight of Chang-O unfolds. For example, she disappears into her huge rabbit companion which then coughs up a red box (presumably containing Chang-O's life force) into the hands of the priest who recites, as if driven, from a Daoist sex manual ('jade stems...5 times in this time, 8 next...2 very deep' etc). Nearby a near naked woman (Gray again) performs the sexual response, rubbing herself against a green fluorescent light pole, pleasuring herself too with a masturbatory device and doing some odd things with ping pong balls. This is suggestive of Chang-O's repressed sexuality in her frozen moon state (shades of Janacek's opera *The Makropolous Affair* with its female immortal and, in another way, the restless sexuality of the immortal Mrs Gollancz in that other festival show *The Ecstatic Bible*). This sexual excess recurs when a ghost appears riding a huge tongue. This frustrated spirit, clothed in transparent plastic, emits an otherworldly rustling (a piece of her costume torn off and crumpled and brushed against her head microphone) echoed by the whole orchestra in one of several heightened sonic moments. Another is the huge whistling that invades you with cicada-like intensity when Chang-O returns to the moon in the end.

Yuè Ling Jié is a major work adding new dimensions musically, theatrically and culturally to Australian music theatre. Let's hope that it stays in the Elision repertoire, becomes more transparent and plays many more festivals.

The full version of this response can be read on www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

One gets to the next slightly

Linda Marie Walker

***Fase*, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker & Rosas, Festival Theatre, March 14**

Fase (Phase): four movements to the music of Steve Reich. A work 18 years old and performed only once at this festival by the choreographer, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, and Michèle Anne De Mey. A tense work, tiring to watch, in its nowhere-to-hide—precise repetitive small moves—style. Tiring because of its relentless repetition, its going over the same movement again and again, not to 'teach' you but to insist on its language—as Reich insists on the minimal (often hard) structure of his music. After a while you begin to doubt your understanding of what is exactly there, as one does after looking at a word for an extended time (said George).

The beauty and excitement of *Fase* is its making of 4 spatial scenes, as if space is produced incrementally, as if it is always (in the end) in the moving-body. There is little to look at, except the height and width of the stage, and light—and the difficult pleasure of bodies performing for the sake of dance—not for the telling of a story with dance. Dance for dance, the dance of dance.

The pleasure is dance itself, or a particular type of dance which 'builds' a world by geometric and sensual fragments. A spatial pleasure which opens up inside one, a presence which is personal and startling (as one returns from some stray thought to find the dancers still there, dancing in one's absence): "Taken to its extreme, the pleasure of space leans towards the poetics of the unconscious, to the edge of madness." (Bernard Tschumi)

The relationship between De Keersmaeker's choreography and the music is close without being illustrative or subservient. There's a similar strength, like a holding pattern, in both forms; they leave each other alone. This I liked, as it assisted the time (timing, as beat, rhythm) of the space-becoming (becoming an experience of strange-fates, of fateful-events). The body was machinic, yet couldn't become robotic, it stayed too human, slightly off-balance now and then, enough to draw one's attention to effort, work, and 'now'. Within deliberate repetition is the dilemma of habit, or a naming of habit, as the effects of our own time alive surface, like a scent: is this how my living looks, arms flailing, head snapping, and sudden repose, like a tiny interlude of almost-sleep, then frantic action again (while sitting in a chair) doesn't matter, up, down, same constant arrival 'nowhere' (or slightly over there): arrival takes its time, a long time, and then it's over, all is changed. In real time, black stage, a few words projected large: *Violin Phase*, for instance.

Violin Phase, the third movement, is a solo work. A circle of light on the stage, the dancer's domain. A circling, lyrical, phase, which edged toward abandon, only to withdraw, and fade, a kind of promise which was never going to be fulfilled. The light constant, keeping movement safe.

The final phase: *Clapping Music*. The sound of hands beating together, and primarily danced by the feet. The feet clapping the floor, the bodies slowly moving toward the 2 suspended lights from the second phase (*Come Out*). Arriving there just in time for the end of the music. Phase 4 reaching back to remember phase 2 (which was all arms). These unannounced symmetries laying quietly beneath appearances, like grammar. There were others. Like the use of light as set—the stage fully lit for the first movement (and spot-lit to make the merged shadows sharp), then moving with the dancers to the front of the stage (and back again); the rectangle of light in phase 4 a counter to the circle in phase 3. The constant use of arms in the first 3 phases, completely subdued in phase 4. Making the body appear much more hinged (making balance look like falling, and bringing the arms to the fore retrospectively).

Arrangements, like words, are orders. We arrange words, produce habits. Often with repetition we are displaced, out of our element, uncomfortable—excessive repetition is a way to make an outside (when despair turns silent, we are not happier, it's just the beginning; noise is breathing, that sort of thing). Being out of one's element is to recall the fact of inhabiting, we see the outside, newly arranged, and we are juxtaposed, instead of harmonised. So, we are alone, peeled off from habit-world, outside the inside of a moment.

In some way *Fase* was dance on the outside of an imagined inside, and to see it we had to come outside too, adrift. And, it might be that there wasn't even an inside, imagined or real.

The 4 phases looked like this to me: *Piano Phase*: Dance For Plains (for the plains of Gerald Murnane: "And then word came that the plains had settled for peach."); *Come Out*: Dance For Waiting (for the men of Maurice Blanchot's infinite conversation: "This is a sentence of a somewhat enigmatic turn."); *Violin Phase*: Dance For Round Things (for the things of Jean-Luc Nancy: "One and one and one."); *Clapping Music*: Dance For Artists (for the music of John Cage: "One more idea and then I am through."). The End.

Neverending stories

Kirsten Krauth

***BIG hART Works*, Care Park, March 13; *Odyssey*, Opera Studio, March 15**

BIG hART has been operating for 10 years, working with marginalised groups (young, Indigenous and aged citizens) with a focus on rural communities, to develop programs which "re-engage people with their communities, restore young lives, re-unite families and rekindle spirit." Each performance comes out of a series of workshops where participants write down their stories, using film, theatre, poetry, visual arts and music, to work though crises. Performances have included the Domestic Violence project in SW Tasmania, the Self Harm Prevention project which toured schools in the Riverina, and the show I have just seen which concentrates on "cruelty, beauty and isolation seen through young eyes." It is a heady journey, full of pain and despair, the finer details you are frightened to know, two and a half hours of unrelenting brutality.

Care Park in Moore Street is set up with beds for homeless people to sleep on, a bridge between the audience and performers. As you walk in, digital camera operators track you down, filming your faces, zooming in close when you know it, and when you don't, later relaying your image on a number of large screens so you are confronted by yourself. It is an awkward moment. The non-homeless. The theatre type. People listening always look more self-conscious than people talking. A kid with a long boom mike runs around, shoving it over people's shoulders as they speak. At one point, performers sketch portraits of us and hand them out. This sense that you are the one under surveillance happens throughout the performance. Young people on the streets know this feeling all too well.

Odyssey is also a restoration, of migrant identity and place, where Andreas Litras revels in being in front of a large Greek audience, taking them on an in-between cultures journey that is joyous and beautifully written and embodied, full of tiny details as well as epic tales of mythology. He asks a woman in the audience to press a white button, controlling the slide show which perfectly evokes his parents' immigration to Australia. White weddings. Flares and camels. Milk bar parties. Fish'n'chips with newspaper wrapping. He repeats the question, "Are you Greek?" to audience members, taking delight in the repartee which he provokes. In the taxi ride home the narrative continues, as our young Greek cabbie Sam talks of the land he owns in the village where his family is from, his passion for Greek history and myth, and how in Greece people work like dogs for 6 months and then party for the rest. He doesn't want to see *Odyssey*. He'd "rather just go to Greece."

In *BIG hART* a boy runs on bricks. Thin legs beating time. Punishing sounds. What is he running from? As he runs, bricks are removed until he is near the floor, and then added; he becomes elevated. He runs for over half an hour, never faltering, and is gradually replaced by others, my favourite the guy who has a quick drag when he thinks no-one is looking. The *BIG hART* set is about construction, structure and support. On a layer of sand Aboriginal and Chinese dancers move through time, then the performers start building, placing bricks, walls to enclose or a house of cards, fraught but holding. A variety of narratives are introduced—"And another time, a girl..."—which snapshot the beautifully realised, lush 16mm films of the performers' lives, re-enactments so effective they initially work as documentary. The opening film has the most impact: an unforgettable black and white image of a girl drawing lines down her face (a sad portrait in contrast with La Ribot's scribblings), tracks of the ants she can feel running around inside her body. She holds a knife to her skin, unable to make the cut, saying she's scared that if she lets them out, they'll never stop.

BIG hART revolves around portraits. Each performer has a realist painting that they present to the audience (face to face), and interact with, scrubbing out their own face or placing the canvas down gently or tossing it aside. It is a revealing moment about representation. Which do you pick? The way young people present themselves or the way others see them, encompassing a range of stereotypes the media and politicians pick up and run with: dole bludgers, gang members, junkies, violent, uncontrollable, lazy, hopeless. Projected statistics dispel these myths, in a language young people can understand—each year in Australia a high school's population of kids commits suicide—and this is just the beginning.

We were never meant to be. You and me. Shelly Atkins' exquisite vocals and massive voice underlie a sense of disconnection throughout the performance, a reaching out for family, despite the abuse. This is given another slant by a bedtime story read aloud, *The Story of Ping*, a duck looking for a place where he belongs. The stories relayed are horrific: the boy who's given a bullet to wear around his neck, a gift from his father, the violent legacy of a man who slams his wife's hands in the door; the girl who watches her father strangle her mother with a swing chain in the motel playground, her life saved only by the motel manager grabbing her before she is hanged; the girl who loves her boxing champion Dad and desperately wants him back (he has died from a stroke) despite his regular beatings of her mother and siblings. Then there are the grandscale, caring, fragile moments: the boy whose mother wanted a baby girl and, when her daughter died shortly after childbirth, had a nervous breakdown and was unable to care for her children. This boy rarely saw his mother but the tenderness with which he describes the relationship he could have had with his sister, and his adult understanding of his mother's needs, envelops me, as he flicks through his carefully tended photo album.

Kerry Armstrong, in one of a number of cameos, takes to the stage to audition for the Role of the Mother. In a series of to-camera script sessions, she reads and re-reads the same text, a mother trying to stop her daughter running away, investing the words with little enthusiasm or emotion. The performers critique her. She argues she can't make a connection and is helped by appalling soundtracks manufacturing pathos, including a live rendition by Robyn Archer. It is a clever way to highlight the difficulty of empathising with experiences not your own, and it's only when the young people on stage start to get angry, demanding her emotional response, that she gets it, to deliver a performance worthy of them. Yesterday I saw two toddlers outside the Festival Centre straying close to the road. The bus came. A woman screamed, running 20 metres to grab her straying kids, yelling that she was going to miss the bus; she hadn't noticed they were gone. She scooped them up, started running, stumbled and fell over, knocking them on the ground. Rather than checking if they were okay, or rubbing their heads, she screamed and whacked them for making her miss the bus. Perhaps auditioning for parenthood is a necessary thing.

BIG hART works and *Odyssey* are about the importance of tracing personal histories in constructing a sense of community, and a place called home, for young people, for immigrants, for the disenfranchised. Andreas, years after turning away from his background in the Australian landscape, returns to Greece where he is continually referred to as 'the Australian'; he is soon able to learn and acknowledge where he fits in. The performers in BIG hART—Kim Bush, Chris Callow, Leanne Curry, Renae Dreyton, Lewis Ellis, Emma Farndale, Aaron Fox, Miranda Grigg-Makepeace, Phillip Grios, Pamela Hayden, Bob Keen, Michael Martin, Paul Mead, Jason Schatz, Melanie Smith, Karen Sturges, Aili Sun, Jamie Tustian, Zheng Xiao Wei—share their often desolate lives and work together to create an edgy and moving experience. Festival goers should alter their course to see both performances.

Eastern Connection 2: new realisms

Mike Walsh

International film movements generally spread first through the established pattern of isolating a small number of auteurs. In 1998 the South Australian Media Resource Centre inaugurated its *Eastern Connection* series with a collection of films by Wong Kar Wai and Takeshi Kitano. For *EC2*, the MRC's curator, Ruth Cross, has chosen a group of films which adopt a more social realist orientation. Cross explains that her objective was "to show what is happening in those regions now, how it is affecting people on a social and cultural level. It is quite dark material dealing with social disintegration."

The films were chosen from the *Age of Independents* sidebar of last year's Hong Kong International Film Festival. Jimmy Choi, a director of the Hong Kong Arts Centre, who played a major role in that event, accompanied the films to Australia. He defines independent film rather loosely, as "having a small budget, and not involving too much interference, either political or financial." As a consequence of this definition, he claims that independent filmmaking in Hong Kong thus far, consists of only a handful of filmmakers and a mere 2 feature films.

One of those features was included in this season. *Love Will Tear Us Apart* (dir: Yu Lik Wai, Hong Kong, 1999) takes as its subject matter the alienated lives of economic migrants from mainland China to Hong Kong. The aim is to produce a dystopian vision of Hong Kong in line with what some critics of postmodern culture would say are the prevalent conditions throughout western society: the reduction of any sense of historical continuity to a series of isolated images, the commodification and alienation of sexuality, and the resultant dispersal, or flattening out, of subjectivity. Yu attempts a return to realism through paring down stylistic elements to signal his rejection of melodramatic forms. He rejects elaborate staging and cutting as well as linear, dialogue-based narrative and emotional performance styles. Most importantly, non-diegetic music is replaced by a heavy overlay of atmosphere tracks consisting primarily of industrial and traffic noise. This leads to a thematic resolution through the opposition of silence and electronic noise music for the 2 central protagonists.

Love Will Tear Us Apart

Yu's 1996 documentary *Neon Goddesses* looks like a sketch for *Love Will Tear Us Apart*, as it tackles the same broad social terrain and even contains several anecdotes which are fictionalised in the later film. This time, Yu deals with young women who have left the countryside for the socialist disco infernos of new, enterprise-driven Beijing. "People rot quickly here," one of the subjects asserts of life in the capital. As much as Yu's fiction film attempts to de-dramatise its fiction, this film takes its orientation to documentary form from Jean Rouch in provoking and staging sequences to cast light on the ways its protagonists emblematise wider social change.

Rounding out the emphasis on Yu Lik Wai as a central figure within the new Chinese realist cinema is *Xiao Wu*, a 1997 co-production between Hong Kong and China, on which Yu functioned as cinematographer. The main character is a pickpocket, a petty criminal who has been unable to make the subtle transition to entrepreneur. At one moment the pickpocket summons up all his historical self-consciousness in describing himself as "an artisan—I work with my hands." Many of the traits of *Love Will Tear Us Apart* have been tried out here, with pared down long takes and a sound mix which brings forward atmosphere tracks.

Swimming on the Highway (dir: Wu Yao-tung, Taiwan, 1998) evokes metaphors of documentary as a blunt instrument with which the filmmaker flails away at reality. In a series of intertitles, the director keeps on telling us that he doesn't know how to proceed in relation to his subject, a friend dying of AIDS. Both Wu and his subject conceive of documentary as being a confessional space akin to the psychoanalytic situation, though neither is able to improvise the therapeutic scripts necessary for transference to take place. André Bazin once wrote of reality yielding up its truth under the unblinking gaze of the camera, but here the existential encounter between camera and subject yields only the consciousness of an unbridgeable space and a despair that can never be reached.

Not only do [seasons like *Eastern Connection*] give us insights into social worlds different from our own, but they allow us to consider filmmaking models different from those currently employed in Australia.

Kal Ng's *Dreamtrips* closed out the season and presented a marked contrast to the films which preceded it. The film begins from the familiar analogy between film and dream but puts a new spin on it through the introduction of virtual technologies. Ng (who was also a guest at *EC2*) sees Hong Kong as an apt place from which to consider technological change as he explains that it "has always been a place of transition. You can look at yourself as dislocated but at the same time you can see yourself as travelling very light, and I think technology implies that you can put away your attachments and be a disengaged mind. But that can be scary too. People have to put issues aside like: 'These are my roots. This is where I'm settled. This is my reference point in the world.'"

