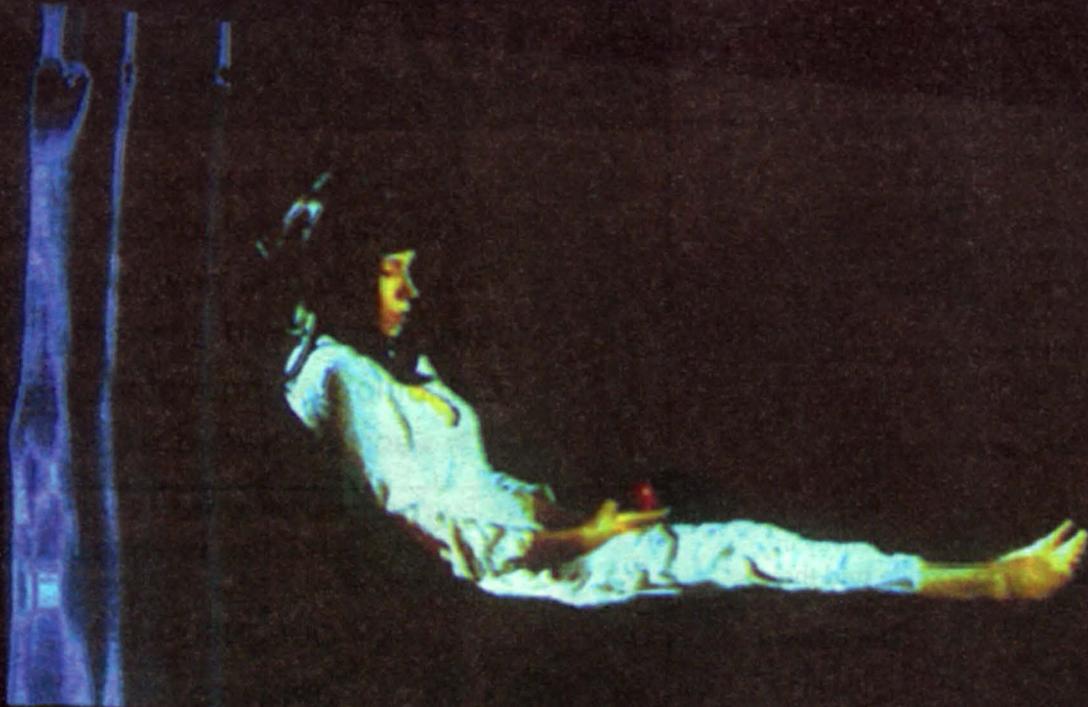


A RealTime feature August – September 2000



Working the Screen 2000

the digital impact – a progress report



RealTime



an initiative of the AFC's
Interactive Media Fund

Armstrong • Leggett • Cleland • Velonaki • Corompt • Crooks • Haig • Glaser
Heyward • Tonkin • Stelarc • Piccinini • Rackham • Pryor • Gibson • Walch • PACT
Felber • Whitelaw • Bonemap • Treister • Richards • Macdonald • Zebington
Trash Vaudeville • McDonald-Crowley • Back to Back Theatre • The Men Who
Knew Too Much • Brown • Cooper • Pryor • Treister • mez • Company in Space
Wallace • Roberts • Dement • • Cmielewski & Starrs • Samartzis • Hennessey • Lycette
Mew • Paine • Kocsis • Kiley • Pentas • da Rimini • Rothwell • Retarded Eye

Introduction

In the 12 months since *Working the Screen 1999* appeared it has been a constant point of reference in print and online for keeping track of digital media works-in-progress. Some of the works previewed in 1999 are complete and are reviewed in the pages of *Working the Screen 2000*, others are still being developed, such is the creative (and labour-intensive) nature of this work and the challenge of funding it.

Given the large number of requests for reviews and the paucity of review space in general for digital work, we decided to allocate space to reviews as well as previews in the 2000 edition. We couldn't review everything submitted, but we got close to it.

Working the Screen provides a unique and much needed resource. Our thanks to the Australian Film Commission for providing the initiative and their continuing support for *Working the Screen*.

Our thanks too to the artists and writers who have kept us up to date with work evolving across the country.

As in 1999, we hope that *Working the Screen* will encourage the keen anticipation and comprehension of new work and the breadth of activity in Australia, be it in video, film, installation, online or in performance and their ever-increasing combinations and permutations.

The Editors

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Cover image

Unstill life from Spectrascope

Photograph of the Mari Velonaki and Gary Zebington installation *Unstill Life*, exhibited as part of *Spectrascope*, curated by Julianne Pierce and Jacqueline Phillips, Performance Space as part of the Sydney Biennale. For a response to *Unstill Life* see page 12.

I found myself returning to *Spectrascope* every time I went to see a performance at Performance Space in recent months, seduced by Mari Velonaki's offering of a real apple to manipulate a digital image of the artist herself; entranced by Denis Beaubois' hand-cam-surveillance camera view of the act of writing what he sees before him in an occasionally glimpsed public space; moved by the curious alchemy of the ever dissolving golden face of John Gillies' sister (her photos held before a camera, splitting into pixels as it struggles to focus); and, after these intimacies, unnervingly entertained by the spectacle of Adrienne Doig and Peter Spilbury's to-scale-recreation of the Little Boy A-Bomb, its nose reflecting video projections of political low points and Doig playing "the cheerleader, the spy and the warrior...enact(ing) a form of complicity in the structures of power" (Julianne Pierce, catalogue). KG

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SDA members' gratefully acknowledge the support of the Australian Film Commission

Segue, stretto, strafe & sashay

Dean Kiley

Apart, of course, from C3PO's nervy variation on the loyal poof valet, the best thing about *Star Wars* (Mach I) was all those twee segues: the windscreen-wiper, the venetian-blind, the diagonal swipe, the horizontal shutter...later zombied back to life in PowerPoint.

In spite of the vistas opened by hyperlinks, much writing for multimedia—and especially for the web—never quite manages decent textual segues, something narrative or perspectival or dialogic that can ease or direct the wormhole transition between nodes. All too often instead you get chunked, clunky Lego blocks of text-as-data and interfaces standing in for connections. Not with these projects.

Tatiana Pentes' *Strange Cities* CD-ROM takes the segue and transposes it to a musical idiom that originates in, reconfigures and encases the unbelievable story of her grandparents, who were serial refugees and always-already aliens or exoticised expatriates.

The frame-story is told by the narrator, Sasha, who didn't believe all their outlandish tales until, after their death, she was about to incinerate a box of old memorabilia from Sergei and Xenia Ermoloeff. We open that box ourselves, and follow the sepia photos and ID papers back to Russia, to the Bolshevik Revolution, escape to China, the marriage in Tianjin, Shanghai's polyglot immigrant community, the decadent jazz clubs Sergei's band played, rubbing tuxedo-ed shoulders with Chiang Kai-shek and Charlie Chaplin, Xenia becoming a glamorous nightclub dancer, Mao's revolution, asylum in Australia and suddenly 50s anti-Reds paranoia, the claustrophobic suburbanality of permanent nostalgia. In and out of frame, as intro and closure, move press clippings, an evocative layered-n-textured Photoshop-ad's-worth of old photos, creaky newsreels and retooled recent footage, Trotsky speeches, Sergei's songs and the band's smoky jazz, contemporary radio broadcasts, un-artificial soundscapes, and narratorial voiceovers.

The effect is that of stretto, the fugue technique of overlapping and entangling voices and time signatures, where Pentes eschews the pull of Hollywoodising the admittedly-amazing story into linear cinematic re-telling, so it's less trajectory than transitional vignettes. These are composed as 'movements'—Prima Volta, Mordente and Lacrimoso—with multiple interfaces, menus, image-maps, differentiated mouse-pointer icons and situational identifying soundtracks. Pentes has exploited the ways in which expressive multimedia can parallel the modes, feel and mechanisms of memory-in-anecdote to memorialise her grandparents' lives in a work that at last makes musical structural metaphors something more than a branding exercise.

Los Dias y las Noches de Los Muertos (*The Days and Nights of the Dead*), a website from **Francesca da Rimini** (www.thing.net/~dollyoko/LOSDIAS/INDE.X.HTML) with sound by **Mikey Grimm** and grafix and translations from a big gaggle of collaborators, is virtually *nothing but* segue, contracted to such a hyperkinetic attack it strafes you. Step 1: download the soundtrack and get its stripped industrial-electronica going. Step 2: um, that's someone crying isn't it? & someone screaming...moaning—disconsolate sobs and it sounds like—& feels like—torture...weird how I'm kicked out of viewer-ly complacency by war's fallout coming tinnily from my tiny speakers. Step 3: "click to start", a disingenuously clichéd invitation that ends up spawning a new window, ambushing my browser to set off a series of graphical and plain-text detonations.

It's all auto-refreshing, webpages replaced automatically by another without a mouse-click. Try clicking and you just get more 3-second-delay transitions.



Tatiana Pentes, *Strange Cities*

We're talking hypertext-as-70s-zapping in Greenaway split-screen TV here, 5 frames vertiginously kaleidoscoping between quotations from Napoleon on the art of war, press stuff from the Zapatistas, excerpts from the US Space Command's 'Vision 2000' policy (terrifyingly vacuous...but remember Reagan's 'Star Wars?'), Machiavellian directives for netwar and a slew of snippets posing as ICQ Logs strobing you in Exhibit-A flashes. In a kind of striking narrativisation of the Seattle WTO protest, globalising multinational capitalism is made to lip-synch the motives and pragmatics of war. So you get, for instance, EXXON announcing "death is nothing; but to live vanquished and without glory is to die every day"; or The Vatican Bank, or Shell, or Coca Cola, philosophising on battle. For anyone who's followed the harrowing online media accounts, the visceral experiences and pleas of the Zapatistas, colliding—often almost literally—with the blandly glib, spin-doctored policy statements on war and the vortex of imagery...it's wrenching.

Similarly disturbing, but uncannily, is *Whoseland.com*, an "inter@ctive documentary" (it's 2000: let's declare a moratorium on @) about the 1998 Africa-Australia Exchange on *Land Rights for the Millennium* (www.whoseland.com). It reads, from Howard's (un)sorry 2000 state of affairs, as an uncanny present-tense palimpsest of connections made and missed, hopes now boxed-up in apathy, and a productive international effort at recompense, equity, practical solutions and modest proposals. It generates its momentum from chronology: the inception of the project, its main press conferences (one by Ben Elton at his ratbag best), the experiences of the delegates from Maasai and Barabaig peoples in Australia and of the Kimberley Land Council in Africa, the 1998 Melbourne protest march, heading towards the Centenary Celebrations in 2000. Each section's colour-coded, crystallised in a spiral site-map and navigable by elegant icons, backed by extensive content varying from first-person accounts to full transcripts, a click-zoom-able map of tribal ownership and languages, and a useful collection of research papers.

The writing is taut and engaging throughout, exploiting the narrative drive and delegates' excitement, heavily and effectively illustrated by photos and vox-pop videos. Return exchange visits were planned for 1999 but—and this is more than the usual existential whinge—although the site promises to provide

updated content up to 2000, it peters out at 1999, exacerbating the cross-wired time perspectives.

Sharkfeed, by **John Grech** and **Matthew Leonard** (www.abc.net.au/sharkfeed/index.htm; see *RealTime/OnScreen* 38), extends such cross-wiring by looping round a 1960 kidnapping-murder case, and literalises it in 'rephotography', which makes a refrain out of re-framing photos with the same subject over disparate time and place locations. In June 1960 the Thorne family from Bondi won the Opera House Lottery (100,000 pounds!), which led to their son Graeme being kidnapped by Stephen Lesley Bradley (Istvan Baranjoy), a migrant Jewish-Hungarian WWII survivor, for a ransom. Graeme died, probably inadvertently but horribly nonetheless on the day of the kidnapping.

As with *Strange Cities*, the project is in focal flux from the main storyline outwards, bricolaging an album of traces from archival footage, old news media photos, recordings, interview/broadcast transcripts, sound files (from Paul Robeson singing in Sydney to the Police Commissioner's briefings), headlines, reconstructed evidence snapshots, sketches, photo montages, mixed-time-period panoramas, and crime-scene maps.

The project's creators explore the way the Thorne case inaugurated the long history of sensationalist quickie-trash true-crime books, yet *Sharkfeed* regularly falls into the same exploitative formulae, like: "Graeme Thorne was kidnapped on the way to school, a journey from which he never returned. Afterwards, nothing was quite the same again." Um, yes. Etc. The main navigation option ('continue' or 'about' as rollovers) is not exactly aesthetically or hypertextually exciting, but you also get regular 'detour' possibilities, a nice-if-superfluous VRML interface, and category menus; but it's the transitions that rescue it from TV-re-enactment, circling round from the compelling narrative-doco and true-crime-voyeur arcs into the wider disturbing social issues. Sure, it leads to some questionable philosophising—"as the lives of all those children were lost, they began another kind of life, in a mythical space from which they can never escape"—and gratuitous puns on 'corpus', but it'll absorb you and make you think, get you arguing and where's your kid right now?

In contrast to the centripetal pull of a main storyline, *Archiving Imagination* (www.archiving.com.au/archiving/index.html) is an unapologetically dis-

parate sampler of collaborations between **Robin Petterd** (digital media artist) and **Diane Caney** (writer/web-author and editor of the *Australian Humanities Review*). Most of the works are brief and concentrated, surreal or haiku-ish poetic writing dramatised by video or made into rhythmic movements by minimal design, braided hyperlink arcs, discrete sound effects, muted terrace-house colour schemes and a beautiful line in fade-in-fade-out gif animations lushly mirroring the lyrical text... "and when I sleep my mind bathes in the memory of your skin." Often coyly unpredictable or navigationally unclear, the design forces cursor exploration: rollovers, image-maps, auto-opening links and floating windows are all used to pointed textual effect with surprises and hidden sections. And the writing itself, to which the focus always returns, is worth the hunt and the wait.

Alyssa Rothwell's *From My Porch* CD-ROM is three-in-one: *Three Mile Creek*, *Getting Dollied Up* and *Pretty Aprons*. The first 2 have only minimal writing components, so I won't cover them here. But *Pretty Aprons!* An absolute bloody gem, as its characters, or my ex-country-town Dad, would say. After some exquisite time-lapse sand animations, you're suddenly in front of a sketched old pedal-powered Singer sewing machine, a basket of cloth by your feet, teacup on the edge. You're on a farm, making aprons for Xmas gifts. Drag your cloth onto the Singer and fragments from sewing patterns or recipes or a faded women's magazine slide onto the screen: assemble them and the stories start, rendered in miniature-insert sand animations or in beautiful pencil sketches featuring a character wearing something made from the cloth you chose. You can drop in on an old chatty neighbour for eggs and stay for a nice cuppa, which you pour yourself, setting off a tangle of yarns about everything from onions as a baldness cure to growing up a tomboy. At one point the teapot just won't stop pouring and as the tide rises round the armchair you hear all about the '54 flood. Then there's the salesyard, the ballet lesson with the Mums sitting knitting but pirouetting inside, while a Prunella Scales voice harangues you "2,3,4...bottoms in THANK you"...but, oh, my favourite was the piano-practice, where you can either listen to someone practising (oops, wrong note) or play the piano yourself with the mouse (no, really). And if you stop playing for more than 5 seconds Mum querulously yells from the kitchen "Why've you stopped?!"

Each time you've had enough of a scene you can pull the pins out to return to the sewing machine and there's another finished apron hanging on the line. A young girl works throughout as the narrator, encouraging you to finish another apron, telling tales on her Mum and her passion for sewing, how once, when the cat finally made a mistake in its acrobatic provocation of the dogs from its perch up on the water-tank, Mum came home to find its insides hanging out, so she took a small needle and some thin fishing line and sewed it back together on the verandah. To this day she wonders if she'd used a bigger needle or a different stitch it'd be walking without a Karloff twist. Funny, real, addictive. For the first time ever I wanna buy a CD-ROM and give it to friends as a present, better'n a book.

Now, naturally, having begun by pontificating about textual transitions, it's become impossible for me to extricate myself by segueing gracefully to a neat close. So I won't.

Dean Kiley teaches the theory & practice of...um, lots of online stuff, at Swinburne University, and is the Online Learning Specialist for Wesley College.

Richard Adams Clem's Big Scary World

This is possibly the world's first surreal encyclopaedia on CD-ROM made by a paranoid 93 year-old from Bluebottle Beach on the NSW Central Coast, and possibly the last one too. The big challenge was for one determined pensioner to produce a title with as much material and educational credibility as something like Microsoft's *Encarta*. Now Microsoft will no doubt have to hire another 500 researchers to ensure their title stays as informative as *Clem's Big Scary World*.

Clem was born in Bluebottle Beach 93 years ago and has never, ever left the place. His hobbies include toast collecting and worrying about a giant tsunami wiping out his town. This CD-ROM is his first brush with technology since buying his trusty old toaster in 1956.

Matthew Beer of Big Stick Productions (www.bigstick.com.au) provided the graphic design, most of the programming, and many of his own images. Richard Fox and Adam Hinshaw assisted with programming, Alex Davies assisted with sound, Robert Adams and Louise Fox provided Clem (clem@zip.com.au) with his research.

Release July 2000. Australian Film Commission. Website early September: www.bigscaryworld.com.

Paul Brown chromos

chromos shows the complete expansion of a set of 4 marks over time. The work is created on-the-fly and so does not show any repetitive behaviour and is different every time it is viewed. It exists on the screen of a computer as either a web-based Shockwave piece or a free-standing CD-ROM application. *chromos* also includes a set of 8 prints known as *The Book of Transformations*. To date, the work has consisted of tedious hand-crafting to create the display engine. Ways of building on artificial intelligence or artificial life processing in order to give the piece some behavioural intention are being investigated.

Paul Brown is a New Media Arts Fellow of the Australia Council and artist-in-residence at the Centre for Computational Neuroscience and Robotics and the School of Cognitive and Computer Sciences at the University of Sussex. He is based in Queensland. Collaborator: Gavin Sade (lingo code).

Completion late 2000. New Media Arts, Australia Council. paul@paul-brown.com
www.paul-brown.com/GALLERY/TIMEBASE/CHROMOS/INDEX.HTM

Tracey Benson Dotty's tour of Oz

Dotty's tour of Oz is an online mystery maze, an Australian landscape through which the user travels as a lost tourist, Dotty, a Judy Garland-like figure trapped in an eternal childhood. The technical challenges are in expanding the web version into an interactive CD-ROM game.

Tracey Benson is a multimedia artist and curator whose work has been presented in the USA, England, Ireland, Netherlands and Russia. She recently exhibited work in the Experimenta Media Arts online gallery, N5M3 (Netherlands) and MAAP'99. She has been artist-in-residence with the *Cowgriffs.com* project at Cooloola Shire Gallery and lectures part time at the University of the Sunshine Coast in the computer-based Art and Design faculty. Collaborators (CD-ROM): Danny Guinsberg (multimedia artist), Ross Barber (sound artist), Linda Carroli (catalogue writer). traceyb@thehub.com.au

Completion September 2000. Evolution can be viewed at www.bigbananatime/dotty.htm



Paul Bai Greetings from Chinatown

Greetings involves 9 postcards which will be featured on the MAAP website in September as e-greeting cards. The work focuses on the collapse of physical distance between people made possible by modern communication technology while the cultural and social distance remain the same.

The challenge has been to use Macromedia Generator to turn the artworks into electronic greeting cards on the webpage, so people can write text on the e-cards and send them to others on the net.

Paul Bai arrived in Australia in 1988 and studied fine art at the Queensland College of Art. In his work he examines the cultural and political roles of the Chinese in contemporary Australian society. He has had exhibitions at Gallery 4A and the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane City Gallery and a public installation in Brisbane city. hiroshimamonamour@hotmail.com

Arts Queensland. Site launched as part of MAAP2000 Festival September 1 - 17, www.maap.org.au

Keith Armstrong t_lounge

t_lounge substantially reworks a low-budget interactive installation called *transit_lounge* (1) originally produced for Brisbane's Metro Arts foyer in mid 1999 (RealTime 32 page 29). *t_lounge's* installation space allows audiences to have important but indirect effect upon a dual screen continuous non-linear narrative. The work features 10 characters performed, at times simultaneously, by Lisa O'Neill.

This ongoing practice seeks to develop an 'open' framework for site specific 'new media space' design which fosters participatory, creative processes between audience and artists. Aiming to avoid direct causal interactivity, it acknowledges systemic or 'ecological' operations, and promotes a strong aesthetic and intellectual response.



Keith Armstrong is a Brisbane-based artist with a long history of producing site specific, new media installation and performance works for public places. His major collaborative works have been shown extensively in Queensland in places such as the historic Spring Hill Baths, Platform 1 of Brunswick Street Railway Station and the Metro Arts foyer. Collaborators: Lisa O'Neill (performance direction), Guy Webster (sound), Gavin Sade, Annette Muller, Sean Young, Callum Lui.

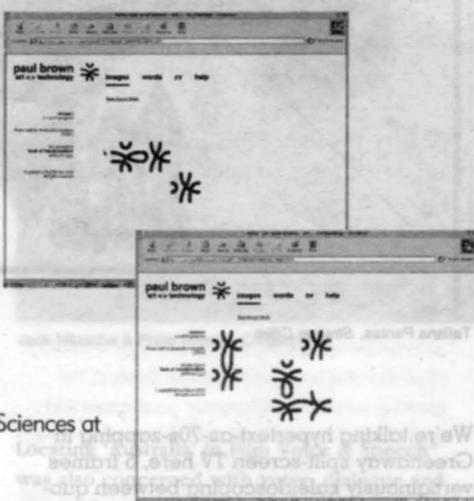
Artspace, Sydney, August 10-September 2. karmstrong@mac.com

Anthony Christou Yenam

The goal for this crazy, deconstructive and surreal cartoon is to create 3 movies at least 5 minutes long that break the boundaries of what people imagine cartoons to be. The movies are Flash animations for the internet, some 3 dimensional and some 2-dimensional.

Anthony Christou is an emerging visual artist who works in digital media and is a Flash website designer.

Completion December 2000. The storyline and characters can be viewed at www.arcomnet.net.axu/~christou/yenam.web%20pages/yenam.htm. A series of animations deconstructing *Yenam* are at www.arcomnet.net.au/~christou/yenam.html



Ian Haig Anti ergonomic hump machine

An installation designed to produce bad posture and humps in the backs of its users with continual use, this work looks at the inverse of ergonomics, where the adverse effects of computers on the human body can be seen as desirable body modifications.

The challenge is to deliberately produce a work that is regressive and self consciously wrong in its thinking—an alternative orthopaedic device for reshaping the human body, which explores the theme of devolution and rethinks our relationship with technology as something which is not always intrinsically 'progressive.'

Ian Haig is a media artist working across video, installation and animation media. Recently his work has been seen in The New York Digital Salon, Visual Arts Museum, New York; Transmediale Festival, Berlin; and FILE, Museum of Image and Sound, Sao Paulo, Brazil. Recent works include *The Super Human Factory Online*, *Psycho Samba* and *Web Devolution*.

Completion November 2000. i.haig@rmit.edu.au

Daniel Crooks inside-out; control

The aim with this installation is to use the data streams (the rhythms and patterns) of our environment as the direct means of spatial and temporal camera control. The flow of a river modulates the pace of a track-mounted camera. The temperature of a decaying animal controls the frame rate of its own timelapse. The endless flow of numbers tapped and rerouted offers new perceptions of the processes by which they are generated.

The major technical challenges are primarily due to budget constraints. Cheap, custom developed options are usually a little more tricky to get up and running than the expensive, off-the-shelf variety. Learning a programming language is harder than paying someone else who already knows it.

Daniel Crooks trained as an animator and graphic designer. His short films, video and interactive work have won several major awards, including a Dendy Award, an ATOM Award, and the City of Stuttgart Prize for Animation. Following an Australia Council New Media fellowship at RMIT in 1997, Daniel's work has become increasingly focused on temporal manipulation and motion control, exploring the nature of time, space and environmental actuation. somebody@dlab.com.au

Exhibition early 2001. New Media Arts Fund, Australia Council. dlab.com.au



Martine Corompt Wild boy

This installation combines sculpture, animation and a pop song, drawing on the yearning and sense of loss that is the hallmark of the sad pop song/ballad. Exaggerating this sentiment, the singer is an animated singing head in the form of a 'wild' half human/half beast. This 2 dimensional character without a body and presumably also without a soul, is all the more tragic for its Frankensteinian predicament, being 'brought to life' (via animation and song) without history, purpose or consent.



Martine Corompt's work combines elements such as drawing, video, sound, sculpture automata and, sometimes, computers. Works include *Sorry* (1996), *PetShop* (1998) and *Dodg'em* (1999) which is touring Perth, Brisbane and Sydney this year. She currently works at Media Arts RMIT, lecturing in Experimental Animation and Interactive Installation. Collaborator: David 'HoneySmack' Habberfeld.

