

RealTime

1

RealTime, Australia's free national arts street paper, is a guest of LIFT97 and part of the Australia Council's involvement in the newIMAGES cultural exchange program. A team of Australian and British writers collaborate to publish four issues of RealTime, responding to performances and recording their experiences of the unfolding themes of LIFT as it engages with diverse cultures, forms and the city itself.

Given LIFT97 has an Australian focus, this issue features a variety of responses to two of the Australian works in the festival, *The Geography of Haunted Places* and *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. The third work, William Yang's *The North*, opens next week. Also in this issue, Enrique Vargas' *Oraculos*, Journey to the East, Gesher Theatre's *K'far*, Hal Foster and others in Daily Dialogues, and reflections on the LIFT experience. RealTime writers enter the labyrinths of *Oraculos*, London and language, initiating an exchange about bodies in performance, bodies British and Australian, and the body of the audience.

LIFT 97 Launch, Australia House, Monday, June 2; *The Geography of Haunted Places*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Royal Court Theatre, June 5; *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts, Battersea Arts Centre, June 6

I'm standing with Carlo from Peckham but over his shoulder I see Bob Geldof at the strictly (invitation only) ballroom launch of LIFT 97. Australia House. The Strand. Baroque splendour, chandeliers, famous faces and summer wine. The (social) spectacle begins. "Sorry, Carlo, but that's Bob Geldof. I know it's a live event, but I can't keep my eyes off the box." I struggle to get real, to turn my attention back to the man in front of me. I don't know it yet, but the first of LIFT's Daily Dialogues—the next day at the Royal Court Theatre (which is not really where it is but in another place during renovation work on its building)—will tussle with Hal Foster's slippery take on the really real in his book which everybody seems to have read, *The Return of the Real*. My problem is the re-turn of the reel of Bob Geldof. But Carlo's not looking at me, he's looking over my shoulder at Bobby Baker being Bobby Baker with body fluids. I look again for a glimpse of that beautiful girl from Canada. Later, a live Salsa band (I recognise the electric violinist from a Cuban jam at Ronnie Scott's) and dancing. A bunch of kids off the bus warm up the dancing and show us the moves. How, I wonder, does LIFT's public celebration of London get launched in a private splash? Everybody knows you can't buy youth, the future belongs to them and London is buzzing with it. Sir Bob's your uncle, but the kids take over. Hackney carriages depart at 10 pm. Prompt. New Labour's new dispensation glitters in the West End. Australian labels; they could be Chilean, South African. We drink everything now (almost). The world has changed. By the close it's a Salsa bash by Bush House, whispering to the World Service: London kids do Cuban Salsa in a little bit of Oz...

There are two plays in town from Australia, which have me humming along with that jolly pioneer in the bush of ghosts who sat and who watched and who waited till his billy boiled over into ectoplasm.

Walking back home in that thunderstorm on Friday night from *The 7 Stages of Grieving* at Battersea, with crowds of people running for shelter and buses, it made me think of, and walk in the rain with, my dead. Somehow I always also deeply grieved the rejection, criminalisation, hangings and death-bed scene of Falstaff and his gang in Shakespeare's history plays. A human dimension to history in the march-past of armies on the fields of France. History not so much as the diary of a madman, but as an account of our (my) losses measured in the mentioning of our dead.

A play that conjures casts of thousands and makes each one count, though dead, is pretty good by my reckoning. In *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, one girl's sense of her dead as the en-actors not only of history but the spirit of the land, culture, language itself and the human bonds which keep that cosmology in orbit is graphically illustrated—and broken. In a silent protest at the killing of a black Australian, thousands march at her side, silent, witnessing and grieving the cheap life and early death. The dead are non-speaking parts; they don't have to speak. You hear them in the shuffling of the pairs of shoes out of the gas chambers and genocides of history into a night of rain. "We're not angry," their spokeswoman points out, "we're grieving."

Everyone knows it's important to bury your dead. *The Geography of Haunted Places*, too, is an Australian ghost story—the see-through fingers and the silver walk of a waltzing Matilda replaced by Miss Discovery, lounge-lizard, sex-goddess, frontiers-woman, lost domesticity, ghost.

Lilian Gish once played a classic Western frontiers-woman in the old black-and-white film, *The Wind*, scrubbing dishes clean in sand. Apart from pre-menstrual tension, wind in the film embodied ghost spirits of the wilderness, super-imposed on the sky as wild, white horses. So, too, *The Geography of Haunted Places* seizes on the totemic power of the Outback. Gone is Eugene Terreblanche's demagogic trademark white horse in his bid to lord it over a white South Africa, and gone Lilian Gish's more ambiguous yearning. Rather, Miss Discovery is herself exhibited camped by the billabong of a divan alongside stuffed marsupials. These totems are definitely, like the Norwegian Blue Parrot, dead. They are a taxonomy of ghosts, their spirit so thoroughly

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



RealTime of LIFT has been assisted by the Australia Council, the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body as part of its involvement in newIMAGES

extinguished by first contact (no stuffed Dodos being available) that the point is they *should not* awake to join the actress on stage.

First contact: the trophies and tropes of exploration, colonial encounter and psychic conflict proliferate into TV Sci-Fi—with theme music from *Star Trek*. But that's escapism; the devil you don't know for the devil you demonised and killed. The actress knows it. The question is not, is she naked or is she nude, beside those slide projections of European Orientalist old paintings of nudes (white bodies in contrast with black bodies) but, is she guilty?

Well, why not confront misogyny as a projection of our own guilty pollution? But what the white actress as Miss Discovery—"optimist, racist, Australian"—confronts is her black counterpart in *The 7 Stages of Grieving*. Both are naked. It's a beauty contest. Catch it. No-one's asking you to judge; there's no golden apple. Australians are looking at themselves. You're the mirror.

Gabriel Gbadamosi

The Geography of Haunted Places, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Royal Court Upstairs, June 3

The travelling body takes days to fall to earth. It's like water, then like lead. It aches and sticks, moves on air, clings to the ground. It runs hot and cold, loses itself. With a suitcase full of separates, I try to co-ordinate myself on this new map, in a new image. To complicate, 'though I checked in at the hotel yesterday, today they appear to have no record of my arrival.

Disappeared and fighting feelings of displacement, here in the faded splendour of the West End, I remember the first time I saw *The Geography of Haunted Places* at The Performance Space (TPS) in Sydney. Akin in philosophy to London's ICA, TPS contains a space which used to be a trade union dance hall. All sorts of contemporary work takes place there—performance (physical, non-text and text-based), dance, multi-artform. The rectangular hall has a small proscenium at one end which most companies cover up. The audience seating is flexible, sometimes dispensed with altogether. In one production, the audience arrived to find their seats surrounded by barbed wire and occupied by the performers.

