Artists in Limbo Between Nugent and Ralph
The Necks: The power of musical intimacy
Philip Adams: The designing choreographer
Palimpsest: Art as environment in Mildura
Makereah: The future on Rottnest Island
Cameron & Scott: Performing Nightfall

Melinda Backham: My viral lover: a www winner
Benjamin & Burns: The indigenous surf movie
Elise McCreide: The art of first time filmmaking
Going Home: SBS' commuter TV venture
Sydney Asia Pacific Film Festival
Plus: Animation, reviews, news & Girls On Loos
Cover: Dots Obsession
1999, Yayoi Kusama

The 2000 Biennale of Sydney has got off to an unusually good start with a high degree of reviewer unanimity that this Biennale has got the goods, offering an invaluable retrospective of works from significant local and international artists, something that Documenta X did too in its own epic way in 1997. This smaller, but still considerable gathering has the added bonus of being free. Several works have already grabbed the public imagination; one of them is Yayoi Kusama's Dots Obsession.

The catalogue entry reports that 'From her childhood Yayoi Kusama was plagued with a nervous disorder that made her hear voices and see visions. She accepted these things as mysterious signals from nature, from the universe. She came to feel that these signals enveloped the world, as if with a curtain, or a net, and started expressing this in her work via polka dots. 'One day', she writes, 'looking at a red flower patterned tablecloth I turned my eyes to the ceiling and saw the same pattern everywhere.' Alter-images seemed to cover everything and it seemed as if she herself would fade away into that dotted world...'Drawing was one way for Kusama to take a stand in this world, by giving reality to what she saw. And so she began to paint polka dots. While dots or spots are simple geometric figures, they are also organic shapes that suggest cells, molecules, particles and seeds that are the fundamental building blocks of life' (Yoko Haegewa, Catalogue, 2000 Biennale of Sydney).

In ReadTime 36 (August-September) there'll be an extensive response to the 2000 Biennale of Sydney 2000.
Artists in limbo - between Nugent and Ralph

Hearing Prime Minister John Howard on radio extolling the virtues of small business as the backbone of the nation, an otherwise unassuming sentiment turned to me and said, "That man's idea of small business is a boss and upwards of 20 employees... he wouldn't know a small business if he fell over it." You get that same feeling about the government's failure to understand the lives of artists with the nightmarish tax limbo that has suddenly opened up in which it seems all too likely that many artists in this country will become lost souls, unable to claim for materials and services basic to their practices unless they are phenomenally successful and don't have that other little earner that keeps them alive and practicing their art. Artists have been refused exemption from the Ralph legislation (New Business Tax System (Integrity Measures) Bill 2000). Primary producers, on the other hand, have been granted an exemption if they earn less than $40,000 from a second income.

When the successful implementation of the financial recommendations of the Arts Guarantee Report was announced in the recent Federal Government Budget, ArtsPeak, the peak arts service organisation, sympathised with those outside the ambit of the major arts organisations: "It drew attention to what it called the 'worrying gap' between funding for smaller companies and individual artists, and the government's support for major arts groups'. (Sydney Morning Herald, May 11). Little did ArtsPeak know how much more sympathy and support for artists would be needed now. With the Budget announcement of the rescue and advancement of the major arts organisations, Dr Helen Nugent said that Arts Minister Senator Richard Alston and the Government should be hailed as heroes by all those who care about the performing arts ('The Australian, May 12). What kind of a government is he who will make a million of the lives of his artists in his determination to eliminate the tax claims of 'hobbies' for their trips to Paris to paint watercolours of Notre Dame? What art does this man see? Is it not artists and visual artist alone who will suffer. There are many performing artists supporting themselves by other means, who will fall foul of Ralph, no longer able to validly claim for classes, research, equipment, travel.

Although anxiety about the likely impact of the Budget report has been around for a while, it's only been newsworthy since Robyn Archer rallied against it at the NSW Premier's Literary Awards: "While the Ralph report gives $70 million extra (including State contributions) to the elite arts... at the same time the Ralph report results in legislation that takes power to thrust literally hundreds of thousands of artists—many of them writers—into dire poverty...Are these the artists of whom we will soon be demanding half of their income at source (under the GST legislation) if they do not have an AB number)—their meagre income and

forbidding them from reclaiming 10 per cent or more of the cost of the tools of their trade?"

We wonder to press, visual artists in several states were organising protest rallies and The Sydney Morning Herald reported that "Greens Senator Bob Brown vowed to move an amendment to the proposed laws... and yesterday the Democrats joined the campaign. The Democrats arts spokesman, Senator Aden Ridgeway... will move to ensure that professional artists making no more than $40,000 on a second income be exempt from the crackdown on non-commercial losses" (SMH, June 2). Last week, Opposition Shadow Arts Minister, Duncan Kerr, said that in the unlikely case of the Democrats moving on this they would have Labor's support.

The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) website at http://www.culture.com.au/ nava details the requirements of the legislation, as summarised here: "Under the legislation as it is proposed, most artists will no longer be able to offset the cost of their artistic practice against other income. Under the new legislation, an artist must pass one of four tests in order to continue to offset costs: the amount of assessable income from a business (read art activity) must be at least $20,000, or in 3 out of 5 years deductions must be less than income, or the value of assets used to carry out the activity on a continuous basis must be at least $100,000, or your interest in real property (read studio, workshop, office but not private dwelling) must be at least $500,000." In a further irony, the Australia Council GST seminars have packed out and there's been a late scramble by artists to get ABN numbers. The B is for business. These people are serious. But, as Tamara Winkoff of NAVA has said, "What the Ralph legislation implies is that most artists are simply hobbyists." She is reported as estimating "that there are about 10,000 practising visual artists in Australia earning less than $10,000 a year."

It's a grim scenario, one in which there is little room to move. As an artist you need an ABN number to avoid being taxed at source at 48.5% where you are paid fees or commissions or grants. If you're not GST registered (not the same thing as having an ABN number) you will pay 10% GST on all the materials for which some of you might have once been tax exempt. And, under Ralph, you most likely won't be able to claim on them anyway. Let's hope that the Greens, the Democrats and Labor can unite to make this appalling situation at least tolerable. Robyn Archer has noted that the Government seems to have made it up with the major arts companies after the "elite arts" share of the last election, but it has a long way to go with the majority of practising artists whom it would like to behave in a business-like way, ABN numbers and all, but seems deter-

ited at the very same moment to knock out the running altogether.

Editorial

Phillip Adams

The choreographer with designs on design

Interview by Philippa Rodfield

The hottest little gallery in the world

Darwin's 24HR Art celebrates an adventurous decade

Suzanne Spunner

A cultural downer

Impeding the Australian-American connection

Peter Ekersall

Elise McCredie

The fits of first time feature filmmaking

The Indigenous surf movie

Surfing the Healing Wave at REAL: life on film

Simon Enticknap

Justifiable paranoia

Salamanca Theatre Company's Panopticon

Sean Kelly

The Necks experience

The power of musical intimacy

Linda Marie Walker

Departments

Dance

4

OnScreen:

Film, Screen Culture, Digital Media

9

Performance

28

Arts Issues

14 & 27

Music/Sound

36
Random's integration of new media into dance

Sophie Hansen

Wayne McGregor's Random Dance Company has been hailed as Britain's answer to the integration of new media into dance.

As numerous British choreographers experiment on the small scale in academic and out of the way contexts, McGregor has succeeded in bringing the technology debate onto middle scale stages across the nation. Through a trilogy of full evening productions which began in 1997, with The Millennium, Random has explored alternative environments for dance. Working with technology as a source of inspiration for choreography and as a filter through which to run his ideas about movement, McGregor has not ventured far into the 'build-it-yourself' technological experimentation which characterises much of Britain's more experimental artists in this arena. Brief incursions into motion capture have produced stimuli for choreography on bodies, rather than leading to the construction of installation-based work, explored by artists such as Susan Kozel. Collaborations with animators have led to the construction of projection-based spaces for dance rather than to the creation of CD-ROMs or online choreography, as explored by artists such as Bruce Marriott and Ruth Gibson.

Random is first and foremost a touring company, funded to create work for large audiences and to engage with them in a discourse about dance, sneaking technology in by the back door through its relation to choreography. The fact that the company has been able to scale up the level of input of technology is testimony to McGregor's growing choreographic invention. Taking energy from his collaborators, rather than becoming lost inside the maze of inter­ meering media, McGregor has defined for himself a context which sits somewhere between mainstream innovation and excavation of new media experiment.

Random performed Aeon, the final piece in the trilogy which began in 1997 with The Millennium, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. I have seen this company at close quarters, having worked with McGregor at a time when Random was growing in ambition and scale. Now with 8 dancers and a full evening piece which is burgeoning with design input from a range of collaborators, Random is clearly on a roll. Aeon opens with a giant amorphous image projected onto several layers of screens. This image dances eerily into shapes which ever more resemble the human form, until suddenly the section ends and tiny Cuningham leaps on stage amidst an assault of projections. Timo Atuhl, who produced the scaring imagery of McGregor's last production, Saltzburg16, has collaborated with an architectural photographer to animate a moving environment of chasques with a hieratic, ominous choreography of their own. The disorientating effect of these images, surging over the angled screens and butresses of Vicki Morris Tier, frames Cunningham in an alienated world.

McGregor then introduces his dancers one by one, in a series of razor sharp solos. Sprunging from behind screens into pools of light, the soloists battle the oppression of the environment and find inspiration and relief in their introverted movement sequences. Sharing a common vocabulary of flickering, reflective movement with blues of gustual activity at the extremities, each dancer is given the space to show themselves. The addition of new male to the company introduces a weightier accent to the choreography, to con­tribute to the spacy, electrical feel of seasoned Random dancers such as Catherina Hulshof. McGregor himself does not perform in Aeon, although I missed seeing his dysfunctional movements fire off his attenuated limbs, I am sure it is this new perspective which has enabled McGregor to tune his choreography more finely to his dancers.

At the end of a trilogy's worth of technology McGregor returns to the engine of his inven­ tiveness, the old-fashioned and enduring human body. Striping away the technology in the final section of Aeon, McGregor focusses upon his choreography and demonstrates the intensity of his connection with the raw expressiveness of movement. The screens rise, the projections fall away and the music softens from the blare and bite of soroj/kinace to classical Corelli. Ben Maher's refined costumes are typically inventive. They sample references to historic periods in jewelled sleeves and extravagant cuffs to contrast the cybered of the earlier sections. Maher's pastel shades and the calm of Lucy Carter's lights introduce a gentler mood to the choreography which takes the dancers into intense communion through duets, quartets, sextets and some glorious octets, where one feels McGregor has new found muscles with admirable control.

More a beginning than an end, Aeon is the definition of context in which McGregor will now develop his choreography. While new media seaks increasingly into the British main­ stream through the use of projections, film and sound experimentation in work by established choreographers, genuine invention in its use is generally still confined to the fringes. The inclusion of technology-heavy installation work, such as Carol Brown's Shelf Life, or Kone's Contours in the same season as Random, nevertheless shows that the climate in UK is changing. With Random trialling an accept­ able path between dance and technology the ensuing exploitation of many facets of this relationship can more readily be explored by a new generation of artists.

Wayne McGregor has taught choreogra­ phers in Australia through Chunky Move, as well as having collaborated with Company in Space.

Sophie Hansen is Creative Centre Manager at the Roundhouse, London and RealTime's London dance correspondent.

Do you have time for a quick chat?

Sue Moss

The seductive power of cults frames the territory of the chalice, a collaborative work by Two Turns Dance Company.

In the chalice which incorporates dance, puppetry, video, soundscore and design, Wendy McPhee and Michael O'Donoghue explore the 12 stages of an individual's jour­ney, in the words of the poet.

Greg Methel's design suggests the cross­cultural elements of cults through a strong, yet spacious entrance, emblematic of a Shinto shrine. Above this hangs a nine-strand­ed necklace. A pile of books rests either side of the central gateway.

The use of books as a symbolic device contributes to the imaginative intensity of the chalice. They signify altars, are scattered in despair, become paths, and represent containers of tired knowledge systems. The intermission shift and the weight of the word always refuses to reveal meaning to the frenzied and compliant recruits.

Puppeteer Philip Mitchell manipulates one book as a mirror for video images of a disembodied eye, mouth and fragmented face. He kneads clay on a table of books. While his hands shape and spawn hums, replicas he repeats: "Do you have time for a quick chat?"

In the chalice the dancers are separated by, and converse across, a central space. It is in this terrain of the middle ground where the energy of submission, conversion, demar­ cation and acceptance is situated. McPhee and O'Donoghue alternately climb and fall onto and across the central structure. Spinning like rejected angels, they use each other's bodies as ledges, ladders and platforms to reach imagined higher ground.

The crack, hiss, static and distortion of Poonkhin Khut's unrelenting sound score accentuates the dancers' spatial travelled and the concentration of disembodied merciless icons. At times I missed the silence that might realise my aural response to the dancers' body score.

Ambiguity of power relations between each recruit and the charismatic cult leader emerges as a central motif of the work. A powerful sequence features a gap of re­peated across a dancer's mouth, containing and suppressing utterance, difference, desire and question. This image inscribes the mouth as the only place where obeisance is avowed.

The dancers' portrayal of simultaneity or contrast (for example, McPhee's writhing body and O'Donoghue's muscular and compact fa­tness) is often relieved by the inter­ vention of the third: the third person portrayed by Phillip Mitchell, the third image of the dancers' shadows on a blank quarry wall, and the connecting/separating third of the space between the chalice cups.

The chalice is symbolically represented by a granite cut, an altar of Agora, an image in a cup shape to trace the centre line of the body passing from lips, throat and heart to the genitals, all sites of vulnerability, violence and desire.

We witness the recruit's territory of dis­orientation, love and quest for stillness.

These recruits are not resilient. They comfort and bruise each other through a journey of confusion, momentary salvation and ultimate exhaustion. The high production standards of the piece effectively exploit the inter­ solved contradiction of cults where surren­der and conformity jostle with cruelty, denial and loss.

The chalice, Two Turns, director Annette Downs, dance and choreography Wendy McPhee & Michael O'Donoghue, puppeteer Philip Mitchell, design Greg Methel, soundscore Poohkhin Khut, digital video design Benjamin Wright, lighting Tim Muaro, multi­media visual artist Chantelle Delreys, Peachy Bovey, London, The Arts Centre, Launceston, April 12-15, Cygnet Town Hall, April 19

Sue Moss is a writer/performer who works in collaborative performance and recording projects with musicians, dancers and visual artists.
As Phillip Adams shows me around his apartment...

Philip Rothfield

Born in New Guinea, Phillip Adams learnt to dance from the white woman in the local ballet hut.

I see the work as...not to draw inspiration from the world of design, but to make it design.

Dumpty. I took Humpty as the metaphor for suicide. All the King’s horses and all the King’s men couldn’t put Humpty together again.

I think that would be a grave error, particularly for me. And I think that it’s important to take it seriously.

I’m trying to find out who I am. I’m trying to figure out who I am as a dancer.

Do you want to show your work overseas?

It’s important to me to have my work shown in an international context. I would love to go to New York for dance festivals.

Do you want to be in Australia, do you like being here making work?

I couldn’t be happier. I think like the choreographers who seem to have infiltrated themselves back nicely in Australia at the moment (Lucy Guerin, Rebecca Hilton). Without the time spent in New York and Europe where I performed for 10 years and danced and did some of my own work, I wouldn’t be who I am today. I was a student at VCA. To come back now and to implement my own work in that context seems to be working okay at the moment.

RealTime 37 June - July 2000
Mapping the wild edge
Nicholas Mills

Bonemaps's the wild edge creates a complex, multilayered, introspectively real journey of the "ephemeral body" in an ongoing exploration of the contrast between the tropical North Queensland landscape and the "wild edge" of urban and built spaces that we humans inhabit. Using performance, film, exhibition, installation, sound and online art, the 3 performances of this bold, seamless multimedia presentation at the Tanks Arts Centre in Cairns (as part of Australian Dance Week) were a milestone in the project. The wild edge is a postmodern slideshow of the 'Deep North', its beauty, unique man-made intrusions, and curious social and physical contexts. Using video material documented at sites as diverse as the Chilliagon Marble Mines, the Powerhouse in Brisbane, a cattle station in Toomba and the New Parliament House in Canberra, the collaboration takes place at each juncture, and another layer is created for the evolving work.

Bonemaps's work has involved journeys to the Body Weather Farm in Japan and Australian field trips with Singapore artist Lee Wen. These investigations place the wild edge—the Australian engagement with the Asia Pacific region.

A choreographer and accomplished performer, Rebecca Youdel and Russell Milledge background informs her current movement practice ever so subtly, while training and discipline is obtained in her total control. Her ability to instate the spectrum of human-animal expression is boundless. Russell Milledge has made a successful transition from 2D practice into movement, finding his niche in slow-motion expression. Together, Youdel and Milledge have found a balance in style and form.

The soundscape created by Michael Whiticker and Paul Lawrence illustrates the tension in the movement, while traditional instruments, voice, sound devices and digital editing create an evocative and emotive soundtrack. Whiticker's dominance and focus on instruments is beautifully complemented by Lawrence's more discreet and quirky play with various installation elements. Pre-recorded sound also contributes to what amounts to a sophisticated live film score.

Form is a key element: Glen O'Malley's rich photography provides a classical launch pad for the human and animal interspecies film, X-rays, performance, sound and installation. In the 'round' of the Tanks, the installation had a distinctly urban feel, and in itself provided a perfect site to explore: the wall of X-rays dividing the dance floor, the hanging ice block (dripping water, and filled with stones ready to drop into aluminium bowls), rocks, a field of blue tufts. The bone, as chief icon, represents decay, the transition between life and death, the connector between ephemeral worlds. Far from being morbid, it symbolises the built presence in the ecological landscape, the natural physical decay that occurs and its inherent beauty.

With shows at the next Next Wave Festival in Tokyo, Umbrella in Townsville, and the new Powerhouse in Brisbane, the wild edge will continue to develop. Its flexibility in delivery is embodied in the exploration of various built environments and our habitation of them. Each new site will add another exciting layer to the work.

Bonneaup, the wild edge, Tanks Art Centre, Cairns, May 13-21; World Dance 2000, Tokyo, August 15-16; New South Sheds, Townsville and Forts, Magnetic Island National Park, August 14-27; Brisbane Powerhouse Sept 9-24.

info@bonemaps.com, or go to www.bonemaps.com

Nicholas Mills is an artist/designer/writer and an Arts Project Officer in Cairns.

Love & menace to a heartbeat
Francesca Renda-Short

No, don't do it. You want to scream. You'll get hurt.

At one time you see them there, a long way off, upstage in a far corner but achingly close because of the drama of the figures, their movements, the eyes that span the distance to hook you in. Their eerie skull-capped faces. Stark yellow vinyl raincoats (you can just about smell the plastic), striped-naked bodies. These masks—in slow mo—chart moments of eroticising love and tenderness mixed with a nearly intolerable menace and violence. To a heartbeat, music.

You're too young. Innocents.

No. These characters don't mean you. None of them do. They live dangerously. Teetering near the edge, sliced up and on the edge. They tip over, reappear, disembodied, provocative and angry. For these characters the bubble of the masked innocents—love to odio. Whether they're kids teasing each other mercilessly, fast onlookers or spectators with ploy-wood teeth, they suck you into a world of suspended disbelief, vulnerability. This is a dance work that pulls you in, eyes swimming out of the crowd of the audience, tempting—oh so tempting—you onto another plane. Do you dare? Take a risk?

They play with you. Humour, laughter, folklore quickly by moments that take your breath away. To leave you very nearly desolate, unnerved. It's raw, confronting. Guaranteed to get you. And all executed with precise movements and an acute sense of timing whether the characters are synchronised swimming on highways, near-to-bursting polka-dots on a construction site or sculptures of sandhills. This is physical theatre that dares to do something. This is a piece of work that is screamingly simple and naïve at times—as striking with wit as with intent. The tap tap tap of witty primary colours, circles, arcs, the tap tap tap of feet in lines and circles—

DANCE WORKS PRESENTS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH BRISBANE POWERHOUSE
a double bill of contemporary dance featuring HAPPY VALLEY by Rebecca Hilton and IN THE HEART OF THE EYE by Sandra Parker (choreographer) Margie Medlin (filmmaker) and Elizabeth Drake (composer)

HAPPY VALLEY
JUNE/JULY 2000
performance mixed metaphor works by artists crossing new territories of meaning
Week One July 27 - 30 Week Two August 3 - 6
Featuring works by:
Susie Fraser, Shahar Dor,
Margaret Trail, Yumi Umiunare,
Jodie Farrugia and Tim Davey

Thursday to Saturday 88pm
Sunday @ 5pm
Tickets: $16 full & $12 conc
Bookings: 9347 2860

DANCEHOUSE
June/July 2000

specialist workshop
lighting dance with nik pajanti
July 22nd 10.00am - 4.00pm
enquiries/registrations: 9347 2860

guest teacher
classes with rebecca hilton
classes running aug 21, 22, 23, 24, 25
10.00am - 11.30am daily
enquiries/registrations: 9347 2860

dancehouse
158 princes of scott 2000
ph: 9347 2860 fax: 9347 8021
rebecca@dancehouse.com.au
www.dancehouse.com.au

in the heart of the eye
BRISBANE
13th June - 17th June
_box office:
BOOKINGS (07) 3544 8000/1300 136 406
COST $30 Full and $14 Conc.
CHEAP NIGHT TUES 13th
ALL THINGS PEOPLE 25c (with Qld)
VISY THEATRE
BRISBANE POWERHOUSE
Enquiries (07) 8533 7371 or dancehouse@fairfax.com.au

ZKM}

RealTime 37 June - July 2000
I've had this creeping feeling over the past few years that the smartest performance work is coming not from a theatre base (physical or otherwise) or even from the visual arts. It seems to be dance that is taking performance and turning it on its head. Somewhere along the way, some dancers have stopped being dancers or choreographers and become dance artists, much less concerned with step-making and much more with the art of performance. This is not, I stress, a move away from craft but towards it. Of course, it's not a new move but such work seems increasingly visible, no doubt facilitated by the sophistication of work seen in Australia over the past few years of the calibre of Alain Platel, Kate Champion and Wendy Houston for instance. There is far less bleating from mainstream reviewers about whatever happened to 'real' dance and much more acceptance of contemporary dance generally. (Not on the east coast, eh.)

The shift is more apparent among more mature artists for whom just possibly the purely physical experience of being a 'dancer' may necessarily have had to change. Here in Perth, this shift in focus is experienced increasingly through the work of a small group of dance artists who often work together in various configurations and under different company names. In this emerging body of work, text, light, film, movement, space, sound and bodies collide: there is discursivity, there is humour. There is complexity and contradiction. There is a willingness to experiment. Gone are the vapidity sentimental and earnestly waltzing performances of a couple of years back; which just goes to show that if you give artists a bit of time and money to work through stuff and keep developing their practical, conceptual and expensive skills, good work will emerge. This work has an edge and it's pretty sharp!

A perfect example was Bill Haddrill's Gatin' Dogs, performed by Jane Diamond and presented by ID319 Dancegroup as part of a double bill at PICA earlier this year. Gatin' Dogs was a wickedly edgy performance resting on the smart side of madness. Jane Diamond, performing the role of Dulcie, a fanatical AFL coach, harried belted the audience (her team) as she relived her glory days on the field with 'Dicko, Cowan and Simon, Mel, Cheesy, Wheaters and Brim', sex in the bink of the Tasmanian Princess and other extraordinary moments in a life lived for football. Performed fast and hard, this monologue was not a dance piece per se but a glorious moment of vernacular performance; yet I doubt it could have been performed by anyone but a dancer and Diamond made this piece so completely her own. Whilst Dulcie is clearly a heterosexual gal, definitely a woman who loves men, with her football tackled under her skirt like a pregnant belly she conforms to no stereotype unless it is the rapidly disappearing Australian tradition of idiosyncratic characters, a rare experience for middle class Perth in the mid 90s.

Sue Peacock's Near Enemies, performed by Paul O'Sullivan, Sete Tele, Shelly Marsden and Sue Peacock, made up the other part of the bill. This was a far less resolved and more rambling work which nevertheless tightened up dramatically over the course of the season. Performed in a cabinet setup with a smoky late night dive atmosphere, this meticulously performed work stretched to achieve a level of theatricality that it never quite attained. Drawing on everything from stand-up to conjuring tricks to flash tango numbers and even a gunfighter shot out and quieter more romantic moments, Near Enemies is much more a work in the making. Hopefully it will get the time it deserves to develop further.

