RealTime + OnScreen

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the digital impact – a progress report

Cover image

Photograph by Narelle Autio, from *The Seventh Wave* an exhibition (Stills Gallery, Sydney) and book (Hot Chilli Press, Sydney 2000) by Trent Parke and Narelle Autio.

"From the walls of the gallery, water spews from lips, curls through hair. Arms open to receive it, heads push against its weight, limbs plough through, torsos tumble in it. It becomes a liquid landscape for for glorious and gawky choreographies." (from review, page 33)

Politics and vision

Our annual outsize edition surveys both issues of the academy in 4 fascinating essays on teaching dance, new media, performance and the visual arts, and the impact of new technologies on the arts in *Working the Screen 2000*, the only comprehensive survey of digital works online, in galleries, performance spaces and on CD-ROM. By all accounts *Working the Screen 1999* had a long life and was certainly one of the most visited sections of our website over the last year. We hope it proves even more valuable for the next 12 months and beyond. The intense and inventive creativity in this area is invigorating.

Throughout *RealTime 38* there's a striking recurrence of political issues. Ben Goldmsith warns that the restructuring of the AFC could result in increasing screen illiteracy. Nadine Clements looks at the narrowing options for consumers and artists as the corporatising of the web proceeds apace under the guise of the advantages of convergence. Sarah Miller questions the Australia Council-Saatchi Report's fundamental understanding of the arts in Australia and of the Council itself. Composer Colin Bright and poet Amanda Stewart discuss the challenges of art as politics prior to the release of the CD of their opera, *The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior*. Bec Dean queries the political vision of young visual artists in the *Hatched* National Graduate Show at PICA and Suzanne Spunner, focusing on The Melbourne Workers' Theatre's *Front* (about the maritime industries dispute last year) notes a series of plays in Melbourne with politics at their centre. Barbara Bolt worries at the corporatising of tertiary teaching, where the teacher's role becomes increasingly managerial and less and less pedagogical, eliminating the possibilities of creative play.

In recent time, a few notable artists have castigated the arts community for its apparent preoccupation with funding, the Ralph Report and the GST at the expense of artistic vision. A parallel phenomenon has been those commentators who have proposed the reduction of arts funding in order to stimulate artistic vision. (That these thinkers are focussing on theatre, an area with considerable problems to do with vision, and, I might add, a shortage of funding in critical areas, is not surprising.) This view suggests, one, that there's a shortage of vision and, two, that survival is not an issue. In recent years as funding has been spread thin and becomes less recurrent for many, I've watched mature artists struggle to live and keep a grip on their work.

Because vision is not much discussed in this country (an enduring cultural problem) and because the promotion of the the arts *within* Australia is weak (in a recent trip to Europe I was impressed how well Australian work is promoted overseas) it's easy to fall into the belief that there isn't much in the way of vision and not much happening in the arts (a view compounded by little media coverage including the severe limits of the ABC's *Art Show*). As Sarah Miller says of Australians and the Arts: A report to the Australia Council from Saatchi & Saatchi Australia (see page 4): "Clearly the huge amount of work undertaken by clients of the Australia Council according to its very own guidelines and priorities— which includes the support of artists from non English speaking backgrounds, the 'distinctively Australian' work undertaken by contemporary performance and arts organisations, community and art & working life organisations, Indigenous and multicultural arts organisations—are not even recognised. If the Australia Council is oblivious to the programs, activities and achievements of even the artists and client organisations it funds, then no wonder the arts have an awareness problem in this country!"

Peter Sellars has provoked mixed reactions in his urging on of Australian artists, some feeling he believes us short of political will and artistic vision without his promptings. But it is clear from Sellars' various statements that his emerging program is founded on the belief that the vision is there, that Australia has unique opportunities to right various wrongs, and that in collaborating with his team of associate artistic directors he can facilitate the furthering of that vision.

Vision, arts politics and survival are deeply entwined: they can't be unravelled by the well-heeled suggesting that will power and funding cuts will solve anything—that's not vision, that's barbarism and fits only too well the economic rationalism that threatens to defeat us so often these days.

Congratulations to two fine artists Rea and Lyndal Jones; Rea for being awarded the 2000 Biennial Indigenous Arts Fellowship Award and Lyndal Jones for being selected to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale.

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Arts Gospel according to Saatchi & Saatchi

Sarah Miller

Anyone who picks up a bottle of tomato sauce can be Jackson Pollock
Backberner, ABC TV

In all of Saatchi & Saatchi's discussion about how Australians view the arts now and how they might view them in the future, a number of big picture questions present themselves. How should we define the arts? Who should define the arts? Who can be an artist? And, most importantly, how might we reconcile the "BIG A" and the "little a" (sic) arts?

Now, I'd just like to note that this is a 'world class' document. It has vision. It has breadth. It's not afraid of change. Furthermore, it demonstrates unparalleled research skills and a knowledge and understanding not just of the arts but of Australian history, geography and contemporary social issues that is simply breathtaking. And I do believe that it is time that real people—bureaucrats, consultants, sports and business people—people on real salaries and with proper working conditions—got into the business of telling us not only what art is but what it could be and should be and how we can all—artists and arts workers alike—do our jobs so much better. That's what we pay them for after all.

As for the arts community or "The Sector", I don't know what we think we've been doing. Clueless. We mightn't be able to define art conclusively (only exclusively it seems) but goddamn, we sure know how not to be in touch. We're anti sport, elitist and we think that 'yarn telling at home' is yarn telling at home! How stupid is that? And as this report so compellingly points out, we've overlooked "the modern Australian cookbook" as a source of inspiration. When was the last time you read a modern Australian cookbook anyway? If you did, you'd know how to draw on the "distinctively Australian mix of national influences not found anywhere else in the world."

Unfortunately the "modern Australian cookbook" doesn't seem to include a chapter on bush tucker. We should, however, embrace multiculturalism whilst simultaneously drawing on the "quintessential Australian notion of people who are down to earth, accessible and without any airs and graces." Imagine that! And as for artists, what on earth gave them the idea that they should have control over the content of their work? Sanctity schmanktity! Like those ever popular Jehovah's Witnesses, artists should be knocking on doors and asking what it is that people want in their art—whether they want it or not.

Not only are we out of touch but many of us, it appears, "lack the skills, experience and training that are needed for effective marketing and communication." No-one seems to have noticed that most of us lack the budgets as well! Whilst I wouldn't dispute the fact that the level of skills and experience within the so-called 'subsidised sector' are unevenly spread, I find it difficult to support Strategic Planner Paul Costantoura's inferred conclusion that the commercial sector is serviced only by people of enormous ability, skill and experience. Working, as many people do, across both private and public spheres, it is clear that the private sector contains many people capable of gross incompetence. They're just not accountable to anyone. Their processes and outcomes are not held up to public scrutiny. When they go bust, it's between them and their bank manager.

The report also states that "people who identify themselves as part of the arts community tend to distinguish between the commercial and the subsidised sector" and no doubt that is how some people see it. In reality, such a reductive opposition is hardly tenable. One point that comes to mind is the difference between those artists and organisations that compromise the commercial aspects of their practice in favour of issues pertaining to both form and content. Working in the not-for-profit sector tends to necessitate a multi-faceted approach—which in fiscal terms typically manifests itself through a mix of earned income and varying levels of (generally inadequate) subsidy in order to carry out those activities which local, state and federal agencies have agreed are worthy of support.

Paul Costantoura's fundamental error lies in confusing perceptions of the arts for the complex reality. In so doing, he does the arts a great disservice. That politicians (government and opposition) are already citing this unwieldy mishmash of misinformation as gospel is more than disturbing.

Now I was under the impression that *Australians & the Arts* was a research project commissioned by the Australia Council in order to ascertain the value 'Australians' place on the arts. *Australians & the Arts* is, according to Dr Margaret Seares, Chair of the Australia Council, "about how Australians see the arts today and how they would like to see the arts tomorrow." It sounds so simple—even benign.

In part that's what we get and there is some interesting and potentially useful information generated through interviews and focus groups. What is infuriating, however, is where this document moves into characterising the arts. In its discussion of the arts sector it is positively insulting. The report is full of specious and often contradictory assumptions based on inaccurate premises. It's defensive in tone—anyone who might disagree is written out of the equation—and patronising and dismissive of what is, after all, a multi-faceted sector. It also assumes that the arts are in a position to solve major social, economic and political inequities in this country, whilst remaining oblivious to those many artists and organisations that continue to be actively engaged in various forms of social action.

This is arguably the most distressing thing about this research document. Whilst the emphasis was on interviewing 'ordinary' Australians as opposed to artists and arts professionals, presumably the Australia Council provided the background briefing to set the research methodology in place. As it stands, *Australians & the Arts* makes claims about the arts sector which are simply not sustainable. Clearly the huge amount of work undertaken by clients of the Australia Council according to its very own guidelines and priorities— which includes the support of artists from non English speaking backgrounds, the 'distinctively Australian' work undertaken by contemporary performance and arts organisations, community and art & working life organisations, Indigenous and multicultural arts organisations—are not even recognised. If the Australia Council is oblivious to the programs, activities and achievements of even the artists and client organisations it funds, then no wonder the arts have an awareness problem in this country!

As for the "BIG A" and the "little a" arts. Phew! There's some amazing stuff in there. The BIG arts are, as you might expect, things like the ballet and the opera and possibly architecture. The little arts are something else altogether and believe me, it ain't anything that anyone in the contemporary arts is doing. In fact, the multiplicity of contemporary art practices taking place throughout this country are completely invisible within this report. On the other hand, we learn that Australians would be much happier if anything they were doing at any given moment was understood as art. So, little arts might include children's painting and rock eisteddfods (think junior league athletics), car design, advertising and the afore-mentioned yarn telling around the kitchen table; in the latter case, only if you live in the country. Creative, sure, and on the one hand, anything is grist to the artistic mill. On the other, just because most of us learn to read and write at school, that doesn't mean that we're all—ipso facto—novelists and poets. Implicit in all this is another bizarre contradiction, that whilst professionalism and (god help us) elite standards are essential to effective marketing and communication, art-making itself should be understood in terms of lifestyle and recreation.

The strategy seems clear. Under the imperatives of access and equity, artists and arts workers will be forced to provide what their consumers want, which is that least likely to disrupt and disturb. No artistic risk. No experimentation. No criticism. If artists aren't willing to participate on those terms, their work will become so invisible as to be rendered meaningless. Australian Culture—now understood as an industry offensive—replaces art. Sport is the pre-eminent Australian art form.

There is a huge amount of work to be done to raise awareness of the arts and their value to the broader community. Improved education particularly at primary and secondary levels regardless of socio-economic background is vital; ditto communications and improved access to the media and to government. These are, however, issues that many in the arts sector have been engaged with in various ways for an extended period of time. There is no doubt that all of us could probably do it a whole lot better than we currently do.

If, however, the very real barriers to achieving these ideals are not able to be recognised for what they are—including the lack of human and financial resources, a small population and an even smaller economy dispersed over a large continent, and the overwhelming disinterest of mainstream media and government—then we are indeed looking towards a bleak future. Marketing should inform the arts, not lead it. The horse before the cart.

Paul Costantoura's fundamental error lies in confusing perceptions of the arts for the complex reality. In so doing, he does the arts a great disservice. That politicians (government and opposition) are already citing this unwieldy mishmash of misinformation as gospel is more than disturbing.

And frankly, art is not about some nice, neat, relaxed and comfortable government agenda. It's time to move beyond the mediocrity of management rhetoric and corporate branding. By all means, let's promote the very real achievements of artists and arts organisations in this country. Let's do something about the misconceptions and misinformation about the arts which means educating both government and the media. Let's recognise that the arts already embrace many disciplines, many social, cultural and political agendas. Let's create a context in which the arts can flourish. Let's put creative artists back into the picture. Let's get beyond the platitudinous crap. Let's really be ambitious for an "artistically (and intellectually) buoyant Australia."

This is an extended version of an article published in The Australian, *July 7, 2000 and is reproduced with permission.*

All quotes are taken from P. Costantoura, Australians and the Arts: A report to the Australia Council from Saatchi & Saatchi Australia, Australia Council, 2000

Wrath on Ralph

The implementation of the Ralph Report recommendations by the federal government would have resulted in the financial impoverishment of many artists unable to claim against the material costs of their art practice.

The successful defeat of the proposed legislation was driven by public protests (visual arts students playing a key role along with NAVA and leading artists like Mike Parr), sympathetic media reporting and Green Senator Bob Brown joining forces with the Democrats and then Labor. By all accounts the internet played a significant role with a flood of protests, petitions and exchanges. The overturning of the legislation is a triumph for artists in what is turning into a continuing struggle to shake off various slurs, for years being accused of being on the 'gravy train' of funding, then labelled an elite in the last federal election, then hobbyists in the terms of the Ralph Report, and now, in *Australians & the Arts* (see Sarah Miller above), as being out of touch with 'ordinary' Australians.

Ralph Report protest, Parliament House, Sydney. Photo, Mike Leggett. Reproduced courtesy of NAVA.

Next Wave 2000: the debriefing

Alex Hutchinson

There are several possible ways to read this article. Call it a set of random observations and mini-deconstructions, a simple snapshot of Australia's premiere 'youth' cultural event (remembering of course that there was much more that could not be shoe-horned into this piece). Think of it as a taste of something you probably missed (but shouldn't have). Hell, pretend it's a preview of a future Next Wave festival. Or just close your eyes and imagine that you are seated on a large, red, velour couch at the back of a (sub)urban hip hop performance at South Gate beside the Yarra river while a tiny woman in a huge Adidas tracksuit screams into the mike that she's givin' props to y'all *and the 'y'all' is you.*

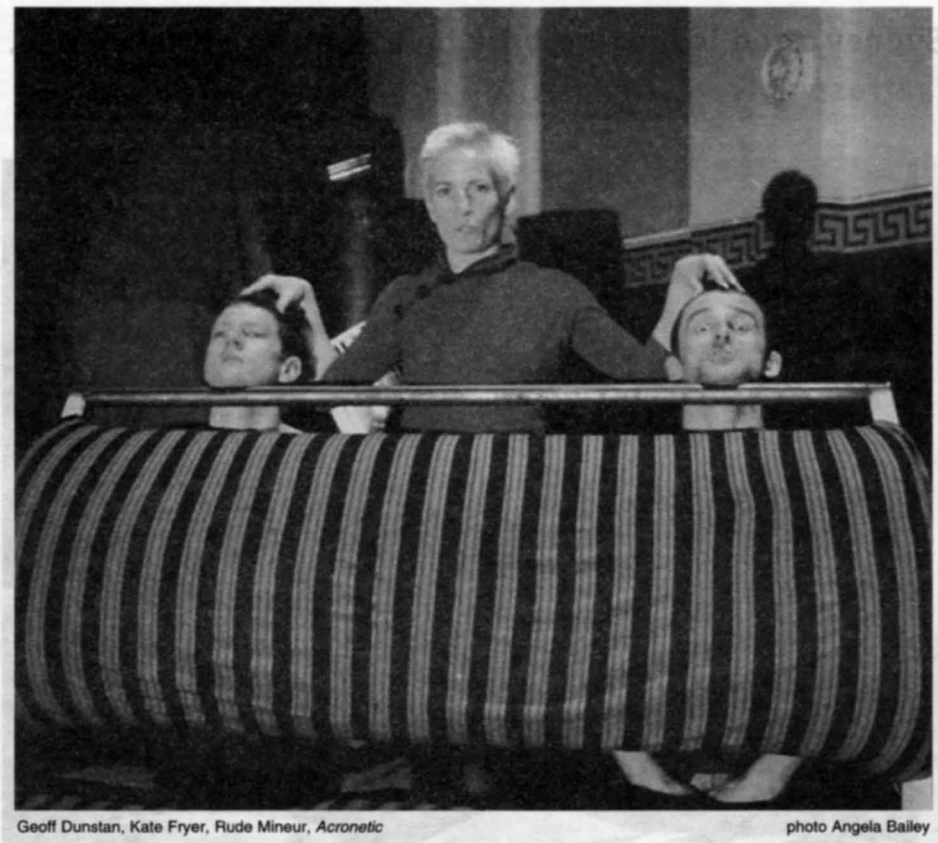
But was it any good? The short answer: Yes. The long answer: watching or visiting or viewing or listening to a large chunk of any festival is guaranteed to be a mixed bag. That some pieces will stick out as more impressive than others is unavoidable even though every time you go into a new show you spend 5 minutes beforehand talking yourself into a state of rapt attention so that you are hyper-aware of the possibility that this show could be good and that even if as a whole it isn't, there are surely several really good bits which you can suck out like marrow—and more importantly, if these bits exist, you are going to suck and suck until you find them.

This has to be done even if after reading the blurb or the artist's statement you quickly realise that it is flawed or dated or poorly thought out or whatever. This has to be done because disliking an entire festival is a short-cut to intellectual suicide and instant depression re the state of the arts etc etc and it is also almost certainly false and misguided and the result of your own preconceptions about what is 'good' and 'worthwhile' and not really connected to the underlying quality of the work at all. Which brings me lopsidedly to the fact that although there were a few flat spots, NW 2000 was often exciting and always different and in the end full of good work by young Australian artists which is exactly what an arts festival is supposed to be, isn't it?

Isn't it?

The really long answer: all the promos (from the program itself to the several different flavours of free postcards) were coloured a kind of open-wound pink and decorated with pictures of little kids playing with (variously) enormous eyeballs, explosives (and here comes the controversial bit) hard drugs. *The Herald Sun* gave that last one a whole 5 paragraphs of negative commentary along with a predictable quote from Festival Director Campion Decent saying it was all just there to "create a little controversy."

Also seeking controversy (or at least trying to freak everyone out) was the only international act, the Tokyo-based dance/movement group 66b/cell, and their performance *faust II*. When I asked the woman on the door what she thought the show would be like, she said it was "going to be strange. But that's good. We like strange." Featuring silver body suits, elongated cone-heads and an abundance of bicycle lights glued to various body parts, it promised to utilise "real time computer graphics and animation to expand the performance potential of the body in a festival of light, sound and motion." And while it had its moments and tried incredibly hard to be new and different and daring and shocking, it only partially succeeded. Tired fractal pattern projections for a background and sloppy stage management broke the spell and some of the extreme facial contortions even caught a laugh from the audience—most definitely not the desired result.



Geoff Dunstan, Kate Fryer, Rude Mineur, *Acronetic* photo Angela Bailey

Few works were easily categorised and all of them were ferociously creative. It's about the work itself and not about fitting things into manageable, digestible, marketable chunks. It's not only 'young' art, it's good art.

Without even trying it was completely outweirded (and outperformed) by the brilliant *No (under)standing anytime* from Next Wave alumni Kage Physical Theatre. Featuring as a set centrepiece, a giant road which ran diagonally across the centre of the stage, climbed and then crossed the wall, with each white dividing line picked out by spotlights, and backed by great music, the whole performance was rock solid. An exploration of isolation and male/female interaction, it was also a remarkably lucid and entertaining work for something as usually obscure and difficult as dance.

(A random aside I couldn't fit in anywhere else: one of the performers, Gerard van Dyck, looks eerily like the French clone from *The City of Lost Children*. Odd.) Anyway, after the show I hear someone (probably a father, or at least a portly uncle) say, "So this is what he wants to do for a living?", a question so ridiculously redundant that somebody should have punched him in the face.

Another sterling piece was Nikki Heywood's *Burn Sonata* toured from Sydney by Performing Lines. Its jagged, uncomfortable combination of raw, electronic music and powerful, sincere performances made the seemingly impossible task of examining abuse and family dysfunction seem effortless. It received great reviews in all states it visited and if it ever tours again don't miss it.

Of the 2 works in progress I previewed last year in RT #31, only one made it up for air. I have no idea what happened to Adam Broinowski's *Hotel Obsino* (a play which had nothing at all to do with dance, something that didn't seem so important at the time but does now) but it was nowhere to be seen. On the other hand, Dislocate's acrobatics/play hybrid appeared under the new title *Acronetic* and although it had nothing at all to do with its preview in either content or design, still proved a winner.

Between high octane acrobatic set pieces from the former Circus Oz performers and moments of pure dialogue, *Acronetic* was truly mesmeric. Conversations occurred while sitting upside down at tables. People entered a club by stepping between the spread legs of a bouncer lying on his back with another bouncer standing on the first guy's feet. Clever, funny and slick, the only downside was the occasionally confused narrative. When the story and movement clicked it proved that the combination of play and acrobatics could be a winner but when it missed it sometimes seemed stilted, and the final revelation that the whole story is a fantasy dreamed up by one of the performers is too stale to disguise with flips and spins, however well executed.

Final Fantasies (curator Chad Chatterton) took its name from Squaresoft's seminal *Role Playing Games* and built a game style environment for real-sized people. You entered through the same door Mario enters in *Mario 64* to find a huge tree dominating the room, except it's not a real tree, it's a game tree, meaning it is made up of spliced 2D planes and only simulates 3D. Surrounding it are more Mario style pipes and stars, a smattering of *Quake* style weaponry and all around the sounds of doors opening and shutting. Exciting as the idea was, much more could have been done. The area seemed bland and sparsely decorated: where were the corridors and over- the-top software environments?

More successful was Christian Thompson's *biyigi* (dream, to dream), its theme clear. Garish, confronting scenes collided with traditional bush imagery, all of it painted (generally) on torn up pieces of old beer boxes, the labels and brands still showing through. Dream segue to the e-media gallery presentation *temple of dreams* (Matt Gardiner and Luke Smiles). Three episodes of animation, new age philosophy and (surprise!) dreams. The central idea of a 'dream database' where you can upload/download dreams is a good one and the demo is well worth catching at www.visual-art.com.

Also exciting were the *Play* and *Imagination Travels Faster* exhibits. Cute, kitsch, pink footballs built from clay and arranged in the shape of a penis were titled *Games Real Men Play*. *Optional Extras* nailed up a wall full of a thousand rear-mirror danglies for examination outside of the car while in the front room Charles Rocco was building people entirely from wire and then hanging them from the ceiling or nailing them to the floor in his brilliant *Artificial Intelligence* exhibition.

Which brings us to the lurid and slightly crazed urban hip hop extravaganza that was *tongue (untied)*, a group made up almost exclusively of young women who are (to quote the program) "exploring the modern evolution of the poetic form." In actual fact, it was a series of individuals or pairs getting up and describing suburban Australia and the trials of being a young woman in highly personalised accounts set to hip hop rap beats. Everything was lo-fi, with the microphone dropped to the floor after every performance to be picked up by the next, the whole thing bizarrely broadcast on the wall beside the stage (except with the contrast turned up too high so everyone looked bleached and pale), the show caught somewhere between a rap version of open-mike night and community access TV. The big (and oft repeated) point was that they were reclaiming hip hop for Melbourne in 2000 which is great and laudable and everything but doesn't really work if you're also appropriating the clothes, style and speech patterns of America. Great, mildly disturbed stuff though.

And finally, squeezed hard up the back end of the festival and feeling a little pale after the performance-heavy 2 weeks was the writers' weekend. Small attendances were blamed on the cold (and it *was* bloody freezing) but you get the feeling most people wanted a show not a story reading. Those who did go caught a series of high energy readings from some great young writers. A highlight was a spirited reading of hardcore gay pornography from Shane McGrath. On a related note: the accompanying special Next Wave issue of *Voiceworks* (#41 and still on sale) was also of a high standard and came in a compact format far superior to the usual.

Which about wraps it up. Deep breath…let it go. Now for a stripped down and compressed conclusion: probably the best/most remarkable/most enjoyable aspect of the festival was its overall cross-genre, cross-art pollination. Few works were easily categorised and all of them were ferociously creative. It's about the work itself and not about fitting things into manageable, digestible, marketable chunks. It's not only 'young' art, it's good art. It deserves much more media attention than it gets and is certainly 50 times more interesting than the middle-aged, tired festivals which *The Age* sponsors every year. Make sure you check it out when it swings round again…

Next Wave Festival 2000, *Artistic Director Campion Decent, Melbourne May 12 - 28*

Just another art show?

Alex Gawronski

Looking at The Biennale of Sydney 2000 is looking back on a past we all recognise. The show itself is perhaps endemic of a certain kind of retrospective millennial thinking.

