

FREE

# RealTime

December 2000 - January 2001 No40

[www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/](http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/)

**+OnScreen**



**The Creativity Panacea: UK Arts & the Community**

**Tasmania: Robyn Archer's Treasure Island**

## RealTime

- **Festivals:** around Australia
- **ADT:** Garry Stewart
- **Terrapin Theatre:** AD Puppets
- **Art Gallery of SA:** Chemistry
- **Olympics:** Installations & Alternalympics
- **Mainstage experiments:** STC & STCSA
- **Forum:** Body & Sound

## OnScreen

- **Indigenous Filmmaking:** Sally Riley
- **Japanime & Atomic Sushi**
- **The Winners are:** AFI Awards
- **Ethics and Ars Electronica**
- **Wales:** Reframing Consciousness
- **Electric Garden:** Garth Paine
- **Scott Rettberg:** online publishing



# RealTime National Distribution

Here's a guide to where to find RealTime. Our free street paper is distributed nationally in the first week of every second month of the year. The following list of drop points is based on regularly updated reports from our distributors, though some points might have changed by the time we went to press.

Our thanks to all the managers who support RealTime by giving the paper space on their premises.

If you run a café, bookshop, cinema, theatre, gallery or community centre and would like to join our distribution network, contact Virginia Baxter at 02 9283 2723/opencity@rttimearts.com and we'll see what we can do.

## NSW

### SYDNEY

**Annandale** Annandale Gallery, Side On Café/Gallery  
**Artarmon** SBS TV, School 63 Dickson Street  
**Balmain** Library, Pentimento Bookshop, Balmain Art School, Cat & Fiddle Hotel, Town Hall Hotel **Bondi** Bondi Pavilion Community Arts Centre Parade Records, Movieland Video, Burgerman, Martin Smith Books **Bondi Junction** Downbeat Music, Melody House Karaoke Box **Chatswood** HUM Records  
**Chippendale** Seymour Theatre Centre, Tin Sheds Gallery **CBD** Abbey's Books, Australian Music Centre, Birdland, Cinestore, Conservatorium of Music, Deli France, Dendy Cinemas Martin Place & Circular Quay, S H Ervin Gallery, FTO, Galaxy Books, MCA, Mother Chu's, NSW Ministry for Arts, One to One Salon, Performing Arts Bookshop, Sydney Art Theatre, Redeye Records, Rocks Visitors' Centre, St Laurence Arts Centre, State Library Shop, Sydney Opera House **Darlinghurst-King Cross-Potts Point** Kings Cross Library, Arthouse Gallery, Tropicana Cafe, Cafe Hernandez, Café Ristretto, Listen Up Records, Metro Video, Warped Records, Vinyl Lounge, Fish Records, Stables Theatre, DISC, Reach N Records, McLeay St Laundry **Double Bay** Lesley Mackay Bookshop **East Sydney** Watters Gallery, City Gym **Edgecliff** British Council **Ersineville** Cafe Brontosaurus, PACT Youth Theatre **Glebe** Library, Gleebooks Secondhand Store, Badde Manors, Lolita's, Recycled Records, Well Connected Café **Gordon/Killara** Libraries **Kensington** NIDA, Theatre & Film Studies UNSW **Leichhardt** Library, Cafe L'Epoca, Palace Norton Street Cinemas, Bar Italia **Manly** Library, Art Gallery & Museum **Marrickville** Library **Millers Point** Sydney Dance Company, Sydney Theatre Company **Mosman** Library, Café Prego **Newtown-Enmore** Emu Technology Café, Omeo Dance Studio, Gould's Books, Performing Arts High, Corelli's Cafe, Cafe 381, Green Iguana Cafe, Café Blue, Enmore Theatre, Newtown Theatre, Inside Out Cafe, Civic Video, Neighbourhood Centre, Noddy's on King, Women's Library, Generation X Café, New Theatre, Fish Records, Dendy Cinema, Fine Print Books **Northern Suburbs** Australian Catholic University, Angel Records, Gold Records, HUM Records, Hayden Orpheum Cinema, **Cremorne** SBS TV, AFTVRS **Paddington** Library, Berkelouw's Café/Bookshop, Campus Art Store, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, College of Fine Arts, Chauvel Cinema (AFI), Metro Screen, Hogarth Gallery, Roslyn Oxley9, Hot Gossip Café, Sherman Galleries, Academy Twin Cinemas, Reach 'n Records, HUM on Oxford, DISC, Australian Centre for Photography **Randwick** Book and Cranny, Rockpool, Culver Café, Zellinis Patisserie **Redfern** Conservatorium of Music (Technology Park), The Performance Space, Performing Lines, MEAA **Rozelle** Writers Centre **Stanmore** Silicon Pulp Animation Gallery, **Surry Hills** Australia Council, Musica Viva Offices, Australian Institute of Music, Australian Writers Guild, Belvoir St Theatre, First Draft Gallery, The Actors Centre, Le Mondo Café, CD Warehouse, Good Groove Records, **Sydney**

## SA

### ADELAIDE

**North Adelaide** Tabriz Video, North Adelaide Art School, O'Connell Plaza Video, Piccadilly Cinema, Carclew Arts Centre **City** Adelaide Festival (Hindley Street) Adelaide Festival Centre Administration & Main Foyer, The Playhouse, Lion Arts Centre, MRC, EAF, Nexus Gallery, Jam Factory, USA Cafe (City West Campus), Doppio Teatro, Caos Cafe, Imprints Booksellers, TAFE City Campus, Centre for Performing Arts, Community Arts Network, Roma's, WEA, Tandanya Gallery, Quirk Café, Alpha Video, Odeon Star Café, Hindmarsh Square Cinema **Rundle Street** East Palace Cinema, Minefield Books, Europa Bookshop, B Sharp Records, SA Writers Centre, Dept

## TAS

### HOBART

Tasmanian School of Art, Plimsoll Gallery, Salamanca Art Gallery, Museum & Art Gallery, Conservatorium of Music **North Hobart** State Cinema, CAST Gallery, Dick Bett Gallery **Sandy Bay** Main Campus, University of Tasmania, Wrest Point Casino **Bellerive** Rosy Arts Centre **Moonah** Art Centre **Glenorchy** Library

### LAUNCESTON

Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Princess Theatre, Launceston Campus, University of Tasmania **North West** Campus, University of Tasmania

## NT

**Darwin** School of Fine Art, NT University, Darwin Entertainment Centre, Corrugated Iron Youth Theatre, Browns Mart, 24 Hour Art, **Alice Springs** Araluen Arts Centre, Swingers Café.

**University** Centre Performance Studies **Ultimo** Co-op Books, ABC Audio Arts, UTS Media Store **Woollahra** Goethe Institut **Woolloomooloo** Australian Film Commission, Artspace, Tilbury Hotel

### WESTERN SYDNEY

**Bankstown** De Haan Gallery, Urban Theatre Projects, Education Training & Employment Centre, Reflections Café **Blacktown** Community College, Migrant Resource Centre **Bonnyrigg** Library **Cabramatta** Fairfield Community Arts Network **Campbelltown** Art Gallery, Community & Cultural Services **Casula** Powerhouse **Fairfield** Community Resource Centre, School of Arts, Fairfield/Liverpool Youth Health Team **Kingswood** Artsup Fine Art Materials **Liverpool** Library, Migrant Resource Centre, Art Matrix, Fairfield Arts Centre, Macarthur Community College, San Lia Music Centre **Menai** Hazelhurst Gallery **Milperra** UWS SRC Shop and Café **Parramatta** Riverside Theatre, Information & Cultural Exchange **Penrith** Nepean Community College, Q Theatre, Joan Sutherland Arts Centre, Lewers Gallery **Smithfield** Fairfield Regional Heritage Centre **Wakeley** Fairfield City Arts & Cultural Centre **Richmond** Toxana Gallery **Smithfield** Regional Heritage Centre **St Marys** Community Arts and Craft

### BLUE MOUNTAINS

**Blackheath** Victory Theatre Wattle, Café, Mountain Top Café **Blaxland** Library, Green Lizard Cafe **Glenbrook** Cinema **Hazelbrook** Delicious Moments Café **Katoomba** Nepean Community College, Bodds Café, Sweet Foray Gallery, Clarendon Theatre, Cafe 40, Fantails Bookshop, Go West Café, Ashram Café, Katoomba Music, Suddich Art Supplies, Varuna Writers Centre, Wattle Cafe **Lawson** Badgery's Café **Leura** Megalong Books, Bon Ton, Tourist Information Centre, **Springwood** Springwood Library, Braemar Gallery

### REGIONAL

**Armidale** University of New England **Albury-Wodonga** Regional Arts Board **Byron Bay** Community Centre and 5 other venues **Illawong** Community Centre, **Lismore** Regional Art Gallery, Sthn Cross University and 5 other venues **Mosvale** Southern Highlands Regional Arts Centre **Newcastle** Beat Records, Cooks Hill Books & Records, Goldberg's Café, Kensington Cinema, Natural Tucker, Newcastle Museum, Regional Library, Octapod, Pepperina's Café & Bookshop, Readers Café, Showcase Cinema, University of Newcastle—Libraries, Union venues, School of Fine Arts, Media Studies, Drama Department, Watt Space Galleries, Three Monkeys Cafe, Newcastle TAFE, McLeans Bookshop, Community Arts Newcastle **Wollongong** City Gallery, University of Wollongong School of Creative Arts, Sth Coast Writers Centre, Project Centre for Contemporary Art

of the Arts, Radio SUV, SA Art Gallery, State Library **University of Adelaide** Bookshop, Cafe, Performing Arts Library, Scott Theatre and Cafe, University of SA Cafe on Frome Road **Norwood** Adelaide Central School of Art **Stepney** Centre for Creative Photography, Cafe, University of SA (Magill), Chelsea Cinema, Trak Cinema **Toorak Gardens** Contemporary Arts Centre **Parkside** Kino Video, Capri Cinema **Flinders University** (Drama Centre, Cafe and Library) **Marion** City Council, University of SA (Underdale), Hendon Studios **Semaphore** Sisters by the Sea, Sirens Cafe **Port Adelaide** Port Community Arts Centre, Information Centre, SA Country Arts Trust plus 130 metropolitan and regional libraries.

## ACT

### CANBERRA

**City** Canberra Theatre Centre, Canberra Museum & Gallery, Café Chaos, City Library, Tossolinis, Street Theatre, Electric Shadows, Café Cactus, Centre Cinema **Braddon** Gorman House Arts Centre Administration, Choreographic Centre, AusDance, Contemporary Arts Space, The Fusion Room, Cornucopia Bakery **Acton** School of Music, Chats Café, Drill Hall Gallery, School of Art **ANU** Arts Centre, Refectories, Chifley Library **Lynham** Tilley's Bar **Watson** Canberra Institute of Technology (Design) **Belconnen** Library, Canberra University **Dickson** Library **Manuka** Style Arcade Café, ART Gallery **Deakin** Café D'lish, Pallet, Australian Made Gallery **Kingston** Studio One Gallery/Workshops **Federation Square-Gungahlin** Café Injoy **Barton** National Library

## VIC

### MELBOURNE

**CBD:** Brown Sugar. Cinemedia, Cinematheque (State Film Theatre), William Mora Gallery, Span Gallery, Robert Lindsay Gallery, Flinders Gallery, Kino Cinemas, Lumiere Cinemas, Pellegrini's Restaurant, Artsalon, Gaslight Records, Basement Records, Augogo Records, Missing Link Records, Collectors Corner, Peril Underground, Discurio, The Lounge, Off ya Tree, Dangerfields, Revival, Forum Theatre, Council of Adult Education, Druid's Café, Alley Cats Café, Hell's Kitchen, Fat Ben's Café, Café Negrita, Cafa Sahara, Café Segovia, Café Cortile, Café de Graves, De Biers Café, Caffè & Biscotta Café **RMIT** Media Arts, Architecture, Fine Arts, Kaleide Cinema, Union Building, Communications, ReVault Café, Storey Hall Gallery **Carlton** Victorian Trades Hall, Melbourne Workers Theatre, Cinema Nova, Comedy Club, Fresherman's Restaurant, Trotters Café, La Mama Theatre, Courthouse, Dancehouse, Readings Bookshop, **Melbourne University** George Paton Gallery, Baillieu Library, Union Building, Union Cinema, Cinema/Media Studies, Music Department **Fitzroy** Black Cat Café, Mayfields, Roar Studios, Sister Ray Records, Dangerfields, Lady Luck Gourmet Cake Shop, 1st Floor Gallery, 3RRR, Universal Theatre, Open Channel, Aboriginal Health Service, Blue Moon Records, Mario's Café, Mayfields, Brunswick Street Bookstore, Vertigo Café, Rumours, Planet Café, Hlde Out Café, Bakers Café, Vegie Bar, Polyester Records, Polyester Books, Brunswick Street Laundry, Punters Club Hotel, Joe's Garage, Rumbarella's Restaurant, Ministry of Style, Babka Café, Rooftop Café, Next Wave/CME/Miranda Brown's offices, Fitzroy Library, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne Film Festival Office, Super 8 Film Group, Erwin Rado Theatre, Victorian Writers Association, The Bagery, Gertrude 200 Gallery, Stripp Gallery, Dantes Cafe, Arcadia Café, Builders Arms Hotel, Café Yaltza, Dr Java Café, Café Coco, Figaro Café, Tragically Hip, Lure Hair Salon, Soulfood, Sally's Hatshop, 3CR, Toucan Club, The Greengrocer, Empress of India Hotel,

## QLD

### BRISBANE

**South Brisbane** Queensland Art Gallery, QPAC, Queensland Museum Courtyard Café, State Library Foyer, Promenade Café, QTC, Conservatorium of Music, Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance **West End** Jazzy Cat Café, Three Monkeys Café, Wok on Inn, Boundary St Brasserie, Avid Reader, Espressohead, Café Tempo, Café Babylon, Brisbane Backpackers, Coffee Club, Emma's, Tongue & Groove Café, The Bohemian Café, Mondo Organics, Queensland Ballet, Community Arts Network **Woollongabba** Burke's Hotel, QPIX, QDOX, QSO **Nathan** Griffith University Bookshop, The Hub, Cafeteria **East Brisbane** Classic Cinema **New Farm** Gerties, Village Twin Cinema, Koffies, AFTRS, Aix Café, Sassy Café, Moray Café, BCC Library, The Summerhouse Café, Brisbane Powerhouse Arts Centre, New Farm Deli **Fortitude Valley** 4ZZZ, Fireworks Gallery, Urban Groove, The Latin, Institute of Modern Art, Fat Boys Café, California Café, Cosmo Café, Scene Café, Red Books, Satellite Space Studio, Coffee Club, Arts Queensland, Regional Museums Association, AusDance **Kelvin Grove** QUT **Milton** Arriverderci Pizza, Blu Deco, Rue de Paris **Morningside**

## WA

### PERTH

**CBD** Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, CMC TAFE, School of Art and Design, Artrage office, WA Music Association, ARX, Arts House (Blue Room Theatre, Photo Gallery) **Northbridge** Brass Monkey, Luke's Café, Plaka Kebabs, Arcane Bookshop, Universal Bar, Internet Paradise, Café Sport, Vultures Café, YHA Youth Hostel, The Moon Café, Valentino's Café, Spaghetti Bar, Cinema Paradiso, Northbridge Pavillion, Lake Street Café, Icon Café **Mt Lawley** Totem Bar, Elysian Fields Books, Siennas Café, Queens Hotel, Meal Box Café, Dome, Globe Café, Chino's Café, Diva Café, Astor Cinema, Edith Cowan University-School of Visual Arts, Academy of Performing Arts, Academy Box Office, Circle Café (Library), Education Building, Mt Lawley TAFE College **City** Craftwest Gallery, King Street Café, Cino's Café, King Street Arts Centre, Mezzanine Café, McMillan's Hairdressers, 78s Records, Da Da Records, Arts WA, Compact Disc Library, Wesley CD Megastore **Leederville** Luna Cinemas, Luna Café, Post Café, Oxford Books, Newcastle Café, Australian Writers Guild **Subiaco** Woodpeckers Pizza, Radd's Café, Subiaco Hotel, Colonial Café, Oriel Café, Dome Café, Rokeby Records, Bridie O'Reilly's Bar, Black Swan

Open Season Gallery/Café **Northcote** Westgarth Cinema, Alphabet City, Salamander Café **Bulleen** Museum of Contemporary Art, Heide Gallery **Bulleen** Museum of Contemporary Art, Heide Gallery **South Melbourne** Arts Victoria, Australian Ballet, ABC Radio, **VCA** Café complex, Depts of Music, Dance, Film, Photography plus Reception and Gallery, The Malthouse, AFI, AFC, Imagestream, Digitech, Emerald Books, Cinemedia Access, Chunky Move **Albert Park** Dance Works, Gasworks, Avenue Books, MDS Mushroom **St Kilda** National Theatre, Galleon Café, Greasy Joe's, Theatreworks, Linden Gallery, Cosmos Books, Big Juice, Metropolis Bookshop, Big Mouth Restaurant, Vibe Café Espresso Bar, Wild Rice Restaurant, Raoul Records, George Cinema, Café and Gallery, Café Diva, Muse Hairdressers, Cova Bar, Tolarno Gallery, Chronicles Books, St Kilda Library, Augogo Café, Astor Theatre, Monroe's Restaurant **Prahran** Also Foundation, Vicious Fish Café, Dangerfield, Revival, ID's Café, Blue Pol's Café/Gallery, Library, Renegade, Revolver, Greville Records **South Yarra** Hares & Hyenas Books, Readings Books, Longford Cinema, Como Cinema, Trak Cinema, St Martin's Theatre, ACCA (Monash University), **Hawthorn** Swinburne Library, Media Dept., Hawthorn Readings, Swinburne Library, Media Dept **Elwood** Classic Cinema, Cinevex, **Brighton** Brighton Bay Cinema, Dendy Cinema, **West Melbourne:** Public Office, **Bundarra:** La Trobe University (Agora Theatre, Media Dept, Café), **Collingwood:** Café Bohemio, The Last Record Store, TAFE Film Dept. Library, SugarLoco, Friends of the Earth, Reading Matters, Barracuda Bar, Australian Galleries, **Footscray:** Footscray Community Centre, Westspace Gallery, **Brunswick** Kaleidoscope Restaurant, Mechanics Institute, Library

### REGIONAL

**Geelong** Art Gallery and Performing Arts Centre, **Ballarat** Her Majesty's Theatre **Bendigo** Art Gallery, La Trobe University

Queensland College of Art **Paddington** Arterial, Pandemonium Café, Le Scoops, The Rest, Sassafras Fine Foods, Java Lounge **Toowong** Coffee Boutique, Blue Café **Indooroopilly** Tim's Café/Bar, Saints & Sinners Café **St Lucia** Internet Café, University of Queensland, Wordsmiths Café, UQ Cafeteria, 29 High St **Hamilton** Ascot Art Materials, BCC Library, Chapter Two Bookshop **City** QUT, Dendy Cinema, Arts Queensland, Expressions Dance Company, Metro Arts Centre Bulletin Area, Playlab, Verve Café, Pacific Film & TV Commission, Aromas Wintergarden, Koffies (Tattersalls Arcade, Myer Centre), The Hub Internet Café, Chi Chi Deluxe, BCC Library, Rockinghorse Records, Coffee Club (Albert & Charlotte Streets, Broadway on the mall and Eagle Street) The Palace Backpackers

### REGIONAL

**Gold Coast** Griffith University, Sunshine Coast University, City Art Gallery **Townsville** James Cook University (Theatre Dept), Civic Centre, Far North Cultural Industry Association, TropicLine Theatre, Umbrella Studios, Community Music Centre **Cairns** Civic Theatre **Ipswich** Global Arts Link

### FREMANTLE

**Fremantle** Arts Centre, Film and TV Institute, Mills Records, Fremantle City Council, Subterranean CDs, Orient Hotel, Moores Building, Philimores, Mouat Street, Iv Bianci Café, Luna SX, Istanbul, Sail and Anchor, The Mill Bakehouse, New Edition, Dome Café, Gino's Café, Old Pappas, Kulcha, Fly By Night Club **South of River** Curtin University Administration, School of Art, Design & Architecture, University Library, Murdoch University Administration, Refectory, Library, AIUS, **Joondalup**, Joondalup ECU, Churchlands ECU

### REGIONAL

**Albany** Arts Council



# Editorial

Given the volume of editorial comment in the *The Arts: What Next* (page 6) and on experimental work in state theatre companies (page 26), we thought it best if we restricted ourselves here simply to Best Wishes for Xmas and the New Year.

To all of our readers across Australia and the many from overseas who read us online, to our ever generous state editorial team members, to our writers, to the artists they write about, to our printers, our distributors in every state and the funding bodies, advertisers and subscribers who make it all possible, our thanks. We hope you have the Xmas you wish for and enjoy a creative and successful 2001.

Virginia Baxter, Keith Gallasch, Gail Priest, Kirsten Krauth, Mireille Juchau

## Cover image

Green Dress, type C photograph, 120 x 120cms  
from the exhibition Deborah Paaue, *Sugar Nights*  
Greenaway Art Gallery, December 2000  
photo courtesy of Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide  
gag@camtech.net.au

*Deborah Paaue's images are enigmatic, sensual, erotic, and very loaded. Every frame is composed and constructed in tight asymmetrical close-up. The framing itself is controlled, directed and precisely articulate in application. In this shoot the female character(s) are carefully presented, almost symbolically, in a manner that's stylistically confronting, as partial bodies. Seductive, self-consciously aware, and still, very still, posed, these characters assert a distinctive presence, a performative presence, a fiction.*

Nicholas Tsoutas (catalogue essay)

Deborah Paaue's work appears in the Art Gallery of South Australia's *Chemistry: South Australian Artists 1990-2000*; see Michael Newall's review, page 29.

## Corrections

Bernard Cohen writes to correct an author error in his piece on the trAce International Online Writing Community in *RealTime* 39 page 4. "The letter in the middle of the piece should be signed from Shirley (first name only) and not from "Shirley ffield Sanford" (which makes it sound as though it is a hoax from Christy Sheffield Sanford, which it most definitely is not)."

Shimmeeshok's production of *A Paper Gathering* reviewed by Chris Reid in *RealTime* 39, page 42, was incorrectly attributed to Yoko Kajio (one of the performers). *A Paper Gathering* was in fact devised and created by Linda Patterson who also performed in the work at Adelaide's Mercury Cinema.

## the roche contemporary art prize

The AUD\$50,000 (not incl. GST)  
"sometimes bed is not an option"  
contemporary art prize and exhibition,  
24th April 2001.

Artists working in any media may  
enter their interpretation of the theme.

Entry deadline Friday 9th February 2001.

Entrant details at [www.rocheart.com](http://www.rocheart.com)  
or for information phone Mojo  
on (02) 9332 0004.



EXHIBITIONISTS

mojopartners

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ACT	Julia Postle		
TAS	Diana Klaosen		



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# RealTime Xmas: 2000 favourite things

*Just before rushing to print we asked RealTime writers (the ones who weren't too busy or travelling) to contribute short, informal pieces about performance, exhibitions, concerts, books or objects of any kind that had engaged them in 2000. For some, it's a "best of the year" report in the artform areas they usually write about, for others it's a mini-review of a recently seen show that grabbed them, for others it's a bit more lateral—and revealing.*

## Indija Mahjoeddin

Quirk Theatre of Puppetry's *The Corpse*, a whimsical silent horror show won my best vote at Brisbane's *Newboards 2000* (November 12-18). Puppeteer Lynne Kent reminds us how magical 'low tech' can get. The film noir style is brought to life by a beautifully rendered cityscape of black paper cutout, barely a foot high. Using only her 6v torch to pan and zoom, the tiny windows and jagged skyline seem 3D on the screen behind. Luring us into a private world through a looming sash window, we witness in shadows grotesque, an anonymous inhabitant stashing body parts into her small suitcase. Theatrically simple, performed to perfection, with wit and a joy in the medium of stage, this is multimedia at its most honest. A screen, light and cardboard cutouts. Lynne Kent had us entranced.

## Stephen Armstrong

Don't die before you've been ravished by: Rose Tremaine's *Music and Silence*, Howard Norman's *The Bird Artist*, Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth, Pouring Rain*, and Patrick McGrath's Gothic masterpiece, *Martha Peake*. These authors understand the necessity of seduction; that for the reader, our collusion is the better part of a ravishing. In that sense, probably no genre gets close to the possibilities of author/reader collusion than Gothic Romance.

McGrath's *Martha Peake* is a parable of the American Revolution, when "in the beginning", as Locke put it, "all the world was America." In high Gothic style, McGrath takes every advantage of the 18th century setting to howl the personal and public desperation of Liberty abandoned, stillborn and putrid in the gutters, towers and gin cellars of the old world, and its bloody delivery into the new. Yet this is also a novel of great-hearted love and mourning. It might be "a black art, the writing of history...to resurrect the dead, and animate their bones, as historians do", but like the novel's drugged and feverish narrators, we are quick to pile flesh onto old bones and share in all the complicities of myth.

## Melinda Rackham

Cinema: *The Goddess of 1967*, Clara Law's sleek, elegant, and intelligent look at baggage and desire in the outback; and Lars Von Trier's harrowing *Dancer in the Dark*. I love being emotionally manipulated to cry through at least 30 minutes of a movie.

Print: I have spent this year ploughing through 5 of Greg Egan's books as research. The reclusive Australian sci-fi writer deals with biotech scenarios, genetic modification, multiple gendered and dimensional universes, utopian and dystopian technological futures. Sometimes it's hard trekking but the viewpoints are well worth it.

Performance: Brazilian finger puppets (Grupo Caixa de Imagens) at the Adelaide Festival...an astonishingly simple, yet personal, intimate and moving experience. Far more fun to stand in line and wait for the exquisite

single viewer experience, perched on a little stool in a public place than indulge in Greenawayesque extravaganza.

## Sue Moss

Highlights of Tasmania 2000 included April's *Mountain Orchestra Concert*: a cacophony of cornemuses, carillon's from CIG cylinders, a Phamylec Phone and a Martin Tucker-inspired Bobble-Donk. Raffaele Marcellino conducted community and conservatorium musicians. Picnic hampers, Autumn and Mount Wellington. The inaugural and lucrative \$40,000 Tasmania Pacific Regional Prize for literature was also launched. *Looking for Life in all the Wrong Places*, featured one theme, 6 writers and 10-minute plays presented by Playworks and the Australian Script Centre. *Ten Days On the Island*, an international festival of island arts commences on March 30, 2001. Come on, down. All of Tasmania will be Robyn Archer's town.

## Chris Reid

Adelaide dancer and choreographer Tuula Roppola took dance into new vistas with her short videos *Loose Woman* and *Blowfish*, where video technology was used to manipulate the performance. *Blowfish* was shot like an animation to compress time and to exaggerate movement. In *Loose Woman*, the performers appeared in a public building. Both videos used angles and close-ups not possible on a conventional stage. In *Blowfish* props moved about (danced) by themselves. These videos were about the observation/ recording of movement and the refiguring of space, employing the flexibility of the screen. *Blowfish* was especially strong and would suit SBS's *Eat Carpet*. Tuula Roppola, Performing Arts Technology Unit, University of Adelaide, October 5.

In a concert of rarely heard works by major contemporary composers, and student works for strings, voice and piano, the highlight was the Australian premiere of Luigi Nono's *Hey que caminar* for 2 violins. In this fabulous piece, the performers shift to different locations in the auditorium for each movement of the 35 minute work, the audience seated in the middle of the space. The music is lyrical, colourful, with an introspection-heightened by the varying sound sources. Violinists James Cuddeford (Australian String Quartet) and Natsuko Yoshimoto gave fine performances. ACME New Music Co at ABC Studio 520, November 16.

## Philippa Rothfield

The performance of *A Large Attendance in the Antechamber*, flipping between performative Gestalts (this is/is not performance), is as much a work of genius as the "Victorian Genius" (Sir Francis Galton) who is its subject. *A Large Attendance* played in a tiny 19th century study in Melbourne's Royal Society theatre. It is almost a diorama but Brian Lipson (writer/performer) is squashed between its book-lined walls. From our 21st century vantage, the audience witnessed the dark side of Eugenics, a philosophy that appeared to enjoy a certain credibility, if only in the antechamber of Galton's mind. The piece is as absurd as it is rigorous, not merely because Galton's sanity deteriorates before our eyes but also because of the madness of Victorian experimentation. God knows how 20th century science will scrub up in the years to come. *A Large Attendance in the Antechamber*, The Royal Society of Victoria, November, 10-26. Sydney Festival, January 15-19, 2001.

## Jonathan Marshall

In a year marked by great physical theatre (Margaret Trail's *Dislocate*), genuinely traumatising performance (Michael Kantor's *Meat Party*, El Periférico de Objetos' *Máquina Hamlet*), absorbing Freudian deconstruction (Strangio's *Portrait of Dora*) and performative music (Aphid's *Ice Carving, Clocked Out*), Chunky Moves' *Hydra* stays with me. After a mixed history of poppy body-slaming, choreographer Gideon Obarzanek moved into slow lyricism with this piece of total theatre, literally blowing up the floor as the dancers slowly or explosively 'died'—ably supported, emulated, provoked, amplified and crushed by the electro-pollution of Darrin Verhagen and the breathtaking, endless crescendo of James Gordon-Anderson's live scoring.

## Sophie Hansen

Merce Cunningham talking at London's The Institute of Contemporary Art was my millennial moment. Accompanying the installation, *Hand Drawn Spaces*, and the company performances of *Biped*, the seminar was part of the digital strand of London's Dance Umbrella festival. Whilst the Chair waxed pompously about cyborgs in meat-free virtual reality, this quiet octogenarian compared his attraction to motion capture to his fascination with animal movement. "I see new things," he stated simply. Chuckling gently at the jargon bandied about him, Cunningham's modest revelations about bodies in space carried the weight of a lifetime's enquiry. Wisdom one, hype nil.

## Mike Leggett

The reading and comprehension of the complex systems of human affairs confronts us daily. Some we learn by rote, others through windows of experience, occasionally through profound immersion. Rarely is a snapshot presented that looks outside our urbanised existence to show the significance of the complex system that is the natural world, a landscape which is part myth and partly innate to our whitefella sensibilities.

The book *The Native Born* follows on from the exhibition of the same name, curated by Djon Mundine O.A.M. and opened at the MCA in 1996. However, it is a different manifestation of what Mick Dodson described at that opening as "...art...extraordinary in its beauty and its power." As a document of religious expression it interweaves words with a rich profusion of images—of art, of country, of ceremony, of the custodians and creators of culture indigenous to Arnhem Land. As a description of the complex system formed by the people of the Glyde River and their land, the book reveals what Dodson suggested to visitors at the exhibition: "You must see [our cultures] as part of a far broader context which is also political, social and economic."

The book comes out of the period of genesis for the Museum, when risk was a requirement, when projects were supported until realisation—this one took 10 years—and where the desire to act collaboratively included the joint custodianship of the artefacts between the MCA and the community who had made them in celebration of their country. *The Native Born—objects and representations from Ramingining, Arnhem Land*, Djon Mundine et al, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney in association with Bula'bula Arts, Ramingining, 2000.

## Jane Mills

The Office of Film and Literature Classification's decision to un-ban Nagisa

Oshima's *Ai No Corrida* was the most exciting cinematic event of the year. On the small screen, however, John Clarke's *The Games* and, with the help of a wombat, HG and Roy, demonstrated that Australian television could be inspired. As did Darlene Johnson's SBS documentary, *Stolen Generations*. But the best visual experiences were the 'Sorry'-sky-writing on Reconciliation Day and the *Papunya Tula* exhibition at the AGNSW—the most exciting display of art I've ever seen in my life. If only Australian cinema could be that good.

## Aleks Sierz

The show that really made me sweat this year was *4.48 Psychosis*, Sarah Kane's last play, put on by the Royal Court in London after her suicide in 1999. On the page, the text is a challenge, a gentle smack in the face to anyone who believes in text-based theatre. For although Kane would have insisted that every word be played, she gives no indication of how many characters are needed. Named after the time of night when suicides are most common, *4.48 Psychosis* vividly portrays a psychotic breakdown, in which the difference between self and external reality implodes, by means of a fragmented, poetic text. Directed by James Macdonald, who'd worked with Kane before, the production used 3 actors and projected images to convey the troubled, but wryly funny world of mental collapse. Media controversy about whether the play was a suicide note or a work of imagination confirmed Kane's position as the most powerful and original writer of her generation.

## Diana Klaosen

Not much can beat being at London's new Tate Modern on the second day it was open (yes, here I am unashamedly showing off), but in Tasmania I was entirely engaged by the emotional political play, *A Beautiful Life*, a collaboration between Matrix Theatre, Brisbane, La Boite and the Energex Brisbane Festival, at the Salamanca Arts Centre's Peacock Theatre. Similarly exciting was a revitalised TasDance's latest presentation, *HYPER\_mobile*—7 excellent dancers, 4 very original choreographers and faultless production values. Then there's the quasi-arthouse film *High Fidelity* for insight into the male mind, the dry humour and the esoteric musical references—plus John Cusack; one need say no more."

## Alex Hutchinson

Despite the appalling launch of Sega's new Dreamcast game console in Australia (bungled completely and utterly by our very own Ozisoft) the system still boasts the most impressive, innovative and inspired entertainment software on the market today. Titles like *Jet Grind Radio*, the 'culture sim' *Sbenmue* and the offensive virtual pet *Seaman* (which features a fish with a man's head that not only grows and develops but somehow manages to spy on your life and insult you) continue to push the bounds of the medium. If you enjoy digital entertainment and you don't own a Dreamcast (especially if you're foolish enough to be waiting for the overhyped PlayStation 2, which barely has a single title worth owning, hitting the shelves in the next year) you're contributing to an industry which is beginning to learn what Hollywood has always known: more of the same is a safer bet than an original gamble. Mediocre console sales have left Sega in difficult financial waters and the future of one of the industry's strongest creative forces looks bleak. Likely to



be eclipsed by the better advertised PlayStation 2 in the next few years, Dreamcast will remain an exciting blip on an otherwise increasingly dull dial.

Ed Scheer

What's the difference between a cosmonaut and an astronaut? How would you explain a toilet to a creature from another planet? How do you cope when your own brother behaves like you were a creature from another planet? Robert Lepage addresses these questions in Ex Machina's superb new production and Lepage's first important solo piece since *Elsinore* (1995). All the tricks of quick costume changes and perspective shifts are in evidence in this performance which combines a brief history of space flight with an examination of everyday mundanity. I found it breathtakingly simple and immensely affecting. It fuses memory and technology and affirms the gravitational power of human contact. Best thing I've seen since Pina Bausch in August! *The Far Side of the Moon*, Robert Lepage, Schiller Theater, Berlin, September 29.

Tina Kaufmann

Not a great year for contemporary cinema, but there's no shortage of films in the mainstream. My real concern is about access to both retrospective work and other national cinemas. The continuing and frustrating dithering over the possibility of a properly funded and resourced cinemathèque forming part of the MCA means that we don't have even the promise this kind of programming would guarantee. The AFI's National Cinemathèque, however, on a tight budget and with very limited resources, still managed to provide a wide-ranging and inviting year-long program, with my particular highlights including Buster Keaton's *The Cameraman*, John Farrow's *His Kind of Woman*, Jacques Tourneur's *Curse of the Demon*, and especially the Russian *Hamlet*, with Kozintev proving that in the right hands (including Welles, of course) that Shakespeare was a great and cinematic screenwriter. The Sydney Film Festival provided solid retrospectives of the absolutely stunning work of UK TV director Alan Clark and the gorgeous films of Max Ophüls, especially *La Signora di Tutti*, *Reckless Moment* and *Madame De*. Beautiful new prints of *The Third Man*, *Some Like it Hot* and *Rear Window* proved that there's plenty of life in old films.

My own particular interest in Asian cinema was rewarded with 2 lovely films from Zhang Yimou, *Not One Less* and *The Road Home*, Chen Kaige's complex visual treat *The Emperor and the Assassin*, regular and more accessible Asian programming at Readings Cinemas in Chinatown, an interesting package of films in the inaugural Sydney Asia Pacific Film Festival, and veteran Japanese Kon Ichikawa proving he hasn't lost his touch with the exuberant *Dora-Heita* at the Sydney Film Festival. A final highlight—meeting Shohei Imamura and seeing his masterly *Black Rain* in a special Japanese film event at AFTRS.

Linda Marie Walker

I have 78 small watercolours. Suzanne Treister painted them for me (as a gift). They are my personal Treister exhibition—in plastic envelopes, between a black cover. Only about 6 people have seen them. When they arrived through the post I was too nervous to look at them. I'm not sure I've seen them all yet. Nearly every one has the letter 'K' embedded in it. They were made (like a pack of cards) for a special reason—a book. The book is called *For The Love Of The Letter K* (of course!). Each picture is alone, and this aloneness is a space, and this space is a secret. Lips, hearts, glasses, flowers, raindrops, faces, books, lines, circles. I think D(K)errida is wrong about 'posting', as they arrived together safe and sound. Of course he's right



Peter Fischmann, *Untitled*, 2000.

(almost always) about 'missing', about missing this or that (kiss, for instance), 'going missing', about 'missing you' (being lead astray); as, painted and arrived as they truly are, I can't show you even a glimpse of one. It's as if they are 'missing' (in action), lost, keepsakes. But they're here with me, so I wish you were too.

Anthony May

Why do I like the Fischmann photograph (above)? Well, let's put it like this: someone chose the yellow in the Torana palette, someone designed the badges that stick on the doors, someone said, 'Let's put eight holes in the mags', someone else drew up the window decals. But no-one tuned the engine to play a scale but the guy behind the wheel. No-one plays the pedals like a violin but the guy in the grease. This is what Fischmann saw. This is what Fischmann got. And this is why I like the Fischmann photograph. *Untitled*, Peter Fischmann, 2000. Type C photograph. New works by Peter Fischmann are at the Doggett St. Studio, Brisbane, December 8-15, 2000.