Paul O'Sullivan returned to PICA in April with his most recent solo show, Anomalies, with dramaturgy by Sally Richardson and movement direction by Sue Peacock. Paul is an amazingly relaxed performer who effortlessly creates an atmosphere of intimate domesticity in his acts the really big questions: "why is the ocean so full of sea sponges?" and "are aliens real?". In Anomalies Paul stretched himself beyond what might have easily slipped into a too coy retreat into the domestic to comment on our contemporary moment. In this case, to expand a statement made by a visiting alien that "what impresses him most about humanity was that it seemed we were at our best when things are at their worst." Paul went on to ask whether the converse may also be true. "Can we be at our worst when we have very little to complain about?" This was a genuinely interesting piece of work, however the moment he donned a pair of black rimmed specs complete with fake fisheye nose to become a stuttering John Howard, incapable of saying sorry, it flashed into brilliance. The everyday suddenly transmogrified into an entirely more sinister experience.

Most recently, Company Loaded returned to PICA to present 3 works in progress. This company was conceived by Stefan Karlsson and Margarete Helgeby to provide a vehicle for mature dancers working with a wide range of choreographers. For Project One (their second project) the choreographers were Stefan Karlsson, Sue Peacock (working with theatre director Sally Richardson) and Lucy Gaernt. Joining them was choreographer Claudia Alesis, Paul O'Sullivan, Sete Tele and Margarete Helgeby who had to withdraw from the programme due to injury and was replaced by Sharon Bott.

This was an interesting process which at times indicated that an increasing theatricality or use of text is neither necessarily nor inevitably desirable. This was particularly apparent in the work of Richardson whose use of cut-up bits of Shakespeare was infinitely literal and often naff. Mind you, it's always tricky talking about works in progress given that what you see at such an early stage may have little or nothing to do with the end product. Karlsson's contribution was by far his most mature choreographic effort to date. This was the most complete work on the night and was beautifully performed by the 3 male dancers. While working with a quite conventional vocabulary it was complemented by a great sound work by composer Cat Hope and lighting by Mark Howett, who did a beautiful job lighting the entire program. Lucy Gaernt's contribution made no attempt to present itself as a resolved or finished work and, perhaps perverts, I found it most satisfying and complete. The concluding contact-inspired trio between Alies, Tele and O'Sullivan was just extraordinary.

It would be nice to step forward and talk [sic] that all these artists will get the opportunity to keep working and developing. Of course, now that they're more 'hobbyists' as opposed to professional artists, life is likely to become even more difficult than it has been to date. Never mind the tail poppy syndrome, we seem to want to row down even the modest sized daisies.

Photo: Ashley De Prazer

Jane Diamond, Catin'Dogs

NEW MEDIA
ESSENTIAL SKILLS

The explosion of the internet has created a whole new media industry. The Graduate Certificate in New Media at UTS is a course designed to help current and prospective new media professionals keep pace with creative development and required technical skills in the field.

Students complete three subjects over two semesters, including the compulsory subjects New Media and Interactive Multimedia, and choose one from either Netcultures and Practices, Writing and New Media or Culture and Technology.

The Graduate Certificate in New Media at UTS is a course designed to help current and prospective new media professionals keep pace with creative development and required technical skills in the field.

For more information on this course and others in the program, phone 02 9514 2729, e-mail danielle.millar@uts.edu.au or visit www.hss.uts.edu.au
Trouble with destinations

Zsuzsanna Soboslav

A loping slinking soundtrack slides, across 50s mid-West domesticities, pasty-white dreams. This Happy Valley is sap opera, scrapbooking, cracking radio, glazy monts of a country town. A horse and prairie loping in there somewhere. If horse is where the heart is, then both home and heart are struggling here: the women stretching, straining from it (and each other) as if elastic snapping in return. Unhappy valley: conformity versus distinction, families, neighbours trying to keep each other tame. Rebecca Hilton’s choreography is inventive, quirky, freshly detailed, hands, limbs, torsos, pushing, pulling, softly stepping tools. Emotionally, the dancers are better informed as the performance season runs: the piece is becoming cruder, more weary and disturbed. The mother figure is perhaps the best fleshed out, Jo Lloyd infusing her performance with mostrar longing, with mildly tempoless ficks, pugnacious and kitsch as a chained mare.

A radio voice croons: ‘I went away for a while. I travelled, but not far enough. Something kept pulling me back. I gave in, I went home’; but here, the daughter does depart, after her struggles, simply walking out the door. We need to see more of her struggle, more feel her imperative to leave. The scenes, for example, where mother and daughter parallel each other’s dance needs not just mirroring, but subtle (perhaps rhythmic) distinctions between them to clarify their mutual rebellions, abandonment and griefs, to articulate the struggle forward and backwards between generations to do with knowing and liking—or despising—where and who you are.

Sandra Parker’s Audible, too, has developed since opening into a dance that is rougher, showing more jaggedness and verse, appropriate in a piece about bodies riddled with and riddling themselves of love/others. But these ‘others’ are not full bodies, only things which have disturbed already shaky cores: you journey from person to person, it’s hard. What is an arm beyond pointing, or clutching at its own strain. In fact, there seems no ‘other’ in this investigation: angular bodies jump against their own edges, are dissected by their own awkward clothing, swish in introspective pain. Where there is partnering, I can’t hear or see beyond the defence lines spoken at one point by a dancer at a microphone: “You don’t know what I’m thinking, even if you ask me I can’t be.”

There is a tautness to reaching out, reflected perhaps in the piece’s relationship with spoken words. There seems a palpable distrust that breath can continue with integrity into language; thus, the projected sentences are so thin as to be easily ignored. I suspect they have been edited down—a pity, as there are elements which lead me to suspect the piece’s intention is somewhere really valuable. This could be an interesting investigation of discrepancies between interior and exterior worlds (as stripped in the mildest bearing of a dance segment), but my suspicion (even after a second viewing) is that this is a work which can’t grasp its own material, generally displaying a reluctance of emotion (resistance to self-reflection?) and at other times, a strange anxiety. “She watched herself waiting,” speaks a probe body, “she was completely still,” whilst others neither illustrate nor counterpoint her text with a juggled dancer that is hard to incorporate in the watching.

Technically, as always, Parker’s choreography and spatial patterning is very capable—although those straight gymning arms are starting to bother me—and I admire the beginnings of a relationship to text that the dancers themselves have explored. I come away retaining most from Elizabeth Drake’s soundcore, and perhaps in the piece the clearest intuition: like a train, the mix of voice and breath, sometimes husky, sometimes sharp as slicing knives, move towards another, never reaching a destination.

Audible, choreographer Sandra Parker; composer and pianist Elizabeth Drake; dancers Joanna Lloyd, Belinda Cooper, Olivia Millard, Tamara Steel, Carlee Mitchell; Happy Valley, choreographer Rebecca Hilton; set designer: Anna Tregloan; costume design Katie Symes & Rebecca Hilton; lighting Efterpl Soropos, costumes Anna Tregloan; Dance Works, North Melbourne Arts House, May 4 & 5-15

New texts for old

Phillipa Rothfield

What is missing from the preoccupation with tradition...is the experience of modern Chinese people in having to live their lives with the knowledge that it is precisely the notion of a still-intact tradition to which they cannot cling—the experience precisely of being impaled on "Westernized" Chinese, and the bearing of that experience on their ways of "seeing" China.

Rey Chow, Woman and Chinese Modernity: the politics of reading between West and East (University of Minnesota Press 1991)

It is a perilous path to tread. On the one side lies authenticity, on the other, the level playing field of postmodern pastiche. Wu Lin Dance Theatre (Tina Yong & Sun Ping) address issues of Chinese culture and identity. If their work is not to be placed within Chinese traditions of performance, how might it be understood? Wu Lin are themselves aware of these dilemmas, having once written a paper entitled Is it traditional or is it contemporary?

NUSHU, the Women’s Script is inspired by historical texts, written by Chinese women. It consists of a series of narrative depictions of women in China. The piece moves from male despotism to the articulation of female anger, a sort of legitimizing sense of equality between the sexes, a familiar feminist tale. Surely the highlight of the work was Yong’s evocation of anger, a duel performed in perfect harmony with the drum player, Junko Sakamoto. This was the moment where the many incarnations of woman as object ended and women’s agency emerged. This produced the finale where the 2 sexes breathe each other’s air, moving their Chi in and out of each other’s territory, finding ground, losing ground, regaining ground.

In performative terms, it was Yong’s clarity and focus which gave depth to this piece, as well as the wonderful musical compositions of Wang Zheng-Ting. Yong was deeply immersed in the predicaments and bodily formations of the choreography. Watching Sun Ping, I wondered whether I required some literacy in Chinese acrobatic dance. The question of tradition did not arise in regard to Yong because her dance is clearly hybrid, having been successively inscribed by ballet, Indian dance and Chinese theatre.

In narrative terms, the piece was a bit jerky, consisting of episodic, staccato moments with no link between the patriarchal domination, the eruption of fury, and the even-handed finale. Although some of those moments were beautiful and poigniant, others looked like they needed development. I imagine that the overall impact on a production would be of great assistance to the company. And yet, what kind of eye am I to suggest—a Western gaze, which might require that Wu Lin commodify their cultural identity as recognizably Other? If Rey Chow is to be believed, Western perspectives have already infiltrated postmodern Chinese sensibilities. For a while I wondered where NUSHU’s final battle of the sexes was situated: in China (old or new)? In Australia? Or in Wu Lin’s own imaginary? But now I think that there are circles within circles, that we cannot sustain the old myths of China over there and Anglo-Australia over here. NUSHU is not the repetition of old texts but the emergence of a new one. If it could be clearer, it would not become a better translation but would rather move more deeply into a script of its own making.

NUSHU, The Women’s Script, Wu Lin Dance Theatre, performers Tina Yong & Sun Ping, music Wang Zheng-Ting (composer), Rebecca Hilton (dance director), Dong Qiu Ming (design, sun), Theatreworks, Melbourne, April 12-16
Hottest little gallery in the world

Suzanne Spunner

24HR Art, the NT Centre for Contemporary Art, opened 10 years ago in Darwin. It is called 24HR Art because it began life in a disused 24 hour petrol station.

In 1994 it moved to its present site, the former Parap Cinema beside the Saturday market. 24 HR Art has been dubbed the hottest little gallery in the world and, despite the installation of ceiling fans, on a steamy day in March or November, it is. Not surprisingly, at one point its logo incorporated a melting digital watch showing 24.00 over a ubiquitous tropical sunset.

24HR Art is, like the 12 other contemporary art spaces dotted around the country, jointly funded by federal and state or territory governments to exhibit and promote cutting edge art. Although it can sell work, it is not required to; its charter is to show work that is not easily marketed either because it is ephemeral or installation, performance or multimedia-based or simply new and unfamiliar to audiences. However the gallery is significantly different from the other contemporary art spaces that make up the national chain because it is in Darwin and the NT is different in ways that qualify, constrain and expand the opportunities for contemporary art practice.

When viewed creatively, these constraints, in particular a small population and vast distances, have become its greatest opportunities. Even remoteness from the southern metro centres of influence is not always a bad thing as Thelma John, former Assistant Director said in 1994: "Remote arts promotes a different city. It is a space for the indigenous life which we, the inhabitants here like to think we have escaped from." Remoteness is relative and 24HR Art is in the midst of the land and the aboriginal artists who work in and from it. It is also closer to Asia and so an ongoing dialogue with contemporary artists from South East Asia has been a feature of its program through artist exchanges, workshops and residencies.

Contemporary artists and curators continue to be inordinately drawn to the NT as a site of the exotic, the authentic, the 'other' Australia and to make contact with the land and (Aboriginal) culture. 24HR Art has frequently brokered and mediated that contact, to ensure it is a 2-way exchange that feeds and informs local artists and audiences. Visiting artists and curators inevitably call in and get a fix on the place, they are welcomed and briefed at the centre before they venture out; visitors to artists and communities are arranged and specialised guides found to introduce them to the country and the art, even to billet them and drive them back to the airport. Local artists have made many valuable and lasting professional contacts during the long drive to Kakadu.

24HR Art's strength has been its democracy and inclusiveness. The themes for the Annual Members' Show have been well chosen to trawl up potent images already rife within the community: dogs, cars and tourism had something for everybody, as did snakes, serpents and crocodiles, and roadtrains coming at the height of Jabiru protests attracting the yellowcake spin. This year the decade was celebrated with a revue of the first show, Ideal Format, with 3/4 postcard size canvas boards being sent in by past and present members. The responses to Ideal Format 10 typify the diversity with a number of artists making pieces related to the recent demolition of the Hotel Darwin, others responding to the issue of mandatory sentencing, while another artist makes a feast of Hockney's Grand Canyon in 8 tiny panels.

A distinguishing feature of 24HR Art has been the generosity and panache of its openings. They are significant events with well-chosen speakers, interesting catalogues, themed art and food and special entertainment where every opportunity is taken to involve different elements of the community. A feature of Snakes and Serpents was a regular gig for the local snake guns who brought his bag of live and deadly pythons into the gallery every Saturday morning during the show. Since returning to Melbourne 3 years ago, my children have been appalled at how boring art openings are in the big smoke and have stopped coming with me: "You call that an opening? Nobody spoke, nobody performed, and where was the food, and why did they all go home so early?"

Over the decade, contemporary art has successfully insinuated itself into the social life of the community. Going to see the latest exhibition has become part of the ritual Darwin Saturday morning activity: go to Parap Market, have a lakas and a satay, order a green pawpaw salad, buy a bunch of giant heliconias and then check out the art. The daunting task for the Director and the programming committee is to tune the mix, follow the harder more conceptual show with another more accessible one, and provide a window for every opportunity.

At times, 24HR Art has been required to function more like a community art space, responding to groups as diverse as the Homebush Association and the Greek Glendi committee; but this too has been a strength. It has taken on curating and exhibiting Year 12 student work in an annual Exit Art show and offers an exhibition in the first year out to a graduate artist chosen by the Director from the Northern Territory University Art School. Under the direction of Steve Fox it initiated a prison art program focusing on Aboriginal artists which resulted in a near sellout show at a commercial Aboriginal art gallery in town.

24HR Art has promulgated both celebrations and critiques of the place in important exhibitions like 100% Tracy which focused on artists using corrugated iron as a way of reconfiguring the traumatic experience of the cyclone, and more recently with Fenske, which interrogated the new built environment of Darwin and the erasure of the tropical vernacular architecture. At the same time, 24HR Art functions as a cosmopolitan centre and point of connection for the dissemination of the hot issues, current in the rest of Australia and internationally, and last year it jointly hosted NEXT, the first NT Multimedia Symposium.

Ten years on, 24HR Art's achievements are manifold and manifest and a real home now exists for emerging and established contemporary artists in the NT.

Suzanne Spunner was invited back to Darwin by 24HR Art to join in the 10 year celebrations and write an essay for the catalogue of RESTITE which examined 24HR Art's history and locale.
**Makrolab: war performance & the art of living**

**Sarah Miller**

Makrolab, better known as Rotnest, is an island of astonishing albeit stark beauty. In summer it resembles me of Sicily, all dazzling blue seas and skies, great snorkelling and cycling, pristine water with more fish than you can imagine, beachside walks, wind twisted salam-salkhut, pig face and the pink and white salt lakes shimmering in the heat haze.

In winter I think of the Orkneys or some other place. I've never been there, nor seen grasses and ducks, sudden squalls blowing across the darker wintry blue of the Indian Ocean. In either instance, the pace is peaceful, no cars only: bikes and the odd tourist bus and service vehicle. Outside the settlement there are relatively few people even during peak holiday periods. It is, however, an island with its own tragic history of death, despair and incarceration.

At different times, white adult male prisoners and women have been imprisoned here: both most horribly. It made an ideal goal for Aboriginal warriors separated from their homelands, language and people. They died on Rotnest from disease, illness, treatment, neglect and broken hearts. In the up-to tourist settlement of Thompsons Bay with its spacious houses and enormous grounds, the land was too much over brush heathland, as an overgrown field. The sign, 'respectfully' blanked by wheel bin, notes this is an unmarked grave yard for the Aboriginal dead. I remember Sally Morgan's famous painting 'Greetings from Rottnest depicting happy white holiday makers on tours to the Aboriginal dead beneath their feet.

I turn my bike around and head out through the centre of the island, away from the truly settlement. I want to reach for the site—the fields-clear site—the windward end of the island, where Makrolab perches like some strangely animate silver ship cast-overlooking the pristine Indian Ocean.

There is something poignant about Makrolab, an ongoing research project taking place over a 10 year period. At any given moment it may complicate architecture and modular environments, sensors, sustainability and energy production systems, food production systems, communication consoles, networks and integration systems, publications and lectures—some of them more potential than actual—but all of them suggestive of possible futures, a kind of ethical ambition, a way forward. According to Project Atlas, the force behind the project, Makrolab is conceived as something that "constantly investigates and moves between reality in all its complexity and art in all its creativity."

WAR. Such a hard word. Such an intrinsical reality. A reality I only experience through the media—an endless series of impossible images—a cacophony of catastrophic experiences... for which the real, artistic and art, war is the history of Rottnest and was the starting point for Makrolab, an autonomous modular communications and living environment, a wind and solar-powered research station, capable of providing 3 people with independent life support for 40 days.

Makrolab's beginnings lie in performance. Where the wars that eventually brought down the former Yugoslavia began to tip the Balkans apart, the idea was born to create a performance space that was not set aside but continued. Inside the plan was to make a stage for a continuous 7 day and night performance on a small island in the Adriatic. The project was conceptual rather (1990, re-created by contemporary Inuit in the style of a soap opera. Families gather in a communal igloo and discuss marriage and the practicalities of the day on end, and we are told in an interview about the process and the presence of the camera that transcends anything purely didactic or historical.

In the Palace of Blue I watch as local artist Rodney Glick's constructed suburban dystopia builds around me. Deep chiaroscuro photographs of decrepit suburban interiors, streetscapes, clouds, and a lonely figure are projected against a wall. The assembled interior of cabinet, carpet and butchered constructed planks that surround the projection seem, as arbitrary signifiers of domestic space, gathered from a random trail through a swap-meet. This already disturbing fiction is embellished by the tiny, Naked hobby-shop figures of women displayed atop building blocks inside the Lounge Room Cabinet.

Likewise, American artist Jeff Wall in his photographic light box Jello repeats this undercurrent of tension in white suburbia. The scene recalls Renaissance compositions of The Annunciation, only within the fabricated set of an 80s-designed kitchen splattered with yellow jelly. Surrounded by this expanse of rag, a full, defiant girl rests against a fridge, eyes searching the floor whilst another stands towards the viewer mesmerised, clutching a bottle of jelly.

As I stand in front of Wall's Polishing, a portrait of corporate and social impoverishment, the melodramatic, trumpeting soundtrack to Sarah Morris' Midway invades its peripheries. Is/it a video of the displacement of white collar workers in the architectural jungle of midtown Manhattan, Morris' camera voyeuristically attempts to engage unsuspecting workers in some kind of moral thriller of the city. Architecture as an oppressive construct in South Africa is also documented by photographer David Goldblatt. The stylized, formal forms of Afrikana Protestant churches are captured starkly in black and white, their spires and steeples dividing the sky.

At the threshold of the exhibition space, a computer links users to the Makrolab, a 'self sufficient' living and research unit installed on Rottnest Island, just off the coast of Western Australia. Besides its function as an ecological laboratory, Makrolab by Slovenian artist Marko Peljin and his group. Project Atlas interprets and tracks communications transmissions from all over the world and beyond. In this context, its function is almost a reflection of the objectives and rhetoric of Home, to provide a platform through which communication and a sharing of experience from diverse locations can converge.

Home, curated by Trevor Smith & Tim Maikaue Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, February 5-April 25
Mildura's Palimpsest: the sigh of the land

Stephanie Radok

When people find out what Palimpsest means they have no trouble seeing it as a word to describe the earth.

In ariel photographs of Mildura it is possible to view a graphic juxtaposition of the land and human use of it, or perhaps more precisely, Indigenous and non-Indigenous land use. Like mirror tiles on a Hunderwasser building the squares of water, irrigated land, shine up at the sky while the old serpent of the river winds and coils on its slow, almost impossible journey to the sea. The Murray is one of the slowest rivers on earth and there is now practically never a day in which we do not read in the newswaper of its slow agony and the suffering of the land around it. Salt from ancient seas rises to the surface of the land because too many trees have been removed. Held up by a series of locks, the river doesn't flood any more and therefore doesn't take River Redgum seeds out to new locations. Excess fertiliser in the water breeds poisonous algae. And so it goes. This is a familiar story, but a story of such pain that we might weep to read it.

Art dealing with societal issues and local histories and narratives is in Palimpsest in all about. Located in Mildura, the site of the famed Sculpture Triennials (1961-1998), the Palimpsests follow on from the Triennials, showing sculpture, drawings, paintings, site specific, conceptual and installation art out in the country. Palimpsests #1, #2 and #5 are boldly uncurtained. Peter Sins was employed to facilitate Palimpsest #3. There was no selection of, or invitation to, the 65 artists from Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and the ACT who answered the calls in art magazines to be involved. They arrived under their own steam and set to work alongside those of locally based artists. They did it because of the opportunity to be involved in a large exhibition and because they share a commitment to art that has grown up as a series of projects, activities and interests in ways botanical, zoological, historical, ecological, social and agricultural.

This year there was a Science/Art symposium accompanying the exhibition. An inaugural event, it contained much more science than art and a sense of promise in speaking across disciplines and professional boundaries. There was a sense of urgency in many of the speakers' words and while there is no suggestion that art can save the world, some form of connection to it is vital.

The Aboriginal histories of the 'Sunrise' area are ongoing; nearby are Lake Mungo and Lake Victoria. European history here is also multilayered. The stories of irrigation, pioneer families, migration from Europe, soldier settlers after the First World War, wine, dried fruit, archaeology, travel, rural mythology are all in the area. These histories reflect events in other parts of Australia and can be found here and there in Palimpsest. Among artworks of note were Sherina Tepen's coat made from fake grass; Andrew McDonald's wind-powered etching machine; Dragan Kostelnić's coloured flags; a performance by the Jubilaka Action Group; Judy Hoping's blue cut-out shapes; Danielle Hobbs and Vicki Reynolds' tail made from carp scales; Janet Gallagher's rooftops made from flywire; Ing Flint's wooden spiral and woolen hills; Neil Fetting's shelves of rusted objects from Mallie dump; Steve Davidson's crushed glass; Antonia Chaffey's long-term project of reclaiming and making separation for her family's history in the district; Jill Antonie and Maree Clarke's Native Garden of multiple concrete Aboriginals; Lee Salaman's 150 upside-down oleander branchlets standing over blue pigment-filled cracks in the cement; Annabelle Collett's 25 brightly coloured skirts around the 'waists' of palm trees; 50 fridges, each surrounded by some 'Jean Dubuffets'; and Anne Bennett's real estate office sale of Paradise.

Martin Sims' Hay Plains NSW work in progress takes an interest in the fact that can be achieved by listening to the land.

Palimpsest, Mildura Arts Centre, Midden Avenue Warehouse, Mildura, March 2000

Making space in Alice

Astri Baker and Clara Fejo

If you're young, with no money, and especially if you're black, there aren't many places to hang out in a town like Alice Springs—a few youth services and the game shop. After the there's 'walking around' town. Even in the game shop, young people experience constant observation and harassment by police who, lately, seem to be making a practice of searching, brutalizing and threatening to charge kids with loitering. Detectives drop in asking young people for information, expecting them to know all and tell all.

The ASYAS (Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Service) youth arts project was born out of the recognition that disadvantaged young people are excluded from all sorts of spaces and opportunities including access to the arts. In late March last year, the arts project ran a 10-day focus project called Ghetto Blast at Watch This Space, the local community art gallery. Introducing young people to this new space, essentially an empty white room, was an interesting exercise in itself. One young woman stood in the doorway of the space and said to 'where is the art gallery?' Downstairs is one of many galleries that cater for the tourist market, where you can have a designer polo nestled anywhere in the world. Outside a paddy wagon cruise the Todd Mall on the lookout for 'anti-social behaviour'—a local euphemism for poverty and drinking—'to clean up' the town for the Queen's impending visit.

Community arts workers facilitated storytelling, performance, soundscapes, ceramics, junk construction, image making and photography. The arts project usually functions from the crowded drop-in space of ASYAS, so although having access to the gallery was a great opportunity, it was also initially a barrier because it was an unknown space for young people.

