

Volume 1
FREE

The Seven Streams of the River Ota

Parallax

Flamma Flamma

Masterkey

Natural Life

Burn Sonata

Va Yomer. Va Yelech

The Architect's Walk

La Tristeza Complice

RealTime is a live-in festival writing ensemble creating four editions (one every four days) in print and on-line, responding to shows, exhibitions, forums, festival themes and debates. RealTime on-site was initiated at the 1996 Adelaide Festival and its team of artist-writers invited to LIFT 97 (London International Festival of Theatre). We now return to Adelaide as part of the official program of the 1998 festival.

RealTime 1 responds to the opening events and performances of the 1998 Adelaide Festival. Already a sense of occasion and ritual has been generated, a gypsy wedding in the rotunda, *Flamma Flamma's* serene and finally fiery spectacle, The Squeezebox jumping like a 30s cartoon. Already themes and kinds of telling are spilling across very different shows—*Masterkey* and *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, *Burn Sonata* and *La Tristeza Complice*. Already there is creative dispute as artists line up for and against *Seven Streams* and *Natural Life*. RealTime offers contrasting responses—several works are discussed by several writers as we open up a range of possible readings.

For detailed background to the works presented in the festival, consult the official Souvenir Program—packed with international articles compiled by the editors of RealTime for the 1998 Adelaide Festival.

The first five minutes

Virginia Baxter

The Seven Streams of the River Ota

Ex Machina

Thebarton Theatre, February 27

Burn Sonata

Nikki Heywood

Odeon Theatre, March 28

One of the rules of conventional theatre that has always irritated me is that good theatre should grab you in the first five minutes, which says something about theatrical time in general. Once it has you by the throat, you should have a handle on the conflict and sided with your protagonist before your temporary release at interval. After that you should probably expect to endure no longer than around 15 minutes into the second half before the end is pretty much in sight.

Among the many invigorating effects of witnessing Robert Lepage's *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* and Nikki Heywood's *Burn Sonata* is that their attention to time is so different. One is seven hours long, the other

is around an hour twenty. The first five minutes of *Burn Sonata* seared. The opening scene of *Seven Streams* trickled, just five of 400 minutes of gradually accumulating detail. I have stronger memories of other scenes—like the one in which a Canadian diplomat and his wife, after attending a performance of a Feydeau farce in Osaka performed by a French-Canadian company, invite one of the actresses to dinner. Over the course of about 20 minutes (or was it 30?) in a tiny room with the shoji screens open for the audience to peek inside, these three indulge in ordinary dinner-table conversation about each other, about the food, about Canada and about theatre while in another room stage right, lit by a table lamp, a laid-back translator dispassionately translates into a microphone. In conventional theatrical terms the scene is too long. Some in the audience, of the Get it? Got it? Good! school, found it irritating. Certainly the tensions in the relationships, the information adding to the narrative, the necessary conflict could have been expressed in much less time. So why not just spit it out?

Days later, John Romeril mentions another scene in which Ada records a Poulenc song in a recording studio. Usually, he says,

RealTime
<http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/>

that scene would begin at some arbitrary point in the song. A few seconds in, someone would wave a hand or enter the studio and cut her off. End of scene. Here the song begins the scene and in the middle of her singing, a man moves silently across the front of the glass, watching her as she sings. He leaves and she completes the song. The song frames the scene. Voila! "Noo theatre" (as Bill Irwin calls it in his *The Regard of Flight* which both parodies and celebrates the new theatre).

Much of what was understatedly unfolding in *The Seven Streams* ("98 version") was happening in real time. In the restaurant scene our attention is split between the actors in the scene and the simultaneous translation of the scene going on in the booth. Instead of topping up the essence or filling in the essentials, what we experience on the stage is something more like the complexity of real life—a split concentration and something closer to the precise number of banalities and implied insults it takes for the obtuse wife to get under the skin of the polite actress observed by the besotted diplomat; the exact degree of tension required to build up over minutes in a small room, to make Sophie finally stand up and break the scene open, blurting out "The play was shit! Why don't you just say it?"

Speaking of which, the murmurings around the *Seven Streams* have also been accumulating over time. Since I saw it I have heard everything from breathless enthusiasm to snarling hatred of "all that realism, its 'superficiality'". Someone said: "All North Americans can do is talk about themselves. It's like seven hours of Ray Martin." I have heard "orientalism" ground on teeth. (Q: Isn't a play by French-Canadians inspired by Japan and populated by, among others, Japanese characters, substantially different from a play claiming to be authentically Japanese?) I have heard rumours of outrage at the final scene, people who won't go because of its references to the Holocaust and suggestions of "more bloody earth mothers" from someone who said she wished she could have taken her feminist off and left her in the cloakroom, and melodrama-loathers drawling drily at the end of the seven hours, "And that's how Dad met Mom".

Caught in these conversations, I'm torn between my sense of responsible interpretation of the ideas contained in the story and my pleasure in the work, which lies elsewhere. If I simply cut to the narrative, I risk losing an essential

quality of the work, ignoring the ideas contained in its careful and detailed scene-making, the non-literariness of its text, its understated non-declamatory acting. But most of all, the way it deals with time. The way some people talk, you'd think they'd been watching a 90-minute play.