The film taps into very current themes of exile and diaspora as it deals with the potential for technology to allow the exile to imagine herself in 2 places simultaneously. Although the mechanics of the sci-fi plot get a little unwieldy as the film progresses, the heroine uses a computer program to enter her dreams but ends up lost in the dreams of her elusive lover, Charles. Ng deals with the opportunities and dangers of occupying what we now like to call hybrid places, as the film moves between Canada and Hong Kong, and between female and male subjectivities. Perhaps the 2 most interesting places that the filmmaker tries to inhabit are the surface of the image and the psychologies of his characters. He seems impressively at home in the former, lavishing a great deal of care on the wide screen compositions and vital blocks of primary colours.

As Australia's film funding institutions grow more closed-minded about screen culture and particularly screen culture activities not directly related to local production, it is important to stress the value of seasons like *Eastern Connection*. Not only do they give us insights into social worlds different from our own, but they allow us to consider filmmaking models different from those currently employed in Australia. As local production's market share sinks south of 3%, we might do well to look north in considering the possibilities for a regional cinema. *EC2* points us to the emergence of new realist directions, whose dystopian visions of a region in flux should have a great deal of force and relevance to us.

Eastern Connections II (EC2), *a festival of Asian independent cinema, presented by AFI and Media Resource Centre, toured nationally from February 17 - March 19*

Milt Barlow: Chairman of the Tribe

Keith Gallasch

Tribe has initiated national and international release of low-budget Australian feature films in their First Rites series. They've also launched their website targeting young audiences.

What's the geographical spread of the Tribe team running the website?

We finished the template by mid-March and we launched Melbourne Tribe towards the end of March and then one a month since then—Canberra in April, Brisbane in May, Adelaide in June and Perth in July. At the same time we're trying to do LA and London. So it's a little crazy in here. Basically what we're doing is employing senior editors for each section. We've got an editor for Sydney Tribe, Music Tribe, Movie Tribe, Social Tribe and Club Tribe—5 major editors. The way we're setting up the publishing dynamic is that eventually a Movie Tribe editor who sits in Perth, as well as doing Perth stories, will be able to cut and paste stories from Adelaide, Sydney, Los Angeles and London. This means that the Perth site, as well as being very local in terms of listings, will have a different feeling and a mix and match of stories that the editor has cut and pasted from the various Tribes around Australia and around the world. So they'll have the ability to mould their site to what they think is relevant to a Perth audience or a Los Angeles audience.

It must be quite a long term investment.

For us it's about really data-base building from our key target audience. We're building a lot of functions into the website where we're giving away a lot of free stuff—free email, frequent surfer program, free downloads. We're prepared to give away stuff for free but we want your data and your permission to use that data in a responsible, qualified way. Of course, there's advertising, promotion and sponsorship but that tends to be small pieces of very large pies. But we've had terrific responses from advertisers who really want to target that market.

What about First Rites?

First Rites is a perfect example of integration of the off-line and the online companies. We want to create a space online for our target audience with our bedrock being entertainment where young creative talent, whether it be in film or fashion or music, can find an outlet. In the off-line world we've started with First Rites video. And that's taking young, cutting edge film directors with their first time projects and giving them a vehicle to release those products. We've just gone out in the US with young American directors and in April we'll launch the first time Canadian directors, and then probably May-June in the UK with first-time British directors. There's a second label called First Rites International. That's gone terrifically well. In the US we launched in January.

And this is through video shops?

In Australia our exclusive partner is Video-Ezy. We've done an exclusive deal in the US with Hollywood Video who have over 1,750 stores—the second biggest chain next to Blockbuster in the US. In Canada, our chain is Roger's Video which is the number 1 video chain.

Is Tribe doing this financially as an independent venture?

In the US we're partnering with a company called The Asylum—3 very impressive young people who I've known from my Village Roadshow days. They're working in the independent film area and they're sourcing product for us and doing the fulfilment and the marketing and the management of it in North America. In the UK we're just signing off on a deal with a similar group.

How do you search out the films?

At the moment First Rites is only picking up completed products. We hope to move to phase 2 somewhere at the back end of this year or maybe early next year where we'll actually look at producing original material under a First Rites theatrical label. But essentially the product is coming to us in droves. The industry is small, the word gets out. We'll release in Australia probably 15 pictures this year. In the US the number's phenomenal—we released 10 pictures in January. We'll follow with about 6 a month.

What's your own background?

Thirty years in the entertainment industry. I was in radio broadcasting for 12 - 15 years, everything from being a disc jockey to programming radio stations to producing live radio satellite shows out of Los Angeles. Then I got involved in the burgeoning video business in New Zealand in the early 80s. I was a partner in a video distribution company in New Zealand that was bought into and then bought out by Roadshow. I came to Roadshow in 1988 as managing director of what was then Roadshow Home Video and is now Roadshow Entertainment. Over that decade I took them from video rental to a broad-based home entertainment distribution and development and marketing company.

Why the name Tribe?

I've always liked the name. I think you can apply it to anything because we all belong to some tribe—music tribe, homemaker tribe, geriatric tribe. I like the urban feel of it and I like the idea of its being primarily youth orientated. For us it's about brand building. We're looking to use entertainment as our bedrock, to build a vertically integrated company that has a base off-line and online and then through the brand building to leverage that into other areas, whether it's fashion or travel or finance in much the same way that Richard Branson built the Virgin brand.

What's the age of the tribe?

We've got a very young team. The average age of the staff here is about 22 - 23 with a few old farts like me who are visionary and think young.

Milt Barlow is the Chairman/CEO of Tribe
www.tribe.com.au

WriteStuff: writing screen images

Hunter Cordaiy

Each year the Oscars highlight the particular isolation of the screenwriter. Over the course of several hours a large number of prizes will be given, but only 2 will be for writing—Best Screenplay and Best Adaptation from another source. Only 2 writers will stand in the spotlight alongside the many actors, directors and producers, editors and supporting others to be acknowledged for their work.

Unfortunately writers are not stars on the night of nights, not seen as central to the process of making movies in the way others are; though, as the introduction to William Froug's *The Screenwriter looks at the Screenwriter* puts it, without the writer nobody works.

This book consists of a series of interviews about the craft of screenwriting and also the practice of working in the film business, of having to deal with others who are in the spotlight. Those interviewed are both young and established, successful and blacklisted. And they talk openly about the big issues: why names are removed from the credits of films; the problems and benefits of close collaboration with a director; how to cope with the lure of dumbed-down television; why critics should be ignored.

What emerges from these conversations is that the experience of writers in the major industry, Hollywood, hasn't substantially altered from the early days of Nunnaly Johnson. Certainly what might have changed, in career terms, is the focus of a writer's life—few cross the screen for theatre and back again (David Mamet is an exception today) and most struggle with TV as a way of earning a living while writing screenplays.

The problem of television is central to the lives of contemporary writers. Louis Carlino puts it clearly: "there's only one reason you create whatever you're creating on television and that's to sell a product so when you buy that set of circumstances, then you also buy all the censorship and everything else that takes place."

In almost every interview the feature film is viewed as 'proper' writing and working for television as a compromise, and the core problem for TV writers is lack of control over their work. Stirling Silliphant, a writer and producer with credits from *The Village of the Damned* and *The New Centurions* to the *Naked City* TV series, says, "There's no possible way for a writer to control his work. I think the most he can do is try to preserve as much of his original intent as he can, therefore he should wear as many hats as he's able."

Nunnaly Johnson agrees, using the analogy that once the writer hands over the script to the director it is like launching a ship, and from that moment the captain takes over and the 'builder' has no role in sailing the ship. Of course there are degrees of collaboration and the old studio process, where often the writer and director didn't meet, has gone, but even in the moment of success the writer can be sidelined.

Ring Lardner recounts that when *MASH* was screening in Cannes (and went on to win the Palme d'Or), he was only invited to France after some considerable pressure was applied, but was not included in the press reception for the film when the main prize was announced. For a once blacklisted writer who had suffered enormously during the McCarthy era, this must have seemed like a return to the bad old days.

The interviews also chart a change in what writers put into scripts, reflecting a gradual disassociation with 'literature' and a more succinct image-based form of screenplay writing. Silliphant recalls that when he started writing, his scripts literally described the sprocket holes in the film but now he writes master scenes only. For example the script of *The New Centurions* has the following: INTERIOR APARTMENT—SHITTY.

Walter Newman says his screenplays describe characters or action on a "need to know" basis only, and Louis Carlino tells of writing *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden* where scenes were constructed like haiku poetry. What this suggests is the power of the image, for its own sake, and the resignation of the writer to the process by which others also imagine what the image might look like.

AOL-Time Warner: bye bye freewheeling web?

Ashley Crawford

In 1995 the outspoken American author Kathy Acker was taken off-line by America On-Line.

Acker's charged fiction first appeared in the 1970s in underground, alternative publications. By the mid-80s she had established a huge audience and was hitting out at the mainstream, attacking everything from government to the education system, religion to social values. Her turbo-charged writing made her a natural denizen of the net. Taking an account with AOL, Acker built a reputation as an outspoken member of the internet community. However, AOL took a dim view of her anarchistic approach and Acker's account was deleted.

America On-Line has an extremely bad reputation amongst the culturati on the internet for its intense censorship in online forums. Now its merger with Time Warner makes it quite possibly the most powerful player on the wires.

Bruce Sterling, author of *The Hacker Crackdown*, points to the plethora of anti-AOL sites on the net such as AOL Watch, *anti-aol.org* and *aoltimewarnersucks.com*. Douglas Rushkoff, author of *Cyberia* and *Media Virus*, hopes that people will rapidly tire of the content offered by the gigantic merger.

"I've always thought of AOL as training wheels for the real Internet. But a lot of people consciously choose pre-digested media, and these people—perhaps a majority—they'll get what they ask for.

"The size of AOL/Time Warner in itself won't change the opportunities for alternative viewpoints. If anything does, it will be the structure and functioning of our information infrastructure. AOL and Time Warner are both entertainment companies. They are simply looking for new ways to push their content. People who are genuinely interested in communicating, organising, educating and networking, well, they can get a taste through AOL...and if they get frustrated enough, they'll venture out onto the Internet or whatever else is around."

If anything, says Rushkoff, "this merger promises only to limit what people might be exposed to, but not necessarily what they can get a hold of."

"It's pretty clear that variety ain't gonna be the spice of life for much longer on the Web," says the author of *Memory Trade: A Prehistory of Cyberculture*, Darren Tofts. "There is a growing uniformity and homogeneity which is all based on free web hosting, product placement and a pervasive parasitical approach to linking; one big in-crowd really. I suspect what will happen with AOL will be an intensification and consolidation of these features."

"The real issue in the merger is who controls broadband," says Sydney media theorist McKenzie Wark. "The cable systems are going to get broadband up before the phone companies do, and so the Internet/TV merger will happen first on cable systems. AOL Time Warner are positioning themselves to control cable access, Internet subscribers and content. It may be the usual messy merger that bogs a company down for years, or it might provide the kind of monopolistic leverage that the shareholders want and that the rest of us should fear."

According to RU Sirius, the founder of the cyber magazine *Mondo 2000*, there is a real danger of people being seduced by the giant body, but, he says, given the changing nature of media it will be a short term problem. "There is a very real chance that there will be a substantial pocket of clueless people for whom AOL will BE the Internet," says Sirius. "They won't know the difference between the two. But in the cultural and business environments we have now, how long can that last? Less than a single generation certainly."

Richard Metzger, editor of the New York-based online magazine *Disinformation* (*www.disinfo.com*) believes the internet is already overly crowded with cultural detritus. "Well, look at the current state of the Internet...it's a vast wasteland...cultural landfill.

"I think that all of the punditry chattering about the AOL Time Warner deal neglect to ask themselves: 'Do I care about this content?' And I think most people will answer 'No, I pay it no mind, I only use email.' Beyond the MGM movie catalogue and CNN, the value of this stuff, content-wise is, to my mind, fairly negligible to AOL."

The fear many express is that this will allow the mainstream to dominate the internet. Music that might be defined as alternative will be crowded out.

Metzger points to the failure of Time Warner's Pathfinder site and asks why anyone would "want to look at the same exact stuff with a different URL?"

"With the amount of sheer white noise going on with all these newly minted.coms spending millions of dollars on primetime advertising campaigns where their product or service is only distinguished by whether it's Whoopie Goldberg or Geena Davis advertising their product, what chance do these businesses have anyway?

"The Internet was always just a delivery service, a better conduit than a fanzine...Anyone thinking that they can start on the WWW now and garner an audience is dead wrong. It's a way too crowded field and let's face it, turn on the TV and see just how thin the talent pool has been spread! The herd has been thinned, already, and it's all gonna be downhill from here for the foreseeable future..."

Even the technology editor for Salon.com—an AOL content partner—saw the merger as a disastrous precedent, writing that "AOL Time Warner's interests are now aligned opposite those of a freewheeling, independent Internet."

With its substantial music and cinema holdings Time Warner will inevitably gain greater access to new markets. The fear many express is that this will allow the mainstream to dominate the internet. Music that might be defined as alternative will be crowded out.

"I don't fear the mainstream," says the lead singer of US band Pere Ubu. "I fear the people who fear the mainstream. Media, politicians and generic do-gooders have dedicated themselves to retraining the ignorant mass of ordinary people. The internet is an exciting tool. History can be rewritten, science invented, political thought channelled, morality redefined. These are the people who succeed in companies like Time Warner and AOL.

"It's hardly surprising that corporate policy is to marginalize protestantism. So the real 'danger' is not to pornographers and social renegades, but to the mainstream by means of a process in which the 'authorized' reference sources become a handful of anodyne internet sites rewriting history to tickle the market and contorting truth to avoid offense."

Genesis P Orridge, whose bands Psychic TV and Throbbing Gristle are renowned in alternative circles, is even more apocalyptic. "Financially we are in the throes of hottest passion. Everyone is doing everyone else in a corporate parody of a bacchanalian orgy, complete with intrigues and perversions. We would do well to recall the last daze of Rome when everything was possible and the sacred and profane unified in power.

"What we are witnessing is the copulation of gargantuan entities whose tendrils probe into and feed off almost every living being on earth. It should come as no surprise that these various entities occasionally absorb each other like amoeba. What once were corporations are now sentient beings a little like feudal warlords in the Middle Ages. They have their ikonagraphic banners, their heraldic crests, and they wage wars of consuming attrition until new territories succumb to their power. A great, and ironic difference from the previous Middle Ages is that in years of old, soldiers and camp followers were paid for their services. Now the grunts, serfs and straphangers pay their Feudal Lords for the privilege of wearing their Lord's ikon in return for their services.

"AOL and Time Warner merging is part of this catastrophic process, as is the ethnic neo-tribalism upsurging everywhere. We are entering a New Dark Ages, where these corporate super-entities will wage Jihad upon each other until one blue micro-chip bond conglomerate is pivotally positioned to encompass omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence and digital infallibility on behalf of all remaining human beings.

"We are watching an anti-intellectual coup of a willingly servile homo-sapiens by entities we imagined we created, but which really are independently sentient at this point with their own agendas and megalomaniac cravings."

However the internet is an inherently anarchic environment. Individuals have already claimed the domain names *anti-aol.org* and *aoltimewarnersucks.com*, and they've even installed a pornography page at *aolwebmaster.com* with the slogan "So sleazy, no wonder I'm number one."

AOL's power play may have met its match in Georgia resident Christopher Alan. He claimed the domain *stephencase.com* (Stephen Case is the chairman of the new entity) and then composed an online rockabilly song about it:

"When you bought Time-Warner we were all impressed/How come you didn't buy your web address?/ You may be a bigshot down at AOL/but I'm the one that got your URL!"

Experimenta into the 21st century

Darren Tofts

In the liner notes to retArded Eye's 1997 film *Superpermanence*, Experimenta's Keely Macarow notes that the film's digitally rendered appearance as a hand processed experimental film "confounds the populist myth that digital = slick techno geekdom!"