In that *Geography...*, the audience sat at one end of the space. The performer appeared at the other, initially obscured by a blazing light shining into the audience's eyes. Between performer and audience on little islands of light reflecting in the shiny floor, floated the draped, stuffed marsupials. Beneath the wig and the cheong-sam I recognised Erin Hefferon, not as an actor in character but as someone performing a series of personae. I relished the contrast between the rough edges of her performance and the smooth theatricality of her surroundings. In the milieu of The Performance Space and The Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, where this production began, it's accepted that the skills deployed in acting and performance are different. In the same way we deal with rabbit plagues, when outbreaks of acting are reported we generally try to institute containment programs as quickly as possible.

Here in the Royal Court Upstairs, the audience is steeply raked, looking down at the stage. Erin looks like just another marsupial caught in the light. The program notes go for content, giving no hint of the anthropology of this performance. I suddenly remember the huge photograph of Larry down in the bar and begin to hallucinate—Dame Judy Dench runs from the audience and drags Erin Hefferon screaming from the theatre. Uncomfortably hot in all this velvet. I'm starting to think that maybe, like bodies, there are works that don't travel well. "So nice to find a sympathetic audience", says Miss Discovery and the words disappear into the curly recesses of the proscenium. Like me, she has gone missing. Only when she strides naked into the auditorium and plants her Union Jack amid the audience do I feel anything like the resonances of the earlier work.

In Australia, *The Geography of Haunted Places* was fairly universally welcomed as a timely work that spoke with seriousness and irony about the Australian psyche. Interestingly, it was one of an increasing number of works from the performance milieu treated seriously by mainstream theatre critics. Here, *The Independent* consigned it to "Fringe", Adrian Turpin admitting that he "couldn't give a monkey's" for its "attempts to tell a few home truths about colonialism and white-bread Ozzie culture". More praising of the work, Lyn Gardner in *The Guardian* thought that this was a work which had obvious meanings in Australia but performing it in Britain was "like bringing the war back home", speaking in the final lines of her review, however, of "being left with images of a map of the dead and of ghosts not yet acknowledged or reconciled".

Days after witnessing *Geography...*, my body finally came to ground inside the Slug and Lettuce. Body clock adjusted to this city teeming with immigrants, scouring the papers for news of the traumatised place I've travelled from, I can't help thinking that Erin Hefferon's confused and beastly personification of the optimistic, racist Australian might be just the shot for an audience of British optimists on a balmy summer night in the West End. Australians are happy to take responsibility for the consequences of their own actions and, these days, Australian artists don't feel the same pressing need to seek legitimacy outside their own country. But in re-staging this work, LIFT 97 has given Britons a chance to share images of Australia that they might easily disown at this distance. Here for a brief visit is your wayward daughter, ours too, wanting you to see what the racist impulses of our white forbears have fathered.

Virginia Baxter

K'far (The Village), by Joshua Sobol, Gesher Company, The Lyric, Hammersmith, June 3

The creative act in *K'far* results from a combination of memory and desire (are they ever far apart?). Yossi, the gravedigger, the survivor, attempts, through raising the villagers of his youth from their graves, to recapture fleetingly a time of peace before the watershed in modern Jewish history: when the oasis of calm midst the orange groves of Palestine was shattered forever by the impending arrival of Rommel's troops, by the news of the Holocaust filtering through, and by the severing, through territorial struggle, of the seemingly harmonious relations between Jew and Arab. The journey back is deliberately ambulatory, non-dramatic, with the open feel of an epic but interlaced with the miraculously insignificant details of daily living that memory treasures ("...living their most beautiful moments when almost nothing was taking place", Sobol).

Overviewing the whole proceedings from his position on the backdrop, the huge figure of a young child looks out at us with the faintest of smiles as he floats Chagall-like over a landscape of fields and donkeys.

—Yossi, the eternally youthful protagonist of the play is able to exist in a constantly optimistic present through the increasingly tense times the play hints at because he too floats, as the world turns around his village, never quite touching base, in the blissfully uncommitted but politically unreal state of the simple fool.

Beneath, lie the sands of Palestine and its dry grass, clustered like pubic hair or a head full of cobwebs.

—This is the terrain of the illicit, the female (in a late scene a search through the foliage turns up items like a suspender belt and a fish) and the animal. Yossi is split psychically between his two animal soulmates: the goat, playful and without care, and the turkey, full of angst, cynicism and eroticism. The potential, personal and social, of that double drive is never quite realised in the play.

Cutting its inexorable pattern across the ground, a revolving platform traces the perimeter of a circle, within which sprouts a jungle of dry grass. This circle on the move burns into the retina—a metaphor of the action of the play.

—In this young village of disparate refugees, the circle is the image of the communalising force, the acceptance of all as equal, the round table, the meeting round the campfire, the corroboree.

—The fact that it is moving sets up an underlying tension to this socialist dream. At this level, the circle is the passage of time and to that irresistible force even the optimism of Yossi has no answer. When it is moving, characters must walk against its direction to remain in the one spot, if they pause for a second to think or converse, they are swept off and out. It stops occasionally to allow an encounter to be revisited, but the image that remains with me is that of people walking resolutely but ineffectively against the circular flow, as if trying like the play to hold out against the disappearance of the past. In the light of what has become of that Palestinian/Israeli village, the passage of time that the stage depicts can only be seen as a tragic force. This is not perhaps how Sobol would want it read, but the moving circle provides a conflictual resistance that is necessary if his return trip to lost innocence is not to succumb to the temptations of quaint nostalgia that threaten to overcome it.

Notes on translation: 1. Memory is circular, rebounding to the rememberer, and spiralling out beyond the proscenium into the laughter and silence of the largely older generation Jewish audience. A communal memorising was taking place. 2. How does an Aussie reviewer plug into that

Russian/Hebrew Communal Memory—sitting in the Lyric Hammersmith with the dispassionate voice of the show's single translator hooked into my right ear? 3. Well, the linguistic distance itself had its own strange power—as in the scene of the news of the Holocaust. This was in fact a scene of translation: a young woman arrives from Europe into the as yet ignorant, innocent village filled with the grievous news of the death of her husband and all his relatives in the death camps. She cannot speak Hebrew and her tale is translated to the villagers, as she tells it, by the dead man's sister. This places us at one remove from the horror—allows it to creep in a side door instead of beating at the portal. Add to this the fact that the earphone translation began translating only the Hebrew sister and then, as she was overcome by grief, switched to translating straight from the Russian refugee. This was, in its combination of visual simplicity, narrative indirectness and communicative complexity, shockingly real—the gaps of translation defamiliarising a tale heard many times, providing space for my own imagination to fill.

Richard Murphet

Oráculos, directed and written by Enrique Vargas, Taller De Investigación De La Imagen Teatral, The Former Coach Station, N 1, June 4

1. I had an appointment, and as I waited an older European man came to the ticket-desk to say the pile of abandoned shoes near the exit had disturbed him, reminded him of the concentration camps, I think he said. I'd been nervous for days, not being a fan of labyrinths, being always scared of losing my way. Like, I'm in 'London' and I continually take readings off buildings, which I usually forget, for example on which corner was BANK exactly, and off which road is NEAL STREET: "You can't miss it". Well, I can. And I must mention how exciting (see para. 8) London feels this time round. Is it the weather, or has coffee finally been recognized as a serious art form, and wine as water, and wandering as sex (in *The 7 Stages Of Grieving* the narrator says: "To wonder is to walk").