The first five minutes of *Burn Sonata* are almost enough. I could have left the theatre satisfied after watching the opening sequence in which Ben Grieve and Claire Hague, their fine-boned physiques almost identical, awkwardly grope like ghost children materialising in the mirror of each other. She is lolling, leading him her way, self-centred. He is articulated, edgily turning towards the door waiting for the other ghosts to enter. After that I lost all sense of time. I might have been there for days. In *Burn Sonata* a dysfunctional family performs for itself its sad sonata to Garry Bradbury's gothic player-piano score. It's a scenario of threatened violence, passive acceptance, internalised fear all contained within the three walls of an acid green room of what must be asbestos. Not narratively driven like *Seven Streams*, *Burn Sonata* is essentially a physical text of interconnections, a state of being teased into strands for the audience to pull together. A family of frightened and frightening animals. The young boy babbles a tale of dismemberment while his brother fantasises an idealised male body. The girl is mostly silent. When she does speak, she can't be heard. The self-lacerating father exposes himself to her in bits. The mother kneads dough with one hand while feeling the inside of one foot with the other. Her dance of longing leads her daughter into another broken mirror. Fear bounces around the walls, from body to body. At the end, the sacred family unit gathers around the altar of the TV, all watching with different eyes. What horrifies one is hysterically funny to another. No touch passes between them, only the proximity of shared sorrow. The last five minutes, like the first, burns itself into the body.

Two Streams

Maryanne Lynch

The Seven Streams of the River Ota

Ex Machina

Thebarton Theatre, February 28

Two images

1. The Orient is female: a lotus flower, a

cherry blossom, a tiger lily with talons. The Orient is inscrutable, veiled beneath kimono, cheong-san or chador. She is pliable, submissive to the White Man whilst carrying the secret of her passion for his caresses.

2. The Orient is the colonised continent who is now the conqueror. Still the Other but regarded with respect and acknowledgement of his equality. The Orient is now a man who transforms himself into a woman only when night covers light.

Two stories

1. An American serviceman meets a Japanese woman in Occupied Japan. She lives in Hiroshima and has been disfigured by the Bomb. They form a friendship, which becomes a passion at her instigation. After lovemaking, they part, never to sight one another again.

2. A young Canadian dancer boards in the home of a Japanese woman some forty years his elder. She lives in Hiroshima and has been disfigured by the Bomb. They form a friendship, which becomes a passion at her instigation. After lovemaking, they part, perhaps never to sight each other again.

Two riddles

1. What does it mean for the Oriental Flower to instigate lovemaking?

2. What does it mean for this image to be at the beginning and the end of *Seven Streams*?

Seven Streams: some reflections.

These two stories are my way of thinking into *Seven Streams*. There are so many stories and so many thoughts—I have to begin somewhere. Let me begin with a story that is at first familiar and then, in its second version, discomfiting, which in turn leads me back to the first story and to further discomfort because, initially, I accept the conventions I see even as I note the incongruities. It is all so 'right': the wedding kimono on display, the woman with her face covered, seated on the tatami mat, the gauche soldier with a gentle heart. A caress, a cry of pain, exile. But what does the second story tell me about the first? The young man is highly strung and shy; the woman is blind but keen-sighted. She is also remote and self-possessed, her passion all the more shocking for its unexpectedness. And the additional shock of age—at first it's almost an act of sexual assault but I

shift my censorious gaze, surprised, before it comes to that. Yet, what does this naked passion of Ex Machina's Orient say to me? Ex Machina, a French-Canadian company already repositioning the East in order to ask questions from and of the West. One thing I know: this is not a play about Asia. This is ... Let me try again. These two stories are told simply; the events are clear. There is some stylisation—the elegant relationship of body, space and light; poetic gestures, graceful movements; language which ebbs and flows like the river—the odd projection—a moment of wild dance. But really, when it comes down to it, Ex Machina, under director Robert Lepage, presents me with two strong narratives. There are even ricepaper screens, a stone garden and a tiled traditional roof to make them solid. And it rains. And yet ... This isn't working. Let me try again. These two stories are disconcerting in their shifts in time and space. Disconcerting and exhilarating. The more plain the dramatic action, the harder it is to grab hold of the meaning. And I'm not always sure why this is so, try as I may. Which is even more unnerving—and exhilarating. I am watching a performance work which even my father would follow, and follow it he would into places not normally inhabited on 'a night out at the theatre'. There is no Mystery of the East about this: Ex Machina has structured things in such a way that the hand is quicker than the eye and I am left to excavate the artistic territory. Someone else's aesthetic and how exciting it is! But I'm losing track. Let me try again. If there are seven streams in this story, and some flow this way and some that way, these two stories may sometimes be in contact and sometimes distant. I can see this. But what could be confusing me is placing the East in the East rather than in the West, where Ex Machina has conceived it. Looking, in other words, for the wrong connecting stream between the stories. Are they unrelated to immediate questions about East and West? Instead, they are the expression of our longing for alterity; that which gives us ourselves? ... No, this is not a solution; this story is incomplete ... Let me try again.

Absence and presence

Anne Thompson

Burn Sonata

Odeon Theatre, March 27

The Architect's Walk

Red Shed

Arts Theatre, March 26

Walk, run, duck! The body subjected to rule becomes the dislocated body; dislocated in relation to an integrated body order and in relation to a sense of place. Or it becomes the disassociated body, the automatic body; the uninhabited body or the body inhabiting an imaginative realm at odds with physical context. *Burn Sonata* incorporates both these bodies, the hysteric and the schizophrenic. It is the physicalisation of the regime of violence in a family—father, mother, older son, young daughter, younger son. These bodies enact the rituals of family life and torture. Is there a difference? These bodies and the possibilities of action within this living room are circumscribed through relationships. There is no possibility of individual free action. Is there ever? These bodies are locked into private narratives within a communal narrative. They are interconnected and disassociated from each other, managing the shifts from complicity to cruelty, as this tale unfolds through sequences of interaction. I am continually engaged. The spoken text is also dislocated or disassociated, monologues sometimes barely audible, sometimes like a snatch of TV.

