PRIZES & PROJECTIONS

THE 2000 AFI AWARDS

The films: features, shorts, documentaries & animations

The issues: global, historical & industrial

RealTime

- Feature: The Arts - What Next?
- Bernard Cohen online+live
- Dance: Lucy Guerin
- Sound: Andrew Kettle
- Visarts: Anne Wallace

OnScreen

- Futurescreen: getting Alife
- Vincent Mallboy Ciarrusso
- Virgin Suicides: reservations
- Sex book: Peepshow + MUFF
- Animator Adam Head
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Editorial

Dieter Huber, Klone#31, from The Liminal Body (see page 43).

After the huge August-September RealTime-Working the Screen edition, here's another big one featuring a RealTime first, PRIZES & PROJECTIONS, devoted to the films and to the issues surrounding the 2000 AFI Awards. The Awards are an important, and much debated, part of Australian culture and RealTime is proud to be able to do some justice to nominated shorts, documentaries and animated films. These rarely get the media attention they deserve given the way of feature films—especially in a year in which there are 25 of the latter (category nominations to be announced October 18). It was, however, beyond us to cover the nominations for television. We hope to see the marvellous Bush Mechanics (by David Barry and Francis Kolly for Warlpiri Media Association) among the winners. Four more episodes have been commissioned for 2001.

Our second feature is an informal survey of arts practices in a variety of regions, communities and age groups. It includes Australian novellist Bernard Cohen's encounters with British communities, including a group of miners, as he attempts to promote interest in online writing. Other articles look at projects in dance and film for young people in Tasmania, online and indigenous communities in Queensland. Tracks' new dance work in Darwin, a first play from a young female Vietnamese Australian writer at Footscray Community Arts Centre, a revealing exhibition about children in the works of leading photographers, and Urban Theatre Project's The Palau— a celebration of older musicians, professional and amateur. As well, Susan Richer Out of Box: Festival of Early Childhood Program Director, has some revealing things to report from her research into children's attitude to the arts.

What Next? The arts, age, regions & communities is the first of a series. In RealTime 40, our London correspondent Sophie Hansen takes a detailed look at new social imperatives driving arts funding in the UK. Will it happen here? Has it already begun?

Katie Hooper

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What next? The arts, age, regions & communities

Here are a set of intriguing phenomena:

- The Australia Council has recently held a series of art-form-based Vision meetings to help shape Council policy over this next decade.
- Since the mid 90s, and spurred on by the rise of One Nation and the continuing rise of the rural sector, federal and state governments have increasingly turned their attention to the arts in outer suburban and regional Australia. Young and emerging artists have also been the subject of funding initiatives. In many cases the money for such ventures has come from existing funds for the arts or is one-off.
- Richard Pratt, the Melbourne-based millionaire and major arts benefactor announced this year that he would be turning his attention to social issues instead of the arts (corporations in the US have been on this track since the early 90s).
- Peter Sellars, the Artistic Director of the 2002 Adelaide Festival, has consistently signalised a strong social agenda for his festival, with a committee of artists playing a decisive role in content and debate programming.
- In the UK, new government arts funding priorities are predicated on social utility—the arts as ameliorating social ills, arts practice as an alternative to anti-social behaviour. This is not simply the familiar community arts model with its own set of practitioners hard at work in the suburbs and the regions, but applied across the board.

To urge open and ongoing discussion among artists about the future of the arts in Australia, RealTime presents in this edition an informal collection of articles about the arts touch- ing on issues of age, region and community. We publish many articles like these in any year, but rarely do we group them like this. What they reveal is some of the geographic and cultural breadth of the work and, certainly, the complexities underlying the apparent simplicity of the categories age, region and community.

In RealTime 40 (December-January), Sophie Hansen (Creative Centre Manager, The Roundhouse, London), will report at length on the successes, the compromises and the engagement with the private sector in the new model of British arts funding. Is this our future? The Editors

Meetings: online writing and other communities

Bernard Cohen

An Australian novelist reports on his UK residency to locate an international conference on writing and the Internet organised and hosted by Trice International Online Writing Community at Nottingham Trent University.

In this presentation I attempted to improve a hyperbolistic performance through a number of (also improvisatory) strategies. These were: 1. sitting among the audience facing forward and without making eye contact; 2. shifting restlessly from seat to seat (8 bad happened been placed in an arc for an earlier panel) at the front of the auditorium; 3. reading to individual audience members and placing the place in the written text by following with my forefinger; 4. sitting on the knees of an audience member; 5. reading to individual audience members; 6. giving copies of my novels to audience members; 7. climbing over chairs stacked precariously at the rear of the auditorium; 8. crawling on hands and knees under the legs of rows of audience members, then sprinting into the air and shouting “Applaus!”; 9. teaching laser-focussing (specifically, Hava Luman Yayan Yayan—this involved the entire audience, and necessitated an interlude of about 4 minutes, after which I continued with the session); 10. wandering up and down the auditorium’s centre or side aisles; 11. striding along the centre aisle pasting audience members on the shoulders in time with the words; 12. informing a baby boy my own 2 year old bad instigated I go straight to Tefletubes websites and bow I’d often have to switch back and forth between my work-in-progress and these children’s sites if I wanted to get work done. These actions are indicated in parentheses where they occurred in the talk, as best as I can remember.

I was interviewed for the Trice Writers-Residency via videoconference (1). I sat in a room at the University of NSW and Sue Thomas and 2 other interviewers occupied a similar space at Nottingham Trent, although because of the camera framing, I could only see 2 of them at any time. During this interview, Thomas was quick to incorporate a definition of the word “flesh” widely circulating in this conference. Flesh is no longer a burden for our immortal souls to bear for a mere lifetime, but a guise which we may wear or discard at our discretion, alternating it with the virtual as a phase or layer of link in internet era identity.

I was flesh writer-in-residence at Trice from June to December 1999 (2). I shopped my neat to the UK by aeroplane, taking up space, eating aeroplane food from plastic aeroplane trays, leaving the plastic covers to become an international waste disposal problem, to become landfill in Singapore, Dubai and London where the plane touched down, sucked in fuel, emitted fumes and unloaded consumed and unconsumable international air traveller waste.

My friend McKenzie Wark (3), the writer and of the “believe me now” money potestas for the postmodem, borrows the term “vector” to describe flows of information, especially in relation to the operation of international media. The term implies both direction and mass (4). Anyone taking an international flight can observe the contents of their aerodynamic cabins, 300 or 400 brains-boxes loaded with prejudices and ambitions with regard to the proper modes for conducting trade, government, travel and conversation, preconceptions and hopes for aesthetics, relationships and marketplaces as the flight arcs over irrelevant places (5), totally aimed at destination.

There has been a lot of reference at this conference to the rhizome as a model for Internet storytelling. I don’t know if this theory holds water, but I’d like to suggest an alternative, the sponge (3). The sponge is a collective of semi-autonomous cells, each of which has its own function yet contributes to the whole. It is possible to separate the cells by sieving. When brought near each other, they are then able to reconstitute the total organism.

I drove up the M1 from London to Nottingham. I was in residence—or perhaps I should trace it back a little earlier—from the moment I saw the massive cement cooling towers, of Nottingham’s coalpower generators (7). Does this site have anything with the sightings of its iconic representation, even if one has not yet discovered that the landmark is iconic?

The flesh residency could be mapped along the length of this room: (11) June, July, August, September, October, November, December. But do to that, I would need to remodel it in the Casuarina College sense. I saw a number of minor technical difficulties and showed various people and groups in the East Midlands ways which they might find certain aspects of internet culture and/or content interesting, useful, engaging, engaging whereas others preferred other modes of research or creative production.

In June, I was overwhelmed with janksuit (3).

Dear Sir:

Having had your name and e-mail address from the Internet, we avail ourselves of the opportunity to write to you and to see if we can establish a business relations with you. We are Haimen Shlit Plant Extracts Co., Ltd., Jiangsu, China, specialising in astragalus extracts. We shall be glad to send you quotation and samples on receipt of your specific inquiry.

We await your early reply with keen interest.

With best regards.

Yours faithfully,

Shirley Field Sanford.

I was a relative newly, but had built only 1 small and simple website, but had a longstanding interest in non-linear narrative, recognised by reviews such as this one of my first novel, Tourism. The back cover blurb it called it a novel, but you might as well call it a gazette or a site-rip pump” (6).

If you said to me in June I would have said (5): I find the internet, in its unrestricted, untangled, chaotic, non-hierarchical, improper, uncharted, unlogged, misnpped, garbage-filled, shit-strewn, unnamed, uncharted, non-linear narrative, linguistically overloaded, fanatical, self-important, trivial, pornographic, commercial, hit-driven, disorganised, memory-swallowing, time-lagging, left-branching, paranoid, unsucfied, meandering, self-promoting, meta-generic, error-message-prone, window-popping, security-promising, self-infection-guardian, website-counter, loss-making, anything-goes, direction-finding, continued on page 5.
What next? The arts, age, regions & communities

The Palais: a possible community

Keith Gallasci

Pita Bauch’s remarkable dance hall fantasy, Kontakthof (opening place), was staged at the Adelaide Festival of 1982 in the ideal venue of the Theatrons Town Hall (I’d been to dance there as a child with my parents). I think it one of the most powerful performances I have ever seen, delicate and severe, mysterious and brutally explicit, more gestured and enacted than danced. As reported in the German dance magazine Ballett in its feature ‘Age’ (Issue 5, May 2000).

Kontakthof has been revived in Germany by Bauch’s company, Wuppertal Theatre. Re-worked for a year by Bauch and longtime assistant Beatrice Liboniti and the Australian Jo Ann Endicott (whose recent autobiography is very popular in Germany), this time the cast is 25 in Bauch’s usual ensemble of performers, but auditioned dancers, actors and ‘theatre extras’, all over 65 years of age. I wish I could have seen it, but I can imagine its power transcended from the original. The distinctive skills, presence and very different strengths of older dancers are being widely recognised, most famously in NITFS (Netherlands Dance Theatre). For some senior dancers and the continuing practice of Michael B切尔shkov among others. It’s not something you see much of in Australia, the occasional appearances of Elizabeth met1on Dallman have been a special exception. But given increasing longevity and not the uncommon determination of artists to ourout conventional retirement barriers, it’s something we’ve been to see more of, and become a part of.

In Urban Theatre Projects The Palais, the ageing musician, in many musical and cultural manifestations, is the subject of our gaze and our listening. Of course, we’re much more used to seeing older musicians at work than dancers, but not as intimately or as variously as here. The elderly Parramatta Town Hall in western Sydney becomes a musical labyrinth as, once again, UTP puts its audience on the move, on a journey of discovery with a musical thread, meeting a musical community made up of older professional and amateur artists from classical, jazz and rock’n’roll backgrounds and a world of musics practised by immigrant cultures. There are musical measures and oddities around most corners in the building in the first part of the show. A star and a piano accordion, make tentative improvisational exchanges before connecting, a choir refrain, 2 musicians watching a video reminiscence about the Johnny O’Keefe years, in a corridor 2 women sing (the audience, uncertain of where to place themselves as the narrow space fills with beautiful notes, with Bob Dukakis through), an informal lesson in Indian dance to tabla accompaniment is seductive, a jazz pianist with a glass of red wine cups his music, a show biz tenor at his dressing room mirror bursts into “When I give my heart to you.” Everything seems, for the moment, too brief, too crowded; the desire to linger, to talk to the people is overwhelming. But we are moved on.

Composer Richard Vella, who conceived The Palais with Mary McLennan and UTP’s Artistic Director John hayls, and directed it with McLennan, writes in his program note that one of his inspirations for this show in which many of the performers have been musicians for up to 50 years, was the documentary Tosa’s Kiss. That film ‘focussed on the house built by Gugnardi Veredi for retired opera singers… the singers live in a world of the past, the builders' house built on to the pond, as voices, children, choirs and duets’. It’s this with its kind of reso-

ance, but way beyond open, that Vella and McLennan welcome us to, armed with maps and in groups we search out the sources of the sounds that fill the building. In the second and third parts of the show in the main hall (witnessed more for-

mally from the balcony and then the floor of the hall) we encounter sometimes banality different musical experiences, some plainly presented, others theatricalised, some demanding great skill, some providing unexpected musical collabora-
tions. Vella himself provides a score that yields end-

low, winding choral complexities as well as a dark, engaging cello quartet and tabla combination.

The Palais we do not encounter a community in the usual sense. Of course, the performers are drawn from ‘the community’ but the specifics here are more and age, and these are not people who would necessarily spend time with each other. This is not a pre-existing community, but a fascinating new artistic, of encounters, odd juxtapositions and shards that gesture towards a possible community, even if only for the duration of creating and performing The Palais.

Inspired by the ‘big band’ percussion sounds of The Baguffathus Ragtime Band (members aged 68 to 95) and rock and jazz fusion from relatively younger performers, including some great singing from a string of female vocalists, the big audience learnt to its feet in the end of the show, applauding passionately. Along with gratitude, however, I felt an unnameable unease, part melancholy, part bewilderment at the unwieldy collage of musical and theatrical experiences, part anxiety over fading voices, faltering skills and vulnerable bodies, part joy at the musical command of many, regardless of age. I was incapable of one response. Like Kontakthof, though inevitably without the same kind of rigor and vision (because it is an altogether different work), The Palais is seductive and inci-
dentially severe, and has memorable moments of pathos and power.

Urban Theatre Projects The Palais, Parramatta Town Hall, July 27-30

Meatings: online writing and other communities

continued from page 4

repetitious, unreliable, unbelievable, incredible, sex-life-saving, breast-expanding, money-throwing, drug-taking, pop-music-loving, bad-pottery-propounding, more-is-more-aestheticising, history-revising, spindoctoring, repetitious, unreliable, neurotically generous and sometimes beautiful incantations to be a useful resource for the understanding of otherwise difficult-to-imitate institutional languages, and their appropriation in my writing for various media.

I spent a good proportion of my residency travelling around the East Midlands (10)—the counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Leicestershire, and the key conurbation in Rutland—introducing internet possibilities to writing and other groups such as journalism students, recovering mental health patients, arts workers (librarians)

(9) One difference between online residenc-

y and flesh residency was that participants in the former were almost entirely self-selecting. They could participate in the discussion on the webboard and for the most part chose to con-

tribute to Chrisy Sheffield Sunderland’s My Millionformum (www.trac.e.ntu.ac.uk/writers/san-
ford/mymillionformum/presents.html) or Alan Sondheim’s kosresnow.htm (www.trac.e.ntu.ac.uk/writers/sondheim) or my Specialfactory (www.trac.e.ntu.ac.uk/writ-
ers/specialfactory/specialfactory.htm/). The project (10).

On that TV program of record, Sky News, it was reported the other night that although internet content was feeble in Britain, it had a wealth of potential. Very Short Time (this story shows up on free-to-

air every 6 weeks, every 3 weeks on Sky), some 15 million Britons have no intention of ever going on line and do not regard the internet as either relevant or necessary (5). I wondered with many of these. While this produced some manually frustrat-

ing interchanges, it also opened up surprising possibilities. One of the projects to which I had been most looking forward was the chance to work with writers, and redundant coalminers.

The East Midlands was a primordial site for the Industrial Era, the first resistance to it (by Luddites), and the major site of its end, hurtled by the economic rationality of the Thatcher govern-

ment (3). I was informed that a group of ex-miners wanted to write their history and stories online. Half through the first issue, the project rang to inquire how it was that an Australian novelist came to write a book about coalmining in Derbyshire (3). I was surprised by this project so far, but at this stage didn’t rule it out. The miners had been told I was con-

ducting research for a book, and that it would be very useful for me if some would show up to assist with this (5). This made the most helpful, and some members of a writers’ group composed largely of ex-miners’ wives, chose to come along, but that none had any interest in internet. So, in the meantime, at this stage, I’d gone along to make their lives better and they’d shown up to improve mine.

We did manage to find material, 19th centu-

ry coalmining poetry, coalmining and mining history discussion lists (3). More importantly, people brought out their archives, writing of 60 years-old catalogues of mining machinery. (Of some of this is now online at www.trac.e.ntu.ac.uk/writers/whites/ front.htm.)

Meatime in that refuge of calm, the internet, various people were teaching me more advanced skills. I’d been trying to make a MOO-based chatterbot say witty remarks, though it had come out more like Peter Hanold’s theatre piece Inauthentic The Audience (5). Later, tece member Pauline Mauser and I constructed duelling sexta bots (12). (They’re currently in the ‘trac.e’ room at LinguaMOO www.

lingua.ualberta.ca and are named bagman and clamjanjstekle.)

Chrisy generously suggested ways of improving my page-building skills, suggestions I abused to the degree that I became notorious for having built one of the ugliest pages in txtec (according to the Arts Council of England’s Digital Network newsletter). Alan invited me to con-

tribute to kosresnow.htm. Instead (using a very

simple Markov Chain program), I remixed an Act from Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet with excerpts from The C4 World Factbook to pro-

duce what may be the ultimate in paranoid and bureaucratic Italian Romance (10). In November, with Terriin White’s assist-

ance, I ran a superfast version of the collabora-

tive e-mail writing exercise Specialfactory, a project devised in its long form by Wark and John Kinsella (5). In its original form, I partner a-

edino 300 words to a second, who had 48 hours to e-mail back. These exchanges seemed to sustain about 15 or 20 ‘rounds’. In the txtec version, participants fired 50 words at each other 20 minutes apart. (The Kinsella/Wark/White/Cohen version is published by Freemantle Arts Centre Press, hopefully within the next year.)

It’s 7 months since the end of the residency, but I’m still involved with tece (5), working with poet Mahendra Solanki, journalist Kaylois Henry and UK-based New Perspectives Theatre Company on another of Thomas’s wild and hopefully achievable ideas, the HOME project, which, like me, is investigating various forms of dislocation.

Incubation, international conference on writing and the internet, tece International Online Writing Community, Nottingham Trent University, UK, July 10-12.
What next? The arts, age, regions & communities

Stompin Youth: working on the railway

Sue Moss

Stompin Youth’s latest performance endows the energy of dancers in the process of becoming primed for life. Artistic director Jerril Rechter has situated Primed in the Irwerks Ramblys Tool lenses—a large and echoing workshop constructed of galvanised iron. Daylight chinks through gashes in the walls. Primed is a site-specific performance that requires the audience to move to 4 locations. This would be a manoeuvre of (sense for any director lacking Rechter’s certainty. Stompin Youth effectively exploit the integrity of each space to perform a dynamically diverse, yet unified sequence of dance.

Site 1—Arcade. The beginning of Darrin Verbenas’s sound sequence evokes a Tibetan prayer bowl. Silence is suspended, a sound from the past. Two skateboarders mirror this effect by circling a frenetic pitch as the dancers respond to her theme. They grip, release and fall, alternating a kickbox movement with a Zen bow-pull action of the arms. A strobe is dropped and ile displaced, winking at a red ball clamped in mechanical arms that hover menacingly. The dancers acknowledge this threatening presence with alternating gestures of homage, longing and uncertainty. Sixteen dancers maintain the focus and patterns of connection as Jan Hector and David Murray’s lighting spits across dance to unerecting dynamic and pulsing sound.

Site 2—Bedroom. Long strands of multi-colored lights hang from the ceiling. Once released, the lights become scents for the audience. The area is in darkness and a slowed video sequence by Marcus Khan (from the original video Destination) establishes the elements of flight, love and lust. Khan’s images highlight an evocative interplay of limbs and bodies while hand-maiden’s unroll red and blue quilt covers onto a domed red and white central bed. The dancers surround and hold a stream of countless counterpoint dancers who sit or move alone. In a world saturated with commodity images of sex, this uncompromising sequence evokes the permutations of sexuality and corporeal codes. Stompin Youth dance the space of desire with authority and maturity.

Site 3—Scanner. A corner of the workshop is dramatically steeped with white light. Sun seeps through the corrugated walls. Five male dancers revet in their strength and potency, testing their physical limits in vigorous duo and trio combinations. The work of Adam Wheeler and Cheyne Mitchell (in his first performance with the company) is robust and skilful. These dancers self-launch from the walls with ballistic force. The operatic voice emerging from Verbenas’s score, and the tracking light grid accentuate the power of this performance. A feature of this site is the dancers’ use of the corrugated walls and framework to enhance the percussive and choreographic effects. The dancers demonstrate a subtle combination of physicality and vulnerability. They realise something other than strength is needed to surmount the whispering static of their own uncertainties.

Site 4—House. This site is the most enigmatic and challenging for a school audience. An empty carriage gradually reveals faces looking out onto dark ground. The train arrives, dancers emerge then re-enter the carriage. Each compartment reveals an upstairs and downstairs level. Hector and Murray’s stunning lighting�emphasises split panels that reflect and accentuate different body parts—hips, hands, heads and shoulders. When the lower level passengers exit there is an intriguing optical effect of surreal disembodiment. Stompin Youth is a young company experienced in choreographic collaboration and working in multi-medial environments. Primed is a sophisticated production that successfully meets the demands of the workshop annex and the transition across 4 sites. Launcetton is fortunate to have a company that so effectively showcases the vitality and excitement of dance in a non-conventional theatre space.

Sue Moss is a writer/performer and former lecturer in dance.

New silents, new music

Martin Walsh

Huddled inside the warm hall at Tasmania’s Moanal Arts Centre on a chilly night, the lucky audience for Dusk Drive were presented with a feast of silent movies project ed as digital video, and backed by 4 of the state’s finest professional musicians, Martin Tucker, Matt Lincoln, Paul Parnell and Don Barie. The dialogue between the live musical improvisation and the short film sequences created a captivating evening that was totally immersed and enthralled.

This film, video and music collaboration emerged from a community arts project, The Works (produced by the centre of the Tasmanian Aboriginal, Tasmanian Trades and Labour and Glenorchwy City). The material was to be shown at dusk in a Glenorchwy City bus mall, but was hit by a deluge of the public at the Moanal.

The films are characterised by an impressive range of stylistic variations, ranging from Stella Allen’s beautifully understated and very personal documentary footage of her grandchildren, to the schlock horror of Felix Blackler and Morgan Neil’s The Pizza Boy, an excellent ‘pizza western’ with a great ‘Jacky Chan ninja pizza of death cam’ sequence. Many of the works make direct and intelligent references to the history of film, television and Australian culture as their source material.

Most, by Mark Hosentine, is a Hammer Horror send-up with a gender inversion twist that makes vegetarianism look like a good option, and He Works in a Snit by Vicse Burwick, Robert Davies and Tim Davies, is a stunningly crafted short film that calls for great Aussie icons like Homicide and Division Four, and even has a touch of the opening sequences of The Cars That Ate Paris. The camera work is silky, the continuity immaculate, and the acting and the props are spot on. It’s a great short piece that really transcends the confines of its restricted form.

Robyn Kerr also takes a look at an Australian cultural icon in her film, A day in the life of a pair of Blunnys. This is an entertaining study of a pair of Blunnys Boots which Kerr follows through a working day. On a more whimsical note, Career Opportunities by Ben Cumbers hauntingly portrays the conversion of a regular rail worker into a ‘Zen track cleaner’ who chooses to take on the gloriously futile task of sweeping the gravel from the countless sleepers on the line. Asking similar questions about existence and individuality is Paperwork by Janssen Herr. This is a bleak and apocalyptically beautiful vision of faceless men shuffling paper in futile perpetuity.

Also screened was The Lazy Basket by Becc Smith, Richard Brooke, Sarah Hadrell, Naomi Watts, Justin Lynch, Matthew Dunne and Dallas Lovell—a humorous look at an attempted clean-up in waster-burg, where a unique invention called the lazy basket is used to hang all items of distraction out-of-sight and out-of mind, suspended from the balcony rail. Very lateral.

The Pocket Master was a component of the project produced with the assistance of filmmak er Rick Randell. The brief given to 15 young filmmakers was to shoot a story within the boundaries of Glenorchwy City using 35mm and a half minute, black and white movie film with all editing to be done in-camera. Recording a non-linear story on a linear medium, in a limited set of locations, required clear planning in the foundation of a complex process that would remain virtual until the film came back from the lab. The resulting 15 films exhibit an unprecedented self-confidence born of faith in an idea combined with sincere effort.

What impressed me so much about this series of short films was the facility with which the makers (between 16 and 50 years of age) expressed themselves visually in their new medium. None of the films were clumsy or ‘undirected’, in fact in the degree of visual sophistication exhibited by this entire group of new filmmakers, most of whom had not used a camera before, is impressive. I look forward to seeing their names crop up on future projects.

Dusk Drive, part of The Works Project, artistic director Ian Pidd, project coordinator Sally Edith, music coordinator Martin Tucker; Dusk Drive coordinators Mark Cormelius and Diana Gref, filmmaker Rick Randell. An associated project involved primary school students making video animations. The Works was initiated by Richard Bladel, arts officer for the producer, the Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council and Glenorchwy City Council with assistance from Arts Tasmania, Screen Tasmania, The Australia Council and The Tasmanian Educational Development Centre, Glenorchwy City, Tasmania, August 10.
A little bit near, a little bit far away

Bill Perrett

On a night at the end of the Dry, with electrical storms cracking over Darwin Harbour, and the lights of the port dotting the background, Tracks dance and performing arts company presented an exquisite evocation of local history in Outside the Camp.

Set in a flat sand space at Fisherman Wharf, the piece is organised around the stories which came from the Leprosarium located at Channel Island in the harbour, "a little bit near, a little bit far away" from the mainland and Darwin. It would be hard to avoid the impression that it was a place of despair. Even less was known about the disease in the quarter of a century to 1955 when the Leprosarium opened, and it seems that people were exiled there for life through a combination of ignorance, fear, and a dehumanised bureaucracy.

Outside the Camp is "a story about coming together and separating." The narrative is organised around the story of an Aboriginal boy who was taken from his family and sent to the Island. The boy is represented in puppet form, manipulated by and attached to the bodies of the Tracks dancers. The puppets are the creation of dancer Tania Lieben. The figure of the boy, a joined stick form with dark eyes, became a powerful evocative performance, evoking his terror, bewilderment and courage. Other props—a minimal cloth boat, burning human figures on wire mesh backgrounds—were beautifully effective in the open air setting.

Woven through the boy’s story is another narrative of a Buddhist couple who live 9 lifetimes together, always fated to be parted. The poignancy of their separations echoes the boy’s story, and connects also the theme of biblical and contemporary Christian religion. The Leprosarium was run by clerical staff, neatly represented in black garb, and one section of the performance, "The Bible Says", cites texts from Leviticus which detail the strictures of biblical law relating to lepers.

Outside the Camp was conceived, written and directed by Tim Newth, and performed by a cast of Indigenous and non-Indigenous performers: Ken Conway, Tania Lieben, Stanley Stanislan, Albyson Mills and David McSkinner. It is a complex and beautiful performance, never overwrought despite the depth of emotion involved in these memories of our very near past, and despite these it also has a wicked sense of humour. Tracks remains unashamedly local and rooted in Territory communities. In a place which has sometimes suffered from something of a cultural cringe it is a cause for celebration and optimism that the company continues to produce work of this excellent standard, and, importantly, is supported by large and enthusiastic audiences. At a stage in its history when Australia is struggling to come to terms with the Stolen Generations—the pain and dysfunction caused by the removal of Aboriginal children from their families—it is also timely. Outside the Camp deserves a wider exposure, both for the quality of its performance and production, and for the importance of its concerns for the nation.

Tracks Inc, Outside the Camp, Darwin Festival, Fisherman Wharf, September 7 - 9 More on the Darwin Festival in RealTime 40.

Oscillate's beetle dancing

Diana Klausen

According to the program for the 4 free performances given by Oscillate Youth Dance Collective, Hobart is Australia's only capital city whose university does not offer tuition in the discipline of dance. While there are private teachers and classes, for many dance students Year 12 is where the formal training and experimentation stop.

The consequent lack of resources and opportunities—and of avenues to perform and present "dance as an accessible conceptual medium"—are motives behind the formation of Oscillate (Kya and Rachel Pybus, Jasmin Ratray, Jessica Rumbold, Tullia Chuang-Tilley, Edwin Morris). The group acknowledges the inspiration and support provided by dance teacher Lesley Graham.

