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Mathilde Monnier Company, *Le Siècle Des Fous*

'The old and the new' theme of the festival has not yet driven festival-goers into excited huddles or yielded frenzied diatribes from soap boxes. Perhaps it's the change in the weather. Even the Vermeer debate has become sensible with convertees admitting being won over and antagonists admitting to small pleasures despite reservations and no longer treating me as if I had half a brain because I enjoyed it. Some were upset at what 'Greenaway' had done to Veermeer—'those tiny, tranquil masterpieces blown up, cut up, acted out...what for?' All that aside, the old/new dynamic has some room to develop. In the shows, of course, it's a not at all a rational exploration: it's hard to find Antigone in Monnier's *Pour Antigone*, the analogy between TV presenter Odyssey Williams and Homer's hero in *The Eye* is truly strained, and ur/faust says as much about the difference between us and the 18th century as it does about intellectual and aesthetic continuity. Perhaps that's what's been quietly nagging at me, a certain unspoken assumption recurring in forums and talks and late night clubbing about a kind of comfy Darwinian evolution of art, the new drawing on the rich gene pool of the old, progress eternal. What about historical ruptures, paradigmatic shifts, aesthetic collapses? The Goldner String Quartet's ambitious history of the 20th century string quartet in a 2 week program offers multiple starting points, clean continuities and sudden alien presences that appear to have little connection with any kind of past except that they have

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the requisite 4 instruments. Yes, art constantly plunders its own history and everything else and it's time we owned up to it instead of forever labelling everything we do as new. We'd certainly save on printing manifestos, not that you see many of those these days (the Danish filmmaking group Dogma got a pretty rough reception). Even so, the dismissal of the old by new generations of artists and the recurrent quarrel with its tyrannies is as interesting as a sustaining and sometimes illusory sense of continuity. It's that dynamic between continuity and the break with it that fuels art. Bring on the soapbox.

Writing light

Virginia Baxter

Light/House
Adelaide Festival Centre Plaza
Red Dice
Bill Seaman
mum's cup
Helen Fuller
Verve:The New Writing
Contemporary Arts Centre of SA, March 7
Conversation with the Architect: Glenn Murcutt with Robyn Archer
Adelaide Festival Piano Bar, March 7
Forum: The Buck Stops Here: the place of the writer in the arts
Adelaide Festival Piano Bar, March 6
Roulette program 1
Ranters Theatre Company
Price Theatre, March 3
Robbery Waitress on Bail
Lucy Guerin
Space Theatre, March 5

On the Adelaide Festival Plaza there's a display of light houses—buildings using light weight structures. Architect Glenn Murcutt in a conversational forum with Robyn Archer (March 7) refers to buildings as needing to have a level of transparency allowing legibility of landscape. He cites knowledge of morphology, typology, scale and materiality as necessary for the architect wishing to touch lightly on the land.

In Bill Seaman's *Red Dice* (part of *Verve: The Other Writing*) a mechanical loom is explored in loving detail until it practically pulses its mechanical heart. The film moves from lingering closeups of machinery parts to languorous views through leafy windows, to waterfalls, birds in flight and eventually to a hand throwing dice. The editing a friend describes as "liquid." The voices (Seaman's own in English and another in French) are mellifluous. They remind me of other soft male voices of contemporary art like Robert Ashley's. Sentences often don't descend to closure but wait wistfully for their partners in the next utterance. The exhibit here is a linear version of a larger work in which sentences and images are woven by the interactor who selects from the visual and textual threads to create what Bill Seaman described in the festival forum on writing as "fields of meaning." *Red Dice* is a lush work. In the cool, darkened gallery there are cushions to make the reading easy. Seaman's presence on the panel about writing (with Peter Greenaway, Raimondo Cortese and May-Brit Akerholt) was reassuring. The idea of inter-authorship and recombinant poetics seems so perfect for the times, it's hard to see why it still agitates some so. Forum chair Michael Cathcart is visibly edgy at the prospect of having his carefully composed words tampered with, but doesn't he know we do that every day with his Arts Today voice as we leave the room, return, run the tap over him...

On the same panel Raimondo Cortese revealed that he finds computers too quick and prefers to write in longhand with a pen and that he speaks as he writes. This made me wonder whether what I found a little unsatisfying about his series of dialogues (*Roulette)* was the sense of someone speaking to himself. Cortese is a gifted writer and I've enjoyed some of his more surreal works for theatre but in these four 25-minute dialogues (*Petrol, Inconsolable, Hotel* and *Borneo*) the rhythms of speech seemed a bit too tightly contrived. Each work had a purpose, a revelation for us and after 2 it was easy to predict the third and fourth. From each a little bit of "soul" emerged for an audience of "silent angels" (writer's program note). Raimondo Cortese believes that writing for the theatre is about what actors *do* otherwise it's a literary soiree. But it's not stage action that interests the writer nor the actors who form the Ranters company. The actors in *Roulette* (Heather Bolton, Beth Buchanan, Zoe Burton, Robert Morgan, Torquil Neilson, Tony Nikolakopoulos, Kelly Tracey and David Tredinnick) are very skilled but don't actually do that much. They're mostly seated or moving within a very small frame. (Aside: creating spaces for this theatre of restraint must be a bummer for designers—a couple of trestles, some junk and a bit of distressed furniture is all that Lisa Trewin is allowed.) When they do something dramatic (as when Zoe Burton strikes Beth Buchanan and she falls to the floor in *Hotel*) it's a real shock. What *Roulette* lacks is lightness, to return to the theme. The actors use their bodies and voices subtly and suggestively but we're too aware of the joinery and there's not enough air. Cortese says in the program that his intention was "to write dialogue where the writer's voice is absent focusing on the intimacy and nuance of everyday speech...The director and designer have similarly aimed for invisibility." The manifesto is troubling. And in *Roulette* I'm not at all sure it works. Cortese seems not so interested in letting the traits of actual conversation—gaps, words that go nowhere—reveal what they will. Instead he uses his pen to construct something clever but altogether more familiar—a neo-romantic theatre of 2 planks and a passion and poetic pauses and meaningful looks and lighting up—lots of cigarettes (about the only place you can smoke in this smoke free festival) that "reminds us that we are not alone...It is the accumulation of these subtle details that makes us human..." Hea-vy.

Kantanka's *The Eye,* is on the other hand, simply light on. The monumental stage machinery (huge moving scaffold with flaming eyeball and concealed camera, container truck with hinged side panel-cum-screen, motor cycle, flying

Lucy Guerin, *Robbery Waitress on Bail*

gear, exploding waterworks) all look impressive but the mechanics of their deployment within the work are so flimsy that the audience is left dangling. Any re-writing of myth, especially for an outdoor spectacle like this one, needs to take proper account of the myth and to take it somewhere appropriately surprising. It wasn't immediately obvious what roving TV reporter Odyssey Williams in her lost OB van was doing in this tale of a hero who has fallen out with the gods and is doomed to repeated tests of heroism. Or for that matter, aside from some fun with "sheep acting" (and fun it was), why we had been transported to the Australian outback. Kantanka has clearly benefited from the collaboration with members of the French company Monique. They now have some heavy machinery skills balancing on a shaky framework. The writing for the actors, the deployment of the objects, the actors' relationship with them has a way to go.

For touching lightly on the land, my feather goes to Lucy Guerin's cap for the unforgettable *Robbery Waitress on Bail*. A small clipping from a newspaper has clearly caught the choreographer's eye. A waitress who helped her boyfriend to rob the all-night cafe where she worked is out on bail. For her part in the crime in which she pretended to be the hostage, she was sentenced to 2 years in jail. Now she's out. The story of the crime is revealed in 3 sections from the clipping on small illuminated panels above the heads of the dancers (Guerin and Ros Warby). Having given us the story, Guerin (with music by Jad McAdam) proceeds to explore the enormity of the rest—the atmosphere of place, sense of character and the woman's state of being. It's all done in a set of often mirrored movements between the dancers who swagger and strut with a shifting sense of bravado, indolence and fear. It's totally engrossing and I wasn't the only person in the audience who would have traded the experience of the second piece on the program (the more densely choreographed and less successful *Heavy*) for an instant replay of the first.

PS: When you go to see the *Verve* collection (and you should), don't miss Helen Fuller's *mum's cup* in the garage out the back of the gallery. On and under a large table an array of detritus is laid out: tins, leather dog collars, nylon stockings, tennis balls, pegs...From a large unsorted central pile, a number of smaller objects scatter across the surface. And next to them are small strips of paper with sentences such as "She told him where to get off", "Sheryl was an afterthought", "The garden was her church". A hundred small sentences try to make sense of themselves by attaching to or sitting alongside the discarded fragments of a family.