I feel as if I am watching family life through the distorting mirror of the amusement park and listening through background noise. The music by Garry Bradbury is thrilling and disturbing, carnivalesque as it floats in and out. At times it sharply focuses the event. We see him play a pianola but the composition is deconstructed and fragmented. What should be assured, the perfected composition, has disintegrated.

There is such pleasure in the fullness of directorial vision. There is no excess. All possibilities are chartered. This is ensemble playing at its best. These performers are good. Their commitment is unwavering I love that Clare Grant, the nuances she finds in stage action. There is something so completely understood about seeing and being in her performance, about being body and woman and part of a narrative. I love her round older body and its connection with thought and feeling.

I begin thinking about the relationship between the phenomenological experience of performance and a semiotic appraisal of performance. The visual tends to lead one into a phenomenological experience, the apprehension of beauty. The performing body often leads one into a phenomenological experience of a different order, the experience of one's own lived body and the intersubjectivity of bodies. So when does the semiotic, the reading of a

performance's signs, kick in? To me, this performance is explicit. I read it as I encounter it. It is satisfying to watch a family in disintegration rather than the disintegration of a family as a narrative. Narrative is used to organise material in time rather than to reason or debate an issue with us.

How difficult it is to grasp meaning in *The Architect's Walk*. Spoken text hangs like an object in the space, as does song, as do the bodies. It is only after the performance is over that I can engage with this piece on a semiotic level. I sit suspended, neither drawn into the theatrical interaction nor into the frame, a fable which intercuts the action, flowing like honey off the tongue of the suited Chorus figure.

On reflection this piece speaks of a man imprisoned for a crime for which people seek retribution, a crime against a race, against difference. Are we there to watch his descent? Surely such a crime demands disintegration?

Are we there to see his suffering, to appease our own? Are we imprisoned by our desire to contain and explain him? This man seems free, not imprisoned at all, free to think, to imagine, to garden.

The priest, Casalis, is trapped by his need to assuage his anger, hostility, outrage. Or is he trapped by his desire to author meaning? He leaves defeated (or is he freed?), knowing that no other can relieve the pain of non/sense. No one can make sense, can order what one cannot approach in oneself. I begin to ponder Reconciliation and the place of women in this narrative. Why do we still locate the moral dilemmas of racial conflict in the bodies of men?

This piece, the design tells us, is about walls and windows. The walls tower. The windows are small gaps out of reach. The traditional imaginary fourth wall appears and disappears, as does the wall of the two-dimensional picture. In theatre usually one character is the window into a theatrical situation. In this narrative Casalis is the window. We watch Speers through him. We watch Hess through Speers. We watch the priest as ourselves. We watch the singer as ourselves. She breaks open the space with her singing and her fullness of presence in that blood-red gown. She sings to Speers, to Hess, to the priest. The operatic diva is an avenging angel singing of suffering. We listen to the Chorus as ourselves. And yet he is somehow 'other' as he stands illuminated in his suit. He tells a tale of redemption sought and found, though realizing that it cannot be granted.

The walls don't hold anyone in or anyone out. We are disturbingly free to come and go. The internal architecture of the piece is not defined. There is a lack of definition in the territory the piece circumnavigates. The text feels like a wall at times and like a window at others.

I watch Ralph Cotterill's *Speer*, the territory surely of this journey, and I cannot chart him. The play is built around an absence but an absence that is never fully allowed. I needed absence or presence here, at the centre.

I'm left again with the question, "How can theatre address its reception?" This piece is beautifully etched as a visual event but its point wanders away from me even as I watch. I have to catch up with it later. *Burn Sonata*, by contrast, makes its points during the performance. It does not trouble me. And maybe because of this it does not stay with me.

Is there no rest/There is no rest

La Tristeza Complice

Les Ballets C de la B and Het Musiek Lod Playhouse, February 27

My father played a button-accordion, for 'old-time' dances. And he was good. He was a sought-after musician, everyone could dance to his music. My mother was a good dancer. My parents took me to these dances, once a month, and taught me all of them. Occasionally at Christmas my father brings out his accordion. And we all sit around the lounge-room and eat and drink. I think my father should be in this festival. I grew up, in the country, with accordion music and dancing. I also grew up with dark nights outside the Mt McIntyre Hall where the cars were parked, where the fights started.

I always wondered what anguish or despair, caused the punches, the smashed bottles, and the violent speech. I wanted to be in the carpark and the hall at the same time. To see both, as if layered. I think I've seen this now. The carpark was dangerous, and the dance-hall wasn't. A thin wooden wall separated them. In *La Tristeza Complice* (The Shared Sorrow) no wall separates living and dying, just invisible honour. And this dying is not literal, it's living death. It's sorrow. And the sharing of sorrow forms tenderness that is so terrible, so resisted and resented, that it barely exists as that. Still, it does. There's no denying it, thank god. It's energy that makes each of the 'characters' so

full of life that they almost burst. It hurts to watch them play it out. Their bodies take a beating, or, they beat their bodies. It's brutal, and sensual, to watch. There are awful, funny, scenes, yet one can't laugh, one forbids oneself (somehow), and here lies the tenuous border.