Brook Andrew, *level one - Reality Check, level two - Torn (video)*, digital print, video and sound (CD) installation, 1999

This aphorism neatly sums up the spirit of Experimenta's signature program of 1999, *Manifesto*. The title of this film (part of Experimenta's 1999 screening program in September) was suggestive of one of the key themes of *Manifesto*, longevity. Macarow's didactic use of the film as a rejoinder to public opinion on the subject of digital art also anticipated the sense of challenge in *Manifesto*.

Manifesto was a series of events aimed at reviewing 20th century experimental media culture and locating this legacy in the context of contemporary digital media. Manifestos, at the best of times, smack of the rantings of the ideologue (think of Marinetti) or march to the beat of the militant avant-garde ("the plain reader be damned"). In curating this serial event, Keely Macarow astutely sidestepped the declamatory inflections of the manifesto and instead garnered its ability to capture a moment (to make it manifest). And I'm not talking about anything so facile as zeitgeists. Manifestos are really about commitments, in the dual sense of giving or bestowing and investment in a principle or policy. In using the venerable technology of the time capsule as a metaphor for embodying the relationship between the experimental history of 20th century media arts and its continuation in digital practices, *Manifesto* literally captured the art of the present and sealed it for posterity in a purpose-built plinth that will reside at Melbourne's Scienceworks for 100 years. It is fitting that in its last program of the 20th century, Experimenta made a commitment to the future, a commitment to its own present.

It's difficult to know what the late 21st century will make of the digital prints of Brook Andrew and Brenda L Croft, the video installation of BIT (Bureau of Inverse Technology), Chris Knowles' soundscape *Beam—Me—Back*, or the web-based installation *Greylands*, produced by KIT, an international group of artists based in Australia, Canada and the US. These pieces are part of a collection of 8 works deemed representative of their time. But time present may be very different from time future; the mediating technology that (in most cases) is required to run them may be dead media in 2099. Curatorial issues of inclusion must have been a breeze compared to the archival decisions about what would actually survive for a century in a time capsule: will we include a VCR? Digital video will probably be a memory in 50 years. What about wooden boxes? Too combustible. Will the enclosed state of the art I-Book be the clay writing tablet of the 21st century?

The time capsule was designed to be more than an archaeological midden. Macarow and Louise Whiting (the project's research co-ordinator) have tried to second-guess the future by including the technology that is least likely to be redundant for the presentation of the work. But more importantly they have retained a sense of temporality, of what was (is) required for the work to be experienced as art. In this sense the time capsule installation itself (designed by Lifford/Smith) is less an archive than a kind of memory theatre, a means of reconstructing a particular cultural event (the installation of the work as an exhibition, originally held at Span galleries) and a specific historical moment (the Australian digital arts scene in 1999). Like the mastabas of ancient Egypt, the time capsule will hopefully be more than a store of treasure for the future custodians of the past; it will be a vibrant key to understanding their own world.

Also included in the capsule were reproductions of other events in the *Manifesto* program, such as the outcomes of the internet media laboratory Hothouse (co-ordinated by Steve Ball). Conceived as an interactive means of exploring new media arts, Hothouse began in late October as a subscription-based discussion list and developed into a collaborative web space, in which participants could include samples of the media art they were discussing (although part of this event has been included in the time capsule, Hothouse is an ongoing project: *www.experimenta.org*).

Also present was a CD-ROM version of Experimenta's first online edition of *Mesh*. The theme of *Mesh* 13 was 'cyberbully', described by Macarow in her editorial as an "omniscient entity that may be found lurking in the cyber corridor of the school yard, the nation state, the digitised corporation or your email discussion list." In a very general sense, *Mesh* contributors set out to reveal how cyberbullies "disseminate, regulate, dictate and infiltrate digitised information, software and hardware." Specifically, this culture of cyberbullying was evidenced in a range of online discursive practices, such as Dean Kiley's brilliant expose of the powerplay of academic mailing lists. Using the discussion of the death of Princess Diana and JFK Junior as exemplars, Kiley constructs an hilarious and ingenious "taxonomy of the postures, gestures, rhetorical moves, subject positions, intimidatory tactics, self-characterisations, other-caricatures, disciplinary gambits, administrative threats, and plain old verbal bashing-up" that manifest when academic communities get together online.

Sam de Silva's piece on NASA's global surveillance system, Echelon, reveals the subtler, more insidious side of the cyberbully who intrudes into every nook and cranny of your telematic space without you ever being aware of it. Lisa Gye's analysis of style bullying in web design questions the prescription of what is good and bad style. The presence of the style bully suggests that the arbitration of taste will continue to be a highly contested area of cultural life and anyone's homepage runs the risk of being ridiculed in Offensive Web Site of the Month. Who said cyberspace was an egalitarian state?

The fourth component to *Manifesto* was Zen Cinema, a survey-celebration of defining avant-garde film and video of the 20th century. Assisted by Ian Haig and Corinne Preston, Macarow assembled an impressive salmagundi of the genre, spanning the heyday of modernist preoccupation with materiality and form (Man Ray's *Retour la Raison* [1923], Marcel Duchamp and Rose Selavy's *Anemic Cinema* [1926]) to postmodern appropriation (Martin Arnold's inspired piece of pure cinema, *Piece Touchee* [1989], Sadie Benning's *Girlpower* [1992]). In between were the pleasures of old favourites, such as Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man* (1961), Kenneth Anger's *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1965) and Nam June Paik and Jud Yalkut's *Electronic Fables* (1971); the latter a true encapsulation in time of some of the acknowledged sages of the digital age, John Cage, Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller.

Zen Cinema provided a real sense of the coalescence of the past with the future that *Manifesto* was trying to achieve. It was successful in reminding us of the synergies between historical moments of experimentation in media arts, which implicitly established the premise of projecting the digital arts scene and its avant-scene into the present of another century. Combined with Experimenta's September screening program, which featured the work of contemporary Australian and international experimental filmmakers, Zen Cinema reinforced the convergent nature of our engagement with and critical understanding of the emergent digital arts scene (fittingly, *Convergence* was the title of a series of forums on art, culture and technology presented by Experimenta at OPENChannel during 1999).

Manifesto was a successful event that culminated an active and fruitful year for Experimenta Media Arts. As an event it was a commendable and memorable expression of Experimenta's commitment to fostering an active and informed media arts culture. *Manifesto*'s singular contribution was its determination to see that new media art carries with it the historical signatures of media past and present. I feel confident that when that time capsule is opened in 2099, those present will feel an uncanny sense of familiarity with the past of their own present.

Manifesto, *curated by Keely Macarow, Experimenta Media Arts, November, 2-13*

Darren Tofts' new book Parallax. Essays on Art, Culture and Technology *is published by Interface Books.*

Breaking the art and science standoff

Paul Brown

"Generative processes have been used by artists for decades. Now, as the computer becomes the medium of choice for many artists, composers and designers, process acquires new form and meaning in the computational realm."

So ran the blurb in the call for participation in *First Iteration*—Australia's first ever conference addressing this important area of artistic research and development. Almost immediately a flame hit the *recode* email list with a complaint about the 'testosterone' orientation of the event—mainly I think due to a misunderstanding about the definition of the adjective 'computational.' However on the day males certainly did predominate.

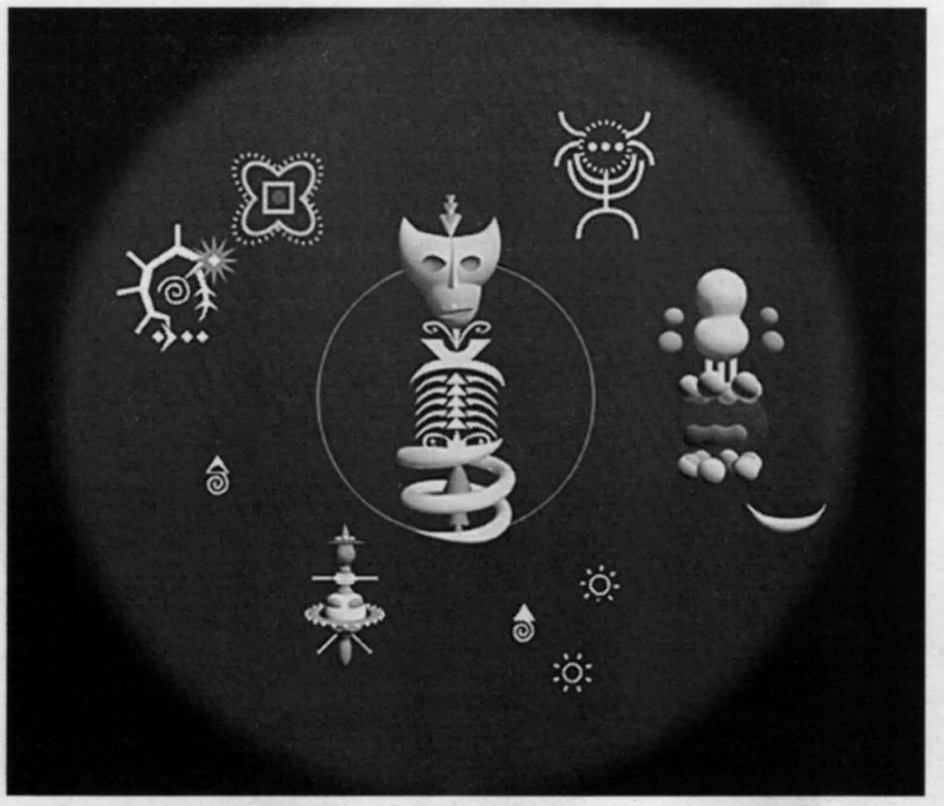
Why? Women are very well represented in the arts and Brenda Laurel has put to rest the 80s chestnut that computer science is a male 'nerd' domain. Women can and do make excellent programmers and analysts and they make up a significant proportion of the workforce. So how come more men seem to be attracted to computer programming (or, better, computational methodology) as a "metamedium" for artistic creation? The answer is complex and I can only summarise my opinion here. The art mainstream and, in particular, the art education sector have to accept much of the blame. Although many of the arts and humanities (psychology, social science, philosophy etc) have significantly adopted the computational paradigm, the practical arts, by contrast, lag disappointingly behind.

Nationally in the visual arts there has been little attempt to address this area with the funding and staffing that it needs. Few art lecturers can do more than push a mouse around with productivity enhancers like PhotoShop. This only reinforces traditional attitudes rather than encouraging a more meaningful engagement with this new metamedium. In general, the idea of science—or a meaningful relationship between art and science—is anathema. I recently attended one research planning meeting at a tertiary institution where the visual art theorists made it clear that they had no idea what theory meant in the context of science or of the relationship between theory and practice in a quantitative discipline. For obvious reasons they were reluctant to include these concepts in their syllabi.

Music, with an established history in permutative and generative techniques, fares better. In animation too there has been a significant development over the past 20 years of tools that overcome the prescriptive and limiting methods of traditional keyframe and inbetweening methods and stop-frame claymation. So it's not perhaps surprising that the conference keynotes reflected these areas.

Alistair Riddell, currently a researcher in the Music program at QUT's Academy of the Arts, presented the first keynote address, "Data Culture Generation." In it he considered how computational methods might alter the perception of music and lead to a new music aesthetic. He discussed process as "a way of thinking about music with an initial (...) absence of sound" and concluded that the "creative design of musical processes might become an art in itself."

Kurt Fleisher is best known for his work in texture generation. His early animation *Knot Reel* (made with Andrew Witkin and Michael Kass) won the Grand Prix at Parigraph '86 and received honourable mention for Prix Ars Electronica '87. He now works for Pixar (*Toy Story I & II* and *A Bug's Life*). In his keynote address, "Who's Driving? Control Issues for Generative Media", Fleischer discussed the dynamic relationship between computer visualisation professionals and the animators and designers in motion picture production. Fleisher and his colleagues are able to generate animations of a field of grass in a rainstorm or armies of ants. However the results have to be flexible enough so that the designers can frame and combine them with the foreground elements that the story prescribes.



Troy Innocent, *Sound Form*

James McCartney gave the last keynote. "Designing SuperCollider—a real-time audio synthesis language" was a first hand account of his development of this powerful digital synthesiser. As those who stayed for his workshop discovered, it's also an extraordinarily difficult tool to learn and McCartney joked that he puts people off buying it. His lesson was simple—if you want to mess around and do a few interesting things get a WYSIWHG "shrink wrapped" app with some nice sliders, dials and buttons and fire it up. However if you want to achieve something a little more significant and at the bleeding edge, you're likely to find yourself on a long and challenging learning curve.

Many artists from Europe, the USA and the Asia Pacific discussed their work and methods. I particularly enjoyed the presentations by David Chesworth and Sonia Leber about *5000 calls*—their large scale sound artwork for the parklands surrounding the new Olympic Stadium. Public art too often devolves into compromised cliché as vested interests 'negotiate' the outcome. *5000 calls* survives this process and demonstrates a role for new media arts in this area. The artists said of their work: "*5000 calls* can be seen as a kind of crowd made up of many individual voices which constantly combine and recombine in different ways. When new voices are introduced by visitors travelling through the space, they contribute to the ever-changing libretto, which is occasionally punctuated by the extraordinary sudden roar of the stadium crowd."

US artist Steven Rooke described his work: "my software begins by assembling random programs in a primordial soup consisting only of mathematical functions. Over eons of simulated evolution, increasingly complex image genomes are created, occasionally merging to form new levels of organisation." His animations, in particular, were mind boggling! They did however prompt the expected question: "yes, but is it art?"

The best answer to this ongoing debate has come from the archivist and historian Patric Prince. She has suggested that professional artworkers should consider the works of people like Rooke in comparison to 'naives' like Grandma Moses. Rooke, like Moses, has no formal training in the visual arts. The paradox, according to Prince is that we expect 'primitive' artists to have unsophisticated technique and this clearly doesn't fit the slick finish of the new computer naives. The question is, of course, another example of the "closed door" philosophy typical of the contemporary arts mainstream. It's an elitist attitude that belies their claims to postmodern pluralism and egalitarianism and one that many of us hope the new computational paradigm will eventually overthrow. It amazes me that such attitudes prevail some 150 years after similar prejudice was voiced against outsider artists like Monet, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Cezanne. Doesn't history teach us anything?

Mitchell Whitelaw, in "The Abstract Organism: Towards a Prehistory for A-Life Art", traced the "detailed engagement with particular processes and structures" into the arts of the 20th century, offering Paul Klee and Kasimir Malevich as examples. It's good to know that such a lucid and thoughtful theorist is creating an historical context and descriptive framework for this area of work.

First Iteration was an important event that brought together practitioners from around the world and confirmed Australia's participation and profile in this new area. Documentation, which includes the Proceedings, a CD-ROM and CD audio, can be ordered from the conference website which also announces the not-to-be-missed *Second Iteration* which is planned for 2001.

First Iteration, *a conference on generative systems in the electronic arts, Monash University, December 1-3 1999. For more information, go to* www.csse.monash.edu.au/~iterate/

Paul Brown (www.paul-brown.com) *is the recipient of an Australia Council New Media Arts Fellowship for 2000/01 and is Artist-in-Residence at the UK's Centre for Computational Neuroscience and Robotics at the University of Sussex.*

Junk: the art of mindless diversion

Alex Hutchinson

Possibility: Videogames are not yet art, but they could eventually *become* art. Possibility: Videogames *are* art already but we don't have the right terms of reference yet to define them as art. Possibility: Videogames are a mindless diversion best left to children and backward 20-somethings without girlfriends or things to do on a Saturday night. Probability: No matter what I say in this little article most people will lean much harder toward the third option than either of the first two.

The first step in convincing anybody would be to throw away the term 'videogame.' There's too much baggage attached. It gives the wrong impression of the medium in the same way that 'comic book' hangs like a stone around the neck of graphic art. If you want people to take you seriously, ditching the whole 'game' scenario is probably a good place to start. But what alternatives do we have? 'Entertainment software' is fine as a stop gap but is unwieldy in the long term and 'interactive art' (although a pretty useful definition of modern games) sounds far too much like a header in an undergrad essay. Which leaves us with nothing, nought, zero and nowhere to go without confusing most people or keeping the whole 'game' mess which is what we're trying to avoid in the first place.

