

RealTime

October - November 2000 No39 FREE
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+OnScreen

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** Giarrusso
- **Virgin Suicides:** reservations
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- **Animator** Adam Head

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Cover image

Kane McNay-Young, Nell Feeney, *Mallboy*, writer-director
Vincent Giarrusso. See interview page 13

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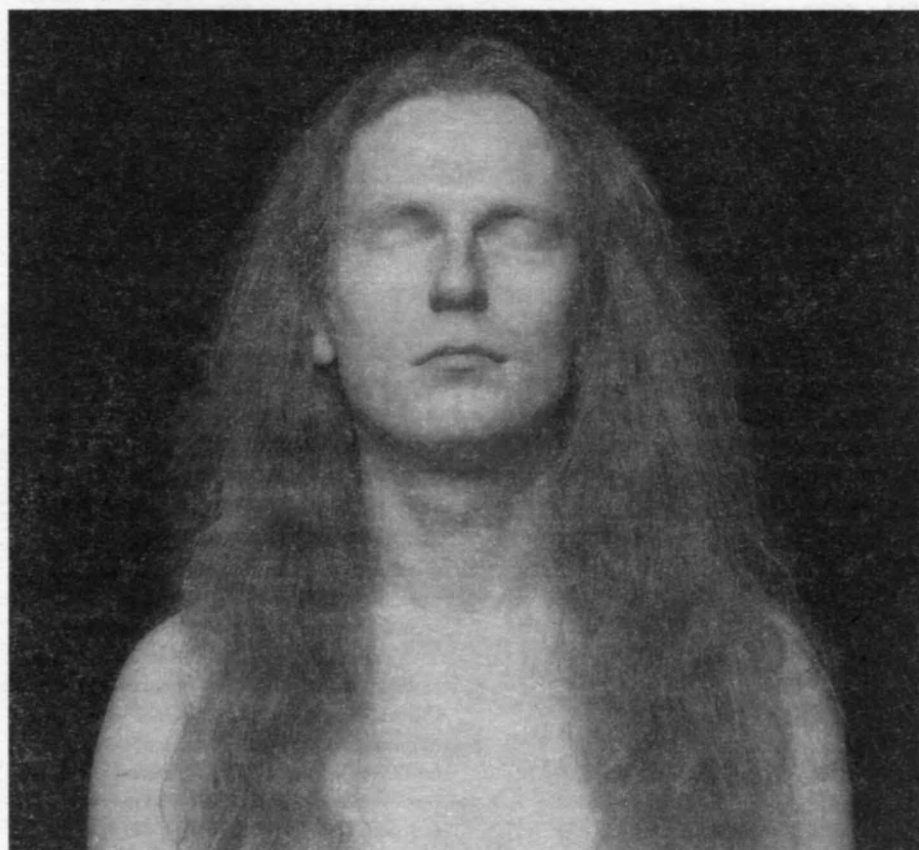
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Editorial



Dieter Huber, *Klone#31*, from *The Liminal Body ACP* (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 sway 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 *Busb Mechanics* (by David Batty and Francis Kelly for Warpiri 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 nov-

elist 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 community ventures 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 Palais*—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? KG

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TAS	Diana Klaosen	Print Post Approved PP 25500302078
		ISSN 1321-4799
		Opinions published in <i>RealTime</i> are not necessarily those of the Editorial Team or the Publisher. Copyright arrangements for images appearing in advertisements are solely the responsibility of the advertiser.
		© 2000 Open City and contributors
		Please contact the publishers before submitting manuscripts.
		Open City is an association incorporated in NSW and is funded by the Australia Council, the federal government's arts advisory body, the Australian Film Commission, the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts, FTO (NSW Film and Television Office) and the South Australian Government through Arts South Australia.

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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 decline 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 signalled 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 touching 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

Meatings: online writing and other communities

Bernard Cohen

An Australian novelist reports on his UK residency to Incubation, an international conference on writing and the internet organised and hosted by trAce International Online Writing Community at Nottingham Trent University.

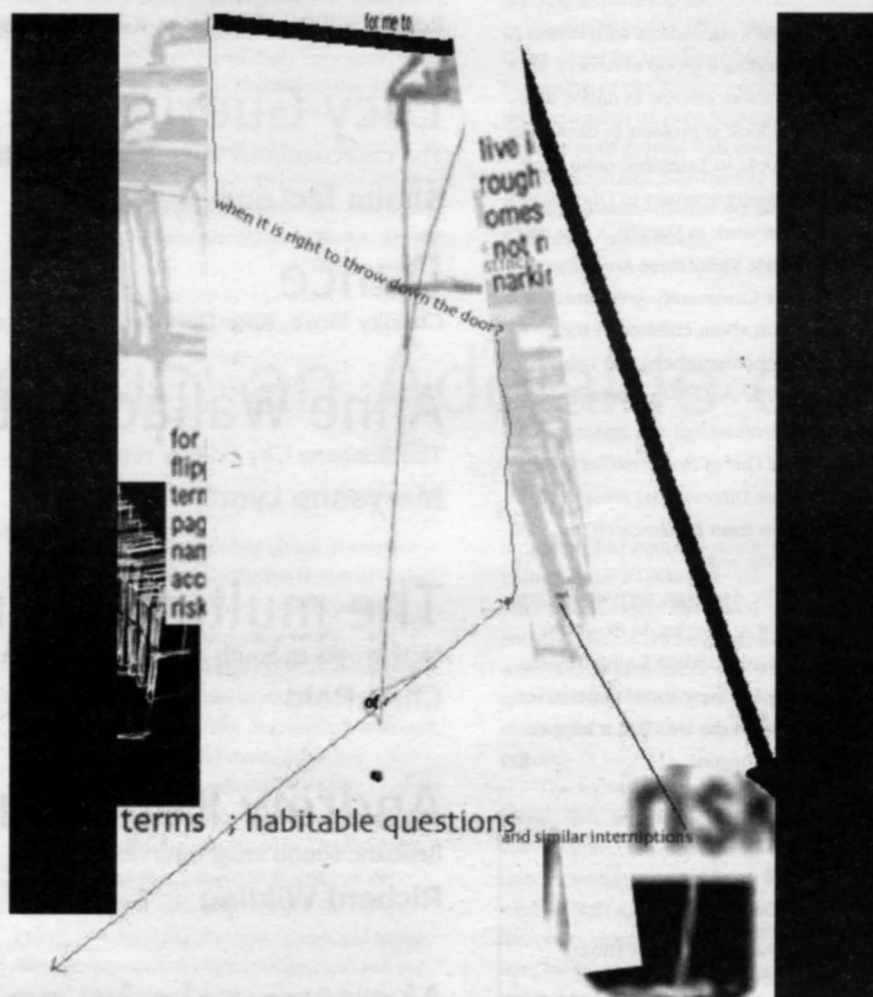
* * *

In this presentation I attempted to improvise a hypertext-like 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 had been placed in an arc for an earlier panel) at the front of the auditorium; 3. reading to individual audience members and showing 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 springing into the air and shouting "Asparagus"; 9. teaching Israeli folkdancing (specifically, Havu Lanu Yayin Yayin—this involved the entire audience, and necessitated an interlude of about 4 minutes, after which I continued the talk somewhat out of breath); 10. wandering up and down the auditorium's centre or side aisles; 11. striding along the centre aisle patting audience members on the shoulders in time with the words; 12. informing a baby how my own 2 year old had insisted I go straight to Teletubbies websites and how 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 trAce Writer-in-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 or link in internet era identity.

I was flesh writer-in-residence at trAce from June to December 1999 (2). I shipped my meat 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

I spent a good proportion of my residency travelling around the East Midlands... introducing internet possibilities to writing and other groups such as journalism students, recovering mental health patients, arts workers and librarians.



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 (I hope he'll excuse me for saying this) polemicist for the postmodern, 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 cylinder, 300 or 400 brain-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 money schemes, as the flight arcs over irrelevant places (10), totally aimed at destination.

(8) There has been a lot of reference at this conference to the rhizome as a model for internet story-telling. I don't know if this theory holds water, but I'd like to suggest as 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, and 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 coal-power generators (7). Does a narrative place begin with the sighting 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, and December. But to do that, I would need to remodel it in the Caesarean manner: I came, I saw, I overcame a number of minor technical difficulties and showed various people and groups in the East Midlands ways in which they might find certain aspects of internet culture and/or content interesting, useful, engaging, engulfing whereas others preferred other modes of research or creative production.

In June, I was overwhelmed with junkmail (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 (sic) 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 (sic) business relations with you. We are Haimen Sibai 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 for your early reply with keen interest.

With best regards,

Yours faithfully,

Shirleyffield Sanford.

I was a relative newby, 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 calls it a novel, but you might as well call it a gazebo or a stirrup pump" (6).

If you'd asked me in June I would have said (5): I find the internet, in its unrestricted, ungated, chaotic, non-hierarchical, improper, uncatalogued, misspelt, garbage-filled, shit-strewn, amateurly built, poorly argued, jargon-ridden, linguistically overloaded, fanatical, self-important, trivial, pornographic, commercial, hit-driven, disorganised, memory-swallowing, time-stealing, left-branched, paranoid, unfocused, meandering, self-promoting, meta-generic, error-message-prone, window-popping, security-promising, satisfaction-guaranteeing, new-age-philosophising, loss-making, anything-goes, direction-finding,

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The Palais: a possible community

Keith Gallasch

Pina Bausch's remarkable dance hall fantasia, *Kontakthof* (meeting place), was staged at the Adelaide Festival of 1982 in the ideal venue of the Thebarton Town Hall (I'd been to dances 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 *ballet tanz* in its feature "Dancing Age" (Issue 5, May 2000), *Kontakthof* has been revived in Germany by Bausch's company, Wuppertal Theatre. Reworked for a year by Bausch and long time associates Beatrice Libonati and the Australian Jo Ann Endicott (whose recent autobiography is very popular in Germany), this time the cast of 25 is not Bausch'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 transposed from the original. The distinctive skills, presence and very different strengths of older dancers are being widely recognised, most famously in NDT3 (Netherlands Dance Theatre's company for senior dancers) and the continuing practice of Mikhail Baryshnikov among others. It's not something you see much of in Australia, the occasional appearances of Elizabeth Cameron Dalman being a notable exception. But given increasing longevity and the not uncommon determination of artists to outstrip conventional retirement barriers, it's something we're bound 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 treasures and oddities around most corners in the building in the first part of the show. A sitar and a piano accordion make tentative improvisational exchanges before connecting, a choir rehearses, 2 musicians watching a video reminisce 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, shyly slips through), an informal lesson in Indian dance to tabla accompaniment is seductive, a jazz pianist with a glass of red wine captures his audience, 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 these people is overwhelming. But we are moved on.

Composer Richard Vella, who conceived *The Palais* with Mary McMenemy and UTP's Artistic Director John Baylis, and directed it with McMenemy, 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 *Tosca's Kiss*. That film "focussed" on the house built by Giuseppe Verdi for retired opera singers...the singers live in a world of the past, the building resonates with arias, choruses and duets". It is with this kind of resonance, but way beyond opera, that Vella and McMenemy welcome us as, 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 formally from the balcony and then the floor of the hall) we encounter sometimes bizarrely different musical experiences, some plainly presented, others theatricalised, some demanding great skill, some providing unexpected musical collaborations. Vella himself provides a score that yields melodic, winding choral complexities as well as a dark, engaging cello quartet and tabla combination.

Vella's second theme is "the musical result that occurs when musicians are required to play



Parramatta Town Hall

together...endless negotiations take place...In *Tosca's Kiss* memory is preserved while in the latter, memory is continually updated." *The Palais* is not simply a tribute to age, or an act of nostalgia: it's a challenge and often a daunting one, stretching musical capacities sometimes to their limit and demanding a stage presence that doesn't always go with musical ability. But the rewards in the course of a generous and epic program, while uneven, are frequent enough, especially as a sense of community grows between performers and with their audience.

In *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 music 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 near anarchic fiction of encounters, odd juxtapositions and sharings 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 Ragamuffin Ragtime Band (members aged 68 to 93) and rock and jazz fusion from relatively younger performers, including some great singing from a string of female vocalists, the big audience leapt to its feet at 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 rigour and vision (because it is an altogether different work), *The Palais* is seductive and incidentally 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, pharmaceutical-flogging, comparison-shopping, bad-poetry-propounding, more-is-more-aestheticising, history-revising, spin-doctoring, repetitious, unreliable, neurotically generous and sometimes beautiful incarnations 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 tiny breakaway enclave of Rutland—introducing internet possibilities to writing and other groups such as journalism students, recovering mental health patients, arts workers and librarians.

(9) One difference between online residency and flesh residency was that participants in the former were almost entirely self-selecting. They chose to participate in discussions on the webboard and for the most part chose to contribute to Christy Sheffield Sanford's *My Millennium* (www.trace.ntu.ac.uk/writers/sanford/my_millennium/presents.html) or Alan Sondheim's *loveandwar* (www.trace.ntu.ac.uk/writers/sondheim) or to my *Speedfactory* (www.trace.ntu.ac.uk/writers/cohen/speedfactory/speedfactory.htm) projects (10).

On that TV program-of-record, *Sky News*, it was reported the other night that although internet connection in Britain has doubled in the last 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 worked with many of these people.

While this produced some mutually frustrating 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 retired 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, hurried by the anti-union rabidity of the Thatcher government (3).

I was informed that a group of ex-miners wanted to write their history and stories online. Half way through the first session, a journalist 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 to say the least, but at this stage cannot entirely rule it out. The miners had been told I was conducting research for a book, and that it would be very useful for me if some would show up to assist with this (5). This meant that the most helpful miners, and some members of a writers'

group composed largely of ex-miners' wives, chose to come along, but that none had any interest in the internet. So, in the manner of farce, I'd gone along to make their lives better and they'd shown up to improve mine.

We did manage to find material, 19th century coalmining poetry, coalmining and mining history discussion lists (3). More importantly, people brought out their archives, writing labours of love and 60 year-old catalogues of mining machinery. (Some of this is now online at www.trace.ntu.ac.uk/writers/cohen/front.htm.)

Meantime 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 Handke's theatre piece *Insulting the Audience* (3). Later, trAce member Pauline Masurel and I constructed duelling sestina bots (12). (They're currently in the "trace" room at LinguaMOO www.lingua.utdallas.edu and are named *balagan* and *clamjambrie*.)

Christy 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 trAce (according to the Arts Council of England's *Dispatches* newsletter). Alan invited me to contribute to *loveandwar*. Instead (using a very

simple Markov Chaining program), I remixed an Act from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with extracts from *The CIA World Factbook* to produce what may be the ultimate in paranoid and bureaucratic Italian Romance (10).

In November, with Terri-ann White's assistance, I ran a superfast version of the collaborative e-mail writing exercise *Speedfactory*, a project devised in its long form by Wark and John Kinsella (5). In its original form, I partner e-mailed 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 trAce version, participants fired 50 words at each other 20 minutes apart. (The Kinsella/Wark/White/Cohen version will be published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press, hopefully within the next year.)

It's 7 months since the end of the residency, but I'm still involved with trAce (3), 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, trAce 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 embodies the energy of dancers in the process of becoming primed for life. Artistic director Jerril Rechter has situated *Primed* in the Inveresk Railways Tool Annex—a large and echoing workshop constructed from 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 (t)error 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 Verhagen's sound score evokes a Tibetan prayer bowl resonating pure sound from its rim. Two skateboarders mirror this effect by circling a huddle of dancers lying on the floor. Four women enter, each with a flashing strobe attached to their belt. Chelsea Billett demonstrates stylised movements which build to 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 lies 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 spills across dance to unrelenting dynamic and pulsing sound.

Site 2—Bedroom. Long strands of multi-coloured milk-crates dangle from the roof. Once released, the crates become seats 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 flirting, love and lust. Khans' languid images highlight an evocative interplay of limbs and bodies while hand-maidens unroll red and blue quilt covers onto randomly slanted beds. The actions of 4 entwined couples counterpoint dancers who sit or move alone. In a world saturated with commodity images of sex, this uncompromising sequence



Stompin Youth, *Primed*

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 revel 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 compa-

ny) is robust and skilful. These dancers self-launch from the walls with ballistic force. The operatic voice emerging from Verhagen'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 sur-

Stompin Youth is a young company experienced in choreographic collaboration and working in multi-medial environments. *Primed* is a sophisticated production...

vive 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 transitions across 4 sites. Launceston is fortunate to have a company that so effectively showcases the vitality and excitement of dance in a non-conventional theatre space.

Primed, Stompin Youth Dance Company in association with the Tasmanian Department of Education, artistic director/choreographer Jerril Rechter, choreographers/performers Cassie Anderson, Emma Anglesay, Sbeona Anglesey, Claire Barker, Chelsea Billett, Rachelle Blakely, Mark Brazendale, Jo Briginsbaw, Sally Anne Charles, Lilly Deeth, Elizabeth Elsbey, Eve Flaberty, Sarah Hankey, Lauree Harris, Kylie Jackson, Tanya Lobrey, Kate MacGregor, Kathryn McKenzie, Cheyne Mitchell, Amalia Patourakis, Chris Philpot, Sandy Rapson, Ingrid Reynolds, Cory Spears, Lyndsay Spencer, Natasha Tabart, Nicola Watson, Adam Wheeler and Linda Voumard; composer Darrin Verhagen, designer Simon Terril, dramaturg Vanessa Pigrum, lighting Jen Hector & David Murray, video/documentary Marcus Khan; Inveresk Railways Tool Annex, Launceston, August 31-September 2.

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

New silents, new music

Martin Walch

Huddled inside the warm hall at Tasmania's Moonah Arts Centre on a chilly night, the lucky audience for *Dusk Drive* were presented with a feast of silent movies projected as digital video, and backed by 4 of the state's finest professional musicians, Martin Tucker, Matt Lincoln, Paul Parnell and Don Bate. The dialogue between the live musical improvisation and the punchy short features created a viewing space in which I was totally immersed and enthralled.

This film, video and music collaboration emerged from a community arts project, *The Works* (produced by the councils of Tasmanian Trades and Labour and Glenorchy City). The material was to be shown at dusk in a Glenorchy City bus mall, but was hit by a deluge—thus the public premiere at Moonah.

The films are characterised by an impressive range of stylistic variations, ranging from Stella Allen's beautifully understated and very personal documentary of her grandparents, to the schlock horror of Felix Blackler and Morgan Neill'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.

Meat, by Mark Heseltine, is a Hammer Horror send-up with a gender inversion twist that makes vegetarianism look like a good option, and *He Works In a Suit* by Vince Barwick, Robert Davies and Tim Davies, is a stunningly crafted short film that calls to mind 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 Blundstone Boots which Kerr follows through a working day.

On a more whimsical note, *Career Opportunities* by Ben Cruthers 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 Becci Smith, Richard Brooke, Sarah Hadrill, Naomi Watts, Justin Lynch, Mathew 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 Max was a component of the project produced with the assistance of filmmaker Rick Randell. The brief given to 15 young filmmakers was to shoot a story within the boundary of Glenorchy City Council using 8mm 3 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 unpretentious 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 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 Cornelius and Diana Graf, 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 Glenorchy City Council with assistance from Arts Tasmania, Screen Tasmania, The Australia Council and The Tasmanian Education Department. *The Moonah Arts Centre*, Glenorchy City, Tasmania, August 10.

A little bit near, a little bit far away

Bill Perrett

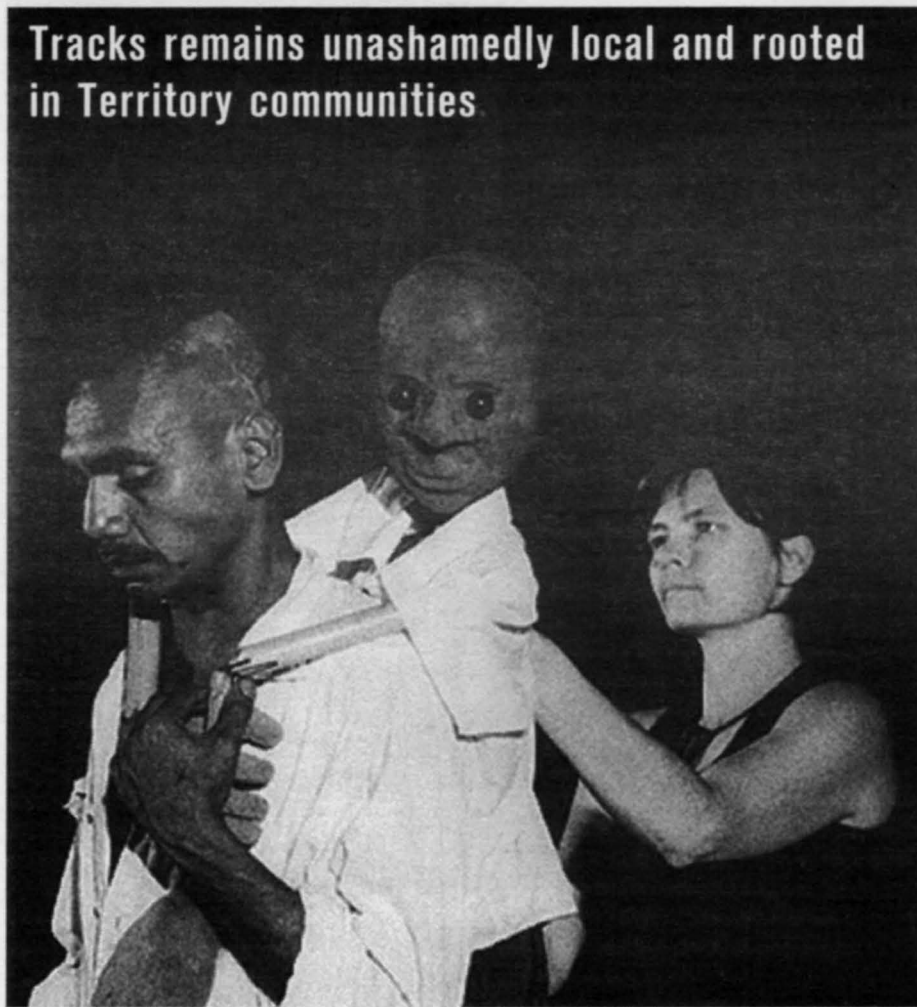
On a night at the end of the Dry, with electrical storms crackling over Darwin Harbour, and the lights of the port dotting the background, Tracks dance and performing arts company presented an exquisite evocation of local history in *Outside the Camp*.

Set in a flat sand space at Fishermans 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 operated, 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 Lieman. The figure of the boy, a jointed stick form with large dark eyes, became the vehicle for a powerfully emotive 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 poignant-

Tracks remains unashamedly local and rooted in Territory communities



Tracks, *Outside the Camp*

cy 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, starkly 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 Lieman, Stanley Stanislaus, Allyson Mills and David McMicken. It is a complex and beautiful performance, never overstated 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 Generation—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, Fishermans Wharf, September 6-9. More on the Darwin Festival in RealTime 40.

Oscillate's beetle dancing

Diana Klaosen

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 (Kyra and Rachel Pybus, Jasmin Rattray, Jessica Rumbold, Tullia Chung-Tilley, Edwina Morris). The group acknowledges the inspiration and support provided by dance teacher Lesley Graham.

The dancers share a background in dance/contemporary movement/choreography studies (Years 11 & 12) at Rosny College and have recent experience in the Hobart Fringe Festival, plus individual work with dance companies Tasdance 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-mixed 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-spe-



Rachel Pybus, Kyra Pybus, Oscillate Youth Dance Collective, *Scarabs*

cific 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 mouthpiece, 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 dancework a strong coherency.

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 gestures and sequences are attention-getting—good, athletic contemporary dance. The beetle theme is well maintained, giving the performance an other-worldliness wisely free of movement mimicry.

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.

Scarabs, performance installation by emerging choreographers, Oscillate Youth Dance Collective, Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery, July 20-23

Susan Richer on children, art and festivals

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.

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

Out of the Box, *Festival of Early
Childhood, Queensland Performing Arts
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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, teased 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 embarrassments, 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* tryptich, 1983/84). Most magnify a mystery or disturbance from childhood; even its clichés (ribbons, 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-medium 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—glazed eyes, pouting, glaring, clowning, vacancy... Children know themselves as powerful, significant, magnetic, and volatile.

PASSING DOWN. Another checkerboard mounting: enlarged, blurred close-ups, dolls' legs, skirts twirling, ferns, strung 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 blurs. Kate Butler's *Girlhood* is a chimaera of parts (though here I miss the ferocious side of the Chimaera). See-lust—a glossy shell seems to come out of a small nipple, a mollusc'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 across 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: *bas* there been a violation? The lighting is chiaroscuro, the effect, a chamber work. The naked girl's body, alone in its frame, is unmarked, seems dreaming to



Pat Brassington, *The Frog*

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

itself—*bont 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 constraints (Isobel 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 corroded or formulated their young self-identities. The pictures are psychoanalytic tableaux, often dealing with cross-cultural misunderstandings, detailed with the lucidity of cold-sweated dreams.

WEARING AWAY. Anne Ferran photographs remnant cloths from archaeological sites (Hyde Park Barracks; Rouse Hill House), allowing light to 'read' a 19th century 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 century insane). Their physiognomies only caught here as shadows, the photographs a moving monument to details of quiet, forgotten lives.