The pacing of the work is careful. It swings from menacing calm to harsh chaos. Neither are deadly, yet each carries death like a precious weight which lifts now and then, leaving the person in a state of even greater loss, as if death holds cells together, is a friend. And this manifests when the winged break-dancer arrives with his small magic carpet, a silly Hermes with a silly message, a trickster whose one prop is a clue, too literal to be trusted – and someone covers it with broken glass for him to dance on. He'll dance anywhere, be tortured anywhere. Calm and chaos append each other, one beckons the other. There is no rest, even in sleep. The finely tuned roller-skate segment declares the company's tough poetics; a sustained poetics that keeps 'faith' to the bitter end; faith summoned up by one great indignant sentence: "So, who decided all of that."

The whole work is composed of tiny, fragile, passing events that infect each other, changing the dynamic and dimension of 'life'. You see a dozen young beings, together but totally alone, and sure of their aloneness. And this is perhaps Platel's clearest intention: that despite the goings-on of others nearby, or in real contact, the self insists on its utter difference, its own expression; it cradles its own story like a gift. This is powerfully told when the black girl begins to sing her sorrowful song – "if love's a sweet passion, why does it torment" – and the transvestite crawls all over her, pulls and bites her, drags her this way and that, covers her face, but cannot stop her song.

La Tristeza Complice, as political performance, respects the self whose screams are reduced to single syllables – no, damn, shit, how, bang – and to brief statements – "I'm Belgian, I'm from Belgium, I'm Belgian." It's that simple. The transformed Henry Purcell music (mostly from 'The Fairy Queen') is played by the ten accordionists from the Conservatoire in Antwerp, the soprano sings, the dancers dance. They all might die, they all might kill. It's about (if 'about' is a fair word) circulating desire (for love and sex). Marguerite Duras wrote of this fierce, sly, worn currency. She also wrote of the gaps within desire and body: "Sometimes they look a hundred years old,

as if they'd forgotten how to live, how to play, how to laugh. ... They weep quietly. They don't say what it is they're crying for. Not a word. They say it's nothing, it'll pass." (*Summer Rain*)

I saw *La Tristeza* after the opening of the Adelaide Biennial, *All this and Heaven too* (at the Art Gallery of SA), and before watching the spectacle of *Flamma Flamma* (at Elder Park). That is, I saw the strong epic black and white texts of Robert MacPherson and the quiet domestic solitude of Anne Ooms' chairs, lights, and books, and then listened to a Requiem, and watched the hundreds of children carry their glowing lanterns, and embrace the river-lake, and inbetween witnessed people brutalize and comfort each other. It was like being burned by flames of every intensity, and squeezed to life.

The key to telling

Adapted from a conversation between
Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter
Masterkey,
Mary Moore
The Space, March 1

What is it about *Masterkey* that marks it as theatre shaped by a designer? Most obviously the fact that the design elements are not sets as such, not backdrops or frames for something else. More objects in themselves. Constants. So everything happens inside and immediately around the six fantastic rooms—cupboards which open from every side. And within them we see events shift and from different angles as they are moved. And doors open out into screens for projections—sometimes evoking mood, sometimes ways of presenting an action—the frightening spilling of ink, not just across a page, but across the whole room and the unfortunate perpetrator. More angles. The rooms are marvellously detailed worlds, each with a magical element. Objects fly. Sudden transformations. But not like stage tricks. More like effects that parallel states of mind. Like in Kabuki or Bunraku. And corridors of light like hanamichi (the Kabuki walkway) link the shifting rooms.

Each switch in focus shifts the ground of the narrative. No single point of view. Different voices. Voiceovers. Some anonymous, establishing the narrative, some speaking as characters. Here and there the characters speak their thoughts live, here and there they interact through dialogue. But always there's the sense of a telling by multiple means. Some parallels with Lepage's *Seven Streams of the River Ota* as different as they are. Both draw on a

Japanese sense of detail and of theatre. Though *Masterkey* is more clearly a Japanese story, the other about Hiroshima and its consequences. Both are intensely visual. For all its scale *Seven Streams* is a kind of intimate Noh play (the form is referred to, especially with regard to Yukio Mishima's attempt to resurrect it), climaxing in the inevitable eerie exorcism, or, more rightly, expiation in this case. In *Seven Streams* the house contains everything. Here the furniture becomes the house, then the building. (John Romeril was saying that when he saw *Seven Streams* in Japan a few years ago, the settings didn't seem to all come so organically and satisfyingly from the Japanese house that fills the stage as they do now—they call this the "98 Version".) In *Masterkey* everything is contained in a set of permutations. Not diffuse, but organic. Concrete. But ephemeral. Like *Seven Streams*, this house contains many transformations. In *Masterkey* nobody is what they seem. Everyone has a secret, a past, or a criminal present. In *Seven Streams* everyone is related in some way.

Masterkey is based on a novel. Did it show? A few creaks and a loss of focus, especially towards the end. Sometimes it was too literal, for example at the mention of school children their voices flood from the soundtrack; a big projection of a street scene is redundant (and so vaguely projected compared with everything else so pristinely and evocatively screened). Sometimes the telling simply becomes over-elaborate, told too often from too many angles. But none of this can deny the beauty and cleverness of the execution and the power of the Japanese actors especially. Bolder in their characterisations somehow than the Australian actors.