Spreading the word about the project and drawing young people into the new space involved running part of the project in the already familiar environment of the game shop where young people documented themselves in their space through photography. Days later, we sat with music blaring by the temporary lake at Larrupa claypans spinning stories together about the images. Posters and video games captured in the photographs provided the ironic titles: Police Trainer, Hell Night and House of the Dead.
The ‘I’ of the beholder

Maryanne Lynch

The female body is a fascinating site. It continues to lure theorists and artists alike, serving as an object for excavation or exaltation depending on its context.

For women—simultaneously possessing and being possessed by this culturally-loaded corporeality—the question mark of identity is even greater.

eye-deals, a programme of short film and video works curated by Edwina Bartlemie from the Griffith Artworks collection, presents a range of female artists’ explorations of this same body. Or rather, of individual bodies, for each of the screened works signals a personal inquiry into the theme ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder.’

Performance artist Jill Orr’s Either/Orr (1997) introduces the programme: A 10-minute video, the work was created from performances by Orr in the Myer-Bourke Street windows during the 1997 Melbourne International Festival. In this space more usually reserved for mannequins, Orr and her unnamed female colleague offered another display of bodies, their own. Featuring a series of grotesquely feminine poses that stay too long, the performances took place in front of an audience which seems oblivious to its own bug-eyed reflection in the glass. On video all of this is captured with carefully casual shots of open mouths, elbows and shoulder bags.

Extending the uneasy relationship in Orr’s clownlike make-up, heavily smeared across her face in a way that highlights rather than conceals its ‘imperfections’—and seen here on the screen in close-up—Vivarium (1993) also translates the familiar emphasis on the ‘pleasing’ female form into something strange. Directed by Mahalaya Middemiere, this 13-minute film shows Sue-ellen Kohler in a dance that embraces all the no-nos of modernism. Kohler’s body is all awkward angles, unyielding or mutating, like the lighting that flattens and distorts her shape: There’s nothing pretty here; instead, something compelling. Not ‘monstrous’, like Orr’s poses, but powerfully ‘wrong’ all the same.

Maree Cunnington takes a different route. Her exploration delves into psychology and those emotional and bodily languages that define us. Secretions (1997), yet another work originating in performance, depicts a seated Cunnington in repetitive gestures with visual and aural texts playing out the same and other stories behind and around her. Honeysuckle runs down her face... even as she seems to be simultaneously retrieving and disowning the texts provoking them. The work is based on the artist’s own experience of growing up in a fundamentalist religious community.

Robyn Weiner’s Snow White (1996) and Jan-Nell Weaver and Kelli Dipple’s Surfacing (1995) come at the woman question from different angles, both familiar: a deconstructed fairy tale and a hefty serve of French feminist theory. Webster’s 20-minute video plays with narrative and film conventions, giving alternative readings of a contemporary tale on the story of snow White. Weaver and Dipple explore the Otherness of female identity using flickering images and sentences, and an unstable geography, to illustrate their thesis. While the spoken text eventually stalls, perhaps because of the artists’ inability to push a familiar idea any further, the camera work has a lingering presence.

The contemporary emphasis on instability of gender, sexuality and, more broadly, identity has not halted some familiar questions about female experience, as eye-deals demonstrates. Some of the ways in which these questions are asked are perhaps richer than others, but this very diversity of intention and approach itself refutes a female ideal.
Junk: comic relief

Alex Hutchinson

Despite a false boom in the early 90s, fuelled by speculators who bought multiple copies of everything they thought might increase in value, which created a kind of media frenzy, comics have never garnered much of a profile. They are novelty news items at best. When Superman 'died', every newspaper, magazine and TV show reported it as a major event while every comic reader knew it was nothing but a sales gimmick and he'd be back in a few months, and he was.

Superhero comics may sell more than their independent brethren but nobody gives them any respect. No, sir. Time and again they save us from the alien hordes or the perils of communism but who fights for them? Who will save the superheroes from artistic oblivion? Probably nobody. But let's fight a little battle for the good old space-dex clad, underpants on the outside, defender of everything good and wholesome by pointing out all the ways in which their creation, themes and interaction with an audience make them modern mythology.

To get the obvious criticisms out of the way, the following experiment works only with big iconic characters. You will not be able to punch a hole in my argument using Sappy the Squirrel who appeared in one issue of Action Comics in 1940. No sir. This is because characters like Batman, Superman, Judge Dredd etc are not the work of a single author. Yes, they had one or more original creators, but soon after their creation was contracted out to somebody else and over the years there have been (usually) a few hundred different writers and artists involved.

This is important because for comics to reflect culture (as any decent myth should) it needs to be more than the product of a single artist. Superheroes are sets of characters and key events which are nearly static. Batman has already changed from the contained detective of the 1940s to the camp, almost comic figure of the 1960s, through the grim and gritty Gothic mystery of the 1980s to the highbrow amalgam of the 1990s. It is this ability to mould themselves to the times that sets comic characters apart from similar characters in any other medium.

Why do they change? To reflect audience demand. The most specific example of this was the 1988 phone poll conducted to decide whether the original Robin would live or die, a decision which resulted in that unfortunate sidekick's demise in Batman #427. Likewise, the resultant calls for his return saw a new Robin appear in Batman #442. But there are plenty more amusing examples. During the 40s, Superman fought Nazis, through the 50s he battled the red menace, and for a brief while in the mid-90s everybody and their dog (seriously: go Keypnana the wonderdog!) were fighting enemies dressed in turbans in oilfields. Why? Because they are the enemies of America (and Americans buy the most comics).

Let's take Sopes as an example. Who is he? Almost invincible, his powers are a childhood cartoon binary. More powerful than a locomotive, faster than a speeding bullet, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. The blue-eyed protector of Metropolis, Superman flies through the streets of a fictional world straight out of the 1938 New York World's Fair, all-art-deco landscapes and mirror windowed buildings. His alter-ego, mild mannered Clark Kent, is a reporter for the newspaper the Daily Planet, and both vigorously pursue the 'truth'. Superman is the ultimate boy scout, polite, pure, impeccably intentioned and able to help whole continents cross the street safely. He is a white knight, incapable of decent, ultracentristic and honest to a fault. It is no surprise his popularity peaked in the 50s as the height of McCarthyism, when he took to fighting communists and campaigning for truth, justice and the 'American' way. He was as pro-American as it was possible to be, a one man army, protecting the USA from anything outside its borders. A one man global police force.

Of course this is not a true reflection of America, but rather a reflection of what America would like to think of itself. But that has always been the role of myth. Epic poets as well as comic authors rely on sales to eat, and to eat they have to make you happy. Comics are also the only 'live' medium on the planet, always moving forward and changing to meet consumer demand. Most of the big guns at DC have been in almost continual production (barring a few months here and there) since the late 1950s. More pages have been dedicated to Batman than the Bible. (Go on: prove me wrong. Start counting.) And you can be sure they've got another 60 years in them easy.

So there you go. A radically condensed reason not to laugh at your kids when they read comics. It's just the Real for pictures.

Asian cultures share a multicultural regionalism, this retreat into nostalgic ideas of a phan­
танmorphic past and the current politics of cultural nationalism can also be observed in the performing arts and the way that they sit uneasily within the ANZAC-plural mainstream. A bit of history might remind Downer and those who think like him that Australian relations are any­
thing but pragmatic and are in fact deeply cul­
tural in nature.

The example of the 1994 Adelaide Arts Festival remains a powerful, and in retrospect, destructive event in that it is the first time since the ANZAC multi­
ethnic and multicultural Australian notions of Australia’s future came into a messy tension. Nowhere that cultural power might have been threatened by the festival, prominently diverse program, the extent to which racism was allowed as a mode of acceptable discourse is frightening, imperi­
able and inexplicable. The 1994 Adelaide Festival, curated by Christopher Hunt, had a special focus. It was a watershed in intercultural and Asia­
Australia relations. The program included 5 Japanese performances and productions from Indonesia, the Pacific, China and Korea. If we were to consider the Japanese performances alone in one location over a 2-week period, there were still 400 performances and the subsequent importance of successful intercultural praxis. Such sentiments express a realised sense of cultural interdependence and the multi­
ple and mean spirited Howardian narrow­
ing of Australia’s identity formations in the early 20th century.

In the political sphere one doesn’t have to look far to see evidence of an increasingly his­
terracial xenophobia and use of anti-Asian, anti­
aboriginal and anti-cultural rhetoric (an adjective that should never have been elevat­
ed to the status of substantive) in the Kennett-style subtext of what is and is not ‘world class’. Strikingly though, the Report has emerged at a time of wider anxiety in Australia: a period in which questions of cul­
tural identification and historical alienage and narrative have a force and urgency that seems to gather each day as we edge towards some unknown future, in at least peripheral, at worst, apocalyptic. If our set­
mores were directed towards the articulation of communal identity, then these sometimes tentative, sometimes strident postulations were directed not only to each other but also outward­
towards a larger community that was seen not as an invidious and potential­
ously hostile.

The recent Nugent Report has once again offi­
cially and formally rearticulated the artistic, indus­
trial, administrative and managerial forma­
tion of Australian arts practitioners, and has formalised a strategy that some see as a shoring up of the conservative vision of arts as keepers of traditional values, with its emphasis on the reintegration of major cultural institutions. Comments such as those made by Pauline Hanson in her maiden speech to parliament in 1996 where she said: I believe that we are in danger of being swamped by ‘Australians’ (cited in Jon Stratton, Race, Dance: Australia in Identity Crisis, Pluto Press, Amanda Now, 1998) might be dismissed as the ravings of a hunched fringe were it not for the fact that they were given voice through our parliamentary institu­
tions, even despised, in turn. What comments by Prime Minister John Howard defending Hanson as one who is ‘articulating the fears and aspirations of millions of real Australians…’ (cited in Stratton) were to conclude the script-book memoirs of the Howard regime in Australia. This is a watershed in Australian relations as well as in Australia’s relations in the world that tells us how far we have retreated into a racialist, illiberal, racist culture where the queen at NADA seems to suggest some ancient and fertile Meinheim restoration. It is not a sym­
bol of a debate that has been percolating over the last decade or so. It is a part of the culture, practice, however that important project continues to be. It is not even a sym­
bol of an old/new cultural war; it has been involved in my life. The Queen at NADA sug­
gests a symbol of something that was sup­
posed to have been fought and won. Won so that we might get on with the main game of building an Australian culture from the reality of our cultural diversity and indiginity.

But while I think that regionalism is to be based solely on pragmatic relations with no (acknowledge ment) of culture, then I perceive failure. When our theatre institutions became more visible to the empire and whiteness I am doubly troubled. The two combine as an old/new cultural war; a falsified imperial model that is as artistically vacuous as it is politically dangerous, and above all, a missed opportunity. To turn Peter Goers’ words back on himself: this is a sym­
bol of the culture of political mendacity, flabby, flu­
sey, rooted and retractive.

Dr Peter Eckersall is a lecturer in theatre studies at the University of Melbourne. He is also a performer and dramatist with Not Yet It’s 2000.
Elise McCredie: fits of first-time filmmaking

Kirsten Krauth

Writer-director Elise McCredie's efforts to get Strange Fits of Passion off the ground and seen by Australian audiences have been as stalled and bumpy a ride as her central character She's forays into sexual adventure-land.

Originally made for television, Strange Fits gained international kudos when it was selected for Critics Week at Cannes in 1999, followed by 3 AFI Award nominations (Best original screenplay, best performance by an actress in a leading role, Michela Noonan; best performance by an actor in a supporting role, Mitchell Buttle) and looked set to be a local success. Then it disappeared.

After film distributor mergers late last year, Beyond Films and UIP finally released it on 2 cinema screens in Melbourne where, after poor box office returns, it failed to get national distribution. A few local critics savaged it including Robin Usher ("Whether the Australian Film", The Age, April 15 2000) who argued that the local industry should not seek "international exposure for modest efforts" and should be aiming for the larger scale like "The Insider" or "The Brothers" rather than "a young woman's sexual confusion". It's a curious argument, considering the first feature from Steven Soderbergh (director, Erin Brockovich) was sex, lies and videotape, an introspective, intelligent tale of self-negotiating themes of sexual dysfunction. Who knows where Elise McCredie's filmmaking will take her...and why this desire to crush her efforts when they've only just begun? I spoke to Elise about romantic ideals, and the one-shot-your-revels policy.

The film's reception must be disappointing considering its selection at Cannes and being well received overseas.

"It's very difficult. I think you assume when your film receives important overseas recognition that your road back home will be something smoother. That certainly hasn't been the case although the Cannes selection at least made it possible for the film to have a cinema release. It was originally made for ABC TV...under an accord between ABC TV, Arena and Film Victoria. Similar to the SBS Independent films, the accord was to make a low budget feature without any distribution guarantee, but definite screenings on ABC and Arena.

How then did it get picked up for Cannes?"

"The producer, Lucy Maclaren, filled in a form and sent the film off and we all forgot about it until we got a Sam fax from the festival saying we'd been selected. It was pretty extraordinary.

What inspired you to take the plunge from being an actor (on series including Blue Heelers and The Damnation of Harvey McElhinney) to becoming a filmmaker?"

"I was living and working in Sydney and I started to feel a very strong desire to write. I'd never written anything before and, as the images started to come out, I realised I was invoking a very cold, intellectual world which I think was an expression of my homeickness for Melbourne. Originally I didn't want to direct the film but after a few years of looking for a director and redrafting the script I came to the realisation that maybe I could do it. It was an important transition for me to make, because I was quite frustrated by the world of acting and the limited roles for women."

This country is obsessed with the one strike and you're out policy, which puts an inordinate amount of pressure on your second film and is the antithesis of creativity.

How did being an actor help you get such film success?"

"I work very much with instinct. I believe in finding the truth between the actors and if that means throwing out the text then so be it...often in the moment an actor will come with better lines. I think a lot of directors underestimate the input actors can have in filmmaking...also, because I was an actor, there was a shared language that cut a lot of corners.

How much did the final film differ from the script?"

"Quite a lot. I found in the editing room that I lost about a quarter of the original film. There were whole characters and subplots that never made it. In some ways that was liberating as we were constantly refining in the editing process. What became clear was that at such a late stage when the film was cut I was veering away from She...the whole film fell apart, so all these clever little scenes became an irrelevant distraction to what was the heart of the story.

Female rites of passage films are a difficult genre as they are working within and against well marked territory. Were you trying to subvert the classic male narrative?"

"Yes I guess I was. I felt so strongly that I'd never seen a complex take on the female coming-of-age story and I wanted to explore it and all, and not sugar coat it in the typical male fantasy way. I wanted to see a clever girl character to sort out the confusion and anxiety associated with sex and sexuality, and with the Francis character I wanted to write a very typical female role (the idealised 'from another love object') and make it a man. I thought the conflict between mind and body was a really interesting one and something I hadn't seen explored before.

I had to struggle a lot early on with people's responses to the intellectual aspects of the film. It was interesting that often people came back to me, after reading the script, saying that they didn't like the character, that she was too cold. I often wondered if this related to the fact that young women were merely portrayed like this and that people found it quite confronting that she was not particularly endearing.

Did you compromise and make her 'warmer'?"

"I felt very strongly that she was not a warm character and that the whole point of the story was that she was confused, and play-acted being aggressive, but I knew in the performance style you would see beyond the façade—I think Michela perfectly evoked this. I do remember in the editing a push to find the takes where Michela looked less miserable. However, I was pretty hard-line about it.

The title seems to perfectly encapsulate the film. What is the significance of the Wordsworth poems? Did you see it as a starting point or did it come later?"

"I was fascinated by the era of Romanticism and the poems like Wordsworth and Blake who believed totally in the sublimity of nature and God. Their poetry was not at all romantic in the way we would see the word but in a way that demanded the body and emotion be secondary to the greater mysteries and wonders of nature. I wrote the story of Strange Fits first and then put in the Romantic poetry. I liked the metaphor and contradiction of a girl who reads all these 'great' male poets but decries them as the pasturage. I also like that the history of Romanticism mirrors her own struggle, that these poets believed that what held meaning was beyond yourself and adhered to some ideal—in the way she does with intellectual theorizing. It was also interesting to place these very pastoral poets in a concrete urban world and see if they still hold meaning—or what meaning we impose on them.

It's interesting too that your film has been marketed as an "anti-romantic" comedy when I feel that the characters had romantic ideals, they just weren't meaningfully fulfilled... I guess for me the anti-romantic label was supposed to refer to it being a subversion of the typical romantic comedy. However you might argue that they all do have romantic ideals, but are those ideals sustainable now, if they ever were? At least that's what the film is asking.

Do you think there's a reluctance in the Australian film community (audience and critics alike) to let filmmakers explore, experiment, even make mistakes? It seems to be okay for short films but not in features where narrative is everything.

The media constantly refer to the fact that the Australian film industry is in crisis, to the point where I think it becomes self-fulfilling and prevents filmmakers from feeling free to explore their artform—because success is judged in terms of box office figures. This country is obsessed with the one strike and you're out policy, which puts an inordinate amount of pressure on your second film and is the antithesis of creativity. We have made plenty of good films in the past few years—The Boys, Hood, OutPost etc. I am very angry about this. Recently in The Age there was an article demanding to know why we aren't making political films like Erin Brockovich instead of films about a young girl exploring her sexuality. What right has a journalist to decide what is and isn't political. I would argue that Strange Fits is a political film.

In the last few months a number of films have been released that are directed by women about women including My Life and Looking for Alibi. Do you see this as a healthy indicator for women working in the Australian film industry in the future?"

"I think Australia has one of the best records anywhere...we have such a high percentage of good female directors. I think in some ways Australia is the best country in the world to be making films if you are female.

Strange Fits of Passion is currently screening in Melbourne and will be released in mid-June in Sydney at the Vaucluse (with no publicity or advertising budget). Elise McCredie plans to remain in Australia to make her second film with which she is in the early stages of writing.
Sydney Asia Pacific Film Festival connects

Tina Kaufmann

Asian films run the gamut of production modes and styles from the big blockbuster music and action extravaganzas of India, Bollywood, through the fast, cheap, multi-genre movies from Hong Kong, to the low-budget, almost cottage industry productions from Thailand and Vietnam, and to films between both in content and in filmmaking practice. Then why is it so hard to get Australian audiences interested in Asian cinema? There are small but significant specialist audiences, especially for films from China, Hong Kong, India and Japan but efforts to widen and extend Australian viewing habits usually go unacknowledged.

The major film festivals, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, manage to maintain and gradually expand the range and diversity of the Asian films they screen, especially when introducing important new Asian filmmakers, but the feedback they receive continually warns that to overload their programs would be counterproductive. Australian audiences should embrace Asian cinema for 2 reasons: they enjoy it and it makes sense to exchange films with other cultures within the region. The latest effort to entice Australians to watch films from the region is the Sydney Asia Pacific Film Festival, which packed a solid program of 8 features, 12 short films, and 2 seminars into 3 days at the end of March. The audience, led by director Cameron Chinn, grew over the festival to pack the final night screenings, and the festival ended up in profit, with its costs covered enough to immediately start working towards next year's event. Juanita Kwock and Paul Carvalho met less than a year ago, but both wanted to bring more films produced in the energetic Asian Pacific region to the Australian public; working together on this aim is fruitful. They met at the Asian Australian Artists Association's Gallery 4A, and with 4A's support, hope to do in cinema what the gallery is already doing in the visual arts; in particular to explore the emerging Asian identity in Australian film.

The first seminar at the festival focused on Asian Australians working in local production, with a panel of filmmakers and actors and special guest Brian Lau, director of the San Francisco Asian American Film Festival (now in its 18th year, the festival aims to create opportunities for Asian Americans to participate fully in the public media). From actor Anthony Wong (who works in film, theatre and TV, and has played everything from "a Hong Kong triad member to a Vietnamese doctor to a cross-dressing Indonesian priest", calling himself the "Meryl Streep of Asian accents") to David Chiem, the first Vietnamese to get acting roles on mainstream TV ("we're now starting to write parts for me in the soaps"), to documentar y producer Tineke Lynx ("I work at the intersection of belonging to the Burmese community and having grown up in Australia"), to filmmaker Chris Scully ("I want to redress the imbalance...get the people behind the camera to work to put Asians on screen") and filmmaker and actor Linda Goih ("you can choose whether to buy into cultural issues, and I have"), everyone had much to contribute to a lively and eloquent debate. As Brian Lau said, "issues of immigration, identity and claiming your own space are universal—the danger is in talking about it, over and over, without getting any further." For a first effort, however, this aimed important issues.

Australia's role in the Pan Asian Film Industry was debated in the second seminar, although Australian filmmaker Teck Tan, currently making a Malaysian film in Malaysia with post-production in Australia, argued, "this whole concept of Asia just doesn't exist—it's the countries within that exist—Korea, China, Malaysia etc. How do their films find audiences in each other's territories, where does Australia fit in, and does Australia care about Asian film, are the questions. There's a lot happening in the region, a lot of money, a lot of social and political change—it's a really fertile ground for interesting filmmaking, if Australians only recognised it." Tan said. Filmmaker Pauline Chan believes that the event highlights the synergy Australia and the Asia Pacific region are the people. "Hollywood would not be Hollywood without the immigrants—Australia needs the enthusiasm and creative input of Asian Australians." Gary Hamilton of Beyond Films, who said that Beyond had spent most of its life in Asia without any major breakthrougbes, doesn't believe that Australia is yet making films that Australia wants to see. Their markets are still dominated by action films and horror, and it would have to be sold as a film like The Wiggory. He believes that the necessary first steps would include more Asian faces on our screens, and more of an Australian presence at Asian film festivals, where the Canadians, the Italians, the French had spent money to maintain a presence. "We fly over Asia to go to Europe," Teck Tan remarked.

With a program of films ranging from the gentile Thai ghost story Nang Nub and the haunting and contemplative Taiwanese drama Connection By Fate to the pop Japanese manga Perfect Blue, and from stylish con men from Korea, Noshure to Hide, as well as an interesting collection of shorts that celebrate the work and concerns of local Asian Australian filmmakers, and 2 interesting and challenging seminars, the festival provided a packed and eventful weekend, an excellent start to an ambitious project that deserves to succeed.

Sydney Asia Pacific Film Festival, Reading Cinema, Curved Theatre, March 29-April 2, www.apf.com.au

Awaiting real life to reveal itself

Simon Enticknap

Now here's a good idea. A festival of film (REAL Life on Film) about human rights and cultural identity to remind us that abstractions have faces too, that theoretical concepts are merely the crusty coating on a beating heart, that rights are about usage, praxis, being able to do what one does. Take a look over here, look outside the box, says festival slogan, there is real life, if you only care to look. It's like passing through to the other side of cynicism, to a space where the power of the image to do good works is reaffirmed—we can care—if only we can point the camera in the right direction, trust in our motives.

But stare long enough and the conundrum intensifies, we become fascinated by difference, the spectacular, suffering, surviving others stand in the noosphere (and thus completely ideologically) space of human rights. Eternal vigilante is the Amnesty catch cry—but who is doing the watching, and who is the object?

In the documentary Surfing the Healing Wave we are told that the object of scrutiny is the Christian Indigenous surfing culture held at Fingal on the far north New South Wales coast. Now I must confess here that, strange as it may seem, I don't like surfing movies (put it down to a bad experience I had once with The Endless Summer—endless it was). And this is a film with lots of people on boards catching waves. And there are lots of people on the beach watching the people on boards catching the waves. The people on boards catch the waves and the people on the beach watch the people on boards catching the waves.

And yet, in spite of it all, this is a wonderful crystallization of film about how an event such as a surfing carnival is used by Indigenous Australians to network, to renew family connections or rediscover lost ones, and ultimately to strengthen a communal identity. We hear from participants who describe what the festival means to them, we hear their stories, learn something of their history and how they are endeavouring to adapt and preserve their culture for the future. All this is worth seeing and hearing.

And yet, what makes this film so intriguing is that no matter how hard the camera tries to frame the event, it remains elusive, seemingly dispersed across myriad layers of intensity: fleeting handshakes, greetings, momentary exchanges, the brief handover from one surfer to another at the water's edge (the contrast here with the Olympics, which is all about freeze-framing and magnifying symbolic moments—lighting the torch, the relay—can't be more marked). There's a sense here of the filmmakers constantly playing catch-up, eagerly awaiting the subject and the subject o itself, to make itself known on film the way they know it and experience it, but never really being able to make it appear that way. There are moments of coming together, even an occasional ceremony, but that's not where the action is, and the more the participants talk about what the event means to them, the harder it becomes to really see it. Can't see it for the sea, the waves, can't read the faces hidden behind sharply reflective sunnies, can't pick up the quicksilver hip-flicks, the jackknife switchbacking of the surfers. You can't capture the surf, man, and that applies equally to this attempt to fix people on film, especially when they can so easily ride over your expectations, turn around and give you what you want while hiding what you don't know you want. The portrayal of human rights here is just as much about what is not represented in film, or rather the complete absence of any representation and interaction which goes on between people at either end of a lens. It's the process, the man, and any film or festival which ignores that, believes naively that 'real life' can be rendered transparently on the big screen, is missing half the plot.