Doug Leonard

Displaying an uncommon brightness of language for performative texts, the playwrights—Binh Duy Ta, a Vietnamese immigrant living in Sydney, and Anna Yen and Indija Mahjoeddin from Brisbane, first generation Chinese and Indonesian respectively—not only provide, as editor Don Batchelor puts it, "an insider's perspective of the immigrant or bi-cultural experience [as] evidence of a more richly complex, social, cultural and artistic environment", but make a significant contribution to developing a uniquely Australian aesthetic (they could only have been written in Australia, while accessing elsewhere). *Three Plays By Asian Australians*, Playlab Press in association with Queensland University of Technology, 2000.

Keith Gallasch

It was a year in which anything that took me out of myself was greatly appreciated, and that included Robyn Archer's 2000 Adelaide Festival, especially Societas Raffaello Sanzio's *Giulio Cesare*, Elision New Music Ensemble's provocative opera, *Yuè Ling Jié*, and the great work of the festival (sadly, seen by few), Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker & Rosas' *I said I* (from Peter Handke's *Self-Accusation*). I caught up with Indigenous writer Kim Scott's *Benang* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press) an engulfing experience about an attempt to breed out blackness, and a brilliant account of the role of story-telling in understanding personal history. American Neal Stephenson's astonishing *Cryptonomicon* (Arrow) is an epic about computing, the net and encryption, spread from the 30s, through World War II and into the near future and set variously in the US, the UK, Singapore, the Philippines, Australia and in a few U-boats in between. Hard work at times, but worth it. On CD I embraced the Amanda Stewart-Colin Bright opera *The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior* (Australian Music Centre), the Richard Barrett-Elision *Opening of the Mouth* (ABC, 1999) and the 1997 album *gustav mabler/uri caine urlicht/primal light*, a ravishing and outrageous interpretation of Mahler symphonic passages, pushing to the fore the brass band and Jewish roots of this great, impassioned melancholia (New Edition CD, NY/Germany). Finally, it was joy to see Sydney's Performance Space kicking back into action under the artistic direction of Fiona Winning, revitalising a sense of purpose, occasion and a performance community.

Virginia Baxter

Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker & Rosas' *I said I* at the Adelaide Festival gets my gong for the year, not least for way it dispensed

forever with the idea that dancers shouldn't speak. De Keersmaecker's dancers argued, teased, were subdued and confronted by Peter Handke's text. They pushed, it pulled, they shook it till it gave in and in a final act of speech ("I Said This") claimed it for their own. After years of waiting, for the chance to finally see a hero in the flesh in 3 (count 'em) works and this one in particular and for being able to share 2 hours of difficult and exhilarating contemporary performance with such an ecstatic Australian audience, hats off to Robyn Archer and the Adelaide Festival of Arts.

And thanks to Tetsuya Wakuda for that night in October when he interrupted the talk at our table with his own subtle suggestion (green apple sorbet), polite interjection (roasted scampi seasoned with tea), understatement (seared scallop with asparagus and summer truffles), occasional overstatement (should venison be tatakied?) saved by another pearl of wisdom (confit of ocean trout with marinated celery) or irresistible seduction (lobster ravioli with seaweed vinaigrette and shellfish essence.) Each plated proposition was delivered from the kitchen and introduced with panache by a waiter who knew it well. I'm glad Tetsuya has moved to larger premises, though I imagine it'll be some time before I sample the pleasures of his table again. Though I liked the fact that such a sensual dining experience was available in the main street of suburban Rozelle, the spatial limitations of the room meant confining the synaesthetic experience to our table. I wish future diners the pleasure of raising eyebrows and licking lips with others in the room who are simultaneously savouring Tetsuya's conversation.



# The Arts: What next? Social work for arts funding?

*I don't think there is a social responsibility for an artist. I think it's their responsibility to work as well as they can and as far as they can with what they're doing. Then I think the nature of what emerges from the work will be much more complicated.* William Kentridge, *Spectrum*, Sydney Morning Herald, November 25

This statement might surprise you if you've seen South African Kentridge's work with the Johannesburg-based Handspring Puppet Theatre (1996 Adelaide Festival) or his animated films (DocumentaX, Germany 1997; SBSTV *Eat Carpet*). The political power of his work is overt and unsettling. However, it looms at you out of fantastic images, not from a set of rational propositions. Kentridge's politics are deeply rooted in a surreal vision.

There has been no shortage of a sense of social responsibility in the history of the arts, especially in the 20th century; however, as a working principle it doesn't always provide a satisfactory creative impulse. Arguments about the social responsibility of the artist and whether or not all art is political are destined to be with us for a long time yet, however, and this is critical, the social

context for those arguments does change—we are entering a period where, in the West, 'social responsibility' has acquired a set of worrying new connotations, ones that could radically change the value of the term.

In *RealTime* 39, we initiated a series of essays and articles about the future of the arts in Australia. In this edition, we provide our first international perspective on the subject, one that might help define the direction in which, possibly, we're already heading...or being led.

Sophie Hansen, Creative Centre Manager at London's The Roundhouse, describes the nature and initial impact of a new British government arts funding policy as it takes effect. The emphasis on creativity and community in that policy is not new to us (*Creative Nation*; "mutual obligation"), but the rigour with which it is being implemented is. As Hansen suggests, perhaps we Australians are already part the way down the new British road. However, for most artists and arts organisations here it's a matter of limited arts funding being spread further and thinner across the Australian cultural and geographic landscape. It is not inconceivable, however, that future governments will

spend more on the arts—but will it come at a price? Will governments want to map out a social role for the arts—instead of work for the dole, will it be social work for arts funding? A crude exaggeration? We do live in an era of rabid communitarianism to which Britain's new arts policy could belong. In a provocative essay in *Spectrum* (Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday, November 4), Tom Morton writes,

*In Australia, Britain and the US, the cult of community is making increasing numbers of converts on Left and Right. Both Tony Blair's New Labour and the British Conservative Party sing the praises of "civil society" and declare their enthusiasm for transferring more and more of the functions of government to the voluntary sector.*

And it's not just the voluntary sector. Morton's essay is well worth searching out. It's not surprising, in the same context, that politicians from all sides have warmly applauded the Australia Council's Saatchi & Saatchi Report—you don't have to read far into it to discover that artists' alleged stereotyping of the Australian public is seen as a much bigger problem than the

same public's negative perception of the arts. What was planned as an exercise in determining how to promote the value of the arts may well turn into demand for social obligation.

If Sophie Hansen appears optimistic about the long term effect of the British arts policy, it's an optimism predicated on the British government at least maintaining financial commitment to its model of arts funding and if those benefiting from it apply due pressure by expecting art to be a part of their lives. In a future edition of *RealTime* Hansen will take a close look at the impact of the policy on particular artists and communities.

Globalisation is another phenomenon bound to have a long term effect on the arts. It's an issue we've touched on from time to time in these pages, but in *RealTime* 41, Ben Goldsmith will report from an international conference of cultural ministers and their 'opposition' (artists, including a strong Canadian contingent and Australian representatives) held on the island of Santorini (the rim of a submerged, extinct volcano between mainland Greece and Crete) this year. KG

## UK Arts: the creativity panacea

Sophie Hansen

It is dubious to suggest that there are parallels in the development of arts policy in Britain and Australia. But Australia's current emphasis on regional distribution of funding looks uncannily like Britain's recent devolution of funds and policy-making power away from a central Arts Council to Regional Arts Boards. And if Australia were, like Britain, to pursue this trajectory towards its logical conclusion, it might end up looking closely at partnerships which promote creativity in communities.

The buzz words are new, but they are powerful, for they are plugged into the "joined-up-thinking" so beloved of the British Labour government. And the arts world is finally speaking the right language. Having cottoned on to "access" and "new audiences" in 1999, The Arts Council of England has been obliged to loosen its grip on power and delegate the majority of its funds to the regions. £127 million per annum has enabled the regional bodies to take a new approach to the arts in their communities and has left The Arts Council free to do more "joining-up." Cannily, it has hitched its wagon to the only buzzword likely to link the arts world to the concerns of the bright young reformers of the social and education sectors; creativity.

The creativity panacea has afforded the arts hope in hard times. Only 2 years ago, the subsidised arts sector was almost bankrupt, with an accumulated deficit of about 14% of total income. In the words of Gerry Robinson, the Chairman of The Arts Council, in his annual lecture tellingly titled "The Creativity Imperative": "Something has shifted in the arts community" ("The Creativity Imperative. Investing in the arts in the 21st Century", New Statesman Arts Lecture, 2000, Published by the Arts Council of England [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)). He quotes the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, before the election, "For too long, arts and culture have stood outside the mainstream, their potential unrecognised in government. That has to change, and under Labour it will...in the 21st Century, we are going to see the world increasingly influenced by innovation and creative minds. Our future depends on creativity."

Britain has a high profile website solely dedicated to encourage thinking on creativity. CreativeNet ([www.creativenet.org.uk](http://www.creativenet.org.uk)), promoted by the Left-leaning policy think-tank Demos, maintains that this new focus is more than a trend. "Creativity is all about equipping our young people for the transfer to the knowledge economy." A challenging report by the Department of Education, entitled *All Our Futures* makes the

**There are still those who refuse to give workshops or enter into collaborations with community groups. With regional funders increasingly sensitive to elitism however, the opportunities to remain aloof are dwindling.**

same hard-hitting conclusion. Still suffering a post-industrial hangover, Britain's education and employment sectors are in no shape for the information age. The media, arts, tourism, and leisure will provide for future generations of young Brits. Yet British educators are mired in a rigid curriculum which strangles free thinking and entrepreneurial skills. Obsessed with literacy and numeracy they are not equipped to teach creativity. Young British people finish learning early or ill prepared, many faced with unemployment and all the consequent social problems this causes. Social services, bogged down with bureaucracy, in an out-moded relationship to society, are not able to innovate and adapt. And the need to start early to break the chain reaction which keeps the young dysfunctional from cradle to grave is urgent. Research shows that a child's potential for creativity is 98% at the age of 5, by 10 it has dropped to 30% and by adulthood it is a mere 2%. If creative communities are the key to the future, then they must be built from the freshest generations. Struggling to loosen the existing structures, the government is looking to artists to come in from the margins to help ease the many transitions taking place across society. (*All our Futures. Creativity, Culture and Education*, 1999, Department for Education and Employment, [Dfee@prologistics.co.uk](mailto:Dfee@prologistics.co.uk))

Massive national initiatives such as The New Opportunities Fund have put policy into practice. Since 1999, the Fund has distributed over £205 million to out-of-school learning activities (a high percentage of which involve artists). Next year, The Standards Fund will distribute over £60 million to schools for similar ends. Education Action Zones, Gifted and Talented Programmes and myriad regional initiatives are developing artists' residencies, cultural festivals, circus arts courses, websites, radio stations and television shows. Behind these measures is the near universal statistic, trumpeted in an Arts Council commissioned MORI poll; "95% of the population believe that children should have more experience of the arts at

school."

The government is also articulating the link between creativity in and around the formal education sector as a route to resolving wider social problems. This year, its Social Inclusion Unit undertook a lengthy commission, dividing into 12 Policy Action Teams to look at issues affecting communities. Tony Blair defined social exclusion as "what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown" (House of Commons Written Answers, 12th May 2000). Significantly, he appointed one team to look specifically at the impact of arts and sports on communities. In the PAT10 Report the government lauded arts-based projects combating rough sleeping, school exclusion, truancy and teenage pregnancy" (Policy Action Team 10, "Arts and Sport, A Report to the Social Inclusion Unit", Department for Culture, Media and Sport, July 1999).

In addition to youth arts work, there has been an emphasis on cultural diversity. Staggering new measures of multi-cultural Britain—for example there are 307 languages spoken in London (*Multicultural Capital*, Battelbridge Publications, London)—have given rise to targeted projects, such as national training schemes for ethnic arts managers and funding programs for community festivals. Again, artists have been taking advantage of non-arts budgets, such as Central Government funds for asylum seekers, to celebrate cultural diversity. The Regional Arts Boards have also invested a large percentage of their National Lottery revenue in participatory arts. National programs, such as the Year of the Artist, have given rise to innovative new partnerships between artists and communities. Single Regeneration Budgets, European Social Funds, Criminal Justice Schemes and Urban Development Budgets have all invested millions in arts projects. At every level of government, community arts are burgeoning.

So what does this mean for artists? Clearly the

kind of art made in these new circumstances is changing. No longer separate from any other aspect of life, the arts are subject to the same pressures as local government. Increased accountability is changing practice, as community artists are required to consult widely before initiating projects, representing the cultural make-up of their communities accurately under close supervision. There is a stronger emphasis upon reporting, evaluation, distribution and, generally, value for money.

For some artists, this is anathema, however there are few who can afford to remain aloof. Those who, for artistic reasons, refuse to give workshops or enter into collaborations with community groups find themselves reliant upon dwindling pots of pure arts funding. Conditions for access and participation accompany all grants in the UK and whilst a few bursaries and individual awards for research remain, the majority of arts funding carries a requirement for community benefits which even those who argue for the intangible benefits of the arts cannot avoid.

Those who are equipped to embrace the changes are enjoying considerable increases in profile and starting to see the benefits of community work for audience development and funding diversification. Ironically, it is the larger companies, with their education officers and outreach workers are best placed to capitalise on the new social and education funds. Thus the ballet and opera companies are amongst those first off the mark for European funds. The established venues all have growing community programmes of great ambition and range. West Yorkshire Playhouse for example has just acquired funds to install an IT Learning Centre in its foyer.

Nation-wide, education departments are growing, special projects co-ordinators, evaluators and consultants are being employed. Jobs for artists willing to work in partnership are not diminishing. The Arts Council report cites a visual art training project in Birmingham as a shining example of the new breed of arts organisation, sitting comfortably with a foot in each camp; "Gallery 37 recruits 140 long-term unemployed people each year. With a specially constructed tented village in the centre of the city, these people work with arts professionals from a range of organisations, such as The Birmingham Royal Ballet and SAMPAD, a South Asian arts development agency. They have the opportunity to develop creative skills—everything from dance to digital work to textiles and music-making.

*continued on page 9*



# Tasmania: Robyn Archer's treasure island

Robyn Archer (excerpts from a conversation with Keith Gallasch)

This year Robyn Archer's Adelaide Festival reached out to include regional centres with a program of international and local artists. In 2001, Robyn hosts 10 Days on the Island, Tasmania's first major arts festival. You'll see a lot of the festival in Hobart, but there's a great deal of it—and the island—you'll miss if you don't venture out of the city for at least a day or 2...or the whole 10. 10 Days on the Island is shaping up to be a truly idiosyncratic, live-in, road movie of a festival that will take you from Hobart to Port Arthur, Roaring Beach, Bicheno, Triabunna, Coles Bay, St Helens, Launceston, Burnie, Cradle Mountain and Queenstown on a journey (mapped out for you) through remarkable landscapes, historical sites and local, national and international performances and exhibitions.

Some major works can only be seen at the site where they have been developed—like IHOS Opera's community opera *Sea Chant—Settlers, Ships & Saw Horses* at Triabunna on the east coast (director Constantine Koukias), or Theatre North's *Our Path* (writer Stella Kent, director Angela Chaplin) in 4 locations in the Cataract Gorge, Launceston, or a Big Hart project from Scott Rankin (co-writer of *Leab Purcell's* *Box the Pony*) on the north-west coast (Images in Pasture, described as "cows chewing in artistic bent"). Koukias, Kent and Rankin are resident Tasmanians, sharing festival billing with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Tasdance, dancer Wendy McPhee and sound artist Poonkbin Kbut (directed by Deborah Pollard, former Salamanca Theatre artistic director), *Stompin' Youth*, composer Rae Marcellino with his new music theatre work, *The Flight of Les Darcy*, dancers Osborne & O'Niele and a host of visual artists and events including *Sculpture by the Sea* at Roaring Beach. There's also a visit to Eddystone Point Lighthouse, Mount William Park, to meet Wilderness & Heritage Artist-in-Residence photographer David Martin and talk about his work.

Guests from the Australian mainland include pianist Roger Woodward, David Young (artistic director of the innovative new music group *Apbids* and the new Artistic Director of *Next Wave*), the *Chesworth Ensemble*, *Circus Oz*, *Strange Fruit*, *Brisbane's Koomba Jdarra* (in Launceston with their play about *Stradbroke Island—Goin' to the Island*) and soprano *Merlyn Quaipe*.

From islands around the world come *Yew Tree Theatre* (Ireland), *Indian Ink Company* (New Zealand), *Ten Finger Puppet Company* (Iceland), *Madelaine Sami* in *No. 2* (New Zealand and the Pacific Islands; writer Toa Fraser), *Oki Kano* (an indigenous Ainu musician from Hokkaido), *D'Gary* (virtuoso guitarist from Madagascar), *CosCeim Dance Theatre* (Ireland), *Dance from the Islands of Japan*, *Theatre Talipot* (La Reunion Islands, Indian Ocean), *Te Vaka* (10 piece New Zealand band) and *Fiddlers' Bid* (Shetland Island).

There are film screenings (from the *Shetland Islands and Tasmania*) showing across the island, street events, literary awards and food events with *Stephanie Alexander*, *Gay Bilson* and *Stefano de Pieri*.

## Kickstart

I'm in no way interested in repeating myself. What's been stimulating with this festival has been to go from the biggest budget in the Southern Hemisphere and 40 years of history to no budget, no history, no staff, nothing! Starting from scratch. It was Anthony Steele doing the feasibility study; Premier Jim Bacon biting the bullet and saying yep, we're going to put \$600,000 into this; Julie Warne [General Manager, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra] rings and says would you like to meet the Premier to talk about this?

## Brand Tasmania

This Brand Tasmania thing is very cleverly done and it's refreshing once you get under the skin of it a little bit to see how much stuff they really do in many different ways that bypasses the mainland entirely. Like, it was a great joy for me—and not related to the arts in a way—to find that Tasmania has really important connections with Japan through the salmon industry and important connections with Iceland through genetics research. Another connection is this guy called Ian Johnson who I discovered simply because it was the day I got me gong [the OA awarded to Robyn this year] and he was on the same page of *The Australian*. I'm reading how this guy got his for services to experimental surgery in Sydney. At 60 years of age, he packed up his scalpel and built a house on the southernmost tip of Bruny Island where he spends his days translating ancient Greek and Chinese texts. And I thought, I've got to find him and I did and we've got an event out of it. An actor is going to read Ian's translations of Chinese poetry accompanied by a Chinese traditional instrument. He was fantastic. Sitting in a little cafe down in Hobart, I ask him, how come you got to be a really top, important surgeon and a scholar with a PhD in Mandarin? And it turned out that for his whole life he needed no more than 4 hours sleep a night. So he was a surgeon by day and a scholar by night. He had 2 lives.

## A whole island festival

Jim Bacon was careful to say it couldn't just be Hobart. And I think Anthony's feasibility study said it needed to be in more places than Hobart. We've got more than 32 towns and 80 different venues. It was beyond my wildest dreams. And it's like the Adelaide Festival, you can't do it unless the community is willing for it to happen. People are pretty intense about wanting it to be in their town and it's been a bit of a battle, saying we can't do everything in this first festival. But if it works and you support this one, we can come to your town next time. There were so many projects. It's ended up being about 50-50 Tasmanian and international acts. There's so much happening.

## The island as star

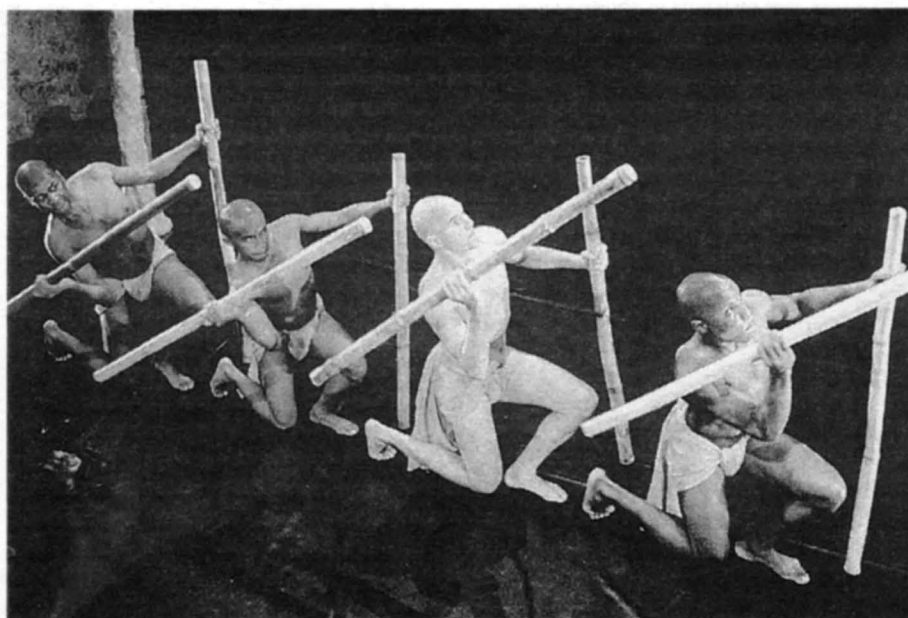
I'm making it like a progressive dinner so that people get to see the island. For me, the place is as much a star as any show can be. As you know I've spoken a lot on invented cultural tourism and how it gives me the shits badly. But if you do something where the landscape is so phenomenal and you can't have a bad drive, where everything is so beautiful, why not draw people's attention to it—especially when it inspires so many artists.

The festival really does take you to the high points of tourism which for me are Cradle Mountain and Coles Bay. Then you can nick up to Stanley. It's the most sensational place. It's like something out of Scotland. Beautiful old weatherboard cottages and seafood restaurants. There's a big hump on the end of the peninsula called The Nut and a grand old colonial home on the top of the cliffs. You can go up there; see the Island Art Prize, have a look at Mark Bishop's studio and his furniture. Stefano de Pieri is going to prepare a meal there.

## A festival about islands

The other thing was to see whether we could make a festival about *only* island cultures. It's like the walk along the beach and thinking oh, there's nothing in those rock pools. And you bend down and you see a world there.

I went to New Zealand and saw their showcases so I got *No. 2* which has just been at Edinburgh. I went to Ireland and I saw *Alone It Stands* [about the day that Munster beat the All Blacks] before it went to Edinburgh. The only



The Water Carriers

thing I really knew about—and I reckon this is what might have inspired me—was *The Water Carriers* from La Reunion Island [population 600,000]. I didn't see the show until about 9 months ago at the Singapore Festival. I'd also seen the most sensational production from another La Reunion company of *Ubu* called *Ubu Colonial*. They did it in a tent under a freeway in Paris. You sat down on benches and ate food from Reunion Island and King Ubu was this tiny little actor who was so foul and came and stood over you while you cast your vote. And they had music and it was the funniest thing. And so I thought, there's something going on on that island. And of course, one knows about Ireland and New Zealand and the renaissance of really good stuff in Singapore and I just thought, let's do it. And when they [the organising committee] got nervous, I just said remember the British Isles and Manhattan. If this event goes for 40 years, you'll never be able to program all that those 2 little islands make.

For the first festival we unashamedly tried to go for those islands where we thought we would get some assistance. We talked to the Scottish Arts Trust about work from the Shetland Islands. That led to the beautiful little screen program exchange *Tartan Shorts and Tassie Tales*. So we did all that stuff and basically came up with a decent formula.

I went through this moment of thinking, you're just bullshitting; this could be any festival from anywhere. Then I looked at the shows and they actually are about the places they come from. D'Gary's songs are about Madagascar and when you get a chance to have a look at that style in the flesh, how can you not learn something about that island? *No. 2* is about a Fijian grandmother. The dance piece, *Ballads*, from Ireland's CosCeim Dance Theatre—performed with uilleann pipes—is about the Irish famine. Yew Tree Theatre's *Alone it Stands* is hysterical. You've never seen anything funnier than the Irish trying to do a Haka in New Zealand accents. Each show or exhibition is about the place it comes from, as is almost all of the Tasmanian work, especially in the visual arts.

## Island exchanges

The traditional dance group from Japan includes dancers from Sado and Okinawa, not just the mainland. We hope to facilitate discussions between them and Indigenous Tasmanians because their stories are identical.

I'm sensing the gratitude that you get from people like Creative New Zealand being so happy that we're bringing in all this New Zealand work. The Scottish Arts Trust is overjoyed that we were interested in a band from the Shetlands, a great band. What you

hear about these islands is the same syndrome that we talk about—isolation. And Tasmania's a very good example. Away from the main centre of influence, away from corporate power, arts funding structures, all that, feeling that they miss out. And so the Scottish Arts Trust are willing to put their hands in their pockets to help us a bit with the Shetland Islanders because it's terribly hard for them to get those people placed in major festivals, because they lack exposure. Now they'll get it. Suddenly you can see island-to-island communication really growing in strength, a fantastic network of cultural exchange.

## Discovering Tasmanian art

Sometimes you go as a tourist to Tasmania and—I think this is what's got up the noses of the arts community—you *happen* on a gallery with some good quality stuff, but it's not the normal course of events. So by focusing on the arts over 10 days, people will get a really good idea of what Tasmanian artists are capable of.

A lot of great stuff has bubbled up. There's a mob called the Island Coes who play music from Cape Barron Island and it's unreal. It's Kentucky. It's folk music. It's like Appalachian. In the 30s and 40s there was a famous band called The Brown Brothers. The Island Coes are older people who still play guitar and fiddle and sing that kind of music. Julie Gough, the Indigenous visual artist is doing an installation up the Midland Highway. Scott Rankin's got this mad thing he's doing in the north-west, so you might see it on the drive from Cradle Mountain to Stanley. It's rural youth being led by three principal artists Daisy, Clara Bell and someone else. It's getting cows to eat through pasture, like crop circles. There's a website and you can watch the process—like watching grass grow.

## The real thing

What would have been horrible would be if I'd got to this point and it looked sort of a poor little Adelaide Festival. But it has its own identity. It's island to island. It's local to local. The decentralised model. And I thought I'd have to rely on lots of Australian stuff but I haven't. Also there are many more Tasmanians than there are mainlanders in the festival. It's truly an island festival.

10 Days on the Island, Tasmania, March 30 - April 8. Enquiries tel 03 6233 5700, [www.tendaysontheisland.org](http://www.tendaysontheisland.org)



# Something is rotten in this age of hope

Richard Murphbet

"You can only contribute to the prevention of the catastrophe when you look upon it as possible," said Heiner Müller in 1987. "...I find it unrealistic to work on the assumption that nothing can happen...And it's an altogether terrific question that American computer philosophy asks: what is more important, the information or the organic life? At the moment the organic life is still the carrier of the information, but maybe that doesn't have to be so. A machine could also be the carrier."

And so *Máquina Hamlet* in which the death of organic life is pronounced at the outset: "I was Hamlet. I stood at the shore and talked with surf BLABLA, the ruins of Europe in back of me. The bells tolled the state funeral..." The opening image, in this version by the Argentinean company El Periférico De Objetos, is highly focused and held long enough for its double edge to emerge. At the back of the large Playhouse stage, behind and to one end of a long table with a coffin on it, sits and stands a group of men, faces covered by blank masks and dressed in the familiar costume of Western power ("goose-stepping councillors" Müller calls them). They are very still, too still, like a late 19th century state photo, or a wax-work, or your grandparents waiting on the verandah of the old peoples' home—are they actors with death masks on? At the other end of the table, in front of it, sits a man, leaning forward, elbows on knees—is he grieving or exhausted or both? We assume he is ("was") Hamlet. The text is amplified so we don't know who is talking, or if any of them are. Again, we assume the voice is connected to the separated man.

Gradually the image disperses, 4 actor-manipulators extricate themselves from the group and the other figures are revealed as life-size dummies—even (especially) our hero Hamlet who is lent upon, twisted, brought to "life" by the manipulators and finally, much later in the show, ripped apart, his body parts hung on wires at the back like trophies. But not before he has sat as mute witness to most of the proceedings.

It would seem, on the one hand, that we are witnessing here the death of politics (the funeral of the state) and of Western history ("the ruins of Europe in back of me"). And who could argue these days as we watch the *reductio ad absurdum*



El Periférico de Objetos, *Máquina Hamlet*

Jeff Busby

of Yasser/Ehud, George W/Al and Johnny/Kim etc etc, shrunk to TV-size in mind, body and stature, trapped in the monitor. We have moved from "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (*Hamlet*), a political problem which can perhaps be rectified with political action, to "SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN THIS AGE OF HOPE" (*Máquina Hamlet*), an existential nexus from which there is no escape.

In the second section, entitled THE EUROPE OF WOMEN, the fate of all the tragic heroines of Western history and drama are embodied in the plight of one, Ophelia, dressed in a whore's red dress, trapped in a wire cage on a vast empty stage, surrounded by snuffling, intrusive rats in male clothing (or men with rats' heads?), waiting for her cigarette to be lit, lost in "the scream of the world." These first two stage images are so powerful, they succeed so well in condensing on

stage the feeling, the concept, the Idea of 'ending', that some of the later scenes (the manipulators beating up the dummies, or dragging a dummy audience member onto the stage, shooting him and throwing darts at the 'corpse' as they watch footage of political events) feel overdetermined in comparison, high on release but low on resonance.

We are also witnessing here the death of theatre ("I was Hamlet")—or certainly of that great tradition of Western drama that has been loaded on to us—all those costumed fools down through the centuries to whom we the mob have paid such close and serious attention, have felt so deeply for again and again, now, before us, actually inanimate objects, dummies in clothes on wheels, treated with such scant respect by their manipulators (as if Fortinbras and his cohorts were expressing all

their disdain as they "take up the bodies"), thrown around the stage, beaten up, danced with disrespectfully, as a cheap act, then consigned unceremoniously to the wings. The Theatre Of Objects is thoroughgoing in its reduction of humanity to machine: the courtiers on wheels, Ophelia an unmoving stage object, the play-within-the-play enacted by baby dolls, and finally the whole drama replayed—audience and all—by naked Barbie dolls in a 'theatre' set within one of the company's touring chests, whilst Ophelia sits immobile in her red dress, oblivious to the 'violence' around her.

*Máquina Hamlet* feels like a laboratory experiment—and the presence of the manipulators in this production as an efficient laboratory team lends this even more credibility. This is an image—a model—of the end of history, the end of theatre. And as we know from Baudrillard, models are inexorably "precessive." "And it is because of this that events no longer have meaning: it is not that they are insignificant in themselves, it is that they were preceded by the model, with which their processes only coincide." *HAM-LETMACHINE* has been a prescient provocation for the past 20 years—although Australia has had little exposure to its radiation. It probably needs to burn out now that we have entered the new millennium. But whilst theatre, the social model par excellence, has no idea where to venture anew, I imagine the play will hang around for some time yet, reminding us of what should by now be put to rest. This production, through its image making, brought its blunt power alive, seducing me, appalling me and keeping me forever at an unbridgeable distance.

"Yes, I am this murmur, as you also are this murmur, yet always separate from one another, on either side of the murmur that says nothing, but, ah, degrading"—"marvellous"—"noise saying nothing but: *it goes its way*" (Maurice Blanchot).

Heiner Müller, *Máquina Hamlet*, El Periférico De Objetos, Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, Playhouse, November 1.

## Falling, breaking and at an end

Philippa Rothfield

I love dance works that use bodies to depict the landscape of the mind. Lucy Guerin's *The Ends of Things* swoops upon a moment in the life of a man (Trevor Patrick). This man is alone yet not alone—4 dancers populate his internal and external reality. At first they are outside. Maybe they are his thoughts, perhaps memories, metaphors, non-literal others. Then they move into his room, peopling his negative space, manipulating him, calling his agency into question. Later a party is thrown and they become people, you know, the ones who always seem to be having fun. Trevor is both visible and invisible. Hugely funny movements occur because of his flickering visibility.

There is humour despite the pathos. The man is pathetic but in the sense that he displays no self-confidence or sense of mastery over his everyday life. Yet neither is he oppressed by this fact. Patrick has a knack of moving with great simplicity. He does not need to look cool. And this creates quite a contrast with everyone else. Perhaps their skill should suggest a neutral kinaesthetic but this is just not possible. Ros Warby, Brett Daffy and

Stephanie Lake are far too good, their movements too elegantly executed.

At one level, *The Ends of Things* deals with the abstract. The 4 dancers are aspects of the man's internal life. Like in an Edward Albee or Harold Pinter play, we do not know exactly what these figures stand for. Perhaps they are real; perhaps they are memories, or aspects of the mind. *The Ends of Things* explores its themes in several ways. It is sad and beautiful. Guerin's is a thoughtful work beyond the intricacies of her usual choreographic style. Sadly the inspiration for the work came from Jad McAdam who died suddenly this year.

Chunky Move's latest mix, *Combination* #3, shown at this year's Melbourne Festival, consists of 3 works by Phillip Adams, Gideon Obarzanek and Kim Itoh. Adams' egg-centric, *Ei Fallen*, hails from *Humpty Dumpty*. Its fluorescent lights, square dance patch and minimalist bench make the stage look like a battery farm on acid. The costumes are bizarre, padded, white egg shapes. Later, they are replaced and fake arms flap around dancing

continued on page 9



Trevor Patrick, Stephanie Lake: Lucy Guerin Company, *The Ends of Things*

Jeff Busby



# Ghosts and histories

Suzanne Spinner

Duong Le Quy's *Meat Party* is part of a trilogy of post-war plays. It was a complex and interesting work directed by Michael Kantor at The Playbox, with a fascinating take on the Vietnam War from a North Vietnamese perspective. The Americans hardly got a look in, but Russian Communism was sharply dissected. The plot concerns an Australian girl coming to Vietnam to search for the remains of her father. She ends up in a strange desert no-man's land peopled by ghosts and marginal survivors of the war.

Music connects the lost Australian soldier and his daughter across generations, and the Vietnamese peasants and the foreign invader, prompting the recognition of common humanity amidst the brutality of an ideological war. However, for the image to work potently and immediately, it needed what the writer had specified—a female flautist. Despite the beauty of the cello, wonderfully played by Alice Garner, it did not provide the bridge between the two cultures that the flute would have.

The most interesting area of the performance was in the meeting of the English and Vietnamese languages. The play was written entirely in English but Kantor's production rendered some scenes in Vietnamese. Tam Phan, a highly accomplished and powerful actor, spoke in Vietnamese while his words were simultaneously delivered in English by Matthew Crosby, playing the lost father. Crosby did not merely say them, as a translator might, nor did he simply act—his voice mediated Phan's words. The effect was very interesting and highly theatrical—utterly dependent on the presence of the actors, the moment of utterance, the delay in translation, the implicit commentary that created a parallel dialogue and another way of listening. Here was a real ghosting and meeting of difference.

Among the great pleasures of returning to Melbourne 4 years ago has been seeing each new Chamber Made Opera production. People are still telling me what I missed in not seeing *The Burrow*, a collaboration between Douglas

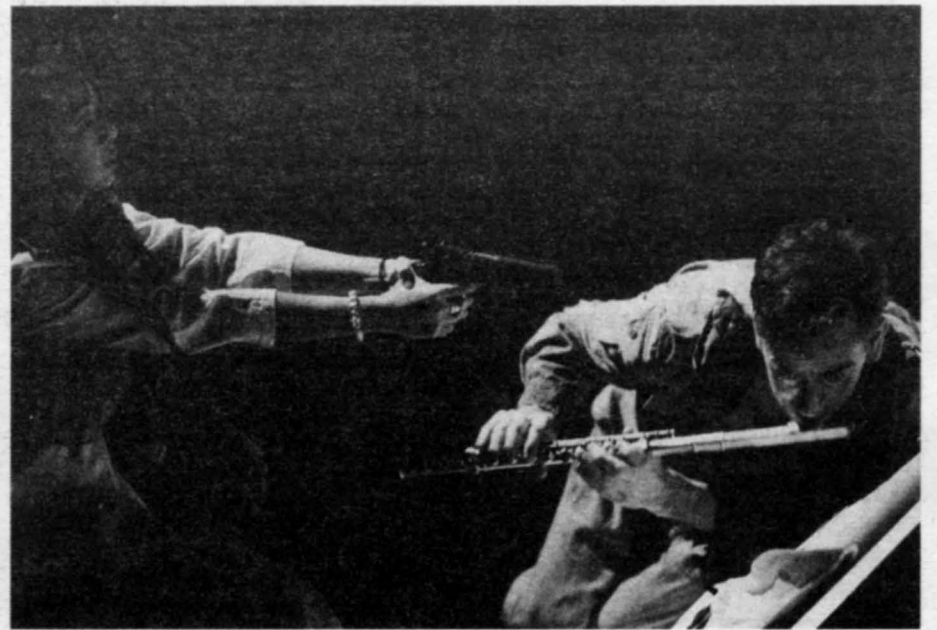
Horton, Michael Smetanin, Alison Croggon and Lyndon Terracini. Last year Horton's production of *Eight Songs for a Mad King* was a highlight, as was Terracini in *The Mercenary*, so it was with unqualified anticipation I went to see Terracini in Chamber Made's *Gauguin* by Smetanin with a libretto by Croggon and directed by Horton.

Sadly, like many other critics, I was disappointed by what I saw and heard. What went wrong? Simply, an awful lot. There was too much of what could have been effective but an excess of visual effects dulled affect. *Gauguin* lacked discrimination and discernment. To begin at the beginning—why have one easel when you can have 20 all the same, but really why have an easel at all?