Like *Seven Streams*, *Masterkey* begins at the beginning and takes the audience through the careful unfolding of a tale. This is a festival of and about telling. Like *Va Yomer. Va Yelech's* account of the first five books of the Bible, here's another text being told. As opposed to a play in which a story is simply embodied, enacted by performers. It happens both ways in *Masterkey*, and the set and the projections tell it with the actors. Most importantly, what Robert Lepage and Mary Moore achieve is a contemporary form of theatre which plays with and goes beyond various naturalisms and the other forms invoked. Above all, they encourage audiences to listen and especially to look in quite different ways from the ways we normally experience conventional theatre.

A different kind of Nazi

Keith Gallasch

The Architect's Walk,
Red Shed Company, Arts Theatre,
February 27

How to spend time with Albert Speer? You can't sympathise, it's hard to empathise (as soon as you do, it's a wrong move). Best to keep your distance. Better to refuse a likeness in those moments when you recognise a certain lack of affect, a not-feeling-guilty when you know you should. How do you spend time with an honest man, a naively evil war criminal? Especially when he seems a different kind of Nazi—not at all vulgar. He's the appealing fascist of grand aesthetic dreams, time's conqueror. The chaplain says "Fuck God", his faith worn thin by his experience of Speer. He says, "I want him to be a saint". But Speer is not, cannot be a saint. The priest fears "a school of Speer", a cult of superior amorality, an 'absence' from the complexities of life. He is prophetic, there is a kind of school of Speer, with it a kind of forgiving, as if to say, he was an artist, a visionary, the most interesting Nazi next to Hitler, and the subject of best-selling biographies.

The Architect's Walk worries at this man's morality. It's a thinking theatre, sparely theatrical, its power in the finely crafted language that grasps at understanding the man and in the strength of the images beyond words—a burning bush, an angel-winged Hess, a soprano in red. These images are not announced, they happen, you make the connections. They happen to a man (mostly) in solitary confinement. Or are they ours—does Speer 'see' the grave storyteller in the cream suit? Speer in prison paces out his sentence, imagining the vast distances he masters across the planet; the man in the suit narrates a possible story of a forester who finds the corpse of a woman ("Marguerite or Shilamuth...?") in a forest and wishes God to resurrect her. In this possible world is the gardener Speer the forester, wishing undone the evil occasioned by (Nazi) murder. Whose fantasy is this? Ours probably. Most likely it's not Speer's—the story entails the kind of feeling we don't 'feel' in Speer. In it a woman says "my eyes were broken on the bodies of my dead children". Speer accepts guilt for his role in managing the war, but not for the dead. It is a technical guilt, abstract, at worst: "guilt at feeling guilty, perhaps", as he puts it to the chaplain. When told he is an intelligent man and asked why an intelligent man didn't know his actions were evil, he retorts: "How can intelligence be a crime?"

In a garish fantasy Speer (accompanied by ghostly soldier musicians) joins a demented Hess in singing a grotesque cabaret song that starts out with shit running down the legs of terrified Jews (the fascist pleasure in the tyranny of his body over another's, and in the collapse of the other's already all too fluid body). Speer is finally repulsed, on the edge of vomiting, deserting the routine. Perhaps it's an abdication on behalf of good taste, not sympathy for Jews. As sympathy it just wouldn't ring true.

This is not a theatre of identification (if it is, it's a testing of the limits) and it's what makes *The Architect's Walk* an emotional and intellectual challenge, not in the moment of its playing (which is powerful here and there), but on reflection. This is not a nice humanist night out, and although it offers no answers, it raises all the right questions, the ones that stay with and haunt you. Not that Speer is without feeling—he experiences wild energy, loneliness, the desire to see his son. He survives by mapping out imaginary space with imagined walks across the world—with which to fill the empty time that threatens to undo him. In this we see Speer's love for and embodiment of the super-human. He proudly recalls a speech he made to Hitler about transcending decay through architecture. His Nazism, he declares, was a seizing of time—he's 26 when he meets Hitler, 30 when Hitler "lays the world at (his) feet"—"I met that moment".

The Architect's Walk is a haunting reverie about power, time and guilt, an intensely poetic speculation, and is appropriately and starkly Germanic with its controlled delivery, integral music and spare design—five slender poplar trunks lit and re-lit to rearrange space, and rusting slabs of prison walls (squeezed into the too tiny Arts Theatre proscenium). The deployment of Michael Smetanin's music throughout, bursting through or murmuring dreamily behind the words, confirms the audience's nightmare visit to an alien psyche, a place we might begin to recognise but never know. I can still hear the opening passage, Speer crossing the stage over and over, walking out his fantasy of survival and conquest, driven by music that is martial with almost dissonant but nonetheless triumphal bells.

I don't mind not identifying with Speer—I cringe when sympathy for characters is invoked as a key criterion for approval of a play as if nothing else is possible—but *The Architect's Walk* draws you in and pushes you away, demands reflection, and you have to go with it, even when it's not quite working, when it pushes too hard, or grows too cool.

Like *Natural Life* it's an invitation into another psyche, in another time, and its demands are hard. I was lucky enough to be by myself after the show, rare given festival communality, and to be with Speer, with my, our and Keene's fantasies of him. I liked the play better for that. In the swift accumulation of works in a festival, the words and images that stay are the ones that count.

Flaming logos

Roland Manderson

Flamma Flamma,
Elder Park, February 27

So exciting to hear the Minister for the Arts encouraging business to aim higher and look to sponsor the Arts as well as Sport. As an arts worker and as a consumer I can only agree. Indeed I was lucky enough to witness an exemplary relationship between Arts and Business at the opening of the Telstra Adelaide Festival. The Holden moment at *Flamma Flamma* really was something special.