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

PEEKABOO. In Pat Brassington's work, orifices spit or spill red milks; a secretive string drops like a yoyo to the feet, a menstrual line direct to hidden labia off-frame. Although my preference is towards Ferran's less explicit *yoni* (archaic vaginal shapes) in the gap where undergarments fail to meet, these pieces nonetheless play subtle disturbances in their imagery. *What kind of knowing is this?*

BIDING TIME. The dummy-sucking 2-year-old, a naked Olympia but not for sale. Her eyes neither charming nor cursing Polixeni Papapetrou's lens. She mimics but does not fill the roles she's seen played out repeatedly in her mother's studio. Strangely barren, like those landscapeless, frozen portraits displayed in shopping-malls. She doesn't even strain against the portrait's desire to keep its subject still. This child seems to know her surface as a shield.

My own daughter runs towards the camera lens. Her spirit seems to pass through cameras lightly.

Telling Tales: the child in contemporary photography, Di Barrett, Pat Brassington, Kate Butler, Anne Ferran, Bill Henson, Nicola Loder, Mark McDean, Tracey Moffatt, Deborah Paauwe, Polixeni Papapetrou, Ronnie van Hout; curated by Katarina Paseta and Samantha Vawdrey; Monash University Gallery (touring exhibition), Monash University, August 22-September 9.

What next? The arts, age, regions & communities

A questionable rebellion

Suzanne Spinner

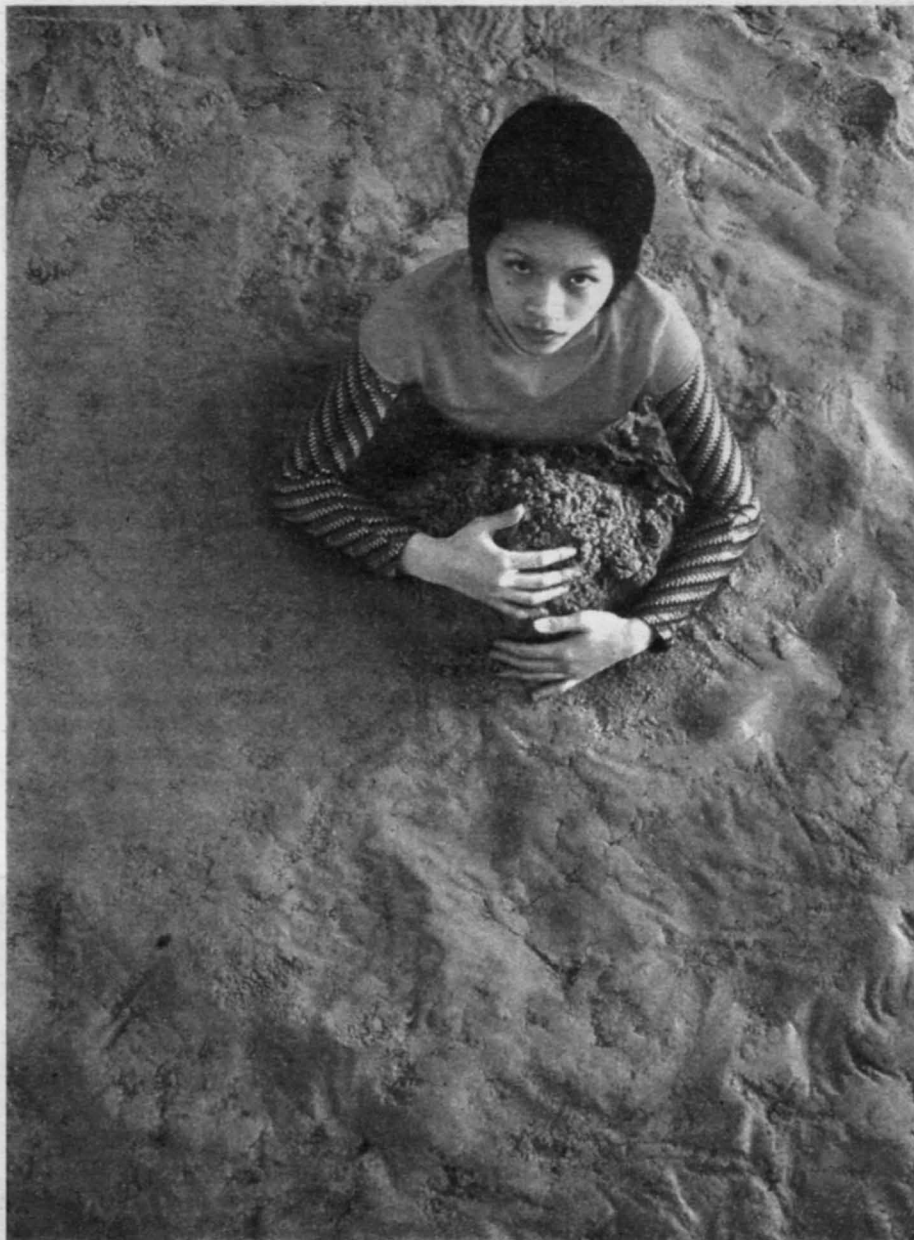
Chi Vu has written the migrant's rite of passage play about the inevitable conflicts between parents and children, between the lost country and the new one, the old language and customs and the new language and the adopted culture, played out in the battles between mother and daughter, for the daughter's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

A Story of Soil has been produced by NHO Stories for Footscray Community Arts Centre and La Mama Theatre, directed by David Everist and performed by an ensemble drawn from the community. It featured stand out performances from Hai Ha as Tien, the daughter, and David Nguyen as her younger brother.

It is always difficult to write about work which one comes with high expectations based on advance publicity and interviews with the writer and it is difficult to be critical of a first play, let alone one by a young Vietnamese woman, a first of a first. But the high profile production received generous reviews, so my remarks are made in that context.

Tien's story was to be shaped and framed by the story of different soils, taking us from the rice fields of Vietnam, to the western suburbs of Melbourne and, ultimately, "the vast, inhospitable Australian landscape." However, this ostensibly resonant "central metaphor" doesn't quite come off. Somehow the characters don't make us connect them with the soil of any of these sites. Vietnam exists more as a remembered urban world and the variously described "outback" and "countryside" of Australia is barely touched on, let alone allowed to affect the characters. The backyard soil is more present, it is where the girl's mother has buried a stash of gold which it turns out the daughter has stolen when she ran away from home.

A Story of Soil is an ambitious work. It is bilingual, employs song and has suggestively powerful poetic elements, but it falls apart and into banality, partly because the plot lines are not clear enough. How old is the daughter, Tien? Is she still at school, or at university? And how is she going with her studies? It's relevant because educational achievement is clearly important to her family. And exactly what is her younger brother up to? The press release refers to him being drawn into gang violence, but there is no indication of this in the play, although it is clear that as a male he is



Hai Ha, *A Story of Soil*, Footscray Community Arts Centre

less constrained. Perhaps the experience of the play is partial and limited for the monolingual, but it left me confused about the significance of Tien's rebellion. Was it understandable, even reasonable by Australian standards or if say, she was doing Year 12, fairly major in anyone's language? Was Tien a petulant, late adolescent or a rightly frustrated young woman?

Leaving aside what the Vietnamese songs were about, I did get longing and homesickness from them. It was curious that they were sung very finely by the Mother when the script does not make reference to her singing but, rather, talks about the great singing voice of the Father in Vietnam who, inexplicably, does not sing. I can accept and appreciate the songs as dramatic punctuation but they are contradictory at a narrative level. Similarly, what was the piano about? A story is related concerning the Father and a piano played in Vietnam. But Tien plays the piano at the beginning of the play and, later, the countryside/outback scenes happen around the piano. I was also confused by the meaning of the visiting uncle from Vietnam who seemed more at ease with the between-cultures dilemma than anyone else. Somehow that sat oddly with the apparent narrative. I liked the misunderstood Australian boyfriend because he was not a stereotype, although his story seemed to work against Tien's conflict with her family.

In the end, much more was suggested in this play than was realised. There was really no proper going out from the suburbs into the truly new soil of the countryside/outback, although from an interview with Chi Vu I learned that going to Arnhem Land was a turning point in her understanding of being a refugee. I missed that revelation in *A Story of Soil*. She is clearly a writer of potential and I look forward to reading her short stories and seeing her voice emerge fully in another play.

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 Digitarts' intentions, as Clare Murphy explains.

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

That's the cute way of describing the rationale of an 8-week project run by Digitarts in August. The project's key aim was to assist young artists from Queensland regions in gaining the skills required to confidently negotiate issues of representation as individuals, artists and members of communities on the web. The *wishu-*

erehere project includes a bit of everything that Digitarts 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 furthestmost 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 Grrrowl Grrl contribution and she will tell you that young women with a desire to communicate and create in a digital medium are Digitart's special priority.

On the Digitarts homepage, founding staff member Lisa Burnett offers us: "A Bit of History. Mostly about me, because I think sharing our stories, however trite, provides us with a common reference point—a place to connect." That's where the "cute" comes in. Digitarts 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 font on your way through their critical framework. Of all the things Digitarts 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 Digitart 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 splendoured 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 *wishuwerehere* allow artist and audience alike to recognise 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.

wishuwerehere is Digitart's most recent flight demonstration for those who marvel at how a project funded organisation with one part-time paid worker and a dynamic team of casual tutors, participants and volunteers can stay afloat amid unpredictable waves of funding. In response to community need, Digitarts emerges as a self-propagating model for cultural development.

wishuwerehere, August 2000, Digitarts project, funded by Arts Queensland, with community support of organisations and services: Graft'n'Arts, Beenleigh Area Youth Service, Beenleigh Library Internet Space, The Cerebral Palsy League Cascade Centre, Women's infolink, Contact Inc and Virtual Artists.

wishuwerehere and earlier Digitart projects, like art for the masses, grrrowl, simply lifeless and love you brisbane, can be glimpsed online at digitarts.va.com.au

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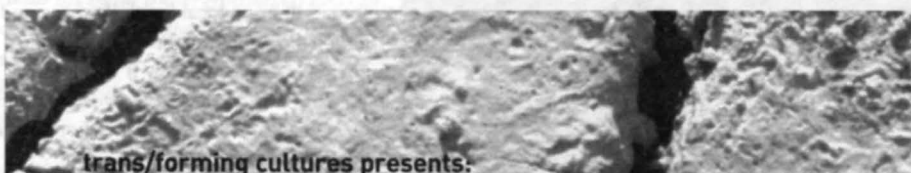
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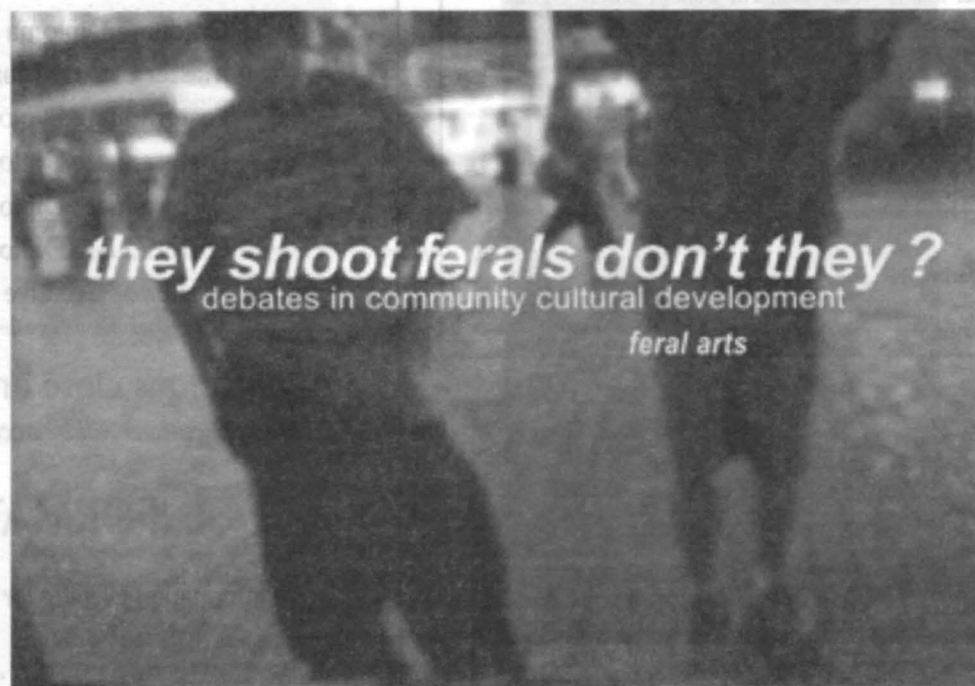
Existing in a wild, uncultivated State

Lucinda Shaw

The fact that community cultural development does not always result 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. 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 and sustained strong connections with South Brisbane and Dajarra, a small Queensland township that has an interesting and unusual history. Dajarra was originally the most western point of the cattle train line. The predominantly Indigenous (Walu Wurra) 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, Norm Horton, say that "There's a slow take up within the CCD sector with new technologies. A fair chunk of our program 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 Dajarra 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 come up on South Bank and around this area, a lot of money sitting here right on the river. Firstly they wiped out the pubs 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 Manbattan 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 24, *Placeworks*, a symposium at Southbank Parklands on place and culture will bring local South Brisbane and Aboriginal 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 funded through the Regional Writing Fund, and production work in South Brisbane and Feral Arts studio. *Whispering Grounds* will be launched later this year. Enquiries: feral@feralarts.com.au

"...existing in a wild, uncultivated State" is the text 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.



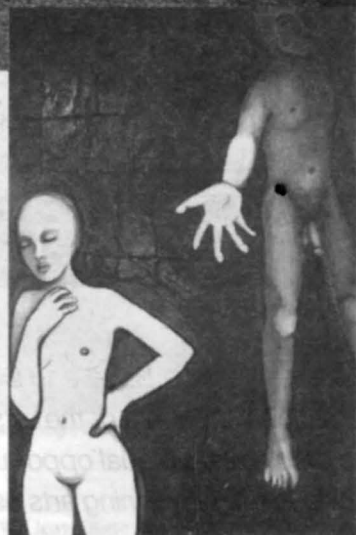
Tambourine Mountain

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 and innovation 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 AhNaid, Monique Brumby and Deborah Conway, Full Fathom Five, the intriguing Moto Niwa'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.

Evolution Festival, Tambourine Mountain Queensland, November 3-5. www.evolutionfestival.com. Festival Hotline 07 5545 4550



Bronwyn Davies

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) ie "an avalanche of psychological warfare." *Envy* is the first feature of this AFTVRS graduate who's made a number of successful shorts (*Kindred*, *Lily* and *One Wild Weekend with the Lonesome Rustler*) which have won prizes in Australian 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 in, change the sheets."

Envy is one of the features screening at this year's World of Women's Cinema (WOW 2000) Festival, the tenth such event organised by one of our most enterprising screen organisations WIFT (Women in Film and Television). There's also a strong program of documentaries including *Live Nude Girls Unite* (USA) about a strippers union in San Francisco, and also from the US, the Australian premiere of Sundance winner *Girlfight* by first-time director Karyn Kusama about a teenage girl from the New York projects who is determined to be a boxer. *Taking Care of Elvis* by Australians Katey 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 Fenech and Kelvis, the Drag King of Rock 'n Roll, complete with Las Vegas showgirls. This year WOW's Short Film competition received an encouraging 170 entries from within Australia and overseas. Prizes will be given for Best Australian and Best International Short as well as an Encouragement Award provided by the University of Technology. Following the Sydney screenings, the films will tour regional NSW and nationally.



Envy

In conjunction with WOW, the Chauvel Cinema will present a special Cinematheque screening of Leontine Sagan's 1931 anti-fascist and lesbian classic *Maedchen in Uniform* (Germany), set in a repressive girls' boarding school.

The festival will also provide the launching pad for the Digital Technology Scheme which expands on WIFT's National Mentor Scheme, supporting the development of women's skills and careers in the screen industries with professional mentorships. This year, WIFT has provided 25 women working in the industry with high profile industry mentors in the areas of cinematography, scriptwriting, editing, production design and continuity, as well as TV and documentary production. The new scheme will extend the program to women working in the digital/multimedia arts.

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 undergroundLOVERS) 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 Glen Bennie 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 Brophy and he recorded us improvising the music. We did about 30 pieces, just playing around with the melodies and feel 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



Vincent Giarrusso

"...we listened back and chose our favourites and cut the film to the performance of the music...What you're seeing and what you're hearing are interacting."

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'd worked with?

It's very much a fiction but as a youth worker you see types and I knew 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 fools, they work that way in the film and the father is very much the king, the ineffectual 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 DOP [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" and 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 is 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 AWGIE for the Artist Service's comedy Introducing Gary Petty. Elise appears in Clara Law's The Goddess of 1967.

The OnScreen supplement of RealTime is funded by the Australia Council, the federal government's arts advisory body, the Australian Film Commission and the FTO (NSW Film & Television Office).

OnScreen is submitted to the following for indexing: Film Literature Index, Film and TV Center, State University of New York at Albany, Richardson 390C, 1400 Washington Ave, Albany NY 1222 USA; Film Index International, BFI Library and Information services, British Film Institute, 21 Stephen St, London W1P 2LN, Great Britain; International Index to Film/TV, FIAF Periodical Indexing Project, 6 Nottingham St, London W1M 3RB, Great Britain; APAIS, National Bibliographic publications, National Library of Australia, Canberra ACT, Australia 2600



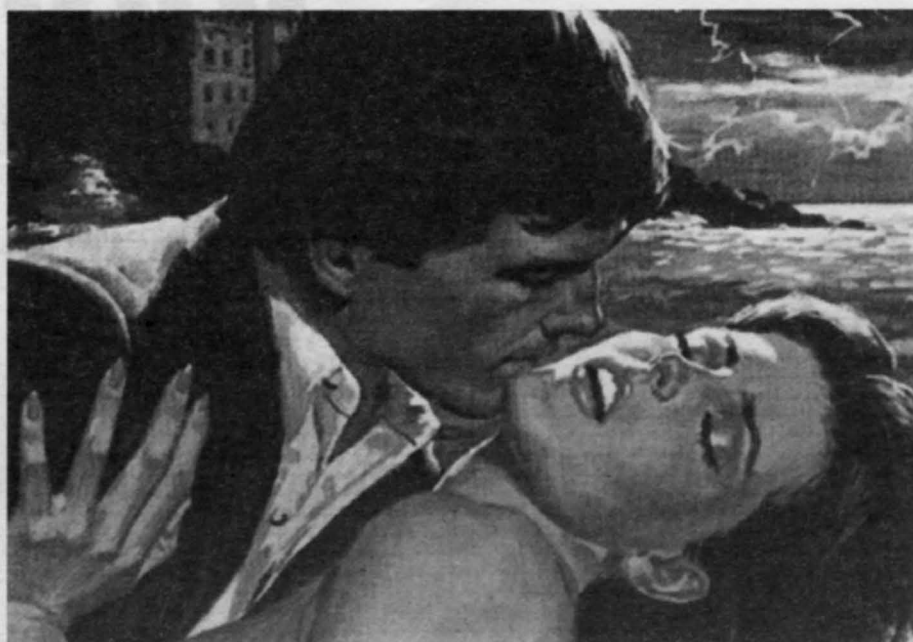
MIFF: experimental film and the sex hook

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 of its pictorial content (what does it mean?) and the avant-garde nature of its pictorial form (why is it shot and edited this way?). Thus, the horror and danger of the tape is ostensibly formal, its otherworldliness (it supposedly emanates from the spirit world) synonymous with its experimental nature.

When preparing to watch the Festival's 2 *Peepshow* programs, 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 tableaux). 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 Dietmar Brehm, were potentially pretty 'dangerous' (with the promise of images of sexual acts and organs to 'soften' the blow). So when the slide 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 (lots of shots of peepers, voyeurs, peeping toms) 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 combative, silent or hushed soundtrack that many of them contain. It



The Morphology of Desire

Though somewhat challenging in terms of their sexual politics...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.

would nevertheless be wrong to state that *Peepshow* did not live up to its blurb ("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 representationally 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

incongruity 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 *Blicklust* 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 *Macumba*. In this film the power of Brehm's technique takes

on its most disturbing edge, as ethnographic footage of tribal 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 triumphantly 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 pornography and romantic fiction). In general, many of the films in the first program presented a kind of fantasy view or space, fixating upon acts of looking that are confrontational, surreptitious and performative. 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 curation of experimental film. Considering the difficulties of getting audiences 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 its own fixation upon themes 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 sight (and sound) of a full auditorium (for a few minutes anyway) responding to the percussive 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 titillating 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 delivered in all senses of the word, but while nudity and pomstars playing actresses playing nuns abounded, so did problems. Here are some other MUFF synonyms: botched, bungled, fumbled and muddled. Not in the actual running of the show (which was probably better handled than aspects of the MIFF) 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 title 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 seemed like parodies of films which were semi-parodies to begin with: the Hong Kong action film, any of the exploitation genres etc. And while enormous amounts of praise should be heaped on everyone involved in the festival for doing something different, for getting everything off the ground in such a short time without gov-

ernment or corporate funding, it's the films themselves which have to stand up, and they don't.

For instance, Nigel Wingrove's *Sacred Flesh* (on import from the UK) purported to be a 'nun-sploitation' 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 exploration 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 increasing ridiculousness where nun after nun manhandled themselves or other nuns for no apparent purpose. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the film was the revelation that breast enlargements, bellybutton rings and pubic sculpture have all been around since Renaissance Europe. Astounding.

At least Mark Savage's *Masturbating Gunman* 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 *There'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 gunman's crippled sidekick, a performance reminiscent of moments in Peter Jackson's cult classic *Bad Taste*). The later passages involving the gunman's sister (who, incidentally, was also a nun—an accidental running theme with the festival) fell very flat. As a curious sidenote, SBS was playing the superior *Killer Condom* (director Martin Walz) at almost the same time on TV. The Savage brothers show promise.

The film that launched the festival after its rejection from MIFF (Melbourne International Film Festival), Richard Wolstencroft's *Pearls Before Swine*, was the best of the bunch but even it was rife with flaws. A hitman 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 violence with helpful suggestions from another char-

acter like "intriguing, please tell me more" or "that's fascinating, do go on." The performances ranged from the passable lead Boyd Rice to the momentarily interesting efforts of the other hitmen to the stilted and monotonous performances of everybody else. Sometimes it seemed (as it did in all the films) that the actors were reading the script for the first time as they performed it.

Word has it that the timing of the festival will be adjusted in the future to avoid a direct clash with MIFF which is probably a good idea. There is definitely room for a festival like MUFF—and I would love to see it handled successfully—however this year's films simply did not stack up in terms of quality. They weren't offensive or shocking as some have claimed (and the festival's promos tried to exploit). They were generally simply bad. Ambitious and refreshing in the angles they took but lacking in execution.

MUFF (Melbourne Underground Film Festival), director Richard Wolstencroft, Cinema Nova, Kino & Lumiere, Melbourne, July 20-30, www.muff.au.com

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 3 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 reshot 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 mobilizes both the iconic imagery of New York City and provides a guide to the work of later filmmakers like Scorsese. 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,



Shadows

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 dramatization 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, Julius. Part documentary, part *mise-en-abyme* fiction, the film enacts 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 Magic*, 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 30s, 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 Magic* 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.harrysmitharchives.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 Demy-Geroe, 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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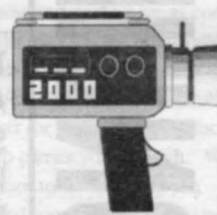


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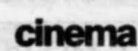
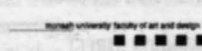
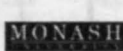
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Don't touch the big red button, Adam Head!

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 slabs 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.

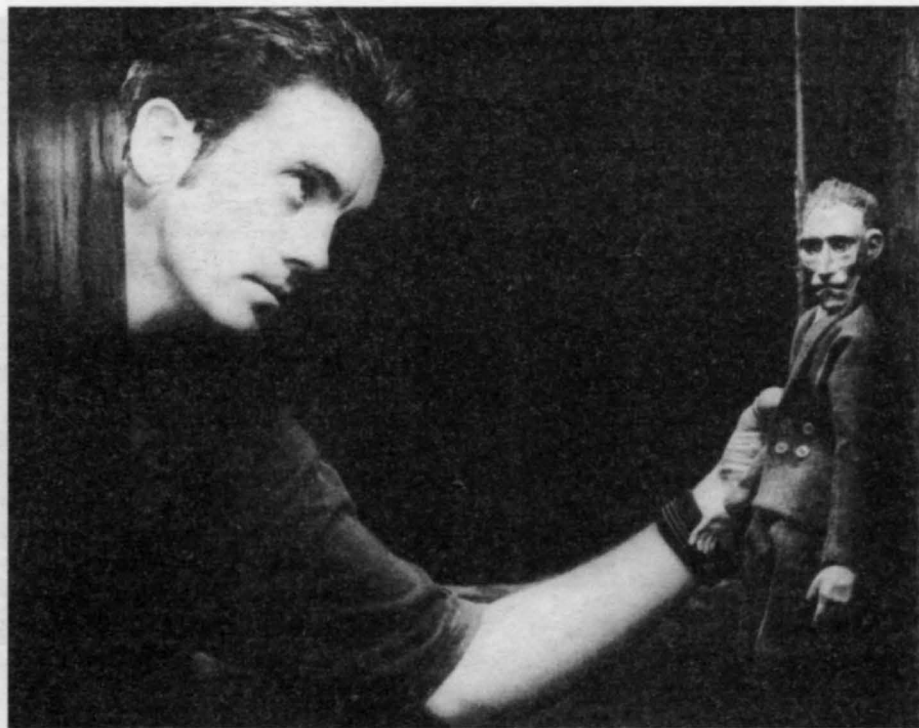
I'm often struck by the sheer creativity and imagination of animators; where do you get your ideas?