Unruly Force
Erin Brannigan

Le Siècle Des Fous (The Century of Fools)
Company Salia Nï Seydou
Space Theatre, March 7

I could be dancing with Seydou Boro right now at the Spiegeltent but no, here I am wondering what I've missed out on...Boro, who appeared in Mathilde Monnier's production, *Pour Antigone*, created *Le Siècle Des Fous* with Salia Sanou. It's a one-off within the festival, an elegant work that Boro informs me has been around for a while, and it provides a nice reference point for the Monnier work, giving an independent voice to her African collaborators.

The simple set of a wide ladder centre upstage and drums set at opposite corners downstage creates anticipation as the instruments remain unused and silent in the unfolding work, their purpose suspended. Percussion is created instead by the bodies of the dancers; they shake their hands so that their fingers slap together, hit their faces against their shoulders, smack their mouths so that they pop, stamp, hit the ground with the length of their bodies. But the rhythm is bigger than this—there is a staccato play of action and stillness that reminds me of the startling beats of Zani Diabaté's drumming in *Pour Antigone*, the blinks of anticipation it caused. The waiting-for-something-to-happen is diffused here beyond any dramatic function that drives toward a climax, consisting instead of micro-dramas within the rhythm of the work. The whole piece is defined by an unruly force that seems to kick it all along, stop go go go stop go, manifesting in a frenzy of swinging limbs, then a quiet moment of mouth-popping. When the drums do come to life, they too seem governed by an alien force, finally jumping out of Sanou's hands altogether.

This all amounts to an improvised feel throughout the piece, although it is simultaneously apparent that this is not how the work is structured. It is this sense of something-happening-as-we-watch, bearing witness, that gets so lost in contemporary dance, the choreography 'taking the stage' so to speak. These bodies seem to be very much in the process of doing rather than thinking 2 steps ahead or operating from a distance through muscle-memory. And this isn't a type of dramatic expressionism either. It's as if the effort to articulate through movement can be seen, witnessed, and becomes intricately tied up with what is trying to be said. These faces don't speak for the body but with it.

Le Siècle is about a century of war and the violent oscillations from action to stillness, and the visible effort to speak through the body perfectly evokes what must be a constant struggle between despair and hope for Africans. What is also striking is the interaction between the 2 performers which also evokes war, running the gamut from tenderness to slapstick; one awkwardly carries the other, wipes his brow, knocks him on the head, checks out his foot. Companionship, worthlessness, tragedy and pathos are all evoked in these moments that really make up the bulk of the action. Dancing is isolated into formal segments that suddenly burst open into joy and an undeniable life force. A very special performance...

Glimpsing the Aurora

Chris Reid

Rites
Jan Garbarek
Festival Theatre, March 6

Garbarek is a legend. Firmly established for over 2 decades as an outstanding jazz exponent, his music precedes him—the audience at this concert have eagerly anticipated the arrival of this master...

Does jazz work in the concert hall? If so, is it still jazz? To describe Jan Garbarek's music thus is to limit it. The Festival Theatre is a large concert hall seating 2000, not an intimate space. Yet, for each audience member, the experience of this concert must have been one of intimacy and reflection.

Garbarek's clean, clinical, minimal saxophone style voices the theme. This music is slow, cool, spiritual, introspective; it does not exhilarate or physically arouse in the way that more earthy jazz does, but at a more metaphysical level. Simultaneously, one is absorbed by the virtuosity of the players, their musicianship, their capacity to explore their instruments, to work as an ensemble.

Though the music is often improvised, the audience is restrained by concert-hall manners, limiting interaction with the musicians to the pauses between each long, elegiac piece. Each member gives an extended solo, but overall the format is based more on ensemble playing than on competing individual flourishes. This may appear to restrain spontaneity, but spontaneity is not the point. Instead one sits back and drifts off into Garbarek's landscape, populated with folk tales, myths and legends, and the spirits of living and dead musicians and composers of many cultures. Improvised though it is, the music in effect is composed through the melding of the minds that created it, Garbarek's associates mapping their own styles onto his framework.

The audience responds especially to the unique style, artistry and wit of percussionist Marilyn Mazur. Her solo draws on a variety of influences including Indonesian gamelan. Rainer Brüninghaus' piano solo culminates in the use of his fist and palm on the keyboard (shades of Henry Cowell). Legendary bassist and ensemble leader Eberhard Weber's solo displays his virtuosity to its fullest—using a tape to record passages as he plays them, he then replays them as the rhythmic or harmonic line, turning his solo into a polyphony. Whenever Garbarek plays, his own effects pedal adds a truly haunting quality to the sound.

Our standing ovation elicits 2 encores. The first is influenced by the Norwegian folk music that has inspired Garbarek. This piece works best of all, commencing with such strong and characteristic melodic phrasing that it becomes a song and can be responded to as such. The shortest work of the night, its brevity makes it more eloquent.

Garbarek has refined his musical conception to the highest level. This is superbly crafted music. Often jazz operates at the level of adrenalin-charged consciousness. Garbarek's music functions more at a subconscious level, almost hypnotically, drawing an intellectual and emotional response.

To refuse to answer the question as asked

Linda Marie Walker

G – a reading
Kevin Henderson & Julie Henderson
Experimental Art Foundation, March 6
Five Rooms and one Empty Space
Kevin Henderson
Experimental Art Foundation, March 7
Robbery Waitress on Bail
Lucy Guerin Company
Space Theatre, March 3-6

As a 'grown-up' I often long to be read to. Or, long for the voice of another who is not 'talking' but addressing me, giving me something—care perhaps. Anyway, a kind of generous, patient, act of human sound.

Kevin Henderson and Julie Henderson read all day Monday in the EAF gallery. An act of endurance, excessive, absurd even. Mostly when someone reads to you, you are faced. Even though the head and the eyes of the reader are focused elsewhere, concentrated toward the written. How close can a listener get to a public reader; can one look over the reader's shoulder, follow the text, make sure they read every word? Are these readers really reading to me, or to the objects in the space? (No, as they've turned their backs to them too). To the wall then (for walls have ears), they are reading to the wall. The wall is a screen;

strange almost-empty—or awfully silent—projected images leisurely come and go. The silhouettes of the 2 readers now darkly overlaid.

The gallery is 'almost-empty' too. A blue globe hangs over a glass of water on a stool. A TV monitor seemingly sandbagged in, a small square 'something' (later found to be a concrete slab) laying calmly inside a yellow outline on the floor (maybe a house plan: is this 5 rooms and one empty space?). No idea where I am, or why—firmly nowhere.

Listening to *G*, the novel by John Berger. Fortuitous for me, being a Berger fan. Yet not recognising one word; not feeling at all familiar. This, I reckon, is why to read outloud, quietly (unperformatively), makes writing strange. (I wanted to hear these words: "He stands absolutely still lest the jug spills.") There is no pretence of entertainment, of keeping me attentive by drama. These 2 people are reading to each other. My absence, and yours, will make no difference, neither will your presence. It's a lonely reading, in company. It feels like a lonely installation, though not necessarily bleak. An arrangement of complex isolated sites. And the live-bodies are immense worlds of complexes, each a site of multiple-sites.

At the moment, throughout the inner city are beautiful, puzzling, exquisitely positioned, complex-sights. Last night walking to the Festival Centre to see the Lucy Guerin Company there was a small table and 2 chairs on the pavement (a setting); it seemed that 2 people had forgotten to arrive (that the 2 readers had lost themselves in their book, for instance, and the 'setting' was left high-and-dry). There was no doubt, this was a festival-work by TJ Kempsey, an artist whose work I have only recently been introduced to (over an odd eggplant dish in small restaurant on Hindley Street). These Kempsey works are ones that are always (can only be) 'found'. It's an ingenious practice—apparently much admired by musicians. The almost invisibility of the work is shocking, in the sense of 'yes', or 'of course', when spotted. The restaurant had a few framed TJ works on the wall.

There's rather a thin line being drawn here from the reading at the EAF to the performance by Lucy Guerin and Ros Warby of *Robbery Waitress on Bail*—a text-influenced work, a story, in fragments, yet not literal, or interpretative even, more as if in parallel—at some distance—so as to leave a considered space between, which not only draws attention to the relationship(s) between 'narrative' and movement, but poetically makes small 'folding-spatial-arrangements' which seem singular, precise, and as 'evident' as the 'report' projected onto 2 modest overhead screens. Perhaps what links the reading/performance and the dancing/performance is a modesty, a working within rather ordinary boundaries, and somehow intensifying the conditions within. It is fitting to have suspended between these refined works the delicate 'still' scenes of Kempsey, moments of respite (tearfully tired/argued dry)–bang, there's a gentle deadly hole in the footpath, or a wine stain on the serviette in the shape of Italy. It's not fair that things can appear (out of the blue) with such inexact perfection, as if choreographed.

