

RealTime^{free}

Performance and the National Arts

Millennial Predilections

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John Conomos

Frances Dyson

Keith Gallasch

Nicholas Gebhardt

Jane Goodall

Ross Harley

Gay Hawkins

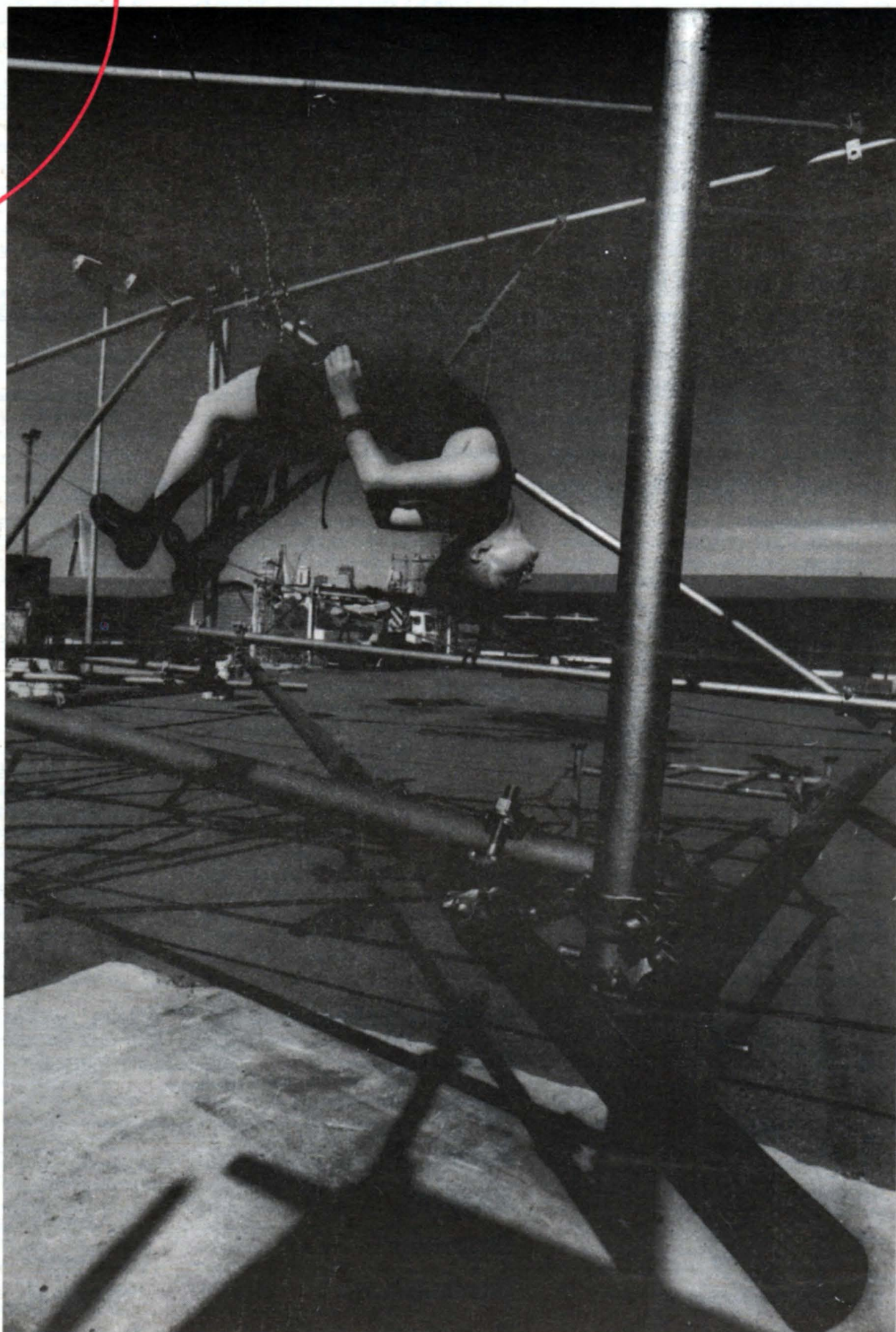
Ann Marsh

Peter McCarthy

Naomi Richards

Robert Schubert

McKenzie Wark



Millennial predilections: toward 2000. It's five years to the millennium and counting.

After the bacchanalia of issue 4, and on Real Times's first birthday, a moment of reflection...Real Time takes time out to check the vital signs of the Creative Nation, to speculate on where we're at in performance, visual arts, film, theatre, sound, design, dance, multimedia and cultural policy, and to tentatively guess at what the future might hold. Obviously noone could be cajoled into making predictions, but our writers took the opportunity to draw perspective on the state of play, with some coming to the conclusion that in the face of the assault of the virtual and the harangue of futurephilia, history, the past and our material baggage are asserting their presence insistently. It's a particularly fruitful point of departure finding a metaphor in the new Museum of Sydney's approach of salvaging scrimshaw while plugging into the World Wide Web.

As Jane Goodall writes of performance, the arts, like the body, "have no choice but to carry their past into their future", a phenomenon palpably evident in what a number of writers perceive to be a return to materiality. Robert Schubert, for instance, takes pleasure in the new "visceral" visual art which has emerged in the wake of the cool hyperintellectualism of the 80s, while Peter McCarthy contrasts the ephemeral artifice of *Priscilla* and *Strictly Ballroom* with cinema of "substance", grounded in the stuff of good character and narrative. For the five dancers in dialogue with Naomi Richards "a body will always be a body" ultimately resisting the "quick hit" mentality of a technology which seeks to turn art into "product". However, as Jane Goodall notes it is perhaps less a question of opposing the technological and the biological, hardware and wetware, than of problematising and negotiating the "relations between matter and circuitry". For Fran Dyson, we are in a moment of repose, precisely at the borders where, thanks to technologies, categories are collapsing, "prompting very basic, thoughtful questions. Is it biological or mechanical, living or dead, heard, felt or seen?"

The concern with the packaging of art and culture is another insistent theme. For Ross Harley, the future is now, and it's gonna cost. Cruising the fast lane of "market ergonomics" he finds that in Total Design Inc., (care of Sony, Microsoft and Co.), your life is their command. That changes in media forms and technology based art practices are driven not so much by new technologies as by the market forecasts of media oligopolies is also hammered home by McKenzie Wark.

Not that everyone's suspicious of market rhetoric. Our writers' response to Creative Nation has been remarkably positive overall, with the policy's assumptions about the need to competitively plug into the international culture supermarket largely unquestioned. In the culture shop, artists are now presented with the choice: publicise, promote and market, or face irrelevance, (as Shaun Davies mordantly observes in his call for a reinvigorated critical practice in visual arts writing). John Conomos however does sound a warning about the increasing bureaucratisation of culture and its potential to shut artists out, particularly in relation to the much hyped CD-ROM platform onto the infobahn.

Reflections on the state of play are necessarily partial. Projections are necessarily foolhardy. Perhaps together they have the potential to listen up to the zeitgeist.

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April
June
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December
February —

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Publisher	OPEN CITY
Publishing Editor	Keith Gallasch
Editors	Annemarie Jonson, Jacqueline Millner
Editorial Team	Colin Hood, Annemarie Jonson, Virginia Baxter, John Potts, Richard Harris, Keith Gallasch.
Manager	Virginia Baxter
Advertising Manager	Michelle Telfer-Smith
Design	Graeme Smith
Design/Production RealTime 5	Paul Saint
Produced at	Art Almanac
Printer	Marrickville Newspapers
Thanks	Billy Crawford, The Performance Space
Office	Open City Inc, 84 Womerah Avenue, Rushcutters Bay NSW 2011 Tel/fax 02 332 4549
Distribution	Nationwide to museums, galleries, cinemas, performing arts venues and companies, cafes, universities, bookshops
Cover and Back Photos	of Anna Sabiel by Heidrun Lohr
ISSN 1321-4799 Opinions published in RealTime are not necessarily those of the Editorial Team or the Publisher © 1995 Open City and contributors Please contact the publishers before submitting manuscripts Open City is an association incorporated in NSW RealTime is an initiative of Open City and is funded by the Australia Council, the federal government's arts advisory body	



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Framegrabs from the Future

Ross Harley windowshops at the the techno-design interface

“Making a dinosaur for Jurassic Park is exactly the same as designing a car.” That’s how Ed McCracken, CEO of computer mega-corp Silicon Graphics, figures it. Truth is, few of us would disagree. Entertainment and commercial manufacturing have always made good bedfellows, though in the past we would seldom mistake one for the other. American industrial designers of the 1920s and 1930s like Henry Dreyfuss and Norman Bel Geddes may have dreamt up sets for Broadway, and General Motors car stylist Harley Earl may have lived in Hollywood, but that’s about where the connection ended. Well almost. But at least there was an epistemological difference between their stylised sets and props on stage or screen and the built environment of consumer products. Nowadays their interchangeability hardly raises an eyebrow. Hollywood and Detroit work out their ‘market ergonomics’ (a niche for every body) and concept development on the same computers, sell their products through the same media (TV, radio, print, billboards) and dump their goods in the same old places (western suburbia or third world economies). Makes no difference to them. At the same time, television has been let out of the studio and shoved headfirst into the world of space, time and architecture – *Natural Born Killers* -style. There’s no denying it. Media, telecommunications, marketing and computing are congealing into newly corporatised urban landscapes that bear none of the dark romantic hallmarks production designers Lawrence Paull and Syd Mead materialised for *Bladerunner*’s bad-new-future. Forget the utopian soothsaying and gothic crystal-ball gazing. For the large majority of us the future is already here – and it’s not what you’d call pretty. It’s planned, it’s calculated, it’s flashy, it’s corporate-global. It’s most probably at a shopping complex or video/computer/TV screen near you. And it’s gonna cost. Our sprawling cities provide the new outlets for a determinedly material culture in which design appears to have no limits. We see and hear evidence that things have been deliberately cast (as if we don’t know by whom and to what end) at every turn – from fetishistic consumer objects to urban planning; from TV graphics and virtual voyaging to the loud packaging of cereals for the supermarket shelf or for television; from the austere public bus shelter to the new tollway or tunnel that increases the distance between home and work even as it’s annihilated. It is increasingly hard to avoid contact with a world designed on the totalising scale of global media. Everyone and everything is plugged-in (especially when it’s advertised ‘Unplugged’). We all know this: the distance that used to separate the media and the world it conjures disappeared seasons ago. But here’s the rub: real life is now designed and experienced as an extension of commercial media, and not (as we used to think) the other way round. North America remains the pioneering source of material media – the phantasms and obscurities of traditional media (from Hollywood to the Fox network) have been concretised in a bombastic web (I hesitate to call it a system) of consumer objects and places. Small wonder American architecture and design are now so closely aligned with the diverse (often perverse) interests of multinational media conglomerates and magnates providing the model upon which countless other cities-as-urban-theme-parks around the world evolve. The following banal ‘framegrabs’ are not from the near or distant future. It’s still 1995, and the theme remains the same: consumption is fun. So what if it costs a little?

Frame 1. Even at 30,000 feet, no-one can escape the right to consume, with the credit

card of your choice. The High Street Emporium guide, just like the other Skymall shopping catalogues, gives me instant access to merchandise I wouldn’t look twice at on the ground. Inside I find exciting gift ideas for family and friends, as well as items I know I can’t live without. Like the solar-powered ventilated golf cap, complete with six 1/2-volt solar cells to power the fan, which directs a constant breeze towards my forehead. Or the vacuum-powered Insect Disposal System. It may look like a simple handheld cleaner but it’s not. Really. Lined with non-toxic gel (harmless to human and pets) and powered by a built-in rechargeable NiCad battery, the 14,000 rpm fan System lets me quickly capture and dispose of insects at a comfortable distance without ever having to touch them. Freedom of choice is a wonderful thing. I continue browsing: the Portabolt (to lock myself and my loved ones safely inside any opening door), the Auto Toothpaste Dispenser (of course), the world’s smallest 8-digit credit card-sized calculator that records up to 20 seconds of instant voice-notes, or the odour-absorbing PoochPads for dog owners who love their dogs but hate the mess. Just call the 1-800 number conveniently accessible on the Airfone Service the phone company have installed in the seat in front of me. These telephones aren’t for talking to people. They’re for ordering more stuff.

Frame 2. I remember this the next time I dial a 1-800 number to purchase some other stuff (tickets for a 3D Imax movie at a brand new retro-styled multiplex cinema at Lincoln Plaza, Manhattan – the screen measures eight storeys high). The call is promptly answered by a friendly female voice who thanks me for using their service. “Welcome to the Sony Cinema Network. Please enter your zipcode to locate the theatre nearest you. Press 9 for more information, or 0 for the operator”. Nothing strange about this – though I can’t recall my zipcode, and the theatre I want is not in my neighbourhood anyway. I press 9 and the increasingly irritatingly calm voice thanks me again (as she does for the remaining nine multiple choices). “If you would like to see the following movie, please press the corresponding number now”. This is the future of interactive TV. More instructions. If I want to see the underwater movie press 1, the Buffafos press 2, the ... Next enter date of the booking. And the time of the session. “I’m sorry, the 3pm session is full. Please choose another time”. I do, making sure to punch in the number of tickets I require, the number of my credit card, and of course its expiry date (a rigorous safeguard against fraud I presume). Tickets confirmed, funds are invisibly sucked from one cyberspace to another. I’m ready to watch the show. After one more machine transaction that is – at the front of the lobby, attached to the wall, in front of the long line. Swipe my card, and out pop three tickets for the 5 o’clock show. Amazing. Only an extra buck per ticket.

Frame 3. At Universal City’s ET Adventure, ride, cards and telephones find another convergence. Sponsored by telecommunications giant AT&T, the ride flies dozens of bicycle riders at a time to land somewhere beyond the narrative limits of Spielberg’s original filmic universe. After waiting in the line, everybody gives their name to the tour hosts. In exchange, we are each given an individual “passport” (coincidentally the same size and dimensions as a regular AT&T calling card). Everybody clears “customs” and we riders soar off above the earthly world – with noisy jeeps and a swelling John Williams soundtrack in hot pursuit. On towards the night sky, and in a minute we’ve reached ET’s cute cartoon planet – a world we’ve never seen (in the movie at least). The most magical highlight is left till last. As we swing past the animatronic

Extra Terrestrial waving us farewell at the end of the ride, we are all called – individually and by name – by Him, ET. After such an experience, who could ever forget to call home again?

Frame 4. At the motion-platform Omnimax ride, Back to the Future – a fifteen minute experience that ushers the participants through an architectural maze of corridors and checkpoints inside the neo-brutalist Institute for Future Technology – we make it home via other means. For a quarter of an hour at least, we’re supposed to go along with the idea that we’re actually participating in an extended narrative from the film of the same name. The uncomplicated labyrinth that distributes us from one checkpoint to the next – complete with surveillance cameras, familiar actors giving us backstory on video monitors, written LED instructions, and real institute “assistants” – is only vaguely engaging. Being strapped into the eight-seater De Lorean time travel mobile is another matter entirely. The reality effect rapidly accelerates, and time slows as in a dream (or nightmare). Crashing headlong through a seamless collage of 20th century shopping centres, town squares, Ice Age landscapes, Hill Valley circa 2015, prehistoric volcanoes, exploding Texaco signs and cineplexes of the future, the four-minute ride is the most visceral experience in the entire complex. Souvenirs can be purchased at the Time Traveller’s Depot on the way out. But everybody seems to know you can get that stuff anywhere.

Frame 5. Like the recently opened New York Skyride on the second floor of the Empire State Building, these flight-simulator attractions blur the distinction between architectural reality and cinematic illusion. The ride propels the traveller from the stasis of the monumental site to the mobile world of the camera. The mechanical simulation and computer controlled movement may be clumsy, but the thrill lures riders back for countless rides. Of course, it doesn’t compare to the “real view” from the Observatory on the 86th floor. But who said it would? It’s a supplement, an addition, an orientation to a world which is in its own way just as inaccessible. “Look at the cars down there! They look like ants!” Plenty of stuff to buy down there.

Frame 6. Which isn’t to say that the rest of the built environment hasn’t learned from such entertainment machines. The young LA-based architect Mehrdad Yazdani’s motion-reality theatre at Universal Citywalk also incorporates kinetics into its design. Its folded fibreglass screen on the facade functions like an electronically liquid marquee, as if to set static architecture in motion. Regardless of the building’s success, such considered designs endow these entertainment complexes with more than a little Culture. Like the radically deconstructivist KFC outlet in the middle of LA (designed by Frank Gehry disciples Jeffrey Daniels and Elyse Grinstein) or the Planet Hollywood restaurant designed by Anton Furst (the late production designer of *Batman*), these places make a virtue of the high pop-moderne culture surrounding us – by selling it back to pop’s corporate initiators as Status. So what’s new?

Frame 7. Indeed, Gehry, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Michael Grave, and Robert Stern have all furnished Disney (under the corporate leadership of Michael Eisner) with designs for some of its most critically successful buildings. Why stop at Florida’s Disney World or Euro-Disney in France? (For despite the failings of the European excursion, a Saudi Prince – assured in his wealth since Desert Storm – has poured over \$300 million into rescuing the operation from its own unpopularity. Go figure.) If, as critic Michael Sorkin has recently put it, “in theme park nation, life is a ride and

everything – transportation, assembly, learning, leisure – must therefore entertain”, we’re in for a lot more fun. Not just in theme parks either.

Frame 8. Disney again. This time with Gehry at the helm, planning to build a retail and hotel complex at New York’s Times Square, just down the road from Disney’s New Amsterdam theatre (currently under renovation). A Virgin superstore and an MTV complex are expected to follow hot on Disney’s heels. More tangible still are the hundreds of total experience entertainment retail outlets mushrooming in major cities – over 300 Disney stores worldwide, with Warner Brothers Studio Stores fast catching up. With over \$US 65 billion a year to be made from merchandising, stores like those in Santa Monica Plaza or midtown Manhattan are blue-chip investments. That’s the image unstable media empires have wanted to project all along. Toontown is rock solid.

Frame 9. So is Sony. Not content with the string of movie theatres they inherited during their takeover of Columbia (not to mention the musical interests of CBS and Epic), they’re into diversification in a big way. Not only do they want a living museum like Sony World in downtown Chicago, they want kudos of the sort Philip Johnson gave AT&T with his infamous po-mo skyscraper on New York’s Madison Avenue. Now it’s called the Sony Building. Its public atrium was criticised when the telephone company (somewhat disingenuously) gave over its plaza to palm trees and wrought iron benches. All that’s gone now. In its place is a sprawling retail playground of Sony Style, Sony Signature, and – you’ll never guess – Sony Wonder Technology Lab. This 18,000 foot amusement park is free, and in America that is as good as being “public”. According to interior designer Edwin Schlossberg, “we wanted to make it human, but in a New York way ... We wanted to fill it with props, with *stuff*.” Stuff you can buy. If not now, then soon. This is the Universal City of consumer electronics. Sony’s toontown sets are not quite inhabitable film or television, but they’re about as close as it gets.

Frame 10. That is of course until we finally get to see computer squillionaire Bill Gates’ “San Simeon of the North”, currently being completed in the suburb of Medina, across Lake Washington from Seattle. Partially tunnelled into the hillside, the five acre waterfront house has journalists debating whether this is *Batman*, *Dr No*, or *Citizen Kane*, revisited. Truth is it’s probably all of the above. While architects James Cutler and Peter Bohlin say they’re trying to avoid ostentation and pretension, there’s no mistaking Gates’ intention to let architecture make concrete what Microsoft can only conjure with floating point geometry. William Randolph Hearst once had a similar scheme. That doesn’t mean the electronic media baron won’t find a prominent place for software in the architectural scheme of things. As the New York Times has it, the Gates Xanadu will have a network of computers that “will alert the boulder-rimmed hot tub, the video art walls, the climate controls, the library, the trampoline room and other sections that the master has arrived and expects an evening tailored to his mood.” So why is Gates remaining so tight-lipped about the details for his intelligent entertainment mansion? I’m sure it has nothing to do with the new Establishment leader’s current fascination with animation. It seems Gates is desperate to have designed a universally recognisable Microsoft cartoon character along the lines of Mickey Mouse or Bart Simpson. But after a recent meeting with Ren and Stimpy creator, John Kricfalusi, uncle Bill decided his work was too cutting edge for the Microsoft demographic. And so the quest continues. One thing’s certain though. When his search is finally over, you can bet your last megabyte of RAM it will only be the start for the rest of us. And we actually have to live here, on the edge of the next millennium these corporations are constructing so obviously.

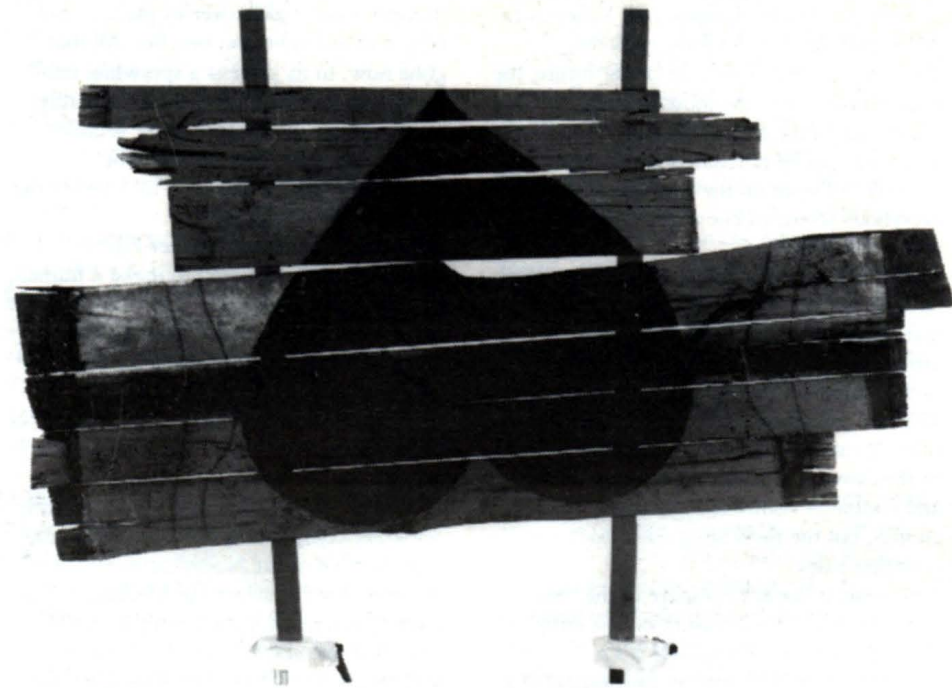
Ross Harley is a theorist and artist who teaches at UNSW.

Warped Crotches and Phallic Prods

Robert Schubert takes a biopsy of the return to materiality in Australian visual arts

Keen postmodern observers will discern a delicious irony in a commentary which, God-like, attempts to sum up and then prophesy developing trends in Australian visual culture. We know M. Foucault too well not to be suspicious that claiming cultural dominance has a habit of producing unity when historically there might be none. Suspicious because years, decades and millennia provide only elementary solutions to the difficult questions of discourse, power, history and periodisation. Lending trends the weight of history is hampered with the not very contemporary idea of exclusion while lending them the weightlessness of soothsaying is pure conjecture. I apologise

of pure aestheticism through the paucity of their materiality. Theirs is not the clean, self-referential limits of materials of specific art practices (oils is oils, steel is steel and so forth) which demarcated the parameters of late modernism. Theirs is a lumpen materiality which, when skillfully deployed, demonstrates that aesthetic virtuosity is somewhere between Greenberg and the garbage bin. Sometimes, however, this reinvigorated 'critique' of aesthetic modernism seems forced. Harper's exhibition at Anna Schwartz half way through 1994 had none of those left-overs, such as masking tape, which characterised her earlier work. Indeed, the enlarged canvases suggested that Harper's



Frank Sena 'Sear' 1994 from 'Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS' construction wood, paint 150 x 150cm.

beforehand to those written out of this history. In spite of these suspicions, there is something seductive in the image of a dawning millennium. It offers security in the doxa of Christian narratives where cultural redemption and damnation (theologians call it chiliasm) provide shelter for our feeling and understanding of what art will look like in 20th century *fin de siècle*. You can't beat the millennium for pure hyperbole. The apocalyptic end is nigh but then, so is the beginning. But the beginning and the end of what? On the more solid turf of the early 90s, artists and curators have developed a romance with different aspects of, for want of a more exacting term, material culture. Neo-abstraction pervaded commercial gallery spaces in 1994, where the revision of aesthetic modernism developed through the late 80s in artist run spaces like Store 5 in Melbourne and First Draft West in Sydney, began to enter mainstream consciousness. Responding to a perceived collapse of the critical debates in so called postmodern culture, artists like Melinda Harper, Rose Nolan and Kerry Poliness revisited aesthetic modernism's affection for materials. For some commentators, it is the distinctive emphasis in works by Harper, for example, on low materials, seriality and acknowledgment of the productive processes in her intentionally slipshod stripe paintings, which critique the heroic claims of both pure abstraction and the readymade. Likewise, Poliness's triangular patterns on masonite and Nolan's cardboard crosses metaphorise the failures

relationship to abstraction may be less critical and more faithful and heroic than commentators have previously argued. It is this emphasis on base materialism which not only characterises the neo of contemporary abstraction, but many other trends in Australian visual art culture. Along with the burgeoning penchant for installation work in Australian visual art programs, evident in recent *Perspectas* and at the Adelaide Festival, there has emerged a repertoire of scavenged collectables, junk and the machine-churned synthetic products of commercial industry. Mikala Dwyer's refashioning (after a sumptuous boudoir) of Sarah Cottier Gallery with *Woops*, is but the most recent moment in a short history of Dwyer tinkering, sewing, stretching, placing, draping, throwing and pinning synthetic fabrics, bric-a-brac and mass produced consumer goods together with a studied nonchalance. Dwyer's seemingly ad hoc orchestration of forms is base not only for the use she makes of materials like nail polish, sequins and stockings, but also because these materials always appeal to our body, usually its bottom half: objects draped in fabric which look like nice places to park your bum, a nailpolished toe, a leg or a crotch warped by stretching pantyhose from gallery floor to ceiling. There is an impure heterogeneity in Dwyer's use of gaudy materials and how they produce metaphors for the body, something like Bataille's big toe deformed by corns. Her work leads an ignoble life distinguished by a playfully inventive anthropomorphism.

More generally, the move towards installation art in the 90s might also be understood as a capacious response to the collapse of postmodern criticality. Like its neo-abstract counterpart, installation harks back to modernism, but its eye is not on Noland or Stella, but a more discursive, anti-aesthetic strain of minimalist sculpture which terrorised the late modernism of the 60s and the conceptual work of the 70s. Like minimalism, much installation in the 90s privileges the viewer in the articulation of visual meaning over the more contemplative place marked out by abstraction and its promise of pure subjectivity. Kate Brennan's ingenious 9 *Consecutive Installations* at Gertrude Street in Melbourne and Neil Emmerson's *Inhabit Me (Like A Memory)* at Artspace in Sydney are two works which might be singled out. Brennan's installation worked the temporal and spatial contingencies of looking by reconvening the spatial arrangements of wood and blankets 9 times over. Robert Morris' gestalts seem a constant reference in Brennan's revisionist project. However her investigation of space relinquished the sometimes defleshed moments of Morris' work. As Chris Ulbrick commented in the catalogue, "Brennan operates ... to corporealise subjective negotiation and renegotiation in a full fleshed spatial manifold," where the subject's body, its materiality, is the condition of an elegant poetics of visibility made palpable in space. It is this engagement with the corporeal materiality of the viewer which Emmerson also developed in his work, where glory holes, beat culture and rectum imagery were arraigned within an inhabitable concertina structure.

At the more extreme end of the materialist spectrum, however, artists like Paul Quinn, Adam Cullen and Hany Armanious are dealing with a blatantly abject, visceral kind of materiality also centring on the body. Quinn's animal anthropomorphs in skin-like rubber, oozing and squelching bubbles from anus-like holes and phallic prods, express such exuberance for degradation that they are less horrific than playful. Quinn's use of latex is a more physical as well as psychological take on Francis Bacon's kind of horror, mixing gender confusion with a curiosity for roadkill. His sculptures are like sex changes gone mad or done on the cheap. Cullen also operates on the abject materiality of the body, invoking it *in absentia* through contraptions for mutilation and the storage of body bits and fluids. An arch reanimator, Cullen assaults the viewer's body through the possibility of plugging-in our live flesh to machines which look more like life-support systems for the dead and rotten. Like Armanious's turd / vomit / intestinal sculptures, none of this has anything to do with the subversion of taste or that most resilient and false of all discourses, the subversion of the gallery. It has much more to do with the articulation of an oxymoronic relationship between masculinity and abjection, equally legitimate terms of reference for the gallery's distribution of aesthetic objects, albeit *objets terribles*.