The music was superbly played and each passage was varied and interesting but en masse lacked apparent development and so did not serve the drama or the singer in the moment. And what of the dramatics? The last thing I expected was a pedestrian chronological narrative. Alison Croggon described the libretto as coming from "looking at his paintings" and as "a kind of hallucinatory dream." I rarely felt taken into any of Gauguin's paintings or for that matter, into the man himself.

There were breathtakingly beautiful moments and sequences but no developing connection or internal logic to the imagery. For all its visual richness it failed to portray paint, painting or Gauguin's paintings because it represented all these things at different moments in a plethora of ways producing an overload of indiscriminate virtuality, sensation after sensation. Rarely was anything given the space and respect it warranted to be seen, heard, taken in and responded to by the audience.

Outside the festival, Aidan Fennessy directed the Melbourne Worker's Theatre production of Peta Murray's *The Procedure* featuring a virtuoso solo performance by Jim Daly as a crafty politician who believes he has been diagnosed with cancer after taking a routine test during a health



Trang Nguyen and Matthew Crosby, *Meat Party*

photo Jeff Busby

promotion campaign. In an extended version of the Woody Allen gag, he runs through all possible scenarios while waiting for his results. This was a superbly crafted monologue which employed contemporary telephone technology, mobiles, speakerphones, recorded messages and car phones to multiply the speech modes available. It ran at a cracking pace and was very funny but ultimately not as revelatory as it promised.

The satire in *The Procedure* was not full blown, so everyone got off the hook. The odious politician did not have the disease therefore we were left with a false positive based on a bullshit test. Similarly he wasn't corrupt to the core as we'd been led to believe. It was all a media beat up after all. One wished for something more fierce and Dario Fo-ish, a dying politician writhing in his own shit...so to speak. His redemption was

underscored by his preference for Bach and the sheep safely grazed which was sort of ironic—though I'm not sure if the resulting feeling was irony or mere washes of sentiment...

*Playbox, Meat Party, writer Duong Le Quy, director Michael Kantor, Maltbouse CUB, October 19-26; Chamber Made Opera, Gauguin, composer Michael Smetanin, director Douglas Horton, librettist Alison Croggon, performer Lyndon Terracini, Victorian Arts Centre, October 21-28. Meat Party and Gauguin were part of the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts. The Procedure, The Melbourne Worker's Theatre, writer Peta Murray, director Aidan Fennessy, performer Jim Daly, North Melbourne Town Hall ArtsHouse, November 2-18.*

## Falling, breaking... Continued from page 8

torsos. The dancers twist and turn in a courtly dance that reminds me of the ball scene from Roman Polanski's *Fearless Vampire Killers*. That's because there is a formal element in *Ei Fallen*. Formal with a twist. *Ei Fallen* concerns death but it didn't make me sad. Perhaps I'm hard-boiled.

Obarzanek's *Crumpled* is distinguished by the intervention of its curtain. The red drapes rise and fall independently of the action, which continues regardless. Perhaps you think this is a Brechtian device but it isn't because there is no particular message to be conveyed. There is a lot of physical interchange, precision, athletic strength and grace but no discernible meaning over and above the movement. Obarzanek describes this piece as "purely structural and formal." On occasion, individuals escape the curtain's divide. At one time, two men are in front, perhaps espousing a male gaze. They do a little comedy sketch—suburban boys trying to dance. At one point, fire breaks out. The curtain is an escape, a pathway to safety. The way in which the curtain breaks the viewer's access is a bit like TV ad breaks; a slash right across the middle of the action.

The last piece in *Combination #3* was Itoh's *Butterfly and Me*. I found it difficult to view this justly after the first two works. Its style of movement was quite different, beginning with many rolls on the floor. There was also a section where people spoke, travelling pathways etched in light. One part had Luke George address the audience, incorporating

elements of the here and now in his text. Although Obarzanek wrote in the program notes of an "imaginary world" shared by all three choreographers, I had a feeling that Itoh's world was quite different—both from the other two and from mine. I think I would need to see more of that world in order to enter fully into it.

*The Ends of Things (for Jad McAdam), Lucy Guerin Company, choreographer Lucy Guerin, sound (original concept) Jad McAdam, composition Franc Tetaz, design Dorotka Sapinska. Combination #3, Chunky Move, Ei Fallen, choreographer Phillip Adams, set and lighting design Gideon Obarzanek, costume and set design Dorotka Sapinska; Crumpled, choreographer Gideon Obarzanek, composer Hugh Covill, costume David Anderson; Butterfly and Me, choreographer Kim Itoh, costume David Anderson, lighting Margie Medlin; National Theatre, Melbourne International Festival of Arts, Melbourne, October 19-28.*

For more Melbourne Festival see Lisa Gye on Garth Paine's installation *Reeds* in **OnScreen**, page 18

## The creativity panacea continued from page 6

Last year, within 6 months of leaving, 87% of the participants had entered further education, training or employment."

Gerry Robinson's lecture bangs home the positive message in all these developments: "This is a great time to be talking about the arts." His extrapolation of case studies into general practice is evangelical. If creativity is so solidly seeded in young people, and their contact with it is so everyday and so excellent (and with such an influx of new money this is not pie in the sky), then the arts have a strong foothold on the future. If artists are still to be viewed as playing a unique and valued part in communities, their integrity cannot be too rudely encroached upon. If creativity is truly the key to future economic survival, then the government is not going to cease pumping blood into creative projects. Indeed, it is only going to increase them, for the young people benefiting from after-schools Midi Music-Making are going to move into further and higher education demand-

ing the same levels of relevance, professionalism, imagination and insight. Many of them might even become artists, or at least work in the creative industries. They are going to take their creativity into their homes and their workplaces and change forever the environment in which we live.

Certainly, there are British artists who agree with this bullish approach to the annexation of social responsibilities and their accompanying funds for the arts. But there are also those who differ and remain cynical of such politicking. There have never been such strong arguments for the arts in mainstream discourse. Worth keeping an eye on, it seems like the relationships between artists and communities in Britain will continue to change in these fast moving political times.

*Sophie Hansen is Creative Centre Manager, The Roundhouse, Chalk Farm Rd, London.*

## Comment on the Vision

The Australia Council has held a series of artform Vision Days with staff, artists, academics, social commentators and others to "gain a broad overview of current issues and trends such as changes in society, the economy, technology, public policy, globalisation etc; and secondly to debate possible and preferred futures..." The Discussion Draft summarising the meetings is due out by about February 12, 2001 for public comment by April 10. If you would like to be sent a copy contact Kris Rossiter k.rossiter@ozco.gov.au or see the draft when it goes online at <http://www.ozco.gov.au/issues/pff/>



# The Darwin Festival in peace time

Suzanne Spinner

The theme of this year's Darwin Festival was "Peace." The city was full of soft spoken, baby-faced American homeboys on leave from peace-keeping in East Timor, and there was a solid wall of big American warships flanking the wharf where the Festival Club bopped every night with Macunian Bluesman Victor Brox and the latest local singing sensation, Shellie Morris. A contingent of marines in their dress whites marched in the Grand Parade, my favourite entry of which was a 1975 Chevrolet in mint condition, imported by its owner straight after the cyclone and driven around Darwin ever since. Its sky blue duco recalled the colour of the roof tiles of the Hotel Darwin, demolished in a frenzy exactly a year ago, and of the ubiquitous UN beret.

In 1988 my play about Darwin, *Dragged Screaming to Paradise* opened at Browns Mart. This year I was fortunate to be in the same theatre for the premiere of Stephen Carleton's play about Darwin, *Choking in the Comfort Zone*. After the premiere he described purging his demons about the place. I understood, but the ones he has called up are the sort that make me glad I'm not still living there. Whereas I only went as far as wryly noting that domestic violence was all around during the Build Up to the annual monsoon season, he refers to a series of horrific and creepy crimes which happened in the suburbs while he was living there.

Carleton is a thirty-something gay man who grew up in Darwin, went south to go to university, and came back. One of the first things he said to me was that he still hadn't read Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*. The woman in my play is asked before she leaves Melbourne—has she read *Capricornia*? The world of *Comfort Zone* is a grungy shared house during the Build Up, festering with sexual tensions and psychic mayhem unleashing an apocalyptic finale, mine was the everyday angst of middle class domesticity.

My play was a departure in its urban and female perspective, but Carleton's is so urban I realised mine was suburban. Not only does he bring a gay slant, there's no reference to Aborigines or the Country, which were so significant for my heroine. My Darwin was defined by its distance from the southern metropolis and its intriguing closeness to Asia. His Darwin is both more cut off and singular but also threatened by its global proximity to Asia—the forest fires in Indonesia send down daily clouds of thick smoke, haze and ash. Asia is no longer something to want to feel part of, but too close for comfort. Carleton has written from the inside for an outside audience whereas I wrote from the outside for an inside audience. People left his play shellshocked, they left mine laughing. The only thing we both felt overwhelmed by was the weather; that hadn't changed.

Tracks' *Outside the Camp* was described in *RealTime* 39. The production raised a number of questions for me. Companies that were once primarily dance-based are now moving endemically into performance. Words are taking an increasingly pre-eminent role and performers are expected to have a multi-skilled approach. It seems artistically democratic but does it serve the work and satisfy the audience?

There is an assumption that if you can write poetic prose—and Tim Newth can—then you can write performance text, which I prefer to call dramatic writing, and would argue is a deceptively different task. The result in *Outside the Camp* was a dramaturgically inadequate "play" delivered by performers trained as dancers, and unplayable scenes delivered by a good actor—like Ken Conway—who is being directed as a dancer and puppeteer but not as an actor. You also get a fantastic dancer like David McMicken barely dancing at all. However, the upside is that a space is found for a great performer, Ally Mills, singing

with an extraordinary presence and a power so strong that it almost carries the show away.

Tracks had just been granted triennial funding from the Australia Council, making them the first Northern Territory performance company to be so recognised. They have exciting plans for the next 3 years, which build on their previous works and their renowned ability to focus on issues, stories and myths that engage the local community and resonate nationally. I hope they will consolidate their strengths—Newth's visuals, concepts and choreography and McMicken's dancing and choreography. I also hope they continue utilising the individual talents found in the community, like Mills, and working with writers like Stephen Carleton (as they are planning to on a new version of the Olive Pink story).

*The Gagny Paintings*, presented by the Alliance Française, was a very modest exhibition (unframed paintings pinned on notice board panels) almost marooned in the sea of marble that is The Great Hall of the Northern Territory Parliament House. The paintings are by French schoolchildren from the Conservatoire Georges Gossec in Gagny, who were taken by their teacher to see a Paris exhibition of Tiwi Art from Munupi Arts Crafts Centre, Melville Island. Their teacher, Emmanuelle Tricoche, had previously lived in Darwin and taught Aboriginal children at Kormilda College. Some of these children were the artists in the Gagny show, *Our Country, Our Designs*. The artists were invited to the school to meet the French students who were then encouraged to paint their own work in response.

It was fascinating. There are 49 works from children aged 7 to 15. Some have painted kangaroos and eagles and fish like the Tiwi, but others have painted blue-winged horses, clowns, pink elephants and marmalade cats. Not surprisingly their depictions of fauna they knew, even when fantastical, was more confident and accurate than

when they tackled the exotic because they were working from the Tiwi versions rather than their own observation and knowledge. The children clearly responded to the Tiwi geometric style, patterned borders and infills and revelled in the riot of bright colours. Not surprisingly the younger artists were bolder than the older teenagers, whose effects showed the strain of self-awareness.

I naively thought everyone would be as entranced as I was, but soon found there was some muttering about appropriation, and an attitude of "well what can you expect from the French they've always ripped off the primitives..." I felt caught between friends. Françoise Barr who runs the Alliance Française was disturbed that motivations of children were seen as contentious; we agreed that it was *un hommage* in the truest sense. Annie Franklin, who was the Art Advisor at Munupi at the time and travelled to Paris with the artists, hadn't seen the show but felt uncomfortable about the Tiwi work being copied. Franklin, I recall, attended a printmaking conference during the French trip where she reported that the Tiwi women were impressed by Paris but said they all preferred Milikapiti to Paris anyway.

*Darwin Theatre Company, Choking in the Comfort Zone, written by Stephen Carleton, Browns Mart, Darwin, September 8-23; Outside the Camp, Tracks Inc, writer-director Tim Newth, performers Ken Conway, Tania Lieman, Stanley Stanislaus, Alyson Mills, David McMicken, Darwin Festival, Fisherman's Wharf, September 6-9; The Gagny Paintings, travelling exhibition of paintings by French children, French Ministry of Culture, Alliance Française, Northern Territory Parliament House, August 27-September 9.*

## The Marrugeku Company: Crying Baby

A stage beneath the stars of Arnhem Land; an ancient rock face for a backdrop, lit by flickering, dancing light; an ecstasy of voices, of Aboriginal tales and chants; a cast of dancers, actors, trapeze-tumblers and still-walkers, performing against projected video images, banks of TVs and satellite dishes; a drama unfolding at once on triple interwoven levels, full of half-buried symbols, rhymes and parallels. Such is the spectacle of *Crying Baby*, the remarkable new production of the Marrugeku Company and the piece de resistance of this year's Darwin Festival.

Nicholas Rothwell,  
*The Australian*, September 8

One of the frustrations of any festival is missing an important work. Suzanne Spinner could not see *Crying Baby* which was presented as a work in progress at the Darwin Festival by The Marrugeku Company. As with their very successful *Mimi*, *Crying Baby* is a collaboration between white and Indigenous artists with direction by Rachael Swain, choreography by Raymond Blanco, musical direction by Matthew Fargher and design by Andrew Carter. Weaver Yvonne Koolmatie and film-maker Warwick Thornton are also involved in the project. The main through line in the work is the personal story of visual artist Thompson Yulidjirri, keeper of the Mimi stories:



The Marrugeku Company, *Crying Baby*

photo David Hancock

Telling that story, that is a good way to teach, that is my way to teach so those balanda (white people) can learn too. Might be they got no mother and father too, those balanda children. Might be they got rainbow serpent too. I think that is good, gamok, if you people dance I will see it and ask, what is this one? Everyone dancing *Crying Baby* or Mr Watson or Lightning Man or whatever, but I

want to see it dancing. Try and work it out, what is the best way to tell this story, work it out, dance, try to do this way or might be no good, we do it that way. If you think first good, go ahead do it with your dancing. We are finding new way, never mind if we don't know that song. It's lost, maybe we can find a new strong one.

Thompson Yulidjirri, The Marrugeku Company

*Crying Baby* has its official premier at the Perth Festival 2001. We'll discuss some of the complexities of the collaboration with Rachael Swain in *RealTime* #41



# Paralympic Arts: Invincible Summer

Keith Gallasch

*In the depths of Winter I finally found that I had an invincible Summer.* Camus (Festival Program)

This was a festival that, in its own small way, trumped the main Olympics Arts Festival in originality, focus and purpose. Largely situated in the Seymour Theatre Centre and titled *Invincible Summer*, the performance quotient of the festival seemed deprived of the media spotlight and mostly played to small audiences who, like me, were impressed by the calibre of what we saw. Other works, like *Mind's Eye* (Peter Woodford-Smith & Nic Wishart) at Olympic Park, with its magical venture into darkness for the sighted (and seeing-impaired as well), attracted large audiences. Lawrence Harvey's *The Occupation of Space* at the Seymour Centre was a head-phone experience, an introduction to the aural cues from the everyday that guide the blind, and based on their experiences.

*Restless Dance Company: Precious*

Blocks of sparkling ice, some reaching as high as the waist, make up 3 sides of the otherwise dimly lit performing space. On each block burn small candles, slowly sinking into their transparent plinths, their light refracted in the glassy chill, a quiet spluttering singing in the silences between the mix of live and recorded percussion that accompanies Adelaide-based Restless Dance Company's *Precious*. The dance of fire and ice resonates with the performers' impressionistic portrayal of individual and group realities and their interplay. Never a narrative as such, it nonetheless begins and ends like one, has key players who evoke specific states of well-being or suffering, employs movement motifs (the body bent, head down, arms swinging, dangling; arms collectively reaching up as bodies turn; a performer threateningly swings another about) and objects (cellophane wrapped sweets clacking to the floor, later gathered up; luggage arrived and departed with). This is Restless Dance Company's youth ensemble.

Choreographed by Ingrid Voorendt, the performers are at their best alone or in duos and trios, some fine moments of work deriving from contact improvisation revealing great control and lyricism. However, as so often happens in youth performance there seems to be a directorial desire to create images of togetherness and harmony, invariably realised by movement in unison. The result, here, was a momentary but marked loss of direction, a dissipation of purpose. That aside, *Precious* worked its magic of touch, cooperation and alarming tension amplified through Gaëlle Mellis' fire and ice set, Mark Pennington's aptly restrained lighting and Catherine Oates' percussion. *York Theatre, October 16-21.*

*Alan Shain: Still Waiting for that Special Bus*

The tone is stand-up comedy but without the ability to actually stand up. In a casual but riveting performance delivered direct to his audience within a theatrical framework, Canadian Alan Shain re-enacts an utterly frustrating night when the service bus that he's booked to take him from his apartment to meet a woman for a date just doesn't turn up. The work is suspenseful and funny. The effect is of being at home with a man who cannot use his legs, but moves about vigorously and unpredictably, and whose voice you have to carefully tune in to. As soon as you do you are confidante to Shain's humour, anxieties and social concerns. He recalls first meeting Linda: "She might be thinking, 'If he's that uncoordinated on his feet, god knows what damage he'll do in bed.'" He says that on meeting her he was wearing a T-shirt that said 'Piss on Pity' and was hoping that she wouldn't offer any sympathy for his condition. "She stops me in mid-sentence and says 'You work?!' I say, 'I like to eat and



Caroline Conlon, Sofya Gollan, *Dislabelled*

drink." But, he tells us, "she was cute and laughed at herself afterwards for even thinking that way." The flow of recollection, for example the hilariously desperate struggle to remember her telephone number after the first meeting, is interrupted by his increasingly desperate calls to the bus service. "The same service as for garbage—boy, did that make me feel special." "Am I gonna come before my bus comes?" He constantly weighs up his financial situation—if he spends the little money he has on a cab, he won't be able to afford drinks. It's the bus or nothing. Frustration turns to sad resignation late in the evening as he imagines Linda giving up and leaving the club. But she calls him and the night is saved. It's a simple tale but it has that lived quality and the pain behind the humour is very real. *Everest Theatre, October 23-28.*

*David Roche: The Church of 80% Sincerity.*

The title of the show and the opening delivery, as this Californian speaker emerges from the shadows in front of his portable altar, suggest for a moment an uncomfortable evening with an evangelical preacher or an inspirational speaker, and this man is certainly a straight talker—no theatrical framework here. But what we get is an upside version of all that, a wicked wit from, as he puts it, "a man with a facial difference...My job is to carry the weight of your fears, so you can pretend to be normal." This is standup that gets more complex as it goes, from jokey religious references ("My face is a gift from God, one I'm not ecstatic about—You shouldn't have!") to autobiographical revelations later in the show. Knowing that we'll want to know what happened to his face, he tells us: radiation treatment for a benign tumour went wrong, as if he'd been "praying at Chernobyl instead of Lourdes." To a nasty, inquiring child he replied, "When I was a little boy, I touched my wee wee." Of us, he says, "You're all attractive in a boring kind of way...How do you tell each other apart? Get a face!" The irony is put aside for a while for a few recollections of a painful youth, a family in denial—"Yes, we were dysfunctional. But isn't that why God invented the nuclear family?"

However, his family did have humorous strategies for dealing with trouble and these obviously gave him much of his strength. Roche was once tempted to be a priest, spending some time in a seminary, but was deterred when told he was too ugly—"Thank God," he says, describing himself in terms of his Catholic background as "an incense survivor." However, in his next 10 years as a Communist "I barely noticed the difference." He observed that his selfless comrades

"had no sense of self." So he decides to establish the Church of 80% Sincerity, "because that's about as good as it gets—20% of the time is good, 80% is compromise or celibacy." He describes it as the first church without ideals.

By now the cynicism is just a little worrying, despite the overlay of humour. Here is a church that recommends panic, it's good for you; that suggests you don't "live in the moment" because "it already lags behind reality"; that celebrates male intuition—"I think it's time for a beer." How does a man know that?! But within a few minutes, and so deftly that you barely notice the transition, Roche learns that the patience of having to "just be there" with a friend dying from AIDS yields grace of a kind. He has, in fact, become inspirational but without the loss of his healthy scepticism, or his Church of 80% Sincerity. As he writes in his program note: "Disability culture has always nurtured a dark-streaked humour. It is a shamanic tool that can dissolve fears and open windows to the unconscious, reframing disfigurement and disability...in my work the artistic metaphor of the scarred face conveys not fear but wholeness." *Everest Theatre, October 23-28.*

*Jane Muras: Is that it????*

Here is the unfolding of another life, that of South Australian Jane Muras, in a neatly constructed tale (researched and written by Pat Rix, dramaturgy by Alison Lyssa) that gradually yields, episode by episode, looking forward and back, the story of a terrible car accident, its consequences and an unpredicted if slow and painful recovery. Beginning simply, it is sincere, gently humorous, its rhythm slow and careful (as if the body requires it), and its story is entwined with Muras' re-enactment of a series of exchanges with a male friend ambivalent about his desire to audition for the role of Richard III. She sketches her wandering family, the father who was no longer there, her grandmother's determination that she recover, memories of being strapped to a chair, denied physical contact and affection in her 'rehabilitation', life in a Darwin ashram, the importance of female intimacy, the 'decision' that her disability will liberate her and the revelation that her body has a vagina. *Is that it????* leads us into dark corners and complexities that stay with us—on the one hand "the accident taught me that bodies have better memories than brains", on the other, that after the totally disabling accident at 11 years of age, she was completely—and still is—cut off from her earlier self. She says there were two things to learn, how to use a body and be herself. Muras asks for no pity. Hers is a celebration of survival and, having been

'written off' by doctors, of the slow emergence of new speech, new movement and identity. She is much younger than Shain and Roche, and lacks some of the irony that might temper what is sometimes a taxing sincerity, but she is careful to underplay her suffering (effectively directed by Paula Carter) and is not at a loss for humour—"Michael Jackson has a complete makeover and he didn't even have an accident." *Everest Theatre, October 16-21.*

*Caroline Conlon & Sofya Gollan: Dislabelled*

This was a festival highlight, soon playing to large houses as the word/sign spread, a richly comic bilingual entertainment in English and Auslan, in the form of a night club act (definitely directed by Tony Strachan) with Blair Greenberg providing musical accompaniment and playing the hearing foil to the show's "deaf as a post" stars, Conlon and Gollan. As they explain, for those who are profoundly deaf a hearing aid is a limited solution to their condition—all that alien noise has to be interpreted. The chatty format allows the performers to romp through an enlightening range of experiences that explain how they live and speak—"the sealed section of the show", for example, is an introduction to swearing in Auslan. The audience learn quickly. The lesson on the numerous variations on fuck (including 'something wrong', 'fed up', 'tantric', 'great sex') concludes with: "Now you can talk to deaf people."

To the audience's delight, sex is a recurrent topic and seems to be at its most fascinating tonight when between a hearing and a non-hearing person. There's the kiss. The hearing person whispers some sweet nothing, so the deaf person has to surrender the pleasure of the moment and pull away to re-focus on the speaker's lips. There's sex in the dark when the deaf person senses that the other is speaking. Out with the torch and "What did you say?" only to lip-read "How was it for you?" More excruciating is the reconstruction of the dinner party where a joke is told and then someone at the table feels obliged to tell it over-explanatorily and slo-mo to the hearing-challenged guest who is then obliged to enjoy the joke. There are songs. Each performer tells a slice of her life. AFTS graduate Gollan shows an impressive short film she has made, *Not the Usual Victim*—an unusual play on the notion of the victim. The killer might not get to murder the brave deaf girl, but a bungling society will. There's much more to the funny and intimate *Dislabelled* about language, humour and sex, let alone about how limiting labels are: it should be seen and heard far and wide. *Australian Theatre of the Deaf, Everest Theatre, October 16-21.*

*Back to Back Theatre: Mental*

As the audience enters the theatre, 2 older Olympics volunteers are expertly playing table tennis centre stage. A girl enthusiastically chases the ball for them. Sacred music plays. A caged poodle watches briefly from the large white, internally lit, compartmentalised wall that backs the stage, and then turns its back on us. *Mental* commences. The world will become even stranger. *Mental* has the oddest and most convoluted of plots, even though parts of it are quite transparent, lucid and challenging. It's a sci-fi fantasy about an older man with an intellectual disability whose daughter is fast losing patience with him and would like to put him in a nursing home. It's written and played with care and expertise, the repeated single word utterances of the father displaying a richness of emotion for all their lack of apparent affect. Father is treated like a dog, especially when he inadvertently defecates on the floor of his daughter's home. In a parallel universe (actually an overlapping part of the same world), we've seen a dog do it (very graphically), but in

*continued on page 12*



# Out of the Box and into the backyard

Mary Ann Hunter

Festival Program Director Susan Richer reckons 'vibe' is a daggy term (*RealTime* 39), and I agree. But how else do you explain the feeling of being surrounded by hundreds of short backpack-toting bodies playing croquet, climbing water fountains, being enthralled by musical hair-play, queuing restlessly for a show, watching dance, dancing dance, and talking art?

*Out of the Box* is an intense festival. It's short, it's crowded with activity and packed with icons of contemporary—and not so contemporary—Australian childhood. Backyards, trips to the beach, and trips into the mind characterise this event which celebrates the cultural lives of 3 to 8-year olds. Throughout the festivities there are playful references to growing up in 70s suburbia: tyre swan art, magpies, rubber thongs, daisy swim caps and rotund caravans. Or are these the remnant imaginings of everyone's childhood?

Far from universalising children's experiences, the festival organisers have ensured diversity. While one group of children chooses to negotiate the Krazy Kroquet, others marvel at the game's rubber tyre installations representing Australian landmarks. In the Hubbub tent, percussive madness is encouraged while elsewhere there are opportunities to mix serious Doof music or to be introduced to the sounds of the orchestra by a Playschool luminary. In the Crashmat zone, storybooks provide respite from the movement and sound outside, while Malu Kiwai and Jagera Jarjum share their stories through dance and song.

Aided by numerous friendly signposts, I make my way through the 'vibe' to *Backseat Drivers*, the first of many sold-out productions at the festival. With co-performer and collaborator Liz Skitch, creator David Megarity has the day trip genre sorted, in a show for anyone who has suffered the backseat or a sibling on a long drive. The audience remained fully engaged for a 45-minute show about boredom which is a testament to the show's understated brilliance. Featuring a simple set of a bench seat, a back window of projected images,



Wide Awake

photo Adam Smith

and the necessary accoutrements of a day at the beach, *Backseat Drivers* effectively details the minutiae of sibling interaction. Relying on few words, the performance is a journey through anticipation, restlessness, measuring space and sharing time. Nice touches include the otherwise unheralded streetcrossings of a dinosaur and Victorian-garbed scooter rider out the back window, and some captivating puppetry with a rubber ball and blanket.

A different kind of journeying is carried out in both *Wide Awake* and *Frozen Girl*. These headline performances of the festival travel into the mind, exploring children's perception, image-making, and the surreal. *Wide Awake*, commissioned for the festival, is a landmark collaboration between adult and child artists, which aims to connect with children's contemporary modes of making, reading, and interpreting culture. Produced by Richer, with director Michael Forde and dramaturg Louise Gough, *Wide Awake* is an amorphous landscape of sound and

image inspired by Michele Lemieux's *Stormy Night*.

Questions of existence, identity, happiness, and purpose provide the scaffolding for an exploration of the mind motivated by night visions and the discovery of an egg. Devised and performed by an ensemble of children from 3 local primary schools and accompanied by a live orchestra, *Wide Awake* strives for fluidity. Large-scale projected imagery derived from children's artwork provides a prominent visual context for the performers' group sculptures. My young companion was impressed by the scale of the stage space and projected images, as well as the fact that "little kids were in it." The performance was a hypnotic experience, especially while nestled in the cavernous Lyric Theatre for a post lunch showing. My companion pondered afterwards on the title of the performance, saying that while the show didn't keep her wide awake with a story, it did so with sights and sound.

*Frozen Girl*, while arguably dealing with similar journeys of the mind, had quite a different effect.

Big hair and big tunes were the order of the day in a narrative about a girl who becomes frozen with fear and is saved by her lovingly eccentric family. To unfreeze her, Mum, Dad and Sis shrink and enter the girl's mind, unwittingly confronting her images of them which are quite different from the way they see themselves. This is light musical fare where love conquers all (and why not), but the complexity of mind-matters and relationships are cleverly portrayed. Ultimately, difference is celebrated and harmony restored. A collaboration between REM Theatre and Sadari (Korea), *Frozen Girl* covered a range of styles: from sci-fi to Lloyd Webber to stagey TV sitcom.

Another, more extended family is encountered in *Binni's Backyard*, a Kooemba Jdarra and Kite Theatre production in association with Therese Collic. The life of 5-year-old Binni revolves around consumables. Running away from home, Binni brings her toy gadgetry to her backyard escape, but ultimately gets bored: the computer game runs out of batteries and the phone is not real. After the distressing de-stuffing of her Teddy by crows, Elders Aunty Tree and Uncle Lizard console Binni by introducing her to an extended family. Beyond the face-value of plastic toys, make up, and pretend animals, Binni finds a far more exciting world of friendship and play in her own yard with Bush Turkey, Spider, Frogs, and rapping Cousins Crow. Kath Porritt's painted backyard backdrop of Brisbane with its red tin roofs and TV towers, invites us to share Binni's new awareness, and once the boundary fence slides away, there are limitless bounties of Spirit, rain, thunderclaps, clucky animals, and dirty blues from a very groovy Uncle Lizard, to be enjoyed.

There was more. Much more. But the 'vibe' was enough for me.

Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood, Queensland Performing Arts Trust, Program Director Susan Richer, Queensland Performing Arts Complex and South Bank Cultural Forecourt, October 24-28.

## Invincible Summer: Paralympic Arts

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that world there are great plans for the dog (an actor in an expressively comic dog suit), for developing his intelligence. Meanwhile, however, father's intelligence is about to be dumbed-down as he is institutionally isolated from life. The father and dog plots seem quite discrete. So far so good. But father conjures a luminous fantasy rabbit that keeps him going. Back in the other world, the counsellor who owns the dog is about to be replaced by a computer. This is quite chilling. She takes out her anger on the dog, beating it without apparent remorse. Later she tackles the computer counsellor only to fall prey to the machine's seductive tone and (less than convincing) questions. Artificial intelligence wins. Why? And the dog does well too. The rest of it escaped me—a kind of multimedia delirium set in, exacerbated by plot complications. Although impressed with the playing (Sonia Teuber, Nick Holland, Darren Riches, Rita Halabarec, Susie Dee, Mark Deans, Jim Russell), the direction (Bruce Gladwin), the multiscreen projections (Rhian Hinkley), the sound (music by Hugh Covill), the lighting (Ben Cobham), I was not alone in my struggle to get a handle on the 3 stories and the overlap between them, let alone their implications about the issue of intelligence which the show claimed to address. Nevertheless, it was great to see Melbourne's Back to Back in Sydney supported by the talents of artists usually associated with the Arena Theatre Company and the Melbourne Workers' Theatre. York Theatre, October 24-28.

Invincible Summer, Paralympic Arts Festival, Seymour Theatre Festival, October 13 - 29.

## Carnivale: big and little secrets

Virginia Baxter

In Nigel Kellaway's *This Most Wicked Body* (1994) he lived in The Performance Space for 10 days and performed at night. And every night he would invite a member of the audience to join him for a meal which was cooked on stage by restaurateur and writer Gay Bilson. The serving of the food in that performance provided one of those unforgettable moments in the theatre. The meal was a construction based on Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, the musical motif adapted for the work by David Montgomery. It began with an aria, a tomato consommé and each day ingredients were added to a reduction from the previous evening's dish. After 10 days, Bilson miraculously returned to the consommé. The meals were not designed to sustain—nourishment was provided each day in the lunches she supplied the performer. All these details compounded to create one of the many striking moments in this performance—the circumstances of the meal's preparation and especially the presence of Gay Bilson producing a genuine sense of the "real" meeting the theatrical.

I am reminded of this moment as I sit with 6 others at the table of Roberta Bosetti in IRAA Theatre's *The Secret Room*. Told to arrive at the secret location at precisely 7.50, greeted by Bosetti at the door and ushered into a waiting room, I am alert and, at the same time, adrift. I search for something substantial in the domestic fabric—books on shelves, pictures on walls. The monitor in the corner running a home video of children acting out a fairy tale offers some clues. "That's me", says Bosetti as she leads us into the dining room. What follows is the most intriguing part of the evening. It places 7 of us around the table and in the same uncertain territory I experienced

watching Nigel Kellaway and his guest share dinner on stage, though here, the audience is invited to speak. Our host places food before us, ventures conversation, gently coaxing responses from the table. Remarkably quickly, intimacies are offered, small secrets divulged. But not taken up. Does she really want us to answer her questions? Is she actually talking to us? How much should we say before we distract her from her task? A video camera in the room is recording all this and broadcasting it on the internet. When she clears the plates from the first course and heads for the kitchen, a man at the table says, "Do you suppose we should offer to help?" Who knows? Nothing is certain here except the familiar ritual of the dinner table which we perform unthinkingly—passing wine, bread, weaving polite conversation. The food is slightly odd but real enough—pasta with salmon followed by a salad of tuna and apples. We are asked about our reading habits. Bosetti reveals that there was a year in which she ate practically nothing. One of the guests removes all the tomatoes from her food. I am enjoying the precarious place the performer has led us. Knowing and not knowing. I have been here before in other performances but tonight it feels like a game being invented as it's played. We share the space of the performer and at the same time observe her as she moves along a dangerous line, dancing with the "real" as a memorised text threatens to cut in at every turn.

Then, suddenly, the alienation device makes its grisly appearance and with a trickle of onion tears, our hostess shifts gear. She invites us, dramatically—upstairs. The elusive sense of intimacy is briefly recaptured as, nothing much said, we linger in a bedroom on the way—upstairs. In the

next room the major transformation occurs. The floor is covered in dirt and we sit on stools to watch as Bosetti unleashes an impassioned monologue revealing in the process her full repertoire of theatrical skills. As her voice increases in volume, a woman in the room has a coughing fit. A man quietly slips her some chewing gum. But none of this can possibly make any difference to the actor in full flight who has now abandoned all pretence at reality. Familiar audience responses kick in. We observe that Bosetti is an "accomplished actor with a resonant voice" and "powerful presence." Her text appears "well motivated" though we cannot know why. Later we discover from an interview on the show's website that it comes from personal experience and that, as well as writing parts of her own story, Bosetti has collected texts mainly by female writers including Karen Finley, Nadia Fusini, Helen Cixous and Holly Hughes. The excerpts from Peter Handke's *Self Accusation* which contribute substantially to the rhythm of the work appear not to be acknowledged. The secret out, we are led back down the stairs and whisked out the front door. Strangers in the night. Three of us move to a cafe for dessert and talk about what might have been if the dramatic exposition of *The Secret Room* had been revealed with all the seemingly insignificant others in the more testing and precarious realm of the first.

*The Secret Room* was created by IRAA Theatre, director Renato Cuocolo, performer Roberta Bosetti. Carnivale from October 1. For more responses to Carnivale visit [www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/](http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/)



# Brisbane Festival: playing from the boundaries

Maryanne Lynch

John Howard's front-row flagwaving at the recent Sydney Olympics reminded me that the body of the state comes in all shapes and sizes. And that *this* doesn't always count in terms of who can deliver the most lethal blow. The same point was made again, in more optimistic circumstances, in two very different shows in the third Energex Brisbane Festival in October.

*Caca Courage* and *Fountains Beyond* both made the point that the body politic is a malleable thing. Whether personal or social, as in *Caca*, or cultural, as in *Fountains*, this body can be pushed or pulled or otherwise manipulated for better and worse. Both shows also spoke mostly from the vantage point of those often forced outside these same malleable boundaries: the "Disabled" and the "Indigenous."

Access Arts' *Caca Courage* had a short season in 1996, as part of a Disability and the Arts Conference in a QPAT studio. This time it opened at the Powerhouse Theatre, a big black box with seats that stretched far up behind the audience and a high ceiling used to amusing effect in the many birth moments that literally litter the show. (Watch out for falling nude chickens.)

Devised by the cast and directed both times by AFI Award-winner and locally born Russell Dykstra, *Caca* adapts bouffon theatre to a contemporary setting that could easily be titled *Survivor Goes Suburban*. It's a brutal tale of a girl (well played by Liz Navratil) who doesn't 'fit' in and the price she pays for this.

Navratil is born into a world of cruel children, cheeky adolescents and cynical adults. These are played by Kathy Brennan, Scotia Monkavitch, Willie Prince and Bob Williams, who tease and taunt and terrify the hapless 'heroine' in the playground, at the shopping centre, any place at all. Even at her birth, Monkavitch as midwife shows scant respect for the niceties as she ruthlessly pulls object after object from Navratil's fictional mother's womb in search of the baby... Meanwhile, Prince as attendant peers down and repeatedly mutters "Hope she's not black." (Prince is Indigenous.)

The not-so-subtextual irony is that these other characters are played by performers who are themselves 'other' to mainstream society by dint of their disabilities. Bouffon theatre is of course an acting style that parodies the norm by way of its outcasts. Here it is perfectly matched to the skills of the performers, and their knowingness about the lip service Australian society pays to them



Queensland Theatre Company, *Fountains Beyond*

Robert MacColl

(and by implication any other 'other', such as Prince's Aboriginality). No matter how many wheelchair-accessible places, their stances say, 'we know...' From picking on Navratil's more-disabled-than-the-disabled girl, the performers turn to the audience, and give us a good look-over. It's a familiar device but no less unnerving; I can feel my inconsistencies squirming.