As usual I am exaggerating, but there is more than a tenuous link between the reading and the dancing (not least because Julie Henderson is a dancer). It's as if they could exist in the same space, as if in their self-absorption yet another fertile-distance would come about. I've put them together here, in an attempt to read across the divide between languages. This was summed-up or consolidated in the performance of Kevin Henderson, *Five Rooms And One Empty Space*. Reading aloud, precise movement, and studied arrangements found a common real ground/floor on which to generate conversation. Henderson enters, shakes a hand, turns on water (out the back), balances a/the concrete slab on his head, walks 'the line' with a red fan in one hand and a bundle of red buttons in the other—as if this is the 'norm' that life comes (down) to, as if this is the everyday; it is spoken (placed in the air) in the very last lines of the performance: "Some years later, as a gift she gave him a button from her blouse. He said: Thanks. But listen, there's no need. She said: But there is."

There are reminders in the work of Kevin Henderson, Julie Henderson, and the Lucy Guerin Company to keep an eye out for the small and large gestures of TJ Kempsey, which are carefully placed right before our eyes, as well as at the edges.

The minute and the monumental

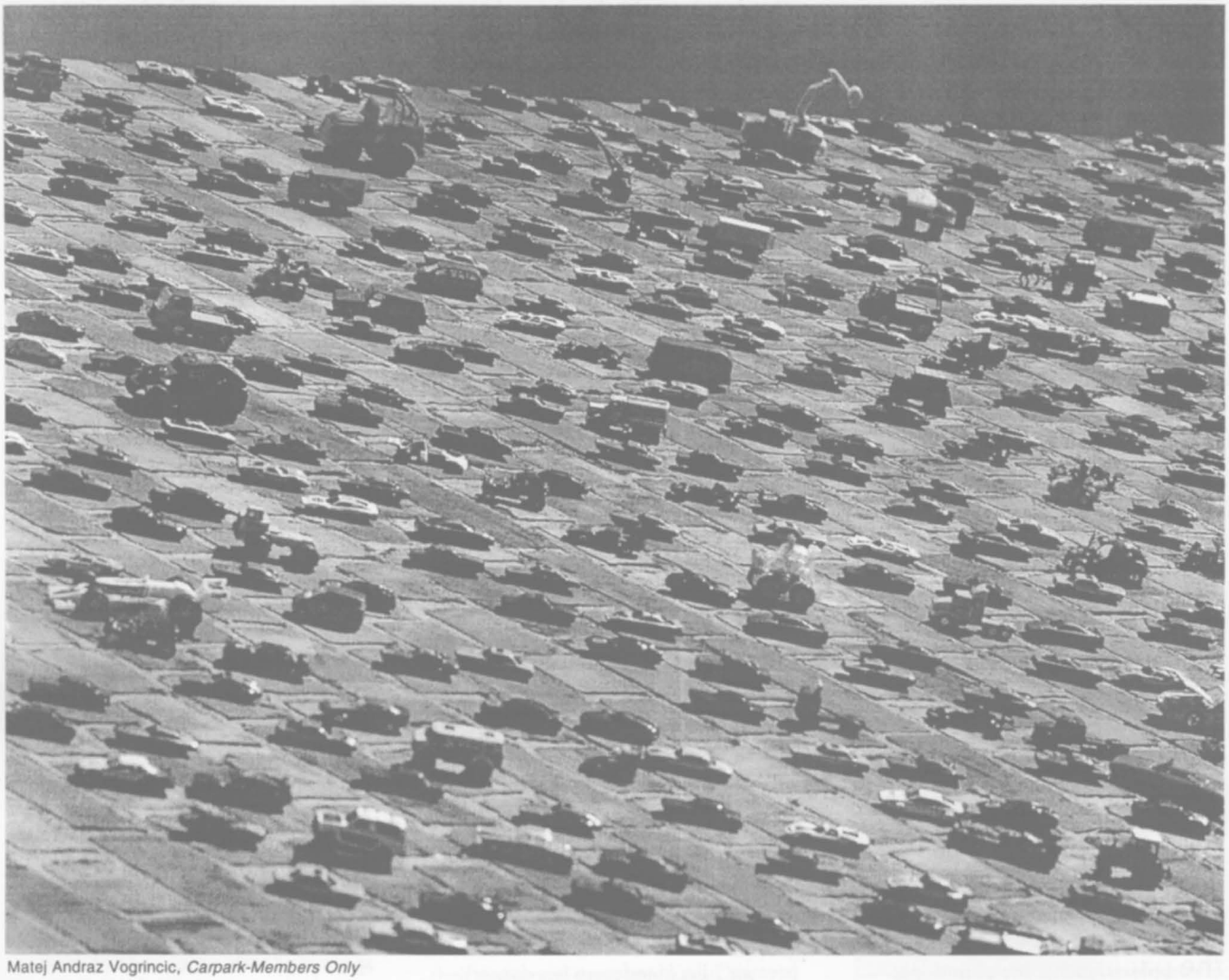
Gail Priest

Carpark-Members Only
Matej Andraz Vogrincic
Rosina St, March 7
Monument to a Lost Civilisation
Ilya/Emilia Kabakov
University of SA Art Museum
March 7

Turning the corner off the fading seediness of Hindley Street I gasp. On a sheer vertical wall are hundreds of tiny cars looking bright and edible. Matej Andraz Vogrincic's installation *Carpark-Members Only* does something strange to your focus. They are so small you want to get closer, but close up the cars are still far away. The diminishing perspective of such a multitude of small things almost gives you vertigo.

In the hot glary carpark it is an obscene display of colour—there are pink cars, yellow cars, green cars, red cars, orange cars. There are even a few things that don't belong, like helicopters and aeroplanes. Standing against the wall looking up, you can see rivers of blue, as many of the toys have tinted windows. The miniature vertical carpark is so realistic it even has disabled parking spaces, no parking zones and arrows on the road. (There are binoculars on hand to help you see the details).

The installation continues beyond the cars to the actual parking spaces below. Maintaining the original signage that inspired Vogrincic to make work on this site—'Members Only' and 'Small Car', 'Large Car'—he has repainted the lower half of the wall a bright sunny yellow, and increased the size of the blue and white parking symbol, enhancing the



Matej Andraz Vogrincic, *Carpark-Members Only*

normal functional messages to "You and your passengers and your vehicle and its contents enter and remain in the carpark totally at your own risk." It is these elements that blur the lines of art and reality, art and functionality. It is beautiful a and humorous monument to the town that is fast being retitled "Adelaide, city of carparks".

Slipping through the slick and surprising automatic sliding door of the University of South Australia Art Museum, I am faced with a potential monument. I say potential, as *Monument to a Lost Civilisation* is an exhibition consisting of the plans for a huge underground museum made up of installations that have been created by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov over the last decade, paying homage to the effects of life under totalitarian rule in Soviet Russia. In the centre we see models of the garden that will exist above ground, and the subterranean labyrinth of rooms that will exist below. Circling the models are descriptions of the arrangement into Neighbourhoods: 1 Community Ideology; 2 Life in Common; 3 Bureaucracy; 4 Cultural Neighbourhood; 5 Hospitals; 6 World of Memories; 7 Monuments to Childhood. Covering the walls are descriptions, drawings and photographs of the actual installations that make up these neighbourhoods. While the layout of the exhibition is a little dry and requires a lot of reading, the subject matter and stories behind the installations are thoroughly engaging. You yearn to experience the actual work.

The most interesting installations for me all seemed to fall into the Life in Common neighbourhood, reflecting the life of 85% of the population who lived in communal apartments. 'The composer' is the story of a man who would set up impromptu concerts in the hallway of his apartment block to bring the community closer together, to be rewarded by being reported to the authorities for blocking the hallway. The Kabakovs set up an installation that was faithful to the composer's original hallway installations, with 6 music stands, on each a drawing and some text, above each stand an open bottomed jar to pick up on the resonances. The other story that leaps out is 'The man who flew into space'—an installation of a room cluttered with debris, with a catapult-like construction hanging over the bed, illustrating the story of a man who thought he could slip through time into different 'petals' on a particular day, at a particular hour, building a contraption to hurl himself though the roof out into space.

From the documentation the installations appear to be astounding in their intricacy and detail. In some the Kabakovs create whole rooms and clutter them with everyday objects placed in careful relation to each other as in 'The Bridge.' In others, such as 'The Empty Museum' the setting is sparse—red walls and moldings emulate a museum with 12 oval spotlights on the walls where the exhibits should be. Comfortable couches facing the empty walls invite you to sit and take in the space while Bach's *Passacali* blares out.