2. I knew that *Oráculos* had dark passages, I didn't know just how many. Then I was asked to move to the chair by the door. Soon a door slowly opened and I was beckoned. But before I could enter I had to have 'it'. What, I asked; a question, she said (see para.10). And so it started, the journey. I had to leave my shoes and socks with her, I agreed, but I really hated the little doll with pink high-heels.

3. There is no doubt: I did allow myself to take the journey, to make the journey, reluctantly at first. I mean, I think, that I made-up this 'trip'. I seriously had a question. And this because of a 'real' commitment to the idea of 'question', and to what might eventuate through commitment. But I was aware too of being inside a production, inside something called Theatre. Now, this is a question in itself, as for me 'the question' (as research, as philosophy, blah blah blah) is a clearly marked personal, political, and intellectual encounter and endeavour, a means of moving matter (see para. 6). So, what to do, play a game or be game to play (see para. 10).

4. Then, to my horror more than my delight, momentarily, all was revealed, or, the need for a question was clarified. At the core of the work is the Tarot, an oracle. Knowing the Tarot as a form of 'knowledge' I was again placed inside a question other than my own. Why use the Tarot? Because, for instance, a long time ago a friend, a visual artist, used a Tarot card for a photographic work, and all hell broke loose. OK OK, coincidence, but when I came to write about this work I was warned, threatened, by one of the recipients of that 'hell'. Still, what kindness, what genuine intent, would be aligned with this oracular event? And attitude makes a difference, matters (see paras. 3 & 6).

5. The point is that one is the solitary 'aliveness' toward which performance is made, and each 'aliveness' is a different creature and community. And so it is an almost equal relationship, if one performs too, not as performer so much as self. And all the time one keeps in mind 'the question', if, that is, one decides to take up the offer ("do you have it", see para. 2).

6. Occasionally terrifying thoughts flooded in: would my hands be cut off now, while they were in the dough? Or, are they laughing at me? I mean, where does their, the company's, attention lie? It matters (see para. 3).

7. The intellect is a sensory, sensuous, emotional aspect of 'me'. The intellect does not need to take second place, or need to be "forced to take second place", it is pleasure. The intellect touches, smells, tastes, speaks, watches, and hears. And responds, and resists. I will not leave my intellect with my shoes and socks, and slip it on later (see para. 3). There is no separation, no opposition. Instead there is 'yes' and 'and' (see para. 9).

8. (I could sit here forever with wine, cigarettes, music, cricket, books, and think. And a telephone would be good, and my friends.)

9. I recall: my hand resting, to be lead, on warm soft skin the shape of which almost repulsed me, yet didn't, being a bit too 'human'; and laying on the cart-like vehicle and feeling I might land on my head; and, overall, the mild yet undeniable sense of being in the hands (literally) of others; and guessing the only way out would be with the help of those others (see para. 4).

10. So, my dilemma (a few hours on from: "I could sit ..." (see para. 8)), while at the Spanish cafe, listening to loud techno-dance music, with the rain shining on the road: the Tarot, the idea of oracles, is potent once more within the 60/70s revival, as it was/is a romance in the West, along with Buddhism, Yoga, Tibet, etc; and any misgivings I have are already suspect because of an appropriation that is older than I've indicated. And, to enter this work honestly one decides on playing or not playing. And not playing means something peculiar, in my estimate, due to the nature of 'question'. And playing means the same. So, to play or not to play, that is the (real) question. Because, you can't decide to play, or wish you had begun, half way through, or, you can, of course, but then 'the question' will be conditioned by the circumstances. Anyway, I'm not sure if it matters (see para. 6), given this is Theatre (see para. 3).

11. And yet, and yet, although *Oráculos* is billed as a sensory experience it does 'play' with the brutal and risky business of 'question' (like the "do you like" segment of *Reflections Of The Moon On Er-Quan in Journey to the East* (1); this is potent and poignant, why?), and question is central to intellectual, psychological, artistic practices, none of which are exclusive (see para. 7).

12. And the strangest thing of all is that everyone ends up at the same place (life/death), having 'taken' their own 'journey'. It is as if one has arrived at one's own 'spot' (see Castenada). Should I even think about this, or is this disturbance the actual issue, this slow delay about warm inner glows and delusions. We want (see para. 7) so much. And this goes back to the Hal Foster talk that left one 'wanting'. Why? And why do we detect uneasiness when another withholds, why are we even watching? And what does to-watch mean, in the infinitive, in the learning of language: I watch, you watch, she/he watches, we watch, they watch (see para. 7). And with *Oráculos*, as with other Theatre, one watches all the way.

Linda Marie Walker

Daily Dialogue, June 4; *The Geography of Haunted Places*, Royal Court Upstairs, June 3; *Journey to the East*, ICA, June 4

"Your English is very good. Where did you learn it?" says the Englishwoman to London-educated, Anglo-Indian Harie in the movie *Jewel in the Crown*. It's the Sunday night two days before LIFT: in the fuzziness of jetlag we succumb to the ease of watching TV and an amorphous (or is that amphibious) sleep before heading off, recovered, into vibrant London Town. The film is strangely apt— dialogues between cultures, displaced peoples, desires for connection between those of different skins demanding much more than naive trust or lust or covetousness to make it happen. LIFT's programme is full of work from varied cultures challenging the snippets one knows from newspapers, history classes ([dates of upheavals, crises, genocides]) and the musings one makes, sharing cafeteria benches and crowded trains with people of different clothing, tongues, and eyes...

("I know what you feel like," she says. "You can't know what it feels like, it's not the same," barks back Harie.)

In what ways are we alike and in what ways do we begin to be different?

Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish, a vapour sometime, like a bear or a lion...

These are black vespers' pageants, which at a thought do wrack, dislimn in air, as water does in water.

Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act IV sc ii

In the first Daily Dialogue, Hal Foster is perturbed by an audience member's demand to consider multiple (perhaps untheorizable) realities, as if that were going too far, not wanting to get into the "burden" of these things. We are here to examine the Return of the Real. It's a curious topic: most of us have just arrived.

(Foster's hand curiously scrubs at his other arm, enigmatically saying how hard it is to "get through".)

His insistence on linking art to trauma almost gags other passions, senses speaking softer doubts, mistakes, motilities.

(Oh, remember how one lips a raspberry, puzzles at a colour, the velvet of a petal can move a tune...)