I am not about to invent a new term. People have been trying it for years and they rarely succeed. Harlan Ellison tried to turn science fiction into 'speculative fiction' and while the term is still popular in the SF scene, the mainstream will give you nothing but a blank stare. Comic books on the other hand have been trying for years to be called graphic novels but the term has been poisoned by literary critics who wish to separate the comics they read and review from the mindless crap they mistakenly assume is the comic industry's staple diet.

We are, unfortunately, stuck with videogames for the forseeable future. I just want you to be aware of my misgivings and the idea that neither 'video' nor 'game' necessarily apply. Whenever you read the term in this piece please replace it with a term of your own devising with a version of the following definition: an interactive amalgamation of animation and/or 3D modelling and/or text and/or live acting and/or music and so on and on, all of which conspires to make videogames very difficult to pin down, explain or illustrate as art. It might be *made up* of artistic media but is the result itself art?

Hairdressing Series November - December 1999 photo Roslyn Sharp

It's probably best to look at the problem from a different angle. The one concept which both binds all these different styles of games together and sets videogames out as a different art form is interactivity. Hypermedia has already clearly demonstrated that interactivity is not an obstacle to artistic acceptance, although many people will tell you it is right out of the gate. The difference of course is that hypermedia offers you passages from one clump of traditional art to another, whereas a game offers you the ability to choose how you get there, when you get there and sometimes even why you get there as well as *where* you're going.

The problems this poses in creating a traditional artistic scenario are immense. How do you create an emotive storyline or moment when you can't even be certain players will choose to follow the path you've laid out for them? How can you communicate a specific idea or message when you are not certain of how much the player already knows? These are problems all evident in hypermedia, but they are magnified in videogames. Think of it as a novel where the reader doesn't just believe s/he's the lead character, s/he can walk the protagonist off a cliff if s/he feels like it. Whatever your intent as the creator or author, it can always be subverted by the player.

Which brings us tidily to the question of whether the creators intend to make art or simply entertainment. It's the rather tedious art vs craft argument again and most people are ready to toss videogames in with needlecraft and be done with it, but what they don't realise is that in an idealised sense videogames are all about creating scenarios, not describing a finished product. They are not about showing the player a scene with the aim of dictating a mood, rather they immerse the player in it and allow the *process* of making that choice create the mood.

Videogames are not a passive medium like novels or films. They require a fresh set of critical tools if they are to be properly understood. We cannot look at videogames and say they aren't art under our current definitions because the honest truth of it is that they never wanted to be. Are videogames art as we know it? No. Not at all. Should they be seen as an art in their own right? I honestly believe they should. I also believe that with the evolution of better technology and an eternally growing user base, the whole concept of games-as-art will eventually become a non-issue. And it's worth remembering that most everything which is art today wasn't yesterday either.

digitalSHORTS

AFTRS recently announced an exciting development in their plans to deliver education via the internet. Combining resources with the National Film and Television School of Great Britain and the University of California, they will deliver the first global film education courses online in 2000. The first courses planned are An Introduction to Scriptwriting and Advanced Scriptwriting. *www.globalfilmschool.com*

The St Kilda Film Festival (May 30 - June 4) will this year have a live performance and film component, FUSION, with 3 sessions exploring the links between technology, film, theatre and dance, showcasing multimedia work in a theatre setting. Hosted by curator Sue McCauley, performances will be interspersed with new interactive multimedia works on CD-ROM, which will be introduced and navigated by their creators. McCauley is also responsible for the new media section of the Next Wave Festival.

A new searchable catalogue of the AFI Research and Information Centre's holdings is now online with access to 550,000 news clippings on Australian and international film and TV, and industry databases. The new web interface means researchers worldwide can access previously unindexed material from Australian film journals including *if*, *RealTime*, *Metro*, *Movie Trader* and *Encore*. Log onto *www.afi.org.au* and click on the Search Our Catalogue button. Also on the website are a selection of papers from *infog99*, the 1999 AFI conference on digital technology and screen culture.

Film Australia has also launched plans to improve access to its extensive archives; the collection spans 85 years of history, comprising over 5000 productions and 8,000,000 feet of footage. The photographic collection dates back to 1911. A telecine program transferring from film to digital betacam has commenced and searchable databases will be available online by late 2000.

Tribe (see interview with Milt Barlow, page 28) has gone into partnership with US-based online film content site *Reel.com*. Reel has acquired the rights to Tribe's first 10 titles in their First Rites series. The Tribe site will stream clips from the films along with interviews with the filmmakers.

The Side On Short Film Festival will this year host Australia's first international interactive online film festival, *Netfest* (October 9 - November 27), a joint venture between Sydney-based Side On and ITV World.com (a streaming content specialist). Online voting by the internet audience will make the awards accessible to all and the festival is now calling for entries for its 3 awards categories: Best Comedy, Best Drama and Best Animation. Deadline is September 1 and all films must be submitted in digital format. *www.side-on.com.au*

Drive-By Film Project is a screen-based installation looking at the driver culture in Perth. Seven new works by WA new media artists in collaboration with practitioners from a variety of disciplines (Rick Mason, Malcolm Riddoch, Vikki Wilson, Erin Hefferon, Cam Merton, Yvette Merton, Sam Landels, Sohann Ariel Hayes, Marcus Canning, Emily Murray, Jo Law and Redmond Bridgeman) will be projected from 7 shop-front windows in city locations so they can be viewed by pedestrians and drivers passing by. If you're in Perth, walk on in, if you're not, go virtual, *www.imago.com.au/driveby, April 15 - 29.*

John Baylis and the performing community

Keith Gallasch

What's interested me over the last 3 years with Urban Theatre Projects (in western Sydney) is that I've come into community-based work with no background in it at all—in fact, having all the usual experimental theatre artist's ignorant contempt for that type of work. And then finding out what's possible and what isn't, all the issues involved—also finding the clichés and unquestioned conventional practices within community work that have grown up over the years based on its political activist beginnings and which have become entrenched. A lot of community arts practice became embedded within the community services offered by government, local government and so on. So a lot of community arts happened through salaried officers in migrant resource centres, youth centres, in local councils. And it's delivered like a government service. There's a way of doing it and you do it. And there hasn't been a lot of questioning about what exactly is hoped to be achieved. It's still tinged with political activism but of a very nebulous sort, it seems to me. I'm more interested in the indirect, avant garde approach which is a politics of very subtly changing the way that people think about things. It won't have an immediate political outcome and it may not have one *ever*. That's probably the best an artist can do—shift the perspective a bit so people's imaginations open a little so that they can see something from a different angle. The political impact of that is for the people involved to determine.

I'm more interested in the indirect, avant garde approach which is a politics of very subtly changing the way that people think about things.

What do you give to people who participate in Urban Theatre Projects?

Part of the ethos of the Sydney Front (a performance company of which Baylis was a member—ed.) was that being skilled wasn't an essential part of the work. It was more to do with the situations you set up, the imagination you'd bring to those situations. That's what I've been trying to emphasise with the participants in the work here. You can make interesting artistic experiences from your imagination. You don't have to have the skills of a trained actor which, for a lot of people unfamiliar with arts practice, is associated with the NIDA-trained actor with the rounded voice. We try to downplay that and use the qualities that people actually have so that hopefully they don't come off as well-meaning but bad actors but in fact their own approach gives their performance a quality that couldn't be achieved by a trained actor.

For your audience, that means a different idea of what theatre and performance are about.

Our audience is probably about 30% city-based contemporary performance audience, 70% locals from the community, whatever that may be. A lot of them wouldn't identify the work with theatre. It's interesting that they bring to it less pure expectation whereas the city audience may see it as an interesting branch of contemporary performance. For the locals it's just an event that's happening comparable to something that happens on the centre stage at the local shopping centre but hopefully more interesting.

There is a strong focus in the works on local spaces, environments. To what extent does that drive the company?

It's fundamental I think. Especially the idea of local spaces, taking spaces that already exist and especially working spaces. Often in site-specific work by contemporary performance artists, the site is chosen for aesthetic reasons, the romance of the old factory, the waste land, the desert. All very fine. I'm not criticising that. I like that kind of work. But our emphasis is on working spaces, spaces that people are actually in, spaces that are generating meaning every day. They're not blank. When we were doing *Subtopia*, when we were first looking for a place to set it, one possibility was Villawood, an almost derelict shopping centre. There are probably about 5 shops still open in a shopping centre designed in the 50s for 30 shops on the edge of a site for a housing estate. Anyway, we decided against that purely because the attractiveness of it was the urban desolate landscape, Mad Max, tumbleweeds. As artists, we could feel ourselves being drawn to it, thinking yes, we can create our own fantasyland here. That's precisely why, in the end, we rejected it. There are more interesting possibilities in having a space which is covered in meanings that people are putting on it every day in their interaction with it. And it's full of people who are using the space in other ways.

What's the future for your performance ensemble?

The logic behind it was that when people come into community-based work they may be interested in the subject matter, an issue concerning their community. Once they're in the work, they become interested in performance and want to continue. This company has always had a history of, you know, we put on a new work and there'll be 4 or 5 people from the last work who want to be involved, which sometimes works and sometimes doesn't—sometimes, you have to say, sorry, you're not Aboriginal. Also it's at odds with the philosophy of the work to have this ongoing group of people when it's supposed to be about different communities. But obviously we were provoking some interest in performance and as long as we stuck to the rigid idea of moving on to another project, another community, we weren't able to take the interest any further.

So the idea of the ensemble was to create a new level of people who were interested and who'd done one show with us. They could then join the ensemble and it's no longer about the idea of community empowerment and development. It's about professional development. It's about opening those people up to other possibilities of artistic expression, developing their artistic sensibilities. Some of that will be skills, but more interesting to me is opening them up to a variety of ways in which performance can happen. This weekend, we're doing our first intensive workshop with them. On Saturday they'll do a full day's workshop with Tess de Quincey and then on Sunday, a day-long workshop with Nico Lathouris. That will give them 2 very different approaches to performance.

It reminds me of that VCA notion of the animateur. There's a possibility in there that these people might engender their own projects or help you with yours.

I'm encouraging them to develop their own performances and looking to the various outlets for that—Performance Space, Carnivale and the like, culminating at the end of the year at Performance Space in a show we'll develop over 6 weeks.

What about your life with the communities. How exciting, how fraught is that?

Each show plunges you into a world which is in some ways quite a privilege. While I'd known individuals, I'd never quite understood how communities see themselves, how they interact, the issues involved, the hopes, fears, aspirations...I find that a humbling aspect to the work. Of course, people, for example, from a Vietnamese background will have a number of identities and strategies for interacting. If you know them in the context of a contemporary performance space, they'll relate to you in that way whereas they have a whole other life within their own community—like we all do.

Like the sociolinguistic notion of code-switching. When a project finishes, is the relationship between the community and Urban Theatre Projects finished?

It varies from show to show. It depends who the community is. The groups we've worked with have been as conventionally described as say, "the Vietnamese community", ie people who regularly use the word "community" through to something as ephemeral as the hip-hop community, the club community, or with shows like *Speed Street*, the Speed Street community. Who was the Speed Street community? Just people who happened to live in that street...but to tell the truth, the word "community"...I don't really know what it means. I've used it so many times.

What usually happens is that the show starts as a community project but after the first, second, third week of workshops, all that drops away and the community is the people who show up. Whatever they bring is what the show becomes. That becomes the concrete community you're working with rather than the abstract one that may be in your fantasy or your funding application beforehand. So the way we keep contact is usually through those people and, for example, within the Vietnamese community there have been a number of people who've stayed with us. About 5 of the ensemble are from Vietnamese backgrounds. And they've been sufficiently inspired to develop their own project quite apart from the ensemble. They got some NSW Ministry funding to do a project in Bankstown which we're helping them with but it's their project. Something like that was beginning to happen after an Aboriginal project (*The Other Side*) we did in south-west Sydney. It's currently stalled but we're hoping that it will start again and an Aboriginal Youth Theatre will grow out of that.

You don't feel like a service provider?

We've managed to avoid that. In all areas of artistic practice, I think UTP is in a unique and quite blessed position. Most community arts practice is trapped in its funding sources...UTP gets most of its money from the Australia Council and the NSW Ministry for the Arts. So it's pure arts funding which means we can range widely. It gives us a great freedom. We have the continuity which most contemporary performance companies don't have. But one thing I miss is the ensemble. We have the community-based performance ensemble but ideally I'd like the company to function as an ensemble too—an ongoing group of 4 or 5 artists with a manager so things you learn can be held rather than...

...being invested in 1 or 2 people who may forget...

So that's an aim for the future, maybe in the next 2 or 3 years. It's partly a funding thing and partly that I would have to abdicate some of my authority as artistic director, which I'm willing to do in the right circumstances. It's a matter of finding a way to make that happen.

John Baylis is Artistic director of Urban Theatre Projects, based in Bankstown in Sydney's west. For a longer version of this interview visit the RealTime website.

Marinheiro, *a UTP-Platform 27 co-production, Performance Space, May 2-14*

UTP performance ensemble L-R: Anna Nguyen, Khoa Do, Tona Nguyen, Edwina Smith, Sean O'Brien, Claudia Chidiac, John Baylis, Bao Khanh, Cicily Ponnor

Kennett's wake

Anni Davey

Melbourne and Victoria have recently endured the reign of former Premier and Arts Minister Jeff Kennett who maintained that the health of the theatre industry was reflected in its major production companies.

His doctrine was, look after the top end of town and the middle size and small theatre companies, the independent and freelance artists will prosper in their wake.

Conventional thinking about the state of theatre in Melbourne is that Jeff's penchant for importing big musicals, art emulating sporting events, caused a slow withering of the smaller, innovative, fringe or freelance companies and performers. It's true that funding has not been particularly forthcoming but theatre makers and companies are tenacious. The current state of Melbourne theatre is generally underfunded, self-subsidised but some of the work going on is inspiring in its innovation and exemplary in its development of new and traditional audiences.

Physical theatre and circus work is notable. While Circus Oz remains the only company operating on a full-time basis with funding at a respectable if not entirely adequate level, there are companies and individuals creating a fascinating body of work as remarkable for its inventiveness as for its lack of visibility. The Melbourne Festival, after 5 years of nurturing its outdoor program has sadly moved inside, commissioning only 1 or 2 pieces for the street this year. Some of the companies that emerged over those 5 years are examples of remarkable and independent success.

Strange Fruit, with their theatrical use of sway poles, are currently rehearsing 3 companies for touring through South America, North America and Europe. They (and other companies like 5 Angry Men) are rarely seen in Melbourne any more, having developed a busy touring schedule overseas.

Dislocate are Geoffrey Dunstan and Kate Fryer who first came to attention as Horn'd Moon with flashy, acrobatic treatments of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. Last year they teamed up with Rudi Mineur (best known from his Rock'n'Roll Circus performances) and Michael Gow (as writer/dramaturg) to present *Risk Reduction* a work-in-progress which will appear in its full-scale version at the Next Wave Festival in April. *3 Speed Crunch Box* is Dislocate's pure 'ennertainment' lovechild. Three stunt people bungle the stunt. It's an outdoor acrobatic piece commissioned for The Melbourne Festival and also seen at the Perth Festival and Moomba this year.

The Melbourne Fringe Festival continues to throw up quality stuff and 1999 saw the most successful festival yet with box office returns increasing by around 30%. The number of shows presented was up too. Contributing to that success is the City of Melbourne's encouragement of the use of the North Melbourne Town Hall by smaller companies. During the Fringe for the last 2 years, it has become the major hub venue, housing 4 performance spaces which program through every afternoon/evening.

SNAFU (Cazerine Barry and friends) was at the Melbourne Fringe using projected images and computer generation combined with dance and acrobatic skills. Mila Faranob designed the costumes. *Separate at Earth* involved some of the same people opening at the North Melbourne Town Hall in late January. The publicity credits a number of performers with virtual appearances.