"It's hard to film a community," said Tim Burns, Co-Director, at the screening in Sydney, referring to the inevitable omissions and ellipses which are integral to doomsmaking. But it is the awareness of this inherent difficulty, and the honest engagement with which the filmmakers attempt to do justice to both the subject and their role as filmmakers, which makes Surfing the Healing Wave so beguiling, so challenging, and ultimately subversive.

Surfing the Healing Wave, directors Hugh Benjamin & Tim Burns, screened as part of REAL Life on Film Festival, State Theatre, Melbourne, April 11, Channel Cinema, Sydney, April 15-16
Rich pickings: Brisbane’s Animation Festival

**Antony May**

**Animation, clayimation, digitalization, pixillation, dynamization.**

It was synopsis, imagination and inspiration run wild at the Third Brisbane International Animation Festival which brought together the brightest and best from local and international animators along with 3 Academy Award nominated films, an AFI winner and master of mythological mayhem, Ray Harryhausen. The 5 events, plus one masterclass for the kids, were very full, a lot of fun and went very fast.

Tracking the evenings would be impossible so what follows is a personal selection from the various categories in which the festival presented the films. From Films In Competition, 2 films stood out. AFI award winner Antony Lucas’ *Slim Pickings* is a clayimation which RealTime readers may have already had a chance to see. At first sight it appears to be a simple, sad but affectionate narrative about a little poor creature so hungry that it has to eat its friend, the vegetable. And the curl of the vegetable’s stem allows Lucas to tip his hat to the persistent irony of cartoonist Michael Leunig. But the wryness in the story, a hidden meaning, opens up a number of themes around love and survival that extend the film’s treatment rather than press a single point home.

Jazzimation, from Oeef Van Luijtenborg of the Netherlands, is an elegant matching of music with a dynamic set of line drawings. Each instrument in the combo has a corresponding set of shapes and lines which shift between abstraction and representative images. Black keys for the piano, horn curves for the trumpet, lines thick and thin for the various guitars and so on. As much a piece of orchestration as animation, Jazzimation, is a coming together of editing and movement with rhythm and melody. A dance video for drawings.

From the Director’s Choice category, Italian Gaetano Toccafondo’s French production of *Le Criminal* was perhaps one of the most reflexive offerings of the festival. An overhead comment, “a jumped up comic book,” pointed to only one of its sources, *Le Criminal* cartoons within a bewildering array of references. From painting it draws on Hopper and Munch. From the comic book, it gets its framing and its sour palette. From Hollywood, it revisits the Italian gialli, the genre of the film’s creator. From the Human Sciences, it draws its anomie, its urban dread and paraphernalia of criminal category. And it blends them in fluid ids.

**Harryhausen vs Hollywood**

**Antony May**

Ray Harryhausen was in Brisbane recently to present a remastered print of the 1963 classic *Jason and the Argonauts*, and the Argonauts, Harryhausen was responsible for the groundbreaking animation (dynamization) in the movie and has become something of a cult figure animation circles. Although no longer active as a filmmaker, he still keeps a keen interest in the field and was happy to speak about developments in animation and film making in general, as well as a number of other issues such as marvellous dinosaurs, confuting mice and the disappearance of the classical movie star. We spoke in the days leading up to the Third Brisbane International Animation Festival.

What do you enjoy watching these days? We don’t go to the films very often. We have a big library of oldies and I’m sorry if it sounds like nostalgia but they at least made stories that were coherent and they had real stars. I was influenced enormously by films I grew up. King Kong put me in my career. Films did leave a tremendous impression on me. In terms of the films today, the impressions they leave are very negative...today’s filmmakers have seen more TV than movies. Televisions changed the face of entertainment. It cut out the attention span. People don’t have the patience to sit and watch a story develop. They have to have bang, bang, bang, bang, bang...

Surely there’s some television that you like?

I was highly impressed with *Walking With Dinosaurs*. CGI is miraculous. They looked so real that you expected David Attenborough to pop out of the woods and start discussing the vicissitudes of their intimate lives. But the hype of CGI has been that everything else should be discarded. It shouldn’t.

How close were your links with the major studios when you worked in Hollywood?

We did things as an independent through Columbia. They never interfered. That’s the good grace of doing inexpensive films. So we were very lucky. Charles Shiner and I made 12 pictures together and we weren’t interfered with at all. I did my thing the way I wanted to do it. That’s why our pictures, I think, are different. They don’t fall into the formula that generally is called Hollywood. I had my own studio far away from Hollywood. I wanted to do everything myself.

But your classic features have a high level of integration between effects and live action.

I was involved in the writing. I don’t just wear a hat of special effects. Mr. Shiner and I and the writer had sweat box sessions long before the director came in. These are not what you call directors’ pictures because the director comes along after things have been prepared. Sometimes we integrate things that he would like to see put in but generally he would realise that it is his job to look after the actors, not create the film. Some people may say that’s sacrilegious but that’s hogwash.

What’s your opinion of current trends in animation within live action movies, Stuart Little for example?

I couldn’t follow it. I couldn’t understand why they weren’t a bit surprised to see a mouse sitting between them. We always tried to put an explanation into fantasy elements. In *The Golden Voyage of Sindbad* we had a wizard who practised magic. But he couldn’t use the hero at the beginning of the film. He had to wait for an hour and a half because each time he used his black magic, he got older. Now that puts a limit on the times that you will use your magic.

From painting it draws on Hopper and Munch. From the comic book, it gets its framing and its sour palette. From Hollywood, it revisits the Italian gialli, the genre of the film’s creator. From the Human Sciences, it draws its anomie, its urban dread and paraphernalia of criminal category. And it blends them in fluid ids.

FILMSHORTS

Polish-born composer Cezary Skubiszewski has just won the APRA (Australian Performing Rights Association) award for best score for Two Hands. Cezary has a long list of features and TV credits — *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (APRA winner for Best Album 1997), *Lillian’s Story, Wogey—* and has just completed work on the soon to be released *Booeymen* and *Ani-Koko* with Eugina Sandler.

Kundan, Seven Years in Tibet and more recently The Cup have generated an interest in the culture, politics and religion of Tibet. The First Tibetan film festival in Australia Beyond Shangri La seeks to go beyond the cliched world of “happy go lucky Buddhist monks in Saffron Robes sipping yak butter” to offer a critical perspective of a people threatened by cultural genocide. Stereotyped films include *The Salmon of Tibet, The Trials of Yibo Rinpoche and The Jew and the Lates*, Valhalla Cinema, Sydney, July 1-2.

At the other end of the scale is the film from France’s Berinois, *Ex Memoriam*. Computer replication and transformation produce a series of facial distortions within Polaroid masks that are linked together by a number of brushes and hands and arms. As the distortions and the linkages progress, the arms turn into fingers which transform into DNA strands and the Polaroid masks reduce into genes tagged onto the strands. But this suggests that I knew what was going on. I didn’t. I was just mesmerised.

All of all over offer over the 2 evenings, the most engaging film of the festival, for my money, came from the Out Of The Closet category, Barry Purves’ *Achilles*. A retelling of the story of Achilles and his love for Penthesiles at the siege of Troy. Achilles is a sophisticated homoerotic assertion of the complexities of love and politics. With a voice-over by Derek Jacobi, the film takes a fragment of *The Illiad* and expands it into a narrative of complex psychology. The power of reference, demonstrated by Toccafondo in *Le Criminal*, is focused back into storytelling here with compelling intensity.

The special event of the festival came on Saturday night when Ray Harryhausen presented a remastered 35mm print of the classic feature, *Jason and the Argonauts*. Harryhausen also conducted a seminar where he spoke on his pioneering work of the 1950s and 1960s. The festival has toured Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne and Perth through April and into May. Animation, a sometimes difficult and obscure form, is presented here with an ingenuity that stresses access and enjoyment and it’s a remarkable success.

Third Brisbane International Animation Festival, Brisbane, April 5-9

Antony May is a lecturer in Film, Media and Cultural Studies at Griffith University and a member of the Queensland editorial team of *RealTime*.
Drive-by screenings and pedestrian anxiety
Felena Alach

When run-away screen artists break out of the black box of the arthouse and sneak into the peripheral view of the passer's eye, such departure threatens the reassuring safe-zone of darkened frontal viewing that most of us seek in our relationship to the screen.

The installation of 7 different screen-based works into the Perth streetscape under the cun­ning guise of the deployed public guerilla tactics of the recent Drive-by project. With well-targeted hits on high-density traffic in its sights, Drive-by effectively challenges the pedestrian with the passenger, challenging coded and accustomed ways of seeing in traversing urban paths. In situating the screen as text(e) of image woven in time against the infinite sign­scape of the night, Drive-by created an interplay between ways of reading and ways of viewing.

Though close enough to some of these prac­titioners and works to declare myself somewhat of an 'insider' I still see this as an exceptionally engaging project. Against the more static landscape of signs, icons and advertisements that besiege our passing streams, the unchoreographed, the screens become a point of surface tension glitch in the facade of the window display. A coup of reflected light fields thrusts us into the threshold of an 'other' time-space—a Tardis-like twist on the 'proper' of the street crca an engagement with the passer's eye, such departure threatens the reassuring safe-zone of darkened frontal viewing that most of us other pee.

Felena Alach is a writer and visual artist based in Perth whose contributions to the cultural conversation include text, installation, performa nce/video and infiltration of the Nintendo generation.

Film reviews

Girls on Loos: A Theatrical Documentary
director Sophie Hyde

funded by the South Australian Youth Arts Board.
launched Napsapart Multimedia Centre,Adelaide, February 19, Melbourne release soon

Taboo. It's a delicious word, the space of the lateral still figures prominently in what we can and can't do and is integral to the works. It incorporates a whole lot of other naughty sex, drugs, even death. Set largely at it all Bains, it's hideous, bugged to share a square. A recent doco on SIB, SIB of a job clerged the air­waves with its expose on sewage plants and the workers who love them. Now we have Sophie Hyde's debut, a shot of what girls do instead, closed doors and whether their partners have reason to be paranoid. They do.

Hampered, like most early filmmaking elops, by terrible sound (hard to control in clubs and pubs) and bad timing, Girls on Loos is most rev­elatory in its side-spot interviews with girls on the pot. Best friends who like to watch each other pee. The sensual act of putting on your lip­stick while strangers are watching. Outside vs in confusing your life's woes to the next chic in the crowd, boundaries some people need a door, some people need a door locked, some people have been to Nepal and have moved beyond The Door. Running water and coughing: strategies for the screen or retreating to your own world. They expe­riences uncharted. Guerilla oncos where every lover seems to be Italian.

The long and dossier numbers, bathed by a series of benevolent werewolves in erotic fur, familiar voice-overs of life experiences, and are bound to attract golden shower fistfuls. I can't often

Looking for Alibrandi
director Kate Woods

novel a screenplay Melissa Marchetta, distributor Village Roadshow screening nationally

Me, Myself I
writer-director Pip Karmel
director Buena Vista screening nationally

I'm sitting on a cellfish battlefield between 2 vast plains of self-discovery and self-improve­ment: Josie (Pia Miranda) at 17, determined to HAVE IT ALL and discovering a father, a grand­mother's secret, her cross-cultural roots, her place. Pamela (Rachel Griffiths) at thirty-some­thing, doubting if she really does HAVE IT ALL but discovering that she still can enjoy the best of both worlds—motherhood/sensational career, husband sexual independence etc.—only not at the same time. Josie looks forward to Pamela's past while Pamela looks back in wonder from Josie's future to locate the point at which the past went awry. Two egotists advancing and retreating relentlessly backwards and forwards towards the same spot where a little self-aware­ness lies simultaneously beneath a tangle of love and limits, in and out of houses and off to school and play and why it is so easy, the gap between generations plugged with reper­tory, the unspoken parade, the endless slow spin cycle of events. Such sweet synchronicity too, like spotting as a marker for absent male fig­ures—the missing father returned for Josie and the lost husband re-found for Pamela—and the upstairs open window, symbol of freedom, hope, the flattering, quivering soul, which is too bad if you happen to live in a bungalow.

Two films so utterly of their time, post­war migration like a faded photograph, broken families and teen suicides, sex and unsuitable spouses, periods and unwanted pregnancies, sex in a Changer or a walk by a Hi-8er and everybody is known by the places they live and the things they do. They paid all those tribal markers from the lower North Shore to the inner West, a demographic, geographic, ide­o­graphic distillation of a culture, the land of Winding Cladding. These are wonderful things to read—not difficult to get into at all warm'n'tunny, a little tragi but poigniant too, soaked in the most poignantly piquant pos­sibility of poignancy, pizazz, pizzazz, all over the place and characters so expertly eviced by their environ that they really should hand out acting awards for the decor. Maybe they already do.

I love this stuff like melting in a hot tub, the thick double-choc coating on a soft centre, or even the ones with nuts in the middle, like some small kernels of hardness where you scrape away the sticky outer layers and end up with 2 women back where they started, reconciled to the fact that they don't lose all the text here: there's nothing that can't be solved by a good long soak in a narrative.

After being lovingly wrapped in back issues of Grazia, stuffed into a pinstriped badly whisked Oprah and then gently laid to rest on a bed of shredded Dolly mags, I emerge feel­ing re-engraged, re-focused, a new me! Once I was unsure of myself and embarrassed with my lot, but now I know I CAN HAVE IT ALL (at least temporarily, vicariously, on the big screen, which is where it really counts).

Simon Entwisle.
First, I need to make an admission. I have not read The Oxford Companion to Australian Film in the way normally required for the purposes of a review such as this—and I don’t think I actually could read it in that way.

I have done this partly out of a kind of sympathy for the ways that such a book is often read. One entry at a time, in a non-linear fashion across entries, and only when the need arises. Neither have I taken the obvious approach and checked just those entries where my own degree of expertise might show up factual inaccuracies, bland prose or that idiosyncratic detail (that I might closely guard in my own attic) that such overviews often exclude. I want to both side-step and address some of the common ways in which a publication of this kind can be approached (and has been ad nauseam in the reviews I have read).

The choice of the term ‘companion’, rather than dictionary or encyclopedia, seems to both point toward the work’s understandably guarded nature and illuminates some of its projected aims and uses. If one views it as a companion, the book no longer need be seen as something which maps out excursions into the territory of Australian cinema but rather as something to take along for the ride (to give us, in the book’s introduction states, “a sense of the sweep of cinema in Australia”). When the book is thought of as a full-scale map it seems to come up short.

A more equivocal approach is all fine and good but perhaps counts little for the actual ways in which this volume is being used (indeed something like an encyclopedia or dictionary which provides a superb, step-by-step answer for all queries about the Australian cinema). This kind of publication is a rare thing in the stodgy contemporary publishing climate and the pressure on such a work to get it right, to be many or all things to everybody, is tantamount (even if unreasonably). We also need to consider whether such a publication is necessary, fills a gap, and complements other publications within the field of Australian cinema. And whether such a catch-all approach (somewhat awkwardly, the title is purely two-dimensional, or indeed possible on, the subject of Australian cinema. A superficial answer might be that it is interested in that failure is in fact a positive sign for Australian cinema—a particular orthodoxy, history or canon may no longer be appropriate or necessary to the understanding and contextualising of this cinema.

The advantage of the heterogeneous and relatively liberal approach adopted by The Oxford Companion is that it allows the joining together of approaches that have previously been the domain of separate works (characteristic of such landmark but somewhat limited works as Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper’s Australian Films 1990-1977). There are short treatises on predictable and idiosyncratic facets of Australian cinema (food, landscape, silent film production, rural myth, etc.), individual filmmakers, actors and production personalities, and selected government bodies, cultural institutions and movements. Each of these areas has more or less successful entries (some entries read themselves a little thin and covered too much territory themselves), and the liberalization of the companion’s approach—which ranges from description to opinionated review, bare bones personal chronology to extended interview—does not exactly contribute to a sense of cohesiveness or even-handness (for example, though undoubtedly significant and much-loved, why is there a 7 page entry on ‘Bud’ Tingwell’ and why does Pamela Rabe require a full page interview).

In fact, it is often easy to feel sorry for those writers (and the subjects they have written about) who have followed an encyclopedic approach which parcell entries down to relatively dry facts and limited prose and which is now placed alongside the more fluid forms of opinion or critical essays. The book’s potential readers as possible (academic, general, popular, industry) is relatively easy to use, is provisionally compulsive and attempts to fill a decidedly insecure hole (the catch-all book on a national industry).

The book contains some broad exclusions which inevitably entail predictably brief coverage of experimental film, short films, exploitation cinema, sex movies (no separate entry!) and some aspects of documentary practice (and of course the book tips towards the particularly contemptuous in those lengthy, and often not too revealing, interviews in a way that may well look slightly footloose in a few years time).

The volume also includes only extremely limited references to a broader film culture, criticism and scholarship. This is particularity vexing for 2 reasons. First, as an act of film scholarship this book needs to place itself, even if indirectly, within a particular critical context and history. Many of the key contributions to Australian film culture, its dissemination, restoration and critical rethinking, have been carried out within this realm (and are mostly not included in this book unless they are involved in film production in some way, such as Jeff Thomson, the Cantrills and Joan Long). To many, such entries might seem tautological in navigation and yet such self-analysis (and promotion) is essential in order to emphasise the symbiosis that exists between film analysis and production, film history and contemporary practice (at a time when the Australian Film Commission, among others, needs to be engaged in such things). The book also needs to see itself justified and contextualised within this framework (and not be ignorantly dismissed or critical for being dated, irrelevant, etc.). It thus needs to promote the culture to which it belongs (and my god it needs promoting). Second, perhaps the strongest on-going aspect of Australian cinema has often been situated within screen culture. For example, the dearth of feature film production in the 50s and 60s is often contrasted with the vibrancy of film culture (including the strengthening of the film society and film festival movements) in the same period. Many of these broad aspects and examples are mentioned but they do not occupy pride of place that a more adventurous volume might grant them (and surely a key function of any book such as this is a degree of iconoclastic, a rethinking of hierarchies, accepted histories, and ways of thinking.

Of course this ‘companion’ needs to be commended for the inroads it makes in these areas, and the space it begins to open up for future histories, dictionaries and even biographies.

In essence the usual suspects get demoted (though at least they still mostly get a mention) while the contemporary, the famous, the emblematic, and the almost take up more space than they deserve or need (I guess the book does have to be generally popular and used, so I accept this focus, begrudgingly). Still, a great aspect of this book is that it places the extremes of the industry side by side (where else would one page contain roughly equal length entries on John Polson, Eric Porter and (Possum Paddock). This non-hierarchical approach also allows those readers both familiar and unfamiliar with Australian cinema to find new pockets of interest, to trace specific threads and stumble across unfamiliar names, films and ways of looking at Australian movies. It is not quite the encyclopaedia or dictionary it is often claimed to be (but which it knows it isn’t), so be warned not to use it as such (check its facts, its approaches, and regard them for what they are—selective, and built on a history of research both groundbreaking and at times speculative). Also, use this book as a means to help celebrate Australian cinema, to begin or further an inquiry. The editors and writers are to be commended for completing a task, quite well under the circumstances and let’s hope that it is the first of many volumes (in various formats) which remap the territory of Australian cinema.

In Magnolia, a vocal schizophrenia is orchestrated, typical of the pleasurably perplexing arrangements of Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks to which Jon Brion stylistically bows. This characteristic divergences and crescendos blurs boundaries and continuously morphing sonorities which is, literal, breath-taking.

All the characters are at some point out of breath, an accidental and inadvertent story of fatalistic eruption. As with Orson Welles’ mix of vocal layers in Citizen Kane (1941) and Almash’s peak in overlapping dialogue in California Split (1977), Magnolia features many show pieces where vocalisation and legibility precariously come near to cancelling each other out as voices intermingle in a mosaic of unison, counterpoint, and registral combinations and conflict. The key insight to the postmodern history of Western vocal music is not a term to be applied to anything as being ‘operatic’ as Magnolia, but rather a technique integral to the postmodern history of Western culture.

Running and rushing headlong into the void, Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks connect—accidentally, coincidentally, and with others like Phil Spector and Jack Nitzsche—constitute a white rock/pop sensibility integral to the post-60s history of West Coast rock and pop production. Running and rushing headlong into the void, Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks used the recording studio not as a stage for the spectacular breaking of taboos, but rather as a dark closet of manic-depressive, schizophrenic and psychotic fusions which they aurally and musically workshopped. Wilson and Spector in particular led quite tragic lives as child prodigies which blossomed in the 60s. Wilson experimented in his personal life with drugs, and Nitzsche used the recording studio not as a stage for the spectacular breaking of taboos, but rather as a dark closet of manic-depressive, schizophrenic and psychotic fusions which they aurally and musically workshopped. Wilson and Spector in particular led quite tragic lives as child prodigies which blossomed in the 60s.

If you have an interest in the film industry and writing your own screenplays, you may be interested in the UWS Bachelor of Arts (Screenwriting) course. Commencing in July 2000, UWS Macarthur will offer a unique, practical and industry-oriented matters in screenwriting. The course is completed over 2 years part-time and has exit points at Graduate Diploma & Certificate level.

The award is full-time free.

For further details, visit: http://fassweb.macarthur.uws.edu.au/MAScreen.htm or call David Knight on (02) 9772 6269 or email d.knight@uws.edu.au

UWS Macarthur is a member of the University of Western Sydney along with UWS Hawkesbury and UWS Nepean.
In the months when William Goldman's newest installment of his Hollywood screenwriting adventures is published in Australia (Which Lie Did I Tell, Bloomsbury Press) there is some good news for aspiring and practicing Australian screenwriters. OUP has unwittingly published Screenwriting: A Manual by Jonathan Dawson, Associate Professor of Film, Media and Cultural Studies at Griffith University, an antidote to Goldman's populist yet ultimately cynical view of the screenwriting profession. The first positive difference between this and Goldman's work is the fact that Dawson's book treats the writer as a professional, working in a broadly based industry which has a range of forms and opportunities.

The professional writer is having to write across genres projects as jobs for money, especially in an antidote to Goldman's populist yet ultimately cynical view of the screenwriting profession. The first positive difference between this and Goldman's work is the fact that Dawson's book treats the writer as a professional, working in a broadly based industry which has a range of forms and opportunities.

This industry reality is rarely described in the ' manuals which have become so popular because they only want to elevate one form, the blockbuster feature film, over all other forms. Most writers know that so few million dollar projects are ever realised, and even fewer million dollar scripts are sold, that working and writing in other parts of the industry is a likely means of support and creativity.

What is refreshing about Dawson's book is its recognition of this professional reality. The Australian screenwriter has as many opportunities as his book describes, and lately the professional palette has broadened to include video games and multimedia programs which form the final chapters.

The other positive and useful dimension to this book is its empathy with the writer's craft and the often mysterious issues which concern all writers such as... where do stories come from and what is the writer's relationship to his/her characters?

The early chapters describe a landscape in which the writer makes decisions based on practical and professional considerations. The "book" or idea is explored in some detail, and

often in its patterns of speech, the gaps, the flows, the awkward pauses. There are too many newsy items and contemporary events covered in an Olympic bid to prove, yes, this did happen today. Sometimes I wish for a beggar or a fundamentalist Christian or a drunk who won't shut up—or silence.

There have been moments of sheer beauty. The appearance of Bradley Braye (star of Ivan Sen's exquisite Wind) as an art teacher working with prisoners, confronted the audience by intensely weaving common stereotypes into a dialogue on Aboriginal identity and reconciliation. Let's hope he becomes more than a blow-in... and he just might, because the show's website (www.wbu.com.au/goinghome/) adds an extra dimension, where from June 12 viewers can suggest scenarios for the series development, contribute to forums, email characters directly, and discuss online the issues raised each night. The audience drives the train.

As one of the forum participants comments: "Great concept... it's about time something original [happened] in a soap on Aussie tv not set in a cop shop, coffee shop or at a beach.

Maybe Going Home could start a commuter uprising. The train has plush blue seats and elegant marble walls (perhaps a reflection of the characters' obsession with State of Origin). The carpets are clean. It looks cosy. Good enough to eat off. It's sponsored by City Rail. And I bet it's always on time."