The Dialogue, avoiding play, becomes a dilution both of the rigour of theoretical analysis and of theatrical *puissance*. The focus on those pinning words (The Return, The Real, The Book, My Book, The Performative) becomes a shield, borders safeguarded or subjected to mockery from multiple Other Sides. There are many reactive statements ("but theatre is about feeling") and oppositional positions ("I used to be in theatre, wasn't good enough, became a critic"), words becoming a spiky carpet too fierce to picnic on. At this stage of the festival, the problem may lie in trying to locate ourselves even before we have had a chance to smell the soil.

We act it out daily: the need to define borders, claim territories, be entertained.

Star Trek dreams of reconcilable differences and speaking common tongues...

I find Edward Lam's *Reflection of the Moon on Er-Quan* (in *Journey To The East*) entertaining and theatrically effective, a dialogue between friends in two languages, only one of which I understand. I like the exclusions: the half-a-piece untranslated, enjoyed by Chinese-speakers in the audience; there is a meticulous play of English words infused amongst the Mandarin, slippages with different counterpoints.

I discover later that the Chinese text itself slips from Mandarin to Cantonese; the laughter is less about poignant homesick realisations than about this game. I hear a Hong Kong expatriate furious at the shallow treatment of displacement and loss, the glib focus on linguistic games.... And I thought I got it....

"This country is mine, by right of vision..." (The opera *Voss*, libretto by David Malouf after Patrick White's novel about a German explorer who loses himself in outback Australia.)

There is an optical illusion, a child's picture-book game you may remember of a grid of black dots on a white ground. I think it's called the *musca volans* effect, or flying fly. Whichever dot is focussed on disappears, as if what we lay claim to as ours by right of vision cannot be ours. (We cannot get the whole picture no matter how hard we try...)

Antony's speech is a reminder that under any circumstances, the idea of seeing the same thing, of the thing being A Thing is illusion. *The Rack Dislimns...* One man's Real is another man's denial. The forum tried to "flatten" this (did I hear this word, or merely sense it in the room?). "Theatre in the round" is not just a moment in architectural history, it is a physical model of what we receive—a sensing in the round, language in the round...influx and input at the anus, shoulder blades, behind the ears...

Jerzy Grotowski trained his actors to extinguish a candle flame with the backs of their heads...witchcraft, or *what is?*

Significantly, Alan Read opened the forum by indicating he invented the forum topics in a moment of viral dilemma, a diseased hallucination. Delirium is not just an hallucination but a place without edges on the way to re-recovery, restitution, replenishment, growth...a place of doubt and change.

(In fact this is an historical-biological necessity, the nerve endings covering our retina, each shadowing what we see and demanding a continuous scanning of the field to compose any image at all...)

The focus on those pinning words was neglectful of/slipping away from occasional suggestions (by practitioners) of childlike, mistaking, hovering, uncertainty—terms, in time, nominally acknowledged but not accommodated within the experience of the discussion as "too hard". Whose is the burden?

Yet what an alien am I to myself? When I perform, parts of my input are marginal to myself, threatening, unaligned to what I know; and yet ignoring any of that information creates a dead zone. This is the exact zone that creates performance and renders it effective, dangerous...and necessary.

Perhaps that's why we cling to words, hoping for certainties....

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

The 7 Stages of Grieving , Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts, Battersea Arts Centre, June 5

The ground is shifting. Lived and worked in London for four years, but what used to be familiar is suddenly now...well...I'm not so sure now...

Being involved with LIFT via *RealTime* I find my perceptions are changing, not simply in an intellectual theoretical way, but now I find myself feeling like a tourist mapping my way all round London through the labyrinth of productions, events, cultures, daily dialogues and world theatre professionals.

Establishments that were once familiar and constant, now take on different hues. Nothing is the same. All the people around me have changed. I go to the ICA to see *Journey to the East* and there are more people of Asian origin than I have ever seen at a theatre.

At the Battersea Arts Centre for *The 7 Stages of Grieving* in the audience I see Indigenous Australian people currently in England to retrieve the sacred remains of ancestors and take them back to their rightful resting place. The crossroads of people and cultures are happening now in the theatre world of London, not just among professionals. LIFT is in town.

It all began on Monday night when I walked from Holborn to Aldwych and into the Exhibition Room at Australia House. Alcohol was consumed; the first of the disorientation set in. Here I was in London in this pillared, chandeliered, marbled ballroom—or sometimes just outside, discussing with fellow smokers on the steps whether one could seek diplomatic immunity on this doorstep or whether the door was the vital boundary. Inside, hundreds of people from everywhere were 'doing' the Salsa to a live South American band. Am I lost?

Battersea Arts Centre. Ice melting, dripping onto a mound of red earth, sand. A woman in a white slip stands weeping, grieving. Words projected onto the screen behind her: "Pain", "Grief", "Sorrow", "Guilt", "Lonely", "I feel...nothing".

As the woman weeps, I'm reminded of the laughing clown and how when he starts, everyone joins in because his laughter is infectious. Suddenly I feel like crying. This takes me by surprise. Crying on stage often creates a difficult moment, but here I sense a genuine mourning that touches me.

The next hour demonstrates and explains this grief through humour, tales, movement, songs and images. We are told of a history of people invaded, colonised and destroyed for the last two hundred years. A history of people denied language, culture and heritage and trying to regain their voice and relevance to today.

We are led through a suitcase of stories and images of an Aboriginal woman. Her grandmother has just died and the family have come together to eat, sing, to live together for a month to grieve together. As her grandmother points out "the only black thing at a funeral should be the colour of your skin". Aunt Grace from England, who left fifty years ago, turns up. She does not stay in the family home and no one sees her cry. She is isolated from and shunned by the rest because, as far as they are concerned, she left. But she does cry when, on her way to the airport, she stops at the grave. She empties her suitcase, fills it with earth and carries it back home.

We are told story after story. Stories of this woman, her brother, her friends. Through her personal history we learn a cultural and political history of a people. We laugh. We're surprised. We're moved. Through their past, the Aborigines carry a sense of shame. The shame of their people, a shame which has caused them to grieve and to need to mourn. As the stories are told and she brushes against the charcoal powder covering the floor, her body becomes blacker. She laughs, she entertains. She demonstrates with sand what happens when children are taken from their language, culture and parents.

Though *The 7 Stages of Grieving* is dealing with a specific culture, location and identity, the feelings, ideas and pain are surprisingly familiar. The similarities in England for all immigrant communities, for Black people...the desperation for a self-defined identity, the need for a voice. The piece strikes a chord. Even through its humour, similarities are felt. Jokes about food, accents, dialects, common physical features are universal for all immigrant/ethnic/minority communities. I learnt Aborigines have rice with everything. For Indians it's chilli on everything and for Caribbeans it's rice 'n' peas.

Where the similarities end is that the Aborigines have been systematically oppressed and destroyed in their own land which has been taken from them. The jibe, "Go back where you came from" does not apply to Indigenous Australians. They are where they belong. Deborah Mailman says, "I am so full and know my capacity for grief, what can I do but ... perform". And then, "Everything has its time". We are left with image after photographic image of looking up to the blue sky through the trees.