However it is impossible not to ask why, at this apparently significant historical moment, are we turned back on a 'History of the Biennale of Sydney'? Surely at this time it would be more pertinent to consider the future or indeed living present of contemporary art and its multiple manifestations. Within the Biennale there are no exceptional curatorial leaps other than arbitrary ones resulting from the mere juxtaposition of unrelated practices. The exhibition does not attempt to connect diverse ideas in an effort to encapsulate the prevailing Zeitgeist. Previously, the Biennale could promise something of a revelation, an exhibition that could isolate trends or at least present us with fragments of possibility. This year we are confronted with a wealth of work, much of it familiar from reproductions in various international art journals. Whilst it may be a positive opportunity to view some of this art close-up, the overall sense is that all the 'right' artists have been chosen. These are artists we have read about, whose works we have seen in books and articles over the past decade or so. What is distinctly absent are the surprises, the shock of new works that might signify a shift in our reading of the exhibition and of art at the turn of the century.

Much of the work varies dramatically in impact from site to site. At Artspace, Paul McCarthy's damaged video installation is sympathetically housed in an environment that allows its grotesque mock hysteria to resonate visually and politically. As visitors to Artspace would have realised, even though it is by no means immediately self-evident, McCarthy's installation details the work's partial destruction due to its mishandling in transit. The exhibited evidence of this unhappy process, rather than detracting from the work, provides an opportunity to consider its supra-artistic dimension. Ultimately, despite the work's bad-boy posturing, we realise its thorough entanglement in the intricacies of ownership that indicate its economic value and respectable collectability. On the other hand, Dieter Roth's many carefully framed and somewhat oblique prints appear at odds in a gallery regarded primarily as a site for contemporary installation art. Same goes for the technicolour material fantasies of Franz West. Despite West's questioning of the limits of aesthetic value, in objects that appear equally as junk, the works themselves could be seen as a type of conservative expressionist manifestation, with each object displayed discreetly on its own isolated plinth.

Customs House, recently renovated and luxuriously sited at Circular Quay, provides perhaps one of the least sympathetic venues for viewing contemporary art in the city. With its large open atrium and series of glass fronted ramps providing space for exhibitions, the building reads more like an upmarket shopping mall, decked in real rather than faux marble and granted permanence due to its heritage listing. Inside and high above an unrelated exhibition of architectural models, float red and white polka dot inflatables by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusami. The obsessive quasi-hallucinatory quality of the artist's work has a palpably present potential for disruption and disturbance. At Customs House however, such qualities are superseded by the ambience of the building itself. Here they appear as nothing more than giant beach balls, representative of sunny Sydney fun. Rosalie Gascoigne's work upstairs, still impressive in its restraint and textuality, is drowned by the prevailing muzak engulfing the building from above. All subtlety is eroded.

Paul McCarthy, *Painter 1995*. Film Still from performance/installation.Collection of Donald & Mera Rubell, Miami, Florida. Photo Karen & Damon McCarthy

Perhaps more successful, though mixed in affect, is the work at the Art Gallery of NSW. Here there are some outstanding pieces, most notably the photographs by Ukranain artist, Boris Mikhailov. In these we witness evidence of the debasement of common humanity suddenly robbed of its previous terms of reference. With the decline of the Soviet system and the resulting economic collapse, more citizens find themselves on the edges of a society that cannot afford them. In the comfortable surrounds of the AGNSW the documentary impact of these images is doubled, disturbing viewers' equilibrium. Most of us have become complacent anyway to the barrage of imagery depicting the intense human suffering of many developing communities. Here however, the society depicted does not technically fit that description. As a result, the suffering portrayed, whilst still distant, appears even closer to us. After all these are 'modern' Europeans.

Still forceful are works by Louise Bourgeois. Her objects and installations, or 'cells' as she calls them, are dark and obtuse. They leave themselves open to numerous distinctly psychological interpretations, and succeed in their apparent grounding in personal experience and the conviction with which the artist pursues private phantoms. Nevertheless, her work is not reducible to simple confessional paradigms. Fiona Hall's objects equally display a mastery of often unconventional materials. They are intricate ruminations on the private pressures of colonialist interventions and their attendant hubris. Her fragile drilled-out and sieve-like works, utilising plastic plumbing, imitate native flora while simultaneously revealing their conspicuous distance from the 'natural.' Nature is inscribed and encoded at every level. At the same time, convenient platitudes concerning a Nature/Culture split do not 'hold water.'

The hallmark of the Biennale is the work assembled at the Museum of Contemporary Art. Here we find some of the big names of international contemporary art. Gerhard Richter is represented by a series of works that, intentionally or not, attempt to summarise his practice thus far. His works range from the sophisticated postmodern drollery of neo-photographic paintings multi-layered abstract 'painterly' works. In such works the artist employs a variety of often subliminal techniques, including photography, to (re)construct the apparent casualness of gestural painting. In fact, the MCA boasts a wealth of photographic and video works alongside painting. These include Jeff Wall's subtly menacing images of urban mundanity and, of course, works by Australia's Bill Henson. These receive special attention. Upon entering the gallery containing Henson's work, we are informed by an attendant that only 8 people may view the work at any time. Perhaps this is an attempt to preserve the sanctified Eurocentricity and nostalgia of the photos themselves, images that apparently require more space in which to contemplate their dark secrets. How these secrets differ essentially from meanings contained by adjacent works remains uncertain.

Less reverential is Pipilotti Rist's video installation *Sip My Ocean* in which the artist parodies Love and Desire as portrayed in contemporary music videos. While the artist alternately screams and croons infantile lyrics from the Chris Isaak song *Wicked Game*, we see items of a vaguely kitsch domesticity sink to the bottom of the ocean. Interspersed are images of the artist herself. Rather than an exercise in narcissism however, Rist appears in grotesque anthropomorphic close-up as a type of female sea-monster. The work itself comes closest perhaps to the spirit of McCarthy at Artspace despite numerous dissimilarities. What unites them is an irreverence and lack of 'taste', set in sharp relief to an exhibition discreet and overtly tasteful in its presentation.

Visiting the Biennale is like shopping. What we are shopping for we find in convenient retrospective bundles. Most often we are presented with a group of familiar works by well known and respected contemporary artists. The act of looking then becomes an act of discrimination for each work is of comparable 'quality' and historical importance. What it becomes is an instance of, 'I really like the Richters but the Ofilis!' Certainly this does not make the art we view any worse. What it preconditions, however, is a museological experience at odds with expectations of the contemporary, the difficult, the contentious. It is ironic that one of the possible points of contention in the show is Chris Ofili's 'infamous' dung paintings. These vital and energetic works are further distanced from us metaphorically courtesy of a message from Australian quarantine. The implication of the standard 'Do not touch' becomes 'Do not touch or you will contract something.'

The Biennale of Sydney 2000, almost despite much of the work it contains, has become just another art show. Admittedly it is large and prestigious yet it lacks the necessary vision to make it an event. It seems remarkable that such an exhibition succeeds in revealing nothing about conditions of contemporary art production. This is the promise that lies at the heart of every Biennale regardless of whether it has proclaimed itself an 'historical survey.' Even so-called historical work can appear contemporary under attentive and imaginative curatorial direction. It would be a disaster if the continuity of the Biennale were endangered. It is the only survey of its kind, certainly in Sydney, and most likely in Australia. Perhaps this thought lurks behind this year's exhibition for it is a show which cannot fail and in consistently not failing, neither does it illuminate or demonstrate possibilities for the future.

The 12th Biennale of Sydney 2000, *venues: Artspace, Object Galleries (Customs House), The Art Gallery of NSW, Museum of Contemporary Art, Government House, May 26 - July 30.*

For an engaging and sometimes provocative collection of reactions to the Biennale, see Critical Readings, 12th Biennale of Sydney 2000, *edited by Susan Best, Charles Green and Simon Rees and published by Artspace (ISBN 1 876017 68). A recurring theme in the collection is of the Biennale in terms of globalisation, most elaborately and passionately (and alarmingly) explored by Green in "What is to be done with the Sydney Biennale?" in which he offers provocative answers to his question—proposals well worth debate. Responding to works in the Biennale, Jacqueline Millner offers another stimulating proposition—"It is no longer a crime to speak of beauty in contemporary arts, but rather an enlivening and challenging strategy." Chris Chapman and John Conomos rank the Biennale's video selection highly, whatever the event's other shortcomings. In fact, the pleasure the writers found in many of the works in the Biennale and, conversely, the disappointment, even anger they felt over the event's failure to generate some overall meaning or reflection of contemporary art practice, provides the collection with a compelling dynamic. The 12th Biennale has been extremely popular (helped along by a free admission policy) and adored for the most part by mainstream art reviewers.* Critical Readings *puts that success in perspective in the best possible way. The other writers are: Rex Butler, Blair French, Toni Ross, Susan Best, Jill Bennet, Andrew McNamara and Beth Jackson.* KG

The Melbourne Festival: big and little

Virginia Baxter

Jonathan Mills launched his Melbourne International Festival in a series of intimate occasions around the country. In one such event, I joined a group of arts writers around the table for lunch at Chicane, one of Sydney's elegant, "Melbourne-style" restaurants. Between courses, the director elaborated on the ingredients that comprise his idiosyncratic festival.

Aside from the much publicised Bach component there's a good deal to tempt the contemporary performance audience—an impressive 7 world premieres by Australian companies including Chunky Move in a triple bill choreographed by Gideon Obarzanek, Philip Adams and Kim Itoh from Japan; *Ice Carving* a collaboration between Contemporary Music Events, Dance Works and Six Degrees Architects; Chamber Made Opera in *Gauguin: A Synthetic Life*, combining digital media and visual theatre effects, directed by Douglas Horton, composed by Michael Smetanin with text by Alison Croggon. St Martins Youth Arts Centre tackles the continuum between technophobia and technophilia in *orb-IT*. Among the highlights of the outdoor festival is *Ngalyod-The Rainbow Serpent* presented by Raymond Blanco's Mulwarr Dance Australia in collaboration with France's celebrated street theatre company Plasticiens Volants. *Meat Party*, a play by Vietnamese-Australian playwright Duong Le Quy, will be directed by Michael Kantor, and Lucy Guerin presents her eagerly anticipated new work, *The Ends of Things*:

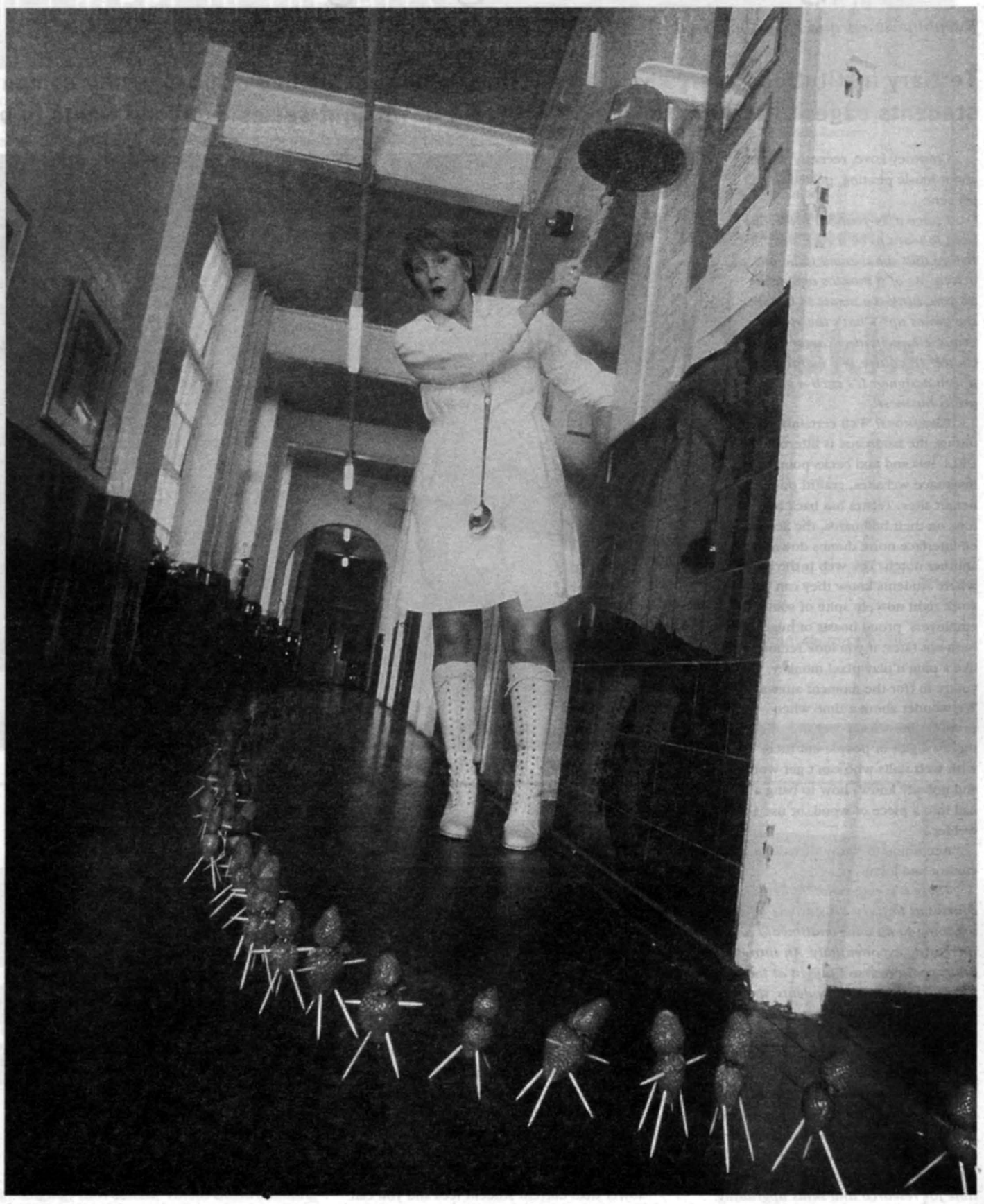
Everything is running out. Along with the milk and the last of the toothpaste, time and reason are coming to an end. Behind the unremarkable actions of everyday routine are the deranged inner machinations of a mind about to say goodnight.

Among the international works Compagnie Montalvo-Hervieu from France presents *Le Jardin Io Ito Ito* comprising 100 dance fragments, each a minute in length, inspired by the ideas of Max Ernst. The theatre program includes Argentina's El Periférico de Objetos with *Màquina Hamlet* which weaves Heiner Müller's text with puppetry and photo-projections to reflect on present day realities in Argentina. Jonathan Mills describes it as "harrowing but unforgettable" and you believe him.

There are several happy returns: Israel's Batsheva Dance Company with their powerful signature work *Anaphase* seen at the Kosky's 1996 Adelaide Festival; a big hit in Adelaide this year and at Expo 2000 in Hanover, *The Theft of Sita* roars into Melbourne with its wild mix of serious jazz and Indonesian gamelan orchestra plus 150 shadow puppets. Then there's the solo wonder that is Bobby Baker—last seen a few years ago at the MCA in Sydney, rolling herself up in a canvas pancake painted with the food of her post-natal depression. This time she explores the 7 virtues as featured on the supermarket shelf in *How to Shop*. (We notice fresh food for thought still attracts GST.) Geoffrey Rush re-lives his first day of school in Neil Armfield's very popular production of *The Small Poppies* and Company B Belvoir and MTC are co-producing a two-hander by Yasmina Reza called *The Unexpected Man*:

A man and a woman sit opposite each other in the detached intimacy of a train carriage. He is a famous author, she carries a copy of his latest novel in her bag and ponders the dilemma of reading it in front of him.

At the centre of the visual arts program is *USEby*, a series of international exhibitions and events exploring artist-run and independent galleries throughout the Asia-Pacific region at the Centre for Contemporary Photography. *Lineage* focusses on the work of Daniel Libeskind, an architect known for his multi-disciplinary approach meshing music, philosophy and art with architecture. And appropriately, the *Instrumental* exhibition features the work of Australian stringed instrument makers curated by the director of Craft Victoria, Kevin Murray.



Bobby Baker, *How to Shop*

And, of course, it's the music program that resounds in this Melbourne Festival. Jonathan Mills is clearly pleased with his Bach centrepiece. In fact, after all that divinity Melbourne may very well lift up her Victorian skirts and hover aloft. This may explain the festival's earthier opening event, *Seven Deadly Sins*—the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra playing works by Kurt Weill and John Adams conducted by Marcus Stenz and featuring American coloratura Laura Aikin.

But from then on it's a Bachhanal—17 days of cantatas and vocal masterworks staged in honour of the 250th anniversary of the composer's death. This most ambitious of musical celebrations features some of the world's finest interpreters of Bach including Germany's famous vocal ensemble Cantus Cölln directed by lutist Konrad Junghänel, The Choir of Trinity College Melbourne with the Elysium Ensemble directed by Michael Leighton-Jones and Greg Dikmans, The Australian Bach Ensemble directed by Antony Chesterman, the world renowned boys choir, Windsbacher Knabenchor with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and conducted by Karl-Friedrich Beringer, Collegium Vocale Gent directed by Philippe Herreweghe, the acclaimed Bach Collegium from Japan directed by Masaaki Suzuki and, for just for the hell of it, the Jacques Loussier Trio.

But if you balk at Bach, there's jazz vocalist Freddy Cole, the "undisputed voice of Greek Song", Maria Farantouri, a Chamber Music Sunset Series chosen by Mills himself, the Harlem Gospel Choir, Quator Mosaïques, the Australian Chamber Orchestra with violinist Ivry Gitlis, a Gilbert and Sullivan show and some eccentricities from Edith Sitwell performed by VCA Opera.

"Great art is often very personal and particular," says Jonathan Mills. "Its impact is achieved by extraordinary insight into ordinary events and circumstances. Very personal moments, intimate experiences, simple objects provide the opportunity to discover monumental truths."

Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, October 19 - November 4 www.melbournefestival.com.au

Teaching new media: aiming at a moving target

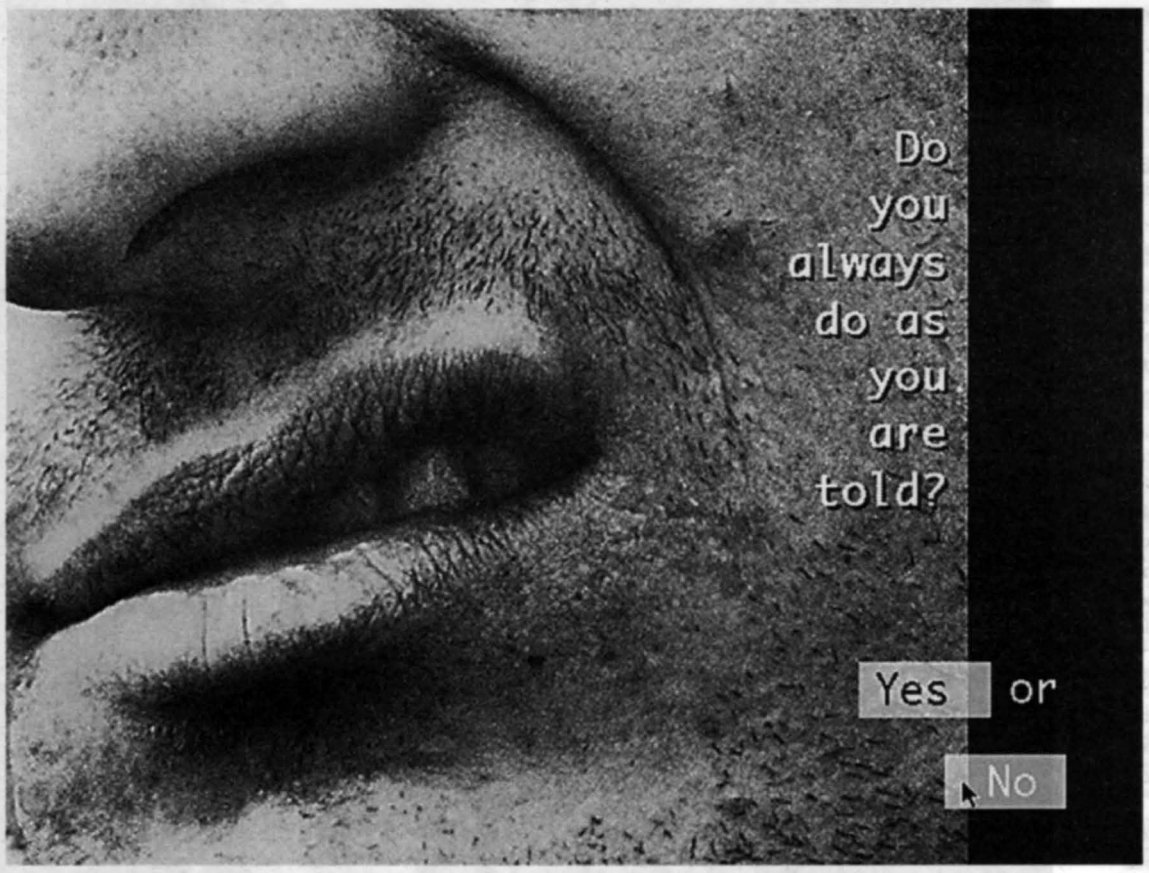
Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski

Tertiary institutions everywhere are setting up new media departments, their computer labs bulging with students eager to skill up for the 21st century in which it seems everyone wants to be a web designer.

Courtney Love, recently writing about music pirating, posted to a list serv:

I have a 14-year-old niece. She used to want to be a rock star. Before that she wanted to be an actress. As of 6 months ago, what do you think she wants to be when she grows up? What's the glamorous, emancipating career of choice? Of course, she wants to be a web designer. It's such a glamorous business!

Glamorous? Well certainly ubiquitous, the landscape is littered with URLs. Bus and taxi backs point to insurance websites, graffiti points to net.art sites, Telstra has back buttons on their billboards, the accepted interface norm dumbs down another notch. The web is the area where students know they can get work right now, in spite of some employers' proud boasts of huge burn-out rates; if you look remotely like a plug'n'play pixel monkey, you're in (for the moment anyway). We wonder about a time when every business has a website, there's a glut of people out there with web skills who can't get work and nobody knows how to bang a nail into a piece of wood, or use a welder.



Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski, *User Unfriendly Interface*

According to Kathy Cleland, new media curator and lecturer:

There is a huge student demand for courses at tertiary institutions which have anything to do with multimedia and this is increasing exponentially. An introductory multimedia course I taught at the beginning of 1999 had 30 students; the same course this year had 95 students. There is also a tendency in full fee paying institutions to over-enrol students to maximise profits which leads to very large tutorial sizes and consequently to staff burnout with huge marking loads. I have been teaching at an institution (half university owned and half corporate) that has 4 semesters per year so there is also very little time for research and skills upgrading.

The difficulties in teaching digital media arise from the breadth and scope of the area. Due to its hybrid nature and links with cultural studies, communication theory, visual design, visual arts, computer science, film studies etc, new media projects typically require a vast skillset and cover a range of considerations which are not necessarily able to be delivered within the one faculty (as lines are currently drawn) or indeed by the one student. This is why it is particularly exciting for us that the School of Design, University of Western Sydney, Nepean is potentially merging with the Communications and Media School. Students currently can choose to undertake subjects across school lines, but it is difficult to "synthesise" school approaches. As new media becomes less new and more consolidated in its own right, we will see some of the moving targets come into focus enough to better track them.

The pedagogical dilemma is the fact that the 'mission statement' doesn't yet exist. There is no agreed canon. It's too early to be able to draw on a history of interactive media, as we have for film and TV. But then again, that's often the attraction. It's new and uncharted, with a plethora of opportunities for innovation.

There is a strong trend towards online education, which makes life easier, or at least more efficient for both students and teachers. List servs can be an extremely useful teaching apparatus, enabling the whole group to communicate their ideas to each other, and also for lecturers to give feedback easily. Online education is going to be a huge growth area and will ultimately challenge the traditional university structure. The fees charged for these courses are much lower than current student fees and you can do a course with the university of your choice anywhere in the world. There are also a lot of corporations looking at education as a vast, extremely lucrative untapped market—so education is not going to remain the exclusive property of universities for much longer. A friend who recently moved to Canada to take up a university teaching position wrote describing a rather dystopian vision of future online education:

Moving to Canada was a mistake because the university I came to is trying really hard to be like a corporate online course farm…I have to be managed and work in a cubicle.

Here it is often visual artists who are teaching digital media in design schools. Practitioners have a wide practical skillset acquired through an exploratory approach to self learning as well as from working in different roles on varied projects, and are experienced in collaborative working models. In our own practice, the aim is to teach people to integrate their creativity more deeply into the computer environment as well as to teach within a cultural context. We encourage practical teamwork as well as learning the toolset, which is an easier task in design than fine art. The fine art world, for all its postmodern rhetoric, is generally trapped in the modernist paradigm of artist as lone lone hero. Consider the promotion of young British artists (or YBAs as they are known) by the advertising firm/art collectors/government consultants, Saatchi and Saatchi, in London. These artists are like popstars, the more famous and controversial the more likely they are to sell their work. And now there are billboards at Heathrow airport of Tracey Emin selling Bombay Sapphire Gin. First artists become products to be promoted and, when famous enough, they can be used to sell other products.