Wild boy will be exhibited at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, November 23 - Dec 16, 2000. martine@rmit.edu.au

Ross Gibson, Kate Richards Life after Wartime



Life after Wartime is a CD-ROM which brings to light the legacy of a city's recent past. A story engine produces countless montages of thought and feeling from mysterious forensic photos, evocative captions and musical sound effects. As we follow our curiosities and compulsions, we piece together larger patterns of

stories and historical notes that offer ways to account for the photographs. The challenge is in using archival material so that it suggests its own interpretations; straddling documentary and fiction; creating fast, malleable faux 3D space as a metaphor for the consciousness of the story-recipient.

Kate Richards is a freelance multimedia producer and artist. She has exhibited nationally and internationally and is currently a Research Fellow in New Media at UTS. Ross Gibson is a writer and media artist who is currently the Creative Director of Cinemedia's Screen Gallery, Victoria. Collaborators: Kate Richards (producer), Ross Gibson (writer/director), Greg White (programmer), Aaron Rogers (designer), Chris Abrahams (composer).

Completion, August 2000. UTS Internal Research Grant; Australian Film Commission. kate.richards@uts.edu.au

Kaz Madigan



Feast

This project is my contribution to an exhibition by ArtAngels (a group of regional women artists). The collective focus is on the interpretation of feast imagery and its meaning in reference to food, indulgence, body image and food justice.

I am interested in technical platforms which create artistic, fluid works. Like my arts practice, handweaving, the internet presents strict protocols which can be reworked with innovation to create new types of communication and imagery.

I am an artist/handweaver/writer and teacher currently transferring these skills and ideas to internet projects. I am the author of *The Australian Weaving Book* and was publisher/editor of *Curious Weaver*, a journal for Australasian weavers. I also serve as a mentor at trAce International Online Writing Community. curiousweaver@hotmail.com Completion, September 2000. www.geocities.com/curiousweaver

Hobbs, Xavier, Beames & Glaser Doctor Pancoast's Cabinet de Curiosités

Anatomically accurate computer graphics and original celluloid vignettes recreate Doctor Pancoast's prurient misadventures. Locked inside his Cabinet are clues to fascinating and vile perversions. In here, monsters live, hidden behind rules of genteel etiquette, concealed inside quaint notions of scientific discovery.



Doctor Pancoast's Cabinet de Curiosités is a narrative with 2 intended distribution outcomes: release as an interactive multimedia and self contained linear short. Managing the narrative structure of each whilst making best use of common graphic content has posed a great challenge. Also, providing a satisfying story experience in the interactive has been a key issue for ongoing discussion.

Collaborators: Amelia Lalanne Hobbs, Marie-Louise Xavier, Nic Beames and Michelle Glaser. Past collaborations between Xavier and Glaser (with Robyn Marais) include *tetragenia*, a net based artwork exhibited in the 1999 Festival of Perth and *Juvenate* (with Andrew Hutchison; see page 6), an interactive narrative selected for exhibition in the interactive program of the 2000 Melbourne Film Festival. Lalanne Hobbs is a freelancer accomplished in both screen and print design. Featured in *Doctor Pancoast* are drawings by WA artists Gina Moore and Richard Gibley.

Completion December 2000. Australian Film Commission; ScreenWest. glaser@wantree.com.au

Redefining hybridity: CD-ROM possibilities

Mike Leggett

It was but 6 years ago that the first works on CD-ROM by artists made their appearance, only 5 since the initial net art sites emerged. The rapid expansion of artists' sites in the last 2 years has eclipsed and diminished the desire to place work onto CD. The considerable range of skills needed to make an interactive CD-ROM and then distribute it have kept artists' attention on the improving quality and range of options available online—faster access times; browser and production software adapting to the desire for sound and movement; and an on tap means for delivering curated exhibitions to the audience (no freight, no installation, no need for a sustained level of funding).

Moving out of the notional centre (from the confined spaces of the gallery, from the vicissitudes of curatorial taste) into the digital highways and byways of cyberspace is becoming challenged, a la revenant, by the laneways and streetscapes of the analogue city. *Drive by* was a series of shop window projection installations by the **Retarded Eye** group for the Perth 2000 International Festival. (See *RealTime* 37, page 18). One of the works *A throw of the dice (can never abolish chance)* was made by **Vikki Wilson** with performer/writer **Erin Hefferon** as "an experiment in electronic writing to produce a work that makes a 'movie' on the fly with text, sound and video. The 'movie' is recognisably the same story but different in each version: a series of compressed serial-killer narratives—Perth-dwellers have been living with this story for some time." The work reiterates its storylines, building a collage of permutations over time and was developed from a narrative database engine (made by **Cam Merton** of Retarded Eye), holding movies, sounds and sentences scripted to combine into narrative sequences as the engine runs. A DVD delivered the piece to the projector installation and is accessible on the web (<http://arc.imago.com.au/driveby>), indicating an inexorable movement by this group and a few others overseas towards forms of online cinema.

As a work distributed on videotape, *Love Hotel* anticipates these shifts, summarising in 7 minutes of linear exposition the impact of online culture and communities on gender politics. **Linda Wallace** (www.machinehunger.com.au) takes video collected from Japan and New York and layers it in windows and boxes containing the words of *Puppet Mistress* (**Francesca da Rimini**) reading excerpts from *Fleshmeat*, her forthcoming anthology, www.thing.net/~dollyoko, vectoring meanings from the collisions of resulting images. Screened recently as part of *d>art00*, the project adopts the provisional location of the love hotel to materialise in the media guises of cinema, television, multimedia, internet and next... gallery installation?

Rosalind Brodsky in her time travelling costumes spans right across the 20th century and into 2058, the year of her demise. The space she occupies during this bungee-jump is, of course, the virtual space of the interactive multimedia computer and the encounter between each user and the rich imagination of the artist... *No Other Symptoms—Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*. Rosalind (the alter ego of the CD-ROM's maker **Suzanne Treister**, see *RealTime* 34, page 22) delivers a monologue that ranges across late 20th century media studies discussion points from psychoanalysis to Mary Poppins, vibrators, sci-fi films, the Russian Revolution (complete with clips from Eisenstein's *October*), 60s euphoria and hope for the future. Stories of Old Europe—pogroms, revolts, émigrés—are encountered. They are central to her history. Rosalind wishes to be "...connected to (her) roots..." and interspersed are photos and videos of the Treister family members, as family and as players in re-enactments of historical



Linda Dement *In My Gash*

moments and encounters with extensive figments of Freud, Jung, Klein, Lacan and Kristeva. Rosalind as a time traveller is able, of course, to warn Freud to leave for London...he does. She sees a lot more of him. And so can we...

Lisa Roberts time travels via the simple action of turning the hands of a clock backwards and forwards (I discovered eventually this had to be performed quite vigorously), until entry is given to the labyrinths of the CD-ROM *Terra Incognita*. The smoke and mirror possibilities of the authoring tool Director (in spite of inexorable pixel-dissolves) recreated the séance-like atmosphere of the magic lantern, with static images from the artist's experienced pencil and paint gestures flickering through parts of the writer **Carmel Bird's** fiction, the images forming "the basis for an interactive 'map' of the creative process" perceived by the artist in response to the writer's work. This is the work of a mature artist picking up and learning a complex multimedia tool.

Juvenate, from the Perth team of **Michelle Glaser, Andrew Hutchison and Marie-Louise Xavier**, also explores intersections of memory—"The beginning and the end reach out their hands to each other." The simple action of rolling over unmarked parts of the images stimulates sounds and successive images to emerge in a flow of snapshot and watercolour elements constructed around the domestic. Abrasions, lesions and drips intervene into the sound of children's voices as the user moves through the 36 scenes following a route that can be re-visited once learnt.

Linda Dement has recently completed her third CD-ROM, *In My Gash*. Like the earlier works, she creates a gentle correspondence between the user and the complex representations seen and heard, that in spite of the implication and threat of violence witnessed gives access through a real engagement to comprehension rather than the dead-end of the hopeless and intractable. As **Anna Munster** has observed: "Dement's 3D animated renderings of gashes seemingly offer up representations of the mysterious leap from the physical to the psychical, from the outside to the inside, from the beautiful to the grotesque that straddle our understanding of gender relations (*Photofile* 60, forthcoming)."

TellTale is the flipside CD-ROM, "a mixture of sweetness, courage, nauseating patheticness and romance" in the words of its creator, **Rebecca Bryant**. As an immersion into the world of a soapie-like group of 'characters in situations', it enables the user to terminate irksome storylines, back into a more promising combination of plot-line options and when all else fails, simply read scurrilous footnotes about members

of the cast. Whilst navigation is elegantly designed and effected, the flux that personifies the notion of the soapie is placed into a state of fixity when delivered as a CD-ROM. Internet narrative possibilities have advanced this option more recently, utilising streamlined vector graphics which, when coupled with graphic images of the kind in *TellTale*, simulate a cinematic experience. (**Jonni Nitro** at www.eruptor.com and **Too Hot** at www.toohot.com are examples of the form if not the content).

The use of the 360 degree virtual space linked via rollovers to movies and graphic sequences enables discrete narratives to be coordinated into the virtual installation of *Cross Currents* by **Dennis Del Favero**, investigating the sex slave trade of Western Europe (see *RealTime* 34, page 32), or the encyclopedic *Lore of the Land* from **Fraynetwork Multimedia**. A big budget project involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians mostly in Victoria, the multi-faceted chapters examine history, ecology, culture, law and land with an approach that encourages the upkeep of an integrated personal journal of the user's journey through the work, collecting images and notes along the way. A curious game of *Discovery* is incorporated (separately authored by **Troy Innocent**) which involves collecting artefacts from an uninhabited cave, egged on by an off-screen Aboriginal voice, before returning them to the ground. The goal of all this earnest activity is to move towards understanding, and the achievement of, reconciliation. The navigation system whilst easy to use keeps this rich resource at arm's length relying, like a television doco, on the personalities of the individual contributors to provide the spirit of the piece. The outcomes of individual journals linked through a website forum (www.loreoftheland.com.au) potentially close the gap between the user and the experience and process of assimilating this work.

User confidence is challenged in the elegant *Electronic Sound Remixers* by **Tobias Kazumichi Grime**, where the ubiquitous Director authoring tool enables the user to combine from a palette of attractive sounds a mix using a design grid with an attractive variety of visual slider devices. Is the mix actual or, as the user begins to suspect, the result of options only partially given by the author?

Virtual kitchens were a factor in the mix of the year's completed works. *Dream Kitchen* by **Leon Cmielewski** and **Josephine Starrs** submerges us beneath the smooth surfaces of the domestic laboratory to examine its seams and what lies hidden: fire-raising pencils and pens, anthropomorphised garbage, an opportunity to take the Interface Test and apply an increasing electrical voltage to a dead

frog. Witnessing from a surveillance position behind the phone the S&M goings-on of the otherwise absent owners adds spice to this ingenious wunderkuchekabinet.

Michael Buckley's *Good Cook* dives beneath the psychic surfaces of the professional kitchen during a sleepless night for the chef. The user shares his frustration at not being able to shake off meandering thought and image recollections as the mouse threads our way from the trials of the previous night's work to childhood memories and the paternal pathways of songs and scriptures.

Delivered after a short gestation, the pixel, the byte and the inkjet are seamlessly integrated via the CCD and the chip into a contemporary practice that is again dissolving the artificial barriers to the possible erected by corporate culture and the ambitions of software engineers. Time-based technologies used to 'fix light to a time signature' are in ever more constant flux, again redefining the terms of hybridity, again continuing the development trajectory of the newer media within screen culture.

Mike Leggett is guest editor of *Photofile* #60 (August 2000), see page 18.

A longer version of this article appears on the *RealTime* website with references to works by **Carla Gottgens and Samantha Slicer, Anna Tow, James Hancock** and another work by **Michael Buckley**.

Mike Leggett curates, teaches and writes about media arts and is currently developing a multimedia project for the Australian Film Commission.

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The end of new media art?

Mitchell Whitelaw

Drawing as it does on rapidly changing technology, electronic art is always looking out for the next wave, a new process, a new platform. As the technology industries continue to generate novelty—a mixture of promises and products—at a breathtaking rate, artists adopt and adapt both the rhetoric and the technology, slipping behind the biggest, fastest juggernaut around.

So in the year when, as a child, I imagined the future would finally arrive, there is an interesting, subtle sense of pressure on the electronic arts—as if they too should be finally 'arriving,' coming up with the goods, delivering on their promises and aspirations, breaking into the mainstream. At the same time, the status of the electronic arts is undergoing perhaps its most serious challenge—because the future is arriving, in a straightforward, quotidian way, but it's arriving all over the place, indiscriminately and without regard for who's been waiting the longest. Here I want to discuss that challenge, and show how it may ultimately—in fact *hopefully*—bring about the end of 'electronic art,' 'digital art' and 'new media art' as they currently exist.

This challenge arises quietly, as a particular threshold is crossed—a threshold of technological saturation. Over the past decade, high-tech (and specifically digital) media forms have proliferated to the point of being ubiquitous in our everyday lives. Almost every manufactured image that we see—every laser-printed flyer taped to a pole, every book jacket, every billboard, every TV ad—is now a high-tech artefact, a product of layers of digital processing and production. Film, a uniquely persistent analogue medium, is embracing digital production. An overwhelming majority of the audio which we encounter is 'digital'—at least in its means of reproduction, though increasingly in its creation as well. At the same time, 'new' media forms (email, the web, console games, mobile phones) are threading themselves ever more tightly into everyday life.

A couple of years ago a new Coles supermarket opened in my neighbourhood, complete with an array of beautiful, flat LCD touchscreens which function as cash registers and point-of-sale advertising displays. When I first saw those screens, I was struck by their potential; I imagined somehow appropriating them for a lavish interactive artwork. They looked so incongruous: precious technological artefacts surrounded by racks of chewing gum and magazines. At some point since then, though, the screens changed: the supermarket assimilated them; now I just see cash registers with banner ads.

The saturation of our lives, and our culture, in media technology, is predictable enough; the process has been clearly underway for decades. What's more interesting here—and what the supermarket story illustrates—is that this process has finally reached a point where these media technologies are completely unremarkable. The 'digital-ness' of a CD simply doesn't matter (any more); nor does the fact that the titles for the evening news are computer-generated, or that this publication is digitally typeset. Even where the technology itself is unavoidable, the rhetoric around it now concentrates on basic utility value: the commercial, consumer web packages itself as a lifestyle-enhancer, a time-saver, an appliance, but never as a technology.

This process of disappearance or dissolution is facilitated by the increasing sophistication of digital media technologies. This is clear in Hollywood cinema where digital technique is crossing a corresponding threshold of perception; nobody remembers the computer graphics in *Saving Private Ryan*. Contrast this with the self-referential graphics of 10 or 20 years ago; remember the opening titles to the first series of *Towards 2000*? Glowing wireframe jet planes and spacecraft zoom out of the screen. The message was clear: "the future is technology, and it's coming right for you." Now that we're here, the glowing wireframe is a retro icon for a simpler time. Contemporary media technology is a shape-shifter—it puts on the skins of forms it's killed (film grain filters, lens flare effects, vinyl crackle plug-ins)—but can look and sound like anything, or nothing.

What does this shift mean for the electronic

or 'new media' arts? In one sense, it means almost nothing, or rather, more of the same. As media technologies become more sophisticated and more accessible, the arts benefit; more room for experimentation and play, more potential, more power, more scope. These have always been the payoffs for riding with the technology juggernaut. In another sense however, this shift represents a significant challenge to the ways in which the high-tech arts construct and identify themselves.

Sparked perhaps by the reluctance of the established art-world to accept their work, artists using electronic media have gathered, over the past 2 decades, under such generic banners as 'electronic art,' 'digital art,' and 'new media art.' An active international scene has emerged, with its own institutions, events, stars, critics, and gossip, all organised around a common creative engagement with technology. This identification with a technological medium has been useful in many ways: technology is a drawcard, a (largely) positive cultural marker, often attractive to the powers that be. While often highly critical of its technologies of choice, electronic art has also been happy to borrow the progressive rhetorics of 'cutting edge' technoculture for self-promotional purposes.

That rhetoric only works, though, when the technologies involved are new and exotic, and digital media are no longer either of those things. Where does this leave (not-so-) new media art? Those with a hankering for the experimental will no doubt continue to seek out esoteric and emerging technologies; biotech art is already a reality, no doubt nanotech art is close at hand. Having been crowded out of digital media, the high-tech avant-garde might simply move elsewhere. However there is another option which is more radical, but also more interesting: what if artists working with

technology stopped identifying their practice as 'new media art' or 'digital art'? How useful are these designators in a culture in which digital media are the ascendant status quo? What if the technology-based banners for this field were simply taken down, now that their age is starting to show?

Suppose for a moment that this were possible, and imagine the consequences. It might demonstrate that these generic labels have never been a useful way of thinking about, or engaging with, this practice. They lump a diverse range of work into a category which ignores the most interesting aspects of the work—its content—and concentrates on a set of technical and production processes. If that category were to dissolve—as it is dissolving in culture at large—we might find a more complex way of thinking about this work. All those clusters of shared values, approaches and aesthetics which already exist within new media practice would come to the fore—those groupings would be recognised, rather than subsumed. At the same time, the networks of trans-disciplinary influence and continuity which already run across the field would develop. These banners involve an act of differentiation, a declaration of a separate practice—yet among the richest zones are those where electronic media meet existing creative and discursive traditions.

The notion of 'new media' as some kind of radical move and/or critical problem will, with any luck, recede. That hoary old excuse for the uneven quality of new media practice—that it's 'early days,' and that 'in X years we'll look back on this as the beginning of a new era'—will go with it. More space and energy will be left for a real engagement with the work, in all its cultural and creative specificity. Of course this is not to propose that the media themselves should be ignored, either by artists or critics. The

process of grappling with the medium is part of doing creative work, just as the process of deconstructing, interrogating and analysing those media is part of critical work. In rapidly-changing domains such as the web, these processes are crucial, and certainly net.art plays an ever-more-essential role in offering alternative ways of thinking through that medium. Still, there's more to it than that.

What about those organisations structured around medium-specific banners? What of the funding bodies, who play an important role in the construction of those categories of practice? Without the banners of 'new media' or 'digital art,' and the sense of solidarity and legitimacy which they bring with them, artists may find it even more difficult to gain support for their work. It's these (important) pragmatics which will most likely ensure that this thought-experiment is never realised. Take it instead as a wistful vision; a sprawling continuum where high- and low-tech art co-exist and intermingle. Or better, a polemical jolt, a hypothetical. Either way, the wider process which sparked it is obstinately real; the 'new media' are becoming everyday, unremarkable, imperceptible, ubiquitous—and they won't be new for long. Similarly, the best thing that could happen to 'new media art' would be for it to dissolve—not vanish, but dissolve—and for the medium to give way to the work.

Mitchell Whitelaw is a writer, academic and artist with interests in sound and "new media." He has recently completed a PhD at the University of Technology, Sydney, on the work of new media artists using artificial life. His audio work else is forthcoming through Fällt (www.fallt.com).

This article is a variation of a talk given at the Being Digital forum, chaired by Susan Charlton and organised by dLux media arts, as part of the Sydney Film Festival, Dendy Martin Place, Sydney June 15.

ensemble logic

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AUSTRALIA COUNCIL

Music Theatre Radio Residency: Call for Proposals

Application Deadline: Friday 29 September 2000

The New Media Arts Fund and the Music Fund of the Australia Council, in collaboration with ABC Radio Arts, call for proposals to undertake the new Music Theatre Radio Residency.

This innovative Residency is designed to enable an emerging artist or creative team, who can demonstrate outstanding artistic potential, to undertake a three-month residency in 2001 with ABC Radio Arts for the creation of music theatre works for the medium of radio. The Residency is valued at \$20,000.

Applications are welcomed from emerging artists working in audio, performance, dance, media arts, and composition. The Residency is not limited to audio artists who have previously worked within a broadcast medium. All applications must respond to the criteria outlined in the Residency brief.

For copies of the Residency brief and further information please contact:

Vanessa Chalker, Music Fund, Australia Council, Tel: (02) 9215 9115 or 1800 226 912 (toll free), e-mail: v.chalker@ozco.gov.au

or

Julie Regan, New Media Arts Fund, Australia Council, (02) 9215 9132, or 1800 226 912 (toll free) e-mail: j.regan@ozco.gov.au



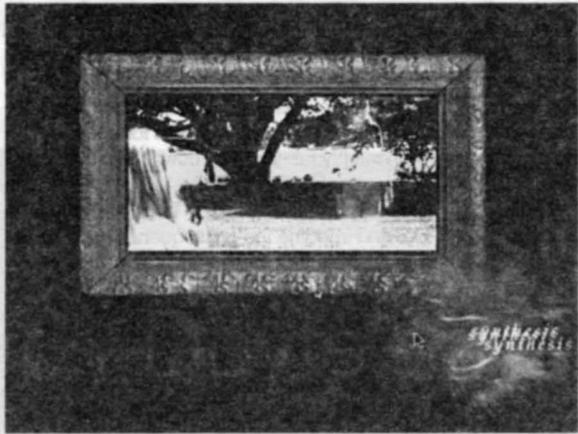
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Megan Heyward Of Day Of Night

A person has lost the ability to dream. Through a series of creative tasks, they attempt to spark their unconscious into dreaming again. This experiment in new media narrative is a hybrid of cinematic, textual and interactive elements, exploring intersections between oneiric experience and the fragmentations, multiplicities and juxtapositions of new media form. The challenge is to animate a text through sound and image with room for uncertainty, indecision, wandering and chance.

With video, sound, text and interactivity, Megan Heyward writes in new media. She developed *I Am A Singer* (1997) with the support of the Australian Film Commission, acting as writer, artist, programmer, sound designer and director. *I Am A Singer* has been widely exhibited internationally and has won several Australian and international new media awards. Megan lectures in new media in the Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, UTS. Collaborators: Graham Cheney, Suheil Dahdal, Phil Kakulas.

Completion February/March 2001. Australian Film Commission and University of Technology, Sydney.
Megan.Heyward@uts.edu.au



Fiona Macdonald Museum Emotions

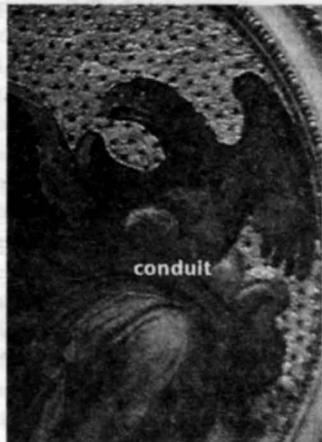
This project brings together the disciplines and conventions of narrative script writing, video and digital imagery, dance performance, composed music and digital sound design to develop a participatory and experiential concept of narrative using a spatial framework of video and sound installation.

The challenge of this work is to develop a form of narrative writing that is created as much through a spatial dimension as a time-based one. Using televisual conventions and rendering them in a purely imagistic way while sustaining a narrative through boundaries of sound and movement is a central idea. Narrative meaning develops from the audience's movement. This could occur in ways that are quite dramatic and confronting for the audience while remaining 'invisible.'

Fiona Macdonald is an artist working in photography, video and installation. Her work has been directed towards showing in public places and she has exhibited in contemporary art spaces and state galleries. Collaborators: Shelley Lasica (choreographer), Francois Tetaz (composer), Jo Lloyd, Deanne Butterworth, Kylie Walters (performers).
New Media Arts Fund, Australia Council.



Sally McLaughlin Real: a digital installation



In this exploration of the dynamics of interpreting experience, images drawn from contemporary environments are juxtaposed with terms such as 'nature', 'prosthesis' and 'body.' Shifts occur in understanding both the images and the terms. Assumptions about the authenticity of practices, modes and readings of experience are brought into play. The work was created over a period of 2 years, the collaborating artists working initially in different cities and ultimately in different countries.

Sydney-based Sally McLaughlin is an educator and interface designer who has developed commercial software, written

on theoretical issues in interface design, and developed programmes of study in media arts. Aaron Fry is a New Zealand artist currently in the USA where he teaches art and digital media.

Completion October 2000. The Waikato Polytechnic and Massey University, New Zealand; equipment and facilities provided by Massachusetts College of Art, USA. msally@visto.com

Second Nature

This non-narrative, 12 minute digital video work develops from abstract fast-moving colour and graphic sequences into tightly edited footage shot in a heavy industrial workplace. The soundtrack, a series of escalating noise intensities, uses the audio recorded onsite as a pure industrial sound element with no mixing down. The script, part translated into Japanese, is rendered in text as subtitles and as a graphic element.

The work is structured partly as a (computer) game, although without clear protagonists. The concept is a meditation on capitalism, commodification and the global economy. The graphic/animated sequences underline this by presenting the human element as interchangeable with a cartoon like or virtual presence.

Fiona Macdonald's video work has been shown in Australia at Experimenta and the St Kilda Film Festival, overseas at Ars Electronica and ISEA, and film festivals in Italy, Canada, USA and Germany.