But there's another kind of discursive materiality which has characterised a number of major exhibitions in Australia. *Don't Leave Me This Way*, currently on show at the National Gallery in Canberra, is the most recent in a number of important exhibitions which have brought sexuality, gender, race, the materiality of cultural bodies and their politics into public purview. However, a show about AIDS art (whatever that might mean) in the mid 90s is by dint of its belatedness fraught with problems which are too complicated to go into here. But the sheer magnitude of the exhibition, acclaimed as the biggest (every gay man knows that big is good) of its kind in the world, encourages an understanding of artistic responses to the disease as merely reflecting rather than forming a constitutive part in shaping attitudes towards AIDS/HIV. Sadly lacking from the show was an historical sense of how the politics

of representations of AIDS/HIV has changed over the years. After all, the political strategies developed by ACT UP in the 80s, strategies which had trouble establishing their relevance in an Australian context, might have changed dramatically as new forms of activism developed under the deconstructive sway of queer theory and practice in the 90s. Needless to say, the exhibition said nothing about the year 2000. A show about AIDS in the 90s is less brave than indicative of a more general acceptance of lesbian, gay or queer discourse as legitimate, non-marginal themes for the visual arts. This mainstream interest in specifically gay, lesbian or queer bodies and representation in Australian visual culture is confirmed by the incorporation of *Perspecta* into the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in 1995, the striking diversity and quantity of this year's Mardi Gras visual arts program, and the festival's ability to draw such art world heavy-weights as Douglas Crimp and Pierre et Gilles, as well as a major show of Robert Mapplethorpe photographs.

My point, however, is that curators and artists have been eager to take up bodies, queer or otherwise, as a locus from which to question Western visual codes and the manner in which vision forges identity within/on specific lived cultural bodies. There's been a marked proliferation of bodies in our galleries proffering a new understanding of corporeality, identity, culture and politics: queer bodies, postcolonial bodies, subaltern bodies, transgendered bodies and a remapping of female corporeality in relation to the prohibitions placed on it by humanist feminisms. *The Aberrant Object, Persona Cognita* at the Museum of Modern Art at Heide and the *Esensual Fragments* program run throughout the last 2 years at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne helped reassess the historical nature of material art practices like dada and surrealism, as a consequence of gender and sexuality issues. There's a kind of performativity cohering around the body in these programs which is producing a complex place for the body, a space over and above its abuse and commodification in mainstream culture. In this context, corporeality has emerged as a major area for a critical dislocation of heteronormative and absurdly patriarchal ideologies churned out by the media.

The federal government's somewhat cynical attempt to bring together computer technologies and the arts as put forth in Creative Nation begs the question as to how this will affect not government nor multinationals, but artists and curators. Is there a possibility that this push to "modernise" art practice in Australia might see a vast experimentation in the technology for its own sake? Are we likely to see neo-abstraction take another path down the infobahn or see installation works curated within the virtual walls of a cyber gallery? Would this push see differing relationships between art practice and materiality emerge in the year 2000 as dominants in the landscape of Australian visual culture? We probably won't see neo-geo at the address <http://www.store.5/-greenberg/garbage/home.html>.

Robert Schubert is a writer and doctoral candidate in Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne.

The Annear View

Jacqueline Millner talks to *Perspecta* 1995 curator Judy Annear

Australian *Perspecta* 1995 is the first curated by a guest curator. Judy Annear, most recently Commissioner for the Australian Pavilion at the 1993 Venice Biennale, has spent much of the last ten months whittling the 1500 artists whose work she viewed down to the 36 on exhibit, a task which unlike her predecessor she undertook without a curatorium. There are many familiar names in the show, and while *Perspecta* has something of a tradition of exhibiting mid-career artists whose work has taken radically new turns - Ken Unsworth is a perennial - the contrast with the "new guard" of the 1993 *Perspecta* is striking. This impression made the selection criteria of particular interest...

JM: The early promotional material for *Perspecta* 1995 mentions the word "hybrid", although the more recent publicity steers clear of the term. Was hybridity still the guiding principle of your curation, and how do you interpret the notion?

JA: There was a point when "hybrid" started to become a sort of "buzzword", so I thought I'd tone the publicity down, so that by the time *Perspecta* opened it would not be like yet another fashionable term of utter meaninglessness. I like the word because it incorporates all sorts of things that have defied and continue to defy labelling, it's a convenient open-ended term which people can't hang mountains of restrictions around. It's that kind of liminality which really interests me not just about contemporary art but art in general, regardless of the medium. Some people have said, "Well, I assume it's a show about new technologies". It's apparently

easy to use a computer to generate hybrid forms, but the reality is that a lot of high tech work really bores me because it's too much about the technology, and too much about trying to recreate reality. There are certainly two people in the show who work with CD-ROM, Troy Innocent and Linda Dement, but their work interests me because they are trying to go beyond the absurdly logical restraints of the computer screen. Another tack on hybridity is that taken by Tony Clark and Linda Marrinon, who you could say are hybridising painting and sculpture, masculinity and femininity.

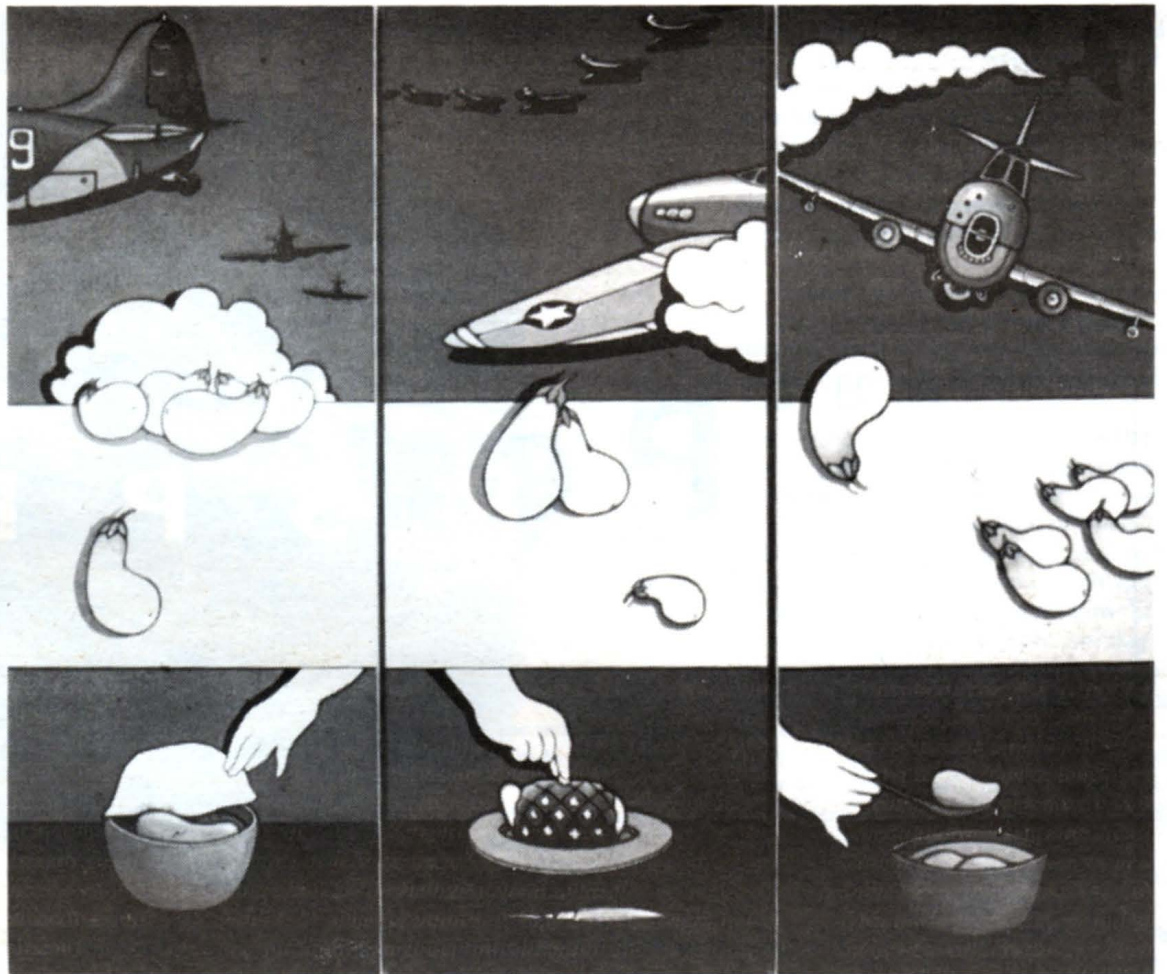
JM: Do you think the very slipperiness of the term risks it evading the hard questions, in terms of meaningful critique?

JA: Yes, I think that is a possibility. There is a real cynicism about the possibility of political change. That was a problem I faced in putting *Perspecta* together, because I wanted to include artists and work which had a very direct connection to society, and a kind of politic, and that's very difficult to find in Australia at the moment.

JM: There is an expectation that *Perspecta* will review what's been happening nationally in contemporary art over the last couple of years. What other criteria did you bring to your curation?

JA: One of the criteria for selection has to be evidence of some understanding of aesthetic value of whatever description. Having worked with a lot of Japanese artists, I'm much more demanding now in terms of what I expect of an artist. To me, the visual arts have a very performative aspect, and it really shows if artists go out in front of an audience and they haven't got it together.

JM: What about the national character of the show? W.A. and Queensland are somewhat underrepresented.



Guan Wei from the series 'The Great War of the Eggplant' 1994 synthetic polymer paint on canvas 3 components each 127 x 49cm

JA: That's a very tricky one. A lot of people in the smaller centres have a real problem with maintaining the kind of rigour necessary to focus on your work regardless of an unsupportive environment. I'm sympathetic, but in the end, when I had to make those critical decisions about those intangibles to do with aesthetics and quality and so on, people just fell off the light box.

JM: Are you using any other venues?

JA: No, I decided to concentrate it here. The thing that really interests me about museums, particularly this one, is that it gets an unbelievable number and range of people. You have to be quite intrepid to go to things that aren't in obvious places. There will be whole sections of the art community which will be irritated by that, but because I'm very interested in the educational role of something like this, I really do want to get to as many people as possible.

JM: Does the way you curated *Perspecta* give you indications about tendencies

within contemporary Australian practice? Where do you think things are headed?

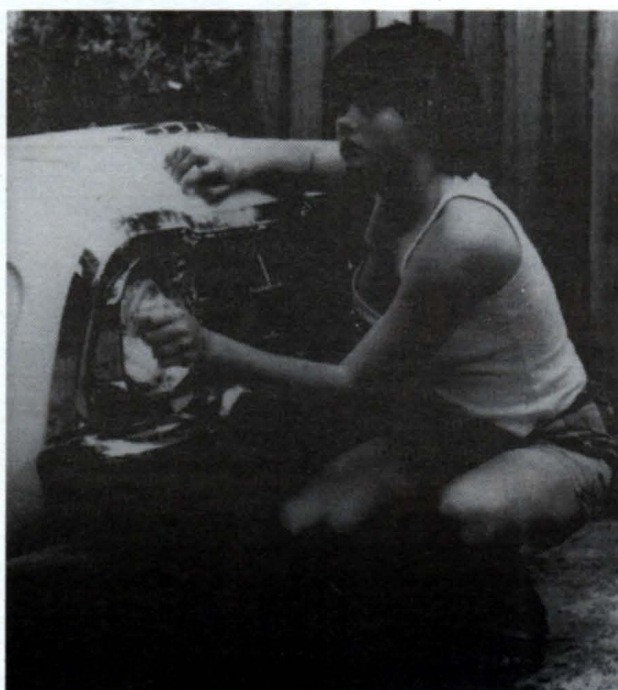
JA: It's very hard to say. It'll depend very much on whether the recession really ends, and private monies start flowing back into the art market, and also on whether the VACB change the way in which they support contemporary arts, and start developing an international program. In terms of artists making art, while I think there is a lot of good work here, I also think that visual artists in Australia really have to be a lot more focused and a lot tougher about what they are doing. While I would like to think that we would have transcended certain kinds of decorative aspects associated with Australian culture, I fear that in five years' time things may not be that different. I think there is a kind of inertia that sets in towards the end of a century, although the year 2001 will probably be absolutely fascinating.

Perspecta is at the Art Gallery of NSW from Friday 3 February to Sunday 26 March.



The Wizard of Oz, 1956

He was playing Dorothy in the school's production of the *Wizard of Oz*. His father got angry at him for getting dressed too early.



Useless, 1974

Her father's nickname for her was 'useless'. from 'Scarred for Life' photo series 1994



Charm Alone, 1965

His brother said, 'crooked nose and no chin - you'll have to survive on charm alone'.

Tracey Moffatt 'Charm Alone, 1965' His brother said, 'crooked nose and no chin - you'll have to survive on charm alone'. from 'Scarred for Life' photo series 1994

Tracey Moffatt 'The Wizard of Oz, 1956' He was playing Dorothy in the school's production of the *Wizard of Oz*. His father got angry at him for getting dressed too early. from 'Scarred for Life' photo series 1994

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Condition Critical

Shaun Davies TKOs visual arts criticism.

As Henry Mencken's aphorism goes, there are no dull subjects, only dull writers. But if it is not simply dull, then what exactly is the problem with most critical writing on contemporary art in Australia today? At a glance through the journals and newspapers which carry such stuff, most writing of this kind—with rare exception—manifests typically in three ways: firstly, as a kind of simplistic, promotional reportage appealing to the lowest common intellectual denominator; secondly, as mere descriptive analyses gleaned from the 'artist's statement' (now so often accompanying exhibited works and slipped into the empty pockets of the desperately seeking journalist), and thirdly, as a kind of gall-bitter pomposity which reflects and magnifies the personal prejudices of the scandal-monger posturing as an important newspaper columnist. Of this third kind, little more is ultimately displayed than the base moralism of a public executioner, and even less could it be said to serve any useful purpose. Each of these three types seem uninterested in—perhaps incapable of—providing any conditions or contexts from which a *variety* of critical positions may be allowed to emerge and proliferate, through which, in turn, more rigorous and open debate over the means by which art is validated or invalidated, criticised and assessed, may be more convincingly taken up. It is as if writing on the subject, passed off as fair comment, actually reflects a certain homogeneity of critical thinking amongst art writers and presumes, equally, the existence of a homogeneous 'readership' characterised as an undifferentiated, unquestioning and passive 'public' only too ready to accept the role of the art writer as the generator of art's 'meaning' and the arbiter of its worth. The condescension is quite breathtaking.

Art writing nowadays generally fulfils the same function as a social column, preoccupied with supplying red-hot tips to a small, competitive in-crowd of art-pundits and purveyors, hangers-on and, more often than not, other artists (see you at the *next* opening!). Perhaps the problem may simply, and more pathetically, reflect a serious lack of imagination on the part of the art writer, a paucity of clear thinking with respect to more important and over-arching social and cultural issues. Here, one form of writing, specific to no one particular subject and oozing more style than substance, may simply substitute for any other. Arts writer as gossip columnist? In all events, it is not hard to understand how even the slightest comment resembling informed, scholarly or intelligent debate gets passed off as 'important' and 'serious' stuff, and how certain art writers gain the credence and reputation they do. 'A cock', said Syrus in the 1st century BC, 'has great influence on his own dunghill'.

Most Australian contemporary artists I have met seem to imagine that their entire future depends upon the publication of absolutely anything whatsoever written about them by anyone whatsoever. Why is this the case? If it might be said that there is nothing terribly new in this situation—that art-production has always disappeared up its own publicity-sucking fundament—I wonder what ultimate benefit may be derived from indulging in such promotional preoccupations? The amassing of an enormously bulging C.V.? How many artists, I wonder, would dare include in their C.V. a full copy of a 'bad' review, or even an honest one? Most, I daresay, would suspiciously resort to including the name of the reviewer only in

the 'selected bibliography'. Arts graduates pumped out wholesale from the various colleges seem to have understood nothing else than the necessity to *publicise, promote and market*. It seems success for the Art Dandy ('Fop-Art?') may be in part measured by having been referred to, say, in the hyper-space of the super-market journals (even if what is said about them is scarcely understood), in some sporadic expanse of tendentiousness over-produced in the more respectable journals, in some smear of self-interested foulness dead-fallen from the presses of the popular dailies, or in an occasional bright spot buried and forgotten in the committee-stacked underfunds. What is wrong with *this* picture?

Not that the fault lies squarely with the artist. Far from it. The business of writing, the sheer undertaking of critical responsibility seems here the thing which is at stake, and perhaps, in Australia, never so urgently. Felicity Fenner often appears in her columns as little more than an epigone's facility, a fashionable 'margin surfer'. Her writing betrays a

surprising lack of concern for how that late 20th century kind of art which feigns self-reflexivity and purports to undermine artistic conventions actually functions to *reinforce* such conventions. Does art merely and placidly unfold of its own accord? Representation, as writing or art, takes on its most impotent form here, that is, at the point where it is disguised as post-representational (which in the genuine sense, roughly speaking, would refrain from mere imitation and instead make explicit the strategies which enable representational works to *work*). On the other hand this may be where it is most potent given that a lot of people probably read this stuff, although then it would represent a kind of power without responsibility. Good criticism should not shrink from engaging with difficult issues, and could perhaps demonstrate *how* representational art functions, *how* it mobilises certain power bases, for instance, and not just *what* representational works represent.

Ostensibly a kind of postmodern form of

address, Fenner's writing lapses into a kind of simple affectation, a (mis)representation of post-representation, and degenerates into the same kind of *de rigueur* stylisations characteristic of the insipidly imitative work she so openly promotes—the very misrepresentation of postmodernism that Lyotard himself so many years ago lamented.

To comment on the other end of the critical writing spectrum, I have always struggled to stifle the yawns which invariably result upon opening one of John McDonald's phials of chloroform. He has perhaps more than any other living art writer anaesthetised entire reading publics with his cyanide gas-bagging. I wish I could say of *him* that I used to like his earlier work (as he has said of Susan Norrie). I now instinctively avoid reading his articles altogether; in the end I simply can't be bothered searching in vain for even the *manifest* content. I can only presume that his editor knows even less about the issues than he appears to. If, by making appeal to some obscure notion of 'good art' or 'aesthetic value' Mc the Knf hopes to convince anyone other than those equally as jaundiced of his odious opinions, if by attracting their middle-brow sneers of disapproval he hopes to demolish the inanities of the contemporary art circus, then I wish him the very best of British. If, in the end, he succeeds in nothing else than simply boring or irritating people, his opprobrium could only be said to perfectly match the objects against which he so bitterly rails.

Shaun Davies teaches art theory at the University of Western Sydney.

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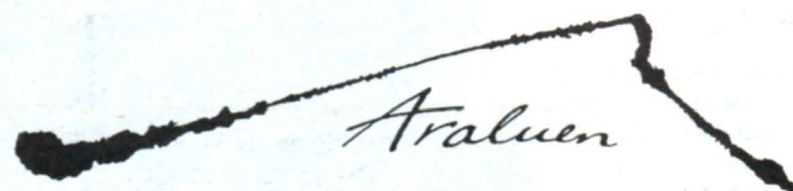
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A Body will Always be a Body

Naomi Richards in dialogue with five dancers in Melbourne

Shelley Lasica, Sandra Parker, Trevor Patrick, John Utans and Ros Warby are all mature dancers and choreographers who have worked in a wide variety of settings. All of them have choreographed and performed their own work, and collaborated with other performing artists in dance, theatre and opera. All have worked overseas, so understand their practice in relation to dance and choreographic practice throughout the world.

Their highly individual work has grown from explorations of a range of classical, modern and postmodern movement and performance techniques including classical ballet, American modern dance, European dance/theatre, release techniques, alignment work and improvisation. Their work is frequently performed without sound. When present, sound is just as likely to be spoken text as music. Although their movement is often subtle, small and slow, the experience of watching their work is vivid.

The questions "What characterises Australian dance in the 90s?", "How is that shaped?" and "What is the future of dance in Australia?" asked of these five practitioners led to very general discussions. The conversations included issues such as the definition of an Australian dance style, the diversity of work here, support for dance and the impact of new technology.

Many of the conversations began by my asking what sense it makes to talk about Australian dance.

JU: The push to find the ultimate Australian style in dance, as in any art form, results in token gestures such as the Australian Ballet's commissioning of *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie* or *Ned Kelly*. I don't think you can push an identity like that...I'm conscious of being an Australian choreographer and dancer but I prefer to place myself in a dance heritage and to reflect on myself as an Australian dancer from this framework...If there's anything that characterises Australian dance it is its diversity.

RW: When people talk about Australian dance in a positive way it's all about the strength, the power, the athleticism and the space that Australian dancers occupy. When you think about that, it's about people "doing" something, and dancers here are very good at "doing". When I am working, I watch. The combination of doing, watching and sensing is very hard, very disciplined work, and you come at it from a very rigorous process. In the training of dancers here, and in the social environment here, "doing" is a much more popular way of existing than sensing, watching, observing.

Australian dance, like many other art forms in Australia, is under constant pressure to make easily reproducible and digestible product. Popular culture's aspiration to preserve an eternally youthful body, together with its stress on the visual and our culture's limited understanding of

physicality, encourage dance to be experienced merely as spectacle.

TP: The institutionalised learning of dance is such that the dance scene is constantly moving from one wave of youthful exuberance to another and often does not reach the point where people are practising as mature artists and working with ideas. Few young artists think of themselves as artists. To most people who are practising dance, it's a job. Again because it is so much tied with youthful vitality, the work being performed and made is imbued with that. The work is often about glamour, virtuosity, the spectacular ... Where is art amongst all this hormonal activity? It's very difficult to fight that, particularly when people are funded in ways which encourage

Australia in the 90s? A stunning Merry Widow; an elastic modern dance; a contact improvisation with text spoken by the dancers; a male dancer in a black frock; a story told in the gestures of hands and eyes; a solo dancer moving without a sound in the gallery; a Western-trained dancer, a designer, an actress, an Eastern-trained dancer and several musicians collaborating in performance; a raunchy rendezvous in a cafe to rival any Grand Marnier TV ad; a barefoot woman in a jumpsuit on a wooden floor listening intently for the next move; a woman with a birdcage on her head; a woman pulling an endless strand of red wool from her mouth; any number of people doing for the thousandth time something with a chair ... The multicultural society is rich with diversity, but how comfortable is it sustaining difference?

TP: It's an interesting problem that I have noticed in the last few years, the dance establishment trying to homogenise the whole scene into one big, happy, harmonious community. I don't think it is. I think there are a lot of vibrant diverse forms, and they need to be separate, they need their own space, and this corralling, it seems to me from organisations that purport to represent the whole community,

SL: One thing that I think would have a very positive effect on dance in Australia and the arts generally is if the whole funding situation was exploded, so that there was not just one source of funding. There needs to be much more diversity: private funding, corporate funding, foundations. That's quite hard to set up in Australia, but somehow it has to be nurtured. In this way you would end up with a far more multi-layered community which can only be better.

In the last decade of the millennium, technology is the buzzword. Is there anything happening with new technology worth talking about? Are the computer boffins getting past gimmickry? Are we being transported into a completely new age?

TP: Technology is having an extraordinary effect on the whole form: film, video, computers, interactive sound. And it's not just because artists want to make the most of what is available to them. It's also that funding bodies and governments even are legislating to manipulate the artistic community along particular lines of achievement, in what they perceive as the development of the arts and creating

exportable commodities ... One of the big dilemmas now seems to be how to integrate the body and technology in performance so that one isn't just dancing around in front of a film, or dancing over music. There seems to be a quest to make that happen, and I don't think it can. I think that a body will always be a body and it can't deconstruct before your very eyes and fade in and fade out, and materialise and dematerialise except in quite a literal way.

SL: New technology is not automatically superior to other technology. Technology is a wonderful tool but it has to be seen in context. It certainly has limitations and the idea that a live performance can be completely transferred into a new medium is nonsense. Why have people chosen the live arts as their medium? It's about the experience. No matter how extraordinary a film or video, it does not replicate the live performance.



John Utans, Sandra Parker, Ros Warby, Shelley Lassica, Trevor Patrick photo: John Bells

them to pursue that energy.

So who in the dance scene is working with ideas and how are such individuals supported?

TP: Usually the people working in this way are older. They are supported by other artists and each other, and through personal exchange with the international community. They don't get a lot of popular support. They tend to become known as the dancer's dancer or the choreographer's choreographer, but it is this body of work which is at the core of the development of dance in this country.

But will it survive for lack of popular support?

TP: It has to, because one constantly feeds the other. Although it's not often acknowledged, any developments that occur in the popular form I feel are made sourcing this other constant that is bubbling away beneath everything. To involve it in the hunger that is the popular arts would be the death of that sort of creativity. It needs to be supported to survive but left alone to do its work. If it was trying to function under the pressure to fill seats, I don't think it could.

What is the diversity of dance in

is misguided.

SL: The homogenisation somehow goes in line with people trying to identify an Australian dance style. But there is no one story and no one history and to set up official histories is the predilection of reasonably unpleasant forces. It disturbs me immensely that the perception exists of a recent springing up of contemporary work from a single source, when if you look at the bigger picture you see how things grow and develop, how the diversity grows and develops.

JU: It is a time of diversity. I just wish that people would accept that diversity. When I think of Melbourne and the different philosophies that different dance makers are employing there's a very rich and vital practice. What bugs me a little is the competition, or that ...

That difference cannot be sustained?

JU: Yes, and that comes back to the funding dollar.

So, as long as everyone's fighting for the dollar, then everyone will have to step on top of one another, maintain and fight for their turf?

JU: Yes, then what is funded is interpreted as the trend.

Another baffling thing is the belief that new technologies can be developed into something meaningful overnight.

SL: You need only look at people who have been working in video art for over twenty years. It's not a matter of running at it. It's a matter of working something through. It's very short-sighted of people to think they are going to develop this work quickly. That quick hit mentality is very much associated with a product-based view of art production.

So what is the future of dance in Australia and what will determine it?

RW: If those individuals can just keep a certain persistence and integrity to their practice, then maybe there's the possibility that an understanding of choreographic practice will extend.

SL: The future of dance in Australia relies on the generosity of spirit among practitioners and an increasing belief in the practice, a realistic belief in the practice and an integrity about what it is that one does. Until practitioners have that sense, why should anyone else take notice?

Naomi Richards is a Melbourne writer on dance.

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Sound Futures

Frances Dyson strikes a repose on the borderlines of contemporary sound art practices.

A recent collection of writing on radio art published under the Semiotext(e) series contains a significant number of historical texts that advert to the noisy and transmissive origins of this contemporary art form. This is not surprising really. Given the current fascination for all things ether, the weirdness of wireless has naturally emerged as a theme of great historical relevance, and rhetorical expedience. The irony is however, that while experiments in early radio and telephony are providing a fertile source of fact and fiction to support the more utopic claims of cyberphiles, radio art is still not receiving the attention it deserves. For institutions and independent producers alike, developments in 'new media' seem to be more in line with the 'wireless' (and hopefully funded) future, offering an alternative to the one-way, stereophonic and often institutionalised broadcasts characteristic of mainstream radio. For instance CD-ROM allows artists to map entirely new ways of engaging with the work, sound files can be 'broadcast' on the internet without institutional approval, sound spatialization technology allows artists to abandon stereophony in favour of a more 'realistic' and immersive listening experience, and virtual audio technology combines interactivity with immersion to simulate changing sound environments as the body moves through the virtual space.

Interest in these technologies has certainly been primed, but it is also important to point out that sound artists have been experimenting with interactivity and spatial immersion through various means for the better half of this century. Installation works in particular allow very precise configurations of sound to be distributed in a given space, and simple electronic devices such as motion detectors can provide an interactive element. The result is a sound-space where the phenomenality of sound, in all its intensity and palpability, can be explored. But irony abounds in the sound world, for as sound installations increasingly direct gallery audiences to the acoustic and architectural nuances of real space, the quality of aesthetic experience they afford is being computed in the virtual space. And the key element in virtual space is not space at all, but time.

Time, writ large, covers every element of the new technologies which enable acoustic space to be mapped. Time figures in the enormous computational processes required to plot a sound moving from one side of the room to another, being absorbed by some materials and reflecting off others as it travels. Time, or lack of it, makes it difficult for artists to experiment with technologies, especially when, as one engineer commented, 'if they haven't got bugs they're obsolete.' Time, or its elision, has produced the sound bite and the untraceable sample - now appropriated by advertising after a long and respectable history within a particular genre of audio art that grew out of tape cut-up. Time, or its storage in recording technologies, makes fashion fodder of once innovative sound compositions, and captures distant voices as exotic in the frenzy of consumer culture's imperialistic sweep. Time, measured in nanoseconds and regimented by mass media, threatens to create a muddy audiophony of brown noise.

But sound artists have also had time. Samplers, one of the most important developments in audio technology, have been standard equipment in both artistic and popular studios for at least the past decade. Prior to sampling, tape cut up and complex multitrack mixing were extremely common, and contributed to the development of a genre ('cut-up', 'scratch' or now 'plunderphonia') characterised by a self-reflexive, critical perspective on both mainstream media and media technologies. So well established is this perspective that all but the most naive audio artist would use a recording without being cognisant of the meaning already embedded in its history. Nor does the production of ever more minute combinations of sounds (and images) appear either hypeworthy or 'new' to most audio artists. As the tone and look of the new delivers a slightly jaded pallor, there is a growing sense that the prerecorded and highly coded media sound, scratched into prolific polysemic forms during the 80s, is disturbingly monotonous, that creating new meanings from the dust pile of media sound is also creating more dust.