Monument to a Lost Civilisation is like the catalogue of a Kabakov retrospective placed on the walls of the gallery—it takes patience to absorb even a small sectiont, but if you give it time the stories pull you in, giving you a tangible sense of the profundity of the individual works. For the entire monument of 40 installations to be realised would create a work of such immensity and beauty it would be mind boggling. *Monument to a Lost Civilisation* is a monument not only to the effects and damage done to the psyche of a people under totalitarian rule, but also to resilience and hope.

The hand(s) that signed the paper

Kirsten Krauth

Writing to Vermeer

The Netherlands Opera
Festival Theatre, March 5

Speaking at one of the regular free festival forums, *The Buck Stops Here—the place of the writer in the arts*, Peter Greenaway spoke of the impetus to film *Prospero's Books* as a sensual and oblique rendering of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Rather than an ego-driven desire to stamp an actor or director's performance, he wanted the film to work as an illustration of the text "in all its richness." *Writing to Vermeer* also lovingly preserves a text, literally even, a pen on screen scratching the letters that Vermeer's lover, mother in law, artist model, send while he's away. As Greenaway says of *The Pillow Book* and his interest in calligraphy, there's nothing as sexy as black on white, ink on sheet, body, paper...The women and children in *Vermeer* walk over texts and lie down on them, a screen underneath their bodies wrapping them up in words.

Keith Gallasch suggests reading the libretto beforehand. This is a must. It stops you straining and gives you the space to think, to revel in this opera's quiet moments, its attention to detail, its tender depiction of women's work, women (again) who are waiting, touched by each other and woven through a love of this man. There is an intimacy in their gatherings and in the amplification of their lives, not often associated with theatrical representations of the past. If Vermeer had a digital video camera, this is what we would see. Vermeer home movies. There are no epiphanies, no tragedies, in the libretto itself. Saskia Boddeke's opera is a celebration of the mundane; what a revelation! It also intrudes into women's bodies: milk, water, blood are dumped. In an ominous moment, the women don corset-tight butcher's aprons as they approach a large pool of blood. One tentatively dips her finger in and then it's complete surrender, a whipped frenzy of bloodstained ballet.

My body becomes overwhelmed. The sound in particular, as it is sucked back through the auditorium as the huge screens come down, explodes from behind and winds me, in teeth grinding scenes of repeated violence: a man stabs his enemy; the bone splinting, gut churning scars of tortured bodies hanging upside down. I need to escape. As 3 women in blue lie down in the water which laps the front of the stage, heads dainty and upturned on floating suitcases, tears flood me too. Sometimes too much beauty can be dangerous; just see Sam Mendes' *American Beauty*.

With new forms of writing emerging on the internet (and email making text trendy again), letter writing is becoming privileged. Chris Marker's experimental film *Sunless* uses 3 words in voiceover 'He wrote me...' to evoke the intimacy and shared experience of a letter written from one person to another, then read aloud to us, the ones lucky enough to be in on the secret. My grandparents talk of falling in love via letters written during the second world war. Like the women in *Vermeer*, my grandmother wrote of the everyday, outings, work, family, words to lift the spirits. Women wrote to many soldiers but it was the men who persevered, who wrote back during years of being apart, who returned to women who had waited. They let me read some of these letters. It was a great gift to be entrusted with their precious words, his obliterated by war censors, giving her space to read between the lines. In the same way, *Writing to Vermeer* offers a space for small things, a new enclave, an arbour all the more powerful in its preservation of the everyday.

A lesson in music (and) history

Chris Reid

The 1900s

The Goldner String Quartet
Elder Hall, March 6

Sydney's Goldner String Quartet has set itself the monumental task of mapping 20th century string quartet music through a series of 10 concerts, one for each decade. The string quartet is a versatile musical form able to convey complex ideas and permitting the highest degree of virtuosity in performance. Some of the greatest composers of the century are included, illustrating what is achievable with the form.

The Goldner Quartet is always meticulous and the concert for the first decade, comprising Ravel's only quartet (1903-4) and Schoenberg's second (1907-8), is no exception. There are no leaps in interpretation—simply a clear and direct rendering of the score. Soprano Merlyn Quaife joins the Quartet for the Schoenberg work, her dramatic voice suiting it handsomely. Both these works break with tradition, and in Schoenberg's case marked the early stages of a musical revolution.

The program identifies major historical features in each decade, and overviews each composer's work, thus plotting the development both of composition and

society, presumably on the assumption that art imitates life etc. The question of the Goldner's choice of composers/compositions will arise, but listeners who stay throughout this ambitious program will be well rewarded, not only with magnificent playing but with unique insights into the development of 20th century music.

Crying in public toilets
Gail Priest

Skin
Crying in Public Places
Space Theatre, March 4

There is honest and then there is earnest. In the effort to avoid being earnest, it is very easy to cease being honest. It is a difficult balance to strike, but one that Crying in Public Places' *Skin* masters with the ease of an acrobat.

Maybe it's 3rd day festival blues. I remember I got it last time after watching Ballet C de la B's *La Tristeza Complice*. I am fine, I am together, then a simple word or tone or gesture has me in the toilet, wailing into the wall and blowing my nose on toilet paper. I sat watching *Skin*, chanting my mantra—that 60s classic "I will not, I will not be moved"—but nothing was going to save me from the seductive blend of intimate a cappella, quirky stories, and questionings of the very essence of being a woman.

Following the narrative of Maude Davey's encounter with Everline— a woman so beautiful it is assumed she has been given the world, yet in fact has nothing except her optimism—the show elucidates the question of "being" and how that being may have been affected by different choices, how there may be another being, being the you that made a different choice at some point. Fully utilising the "twinness" of the Davey sisters, they play out a parallel life ending in domestic disaster in Melton, with the very catchy song "My Melton house just melted." Their twinness is also used to amplify the question of identity, the difficulty of differentiating yourself from those closest to you. "I am here. You are there. Why do you always have to be where I am?"

The text is insightful, self-reflective but never self-indulgent. Thanks to the dramaturgy of John Romeril, the show seamlessly flows through various textual devices: direct address to the audience, storytelling, and more stylised episodes—the performers speaking their lines in the third person, "The woman at the front is at a loss", "The woman behind the woman at the front scratches her head."

The main strength of the text is in its asides and self referential moments. As certain scenes and themes are repeated, the performers stop and Anni Davey intones "Didn't I, didn't I didn't I didn't I already say that." In the middle of a story 2 of the characters take time out to discuss the finer points of what it means to be a winner or a loser—are you a winner even if you think you are a loser but perceived to be a winner? It is these conversational moments (often labelled "*Seinfeld* moments" even though we were all having them before we'd ever heard of Jerry) that create the wit and humour that gives the work warmth and honesty and save it from becoming earnest.

The music is catchy, songs take surprising melodic shifts and the harmonies are liquid and sweet and suit the blend of voices. They seem dedicated to keeping the volume levels quite low, keeping intimacy of tone (something also insisted upon by Louis Andriessen through the use of microphones in *Writing to Vermeer*). Maybe the big belt is out.

Despite all this I refused to be moved...until the last line of the last song, when I looked at the exuberance on their faces, the glow that says "goddamn I love what I do and I'm pretty happy with who I am" and I let the grip go on my cynical Sydney self and let rip with a darn good bawl that has probably increased the level of the flood waters in northern Australia.

After this attempt to explain it I still don't know why. Maybe it's a woman's thing.

PS. I apologise for the earnestness of this article.

Opera and its anxieties
Keith Gallasch

Opera Now
Telstra Adelaide Festival/State Opera of South Australia
Adelaide Festival Centre
March 5

It fell to me in the last session of this timely and often entertaining forum to provide an overview of the day's discussion, a daunting task given the calibre and experience of the speakers, the wealth of anecdote they used by way of illustration and the complexity of some of the issues broached. I managed to attend most of the sessions but, unfortunately, I had to miss out on hearing the *Barbara/O* team for the opportunity to interview Saskia Boddeke, the director of *Writing to Veermeer*, for RTV (RealTime Video, entrance to the Piano Bar, Adelaide Festival Centre). It seemed to me that the forum threw up many dichotomies, of which many of the speakers were only too aware. Some of these tensions are a real worry, but many are signs of a form which is very much alive despite constant talk of its imminent demise. The very fact that the nature and future of opera and music theatre are so hotly debated and widely discussed these days signals a kind of good health. Theatre, for example, does not currently enjoy this attention. Indeed a considerable number of theatre artists, especially directors and designers, are finding themselves attracted to music theatre. As Robyn Archer has observed, it's a form where you can do everything, especially, of course, work with music. Certainly in Australia, opera and music theatre are busy sites of real purpose, experimentation and a furthering of the synaesthetic possibilities (the interplay and overlapping of the senses) that Peter Sellars spoke of as the particular power of opera.