Completion July 2000. Work made during tenure as artist-in-residence in the Department of Visual Culture at Monash University.

ART ORIENTE Objet & Maria Lunney

This as yet untitled work involves a 4 month collaboration-residency in Paris with contemporary art duo ART ORIENTE Objet (Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoit Mangin) to create a multi-media installation for an exhibition in September 2000 at Galerie des Archives, Paris. The project will explore the connections between visual culture, technology, science and philosophy via the concept of the "ready thought" in opposition to the "open work." The project contends that if Dadaism pondered the questions of the machine age, and the International Situationists questioned the urban capitalist environment, then today's question would be to find the place of artistic production in an excessively image saturated world.

Maria Lunney completed a Graduate Diploma in Fine Arts at the VCA in printmaking/film/video and has exhibited recently at the Melbourne International Biennial and the New York Drawing Marathon.

Completion September 2000; online December 2000; URL not yet specified. Also planned for CD-ROM. New Media Arts Fund, Australia Council.

mez Dataface Babe

Dataface Babe is a collaborative net.wurk that mezanders into the real world via a sculptural statement of virtual worth. This project is concerned with exploring the hackneyed notions of the 'interface' and developing alternative perspectives through a net.wurk reworking of this accepted paradigm.

Mez (Mary-Anne Breeze) is a widely exhibited net.wurk artist, avataristic author of the networked polysemic language system termed "mezangelle" and regular on and off-line journalist. Walter Brecely is an Australian-based visual artist with a fetish for metal who has exhibited and been involved in artistic-commissioned work for the last 7 years. mezandwalt@wollongong.starway.net.au.

Completion December 2000. <http://wollongong.starway.net.au/~mezandwalt>.



Sally Pryor As I May Write

An experimental and interactive artwork about writing systems and the human-computer interface, this project explores histories (eg earliest graphemes, "Picture Writing" etc), contemporary visual languages (eg Blissymbolics, logos etc), relevant theories (eg hypertext, semiotics etc) and possible applications of "intelligent" icons in an interactive media space.

I am trying to create a hybrid form which combines advantages of CD-ROM (a bandwidth enabling generous/good quality images/audio; the creation of an actual physical object) with the immediacy, connectivity and changeability of a website. The other challenge is that I make art in order to find out what I think/feel about something. So I can't do detailed technical and artistic planning before starting. I have to program it, "look" at it, re-program it, in a spiral process that works for me but makes team work difficult.

Sally Pryor is an artist/programmer and independent multimedia developer with an eclectic background including biochemistry and 3D computer animation. Her most recent work was the internationally award-winning CD-ROM *Postcard From Tunis*.

Completion June 2001. New Media Arts Fund Fellowship, Australia Council. A small web component exists online: www.ozemail.com.au/~spryor/write.html



Melinda Rackham empyrean

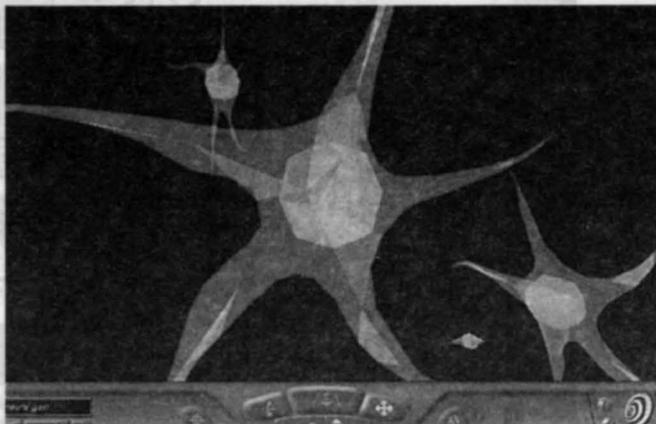
empyrean is a parallel universe, an online multi-user virtual reality environment, an arena beyond space and time—the void where all things are possible, the realm of the spirit, embracing the folds of the soul, a soft world of gaps and intervals, fluidly traced and transversed by in-tensions, relations, attractions and transitions between energetic avatars.

The challenges of the work are in 3 phases: firstly, to build an elegant vml space of low bandwidth and crossplatform and plugin compatibility for internet delivery by September 2000. Secondly, to have a stable crossplatform multiuser space for web performances by June 2001, and thirdly, to eventually port the online world into a hard space immersive virtual reality environment in a museum by late 2001.

Melinda Rackham is an artist and writer who has been constructing imaginal and hypertextual net.art in her domain www.subtle.net since 1995. She is currently undertaking a PhD at COFA UNSW, has widely exhibited her web works and published theoretical and poetic texts both in Australia and internationally, and recently won the Faulding Award for Multimedia for *Carrier*. melinda@subtle.net

Collaborators: Horst Kiechle (additional modelling and scripting), Mitchell Whitelaw (sound).

The website will be available for viewing in September. www.subtle.net/melinda@subtle.net



Robin Petterd Unsteady Motions

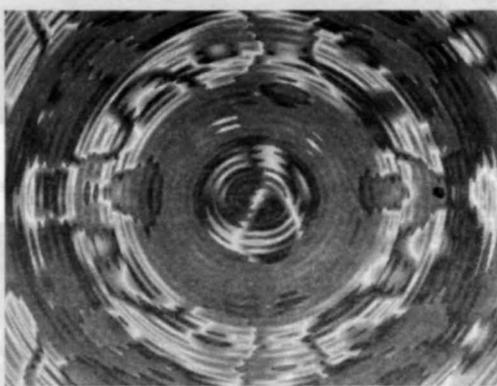
The visitor enters a dark space. An image of a tree being blown around in a storm appears. The visitor pauses to contemplate it. It freezes as they stop moving. They ponder the still image and the silence of the space in contrast to the turbulence of the storm. The image disappears. When the visitor moves the image erupts again.

The development of this piece has gone through many changes and explorations, different confirmations of images and sounds and responses to different types of movements. Constant technical compromises have had to be made between the image quality and the ability to process effects on the image in real time.

Robin Petterd's recent web-based work has been included in events in Australia, Brazil, the USA and Spain. His move to installation work is relatively recent and is part of a research program at the Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart.

Completion November 2000
robin@otheredge.com.au

Kristian Thomas Pseudo sound project



Pseudo sound project: you hear only what you want to hear is about sitting back and listening to weird techno-music, a focus very different from the typical nightclub scene. It will engage the eyes as well as the ears, as sounds are developed by interactive and/or graphic means, with

hypnotic displays (sometimes called "eye candy"). The challenge is to program music into a computer, to make video, and make both simultaneously (not to mention faster).

When Kristian Thomas was 7, he 'ganked' his older brother's "good at the time" Casio keyboard, and would place heavy objects on the keys to warm it up for a while. Today, studying at the School of Art, University of South Australia, he uses digital equipment that can be given its own consciousness, so it can warm itself up. Collaborators: I Candy is a group of mainly sound artists performing together in Adelaide, including Greg Peterkin (eyespine), Echelon, Dan freak, Trip Wire, Cooper Black and Free the Radical. kristianthomas@hotmail.com

The work was given a first hearing June 23. Online Mp3 and Mpeg works available at kristianthomas.jumptunes.com

Lisa Roberts Lillie's Time Piece

A Victorian travelling clock opens to reveal a collection of memorabilia passed down by Lillian Williamson, frame maker and wife of painter Tom Roberts. Arranged within the 6 categories of meaning devised by Peter Roget for his Thesaurus, Lillian's most treasured objects, her artwork, photographs and letters, are interlinked through a play on the written and spoken word through both scripted and randomly accessed voiceovers and text. Viewers are invited to read their own meaning into her memorabilia and pose questions about identity that might be expressed through the items we ourselves value and keep.

The technical challenges include keeping the hardware up to the demands of the data involved and optimising the script for seamless transitions and links between large files.

Tasmania-based Lisa Roberts, grand-daughter of Lillian Williamson and Tom Roberts, studied at the National Gallery Art School (later the VCA), Swinburne Film & TV School, and recently completed a Masters in Animation and Interactive Media at RMIT. Collaborators: Helen Rayment (curator), Ron Ngorka (composer), Ruth Luxford (programmer), Veronika Macnow (oral historian), Rosy Green (research assistant).

CD-ROM completion November 2000. Website under construction. Funded and sponsored by Gallery101, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Macromedia, TechAustralia. llisa@southcom.com.au

Roget's Circular: An Artist Book on CD-ROM

Peter Mark Roget wrote the Thesaurus, arranging words into Six Categories of Meaning so that the reader could bring order out of the chaos of thought and language. He saw that it was in their relationships to each other that words could approximate truth. A touch screen lies face-up in a suitcase, inviting viewers to participate in a dialogue between 2 travellers through 1999-2001, where Roget's categories provide the framework for engaging with imagery, sound and text collected throughout their interconnecting journeys via email.

The challenge here was to design and program a navigable interface within which to interconnect the journeys of 2 travellers, as well as to involve the viewer in their own enquiry. An organising device developed at the turn of the last century is being appropriated and extended to incorporate the generation of random image, sound and text within a series of interconnecting calendars. Collaborators: Melissa Smith (visual artist/composer), Ruth Luxford (programmer).

Completion November 2000. Macromedia, TechAustralia.
llisa@southcom.com.au



ANAT's special alchemy

Amanda McDonald-Crowley interviewed by Keith Gallasch

As her last major project for ANAT (Australian Network for Art and Technology), Director Amanda McDonald-Crowley planned and hosted *Alchemy*, a 5 week workshop presented at Brisbane's Powerhouse (May 8 - June 9). In almost 5 years Amanda has expanded the scale and vision of ANAT, transforming its annual schools and international connections into something new and substantial, *Alchemy*, with its intensive workshops, forums and presentations with Australian and international participants and tutors. Amanda is now one of the growing team of Associate Directors for the Peter Sellars' 2002 Adelaide Festival.

The first week of *Alchemy* was a set-up week. The sponsored equipment didn't turn up until the Saturday before and doing it in a new building was pretty tricky too. It was a fantastic venue to work in: we had the run of the whole space. But it didn't have any internet connectivity so we had to work with the Powerhouse to get that up. Getting the technical requirements out of the tutors was a pain. The best was when one of the UK group Mongrel said he needed 2 blow-up dolls. Cute, but not very useful.

You've run ANAT Summer Schools, what was the difference?

It was a lot bigger, 16 tutors, 46 participants, but never more than 26 there at any given time for a minimum of 2 weeks. In the future I'd insist on 3 weeks. Our Summer Schools have always been that and in teched-up venues belonging to organisations who sometimes use the schools as leverage to get enough equipment or set up a laboratory. By the third week people are using the tools and feeling familiar with them after being on a steep learning curve all the time.

We started out with art and science collaborations with tutors **Nina Czegledy** from Canada and Hungary, **John Tonkin** and **Marko Peljan** having just finished with *Makrolab* on Rottneest Island (*RealTime* 37, page 10). A lot of curators with some arts practice, attended this and there was a lot of discussion about public art and how you negotiate space and the overlap between public and private and then physical and virtual space. In the second week most of the Indigenous artists were there. I wanted them to be there at the same time. I think the bonding process is very important. Two of them, **Christian Thompson** and **Jenny Fraser**, had done the National Indigenous School in New Media Art last year that Brenda Croft had project-managed, so they mentored the 2 younger artists who had come from regional areas. That worked really well. They were doing a lot of digital imaging—**Rea** was teaching in that component—and work online, too, developing websites and building gif animations. A young guy called **Chris Dempsey** from Mount Isa is a cartoonist who's never worked with computers and did some fantastic gif animations.

So the workshops are not focused on direct outcomes?

No. When people arrive, one of the first things I say is if you've come with a project you want to do, forget it now. It is about process, about what you can do. It's exploratory, even moreso than the summer schools because there was a constantly shifting framework and negotiating with new arrivals, the people you'd be working with. I was there for almost all of it, except when I had to pop back to Adelaide for an AGM and a haircut. So I did a lot of hand holding. Having John Tonkin, who's taught at the Summer Schools, and Rea who taught at NISMA, was really useful. It was more difficult where the tutors hadn't worked with us

before. Then I did more hand-holding. The challenge is that it's so formless—you arrive with ideas and talk it through.

In the second and third weeks we were looking at something ANAT's been focussed on, 'A Digital Region?', what it might be, and the network of artists in our geographical region, mostly in Asia. **Shuddhabrata Sengupta** from India led some fantastic discussions. A majority of the international participants came from Asia and several from New Zealand. When I'm travelling I come across pockets of work in our region and there's a sense that there's a lot going on that you don't know about. And it also comes from the frustration of going to the northern hemisphere to find that they're convinced that the world is hemispherical and nothing exists below the equator... "So Australian artists make net art?"

Australians are well respected in this field and have great connections but it's always with a complete lack of acknowledgment of the cultural and geographical differences that artists in our region here face...they think, 'you're kinda like us really.' When Shuddha talks access, it's a completely different way of thinking, it's not about your computer at home not working or everyone having a connection, it's much more about sharing and access. Seventeen people from the Raqs Media Collective and friends (part of the team setting up Sarai New Media Institute, New Delhi) shared the first computer they got and 32 people shared the email account. It's also about printing out stuff from the internet and distributing it that way, a crossover between soft copy and hard copy.

Is this about collaboration within the region?

It can be about one-on-one collaborations. **Graham Harwood** from Mongrel said that it was the first time he'd been at an event with so many people from such diverse cultures who actually got beyond just cooking together, that people actually started to engage with what it might mean to work in cross-cultural ways. It was interesting that the fact that we were all working with new media was secondary to how we might work together. There were different expectations—someone like **Raul Ferrera** from Mexico arrived wanting skills—"You've got no idea what it's like working in a Third World country, I don't want to talk ideas anymore, I've done all this." But he left feeling that the experience and connections had been rewarding. We did cook together and there were some fantastic meals.

Graham was at the school for 2 weeks and **Richard Pierre-Davies** and **Mervin Jarman** popped in and out a bit and did residencies elsewhere including with an Indigenous community in Cairns. Mongrel are all cultural 'mongrels' who do work with communities...like the Korean community in Bristol. They're very generous, they're not there to take anything away, they're here to offer skills. They've developed a software called *Linker*, a bit like a Director hack, but very simple to use in order to allow participants in workshops to make their own stories, with images and sound and video, within a day or 2 of



Alchemy workshops, Brisbane Powerhouse

using it. Harwood gave a great presentation that had nice confluences—rather than teaching a piece of software he's much more interested in people knowing about how software works. So he draws maps about grasping it conceptually. So even people with high-end skills in Director or Dreamweaver found it incredibly useful to go back to basics, to think about what is it you're doing when you're using a piece of high-end software. He also did a great lecture on the potato and its responsibility for the Industrial Revolution. That came out of some tense moments of cross-cultural discussion about what it means to have been colonised, difficult stories to be negotiated. We were talking about people a lot, so Harwood decided we should talk about potatoes. He'd also been commissioned to do a piece of web art work with the Tate Organisation (all of the Tate museums) so he hacked their entire site and re-told the stories and history of how the Tate came about. The Tate British is built on the ruins of a penitentiary built at the time of the hulks. So the site for Tate British was a

key prison for transportation to Australia.

Richard and Mervin from Mongrel taught skills at the Murri school in the mornings during the D&R Festival, the Indigenous arts festival that was happening at the same time.

What came next?

Performance and hybridity, but even earlier there had been a performative element with the curators. Earlier **Sara Diamond** (Director, New Media Institute, BANFF Centre for the Arts, Canada) had made everyone enact a game and it was one of the silliest things I've seen, all these curators and artists wandering around the Powerhouse looking like weirdos. They were broken into several groups, for example the designers looked at how you might think about the framework for a game. A lot of it came out of an interest in the history of the building we were in, the Indigenous site, the factory, kids playing in it and squatters after it was decommissioned. So Sara said let's make a game about the building, a multimedia game which you can't do until you've actually

physically acted it out.

How far did this go?

It remained at the imaginary stage, but they went through how you get your head into the space to make a game. We rarely went straight to the computer. It wasn't about sitting in front of the boxes all of the time. When **Blast Theory** (UK) came they did a digital karaoke workshop, a daggy way of stripping away the technology first before you think about using it. They then broke people up into smaller working groups and projects were again based on the building, developing a concept, bringing it back to the group. The following week, **Tess de Quincey** arrived and got everyone doing physical work in the mornings and conceptual project development in the afternoons with media artist and web designer **Laura Jordan** who worked with Tess on Triple Alice (RealTime 35, page 8).

What was the function of the physical work—getting into a state of mind or being before tackling the work?

That's part of it, reminding ourselves that we have a body before sitting in front of a screen. Placing yourself in relation to the work but also the world around you. Sounds a bit warm and fuzzy, doesn't it, but that's what it was about, and it informed some of the projects. We had public events, 2 forums, a sound event, and then performances.

What kind of people came for the performance module?

Dance and movement people, **Samuel James**, stage designer and video, **Vanessa Mafe-Kean**, the PVI music col-

lective from Perth, performance artist **Peter Toy**, **Bruce Gladwin** from Back to Back Theatre, **Rebecca Youdell** from Bonemap, **Grisha Coleman** from New York, **Mike Stubbs** a video artist from the UK, **Kamal Krishna**, performance artist from Brisbane. If anything, it was a bit too heavily balanced towards performers. The previous weeks had been much more cross-disciplinary with more skill sharing and cross-overs in working in totally different areas—a sound artist wants to be a visual artist for a fortnight working with digital manipulation. You don't want people to go away owning a different discipline but knowing enough about it to be openminded about working with other people. But there was a lot of sharing, a lot of talk. A lot of show and tell. Laura would help people with technical skills, how to document work on the internet, how to use it. They didn't walk out web designers, but they understood it. Participants became tutors for a moment. Sam James helped with video editing.

We invited the public in to show some of the work and I'd booked the Visy Theatre and the computer room, but the artists wanted to be outside the building, to use the lift (sound artist **Sophea Lerner** was determined to use it). It ended up like stations, each with a performative element. The aim of the audience that night was to find all of the 12 stations, to visit them each at least once. The Visy Theatre was used after all, a single computer sitting in a spotlight in the middle of the stage, next to a speaker on its back so that vibration would move the computer's mouse and that would affect the interactive work on the computer. The rest of the sites were performative: in the lift people

Alchemy wasn't as I expected—full of tech-heads—but instead full of artists trying to find ways around the outside of technology or looking at technology from the outside-in. The title *Alchemy* I thought referred to artists pooling together all the parts of the world in order to create a new brew (with digital media as just one part of the collective terrain available to artists) and distilling down processes to find the intrinsic nature of communication and how we now think of it. It seemed that there was a lot of work being made (in the actual *Alchemy* workshops) that was about the means and the utilisation of the many available vehicles of communication. I know that the New Media Fund shies away from 'discrete arts practices' and *Alchemy* was the same. There was not much room for development of individual practices but more on communal exchange, personal exchange and thinking 'low-tech'—can I make this performance/installation say what I'm trying to say without computers, or with a tape recorder or the existing potentials of the site or space, electronic or not. It was a bit like going to do a computer course and getting a massage instead. Then when you're walking home each night you are often thinking, "Well, I feel refreshed, I feel human..." The course would be suited to being hosted by regional arts organisations, especially with the international participants. It was a very earthy course which is where I imagine Amanda believes our best resources are.

Sam James

We flew into Brisbane from around the world and from within Australia, bringing our cultural backgrounds and experiences from a wide variety of media—coming together at the Powerhouse under the generous umbrella of new technologies. We spoke of similarities and difference, attempting to articulate impossible spaces while discovering new ones. We plotted maps to explore unfound territories, cooked magnificent feasts, invented crazy games, gained networks, enriched concepts, and strengthened and acquired new skills. Alchemy was an info surge, a completely invaluable experience.

Megan Rainey

had to do things you wouldn't normally do in a lift. **Keith Armstrong** I believe was good at getting far too close to people. When I entered the lift I suddenly knew that I would have to swap clothes with **Mari Velonaki**...with the help of a little girl. Kamal with Mike Stubbs did a video piece as a shrine. A sound piece was developed with sound artist **Alexei Shulgin** about a computer that only speaks computer language. You had to tell it something intimate about your life and it would come back with something as mundane as 'System error 404.' It's about interactive sound pieces being about speaking very different languages. There was a great screaming sound installation with the lift and Vanessa playing the body. You could record your own scream.

These were works devised over 12 to 24 hours, they weren't resolved so the audience didn't get a slick performance—it was about playing with ideas, about networking and the participants are still chatting to each other on the list server we set up. From these schools people do get to work with each other years later and the international element of this one—the summer schools weren't international—will have a long term effect.

How did you achieve support for Alchemy?

Last year we ran 3 workshops, one for curators with the AFC and the Australia Council, one for Indigenous artists in collaboration with the Australia Council and the 'normal' summer school. Because we'd developed our international connections so well, we'd get a lot of overseas interest about participating, but I'd have to say, no it's funded for Australian artists. So we decided to go international and got money from the Daniel Langlois Foundation in Canada for the international participants, plus support from the Australia Council, the AFC, state governments, Macintosh and Choice Connections in Brisbane for the computers.

How many years were you at ANAT and was Alchemy a culmination of your work there?

Just under 5 years. Well it was a bit serendipitous. A few people made jokes,

'Ah getting together all your mates and colleagues from across Australia and internationally to have a big party before you leave.' In my job interview for ANAT I said I thought the summer school idea had run its course, tertiary institutions were starting up courses and now there's a lot. But once I'd run some I saw that it was a completely different kettle of fish. It's more about a masterclass environment, or perhaps I've turned it into that, rather than just skills-based.

You expanded the school model and ANAT to an international level. Was there enough strength in the organisation for you to build on when you arrived or did you have your work cut out for you?

It had gone through a lot and was at a bit of a sink or swim stage, and it didn't get any money from Creative Nation, despite lobbying. Yes, I did have my work cut out for me. We worked closely with the Australia Council at the time. ANAT's budget has now tripled, we've got fantastic support from the Australia Council, which comes as well from ANAT's success prior to my arrival, giving the Council the courage to support it. And we've developed a relationship with the AFC on a project by project basis. We haven't increased our infrastructure much (ANAT has 2 fulltime and 2 part-time staff). We have a national board and I think it's remarkable that an organisation like this has grown up in Adelaide. And I'm pleased to say that for the first time ever that at the moment I'm leaving we've actually got core administration funding from the South Australian Government.

Why stop now?

I think it's important for small organisations such as ANAT to have fresh input and ideas every few years. I'm stopping short of 5 years, and 5 years is all I've ever intended doing, because of the fabulous offer from the Adelaide Festival. We'll all be working in a very collaborative way. I'm keen to see new media and technology fully integrated into the entire festival, not just for streaming what's happening, but for community building and internet projects.

ANAT, Alchemy, Brisbane Powerhouse, May 8 - June 9, 2000

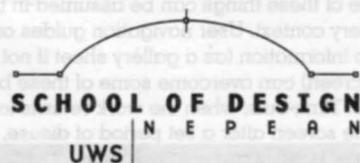
"... in a new medium which is continually changing it's imperative to have the skills of exploration which allow practitioners to push the medium. This is where the technology drive comes from.

The combination of pushing, the fusion of experimentation, imagination, conceptual and practical skills that the MDes course offered me are invaluable in achieving this."

John Horniblow
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Beyond the interface: exhibiting digital media:

Kathy Cleland

With the increasing prevalence of new media work being shown in galleries, installation design is an important area of concern for both artists and curators. Because of the ease with which digital media can be modified and reconfigured, new media works can be exhibited in a variety of formats to suit different exhibition and viewing situations. While many new media works have been created specifically for the web or CD-ROM, these works often achieve parallel lives as gallery installations. On the other hand, the ease of distribution is a double-edged sword as artists relinquish control of how that work is viewed and used. As media artist **Leon Cmielewski** comments: "the jukebox format encourages people to skip to the next work. [CD-ROMs] take an extraordinary amount of time and effort to compose and I feel everyone's work deserves at least an even chance when it comes to presentation."

For this reason, and when given the opportunity, many artists prefer to exhibit installation versions of their work, most frequently using data projectors and sound systems to amplify the work and create a more immersive cinematic environment than is possible via a computer monitor with in-built speakers or headphones.

Spectrascope (Sydney Biennale, Performance Space) co-curator **Julianne Pierce** says: "Generally speaking, an interactive work exhibited in the context of projected installation is more directly engaging than the same work exhibited on a monitor. The projection will often enhance the image, giving it a more cinematic quality." Nevertheless, despite the current preference for projected work, bigger is not always better. The large screen experience can prove intimidating or embarrassing for individual users, particularly when they are not sure how to navigate the work or are being required to type in responses while being observed by other audience members.