The dancers share a background in dance/contemporary movement/chorography studies (Years 11 & 12) at Rosny College and have recent experience in the Hobart Fringe Festival, plus individual work with dance companies Tandance and Par Avion. Scarabs was danced and choreographed by all Oscillate members and devised in partnership with the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery that has, over the past few years, presented a number of innovative dance works with related exhibitions.

The 30-minute performance features ingenious costuming (inspired by the Museum’s extensive beetle collection), a unique, custom-made soundtrack that is more an eclectic mix of sounds and rhythms than music (“stomachy sounds” as one dancer put it at the post-performance forum) and a simple and effective lighting design. The piece worked well as a site-specific dance installation, responding to its intimate gallery space.

The work is deceptively simple, with barefoot performers in costumes suggesting the iridescent winged surface of the scarab beetle. Each dancer enters with her back to the audience. As she turns, she is revealed to be 'gagged' by a beetle-shaped mouth-piece, its sexual and violent overtones inescapable, even if perhaps not part of the ensemble’s intentions. The scarab beetle theme and the group’s fascination with the museum’s displays give this essentially abstract dance work a strong coherence.

Initially, subtle movements are made in synch; then the choreography expands with each dancer performing her own variations, while still reacting to and with the rest of the troupe. The collaborative choreography is, just occasionally, derivative, but overall the gestural sequences are attention-getting—good, athletic contemporary dance.

The beetle theme is well maintained, giving the performance an other-worldliness. The standard of dance is high; it is evident that some Oscillate dancers have experience in gymnastics and aerobics. A highlight is one dancer who has virtually mastered the knack of barefoot pointe dancing.

The printed program is a useful extra detail to a very professional work, the catalogue essay expanding on the dancers’ concerns and inspirations. With its genesis in a ‘brainstorming’ creative process and the product of 4 months’ collaborative work, Scarabs is a worthwhile project successfully brought to fruition and clearly much enjoyed by a responsive, standing-room-only audience.
Susan Richer on children, art and festivals

"I feel that children's cultural development, children's aesthetic development, children's cultural lives, children's artmaking processes and outcomes are deadly serious..."

Mary Ann Hunter

Former producer with Brisbane's Stage X festival for young people, Susan Richer is the Program Director of Out of the Box, the Queensland Performing Arts Trust's Festival for children aged 3 to 8. We began by discussing what makes a festival more than just a series of events.

There's an atmospheric consideration that is about physical location and 'vibe'—though that's such a daggy term. Some manifestations of atmosphere planning occur via dressing and decoration, dealing with existing architecture. For children, the fountain at QPAC is every bit as interesting as what they might see on a stage. A festival often is a series of events but unless those events are well contextualised, connected, meaningful, relevant and appropriate there is no reason for anyone to really care about them. People have to feel that they belong to a festival, that they own it in some way. That's what ultimately creates the vibe—oops, said it again.

So it's partly about altering the everyday perception or use of the space? Yes, though it's not about any magical transformation necessarily. It's really just about perception and effective planning.

There's an element of navigation that I want children to experience with this festival, that sense of having to choose, find or discover, both within the program and site. Once they're here, it's also about having a few surprises, unexpected sights, sounds, smells.

That concept of navigation is also emphasised in the philosophical principles listed on the Out of the Box website.

My research last year indicated that children's arts and entertainment are only taken seriously when they're profit makers. In the late 1980s Faith Popcorn predicted that, by the end of the 90s, children's entertainment would become a huge money-making business and it has. But a lot of children's entertainment is what I call sanitised kitsch, it's not actually a serious business in any way apart from the profit making at the end of it. A lot of it assumes that children don't think in deep, critical, complex and philosophical modes. But I feel that children's cultural development, children's aesthetic development, children's cultural lives, children's artmaking processes and outcomes are deadly serious, as valid as the art business of adults, and that they'll only be taken seriously if the reasons for why they're serious are clearly articulated. I also feel that a festival like Out of the Box that operates on a significant amount of public money has to be absolutely transparent about why it's happening. The festival's philosophical principles directly inform the curation of the festival which is a transparent process as well.

You mentioned earlier that you conducted research directly with children...You are also the creative producer of Wide Awake, a new work for the festival inspired by Michelle Lemieux's Stormy Night. Yes, it keeps me sane, it allows me to work with children during the lead-up to the festival. Around 100 children between the ages of 5 and 8 are collaborating with professional artists in Wide Awake's devising and rehearsal process. The majority of the children have never performed before, let alone devised a multi-form work. Very scary and very exciting. They are working with some of Queensland's best artists in performance, projection art, design and music to present quite a surreal work that explores the philosophical journey of a child one over night.

I believe that Angela McRobbie is right in saying we live in a 'culture society', one in which culture and profit making are bound together. For us that means festivals are stuck in cultural tourism mode rather than being an integrated, important celebration of who we are, and why, and where. Wide Awake is the signature work for the festival, a work that is by, for and about the very young. Much of its language and iconography has come from the children themselves; some adults may not be able to read it, but that's okay, it's not for them. Out of the Box is not about inducting children into culture buying, it's about children being able to connect with relevant and meaningful arts-based experiences. Children are often constructed as little consumers, future ticket buyers, not current cultural contributors. We're trying to challenge and subvert that view of consumption.

I conducted focus groups with children outside of schools, and then I went to 8 different schools trying to cover the geographic and demographic spread of the festival. I facilitated workshops that allowed children to communicate ideas through a number of forms. But despite the differences between schools and groups, the lack of confidence and knowledge about the arts was fairly consistent.

Were you expecting this?

I was really surprised by it. Whenever I asked "what is the art?" or "what is art?", the answers were mostly about cutting and pasting classroom activities. When I asked about festivals, the participants were really anticipate and wanted to keep talking about their experiences: whether that was a street festival or a school fete. One kid said that a festival was when a teacher puts up their artwork around the classroom and another said that a festival is when you get to see what's inside the minds of other people. Some really quite profound statements, but there was never that intensity of discussion or excitement with "what is art?" It wasn't so much these children weren't accessing arts in any way, it's just that they didn't recognise their art making or arts experiencing in such. So the festival also has an advocacy responsibility in raising awareness about the arts amongst children and raising awareness amongst adults about the importance of the works of art that children process and produce.

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The child photographed, the child apart

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

FACING PHOTOGRAPHY. If I face myself as I face my daughter, I face not only the part that cares for, cherishes, hopes to nurture a self separate from my own identity, but also the part which is confounded by this disparity, is held back, or, indeed, teared by it (and I include in this, teased sexually, reminding me of my own frustrations, barricades, and unfulfilled desires). What stops me using her as a tool for my desires is a solid recognition of her entity, her fleshly (and mental) distinction from my own self, a force-field in its own gravitation. How can a camera, with its "third eye" capability, with its lenses, shutters, measurements, framings and flattenings, do similarly?

The camera, identified as anything from a tool of policing (Sontag, Foucault), to one of democracy (Bourdieu), is often laid open to accusations of veiling its interpretive manipulations under the guise of objectivity. Especially contentious perhaps in its snappings of families and children, holding crocodile smiles and tears, arch embarrassment, retrospective longings. The photographs in Telling Tales vary in approaches from re-colouring the family album (Di Barrett, Mark McDean) to glancing across moist pubescent skin marked as if with the dust from chandeliers (Bill Henson's Untitled triptych, 1983/84). Most magnify a mystery or disturbance from childhood; even its clichés (ribons, innocence, awkwardness) bloat with doubts and uncertainties.

I leave my daughter at home to scrawl, sneak, pass, push, think, snatch, wait and grow, and catch these images playing out in front of me.

PUSHING AWAY. A mounted chocolate-block of children's faces. Part of a larger Nicola Loder work of 175 portraits lining a wall in shots taken with an old-format camera without tripod or lightmeter and unaltered in the darkroom. Low-angled shots romanticise the subjects, yet the faces themselves pull away with the various means children have of challenging and withholding from the adult gaze—glaced eyes, pouting, glaring, clowing, vacancy... Children know themselves as powerful, significant, magnetic, and volatile.

PASSING DOWN. Another checkerboard mounting: enlarged, blurred close-ups, dol' s legs, skirts twirling, ferns, strong beads, a plastic shoe. Fragments of (be)longing, treasures handed down mother to daughter, constructing lineage and role.

Perhaps an old smell fills in the blues. Kate Butler's Girbidhood is a chimera of parts (though here I miss the ferocious side of the Chimaera). See-loss—a glossy shell seems to come out of a small nipple, a mol- luc's longing. What is the meaning of milk-memory when a breast is still too young to give.

SNATCHING, CATCHING. In Bill Henson's Paris Opera, a silver-haired man sits with a dressed, pubescent girl asleep atop his lap. She is blushed with a run-out exhaustion that could (but need not) be construed as a sexual flush (a glow that one has to be careful, with children, not to misconstrue). The paternal gaze is ambiguous, his look sea-borne, as if listening to violins. In the second picture, the young girl lies fully naked; has there been a violation? The lighting is chiaroscuro, the effect, a cham- ber work. The naked girl's body, alone in its frame, is unmarked, seems dreaming to itself—honi soit—unless we deliberately penetrate the pictures with a gaze intent on linking a narrative between figures and frames. Henson's figures pay no caution to circumstance, and "apparently act... according to their dreams and needs in ways that often bear little relationship" to social con- straints (Isabel Crombie, curator, Venice Biennale 1995).

SNEAKING BY. "Every evening, the children had to walk past their drunken father on the doorstep to get indoors." Tracey Moffatt's superrealist portraits (her Scarred for Life series) head right into troubled zones, recreating period scenes from stories told by friends of experiences which cor- roded or formulated their young self-identi- ties. The pictures are psychoanalytic tableaux, often dealing with cross-cultural misunderstandings, detailed with the facu- lity of cold-sweat dreams.

WEARING AWAY. Anne Ferran pho- tograms remnant clothes from archaeological sites (Hyde Park Barracks; Rose Hill House), allowing light to 'read' a 19th centu- ry child's lace underdress placed directly onto photographic paper. The image is 3-dimensional, the effect like catching the substance of a ghost or spirit long gone. This is a double-take on the idea of the document: finders, keepers; the 'losers' those whose lives passed unrecorded in historical logbooks (women, children, the 19th centu- ry insane). Their physiognomies only caught here as shadows, the photograms a moving monument to details of quiet, forgotten lives.

By contrast, her Carnal Knowledge series creates a different monument: chil- dren's faces overlayed with surface textures from rocks. A domestic Mount Rushmore, displacing Presidents: these young lives span a mountain's time.

Most [works] magnify a mystery or disturbance from childhood; even its clichés (ribbons, innocence, awkwardness) bloat with doubts and uncertainties.
A questionable rebellion

Suzanne Spunner

Chi Vu has written the migrant's rite of passage play about the inevitable conflicts between parents and children, between the lost country and the new one, the old language and customs and the new language and the adopted culture, played out in the battles between mother and daughter, for the daughter's right to choose her own life.

A Story of Soil has been produced by NBO Stories for Footscray Community Arts Centre and La Mama Theatre, directed by David Trevett and performed in a community-based theatre setting.

In a recent interview with Chi Vu I learned that going to Armnhem Land was a turning point in her understanding of being a refugee. I missed that revelation in a previous interview with Vu and I am grateful that she allowed me to talk about it.

Vu was not a stereotypical Vietnamese woman. She was a young woman who had been forced to leave Vietnam in her youth. Her mother had buried a stash of money that she had stolen when she left, and this money was used to support her daughter's education.

Vu's play is about the conflict between mother and daughter, for the daughter's right to choose her own life. It is a story of communities on the move, of the displacement of people and the loss of cultural identity.

Vu's play is also a commentary on the displacement of cultures and the loss of identity. It is a story of the loss of cultural heritage and the struggle to maintain it.

In the end, much more was suggested in this play than was realised. There was real potential for going out from the suburbs into the truly new soil of the countryside/outback, although from an interview with Vu I learned that going to Armnhem Land was a turning point in her understanding of being a refugee. I missed that revelation in a previous interview with Vu and I am grateful that she allowed me to talk about it.

Vu's play is a story of Soil, Footscray Community Arts Centre, Melbourne, August 16-26.

Web kickstart for Digi-Tarts

Clare Murphy

The mix of innocence and sophistication evident in the collaged images created by young artists of various ages for transmission and exchange on their first web venture, belies the seriousness of 'Digi-Tarts' intentions, as Clare Murphy explains.

[Web address] offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to visit your choice of the following culture-packed Queensland destinations (or representation): Brisbane, Logan, Redcliffe, Beenleigh and Cairns. Your tour guide, Digi-Tarts, will show you how to meaningfully incorporate the use of "real time" (coincide and off), "real place" and "virtual space" into a cross-community project with outcomes you—the cultural producers—can own, share and recreate as necessary.

That's the cute way of describing the rationale of an 8-week project run by Digi-Tarts in August. The project's key aim was to assist young artists to turn their creativity into currency, in gaining the skills required to confidently negotiate issues of representation as individuals, artists and members of communities on the web. The webbushere project includes a bit of everything that Digi-Tarts does best—such as working to include the disadvantaged in the digital world, creating projects with a focus on young or emerging artists and their cultures and working extensively in the furthest Queensland regions. Oh, and they're not afraid to get cute with you either. Ask any Digi-Tart attending a free workshop on how to make her kewpie doll's eyes flash red or handing in her Gowgi Gerl contribution and she will tell you that young women with a desire to communicate and create in a digital medium are Digi-Tarts' special priority.

On the Digi-Tarts homepage, founding staff member Lisa Burnett offers us, "A Bit of History. Mostly about me, because I think sharing our stories, however little, provides us with a common reference point—a place to connect." That's where the "cute" comes in. Digi-Tarts are as clever with language or content development as they are at practically addressing their steadfast concern and commitment to social justice issues related to community representation and digital equality. You can't help but pardon the "place" puns or the occasional pink foot on your way through their critical framework. Of all the things Digi-Tarts has to offer, the first (and most important to the digitally uninitiated) is the opportunity to uniquely identify oneself as a Digi-Tart or a Digi-Art as the home page explains: "A Digi-Tart is not a singular thing—at all times she is part of a whole: a diverse and many splintered whole. We are varied in age, in lifestyle, in attitude, in personality and I can only think of three things that link us: 1. a need to know and understand what 'the digital' can do for us, 2. a desire to have our views and creativity represented and 3. a love of food—any variety.

Projects like [web address] allow artist and audience alike to recognize the value of difference and appreciate the fresh perspective gained in understanding how others build their universe. Personally constructed e-postcards explore a sense of place and aid in the negotiation of a shared cultural meaning beyond the ethnocentric scope of tourism. The digital medium's invitation to meet at a shared starting point, a "non-space" emphasises the need to understand and perceive yourself in relation to place.

[Web address] is Digi-Tarts' most recent flight demonstration for those who marvel at how a project funded organised with one part-time paid worker and a dynamic team of casual tutors, participants and volunteers can stay aloft amid unpredictable waves of funding. In response to community need, Digi-Tarts emerges as a self-propelling model for cultural development.

[Web address], August 2000. Digi-Tarts project, funded by Arts Queensland, with community support of organisations and services: Graft'A'Arts, Beenleigh Area Youth Service, Beenleigh Library Internet Space, The Cerebral Palsy League Cascade Centre, Women's infolink, Contact Inc and Virtual Artists.

[Web address] and earlier Digi-Tarts projects, like the arms for the masses, gowgi, simply lifeless and you Brisbane, can be glimpsed online at digiarts.vs.com.au

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Existing in a wild, uncultivated State

Lucinda Shaw

The fact that community cultural development does not always work in tangible public art, but is rather about longer term, broader and subtler outcomes, can be confronting to arts and funding bodies' preconceptions. Indeed, in some circumstances culture may or may not be synonymous with art. Feral Arts artist Sarah Moynihan says, "People find it hard to get their heads around it. It's not about photo opportunities." The Ferals therefore recommend that community arts and community cultural development be given the breathing space to have rightfully separate identities and agendas. That the art being made in workshops may have an end product, but cultural and community development is more interested in collaborations and generating relationships.

Feral Arts began about 10 years ago and sprang from Sarah Moynihan's work with marginalised young people in Logan City. Since then the Ferals have developed strong connections with South Brisbane and Dajara, a small Queensland township that has an interesting and unusual history. Dajara was originally the most western point of the American train line. The predominantly Indigenous (Walu Wurr) community comprises those who stayed when the cattle trains stopped and Northern Territory people drawn to Queensland for schooling. The Ferals have been working in the area on a multi-arts program focused on oral history. Their work provides resources, training and information to advance the Indigenous culture.

The Feral's work is often based around interviews and recording of oral histories, mainly on video. Rather than going into a community as documentary makers, they prefer to help the community obtain the technology and skills to document their stories themselves. In this way the work remains within the community and is owned by families and interviewees. However, Moynihan and another Feral Arts artist, Neena Horton, say that "There's a slow take up within the CCD sector with new technologies. A fair chunk of our work is CD-ROM and internet work. It's important though to work out ways of getting gear and training to marginal groups that is sustainable, not just to dump and run without the support."

The work at Dajara is similar to that at Musgrave Park Cultural Centre which has been working on the post-production for The Spirit of Musgrave Park video through the Feral Arts PlaceLab program. The video, to be launched this year, brings together oral histories recorded by the centre in researching Indigenous associations with South Brisbane. The development of Brisbane's South Bank with its cultural precinct and public space did not take into account those associations.

When the issue of development came up on South Bank and around this area, a lot of money sitting here right on the river. Firstly they wiped out the puts around the area, and then they started selling, and they sold it up, and in selling it they stole the South Side River Bank, they stole Old Tank City, they stole Manhattan Park and they pushed us back to Musgrave Park. Selwyn Johnson, President Musgrave Park Cultural Centre. Feral Arts video transcript 1998.

A sense of place is central to the work of Feral Arts. Ironically, says Horton, displacement is a common point between people from Indigenous, non-indigenous and non-English speaking backgrounds. "The Pauline Hanson thing was a denial of Australian cultural history. We're providing opportunities to think about displacement and the significance of place," he says.

On November 19, Placeworks, a symposium at Southbank Parklands on place and culture will bring local South Brisbane and Aborginal people together with arts and funding bodies. "Hopefully it will inform local work and consequently work in other areas. On a state and federal level opportunities have been missed."

Another Feral Arts project is Whispering Grounds with leading Aboriginal poet Lionel Fogarty working on the production of a video/poetry CD-ROM about associations with Cherbourg and South Brisbane. The project involves writing and video workshops in Cherbourg as well as the Regional Writing Fund, and production work in South Brisbane and Feral Arts studio. Whispering Grounds will be launched later this year. Enquiries: feralarts@feralarts.com.au.

...existing in a wild, uncultivated State... is the best accompanying the title Feral Arts on the website www.feralarts.com.au. The quotation from Selwyn Johnson is taken from they shoot ferals don't they? A Feral Arts report available on the website.

Lucinda Shaw is a Brisbane based freelance writer, actor, director, visual artist and educator.

The WOW Factor

In Julie Money's Thriller Envy the worlds of two women collide when a businesswoman and mother meets by chance a young thief who once stole one of her dresses. What ensues is what you'd expect in a film "an avalanche of psychological warfare." Envy is the first feature of ATIVS graduate who's made a number of successful shorts (Kindred, Lily and One Wild Weekend with the Loosemeуст Rutile) which have won prizes in Australia and international festivals. Seven years in the making, Envy demanded more from the film-maker than the usual personal attachment to the process. Julie Money says, "As well as becoming the major location, my house provided wardrobe and make-up rooms, a catering facility, the rushes- screening room and the green room for the cast. My bedroom became the room for the husband and wife in the film. In the morning, I'd get out of bed and jump in the shower, then the art department would rush to change the sheets."

Envy is one of the features screening at this year's World of Women's Cinema (WOW 2001) Festival, the tenth such event organized by one of our most enterprising screen organisations WFT (Women in Film and Television). There's also a strong program of documentaries including Live NudeGirls Unite (USA) about strippers union in San Francisco, and also from the US, the Australian premier of Sundance winner Girrlfit by first-time director Karen Kusama about a teenage girl from the New York projects who is determined to be a boxer. Taking Care of Elvis by Australian Katay and David Grusovin follows a group of Elvis fans on a pilgrimage to Graceland. The screening of this film will be accompanied by performances from Elvis impersonator Paul Fenchel and Katis, the Drag King of Rock 'n Roll, complete with Las Vegas showgirls. This year WOW's Short Film competition received an encouraging 120 entries from within Australia and overseas. Prizes worth $10,000 for Best Australian and Best International Short as well as an Encouragement Award provided by the University of Technology. Following the Sydney screenings, the film will tour regional WOW and nationally.

Festival Hotline 07 5545 4559

Tambourine Mountain

For those forever in the state of recreation comes The Evolution Festival. Taking place at Tambourine Mountain Queensland the evolution festival is a mixed media festival seeking to explore and inform community debate socially, scientifically and artistically as to how the human race has dealt with evolution, and how to face our own evolution.

The Festival Director Bronwyn Davies hopes to create an environment that will encourage collaborations not only between artforms, but also between communities. One of the ways she hopes to do this through the Evolution Art Prize - a $10,000 mixed media art prize for collaborations between media, artists and forms with encouragement awards for excellence in areas such as Best work by an emerging artist under 35, Best collaborative piece, Best short film, Best performance, Best poetry or literature performance, Best rendition of the reason why I live here (for Tambourine Mountain residents only) and the Chaos Theory Award.

There will also be 3 days of live music from groups such as Tulipan, Diana Almald, Monique Brunery and Deborah Conway, Full Fat Fowl, the Intriguing Moto Mino's Art machine experience - a hybrid Australian Indigenous and Japanese minimal theatre/music experience—and a host of other local and national acts. Across the 3 days there will also be workshops, a short film festival, poetry performances and the Mixed Media Art Experiment, a mass improvised performance involving dance, projected digital images, musicians, and mixed media artists, creating works through the performance.

Vincent Giarrusso: the movie, the music, the mall

Elise McCredie

Vincent Giarrusso has made the rare leap from ARIA award winning musician (with his band underground (OVERS)) to writer-director of the only Australian feature selected for this year's Cannes International Film Festival, Mallboy.

It's a fairly unusual career transition to go from musician to filmmaker. How did it come about?

I wrote Mallboy initially as a poem about 7 years ago while I was writing albums for the band. It was a long form poem, and I showed it to a lecturer at uni and he thought it was very bad—no not really (laughs)—but it didn't really cut it as a poem because the dialogue and the characters were too strong. I was really living the characters and I kept surprising myself as I was writing. The characters are very vivid for me.

Who read the poem and said it should be a film or was that something you realised?

It was something I realised. There was a good story there and good images and I thought it would be great to translate to the screen. So I sent away to Film Vic and the AFC for guidelines on how to write films and a year later it got AFC funding through the New Writers Scheme.

How would you compare the process of writing a film narrative with writing a song? Do you think there are similarities in structure?

Not so much with a song but the way

Giann Bonna and I write albums we put together a whole lot of songs and then we structure an album in post-production, which is quite similar to film. We always bring a certain dramatic sensibility to the album, always very conscious of the album progressing and the juxtapositions between songs. It's very similar. But in film it's just a much bigger scale, you're dealing with different people, different departments whereas in music you're mainly dealing with your musicians. But still it's always collaboration.

Did you wait until you had a cut before you composed the music for Mallboy?

No, I had music ideas when I was writing and melodies that I always had in my mind. After about 2 weeks of editing we got together with our sound designer Phillip Trophy and he recorded us improvising the music. We did about 30 pieces, just playing around with the melodies and feet with just electric guitar and keyboards. And then we mixed that and listened back and chose our favourites and cut the film to the performance of the music. It was very organic and non-intrusive. What you're seeing and what you're hearing are interacting. It's a journey between the two.

The acting in Mallboy rings very true. Is improvising a method you used to get such great performances?

We did a lot of improvising in rehearsal. We improvised before and after scenes just so there was a sense of this being a slice of their life, that things were going on all the time. But then on the day we stuck to the script.

In Australian film we are forever seeing the heightened almost stereotypical version of the working class. Yet in Mallboy the characters are portrayed with genuine affection and respect. Were they based on particular people you worked with?

It's very much a fiction but as a youth worker you see types and I know some kids who were very similar to Shaun. As you write you go into types that will suit the drama. That was always the big issue for me—how do you reconcile realism with what you know is really just a construct. The sisters are classic twin foils, they work that way in the film and the father is very much the king, the intellectual king, so it's playing with all those archetypes. Then there's what degree of reality you give the performance and the look of the film. That was always the tension.

In the credits Rowan Woods [director, The Boys] is named as one of your mentors. What was his role?

I spent 2 days with Rowan up in Sydney and we hung out in malls. He has such energy and such a refined mind. We talked about having an overall plan for the film. I'd been thinking about the same thing but I didn't know how to do it. So we had this idea that the film was 5 acts and we mapped out a camera and lighting plan for each act. Then I went back to the DOF [Brendan Lavelle] and we took bits of this plan but eventually we made our own. We wanted the camera to be respectful and not too into the action. The subjective camera and the objective camera. Always from Shaun's perspective and a lot of time from his height. We borrowed from Ken Loach—the respectful camera. The camera was mainly on tripods; we only used dollies and moved the camera when there was heightened emotion in relation to Shaun. We only used prime lenses, didn't use zooms. Very traditional filmmaking.

Cannes can be a pretty intense place to show your first film. How was it received over there?

It was amazing. We'd just finished the film in February-March and we joked about 'oh when's the next festival!' Oh Cannes, oh we'll get into that yes we did. I think they really responded to the universal aspects of the story—the separation of the mother and the son and the rejection by the father. Some of the best feedback we got was that people said they'd had a cinematic experience; even though it's such a small film, people felt like they were moved on a number of levels.

What about the future?

We're getting a draft of a new script out there with the same team and we hope to make that soon. It's called Orange and it's a teenage story. I'm always writing and there are a few other things I want to do.

So, ideally, will you continue to write music and make films?

Yeah definitely; they're one and the same thing to me. I've already written some of the music for Orange...

Mallboy opens nationally on December 26 and it's a candidate for an AFI Award for Best Feature Film (see page 22).

Elise McCredie is an actor, writer and director. She wrote and directed the feature film Strange Fits of Passion and this year won an ARGIE for the Artist Service's comedy introducing Gary Petry. Elise appears in Clara Law's The Goddess of 1967.
Adrian Danks

Two of the more intriguing films screening at this year’s Melbourne International Film Festival were Nakato Hideo’s Ring 1 and Ring 2. In both films a group of characters (mostly teenagers) die as a result of watching videotape that contains spooky, difficult to decipher and plainly abstract imagery. The horror for the characters who watch this tape emanates from both what they experience in its pictorial content (the ‘spirit world’) and the avant-garde nature of its pictorial form (why it is shot and edited this way). Thus, the horror and danger of the tape is ostensibly formal, its other-worldly nature stemming from the spirit world) synonymous with its experimental nature.

When preparing to watch the Festival’s 2 Physiology programmes, I couldn’t help but think back to these 2 films and their very real insight into the nature of cinematic horror. For most audiences the ‘real’ horror to be found in film and the cinematic experience in general, lies not in gory scenes, ghostly figures and taboo subjects but in the ‘danger’ of formal experimentation (just remember those audiences who turned away from the screen during the credits for Seven but watched its gory tableau). In this sense some of the films in these programs, particularly the whole of the second devoted to the formally rigorous, often found-footage work of Austrian D Turner Brehm, were potentially pretty dangerous’ (with the promise of images of actual acts and organs to ‘disturb’ the blow). So when the slate came up on the screen warning audiences of the ‘graphic sexual and surgical images’ that were about to be displayed, I thought they’d left something off (if you’re going to warn audiences—which is in itself a bit silly—then you should probably point out what’s going to most offend them).