With the present mediascape looking so degraded—a landscape of remains, where ever rationalised time becomes an industrial expedient engendering amnesia—it is not surprising that sound artists are now interested in spaces, be they real or virtual, in sonic formations and flows, and in non-institutionalised acoustic interactions. The eloquence (if not the hi-fidelity) of pre- and post-media appears in the audio artworks forming new territories on the net, or in work that rediscovers the noisy origins of audio recording and transmission (remember the telephone?). The question of space is raised again as sound artists rekindle the issue of noise pollution which Murray Schafer and the World Soundscape Project began to articulate in the late-1970s. However this return sees a shift from the pristine recordings of mostly 'natural' sound that characterised soundscape, to the more complex and in a sense rhetorical scope of acoustic ecology. Within this field, sound—be it bird song or buzzing fluorescent light—is treated as part of an aural habitat, an aural culture that can no longer support notions of 'silence' or 'pure sound', and that is beginning to realise the importance of the noises it has studiously ignored.

For the future, the territories are not necessarily new. While developments in audio technologies will certainly contribute to the consolidation of sound art and the proliferation of its forms, what seems most important is the deliberate interjection of repose within contemporary work. Ironically, again, this occurs at the borders where, often thanks to new technology, categories are beginning to collapse, prompting very basic, thoughtful questions to be asked. Is it vibrational or electrical, is it sound or data, biological or mechanical, living or dead, heard, felt or seen? How sounds the tick?

Frances Dyson is a media artist and theorist who lectures at the University of Wollongong.

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Noises Off

Nicholas Gebhardt speaks to Australian sound artists and curators

In a recent catalogue essay, the historian Paul Carter suggests that the "... nostalgia implicit in the odd term sound art should be resisted." Carter's statement might seem fairly incidental were it not for the surge in major sound events and exhibitions, both nationally and internationally, that apply the category of "sound art" to a range of events and emissions. The presumption, of course, is sound: that it's there, that we can't escape it, and that to ignore it is to fall for a history of ocularcentrism. But does sound art in fact engage with or produce a concept of sound that allows for a questioning and deconstruction of essentialist notions of sound?

This question is inevitably bound to a series of imaginative leaps from radio to gallery spaces, from contemporary music to shopping malls and on into the big blue of pop music with its passion for "the mix". In a sense, sound art is everywhere and nowhere at once, a noisy imposition on an even noisier silence and a mute interloper amongst centuries of visual tropes. Its characters harp and harangue and hollow out the way we listen so that what was once tongue-in-cheek becomes a kick in the ear. As sculptor Nigel Helyer points out: "The study of sound is a kind of diaspora and as a diaspora it's a connective tissue between all disciplines. If you work in sound that's the way you have to work, that's the way you're forced to work."

It is a mistake to imagine that experimentation with sounds beyond the realm of the tempered scale is a new thing. After all, from Edison to Artaud, radiophony and phonography offered the possibility of a radical reorganisation of sonorous physical and psychic spaces. What is new, however, is the way in which the debate over sound art in Australia is taking place within the larger debate - overtly announced with the arrival of Creative Nation - over the necessity for 'culture' and the role of artists in creating and sustaining that culture.

There are, obviously, some salient moments locally that highlight an emergent sound art practice and its accompanying theoretical overtures: Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, *Earwitness*, and the Contemporary Music Co. in Melbourne; *Soundculture 91* at The Performance Space in Sydney, and *Surface Tension* and *The Listening Room* on ABC radio; and in Perth the events

organised by Lynn Mitchell for EVOS. Out of this context works as diverse as Joyce Hinterding's sonic imaging, Warren Burt's aleatory experiments with digital systems, Derek Kreckler's soundless installations, Joan Brassil's sound transferences, Rik Rue's tape manipulation of 'natural' sounds, and Virginia Madsen's audio operas, amongst others, have begun to grapple with the logistics of sound across a range of media and a variety of public sites.

Sonia Leber, the curator of Melbourne's recent *Earwitness* program and Rebecca Coyle, who is curating the *Sound in Space* exhibition opening in May 1995 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, both express concern about the difficulties of exhibiting sound art; of dealing with volume, with balance, reverberation, resistant surfaces, and resistant audiences. Coyle extends this, advocating a critical emphasis on the element of sound in all art practice, and "... looks forward to a time when we don't need sound art shows, but instead, incorporate sound along thematic lines of questioning rather than simply defining a certain effect."

In a restricted cultural economy that privileges certain perceptions of what should be heard in creating a nation, the audio arts become fundamental to sonorising the environment. It is in this sense that radio producer Tony MacGregor identifies more and more "... artists who normally wouldn't call themselves sound artists using sound as a resource, in that there is a sonorousness or a noisiness that is more and more explicit. What we're seeing is that noisy space has opened up and been encouraged to open up, by institutions such as the ABC, the Australia Council, in Biennales, and in *Perspecta*. In galleries and museums and other public sites, artists have been allowed to make more and more noise."

So there are changes in the air that seem to be bringing sound into the fold, that open up the potential for art to make itself heard. It is an opening that is carried through at a bureaucratic level as well, with the idealisation of hybridity as the form through which a global or multinational aesthetics takes shape. And as curator Allesio Cavallaro points out, the category of hybridity is highly conducive to the sonic arts, with its emphasis on a multiplicity of events and a pre-history of recorded

material across a variety of sites. Ultimately though, it is the collusion of Creative Nation and the multimedia industry that in many ways introduces an unheard of opportunity for sonic artists, where the sound element is installed as the core of the multimedia or virtual reality experience.

As Nigel Helyer suggests, however, multimedia is still "... in the inchoate stage, trapped in that flat void of the screen, whereas a sound can be a very rich experience. There's a minimal amount of work being done in terms of the multi-dimensionality of sound. The sound images that we're used to from the 1950s and 1960s hi-fi developments are based on pictorialism with perspectival arrangements in them. There's nothing happening in multimedia to liberate sound from the confines of this pictorial space." For Helyer, to work with multimedia it's necessary to make the sonic capacity come alive, to draw out the somatic and emotional power of sound.

So how might sound be placed in virtual environments that all too often take sound literally? Virginia Madsen speaks of sound as something already both actual and virtual, actual because it always has bodily effects, the waves are always hitting you and affecting you viscerally, virtual in the way it calls to a virtual past or a virtual future. Its power lies in its not being attached to a particular image. The mistake, though, is to reconfigure all events, all processes, within a (multi)media space, to build a sound aesthetics based on an understanding of sound as somehow 'natural' or formal, where sound art is maintained as an organic process that only ever reveals the meaning of sound as internal to itself.

This tendency raises the question of what kind of an experience of sound can be achieved in gallery, museum and other spaces which are historically bound to the

primacy of the visual, the autonomy of the work, and a listening that is still, in many ways, a question of absolute fidelity to the source. For Paul Carter, the real problem lies in the expectations associated with the paradigm of the "the gallery" or the museum or radio, in producing a concept of a sound work that does more than simply produce a sound. It's a problem, however, that involves rejecting as naive optimism the ability to transform a public space through sound, or reify ambience to enclose or encompass space.

So in the rush to confront multimedia and hybrid possibilities, it's not a matter of manufacturing new aural experiences in which the sonic arts are held to the same kind of formal properties that see all sound in terms of its generative potential. We are well aware of the limits of sound, of the obvious incursions that take place in the name of an enclosed listening, an ear that is completely immersed. Given this potential fascism of sound, it is important to question a sonic arts practice that grounds itself in sound as the total experience of the ear.

In this context, the work of someone like John Cage (and Cage's influence on creating a field of sonic art is formidable) still has a strangely romantic attachment to the image of the ear, to constructing a listening. In severing his ear, it is Van Gogh who in fact marks listening as obsolete, and makes sound a question of a continuum, of how sound is to be framed. A sound event therefore, is not something to be heard; it is no longer necessary to invent an ear. Rather, to amplify and record sounds is to pass through a series of possible moments, of characters, that take hold of sound as simply another element in thinking through the 'noise of time'.

Nicholas Gebhardt is a Sydney writer and doctoral candidate at the University of Sydney.

SOUND IN SPACE

an MCA exhibition

SOUND IN SPACE is an event which will explore the tantalisingly elusive medium of sound in an Australian context. Sound has its own performative qualities, yet the physical definition of sound - as vibrations in the air - cannot encompass the powerfully affective qualities of aural experience: the sound of a lover's voice, musical excursions, fingernails scraping chalkboard, a baby's cry, hypnotic rhythms and riffs. Nor can such a definition illustrate the multi-dimensionality of sound art interpretation and practice. In Australia, sound and audio practice reach into the fields of multi-media art, sculpture, experimental and new music, performance, sound poetry, radiophony, soundtrack and sound design. *SOUND IN SPACE* encompasses all these 'categories' - but with a strong visual dimension. The exhibition will feature both new and classic work by artists who have delineated and continue to contribute to an Australian practice in sound. Their works range from those which integrate sound with a visual component, to those in which visual images are created by listeners from audio triggers. One theme explored in the show is the technological production and reproduction of

sound - from object-on-object, to grainy analogue sound, to digital effects. A second major theme is ambient sound - the sounds ever present in the internal and external spaces of the body and the environments of everyday life. *SOUND IN SPACE* has been organised by guest curator Rebecca Coyle for Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. It opens at the MCA on 12 May this year, and will run until August. An accompanying performance program will be held in late April at Artspace, Woolloomooloo (ring Nick Tsoutas on 02-368 1899 for details). Talks and seminars will be held at the MCA throughout the exhibition. A two-evening program of film and video works centred on audio art soundtracks or sound art performance will be held at the MCA in July. In June, a special issue of the Australian Music Centre's journal *Sounds Australian* will be linked to *SOUND IN SPACE*. This exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue and CD, available at the MCA.

For further details ring Linda Michael or Louise Pether at the MCA. tel: 02-252 4033 fax: 02-252 4361.

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Orchestration of a Nation

Nicholas Gebhardt talks to composer Jonathan Mills, music consultant to the Brisbane Music Biennial

"It's certainly no accident that the most interesting works produced with the new digital technologies are by musicians without a past"

Luciano Berio

The contemporary music scene is in a curious state. It is skewed by strangely antiquated concerns, traumatised by the symphonic nationalism that is plaguing the end of the century. Speaking with Jonathan Mills, a composer and research fellow at RMIT in Melbourne, you realise that it will take more than a return to a sound state to make the music come to life: "We have gone down the path in this country of being dominated by certain notions of what an official culture is. We are driven by an overpowering need to create an official culture and yet our culture is not something which you can prescribe or define. And as for the economic realities, they are in some ways a separate issue and they need to be treated separately. What needs to be dealt with right now, in a comprehensive document, is the artistic musical imperatives at work here."

Mills traces the problem to an outdated and repressive system of musical administration which stems from the power of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and an imperial mentality that still sees symphonic grandeur as the apex of musical culture (and this applies to pop music as well). He points out that we are "... lumbered with a structure which is nineteenth century and does not even deal



Machine for Making Sense - Brisbane Biennial 1995

with the way in which we hear. Most of the population of this country receive their acoustic information via some form of electronic technological mediation. So wouldn't it be sensible and mainstream to put a few bucks into research in that area? We are simply not understanding the quantum leaps that are possible in terms of how sound can be defined.

"The whole of 18th and 19th century western music was based on certain assumptions about modulation, equal temperament, and the uniformity of instrumental technology. We have moved in terms of our sound world far beyond that.

It's almost an anachronism to even talk about figures like John Cage and Pierre Schaeffer. It's not merely that there are these things that happened in the early twentieth century called musique concrete, or aleatory processes, that we haven't caught up with. Rather, it's that we've gone far beyond them and so have the mainstream practices. Any three second TV commercial understands the Schaefferian moment

in a way that music practice in Australia has yet to acknowledge. It's absurd."

For Mills, the most significant act in Creative Nation in terms of music was to remove the Sydney Symphony Orchestra from the ABC. This at least potentially opens up the system of musical control which, since the 60s, has confined such musical developments as authentic performance practice, certain contemporary forms, improvisatory and non-scored techniques and electro-acoustic music, to the margins.

Mills emphasises that "... if you think



Miriam Makeba - Brisbane Biennial 1995

that the government and the ABC charter is to actually present Australian culture in all its diversity, and by that I think one needs to look not only at the cultural background of people involved - which does not mean Aboriginal violinists - one actually has to look at the available technology and performance practices that the ABC and other cultural bodies might have invested in or investigated. None of that's happened, even though 90% of the money available for non-commercial music goes into an orchestra, an opera company or a ballet company."

In this sense, "... contemporary music practice has to be understood as a question of a spectrum, where all sounds are potentially transformable into anything else. Putting aside the technological implications of that, the aesthetic implications are astounding and completely ignored, except by a few fringe dwellers whose work has appeared in scattered events like *The Listening Room*, *Perspecta*, the Biennale, the Sculpture Triennial in Melbourne, and *Soundculture*. And still we are mindlessly churning out these people to play violin or viola and yet technology has gone so far beyond the need for a viola that it's ridiculous."

It's just as easy, Mills admits, to be prescriptive in the face of prescription, to offer only alternatives rather than experiments, to crush thought in the name of a new, more insidious nationalism. His concern, however, about things like Creative Nation and more general cultural statements, is that no one talks about the music, about the development in contemporary music, except in terms of what it takes away from the 'mainstream'. Nowhere is the central question of composition, of the composer's act, taken into account.

"Chris Mann once said that Schoenberg brought the act of composition to an absolute distillation in terms of the ways composers create new sound worlds. And with Cage, composers create new listenings, they construct an ear. What is the composer of the future supposed to do? Now *that* presupposes a political set of issues to do with the supremacy of a single composer. So there is a vast set of issues to do with the definition of the composer alone. There is the definition of the composer in a post-Cagean world, of the improvised world. None of this is taken into account in any of the current cultural debates about the actuality of the musical process that is taking place in our society. In Australia at the moment, despite a fundamental lack of imagination, we have the possibility, through a range of cross-cultural resources - human, intellectual, cultural, instrumental - of actually rethinking the role of the composer and of music in quite different and challenging ways."

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Wired for Performance

Annemarie Jonson interviews ABC Radio's Sarah Benjamin

When Sarah Benjamin was appointed as the manager of arts for ABC radio in May 1994, she commented that she would like to enhance the role of radio as a venue for performance. Annemarie Jonson asked her what she intended to do and what she meant by radio as a performance venue.

SB: An evening "strip" from 9.30 pm to 10 pm of performance has just begun. There's a difference between how I understand performance and how the network managers would understand performance. Radio National managers have wanted a fairly conventional interpretation of performance initially, which I hope we can broaden out. At the moment we have some Shakespeare in production, but most of the productions for that strip will be new drama written especially for radio by Australian playwrights who are interested in the possibilities of the medium as an opportunity rather than a limitation. There'll also be a poetry program featuring contemporary Australian as well as international poetry. We'll also be featuring new Australian comedy. What I'd like to do over the next year is to really push the notion of performance so you get the audience used to a different sound on radio, because poetry, drama or performance have not been common listening experiences.

AJ: *On your appointment, you said that radio is one of the most accessible mediums, but also that you'd like to enhance serious critical debate on the arts. How do you reconcile these objectives?*

SB: I don't think that accessibility has anything to do with level of debate. When I say accessible I mean, firstly, being accessible over physical distance to a great number of people. Many more people can hear a radio drama than would ever get to see one in a live space. Accessibility can also mean the role of the program or presenter in making things available to the listener who is unfamiliar with them. I think in radio you can bring things to the listener's attention that are often missed by the other media. Because radio is live, you can be both searching and critical. You take the position of the listener much more than you can if you're in print journalism.

AJ: *Doesn't that assume that there is a kind of unified listener? How do you anticipate the range of interests and backgrounds that your listenership will bring to listening, if you are aiming at accessibility and therefore a diverse audience?*

SB: If a question is good it should be able to cover the range of positions out there, and judging anecdotally and by the ratings figures for *Arts Today*, it's working. There are some critics of our programs but when they hit their high peaks they're really questioning ... I'll give you an example: (art critic) John Macdonald's critique of (visual artist) Jenny Watson. What that program did was really bring out what those current critical debates in the visual arts were and this interested both practitioners and the lay listener who has had suspicions for a while but has never had the experience or language to question.

AJ: *John Macdonald has a reputation as having a very narrow and conservative position, so when he becomes the privileged voice of art criticism he opens up and frames the debate in a particular way, and he's given an uninterrupted space to do it.*

SB: I have no problem with this, I would encourage the likes of John Macdonald to

come on. If you want to get a message across in radio you have to have a very loud voice to make it heard. It's important to provide a platform where the most articulate or those who have something strong to say can come on. We don't toe a particular line—that's bad journalism. I would like the arts coverage programs to take more of a position, not to accept the arts as all good and fine and to be supported like some kind of charity. *Arts Today* is doing that and Arts National will do that increasingly in the future. The ABC's role is not to just support and wave on.

AJ: *Going back to Arts Today, David Marr comes under a degree of criticism for what is perceived to be his patrician perspective and for his authorial voice. In February 1994's 24 hours he said that he'd like Arts Today to be a cross between Civilisation and PM. (Both laugh) Marr also said he was keen to maintain the distinction between opera and ceramics while the then executive producer Janne Ryan said the program would work in an interdisciplinary way. Would you care to comment?*

SB: I don't think he'd say that now (about *Civilisation*). I think David is a fabulous mind. That program has developed from its infancy to something much stronger. There's a kind of maturity there and I don't think it's a cross between PM and *Civilisation*. I think the program has also done a really good job of breaking down barriers between disciplines. It has managed to integrate a performative element and arts reportage.

AJ: *The flagship acoustic arts program on ABC radio is The Listening Room (TLR). I understand it's constantly threatened by budget cuts and its duration was cut from 90 to around 60 minutes in 1993. What is its future under your management?*

SB: TLR is the radiophonic nerve centre of the ABC. It makes no bones about the fact that it is an artistic centre in the way that other programs aren't. I went to the Prix Italia last year and was bowled over by the recognition of TLR and the acoustic arts, and this is a classic example of Australian performance being more highly regarded overseas than it is in Australia. If I were to achieve anything I would really like to change that. There's a lot of the "don't know, don't understand, therefore dismiss" syndrome. It is expensive at a time when the rest of radio has been asked to produce more output on less money. So it is a struggle, but as far as I'm concerned TLR is critical to a certain level of artistic enterprise and endeavour and also critical to the ABC's artistic credibility.

AJ: *Where will arts on ABC be in a few years from now?*

SB: I like to think about the future of arts in terms of consistency of quality in programs. I would also like all our programs to have more position and I don't just mean 'scoops', but inviting more debate. I also mean not being afraid, a boldness about how you use the forum. My idea would be to continue to develop outstanding programs, and that entails taking risks and risking flops. It's also about striking a balance between experience and fresh ideas, being in tune with what's going on intellectually or artistically beyond the ABC. We are bringing people in through, for example, the Australia Council Hybrid Arts Committee's residencies with the ABC. It'll be important to work to maintain the freshness, creativity and intellectual rigor of arts on the ABC.

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Come Out '95

Come Out, the festival for young people, is an important part of Adelaide and the national cultural life. Along with Melbourne's *Next Wave* for youth (and beyond) and Brisbane's *Out of the Box* for younger children, *Come Out* offers the young a perspective on themselves across cultures, nations and art forms. Each of these festivals is just as significant for adults. In Adelaide you don't have to have children or a classroom of kids to motivate you to attend.

Even compared with the Adelaide Festival, the scale of *Come Out* is awesome. The 1995 program ranges from puppetry to rap ballet to a 'Barry Kosky Masterclass' for "emerging young performers. Six workshops culminating in a presentation". There are diverse theatre works, a Critics' Symposium, *Allwrite* (a statewide literature program with 37 writers international, national and local), *Over to Youth* (showcasing innovative work by secondary school students), 22 visual art exhibitions, *Outbeat* (the extensive regional version of *Come Out*) and, an important innovation, *1st Site*. A particular strength of *Come Out* is its attempt to reach well beyond the city into schools, suburbs and regional centres.

1st Site's audience is intended to be 18 to 25 year olds and is based at the headquarters of Adelaide's Fringe Festival, the Lion Arts Centre. It will operate for nine days and will feature some fifteen performance groups, poetry, food, installations and exhibitions. Presumably it will also look very attractive to the under 18s, especially given the sense of focus and community that the Lion Arts Centre can provide. Techno-arts group Safe Chamber are presenting *Relatives/Friends/Victims*, Clarissa Pinkola Este, author of *Women Who Run With Wolves*, is to have her stories interpreted by Narrabundah Theatre Company, Riverland Youth Theatre is performing *Up the River Darling*, 'a musical comedy about tap-dancing feral pigs, talking motorbikes, spaced-out hippies and a tired theatre troupe looking for success'. These three are for ages 16 and up while Jete's *Al Ka Me*, a dance and skating work 'performed on ice, inspired by alchemy' at the cavernous

Thebarton Ice Arena, is for ages 15 and up. Will presentation of birth certificates be required for entry? Of course not. What is interesting is the extension of the festival, as with *Next Wave*, to older and older audiences.

Back at the main program you find Lyndon Terracini's *The Cars That Ate Paris*, fresh from the Perth Festival billed as 'a spectacular rock musical', 'a total assault on the senses' i.e. now pitched at a youth audience and alongside more predictably 'charming', 'delightful' and 'wondrous' events in the language of the press release. From the USA 'the Chaplin of the 90s, master clown Gale LaJoye', from Italy TAM's *Robinson Crusoe* with drums, xylophone and a giant pendulum, from Sweden *The Story of The Little Gentlemen* with string quartet and flute, Carouselle's *Don Quixote* directed by Czech puppet-master Josef Krofta, a rap ballet from New Zealand, *The Hairy MacLary Show*, Evelyn Roth's *Water Garden* (for the under 8s - 'huge multi-coloured inflatables. Explore the insides of a dugong, fish or crab'), and Zanza Ufujishi Taiko, Japan's youngest professional drumming ensemble.

Other Australian content includes Nigel Jamieson's production of Gillian Rubinstein's sci-fi *Galax-Arena*, Queensland's Kite Theatre's *Murri Time*, WA's Barking Gecko with three plays 'about humans and other intelligent animals', *Visiting the Relatives*, *Ivory Circle* and *Dolphin Talk*, Magpie Theatre's *Verona* with 'acrobats, visual comedian and orchestra', the return (via Sydney) of Unley Youth Theatre's *Toxic Girls*, Cirkidz *All Aboard* and Yirra Yaakin Youth Theatre's *The Bird*, a story of 'an Aboriginal family torn apart by glue sniffing, alcoholism and cultural isolation'.

The expanding vision of what constitutes a young audience, the juxtaposition of traditional fare and the new (physical theatre, the embracing of some tough issues, cross cultural work, the provision of a 'club' focus with *1st Site*) promise a rich *Come Out* with a few notable gaps. The emphasis is certainly theatrical, dance has a little space, music is represented within a theatrical context and not much on its own and the techno-arts are barely glimpsed (while *Next Wave* is rumoured to be gearing up for a hi-tech 1996). There's still room to move.

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Barking Gecko Theatre Co
DOLPHIN TALK, VISITING THE RELATIVES AND IVORY CIRCLE (WA)
Carclew Youth Arts Centre, Tickets \$8, Trilogy \$18

Maclary Theatre Productions and Madley Dance
THE HAIRY MACLARY SHOW (NZ/SA)
Scott Theatre, All tickets \$9.90 Families (2+2) \$32

Pulp Formalism

Peter McCarthy

On a summer's day sometime during the fifties on Sydney's waterfront, a troupe of 'worker-actors' (agitprop attachés to the communist Waterside Workers' Federation) performed some workers' theatre (one act, possibly Brechtian) to a difficult crowd of wharfies baking in the lunch-time sun. At its conclusion, one well-intentioned worker-Lothario stepped up to the audience and asked confidently: "Any questions?" "Yeah!" came the laconic reply: "Show us your cock!"

I was reminded of this story of what could be called form over substance when screenwriter Hanif Kureishi spoke in Sydney some years ago about the same issue. Flush with the success of *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, Kureishi was invited to address some audiences on the role of the writer in film and to conduct some writers' workshops. At one of these sessions he was asked the secret of the success of the alliance between he and Stephen Frears. "Was it form? Was it in the script?", asked someone in the audience. "Anyone can write a script," replied Kureishi, turning on this would-be screenwriter. "Not everyone can tell a good story. What we need are good stories." Whatever happened to Hanif Kureishi? Or, perhaps, we should now more properly ask: "Whatever happened to the good story?" His prescription, it seems, fell on deaf ears.

Speaking of his part in Vincent Ward's epic *Map of the Human Heart*, Louis Nowra argued that in fact the scriptwriter was over-rated, that he was fed up with writers carping about directors bastardising their scripts. He's harsh on the writer-turned-director such as Mamet and Pinter whose films he believes choke on their own words, words that work constantly against the grain of the film. But at heart, Nowra is a good story teller and this, combined with Ward's own ear for a good story and exceptional eye for filmic form, is what renders *Map of the Human Heart* a piece of exceptional film art. But this combination is rare and with few exceptions the current crop of Australian films are characterised by a fundamental split between what might unfashionably be called form and content. Some redeem themselves with strengths in at least one of these areas but most fall down precisely because of their impossible relation.

The current genre (should this be the appropriate designation) of 'quirky' Australian films - beginning, let's say, with Luhmann's *Strictly Ballroom* - has given rise again to the ridiculous optimism for an Australian film industry, described variously since the late sixties as 'burgeoning' and 'booming'. Ken G. Hall, the late veteran director of the only period in Australian history that could truly boast a film industry, argued in the late seventies against the possibility of this country ever achieving anything like real industry status. About the same time Phil Noyce argued that Australian filmmakers had let foreign adulation 'get under their skin' - a symptom he also attributed to himself - with the result that we are often 'financing rubbish and, at that, not even popular rubbish.' Almost twenty years later, it would seem that Noyce's comments have a powerful resonance. The current crop of popular Australian rubbish - spanned, I would argue, by *Strictly Ballroom* (with some qualifications) and Elliott's *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (with no qualifications) - would have us believe in another renaissance of Australian film. The yearly, highly expensive and largely publicly-funded 'pitches' at Cannes serve only to vindicate Noyce. Hotly followed by

the media, at this time of the year we hear incessantly of standing ovations, rave reviews and high-level negotiations for overseas sales. But apart from the negligible financial return of these films, in real terms, and the ephemeral foreign praise of this new crop of auteurs, one wonders what obtains in this renaissance beyond the obvious proliferation of prancing white singlets and populist camp.

What forges this split between substance and form (usually bad form in any case) in this, the rise of the 'new Australian film'? I would argue that it is not just a matter of weak or bad stories, but a sort of institutionalised but misguided arthouse formalism which, bereft of content, and driven only by the fashionable desire to quote other auteurs, other genres, is merely bad formalism. And when a good story does manage to emerge it is either consumed by this clumsy and pretentious formalism or is doomed to hover about its surface, no watchable form to pin it down. Witness Jackie Farkas's *Amelia Rose Towers* - a 'short film about a very tall girl', it was short only on substance. This type of *graduate-short-as-entrée-to-industry* is exemplary precisely for its expensive artifice - a kind of bloated and dishonest industry-based 'art' (catering, clipboards and 2ADs) that further forges this gap between content and form or, in the true tradition of the fetishised object, conflates its content and form such that its labours simply evaporate. It seems that there are two extreme and contradictory art school tendencies prevailing here - at one end, the earnest purveyors of film art who explore the characters only of their variously fashionable auteurs; and at the other, the 'art film' parading as 'anti-art film', rabidly anti-intellectual artifice that gains credibility in artistic and fashionable quarters without even trying. This is not film work but film play. At the other end of this formal nonsense is Debra Niski's *Vindication*, another *graduate-short-as-entrée-to-industry*. This film however is notable precisely for its beauty and its absurd realism. A five minute film about judicial corruption in five simple but fluid shots, it attracted first prize in a film competition mounted last year by the Independent Commission Against Corruption. It remains to be seen whether this kind of art can be maintained in the face of growing budgets and their attendant assistant directors.

Form is good and there's little doubt that good form makes a good story even better, but it's not an end in itself as some of the new breed would have us believe. Bob Ellis has pointed out the Australian proclivity for narratives of 'pointlessness' - narratives of inherent failure, the 'we're in it, whether we like it not' kind of resignation at the heart of the earlier 'renaissance' epitomised by the likes of Weir, Beresford, Noyce, Armstrong and Schepisi. These narratives were 'pointless' only to the extent that they explored the vicissitudes of what they saw as the Australian condition - a sort of pathological exilic condition that we were stuck with and just had to get used to, and this was precisely their point. But there is a new kind of pointlessness at play in the 'new genre' which has little to do with the exploration of anything. The kind of 'dress-up' film typified by Elliott's frock opera *Priscilla* is at the cutting edge of this 'new pointlessness' - dressing up to conceal the point that there is no point, revelling only in the apparent ecstasy of men parading as women (there is of course an ever-ready counter-argument to this criticism of drag as parody of women - usually articulated as 'we just wanna have fun'), Elliott comes

nowhere near to approaching pathology, of either the characters in his film or the medium itself.