Midway through the third sombre and rather ponderous song in the event, spot lights brilliantly picked out the Holden Logo prominently located either side of the stage. All 30,000 in the audience, despite our universal groan of disgust, will without a doubt rush now to buy a Holden Car because the Company has proved it understands the finer things in life. I can only presume that Channel 9 was represented by the helicopter which circled over head during the quieter moments, as no special lighting cues were organised for them.

Actually I thought there were too many quieter moments for a football sized crowd of all sorts and all ages, particularly before the fire arrived. A requiem for the end of the millennium makes a little sense on an intellectual level, but a stand and deliver operatic concert of some fairly mournful music seemed a surprising choice for such a populist event.

I can only imagine that the program was chosen by Holden in order to draw attention to the European refinement of their Vectra or Astra, and to highlight the repressed aggression inherent in that lion logo...

And of course *Flamma Flamma* did hot up once the fire arrived, suggesting that the Natural Gas Company would have made a better natural partner.

Other features of the night included Mara!, "the ethnic singers" to quote our channel 9 presenter, hundreds of kids who

were processioned through the crowd (but had to stand still for rather too long by anybody's standards) extraordinary lanterns and constructions, and a terrific use of landscape.

I'm not sure if that was a stipulation of the sponsors too ... so their logo would be in your face ... or if it was an artistic choice made by artists. either way, that was my chief frustration.

Flamma Flamma used the terraces and roof of the Arts Centre and the banks and the water of the river to great effect, with flames moving up and down stream and the final procession of giant community icons wending slowly towards the West.

Properly organised it could have left us with a moving and memorable experience. A real inspiration and exhilaration for the tremendous crowd and the massive team of performers and creators. But while everyone understood the ingredients, many of which were beautiful and haunting, the whole thing was fragmented. Leaving Holden the winner. Or loser.

In the forever motion

Anne Thompson

Parallax, Leigh Warren and Dancers
Norwood Town Hall, February 28

The curtain parts to reveal the Australian String Quartet on a tilted platform, a heavenly sight. The domed ceiling of the Norwood Town Hall, delicately lit, becomes part of the scenography. The shadows of the musicians appear on the wall below and behind. I am reminded of Plato's contention that the life we know is a shadow play on a cave wall. But in this configuration we see the ideal as well as the shadows. The shadows of the bent arms holding the violin and cello bows reminding me of the Wayang Kulit, the bars of the enclosed platform appearing like strings.

After the musical *Prelude* the dancers enter the celestial topography. Beams of light play across the stage. Deep lunges into extended shapes, the dancers are bound to the ground. Flows of movement lead to these lithe, articulate bodies being caught body over body. A phrase of opening and closing is interrupted by a contraction, palms facing forward or a lift backward, body facing front, arms pressed to the sides. Moments of rigidity. This is familiar dance territory, a trace of Graham, a trace of Limon. These contractions feel abstract, physical, a part of the vocabulary of the piece rather than

representational. It ends abruptly, this flow of movement dispersed through bodies.

Now what is heavenly, or earthly, about dance for Leigh Warren? It appeared to be body line and continuous motion. These bodies have long lines, and these lines fold and extend in liquid motion. They are forever on the move. How does one make meaning out of continuous motion? The pathways are well trodden in these bodies who know their way through this flow of movement which has its own pulse even as it organises in relation to the music. It is not musical form which is the focus of the dance but flow. *Adieu* was over before I felt I had entered its flow, before I had come to terms with the dancing that appeared after the imaginative promise of the opening image. This strain of modern dance articulates Da Vinci's dream, a geometry of the body. I marvel but am not moved. These bodies often seem to strive too hard to explicate their possibilities. In the forever motion, in the explication, is a loss of apparent intent.

Helix was the exposition of a simpler concept. A huge aluminium helix shape cuts through the space. A lone violinist, Peter Tanfield stands and plays Bach. A solo, a duet, a trio, a solo are intercut across these combinations, a moment of unison and then a dispersal of material across these groupings once more. This form, the helix (designed by Michael Geissler and Stefan Kahn) made sense to me of Warren's continuous spiralling movement, loops of material that never complete but move into new loops. The piece begins with the female solo body. As has happened before for me when watching the female solos in Warren's work, this body is so articulated it disappears in the insistent detail, the endless qualifying of every move. I enjoyed more the friction when the moving female body met the male bodies in the duet and trio. Then I rode the dance for a while. Would she be able to continue her liquid path even as these other bodies lifted her up and around, suspended here? This game is engaging and her desire for complexity becomes a struggle and a challenge which reads in interesting ways.

Detail can be a pleasurable interruption in the best of Warren's choreography. I recall the delicious detail of the flexed feet of the two men lying on the ground in the trio. The male solo body, compared to the female, bounds through space, articulates space, is not endlessly self-referential.

And then I felt my body settle. The company appeared, albeit briefly, and danced a phrase in unison. I saw/felt a company of highly skilled bodies inscribed so cleanly with

certain pathways of motion, both corporeally and spatially. This was a pleasure. The individual body became part of a community of bodies that understood and knew each other. This is a feature of this company. I remember with pleasure the ensemble in *Quiver*. Then the community disperses and reassembles across varying combinations. This is what I think Leigh Warren does well... unison to polyphony. They are dancing together now and then it is over.