Indhu Rubasingham

I cry at the movies, I cry when someone wins a gold medal, I cry when a batsman makes his first century or is out for a duck, but I never cry in the theatre. It's just beyond me to take the characters 'pain' or 'joy' as anything but acting. So, to feel the tears come and stay while watching *The 7 Stages of Grieving* was shocking, for me. And it was, this awkward crying, because I could keep no distance, as an Australian. Not even to watch the fiction of, the dramatization of, a trauma so immense that a whole nation must listen and grieve at the same time. It's that trauma, for sure, that touches me, and there's no way around that, it is part of Australian history and an overwhelming part of our present. And here again Hal Foster (and, I won't mention him again) could have been an energizing as well as an analytical presence (and, sure it's just a voice, briefly appearing, but it's weird how sometimes one voice can trigger associations and open out conversation and therefore writing), as at the ICA he talked about 'trauma', about people as being(s) 'traumatized', and about how this has come to be the issue, the framing narrative, perhaps, of this century, in many cultures. To have had a critical facet to this difficult and (and, I can't believe this: John Farnham singing 'Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head' on the radio) ongoing icy/hot (like the block of ice slowly melting in *7 Stages*, turning the ground, the whole continent, as a graveyard, to mud) topic could have been challenging. So, it's that, the trauma, that touches me, and it's the performance itself. The fine presentation by Deborah Mailman, who wrote the script together with the director, Wesley Enoch. It wasn't primarily a learning experience for me, although the work has a sharp didactic edge, especially about the power of story-telling and the strength of community. The stories told and the meanings of communities are dark and explosive wounds in Australia at this moment. They are changing the consciousness and the culture of a country, and are the everyday of our Indigenous people. It's important to work with this material for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and it's even more important to find ways and means, in creative practices, to do this.

The politics are known in Australia, even if they are denied, resisted, or opposed, and are known more day by day. There is no way back now, there can be no 1950s (do you know what was still happening in the 50s, the decade into which I was born) again, as our PM has urged there be, and it's this unravelling that, thankfully, will refuse such nonsense. And it's a bleak history which of course began here, in England, with colonization.

Enoch and Mailman have found one way, in one form, to show sorrow and struggle. And the layered and shifting landscapes of these within the personal is fundamental to the work's effect, its success as art, as it doesn't seduce, cajole, or lecture: it performs, and it uses the difficult mode of monologue (as does *The Geography Of Haunted Places*) to tell a terrible tale. And this tale is one which Australia as land and England as land has to bear. The blood of unavenged death will keep rising to the surface until it is loved.

Linda Marie Walker

I arrive at this performance with fear and trepidation at having to write about a work by fellow black artists and knowing the larger burden of representation placed on coloured or black artists globally. It's a double bind: one's own community demands an accessible and authentic representation of a particular culture; the mixed audiences for the works expect form and structure associated with contemporary art practice delivered with the authenticity of black artists rooted in cultural specificity. The struggle to meet such competing demands is a problem for diasporic communities and can lead to major difficulties in new work.

The 7 Stages of Grieving manages to work on both levels and with a passion that is sometimes frightening. It is beautifully staged. Its compelling storytelling is not conveyed as the narrative of one protagonist but as the narration of the Indigenous people of a continent. Kooemba Jdarra's aesthetic is a hybrid of Indigenous oral and physical storytelling traditions mixed with the multi-layered textuality of current Western theatre practice. There are many stories entwined in its collage of visual, vocal and movement imagery.

On stage a large, suspended block of ice melts onto a mound the size and shape of a grave filled with red earth. The ice has a visible internal metallic structure, a foreboding of something terrible that may be released—a time bomb. When will it happen? What horror will be unleashed? Will the force be nature, capitalism or colonialism or the junctures in history where all that is solid melts into air, and leads to a path of wholesale destruction or decimation of land and communities?

Deborah Mailman's performance is captivating: she draws you in and doesn't let go until she leaves the stage. The stories she tells are revelations that are deliberately manipulative, provoking, compassionate, forceful and funny. The performance provokes a collective grieving: it explains the grieving stages of Australian Aborigines and at the same time, allows the audience to personally experience that process of pain, loss and sorrow, not as some kind of denial of history and oppression or even suppression, but as catharsis. It allows us to engage with history and the experience of a people and to believe that there is a recuperative dimension which enables reconciliation.

Zahid Dar

She is monumental, statuesque: a woman on a plinth, multiplied by shadows. She is beautifully present in the curve of the horizon that bends behind her with words and memories, slides of departed ancestors, and with colours stretching purple, red, ochre behind her like the length of time it takes to cross a desert.

She packs her memories in a suitcase pulled from under sand. Whose baggage is this? Not just the renegade Aunt's, who left for England and refused to return until Death (a grandmother's) tore her enough to come home. Not just Mailman's, as she shores sand against her ruins. It is also the suitcase of the traveller, the tourist, the exile. [The customs officer, concerned with knives and coins, lets travellers through with secrets he can't imagine.] She turfs out remnants of a sepia past and replaces it with soil.

She is monumental, statuesque. Yet she is crying. Wailing, shattered with tears. The audacity of having an actor cry, and cry, and cry on stage, a space where we are meant to be entertained (or provoked, or harangued, or mirrored). This crying is harrowing, because it is something about

which we can do nothing, just watch, giving it its time ("everything has its time"), allowing someone the dignity of her grieving ("we were only grieving", she continually asserts, recounting stories of the earliest Brisbane marches against black deaths-in-custody, which most of us only know via headlines).

Such a turn-around of words—"custody", a kind of caretaking-gone-wrong, with the intentions of the custodians corrupted by misunderstanding and fear. Customs, custodians, custody...custards, no doubt, in place of wild yams and leaves.

A Roman alphabet is loudly inscribed on her young-singing body, confusing her native words and changing her tune. She comes under suspicion for her difference, her blackness a liability for getting into shops, cars, costumes...the beauty we see dance and sing and tell on stage subjected to corrosion and ridicule.

Her white dress is blackened as she progressively rolls along the charcoaled floor—at times a proud dirtying, at others an ambivalent qualifying of her appearance. How do we wear our skins?

Her brother's shame following his first arrest for a slight misdemeanour is palpably enacted, the threat of his further decline is real.

A word is dismantled and packed into a suitcase—"reconciliation" only a promise that is yet difficult to feel. Aesthetically, this image is beautiful, whimsical, poignant (forgiving); technically sharp; with its closing lid, the suitcase (unforgetting).

The block of ice has frozen the ropes which hung her brothers—the melting is slow, muddy, needing its time. The production manager tells us that each night the block must be smashed apart to allow the next to be put in place. The expediency of putting on a show, keeping the surface ready to perform (though we leave the theatre knowing the melting will take longer).

King Lear, dying, divides his lands, cranky with his children. Unevenly, he slices map with sword. In sand, Mailman shows us a culture of stolen children, divided from its land. The compass is ruined, this is no longer the known world: and yet, this show about loss ends with hope, the final fish-eye slides of the world in a forest, the forest in a globe.