Though somewhat challenging in terms of their sexual politics, intermittent recontextualisation of mostly soft-core pornography, and foregrounding of acts of voyeurism (dots of shots of peepers, voyeur, peeping tom) and performative role-playing, these films are probably more confronting for audiences in their experimentation with refilming, reframing, and collage techniques and with the textures and surfaces of the image itself. Equally challenging, particularly in the case of Brehm’s work, is the often obtuse, silent or husky soundtrack that many of them contain. It would nevertheless be wrong to state that Peepshow did not live up to its ‘bizzare’ (titillation and the moving image’). The Brehm program, though formally rigorous, exhausting and fascinating as any experimental film program I can remember recently seeing, was also representatively confronting and ‘titillating’, exemplifying both programs’ fascination with the shadow worlds of sexuality, voyeurism and violence (sexual and formal). The fascination of many of the films in these 2 programs lies in the removal or obliteration of particular elements of the image and sound, the incorrigibility of what is being seen and heard, or the difficulty of working out what one is indeed watching or listening to. For example, Brehm’s Blackfriar relies upon the juxtaposition of surgical and sexual footage, the processes of refilming, reframing and abstracting images and registering them as a collection of blacks and whites, shapes and penetrating objects. Brehm’s mastery of recontextualisation, juxtaposition and montage, and the provocative and unsettling spectatorial experiences it can provoke is exemplified by the spellbinding, difficult and problematic Macabrum. In this film the power of Brehm’s technique takes

on its most disturbing edge, as ethnographic footage of ritual rituals is associatively edited to ‘70s multiracial pornography. Questions of voyeurism, of what we should and shouldn’t be watching, and of the integrity of represented events, come most to the fore in this work. In such basically fun and sometimes tri- umphantly silly films as Naomi Uman’s Removed and Robert Arnold’s The Morphology of Desire, the recontextualisation of—in turn—porn footage (with the woman’s body ‘erased’) and romance novel covers, equally highlights the absurdity of images, gestures and narrative events (particularly within the heightened ‘sexual’ worlds of pornog- raphy and romantic fiction). In general, many of the films in the first program presented a kind of fantasy view or space, floating upon acts of look- ing that are confrontational, surreptitious and per- formative. These films are equally concerned with the corporeal nature of such bodies and spaces even when ‘removed’ from or ‘morphed’ into the frame.

These 2 programs suggest an interesting set of possibilities for the curating of experimental film. Considering the difficulties of getting audi- ences to such programs it is necessary to find another hook, another context within which to place the films (and sex, possibly explicit, will do better than most). The 2000 festival provided such a context, with the possibility of voyeurism, sexual representation and exploitation, and its catalogue cover which featured a woman peeping through an illuminated slit in a wall.

Despite the timidity of the festival in relation to the Peepshow programs—a series of warnings in the catalogue and on the screen—this specially curated program (by the AFI’s Clare Stewart) proved to be a sell-out event. And the night (and sounds) of a full auditorium (for a few minutes any- way) responding to the perceptive and pulsating work of an iconoclast such as Brehm, provided one of the highlights of this year’s festival. The fact that this response was limited, and that some audiences clearly didn’t know what they had gotten themselves into, was, I guess, pretty telling as well.

Peepshow, curator Clare Stewart, Melbourne International Film Festival, July 19 - August 6

MUFFed
Alex Hutchinson

Any festival with an acronym like MUFF (Melbourne Underground Film Festival) is going to be open to some predictable jokes. On one hand, it is delivered in all senses of the word, but while nudity and pantones playing actresses playing running nurses abounded, so did problems. Here are some other MUFF synonyms: boozed, bungled, fuelled and muddled. Not in the actual running of the show (which was probably better handled than aspects of the MUFF) but rather in the films themselves.

Firstly, there is a question mark over whether you can deliberately make an ‘underground’ film—a feat which several of the features clearly aimed for. Underground or cult status is usually a term conferred after the film has been screened, not pitched as part of the reason for making it in the first place. In that sense, many features seem to be asking us what do we mean by cinema? parallels to be drawn with the Hong Kong action film, any of the exploitation genres etc. And while enormous amounts of praise should be heaped upon directors doing something different, for getting everything off the ground in such a short time without gov- ernment or corporate funding, it’s the films them- selves which have to stand up, and they don’t.

For instance, Nigel Winsgordon’s Sexual Hook (an import from the UK) purported to be a ‘man- splotation’ flick: a promising premise if ever there was one. However, apart from a contrived and (unfortunately) deadly serious message about sexual repression in the church (the entire explo- ration of which took place in the oft repeated phrase “unrestrained celibacy is as dangerous as unrestrained sexuality”) it delivered nothing but a soft porn montage of increasingly ridiculousness, where man after man manhandled themselves or other men for no apparent purpose. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the film was the revelation that breast enhancements, bellybutton rings and public sculpture have all been around since Renaissance Europe. Astounding.

At least Mark Savage’s Masterbatter Gummam was funny. About a detective who can trace his prey by sniffing the panties of victims, it aimed to parody your average Hong Kong action flick as well as (according to the blurb) pornography. The result was humorous if predictable and featured a great deal more semen than Thore’s

Something About Mary although none of that film’s decent actors (apart from the director’s brother Colin Savage who worked hard to get a laugh as the gymnast’s crippled sidekick, a per- formance reminiscent of moments in Peter Jackson’s cult classic Bad Taste). The latter pas- sages involving the gymnast’s sister (who, inci- dently, was also a man—an accidental running theme with the festival) fell very flat. As a curious sideline, SBS was playing the superior Killer Coudon (director Martin Wilz) at almost the same time on TV. The Savage brothers show promise.

The film that launched the festival after its rejection from MUFF (Melbourne International Film Festival), Richard Wolterscroft’s Pearls Before Sreet, was the best of the bunch but even it was flat with films. A sticks obsessed with masochism and violence is hired to kill an author of subversive literature, instead of the usual street kids, for their organs. A clear victim of the ‘show not tell’ mentality, the script often degenerated into a character’s long and stilted monologue on the nature of masochism or vio- lence with helpful suggestions from another char- actor like “intriguing, please tell me more” or “that’s fascinating, do go on.” The performances ranged from the passable lead Rafe Spall to the momentarily interesting efforts of the other ba- men to the stilted and monotonous performances of everybody else. Sometimes it seemed as if it did in all the films) that the actors were reading the script for the first time as they performed it. Words had it that the timing of the festival will be adjusted in the future to avoid a direct clash with MUFF which is probably a good idea. There is definitely room for a festival like MUFF—and I would love to see it handled successfully—how- ever this year’s films simply did not stack up in terms of quality. They weren’t offensive or shock- ing as some have claimed (and the festival’s pro- mos tried to exploit). They were generally bad. Ambitious and refreshing in the angles they took but lacking in execution.

MUFF (Melbourne Underground Film Festival), director Richard Wolterscroft, Cinema Nova, Kings & Littlemore, Melbourne, July 20-30, www.muff.net.au

The Morphology of Desire

Though somewhat challenging in terms of their sexual politics… these films are probably more confronting for audiences in their experimenta- tion with refilming, reframing, and collage techniques and with the textures and surfaces of the image itself.

MUFF: experimental film and the sex hook

RealTime/OnScreen 39 October - November 2000
BIFF rebirths Beat cool

Anthony May

RealTime went to the movies in July—the Brisbane International Film Festival and had a lot of fun. In a spirit of nostalgia and lost opportunity, this viewer restricted himself to the season of Beat movies—there were films on show here that have not been projected in a very long time.

For the most part, they provided an interesting reminder of the long tradition in experimental cinema and a fond remembrance of a time when documentary was shot on film and exhibited in theatres.

There were three strands to the Beat season: the features, the experimental documentaries and the outright wacky stuff. The most famous film of that period of late 50s/early 60s experimental cinema has to be John Cassavetes' Shadows (1959). Celebrated as a feature length improvisational film, festival guest, English academic Jack Sargeant noted it was not the film it was designed to be.

After shooting the film as an improvised work, Cassavetes scripted and reshoot sections of the film so that the final object would hang together. It doesn't really matter because, as a period piece, Shadows remains a classic of late 50s cool. The composition of Cassavetes' street photography mobilises both the iconic imagery of New York City and provides a guide to the work of later filmmakers like Sosemae. The soundtrack, by Charles Mingus and others, quickly became the sound of the time.

By the time Jonas Mekas made Guns of the Trees in 1961, this look for the New York streets had become a requirement. Guns of the Trees is in many ways a more cohesive film than Shadows; its suicide theme and the by now normative use of a classical imagery with a disruptive soundtrack give it a generational feel. Its use of Beat poetry—Allen Ginsberg makes an almost obligatory appearance—and the music of the folk revival, anchor its narrative personal disjunction right in the period of post-war anomie.

If the dominant force in the feature length Beat film was the influence of Cassavetes, in documentary the main figure has to be Robert Frank. Swiss-born Frank had already produced the main visual document of the Beat generation when he published his book of still photography, The Americans in 1959, with a foreword by Jack Kerouac. In the same year he made Pull my Daisy with Alfred Leslie. Loosely based on the third act of Kerouac's play, The Beat Generation, it is somewhere between a fiction of family disharmony and a dramatisation of Beat slogan making. The emphasis here is on experiment rather than storytelling.

Frank came back in 1968 with a far more penetrating documentary, Me and my brother, which follows a poetry tour. Sharing the stage and lives of Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky is Orlovsky's catatonic schizophrenic brother, Jonas. Part documentary, part meta-psychedelic fiction, the film erects a lot of the problems that Frank obviously encountered in documentary making. His collaborator, scriptwise, on this excursion was dramatist, actor and Dylan collaborator, Sam Shepard. Even Christopher Walken turns up in a minor role.

Of the films featured, it doesn't get wackier than Heaven and Earth Music, an animation by Harry Smith. Smith is rightly a legend for his 6-album collection of hillbilly and other music from the late 20s-early 50s, The Anthology of American Folk Music. These albums became the grounding documents of the American folk revival and were recently reissued on Smithsonian-Folkways. Heaven and Earth Music is about alchemy and the transformation of the mundane into the bizarre, sublime and eternal. It's also the source for Terry Gilliam's famous Monty Python animation. Smith, who eventually won an Emmy, I believe, was truly mad, thank god. Have a look at (www.harysmitharchives.com) and tell me I'm wrong.

These were the best and most memorable of the Beat films. It was good of the festival to run them amidst the current crop of the new and wonderful. Strategies such as this are what make BIFF better each year.

The Beat Generation, curator Anne Dempsey-George, Brisbane International Film Festival, July 27-August 6

Anthony May is a lecturer in Film and Cultural Studies at Griffith University, Nathan.

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Don't touch the big red button, Adam Head!

Sandra Graham

Growing up playing in the clay drains of his mother's pottery studio, Queensland
Adam Head had always sought to combine his love of art with his other passion, film. Now with an AFI nomination for his animation about the darker side of curiosity, Adam's life has indeed come Full Circle.

What are your influences as an animator?
I really like European style animation like Jan Svankmajer (from the Czech Republic) and Yugoslavian films. Jan does a lot of stuff where he might animate slices of meat. It is not traditional style animation like Disney. It's very dark. That's the feel that I would like to produce in my own films.

I'm often struck by the sheer creativity and imagination of animators, where do you get your ideas?
I've always got a little notebook or sketchbook and very often it's just like a visual idea that pops into my head. Basically I come up with the story first. One idea pops up and I work everything around that one idea. Everyone seems to think that the characters that I do are some sort of weird caricature of myself. I personally can't see it. Maybe it's sub-conscious.

What is Full Circle about?
Full Circle refers to the symbolic snake eating its own tail. The main character is an entomologist, so he labels bugs and everything has its place. He receives a package and opens it. On the door beside him is a killing jar. There begins a contemplation that he's got this object that's not like anything he's ever seen, it is not labelled and it's out of the ordinary. He can't help himself; he touches it and creates an event that leads to a situation, which keeps circulating. I was working building some floats for Movie World (Gold Coast).

Behind the Police Academy show there is this big red button that says don't touch. I couldn't take my eyes off it. Every time I turned around there it was. I wanted to touch it because I wanted to know what it did. That gave me the initial idea… what happens when your curiosity gets the better of you.

How long did it take to make Full Circle?
Well, the script I had floating around for a while. Naomi Just [producer] had put it into the Pacific Film and Television Commission for funding. If Naomi wasn't there to put the boot up me, I probably would be still contemplating how to make this film. It took us 2 and a half weeks to make the set. There were probably about 10 sets in all, and I think we went overboard in buying. We moved everything to the ABC studios. The ABC have a little animation room set up for when they're doing Kimu and Woof. It took us a little over 2 weeks to shoot at the studios, so in total about 4 and a half weeks to complete.

Can you tell me about the look of Full Circle?
I wanted everything really painterly. We made the entomologist's head and hands out of fiberglass and painted them with oil paints. His eyes were doll's eyes. Because an armature to make the body is very expensive, I got old tech drawing compasses and used them for the legs and arms. I just found whatever I could.

I really wanted that European style so everything was dark. The furniture was covered in rorimord so it looks as if it was French polished. I wanted everything in browns and greys because the butterfly— which is the main catalyst of the story—is quite blue and I wanted the butterfly to really stand out, to be vivid.

We made the floor out of metal because very often with animation you've got to secure the feet down in position. I was trying to get around having to drill holes and put screws up to hold him in position, so we got a metal floor and put magnets into his feet. You can just click the figure into position and it will stay there. That way we can do different camera angles and shots in a shorter space of time.

The figure is 5 feet tall and the set was 1.2-1.5 metres high. A lot of people do half scale but the smaller the figure is, the more time consuming it is to keep moving it. We wanted to do it fairly quickly because we had to shoot about 30 seconds of animation a day. Wallace and Grommit animators shoot about 2 seconds a day. On the other hand, we had to make it small enough to fit into the animation studio.

I was surprised to learn that animators are often snapped up for work even before leaving university; why are you interested in making shorts?
I was in second year when Disney came to Queensland College of Art to recruit people. It's because there is such a big call for animators. I just think once you work for a large corporation like Disney, it becomes a corporate type thing. You begin to draw everything in a particular way because you're doing it day in, day out. Independent animation lets you experiment and keep your own style up. That's what I love about animation, that you have total creative freedom and you really are only limited by your imagination.

Full Circle is nominated for an AFI Award for Best Animation Short (see Daniel Crooks' review, page 25).

Sandra Graham is a Queensland writer/director of short films and documentaries. Her first fully funded short is Mohammed's Passion.
Film Reviews

The Virgin Suicides
derived from the novel by Jeffrey Eugenides
written and directed by Sofia Coppola

Sofia Coppola's adapted film of Jeffrey Eugenides' novel is an essay on the ultra-feminine. It could also be viewed as a project about memory and the eternal crisis of the innocent narrator as she struggles to make sense of a film about the inessential nature of death. Barbara Credel could have a field day mining the film for evidence of the monstrosity of feminine; Laurna Belfer could do wonders for hours as to its revisionist relationship to "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1973). Trouble is, this is, as the movie wends its way towards its ending, a whole lot of nothing. It's a film about suicide as the act of (crime) the (crime) suicide is the act of killing oneself. It's a film about the little things, the banal nature of the some of the details highlighting the tragedy of people's lives. Loneliness and neglect are as confronting as violence. The women are often called out by real estate agents because elderly citizens have died in their homes. One woman was buried up in an electric blanket for 5 months. "The fact that you're able to help carries you through." Why? Do you think people are more tolerable, focused on the little things? The Australian community has no hungry mouths, no litter, no noisy voices, a woman and a man and a red house, a red brick house concealed behind an overgrown bush—we are we ever to enter the suburban tract and a family trapped, this is a physically and emotionally beautiful family. We breathe through the air of the question as we wander the empty rooms. The clever technique of filming an empty house while recreating a voiceover of the events and forensic details of the rooms, cupboards, walls were immediately after the meridians heightened the feel of the movie and the child's awareness of blood spilt on the phone. "We tried to call 900 but nothing happened." The repeated shots of photo frames, dishes, a child's toy, the victims with Pam and Marilyn, and with the audience; they could be any family. A bloodied mattress is the only remains of a fire, and a child's toy, dis- posed of in flames at the film's end.

The Jew in the Lotus
directed by Laurent Chateau
based on the book by Roger Kamenetz
brought to Australia by the Australia Tibet Council

This year the gala ceremony and weekend celebration of many local film productions converged on screens at the Film and Television Institute. Initial uncertainty over the Screen Awards when the AFC re-directed its funding was alleviated when ScreenWest came on board with sponsorship and support. As a result the event has been restructured and now incorporates a series of awards for local industry production of outstanding quality. Successful local films including Lord of the Little Kings, Perfect Pale Blue, Dancing School, Winds Of Change and Bodies Road received awards for outstanding achievement at the annual WA Screen Awards.

It is valuable to recognize the achievements of those working within the industry who have received a measure of independence success. One pleasing new example of such work from this sector is the polished and finely executed short fiction Parltarni D'Amore (Speak To Me Of Love) which won Elena Pasquini the awards for Writing and Producing. The camera depends upon an old man who tells the tale of courting his wife in the Italian countryside to his grandson. This highly crafted yet simply told anecdote successfully coaxes a genuine feeling of affection and empathy.

The awards are balanced between the achievements of established and emerging film-makers, with thought and inspiration values. However, an unfortunate by-product of restructuring is the opening of some significant gaps in the award categories. For example, the experimental category has disappeared, reducing the recognition of an important form. It is worrying to see the collapse—into a generic "open" category—of certain necessary distinctions of intention and artistic direction such as those that occur within different forms of filmmaking (for example narrative versus structuralist/non-narrative). Surely this risks limiting the potential of hybrid and crossover initiatives from the outset? Often it is within this overlapping space that the most fertile and innovative approaches to filmmaking emerge. Cross-pollination and dialogue between various modes of filmmaking can only push each toward a richer exploration of the medium.

Short narrative works predominated in the AFC's adaptation of Jeffrey Eugenides' novel as an essay on the ultra-feminine. It could also be viewed as a project about memory and the eternal crisis of the innocent narrator as she struggles to make sense of a film about the inessential nature of death. Barbara Credel could have a field day mining the film for evidence of the monstrosity of feminine; Laurna Belfer could do wonders for hours as to its revisionist relationship to "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1973). Trouble is, this is, as the movie wends its way towards its ending, a whole lot of nothing. It's a film about suicide as the act of (crime) the (crime) suicide is the act of killing oneself. It's a film about the little things, the banal nature of the some of the details highlighting the tragedy of people's lives. Loneliness and neglect are as confronting as violence. The women are often called out by real estate agents because elderly citizens have died in their homes. One woman was buried up in an electric blanket for 5 months. "The fact that you're able to help carries you through." Why? Do you think people are more tolerable, focused on the little things? The Australian community has no hungry mouths, no litter, no noisy voices, a woman and a man and a red house, a red brick house concealed behind an overgrown bush—we are we ever to enter the suburban tract and a family trapped, this is a physically and emotionally beautiful family. We breathe through the air of the question as we wander the empty rooms. The clever technique of filming an empty house while recreating a voiceover of the events and forensic details of the rooms, cupboards, walls were immediately after the meridians heightened the feel of the movie and the child's awareness of blood spilt on the phone. "We tried to call 900 but nothing happened." The repeated shots of photo frames, dishes, a child's toy, the victims with Pam and Marilyn, and with the audience; they could be any family. A bloodied mattress is the only remains of a fire, and a child's toy, disposed of in flames at the film's end.

Kirsten Kraush
Judy Crombie: homing in on independent film

Mike Walshe

In May this year, Judith Crombie was appointed the new CEO of the South Australian Film Corporation (SAFC). She began her career in film and television with the ABC in Adelaide. From there she went to The Commonwealth Film Library in London before entering its film library before her first stint at the SAFC, where she held various positions including post-production manager, studio manager and distribution manager. After leaving SAFC in 1992 she worked for Film Queensland and Dragon Films, before taking over as CEO of AF是没有

Crombie's return to the SAFC comes at an auspicious moment with the recent release of a major report into the funding of the SAFC. The report, by consultants Bruce Moir and Barry Burgman, recommended that, due to increased interstate competition, the SAFC needed to increase funding in order to maintain a viable industry in the state. It attempted to sell the argument to government by citing the economic returns of film production to the state's economy. The argument was a productive one as the recent state budget provided an additional $3.0m for the SAFC over 3 years.

Could you explain the industrial logic that produced the increased funding, and outline the avenues to keep the film industry in the state?

My predecessors, Judith McCann and Craig Ranseben, worked assiduously to develop and attract production to South Australia, with the result that the SAFC had more production than available investment funds. The government recognised the benefits that flowed on to maintaining the cultural sector, employing thousands of skilled and tradesmen, and generally contributing to the economy of the state.

This year $15m will be directly applied to investment into those projects that meet the criteria under the SACF's guidelines. Two thousand thousand dollars has been earmarked for script development, professional development and education/training.

The biggest increase (from $650,000 to $1,550,000) will be in equity investments in productions. That will allow us to maintain any changes in the decision-making processes concerning investment decisions?

At this stage the level of investment in individual projects remains the same, that is, a maximum of 10% of the total production budget, or $200,000, whichever is the lesser, although the SACF may use its discretion to increase this level for productions of significant benefit to the South Australian industry.

Funds are available for feature films, television series, mini-series and telefeature, and documentaries. To date we haven't received applications for multimedia projects, but we are expecting this to change in light of the Burgman Report.

The criteria remain the same: quality of script, economic and cultural benefits of the project to the SA, the proposed financing and recoupment structure, existing market attachments and marketability, and the experience and track record of key personnel.

In short, if we're eligible, the SACF takes into account whether the project will be produced and post-produced in SA using principally SA cast and crew and facilities. Also, if there is the demonstration of a new economic benefit to SA.

You aim to create another 200 jobs in the sector. What kind of skills base are you trying to develop?

There will be a strong emphasis on training, with SACF forming alliances with the commercial sector to provide career paths in the industry. I suspect that most of the training opportunities will lead to jobs in post-production, multimedia, web design, content management etc rather than grips, gaffers and art department workers.

A future of specialisation is what we are looking at. For instance, SA does not have a dedicated film school but there are gaps in training that we have identified. With partners, we are investigating the feasibility of creating a specialist postgraduate course in screenwriting and/or film direction.

The structure of SACF has included a position for Production and Financing Media, which gives us the opportunity, at last, to embrace issues and opportunities relating to new media. It is the SACF acknowledged emerging technology and included it as part of our core business. New technology poses no threat to our traditional business of providing content, in fact it provides more work and cross-skilling opportunities and spreads our development and investment risk.

We are also discussing the potential for the provision of education material. It's early days yet, but there are opportunities here.

How do you see South Australia fitting in with the production climate of the other states?

Each state agency has programs of assistance designed to encourage, stimulate and maintain their local film industry. Each state has different needs in order to grow their industry. SA has embraced the phrase "home of the independent filmmaker" for the past year or so and the slogan is working.

SA doesn't have the big budgets of the eastern states and therefore we don't have the same urgency to fund productions through a genuine feature film complex. The SACF has a small, self-contained facility that works extremely well for most Australian films and series.

Of course all states compete for offshore and footloose production. Such productions bring obvious benefits but South Australia is not geared, either with resources or funds, to concentrate or chase that market at the expense of Australian producers.

One of my aims is to create a climate in SA where filmmakers want to shoot in a friendly, efficient and cost-effective environment. I also want writers, producers, directors and so forth to be approaching SACF first for development funding and for production investment.

How do you define independent production?

My take on independent production is any (preternaturally "quality") Australian project that needs assistance to be realised. There are too many of not well-talented filmmakers, as well as practitioners with track records, who are finding it difficult to get their projects up. We want to help them to experience what SA has to offer in the professional sense, as well as our lifestyle.

Obviously we'd like to invest in as many commercially and critically acclaimed in SA, but we're not in the realist about the odds. That said, the SACF wants to encourage the best possible mix of product from cutting edge content for delivery on the internet through to highend movies with big budgets.

Would you like to signal any other new developments or emphasis for the SACF under your leadership?

On a broader scale I intend the SACF to have closer relations with all sections of the industry as well as forming new relationships with the corporate sector and whole of government. Our survival depends on mutual understanding and making the most of the talents that exist in SA. There will be changes at the SAFC itself, in image, thinking and approach, and changes in structure. Watch this space!

Writestuff: a mission not quite impossible

Hunter Cordaty

When I decided to be a screenwriter I was fortune to have a mentor—David Thomson, who had been my teacher and recently written a Bio-Bibliographical Dictionary of the Film and Television Industry (Warburg, London). I was teaching film studies in England and he was Head of Film at Dartmouth College in Vermont—an auspicious if somewhat dubious series of circumstantial coincidences. There were no websites, few professional organisations other than the major guilds, and even fewer books or puny opinion pieces. In the previous era, the sparsely available, sporadic information was gathered from specialisations to published scripts and a plethora of websites, some offering free script assessments.

Consequently, if the script was the biggest change that has taken place in the structure of the film business, its cultural context and the way professional writers approach the task of getting work onto the screen. There are still some writers who live very private lives, emerging every year or so with a new script for their agent to circulate. Others more openly participate in the industry in all its diversity. For these in particular there's a new wealth of resources. These range from film industry websites to tutorials specialised in published scripts and a plethora of websites, some offering free script assessments.

Certainly, over the last decade or so, has been the increasing number of Australian scripts available, reflecting the interest and need of a screenwriters' public. Currency Press has about 20 in print, the newest being Lou Novev's Radiance, Stephen Sewell's The Boys and Melissa Martin's Looking for Alibrand. By any measure, these are significant films and the opportunity to read them in detail is invaluable. The inclusion of commercial introduction by the writer, providing an accessible form for discussion of the screenwriting process.

How do you think that a writer can hope to complete an and then screened script is often described as a complex problem, but there are a series of fundamental steps towards professionalism which any writer should work through.

The first is to ensure in a screenplay. These roughly fall into 2 categories: the nonacademic approach to the scriptwriting form or those which are regularly advertised in newspapers and film magazines. Such courses are taught by established film critics, screenwriters and occasionally, as Australia becomes part of their circuit, high profile writers from LA. Whilst these courses seem to have high educational empowerment, the real value is in the networking possibilities they offer, the quick nature of the whole process, and the chance to 'test the water' without a long-term commitment.

University undergraduate courses, by contrast, are harder to find and often hide inside media, communications and English writing departments. As adjuncts to film studies or literature degrees, these subjects often do not have a true pathway through / 7 years of study and they're not usually taught by professional screen writers.

There's also a well-known conflict between the traditional professional writing taught under the banner of media and traditional creative writing courses which are usually based around the teaching of fiction and poetry. The question often is—where does a screenwriting course best fit in the curriculum and when can it be seen as both a form of professional and creative expression? Some of the newer communications courses concentrate on journalism, critical writing and the design of text on screen. Aspiring screenwriters should choose carefully the universities or writing programs they have become the so-called program by both these disciplines.

The Australian Film, TV and Radio School takes only a handful, though this will change when the internet consortium (globalfilmschool.com) of the ATLP, Sydney, the National Film and Television School, London, and the SMCS School of Theater Film and Television, Los Angeles is fully operational. Other universities have the capacity for larger numbers. At a first glance, a few of the more prestigious Sydney where I teach we offer 8 places a year in an MA Screenwriting course, and this is likely to increase as the course develops with both on campus and distance modules via the net.

The great advantage of studying at Honours or Masters level is that the institutions also offer production courses with professional filmmakers on the institution's staff, giving opportunities to film and video short scripts and access to access the nearest script programs.

Above all, for Masters course, for example, will offer a context and structure for a writer who is likely to lose if not abandoned in the search for a career. To commit to the possibility of fulltime writing in a true mission, a calling which is only at the edge of film glamour and less lucrative than media hype tends to suggest. So a graduate writer, armed with a feature script or TV drama series, starting out on the often discouraging path of submitting their work should be at the same time gather as much professional support as possible. This means joining one of several professional organisations and trying to acquire an agent. The Australian Writers Guild is a useful resource, providing a list of recommended agents as well as sample contracts and other documents that are essential to understand. The Australian Arts Law Centre can also help with legal advice. Both the Producers and Directors Guilds have regular events where writers can network and even pitch scripts. All these groups can be contacted through the AFTC.