New media artists tend to be critical of the current fine art institutions. We like to employ a hacker mentality in our approach not only to technology but systems in general, whether they be social systems or 'the media' themselves. Our interest in the area of new technologies is fuelled by a mixture of scepticism (who is excluded from technotopia and why would anyone want to live there anyway?) as well as enthusiasm for the playful possibilities of digital media. Our own work which includes the *User Unfriendly Interface*, *Paranoid Interface* and the *Bio-Tek Kitchen* game patch (*www.anat.org.au/resistant-media/Bio-Tek)* deconstructs current interface and game paradigms, subverting them to reveal that our experiences are being increasingly mediated by new technologies and that there are dangers hardwired into this trend.

At UWS we introduce students to different online and gaming cultures, cyberfeminism, hacktivism, and 'Tactical Media', which is the rather slippery term used to describe the practices of a loose alliance of international media theorists, artists, designers and activists. We also expose people to the enormous amount of interesting and playful work which is being made around the globe. Often what excites the students excites us and, as play and pleasure have always been an integral part of our work, we encourage people to do the same and sometimes get great results—work which can inspire and entertain us all.

Thanks to Robyn Stacey and Sarah Waterson (School of Design, UWS Nepean) and Brad Miller (College of Fine Arts, UNSW), for their valuable input into this article.

Josephine Starrs and Leon Cmielewski are artists and lecturers in new media at the School of Design, University of Western Sydney, Nepean. Their latest work Dream Kitchen *is an interactive stop motion animation CD-ROM (*http://sysx.org/dreamkitchen*).*
See Working the Screen, *page 6*

The knife and the stethoscope: pedagogy in performance

Barry Laing

The word pedagogue was at one time taken to refer to the person who escorted or accompanied a child to and from a place of instruction—a guide—though later, and contemporaneously, to mean the one who instructs. There is something in this image which moves—guided travel between home and school—reflecting the metaphorical, figurative and practical possibilities for a pedagogy positioned in this liminal 'space between.'

Where pedagogy or teaching is concerned, how might the assumption of, and desire for, the security of knowing (by both teacher and student) be met with an equally powerful and yet passive fall into learning?

In 2 recent performance workshops at Dancehouse, Melbourne—*Little Tyrannies, Bigger Lies* and *Dissent/Descent and Desire*—I attempted to structure the work in such a way as to confront the demands of a skills base (technique), and also engage articulately with the play of appearances in performance—with what might be called imaginal practice. In general, the work was drawn from combinations of theatre and dance strategies, and the performances that ensued may be described as between these forms in varying degrees.

Mick Angus, Peter Fraser, Darren Steffen

I was concerned to stage a pedagogy that was audacious in its resistance to resolution into one set of formal or aesthetic pre-occupations, defying the tendency to harden into its own discursive position. The idea of staging a pedagogy derives from the performative metaphor which confronts any inquiry into pedagogy in performance with the conundrum of the performance/s in pedagogy. The teaching itself was concerned primarily with the work of the performer and questions of presence and absence. The work proceeded under the provocative shadow of an attempt to teach and practice performance-making "while knowing that there is, in the field of knowing, a scrim of theatricality over our lives" (Herbert Blau, "Ideology and Performance", *Theatre Journal*, Vol 33, No 4, 1983).

In the context of performance, psychologist James Hillman has said that wherever there is resistance, there is body (Enrique Pardo, "The Angel's Hideout: Between Dance and Theatre", *Performance Research*, Vol 3, No.2, 1998). Body, as in a good red wine. Body in the sense of the materialisation of images and the imagination. Body which realises the invisible and makes it visible. Such resistance was adopted as a working principle in practical, physical and imaginal strategies engaged by the performers in the workshops.

The second major working principle concerned the notion of embracing a kind of violence: not the staging of a representation of the pornography of violence but, rather, participation in a pedagogical or dramaturgical practice "which would not (necessarily) originate in a good nature and a good will, but which would come from a violence suffered by thought" (Gilles Deleuze & Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). Antonin Artaud suggested a similar kind of violence which he imbibed in the notion of a Theatre of Cruelty. He defined cruelty as first and foremost "cruelty to ourselves" (Artaud, *Theatre and its Double*, New York, Grove Press 1958).

The titles of the workshops suggest these working principles of resistance and violence in a kind of affective, imaginal and metaphorical guise—performative ruses that helped focus the work and offer a site for reflection. In the first workshop, the notion that 'a little tyranny needs a bigger lie' was tested in practical terms via the working principles above. Tyrannies may be understood as discursive, like the discourse of the Real, of Truth and Emotion in certain kinds of theatre. Metaphorically, the scope is wide: musical tyrannies, spatial tyrannies, linear time, political correctness, entrenched dance vocabularies, or anxiety. Lies can be conceived as fictions, illusions, image, artifice—as contrary, for example, to the little tyranny of capital T Truth outlined above. Lies understood and practised as fictional transgressions, pretence, insolence, stupidity, laughter and re-presentations (see Barry Laing, "Little Tyrannies, Bigger Lies: A Letter from the Other Side", *Performance Research*, Vol 3, No.2, 1998).

Glynis Angel, Noelle Rees-Hatton

In the second workshop, *Dissent/Descent and Desire*, the group worked with and against gravity in all its material and metaphorical richness—literally, with weight, the body, resistance and momentum, and metaphorically, with defiance, betrayal, scandal, insolence and weightlessness. In defying gravity—when gravity is, say, anxiety—is it possible to fall into fiction, resisting gravity and the weight of the world by going with its flow? In this regard, the two workshops were not discrete in focus. There was also a large overlap of participants in the 2 workshops, drawn from many backgrounds—actors, dancers, musicians, sound engineers, librarians and teachers—challenging the terms of pedagogy and keeping the work strung between forms.

A major part of the practical, physical work in both workshops was a long series of layered variations on a body of work called *The Knife and the Stethoscope*. The preparations for this involved group and individual work with movement, text and music. In the first instance, the performers were introduced to a physical architecture for the body that was called, variously, Mr or Ms New. The architecture is a simple, though detailed combination of physical propositions drawn from Feldenkrais, Alexander, martial arts and neutral mask work. 'New' because non-habitual. 'Mr' or 'Ms' to suggest (playfully, ironically even) matter, import and bearing—though neither happy nor sad, a kind of non-expressive physical 'mask.' An important part of the architecture is the demand of physical work and attention in the body simultaneously drawing up, resisting gravity, and reaching down, in line with its influence. A kind of constant inner play founded on physical organisation. With the performer strung between, maintaining this tension, this new body is subjected to various physical tasks—walking, running, turning, falling, speaking text—first, with a kind of closed attention going in and down, and subsequently and simultaneously turning up and out. The performer is then subject in turn to the influence of the physical space, interactions with other performers, and finally imaginal space. Detailed work on variations of the gaze of the performer is woven into this architecture.

In *The Knife and the Stethoscope*, the proposition is for this new body/persona to enact the various roles of the structure, both major and minor, protagonist and antagonist. Again, this is a performative, imaginal strategy or ruse, though founded in the conviction of a physical form. Four performers work in a group: a Text-speaker, a Receiver, a Knife and a Stethoscope. The Text-speaker moves freely in the space, though impacted upon physically and verbally by the Knife and the Stethoscope. The Knife attempts to disrupt, scandalise, betray and steal from the flow of text. The Stethoscope is on the Text-speaker's side, resuscitating, encouraging, and supporting the work of the Text-speaker. The Text-speaker speaks for and to the Receiver, who is limited to a particular location in the space, anchoring the overall choreography and image, and showing in movement the receipt of the text...then, various combinations of others coming away, leaving Text-speaker to work, harvest from the memory of the physical interventions. This their engine, their only possible body…excellent long work…submitting to the knife, and transforming it into the dramatic situation…falling, descending, accepting to fall into the knifing…breaking up the ego that would hold against this…

Given these starting points, a number of questions surfaced over and again. Where pedagogy or teaching is concerned, how might the assumption of, and desire for, the security of knowing (by both teacher and student) be met with an equally powerful and yet passive fall into learning? At the same time, how might the performer's genius, the particular and peculiar quality each performer brings, be preserved? Where the act of performance is concerned, there are infinite fictional worlds, forms, styles, genres, and discourses to swim in. How to keep swimming? How to diffuse the desire to be (real), for example, with the pleasure of pretending to be? How to play and be played upon, subject to internal and external influences? How to be in this place as a performer—strung between—maintaining the tension with another/others? Ambiguously cruel questions.

When we perform, where and upon what do we perform? In my field of interest, which has its roots between theatre, contemporary dance and image-based practices, it is possible to answer that we are acting on the space between the observer and the observed—between the stage world and the audience. With what will we imbue this space? What signposts for the imagination, defying the tyrannies of a particular discourse? What temptations beyond the familiarity and control of the observers? What seductions, what convulsions of complacencies via the imaginal field we share? And the players? How to radicalise the performer's subjectivity, resisting the provision of an easy objectivity under the weighty gaze of the audience?

Daniel Witton

photos Barry Laing & Kim Cullen

Little Tyrannies, Bigger Lies *and* Descent/Dissent & Desire, *performance workshops directed by Barry Laing, Dancehouse, Melbourne, June 2000*

Barry Laing is a freelance performer, director and teacher based in Melbourne. He teaches in Performance Studies at Victoria University, Footscray. He has trained and worked extensively in Australia, the UK and France.

Art teacher as anxious manager

Barbara Bolt

...the concepts that much of social and political philosophy has embraced...make change impossible insofar as they are static and rigid representational concepts that lack the fluidity that is conducive to conceptualising change.

Dorothea Olkowski, *Gilles Deleuze and the ruin of representation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999

I have been thinking a good deal about the applicability of this statement to visual arts education since receiving the ACUADS (Australian Council of Art and Design Schools) March/April newsletter. This newsletter calls for papers for the ACUADS 2000 conference, which is to be held in Adelaide in September this year. The context for the conference is quite clear. "Within a rapid and continually changing academic environment there is a need to identify strategies by which art and design schools can develop and exert greater self determination and leadership and increase creative achievement and satisfaction" (ACUADS March/April Newsletter). I would agree. These goals appear desirable and necessary. The preamble continues: "The conference aims to reinforce the role of Level A, B and C lecturers as leaders in the development of visual arts, crafts and design, as well as key contributors to the wider 'professional' arts sector." It was at this point that

To think altogether differently is to be playful and creative. I want to contrast the "fearful anxiety" that is radiating from art school administrations with the "playful anxiety" that is anticipated of students studying in art and design schools.

Olkowski's caution began to register. What concepts are we embracing? Do these concepts effect change and, if so, are we happy to live with the direction of those changes?

Bearing this caution in mind I would ask, what are the concepts under which art and design schools have come to operate? I want to return for a moment to the proposed conference and to the way in which it has been framed. In an environment of economic rationalism, we are told, the language "we" use has changed. This change in language is part of a strategy to gain greater recognition for the value of the arts in the community. Artists (we now know) are professionals. We work in an "arts industry" in which outputs can be measured in terms of employment, investment and export potential. Since we are "in business" we need business skills—marketing, promotional and financial management skills. We need to set in place codes of practice to provide the necessary "benchmarks" and ensure "reasonable" compliance to those codes. Our art and design schools need to adopt models of training to bridge the gap between training and professional practice. Further, in our art and design schools and in our profession, we need to ensure "best practice" so that we are able to broker partnerships, engage in resource sharing and utilisation, find external sources of revenue, be flexible and find the best options, solutions and actions. The image created seems familiar. The words roll so easily off the tongue that we barely stop to ponder what we have said. But what if we stop talking for a moment and savour the words. Weigh them up. Draw out the implications of using them.

I want to ask, what is gathered up in a word? What does it mean to engage in "best practice", to adopt a "training model" in art and design schools, to define "codes of practice" or simply reinforce the role of Level A, B and C lecturers? Are these words simply words or do they have a greater power? Is an image just an image? To ask such questions is to evoke the conundrum that haunted art theory and practice during the 20th century. What is the relationship between representation and reality? Does representation reflect or produce "reality"? If the former, are we destined to our fate as subject to the law of managerialism? If the latter, do we become complicit in producing the very monster that in turn subjects us to its laws? Representation produces the prototype and this prototype proliferates its copies. Either way, it seems that our representational concepts significantly shape and structure our world. Talk like a manager and that's what you are or what you will become.

So, what is the language of managerialism doing in art and design schools? Isn't it a contradiction in terms? Graham Sullivan argues that art schools are going through an "identity crisis." This crisis stems from their incorporation into the "academy" (ie the unified system of universities) in the 1980s at a time when the universities were becoming increasingly subject to the laws and language of economic rationalism (Sullivan G, "An Identity Crisis for Art Education", *Artlink* Vol 19, No 2, 1999). Like all university departments and faculties, art and design schools took on the language of managerialism in order to "get bums on seats", to be accountable and satisfy the number crunchers. But has this effort led to greater self determination and leadership or to an increase in creative achievement and satisfaction? It seems not. The effect has been to produce a generalised anxiety and pessimism amongst lecturing and administrative staff (this panic and pessimism is clearly laid out in Rodney Cracker's "How the tail now wags the dog", *Artlink* Vol 19, No 2. 1999). It could be said that art and design schools are trembling with fearful anxiety about what comes next and how their positions might be reserved. The problem of "fearful anxiety" is that it leads to a lack of faith about the future, a pessimism about what is possible and a submission to the order of things.

The ACUADS conference preamble suggests one response to the problem at hand. Get better at being managerial. Become a faithful copyist and join the ranks. Yet this, in my opinion, is a reverent miming. I think there is a need to be less reverential and polite. Perhaps we need to be much more playful and do what we, as artists and designers (as well as lecturers and administrators) claim we do. Perhaps we need to think altogether differently (here I am referring to Deleuze's development of difference in his book *Difference and Repetition*, 1994).

To think altogether differently is to be playful and creative. I want to contrast the "fearful anxiety" that is radiating from art school administrations with the "playful anxiety" that is anticipated of students studying in art and design schools. "Playful anxiety" is productive (the notions of "fearful anxiety" and "playful anxiety" developed here derive from Kierkegaard's understanding of anxiety). It is the anxiety one experiences in the face of the indeterminate; not knowing what will happen but nevertheless being prepared to make that leap. Thus art students are expected to be inventive and edgy. They are encouraged to play with new possibilities, get off the grid and out of their comfort zones. They are provoked to leap into the void and break new ground. How then can art and design schools expect this leap of faith from their students if they can't also keep faith in that possibility? How can a fearfully anxious administration engender a playfully anxious arts community?

The forthcoming ACUADS conference is a critical event for evaluating just where art and design schools "think" they are going. It is my hope that the delegates do not accept unquestioningly the agenda that has been set before them, but use the conference as a forum to go back to basics. I believe that what is at stake is far more insidious than we have been prepared to concede. The concepts that we have come to accept and use unquestioningly are static and rigid representational concepts. They lack the fluidity that is conducive to conceptualising change. They fix us in position and disable us. They engender fear and trembling. Perhaps, as Sullivan has argued, we remain far too polite and subservient in our responses. "Enough is enough!" We should begin again to practice what we preach. Art and design schools should be inventive, edgy and break new ground. We should leap into the void and become chameleons for the day. Otherwise, what sort of leadership can art and design schools provide?

How can a fearfully anxious administration engender a playfully anxious arts community?

When can the teacher dance?

Shaun McLeod

With access to funding more competitive and scarce than ever, the relationship between universities and dance artists seems to have gained new significance. The academy has been a traditional source of valuable employment for many dancers and choreographers but a new dimension has recently appeared where choreographers are engaging with the research paradigms of universities. Melbourne has seen a steady growth in the number of practitioners returning to do postgraduate studies in dance as a way of deepening their practice and extending their careers. The universities have also become more explicit in their demands that practitioners who are also lecturers/teachers become better qualified academically. This has led dancers to engage with theoretical constructs in ways that did not exist 10 years ago. But what sort of a marriage is it, this meshing of the academy and practice? And how do the artists themselves view the intersection of dance and theory? The relationship is in continual flux but talking to 3 Melbourne choreographers and a performance maker, some interesting themes emerged about this occasionally uncomfortable relationship.

For choreographer Anna Smith, who teaches technique sessionally and is a research associate at the Victorian College of the Arts, the relationship is clearly positive. She is appreciative of the support and access to resources the work gives her and is philosophical about the impact the teaching work has on her own practice. She often finds it problematic trying to separate her teaching from her choreographic practice, even though both require a different focus and intent. But she says, "I have to be pragmatic about it and value it for what it gives me which is space in the studio and a lot of support—not just financial support but also people walking in. I could grab someone in the hallway and say could you just have a look at this."

This appreciation of the support universities provide was echoed by all the artists I talked to. The job of teaching itself was also often a big attraction. Dianne Reid, ex-Dance Works dancer, choreographer and dance-video maker has been teaching technique, composition and theory at Deakin University's Rusden campus for 4 years now. Teaching for her is an extension of her skills as a performance-maker and an opportunity to try new ways of delivering the material, such as her highly performative lectures—a major hit with first year theory students. She loves the investigative environment of the university which leaves her free to experiment and tailor courses which reflect both her own artistic interests and the needs of the students. She is currently developing a dance-video unit for third year Bachelor of Contemporary Arts students, allowing her to combine teaching requirements with her passion for dance and the camera.

The downside of having an ongoing position is the loss of profile. Suddenly Reid has become strictly a dance educator not an artist, something that clearly rankles. "You tend to disappear in people's eyes when you are at a university."

The sheer workload for full-time teachers also has an impact. Multi-disciplinary artist Margaret Trail (not strictly speaking a choreographer but whose work is often seen in dance contexts such as Dancehouse) has been teaching full-time for 2 years at Victoria University of Technology in the Performance Studies course. While she loves teaching, the first 18 months of full-time work were challenging. Rocked by the demands of the workload and the new administrative responsibilities of the full-timer, she was left with no choice but to concentrate wholly on the job itself, to the detriment of her practice. "I do get enormously frustrated with the university and that's compounded by the fact that as a full-time staff member you can't walk away. You have to take the university on. You have to make a relationship with this bureaucracy which is often dysfunctional, which tends to undervalue teaching, which is increasingly driven by economic, not educational motives and you have to survive inside it and feel alright."

Certainly, doing justice to both the theorising about and making of dance work is difficult. It requires skill in juggling and expertise in very different forms of knowledge.

High profile choreographer Lucy Guerin did a stint of teaching technique and choreographing at the Victorian College of the Arts in 1999 and felt uncomfortable with aspects of the job. To be responsible for the training of students and to respond to their multifarious needs weighed heavily on her. "I'm really happy to go in and give people a taste of my work and my choreography and where it has come from—what its technical origins are. But in terms of teaching long-term and taking responsibility for people's development, I felt I couldn't really take that on in the way they needed."

However, Guerin saw the opportunity to choreograph as beneficial and a way to develop her ideas with a large group of dancers otherwise impossible for her to access. In so doing, she saw the process quickly shift from being exclusively about her ideas to also becoming a response to the needs of students. How could she achieve a common stylistic understanding from 19 dancers of different abilities and yet foster a personal investigation and embodied awareness of her choreography? She relates the almost rigid approach of some students to the legacy of dance training throughout Australia. Tired students are striving to reach a standard of technical excellence that is perceived to be appropriate for the professional arena. The demands of this kind of training leave little time to concentrate on investigation and experiential understanding of movement. "It's not the fault of the institution. They are very aware of these problems. It's just how to implement [the changes] within this kind of structure which is subject to all this history. The students come in with particular preconceptions about what they are going to be doing and it's quite hard to break them down."

Another major challenge for practitioners working within universities, and one with huge potential implications, is negotiating the vexed issue of theory and dance. Traditionally resistant to entering this domain, many dancers and choreographers, either through postgraduate degrees or as lecturers, are now being asked to rigorously confront theoretical frameworks and use these to analyse and inform their practice. It remains unclear how this will change the ways artists create or think about their work—the relationship between dance and theory is still nebulous and few choreographers currently write about their work. If the growth in practitioners doing postgraduate research continues, a major shift in approach will surely follow. But how do practitioners feel about the meeting of theory and practice? Although wary of the academisation of practice, Margaret Trail says, "I'm terribly interested in that cross-over because to me it has only ever been productive, although I do think they are 2 different ways to process information and I never take my Lacan down to the studio. Still, encounters with theory have only ever been exciting and wonderful and have opened things up in practice."

Certainly, doing justice to both the theorising about and making of dance work is difficult. It requires skill in juggling and expertise in very different forms of knowledge. Writing takes just as much practice as dancing, which can then interfere with the experiential nature of the studio work and even the needs of dancers' bodies. Research into dance has its own needs but the body of writing on dance research remains comparatively small and is still justifying its own place in many universities. Questions also remain about the balance of practice and research and the impact they will have on each other. But Dianne Reid, who has been granted research leave by Deakin University to take part in Luke Hockley's forthcoming project at The Choreographic Centre, sees the emerging relationship as moving in the right direction. As long as artists remain proactive and have clear plans about how to work within the institution, they can develop a positive relationship. "There's more and more understanding and support and inquiry into research into the arts which we used to just call working or rehearsing or process but really it's the same thing."

Shaun McLeod is a Melbourne choreographer and dancer. He teaches dance at Deakin University's Rusden Campus.

The dance unfolds

Virginia Baxter

We've been watching Rosalind Crisp for a good while now. As a dancer-choreograher she's made more than her share of moves but always with a strong through-line and serious attention to research and careful development. We have followed her trajectory through many solos including a continuing persona in *The Lucy Dances*, dance theatre works like *The Cutting Room*, dance-music collaborations such as *Proximity* (with Keiko Takeya Contemporary Dance Company, Tokyo). We've enjoyed her evolving collaboration with composer Ion Pearce, her dialogue with dancer-writer Eleanor Brickhill. More recently she has concentrated her attention on choreographing for an idiosyncratic company of young female dancers and herself called stella b.

accumulation (1-40) showed us a further development of an ongoing work which we last saw at Artspace in January this year (*The View From Here*). In this latest version, as well as the core dancers, Crisp has opened the process to a broader range of bodies. An advertisement was placed for people interested in participating. 30 turned up and most of them appear in one magical sequence in *accumulation*. They arrive quitely en masse, lend a different weight and texture to the work with their graceful (mostly non-dancer) bodies, then leave. Watching them work in unison is a strangely moving experience.

Observing the evolution of this dance, you venture a possible direction for the next version. In *accumulation*, drama lurks at the edges of abstract scenarios. The program notes, "Two feet are visible in the half light, working the floor. In another space a solo dancer inverts a

dance she knew before." Ion Pearce's score, this time recorded, seems a little less Zen, more obviously and insistently rhythmic. Richard Manner's lighting is quietely dramatic marking out evocative spaces. You sense it wouldn't take much for the dance to tip-toe into the theatrical without surrendering any of its choreographic seriousness. Some of the performers project identies, even palpable personalities. Being caught by Nalina Wait's intense gaze or watching Eleanor Brickhill's concentrated dance of tiny adjustments and changes of mind, it's hard to see them as purely formal presences. At the same time, this is a work about dancing—it's constructed in layers, it's arithmetical, cumulative. And all is revealed in the penultimate sequence when some of the intricate patterns are unpicked by the dancers in a line-up in which a series of interlocking, accumulative gestures slip in and out of synch. It ends with a solo of articulating joints. It's dance we could watch for hours. We await its further unfolding.

Rosalind Crisp, stella b. and guests, accumulation (1-40), *the outcome of a Performance Space residency; choreography and direction Rosalind Crisp, dance and solo material Eleanor Brickhill, dance & treatment of material Nalina Wait, Kathy Macdonald, Danielle van der Borch, Bronwyn Ritchie, Laurie Foster, sound Ion Pearce, lighting Richard Manner. Performance Space, July 13 -16.*

The attractions of Reel Dance

Karen Pearlman

***Abracadabra* opens Reel Dance and, as with any good password to any good world of wonders, transportation begins immediately.**

Phillippe Decouflé's 1998 dance film (France) is an excellent password for this particular dance film festival, which goes right past mundane questions of 'is it really dance?' to the much more intriguing questions of how physical languages and cinematic languages might intersect. *Abracadabra* begins at the beginning of this question by linking dance to early cinema. A series of what film theorist Tom Gunning calls "attractions" are displayed. The word attraction partly refers to attraction as in circus act or novelty. Decouflé revels in this meaning, presenting danced oddities and bizarre displays with great glee. Then there is the attraction people have to the trompe d'oeil or cinematic trick of the eye. The viewer's eyes are tricked overtly and inventively through various devices in *Abracadabra*, such as the use of deep focus creating illusions of outlandish differences of scale between foreground and background objects and actions. The final vignette is an acrobatic display in which the dancers do incredible things which, with enough skill, could really happen in the real world. These displays then evolve into the hilariously impossible and the audience realises a cinematic trick is being played on them. Both senses of the word attraction apply here—the acrobatics are an attraction or an act, and the moving image is itself a trick of the eye that attracts our attention.