Long, loud, silent and proud, grieving is a necessary mirror on the way to a new world.

Zsuzsanna Soboslay

Hal Foster, Daily Dialogue, June 4, Royal Court Theatre Upstairs; The Opening Party, Australia House, June 2

Wednesday: I begin where I ended tonight, at the ICA listening to Hal Foster, who had just one hour earlier spoken at the first of LIFT's Daily Dialogues, a series of discussions running throughout the month at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs. Now, at the ICA Foster was what I wanted, and this is always dangerous: intense, difficult, complex, contrary, and provocative. At the Royal Court I had received – and I acknowledge the strange expectations that comes with the gift of speech, the pleasure of listening, while understanding that the speaker or performer is under pressure to deliver, to surrender even, to 'give', and knowing at the same time too that this is a choice, that one knows one is 'the speaker/performer', it's a deliberate act, there is no suspension of belief, this is 'real', and I am there (not even returned, having not left, this day anyway), for this exchange, of which I know nothing, moment to moment—a rather, or so I imagined, thin (starved and starving) account of his, and him, thinking. So, at this moment, in the Spanish restaurant (Cafe Olé) eating tapas, drinking wine, having a cigarette, I'm a bit out of sorts, certainly puzzled. It doesn't matter too much (rhetorically, let's say) in the practice of critical thinking what is being thought through, engaged, challenged, examined (hopefully not interrogated) because any matter is usually related to many other matters, and so a layering comes about, which is the point of bringing to a particular arena dialogue from elsewhere (the intention of a festival like LIFT I am sure), but it does matter that we get a fully-expressed version, even if fleeting. It's a tall order, but there is beauty and risk in that, and generosity. It was especially frustrating that in the era of inter-disciplinary desires the tasks and agendas of one discipline aren't/weren't shared with another. That is, 'expertise' is/was not truly revealed. While, at the same time, it was being advocated (by Foster). Sure, this is a bit naive on my part, and that is why I went on to the ICA, and I'm pleased I did. An audience does affect an event, and the audience at the Royal Court helped ground Foster. And to discuss afterwards the 'this-and-that', the actual voice and view of the performer, it is best to have had the richness of the intricate intellect of, in this case, the theorist, in the 'performing' of his discipline. Theatre, LIFT, missed a wonderful opportunity, given the works included in this festival (the proposed traumatised nature of them, e.g. *Journey To The East*, *The 7 Stages Of Grieving*, and perhaps even the 'waiting' aspect of *Oráculos*). Hal Foster had much to offer debate around the conceptual framework of LIFT, perhaps no-one told him. Particularly in terms of the reading of work. And perhaps if he had read from his book, as he did at the ICA, the Royal Court audience would have gradually left, but at least that would have prevented talk of 'realities', and sensory experience as more 'real'.

OK, to the opening party at Australia House, to which we all went (as and in 'Real Time') slightly dressed-up and looked, mouths slightly open, as we are polite, at the columns and the chandeliers, which were not slight. And soon, amongst the crowd, being served Australian wine, we saw replicas of Hills Hoists on the stage; and on the floor, half dead floral arrangements of gum tree branches and waratahs. There were a couple of trays of chicken nuggets. We heard there were kangaroo meat 'somethings' somewhere, which we didn't spot. Food was scarce. Why, Australia's a big country? Then the speeches. Then Bobby Baker performed, making a huge cream pool on the shiny floor, and everyone at the back talked on, including Bob Geldof and Richard Neville. So most of us round-about the middle were stranded, looking at Baker, hearing the babble. Then the Salsa band and Salsa dancing, beginning with a group of young dancers who were wonderful. Sexy salsa music in Australia House, great for jet lag.

At the ICA Foster spoke a little about the use of 'I' in writing. How everyone is doing their memoirs, every twenty year old, wounded or not. And 'I' thought, my god, I am guilty (not of memoirs), then later he talked about the importance of telling stories, and of telling stories from where one is, and about his love of country music (as history I think he said, and this is so, the telling of history, the accumulation of history, through word and sound, of love, loss, and living), and at one point, having fleshed out 'expertise', and placed it alongside 'interdisciplinary', said "what the hell, that's what I think", and being the bad student I am, I thought too: "what the hell".

Linda Marie Walker

The Geography of Haunted Places, Royal Court Upstairs, Wednesday June 4

There is a slide projection, a close-up on the feet and fan of Ingres' painting, *Grande Odalisque*. There is a sense of anticipation in the air. Also visible through the screen is a form draped in white muslin. At this moment *Geography* sets up the expectation of a theatrical critique of the female nude in European painting. This captures my imagination for some time, as does the growing realisation that perhaps the piece is not so much theatrical drama as performance art. While trying not to be elitist I congratulate myself that I know I am watching performance art in a theatre: is there a metaphor here about crossing borders too? There is a difference, but rather than dwell on this, I find myself thinking about how this piece is a continuum between the two, rather than falling on one side of the divide. The cloud of confusion lifts as I settle myself into that false sense of security that comes when, having defined your form, you become the producer of meaning. But hold on, it's going to be a bumpy ride...an anti-narrative bricolage.

In a striking opening sequence, stuffed animals are unveiled from their muslin shrouds and we are unambiguously located in the Australian continent. But here the certainty ends and I am never quite clear whether the often confusing juxtaposition of spoken text and visual imagery is gesturing towards some kind of statement about the objectification of women, colonialism/imperialism, or the postmodern condition.

During one particularly odd section, the naked performer charges at the audience waving a Union Jack. Is this Liberty leading the people, the naked

body as emblem of the purity of revolutionary action (as in the Delacroix painting to which it seems to refer) or an ironic reference to the British colonial invader bringing 'progress' and 'civilisation' to the naked savages of the outback? Is it the objectified female nude of European painting, or are we seeing the celebration of power in rampant female sexuality. The actor assumes the personae of blonde bombshell, Hawaiian hula dancer and Asian sex-worker. The persona that remains is that of the blonde, the others are fleeting and under-developed.

The narration in *The Geography of Haunted Places* challenges the claims for truth of the Enlightenment project but in the end, doesn't pursue the question in any satisfactory direction. I was left wanting more serious consideration of the effects of British colonisation of Australia. In this post-colonial world, have the Indigenous people of Australia been recompensed for the genocide they suffered and the current lamentable practice of virtual apartheid?

Theatre practitioners, and here I include myself, may choose to describe this as naive drama, lacking basic performance skills. But again, this is often a deliberate strategy used by some performance artists in their efforts to be free of theatre's demand for staging spectacles. As with much performance art, here all is process and surface. You are shown subjective positions and left with a feeling of despair. What of hope? Of justice? Of possible futures? There are no answers in *The Geography of Haunted Places*. "There is no story...you seekers of meaning", declares the nude Miss Discovery, caught between the Scylla of postmodernism and the Charybdis of postcolonialism.