The performers are supported by the spare musical direction of Stephanie McCaw and the minimal design of Kate Stewart which allow the performers and the gags to get bigger and bigger. I recall the show as even bigger last time but perhaps it's the change of venue and the polish that is giving me this impression. At least they kept the poo joke (Navratil doing some fingerpainting as an infant).

Approaching from a very different time and place, *Fountains Beyond* should really be a history lesson. Sadly it isn't, as recent government and popular attitudes towards Indigenous Australians have demonstrated.

*Fountains* was written as a "realist drama" in the late 1930s by Queenslander George Landen Dann. Landen Dann was, through present-day eyes, a social progressive. A white man, he wrote several plays about the plight of black Australians at a time

when Aboriginal people were not granted full human status. His work is commemorated in an annual award given by the Queensland Theatre Company and the *Courier Mail* as well as by the occasional reading of one of his pieces.

In Michael Gow's first year as artistic director of the QTC, *Fountains* is in the main season in a production directed by Wesley Enoch (like Dykstra, a local turned emigré). Gow here demonstrates his commitment to continuing Robyn Nevin's legacy of supporting black work, black artists and black issues, and demonstrates it rather boldly given that, in theatrical terms, the script is something of a creaky melodrama.

*Fountains* tells the story of a family group who are about to be turfed off the little land they have left, which is a reserve. The central character, Vic Filmer (a strong performance by Rod Smith), resists both this and the more insidious debasement of his culture, for example, the staging of a "corroboree" for the benefit of white spectators.

Into this tense situation comes the Englishwoman Miss Hamett, a do-gooder who soon realises that she is as liable for the ills she sees around her as the next white person. Roxanne McDonald plays Miss Hamett as part of Enoch's

provocative casting of black actors in the white roles. (*Fountains* has a long history of white actors 'blacking up' to play the Indigenous roles.) McDonald does a good job of putting the white woman's concerns from this ironic position.

These two characters represent the emotional heart of the work as well as the impetus for change. The change that comes is not positive on face value—the family are forced to leave—but contains hope in the bond forged between Vic and Miss Hamett. (Just as the writing of the play in 1930s offers hope for a reconciled Australia.)

I am focusing on the plot/script here, pedestrian as it is, for it seems this is one of the main reasons that *Fountains* has been remounted. Bolder direction might have made more of reinterpreting Landen Dann's earnest preaching in blackfella terms but Enoch has made a strong choice in remaining reasonably faithful to the text and thus showing *plus ça change*...

Enoch and the cast are aided by the compositional work of John Rodgers and the lighting of Matt Scott (who both worked on *The Sunshine Club*). In particular, the use of emotive non-verbal singing by cast members, especially the compelling Delmae Barton, and the poetry of Scott's non-naturalistic lighting lift *Fountains* onto an epic level without making grandiose claims.

*Fountains Beyond* and *Caca Courage* left me with an image of the body politic as weak-kneed and lily-livered when in defensive mode, like a certain Prime Minister I know, and of middle Australia's continued failure to stop the voices of the disenfranchised being heard. Neither show could be considered 'nice' theatre and, for including them in its program, the Brisbane Festival is to be commended.

*Caca Courage*, director Russell Dykstra, musical director Stephanie McCaw, lighting designer Geoff Squires, designer Kate Stewart, Access Arts and Queensland Performing Arts Trust, Powerhouse Theatre, Energex Brisbane Festival, Brisbane, October 11-15.

*Fountains Beyond*, director Wesley Enoch, composer John Rodgers, lighting designer Matt Scott, designer Richard Roberts, Queensland Theatre Company and The Brisbane Festival, Gardens Point Theatre, Energex Brisbane Festival, October 5-28.

# Barcelona: terror of stages

Gail Priest

La Rambla, Barcelona. The main drag. Endless travellers' tales' of pickpockets and muggers. I stash my valuables in ridiculous places, so even I can't find them. I stare hard into the eyes of every face to see if they think they've spotted their next victim. We awake to the sounds of 2 sets of footsteps thudding under our window and an English accent yelling, "Stop him, someone stop him."

Compared with this, I felt relatively safe, issued with 3D glasses and entering the cavernous warehouse space of the Mercat de les Flors, home to La Fura Dels Baus' production *Obs*. I have always been terrified of La Fura. Back in 1989 I read a description of the show they performed as part of the Sydney Festival with chainsaws and swinging maces, and it fascinated me. A great part of me wished that I had seen it, but I knew I didn't have the mettle for that kind of stuff. Later I fell in with the post-punk crowd and the legend of La Fura, and my fear of them grew in intensity, until I finally saw them at the 1996 Adelaide Festival. Someone was threatening legal action at the time after a massive cardboard box had been dropped on their head. I kept to the periphery with the other girls with handbags, in my sensible shoes, ready to run. But despite a kind of roller coaster exhilaration, I was a little disappointed. Not quite

enough had shocked me, or wowed me, or awed me. I just wasn't convinced that they had said anything.

Both La Fura shows that I have seen start with bellowed warnings, text flashing across screens. In Adelaide, the majority of these were translated. Of course, in Barcelona there is no need for such niceties. Warnings flashed on the screen in Spanish, some I suspect in Catalan, and my faithful interpreter hastily whispered translations in my ear: Don't touch anything!, Don't get in the way!, Don't remove your glasses! Why not? They show you an eye popping snippet from a horror film. With agitation mounting, a punk guitar/noise riff blasts out of a multitude of speakers and everything begins to move. There are at least 4 mobile structures, 2 of which are brandishing killer clotheslines covered in coats which swirl and dip across the audience, swishing us away like giant floor polishers. As I try to avoid this, a hospital gurney bearing a sputtering engine comes up the inside.

The true art of La Fura is in making people move. They disorient you with flashes of light and loud noises and then get you to run like lab rats through an arbitrary maze of their devising. After a series of shuffling jogs around the space, a scene

emerges. Men in a quiz game, 3D video audience behind them. They appear to be vying for power. On another platform a woman does an acrobatic striptease pole dance in front of a 3D artist's impression of a vagina, and seduces the game show victor to give her his crown. Before you know it we're watching a game show *Macbeth*, complete with a carnivorous banquet scene which involves shoving cast and (what I hope to be volunteer) audience members up a conveyor belt and into a path of mince meat and balloons full of fake blood. And there's a mobile blood bath for Lady Macbeth to really get her hands dirty.

Amidst the punk, loud and gritty aesthetic, there are moments of breathtaking beauty as MacDuff is 'from his mother's womb untimely ripped', suspended in an amniotic sack of cling wrap in front of a 3D computer-generated image of a pregnant woman decaying and turning to dust. He is unleashed, naked except for a sword and he takes off swinging blindly through the crowd. Suddenly all the structures begin to hedge forward, and fire brandishing guards block all possible escape routes. We have to bear witness to the slaughter, which of course ends with the trademark revelation of Macbeth's plaster cast severed head.

While La Fura has developed a complex

methodology for audience manipulation and punk porn imagery, *Obs* illustrates a weakness in their performer to performer interaction. In the game show section it is high-camp farce, suitably big, blustery and grotesque. But the scale of the production makes the quieter interactions between characters difficult to pitch. They are playing a kind of mimed realism which ends up looking like earnest overacting. They need to push the stylisation, as they do in their imagery, and head for a grand opera style, or even better a non-actorly Brechtian presentation style, the performer a step removed from the character.

Maybe I'm a little older and wiser or jaded now. Or maybe La Fura has developed a recognisable formula. They still get the adrenalin pumping as men emerge out of nowhere with computer packs strapped to their backs and elaborate VR-looking helmets stabbing at the air above my head, but I don't really believe that they're out to kill me anymore. Whereas that man standing in the doorway of the Metro, I'll be keeping my eye on him.

*La Fura Dels Baus, Obs, Mercat de les Flores, Barcelona November 3- December 3, 2000.*  
www.lafura.com



# Kings Cross: Looking for bohemia

Hunter Corday

The search for bohemia creates personalities and consumes lives. It is a constant cultural force that has underwritten great works of literature, music and art, establishing areas, in some cases particular streets, where bohemian life can be reliably found.

Everything we have read or been told about bohemia is probably true. Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir did have a regular table at the Deux Magots, Francis Bacon regularly drank at the Pillars of Hercules in Soho and in Greenwich Village famous Beats could be seen daily at bars like the Whitehorse Tavern.

There are two sides to bohemia—the lifestyle that feeds a creative career, and being bohemian. The first is what attracted me to Kings Cross, and later Soho in London, followed by certain streets in Paris. Thinking about those years, it seems clear that bohemia is much more than mere style; though this might now be its nostalgic attraction. It has never strictly been a place, but rather a state of mind, transportable from city to city as the map of exile dictated. And this is its great liberating force—no matter whether you are in Kings Cross, Prague or Barcelona, bohemia is authentically possible.

Two new books focus on Sydney bohemia past and present—*In The Gutter... Looking At The Stars: A Literary Adventure Through Kings Cross* (edited by Mandy Sayer and Louis Nowra) and *Sydney Cafés, Where The Writers Go* (introduction by John Birmingham, photographs by Suzon Fuks).

*In The Gutter* is a collection of stories, fictions and poetry written in and about Kings Cross. From the contents it is clear that great writers lived and wrote in this small but vibrant district of Sydney. It is worth thinking about how such an arrondissement could affect so many creative minds over so many years. It was home, at some point, to writers such as Patrick White, Kenneth Slessor, Sumner Locke Elliot, Frank Moorhouse and others.

It was this reputation that attracted me to the Cross as a young schoolboy poet trying to find a life beyond the stifling suburbs. It began with a photograph in Constance Fitzgibbon's *The Life of Dylan Thomas*. Titled "In Their Chelsea Studio" (1944). The picture shows a newly married Dylan and Caitlin in a calculated study of bohemian pose. They are in a book-lined room, he is standing by a large table, glass of beer and cigarette in hand. She sits to the side, at ease. It is not a portrait of a working writer but of a poet with his woman, books and booze.

The need for bohemia quickly becomes a search for places and people where the image can be lived out. At 16 I used to skip school and head for the Cross, looking for the reality of that photograph, the woman, the poet's life. These were the early days of the Vietnam War and the first R&R ships. The Cross was exciting, and probably dangerous though my memories are of moral danger more than anything else—of my being very definitely off-limits amongst bars, coffee shops and strip clubs.

I eventually found my way to Hughes Street where there were poetry readings at the Wayside Chapel, accompanied by folk guitar. No matter how juvenile my poems might have been, what was exhilarating was to be accepted as a poet. No where else in my life was this possible.

The readings were followed by back room art auctions upstairs in William Street just near the Whisky Au-Go-Go (my job was to hold up the paintings) and there were sips of gin and smokes with beatnik women later on the stairs. I was too young to meet many of the writers in Sayers and Nowra's book of course, but I sensed I was part of something, a way of life that would be my destiny even if I was, at that time, just a visitor. There wasn't a night I didn't dream of living there.

I kept all this hidden because bohemia is, in part, a secret society and it was best not to show my inclinations too early. After a long absence overseas I came back to the Cross 25 years later, and bought an apartment at the centre of things, one street from the Wayside Chapel. I was looking,



Bar Coluzzi, Kings Cross

photo Suzon Fuks

now, for the cafe life so well described in *Sydney Cafés*... an espresso streetscape where I could be a working writer amongst my peers.

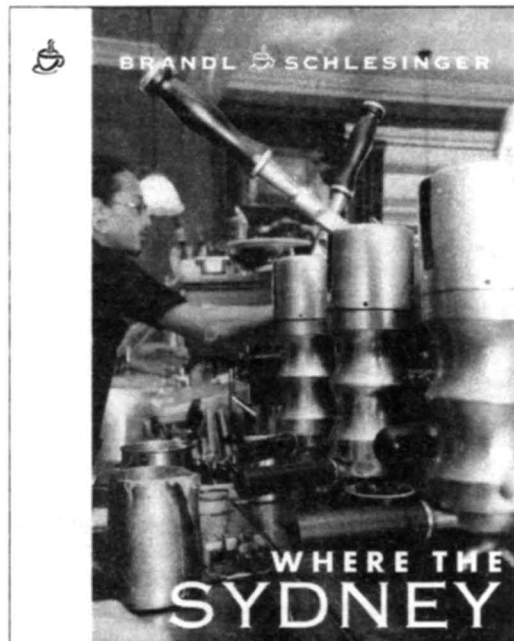
The big change in those years was the appearance of a cuisine (rather than Chesterfield Plus and cinnamon toast) that complemented and contributed to the ambience. *Sydney Cafés* has a good selection of Kings Cross establishments (and some in Glebe, Balmain and Newtown) and each site is recommended by a writer (José Borghino, Anne Coombs, Robert Dessaix and others) not only for atmosphere and coffee blend but food (recipes are included). It is in this sense a living guide to the contemporary bohemia from insiders.

For the last 6 years what I have loved about the Cross, so well described in both these books, is that the district is always 'on.' Since it now costs more to live there, the Sydney bohemia has expanded from a place frequented by painters and writers to include those from the film and television industry. There is almost a straight line from the El Alamein Fountain to Fox Studios, and this strip, on Victoria Street (largely now between William and Liverpool Streets) has become the place to drink coffee, take meetings, do business, to live. On this narrow line there is an overwhelming sense of being free and belonging.

In the Cross you can, as the writers in Sayer and Nowra's book attest, be yourself without guilt, fulfil your destiny. In some ways Kings Cross is still a village within a city, and it's easy to make friends with the shopkeepers, to be a 'regular' at a cafe which has its own rewards, its own comfort. To be there is to be home, at last.

Until, that is, your small children reach for their ball in the park and find only used and bloody needles in the bushes. Heroin has made the Cross unliveable for anyone with kids and what was once a fashionable part of bohemian life (remember the number of writers, especially Beats like William Burroughs, who made careers out of their addiction) has turned the streets tense and unsafe. Instead of a dawn chorus of junkies arguing over the last grains of dope, I now wake to a cacophony of Blue Mountains birds. There is a cafe culture up here too, and the largest number of writers outside the CBDs of Sydney and Melbourne.

*In The Gutter... Looking At The Stars: A Literary Adventure through Kings Cross*, editors Mandy Sayer and Louis Nowra, Random House, 2000. *Sydney Cafés, Where the Writers Go*, Brandl & Schlesinger, 2000.



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## Making bigger stories

Sally Riley talks to **OnScreen**

Sally Riley, a member of the Wiradjuri nation, filmmaker and the Manager of the Indigenous Unit of the Australian Film Commission spoke to *OnScreen*, describing some of the achievements and aspirations of Indigenous filmmakers in Australia, the networks of support and the challenges to taking the next step into making feature films and longer documentaries.

Feature films by Indigenous directors have been few—Rachel Perkins' *Radiance* (1998) and Tracey Moffat's *Bedevil* (1993). Expectations are high that, given the opportunity they deserve, the current generation of Indigenous filmmakers are more than capable of creating some remarkable feature films.

Riley described the developmental role played by the Indigenous Unit of the AFC and SBS Independent (the film production wing of SBS) in producing the ongoing series of short film initiatives commencing in 1996 with *From Sand to Celluloid*, followed by *Shifting Sands* (1998), *Crossing Tracks* (1999) and *On Wheels* (2000). Distribution within Australia through the AFI, screenings on SBS TV and ABC TV, appearances and awards in international film festivals and the AFI's educational marketing of the films have meant that the series continue to develop Indigenous filmmakers and alert audiences to their considerable talent and distinctive modes of storytelling.

The filmmakers include Ivan Sen (*Tears, Wind* and recently *Dust*), "He's such a beautiful stylist with a great eye," and Catriona McKenzie, "is a fantastic writer with a great sense of story but she's also got an incredible sense of style. Erica Glynn is another favourite, with films like *My Bed, Your Bed* and *My Mother, My Son*."

Referring to Richard Frankland, Riley says, "Our filmmakers seem to move between documentary and drama and not just specialise in one area. Richard has made both. Last year he won Best Short Film at the Hollywood Black Film Festival in Los Angeles for *Harry's War* and he's now got a Hollywood agent. He's got 3 or 4 features written and it looks like Rolf de Heer's going to help produce one for him."

Asked about her own films, Sally Riley says, "When I was at Film Australia they funded *Fly Peewee, Fly!* (*From Sand to Celluloid*). Then, through the ABC Indigenous Programs Unit, I made a film about novelist and screenwriter Archie Weller called *In Search of Archie*. That was a half-hour documentary about Archie trying to, I guess, find proof of his Aboriginality. A lot of my work deals with that issue of being of fair complexion and being Aboriginal. My latest film, *Confessions of a Headhunter*, screened on SBS recently and won the AFI Award for Best Short Fiction, which was very exciting."

Rachel Perkins, who made *Radiance* has a new work. "It's called *One Night The Moon* and it's actually a music drama for television, a co-production between Opera Australia and the ABC (the mdTV commissions—4 music dramas for television). Paul Kelly's in it and has written the music with Kev Carmody."

There is no shortage, says Riley, of Indigenous filmmakers with feature scripts ready to go or ripe for development. "Ivan Sen has one. Catriona McKenzie has a script. Richard Frankland has several scripts. Erica Glynn has just



Co-director David Batty shooting "mulga suspension", *Bush Mechanics*

formed a partnership with performance poet and writer Romaine Moreton. Rima Tamou and Pauline Clague of Core Original are developing feature projects. Darlene Johnson (*Two Bob Mermaid* and *The Stolen Generations*) is working on a few projects. The scripts are there but they need developing. And that's part of my job here. We don't have enough money to fully fund a feature but we can get them ready to go other places.

"Filmmakers can come to us with an idea, a treatment to start with. We'll fund them draft by draft with a script editor, with money for research—whatever they need basically. Last year, the FTO ran an Indigenous Feature Film Screenwriting course. A few scripts have come out of that. We funded Steven McGregor (from CAAMA, Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association) to go to that and he has a draft of a feature film. At the moment we've got about 6 or 7 screenplays in early development."

A range of organisations provide vital support for the development and showing of these films. They include public broadcasters and Indigenous media organisations and state funding agencies. Asked about the significance of the AFC Indigenous Unit partnership with SBS Independent, Riley says it cannot be understated: "SBS have been absolutely crucial in getting all these drama initiatives going and been the partner in all of them since day one of the first Indigenous Drama Initiative in 1996. Bridget Ikin of SBS Independent is a real visionary."

"The ABC through the Indigenous Programs Unit has played a part as well. They came in on the *Sand to Celluloid* and *Crossing Tracks* series, bought a second screening of them, and also screened the National Indigenous Documentary Film series. They've just got their *Message Stick* program going at the moment, a half hour of stories put together and screened on Sunday afternoons. David Jowsey the Executive Producer has quite a stable of Indigenous filmmakers making 5 and 10-minute pieces for that program which is all

good experience and it pays well. It's a good training ground."

CAAMA, based in Alice Springs, has produced many documentaries including a series on traditional language. Each year they make around 10 documentaries totally within communities and in language, co-funded by Imparja TV. CAAMA is now turning to drama as well. Given the importance of developing Indigenous expertise in all areas of filmmaking, Riley notes that "nearly all of CAAMA's production team have been to AFTRS now—producer Cilla Collins, director Steven McGregor is there at the moment, Alan Collins who's one of our leading directors of photography, Warwick Thornton, another director and a leading director of photography, and Erica Glynn (currently making a documentary about the Women's Council in the Central Desert). So CAAMA has put all their crew through film school and they're now taking that back to Alice Springs and working with the communities."

Another important element, one supported by a number of organisations, is the National Indigenous Documentary Fund, now generating its third series of films. ATSIC is the major contributor, granting funds to be managed by NIMAA (National Indigenous Media Association of Australia). ABC TV contributes pre-sale finance for each film to gain broadcast rights. The Australian Film Commission invests in development funds and the film agencies of the state governments contribute as well. CAAMA was appointed series producer to supervise production. Riley says, "It's been fantastic in bringing on lots of documentary makers like Kootchi Raymond and producing successes like David Batty and Francis Jurpurulla Kelly's *Bush Mechanics*. Because of the NIDF, Indigenous documentary is developing quite well. The next thing is for them to move on to 50-minute documentaries which are more difficult to get funded."

"Part of our program at the AFC is to fund the development of some of those documen-

taries. What we're trying to do here is support the entry level filmmakers and also help them to develop any project that they have. But I also want to support the filmmakers who are at the point where they need to make a feature or a 50-minute documentary to keep them going, because it's so hard to survive and keep your skills up between films. The AFC Indigenous Branch has \$800,000 a year plus another \$40,000 for interactive media works. It doesn't go very far. You can't fund big projects."

Riley is adamant about the value of the mentoring and workshoping approaches. "We always do visual storytelling workshops with our drama initiatives. This was set up right at the beginning by Walter Saunders who, with the help of others, formulated the drama initiatives. Most of the filmmakers were writer-directors. They were attached to a mentor director through the 6 to 10 day period. They worked together on scripting half a day. The other half they workshoped their scripts with actors. We had a couple of DOPs with cameras so they could shoot scenes if they wanted to. It's been really successful and I think it's partly why the shorts have been so good. We've really developed them. We've set it up so the directors can do the workshop and then go away and write their scripts; but they're supported through that process with money to write and with their mentors. Having come through it myself, I know how important it is."

Sally Riley has recently announced a new drama initiative with SBS Independent—"another five 10-minute films as well as two 50-minute films. With the 10-minute films it'll be new people who've come through state-based organisations like Metro Screen in NSW—they had an Indigenous Mentorship Scheme last year with around \$5,000 for each 10-minute film shot on DVC. Then for the two 50-minuters, people will have to have had a screen credit. Hopefully what we can do is develop more than 2 so the filmmakers can look for further funding for them." As well, Riley is determined to shape schemes to develop Indigenous producers and film crews, especially assistant directors and designers, to support the wealth of directing talent.

The success rate of Indigenous films in being selected for festivals here and overseas and in winning awards is, as Riley proudly points out, very high indeed, especially those from the *Sand to Celluloid* and subsequent series. Asked how she would sum up the situation for Indigenous filmmakers at present, Riley is certain that "We're on the verge of doing really big things but we need the support of the mainstream and of the funding bodies to get us there. We can't do it all out of the Indigenous Unit. A lot of people have said the Indigenous shorts have been the best short films from the AFC for donkeys' years. Now our filmmakers are saying well, support what you're saying and fund us to make bigger stories."

KG, VB

*A version of this article originally appeared in Australia's Indigenous Arts, an Australia Council publication, and is reproduced here with permission. Australia's Indigenous Arts can be found at <http://www.ozco.gov.au/resources/publications/>*



# Animation evolution—Japanime

Juanita Kwok

For a brief period in the late 60s, Australian television flickered with animated Japanese series, spawning a legion of loyal fans amongst Generation X toddlers whose hearts thumped with Kimba's as the hyenas appeared on the horizon, whose imaginations soared higher than Astro Boy, and who dreamt of one day seeing these fantastic creations again. While animation clubs online and at universities have flourished, in cinemas, aside from the odd screening, Japanese animation has been all but ignored. Many of the audience who queued to see the films of *Japanime*, an Olympic Arts Festival event at Dendy Opera Quays had waited a long time for this and were rewarded with a feast.

Freerange Animation producer Deborah Szapiro curated *Japanime*, hoping to challenge perceptions of animated film and to show that the form is equally suited to adults and children. "The Japanese don't restrict themselves to a narrow view of what you can and can't deal with in storyline in animation and this is what makes their work so dynamic and exciting," Szapiro says. The audience agreed, with the most popular films reflecting diverse tastes in animation. *Princess Mononoke* is the saga of a girl raised by wolves who battles developers to protect the forest from exploitation. *Jin-Rob* fuses the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*, with an alternative post World War II scenario in which an elite corps of soldiers is trained to crush an anti-government underground group known as "the sect." *Vampire Hunter D* is the story of a "dunpeal", a half-human, half-vampire, on a quest to recover a woman kidnapped by a vampire. Particularly notable for bringing animation into a contemporary setting is *Perfect Blue*, whose heroine, pop idol Mima, is the victim of physical and virtual stalking. Though the films are vastly different, they all have imaginative scripts and complex characterisations.

The programme of 29 films featured two giants of Japanese animation—Tezuka Osamu, the godfather of Japanese animation and creator of the beloved *Astro Boy* and *Kimba* and the Studio



Blood, Production IG

Ghibli films of Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata. It also covered landmarks in the development of anime up to the latest digital feature film.

To complete the overview of Japanese animation, two seminars focused on 40 years of anime's evolution—Philip Brophy's discussion and screening of Osamu Tezuka's experimental films, and Animation 2000 and Beyond, a forum on the current state and future of Japanese animation. Fans were disappointed by the absence of Mamoru Ishii, director of *Ghost in the Shell* and writer of *Jin-Rob*, but Mitsuhsa Ishikawa (CEO of Production IG, responsible for *Ghost in the Shell*, *Jin-Rob* and *Blood*) visited from Japan, as did prolific Japanese film critic Tadao Sato.

Sato had an interesting interpretation of the development of animation from its beginnings as war propaganda. In the post-war period, he said, the work of Tezuka inspired a new generation of young animators. Whilst some like Hayao Miyazaki followed the example of Tezuka's moral leadership, others

formed a new tradition. Unlike Tezuka who had training in medicine, they came from the most underprivileged of backgrounds and used their experience of poverty and disadvantage as the themes of their animations, sometimes resorting to extreme expressions of violence. They continued to draw for their fans as they matured, creating a new audience of adults. These are the two pillars that form the contemporary basis of Japanese animation, according to Sato. In the new era of Japanese animation, Ishikawa described how the analogue *Jin-Rob* and the digital animation *Blood* were produced simultaneously by competitive teams at Production IG. *Jin-Rob* was the last fully analogue film to be made there. When you find out it was composed of 80,000 cels you can understand why. While production moves towards full digitalisation, Ishikawa views computers as tools to assist humans, and insists that in Japan the highest standard of drawing is by hand. He predicts a great future for Japanese animation in the marriage of hand drawing and digitalisation.

My personal favourite of *Japanime* was the sublimely entertaining *Porco Rosso*, the adventures of the bounty hunting porcine pilot created by Hayao Miyazaki "as a piece of pure escapism for the Japanese salaryman." From the enthralled kids who sat through one and half hours of *My Neighbour Totoro*, scarcely uttering a sound, to my own delight at watching *Porco Rosso*, anime reaches across age barriers, transporting both adults and children into imagined worlds and landscapes.

Exquisite drawings from *Jin-Rob*, *Astro Boy*, *Dragonball Z* and other films were featured in *Atomic Susbi*, an exhibition at the Silicon Pulp Animation Gallery. Conceived by gallery director Steve Lucas and curator Cefn Ridout, the exhibition of 89 original cels, original drawings, digital prints and poster art allowed audiences to marvel at the process behind the *Japanime* films. The exhibition was supplemented by artwork loaned from Production IG and included a large number of videos. Specially commissioned essays on animation were published in the handsome catalogue.

*Japanime* was one of the biggest successes of the Olympic Arts Festival, with most sessions fully subscribed. Many of the films could have sold out at least twice over but were only screened once. The good news is Deborah Szapiro is planning *Japanime II* and *Atomic Susbi* is currently at ScreenSound Canberra until the end of February. For those who can't make it to Canberra, keep your eyes peeled for *Atomic Susbi II* planned for April/May at Silicon Pulp.

*Japanime*, curator Deborah Szapiro, Olympic Arts Festival, Dendy Opera Quays, Sydney, August 23-27; Atomic Sushi, curator Cefn Ridout, gallery director Steve Lucas, Silicon Pulp Animation Gallery, Sydney, August 11-October 14; ScreenSound Canberra, November-February 28.

Juanita Kwok is co-director of the Sydney Asia Pacific Film Festival, which screened *Perfect Blue* in its inaugural programme in 2000.

# The Björk-Von Trier sound of music

Gail Priest

I bought Björk's *Selma's Songs*, the soundtrack to *Dancer in the Dark*, 2 months ago, before there were any mutterings about the film. Gradually it dawned on me that the songs were not a backing sound track, but actually performed in the film. How was anybody going to pull off a modern film musical? And how, in particular was Lars Von Trier, known for his low-end, handy cam style and gritty, unrelenting naturalism going to handle a musical?

Set in mid-west America (Von Trier has never been there—it was shot in Sweden), *Dancer in the Dark* revolves around Selma (Björk), a Czech immigrant who works in a factory by day, doing piece work by night, desperately trying to hide her impending blindness, and saving money for an operation on her son, who will otherwise face the same fate. She escapes through her love of musicals and is playing Maria in the town's production of *The Sound of Music*.

Björk's Selma is open, naive and guileless. She is simple only in that she possesses very little and that makes her needs simple. She is surrounded by warm and loving people: her friend Cathy (Catherine Deneuve); the town police officer Bill (David Morse); his wife Linda from whom she rents the trailer in which she and her son Gene live; and the besotted Jeff (Peter Stormare) who waits at the factory every day in the hope that Selma will accept a ride home. There is an overwhelming gentleness about them all, as if Selma draws out the benevolence in people. Von Trier uses this to lure the viewer into Selma's world—you love her because all those around her love



Björk as Selma, *Dancer in the Dark*

her—but also to create a shocking contrast to the malevolence and violence that later emerges. Von Trier is playing with good and evil, standing one behind the other, obscuring the worst from view, until you inevitably catch its shadow.

Like *Breaking the Waves* (the first of the Golden Heart Trilogy, followed by *The Idiots* and *Dancer in the Dark*) Von Trier uses hand held video, single angles and rough edits to create a documentary feel. It is gritty, hyper real, and requires improvisatory performances that are so subtle as to be almost banal—a style that works particularly well for Björk and David Morse. The challenge for Von Trier is to move from such natu-

ralism to large scale musical numbers in a way that a modern audience will accept. Selma's failing eyesight is the key—as her life gets worse she becomes more inclined to fantasise about her beloved musicals and she begins to dwell more and more in an aural sphere. The musical scenes are always initiated by Selma tuning in to a particular sound. Von Trier admits that this is an obvious device, but it is one that works well, particularly given the style of Björk's compositions. By concentrating on the noise of the factory, or a passing freight train she creates industrial percussive motifs that build into full song and dance numbers with the familiar crunch and grind rhythm tracks underpinning the sheer soaring vocals. As Selma's life plummets into despair, the musical scenes come thick and fast, with a fantastical waltz with the dead initiated by the crackling of a phonograph needle at the end of a record, and a Tracey Ulmanesque courtroom routine with a guest star all-tapping appearance by Joel Grey.

The musical sequences were filmed with 100 fixed video cameras giving them the same grainy 'live' quality as the real life scenes, but the colour is heightened, and the static but multifarious points of view give it the feeling of a big warped Hollywood extravaganza. The shape of the Hollywood musical is there but things are a little clunky, less than slick. The choreography by Vincent Patterson echoes Selma's cute and awkward physicality—she can only fantasise from the humble reality she knows.

However the true power of *Dancer in the Dark* comes from Björk's brutally honest performance.

The Björk we see in MTV interviews, is the one we see here. She has a lightness, a playfulness, an honesty which can also be ripped open to depict utter devastation. She is suffering in the flesh as horror shudders through her body and breaks her down. It is difficult to watch, yet perversely compelling. Her unaccompanied version of *My Favourite Things* which could so easily be clichéd is a performance of bare boned despair. Finally, *The Next To Last Song*, uncomfortably but cleverly justified in its placement, is a truly sublime performance, intertwining mortal fear and tragic relief.

Combined with the power of Björk's performance is Von Trier's determination not to back away at the moment when other directors would. It both angers and enthralls. He offers the audience no respite, the relentless, extreme close-ups blocking escape, forcing us to dive through the centre of the catharsis. You have to make a leap of faith that Von Trier will land back in your own safe cinema seat. In this case I landed, emotionally drained, a little worse for wear, but rewarded by a bizarre, beguiling and ultimately devastating cinema experience.

*Dancer in the Dark*, written and directed by Lars Von Trier, musical composition by Björk. Distributed by Palace Films. Released nationally December.

Philip Brophy's Cinesonic column will return in 2001.



# 2000 AFI Awards Results

## FEATURE FILM—EMIRATES AFI AWARDS

### Emirates AFI Award for Best Film

(awarded to producer/s)

*Looking for Alibrandi*

Producer Robyn Kershaw

Director Kate Woods

Screenwriter Melina Marchetta

### NewVision Films AFI Award for Best Achievement in Direction

Andrew Dominik

*Chopper*

### Showtime AFI Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role

Eric Bana

*Chopper*

### Fox Studios Australia AFI Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role

Pia Miranda

*Looking for Alibrandi*

### Beyond Films AFI Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role

Simon Lyndon

*Chopper*

### Scape AFI Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role

Greta Scacchi

*Looking for Alibrandi*

### Currency Press AFI Award for Best Original Screenplay

Stavros Kazantzidis, Allanah Zitserman

*Russian Doll*

### The Australian AFI Award for Best Screenplay Adapted from Another Source

Melina Marchetta

*Looking for Alibrandi*

### BOSE Award for Best Original Music Score

Cezary Skubiszewski

*Bootmen*

### CLEO AFI Award for Best Achievement in Costume Design

Tess Schofield

*Bootmen*

### Digital Pictures AFI Award for Best Achievement in Editing

Martin Connor

*Looking for Alibrandi*

### Panavision Australia AFI Award for Best Achievement in Cinematography

Steve Mason

*Bootmen*

### Soundfirm AFI Award for Best Achievement in Sound

David Lee, Laurence Maddy, Andrew Plain & Ian McLoughlin

*Bootmen*

### GMD AFI Award for Best Achievement in Production Design

Murray Picknett

*Bootmen*

### Atlab Australia AFI Award for Best Foreign Film (awarded to the producer/s)

*American Beauty*

Producers Bruce Cohen, Dan Jinks

Director Sam Mendes

Screenwriter Alan Ball

### SLATS AFI Young Actor's Award

Kane McNay

*Mallboy*

## TELEVISION—EMIRATES AFI AWARDS

### AFI Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role in a Television Drama Series

Geoff Morrell

*Grass Roots*—"The Whole Year"

### Beyond Television AFI Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Television Drama Series

Anne Phelan

*Something in the Air*—

"We Will Remember Them"

### Prototype Casting AFI Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Telefeature or Mini Series

Andy Anderson

*Halifax f.p.* "A Person of Interest"

### AFI Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Telefeature or Mini Series

Noni Hazlehurst

*Waiting At The Royal*

### AFI Award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Guest Role in a Television Drama Series

Chris Haywood

*Stingers* "Men In The Dark"

### AFI Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Guest Role in a Television Drama Series

Lois Ramsey

*Grass Roots*—"Late September"

### The Kirketon AFI Award for Best Direction in a Television Drama

Peter Andrikidis

*Grass Roots*—"The Whole Year"

### Columbia TriStar Productions AFI Award for Best Screenplay in a Television Drama

Geoffrey Atherden

*Grass Roots*—"The Whole Year"

### AFI Award for Best Episode in a Television Drama Series (awarded to producer/s)

*Grass Roots*—"The Whole Year"

ABC Television and Eastway Communication

Producer John Eastway

Director Peter Andrikidis

Screenwriter Geoffrey Atherden

### Avid Australia AFI Award for Best Episode in a Television Drama Series (Long)

(awarded to producer/s)

*All Saints*—"Valley of The Shadow (part 1)"

Seven Network Australia

Producer Jo Porter

Director Mark Piper

Screenwriter David Phillips

### Holding Redlich AFI Award for Best Mini-Series or Telefeature (awarded to producer/s)

*On The Beach*

Southern Star John Edwards in association with

Coote/Hayes

Producers John Edwards, Errol Sullivan, Jeff

Hayes, Greg Coote

Director Russell Mulcahy

Screenwriters David Williamson, Bill Kerby

### AAV Australia AFI Award for Best Children's Television Drama (awarded to producer/s)

*Eugenie Sandler P.I.*—Episode 2

Burberry Productions

Producer Margot McDonald

Director Ana Kokkinos

Screenwriter David McRobbie

### Complete Post AFI Award for Open Craft in Television

*On The Beach*

Sally Shepherd, Roger Ford for Set Design

## NON—FEATURE—EMIRATES AFI AWARDS

### Film Australia AFI Award for Best Documentary (awarded to producer)

*The Diplomat*

Producers Sally Browning, Wilson da Silva

Director Tom Zubrycki

### Cinema Nova AFI Award for Award for Best Short Fiction Film (awarded to director)

*Confessions of a Headhunter*

Director Sally Riley

Producer Kath Shelper

Screenwriters Sally Riley, Archie Weller

### Yoram Gross AFI Award for Best Short Animation (awarded to director)

*Brother*

Director Adam Elliot

Producer Adam Elliot

Screenwriter Adam Elliot

### SBS Television AFI Award for Best Direction in a Documentary

Tom Zubrycki

*The Diplomat*

### Currency Press AFI Award for Best Screenplay in a Short Fiction Film

Adam Elliot

*Brother*

### Kodak AFI Award for Best Cinematography in a Non-Feature Film

Klaus Toft, Campbell Miller, Wade Fairley & Malcolm Ludgate

*La Nina*

### FRAMEWORKS AFI Award for Best Editing in a Non-Feature Film

Andrea Lang

*Thomson of Arnhem Land*

### Song Zu AFI Award for Best Sound in a Non-Feature Film

Mark Tarpey, Paul Pirola & Livia Ruzic

*Pozieres*

### Open Craft AFI Award

Phillip Crawford

*Hurt for Concept*

### BYRON KENNEDY AWARD

Matt Wheeldon & Gary Doust—Popcorn Taxi (Founders)

Stephen Jenner & David Barda—*if Magazine* (Publishers)

### RAYMOND LONGFORD AWARD

Anthony Buckley AO (Producer)

The 2000 AFI Awards, Fox Studios, Broadcast Live on SBS TV, November 18 ([www.sbs.com.au/afiz2000](http://www.sbs.com.au/afiz2000)).