This combination of attractions is one of the things that Reel Dance seems to propose defines dance on screen: physicality far enough outside of the norm to present itself as an attraction, combined with the many cinematic conventions that have evolved through and since early cinematic tricks of the eye. It's not exactly a new form, but it's an intriguing combination—making use of the conventions of cinema with dancing rather than acting as a vehicle for conveying content.

This combination was explored throughout the weekend, with many of the films drawing on particular film genres and infiltrating them with particular forms of dance. Dancers from the Frankfurt Ballet were involved in an overlong but intriguing dance in the genre of science fiction called *The Way of the Weed* (Belgium). Wim Vandekeybus contributed *The Last Words*, a magic realist fantasy film driven by physicality rather than being about it. *Nussin* (Netherlands), brilliantly directed by Clara van Gool, referenced gritty, naturalist filmmaking, set in a run down housing development in the middle of an icy winter. Combining this cinematic style with the tango, a most elegant, precise and aristocratic dance, created a feverish heat and chilling beauty.

Not all films were equally successful in their intersection of the capacities of cinema with physicality although the 2 films that appealed the least shared the prize for Best Screen Choreography at IMZ dance screen 99. Margaret Williams' *Dust* (UK) felt like it drew mainly on the cinematic conventions of advertising with its beautiful but meaningless shots, textures, angles, cutting and sound. Her film *Men* irritated with its cute humanism, exploiting men over 70 and beautiful landscapes—just like a National Geographic documentary making the extremes of nature into comfortable TV.

On the other hand, *La Tristeza Complice* (Belgium), a film which exploited the cinematic tradition of verité documentary most subtly and poetically, was not an audience favourite. Perhaps people were irritated by the grainy degraded quality of the image and the odd marks and scratches which flashed by on the screen. However, these could be viewed as cinematic expressions of the subject matter, the elevation of the everyday, degraded and scratchy as it may be, to the status of image, and the manipulation of the dynamics of those moving images into an aria of the ordinary. Verité documentary often has odd flashes of beauty caught more by perseverance than by plan, and this film seemed to make a choreography of these images of dancers laughing, eating, smoking, arguing and passing the languages of their bodies and lives to each other. The film was itself a dance, made in the editing suite, and, since it is documenting a rehearsal, the editor's marks—the chinagraph pencil marks for dissolves and cuts—were left on the image as clues to the working process of making this film dance.

The selections representing Australian work in *Dance on Screen*, as finalists for the Reel Dance Awards, were surprising and intriguing, the films presented in the historical retrospective session a bit less so. It is certainly tricky to present a whole country's output (since the beginning of its engagement with the form) in one session, which perhaps explains why, in a festival that had a very strong curatorial vision throughout, the retrospective session seemed to lack focus and momentum.

However, in the Dance Awards screening, a much stronger through line appeared. There were very few well-known dancers or dance companies—almost none of the usual suspects. Instead, maverick filmmakers experimenting with the moving image through the device of moving bodies prevailed. There was a strong emphasis on the choreography which takes place in post production—after the dance has been danced and the film has been shot—through editing and digital effects. The tricks of the eye become trickier, more apparent, less illusory precisely because they couldn't possibly happen in 'real life.' But as manipulations of the moving body they are the definition of choreography. They are the manipulation of the dynamics, rhythms, shapes and causes of movement, even though a real body could never do these 'post produced' moves. They are dance attractions engaging with the new form of cinematic attractions—the digitally generated tricks of the eye.

Finally, there were even magic words uttered at the closing ceremony of Reel Dance. Annette Shun Wah, chair of One Extra, expressed the hope that Reel Dance (a One Extra event) would "inspire", and sent the spectators forth from this world of wonders, saturated with the potency of its images and ideas, to create next year's attractions.

One Extra Dance Company, Reel Dance, *curated by Erin Brannigan, Reading Cinema, Sydney, May 19-21*

Karen Pearlman's most recent dance films are Rubberman Accepts the Nobel Prize *and* A Dancer Drops Out of The Sky. *She is co-director, with Richard James Allen, of The Physical TV Company*

Winning Films:

In the Heart of the Eye
director Margie Medlin
choreographer Sandra Parker

Traversing Sense
directors Sherridan Green & Leah Grycewicz & Heike Muller

Interior
directors Jessica Wallace & Michelle Heaven
choreography Michelle Heaven

Potsdamer
director Samuel James
choreographer-performer Martin del Amo

Over the choreographic precipice

Julia Postle

Improvisation in whatever artform is about freedom; freedom of expression at the most overt level, throwing off all the restrictions and codes of artistic practice and replacing them with a spontaneous exploration of the very process of creating art. That it is art in process and simultaneously 'in product' is what places us, as observers, in a new relationship with the performers.

In dance, improvisation as a mode of performance represents fluidity, play and impulse, in contrast to the often rigid structure and form of choreographed movement. Sally Banes, in her 1993 text *Democracy's Body*, describes improvisation's extremity best: "If all dance is evanescent, disappearing the moment it has been performed, improvisation emphasises that evanescence to the point that the identity of the dance is attenuated, leaving few traces in written scores, or even muscle memory."

In May, the Choreographic Centre hosted a weekend of improvisation, featuring the work of 4 groups that have embraced improvisation for the development of their performance. Familiar to Melbourne audiences, the groups were in Canberra as part of the third annual *Precipice* event .

Peter Trotman and Lynne Santos

Their improvisation starts with heavy movement—arms sweeping. Then it floats—the hands flexed. They are giving into their own weight, moving in isolation and yet there are moments of connection in the randomness. The pace increases and the movement becomes more abrupt, but there is still

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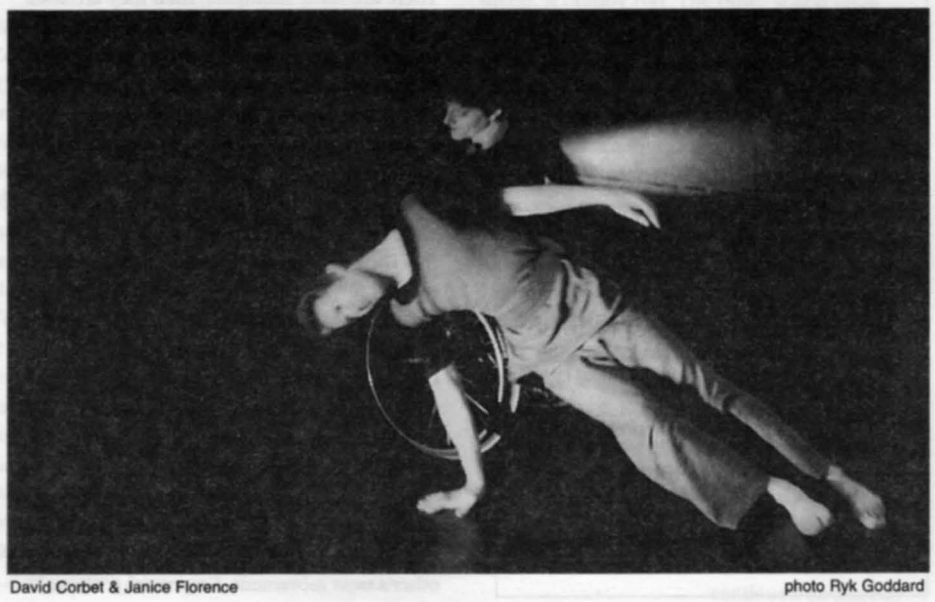


David Corbet & Janice Florence photo Ryk Goddard

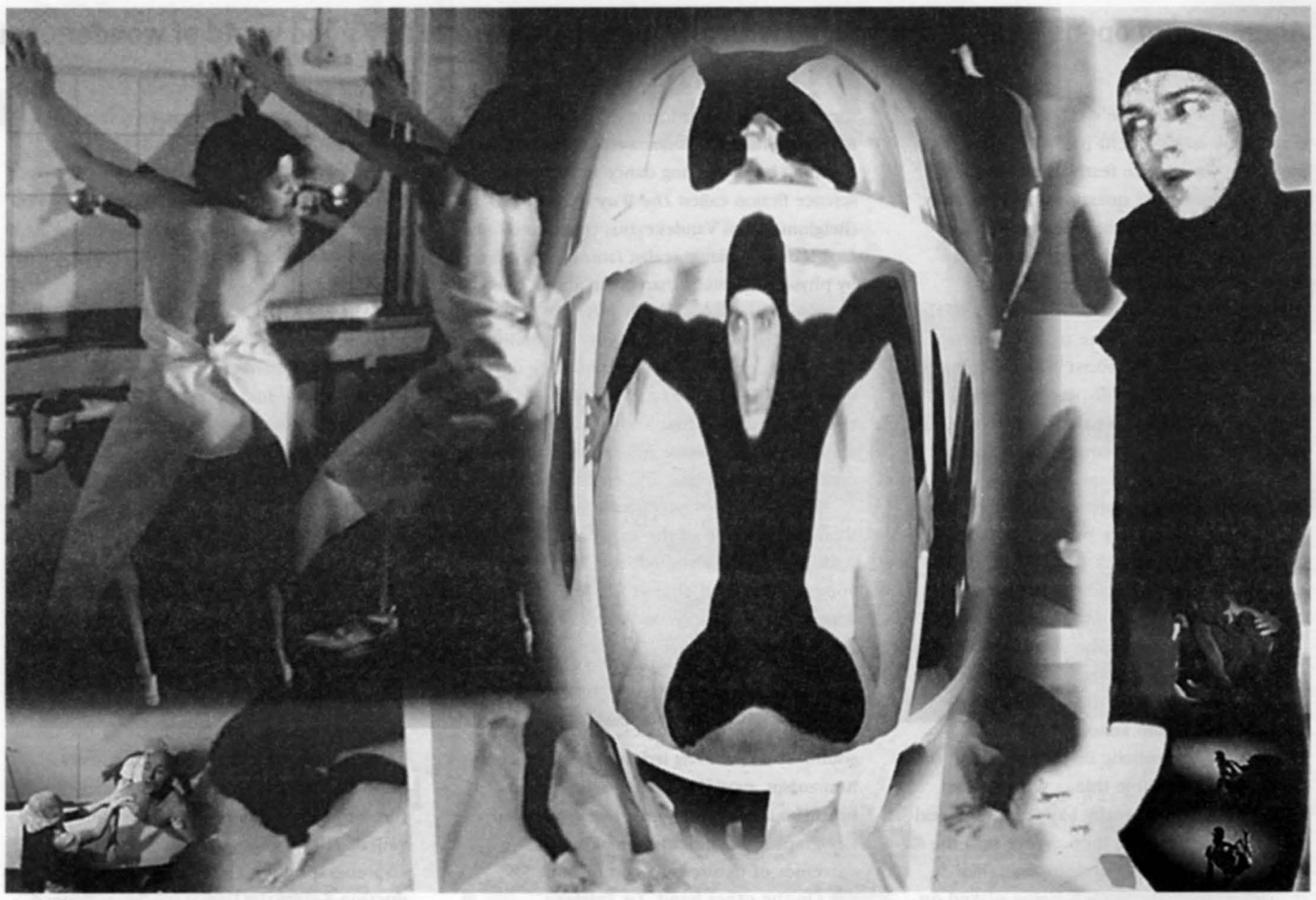
The body apart—a new dance film

Jonathan Marshall

The centrality of the abstract yet highly physical concept of the body in contemporary criticism renders our material form as the supreme subject of cultural, psycho-physiological forces. From Sigourney Weaver to genetic engineering, Artaud to dance music, the body has become a mesmerically omnipresent *object* which is gazed at, deconstructed, theorised, disciplined and choreographed. Choreography and criticism replicate a form of social violence which the body must routinely endure.

This insensitivity to the needs of the body as a living body—a critical-choreographic refusal of the *soft* body—is forcefully rendered in dance-maker Brett Daffy's film *Stark White*. Daffy formerly acted as the archetypal self-mutilating, queer 'hard-boy' of Gideon Obarzanek's early choreography and his independent dance proceeds from this precedent. With *Stark White*, Daffy's disconcertingly pliable anatomy is pulled apart and reformulated in horribly compelling, 'unnatural' ways. This happens both *internally*—Daffy choreographing Daffy—and *externally*—women pulling at his limbs, angrily manipulating his joints, and grabbing at his form, before these bodies too undulate under the influence of an internal, psychophysical aphasia. The dancer moves from the bewildered voyeur of others' psycho-somatic abjection to the primary subject of these forces, awakening to find himself enmeshed in an Escher-like landscape of physical and architectural repetition.

Brett Daffy extends this choreographic violence into the cinesonic language of *Stark White*. He and director Sherridan Green reject the tendency of dance film to sew together isolated frames so as to reconstitute a single, moving body. Image, sound and gesture are fragmented by the very processes of filmic production, and there is little attempt here to bring them back together. *Stark White* is not a montage of random material, but it does not conceal the brutality of its production. Like the protagonist, the audience is forced to recall its own position as producer of the cinematic experience—as flickering eyes and aural filters—fragmenting the film even as one attempts to draw it into coherence. Daffy, Green and composer Luke Smiles are therefore unconcerned by the body lying out of shot or gaps in the linearity of sound and image. The film jumps and shudders, creating something akin to a great, fleshy car backfiring crystalline apostrophes as it bunny-hops down a tinted, scratched subterranean road.



Stark White

Daffy nevertheless prevents his work from becoming consistent with implicitly sado-masochistic, misogynistic or simply oppressively voyeuristic modes prevalent in advertising, painting (especially the nude), dance and ballet. He achieves this by placing himself and *not* the women at the centre of the literal and metaphoric technologies of the work. The cinesonic focus and choreographic violence spirals around his form and disorientation, his alienation and recovery. After seeing him both literally and metaphorically stripped and shaved, our gaze forces his body into the realm of sexual ambivalence and ambiguity. He is transfigured, a queer Christ perhaps. Like Calvin Klein's models, Daffy lies beyond the heterosexed. Unlike advertorial homoeroticism though, this transmutation (this crucifixion?) is achieved through ecstatically painful dismemberment, by cathecting bodily parts and gestures such that monsters are born. The finale leaves us with this sexual beast flipping through the axial patterns elaborated in Leonardo's *Ecce homo*, yet menaced by the possibility of psychological, sexual and physical hybridity that one sees in Hieronymous Bosch. A post-human for our age of monsters.

Stark White, *writer/choreographer/performer/producer Brett Daffy, director/editor Sherridan Green, sound score Luke Smiles, Motion Laboratories, performers Sally Smith, Larissa O'Brien, Sharilee Brown, Lina Limosani, Ben Gauci, Larrissa McGowen, Paul Hickman, Kathleen Skipp, Anna Smallwood.*

Over the choreographic precipice

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a seeming softness to their joints.
There are static moments; then they are leaning into and later onto each other, pushing away and falling upon. There is a fluttering of hands. "Heart beating pulse racing eyes blinking tongue licking," Trotman blurts out.
There's a story to this performance, but where it ended up I have no idea…

State of Flux

The focus here is more on contact improvisation…physical support, touch, suspension of weight. The duet between 2 of the performers, one in a wheelchair, conveyed the honesty of contact improvisation. There are chance funny moments…he balances on her lap, shifts position his bum is in her face…and intimate moments…wheelchair discarded, rolling on the floor, moving over each other…and some pretty clumsy moments too…the uneasiness and heaviness of it all, bodies not intuitively sensing each other's next movement. Sometimes it seems like the distance between the individuals is expansive; at other times it seems like the group is a single entity.

Five Square Metres

There's a definite frivolity to this group; the 4 performers are expressive and frequently quite silly. The wit and chatter is all a vital part of the improvisation. The use of breath is another clever layer of the performance…sighs, deep inhalations and exclamations, all uttered on top of each other and set against equally staccato movement, such as shuffling in file and bumping into each other. There seems to be more of a narrative than in the other events on the program. The movement is but one element of the performance, and more driven by the group than the individual, almost a kind of expression of community.

Gallymaufry

Andrew Morrish brings out his mike, Madeleine Flynn plucks her violin and Tim Humphrey toots the trumpet. Morrish does most of the talking, absurd little phrases really, amusing as part of the situation, "I've been dreaming after hours." The music is cartoon-like in the way it complements his prattle. He steps away from the microphone, arms reaching, then stretching gently, he steps out into more dynamic movement. Humphrey is yelling, "Open that door and jump!" Is it a command for Morrish or for us? Madeleine goes to the accordion and Morrish is moving again. It's the funny mishmash of music, word and movement that gives the performance its meaning.

In an evening full of humour and more than the usual risk-taking, these groups created new performances and challenged us as observers to do a little risk-taking of our own.

Precipice: on and over the edge, *The Choreographic Centre, Canberra, May 26-28*

OnScreen
film digital media screen culture

A reckless missionary: Chris Doyle's way with words

Juanita Kwok

Chris Doyle is everywhere. After winning acclaim in Asia and the attention of Hollywood his signature use of saturated colour, the lighting and stuttered camera-work has become the international grammar of music videos and advertising. He is criss-crossing the globe on film and commercial shoots. He made time to be at the Sydney Film Festival for the weekend opening of both his debut feature film *Away With Words* and Rick Farquharson's documentary, *Orientations: Chris Doyle: Stirred Not Shaken*.

In *Orientations*, he posed the question, "The problem with being so-called cutting edge is that you cut the edge and there's nothing left so where do you go?" For someone whose aesthetic is so widely imitated, how does he manage to keep his edge?

"Why are the best cinematographers and some of the best directors in Hollywood outsiders? They always have and always will be outsiders because you have to look at something from a different perspective...I do that mainly by living in cultures that I'm very familiar with, but I have a certain edge. I don't have to conform to the conventions of that society because everyone knows I'm nuts first of all and secondly they know I'm from outside so that's a great freedom."

Doyle's experience of Hollywood came first hand when cash ran out while directing his first feature film, *Away With Words*, and he accepted a job as cinematographer on Gus Van Sant's remake of *Psycho*. Doyle has described working on *Psycho* as a "20 million dollar art project—the film is bullshit, the point is we tricked Hollywood out of $20 million to do Gus Van Sant PhD in Fine Arts." Two weeks later, another job, this time on Barry Levinson's *Liberty Heights*, raised enough cash to complete the film.

How does Hollywood compare with working in Hong Kong?

"In Hollywood the crew spoke of filming as a 'show', there were rules about what time you start work, what time you finish, how long you have for lunch. That's not what I'm about, that's not what the group I work with is about."

The group that Doyle refers to is director Wong Kar-Wai and art director William Jang. Doyle has worked with them on films such as *Chungking Express*, *Ashes of Time* and *Happy Together*. He took time out from the team to create his own personal vision in *Away With Words*.

"The title of the film is a pun, a way with words, a means of using words which is my job as a cinematographer, to translate words on a page into images, translate the appropriate gestures, the verbalisations of an actor into a certain energy. That happens to be what I've been doing for however many number of years and it has become very intuitive and personal for me."

Chris Doyle

Written, photographed and directed by Chris Doyle, *Away With Words* was inspired by writer Jorge Luis Borges and Russian psychiatrist Luria's insights into a mnemonist, for whom every word is an image arranged along a street in his mind.

There are 2 central motif scenes in *Away With Words*. One is a sandy road leading to the sea, the childhood memory of Asano (Asano Tadanobu) and the metaphoric pathway of his mnemonist's mind. The other is of cross-dressing lush Kevin (Kevin Sherlock) waking up in the Peak Police Station in Hong Kong, wondering where the fuck he is. The 2 characters, Asano (who remembers everything) and Kevin ("You could write a book about what I've forgotten") are brought together when Asano arrives in Hong Kong and sets up home in Kevin's 'Dive Bar.' Between the 2 is Susie (Mavis Xu), a fashion designer, whose other job is to pick Kevin up after he has had one too many.

Doyle, like Susie, is somewhere between the two. Just as Asano's memories are filled with the beach of his childhood, Doyle grew up near the beach before leaving Sydney in the 70s on a one-year voyage that extended into over 30 years. Like Asano he ended up finding a home in Hong Kong. The characters represent aspects of himself and his experience, "Kevin is not an actor, he is a personal friend of mine." While the Peak Police Station story is based on a real event, Kevin is not the only one with a love of beer. Is it he or Doyle who usually ends up in the police station after a night of drinking? "Six of one and half a dozen of the other."

Does free verse visual poetry and a collision of memories and experience have something to say to an audience?

"You write your first film because you have something to say, to get out of your system. Ultimately, making a film is about responsibility to yourself and to your own vision and if that connects with an audience that's good." While *Away With Words* connected with audiences in Japan where it gained a release in 20 cinemas, it has not yet found a distributor in Australia. Doyle describes the real test of a director as the second film, and admires Zhang Yimou for his tenacity in developing his craft and making films every year. Will Doyle direct another? "Yes, but I'd always prefer to be a good cinematographer to an interesting director."

Chris Doyle went back to collaborating with Wong Kar-Wai on *In the Mood for Love*, which earned him yet another award at Cannes this year. In *Orientations*, interviews with colleagues and with Doyle on the run between shoots, on the set and making collages in the studio, show his genius at work. Seen together at the festival with *Away With Words*, you get a picture of a free spirit possessed of an unceasing energy and exceptional talent.

But Doyle disdains adulation. At the Hawaiian International Film Festival this year where he was awarded the Kodak Eastman Award for Excellence in Cinematography, he interrupted the presentation to complain of hyperbole in describing his merits. In Farquharson's warts'n'all documentary he snaps back at a fan who starts her question "I'm a fan of yours and I'd like to take you out for a drink or twelve..." with "Why don't you go out and make your own fucking movie."

How do you reconcile this attitude with the likeable and humble man on stage at the State Theatre calling himself a "missionary of cinema"? Maybe it's the fact that his family are in the audience, so he's on best behaviour. It's also part of his message to pursue your own personal vision. "To live rather than to theorise about it, that's my way. If you're gonna do films you should have the energy and the drive and the courage and the recklessness and also the life to say something to people."

Sydney Film Festival: Chris Doyle, Away With Words, *Australian premiere, Dendy Opera Quays, June 17*. Orientations: Chris Doyle: Stirred Not Shaken, *premiere, State Theatre, June 17, will also be screening at the Melbourne and Brisbane Film Festivals. Chris Doyle was brought to Sydney by the Hong Kong Tourism Association and the Sydney Film Festival.*

Juanita Kwok is co-director of the Sydney Asia Pacific Film Festival, a new film festival which screened at Reading Cinemas, Sydney, earlier this year.