Transcendence, spirituality and ecstasy were recurrently invoked to describe the effect of opera on its audience. Robyn Archer worried that often in opera this is a purely aesthetic effect, strong on beauty, short on brains. However, intel-

ligent productions of opera (like Sellars' account of Handel's *Theodora* and the Wagner Ring Cycle in Adelaide in 1999) transported her unexpectedly into new worlds of pleasure and understanding.

On the other hand, Sellars argued that opera's transcendence entails the transgressive, the forbidden, secrets, the unspoken (appropriately he recalled witnessing a 3 day burial ritual held by the indigenous people of Bali with song and dance and, especially, the speaking of things hitherto not spoken about the deceased). He said "opera is about delirium and bad behaviour...madness, folly, rage...when you don't know the limits any more...(and) total sensuality." Consequently opera can, like love, be an inconvenience to the status quo (and not only for the expense of producing it—"throwing away the maximum amount of money for the least tangible result"). He reminded us that until this century, the history of opera was always of the new, new composers, new works, and that the issues of love and power and class addressed in these works were often socially and politically transgressive.

Transcendence that can be transgressive finds itself realised in another dichotomy, between the "pleasure vacuum" of self-absorption and social responsibility. Sellars admitted that he could get as involved as any opera lover in debating which was the best CD version of *Simon Boccanegra*. However, like Robyn Archer, his social concerns prevent him from accepting pleasure as the only principle of opera. He spoke of opera as being made up of many voices—"A composite art form in a composite society"—especially now of diverse cultural voices. And it must be able to speak for all those voices, to blur the lines between majority and minority, mainstage and margin, and to voice the secrets of society. He noted too the increasing and significant impact of women artists on opera—he is directing a new work by a female Finnish composer for the next Salzburg Festival.

Accessibility proved an issue in this dichotomy of pleasure and responsibility. Sellars said there has to be a greater sharing of the pleasure of opera. Saskia Boddeke had been distressed to find that a group of young women who introduced themselves to her and expressed their excitement at her visit could not afford to see *Writing to Vermeer*. She wondered if the Australian performing arts were too much in the grip of sponsorship and mentioned a government subsidy system for young audiences in Holland.

The tension between opera and music theatre was mulled over from time to time. Andrew Ford (*Night and Dreams, the Death of Sigmund Freud*, premiered March 8) declaring that his new work with librettist Margaret Morgan was certainly not opera, though he wasn't sure exactly what music theatre was. Robyn Archer distinguished firmly between her engagement with music theatre (the version initiated by Brecht and Weill) and the grand opera of which she has been so wary. Peter Greenaway said, yes it is a privilege to do opera given its scale and costs but it is such an exciting form that it must be continued. Later, Boddeke described to me a new site specific operatic work in Venice that she and Greenaway were embarking on where the audience would be on the move through the performance. Sellars described current projects like his staged Bach *Cantatas*, and a new cross cultural work in collaboration with composer John Adams, 3 Frankfurt Ballet dancers on digital video, and a Latin American mural artist creating portraits of East Los Angeles mothers and their babies. Adams' theme is the nativity (his answer to pressure to present a 'millennial' work) but based on apocryphal tales about Mary. The work is for orchestra and digital projection, and given how manipulable the digital system is, and how simple the design will be, the work will be portable and able to be performed by many orchestras. These kinds of developments, said Sellars, "are some of the future of opera."

As for the opera-music theatre split, it is a division which is fast blurring as new music theatres emerge in the form of site works, installations and multimedia works, through-composed plays and dramatised concert works (such as Sellars described). Opera appears to be just one of a number of forms within music theatre. However, Robyn Archer made an important distinction, that traditionally in music theatre (and the musical) words are as important as the music—this is not always the case in opera, *Writing to Vermeer* being the touchstone for discussing this particular issue across the day. The demands on the opera singer's voice, the primacy of composition and the beauty of the sound over the enunciation of the words, having to sing in languages other than one's own, all of these contribute to degrees of unintelligibility. That most lucid of singers, Gerald English, bewailed the common lack of clarity in opera, but rather than simply banish opera, or certain singers, he thought that it was worth reviving the 18th and 19th century tradition of the libretto (the little book) of the opera being on sale before the work was shown (it was also a form of subscription). Tom Shapcott spoke of the specific demands on the librettist, of knowing how the sounds of a language work in relationship to music. Inevitably the relationship between composer and librettist was another of the dichotomies explored with the Peters Greenaway and Goldsworthy bowing to the judgement of the composer as to what exactly is heard in the finished opera.

While opera and music theatre are attracting an increasing number of artists, and the form appears to be thriving (if the Australia Council's *In Repertoire, A Select Guide to Australian Music Theatre* is anything to go by), Robyn Archer was anxious about the future. Opera Australia absorbs an enormous amount of public funding while other small companies and individual artists often struggle to realise their visions. Peter Sellars spoke of "satanic cost analysis" and huge budget cuts in even the largest of opera companies, the ENO (English National Opera) struggling to produce his new production of Adams' *Nixon in China* which, he said, had been premiered inexpensively by the Houston Grand Opera in the mid-80s.

Among other dichotomies addressed, Saskia Boddeke spoke about the challenge of working with singers with great vocal and traditional acting ability, but

lacking movement skills. Her solution was to develop her own choreographic skills through intensive workshops with dancers, and then applying what she had learned to working with singers. She feels that it is important that singers don't feel that movement is imposed on them and that they contribute imaginatively to the movement in their roles. Another dichotomy was an occasional anxiety about the incursion of new technologies into opera. Some speakers felt comfortable with it (opera is already a fascinating hybrid), others like Greenaway, Boddeke and Sellars were truly excited by its possibilities, about the dynamic between live and pre-recorded performance, between the screen and the stage.

This rapid oscillation between the positives and negatives about the state of opera and the possibilities for its various futures good and bad in Australia and across the western world can yield anxiety, but the overall feeling of the forum was of optimism. There are now in Australia more and more artists working in the field, many works in repertoire, many works touring nationally and more going overseas. Chairing the final session I asked Michael Billington, theatre reviewer for London's *Guardian,* about the state of opera in the UK. He said that the financial and managerial state of the Royal Opera House and the account of it in the television documentary series *The House* had been enormously damaging. If we suffer from the abuse of the term "elite" as applied to the arts in Australia (but not to sport), it's "toffs" in Britain, said Billington. The good news was that, as in Australia, new works are surviving and there is a constant injection of fresh work, including Mark Anthony Turnage's *The Silver Tassi.* Billington felt that Turnage's composition not only completed this unfinished O'Casey work but also solved its stylistic problems. The Almeida Theatre was continuing its commitment to the form with its development of 3 or 4 new works each summer. With composers of the calibre of Thomas Adés, Harrison Birtwistle and Turnage, said Billington, there was a living tradition of opera in Britain.

Asked why he had taken an interest in opera, Billington replied that in the 80s the influence of the Australian David Freedman and his Opera Factory had been considerable, but more important was the interaction between theatre and opera, with great theatre directors turning to opera, along with the powerhouse input of Eno, Poutney and Elder. Great opera is great theatre said Billington. And we know in Australia it can be that, and many other things as well, as music theatre embraces new spaces, technologies and ideas, displaying the brains that Robyn Archer yearns for, the social responsibility that Peter Sellars demands, and the need to keep working at it that Peter Greenaway encourages.

Oliver in Osaka

Gail Priest

Mizumachi
Ishinha
Torrens Parade Ground
March 6

What makes *Mizumachi* more than a musical? Not a lot in terms of basic structure—huge scenery, live musicians, a large chorus that sets the tone and texture of the piece, interspersed with realistic "acting scenes" that advance plot and develop character. At this point *Mizumachi* could just be the Japanese version of *Les Miserables* or *Oliver.* It is this familiar structure that is making the 2 hour work, totally in Japanese and assorted dialects, with no surtitles, so palatable to a general public. However it is the very Japanese-ness, the hybridity of modern forms with ancient opera traditions—the Kabuki, the Noh, the Suzuki stomping, the Butoh—that influence the movement patterns, the style of chorus work, the rhythmic chanting rather than singing that has been equated with Dada poetry and rap, the very hands-on way that the huge set changes occur, that so fascinates an 'art' crowd that would sooner shoot themselves in the foot than go and see a musical.