Going Home, writers Rh Huie, Dave Warner, Michael O'Herne; directors Steve Nissenbaum, Alan Coleman, Andrew Lewis; performers John Gibson, Camilla Ah Kin, Lyn Peries, David Callam, Kririttina Totty, Rhonda Doyle, Brian Nangan, Jason Tsong, Arthur Angel; weekdays, SBS, 7.30pm

Save hundreds of $$$$$

THE SCREENWRITER'S TOOLKIT

Why buy expensive software programs? There is everything you will ever need to create, format and market your short film, feature film or television script. An unbeatable collection of the latest software, add-ons, templates, directories and valuable information.

- 4 SCREENPLAY FORMATTER ADD-ONS FOR MS WORD
- 5 FULLY FUNCTIONAL STAND ALONE DEMOS
- STORYBOARD 1.1
- SCRIPT OUTLINER
- COLLABORATOR STORY DEVELOPMENT (WORTH $330)
- AUSTRALIAN AGENTS DIRECTORY
- HOLLYWOOD AGENTS DIRECTORY
- HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION COMPANY DIRECTORY

- How to format your script
- How to get an agent
- Screenwriting Glossary
- Sample Releases
- How to write the Outline
g Company Information
- Writing the Outline, Copyright & Registration Forms
- The TV Writers Handbook
- plus much more

IBM/PC on CD ROM... $49.95
available exclusively at
THE CINESTORE
37 Liverpool Street Sydney, NSW 2000 Australia

dv oz publications
1/2 Liverpool Street, Sydney 2000
ph: (02) 9365 7927 email: ozpublishing@ozemail.com

RealTime/OnScreen 37 June - July 2000

'4 SCREE.Nf>IA.F> AMOND ADO-ONS FOR"
The dirt on the Dream Kitchen

Joni Taylor

It’s getting DIRTY in domestic land. QUICK, the housewife is hiding something under her apron. Aifold of creepy crawlies? “Domestic bliss” spray should get rid of them... for a moment.

Dream Kitchen places itself between interaction and animation. While some aspects demand immediate action, other sections are watched as events evolve and mutate. The cue is the only indication of any entry points.

The Dream Kitchen is clean. Melamine, minimal, there’s a bowl of fruit. It’s not contemporary flash but enough mod cons for the average homeowner. But the “player” is not only a secret visitor, furrie, airborne and easily passed by.

There’s a quick panic tour. Like an out of control cannonade the effects are dizzyly sped up. Seen from below the fringe, towering monolithic stools ascend and giant telephones ring incessantly.

First stop is under the Fridge where inanimate objects take on evil lives of their own. Pencil set to turn to pens, and under militant conditions there are brandings at the stalks of the masses.

The kitchen is getting dirtier. Next stop the Sink. Down the plug hole and the pipes reveal a floating dreamworld of garbage, underwear sounds, no air only the throbbing pressure against your skull. Rollers reveal the floating rubbish transforming slowly (very slowly) into an evil garbage man...recycled scarecrow boy made from the detritus of Aussie junk, Terra pack shoulder blade, Maccas thinskewlke arms...

And it gets dirtier...Don’t put your fingers in the open socket... Inside reveals a world of cables and uncab wires. Tearing electrocuted screams fly the cardboards, sexual tension between the reproductive and penitent plugs.

Under the Oven is a cardboard world. Scuffle around to reveal the macabre forgotten, the dead and decaying. A Frog, a Mistant Bug and a decayed Rat with a secret are the specimens to be tampered with. Electrodes, clamps, razor blades and X-Rays are all at your disposal. Furtively you experiment to the sounds of electro shocks and metal scraping, but someone is examining you...under the oven noone can hear your screams... Dirt. Dirty phone calls. Phoning incessantly finally allows you in. It reveals an Orwellian landscape of clandestine Carrier different, or the same?

The carrier virus site is of transient and multiple gender, and is posted as one lover rather than an enemy to be destroyed with antiviral software or medication. We willingly enter into the relationship with site, as an exploitative partner, rather than a toxic and scary alien.

And the work is very open in extending an erotic invitation, it wants to infect us, but not in a malicious way, more like a tight embrace. How do people respond to this invitation?

Some people find it totally spooky, however most respond positively—with a sense of intimacy and immersion. When you think about it, a virus penetrating your cellular core is probably the most intimate relationship you can have with another species.

In an essay on Carrier you question the romantic notion (from Roy Jacobs) of the net’s “immaterial embrace”. Does the work’s intimacy involve a struggle with the mundane?

I work on the net and I love the net, however I am highly critical of the net as an artistic medium, and as a social mediator, and see Carrier’s perceived intimacy as a vehicle to address what intimacy now means. Is intimacy a shared viral illness with a group of people you have never met? Is intimacy built because the site asks you personal questions to which you must respond to continue viewing? Are we more inti­mate with our computers than our partners?

Following that infection which the work invites, there’s a viral line here which leads towards a radically altered sense of self—of where our borders are and what can cross them. This changes a lot of things, like ideas of “sick” and “well” “Is there a kind of radical viral identity/politics lurking under here?”

Binaries like “sick” and “well” are only useful to identify points in a spectrum of possibilities. The reality is that human bodies are composed of swarms of bacteria, viruses, and other organisms that we see as agents of illness, and don’t acknowledge when we think of our bodies.

Evolutionary biology posts that we only evolve with our illnesses, and that the difference and the diversity that comes from infection and contagion is what actually allows us to continue to proliferate and survive in a variety of environmental conditions on the planet. So we have to love our sicknesses, because in fact we are a conglomeration of diseases.

Carrier, Melinda Rackham, www.subtle.com/carrer

DIGITALshorts

“Mary Kay’s album was recorded digitally but we don’t call her a digital artist.” Hear Mitchell Whitelaw, Chris Rose and International artist Vibeke Sorensen (see Interview page 26) debate what a digital work should look and sound like at the Being Digital forum, presented by dlz media arts as part of the Sydney Film Festival, Dendy Martin Place, June 26, 22, 23.

The ABC is launching a new website in July which explores the cultural and social implications of one of Australia’s pivotal crimes, the 1960 abduction of Sydney schoolboy Graham Thorne by Stephen Lesley Bradley. Matthew Leonard from Radio-Eye and artist John Grech have collaborated to investigate possibilities for feature radio and documentary on the topic of the non-linear nature of net material to explore the Thorne case. As Leonard comments, “It was an event which triggered cultural responses like the concept of ‘stranger danger.’” Matthew Leonard, leonard.matthew@abc.net.au

QPI recently launched MediaSpace, its first public access digital laboratory, dedicated to encouraging Queensland-based new media artists and collaboration between the arts and sciences. Low cost access to workstations will be offered to artists working in hybrid media including dance, visual arts, film, music, theatre and writing. A number of artists-in-residency grants will be offered in the first year under the title The Chinese Boxes. Project. Contact QPI, tel 07 3392 2653, www.qpiq.org.au

My viral lover

Mitchell Whitelaw interviews Melinda Rackham

Can you explain how you came to make Carrier?

There are a few sources for Carrier: firstly I have hepatitis C virus, and I wanted to redress the social invisibility of this serious health issue. The work, also grew out of my research interests over the last 10 years: notions of identity, sexuality, attraction and repulsion, beauty and ugliness and the messy body.

And the work has had a successful interna­tional life.

Web work is of necessity international, as it lives out there on the global matrix. Yes it has been exhibited in gallery-based shows around the world including Japan, North America and Europe, and seen in South Africa and South America. The Australia Council assisted me to promote the work overseas, which has been quite effective.

It’s recently won the Faucland Award for Multimedia, a prize for writing in digital media. While there’s a lot of writing in the piece, it’s certainly not a straightforward text, or even a conventional hypertext. How do you feel about the work being treated as “writing”?

For me the distinction between text and image is minimal. As a “net. artist” I see myself more akin to a filmmaker, but this also encompasses being a “writer.” I construct a digital architecture which is in itself a text, whether the individual components contained within it are image, word, audio, quicktime or VRML.

The work involves an unusual mixture of modes: there are game-like elements with artificial agents and interactive dialogue, and this is combined with dense layers of visual material. But there’s also a whole layer of straight “information” about Hepl. C. Can you talk about this mixture of media?

I work on the web because I’m interested in reaching the widest audience possible, and this requires that “information” be structured in differ­ently accessible ways. Some users will want the scientific and medical information: while others want to play a Shockwave game, read the personal stories, or will be interested in the seductive textual elements, which all give “information” in a different way. I think the site is succes­sful because there is a balance of navigation, viewing and content options; it simultaneously functions as an artistic work and a public resource.

Carrier also makes a detailed exploration of viral immunology—and it seems that new media artists are increasingly taking on this kind of transcultural conceptual material. What’s the attraction here?

I don’t think one can work any more in clearly divided disciplines, everything seems to be cross-pollinating everything. Reading and researching texts from areas like immunology, or more recently quantum physics for my new multimedia VRML project Etymology, is totally fasci­nating. It’s science, it’s science fiction, and it’s as theatrical as soap-opera television.

The work revolves around ideas of the virus—and it’s a virus which is both biological and digital. Of course digital media have been ripe with virus for some time; the computer virus is a familiar figure. How is the virus in Carrier different, or the same?

The carrier virus site is of transient and multi­ple gender, and is posted as one lover rather than an enemy to be destroyed with antiviral software or medication. We willingly enter into the relationship with site, as an exploitative partner, rather than a toxic and scary alien.

And the work is very open in extending an erotic invitation, it wants to infect us, but not in a malicious way, more like a tight embrace. How do people respond to this invitation?

Some people find it totally spooky, however most respond positively—with a sense of intima­cy and immersion. When you think about it, a virus penetrating your cellular core is probably the most intimate relationship you can have with another species.

In an essay on Carrier you question the romantic notion (from Roy Jacobs) of the net’s “immaterial embrace”. Does the work’s intimacy involve a struggle with the mundane?

I work on the net and I love the net, however I am highly critical of the net as an artistic medium, and as a social mediator, and see Carrier’s perceived intimacy as a vehicle to address what intimacy now means. Is intimacy a shared viral illness with a group of people you have never met? Is intimacy built because the site asks you personal questions to which you must respond to continue viewing? Are we more inti­mate with our computers than our partners?

Following that infection which the work invites, there’s a viral line here which leads towards a radically altered sense of self—of where our borders are and what can cross them. This changes a lot of things, like ideas of “sick” and “well” “Is there a kind of radical viral identity/politics lurking under here?”

Binaries like “sick” and “well” are only useful to identify points in a spectrum of possibilities. The reality is that human bodies are composed of swarms of bacteria, viruses, and other organisms that we see as agents of illness, and don’t acknowledge when we think of our bodies.

Evolutionary biology posts that we only evolve with our illnesses, and that the difference and the diversity that comes from infection and contagion is what actually allows us to continue to proliferate and survive in a variety of environ­mental conditions on the planet. So we have to love our sicknesses, because in fact we are a conglomeration of diseases.

Carrier, Melinda Rackham, www.subtle.com/carrer
Parallax resists cultural amnesia

Mitchell Whitelaw

Parallax is a rare specimen, an anthology of locally curated cultural criticisms which tackles, among other things, digital media. Darren Tofts, correspondingly, is one of a handful of figures on the Australian scene to have established a profile as a theorist and critic of digital media. In the local context then, this slim compilation is bigger than it first appears—a no-nonsense indication of the emergence of a homegrown critical culture.

This is a collection of essays written between 1995 and 1999, many of which have been published in local venues such as Australian Art, World Art and the sadly-missed 21C. Others come from conference presentations and lectures. That the material isn’t broad new might disappoint voracious theory-junkies, though only the most avid would know all of these papers. The result is a compilation which demonstrates both the diversity and consistency of Tofts’ concerns over the last half-decade or so.

That diversity is considerable, at least in terms of critical subject matter. Tofts takes on new media art, hypertext, the historical avant-garde, Joyce, Duchamp, Beckett, Bacon, digital imaging, Andres Serrano and Tony Linnon. In the process he touches on cyberrhetoric, indeterminacy, the notion of expressiveness in painting, Brandtelled and Star Trek (to take a random sampling). The sum is not as inconclusive as it sounds; it manifests a set of specific foci and characteristical approaches. As the names above suggest, Tofts’ work articulates the big grass of modernist literature and visual arts with a constellation of contemporary works, artists and cultural moments. This interweaving isn’t an attempt to write the postmodern, digitised present into a solid modernist lineage; rather, as Tofts puts it, it works “uncanny parallels, incongruous juxtapositions and surprising fusions of ideas between the old and the new, the residual and the emergent.”

Tofts pitches the project as a corrective to that “digital orthodoxy” which tends to forget these historical parallels, resulting in “cultural amnesia.”

The most prominent of the parallels runs between modernist art and literature and contemporary hypertext—spanning hypertext, the web, and interactive media. So it is that in “Un Autre Coup de Dés. Multimedia and the Game Paradigm”, an artist and academic portends Shane Malley hangs out with cybernetician Norbert Wiener, Myst and the Residents’ Bad Day on the Midway, in a work in which the narrative meaning from the indeterminate, erasopic story-worlds of digital media are echoed. Tofts suggests, in the ways in which we read Malley’s nonlinear poetry, in “Hyperlogic, the Avant-Garde and Other Instructive Arts”, John Cage, Marcel Duchamp and James Joyce are brought together as practitioners of that interactive, nonlinear “hyperlogic” more often identified with high-tech hypermedia. The central, and well-supported assertion made in both these essays is that “hypermedia should be considered as an extension of the modernist avant-garde.” Tofts isn’t talking up new media here, in fact he’s quite clear on the point that they have “a lot of catching up to do”, lagging in the shadows of modernist monoliths like Ulysses and Finnegan’s Wake.

Tofts’ assured literary scholarship underpins these parallel readings, but it also gets a few essays to itself in Parallax. “Ulysses Redux” is a detailed treatment of the troubled life of Joyce’s tome; its many editions, corrections, editorial gauges and presumptions, all striving for an authoritative, authoritative masterwork. Tofts good-naturedly points out the absurd contradictions here, as literary scholars scramble to tidy up, straighten out and nudge down a work which is very clearly trying to resist such determination. He is more optimistically about a proposal for a hypertext Ulysses with multiple parallel versions of the text and additional multimedia epiphenomena—an appropriate brooding fork of interaction between Joyce’s epic and his Duchampian equivalent: The Large Glass.

What propels the essay is some fascinating literary detective work, beginning with a manuscript fragment in which Joyce’s protagonist.describes a world which seems to be The Bride Stripped Bare. This thread triggers Tofts’ refurbishing of Ulysses in which it comes to resemble Duchamp’s collection of notes on The Bride, The Green Box, and explodes into a million interactive pieces.

Perhaps it’s a subjective case of greener grass on the other side of the disciplinary fence, but I find Tofts’ literary studies more interesting than his writing on new media. This may also have something to do with the fact that writing in this area, like the work, dates practically overnight. Tofts’ "Your Place or Mine? Locating Digital Art" is from 1996, the year of the MCA’s Burning the Interface exhibition—but here four years seems like 10 (remember CD-ROMs!). Of course this absurd time-lapse should be resisted wherever possible, and Tofts’ historical perspective is valuable here. Certainly Nan Lam Pak, John Cage and Merce Cunningham are important precursors for the conceptual and practical concerns of contemporary digital media, and the importance of “the walk” in virtual spaces is prefigured in the ancient arts memoria. However Tofts stops short of following these historical contexts through to critical analysis. Not that he’s pulling punches, necessarily: his writing seems to reflect a genuine enthusiasm for new media practice, together with an endorsement of some of its dominant drivers. “The most like- and desirable outcome of the trajectory of the desktop to immersive, virtual spaces, is the creation of something that resembles the Holodeck on Star Trek: The Next Generation.” Complete immersion in a seamless “apparent reality” is the unquestioned goal here—a trajectory which seeks a kind of digital totalisation of the overwhelming plurality of a work like Ulysses.

Nowhere is Tofts’ enthusiasm more apparent than in his writing on Tony Innocent. “Travelling to Iconica” is a glowing account of Innocent’s work, Tofts hails the artist as perhaps digital animation’s “first major exponent of the art of virtuality.” Once again Tofts’ writing misses a chance to make some well-informed critiques and ask some curiously honest or at least not in public. For the health of the scene itself, I hope this changes.


---

**dLux media arts**

innovative film, video, new media and sound arts

**dd art 00**

australia’s premier annual showcase of innovative video, cd-rom, web & sound art by local and international artists

What should we now expect a digital art work to look or sound like?

**dd art 00 cd-rom, web & sound art**

citywidegallery PACE Customs House, 31 Alfred St, Circular Quay

Thursday 8 June – Sunday 2 July

**dd art 00 film & video screenings**

2000 Sydney Film Festival, Dendy Opera Quays, 2 East Circular Quay 9 pm Tuesday 20 June & 3:05 pm Thursday 22 June

‘Being Digital’

dLux media arts Sydney Film Festival forum

Dendy Martin Place • 22.30 pm Thursday 15 June

**California Dreaming**

Historical and contemporary animation from the Division of Animation and Digital Arts at the University of Southern California

2000 Sydney Film Festival, Dendy Opera Quays, 2 East Circular Quay 2.50 pm Monday 12 June & 3.15 pm Wednesday 14 June

Info: Susan Charlton 02 93804255 • dLux@dxu.org.au • www.dlux.org.au

---

**RealTime/OnScreen 37 June – July 2000**
California Dreaming becoming a reality

Kathy Smith

We are plenty of evidence of what George Lucas is up to now, but what's going on at the film school he went to in the 60s? What is now the Division of Animation and Digital Arts (in the School of Cinema Television at the University of Southern California) sit poised at the intersection of Los Angeles' entertainment, multimedia, fine arts and cross-cultural communities. A program of historical and contemporary works from the school is being presented by iRecco media arts at the 2000 Sydney Film Festival. The program, ranging from a gorgeous noir homage to the car in the city at night by the young George Lucas to the virtual and technological experiments of today, has been selected by Susan Charlton (iRecco Project Manager) for Curt 00, from a body of work proposed by the school.

I spoke to Vibke Sorensen (Chair and Professor) and Mar Elephants (Program Director and Professor) from the school about the California Dreaming program, their own role as artists and the place of the school in the life of LA.

Vibke:
The works in California Dreaming largely reflect the great diversity of Los Angeles, a major metropolis which is highly international and multicultural. USC is physically located in the very heart of Los Angeles, next to downtown in South Central LA where some of the worst rioting took place in 1992. The films represent an alternative to what is typically portrayed by Hollywood. But this is changing. The demographic realities of Los Angeles have become a major political and cultural force winding its way into the mainstream. Therefore our program is both an alternative to Hollywood and an incubator for its evolving identity.

The history of your own artwork, how is that playing itself out in your role at USC?

Vibke:
I have in many ways found a home at USC. This is quite odd, as it is the school most closely associated with Hollywood and my work is far from the scene. This 'comfort level' has to do with the support I have had for shaping our program into one which is international and multicultural. This is due to the fact that I have been a cross-cultural child myself... going back and forth between Scandinavia and the US... being a woman in what has traditionally been a male dominated field (computer animation), an artist working with scientists (before it was considered cool to do so), and developing new forms such as net-based, improvised visual music performances, physio-digital installation art and stereoic animation/virtual reality, all of which are considered highly unnatural forms of animation. USC is a research university, and many of the processes I have engaged in my work over the years are research areas of interest to colleagues in different departments... the research feeds directly into my teaching and so students have a chance to work in these areas as well.

LB:
It was only after graduation from USC in the '70s and after I started working as the manager of the school's film processing facility that I started to realise the importance and value of personal expression in my case filmmaking, using what people call animation.

What happened was, as I was put in charge of processing student films, I realised how painful and difficult filmmaking is, especially personal filmmaking. As I learned my technical craft as a film processing technician I raised a lot of students' films. I tried to make up for this atoniey by trying to learn faster and working a lot of extra hours to help students out. I was charged with the passion of a political activist who had no specific ideology. At the same time, I started making short films using the techniques of experimental animation. I would do a new film every year. I ended up with a body of work from the late 70s to the mid 80s. I realised I am a filmmaker and this was paralleled with my contracts with the serious filmmakers in the school whose films I was raving less and less.

The next breakthrough was my introduction and association with Visual Communications. This is the first and oldest Asian American Media Arts organization in the US. I began to appreciate not just the ideologies but also their commitment to the community and their use of the moving image to revitalise it. I was invited to do animation workshops and this was the start of my politicisation. The memorable aspects of this ongoing journey are the people I helped kids create about the LA Uplands (others call it Rico) in 92. I now feel very lucky to have met and worked with all these people. The moving image has gone beyond entertainment for me. I now fully understand its power to give a voice.

Vibke Sorensen and Mar Elephants are guests of the Sydney Film Festival. They will introduce 2 screenings of California Dreaming June 12, 2.50pm & June 14, 1.15pm. Sorensen will also speak at the iRecco media arts forum Being Digital, Diddy Martin Place, June 16, 2pm. An exhibition of California Dreaming digital prints and additional animations will be presented at Side On Gallery O Cinema, 83 Parramatta Road, Annandale, June 12 - July 1.

Kathy Smith is an Australian painter and animator who is artist in residence and lecturer at USC. She produced and developed the California Dreaming program.
3rd international conference on film scores & sound design

June 29th - July 2nd 2000

experiencing the soundtrack
Capitol Theatre & Treasury Theatre, Melbourne, Australia

cinesonic.rmit.edu.au

contact: monica.cinesonic@rmit.edu.au (03-99252188)
**Exposing an emerging genre**

**Kaz Madigan**

Archiving Imagination is an accumulating exhibition of online projects. On the surface, the virtual pushbutton is to read both the technical nuances and literary ideas inherent in the text and imagery but these also foreground the collaboration that is a part of every screen, providing a topographical view of the text reads like a text, or a web artist and writer, and make the work more navigable in a three-dimensional space where pages can be visited by clicking on their eponymous objects. In turn, following a text link loads a page with the panoramic which is the view from that geographical location, so the reader has, in fact, 2 methods of reading. One is spatial and concrete, the other is textual and abstract. Through these panoramas Moulthrop is not only exploring spatial metaphors in narrative, but expanding the relation of image to word. There is a well formed irony between the stability of the fictional visual world and its contradiction to the permeability of the textual universe. The images are plainly imaginary (the Bryce generated landscapes tilt their collective caps significantly towards Myrt and Rives) yet remain much more stability than the text, which in its turn appears as a series of fragmentary axioms, personal reminiscences, observations and self reflective aphorisms. In other words, the text reads like a typically intertextual postmodern fiction and so manages an ironical sense of being a digital text, while the images of an imagined world, yet concrete in its discursive performance.

The world defined and produced by Reagan Library is one where the reader is unable to return to a space, where hypertextual repetition becomes a play of difference, a continual question of subtle variation. Within this world Reagan Library combines history, criticism, and self reflexive irony to meld a narrative that takes well aimed bullets at both the self appointed keepers of a literary heritage and those who missed the vicissitudes of hypertext as merely the opportunity to turn a trick.

This is a work that is almost Oulipian in intent, but rather than operate as a rule governed combinatorial engine, Reagan Library probes the relation of reading and game playing, and explores the boundary between image and text based digitalographics, demonstrating that writing's electronic future is less about textual pyrotechnics than a reforging of words into other narrative spaces.


Between definition & practice in Canadian art

Lisa Colley

In April 1999, Claude Schryer (electro-acoustic composer and musician) was commissioned with the task of reviewing the Interdisciplinary Work and Performance Art Program at the Canada Council where he found himself faced with intriguing questions:

What is performance art and interdisciplinary work? Are there other artistic practices that don't fit these categories? Who are the stakeholders of this community? What are their weaknesses, opportunities, threats? Who is the audience? How are technologies affecting the creation and dissemination of these practices?

How do contemporary interdisciplinary and performance art practices position themselves in an increasingly transdisciplinary world?

Sound familiar? These questions were also resonating throughout the artistic community.

Hence the call by Guy Lamarre (interdisciplinary artist and panel member for the Canada Council) for artists to register interest in a Conference on Interdisciplinary Art Practices in Canada. The conference was sponsored by the Canada Council and over 100 artists traveled from all over Canada to attend.

The final report written by Claude Schryer was completed in November 1999 and the new programs announced at the same time. The conference became an opportunity to disseminate and discuss new directions and practices for the artistic community to further debate the issues raised in the review process. It was invited to lend an Australian perspective, the New Media Arts Fund having been through a lengthy process of review and debate leading to its formal establishment as a Fund in July 1998. It was then invited by the Canada Council to attend the first meeting of the new InterArts Panel and to discuss lessons learnt over the last few years. This coincided with the conference in Montreal and it was a unique opportunity to get an overview of Canadian artists’ concerns and work.