Combine major organisations like this with regular publications and internet contact with script sites around the world and there is only life, talent and ambition left to conquer before a successful opening night (and hopefully) a royalty cheque.

RealTime/OnScreen 39 October - November 2000 18
After 42 years of AFI Awards, and as we enter the second century of Australian film, what better time to comprehensively re-evaluate the awards. Are they merely 'a thermostat for hype'? Do they really add to the income of winning films? What do they mean overseas? Do they promote public debate about Australian film—witness the Bryan Brown-Russell Crowe clash at the 1999 Awards? What more can they do?

What, asks Ben Goldsmith, is the significance of the AFI Awards in the global market place? Tina Kauffman quizzes members of the film industry about what the Awards mean to them, as voters, as contenders for the prizes and as supporters of Australian film. Kristen Matthews explains the virtues and anomalies of the current Awards by surveying the history of the judging system as it responded to industry needs over half a century. These are some of the key issues addressed in this RealTime 2000 AFI Awards feature.

PRIZES & PROJECTIONS also places its bets for the 2000 AFI Awards, for the films that will most likely win—and those that should. Simon Enticknap takes a close look at documentaries, casting his vote for Darlene Johnson's Stolen Generations; Mike Walsh, facing the huge array of feature films, plumps for Malthy while acknowledging the strong chances of Looking for Alibrandi and Chopper; in animation Daniel Crooks opts for Leunig: Tricks; and OnScreen Editor Kirsten Krauth defies Award categories for short films, applauding Flowergirl, Confessions of a Headhunter, Gate, The Director, The Third Note and The Night Light.

PRIZES & PROJECTIONS flows onto the pages of OnScreen with Awards contenders Vincent Giarrusso (the director of Malthy) interviewed by filmmaker Elise McCredie and Adam Head (animator, Brother) interviewed by Sandra Graham.

Enjoy our writers' celebration and critique of the AFI Awards and place your bets—the Awards will be held on November 18 at Sydney's Fox Studios and screened live on SBS TV.

RealTime + OnScreen

PRIZES & PROJECTIONS is an initiative of Industry & Cultural Development, Australian Film Commission
NON-FEATURE NOMINATIONS

Film Australia Award for Best Documentary
The Diplomat: Producers Sally Browning & Wilson da Silva
Uncle Chatzek: Producers Rod Freedman, Emile Sherman
A Death in the Family: Producers Terry Carlyon & Robyn Miller
Stolen Generations: Producer Tom Zubrycki

SBS Television Award for Best Direction in a Documentary
The Diplomat: Tom Zubrycki
A Death in the Family: Terry Carlyon
Chasing Buddha: Aniel Courtin-Wilson
Posies: Wain Fenei

Award for Best Screenplay in a Short Film
Brother: Adam Elliot
Confessions of a Headhunter: Sally Riley, Archie Weller
Gate: Peter Carstairs

Kodak Award for Best Cinematography in a Non-Feature Film
Breath: David Burr
The Night Light: Vincent Taylor
La Nina: Klaus Toft, Campbell Miller, Wade Fairley, Malcolm Ludgate

FRAMEWORKS Award for Best Editing in a Non-Feature Film
The Extra: Louis Byrne-Smith
The Director: Patrick Hughes
Thomson of Arnhem Land: Andrea Lang

Award for Best Sound in a Non-Feature film
Thomson of Arnhem Land: Andrea Lang

Yoram Gross Award for Best Short Animation
Brother: Adam Elliot
Full Circle: Adam Head
Lunig: Tricks: Andrew Horne

Award for Best Short Fiction Film
Confessions of a Headhunter: Sally Riley
The Extra: Darren Ashton

Prototype Casting Open Craft Award
Intransit: Special Effects, Mike Daly
The Other Days of Ruby Rae: Acting, Magda Hughes
Uncle Chatzek: Original Score, Guy Gross

J. C. Patrick Murphy Award for Best Production Design in a Non-Feature Film
City Loop: Mark Savage, John Brousek, Mark Pirola, Liva Ruzic

Intransit: Best Casting

The nominations appearing on this page are for film categories only and do not include television and other nominations.

FEATURE FILM ENTRIES

Nominations will be announced October 18

15 Amore
pd Maurice Murphy, Margaret Murphy, Brooke Wilson
dir/wr Maurice Murphy

A Wreck, A Tangle
pd Nicki Roller
dir Scott Patterson
wr John O'Brien

Angst (UPI)
pd Jonathan Green
dir Daniel Nettheim
wr Anthony O'Connor

Better Than Sex (Newvision)
pd Bruna Papandrea, Frank Cox
dir/wr Jonathan Teplitzky

Beware of Greeks Bearing Guns (Palace Films)
pd John Teatull, Colin South, Dionysis Samiotis, Anastasios Vasilhou, dir John Teatull
wr Tom Galbraith

Bootmen (20th Century Fox)
pd Hilary Linstead
dir Deon Perry
wr Steve Worland

Chasing Parked Cars
pd Vicky Fisher, Holly Fisher
dir Holly Fisher, Fish Entertainment
wr Vicky Fisher

Chopper (Palace Films)
pd Michael Bennett, exec. pd Al Clark
martin Fabinyi, co-pd Michael Gudinski
dir/wr Andrew Dominik

City Loop
pd Bruce Redman, Red Movies
dir Belinda Cheyko
wr Stephen Davis

Cut (Beyond Films)
pd Martin Fabinyi, Jennifer Bennett, Bill Bennett
dir Kimble Rendall
wr Dave Warner

The Day Neil Armstrong Walked on the Moon
pd/dir/wr Michael J Rivette

Innocence (Sharmill Films)
pd Paul Cox, Mark Patterson
dir/wr Paul Cox

Kick (Beyond Films)
pd Meis Beros, Sharon Kugler, Ross Matthews
dir Lynda Heys
wr Stuart Beattie

Looking for Alibrandi (Roadshow)
pd Robyn Kendal
dir Kate Woods
wr Melina Marchetta

The Magic Pudding (20th Century Fox)
pd Gerry Taven, assoc pd Ed Trott
dir Karl Zwicky
animation Robbert Smit
wr Harry Cripps, Greg Haddock, Simon Hopkinson

Maliboy (Buena vista International)
pd Fiona Eager
dir/wr Vincent Gianuso

Me Myself I (Buena Vista International)
pd Fabien Liron, Andrea Finlay

My Mother Frank (Beyond Films)
pd Phedon Vass, Susan Vass, John Winter
dir Mark Lappell

Russian Doll (Beyond Films)
pd Allanah Zitserman
dir Stavros Kazantzidis

Sample People (REP Distribution)
pd Barton Smith, Emile Sherman
dir Clinton Smith
wr Clinton Smith, Peter Buckmaster

Selkie (UIP)
pd Jane Ballantyne, Rob George
dir Donald Crombie
wr Rob George

Sensitive New Age Killer
pd John Brousek, Mark Savage
dir Mark Savage
wr Mark Savage, David Richardson

Starring Duncan Wiley
pd Julian Segers, Jason Gooden
dir Denis Whitham
wr Denis Whitham, Daryl Mason

Walk the Walk (20th Century Fox)
pd Jan Chapman
dir/wr Shirley Bantett

The Wog Boy (20th Century Fox)
pd Nick Gannopoulos, John Brousek
dir Aladi Vella
wr Nick Gannopoulos, Chris Anastasiades

This feature on the 2000 AFI Awards is an initiative of Industry and Cultural Development, Australian Film Commission

Editors: Kirsten Kraith, Keith Gallasch
Layout & design: Gail Priest
International kickstart or local thinkspace?

Ben Goldsmith

The AFI Awards celebrate the art of cinema in Australia and acknowledge the achievements of Australian filmmakers. And because Australian cinema has been so tightly bound up with the telling of Australian stories, with the representation of what it means to be Australian, the Awards have traditionally both provided a space for reflection about the representation of Australian identity and acted as a gauge of the health of the domestic film industry.

However, in recent years, the AFI Awards have undergone a significant transformation. With the increasing internationalisation of the Australian film industry, the Awards are now seen as a key event on the industry calendar, providing a platform for filmmakers to showcase their work and receive recognition on the global stage.

In 2000, the AFI Awards ceremony was held at the Sydney Opera House, with a live audience of over 2,000 guests. The ceremony was broadcast on national television, reaching millions of viewers across the country.

Albarn--is already one of the 25 highest grossing Australian films. Overseas distribution deals and the sale of domestic television rights will most likely be in place before the AFI Awards, so the awards will only add to the film's already established reputation.

This is not to say that the AFI Awards are unimportant in this regard. Like all awards ceremonies, they do function as a kind of thermometer for the industry. The application of critical judgement on the part of the AFI members, as they assess the films, will shape the perception of the industry, and ultimately influence the future of the industry.

Actor Bryan Brown gave voice to some of the concerns which have been rumbling through the industry and beyond for some time. Exactly one week after the Republic referendum was defeated and the Fox Studios were officially opened with a show which celebrated the achievements of the American film industry--with passing mention of one or two Australians who have contributed to that success--the awards ceremony was held for the first time at the Fox Studios complex in Sydney.

Accepting the Best Supporting Actor award for his performance in Two Hands, Brown took it upon himself to make a stand against what actor Sacha Horler has described as "the phenomenon of the Glitz perception" whereby politicians and industry movers and shakers are blinded by the glamour of this proxy Hollywood into believing that the industry is flourishing. "Setting the Record Straight" in a preshow speech, Brown made it clear that the success of the AFI Awards ceremony was a reflection of the hard work, sweat and commitment put into the film industry by Australians.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the AFI Awards is their capacity to provide a 'thinkspace' within which conversations about our cultural past, present and future are possible. It is to be hoped that the commercial success enjoyed this year by Chopper, Looking for Alibrandi, The Hog Bay and Me, Myself, I, and the likely success of Bootmen and perhaps Better Than Sex, will increase public interest in the awards and broaden the conversation in this country.

As the recent protests against the World Economic Forum in Melbourne and the staging of the Sydney Olympics have brought to the fore the need for Australians to reassert our own identity, the AFI Awards provide an opportunity to create and maintain the space for these discussions to take place.

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

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2000 AFI AWARDS: ISSUES

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Who should win and who will

Mike Walsh

The prospect of seeing 25 Australian films in 3 weeks would strike terror into the most fervent cultural nationalist. Then again, it's like sitting high up in the grandstand — while the detail might blur, you have an overview of the state of the game. In this contest, each film carries the burden of the national film industry on its shoulders. It has to answer not only to its own aesthetic sins, but to our hopes and fears for The Industry. Let me shape my response to this year's films then, in terms of the way they stand in relation to some big picture issues.

Issue 1: The commercial imperative, or, suppose they gave a cinema and no one came?

We all know that Australian films can't get by on cultural nationalism anymore, especially when people can feel good about supporting Australian culture by going to see Russell Crowe in Gladiator. Much ink has been spilt over the pros and cons of commercial orientation in government film policy, but we need to acknowledge that it takes a lot of skill to make good commercial cinema.

The Wag Bay enters this debate from the financial high ground. No one is going to lay a finger on a film which has done over $11 million domestically. That figure is positively transcendent both for the industry, which desperately wants to get its share of the domestic box office heading north from 3%, and for cultural critics who want to avoid any tint of bourgeois elitism. The Wag Bay shows a solid understanding of commercial filmmaking. Constructing action around a consistently sympathetic protagonist, it encourages an audience to enjoy itself, but damn me if it isn't also the closest thing to political cinema we have this year. It deals with the demonisation of the poor and exploitative work for the dole schemes. Unfortunately, the only way it can finally resolve its conflicts is to displace them — its hero's decisive argument against work for the dole is that it is championed by a sexually aggressive woman.

The other side of the commercial coin is represented by the two musicals, Bootmen and Kick. The basic narrative material of both is MGM-hew-kids-let's-put-on-a-show with some rather tedious plot delays put in the way of the big show and the romantic resolution. Bootmen is aimed at wide commercial release based on its relation to a pre-sold theatrical success (think Wag Bay) while internationally it seeks to ride the coat-tails of Fox Searchlight's The Full Monty, with the late-breaking boost of the Olympics opening ceremony for good measure. The pity is that so much of it is well crafted rather than an episode of Home and Away.

Kick has a promising storyline, with Russell Page as the oldest high school student since the early days of 90210, trying to combine rugby with ballet. It ought to be quite a funny film, but at almost every moment when wit or grace are called for, it fails the test. Australia's commercial filmmakers are going to have to think about the balance of invention to offset the prevalence of some very tired convention. This invention needs to be supplied at the small-scale level. It's more simply enough to rely on commercial concepts when the film falls flat on a scene-by-scene basis. This, however, brings me to:

Issue 2: Are there new genres for the Aussie film?

In the Australian cinema, there is no sin so unforgivable as getting to a national genre a year late. We all saw what happened to Sam Sunset when it turned out to be a Quirky Comedy Too Far. If we reach back even further, Liz Jocke and Susan Demody coined the term "AFC film" to describe the tasteless period film produced in the 1970s. This suits Amore well enough: too much art direction, too much cinematography, too much music. If minimalists believe that less is more, Australian filmmakers have always headed resolutely in the opposite direction, as though needing constantly to prove their professional chops.

A contender for new genre this year is the youth slicker film. A punchy computer-generated credits sequence, some electronic music and a story about a collection of middle class kids discovering economic disadvantage. They are hip to the uncoolness of Howard's Australia, but know they are smarter and sexier than the suits. The cool young person dealing with the public servant dork is almost a primal scene this year, turning up in 3 films. Angat and City Loop are at the heart of this genre, with Chasing Parked Cars contributing a more stylishly conservative spin. However, if there is a slicker youth market, does it want to see films about slackers? If these films are right about young people, surely they will be at American genre movies where they can give their ironic denials a more satisfactory workout.

The makers of Cut at least know this much. The film seems to exist for no other reason than to be sneered at. The logic is that we all know that the slasher film is a game played between film and audience. If you want to offer the audience the pleasure of feeling better than the game, you create a more feeble game.

The fact that Cut is an obvious knock-off of Scream, that Bootmen is The Full Monty with different steps, that Steven Ducan Wiley is Boogie Nights without the prosthetic dick, and that Wag the Fox turns into The King of Comedy, indicates that Australia is mining the successes of international cinema for its inspiration rather than looking for national identity in exclusively Australian material. Australian cinema now assets that we are part of western society and that Australianness simply involves putting our own self-consciously understated spin on international multiplex filmmaking. Nick Gionnopoulos plays at being a doggy Travis in, while Eric Bana gets to be De Niro with the prosthetic dick ("You tolkin' to me, Keithy?").

The other new genre to stand out this year is the Sydney sex film. Am I alone in being shocked that everywhere in Sydney seems to be engaging in adulterous affairs? And is Rebecca Firth at every

Australian cinema now assets that we are part of western society and that Australianness simply involves putting our own self-consciously understated spin on international multiplex filmmaking.
able to combine economic and critical capital, but beyond this it is shaping up as a battle of liberal empathy against harsh brevity. Alibrandi plays out its way scenario in an engaging fashion, after recovering from an alarming beginning with some unfortunate fantasy sequences. In its story of 3 generations of Italian women, the film gives weight to the way that Australian cinema is increasingly looking to women's themes and women filmmakers. Chopper immediately represents the antithesis of this generalisation. The harsh bleach bypass, the exaggerated lack of colour correction, the repetition of a stylised underplaying of extreme violence, and the prominent method acting all suggest Scorsese or Fincher. It is the work of a filmmaker with a sureness of touch rather than a sustained inventiveness.

That's who I think will win, but who do I think should win? I liked Vincent Giarrusso's Malibo as the best film this year. From the first deep space shot of the protagonist slowly approaching on an escalator, and the image of a Melbourne mall glowing red in the sun like a suburban Uluru, the film combined a visual richness and a dense soundtrack with a strong sense of character. Its outer suburban underclass aren't middle class children lamenting the lack of their privilege, nor do they need to be patronised or have their problems worked through. Giarrusso has the maturity to embrace the social world he depicts, and to understand that social observation is more vital than social criticism.

dinner party? Me Myself I, A Wreck A Tangle, and Russian Doll (in descending order of interest) are the prime exhibits here. While our hormones are engaged, let's turn to a close cousin of these films, Jonathan Teplitzky's Better Than Sex.

This extends David Wenham's telly image as well. This year's other films, Cox's perverse primer time from of 'It's a casual affair going on descending order of interest.

Innocence, Myself, A Wreck, Chopper.

Paul Cox has also long been obsessed by sex and abstraction, yet in different measures. The characters in Innocence are intent on grasping the pleasures of the flesh in a serious fashion. Sex might be joyous, but its joy entails a weighty responsibility. Cox is also given to obsessions, but of a much less fashionable kind. He has long been intent on fashioning an European art cinema with muted colour palette and softer light on the margins of the Australian cinema. This is accentuated by the foreign investment which provides Charles Bud Tingwell and Julio Blake with flashbacks of a Belgian youth in Innocence. In the context of this year's other films, Cox's perverse choices start to look more appealing. The big achievement of Innocence is to have characters discuss abstract concepts in a convincing fashion without the heavy-handedness of having them characterise themselves everyday they open their mouths.

Issue 3: Enough of the big picture. Who should I back for the awards? The smart money is probably on either Looking for Alibrandi or Chopper. Both have been
Bennett...believed that the industry voting on its own output was not only "incestuoud" and rife with conflicts of interest, but it also took the focus away from raising the standards of film as art.

Bennett asserted early in the debate that if the industry wanted to judge itself it should organise its own awards. As he stated, "the Australian Film Institute hasn't the exclusive right to film awards in this country." Bennett, "Film Awards have vital role in picture industry. (The Age, November 12, 1976)."

The resulting structure, still in effect for the 2000 Awards, is that all AFI members are permitted to vote for a feature film while a few members vote in areas of speciality, provided all films are viewed. Having differing measures of voting eligibility for Best (Feature) Film as opposed to the other categories, also results in the AFI being a number of producers in 1986 who felt that the Awards were unrepresentative of the industry because AFI membership consisted primarily of film buffs and others who were not film professionals.

Although the feature film pre-selection debate has settled, non-feature entries, due to their numbers, continue to be pre-selected without complaint. There is also very little if (only open) discussion in regards to the selection procedure for the 14 awards for Television Drama. These Awards are, and have been since their introduction in 1986, judged by a panel without attracting the attention the feature film category received in the 1970s.

The comparative lack of discussion over the non-feature and televisual judging processes is indicative of the size of the "shadow" that feature films cast over the other categories. The structural overhaul of the Awards in 1976 broadened the divide between features and non-features. Since then, the non-feature category's struggle for significance has been played out with a touch of bitter irony considering that the Awards were originally created for a body of work consisting entirely of non-feature films.

The feature film revival has, however, been instrumental in fulfilling one of the AFI's other aims: "to direct public attention to Australian films." Bennett, though initially tolerant of "razzamataz and folie glamour"—provided that it brought the necessary attention to the Awards. Bennett (1976)—was quite scathing in his comments that the AFI had "sold out" and "summoned in a battalion of PR and purveyors of bolsho" (Bennett, "The Oceans. Our Film Awards Have Become a Mockery", The Age, August 12, 1978). Countless others joined him in his embarrassment at the manner in which the character and meaning of the Awards was revised at the 1999 ceremony held at Fox Studios—see Ben Goldsmith, page 21.

The decision to present the awards to individuals rather than films in 1978 altered the nature of the Awards quite substantially. It may have compromised the original emphasis on collaboration but it did ease the way for the utilisation of "star power". The drive to attract greater attention and validation for the Awards suffered a major setback in 1986 when Paul Hogan and John Conway withdrew Crocodile Dundee from competition. Added to the non-entry of Kennedy-Miller's Mad Max—Beyond Thunderdome the previous year, the withdrawal of Crocodile Dundee from competition added to the non-entry of Kennedy-Miller's Mad Max—Beyond Thunderdome the previous year. The withdrawal of Crocodile Dundee from competition added to the non-entry of Kennedy-Miller's Mad Max—Beyond Thunderdome the previous year.

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A multiple choicer

Daniel Crooks

Which of the following is the best animated film?

(a) Brother

Directed by Adam Elliot, this is the third in his trilogy of obervation films that includes Cousin and the phenomenally successful Uncle (made while still a student at the VCA). Following much the same course as the earlier films, Brother is a narrated story detailing the antics of said sibling. Over the course of 8 minutes we are introduced, through a series of brief vignettes, to an array of stunned looking pets and relatives. The situationist gags are still there as is the excellent voiceover of William McInnes but this time the story is a little darker and a fraction less sentimental.

What Brother also shares with its earlier relatives is a near complete lack of animation. Occasionally a stunned looking pair of eyes will blink. Or in the case of the title character, who wears a patch, only the single eye is blessed with a blink. A few arms get waved around and a clothesline does in fact do several rotations. But, to be blunt, I've seen storyboards that are more animat­ed. I like this film, the script is genuinely amusing and the editing is very well-timed, but where is the animation? Barry Punsh, the madman behind films such as Achille, says he would prefer a format that used 50 frames per second as he finds 25 too rough and clunky. Again, Barry Punsh is evidently quite mad. Shooting 50 frames a day just isn't human. On the other hand, shooting almost your entire film at 24 fps just isn't animation. Perhaps Elliot felt trapped by the success of Uncle, a formula from which he dared not deviate. Maybe he just realised how excited the AFC were getting over the number of prints that were in worldwide circulation. (See also Karten Krauth, page 26.)

(b) The Way of the Birds

Sarah Watt's film comprises 24 minutes of hand rendered colour and movement ignoring the pleas of her mother our young heroine won't utter a word. Until, that is, she is transformed by a fantastical flight of fancy. She migrates north with the local bird contingent as one of their own. A brief tour of Southeast Asia ensues. Disaster in the form of a local gourmand is narrowly averted and the flight back is topped off with an Aboriginal family frolicking somewhere near Uluru. Upon her return home (and to human form) she sets about constructing a special token of gratitude for her feathered friends. Sitting atop the family fence, content with her monument to the birds, she at last speaks her first words. Needless to say Mum is overjoyed.

Watt and her team of animators (including Emma Kelly) have produced a very personal story. The animation is free flowing, almost naive in style, with much of the film seen from a bird's eye view. Landscapes unfurl beneath us, rivers wind and cities dwindle as we glide through each scene. Shooting on 'twos' (2 frames per cell), however, reduces the fluidity of the animation in places and some of the sound effects lack a certain subtlety; those dishwashing sounds could have easily dropped a few decibels. A couple of minutes would have been better left in the editing room, as would the gloss eyes, lead to a small blue box. Cut to the lid of a 'real cardboard box being shut and placed on a shelf of similars. Another greater reality beyond the world of our character, the completion of the full cycle. The loop as a theme is not uncommon in animated cinema; the challenge lies in achieving an original reworking (see Rapepe by Michaela Pelekaitis). Unfortunately this seems to be a point that is lost throughout the film. There is some beautiful photography (those gloss eyes), lighting and set models. The problem is there's just very little in the way of originality. The animation is far from fluid and the story uninteresting. Add to this a giveaway title and the last half loses any chance of surprising the audience.

...animation is a term that has now become so broad it retains very little usefulness in a categorical sense...How do you judge between the physicality of a stopmotion model and the nuance of a hand drawn image? Let alone the algorithmic precision of a metaverse digitally rendered with full radiosity.

(c) Full Croke

As the name suggests, this is a cyclical film (see interview page 16). Adam Head's 10 minute loop begins in a dimly lit room, the walls covered with drawers and mounted insects. On a table in the centre stand a cage and a killing jar. Seated at the table is a character that bears an alarming resemblance to the protagonist from Street of Crocodiles by the Brothers Quay. True, Street of Crocodiles was itself a homage to the work of Jan Scanlance but I get the feeling this wasn't the point. After a brief inspection of the captive, a winged chromokey blue insect, and a few glass eye closeups we proceed to the grasing stage. The bug duly mounted in a frame, it's time for the discovery of a mysterious blue line leading from the room. A few minutes of steadily investiga­tion, and a few more closeups of those glass eyes, lead to a small blue box. Cut to the lid of a 'real cardboard box being shut and placed on a shelf of similars. Another greater reality beyond the world of our character, the completion of the full cycle. The loop as a theme is not uncommon in ani­mated cinema; the challenge lies in achieving an original reworking (see Rapepe by Michaela Pelekaitis). Unfortunately this seems to be a point that is lost throughout the film. There is some beautiful photography (those gloss eyes), lighting and set models. The problem is there's just very little in the way of originality. The animation is far from fluid and the story uninteresting. Add to this a giveaway title and the last half loses any chance of surprising the audience.

(d) Leunig-Tricks

With a one-minute film you're really not expecting more than a single gag, short, sweet and to the point, and this is exactly what Andrew Home has delivered. At first I was quite surprised to see Leunig's drawn charac­ters replaced by models, foam latex providing the substance for those familiar and well­endowed nasal features. The scene is a 'typi­cal' Australian backyard. Hula hoop in hand, our large-nosed friend is seen trying to coax his dog to perform a circus trick. After several pleas (of course using international film festi­val friendly, non-lingual communication) the dog responds by standing upright, paws on hips, and passing through the hoop—every­body laughs, end of film. Using a comic strip that is so well known and loved is a double­edged sword. On the one hand it is hard to see how Home could go wrong with the irrever­ent humour of Mr Leunig as his starting point; but the audience has its own firmly established expectations of how the characters should move and sound (I never got over how weird it was hearing Asterix and Obelix speak for the first time). Home has also given him­self another challenge in bringing a third dimension to Leunig's 2D characters, and he has pulled it off admirably. The paths and timing of the comic strips have been faithfully preserved with the addition of colour, move­ment and sound only adding to the whole.

The answer

Four films are here grouped together under the broad heading of animation which has now become so broad it retains very little usefulness in a categorical sense. To use a topically Olympic metaphor, it is similar to calling every sporting activity that occurs in a pool "swimming" and then proceeding to hand out a single gold medal. How do you judge the comparative merits of water polo versus syn­chronised swimming, the 1500 metres butter­fly versus the 10 metre platform dive? What about differentiating between the physicality of a stopmotion model and the nuance of a hand drawn image? Let alone the algorithmic precision of a metaverse digitally rendered with full radiosity. Even further removed are the more abstract, experimental or commercial works; some of the strongest animation in this country, in both concept and execution, is coming from the realm of advertising, music videos and computer games.

Is this an elaborate excuse for fence sit­ting? No doubt, therefore I shall employ the logic of the multiple choice question: (c) is obviously wrong, (a) just doesn't seem right either, the answer must be (b) or (d). For some reason (d) just feels a little more concise so let's run with that. Leunig and Andrew Home get the tick.

Daniel Crooks used to be an award winning animator. His current work is based around tem­poral manipulation, motion control and environ­mental effects. Special thanks for the editorial assistance of Thomas Howle and Miiriam Ransom. somebody@dlab.com.au.
Brief lives, top scores

Kirsten Krauth

The Award for Best Short Fiction Film goes to...

Flowergirl. I've seen it 4 times over the past year and each time it gains more resonance. It's won nearly every short film award in Australia: Dendy for short fiction, Flickerfest for best director and sound, St Kilda Film Fest for best director. Unlike most Oz shorts, it screams NOW, a contemporary look at Sydney culture, not through misty nostalgic eyes but Bondi - Japanese style, right here, right now, reminiscent of Wong Kar Wu's Chungking Express with funky short-haired girl Hano and romantic male Diosuke, a spare aesthetic and a tourist's pace, vivid blues and reds. Australian culture looks and smells different through the romero here: Diosuke is returning to Japan to work in his father's butcher shop. A vegetarian, he remembers burning ran­cid carcasses: "my mother's fingers tasted like iron." What he likes about Australia is the colour of the bricks. Deep and rich. He shares an apart­ment with Hano/flowergirl whom he secretly desires. His digital camera footage is evocatively used to fetishise Hano and her belongings. The interscenes, where she cruises the Bondi streets at night, 'so mo walkin' the walk, zipped up red, give a real feeling of freedom; she is everything I want to be, "fresh, filled with life."