A graveyard of chick magnets

Kirsten Krauth

Carpark - Members Only
Matej Andra Vogrincic
Carpark, Rosina St
March 3 - 26

Carpark is so well camouflaged I walked straight past. I could have asked for directions right in front of it. Real (ie large) cars are straight parked in a small area marked MEMBERS ONLY but it's very much public domain, a thoroughfare where everyone walking by stops to have a gawk. There's a SMALL CARS sign above the parked vehicles which aren't as small as the ones you see when you raise your eyes above the horizon. After squinting into the sun for a while, I'm handed a pair of binoculars. It makes life easier. Thousands of toy plastic cars perch perilously off the side of a brick wall, a graveyard of chick magnets. A pipe running north-south and a concrete slab east-west help orientation.

People have donated these vehicles. Large, shiny pink beetles, green hoony dragracers, an aeroplane in the top row. Are cars like dogs? Does every car reflect the owner's personality? There are 14,900 on the wall but not all are from Adelaide. My friendly guide complains that more should have been donated. Adelaide is obsessed with cars, he says, a car culture, people are dependent on them, love cars more than other people. The parents start materialising out of the red brick. A woman stands with binocs hovering and swoops. "I've found it!" Her car, she points out proudly, bottom row, off drainpipe, she shows me a photo so I can make it out, Miss Piggy in a Red Cross vehicle. I start getting vertigo—can this happen looking up? My hands-on friendly guide gives me a mission, should I choose to accept it: to find 2 helicopters. Getting dizzy from lack of concentration and poor focus-pulling skills, I admit defeat and he points them out in the top row. He's trying to hide it but I can tell he thinks I'm a quitter. He points out his shiny big red fire engine and I'm thinking the dog theory might hold.

A performance artist walks past screaming. You fucking bitch! he yells. You fucking bitch! he remonstrates in front of the wall, as if there is some secret planted there. You fucking bitch! he punches the air and looks up at the cars in despair. An altar of wrecks. What did she do? Donate his remote control Porsche? Not a performance artist after all. Freak magnet. Wherever I go they find me. I try to blend in, stick my thumb out, hoping for a hitch.

A rare and delicious treat
Chris Reid

The Pear Orchard Opera
Han Teng Yuefu
Adelaide Town Hall, March 5

Nanguan is an ancient form of Chinese chamber music, essentially music theatre. Much research has gone into the origins of nanguan to record and preserve it. This enchanting performance by the 10 member Han Teng Yuefu ensemble showcases a sophisticated and unique art.

Dance and story are the foundation of this exquisite dramatic form. The principal instrument is something like a lute, and its player sings, as narrator of a tale. The dance is minutely choreographed and very restrained, based on symbolic gestures through delicate movement of fingers, hands, limbs and head at a contemplative pace. There is a flavour of mime, the form falling between dance and theatre.

Of the work's 6 elements, the most captivating are the fourth and fifth. In the fourth, the singer, seated by a candle, provides a long introduction; a dancer then enters, initially hooded, carrying a stick, perhaps a sceptre. The slow dance which unfolds suggests a universal power over life and death. In the fifth, 6 unaccompanied dancers hold in each hand a pair of small wooden clapsticks, making gentle, synchronised rattling movements (evoking the buzzing of insects), punctuated by louder claps, the dance's orderliness and development perhaps attesting life's inevitable cycle.

The setting is minimal, the costumes simple though elegant. Sadly, the program does not identify the elements of the work, translate the text or describe the instruments. Neither is the cavernous Adelaide Town Hall ideal for this ensemble, which needs an intimate space like a small theatre.

Never a borrower or a lender be
Suzanne Spunner

From Appreciation to Appropriation
Flinders University Art Museum
City Gallery, March 6

From Appreciation to Appropriation—Indigenous influences and images in Australian Art curated by Christine Nicholls is a valuable insertion in the visual arts program which focuses on contemporary Aboriginal art. Its title is deceptively benign as it acknowledges that appropriation is often the end result of appreciation. Artists, as Nicholls said in her floor talk on Monday, have always reserved the right to smash and grab; to be open to influences from other cultures and the 20th century has been a happy hunting ground for artists from Picasso and Matisse to Cezanne who liked nothing more than foraging in other cultures. The real issue ultimately comes down to power as the traffic is usually one way, with artists from the dominant culture appreciating, then borrowing/taking, incorporating and reworking imagery from Indigenous and often marginalised art cultures.

The exhibition includes works by Margaret Preston an artist whose appreciation of Aboriginal art in the 1940s was not questioned, her motives less sullied. She studied Aboriginal art in museums in Sydney and then made a number of trips to the Northern Territory to see it for herself. She began from a position of arguing that Aboriginal art had intrinsic aesthetic merit even if you did not understand what it was all about. Later, after more study and travel, she argued that the meaning needed to be appreciated as well. She was looking for a position from which Australian art could be both invigorated and made truly national, particular and unique, and exhorted her generation "to be Aboriginal." As Nicholls says, Preston was really onto something—seeing the future of Australian art as Aboriginal—and yet for all her forward thinking she also missed the point. Preston did not contemplate the notion that 'Aboriginal' Australian art would be made by Aboriginal artists, and in that she was the victim of her historical epoch where many thoughtful people believed Aboriginal culture was in its death throes.

Jump forward 50 years to the current epoch and you find the extraordinary situation of Eddie Burrup aka Elizabeth Durack, a white Australian artist, daughter of a pastoral dynasty, someone at the centre of the dominant culture, who has taken Preston's exhortation literally and "become" Aboriginal. The Durack case is as fascinating as it is bizarre and from Preston's standpoint, would have been not just unimaginable, but perverse. For Preston, there would have been everything to lose—power, status, credibility and, of course, her market—whereas for Durack the decision to become Eddie has an acknowledged element of self-interest. Her art dealer daughter suggested to Durack that had a new series of paintings been done by an Aboriginal artist, they would certainly sell and be popular. Durack's daughter thought they "looked" Aboriginal and she knew how to market Aboriginal art whereas strange atypical work from an older white woman artist with a fading reputation was much more difficult to position in the market these days.

I don't think these Durack/Burrup works look particularly Aboriginal or particularly like earlier Durack work—what is intriguing is why she did it. There are so many layers of explanations and rationales. At Monday's seminar, Professor Julie Marcus offered her explanation arguing that contrary to Durack's later stated intentions, this was not an act of reconciliation but rather an act of stealing the only real power Aboriginal art has: its spiritual value which is the source of its considerable marketability. Marcus alluded to Durack's earlier work

which focused on representing Aboriginal people and she said that there was a tendency to see Aboriginal people as smudges and shadows as if they were part of the landscape itself. I am not so sure I agree with her. In the past Durack painted portraits of Aboriginal people she had known from her life, growing up alongside them in the Kimberley region. At the time, portraying Aboriginal people as individuals was not a popular or particularly marketable concept and it could be argued that Durack "suffered" as an artist because of her subject matter.

Marcus also mentioned another interpretation of Durack's motives which suggested she may have had a significant relationship with an Aboriginal man and the creation of Eddie somehow speaks of that which she cannot otherwise acknowledge. In questions afterwards, art writer Susan McCulloch queries whether Marcus had spoken to Durack. She had not. McCulloch has, extensively, and also to Aboriginal people in the Kimberley.

I am intrigued not so much by Eddie's art as by the whole creation of the persona of Eddie Burrup whose biography grew more and more elaborate and particularised as the projection grew. It seems to serve a deep need of Durack's to become Aboriginal, and interestingly, not an Aboriginal woman but an Aboriginal man.

Watch for further instalments in this riveting story as Durack herself speaks in various panel discussions on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I long for a psychoanalytic reading of the case. There's more than meets the eye and I suspect that art is not really what is at stake here.

Indoors outdoors

Suzanne Spunner

Ochre & Dust
The Auditorium, Art Gallery of SA, March 8
Spirit of Lanky
Wharf Shed 10, Port Adelaide

Go to the new Aboriginal Cultures Gallery at the SA Museum and you'll see spare and pristine, beautifully lit, state of the art museum display. No sand or spinifex, not a diorama within cooee.

Go to *Ochre and Dust* or *The Spirit of Lanky* and you'll get sand and leaves, painted backdrops and projections of hills and trees.

What can this all mean? Perhaps that these are works that sit uncomfortably in a theatre space—in fact, that aren't meant to be taken indoors at all. *Ochre and Dust* is a storytelling event and feels out of place inside under lights. It is augmented by slides and a strangely irrelevant installation by Fiona Foley. What were the whalebones about? The red sand makes the storytellers comfortable and probably would have been enough without Heidrun Löhr's slides which, although quite interesting in themselves, are distracting to attend to and are further estranged by being projected onto a series of leaf or coolamon-shaped ellipses reminiscent of the SBS logo.

The power of *Ochre and Dust* is the act of sharing story and the technique of using leaves to illustrate and animate that story. If any element could have done with enhancement it was these leaves; simply because the scale of them and the size of the audience meant that an imperative intimacy was lost. Had they been videotaped and projected, for example, then there would have been some advantage to being inside.