In *Business as Usual*, The Business (Kate Kantor, Penny Baron and Claire Bartholomew) do fantastic clown work based on Le Coq ending with a memorable final image—a cascade of envelopes bearing instructions from the perpetrators of war with the 3 bumbling apparatchiks in business suits drinking tea under an umbrella.

Rita Halabarec, Mark Deans, Darren Riches, Sonia Teuben, Nicki Holland, Back to Back Theatre photo: Jeff Busby

Parallax Island won the Best Drama Production at the Fringe Festival 99. A 45-minute piece about 2 people on an island, written, devised, performed and sung by Maude Davey and David Pidd, it's already been recorded for ABC Radio Drama and will go to Hothouse Theatre in Albury in August this year. Also performing was Yumi Umiumare in *Tokyo DasShoku Girl* mixing the Butoh form with a contemporary take on dance as cabaret.

Other work to look out for comes from companies and people who have been nurturing theatre in Melbourne for years. *Shadows and Light* is a one-man show by John Bolton who has recently closed down his performance school in Williamstown. This show is an ode to his family and his life as a performer and teacher. John's school produced some very fine and funny performers. The 4 Noels (Jesse Griffin, James Pratt And John Forman) are John Bolton grads. These 3 boys do brilliant, absurdist, macro-micro, musical and physical comedy. Their 3 shows—*Nohj Namrof; A Space Odyssey*, *Brian the Musical* and *The Magnificent Seventeen*, are at their best, really fine, totally performer-driven comedies.

Zeal is Tom Lycos and Stepho Nantsou. In 1996 they devised a simple piece of theatre for presentation in schools based on the true story of 2 boys who get their kicks out of throwing rocks off an overpass onto a busy freeway. They hit the windscreen of a car and kill the driver. *STONES* has been hugely successful, it won an award for best Performance at the Festival of Theatre for Young People in Norway in 1999 and in 2000 Zeal goes to Europe for 5 months of engagements. They have a second show about teenagers and drugs called *Fixin' Bart and Maggie* which has also been in great demand for touring schools.

The Snuff Puppets are always confronting, vulgar and brilliant, and have a new Artistic Director, Ian Pidd, who has recently handed over the Artistic Directorship of Back to Back Theatre to Bruce Gladwin. Back to Back is the last remaining company in Victoria which supports a full-time ensemble of actors. This stability shows in the very high quality of their work, the development of the actors, and the devising process which is apparent from one show to the next. *Mental* is about perceptions of intelligence, and is as confronting, as funny and original (these guys sometimes shoot from way left of any field) as Back to Back always is. It is hoped *Mental* will feature in the Paralympics Arts Program in 2000.

Lack of funding for small companies is one problem, audience is another.

Devising strategies to solve problems, town planners use a 10-year projection method. If we didn't have a litter problem, in 10 years we wouldn't need rubbish bins on the street. Ergo, one possible solution to the litter problem is to remove all rubbish bins from the streets (apparently this has actually been applied in North Sydney with some success). We can extrapolate on this and apply it to the problem of diminishing audiences, the bums-on-seats dilemma. If this wasn't a problem, then in 10 years we wouldn't have enough seats for the bums. It follows then that a possible solution might be to create theatres with smaller capacities so that there literally aren't enough seats. There's nothing that breeds good word of mouth better than a sold-out season.

La Mama thrives on this very solution. In 1999 the company expanded to program 3 theatres, the Carlton Courthouse, Trades Hall and the original 40-seat La Mama on Faraday Street. The Keene/Taylor Project's enormous success reflects the force of work being created and not compromised by the art-as-sport, art-as-marketing, art-as-product push of recent times.

Anni Davey appeared at the Adelaide Festival in the premiere season of Crying In Public Places' new show Skin, *and with Rock 'n Roll Circus at the Adelaide Fringe in* Love Stunts.

Gail Priest and Caitlin Newton-Broad, *White Collar Project* photo Samuel James

Q: What does the white collar workaholic ask at the perfume counter?
A: Have you got anything that smells like a desk?

The team that conceived the unnerving *Dead Girls Party* (1997) are back with *White Collar Project*, a new sound and performance event that takes the audience into the heart of the CBD at night for "a sensory event blending the atmosphere of a real city rooftop with the fantasy landscapes of great cinema cities, city myths with personal secrets." *White Collar Project* will be staged on the roof of the Hotel Coronation in Park Street, Sydney.

Nerveshell is a group of DIY artists making multimedia works which combine live performance, the spectacle and fantasy space of cinema sound and the experience of the site-specific. Nerveshell is Caitlin Newton-Broad (Artistic Director PACT Youth Theatre, assistant director Company B's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* [1999], co-creator of works with St Martins Youth Theatre, Urban Theatre Projects) and Gail Priest (sound artist, performer, singer-songwriter), joined for *White Collar* by Regina Heilmann (Sidetrack, opera Project), Samuel James (video artist, *Space 1999*, Performance Space), Shane Wynter (techinical concepts, dirtymouse.net), Drew Fairley (performer Throttle and Kantanka's *The Eye* 2000 Adelaide Festival) and Ben Rogan (performer *Natural Life*, 1998 Adelaide Festival). Through April Nerveshell is company in residence at Performance Space.

For all those people who take work home, who dream of skyscrapers, fetishise photocopiers, finally something to take you out of yourself. As the impenetrable Olympic spectacle threatens to swallow public spaces whole, such renegade incursions into the CBD are as welcome as the long lunch, not to mention the 35 hour week.

Nerveshell, White Collar Project, *April 26 - 30, Hotel Coronation, 5-7 Park St, Sydney. Bookings 02 9698 7235*

Bonemap

Out of Cairns and off to Townsville, Brisbane and Tokyo, and from a long line of projects since 1994 focused around the body in the environment and how to transgress the romanticising of the landscape, comes *Bonemap—the wild edge*. It's a site-specific exploration in collaborative art-making where audiences will enter the 'wild edge' between tropical Australia and urban space. Field trips across North Queensland in 1999 and a movement research stage at the Choreographic Centre in Canberra in early 2000 have allowed the artists to develop the work as a set of discrete modules of performance, dance video, photographic and object-based exhibition, audio CD and temporary sculptural treatments of different environments—the Tanks in Cairns, Magnetic Island and the Brisbane Powerhouse. Rebecca Youdell says, "We can present *Bonemap* in myriad situations, indoors or outdoors, responding to the environment." Russell Milledge says, "We've photographed and filmed in a lot of messed up places that have been abandoned, and, through our work, tried to regenerate them as sites for cultural inscription. We can still give a place cultural relevance without having a big impact on the environment."

Certain modules will suit some sites better than others. For example, Milledge says that The Tanks in Cairns is a round, thousand square metre theatrical space where film can work. At the Forts on Magnetic Island, power might not be available so film or projection is probably out, but a series of life size photograms along the track can engage the viewer, so time can play an important role. Individual modules will be marketed separately across art form boundaries in gallery exhibitions, film festivals, theatres, environmental/site specific events.

The principal artists are Russell Milledge—digital media, video, performance, lighting and staging design; Rebecca Youdell—choreography and performance; Glen O'Malley—photography, photograms, slides and exhibition; Michael Whiticker and Paul Lawrence—sound score and music performance. For Milledge and Youdell, "Living in tropical Australia, environment is a lifestyle choice which seriously informs our practice." This is a work aiming "to observe Australian cultural identity through ecology." RT

Cairns—Tanks Art Centre, Residency (Tank 3), May 13 - 21; performances May 18 - 20; Tokyo—World Dance 2000: Celebrating the Millennium Conference and Festival: Asian Next Wave, Theatre Tram, Tokyo, August 1 - 5; Townsville—Magnetic Island National Park 'Forts', Performance August 20; Townsville—Umbrella Studio Association inc. 'Victoria Bridge,' August 25; Brisbane Powerhouse, l'attitude 27.5°, Residency, September 9 - 25; performances September 22 - 24. www.bonemap.com info@bonemap.com

Frank: between method and performance

Brad Haseman

three Frank women: 3 performers acknowledging a debt and drawing on the same inspiration—Caroline Dunphy, Jo Loth and Lisa O'Neill are long standing members of Frank: AustralAsian Performance Ensemble, established by Jacqui Carroll and John Nobbs, and committed to the Suzuki Actor Training Method. Those who have followed Jacqui and John's ensemble over the years know this is not the place for dilettantes; their physical training is rigorous, demanding expectations are set and transcendent performance is the goal. They have been enormously successful too. They are regularly invited to perform with the master, Tadashi Suzuki, at his annual international arts festival in Toga Japan and at festivals around the world. All this has been achieved against the odds from Brisbane where they have carved out a devoted following for their shows, which use the focused and intense Suzuki performance style to excavate and re-stage classical texts. Their production of *The Romance of Orpheus* for example brought these forces to bear with mesmeric power. These three Frank women performed in Japan last year and will return for more performances in May. The progam is made up of 3 pieces, 1 from each of the performers, loosely united by a shared design and creative impulse.

The design of the performance space in the intimate Metro Arts theatre is immediately arresting. Designer Jodi Cox is a visual artist who specialises in creating installations and our first encounter with the piece comes as a stunning tableau of the performers frozen in Cox's installation. Clustered in two groups, long elastic tendrils hang from the ceiling to meet the floor in weighty pouches and evoke a crisp Japanese minimalism. The lights shimmer off these suspended threads and between them Jo Loth in white satin baby-doll pyjamas, Lisa O'Neill in sleek, red evening wear and Carolyn Dunphy in a long white bridal gown, further sculpt the space and take it to the audience, silently demanding 'here we stand, now watch us.'

Jo Loth's piece *Ismene* brings the forms and stylistics of Suzuki to elaborate the lives and circumstances of 2 sisters Antigone and Ismene. These twin characters are set up as binary opposites and in a focused and elemental way Loth, armed with a single umbrella and length of rope, enacts the struggle between them. The movement has many of the Suzuki trademarks, the stooped body, intense and deliberate, fused with stillness and penetrating gaze. This heightened performance style suits the high emotions of the Sophocles text. But for all these physical and emotional fireworks, the piece fails to engage. The slabs of text are too large, the sources of tension obscure and the characters insufficiently differentiated to allow the specifics of the dramatic context to bother us. As an acting method Suzuki seems best suited to detail the lingering anguish and pain of known and specific moments rather than the emerging subtleties of characters and their interdependence.

Caroline Dunphy, *three Frank Women* photo Jodie Cox

This lingering on a moment provides the basis of Caroline Dunphy's piece *Waiting for Yoshio, waiting for Hanako*. Dunphy has drawn from a Mishima work to investigate the psychological state of a woman during her 3 year wait for her lover at a train station. Not unlike Jenny Kemp's *Black Sequined Dress*, which examined the psychology of a single moment (a woman slipping while visiting a nightclub), Dunphy examines eternal waiting and repeated disappointment as empty trains arrive and depart. The strength of this work is that it is both specifically and metaphorically grounded in the space that she defines with newspaper and fan. Dunphy alone uses the design installation too. In a moment of poetry she moves behind it, waiting but hiding, hoping but fearing.

In *Sweet Yetti* Lisa O'Neill achieves a successful melding of Suzuki and contemporary dance in a swish, virtuosic display of technique and control. She moves from full-on Suzuki stomping to her own idiosyncratic wall play. Working from a centre of gravity in the body pivotal to both forms, O'Neill has taken the power of stillness, the focused gaze and crisp articulation from Suzuki to write her own performance vocabulary. Unfortunately this remarkable achievement is not amplified in the piece as a whole as it remains a stitching together of earlier, discrete works.

The performers seek a deeper understanding of the internal physics of the Suzuki method in performance. For Loth it is in relation to characters and their interrelationships, for Dunphy it is in the detail of a repeated dramatic moment and for O'Neill it is in the intersection of Suzuki and contemporary dance. By the end, it appears the Suzuki method will only allow itself to be used on its own terms. It seems too complete and codified a system, too monolithic, to really come under the agency of other forms. In Lisa O'Neill's work we can how see her contemporary dance language has been extended by incorporating and appropriating Suzuki but it is hard to see how Suzuki as a performance method can be transformed by contemporary dance or by the psychological exploration of dramatic characters or contexts.

Monolithic systems can change and perhaps we caught a glimpse of how this may happen in *three Frank women*. Just once or twice we witnessed the performers taking liberties with the form. The quirky almost parodic way O'Neill removed her Suzuki slippers and Dunphy's most extreme fan work introduced a playful and self-referential hint to the performance. In these moments, the reverence that surrounds Suzuki is uncovered and the earnestness with which many approach the method and keep it inviolate is exposed. Just as William Forsythe has repositioned classical ballet technique so the Suzuki method awaits its transgressive genius. Maybe it's about to happen in Brisbane.

three Frank women, *performed by Caroline Dunphy, Jo Loth and Lisa O'Neill, set design Jodie Cox, Metro Arts Theatre, Brisbane, February 23 - March 4*

Fooling with the panopticon

Keith Gallasch

Everyone wants one. What's a performance work without one? A panopticon a la Foucault out of Bentham. Paranoia plus as entertainment and politics. Let's turn the watchers into the watched, the audience into unwitting performers. Get in a specialist, Denis Beaubois, who's turned watching the watchers into an art form, shooting and confusing those cameras that track us in the streets, or relaying images of the audience to a screen at the front of The Performance Space. Next, look where you're at. Tasmania. Port Arthur, one of the first model prisons of the 19th century designed after Bentham's proposed panopticon. Get in an historian and a cultural theorist. Consider how surveillance, a mere architectural point of view, can replace physical with psychological punishment, can anticipate, a la McLuhan, the camera right to the point that technology replaces architecture. Okay, that's the conceptual stuff sorted out. Time to get Roar Films in to work with Beaubois to extend his surveillance artist explorations onto a larger scale and to recreate some of that 19th century prison ambience. Think. What are you going to do to the audience? History reveals the prison chapel, a mini-panopticon in which every inmate was separated from the other, but each still in view of the chaplain. Perfect. Designer Greg Methé can build a chapel, every audience member under surveillance, each in their separate world (sound by PK Khut). But what do the audience-inmates see? A chaplain? No. Three clowns (Katia Molina, Adam Broinowski, Deborah Pollard). A pulpit? No. A circus ring. Don't ask. See it for yourself, though 'experience' seems more apt. Over breakfast, mid-Adelaide Festival, I can sense Salamanca Theatre Company Artistic Director Deborah Pollard's fervent desire to put on a red nose and torment a captive audience. "Are these clowns vicious?" I ask. "They're innocents," she smiles. The ideas are big, the talents are big, the noses are big, the paranoia is justifiable. What else do you want? Get along, suffer, laugh and learn.

Deborah Pollard

Salamanca Theatre Company, What is Panopticon?, *HMAS Huon Drill Hall, May 9-20*

Transgressive tragedy

Douglas Leonard

Fractal's *Oresteia*, presented in conjunction with the *Gods and Gladiators* exhibition, was a one-hour adaptation of the first 2 plays of Aeschylus' trilogy at the Queensland Museum. Their 1993 *Oresteia* was done 'Butoh style', but this densely penetrating, stylistically hybrid and humanly darker reworking, after an uneven first showing, made good sense in the intimate amphitheatre space.

Elements of Butoh were elided into movement modelled on friezes on Greek vases, but costumes and music score exhibited an Asian influence, evoking the distance of the Homeric age from Classical Greece. Experiments with delivery of the text paid off, especially in the hands of diva Alison St Ledger who handled beautifully her transitions from speech to oratorio to ululation. Greek drama has inspired opera, ballet, and traditional theatre. This production aimed to fuse these forms in a contemporary context.

Greek tragic theatre is linked to notions of gender. If the house is the property of the male and his heirs, it is the proper domain of women. Klytemnestra, avenging the daughter, sacrificed by her husband, Agamemnon, entices him to enter the house, to go to his death. Only Kassandra, a woman with second sight, perceives, but cannot convey, what lies behind Klytemnestra's guile. If Orestes succeeds in entering the house to avenge his father, he does so by joining forces with his sister, Elektra. Even if his resort to trickery and disguise entails further risk to his masculine stature, he nonetheless

Fractal, *The Oresteia*

achieves his own uncanny insight. Although Klytemnestra is tragic, she is also the mistress of mimesis, heart and soul of theatre. Fractal characteristically extended the purlieus of the feminine: the Chorus of citizenry became entertainers 'inside' the house.