Another more intimate option is to create custom built installation housings or kiosks such as those made by **Ian Haig** for his works *Hack* and *Web Devolution*. Haig writes, "...nothing is more unengaging than a Mac on a table or a plinth for displaying interactive work. Installations that house the work can give things a much wider context to operate in." In many cases the nature of the work itself will suggest a particular mode of presentation. **Leon Cmielewski** says of *The User Unfriendly Interface* (created with **Josephine Starrs**) that "in places it used a very intimate interrogation and so we thought a one-to-one kind of experience like that should be housed in a kiosk which precluded more than one person using it and also encouraged people to answer the questions without the embarrassment of having an audience watching their responses (or typing skills)."

Unlike works that are viewed privately, where it can be assumed that the viewer is reasonably computer literate and has a high degree of motivation and commitment, none of these things can be assumed in the gallery context. User navigation guides or help information (as a gallery sheet if not onscreen) can overcome some of these barriers. Time-outs, when the work returns to a home screen after a set period of disuse, or 'home' buttons are also helpful in orienting gallery audiences who will often not be entering the work where the artist intends them to start but somewhere in the middle—often at a tricky part that's hard to get out of!

Another consideration for artists and curators is the length of time audience members are likely to spend with a work in a gallery. Five to ten minutes with an individual work is probably a generous estimate; many will spend considerably less! Interactive multimedia producer and artist **Kate Richards** thinks that pieces requiring a short time commitment from the player (3 - 6 minutes) are coming into their own. "With *Darkness Loiters* (Sydney Suburb, in Museum of Sydney, 2000), **Ross Gibson** and I have devised a piece that a player might spend only a few minutes to under-

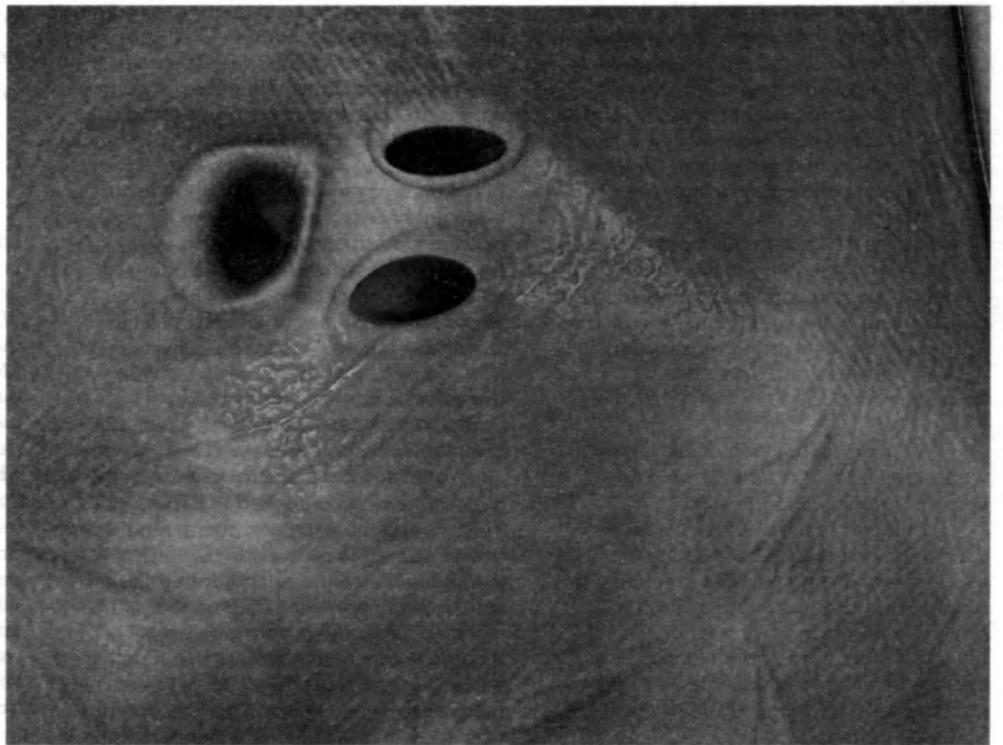
stand the interactivity design and scope. Then, if interested, they can continue interacting for quite some time and so get to understand a deeper layer of writerly connectivity and audio design."

In *Darkness Loiters*, audiences become voyeurs, viewing the work via a 'peephole' constructed of horizontal wooden slats which allow access to a projected screen at 2 eye levels. Using old crime scene photographs taken in Sydney in the 1940s and 1950s, Richards and Gibson have created an interactive story engine which generates endless paranoid narratives. Small photographic images fade in and out of view in the top half of the screen and when clicked on they flash up full screen before settling into the bottom section of the screen. Once 3 images have been selected, they flash up again in sequence with individual captions forming surreal narrative juxtapositions.

Patricia Piccinini's *Breathing Room* (Moët and Chandon 2000, AGNSW) created a particularly powerful and physically immersive installation environment. The work incorporated 3 large back projections of digitised human/animal/mutated skin which 'breathed' and pulsed in time to a soundtrack of human breathing. The soundtrack follows a cycle where the pace of the breathing escalates to what sounds like a panic attack before gradually calming and slowing. This work induces an intensely visceral and emotional response—I found it impossible to control my own breathing and heartbeat which also sped up as the pace of the breathing intensified. This visceral sensation was enhanced by innovative use of a mechanised floor which shuddered in time to the breathing.

Justine Cooper, in her new work *Scynescape* (which I viewed as a work in progress), also sets up a physically immersive environment via multiple video projections of magnified biological samples of the artist onto tensioned sheets of latex. The walls of latex form a maze that audience members navigate, adding their own shadows to the projections and (in the completed version of the work) activating aural components of the work via motion sensors. Cooper comments: "For me installation and projection are integral to the success of the work because I deal directly with issues of space—both body space and 'experienced space.'...So even while it is necessary for me to create the work sitting in front of a monitor, the last thing in the world I want is for the viewer to sit in front of a box, linked only visually to what is unfolding in front of them."

The use of 'sensitive' spaces where the movements of the audience act as input



Patricia Piccinini, *Breathing Room*

devices rather than a mouse or keyboard are some of the most fascinating and engaging examples of current new media installation practice. **Garth Paine's** *MAP 2* (viewed via video documentation) is an interactive sound environment that was exhibited as part of the Kunstfest Am Kultur Forum in Berlin (December 1999). Using CCTV cameras and customised software audience members' movements trigger musical notes and phrases. The area is divided into 4 zones which operate as 4 individual musical instruments allowing up to 4 audience members to participate at a time. In many ways the work is as much performance as installation, as audience members learn how to 'play' the work. Paine also collaborates with choreographers and dancers, for example with the innovative Melbourne-based Company in Space (see page 16) developing a new software instrument that will allow real time interactive input from both dancers and the composer. Information and short video excerpts of Garth Paine's installation works, *MAP1* and *MAP2* and his new *Reeds* installation for this year's Melbourne Festival, are available at www.activated-space.com.au/installations.

Exhibited as part of *Spectrascope*, *Unstill Life* by **Mari Velonaki** and **Gary Zebington** also goes beyond the standard mouse/keyboard/screen interface using a video camera and artificial vision systems

software (*Chognacrome*) to create an invisible interactive interface between audience members and a woman's digital portrait. The portrait is projected onto gossamer fabric creating a wonderfully luminous silvery image which contrasts dramatically with the traditional dark wooden frame that houses it. The Renaissance meets the 21st century. As the title of the work suggests, this is no ordinary still life. As you enter the gallery space, the woman observes and responds to your movements. A container of red apples acts as the interface and when an audience member approaches the container to pick up an apple, the woman becomes alert and excited.

Theoretically the more apples you eat (or appear to eat) the more animated the woman becomes. This work is still in development and the scope of the interaction is presently somewhat limited and unpredictable. Nevertheless, it is an exciting experiment and I am looking forward to seeing Velonaki and Zebington's future collaborations. There was a truly magical moment when I walked into the room and the woman sat up and looked back at me and I was transfixed but then she lost interest no matter how many apples I pretended to eat!

All quotations in this article are from personal email correspondence. The full version can be found on www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/

Mari Velonaki Mutual Exchange

Viewers wearing coloured cotton gloves engage with projected characters by signalling to them. The reactions, moods and life span of the characters are effected by the participants' gestures, distance from the screen and the colour of both their clothing and the gloves of choice.

The integration of genetic algorithms and a robotic optical recognition system is the challenge, one amplified by the necessity of translating UNIX-based software and hardware into a Macintosh environment.

Mari Velonaki is a media artist with a performance background. She aims to engage spectators with digital characters in interplays activated by sensory triggered interfaces (breath activated, speech recognition, artificial vision systems). Her work has been shown at Artspace, PICA, Sciencentre of Queensland, IMA, Kunsthalle Prisma, Ton and Bild Spectakel. Collaborators: Gary Zebington (graphics & programming), Shannon O'Neill (sound design).

Completion December 2000. New Media Arts Fund, Australia Council; Newton Research Labs, USA.



John Tonkin Prototype for a Universal Ideology

"Tell me a theory on life. It could be grand or mundane, advice your parents told you or a heart-felt belief."

The spoken voice of each user becomes the raw material for a process analogous to the genetic recombination of DNA. The audio waveforms are broken down into fragments and rearranged with the phrases of other users. Users can breed different statements and decide which new recombinant statements survive, and consequently how they develop collaboratively over time to form a gene pool of ideas and memory.

John Tonkin is a Sydney-based artist who began programming and making computer animation in 1985. His current works involve building frameworks/tools/toys in which the artwork is formed through the accumulated interactions of its users. In 1999 Tonkin received a fellowship from the Australia Council's New Media Arts Fund. He is currently working on *Strange Weather: a grand unified theory*, a visualisation tool for making sense of life.

Prototype for a Universal Ideology is being developed as part of Cyber Cultures' Sustained Release: *Infectious Agents*, Casula Powerhouse (see interview with Kathy Cleland, page 12).

www.johnt.org/projects/prototype.html

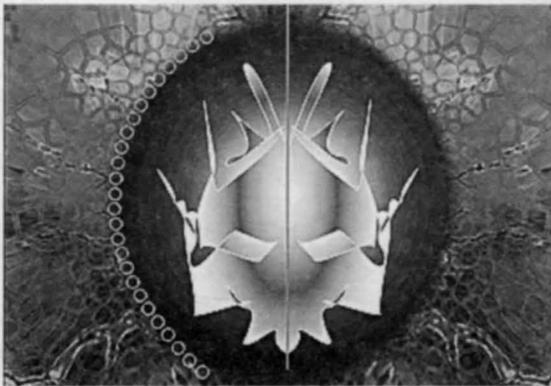
Gary Zebington Bodyssey

This work chronicles modified phases of the human life cycle. Biotic engineering and older myths of transformation promise freedom from the ancestral, deterministic life cycle. Borrowing form and process from tales of real and invented species, we wander a continuum of bodily experience, through conception to reincarnate uploads into dataspace.

Challenges include: intertwining sound, speech recognition, text-to-speech, vml, responsive texts and 2D image environments into parallel coherence (eased by the life cycle's natural narrative); transmuted image matter via inscriptions and conjurations; casting aside notions that form follows function and that sufficiently advanced technologies and magic are indistinguishable.

Gary Zebington converted from painting to digital media in 1990. Graphics and programming have featured in large-scale robotic performances, fibre-optic television, websites, CD-ROMs and international installations. He holds BA, IBM Broadband Scholarship, postgrad Design Computing and has been engaged in the design and development of experimental medical software at Sydney University since 1997. He rarely encounters steering committees. Collaborators: Gary Zebington (graphics, programming, text), Andrew Garton (sound designer), Gina Fenton (producer), Philipa Veitch (researcher).
garu@eye.usyd.edu.au

Completion October 2000. Australian Film Commission.



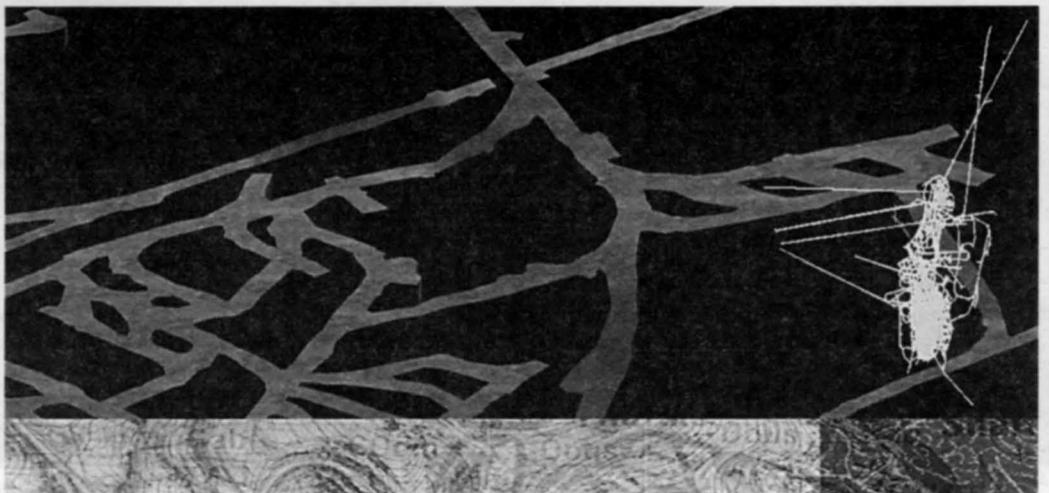
Martin Walch Mt Lyell Copper Mine

This animation explores the visual and aural spaces both above and below ground at the Mt Lyell Copper Mine in Tasmania, combining topographical modeling, historical and contemporary photography, and recorded sounds from the site.

Immensely challenging, the project has given me the opportunity to extend my arts practice from a static photographic basis to a visually and sonically animated one. At the same time, working with a mining company during a volatile period in its history has presented another set of challenges that have influenced my work.

Martin Walch is a visual artist and writer, living and working in Tasmania. His formal studies include an Honors Degree in Photography and a Master of Fine Arts Degree (by Research) in Digital Stereoscopic Imaging. He is particularly interested in the interactions between people and the physical environments they work/live and recreate in.

Completion November 2000. New Media Arts Fund, Australia Council; extensive in kind support from Copper Mines of Tasmania.



MAAP Festival 2000

A preview of Australia's digital arts festival

Annual MAAP festivals have become a notable fixture in the national and regional digital arts media calendar. After the rich collaboration with the Asia Pacific Triennial in 1999, MAAP 2000 centred at the Brisbane Powerhouse Centre for the Arts, is a deceptively smaller looking affair offering 3 days of concentrated viewing, interactivity and talk. There's a screening program (SEE), interactive exhibitions (SEEK), and a forum in situ and online (SPEAK). The 2000 festival is both an affirmation and rethinking of MAAP's role.

MAAP Festival Director Kim Machan explains, "This year we are directing a short and sharply focused physical festival with major labour pouring into the website! MAAP is working on a new emphasis for the organisation. We are building more content to attract and reflect the new media digital art community and progressing toward the full development of a meaningful new media digital art portal." Machan is eager for "the web site...to develop as the major digital art portal for artists and our web strategies are predominantly in line with this goal." She says that this next phase for MAAP has been driven by "streams of enquiries and demands for such a site." Machan is eager to realise her goal in the next 12 months.

As for the 2000 festival, the opening on Friday September 15 will feature the launch of the new Singapore digital art portal *artsvox* and the world premiere of a new video work by Chinese artist Gongxin Wang.

On Saturday the SEE program will offer free all-day screenings in the Powerhouse Theatre of video/digital art with artists' work from Singapore, Malaysia, China, Indonesia, Japan and Australia. The program includes new Chinese video; the Videotage selection from Hong Kong curated by Director Fion Ng; the dLux media arts *d'art>00* interactive CD-ROM program; the 5th Malaysian video awards 2000; the Siggraph Singapore Chapter Animation Awards 2000; and the *digital degrees* student program from Australia and Asia-Pacific tertiary institutions.

Machan writes that for the SPEAK program there will be an all-day forum on Sunday, "with international panels in Brisbane and across the region to discuss and exchange issues presented by curators, theorists and artists. Panels will be netcast and streamed through the MAAP web site with online chats simultaneously open for interaction from international participants in Hong Kong, Seoul, Beijing, Tokyo and Australian cities." This will be facilitated by international new media agitator Geert Lovink and co-coordinated

by art and screen curator and teacher Molly Hankwitz.

In the SEEK program, MAAP will showcase a wide range of art and technology projects. The Chinese artists' CD-ROM exhibition is being curated by Pi Li. Other works have yet to be announced. There'll also be a sound installation by Adam Donovan. Russell Milledge will run a workshop based on his and Rebecca Youdell's *Boñemap—the wild edge*, about site specific installation and performance with film and online art (September 16-17).

As in 1999, MAAP is again offering digital artists opportunities to display their work through links on the MAAP web site. The online *missile launch* project, featuring innovative web art from Asia, the Pacific and Australia, will be launched daily September 1-17. "Artists may also apply for free server space to host outstanding work. We are offering a 'Free Tools' section," says Machan. "The website will also have a bulletin board, a chat room and, from MAAP research, extensive links with digital media organisations in the region." Online computers will be available and projections continuously showing in the Powerhouse Bar over the festival. There'll also be an informative Macromedia seminar.

Satellite events include *Dodg'em*, an audio interactive installation by Martine Corompt and Philip Samartzis at the IMA. New media artist Freya Pinner and mentor Di Ball will present *[co:]installations*, a multimedia show exploring notions of transgression between mediums, visual arts practices and between text and body relationships at Double Helix, opening September 9.

Kim says that the aim of the festival is "to create a presentation platform to promote excellence and exchange of creative ideas" and through "a dialogue between professionals who create, experiment, design and build electronic forms of art (to) focus on creativity and industry development." The range of forms embraced by MAAP include new media installation, online artwork, digital animation, video, sound, photography, CD-ROM, and cultural internet projects.

Machan's rallying cry is "See...Seek...Speak!" "SEE your work included in the online festival. SEEK out cultural content and people who are interested and curious. SPEAK your opinions and perceptions of the new media related world. We are at your server!" See you there, in the flesh or online. **KG**

MAAP 2000 Festival, Multimedia Art Asia Pacific Inc, Kim Machan Festival Director tel 07 3348 7403 fax 07 3348 4109 <http://www.maap.org.au>. Venue: Brisbane Powerhouse September 15 -17

Positively infectious

Cyber Cultures curator Kathy Cleland talks to Keith Gallasch

Cyber Cultures has been a huge project, a long evolving thing. Originally it was done through Street Level (the moveable Western Sydney 'gallery' Kathy Cleland founded with David Cranswick, eds) and we approached Performance Space and Casula Powerhouse. We were hoping to do a 3-venue thing. As it happened we didn't get the funding we needed and the whole thing ended up happening at Performance Space in 1996. That show was so popular that we actually managed to get more funding and we did quite a large show at Casula the next year. It really got some new audiences out to the Powerhouse. It was a really big event for the organisation. It required a huge amount of equipment. Nevertheless, out of that grew the idea of doing something more sustained—hence *Cyber Cultures: Sustained Release*. Instead of having the big bang exhibition where everything happens in a month, we decided to have 4 smaller exhibitions over a longer period which would really help us to build audiences out west. We're in the middle of developing the touring itinerary at the moment. We've had a lot of interest from all over the country.

What seems to happen with new media work is that it's quite well supported in the more urban centres and the contemporary artspace organisations who've got a bit of equipment. But a lot of the regional galleries have very little...so one of the motivations behind the tour this time is to really focus on the regional—particularly regional NSW—and try and tie it in with some training for local staff in how to set up and run and maintain an exhibition like this. Questions I'm asking regional spaces are, do you have a local Apple Centre? Maybe your local council has a data projector? What about the library? So it's not just going in, doing a show and going out, and there's nothing left.

What about your choice of works? You have quite a few significant names, award winners, fellowship winners. Is this a kind of 'best-of'?

I wouldn't necessarily want to say it's a 'best-of.' It's a very personal selection. These are people whose work has interested me, some of them for a very long time, some more recently. It's also seeing what's out there, what artists seem to be interested in and the directions that the work is going.

In this first stage, called *Infectious Agents*, there's obviously some commonality in terms of the idea of infection.

The way the work is being exhibited at

Casula it's all over the building. It's in these discrete areas that you stumble across. So it's a bit like the idea of a virus spreading. And I suppose in terms of the tour we're sending out these little viral pods.

I noted that there are 2 relatively private spaces, one for **Melinda Rackham's** *Carrier*, (see *RealTime* 37, page 23), the other an adults-only space for **Linda Dement's** *In My Gash* (see *Working the Screen* page 6) and then a couple are out in the open: the very playful one by **Ian Haig** called *web devolution: a mobile digital evangelist unit* (1998) and **John Tonkin's** *Prototype for a Universal Ideology* (2000) and *Notes for a Collective Memory* (2000) where the user gets into a compositional experience.

It's been really interesting watching **John Tonkin's** works in the gallery. People love them. You can listen to other people's ideas—either their theory of life or a personal memory which they've recorded—and you can cut it up and start mixing and matching it with other things. People sit there for ages. You can see them thinking, no I don't like that one, I'll try another one—listening to all these different permutations...

"...forming a gene pool of ideas and memory" says the catalogue. How does **Ian Haig's** very playful work fit your theme?

Cyber evangelism. It's very much like a digital soapbox spewing forth all sorts of crank ideas. That's how it fits in. The way that the internet and the world wide web have become these huge international fora for mad ideas and the way we're constantly bombarded from screens.

Other works invite quite a degree of intimacy. Sometimes this can be quite uncomfortable. Navigating **Melinda Rackham's** *Carrier*, you're implicating yourself in the world of the work.

In the user-notes that accompany that work there are 2 suggested ways of going through it. One is navigating through the linked words at the bottom of the screen but the way you're describing, which is the best way to do it, is to enter your name and the piece talks to you and asks you questions.

It says, "Hello Keith," and you have to decide whether to take on the infection and live with the consequences. I was standing there, musing on it and someone standing next to me was saying, oh no you should keep going, move ahead. I said no, no, I'm just absorbing this. *Carrier* is interesting



Martine Corompt & Philip Samartzis, *Dodg'em* 1999

because it looks like a cross between an informational site with medical data ...

... and an incredibly poetic space...

... with 3 dimensional objects rotating in space which appear to be the viral components. **Linda Dement's** *In My Gash*, which has some of the most sophisticated imaging of the 4 works, is full of shocks and surprises, quick-time violence.

I had assumed that Linda would have preferred it to be more of a private piece and that maybe we'd be constructing some kind of housing around a single monitor so it was like a one-person-at-a-time viewing situation. But she'd actually done a few demos more like artists' talks with the work projected, and she likes the projected quality. So that was her decision. But it is in some ways an uncomfortable piece to watch with other people around.

Next up in the series is *Post Human Bodies* which we're launching with a new performance work of **Stelarc's**—*Movotar*. The work's been in development for a long time. At the moment the pneumatic arm is being constructed in Hamburg. Stelarc's using an avatar creation, a virtual autonomous body that lives onscreen. That will be projected but the avatar becomes what Stelarc calls a "movotar" in that it can access his fleshbody in the real world. There's feedback and interaction between Stelarc's

body and the algorithms that are programming the movotar. When they reach threshold states Stelarc's body will be activated by the movotar driving the pneumatic arm. So it's kind of a turnaround of the normal avatar where you have a virtual body that represents you in cyberspace. This movotar controls the fleshbody to access the real world. Stelarc's maintaining control of his legs so he can remain upright.

Who's triggering the action?

The movotar is autonomous. It has its own desires which Stelarc can respond to and override if they are becoming unsustainable.

Also in *Post Human Bodies* is a new work by **Gary Zebington**. As well as working with Stelarc, he's been working on his own CD-ROM, *Bodyssey*, for a

couple of years now. This will be its first public outing. I'm very happy to have the *Lump* CD-ROM, the project that **Patricia Piccinini** and **Peter Hennessey** have been working on for a few years. We exhibited *Lump* in 1996 *Cyber Cultures*. So this is the evolved CD-ROM project. Also there's an international work by **Jane Prophet** called *Internal Organs of a Cyborg* which is like a comic book photo story. You know how when advertising agencies need images they go to stock libraries? Well Jane's been using some of the same images which tend to be of elderly businessmen and beautiful young blondes. She's created a story involving this woman who's been a medical test subject for new drugs. There are all these ideas about the medicalised cyborg body. Also this elderly gentleman is about to have heart failure and her heart ends up going to him...The other work in *Post Human Bodies* is **John Tonkin's** *Personal Eugenics* which has been exhibited in a number of spaces already but I just think it's a wonderful work and one I really want to get out to the regions.

This is the one where you scan your face...

...and evolve yourself, decide which qualities you like, what you would like to become—more intellectual, more successful. And there's a Java algorithm you can click on and it morphs your face in different ways. Then you pick the one that looks most like you'd like to be. And you can keep going. You can also play around with other people's faces—based on what they say they want to be, you can help them evolve to their desired state.