Spirit of Lanky, a one-off event at Port Adelaide in a vast wharf shed, was a confusing phenomenon. I thought it was going to be about Lanky, an Aboriginal tracker; it's not. Owen Love, the writer, designer and performer said in his introductory chat that it was intended primarily as a touring work to show the world this story and that there would be very little dialogue. There was plenty of dialogue and it looked nigh impossible to tour.

When I arrived I read that it was an outdoor fire sculpture event. We were, in fact, inside a very big shed but I could smell kerosene. By the time it ended, a number of things had emerged. This was clearly a community arts project which had grown like Topsy over a long period and you could discern sedimentary layers of concerns, intentions, contributions by different communities that had, bit by bit, swamped the original idea about Lanky. Its concerns ranged from sustainable environmental responsibility to Aboriginal reconciliation; it showed how the understanding, mapping and remembering of particular places must include knowledge of the natural environment and awareness of the history of Aboriginal occupancy to tell any story of the land fully. I left wondering why it was a one-off event and hoping that lots of people of all ages from the communities it addresses get the chance to see it.

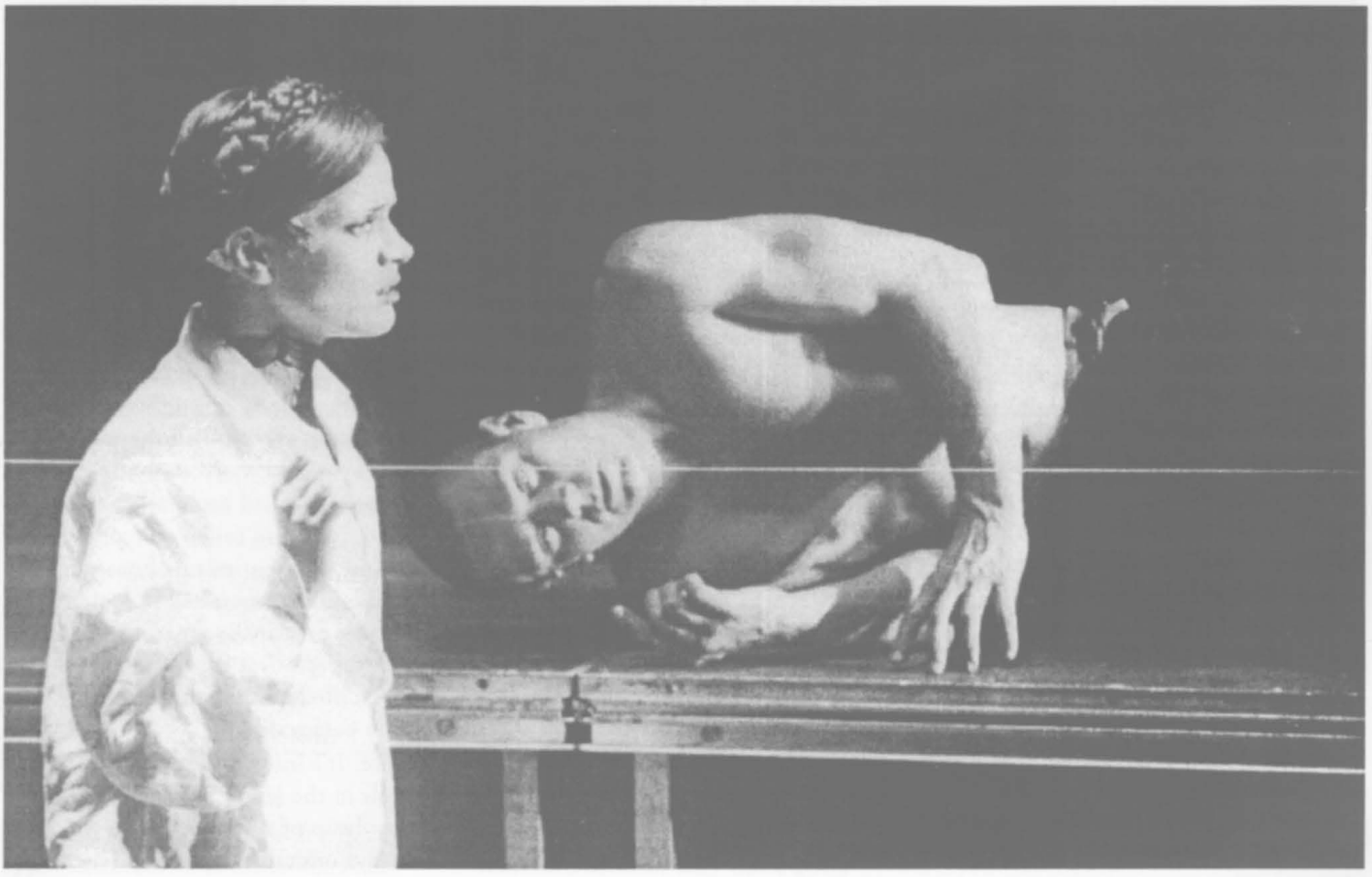
Faust and not-Faust

Keith Gallasch

ur/faust
Queens Theatre
March 6

In a smoke filled, hazy place, unidentifiable figures move about stretching their limbs and their voices. Either side of them and just to the front of us, in perfect rows, are plastic water bottles holding dead and dying flowers, stiff, thin-stemmed, losing their colour. Taped high up on the back wall is a row of photographed faces of the performers, richly coloured, expressions neutral. Soon we notice small prints of these tied to the bottles. We are in a place of death, a poor graveyard. At the back there's a platform, just in front of us another one, a kind of catwalk crossing the performing space. Around this platform and travelling up and across are red vertical and horizontal lines in space. When the lights dim and this graveyard opens to take us in, the lines form a perfect grid, framing in the distance the row of seated performers quietly and then more forcefully hymning "My mother the whore who killed me/My father the rogue who raped me..." over the flickering grain of cosmic radio noise.

The light brightens, the grid sharpens and 2 men in black suits and white



ur/faust

open-necked shirts walk toward us and, magically, through the red lines—we are in the presence of ghosts. Far back, a man in white slips into angel wings, a woman dances like a sprite. It looks for a moment like Greenaway has been here—heightened Renaissance perspective, a world of damaged mortals and unpredictable spirits.

One man picks up a white electric guitar, turns his back on us and thunders out chords, while the other, revealing himself to be Faust, declares his pride and his ambition. He is pure bellowing anger, already fallen, crashing to the floor by the minute, hoisting himself undamaged to rant again, microphone in hand, like a humourless stand-up comic oblivious to his audience. The violence of his assertions and demands is soon rewarded by a gift, a small video camera into which he gazes and sees (and we see on black and white monitors) himself—"Am I a God? I see so clear." An angel flutters, a woman dances, a sprite reads a magic tome by Faust's feet. And all the great scholar's "senses blast" (and so do ours) as he enters his pact with Mephisto, a purely visual and aural engagement which becomes physically violent as the 2 men wrestle, yielding a kind of erotic intimacy—followed by the inevitable cigarette (and a patch of recurrent giggling near me at the 'coolness' of the cigarette motif). Far away something red swings and thuds, a sprite has been hammering a huge red punching bag as the men fight.

The *mis en scene* for this *Faust*, this adaptation of Goethe's *Urfaust* ("original Faust", his very first version of his master work), echoes the original in its fragmentation (it was unfinished), economy of narrative, and theatrical potential (Brecht embraced its Epic potential in a production in East Berlin in the 50s). The narrative speeds and bumps along with varying degrees of intelligibility. As soon as Faust and Mephisto have bonded, Faust demands he be given Margarete, a young woman he has only just glimpsed. Mephisto has to brief his charge on the complexities of demonic power in the face of goodness—"nothing can be taken by storm...You think everything is child's play." In Christopher Marlowe's play, Faustus' magnificent ambitions quickly turn material, cruel and petty. In Goethe, it is the love for Margarete (sometimes called Gretchen) that overwhelms him and makes a tragedy of her life (in this version she later becomes another Faust). It's still a shock, of a kind, that such metaphysical posturing and defiant rage can be so immediately thwarted by such corporeal desire. At the same time as it humanises Faust in some respects, it diminishes him as he drags Margarete down the slippery slope with him. Once she has been seduced by the same jewel with which Mephisto engaged Faust's narcissism (the video camera) she's on her way to murder and infanticide and a chilling failure of the love between her and Faust.