In RealTime 41 (Feb/March 2001) there will be a commentary on the AFI Awards results.

from the director of BREAKING THE WAVES and THE KINGDOM

**Björk** Catherine Deneuve

"Björk, in her movie debut, seems to be inventing a new style of film acting, if not an entirely new kind of human being."

AO Book News Today

a film by Lars von Trier

**Dancer in the Dark**

original soundtrack by Björk "SelmaSongs" out now through Universal Music Australia

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Music composed by BJÖRK • Starring BJÖRK, CATHERINE DENEUVE, DAVID MORSE, PETER STORMARE, JEAN-MARC BARR & JOEL GREY  
Produced by VIBEKE WINDELJØV • Executive Producer PETER AALBARK JENSEN • Danish Film Production MAGNUS SLOT • Lars Jönsson • Director of Photography ROBBY MULLER  
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# Superfluous sex at Ars Electronica

Melinda Rackham

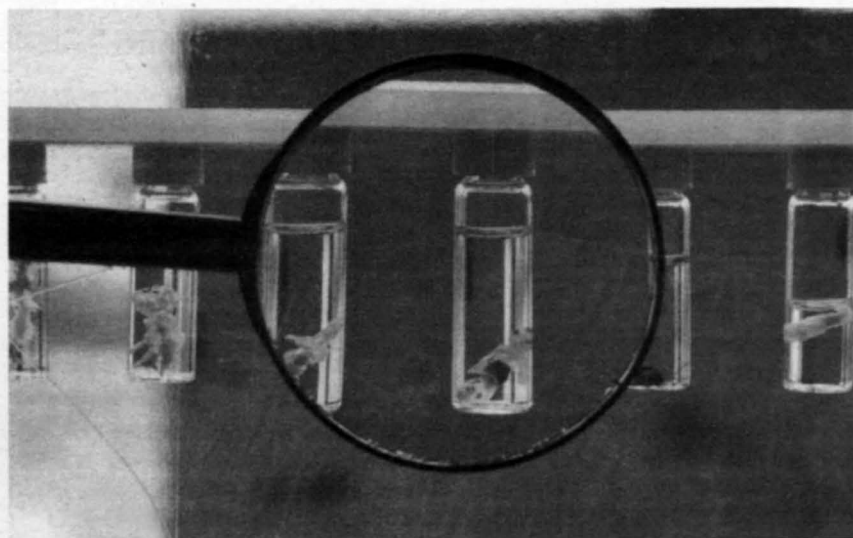
"Test the power of your loins!" was the call for men to donate their semen for Sperm Race—one of the most publicised events of *Next Sex: Sex in the Age of its Procreative Superfluity*, this year's Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria. The festival sought to engage electronic arts, gender studies and queer theory to highlight the mechanisms of discrimination based on sexual preference, gender or heredity. Analysing men's semen for mobility and hence reproductive success, while giving women the opportunity to participate by placing bets on whose sperm they thought would be the fastest swimmer, seemed to reinforce rather than challenge these issues, but I tried to keep an open mind...

While the banks of the Danube resonated with *To Rocco Rot* from the outdoor sound stage, the very brown Brucknerhaus Concert Hall was hung with Dieter Huber's huge vinyl prints of irritating, unerotic, morphed double vaginas and multiple penises. Wander upstairs and you'd find a pink faux fluffy viewing lounge for Natacha Merritt's (US) web-published soft porn digital images of herself. Demonstrating the festival's prevailing lack of critical engagement, Merritt was sure her work was really "art" as she also had a print publishing deal.

In a simulation of sleaze you could follow some gaffer taped arrows down back corridors to find Shu-Lea Cheang's (US) *The IKU Experience*. The *Blade Runner*-esque *Experience* has a variety of straight and queer couplings, a loose narrative of sci-fi viral cybersexual encounters, dialogue of the moaning kind, a sprinkling of sexy cinematography and 3D graphics—but I'm not sure how it ends.

The most rewarding installation was Sergio Messina's *Brave New Porn* which showcases amateur (rather than industry) porn images from similar-interest-groups on the net. Perhaps you are looking for a hiccupping lover, a play pony to ride, another clog worshipper, or you just want to swap pictures with some friends that delight in "plush sex"—the arranging and photographing of cuddly toys in erotic poses. Messina illustrates with both humour and respect the variety of human desire as these otherwise marginalised consenting adults get together online.

On the gallery level clear plastic tents housed a selection of bio-art projects that manipulate nature by processes like changing the spots on butterflies by cell modification or inserting synthetic DNA into living cells. Australians Oran Catts, Ionat Zurr and Guy Ben-Ary (Israel) were showing their ongoing project *Tissue Culture and Art(ificial) Wombs*



Oran Catts, Ionat Zurr and Guy Ben-Ary, *Tissue Culture and Art(ificial) Wombs*

*Wombs*, now being carried out at Harvard Medical School in Boston—growing skin, muscle and bone tissue culture on degradable polymer worry dolls in the artificial womb environment of a NASA developed bioreactor. The project questions our loss of innocence in the age of technological reproduction, but is not clear on the ethical issues surrounding the seam between tissue culture and the creation of an autonomous living entity.

The *Next Sex* symposium covered tired material such as disembodied cyber sex, contraception, and transgender operative procedures. Sandy Stone, a pioneer in the field of virtual sexuality, had nothing new to say either as she did the same performance I saw at *Digital Aesthetics* in Sydney in 1996. The controversy of the festival was neo-Darwinist Randy Thornhill's theories on rape as a natural evolutionary adaptation for survival, generating outrage from both men and women in the audience. However, there was no official platform for response.

Thankfully downstairs the independently curated *electrolobby*—a net event of streaming and sushi provided a haven from sex. Works included *Sissy Fight*, Eric Zimmerman's (US) engaging multi-user bitchy playground game of teasing and scratching and ganging-up strategies and *Icontown* from Bernd Holzhausen—a network community project based on the concept of the pixel as build-

ing material. Also featured was *Leonardo*, with Annick Bureaud, the artistic and scientific network that has existed for more than 30 years and has been slapped with a lawsuit by a French financial firm claiming violation of its trademark rights and *etoy* (Switzerland) who won their legal battle against retailer Etoys in a similar name dispute, by mobilising a global army of net users to electronically engage and defeat the corporate giant.

The parallel *Cyberarts 2000* exhibit in the Ars Electronic Centre and the OK.Centrum venues hosted a variety of interactive and sound works. *Borderland* from Laurant Hart/Julien Alma is a variation of the Streetfighter genre, a game console with a choice of about 40 disparate and amusing opponents, such as a woman with a sink plunger, a man covered in cardboard boxes, a set of twins, gasmask guy, the backpacker who swings the backpack as her weapon. You also get to choose the backgrounds, from postindustrial urban wasteland to desert terrains. The control buttons are a semi-dismantled standard computer keyboard leaving enough keys to move your player, adding to the sense of hacked genres.

On the large scale was Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's (Mexico/Canada) *Vectorial Elevation*, a stunning execution of public art with international participation facilitated by an internet site. Over a 2 week period you could design via the web a light

sculpture to be made by 18 searchlights on top of buildings around Mexico City's main square, which could be seen for a 10 mile radius. Global participants were sent back webcam documentation of their implemented design, creating a tangible sense of technologically mediated remote intervention into public spaces.

Each evening a different performance event was featured—the most enjoyable was *Scribble* with Golan Levin's (US) Audio Visual Environment Suite software projected onto a massive screen in the concert hall where the mesmerising graphical interface generated soundscapes. Ars Electronica also ran a late night social club with themes of sex work, peep shows and beauty contests. These were supposed to be provocative, but hardly seemed to raise an eyebrow amongst the audience. The highlight was the wo-man gender morph night with two very differently paced acts—New Yorker Dred-Drage King Extrordinaire's sweaty hip hop and rap sets, and Sydney's normie mAy-welby performing intelligent cabaret to the crowd's delight.

The Free Speech Camp squatted outside the social club in the Ars Quarter. This motley assortment of caravans and a corrugated iron cantina provided the only mention during the festival of the current Austrian political situation where organisations such as Public Netbase in Vienna and Radio FRO may lose their funding and ability to provide independent commentary against Austria's right wing government.

Being at Ars felt a little like playing shuffleboard on the Titanic, as eugenics and bioengineering were discussed without any reference to political contexts or social realities. Turning the ship around is unlikely as Ars Electronica is following the genetic theme again next year. Nearly everyone I spoke to expressed their dissatisfaction with this as well as the jurying process for the Prix and the lack of responsiveness to contemporary debates. In its larger context as an arts festival Ars Electronica is sponsored by global computing and telecommunications corporate entities that are perhaps unwilling to engage with these ethical issues.

Microsoft, one of *Next Sex*'s main sponsors, may be excited by the possibility of a "genetic upgrade of mankind", however the rest of us may like to stay with our current bio-operating system as the hidden upgrade costs may be too high.

Ars Electronica 2000 and Cyberarts 2000, Ars Electronic Centre, Brucknerhaus Concert Hall, OK.Centrum, Linz, Austria, September 2-7, [www.aec.at/festival2000](http://www.aec.at/festival2000)

# Music of the pods: Garth Paine's *Reeds*

Lisa Gye

The cygnets on the ornamental lake at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne were somewhat bemused. When not being enlisted by their long necked parents to drum up a little business from people throwing bread at the water's edge, they poked about the curious floating objects which have temporarily invaded their space. These objects, which sang and chirruped exquisitely as the cygnets cavorted around them, were part of Garth Paine's installation *Reeds*, for the Melbourne International Festival.

*Reeds* was a site-specific installation consisting of a series of reed pod sculptures (artfully designed by Christopher Langton) which transmitted and broadcast computer-generated music. The music was produced in response to data gathered by the pods on the basis of variations in the weather, light, wind speed and direction and solar activity. In this sense, the music was conducted by the natural environment with the aid of interpretive and generative software programs hooked up to the reed pods. The data collected by the pods

was transmitted to a land-based computer which analysed and fed it into a sound synthesis software program designed to generate music in real time, producing 8 channels of digital audio. These channels were then broadcast back to the reed pods where Sennheiser EK300 stereo receivers, installed in 6 of the pods, received the broadcast signal. These signals were then separated into 2 mono components, fed into 2 adjacent pods and broadcast using amplifiers attached to the reed stems.

The reed pods were designed to blend almost seamlessly with the surrounding environment. Similarly, the music generated by the pods subtly mimicked the kinds of sounds you would expect to hear in this environment. You needed to constantly remind yourself that what you were seeing and hearing was, in fact, artificially constructed. The Botanic Gardens, an artificially constructed "experience" of the natural, are an apt setting for the work, highlighting an important theme of Paine's work. *Reeds* allowed the viewer to negoti-

ate a number of tenuous oppositions, such as the distinctions between the natural and the real, the artificial and the virtual.

*Reeds*, positioned as neither for nature nor against technology, enabled the viewer to experience the symbiosis between the two. The processes enacted by the reed pods were akin to the photosynthetic responses triggered in the surrounding plant-life when they are exposed to the same stimulus. At a time when popular representations of technology tend toward hysterical denunciation and generate fears about its dehumanising properties, *Reeds* reminds us that the nature/technology dichotomy is itself entirely artificial as is the concept of nature.

The question of where the sound performance of the installation takes place also highlights this blurring of boundaries between the artificial and the real. As Paine points out in the *Reeds* catalogue, sound literally penetrates the body. In this sense, the presence of the human audience is as necessary a condition for

the performance as all of the technologies that drive the installation. We can't separate the human from the technological—technology is, in fact, a necessary condition of humanity.

*Reeds* continues Paine's explorations of the responsive, activated space that began with such works as *Ghost in the Machine*, *Footfall* and *Map 1*. Like these, *Reeds* is thoughtful, eloquent, evocative and ingeniously executed. The only disappointing aspect of the installation is that it could not remain in the Botanic Gardens permanently. I'm quite sure the swans wouldn't mind.

*Reeds, Interactive Sound Installation* by Garth Paine, Melbourne International Festival, Ornamental Lake, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, October 14-November 12, [www.activatedspace.com.au/installations](http://www.activatedspace.com.au/installations)

Lisa Gye is a lecturer in Media and Communications at Swinburne University in Melbourne and is currently working on the forthcoming issue of *Mesh* for *Experimenta Media Arts*.



# A view from the bleeding edge

Paul Brown

In the 1980s the place to be and be seen was SIGGRAPH. Its first Art Show was in 1981 in Dallas and it became the essential focus for the art and technology community. By 1990 ISEA was the young kid on the block, unfettered by convention and keen to take risks. But by the late 90s it had burned out. So now, at the dawn of a new decade, century and millennium there's *Consciousness Reframed* ([www.caii-star.net/production/conref99/index.html](http://www.caii-star.net/production/conref99/index.html)). Over its first 3 invocations (1997, 98 and 2000) *Consciousness Reframed* has established itself as one of the more significant international meeting places for the misfits who often slip between the cracks of conventional discipline boundaries.

The conference convenor is Roy Ascott, Founder and Director of the CAiiA-STAR postgraduate program that has attracted some of the top international talent in the arts field ([www.caii-star.net/people/RA.html](http://www.caii-star.net/people/RA.html)). In his own plenary talks and presentation Ascott was anxious to reinforce his concept of the transdisciplinary nature of the art, science, technology and consciousness convergence. He also quoted another regular contributor, Australian Stephen Jones: "The term technoetic is the key. It refers to our use of technology in cultural production, and it also refers to the noetic, or how we understand the world and our processes of being in it. This suggests the exploration of how technology is changing our perception of the world."

Ascott proposes "Edge Life: technoetic structures and moist media" where "between the dry world of virtuality and the wet world of biology lies a new moist domain, a new interspace of potentiality and promise. Moist media will constitute the substrate of the art of the new century, a transformative art concerned with the construction of fluid reality. This will mean the spread of intelligence to every part of the built environment coupled with recognition of the intelligence that lies within every part of the living planet." Shades of de Chardin and Gaia as he continues: "This burgeoning awareness is technoetic: techne and gnosis combined into a new knowledge of the world, a connective mind that is spawning new realities and new definitions of life and human identity. This mind will in turn seek new forms of embodiment and articulation."

In his own talk Stephen Jones ([www.culture.com.au/brain\\_proj/](http://www.culture.com.au/brain_proj/)) describes cyberspace as a system that orders information objects according to their importance to each other or via their perceived value to an observer. This geometric space is very different from the perspectival space that orders objects according to their geographical location. As such cyberspace has more of a relationship with medieval organisation, (I was reminded of Eco's library in *The Name of the Rose*) than with the Renaissance systems that displaced them and have dominated our thinking since. The mind has a similar structure where myriad connections are rhizomatically made and

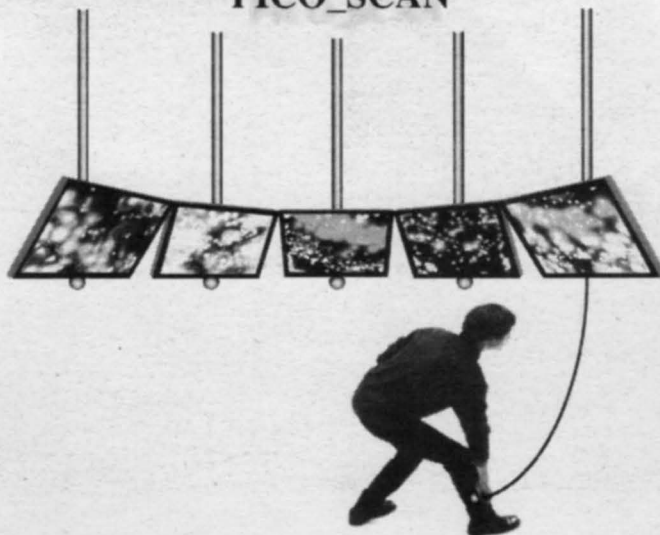
remade allowing consciousness to emerge. He concluded that the real and the virtual are of the same nature. Fact and fiction converge. We face a continuous spectrum of experience differentiated only by the tools we use to observe this continuum.

Many of the artists speaking at *Consciousness Reframed* describe virtual artworks. Donna Cox ([www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/People/cox/](http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/People/cox/)), the pioneer of 'renaissance teams' where artist and scientist work together to reveal knowledge via computational tools, has recently joined the CAiiA-STAR PhD program. Her virtual theatre is the Hayden Planetarium at the American Natural History Museum in New York and she talks about the global virtual team who created their spectacular digital tour of our local Milky Way Galaxy. She compares this to her personal research which looks at the way that different civilisations have merged scientific knowledge and artistic practice in order to understand the nature of the universe and consciousness.

From the other end of the budget, Sydney-based Melinda Rackham (<http://emptyrean.cofa.unsw.edu.au/>, [www.subtle.net/](http://www.subtle.net/)) demonstrates her "Emptyrean—soft skinned space." She says, "however I am the centre, I hold the axial position 0 0 0 in this space—that of the empyre builder." Her presentation playfully mixes her own poetic insights with quotes from the VRML manual to create a fluid frame of double meaning. "My words become flesh—my statements create mythology." Emptyrean achieves a sensitivity that is unusual in the often clunky VRML world and will consolidate Rackham's reputation for work in the network domain.

Greg Garvey describes a split brain user interface that he developed during a residency at the Banff Centre in 1999. Using a headmounted display with both stereo vision and sound, he presents the user with the emotionally charged testimony from the 1991 Supreme Court Nomination Hearings

## PICO\_SCAN



where nominee Clarence Thomas faced Anita Hill who accused him of sexual harassment. The spectator simultaneously sees and hears the two protagonists—one via the left eye/ear, the other via the right. Like most of Garvey's work the simplicity of the concept belies the complexity of the ideas and emotions he juggles. It's a profound and challenging piece that sadly, since C-SPAN won't release their video rights, cannot be exhibited.

Michael Quantrill is a researcher and artist-in-residence at the Creativity and Cognition Research Studios at the University of Loughborough (<http://creative.lboro.ac.uk/ccrs/>). He describes a system he has been developing with the centre director, Ernest Edmonds—one of the pioneers of the computational arts in the UK. It's based on an earlier work called *SoftBoard* which uses a large scale whiteboard interface that allows artists to communicate with a computer process by drawing standing as if at an easel and which allows greater flexibility of movement than a mouse or graphics tablet. Their more recent work extends this to more general movement detection where "the computer can become an extension of the individual, part of us, but not always under our direct conscious control."

The theme of human computer symbiosis continues with Laurent Mignonneau and Christa Sommerer ([www.mic.atr.co.jp/~christa/](http://www.mic.atr.co.jp/~christa/)) who describe their new PICO-SCAN system created for the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin. The spectator faces an array of flat panel plasma screens each with an attached hand held scanner. When the scanner is picked up, artificial-life creatures come out of hibernation and the spectator can modify their behaviour and feed them by scanning in parts of their bodies. When the creatures acquire enough energy they can mate and produce offspring that inherit various characteristics from their parents, as well as minor mutations. The artists describe the

work as an open system since it involves the external agency of the spectator and suggests that the creature-creature interactions coupled with the creature-spectator interactions create a complex adaptive system that links the real and the virtual.

During the 90s the Brazilian/US artist Eduardo Kac ([www.ekac.org](http://www.ekac.org)) established an impressive reputation and he has created several key works in the emergent genres of telecommunications, telepresence and interaction. Now another member of the CAiiA program, he describes his most recent work in Transgenic Art—works that involve genetic engineering.

*Genesis* takes a sentence from the Bible: "Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." The genesis gene was created by first converting the sentence into the dots and dashes of Morse code. Kac describes his decisions: "This sentence was chosen for its implications regarding the dubious notion of (divinely sanctioned) humanity's supremacy over nature. Morse code was chosen because, as first employed in radiotelegraphy, it represents the dawn of the information age—the genesis of global communications." (In the same month that Kac described this work at *Consciousness Reframed* Morse code was officially retired from the telecommunication spectrum.) The next step converted this Morse code into a DNA sequence where: dashes were represented by the letter T (thymine); dots were represented by the letter C (cytosine); word spaces were replaced by the letter A (adenine); and letter spaces were substituted by the letter G (guanine). This DNA sequence was then synthesised and inserted into the genome of a strain of E-coli. This living bacterium was exhibited and grew, reproduced and mutated. After exhibition the mutated DNA sequence was decoded to produce the modified sentence: "let aan have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that loves ua eon the earth."

The relatively remote location of the conference, at Caerleon in South Wales, helps make the event small and intimate with plenty of opportunity for networking and socialising. Next year Ascott intends to focus on the non-ordinary, non-local and non-linear with an emphasis on parapsychology.

*Consciousness Reframed 2000, The Centre for Advanced Inquiry in the Interactive Arts—CAiiA, University of Wales College, Newport, UK, August 23-26.*

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

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# Navigating dark spaces

John Conomos

Debra Petrovich's new CD-ROM *Uncle Bill* is an engrossing, multilayered work that explores, with thematic and formal inventiveness, questions dealing with childhood memories, sexual abuse, social class and space. Petrovich's distinctive, foreboding soundtrack presages its Gothic narrative of sexual violence, industrial chaos and repression. Set in Wollongong in the 1960s with the 'satanic mills' of BHP's steelworks, *Uncle Bill*'s opening macroscopic aerial focus of Petrovich's childhood neighbourhood and its subsequent microscopic zoom into the intimidating spaces of a home, set the right frame of dramatic action for the user to navigate the work.

*Uncle Bill* displays a subtle use of still, moving and scrolling illuminated text images accompanied by pulsating images of a child threatened by drunken men sporting air rifles. Bored teenagers and leather-clad bikies milling around milk bars on their bicycles and motorbikes sometimes give *Uncle Bill* a Kenneth Anger look. Footage of crashed cars and roadside victims evoke a JG Ballard undercurrent. As we navigate the rooms and corridors of the home, the industrial sounds of Wollongong are a perfect aural metaphor for the traumas of a child in the care of sadistic, loveless people.

*Uncle Bill*'s powerfully raw images and sounds form a stark, resonant work with aesthetic, cultural and formal roots in various feminist video and new media traditions exemplified by artists Lynne Hershman, Joan Jonas, Laurie Anderson, Dara Birnbaum, Sadie Benning and Carole Schneeman. The violent treatment of a child is acutely rendered by the recurring motifs of her playing in a tub of water and the frequent abrasive sounds of a barking dog (off-space). Both motifs underline *Uncle Bill*'s chilling mise-en-scene of child sexual abuse.

In a tour-de-force section of the work, a collage of structured scrolling text attests to Petrovich's strong visual and sound instincts as



Uncle Bill, CD-ROM, Debra Petrovitch

an artist/narrator. Her graphic multimedia skills and unswerving motivation to create form out of chaos is ideally suited to the expressionist treatment of this subject matter. The CD-ROM genre suits Petrovich's atmospheric collage style of techno-creativity. As we follow our own navigational instincts, we can immediately experience the overpowering sense of "no escape" from the violent domestic and industrial cacophony that surrounds Petrovich's child protagonist.

The ugliness of the suburban-industrial landscape of the CD-ROM provides an apt metaphor for domestic violence. However, *Uncle Bill* is not

a thesis—it does not set out to prove a point—but instead it reveals a tragic assemblage of ideas, gestures and atmospheres that vividly telegraph to us the traumatic horrors of child sexual abuse.

Ideally because of the expressionist stylistics used in *Uncle Bill*, it would be better exhibited as an installation (as it was at Artspace, Sydney in August). It is a large, bold and atmospheric work notable for its omnidirectional thematic and formal concerns around an issue central to our individual and social psychic lives.

Despite initial scepticism in certain quarters, CD-ROM is thriving in this country and overseas. *Uncle Bill* is an innovative, experimental contri-

bution to the expanding definition of the genre.

*Uncle Bill*, written and directed by Debra Petrovich; interface designer Wade Marynowsky; producer Julianne Pierce, CD-ROM 2000.

John Conomos was recently awarded a 2-year New Media Fellowship from the Australia Council for the Arts and has just returned from the Medi@terra Symposium and Festival in Athens, Greece. He has co-edited with Brad Buckley the forthcoming anthology *Republics of Ideas* (Pluto Press/ Artspace).

# Incubating online writing possibilities

Mark Stephens

Writers and ideas engaging in and with the relationship between writing and the internet came together recently at the *incubation* conference, organised by the trAce: online writing community at Nottingham Trent University, UK.

A text not only approaches the singularity of its writer(s) but also a community comprising each and every reader. If the reading audience inhabits the space between words, one hopes a comfortable space will be made by the text for its visitors (the writing of ambience). Considered as such, the text itself is structural, paradigmatic—a necessary and arbitrary formality whose contrivance abridges physical and ideological distances. This contraction apparent in language is a one whose design draws people together in the social space between signs.

The thread I know specifically as *incubation* and then generally as conference—itsself a type of text—also functioned as a structural formality with its own set of social spaces. By providing opportunities for meeting or gathering—the rapture of the moment as a celebration—*incubation* was a success. Many delegates commented that *incubation* possessed a vibrancy not normally felt at conferences.

The gift to be found in conversation is perhaps to make possible in writing the passage and the place, the transient and the preserved, the singular and communal, the foreign and familiar, comfort and vulnerability without contradiction. Conversation that keeps the lines of communica-

tion open and plural, speaks of what it means for writing (language) to be interactive.

Linda Marie Walker and Michael Tawa consider the reciprocating contexts of language and structure as an endless modification and questioning of reality's perceived formal dimensions—or the validity of a finished product—by way of an email correspondence. Conversation approaches an inclusive space in which each participant's contribution is welcomed—"... so, to live is to live with strangeness, to approach without knowing, to touch without possessing" (Linda Carroll, *Speak*, <http://ensemble.va.com.au/speak/> featured in *Salon*, an exhibition of internet writing curated by Mark Amerika, <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/incubation> as part of the *incubation* program).

How to find ways of being with others is the question approached infinitely through the practice of communication and writing. This motif recurs variously in the hypertexts of the writers featured in *Salon*.

*incubation* asked: "What is the value of the conference as a mode of communicating in the field of electronic media?" For me, its value lies with the understanding that television, telephone, mail, book, video, voice, conversation, music, song, sculpture, internet, conference and letter are all possible means of facilitating communication. There is room enough in the world for all mediums and means when one recognises that each moment of expression complements, enhances and accompanies the others.

It follows that if one considers how one writes; one will have also considered how one writes for the internet. Writing and the internet exist as social practices within a world of reciprocating contexts. Here I found the theme of writing and the internet sadly limited in scope in contrast to the experience of *verve: the other writing*, coordinated by Teri Hoskin for the 2000 Adelaide Festival of Arts, in which writing and writing technologies were considered expansively.

Something of the other writing was suggested in Dr Jill Seal's discussion of the *Perdita Project*—a growing online compilation of manuscripts by women that not only recovers their historical contribution through writing, but also includes often overlooked writing practices such as diaries, account books, vitalogies and devotional writings.

Voice and text messaging already articulate private and transient writing practices whose relevance and joy exist purely for participants. Panelist Mike Allison suggested that we are the last generation for whom the printed word carries implicit authority, and so perhaps the revolutionary practices he feels are so lacking on the internet are already taking place in the privacy of chatrooms, through mobile phone message banks and via email.

The internet's wider ecology of communication technologies and communicating possibilities were addressed by panelist Robin Hamman who spoke of television and mobile telephones as tools with the potential to broaden individuals' access

to information and chatrooms over the internet. The chatroom—itsself a transgressive writing practice—is a series of private and public overlapping texts made by a community of individuals. Independent of the formal channels of professional literary institutions, the chatroom, or MOO environment, reminds us that writing perceived at the level of its universal practice can be a truly liberating experience.

Mark Stephens attended incubation with the assistance of ANAT (Australian Network for Art and Technology) through its Conferences and Workshops fund. The Salon exhibition, conference abstracts, web postings and information on the presenters are all available online at <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/incubation>.

incubation: trAce International Conference on Writing and the Internet, director Sue Thomas, web design Simon Mills, administrative assistant Jill Pollicott, web editor Helen Whitebread, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK, July 10-12.

## WriteStuff

WriteStuff starts up again in February 2001. See Hunter Cordaiy's 'Looking for Bohemia', page 14.



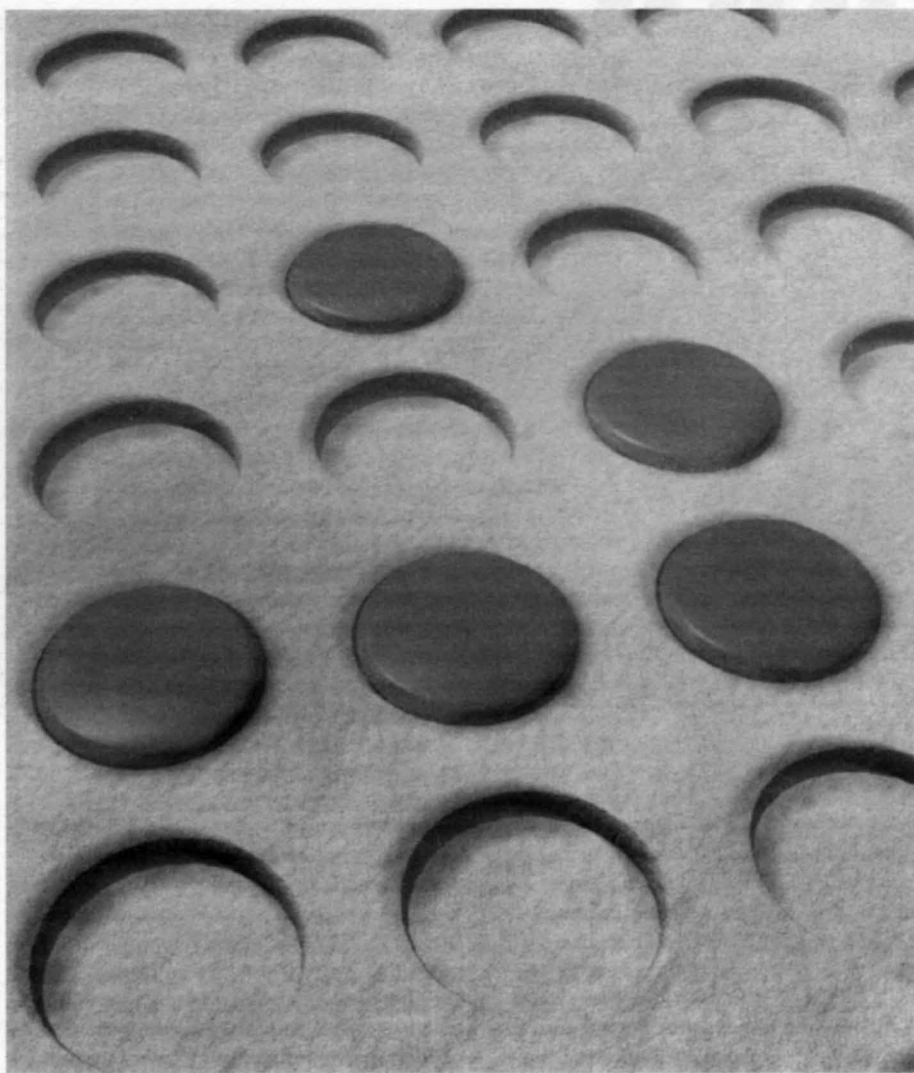
# Cyberbiodiversity: new life at Casula

Mitchell Whitelaw

During that strange, sunny quiet of the Sydney Olympics, the train journey out to Casula had a tinge of the surreal. It was Spring, the natural time for *New Life*, the third "capsule" in the *Cybercultures: Sustained Release* program at the Powerhouse. Rolling through the balmy outer suburbs, you could feel the new life photosynthesising—an ongoing renewal of ancient, carbon-based forms. Inside the wonderfully cavernous gallery, the idea gets a twist; this life is new like a new car, a new TV. It's crawling around inside 'new media', conjured by artists and turned loose inside the computer.

*Technosphere III*, by British collaborators Jane Prophet, Gordon Selley and Mark Hurry, is one of the 'classics' of this decade-old microgenre. The plot is simple: you create an artificial creature from a set of off-the-shelf parts (head, body, mouth, eyes, wheels or legs) and then release it into the wilds of the *Technosphere*, a vast artificial savanna where thousands of others roam. Life for a technocreature consists of the bare essentials: foraging, eating and procreating. Death is as close as the pointy jaws of the nearest 'carnivore.' In its original online incarnation, circa 1996, the *Technosphere* remained invisible; the system sent out regular emails detailing the artificial life of your cartoon creation. In this newer off-line version, we can follow the creature in real time, watch it shuttling around the plains meeting, eating and having sex with passers-by. This is life in 3D, with hardware acceleration; sharp-edged and fast-paced. Like a game of *Quake*.

Jon McCormack's *Eden* is a more restrained and complex artificial ecosystem. McCormack seems to be moving away from the lush 3D aesthetic of works such as *Turbulence*; *Eden*'s visual surface is simple to the point of being diagrammatic. Flickering discs move through a flat matrix of cells, foraging on lichen-like patches of 'food'; every now and then one of them 'sings' an abstract refrain. Like many such works, *Eden* gets interesting in the longer term, as these artificial organisms adapt to each other and their environment. Equipped



Jon McCormack, *Eden*.

with virtual hearing, their behaviour becomes linked to sound—organisms sing to attract a mate, or (altruistically) announce the presence of food. While this sounds like an experiment in cyberbiology, it's also a manifestation of McCormack's reflective nature philosophy—in particular a concern about the human need to experience 'nature', and the gradual erosion of living environments in favour of their simulations. In this sense the work's title is highly

ambiguous—this little world is complex and engaging, pleasant to see and hear, and like that fabled garden, it's whole, contained and ordered. On the other hand it's the merest tracing of the complexity and vitality of a real ecosystem, and it won't grow us food or generate oxygen; it's a kind of uninhabitable Eden.

Anita Kocsis' *Neonverte* is an electronic garden in a quite different form. Clusters of flickering LEDs line the walls of a darkened

space, leading towards a video-projected image. An abstract, low-fi soundtrack meshes with the stuttering 3D wireframes of the video. Layers of meshed trees and flowers scroll by, a bird is frozen on a branch; the virtual space is discontinuous, dissolving into flashing pixel-grids and chunky texture-maps. There is a kind of poetry of digital degradation at work here which sits well with the idea of the garden; Kocsis has generated an electronic mulch which folds familiar nature imagery in with the blank, abject surfaces of wireframe 3D. The technical means are simple enough—no Artificial Life programming here, or complex interactivity—but the result is remarkably poignant.

In *Neonverte* pixels seem to decay and sprout; so too in Kat Mew's *Muto*, an interactive which plays out the fusion of biological matter and digital code. Like *Neonverte*, *Muto* does without the A-life processes of *Technosphere* and *Eden*; and this seems to leave more space for aesthetic invention. *Muto* runs in a circular domain, like the view down a microscope. Jittery animation loops slide through 5 elemental domains; cellular blobs fuse, clumps of code shed pixellated numerals; Steve Law's soundtrack is all funky bleeps. While this cyber-bio mix-up is a familiar story, what marks *Muto* out is attention to detail: Mew's animation in particular is intricate and energetic. Its presentation at the Powerhouse matched that level of detail, with video projected onto a weather balloon, wrapping perfectly around to push *Muto*'s disc-world into a gently swaying, glowing sphere.

If biodiversity is important, perhaps cyberbiodiversity is too. *New Life* presented an enjoyable balance of approaches, and a mixture of technical and aesthetic concerns. While this stuff is hardly "new life", it offers imaginings, proposals, for how life and technology might come together—and in that sense diversity is crucial.

New Life. *Cybercultures: Sustained Release*, curator Kathy Cleland; *Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Casula, September 30-November 12*.

## Onlining the documentary

Australian filmmakers and interactive media artists interested in challenging traditional forms of documentary can now apply for up to \$100,000 to produce an online project. The Australian Film Commission recently established an initiative with the ABC to encourage documentary projects that "explore the online environment in innovative, challenging and original ways." Up to 4 successful works will be selected for production and housed on ABC ONLINE.

The initiative provides a vital space for Australian cultural content at a time when the Internet is primarily a site for commercial transactions, says the manager of co-production at ABC New Media. With the online documentary genre still in its infancy, Domenic Friguglietti says it's an opportune time to dedicate web space for the development and inclusion of Australian rather than North American cultural material.

Peter Kaufmann, project manager at the AFC, hopes this initiative will encourage filmmakers to redefine the boundaries of conven-

tional documentary. The fund also provides a unique scope for documentaries to be instantly available to an international audience. Audiences can also have the opportunity to respond and engage in an intimate and idiosyncratic way with the content of the online works, making their own contributions. Kaufmann says the AFC definitely isn't looking to provide conventional documentaries with an alternative delivery and marketing system via the online environment, but is interested in new and radical approaches that explore what is possible within the documentary genre.

Recent Australian examples of the form include a chronicle of the life and work of artist Russell Drysdale compiled by the ABC and the National Gallery of Australia ([www.abc.net.au/arts.drysdale](http://www.abc.net.au/arts.drysdale)), a work by Carolena Helderma on personal stories of HIV ([www.hivaid.webcentral.com.au](http://www.hivaid.webcentral.com.au)) and *Fools Paradise*, a history of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival documented by Peter Milne and produced by the ABC and the

Performing Arts Museum ([www.abc.net.au/arts/fools](http://www.abc.net.au/arts/fools)). See also *Sharkfeed* by John Grech and Matthew Leonard ([www.abc.net.au/sharkfeed/index.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/sharkfeed/index.htm)), an exploration of the social and cultural after-effects of Sydney's 1960 Graeme Thorne kidnapping. (See Dean Kiley's response to the work in *Working the Screen*, page 3, and the authors' account on page 26 of *OnScreen* both in *RealTime* 38, August-September, 2000).