Death is for the living and not the dead so much

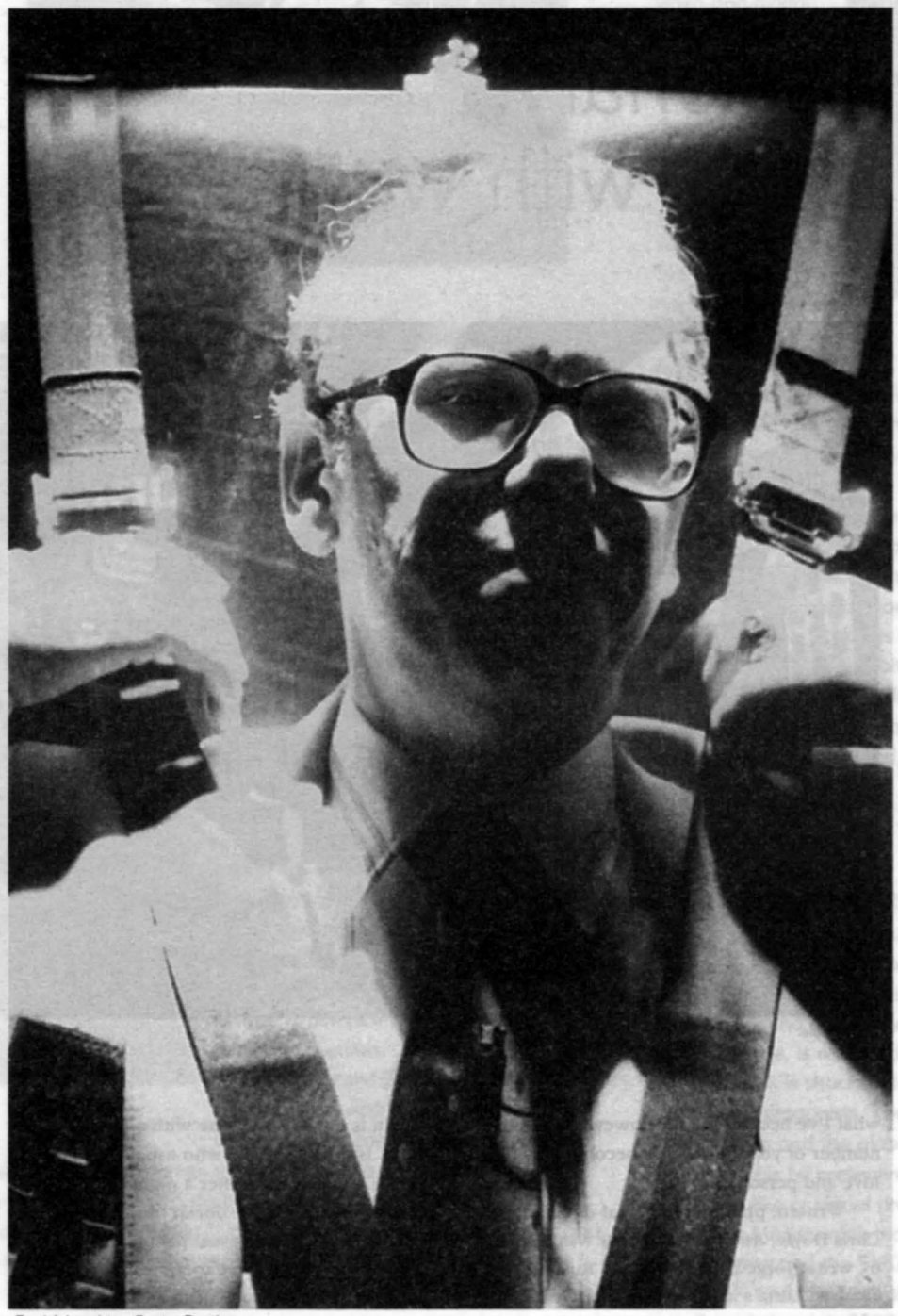
Kirsten Krauth

Seal's memorable lament, "and we're never going to survive unless we get a little crazy", permeated the Sydney Film Festival this year. Death, idiocy, survival, sanity, decay were all very much on the agenda, revealing filmmakers willing to dig into their cultures and unearth rotting corpses: a man who builds electric chairs (*Mr Death*) and a celebration of the first electrocution in an Indian village (*Throne of Death*); choreographed isolation and menace in northern Africa (*Beau Travail*) and a melancholy salute to Berlin (*Berlin-Cinema*) and 70s idealism (*Jesus' Son*). These films stood out amongst the wispy Eurocentric mélange (*The Legends of Rita*, *Une Liaison Pornographique*, *Sombreman's Action*) to question the divisions (doco/feature, farce/tragedy, truth/fiction, image/text) that film fests are often still structured around.

In Errol Morris' coolly realised doco *Mr Death*, it's a relief to see a director willing to experiment stylistically with a form that has not changed much in 50 years. A soundtrack pulsing with fizzes of electricity courses through the film and introduces us to Fred A Leuchter Jnr, who redesigns electric chairs (and later, lethal injection machines and gallows) with the enthusiasm of a fan. His aim is to make extermination more "humane" and the examples he gives—a man whose head catches on fire (think *The Green Mile*), a man tortured for half an hour while the chair malfunctions and is fixed—means we are (in theory) sympathetic to his views. It's hard to tell whether Fred is naïve or an egomaniac (and this is a strength of Morris' ambiguous direction) but the film's sudden tilt (he's sent by Nazi sympathisers to go to "the epicentre of death" Auschwitz, to take (secret) samples in an attempt to prove that there were no gas chambers) adds a sinister edge to his fascination with death. What's most disturbing is that Fred truly believes he is the only person qualified to do this research (and he doesn't even bother to check his findings against 60 years of historical documentation). As Errol says with characteristic humour, *Mr Death* is frightening because "Fred is everyman...when God created the Garden of Eden, he added self deception to the mix: things'll be horrible but they'll never notice."

Throne of Death, Camera D'Or winner at Cannes (1999), takes this issue of American superiority and cultural imperialism to new extremes in its depiction of an Indian village promoting its greatest new gadget—an electric chair—imported from the States. This exquisitely shot film works on the precipice of tragedy and irony: a poverty stricken man gains martyrdom, and a bronze plaque, when he is the first to be executed in the village; his wife and child get their first good feed for years in a last supper served by attentive waiters the night before his death. The political intricacies of village life are revealed in the well orchestrated celebration of the Chair's arrival—dancing girls, a sea of happy faces, moving speeches—and we (and they) are culpable in the knowledge that the accused man is innocent.

A Brief History of Errol Morris is a thoughtful parallel to both these films, offering insight into Morris' techniques and why he chose to focus on the "Florence Nightingale of Death Row." Interviews with Werner Herzog and other kindred spirits reveal an obsessive filmmaker who uses his background as a detective to get under the skin of his characters, slowly: he never fills a silence, letting the camera roll. As Errol says, "we see ourselves as protagonists in our own private drama...I try to capture that." Like writer James Ellroy he is obsessed with crime and murder, and the line between life and death. He likes rural America, David Lynch country, where he interviews "philosopher kings of the swamp" in documentaries like *Gates of Heaven* (pet cemeteries); and inhabits places like Vernon, Florida, better known as Nub City, because it has the highest case of insurance fraud in the States (people blow their own limbs off, but they can still drive a Cadillac). Morris' *Thin Blue Line* had the rare acclaim of being a documentary that saved a prisoner from death row. The murder case was resolved, not because of factual evidence brought to light (or a cinema verité style) but because the stylistic deviations from the realist documentary form—re-enactment of events, contradictions, lies, juxtapositions of characters' accounts—created a truth out of the "sea of the false." As one of his interviewees says, "you mean this is the real world? I never thought of that." (Hint for Gayle Lake: how about an Errol Morris retrospective next year?)



Fred A Leuchter, *Doctor Death*

Berlin-Cinema also examines this tenuous relationship between documentary and fiction, Wim Wenders meditating on the nature of emptiness, the gaps, between lines and words, reading and films, bricks and mortar. He remembers a Berlin before the wall came down, where there was space, between buildings, before the gaps were filled. He argues for the same space in films today, past the tendencies to break story down into formula. He gives an example of footage shot during World War II in Germany, the same scenes filmed by US and Russian troops. The Russians shot in black and white, restaged the events, fictionalised the account by adding characters, while the Americans used colour and filmed in verite style, trying to capture and preserve history as it was. Wenders argues that the Russians captured more "truth" in their evocation of an historical moment, echoing Morris' observation that a made up account can reveal as much or more about an event or person. Ironically *Berlin-Cinema* is nostalgic about film's 'demise' (and wants to preserve the film/digital boundary) but remains a joy for film buffs, recreating Wenders' memorable imagery from *Wings of Desire*, using repetition of still shots and the words of Godard and moving objects through frames to evoke a haunting mesmeric lingering dream.

Beau Travail continues this deliberate, sensual pace and is my favourite from the festival in its reinvention of male soldier rituals into a stylised choreography in the sandy terrain of Djibouti. French legionnaires become feminised under their elegant ironed creases, objects of Claire Denis' knowing gaze, computer game antagonists who size each other up and play out boy's club death wishes, their muted passions and loyalties and jealousies under siege in the harsh blue light and dusty sultry nightclub, where our anti-hero jungle-boogies at the end, letting loose in a parody and (dis)integration of his army moves, amidst the African women glowing under neon. (The Melbourne Film Festival recently featured a retrospective of Claire Denis' films.)

FH, aka Fuckhead, the central character in *Jesus' Son*, asks whether death and living are the same thing...are we only unhappy because we make a distinction? Hallucinating after having dropped a few tabs (stolen from the hospital where he works as an orderly), FH is in the "wilderness" looking for a place to pitch a tent. He comes across a graveyard, the glowing crosses extending for miles, which his buddy can't see. Not because it isn't there, but because it's a drive-in, the white crosses empty poles the speakers used to hang on. It's a great evocation of the end of an era (70s idealism) in a crazy and bleak collection of white trash vignettes directed by NZ filmmaker Alison Maclean. With strong performances by Samantha Morton (as usual, brilliant) and Billy Crudup along with restrained drop-ins by Dennis Hopper and Holly Hunter, its combination of whimsical humour and uneasy romance is reminiscent of Hartley's *Trust* and Gallo's *Buffalo 66*. What sets it apart from recent US indie features is an interesting structure and voiceover: a drug fucked narrator steers us in the wrong directions, heads off on a tangent, pauses, forgets where he's at, moves in another direction, returns to another story mid-frame. Skewed, out of order, confused and unreliable, it works like memory, better than the usual (yawn) circular narrative that begins at the end and ends at the end, or is that the beginning, a nice neat circle usually involving the view from a plane window and fluffy clouds...and resolution.

Beau Travail *(France), writer/director Claire Denis, writer Jean-Pol Fargeau, based on the work of Herman Melville;* Jesus' Son *(USA), director Alison Maclean, based on Denis Johnson's short stories;* Mr Death: the rise and fall of Fred A Leuchter Jr *(USA), director Errol Morris;* Throne of Death *(India), writer/director Murali Nair;* Berlin-Cinema (Titre Provisoire) *(Switzerland/France), writer/director Samira Gloor-Fadel;* A Brief History of Errol Morris *(UK), director Kevin Macdonald;* Sydney Film Festival, State Theatre & Dendy Opera Quays, Sydney, June 9-23

The title of this review is taken from Errol Morris' documentary Gates of Heaven.

Anti-auteur: music video art

Erin Brannigan

At the forum held during the *MuVi* screenings at the Valhalla in Sydney, a debate sprang up about the absence of credits from the screening of music videos. This fact is pivotal in understanding the position held by music videos within the broader screen culture. The best of the genre are positioned along the cutting edge of video art and technology, they are collaborations with some of the best new and established music artists and occupy the fertile common ground between music and screen. Consequently they are financially supported by the music industry and, in a productive reciprocal relationship, influence the developments and directions within that industry. At this point, between disciplines and their associated technologies, between art and promotion, between production and product, the music video creators exist as enigmas. In a move that has been toyed with by avant-garde filmmakers, the power hierarchies implicit in credits are absent here representing the situation for the music video described above; they result from so many forces that the impulse to identify an 'auteur' is dissipated.

Having recently been presented with the task of researching the 'hot choreographers' of the moment, I naturally turned to music videos. The history of commercial dance in the late 20th century has been a succession of fads drawn directly from this small screen genre: Michael Jackson's softened rap moves, Janet Jackson's 'one-move-per-beat' style, Paula Abdul's hard hitting accents, all had their day and, to differing degrees, still linger on in jazz classes around the country. But identifying Ricky

Window Licker

Martin's choreographer (who incidentally is Tina Landon of Janet Jackson fame) is no easy feat; professional dance networks across USA, fan-club websites and finally the LA music video awards website had to be negotiated. The people who help create the 'aura' of our popstars are thus themselves surrounded by mystique due to the scarcity of information relating to them.

With the rise of electronic dance music that often has a pasty DJ as its 'star' instead of an appealing singer, doors have opened for music video directors both in terms of creative freedom and recognition. Combined with the 'mystique' mentioned above, directors such as Chris Cunningham and Spike Jonze have acquired cult status and both now move between the music video format and feature film work.

Three clips by Cunningham were screened at *MuVi* (at the St Kilda Film Festival and elsewhere): *Window Licker* (Aphex Twin), *All is Full of Love* (Björk) and *Africa Shox* (Leftfield). Cunningham's feature film work includes designing the aliens for *Alien 3* and he is currently directing a film version of *Neuromancer*. He was also in discussion with Stanley Kubrick about a sci-fi project before the director's death. I'm sounding like a fan because I am one. The 11 minute version of *Window Licker* is a remarkable short film referencing the boot clips associated with American R&B, Michael Jackson's mini-musicals of the 80s, Spike Lee's cinematic aesthetic, and the choreography of Gene Kelly. It also comments on the portrayal of women in video clips (a close-up of cellulite-laden bikini-clad buttocks gyrating in slow-mo is truly awesome/awful) and the construction of the popstar, with the artist's face appearing on every-body. In the Björk clip, the camera fetishistically lingers over 2 Björk robot clones who then proceed to tenderly embrace, metal to metal, and in *Africa Shox*, an African man walks the city streets gradually losing limbs that shatter like clay, creating images of a literally broken man that are really distressing.

The latitude allowed these filmmakers was addressed by the forum panel but always in the context of an art vs industry binary which led nowhere. The play with genres, pop culture constructions and the shift away from identities and towards abstract movement studies brought about by the rise of the DJ as music artist, are the issues that seemed obvious post-screening, but they weren't touched on. The German and Australian work contained some treasures, a favourite being the dancing garage doors that perform a tightly choreographed ballet to the electronic score (*Star Escalator* by Sensorama) and another that features an eerie semi-rural landscape with a distant overpass that glitters with passing traffic that throws off UFO like light, exploding every now and then into a pyrotechnic peak when the music demands it (*Au Pair* by Kreidler).

The inclusion of *MuVi* in the St Kilda Film Festival and the attention granted to music videos at festivals such as Oberhausen is testimony to the innovation and rapid development occurring in this field. Although, as one audience member pointed out, David Bowie has been onto this for decades. I'll keep watching *Rage* on Friday nights to see what happens next.

Muvi—*international music videos from the Oberhausen Film Festival in Germany;* eMuvi—*finalists from the Alchemy electronic music video competition; AFI conversations on film: Valhalla, Sydney, June 5-6; George Cinemas, Melbourne May 31-June 4; Electric Shadows, Canberra, June 11; FTI theatre, Perth, June 23-24; AFI State Cinema, Hobart, July 1-2; Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, July 6-8; State Library of Qld theatrette, Brisbane, July 12 & 15. St Kilda Film Festival May 31- June 4*

Value for money at the Sydney Film Festival?

Simon Enticknap

How do you measure a film's worth? In *Clouds of May*, a lovingly lethargic film from Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan, there is a scene in which a film director shoots the same scene again and again, trying to capture a perfect take while adding up the mounting cost of the film (which, presumably, is what it cost to make the film we're watching). The joke is that, ultimately, we're the ones who choose to pay and watch this so-called waste of film, and we do so because we expect a pay-off in the end, a reward for our perseverance, just like the little boy in the film who must carry an egg in his pocket for 40 days in order to gain a musical watch.

Such questions of value and recompense were particularly relevant to this year's festival where subscribers, who once had access to nearly all the festival films, were asked to pay extra to see about half the program, including a retrospective of Alan Clarke films and several documentaries. A subscription still bought you access to nearly 40 features and documentaries at the State theatre—good value, undoubtedly—but a major change from previous years in which one of the pleasures of the festival has been the freedom to wander from screen to screen, dipping in and out of the light, sliding from your seat if something became too soporific, or perchance to stay, having the luxury to take a punt on an unknown. Alas, the days of being a film flaneur seem to be numbered; we must make a choice, discriminate, exercise our buying power—and it hurts.

Two films which paid in full at the State were *Human Resources* and *Ratcatcher*, both described as being reminiscent of Ken Loach's films despite their differences in look and feel. What they shared was a focus on working class communities under stress, from contemporary industrial France to the tenement blocks of 70s Glasgow. *Human Resources* also recalled Bertrand Tavernier's *It All Starts Today* from last year's festival, particularly in the way it documented the effects of post-industrialisation and economic rationalism, as well as in its use of a mainly amateur cast. In Tavernier's case, however, this local talent was portrayed as inherently passive, a silent oppressed mass waiting to be saved through the efforts of the professional classes—the schoolteacher, the artist, the social worker etc. *Human Resources*, on the other hand, captures the complex interaction and antagonism between classes, even within the same family, and presents all the players as dynamic, engaged individuals; the result is a film about the campaign for a 35-hour working week which is also a moving Oedipal drama.

The special quality of *Ratcatcher* lies in its uncompromising nature, not so much the result of any gritty, in-yer-face shock tactics—it is a tough but tender film and weepingly beautiful throughout—but rather in its absolute refusal to sentimentalise the lives of its characters. In this respect it suggests Loach's *Kes*—Ramsay goes close to offering us the fulfilment of a happy ending but can't quite do it, doesn't go for the easy satisfaction—but it reminded me especially of Terence Davies' films about childhood, notably in the use of sound and song to evoke the most deeply wrought emotions concerning family, loneliness, yearning…

Time to get personal. *Innocence* and *A Pornographic Affair* offered contrasting views of a woman and a man's lust in action, or perhaps love in all its glory and pathos. Paul Cox's new film examines what happens when feelings you thought had expired many moons ago turn around and bite you with renewed vigour even as the sands of time are beginning to peter out. Not surprisingly then, the protagonists barely have time to sit still for long, are always on the move, constantly coming and going as they try to get at least one thing straight before the death knell sounds. It's a film full of reflection, literally in the myriad windows and mirrors, as well as in the mouths of characters who like to ruminate with sentences like "The thing about love/death/life" etc etc as they stomp around the living room, up and down river banks, in and out of houses.

In contrast, *A Pornographic Affair* is all about staying still and not saying very much, in fact the less said the better—it's pretty much a no-names affair. While Cox's characters can hardly constrain themselves, the Man and the Woman in *A Pornographic Affair* spend a lot of time sitting around (same table, same day) being inscrutable, before retiring discreetly to a nearby hotel room. Their affair is all about staying in control—don't give too much away, come too soon, open up—so that any emotion which emerges here is as intense as it is insignificant. A mock-documentary style gives everybody the chance to be mature and objective, as well as preventing the viewer or anybody else from getting too close. Next question please.

In the world of real documentary, Heddy Honigmann's film, *Crazy*, goes to the opposite extreme, chasing any tell-tale signs of emotion like a dog after a stick. "No comment" is not acceptable here. In a series of grimly repetitive interviews with Dutch peace keepers about their experiences in various New World Order trouble-spots (Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia), Honigmann asks the soldiers to listen to a piece of music connected with their experiences—then keeps the camera rolling. As a strategy, it opens up possibilities for exploring the role of popular music in the military (arias for the officers and euro-pop for the recruits) but, ultimately, comes across as a rather crude means of getting subjects to emote on camera. And they do—at length—until I desperately wanted somebody to make some connections between all this agony and the practice of using soldiers to (not) fight for peace. There are questions which could have been asked here—such as why the West is so obsessed but also paralysed by the suffering of 'innocent' victims—but the uncomfortable feeling persists that the reason they're not asked is because it might serve only to distract from the pain.

For a far better use of music as means of doing all those ex-things to a culture—examine, explore, explain, exalt (but not exploit)—refer to *Buried Country*. The music is C&W with a Koori twist, the humanity is 100% pure rockin' gold, and Jimmy Little sang live on stage—a hard act for the rest of the festival to follow.

So was it all worth it in the end? As a festival replete with strong screenings and thoughtful programming, it left me feeling completely whelmed, neither more nor less. I came, I saw, I consumed—the ideal new festival patron (except I didn't pay).

Buried Country, *director Andy Nehl, Australia;* Clouds of May, *director/writer/photography Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Turkey;* Crazy, *director Heddy Honigmann, Netherlands;* Human Resources, *director Laurent Canet, France;* Innocence, *director/writer Paul Cox, Australia;* A Pornographic Affair, *director Frederic Fonteyne, France;* Ratcatcher, *director/writer Lynne Ramsay, UK; Sydney Film Festival, State Theatre, June 9 - 23*

St Kilda Film Festival: digital links

Anna Dzenis

Fusion, n. Fusing; fused mass; blending of different things into one; coalition

…when two strange images meet, two images that are the work of two poets pursuing separate dreams, they apparently strengthen each other…"

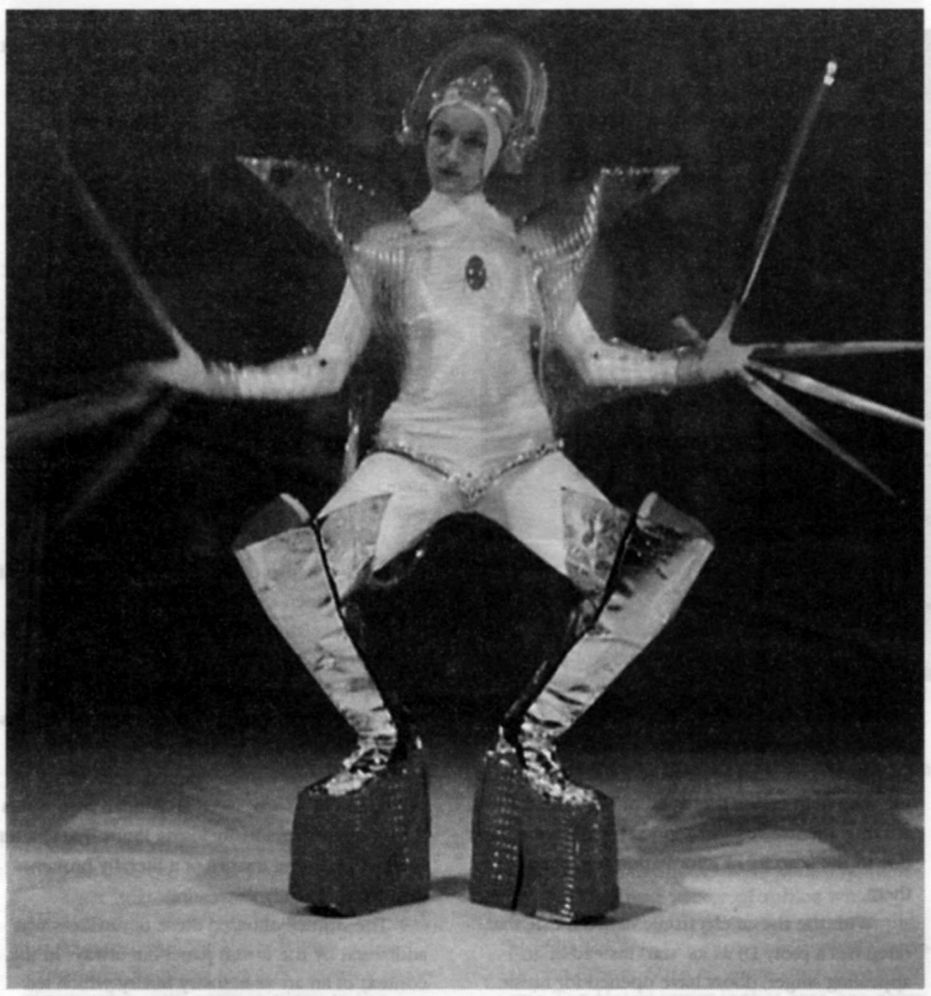
Gaston Bachelard, Poetics of Space

Fusion was an evening of multimedia presentations, a part of the St. Kilda Film Festival program. Curator Sue McCauley successfully brought together a range of material with the stated aim of exploring the interactive possibilities of digital media. The program was scheduled to take place in 3 separate sessions. The first introduced several new innovative CD-ROM works; the second focused on the demonstration of a number of politically charged interactive documentaries; and the third showcased a variety of performance pieces which also incorporated digital material.

Curator Sue McCauley comments: "As the curator of the program for the second year in succession, I knew that the festival and particularly the venue was a fantastic opportunity to showcase the latest in CD-ROM and performance. It is not often that artists get this sort of opportunity. As a survey type, I felt that I could do 3 very different sorts of programs where artists could demonstrate their works for the general festival-going audience.

"I have recently also coordinated the digital arts program for the Next Wave Festival, ***Wide Awake Dreaming at Twilight***. In both events I focused on creating contexts for the exhibition of multimedia works that did not rely on viewers looking at works on the computer. I was interested in getting away from the idea that the site of production was the exhibition platform. I want to give artist the opportunity to escape the box when showing their work. So works were incorporated in installation, in theatrical peformance or as installations."

It has become common practice to incorporate CD-ROMs into film festival programs. In the last couple of years at the Melbourne International Film Festival, exhibitions of multimedia works have been set up in foyers and adjacent gallery spaces enabling patrons to move between film screenings and the interactives. There were, however, several things that made the *Fusion* program quite distinctive. First was the diversity of material that was presented—a demonstration of the real range of work currently being undertaken. Second was the impressive way that a human presence was brought back to the centre of the multimedia stage. This took the form of the creators of the CD-ROMs actually presenting their work, taking the audience through some of the pathways of their creations, and answering



66B/cell, *Cybermyth*

questions about the work and the creative process. It also took the form, in the final session, of a number of manifestations of the performing body, from playfully acerbic monologues to high-tech choreographed dance ensembles.