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 subconscious.

What is Full Circle about?

Full Circle refers to the symbol of the 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



Adam Head, Full Circle

opens it. On the desk 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 are doing Kitu and Woofl. 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 fibreglass 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 ormonoid 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 3 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 Mohamed's Passion.

DOCUMENTARY ONLINE



THE AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION AND THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION ARE SEEKING APPLICATIONS FROM FILMMAKERS AND INTERACTIVE MEDIA PRACTITIONERS WITH DOCUMENTARY PROJECTS THAT EXPLORE THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT IN INNOVATIVE CHALLENGING AND ORIGINAL WAYS.

These works will specifically be developed and produced for web-streaming online as part of the joint AFC/ABC DOCUMENTARY ONLINE initiative which will be housed on ABC ONLINE.

Applicants are initially required to submit a three page proposal outlining their project and its ambitions, together with an AFC application form. A short list of ten projects will be selected for further development of which four will finally be selected for production. The maximum production budget will be \$100,000 per project.

The AFC and ABC are looking for exciting and adventurous projects

that exploit the possibilities of the documentary form and the internet.

Public forums will be held in Sydney and Melbourne to discuss these possibilities and to provide further information. Dates, times and locations will be confirmed shortly.

More detailed guidelines including technical specifications and application forms are available from AFC offices or from the AFC website at www.afc.gov.au

For further information contact Peter Kaufmann Project Manager Australian Film Commission Tel (03) 9279 3400

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Felena Alach

Judith Crombie: homing in on independent film

Mike Walsh

In May this year, Judith Crombie was appointed as 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 Unit to establish its film library before her first stint at the SAFC where she held various positions including post-production supervisor, assistant studio manager and distribution manager. After leaving SA in 1992 she worked for Film Queensland and Dragon Film & Television before taking over as CEO of AusFILM in 1998.

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 Burgan, 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 \$3.6m. for the SAFC over 3 years.

Could you explain the industrial logic that produced the increased funding, and outline the areas in which these funds will be spent?

My predecessors, Judith McCann and Craig Raneberg, 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 crew skill base, employing local actors and tradesmen, and generally contributing to the economy of the State.

This year \$1m will be directly applied to

investment into those projects that meet the criteria under the SAFC guidelines. Two hundred thousand dollars has been earmarked for script development, professional development and education/training.

The biggest increase (from \$650,000 to \$1,650,000) will be in equity investments in production. Will this necessitate 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 SAFC 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 telefeatures, and documentaries. To date we haven't received applications for multimedia projects, but we are expecting this to change in light of the Burgan-Moir Report.

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

To be eligible, the SAFC takes into account whether the project will be produced and post-produced in SA using principally SA cast and crew and facilities. Also, there must be demonstrable nett 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 SAFC 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.

There are areas of specialisation that 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 post-graduate course in screenwriting and/or film direction.

The re-structure of SAFC has included a position, Manager Production and Emerging Media, which gives us the opportunity, at last, to embrace issues and opportunities relating to new media. It is time the SAFC acknowledged emerging technology and included it as part of its 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 production 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 nurture their local filmmakers. But each state has to address a different set of 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 studios of the eastern states and therefore we don't have the same urgency to feed productions through those complexes. The SAFC 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 and directors to think of approaching SAFC first for development funding and for production investment.

How do you define independent production?

My take on independent production is any (preferably "quality") Australian project that needs assistance to be realised. There are a lot of new 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 commercial and critical hits as possible but I am a realist about the odds. That said, the SAFC wants to encourage the best possible mix of product from cutting edge content for delivery on the internet through to high-end movies with big budgets.

Would you like to signal any other new directions or emphases for the SAFC under your leadership?

On a broad scale I intend the SAFC to have closer relations with all sectors 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, changes 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 fortunate to have a mentor—David Thomson, who had been my teacher and recently written *A Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema* (Secker & Warburg, London). I was teaching film studies in England and he was Head of Film at Dartmouth College in Vermont—an auspicious if somewhat distant set of circumstances. In those days there were no websites, few professional organisations other than the major guilds, and even fewer books or published scripts to reference. What we had instead was a serious and lasting ambition to be in the film business plus a script we wanted to write together despite being so far apart.

It was a difficult and expensive 18 months before that final draft was ready. If we were doing this today it would be so much easier. In the intervening years, extraordinary changes have taken place in the structure of the film business, its cultural context and the ways 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 now a wealth of resources ranging from professional organisations to published scripts and a plethora of websites, some offering free script assessments.

Access to scripts is the biggest change that has taken place in the last 10 years. Before this were only the masterpieces that were required for screen studies courses—the obligatory Renoir, Godard, Welles and Lang. But publishers such as Faber and Faber and Cambridge University Press have realised that the script and associated commentary is of interest to a wider audience and that writers in particular need to see what the genuine article looks like, and more importantly, to study

how it is structured.

In America, scripts for thousands of films can be ordered over the internet and many are available from specialist bookshops. Just type script.com and stand back.

The rise of the specialist film bookshop, such as the Cinestore in Sydney, now rivals the inner city coffee shop as the screenwriter's most valuable resource. The shop has titles on writing, directing and criticism, plus stock of over 3,000 on-set film and TV scripts. The newest title is their homegrown Screenwriters Toolkit (\$54-\$95; *cinestore.com*) which has templates for Australian and American scripts, plus directories for agents and writers guilds. To place the true value of this computer program in perspective, only a few years ago the price for Movie Magic was \$1,000 US.

The most significant development for local writers has been the increasing number of Australian scripts available, reflecting the interest and needs of a screen-literate public. Currency Press has almost 20 in print, the newest being Louis Nowra's *Radiance*, Stephen Sewell's *The Boys* and Melina Marchetta's *Looking for Alibrandi*. By any measure, these are significant films and the opportunity to read them in detail is invaluable. Each has a commentary and introduction by the writer, providing an accessible form for discussion of the screenwriting process.

How to get from a wish to write to a completed and then screened script is often described as a complete mystery, but there are a series of fundamental steps towards professionalism which any writer can take.

The first is to enrol in a screenwriting course. These roughly fall into 2 categories: the non-academic courses held over a few days or weeks which are regularly advertised in newspapers and film magazines. Such courses are taught by estab-

lished film critics, ex-journalists and occasionally, as Australia becomes part of their circuit, high profile writers from LA. Whilst these courses might seem to be similar to self-improvement classes, their 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, creative writing or English departments. As adjuncts to film studies or literature degrees, these subjects often do not have a true pathway through 3 years of study and they're not usually taught by specialist screen writers.

There's also a well-known conflict between the '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 when it can 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 because genuine screenwriting courses have become the sought-after prize 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 AFTRS, Sydney, the National Film and Television School, London, and the UCLA School of Theater Film and Television, Los Angeles is fully operational. Other universities have the capacity for larger numbers. At the University of Western 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 facilities and sophisticated computer infrastructure, giving opportunities to film and video short scripts and acquire access to the newest script programs.

Above all, a Masters course, for example, will offer a context and structure for a writer who is likely to feel lost if not abandoned in the search for a career. To commit to the possibility of full-time writing is 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 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. Here the Australian Writers Guild is a useful resource, providing a list of recommended agents as well as sample contracts and other documents the writer needs 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 AFC's internet portal.

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.

PRIZES & PROJECTIONS

2000 AFI AWARDS - THE ISSUES AND THE FILMS

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?

Mikiko Ooka, *Flowergirl*

photo Jun Tagami

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 *Mallboy* 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 *Mallboy*) 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



2000 AFI: Nominations

NON-FEATURE NOMINATIONS

Film Australia Award for Best Documentary

The Diplomat: Producers Sally Browning & Wilson da Silva
Uncle Chatzkel: 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: Amiel Courtin-Wilson
Pozieres: Wain Fimeri

Award for Best Screenplay in a Short Film

Brother: Adam Elliot
Confessions of a Headhunter: Sally Riley, Archie Weller
Gate: Peter Carstairs
The Other Days of Ruby Rae: Vikki Blanche

Kodak Award for Best Cinematography in a Non-Feature Film

Breathe: David Burr
The Night Light: Vincent Taylor
La Nina: Klaus Toft, Campbell Miller, Wade Fairley, Malcolm Ludgate
The Letter: Kathryn Milliss

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
Hurt: Jack Rath & Phillip Crawford

Award for Best Sound in a Non-Feature Film

Intransit: Liam Price
The Third Note: Paul Miskin
La Nina: Emma Bortignon, Craig Carter, Mark Street & Bryce Grunden
Pozieres: Mark Tarpey, Paul Pirola & Livia Ruzic

Prototype Casting Open Craft Award

Intransit: Special Effects, Mike Daly
The Other Days of Ruby Rae: Acting, Magda Hughes
Uncle Chatzkel: Original Score, Guy Gross
Hurt: Concept, Phillip Crawford

Yoram Gross Award for Best Short Animation

Brother: Adam Elliot
Full Circle: Adam Head
Leunig: Tricks: Andrew Horne
The Way of the Birds: Sarah Watt

Award for Best Short Fiction Film

Confessions of a Headhunter: Sally Riley
The Extra: Darren Ashton
Flowergirl: Cate Shortland
Kulli Foot: Brendan Fletcher

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

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

Editors: Kirsten Krauth, Keith Gallasch

Layout & design: Gail Priest



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 (UIP)

pd Jonathon Green
dir Daniel Nettheim
wr Anthony O'Connor

Better Than Sex (Newvision)

pd Bruna Papandrea, Frank Cox
dir/wr Jonathon Teplitzky

Beware of Greeks Bearing Guns (Palace Films)

pd John Taoulis, Colin South, Dionyssi Samiotis, Anastasios Vasiliou,
dir John Taoulis
wr Tom Galbraith

Bootmen (20th Century Fox)

pd Hilary Linstead
dir Dein 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 Chayko
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 Mariel Beros, Sharon Kruger, Ross Matthews
dir Lynda Heys
wr Stuart Beattie

Looking for Alibrandi (Roadshow)

pd Robyn Kershaw
dir Kate Woods
wr Melina Marchetta

The Magic Pudding (20th Century Fox)

pd Gerry Travers, assoc pd Ed Trost
dir Karl Zwicky
animation Robbert Smit
wr Harry Cripps, Greg Haddock, Simon Hopkinson

Mallboy (Buena vista International)

pd Fiona Eagar
dir/wr Vincent Giarrusso

Me Myself I (Buena Vista International)

pd Fabien Liron, Andrena Finlay
dir/wr Pip Karmel

My Mother Frank (Beyond Films)

pd Phaedon Vass, Susan Vass, John Winter
dir Mark Lamprell

Russian Doll (Beyond Films)

pd Allannah 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 Saggars, Jason Gooden
dir Denis Whitburn
wr Denis Whitburn, Darryl Mason

Walk the Talk (20th Century Fox)

pd Jan Chapman
dir/wr Shirley Barrett

The Wog Boy (20th Century Fox)

pd Nick Giannopoulos, John Brousek
dir Aleksis Vellis
wr Nick Giannopoulos, Chris Anastasiades

International kickstart or local thinkspace?

Ben Goldsmith

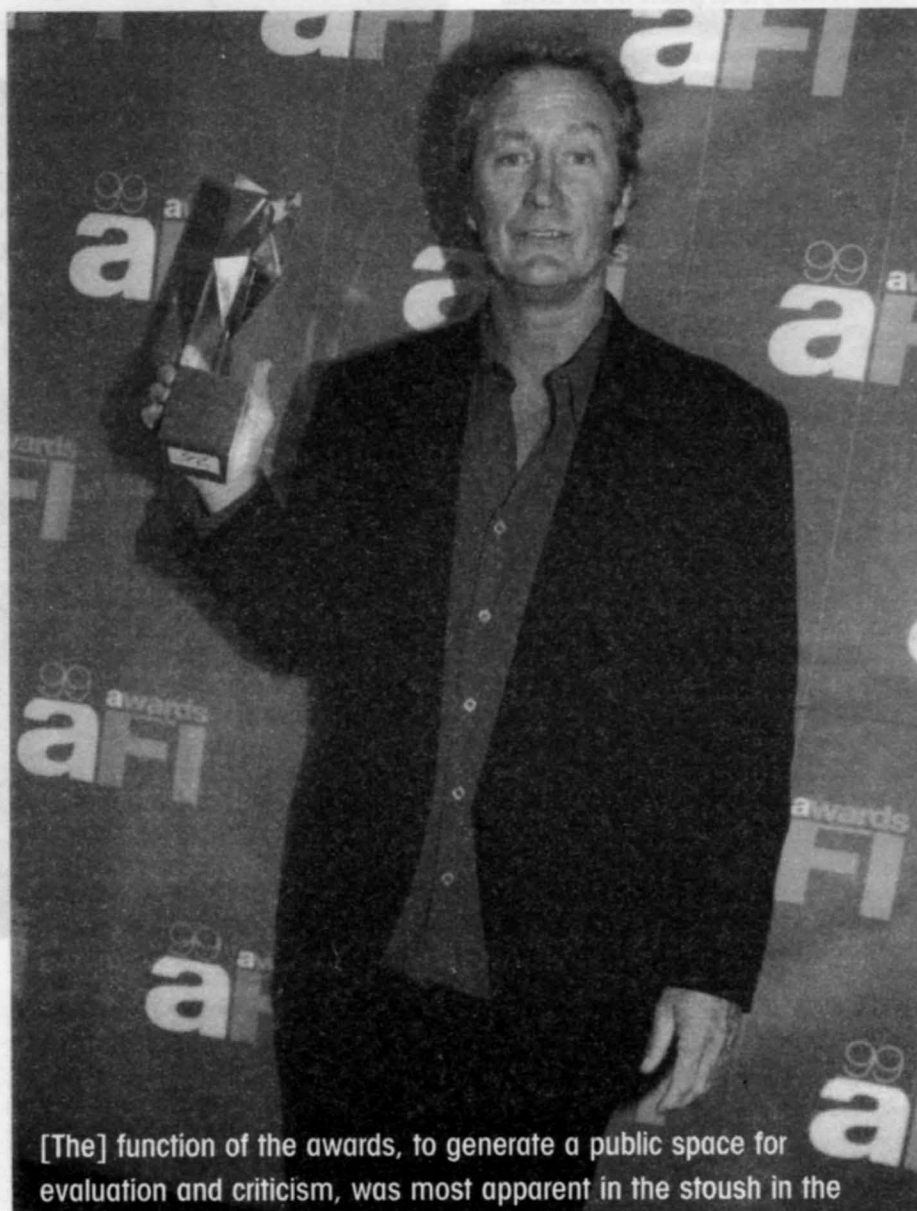
The AFI Awards celebrate the art of cinema in Australia and acknowledge the achievements of Australian filmmakers. And because Australian cinema has been so tightly bound up with the telling of Australian stories, with the representation of what it means to be Australian, the Awards have traditionally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

However, increases in the levels of foreign production, international co-production and runaway post-production (where American, Japanese and now Chinese films are post-produced in Australia for reasons of cost, the availability of cutting edge technology, imagination and expertise) are both challenging traditional definitions of Australian film and changing the structure of the industry in this country. Most of this production activity will not be in contention for honours, essentially because it is seen to be the work of the film industry in Australia, rather than the Australian film industry. But since international collaboration and runaway production are becoming the norm in the global film industry, a number of questions are begged: just how representative are the AFI Awards? What role do they play in an increasingly internationalised industry? Are they still relevant? What purpose do they serve?

On a material level, winning an AFI Award will never be as commercially rewarding as winning an Oscar which, by some measures, can add US\$100 million to a film's global box office and several million dollars to the fees demanded by successful actors and creatives. Last year only 2 of the main contenders for the major AFI Awards, *Two Hands* and *Soft Fruit*, were in theatrical release in this country at the time of the ceremony. While both did benefit from their success at the Awards, neither received the kind of boost an Oscar nomination or award can give to a film both domestically and internationally.

Nor are the AFI Awards as prestigious as those given out at international film festivals: the Palme or Camera d'Or (Cannes), the Golden and Silver Bears (Berlin), the Golden Lion or the Coppa Volpi (Venice). The AFI Awards undoubtedly provide a useful marketing and promotional hook for a film and aid its sales prospects in international markets, but are less significant in generating the all important buzz around a film than screenings at the major European film festivals or the crucial North American gatherings like Sundance or Toronto.

While the swag of AFI Awards which Scott Hicks' film *Shine* won in 1996 undoubtedly helped build the momentum which carried it to Oscar success the following March, the international buzz around the film began at its Sundance screening and was augmented by its success in September 1996 at the Toronto Film Festival where the film won both first prize in the competitive section, and the People's Choice award—fully 2 months prior to the AFI Awards. Similarly, international buzz is building around the film which is likely to be the frontrunner in most of the major categories at this year's AFIs, Andrew Dominik's *Chopper*, on the strength of its official selection for Toronto. Dominik has reportedly been besieged by Hollywood agents keen to attach themselves to a potential "next big thing." *Chopper* has already taken around \$6 million at the Australian box office, and along with 2 other films in contention for honours at this year's AFIs—Alexi Vellis' *The Wog Boy* and Kate Woods' *Looking for*



[The] function of the awards, to generate a public space for evaluation and criticism, was most apparent in the stoush in the nationally televised 1999 AFI Awards ceremony between Bryan Brown and Russell Crowe...

Alibrandi—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 AFIs in November, so the awards will only gild the film's already well-established reputation.

This is not to say that the AFIs are unimportant in this regard. Like all awards ceremonies of any repute, they do function as a kind of thermostat for hype. The application of critical judgement which they represent acts to regulate noise and to muffle or amplify the buzz which publicists and filmmakers strive to create for their films. But they are not as significant internationally for the career prospects of nominees or winners as is recognition at major overseas festivals.

Despite their questionable contribution to a film's earning power, or the amount of prestige they bestow upon recipients, film award ceremonies like the AFIs do serve 2 invaluable functions. They provide the opportunity for excellence to be recognised and celebrated by film audiences and by peers. Acting AFI Chief Executive Deb Verhoeven argues that as a significant public annual event they act as a "thinkspace", permitting reflection on the immediate past and anticipation of the future. This function of the awards, to generate a public space for evaluation and criticism, was most apparent in the stoush in the

nationally televised 1999 AFI Awards ceremony between Bryan Brown and Russell Crowe over the impact of Hollywood on Australian cultural identity, and on the future development 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" *Cinema Papers* no. 132, May 2000, p. 17). While it was fitting that Brown had the opportunity to make his statement in the place which many within the industry see as the arch symbol of these internationalising tendencies challenging established industrial practices and repre-

sentations of Australian identity, his remarks touched on issues beyond the film industry:

I said to Gregor [Jordan, director of Two Hands] when we were making this movie, if this summer down at Bondi all the young blokes are walking around in stubbies, thongs and rayon T-shirts he's got a lot to answer for. But at least they would be recognisably Australian, which after last weekend could only be a plus, given that on Saturday evening the country voted for an English monarch to long reign over us, and... Sunday saw a celebration of American film culture. A bloke I suppose could be forgiven for starting to wonder exactly who owns this country.

Brown then read a short list of actors who he felt had "not only contributed to Australian cinema but to the Australian identity" and who had been overlooked in the previous weekend's version of the modern cultural cringe. If the level of applause which Brown's comments inspired is any guide, his sentiments are widely shared. But not everyone held the same view.

Perhaps still smarting from a newspaper review which had criticised his role in Michael Mann's *The Insider* by noting that "Australian culture is hardly promoted by Crowe's American accent", Russell Crowe took personally Brown's attack on the uneven relationship between Hollywood and the Australian cinema. Departing from the prepared script while about to present an award, Crowe said "Bryan, on behalf of Nicole Kidman and myself, we forgive you. You're ignoring the fact that, based on hard work, sweat and commitment there is a bridge that exists between the Australian film industry and the world. All sorts of people over the years have worked hard for Australia to be taken seriously, both artists and technicians... Crossing that bridge doesn't make you any less Australian. It simply amplifies the broad and infinite nature of... Australian film culture." Whichever argument you are more convinced by, it is impossible not to acknowledge that both made valid and important contributions to the Australian screen conversation. And importantly they were aired on the one night of the year when at least some of the national attention is focussed on Australian cinema.

The awards are then most significant in their capacity to provide a "think space" within which conversations about our cultural past, present and future may take place. It is to be hoped that the commercial success enjoyed this year by *Chopper*, *Looking for Alibrandi*, *The Wog Boy*, 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 screen conversation in this country.

As the recent protests against the World Economic Forum in Melbourne and the staging of the Sydney Olympics have exemplified, we are at a crossroads in our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. Film has an important role to play in representing, enabling and encouraging the vital, ongoing, sustained discussion about the cultural manifestations and repercussions of globalisation which every community now needs to engage in. The continuing relevance of the AFI Awards will depend on their capacity to create and maintain the space for these discussions to take place.

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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 hope for an overview of the state of the game. In this context, 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?

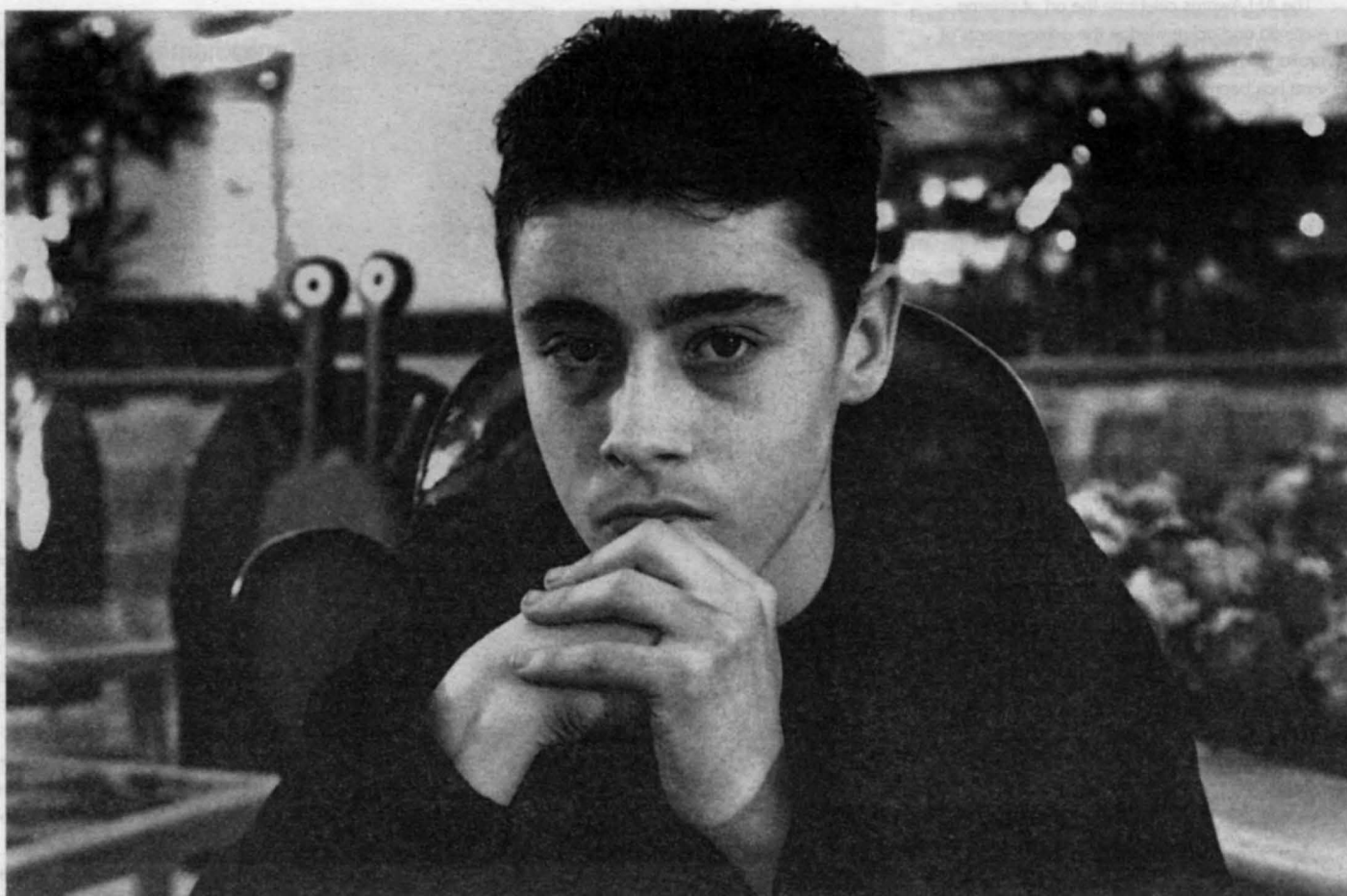
We all know that Australian films can't get by on cultural nationalism anymore, especially when people can feel good about supporting Australian culture by going to see Russell Crowe in *Gladiator*. Much ink has been spilt over the pros and cons of commercial orientation in government film policy, but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

The Wog Boy 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 taint of bourgeois elitism. *The Wog Boy* 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-hey-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 *Wog Boy*)



Bootmen



Kane McNay-Young, *Mailboy*

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 less well crafted 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 not 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 *Siam Sunset* when it turned out to be *A Quirky Comedy Too Far*. If we reach back even further, Liz Jacka and Susan Dermody coined the term "AFC film" to describe the tasteful period film produced in the 1970s. This suits *15 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 slacker 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.) *Angst* and *City Loop* are at the heart of this genre, with *Chasing Parked Cars* contributing a more stylistically conservative spin. However, if there is a slacker 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 derision 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 *Starring Duncan Wiley* is *Boogie Nights* without the prosthetic dick, and that *Walk the Talk* 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 asserts that we are part of western society and that Australianness simply involves putting our own self-consciously understated spin on international multiplex filmmaking. Nick Giannopoulos plays at being a daggy Travolta, while Eric Bana gets to be De Niro with the prosthetic dick ("You talkin' to me, Keithy?").