While the narrative itself is less than bracing, it's the sheer theatricality of director Benedict Andrews' vision that grips and repels in its juxtaposition of an often quaintly formal text with a brutal modernity—industrial strength noise and light that signal souls in torment as

they transgress, a masturbating Mephisto, Faust and Margarete's tough love making echoing the men's wrestling, and the shifting signifier of desire as it criss-crosses genders and is eerily displaced in Margarete's addressing Mephisto as if talking to Faust. These and the finale of Margarete's assumption of Faust's role, are light years from Goethe's ur-conception, but they have their own peculiar power even where they step into bathos, bombast or cigarette acting. I saw a version of this work without lighting or the full sound setup before it travelled to Germany. Between then and now the production has matured enormously, the gestural language is more contained, the performers have great presence (if still vocally uneven). Deprived of a great text, *ur/faust* can only operate within severe limits, but it is a theatrical adventure that warrants attention, even if it marks the difference between our age and Goethe's more than it can draw parallels, and yields a problematic connection between the old and the new that tests any easy assumptions about influence and artistic lineage.

History is bunk (not)

Chris Reid

Ensemble 415 and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra
Adelaide Town Hall, March 7

History and its lessons are inescapable in AdFest 2000. Whether the festival's programmers felt the need to acknowledge a possible millennial apocalypse, thought we needed some education, or simply yearned for happier days, their musical offerings telescope the evolution of the art and remind us that we cannot escape our cultural roots and traditions. Not only can we not escape, but some of our past is worth revelling in. The Goldner Quartet is tracing the history of the West through the string quartet music of the 20th century, ancient and modern Eastern 'chamber' music ensembles are in town, and Ensemble 415 is here to examine the Baroque and Classical eras and then transport us to the present day through contemporary composers.

Switzerland's Ensemble 415, led by violinist Chiara Banchini, is offering 4 concerts, ranging from large ensemble works for 40 or so players, to small chamber works, often with guest performers. In the first concert the Ensemble is joined by members of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. All string players use gut strings and the early slack bows; the popular use of early instruments to perform early works continues. Early instruments often make quite different sounds, in this case producing a rich, creamy texture.

The cohesion of the 415/ASO joint ensemble is excellent. Their readings of Arcangelo Corelli's Concerti Grosso Nos 7, 2 and 5 from his Concerto de Chiesa Op. VI are superbly detailed and highly polished. Interspersed with these 3 concerti are 2 works by Muffat, concerti Nos 2 and 5 from his Armonico Tributo. By comparison with Corelli, the Muffat compositions seem a little less refined, perhaps less technically focused, but richer emotionally. Muffat's background as an organist perhaps prompted a darker bass. In his no 2 concerto, every other movement is marked 'grave' and some are sombre passages indeed. Overall this is a delightful and revealing concert.

The concerto grosso form, in which several short, contrasting movements are performed by a small group of solo instruments, eg violin, cello, theorbo, supported by a large ensemble, was popularised by Corelli and reached its peak in the next generation of composers including JS Bach. Georg Muffat knew and was influenced by Corelli, and his compositions in this concert are intended as a tribute to that teacher. Equally significant is the development of a strict formal basis for instrumental composition and the first publication of musical works in print—form and dissemination are essential civilising aspects in any culture. Little of Corelli's work remains, however. He was not the first nor the last to seek perfection in the work which would outlive him, and to destroy that which he thought inferior, to the annoyance of both historians and future listeners.

Howard Barker complicates your life

Keith Gallasch

March 6

KG What is the impulse to create the counter-mythology of The Ecstatic Bible *and on such a scale?*

HB It's not a new play. It's about 5 years old now but because I knew we were coming up to this apparently significant event called the millennium, I was interested in doing a big play that looked back rather than forward. Much so called millennial work is about our optimism about the future. I was interested in looking back at principally what it's like being a European over the last hundred years, the last few centuries really. So it's a backward looking piece in that sense. It's interested in the past. It deals in the landscape and the compost heap of a culture. In a sense that always underlies my work. This is the first piece in which I've tried to excavate that deeply. It's a bit like an archaeological site isn't it?

KG An archaeological site but it's a fictional site. In other plays you've dealt with actual history—the English revolution and such but here you've created a kind of cosmology.

HB Yes. I really compare it with a 16th century painter like Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights.* It's not a real place. It's a mythical landscape which has various points of recognition in it.

KG And why Bible in the title?

HB Well the Bible is, of course, a hugely important ethical document, isn't it? All the parables of the Bible—especially the Old Testament which is what this one is more like—are moral tales and generally very violent. These are amoral tales which are very violent. It would be impossible to extract an Enlightenment message from this work. There are no messages in it. It's not about ethics at all.

KG In the program you offer a set

of propositions rather than a set of commandments. Why do you do that?

HB That's because I'm a theatre writer. I'm a dramatist. For me, drama is about not-knowing, not about knowing. Over the years and this century in particular, Shaw, Brecht and contemporary writers are often trying to enlighten the audience. There's an idea that you could ask an artist to tell you how to live. I'm very opposed to that. For me, the idea of the artist is to complicate your life, not to sort it out, not to clarify, but to make it more complex. So art becomes more painful. It's a source of pain. So in this, what you get is a lot of emotional experiences, a lot of imaginative experiences, a lot of speculations but you don't get advice.

KG Nor is it conventionally cathartic.

HB By no means. I don't believe in catharsis either. This is not really a tragedy. I do tend to write tragedies but I don't think this is one. When I write a tragedy I don't aim to get a catharsis out of it. I don't find theatre is a service for the audience. If it is a service, it's not part of the welfare state, it's a service in that in brings you nearer to human pain. And human pain is essential. We need to see it. We need to experience it too, probably.

KG Do you think people need to be reminded of it? People say we get enough of this at home. Why should we go to the theatre to see it?

HB I think people need it spiritually even if they are repelled by it in practice—I think that's why Greek tragedy existed—especially in societies like ours. Australia's a good example, but the whole world is like it now—in which there's an official optimism, a political official optimism about progress and various empty phrases like 'everything's getting better', 'we're all getting healthier', 'we never need to know what pain is again'. There's a resource for everything. Whereas I refer back to something like Grimm's Fairy Tales. To me that's a great bible in which spasmodic acts of cruelty occur. And they're truths. They're great truths.

KG And Greek mythology. There were moments in the play when I thought this is like a polytheism where there are many, many people with enormous sudden power who behave like the gods, ruthlessly.

HB That's right. In a way that's just an encapsulation of what Europeans have experienced this century in particular—the madness of nationalism, fascism, communism.

KG Some people have said seeing The Ecstatic Bible *was a great experience, that it was a very dark work. It's grim, potentially misanthropic.*

HB It's dark. I don't find that's misanthropic. It's interesting that critics in England keep saying well such and such is pessimistic and therefore in some way not a good thing. Life is pessimistic. It's a struggle to keep away from suicide often because life's very grim. To continually pretend to affect a kind of idealism that isn't really there is an effort in itself. I think it's Nietzsche who says you must see life and take life as it is and live it. And if that's grim you must accept the grimness of it and you get strength from that. It's not weakening.

KG You say the work is some 5 years old. To what extent is the work strictly your own and to what extent is it a collaboration with The Wrestling School. Is there a sense of a work evolving or is it one person's vision?

HB No. We're not a collaborative company, not a collective at all. I write the text and I direct them and I work with a team of actors who are very interested in text. They speak wonderfully and they work with text. I produce the text. The text you saw is shorter but not really altered in rehearsal, just cut. That's the one they play. So we're a kind of machine that puts this text on the stage. There's no working through or re-working at all in a normal sense.

KG It's sublime ensemble playing even though it's two companies in this case, and beautifully directed. How have you come to directing?

HB Unwillingly originally. The Wrestling School was set up with a particular director who then five years into the life of the company resigned and joined a bigger organisation. So we had a choice of getting a new director in or me doing it myself. I found the first one difficult but subsequently I've found the experience important. I think more writers should direct.

KG Does it fuel your writing?

HB Probably though I couldn't say how. I'm sure it does.

KG Often writers don't want to talk about the tradition that they're in. They somehow see themselves floating free of it. But when I see your work and I've enjoyed it for many years, I sometimes think of Blake—your propositions are not unlike Blake's Proverbs of Heaven and Hell *though they're more contemporary. Your work is not generally like Peter Greenaway's but in some ways it is. You create particular kinds of cosmologies. I think also of the English novelist and poet, Ian Sinclair.*

HB I think what you're describing there is a kind of poetic climate of a given age. I know we all wish we were immaculately conceived and I often think that. People often say who are the dramatists who influenced you and I have to say Shakespeare but that's about it. But you can't deny your surroundings or the psychological nature of the society you live in and, of course, I'm a product of that. My influences tend to be pictorial though, I must say. A lot of my work has been the result of looking at pictures very closely. 17th century painting has influenced me a lot. And a lot of European poets, some of them quite obscure. So, no, I don't think I float freely through the heavens and I do have people who inspire me a great deal but they're usually not dramatists.

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