The first session, Surface Tension, featured 2 CD-ROMs which could be described as explorations of personal spaces and the subterranean, shifting zones beneath the surface of things. Leon Cmielewski and Josephine Starr's *Dream Kitchen* is an interactive stop-motion animation. The space for this interactive is a pristine, gleaming kitchen setting. Cmielewski explained that the concept originated in a story from Japan where people put on VR helmets to see what their dream kitchen might be like. Once we start to explore this dream zone, however, we encounter 'eaky borders' which allow us to slip into the oven, under the fridge, down the sink. Here we discover debris, missing pens and pencils, and rodents: we are even able to administer electric shock to a rat. Each return to the kitchen space finds it in increasing disarray—dirtier, messier, falling apart. In comparison, the space for Matthew Riley's *Memo* is more personal and meditative. Riley's idea was to create an artist's diary full of hand-drawn, painterly sketches and scrawling text in a high-tech medium. He wanted this journal-like structure to incorporate his many observations of the relationships between popular culture and the everyday. And he felt that interactivity would enable him to suggest complex conjunctions of meaning between situations as diverse as phone sex, football, gambling, and shopping, with a focus on the different ways in which language works.

The second session featured a series of interactive documentaries with tough political and educational agendas. It became clear that interactivity has provided practitioners with many new opportunities. It was also evident from the work that the interactive form of documentary has become the site of close callaboration between the subjects and the storytellers. Filmmaker and activist Richard Frankland introduced the CD-ROM *The Lore of the Land* and spoke of the way Fraynework Multimedia's work supported Indigenous people in telling their own stories by not editing the material that they have collected. Similar sentiments were expressed by those who worked on the disturbing and poetic *East Timor Identity, Resistance and Dreams of Return*. The producers saw themselves as facilitators encouraging the stories of East Timorese refugees in exile to be told. The final documentary, *Mabo: The Native Title Revolution,* turned out to be an equally interesting hybrid that includes a re-edit of filmmaker Trevor Graham's *Land Bilong Islanders* with a new ending taken from his other film *Mabo: Life of an Island Man*. A great deal of extra material has also been gathered together into this CD-ROM to make it a valuable research resource with clear educational potential.

The third session was the most provocative and high octane. Live performers interacted with digital projections of pre-recorded images—a fusion of voices, bodies, and dancing limbs in a multimedia theatre-scape. Frank Lovece's *Poopants* was a voice-driven work dedicated to narrative. Lovece's fast-track monologue touched on issues of violence, the republic, race and class as his words and voice interacted with projected image fragments. A series of screens and structures were strategically set up on stage to further break up and fragment the images, and complicate possible readings or interpretations. The next 2 performances were Cazerine Barry's innovative dance works. *Pony Girl* took its inspiration from *Girl's Own* Annuals and Barry's prancing, energetic body took mock riding lessons from a 60s style projected voice. *Lampscape* was a more mesmeric piece with Barry dancing behind a large gauze screen shadowed by, and interacting with, images of herself projected through the screen—a theatre of the figural. The final performance was a futuristic work of alchemy which came from the Tokyo-based collaborative group 66b/cell's *Cybermyth*, a collaboration of Japanese and Australian performers. The work they presented was a remix of Goethe's *Faust*—a kind of Faust in Space—with characters plucked from the text free-form, clothed in graphically striking cyber costumes which intermittently flashed and created their own light shows, performing choreographed Butoh-inspired dance movements which also incorporated digital video projections. During question time, one of the artists explained that they had tried the piece with visuals alone but felt that it wasn't enough. The stage, they said, needed a human body.

This was one of *Fusion*'s real achievements. Invoking McCauley's words, Fusion was a program which "escaped the box".

Fusion, *St Kilda Film Festival, The George Ballroom, Melbourne, June 2*

FILMshorts

Hurt, a film made by young people in North West NSW as part of a project in conjunction with non profit arts group BIG hART (seen in performance at the Adelaide Festival), has been nominated for 2 AFI awards. With the assistance of filmmaker Phillip Crawford and screenwriter Scott Rankin, 250 children from Walgett, Narrabri, Tamworth, Armidale and Moree were involved in the making. NSW Premier Bob Carr commented, "the film has already been adopted by the Federal Office of the Status of Women as a tool to address domestic violence issues, but what is most important is the effect that making the film has had on changing the lives of the young people at the core of the project."

Extreme Heat is a new project (financed by Pacific Film & Television Commission and AFC) geared to creating low cost production opportunities for Qld filmmakers. *Rubber Gloves* from Kris Kneen & Anthony Mullins (whose short *Stop* competed at this year's Cannes Festival), Sandra Graham's *Mohammed' s Passion*and *Crack* by AFI winner Evan Clarry are the first films funded under the scheme and will be completed in late August.

Film Australia scored a hat-trick at the Sydney Film Festival with attendees voting *The Diplomat*, *Tosca* and *Buried Country* the three most popular documentaries. Winning film, Tom Zubrycki's *The Diplomat*, with a special appearance by Jose Ramos Horta, received a standing ovation and has been nominated for Best Documentary and Best Direction in the AFI Awards. Sharon Connolly, Film Australia's CEO said, "these latest accolades are further proof that Australian audiences appreciate the quality, relevance and diversity of the documentaries which Australia produces." *The Diplomat* will be released nationally, commencing in Sydney August 18, and all 3 films will screen on SBS.

Call for shorts: Melbourne Fringe Festival is looking for short films of less than 20 minutes for *Short Stuff*, an open access program. Docos, animation, digital, experimental, fiction are all welcome. Deadline August 18. Tel 03 9481 5111, *www.melbournefringe.org.au*.

Media Resource Centre, Adelaide, is presenting a series of seminars called Lipsync. The next session on Aug 29 looks at "What Makes A Good Short." Tel 08 8410 0979, *www.mrc.org.au*

TVshorts

Four new TV programs have been commissioned under the FTO/SBS Independent DIY TV Initiative, which encourages original and imaginative ideas for TV. *Video Dare*, *In the Swim*, *Let' s Vote* and *Bloodsports* feature Real TV, a political game show, ex-Olympic swimmers and the Kelly family Christmas dinner. Stay tuned.

The ABC is planning a second season of *Short and Sweet* for broadcast in December and is scouting for dramas less than 25 mins with no restrictions on style or content. Call Wendy Charell, 02 9950 3670.

Will the AFC gag screen conversation?

Ben Goldsmith

In keeping with our new taste for public disclosures of partiality, I must at the outset declare my hand. I have been a member of the Australian Film Institute since 1996. I regularly use, most often at a distance, the Institute's research and information service and its unique collection of electronic and print resources ranging from scripts, to press packs, to clippings files, to trade papers, books and academic journals of criticism, analysis and theory. I have also been an audience for a large number of films and other projects assisted by the Australian Film Commission. I have attended festivals and screenings, conferences and seminars, premieres and opening night parties. I have pretended to be important in public and stood, alone, in a crowded room with my name pinned to my shirt. I've written about some of these texts and events. Some of these writings have been published. One or two have been read. I taught screen studies to second year undergraduates for a short period. I've been researching screen policy, production and consumption for longer. I am an information junkie. I subscribe to the daily email update Filmnet. I follow numerous discussion lists and bulletin boards including indieWire, Oz Short Films, and the Benton Foundation's Communications-related Headlines Update service. I fled from H-Film when the flavour of debate turned to listmaking and context deficient expressions of favouritism. I've been pleasantly surprised by the new incarnation of *Cinema Papers*. I won a video in a competition run by the *Urban Cinefile* website. I read *Metro* when I can find it in Brisbane, *Encore* and *if* magazine regularly, *Senses of Cinema* and *Screening the Past* periodically. I fraudulently appeared on national public radio and state public television talking knowledgeably about drive-in cinemas having been to one only twice in my life. As work, domestic circumstance and personality permit, I take an active interest in the flow of Australian screen culture, or what I prefer to call the screen conversation.

Recent policy decisions and amendments to funding procedures and guidelines made by the newly restructured Australian Film Commission promise to impact in multiple and profound ways on the shape, tenor and vitality of the screen conversation in Australia. These decisions are notable for a number of reasons. They privilege screen production over consumption, downplay the role of public debate in nurturing a vigorous screen culture, and strain the web of relationships connecting the film industry and the education sector. At a broader level they are symptomatic of the new cultural policy environment in which the dominant voices are not those of social concern and cultural commitment, but those of economic benefit and industrial development. These voices preach new policymaking priorities for the cultural sector. And these priorities reflect and derive from new relationships between cultural industries and public funding agencies and the weight given to market forces in the determination of the public responsibilities of government.

The first decision was outlined in a letter from the Chief Executive of the AFC to the Australian Film Institute in January of this year. In the letter, partially reproduced in the 1999 AFI Annual Report, Kim Dalton advised that because the Institute's activities were primarily directed towards resourcing the education sector, and since "it is not the role of the AFC to fund the provision of services to the education sector", the funding that the Institute's research and information centre had been receiving from the Commission would cease in December 2000. The same claim was made in an article in *The Age* (Philippa Hawker, "Cut! Institute cries foul as funding slashed", April 19), and another by Paul Harris in the latest issue of *Cinema Papers* ('In defence of research and development", June/July). This decision, if carried through, has potentially disastrous implications for the AFI since the research and information service undergirds and links all of the AFI's activities: short film and documentary sales and distribution: a travelling exhibition program including the National Cinematheque, occasional seasons and the annual AFI Awards screenings and ceremony. A working group comprising representatives of the AFC, the AFI, ScreenSound Australia (formerly the National Film and Sound Archive), Film Australia, the Australian Film Television and Radio School and Cinemedia has been reviewing the need for the services and their value to the industry throughout the year. The group will undoubtedly take note of the volume of support the Institute has received from within the film industry, from the education sector, and from other Australian and international film agencies and organisations. It is understood that there is a strong possibility some kind of accommodation will be reached, and it is to be hoped that funding to permit the centre to continue will be secured.

There is a new set of national and international tensions, challenges and opportunities for technology, policy and content production—the convergence of information, communication and entertainment media and industries; new sources of production and co-production finance; the growing incidence of runaway production and studio construction; new competition for eyeballs and for screen space from the internet, games consoles, DVD; the imminent introduction of digital broadcasting and datacasting; new patterns of cinema going, changing release patterns and cinema rebuilding; and the decline in real terms of federal government commitments to the arts and cultural sectors. Faced with these, the AFC, like other agencies and organisations which disburse or utilise public funding, has in recent years been forced to make some tough decisions in defining its "core functions."

As David Gonski recommended in his 1997 *Review of Commonwealth Assistance to the Film Industry*, the AFC has chosen to concentrate its limited resources on assisting screen production in its many and varied forms. This is of course an entirely reasonable and appropriate course for a key public funding agency to take, if it is accepted that while audiovisual and new media production make important contributions to our media culture by giving it a local flavour and perspective, that production will not always meet tests of commercial viability and may not be made without some form of public assistance albeit often in partnership with the private sector.

But given that screen media (whether viewed or intended for viewing in the cinema or in the home, on a television or a computer or a mobile phone) will play an increasingly prominent part in our work and leisure, ministering to our information, communication and entertainment needs, it is equally imperative that support be given to the project of equipping citizens with critical and creative screen skills. Such skills are not only of vocational value, they facilitate informed and active participation in the screen conversation through the understanding and familiarity they promote for the instruments that mediate that culture and that debate.

The Commission's apparent downgrading of support to screen education instruments on the grounds that they are outside its remit is unfortunate and untimely. It underestimates and undervalues the role played by educators and students in colouring, challenging and nurturing Australian screen culture, as well as in training future creative professionals. It also runs counter to contemporary practice overseas, where those things which contribute to the screen culture environment and shape its rhetorics, logics and discourses are recognised for their social value as much as for the contribution they make to industry development and future employment prospects. As a recent British report on screen education, *Making Movies Matter*, noted, the skill to navigate and negotiate the new media environment "will be a key element of literacy in the 21st century (BFI, 1999)." Support for screen education, the report went on, "will help to create the knowledgeable, critically aware audiences upon which the value and integrity of [the screen industries'] future output depend."

Screen and media studies courses comprising both production and critical elements are now offered by most tertiary institutions, and many secondary schools and vocational colleges. Academics and students participate in the Australian screen conversation as filmmakers and multimedia artists, as archivists and essayists, as volunteers and enthusiasts, and above all as audiences and publics. In its most recent Strategic Plan, the Australian Research Council calculates that Australian academic research papers in the arts and humanities are cited 40% more frequently than the world's papers in these fields. Many of these papers discuss Australian screen media, or draw their examples from the pool of Australian moving image experience. All of these activities help build the buzz of world interest in Australian screen production which in turn draws Australian practitioners to North America, Europe, Hong Kong, enhances the attractiveness of Australia as a film location, enjoins content producers in a global screen conversation and invigorates Australian screen culture.

The linkages between education and media are not only strategic, they are deep and genuine. The AFC has in the past been instrumental in facilitating these connections through its support for conferences, publications and joint research projects. And without downplaying the effort that goes in to spreading an ever decreasing budget ever wider, the Commission should be challenged to reconsider its stance on education and treat it as a priority funding concern in recognition of the sector's contribution to the screen conversation. In response the Commission might argue that there are other cultural organisations well placed to take on responsibility for screen education, and that the education sector itself has a part to play. While both may be true, the AFC is still in its own words "the primary development agency for the film, television and creative multimedia industries in Australia and a major supporter of screen culture." In education, universities are rewarded for their corporate accessibility, for the commercial appeal of their work, and for developing the now ubiquitous cross-sectoral partnerships. These arrangements require reciprocation, but in the screen media arena the AFC, it seems, is reluctant to remain in the conversation.

In focusing on the "core function" of production development, the Commission is responding to what it termed a crisis in Australian production at the end of 1999, exacerbated by the Sydney Fox Studios development and evidenced by the 3% share of the domestic box office commanded by Australian feature films last year. Gonski made similar recommendations in calling for the AFC to refocus on the core functions of script development of Australian film and television productions and professional development of new entrants to the industry. Gonski further recommended that funding for screen culture be capped at $1million, roughly 2% of the AFC's annual budget. In this, as in the underperforming Film Licensed Investment Company scheme, Gonski got it wrong.

This is precisely the moment that the AFC should be broadening its commitments to the screen conversation and to initiatives which promote screen education. This can be achieved through operational subsidies, research partnerships, funding for archival resources, and support for new initiatives like the broad range of developments which play a hugely valuable role in public-ising Australian screen culture—the weekly Sydney screening and Q&A program Popcorn Taxi, the email update Filmnet, the newly formed Friends of the National Film or Sound Archive Inc, for example. But however valuable the broad thrust of the Friends' discussion paper is, the Commission should take it as a personal affront that the Friends are motivated to fill "a long-standing void in the Australian film community caused by…the scarcity of national organisations focused on stimulating film culture and academic excellence" ("A New Role for the Archive in the 21st Century", July 2000). This statement echoes Gonski's findings, but fails to acknowledge that in the immediate wake of the public release of the Gonski report, the 4 main national collecting institutions were required to announce their distinction from one another. Each took on responsibility for the collection of screen resources in one particular area, with duplication and overlap to be eradicated—the National Film and Sound Archive, lately ScreenSound, is responsible for film footage; the Australian Film, Television and Radio School collects training and technical materials; the Australian Film Commission's own Research and Information collates statistical data on all aspects of the screen media; and the AFI's Research and Information concentrates on film history, criticism, commentary and review. It should be equally galling to the Commission to read declamations in one of the brightest new energies, and most interesting contributor to the screen conversation, *if* magazine, of the "pitiful state" and "general poverty of film culture in Australia" (Peter Galvin, "ScreenSound finds a few new friends", July 2000).

Instead the Commission is actively depublicising the screen conversation as it shrinks back to its core constituency, the production industry. In addition to the AFC's unwillingness to maintain a responsibility to screen education, the guidelines of the Industry and Cultural Development Organisations, Events and Activities Fund—the main source of funding for screen culture organisations such as the AFI's Research and Information centre, and screen publications including *Metro*, *if* magazine and *RealTime+OnScreen*—have been amended, with applications accepted by invitation only. In closing down the selection process, the Commission allows itself to be portrayed as a prescriptive rather than a facilitating agent in the screen conversation. Furthermore, the closed selection process appears to stretch reasonable public expectation that public funds for screen culture should be contestable, their guidelines flexible, and their procedures open and transparent.

It raises questions as to the extent to which the AFC is pruning and shaping rather than growing at arm's length screen culture in this country. These are vital questions which should rightfully be matters for vigorous public debate. This screen conversation should transcend sectoral boundaries, though the informed position of each participant should be acknowledged and respected. It is the role of the education sector to provide the skills with which to engage in the screen conversation. It is in the interests of content producers and those working in ancillary industries to foster a receptive, critical, engaged, passionate screen public. And it is the responsibility of public agencies to facilitate and encourage connections and dialogue, to provide opportunities and spaces for the conversation to be held, the buzz to be heard, the beautiful cacophony of noise that is our screen culture to be made.

But that's just me. What do you reckon?

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Cinesonic 3: all ears at the movies

Anna Dzenis

For a third time Philip Brophy has brought together an eclectic, impressive international group of film academics, professional writers and practitioners for Cinesonic, a conference on film scores and sound design. Cinesonic has firmly established itself as a place where theorists and practitioners can come together and their work, analyses and language can interact and create a new dialogue.

True to its reputation, Cinesonic once again brought to the centre-stage sound artists and industry professionals who have received scant attention; it programmed papers which complicated the ways in which we might think about sound and music; and it continued to raise important questions about the relationship between sound and the cinema. Films chosen for analysis ranged from Alice Guy's silent *A House Divided* (1913) and the exploitation film *Spermula* (1976) to Vince Giarrusso's *Mallboy* (2000), recently selected for Directors' Fortnight at Cannes. And for conference participants who had been itching to put such knowledge into practice—to really 'listen to' and 'hear' a film—there were several programmed precisely because of their particular soundtracks.

Practitioners

Cinesonic's first evening session kicked off with a much-anticipated "Conversation" with the extraordinary Jack Nitzsche who came onto the stage gloriously resplendent in embroidered, beaded and fringed black jacket, studded boots, layered chains, dark glasses and wicked black hat. He was a visual and sonic spectacle—delighted to be invited and acknowledged. Nitzsche's music credits are astonishing—they extend right back to his work with Phil Spector, The Rolling Stones, Neil Young, The Monkees and The Cramps. And, as a "rock migrant in the cinema", he has also been involved in composing scores and producing music for more than 33 films. His conversation was richly interspersed with clips from films as diverse as *Performance* (1970), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), *Blue Collar* (1978), *Hard Core* (1979), *Cruising* (1980), *Cutter's Way* (1981), *Starman* (1984), *The Hot Spot* (1990) and *The Indian Runner* (1991). And Nitzsche shared anecdotes about his work with performers such as Elvis and Miles Davis and directors such as Dennis Hopper and Sean Penn.

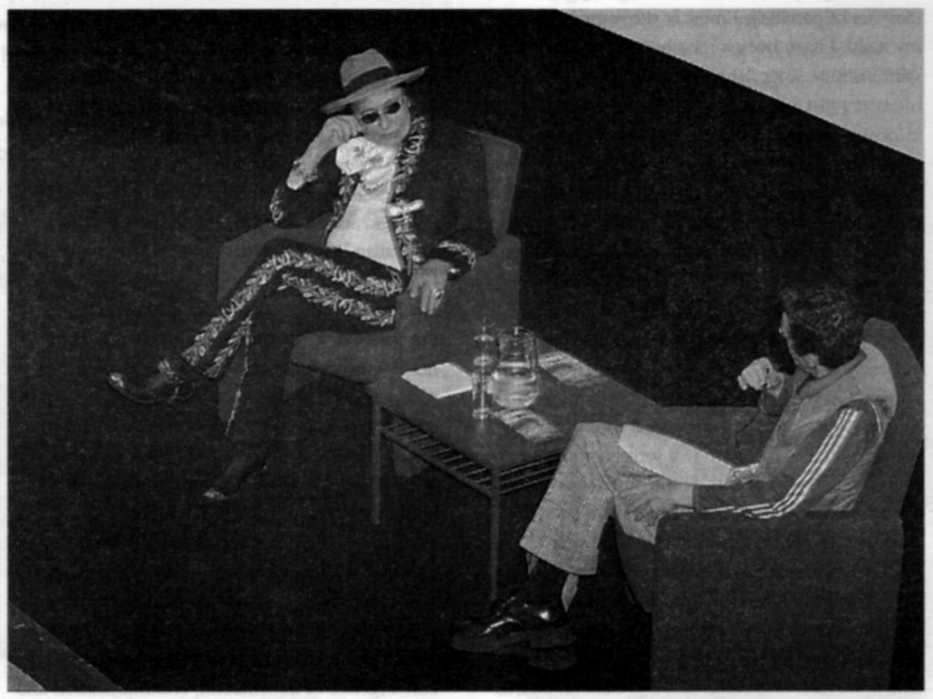
The second of the practitioners' sessions was an industry presentation from sound designer and Dolby Consultant Bruce Emery who tried to demystify the history and practice of the Dolby Laboratories and explain how Dolby has contributed to the sound we hear in the cinema. His talk provided access to an insider's knowledge and was supported by a surprisingly informative instructional video. But the real coup for this year had to be the privileged insight into the creative collaboration of director Vince Giarrusso, producer Fiona Eagger and sound designer/music supervisor Philip Brophy on the much-anticipated feature *MallBoy*. A number of clips from the film were screened, to the delight of everyone present, and there was detailed discussion about sound and music choices, and how the process of "talking through" helped everyone arrive at a mutually satisfactory solution to the many creative problems that were encountered. Brophy's theory that "you can have a radical approach to sound-production on a non-alienating film" appeared to have been put into practice.

Theorists

Bill Routt's provocative "Hearing Silent Images" was the first of the day sessions and, just like strong coffee, it stirred the mind and the senses. Routt's paper investigated the apparent incongruity of "sound in the silent cinema", asking what it meant to "hear silent images." Using the work of theorists such as Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Luc Nancy, he proposed that there was a way of talking about silent films as though they could be apprehended through hearing rather than seeing or reading. His analytical and cinesthetic investigations were compelling. Equally provocative was Adrian Martin's "Musical Mutations" which was also interested in the incongruous as a way of rethinking film history. Martin's presentation began with a treasured anecdote from John Cassavetes, that he would be interested in making only one musical, a musical based on Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Martin proceeded from this surprising example to track a quite different history of the musical—the mutant musical—illustrated with sparkling examples from Jerry Lewis' *The Ladies Man* (1961), Sally Potter's *The Tango Lesson* (1997), Bertolucci's *La Luna* (1979), Godard's *Pierrot Le Fou* (1965), Nanni Moretti's *Caro Diario* (1994) and Tsia-Ming Liang's *The Hole* (1998) to name only a few of this generic variant.

Several other papers were interested in the musical soundtrack, but more specifically in the "processes of reading and interpretation." Krin Gabbard proceeded chronologically through the Kubrick oeuvre mapping out his increasing control over the films' musical scores and pointing out how these have coded the films as artefacts of high culture. Annahid Kassabian's paper was more concerned with musical scores in popular Hollywood films. Beginning from the premise that music was as important to identification as image and narrative, Kassabian made a sharp distinction between the different ways that "compiled scores" and "composed scores" tracked identification. The complexity of this identification was highlighted by a detailed analysis of *Dangerous Minds* and *The Mark of Zorro*.

Other papers dealt with the sound of the voice and its many accents. Philip Brophy's paper explored the practice of "dubbing" and "talking over" in films, beginning with the observation that most people think *Astroboy* is American because of its dubbed soundtracks. These presumptions were further problematised when the American and Japanese *Godzilla* films were compared, and their distinctive cultural sensitivities examined. Rebecca Coyle's "Speaking 'Strine': Locating 'Australia' in Film Voice & Speech" was also concerned with voice, dialogue and accent. But Coyle's study was focused quite specifically on Australian feature films that have been marketed successfully overseas, with examples such as *Crocodile Dundee* and *Muriel's Wedding* foregrounding vocal cultural stereotypes.



Jack Nitzsche & Philip Brophy, Cinesonic 3

For the last 2 papers, the focus was on the "marginal" and the "overlooked". Jeff Smith's "Taking Music Supervisors Seriously" elaborated a history of the music supervisor's role and how it has been so consistently disregarded. Ian Penman's paper was another left-field contribution. Firstly, because of its wild title: "Garvey's Ghost meets Heidegger's Geist—Or, how DUB became everyone's soundtrack". And secondly, because Penman's background in music writing brought a different perspective to the study of the cinema soundtrack. His mesmeric presentation used the poetry of words and their metaphoric associations to make his argument, with the low hum of dub coming from the speakers. But what was particularly memorable was his suggestion that dub was, in fact, its own film. Even more provocative was his suggestion that we don't need more soundtracks for the cinema—what we really need are more and better films for our soundtracks.