Jocelyn Moorhouse's debut *Proof* similarly entered the fray at Cannes and uncomfortably fits this genre. But *Proof* is at least the product of good form and substance. Decidedly arthouse, it is, however, a good story - the idea of a blind photographer is a good one - with realistic characterisations and psychological depth. (You do get the sense that this was originally an idea for a short film, made feature-length by unexpected funding and creative support). This marriage of form and content extends to P.J.Hogan's *Muriel's Wedding* (especially so since Hogan's wife, Moorhouse, produced it). While having been unfortunately shoe-horned into this genre of the 'quirky', *Muriel's Wedding* ('two weddings and a funeral') bears little relation to this genre's key characteristics. There is the nineties camp of ABBA, which fortunately only drives the marketing of this film, not its story. This is a film with substance - well-written, richly acted and formally crafted. John Ruane's *Death in Brunswick* immediately springs to mind with these films as a sort of omnibus of the 'quirky' Australian film. While *Strictly Ballroom* did have some well-wrought characterisations - absurd but close-to-the-bone observations of working class interest and pride - it all too quickly fell into the realm of fashionable camp, parodying its working-class subjects such that any warmth for them quickly evaporated. Interestingly, it seems, so did Luhmann in the local film scene. But Hogan's and Ruane's films work precisely where Luhmann's fails - their characters are real. This sense of the real is more than evident in Rolf de Heer's *Bad Boy Bubby*, a film that touches this genre in its 'quirkiness' but stands apart in its powerful and brave blend of stark realism and urban absurdity. Interestingly *Bad Boy Bubby* wasn't feted by the media but did get standing ovations at overseas festivals. While largely due perhaps to Nicholas Hope's performance as the 'wild child' Bubby, the film's success lies in the strong formal liberation given Hope's character. Formally, the film is in two parts, the first - static camera, tightly shot, near to monochrome images - reminiscent of the dark, slow, claustrophobic and stinking industrial landscapes of Lynch's *Eraserhead* (de Heer also uses sound to similar effect); the second, bursting with the liberated Bubby into the harsh light and polluted gold sunsets of Port Adelaide, camera moving freely. With the sole exception of an unnecessary new age monologue about violence and colonisation (a scene that resounds with bad faith and would have done better on the cutting room floor), *Bad Boy Bubby* explores with great intelligence and humour the pathology of social repression. It soars in its honesty and its simplicity.

There is certainly a strong tradition of realist filmmakers in this country who eschew the current 'school' of filmmaking and, it would be fair to argue, can afford the luxury of doing so. But apart from the obvious 'runaway' successes such as Noyce, Weir, Armstrong, Miller, Beresford and Duigan, who variously ply or have plied their trade overseas, I'm thinking of the likes of Paul Cox, Bill Bennett, Bob Ellis, Esben Storm, Richard Lowenstein and others - not all, of course, in the same league but who seem to get on with their work without the kind of carping that Nowra was talking about. Esben Storm's first feature, the road movie *In Search of Anna*, was a landmark for its time in both its truth to its characters and its low-budget independence. Lowenstein's *Strikebound* is a strikingly realist version of the 'pit-film' which bears strong traces of working-class politics and a brooding sense of commitment, not only to the cause at the heart of the film - the miners' strikes of the thirties - but to the making of the film itself. No wonder he seems to have disappeared without a trace. Bill Bennett's

early work in *A Street to Die* and *Backlash* were largely self-funded projects which coupled passionate stories (with little or no script, workshopped with their actors) and Bennett's keen eye for images (Bennett is a former news cameraman) in strong realist works which augured well for his critically acclaimed documentary-drama work, such as *Malpractice*, produced by Film Australia. Bennett's *Spider and Rose*, the first production venture by Dendy Films, gained some acceptance by a relatively mainstream audience - largely perhaps due to Ruth Cracknell's performance. But its attempt to enliven the character of Spider, the punk ambulance driver, with some sort of street kid sensibility and inner-city rock sent it dangerously in the direction of the 'quirky' which ultimately worked against an otherwise fine and articulate film.

Last year John Dingwall returned to the screen with *The Custodian*, a topical but 'international' police corruption drama, which he wrote and directed. With Anthony La Paglia in the lead and a sinister but unconvincing Hugo Weaving as a recognisable Sydney police identity, it seemed destined for great things. Ostensibly about the cult and pitfalls of mateship - by now for Dingwall a social disease - the film fell progressively into moral cliché.

Dingwall is a good writer, and while the film looked good it failed to pull off the strong narrative Dingwall had in mind and quickly disappeared. This from the man who wrote the quintessential film about mateship, the Ken Hannam-directed *Sunday Too Far Away*, which stands, with the performance of its star Jack Thompson, as a landmark in Australian film. Ted Kotcheff's *Wake in Fright* also comes to mind here. Less a romantic portrait of the solidarity and comradeship at the heart of Dingwall's story and more savage, at times almost surreal rendering of the existential dilemmas facing an alien in the midst of this Australian code and landscape, Kotcheff's drama is rivetting precisely in its substantial and sickening realism. (It was here that the character of the drunken doctor and 'estranged intellectual' Tydon uttered some philosophical cant to the similarly drunken and estranged protagonist Grant - a bonded school teacher doing his time in the outback, pining for England: "Affectability! A vanity spawned by fear" says Tydon as Grant slides to the floor. While addressed to the thin veneer of moral culture characterised by this school teacher in the outback, these words had a certain prescience in their characterisation of much of the film culture that would follow in the nineties). Another film about mateship - a particular kind of mateship - Geoff Burton's *The Sum of Us*, plays with the psychological parameters of love and mateship with direct quotation of the male bonding in *Sunday Too Far Away* - a nineties version in which the homosexuality is no longer latent but manifest, and it has a point.

While Jane Campion's *The Piano* is only vicariously Australian, it is worth a mention precisely because it is a film with a point and one which works against the current crop of artifice passing itself off as art. As a 'woman's film' it was at the time critically unassailable, prompting Ellis to refer to it as "The Empress's New Finger" and Phillip Adams to 'cheer on the Steinway' as it dragged its star to a possible watery grave. This would have fitted nicely into Ellis's narrative of pointlessness had Holly Hunter not resurfaced to find a new life of bearable unhappiness with Harvey Keitel and an appropriately 'up' ending for the American market. But *The Piano* is a solid piece of film art with both popular and specialist appeal and we can only hope that she can do just as well with Henry James.

Again speaking on Vincent Ward's *Map of the Human Heart*, Louis Nowra attributed a sort of 'brooding violence' to a New Zealand aesthetic. A realism-forging aesthetic, this is implicit in both Ward's and Campion's work (Ward's amazing earlier

film, *Vigil*, shares something with *The Piano* in its exploration of a pathology of isolation, sexual repression and search for freedom) and it's no wonder they are suddenly adopted by Australia as Australian when they succeed - the fact that they may live and work here has little to do with it. It would be easier, however, if New Zealander Lee Tamahori did live here and wasn't Maori - we could call his masterpiece of social realism *Once Were Warriors* our own. Tamahori said he wanted to 'do a Ken Loach' and with the powerful and honest writing of Alan Duff's novel, on which the film is based, he has come pretty close. He tells a good story and with the help of Stuart Dryburgh's camera (cinematographer also for *The Piano*) gives it good form. This too is the case with Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*, another 'woman's film' astounding for its strength of character and unpretentiously innovative form. Were these films Australian, it wouldn't be such a bad thing since they may have the effect of forging another aesthetic - an aesthetic of substance. But where does this current Australian tendency to cultural veneer take us? There is clearly no shortage of budding directors - institutionalised or not, the desire to *direct!* is evident everywhere - and indeed it seems that nothing will stem the flow of what passes for film art. The all-too accessible medium of video is arguably responsible for the current proliferation of self-expression and artistic aspiration - it used to be that the artist did video as entree to the higher budgetary concerns of film but now, it seems, all that is necessary is that one work in a video shop. This is, however, not the issue. The real problem is that this current crop of video auteurs is the stuff of tomorrow's film industry, all eagerly vying for public funding for yet another 'quirky' Australian film, further forging an aesthetic defined merely by its marketability. If the marketability of Elliott's artless aesthetic (none dare shout "Show us your cock!" here) is anything to go by, we're in for a further cycle of this publicly-funded 'quirkiness', unless that is, someone notices the very marketable product coming to us from across the Tasman - a marketability matched only by its character and its substance.

Peter McCarthy is a Sydney writer and education officer

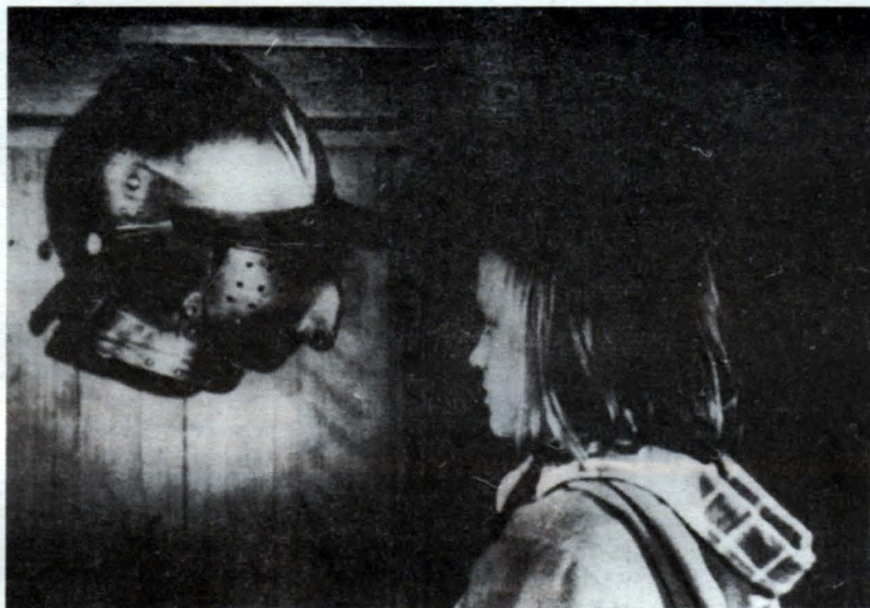
Cinematheque 1995

The AFI in association with the Melbourne Cinematheque has announced its program for 1995 - the centennial year of cinema **. Featuring over 100 films shown weekly in capital cities throughout Australia (why no regional cinemas?) the National Cinematheque functions as a 'gallery' of cinema, offering cinema classics as well as films which inspired the classics - curious films, forgotten or unjustly reviled; films from historical archives and private collections; well-known films screened the way they were intended to be seen rather than on television or video screens; extraordinary films from cinema's alternative cultures - its experimental and political underground; cult films; and films in formats such as video or super 8 whose many and varied practitioners are often dismissed from cinema altogether. The Cinematheque also has access to many films to which commercial distributors do not, including those of the National Library and the National Film and Sound Archive,

as well as foreign embassies and cultural institutions. The 1995 program includes: a celebration of the documentary work of major French film-makers including Resnais, Demy, Godard, Franju, Chris Marker and Cocteau. A highlight will be the Australian premiere of Godard's *Helas Pour Moi*, a 1993 version of the Greek myth of Alcmene with Gerard Depardieu. Popular classics by Capra, Welles, Scorsese, Busby Berkeley, Ernst Lubitsch. Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Junior* and W.C. Fields' *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*. A tribute to the late Cecil Holmes; fifty years of films from the Commonwealth Film Unit and a collection of remarkable animation films by Walerian Borowczyk and Jay Lenica.



Atom Egoyan 'The Adjuster' 1992



Franju 'Hotel Des Invalides'

** From the *Movie Film Alive Newsletter*: "French film pioneer Augustin Le Prince developed a working projector using frame by frame film stock at the Blind Institute in New York as far back as 1886. However Le Prince and his projector vanished without trace from a French train several years later. The Lumiere Brothers and Thomas Edison were then unjustly acclaimed as the real inventors of today's motion picture technology." Appropriately, Sydney's 1st Foto and Film Fair (Sunday Feb 19, 10 am to 4 pm) will be held at the Railway Institute Hall, Devonshire Street, Central Railway. On sale: Cameras (working and collectables), Film, Books, Movie Cameras, Projectors, Editors, Film Stock and Feature Films. Enquiries: (02) 211 6514

RT



Sister Penchang with Kapitana Tika (standing) gossiping about Juli, Basilio and Kabesang Tales from 'Babae in the Land of the Big Sky'

Pilbara Performance on Video

Babae in the Land of the Big Sky is a community theatre project created by Filipino women in the Pilbara in 1994 through the auspices of the Community Arts Network (WA). It ran for twelve weeks through interviews and cultural action workshops around the issues of domestic violence and cross cultural marriages. Out of these came a script and a performance given in the Matt Dan Cultural Centre. Set both in the Philippines and Australia in the 19th and 20th centuries, using dialogue and dance, the work gives women the opportunity to share their experiences about migration, isolation, discrimination and the stereotype of the 'mail order bride'. Two videos of the project have been released. Call 09 328 2022 or write to Community Arts Network (WA) Inc. 123 Claisebrook Rd, Perth WA 6000.

9th WA Film & Video Festival

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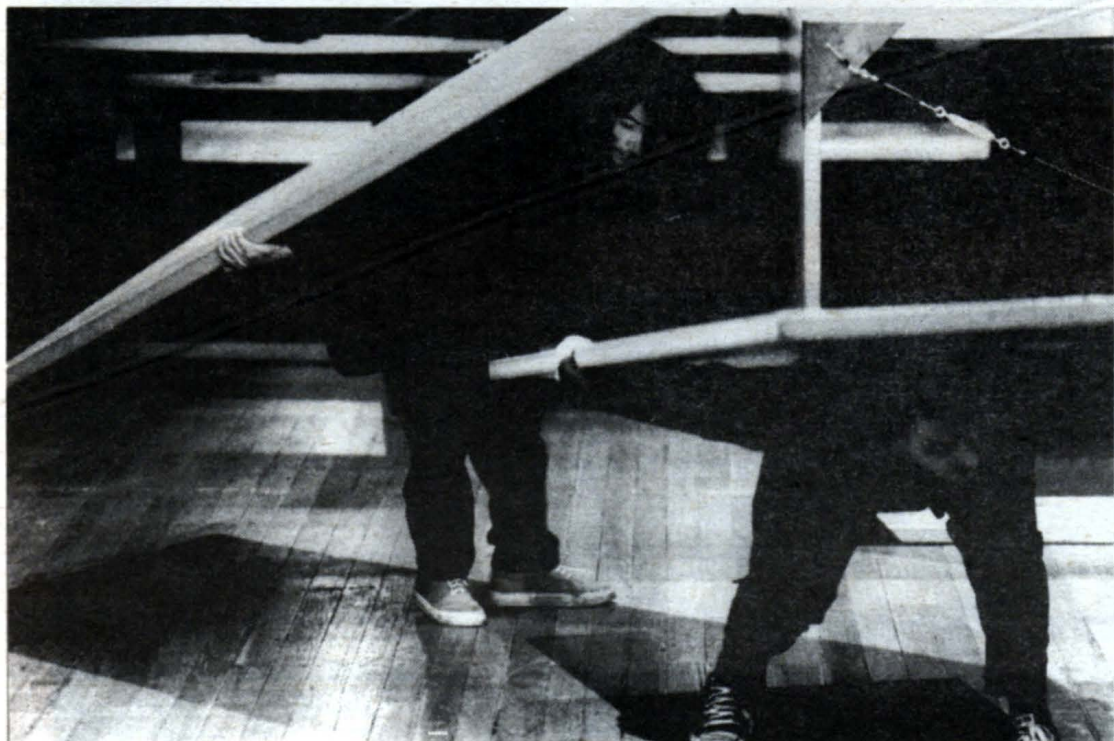
2000: Some Detours

Jane Goodall traces a performative future where neophilia and the necropolis, and becoming and entropy collide.

Since 2000 took over from 1984 as code for "the future", a picture of the world to come as a place of imprisoned possibilities (1984) has been replaced by images of a world where possibilities are running riot (2000), a world racing ahead, towards the round numbers of the millennium at which tomorrow will swallow up yesterday in a cataclysmic act of supercession. Looking down the barrel of the future into mondo 2000, what do we see? The post-human dwelling in a wonderland of techno-baroque, whilst the super-human displays the Olympian body striving for its peak

invited to speculate about the future of any artistic practice seems like a lure to hitch up to the *Go-Techno!* bandwagon and get discoursing about the virtual and the cyber, the super, the hyper and post. ... Or was that last year? 1994, the year the multimedia multicultural Creative Nation got set to sweep into tomorrow's world. The year Sydney, 2000 and the future were coded together with winning the Olympics bid. As all this futures-production was going on, though, performance and performance art had gone reminiscent. People were reading Anne Marsh's *Body*

always heavily invested. To economists, the very word means investment: futures are resonant of growing assets, realised capital, and pervasive development. If my task in this article is to do a take on where performance is going, my first response is that one of the things I've most enjoyed about performance in the last ten years is its refusal to acknowledge any



Alan Schacher

performances in real time, beating the clock, beating records, beating rivals, beating the track to the goal post in the ultimate bid to be unsurpassable. What has performance to do with this vision? In the present cultural climate, to be

and *Self, Performance Art in Australia 1969-1992*. Nick Waterlow's retrospective exhibition *25 Years of Performance Art in Australia* opened in Sydney in June, and went to Brisbane in August; this year will see it in Adelaide, Melbourne and Perth.

Maybe retro is the right mode for a resistant practice when neo-futurism is the new mode of conservatism. Or maybe performance, with its real-time commitments to slow motion, stillness and repetition, has been casting itself against the fast forward set of late capitalism since John Cage first tried to rescue "the now moment" in New York in the 1940s. But there are particular Australian resonances to the futuristic imperative. You can't miss them if you walk out of Redfern Station in Sydney, where the bridge wall in front of you is painted with Aboriginal images and the words *40,000 years is a long long time. 40,000 years still on my mind*. To go gung-ho for 2000 is to cultivate amnesia as regards the 40,000. Futures are



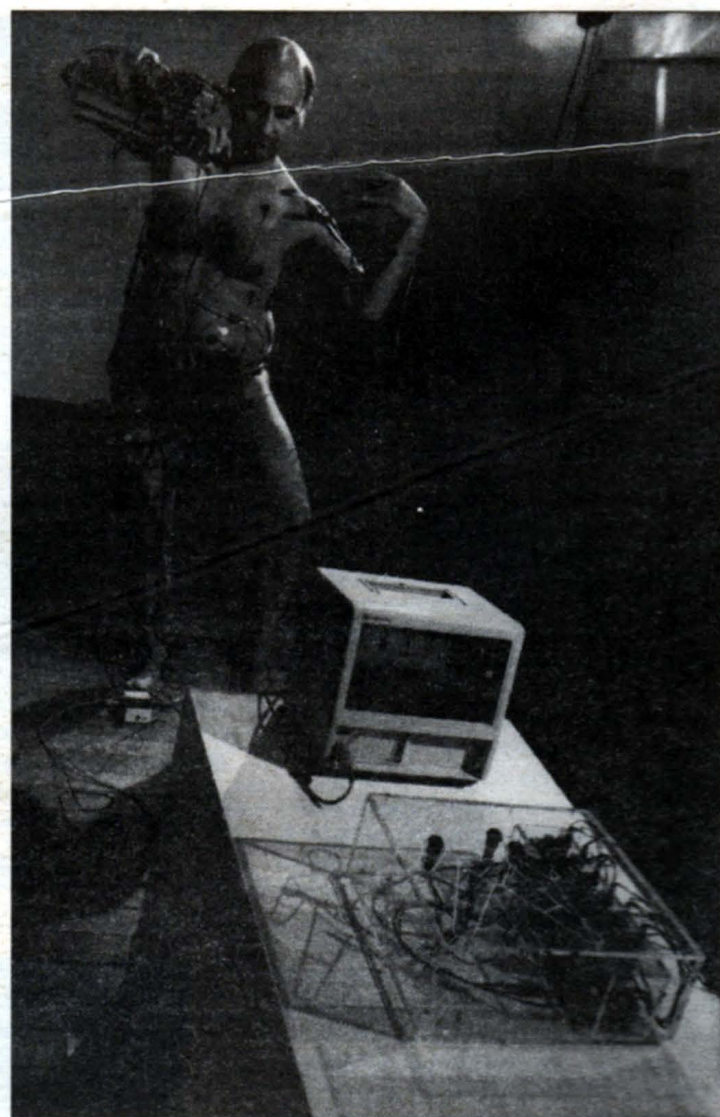
Gerardo Rodriguez-Bruzzesi

Heidrun Löhr

need to know where it was going. It seemed to be successfully eluding the ethos of forced becoming that operates at every level - the personal, the institutional, the national - in a late capitalist climate. Perhaps there's an important role ahead for performance and performance art in maintaining a cultural space that is not-the-Olympics, providing some detours around 2000, working to redeem the future from the tyranny of the futuristic.

For me, then, a prospective view of performance is bound up with a retrospective view; this starts in the studio of Heidrun Löhr, who has specialised in photographing performance art since the mid 1980s. We cover her large wooden table with pictures, looking for a principle of selection. Performance has an afterlife through its documentation, and here the photographer's contribution is crucial, but Löhr does more than document. She is one of those rare photographers who has an instinct for witnessing the instantaneous unfolding of an event and she captures the figure of the performer in ways that convey something of what it is to risk live action. Alan Schacher carries a heavy, door-sized wooden board on his back, maintaining his balance with visible effort. Stelarc, looking fleshly and not a bit post human, concentrates on getting his equipment working. Next to Stelarc, we put Gerardo Rodriguez-Bruzzesi, grimacing under a shower of green and gold glitter, which he tips over his head from two buckets as he shimmies to a gathering drumbeat. He has coated his body with vegemite, and you can see the glitter randomly catching, bouncing and cascading down one gleaming leg. The action shot *par excellence*.

There are two photos I've never seen before, of Judy Best's *60 Second Performance for Building Site and Feathers* (1988). One of these makes an immediate impression as a superb dramatic composition. It's a picture of a demolition site, with the foreground line marked by a huge iron girder, and the rubble sweeping back to the towering shell of a four story building, etched against the sky. The focus is so clear you can see every broken brick. Judy Best, a ghost figure in white with a



Stelarc

Heidrun Löhr

veiled hat, carries her great white bag of feathers across the rubble and passes a man on crutches, her collaborator Terry Burrows, who had a broken leg. The second picture shows the white figure in an upper story of the building, framed by the rectangle of the room's shell, about to release her mass of feathers over the site. These shots have the classical qualities of the analogue photograph: in their linear composition, the technical virtuosity of the black to white tonings, and their sense of capturing the moment (what Barthes called *ca a était*). Work like this doesn't belong to a digital culture. And the performance itself was deeply retrospective. It marked the loss of the Old Canberra Hotel at King's Cross, a cheap haunt for travellers and local drinkers, which was to be replaced by an ultra modern international hotel. The feathers came originally from an old kapok quilt bought second hand, and Best had recycled them to make a quilt of her own. Letting fly the feathers was a letting go of this emblem of her own past, with all its personal investments and associations. Entropy, diaspora, demolition. Neophilia does not acknowledge these. Nor does it acknowledge that discontinuities have their price, and continuities their value. William Yang concludes his recent performance *The Fabulous Trifle and Other Great Meals* with an account of the sudden recognition that a meal he had eaten in a peasant kitchen in China was a meal that had been prepared and eaten in the same way for hundreds and hundreds of years. "And in that moment", he says, "time and space disappeared and all the meals I had ever eaten merged into one." Nigel Kellaway starts *This Most Wicked Body* by announcing: "Yesterday I discovered a dead spot on my skin, a piece of desert. Dying begins. Or rather, is accelerating. By the way, I happen to agree with it. One life is enough." Kellaway has a seductive beauty in performance, and he exploits it. He plays being beautiful, plays it for all its worth, but it keeps getting away from him and this becomes what the performance is about. This most wicked body has an anti-aesthetic life of its own; its entropic tendencies are manifested sometimes in wastage and fatigue, sometimes in riotously grotesque escape from the disciplines of formal presentation in which it has been

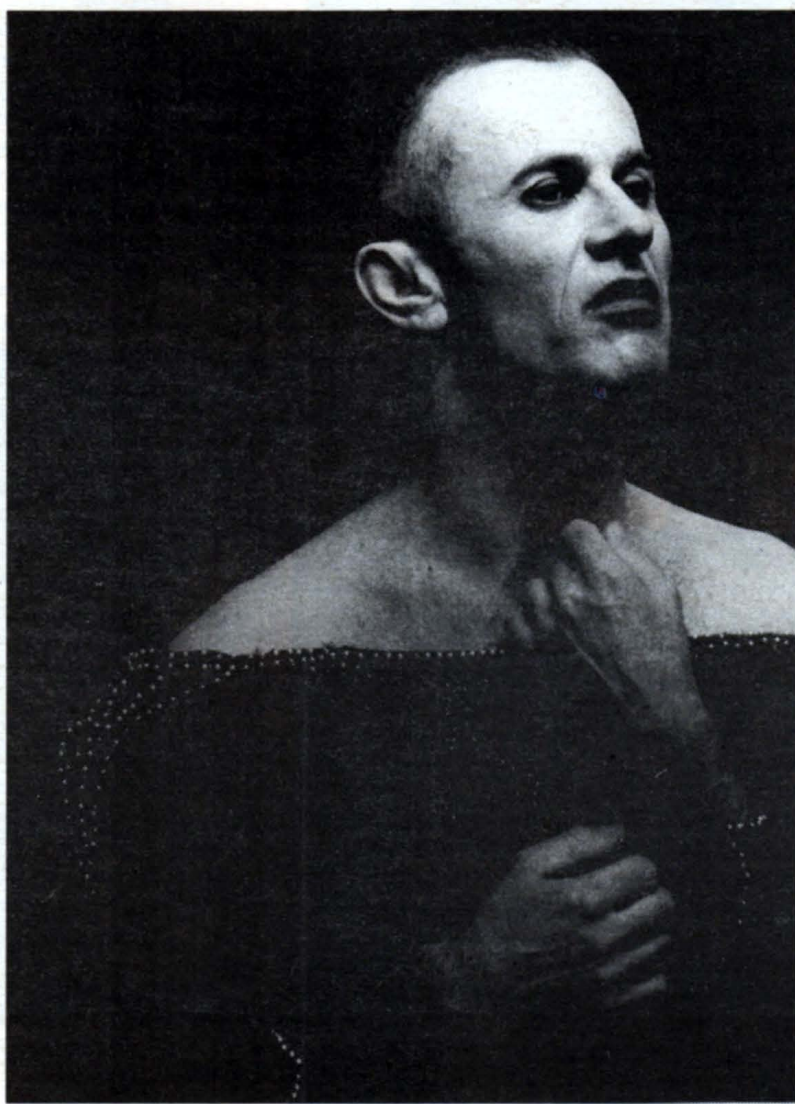


Judy Best

Heidrun Löhr

schooled. Löhr catches the wicked body at various of its escape points. There is the portrait shot, where the genre unmistakably calls for beauty, but the face has slid into a heavy-featured expression of disgust. And there is the pirouette pose, which perverts aesthetic codes by combining them into jarring hybridity: the masculine and the feminine, the nude and the costumed body, the classical and the avant-garde.

What does the future mean for the body? There has been much speculation about the body/technology nexus, and the coming age of the cyborg. Stelarc has been a major international influence on this speculation, and has given it some explicit directions, but Stelarc remains unique. For most of us, wet life is here to stay, and the future of the body - of the individual bodies we inhabit - necessarily involves deterioration. The body has no choice but to carry its past into its future. And the



Nigel Kellaway

performer, whose medium is the body, must engage with all the complexities of its continuous becoming and unbecomings. Anna Sabiel's work is strongly directed by a fascination with body memories, which she explores in meditative performance installations through a series of experiments called *Internalised Cities*.