Natural Life perversely

Keith Gallasch

Natural life,

State Theatre Company of South Australia, Queen's Theatre, February 26

Intensely, excessively hysterical (as in hysteria—out of the uterus—the neurotic female condition à la Freud), *Natural Life* is the perfect wedding of form and content, no dialectic permitted, none desired, no light to perturb the dark—the idealised painterly landscape on the front drop is almost immediately superimposed with images of wildlife, fire, plague and extinction. This case study appears as neurotic as its subject, a study not of an individual (there are none in this work, possibly one), but the collective hysteria of a nation (cf Erich Fromm, Wilhelm Reich), of a colonial pre-1890s Australia. These are often forgotten, over-mythologised but nonetheless defining years. In *Natural Life* they are rich in trauma. The audience and an Aboriginal child—a girl, downstage—are entertained with...not a story, rather with a show, part British music hall (organ accompaniment), part European cabaret via Melbourne, with a community of white-face, blazered, singing cricketing fools whose sublime singing and unintentionally appalling lyrics (“all sacred turf is fairyland”) yield to discord (a horrible animal out-of-tune cooing for “The White Woman”). She appears, grossly grunting and smiling her way into speech, suffering not constipation but a womb-clutching hysteria, a profound fear of assault. Fragments of events haunt her. Snakes (huge projections), plagues, fire, images of extinction sweep before us.

The world of these people is not the open landscape so familiar to us, but a claustrophobic box, middle-European surreal (designer Tomek Koman), thick, swirling, oily surfaces, hessian-floored, an insect case, a place of nightmares— video monitors rise from the floor displaying rare footage of the ‘last’ of the Tasmanian

tigers. In his program note, adaptor Humphrey Bower cites Joyce: “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awaken”; and Wagner, from Parsifal, “Here time becomes a room”.

The White Woman is played by a man and sooner or later all the bat waving clan get to play her and, eventually, almost all at once. But not before their white bats mimic the walking sticks of the blind (do they really see her?), or inflated phallic orange bats beating one of their lot to a bloody pulp (a rare direct reference to the penal culture central to Marcus Clarke’s novel). Battered outsize cricket bats finally fill the upper stage turning with a slow determination, not unlike windmills, permanent fixtures on the landscape. The Indigenous child is finally absorbed into the repeated, neurotic narrative, her psyche colonised, the body-wracking fits of the Europeans now horribly hers. She finally sees the audience and...

For all its apparent excess, *Natural Life* is a minimalist act of repetition compulsion, the same small set of words uttered over and over, the same awful images, the same scenario rehearsed over and over only to end in the same empty exclamation. The ‘neurosis’ inherited from 19th century Australia, is still with us. Clarke’s novel ignores the Aboriginal. Director Michael Kantor inserts the Aboriginal into a *reductio ad absurdum* of the novel, but absurdly, with painful purpose.

This is a work of sheer virtuosity at many levels and it is theatre that hurts. It’s insistent, unremittably declamatory, a contemporary rendering of a 19th century theatre language. It’s a nightmare of painfully sustained images, it’s a bold statement, a cheap satire (especially in its final song medley bringing us up to the near present), and a distinctly male fantasy—but one about a male fantasy (Marcus Clarke’s and the colonial psyche), one which admits the male to the condemned cell of the hysterical. There are times when its cross-dressing, hammed up, screaming hysteria is deeply camp—is this a dialectic...or an oxymoron? This is uncomfortable theatre, not of depth or complexity, but of the reproduction of a condition, an uneasy state of being that is never quite at home in the Australian landscape, destroys what it doesn’t like by acts of extinction and absorption. As a comment on Clarke’s novel (but never an adaptation of it), yes, but now? The roots of the Wik debate? White, 19th century, neurotic, psychotic? Still? As utterly alien as *Natural Life* looks and sounds, the question

stays with you, and the image of The White Woman intoning, “I am the Queen of the Isle”.

The Word bites

Maryanne Lynch

Va Yomer. Va Yelech

(*And He Said. And He Walked*)

Ridley Centre, Adelaide Showgrounds

27 February 1998

Sinuous voice inside my head.

‘And he prayed. And he cursed. And he destroyed.’

Sweet tongue; words of fire; obstinate pain.

I am translating a translation of a translation—or is it translating me?

In the beginning is the Word.

Rolling out, swimming over me, pulling me in and drowning me.

In the beginning is a ghosted space, twelve players and an audience.

I sit, I watch, I listen to the familiar stories through the sounds of thrashing syllables. Headset off, on, off, on; I am seeking a path I know through a place that doesn’t always welcome me. I am removed, I am detached, I am lulled and lured before I recognise my submission. (Is it?) Resistance flares with jarring notes, desperate measures, the too-try-hard acrobatics of staging in a piece where staging is denied. “This theatre is more real than theatre” trumpets the programme. (Is it?) But, an anonymous voice asks, do the walls come tumbling down? Yes, no, no, yes; I struggle to breathe an answer. Is there one answer? The answer: only the Word.

Which translation am I translating?

How do I read it? How do I say it? How do I know it?

I hear so many voices now but no one is speaking.

Mouths open and shut in silent screams.

In the beginning is the Word, and then the Word is made flesh.

Characters form; they form and re-form.

Actors inhabit choreographed versions of themselves.

They speak their grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, mothers, fathers, the diaspora. Parody the trappings of identity—knives and forks, a fur stole, someone’s hat—even as never was identity fought over so bitterly, so keenly. I hear myself say: I am not a Jew but I cannot help being a Jew. In translation: If to be a Jew is to be human, I am a Jew. But the Word is made flesh, and it is not my flesh that sings and sears in the gas ovens of history. I am treading in water without solid ground. (Is it?) There

is a woman shouting nearby but I can't hear her. Or rather, her voice comes to me through the water, now an echo, now a murmur, now a trace of the Word, which is all I can hope for. (Is it?) This theatre, however, makes claims for its own translation. Plants the flags between which I can swim. 'This theatre is more real than theatre' but if nothing is more real than the Word, and that always requires translation, how is this theatre any more or less real than any other? I am getting cold feet.