Klytemnestra's seducer, Aegisthus, seeks to consummate his father's curse on the house of Atreus for having been tricked by Agamemnon's father into eating his own children. Fractal's production took this to its heart, along the lines of Alice Miller's post-Freudian indictment of society's betrayal of the child, and had Brenna Lee-Cooney's Elektra die clutching the red cloth issuing from between her murdered mother's knees as if still attached to her birth cord; Eugene Gilfedder's Orestes, surrounded by invisible Furies, speaks with the sombre bafflement of a hurt little boy: both victims of a poisonous pedagogy.

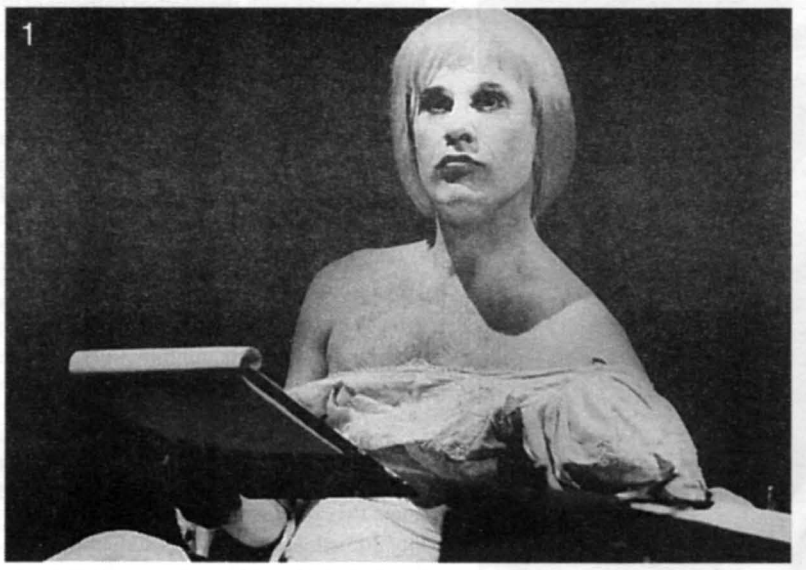
Alison St Ledger's Klytemnestra was voluptuous and feral, a primal force defending the house against masculine violation of its integrity. Eugene Gilfedder's Agamemnon had equal stature as a nightmare figure from childhood: you could still smell the blood of Troy on him. The Chorus (nicely articulate) were like younger siblings, questioning and mirroring their elders. Andrew Cory's brief but strong portrayal of Aegisthus was a suitably creepy 'uncle.' But it was Kassandra, the 'other' to this family, masterfully underplayed by Brenna Lee-Cooney, who brought home the social consequences of all this bloodthirstiness: she was as authentically haunted and haunting as those weary faces on the television news fleeing from a war that never ends.

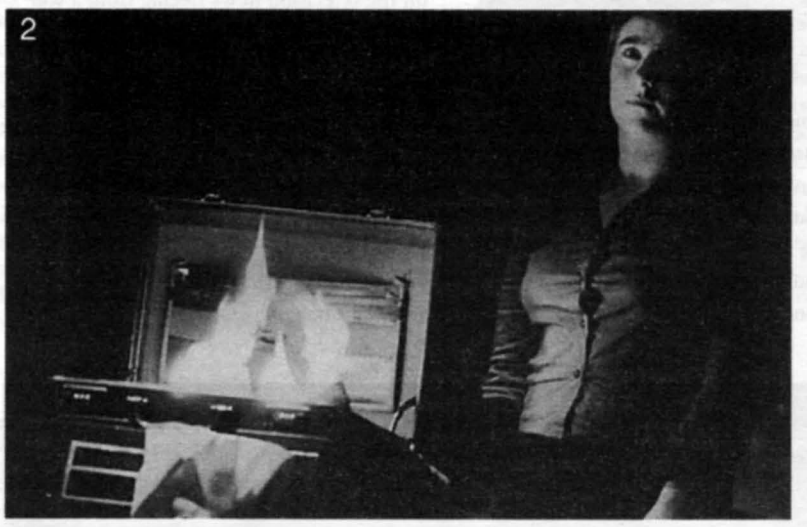
Aeschylus' trilogy, through the God Apollo, restores paternal authority. Fractal's truncated, transgressive version seems of our times.

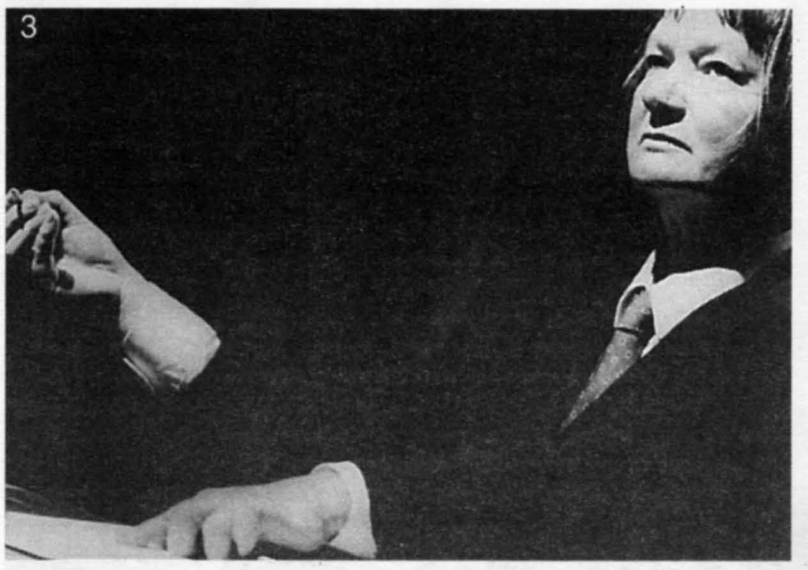
Aeschylus, The Oresteia, *adapted by Eugene Gilfedder, director Eugene Gilfedder, Fractal Theatre, Queensland Museum Theatre, Brisbane, March 4 - April 2.*

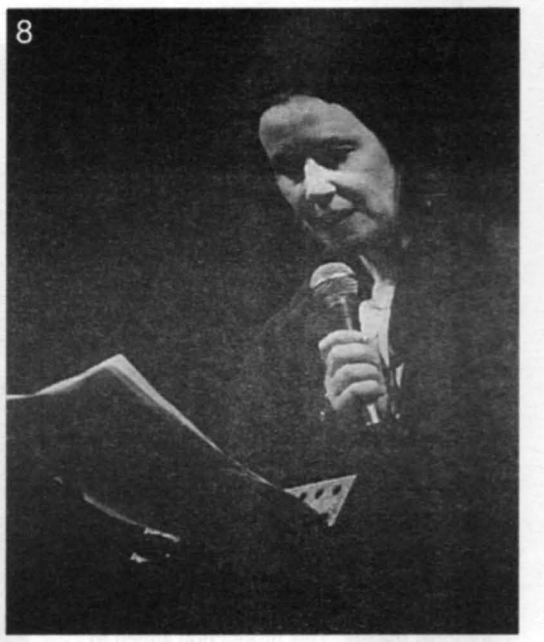
Performing Hitch

10 am, Saturday March 25. The Performance Space, Sydney. The usual performance suspects and a crowd of curious strangers gather to reflect on the often lateral but always significant links between Hitchcock and performance. In an appropriately *Spellbound* space (Nigel Kellaway, Simon Wise) of curtains and screens, we are immersed in performances and performative papers on the subject of seeing and hearing the world through Hitchcock eyes and bodies. Open City (Virginia Baxter, Keith Gallasch) introduce the cast and between acts and perform Hitchcock-influenced moments from their work. Produced by Performance Space, sponsored by the Humanities Research Program, UNSW. Photographs by Heidrun Löhr.









1. Looking like Mrs Bates on a good hair day, Nigel Kellaway unnervingly recreates the murder exchange scene from *Strangers on a Train*.

2. Nerveshell (Caitlin Newton-Broad, Gail Priest) resurrect one of Hitchcock's female icons from the 50s. Marnie sets her shoes on fire.

3. Clare Grant is all threat. Dressed in a suit, walking a little like the man himself, she authoritatively makes her way from the stage to confront the audience with nothing more than a look. As John Gillies' slow-mo *Psycho* score crescendos, she takes a pen from her pocket and ticks off a list of...what? What!!!

4. With an eye to the cut, the fit, the stitching, Simon Rees expounds on the grid of a new wave of modernity in the 50s manifest in Cary Grant's impeccable, ever-resilient Brooks Brothers' suit in *North by North West*.

5. Against a backdrop of food scenes from *Frenzy*, Lesley Stern takes us on a meandering circuit through Bondi. There's Hitchcock in the everyday but if you leave your hysteria at the door you can avoid treading on plot.

6. Karen Pearlman, with an expert AFTVRS crew, recreates scenes from *Rear Window* from the perspective of the dancer "Miss Torso". With one eye on the dancing and one on the theory of the gaze, Miss Torso heads off decapitation, confounds Hitchockian ambiguity and throws up a few ideas of her own about suspense.

7. A besuited Edward Scheer re-enacts Cary Grant's stunt fall beneath the cropduster in *North by North West*, diving beneath the screen which soon shows us Vincent Gallo doing the same thing in Kusturica's *Arizona Sunset* to demonstrate, among other things, that *North by North West* is really a film about acting.

8. "I can't bear suspense. It terrifies me" says Jane Goodall. Slipping out of her suit and into a *Blair Witch* beanie and a windcheater, abetted by the dark and a soundtrack of screams and cries for help, she re-lives a reverie which was writing itself as she exited the MCA's Hitchcock exhibition, longing for a shower.

9. Recasting *Rear Window* as a 'silent' movie, John Potts re-scores Bernard Hermann and re-frames some of Hitchcock's images to make us look again at the ethics of watching and our deep ambivalence about surveillance and privacy in the new millennium.

Fusing with techno-ness

Esther Milne

Have you heard the pop song that goes something like 'I give myself permission to shine'? After the retching subsides, what's interesting about it is its dissemination and popularisation of an institutionalised lexicon. Admittedly, the language of Californian psychology is already widely distributed, but increasingly academic sound bites are part of the practice of everyday life. Think 'cars', for example, and pretty soon you're sharing a chamois with those hyperbolic grease monkeys Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio. Cars and culture also invoke figures like Marinetti, Ballard and Cronenberg all having 'fun fun fun at Autobarn.' Two recent exhibitions in Melbourne speculate about the car's theoretical and aesthetic lineage; each deals with this history in quite different ways.

On the Road—the car in Australian art draws from a wide set of media—photography, painting, drawing, sculpture—covering 1930 to the present and including about 80 works. Curated by Ted Gott and Kelly Gellatly, the exhibition is an eclectic assemblage of sleek design, iconic Australian images, high-octane theory, and whimsy. Underscoring the exhibition's preoccupation with notions of representation is the work *Everything it takes to make you happy* (1987). Stephen Bush's oil painting is a portrait of Harley Earl who, in 1927, supervised the Art and Colour section at General Motors. Earl is shown chiselling a car from clay, one hand resting possessively on the deco curves of his new design. Foregrounding its own construction—an image of an image of a car—Bush's painting is a production in vertiginous spectatorship. Functioning in a similarly self-conscious manner is Brian Tanti's (1998/9) wittily named *Alloy Streamlined*, a sculpture of aluminium. As with Jeff Koons' *Rabbit*, the reflective surface of this piece captures the viewer within the object viewed. Tanti's work also references Futurism with its chic conflation of motor and matter; eroticised speeding bodies and what David Cronenberg calls "the desire to fuse with technoness" (Introduction, *Crash*, screenplay, Faber, London 1996).

Critiquing the automotive body is a primary concern of this exhibition. In particular, eX de Medici's *Bodycatcher Group* (1998) explores the connections between female sexuality and instruments of destruction. Nicknamed 'bodycatchers' for their ability to pierce human skin, these large photographs of car hood ornaments contrast the body's fleshiness with the machine's sharp pointy bits. Yet the artist complicates the fetishism by calling them "Celibate." These are, she maintains, "objects without a context...removed from their dangerous whole" (*On the Road*, Catalogue).

Similarly detached from their whole are the garishly painted bonnets and car doors occupying one of the spaces. A curious mix of irony and kitsch, these disembodied objects recall a world of beach n' babes, The Ted Mulray Gang and that well known tumescent boast 'don't laugh, your daughter's inside.' The gloriously named Rod Ramage exhibits a psychedelic rear door of a Holden Sandman called *Tropical Sunset* (1999). And Frank Lee's airbrushed car bonnet, *Women & Tigers* (1987), is a cartoon confection of girls in small bikinis stroking fully-grown beasts. The stallion, one presumes, is on another panel. A highly charged link between female and metal bodies is, of course, well articulated in the exhibition. An overt instance is Jon Paton's *Pacer Girl* (1997) where a glam woman's body is fused with a Valiant body. A homage to Pop Art and a pastiche of the garage pin-up calendar, Paton's piece raises some interesting interpretive issues. Is this pastiche or perpetuation? Personally, I think it's grouse. One of the problems with critiquing the 'cars n' girls' motif is the reluctance of critics to recognise that girls can do the desiring. I've been lusting after an Alpha 1800 for years. A thoroughly unreconstructed representation, however, is Ross Crothall's *Woman Driver* (1962). This is a pair of old fashioned weighing scales turned on their side to resemble a woman's body. She's ugly and stupid, her painted 'face' a vacant stare and her breasts way too low. 'Woman driver' indeed. One can almost hear those other tiresome phrases: 'her indoors' or 'she who must be obeyed'. Yawn.

John Paton, *Pacer Girl*, 1997, colour woodcut

Falling asleep in a car can be fatal. Among those artists exploring car crash poetics is Tim Jones' sculpture *The Iron Escape* (1984), a sublime invocation of dizzy mountain cliffs and splintering metal; Trent Parkes' photographic study of masculinity, velocity and danger called *Cars speed around at up to 80 km per hour* (1998); and Robert Rooney's oil painting, *Red Death* (1960), a visceral depiction of smashed bodies and wrecked windscreens.

If the car is late modernity's signifier, then the transition to the next phase occurs through its windscreen. The car windscreen mediates perception in analogous ways to the computer interface and 'the screen' is fast becoming the metaphor of choice for cultural pundits. Ben Morieson's recent streetscape installation, *Reflex*, is an astute theorisation of 'the screen' and its modalities. Occupying a disused service station on a busy road, Morieson's project consists of two large dot matrix freeway message boards. Flashing intermittently across their surface are disjointed fragments of text from *The Sun Rising* by the 17th century poet, John Donne. Ben Morieson is a Melbourne artist who has exhibited at events such as the Adelaide Festival and the Moet et Chandon exhibition. Informed by Baudrillardian narratives, *Reflex* is an intriguing speculation about the production and circulation of multiple signs systems; on the correspondence between sign and referent. Morieson argues that this work "deliberately sets out to grab attention through a disorientation of the senses...by dislocating the text from the sign, the sign's structure becomes the point of focus." What gives the project theoretical savvy is that his dissertation on matters semiotic is played out on a 'real sign.'

The metaphysical poets are well known for their paradoxical juxtaposition of imagery (Samuel Johnson's 'occult resemblances'), which Morieson's work aptly references. *Reflex* contrasts canonical modes of communication with emergent forms; signs of the English Renaissance with those of industrialisation. There remains, however, a quite pleasing symmetry between text and context: Donne's celebration of the amorous body in the midst of a traffic jam. You can almost hear James Spader unzipping his pants.

On the Road—the car in Australian art, *Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, December 11 - March 19;* Reflex: signs to reflect upon, *Ben Morieson, 206 - 220 Johnston Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, December 3 - January 3*

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The ephemeral makes its mark

Ned Rossiter

Ten sets of headphones dangle from the ceiling, suspended over a standard issue, black leather gallery bench seat. A wall trim of red LEDs pulsate a minimum of light as hesitant visitors slide the door closed, shuffle toward phones awaiting heads, and grope for a cord of location. Dock in and butt-down for a trajectory through the sonic terrain of Anita Kocsis' installation, *Invisible Viridian*.