Director Cate Shortland spoke at Popcorn Taxi recently about seeing contemporary Japanese filmmaking in festivals overseas and being influenced by their use of "intimate" digi­cam footage. The final scene splits them— Diosuke in Japan and Hano in Bondi—but they are linked on-screen, a naughty keepake, where he can devour her but not touch.

The Extra, which screened at Tropfest in 99 and features Peter Phelps and comedian Julia Zemiro, seems lightweight compared to the other nominated shorts although there is some­thing compelling about all-consuming desire to be a star and the dividing lines between cast, crew and extras on set: "he's not as tall as I thought he'd be," says The Extra (about Phelps), a line most vertically-challenged actors can probably identify with, the old undercut to the ego. This Extra is a central freak. She wears Rieweks to make her "legs look longer", defying the Ugg Boots offered—she's not a Westie, even when she's meant to be asleep. "Unconscious is good" says the director after the fourth take. The film can be summed up in 2 words: indomitable spirit: "I'm out there...I'm one of the lucky ones," she comments to camera after being replaced by a hound dog. Whippets who spoiled the gag. Sorry.

Indigenous content is strong this year with Kuli Foot and Confessions of a Headhunter— exploring Aboriginal communities/cultures in rural and urban WA. Kuli Foot, set in Broome, is imbued with a gentle warmth and, while pushing a crucial message about Aboriginal role models and the importance of finding your own skills and excelling on your own terms etc, is just too sentimental for my taste. Its editing is particularly didactic: Sydney Swans footballer Trevor Jamiesson kicks a goal, out to Aboriginal boy spearing a fish. They both score. The crowd goes wild. Not letting labels define you is a starting point for many films but I just couldn't get past the corny juxtapositions and srs no cliches.

Confessions of a Headhunter (also nominat­ed for Best Animation Short, see page 25) is a moving look at subur­ban life. A droll voiceover makes you squirm. Simple grey-scale animation introduces the main characters: Mum, Dad, Brother, Suburban Powerlines. Dad was an acrobat in the Flying Tropinos. Now he's a paraplegic and an alco­holic who battles from the sidelines. Mum cuts hair at the old people's home. Scissors slip a couple of wiry strands. The acute humour/tragedy comes from observations ele­gantly and sparingly written in that tell-it-as-you-see-it voice of a child. The literal invocation works on many levels, as only the best animation can. Details are revelled in: lollies bought from Ruby's shop where her "nipples looked like big walnuts." The brother character is especially memorable. Like Bart Simpson, he means well but trouble "seemed to find him." He steals parts from the corner store for no reason. He collects cigarette butts. He smokes a teabag. At school he is blamed for anything, "when he's not even there." You feel enveloped in this film, treated like a Best Friend, safe from that impres­sive world of adults. The final scene is a kick in the guts, unexpected and quietly devastating. Don't miss this film. Take your kids. It's pick for Best Screensaw, for the amount it encom­passes in a small time frame.

Gate is another clever offering, a low key whodunnit in a shearing shed where the charac­ters line up and yak. In recent years, shorts film­makers like Krv Stenders (Two/Out) and Ivan Sen (Wind, Dust) have learned the minimalist approach, taking their time to make a mood, and this is another great example of how to build tension, with repeated still shots and monoto­nous landscape, good dialogue and deadpan acting. Everyday sayings are turned inside-out—"so hot you can fry an egg on the ute"—and myths are deconstructed. The city dude remains

Kullen Pell

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the outsider. Conversations swirl like Willy nilly—"who left the gate open?"—and implications surface slowly: "Any cars you recognised?" ... No, but I did see cars I didn't recognise." Losseback poker faced, pointed bolts cut with serene Goulburn landscapes. A goodie.

The Winner of Best All Rounder (if there was such a category) is ... The Director is not nominated for Best Short but deserves to be; and even win! It's up for Best Editing but is brilliantly executed throughout, focusing, like The Exeo, on a film crew, but with a deadly twist that is so well set up. From the opening credits it's pure pizza. Funky fonts set up the scenario and introduce The Director, The Sound Guy, The Makeup, Chick, The Runner, The people who live and breathe the film. The A Team who "ain't coming back for any fucking pickups." The film dips into the pretensions of filmmakers and the way they stamp on other people while revelling in their gung ho actions. The In-Jokes are jam-packed. The crew is in a bank making a feature, using real life tellers as actors in an armed holdup scene. Alarms are turned off, security shutters de-activated, paperwork is shredded and the door, is of the Victoria mawer brigade while Mailman plays the piano discordantly when she's angry. Vicla. Piano. Let's call the whole thing off.

The Other Days of Ruby Roe (nominated for Best Screenplay, Open Craft Award for Acting) has Norman Kaye as a priest, so familiar it's like coming home for a cup of tea on a cold night. Synchronised women in black hats and black landscapes and 35mm textures—cigarette butt, blue, stone, wheat—rule a strange oacular film which somehow manages a strong sense of place and connection. Magda Hughes (the nominated actress) is a perfect foil for Kaye as they juggle reincarnation and joy and faith and spiritual enlightenment in a world where "there is a season for everything."

Internal (nominated for Best Sound and Open Craft Award for Special Effects) couldn't be more different in its soulless depiction of a slick cityscape where we glide through buildings and skateboard into a low-lit subway and Matrix-like paranoia. The audience becomes the bullet, propelled through the lens. Like teenagers—under surveillance, unable to loiter, always moving

on—this film has a sense of disconnection. Kafka meets high tech, but the sinister effect is almost definitely diffused by the digital technologies which create it. It's just too perfect.

Cut to Night Light (nominated for Best Cinematography in a Non-Feature), an almost deliciously gorgeous and technically demanding short where location is as central as character. Harold Hopkins is disturbing as Pop, the returned Light Horseman re-living war atrocities in the greatest isolation possible. A lighthouse. Black and white, in silver shots of waves, sand and what light, revolve around Pop and his grandson, reflecting on his time fighting, the almost feverish intensity. This is a fight meant to guard and protect and ward off danger but it cloaks him in panic, though he is buoyed by a grandson keen to show his obsession for playing soldiers. It's rare to see a short where every moment is as composed, almost Hitchcockian in its dark and light touches. Did you know that every Light Horseman was given a bullet with which to shoot his horse at the end of the war? Kind of takes away the glory...
The Awards: do they make a difference

Tina Kaufmann

...in terms of marketing the Awards do have a role to play, and you'd have to keep them going because there's no other recognition; the promotion of Australian films is complex and problematic...

...to highlight the contributions of key creative people to the filmmaking process.

Sue Murray, currently Acquisitions Consultant for the US company Fine Line Features, and for many years head of programming at the Australian Film Commission, from 1977 to 1980 actually ran the AFI Awards. For her, the role of the Awards has always been two-fold: first, to create a public profile for the films and the industry, and secondly for the benefit of industry personnel, so they can get together and consider the year's output. For many years those roles went hand in hand, but during the time of preselection that second role was diminished, so I saw the role to open screenings a couple of years ago as very positive," she says.

"Research was done in 1998 on box office returns, pre and post awards, on films that were in release at the time of the Awards telecast, to see if awards did increase a film's earnings; it showed a number of interesting results. Lonely Hearts in 1992 had a 30% increase after the Awards, with a 25% increase in Malcom in 1986; 22% for Proof in 1991, 286% for Bad Boy Bubby in 1994, and 44% for Angel Baby in 1995. Accredited claims have also been made that Romper Stomper widened its audience demographics in 1993 after winning 3 awards, and that Shine actually received a better release deal from its exhibitor because of the number of nominations it had. Richard Payer from the Globe Group, one of the most active independent distributors of Australian films, says that within their own knowledge whether the Awards were effective, but with Globe had the Interview release in 1998. "It had been trickling along for a couple of weeks until the Awards the film won a gold box." However, most people concede that these are niche market films, and that any flow-on effect is relatively marginal and fleeting, and that only works within that portion of the audience that is already interested in Australian film. "I've always maintained that for the Awards to get out into the mainstream audience, it has to rate on commercial television—and it needs big stars," says Richard Payer. "It's bit of a vicious circle, you need the stars to get the ratings, and you need the ratings to get the sponsorship to get the stars, I really believe the focus should be on the stars; the only way to build our own star system is to ride on the back of what's happening to our actors overseas." _The range spends money within the Australian community._ SBS does a good job of presenting the Awards, but it is good for the Awards to be on SBS, with its international audience. In fact, many filmmakers and distributors are nervous about entering their films in the Awards, claims veteran producer/director Michael Thornhill. "They don't want reviewers getting to their film too early, and they don't think winning awards would..."
**Stolen Generations as winners**

**Simon Enticknap**

Pain, guilt, redemption, survival—the documentary program at this year's AFI Awards nomination displays a sombre streak, a preoccupation with families and genocide, and the macro and macrof level of human struggle. Don't ask me why, maybe it's a millenium bug that's catching.

Stolen Generations made this connection most directly in telling the story of 3 Aboriginal children taken from their families, burnt out tracks and dead trees. Hopefully, in the process of filming, Hurt became Heal.

This was easy viewing—no escapist or diversionary tactics allowed here—but neither was it uniformly dark; we had compassion and empathy too, bitter-sweet loneliness and that's catching.

Tom Zubrycki's The Diplomat has already received its accolades (Best Documentary at the Sydney Film Festival) and deservedly so for being an invaluable historical record of events in East Timor last year, capturing not just the newsworthy stuff as it is played out before the global media, but also the quotidien detail either side of a news edit—the comic sight of All Aotists tripping and almost going out-of-focus, or an interview with Ramos Horta interrupted by the sound of a dog drinking from a watersholy.

As a portrait of a human being, the film remains strangely unsatisfying, although not through any failing of the filmmakers. The overwhelming impression of Ramos Horta is of a man completely consumed by the struggles eaten alive by soundbytes and hollowed out by loneliness; even the personal revelations and bouts of anger and indignation sit oddly, as if played to an audience, and he only appears to be truly himself with half a dozen microphones shoved in his face. Put out the light and what are his particular pecadilloes and everyday follies? The suspicion remains that these things were sloughed off many years ago.

Uncle Chetzel is another historical documentary reaching back to the start of the 20th century—how distant that seems now—to remind us that European history is still part of our own, and that we are less for losing it. Uncle Chetzel understands this because he's lived through it, lost family in the Holocaust, struggled to keep what remains, but his Australian descendants are almost too slow to realise it, have the luxury of being negligent. This is a family history but it is also about translation and migration, the destruction of a culture and its presentation in words, in the face of everything, language becomes the carrier of identity, our life-lines written on the page.

There's a lot of writing too in A Death in the Family, staggery footage of the trepid investigative journalist popping away at his keyboard deep into the night, at home, in motel rooms, or scribbling vital notes in his diary. Why is this? What is he writing? Pity it wasn't a stronger script to save this one from collapsing under the weight of cliches. This also highlights a central dilemma of the film in that it can't quite decide whether it's about the journalist's investigation into Jenny Tanner's supposed suicide (hence the non-stop note-taking and fake conversations on the phone to re-exact what happened), or simply about the case itself and the conduct of the police involved (in which case the journalist's story is irrelevant—we don't need to see him typing it up). The result is a mish-mash which only serves to detract from the genuinely powerful material and some wonderfully gloomy footage of the Victorian countryside.

There were moments of film-making virtuosity such as Andy Delaney's The Letter which succeeded in making the unbearable (a miasma performed without anaesthetic) watchable. Its aesthetic appeal is such that the viewer is caught between appreciation and aversion, a compulsion to keep on watching and on instinct to turn away.

Chasing Buddha peeled onto the screen with a restlessness which, at first, seems at odds with the path to spiritual enlightenment; It's all buzz and a busy rhythm of images running on high-performance Coltrane as we follow a bosy Buddhist nun across towns, cities and continents in search of something, maybe just an outlet for her unbridled energy. But then the film is most poignant when it switches from the brisk, schoolmarmish activity of nun Robina Court to moments of stillness and solitude where a different voice emerges—vulnerable, slightly querulous—as if, for all her selfless dedication, Courtin still has to convince someone about it all herself.

Elsewhere, Lo Nieko shows what can be done in nature documentary mode; you want to see a chycone, the tiniest insect, or anything in between, the camera can oblige. What it really shows is that Australians can make nature docs just like everybody else.

In the midst of all this cinematographic excellence, there was Stolen Generations to remind us why documentary film matters.

Pozieres opted for re-enactments to tell the story of Australian involvement in the First World War. This had the interesting effect of making the Anzacs appear like Aussie backpaddock, or actors—it's hard to say which; the You Were There approach is always a bit of a gamble. In the end, the film's most successful innovation was to include some of the unsung anti-heroes of WWI—atrocity committed by Australian soldiers, conscription battles on the home front—to demonstrate that every white-washed version of history has its stain.

In the midst of all this cinematicographic excellence, there was Stolen Generations to remind us why documentary film matters.
The Virgin Suicides looks and moves like a video clip copied from an ad copied from a movie copied from a send-up on a TV show copied from a video clip copied from an avant-garde fashion spread copied from a nightclub flyer copied from a film.

The Virgin Suicides

Cinesonic: blanched retro trip with deathly virgins

Philip Brophy

Maui-surfer beaded necklace, peering through a shirt undone to the chest. Two-toned aviator sunglasses, optionally worn or freed. Narrow flared trousers slung low at the hip line. And a sexy sad hairstyle: an amalgam of Farnish Fawcett's heat-warded wings, the Botticelli 'pagan-boy' look and the ubiquitous bigness of Jesus Christ. Such is the retro visage of one Trip Fontaine (Josh Hartnett) as he saulys down the corridor of an upper middle-class Catholic high school circa 1975 in Sofia Coppola's The Virgin Suicides.

Despite the pleasure in reading this scene (accompanied as it is by Heart's Magic Man) the vacuousness of The Virgin Suicides perplexes me. From what I could get, a quartet of blondes moves around for 90 minutes, often in repose as if they are about to engage in a soft-core bachi
dalnia. Eventually, they off themselves. Something about life being tough when you're a teen girl. A mention that it's French band, as mang 

d of manner of mad style is typically retro—

and typically insouciant. Most tellingly, it is anachronistic and relatively non-historical, a stand which makes it so weak and reduces it to the highly conservative paradigms that define kitsch and camp. Like the straight declaration of love for ABBA as a statement. Like the gay aesthet

ic embrace of Kylie as a polite. Real radical. The Virgin Suicides looks and moves like a video clip copied from an ad copied from a movie copied from a send-up on a TV show copied from a video clip copied from an avant-garde fashion spread copied from a nightclub flyer copied from a film. In the end you get a microwavable soft movie which numbs you to all processing in the act of consumption.

How exactly does this microwaving—this "recycling" work? What is a film in an otherwise visual sense? How does one fold, caring, arrange and drape a cinesic fabric from another era as part of the material texturing and rendering which can enliven and embody a film's aesh

tic, purpose and pleasure? The Virgin Suicides offers a chance for considering this—even though the film is wholly off the mark in terms of successfully exploiting, fusing or even handling audiovisual issues.

The Virgin Suicides has a requisite peppering of 70s songs, music and fashion is catty and accurate: Todd Rundgren, Gilbert O'Sullivan, 10CC. Heart. A consistency guides the selection into a cache of soft sensual rock. Not entirely vivid, but coeing with a pringual sexuality which thematically mirrors the languid moves of the blonde quartet and their palpable presence as a soft rock sector from the mid-70s althoed to heady states of passion without unleashing any noticeable libidinal energy (The Starlight Band's Aoonight Delight being the penultimate example), the virgin blondes how objects beyond reach—bed

moist and ripe for engagement. In a scene, they visualize the 4-part vocal harmonies that densely pop music's chord floddity. Such harmonic vocalizations within Pop's meta-trajectory—from barber shop quartets to wartime swing to urban doo-wop to secularized gospel to first pop to ornam R'n'B to the currently undying boy/girl

segment—use multiples of voice to act as a swirling gewgaw which simultaneously oungrily exploits and tends to comesthetica

and rendered pornographic when one lyrically addresses intimacy, privacy and consumption. Although a better selection of tracks would more effectively amplify this, the gratuitously enigmatic placement of the blondes throughout the film serves to sound this musicalcore trope.

Where the audiovisual construct of seduc


tive shots of the blondes ling around comb

bined with 70s soft rock on the soundtrack gen

erates a candal complexity central to the film's "what-me-me?" tease; the music of Air melds these two elements into an interiorised sound

track. The score provided by Air (and released as a CD separate to the official 'soundtrack recording' compile of '70s songs) imagines the film musically almost by pretending to be a band from 1975 who has been asked to score a movie. The Air sound is thus highly referential and as thoroughly incorporated, performed and French culture's curating of stylists who excel in replication (which may be why post-70s Japanese pop culture has been so transfused by all things French). The choice of Air is a savvy one—though the band's playful authorial coding tends to b lost in the film's own vagueness because its alignment with the 'sound of Air' is posed against the film's ambivalence toward the history of that sound.

So what exactly is this 'sound of Air'? Their music and the narroaial Suicides can be identified and classified by tracing a multiple of iconic arcs that stream forth from the band's studio-produced epicentre. One stream leads to a 'sym

phonic lock', wherein a melting pot of mid-70s Euro rock references, echoes, phonemes and motifs can be discerned. I spy conent rippling emanating from Magma, PFM, Le Orme, Ash Ra Tempel, La Dusseldorf, Klaus Schulze, Kingdom Come, Goblin, King Crimson, et al. Another stream leads to the lite-rock arrangements gleaned from the best of Montone, Riz Ortolani, Bruno Nicolai, Michel Polnareff, Michel LeGrand, Gert Wilden, Manfred Huber, Siegfred Schwab, et al. Their frothy film scores from the late 70s to the early 80s trancity music prevails to the extent of justifying which poses via their use of rock/pop instrumentation and spacey studio effects to suggest a libertine power unleashed by their pseudo-bip music. I imagine that in Air's record collection you would find Francois de Rosnay's score for Harry Kumel's Daughters of Darkness (1971); Peter Churchill's score for Robert Rutledge's The Last Tango in Paris (1975); the Vampires' Sound Incorporated's score for Jess Franco's Succubus (1974); Jose Barreda's score for Charles Matton's Spumaldia (1976), Michel Polnareff's score for Lament Johnson's Lipstick (1970); and Golbin's score for George Romero's Dawn of the Dead (1979). At the very least, it has to be noted that the 2-chord pattern of The Virgin Suicides' main theme is lifted straight from Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon, 1973.)

Collectively, these composers, ensembles, arrangers and orchestrations often employed Baroque-style scores and chord sequences which root the melodic terrain of European pop music as solidly as blues idioms provide the musical cartography for American pop music. There's a very real head which the gradually enigmatic placement of the blondes throughout the film serves to sound this musicalcore trope.

The bizarre thing is that the soft-core sex boom which fuelled European film production between 1960 and 1977 often featured scenarios of mysterious topless nudes wandering sumbambulously through mansions, castles, convents and tombs with symphonic rock throbbing underneath a soundtrack of mixed origins, including baroque music. As scantily as the costumes adored women's bodies, so did themes of redemption, salvation, retribution and seduction drape these films, limpily aligning them to purported liberated Boris on any occasion. I would argue—recalls far greater titles (and films) like The Virgin Report, Virgin Among The Living Dead, The Blood Splattered Bride, Conflagration of A Sluts Forms Girl, Beyond Consent Walls, etc through its sensationalist juxtaposition of "virgin,' 'suicide' and David Hamilton's 'soft-core' effect. This is a cobbled-up film. Yet in place of the kind of haunting erotic inexplicability one finds in such '70s Euro exploitation, The Virgin Suicides seems to be a blanched, companionate-Catholic ambience intermixed with a lack

ad.

alasial eroticism. The references and codes loudly announce themselves in the film's aural terrain, but one does not find their machines on. Despite the careful non-audiovisual land

scaping of all—despite the Narrator's two-dimensionality, which guides the film's plasticity and performances—a farness pervades the very surface of the film. Whilst this view sounds contra

dictory, it is noted that the recogising and appropriation of a generic or iconic audiovis

ual textualuality does not conform to the exact and reduced notions of postmodern quotation. You might say that the film has a veritable expense still for a photo shoot in a fashion mag staged inside a new retro-outfitted night-club and get all the details right, but such production is like chemi

cally distilling a beverage. It is suggesting your molecular formula of reconstruction remains in the immutable realm of calculable formula. You are doing an useless and infinitesimal thing, it was already rendered immaterial before your arrival.

Sound—specifically, the tonality of sound of the recording of a musical style—is a dense fab

ric of textures, hyper-material and abstract. It happens when you arrive at it. Less a terrain of signs, images and objects and more a dimension of shades, tones and surfaces. The surface of music is never flat, as its sound images its depth and engineers an environment for experience. Image production does not operate in this way at all. So when you bring the 2 together—in the film soundtrack—you design a multi-planar and multi-linear space for audio-visual narrative. Music—specifically, the scores of film, com

posed—may be treated as mere wallpaper as in The Virgin Suicides, but music is the whole room, the view outside the window and the space around.

How does one fold, caring, arrange and drape a cinesic fabric from another era as part of the material texturing and rendering which can enliven and embody a film's aesthetic, purpose and pleasure? The research continues.

Sofia Coppola, The Virgin Suicides, Paramount Classics.
**Orbital was an ambitious exhibition of time-based media installations, simultaneously held in Melbourne and London. It featured 5 new media artworks by Australian artists Nicola Loder, Megan Jones, Nigel Helyer, Margie Medlin, Brook Andrew and Raymond Peer.**

The first thing that struck me as I walked into the CCP gallery space (Gallery 1) was Nigel Helyer's *Ariel*, a luminous lime-green and lemon interactive sound sculpture installation described in the catalogue as "a sensor based system of mutant jellyfish-like radio objects which respond to the physical presence of a human interface." In the catalogue Helyer reflects on his work as "a sonic-mapping of voices lost in the ether, of song long settled in the dust." Pugnitive sounds, with all of their associated resonance, vibrated and echoed in this labyrinthine soundscape.

Voices speaking to each other were affecting in different ways in Nicola Loder's monitor-based digital video installation. A wall of monitors simultaneously screened 5 sets of strangers interacting with each other in a neutral photographic studio space. This mise-en-scene of blank white background focused further attention on the people and their conversations. Each monitor had its own set of earphones which enabled a semi-auditory listening-in to encounters which were variously polemical, topical, intimate, sometimes even indifferent. Positioned as an acousticon, I had memories of Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window, in its invitation to multiple intrusiveness.

Megan Jones' *Sites of Interventions*, on the other hand, was clearly a work whose purpose was both educational and political. This multimedia installation invites viewers to look at satellite imagery of the Murray Darling Basin in the Sunnyside region of Victoria, to explore *Quicktime VR 360-degree panonomic environments of the region.* Megan's CDROM was created in consultation with the Salinity Management Consortium as a SunRISE 21 Artist in Industry project and explores the sustainability of the Sunnyside region in the 21st century. The pathways through these topographical images, however, often transcended their informational function. There was at times a poetic feeling of place in the images of vastness and proximity, in the comparisons of the parched and the lush landscapes.

In the second gallery space there were 2 installations, one on each side of the room, a space enveloped in thought, flickering constantly. On one side Margie Medlin's monitor-based digital media installation, *Satellite*, focused on the nexus between dance, film and digital media. A kinetic dancer traverses a montage of digital images of Australian and Asian cities. A dance of the figurative, in the unlikely millions of an ever-expanding urban vista.

On the other side was the Extension (BODILY INSTINCT YEARNING TECHNOLOGY/multiplying empathy/identity), a digital video projection-based installation directed by Brook Andrew and choreographed by Raymond Peer. The intention of this installation was to give Wundajat (Aboriginal) and Australian perspectives of an Australian landscape. A multiple madness of images is navigated through 5 Australian identities. These figures are an Aboriginal surveyor re-mapping a city landscape, an Asyrian businessman locked in a twilight zone of a train station trying to scale the capitalist terrain, and a displaced German woman living out of a trolley filled with both European and Australian objects. These narratives intersect and parallel one another, creating a complex cityscape tableau.

Orbital's accomplishments were highlighted in the different conceptions and visions of Australia represented from the sonic echoes of the past to theistent meetings of strangers; from the vast and sparsely inhabited landscape to the bustling city streets and metropolises. The invitation of this exhibition was to reflect on the many ways that we have, and continue to, imagine ourselves in the many places that we live.


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**RealTime/OnScreen 39 October - November 2000**

31
Mitchell Whitelease talks with Keith Gallasch

I'm part of a large organising committee including Peter, like Annette Jenson, and John Tolkan. I'm helping out with the exhibition components. I've recently finished PhD which looks at artists using Artificial Life because essentially that's the theme of this futureScreen.

The right man at the right time in the right place. How is the theme realised?

It's been taken on in a broad way. Alife is a quite a broad scientific discipline with its own conferences and papers and journals and there is quite a lot of art that draws directly on the techniques of that scientific culture. On the other hand, the idea of artificial life is much broader than that and embraces all kinds of re-engineerings of life including biotechnology and medical technologies where a lot of people, we've got people who are researchers in the field. We've done incredibly well and got Christopher Langton, the guy who basically founded Artificial Life. He's coming to give a keynote, which is fantastic.

When did he make the discovery?

During the early 80s Alife defines itself by distinguishing itself from Artificial Intelligence. It came about a lot through a bunch of art and the artists going about things the wrong way by trying to start with intelligence as the object that needed simulating. The basic intimation of Alife is why don't we work with the artificial stupidities that we can work out how living systems work. The key approach of Alife is to think that the intelligence will pop up out of the life once the life is put together in the right way.

Over the years we've seen life being generated and created on computer screens. It's an obsession but it's also quite a well-established tradition in the electronic arts. This is quite a strong thread, which almost immediately for science. I think of it as a generative urge and an urge for automation, if that's the right word, for the automatic creation of those things that you can trace it back to kinetic art and systems art in the 60s if not well before that. To me that's what's fascinating about this. Artists are taken with it because they're interested in exactly those aims.

So they take up these techniques from the scientific field and start tinkering with them...

It's so different from the idea of the static, finished artwork.

On the other hand there are things I have problems with about it—things like organic ideas about the wholeness of the work or the work being some sort of perfect functioning unit or ideas about the 'living' work. That's the whole modernist tradition which all of this stuff is really involved with, I think. But when it works well it sidesteps that.

In what way shall it manifest itself in futureScreen 00?

All kinds of ways. We've got some beautiful robotic work. An American artist called Kenneth Rinaldi for many years has been building robotic systems. He has them doing 'confluence' between technological and biological systems. They're robotic arms but the structural material is generated with delicate wire and pulleys and articulations. The work's called Autopoints and consists of 14 of these arms, we've got 8 of them, each about 3 metres long. They hang from the ceiling, sense each other's location and sort of float around. They also sense the location of people walking in the room and turn and sing to each other, using telephone hoses.

Sounds like a major piece.

It's huge. It's come fresh from the Kiasma Museum in Helsinki who commissioned it. It's a piece of straight Alife in the sense that it's using all of the basic techniques from Artificial Life to do with putting lots of simple units together and watching them interact in order to make something more complex, something emergent happen.

These things are generative—is there a chance element?

With Ken's work and a lot of the other work it's a kind of involvement of the environment, the work is sensing itself and sensing changes within itself. It's really the setting in place of a system that is richly interconnected both with itself and with its environment. So it's reacting and that is, I suppose, where the impression of life-likeness or autonomy comes from, from the complexity and the patterned nature of those responses.

Autopoints is at the Australian Centre for Photography. Also at the ACP is Michele Barker's new work Praternatural which is very a lucid, interactive CHM-based work about the engineering of a being, a build-your-baby scenario. There's also an Australian group called Tissue Culture who make tiny artworks out of bits of being—tiny postage stamp sized bits of scaffold folding with actual living stuff growing on it. That should be interesting to see.