Experiencing the Soundtrack

But what does this all have to do with our individual experiences at the cinema? And how does listening to people talking about sound and music inform our own listening and hearing? In response to such questions, this year's Cinesonic programmed 2 quite distinctive double bills. The first program, *Satanic Noise and Screaming Rock'n'Roll*, was introduced by Adrian Martin who compared the cacophonous, often contradictory sound collage of *The Exorcist* (1971) with *Sympathy for the Devil* (1970), a film he described as totally sound-driven with absolutely no conversation. The second program, *Sounds of the City*, was introduced by Philip Brophy who invited a comparison between the brooding, breathing, percolating city in *Taxi Driver* (1976) with the vibrating, clinking interior spaces of domestic objects and people in *Playtime* (1967).

With its invitation to listen to the cinema, Cinesonic is well on its way to achieving its aim of instigating a vibrant sonic culture. For those who were unable to attend last year's Cinesonic, the book with all of the conference papers is now available: *Cinesonic: Cinema and the Sound of Music*, edited by Philip Brophy (Australian Film Television and Radio School, 2000).

Cinesonic 3—Experiencing the Soundtrack, 3rd international conference on film scores and sound design, RMIT, Melbourne, June 29-July 2, http://cinesonic.rmit.edu/

SCREENCULTUREshorts

As reported on the b4bfilmtv website (a useful collection of film industry comment), a recent Australian Writers Guild forum held at the Sydney Film Festival highlighted an increasing division between writers and producers. Stephen Sewell and Louis Nowra argued for more understanding of the craft of screenwriting and Ian David (soon AWG president) commented: "When you consider that the FFC has invested in over 100 Australian films and less than 6.5% have returned their production budget, there is something wrong and it's not the scripts, it's the people who put the deals together." Kim Dalton, AFC Chief Executive, claimed the media have been responsible for blaming poor performance at the box office on poor screenwriting, and that the AFC plans to establish programs targeted at script funding. www.b4bfilmtv.com/

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission recently announced a 2 month trial of open captioned movies in an attempt to make cinema more accessible for people with hearing impairments. The new release films will be screened August - September at specific sessions in Greater Union, Hoyts and Village Cinemas in the Melbourne and Sydney CBDs. Participating cinemas and film distributors proposed the trial as part of an inquiry set up following a complaint from a man who is hearing impaired. Open captioned films are more sophisticated than subtitles, with icons and written descriptions of sounds used to help convey the film's atmosphere. More information: *www.hreoc.gov.au, www.auscap.com.au or check newspapers for screening times.*

Peter Bart, editor-in-chief of *Variety*, will speak on how cinematic imagination has been overtaken by executive greed in Hollywood in a series of forums presented by the AFI, coinciding with the Melbourne Writers Festival. The Malthouse, Melbourne, August 26; MCA, Sydney, August 29.

Cinesonics: The Straight Story

Philip Brophy

What is it like to be alone, truly alone? You would lose something we take for granted every moment of our social existence: proximity. Things, objects, events, people, would be held from afar. All would be over there, beyond reach, away from you. As you get old, an audiovisual loneliness develops in tandem with a psychological and physical fraying of the self. Faces are not as distinct; voices become muted and muffled; everything appears to be occurring 'over there' as the senses become dulled, diffused, dilated. Combine this with the loss of loved ones, friends, even acquaintances, and all immediacy and proximity start to fade.

David Lynch's *The Straight Story* (2000) explores the psycho-acoustic realm of loneliness as it is enveloped by the onset of old age. Just as you will eventually experience the dimming of light and the narrowing of frequencies in real life, so will you experience all manner and mode of recession, resignation and regression during the sonorous unfolding of *The Straight Story*.

This is what marks Lynch as a uniquely experiential director: he investigates the audiovisual nature of cinema in order to generate visceral and vicarious experiences that provide the basis for psychological consideration. We know this of him, albeit filtered unnecessarily through a cultdom of surrealism, absurdism and artifice. Do not presume that Lynch's predilection for producing a proscenium for psychotica marks a fixed disposure to loudness. No matter how 'loud' his cinema may appear at every level of its execution, Lynch is more concerned with the screaming silence and numbing noise that vibrates deep within the individual than any vocalisation that is distributed at the sociological plane. And it is Lynch's hypersensitivity to those vibrations, to the monumental psychic cataclysms which follow even the most microscopic events, that grants him direct access to the most particular frissons of the self. Lynch carries a genuinely scarred cranium in difference to, say, the tacky toupee which serves as the mantle for Oliver Stone's 'wild youth' cinema. Where Stone plays reissue CDs of The Doors and hears the selfish voice of a generation, Lynch hears air whistling under a door and the sound of degeneration within the self.

For a film which depicts old age with great attention to detail, *The Straight Story* gracefully avoids the pithy conceits of 'generation gaps' and similar journalistic tropes which have embalmed the 90s teen cycle before a single sign of acne is allowed on the screen. More remarkably, *The Straight Story* is not even 'aimed' at an older audience, begging for their laboured, pathetic identification. For this is a document of how cinema can address old age in the act of aging, foregrounding age as a process of the present, and as such goes against most narrative norms which exploit the advance of age as a dramatic and thematic pause for contemplation, memory and resolution, for revisiting the past. Alvin Straight (Richard Farnsworth) has not only aged in the back story of the film, but he engages in forward action (literally, driving forth on a tractor) in a cathartic attempt to deal with his aging by achieving closure through speaking to his brother (cameo-ed by Harry Dean Stanton). So let us look at through some of the ways in which Lynch executes this act of aging as a series of cinesonic acts.

First sonic feature of *The Straight Story*: the silencing of speech. The dramatic graft which forges momentum in the film's story is the silence that hangs like a cloud over the Straight brothers. Having not spoken to each other in so many years, their silence resounds like an unfinished sentence, an unresolved melody, an incomplete causality. Alvin travels across 3 states not merely to reunite with his blood brother, but to hear his own voice in the shared acoustic space. That is how Alvin will deal with the psycho-acoustic loneliness that has befallen him. It is so fitting that his brother is wordless at this reunion, overcome with emotion as he hears the sound of Alvin's voice. The silence that lolls between them at the film's finish is the end to a disturbing hum which rang ceaselessly across time and space until physical proximity could touch that hum and set it to rest. The beauty of the moment lies not merely in its emotional depth, but in the way that it reflects on the material role of the human voice in such familial conflict, and the way it extends to the social plane a physical aspect of how vibrations can continue unabated until the grounding of physical touch will reduce them to stasis. Only a director with an ear (David Lynch is also the sound designer for *The Straight Story*) could construct this type of post-literary acousmatic object of narration. In the hands of a less tuned director, this same narrational envelope could be presented through the conventional trappings which both literary types and so-called cineastes would find expressive and poetic. But the power of Lynch lies in his ability to wrench the poetic from its historical stricture within those traditions, which surely in the year 2000 have to be verging on the archaic and should therefore be treated with polite disdain.

Lynch's approach to the dramatic signification of non-speech and unfinished-speech is thematically mapped across the characters of *The Straight Story*. Rose (Sissy Spacek) talks in a dysfunctional manner due to her placement within this same familial map. Traumatised by the forced separation of her children due to her own psychological instability, her speech patterns carry the scar of this wrenching, leaving her to speak grammatically correct sentences but in a timing which forces the flow of meaning through a series of ruptures and spurts of fragmented phrases and clauses. (It truly is a remarkable vocal performance.) Like Alvin, her voice is her story, not through words as written into her, but as words sounded through her. Note also the way these voices are contrasted against the warm blanketed tones that flow forth from the friendly family with whom Alvin stays while his tractor is being repaired en route. Their rich sonority and the effortless way in which it flows from their mouths sonically portrays a comfortable middle America—retired and retiring—not in a parodic way, but as a means of contrasting their fortunate life against the emotional trauma which Alvin has been holding within him for so many years.

In the documentary *Brother's Keeper* (1992), one of 2 brothers accused of mercy-killing a third brother (all past their 60s) takes the stand in a court trial. This withered shell of a man is struck catatonic and collapses into a nervous spasm, shaking his arm uncontrollably. The court adjourns. He takes the stand again, opens his mouth—and reverts to the same state. The court adjourns again. And again. It is hard to think of a more moving scene in a documentary, struck by the complete incapacity of the human voice at the point of its declaration. The ending of *The Straight Story* reminded me of that scene, and of how much I detest those things we call 'scripts'; of how I wish scriptwriters would try shutting up for once. Stop stuffing words down characters' throats and making them mouth their authorial power. Consider the options of having an actor perform the silence that more aptly reflects how often we are lost for words and rendered speechless in our everyday emotional exchanges. John Roach and Mary Sweeney's lean script for *The Straight Story* is the result not only of 2 people who write well, but also listen well. Mary Sweeney's editing also creates the appropriate timing crucial to conveying this distinctive temporality. And David Lynch's direction of Farnsworth and Spacek evidences an ability to hear their wordlessness as much as their speech.

Second sonic feature of *The Straight Story*: the permeance of quietude. In an era when digital sound has favoured the format's ability to maintain non-distorting louder levels and more impactful transient peaks, it is forgotten how effective the relatively 'pure' silence generated through the absence of surface noise can be in sound design. Don't misread me here: I'm not advocating 'quiet' in today's 'noisy movies.' Such a reactionary stance leads to gentle chords on grand pianos and soft strums of acoustic guitars, which to my ear are repulsive signs of conservative times. My point is that you can achieve a type of abject silence in digital sound wherein the absence of surface noise creates dramatic and psychological holes in a narrative, intensifying equally modes of identification (sucking you into the absence) and disorientation (unsettling you by removing the 'ground hum' of a picture). *The Straight Story* is possibly the first film to explore the psycho-acoustic ramifications of this in detail.

There are many moments in the film where you hear absolutely nothing. Conditioned to hearing the crackle of the optical print, silence in the analogue film soundtrack always comforts you, saying 'I really haven't gone away.' Even 'fades to black' rarely occur in silence, as they will carry an audio fade-out, cross-fade or resolving musical cue—all of which will work toward preparing for the fade-up before we are stranded in a cinematic void. The abject silence of *The Straight Story* echoes that loss of proximity engineered by old age: literally, we are removed from the film—not merely from a certain narrational moment, turn or passage, but from the realm of narration. We are left sitting in the cinema in total isolation, like when the cinema's amplifiers suddenly cut out. Yet the film also exploits the digital soundtrack's capacity to move accurately between these aural extremes. The mix of the film quite noticeably does not stay at a median of acceptable audio presence. Normally, a film's dialogue in particular will hover within a comfortable decibel range, utilising a variety of compression methods to keep the signal level at a norm so as to aid psycho-acoustic aspects of legibility on the part of the cinema listener. *The Straight Story* has numerous moments where you are urged to listen more carefully, not because of distractions, simultaneous events or sonic density, but simply because you are at a remove from spoken action. The scene that best demonstrates this is when Alvin is chatting with the family with whom he spends a few days. In one unedited shot, we hear a long, quite insignificant conversation at a very low level, filmed from a long distance so as to create a calming, casual observational feeling. A vicarious deafness is experienced here in that one can manage to understand words—as do old people suffering the onset of deafness—but at a severely reduced auditory level. Again, *The Straight Story* provides the sonic suit within which we can experience old age.

Third sonic feature of *The Straight Story*: aural decay. In the history of modern sound design, Lynch is the harbinger of deep booms and dark drones noticeable in his early films. Progressively, Lynch's sound design has re-addressed this approach, developing it initially into the thick textures of sonic nothingness which permeate the psychotic expanses of shadowy nothingness throughout *Lost Highway* (1997). With *The Straight Story*, Lynch has focused on the residue of those events. In scintillating passages of apparent silence, a breathy textural hum is heard ever so faintly on the soundtrack. It sounds like a long-ringing reverberant patina of parts of Angelo Badalamenti's lyrical score—almost as if a phrase of his music has been digitally processed into a jus or light puree of diffusion which gently coats the auditorium. We faintly make out the haunting presence of music, yet recognisable instrumentation and tonality are absent. Orson Welles engineered a similar effect with a Bernard Herrmann cue in *Citizen Kane* (1941) as Susan Alexander lies in her bed, exhausted from the opera forced down her own throat, the orchestral din ringing softly yet fatally in her head, intermingled with the sound of her own fading breath. The effect in *The Straight Story* also carries a fatalistic aspect—not so morbidly, but due to the rich yet fixed tonality of these harmonic sheets of soft pink noise, these hums have a base key which works contra-harmonically to Badalamenti's whimsical cues. The music rolls on lovingly as Alvin distractedly putt-putts on his tractor, while these tones well up in the proceeding silences as a forecast of the possibility that his brother may have already died.

Many people have not heard these tones in the film, but they are there. Sonically and symbolically, they recall the sensation of a distant ringing in the ear, left over from loud events that affected the ear the night before, some years ago, or in your youth. Like an emotional tinitis, this ringing is subtle but persuasive. It is the sound of the past: lingering, lilting, longing. It is the ringing which will not stop until Alvin speaks with his brother. And only then, only at that precise auditory moment when they are near enough to hear the other's voice, will the silence of estrangement be replaced with the silence of calm. Only then will the decay reside.

The Straight Story, *director David Lynch, is currently on video release.*

WriteStuff: Teaming up on *The Games*

Hunter Cordaiy interviews Ross Stevenson

The second series of The Games, *currently screening on ABC TV, is one of the most sophisticated combinations of good writing intersecting with contemporary political reality to appear on Australian television.*

The Games *has developed from a satirical observation of the Olympic phenomenon to a dark and richly layered commentary on the political and social implications of a multi-million dollar event.*

In the first series, John Clarke played the naive and often bumbling CEO of the Sydney Olympics, a Gulliver adrift in the world of savvy media assistants and shrewd financial controllers. The series became an indictment of amateurs leading the blind, and suggested to the viewer that no one at Olympic headquarters really understood the enormous task they had undertaken.

The second series has changed its dramatic balance—Clarke's character is now learned, cynical, and aware of the chasm (financial and political) that is just in front of his every footstep. The absurdity of the Olympics has become real for him, whereas his two assistants have retreated into Olympic-speak, believing their own press releases and openly discussing how to fool the public.

In this interview, Ross Stevenson talks about the scripting process of The Games *and the issues surrounding team writing and producing.*

Usually there is a distinct sense of heightened reality in drama, but in The Games *there is the opposite. How did you and John Clarke develop this method?*

I guess we thought that the more 'real' the series was, the more it worked for us, given that we were paralleling a real event. To have it less real would mean that it was less parallel and that was probably not going to work as well.

Has this anything to do with team writing—what are the problems/advantages of team writing, especially in television?

No I don't think it's a product of the fact that two of us are doing the writing. The principal benefit of writing with someone else is that you only have to do half as much work. Haven't seen any problems with it yet.

Can you describe the script process of The Games, *especially the method of working so close to the shooting date for each episode. What are the advantages/stresses of this for the writers?*

We don't write all that close to the shoot date other than in the sense that we are always making small changes up to shooting time; the cast will make changes during shooting and then some pick up scenes will be shot after. The core of the script is completed weeks or months before it is shot.

John Clarke & Ross Stevenson

How does this affect editorial process?

The editorial process absorbs a lot of the pressure in what we do but is so central it has to work and the editor Wayne Hyett is so good it does work.

As you and John are also producers of the series, can you describe the experience of being both writer and producer?

It means in many ways that you are involved in more of the 'aspects' of the making of the program. Especially John, when you see that he is in it as well. The time from preproduction through to wrap is a pretty intense one when you are involved at so many levels and for John it becomes pretty well a 24 hour affair.

How did you decide on The Games *as a subject? While it might be obvious as an event it is not necessarily obvious as a comic event...do you see the Games themselves as a form of 'absurd' event?*

We are both real sports fans so the Games themselves we don't see as ridiculous or essentially corrupt. Rather the opposite. However, what the possibility of making a quid (or a name for yourself out of attaching yourself to such an event) will do to otherwise unremarkable individuals is probably what we think worthy of comic examination.

Does television handle this scale of comedy well and how did you develop the style of the program?

Television suits *The Games* admirably. The series itself is pretty well words-based so radio would not be beyond it either I suspect. The style we discovered by trial and error, principally by starting to shoot it and letting it find its own level. Don't know that this method is to be recommended but it worked well for us.

Is Australian television comfortable with this mixture of politics and comedy?

Some Australian television is. More importantly though, I guess all the indications are that the Australian television audience has shown that it is more than comfortable with it.

The Games, *written by John Clarke and Ross Stevenson, is currently screening Monday nights, ABC TV, 8pm.*

RealTime 39 will look at another complex and politically astute comedy, Grass Roots *(ABC TV Sundays, 7.30pm).*

Web convergence traps artists and consumers

Nadine Clements

Anyone interested enough to pass by the Stock Exchange building in Sydney a few months ago would have witnessed the spectacle of the dotcom crash, or "new media adjustment", as financial pundits would have it. Small-time investors and internet start-up owners stood, some with noses unselfconsciously pressed to the glass, watching their stock devalue minute by minute. Informed by the U.S. NASDAQ (the American financial index for new media stock) the electronic red ticker streamed a sorry story; some stocks nosedived to within a hair's breadth of their issue price, others simply entered negative figures.

The crash came at an interesting time. In internet years (roughly comparable to dog years in terms of development), the web was colonised by technology corporations a very long time ago. They are responsible for both interpreting the web as a rampantly commercial space (with all that that entails), and developing sophisticated platforms from which to serve what they call "content", a lazily defined term which means anything from editorial to a nifty, Java-scripted button on a navigation bar. Strategies ranged from providing millions of free email addresses and giving away software to skimming a percentage off the top of credit card purchases. Very few of them made actual money and the market eventually got nervous, hence the crash. Things, as they say, will never be the same again.

The development of the technology, however, continues apace. WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) will be coming to someone with a fairly hefty mobile phone plan near you very soon, delivering components of the web (news headlines, movie session times, sporting updates and of course stock reports) to the thing that just used to go ring ring. Interactive TV has already been introduced, and Pay TV viewers are familiarising themselves with the idea of fusing a website interface with broadcast programs—checking their email while the cricket is playing. All pretty handy.

So what's an article about a bunch of well-off wankers losing their money during a period of vastly accelerated technological growth and innovation doing in *RealTime*? Serving as speculation, mainly, about what all of this means for the way in which information we want to find and "content" we might very well create, will be disseminated in the future. These emerging technologies will indeed be handy, but who will be setting the agenda as to how they are used? In a post-crash environment, where the cash won't be flowing anywhere near as freely as it did before, the web as it spreads to TV and your phone will be economically rationalised. Internet service providers of all kinds now have a vested interest in keeping their subscribers within the walls of the content that they have purchased or aggregated. Some are giving away free access—you don't pay a cent, but you can't actually leave the network you're in to explore the rest of the web. So if you're forced to bank online because your local branch has closed down, and you can't afford to pay for an internet connection, welcome to the "walled garden." Others provide services exclusively to their paying customers; everything from 5 email addresses to animated short films and "superior" news coverage. Stuff the rest of the rabble will never see, unless they upgrade.

Of course it's all in the name of commercial good sense, but does it have to be inevitable that the medium that started as a tool for Cold War military communication, transmogrified into an academic language (Hyper Text Markup Language or HTML) and still boasts worldwide access to information about subversive and marginalised cultures, will become a segregated medium?

Firstly, to the culture. The internet industry workforce is home to some of the most brilliant technology heads outside of the science world. They are able to solve problems more quickly than it would take to explain them, and remain wisely apolitical within the sphere of the working day; a geeky empire unto themselves. But the industry is still bloated with counter-culture poseurs; under 35 year-olds with Palm Pilots and wardrobes full of utility chic couture, spouting new media pseudo ideology-speak as flimsy as the content they are responsible for publishing on the web. Attend a meeting with these kids and buzz phrases such as "synergy" (a greasy economic fit between 2 businesses) and "robust nature" (the ability for "content" to be pillaged for e-commerce opportunities and syndication models) will zap around the room like so much locally routed data. It is very possible you will witness them encouraging each other to "think outside of the square" (come up with ethically unsound solutions to content problems, such as sell the arts section of a website to a sponsor and skew the editorial in its favour). And if you're unlucky enough to suggest something which doesn't have a "fit"—even outside the square—it's possible you'll be told to "take it offline."

It is to these people that many writers and filmmakers will be entrusting their work. These are the people who will privilege sport and mainstream computer games over the arts because the stats tell them to. If you're lucky enough to find decent arts listings on a commercial website, it'll be a personal indulgence on the part of the producer who runs it.

Further up the food chain, however, are the heavyweights. The ones glamorised by IBM advertisements. Old tie private schoolboys, ex-lawyers, ex-traditional media and too bright MBA grads who, come lately or by right of birth, subscribe to the old capitalist school of dress and behaviour; they wear suits (jeans are allowed on Fridays, providing they don't have a meeting with the Telstra guys), make or tastefully ignore sexist jokes and earn a shitload of money for the privilege. Despite the recent dotcom 'adjustment' on the NASDAQ, these people still command salaries that start at 140k (even without equity) and just keep on getting higher. A polyglot of marketing executives, business strategists, e-commerce directors, CEOs and managing directors, these are the people who hold the purse strings. They are the people responsible for encouraging the syndication of content (ie that stuff we used to call editorial — the stuff it simply doesn't make sense to produce in-house) across as many portals (the gateway to the rest of an internet network) as possible, to whom the term "media saturation" is freely interchangeable with "cost-effective."

These are the people responsible for the hype surrounding convergence, who are currently shaping the "content" landscape on the web, setting the precedent for the licensing of short films from artists at rip-off rates, readily getting rid of web pages that aren't paying for themselves. These are the people who are excited by the prospect of an internet/interactive TV/broadband (expensive, fast access to the net) environment by which your capacity to surf is limited to the content the corporation owns.

Despite what the Information Technology (a strange misnomer if ever there were one) sections of newspapers would have you believe, convergence is a fair way off becoming a digital reality for most people. But by the time it is, getting the right kind of money from a web company who wants to appear credible by licensing your film, might be nigh impossible. Looking to your interactive TV for inspiring content will feel strangely similar to subscribing to cable TV. Only instead of there being 200 channels of rehashed crap, there will be thousands of sites shoving crass advertorial and e-commerce opportunities down your throat—and the 9 rebranded corporations that used to form Microsoft will have a finger in most of them. We'll look back with consumerist nostalgia to the time when advertising was actually distinguishable from the television show itself.

Maybe when the Coalition is voted out there will be more government subsidies and new media grants to ensure that interesting sites are built and web events take place. And hopefully, some of those projects will use the medium to critique the medium.

And hopefully most of us won't be sucked in by a website funded by a bank whose spuriously deconstructive sociopolitical agenda—or is it an advertising campaign?—is to "unlearn."

d>art00: digital exceptions

Keith Gallasch

Once again dLux media arts has played a notable role in the Sydney Film Festival, displaying interactive digital works in its *d>art00* Exhibition at Customs House, Circular Quay (several of the works are reviewed in *Working the Screen*, see below) and screenings in the Dendy Opera Quays cinema. Both events were well-attended. While the interactive works offered various levels of pleasure, depending on your patience and the availability of computers, and pretty much looked how you'd expect digital works to look, the films and videos were another matter altogether and provoked some intense discussion.

There was more than a hint from *d>art00* Project Manager Susan Charlton in her preface to the program that there would be an issue here:

What should we now expect a digital artwork to look or sound like? Have digital technologies become so pervasive that they are almost invisible...There is no question that artists are increasingly taking up digital technologies to create their works. But how are they using them right now?

This theme of invisibility and its ramifications is developed by Mitchell Whitelaw in an extension of a paper (*Working the Screen*, page 3) he gave at the *d>art00* forum in which he proposed an end to the use of terms like new media arts and digital arts. Peta Tait's review of the new work at the Melbourne Planetarium by The Men Who Knew Too Much, *Virtual Humanoids* (Working the Screen, page 18), offers another perspective on the same theme.