A fighter jet roars overhead, and does it again, and again. Water trickles through the buzz of insect wings, the jets tear my belly open, my innards vibrate with the coming of warmth. A car engine ignites. Space Invader blips interject the acceleration of game arcade motor racing, indexing my age and reminding me how clumsy I am at such contests of sensory dexterity. Electronic swamp-bugs, blowflies hovering over the steam of jungle decay. Birds, water. Headphones vacillate. A twinkle of harp performs its magical segue to the kooky trip hop scratch of Indian rap. Crash! A Sunday lover-couple leak light as they enter the installation; the woman freaks: "I'm not going in there!" A hound barks, a diesel engine chugs into flight departure instructions. Waves and a gentle soprano, flight transfer and more game-blips, touchdown at Melbourne. Remain seated.

These samples of otherwise disjunctural places are fused into a mutable sonic terrain, refiguring geocultural and historic places as a spatial ecology of sound. *Invisible Viridian* undermines the primacy of vision and its sensory capacity to discern spatial limits. Space is articulated not so much as a geometric regime—though the surrounding LED's work in part to recall such governance—but as a singular encounter with verdant fields of sonic association. While a physical proximity between visitors attends both the site of listening and the negotiation of exchanging headphones, the immersion in sound is distinguished by the programmatic stage of the audio-loop and the solitude of listening.

It is this dual aspect of collective presence and singular encounter that differentiates *Invisible Viridian*'s contribution to current experiments undertaken in Melbourne in "sound immersion"—a project, you could say, figure-headed by Philip Brophy and Philip Samartzis, exploring the sonic dimension of cinema. I don't know if there's any formal association between Kocsis and Brophy & Samartzis (also known, on occasion, as Ph2), but Melbourne's a small enough town to warrant the comparison.

Ph2 foreground the way sound composition and formats structure and precede the affective and semiotic potential of the image, whereas in Kocsis' installation the image is not so much a symptomatic outcome nor a point of departure or elision. Instead, the image is simply assumed redundant through its own over-coding. Both Ph2 and Kocsis seek to contest the predominance of vision and reclaim the potency of sound. Such a concern could be seen as a timely intervention into the normalising tendency of image based information economies. As Scott Lash and John Urry have written, "A visual culture is publicly controllable in a way in which a literary culture is not" (*Economies of Signs and Space*, Sage, London, 1994). However, inquiries into the immersive experience of sound quite obviously do not wish to reinstate the bourgeois cultivation of a critical, private self peculiar to literary culture.

Ph2 and Kocsis part company in the realm of reception. The collective assemblage of Ph2 audiences in a cinema, art gallery, bar or public space inevitably incorporates the noise of the location, be it audience rustling, passing traffic, or whatever. *Invisible Viridian* does not architectonically construct an 'audience'. You are not positioned as collective witness to an event, singular as the perception of such events may be. While a physical proximity to others may prevail, the various orders of encased sound mixes ensure an hermetic sensibility like no other.

Perhaps the appeal of sound installations lies in the relatively uncoded flow of information, and the variegated sensations evoked by processes of remembrance and invention through aural association. The idea of uncoded sound might seem an absurd and stupid point to make because we 'know' sound, and any producer of sound, be it a musician or even a child howling, is aware of the rules of composition which enable an affective dimension. Nonetheless, the capacity of sound to structure and create space is largely overlooked by many working in media arts and theory.

Maybe Anita Kocsis is sensing a weariness with a certain repetition of visual codes within new media. The novelty of the ever present 'new' has become a tired refrain, and, judging by the relative popularity of various instalments of sonic experimentation in this city, the emphemerality of sound persists in holding our interest.

Anita Kocsis, Invisible Viridian, *Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), February 5 - March 12 2000.*

Helen Herbertson: the place where things slip

Philipa Rothfield

Helen Herbertson was Artistic Director of the Melbourne-based company Danceworks between 1989 and 1997. For the next 2 years, she received a Fellowship from the Australia Council (Dance Fund). This assisted the creation of her extraordinary new work, *Delirium*, which won a Green Room Award in 1999, and has recently been shown in Glasgow as part of the *New Moves (new territories)* dance festival.

Was your dance training here in Australia or did you go away?

All my training is Australian. Classical ballet as a little one. Then I met a couple of Sydney people, Brian Cobram and Jacqui Carroll. I got involved in the independent scene. There wasn't a lot of funding around then and people just had ideas and did them. Eventually I moved to Adelaide where I started doing a lot more teaching in institutions. I did a lot of choreography for the Centre for the Performing Arts and that was when I really started to think about myself as a choreographer. I probably spent 10 years or so in that market making work, until Danceworks happened, where Beth Shelton and I began as co-directors. Beth left the company after a couple of years, and then I left at the end of '97. I made a lot of work there.

I think Danceworks was a great opportunity to deepen my work. I remember that first year where we had blocks of 10 week rehearsals, and I said, "What are we going to do, we'll be finished in 2 or 3 weeks?" It didn't take me long to really start to appreciate that amount of time and working with people continuously. It was fantastic.

How long did it take you to make your current work, Delirium, *then?*

Two years. I mean, to me, it feels like it's part of *Descansos* (Danceworks, 1996). That was the beginning of this particular team of people: Trevor Patrick, Jenny Kemp, Ben Cobham and myself. Simon Barley was also there. Danceworks was about making relationships with other practitioners and finding ways to collaborate, whereas what it's been in the last 4 years is about bringing myself as the performer back into the work. It's a very complex thing though, directing it, choreographing it, performing it, collaborating in it.

Yes, looking at the credits for Delirium, *you see all these names. It was like a sort of macrame or a plait.*

Every component is integral. Often the way a work's made is that you make the dance material and then you put the lighting on top and then you decide on the costumes and it's made in a linear way. Whereas all through Danceworks I was moving towards another way of operating.

Helen Herbertson photo David B Simmonds

Could you briefly describe Delirium*? When I saw it I felt I hadn't seen anything like it. It had its own 'little' quality. I say little because it felt small, like looking down a telescope backwards.*

Where to start, what to say? Well you'd see light and dark, you'd see 2 figures sliding between entrapment and freedom, you'd see a kind of lighting interplay that allows figures to appear and re-appear, in places you don't quite expect because it's so dark. Or sometimes, figures are floating as if they're off the floor. There are elemental sounds in it, you wouldn't say there's any music there. The soundtrack uses things like the sound of fire or the tinkling of bells or things that are really evocative, quite pure sounds. The sound of water dripping or a landslide or birds. I imagine if you watch it, it might feel like you're entering some kind of internal world inside these people, as if you're travelling a time line or something with them. I was interested in the place where things slip. You slip into madness or you're not quite awake or just asleep…sort of transformation places…it's hard to describe but the word *Delirium* came well after the place that things formed.

Once *Descansos* had happened, the team had a meeting. One issue about that work was that we wanted to take it and show it to other places but it was so site specific, so the idea for the floor grew from that need to have the site as the rehearsal space.

So that constructed proscenium arch in the middle of the National Theatre—that was meant to be like that?

Absolutely. I chose that theatre with absolute care because of its prosceniumness. We're not going to a space like that in Glasgow, so the void will have a whole other kind of framing. We've had to build the proscenium much smaller, so the whole thing has been framed down to a sort of chocolate box.

I see so much work that doesn't adapt well. I think people just forget that the volume of space that something's made inside of is as much a part of it as the work. That kind of history of a work, that negative space, the space around the bodies, it's all part of it, yet it just doesn't seem to be thought about. A lot of work doesn't survive. You can see a work in its initial stage and it's fantastic and then it moves on to another space and something's not right. I'm a sucker for any space that I rehearse in—it becomes a component of the work. That's why, in making this, we moved all over the place. What I really like about this work is that it never really lands. It just becomes visible for a little while.

In terms of the future, are you thinking of moving Delirium *on or have you got ideas/energy for something else?*

No, *Delirium* is going to keep on moving, I think. I have got some other things cooking, just on my own, for a little while, but nothing is formed as yet. Two years of time in the making is a long twist. This year feels like coming back down to reality. Last year was quite a weird year and I'm sure a lot of it had to do with the sort of states that had to be, to be inside *Delirium* to perform—unconsciously. That's why I'm fascinated with Glasgow because I have to re-enter those things again but in a much more practical way. It's going to be interesting.

Jude Walton: movement's third eye

Philipa Rothfield

How do we know where we are and what our bodies are up to?

To what extent do we rely upon how our bodies feel (proprioception, kinaesthetics), and to what extent do we depend upon a sense of how they look? Whilst some dance forms privilege visual display, and others the felt experience of moving, clearly both factors are at play in the art of movement. Jude Walton's recent exhibition, *Looking for Pierre, part 1*, is more than an investigation of these matters. It is an intervention, a Darwinian leap into a possible future, through which Walton is (modestly) able to play God.

It all begins with the question of perspective. Perspectival drawing systems sprang from the Renaissance drawings of Alberti, who is credited with the discovery of artificial or scientific perspective. Walton's exhibition begins with a room lined with a series of computerised, perspectival drawings, twisted and warped in myriad ways. You begin to wonder whether the objects presented and re-presented are real or not. Are all those oblique lines of perspective how we actually see objects from various standpoints, or have we been trained to see these lines as reality?

Room 2 contains another kind of 'discovery' on perspective, this time our perspective upon our own bodies. Through the use of equipment (courtesy the biomechanics laboratory, Victoria University of Technology), Walton has been able to fiddle with our means of bodily perception. Room 2 is an empty space, containing a set of video goggles that can be strapped on. The headgear has little screens a few inches from the naked eye. These screens provide an external visual perspective on your own moving body (a camera linked to the goggles has been set up in the corner of the space). Visitors to the gallery are invited to experiment with these goggles.

It's quite extraordinary to see the back of your body as you dance, to watch yourself moving from quite alien points of view. I spent some time, dancing, whilst watching myself dance, combining my feelings of movement with this external visual information. Walton moved with me to offer the experience of moving with another person, and also videotaped my activities just to offer yet another perspective on the experience.

Not everyone deals with this 'new set of eyes' in the same way. Some felt that they were seeing themselves from the point of view of the camera, that they were outside their own bodies. Others tried to maintain their regular field of perception. I found myself flipping between my usual feelings of movement, and this 'other' visual look which enveloped those feelings. Then I started to wonder what I looked like doing this, what others would see of me, yet another perceptual take. To see oneself live is different from viewing a recording; the virtual feedback is immediate, thus, there is a sense that one can respond to the information within the ambit of the event itself. The usual closure of time is absent here.

By providing a new organ of sight, as it were, Walton has been able to provoke something like a new body, a new structure of perception. I remember one of my philosophy teachers asking us whether we thought Martians would perceive the world just like humans. It's clear that animals have different perceptual structures. What I find interesting about Walton's experiment is that a changed perceptual structure does not lead to the same experience for all people. It just goes to show that even God cannot anticipate the quality of individual perception.

Jude Walton, Looking for Pierre, *part 1, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, February 5 - 23*

Dance film: the art, the market

Keith Gallasch

Erin Brannigan is strongly motivated in organising a festival of dance film for One Extra. It's not only a form that fascinates her, it's also the subject of her PhD-in-progress, and, as reported in the pages of *RealTime*, she's visited overseas dance film festivals. Brannigan says, "I was quite overwhelmed by the amount of support for the form in Europe and America. I felt that Australia was behind the 8 ball in terms of the rest of the world." With limited funds, Brannigan curated the *Dance Lumière* project for Dancehouse in 1998. This time she's got a bit more room to move and has found a home for the festival at Sydney's Reading Cinemas—a significant move designed to reach a wider audience for a burgeoning form. She also feels for filmmakers: "there's not much impetus to make dance films if they're not going to be screened. I want to provide a platform for the work to be screened and for film-makers and choreographers to get together and talk. The interdisciplinary nature of the form requires an interface between the two."

While the transfer of plays to the screen is rare and most opera on screen is a higher form of documentation, dance and film have joined to create a hybrid where experimentation is fundamental. What is it about dance that invites filming? "I was speaking to Damien Cooper, and he talked about the kind of limitless scope for creating spaces for dancers through lighting. And I think that dance somehow offers opportunities for exploring different ways of staging that theatre doesn't—purely because dance can be a lot more abstract and it opens up different possibilities for context. And then there's the pure compatibility of the movement of the body and the moving camera. Dance is a challenge for film in terms of capturing the kinetic impact of human movement. But I also think it's an archival thing. From the beginning, I think the possibilitiy of capturing dance on film was always such a boon for dancers and choreographers because there was no other appropriate way of recording or documenting their work."

Reeldance, however, is not archivally motivated: "It's about looking at the more successful combinations of the 2 forms rather than something that's dictated by the dance performance." Brannigan has decided to hold a competition. After an initally slow response, she now has 30 entries. Competition, she thinks, is a sure way to attract filmmakers, especially since "there aren't really good networks of dance film-makers."

Because of the cost involved, the increasingly significant nexus of screen and live dance won't be represented by performance in *Reeldance*. However Margie Medlin's film for Sandra Parker's *In the heart of the eye* (see *RealTime* 35) will be shown. The film is "really interesting in terms of what they're trying to do with the camera and the performer's eye. Even just seeing the film there's a very strong link with a particular performance. But for me, screen in performance is almost a completely other genre. What I'm interested in is a festival that is about looking at films and the way that dance operates within film. "

To make *Reeldance* work, Brannigan needs to attract a hybrid audience of film fans, dance addicts, filmmakers, choreographers and dancers. "I've gone for quite high profile choreographers because I think that's going to be an important drawcard. There'll be work by Philippe Decouffle, Wim Vandekeybus and Alain Platel of Les Ballets C de la B. I think that will attract a dance audience but also dance practitioners. Most choreographers who work in film seem to have strong connections with other art forms and a lot of them have very theatrical sensibilities—such as Vandekeybus and Platel. I think there's something about the narrative history of film which appeals to those kinds of choreographers. I think we'll also get people who are specifically interested in those companies (especially after the 1998 and 2000 success of the Les Ballets C de la B showings at the Adelaide festival). I'm hoping we'll get the short film crowd who are interested in the potential that dance-film offers for a different type of language. And people studying film, and of course film-makers who are interested in the possibilities of dance on film. I'm hoping for a cross-disciplinary audience."

Reeldance is a real live-in event, with not only numerous screenings but also forums. Brannigan's international guests are the joint winners of the IMZ Dance Screen Festival last year in Cologne—Pascal Magnin from Switzerland and Miriam King from the UK. "Their films screen on a double bill on the Saturday night. On the same program is Mura Dehn's *The Spirit Moves*, a documentation of jazz dancing in America in the 40s and 50s. Prior to that we'll have a forum with Pascal and Miriam about the international dance film circuit. On the Sunday, we've got a retrospective Australian program screening some films from AFTVRS and also the Screensound collection. Then we'll have the short-listed Australian filmmakers talking about the practicalities of making their work before we run the films on the big screen on the Sunday evening."

Reel Dance: International Dance on Screen Festival, *Reading Cinemas, Haymarket, Sydney,* May 19-21. tel 02 9351 7948 www.ozemail.com.au/~oneextra

Sacred geometry: John Rodgers

Robert Davidson

When you started to read Dante, you'd just been reading a lot of ancient Greek texts—Euripides, Sophocles...

That's right and then Liza Lim said, "Why don't you read the *Inferno*." I'd been reading the *Oresteia*, *Oedipus Rex*, revelling in the intensity.

Was it a similar intensity which attracted you to Dante?

The intensity and the structure. Partially because I had just worked with South Indian musicians (Karikudi R Mani), who have a strong connection between philosophy, geometry, music, religion—they are all interrelated as they are in Dante.

Dante worked within the concept of sacred geometry, and his poem is extraordinarily architectural in its proportions. Can you talk about how this is reflected in the score?

One overall thing is the use of the "spectrum" for all of the rivers of Hell.