Then opening during October at Artspace are 4 other works. Two of my favourite Alife artists, Erwin Driessens and Maria Verstappen, are relatively unknown in the electronic arts world because they come out of the contemporary European gallery scene. We have 2 works of theirs. One is called IME Traveller, which is a computer-driven video mapping piece, very very dynamic. It is like you're diving into a field of multi-coloured clouds and the clouds advance towards you and keep changing and grow in and in and it. It's kind of a zone that never stops. That's it's made by a little cellular structure. They call it 'pixel consciousness'—each of these pixels looks around at its neighbours and then splits into a bunch of other pixels. So it's like a microbial rat of pixels.

What's it responding to?

Nothing apart from itself. It looks around in the picture plane. Each pixel looks at its neighbours. The work borrows an idea from Artificial Life called cellular automata, a kind of computational system involving cells which do things based on what their neighbours are doing. The classic is a work called Game of Life by John Conway. This one is really great because it has cells but the cells actually split. Conventionally, they stay as static units, but these sort of split and push each other out. So it's a much more dynamic structure. It gives a beautiful result. As a sensual thing, it's gorgeous. I'm really excited about seeing that on a big projection screen. The other work of theirs, called BOARD, uses similar cellular splitting process but in 3 dimensions. The artists are sending out some intricate little polyester resin computer manufactured forms. Their work is interesting because while it's very beautiful, it involves a kind of blankness, a total removal of artistic volition from a process of morphogenesis.

So, once it's going, it's going.

Yes, it's like the artists are asking how can we remove ourselves from decision-making and just make varieties of stuff. One of the most complex works in the show is Life Space by a pair of European artists based in Japan, Chrisa Sommerer and Laurent Magnussen. It's an artificial ecosystem where the creatures live in a bucket of vegetation and you can interact with them on a video screen. Interestingly, the way that you generate more creatures is by typing text into the system. You can send an e-mail, which it will interpret—that is the generic code for a new organism and based on the characters in your e-mail it will generate some new creature. Then other people can log into the site and see what the other creatures are doing. You can encourage them to get together and have babies or stop your favourite creature from being eaten by the others. Stuff like that. It's a play garden.

Do you have to learn a code to do it?

No. All the interaction level is quite fluent, quite intuitive. Also in the exhibition there's a listening station for a site I'm curating called AutonomousAudio (www.artspace.org.au/autonomousAudio), which is a collection of audio pieces by artists using Artificial Life and other complex generative systems. Everything from conventional Artificial Life techniques of cellular automata and simulated genetics through to more open-ended physical feedback systems and other complex forms. That's at Artspace and we're streaming audio on-line as well as mp3 downloads. It includes some interesting Australian computer music—academia-based computer musicians in the art music mode—and then some people who are more experimental media hackers but often using similar processes and coming up with stuff that in some cases sounds quite similar to old school computer music. There's a piece by Oren Ambarchi and Martin Nig who are local improv merchants—a beautiful piece using feedback systems running through turntables.

Then there's the forum event—another all star line up. There's Langton, as well as Tom Ray, another Alife pioneer who will be doing a remote presentation, and Cynthia Brezinski, who builds 'social robots' with Rodney Brooks at MIT. We also have Steve Kurtz from the American group Critical Art Ensemble, who makes a strong political critique of biotechnology. There is some interesting AI people. There's Claude Samut, who was involved in the Robo-locomotor Tournament with the winning team of Sony AIBO dogs. Sony's little artificial pets. There's also some good local people like Stephen Jones and Jon McCormak, an artist who has been working in this area longer than most people. Oh, and also, we have Don Colgan from the Australian Museum who's involved in the Thylacine project, hoping to clone and revive the Thylacine from preserved genetic material. That'll be fascinating.
Tokyo Diary: the city performs

Four writers participating in the ongoing Gekidan Kaitha-Not Yet It’s Difficult (NYID) intercultural collaboration project (see RealTime 37 page 32) and the Journey to Con-fusion #2 theatre symposium, report from Tokyo.

Tokyo Diary I Peter Eckersley

Confusion #2 took place in Melbourne in December 1999. This was a week of skills and ideas exchange with a presentation of work-in-progress and conference plus stand-alone performances. The event was supported in Tokyo only they were hosting and NYID didn’t do their own performances, Excellent hospitality. The week was also marked by friendship.

Although agreeing on the theme of ‘media’, differences between the companies became more pronounced in Tokyo. Both inevitable and strategic, this confusion struck under the media threat and became a starting point for creative work.

When the project worked best it was fused literally. The combined companies juggling through the Yokohama Mermaid Theater Director David Pledger’s cube formation, for example, or performing the hyperspace Japanese folk dance sequence (Gekidan Director Shigeki Shimmura calls this “the meditative shower” that unites and animates the body). Such performance exercises, fragmented and intermingled, became representations of the diverse cultural and language slippage and hybrid landscapes. One of the new kinds of performing bodies and cultures.

On the other hand, Pledger’s sports theatre straggles in Tokyo where like any big city sports cultures are diffused by population and diversity. One critic’s comments about the ‘AIF bodies’ of the Australian cast made me wonder if we are still unable to watch the other.

The project highlighted contextual matters and historical conditions in theatre; the ideological tensions between the representational forces of exteriority employed by NYID and the motional forces of interior work seen in Kaitha’s process. Their reconciliation is made difficult by the imprint of these historical conditions and the way that such conditions have been experienced in Australian and Japanese theatre culture.

(NYID’s spectator Brechtian in reaction to the performance/installation, for example, created a cultural moment of tension without banishing personal goodwill and friendships run deep, as a character of humanity for example, or personal and social goodwill and friendships run deep, as does the river of difference.

Tokyo Diary II Edward Scheer

Australia is a state keeping itself busy stereo perceptions of economic obsolescence through sub-dividual acts of self against people’s own (the elderly, students, unemployed, indigenous etc) and others. As I write, the inmates (is there a better hyper-feminine image) a small group who appear to have no existence in the city. These people with no ‘entitlement’ to freedom (Philip Ruddock, ZB) news. August 28) We bear in these words the absolute rule of bureaucratic values, the collapse of logic and the absence of a human perspective.

Is this related to my trip to Tokyo to participate in an intercultural exchange between theatre companies Gekidan Kaitha and NYID? How can it not be? All Tokyo’s noise can not shut out the noise of my own nationality. Once an Australian was found stumbling through the ignorance of the world undetected. Now there’s a sense of awkward visibility, skim marks on the radar screen of the region.

In the solitude of airports I breathe again, I am a privileged person. My namaea is a privilege, protected by torture, barbaric war prose... Heiner Muller, 1977.

El Professor Mr. Jose Prates 1991. Breakfast at Starbucks. Move through the heat to ICC Inter Communications Centre to visit the anachronist chamber. Completely alien—even with the door open there is no reverberation. The sound echoing back off the walls and floor, so it’s hard to orientate oneself. I feel like a bat with headphones on, bouncing off the walls of the cave. A girl comes in but I have no idea what she is to me. The sound of pages flipping in her guidebook could be right next to my ear but as I turn she notices me several metres away in the doorway. Suddenly another figure appears in the door. Unannounced by any sounds, their presence is uncanny. Likewise I guess.

The quality of space here is not unlike the silence of the shrines at Nikko north of the city. Rinnos boasts the temple of the roaming dragon. A monk asks you to listen and directs your gaze to the door. He then poses with legs apart and concentrates ferociously on 2 sticks which he strikes together like the clap sticks some Koori percussionists use. The echo is a sudden and heavy sound he says, because it is the voice of the dragon responding to the summons of the sticks. Is there a cultural truth here? Can we discern cultural difference through listening? World music aficionados say no-one owns a beat... I don’t know, but I suppose we can be responsive to the echo of the other, to allow spontaneous reverberations to help us re-unimate our tired bodies. The sensuousness of travel has been documented beautifully by Alphonso Lingis in much of his recent work but even he would find it hard to document the feeling of relief in the heat of the city of Tokyo after the freezing temperatures in Sydney in early July.

Back to the Hotel to watch a bit of the sumo tournament. The big Yokohama Akebono slipped in his bout against a much smaller opponent and almost fell right before himself and shyly handed out the other sumo out of the ring. That night at Sentagya Public Theater, a body on the ground outside the theatre turned out to be a dancer from Dumb Type. The motionlessness of the sick body appeared to allude to the power struggle from time to time and in the homage to Furushashi in GDR. Strange to see it displaced on the pavement but there is always a realist connection to the performance metaphor. The writer-director Sato Mokoto, though exhausted after a day’s rehearsal for his version of Ubu Roi, helped the young man to his feet and into a taxi. Later I asked him if he thought there was an Ubu in every culture and who the Japanese Ubu might be? He smiled and said something I didn’t understand. It wasn’t Akebono and Kotsuki but... they have too much authority to be considered avatars of Javrin’s craven powerless freak. I could think of plenty of Australian examples.

Tokyo Diary III - Denise Varney

Tokyo’s awesome order and efficiency works on the maintenance of a rhythm—a fluidity of movement and best whose pace is set, perhaps, by an invisible control tower or a cerebral chip that enters the body as it enters the street. Put unsettling, put beautiful, you follow, adjusting an expansive Australian ankle to a different pace. You could start dreaming of bodies without organs, legs without feet, without shirts and arms with out elbows, for the body appears constructed and unconnected by a failure to pass through.

Vis by Miyake’s summer range of infrahtable clothing. The little plastic noodles on the hats, skirts, and tops allow the clothes to inflate and exude. They enact a metaphor for the breath, the making of the body into a round or flat surface, to fit on a train, perhaps, or breathe again at a shower.

Two observations cut through this smooth time.

At Shibuya where the pace is quicker than in more conservative districts, the lights are brighter and faster and the crowds waking. I notice a young woman talking from a public phone box who wears what I will call the Shibuya Look. The look includes the high and the shoes and the socks held on with a toe strap. They come in different versions from sandal to sneaker but for neither beach nor running track. They throw the body forward into a halffist and shuffle it from side to side. Anecdotal evidence is that the platforms are deadly; movement, once begun, is hard to stop. There is no way to grip the ground to stop in a hurry. Women have been known to fall onto cars, there have been terrible ankle injuries.

The girl at the telephone wears a sleeveless red dress and her long blonde hair loose. Despite the European signifiers, this look is not about becoming Western. The Shibuya Look reads as an enactment of cute girl culture. Translated into fashion, the hyper-feminine image replicates and mocks the cute at the same time as it marks its bearer with the power of the supercool. But there is a sense in which the Look ends as a sick joke at the expense of young women’s relation to speed and movement. They cannot keep up with the flow of movement, the steady pace that keeps the look alive and functional. You can’t really wear that inside your shoes. I don’t think so. The young women perform finity, vulnerability and instability. Their rates of speed are erratic, they do not glide and they like to discover their elbows. They are all out of step.

continued on page 34
Tokyo Diary: the city performs

continued from page 33

The second observation still concerns the woman at the telephone. For the first time in my visit I see a person in a state of alarm. She puts down the telephone and begins to walk/stroll/roll movement towards the station. She is in a hurry and pushes through with her elbows. She reaches the pedestrian crossing and then runs. She stops but is soon overcome. Near the station, a young man in flannelet grabs her at her arm. She veers off towards another entrance, he follows and she disappears at an angle. I observe the same scene many times and it happens very quickly. The atmosphere opens and closes behind her. The next morning I wake and think about her, as I do still.

Tokyo Diary IV Rachel Fensham
To avoid the label of observatory, I have decided my mission is looking for inflatables. Ever since seeing Mr Dob by Murakami at the Asia-Pacific Triennial in 1996, I have equated Japanese popular culture with blowups dolls. My first purchase was an inflatable mermaid. In a syzygy I bought an inflatable woman with the stars and stripes on his back.
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Peeling back epidermis Australis

Dixon Oxenburgh

English playwright Martin Crimp’s late 80s satire on Thatcherite conservation, Play with Repets, has been reprieved in a quietly effective production at the ADL’s Barony Theatre. In a one-off production, director Chris Drummond guided his strong ensemble through the bleak netherworld of the central character Anthony Steadman (played by naive fanaticism by Geoff Revell). Steadman inhabits a limbo of desolate urban spaces like some latter day Candide, energised by a kind of intuitive optimism that “everything is possible.

This is an amiable, unassuming low-tech worker in a hi-fi factory whose blind faith belies the deep cynicism and depressive fear of most of the characters that he comes into contact with: embittered fellow travellers at the bar—Kate (Jacqueline Cook) and Nick (Justin Moore), and Steadman's hardened boss Franky (effectively dou­bled by Cook). This white-collar subsistence world is stripped of meaning by economic rationalism, where cynicism is the strongest bulwark against despair. Steadman tries to further understand the world by employing the services of Lamine, a shabby, inarticulate clown (played with shuffling pomposity by Phil Spruce). But Steadman’s utopian alternative to the post-industrial wasteland he inhabits is revealed to be a nostalgic neo-Victorian conservatism connoted by visions of grand houses and sweeping gardens. His re-emergence is finally marked by a realisation that the only possible reality for human warmth and companionship held out by Bar (interpreted with typical sincerity by Cathy Adamson) is largely immaterial.

With some great jazz by music director Julian Ferretto, and effective, functional stage design by Gudie Molts, Play with Repets still has metaphorical resonance today, giving us pause to reflect on what we have lost or gained through the past 10 years of fundamental economic change. Who has benefited from that change and at what cost to community values?

Community and attendant notions of connection and alienation are explored in 2 other recent

arTS events in Adelaide. Piercing the Skin and Body Art have peered back epidermises Australis with striking results.

The human body as post-structural icon scarred by the twins of force and identity is a popular theme in contemporary arts and culture. "The body is both a playground and a battlefield, the site where the greatest tensions occur and the most brutal inequality is acted out." says Vanesa Baird of the New Internationalist-inspired Piercing The Skin, a performance collage of impressive quality and diversity performed last month by Junction Theatre and Leigh Warren Dancers. The companies jointly commissioned 6 distinctly different writers (Rodney Hall, Stephen House, Eva Johnson, Vertly Laughton and Paul Rees) to interpret Baird’s sentiment. The result was a series of vignettes, each exploring broad connections of time and space, language and subcultures in an eclectic interplay of styles. Eva Johnson’s The Body Born Indigenous 1 & 2 took the form of a poignant ode to identity and sense of place, while Paul Rees chose a monologue for Spare Parts (162), a mordant apologia for body part farming (the ultimate rationalisation of the individual). Vertly Laughton created a vivid poetic dialogue for Fox, a forensic whoodle spanning 1000 years. Stephen House’s expressionistic Walk to the Dirt and Rodney Hall’s The Self, a satic examination of gender and difference, rounded out the conceptual kaleidoscope.

Rather than appealing a lyrical hotpotch, I thought Piercing the skin achieved a real sense of playful connection—sacred of cooperation that has split over into future joint projects mooted for the 2 companies.

Skin piercing took on a decidedly more permanent connotation in Body Art, an ethnographic survey of body decoration at the Museum of South Australia. Representations of traditional culture and insinuations from Pacific nations such as Samoan tatu and Maori ta moko are juxtaposed with voyeuristic images of urban tattooing, piercing and scarification. While I appreciate the depth of curatorial narrative, I found the thematic program of the exhibition rather too open ended, relying on sensationalism (SM & fetishism) rather than substantial analysis. Camp irony abounds in some of the contrasts, such as the comparison between tribal men wearing restrictive belts and Kylie Minogue sporting her version. In all, Body Art goes a long way in opening up debate surrounding the psycho-sexual pleasures in adornment and cultural initiation but I was troubled by its celebration of a particular stream of underground counterculture by making superficial comparisons with traditional images and material. I also wondered why cosmetic surgery was included, but not surgical scoring?

Ironically, in a small town like Adelaide, neither Piercing The Skin nor Body Art seemed to know of the other’s existence! Better communication spells more latent audience crossover, which is always handy when you’re doing good contemporary theatre.

Play With Repets, writer Martin Crimp, director Chris Drummond, Mark Pennington, music Julian Ferrari, designer consultant Gaelle Motte, Barony Theatre.


The party’s never over

Maryanne Lynch

A new poetics is emerging in the work of Rock’n’Roll Circus. A new vision, a new identity. After a couple of years of struggling to redefine itself following the demise of the old Rock’n’Roll, its latest production for the season proved the payoff. It is a work that acknowledges the strengths of the company’s history and yet takes confident (if still f weblog) steps onto new artsic ground.

Directed by Yaron Lifschitz, Sonatas 2 parts are linked by theme, character and the playing of renowned pianist Tamara Anna Cilowka. In circumstances 30 years apart, a group of children/adults waste and terrorise each other via giddy sexual politics, power plays and the odd moment of misguided tenderness. Instead of the old “don’t look back you spineless wimp” demands, this work offers a further interrogation of the precarious self-other relationship. Or rather, it provides a different formal exploration where a chronological narrative is developed, especially through clowning and acrobatics, and in the presence of Cilowka.

The story begins with the arrival of the pianist. With flowing red hair and clad in a black cape, Cilowka sits at a glinting baby grand, remaining there throughout the show, playing first Schumann’s Piano Sonata #1 op 11 and then Beethoven Piano Sonata #3 op 5 in concentrated solitude. Yet, she is not alone, as the work’s title indicates, nor a remove from action. As the other performers appear as guests at a birthday and then a dinner party, the epic qualities of the words that Cilowka plays begin to find their physical expression in the smallest of everyday moments. Playwright politics, it seems, are not to be snubbed at, nor are tableau arguments, especially when conducted from the great heights of a pyramid of chairs. A more subtle resonance between pianist and circus performer is the shared hue of design, lighting, Cilowka’s hair and the passions that overtake events. At the centre of the narrative are the typically sadistic performance personas of Andrew Bray, this time realised as the birthday boy and the dinner host. The charismatic Bray plays a character hoping for popularity but, naturally, inevitably, becomes the target of everyone else’s testing of boundaries—most notably the quick-tempered girl/woman of Chelsea McGuffin (a role apparently shared with All Weaver). Between her character and the other party guests, created by Azara Universe and Andrew Bright, are ever changing alliances with the shared task of biting Bray. At this they all succeed admirably.

On the night 1 attended, the audience laughed in echo recognition of the ferocity of childhood conflicts and how deep their scars can be. By the second act our laughter played back to us as the same conflicts were revealed in supposedly “natural” form. The same circus tricks, the same petty jealousies; not much had changed, and we saw ourselves with small. And always throughout Cilowka played, focused, almost motionless, intent.

In keeping with tradition, Sonata is a work created by the company. Unusually though, it isn’t a show of virtuoso physicality—the circus work could almost be deleted, even deliberately mundane—but in this bringing together of music, bodies and narrative something else is stirring. A more subtilcnt intention. A bigger ambition. Rock’n’Roll Circus is moving ahead.

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Junction Theatre & Leigh Warren Dancers, Piercing the Skin

phot Alex Makeyev

Rock’n’Roll Circus, Sonatas for Ten Hands, director Yaron Lifschitz, pianist Tamara Anna Cilowka, performers Andrew Bray, Andrew Bright, All Weaver/Chelsea McGuffin, Azara Universe, lighting designer Jason Organ; Brisbane Powerhouse, Brisbane, June 7-15.
Lucy Guerin: finality and new directions

Shawn McLeod

The Ends of Things, your new work for the Melbourne Festival has an intriguing title. "Where did it come from?"

Originally from a composer I worked with, Jad McAdam (Jaddua Wade McAdam), this idea and it grew out of a sound idea really, to do with creating a score from sounds of finality. Like the end of a record or the tone after someone has hung up on you on the telephone, or when a film reel comes to an end and you hear a clicking noise. There are a lot of different sounds of things running out and ending and slipping off the air. So rather than in a huge catastrophic, catastrophic way it was more like that empty hollow sense of endings.

How have you chosen to work with that idea?

It was difficult because I did a development period on the piece earlier in the year and I thought that I would use all these gestures of finality and I set up these situations that had this emotional tone of endings. But it became extremely difficult. I realised that to create a sense of endings without anything going before it was almost impossible for me. And I found a very, very draining and found myself not really being able to get into the process that much during the developmental period. It was in January. So I let myself wander a bit with it and get off the track a little bit and just try out a few things, but that ended fairly soon. When I thought about it a lot and I've developed more of an overall structure, which will have more of a beginning, middle and end. And within that structure these little final moments will present themselves. So they'll set the emotional tone of the piece; but there will be a greater end as well, almost like the end of a narrative.

It sounds like it has the potential to be quite bleak.

Yes, well it does. And that was one of the other things that was worrying me about it, actually. I didn't really want to make a piece that was completely dark. But having thought about it, I've sort of made Trevor Patrick the central character. He has this very dry, interesting sense of humour and he's sort of like a character. It's almost like his life. The dancers represent more the workings of his mind or his past or his fears—they are more like his psychological state. So I think it will probably end up being fairly bleak in the final scene but there will be quite a bit of humour before that, slight comic moment, but it won't all be dour and doleful.

Your work is often marked by that mischievous wit and dry humour.

Yes, I think that will be in there, definitely, especially in the first scene where we set him up in that inner room environment. Yes, but I won't give too much away.

Is there a narrative thread that runs through this at all or is it predominantly an abstract work?

No, it actually quite narrative, much more narrative than works I've done previously. So I feel like I'm trying to have both worlds in this work. I do have this narrative character who is isolated pretty much for the first two sections of the work. We pick him up at a certain time in his life where he's become quite withdrawn from the world and he's obviously a fairly sensitive character who can't really deal with the pace of things outside of his own room. He's at a point where his isolation and cutting off from people is just starting to cause his world to disintegrate and he is losing connection with reality. Hence things running out. The Ends of Things ultimately relates to the end of control or reason, so he's losing it a bit. It is a bit bleak in that way.

It also sounds interesting that you are actually tackling that way of making work.

Yes, it's quite psychological.

Is that new for you?

I think I've always felt that when I've made works that I was entering a psychological state or getting into a particular zone of psychology. But I haven't actually defined a character before as specifically as I am this time. Well, I suppose that when I did Robbery Wolfress on Bail, I wanted that mood of the suburban teenager and that sort of frustration and hopelessness. But it was more through just an emotional tone. This time I'm being a little more specific with myself about who this person is. So I suppose it's more like a writer would research their character. And I don't know what's going to happen because I haven't worked this way before and it will be interesting to see if that's helpful or hindering when it comes to this next rehearsal period and creating the movement.

Is that specificity going to be clearly interpreted by the audience?

I think I want to transfer to the audience, to be quite simple and straightforward, which is something I haven't really done before. I mean I think I was quite happy for people to enter a more dramatic realm but I wasn't too fussed if they got exactly what was going on. In fact, it wasn't necessary for me at all. This time I'm really interested in them knowing what the situation is. I still haven't quite figured out how I'm going to get people to realise that the other dancers are what's going on inside his head. But, I don't know, maybe you need them—really obvious voiceovers or signs coming down or someone coming out and making an announcement. I hope not.

Is this new interest something that's been prompted by making work in Australia?

It's partly to do with making work here in Australia because when I made work in New York my main audience were other choreographers and dancers or other people from the art world who really easily accept abstraction and don't feel threatened by it at all. If they don't understand it they're quite happy to make an attempt to engage with it anyway. And that was great except that you do start to work within a bubble in a way that's not really connected to anybody else. It's an art for artists in a way.

There has been a lot of talk about making what we do accessible to a wider audience.

Yes, but I think a lot of that has to do with wanting to sell more tickets and create more income, which is not my main interest. I find it quite challenging for myself to actually be clearer about what I mean and not be afraid for people to know what it is. So that you are a bit more exposed, you are a bit more revealing if you actually say it straight out. I think a lot of artists are afraid of that. I think I have been.

"I like smashing things," Margaret Trial confessed in Kring! It was a night of 'smashing' in Melbourne, from Chunky Move's exploding set floor in their Hydra (shades of John Carpenter's The Thing) to Yumi Uminoire's evocation of the Hanish earthquake in her Mixed Metaphor piece INORI-invisible. Atrazi's explanation that 'The sky has gone mad!' was repetitively rendered on stage.

The Mixed Metaphor artists were obsessed with language, or languages—their linguistic, incommensurable and post-representational similarity. Dancehouse was filled with projected text, surtitles, interrupted whispers, mangled soundtracks, bodies both literally and metaphorically inscribed in a way effective and yet impossible to fully know. Metaphors of likeness and unlikeliness, these are works inhabiting a realm between holis- tic unity and irreducible multiplicity.

A new space is opened up in the cre- ation of a performance which is like a per- formance (rather than 'like nature'); metaphors about metaphors. Susie Fraser for example, offered us the doubled spectacle of watching a mother watching her experience of motherhood, represented by diary entries, medical reports, home videos and more. Her confession however left much unsaid. Similarly dancer/choreographer Jodie Farrugia projected a mysterious book above the dancers, containing poses that they appeared preordained to echo. A partial reve- lation of the inaccessibility of destiny as semi-uncconscious accord.

Fascination was perpetually offered yet denied the audience. Various texts bound these performances together whilst allowing one to glimpse through them towards some- thing else—aporia perhaps. The performanc- es were vertiginous in their very materiality, creating the possibility of a metaphorical con- fusion and confabulation of the word.

In this respect, Trail's Kring! was the most disturbing, and frighteningly funny, work. Scored to a complex deconstruction and montage of pieces torn from some unknowable and apparently absurd conversa- tion or conversations ('Are you really a fire- man?" she remarked), the text was constant- ly interrupted by the sound of smashing crotchet and other materials. Each misplaced phrase shimmered the verifier of normality, raising the almost literally hypothetical possibili- ty of social euphoria and embarrassment ("What is... what is it... it is... this really quite unpleasant thing we do?). Trail stood largely at ease in the centre of this vortex of mistakes, Freudian slips and alliterated nonsense, pondering and impos- sibly miming under the spotlight. She acted as a performer performing someone not per- forming—not really, not in any overt way.

The subject-hood of the scored 'characters' she interacted with was provisionally and variously defined by the name they answered to—"I'm super-modern Margaret", I'm fire- man Jeff'. Trail dramatised how all conversa- tion and recognition occurs under the threat of potentially sublime linguistic breakage or meltdowm ("Kring!").

Lest one seek refuge in the idea of a pre- linguistic body, Trail exemplified the tenden- cy of the performers to dramatise the body as a parallel, coded presence. Her physical performance consisted of a series of abstract yet implicitly communicative gestures: arms raised, hands spread wide and shaken in frus- tration, or fingers curled delicately as they described the space that bathed and sus- tained the subject. Though these actions 'touched' the recorded vocalisations, they never followed the same logic or pathway—meta-performance perhaps. The poses recurred and frayed, like old phrases becom- ing increasingly meaningless or overloaded through use. The body struggling against becoming a cliche. Of what? Of itself.

Compared to Trail's thoughtful, at times ecstatic, implicitly sexual linguistic force, Yumi Uminourae's performance was immedi-ately disturbing. Should one laugh? Is it okay to laugh at someone else's horror? Can an Anglophone laugh when heard in Japanese without appearing insensitive or culturally smug? Aural hieroglyphs from the perspec- tive of the Anglophone, words transformed—transfixed—rendered as 'pure' sound or affect by cultural and geographic distance.

Umourae entertained her audience, but she did not let them off lightly. She was, however, more reluctant than Trail to reveal in smashing. The sticks she wielded acted as ambiguous talismans of the quake zone, memory and experience. The core of the performance was Umourae 're-enacting', trying to phone her relatives in Hanshin.

"Hello!... Hello!... Hello?" Echoing calls degenerating into violent, hysterical shouts, and even a psychic space outside of this. An implosion of space, time and emotion. The venue becomes an abstract, amnestic thea- tre in which Umourae imagines an event she herself was denied. The walls 'shackle' she mined for us, breaking through language for a moment. Umourae's adoption of an almost childlike, tragically performative mode suffused the space with an over- whelming sense of presence and absence, of felt pain and the impossibility of its recapture. One moved from Trail's almost organic celebration of smashing, to Umourae's ambivalent attempt to recapture it.