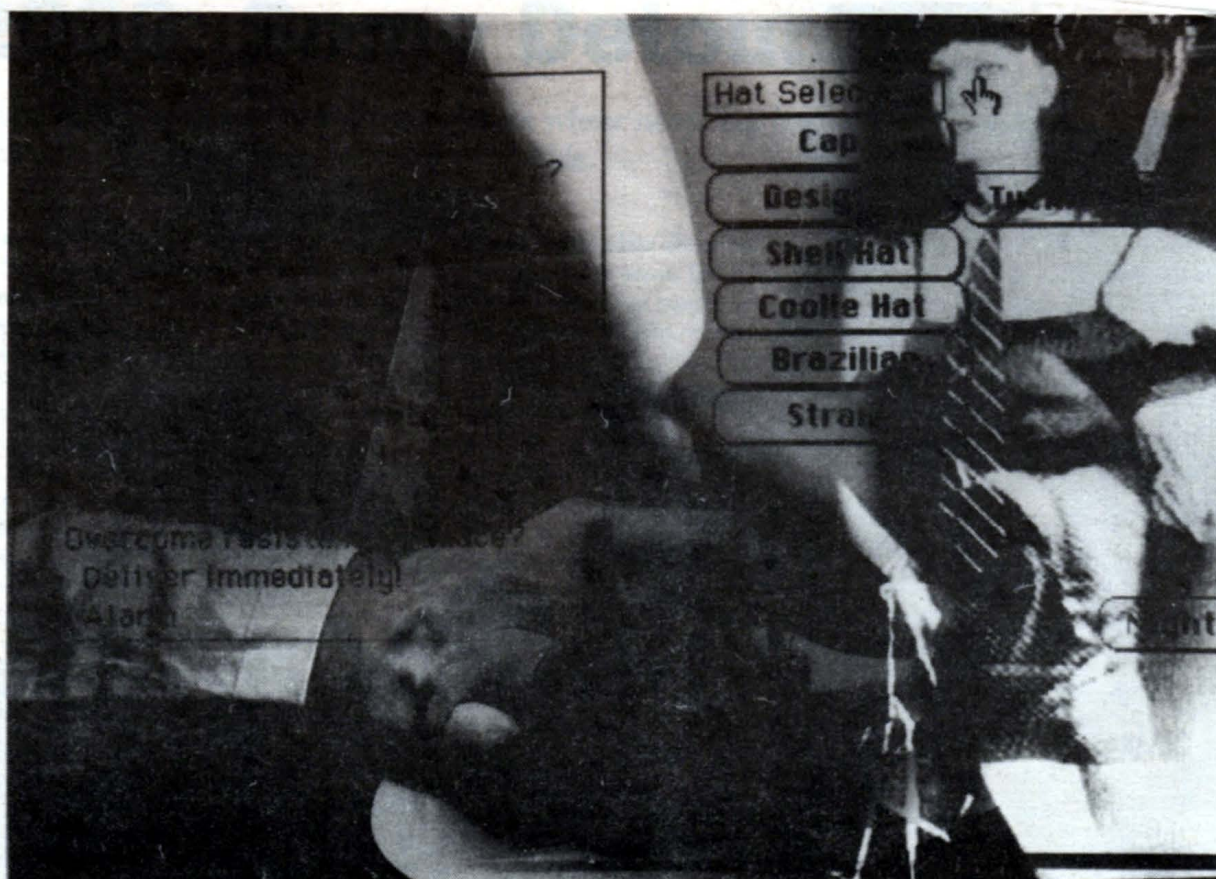
I go with Heidrun Löhr to watch a photographic session on site at the Rigging and Scaffolding Annex of the Sydney Institute of Technology, where Anna and installation artist Sarah Waterson are working on an articulated construction of cross bolted scaffolding poles, suspended from twisted steel cable between two 8



Heidrun Löhr

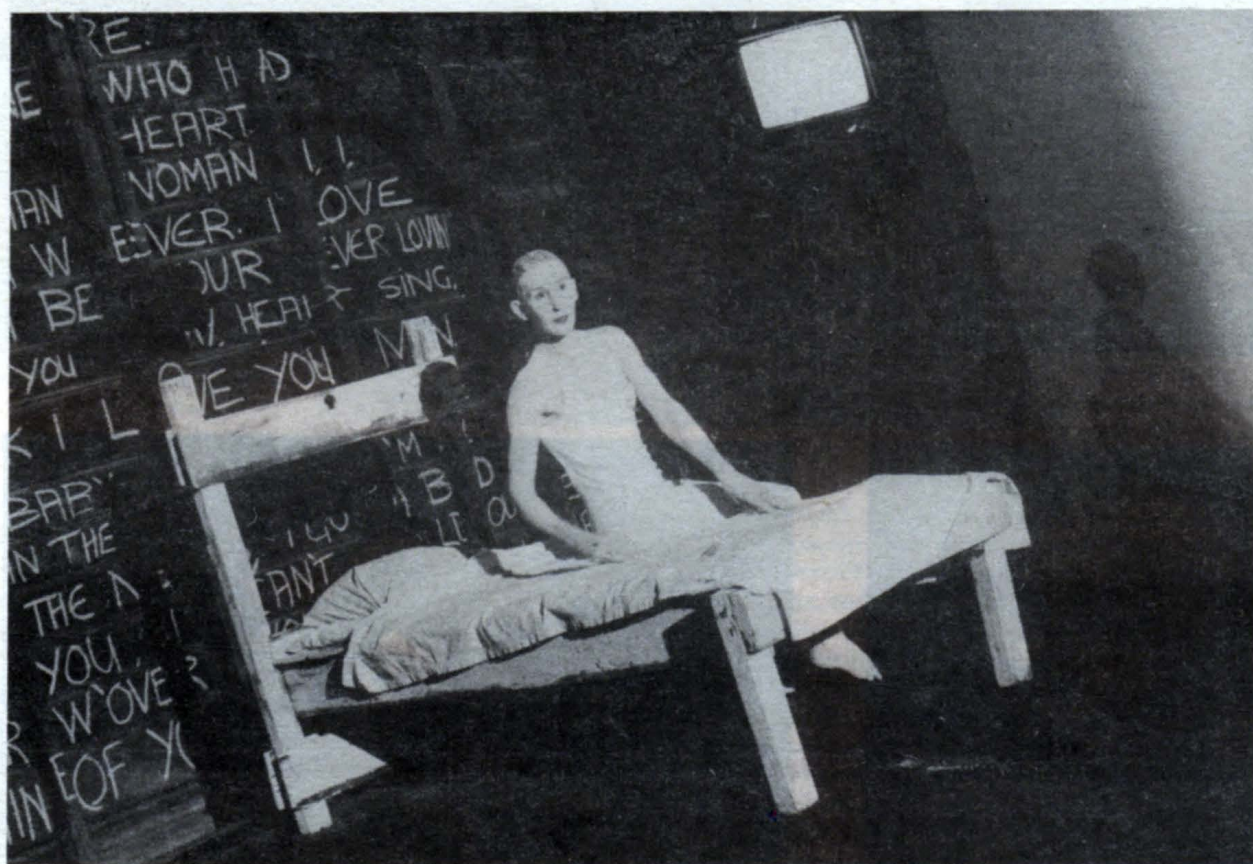
metre joists raised to a not quite vertical axis. "There are lines everywhere", says Heidrun, lying on the ground, trying to get the structure against a looming sky. It's a complex of skewed verticals and horizontals, built in a series of vertebra-like sections which are joined by strips of purple lycra. Anna adjusts the velcro fastenings on

the strips. A Heath-Robinson touch, quite out of keeping with the rigorous technical knowledge that has gone into the rigging process. But it works. She climbs onto one of the bars, and the whole thing responds with a reptilian sway. As Anna tries to get the feel of it, Heidrun is clicking away, witnessing a newly developing relationship



Open City

Heidrun Löhr



Jill Orr

Heidrun Löhr



Katya Molino

Heidrun Löhr

between two bodies that are quite strange to each other. What will come of it? Memories. The installation is to be wired for sound by Shane Fahey, and Tess de Quincy is collaborating on the movement design, to create an orchestrated suspension performance that taps the residual memories in the body itself. (See Cover) Anna Sabiel's commitment to heavy metal is a salutary reminder that technology is not all electronics. The material remains of dead machines or machinic constructions are everywhere, and we'll go on adding to them till well beyond 2000. There's no better medium than performance, though, for exploring the absurdities in the relations between matter and circuitry. Another photograph from Heidrun Löhr's collection shows Jill Orr in *Love Songs* (1991) sitting on the edge of a primitive wooden bed in what looks like an old world log cabin, watched over blankly by the glowing screen of a TV in the corner. The walls are chalked with the timeless slogans of broken love, and Orr herself is covered in chalk-like make-up, as though her body were starting to be encrusted with its past experiences. Open City have got into a highly developed relationship with the screen in *Shop* and *The Necessary Orgy*. They make light of the adventures of the flesh in an electronic environment, where desire follows ever diversifying objects. Entropy again. The screen lures energies only to effect their dispersal through an infinite process of futile selection. No sale. Virginia Baxter shrugs off the wasted enterprise and, in real time, rallies her energies and reinvents her desires for another go. Keith Gallasch, exhausting himself amongst virtual bodies, warns

*If you are already feeling
grubby, splintered, public,
sad and thinking
I won't last the next five minutes,
The Necessary Orgy is not for you.*

The future is the next five minutes, as well as the millennial leap. Can performance erode the tyranny of 2000 by an infinite succession of five minute detours? Where is performance going? The obvious answers - that it's going hybrid, multicultural and technological - surely don't need rehearsing again. Returning to Heidrun's table, there is a picture of Katya Molino, dressed as a nurse, dancing with a skeleton by a field of fake poppies. In a minute, she will sit down and tell a story based on the memory of lying in an Intensive Care Unit. The past and the future are another kind of hybrid, which is belied by the dichotomous thinking of futurism. I've recently moved to Homebush, to the heart of 2000 territory. On the UBD map, the house where I am living is situated mid way between two large yellow patches that are free of roads. The upper one is the Homebush Bay Olympic site. The lower one, quite a bit bigger, is its unacknowledged Other, Rookwood cemetery, the largest city of the dead in the Southern Hemisphere.

Jane Goodall teaches Postmodern Studies at The University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury and writes widely on performance and other experimental art forms. She is the author of Artaud and the Gnostic Drama, Oxford University Press, 1994.

Once More With Feeling

Anne Marsh looks back at the year 2000

Looking 'toward 2000' in the artworld is like trying to experience what has already taken place. After all, Jean Baudrillard, intergalactic captain of the 'already there', turned 2000 into a nostalgia trip in 1984 under the pre-tense that the year 2000 would not take place, and later that the year 2000 had already happened.

One thing is certain: the year that designates the end of the century and the beginning of the next has become a sign and its meaning shifts with its context. The fin de siècle has always been an hysterical moment in history but after a whole generation of artists and critics have been schooled in the properties of the sign, it does seem significant that the three-zero binary of 2000 takes on mythological status.

Performance art which focuses on the body and the identities signified upon it collides with the metaphorical constructions of century's simultaneous endings and beginnings.

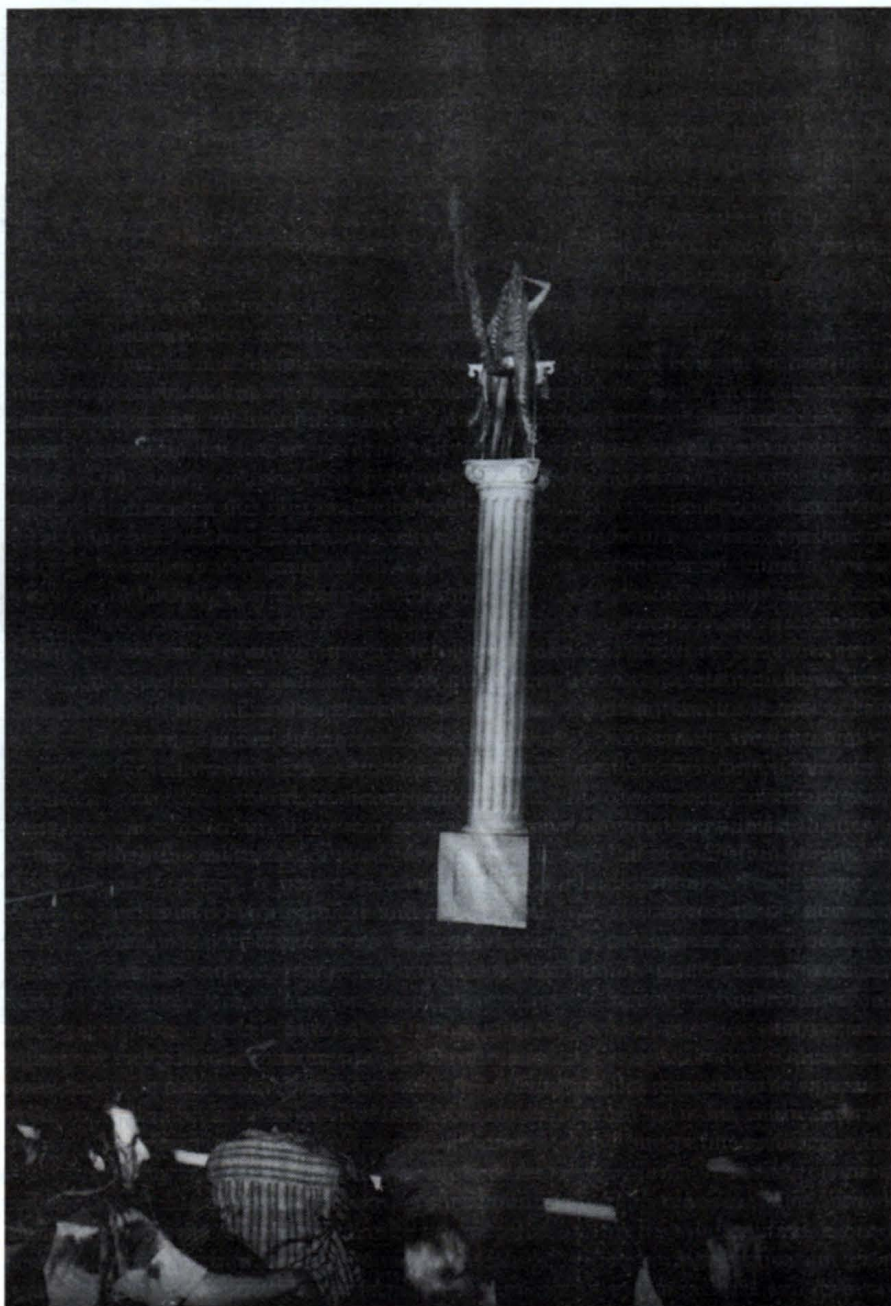
The body and technology have been recurring themes in recent performance art. The renewed interest in the corporeal body, spurred on by feminist theories of difference, manifests in investigations of the social coding of the body as well as the much touted angry, abject work.

The interface between the body and technology is explored in the spectacular body amplification and robotic

choreography of Stelarc's performances. It is also exploited by Laurie Anderson who wires her body for performance, using technology to change her sexual persona on stage.

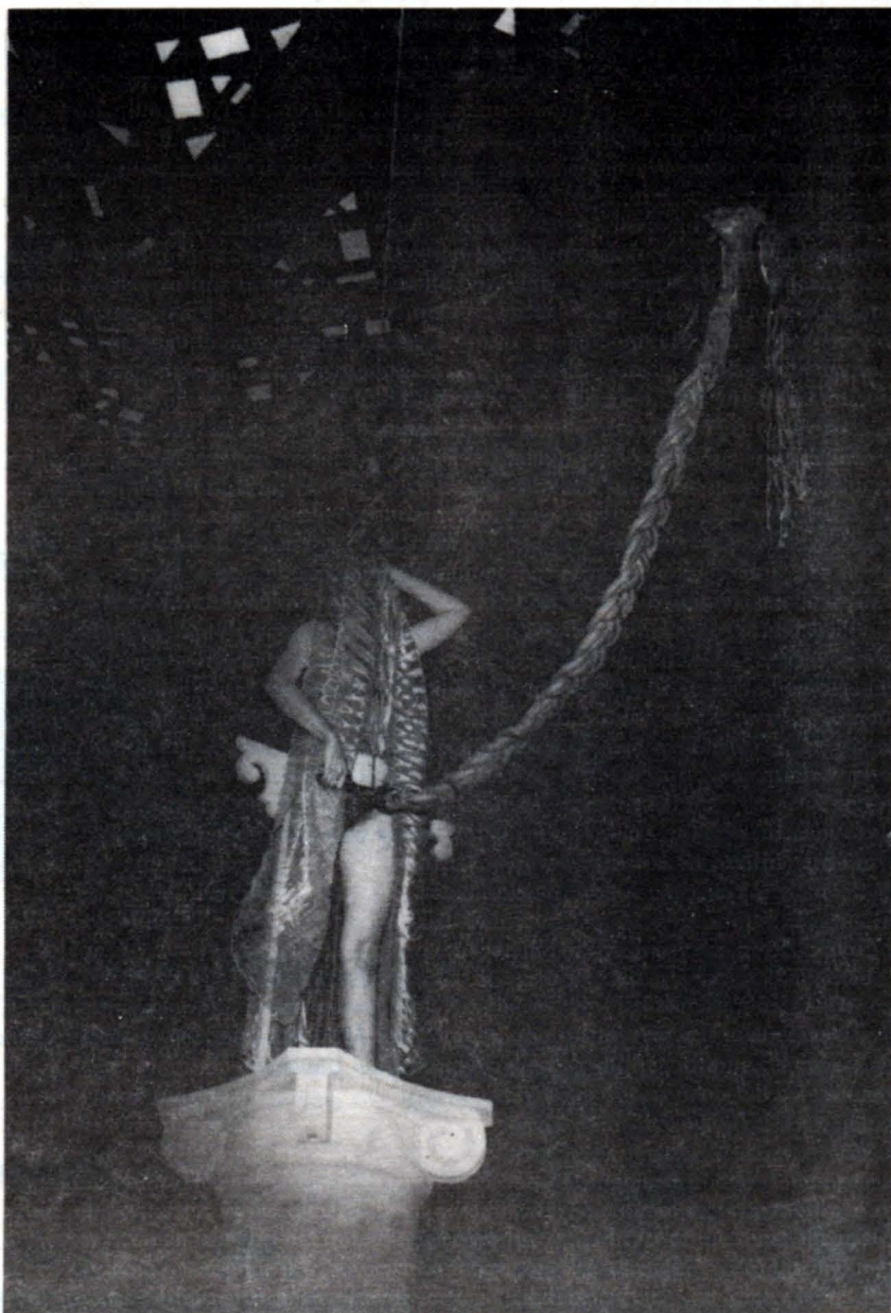
The intervention of technology in society and within the body still causes ethical concerns for the loss of privacy, subjectivity, spirituality. The elusiveness of that which cannot be represented fascinates us and continues to produce some of the most sustained conceptual performance. Many of these works rely on transmitting cultural and personal memory and it is often technology which allows for such representation.

Barbara Campbell's historical and sociological meandering in *Cries from the Tower*, *The Diamond Necklace Affair* and more recently *Backwash* are interesting examples of a new direction in performance art. Campbell is interested in the way in which history is written, who makes history and why. In *Backwash* (ACCA and AGNSW 1994) she used taped telephone conversations intercepted with narrative and chant-like sequences of phone numbers and place names to re-create a moment in local history. A bank of tape recorders, mixers and microphones enabled the artist to choreograph an alternative history, one which focused on the role women had played rather than the heroism of the men documented in previous accounts. (Contin.)



Linda Sproul 'Roots' 1994

Collin Bogaars

[illegible]

Linda Sproul 'Roots' 1994

Collin Bogaars



Barbara Campbell 'Backwash' 1993

Heidrun Lohr

Festive Nation: One Off or A Way of Life?

Sarah Miller puts the 1995 Perth Festival in context

Australia is in a constant state of excitement, a country renowned for taking a festive day out for everything from Labour day to the Queen's Birthday to Anzac Day to bank holidays, butchers' picnics and Australia Day - serial festivity on a national scale. Surely our national psyche is shaped by this celebratory and carnivalesque lifestyle. Joe and Josie Public are certainly not the stoic (albeit imaginary) Aussie battlers of yesteryear. They're party animals blowing plastic trumpets (all in the one pitch) and screaming gaily while watching FM- simulcast-fireworks; listening to opera, jazz, rock'n'roll and

In the 1990s there is much talk of the 'performative' body as boundaries between modes of performance break down further into what some are calling the 'hybrid arts'. Difference theory, queer theory and theory concerned with the corporeal have contributed significantly to a critical understanding of the 'performative' and its role in postmodern culture.

In contemporary photography the performative is a dominant theme and some of the most challenging images in Australia are being made by artists interrogating racial and sexual histories and identities. Rea's *Definitions of Difference* (Blakness ACCA 1994) is a dramatic series of coloured bodies all tied in various ways with a noose knot. Over each image is a fishing manual definition of a particular knot. The sequence of posed body portraits questions black identity as a homogeneous idea by colouring the bodies differently, but still conveys the social oppression of that body in the sinister sign of the noose.

It seems that as the century closes the body with its social and psychic structures will continue to be a vital surface for exploration in the arts. Although there are now quite complex and sophisticated works being produced, the spectacle of the abject body returns in a variety of rehashes of 70s body art.

Simone O'Brien's pissing from a trapeze in The Performance Space's *Open Week* might have been tongue-in-cheek but it shares the same infantile fantasies as many of the pre-oedipal antics of the 1970s. That it was an emission by a woman in the 1990s makes for good business in the artworld at present but this is only because the bad girl/wicked woman syndrome has been poached for all it's worth by critics, many of whom, along with some artists, miss the critical edge.

Jill Orr's *Raising the Spirits* (Persona Cognita, MoMA, 1994) and *Marriage of the Bride to Art* (NGV, 1994) both explored female cross-dressing. This aspect of the 'wicked woman' genre is still pertinent because cross-dressing has, until recently, been considered the domain of the female impersonator. The current fashion for cross-dressing among men, spurred by the success of *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, is not as socially challenging as a woman mocking the phallic symbol. Mike Parr's rendition of the bride on the front cover of December's *Art and Australia* is a

sad existential story without the camp edge of the queer queen or the menacing gaze of the phallic woman.

Linda Sproul's work is in danger of being misread under the somewhat facile categories of wicked/angry/bad. The trouble with these terms is that they resonate quite vibrantly with old existential tropes so that the oedipal play continues, albeit in another body.

Sproul's performance opus is densely packed with social, historical and psychological references. *Roots* (NGV 1994) looked at the monumental myth of woman as she has been enshrined as object in western art. Standing on top of a 4 metre high column she proceeded to sever a 2.5 metre plait tied to her pubic hair. The phallic protrusion fell in an arch above the audience as Sproul was winched off the pedestal in a neck brace and the column collapsed to the ground. Suspended in the Great Hall of the National Gallery the artist dressed in gold appeared as the goddess, virgin and temptress so often depicted in art history. Once on the ground she handed out her trademark funeral cards. This time the message included a small plait of hair and the caption "remember to die".

Sproul's announcement could have been usefully employed by emerging artists who were challenged by the old avant-garde during the seminar programme of *25 Years of Performance Art* (The Performance Space, 1994) to justify their territory as performance artists. As we contemplate the year 2000 it is difficult to be clear about exactly what has died but it seems relatively safe to say that once we get there we'll know we've already been there before.

Anne Marsh is author of *Body and Self: Performance Art in Australia, 1969-1992*, OUP, 1993 and a lecturer in Visual Arts at Monash University.

Dreaming Theatres

Rubbing against each other, overlapping, brawling, forgetting who they are, multiplying, burning out, dreaming, reinventing and re-locating, lulling and subverting, they are the Mac-musical, the state companies, the regionals, circus, community, alternative, hybrid and performance theatres, black, white, homosexual, female, educational, deaf, disabled, old and young. Actors and a few directors and designers criss-cross this massive pluralised territory, most of us don't know the map. We live in a theatre age of astonishing complexity and perplexity, as dense and rich as you could perhaps wish and impossible to take in.

Some, conservative and radical, wish backwards to a small monolithic mainstream with a ginger alternative current. Some wish forwards to a theatre that is part of everyday life, visionary and influential. Theatre in Australia, relative to its past, is big, widespread, touring, bewildering and Australian as never before, but the industry is anxious, bickering, threatened inside and out, even prophesying its doom. Because so much has changed so quickly, because so much has multiplied and diversified - forms, venues, training institutions, the number of theatre graduates, proliferating writers, the races and classes represented - this is not surprising. Creative Nation's marketing and promotion impulse, the long-term brake on increased funding to individual artists, the threats of conservative state governments, the ill-advised creation of the Major Organisations Board of the Australia Council, all feed the apparent paranoia with apparent fragmentation, with old hierarchies apparently re-confirmed, with apparently conflicting criteria of excellence and access. There is no easy overview, no big picture, no one critic to conveniently if terribly divide the quick from the dead. Voices are raised, demanding a-political funding, support for

ensembles, 'homes' for the performing community, access to multi-media (these last three at the 1994 National Performers Conference, Melbourne). A war of the theatres threatens to erupt between Belvoir Street and the Sydney Theatre Company over art, ensembles and relations with the Australia Council, the STC's director pleading for additional state support so that he can cut what he experiences as strangling ties with the Council. The Australia Council, led by the Music Board, has set about simplifying and clarifying its goals and funding criteria, perhaps a good thing, but it won't ease the fears of a very real, complex world and much energy will be expended on reading between the lines as explicit criteria fade.

Even at its most elaborate, behind sets, masks and techno-lighting, theatre dreams of a purity incarnate in the body of the actor, of an empty space, the ensemble, and an uncluttered division of labour. Theatre embodies a tension between profoundly conservative and radical impulses. Even at its most conservative, even reactionary, theatre has been an outsider, vulnerable, under-employed, its dreamers far outnumbering those who even get half-way to the transformations, otherness and influence they yearn for. Even when radical, it can be patronising, luddite, precious and disapproving, clinging to a past pre-film, pre-television, pre CD-ROM, suspicious of, even hostile to the freshly categorised Hybrid Arts even though sharing much with them. There is much to value in theatre's innate conservatism, but much which keeps it out of touch, embarrassingly late off the relevancy mark (as a leading Australian director once observed, you can get the topical drift by watching TV soaps, but not the theatre), anxious, threatened and playing to a small if growing part of the population. It's a kind of half-living national treasure, propped up, contrary, awful and awesome in its energies and lassitude, nowhere more evident than in the state companies as they are rescued by MOB from their irritating peers.