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

Australian cinema now asserts that we are part of western society and that Australianness simply involves putting our own self-consciously understated spin on international multiplex filmmaking.



Susie Porter, David Wenham, *Better than Sex*

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, Jonathon Teplitzky's *Better Than Sex*.

This extends David Wenham's telly image as the thinking woman's hunk, as he and Susie Porter play out a story about a casual affair that grows into something more. Although the central protagonists go at it relentlessly over the compressed timeframe of the story, the film is built around an impulse towards glossy formal abstraction. The big sex issues are raised in the central narrative (etiquette for when you don't come, oral sex: turn on or turn off?) and then workshopped by a chorus of beautiful young people in artfully asymmetrical, direct-to-camera commentary. The effect is a bit like reading *Cosmopolitan* for 90 minutes.

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 abstraction, but of a much less fashionable kind. He has long been intent on fashioning a 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 Julia 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 everytime they open their mouths.

Issue 3: Enough of the big picture. Who should I back for the awards?

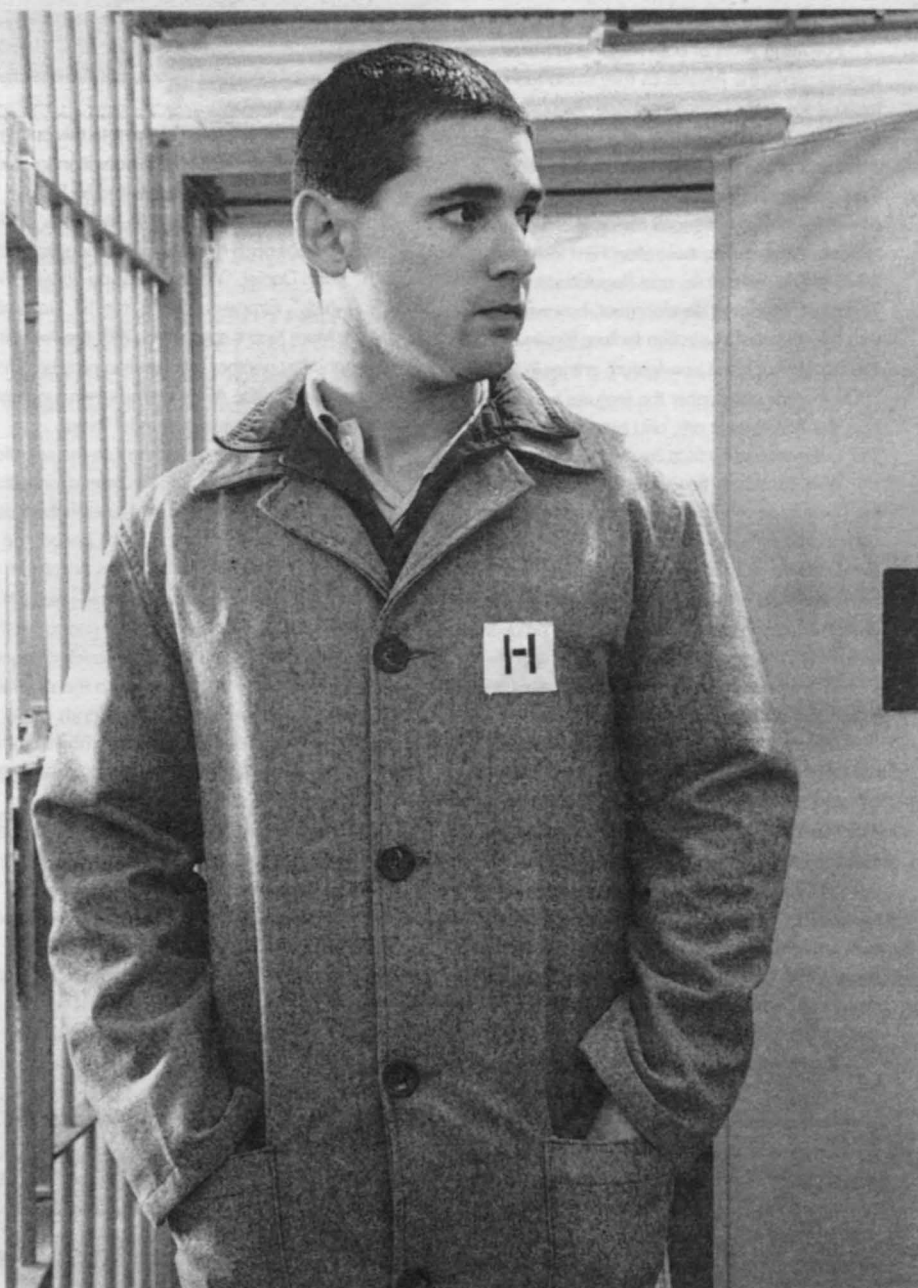
The smart money is probably on either *Looking for Alibrandi* or *Chopper*. Both have been



Julia Blake, Charles Bud Tingwell, *Innocence*

able to combine economic and critical capital, but beyond this it is shaping up as a battle of liberal empathy against harsh bravura. *Alibrandi* plays out its wog 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 *Mallboy* (interview, page 13) 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.



Eric Bana, *Chopper*

[*Looking for Alibrandi* and *Chopper* are] who I think will win, but who do I think should win? I liked Vincent Giarrusso's *Mallboy* 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.

Getting it right

Kristen Matthews

Throughout its 42 year history, the AFI Awards have been dogged with their fair share of criticism and controversy. It seems that when it comes to recognising the achievements of our film and television industry, the odd dispute over the outcome is somewhat insignificant when compared to the ongoing dispute over the methodology and philosophy behind reaching it.

The AFI was established in 1958 to administer the Australian Film Awards with the primary objective of "encourag[ing] the development of the art of the film." ("Aims and Objectives", Richard Watts, "Australian Film Institute: A Brief History", unpublished paper, 1984). Nominees drawn from a range of documentaries, teaching and advertising films were chosen by a panel of judges primarily consisting of critics. Rather than isolating the achievements of individual crew-members, the awards were granted in the name of the films in recognition of the collaborative nature of the industry.

Following years of both major and minor amendments, the Awards as they stand today have taken a somewhat different shape. As opposed to the artistic and collaborative priorities and non-feature focus of the past, the Awards now recognise the "outstanding achievements" of "individuals whose talent has advanced the craft of film and television" (my italics; Australian Film Institute, 2000 AFI Awards: Rules and Regulations, 2000). The most significant development, however, came with the revival of Australian feature film in the 1970s. Although the non-feature entries in the 2000 Awards outnumber the features nearly six to one, the AFI Awards are, and have been since 1971, dominated by features.

With the steady flow of features coming in to the Awards, so too came the steady flow of criticism, particularly in relation to the judging process. Amid debate as to whether the best judges of film are filmmakers or those for whom the films are created, the judging process went through an overhaul in 1976 when the panel of judges was dismissed in favour of an industry-voted system based loosely on the Academy Awards.

Since the early 70s, there has been ongoing bickering between those who claim that the Award selectors are either 'too arty' or not 'arty enough' in their verdicts. While the assumption could be made that the judging panel system received most of the 'too arty' complaints and the industry vote the latter, this was not the case. Although many based their arguments on the validity of one system against the other during the transition, the same argument continued regardless of which system was used to evaluate the films.

The major issue raised with the introduction of peer-voting was in relation to the problems inherent in the self-assessment of an industry. Colin Bennett, film columnist and former AFI judge, was the most outspoken on the issue. He believed that the industry voting on its own output was not only "incestuous" and rife with conflicts of interest, but it also took the focus away from raising the standards of film as art (Bennett, "Must We Ape the Incestuous Oscar?", *The Age*, July 24, 1976). Erwin Rado, the founder of the AFI Awards was similarly dissatisfied. He considered the commercial skew of the new approach to be "the complete debauchery of the original aim of the awards" (Erwin Rado, "Letter to the Editor; Bush Oscars", *The Age*, July 28, 1976).

Public discussions were held in Melbourne and Sydney in 1978 to evaluate the rules and regulations of the awards. The consensus was that the industry participation voting system should remain with some minor amendments.

Bennett...believed that the industry voting on its own output was not only "incestuous" 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 to play here", *The Age*, December 8, 1973). Rumours of such an intention have been frequent over the years (1979, 1983, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1998) however none of these plans have successfully come to fruition.

Perhaps the primary deterrent to this option is the amount of administrative preparation involved in staging such an event. As expressed by SPAA (Screen Producers Association Australia) in 1988, "a conference once a year is quite enough to cope with" (John Daniel, "What would you do with the AFI Awards", *Filmnews*, Vol 18, No 10, November, 1988). More recent speculation that the Awards be re-assigned to another organisation may be a realistic challenge for the AFI in a time when funding for some of its other activities is under threat.

In 1982 a further adjustment to the selection process created what was to become a long-standing issue. Due to the number of feature films produced during the peak of the 10BA period, the viewing of all 30 entries by all voters became a logistical nightmare. As a result, a pre-selection committee of 20 members was formed to vet the entries and cast 4 nominations for each category. The re-introduction of a panel, even though the ultimate decision remained at the hands of the voters, prompted an outcry among members of the industry, many of whom felt that this move jeopardised the democratic spirit of the Awards.

The acceptance of pre-selection was further hampered by results which "strongly favour[ed] new films only just released or awaiting release" (Les Rabinowicz, "The Film Rewards", *National Times*, October 24, 1982). Possibly with this in mind, but more likely due to the drop to 22 feature entries the following year, pre-selection was shelved in 1983 until similar circumstances called for its re-introduction 4 years later.

To facilitate the 1987 re-introduction, an industry advisory committee consisting of representatives from film guilds, associations and societies as well as the AFC and FFC (Film Finance Corporation) met every 2 months to evaluate and discuss the voting procedure (the panel now meets annually). Although the process was frequently discussed in an official forum, there were still those who expressed extreme dissatisfaction with the system.

In 1988, amid the controversy surrounding the writers' strike in the US, an Australian Writers Guild boycott of the AFI Awards over the reciprocal right to vote for directors on the pre-selection panels, led to the exclusion of both screenplay awards. A subsequent review resolved that from 1989 all AFI members with film accreditation, regardless of speciality, were permitted to vote in all categories including Best Film (a system similar to the US Oscars).

Pre-selection for feature films was finally dropped in 1997 following intense discussion triggered by director Richard Lowenstein's impassioned open letters to *Cinema Papers*. He protested the unfairness of pre-selection, calling it an "unrepresentative and undemocratic process" (Richard Lowenstein, "Open Letter to the Australian Film Institute", *Cinema Papers*, No. 112, October 1996). Though Lowenstein's complaints were strongly counter-argued by the AFI, the decision made by the AFI Awards Advisory Committee in February 1997 was unanimous.

The resulting structure, still in effect for the 2000 Awards, is that all AFI members are permitted to vote for Best Film while only accredited 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 craft awards, also resolves the issue raised by 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 any) 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 television 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 "razzmatazz and false 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 "surrendered to the merchants of PR and purveyors of bal-lyhoo" (Bennett, "The Oscars: Our Film Awards Have Become a Mockery", *The Age*, August 12 1978). Countless others joined him in his embarrassment at the blatant mimicry of Hollywood, but it was all in vain. Newspaper articles dating back to 1963 referred to the AFI Awards as the "Aussie Oscars" and by 1978 the term "Ozscars" was catching on. [Some of the tension over the character and meaning of the Awards was revived

The comparative lack of discussion over the non-feature and television judging processes is indicative of the size of the 'shadow' feature films cast over the other categories.

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' to attract the much needed public interest.

The drive to attract greater attention and validation for the Awards suffered a major setback in 1986 when Paul Hogan and John Cornell withdrew *Crocodile Dundee* from competition. Added to the non-entry of Kennedy-Miller's *Mad Max—Beyond Thunderdome* the previous year, the withdrawal reportedly sparked Federal Arts Minister Barry Cohen to argue that "the Awards are generally biased against commercial films and voters may be professionally jealous" (Michael Cordell, "No razzmatazz, but a few hot chances", *Encore*, Vol 4, No. 19, 1986).

The Awards were considered by some of the more commercial filmmakers in the industry as an unnecessary expense. With the subsequent withholding of *Crocodile Dundee 2* in 1988, Cornell was reported to claim that "success in the awards did not have any benefit after millions of people had voted with their wallet." (Katherine Teh, "Debate Rages on the AFI Awards", *The Age*, October 7, 1988). Fifteen years earlier, Colin Bennett pre-empted this argument when he feared that the artistic objective of the Awards might be compromised; "Why bother with competitions at all? Why not simply await the box office returns and hand out the prizes automatically?" (Bennett, 1973). At the request of Richard Sattler, independent producer of the 1986 Awards, the AFI awarded a special "Non-Entry" accolade to *Crocodile Dundee* in what cynics claimed to be an effort not to offend anyone in a time when securing television network commitment to the Awards was increasingly difficult.

The Awards were telecast nationally for the first time in 1976. Although receiving high ratings with its debut on the Nine Network, they have had trouble finding a 'home' on our screens, jumping from network to network and, on occasion, failing to secure any network interest. Industrial disputes have also affected the ability of the Awards to reach a coveted audience. An altercation with Australian Theatrical Amusement Employees Association members resulted in the cancellation of the 1979 telecast but the most turbulent year was 1988. Already burdened with the writers' boycott, a threatened actors' boycott over the ceremony admission price for nominees didn't help negotiations with the ABC over a more agreeable price or timeslot for the telecast. That year the only substantial television exposure was 60 minutes of highlights on SBS's *The Movie Show*.

Since SBS began screening the ceremony in 1998 an improvement in the quality of the production has been noted. With the welcome addition of Emirates as a major sponsor, the hope for higher production values may be a possibility this year.

Although the troubles seem to have subsided, the struggle to find an Awards system agreeable to all will inevitably resurface. With 25 features entered this year, a difference of as little as 2 or 3 entries could be all that is holding off a third pre-selection debate. As for the 'commercially viable' issue, let's just see if *Crocodile Dundee 3* is entered next 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 claymation 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 McNnes 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 clothes-line 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 Purvis, the madman behind films such as *Achilles*, says he would prefer a format that used 50 frames per second as he finds 25 too rough and clunky. Again, Barry Purvis 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 Kirsten 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 naïve 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 racial stereotypes. The naïvete of the images almost covers the latter but not quite. Still, a very accomplished film.



Leunig: Tricks

(c) *Full Circle*

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 Svankmajer but I get the feeling this wasn't the point. After a brief inspection of the captive, a winged chromakey blue insect, and a few glass eye closeups we proceed to the gassing 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 stealthy investiga-

tion, 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 *Repete* by Michaela Pavlatova). Unfortunately this seems to be a point that is lost throughout the film. There is some beautiful photography (those glass 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 Horne 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 well-endowed 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 pissing through the hoop—everybody laughs, end of film. Using a comic strip that is so well known and loved is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it is hard to see how Horne could go wrong with the irreverent humour of Mr Leunig as his starting point; but the audience has their 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). Horne has also given himself another challenge in bringing a third dimension to Leunig's 2D characters, and he has pulled it off admirably. The pathos 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 banner of animation, a term that 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 so 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 Horne get the tick.

Daniel Crooks used to be an award winning animator. His current work is based around temporal manipulation, motion control and environmental actuation. Special thanks for the editorial assistance of Thomas Howie and Miriam Ransom. somebody@dlab.com.au.

...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.



Brother

Brief lives, top scores

Kirsten Krauth

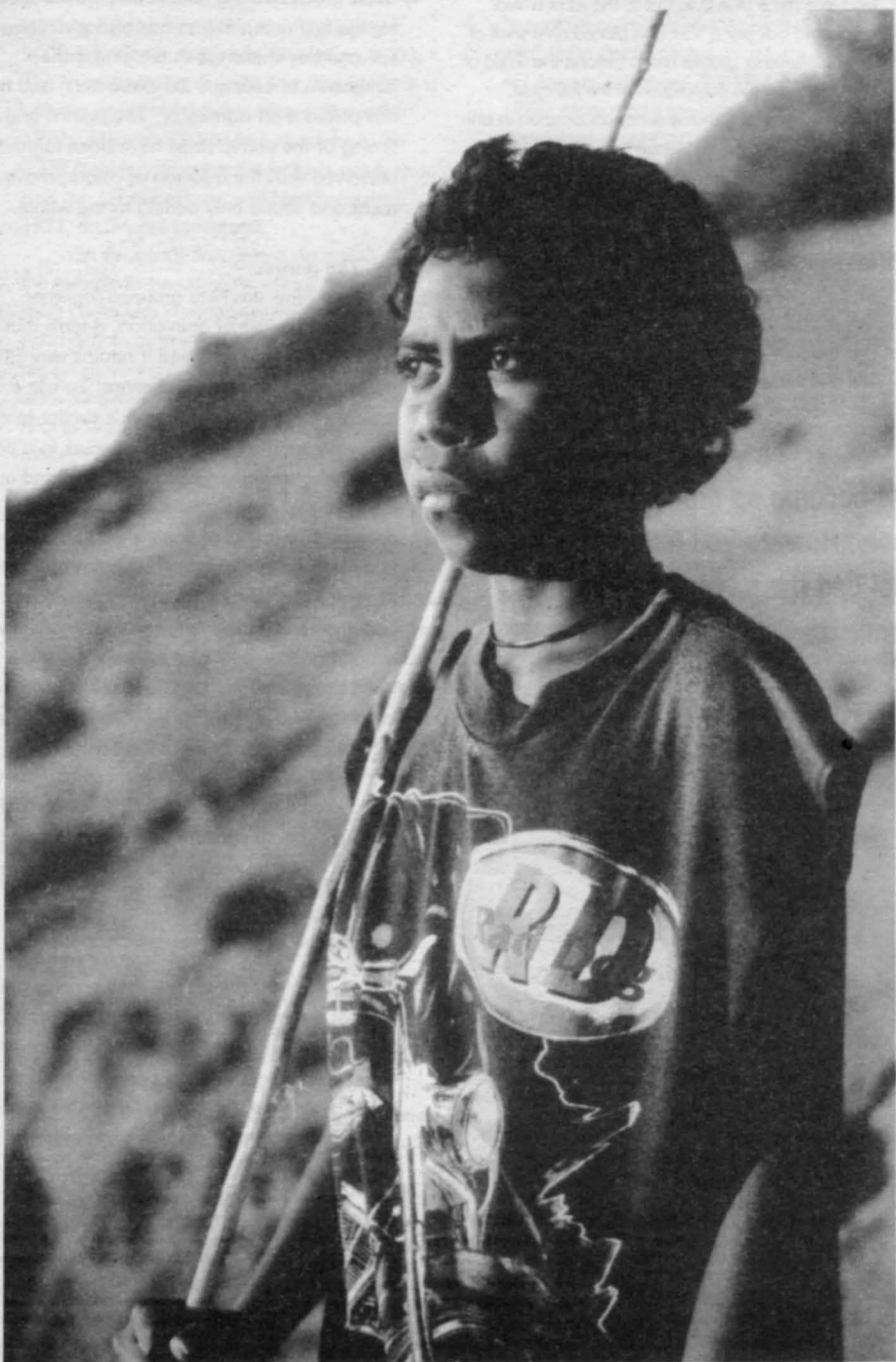
The Award for Best Short Fiction Film goes to...

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 Wai's *Chungking Express* with funky short-haired girl Hana and romantic male Diasuke, a spare aesthetic and a tourist's pace, vivid blues and reds. Australian culture looks and smells different through the camera here: Diasuke 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 Hana/flowergirl whom he secretly desires. His digital camera footage is evocatively used to fetishise Hana and her belongings. The interscenes, where she cruises the Bondi streets at night, slo 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" digi-cam footage. The final scene splits them—Diasuke in Japan and Hana in Bondi—but they

[In *The Director*] the film within the film crosses the line and we come out the other end with social critique (of economic rationalism, of the need to make Oz films that are bankable), shining wit and action/comedy shaped into a cohesive force.



Kullil Foot



Kelton Pell, Morton Hansen, Bruce Hutchison, *Confessions of a Head Hunter*

photo Ashley de Prazer

are linked on-screen, a naughty keepsake, 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 that 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 underdog to the ego. This *Extra* is a control freak. She wears Reeboks 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. Whoops I spoiled the gag. Sorry.

Indigenous content is strong this year with *Kullil Foot* and *Confessions of a Headhunter* exploring Aboriginal communities/cultures in rural and urban WA. *Kullil 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 Jamieson kicks a goal, cut 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 slo mo clichés.

Confessions of a Headhunter (also nominated for Best Screenplay—Archie Roach and Sally Riley) is more interesting and repeated viewings reveal a sly, subversive look at Australian history—who and what defines it—targeting explorers, symbolising oppression/authority/indifference/heroism, depending on who you talk to. In *Confessions of a Headhunter* old values of colonialism and white power crash down—like the head of Captain Cook, victim of a hacksaw. This film tackles identity and belonging but revels too in its humorous take on onscreen violence. The police interrogation scenes are the weakest in

terms of writing/acting but ultimately don't detract from what is a conceptually strong and necessary re-moulding of Australian myths and identity by/for communities who deserve a central place in our shared history.

The Award for Best Screenplay in a Non-Feature Film goes to...

Brother (also nominated for Best Animation Short, see page 25) is a moving look at suburban life. A droll voiceover makes you squirm. Simple greyscale animation introduces the main characters. Mum. Dad. Brother. Suburbia. Powerlines. Dad was an acrobat in the Flying Trapinos. Now he's a paraplegic and an alcoholic who battles from the sidelines. Mum cuts hair at the old people's home. Scissors snip a couple of wiry strands. The acute humour/tragedy comes from observations elegantly and sparsely 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 pantyhose 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 impenetrable 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 my pick for Best Screenplay, 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 Kriv 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

2000 AFI AWARDS: SHORT FILMS

the outsider. Conversations swirl like willy willys—"who left the gate open?"—and implications surface slowly: "Any cars you recognised?"... "No, but I did see cars I didn't recognise." Laidback, poker faced, pointed barbs 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 Extra*, on a film crew, but with a deadly twist that is so well set up. From the opening credits it's pure pizzazz. Funky fonts set up the scenario and introduce The Director, The Sound Guy, The Makeup Chick, The Runner. The people who live and breathe film. The A Team who "ain't coming back for any fucking pickups." The film digs into the pretensions of filmmakers and the way they stomp 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 cleared with head office, interested passersby veered off, and we're ready to "make a movie." Then, suddenly, it's pitch black humour, the discomfort zone where the film within the film crosses the line and we come out the other end with social critique (of economic rationalism, of the need to make Oz films that are bankable), shining wit and action/comedy shaped into a cohesive force.

Other contenders...

Catrina McKenzie's *The Third Note* (Best Sound nominee—Paul Miskin) looks at an isolated pair of neighbours, united by a mutual hatred they play out through sounding off—pretty appropriate considering *The Woman* (Deborah Mailman) is blind. I've always found it hard to watch sighted actors play visually impaired characters and this is no exception, even an actor as good as Mailman (grab *The Colour of Heaven* on video to hear and feel your way through a film). Slava, from next door, is one of the Victoria mower brigade while Mailman plays the piano discordantly when she's angry. *Victoria Piano*. *Victoria Piano*. Let's call the whole thing off.

The Other Days of Ruby Rae (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 bleak landscapes and 35mm textures—corrugated iron, bluestone, wheat—rule a strange other-worldly 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."

Intransit (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 its sinister effect is ultimately 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 deliriously 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, near silver shots of waves, sand and

velvet light, revolve around Pop and his grandson, reflecting on his face, swirling into almost feverish intensity. This is a light meant to guard and protect and ward off danger but it cloaks him in panic, though he is buoyed by a grandson keen to share 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 one bullet with which to shoot his horse at the end of the war? Kind of takes away the glory...




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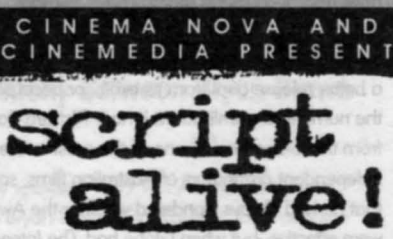
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The Awards: do they make a difference

Tina Kaufmann

The problem for the AFI Awards is the same as for Australian films themselves; they are dwarfed by the Hollywood juggernaut, which monopolises the box office and the spaces for news, gossip and even critical comment in much of the mainstream media, and commands the loyalties of most of the audience. The Australian film awards are nowhere near as visible to the general movie-going public as the US Academy Awards, or as relevant when it comes to choosing films to see. Our local actors and filmmakers are not stars; they really only become stars when they crack the bigtime in Hollywood. The Academy Awards have been portrayed in the media as a triumph for Australian filmmaking because of the awards for Geoffrey Rush, Dean Cain and Lizzie Gardiner and the nominations for Russell Crowe, Cate Blanchett, Toni Collette and Rachel Griffiths, and combined with the publicity surrounding the US films made at the Fox Studios, *Dark City*, *The Matrix*, and of course *Mission Impossible 2*, this acclaim actually worries many in the local industry, in case it gives an erroneous impression of the vitality of Australian film production.