You're referring to the electronically generated sound, using pure sine tones, which is heard throughout the piece, and gradually builds to a climax over a long time frame.

Yes. It came from the idea of Hell from the bottom up, and thinking that none of this would exist (for Dante) if Lucifer hadn't been proud, fallen to the centre of the earth and so on. From this very fall, which happened in one motion, the whole possibility of human suffering and human redemption were simultaneously created with the yawning gap of Hell and the mountain of Purgatory on the other side of the earth...Satan at the bottom of Hell breathing out this contagion, resulting in the endless fall of human tears down to him, structurally that defines the whole piece. So I imagined an endless drone that is always just below our hearing, its partials mildly distorted.

You mean distorted from the 'pure', naturally occurring harmonic series?

Yes. The spectrum can be conceived of as something which reaches eternally upward in pitch from its fundamental, which you might think of as an analogy to the heavens. I distort this, illustrating the idea of bending the will of God or the truth of nature, leading to limitation and stasis. The distortion, which is very mild and almost imperceptible at any point, results in the fact that the series doesn't reach eternally upwards, that it in fact has a ceiling and falls back down and crushes the sound spectrum into potentially white noise, if you take it far enough.

This idea of distortion, which gradually grows, is carried through to many other aspects of the piece, such as the manner of playing the instruments.

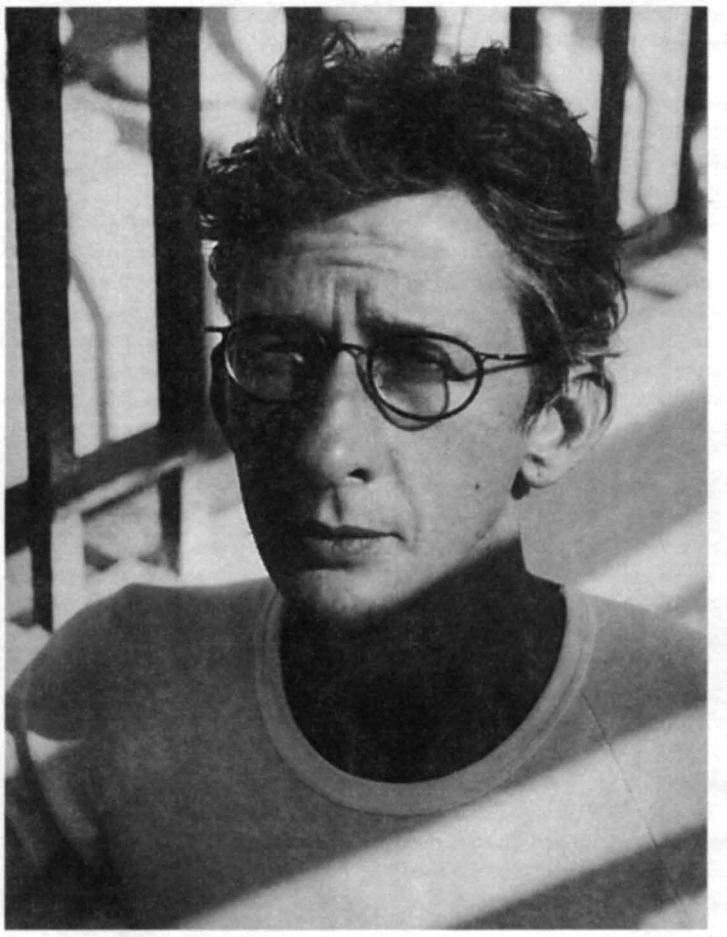
There are a lot of means used to make each instrument's sound world a microcosm of Hell. And distortion increases through the piece—the string instruments, for example, gradually loosen their strings and become flatter and flatter, until completely slack, which creates very interesting sounds. This expresses the impotence, the frozen stasis that exists at the bottom of Hell. The oboe is distorted by increasing its length, resulting in very complex multiphonic sounds, and making it almost unplayable by the third Circle of Hell.

Then of course you distort the very material of the instrument when we reach Cocytus, the frozen lake which fills the bottom of Hell, and actually replace the wood with ice.

Indeed, the flute and oboe are made out of ice at the end of the piece and are played until they melt and break.

You've made a great many specific connections to details in the poem. In Limbo, *for example, you have a lot of crystalline sounds, which is a contrast to the sounds of the lower parts of Hell.*

When you first see the Devil, it doesn't look like the Devil at all. And when Dante first gets into Hell, in the first circle, it's a place where he meets some of those he considers to be the greatest people in history. Limbo exists in sharp contrast to every other place in Hell, but it *is* the top of Hell.



John Rodgers

Then in the circle of the Lustful, Amor, centering on the figures of Paulo and Francesca, you have a very symbolic use of the instruments in which the flute is inserted into the oboe, suggesting coitus, while both are played to create a strange hybrid sound.

Paulo and Francesca are eternally bound together—the flute and oboe always have to breathe at the same time—they never play overlapping phrases, they always play together. They try to stabilise themselves and fail repeatedly. Eventually everything stops; they do their act, and then get swept away in the wind again.

As you are dealing with the time art par excellence, I imagine you were interested in Dante's many notions of time.

One which really struck me was that the spirits in Hell can very accurately see the past and the future, but as it comes towards the present, their vision becomes increasingly blurry, and at the point of the exact present they've got no idea what's happening at all. This is a devastating thought, that at the end of time, when there is no more time, they will be completely shut out of existence, because there is only the present and they haven't got one.

Were there other ideas about time?

Motion is increasingly reduced towards stasis, and all of the music is struggling to survive against a constant slowing of time. That led to the idea of magnification—that what looked like a dot on the page at the start of the piece was like the universe at the end of the piece, because it had been magnified by the slowing of time. Things which sounded together turn out to have great gaps between them, and show all manner of further information inside that. I was thinking of them as wounds in skin, which appear faultless, but open up as you go further in. Revealing the fraud, looking at things closer and closer.

The music tries to stay active and alive and in motion, but it's set up that eventually it starts to die and there's no way for there to be any more motion. By the middle of Malebolge there's no way according to the composed techniques I was using for there to be any more motion and the only way to go on (as in the poem) is by improvisation.

You have an interesting interaction between strict, notated music and free improvisation. This mirrors the relationship in the poem between reason and intuition. Reason begins to fail in Malebolge.

Yes, the poem's idea is that reason would fail on its own. If Dante hadn't panicked, if he hadn't questioned Virgil, who represents reason, he may well have remained in Hell for eternity. I found it very interesting as a composer to mix improvisation and music which is notated to the hilt, having not put them together so much before, having done one or the other.

Do you think that many of the details you're discussing will be missed by most of the audience?

Yes, but I tried not to lose sight of the fact that I was ultimately writing a piece of music that must not need to have any relationship with Dante's poem for the audience to appreciate it. I felt like I succeeded in that by having fundamental musical things in operation. It must have its own *musical* line of discussion.

Is Hell relevant today?

Well, Murray Kane states in the program note that if you take away a mythological Hell, it will reappear through fissures in the mind and lead to insanity (laughs). Hell has to exist in some way. If we try to get rid of it, it will turn up in ways we are less likely to be able to control.

John Rodgers, Inferno, *a musical composition based on Dante's* Divine Comedy, *Elision contemporary music ensemble, Telstra Adelaide Festival 2000, Wharf 10, Port Adelaide, March 10, 11 (see Drew Crawford, "The Devil's Music", RealTime 3, Adelaide Festival,* www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

New Music Notes

The **New Music Network** is about telling audiences and performers where, when and how to hear the best in new music performance around Australia. Read on and visit the NMN website for more performance details and a full calendar.

Australia's award winning ensemble **Synergy Percussion** continue their excellent subscription series this year by presenting some very fine performers from around the world, as well as showcasing the unique talents of Synergy's own members. Three exciting concerts this year present such international masters as **Fritz Hauser**, **Aly N'Diaye Rose**, **Glen Velez**, **Satsuki Odamura** and **Matthew Doyle** performing heaps of Australian and world premieres. Kicking off in April, a must-hear is Fritz Hauser. If you missed the subscription concert on April 1, get down to The Studio at the Opera House, April 14 to witness this legend for yourself. *The New York Times* claims he's "one of the best drummers alive." Call the SOH box office for tickets ($31) on 02 9250 7777.

At the Eugene Goossens Hall (ABC Centre), the **Sydney Alpha Ensemble** will present a program of works including ex-ex-pat' **Vincent Plush**'s *On Shooting Stars*. Other composers featured will be Finsterer, Henze, Benjamin, Berg and Gaussin. Friday May 5, 8pm. Enquiries tel 029953 1108

Machine for Making Sense has been pretty busy lately, and continues to evolve with ***Organism*** in May. See these creatures at the Harbourside Brasserie Thursday May 11, 8pm and the Wollongong City Gallery Saturday May 13, 8pm. **Rik Rue**—digital and analog tape manipulations; **Stevie Wishart**—violin, hurdy gurdy, voice + electronics; **Jim Denley**—wind instruments and voice; **Amanda Stewart**—voice and text; and surprise guests.

This is what a UK reviewer had to say about MfMS recently: "Though MfMS sounds like a single complex organism, it isn't synchronised like a shoal of darting fish. Within the group the degrees of independence, dependence and interdependence are hard to fathom - much like human consciousness itself."

The 3rd **Totally Huge New Music Festival** 2000. A 9 day adventure inside the world of new music, Perth's premiere new music event returns with a city-wide program of events, May 6 -14. With an impressive line up of international, interstate and local artists, the festival offers Perth audiences a world-class program of performances, workshops and master classes on the cutting edge.

This year's Totally Huge features the work of New York composer and performer **Annie Gosfield** in combination with fellow New Yorker, guitarist **Roger Kleier**. Other guests of the festival include **David Thrussell**, **Duo Contemporain**, NMN members **Ensemble Offspring**, and Paul Lowin Prize-winner **Michael Smetanin.** For info go to NMN's website calendar.

The **2000 Sydney Spring Festival of New Music** is seeking new or recent compositions from young composers, under the age of 26 years on August 1, 2000, for the 2nd **Young Composers' Salon**. One of the success stories from the 1999 festival, young composers' performances take place prior to the 8.15pm program each night of the festival. For more information contact Barry Plews: *sydney.spring@reckless.on.net*

Watch this space for inormation on the Peggy Glanville-Hicks Annual Address to take place later in the year. If you'd like to receive the NMN's email bulletins, and for more info on times, prices and venues, visit our website: *www.nmn.org.au*

Place and re-processing in new music

Jonathan Marshall

Philip Brophy claims that his reprocessing of film soundtracks on *The Cavern of Deep Tones* "turns the music inside out to uncover the deep rumbling at the core of the orchestral machine prior to it being forced to make grand symphonic beauty," a project common to the new music movement as it developed after World War II. Sound was stretched and deconstructed into pure noise. Tone overtook melody and rhythm as the single note or scratch became a signifier of minimalistic depth, returning silence to the acoustic centre. Music is that with which one structures the sublime vacuum. Despite fitful resurgences and continuities by artists using traditional instrumentation or novel tunings (notably Sonic Youth's retrospective of the New York avant-garde *Goodbye 20th Century* or the work of the Elision ensemble and Aphids), such ideas are more likely to now be realised through contemporary sample-based music. Turntablists like DJ Spooky and Ken Ishii rarely let a single blip of an original musical phrase enter their corpus without extruding and morphing it, imploding the moment into cut-up microcosms.

David Chesworth straddles this dichotomy between electronica and post-classical/post-punk music. A former member of techno-instrumental band Essendon Airport (often somewhat simplistically described as Australia's answer to Kraftwerk), Chesworth's composition characteristically takes the form of creative editorial. "I like music to have been on a journey," he observed of his take on the score to the film, *Badlands*. "Music becomes more interesting as it collects more baggage. I don't think I'd feel as comfortable sitting down with a blank page or a blank computer screen and writing something." Unlike Elena Kats-Chernin—who claims that the referential quality of her music is primarily strategic; a consequence of the emotional and theatrical effects she wants to achieve—Chesworth embraces chamber composition as a form of "classical sampling." Chesworth's collaboration with Sonia Leber on the Olympics acoustic forest project—a spatial realm of strangely dissonant yet related human action sounds—is therefore consistent with his general practice. Mental composition microprocesses found acoustics, be they scores, recordings or programmed noises. It is thus appropriate that *Badlands* includes Robert Goodge's dance-floor-friendly, ambient reworking of a Chesworth Ensemble track, which transforms the original Reichian pulses into pure electro-acoustic tones.

New music cannot however be assimilated into Zen-inspired minimalism à la Philip Glass and Steve Reich. Even much of their music features a distinctive 'shimmer', a polyrhythmic layering of tone, force and texture producing a motile mesh of sound. Electronica now seems better at creating this effect also. Darrin Verhagen's *Zero/Stung* for instance is a superlative example of electronica featured in recent South-Eastern Australian Post-Modernist dance (others include Franc Tetaz—who also masters Brophy's material—Livia Ruzic and Voiteck).

Verhagen's work shifts from intensely atmospheric, sonically open spaces invaded by light rumbles and crystalline white-noise, to slammin', crunchy beats unsettled by smears of back-tracking. Where early new music and subsequent spartan turntablism from John Cage, John Zorn and even Brophy tends to place single sonic events in broken, dispersed aural environments, composers like Verhagen, who are closer to club culture, create an impossibly complex inter-weaving of thousands of tiny elements, coalescing into a crinkly, pulsating wall of noise.

Ph2—Brophy's collaboration with Philip Samartzis—bridges this apparent divide in cinesonics. Where the primary logic of *The Cavern of Deep Tones* lies in an acoustic-spatial separation within an overall textured unity, Ph2's *Bionic Blue Bubblegum Slurpee* is, by Brophy's own admission, "schizophrenic in how it matches sounds and music styles." It is a neon-lit, LA-style suburban dream of subsonic rumbles, crisp high frequency fuzz, driving neo-percussion and alienating, apocalyptically space-age realms, perpetually haunted by spectres of Hollywood like Michael Mann. Few techno releases (with the exception of 310's drum'n'bass urban ethnography *The Dirty Rope*) traverse such a range of sound and tempo.

The neo-Dadaist happenings and Fluxus events of early new music were intensely theatrical. They were nevertheless 'post-humanist' in character. The introduction of chance, spontaneity and dissonance challenged the proposition that either a rationality or a unified emotional sensibility underlay composition. This separation between authorship and art is now more effectively (dis)embodied in electronica. The artist-as-processor recedes further from the work than the curious yet absent-minded dice-thrower of early Cage. It is significant that Verhagen, Brophy and Chesworth all refer to other sites: the dance floor for Verhagen, acoustic spaces for Ph2, clockwork universes and physical actions for Chesworth. Only the more traditional instrumentation of Chesworth's Ensemble actively embodies live action and gestural playing in performance; console artists disappear behind and into their work-stations. In contemporary electronica, the body is allusively and elusively dispersed.

The Cavern of Deep Tones, *Philip Brophy (Sound Punch: 1999);* Goodbye 20th Century *(Sonic Youth Records 4); Sonic Youth et al (Sonic Youth Records: 1999);* Reich Remixed, *Steve Reich, with DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid, Ken Ishii & more (Nonesuch: 1999);* File Under Futurism, *DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid vs. the Freight Elevator Quartet (Caipirinha: 1999);* Badlands, *David Chesworth Ensemble, (W.Minc/Fido: 1998);* 5,000 Calls, *Wax Sound Media [David Chesworth, Sonia Leber], Sydney 2000 Olympics Urban Forest;* Zero/Stung, *Darrin Verbagen & Shinjuku Filth (Iridium: 1999);* Bionic Blue Bubblegum, *Pb2 (Philip Brophy, Philip Samartzis), (Sound Punch: 1999).* The Dirty Rope, *310 (Leaf: 1999).*

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caleb k reports from *New Media and Electronic Music*, Metro Screen, Sydney Film Centre, Paddington Town Hall, February 14, where Toby (Kazumichi) Grime, Scott Horsecroft, Wade Marynowsky and David Rogers talked software, machines and noise.