*Levinas says speech is the act of listening.
Freud says speech is what is not said.
I am straining to read between the lines,
to avoid lipservice, or unintentional insult,
and to translate with fidelity,
which some say means to be absolutely
unfaithful.*

I take a fresh plunge, this time of my own volition, into a different view, a wide-eyed view. Here I see a theatre made up of the said and the unsaid of the Word, a theatre which knows and loves its own limitations, a theatre struck dumb because that is the point, isn't it? (Is it?) Bold claims are pushed down; my lungs are filling with water. A theatre of un/settled, un/satisfied, un/comfortable translation—and I, a translator and a translation, also un/settled, un/satisfied and un/comfortable. Nothing is airtight. (Is it?) In this theatre—a juxtaposition of styles, stories and personae—irresolution is sought even as, again and again, the same old story, resolution sneaks up and tries to take over. In this theatre actors savagely play with sacred texts in order to show their sanctity. Hurl commandments round like frisbees on a beach. Show no mercy for the weak and the poor, nor the strong and the rich. Show no quarter because in violence lies its opposite, and in and beyond opposites lie the Word. The Word is the Word: this is what I can finally make out through water-logged ears. Va Yomer. Va Yelech ... And He Said. And He Walked.

*My translation halts.
I cannot find the words.
I take a bite of the apple
and taste this knowledge.*

Oh, a stranger, thank you

Linda Marie Walker

It must be wonderful to be a visitor to this city at Festival time. To be a stranger here, I mean. In this small city. It's not a metropolis, not a sprawling thing, although there's 'hopes' for this. Let's 'hope' hopes fail. It's a

city. It must be a little disturbing to be here, too. I'm not sure why it should be disturbing, but it might have something to do with there being only one 'centre'. I have a friend, here from o/s (as we say) who still urges me to speed in my car, to dodge and weave through traffic. Why. I haven't a clue. And we had an argument last night because I wanted to park on North Terrace. He thought that was a long way away (he meant to walk) from the Railway Station. And so I drove on (thinking I was stressing him), and then he wanted me to do a U-turn near the King William Street intersection (he was going to get out, run across the road, and hold the parking space he thought he saw; I was supposed to go on down the road, and then find my way back, while he 'waved' on other would-be parkers: give me a break). Talk about hysteria. And then he told me how 'he'd' find parks in Cologne. Well, so be it. It was a lesson. Park where you know, that my advice. This is not advice about sunscreen.

Anyway, I like the city becoming strange. The Adelaide I know turns itself on during the Festival. It coincides of course with the turn of the season (this might mean something). It is difficult nevertheless to be a stranger in one's own town. Even though this is not where I was born. I've been here twenty years, and I'm still a little in love with it. I'm still a country 'girl'. It's just big enough for me. Too big some-times, and too small other-times (that's when I book a flight out, stuff the money). Walking back to my car tonight after the announcement of the Festival Literary Awards I passed people who were puzzling their way to the theatre. I tried to look at the buildings on North Terrace as they might see them. It's not easy. I slowed down. Took my time. My body wasn't used to this, it made me feel awkward, self-conscious. Stupid.

The thing is this: people have come, people have been brought here, people have been called here (meetings, conferences, awards), and they must wonder where on earth they are. I went to 'Writer's Week' this afternoon to hear Colm Toibin, and I liked him so much. I wanted to go up and talk to him, but I didn't. This always happens. One is so wanting to say how much enjoyment one received. But one is so 'small' (one becomes an insect, easily brushed off), one already (like a prophecy) knows it's unimportant. He knows (he knows what? In visual art practise one is always so grateful for the smallest of compliments): in truth, I wanted to ask him something about Ireland, something personal. And I heard Arnon Grunberg read about his encounter with a prostitute (they *will* have titles like: The

Word Made Flesh). And later as I checked out the next session there he was drinking beer, and with a spare chair beside him, so I sat there, said (stupidly) "enjoyed your reading". Perhaps he said something, not sure, perhaps he even smiled. And then someone on the stage began saying that theatre these days is not about words, and this was regrettable, and I saw red (or a pale pink) and muttered "rubbish" and left. I went to the tent where Rodney Hall was talking about Judith Wright. I liked this, even though it was a 'launch'. Hall was kind and quiet, and Veronica Brady (Wright's biographer) was modest and funny.

At the Literary Awards there was a lovely moment: Cath Kennelly received a major one (she's like a living-treasure here). There were other lovely moments-too (Robert Drewe, for instance). This one was special, Cath on the stage, and everyone local knew this.

Anyway, this friend of mine, the mad driver/composer one, came here last year for the first time. He looked at Rundle Street and thought he was in a Western film. I hadn't seem it that way before. Every building two storeys, and with a balcony. Have a look next time. He hasn't seen the Flinders Ranges yet, can't wait till he misses the 'mountains'.

Next edition will appear
Friday the March 6.
For more information about
RealTime at the Adelaide
Festival call 8216 8969



Layout and design: Gail Priest

Realtime at the Telstra Adelaide Festival 98 has also been assisted by the Australia Council, the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body and the NSW Government through its Ministry for the Arts