The range of films entered in this year's AFI Awards is probably a more accurate indication of the health of the local industry, and, as such, should be of some concern. This year, it's not so much the quality of the films, although in many cases that's a worry, too, but what the actual equation is.

Twenty-five films is one of the highest levels of production, and it could have been even higher; a number of anticipated films were not entered, either because they were said not to be ready—*The Dish*, *Monkey's Mask*—or because the producers had other plans for their release—*Goddess of 1967*, *Mr Accident*. But how many of this year's crop were made on ultra low budgets—so-called credit card films—without the benefit of a rigorous development process? How many don't have a distributor, and are unlikely to reach an audience? And of those with a distributor, how many will actually make any impression at the box office?

Or, perhaps to ask the question another way—how many are the sort of brave, risky, passionately made films that have found their audience in the past, that have convinced us that Australians do know how to make movies? Some people within the industry are already calling this a good year for Australian films, because *Wogboy*, *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Chopper* have made considerable inroads at the box office, have in fact doubled last year's local earnings for Australian films. And if box office results are the criteria, then they're right. But if it's the overall quality of the films that should be used to judge the success of the year, then it's far more problematic.

For those in the industry, however, the AFI Awards, and probably more importantly, the judging screenings held all around Australia, have been for years a major event on the calendar. Canvassing among attendees at early morning screenings at the Cremorne Orpheum, weekend sessions at the Chauvel and evening screenings at the Valhalla, you find that practitioners have mixed feelings about the Awards and their role, but they do agree on one thing—there is an absolute requirement for such an event. As Richard Harris, Executive Director of the Australian Screen Directors' Association, says, "the awards are not only still relevant, they're needed. It's important to have a system of awards in the industry. They add to the exposure for some films, and can do much

"...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 marketing 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 for 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 glove, but during the time of preselection that second role was diminished, so I saw the return 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 1982 had a 30% increase after the Awards, with a 25% increase for *Malcolm* in 1986, 22% for *Proof* in 1991, 286% for *Bad Boy Bubby* in 1994, and 44% for *Angel Baby* in 1995. Anecdotal 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 Payten from the Globe Group, one of the most active independent distributors of Australian films, says that he had always wondered whether the Awards were effective, but when Globe had *The Interview* in release in 1998, "it had been trickling along for a couple of weeks until the Awards the film won gave it a real boost."

However, most people concede that these are niche market films, and that any flow-on effect is relatively marginal and fleeting, and really 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 Payten. "It's a 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 stars; the only way to build our own star system is to ride on the back of what's happening to our actors overseas."

Richard Harris agrees. "We need a wider acceptance within the general Australian community. SBS does a good job of presenting the Awards, but is it good for the Awards to be on SBS, with its small 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

outweigh that," he says. He doesn't believe that the AFI Awards really register with the general public. "It's good that they happen, but they're not doing anything outside the industry."

This year's roll-up of 25 features has taxed audiences somewhat. Last year, 20,000 general and accredited members of the AFI attended the screenings, and the AFI confidently expects that total attendance to be exceeded. But how many last the distance to qualify to vote? Richard Harris was asked by one exhausted viewer, "just who are the 3 people who'll last out to see all the films?" and wonders just how many of the accredited industry professionals are able to see all the films and qualify to vote, particularly in the creative categories. "What's the percentage of the audience who actually manage to fill out their forms at the end of the process?" Harris asks.

The interim head of the AFI, Deb Verhoeven, agrees that the number of films this year will test the stamina of the members, and that the voting percentages will certainly be something the AFI will be looking at, post-Awards. "It's the largest entry by far for a number of years. However, as a board member I don't remember it being raised as an issue of concern—I think the level of voting has been something the AFI has been happy with since we changed back to the open system. Whatever happens, however, the judging has to be, and has to be seen to be, a fair system, and one that offers the films that haven't been released, an equal chance."

Producer Ross Matthews doesn't mind attending all the screenings if he's not working on a production. "It's a good way to catch up with the range of local production. It's interesting, but it can be depressing, which it has been on the whole this year, despite some good films and the high level of production. In fact, this year made me wonder why we have to watch these \$40,000 video films that someone's daddy has given them the money to blow up. Should they be eligible? But then I realised that if that had been the case a few years ago, we might not have had *Love and Other Catastrophes*."

Matthews is concerned, however, about the specialised voting. "Just how many valid votes will there be in some of the specialist categories—cinematography, editing, design? I've been going to screenings at several venues, and I haven't seen many cinematographers or editors there. Across Australia you'd think they might only amass about 20 or 30 valid votes, and with many more producers and directors voting you could get a seriously skewed result in particular categories."

If watching 25 features is hard, consider the task for those judging the television awards. In addition to seeing all the features, producer Richard Brennan has been on 2 television panels this year, has had to watch 25 hours of drama series and serials for one panel, and 20 hours, including children's drama and telefeatures, for the second. "I've actually preferred the panel system of judging, because I've had to examine my support for a particular episode of a series, or a particular performance. It's very rare to get unanimity on any decision, so there is much discussion in narrowing the field. For example, I particularly liked one episode of a series, but after much discussion we selected a different episode of the same series, and I was quite happy with that."

As well as television, awards are given for documentary and for short films. All awards are important to filmmakers, says film writer and broadcaster

Paul Harris, in terms of earning attention for themselves and their films, but now, when there are so many short film competitions and festivals, he believes, "the AFI Awards for short films may be even more important because of their stability and permanence. And of course, there's the TV exposure."

Richard Brennan thinks the AFI Awards are a highlight of the film year, and although there can be some surprising results, he believes that more often than not, justice gets done. "It's also very rewarding how people who are recognised early in their careers, like Russell Crowe and Rachel Griffiths, go on to international acclaim." And he particularly enjoys the recognition given to people in the industry through the Byron Kennedy and Raymond Longford Awards. "It's a shame, though, that they've often given the Longford Award to people in mid-career; it was always meant to be given at the end of a career, as a celebration of their contribution to the industry."

This year is a very competitive year, with no clear front runner for Best Film, and the expectation that awards will be spread across a number of films, rather than the clean sweep that can be so depressing.

"When the awards were on a commercial network there was a strong connection between press and TV, with more promotion, more publicity leading up to the event," explains Sue Murray, "but in recent years there doesn't seem to have been so much success in getting press coverage. This year might be more attractive to the media, with a number of the films having a profile already. With many people having already seen those films, they might be more interested to see who wins."

As Barbra Luby, film writer and veteran Awards-screening-attender says, "It could be hard to tell what effect awards have this year, because several of the films that could benefit have already been released—*Wogboy*, *Alibrandi*, *Chopper*—and I predict that *Better Than Sex* will do well because of the David Wenham/*Sea Change* factor, whether or not it wins any awards. But 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, and the Awards must have a place within that process."

However, although the judging screenings do allow those in the industry the opportunity for discussion, it's rare for a really open debate to take place. This year there were 3 films that had gone through quite drastic, protracted and at times unpleasant challenges and changes, but this didn't appear to be talked about. As Jeremy Bean, who works in policy research for the AFC, argues, "you rarely, if ever, see filmmakers actually looking at projects, discussing, dissecting them objectively, and trying to draw lessons. We ought to have found a way to use the awards process in a more rigorous, constructive way. We're scared of being too harsh, worried that if we criticise ourselves too much, we disparage the industry and give ammunition to those in the government who might want to cut our funding."

Tina Kaufmann is a writer on film and media and former editor of the late, lamented *Filmnews*.

2000 AFI AWARDS: DOCUMENTARIES

Stolen Generations as winners

Simon Enticknap

Pain, guilt, redemption, survival—the documentary program at this year's AFI Awards nominations displayed a sombre streak, a preoccupation with families and genocide, and the micro and macro fields of human struggle. Don't ask me why, maybe it's a millennium bug that's catching.

Stolen Generations made this connection most directly in telling the stories of 3 Aboriginal children taken from their families, but it found echoes in all the nominations for the Film Australia Award Best Documentary category: *The Diplomat* which witnessed the events surrounding the vote for independence in East Timor from the very public point of view of José Ramos Horta; *Uncle Chatzkel* which discovered another family legacy of persecution, deprivation and survival in Lithuania; and *A Death in the Family* which re-examined the Jenny Tanner case in Victoria to show how truly murderous familiar relations can be, not to mention the evil engendered when corrupt state officials are involved.

These themes were replayed in other non-feature films, such as *Thomson of Anhem Land* which complemented *Stolen Generations* (the 2 should be watched in tandem) in using archival material—the undeniable substance of historical evidence—to detail the genesis, development and opposition to destructive assimilation policies of successive governments. Likewise, *Hurt* is a remarkable collage of young voices and faces recounting stories of alienation, abuse, loss and loneliness in country NSW, accounts of misfiring families and emotions running out of control against a backdrop of big skies, long flat tracks and dead trees. Hopefully, in the process of filming, *Hurt* became *Heal*.

None of this was easy viewing—no escapism or diversionary tactics allowed here—but neither was it uniformly dark; we had compassion and empathy too, bitter-sweet moments of joy which could almost be mistaken for happiness. Inevitably there are unresolved issues to be addressed—who is responsible, who should be made to pay for the pain?—but, for the moment, it is time to pass a not-so-heavy judgement on the films themselves.

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 quotidian detail either side of a news edit—the comic sight of Ali Alatas tripping and almost going arse-over or an interview with Ramos Horta interrupted by the sound of a dog drinking from a waterbowl.

Zubrycki's greatest asset is that, in the middle of the media maelstrom surrounding the independence vote and militia rampages, he has unrivalled access to his subject; he not only gets to interview Ramos Horta but can film him being interviewed, then get the interview about the interview. It's when Zubrycki doesn't have this access and has to make do with everyday media footage that we notice its absence; instead of riding in the car, we see Ramos Horta driving away from us, have to catch up with him later, and in the meantime there's commentary along the lines of 'it's hard to imagine what he must have been feeling.' Well, yes, it would have been interesting to know.



Uncle Chatzkel

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 struggle, 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 limelight and what are his particular peccadillos and everyday foibles? The suspicion remains that these things were sloughed off many years ago.

Uncle Chatzkel is another historical document 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 Chatzkel 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 preservation 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*, stagey footage of the intrepid investigative journalist tapping 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 clichés. 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-enact 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 filmmaking virtuosity such as Anne Delaney's *The Letter* which succeeded in making the unbearable (a mastectomy 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 an instinctive reflex to turn away.

Chasing Buddha popped 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 bossy 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 Courtin 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, *La Nina* shows what can be done in nature documentary mode; you want to see a cyclone, 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 backpackers, 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-heroics of WWI—atrocities 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 cinematographic excellence, there was *Stolen Generations* to remind us why documentary film matters. What does it do? It bears witness to a truth which must be told. It allows people to tell their stories in their own voices. It provides a context in which to promote understanding. Darlene Johnson's film does all this with admirable clarity, intelligence and a keen sense of justice. It is a film which needed to be made and demands to be seen, which is why, despite the obvious merits of other contenders, *Stolen Generations* gets my vote for Best Documentary for the 2000 AFI Awards.

Cinesonic: blanched retro trip with deathly virgins

Philip Brophy

Maui-surfer bead necklace, peeking through a shirt undone to the chest. Two-toned aviator sunglasses, optionally worn or fondled. Narrow flared trousers slung low at the hip line. And a sexy stud haircut: an amalgam of Farrah Fawcett's heat-wanded wings, the Botticelli 'page-boy' look and the unfurled hirsuteness of Jesus Christ. Such is the retro visage of one Trip Fontaine (Josh Hartnett) as he sashays 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 bacchanalia. Eventually, they off themselves. Something about life being tough when you're a teen girl. A bunch of male nerds perv on them in a variety of ways (all ludicrously ineffective) but can't even manage to wank. And some dork drones on and on with a voice-over narration that is as insightful as *The Wonder Years*. Something about "we-this" and "we-that" and other crap about love, society, yadda-yadda. I guess the book was a "must-read." Through this blanc-mange of 70s panel van art (about as hip now as using a Chemical break-beat sample) an arch "girliness" wafts through the music by Air—a French band, as they label themselves. And did I mention that it's set in the 70s? The film reminds you of this about every 30 seconds.

It's 2000 and still people think the 70s are 'cool'. Like, they're able to laugh at those 'dags'

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.

back then. Like people dressed in Country Road, Mooks and new Levis are not 'dags.' Like kids going into ad agencies with 'rad' ideas like "sending up the 70s" are real with-it. This ongoing flirtation with 'bad' style is typically retro—and typically insecure. Most tellingly, it is achingly sanctioned and validated as a stylistic stance, 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 aesthetic embrace of Kylie as a politic. 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 microwave safe movie which numbs you to all processing in the act of consumption.

How exactly does this microwaving—this "retrogradation"—work in a film in an audio-visual sense? How does one fold, caress, arrange and drape a cinesonic 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 Virgin Suicides* offers a chance for considering this—even though the film is woefully off the mark in terms of successfully exploiting, fusing or even handling audio-visual issues.

The Virgin Suicides has a requisite peppering of 70s songs, and the music supervision is canny and accurate: Todd Rungren, Gilbert O'Sullivan, 10CC, Heart. A consistency guides the selection into a cache of soft sensual rock. Not entirely vapid, but oozing with a pregnant sexuality which thematically mirrors the languid moves of the blonde quartet and their palpable pubescence. Just as many soft rock songs from the mid-70s alluded to heady states of passion without unleashing any noticeable libidinal energy (The Starlight Band's *Afternoon Delight* being the penultimate example), the virgin blondes hover as objects beyond reach—but moist and ripe for engagement. In a sense, they visualize the 4-part vocal harmonies that densify pop music's choral floridity. Such harmonic vocalizations within Pop's meta-trajectory—from barber shop quartets to wartime swing to urban doo-wop to secularized gospel to Brit pop to ornate R'n'B to the currently undying boy/girl-group resurgence—use multiples of voice to act as a swirling garment which simultaneously dresses and undresses a melody. Such eroticism is rendered pornographic when one lyrically addresses intimacy, privacy and consummation. 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 musicological trope.

Where the audiovisual construct of seductive shots of the blondes lolling around combined with 70's soft rock on the soundtrack generates a coital limpidity central to the film's "what-me-sexy?" 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 hyper-representational, perfectly befitting French culture's curating of stylists who excel in replication (which may be why post-70s Japanese pop culture has been so transfixed by all things French). The choice of Air is a savvy one—though the band's playful authorial coding tends to be lost within 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 for *The Virgin Suicides* can be identified and classified by tracing a multiple of sonic arcs that stream forth from the band's studio-produced epicentre. One stream leads to a "symphonic loch", wherein a melting pot of mid-70s Euro rock references, echoes, phonemes and motifs can be discerned. I spy concentric ripples emanating from Magma, PFM, Le Orme, Ash Ra Tempel, La Dusseldorf, Klaus Shulze, Kingdom Come, Goblin, King Crimson, et al. Another stream leads to the lite-rock arrangements gleaned from Ennio Morricone, Riz Ortolani, Bruno Nicolai, Michel Polnareff, Michel LeGrand, Gert Wilden, Manfred Hubler, Siegfried Schwab, et al. Their frothy film scores from the late 60s to late 70s struck modern and modish poses via their use of rock/pop instrumentation and spacey studio effects to suggest a libertine power unleashed by their pseudo-hip music. I imagine that in Air's record collection you would find Francois de Roubaix's score for Harry Kruml's *Daughters of Darkness* (1971); Pink Floyd's score for Barbet Schroeder's *The Valley* (1972); Gato Barbieri's score for Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango In Paris* (1973); The Vampires' Sound Incorporated's score for Jess Franco's *Succubus* (1974); Jose Bartel's score for Charles Matton's *Spermula* (1976); Michel Polnareff's score for Lamont Johnson's *Lipstick* (1976); and Goblin's score for George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). (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 orchestrators often employed Baroque-style modals 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 simple way of putting this: Euro music always sounds like it somehow comes from a church. Its melodic progression, drama and resolution wells up deep from the musical architectonics that mark the shifts through Early, Medieval and Baroque music. Knowingly or unknowingly, every trained keyboard player who ended up as a composer or band member in the 70s imported such mock piety through the use of organs, synthesizers and mellotrons.

The bizarre thing is that the soft-core sex boom which fuelled European film production between 1969 to 1977 often combined scenarios of mysterious topless nubile wandering somnambulistically through mansions, castles, convents and tombs with symphonic rock throbbing and pipe organs droning on the soundtrack. As scantily as the costumes adorned women's bodies, so did themes of redemption, salvation, retribution and seduction drape these films, limply aligning them to purported libertine ideals intended to decimate the mouldy values of the Church and the State's repression of sexual freedom. (In other words: virgin lesbian nuns humping to progressive rock.) Such were the characteristically heady delusions of the upper middle class that both produced and consumed these movies.

Taking all of this into account, *The Virgin Suicides* can be viewed as a contemporary art-house version of this endearingly pathetic period of progressive cinema. It even—unknowing, I would argue—recalls far greater titles (and films) like *The Virgin Report*, *Virgin Among The Living Dead*, *The Blood Splattered Bride*, *Confession of A Sixth Form Girl*, *Behind Convent Walls*, etc through its sensationalist juxtaposition of "virgin", "suicide" and David Hamilton photographic effects (though all we get is a cupboard full of Tampax). Yet in place of the kind of haunting erotic inexplicability one finds in much 70s Euro sexploitation, *The Virgin Suicides* serves up a blanched, complacent Italo-Catholic ambience intermingled with a lackadaisical sexuality. The referents and codes lazily announce themselves in the film's audiovisual terrain, but the narrational machine of the film does not run on their fuel.

Despite the careful sono-musical landscaping of Air—and despite a controlled and consistent tone, which guides the film's plasticity and performances—a flatness pervades the very surface of the film. Whilst this view sounds contradictory, it should be noted that the recouping and appropriation of a generic or iconic audiovisual textuality does not conform to the extant and reduced notions of postmodern quotation. You might be po-mo by restaging a film 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 chemically distilling the flavour of lemon detergent: your molecular formula of reconstruction remains in the immaterial realm of calculable formula. You're doing an image of an image; it was already rendered immaterial before your arrival.

Sound—specifically, the tonality of sound of the recording of a musical style—is a dense fabric 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 narration. Music—supervised, commissioned, scored, composed—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 inside your head.

How does one fold, caress, arrange and drape a cinesonic 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.

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Experimenta's orbital view

Anna Dzenis

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 Loader, 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 ecosystem 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." Fugitive 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 Loader'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-voyeuristic listening-in to encounters which were variously polemical, topical, intimate, sometimes even indifferent. Positioned as an acousmetre, I had memories of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, in its invitation to multiple intrusiveness.

Megan Jones' *Sites of Interception*, on the other hand, was clearly a work whose purpose was both educational and political. This multimedia installation invites viewers to look at satel-



Nicola Loader, *Untitled*

lite imagery of the Murray Darling Basin in the Sunraysia region of Victoria, to explore Quicktime VR 360-degree panoramic environments of the region. Megan's CD-ROM was created in consultation with the Salinity Management Consortium as a *SunRISE 21 Artist in Industry* project and explores the sustainability of the Sunraysia 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 images, flickering constantly. On one side Margie Medlin's monitor-based digital media installation, *Estate*, 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 figural, in the unlikely milieu of an ever-expanding urban vista.

On the other side was *BIYT/me/I (BODILY INSTINCT YEARNING TECHNOLOGY/multiplying emptiness/Identity)*, a digital video projection-based installation directed by Brook Andrew and choreographed by Raymond Peer. The intention of this installation was to give Wiradjuri (Aboriginal) and Assyrian perspectives of an Australian landscape. A multiple madness of images is navigated through 3 Australian identities. These figures are an Aboriginal surveyor re-mapping a city landscape, an Assyrian business man 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 the hesitant 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.

Orbital: visions of a future Australian landscape, curator Keely Macarow, Experimenta Media Arts, an associated event of the Australia Council's HeadsUp Australia 100 festival, London, Lux Gallery, London, July 2-9; Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, July 6-29.

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5TH OCTOBER
autonomousAudio
 works by Oren Ambarchi & Martin Ng; Nik Gaffney
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 Jaques Soddell; Christopher Willits
 curated by Mitchell Whitelaw

IMA Traveller + Breed
 Erwin Driessens & Maria Verstappen (Neth)

20TH OCTOBER
Life Spaces II
 Christa Sommerer & Laurent Mignonneau (Jap)

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY
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Autopoiesis by Kenneth Rinaldo (US)
Præturnatural by Michelle Barker (Aus)
The Tissue Culture and Art Project
 Oron Catts, Ionat Zurr & Guy Ben-Ary (Aus)

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futureScreen 00: getting Alife

Mitchell Whitelaw talks with Keith Gallasch

I'm part of a large organising committee including people like Annemarie Jonson, and John Tonkin. I'm helping out with the exhibition components. I've recently finished my 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 coherent little 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; it also filters into artificial intelligence and robotics. All those things are broader than Alife as a discipline but all of them are involved in futureScreen 00.

How is it staged?

The core event is a forum that spans technoscience, creative practice and cultural thought. So in the last one, which was about avatars, we had technologists who were building software to make avatars and people who were building virtual worlds from the technology, IT and commercial industry point of view. We also had lots of artists who were doing the same sort of thing. Similarly with Alife, 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 through a hunch that AI was basically going about things the wrong way by trying to start with intelligence as the object that needed simulating. The basic intuition of Alife is why don't we start with something simpler and see if 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 mutated on computer screens.

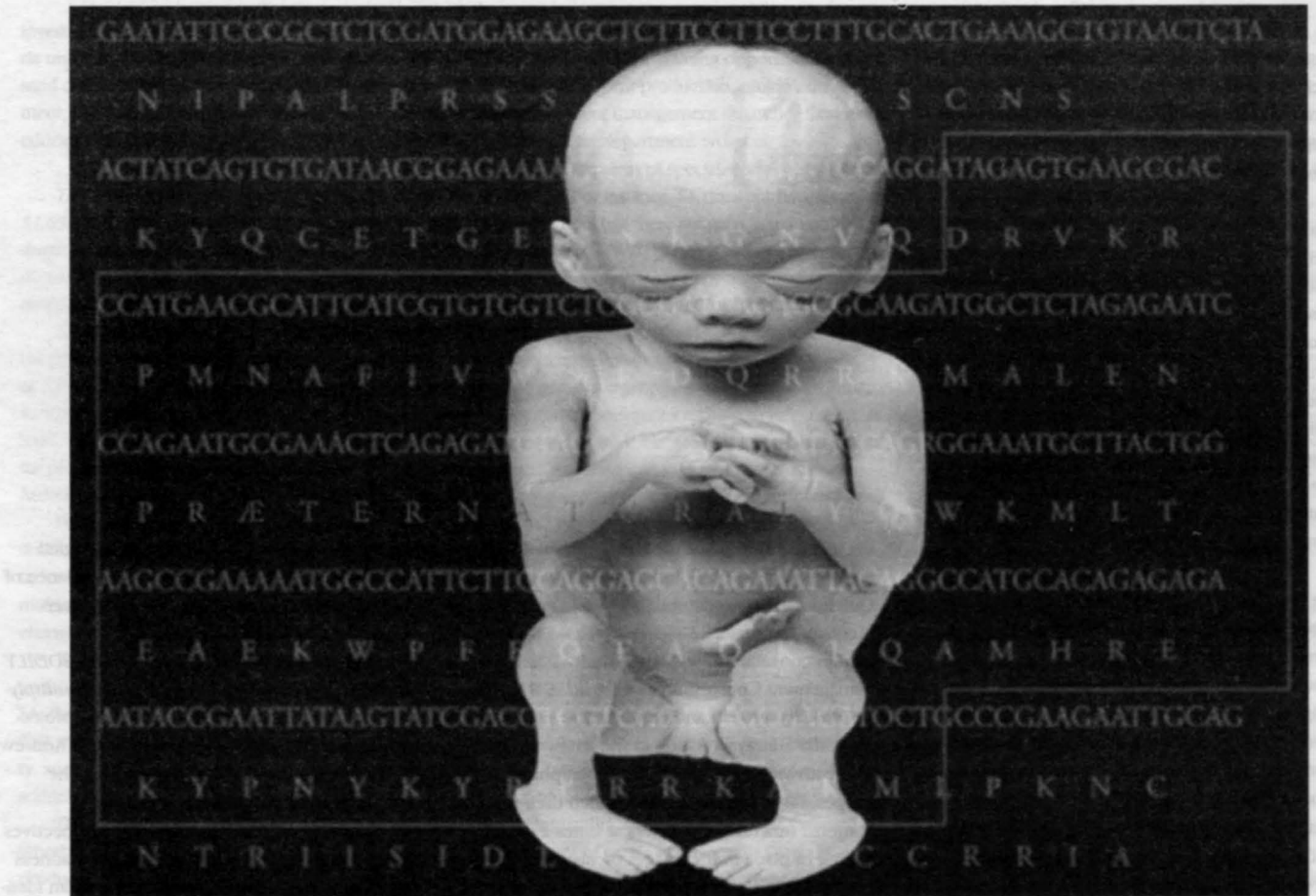
It's an obsession but it's also quite a well-established tradition in the electronic arts. This is quite a strong thread, which almost parallels the science. I think of it as a generative urge and an urge for automatism, if that's the right word, for the automatic, for the thing that does its own thing. I guess 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 organicist 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 will it manifest itself in futureScreen?