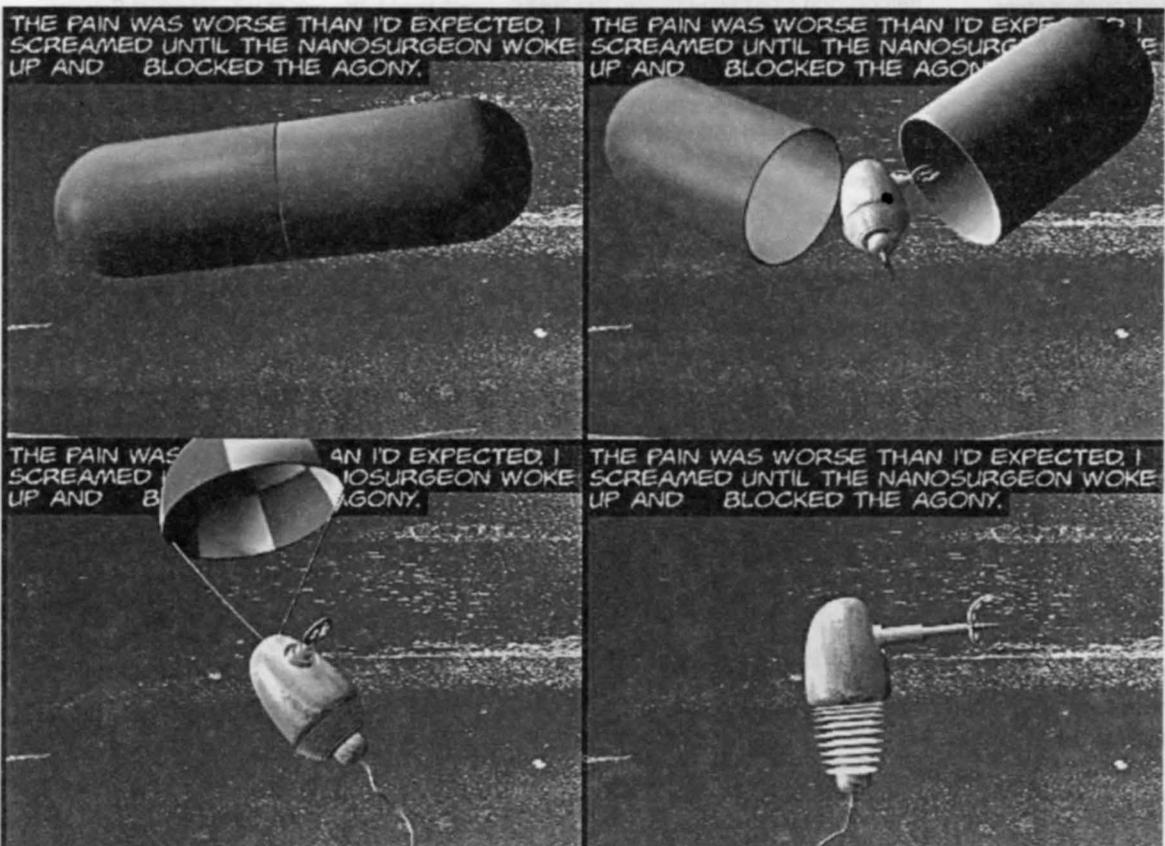
How does **Piccinini's** *Lump* fit in the *Post Human Bodies* scenario?

This is a completely digital world. The *Lumps* are digital mutant evolutions which are part human, part something else. When **Piccinini** was making this earlier on, the babies existed out in the world without a context. **Peter Hennessey** has created an architecture, like a factory or a museum. It's like a *Lump* baby goes home. You go into the incubator and see all the facets of *Lump* life.

And the third show?

New Life is looking at crossovers between digital and biological life forms and how some of those boundaries are starting to blur. There's a new work by **Jon McCormack** called *Eden* which is, as it suggests, a new world populated by entities that users interact with and help to breed. It's an online world where you can create a herbivore or carnivore—its head, body and legs can be wehacks or little spiky things and then you can track its existence, see how it gets on. I must confess when I tried it all my creatures died very quickly. Other people have had more success.

There are also some younger artists: **Kathryn Mew's** *Muto* which, again, has been around for a little while now but this will be



Jane Prophet, image from *The Internal Organs of a Cyborg*, 1999

the first time she's exhibited the work as installation and she's always wanted to do this. She's planning to project the work onto a huge weather balloon. Kathryn's also working with little digital life forms and worlds that have organic as well as digital characteristics.

Anita Kocsis, like Jon and Kathryn, is a Melbourne-based artist. She has a new work called *Neonvert* which came out of an ANAT residency at Gertrude Street Gallery. It's like a digital garden which Anita has largely developed on the web. The way she exhibits the work is via video documentation of that event and creating a physical installation around it. There are remnants of real garden and then projected digital gardenscapes. It's not purely organic. She's been working with Flash and some of the newer web software to help create it.

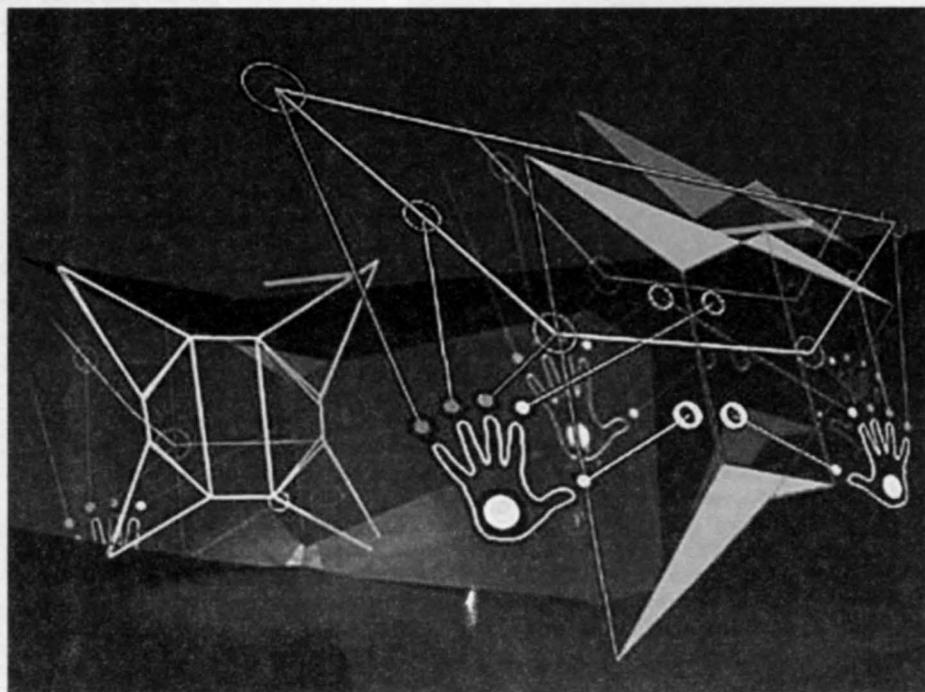
What about the final selection?

A fun family one we hope! It's called *Animation Playground* and we're exhibiting **Martine Corompt** and **Philip Samartzis'** *Dodg'em* which has 2 push pedal cars you can drive round the gallery navigating via a soundscape (see *RealTime* 33, page 17). As you pedal, you trigger different sounds which let you know where various things are. Dogs start barking and you have to go somewhere else. It's a lot of fun and the soundscape is a huge part of the work. It's like animation sound meets amusement park. And the other works in that selection are *Dream Kitchen* (see page 6), the CD-ROM from **Josephine Starrs** and **Leon Cmielewski** which was exhibited at *Biomachines* at the Adelaide Festival this year and as part of *d>art00* during the Sydney Film Festival. What's interesting about these artists is they've done so

cultural resonances for different peoples. They have Maori names but what happens when she leaves out the naming is that people say oh, that means this. It seems everyone has ideas about these shapes. John Fairclough has built an interactive program around it. There are digital handsets so you press buttons or coloured pads and you can create digital strings that link and build shapes as well. There's an installation with threads that respond to UV light. So it's a physical installation with a digital overlay. Apparently it's quite complex and if you're not successful, things dissolve. So you're implicated in the cycle of creation and destruction.

As the curator of Cyber Cultures and Chair of dLux media arts, how do you see the health of new media in Australia?

I think organisations like dLux and MAAP in Brisbane and Experimenta in Melbourne are doing amazing things with really very small amounts of money. It's quite difficult working in this area in NSW because the pools of money are pretty poor. The PTO (NSW Film & Television Office) for example and its staff like Sharon Baker are incredibly supportive but they have such small amounts to give out. It's hard for us to look at something like Cinemedia in Victoria which got substantial amounts of money. It's fantastic what's happening there and in Queensland as well. I'm a New Zealander and the Labor government there has just committed \$86 million to the arts, the arts in general, over 3 years. Organisations like ANAT have been instrumental in supporting so many artists in this area, especially with summer schools and training. That's been a huge factor for so many of the artists I've spoken to in the devel-



John Fairclough and Maureen Lander, *Digital String Games* 1998-2000

much work with different types of animation—stop motion, models, all sorts of things. People love it though some are a bit shocked at some of the violence...

The pencil-sharpening scene is particularly scary.

...slicing open the rat. There's a bit of dissection stuff but, you know, eminently enjoyable. There's also *Un-Icon* by **Mark** and **John Lycette** which is a very simple but very beautiful animation. It takes different screen cursors like the little arrow or the blinking icon and transforms them in amazing animations. They'll create their own shapes and then whiz off round the screen and then form into another shape altogether—magnifying glasses, arrows. It's black and white and working very much with computer aesthetics. Very simple but really magical. We also have another work from **Martine Corompt**, a cute little thing called *PetShop* which has little animated animals scratching to get out of their TV monitors! And there's another international collaborative work by **Maureen Lander** and **John Fairclough**. Maureen is a Maori artist and this particular piece is called *Digital String Games 3*. She's created all these shapes which have

opment of their work. There are some really good things going on in Australia but much more money needs to go into it. And into long-term support for work. It's like everyone wants something now. And they're more inclined to give money to a project that's going to have a quick and very visible result in contrast to something that's going to develop over a longer time. That's where the Australia Council New Media Art Fellowships have been good in giving artists that 2 year period for a body of work. And it's not tied to specific outcomes. Mind you, there usually are outcomes.

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

Cyber Cultures: sustained release:
Infectious Agents, July 7 - August 11;
Posthuman Bodies, August 19 - September 24;
New Life, September 30 - November 12;
Animation Playground, November 18 - December 22;
 presented by *Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre*, 1 Casula Road, Casula. Open every day 10am-4pm.
 Tel 61 2 9824 1121
www.casulapowerhouse.com/cybercultures

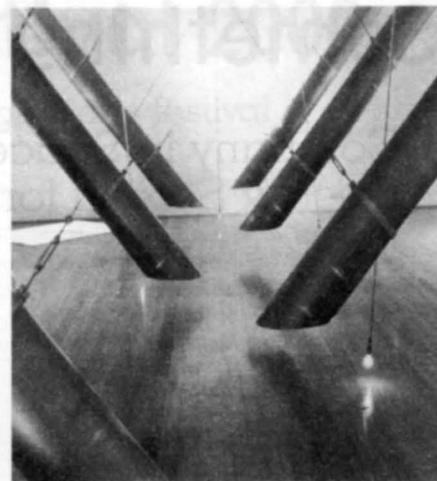
Joe Felber 25 Songs...

25 Songs on 25 Lines of Words on Art Statement for Seven Voices and Dance is a collaborative work between artist Joe Felber, composer Elliott Gyger and dancer Lucy Guerin, each of whom is responding directly to American painter Ad Reinhardt's famous *25 Lines of Words on Art Statement*. The 3 artists have created a theatre of response, reconsidering Reinhardt's seminal 1958 writing on abstraction, art and modernism through the creation of a work combining music, image, video and dance.

Involving interdisciplinary arts practice and new media technology, the installation runs from the Cubase program. The video, stills photography and text graphics were created on Adobe After Effects and Premiere. The *Pendulums* run on a 12 volt magnet call from 2 transformers.

Joe Felber is an Australian citizen of Swiss origin. He completed an architectural draftsman apprenticeship in Switzerland and Master in Art (sculpture) at RMIT. His is a pluralistic arts practice including painting, photography, video and new media art. He has exhibited internationally since 1985 in New York, Europe and Australia.

This work toured Australia and Singapore and will be shown October-December 2001 at the Minoriten in Graz and Landesgalerie, Ladesmuseum in Linz Austria. Australia Council for the Arts, Pro Helvetia, Switzerland, Credit Suisse Group, Singapore.
joefelber@hotmail.com



PACT Youth Theatre Replicant Hotel

Replicant Hotel is a contemporary performance work incorporating collaborative writing and performance processes. The performance is layered with media archives or keyholes strewn about the hotel, a refuge for Replicants (read anything from Poe to *Blade Runner*).

Replicant Hotel centres on 5 figures abandoned by the 20th century. We

have a Bell Boy (sometimes encountered in multiples) who is always intervening in potential wars with a calming soup. Voltaire, that populist journalist, is pronouncing revolution and croissants from his bedroom podium while cities crumble in the distance. Television Boy is locked to the Box, in love with the trickle of images that keep him awake at night. A painter is escaping his own portrait and a charming maid plays out movie scenes behind the curtains.

The challenges of this production include the integration of 5 distinct aesthetics supplied by 5 writers and the incorporation of pre-recorded "archives" (video, sound, film) based on the writing and performance making process. Novelist and dramaturg Mireille Juchau has been working with a small group of emerging writers: Shelley O'Donnell, Brian Fuata, Roanna Gonsalvez, Adrian Chiarella and Sarah Rodigari. Together they are plotting an intricate web of moments, each informed by a central figure that has fascinated them in the wake of the 20th century. This work is then fed into the performance group who interpret, rip and tear at the material to develop a performance labyrinth.

Collaborators: Caitlin Newton-Broad (director), Mireille Juchau (dramaturg & writing facilitator), Samuel James (space & media design), Gail Priest (sound designer), Richard Manner (lighting design).

Completion: August 2000. New Media Arts and Theatre Funds, Australia Council, NSW Ministry for the Arts, South Sydney Council. pact@viper.net.au



Something more than choreography

Company in Space's Hellen Sky at the RealTime/Performance Space Flesh & Screen forum

Across Australia, there are a significant number of artists and companies working with digital media and in multimedia, each in their own distinctive way, sometimes continuously, occasionally in one-off projects, exploring the relationship between live and pre-recorded performance, or between live and realtime mediated performance, or combinations. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it is indicative of the extent of the engagement: Arena Theatre, Trash Vaudeville, Bonemap, Back to Back Theatre, Sidetrack Performance Group, Urban Theatre Projects, Melbourne Workers Theatre, Nerve Shell, Salamanca Theatre, Dance Works, Heliograph, Doppio Parallelo, Anna Sabiel and Sarah Waterson, Dina Panozzo, Marrugeku Company, Louise Taube, Snafu, skadada, Sam James, Mark Rogers, Brink Visual Theatre (Brisbane) and Cazerine Barry. The most dedicated and widely travelled (and broadcast) of groups committed to exploring performance and technology, and for the longest time, has been Company in Space.

In the first of the RealTime/Performance Space forums for artists about vision, training and practice, Company in Space co-Artistic Director Hellen Sky talked to Keith Gallasch, with questions coming from the audience when they wished. This is a small part of a much longer discussion available on the RealTime website. After a brief introduction to the work of Company in Space (John McCormick is co-Artistic Director), Keith asked about the dancer's "relationship with the screen in performance, your awareness of the other dancer who is in another space?"

It's not like you're watching the screen all the time but a part of your eye, if you need it to, is going to the screen. In telematic works when you're dealing with different geographies, the screen is your conduit to the other dancer. No longer are you sharing a space, no longer can you hear their breath, their footfall. When working in any group choreography and looking at simultaneity of movement, your perception is already in the physical space, not just through your eyes, it's listening, you feel the people you're dancing with. There is this shared body thing. When you separate from that, you still have to feel that you're sharing that space, that you can get this sense of them being there. In terms of consciousness, this is very expansive—how might you perceive yourself being in the moment of the performance? But there is this thing which is the screen. And it changes depending on the circumstances. In January I was in Hong Kong and Louise Taube was in a nightclub in Melbourne. You can't always put the screen exactly where you want it to be in the performance space. It's not like you can always design it to have the privilege of your point of view going straight to your partner. And you don't want to be looking at the screen anyway. You actually want to be addressing all the other things that are going on in the space.

KG Here on video are 2 versions of *Escape Velocity*, one Hellen calls the "contained" performance, and then the telematic version performed in 2 locations.

This was done in 1998 in a non-conventional space. At this point, the hand and the head are orchestrating the sound. So very small movements of the body are creating the score. What you can't see is the little laser lights on the floor, a grid that doesn't emerge in the video. The movement is being motion-detected. The velocity of the movement is creating the score. The other sound is being mixed into the score because there's a ledge up there and we were out of the range of the camera and couldn't trigger the score. We're about 6 metres up in the air by now. You can see Kelly and Luke here. They're the ones down below who are stopping us from falling on our faces. Not

only are they belaying us through all of this (controlling the raising and lowering of the performers) but they're also filming us from underneath and our images are being fed into the computer and an effect added and it's going across a whole cyclorama of screens at the back. This is their camera point of view happening in real time as they're belaying us and leaning backwards on the floor. The whole thing was about gravity and loss of gravity. Where is the body really when we have the possibility to exist in this virtual space where there's no gravity? What is meaning there? What is memory there?

Audience All the movement is set?

It's set in that if we want it to go slow we can. In that section where we're pushing it, we still have the privilege of being with each other and hearing each other. The movement is trying very much to be in unison. If we were to hang back we would do so together and know that we'd brought the score to silence. So from night to night, there's some flexibility to deal with—'Hey, I really like it here. It's good to have it quiet for a bit.' It's quite flexible.

Audience The audience is not necessarily aware what is happening technically?

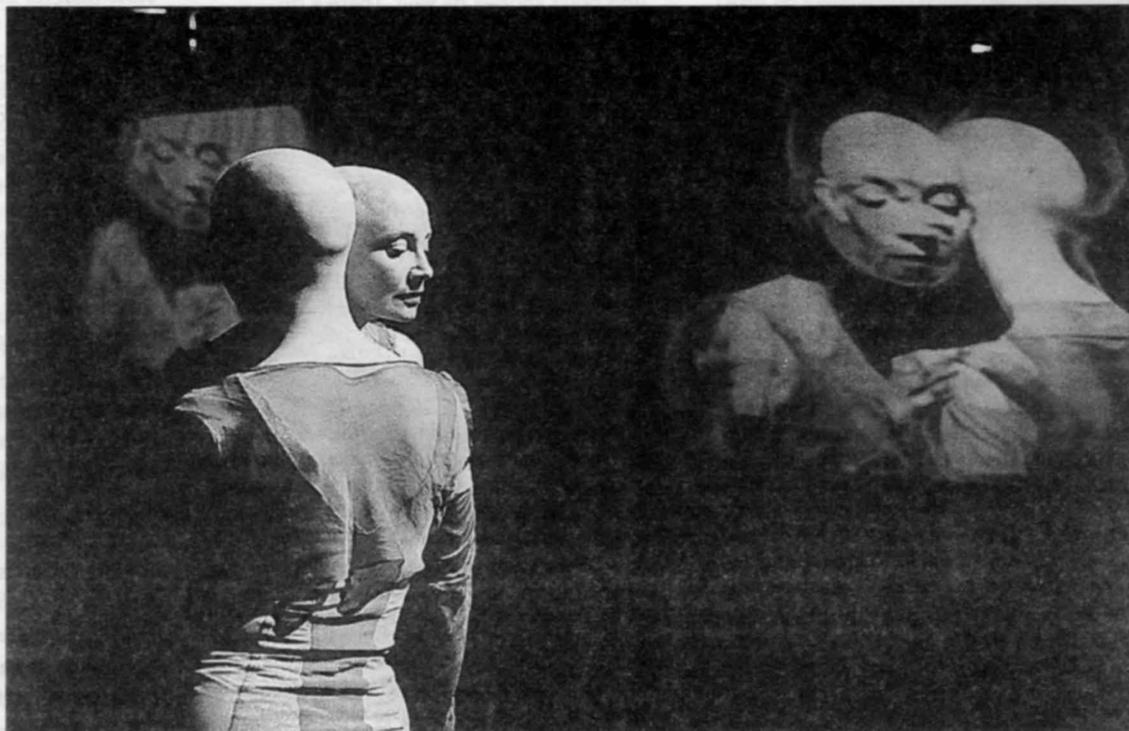
In a way I don't care if the audience knows it or not but it changes my relationship to it and, therefore, it changes my presence and the evolution of the piece.

Audience I can see that not knowing that the dance and the sound are connected wouldn't matter but the sound seems like a sea of sound. How does the technology handle specific or subtle movements affecting the sound?

When we were experimenting with it, I could go like that with my little finger and Garth Paine could make it a huge or a little sound or it could happen 4 minutes later. That's its potential. That's a nice thing to play with. I could put the camera on my face and just do a whole thing with my tongue. It's something more than choreography responding to music. It's an expansive experience. And, if we had the privilege of being able to educate ourselves with this stuff, it'd be an expansive experience for the body to learn.

Audience Those little movements, do they happen live or did they have to be pre-programmed?

Absolutely in real time. I could ask him to delay the data and it would be different. The collaboration then is what becomes of data. I have to know the possibilities. Those are the things that take time to negotiate. For Garth to be able to set up the parameters and the data it takes time but it's quite interesting. These animations and graphics are pre-constructed with a brief. Some of them I made and some of them I've worked with an animation artist. I don't work with 3D graphics. You can't do everything. That's great. Why would you want to? Other people do one thing really well. You don't have to multi-skill. When you're beginning maybe you want to just so you know. I worked with an electronics engineer and each of the laser lights had stepper motors on them so that when you broke the laser beam the light would shift. My idea was to have a 3-dimensional light space which enclosed the body but which kept shifting around it.



Company in Space, *Escape Velocity*

Photo Jeff Busby

Sometimes these things fail too. The stepper motors didn't always work but there's a sense that I'm changing the light around the body.

Now you can see the 2 dancers juxtaposed against this but then the camera choreography comes in and we're working with a duplication of ourselves in the video frame. Now Louise is in red and has an overhead camera with virtual objects in it. Her virtual body is breaking these objects, creating noises, constructing her score. You can see the little icons there on the field. So we have an overhead camera point of view which is giving her virtual body the option of being able to break a virtual video object which can change the background but also orchestrate the sound in real time.

Audience What's a virtual video object?

It's a video icon which you can call a button. That's one layer. The mixing in of the camera point of view is another layer. Then the animations under that are another layer. When this object perceives the breaking of the object from the virtual camera body, it triggers the sound. That's the system that John invented.

KG That's the video of the "contained" version. Here's the telematic duet.

This was between Arizona and Melbourne. And just to think about how you might set something like this up is a whole dialogue in itself. It's about pragmatic things, about finding overseas partners who understand what you're trying to do...and installing the link. Just getting the link right! That's me in Arizona chatting to the audience. It was a thing called International Dance and Technology that they held at Arizona State University (see *RealTime 31*, page 35). The other place is the Rusden Campus of Deakin University.

Audience How is it connected?

Through an ISDN. A single line. 264k ISDN so it's 128k point to point ISDN. ISDN is what they use for tele-conferencing in the corporate sector or in the medical and educational sectors more and more, when you have 2 or 3 talking heads.

Audience It's like 6 telephone lines.

And ideally you want to have 3 of them. But each time you do it between here and America it's like a \$450 per half hour phone bill. So, the thing about budgets is interesting once you start working on it. So for me to do this work was to reduce it from about

45 minutes into a 20 minute performance where the 2 camera operators and 2 dancers are in separate locations. The negotiation of framing is very intuitive. They're having to watch the screen output and know that they're putting us in the right relationship. Also, the intelligent hub with all the computers and the camera network is based in Melbourne and it's a camera feed that's going through to Melbourne. On the way it's going through a whole lot of processes and it's being sent back and there's a 3 second delay. So there's this whole thing about time. Some people might see it as a problem. I think it's quite interesting that time is altered because you're trying to pipe all this visual and audio information through what can be a 2 way exchange. You can see here that the image is slightly degraded, my image moreso than Louise's. I like that. Something's happening in the conduit. I think that's interesting.

Audience I'm curious at what point, if ever, do considerations of more traditional screen arts and their processes and methods come into play?

A lot actually and maybe in our next work it's more obvious. Often when you're having to control the cross-fades between 4 or 5 cameras it's much more cinematic and cinematic in real time. Things like the duration of a cross-over, when you want that to happen. It's very much a part of the direction of the whole work. As a choreographer I always used to work with film. I've been a photographer and a lot of my work would have Super8 or slides or something to do with light. I guess when we first started to work with these computers, there was a way of actually having all these different things speak to each other through a hub which meant there was a duplicity of possible juxtapositions of meaning, and that keeps happening now but through more complex interfaces.

Audience Does it influence considerations of structure in the whole work?