By the year 2000 they might not be recognisable. Sydney, Melbourne and Queensland state companies look much as they have for a long time, anachronistic, with the odd innovative moment, and high

even 'world music' by harboursides, in parks, on river banks, in every corner of this great sunburnt country. There are arts festivals, community festivals, religious festivals, the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and the Jacaranda, Salamanca, Fremantle, Moomba and Maleny Festivals, the Sardine Festival, the Livid Festival, the Multicultural Theatre Festival, suburban festivals like Newtown and Northbridge, the Festivals of Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne and Sydney, Brisbane's Biennial Music Festival, the Australian Theatre Festival in Canberra, Fringe Festivals everywhere, film and video festivals, diverse rural and agricultural 'shows' and so on and on ad infinitum. The best festivals, according to Christopher Hunt (director Adelaide Festival 1994) are "festive" in that "they inspire that special social euphoria, the buzz of stimulated people interacting". This still begs the question. In particular, what are arts festivals? Are they about new experiences or maintaining the cultural status quo or intended to privilege some neglected aspect of Australian culture - as with Sydney's now 'defunct' Carnivale. Should they authorise Australian cultural product, accustom us to the 'new', promote ideas and cultural exchange? Are they just bread and circuses, or serious business and what kind of serious business are we talking? 1996 has been declared the Year of the Festival. Following the Year of Indigenous People and the Year of the Family, what is that supposed to mean? The next festival I'm attending is the 1995

Perth Festival, Australia's oldest arts festival, respectively directed and administered by emigré Englishmen, David Blenkinsop and Henry Boston, Australia's longest running and most consistent executive team. Inevitably, the festival is stamped in their image: solid rather than particularly innovative, emphasising excellence in the performing arts: 'great' plays (Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*, Royal National Theatre of Great Britain and Synge's *The Well of Saints* from the Abbey Theatre in Dublin); world ranked orchestras and chamber ensembles (the Odessa Philharmonic, the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra, the Prague Chamber Choir and the Moscow Conservatory Trio) and less predictably, contemporary dance, in which this festival has a noticeably adventurous record. Garth Fagan's Dance Company presents *Griot New York* and there is also a 'creative project between India and Australia', *Worlds Within Worlds* featuring the music of WA composers Roger Smalley, Cathy Travers and David Pye with choreography by India's Mallika Sarabhai. Less solidly classical, although suggestively substantial, is a cross cultural co-production between Black Swan Theatre Company and the State Theatre Company of South Australia, John Romeril's *The Floating World*. Local Polish company Theatre Zart is presenting a double bill of Dostoyevski's *Crime and Punishment* and *Nastasia*. More lurid are Lyndon Terracini's *The Cars That Ate Paris* (from NORPA, based in Lismore, NSW), One

Yellow Rabbit's *Ilsa, Queen of the Nazi Love Camp* from Canada and the Lithuanian State Academic Theatre Company's 'biting black comedy' *There to be Here*, promising 'an eccentric world of slapstick comedy, Chaplinesque mime and abstract performance'. Along with almost every Festival in the country, Adelaide excepted, the visual arts program is typically lacklustre. This is not to suggest that individual exhibitions are poor but that the program consists of whatever happens to be on at the time. There is no program, artist or exhibition financially supported by the festival in 1995, although there are plans to address this issue in the future. Nevertheless, it is likely that one of the more exciting (hybrid) projects will be the collaboration between installation artists, Domenico de Clario and the Elison Ensemble musicians. *Bar-Do'-J-Thos-Grol (the Tibetan Book of the Dead)* which deals with the journey to enlightenment as the soul experiences the transitional - Bardo - state between life and death) will be performed in seven successive locations, spanning seven nights between sunset and sunrise. Otherwise, the festival is almost encompassing. The street theatre program, whilst determinedly Eurocentric, looks and usually is - pretty good. Sidetrack Performance Company from Sydney are offering their performance menu *Heaven ... it's not for angels*, in association with PICA, and an outdoor ambient work, *The Measure* in the CBD. Local WA companies are also participating:

Perth Theatre Company has adapted Tim Wintons' *Lockie Leonard*, *Human Torpedo* for the stage; Barking Geckos perform Graham Pitt's *The Egg*; Spare Parts Puppetry presents *There's a Desert in My Teapot*. There's a bit of folk, a bit of jazz, a bit of 'world music', a bit of outdoor cinema; a bit of comedy and a bit of circus - you couldn't have a festival without the now ubiquitous acrobatic troupe. Don't get me wrong, I'm a fan, but ... There's Writers Week and a range of Festival forums like *The Music of Stravinsky: A view from the conductor's podium* or *Contemporary Dance: A Universal Language* and *Hybrid Arts - The Melting pot or a Marriage of Convenience* as well as the independently organised International Critics Conference and an 'Exporting the Arts' conference. Even cricket and football get a half page in the program. Opening fireworks-with-orchestra and a festival finale complete the program. Last year I was particularly taken with a group of young ballerinas costumed as peonies in bronze body paint and a sort of tableau vivant with exploding cakes. There are also festivals within the festival: the festival of Northbridge (inner city cafe, nightclub and cultural precinct of Perth) and the Western Power West End Festival which brings together 'dynamic businesses' and families! Now that's really something. That's more than festive, that's creative. Oh what a feeling ... ! What is a festival? If there's no easy answer in Perth 1995, surely there's something for everyone.

financial anxiety but South Australia's is boldly entrepreneurial, multi-cultural, playing with form and venue and has a significant female input. Not that it is any more financially secure. Playbox is not in the MOB but runs a spare, adventurous, touring, entrepreneurial Australian program. In Western Australia, Black Swan looks set to take the middle ground left by the demise of the State Theatre Company while maintaining its commitment to black writing and performance. The WA government came good with its promise to disburse State Theatre Company funds to other companies, \$118,000 to Black Swan to workshop Jimmy 'Bran Nue Dae' Chi's *Corrugation Road*. With the advent of Playing Australia and the financial pressures they face, it's difficult to see how regional companies based on the state company model will survive. Quirkier alternatives are bound to supplant them. A greater black Australian presence in the form of performance companies, writers and directors is easy to predict given the strong foundations in the writings and performances of the work of Jack Davis and Jimmy Chi in WA, Black Swan's progress, Brisbane's Kooemba Jdarra (most recently with Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers*), an annual theatre conference, directors like Lydia Miller and many writers with strong potential. Women have long been hard at work and influential in youth, community, educational and circus theatres, and the continual creation, as Peta Tait has documented, of distinctive works devised for themselves. Their presence as artistic directors and directors of plays in the mainstream is still small, but increasing in the smaller companies - Griffin, La Boite, Deckchair, Zootango. Of all the art forms, theatre seems to have been the slowest to share power with women. The complacency with which some argue that, because women's overall participation rate has increased, enough has been done in the way of positive discrimination, is an appalling failure to assess the kind of participation and its uncertainty. The situation with women playwrights is bleaker, if a little improved and despite the best efforts of Playworks who have helped many writers get their work produced in recent years, but rarely in

the mainstream. As they largely continue their innovations at the poorly paid edges of Australian theatre, women must dream nervously of 2000. The continuing surge of rich multicultural work is only obvious to those who seek it out. It needs continued assistance and promotion. It offers enormous cross-cultural potential, most productions displaying not ethnocentrism but a sharing of theatre skills and cultural knowledge. They are also distinctive for experimentation with form. Barry Kosky's Gilgul Company has received deserved praise but, as Pamela Payne argues, *New models and methods of theatre are rarely taken into account until they arrive in the mainstream. They don't feature in the theatrical debate; they simply don't exist. The strengths and weaknesses of particular ways of working may be ignored for a long time; their impact and influence will not be felt. Aftershocks, for example, instigated debate on the effectiveness, artistic force and viability of verbatim theatre because it was at Belvoir Street, The wealth of verbatim theatre that had been happening for years in community theatre and regional venues had rarely attracted press comment, and had not been part of any debate.* Meanjin, 3/1994 (In the same issue of Meanjin, WA critic Gareth Griffiths makes a comparable point about the fate of Lois Achimovitch's *Meetkatharra* in the face of a mainstreamed *Dead Heart* by Nicholas Parsons.) Despite the relatively high profiles of Gilgul and Adelaide's Doppio Teatro, there is no room for complacency about what can be gained and learned from theatre driven by multi-cultural forces. We dream of less dogmatic and less patently educational theatre-in-education companies, and less patronising community theatres. In fact, the changes in these forms have been long under way, creating distinctive work and slowly parting company with old U.K. models in time for the advent of the republic. Theatre for young people and by young people ranges from access programs to acclaimed innovations in demanding territory. The stage already dissolves into galleries, wharves, streets, railway sheds, tents, laneways, botanic gardens, a former powerhouse, distant landscapes, rooms above pubs and cyberspace. At the same

time, old theatres are refurbished as the cry for more venues persists. Critics, queried, challenged, banned as never before in this country, know, some of them, that they have a new task in front of them. Critics Pamela Payne and Helen Thompson in Meanjin's *Pearls before swine*, *Australian Theatre Criticism* issue, give the best available account of the task. Thompson, the Melbourne reviewer for the Age and hardly a favourite with Melbourne's small avant-garde, dreams up the future critic: *Above all the critic of the new needs to have thought about postmodernity - a convenient elastic term that sums up the sheer plasticity of new theatre work, its eclectic, inclusive, protean and shameless borrowing of forms and techniques from outside its old boundaries. The best critics of this work will invent a language appropriate to its needs. They will need to go to the opera as well as the art gallery if they are to understand the complex new languages of performance. They will have an understanding of theatre as part of a rich cultural discourse that may embrace Foucault as well as Piaf. They will transmit a sense of excitement as the new replaces the familiar. They will also be aware that their work records cultural process and will eventually constitute historical record.* This 'new' is not simply 'hybrid' or 'performance', it is theatre. More and more plays and productions in theatre in the coming years will, late as ever, play with time, narrative and space. Theatre audiences increasingly find themselves in the unexpected worlds of Kosky, Kemp, Mad Love, Doppio Teatro, Sue Ingleton, Ningali, Legs on the Wall. We dream then, too, of enlarged arts pages (*The Sydney Morning Herald* being the only example of this as others diminish) for critics to expand their reviews into meaningful statements. We dream of television committing itself to the performing arts beyond the pitiful minutes currently allocated often with Australia Council funds and prompting. We dream of an Australian arts internet so that theatre artists can at last know what is happening when and where. (*See ITI in At Short Notice*) Australian theatre's Asian dreams are rarely remembered on waking, if dreamt at all. Physical, musical theatre is exportable, but

the theatre of words will make its way only slowly into Asia. John Romeril's engaging, pragmatic Meanjin account of Australian performers at work in Japan is a timely reminder of the challenge ahead of the initial excitement. The Australia Council pushes ahead boldly with marketing Australian performance internationally, most recently at the Festival of Australian Theatre in Canberra. The Australian National playwrights conference has consciously sited itself as part of Asia and the Pacific. This dream is of a long road, but the drive has begun. That so much has been achieved and so much is being invented and proposed (including a national writers' theatre) seems to belie the wave of anxieties theatre faces as it transforms from the one to the many, but the anxieties are real, to do with survival, with careers, control, new hierarchies and antagonisms (I was recently told that the Melbourne-Sydney split was confirmed in the text versus non-text 'debate'!), and the post-Creative Nation depression that dawned when it was understood that artists weren't part of the big picture - unless you're the ones who'll get promoted and toured to Asia, New York and ... But being a victim is insufficient grounds for anxiety. Just as many actors and performers have generated an enormous amount of significant work outside big companies and institutions over recent years, theatre workers need to understand what is happening around them, take in the new forms, learn new technologies, avoid the temptation to turn on each other, except for productive debate, make proposals that will work and stop playing threatened. The Australian facility for an easy-going fatalism means that too often we surrender the few utopias we ever dream. *Keith Gallasch* Meanjin 3/1994 *Pearls before Swine*, Australian Theatre Criticism can be found in bookshops or ordered from Meanjin, University of Melbourne, Parkville, 3052 *Keith Gallasch is a dramaturg, most recently for Timothy Daly's Kafka Dances (Griffin), Tobsha Learner's The Glass Mermaid (Playbox) and (forthcoming) Daly's Moonwalkers, Sally Sussman's Orientalia, and Sidetrack's Fright.*

Mardi Gras '95

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival (3 February to mid-March) reinforces its international heavyweight status this year with the participation of Pierre et Gilles, "the twin gay icons" of the art world who will present their "stunning, unique images of kitsch, hard hitting camp and fab decor" at Roslyn Oxley Gallery. The visual arts program overall reflects an acknowledgement of the strength of queer art in mainstream circles. Major galleries — the MCA with Mapplethorpe and the AGNSW whose *Perspecta* is an official Mardi Gras event — are involved for the first time, and boutique commercials, such as Sarah Cottier with photographs by New Yorker Jack Pierson, are also grabbing a share of the action. Nonetheless, the overwhelming flavour is still one of community and grass roots inclusiveness: alongside *Out Art*, the Mardi Gras community art show at ARDT Gallery, there are 36 exhibitions scattered throughout Sydney's cafes, warehouses and public sites. The Sydney ArtBus, complete with your very own queer performer as guide, a Stephen Cummins retrospective, and *Out City Projections*, a moveable installation of projected images, look of particular interest.

The emphasis on community also comes through in the decision to move the nerve centre of the performing arts program "out west" to Newtown. The New Theatre presents Barry Lowe's *The Death of Peter Pan*, an exploration of the fraught love between youth and ageing author J.M. Barrie, creator of the little boy who never grows up. *Toxic Girls* by Mardi McConnochie, where four schoolgirls "discover that passion can lurk in the most unexpected places", is on at Newtown High School, whilst The Studio Theatre hosts *A Body of Work*, "handsome abstract dance" by Lance Gries, who's been known to play the piano other than with his fingers. Closer to the city, The Performance Space becomes cLUB bENT, the Festival's first late night arts club, a showcase for queer performance, trapeze work, cabaret, film, monologues and video and computer art. Belvoir Street presents Honour Molloy's *Tongues of Stone* which uses the disturbing history of abortion in late 19th century New York as a backdrop for the consideration of contemporary concerns about the right to privacy and freedom of expression. And the tiny Lookout Theatre packs a punch with *Queer Fringe*, a season of work by local Australian playwrights.

The sense of community building carries into the big events such as the fair with its dog and drag competitions ("see if you can tell the difference!"), the Awards night, the Sports Festival, and of course *Together Forever*, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Choir gig at ABC's Eugene Goossens Hall. This performance forms part of the Festival's inaugural music program, which also includes *Wilde Alone*,

Opera Appollo's production of Larry Sitsky's 1982 opera, and *Live At the Eco Bar*, late night casual jazz, country and rock.

For the more bookish, the literature program offers two book launches — *Divertika* queer anthology and *Love Cries: Cruel Passions, Strange Desires* — and two prose/poetry readings, at the Writers' Centre and The Women's Library, while the highlights of the forums include *Art & Culture* at the MCA and *Needlefest*, a discussion of issues faced by gay and lesbian injecting drug-users via a variety of popular films. RT

For more info, get yourself a Festival guide or call (02) 361 0655



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Embodying Archetypes, Personally

Nikki Heywood's *Creatures Ourselves* previewed

Anyone who saw Nikki Heywood's disturbing, balloon-frocked contribution to the innovative *Steps* program curated by Leisa Shelton at Sydney's The Performance Space in 1994, will want to see Heywood's latest full scale work.

Creatures Ourselves is a performance born out of collaboration between Nikki, five performers and two musician/composers. It is a movement-based work influenced by butoh practices, particularly Body Weather, but with a strong interest in the ordinary gesture. Swinging between the grotesque and the banal, it examines the world of the insect hive as a metaphor for male and female archetypes and their relationships.

This is the third and most complex of a series of performances in which Nikki has looked at powerful female archetypes. The first, *SOMA/Memory Frame*, with music by Matthew Fargher, was a solo based on the Sumerian myth of Innana and her journey into the underworld, her encounter with and near annihilation at the hands of the monstrous Ereshkigal, her rescue and re-emergence.

The second work, *The Body Sings*, grew out of a fascination with the gargantuan myth of Ereshkigal, her relationship with fertility and death, and her dreams of ascension from the shadows.

In *Creatures Ourselves*, the enlarged female body now inhabits a world populated by others. She is queen or supreme matriarch, a position she may or may not have chosen

for herself, as it implies entrapment, service and, ultimately, sacrifice to the others.

Implicit in this dynamic is the relationship between size and power, the mutability of the female body, anorexia being the most potent example of the struggle between an assertion of power and its complete removal.

This is particularly relevant in dance where anorexia abounds in the quest for perfect form. In *Creatures Ourselves*, we see a reversal of this form, where the female body is expanded to its full potential and the male body is diminished as a consequence.

The soundscape for *Creatures Ourselves* has evolved from a collaboration between Gary Bradbury and Tony Backhouse. A capella voice engages with electronics. Sounds from performer improvisations led by Backhouse focus on vocal textures and dissonance rather than song. The electronic component has been generated by Bradbury entirely from samplings of voices, utilising digital treatments and analogue synthesizer filtering effects. Electronics are also employed 'live'.

This conjunction between the human and the electronic echoes the thematic range of the performance from archetypal to personal. RT

Creatures Ourselves, The Performance Space, Sydney, March 2-5, 7-12 8pm



Nikki Heywood

Heidrun Löhr

One Extra Miracle

A new dance of ideas about hope, desire and belief

The One Extra Dance Company's *Tent of Miracles* has a story to tell: "Somewhere in drought-ridden, rural Australia, after much wishing and praying, a spirit cockatoo guides a woman to water. But blind faith is exploited when this water is taken to a carnival and sold as 'Miracle Water'."

One Extra's commitment to dance as theatre is well known. Appropriately, the company's founding director Kai Tai Chan returns to the company as dramaturg and co-director to work with current artistic director Graeme Watson who is directing and choreographing *Tent of Miracles*.

The narrative outline shouldn't suggest a preoccupation with story alone. Doubtless it provides a schema from which will spring powerful and cumulative theatrical and dance moments and motifs. One Extra are not afraid of ideas, hence they subtitle the company 'dance of ideas'. Watson is interested in the appeal of miracles in an imperfect world, indeed in what can appear to be a miracle in such an age as ours. Fundamentalists reaffirm the belief in

miracle, the Pope beatifies as many miracle-makers as he can. Watson thinks "the appeal of change without explanation is not surprising in a culture in which everything is explained".

The first act of *Tent of Miracles* is rural. The arrival of rain is interpreted as a miracle. In the second, urban act, this miracle, or the blind faith in it, is exploited and trivialised. Watson observes that in Christianity, miracles are invariably in narrative form, but perhaps there are other forms of miracle - the event to which a narrative is attached in hindsight or all those moments that could be labelled miraculous but we don't know that they are.

Watson says, "*Tent of Miracles* could be read as referring in part to the dance world. Traditionally dance was preoccupied with perfectibility of body and performance. Now the miracle of achievement," he says, "is located in marketing." He worries that this narrows the possibilities of being subversive as we work to survive rather than create. This is confirmed by Creative Nation's focus on marketing and promotion and, he fears, the hiving off of subversion to the new Hybrid Arts Committee of the Australia Council. One Extra, he points out, has always been 'cross artform', and the pleasure of working with One Extra is in its refusal to be easily categorised. The categorising of experience (as miracles) or forms (as pure dance) can be demanding and limiting.

Rory Dempster is creating 'a tent of light', incorporating performers and audience in

the capacious St Georges Hall Theatre in Newtown, Sydney. Eammon D'Arcy is creating the set. Live music is by Anthony Partos. The ensemble of dancers includes Lisa Ffrench, Patrick Harding-Irmer, Dean Walsh and Michael Campbell (a leading dancer with Cologne's Tanzforum) and Jeannette Fabila from New Guinea and a 1994 Graduate of NAISDA. RT

The One Extra Company's Tent of Miracles, St Georges Hall Theatre, Newtown, 23 March - 9 April.



Dean Walsh and Lisa Ffrench

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Emergent media zones

McKenzie Wark tunes his aerials to the information superhighway

How is the mediascape likely to change over the next decade and how does this affect the practice of new media art?

The changes in the technology of the media that are either happening or imminent have been much hyped, and not without reason. New media forms will open up some interesting possibilities for art practice, and perhaps close off some old ones.

Less often discussed is a second aspect of this—the changing expectations and competencies of audiences. The media often discusses the media as if the process of choosing, receiving and interpreting media flow were some kind of natural process. No matter how much the technobusters might like to presume that the development of the new media vectors will automatically create a new audience and a new market, it ain't necessarily so. The relationship between existing audience cultures and new media forms is always a complicated and quirky business. This is as true for the uses made of media by art as by commerce. Changes in media forms often appear to be driven by new technologies but what drives these new technologies is the problem foreseen and the opportunity seized by a number of media oligopolists. Basically, every medium faced the same problem in the 80s: costs were rising faster than audiences or markets were growing. This was the problem with the movie business, television, publishing, computers and telephony.

One solution to this problem was globalisation—the campaign against the cultural protectionism of countries like France and Australia and the privatisation of state telephone monopolies in many countries are examples of this strategy. A whole range of businesses, based in TV or publishing or telephony, from well developed markets such as Australia, Italy, England or the US, built global empires in a climate of reduced protectionism, and the privatisation of formerly public media assets or state industrial monopolies.

The second solution is to try to take a chunk of the media market away from some other media industry. In the US the phone companies and the cable TV companies have been contemplating this for some time. Cable network owners want to use their infrastructure to carry phone calls as well and vice versa. This would require pulling down the regulatory walls within the US and this in essence is what was behind the push for a new communications bill and all that guff about the 'information superhighway'.

The third option is to develop a new technology for which one can charge a premium price or with which one can grab a big share of an as yet undefined new market for culture. The so-called experience industry (including 'virtual reality') and multimedia (including CD-ROM) are two different versions of this process.

The economics of the experience business

are very simple. American punters will pay about eight bucks for 90 minutes of feature movie, but will pay eight bucks for 10 minutes of virtual reality or for 30 minutes of I-max format 3-D cinema. For the most part these are experiments developed by a combination of movie business cultural skills and Silicon Valley computer industry technology, a marriage dubbed 'Siliwood'.

Since it is by no means clear who has the cultural capital required to make heightened experience media work, all kinds of people from cinema directors to video game producers to performance artists end up getting sucked into this development process. The experience industry is based on the premise of increasing the intensity of the spectacle. For example, Douglas Trumbull who produced famous special effects for *2001* and *Bladerunner* is now trying to develop experiential cinema. Brenda Laurel, who has a background in theatre and performance as well as a doctorate in computer interface design is working on a virtual reality environment called Place Holder. Ivan Sutherland, one of the most famous names in interface engineering is into 3-D interactive environments. Disney is also trying to turn animations like *Aladdin* into a virtual 'product' for its theme parks. Video game maker Sega has the AS-1, a highly kinetic ride designed for video game arcades.

If the experience industry is mostly about increasing the intensity of the spectacle, multimedia are about increasing the freedom of movement of the person using the media. VR is in theory an attempt to offer both simultaneously—but in practice ends up falling on one side of the line or the other. It simply isn't feasible with present technology to offer intensity of experience combined with interactivity. Interactive media, hypermedia or multimedia are mostly pretty low resolution technologies compared to cinema or even television, but don't limit the user to one narrative strand.

Interactivity can be delivered via some kind of portable product like a CD-ROM, or over a network, be it the telephone system used by the internet or cable and satellite vectors that presently deliver multichannel television. On the internet, the World Wide Web is growing rapidly and offers space for low cost experiments, like video artist David Blair's *Wax Web*. CD-ROM is also a potentially low cost medium and many artists are presently exploring it. Interactive television is another story, and experiments here are mostly restricted to corporate test beds for commercial products. In the US, access to this medium depends on mainlining the community access principle already in place for pay TV.

In the relatively high tech area of the experience media, the talents of creative artists are brought in by investors hedging their bets on what kinds of cultural forms might work with as yet unspecified audiences. In those areas of interactive media that use established software tools and delivery formats it is often possible to create works on very small budgets. An example is the very successful CD-ROM *Myst*, produced by a team of three people working at home. Many visual artists and filmmakers are now experimenting with CD-ROM works.

The first big problem is distribution. There is as yet no easy way to distribute CD-ROM art. Book publishers and video game companies are rushing out CD-ROM based products, and these are distributed via computer stores and occasionally, on an experimental basis at this stage, by bookshops. Many of these

products are very poor, particularly some of the crap authored by publishers and TV documentary producers, but because they have media conglomerates of the order of Time-Warner behind them, they are on the market.

Most interactive products from commercial producers are adaptations of existing cultural forms, including encyclopaedias, music video, documentaries and video games. They often have high production values but fail to maintain the interest of the idea or to really use interactivity in any interesting way. How is pressing buttons and waiting ages for the screen to redraw any more interactive than flipping the pages of a book? Where interactivity gets interesting is where the skills of film, video, music, games and publishing collide with each other. In Australia, producers with a diverse range of media experience such as Troy Innocent, Brad Miller, Linda Dement, John Collette and VNS Matrix are all producing interesting hybrid forms of interactivity, mostly using readily available delivery formats such as CD-ROM and laser disk. Jon McCormack's work stands out in this company because of his abilities in computer programming. On the whole, however, the opportunities for artists, particularly for Australian artists, lie in bringing conceptual and cultural forms to existing technologies, rather than being on the so-called 'cutting edge' of technological change per se.

Television based interactive media are a long way off for Australian media producers. The collusive interests of the broadcasters have locked us out of multichannel television for a generation. To this one can add the enormous difficulties in raising investment money in Australia for any new media. Some community TV activists have a foot in the door with the Telecom cable roll out. For example, Metro TV in Sydney is involved in putting community TV to air via cable, and a small band of energetic community TV activists, such as the indefatigable Jeff Cook, have interactivity in their sights as well. The TV remote control is a pretty rudimentary form of interactive device but it can be used to drive a menu-based interactive information format.

In the Australian context, access to new media for artists, or indeed for anybody, is constrained by a number of factors. Pressures from globalising media oligopolies to relinquish cultural protectionism will increase. The Hollywood movie conglomerates lost on this issue in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, but are actively working for free trade in cultural commodities for the next.

Given the stranglehold media oligopolies have on mainstream Australian media, and their influence on the policy process, it will be extremely difficult to maintain spaces in the emerging media landscape for something analogous to public and community broadcasting and subsidised cinema and art. It was refreshing to see a strong commitment in last year's cultural policy statement to experimentation and production of Australian content in film, television and new media, to be administered by a new committee, the Film Commission and SBS. That the ABC was unable to negotiate this policy commitment was very disturbing, as is the present government's lack of commitment to the main public broadcaster at a time in which it has undergone massive restructuring to orient it to the new environment.

Community activities won a significant victory in 1993 in getting bandwidth set aside for a sixth TV channel devoted to community video access. Yet it remains

an open question whether community media groups have the resources and experience to capitalise on this opportunity. The lack of coordination between arts policy, community media policy and new media policy on the part of government finds an unfortunate parallel in the lack of coordination between different interest groups in the media and the arts. Creating spaces for dialogue on media futures is very urgent.

There are now significant funds to disburse for new media experiments. This will work best if concentrated on the cultural forms of new media rather than on cutting edge technology. Australia is a technologically dependent media market, being a long way from centres of research and power in the emerging 'military entertainment complex' of California.

Art tends to occupy one of two margins in relation to the dominant media technology of the day. Either it colonises residual media left behind by changes wrought by the culture industries, or it forms an avant-garde in the emergent media that do not yet have a stable cultural form. The interesting opportunities for art practice at the moment are opening up in the emergent media zone. There is a narrow window of opportunity there for new and creative work, a window that it is more broadly important to keep open, given the instability of the whole nexus between media technology and cultural forms at present. The patterns of culture that will stabilise in the next millennium may well be determined by experiments and struggles undertaken today.

McKenzie Wark's book *Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events* is published by Indiana University Press and distributed by Manic Exposeur.

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System Error

John Conomos retrieves artists from the Creative Nation trash can

The rhetorical architecture of Paul Keating's recent Creative Nation statement signals the growing realisation that the new media arts are emblematic of new cultural, economic and paradigmatic shifts in our everyday lives. Clearly, this document suggests a substantial shift in government cultural policy from the more traditional emphasis on direct assistance to visual artists, filmmakers, writers, performers, dancers, and all kinds of cultural producers, to a more recent one of supporting diverse institutions and mechanisms of cultural products and services in the context of local, national and global cultural spaces.

For the first time, aside from the more necessary concerns of supporting relevant arts funding institutions like the Australia Council and the traditional art forms, we have a focus on the way the new multimedia technologies connect to broadcasting, computing, telephony and information. This signifies throughout the document a sustained project to expand the economic export potential of the arts by encouraging the computer/multimedia sector of our economy to fund new digital media products. Further, it indicates the emergence of new post-biological art forms evolving from a multiplicity of interactions in electronic space.

Although Creative Nation possesses numerous worthwhile ideas, rhetorical emphases, and pragmatic funding suggestions, there is nevertheless a problematic Arnoldian characterisation of the traditional and the new media art forms in terms of cultural excellence, national identity, self-expression and quality. To a considerable degree, this is a valuable road map to our expanding techno-culture and its relevance to us as individuals and as a highly urbanised multicultural society. But it is a document that also typifies certain cultural, epistemological and technological pitfalls of a more utopian/technophilic approach to the question of new media technologies and contemporary art practice.

Too much emphasis has been placed on how high-tech entrepreneurs have the magical formula for transforming Australia into a cutting-edge cultural producer in the Pacific Rim. The \$84 million that is to be spent in the next four years is a positive

step in facilitating new media products and services for Australia's rapid entry into a post-broadcast world of global media, but little consideration has been given to the more marginalised artists, who are more representative of the postmodern technological avant-garde, in the emerging multimedia institutional landscape.

Too often reading Creative Nation one has the conviction of *déjà vu*: a naive belief in a top-down hierarchical model of cultural production, new media technologies as an expression of late-capital culture and Platonic cyberspace ideology. It is also assumed that new media art forms imply, *ipso facto*, new aesthetic paradigms. This does not mean that I subscribe to the wilder romantic excesses of Roy Ascott's view of the new interactive media as a global "mind-to-mind" revolution nor to a Jeffersonian model of the information superhighway and its putative emancipatory possibilities as we read in *Wired* and other West Coast New Age publications. But I do believe in the critical project of conceptualising the new media art forms (as Ascott does) along the lines of a bottom-up paradigm of connectivity and interactivity.

The new "terminal identity" subjectivity that defines the young navigators of today's computer terminals of multimedia forms has not been adequately acknowledged. Electronic art as an open-ended paradigm for re-thinking our institutions, our perceptions of ourselves and the complex continuity between traditional and new media has taken second place to the notion of new multimedia technology as a national educational "down-loading" technology. (This is especially evident in the "Australia on CD" Program). The proactive stance adopted by Creative Nation to engender a viable content-oriented multimedia industry suggests a limited utilitarian concept of the new electronic media. It rarely acknowledges that the genealogical formations of new media art forms are complex and that their innovative computer-mediated audiovisual concepts, forms, textures and cultural agendas are a legacy of modernism as much as they are of the post-war avant-garde arts. (This is tangentially indicated in the recent Nike TV advertisement featuring William

Burroughs).

What is commendable in this cultural policy document is its underlying objective to locate the new media arts in the broader domain of everyday life. However, this does not negate the importance of creating new exhibition, production and rhetorical contexts for artists engaged in the new cultural forms, in the gallery and the festival world as much as in the proposed Co-operative Multimedia Development Centres. The electronic arts depend on our ability to question the misleading beliefs and assumptions of our cultural zeitgeist, whether they do constitute an "avant-garde" practice and how they relate to the more traditional art forms. Further, irrespective of the document's practical strategies to create national multimedia forums, the Australian Multimedia Enterprise, the Co-operative Multimedia Development Centres, the "Australia on CD" Program and funding the Australian Film Commission to produce multimedia works, we need to ask the more demanding self-reflexive questions regarding technology's masculinist conceptual frameworks, seeing how cultural institutions mask the vested interests of academic, bureaucratic and corporate culture and how our mainstream thinking about art, culture and technology is hopelessly inadequate in the light of the aesthetic and cultural turbulence the new cultural technologies are creating. (On the latter point, Laurence Rickels amongst others, has appropriately described our symptomatic inability to find our way from the inside of technologisation as "perspective psychosis").