All kinds of ways. We've got some beautiful robotic work. An American artist called Kenneth Rinaldo for many years has been building robotic systems. He calls them a "confluence" between technological and biological systems. They're robotic arms but the structural material is grapevines with delicate little wire and pulley articulations. The work's called *Autopoiesis* and consists of 14 of these arms; we've got 8 of them, each



Michele Barker, *Praeternatural*

about 3 metres long. They hang from the ceiling, sense each other's location and sort of flock around. They also sense the location of people walking around in the room and they twist and turn and sing to each other, using telephone tones.

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.

Autopoiesis is at the Australian Centre for Photography. Also at the ACP is Michele Barker's new work *Praeternatural* which is a very lush, interactive CD-ROM-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 living tissue—tiny postage stamp sized bits of scaffolding 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 *IMA Traveller*, which is a computer-driven video projection piece, very very simple. It looks like you're diving into a field of multi-coloured clouds and the clouds advance towards you and keep differentiating and you keep diving in and in and in. It's a kind of zoom that never stops. But 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 mat 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 *The 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 *Breed*, 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 our aesthetic 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, Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau. It's an artificial ecosystem where the creatures live in a thicket 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 it an e-mail, which it will interpret—this is the genetic 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 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 *Autonomous Audio* (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 mpeg 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 Ng who are local improv. merchants—a beautiful piece using feedback systems running through turntables.

Then there's the forum event—another all star lineup. There's Langton, as well as Tom Ray, another Alife pioneer who will be doing a remote presentation, and Cynthia Brezale, who builds "sociable 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 are some interesting AI people. There's Claude Samut, who was involved in the Robo Soccer 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 McCormack, 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 Thylacene project, hoping to clone or revive the Thylacene from preserved genetic material. That'll be fascinating.

dLux media arts, futureScreen00, *Symposium*, Powerhouse Museum, October 27 - 29, Exhibitions: Artspace, October 5-29, ACP (Australian Centre for Photography), October 20 - November 20, (www.dlux.org.au/fs00).

Tokyo Diary: the city performs

Four writers participating in the ongoing Gekidan Kaitaisha-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 Eckersall

Confusion #1 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 by Kaitaisha. The same model applied in Tokyo only they were hosting and NYID didn't do their own performances. Excellent hospitality. The work was also more developed.

Although agreeing on the theme of 'media', differences between the companies became more pronounced in Tokyo. Both inevitable and strategic, this con-fusion snuck under the media theme and became a starting point for creative work. When the project worked best it was fused literally. The combined companies jogging through the Tokyo suburbs in NYID Artistic Director David Pledger's cube formation, for example, or performing the hyper-speedy Japanese folk dance sequence (Gekidan Director Shinjin Shimizu calls this the "media shower" that activates and saturates the body). Such performance exercises, fragmented and intermingled, became representations of contested cultural terrains, language slippage and hybrid landscapes. One imagined new kinds of performing bodies and cultures.

On the other hand, Pledger's sports theatre sat strangely in Tokyo where like any big city sports cultures are diffused by population and diversity. One critic's comments about the "AFL bodies" of the Australian cast made me wonder if we are aiding an unhelpful stereotype here.

The project highlighted contextual matters and historical conditions in theatre; the ideological tension between the representational forces of exterior form favoured by NYID and the motivational forces of interior work seen in Kaitaisha'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 incipient Brechtism in reaction to the personal-subjective modern; Kaitaisha's post-Grotowski forms as a reaction to Shingeki/modern theatre). These were not reconciled, only observed. Nonetheless it was fascinating to see different politics and histories associated with questions of representation debated in the workshop and displayed on bodies in performance.

The Kaitaisha company remove clothing for an exercise called 'exile.' These contact-release bodily encounters are one of Kaitaisha's signature performative gestures. 'Exile' conveys the melancholy sensibility of humanity in close contact but unable to communicate. Kaitaisha suggest that the exercise develops an awareness of skin as the edge, or the surface, of the body. The lack of clothing aids in body contact that seeks to achieve an almost molecular-level imaginary integration of skin surfaces. For some of the participants and observers, however, the nudity raised obvious questions associated with gender and sexual politics. As intimated, such problems of representation were foregrounded in the project as a whole. The temporary solution to the debate saw NYID actors put on clothing at precisely the moment when Kaitaisha removed some. A humorous moment for those in on the joke but it didn't really solve the problem.

In the sequence called *Funeral*, NYID actors recalled deep-seated memories. Subliminal and disjointed, these thoughts were recorded in video close-up and replayed on a split screen. This beautiful sequence raised provocative questions about memory/history as a source of identity and power. Shimizu's notion of memory as a process of 'becoming' in performance and a way of making the past and the self, offers a model for cultural renewal and reconciliation of difference. But why

the continuous use of English even if it was jumbled? "The all-pervasive and colonial discourse" as David Goodman says. I wonder if there are some unexamined assumptions about the western body and western actors as receptacles for psychological realism and neurosis.

As a journey to con-fusion though, the project was able to investigate creative, political and cross cultural moments and tensions without banishing one side or others viewpoint. The artistic and personal goodwill and friendships run deep, as does the river of difference.

Tokyo Diary II Edward Scheer

Australia is a state keeping itself busy staving off perceptions of economic oblivion through subtle acts of brutality against people: its own (the elderly, students, unemployed, indigenous etc) and others. As I write, the inmates (is there a better term?) of Woormah detention centre in the South Australian desert have been storming the complex while the relevant minister (spot the oxymoron) coldly talks not of the rights of people without land in a land without people but of people with no 'entitlement' to freedom (Philip Ruddock, 2JJJ news, August 28.) We hear 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 exercise between theatre companies Gekidan Kaitaisha 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 invisible, moving through the ignorance of the world undetected. Now there's a sense of awkward visibility, skid marks on the radar screen of the region.

In the solitude of airports I breathe again. I am a privileged person. My nausea is a privilege, protected by torture, barbed wire prisons... Heiner Müller, 1977.

Friday, July 14. Breakfast at Starbucks. Move through the heat to ICC Inter Communications Centre to visit the anechoic chamber. Completely silent—even with the door open there is no reverb at all and no sound echoing back off the walls and floor, so it's hard to orientate oneself. I feel like a bat with headphones on, banging off the walls of the cave. A girl comes in but I have no idea how close she is to me. The sound of pages flipping in her guidebook could be right next to my ear but as I turn I notice she's several metres away in the doorway. Suddenly another figure appears in the door. Unannounced by any sounds, their presence is uncanny. Like mine I guess.

The quality of space here is not unlike the silence of the shrines at Nikko north of the city. Rinnoji boasts the temple of the roaring dragon. A monk asks you to listen and directs your gaze to the painted dragon on the ceiling of the room. 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 so sudden and sharp he says, because it is the voice of the dragon responding to the summons of the sticks. Is there a cultural acoustics? Can we discern cultural difference through listening to the place? 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 sympathetic reverberations to flow through us to reanimate 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 Yokezuna Akebono slipped in his bout against a much smaller opponent and almost fell before righting himself and idly bundling the other sumo out of the ring. That night at Setegaya Public Theatre, a body on the ground outside the theatre turned out to be a dancer from Dumb Type. The motionlessness of the sick body appeared in Furuhashi's choreography from time to time and in the homage to Furuhashi in OR. Strange to see it displaced on the pavement but there is always a realtime connection to the performative moment. The great 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 anyway the sumo have too much authority to be considered avatars of Jerry's craven power-crazed 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 beat whose pace is set, perhaps, by an invisible control tower or a cerebral chip that enters the body as it enters the street. Part unsettling, part beautiful, you follow, adjusting an expansive Australian amble to a disciplined Tokyo pace. You could start dreaming of bodies without organs, legs without feet, feet without shoes and arms without elbows, for the body appears unobstructed and unencumbered by a failure to pass through.

Viz. Issy Miyake's summer range of inflatable clothing. The little plastic nozzles on the hats, skirts, tops and coats allow the clothes to inflate and exhale. 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 shrine.

Two observations cut through this smooth time.

At Shibuya where the pace is quicker than in more conservative districts, the lighting designers flood and strafe the walking crowd. I notice a young woman talking from a public phone box who bears what I will call the Shibuya-Look. The Look begins with the shoes—15-20cm platform soles held on with a toe strap. They come in different versions from sandal to sneaker, but are for neither beach nor running track. They throw the body forward into a half-fall and ship-roll 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 blond hair loose. Despite the European signifiers, this Look is not about becoming western. The Shibuya-Look reads as an enactment of cutie 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 super-cool. But there is a sense in which the Look reads 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 city ordered and functioning. Resistant, subversive? I don't think so. The young women perform frailty, vulnerability and instability. Their rates of speed are erratic, they do not glide and they have to discover their elbows. They are all out of step.

continued on page 34

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Double vision: recent Sydney performance

Keith Gallasch

1. The second time I saw Barrie Kosky's *Oedipus* (Seneca via Ted Hughes), I was vulnerable from a recent operation that hadn't yet quite worked out and constantly felt the jab and twist in the guts of Hughes' visceral explicitness. The condition was amplified by often feeling as if eye to eye with that primordially wounded man. At my first viewing I was sitting well to the side of the performance, a little too distant, if nonetheless engaged. At my second, the intense focus of Kosky's direction was felt even more strongly—the tiny 6 square metre raised stage, a ceiling largely bereft of stage lighting, Paul Healy's quietly swirling metallic sound score (a kind of aural, though unkitschy plague equivalent of the cosmic disturbances in De Mille's *The Ten Commandments*) and the finely tuned, wracked interiority of Robert Menzies' performance, all logic and denial in the face of the increasingly obvious. Here is a man who is blind before he blinds himself (not surprising then, though theatrically risky, that the blinding in the script is narrated not seen). An essential stillness in the production amplified the claustrophobic vision, intensifying the anguished poetry, interrupted only here and there by intense bursts of physicality erupting out of ritual (rather quaint), psychic revelation (brutally convincing, especially in Matthew Whittet's gawky adolescent Manto) and the dead thrusting up out of the earth. The Seneca-Hughes-Kosky vision is a 3am wideawake nightmare of our times. In *RealTime* 38 we promised you an interview with Menzies, but by the time my body fixed it was too late. Seneca's *Oedipus*, *Sydney Theatre Company*, Wharf 1, opened July 1.

2. I saw Michael Kantor's account of Patrick White's *The Ham Funeral* just once, but the vision of Armfield's production of a decade ago was still with me. The pleasure of the earlier production (televised as well on ABC) was that Armfield had appropriately replaced his usual warm naturalism with something more surreal. It was a reminder too that in the lead up to the Theatre of the Absurd, White (with Priestley among others) was not alone in tinkering with a poetic interplay between the real and the dream. The results though were often forgettable (as a student I endured the agony of appearing in Priestley's *Johnson Over Jordan*). *The Ham Funeral* however is resilient, a kind of classic for an Australian audience, and survives even Kantor's



Rachel Szalay, Robert Menzies, *Oedipus*
photo Tracey Schramm

richly realised extremes and Ben Rogan's inability to give the rather thankless role (even for Tyler Copin for Armfield) of the Young Man a life. It becomes very much (and who would any longer be surprised by this) the Landlady's play with Julie Forsyth in her full incantatory, operatic mode, pathos bordering on tragedy. The relationship between the Girl and the Young Man is very awkwardly realised and chorus of relatives works in fits and starts. This is not Kantor at his best, but there was something right about the push right into total nightmare. However, it's Armfield's netherworld that will stay with me. *Company B Belvoir*, *Patrick White*, *The Ham Funeral*, *Belvoir St Theatre*, opened August 2.

3. Am I seeing double? I wouldn't be surprised, it's the day of the onset of the illness and in a mild delirium I don't know what's wrong.

One night I'm watching a group of young performers (mid teens to mid 20s, PACT Youth Theatre) sometimes hauntingly multiplied on video monitors and the transparent walls of the hotel set. A dream of an uneasy future, or is it already present—electronic clones, ghost philosophers, TV obsessives and theatre doubles—are they Genet's maids? The next afternoon I'm watching an elderly Japanese Butoh performer move with quiet anxiety amidst transparent screens that multiply images of grids, trains, buildings and the rocky landscape she is finally exiled to (*Exile*, see page 47). The vision is both a real and a media(ted) nightmare. Both productions are exemplary models of multimedia production, both utterly assured and performed with great conviction.

PACT's *Replicant Hotel* boasts taut and commanding direction by Caitlin Newton-Broad, powerful space and media design by Sam James (a set of transparent hotel rooms; thin strips of light that suddenly unfurl into cinematic images of huge restless crowds; richly coloured images of performers on hotel room TVs), and an engrossing, driving sound track collaged by Gail Priest. *Replicant Hotel* is visually and performatively lucid, the kind of thing you could watch without immediate anxiety over what every moment means—something to reflect on later, like all good performance. However, despite a broad dramaturgical coherence, a superfluity of text and writing of variable quality from, it would seem, many hands had me grabbing for a pen in the dark—'Gee, I better get that down.' 'God, I missed that.' 'Which of the two Voltaires said that?' 'It's okay, I'll read the book afterwards.' That not insignificant complaint aside, *Replicant Hotel* was a joyous experience, evidence not only of the innovative good health and theatrical expertise of PACT, but also of the promise of an emerging form where the interplay of live performance and projected images really works. *Replicant Hotel*, *PACT Youth Theatre*, *Erskineville*, August 4 - 19.

continued page 47



Veronica Porcaro, *Replicant Hotel*

photo Heidrun Lohr

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 a fall/walk/sway/roll movement towards the station. She is in a hurry and pushes through with her elbows. She reaches the pedestrian crossing and is first off at the lights, but is soon overtaken. Nearing the station, a young man in flat sneakers grabs at her arm. She veers off towards another entrance, he follows and she disappears at an angle down the stairs and is gone. This 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 tourist-voyeur, 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 blow-up dolls. My first purchase is easy, in a toyshop I purchase a NASA astronaut with the Stars and Stripes on his back-

pack and screen-like face. The signs are ominous.

At the NYID-Kaitaisha symposium, 2 things about dolls arise. It is after all an unusual occasion—a forum in which the artists, including the actors, can converse about the exchange project with an audience of closely attentive scholars and students. Two of the female performers, one from Melbourne and one from Tokyo, say almost the same thing—that they could not understand what was being asked of them by the unfamiliar director. In spite of hearing the request to 'dehumanise', they resisted the task or found their own way of moving it. As Hirosan, Kaitaisha's leading woman, says "it is difficult to be unhuman."

Kathleen Mezur, a US feminist critic has been researching the Japanese girlie performance groups, that she says are "remapping the doll body." We request a visit to a 'girlie' performance ensemble and are invited instead to a rehearsal. Far away in a very ordinary suburban community centre, Pearl Sauce is rehearsing "the little mermaid", about a Vietnamese girl working in a restaurant. Eleven women who look like school girls, neat and clean, are

waiting while 2 men encase one very thin young woman into her tail. Her rubber latex top is all peeling flesh, mobile and sticky, the tail is made of rusty steel plates stitched together. The sharp edges of the casing cut into her slender waist, and someone offers her a towel. She is captive—lifted into the air. There is a disjunction between the upper and lower bodies of weight, texture and mobility. She cannot move, either to push herself up with her arms or to straighten her body out. We watch horrified, fearful that she might snap. The men labour over their artwork, the woman listlessly practice parts of their lotus dance. Barthes wrote of the Bunraku doll: "the men in black busy themselves around the doll, but without any affectation of skill or discretion, their actions are eminently transitive." Sensibly, they ignore us. Time passes, we sit uncomfortably on our row of seats and pretend we are not there. How else to explain our participation as performance analysts in this bizarre sadistic ritual?

I search everywhere for more inflatable

dolls. At the entrance to the Kudanshita subway on the way to catch my plane there is a street fair selling hundreds of different inflatables. There are the Kewpie dolls and Astroboys that I was looking for. I pick up several in my arms. They have plastic ponytails and plastic flipskirts and highheel boots. Their big eyes and cute smiles and white flesh greet me. I ask the man to let their air out. I try to make a purchase but discover that I can't afford any of these empty dolls. I will miss my plane. I let the signifier go.

At the airport, my son's fireworks are confiscated. But I have in my suitcase another doll, a cardboard girl on trapeze, who strips when you pull a string. At least so I thought. But it turns out she is a firework. You light it at the base of the swing, and the explosion causes a chain reaction from which she falls onto her seat, loses her bra, clutches her breasts and shrieks "OH, NO!" Needless to say the potentially destructive 'no sight' of this event prevents me from ever lighting the firework, so the "OH, NO!" Tokyo doll remains in her bikini, pinned to my noticeboard.

the dark
at the top
of the stairs




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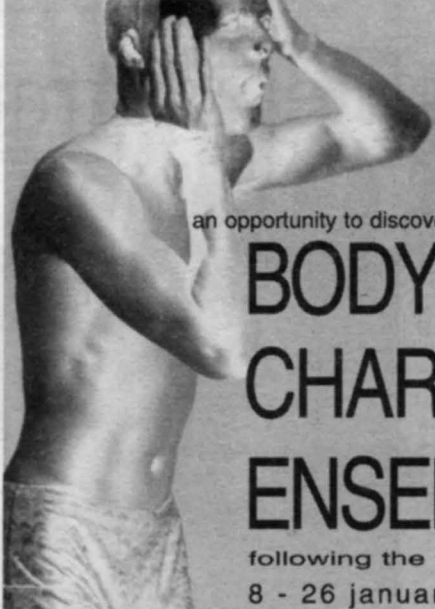

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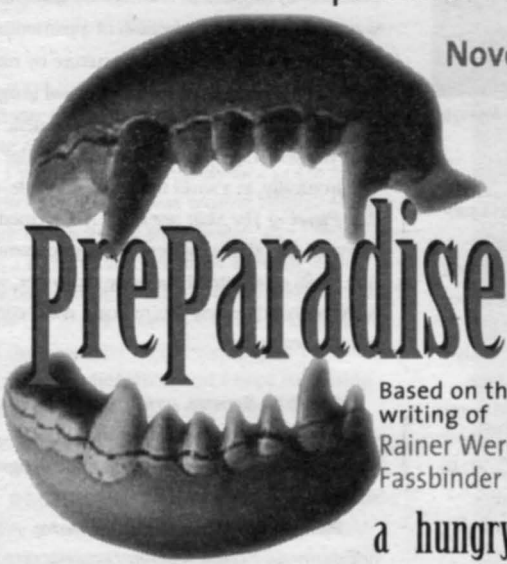
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Peeling back epidermis Australis

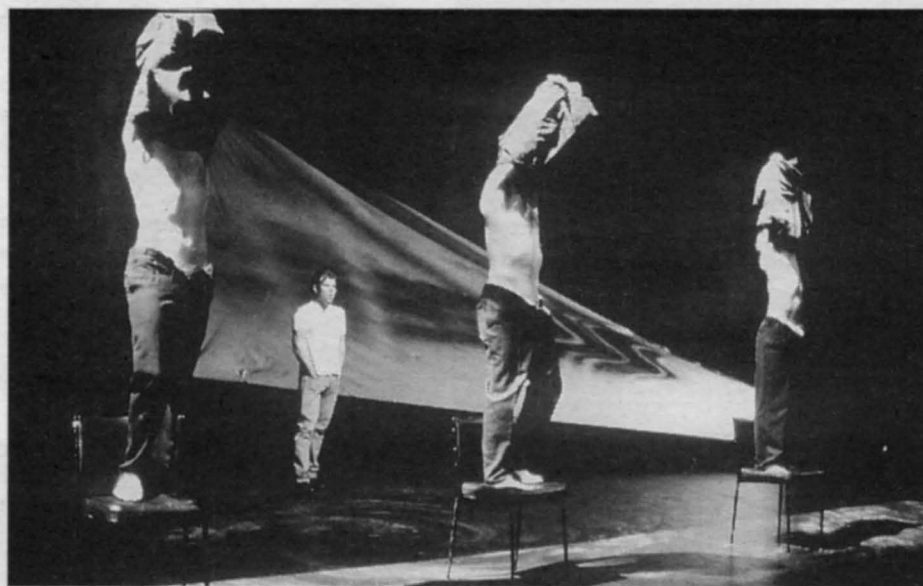
Dickon Oxenburgh

English playwright Martin Crimp's late 80's satire on Thatcherite conservatism, *Play With Repeats*, has been reprised in a quietly effective production at the ADT's Balcony Theatre. In a one-off production, director Chris Drummond guided his strong ensemble through the bleak netherworld of the central character Anthony Steadman (played with naïve 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."

Steadman is an amiable, unambitious 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 harried 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 his world by employing the services of Lamine, a shabby, irascible clairvoyant (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 real nature is finally revealed when he tramples the only real possibility for human warmth and companionship held out by Barbara (interpreted with fragile sincerity by Cathy Adamek).

With some great jazz by music director Julian Ferraretto, and effective, functional stage design by Gaelle Mellis, *Play with Repeats* still has metaphoric 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



Junction Theatre & Leigh Warren Dancers, *Piercing the Skin*

phot Alex Makeyev

arts events in Adelaide. *Piercing the Skin* and *Body Art* have peeled back *epidermis Australis* with striking results.

The human body as post-structural icon scarified by the twin forces of identity and power is a popular theme in contemporary arts and culture. "The body is both a playground and a battlefield; the site where the greatest tenderness occurs and the most brutal inequality is acted out," says Vanessa 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 5 distinctly different writers (Rodney Hall, Stephen House, Eva Johnson, Verity 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 piquant ode to identity and sense of place, while Paul Rees chose a monologue for *Spare Parts (1&2)*, a mordant apologia for body-part farming (the ultimate rationalization of the individual?). Verity Laughton created a vivid poetic dialogue for *Fox*, a forensic whodunit spanning 1000 years. Stephen House's expressionistic *Walk In the Dirt* and Rodney Hall's *The Self*, a satiric examination of gender and difference, rounded out the conceptual kaleidoscope.

Rather than appearing a stylistic hotpotch, I thought *Piercing the Skin* achieved a real sense of playful connection—a spirit of co-operation that has spilt over into future joint projects mooted for the 2 companies.

Skin piercing took on a decidedly more per-

manent connotation in *Body Art*, an ethnographic survey of body decoration at the Museum of South Australia. Representations of traditional cultural insignia from Pacific nations such as Samoan tatua and Maori ta moto are juxtaposed with voyeuristic images of urban tattooing, piercing and scarification. While I appreciate the death of curatorial narrative, I found the thematic progress of the exhibition rather too open ended, relying on sensation (S&M, 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 scarring?

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 lateral audience crossover, which is always handy when you're doing good contemporary theatre.

Play With Repeats, writer Martin Crimp, director Chris Drummond, lighting Mark Pennington, music Julian Ferraretto, design consultant Gaelle Mellis, Balcony Theatre.

Piercing The Skin, Junction Theatre Company and Leigh Warren Dancers, directed by Geoff Croubust and Leigh Warren; designers Kerru Reled and Dean Hills, music David Hirschfelder and Collage; *The Space*

Body Art, National Museum and the South Australian Museum, Museum of South Australia, July 15–September 30.

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 *Sonata for Ten Hands* reveals the payoff. It is a work that acknowledges the strengths of the company's history and yet takes confident (if still fledgling) steps onto new artistic ground.

Directed by Yaron Lifschitz, *Sonata's* 2 parts are linked by theme, character and the playing of renowned pianist Tamara Anna Cislowska. In circumstances 30 years apart, a group of children/adults tease and terrify each other via giddy sexual politics, power plays and the odd moment of misjudged tenderness. Instead of the old "don't-fuck-with-me" swagger and "gimme" demands, this work offers a another 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 Cislowska.

The *Sonata* story begins with the arrival of the pianist. With flowing red hair and clad in a black cape, Cislowska sits at a glistening baby grand, remaining there throughout the show, playing first Schumann's *Piano Sonata #1* op 11 and then Brahms *Piano Sonata #3* op 5 in concentrated solitude. Yet, she is not alone, as the work's title indicates, nor removed from the action. As the other performers appear as guests at a birthday and then a dinner party, the epic qualities of

the works that Cislowska plays begin to find their physical expression in the smallest of everyday moments. Playground politics, it seems, are not to be sneered at, nor are tabletop arguments, especially when conducted from the great heights of a pyramid of chairs. A more subtle resonance between pianist and circus performers is the shared hue of design, lighting, Cislowska's hair and the passions that overtake events. At the centre of the narrative are the typically sad-sack performance personae of Andrew Bray, this time realised as the birthday boy and the dinner host. The charismatic Bray plays a character hoping for popularity but, rapidly, 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 Ali Weaver). Between her character and the other party guests, created by Azaria Universe and Andrew Bright, are ever changing alliances with the shared task of baiting Bray. At this they all succeed admirably.

On the night I attended, the audience laughed in wry 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 "mature" form. The same circus tricks, the same petty jealousies; not much had changed, and we saw ourselves writ small. And always throughout Cislowska 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 called clumsy, even deliberately mundane—but in this bringing together of music, bodies and narrative something else is stirring. A more subtle intention. A bigger ambition. Rock'n'Roll Circus is moving ahead.

Rock'n'Roll Circus, *Sonata* for Ten Hands, director Yaron Lifschitz, pianist Tamara Anna Cislowska; performers Andrew Bray, Andrew Bright, Ali Weaver/Chelsea McGuffin, Azaria Universe; lighting designer Jason Organ; Brisbane Powerhouse, Brisbane, June 7-15.