It does. Is the image just happening on the screen? Is it happening in the space? How long will the image be suspended? I don't know if we're consciously thinking about filmic structures in terms of say scripting but we've discovered that we score things in quite a complex way. When you're thinking about which camera, what frame, what effect, what cross-over, I suppose we are. But I hadn't deliberately thought about working in the sense of say, story-boarding or something like that.

KG *Trial by Video is interesting in terms of site. It was done at the Economist Building and in the Old Magistrates Court in Melbourne where Ned Kelly was tried. It's been done in an old building in Glasgow recently. What's the importance of site in the work you perform?*

I think they empower a work. I suppose that's my visual arts perspective—how you install a work, what you actually get from the physical space, how that can amplify the content, how can you construct things so that they're satisfying for people just to walk in as an installation before they become enlivened through the performance. There's lots of histories and textures, possibilities within the physical space we've worked in.

For *Trial by Video* we set up installations at PICA in Perth and at Performance Space and another space in Brisbane. Simultaneously, we were performing in an underground railway station in Melbourne. We had 2 cameras set up in the installation spaces with 2 cameras and an ISDN connection so that the viewers at this end could do certain actions and have an influence on the performance as it happened in Melbourne. They also became part of the visual environment of the performance work.

The tunnel was blocked at both ends so people were contained within the 2 screens at either end of the tunnel. In each of the spaces in PICA and Performance Space and here we had the screen, the cameras, a tray of sand (audiences could move the sand to trigger sound) and a giant book with black and white pages. We did it in 1997 when Pauline Hanson was so, um, "outspoken". It's a very political work deliberately looking at the technology and the power of the media to be able to manipulate the masses and what the potential offloading of that is on an individual.

KG *A lot of it is about the language of political gesture.*

All of the movement was done from John's research into gestures. Basically a person doesn't just have identity through language and appearance but the way they talk with their hands is a development of who they are. He gave us scores of gestures to use. I was the voice of dissent. He was a politician. It's a very strong work and even though it was done in 1998, no matter what context we do it in again, (we did it in Glasgow in March this year) the work becomes more sophisticated because we know more about the technology and possibilities. We change it according to the political environment. If you're actually looking at media power and politics, it's not ever gonna get out of history. You'll remember there was a strong anti-Asian immigration debate going on too. John's half-Chinese and he learned the gestures from A-Z of all of these different words and performed it like a language test. It was as if he was being tested in Chinese and English. There was also a little bit of text from a Pauline Hanson speech—

Trash Vaudeville Loose End

The focus of this new work is a process of experimentation using projected animation sequences and live performance. Animation, produced using clunky but vibrant analogue technology, is projected onto large screens and mixed with the live performer to tell a seedy story of finding desire and losing your mind. Two characters inhabiting the peripheries of gay life cross paths on the stroke of midnight. Loose End traces the ensuing havoc.

Trash Vaudeville

A work in development, *Loose End* is an investigation into the total integration of performer and projection. Animated sequences run across 3 screens. Some animations run solo, some involve actual highlighted spaces for the performer to become part of the animation and to interact with the projected characters. The work is quite literal in its methods of integration creating the effect of a cartoon character coming to life. The body/image integration works particularly well when the animations are used to stretch reality—when a cat transforms into a man, or the soul leaves a battered body and flies up to the heavens. The strength of the work is that the technology is used to expand reality, without losing the special vibrancy that can only be created by the presence of the living, breathing body on stage.

Gail Priest

Direction, animation and performance Trash Vaudeville, sound & audio visual management Severin Sieben, set construction Chris Fox, lighting design David Darker. Performance Space, Sydney, July 15 - 17

another flavour to the oral content.

KG *What have you seen of motion capture technology?*

Merce Cunningham has done some great things with motion capture. I saw it at SIGGRAPH in 1998 in Florida. He has 3 screens and he's working with coming in and out of the frame. And it's Merce's choreography. You just know it's Merce's choreography but it's not a body. It's just this whisp of a line but it has weight because it's come from a body with weight. And it's beautiful, it's just beautiful. And I'm thinking I'm getting old too and perhaps I can keep going on too. That's a big thing about age and Australia. A lot of us want to keep on moving and there's not a lot of acceptance for older movers in this culture.

Audience I think technology has the potential to change what we experience as a real event. That's really going to change a lot in the next 20 years if they do away with the screen and write on the retina. So your experience will be like a waking dream. There's still touch and smell locking you back down to earth but...

At SIGGRAPH there was a wonderful woman called Gretchen from Paris. She's an installation artist working with 'a trip around the world.' It was much more lateral than that but the way you experienced it was on a little footpad that had pebbles. Depending on how you shifted your weight, you went on a journey. The materials were all very tactile but it was like this very haptic relationship to the technology that just grounded the body in this other experience. It was so beautiful. That's installation work but the thing of touch and so on are important to work about the interfaces—not just the eye and the body and the screen.

KG *That's something that Mari Velonaki's doing in her work.*

Mari Velonaki Yes, I'm trying to link the spectator with a projected digital person through objects, through smell, touch, breath...

In installation it's very much more a one-to-one relationship. Even though you might be in a room with lots of people and there might be devices that are making that more complex, the notion of engaging in the experience in an installation is still very much yourself with it. When it can be as haptic as possible that's when it's most satisfying.

Mari Velonaki When you can forget about the interface and just go through it.

Company in Space's new work Architecture of Biography (see Working the Screen 99, page 16) will premiere in association with Melbourne International Festival 2001.

Bonemap the wild edge

Bonemap the wild edge dance | screen | sound | image | object is a site-specific artwork emphasising the ephemeral body via the social and natural landscape. The artists interpret contrasts between the tropical Australian environment and the 'wild edge' of urban and built spaces. Exploring relationships of the moment and notations of identity and place sees performance, multimedia, exhibition,

installation and sound composition merge into the wild edge. Available as discrete modules.

Challenges: reconnaissance and personal knowledge of sites; small crew multi-tasking in diverse and distant locations; meteorological and extreme environmental effects on technical equipment (sun, water, tiny insects inside camera lens); and stretching of human/technical resources.

Russell Milledge is an artist, curator and consultant. His performance, sculpture, installation art, interface design and multimedia work is collaborative and represented in the collections of Queensland Art Gallery and Cairns Regional Gallery. Rebecca Youdell is a choreographer and performer working in contemporary dance via site-specific collaborations involving multimedia, installation and performance. Collaborators: Glen O'Malley, Michael Whitticker and Paul Lawrence. info@bonemap.com.

the wild edge has been presented in Cairns and Tokyo and will be seen in Townsville in August and as part of *l'attitude 27.5°* at Brisbane Powerhouse, September 9 - 25. Australia Council, Arts Queensland, The Choreographic Centre (ACT), Cairns City Council. www.bonemap.com

Back to Back Theatre Soft

A collaboration between Back To Back Theatre and Deakin University's School of Architecture, *Soft* is a performance merging architectural design, virtual and live performance, character animation and surround sound. *Soft* will take place in a purpose-built architectural structure and utilise a diversity of media to realise the performers' inner worlds. The venue will be a purpose-built, inflatable unit or self-supporting structure incorporating a 360 degree projection membrane with surround sound. It will include elements of virtual architecture with the capacity to respond to the actions of performers.

Established in 1987, Back to Back Theatre operates around an ensemble of professional performers with intellectual disabilities. Recent artistic work employs digital technology for pre-production, documentation, show control and operating technology.

Collaborators: Rita Halabarec, Mark Deans, Darren Riches, Nicki Holland, Sonia Teuben (actors/devisers), Bruce Gladwin (director), Julianne O'Brien (dramaturg), Hugh Covill (sound design), Professor Mark Barry with students of Architecture & Building, Deakin University, Geelong (physical and virtual design), Efterpi Soropos (lighting design), Anna Tregloan (costume design). back2back@ozemail.com.au

Creative development period July-December 2000. New Media Arts Fund, Australia Council; Arts Victoria.

Denis Beaubois Group Stare #1 and #4

A situation is created where a group of strangers is divided into 2 groups, separated and invited to look at each other, each individual given a partner to look at from the other group. At any time they may leave the room and their partner choose to refocus their gaze on another person.

The group stare is a closed system which generates its own performative platform where the viewer is also the performer. The work is exhibited as 2 projections side by side. The initial impact in the gallery provides an impression of a crowd (possibly an audience) looking back at the viewer. This crowd appears to be reacting to something outside the camera's field of vision. As more time is spent with the work, a relationship can be derived between the people from the different screens.

Denis Beaubois' practice includes performance, video and photography. His works have been performed and exhibited throughout Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Spain, South America and the US. In 1998 he performed in New York and at the Cleveland Festival of Performance Art. He was the winner of Bonn Videonale 8 in Germany. In 1999 he was the resident guest artist at the Artist Unlimited Group in Bielefeld Germany and is currently artist in residence at the University of NSW. His work, *Writing*, is exhibited as part of *Spectroscope* at Performance Space (see page 2).

Group Stare is an ongoing project which has been exhibited in Bielfeld, Germany and was recently shown at BUNKER @ Linden Gallery in St Kilda as well as being performed at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space. New Media Arts Fund, Australia Council.



More sites, events and artists

Online

Johnny Ice, Digital Detective is a weekly multimedia comic about futuristic cop Johnny, "working with cheap clients and even cheaper technology." There are plenty of soundbytes and animations within the 13 episodes, and more to come. www.secretcity.com.au/johnnyice/

PreFab, curated by Shiralee Saul & Helen Stuckey, is an exhibition of VRML sites exploring the "pleasures and potentialities of the digital suburbs", allowing viewers to explore the virtual homes of architects and multimedia artists including Horst Kiechle & Jamie C Paynter. www.maap.org.au/maap99/prefab/

Sydney@rt maps a maze of artists from non-English speaking backgrounds, using music, video, digital images, writing labs and animation to investigate Sydney life; some are incredibly confronting like the abusive woman who rings the Multicultural Arts Alliance with a diatribe against migrants. Real or fiction? Artists featured: Justo Diaz, Misako Sugiyama, Tiet Ho, Zoja Bojic, Vahid Vahed. www.multart.org.au/sydneyart/

The **Fine Art Forum** online gallery always features interesting digital artists, both Australian and international, and explores crossovers between arts and sciences, and the use of medical technology. An upcoming exhibition in August is *eyesee* where new Indigenous artists explore digital media. www.fineartforum.org/gallery/navbar.html

Melbourne's **Next Wave** festival (see Alex Hutchinson review, RT 38) featured a wide range of web works under the banner *Wide Awake: dreaming at twilight*, including **Matt Gardiner's** *temple of dreams*, a virtual drive-in cinema, and *fest on the net* (<http://arts.abc.net.au/netfest/>), online festival coverage including net radio, video of performances and reviews compiled by RMIT students. www.nextwave.org.au

University of SA's **mag net** (www.mag-net.unisa.edu.au/) promotes the work of students from the Department of Communications with a multimedia channel showcasing animation, interactive works and digital video, while design students at UWS have put together **gleematrix**, a nifty site commissioned by gleebooks, which looks at the art of writing in a digital context. www.design.nepean.uws.edu.au/projects/gleematrix

Juliana Wong's teasing site of manga gifs and text should keep you busy for a while. That's if you can find your way into

the site. Persevere. Tiny glimpses, almost unattainable, offer frustration and fun. www.anu.edu.au/ITA/CSA/photomedia/wong/interface/ KK

The Australian Multimedia Catalogue has been updated and is available on the website of the Australian Film Commission (www.afc.gov.au/resources/searchd/mm/). The catalogue lists 740 interactive multimedia titles recently completed or currently being developed by Australian multimedia developers. The catalogue is produced from the Multimedia Projects Database maintained by AFC Research and Information. This database is also used to produce a hard copy version of the catalogue which is distributed free to distributors and at major international markets such as Milia and E3.

CD-ROM

Helen Grace's *Before Utopia, A Non-official Prehistory of the Present* is a really good read. That's something you can't often say of a CD-ROM. It's a multi-layered history of art, politics and visual art politics from the mid 50s to 1990 with the Art Workers Union (NSW) at its centre. Grace has done the editing, collating, curating and timing—each at the centre of the work is a string of years to click your way through, each marked by a choice quotation and an image—a photo or a poster. Then you click into the year of your choice to find a table of 3 columns—Art, Union, World—each with events, documents, interview transcripts and images. If you want to go further into the documents, you can and, beyond, into the extensive artist/writer bibliographies. The glimpses of Art Workers Union posters designed for parties and protests are powerfully evocative of more combative political times as are the often vigorous documents and diatribes taken from notes, minutes, journals, catalogues, BUGA UP graffiti and the press. Grace hasn't written a history, she's facilitated the making of one. It's up to you to put it all together. It's an invaluable resource, easy to use, and, as she says, the CD-ROM format allows it to be sooner or later added to—something you find yourself often inclined to. One complaint—the single loop of music (it's all I got) could drive you mad unless you're addicted to the band, but even then... Turn off the sound. *Before Utopia* is not a whizz-bang CD-ROM but it does what it sets out to do and does it well. Media Culture Books, Series Editor McKenzie Wark. Distributed by Pluto Press. KG

Uncle Bill, created by **Debra Petrovich** and produced by **Julianne Pierce**, forecast in *Working the Screen 1999*, is about to be launched as part of an installation at

Artspace in August. A sneak preview revealed a haunting evocation of a disturbing relationship, shot in black and white and mixed in with historical/home movie footage. You work your way through a house and the surrounding landscape in a regional industrial town, triggering recollections and anxieties. KG

Kiersty Garbett's *Parasite* follows the journey of a parasite through the human body—a street system with road signs to vital organs. It was recently exhibited at the e-media gallery at the Contemporary Centre for Photography in Melbourne.

Events

Experimenta's *Orbital*, shown simultaneously at CCP and the Lux Centre for Film, Video and Digital Media in London, has just finished. It featured artists **Brook Andrew, Raymond Peer, Megan Jones, Nicola Loader, Margie Medlin & Nigel Helyer** exploring, through digital media, Australia's cultural and topographical landscapes and issues surrounding salination, biological & technological ecosystems, cultural identity & colonialism (see review in *RealTime* 39).

Octopus no. 1 at 200 Gertrude St Melbourne (until August 16) is the first in a series engaging with the "changing perception of objects according to the tenets of the digital, the virtual and the technological realms." Curated by Max Delany, artists include **ADS Donaldson, Julia Gorman, Michael Graeve & Sandra Selig**.

James Angus' new works at Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide (until August 5), play with scale, using digital technologies to calculate and model shapes and objects falling from high altitudes at the moment of collapse. Chris Chapman, director, writes that "dynamics software, CAD and stereolithography [are used] to realise in actual physical terms an imaginary, or as the artist suggests, 'virtual event'."

Marrugeku Company, a collaboration between Stalker and Kunwinjki people from Kumbulunya in the Northern Territory, is developing *Crying Baby*, a large-scale outdoor inter-cultural performance employing physical theatre, Kunwinjki dance, music, film, installation, weaving, sound art and composition. Funded by the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council.

Recent publications

Go online, slip in the **ensemble logic** CD-ROM, and you have access to a host of **electronic Writing Research ensemble** and associated writers. As editor **Teri Hoskin**

says in her "post-face", "what this book wants to do is to open up portals, or spaces between projects/events—to restructure the structure without shifting a tag, sans touching a stone or a strut." A handsomely produced book of text offers a foretaste of the works. Contributors include Linda Marie Walker, Linda Carroli, Josephine Wilson, Bill Seaman, Sue Thomas, Mark Amerika, Katie More, Dylan Everett and more. <http://ensemble.va.com.au>

Artlink, Vol 20, no 1, *Reconciliation? Indigenous Art for the 21st century*, includes Susan Angel's "Remote area computer art: multimedia talent emerges at Yuendumu", focusing on the work of **Donovan Rice**.

Photofile #60, August 2000 Edited by Mike Leggett, this edition includes Darren Tofts on Murray McKeich; Les Walking on the industrialisation of image manipulation tools; Leggett on the discontinued Photoshop 'rival', Live Picture; Edwina Bartle on queer theory and digital aesthetics as she prepares *Queer Transgressions* for the Brisbane Powerhouse; Ricky Cox on internet opportunities for photographers; plus the work of the Perth-based group of media artists, Retarded Eye. The issue features work by Patricia Piccinini, Caroline Brunet, Marty Saint James, Xiao Xian Liu and Rebecca Cummins along with reviews of recent exhibitions. Published by Australian Centre for Photography. www.acp.au.com

ART Asia Pacific, Issue 27, *new.media*. For images and information alone, this is an impressive issue. It includes Japan's Dumb type; interactive art in Japan; Korean video art; Melbourne's Federation Square; electronic art in Malaysia; Taiwan-born Shu Lea Chang's provocative New York site and online works; and the boom in mainland Chinese video installation. Kathy Cleland writes about New Zealand's Maureen Lander and John Fairclough, Sydney-based artists Melinda Rackham and Justine Cooper, and Canberra-based, Hong Kong-born Juliana Wong. With assistance from MAAAP, a selection of articles will appear on www.artasiapacific.com

Ashley Crawford, formerly Editor of the late lamented *21.C* and new media correspondent has been appointed Editor of the New York-based *Artbyte* magazine. It's glossy and informative and occasionally glimpsed in Australian inner-city newsagencies. Congratulations Ashley. www.artbyte.com

The Men Who Knew Too Much Virtual Humanoids

Melbourne's Planetarium as a performance venue was an inspired choice by *The Men Who Knew Too Much*. In this space *Virtual Humanoids* was a wondrous meeting of interfaces; electronic art and absurdism, screen and stage, live and virtual, human bodies and computerised voices. The venue's white dome-shaped roof functioned as more than the computer screen: it enveloped audience bodies leaning back in their chairs angled towards the horizontal. Projected images floated across laid-out torsos and upturned faces. A disembodied humanoid voice as director seems almost a family familiar tucking us in for the night—Hal meets *Star Trek's* Spock.

Enter 6 male performers. Writer-designer Simon Hill, Patrick Cronin, Louis Dingemans and Richard Gray, live, vertical, human-like in dark suits and heavy-rimmed glasses delivering pithy lines. Peter Eckersall appeared on-screen, often only in ice blue, pinkish outlines of his head. Music and VR creator Adam Nash played the hacker, Setarcos, live, seated, driving the images on the dome screen and emailing longingly to the only visible woman, Yasuka Yohama, who emails back that she is virtual. Performance director was Susie Dee.

Virtual Humanoids is an early 21st century reinvention of the variety show: jokey, blokey, silly, amusing, beguiling, techno-savvy and clever. Larger-than life images of Man in evolution up to the stage of 'suits' ringed the dome, a blue-suited, headless virtual singer cloned as wall-paper, a Martian selling white-goods, gigantic table settings, a cyber housefly at the cyber fly port. The net refracted through domestic life. The show performed the aesthetics

of the internet surf, short fast grabs seemingly at random, except that *The Men's* web search deliberately brought up cultural clashes and longstanding anxieties; dehumanised corporate men, robotic unthinking behaviour, a cross-dressed bride, an electronic maze.

Screen images alternated back streets and identikit houses, with abstract computer generated figures and patterns, several of which were sensorially beautiful mobiles and sensory tunnels. Hilarious web pages with extreme environmental messages pointed towards alienated ineffectualness—trees as information lists. If the show's gentle humour highlighted the deliciousness of human opportunism and games in the dotcom world, it's form linked the disembodiment of dotcoms to dehumanising corporate norms. The ideas are not new. They have a history as the nostalgic use of lines from 60s comedy attested. However, making connections between the web's illogicality and its market driven commercialism is a crucial message towards awareness of the consequence of social life mediated by on-line languages.

Virtual Humanoids' polished, stylised format integrated its digital imagery completely with live sequences. Electronic technology was used in the artmaking, not merely as the broadcast medium. I found myself silently disputing Philip Auslander's claim that the televisual invariably dominates liveness. My attention roamed equally between the performers' faces and screen images, perhaps because their bodies were in a life-like scale to my own in the second row but also because their faces were specially lit.

The production confirmed my view that much of the new media arts retains the distinctions of artistic disciplines. This work was clearly performed to and for an audience who like theatre, with even the obligatory participation when one spectator was singled out to be photographed and scanned onto a suited body in the virtual world. This approach is quite different to the stand-alone electronic screens in the visual arts where flat gallery walls become huge screens or miniaturised monitors are hidden in other objects or multiples function like mundane sculpture, for example the shopping-mall aura of Nam June Paik's latest work. Or where galleries overseas must employ attendants to encourage visitors to interactively click and scroll the artwork on screens like those they have at work. Because new technologies are already so advanced in corporate and game delivery, and webcam broadcasting seems to have been co-opted by the sex industry, innovation in electronic screen performance needs to generate more than technological presence in image display or more immediate script access. At least New York computer installation artist Toni Dove and dancers like Company in Space 'move' the technology imaginatively.

Virtual Humanoids also offers an innovative approach with its comic expressiveness and captivating spaces that expose the failings, foibles and duplicity of these new technologies we love.

Peta Tait

Virtual Humanoids, The Men Who Knew Too Much, Melbourne Planetarium, Scienceworks, July 19-30

Anti-auteur: music video art

Erin Brannigan

At the forum held during the *MuVi* screenings at the Valhalla in Sydney, a debate sprang up about the absence of credits from the screening of music videos. This fact is pivotal in understanding the position held by music videos within the broader screen culture. The best of the genre are positioned along the cutting edge of video art and technology, they are collaborations with some of the best new and established music artists and occupy the fertile common ground between music and screen. Consequently they are financially supported by the music industry and, in a productive reciprocal relationship, influence the developments and directions within that industry. At this point, between disciplines and their associated technologies, between art and promotion, between production and product, the music video creators exist as enigmas. In a move that has been toyed with by avant-garde filmmakers, the power hierarchies implicit in credits are absent here representing the situation for the music video described above; they result from so many forces that the impulse to identify an 'auteur' is dissipated.

Having recently been presented with the task of researching the 'hot choreographers' of the moment, I naturally turned to music videos. The history of commercial dance in the late 20th century has been a succession of fads drawn directly from this small screen genre: Michael Jackson's softened rap moves, Janet Jackson's 'one-move-per-beat' style, Paula Abdul's hard hitting accents, all had their day and, to differing degrees, still linger on in jazz classes around the country. But identifying Ricky



Window Licker

Martin's choreographer (who incidentally is Tina Landon of Janet Jackson fame) is no easy feat; professional dance networks across USA, fan-club websites and finally the LA music video awards website had to be negotiated. The people who help create the 'aura' of our popstars are thus themselves surrounded by mystique due to the scarcity of information relating to them.

With the rise of electronic dance music that often has a pasty DJ as its 'star' instead of an appealing singer, doors have opened for music video directors both in terms of creative freedom and recognition. Combined with the 'mys-

tique' mentioned above, directors such as Chris Cunningham and Spike Jonze have acquired cult status and both now move between the music video format and feature film work.

Three clips by Cunningham were screened at *MuVi* (at the St Kilda Film Festival and elsewhere): *Window Licker* (Aphex Twin), *All is Full of Love* (Björk) and *Africa Sbox* (Leftfield). Cunningham's feature film work includes designing the aliens for *Alien 3* and he is currently directing a film version of *Neuromancer*. He was also in discussion with Stanley Kubrick about a sci-fi project before the director's death. I'm sounding like a fan because I am one. The 11 minute version of *Window Licker* is a remarkable short film referencing the boot clips associated with American R&B, Michael Jackson's mini-musicals of the 80s, Spike Lee's cinematic aesthetic, and the choreography of Gene Kelly. It also comments on the portrayal of women in video clips (a close-up of cellulite-laden bikini-clad buttocks gyrating in slow-mo is truly awesome/awful) and the construction of the popstar, with the artist's face appearing on everybody. In the Björk clip, the camera fetishistically lingers over 2 Björk robot clones who then proceed to tenderly embrace, metal to metal, and in *Africa Sbox*, an African man walks the city streets gradually losing limbs that shatter like clay, creating images of a literally broken man that are really distressing.

The latitude allowed these filmmakers was addressed by the forum panel but always in the context of an art vs industry binary which led nowhere. The play with genres, pop culture constructions and the shift away from identities

and towards abstract movement studies brought about by the rise of the DJ as music artist, are the issues that seemed obvious post-screening, but they weren't touched on. The German and Australian work contained some treasures, a favourite being the dancing garage doors that perform a tightly choreographed ballet to the electronic score (*Star Escalator* by Sensorama) and another that features an eerie semi-rural landscape with a distant overpass that glitters with passing traffic that throws off UFO like light, exploding every now and then into a pyrotechnic peak when the music demands it (*Au Pair* by Kreidler).

The inclusion of *MuVi* in the St Kilda Film Festival and the attention granted to music videos at festivals such as Oberhausen is testimony to the innovation and rapid development occurring in this field. Although, as one audience member pointed out, David Bowie has been onto this for decades. I'll keep watching *Rage* on Friday nights to see what happens next.