Guy Lamarre posed a series of questions to the presenters and these became the focus of the event.

Should we look at the interdisciplinarity at a mixture of artforms, or rather as genre-transversing throughline? Is interdisciplinary art a recent phenomenon or is it an undifferentiated primal space, a necessary condition for any artistic expression? How does one become an interdisciplinary artist?

There were no conclusions drawn. However I came away with a range of new perspectives on the same questions we are asking here in Australia, and some observations about the similarities and differences in the Canadian experience.

As in Australia, the diversity of practice is extraordinary: the participants ranged from established artists to emerging, covering performance, installation, site specific and ecological work, sound, film... It is interesting that artists working in media arts (as they are termed in Canada) were under-represented at this gathering. In Australia there is more crossover with artists working in new technologies.

There was a very strong theme running through the conference of artists working from a political activist base, on interventions in communities, on environmental projects, and with first nation peoples. There was also an active contingent who claim the term performance artist and refuse the term interdisciplinary. This was a much stronger debate than I have heard in Australia, where the term performance art is not in such common usage.

The keynote was given by Dr Ron Burnett, President of Emily Carr Institute. His presentation was both challenging and accessible. He proposed and introduced the term transcultural as appropriate to the work being discussed. Transculturalism is not to be confused with interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, both of which remain linked to "the frameworks of disciplinary research..."...for people involved in transcultural research, nothing is sacred. (The full text of this paper can be found at www.ecc.ca/art/culturalresearch.html). From then on, the terminology debate raged and it was only when we turned to the work of artists on the panel that connections were made about the nature of practice across disciplines.

It was clear from the discussions that artists in Canada and Australia share many of the same concerns, in particular that funding bodies define the nature of the work artists are undertaking and put the work in boxes. There was a passionate plea to keep performance art as a separate category while others argued that labels were meaningless and the focus should be on making the old disciplines more rigorous.

I can only briefly touch on the artists who spoke at the conference. Among those were over 15 presentations, New York artist Devon Neumark peeling beetroot outside her burnt apartment, talking with the neighborhood as part of her grieving process made into art; Daiches Langridge on her greatest flop, a performance work based on ice hockey that the ice hockey fans loved and the art world hated; Pam Hall from St. Johns Newfoundland, artist in residence in the Faculty of Medicine at Memorial University for 2 years, now working on a national project exploring issues of justice in Canadian Fisheries (www.med.mun.ca/artisticrecreation); Nancy Bleck’s photo documentation from the Witness project, beautiful tracts of rainforest one day, woodchip the next. (All the presentations and contact details for the participants will be published. For more information, email Guy Lamarre at INTER2000@tamu.com.)

The new programs of the Canada Council had been released by the time the conference took place and there was generally a very good response from participants. The programs are now structured under a new section called InterArts with categories for Performance Art/interdisciplinary work and New Artistic Practices.

Schyrer concludes in his report:

Contemporary artists in general and visual and media artists in particular are constantly shifting, mixing and questioning conventions, concepts, procedures and structures. As Danielle Routet points out in her article (which is part of the report), Reflections on Interdisciplinary Practices in Canada’, artists rarely agree on any single definition: they tend rather to think in terms of materials, media and contexts, continually seeking the best material and formal strategies for carrying out their intentions. In a sense the InterArts office is both a transition zone towards expansion of disciplinary boundaries and a harbour for emerging and experimental interdisciplinary artistic practices.

(The full text of the report is available through the Canada Council website at www.canadacouncil.ca. Claude Schryer is the InterArts Officer.)
Das Arts: training for the theatre of the future

Rachael Swain

During 1999 I spent 2 seasons as a 'participat' at Das Arts, a small international school for experienced artists in advanced research in interdisciplinary art practice. Das Arts is based in Amsterdam and is subsidised by the Rock Foundation, a British arts charity. Das Arts is a fantastic place for an artist to be. It is a small, friendly, open-minded environment where you can explore new ideas and try out new things without fear of failure. Das Arts is also a useful resource for those of us who are interested in interdisciplinary art. The school is a refuge of creativity and innovation, a place where you can meet other artists from all over the world and have your ideas challenged and developed.

The city dead and undead

Stephen Armstrong

We're at the Coronation Hotel and 20 minutes after stepping into the lift we're still in transit. At first we think the performance has begun; the lift's up and bel in the Morse code of a disfigured man. The lift halts, and directed the Mickey Theater in Amsterdam. This year, the reits are being taken by Alda Lesto; coming from her role as director of De Nieuwe School, a multicultural, interdisciplinary school with a strong focus on dance. The school's structure, like many of the great things in life, is both complex and simple. With a stated aim of training artists who will create 'the theater of the future' it completely refashions itself twice a year. This time it is not obvious what curriculum allows the school to create itself in response to the developing sociopolitical and artistic climate and through the vision of 2 mentors, a number of guest artists and the participating participants. Each block is curated by guest mentors who are selected by the director of the school from a talented pool of international avant-garde artists and others who have been influential in the development of current international performance practice.

The mentors are asked to curate a block based on a field they are investigating at the time. They invite guest artists and experts, plan field trips both national and international, and devise provocations for the participants to fuel the constant process of 'performative research' developed by Das Arts. This structure places responsibility on each participant to constantly process the vast amount of stimulating input into their chosen medium and via their personal experience. The school provides its own studio, audio, video, film and production management resources. Due to the number of disciplines being practiced, each participant is also given a budget for hiring equipment or conducting whatever research is necessary to the particular development of their own work or group projects, in response to the content of the block.

Das Arts strides boldly into the inherent paradox of teaching a person how to be an artist or create a work of art; both structure and art structure are apparent at every turn within the school's make-up. A double edged inward/outward gaze is fostered, encouraging the participants to navigate both very personal territory and the complexity of the world in which we live.

The first block I attended in the winter/spring of 99 was 'Reconciliation and Storytelling', drawing deeply on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and on the storytelling traditions of South Africa. This block was a harrowing walk through a nation's process of reconciliation, a look in the face of gross violations of human rights, of the vagaries of truth (forensic and emotional), the human cost of lies and the simple power of storytelling, whatever form it might take. Guest teachers from South Africa, including ANC leaders, exiled writers, an elderly Zulu poet, singers and dancers, led the 10 participants from Eastern and Western Europe, South Africa and Australia.

The second block titled 'Performance, Food and Cookery' was mentored by director and Performance Studies wiz Richard Gough and Art Historian Bob Beruah employing what we eat - the ceremonies surrounding it - how food marks our sameness and our difference, its myths and symbolic importance, the joy of plenty, the fear of famine and deprivation - as occasions for reflection. A fabulous 'performance kitchen' was created in one of the studios complete with mini-restaurants and video screen. Here the participants (from Croatia, Serbia, South Africa, South Africa, Romania and the Netherlands) brought a wealth of artistic and culinary traditions to the collaborative table.

Finding your way amidst the constant stream of stimulating material, dialogue and other artists' processes, and at the same time exploring the edge of your own practice, is not an easy matter. The most profound thing about being there was to be watched in practice, i.e., in a probing, informed and personal way: to talk and be given feedback one artist to another, one participant to something, I fear we say away from here in Australia. As an established practitioner used to creating large and complex projects, it was both contrasting and liberating to be in a carefully facilitated environment where I could get lost. Letting go of tools I rely on to get me through projects, taking other kinds of risks (more personal than I usually allow myself) and experimenting in other media.

Such a dynamic and educational model providing a quality of mentorship to a few students is a rare and precious thing in today's world. There are days when I wonder how long it can exist even in the comparative generality of northern European arts funding. I only hope that from Das Arts' focus on quality, risk, sociopolitical and artistic climates and personal exploration, ripples will spread along with those artists who will define the theatre of the future.

For more information on Das Arts, visit their website www.dasarts.nl or email dasans@d.isarts.nld Das Arts is director of Stalker and a long term intercultural project, The Marrugeku Company. Marrugeku is currently in rehearsal for its second production Crying baby which is being created in Sydney and Arnhem Land this year. Rachael was funded by the Gloria Payten and Gloria Davin fellowship to attend Das Arts in 1999.

POWER PUBLICATIONS
ph: 9351 6904 • fax: 9351 7323

recent publications

100 years of cruelty: essays on artaud ed. edward schear (published with Artspace) (2000) ISBN 1864872918, $19.95*


Virginia Baxter

The production of Joanna Murray-Smith's play Nightfall directed by Jenny Kemp premiered at the Theatre Studio in November 2000. The set design was by Adam Showes, costumes by Emily King, and lighting by Caroline Hennessy. The play was set in the dining room of a large house, and the action takes place over the course of a single evening, during which the characters are forced to confront their deepest fears and desires.

MC: The approach to the play as far as a matter of the whole body of physically listening. The listening body is like an animal...you can get caught, suspended, you're hearing the sound and the emotional sound. Jenny Kemp is a very good director for me in that she loves to see that. If you get stranded halfway, held in space, Jenny's in a state of delight because it's dangerous. She credits the initiative as I've always been there. You can get caught in this sort of writing can produce some powerful performances where there are no words.

MC: That's going on all the time in these characters. Emily is going to a place where she can't talk. It's as if the play's a grid and there are references going on all the time to the grid.

IS: You take a few of those all over places and put them out on paper you would have another map, another text through the play. There's a lot of things that Ed is like "what is it?"...just say what it is you're imitating...where did this all go..." and I can't. I can't actually use words because they fit into and he can't have that.

That inability to speak is expressed physically—by- for instance, I became aware of all the little muscles around the sides of your jaws. Daid Ferguson's design pretty much locks into a small space...I stuck a door out the back. How do you respond to the physical confinement of the space?

IS: I think of it as a technical thing that you can't occupy a place and say there because the emotions or the unfolding will project you into different places—Jenny was very conscious that it has to arrive naturally. So then you release other things are important, that you can use your back to the audience; that you can be in a position where you're uncomfortable.

MC: You know that your whole body is being used, wherever it is. You are completely visible. There's also the wonderful expression of the in and the out. Because Cora may be out there in the garden, it feels like an amphitheatre and you're able to have double faces. You cross one face inside the living room and then you turn to the audience and go, "What is she talking about?" The audience is in the place of the reading of the inner feelings of the characters when they're looking out.

Is that written into the script?

MC: It's written into the design, I think, and the director.

IS: I think of moments of stillness and the moment in the play when Kate starts telling us that Cora has been depressed and she's revealing bits and pieces of information. The room goes almost absolutely still.

MC: Every single night, the whole theatre goes...the audience is still for a second because...

IS: Receiving that information and being victims of Kate's knowledge produces a kind of parody. When that breaks, we say things like, 'it's this thing back on the real...and we have trigger points. One of Ed's is to get up and tell a story and rebel against the visitor. The stories become physical. Sometimes those things follow in a predictable fashion but there are unusual moments in what Emily says at the end. It is written in a very denuded fashion but there is something else there that takes over despite the way it's written. It's a particular form of physical moment.

MC: The play starts right on an edge but then it's actually something that needs to be held and contained and contained. You can't break out of it. It keeps on. You can't hold it and hold it. You never really go for the dramatic moment. You just hold form. Then it...just right at the very end, it breaks, Emily is trapped behind the coach and she does this elision. Her lines are: "I feel like nothing less than I can tell you I want to vanish." The audience might think that she's answering the question, "What was it that Cora remembered?" but she's not, she's holding under emotional pressure just talking. Structurally, if it dips emotionally too strongly anywhere else, you lose that break. And it's a very subtle breaking point. So the drama leaks, it leaks out of the structure if you don't play it vacuously.

Is the performance fixed, does it vary much?

IS: It's one of the tightest shows I've ever done. MC: But the knowledge that it still allows you to be aware emotionally so that on any particular evening there might be a point reached in the graph, which is a little bit unexpected or the intensity is less than last night, what happens is that it goes somewhere underneath—It's curve around and sort of push you in another sequence. So you're playing the essentials every night but where they occur is very different and moveable.

It's a very powerful moment. IS: It's one of the tightest shows I've ever done.

MC: And it's emotional, it's physical, it's about. They deal with the emotional stuff as a whole. They deal with some other detached stuff, too. And they deal with some other detached stuff, too.

IS: It's the moment when you have and from your point of view, there's a release; but also for the audience a sense of relief that...

...that a sentence has been completed.

MC: There's been a break.

That's a kind of a break that's being made. It feels to be a kind of a break that's being made. It feels to be a kind of a break that's being made.

What does it feel like to walk around with this play inside you?

IS: It's a kind of a burden that's carried. There are some plays that leave you completely exhausted but refreshed.

MC: You can't really not because you have to begin again that night and there's no way of emotional energy that we'll bring it to. It's not as though in your resting you can return to a kind of inertia. You actually...I can feel in the jaw a little bit of a pull. A little bit of a pile-up that has to be considered again this evening. And it really is considered again because there are unknowns.

It's a constant kind of grappling with this thing and trying to find the way to be true to yourself, to know when to get angry, when to get happy, to sleep, to know when to get up and do something else...

MC: It's a physical task, artistic. You look at someone who's training and they do this all through, their stomach is gone when they get that line. Sometimes I've come downstage and looked at my body and it's hollowed out from holding it for this tiny voice to come out.

IS: You try to use all the actor's training but you can't really have that freedom, that freedom in these sorts of territories. I suppose what you do is to try to minimise the damage and be as aware as you can. Particularly of the body are not allowed. When I come out, when I think it's standing behind the sofa when Emily's confessing—I come off and my break.

MC: Come back to being...

IS: So we're both on wheat grass and grain—...No.17 from the Kings Cross Juice Stop.

MC: I feel sick at the thought of doing it again tonight.

LAUGHTER

Nightfall, Playhouse & the Sydney Theatre Company, Wharf Theatre, opened April 12
Saved from the eternal purgatory of development

Suzanne Spurr

Each year hundreds of scripts come to Playbox for assessment. Currently they have 15 playwrights under commission and 18 more whose pitch is receiving development support. It must be a daunting task to sift through these scripts, so the decision to create a season within a season and produce 5 new works for ostensibly the cost of one was a sensible, commendable and possibly heroic one. Inside 2000 was billed as 'five plays, five directors, six actors and forty-five roles, one space—hence yourself.' They were rehearsed in a carefully calculated timetable over 7 weeks and presented in a repertory format with a new play opening each week.

In the midst of the season I spoke with coordinating director Tom Healey, designer Greg Clarke and writer of the writers Michele Millier, and it was very clear that the initiative has been gracefully embraced by the writers and their directors, who were usually well-established collaborators. Playbox audiences had responded enthusiastically and the works had been well received; nobody expressed frustration with the breakneck speed and all were positive about the ensemble feel that had developed within the creative team, and the spin off stimulation of being exposed to each other's work. The writers in particular were happy to be included fully in the rehearsal process and to have their advocates, the passionate and benevolent Healey, at the helm. Healey spoke of the problem for so-called 'emerging writers' in Victoria since the demise of the middleground companies and spaces, where the choice between to go to La Mama or Playbox, with the Playbox spots taken up by established and bankable writers and La Mama offering opportunities to the genuinely emergent. The rest languish in the eternal purgatory of 'development.'

The 5 works were diverse with different development histories. Jodi Gallagher's Ellygo, Samantha Bews So Wet and Gabrielle McDonald's Like a Metaphor had already been through development with Playbox's theatre in the Raw, which offers dramatic support and a rehearsed reading. Pam Leversides' Violet In has been developed outside Playbox. The first part produced 5 years ago by 85 Theatre Co and the second part commissioned by Branch Theatre Co who were co-producers.

Campion Decent's Baby X premiered at Belvoir Street Theatre during Mardi Gra (see Realtime 36, "Sampling the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gra, p.10) and for the Playbox production had a new production with different director and cast. With the exception of Baby X, directorial and dramaturgical relationships with the writers were well established before Inside 2000. It is imperative in a season of new work with such tight rehearsal periods that development be completed beforehand and the creative team have a strong investment in the piece to withstand the rigours of the schedule. Baby X really was a ringer and I questioned its inclusion in this season other than providing some subscriber temptation in view of its subject matter. Lesbian parenthood and sperm donors.

Only McDonald's Like a Metaphor, a series of 5 monologues animating the female body, had the mark of an exciting new theatrical voice. Jointly directed by McDonald and actor Margaret Mills, the potency of work is in an installation by Perth Summers (of oddly angled, lasered kitchen chains) captured the vulnerability and fragility of the various voices. Mills' virtuosic performance was crystalline and the words sharp as knives, it was theatre at its simplest and most powerful. Each monologue was left whole and the temptation to dominate by intervening them was resisted so each voice spoke clearly and the sum was an accretion of layers for the audience to put together.

McDonald and Summers are involved in an ongoing collaboration and want to rework it in a gallery to explore more fully the installation aspects. For what it's worth, it was a triumph of visual design, Page's Violet Inc was the work of one already out. Full of interesting ideas about art and culture, varied voices and dramatic modes, it was enlivened by its disparate tones at times viciously satirical, at other moments elegiac. However the conceit of Violet's ghost being the motivating force for the virtual protagonist, the ambitious art historian, off the moral hook at the end, just when things were getting interesting.

So . . . in the hands of a very experienced director Nancy Black and a strong cast, exhausted its potential and thereafter revealed its limitations while Ellygo's final hands of Healey, its dramaturgy, set up an intriguing and predictable rhythm of cross cues which did not layer the meanings in the way they were intended to. As a sequence in a way that did not advance our understanding or involvement with the characters. While the aim was to promote new writing, audiences could be forgiven for thinking it was to showcase the diverse talents and phenomenal energy of the team (Joan, Margaret Mills, Ken Radley, Fiona Todd and James Wardlaw), the cleverness of Greg Clarke's infinitely adaptable set, and Phil Lethlean's surprise of sound and the Repertoire of lighting effects. The good news is that Playbox are already thinking about Inside 2001.

Inside 2000, Playbox Theatre, CUB Mulhouse, Melbourne, April 4-8, 11-15, 18-22, 25-29, May 3-13

Brink tackles Tyrannosaurus text

Dickon Ozenburg

The work of the late German playwright Heiner Müller (1929-1995) is mostly produced in this country. Among the more notable productions are Madame Colas Johnson and Gerhard Fisher's workshop of The Aborigine: Dreamtime confront the Declaration of the Republic with the production of The Commission, its subsequent production (directed by Nade Towner) at The Performance Space and tour to Germany, and the original production of Quartet, at the Seymour Centre, Sydney in 1982. Despite his relative obscurity in this country, Müller is generally recognised as the most important German playwright since Brecht.

The dramaturgy of Müller's theatre in part reflects the decay of ideology. Early works included socio-realistic/naturalistic adaptions of workers' theatre texts for Volkstheater theatre but with the onset of political stagnation the themes of his work became darker, more misanthropic, centring on the futility of power and violence. Nowhere is that more refined or savage than Quartet.

Quartet, written in 1982 Qurant has loosely adapted from Lacce's late 18th century episodic novel Les Liaisons Dangereuses. The narrative concerns itself with a pair of jaded French aristocrats, the Visconde de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil who, through a chain of letters, make a pact that Valmont seduce and corrupt 2 innocent Madame de Tourvel and Volange, Merteuil's niece. The seduction are acts of revenge on the husband of Tourvel, who spurned Merteuil, and the fiancée of Volange who previously lured a lady away from Valmont. Merteuil and Valmont are former lovers and through the course of their correspondence play out their ambivalent relationship as a private hell.

In Miller's adaptation, Valmont and Merteuil role-play the seductions in a transvestite orgiastic fantasy, highly reminiscent of Genet's The Maids. The mini-game climaxes with Merteuil murdering Valmont, leaving herself alone to consummate her self-destruction with "causing my lover." The decadent exchange of Les Liaisons Dangereuses becomes an exercise in hallucinatory lapsed.

Visiting English director/designer Gerard McArthur and fellow designer Richard Kelly have derived beneath the neo-classical attire of the historic Queens Theatre to create a claustrophobic post-apocalyptic wasteland for this "game for two players." Surrounding by scores of high heels from a thousand cocktail parties (or a thousand hallucinogens?), the characters play out their claustrophobic/traumatic game of mutual hatred. Actors Colette Cross and Syd Brisbane bring considerable stamina and control to their roles of the Marquise and Valmont. In a high voltage verbal barrage Cross alternately lacerates or bhlgues and slurs in her path, while Brisbane plays Volant with post-Godard cool at a strutting gender bender wide boy. Together they assault the audience with Müller's impossible dense and dark text. The internal rhythms of this are reinforced with evocative lighting by Geoff Cobham and an impressive industrial soundscape by composer Jeremy Rowsey.

To synchonise Quartet's "clockwork" structure, McArthur has elected for an absurdist framework reminiscent of Beckett and Sartre. While newcomers to absurdist theatre may find its conventions intriguing, those familiar with the form could find the experience predictable, in turn lessening the theatrical immediacy. The climactic battle of the Aramis Round is The Sea by Randolph Stow.
CUOCOLO BOSETTI - INTERIOR SITES PROJECT
Season 1: THE SECRET ROOM
Directed by Renato Cuocolo with Roberta Bosetti

From Thursday 8 June
(performances Tuesday to Saturday 8pm)

The Secret Room is the most intimate and isolated place that exists in every house. The place where everything that ought to remain hidden comes to light.

This two day workshop encourages writers to hear the weave of intentional and incidental word and language in which we are constantly immersed. The rural environment will then be drawn on to develop an embodied mode of writing for performance.

Christine will explore the use of soundscapes, found conversations, rhythmic patterning and harmonic tension as sources and structuring devices in the process of writing for performance. The workshop will combine word-dropping excursions and individual and collaborative writing exercises.

Christine Evans is a writer, composer and performer whose credits include My Venetian Angel, Emma and Love and Magic in Momo's Kitchen, Appearing in Pecos and Tanguree Road. She is musical director on the STCSA production of Lehn's in Driee which opens in the Playhouse on July 4.

To register, please contact Playworks
PO Box A2316, Sydney South, NSW 1235
Tel (02) 9264 8414 Fax (02) 9264 8494
Email playworks@ozemail.com.au

"Bosetti has the seductive quality of the legendary Lulu. Clearly a woman who claims language and sexuality on her own terms she seems to be in command of both." 

Richard Keene
Australia/Japan: gesture and place

Edward Scheer

A theatre director quoting Foucault. Bizarre. A theatre director using Foucault. More bizarre. Intellect is rarely spectacular but its staging can be provocative, productive, memorable. Ask anyone who saw the ongoing NYID/Gekidan Kaitaisha (Theatre of Decomposition) collaboration in Melbourne last December. In the transient fever of recurrent festival seasons it's good to be reminded of an international collaborative theatre project with longevity. In 5 performances at Melbourne University's Open Stage, La Mama and Dancehouse, Gekidan Kaitaisha—one of the edgier outfits of the current crop of experimental Japanese performance companies—showed an impressively intense brand of gesture based physical theatre, part Ibrechtian Gestus, displaying a socialised positioning and critique; part Artaudian 'inspired torture'. Limited use of verbal language also opened up the Artaudian terrain of the work and made it accessible to English speaking audiences.

The object of their visit was a collaborative workshop with Melbourne-based NYID (Not Yet It's Difficult) whose work we haven't yet seen in Sydney but who also use a vocabulary of dynamic gesture described by dramaturg Peter Eckersall as "a kinetic layering of signs on the body of the actor." NYID's opus included the controversial The Australian/Asian Post cartoon Sport Edition (1997) with its sequence of a staged bashing of the only Asian member of the company (promising at least a colourful interaction with GK) and William Shakespeare Hang Drawn and Quartered (WSHDQ) 1994) which features actor Greg Ullewa ordering the 'to be or not to be' text while being smushed to the ground with a copy of Shakespeare's Complete Works. This conflict between text dominated theatre and the performance of the body is a theme which animates NYID's approach to performance. WSHDQ also has an impressively choreographed kendō fight sequence in which the combatants periodically stop after a flurry of blows to address the audience with a petty swipe at old WS: whack whack pause, "Shakespeare invented violence" and so on. The object of critique is the WS addiction displayed by most of our mainstream theatre, an issue that ironically resurfaced in the lead up to the Gekidan Kaitaisha/NYID collaboration. NYID director David Pledger (a deserveing winner of the 1999 Myer award for services to theatre) suggested to the director of GK, Shinjin Shimizu, that they work on text or not to be" text but this notion was met with some resistance. Shinjin argued that there is a danger in globalising and insisted on the "need to residue" and the need to "deconstruct." Pledger's intention was to place the WS in an ironic contrast with his gestural performance mode and see how the 2 companies could deconstruct the East/West opposition, which WS seems to embody. Only a fragment of the text was used in the eventual joint workshop.