Kaufmann says these should not necessarily be seen as indicative of the kind of projects the AFC will produce, but rather as examples of the possibilities of the form. Filmmakers and new media artists often ask what type of online documentaries the AFC might fund, but besides limiting the content to material based on fact, Kaufmann prefers not to offer prescriptions and hopes people will design and assemble their own unique aesthetic.

Application forms and detailed guidelines can be found on the AFC website [www.afc.gov.au](http://www.afc.gov.au)

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





# Literature for a new medium

Adrian Miles interviews Scott Rettberg

Writers and new media authors appear to be well served by 2 organisations with ambitions to foster all aspects of electronic literature—the trAce writing community based in Nottingham and the more recent Electronic Literature Organization (ELO). Recently the ELO announced 2 new \$US10,000 prizes for Electronic Fiction and Poetry in the first annual Electronic Literature Awards.

While notionally based in Chicago, the ELO (yes, they've heard all the jokes) has an ambitious international mission to "promote and facilitate the writing, publishing, and reading of electronic literature." Scott Rettberg is Executive Director of the ELO ([www.eliterature.org](http://www.eliterature.org)) and co-author of the hypertext fiction *The Unknown* ([www.unknownhypertext.com/](http://www.unknownhypertext.com/)), which won the first trAce international hypertext writing prize.

## trAce and ELO

trAce ([www.trace.ntu.ac.uk/](http://www.trace.ntu.ac.uk/)) is already well known in Australia, with Sydney writer Bernard Cohen a former writer in residence, a visit to the Adelaide Festival by trAce director Sue Thomas, and Alan Sondheim (a former trAce writer-in-residence) currently at the Australian National University. In what ways does the ELO replicate the activities of an organisation like trAce, and how does it differ?

Both trAce and ELO are focused on the expansion of the literary use of electronic media and both have an international focus. Both have very valuable web resources which are hubs for our community and for showcasing electronic literature, and both organisations are attempting to sponsor international electronic literature prizes.

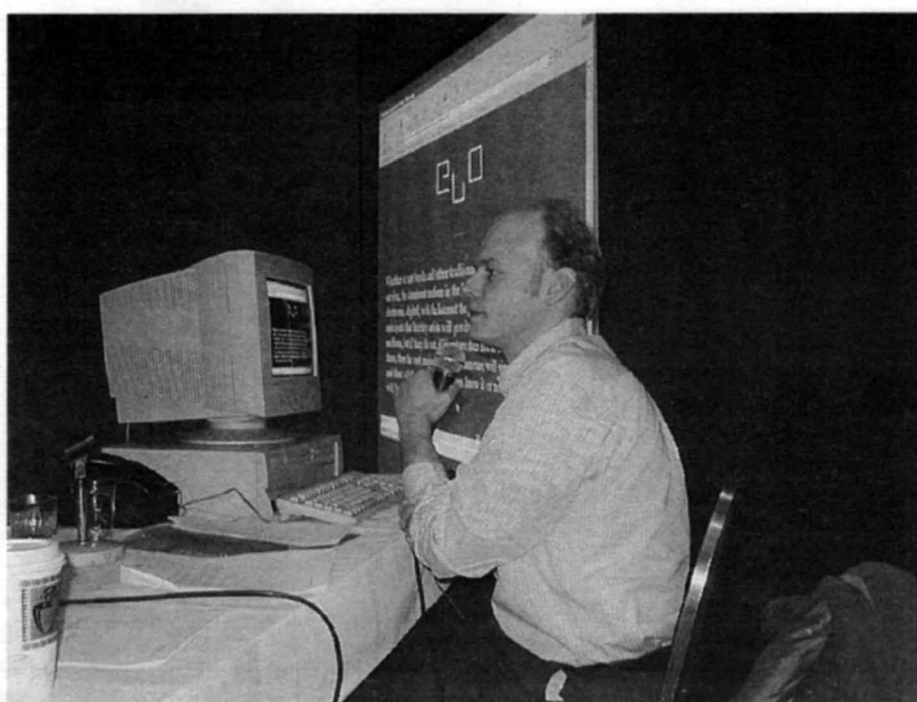
One obvious difference between the two is that trAce has both an international focus and a local base in Nottingham and ELO has an international focus and more of a national base in the US. We're as active in New York, San Francisco and Seattle as we are in Chicago, and during these early stages of our activity, we're intensely focused on raising awareness of electronic literature in major US population centres. We're holding a variety of readings and other events, and we're facilitating more ongoing discussion of both the economic and artistic issues involved in electronic literature. We're acting both on the web and in person. As wired as we are, there's still no better way to draw people into the field than live interaction. Many of our programs are focused on facilitating that person-to-person interaction. We're focused on making this a bigger tent, and neophytes are welcome.

The other principle difference between trAce and ELO is that we're as interested in helping to develop new distribution models and markets for electronic literature as we are in fostering its artistic growth. So though we're most interested in forms of literature like hypertext fiction, kinetic poetry and interactive drama—forms designed specifically for the electronic media, that use the computer to do things which can't be done in print—we're also focusing attention on what's going on in electronic publishing. It's a tremendously exciting time in that arena. As a writer, I'd ultimately like to see publishing models that enable electronic writers to support themselves through their work.

## Funding and independence

Most cultural support in Australia is state funded in some manner. How is ELO funded and how you ensure your independence?

The state of public funding for the Arts in the US is quite dismal. Recently the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities have both been whittled to shadows of what they once were. I consider this a national disgrace, but regardless, to develop the kind of programs that we're try-



Scott Rettberg

ing to pull off, we clearly couldn't rely on public funding from the federal government here. Instead, we're reaching out to corporations, foundations, and individuals. Many internet and technology companies in the US have done quite well in the internet boom (even after the NASDAQ crash), and we're asking them to help fulfill the cultural responsibility that our government will not. It's a tough pitch of course, but many of these companies were founded and are led by people who do have something of a visionary impulse, who do want to better the world through technology. Though pure greed is quite rampant in the dot com universe, individuals and companies within the internet sector have not entirely lost sight of the idea that the internet is a global village, one which should have art and culture as well as a marketplace. Even more important to our fundraising strategy is giving from individuals. More than half of our seed money came from individual gifts, and I'm hopeful that our operating budget will also reflect that kind of grass-roots support.

As the founder of the organisation, I decided early on that the ELO will remain independent of the prerogatives of any single corporate entity or government institution. Our funding comes from a variety of sources. Additionally, we have three clearly separated boards—a board of directors, of internet industry advisors and of literary advisors. When they are funded, our prizes will be judged by the international board of literary advisors, who are not beholden in their judgment to either the board of directors or to our corporate sponsors. All this has made funding the organisation more difficult than it may have otherwise been, but that integrity is worth the hassles it entails.

## The prizes

The ELO has announced a series of major electronic literature prizes for 2001. Could you describe what genres of electronic literature will be eligible?

At this stage the prizes are for Fiction and Poetry but we hope to eventually include Drama, Creative Non-Fiction and Children's Literature. The main criteria for judging the competition will be the innovative use of electronic techniques and the literary quality of the work. The fiction competition will be judged by Larry McCaffery, author of *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction*, and *After Yesterday's Crash: The Avant Pop Anthology*. Heather McHugh, Chancellor of the Academy of

American Poets and author of *Hinge & Sign* and *The Father of the Predicaments*, will judge the poetry competition.

We're trying to focus the prizes on extending and enhancing the literary tradition, endowing them with both the monetary weight and the prestige of something like a Booker Prize or a National Book Award. We hope to raise the bar for electronic literature. We want the best writers and artists in our culture(s) working in the realm of electronic literature, and one of the best ways to do that is to sponsor a series of prizes that will in effect give the winners more time to work on new projects.

By putting together an international board of literary advisors including not only renowned experts on electronic literature, such as Sue Thomas, Michael Joyce, and Takayuki Tatsumi, but also print writers such as TC Boyle and George Plimpton, and leading critics and publishers from both the print and electronic side of things, we're seeking a different level of engagement from the culture as a whole. The prizes should do a great deal to validate the field, and bring more people into the tent of electronic literature.

## What is electronic literature?

An interesting issue being discussed in the electronic literature and hypertext communities is just what constitutes electronic literature. For example does the ELO want, or see any need, to distinguish between print based poetry, the same poetry presented electronically (for instance via a web page), or poetry that can only be presented electronically?

These distinctions are tough to make, but our focus is on aiding and publicising the development of literary works which utilise the electronic media to accomplish things that could not be done in print. I'm a big book reader, and treasure the print form, but there are already organisations working to support literature in print. Electronic literature is the babe in the woods—it's what needs our help right now. Furthermore, it's the way that literature is going to reach a generation of readers who are more accustomed to surfing the web than they are to picking up a book. So most of my hopes and fears for literature in general are tied up in the idea that without some particularly literary innovation in the electronic media, the internet will move ahead without a literature native to it. Such a failure would be an horrendous missed opportunity. We don't want to see what happened to television happen to the web.

## The meaning of Stephen King's e-book

Electronic literature seems to be entering the dot com universe with the success of things like Stephen King's recent offering. Do you see this as something good for the future of electronic literature?

Yes, I do. Even though King's e-book was essentially just a print novella made available for download, it served as proof-of-concept for the whole field of electronic publishing. The people, in effect, have spoken, and their overwhelming message to publishers was "we will and do read off our screens." For years, we suffered the likes of Sven Birkerts (*The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, London, Faber & Faber, 1996) jawing on about how the electronic media is the end of literature. Then King comes along, and suddenly the nature of the discourse changes—electronic publishing just may be the future of the book, rather than its end.

The other tremendously important aspect of the King e-book is that it is actually necessitating that publishers re-examine their own publishing models and royalty structures. If we're able to remove the costs of printing, binding, shipping, warehousing and pulping the artifact, we're able to produce literature at a lower cost to publishers. As in King's case, a higher percentage of the profits should go to the writers, and a great deal of savings should be passed on to the readers. Even after constructing this more equitable model and passing on the savings, publishers will be able to reap higher profits as well. In my view, even pure print publishers will benefit. With the simultaneous evolution of print-on-demand technology, more books should be available in print and electronic format, as well as the literature that is created and designed for the electronic media.

## The future

In 5 years time what would you like the ELO to have achieved? What would be different?

Wow, that's a tough one. Firstly, I hope that ELO is still around. Even accomplishing that is not going to be easy. Secondly, I hope that as many people spend as much time reading the web as they spend now playing DOOM. Thirdly, I hope that the international community of which you and I are a part will have expanded and will include many of the most talented writers and artists of our generation. Lastly, I hope that there is a sustainable market for the work that they produce.

Right now, when I mention electronic literature, people say, "Isn't that a contradiction in terms?" Five years from now, I'd like people to be able to introduce themselves as electronic authors, and to have that mean that they keep bread on the table by making great art happen on the internet.

When can we expect to see the ELO and The Unknown in Australia?

We're hoping to line up an International Day of Readings next year for ELO, and would love Australia to be represented in that. As far as *The Unknown*, we're waiting by the phone. We've encountered many Australians on our travels, and you folks celebrate in the style to which we are accustomed. Line us up some readings, Adrian. We'd love to come out there next year to tour the continent.

This is an edited version of an email interview with Scott Rettberg, Executive Director of the Electronic Literature Organisation, Chicago, USA.



# Building a laboratory for the mainstage

Dickon Oxenburgh talks with Rosalba Clemente

In her introduction to the 2001 season of the State Theatre Company, artistic director Rosalba Clemente emphasises that the basis of great theatre is great writing. Dickon Oxenburgh talks to her about the season, the Faulding On Site Theatre Laboratory and how Clemente herself fits in as a storyteller.

Well I fit in as a director and as an actor really—a channel through which the story is manifested in 3-dimensional space, trying always to stay as true as possible to the voice of the writer but bringing my own interpretation either as a director or actor. The basis of great theatre is great writing doubled with great performance, I mean what else is there?

Clemente prefers a minimalist approach, a matter of substance over style.

What I'm intrigued with is the central ideas, the things that make the whole text pulse, bring the greatest performers to that centre so that they can execute those ideas in 3-dimensional space with the audience, and then the rest is wrapping, as far I'm concerned. If you get that centre absolutely right, then the wrapping is just wrapping...and nothing more.

While 2000 was her debut season as Artistic Director of the company, the direction it took was not entirely of her own making.

2001 feels like (it will be) my first year in a way; 2000 was a year of consolidation, there were some things to inherit. Next year looks very fresh to me and it's much more a reflection of the direction I want the company to head in. I'm interested in working with more contemporary texts. I do love the classics but I kind of think that the classics get done an awful lot and unless you do a radical interpretation that makes them relevant to a modern day audience then I don't really see much point in revisiting them. So I've gone deliberately for new, contemporary work.



Rosalba Clemente

Tobin Lush

This is a vaguely incongruous moment, given that Clemente is conducting the interview in full Elizabethan costume on a rehearsal break from playing Katrina in the company's final show of the 2000 season—The Taming of The Shrew! But this kind of synergy is all a part of the balancing act of the actor/director.

We should be doing the known pieces—we need those to reflect on the past...to give us an understanding of who we are in the present, or who we might become in the future...but what's also important for state theatre companies is a more critical role in being parent bodies for more innovative work within the country and that's why I've set up the (Faulding On Site) Theatre Lab. It's a way of bringing more artists into the central life of the company...for the company to become the parent body to innovation...new Australian work, works that have a uniquely Australian flavour.

When Clemente created the Lab this year with no support from funding bodies she was forced to be "ingenious." She was able to transfer money earmarked for an associate director's position and fund a small new writing program. At present Chris Drummond and Susan Rogers are adapting Robert Dessaix's novel Night Letters and Fiona Sprott (Often I find I am Naked) is feeling her way through the preliminary stages of a new play Drowning In My Ocean of You, while Andrew Bovell's Holy Day, the subject of which Rosalba calls "white shame in a black land", premieres in the 2001 season.

All the works in the onsite laboratory are being led and visioned by South Australian artists, because I think it's also part of my job to re-empower the local artists as well as weave into the national fabric of theatre culture, so there are three plays in evolution at the moment.

Overall the 2001 season promises some strong text choices with a 4/5 balance of Australian and international content. The season features a thoughtful blend of crowd pleasers including: David Williamson's Third World Blues, David Holman's The Small Poppies, Noel Coward's Design for Living and the long awaited Art by Yasmina Reza; with some social frisson in Killer Joe by Tracy Letts, Life After George by Hattie Rayson and Holy Day by Andrew Bovell. Clemente expands on a couple of works in the 2001 program new to Australian audiences:

House Amongst The Stars is by Michel Tremblay; he's an icon amongst French-Canadian writers and I see him as a modern day Chekhov and he's rarely been produced here. What I find intriguing about his plays is they're not based on plot, but rather the psychic landscape—quite spiritual works actually—dealing with ordinary people...people who are outsiders (be it socio-economic or sexual) to their world.

The Dying Gaul by a wonderful writer, Craig Lucas, is a dynamic play looking at the whole notion of the 'golden triangle' that everyone is somehow trying to enter and that youth is particularly obsessed with, and that in my time I have been obsessed with too. Those guys at the top, if only we could all get there then everything would be wonderful—if only...Hollywood is such a representation of that golden triangle to the western world, all the money, all the fame, all the myths that are perpetuated in that very specific place in America and how that impinges on the rest of the world and really what lies at the centre of it is a whole lot of illusion, a whole lot of myths, including romantic love and that money makes your life somehow okay...I think that's an important play, for all those reasons, and I think it will speak to a modern audience. I've looked at all the 2001 season plays in that light—what's going to talk to people today.

## An object lesson: Margaret Cameron's BANG!

Jonathan Marshall

On a recent CD slick, Sascha Kösch observed that minimalism and its traces "no longer are a part of what can be imagined as a cultural process, they are its value, its measuring, its money, rules, laws, content, communication..." (clicks + cuts, mille plateau, 2000). The high Modernist process of employing the minimal as a door onto the expansiveness of the divine has been overtaken by Postmodernist avant-garde approaches in which focusing on the minutiae of creating an art work renders it strangely material and self-referential. Unlike Malevich's highly religious blocks of painted colour and black lines, performance leaves one with the space of performance itself, the wiring of the lighting, the flesh of the body.

It is this spiritual-spatial ambivalence within minimalism and performativity that lent Margaret Cameron's latest work in progress—BANG! A critical fiction!—an intriguing, seductive, but also vaguely unsatisfying character. Cameron drew on a wide range of materials to create BANG!, but they fundamentally revolved around an unadorned, minimalist tendency to reduce symbols to their overt, physical/performative forms.

At the centre of Cameron's performance was a space, a venue or installation, a mini-domestic world inhabited by an almost magical chest of drawers. In the words of Gaston Bachelard (whom Cameron quotes in her introduction to the script) the drawers are "an organ of a secret psychological life" (The Poetics of Space), an invitation to enter an immaterial, rich internal space.

The chest of drawers acted most obviously as a chest of drawers, but also as a suggestive, punctuating light-source, a horse, a train, a chair, and so

on. Throughout these changes however it stayed very clearly a chest of drawers. Cameron's ethos and style of address to the audience remained strongly de-naturalising and self-aware.

In classically Surrealist terms, one could describe the performance as the dream of a series of domestic objects: drawers, lamp and stereo. Cameron even mused whether it was she who owned the chest of drawers or vice versa. Such a description fails to do justice to the almost brutally simple design however, and the harsh, overtly manipulated, uncoloured lighting. A thwarted dream, or perhaps not a dream at all. Once again, we are left with the minutiae of performance vividly present in the mind of the audience and the performer: drawers, lamp, stereo.

Cameron's self-consciously theatrical work was not just 'about performance' though. The text overflowed with opportunities for verbal joking and philosophic meanderings. The Western was evoked as both a technique and an almost Existentialist problem. Cameron confessed to the audience that she felt her laconic, cowboy drawl authorised her ability to speak of such issues. ("You know the beauty about talkin' lahk this is that you can repeat yerself—an' some things need repeatin'!") Similarly the idea of the loner on the plain, dogged by a shadow here both literal and metaphorical, provided the central personal dilemma for her characterisation.

Even so, the audience was not encouraged to imagine empty plains stretching out behind Cameron as she spoke. On the contrary, she forced us to quite literally face the wall by addressing her shadow. ("You sure are a cowardly thang,



Margaret Cameron

Sarah Murray

Lonesome!") Rather than evoking an inner life, this tended to highlight the outward aspects of the production. Minimalism as sheer minimalism. Once again, one is left with the object *qua* object, minimal and pure.

While much of Cameron's performance touched on generic Western themes—loneliness, the search for self in the face of an expansive space without clear boundaries, an almost pathological desire for travel and change—her technique

ensured that these spiritual elements remained curtailed by the minimalism of her own staging. She constantly invited the audience to think beyond (or through) the space of the performance, while simultaneously frustrating such emotional-spatial displacements. There was therefore more than a little 'cruelty' underlying Cameron's otherwise droll, comic persona.

As Kösch's observation suggests, this separation between the materials of minimalism and that which they evoke is perhaps false. The minimal—the object *qua* object—is not so much a symbol or a process, it is the logic of cultural exchange and reality itself. Margaret Cameron's objects and gestures are not fetishistic or generic because they refer to another reality such as the dream world of the psyche; they are fetishistic because *reality itself* is composed of such exchanges. Cameron's character purchased neither a chest of drawers, nor a symbol, but the rich symbolism, internal life and contradictions of domesticity itself. BANG! demonstrates how in buying lifestyles, we have rendered the materials and commodities of minimalism as maximal.

BANG! A critical fiction! devised, performed and designed by Margaret Cameron, La Mama, Melbourne, September 20-October 1.

clicks + cuts (mille plateau, 2000) was a major source for Franc Tetaz's sound design for Lucy Guerin's The Ends of Things, Melbourne International Festival of Arts (see page 8).



# Terrapin does terror

Sue Moss

Night. Bushland. A bevy of butterflies. A woman alone. A stalled car and a malfunctioning mobile phone. These opening images establish the territory for an exploration of a mind snared by fear in Terrapin Theatre's production *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*.

Carla (Kirsty Grierson) is stranded by the roadside. A lone butterfly circles. Ben Sibson's sound-score evokes terror for a vulnerable mind—frog calls, the frenetic punch into a keypad, tyres on gravel and yahoo voices. Within minutes Carla's familiar trajectory of space and time is dissipated. Her journey into the violence and blind spots of memory begins.

*The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, based on a text by Noëlle Janaczewska, exploits the domain of internalised fear. Leigh Carmichael and Matt Newton's visual montage of newspaper headlines and bold typefaces announce disappearance and violation. They spill across and lacerate the performance space. Carla's twin sister, Bridie, disappeared when she was 8 years old. Much of Carla's journey revolves around the mystery of this disappearance and the hauntings of loss, guilt, cruelty and desire.

The intricacy and layering of Carla's memory are enhanced by Julia Christie's impressive stage design. A white cinematic frame encloses the stage space. When the scrim lifts to reveal Carla's marionette family of Mum, Dad, and Auntie V, we peer into a 3-dimensional family scene that resembles a museum diorama.

Marionettes fascinate with the human qualities they imbue and the responses they invoke. Puppeteers Philip Mitchell, Gavin Sainsbury and Michael O'Donaghue demonstrate a panoply of

skills in this technically challenging form. Mum, Dad and Auntie V are manipulative and malevolent. Mum tinkers with her precious bone china while jerkin-clad Dad gropes and strokes temptress Auntie V who pouts, seduces and allows. We laugh, but this claustrophobic triad is all too familiar.

Fragments of Mum's warped voice, redolent with nastiness, intone children's stories and trigger Carla's fear in the tremulous dark. It is the language of growling and snatching creatures that eat little girls. "Can you bear them?" Brothers Grimm stories in the wrong mouths become a weapon, a training ground for internalised terror and control.

We witness the family slide show: black and white images of beach holidays, bush scenes and two little girls—Carla and Bridie. Family snaps. The family snaps.

Huddles of memory disperse and coalesce. Carla's landscape of the mind devolves around shapes, echoes and whispers. Dad sweeps Autumn leaves—the curled artifacts of season—accompanied by a tenuous atonal piano. Carla, walking over old ground uncovers a hole and unearths a red dress.

The marionette sister Bridie is engaging, a constant visitor to Carla's disjointed memory. In a beautifully nuanced scene Carla pushes Bridie on a swing. Her red dress flashes and soars. This is juxtaposed with Carla's guilt at abandoning Bridie to Mum's enraged punishment after a piece of prized bone china is smashed. Carla interacts with a Bridie look-a-like doll revealing the slip-page between affection and malice as she manipulates and attempts to bend the doll to her will.

All the family members, through their exclu-



The Dark at the Top of the Stairs

Eddi Safarik

sions and cruelties are implicated in the mystery of Bridie's disappearance. A child's game of doctor and patient terminates with the dramatic removal of Bridie's entrails by Carla playing the doctor. Bridie's limp form remains hollowed out and sepulchral.

Carla's fear revolves around elements of violation by family, strangers and microbes. In a dramatic lighting shift, Philip Lethlean swathes the stage in red. Carla, in a Calcutta bar, is con-

fronted by the Man (Michael O'Donaghue), as slimy and relentless as the larval hookworms' corporeal invasion he lasciviously describes.

Disorientation, drugs and desire implode across the cartography of Carla's mind. She is seduced by an android Shiva. A lone butterfly palpates like a memory against an X-ray image of her chest cavity. The Man assists Carla to excise a fluttering butterfly—embodied fear—from her stomach.

*The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* is a complex production. Director Jessica Wilson successfully translates Janaczewska's poetic prose into images for puppetry *that's not for kids*. The interaction of performers, marionettes and cinematic sequences, often screened in powerful overlays of video and stills, demonstrates the calibre of artists collaborating with Terrapin.

The final video scene of Mum and Dad passively watching television blanks out Carla's question about Bridie's disappearance. Janaczewska uncompromisingly situates the family d(i)o(r)ama as both source and site of disaffection and fear. Although Carla descends the stairs into the light, familial denial haunts the vellum of memory.

*The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, Terrapin Theatre, director Jessica Wilson, writer Noëlle Janaczewska, designer Julia Christie, composer Ben Sibson, lighting designer Philip Lethlean, performer Carla Kirsty Grierson; Peacock Theatre, Hobart, Tasmania, September 8-November 18.

# Cyborgs vs Goddesses

Shane Rowlands

Juggling its roles as a platform for community arts/development work and as a launch pad for emerging physical theatre performers, Brisbane's Vulcana Women's Circus has gone from strength to strength during the last 6 years. Vulcana's reputation for celebrating women's communal strength and daring in high-energy and witty circus productions was recognised in July when the company was offered a permanent home and training space in the Brisbane Powerhouse's Stores Studio.

Within 4 months, the benefits afforded by a full-time tenancy were evident in Vulcana's annual community show. Writer-dramaturg and guest director Therese Collie worked with 18 performers for 3 months to create this year's circus theatre extravaganza, *I'd Rather Be A Cyborg Than A Goddess*, which took quantum leaps on a number of fronts. The depth, diversity and overall skill in executing

tricks has gone through the roof and the slick production values achieved by the 20-strong team of designers, operators, trainers and riggers set an all-time high. In comparison to past performances, this work had a clearer conceptual and narrative framework, which allowed the performers' physicality, tricks and routines to become more 'articulate.'

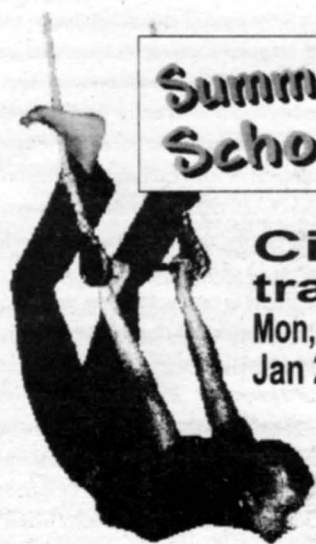
Looking at women's relationships with new technologies and ancient myths, the piece is staged as a computer game featuring 2 teams, the cyborgs and the goddesses. Each team is presented with a series of challenges in order to progress to the next level. Some of the many highlights include a cloudswinging "Goddess of Melanoma and Coconut Oil" surfing a giant tsunami (projection); a static trapeze scene in which 3 cyborgs attempt to reprogram a goddess; the double tissues routine in which the differences between automaton and

deity are hybridised; and Brisbane band Tulipan's evocative score and live soundscape (Laurie Anderson meets Lara Croft).

The amazing transformations promised by new (medical, scientific, electronic) technologies are parodied in a series of hokey magic acts, featuring a drag king magician, his bimbo Marilyn (Monroe), and an assistant who is dismembered (by swords, blades and a chainsaw) and "rebuilt by the magic of technology." Timing is crucial in delivering stand-up, but the energy and pace sagged in these scenes. Plotting also became confused towards the end with the magician suddenly claiming control of the entire game. Ultimately though, his all-powerful status (as well as the notion of male-dominated technology?) is sabotaged by Marilyn's masquerade as dumb blonde and the Bionic Woman's solo swinging trapeze finale.

While it's important that everyone gets to strut their stuff, it's now time for Vulcana to trust that they do not need to cram every single trick into the one show. Future productions of *I'd Rather Be A Cyborg Than A Goddess* are scheduled for northern NSW in March 2001 and the national circus festival. There are exciting opportunities for the troupe to continue developing this work, particularly in terms of strengthening performance skills and on-stage presence and also elaborating the relationships between gender, technology, techno-bodies, cosmic energies and physicality.

*I'd Rather Be A Cyborg Than A Goddess*, Vulcana Women's Circus, guest director-writer-dramaturg Therese Collie; Turbine Theatre, Brisbane Powerhouse, Queensland, November 7-11.



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# B-grade Alternalympics

Caitlin Newton-Broad

I'm walking through an eerie city evening that has been emptied of people by the Olympics' opening ceremony. Somewhere in the wormholes of space, most citizens have been captured by the televised spectacle of SPORT SPORT SPORT laced with a bit of heavy, complicated patriotic symbolism. After ingesting a hit of horse-riders and jellyfish through a pub window, I head off to the third season of *B-Grade Performance* at the Performance Space, to pay homage to all things bizarre, beautiful, fun and kitsch. What better night for it?

*B-Grade* has attracted a cult lustre, known for short, kinked performances assembled in a genuinely laid back fashion by Jeff Stein. It is the Alternalympics for making fun.

Despite the scary prospect of competing against "the nation's greatest cultural moment" there is a large group of people huddled at the Performance Space entrance. I can just make out a female figure parading up and down Cleveland Street (a main arterial route for Sydney) in her birthday suit! As I get closer I recognise Alicia Talbot, in very high heels, demonstrating her naked passion for the few cars that rev past. She has lashed a big sign to a tree, facing her flash-past audience—it says, "HONK, if you're interested in a long term relationship!" She beams into the oncoming traffic with a Fosters in one hand, hopeful as a button.

The first weekend of *B-Grade* was crowned "PORN meets KUNG FU" and heralded by a bluish Incredible Hulk humping a euphoric Miss Pants-Round-Her-Ankles Barbie. The tone was set.

This is only a partial record of an excellent event of 30 something acts got up on the smell of a tattered hanky and also an account of a performance phenomena that is original, base and immediate. These acts piss all over the tame Olympic fakery (see the trough of bad satire in Barrie Kosky's *There is No Need to Wake Up*—for NIDA). In response to the statement by Kosky on ABC TV's *The Arts Show* that theatre is in a terrible state, that there is no good work and that the Federal Government might consider cutting all arts funding to see what springs up—well—perhaps these artists are the truest, most vital indicators of what could happen...

Morgan Lewis pounces on us as we settle in the theatre. His sport-meets-art antics are well known but this piece of *Ring Mastery* is exceptional. The crowd is high and excited and ready to moan like Dirk Diggler and grunt like Jackie Chan. At Morgan's behest, we leap from our seats to perform Kung Fu on our neighbours and pash, pose and expose a bit of X-Rated to whoever we can tumble. Morgan elicits a number of extraordinary confessions from some very 'ordinary Australians' and as we all strain toward the sinners, we get hooked.



Alicia Talbot

Samuel James

To kick off the acts, Talbot emerges on stage, in evening wear to cover her earlier street exposure. In the theatre she delivers an equally desperate and edgy account of lovers' loyalty. "I will, with pleasure..." is the mantra of a woman with no defences and no humiliation-detector. Talbot's ability to lead us through our own Valley of the Shadow of Death so lightly makes the audience squirm with the familiar terror of loneliness.



Shauna Winram

Samuel James

Annabel Lines' *Foxy Lady* follows, parading in great strides into the circus ring, with Hendrix as her intro. Lines is a member of the incomparable Toy Death and this time she keeps her kids' toys close at hand. A tiny plastic guitar and a hula-hoop are commandeered into a strip/bitch routine that makes us glow with rock'n roll wonder.

Shauna Winram tells a story about Olympian libido and suicide. She delivers her rave in gum-leaf green Speedos, a large harmonica wedged between her legs, a pair of Susie O'Neill-style goggles and some Dunlops. Winram's candid presence and ability to keep a story rolling while completely tipping us over the edge, was stunning.

Trash Vaudeville played a hapless, bookish victim who drinks to excess. His tale of graduation from the bush to the backroom of a cheap porn studio was punctuated with spirited renditions of Shakespeare and slugs of whisky hidden in an ingenious bookshelf-cum-liquor cabinet disguise.

The amazing Edna (stage-name) undertook delicate surgery on Siamese twins—Mary and Josie—through a piano operation/concerto. This piece was the pinnacle of the *B-Grade* series for me. The performer wove together a compelling midnight logic about the difficult act of separation, drilling direct into our unconscious obsessions and superstitions, like watching a child perform metaphorical war upon the world. This surgical procedure enticed the mind to splits and twists. A postcard of Beethoven's hearing aids was placed where sheet music should be, then Edna, an accomplished pianist, played with occult eeriness and astute rationality.

Other tarnished treasures included: Rose Turtle and Chipta's *Dance of Duality* with their signature choreography and two glorious shadow puppets; a whole night of Frumpus' unseemly interludes; Gail Priest's aural orgasms; Version 1.0's pants-down for the corporate dollar and Father Christmas; Eric the Electric Dog; loud noises and chair stacking by Gary Butler and Robbie Avenaim; an exhumed post-Arrivalist' Holden fuck; a tentative love scene by Sam James; Hannah Furnage and Brian Fuata's Liz and Richard inspired *The Devil Made Me Do It*; Caca's shit eating special and much much more...

All in all *B-Grade* gave off its radiant, accursed glow for all the Sydney rats trawling the sewers for something substantial to experience. This season was a proper carnival for a city consumed by celebrity posturing and coated in a very thin veneer of amicability to disguise its rotten depths.

*B-Grade Performance*, curator Jeff Stein, Performance Space, Sydney, September 15-23.

*Scratch*, Urban Theatre Projects & Performance Space, Performance Space, Sydney, February 2-3. Enquiries: 02 96987235.

## Got an itch?

*Scratch* is an upcoming performance event designed to challenge a team of 4 to 5 artists, theorists, stand-up comedians and media people to rapidly generate a piece about up-to-the-minute debates or issues.

Inspired by "a desire to see performance with guts" rather than work that "looks great but needs more development", *Scratch* is a joint production between Urban Theatre Projects and Performance Space where the first of these events takes place in February.

Harley Stumm, manager of UTP says *Scratch* offers experienced and emerging artists as well as interesting non-artists from diverse backgrounds the chance to work collaboratively. Stumm hopes the performances will connect

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six short sharp acts  
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# The plight of the new

Keith Gallasch

American director and academic Richard Schechner berated an audience of performers and scholars at a performance studies conference in New York University in 1999 for seeing themselves as radically at work on the margins of society and the arts. Wrong metaphor, he said, it's a dated avant garde notion. You're at the centre, he railed, not the edge, the centre! But you are in the cracks, in the dips, the troughs in the centre of the cultural landscape. I can't recall his exact words. Nor could he. As soon as he finished speaking he declared, that was great, did anyone record it? No one had. But the idea stuck.

Mainstage theatre in Australia is notoriously conservative, as are most of the reviewers who celebrate it, and most of the audiences who enjoy it. But occasionally the dry surface cracks and an alien flower blooms. At The Sydney Theatre Company Michael Gow as a director had a couple of interesting New Stages seasons in Wharf 2 (including a rare glimpse of Botho Strauss' *Time and the Room*). Wayne Harrison unleashed Barrie Kosky on subscribers with Molière's *Tartuffe* and O'Neill's *Mourning becomes Elektra*. Robyn Nevin sustained the Kosky connection with Seneca's *Oedipus*, added Jenny Kemp's production of Joanna Murray-Smith's *Nightfall* to her 2000 season, and committed herself to new Australian work and innovative overseas plays, English and German, in the *Blueprints* program, created by Associate Directors Wesley Enoch and Benedict Andrews in Wharf 2, as well as the work of those 2 on the company's main stages. The extent to which this rare flower will be able to continue to bloom and multiply must be in some doubt given Nevin's very public disappointment (voiced in her 2000 Philip Parsons Lecture) with the financial outcome of the Nugent report for state theatre companies. Nevin had hoped for increased funds that would guarantee continuity and development of the *Blueprints* program. The STC was given \$63,504, nothing like the hoped for \$200,000. In the past the STC's forays into experimentation have seemed just that—innovative works now and then in Wharf 2, occasional artistically inventive aberrations on the mainstage. Here was an opportunity for sustained research and development. What now? More fundraising? Meanwhile the Melbourne Theatre Company has put its developmental wing on hold, while the State Theatre Company of South Australia has initiated its own with some help from sponsorship.

Elsewhere in the cultural landscape the situation is dire rather than difficult—artists working on a project to project basis in performance, physical theatre and multimedia can barely drag themselves from the cracks, dips and troughs that deepen as funding is spread thin and recurs less and less frequently. The Australia Council's Vision Days in August appeared to be the first sign that it was going to act on its promise that post-Nugent it would turn its attention from the financial plight of the major performing arts organisations to the needs of the rest of the arts. Commit yourself now to reading the Vision Days Discussion Draft and having your say (see page 9). Not surprisingly, Australia's innovative and widely travelled performance community is less than impressed with the anxieties of state theatre companies and their like. However, the cultural health of the country requires innovation at every level.

The transparency and grim, fable-like quality of Benedict Andrews' intensely physical version of Marivaux's *La Dispute* attracted big audiences to Wharf 2 for the Sydney Theatre Company. His latest production, *Attempts on Her Life* by British playwright Martin Crimp was playing to somewhat smaller but significantly young houses when I saw it. The tone of *Sydney Morning Herald* reviewer Bryce Hallet was non-plussed and finally dismissive. As I recall it, he seemed to be unable to get a grip on a play without plot or characters and therefore experienced a lack of depth. Doubtless he missed out on the richness of the surfaces of the play and Andrews' production. Without the familiar hooks of plot and character, a theatre audience unused to



Sydney Theatre Company, *Attempts on Her Life*

Tracey Schramm

simply looking (as they might at a painting) or letting themselves pay a different kind of attention to words (as to music), can find work like Crimp's quite alien. Of course in contemporary performance (as witnessed at Sydney's Performance Space or at Adelaide Festivals) such relaxed, patient attentiveness is a given, as is recognition of the insights (and clichés) of postmodernity. Surface is a pleasure, depth is a lie, and 'the human condition' is a cliché which prevents you from seeing what others are really like. The theatre of the conventional play has come late to the postmodern, ignored it really, and thank goodness many would say. That's a pity, because it means that a play like *Attempts on Her Life* will, for a large audience, go missing in Australia, falling into the cracks with Pirandello, Handke, Beckett.