Zahid Dar

Journey To The East, curated by Danny Yung, organised by Zuni Icosahedron, ICA, June 3

The first show I see: *Journey To The East*, opening night, at the ICA theatre, just through the door from the bar, where New York mixers Soundlab are doing a night of "cut & paste beats, drum & bass, and dubbed out funk".

Journey is a set of eight short plays in two programs from 'The Chinese Diaspora (Beijing, Hong Kong, Taipei)', each written in response to the end of colonial rule in Hong Kong, and each using the standard Beijing Opera set of one table and two chairs, and each about a particular type of cultural violence or violation, some sort of deep interference with/to body and soul.

(The music mixing, an event, is strangely calmly hypnotically about the language of 'damage', of finding voice—to make once more, to make over, to make new—of remembering, so as to see where memory and flesh are and could be, and to touch the inside of the body, especially the heart—music as fluid and pulse, say. These searches and rhythms are all around, in all the various forms of expression, and I should have stayed longer to listen, after the show.)

The four works of this first program address issues of translation in the broadest sense. How does one tell the infinite ways in which individuals are marked by their culture. And how does one as viewer and hearer come to that, wait with that, whether in the theatre or not, and make sense of it, or perhaps not sense as much as will and willingness. How does a community tell another community what it is? We do this constantly, gradually, if we imagine the person nearest us is a community. And although we attend to their voice and gestures, it is inevitable we will be mistaken, and perhaps only hear our own voice anyway. This too is crucial, as it is in hearing another that one can hear one's own story. So, that might be what happens, a parallel telling, a sudden crossing of paths. A moment where translation is both given and received. "I am listening to you is to listen to your words as something unique, irreducible, especially to my own, as something new, as yet unknown." (Ingaray)

Play One: *Jiu Ge and Lao Qi—A 1997 Rhapsody* by Edward Yang, from Taipei, has a gunman and a 'travel agent', a euphemism for Taiwan politicians visiting Hong Kong. This, in all ways, takes the shape of known power relations, as the past is revenged. People are referred to as numbers, and there's a good chance someone will be killed, on the chair, and the briefcase is the site of exchange, also familiar. There are some good lines (surtitles above, performed in Mandarin), like: "The silencer was cool ...", and "Democracy is fun ...", and "Appear to surrender, the Americans will never get it". And then a bit of common ground is found, and over a betel nut, anger dissolves.

Play Two: *Reflection of the Moon on Er-quan* by Edward Lam, from Hong Kong, is a street-wise look at language. The table and chairs are used here for what they physically are, places to be together and places to be apart. They are objects for people. This is a funny and sharp work which directly touches me, because I can't avoid 'you' if you talk to me, nor can you avoid me if I talk to 'you'. And so the language, English, is mixed with the languages Cantonese and Mandarin, and there appears magically the surreal fact of being a being—from a given culture (safe and solitary). And this naming, 'I am ...', is deeply loved and resisted, and is the mechanism by which we see and speak to each other in banal and spatial dialogues, which are perhaps even more banal and spatial when one is within and yet outside of another's language. There is this exchange about a sunset: "It was the most incredible thing I've ever seen", "Oh, really". Now, who is saying what? Is seeing a sunset banal, or is thinking a sunset banal, banal?

Play Three: *No story about chairs and tables* by Li Liuyi, from Beijing, tries one's patience. And yet the patience with which devotion is learned must be the worst of all. And so the struggle within that, the actual time of scarring, both the time it takes and the timing of it historically, the implications for the imagination of self and self-relations, and the inevitable repetition, is crucial to glimpsing, as a stranger, the experience of another, without the usual comparison with what-I-already-know. The 'furniture' is cleaned religiously, and is never clean enough, the 'air' (the nothing that we breathe) is cleaned, and then of course each other. Nowhere to go to, no words to play with. And so it goes, on and on.

Play Four: *Piece* by Stanley Kwan, from Hong Kong, uses video footage, voice-over, shadows, slides, and the table and chairs. The movement between these mediums is sometimes fine, sometimes awkward. And, as elsewhere, in film, writing, music, dance, the very personal, the site of amazement, often makes available, simply, quietly, just what it is that wants to speak. And I must then be silent. Perhaps what happens is contrary to plan, as when a number of 'flat' surfaces come together, space itself becomes surface, and three-dimensional, and this without 'real' bodies. Real bodies, the audience, are given space, and there they might appear. Video in the theatre is always unsatisfactory in terms of presence, because other lighting interferes. However, this is part of its charm too, like Super-8, one is aware of form. And in *Piece* one is aware of all the forms at once.

What strikes me now, suddenly, is how these four pieces might 'look' as one, how extraordinary that could be, if they were staged simultaneously, sort of choreographed, mixed like the ambient music being played in the bar. And given that we are so used to these mixes, these overwhelming, and yet ordinary, simultaneous inputs, through walking streets, or sitting in cafes, the cutting together (and here I'm unsure of the words to use, but they are to do with a choral or 'chora' approach, to do with space) of the separate works might in some way make even clearer the possibilities, and difficulties, of the brief that the curator Danny Yung gave these directors.

Coda: tonight, Friday, I see Program Two, three different works plus *Piece*. A few words about *Three o'clock in the afternoon* by Lin Zhao Hua, from Beijing: this is a controlled formal dance work, it maintains a tension, both physically and verbally, from beginning to end, and is equally weighted between female and male, and between the intended metaphors of land and loss. Importantly, performance is foregrounded, as there is little room for error, and the last few moments on the table are slightly, and necessarily, anxious.

Linda Marie Walker

Editorial: New images, real bodies

How real is LIFT? How real am I? The first LIFT Daily Dialogue throws me in the deep end. I can't swim. Not today. American writer Hal Foster, sometime proponent of a liberal left politically responsible postmodernism, is attempting to retrieve the real from the highly systematised codings of

several decades of high theory. He's in search of those moments beyond coding. Foster tries a few cool laps, but there are too many people in the pool. His audience want real Reals. The Royal Court Upstairs is choppy with Reals. I'm intrigued—how can this man connect with a theatre-going audience? Is he oblivious to decades of performance that is neither theatre nor performance art? But the Real intrudes. My body demands attention—jet lag and a sudden head cold have possessed me. Get out of the pool. From the back row I stare unseeing into the pool below. But a prickling at the back of the neck tells me of another possession, a presence hovering close behind, and behind that another. I know these ghosts, highly coded bodies that inhabit me from time to time, real presences, real coded me, personae to be interrogated in the cultural exchange that LIFT epitomises.

The first spectre is male, headless (intellect in exile), lean, stoic, ironic, a good mate, egalitarian (to a point), a cruel joker (Can't ya take a joke?), gut-full, an eternal youth, vigorous in work and sport, benignly fatalistic (No worries, she'll be right). This is Jung's *puer aeternus*, an immature, wounded young male, ever the incomplete hero, yearning for independence but prone to separation anxiety. The wounding is a history of victory in defeat in the service of parent empires—Khartoum (part of the relief force), Boer War (the doomed hero Breaker Morant), Gallipoli, Vietnam War. The wounding entails a land never quite conquered, a land that is always someone else's. For me, this body is as real as my grandfather, an Anzac, hero, victim with one arm and no legs, alcoholic, popular postmaster of a small country town, president of the football club.