Where Creative Nation is correct is in stressing the diverse division of cultural labour that is required for the production of CD-ROM technology, broadband interactives services, and on-line PC services. It is confused and vague however on the complexities of training individuals in the new electronic media and on how established and younger artists will connect with corporate, software and tertiary personnel in these new production contexts. Creative Nation underestimates not only the experimental necessity of the role that more peripheral Nintendo literate artists have to play in the production of the new multimedia exhibits and screen-based electronic media, but it also overlooks the importance of how difficult it is to locate adequately trained new media arts personnel.

Consequently, artists familiar with the new

media forms need to be situated in the chain of executive decision-making, they need to be empowered and visible in the new tertiary sites creating their hybrid works for the Internet as much as for the more orthodox forms of broadcasting, exhibition and critical reception. Bureaucrats, curators, producers and our museums and heritage sites need to commission new media artists to do new works for everyday consumption, something that is finally recognised in the Creative Nation document and is sadly lacking today with the exception of one or two museums like the Museum of Sydney.

It is crucial that we remind ourselves whenever possible that the emergent media arts are starting to represent a canon as much as the more traditional art forms do. This necessitates the hermeneutic awareness to question our established tendency to either subscribe to a utopian or a dystopic view of the new media arts.

As we approach the end of this century, what is clearly emerging in electronic media are the unpredictable non-binary intertextual forms between computer art, video, cinema, television, performance, virtual reality and photography and the increasing significance of computer animation and graphics in shaping the concerns and techniques of interactive installation art. Lamentably, Creative Nation does not give due recognition to these dynamic aesthetic, cultural and technological forms, nor to their multimedia creators and neither does it consider how they might be located in reference to education, culture and industry.

Notwithstanding the questionable nationalist slant of Creative Nation and its overall tendency to define the new media technologies almost solely in audience, economic, marketing and social terms, it nevertheless manages to address important issues relating to how the new digital arts are connected to the experience of our everyday lives. It is a significant "weather vane" signal by the Keating administration that finally the new media technologies are being factored into government cultural policy. But why should new media artists endowed with experience and knowledge of these art forms play second fiddle to our techno-corporate industrialists?

John Conomos is a Sydney media artist and commentator.

The New Chimera

Synapse, the organising body of *Chimera*, a five day art event for Sydney (February 22 - 26), claims the event as "the first of its kind in Australia to focus on new directions in artists' practices that are emerging internationally". Forty seven artists from Argentina, Thailand, England, Korea, Italy, Canada, Ireland, the Philippines, Germany, the U.S.A., Northern Ireland, Singapore and Australia will be participating through conferencing, exhibiting, and internetting. The symposium is at the Goethe Institut, the exhibition at Parliament House, the 'computer

mediated communications' at UNSW's College of Fine Arts.

Co-ordinator Neil Berecny emphasises the optimism of the event and the vitality of new arts practices, especially in the blurring of boundaries between art, science, technology, music, education and philosophy. The last like gathering of artists was in Manchester, the next in Halifax (coordinator: Bruce Barber, Intermedia Dept., Nova Scotia College of Arts & Design, Canada).

Chimera will be opened by NSW Arts Minister Peter Collins and the opening address will be given by Michael Lee, federal Minister for Communications and the Arts.

Berecny reels off an impressive list of artists working directly with industry, local and state governments across the world. Argentina's Ala Plastica creates environmental works with government co-operation. Peter Fend (Ocean Earth,

U.S.A.; resident at Artpace) draws on satellite site surveillance to create large scale artworks and models, sells imagery to the media, and reveals the gap between real and official information. Italy's Art Way of Thinking and Canada's Terra Cultural Research Society promote interdisciplinary and cross cultural work. Renata Lorenz (Game Girl, Germany) uses public meetings to interpret artistically and information-ally, the latest on genetic research. Ailbhe Murphy (Unspoken Truths, The Irish Museum of Modern Art) has created works with Dublin working class women. Marie Barrett (Artlink, Ireland) working out of Donegal has worked with deaf adolescents and has created sculptural works at the border between Eire and Northern Ireland to link the two. Australian participants include Adrian Hall, Pat Hoffie, Michael Eather and Richard McCarthy (Fire-works Gallery, Qld.), Isabelle Delmotte, Pam Lofts (Watch This Space, Alice Springs),

Jeffrey Cook (Open Access Cable, Sydney) and John Conomos.

"Most of the visiting artists and their organisations," says Berecny, "work outside the normal art world and with a non-exhibition aspect and usually without a building. Process is as important as the finished work and there is a belief that social change can be effected as people are brought together."

A significant focus of the event is to develop communications between artists through fax, e mail and internet, to integrate new media into art practices both as art and as information and to make such means accessible. Berecny says Apple have been very helpful and that Michael Lee will present his opening address on-line. Another interesting feature is that the conference will allocate time for the presentation of proposals for future projects with a strong emphasis on collaborations across nations, cultures and forms. RT

Culture Shop

Gay Hawkins unwraps the Creative Nation package

Stuck in traffic recently I noticed the ad on the back of the bus in front. Under an image of an eager-looking woman sitting beside a phone, two words jumped out in bold: WORKING NATION. It wasn't until I read the fine print that I realised that the purpose of this catchy phrase was to promote one of the myriad new training schemes funded by the commonwealth government.

There seems to be no limit to the Keating government's capacity to inject nationalist sentiment into every new policy development. We've had the Greening Australia environmental policy, Playing Australia, a touring arts program, Multicultural Australia for the Olympics bid, the republic debate with all its rhetoric about the 'mature' nation and, at the end of last year after much hype, the long awaited commonwealth cultural policy.

Creative Nation is certainly a very hip title for a cultural policy. Not only does it affirm government's role in supporting creativity but it also plays on the idea of nations as cultural formations, as powerful inventions influencing our sense of identity and attachments. This is fundamentally what this landmark document is all about: how should government intervene in the complicated worlds of cultural production, distribution and consumption? And how should these interventions help reflect and create something called 'Australian culture'? Or, to put it another way: what is the role of cultural policy in nation formation?

'Pretty crucial' is the answer that Creative Nation comes up with. In the past it tended to be wars or wool that put us on the map. Not any more, now it's *Priscilla* and Aboriginal art. Culture is increasingly being promoted as our mark of difference and distinction. And developments in cultural policy over the last twenty five years have played a key role in nurturing this profound transformation. Although Creative Nation is a forward-looking document, a framework for future management, its recommendations reflect a strong sense of recent cultural history.

Take the section on the Australia Council. For once the achievements of this organisation are acknowledged and affirmed. Unlike so many previous inquiries into its role and future with their interminable recommendations for cuts and/or abolition, Creative Nation seeks to build on strengths and equip the council with the resources to adapt to changing conditions. Triennial funding, the Major Organisations Board, international marketing strategies, audience development programs and increased links between the arts and broadcasting technologies are all sensible ideas long overdue for implementation. The significance of these recommendations is that they reveal a shift away from policies directed at supporting individual artists. While the Council has not given up its role as a patron it has realised that developing international markets, wider distribution networks and new audiences are equally important strategies. These approaches focus on extending the economic base of the arts and offer the possibility of greater self sufficiency for artists.

Some useful insights into the impacts of government support for the arts are also offered. It's important to be reminded that in 1972 only 19 novels by Australian writers were published. In 1992 over 200 were and the policies and money of the Literature Board of the Australia Council are one of the forces behind this growth. Cynics could dismiss these details as nothing more than government self-promotion, even propaganda. But this reading would deny the fact that without government subsidies, cultural industry regulations, public cultural institutions etc., the complex varieties of nationalism currently on offer would not exist. Culture and policy need each other, it's how you put them together that matters. If you want a taste of life without much government intervention watch Channel Nine or listen to Mix FM for a while and remember that anything created in Australia on these media is largely there because of the Australian Broadcasting Authority's Australian content regulations.

This plea for the role of policy in providing structures for national (and local) cultural expressions is not based on the search for 'excellence' as the sign of Australia's civilised status. I don't think that cultural policy should ever be dominated by the pursuit of purely aesthetic objectives. Rather, it should, and often is, about creating and protecting spaces of possibility, innovation, employment, critique and creativity in which the nation is imagined in important and progressive ways. You simply don't see groundbreaking television like *Heartland* or *Phoenix* or *Out* on the commercial channels. Being free of market pressures allows for social and political objectives to drive programming and it allows for audiences completely ignored by markets to be addressed.

A major theme running through Creative Nation is the need to maintain these policy traditions of cultural nationalism and protectionism; to continue government's role in creating spaces of possibility. But the justifications for this have taken on an added twist. In the recent past cultural industries were regulated or subsidised so that Australians could 'dream their own dreams', to quote a popular piece of policy rhetoric. The justifications were inward looking. Australian identity was young, fragile and vulnerable and government supported arts, films, books and images would help us find out who we were.

There is little of this insecurity and defensiveness in Creative Nation. Instead, the tone is confident and outward looking. Export markets, international recognition and trade possibilities are the new rationales for policy. Culture has to be put to work to attract tourists, open up new markets and assist the balance of trade figures. Programs like the Visual Arts Export Strategy, support for Australian multimedia companies to compete internationally, cultural industry development strategies and the ABC's satellite television service in South-East Asia are examples of this export push.

This drive to market Australian culture beyond national boundaries is a sign of the times. Like those of most second order nations, Australian cultural industries face the problem of small markets and intense competition from larger countries. Their long term viability is increasingly dependent on exports and the bigger markets these offer. In fact, many forms of government support (film production in particular) are now tied to the demand that the product has definite international sales.

Going global presents an interesting set of dilemmas for national cultural policy makers: how do you assist cultural

industries to compete internationally and retain a sense of local or national integrity? Some analysts of the increasing globalisation of media and communications industries argue that this is an impossible demand. Globalisation inevitably obliterates national cultures not simply because of the brute economic muscle of enormous multinational communications corporations but also because global cultural products have to be bland and placeless to successfully circulate. Difference and diversity are being overrun by the Coca Colarisation of the world. These claims about the impacts of globalisation are somewhat misdirected and exaggerated. They imply that *The Simpsons*, *MacDonalds* and *Paradise Beach* mean the same wherever they are consumed. But surely audiences are more active and various? Different audiences with different histories, languages, locations and rituals bring their own meanings to these products. The global is always consumed locally.

The impact of globalisation on Australian culture is complex. On the one hand we are seeing more and more American media product on our screens (and Pay TV hasn't even really started yet!) on the other hand, we are seeing distinctively Australian films and TV programs find enormous overseas audiences. Who could have predicted the success of *Neighbours* in England? Difference has not so much been wiped out as put into play. Globalisation and new technologies have opened up possibilities for multi-directional flows of cultural products. Because these flows are still vastly uneven there is a strong commitment in Creative Nation to retaining protectionist policies for culture, to defending and nurturing the national against an onslaught of imports and the continuing push from America to liberalise trade in audio-visual services. But there are also recommendations geared at assisting cultural industries to compete globally, to seek out international markets and facilitate the wider circulation of Australian cultural products.

The export drive in Creative Nation seeks to exploit Australia's difference internationally. Other recommendations support the fact of cultural difference *within* the nation. There are a range of policy initiatives for indigenous and ethnic communities. Multiculturalism has definitely arrived in cultural policy. SBS gets an extra \$13 million over four years to commission quality Australian programs from independent producers. A National Institute for Indigenous Performing Arts will be established. Developments like these are important because they represent real gains for constituencies that have long been marginalised within cultural policy.

However, one could ask why there is not equal attention to other disadvantaged communities? Why have these groups been privileged? A striking absence in Creative Nation is the discourse on access and equity that dominated many areas of cultural policy in the 1980s. There is no mention of community arts or local cultural participation and development. There is no attempt to consolidate or extend the vast array of community cultural activities that have nurtured all sorts of neglected constituencies: people living in economically disadvantaged regions, isolated women, workers, youth, children, gays. The list is endless. Community radio, community TV, local arts centres etc. have played a crucial role in providing cheap accessible cultural infrastructure for the expression of difference and the maintenance of a sense of community amongst those often ignored or misrepresented in mainstream media and culture. These publicly funded services have also provided spaces for the creation of innovative and exciting

cultural forms that have often been the only site of diversity or opposition in a sea of conformity.

Ignoring the small, local, fringe and community cultural sectors is a serious oversight in Creative Nation. Without these sorts of services and structures many Australians would have little access to affirmative cultural forms. While the big prestigious organisations like national galleries, museums and training institutions are good for our image and essential for collecting, archiving and representing, they are not used by large sections of the population. There are still plenty of people who find these places uncomfortable and irrelevant and there are still plenty of curators and cultural managers who have very restricted and elitist notions of what counts as culture. This is why a diversity of levels and forms of cultural infrastructure is important to any national cultural policy genuinely committed to the recognition of difference.

The image of Australia in this policy blueprint has much to value. Like the republic debate and Mabo, Creative Nation is part of the Keating government's drive to establish new nationalisms appropriate to present and future economic and social conditions. The role of cultural policy in this process is crucial. Protection of content and local production, support for creators and a more aggressive export orientation for cultural industries are all strategies that will foster multiple varieties of Australian identity and hopefully keep them independent and vibrant.

Gay Hawkins teaches cultural studies in the School of Sociology at the University of New South Wales.

Orientalia a fantasia of mutations and projections

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Virginia Baxter
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Annemaree Dalziel
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How to Get a Bite of the CD-ROM Action

David Harrington on the commercial steps to the CD-ROM platform.

With Microsoft CEO Bill Gates and the Pope in Sydney at the same time in January this year, inevitably comparisons arose, with one newspaper declaring that "the Pope is here and God is too". But while the Pope beatified Mary MacKillop, Gates preached a new religion of digital information.

Paul Keating ratified Gates' vision in his Creative Nation statement, by committing \$84 million to supporting the development of indigenous CD-ROM and on-line information services. But how can individual Australian developers take advantage of the multimedia hype and successfully build and market their own CD-ROMs or on-line information services?

Given that multimedia developers typically fall into two camps, the technoheads and the artists, the first challenge is marrying creative with technical and software skills. Here, the internet or physical bulletin boards of universities and colleges can help. Also useful could be Microsoft's "Multimedia

Jumpstart", a CD-ROM developer's kit, and *Interactive Multimedia Development Guide*, a free publication on how to develop CD-ROMs, available from Microsoft.

The second challenge is getting access to funding to develop your concept commercially. It can cost up to half a million dollars to successfully develop and market a CD-ROM globally. Commercial information services can cost similar amounts.

There are five main development phases for multimedia: market analysis and development of a proposal, including the business plan; scripting; prototyping; production; and marketing and distribution. There are several possible avenues to secure funding for each phase:

- Friends wishing to take a share of your business. Many small high tech companies begin this way.
- Small business loans from the bank, difficult to get if you are a sole proprietor, and do not have four or five years of

business success under your belt.

- Australian or overseas multimedia companies that may want to invest in your title. All global multimedia companies have departments to assess acquisition or investment in start-up companies. New on-line information gateways being established in Australia such as On Australia, the joint venture between Telecom and Microsoft, may also be interested.

- Venture capital funds in Australia or United States. Depending on their assessment of your business plan, market forecasts and management ability, these companies take a share of your business in return for providing funding.

- Federal arts or small business loans and grants. The Australia Council, Film Australia and the soon to be established Australian Multimedia Enterprise (AME) fund a variety of multimedia and will generally review your business plans in a similar manner to the venture capital funds.

Distribution is the third big challenge.

With the flood of CD-ROMs coming onto the market there will soon be a 'shelf space' problem, where smaller independent publishers will have difficulty selling their products because the majors will dominate the shelf space for CD-ROM sales. The most successful approach seems to be negotiating a licensing or distribution deal with one of the majors, such as Microsoft or Brodurbund.

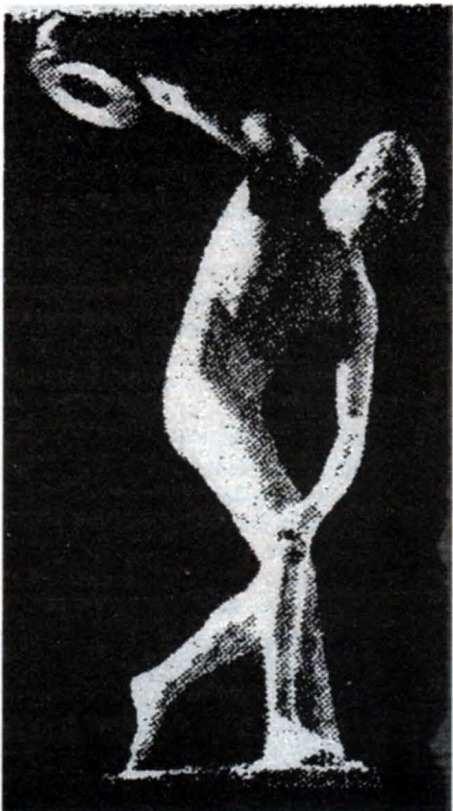
Independent developers will also need to rapidly acquire new skills in the field of user interface design. If Microsoft's success in developing icon-based graphical user interfaces is any indication, the multimedia titles that are most intuitive for users will also be most successful.

When AME is established in March this year, its mandate will include providing advice to new Australian developers seeking multimedia project finance. This will go some way to creating a much needed information node and coordination point for the multimedia industry in Australia. It could be a useful starting point for you if you require advice about how to take your multimedia idea one step further towards commercial development.

David Harrington is a consultant with McKinsey & Co. specialising in multimedia.

CD-ROM - The 21st Century Bronze?

Mike Leggett on the potential of CD-ROM technology for artists



with computer technology since its arrival on the scene in the 40s, CD-ROM enables the digital data stream to be stored in a medium more stable than the magnetised surface, whose delicate and fugitive nature evokes the clay used by sculptors before bronze-casting arrived to maximise plasticity and permanence.

Recently, desktop CD-ROM burners capable of making an individual Compact Disc-Read Only Memory (CD-ROM) hit the market. Initially intended for the archiving of company accounts and records, increasingly, contemporary artists are responding to the potential of the computer/CD-ROM medium as several of the 'problem areas' are addressed:

- Where previously there was a whole host of 'computing systems' of infinite combinations of hardware and software, the CD as a publishing/distribution medium has encouraged the convergence of systems for making, and replicating, the artwork.
- The ephemeral and fugitive nature of much computer-based work has restricted its exhibition potential to one-off installations, or playout through video/film recording. The archival specifications of CD-ROM can more or less guarantee the integrity of a completed work as "art-on-disc", as well as enhance the prospects for financial return to artists through purchase, editioning and licensing.

- The cost of transferring computer files from "the studio" (the workstation with hard disc/server) to "the gallery" (the Compact Disc) has been lowered, enabling relatively cheap 'casting' - AU\$150 per copy commercially down to AU\$30 material costs if a 'burner' can be accessed.

- The industry has designed tools for production, for specialist users rather than programmers, offering artists independence from profit-orientated facility houses at the production stage, although one has to be a truly Renaissance individual - simultaneously photographer, film/video camera operator, lighting director, graphic designer, writer, picture and sound editor, typographer, sound recordist, computer

programmer and line producer - or play at "the real estate business" and raise a budget to be able to pay for the expertise required.

Whilst being regarded by sections of the industry as an intermediate technology awaiting the arrival of the 'superhighway' networks, the CD medium's material immutability will remain a major advantage as a storage device. Through an interface with whatever distribution system technology provides, like the Greek bronze, the disc is a stable repository of cultural evidence capable of becoming knowledge.

Mike Leggett is currently preparing an international survey exhibition of artists making and distributing work on CD-ROM for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney to be held mid-year. This article is extracted from a paper presented at the Intersections Conference at the UNSW in September 1994. The full paper and further details about the Artists CD-ROM Show can be accessed on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.gu.edu.au/gart/FineartOnline/info/cd-rom.html>

The MCA is on the lookout for artists whose work uses CD-ROM for possible inclusion in their show planned for September this year. The curators' main aim is to represent the diversity of practice being pursued worldwide by artists working with computers, giving particular emphasis to work that is extending the possibilities of the medium, for example its potential to alter the nature of engagement between a work and its audience. Innovative presentations by artists using CD-ROM of work in other media will also be considered.

Interested artists should send a copy of their work or address any enquiries to: Mike Leggett, Artists CD-ROM Exhibition, MCA, PO Box R1286, Sydney 2000

or contact Mike by fax :(02) 252 4361 or e-mail: M.Leggett@unsw.edu.au.

The deadline for proposals is 17 February, 1995.

Those of us who have been keeping an eye on the creative and meaning-making possibilities of the computer since the early 70s have always been daunted by the technology with which it is associated, by its cost and by the complexity of the metalanguage. The developments in multimedia computing technology of recent years have to some extent addressed these concerns, although the time, effort and precision required to assemble a series of images for interactive purposes are still considerable. The prospect of a crash is all too real, unless well-designed software runs smoothly from the memory store. It is here that the CD-ROM can make its greatest contribution to art production.

The CD-ROM has more stable attributes than the memory storage devices normally linked to the computer's processor, such as floppy and hard discs, which are based on magnetic media and so subject to interference both electro-magnetic and physical. While artists have been working

CD ROM

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Amanda McDonald Crowley and Brad Miller at the *Doors of Perception 2: @HOME* conference, the Netherlands, 1994.

Doors of Perception 1994 was staged by the Netherlands Design Institute and *Mediamatic* magazine. Over 1000 delegates from all over Europe, the USA, Japan and Australia, from the fields of technology, design, psychology, philosophy, art, and architecture were in Amsterdam for the event.

The conference organisers started from the premise that when a new technology enters a culture, the culture changes. In response, speakers focused on a particular culture, 'home': home as market, as metaphor and as myth.

Speakers compared the qualities of telematic space and domestic space, and analysed changes to our sense of place, both public and private. They looked at the psychology of belonging - to a family, group, or community, and explored the architecture of information and the creation of shared meaning in virtual communities. There was concern expressed that vast resources are being devoted to digital versions of existing human activities - teleshopping, video-on-demand, telecommuting, but attempts to create entirely new uses for the technologies have been unambitious, to say the least. As the concept of 'home' developed, various speakers engaged in debate about the political and cultural potential of new media and its impact on domestic space. What 'home' might constitute in light of advances in telematics physically as well as psychologically became a key issue for the conference.

For John Perry Barlow, lyricist for The Grateful Dead and co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, the global interpersonal links facilitated by the "information superhighway" mean that one can go out and make everywhere 'home'. Pauline Terreehorst, journalist and author, speculated on the other hand, that the introduction of communication

technologies into the physical home would transform the home into a place where people could also work thereby fostering positive changes in relationships between men and women. Her argument was founded on the belief that home played a much more positive role before industrialisation forced people to separate the domestic sphere from work.

Amy Bruckman, a doctoral candidate at MIT, and founder of MediaMOO (a text-based virtual reality environment designed as a professional on-line community for media researchers), saw communication networks as a place - perhaps an extension of the home. She stressed the

expressive powers of language and the role of the imagination in new media, pointing out that the network was a place or space to inhabit, and that MOOs are more about a sense of community than they are about information exchange.

Mitch Ratcliffe, editor of *Digital Media* and co-author of *Powerbook: The Digital Nomad's Guide*, was particularly concerned to ensure that freedom of speech and thought along with privacy in all personal transactions are protected by the technosystems. He stressed that public participation is crucial to the development of information networks, given that currently the networks simply resemble an "infomercial superhighway". To Ratcliffe,

the Church, the State, and the Corporation have to date been the dominant influences on society, whereas we now need to focus on a sense of community.

Whilst the sense of family, or community on the net provided the audience with a positive - indeed almost warm and fuzzy feeling - as the conference progressed the issues related to privacy and access and the fear that the internet already appears to be slipping from the public sphere provided a counter argument. This tension exploded during David Chaum's paper. Chaum is managing director of DigiCash, an Amsterdam-based company which has

pioneered electronic cash payment systems and also chairs CAFE, the European Union research consortium investigating the technical infrastructure and equipment for electronic money in Europe. He described the possible introduction of purchasing power via the internet, which raised concerns amongst many of the conference participants about what sort and how much personal information about

users would become readily available via the net.

Whilst artists such as Jeffrey Shaw from Karlsruhe, and Lynn Herschman from California provided some insight into how media art can provide a means of critiquing space and place in the impending telematic

age, more concrete issues of how to maintain or indeed gain equitable access to the "infobahn" tended to be marginalised by the debate.

Given the multimedia-mania which has arisen out of the Federal Government's recently announced Cultural Policy, you too may wish to participate in the echoes of these debates. You can do this by accessing papers delivered at the conference at the World Wide Web site set up by *Mediamatic* and the Design Institute, where, sitting in a dark bedroom bathed in the light emanating from your computer terminal, there is also the opportunity to reply. <http://mmol.mediamatic.nl>

The Netherlands Design Institute, established in 1993 as an independent foundation which receives core funding from the Dutch Government, aims to identify new ways by which design may contribute to the economic and cultural vitality of the community. It is a 'think-and-do tank' which develops scenarios about the future of design and undertakes research projects to test them.

Contact: * e-mail: desk@nvi.mediamatic.xs4all.nl * fax: +31 (0)20 6201031

Mediamatic magazine is a quarterly on art and media and the changes being wrought by techno-culture, hypermedia and virtual reality. Aside from the print and CD-ROM publications, Mediamatic magazine is also published on the internet. Mediamatic Interactive Publishing also offers content driven research and development.

Contact: * e-mail: desk@mediamatic.nl * fax: +31 (0)20 6263793 * World Wide Web: <http://mmol.mediamatic.nl>

Brad Miller is a Sydney media artist; Amanda McDonald Crowley is an arts administrator.



Friend, It's Cartoons For You

Linda Marie Walker at Hypertext #3 in Adelaide

Sunday evening, seven short 'items' and a video. The MC moving the show along, a concert, barely a hitch. A second storey white room, windows, audience sitting on concrete floor, moved from here to there. A microphone, sound equipment, lights. The 'items' were called events ("sequence of events") on the program, so quoting was granted, in a sense. Right away, that shifty position, with infinite angles, where the 'post' artist begins (again). Almost an Event.

We'd come to see Hypertext #3, a curated project of Safe Chamber Studio, a performance group of five recent theatre graduates from Adelaide University. A terrific monthly project: word, sound, song, theatre, bound for a big following. And risky moment to moment. Such work destined to fail and succeed, sometimes together, as if subject to swift rips. SCS promote plural practice and the 'hyper' generated from such relations. And the gamble of experiment as public product. Gregory Ulmer (*Heuretics, The Logic of Invention*) calls it 'choral' work: "Choral work ... puts the 'adventure of knowledge' under erasure, which is to say that it is only prelude, a mere beginning, a proposal, an experiment. ... In order to foreground the foundational function of location in thought, choral writing organises any

manner of information by means of the writer's specific position in the time and space of culture." It's difficult 'work' with mere confession a slip away.

Most of the items were 'about' sexuality, violence, anger, death. And 'about' is literally meant, as narrative was primary, a theatrical thread, and the least 'hyper' aspect, slowing rhythm, predicting shape, and closing meaning. Audience participation always seems to be 'about' too, makes me wish I'd stayed home. Not me prop, please. It was mainly by design though (I think) except for the collective rope-in and tie-up. Thankfully, there were no blackouts - to suffer 'about'.

It's a while since Adelaide had a (new) movement of performed text as art. Or, for that matter, new performance (a revival, then). It's a while since performance stood its ground here, and acted out such raw, rattled, brittle cries. Things were said that have been said over and over. Heard again and again. Repetition as insistence. New memories are old memories.

Each item distinct, with a flash, or 'X' quality, adding up to a tough night out.

Blue/Fist by Jason van Adrichem-Sweeney (MC) was polished and concise, the singing (in a brief black slip) of *To Know Him Is To Love Him* almost poignant, leaving an afterimage of someone

(audience, male) standing (having been serenaded) at a microphone, with nothing to do, while the rest of us were read to. All slightly, tellingly, underdone. Nero Bubble then tried to lift us from surfaces with a sound piece, *Eat Shit & Die (Thetan Overdose)*. Like a physical dream where menace is faceless, voice dust, ears nothing. A lovely stretched melody intruded despite beaten woundless. No Cage silence, no OK gesture. *My Body My Car* by Steven Noonan made me, woman, think of Margaret Dodd's film *This Woman Is Not A Car*. This was not the work's premise though, as his body was car. But I was herded (big black rubber band), car/woman was invoked, what should I do ... walk. Then the *Jungle Songs* of Jenny Weight, their thin tone, bare, bitey too. Serious, like a hot night, unforgiving. Nothing to conceal this offhand voice. The taped carnival music left to itself, a clown body, to watch. The first three *Songs* gems and somewhere the line: "friend, it's cartoons for you".

An Evening With A Perfect Stranger by David Phillips used Frank Sinatra's *Strangers In The Night* as its motif. The text, spoken by Phillips, explicitly gay-sexual. With a terror theme: silent night, which never is, ever. A recorded voice finally details a gang bashing. Caroline

Daish offered a song-dedication at the beginning of *Audition Piece No. 1* with Steve Noonan: to those who wish to "tie me up". It goes (in harmony with Noonan): hmmm. They roped us off, and falsely begged us to comply, yes, no, in, out, come, go. Tie me up, don't. The last event, *Pandora's Boy* by Alyson Brown and Fiona Sprott, wore demise on its sleeve, with much to say: "fear is a bitch". It began behind doors, with whispered voices: "The wind goes through my head" and "I can't get hold onto these thoughts". Black tights, red lingerie - easy trappings - for the "perfect" performance (sexual demand). The revenge-of-the-victim is brutal.