If anything this conflict illustrates that Shinjin's approach to text is minimal in the extreme. In any case Pledger's style is inherently deconstructive in precisely this way. His infect ed Suzuki method (the most original use of this system since The Sydney Front in the early 90s) provides an intriguing way of disrupting the integrity of this system while enhancing the effects of its discipline, staging it with humour and intelligence, quite contrary to the critics of the company who emphasise the 'totalitarian' nature of the 'hard-body sameness of NYID actors.' The discussions in the public forums focused, not surprisingly, on the different approach to gesture. GK's director Shinjin referred to Foucault—more the Foucault of 'docile bodies' than the later 'technologies of the self', in that he is interested in exploring bodily passivity and indifference to the techniques imposed upon it by the imperatives of industry—and to the nervous system as the key starting point for understanding his approach. The GK performances stage exhausting repetitious gestural sequences in a way which is similar to the NYID method. As Eckersall explains: "each NYID performance typically dissolves into a repetitious semiotic landscape" while Kaitaisha on the other hand stage a "radical anti-theatricity" suffused with "the semiotics of violence, aggression...colossalisation and regulation" which "is not so much performed as it seeps through the moment and clings to the air." The beauty of the workshop was the intriguing hybrid produced by the Suzuki based training on Australian performers feeding back into the Japanese avant-garde through David Pledger's appropriation of Suzuki's style.

The legacy of this type of collaboration is probably still unclear and particularly as the next phase of the relationship is yet to occur, but some lessons from the rigor of the GK attitude are already worth noting. Shinjin Shimizu argues that their work is not theatre, not performance, and is perhaps another representation of power and self/identity or expression. But what might this be? What new form might this call into being? Is there no ready-made answer to this, it is in the making, but if you want to figure out what he means perhaps you could have a look on the net at www.kaitaisha.com. So while GK emphasised the disappearing boundary separating performance and public life in Japan, NYID's position, ironically, looked like 'a defence of the theatrical'. The question that emerges becomes more than a question about the place of gesture in our theatre but about the very place of theatre in our culture. Eckersall, who, as organiser of the event, deserves the last word here, asks: "What is different in Australia and Japan that might undermine theatre/performance as a possibility in one place and validate it in another? What should we be doing here in terms of provocative, gaity, political work? To be continued...

Peter Eckersall writes: "The second stage of the project will be in Tokyo, July 1-10. NYID members David Pledger, Katia Molina, Greg Uffman, Louise Taihle, Simon Hall and myself will go for the duration. There will be a symposium on the 9th."
Reversions to form
Keith Gallow

In the last 2 months the Sydney theatre and performance scene has generated some curious crossovers.

True to the postmodern condition where, as with cable TV, everything ever made appears to be forever available, theatre-going has been like unwanted time-traveling, at least in terms of form. What is Don Juan's journey, a subtext of the Pop-performance, doing at Sidertrack directing a piece of naturalism from the early 60s? And Jenny Kemp's production of Nightfall where suddenly we knew I where it all going. My heart sank. How long would this unfolding take? That irritation never went away, but it does lessen considerably by several factors.

One was that Murray-smith's dialogue has taken a leap forward, certainly for two of her characters, the husband and wife (Scott and Cameron) who yearn for the recognition of their love. It's a new love, but also in love with spectacle—the massive storm-at-sea scene stokes, walls loudspeakers and rolls performers unconvincingly about the floor. The mix of banal historical and melodramatic spectacle (like a bit of Sydney Fishmarket sex-assault with a watermelon thrown in) suggests that the director Legato is in the early stages of finding a performance language. However, more controlled moments in the production and the power of performances from Valerie Berry, Rolando Ramos and Paul Cordeiro suggest potential that perhaps a writer might help shape.

It was hard to believe that Welsey Enoch, the same director who gave us 7 Stages of Grieving (which he co-wrote with performer Deborah Mailman) has directed Stoles. The production has received excellent reviews and standing ovations at many performances. The performers are good, the space is set eerily lit


Nightfall

"The house is in Carton. The address is secret (details upon booking)," declares the publicity for The Secret Room. You're in for an intimate adventure, Melbourne's stylishly innovative IARA Theatre is back with a mystery location, a real home for its female protagonist and audience: "The house is not a backdrop for the stage but a map for reality. Real life space and theatre space overlap." The performer is Roberta Bosetti, the director, Roma Costello, and media artist Warwick Page is collaborating—this performance will be broadcast live on the net.


Theatre Company? Why are young, ambitious, audacious and good-looking creatives like Murray-smith and Cameron driving a thing that at first glance seems so far from the present? That is a very important question, and one that I think was being asked by audience in the audience. However, per the hybridity yielded by the postmodern, there's nothing simple about these apparent reversions.

Jenny Kemp's production of Nightfall is a provocative experience. Joanna Murray-Smith's other plays have irritated me with their short-storystory plot contrivances and the insinuation feeling that they don't really belong to an Australian culture. That suspicion persists in this big-dark secret play of the buried-child tradition so beloved of American playwrights when getting the secret out of the open is more important than dealing with the consequences of its unveiling—a more composite rather than revelatory formula. There was an early stir in Nightfall where suddenly I knew where it all going. My heart sank. How long would this unfolding take? That irritation never went away, but it does lessen considerably by several factors.

One was that Murray-smith's dialogue has taken a leap forward, certainly for two of her characters, the husband and wife (Scott and Cameron) who yearn for the recognition of their love. It's a new love, but also in love with spectacle—the massive storm-at-sea scene stokes, walls loudspeakers and rolls performers unconvincingly about the floor. The mix of banal historical and melodramatic spectacle (like a bit of Sydney Fishmarket sex-assault with a watermelon thrown in) suggests that the director Legato is in the early stages of finding a performance language. However, more controlled moments in the production and the power of performances from Valerie Berry, Rolando Ramos and Paul Cordeiro suggest potential that perhaps a writer might help shape.

It was hard to believe that Welsey Enoch, the same director who gave us 7 Stages of Grieving (which he co-wrote with performer Deborah Mailman) has directed Stoles. The production has received excellent reviews and standing ovations at many performances. The performers are good, the space is set eerily lit


Nightfall

"The house is in Carton. The address is secret (details upon booking)," declares the publicity for The Secret Room. You're in for an intimate adventure, Melbourne's stylishly innovative IARA Theatre is back with a mystery location, a real home for its female protagonist and audience: "The house is not a backdrop for the stage but a map for reality. Real life space and theatre space overlap." The performer is Roberta Bosetti, the director, Roma Costello, and media artist Warwick Page is collaborating—this performance will be broadcast live on the net.


Theatre Company? Why are young, ambitious, audacious and good-looking creatives like Murray-smith and Cameron driving a thing that at first glance seems so far from the present? That is a very important question, and one that I think was being asked by audience in the audience. However, per the hybridity yielded by the postmodern, there's nothing simple about these apparent reversions.

Jenny Kemp's production of Nightfall is a provocative experience. Joanna Murray-Smith's other plays have irritated me with their short-storystory plot contrivances and the insinuation feeling that they don't really belong to an Australian culture. That suspicion persists in this big-dark secret play of the buried-child tradition so beloved of American playwrights when getting the secret out of the open is more important than dealing with the consequences of its unveiling—a more composite rather than revelatory formula. There was an early stir in Nightfall where suddenly I knew where it all going. My heart sank. How long would this unfolding take? That irritation never went away, but it does lessen considerably by several factors.

One was that Murray-smith's dialogue has taken a leap forward, certainly for two of her characters, the husband and wife (Scott and Cameron) who yearn for the recognition of their love. It's a new love, but also in love with spectacle—the massive storm-at-sea scene stokes, walls loudspeakers and rolls performers unconvincingly about the floor. The mix of banal historical and melodramatic spectacle (like a bit of Sydney Fishmarket sex-assault with a watermelon thrown in) suggests that the director Legato is in the early stages of finding a performance language. However, more controlled moments in the production and the power of performances from Valerie Berry, Rolando Ramos and Paul Cordeiro suggest potential that perhaps a writer might help shape.

It was hard to believe that Welsey Enoch, the same director who gave us 7 Stages of Grieving (which he co-wrote with performer Deborah Mailman) has directed Stoles. The production has received excellent reviews and standing ovations at many performances. The performers are good, the space is set eerily lit


Nightfall

"The house is in Carton. The address is secret (details upon booking)," declares the publicity for The Secret Room. You're in for an intimate adventure, Melbourne's stylishly innovative IARA Theatre is back with a mystery location, a real home for its female protagonist and audience: "The house is not a backdrop for the stage but a map for reality. Real life space and theatre space overlap." The performer is Roberta Bosetti, the director, Roma Costello, and media artist Warwick Page is collaborating—this performance will be broadcast live on the net.


Theatre Company? Why are young, ambitious, audacious and good-looking creatives like Murray-smith and Cameron driving a thing that at first glance seems so far from the present? That is a very important question, and one that I think was being asked by audience in the audience. However, per the hybridity yielded by the postmodern, there's nothing simple about these apparent reversions.
Achieving runthood: Frumpus

Eleanor Brickhill

Runthood: a term of opprobrium; disgrace incurred for shameful conduct; a weakling, undersized and stunted.

Runthood is restful and wriggling a rest of the lit for warmth, frightened of being left out in the cold. Runhood want to be strong and fearless and beautiful but something seems to get in the way; basically they’re a bit of a mess, always — so it seems — caught with their pants down. These runhoods are bent with a shared nightmare, forever up against strange elements, the frightful dark, the monstrous terrain and awful howling sounds, but above all, The Susted, 3 spooky but surely dressed fantasy oppressors, who hang around often on the side-lines, and sometimes centre stage, but seem to hold the fates of our 5 irregular red-tracksuited heroines in their oily palms.

The audience enters at bedtime for runnies, witnessing a burlesque of fraught and agonised sleep, postures contorting in tandem, fingers faces twitching, humming, slack and stupid. But somehow we like these runhoods. They’re a bit like we are, the heroes of their own fantasies.

In their dream the story begins, a sequence of scenes not always connected, but all somehow part of the same horrific nightmare. Or maybe it’s just a bit of fun, a bundle of bits and pieces, a collage of strange and funny ideas looking for a theme. Take your pick.

The performers are clowns, comedians — actions, body language, expressions, are all exaggerated and overblown, like their fake plastic bums and tits and horribly lipsticksticked mouths. The style is beautifully rough, naivé and burlesque, some of the action cartoon-like, or reminiscent of silent movie melodrama.

Sometimes they are ‘girls against the odds’, pitting their weaknesses against imagined horrors: nightmarishly trying to out-run some evil cartoon-fashions but never getting anywhere, getting separated and lost, making you want to yell out an agonyed “Look out behind you!”; or perhaps climbing tall buildings on a mission, with sparklers on their heads to light the way.

And sometimes, as in dreams, scenes shift unfeasibly from one theatrical fantasy to another with no smooth segue, but the heroines use the opportunity to dress up and parody their favourite women of the stage. We are told to “Make a date with the woman you’ll never forget”, and to note “the woman whose face and figure fascinates every man.”

The heroines get to be German Expressionist dancers, sitting astride chairs in black boots and chemises, showing their inner thighs; they get to put on dark glasses and scarves and mime “Look at me. I am beautiful”; they don short babydoll pajamas and lie about seductively on big cushions kicking their legs in the air in 19th century soft-porn mode. My favourite favourite is the bit from Allen, with extra-terrestrial exploding from their chest, naming “Get away from her, you bitch.”

In one small, misted scene was a tiny lighted cardboard cut-out cityscape, with windows in the widens and flickering lights in the windows. We watched the 5 cut-out figures in red — tiny cardboard puppets — still battling the elements, under manipulated lightning bolts and crashes of thunder and rain. Naïve, funny and memorable.

Runthood Frumpus is Cheryl Moore, Jenny Ann Low, Stephanie Harts, Alycia Ferguson, Rosanna Scarcello, director Celia White, Performance Space, April 13-16.

Kooemba Jdarra: connecting black and white

Mary Ann Hunter

“What is the first thing I see when I look at you?” was the question initially asked at devising workshops for Kooemba Jdarra’s latest production, Skin Deep. While the first answer was ‘skin colour’, a second second must have been ‘gender’, as this two-hander is as much about implicit notions of ‘woman’ as explicit constructions of ‘black’ and ‘white’.

Dallas Winmar’s script explores both the sublime and gross forms of racism experienced by Indigenous women in the everyday. Strong, direct monologues are based on real life experiences and communicate the pain, anger and ignorance of women on both sides of the black and white divide, and those caught in between. Other vignettes — sharing a train platform, going to a beautician, making cannery conversation — provide well-chosen contrasts with their playful exaggeration and inversion. Performers Rosanne McDonald and Zara Grose in the characters of Black Girl and White Girl enjoyably play up to the task, interchanging shoes like experience (“those black shoes, they pinch... but the white, why take them off? they’re so easy and comfortable to wear!”) and wage war in miniature studios, shooting stereotyped perceptions back and forth. The lessons here are clear: that personal experience of racism is raw and diverse, yet institutional racism continues unabated, charged with hollow stereotypes that foster ignorance and pain.

It often feels as though the performance is on the verge of doing something more. A deeper engagement with any one of the monologues or vignettes is eagerly awaited, promising further dramatic and political possibilities. But Skin Deep does not really go below the surface to explore the complexities and challenges of the situations it presents. Instead, having raised awareness of difference in a society in white overdrive, Skin Deep attempts to reconnect black and white through the singular body of ‘woman’. This is represented by the symbolic assembly of a large female form, framing the individual vignettes. This notion of an essential woman-spirit imbues many aspects of the performance: from the circular representation of women holding hands on the floor to the closing image of the large opaque google of the woman-body pushing with a foetus, reinforcing a biological and, for some, a spiritual determinancy of women’s connections with each other.

Skin Deep is centred around honest stories of women living with racism in Australia. To have shared these stories in workshops would have been a rich and risky experience for those involved. While that richness is available to the audience in many instances during the performance (in particular, Black Girl’s talk with her deceased Grandmother), dramatically this work requires further risk-taking, to stretch the text, performers and audience. Assembling the one woman-body never feels symbolically strong enough to ground the short narratives (women still working with differences in economic status, sexual orientation, political persuasion and spiritual values). As a work confronting the difficulties of respecting and communicating difference, Skin Deep is pregnant with possibilities.

Skin Deep, Kooemba Jdarra, writer Dallas Winmar, director Nadine McDonald, dramaturg Maryanne Lynch, designer Deleors McDonald, performers Rosanne McDonald & Zara Grose, La Boite Theatre, Brisbane, May 13-June 3.

Mary Ann is a performance educator and researcher with a background in community-based and cross-disciplinary performing arts. She currently teaches at Queenslands University of Technology.
Justifiable paranoia in Port Arthur

Sean Kelly

Panopticon is an ambitious project in virtually every sense that a theatrical production can be. It is a project that, both in the conceptual base it proceeds from, the staging and presentation mechanism, and the sustained non-verbal performances required.

Panopticon was developed by Salamanca Theatre Company's director Deborah Pollard in collaboration with Ben Grimes. The project is a Panopticon—surveillance. The concept grows out of the Panopticon devised by Jeremy Bentham. Panoptic surveillance was described by Bentham as "all seeing." It was Bentham's belief that in the 19th century there was a more effective way to treat prisoners than locking them up in cells to exist unproductively with little or no chance of redemption and rehabilitation. As a utilitarian philosopher, Bentham's vision was influenced by a desire to make it possible to improve oneself given the right conditions, and that the process of personal growth to redemption and usefulness could be achieved through reflection and introspection. He devised a prison plan of elegant simplicity and efficiency (he was an economist as well). In Bentham's prison a physical structure contained inward facing cells at the centre of which was an observation tower. The benefits were obvious. The cells were monitored by as few as one guard and the prisoners were never sure who was being specifically monitored at any given time. The guards and the prisoners were isolated from each other and effectively monitored constantly. There they could reflect on their situation and ponder how they may improve, safe from the insidious influence of their peers.

One wonders how Bentham, an arch pragmatist, could not have foreseen the sinister psychological implications since he also co-ordinated a surveillance system. Panopticon takes this as the starting point, both for the development of its central concept and in the presentation of the work. The basic premise of the show is that the Panopticon of Bentham has been replaced by new and potentially more sinister forms of surveillance—technology has advanced to the point where we are all potential subjects and, in most cases, may not even be aware of when and how it is happening. The outcome—paranoia. It could be argued that paranoia is a characteristic of the contemporary psyche and with some justification. Just because you are paranoid does not mean that you are not out to get you. What is most insidious about this form of surveillance and control is that in most cases we are powerless to act against it as we are never sure of the depth and nature of its penetration into our lives. The internet, global pseudo-military installations also used for industrially espionage, digital data recording and widening of the technological net across all activities and into all spaces are reasons to be concerned. How do we feel? How do we respond?

We are controlled as we enter the space. First, silence is imposed (gently, by example) and then we are separated into groups and led off into different rooms, one by one to our appointed places (one of 72 in a specially constructed set not unlike the prison chapel). Designer Greg Mertel has excelled himself with this staging. A small (seemingly innocuous, even friendly) camera lens is noted in each space, aimed at the viewer—a less obvious trap. The space is in front of a circus ring into which 5 wry clowns enter and soundlessly go about their business. Behind the action the images on the walls accommodate images both pre-recorded and live. Some of these become images of the audience, interacting with those generated by the clown and those already created. Live action, live narration mixes seamlessly with pre-recorded elements so clearly that you feel confident that these gents are on top of the technical and other complexities. You can suspend your disbelief and enter more deeply into the experience.

Deborah Pollard has set a new and fresh course for the Salamanca Theatre Company in the time she has been its director. The projects she has developed have been characterised by an eager embracing of new technologies as well as active collaboration with a number of artists practitioners from diverse backgrounds and practices. Filmmakers (Rose Films), sound artists (PK Khan), live video all feature in this production. None is used gratuitously, all are balanced and all are necessary. Salamanca is a youth company and now it utilises a language familiar to the new culture.

In Panopticon it uses this form to examine itself Conceptually it is equally ambitious. What is it about the clown? Like the jester the clown has an imprimatur to stretch the boundaries, to poke fun, to take risks in a social discourse. Clowns can be scary (how can I avoid the apogee of the sinister clown—John Wayne Gacy). The clown is us, muddling about with the technology, partly defining its threat. It never resolves, it never ever becomes, even if they feel about it. This was a long bow to draw, colliding the culture of control of 19th century prisons with the performance of 5 clowns. No narrative, just a series of short often very funny pieces exploring our interaction with something we can never quite hope to understand. This is just one of the ambitious leaps this production takes and it works.

The show also deals very effectively with the more general issue of the viewer's experience. There are flashes of the absurd and 'assaults' on the audience but not the visceral attacks of Peter Handke or Arthur's Theatre of Cruelty. This is tricky ground. The show unsettling and keeps them in a state of anticipation and even apprehension but it never alienates and does not seek that ground. It holds us, yet it is an icy sort of embrace as we never sure when we will become part of the process. There is more of a Dada edge to this theatre but still it holds its conceptual base together through a kind of focused 'nothingness', a bit like the Dada figure of Benjamin Peret who liked to seek out poets in the street and insult them (on behalf of everyone else).

This is the most complete, focused and polished theatrical production I have ever seen. It is also absolutely timely. It uses everything but the kitchen sink, has a risky premise and asks a lot from the audience. Deborah Pollard (Panoptic) and Bronowski and Kati Molino. It is presented in a fascinating but difficult space. I hope this one goes on the road, as it deserves a big audience and a long life. If it is fitting that this work should be Deborah Pollard's last, it's where she and the company have been heading. It's also clear that the material artists who have worked with the company have now been fully integrated into that vision. This will outlast Pollard, there's no going back from this point.

Panopticon, Salamanca Theatre Company, HMAB Huon Quays Drill Hall, Port Arthur, Tasmania

Solin Kelly is Director of Contemporary Art Services Tasmania

Brisbane's Powerhouse open for business

Shaaron Boughen

In mid May when the Queensland Government announced funding for a new contemporary arts gallery and the development of regional arts infrastructure Queensland could be forgiven for thinking that any new gallery venues were the first growth of this arts Spring is the Brisbane Powerhouse which stands unique on a significant cusp of the river in New Farm. This is no South Bank, no elitist performing arts centre. This is a building with raw edges, graffiti'd walls—a contemporary space that offers the potential for diversity in live arts practice and performance. The old powerhouse that once generated the energy to run Brisbane's trams is now ready to emerge as an arts space that some see as conservative and others as parochial—perceptions which deny the existence of a rich contemporary contemporary arts already conversational in their practice.

The Powerhouse is the result of an exhausive consultative process initiated by the Brisbane City Council and genuinely based in community advice and opinion. It houses 2 multi-configurational theatres of 200 and 400 seats, reception, café, gallery, function rooms, offices and rehearsal and storage space, which all sounds like any other venue but Peter Roy and Lottereau have carefully reconstructed the integrity of the original building that offers more, lifts our expectations and ultimately needs growing into. Artistic Director of the venue, Zane Trow, has in place a series of programs to stimulate, support and develop audiences, artists and new works. He will need these programs as the Powerhouse will devour product and only the best of local and interstate work will satisfy ever-discriminating audiences.

Brisbane Powerhouse, opening weekend, May 6 & 7

The National Circus and Physical Theatre Association in association with ENEREX Brisbane Festival and Brisbane Powerhouse Centre for Live Arts presents

CIRCUS AND PHYSICAL THEATRE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

An articulate investigation of who we are, the praxis of art and business and the role of the National Circus Association.

BRISBANE POWERHOUSE, WEDNESDAY 18 TO SUNDAY 22 OCTOBER, 2000

MAGISTRACET October 18 and 19 COST $130 per person

CONFERENCE October 20 – 22 $90 early bird (before July 31)
CIRCU S CABARET October 18 – 22 $80 late bird (after July 31)
PERFORMANCE October 19 – 22 REGISTRATION ON THE NETWORK AT:
PUBLIC LECTURES October 20 and 22 www.brisbanepowerhouse.org/chaosandsynergy

This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body

R RealTime 37 June - July 2000 35
music can only be played, including by those who only listen. The entire body is involved in this play: tensions, distances, heights, movements, rhythmic schemes, grains, and timbres—without which there is no music.


The Necks make a music which seems, at the outset, background, ambient. This is not so, the music is disturbing. There are no comparisons, while being, however, relational. And because it is, one seems to 'see' it, as if the eyes are longing for what the ears are receiving. Watching The Necks is a significant pleasure of their music, and is a pleasure unlike watching a film. Hard to say why, but it is concerned with the separation, the independence, of the 3 layers—piano, bass, drums—and the way in which these layers shift or turn almost imperceptibly (I think it’s that the eyes imagine as literal movement, as if the music is film or dance). Seeing Tony Buck select his ‘sticks’ is not only fascinating, it’s motif; it signals an overall improvisational process. Seeing, or just missing, Lloyd Swanton change patterns on the double bass is like being suddenly released. Seeing Chris Abrahams repeat a group of notes on the piano until they’re beyond exhaustion, yet still overflowing, is bodily wearing.

The motif, the process, is ‘relientless’. It clamps you. This happens either slowly (Sex) or quickly (Hanging Gardens). It doesn’t matter, sooner or later you are surrounded.

I’ve seen them play twice—each time has been riveting (like watching/readirhinking) in the best sense of theatre. ‘Competing’ is a strong word: the music is compelling; it’s also crystalline, and as beauty comes about over time, being played is a knowing state of suspension. This music is space (as is all music), but ‘this’ music spaces-out space—makes you think space, reminds you of spacings (gaps, voids, piercings, screams, calls, night), of walking (measuring) the world, of sitting alone, of smelling the beloved: ‘Sound has no hidden surfaces. It is like a totality of space, on the confines of the very start...’ (Nancy’s) such a delicate impossible proposition: it seems to roll out before you like a landscape—a plain or a desert. No music is more bare a base than this; on the other hand, Hanging Gardens is dense, thick, humid.

The music of The Necks, often recorded live, has an intimacy, as well as a threatening undercurrent. (The Boys, for instance, and particular moments in Apatico and Sex and the way Hanging Gardens begins, together with the low piano notes and a scraping noise that happens occasionally.) The simultaneity of sensuality (a touching) and dark ominous tension (a repelling) is almost tangible, like skin on skin. What appears, as space, as opening (of language) is a sonorous philosophy of love, not Love, but that wonder when the density of the silence is fully itself and something extra/excessive—beautiful, delicious, pungent, molten, etc. It comes to be inside, and is then of space.