This is a body dismissive of intellect (generations of artists and thinkers fled here to the Old Country never to return). This is a male body that excludes the female and the Indigenous. It is an insular body, wary of foreigners, anxious about disease. This body is all body, all gut culture—beer gut, meat and two veg—always youthful, always vigorous. A substitute heroism resides in sport, in thrashing the parent (the eternal struggle for the Ashes), the body triumphant. This monolithic body is a perpetual presence, disinterred by conservative governments (education and health cuts, xenophobia), conjured up by Labor (Bob Hawke's sport-driven nationalism and neo-Ockerism) and the racist right—"We are not from Asians" (Pauline Hanson). A few years ago, in an informal survey in western Sydney, people in the street were asked to describe the typical Australian. In Australia's densest multicultural population with some 40 national and racial groups and twice as many languages, the commonest image conjured was male, fair, tanned, a typical easy-going Aussie. This is a pervasive body.

Behind me, behind this Australian spectre, hovers a more distant, but very real spirit. My Anzac grandfather was in fact an East Londoner. He ran away from a tyrannical father when he was 12, became a cabin boy and then a stockman in Australia before going to war, as an Australian. The memory of him is a reminder of the English body that persists in the Anglo-Australian body: a childhood of regularity (swallowing Laxettes and cod liver oil), saluting the Union Jack every primary school morning of the week, standing for "God Save the Queen" in the cinemas, eating stodge, performing English manners (the surplus of 'thank you's' that bewilder South East Asians in the same way we find American effusiveness insincere), espousing common sense, refusing the spiritual, cautious with the emotions, flinching at the too familiar touch, stoic in matters of health, mouthing the Queen's English. We couldn't do all of these ably, we defied and distorted them, but they were bodily present, standards by which we ourselves and the British castigated us—the body we were of but could not be. There was also the American body, fashion and the odd phrase revealed a continuing flirtation with that other colonising body. But a clutch of American words don't amount to a syntax or an accent. However, the American view of the body as mechanical, serviceable, replaceable has mixed uneasily with our stoicism. Australia has some of the world's highest rates of hysterectomy, mastectomy and is second only to the Americans in pharmaceutical over-dosing.

Since the late 60s, this monolith Australian body and the British body within, has been transformed by waves of European and Asian immigration, feminism, the gay and lesbian movement, a growing awareness of Indigenous culture. There are now many bodies, many voices, many manners. There are moments, like now, of panic, of woundedness, of a desire to regress back into the one body of an imagined past. But, by and large, we have screwed our heads on, we have had government-driven bouts of being a Clever Nation and a Creative Nation, we have declared our identities, exported more than sport to the world, we eat better (well, 30% of us do, it's still a gut culture), we ingest the landscape (emu, kangaroo, crocodile, native herbs and fruits) in a curious gesture of connection with the land and kinship with the Indigenous people whose spirituality we acknowledge and envy. We are less insular. We touch. The Leader of the Opposition weeps in Parliament after reading the report on the stolen generation of Aboriginal children.

This is a better body, a body of many bodies, male and female, it is real and it is complex, comfortable for some, not for others. Its Indigenous body is un-well and uncared for. For all of us, the question of the moment is, What space does this body of bodies inhabit? Indigenous artists and writers speak of all of us others as immigrants, from the earliest convict to the latest South East Asian arrival. For all of us immigrants, the land belongs to someone else whose ownership is put in perpetual doubt by government, miners, farmers, racists. There is also talk of Australia as an Asian nation. Uproar ensues. Where can this body of bodies put itself? The once insular boundary between Australia and the rest of the world has faded. Even the new conservative government, initially hostile to Asia, now pragmatically recognises our need to be economically part of the region. We war with Malaysia over their civil rights abuse and our racism. In Australia the Land is the focus of almost all current anxieties—land as wealth, as environment, as spiritual, as property, as spiritual property. The issues are clear, the immigrants must share the land with its Indigenous peoples. However, those promulgating the notion of property as wealth and the politics of One Nation do not want a sharing, they want one place, one body, and one word, "certainty".

I dip my toes back into the Daily Dialogue, thinking how the current wealth of Australian performance embodies in form and content the hybrid condition of Australian culture. These works are not plays, they are not merely exercises in theatre "transgressing its own limits" (Foster's description of an artistic dead end), they have much more to say and be than that. When the Dialogue chair, Alan Read, asks one of LIFT's directors, Lucy Neal, why have a festival like LIFT when London itself already offers huge cultural diversity, is he wondering how real LIFT is. Lucy doesn't get the opportunity to reply. I have already begun to suspect that LIFT offers a city in love with theatre sustained access to other ways of performing, inside and outside the theatre, that LIFT embraces other bodies with a committed cross cultural survey (unlike most international arts festivals) and offers the opportunity, by juxtaposition, to imagine the British body past and present. Cultural diversity alone within a city (or a country) is not enough for the body to step outside itself and query its constitution. The ideal LIFT will throw up unnameable othernesses, contradictions, flashes of the real. I welcome my ghosts.

LIFT starts. I am intrigued by the Gesher Theatre in *K'Far*, by the sheer casualness of the performance pitched against sudden moments of physical virtuosity (I recall in the same tradition the Maly Theatre of St Petersburg), though nothing in the play beyond the staging and this lived-in-theatre-body is mysterious or enlighteningly other. But I revel in the body of the full-house Jewish audience, the nudges, the volleys of Oi!, the muttering commentaries. A murmured song and snatches of dance-step in an improvisation by Maya Rao in an Aldgate East rehearsal room, in an emerging work about departures, places for a mere moment or two, classical Indian dance in a contemporary performance framework (something I've rarely experienced). For me, the improvisation conveys anxiety—the body in the briefest moments of dance focussed and complete, the body performing with found objects from a suitcase seems uncertain. It's only an improvisation and is generously offered, but here are two bodies, two traditions. I look forward to their meeting in Rao's LIFT offering, *Khol Do (The Return)*. At the ICA, the play of voices across Cantonese, Mandarin and English in *Reflection of the Moon on Er-Quan (Hong Kong)* in a neatly staged (the voices flood out of a loaded stillness) and thankfully uncathartic conversation, is a great pleasure, casting the audience in the creative role of curious onlooker and, best, sometime interpreter. As with *The Geography of Haunted Places*, the issue here is not of acting, characters, plot, theatre, catharsis, but the presence of bodies, states of being, modes of discourse. These have to be accommodated in new ways, every time, preconceptions banished. These are early days for LIFT, but already I know the questions I want to ask about performance, theatre, culture and the body. Already, the exchange has begun as old bodies meet new, between us and within. Next, the British body.

Keith Gallasch