Muvi—international music videos from the Oberhausen Film Festival in Germany; eMuvi—finalists from the Alchemy electronic music video competition; AFI conversations on film: Valhalla, Sydney, June 5-6; George Cinemas, Melbourne May 31-June 4; Electric Shadows, Canberra, June 11; FTI theatre, Perth, June 23-24; AFI State Cinema, Hobart, July 1-2; Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, July 6-8; State Library of Qld theatre, Brisbane, July 12 & 15. St Kilda Film Festival May 31-June 4

Value for money at the Sydney Film Festival?

Simon Enticknap

How do you measure a film's worth? In *Clouds of May*, a lovingly lethargic film from Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan, there is a scene in which a film director shoots the same scene again and again, trying to capture a perfect take while adding up the mounting cost of the film (which, presumably, is what it cost to make the film we're watching). The joke is that, ultimately, we're the ones who choose to pay and watch this so-called waste of film, and we do so because we expect a pay-off in the end, a reward for our perseverance, just like the little boy in the film who must carry an egg in his pocket for 40 days in order to gain a musical watch.

Such questions of value and recompense were particularly relevant to this year's festival where subscribers, who once had access to nearly all the festival films, were asked to pay extra to see about half the program, including a retrospective of Alan Clarke films and several documentaries. A subscription still bought you access to nearly 40 features and documentaries at the State theatre—good value, undoubtedly—but a major change from previous years in which one of the pleasures of the festival has been the freedom to wander from screen to screen, dipping in and out of the light, sliding from your seat if something became too soporific, or perchance to stay, having the luxury to take a punt on an unknown. Alas, the days of being a film flaneur seem to be numbered; we must make a choice, discriminate, exercise our buying power—and it hurts.

Two films which paid in full at the State were *Human Resources* and *Ratcatcher*, both described as being reminiscent of Ken Loach's films despite their differences in look and feel. What they shared was a focus on working class communities under stress, from contemporary

industrial France to the tenement blocks of 70s Glasgow. *Human Resources* also recalled Bertrand Tavernier's *It All Starts Today* from last year's festival, particularly in the way it documented the effects of post-industrialisation and economic rationalism, as well as in its use of a mainly amateur cast. In Tavernier's case, however, this local talent was portrayed as inherently passive, a silent oppressed mass waiting to be saved through the efforts of the professional classes—the schoolteacher, the artist, the social worker etc. *Human Resources*, on the other hand, captures the complex interaction and antagonism between classes, even within the same family, and presents all the players as dynamic, engaged individuals; the result is a film about the campaign for a 35-hour working week which is also a moving Oedipal drama.

The special quality of *Ratcatcher* lies in its uncompromising nature, not so much the result of any gritty, in-ye-face shock tactics—it is a tough but tender film and weepingly beautiful throughout—but rather in its absolute refusal to sentimentalise the lives of its characters. In this respect it suggests Loach's *Kes*—Ramsay goes close to offering us the fulfilment of a happy ending but can't quite do it, doesn't go for the easy satisfaction—but it reminded me especially of Terence Davies' films about childhood, notably in the use of sound and song to evoke the most deeply wrought emotions concerning family, loneliness, yearning...

Time to get personal. *Innocence* and *A Pornographic Affair* offered contrasting views of a woman and a man's lust in action, or perhaps love in all its glory and pathos. Paul Cox's new film examines what happens when feelings you thought had expired many moons ago turn around and bite you with renewed vigour even

as the sands of time are beginning to peter out. Not surprisingly then, the protagonists barely have time to sit still for long, are always on the move, constantly coming and going as they try to get at least one thing straight before the death knell sounds. It's a film full of reflection, literally in the myriad windows and mirrors, as well as in the mouths of characters who like to ruminate with sentences like "The thing about love/death/life" etc etc as they stomp around the living room, up and down river banks, in and out of houses.

In contrast, *A Pornographic Affair* is all about staying still and not saying very much, in fact the less said the better—it's pretty much a no-names affair. While Cox's characters can hardly constrain themselves, the Man and the Woman in *A Pornographic Affair* spend a lot of time sitting around (same table, same day) being inscrutable, before retiring discreetly to a nearby hotel room. Their affair is all about staying in control—don't give too much away, come too soon, open up—so that any emotion which emerges here is as intense as it is insignificant. A mock-documentary style gives everybody the chance to be mature and objective, as well as preventing the viewer or anybody else from getting too close. Next question please.

In the world of real documentary, Hedy Honigmann's film, *Crazy*, goes to the opposite extreme, chasing any tell-tale signs of emotion like a dog after a stick. "No comment" is not acceptable here. In a series of grimly repetitive interviews with Dutch peace keepers about their experiences in various New World Order trouble-spots (Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia), Honigmann asks the soldiers to listen to a piece of music connected with their experiences—then keeps the camera rolling. As a strategy, it

opens up possibilities for exploring the role of popular music in the military (arias for the officers and euro-pop for the recruits) but, ultimately, comes across as a rather crude means of getting subjects to emote on camera. And they do—at length—until I desperately wanted somebody to make some connections between all this agony and the practice of using soldiers to (not) fight for peace. There are questions which could have been asked here—such as why the West is so obsessed but also paralysed by the suffering of 'innocent' victims—but the uncomfortable feeling persists that the reason they're not asked is because it might serve only to distract from the pain.

For a far better use of music as means of doing all those ex-things to a culture—examine, explore, explain, exalt (but not exploit)—refer to *Buried Country*. The music is C&W with a Koori twist, the humanity is 100% pure rockin' gold, and Jimmy Little sang live on stage—a hard act for the rest of the festival to follow.

So was it all worth it in the end? As a festival replete with strong screenings and thoughtful programming, it left me feeling completely whelmed, neither more nor less. I came, I saw, I consumed—the ideal new festival patron (except I didn't pay).

Buried Country, director Andy Nebl, Australia; Clouds of May, director/writer/photography Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Turkey; Crazy, director Hedy Honigmann, Netherlands; Human Resources, director Laurent Canet, France; Innocence, director/writer Paul Cox, Australia; A Pornographic Affair, director Frederic Fonteyne, France; Ratcatcher, director/writer Lynne Ramsay, UK; Sydney Film Festival, State Theatre, June 9 - 23

St Kilda Film Festival: digital links

Anna Dzenis

Mike Leggett

Fusion, n. Fusing; fused mass; blending of different things into one; coalition

...when two strange images meet, two images that are the work of two poets pursuing separate dreams, they apparently strengthen each other...

Gaston Bachelard, Poetics of Space

Fusion was an evening of multimedia presentations, a part of the St. Kilda Film Festival program. Curator Sue McCauley successfully brought together a range of material with the stated aim of exploring the interactive possibilities of digital media. The program was scheduled to take place in 3 separate sessions. The first introduced several new innovative CD-ROM works; the second focused on the demonstration of a number of politically charged interactive documentaries; and the third showcased a variety of performance pieces which also incorporated digital material.

Curator Sue McCauley comments: "As the curator of the program for the second year in succession, I knew that the festival and particularly the venue was a fantastic opportunity to showcase the latest in CD-ROM and performance. It is not often that artists get this sort of opportunity. As a survey type, I felt that I could do 3 very different sorts of programs where artists could demonstrate their works for the general festival-going audience.

"I have recently also coordinated the digital arts program for the Next Wave Festival, *Wide Awake Dreaming at Twilight*. In both events I focused on creating contexts for the exhibition of multimedia works that did not rely on viewers looking at works on the computer. I was interested in getting away from the idea that the site of production was the exhibition platform. I want to give artist the opportunity to escape the box when showing their work. So works were incorporated in installation, in theatrical performance or as installations."

It has become common practice to incorporate CD-ROMs into film festival programs. In the last couple of years at the Melbourne International Film Festival, exhibitions of multimedia works have been set up in foyers and adjacent gallery spaces enabling patrons to move between film screenings and the interactives. There were, however, several things that made the *Fusion* program quite distinctive. First was the diversity of material that was presented—a demonstration of the real range of work currently being undertaken. Second was the impressive way that a human presence was brought back to the centre of the multimedia stage. This took the form of the creators of the CD-ROMs actually presenting their work, taking the audience through some of the pathways of their creations, and answering



66b/cell, *Cybermyth*

questions about the work and the creative process. It also took the form, in the final session, of a number of manifestations of the performing body, from playfully acerbic monologues to high-tech choreographed dance ensembles.

The first session, *Surface Tension*, featured 2 CD-ROMs which could be described as explorations of personal spaces and the subterranean, shifting zones beneath the surface of things. Leon Cmielewski and Josephine Starr's *Dream Kitchen* is an interactive stop-motion animation. The space for this interactive is a pristine, gleaming kitchen setting. Cmielewski explained that the concept originated in a story from Japan where people put on VR helmets to see what their dream kitchen might be like. Once we start to explore this dream zone, however, we encounter 'eaky borders' which allow us to slip into the oven, under the fridge, down the sink. Here we discover debris, missing pens and pencils, and rodents: we are even able to administer electric shock to a rat. Each return to the kitchen space finds it in increasing disarray—dirtier, messier, falling apart. In comparison, the space for

Matthew Riley's *Memo* is more personal and meditative. Riley's idea was to create an artist's diary full of hand-drawn, painterly sketches and scrawling text in a high-tech medium. He wanted this journal-like structure to incorporate his many observations of the relationships between popular culture and the everyday. And he felt that interactivity would enable him to suggest complex conjunctions of meaning between situations as diverse as phone sex, football, gambling, and shopping, with a focus on the different ways in which language works.

The second session featured a series of interactive documentaries with tough political and educational agendas. It became clear that interactivity has provided practitioners with many new opportunities. It was also evident from the work that the interactive form of documentary has become the site of close collaboration between the subjects and the storytellers. Filmmaker and activist Richard Frankland introduced the CD-ROM *The Lore of the Land* and spoke of the way Fraynetwork Multimedia's work supported Indigenous people in telling their own stories by not editing

the material that they have collected. Similar sentiments were expressed by those who worked on the disturbing and poetic *East Timor Identity, Resistance and Dreams of Return*. The producers saw themselves as facilitators encouraging the stories of East Timorese refugees in exile to be told. The final documentary, *Mabo: The Native Title Revolution*, turned out to be an equally interesting hybrid that includes a re-edit of filmmaker Trevor Graham's *Land Bilong Islanders* with a new ending taken from his other film *Mabo: Life of an Island Man*. A great deal of extra material has also been gathered together into this CD-ROM to make it a valuable research resource with clear educational potential.

The third session was the most provocative and high octane. Live performers interacted with digital projections of pre-recorded images—a fusion of voices, bodies, and dancing limbs in a multimedia theatre-scape. Frank Lovece's *Poopants* was a voice-driven work dedicated to narrative. Lovece's fast-track monologue touched on issues of violence, the republic, race and class as his words and voice interacted with projected image fragments. A series of screens and structures were strategically set up on stage to further break up and fragment the images, and complicate possible readings or interpretations. The next 2 performances were Cazerine Barry's innovative dance works. *Pony Girl* took its inspiration from *Girl's Own Annuals* and Barry's prancing, energetic body took mock riding lessons from a 60s style projected voice. *Landscape* was a more mesmeric piece with Barry dancing behind a large gauze screen shadowed by, and interacting with, images of herself projected through the screen—a theatre of the figural. The final performance was a futuristic work of alchemy which came from the Tokyo-based collaborative group 66b/cell's *Cybermyth*, a collaboration of Japanese and Australian performers. The work they presented was a remix of Goethe's *Faust*—a kind of Faust in Space—with characters plucked from the text free-form, clothed in graphically striking cyber costumes which intermittently flashed and created their own light shows, performing choreographed Butoh-inspired dance movements which also incorporated digital video projections. During question time, one of the artists explained that they had tried the piece with visuals alone but felt that it wasn't enough. The stage, they said, needed a human body.

This was one of *Fusion's* real achievements. Invoking McCauley's words, Fusion was a program which "escaped the box".

Fusion, St Kilda Film Festival, The George Ballroom, Melbourne, June 2

FILMshorts

Hurt, a film made by young people in North West NSW as part of a project in conjunction with non profit arts group BIG hART (seen in performance at the Adelaide Festival), has been nominated for 2 AFI awards. With the assistance of filmmaker Phillip Crawford and screenwriter Scott Rankin, 250 children from Walgett, Narrabri, Tamworth, Armidale and Moree were involved in the making. NSW Premier Bob Carr commented, "the film has already been adopted by the Federal Office of the Status of Women as a tool to address domestic violence issues, but what is most important is the effect that making the film has had on changing the lives of the young people at the core of the project."

Extreme Heat is a new project (financed by Pacific Film & Television Commission and AFC) geared to creating low cost production opportunities for Qld filmmakers. *Rubber Gloves* from Kris Kneen & Anthony Mullins (whose short *Stop* competed at this year's Cannes Festival), Sandra Graham's *Mohammed's Passion* and *Crack* by AFI winner Evan Clarry are the first films funded under the scheme and will be completed in late August.

Film Australia scored a hat-trick at the Sydney Film Festival with attendees voting *The Diplomat*, *Tosca* and *Buried Country* the three most popular documentaries. Winning film, Tom Zubrycki's *The Diplomat*, with a special appearance by Jose Ramos Horta, received a standing ovation and has been nominated for Best Documentary and Best Direction in the AFI Awards. Sharon Connolly, Film Australia's CEO said, "these latest accolades are further proof that Australian audiences appreciate the quality, relevance and diversity of the documentaries which Australia produces." *The Diplomat* will be released nationally, commencing in Sydney August 18, and all 3 films will screen on SBS.

Call for shorts: Melbourne Fringe Festival is looking for short films of less than 20 minutes for *Short Stuff*, an open access program. Docos, animation, digital, experimental, fiction are all welcome. Deadline August 18. Tel 03 9481 5111, www.melbournefringe.org.au.

Media Resource Centre, Adelaide, is presenting a series of seminars called Lipsync. The next session on Aug 29 looks at "What Makes A Good Short." Tel 08 8410 0979, www.mrc.org.au

TVshorts

Four new TV programs have been commissioned under the FTO/SBS Independent DIY TV Initiative, which encourages original and imaginative ideas for TV. *Video Dare*, *In the Swim*, *Let's Vote* and *Bloodsports* feature Real TV, a political game show, ex-Olympic swimmers and the Kelly family Christmas dinner. Stay tuned.

The ABC is planning a second season of *Short and Sweet* for broadcast in December and is scouting for dramas less than 25 mins with no restrictions on style or content. Call Wendy Charell, 02 9950 3670.

Will the AFC gag screen conversation?

Ben Goldsmith

In keeping with our new taste for public disclosures of partiality, I must at the outset declare my hand. I have been a member of the Australian Film Institute since 1996. I regularly use, most often at a distance, the Institute's research and information service and its unique collection of electronic and print resources ranging from scripts, to press packs, to clippings files, to trade papers, books and academic journals of criticism, analysis and theory. I have also been an audience for a large number of films and other projects assisted by the Australian Film Commission. I have attended festivals and screenings, conferences and seminars, premieres and opening night parties. I have pretended to be important in public and stood, alone, in a crowded room with my name pinned to my shirt. I've written about some of these texts and events. Some of these writings have been published. One or two have been read. I taught screen studies to second year undergraduates for a short period. I've been researching screen policy, production and consumption for longer. I am an information junkie. I subscribe to the daily email update Filmnet. I follow numerous discussion lists and bulletin boards including indieWire, Oz Short Films, and the Benton Foundation's Communications-related Headlines Update service. I fled from H-Film when the flavour of debate turned to listmaking and context deficient expressions of favouritism. I've been pleasantly surprised by the new incarnation of *Cinema Papers*. I won a video in a competition run by the *Urban Cinefile* website. I read *Metro* when I can find it in Brisbane, *Encore* and *If* magazine regularly, *Senses of Cinema* and *Screening the Past* periodically. I fraudulently appeared on national public radio and state public television talking knowledgeably about drive-in cinemas having been to one only twice in my life. As work, domestic circumstance and personality permit, I take an active interest in the flow of Australian screen culture, or what I prefer to call the screen conversation.

Recent policy decisions and amendments to funding procedures and guidelines made by the newly restructured Australian Film Commission promise to impact in multiple and profound ways on the shape, tenor and vitality of the screen conversation in Australia. These decisions are notable for a number of reasons. They privilege screen production over consumption, downplay the role of public debate in nurturing a vigorous screen culture, and strain the web of relationships connecting the film industry and the education sector. At a broader level they are symptomatic of the new cultural policy environment in which the dominant voices are not those of social concern and cultural commitment, but those of economic benefit and industrial development. These voices preach new policymaking priorities for the cultural sector. And these priorities reflect and derive from new relationships between cultural industries and public funding agencies and the weight given to market forces in the determination of the public responsibilities of government.

The first decision was outlined in a letter from the Chief Executive of the AFC to the Australian Film Institute in January of this year. In the letter, partially reproduced in the 1999 AFI Annual Report, Kim Dalton advised that because the Institute's activities were primarily directed towards resourcing the education sector, and since "it is not the role of the AFC to fund the provision of services to the education sector", the funding that the Institute's research and information centre had been receiving from the Commission would cease in December 2000. The same claim was made in an article in *The Age* (Philippa Hawker, "Cut! Institute cries foul as funding slashed", April 19), and another by Paul Harris in the latest issue of *Cinema Papers* ("In defence of research and development", June/July). This decision, if carried through, has potentially disastrous implications for the AFI

since the research and information service undergirds and links all of the AFI's activities: short film and documentary sales and distribution; a travelling exhibition program including the National Cinematheque, occasional seasons and the annual AFI Awards screenings and ceremony. A working group comprising representatives of the AFC, the AFI, ScreenSound Australia (formerly the National Film and Sound Archive), Film Australia, the Australian Film Television and Radio School and Cinemedia has been reviewing the need for the services and their value to the industry throughout the year. The group will undoubtedly take note of the volume of support the Institute has received from within the film industry, from the education sector, and from other Australian and international film agencies and organisations. It is understood that there is a strong possibility some kind of accommodation will be reached, and it is to be hoped that funding to permit the centre to continue will be secured.

There is a new set of national and international tensions, challenges and opportunities for technology, policy and content production—the convergence of information, communication and entertainment media and industries; new sources of production and co-production finance; the growing incidence of runaway production and studio construction; new competition for eyeballs and for screen space from the internet, games consoles, DVD; the imminent introduction of digital broadcasting and datacasting; new patterns of cinema going, changing release patterns and cinema rebuilding; and the decline in real terms of federal government commitments to the arts and cultural sectors. Faced with these, the AFC, like other agencies and organisations which disburse or utilise public funding, has in recent years been forced to make some tough decisions in defining its "core functions."

As David Gonski recommended in his 1997 *Review of Commonwealth Assistance to the Film Industry*, the AFC has chosen to concentrate its limited resources on assisting screen production in its many and varied forms. This is of course an entirely reasonable and appropriate course for a key public funding agency to take, if it is accepted that while audiovisual and new media production make important contributions to our media culture by giving it a local flavour and perspective, that production will not always meet tests of commercial viability and may not be made without some form of public assistance albeit often in partnership with the private sector.

But given that screen media (whether viewed or intended for viewing in the cinema or in the home, on a television or a computer or a mobile phone) will play an increasingly prominent part in our work and leisure, ministering to our information, communication and entertainment needs, it is equally imperative that support be given to the project of equipping citizens with critical and creative screen skills. Such skills are not only of vocational value, they facilitate informed and active participation in the screen conversation through the understanding and familiarity they promote for the instruments that mediate that culture and that debate.

The Commission's apparent downgrading of support to screen education instruments on the grounds that they are outside its remit is unfortunate and untimely. It underestimates and undervalues the role played by educators and students in colouring, challenging and nurturing Australian screen culture, as well as in training future creative professionals. It also runs counter to contemporary practice overseas, where those things which contribute to the screen culture environment and shape its rhetorics, logics and discourses are recognised for their social value as much as for the contribution they make to industry development and future employment prospects. As a recent British report on screen education, *Making Movies Matter*, noted, the skill to navi-

gate and negotiate the new media environment "will be a key element of literacy in the 21st century (BFI, 1999)." Support for screen education, the report went on, "will help to create the knowledgeable, critically aware audiences upon which the value and integrity of [the screen industries'] future output depend."

Screen and media studies courses comprising both production and critical elements are now offered by most tertiary institutions, and many secondary schools and vocational colleges. Academics and students participate in the Australian screen conversation as filmmakers and multimedia artists, as archivists and essayists, as volunteers and enthusiasts, and above all as audiences and publics. In its most recent Strategic Plan, the Australian Research Council calculates that Australian academic research papers in the arts and humanities are cited 40% more frequently than the world's papers in these fields. Many of these papers discuss Australian screen media, or draw their examples from the pool of Australian moving image experience. All of these activities help build the buzz of world interest in Australian screen production which in turn draws Australian practitioners to North America, Europe, Hong Kong, enhances the attractiveness of Australia as a film location, enjoins content producers in a global screen conversation and invigorates Australian screen culture.

The linkages between education and media are not only strategic, they are deep and genuine. The AFC has in the past been instrumental in facilitating these connections through its support for conferences, publications and joint research projects. And without downplaying the effort that goes in to spreading an ever decreasing budget ever wider, the Commission should be challenged to reconsider its stance on education and treat it as a priority funding concern in recognition of the sector's contribution to the screen conversation. In response the Commission might argue that there are other cultural organisations well placed to take on responsibility for screen education, and that the education sector itself has a part to play. While both may be true, the AFC is still in its own words "the primary development agency for the film, television and creative multimedia industries in Australia and a major supporter of screen culture." In education, universities are rewarded for their corporate accessibility, for the commercial appeal of their work, and for developing the now ubiquitous cross-sectoral partnerships. These arrangements require reciprocation, but in the screen media arena the AFC, it seems, is reluctant to remain in the conversation.

In focusing on the "core function" of production development, the Commission is responding to what it termed a crisis in Australian production at the end of 1999, exacerbated by the Sydney Fox Studios development and evidenced by the 3% share of the domestic box office commanded by Australian feature films last year. Gonski made similar recommendations in calling for the AFC to refocus on the core functions of script development of Australian film and television productions and professional development of new entrants to the industry. Gonski further recommended that funding for screen culture be capped at \$1 million, roughly 2% of the AFC's annual budget. In this, as in the underperforming Film Licensed Investment Company scheme, Gonski got it wrong.

This is precisely the moment that the AFC should be broadening its commitments to the screen conversation and to initiatives which promote screen education. This can be achieved through operational subsidies, research partnerships, funding for archival resources, and support for new initiatives like the broad range of developments which play a hugely valuable role in publicising Australian screen culture—the

weekly Sydney screening and Q&A program Popcorn Taxi, the email update Filmnet, the newly formed Friends of the National Film or Sound Archive Inc, for example. But however valuable the broad thrust of the Friends' discussion paper is, the Commission should take it as a personal affront that the Friends are motivated to fill "a long-standing void in the Australian film community caused by...the scarcity of national organisations focused on stimulating film culture and academic excellence" ("A New Role for the Archive in the 21st Century", July 2000). This statement echoes Gonski's findings, but fails to acknowledge that in the immediate wake of the public release of the Gonski report, the 4 main national collecting institutions were required to announce their distinction from one another. Each took on responsibility for the collection of screen resources in one particular area, with duplication and overlap to be eradicated—the National Film and Sound Archive, lately ScreenSound, is responsible for film footage; the Australian Film, Television and Radio School collects training and technical materials; the Australian Film Commission's own Research and Information collates statistical data on all aspects of the screen media; and the AFI's Research and Information concentrates on film history, criticism, commentary and review. It should be equally galling to the Commission to read declamations in one of the brightest new energies, and most interesting contributor to the screen conversation, *If* magazine, of the "pitiful state" and "general poverty of film culture in Australia" (Peter Galvin, "ScreenSound finds a few new friends", July 2000).

Instead the Commission is actively depublishing the screen conversation as it shrinks back to its core constituency, the production industry. In addition to the AFC's unwillingness to maintain a responsibility to screen education, the guidelines of the Industry and Cultural Development Organisations, Events and Activities Fund—the main source of funding for screen culture organisations such as the AFI's Research and Information centre, and screen publications including *Metro*, *If* magazine and *RealTime+OnScreen*—have been amended, with applications accepted by invitation only. In closing down the selection process, the Commission allows itself to be portrayed as a prescriptive rather than a facilitating agent in the screen conversation. Furthermore, the closed selection process appears to stretch reasonable public expectation that public funds for screen culture should be contestable, their guidelines flexible, and their procedures open and transparent.

It raises questions as to the extent to which the AFC is pruning and shaping rather than growing at arm's length screen culture in this country. These are vital questions which should rightfully be matters for vigorous public debate. This screen conversation should transcend sectoral boundaries, though the informed position of each participant should be acknowledged and respected. It is the role of the education sector to provide the skills with which to engage in the screen conversation. It is in the interests of content producers and those working in ancillary industries to foster a receptive, critical, engaged, passionate screen public. And it is the responsibility of public agencies to facilitate and encourage connections and dialogue, to provide opportunities and spaces for the conversation to be held, the buzz to be heard, the beautiful cacophony of noise that is our screen culture to be made.