Crashing the party
Philibuta Rothfield

Although Kate Desborough's Birthday involves 2 members of the crew's inexist- ent family, it has a solo ring to it. This is because the feelings of the piece centre around Desborough's existential self-questioning. Birthdays can do that to you, sometimes creat- ing solitude in the midst of celebration.

The set is small. A little bit of a house comes crashing down. A party is held. The audience are the party, that is, apart from Kate who does everything. She owns her own party games amid a choreography of excite- ment. Funny how sad it all seems. The bigger the gesticulation, the emptier the gesture. Finally, a headpiece is revealed, a sort of silver galaxy with orbiting blue lights. When the headgear is fitted, the piece changes from witty, funny, and sad to surreal. This is the larger-danced section of the plotwork of beautifully shaped legs and turns and tother- ing unkn Owness, turned inside out. The walls of this small universe provide anchorage but not direction.

It takes Dad (Michael Desborough) to bring his daughter out of her existential nau- ses with cake and champagne. But before they leave, he faces away, his mortality getting the better of him, leaving our hero alone again. The wall momentarily functions as an artificial partner, another self, the heir of loss. Bit too god- damned good can a wall be? Luckily, youth saves the day and dashes across the stage to grab a mouthful of cake. We leave Kate seated by the young music- ian (Christopher Bolton), having her cake and eating it too. A thoughtful piece that comes from a deep emotional place. Three cheers.

Birthday, choreography Kate Desborough, direction John Bolton, perform- ers Kate Desborough, Michael Desborough, Charlotte Gelletly, Luke Gage, Kristan Green, sound Frane Tetz; CUR. Maltbouse, September 14-16.

Michael Pearce, Flow

Flesh/parchment/flesh

Michael Pearce is a well established stage and costume designer for dance and recently won a Green Room Award (his second) for the set and costumes in James Kudlak's Room. (Megan Dance) (Australian Dance Theatre). His latest solo exhibition, Flow, was inspired by an Asianlil residency in Hanoi.

A series of drawings were hung on gallery walls, some overflowing onto the floor. They were shaped like Chinese wall hangings but their content was different. Most of the drawings were of body parts, feet, head, face, wrist, arms. They vivid colours reminded me of the impressionists' deconstruction of white light into the spec- trum but in this case, the subject was a body in movement. Even in stillness, the impres- sionists' concern was with the animation that makes a body alive. My favourite piece was a pair of feet, tapping the floor from the wall. In this interpretation, you could feel the his- tory of practice that has formed this particu- lar pair of feet, the uneven weight distribu- tion, the irregularities of its toes.

Pearce used a ghosting technique to sug- gest a trace, a not-quite presence related to the very palpable flesh of his work. Even the parchment began to look like skin to me. I was reminded a little of this year's Sydney Biennale exhibitor, Adriana Varajo, but where her flesh is thrust in your face, Michael's very gently emerges somewhere between you and the work.
Chunky Move dances the irreducible

Philippa Rothfield

According to anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, mythology is the means by which society expresses the mysteries of existence. These enigmas are not apparent to the naked eye. Rather, they lie beneath the surface of the stories we tell ourselves, locked in deadly embrace. If Levi-Strauss is right, then Chunky Move's Hydra is a work of mythic proportions. The name and its sur­rounding publicity suggest a mythical inspiration for the work, but it is also possible to interpret Hydra in the narrower sense suggested by Levi-Strauss—as standing for the irreducible conflicts that underlie human existence.

Hydra opens with twin figures who seethe through the shallows. These sexual crea­tures seem not of this world. Their wetnet flesh suggests that they hail from the depths, whether of mind or matter we do not know. Their natural habitat is below, undersea, throwing up into the world that underlies human con­sciousness. But are we not here to plumb the depths of each and every mystery.


The last section of Hydra involves a live per­formance by Michael Kieran Harvey on piano and Miwako Abe on violin. Repeated waves of musical consciousness lap the action, hiking us into still­ness. The otherworldly temporality of the music breaks any sense that the end of the work is at­earthly one. Rather, there is an inductable move­ment towards a trace, one which leaves everyone drained. The sense is meditative.

What then are we left with? Hydra can be seen as a battle between oppositional forces, per­haps where man/machine and woman/nature (not again) But it is richer than that. Firstly, the mor­tals' movements are complex; they are definitely skilful yet they manifest a human fallibility.

Choreographer Gideon Obarzanek leaves the world of displayed virtuosity for something else here. Second, there are several fine kinaesthetic interchanges, duets and trios, which need not be reduced to a single storyline. I like the abstraction that washes over Hydra. It's thoughtful. If it is about the conflicts of myth, these dwell way beneath consciousness. It is not for us to plumb the depths of each and every mystery.

Hydra, Chunky Move, choreography Gideon Obarzanek in collaboration with dance artists Pia Low, Luke Smiles, Kathryn Dunn, Sarah-Jane Howard, Michelle Hooven, David Tyndall, Stephanie Lake; musical com­position James Gordon-Ander son, Derrin Verhagen; design Rhubod, National Theatre, Melbourne, August 2-12.

Powerhouse dancing: Les attitudes monstre gai

Indija Matjeboeddin

Triple Bill opened the Brisbane Powerhouse's inaugural Fattitude 27°5, an annual event of con­temporary independent performance intended to showcase risk-taking fusions of dance, music, and installation art alongside forums, workshops and masterclasses. Curated by Zane Trew and Gail Hewton, the intention is to support independent artists and small companies by providing a plat­form to make new work, assistance to build net­works and to highlight opportunities for visiting overseas artists, and the connections to get their work shown beyond Brisbane. Fattitude 27°5 offers 3 weeks focusing on Australian dance and instal­lation artists beginning with 3 new works by Brisbane choreographers.

Sharon Boughen's Bleeding 6 Part is a moody exploration of love, desire, manipulation and obsession, sensuously danced by Fiona Malone with Tim Davey. Three scint scintillating pro­viding layering and texture initially veil the duo. She appears in the doorway, her body and face hidden as she steps to the next screen, each time she adds clothing items—layers—of separation. Susan Watkins' deftly craft­ened soundcape of cello, piano, and spoken text gives body and substance to the whole. More lay­ers—tips for young women from the Vogue beaut­y book, a manual on preparing nibbit carcasses, love scenes from Cole Porter, the laboratory dis­section of a rat, erotic secrets of an imaginary lover—words juxtaposed against movement driv­en by the feminine point of view. Always the female wooling, the male resisting, rigid, passive. By contrast, his narrative is a left unperceived. A prop for her to propel herself relentlessly against—towards—hurting herself at desire, receding from his touch.

The second piece, Ain't no reason, an image, a sound, but an image projected, dancing with the narcissistic ghost image of her­self as her lover, a heroin, before the image dis­ solves into 'he' and therefore turns away from her.

The perspective evokes a scene in which two lovers play a game of hide-and-seek, hiding and seeking each other, one of them always just out of reach, just out of sight, just out of the... 

Another exit: high-flying fowling for the flick­land looks-past...eyes in her feet, in all her body parts. Quivering, questioning, quiedy feet. Despite the brief lapse, O'Neill's Fugan San is powerful, playful. With no agenda, it demands no explana­tion. One could charge O'Neill with conservative formalism, or banal decorativeness, but Fugan San transcends that by the shamanistic power of the per­former. With a noble reticence to disclose her secret narrative, Fugan San does not invite us, she simply embeds her mysterious journey, and I want to follow.

The set of Monster loosely suggests a Hammer horror, its gothic doorway, its deepes splattered in lipstick pink blood. A scream in the dark. Now he takes it back. "What, did you think I'd serve you up a monster just like that?... Fuck off!" Monster is a highly personal work for dance and text by Brian Lucas, supported by Brett Cotter's eloquent soundscaping, to explore the iconography of Frankenstein's mon­ster, the politics of the monstrous and the mon­ster itself, but weighted towards the relationship break-down that drives it, sparking the inquiry into monsters but never really descending into the deep. These are the monsters of bad faith. There are 10 ways to hit out at the lover who deserted you—stapling his trouser legs; hiding 6 pork chops around the apartment, eating the beloved to his father.

As if writer, performer and choreographer all know each other, Lucas presents a hybrid per­formance—a space where movement and text arise out of the same impulsive; a self critiquing narrative that turns over and over, folding in upon itself whilst winding its way forward through love story, childhood revenge, the father's story, the lover's revenge. 'One! Two! Three! Four!... such a Control Freak' Lucas parodies his choreographer, himself. Dad-monster shuffles and swears—"Pig

Aren't you Cute?'—his fingers wobbling.

The demanding range of performance skills is delivered with assurance, seamlessly moving between dance and dialogue, between multiple strands of narrative: creator/creature, father/lover, woman/nature, choreographer/performance. But the risk is the monstrous, monsters of domestic pettiness prevail, pivoting on loss of self esteem. For me, only this monstrous father evoked the kind of revulsion and pity that challenged.

In this self expression made art or an effort to make artistic capital out of a surplus of self? Is this monster a power-break manipulating us into con­doning and approving of his monstrous, perpetually ironic cancels itself out. By setting up and pulling down, Lucas wants to have his cake and eat it too. Raw, exposed and self-absorbed relationship therapy. Whilst compellingly performed, I feel Lucas relies on a sophisticated complicity from his audience, implicating us in his revenge tactic. no 5. to: "analyze his relationship breakdown in a performance piece." How mon­strously decadent!

Triple Bill, Bleeding 6 Part, director/designer Sharon Boughen, writer Michael Richards, dance/artists Tim Davey, Fiona Malone; Fugan San, cre­ated and performed by Michala Perrin; Butterfly Scher, cre­ated and performed by Brian Lucas; Tattitude 27°5, curators Zane Trew, Gail Hewton; Butterfly Scher, Brisbane Powerhouse, September 5-17.

Indija N Matjeboeddin is a theatre-maker, who writes performance text mainly in the romanflu folk opera tradition. She directs and per­forms and is a founder of South Kaetel. Her latest work The Butterfly Seat is featured in the recent QUE/Paylay press publication, Three Plays by Asian Australians.

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RealTime 39 October - November 2000 39
About time: the Pompidou Centre revamped
Diana Klaosen

Le Temps, vité! is a thoroughly absorbing and ambitious exhibition. The title can be idiomatically translated as something like "Look at the time! Hurry!" but it also alludes to the speed of time's passing.

The "new" Pompidou Centre is exceedingly popular and busy. Although Richard Rogers apparently pulled out of his and Renzo Piano's revision of their creation because it was becoming "too much like a gallery!"), the enormous structure now accommodates visitors more efficiently and comfortably and is easier to find one's way around. The innovative "inside-out" architecture remains.

Like numerous events the world over, Le Temps, vité!, the first major exhibition to be installed in the re-opened centre, is inspired by the year 2000 and a new century. Utilising a vast gallery space, it is installed in 12 sections, the number having the obvious associations of hours of the day and months of the year. Without being likely to alienate the unwary or uninformed, Le Temps, vité! is a darkened minicinema with 50 contemporary photographic versions by artists such as Cindy Sherman and Robert Mapplethorpe. Another segment, "Language and Time", refers to the way concepts and descriptions of time punctuate everyday speech and define and contextualise our sense of where we are and what we do. A fascinating, if simple feature is a sound installation repeating the word "time" in more than 60 languages, the majority of them very obscure. Elsewhere, another simple but immensely effective installation is a darkened mini-cinema with 50 contemporary French writers on film reading aloud, one by one, from Marcel Proust's novel La Recherche du Temps Perdu (In Search of Times Past). No matter what one's comprehension of spoken French, the hypnotic flow of these readings and the gravitas brought to them by the various readers make this a thoroughly compelling sound-work.

Gradually the gallery visitor comes to realise that major and emerging contemporary artists feature more than once from section to section—"Measuring Time", "Time", "Working Time", "Memories", "Real Time"(!). "Irreversibility", Christian Boltanski, Warhol, Bruce Nauman, Marcel Broodthaers and Claude Closky, for example, are encountered again at various stages of the exhibition yielding interesting and often unexpected new readings of their works.

Not surprisingly in an exhibition celebrating the re-opening of one of the world's most innovative, high-tech galleries, the new media in their many forms are a very strong feature. Digitally generated prints and photographs, especially from French and American artists, are prominent. Amongst many videos, Steve Reich's 1995 work City Life is a highlight. Sound-works, too, are a major element, with evocative contributions from artists such as Laurie Anderson, Pierre Boulanger and Heiner Goebbels whose complex "sound environment" is inspired by a literary extract with a digitally remastered vocal soundtrack.

A huge specially constructed library features hundreds of fiction and reference works on aspects of the theme of time. Here, a vast bank of interactive screens enable viewers to visit a comprehensive range of sites that further investigate and expand the topic, mostly from a scientific or philosophical viewpoint. One of the most interesting features a very accessible interview with Stephen Hawking, known of course for his pioneering work on the origins of time and the universe.

Gradually the visitor is guided—or drawn—through the show, each area partitioned by gauzy fabric so that one is always just aware of what is to come. The lighting level in the gallery is low, presumably to protect the more fragile works, but this also creates a sense of being in a separate, womb-like space, self-contained and private. As if external space and time no longer exist...

The average gallery-goer could hardly expect to take in all of the exhibition with its thousand-plus works on display, or its changing, daily film screenings, readings, dance installations, improvisations and music and theatrical works. Nevertheless, the sheer breadth and range of the Le Temps, vité! means that even a single visit makes for a highly satisfying experience. During 2 months in Paris, this was one of the most engaging shows I visited.

Diana Klaosen was at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris recently on a Gouldan Sappin-Jahoulster Scholarship from the University of Tasmania.

Le Temps, vité!, Pompidou Centre, Gallery 1, Paris, January - April.
Against the wall: the art of Anne Wallace

Maryanne Lynch

Maryanne Lynch interviews Anne Wallace, winner of the 1993 Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship and the 1999 Salaman Prize, about her first solo show in her hometown of Brisbane.

Paintings turned to walls, life-still moments, and colours inspired by Jimmy Stewart and the Wicked Witch of the West—this is the world of painter Anne Wallace.

What do you see when you look around?

It's a slightly strange thing—looking at my past presented by someone else. I would have put in a slightly different show if it had been me selecting. But in the end I'm glad the responsibility was taken away from me.

What might have been different?

In my early works I was looking for a "subject." I think about painting differently now. I don't feel I have to paint "reality" any more.

There's been a fair bit written about you in relation to this question of reality, particularly in reference to the question of realism. Is your work figurative painting?

To my mind, it's not. Or not in the sense it's given in that type of statement. I find the term "realism" totally inappropriate. It immediately opens up the question of what is real. The kind of criticism that calls me a realist painter is the kind that attacks me on the basis of anatomical incorrectness. Sure, I'm not the greatest painter but that's not really the point.

What is the point?

I enjoy painting the images I want to paint, without worrying about whether they're justifiable on that sort of level.

You've mentioned in an essay an interest in "lifelessness" as opposed to the traditional figurative attempt to convey life. Is this nudging towards what you mean?

It's a lot of figurative painters dislike about my work, that I'm not creating something "lively." I was never comfortable with that. It's the way I do it in part from getting some other to pose, photographing that and then realising that the photo is closer to what I wanted anyway. That removes some distance.

In a work like Damage, it's precisely this use of human form in a "lifeless" way that is vastly disquieting and very effective.

I think it's because it's a painting of a woman from the waist down to the ankles—it's quite deliberately cut off at those two points—wearing a short skirt, with rivulets of blood running down her legs. It's not splashy, she's perhaps wounded but there's no real sense of this; it's supposed to look like spontaneous bleeding. Her legs look quite alluring, and what she's wearing and the way it's painted are supposed to look elegant. And I wanted to have the blood as a horrifying vision. It's not about violence against women but rather how much more people, femininity, at some stage in their life, is somehow frightening.

I didn't read the image as at all violent against women. In part because the female figure has her back to us. A motif you use quite a lot.

The back view is something that gives you less access. It's the thing of not being able to see someone's face: it can be disturbing, especially when you put it in that context.

Can you talk a little more about your interest in "lifelessness" and how you achieve that?

In most of my work the bodies are alive but it's the way I choose to place them that counts. I suppose the subject of my work is in part to do with death, like some of the works that have really influenced me. They have that aspect of something that's not quite shown, and that can be very unsettling. I remember seeing this painting by David, of Brus sitting in the corner of a darkened room, and in the background you can see the soldiers carrying in the bodies of his dead sons and all you can see are the little legs, the calves. I found that image frightening when I saw it as a child; it had a big impact on me.

I get the impression when I'm looking at your work that although there's this emphasis on the human form you're not actually concentrating on it really only as a way of containing something else. It's the psychological content of the work that's more important. When I hear the term "human form" it makes me think of an abstract ideal figure that has no meaning. In my work the forms do have meaning even if the figures are generic.

Then why so many female forms?

Put it this way, it's something that's just happened. I remember talking to someone once and crapping on about how it's—about female experience, and then reading over that interview and thinking this sounds not what I'm about at all. I've painted male figures but they've definitely been eclipsed. I don't know—a matter for an analyst perhaps?

Along with the female form and the partial shots of moments, you seem to have a certain palette of colours. Rich but contained.

I used to have an extremely monotonous palette, dominated by earth colours, because I felt I still had to paint things that are real, whereas now I really like the idea of totally fabricating colour. My favourite film, like many people, is Vertigo, and that has got the most fantastic colours. I remember seeing them, these jewel-like colours, and thinking I'd like to suffuse my work with them. There's a particular scene where Scottie is having a nightmare and the colour is changing back and forth, and there's this amazing mauve...I'd love to do something like that.

If I can generalise at all, I see the colours you use as glinting, even metallic, with something soft underneath. I do have certain colours that I like going into, like poison green. I don't know in what childhood story the witch was green. The Wizard of Oz? That's another movie with fantastic colours. Colour is something that's a strange issue. On the one hand if you're painting something representational you have to use it, but then again I want the works to look autonomous. So for instance in Damage there's a particular green that's derived from chrome. I use a lot of chrome colours. They have some metallic aspect, they're also very artificial, very strident.

How does this fit with what I'd describe as the cool beauty of your paintings?

What I enjoy doing is to use oil painting, which is the closest thing to a pure commodity these days and therefore totally kitsch, to paint figurative paintings that are very polite but also disturbing. It amazes me when people want them on their wall! My work is pushing towards doing things that are almost tasteless, really strange. My latest work for instance has a woman sitting on a bed crying, her face all contorted.

May your work should be hung face to the wall?

Personally I like to turn them around. I feel like I'm producing a pointless commodity. To put it in its most extreme way, and it always falls back one step to where it's polite and contained. I want to do something that is almost like an alien infestation, an alien occupation, that takes over the painting.

So where are you heading at the moment?

I think my work's broadening out a bit. Now I'm doing more inanimate objects, situations without a figure in them—they're not as readable along those lines. A work, for instance, like Night Unseen, of a door with water coming through it, with a real schlock sense because of the green. What I'm hoping to do are works that are getting less and less readable but still obviously representational. There's also a little element of humour.

Does that mean you're still exploring the psychology of being? I read your work as often exploring what is in-between, what can't be held or said or whatever. The inexpressible is not exclusively, it seems, human.

Sometimes you wonder who you are and you sometimes get snagged on that, and you can almost work yourself into a trance where you're not actually a person any more. There is an element of something else, outside of that. In a way I'm drawn to stuff you can't know, or can't explain.

Private Rooms 10 Years of Paintings, Anne Wallace, curated by Simon Elliott, Brisbane City Gallery, Brisbane, June 27-September 10.
SALA's rare mix
Chris Reid

As artists continue to investigate cross-media combinations and audiences continue to learn new viewing techniques, this year's South Australian Living Artists Week (SALA) included the new Moving Image festival, whose main element, Mixed Messages, comprised 22 short works over 2 nights, permitting rare combinations of media, including live performance, video, computer-generated imagery and sound.

Shrimshok’s delightful A Paper Gathering by the prolific Yoko Kajio, involved 2 performers atop tall ladders on the Mercury Cinema’s stage, dressed in long, sumptuous paper gowns that shrouded the ladders. Pulling strips of tape from their mouths, they wore patterns silhouetted against the screen. Two others similarly dressed danced on stage, the screen showing a late at dusk with 2 airborne seagulls, the soundtrack blending birdsong with music.

In Alton Main’s animation Memento Mortem—Ehmejama’s Explorations, an elderly pink dinosaur escapes her nursing home to re-discover adventure and passion. The dinosaur is a comic, melancholic figure in this blend of silent movie and cartoon formats. Margaret Dodd showed a series of short films of beautiful scenery (Alton Eye), made for the intentions between TV programmes. Each film, though less than a minute, was accompanied by fulllength credits, their repetition annoying audience members. But these punctuation ironically contrasted with the film content: something about TV presentation.

Samantha Oster’s Silent Night was a short erotic film concerning 2 sisters, Justine and Juliette, one obsessive about cleanliness, the other sadistic; the result—murder. The cinema screen projection was complemented by another projection on a smaller screen. Doubling the image testified viewers’ cinematic focus, echoing the binaries in the drama. Kristian Thomas’ The Pseudo Sound Project combined sampled and electronically generated sounds, with a colorful image on the screen—fine for discos, but not something to sit and view unless sedated. Sonja Porciu’s TouchBinds, Ambrosia and Scarlet involved the artist reading texts on stage in front of taped visual imagery.

Porciu’s quiet monologue deflected absorption of the text.

Stephen Housten’s outstanding untitled work comprised 4 elements: a slowo video of pedestrians in Adelaide’s shopping mall, Housten reading a text concerning Adelaide’s Indigenous inhabitants, actor Tommy Darwin, in a black cloth cubicle, with a camera relaying him as he declaimed a confessional on an adjacent monitor, and Simon Bobb telephoning Adelaidians at random, seeking their thoughts on SALA Week, their astonished responses broadcast through the auditorium.

Darwin also featured, with Caroline Farmer, in Michelle Luke’s The Mechanics of Subtle Persuasion. Two 30-something girls, on skateboard and roller-skates, with video cameras strapped in front of their faces to relay close-ups to the cinema screen. Their taped voices reveal their private thoughts (‘...the sex is sweet but tentative...’) after a bare-arms pickup, while they pull away from each other, their wheels sliding uselessly across the stage, their forced smiles larger than life on screen. This piece was tight and the staging emphasised the human drama—artificiality, superficiality, confused appearances masking self-doubt and fear.

Experimental use of media does not of itself make art. Content must be interesting, affecting, conceptually resolved, and the choice of media should inform the realisation. Continually shifting your attention from one spectacle/language to another is like crashing 2 rabbits at once and catching neither. Most of the works in Mixed Messages were based principally in one medium, augmented by another, defeating realism. Blended forms look beyond narrative. We read symbols, metaphors, in 2 levels, it is within the narrative and within the media themselves. The Mechanics of Subtle Persuasion, for example, worked because each set of symbols complemented the others. The meta-language depends on coherence within and between constituent languages.

South Australian Living Artists’ Week, Mixed Messages, curator Jo, Hobbs Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, August 6-10.

Airing WA treasures
Bec Dean

Something in the air besides dust indicates that the joys of spring, and monsoon of spring-cleaning, have recently disturbed the concrete psyche of the Perth Cultural Centre. Apart from the emotive responses that come with the airing of substantial chunks of history and hidden treasures. The past month has been marked by 2 large exhibitions of works chosen from both private and public Western Australian collections, with the basic primary objective of bringing the work together under one roof. Centre. One aimed to fill a vast space to consolidate the private collections of Western Australia with our largest public collection, while the other attempted to recapitulate the production of Western Australia’s oldest art and design school over the last 100 years. Side by Side at the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Perth Technical Centennial Exhibition at PICA coincided in the city’s most conspicuous cultural precinct.

Nothing that declares itself the biggest, most comprehensive exhibition of its kind, is a daunting or exciting prospect for any gallery visitor, depending upon your agenda. No amount of sensory fine-tuning could have prepared me for the wall-to-wall gallery of the Perth Technical

Centennial Exhibition that crammed 600 works into PICa. The exhibition was accompanied by an ardently researched book of historical importance and an additional essay, Now and Then by local critic David Bromfield, detailing changes in teaching techniques at the Perth Tech. With the lack of any visible curatorial prerogative, the exhibition appeared as if it clearly wanted to move to a shopping centre. It was split into several vaguely organised sections—the ground floor was dedicated to contemporary work from each of the schools and the upper galleries were arranged in a kind of chronological hierarchy.

Individual schools vying for equal representation on the ground floor encroached on each other’s space, a possible political issue that more careful curation could have resolved. Contributing to the confusion of an already undefined, exo layout, the Design for Industry, Graphics, Fashion, Jewelry and Media components focused on the work of recently graduated students, whereas Fine Arts was dedicated to the contemporary work of successful local artists who graduated from the school in the 70s, 80s and early 90s. Among these many works, there seemed to be no reason for the over-representation of certain artists, or the cluttered salon-buff format of paintings and works on paper.

The curatorial problems of mounting significant and varied bodies of work have been managed by the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Side by Side through individually curated shows that span the gallery spaces. Like the Perth Tech Centennial, which was immensely popular, emotive responses to the sheer breadth of Side by Side have also been significant. The loan of works from the private collections of Stokes, Holmes a Court and Grunthan, and the corporate collection of Westfarmers, have allowed an exploration of ideas to flow through the associations between artists working at the same time, or traversing particular social or conceptual issues.

The People Place component of Side by Side curated by Brenda I. Croft was exemplary in its examination of the work of predominantly Western Australian, contemporary Indigenous practitioners including Yvonne Koolmuntie, Julie Dowling, Roy Wiggan and Joyce Winesett. Croft’s placement collapsed the conservative conceptual space between works considered to be of the desert, and those of urban “contemporary” Indigenous artists.

Upstairs, the galleries were divided by formal concerns with light, scale, texture and geometry.

James Angus’ Giraffe was placed in relation to Susan Norrie’s 2 large-scale, vertical paintings, Seductive and Poisonous Fly Paper. Howard Taylor’s Light Figure was exhibited alongside Claude Monet’s LaBaty Point, 1867 side. Another gallery, curated by Trevor Smith, examined subjects of sexuality and violence with works by Bill Henson and Gilbert and George flanking its entrance.

In a certain sense, the gallery has undertaken on a grand scale that which it practices as a matter of course. The Perth Tech Centennial Exhibition drew upon the vast local history and personal collections informing the lives and practices of generations of Western Australian artists, relying upon a deal of nostalgia and genuine good will to compensate for somewhat overzealous presentation. Side by Side on the other hand revealed the extent to which the accumulative acquisitions of Western Australians can become a conspicuous part of the fabric of an artistic community, and the real need for more spaces to be dedicated to their public exhibition.

Side by Side, curator Gary Dufour, The Art Gallery of Western Australia, August 12-October 4; Perth Technical Centennial Exhibition, curator David Bromfield, PICA, August 26-September 17.

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Paranoid detective investigates gasfitter

Russell Smith

Shawn Kirby's work is something like a text, a rebus. The objects are so minimal, so signlike. Like words, they're empty, arbitrary, and meaning- less as things-in-themselves, intelligible only through their relationships. But rather than the joyous challenge of the riddle, Kirby's is the creepy syntax of the enigma. A riddle is made by removing key elements of a totality, giving you just enough pieces to put it back together. The enigma is altogether different: everything is there, but there is no totality. The work demands interpreta- tion, but you know in advance that all answers are wrong. Like a good detective, however, you gather clues.

1. An lofted corridor of wooden frames, draped with clear plastic, and lit from within as if to insist upon its transparent emptiness. At its head, a photograph of a small courtyard behind an intricately tense block. A closer look reveals that a flat has been demolished, and what we see are the remains of its inner walls—wallpaper, bathroom tiles, traces of kitchen cupboards. It's literally unbuildable—the domestic interior turned inside out. Side walls are enveloped in the same suffocating protective plastic.

2. A photograph of a wooden workbench encrusted with wax or grease.

3. A stylized illustration of a man reading a newspaper. His glasses are cracked or clouded over, and the newspaper's masthead hovers on the threshold of legibility, yet he wears the facile leer of the satisfied customer. Am I a blind reader? Hey, steady on!