Hypertext #3 worked hypertextually as concert (not Event). This was strange, familiar. And tense, due to the fracture between 'item' and format. Aiding the idea of 'choral work'. Drawing upon the device of MC, and the shape of concert, to invent a running joke (no punchline). Barthes' definition of ideal-text matches that of hyper-text: "... it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilises extend as far as the eye can reach, they are indeterminable ..." Hypertext is "... perpetually unfinished ..." dense, complex, layered. The SCS project is that.

Linda Marie Walker is an Adelaide writer and artist.

The Web of History

Gary Warner walks *RealTime's* Colin Hood through the new Museum of Sydney

The Theme Gallery of the new Museum of Sydney is alive with the sound and light of metal work as Marcus Skipper cuts huge chained links to size. These will blend into an intricate space of textures, materials and viewing screens that will transform mute objects (bottles, scrimshaw - and the silent objects of colonial bond-store commerce) into 36 video shorts about their place in Australian history. It's a style of exhibition that breaks with most conventions of museum display. Here objects will speak for themselves - transformed into short stories (the work of Vincent Sheehan, Ross Gibson and Jackie Farkas) told by the characters who made, possessed or sold them. The histories that surround these minutiae will also raise questions as to what kind of historical narratives are being negotiated.

Constructed on the original site of the first government house (which was demolished in 1846), both audio-visual co-ordinator Gary Warner and senior curator Peter Emmett are co-ordinating the delivery (in May this year) of an array of high tech or rather, para-tech exhibition sites working up three levels - complete with a

two and a half storey video wall and installations by contemporary Australian artists.

In its first outing as a project space, The Focus Gallery will feature works from the Natural History Museum of London. The Eora showcase (named after indigenous inhabitants of the Sydney region) features Aboriginal works with video accompaniment (produced by David Prosser and Michael Riley). The Theatre of Authority traces the exploits - and misdeeds - of colonial administrators from the time of first settlement, and a special viewing platform provides both an overview of the courtyard and a space for reflection. From this vantage point, visitors will be able to view the traces of the original foundations of Government House (marked by stone of different textures and colours) as well as *The Edge Of The Trees*, an impressive sculptural installation (by artists Fiona Foley and Janet Laurence) which stands as a 'telegraphic' monument to the diversity of Australian languages and contact histories.

The building itself was designed by the architect Richard Johnson, and both architecture and display design are in some

ways reminiscent of the work of the Venetian architect and designer, Carlo Scarpa. Here, the monumentality of rough-hewn stone and steel are softened by the luminosity of glass and light. Inside the main foyer, Clive Lucas and Associates have re-created a feature wall of the old building using original material from the archaeological excavation. *Lost Subjects* - a sound-scape by Paul Carter, running the entire length of the third level - will add a critical tuning to the space with its fragments of diaries, letters and historical records.

CH: You speak of the museum as containing active sites of interpretation - what conceptions, methodologies of history, especially Australian history, are being explored or disputed do you think?

GW: It's an idea of opening up history again. We see the museum as being a site where those kinds of arguments have got a point of focus, creating a place where all voices converge in the broadest possible sense. It's not a commemorative approach. It's more a matter of getting down to the fibre of history - the way that authority, discipline, government and commerce reach into ordinary lives and objects.

CH: It's good to see writers and artists like Ross Gibson and Paul Carter actively working on sound and video projects. I feel some confidence - even at this early stage - that their involvement will bring other kinds of historical narrative and story-

telling media into play.

GW: There are programs in place for the museum once it opens, to bring artists and archaeologists, musicians and historians together. We want to set up transitional communities of professionals who deal with cultural meaning, making it a site where they can come together for specific short term projects. This is one of the reasons why we're setting the museum up with digital networking capabilities.

CH: I noticed that even the lecture theatre podium is patched into the AV and computer network. This would enable a tremendous amount of information and images to be accessed and then presented by a member of staff or visiting speaker. Will this networking extend to remote access for internet users?

GW: Certainly a home page, or site on the World Wide Web, is part of the forward planning of the museum. Like many schools, colleges and museums that are developing as interactive sites, we're keen to move into new areas of electronic publishing as well as producing CD-ROMs. Yet we're also working against that kind of overwhelming tele-visual aesthetic. Different exhibition sites require different media and different modes of reception. We want to alter the public's perception of the high-tech museum - that of flashing video walls, constant noise, of overactive interactivity, by working within - but also challenging - the conventions of museum display, design and content.

M o S

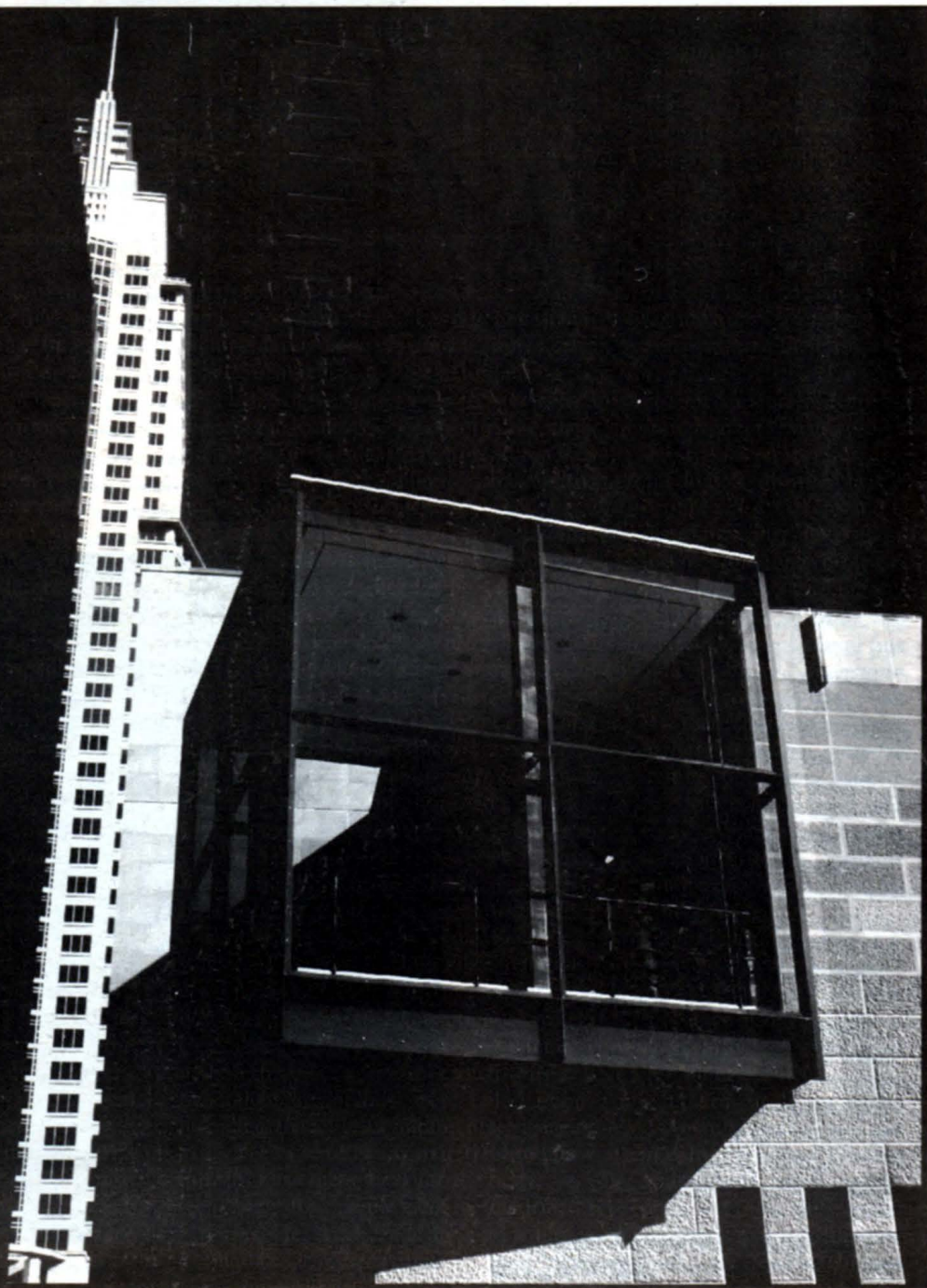
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The error of his ways

Diana Prichard talks to Edward Colless about his new collection of essays.

It was with some trepidation that I approached Ted Colless to discuss his forthcoming book, *The Error of My Ways, Selected Writing 1981-1994*. Leafing through the final draft it was clear much of it was informed by art theories, practices and movements, and not being of the art world myself, let alone sipping champagne on its periphery, I wasn't sure if I could do it justice.

But once I sat down and seriously began to read, I discovered it was accessible to both those "in the know" and those in "the don't know but interested to find out". Although the language is complicated at times and the references specific, the ideas linked to them can't be missed.

The range of writing is diverse in tone and content, but is always a response to some event, as in *"Losing It"*, a response to "an occasion, an exhibition, a commission, a conversation, a moment while travelling, perhaps just a sudden idea".

The essays, a format dictated by the times he can write, late at night and on weekends, include scathing criticisms of the style-conscious 1980s and what the decade represented; melancholy autobiographical pieces, the pain of an outsider palpable; a surreal travel story (one informed by a sick body and a feverish mind); slick exercises in linguistics and textuality co-written with David Kelly; and generous reviews of artists' work prompting me to ask whether he only wrote about work he liked. It has to have a "spark", he said, something that "gets it moving".

A characteristic of Ted's writing style is fragmentation, although the seemingly disparate ideas are skillfully linked. "I develop ideas by unpredictable associations between things," he said, and it is these "connections" which inspire him to write. In *"The Possessed"* for example he links style, acting, pornography and performance art; in *"Folly"*, the mysteries of women and UFOs, and the existence of God; and in *"The Imaginary Hypermannerist"*, hip but shallow film theory courses, teachers as entertainers "making the substance of their classes the very absence of a subject", and a fine reading of Frank Capra's *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*.

His beef with the 1980s, specifically the boom in "phoney" tertiary courses like "cultural studies", academic opportunism, and "smart" artists working as "operators" led me to ask if his writing was ever motivated by revenge? He laughed wickedly and finished exhaling a cigarette. "A degree of revenge," he replied, "self-recrimination too". And by way of justification: "The most interesting writing takes part in debate ... crosses all passions - desire, revenge, enthusiasm, frustration, love ...". This form of writing, he added sadly, was purged from teaching. Academia disciplines language, and this in turn "represses students' passions".

A recurring theme in Ted's writing is the "feminine", touched on with a certain wonder, sometimes a grudging admiration, at times a definite crankiness. In *"The Imaginary Hypermannerist"*, a "seductive, accusatory, empty delirium of language" is provocatively called "feminine". "No man can win against a woman's infuriatingly graceful sophistry", he goes on to write. In *"Place, Taste, Tradition"*, a woman can successfully assume a new look, like the androgynous for example, but still remain true to her femininity, the "spectacle" part

of her "presence", whereas a man "partakes of that spectacle like a clown, only by mere mimicry". In *"Woman of the Night"*, he writes it is easy to see the evening as "feminine" - "beneath the masquerade, nothing; within the maternal embrace, death". He draws on the myth of night's attendants personified as female: nocturnal hags, banshees, sphinxes, and lunar goddesses. "Whether these are terrible or serene creatures, they act from incomprehensible motives", he writes, whereas night's men, "a secret fraternity of necromancers, vampires, ghouls, criminals, seducers - display their motives clearly, even if these motives are perverse, cruel or irrational". So, Ted, I ask, is this how you really see women? He admits depicting women in this way gets a "rise out of people". Can men and women ever be friends without there being a gender consciousness? I ask. "There will always be a war between them," he says, "always a degree of incomprehension of the other".

After receiving a Writers Fellowship from the Australia Council's Visual Arts and Crafts Board last year, Ted has begun a second book, *To the Edge of Things*, a collection of new essays about peripheries. The subject is fitting, given he lives in southern Tasmania. "It is an interesting place, because it's on the edge of the world," he said, "where deformations of time and space exist. We're close to the Tasmanian wilderness areas - figuratively areas of the unconscious are near us - and then there's the Southern Ocean and Antarctica, blank, indifferent parts of the earth, expressionless, unearthly".

Edward Colless is a writer and lecturer in art theory at the University of Tasmania. The Error of My Ways, Selected Writing 1981-1994 will be published by the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane this year.

Diana Prichard is a Hobart-based writer.

CDs

Tony Buck *Solo Live* Wright Recordings/Shock
A one-man digital workstation, Tony Buck produces enough power here to run a post-industrial city. Samplers working overtime, he rummages through electronic culture, snatching noise, media bites, riffs and junk. It all becomes percussion of some sort: tinkering, crashing, jarring. 25 tracks, some as short as 20 seconds, feed into each other, sounding like the 1990s on fast forward. Play this if ever you think life has become slow and boring.

Alison's *Wonderland Once Upon A Timelessness...* Newmarket Music
Violinist Alison O'Carroll leads her band through eight of her own compositions on this sprightly album. Jazz laced with folk, carnival numbers balanced with introspective ballads. Saxophonist Andrew Robson excels, and listen out for Adam Armstrong on acoustic bass. Ideal for playing in the back yard, late summer afternoon, with a large bowl of punch by your side.

More CD reviews in RealTime 6 including: the Lydia Lunch three CD release Crimes Against Nature (Triple X Records), DisClosure, Voices of Women (New Alliance Records) and Australian Dave Cubby's Art and Kindness (DCRC), all available at Ariel Booksellers, Sydney.

CD Winners

The recent RT competition for Spoken Word CDs from **Mushroom Distribution** (Why I need CD Spoken Word) produced some great responses including this one from Andrew Barnum (NSW) who won a Ginsberg box set with this:

"I need spo," Ken whirred
I need Spoke and Wurder
attorneys of murder
I kneed the dough
I am a CD sucking goon
I kneel at Spokane World conceding
awaiting post box-bright receding
send me silicon cascade
carbon jewel cased wet sensations

plagued and restless word monkey
spinning out sick
I stare at the racks of Jills and Jacks
and find no romance staring back
no wax that strokes and pleases

I scratch the itch of fleas
a glass of words my favourite poison
intestine roads tarred and black
conclusion deep and thorny bone fur toys
I submit to the love of tongue mouth noise

Others were more pithy: "Not having spoken word is like burying the last witch-doctor without learning the secrets" (Richard Dunlap QLD)

Other Winners: Stephen Faulds (WA), Elly Pinczewski (VIC), Julian Bull (SA), Tim Dunn (NSW), Dr. S. Green (NSW) Stephen Haby (VIC), Don Dieso (SA)

There's still one Gang of Seven CD to be won if anyone else would like to show their style.

Write to:
Simon Killen, Mushroom Distribution,
55 Danks Street, Port Melbourne.
Fax (61-3) 645-2909

Sport

Tooth and Claw

With Jack Rufus

The recent expulsion of Frenchman Eric Cantona from English football has exposed a crisis in the contemporary world: the incompatibility of philosophy and sport. Cantona was well known in Britain for his television appearances off the pitch: dressed in a black polo-neck skivvy, glass of red wine in his hand, he extemporised on aesthetics, he held forth on ethics, he pontificated on existentialism. "I am a philosopher," he proudly told the bewildered Brits, who were as ill-equipped to understand him as if he had zoomed in from Mars.

Contemptuous of the prosaic English game, with its plod and graft, he was the complete continental footballer. Unfortunately, this poet of the pitch carried his mastery of twentieth century thought into his midfield strategy. Annoyed by the persistence of an irritating off-side trap, he would lash out at the nearest opponent with a ferocity worthy of Bataille. Sent off one time too many by uncomprehending Anglo-Saxon referees, he responded to the barbaric goading of opposing fans the only way he knew: with a flying drop-kick to the head, followed by a series of robust jabs and uppercuts. This perfectly Artaudian performance was, need it be said, much too profound for the English orthodoxy. The dour overseers of the game sent the brilliant Frenchman into exile.

In hindsight, Cantona's final performance can be seen as the last act of his own Theatre of Cruelty.

His savage onslaught on the crowd exploded the dialectic of performance in front of horrified spectators around the world. In one last heroic gesture, he hurled himself boots-first into the Nietzschean vortex - and as he well knew, there could only be one outcome. Footballing Dionysus, Cantona paid the ultimate sacrifice: himself. Farewell, Eric, this world was never meant for one as intellectual as you.

Tee Off

with Vivienne Inch

Vivienne Inch was last spotted at *Perspecta* contemplating in plus fours the fissures and fractures of modernity in Jan Nelson's *Between a Cabbage and a Basketball*. Viv will be back in RealTime 6. Fore!!



Simryn Gill IMA

At Short Notice

Out of the Void: Mad and Bad Women

As part of the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of International Women's Day, many Australian galleries will hold exhibitions of works by women artists this year. **Queensland Art Gallery** will let loose some 40 "confrontational, quirky, humorous, shocking" works by women artists from its collection. Australian artists include Tracey Moffatt, Julie Rrap, Davida Allen, Pat HOFFIE, Vivienne Binns, Jay Younger, Pamela Harris, Eliza Campbell, Maria Kozic, Merilyn Fairskye, Kim Mahood. Also included Christine Webster (NZ), Cindy Sherman and Laurie Simmonds (USA) and Rimma Gerlovin (Soviet Union). February 15-April 25



Fiona Foley IMA

PICA celebrates IWD with **In The Company of Women**, an exhibition of Australian women artists that charts the modernist project through women's practice - largely painting (many self-portraits) from the 1890's to 1990's. Artists include Kathleen O'Connor, Elise Blumann and Margaret Preston, transitional artists Grace Cossington-Smith, Joy Hester and Bea Maddock and contemporary practitioners including Annie Newmarch, Ruth Waller, Linda Marrinon and Ada Bird Petyarre, Narelle Jubelin, Judy Watson.

Also in February at **PICA for the Perth Festival** - A series of Hi-8 and computer integrated text and sound works developed by **Lucille Martin** while in residence in Tokyo last year.



Jay Younger IMA

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (Melbourne) presents **Bad Toys** to March 5. Curator Natalie King has told fourteen artists to go out and play with the twisted and perverted aspects of toys and childhood fictions. Barbie, Babar, Pinocchio, dummies, teddies are beheaded, ethnicised, synthesised, psychoanalysed, superimposed, subverted, made into pie (charts) by Bronwyn Platten, Maria Kozic, Justene Williams, Destiny Deacon, Bronwyn Platten, Susan Norrie, Rod McLeish, Karen Ferguson, Sally Pryor, L.E. Young, Stephen Bush, Victoria Lobregat and Christopher Langton.

"...Growing up I never had any interest in

dolls. They're not in my nature. I only started collecting them because - what can you say? I felt sorry for them" Destiny Deacon.

Jazz lovers have a chance to sample a European slant on the modern development of this art form when Sydney's energetic promoters of contemporary music **SIMA** join forces with **Dusseldorf's Foundation of Art and Culture** to bring **The Gerd Dudek, Rob Van Den Broeck and Ali Haurand Trio** to Australia for performances in Kiama, Armidale, Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. All members of the European Jazz Ensemble, these musicians have recently appeared at the Leverkusener International Jazz Festival followed by a highly successful British tour. SIMA's February program features a strong lineup of Australian bands including Mark Isaacs Trio (last gig before they head off on the Trans-Siberian; Adrian Mears Groove Project (now plus didgeridoo) Barney McAll Quartet, Morgana - all-women free-form music, Utungun Percussion on their way to Womadelaide, Steve Hunter Group, Tim Hopkins Quartet and the catholics.

In September, Carcanet Press (Manchester, UK) published in hardback Paul Carter's **Baroque Memories**. At the same time Carcanet's Australian distributor ceased operations. Result Baroque Memories is not available in Australia. The TLS described Baroque Memories as "a novel, but deliberately and provocatively novel in its claims to be such". The parallel stories of Christopher and Nostalgia give rise, the same reviewer wrote, "to provocative, digressive, unsettling meditations on displacement, memory, time, colonialism, the uses and abuses of history, the mysterious nature of desire, the nature of perception itself, and, above all, the gaps between perceptual reference points," and she praised "the intellectual brilliance and the immaculate and lyrical quality of the writing." Baroque Memories is also rooted in a rather locally-Australian experience of the migrant; if it is "novel" it is because it tries to express the everyday appearances of life as they appear to people who have been thrown out of "History" and refused the solace of Fiction. Despite these credentials, no Australian publisher has shown interest in releasing the book here. To break the log-jam and ensure that the book is available to at least some readers, Paul Carter has imported some copies now offering for \$27.50. If you'd like a copy, send cheque with your name and address to PO Box 513, Buninyong VIC 3357.

ISNT is a not for profit artist run and administered studio and gallery that endeavours to bring work by emerging artists and art of a more experimental nature to a broader public arena. ISNT is an important local venue for the exhibition of work by lesser known contemporary artists and is dedicated to promoting new levels of interaction between artists and audience. Each month ISNT presents at least two exhibitions as well as separate performance and music events. They also publish the quarterly Top Loading featuring local reviews, artists pages and a range of discussion and debate affecting younger artists. ISNT PO Box 39, Broadway QLD 4006.

ARX (Artists Regional Exchange) dedicated to developing innovative models of cultural exchange and facilitating critical debate in the contemporary visual arts exhibits/dialogues in ARX 4 throughout March. Subtitled Torque, ARX presents an intensive residency project for twenty artists and writers from Indonesia, the Philippines and Australia, an exhibition (at PICA March-April) a publication and symposium. Participants include Francesca Enriquez, Karen Flores, Ana Labrador, Tony Leano (all from Manila) Willy Magtibay (Bagulo Arts Guild), Norberto Monterona (Mindanao), Arahmaiani (Rahmayani), I Made Jima (Bali), Agoes Hari Rhardjo (Jakarta), Moelyono (Surabaya), Enin Supriyanto (Jakarta) and from Australia: Tim Barrass, Carmela Corvaia, Kerry Giles, Virginia Hilyard, Jerry Morrison,

Rea, H J Wedge, George Alexander. If you're topical about cross-cultural issues in the contemporary visual artists, ARX is interested in hearing from you. Associated ARX events include artists' talks, a multicultural film festival and performance nights. Cafe Folklorico in conjunction with PICA Cafe will also host weekly events in the evenings. A catalogue of the exhibition and video of the event will be available from PICA.

Australian Centre of International Theatre Institute has declared 1995 The Year of the Modern and will be piloting a nationally accessible electronic

communications network for the performing arts that will allow users not only to access the information already held by the ITI but also to communicate with each other (eg to distribute material to customised sets of individuals/groups); to independently input and access material to and from ITI's news system. ITI are eager to hear from performing arts organisations/individuals with moderns who would like to test this new system. New services are planned including a national calendar of performances, sophisticated search mechanisms applying to venues and festivals, listings of job vacancies, customised mailouts, real-time electronic link-ups, ticket buying and electronic access to overseas data. "We are confident that many of the difficult jobs surrounding the actual creation of work will be made immeasurably easier through this process: setting up a tour, finding a venue, a job, a suitable group, a suitable person for a position, promoting a show, academic research, funding and training opportunities - all will be possible through your screen link to this system." Information (02) 319 0718.

National Aboriginal Art Award - A Five Year Retrospective at the Victorian Arts Centre features winning entries by artists including Paddy Fordham Wainburranga, Dundiwy Wanambi, Jack Britton, Elaine Russell, David Malangi and Nina Puruntatameri. The award was established by the Museum and Art Gallery of the NT in 1984. 80 entries were received that year. This year 140. The Award represents contemporary Aboriginal art in its stylistic and technical diversity and is the only award of its kind offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. Works are on show in the Westpac Gallery from February 4 to March 5.

Artists take the gallery apart for **IMA's** first exhibition for 1995 **Simryn Gill** floats paper sampans on the ceiling (Out Of My Hair); **Fiona Foley** deposits mounds of arsenic-laced flour on the floorboards (Exotica Under the Microscope); **Jay Younger** makes holes (Big Wig and Charger). Only **Kathy Temin** uses the walls to take formalism to haberdashery (Wall Drawings). Institute of Modern Art, 608 Ann Street, Fortitude Valley.

Melbourne's **Napier Street Theatre** Season 6 announces its usual diversity of new companies, premieres of new Australian plays, dance and performance works including a long awaited new show from the fabulous Crying in Public Places; a comedy festival in April (is it time for a Festival of Fatalism? Ennu?) ; a new company out of Danceworks; In Visible Ink and Arena will premiere Electro Diva, a new work for young people. The season will finish with the Melbourne premiere of The Pitchfork Disney and Jack Hibberd's latest play, Slam Dunk.

Nexus Gallery run by Adelaide's Multicultural Artworkers Committee will open its 1995 program with an exhibition of colour photographic works by Chinese-Australian photographer **Jia-shu Xu**. The exhibition entitled **Choice** features scenes from rural China and Australia. Each piece will be accompanied by a poem written by Jia-shu's father Ding-kan Xu. February 10-March 10. Lion Arts Centre, Adelaide.

Are you a Mind or a Mouse? Don't know? See **New Media Network's Sim.**, a multi-media exhibition exploring the attraction, benefits and dangers of simulated realities. An exhibition in which nothing is what it seems, in which everything is something else. "sim. buys out of the current obsession with technology's bells and whistles and takes new media the next step to maturity. It proposes that ideas and content are more important than delivery platforms!" Works include Elka Preilipp's duelling paint and computer images; Natasha Dwyer's ambiguous refrigerator (nourishment or nausea?); Chakra, a spiritual computer game from Adam Jaffers & Anna Nervegna; John Tonkin's digital landscapes and a User Unfriendly Interactive from Annalea Beattie, Josephine Starrs and Leon Cozielska. 1-25 February, Mid-Level Southgate, Melbourne 12-6pm

If you'd like to be part of **Drum Out** - i.e join "thousands" of drummers in costume with decorated faces playing salvage sambas on everything from car parts to kitchen sinks, singing songs like Cold Chisel's Three Day Growth (are there songs like that?) and parading through the streets of St. Kilda you'll clearly need to prepare by attending the Preparation Workshops February 4, 5, 11 and 12 St Kilda Primary School. If you're in St. Kilda you could hardly miss the event itself February 12. Information: (03) 596-2567 **St. Kilda Festival**.

Out of Bounds is a program of new dance/movement works by dance independents all involved in the 'queer' community. Artists include Amanda Morris (dance parties and Software 93 & 94); Jeremy Robbins (dancer also given to sexy solo suspension); Ruth Bauer (desoxy, Women's Circus) exploring ups and downs with bodies, voices and ladders; Adrian Vincent in a serious game of dress-ups; Paul Stack messing with death and loss; Leanne Plunkett with the

space between lesbian lovers. Athenaeum 2 Theatre, Collins Street, Weds-Sun February 1-5, 8-11.

Response to Adelaide's March **1995 International Workshop Festival** has already been strong but there's still some room. Among the guests, Philippe Gaulier from France (can't you tell?) whose unconventional teaching technique uses make-believe games incorporating elements of theatre, mime, clowning, masked play, melodrama and tragedy. Gaulier is quoted as saying "Truth is for the Salvation Army, lies are for the stage". Other guests include Suraya Hilal (Egypt), leading exponent of the erotic solo female dance called Raqs Sharqi; Monika Pagneux (France) whose approach concentrates on "lightness of movement"; voice trainers Patsy Rodenburg (UK) and Frankie Armstrong (UK); Bangarra Dance Theatre (Australia); butoh dancer Anzu Furukawa (Japan); dancer Rosario Cardenas (Cuba) and physical-theatre exponent Nigel Jamieson (UK-Australia). Information Adelaide Fringe (08) 231-7760



Philippe Gaulier

Microdance: A joint project of Australian Film Commission, Australia Council and Australian Broadcasting Corporation. \$420,000 has been allocated to develop for broadcast the work of Australian dancers, choreographers and directors. The three-stage project will begin with a series of workshops in major capital cities. These will cover video editing, performance and choreography for the camera. Proposals for film projects will be gathered under stage two where between 10 and 12 proposals will be shortlisted and further development allocated. In the final stage, four proposals will be selected by a joint panel of the three agencies. These projects will be filmed in early 1996 and screened later on ABC TV. Dancers, directors and choreographers interested in Microdance can write to Dance Officer, Performing Arts Board, Australia Council, PO Box 788, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 or phone (02) 950-9000

Museum of Contemporary Art February/March program includes **The Mapplethorpe Party** presented in the tradition of the spectacular 1993 Warhol Party and a Late Night Preview. Author Edmund White lectures on Mapplethorpe. For Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras a Seminar on artistic practice and queer cultural politics. In March, visiting American historian and cultural critic Douglas Crimp presents a public lecture on cultural work on AIDS titled **Look What's Happening to Us** and later in the month **Art Taiwan**, an exhibition of works by 30 contemporary Taiwanese artists curated by Deborah Hart and Yang Wen-i.



Drum Out

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