But that's just me. What do you reckon?

Ben Goldsmith is a Research Fellow at the Australian Key Centre for Cultural & Media Policy at Griffith University.

Cinesonic 3: all ears at the movies

Anna Dzenis

For a third time Philip Brophy has brought together an eclectic, impressive international group of film academics, professional writers and practitioners for Cinesonic, a conference on film scores and sound design. Cinesonic has firmly established itself as a place where theorists and practitioners can come together and their work, analyses and language can interact and create a new dialogue.

True to its reputation, Cinesonic once again brought to the centre-stage sound artists and industry professionals who have received scant attention; it programmed papers which complicated the ways in which we might think about sound and music; and it continued to raise important questions about the relationship between sound and the cinema. Films chosen for analysis ranged from Alice Guy's silent *A House Divided* (1913) and the exploitation film *Spermula* (1976) to Vince Giarrusso's *Mallboy* (2000), recently selected for Directors' Fortnight at Cannes. And for conference participants who had been itching to put such knowledge into practice—to really 'listen to' and 'hear' a film—there were several programmed precisely because of their particular soundtracks.

Practitioners

Cinesonic's first evening session kicked off with a much-anticipated "Conversation" with the extraordinary Jack Nitzsche who came onto the stage gloriously resplendent in embroidered, beaded and fringed black jacket, studded boots, layered chains, dark glasses and wicked black hat. He was a visual and sonic spectacle—delighted to be invited and acknowledged. Nitzsche's music credits are astonishing—they extend right back to his work with Phil Spector, The Rolling Stones, Neil Young, The Monkees and The Cramps. And, as a "rock migrant in the cinema", he has also been involved in composing scores and producing music for more than 33 films. His conversation was richly interspersed with clips from films as diverse as *Performance* (1970), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), *Blue Collar* (1978), *Hard Core* (1979), *Cruising* (1980), *Cutter's Way* (1981), *Starman* (1984), *The Hot Spot* (1990) and *The Indian Runner* (1991). And Nitzsche shared anecdotes about his work with performers such as Elvis and Miles Davis and directors such as Dennis Hopper and Sean Penn.

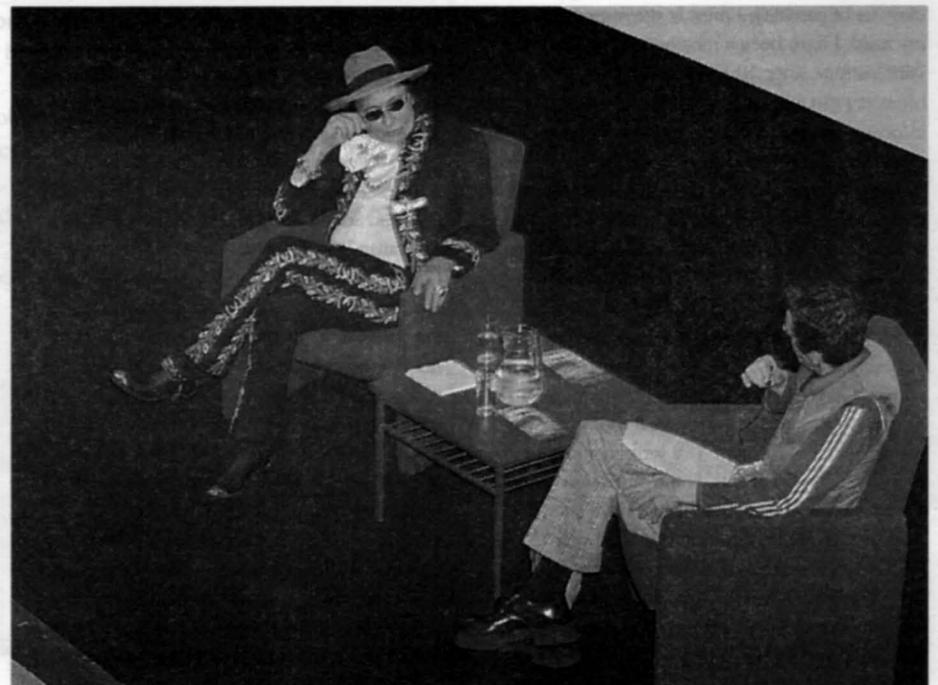
The second of the practitioners' sessions was an industry presentation from sound designer and Dolby Consultant Bruce Emery who tried to demystify the history and practice of the Dolby Laboratories and explain how Dolby has contributed to the sound we hear in the cinema. His talk provided access to an insider's knowledge and was supported by a surprisingly informative instructional video. But the real coup for this year had to be the privileged insight into the creative collaboration of director Vince Giarrusso, producer Fiona Egger and sound designer/music supervisor Philip Brophy on the much-anticipated feature *Mallboy*. A number of clips from the film were screened, to the delight of everyone present, and there was detailed discussion about sound and music choices, and how the process of "talking through" helped everyone arrive at a mutually satisfactory solution to the many creative problems that were encountered. Brophy's theory that "you can have a radical approach to sound-production on a non-alienating film" appeared to have been put into practice.

Theorists

Bill Routt's provocative "Hearing Silent Images" was the first of the day sessions and, just like strong coffee, it stirred the mind and the senses. Routt's paper investigated the apparent incongruity of "sound in the silent cinema", asking what it meant to "hear silent images." Using the work of theorists such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Luc Nancy, he proposed that there was a way of talking about silent films as though they could be apprehended through hearing rather than seeing or reading. His analytical and cinesthetic investigations were compelling. Equally provocative was Adrian Martin's "Musical Mutations" which was also interested in the incongruous as a way of re-thinking film history. Martin's presentation began with a treasured anecdote from John Cassavetes, that he would be interested in making only one musical, a musical based on Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Martin proceeded from this surprising example to track a quite different history of the musical—the mutant musical—illustrated with sparkling examples from Jerry Lewis' *The Ladies Man* (1961), Sally Potter's *The Tango Lesson* (1997), Bertolucci's *La Luna* (1979), Godard's *Pierrot Le Fou* (1965), Nanni Moretti's *Caro Diario* (1994) and Tsia-Ming Liang's *The Hole* (1998) to name only a few of this generic variant.

Several other papers were interested in the musical soundtrack, but more specifically in the "processes of reading and interpretation." Krin Gabbard proceeded chronologically through the Kubrick oeuvre mapping out his increasing control over the films' musical scores and pointing out how these have coded the films as artefacts of high culture. Annahid Kassabian's paper was more concerned with musical scores in popular Hollywood films. Beginning from the premise that music was as important to identification as image and narrative, Kassabian made a sharp distinction between the different ways that "compiled scores" and "composed scores" tracked identification. The complexity of this identification was highlighted by a detailed analysis of *Dangerous Minds* and *The Mark of Zorro*.

Other papers dealt with the sound of the voice and its many accents. Philip Brophy's paper explored the practice of "dubbing" and "talking over" in films, beginning with the observation that most people think *Astroboy* is American because of its dubbed soundtracks. These presumptions were further problematised when the American and Japanese *Godzilla* films were compared, and their distinctive cultural sensitivities examined. Rebecca Coyle's "Speaking 'Strine":



Jack Nitzsche & Philip Brophy, Cinesonic 3

Locating 'Australia' in Film Voice & Speech" was also concerned with voice, dialogue and accent. But Coyle's study was focused quite specifically on Australian feature films that have been marketed successfully overseas, with examples such as *Crocodile Dundee* and *Muriel's Wedding* foregrounding vocal cultural stereotypes.

For the last 2 papers, the focus was on the "marginal" and the "overlooked". Jeff Smith's "Taking Music Supervisors Seriously" elaborated a history of the music supervisor's role and how it has been so consistently disregarded. Ian Penman's paper was another left-field contribution. Firstly, because of its wild title: "Garvey's Ghost meets Heidegger's Geist—Or, how DUB became everyone's soundtrack". And secondly, because Penman's background in music writing brought a different perspective to the study of the cinema soundtrack. His mesmeric presentation used the poetry of words and their metaphoric associations to make his argument, with the low hum of dub coming from the speakers. But what was particularly memorable was his suggestion that dub was, in fact, its own film. Even more provocative was his suggestion that we don't need more soundtracks for the cinema—what we really need are more and better films for our soundtracks.

Experiencing the Soundtrack

But what does this all have to do with our individual experiences at the cinema?

And how does listening to people talking about sound and music inform our own listening and hearing? In response to such questions, this year's Cinesonic programmed 2 quite distinctive double bills. The first program, *Satanic Noise and Screaming Rock'n'Roll*, was introduced by Adrian Martin who compared the cacophonous, often contradictory sound collage of *The Exorcist* (1971) with *Sympathy for the Devil* (1970), a film he described as totally sound-driven with absolutely no conversation. The second program, *Sounds of the City*, was introduced by Philip Brophy who invited a comparison between the brooding, breathing, percolating city in *Taxi Driver* (1976) with the vibrating, clinking interior spaces of domestic objects and people in *Playtime* (1967).

With its invitation to listen to the cinema, Cinesonic is well on its way to achieving its aim of instigating a vibrant sonic culture. For those who were unable to attend last year's Cinesonic, the book with all of the conference papers is now available: *Cinesonic: Cinema and the Sound of Music*, edited by Philip Brophy (Australian Film Television and Radio School, 2000).

Cinesonic 3—Experiencing the Soundtrack, 3rd international conference on film scores and sound design, RMIT, Melbourne, June 29-July 2, <http://cinesonic.rmit.edu/>

SCREENCULTUREshorts

As reported on the b4bfilmv.com website (a useful collection of film industry comment), a recent Australian Writers Guild forum held at the Sydney Film Festival highlighted an increasing division between writers and producers. Stephen Sewell and Louis Nowra argued for more understanding of the craft of screenwriting and Ian David (soon AWG president) commented: "When you consider that the FFC has invested in over 100 Australian films and less than 6.5% have returned their production budget, there is something wrong and it's not the scripts, it's the people who put the deals together." Kim Dalton, AFC Chief Executive, claimed the media have been responsible for blaming poor performance at the box office on poor screenwriting, and that the AFC plans to establish programs targeted at script funding. www.b4bfilmv.com/

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission recently announced a 2 month trial of open captioned movies in an attempt to make cinema more accessi-

ble for people with hearing impairments. The new release films will be screened August - September at specific sessions in Greater Union, Hoyts and Village Cinemas in the Melbourne and Sydney CBDs. Participating cinemas and film distributors proposed the trial as part of an inquiry set up following a complaint from a man who is hearing impaired. Open captioned films are more sophisticated than subtitles, with icons and written descriptions of sounds used to help convey the film's atmosphere. More information: www.hreoc.gov.au, www.auscap.com.au or check newspapers for screening times.

Peter Bart, editor-in-chief of *Variety*, will speak on how cinematic imagination has been overtaken by executive greed in Hollywood in a series of forums presented by the AFI, coinciding with the Melbourne Writers Festival. The Malthouse, Melbourne, August 26; MCA, Sydney, August 29.

Cinesonics: The Straight Story

Philip Brophy

What is it like to be alone, truly alone? You would lose something we take for granted every moment of our social existence: proximity. Things, objects, events, people, would be held from afar. All would be over there, beyond reach, away from you. As you get old, an audiovisual loneliness develops in tandem with a psychological and physical fraying of the self. Faces are not as distinct; voices become muted and muffled; everything appears to be occurring 'over there' as the senses become dulled, diffused, dilated. Combine this with the loss of loved ones, friends, even acquaintances, and all immediacy and proximity start to fade.

David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (2000) explores the psycho-acoustic realm of loneliness as it is enveloped by the onset of old age. Just as you will eventually experience the dimming of light and the narrowing of frequencies in real life, so will you experience all manner and mode of recession, resignation and regression during the sonorous unfolding of *The Straight Story*.

This is what marks Lynch as a uniquely experiential director: he investigates the audiovisual nature of cinema in order to generate visceral and vicarious experiences that provide the basis for psychological consideration. We know this of him, albeit filtered unnecessarily through a cultdom of surrealism, absurdism and artifice. Do not presume that Lynch's predilection for producing a proscenium for psychotica marks a fixed disposition to loudness. No matter how 'loud' his cinema may appear at every level of its execution, Lynch is more concerned with the screaming silence and numbing noise that vibrates deep within the individual than any vocalisation that is distributed at the sociological plane. And it is Lynch's hypersensitivity to those vibrations, to the monumental psychic cataclysms which follow even the most microscopic events, that grants him direct access to the most particular frissons of the self. Lynch carries a genuinely scarred cranium in difference to, say, the tacky toupee which serves as the mantle for Oliver Stone's 'wild youth' cinema. Where Stone plays reissue CDs of The Doors and hears the selfish voice of a generation, Lynch hears air whistling under a door and the sound of degeneration within the self.

For a film which depicts old age with great attention to detail, *The Straight Story* gracefully avoids the pithy conceits of 'generation gaps' and similar journalistic tropes which have embalmed the 90s teen cycle before a single sign of acne is allowed on the screen. More remarkably, *The Straight Story* is not even 'aimed' at an older audience, begging for their laboured, pathetic identification. For this is a document of how cinema can address old age in the act of aging, foregrounding age as a process of the present, and as such goes against most narrative norms which exploit the advance of age as a dramatic and thematic pause for contemplation, memory and resolution, for revisiting the past. Alvin Straight (Richard Farnsworth) has not only aged in the back story of the film, but he engages in forward action (literally, driving forth on a tractor) in a cathartic attempt to deal with his aging by achieving closure through speaking to his brother (cameo-ed by Harry Dean Stanton). So let us look at through some of the ways in which Lynch executes this act

of aging as a series of cinesonic acts.

First sonic feature of *The Straight Story*: the silencing of speech. The dramatic graft which forges momentum in the film's story is the silence that hangs like a cloud over the Straight brothers. Having not spoken to each other in so many years, their silence resounds like an unfinished sentence, an unresolved melody, an incomplete causality. Alvin travels across 3 states not merely to reunite with his blood brother, but to hear his own voice in the shared acoustic space. That is how Alvin will deal with the psycho-acoustic loneliness that has befallen him. It is so fitting that his brother is wordless at this reunion, overcome with emotion as he hears the sound of Alvin's voice. The silence that lolls between them at the film's finish is the end to a disturbing hum which rang ceaselessly across time and space until physical proximity could touch that hum and set it to rest. The beauty of the moment lies not merely in its emotional depth, but in the way that it reflects on the material role of the human voice in such familial conflict, and the way it extends to the social plane a physical aspect of how vibrations can continue unabated until the grounding of physical touch will reduce them to stasis. Only a director with an ear (David Lynch is also the sound designer for *The Straight Story*) could construct this type of post-literary acousmatic object of narration. In the hands of a less tuned director, this same narrational envelope could be presented through the conventional trappings which both literary types and so-called cineastes would find expressive and poetic. But the power of Lynch lies in his ability to wrench the poetic from its historical stricture within those traditions, which surely in the year 2000 have to be verging on the archaic and should therefore be treated with polite disdain.

Lynch's approach to the dramatic signification of non-speech and unfinished-speech is thematically mapped across the characters of *The Straight Story*. Rose (Sissy Spacek) talks in a dysfunctional manner due to her placement within this same familial map. Traumatized by the forced separation of her children due to her own psychological instability, her speech patterns carry the scar of this wrenching, leaving her to speak grammatically correct sentences but in a timing which forces the flow of meaning through a series of ruptures and spurts of fragmented phrases and clauses. (It truly is a remarkable vocal performance.) Like Alvin, her voice is her story, not through words as written into her, but as words sounded through her. Note also the way these voices are contrasted against the warm blanketed tones that flow forth from the friendly family with whom Alvin stays while his tractor is being repaired en route. Their rich sonority and the effortless way in which it flows from their mouths sonically portrays a comfortable middle America—retired and retiring—not in a parodic way, but as a means of contrasting their fortunate life against the emotional trauma which Alvin has been holding within him for so many years.

In the documentary *Brother's Keeper* (1992), one of 2 brothers accused of mercy-killing a third brother (all past their 60s) takes the stand in a court trial. This withered shell of a man is struck catatonic and collapses into a nervous spasm, shaking his

arm uncontrollably. The court adjourns. He takes the stand again, opens his mouth—and reverts to the same state. The court adjourns again. And again. It is hard to think of a more moving scene in a documentary, struck by the complete incapacity of the human voice at the point of its declaration. The ending of *The Straight Story* reminded me of that scene, and of how much I detest those things we call 'scripts'; of how I wish scriptwriters would try shutting up for once. Stop stuffing words down characters' throats and making them mouth their authorial power. Consider the options of having an actor perform the silence that more aptly reflects how often we are lost for words and rendered speechless in our everyday emotional exchanges. John Roach and Mary Sweeney's lean script for *The Straight Story* is the result not only of 2 people who write well, but also listen well. Mary Sweeney's editing also creates the appropriate timing crucial to conveying this distinctive temporality. And David Lynch's direction of Farnsworth and Spacek evidences an ability to hear their wordlessness as much as their speech.

Second sonic feature of *The Straight Story*: the permeance of quietude. In an era when digital sound has favoured the format's ability to maintain non-distorting louder levels and more impactful transient peaks, it is forgotten how effective the relatively 'pure' silence generated through the absence of surface noise can be in sound design. Don't misread me here: I'm not advocating 'quiet' in today's 'noisy movies.' Such a reactionary stance leads to gentle chords on grand pianos and soft strums of acoustic guitars, which to my ear are repulsive signs of conservative times. My point is that you can achieve a type of abject silence in digital sound wherein the absence of surface noise creates dramatic and psychological holes in a narrative, intensifying equally modes of identification (sucking you into the absence) and disorientation (unsettling you by removing the 'ground hum' of a picture). *The Straight Story* is possibly the first film to explore the psycho-acoustic ramifications of this in detail.

There are many moments in the film where you hear absolutely nothing. Conditioned to hearing the crackle of the optical print, silence in the analogue film soundtrack always comforts you, saying 'I really haven't gone away.' Even 'fades to black' rarely occur in silence, as they will carry an audio fade-out, cross-fade or resolving musical cue—all of which will work toward preparing for the fade-up before we are stranded in a cinematic void. The abject silence of *The Straight Story* echoes that loss of proximity engineered by old age: literally, we are removed from the film—not merely from a certain narrational moment, turn or passage, but from the realm of narration. We are left sitting in the cinema in total isolation, like when the cinema's amplifiers suddenly cut out. Yet the film also exploits the digital soundtrack's capacity to move accurately between these aural extremes. The mix of the film quite noticeably does not stay at a median of acceptable audio presence. Normally, a film's dialogue in particular will hover within a comfortable decibel range, utilising a variety of compression methods to keep the signal level at a norm so as to aid psycho-acoustic aspects of legibility on the part of the cine-

ma listener. *The Straight Story* has numerous moments where you are urged to listen more carefully, not because of distractions, simultaneous events or sonic density, but simply because you are at a remove from spoken action. The scene that best demonstrates this is when Alvin is chatting with the family with whom he spends a few days. In one unedited shot, we hear a long, quite insignificant conversation at a very low level, filmed from a long distance so as to create a calming, casual observational feeling. A vicarious deafness is experienced here in that one can manage to understand words—as do old people suffering the onset of deafness—but at a severely reduced auditory level. Again, *The Straight Story* provides the sonic suit within which we can experience old age.

Third sonic feature of *The Straight Story*: aural decay. In the history of modern sound design, Lynch is the harbinger of deep booms and dark drones noticeable in his early films. Progressively, Lynch's sound design has re-addressed this approach, developing it initially into the thick textures of sonic nothingness which permeate the psychotic expanses of shadowy nothingness throughout *Lost Highway* (1997). With *The Straight Story*, Lynch has focused on the residue of those events. In scintillating passages of apparent silence, a breathy textural hum is heard ever so faintly on the soundtrack. It sounds like a long-ringing reverberant patina of parts of Angelo Badalamenti's lyrical score—almost as if a phrase of his music has been digitally processed into a just or light puree of diffusion which gently coats the auditorium. We faintly make out the haunting presence of music, yet recognisable instrumentation and tonality are absent. Orson Welles engineered a similar effect with a Bernard Herrmann cue in *Citizen Kane* (1941) as Susan Alexander lies in her bed, exhausted from the opera forced down her own throat, the orchestral din ringing softly yet fatally in her head, intermingled with the sound of her own fading breath. The effect in *The Straight Story* also carries a fatalistic aspect—not so morbidly, but due to the rich yet fixed tonality of these harmonic sheets of soft pink noise, these hums have a base key which works contra-harmonically to Badalamenti's whimsical cues. The music rolls on lovingly as Alvin distractedly putt-putts on his tractor, while these tones well up in the proceeding silences as a forecast of the possibility that his brother may have already died.

Many people have not heard these tones in the film, but they are there. Sonically and symbolically, they recall the sensation of a distant ringing in the ear, left over from loud events that affected the ear the night before, some years ago, or in your youth. Like an emotional tinitis, this ringing is subtle but persuasive. It is the sound of the past: lingering, lilting, longing. It is the ringing which will not stop until Alvin speaks with his brother. And only then, only at that precise auditory moment when they are near enough to hear the other's voice, will the silence of estrangement be replaced with the silence of calm. Only then will the decay reside.

The Straight Story, director David Lynch, is currently on video release.

WriteStuff: Teaming up on *The Games*

Hunter Corday interviews Ross Stevenson

The second series of *The Games*, currently screening on ABC TV, is one of the most sophisticated combinations of good writing intersecting with contemporary political reality to appear on Australian television.

The Games has developed from a satirical observation of the Olympic phenomenon to a dark and richly layered commentary on the political and social implications of a multi-million dollar event.

In the first series, John Clarke played the naive and often bumbling CEO of the Sydney Olympics, a Gulliver adrift in the world of savvy media assistants and shrewd financial controllers. The series became an indictment of amateurs leading the blind, and suggested to the viewer that no one at Olympic headquarters really understood the enormous task they had undertaken.

The second series has changed its dramatic balance—Clarke's character is now learned, cynical, and aware of the chasm (financial and political) that is just in front of his every footstep. The absurdity of the Olympics has become real for him, whereas his two assistants have retreated into Olympic-speak, believing their own press releases and openly discussing how to fool the public.

In this interview, Ross Stevenson talks about the scripting process of *The Games* and the issues surrounding team writing and producing.

Usually there is a distinct sense of heightened reality in drama, but in *The Games* there is the opposite. How did you and John Clarke develop this method?

I guess we thought that the more 'real' the series was, the more it worked for us, given that we were paralleling a real event. To have it less real would mean that it was less parallel and that was probably not going to work as well.

Has this anything to do with team writing—what are the problems/advantages of team writing, especially in television?

No I don't think it's a product of the fact that two of us are doing the writing. The principal benefit of writing with someone else is that you only have to do half as much work. Haven't seen any problems with it yet.

Can you describe the script process of *The Games*, especially the method of working so close to the shooting date for each episode. What are the advantages/stresses of this for the writers?

We don't write all that close to the shoot date other than in the sense that we are always making small changes up to shooting time; the cast will make changes during shooting and then some pick up scenes will be shot after. The core of the script is completed weeks or months before it is shot.



John Clarke & Ross Stevenson

How does this affect editorial process?

The editorial process absorbs a lot of the pressure in what we do but is so central it has to work and the editor Wayne Hyett is so good it does work.

As you and John are also producers of the series, can you describe the experience of being both writer and producer?

It means in many ways that you are involved in more of the 'aspects' of the making of the program. Especially John, when you see that he is in it as well. The time from pre-production through to wrap is a pretty intense one when you are involved at so many levels and for John it becomes pretty well a 24 hour affair.

How did you decide on *The Games* as a subject? While it might be obvious as an event it is not necessarily obvious as a comic event...do you see *The Games* themselves as a form of 'absurd' event?

We are both real sports fans so the *Games* themselves we don't see as ridiculous or essentially corrupt. Rather the opposite. However, what the possibility of making a quid (or a name for yourself out of attaching yourself to

such an event) will do to otherwise unremarkable individuals is probably what we think worthy of comic examination.

Does television handle this scale of comedy well and how did you develop the style of the program?

Television suits *The Games* admirably. The series itself is pretty well words-based so radio would not be beyond it either I suspect. The style we discovered by trial and error, principally by starting to shoot it and letting it find its own level. Don't know that this method is to be recommended but it worked well for us.

Is Australian television comfortable with this mixture of politics and comedy?

Some Australian television is. More importantly though, I guess all the indications are that the Australian television audience has shown that it is more than comfortable with it.

The Games, written by John Clarke and Ross Stevenson, is currently screening Monday nights, ABC TV, 8pm.

RealTime 39 will look at another complex and politically astute comedy, *Grass Roots* (ABC TV Sundays, 7.30pm).

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