Aleks Sierz, *RealTime's* London performance correspondent, regards Crimp highly and sees him as a great influence on young writers such as the late Sarah Kane (see page 4), Mark Ravenhill and David Greig. Crimp belongs to a slightly older generation than the playwrights whose debuts happened after 1990 and who are central to Sierz' *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (Faber and Faber, forthcoming 2001). In his book Sierz writes:

*In March 1997, [at the] Royal Court... Attempts on Her Life was a postmodern extravaganza which could be read as a series of provocative suggestions for creating a new kind of theatre. The recipe was: subvert the idea of a coherent character; turn scenes into flexible scenarios; substitute brief messages or poetic clusters for text; mix clever dialogue with brutal images; stage the show as an art installation. The playwright doesn't specify who says which lines, but Tim Albery's production brought out the acuity and humour of Crimp's writing, with its characteristic irony, and its pointed comments on the pointlessness of searching for a point.*

*Attempts on Her Life* is a performance text (and a very good read on the page; Faber & Faber, London, 1997); it is open, offering director and actors many choices. There are no characters, the dialogue is not allocated to particular speakers, there are a series of scenes that resonate with each other rather than follow any obvious logic (though of course they do). Crimp offers only these instructions:

*This is a piece for a company of actors whose composition should reflect the composition of the world.*

*Let each scenario in words—the dialogue—unfold against a distinct world—a design—which best exposes its irony.*

Design is not specified in any way, that is the words are cut free from character and place—they float, signifiers waiting for director/actors/designers

to find them referents. As soon as it is decided how many players there will be and who will speak which words, then another text emerges. As in many a performance text, the language is inclined to the poetic, the language of litany and reverie (requiring that other attentiveness) and it is pointedly about language (conversation, advertising, racism, politics, theory, reviewing and translation). It is also about there not being a point—of course there will be one, or more, but which ones and why do they seem to contradict each other? As in Susan Sontag's famous essay "Against Interpretation", there's a concern that the audience have an experience that can't be immediately labelled 'theme' and ascribed 'depth'; in other words, are the audience really seeing and hearing what is before them—the rich surface of things? To witness such openness engaged with by a state theatre company is a singular pleasure. The opportunity to see a play you only ever expected to read about is very special.

You enter Wharf 2 to see a big metallic box of a set, simply an object in which 8 young performers are gathered, a DJ among them, cross-legged on the floor with his equipment. At the back and high up, a large LED readout pulses its red messages. A thin red line of laser light crosses the front of the stage at chest height, an inexplicable barrier between actors and audience. A series of answer-phone messages greets us before the house lights dim, a worrying mix of abuse, lover's apology, conspiracy, parental anxiety, and anger from someone fearing that Anne has already suicided. How can all these calls be directed to one and the same person? That's where the play starts, and it's where it will end, in the construction of Anne, someone who never appears on stage, someone who is hard to put together, apparently constituted of contradictions. It's similar in some ways to the experience of meeting someone who has been left by a lover or a son or daughter, and discovered that this person was someone they thought they knew, but never did.

However, it's not as straightforward as that, because Anne appears to be improvised into being in a collective invention which is grimly and theatrically fascinating throughout. Operating en masse or alone, in duos and trios, the performers enter a netherworld of creation, sometimes furiously, sometimes languidly, with a mix of youthful moodiness (evocative of the contemporary fashion photography it parodies here and embraces there) and obsessiveness—the persistence with which Anne is constructed whatever the contradictions:

*— Takes Anne's tear-stained face between his hands like a precious chalice.*

*— Or a rugby-football.*

*— Like a precious chalice or as you say a rugby-football before a drop kick he takes Anne's angry tear-stained face between his hands.*

Or:

*—I don't think so. I don't think Anya screams. I don't think she breaks down and scratches her cheeks like something from an ancient tragedy. I think her eyes blaze. I think she advances towards the camera and begins to curse.*

*Attempts on Her Life* is not a higher form of Theatre Sports. No one plays Anne (or is it Anya, or Anny), no one physically recreates scenes in which they imagine her to have been involved. *Attempts on Her Life* is an act of telling with an ambiguous third person subject, as if a group of people has gathered to brainstorm a novel into being with every means they can, prosaic, poetic, parodic, satiric, plundering pop, advertising, politics, cultural theory. You're astonished to hear that the New Anny is in fact a car that "skims the white beaches of the world as easily as she parks outside the halogen-lit shoe shops of the great cities... As a testimony to our ongoing concern for a cleaner, greener environment...there are no filthy gypsies in the Anny."

However important or interesting Anne becomes (and she does threaten to emerge as a character at times despite the contradictions—a young woman in love with, but detesting power, the right-wing-cult mother of 2, the childless artist exhibiting in a gallery the suicide notes and videos of her attempts on her life, the bed-wetting child who dreams of being a terrorist), this act of telling is equally important. It's what we watch, it's what we hear as the performers go about their task of invention. Andrews wisely chooses not to literalise the process, not to naturalise it as a careful, logical act of fiction-making. The distancing devices of the digital readout that titles scenes, the changes in form (song, advertisement, interrogation, translation, review) are paralleled by sudden shifts of energy and performance mode—scenes burst into life in white heat, or murmur in quiet reflection, or dream like a movie soundtrack. Until towards the play's end. It's then that you sense something different is happening, the invention is perhaps reaching its end. A lone performer (Emma Lung), a young girl (as specified by Crimp, and the lines, most of them, are hers) tries to sustain, and correct, the construction of Anne (at about her own age)...but she forgets her lines several times (spookily well-handled), has to be prompted, is matter-of-factly replaced, but returns. For a moment, as the others seem to drift away from their subject, we glimpse the one performer who has apparently identified with Anne, no matter how ironic the text, or how strong the sense of failure (that Anne had not realised "this thing" that was in her):

*—Anne will distribute the world's resources evenly across the earth...*

*—...raise from the dust the faces of the disaffected...*

*—...while guaranteeing not to erode the privileges of the middle-class.*

The title says it all—the performers attempt to build a life, the woman attempts suicide, there are attempts to murder her (the final image is of a husband murdering his sleeping wife in front of their child), there are attempts to understand her. The attempt to create Anne is a powerful, funny, dense theatrical experience. Andrews' production does justice to the text's rigours and to its openness. The playing had a strong sense of ensemble (something Nevin wants to develop throughout the company) although it sometimes seemed uneven, some performers simply pushing too hard to create the moment. Of all the performers Emma Lung, Dan Spielman and Matthew Whittet seemed to find the very right level of playing on that thin line between the histrionic and the alarmingly real. But without the other excesses, this finesse would not be so potent.

There is a problem when actors used to projecting, forming character and working with plot have to take on texts like Crimp's. At LIFT 97 (London Festival of Theatre, 1997), Stephen Daldry directed a workshop showing of *The Chair*, a

*continued on page 27*



# Garry Stewart's vision for the ADT

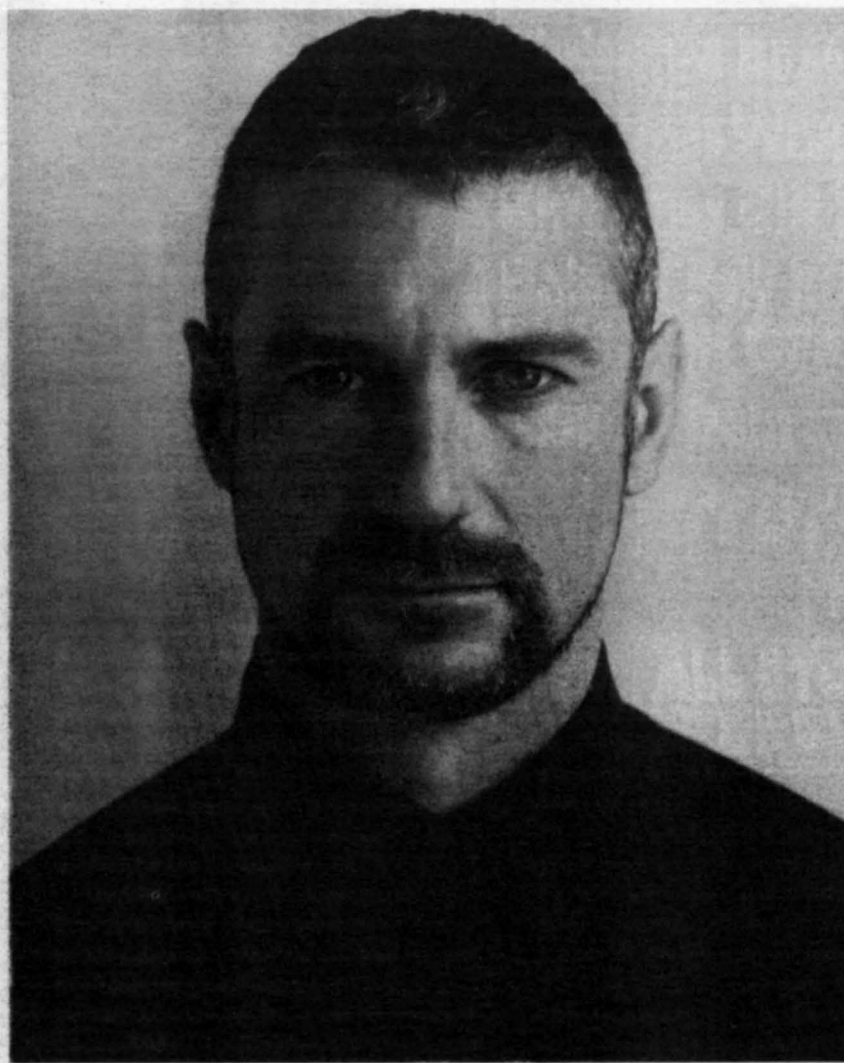
Anne Thompson interviews Garry Stewart

*Twelve months into your Artistic Directorship of the Australian Dance Theatre in Adelaide, where are you at?*

I don't know whether it was just naivete on my part or because I was so focused on the work but I didn't really think about the history of the company when I took the job. In every interview that I've given, up until very recently, the situation with the previous director, has been brought up. But for me, an organisation advertised a job, I applied for it, I was the successful candidate. I've always wanted to have a cohesive unit of dancers and a creative team to work with on an ongoing basis. Now I find myself in this situation, I'm really doing what I've always wanted to do. However there has been a change in the culture here. I've come into a company that's had a particular mode of operation and a particular way of presenting itself within the artistic and greater community. That's probably been the biggest challenge—to come in and shift the culture within this company. I feel my ideas have been embraced by the Board and the management although with every new idea I come up with they don't say, "Great! let's do it tomorrow!" They are governing the company responsibly by asking me to bring them more information and to talk it through and I really appreciate that.

*Can you give examples of some of the ideas?*

We want to push towards film and multimedia as part of our agenda. We plan to work in alternative spaces, not only virtually and digitally but also in real alternative spaces. We want to continue curating seasons of work by local, independent choreographers and support the local dance community. I want to try and open up rehearsals from time to time so that local dance practitioners and members of the public can walk into rehearsals and talk to the dancers and gain some insight into our rehearsal process. I want more sense of community ownership of the company. We want to throw open the doors and offer our studios for next to nothing to local choreographers who are underfunded. We have rehearsal studios that sit here vacant from 6pm every night and on the weekends and as far as I'm concerned they are not our property completely. They are the property of the community. Once a month I want to have showings in the Balcony Theatre and from that process works will emerge for a more formalised season that may occur once every 6 months. I've always felt that flagship companies should be more than just the director and the dancers and the touring of proscenium arch works. We certainly do have a charter of responsibility



Garry Stewart

Harold David

ities and that is why we are funded to the level that we are—to maintain performance levels in particular spaces of representation. But we should also try to be dynamic and far-reaching in our relationships. I mean it's nothing radical. It's nothing new at all. But it hasn't happened. When I first applied for the job I envisaged ADT, these studios, as being a real nerve centre for dance in Adelaide, a hive of activity and not always from or about myself and my dancers.

*Could you talk about your interest in multimedia? Why film/video? Why dance? Why the mix?*

When I create I like to manipulate a very open palette. I'm interested in projecting a contrasting semiotic layer, something that's going to skew the image of the live dancing bodies, some other text which will create a new image and a new experience and allow

a different reading of the performance. I'm interested in finding fresh aesthetics and meanings and experiences through incongruous juxtapositions of texts. If ever I employ any technology within a live performance it is there, as the platitude goes, to serve the idea of the work. Because this generation of artists is pioneering the use of new media in performance, much weight and time can be taken up by the technology at the expense of the ideas and the conceptual terrain of the work. I wonder if the artist should know what the technology can do but at the same time be separated from it when it comes to making the work, should let go of the need to have a "hands on" approach. I have. I've actually shied away from multimedia works because I think what you can do with technology in performance is still actually quite crude and basic. Unless the audience is armed with knowledge of what is technically occurring, they don't have the same impression of the work as the creators of the work do. I am interested in working with film and video technology but that's not new technology. If we're talking new technology, we're talking developments on the web and also digital broadcasting.

What I'm interested in and what I'm planning at the moment is doing a multi-platform work. It's one project but its delivery is on a number of different media platforms. Its working title is *Mind Game*. It will have an online delivery, a digital broadcast, a separate film that's a composite of the film within those works and perhaps a CD-ROM. although I wonder about the future of CD-ROM. It hasn't really taken off. This work is about the mind and paranormal phenomena. It started off as an interest in Jung but from there I've developed an interest in telekinesis and mind reading and these strange pockets of mental phenomena that can't be absorbed by science.

*But why film and dance?*

I have an interest in dance and in certain aspects of culture or civilisation so I want to bring the human body into dialogue with these. Using video and film in performance allows me to do this. I think it would be difficult to stage this dialogue with just bodies in space although I fetishise pure movement to a degree as a choreographer and uphold it as a totally valid point of view.

*Could you talk more about what attracts you to certain movements?*

It's a really strange connection between my subconscious desires and my body trying to fulfil those, which drives me into dance and hence choreography. And I don't understand that connection and I don't even know if biologists understand that connection. A fundamental desire of mine is to see bodies manipulate themselves through space at great velocity and in an ambiguous orientation. I remember reading an interview with Edouard Locke from the Belgian dance company La La La Human Steps about 12 years ago. He was saying when a dancer is spinning horizontally in space, like in a full twisting butterfly, it connects us to our dream state because floating in space is like dreaming. I really identify with that statement. I receive a great deal of psychic satisfaction from watching dancers perform those kind of phrases and those kind of movements. So I choreograph in this way for very individual, personal reasons. It's not that I think because it's spectacular and high risk that people are going to be drawn to it. It's not about that at all. It's a personal pursuit.

*Your dancers seem really trained up in that kind of movement now.*

Because they've had an incredibly steep learning curve with regard to movement, they are hypersensitive to the complexity of constructing a move. They have a heightened sense of how to regulate their own bodies to approach a move. They have developed this awareness from having to pick up a diverse range of skills in a relatively short amount of time. It's something they don't get too much relief from. We have a training program that's very constant and consistent. Not only do the dancers do release classes and ballet classes but they also do advanced yoga, and 3 training sessions per week in gymnastics, breakdance, martial arts and Capoeira manoeuvres. From these movement disciplines we have developed a vocabulary that is specific to this company over the past 12 months. There's a misconception about my process. What the audience sees on stage is really difficult, risky work which looks really punishing on the body. There's an assumption in the dance community that I just take dancers and force them to do these difficult movements that are way above their level of ability. That's not the case at all. We have probably the most well thought out, well planned, training regime of any company in Australia.

*And you have a diverse range of bodies?*

That's because I'm attracted to individuals. I get attracted to certain individuals that I meet and come across.

*Any last word?*

I feel incredibly supported in what I want to do with this company. It's not something you can do overnight but it's happening.

## The plight of the new *continued from page 26*

short experimental piece by Caryl Churchill. Someone leaving the theatre was overheard saying: "It was like live art with the luvvies." (Live art is the British term for performance art and contemporary performance.) Andrews' work increasingly shows the ability to overcome this kind of awkwardness (though less so in the casually choreographed group movements that looked twee) as he moves towards finding a distinctive language and a group of performers and designers to realise it. *Attempts on Her Life* has been produced across Europe in very different productions. Now, I'd like to see Jenny Kemp or Michael Kantor do it. Just as I'd like to see Kemp, Tim Maddock and others do Catherine Zimdahl's *Clark in Sarajevo*, a remarkable Australian work in which the usual conventions of plot and character go missing with profound results. I'm greedy for works that make me want to step into the theatre 5 nights a week (as I

sometimes have to) without hearing calls for character or passion or depth—I want works that offer different surfaces, new rhythms, that induce reverie and contemplation, that require a very different surrender of self. *Attempts on Her Life* was such a rare moment in Sydney that said a lot about theatre and about the way we construct others, gender, ourselves, but without anchoring itself in the concrete block of a single theme that would have sunk it beneath its rich surface.

*Martin Crimp, Attempts on Her Life, director Benedict Andrews, designer Gabriela Tylesova, DJ Patrick Cronin, lighting Mark Truebridge, performers Paula Arundell, Valerie Berry, Gosia Dobrowolska, Rebecca Harvey, Emma Lung, Nathan Page, Dan Spielman, Matthew Whittet; Wharf 2 Blueprints, Sydney Theatre Company, opened October 2.*



# Game over? The Olympics arts commissions

Alex Gawronski

With the spectacle of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games already dwindling, it is worth considering those artworks commissioned by the Olympic authority to enhance its Homebush Bay site. Having foreseen the enormous crowds of visitors the site would inevitably attract, the success of public artwork here seemed guaranteed at least in terms of public and international accessibility. The Paralympics, which followed the Games also drew considerable public attention and fully utilised the Homebush site. Now as the Olympic village is put to public tender as local housing, what is to become of the site, and those artworks specially commissioned for it? Will Homebush continue to attract local and international visitors and keep such artwork alive and contemporary? Or will the work function merely in a commemorative and historicised manner? It is equally pertinent to wonder whether the Homebush Bay site, previously undistinguished and industrialised, will become the focus for urban leisure.

A sense of impermanence perfectly suited the first commissioned artwork I stumbled upon. *5000 Calls* is a sound-based collaboration between artists, David Chesworth and Sonia Leber. Their work comes as a complete surprise both in its functioning and in what it says about the inclusive possibilities for the creation of public art in highly visible venues. *5000 Calls* utterly transgresses presumptions of the monumental generally associated with privileged outdoor sites. Instead the work dematerialises monumentality replacing it with an eerie and disturbing audio experience. As we traverse the so-called 'Urban Forest' of eucalypts surrounding the main athletic stadium, distant, distinctly urbanised sound fragments greet us. These include vocal cries in various languages including Aboriginal dialects; incidental sounds suggesting construction or labouring work, as well as amplified breathing. These 'concrete' sounds are underscored intermittently by a low drone that unifies the composition. The combination of these sounds suggests continuous occupation even in the distinct absence of occupation.

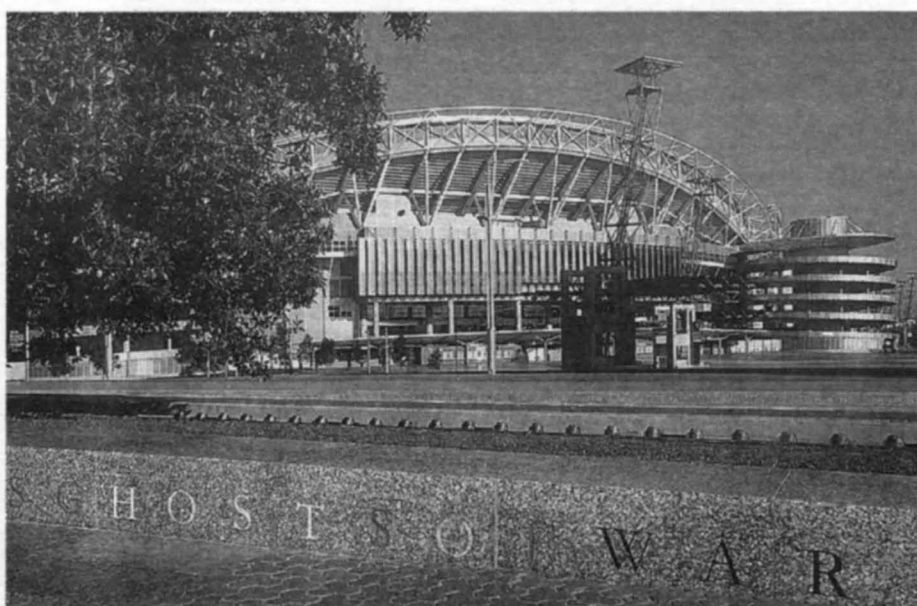
*5000 Calls* is a work that literally haunts the site, blurring the delineation of public and private, presence and absence, celebration and distress. At the same time it is difficult not to read a political sub-text into the work, preoccupied as it is with the inhabitation of place. Such a reading is especially congruent given its recourse to Aboriginal language. The work is doubly surprising when we imagine its near complete inaudibility and invisibility during peaks of Olympic fervour. At these moments the imaginary ghosts of previous inhabitants and those of individuals excluded from Olympic attendance due to geographic and economic limitations mingle imperceptibly with those present. Rather than offering a glib statement about universal fraternity and international sporting goodwill 'no-matter-where-you-are', the result is a subtle indictment of such platitudes.

Equally discreet is *Relay*, the collaborative work of Ruark Lewis and Paul Carter, both of whom have a longstanding relationship with text. At Homebush Bay, the text inhabits a series of stone stairs flanking a fountain of arching water-spouts. The title alerts the viewer to the fact that the first and last letter of each word is shared with its neighbour in much the same way as an athlete passes a baton from competitor to competitor. These stairs are vast yet remain low to the ground.

## Relay for Radio

Sixteen 'Olympian Odes' in the tradition of the dada/futurist, trans-lingual poem evoking the 'meaning of the Olympics to Australians' and derived from site-specific art work installed at Homebush Bay, will be broadcast on ABC Classic FM's *The Listening Room*. Written by Paul Carter; produced by Carter and Andrew McLennan; sound engineer Russell Stapleton.

Relay for Radio, *The Listening Room*, 9.00pm, December 18.



Griep

The text of *Relay* is visually distinguished by its use of colours to commemorate past Olympic games. For example: red indicates the Athens games of 1896, yellow the 1956 Melbourne Games. The Sydney 2000 Games are represented by blue and future games are green. (Black remains curiously or symbolically unspecified.) For those not privy to such symbolism, the colours fulfil a formal role that enhances the visual appeal of the piece. Furthermore, by ascribing different colour values to clusters of words, individual words are then forced into visual relief as isolated points of inquiry and contemplation. This device fulfils the work's poetic aspirations. The poem no longer reads in the linear manner traditionally deemed most appropriate for national eulogies. Instead the text is deliberately dis-integrated and spins off in myriad directions.

In *Relay* the words themselves incorporate playful and experimental attitudes to language that are as sensitive to notions of place as they are receptive to more serious questions concerning original occupation and colonisation. One such example is the juxtaposition of the words in black, OTHER and BLACK MARCH. While the meaning here is non-specific and apparently accidental, the overall effect is alternately calculated and highly charged. In the same way a text fragment like SUN BURNT COUNT wryly ridicules the inherent incongruity of colonial presence in this country. The success of Lewis and Carter's work rests on its openness—a strategy that subverts the hierarchical order of language and particularly the official jargon that readily clouds national celebration. Similarly the artists' text displaces hierarchies suggested by the steps themselves, which further complicate nationalism's affiliation with fierce sporting competition.

Also incorporating aquatic elements is Ari Purhonen's *Osmosis*. This work inhabits the floor of Haslam's Pier at the northern periphery of Olympic Park. *Osmosis* is another distinctly minimal work but in this case the minimalist severity is problematic. The work consists of a series of fluorescent painted aluminium beams hidden under the floor of the pier. These subtly change colour and direction as we walk from one end of the pier to the other. The artist's stated desire is to indicate and enhance the environmentally fluid relationship between the work and the wetland environment around it. At night, lit from beneath,

the effect is 'psychedelic' according to the pamphlet accompanying the work. My own experience of it was anything but. The day was overcast, but still bright, which effectively annihilated any presence the work might have had. In this instance what remained was simply the pier structure, which despite its elegant simplicity illuminates nothing about the work or site. In fact, Purhonen's method is phenomenological rather than analytic or politicised and thus, without sufficient opportunity for spectacle, *Osmosis* is overly

subtle for no apparent reason.

While crowds to Olympic Park have predictably decreased, the site is not without its fair share of visitors; during my visit there were many families and tourists. Of course it seems difficult to imagine Homebush Bay full in the near future. Therefore areas of the Park seem destined to remain deserted, with the aura of a film set or airport. In fact, viewed in its totality, Olympic Park becomes a flimsy simulation of a city, a city still prey to Modernist nostalgia for an athletic utopia. Contrarily some of those artworks executed for the Olympic authority and particularly works like *5000 Calls* and *Relay* fracture the architectural homogeneity of the site by introducing alternative voices. This resulting tension becomes crucial in locating Olympic Park as something other than the terrain of futuristic sheds robbed of previous inhabitation or current usefulness. Similarly, the discrepancy between the site's past and contemporary use allows artworks to playfully and subversively enter into a dialogue with the stadiums and pavilions. The ensuing relativity suggests these purpose built structures are ultimately fantastic and imaginary, each a real *memento mori* of the 2000 Games. Alternatively it is the art that survives through its capacity for ongoing discourse. It is laudable that these examples of public art succeed in such unexpected ways.

Sydney 2000 Olympic Games art commissions, September 2000. James Carpenter, Paul Carter & Ruark Lewis, David Chesworth and Sonia Leber, Neil Dawson, Elizabeth Gower, Janet Laurence, Robert Owen, Ari Purhonen.

## Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts

### Exhibition

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#### A Small Town at the Turn of the Century

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### ARTiculations

January 27

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### Performance

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### The Garden

Ben Laden and the Eater Presents Collective as part of the Perth International Arts Festival

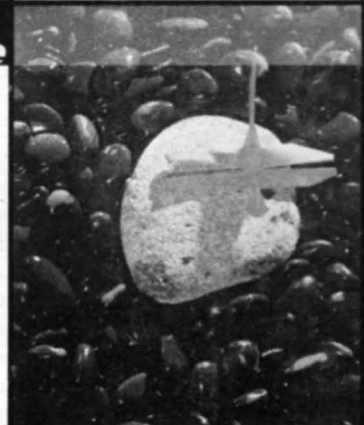
An environmental installation performance: the illusion of a Japanese garden. An old storyteller recounts a tale of a tragic love.

February 14 - 18

### Pivot and Enter

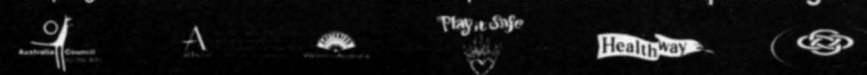
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# Beauty returns: SA art 1990-2000

Michael Newall

The past decade of South Australian art and craft is surveyed in an exhibition drawn largely from the Art Gallery of SA's collection. Not surprisingly, given the diversity of the decade, there isn't a great feeling of synthesis in *Chemistry: Art in South Australia 1990-2000*. The work coheres, as far as it does, through a cluster of similarities—family resemblances perhaps.

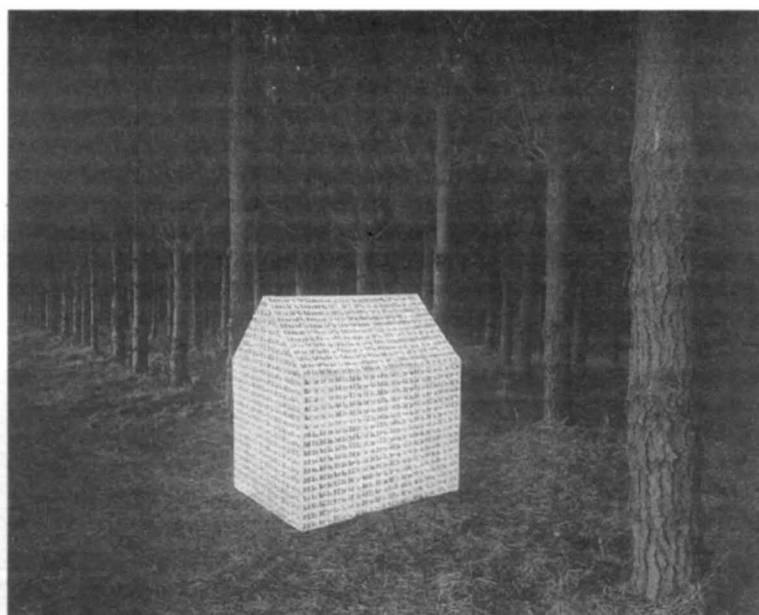
The centre of one such cluster, and a vital work for a lot of younger South Australian artists, is George Popperwell's *Region* (1994-96). It's a huge plywood construction, which takes up an entire room of the gallery. The various elements have an architectural quality, but none are on a human scale; everything seems magnified or microscopied. As a result, one can wander around *Region* as much as one likes, but it always seems alien. There's an element of willful obscurantism in Popperwell's art; he encodes thoughts into his work that the unsuspecting viewer is unlikely to uncover. *Region* is a great example of this; the plywood forms, which suggest constructivism and functionalism, are actually derived from the architecture and design of the Nazi death camps. Once one knows this, it adds a menace and pathos to the experience of the work, which is impossible to dispel.

Popperwell's 'obscurantism' is of crucial importance to this work, and to a lot of Adelaide artists who have drawn something from his method. It makes demands of the viewer: a broad knowledge of the history of Modernity, an attention to detail and a willingness to consider apparently chance connotations, and patience. The slowness and uncertainty with which interpretation comes under these conditions becomes affecting and expressive—developing the initial alienness of the work into something emotionally and morally engaging.

Two artists who have turned such an approach to different ends are Bronwyn Platten and Shaun Kirby. Platten, in works such as *A monument to wolf children* (2000), looks at the origins of personal identity in language, drawing much from psychoanalysis. *A monument...* is a light box featuring a transparency of a white tent in a pine-tree forest. A light glows from within, and the fabric of the tent is printed with the endlessly repeated phrase, "Id la"—a reference, I think, to the idiolects—private languages—developed by 'wolf-children', who have experienced, from birth, no contact with human culture. Shaun Kirby, in a not dissimilar way, focuses on repression and subject-formation in individuals and cultures. In his *German tailor scissors* (1995), a baby's white jumpsuit hangs from a rod fixed to the gallery wall. On the back of the jumpsuit are embroidered the words: "I'm not a charlatan. He's a charlatan. He hates me." The empty clothing hangs facing a dark doppelganger: the shadow it casts on the wall. Platten and Kirby share a mordant sense of humour.

There's not nearly as much 'identity art' as one might expect in a 90s survey show, but most of the boxes get ticked. Hossein Valamanesh engages issues of multicultural identity in *Longing belonging* (1997). Di Barrett gives a lesbian reappraisal of art history in *Portrait of Diana de Poitiers (detail)* (1997), and Kay Lawrence's impressively large tapestry, *Daughter* (1995-96), carries the torch for feminism. Indigeneity gets a look-in with Darren Siwes' photograph, *Stand (monument)* (1999), that shows an Aboriginal man dressed in a suit and rendered ghostly by double exposure. He stands in a cemetery beside a pale funerary obelisk—a black ghost haunting a white graveyard.

The work of a handful of artists, which a few years ago would have fallen within the rubric of identity art, seems to have survived the artworld's waning interest in the politics of identity and has come to be recognised as exemplifying a new, or rather, renewed quality in contemporary art: beauty. Valamanesh's work, with its delicate use of natural materials, has bridged this gap comfortably. The work of two other artists—painter Annette Bezor and photographer Deborah Paauwe—follows a similar trajectory. Bezor and Paauwe, who both make sensuous and colourful work often representing the female body, gained critical acceptance earlier in the



Bronwyn Platten, *A Monument to Wolf Children*

Brenton McGeachie

90s on the basis of their investigations and affirmations of female identity. Now, with the 'return' of beauty, works such as Bezor's painting, *Fishing in Paris* (1996-97), and Paauwe's photograph, *A Peeling* (1998-99), are the subjects of renewed 'aesthetic' appreciation.

There's a great deal of remarkable work in *Chemistry* that I haven't the space to discuss here. I'd like to say more about John Barbour's sculptures, which tap into a world of abjectness and horror, and have provided a number of younger artists,

myself included, with a model of the expressive utility of grunge. The strange mix of cultural and organic references in Fiona Hall's sculptures and installations remains as durable a proposition this century as it did the last. Rod Taylor and Anna Platten, who continue to champion something called 'tonal realism', also deserve attention. Their paintings are a lot more interesting than this pat phrase suggests. Other names well and truly carved into the SA honour roll in the past decade include those of Aldo Iacobelli, Craig Andrae, Anton Hart, Helen Fuller,

Richard Grayson, Suzy Treister, Warren Vance, Paul Hewson, Alan Cruickshank, Linda Marie Walker, Ian North and Antony Hamilton. *Chemistry* also features a beautiful selection of contemporary craft and 'traditional' Aboriginal art.

I have only two qualms about the show. The floor-works, environmental installations and multimedia work that characterised much of the 90s are under-represented. These works are sometimes difficult to collect, but the gallery needs to develop creative solutions to this problem. Younger artists, too, are poorly represented. Katie Moore, Nic Folland, Kristian Burford and Sally-Ann Rowland, to name only 4, are noticeably absent.

A second criticism can be directed at the catalogue. As it stands, it will prove to be the basic source document on South Australian Art in the 90s for years to come, but it also leaves out a lot. The ideas, ideals, programs and theories which brought these works into being, and which were in turn developed by these works, remain largely undressed. Only the social and institutional conditions under which the works were made get real coverage in the catalogue. Beauty does okay under these circumstances: it speaks—so far as it speaks at all—for itself. Works like Popperwell's, Bronwyn Platten's and Shaun Kirby's manage less well: they need a richer context in which to be understood. If the purpose of an art gallery is to preserve these works, it must do more than house the physical objects, it must articulate the contexts which give them meaning.

*Chemistry: Art in South Australia 1990-2000, The Faudling Exhibition, curator Sarah Thomas, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, September 16-November 5.*

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# The worrisome art of documenting art

Chris Reid

Photography intersects with and captures the fleeting arts of installation and performance in the recent *Installation Stills* at the Contemporary Arts Centre of South Australia. In these images, as Alison Main explains in the catalogue essay, the photographer acts as artistic intermediary and the photograph permits only one angle on each installation. We can't interact with it, or watch others interacting with it. At best we have a photographic record of the response of other onlookers.

The photograph documents the installation for us—we can see Hossein Valamanesh's *You just sit here, I will keep my eyes open* without going to Tokyo where it was installed. The photo makes more permanent what was temporary. In the image of the boiling Pyrex kettle in Sarah Minney's *Just because I don't see you any more doesn't mean I don't love you*, the water will never steam away. And the foam plastic used in Katie Moore's *swing* won't yellow like her foam plastic installations do during their gallery exhibition. Dylan Everett's *UNDERLINE* was an installation in galleries and other places—here it is on the pavement in Adelaide's main shopping mall in an image that includes bemused onlookers.

We might be permitted perspectives on the work that are not possible from direct viewing, creating new meanings. Craig Andrae's *Take that rookie series: Mr Match* is made with matches, broken or bent into various shapes and blu-tacked to a flat surface. Here we see an example in close-up, as if through a low-powered microscope. The individual strands of timber in the match, difficult to see with the naked eye, are clearly visible. The fracturing of the timber is thus more powerful, even poignant, now signifying shattered (human) limbs. Bronwyn Platten's *The Circle of Murmur* which comprised grey painted letters made of sculpting compound to form the word "murmur"



Steve Wigg+Dave Watt, *Was That the Human Thing To Do*, 1987

Alan Cruickshank

twice in a circle, and lit to cast long shadows, now looks like an aerial photo of Stonehenge at sunrise. Moore's *swing* casts a shadow that is more forbidding for being frozen into the image.

*Installation Stills* recalls the exhibition of grisly photos from the 19th century police archives shown in Paris earlier this year.

The images in *Perverse*, the Performance Photo Archive 1987-92, are of an entirely different order. They document events, apparently impartially. A photo from a performance is like a still from a movie, except that, again, viewers of the live performance can move about to observe

from various angles. In the cinema, you have only the director's angle. Several stills of each performance are shown, suggesting temporal progression, movement and process, but the meanings suggested by the images must be different from those suggested by the original event. In *Was that the human thing to do?* (1987), Steve Wigg and Dave Watt are on a stage with various props and costumes. Michelle Luke, in *Spring Clean—Heptad Heresies* (1991), appears to be reading aloud—but what? We can only guess what took place, unless we were actually there.

These images tease. A newspaper photo typi-

cally does not stand alone, but is accompanied by descriptive text. Nor are these images like those in theatre foyers recording the resounding successes of a previous season. In his catalogue essay, Richard Grayson (himself a subject/actor in these images) delineates the philosophical basis for post-object art, tracing its anti-establishment posture and its impact nationally and internationally. But he doesn't, and can't, recreate these events for us. The transient and non-material nature of performance art is defeated by documenting it. These are photos of an historical nature, in the sense that the artistic agenda has now changed. The problem is that we want to know what happened in those performances, we want to see them, and we never will. Grayson now wonders why anyone should want to make work that leaves so little evidence of itself. So, now, do we. [Anyone want to take up that provocation? Eds]

In the CACSA's tiny Gallery Spain, is Katrina Simmons' delightful *Semi-Permeable Membrane*, a quilt-sized collage of photos, postcards and other photographic snippets, overlaid with a painted stencil of white lace. One peers through the lace as if at her bed's dim memories. This work opposes the stark, evidentiary feel of the main exhibitions. In the new exhibition space, the Shed, Peter Franov's *Lack Luster* comprises several paintings and sculptures forcefully depicting psycho-social, sexual and environmental dystopia. Condensing many contemporary styles of art, including surrealism, abstraction and especially grunge, they are solidly and thoughtfully rendered.