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Lucy Guerin: finality and new directions

Shaun 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. It was his 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 clacking noise. There are a lot of different sounds of things running out and ending and television going off the air. So rather than in a huge cataclysmic, catastrophic way it was more like that empty hollow sense of endings.

How have you chosen to work with that idea?

That 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'd 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. Also I found it very, very draining and found myself not really being able to get into the process that much during the development period which 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 inconclusively. Since then I've 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, slightly black humour, but it won't all be dirge-y and doom ridden.

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 his little 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 is 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 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 Waitress 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?

Yes, I want it 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. Because, I don't know, maybe you need these 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



Lucy Guerin

Ross Bird

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 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 revealed if you actually say it straight out. I think a lot of artists are afraid of that. I think I have been.

The Ends of Things, choreographer Lucy Guerin, composer Franc Tetaz, dancers Ros Warby, Trevor Patrick, Brett Daffy, Stephanie Lake; design Dorotka Sapinska, dramaturg Tom Wright; Lucy Guerin Company, Melbourne International Festival, National Theatre, October 20-28.

Obituary

Jad McAdam (Jaddua Wade McAdam)

30/4/70 - 28/7/00

Jad McAdam's short, multifarious and incredibly prolific career had a particular impact on the performing arts through his role as composer and DJ for choreographers Gideon Obarzanek, Lucy Guerin, Lisa Ffrench and Garry Stewart. Jad played a significant role within a wave of pioneering collaborations between contemporary choreographers and electronic musicians and DJs in Australia.

He began creating music for contemporary dance in 1996 at the invitation of Obarzanek who called Jad at Sydney's 2SER FM during his radio show, *Strange Days*. Whisked off to Holland and NDT2, Jad co-composed the score for Obarzanek's *Lurch* with Jon Hassel. While there he played at Jiri Kylian's 50th birthday party and was invited by Stuttgart Staatstheater Ballet to create an original composition for *RAM* (Random Access Memory) choreographed by Martino Muller which was performed in 1997 and 1999.

He then developed a strong collaboration with Guerin creating 'soundtracks' for her

works *Remote*, *Robbery Waitress on Bail* (co-composed with Andrew Lancaster), and in 1998 Jad's mix for *Heavy* was nominated for a Green Room Award. He also worked with Ffrench on *How to Draw a Perfect Heart* and created the music for Stewart's *Fugly* and *Plastic Space*.

His work with Andrew Lancaster and Lisa Ffrench led to the 3 forming the pop band Lino, which is signed to Virgin Records and is currently finishing a second album begun with Jad and dedicated to him. A successful journalist writing for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *Rolling Stone* and *DJ Magazine*, London, Jad was nominated for a National Magazine Award in 1998 in the opinion-editorial section. Jad was also halfway through a PhD in Cultural Studies on the topic of boredom.

Jad died suddenly on July 28 and will be sadly missed by his family, friends and collaborators.

Erin Brannigan

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Mixed Metaphor: selected breakages

Jonathan Marshall

"I like smashing things," Margaret Trail confessed in *K-ting!*. It was a fortnight of 'smashing' in Melbourne, from Chunky Move's exploding set floor in their *Hydra* (shades of John Carpenter's *The Thing*) to Yumi Umiumare's evocation of the Hanshin earthquake in her *Mixed Metaphor* piece *INORI-in-visible*. Artaud's exclamation that "The sky has gone mad!" was repetitively rendered on stage.

The Mixed Metaphor artists were obsessed with language, or *languages*—their layering, mutual incompatibility and paradoxical similarity. Dancehouse was filled with projected text, surtitles, interrupted whippers, mangled soundtracks, bodies both literally and metaphorically inscribed in a way affective and yet impossible to fully know. Metaphors of likeness and unlikeness, these are works inhabiting a realm between holistic unity and irreducible multiplicity.

A new space is opened up in the creation of a performance which is *like* a performance (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 video 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 revelation of the inaccessibility of destiny as semi-unconscious accord.

Full revelation was perpetually offered yet denied the audience. Various texts bound these performances together whilst allowing one to glimpse through them towards something else—aporia perhaps. The performances were vertiginous in their very materiality, creating the possibility of a metaphoric con-

flation and conflagration of the word.

In this respect, Trail's *K-ting!* was the most absorbing, and frighteningly funny, work. Scored to a complex deconstruction and montage of pieces torn from some unknowable and apparently absurd conversation or conversations ("Are you really a fireman?" she remarked), the text was constantly interrupted by the sound of smashing crockery and other materials. Each misplaced phoneme shattered the veneer of normality, raising the almost literally hysterical possibility of social opprobrium 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 imperfectly miming under the spotlight. She acted as a performer performing someone not performing—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-model Margaret", "I'm fireman Jeff". Trail dramatised how all conversation and recognition occurs under the threat of potentially sublime linguistic breakage or meltdown ("k-ting!").

Lest one seek refuge in the idea of a pre-linguistic body, Trail exemplified the tendency 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 frustration, or fingers curled delicately as they described the space that bathed and sustained 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-



Yumi Umiumare, *INORI-in-visible* photo Brad Hick

ing increasingly meaningless or overloaded through use. The body struggling against becoming a cliché. Of what? Of itself.

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

Umiumare 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 Umiumare '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, mnemonic theatre in which Umiumare imagines an event she herself was denied. The walls 'shake' she mimed for us, breaking through language for a moment. Umiumare's adoption of an almost childlike, tragically playful performance mode suffused the space with an overwhelming sense of presence and absence, of felt pain and the impossibility of its recapture. One moved from Trail's almost orgiastic celebration of smashing, to Umiumare's ambivalent attempt to recapture it.

Mixed Metaphor, *Separate at Earth*, video installation Cazerine Barry; *Stories From The Interior...Shedding*, writing/direction/performance Susie Fraser, video Lisa Philip-Harbutt, dramaturgy Sue Formby. In *Outside*, direction/choreography/performance Jodie Farrugia, performer/collaborators Dylan Hodda, Rowan Marchingo, video Dermot Egan. *K-ting!*, writing/direction/performance/sound Margaret Trail. *Operation in the Middle of Things*, creation/performance Tim Davey. *INORI-in-visible*, creation/performance Yumi Umiumare, set Anthony Pelchen, sound Tatsuyoshi Kawabata. *Lighting* (all works) Nik Pajantl. Dancehouse, Melbourne, July 27-August 6.

Crashing the party

Phillipa Rothfield

Although Kate Denborough's *Birthday* involves 2 members of the crew's immediate family, it has a solo ring to it. This is because the feelings of the piece centre around Denborough's existential self-questioning. Birthdays can do that to you, sometimes creating 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 even plays her own party games amidst a choreography of excitement. 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, funky, and sad to surreal. This is the largest danced section of the piece—a mixture of beautifully shaped legs and turns and tottering unknowingness, turned inside out. The walls of this small universe provide anchorage but not direction.

It takes Dad (Michael Denborough) to bring his daughter out of her existential nausea with cake and champagne. Unfortunately, he fades away, his mortality getting the better of him, leaving our hero alone again. The wall momentarily functions as an artificial partner, absorbing the betrayal of loss. But how good can a wall be? Luckily, youth saves the day and dashes across the stage to grab a mouthful of



Kate Denborough, *Birthday*

cake. We leave Kate seated by the young musician (Christopher Bolton), having her cake and eating it too. A thoughtful piece that comes from a deep emotional place. Three cheers.

Birthday, choreography Kate Denborough, direction John Bolton, performers Kate Denborough, Michael Denborough, Christopher Bolton, design Ben Cobham, Kristin Green, sound Franc Tetaz; CUB. Malthouse, September 14-16.

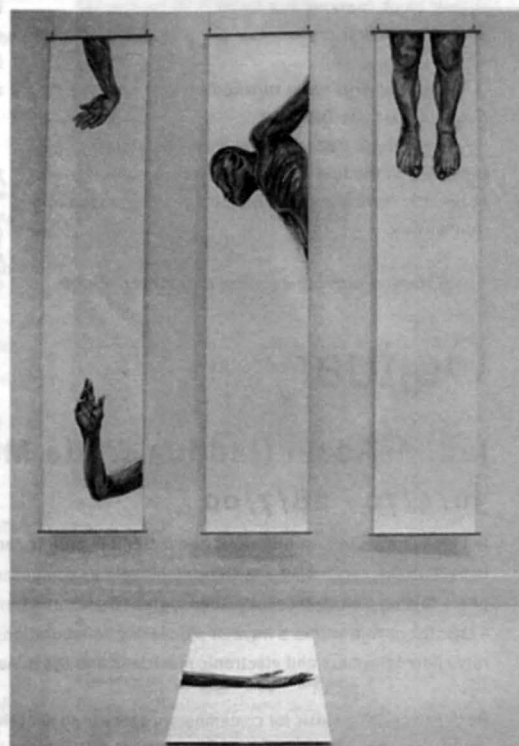
Flesh/parchment/flesh

Phillipa Rothfield

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 Kudelka's *Book of Alleged Dances* (Australian Ballet). His latest solo exhibition, *Flow*, was inspired by an Asialink 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. Their vivid colours reminded me of the impressionists' deconstruction of white light into the spectrum but in this case, the subject was a body in movement. Even in stillness, the impressionists' concern was with the animation that makes a body alive. My favourite piece was a pair of feet, lapping the floor from the wall. In this interpretation, you could feel the history of practice that has formed this particular pair of feet, the uneven weight distribution, the irregularities of its toes.

Pearce used a ghosting technique to suggest 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 Varejao, but where her flesh is thrust in your face, Michael's very gently emerges somewhere between you and the work.



Michael Pearce, *Flow*

Flow, drawing installation by Michael Pearce, The Counihan Gallery, Brunswick, August 17 - September 3.

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 twining figures who seethe through the shallows. These sexual creatures seem not of this world. Their wetsuit flesh suggests that they hail from the depths, whether of mind or matter we do not know. Their natural habitat is below, underneath the surface. Contrast these beings with what appear to be humans whose dress is urbane and whose movement tells a different tale. These mortals lurch through space, throwing themselves from situation to situation. They are not in control. They expend energy but life speaks through them, they do not speak it. Almost somnambulist, their lexicon of movement reminds me of B-grade zombie films.

The set of *Hydra* connects and separates the two levels of reality represented by each type of being. It consists of a shallow pool of water, covered by a removable wooden floor. As the work progresses we see land become water become land again, through a series of deformations and reformations. When the land level is lifted, the



David Tyndall, Sarah-Jane Howard, Luke Smiles, Chunky Move, *Hydra*

photo Jeff Busby

structure looks like the inside of Moby Dick—a large wooden ribcage.

The water creatures are pitted against the humans. There is no love lost between them. Yet, the humans must interact with the water. They fall into it, fall out of it, they lie across its boundaries. Although none of the beings in this landscape exhibit anything as explicit as consciousness, each will destroy the other if occasion allows. Some wonderful duets and trios occur

betwixt and between these creatures.

Whatever *Hydra* is about, and not knowing is a strength of the piece, it is clear that it represents conflict. For Levi-Strauss, the inability to resolve the fundamental contradictions of human existence is the lifeblood of myth. Myth covers over that inability, somehow pretending a resolution; through what we might call narrative closure. At the end of *Hydra*, the wooden floor is reassembled. An uneasy peace reigns but not all is resolved.

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, lulling us into stillness. The otherworldly temporality of the music breaks any sense that the end of the work is an earthly one. Rather, there is an ineluctable movement towards a truce, 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=culture 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. Secondly, 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 dancers Fiona Cameron, Luke Smiles, Kathryn Dunn, Sarah-Jayne Howard, Michelle Heaven, David Tyndall, Stephanie Lake; musical composition James Gordon-Anderson, Darrin Verhagen; design Bluebottle, National Theatre, Melbourne, August 2-12.

Powerhouse dancing: Les attitudes monstre gai

Indija Mahjoeddin

Triple Bill opened the Brisbane Powerhouse's inaugural *l'attitude 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 Trow 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 including residencies with visiting overseas artists, and the connections to get their work shown beyond Brisbane. *l'attitude 27°5* offers 3 weeks focusing on Australian dance and installation artists beginning with 3 new works by Brisbane choreographers.

Shaaron Boughen's *Bleeding-A-Part* is a moody exploration of love, desire, manipulation and obsession, sensuously danced by Fiona Malone with Tim Davey. Three scrim screens providing layering and texture initially veil the duo. She approaches, he rejects...they move to the next screen, each time she adds clothing items—layers—of separation. Susan Hawkins' deftly crafted soundscape 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 rabbit 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 wooing, the male resisting, rigid, passive. By contrast, his narrative is left unpenetrated. A prop for her to propel herself relentlessly against—towards—hurling her desire at him, recoiling from his touch.

The highlight: a haunting screen projection, dancing with the narcissistic ghost image of herself as her lover, a her-him, before the image dissolves into 'he' and therefore turns away from her

once more. Artfully realised, *Bleeding-A-Part* seems resigned in its mild meditation on the ambiguity of a hunger for desire with no messy, juicy bits.

Fugu San. Space made tangible. Sliced. Shifted. Sculpted. *Fugu San* is not alone but in pas-de-deux with her environment. The first sound from the darkness is a rhythmic knocking beat. A shaft of light slowly reveals the pounding of crimson pink pointe shoes like pistons into the floor. Above, Lisa O'Neill, austere in black, and seemingly still. For 6 minutes the pointe shoe generator rumbles under black skirt, an engine building up a charge, whilst oblivious, the arms, torso, head explore the space they occupy. Behind her, Emma Pursey cuts a dramatic presence as the gothic mistress before a glass cabinet of sound, mixing live from her potions on vinyl.

O'Neill is a vital performer, more than just the pay-off of her disciplined training—Suzuki on top of an orthodox dance background. Absorbed in kinetic ritual we are absorbed in her absorption. She manipulates space and time with mesmerising nuances.

Disappearing down a hazy passage of yellow light. Emerging from another, icy blue. Symmetry informs the work, an architectural geometry in design of body movement and staging that is used to underscore mood. And the hint of a Japanese aesthetic? (The title, I am informed, is a nickname meaning 'blowfish' but does not bear directly on the work.)

It's not just a matter of body control and focus. Highlighting this, the third movement, a variation with grand pliés in first, momentarily loses that unmeasurable quality despite unwavering focus and control. A subtle shift, and I feel the movements are suddenly no longer satisfying her but made for us. Why...to extend the work, fill a quota?

Another exit: hip-rib-shift-elbow-leg heel-flick-land-look-pause....Eyes in her feet, in all her body parts. Querying, questioning, quirky feet. Despite the brief lapse, O'Neill's *Fugu San* is powerful, playful. With no agenda, it demands no explanation. One could charge O'Neill with conservative formalism, or banal decorativism, but *Fugu San* transcends that by the shamanic power of the performer. With a noble reticence to disclose her secret narrative, *Fugu San* does not invite us, she simply embarks on her mysterious journey, and I want to follow.

The set of *Monster* loosely suggests a Hammer horror, its gothic doorway, its drapes 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 Coltery's eloquent soundscape, claiming to explore the iconography of Frankenstein's monster, the politics of the monstrous and the monster within, 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, outing the beloved to his father.

As if writer, performer and choreographer all knew each other, Lucas presents a hybrid performance piece where movement and text arise out of the same impulse; a self critiquing narrative that turns over and over, folding in upon itself whilst winding its way forward through love story, childhood reverie, 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—"Pigs

Arse yer Cunt!"—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/son, lover/beloved, choreographer/performer. But skirting the truly monstrous, monsters of domestic pettiness prevail, pivoting on loss of self esteem. For me, only his monstrous father evoked the kind of revulsion and pity that challenged.

Is this self expression made art or an effort to make artistic capital out of a surplus of self? Is this monster a power-freak manipulating us into condoning and approving of his monstrosity? Surely perpetual irony cancels itself out. By setting up and pulling down, Lucas wants to have his cake and eat it too: brave, raw exposé 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 "analyse his relationship breakdown in a performance piece." How monstrously decadent!

Triple Bill, *Bleeding-A-Part*, director/designer Shaaron Boughen, writer Michael Richards, dancers Tim Davey, Fiona Malone; *Fugu San*, created and performed by Lisa O'Neill; *Monster*, created and performed by Brian Lucas; *l'attitude 27°5*, curators Zane Trow, Gail Hewton: Visy Theatre, Brisbane Powerhouse, September 5-17

Indija N Mahjoeddin is a theatre-maker, who writes performance text mainly in the randai folk opera tradition. She directs and performs with her randai troupe, MusiK KabaU. Her latest work *The Butterfly Secret* is featured in the recent *QUT/Playlab* press publication, *Three Plays by Asian Australians*.

About time: the Pompidou Centre revamped

Diana Klaosen

Le Temps, vite! 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, vite!*, 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 gallery-goer, the realisation of the 12 thematic sections is inventive and unexpected, crammed with works of art in both traditional and new media.

The intricate curatorial collaboration encompasses science, literature, experimental cinema, graphic design, visual art, architecture and music and sound, with about 70 staff acknowledged in the catalogue. There are more than 1,000 exhibits raising expectations that the show will be something well

beyond the ordinary—and so it is. Entering the dimly lit introductory section, one is surprised to find—in a museum of contemporary art—an enormous Paleolithic (35,000 years old) engraved stone "lunar calendar." This section is "Le temps, le ciel" (time, sky) and includes mediaeval astrolabes and navigational treatises with other historical curiosities. Maria Clara Eimmart's illustrations of celestial phenomena date from the late 1600s and are exquisite, but to provide a contemporary edge, the final exhibit here is Nam June Paik's compelling video installation, *Moon is the Oldest TV*.

Most of the other sections favour contemporary work though, not surprisingly, one alcove features a strong collection of Flemish 17th century "vanitas" paintings in striking counterpoint to 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 compre-

hension 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", "Free 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 Boulez 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, vite!* 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 that I visited.

Diana Klaosen was at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris recently on a Goddard Sapin-Jaloustre Scholarship from the University of Tasmania.

Le Temps, vite!, Pompidou Centre, Gallery 1, Paris, January - April.

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An Australian Centre for Contemporary Art / Organisation for Visual Arts, London touring exhibition

image: Fiona Hall, Karrawari (Pitjantjatjara)

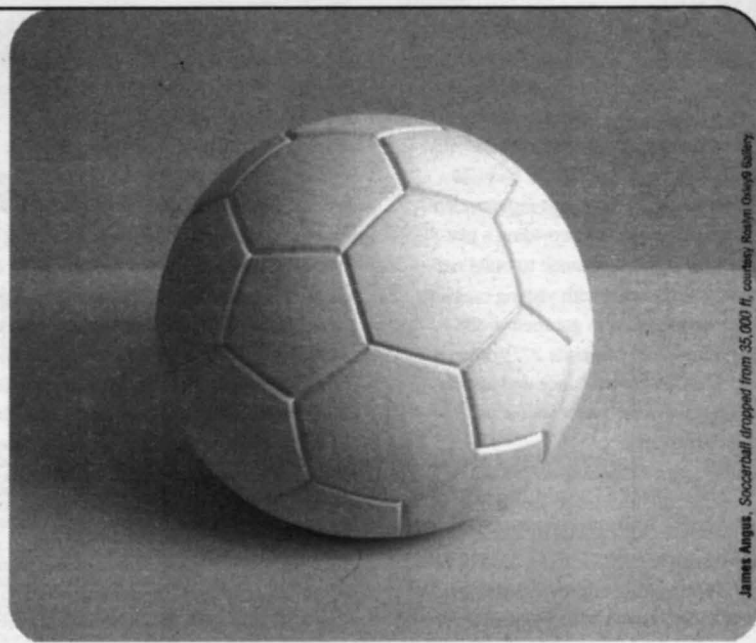
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James Angus, Soccerball dropped from 35,000 ft, courtesy Rainey Oval Gallery

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ARTS VICTORIA



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 Sulman 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 what a lot of figurative painters dislike about my work, that I'm not creating something "lively." I was never comfortable with that. I work the way I do in part from getting someone to pose, photographing them, and then realising that the photo is closer to what I wanted anyway. That remove; 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 for most 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 often.

The back view is something that gives you less access. It's the thing of not being



Anne Wallace, *Springtime*

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 Brutus 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 that, or 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 all 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 glistening, 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.

Maybe 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 containable, 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 *Sight 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 ineffable 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.

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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 *Mixed 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.

Shimmeeshok's delightful *A Paper Gathering*, by the prolific Yoko Kaijo, 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 wove patterns silhouetted against the screen. Two others similarly dressed danced on stage, the screen showing a lake at dusk with 2 airborne onlookers, the soundtrack blending bird-song with music.

In Alison Main's animation *Memento Morituri—Ermytrude's Explorations*, an elderly pink dinosaur escapes her nursing home to rediscover 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 (*Allen Eye*), made for the interstices between TV programs. Each film, though less than a minute, was accompanied by full-length credits, their repetition annoying audience members. But these punctuations ironically contrasted with the film content, saying 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



Shimmeeshok, *A Paper Gathering*

photo Mick Bradley

was complemented by another projection on a smaller screen. Doubling the image tested viewers' cinematic focus, echoing the binaries in the drama.

Kristian Thomas' *The Pseudo Sound Project* comprised 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 Porcaro's *Snowbird*, *Ambrosia* and *Scarlet* involved the artist reading texts on stage in front of taped visual imagery.

Porcaro's quiet monotone defeated absorption of the text.

Stephen Houston's outstanding untitled work comprised 4 elements: a slo-mo video of pedestrians in Adelaide's shopping mall; Houston 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 confession on an adjacent monitor; and Simon Robb 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-somethings enter, 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 bar-room pick-up, 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, confident 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 chasing 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, at 2 levels, ie 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 Holmes Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, August 6 & 10

Airing WA treasures

Bec Dean

Something in the air besides dust indicates that the joys of spring, and moreover of spring-cleaning, have recently disturbed the concrete psyche of the Perth Cultural Centre. So too the emotive responses that come with the airing of substantive chunks of history and hidden treasures.

The past month has been marked by 2 large exhibitions of works chosen from both private and public West Australian collections, with the basic primary objective of bringing the work together under the same roof. One aimed throughout its vast space to consolidate the private collections of Western Australia with our largest public collection, while the other attempted to encapsulate 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.

Anything 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 however could have prepared me for the wall-to-wall gridlock 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 art critic David Bromfield, detailing changes in teaching practices at the Perth Tech. With a lack of any visible curatorial prerogative, the exhibition appeared as if it dearly 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 chronology according-to-type.

Individual schools vying for equal representa-

tion 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, expo layout, the Design for Industry, Graphics, Fashion, Jewelry and Media components focussed 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 70's, 80's and early 90s. Among these many works, there seemed to be no reason for the overrepresentation of certain artists, or the cluttered salon-hung 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 à Court and Cruthers, 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 *Land 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 Koolmatie, Julie Dowling, Roy Wiggan and Joyce Winsley. 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 *Serendipity* and *Poisonous Fly Paper*. Howard Taylor's *Light Figure* was exhibited alongside Claude Monet's *L'Ally Point, low tide*. 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 larger 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 compen-

sate 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 8; Perth Technical Centennial Exhibition, curator David Bromfield, PICA, August 26-September 17.

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Paranoid detective investigates gasfitter

Russell Smith

Shaun Kirby's work is something like a text, a rebus. The objects are so minimal, so sign-like. Like words, they're empty, arbitrary, and meaningless as things-in-themselves, intelligible only through their relationships. But rather than the jokey 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 interpretation, but you know in advance that *all answers are wrong*. Like a good detective, however, you gather clues.

1. An L-shaped 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 inner-city terrace 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 *unheimlich*—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 pixilated 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 this 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 paranoid 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 caravan wrapped in a skirt of the same clear plastic.

6. A low yellow shelf 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 photograph of an open window. On the windowpane is a casual doodle: stick figures, or a spider, something, nothing. One of the spider's legs is raised against the yellow shelf, denying passage, claiming territory. You have to step carefully between its feet to approach the photograph.

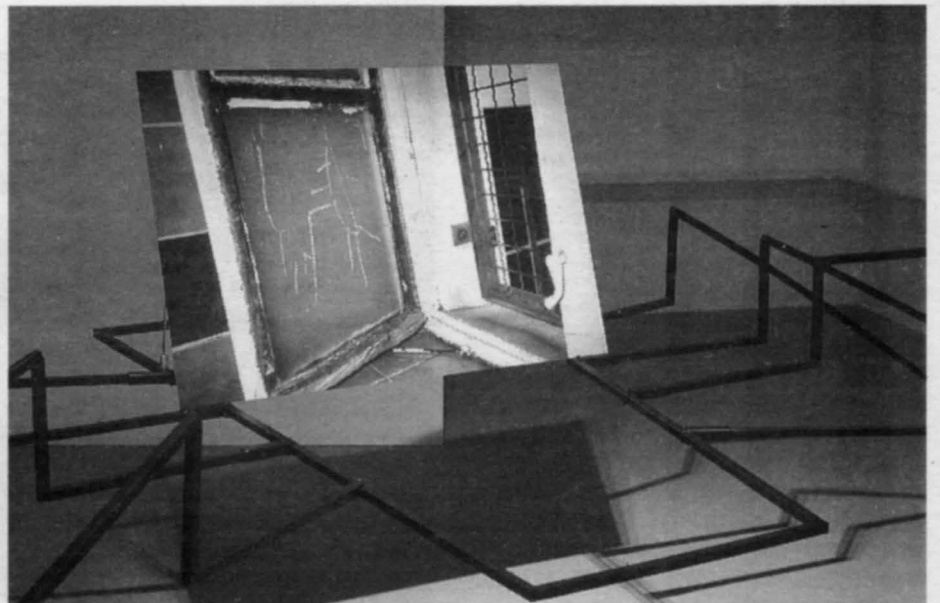
8. In the corner, 4 short walls haphazardly break up the space. There's nothing there, just walls. But they screen a shadowy corner you investigate nevertheless.