There are several aspects of The Necks’ music which makes it distinct. One is that the 5 musicians play all of the time, even when joined by another musician on Accordion—Steve Wishart (bundy-gurdy). This instrument suits so well the swirling rush which happens regularly. The music does not conform to just classical forms. No solos, the differences—density, intensity, tonality, momentum—happen within the perpetual playing ‘together.’

This means something. You read about it elsewhere, say in Deleuze, Blanchot, Cage, and you hear in electronic music (FilA Bzztril, for instance—who are Jans of The Necks). Another is that these long works (one track per CD: Sex, Piano Bass Drums, Hanging Gardens) are improvised, so listening is ‘the composer.’ Although one recognises the sound of The Necks one can’t know beforehand what you will be played. This contributes to theatre, it might be the theatre. One watches music being composed and played at the same time; something unpredictable occurs when an ‘ensemble’ performs at once, and over time (no-duration); it is arduous, equally—an investment of work, and perhaps more than that, a democracy of making (the result is art); a sustained connection between the musicians gives a similar quality (to the ear) to that of a dance-work with all the dancers on stage for the entire performance (to the eyes)—like Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker’s Drumming or I and I (2000 Adelaide Festival). That The Necks make one think of other practices (of other places) is also an aspect which sets them apart. I think, for example, of Beckett and Duras; inevitability, horror, extinction, yet also, a keeping on, and insistence—for what... whatever... Their music is too much, excessive in the exact right way: resonant; opening the world. It is difficult to know why a specific music works. Near the end of the concert at The Governor Hindmarsh Hotel in Adelaide the guys at the bar couldn’t resist shouting ‘homy, homy,’ or the like. The Necks’ curious tender touch is so on-the-surface (is this a reason for the name: vulnerability), a fragility of loneliness—sounds leaving, dissolving. At the very moment of receiving: nothing. In a sense

Lloyd Swanton, Tony Buck, Chris Abrahams—The Necks

Linda Marie Walker

Return of the Rainbow Warrior

In 1983 Rainbow Warrior, flagship of the Greenpeace fleet, was sunk by an explosion in Auckland Harbour, New Zealand. This September, 2000, the new Rainbow Warriors sail into Sydney Harbour for the start of the Sydney Olympics, the ‘Green Games’.

To commemorate the occasion a CD of Colin Bright’s opera The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior will be released by ABC Classic FM in July and you can buy it from the Australian Music Centre and good music shops.

Level 1, 13 Argyle Street, The Rocks, NSW 2000
PO Box N690, Grosvenor Place NSW 1220
Level 1, 18 Argyle Street, The Rocks, NSW 2000
Tel: (02) 9247 4677 Fax: (02) 9241 2873
Toll-free (outside Sydney): 1800 651 834

www.amcoz.com.au

Connecting the world with Australian Music

See & hearing The Necks from all directions

Linda Marie Walker

This music is voice, it invites from the listener a wish to respond (but how). It’s a music which one writes toward, in answer to, in despair with, and as partner of, or (il)literate, participant in, and this one (listener), while pretending relations here, is unsure how to be clear (try listening to Hanging Gardens late at night, alone); it is a night work (air still, perfumed, full moon), almost ceremonial, funereal in a deceptive way—i.e: if kettle drums will reduce; it starts in the inside, knowing this music is its condition. Perhaps they don’t know the relationship between writing music, and perhaps they don’t care ‘to-write’; but writing often cares ‘to-music’. Clarice Lispector, for instance, invokes the composers, pays homage to them in her works. At the start of The Hour of the Star she writes: ‘I dedicate (this narrative) to the tempest of beethoven. To the vibrations of Bach’s neutral colours. To Chopin who leaves me weak. To Stravinsky who terrifies me and makes me want in flames...’ Lispector might be answering Jean-Luc Nancy’s question, which is no-question: what if sound/speech was ‘the condition of sense’?

The bleak (world), Fife and Drum from The Boys (the soundtrack to the film), can only mean bad acts (actions). A marching into a place—swamps, tangled trees, coarse underground—of nausea. All the sounds of distant (sole) life following the overwhelming beats of a fearful heart. The awful ringing in the ears of blood—long dreams over notes hanging over this thumping. The most interior: the body in a state of sensory deprivation continues or comes to hear itself, to hear its own noise, its heartbeat, its breathing, scraping, whirring, and the march continues, and then something happens: the hard ringing beat stops, a few last breaths, water, nothing: like music ‘as its invisible gripping presence’, its very ordinary nature, its fact: silence: ‘Something is lost essentially in the sound’s resonance’ (Nancy). This ‘piece’ of music effects long after hearing. The dread which lives in it is dread I dread hearing. From the first moment there is no hope, death is the land: ‘...these are the worlds we made...’ (inner CD sleeve, The Boys).

It’s the way (the approach) of this music, it delirium, the passage of its taking-time, its capacity to wait with its own company—does this make sense?—its suspension, acknowledged, finally in the latest title Hanging Gardens. The Necks’ music is a making in-the-making, a making which (here comes the night) unfurls before your eyes/ear when you watch them, and before your eyes/ear when you listen to them. They give, offer, one the chance to think of/inside music, not just there, but as the space which reaches/touches us through-the-air (from all the other directions), and is in ‘a sense’ the art which passes through us. At breath. They give a sense of space and time, generously, and in the mode of risk: ‘...a playful execution of sense, a being-in-action through cadence, attack, infliction, echo, syncopation...’ (Nancy).

The Necks are Chris Abrahams, Tony Buck, Lloyd Swanton. http://theonecks.com/
Performing the inland

Keith Gallasch

Originally produced for and broadcast on ABC Classic FM's The Listening Room, Gretchen Miller's Inland has been realised as a live performance in the Studio at the Sydney Opera House. This live version of this edited interview can be found on the RealTime website.

Inland is a layered work. In each of the 4 sections there's a sense of an identity, someone who's prominent in the piece, a voice which often sounds like an authentic voice, a real voice that's there because of the performative voice, then there's your musical compositions and various sonic elements. To what degree is it a composed work?

It was highly composed. The score has come after the radio work but during the writing of it I would go down every morning into a place full of logs of sound from my travels out west. They're on tape but I log them on paper so I know what sounds I have—lost lambs, my dog to the piano room with those logs and the sounds in my head and I would compose the music on the piano with a magical virtuoso state simultaneously. I gave each section a week to begin with. So in a month I decided I was going to have 4 sections to this work and each week I would already write text and sound together. Not that it's like a song because I would be writing fragments—lots of fragments coming out of the song. I've always been a very political artist and I had at the ABC, jointly operated with the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council. The work was originally for The Listening Room.

Your somatic includes interwoven as well. The story of the opal dealer has a vertigo quality. What about the other texts and music together?

To begin with I wrote these vignettes, little fragments of reality—a story about a woman pilot, a tale of an opal's history. Some opals have names. There are famous ones like the Pandoro or the Black Prince. And I wrote those from so-called reality or fact, from history books or whatever. Then I thought might be interesting to get in some people who were involved, so one story is about an alcoholic cripple opal miner living in the bush, on a straw bed, around ring around the opals shops to talk about his history. His voice held some of that history so I got him in to read some of those vignettes.

So that's not his personal history we bear.

I got him in to read but then we talked about his life and fragments of Greg's life came in as another layer.

Tell us about Nancy Bird.

She was a pioneer aviatrice of the 20s and 30s, one of the first to fly as a pilot which had been regarded as a sport for rich people. She worked with the flying doctors when they started up and was trained by Kingsford Smith. I asked her in to read me some vignettes, little stories of her comedies I guess—women pilots from the 30s. When I told her this she told me another story and that became part of the piece as well.

I also spoke to Yumi Lester, the Aboriginal elder from the area Maralinga region (in the fourth section, Inland). He was filmed from an Australian documentary on the land which is a quite a significant political figure but instead of making an overt political statement in that section, I asked him to describe the landscape that he knows but also knew visually before he went blind at 14 years of age.

We're not told that he's blind. It's like a mirroring—various voices including his own

listing the parameters of his territory.

The tracks, I asked him about the routes that people would take over that landscape before it became untractable but he also named the landmarks, the animals, the flora and fauna. And he also talked about the use of fire and that had a resonance with the fire of the bomb blast, the fire of the sun.

You save up the bomb until well into that section and it emerges in an almost poetic way about baldness and the light. Suddenly the listener thinks, oh the bomb.

The elements. And I don't use the word Maralinga either. It's there.

* The first section is immersion but water returns in the last one, how there's a whole sound, rocks sounds of ground. Then it goes liquid.

Because a really important part of this whole piece is to do with transformation, elemental transformation and breakdown and decay. When you go into the so-called dry inland, you become acutely aware of how the water things transform and you don't really do on the way—the water will sink into sand and disappear.

You have even more even more exceptions like liquid opal forming in the cavities of bone through a process of fossilisation.

I notice that in the section called Stone bone turns to opal. In Flight there's a sort of pre¬echo of that with the woman and the bird flying and the bird falls to the ground and becomes stone, covered by sand. Thousands of years later that bird has become an ancient sea creature which fossilises and turns to opal. Light in opal becomes the light of a hydrogen bomb.

How does the first section, Immersion, relate to the idea of the inland?

This piece was the story of my great-grandfather. My mother's recently been doing the digging, as you do, and she found a convict who came here. Our approach to Australia was by sea. Our approach inland was by water quite often, up through the rivers and that's exactly what this figure does in my imagination. Robert Wadl had a lot to do with water. He was a convict so he was shipped over here. He was imprisoned on a hull, the Phoenix, in the middle of the Harbour. He was destined for Norfolk Island. He was also an expert plumber and the government architect of the day apparently prevented him from going off to Norfolk Island and employed him instead. And, of course, Wisconsin in Australia is desperate to take water inland. So he travels inland on a boat, just imagined him rowing away or rowing this boat inland and dreaming of piping water through stone. There's just a hint of the snowy Mountains scheme there. He fantasises something that happens a hundred or so years later.

And he dreams of taking water inland.

When you go inland the grasses are tall, it is very thick, the wind blowing across the grasses. In these plains of grasses are the places that people desperately wanted to find an inland sea. I went to the Stout Story Desert and recorded there and it's extraordinary. There are stones there that are red. They're smoothed by wind. They look like undersea. Underwater. There are beautiful things and yet it's so desperate.

* Your compositions for bass clarinet, double bass and percussion are very engaging.

The music has tonal centres but I've always loved to reference the 12-tone every now and again. The double bass and bass clarinet are very vocal to me. I also love certain brass instruments like the trombone because they're sohuman and humorous. But I also chose these instruments because you can fragment the pitch and there are a lot of multiphonics in the clarinet and harmonics in the double bass. That parallels the breakdown of elemental structures. To me those two bass instruments refer to a vibrating environment, whereas the percussion refers more to the delicacy of the objects, their fragility but also their hardness, their permanence. It's also a decaying instrument—you can't sustain in the percussion. So again, there's decay.

Why have you decided on a concert version—is that what you'd call it?

I see it more as a piece of theatre but there is no movement on the stage. You've got 3 instrumentalist and 4 speakers. I think what I intend the work to do is to transport the listener to another place, to an internal place or to the desert itself in some form. I decided that it

And it would work as a live performance. The experience of having a story told to you is usually one which is face to face—you associate the voice with a physical presence. And you have a sense of empathy to what you're hearing, to this musical space. A really enriching part of the live performance will also be the images which are projected throughout the work. The photographer, Anthony King and I travelled together. So while I was making recordings, I was doing photography—not with the intention of putting a piece of music onto a visual space. There's another narrative which he has created, but there's no attempt at a literal representation.

What about the performers you've chosen?

Virginia Butcher is probably the most overt of the centrality of the narrative line with strength in 2 of the sections. Then there's me—I suppose I take the more poetic voice and the sung voice. There's Kerry Casey, the only male voice—he has a very rich tone and he also has a wonderful historical with the outback. There's Karen Peartman who's best known for her dance work with spoken word. She has an American accent which is very soft. I wanted that voice to be sensual. To me this work is very sensual, Daryl Pratt is on percussion. He's one of the country's leading percussionists—a double bass—jazz is his background but he's done a lot of contemporary work. Marjorie Smith on clarinet is extraordinary as well. Russell Simpson who was the engineer on the original radio version is also an accomplished musician and has an instructive sense of things for working with sound. He remixed the sounds for this performance. We had to break the work, the text and the music out. He'll be playing them. Anthony King is the one who is projecting the images onto 3 huge floating sheets of fabric and Neil Simpson has done the staging and lighting.

* I don't think I'll ever leave the inland behind. It's a creepy thing to say but it goes inside you, under your skin. After the first trip in 1996 I went back in 1998, 1999 and this year again, I can't stay away from it. I need it as a place to just go and be. It is a love affair. There are certain places that I return to again and again and rediscover things and always take a microphone.

So the product is an act of both recrea¬tion and an act of fantasy! You evoke the place and then you're in your piano room, you're writing whatever comes out. Absolute fiction. There's very little fact in this. The place is in the sound and the allusions and within the voices.


Interface - Australasian Computer Music Conference 2000

Reading a recent interview with dance music wonderland BT reminded me of how many other erotic computer music pieces and composition techniques have emerged from the range of research labs in universities to the desktops of the inner-urban DJ. Techno and grunge synthesis which BT uses extensively on his latest album were developed by practitioners of the computer music avant garde in the last decade or so. The expanding role of computer music as technology for recording, marketing and dissemination of music has meant that tools and techniques that only a few years ago were considered the sole domain of electronic music postgrads have spread out into the wider social sphere—the arcane becomes the quotidien.

In 2000, the annual conference of the Australasian Computer Music Association plans to shift across genre boundaries by inviting participation from innovative musicians and sound artists working in a variety of fields from universities to dance clubs in Australia, New Zealand and internationally. The conference will be hosted in Brisbane by the Queensland University of Technology from 5-6 of July.

This year, ACM2000 will focus on the interfaces between artists and audiences as well as between musicians and technology. It is an opportunity for composers, programmers and other practitioners of computer music to share their work and encourage cross-pollination between disciplines and genres.

The keynote speaker will be Jane Trew who will inject his perspective on audiences and technologies for new interactive music into the mix. Director of the newly opened Brisbane Powerhouse, A public performance of diffused electro-acoustic works is also planned to be held at the Powerhouse. Other performances will engage with audiences in a variety of environments from the concert hall to the music bar culminating in a live radio broadcast via independent FM station, 6ZZZ.

More information regarding the conference can be found online at http://auscmu.anu.edu.au or by mail at ACM2000, QUT Music, Victoria Park Road, Kelvin Grove 4059.

Richard Waddington
Oliver & Olivier: Radio France celebrates 20th century music

Chris Reid

Outside it's cold, a Puritan winter. Inside, the buildings are overheated, the metro overheated. The Parisians are pretty cold, unambitiously in black overcoats, somber scarves, often smoking, hurry ing, eyes averted. I catch the Metro to Place Pigalle, then walk by the river to Radio France. The Metro crosses Pont de Béklelet near the Tocadéro, and from the train window—there's the Béklelet Tower. In sparkling millennium lights, thousands of globes flashing randomly, momentarily, all over it, the tower glitters in the dusk like a giant chandelier.

New music receives modest attention here—in the previous festival, only a recital of 20th century chamber music for saxophone at l'Église Americaine. Now Radio France is mounting this 2-week festival of 20th century music broadcasts. There are concerts every night and on weekend afternoons. Star performers present work by well-known names—Léger, Crumb, Dubost, Gryély, Turrage, Messiaen—and newer names. Much is specially commissioned.

4 février

Opening night. We must enter the Radio France building, a cake-shaped concrete block, through an airport metal detector. Everyone triggers the beeper but the staff ignores this music; marshalling the horde into queues firstly for the limited five tickets and then for the charge to the doors of the 800 seat Salé Olivier Messiaen.

Leif Segerman, a giant in tuxedo and tail, smoothened in grey hair and beard, conducts l'Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France in works of Van Manen, Yumi Nara and Marco Stroppa and himself. The works are complex, energetic, demanding, with many themes and sub-themes running at once, requiring large orchestral forces, especially percussion. They are monumen tal, though in Taine's case, more lyrical and refined. Called to the stage after the performance of her work, the 62 year old Taine seems so diminutive—how could she produce such forceful writing? legerman's Symphony No. 27. Symphonic thoughts after the change of the millennium No. 1, involves a massive ensemble, a piano at either end of the crowded stage, Segerman driving one of them. His 27th attempt is prodigious rather than apocalyptic or farseeing.

During interval, boisterous, multilingual chat fills the foyer—meetings of hearts and minds from across Europe, the cheapest coffee in Paris at 5:00F. This brotherhood in contemporary musical appreciation is delighted with everything.

4 février

Music for solo piano and for piano and percussion. pianist Florian Hoeschel dreams in the middle of other pieces, Steppros's miniature extravert [little inspirational!], premiere here.

7 février

The concert is built around the adventurous, dramatic and brilliantly red-headed harpsichordist, Elisabeth Chojnacka, with various colleagues on percussion, sh, chung and flamenco guitar. Only an extrovert could bring this off—she does!

8 février

Mesmerizing London fistonets—best known for its rendition, under Zimmer with soprano Dawn Upshaw, of Gorecki's Symphony of Sorrowful Songs. On this crossing of the channel they're directed by composer Oliver Knussen in work by Julian Anderson, Geoffrey King-Gomez and (naturallv) Knussen. Self-reflecting Olle is cheered into accepting the acclamation so deserved by ensemble and composers. Great concert—lyrical, fluent writing, clear direction, every instrument outstanding. More composers take bows—they're sometimes the worst-dressed, their partners the best-dressed, in the season's audiences.

12 février

600pm: performances of Batutonyo (La citémonieux du repentou) and Sappho Ibokets (Sappho imbookae), by Jean Claude Doy, for voice and percussion. Highly theatrical, didactic work, Fatima Minnasi and Yumi Nara's formidable delivery ensures success.

8:00 two long electro-acoustic works, Eruco (Chatut, louange) and Galaxies, version Sigma by Doy. The stage, aisles and balconies are filled with (at least), 24 pairs of large loudspeakers, playing taped music recorded from vocal, eastern instrumental and other sources. Doy's ideas seem limitless, the delivery awesome, but the material not quite as convincing.

15 février

The fabulous Ensemble Adel, led by pianist Alice Ader, gives concerts at 3.00, 4.30 and 6.00pm. Including clarinet, violin, flute and cellls, the ensemble's jewer is shaven-headed, barrel-chested, Guggiubed Stephen Jowens, whose effortless, rich, articulate batonite fills the hall. The 11 composers' works are consistently high class, but lagio's Preiser discoun du Jour (Father's wife), 600003's quinse for solo piano (Adel), and Pendercliff's Quinto car定律 clarettes stand out.

Not taken as read: speech occludes the visual

Chris Reid

A space is a resonant body, a site that cataylizes interaction and creation. German per formance artist and composer Johannes Sittermann demonstrated this in 4 performances at the CACsA involving local artists and himself.

Opening night, Johannes and 3 colleagues sang a single note while applying glue to catch the breadcrumbs and building a cake-laped tower, eventually revealing the musician's mind. The space was a sparkling millennium lights, thousands of globes flashing randomly, around the wall, floor and ceiling, that fed back to the musicians as und, leaving the audience and the musicians and the audience and the musicians and the audience and the musicians and the audience. Doy's ideas seem limitless, the delivery awesome, but the material not quite as convincing.

A week later, writer-artists Christopher Chapman, Teri Hoskin, Jan Moss and Linda Marie Walker scratched text on pieces of car bodies wired for sound, their sculptures amplified through sheets of black paper also used as loudspeakers, hanging on the wall like pictures. The third evening included 4 works in which composers were invited to read. In the first, the Parisians are sitting with their faces towards the reader, feeding a phase vocoder through a mixer to loudspeakers that fed back to the microphone, along with ambient sounds. The mixer selected random sentences from works by Bacon, Schopenhausier, Ptegarger, Kepler, Tartini, its female voice (HAL) blended by Whittlimgton and the vocoder with a synthesizer to produce philosophically profound musical speech, the non-text of aleatoric literary appropriation.

Then David Harris, Lily Leaver and Cat McGuffie of ASC New Music Company, sat at desks around the car parts in the rear room, read Harris' word lists, their speech structured in time-clocks. The lists of words, temporally and syntactically fragmented, rendered the word as sound, leaving meaning open.

Sittermann's own performance followed in the front gallery: Sticking one end of a roll of packing tape to the wall, he slowly unraveled it, moving across the room and sticking it to the floor, vocalizing intemelitively. The tape's unraveling made a scrawny screech as he wound it around his head, then his torso, his voice thus muffled, packed away.

Concluding the evening, Lily Leaver's ensemble of nine voices sang, beautifully but wordlessly, Leaver and tenor Gordon Combes at the entrance of the darkened crenel... tre room where a chorus of singers lay supine, Leaver's electric torch probing the space. Again, language = music.

On the final night the audience performed, amongst the month-old bread-crums, placing tuning forks against the wall, floor and car parts to 'tune the space.' The mood was slow, meditative.

There was an accretion of sound, language and thought over the 4 weeks. Sounds are inherent in any space or object and Sittermann finds them and weaves them into a subtle fabric. He uses space as a sound box and the audience and objects as sound sources. The audience acts directly, as with tuning forks, or indirectly, their movements and wordings recorded and reproduced through an amplifier and transducers attached to objects. Thus integrated with the space, with the sonic, visual and temporal forms and textures, one's awareness is heightened. One notices the subtle background sounds, considers the meaningfulness of sounds that are usually unheard. By working at the edge of apprehension, Sittermann identifies the edges of perception and thus of meaning.

Day of Resonance, Night of Beginnings, Johannes at the Contemporary Art Centre of SA, Adelaide, March 31, April 7, 14 and 20
One of the major tasks of Douglas Kahn's new book, Noise: Water. Energy. Meaning. Sound in the Arts, is to redress an imbalance in the history of contemporary artistic practices in which the specificity of sound has been grappling with. Passing from late 19th century literary evocations of an 'auditory sense' through the ambitious projects of the Italian Futurists, early cinematography and avant garde music, to the major innovations of John Cage, William Burroughs, Antonin Artaud and Michael McClure, Kahn plots an ambitious historical and theoretical path through the labyrinth of modernist and postmodernist discourses on sound. He outlines the various intrusions of what be terms 'worldly sound' into a range of artistic productions (not just music, as some critics would have it) and to define the allusive qualities that make these sounds seductive. I asked Kahn how he established the relationships between such disparate phenomena.

I wanted to introduce history, culture and human agency into sound discourse, not sound in and of itself, but things like technology and culture, and also cinema and radio, as well as art. To call something a 'practice' there has to be a critical mass and, as I try to show, this emerged after the Second World War. So in what sense is the book equally a history of bratalising techniques and the automatic? In the century experience of pop, the industrial arts are driven by a powerful efficacy of abstraction.

I always try, in this work and in other writings, to try to get a perspective from the practicality of the artist, and not the sociologist. I've been a practicing artist myself. In that respect, I am animated by a sense of artistic possibility, which is not something I care offered in Jacques Attali's Noise, which would probably be one of the biggest illustrations of the brutality of audiovisual technique. In his book he demystifies sound, and associates it with the political and economic period of what he calls repetition, and the overwhelming power of commodity culture. That argument has a sort of normative impetus when you start talking about technology in such ways. I'm more interested in investigating specific instances of artistic possibility, rather than making monolithic claims for technology.

In this sense, are you continually working against the abstractions that creep into discussion about sound? I didn't go into this analysis to oppose this or that abstraction. It's just that the state of play on talking about sound is not very advanced. There are people in Australia like Paul Carter, John Potter, Fran Dyson, who have a background in this area that is pretty unconscious. Developments from their work, however, there's not much material place that is very useful. So the book emerged from my own development in an artistic capacity dedicated to working with sounds, and my writings emerged as a kind of service to these artists.

Working the Screen 2000

Feature liftout in RealTime 38 August - September

>>> The latest digital works online, CD-ROM, installation, in film and performance from new and leading Australian artists

>>>30 works-in-progress previewed

>>>30 new works reviewed in 5 surveys

Enquiries: 02 9283 2723 or opencity@ttimearts.com

An initiative of the AFC's Interactive Media Fund

www.atrecordings.com

IT'S WHERE INDEPENDENT MUSIC IS AT.