4. To his right, a rack with 6 hooks, from 1 of which hangs a hammer with 6 heads sprouting from its central shaft. It suggests a kind of para- noid condensation of force, which at the same time renders the hammer exceedingly awkward, even dangerous to its wielder.

5. A lightbox illuminates a photograph of a canvas wrapped in a slate of the same clear plastic.

6. A low yellow shell runs along one wall of the gallery, turns a corner and disappears out the back. A small pane of glass stands near one end.

7. A large spider-like frame constructed from angular sections of black metal supports a photo- graph of an open window. On the windowpane is a casual doodle: stick figures, or a spider, some- thing, nothing. One of the spider's legs is raised against the yellow shell, denying passage, claiming territory. You have to step carefully between its feet to approach the photograph.

8. In the corner, 4 short walls haphazardly break up the space. There's nothing there, just walls, but they screen a shadowy corner you investigate nevertheless.

9. The catalogue gives you a kind of factual slogan: SURPLUS OMISSION, SURPLUS ENJOY- MENT, followed by the words of a song, "The Laughing Policeman" of 1926: "Oooh Hoo Hoo, Hoo Hoo HA HA HA HA HA HA HA ."

So, there it is. Like the gasfitter, perhaps, you make connections. The sinister overtone of the slogan, the hammer, the swastika-like spider, seem to point to a familiar historical nightmare. Like the gasfitter of the Third Reich, you're only doing your job, not? Rather?

But these are merely answers, guesses at a rid- dle. If the riddle is personal, insisting on the recovery of missing contents, the enigma is neu- rotic, insisting that you learn to live with your ignorance. Like the blind reader with his illegible text, you can laugh it off.

All the same, The Gasfitter does involve secrets. Like a good (paranoid) detective, you do a little research, ask around. The beach, for instance, has been used for centuries to roll cheese in wax. Cheese is a Kirby signature: the rotten stuff of the repurposed, layered wax covering the sink. The man reading the paper is only half a picture, the "missing" part of which shows a girl firing a gun. The witless citizen is so wrapped in his newspaper that he doesn't see the bullet with his own name on it. The stick-figure doodle was idly drawn in the condensation on a bathroom window by a stranger in a cheap Berlin hotel. A private moment captured and magnified, it becomes strangely disgust- ing, too much intimacy.

Let's get liminal

Virginia Baxter

Walking into the exhibition that is the ACP's provocation to Sydney's Olympian obsession with perfect bodies, The Liminal Body, you wonder whether that's formula you smell or photographic chemicals. Of course, it's neither but more than other exhibitions this one draws your attention to the complex sensory experience of gallery going, and more than that, the physical and psychologi- cal manipulations necessary for the viewing of depersonalized flesh.

Dispensing dreams of disembowelment, that chance sighting of a medical textbook at age 7, not to mention a recent encounter with the sur- goner's probe, you walk through the rooms, your eyes peeled. Even so there will sit, you can't face. I'll spit it out. Blood and incision are my downfall. Bodily dissected on morbant slabs leave me cold. I decline Sue Fox's invitation to look—even though I know she's a Buddhist—I walk the line of her "meditation upon death" with even my peripheral vision out to lunch. Then feel I have misunderstood something. For a moment I fear it might be the same with Dieter Huber's Klomos yelling at me from the small gallery at end of the line of cabinets to come see. But the expense of skin too, too much like the inside. I retreat my steps, run the gauntlet of cadavers and head for the foyer to talk to the artists who are gathered for this preview viewing. In the ordinary act of eating sandwiches, the ringing in my ears stops and is replaced by the calm voice of Austrian Dieter Huber talking about his published works in which plants and landscapes are manipulated in the computer to produce impossible flowers and fruits, lush landscapes of implausible places. Intrigued, I decide I can cope with Dieter's deadly clones. Standing in front of them I feel like Rosemary who had to look at that baby even though she knew it was going to look like the devil. Then I find it hard to look away from these explorations on the possibilities of flesh. The skin of lip and tongue is morphed with the skin of genitals. All manner of sensual trace memory is triggered by these sights.

You could go wild in this room if it wasn't for the sober portrait on the adjacent wall—Kloesel #14 homage to the self portrait of Albrecht Dürer, the photographer's face with all the sensual offices closed off with skin—no eyes, no ears, no mouth, no nostrils (see page 5). "Possibly the future for art (for the artist) is to look inside and use some- thing like a stethoscope with which to perceive the exterior world." I zip my lips and think.

A similar interest in the eyes of the subcon- scious drives the work of Diana Thorneycroft. Her extraordinary pictures are evidence of her inten- sive stagings for her self in which she varsally binds, straps, blindfolds and confines her body in scenarios that look at first like S & M fantasies but on closer inspection (and that's what it feels like) recall claustrophobic dreams and, depending on your persuasion, dark desires. In the flesh, Diana Thorneycroft is a fresh faced woman from Winnipeg. Like an actress she feels her way into these photographs. Though still I don't under- stand how exactly she does it, somehow she does.

And there she stays, Diana and Nikon, her camera lens open wide to receive the light she emits from the small torch she carries. She doesn't know how long it takes exactly. It can feel like hours. Perhaps the sense of time is the first threshold we cross as trespass the interior world.

The Liminal Body, Australian Centre for Photography September 8 - October 15

Shawn Kirby

Photo Alan Cruickshank

Diana Thorneycroft, untitled (Corona)
Andrew Kettle: sound jeweller

Andrew Kettle is a Brisbane-based sound artist whose works have generally dealt with experiments in noise and tonal perception. He is incredibly active (to the point of hyperactive) in the electronic music scene with regular interstate performances and collaborations while hosting a regular slot on radio station 4ZZZ - Atmospheric Disturbances. I first met Andrew at last year’s ADAPT (Analogue Digital & Physical Technologies) festival in Brisbane where he performed several works including The Turing Test for 8 electronic organs and a mammoth 5-hour piece, Drone 9, which exploited the acoustic properties of an alley way for an immersive experience that included the listener’s whole body. I was interested in hearing what he had planned for ADAPT this year, so I met him at an appropriately noisy cafe in Fortitude Valley where he had laid out 2 rings of resin with lengths of black signal cable attached. Close inspection revealed that coils of copper wire were ensnared within the clear resin.

They’re induction microphones for the ADAPT performance. A performer wears them on their fingers and uses them to interact with electromagnetic radiation given off by domestic appliances. My performance has this little temple set-up and one element is a microwave with a child’s cooking and the other is a television. It’s a half-hour performance starting with programming the microwave...

My performance has this little temple set-up and one element is a microwave with a chicken cooking and the other is a television. It’s a half-hour performance starting with programming the microwave...

so what shifted you into working with sound?

Firstly, my exposure to computers in the early 90’s and playing around with software to produce tones from formulas and computer voice generation. The computers were nothing special, just XT’s—you can get more powerful pocket calculators these days—but it was great stuff. Secondly, I was living out on a property to escape city life for a while and listening to Radio National a lot. I was hearing the effects of snapping activity on the signal, hearing it fade in and out from day to night.

You were listening to the texture of the radio signals themselves?

Yeah, I’d be listening to 4QR and hearing this strange squealing sound in the background. It was snapping activity interfering with the radio waves—really amazing stuff. I became interested in static and the noises of technology. Last year at ADAPT I gave a masterclass on noise, about where to find noise and how to incorporate it into composition, looking at different sources of digital noise and static such as snapping activity. I showed how mobile phones interfered with musical equipment using a home organ.

...and one element is a microwave with a child’s cooking and the other is a television. It’s a half-hour performance starting with programming the microwave...

All of that led on to the desire to find more sources of electromagnetic noise and I began working with inductive microphones to reveal the sounds of CPU chips in computers, fax modems, scanners and whatever else. I was working with all this digital equipment to produce analogue noise! Some of that material will be used by the Melbourne animator Junia Walle in her short film <dEssays>. The soundtrack will consist mainly of noises from different domestic sources such as computers, microwaves, televisions, alarm clocks, anything—whatever makes electromagnetic radiation in the house.

You’re obviously very interested in taking domestic items and appliances and turning them into performance elements. Is this a common thread in your work?

I suppose one of the requirements behind the elements that I use is that they have to be cheap and ready-made. I did The Turing Test performance last year with multiple home electronic organs. In the late 70s and early 80s all these drum machines and electronic keyboards became cheap enough for most people to buy and as a result, in the midst of all this, electronic dance music was created. I was looking at the end of the 90s for what was cheap and nasty for people to reappropriate and saw that home organs in The Travelling Post were 50 bucks. So I acquired a few of these for the performance and also as a source for parts such as speakers and small amplifiers to use later on in other works. But in the end it wasn’t so cheap after I’d bought 8 of the things and it was a nightmare to cart them around—I still have 4 in the garage! I said I’d never do that again but I was still interested in using organs. Anyway, at Christmas I found some cheap little kids’ organs for about 3 dollars and pulled them apart to make these electronic mouth organs which I used in a piece called Earth Hum. Great or innovative designs can be quite simple and essentially it was about looking for what I could do cheaply because, in Brisbane, experimental music doesn’t pay for itself.

You’re also interested in the sensual aspect of a sound environment. Drone 9 seemed to be about highlighting the sonic properties of an acoustic space and how a listener perceives those properties when immersed in it.

One of the main motivating elements in my work is wanting to accentuate the senses so that people can have a comparative experience as well as becoming more aware of their senses outside of the range of everyday life. In Drone 9 I wanted people to directly experience pure tones. The electromagnetic stuff I’ve been doing lately involved going around the home and looking at what was actually radiating and realising how much of this field we live in as a permanent state of existence.

It really is a bittersweet world, isn’t it?

Yes, it is! You look at normal domestic reality and you think, “God, the world can’t be this boring!” then you start revealing electromagnetic radiation and suddenly, wow, there’s all this stuff going on! Stoves are brilliant—the hum you get off stoves just give you a nice physical feeling. It’s a powerful field that you can play with totally and dynamically by moving in and out of it. There is really an aesthetic quality to static. But you also realise that when you’re cooking everything is immersed in intensified electric radiation and you start thinking, “what is that doing?”

So any device you find could potentially become an electronic instrument that works like a Theremin in that you’re using the body to interact with its electromagnetic fields in order to produce tones or hums?

Yes, that’s right. You start wandering around finding all these sources and perhaps begin to think maybe it’s a really unhealthy environment you live and work in. It’s really a spirit of exploration.

Like a prospector finding a rich seam to mine...

It’s really exciting now when I look at a new piece of equipment like a digital camera. I wonder what it’s creating as far as electromagnetic radiation is concerned. Digital equipment is great for that, actually being able to hear the CPU and all the data being shunted around on the motherboard—it’s wild stuff! And it does have that chaot ic appeal in that you listen to it and hear all those patterns bubbling up. It’s like a new organic in a strange sort of way. I’m interested in looking at the new sounds extracted from our society as the source. The more technology advances the more potential sources of sound are being created.

Richard Wilding

Andrew Kettle, Nocturnal

Nocturnal, Andrew Kettle, ADAPT, Metro Arts Studio Space, Brisbane, September 9–16, Electrofringe, Newcastle October 5–9
Early Spring: new music
Keith Gallasch

This year's Sydney Spring International Festival of New Music, the 11th, was sprung on us early in August, well clear of Olympic compe-
tition. Under the artistic direction of pianist Roger Woodward, the annual festival of mostly contemporary music (Arvo Pärt was a recent guest) has varied in scale and impact over the years. Eny Tan's managed, at last, a single home for the festival, The Studio in the Sydney Opera House, are making for a more coherent sense of occasion, supporting what has become Tomoko Takai's remarkable persistence.

Opening the festival with a multimedia per-
formance, Exile, was a good move. Not only is the work utterly engrossing but it attracted a wider audience who might not otherwise see this festival as theirs. And, as so often these days, music is finding significant space in these new works. Stuart Day's score for Exile, mixed live, is quite formal in the Minimalist manner of its unfolding, but has its own voice and is suffi-
ciently open-ended to respond to Dutch artist Tomoko Takai's partly improvised performance. Its etherial qualities perfectly matched the layer-
ing of video images that absorbed the audience.

Mary Moore is one of Australia's very best stage designers. In recent years she has turned to creating her own work—in the 1998 Adelaide Festival it was the ambitious Masterkey with 4 Japanese performers and a remarkable interplay of stage objects and projections. Exile is a simpler work but in many ways more powerful.

From out of a very dark space spring grid-
lines, moving exactly 10 transposed, uncoordinated screens which reach up either side of the front rows of the audience. The effect is mildly vertig-
ious (and morno later) as we struggle involun-
tarily to estimate this new space. The gridlines later, if momentarily, open out into impressionis-
tic images of trains and buildings, but remain an abstraction, the city in which an old woman moves alone and without connection. Eventually she leaves the city carrying her few belongings on her back, the screens filling with a rocky landscape that moves ever upwards. Her exilic,
complete, she unfurls her cloth bundle, reveal-
ing a beautiful kimono. Soon she is dazzlingly transformed, moving through the barest memo-
ry of a dance, a rare moment of rich colour amidst the whites, blacks and greys of the projec-
tions. The images fade and so does she—as if a life has passed.

I was reminded of Shosheit Imanuma's The Ballad of Narayama (1983), in which a mother is removed by her son to a bleak, rocky valley where the elderly are by custom left to die—for the sake of the survival of their village in a brutal scarcity economy. In Exile, the drama is solitary, but nonetheless the idea that banishment is forced on the elderly, now by social indiffer-
ence, is strongly felt. Exile is a memorable work and deserves to be widely seen—it's playing in the Shanghai Festival this November.

For just over a week, Sydney Opera ran a concentrated program—a selection of perform-
ances are reviewed on these pages. I had the pleasure of catching Robert Curry and Stephanie McCallum piano duo their way through Liszt's A Faust Symphonie with courage and aplomb. It's a refreshing change from the orchestral ver-
sion and sounds considerably more contemporary. I've got a bit of a thing at the moment about piano duets of major works: Hobi's The Planets (Nixon CD; excellent except for Jupiter) and Shostakovich and companion playing his

The surprising thing about Pereira's solo concert was the sheer range of musical expres-
sion he attained. The cello has an intrinsically beautiful tone (it's even beautiful to look at), yet the compositions performed were not content with the deep briticism usually associ-
ated with the instrument. Of the 4 works, all by contemporary Australian composers, 3 incorporated electronic treatments of the cello, played back on disc while Pereira played live. This produced a multiplying effect: at times it seemed as if the cello seemed retracted into a diverse versions of itself, at others the record-
ing provided a cello 'wall of sound' which challenged the soloist to interact with.

Carl Vine's Inner World, written for Pereira, is a dense interplay of the live with the electronic. A skillful work, it also requires great skill of the performer. Pereira succeeded admirably in the role of solo performer whose every musical expression was treated and fed back into a multi-synthesizer system. Nigel Westlake's Ommatospheira, originally for bass clarinet and digital delay, has been adapted by

Pereira to form another multiple work for cello. Phrases and rhythmic patterns are lay-
ered in delay, creating a complex weaving for the solo cello. The delay technique, also used at times in jazz, created an agreeable jazz-like air of improvisation in its pattern of call and response.

Martin Wesley-Smith's Welcome To The Hotel Turista is an ambitious musical reflec-
tion of events in East Timor. Pre-recorded sound creates the ambience of a battered hotel in the midst of devastation. A foyer piano and the sounds of violence outside form the back-
drop for a 'metaphysical cello', recounting the destruction of East Timor. While the effects were at times laid on too thick by Wesley-
Smith, and the hoponk-tok piano occasion was occasion-
ally an irritation, this piece effectively depicted the madness and pain of life in East Timor since 1975.

Peter Schuhporhe's Requiem, For Cello Alone was the odd one out in this company, standing alone without electronic backing. But it was no less powerful for that. Its plaintive influence, allowing large spaces between the lines, emphasised the long slow notes of the melody. The effect was of stillness and solemn-
ity, expertly achieved by Pereira.

There is no doubting The Song Company's technical skill and sense of adventure. In a context that evening they brought to the stage a new kind of boundary crossing, an exploration of contemporary works by international com-
posers; if the works themselves were uneven, the unifying aspect of the concert was the pas-
tion with which The Song Company per-
formed them.

One problem with contemporary vocal music may be that while there is now a vastly expanded repertoire of vocal techniques—
including spoken word and extreme vocalisa-
tions—those techniques are now so familiar that they risk becoming banal unless properly integrated into a greater whole. However, The Song Company's vitality and, at times, humour, kept the concert going. The most resonant composition was saved until last: Gerard Brophy's new work Pink Edges. This multiari-
ous piece ranged from quirky vocal irrever-
ence to lavish harmonies, achieving a unity across diversity.

These 2 concerts were both full of beauty and surprise. They were executed with sure technique and a love of new music. The musi-
cal adventure they took us on deserves to have even more along for the ride.

David Pereira, The Song Company, Spring Music Festival of New Music, August 12

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RealTime 39 October - November 2000 45
11th Sydney Spring International Festival of New Music

Composer self help and due rewards

Gretchen Miller

Composers, critics and audiences should adjust the way they approach new music, according to Barry Conyngham, the new Chair of Australian Studies at Harvard University. Delivering the second Peggy Glanville Hicks Address, he called for composers to feel the confidence in themselves that they so richly deserve. Despite the diversity and productivity of composers—at their highest level in the 60s and 70s—Conyngham feels there is still a sense of Australia being tied to the apron strings of Europe. Composers should worry less about what critics and funding bodies think and judge first of all for themselves the value of their work. They should also support one another rather than compete and squabble amongst themselves.

Ultra-modernist pulse racer

Gretchen Miller

There’s nothing like an ultra-modernist to get publicity racing and Pierre Boulez’s Sur incises, at the finale of the Sydney Spring Festival did just that, under the elegant hands of conductor Roland Peelman leading some of Australia’s top performers, including Daryll Pratt, Alison Low Choy and Claire Edwards on percussion, Stephanie McCaullam, Robert Curly and Daniel Hencovitch on pianos and Marshall McClure, Genevieve Lang and Louise Johnson on harp.

To me the work called upon the instrumentalists to function as one meta-instrument—this was one giant piano—and the musicians carried off that intention. At one side of the hall normally placed picnic tables ricocheted onto the giant keys of the vibraphone and marimba, at the other, the notes seemed to run off into the string structure of the harp, like so many baby grands turned on their sides.

The piece was particularly evocative when harp and vibes worked together—the harp ringing with a single extended vibration or—when the music, watery-like, rocked, ran, swept and swayed across the instruments in an almost three dimensional effect. Notes fell like bricks dropped from a great height off the end of the piano and onto the harps where they seemed to vibrate.

Of course, Boulez would never refer to the work in such an impressionistic and sensual way. It sprang originally from a piano piece, Incises, written for the Concourses Mitchel competition in Milan in 1994. The original work (performed by Stephanie McCaullam at the beginning of the Boulez concert) was about the expression of even the tiniest notes and the cementing role of the marimba in the quartet, but the percussionist’s new interpretation placed no doubt on Sur incises involved a further expansion—hence my fanciful interpretation of the meta-piano.

The audience was rightly rapturous at the end of this high-energy 45 minute and the musicians also appeared ecstatic. I felt as if I’d been taken on some strange journey where all was expansion and contraction of musical time and space, the notes exquisite in their meaningfulness—just what I like from a modernist composer.


Australian music: an Adelaide celebration

Chris Reid

Spanning a fortnight, the Flinders Street School of Music’s first Festival of New Music comprised 20 concerts of works by over 70 composers. The most commercially and critically acclaimed was Internationally acclaimed percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson returned to alma mater as musician in residence.

Opening night featured two concerts. Students and graduates performed Betty Heath’s Points in a Journey for piano, flute and coun ter tenor (in which singer Gordon Combs stood out), Margaret Sutherland’s clarinet quartet, and solo flute works by Larry Sisky and Richard Meale. Also included was Ross Bond’s Meditation, for the really hardusto do, an early instrument resembling a recorder and evoking Japanese shakuhachi music. Rebecca Johnson beautifully rendered Meale’s finely wrought and evocative Mothman. David Barnard’s performance, of two of Gillian Whiteman’s Four Short Pieces for piano, excelled.

A staff concert followed, with a clarinet quintet by contemporary Adelaidean Raymond Chapman Smith, and Allen Hall’s first string quartet, which, though delisive, was delightful. There were some fascinating solo cello pieces including Peter Sculthorpe’s Requiem for Cello Alone. For Claudio Sculthorpe’s Sequence for Solo Cello was the most radical composition—written in 1967, it remains powerful, using dramatic technical effects and requiring great proficiency and musicality in its realisation.

Tomlinson’s outstanding recital of solo percussion works opened with Erik Griswold’s magical Hypnotic Strutus for drums and cymbals. Warming up the crowd for further exploration of the cymbals was California Coastal Round (1990) for marimba, xylophone and taped electronic drone explores harmonics and tonal shifts. Tomlinson’s own composition Practice (2000) exemplified her renowned ability as a performance artist. Offering a microphone she included vocalisations and the sound of paper clips rapping onto a horizontally mounted bass drum, suggesting a play of the mind. Gaerne Leek’s and now for the news (1985) uses woodblocks, bells, gongs and taped Vietnamese voices to make political and cultural points. All six pieces were season highlights.

Perception featured throughout the Festival, with two quarters, Percussion and Stick’s N’ Tones, giving separate recitals. Most interesting was Sculthorpe’s Sonata for Viola and Percussion, in which Kate Szeman’s strong work on drums, tam tam and cymbals combined with Gyula Csejtey’s mournful viola.

The festival included two composer competitions, both intriguing events. In the Adelaide Chamber Orchestras Trust sponsored competition, students were to write a work 60 minutes long for the ensemble comprising clarinets, saxophones, violins, double bass, percussion, trumpet and trombone, in the form of an overture to Stravinsky’s Th Soldier’s Tale. Stravinsky’s famous work needs no elaboration, so an overture is both redundant and a compositional challenge. The winner of the $1,000 prize was Kat McGuffie, whose work began and ended with powerful crescendos between exploration of instrument styles with colour and drama, meditative at times and forceful. The competition was close, demonstrating the strength of the School’s composition cohort.

The second competition was for solo piano works. First, second and third-year composers were required to write tone simply but rhythmically with pieces of up to 150 seconds. All were of high standard, the most effective using the compositional constraints to inform their content, for example using awkward rhythms to express an idea. Third-year McGuffie’s and first–year Jeremy Gordon’s works stood out.

The festival included a tribute to Trintin Cary, a pioneer of electronic and electroacoustic music, known for his film scores and contributions to Dr Who. The concert included works by Cary and by composers influenced by this significant Adelaide figure. His Black, White and Rose was broadcast live on National Music Australia on ABC FM radio.

The Festival featured a retrospective of the work of David Harris, including the delightful Composer XIX—In Memory of Doctor Harris, performed on air by the Adelaide Chamber Singers. Composer XIX means ‘able to coexist with’, and Harris frequently juxtaposes seemingly disparate forms and textures, here portraying the later form of Palmer’s capacity to unify disparate elements in the community. Harris’s piano work, Variations on a Sixteen Note Program—Shadows into White (2000), performed by new music specialist Gabriella Smart, is lyrical and melodic by comparison with his earlier, starkly minimalist and heavily textured style. His superb For Yasmina of 1992, performed expertly by the dedicatee, is a minimalist work for marimba, comprising 36 short phrases of repeated three-note clusters. Harris’s work seems simple; only in less expert hands does their difficulty show.

The final concert was a grand affair, commencing with Hurtle’s Fanfare for a Ceremony and finishing with Gunther’s Irish Tune from County Derry. This Fabulous festival provided opportunities for audiences to hear new and older Australian work and for students to gain invaluable experience and feedback. Familiarity with Australian composers is usually through works for orchestra or chamber ensemble performed as concert curtain-raisers, but here their lesser known works were showcased, overviewing the development of their music. The School is to merge with the Conservatorium of the University of Adelaide, a move that appears unpalatable among students and staff. It is to be hoped that opportunities for such festivals are maintained and extended.

The Festival of Australian Music, Flinders St School of Music and other venues, August 21 September 5.
Double vision: recent Sydney performance

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4. Sitting in the front row of Wharf 2, the curtain billowing in my face, I'm about to see more doubles — 4 young adults kept isolated from society and flung together in pairs in an austerity pit (a dirt floor with a single channel of water running through it) to be watched from above (behind a glass panel) by a couple of aristocrats keen to see what happens to these innocents... to see just how innocent they are. Benedict Andrew's realisation of 18th century French playwright Marivaux’s La Dispute (translated and adapted by Timberlake Wertenbaker) proved to be powerful, intelligent audience-pulling theatre, sublimely designed by Justin Kuznet (not unlike contemporary German stage design but not at all derivative) and featuring a phenomenally idiosyncratic performance from Leonn Walsman, eerily reminiscent (a complex inner self, a slightly off-kilter physicality, a risk-taker) of the young Gillian Jones. Marivaux’s hands take on the child deprived of normal social training (not the Rousseau-inspired Romanticism that was to come) has a hit and miss relevance for modern audien ces. The production always engages and the raw but controlled physicality of these near-adult children under the tutelage of their black monarchs (whom they turn on with sudden, as if infantile) racism) is expertly directed and choreographed. A disturbing dynamic of the Enlightenment formality and uncustomed wilderness drives the production. However its ending is cruelly inflated when the aristocrat experimenter attaches his silencer to his gun and executes his 4 charges—who cannot even recognise death when they see it. This was a production really worth seeing and bodies well for the Sydney Theatre Company's exposition of a dangerous wing directed by Andrews and Wesley Enoch. Sadly, my body turned on me for a second time the very night I was supposed to see Enoch's Black Medes.

5. I went to Nikki Heywood’s Inland Sea twice, to try to see what I was seeing, to not make the same mistakes of the previous year. I am always the same one. I think of ways it was curiously literal — but see if I could connect with it. I’ve been long haunted by the power of Heywood's earlier Burn Sonatas (1996; toured to Next Wave and regionally in 2000) and the intense realism of its non-realistic scenario (waves and cycles of connection and disconnection in a family). In Inland Sea the same family are visited by an Aboriginal woman. The timber wall of their house opens and they are suddenly inland, in an alien land. A child is lost/murdered, each of the family enacts some personal drama—that’s a brutally short and misleading synopsis but it’s necessary. When reviewers and audiences were asked at what wasn’t working in Inland Sea, a common response was "Edit it!", or 'Drop the text’. Granted, the lost child scenario starts up just when you think Inland Sea already has more than enough on its plate to work through. Granted that the text, moments of felicity aside, sits on the production like an unassimilated layer (a condition exacerbated by the use of handheld microphones). But what if the problem is not resolved by cut and paste? What if the problem is more fundamental? What does it mean for a suburban family, to date all interrelated and almost unassimilated? Suddenly be transported to the inland/outback (see similarly, Suzanne Spanner, page 10)? Crucially, what is this “inland sea”? And is there in fact as insatiable lust for hurting the psyche of the urban sprawl? The "inland" of this work is stolen Aboriginal land, it is the white myth of the lost child, and the history of blinding exploration. Heywood’s very real, visceral, crazed family meets ideas, they enter a theoretical space. Suburban interiority seems unfurled at the apocalyptic inland (suggested powerfully by John Levey’s set and Heidrun Lohr’s unfortunately dimmed projections). And the meeting with the Aboriginal woman (and her ongoing presence) becomes a non-event. How much more interesting it might have been if, instead of being loosed on some great mythical outdoors, the family of Burn Sonatas had been forced to stay inside to face the Aboriginal woman on whose land they’d erected their hellish heart.

This is not to say that Inland Sea is a lost cause, but that Heywood needs to look not at how to improve the work as is, but to query its very starting point. The strength of much of the direction, the performers, the design and Garry Bradbury’s beautiful orchestration remains intact, although unlike Burn Sonatas played here like a score rather than something with its own source and vocation) is not to be denied.

Inland Sea, Performance Space, July 21- August 6
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