*Installation Stills, Perverse, Lack Luster, Semi-Permeable Membrane, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, October 20-November 19, 2000.*

# The art of cultural refurbishment

Peter Anderson

A couple of months ago I was in the library slowly scrolling through microfilm of Brisbane's *Courier Mail* from 1975, looking for articles related to the early history of the Institute of Modern Art, when I came across a brief report on a proposal to turn Coronation House into a youth arts centre. It was the kind of snippet of information that could easily be overlooked as being of no contemporary relevance. But the fact that the building formerly known as Coronation House, became the Brisbane Community Arts Centre, and then Metro Arts, is quite significant to Brisbane's contemporary cultural history. There was a certain irony in the way this small news report might now figure in the history of Metro. When the state government's Arts Accommodation Taskforce released its 1997 report, *Accommodating Creativity*, one of its key recommendations was that Metro should be developed as a centre for youth and emerging art.

Placing these 2 moments next to each other raises some interesting questions about the way local arts infrastructure has developed. In the context of my research on the IMA, it was interesting to note that Coronation House was one of a number of sites considered as a possible first home for this contemporary art space. After 25 years in several less than ideal spaces the IMA is moving into a new contemporary arts centre in Fortitude Valley.

*Venture: Art and Spatial Politics* is an exhibition that tries to deal with connections on this level. In fact, some of the links it makes are far more obscure than this, which makes it both a difficult and very interesting exhibition. In essence it could be described as an exhibition about cultural space and—in part—the way the politics of space has an impact on artists' engagements with the city. The exhibition takes Metro Arts as the starting point, or



Cultural Fragment No 1

Joseph O'Connor

at least seems to revolve around the organisation. But it's not a simple exhibition about the history of either the site or Metro, though it does engage with both. (In this respect it could be read as a counterpoint to the IMA's current exhibition *Quo Vadis?*, which documents the organisation's last 25 years in a fairly inward looking and straightforward manner, using selected archival materials and Richard Stringer's installation shots of IMA exhibitions).

At the heart of *Venture*, both physically and intellectually, is the proposed redevelopment of the

Metro building. Unlike nearly every other arts organisation in Brisbane, Metro manages the space which it occupies with other arts organisations. Significantly, Metro has been more active in developing creative projects of its own in the last few years, and is now poised to purchase the building from the Commonwealth. Hence, there is a need to rethink the way Metro functions as part of the city's cultural infrastructure.

This is signalled in the exhibition through the inclusion of proposals for the building's refurbish-

ment developed by interior design students from the Queensland University of Technology's School of Architecture, Interior and Industrial Design. These are quite speculative proposals offering a range of alternatives for both the internal and external configuration of the building. The exhibition also includes new work by several young artists—Christopher Handran, Damien Krell, Rebecca Ross, Martin Smith and Grant Stephens—each engaging in different ways with the city.

The exhibition's curator—Metro's artistic director Joseph O'Connor—has used the exhibition as a space for complex reflections about art making and its intersection with debates on arts infrastructure and urban space. It's an interesting and productive experiment in curatorial practice, drawing on a wide variety of materials—from the archaeological *Cultural Fragment No.2* (pieces of marble stair from the now demolished Cloudland Ballroom) to O'Connor's art, not to mention a few documents associated with other related projects. The specificity of some of the references might make the exhibition a challenge for a casual viewer. But for those involved in Brisbane's current rush of cultural refurbishment, relocation and urban renewal, it has some important and poetic points to make. As I read it, this exhibition seeks to open up a debate about the way we understand the culture of the city and the role of its arts infrastructure. It's a debate that in recent times has tended to get lost under the increasing piles of self-justifying paperwork and the overheated spin of political PR.

*Venture: Art and Spatial Politics, Metro Arts, Brisbane October 4-November 24.*



# Voyeurism, vulnerability and Elvis

Diana Klaosen

The University of Tasmania's Plimsoll Gallery imports strong national and international touring exhibitions and actively supports locally curated shows—often by younger, first-time curators.

Kylie Johnson's eclectic and relentlessly contemporary show *Heart On Your Sleeve* features 6 artists, generally with growing international profiles. Most are Australasian; David Michael Clarke is British, currently based in France. Johnson encountered his work while on study exchange in Glasgow; *Heart On Your Sleeve* is his Australian debut.

As the title implies, *Heart on Your Sleeve* emerges from a personal interest in work "which explores the slippage between the personal and the public, the social and the personal, fact and fiction" (Johnson, catalogue essay). In the participating artists' work, the "stuff" of everyday life—relationships, memories, music, television, film and the popular press—has been used as raw material.

So *Heart on Your Sleeve* explores popular culture's fascination with everything personal—the private and intimate brought into the public sphere. Johnson herself speaks of enjoying experiences like being confided in in bars; observing people trying on clothes and looking at themselves in those mirrors that are placed just *outside* changing rooms; watching people hurl themselves around club dance floors when their 'all-time favourite' song comes on...

This complicit voyeurism is a starting point for a show that goes on to deliver quite a lot more. Aiming to produce an exhibition unlike anything seen in Hobart before (which, of course, many curators attempt) Johnson also informs

*Heart* with her interest in the YBAs—the current crop of young British artists. In doing so she gives the 'private/personal' theme—not new in itself—an interesting angle. Possibly it is a more mature manifestation of personal concerns, as if the theme here has come of age.

If a pop sensibility is central to the show, it is revealed in a variety of interesting ways. Chris Chapman, of Adelaide's Experimental Art Foundation, offers two simple, untitled drawings of boys, clothed in one image, unclothed in the next, engaged in pissing competitions. Traced from 'water sports' magazines, they are hand-coloured as deceptively conventional framed artworks. The private, usually secret act, thus placed in a public context, is given a new reading.

Similarly, David Michael Clarke's 2 videos *In Between Days* have the simplest subject matter—in one he is reading in bed, in the other he is in bed with his girlfriend, kissing a bit, but that's about it. Private and unpretentious, yes, and frequently seen on TV, but not usually seen 'for real.' As Johnson notes, "the sense of construction and viewer manipulation in Clarke's videos sit alongside moments of apparent sincerity", a feeling heightened by soundtracks of Elvis at his most excruciatingly sentimental which adds to the vulnerability of Clarke's videos.

David Rosetzky presents a different and strangely disquieting central image in his video, *Summer Blend 2000*. Participants rub cream into themselves as the camera pans down their bodies. The subjects have disengaged expressions and parallels with pornography are inevitable, though the content is by no means as explicit. A deadpan soundtrack is part of the highly con-

structed experience of *Summer Blend*—yet another way in which it contrasts with the willful amateurishness that is deliberately allowed to slip into David Michael Clarke's work.

The sound elements and the need for all videos to be viewed in at least semi-darkened, separate spaces (and a poignant music video by eminent independent Australian performer Alex Lloyd) make for one of the few problematic elements of this exhibition. Upon entry the viewer is confronted by panels and cubicles with only some of the very few, small wall-based works to be seen. While it becomes quite engaging to negotiate these spaces, the fact remains that the exhibition's initial impression lacks impact.

Nonetheless, the works, as you find them are worth the effort. Tasmania's Julie Gough utilises found objects and family souvenirs as "slices of memory and time" to pin down fleeting experiences and shifting memories that hover between the real and the imagined. Michael Harrison's acrylics on paper have evocative titles (*Thoughts Laid Bare; Yours and Mine*) and on close scrutiny reveal, small, personal details such as embracing couples on what might at first seem to be straightforward, even "quiet" semi-abstracts.

Curator Kylie Johnson has created a strong show—to use the terms non-pejoratively—a fashionable show where the works are united by a slickness, a polish. She has taken some interesting curatorial criteria and united a diverse group of artists who have addressed these themes in challenging ways.



David Rosetzky, *Summer Blend*

*Heart On Your Sleeve*, works by Chris Chapman, David Michael Clarke, Julie Gough, Michael Harrison, Alex Lloyd, David Rosetzky; curated by Kylie Johnson, Plimsoll Gallery, Centre for the Arts, Hobart, August 12-September 3

## Taking an island

Diana Klaosen

Transcending the tradition of Tasmanian landscape photography, German-born Christl Berg's installation *Reciprocity* displays an intellectual rigour and some engaging hypotheses and criteria.

Realising that our view of nature is "so riddled with concepts of art that the two are difficult to distinguish" (Ian McLean, *Reciprocity* catalogue), Berg asks "can nature resist its own making as landscape?" and thinks it is "on the border between place and space that she looks for her images." She addresses the limits of aesthetic intention to order the earth and the way the earth is more real than its artistic simulations.

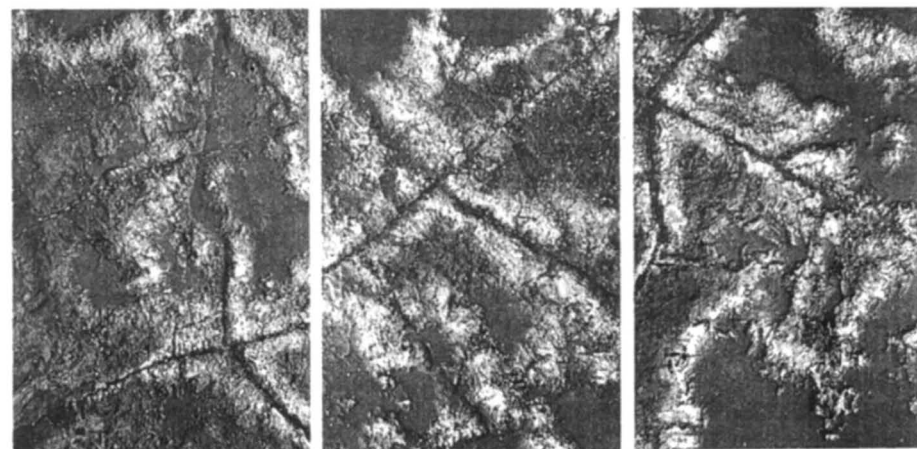
Berg's methodology was refined during a residency on Tasmania's Maria Island, with its colourful, chequered past as, variously, an Aboriginal settlement, a whaling station, penal outpost and the site of some wildly unrealistic entrepreneurial schemes, from Coffee Palace to vineyards and cementworks.

Today, the island is returning to its pris-

tine state. Berg's medium-sized "natural history" images, close-ups of rock formations, long grasses and the ground immediately in front of her feet have a striking purity and a quasi-abstract quality. An enormous photogram, displayed banner-like from wall to floor, is a Christoesque index of the island—Berg could conceivably cover the island with these full-size replications of itself.

Then, there is the third wall on which the artist has handwritten, faintly, the complex and compelling story of the island since 4,000 BC. These intriguing details—which the casual observer could miss—inform and unite the other elements in the installation and engender a sense of participation in this well resolved, haunting work.

*Reciprocity*, photo-installation by Christl Berg, University of Tasmania Gallery, Launceston, Tasmania, August 3-27.



Christl Berg, *Reciprocity*

## Squat Space

Following their victory over the South Sydney Council's eviction attempt, the Broadway Squatters now turn their energy from defending their homes to more creative pursuits. Squatspace, the community-involved street-level art and event space, will be launched with a multimedia installation documenting the history of the Broadway Squats. Squatspace offers a solution to the city's ridiculously expensive gallery rents and recognises that the current "pay as you show" system robs artists of money at the time they need to develop their work on an exhibition is often a crippling affair. Squatspace operates outside the cash economy. The gallery will feature political, experimental, time-intensive and process-based work and will also enable projects by community groups and outsider artists. Squatspace's debut show, *Don't Board It Up: Live It Up!*, opens December 4 with an event featuring performances, projections and sound works. Until then, passers-by will be treated to a window display of skewed tabloid journalism by SHOK, the infamous psycho-babble text graffitist of Broadway. For more info contact Mickie Quick, Everwilling or Texta Queen on [squatspace@yahoo.com](mailto:squatspace@yahoo.com)

[www.go.to/squatspace](http://www.go.to/squatspace)

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# The tweaker, the tailor and...

*Conversations from the RealTime-Performance Space Body & Sound Forum.*

*In just over a decade there has been a revolution in sound design and composition for performance. No longer is the composer/sound designer a silent partner who obligingly provides accompaniment or fills the blanks between scenes. These artists are now central to many collaborations, with some, like DJs and composer-instrumentalists, increasingly appearing onstage/onsite.*

*Some 50 composers, sound designers, directors and performers gathered for a 2 hour informal conversation about sound and music in performance and their relationship to venue, audience, design and performer. The conversation was guided by Tony MacGregor, Executive Producer of Radio National's Radio Eye, collaborating sound artist on installations by Dennis Del Favero and librettist with composer David Chesworth on their Opera Australia commission, Angela's Cosmonaut. The following is an edited version of the conversation that appears on the RealTime website.*

**Tony MacGregor** I wonder whether people might want, as practitioners, to talk about the many possibilities of sound, where they locate the primary purpose of its meaning and function in performance. Is it about defining spatiality-creating spaces, opening up spaces? Is it about shifting or changing an emotional relationship between performer and audience? Is it a source of information? Traditionally, in the straight theatre, you get the informational function of sound. But what other kinds of information do we get when writers and directors turn to sound artists? Is sound in itself a diegetic narrative?

**Nikki Heywood** Somebody talking about Garry Bradbury's sound in my work *Burn Sonata* commented on the way he placed sound where movement might begin and the sound would come right in underneath. They saw the sound as providing a raft for the performers to ride on.

**TM** Is it both a raft and the stream as well?

**Garry Bradbury** I guess it's very cyclic as well. In terms of textures and spatial relationships, as a composer I tend to think in terms of illusions of depth and the physical substance of sounds and how that works inside the whole design.

**Paul Charlier** And at other times it becomes like another character on the stage. That's when it's most enjoyable for me. But doing a lot of theatre sound you get stuck with the limitations of the space.

**NH** What would be an ideal space within which to place sound?

**Gail Priest** Head phones. You want people to hear the nuances you've made. And you know it's going to be incredibly hard by the time there are things like, No, you can't have the volume up that high because we want to hear the actors... So much is lost... In the work I do with Caitlin Newton-Broad (as Nerve Shell and with PACT Youth Theatre), we work collaboratively right from the beginning. We are co-creators. The sound informs the way the performance develops from day one.

**Panos Couros** The idea of an ideal space is misleading. It's really about the context of the work and what it's trying to say. It's about what the sound is trying to reinforce or embellish or support rather than whether it's in a good acoustic environment.

**GB** There's no such thing as an ideal acoustic environment.

**Paul Charlier** Well, yes but you can't write with black ink on black paper, no matter what you want to say. A lot of the time your creativity is limited because the first thing you're doing is overcoming the problems of the space before the

work can occur. My view is that there are great buildings and you can do work that's suitable in those buildings...I think Belvoir Street is the best venue in Sydney for spoken word theatre because the audience is in an ideal configuration for the actors. But then I went to a theatre in Vienna and, from the top balcony, I could hear an actor facing upstage. You sit there marvelling that some architect could see this as an acoustic space.

**Paul Healy** The ideal space is a cinema.

**TM** Do you mean it's an ideal space acoustically or is it the relationship which the audience has to the sound sources?

**PH** At least cinema conventions have given sound some kind of status and primacy which means that you don't have to deal with being a technician as well as a creative person, which is okay if you can.

**Barbara Totterdell** What you have is the flattest space, so you're creating sound from point zero. It's the closest you can get to a studio.

**PH** It's controlled, it's the same across most venues. It allows you to hear detail. Geographically it may not be the best place. If you're working with film, you don't have to put speakers up for the audience. Whereas at the Sydney Theatre Company you do, which seems crazy.

**TM** Film has a set of well established conventions and a set of industrial practices around it that make it function in certain ways.

**PH** The ideal space for a sound designer is the dark.

\* \* \*

**TM** In the process in which a performance piece arises, a lot of composers are coming in a way down the track.

**Rosalind Crisp** The great thing working with Ion Pearce over a long period is that each process feeds into the next one. The longer we work together the more co-creating is going on. And the more understanding there is between us about what it is we're dealing with.

**TM** I know Ion Pearce sees his music in terms of movement. Who makes the first move, as it were?

**RC** I don't know where it started. I suppose as things have gone on I've invited him to come in and keep working with me and that process has changed, evolved. In the last piece, *Accumulation*, Ion accompanied. He never watches the dance anyway.

**Virginia Baxter** What do you mean?

**RC** In the dance studio, he never watches.

**VB** So is it like a peripheral relationship?

**RC** I don't want to speak for him, but it's like maybe he doesn't want to look too directly, too closely, or he'll start accompanying. The most exciting things have happened when we've come in from different ends and it's sort of worked.

**Panos Couros** The best relationships I've had with directors or choreographers have been when you've read the script or talked about the project and then you've given them a piece of sound and they say, "That fits perfectly and I never would have thought you could put that dimension into it." The worst possible relationship is when they say, I need this sound for that and nothing else.

**TM** That's a relationship in which "they" have



Ion Pearce

Alan Cruickshank

the work in mind.

**Nikki Heywood** Part of the reality is that I have never been invited by a sound artist to work with them on their project. It's usually the other way.

**Gail Priest** But with new media a work can originate with a sound designer and a video designer.

**PC** I've initiated projects and received funding for them as a sound designer inviting visual people in.

**Gretchen Miller** Likewise. I don't think I would bother working in theatre if it was going to be performance first, sound second. It doesn't interest me at all.

**Jenny Kemp** When I work with Elizabeth Drake there's a script there and she doesn't really look at it. Then there's the choreographer who's a mature artist too. Coming into collaboration but not looking too directly at each other but maintaining a certain sort of autonomy, there's a possibility of a pure sort of synergy, a kind of opening into each other's difference that's really catalytic. Each of us travels from our positions to somewhere else, which is the place where we all meet. That's the place that gets interesting.

**RC** It's the same for me as a choreographer. If I hold Ion's sound too close it takes away the other things I'm aware of in the dance and I lose the autonomy of the piece.

**TM** In my sense of your work, Jenny, particularly in the theatre, the composer and the choreographer and the writer-director are working together with one informing the other in a kind of catalytic process in which all the elements are transformed. Nonetheless, the audience tends to walk away with the plot, the story. There's no mechanism for crediting the extent to which their experience was transformed by, say, sound.

**RC** I think that depends on the work. In Helen Herbertson's *Descansos* or *Delirium* [dance-based works on which Jenny Kemp has collaborated] I felt equally aware of all players.

**Sophea Lemer** It's not always desirable to have everyone pay attention to the sound in that way. Sometimes you want it to affect them in ways they're not thinking about. Sometimes it's been really effective if they haven't noticed it. So credit it, but you don't always want it to jump out at people.

**Amanda Stewart** As soon as you've got language, physical movement and sound in some field, certain hierarchies start to form. Some of the infrastructural contexts we work in—realist theatre etc—are structures of the 19th and 20th century. New technologies give us a chance to reconfigure those hierarchies.

When a child learns language, there's this pneumatic feedback loop between the ballistic act of forming sound in your throat, then subsequently distinguishing sound, then starting to assign function to sound. So they're all linked—movement, sound production and listening and language, at that basic level. The way they get culturally separated out is another point. So people have an opportunity to make their own system through working together for a long time and forming their own relationships before they even do anything in public...but we never get a chance to do that these days.

**Rik Rue** I like it when it gets blurred. When people say, I didn't like the show but the music was good. I'd rather hear, that was a great show and by the way, the sound was good.

**TM** Even when sound is simply emotional underlining, that's still transforming the experience of the words?

**Paul Charlier** I wouldn't agree with that. Any aspect of performance can be a transforming thing. You get a good actor and they may transform you without saying a word. It's the nature of what's being expressed, not its form or its source.

**Sophea Lemer** Sound does change what we see.

**PC** Yes, but visuals change what you hear.

**TM** You can totally transform the meaning and reception for a set of words by shifting the sound within them.



# ...the not too silent partner

PC You can do that by painting the set a different colour.

TM Is that all that sound is then?

Panos Couros Sound is just another language. And all of the elements you're trying to put together come together to communicate. Whether there's sound or not, it's a matter of what you're trying to say.

Garry Bradbury I don't know what I'm trying to communicate when I put together a piece of music. What I'm interested in are configurations. Before, we talked about Ion Pearce not following the performance that closely. It's interesting that when performance and a piece of music come together in a way where they are not meant to, somehow they collide and generate new meanings. That's when sound is being used in a really fascinating way. I seem to have stumbled across things like this working with Nikki Heywood and that's why we keep working together. I'll compose a piece for one part of the performance and it's too obvious and we put it somewhere else and some weird counterpoint happens that creates a new tension we would never have thought of. That's creativity, but it's not like trying to communicate anything specific. It's just standing back and watching what happens and keeping it when it works, when it's potent.

Gretchen Miller I like the idea of using sound to create a completely different space so that you actually expand the walls of the space and the physicality of the space almost becomes irrelevant. You can take sound and almost bodily place the listeners elsewhere.

GB Don't you think the world is virtual enough? If I'm in a theatre I want to be in a theatre. I don't want to be transported to some kind of ethereal netherworld.

GM I'm not talking about an ethereal netherworld. I'm really just talking about bringing other spaces to that place.

TM Do you mean like a desert environment, or other places that have a sonic trace?

GM Yes, but specific desert environments, not just generic ones.

GB I find this whole soundscape idea to be more of a cinematic approach to sound than a genuinely 21st century theatrical one. I have real problems with this illusionistic approach to sound.

Paul Charlier A couple of years ago something happened with my work in which the

whole idea of transporting someone to another world no longer interested me. I got interested in making the theatre the specific space that the person was in and elaborating on that. It's the worst thing in the world to put a siren in at The Stables Theatre because the audience is listening to real sirens outside the whole time. Everything's in the context of what you're hearing at the moment. You can have the best church sound in the world but if the actors' voices sound like they're in a carpeted lounge room, the brain's smart enough to know that they're lying. For me it's got to get to the truth, the physicality of sound.

Keith Gallasch Paul Healy, in the work you've done with Barrie Kosky, the actors are radio miked, so you can play your sound score at a considerable volume if you wish or make it more nuanced or whatever. What sort of spaces are you creating there?

PH I'm sort of the opposite of Paul. *Oedipus* was a 2-hour show in which everything that was played was synced within 10 seconds of the action. It was a continuous, 2 hour sound score. I'm very interested in creating entirely controlled environments in which to experience theatre, leaving very little to chance, and pulling the strings of the audience in terms of what you want them to feel.

KG What happens to the performer in that scenario? They're operating on a different plane. Some performers might feel disembodied or as if their voices are coming at them from somewhere else.

PH To me, it's irrelevant what they feel. [Audience laughter.]

Gretchen Miller I think that when you radio mike the performers and you start to work voice with sound in that way you're no longer creating an environment where sound is *within* the theatre. You're actually bringing voice and sound together in an incredibly intimate and compositional way. So I'm with you. Your accidents happen before the actual gig. You're creating an intimate relationship between text, sound and music such that they're not on separate planes but become the one language. And so you're not creating a soundscape so much as an entire environment from all 3 of those elements. I was really excited by *Oedipus* because I thought what you did was very radio-phonetic and for me that's a fantastic space to place theatre because you actually do, in some ways, remove the body. But *then* you bring it back in a completely different way.

PH I think the problem with theatre is that you cannot suspend disbelief. I don't go to the theatre because that's the problem I have with it. The only way to overcome that I believe is to adopt a differ-



Rosalind Crisp

Alan Cruickshank

ent approach where you're pulling the actors forward sonically and pulling the world onto the audience. And then they can start to feel things... You're not thinking oh, I'm at the theatre, you're actually *in* the world [of the play].

PH It's no longer about projection, saying "I'm on stage..."

Paul Charlier In *Suddenly Last Summer* at Belvoir Street we managed to do about 95% underscore without radio microphones only because the main actors had fantastic voices. Also one of the things I like about performance is that it's never the same twice and one of the things I hate about doing a one cue soundtrack is that you're forcing a mode which by its nature changes every night... For me it's been about trying to write styles of music that can be played back in a way that fits that shifting mode of performance.

Jenny Kemp There's a kind of emotional liberation in having a radio mike in terms of the vertical range that a performer can access or plunder. And quite often it seems to be about accessing the place of an inner voice. There's some-

thing a bit "held" about the external nature of projecting that seems to me to cut off the possibility of a whole range of emotional exploration. The naked voice in the space is really beautiful and one wants to hold on to that with the radio mike not turned up too high.

Panos Couros I reckon it boils down to whether you're a good actor or not.

Rik Rue I think if you're going to use a radio mike, learn to use it.

JK There's a danger of being passive with the radio mike where you're not making any effort. It's a balance.

The discussion continued on to address issues of "performance aspiring to the cinematic condition", venue design and more on the collaborative process. Visit [www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/](http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/)

RealTime-Performance Space, Body & Sound Forum, Redfern Town Hall, Sydney, August 24.

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# Lux Mammoth & Perth's new music scene

Andrew Beck

Al Smith and Cat Hope are Lux Mammoth, a new music duo whose recently released first CD *Hertz Circus* with its raw-edged ambience is in contrast to their improvised noise-based live performances.

Al Smith comes from a rock'n'roll background in Perth. A bass guitarist in ephemeral band land for 6 years, Al co-formed KAK with his brother Col and friend Carl in 1998. The 3-piece noise band burnt an album's worth of CDRs just for the record. "We recorded a lot of stuff in the noise genre, but we didn't really think anyone would want to listen..." Before the noise-with-musicality of Lux Mammoth, Smith was not aware of the breadth of the Perth new music scene.

We (KAK) were all sort of interested in that sort of music and we thought, 'well, just for fun'...I'd heard of Evos (new music promoters/advocates, now Tura Events), but it was before I was aware of others...working in the area. We came from the experimental end of rock'n'roll and just wanted to take it a little bit further. My brother is still playing in Closet Panic Sniveller and Carl and I were playing in a band called Swapmeat. We sort of folded at the end of last year.

I did a recording session for Cat's band Gata Negra, which is her more sort of rock band. And she brought down Rob Muir during the recording sessions. We were talking about different styles of music...and they were interested in bearing some KAK stuff. And they really liked it. Those two had obviously been involved with the new music

scene over the years a lot, especially Rob. So from that, Cat suggested that she and I form a band for the Totally Huge New Music Festival in 1999. And that was when I first realised there was a scene. People doing similar things.

When it's suggested that Lux Mammoth the recording artists and Lux Mammoth the performance artists can be very different things, Smith explains,

Initially we started out as the Lux Mammoth format, two bass guitars but playing them in non-traditional ways or trying to create interesting sounds from a traditional instrument. For the CD we were recording in that sort of format because when someone is sitting down in their own listening environment I think you can afford to be a little more intricate and a bit more technical in the recording process. So we put something together that was fairly noisy but a lot more ambient than our live performance.

In the live performances we incorporate the visuals. With the Tools show we've just done and the meat manipulation show at PICA (Perth Institute of Contemporary Art) we had something a bit more interesting for the audience to watch. People commented that even with the big video screen they spent a lot of time watching what we were doing with the tools and trying to make the association with the sound. That's what we are trying to do with the live performance.

With the release of *Hertz Circus*, the 2 performance shows, *Tools* and *In Its Own Blood*, and their other live gigs, Smith has come to understand through audience feedback that there is a collection of people who, like him, have been performing in bedroom and garage studios all over Perth.

If you ask someone if they have a CD or tape of their work you can listen to, it soon becomes obvious that there's not that much about. If you want to listen to, to experience experimental music from Perth there doesn't seem to be an avenue if you don't like going to live gigs. And that's not everybody's scene.

Smith, who is also a sound engineer and runs Bergerk! Recording Studio in a northern suburb of Perth, started up the *Sound Gallery* series under his formed-for-the-occasion Bergerk! label. The *Sound Gallery* series is both a forum and an archive, Smith says. The first two label releases for this December are a KAK CD and a Cat Hope solo CD of live material recorded during a US tour for the *Extreme Music from Women* compilation. Each release is being limited to 50 "hand made" copies to



exploit the developing local market. By limiting the copies Smith hopes to publish more material. He has a further 2 releases on track for January and hopes to maintain an output of 2 artists a month.

I like to listen to CDs. I mean, there are people like Rob Muir who have created a large body of work over the years but it's not available publicly. It was mainly for shows and performance. Another guy, Steve Matzkov, he calls himself High Impedance, a

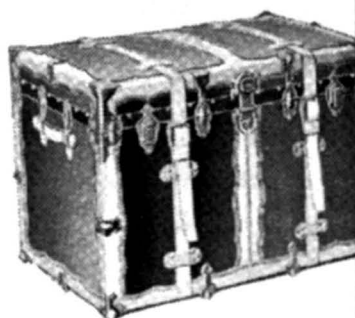
solo guitarist. Not traditional, he creates layers and layers of really ambient floating sounds.

Also due out in early 2001 are 5 film/video quasi-collaborations between Lux Mammoth and local independent film/video makers. These are a direct result of the *Tools* performances where local film/video maker Andrew Ewing created the video projection backdrop to one of the tracks that now appears on *Hertz Circus*.

After the shows we met a lot of filmmakers who were interested in doing a similar thing. There are 6 tracks on the CD and so far there are 6 filmmakers. They're all going to make a short film to each of the tracks on the CD...We're hoping to screen them in a cinema...perhaps travelling to short film festivals...[W]e haven't any input into the making of the films, what goes into them visually, but it's our music.

Andrew is a lecturer in web communications, indulges in analogue imaging and is co-director of independent live arts promotion and management company X-Events. His association with new music began in the late 80s when he first worked as a sound designer and, under duress, recording engineer.

Interviews with more West Australian composers, sound artists and event organisers like Tos Maboney will appear in *RealTime* in 2001.



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# The Firm gives its all

Chris Reid

In the 250th anniversary year of the death of JS Bach, The Firm—Adelaide composers Raymond Chapman-Smith, Quentin Grant, David Kotlowy and John Polglase—paid an outstanding homage by including Bach's works in each of their last 3 concerts, placing their own music in a singular perspective.

The highlight of their September concert was Polglase's *Concertino for Strings*, with dark musings and searching development. Polglase owes as much to Brahms as to the New Viennese School. The prelude established the work—strong textures, well-delineated voicings across the ensemble, and complex thematic development, at a slowish, introverted pace. The second movement's strong marching beat began in the bass and transferred to the strings, again with complex development, though it could be shortened for emphasis. The third movement, a deliciously slow weave of simple, haunting ideas was followed by a postlude that resolved earlier ideas.

Kotlowy's *blossom drift* a single, typically spare movement, concentrates the listener's focus inward. Influenced by John Cage and Zen, Kotlowy's works are an opportunity for meditation and awareness of ambient sound—the Town Hall clock striking, or a siren wailing past. Grant's *Elegy—on the Death of Robert Schumann* is a homage in 3 movements, the first a brief quotation forming a theme, with variations and other explorations depicting the personality of the manic-depressive composer.

Chapman Smith's *Sinfonia* represents a further, perhaps surprising example of his move towards tonality. He can sure write a tune, even if he has often avoided it previously. *Sinfonia* is tightly wrought, expressive, with strong orches-

tration of simple motifs—symphonic in character. Structure remains at the heart of all Chapman-Smith's work. The Adelaide Symphony Orchestra members' ensemble playing showed good balance, dynamics, and interpretation.

The Firm's October 9 concert, a solo recital by pianist Anna Goldsworthy, comprised excerpts from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* and works by Chapman-Smith and Grant. Goldsworthy's Bach is sublime, subtly nuanced, rather than interpreted. Chapman-Smith's *Ciclus*, variations for piano with a typically New Viennese flavour, is based on gently developing forms punctuated by crescendi, evocative, though highly structured intellectual music. Grant's romantic *The Misty Hill* followed—9 études, which he says, draw on Janacek's *In the Mist*, translated to evoke his childhood Tasmanian farm home. Messiaen's influence also appears. Chapman-Smith's and Grant's works probe musical style and craft convincingly, requiring considerable pianism.

On October 23, the new Langbein Quartet supported by violinist Margaret Blades and gifted young pianist Leigh Harold, performed works by all Firm members, and Bach and Brahms. Grant's *Sky and Vertigo* is a gentle, lyrical, single-movement adagio, with moments of foreboding created by chromatic discord. John Polglase's very classical piano quartet is highly textured, with a strong piano line, great orchestration and colour. Kotlowy's piece, as ever, is deliciously meditative and spacious. In Chapman-Smith's measured work, the piano's short, march-like phrases introduce a dialogue of string glissandi. The Langbein Quartet is superb, a welcome addition to Australia's musical scene. The final movement of Brahms' *Piano Quartet in G minor*, stunningly

rendered, closed the season.

The Firm's work contrasted with two excellent concerts at the Performing Arts Technology Unit. In his premiere of *Other Planes*, Melbourne-based Californian Erik Griswold used prepared piano to explore the middle, treble, bass and harmonic 'planes' of the piano. *Treble Plane* evokes a toy piano, the cascading staccato notes all within an octave or two. The jazz-influenced *Bass Plane* suggests a funky bass guitar. In the title work, Griswold used an unprepared section of the piano—descending chords were accompanied by readings from Craig Foltz live over the phone from New York and broadcast through loudspeakers in the auditorium. The text, about lists, mirrored the music's listing of notes. In what Griswold calls "trance music", the form seduces the listener with its repetitiveness and textures.

Pianist Stephen Whittington's *Fragments/Visions* comprised short works by 11 composers, varying in length from 15 seconds to about 3 minutes. Whittington played 48 pieces, spanning the era from the mid-19th century (Alkan's *Esquisses*) to 1999 (Sophie Lacaze's *Three Preludes*), to exemplify the musical miniature. Interestingly, Whittington omitted Webern's famous miniatures but included some of Schoenberg's, as well as works by Boulez, Cage and Skempton. The most bizarre were the 4 *Take-Offs* (1905) by Charles Ives, showing just how radical Ives was. Whittington interspersed Kurtag's musings on flowers, each a mere line of music, through the recital.

What is marvellous about Whittington is his commitment and enthusiasm for contemporary music, and his great technique. To perform the work of so many challenging composers in one



Stephen Whittington

Ben Osborne

evening, with such accomplishment, is a significant feat.

At Tandanya on November 14, new music exponent Gabriella Smart joined Goldsworthy in a program of 20th century music for 2 pianos. The highlights were Katchaturian's *Three Pieces* and Polglase's intense *Totentanz*. Polglase's frenzied arpeggios in the second instrument created high drama as the Devil whisked away his victim. Smart and Goldsworthy are an outstanding ensemble, playing as if a single mind is performing.

The Firm, *Pilgrim Church*, September 25, October 9, 23; Erik Griswold, August 31 and Stephen Whittington, October 24, Performing Arts Technology Unit, Adelaide.

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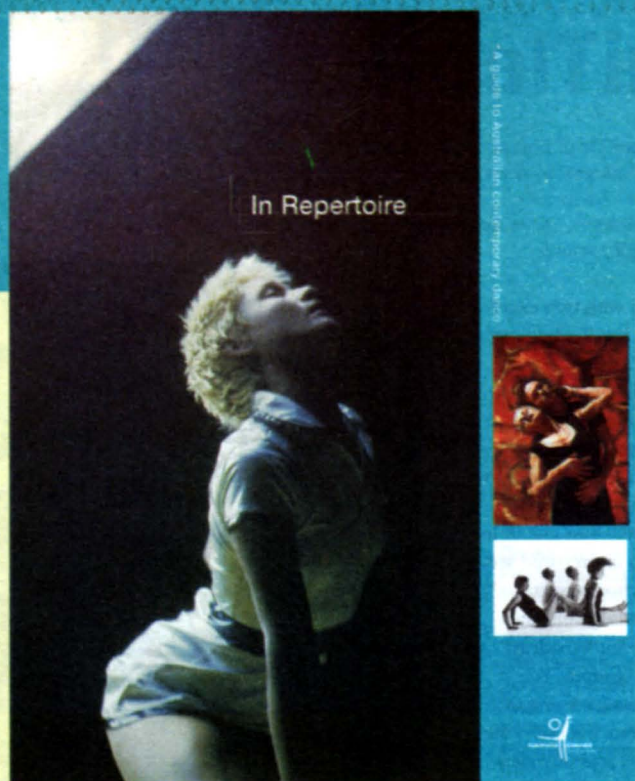
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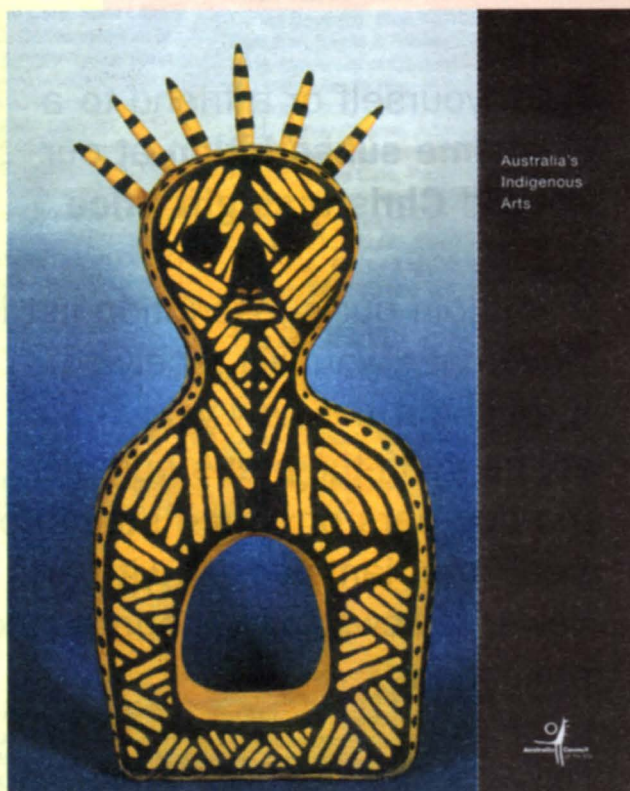
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