9. The catalogue gives you a kind of fascist slogan: SURPLUS OBEDIENCE, SURPLUS ENJOYMENT, followed by the words of a song, "The Laughing Policeman" of 1926: OOOH HOO HOO HOO HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.

So, there it is. Like the gasfitter, perhaps, you make connections. The sinister overtones of the slogan, the hammer, the swastika-like spider, seem to point to a familiar historical nightmare. Like the gasfitters of the Third Reich, you're only doing your job, *nicht wahr?*

But these are merely answers, guesses at a riddle. If the riddle is paranoid, insisting on the recovery of missing contents, the enigma is neurotic, 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



Shaun Kirby

photo Alan Cruickshank

little research, ask around. The bench, for instance, has been used for centuries to roll cheese in wax. Cheese is a Kirby signature: the rotten stuff of the repressed, layers of wax covering the stink. 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 disgusting: too much intimacy.

Do these clues help? Only in that they show that the syntax, rather than the content, is of prime importance. It's the grammar of repression, of the screen memory, of the unconscious. *Of not knowing and not wanting to know.* *The Gasfitter* suggests the sinister element of everyday things, the way horror might be accommodated, might become gradually absorbed into the structure of reality. It's not the syntax of paranoia, but of normality: the micro-fascism of everyday life.

The Gasfitter, Shaun Kirby, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, August 10 - September 2.

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 formalin 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 psychological manipulations necessary for the viewing of depersonalised flesh.

Dispersing dreams of dismemberment, that chance sighting of a medical textbook at age 7, not to mention a recent encounter with the surgeon's probe, you walk through the rooms, your eyes peeled. Even so there are sights you can't face. I'll spit it out. Blood and incision are my downfall. Bodies dissected on mortuary 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 missed something. For a moment I fear it might be the same with Dieter Huber's *Klones* yelling at me from the small gallery at end of the line of corpses, to come see. But the expanse of skin too large, too much like the insides. I retrace 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 fleshy clones. Standing in front of them I feel like Rosemary who had to look at that baby even though she knew it



Diana Thomeycroft, untitled (Coma)

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—*Klone #31a* homage to the self portrait of Albrecht Durer, the photographer's face with all the sensual orifices closed off with skin—no eyes, no ears, no mouth, no nostrils (see page 3). "Possibly the future for art (for the artist) is to look inside and use something like a sixth sense with which to perceive the exterior world." I zip my lips and think.

A similar interest in the eyes of the subconscious drives the work of Diana Thomeycroft. Her extraordinary pictures are evidence of her intricate stagings for her self in which she variously binds, straps, blindfolds and contorts 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 Thomeycroft is a fresh faced woman from Winnipeg. Like an actor she feels her way into these photographs. Though I still don't understand 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

Andrew Kettle: sound jeweller

Richard Wilding

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 9-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. Closer inspection revealed that coils of copper wire were encased 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 chicken cooking and the other is a television. It's a half-hour performance starting with programming the microwave (I really like the idea of timed performances). So there'll be this microwaved chook and a video playing on the television, but I haven't decided on that as yet—maybe it'll be *Teletubbies*. The inductive microphones will pick up all the electromagnetic radiation coming from the appliances and I'll be doing some slow tai-chi choreography that interacts with the fields. It'll be a cult celebration of static. I appropriated the induction coils from telephone contact mikes...and molded the resin myself. They've turned out beautifully—like sound jewellery.

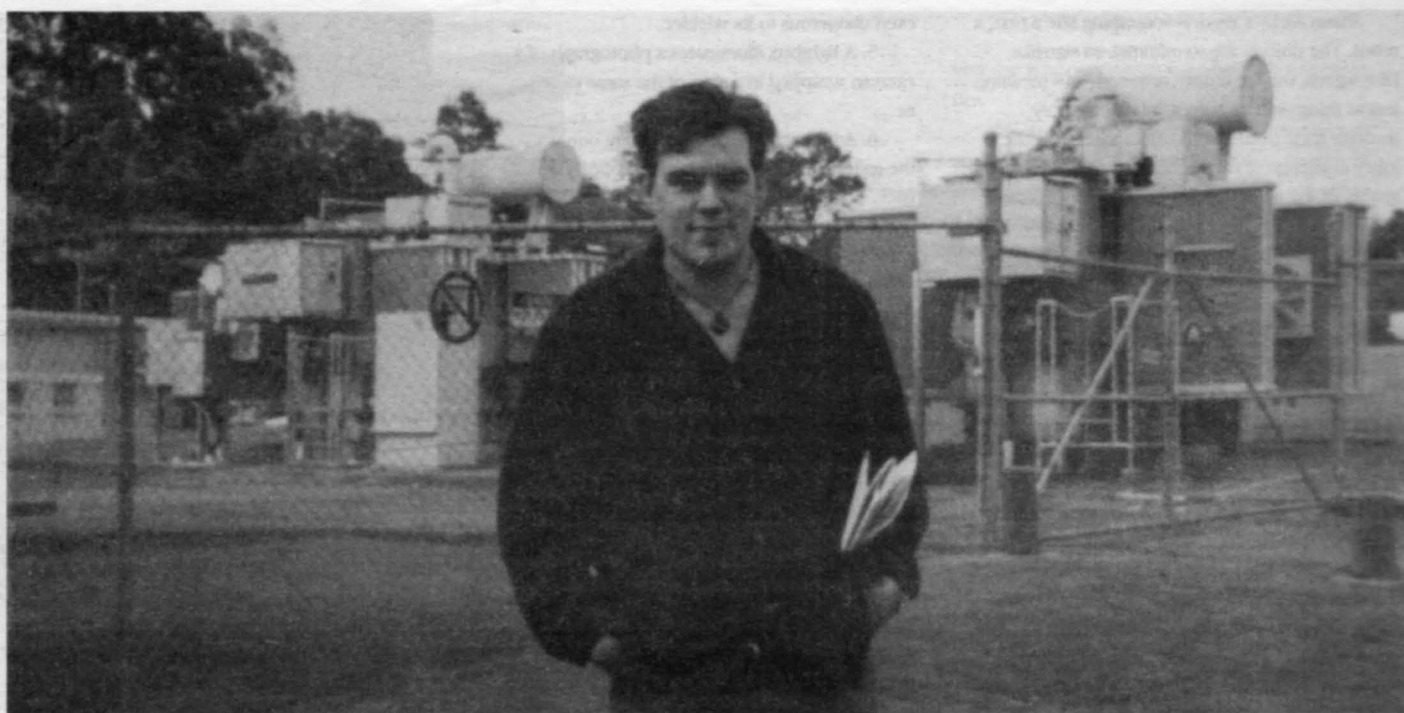
The performance will be part of the Saturday night event called *Nocturnal* and I'll be appearing along with four other artists. Brendan Palmer from SBS' *Albany* will be there and Octagrove will be playing along with other electronic acts. After ADAPT I'll be heading to Newcastle for *Electrofringe* (www.octapod.org.au/electrofringe/2000/) where I'll be performing and speaking at conference forums.

You have a visual arts college background,

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...



Andrew Kettle, *Nocturnal*



Andrew Kettle

so what shifted you into working with sound?

Firstly, my exposure to computers in the early '90s and playing around with software to produce tones from formulas and computer voice generation. The computers were nothing special, just XTs—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 sunspot 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 sunspot 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 sunspot activity. I showed how mobile phones interfered with musical equipment using a home organ.

All of that led on to the desire to find more

sources of electromagnetic noises 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 Wulfe in her short film *<I>Gray<P>*. 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 Trading 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 hidden 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 hums you get off stoves just give you a nice physical feeling. It's a powerful field that you can play with tonally 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 in 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 chaotic 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.

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 competition. 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. Barry Plews' management and, 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 Woodward's remarkable persistence.

Opening the festival with a multimedia performance, *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 sufficiently open-ended to respond to Butoh artist Tomiko Takai's partly improvised performance. Its ethereal qualities perfectly matched the layering of video images that absorbed the audience.

Mary Moore is one of the 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 integration of stage objects and projections. *Exile* is a simpler work but in many ways more powerful.

From out of a very dark space spring gridlines, moving across some 10 transparent screens which reach up either side of the front rows of the audience. The effect is mildly vertiginous (and moreso later) as we struggle involun-

tarily to estimate this new space. The gridlines later, if momentarily, open out into impressionistic 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 exile complete, she unfurls her cloth bundle, revealing a beautiful kimono. Soon she is dazzlingly transformed, moving through the barest memory of a dance, a rare moment of rich colour amidst the blacks, whites and greys of the projections. The images fade and so does she—as if a life has passed.

I was reminded of Shohei Imamura'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 indifference, 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 Spring ran a concentrated program—a selection of performances are reviewed on these pages. I had the pleasure of catching Robert Curry and Stephanie McCallum piano duet their way through Liszt's *A Faust Symphony* with courage and aplomb. It's a refreshing change from the orchestral version and sounds curiously more contemporary. I've got a bit of a thing at the moment about piano duets of major works: Holst's *The Planets* (Naxos CD; excellent except for *Jupiter*) and Shostakovich and companion playing his



Tomiko Takai, *Exile*

Symphony No 10 (Revelation CD; the pianos straining and drifting out of tune, but who cares), so this Liszt concert was a real treat.

On the same day the Erzsébet Marosszéky Trio gave everything with Gorecki's insistent *Larchenmusik* and introduced us to Laszlo Tihanyi's bracing *Schattenspiel*. Roll on Spring 2001, hopefully in the same venue and with continuing connections with multimedia—and why not music theatre.

11th Sydney Spring International Festival of New Music, The Studio, Sydney Opera House, August 4-14.

Exile, director-designer Mary Moore, choreographer-performer Tomiko Takai, composer Stuart Day, dramaturg Julie Holledge; video imagery Richard Back, video animation Paul Jennings; 11th Sydney Spring International Festival of New Music, The Studio, Sydney Opera House, August 4 - 5.

Cello dialogues and passionate voices

John Potts

One of the perennial problems for new music is in attracting decent audiences, especially young people. While innovative film and visual arts draw in good crowds of all ages, the audience for contemporary music remains small and resolutely middle-aged. The concerts by cellist David Pereira and The Song Company indicated how this problem could be overcome. Both programs offered intense yet engaging repertoires, with enough variety and technical innovation to please anyone wary of 'new music.'

The surprising thing about Pereira's solo concert was the sheer range of musical expression he attained. The cello has an intrinsically beautiful tone (it's even beautiful to look at), yet the compositions he performed were not content with the deep lyricism usually associated 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 the solo cello seemed refracted into diverse versions of itself, at others the recording provided a cello 'wall of sound' which challenged the soloist to interact.

Carl Vine's *Inner World*, written for Pereira, is a dynamic interplay of the live with the electronic. A skilful 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-timbral system. Nigel Westlake's *Onomatopoeia*, originally for bass clarinet and digital delay, has been adapted by

Pereira to form another multiple work for cello. Phrases and rhythmical patterns are layered in delay, creating a complex setting 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 Turismo* is an ambitious musical reflection 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 backdrop 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 honky-tonk piano was occasionally an irritation, this piece effectively depicted the madness and pain of life in East Timor since 1975.

Peter Sculthorpe'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 plainchant influence, allowing large spaces between the lines, emphasised the long slow notes of the melody. The effect was of stillness and solemnity, expertly achieved by Pereira.

There is no doubting The Song Company's technical skill and sense of adventure. In a concert that evening they brought together contemporary works by international composers; if the works themselves were uneven, the unifying aspect of the concert was the passion with which *The Song Company* performed 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 vocalisations—those techniques are now so familiar that they risk becoming boring 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 multifarious 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 musical 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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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 deserved. 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 will 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.

He called upon critics to be less harsh on Australian composers and to acknowledge the amount of work that goes into the act of creating and support the industry. According to Conyngham, if a critic does not like a work, he or she should talk about something else. Audiences too should be prepared for risk taking—it's better to see a composer fail doing something risky, than succeed in taking the easy route, he said. Listening with set expectations was the worst way to experience a new work.

Conyngham suggested the fee structure for composers should be reworked to reflect the fees for composers overseas, which are often double or triple those in Australia. But composers should also look beyond the fund-

ing bodies for commissions and explore sponsorship as another means of raising the money they need. The current rates are around \$10,000 to \$12,000 for an orchestral work, \$6,000 to \$8,000 for a chamber piece. At 6 works a year, this would see composers earning the equivalent of schoolteachers or university lecturers and would result in a corresponding flooding of the market. Some other way of valuing composition has to be found, Conyngham said.

Paradoxically, new music is often too new. The pressure for premiere works from composers means that older works are rarely revisited and don't become part of the repertoire. There are no repeat performance fees which increases the pressure for new compo-

sitions. Conyngham said that valuing a composition as something other than a premiere, and paying for it, would give works a longer lifespan, take the pressure off composers to churn out new work and reduce the risk of 'market' flooding.

Finally, Conyngham urged composers and performers to let the ministers for the arts and the funding bodies know of good work being produced rather than only approaching them when in search of funding.

Peggy Glanville Hicks Address, Barry Conyngham, Chair of Australian Studies, Harvard University, Sydney Spring Festival, August 13.

Ultra-modernist pulse racer

Gretchen Miller

There's nothing like an ultra-modernist to get the pulse racing and Pierre Boulez' *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 Daryl Pratt, Alison Low Choy and Claire Edwardes on percussion, Stephanie McCallum, Robert Curry and Daniel Herscovitch on pianos and Marshall McGuire, 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 centrally placed pianos, the notes ricocheted onto the giant keys of the vibes 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 out and extending the vibes' decay—or when the music, water-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 came to a furious rest.

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 Concours Micheli competition in Milan in 1994. The original work (performed by Stephanie McCallum at the beginning of the Boulez concert) was about the expansion of even semiquavers into interrupting note groups—all mathematically placed no doubt. *Sur Incises* involved a further expansion—hence my fanciful interpretation of the meta-piano.

The audience was rightly rapturous at the end of the high-energy 45 minutes 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 meaninglessness—just what I like from a modernist composer.

Sur Incises, Pierre Boulez, Sydney Spring Festival, The Studio, Sydney Opera House, August 13.

Australian music: an Adelaide celebration

Chris Reid

Spanning a fortnight, the Flinders Street School of Music's first Festival of Australian Music comprised 20 concerts of works by over 70 composers, including big names in Australian music. Internationally acclaimed percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson returned to her *alma mater* as musician in residence.

Opening night featured two concerts. Students and graduates performed Betty Beath's *Points in a Journey* for piano, flute and counter-tenor (in which singer Gordon Combes stood out), Margaret Sutherland's clarinet quartet, and solo flute works by Larry Sitsky and Richard Meale. Also included was Ros Bandt's *Meditation*, for the rarely heard *flauto dolce*, an early instrument resembling a recorder and evoking Japanese shakuhachi music. Rebecca Johnson beautifully rendered Meale's finely wrought and evocative *Melissande*. David Barnard's performance, of two of Gillian Whitehead's *Four Short Pieces* for piano, excelled.

A staff concert followed, with a clarinet quintet by contemporary Adelaiddian Raymond Chapman Smith, and Alfred Hill's first string quartet, which, though derivative, was delightful. There were some fascinating solo cello pieces including Peter Sculthorpe's *Requiem for Cello Alone*. Don Banks' *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 Strains* for drums and cymbals. Warren Burt's *Beat Generation in the Californian Coastal Range* (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. Donning a microphone she included vocalisations and the sound of paper clips raining onto a horizontally mounted bass drum, suggesting a play of the mind. Graeme Leak'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.

Percussion featured throughout the Festival, with two quartets, PercusSon and Stix 'n Tones, giving separate recitals. Most interesting was Sculthorpe's *Sonata for Viola and Percussion*, in which Kate Seaman's strong work on drums, tam tam and cymbals combined with Gyula Cseszko's mournful viola.

The festival included two composer competitions, both intriguing events. In the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra Trust sponsored competition, students were to write a work 6-8 minutes long for an ensemble comprising clarinet, bassoon, violin, double bass, percussion, trumpet and trombone, in the form of an overture to Stravinsky's *The 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 *crescendi* and in between explored Stravinsky's 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 tonally simple but rhythmically awkward 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 Conlon's works stood out.

The festival included a tribute to Tristram Cary, a pioneer of electronic and electro-acoustic 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 *New Music Australia* on ABC FM radio.

The Festival featured a retrospective of the work of David Harris, including the delightful *Compossible XI—in Memory of Don Dunstan*, performed on air by the Adelaide Chamber Singers. *Compossible* means 'able to co-exist with', and Harris frequently juxtaposes seemingly disparate forms and textures, here portraying the

late former SA Premier's capacity to unify disparate elements in the community. Harris' piano work, *Variations on a Sixteen Note Program—Shading 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 Vanessa* of 1992, performed expertly by the dedicatee, is a minimalist work for marimba, comprising 36 short phases of repeated three-note clusters. Harris' works often seem simple; only in less expert hands does their difficulty show.

The final concert was a grand affair, commencing with Butterly's *Fanfare for a Ceremony* and finishing with Grainger'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 unpopular amongst 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 3.

In tune with Claire Edwardes

Viginia Baxter

Claire Edwardes' performance begins on the balcony of The Studio. The piece is Andrew Ford's *Composition in Blue, Grey and Pink*, an asymmetrical drumming piece with striking shifts in tempo. It sets the tone for the next 3 works. As the lights go out on the drums we hear the mel-low sound of the marimba before Edwardes actually reaches the instrument for Ton de Leeuw's glorious *Midare*. Here she extracts myriad sounds and colours from the instrument. With each change of mallets comes another subtle shift. She persuades sounds, bends, lifts them into the air. Her action is not the usual percussive striking but a teasing proximity to the instrument, her deep concentration reflected in her serious face. A brisk change of clothes—from apple green to black—and Edwardes is back on stage for Franco Donati Omar's *due pezzi per vibrafono*, this time at a smaller instrument for a piece made of fine frag-

ments of sound. Again Edwardes seems tuned to her instrument, eyes fixed to keys, mallets moving like fingers.

In James Woods' *Rogasanti* standing in a circle of drums, gourds, chimes, gongs and sheets of metal, she manages to create more subtle, mellifluous, constantly changing sounds, interrupted at intervals by a booming bass drum. Her final piece is Peter Klatzow's *Dances of Earth and Fire* which takes her back to the marimba for a final flourish. Claire Edwardes is a young Australian musician of consummate skill. Her choice of composers from Australia, Holland, Italy, England and South Africa draws our attention to a tantalising world of 'new' musics. Edwardes' strong presence and the careful staging of the concert enhanced the experience of the music. At the end, many of the audience hovered around

the instruments, looking at the scores for clues to the magic they'd witnessed.

As I left The Studio I passed Bridget Eliot's exhibition of photographs of Australian composers. Here were 50 Australian artists with impressive careers in the composition and performance of new music. It reminded me that outside the small number who receive almost obsessive attention, the faces of most Australian artists are unfamiliar to the general public. In 1999 Claire Edwardes was named Symphony Australia Young Performer of the Year. She is currently studying at the Rotterdam Conservatorium. It's good to see she has a string of concert engagements lined up for her return to Australia in 2001 so many more people can get to know her face and her music.

Claire Edwardes, *The Studio*, August 10

Double vision: recent Sydney performance

continued from page 34

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 austere 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 Kurzel (not unlike contemporary German stage design but not at all derivative) and featuring a phenomenally idiosyncratic performance from Leanna Walsman, eerily reminiscent (a complex inner self, a slightly off-kilter physicality, a risk-taker) of the young Gillian Jones. Marivaux's harsh 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 audiences. The production always engages and the raw but controlled physicality of these near-adult children under the tutelage of their black minders (whom they turn on with sudden, as if innate racism) is expertly directed and choreographed. A disturbing dynamic of the Enlightenment formality and untutored wildness drives the production. However its ending is crudely 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 bodes well for the Sydney Theatre Company's experimental *Blueprint* 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 Medea*.

5. I went to Nikki Heywood's *Inland Sea* twice, to try to see what I was seeing; not to make some sense of it—in some surprising ways it was curiously literal—but to see if I could connect with it. I've been long haunted by the power of Heywood's earlier *Burn Sonata* (1996; toured to *Next Wave* and regionally in 2000) and the intense realism of its non-realistic scenario (waves and cycles of



Dean Walsh, Tony Osborne, *Inland Sea*

photo Heidrun Löhr

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 worried 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 can't be resolved by cut and paste? What if the problem is more fundamental? What does it mean for a suburban family, to date all interiority and damage, to suddenly be transported to the inland/outback (see similarly, Suzanne Spinner, page 10)?

Crucially, what is this "inland sea?" And is there in fact an insatiable lust for it lurking in 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 blind exploration. Heywood's very real, visceral, crazed family meets ideas, they enter a theoretical space. Suburban interiority seems unfazed at the agoraphobic inland (suggested powerfully by John Levey's set and Heidrun Löhr'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 mythic outdoors, the family of *Burn Sonata* had been forced to stay inside to face the Aboriginal woman on whose land they'd erected their hellish hearth.

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 staring point. The strength of much of the direction, the performers, the design and Garry Bradbury's beautiful orchestration of found sounds (though unlike *Burn Sonata* played here like a movie score rather than something with its own source and volition) is not to be denied.

Inland Sea, *Performance Space*, July 21-August 6

Letter

Dear Editors

After reading the last issue of *RealTime* (which I always enjoy) I felt compelled to respond to some issues raised in the articles "d>art: digital exceptions" and "Just Another Art Show?" I state at the outset that I had a video in *d>art* 2000, but that's not an issue here.

Unlike last year's instalment of *d>art*, we didn't all retreat down to the pub to get depressed. In *d>art* 99 many of the works were chosen on the basis of how 'digital' they were, rather than on quality.

Now the name *d>art* and the guidelines for entry stress the 'digital.' But the program is really what we should call experimental film/video or video art, which since the last 7 or 8 years has used digital technologies in production. This technical revolution happened with sound and music production in the mid-80s. The moving image has been in its grips of these technical changes during the last 5 years.

Maybe one reason that so much of the work 'looks like film' is that it was shot or originated from film material. But does this really matter? *Festa Mobile* (I agree with Keith Gallasch here. It was probably my favourite in the program and is probably the least 'digital', if that means anything.) As the program points out it's constructed by meticulously painting black ink on frames of 'found' 16mm film, a technique first employed in the 1920s. The aim of much commercially available software now is to emulate the look of film and, with audio, the sound of analogue.

For a number of reasons I didn't share Keith's response to *Little Echo Lost*. This was a troubling work for me and many others, and not just for reasons of budget envy (this one cost possibly 100 times more to make than some of the other works). How can someone in Australia in 1999 make a work, set in the Blue Mountains (albeit a kitschy, digitally manipulated one) that attempts a poetic around the idea of 'the last surviving Echo man'? What are we talking about here? This is a poetics straight out of any number of Australian literary journals of 100 years ago.

The Biennale was a healthy reprise from the didactic curatorial theme often cracking under the weight of internal contradictions. As for Alex Gawronski's response to the Sydney Biennale, he writes: "...there are no exceptional curatorial leaps other than arbitrary ones resulting from the mere juxtaposition of unrelated practices." In fact there is a theme to this show—its very inclusivity and its breadth. Yes, and I guess, like 'shopping' in the West, the show presents an incredible range of work where the viewer 'decides' because you can't spend a lot of time with everything. One of the many things we did experience here was probably the most important exhibition of video art installation ever assembled in Australia. There was also a strong component of performance in many works.

And what's wrong with the idea of a non-hierarchy of ideas and materials, age, sex, culture, etc. Yes, clay can be as interesting as paint, or a computer, or film.

Many, including Gawronski, complained about the 'retrospective' nature of the Biennale. These were major works by major artists. The majority were Australian premieres. Does a Sydney 'art literate' audience really think it knows these works by looking at magazine photographs and reading articles, or by reputation? More importantly, this is a show which attempts and succeeds in communicating with a broad audience. There were always queues to see work at the MCA; there was a lot of engaging and thinking going on.

One of many works which was critically overlooked but passionately debated and talked about by punters for days afterwards was Matthew Barney's *Cremaster 2* (2 packed sessions in association with the Sydney Film Festival). One of the major international artists of his generation and curiously unseen in Australia before, Barney's work as it has developed throughout the 90s is based in performance art, mutating through video art, film-making and object-making. *Cremaster 2* utilises 35mm film, HDTV, digital manipulations, balsa wood sets, actors playing characters, the artist as performer, heavy metal drummers, an orchestral soundtrack, bees and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. And nobody cared whether it was 'digital' or analogue or whatever.

Implicit in funding choices and policies developed during the 1990s is a belief that funding 'commercially marginal', 'artistic' or 'experimental' screen-based and interactive work is only a kind of research and development laboratory for feature films and new screen-based industries. Of importance here is the deliberate decision to stop funding the internationally recognised Australian International Video Festival in favour of the occasional promotion of 'digital' works. Technologies are here to be used.

John Gillies

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