The *d>art00* screenings provoked 2 kinds of response. The first was acclaim, a response to the absence, pretty much, of conspicuous computer animation and pleasure in a return to avant-garde form—short bursts of serious, grainy, sometimes scratchy filmmaking, various discontinuities and ruptures and a shortage of *Tropfest* jokiness. The second was disappointment, surprise that this is where ditigal film and video are alleged to be going—backwards into the well-established conventions of Super 8 'experimentation.' A dispassionate viewing could sympathise with both sides, weary of slick digital animation but too familar with the film language, but the selection was certainly curious and there was a pronounced formal retro feel in many of the films. The works that offered most appeared to exploit new technology more visibly, and that feeling was doubtless exacerbated by the unadventurousness of many of the others where the mere flicker of an idea or a formal gesture seemed to have been enough to warrant a screening. Anyway, who was I to know where the technology was showing through? Clearly though, the technology is available to make your video look like Super 8.

Some works started out with promise. *How to become a Film Freak in 7 Easy Lessons* (Germany, Harrald Schleicher, video 1999) offered vaguely interesting floating full motion 'cut-outs' (backgrounds casually deleted) of mostly famous film actors (Bogart and Swanson repeatedly) delivering lines from movies about movie-making. Soon it felt like not much more than a nostalgic pick-the-movie trivia game. It wasn't as funny as it thought it was. Kerry Tribe's *The Audition Tapes* (video, USA, 1998) promised more than it could deliver, like a side show to something more significant as actors auditioned to play members of the filmmakers' family in a mock documentary. The director's sometimes confusing offscreen instructions and the hint of a dark family secret offered a certain frisson. But what was it doing in *d>art00*? Jim Finn's *Sharambaba* (video, USA, 1999) shifted from a conversation between a man and a woman (the sound as if fed backwards and against a rackety clicking, the framing unsteady, subtitles for the dialogue) to faded shots of dusty streets, perhaps from another time. Lots of layering, but adding up to little. *A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing* (Sam Easterson, USA, video 1999) has a camera attached to the head of a sheep. A bumpy run. The other sheep seem alarmed. Hardly a sheep's point of view and certainly not an example of cultural relativity. A slight video that has won a lot of unwarranted attention.

There were more engaging works that seemed to be pushing the limits of film by way of having something to say. *Little Echo Lost* (Armagan Ballantyne, Australia, 35mm, 1999) was the only film with any visceral punch, offering a widescreen, vertiginous, Rosemary Laing-ish landscape, and a potent degree of visual subjectivity in the breath-taking moment when 'we' emerge from our little hole in the ground into Blue Mountains spectacle with a sonic whoosh. Doubtless some thought it a slick AFTRS product. The technically adroit *lovebotel* (Linda Wallace, video, Australia 2000), a commercial for an inscrutable, sunglassed global citizen, Francesca ("suck my

continued on page 27

The documentary goes online

John Grech & Matthew Leonard

In July 1960, a Sydney schoolboy was abducted and killed. His family had recently won 100,000 pounds in the Opera House lottery—the reason Stephen Lesley Bradley targeted the boy—which triggered cultural responses like 'stranger danger.' There have been a variety of readings of this narrative, and Sharkfeed ***is the latest, a new ABC website which highlights some of the challenges and possibilities for delivering documentary content on the internet. Here artist John Grech and sound designer Matthew Leonard discuss some of the issues raised in its production.***

ML Attempting to bring the philosophy of the radio feature or documentary to the internet harks back to elements of the historical form after the Second World War. There is a real emphasis on writing again; and balancing this with the potential for carefully deployed images and sound. Both share a sparseness of texture.

JG There is a lot of scope for artists to transform their practices into new media. However, this presents the same problems that early filmmakers faced. For example, how do you make a movie like *Metropolis* when no-one's ever made a movie like that before? How many movie genres do we have today? Back in 1900, there were no such production discourses available. But artists must adapt their techniques to new technologies to utilise new media possibilities, not try to make new technologies do what old technologies do. Also, writing highlights the origins of documentary. As film theorist Bill Nichols pointed out, the distinction between writing as description (traditional documentary) and writing as narrative (fiction) is spurious. Writing a fictional narrative and writing a documentary description are both highly constructed, creative acts of storytelling.

ML *Sharkfeed* has enabled us to explore the subjectivities that surround these various acts of storytelling. Another interesting aspect has been the disruption of chronology which historically characterises 'classic' radio and cinema documentaries. Has this also had an impact on your approach to the visual material?

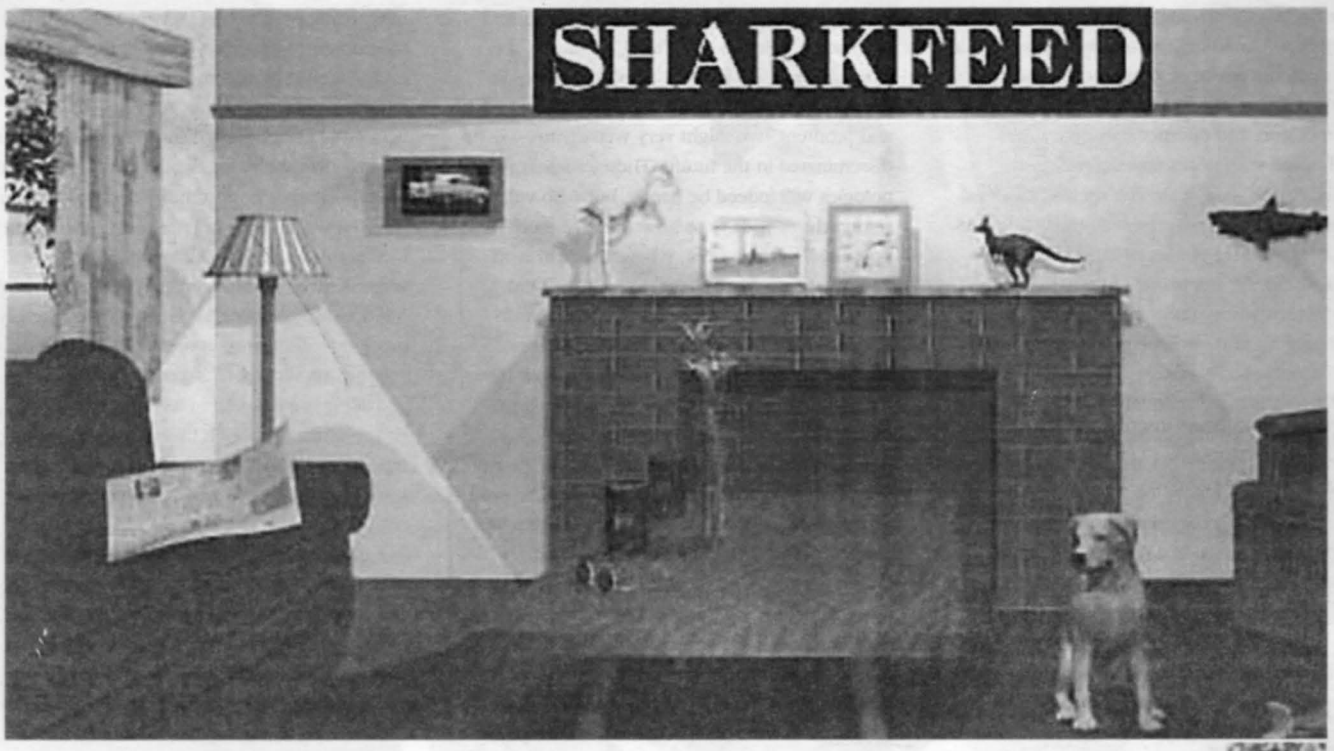
JG Visual art is basically a spatial medium. Although the web offers an unpredictable space, it still deals with time as time, not just by spatialising it as visual art does. The digital screen is a fascinating way of experiencing both time and space, but I'm not sure there is yet a very useful critical or theoretical framework on how people actually experience these.

ML Again, if we compare it with existing forms, the experience of hearing a radio program is driven by the durations of sound events, conversations, voices. This has a critical impact on the tone of a program, but part of the trick with the internet is being able to anticipate such factors as download time and server timeouts which strongly dictate the 'tempo' of the work. From a sound perspective, this is a critical difference.

JG This probably represents the greatest limitation of the medium. But it is closer to how people experience an exhibition in a gallery—someone might walk quickly or haphazardly through a space, while another might tread very carefully along a more predictable path. One major difference between the web and a gallery is the fact that people in galleries still determine the speed and succession of events. On the web, these are determined more by technology. The web is still at an early stage of development.

ML The potential for synchronous sound on the internet is still at a fairly primitive level, and seems to require a high level of commitment and experience from the users to get the most out it. We agreed it was important that the site represent a mixture of period and contemporary interpretation in a way that leaves interpretation open for the audience. However, I feel that *Sharkfeed* has also become an interrogation of our own processes of understanding, particularly with the inclusion of a variety of commentaries in the experience.

JG That was one of the lies about conventional documentary. What gave analog photography the "aura" it had was the belief that it truly was the "Pencil of Nature" or that it created a footprint of the real world on a negative which was incapable of being interfered with by its maker. Thinkers like Walter Benjamin, Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes have shown that no image is neutral of its maker's subjectivity. If we eradicate our subjectivity from the things we make, they would become meaningless. Subjectivity gives meaning to things. Without subjectivity, everything is reduced to a flat and featureless landscape. It's the difference between noise and sound, although people like John Cage have played a lot with such distinctions.



Sharkfeed, archival footage, courtesy ABC

Sharkfeed **has enabled us to explore the subjectivities that surround these various acts of storytelling. Another interesting aspect has been the disruption of chronology which historically characterises 'classic' radio and cinema documentaries.**

Sharkfeed, *Matthew Leonard & John Grech*, www.abc.net.au/sharkfeed/index.htm, *was launched at ABC Radio Arts, Sydney, July 25.* *See review,* Working the Screen, *page 3.*

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WriteSites: the email liaison as novel

Esther Milne

You're the cutest thing that I ever did see/really luv your peaches wanna shake your tree/Lovey dovey, lovey dovey, lovey dovey all the time/Oooey baby I sure show you a good time.

Er, sorry about that. Don't know what's wrong with me today. Must be that email I just got from Peaches. I mean seriously, do you know anyone called Peaches? What about Buck, heard from him lately? Unlikely as it may sound, this nomenclature resonates with literary *gravitas* and the portent of tele-communications historiography. Stay with me.

Since McLuhan's observation that new technologies are always inscribed by earlier modes and practices, media theory has insisted that its forms do not arrive unheralded. Cybercultural genealogy is awash with theorists peering further and further into the past. Commentators such as Margaret Wertheim (*The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A history of space from Dante to the Internet*, Doubleday, Sydney, 1999) argue that the idea of cyberspace is unthinkable without critiquing the changing metaphysical and scientific conceptions of space, and writers like Janet Abbate (*Inventing the Internet*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1999) or Katie Hafner and Matthew Lyon (*Where Wizards Stay Up Late: the Origins of the Internet*, Touchstone, New York 1996) dispute the conventional myth that the internet's origins are limited to American military scenarios. But as these areas of inquiry are comprehensively covered, others remain somewhat under researched.

Electronic mail, while implicit in the cited studies, seems not to receive the same sort of sustained critique. One way to redress the gap is to historicise the email novel. This emerging genre can be traced to 18th century British and European cultures where an increasingly literate population and the technological advancements of the postal service give rise to the epistolary novel. Works such as *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Choderlos de Laclos, Jean Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* or Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* are narratives constructed from letters whose formal and thematic properties presage certain contemporary literary genres.

How to spot an email novel? Well, the title

must include technological form, literary vehicle and a signifier of lerv. Cyber word, colon: love word. Consider, *Chat: a cybernovel* (Nan McCarthy, Peachpit Press, Berkeley 1996); *Virtual Love: a novel* (Simon & Schuster, New York 1994.); *Safe Sex: An e-mail romance* (Linda Burgess & Stephen Stratford, Godwit Publishing Limited, Auckland 1997); and *Email: a love story* (Stephanie D Fletcher, Headline Book Publishing, London 1996) and you begin to see the point. To a large extent, email novels function according to the generic principles of epistolary fiction. The exchanges are presented chronologically, framed by dates, salutations and signatures. In both genres there is a strong emphasis on the body's absence: correspondents are separated spatially and temporally and the missive is used as a means to negotiate this gap. And both narratives are informed by themes of love, seduction, adultery and betrayal. More specifically, one might draw parallels between 2 of the texts by comparing their articulations of subjectivity formation.

Both the 18th century epistolary novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and Fletcher's *E-Mail: A Love Story*, for example, wrestle with the problem of women's sexuality in terms of the transgression of institutional ideology. Laclos' Mme de Merteuil is exiled because she dares to usurp the masculine privilege of the sexual aggressor and Katherine Simmons, the protagonist of *E-Mail: A Love Story*, is reformed at the novel's end by her return to legitimate sexual acts defined by the marital contract. The configuration of identity seems to concern both genres since the epistle form permits an opportunity to explore or radicalise questions of subject formation. Mme de Merteuil explicitly refers to her propensity for dissembling and reinventing herself and the correspondents in Fletcher's text regularly discuss the advantages of and need for the use of pseudonyms (hence "Peaches" and "Your cowboy, Buck").

While the 2 genres share some formal and thematic elements, there are of course points of departure. Part of the problem is to do with the awkward mimetic situation of email novels because they use the conventions of print technology to describe, represent and invoke the tropes of electronic communication. Email novels quote the digital sign. In place of the usual epistolary preface, *E-mail a love story* begins with 3 pages that reproduce the instructions for a fictitious computer based communications system called 'Luxnet' (based presumably on services such as America On Line or CompuServe): "to learn more about electronic mail simply click your mouse over the mail icon on the screen." Needless to say, there is no mouse, icon or screen.

This mimetic fissure is tackled by Carl Steadman in a fascinating internet based project called *Two Solitudes, an e-mail romance* (*http://www.freedonia.com/*). Steadman (one of the co-founders of *Suck*) has written a novel dictated by the email interface rather than the print environment. One 'subscribes' to the story using similar protocols to Listserv discussion groups. What follows is a series of emails purported to be copies of the correspondence from the exchanges of 2 people of indeterminate gender (Lane and Dana) but amorous intent. The technological verisimilitude is so successful that it is quite possible to forget one is reading fake mail. It is a compelling literary experiment clearly informed by the epistolary theory of Jacques Derrida's *The Post Card* (1987).

Where Steadman's theoretically astute email fiction is overtly indebted to an epistolary past (and all that that implies about the author/reader dynamic of tele-communication), the email novels must also be seen within their literary heritage. Just because someone in *Email: A Love Story* signs his missives from a 'cyber Romeo', doesn't mean he can't grow up to be John Malkovich.

d>art00: digital exceptions

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code, baby") da Rimini, looked like it would be more at home on a computer screen and all the better for being manipulable—at least to get a better look and to attend properly to the gash girl's texts (see *Working the Screen*, page 6). Michiel van Bakel's *Undertow* (video, Netherlands, 1999), set in the columns beneath a freeway, intially appears to be a formal exercise, rearranging the columns by angles and various lenses. But a man is introduced, leaping into the air until he remains suspended between the columns, the camera circling him magically without interruption or edit. Of course *Matrix* did this kind of thing but without offering us the opportunity for a long, contemplative gaze. *Auto-matic* (Manu Gondeau, France, video, 1998) a brisk digitally animated anti-advertisment has its best moment early on in its 1'30 when a cut-out muscular young man coughs up a sleek motor vehicle, as if giving birth. Nought after that, unless you see flashes of "Static" and "Monomonia" as meaningful.

Somewhere between the traditions of the avant-garde and the new technical virtuosity (not that I know how she did it) is *Festa Mobile* (Moving Party; Valentina Coccetti, video, Italy, 1999), a visual feast, a bizarre animation with the key figure a bulbous black duck (an image from somewhere in modernist iconography) transforming into a mouse a la Mickey, a bear and an elephant and moving in and out of westerns, pornography and travelogues against a soundtrack shifting elegantly from romantic strings to jazz by composer Nunzi. Despite the lurching, earnest animation we know so well, there was a deftness of touch and a visual richness that underpinned this increasingly sinister reverie.

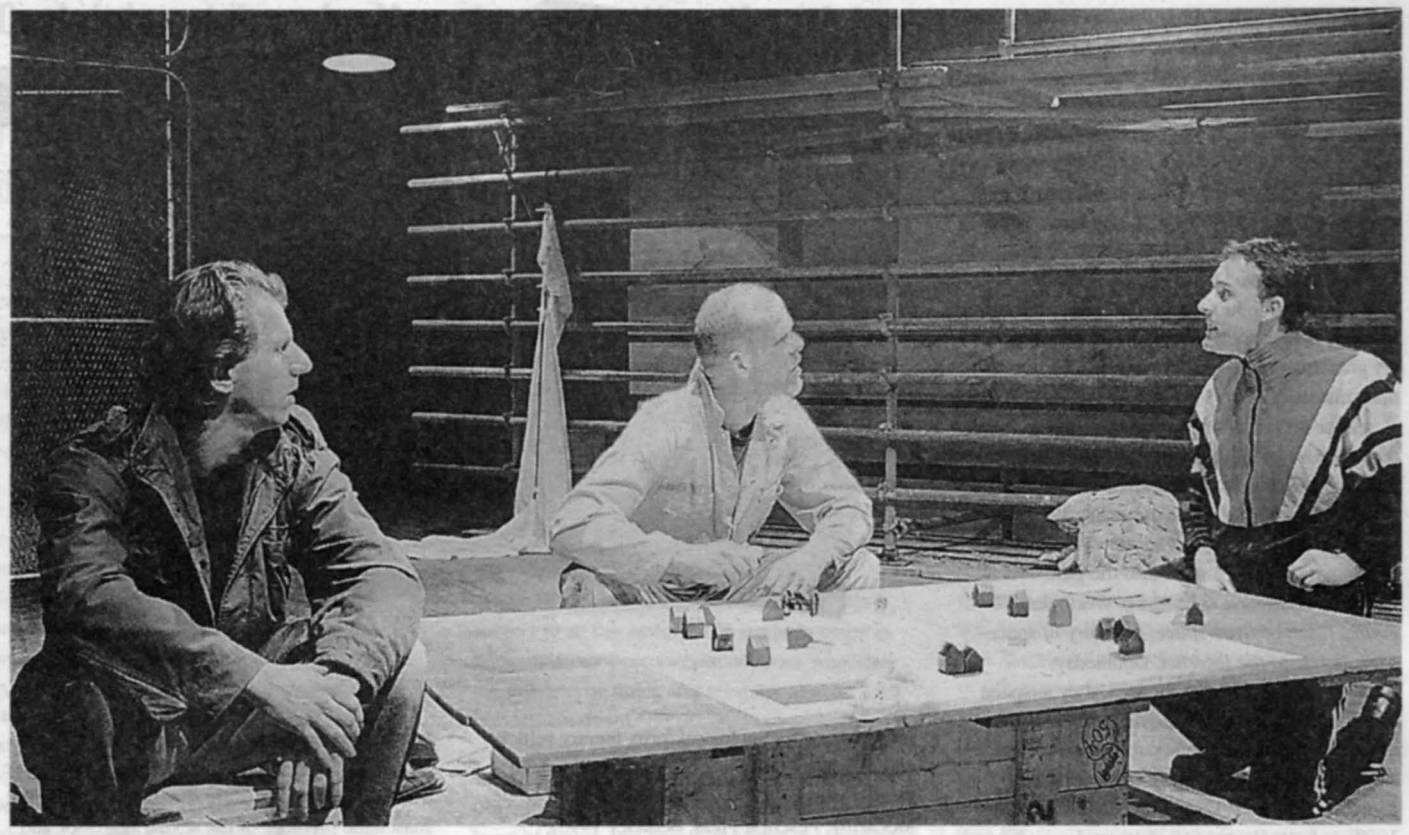
The *d>art00* screenings were a very mixed bag. Whether they affirmed the curatorial thesis of the increasing invisibility of the digital is another matter (it would have been interesting to have more detailed technical program notes on each film—a future possibility?). While the truth of that invisibility is obvious in many respects (eg in action feature films) the argument does little justice to a different kind of distinctiveness, the hybrids emerging in places other than cinemas and screening rooms, like *d>art00* in Customs House, in theatres and public places and events like *Cyber Cultures*. While it's pleasing to see film festivals embrace 'new media', it does position such work as an adjunct to the movie experience (while doubtless promoting an interest in it). Why, with a few inviting exceptions, did *d>art00* place itself firmly back in film tradition? What exactly is its curatorial rationale, or are we really at some defining moment where the old forms rule again and film is film, dance is dance, theatre is theatre?

dLux media arts, d>art00 *screenings, film & video, Sydney Film Festival, Dendy Opera Quays cinema, June 20, 22*

See Working the Screen *page 6 for reviews of Rebecca Bryant's* TellTale, *Linda Wallace's* lovehotel, *Tobias Kazumichi Grimes'* Electronic Sound Remixer, *Leon Cmielewski and Josephine Starrs'* Dream Kitchen *from the* d>art00 *Exhibition, Customs House, Circular Quay, Sydney. June 8 - July 2*

Staging the political romance of the waterfront

Suzanne Spunner



Melbourne Workers Theatre, *Front* photo Angela Bailey

Over the last month in Melbourne audiences have been exposed to 3 new plays which address contemporary politics in Australia: *Front* by Melbourne Workers Theatre, Michael Gurr's *Crazy Brave* at Playbox and, from Brisbane, Matrix Theatre's *A Beautiful Life*. This is politics on stage while our government's every effort is directed towards ensuring that it's backstage, reduced to the wallet in the hip pocket. Issues of rights and principles of democracy have been chained up and the UN told to butt out as Howard resiles from honouring our obligations under the conventions we have signed, not to mention the ordinary conventions of democracy which include the right to unionise and to strike, the very issues at the centre of *Front*.

Director-writer Peter Houghton was already writing a play set on the Australian waterfront and intending to examine the dangers of social division when the Docks dispute erupted in 1998 and the real drama unfolded. In many ways *Front* mirrors the dispute by masking in heroic rhetoric the romance of the waterfront. While the dispute was settled for the wrong reasons, reasons that were easy to grasp—the right to strike, the right to unionise, the spectre of paid goons and balaclava-ed thugs who looked like terrorists, the idiocy of Patricks' Dubai-trained workforce—none of us was forced to look at much harder issues like the real need for waterfront reform and the connection between the waterfront and the export markets we need to maintain. We want the workers to be right when they have been so grossly wronged by the dastardly conspiracies of bosses and government, and it becomes too much to ask for things to be better and more efficient and more sustainable in the long term.

Front is a well made play almost from another era, the male characters convincingly delineated, the women sketchy and stereotyped, and not as interestingly performed. Houghton wisely does not burden the play with detail of the actual dispute and avoids any documentary element by condensing a year of complicated deals and double deals and myriad workers, union leaders, dock owners, mercenaries, strikebreakers, ministers, the Prime Minister and the National Farmers Federation into a cast of 7 and compresses the action into just 7 days. Instead it focuses on character or, more correctly, types or humours in a modern fable or morality play: "The fence sitter, the pragmatist, the cheat, the coward, the villain, the liar and the hero are presented, as they are in most plays. Your job as an audience is to decide who is who" (program note). Within its own terms it succeeds admirably, with the addition of the faithful wife and the duplicitous vamp to its list.

In the opening scenes *Front*'s characters and the apt and witty metaphor of the Monopoly board are skilfully set up. In the union tea-room, personalities are vibrant, intra-group rivalries ventilated in vignettes of workers chiacking each other. From then on, things move fast and furious, cleanly and clearly in a plot that's both tight and too cute for words, but carries you along as drama. The experience is emotionally satisfying, but stultifies critical reflection and denies the viciousness and complexity of the Realpolitik. It demonises the forces that are the bosses' agents but it also lets the bosses and government off the hook; although it certainly doesn't purport to represent any of that other side's argument that might have had any validity, which is perhaps fair enough given that it is MWT. What it does well is animate the old story, the way things were on the docks, the job for life, the traditions of the sea and the ships and the men who unload them, from the Internationale to moving renditions of sea shanties. That's the story we loved in the media and that's the story we get here, and along the way the complexities of the Monopoly board metaphor get lost.

Melbourne Workers Theatre, Front, *Theatreworks, St Kilda, June 14 - July 1*
www.melbourneworkestheatre.com.au

IRAA Theatre and the implicated audience

Suzanne Spunner

It is only possible to write about *The Secret Room* at a meta level because to write about the rich theatricality, the potent visual imagery and the dense language is to betray the secret at its heart.

The events it deals with are shocking and intensely personal but the experience has been shaped as a beautiful, delicate and erotic work of art, layered with resonant images where nothing that we see or hear is accidental or casual.

Its relationship to its audience is paradoxical and contradictory. You can see it as live performance in a house in Carlton where you are received as a guest along with 6 other strangers. Performer Roberta Bosetti is your hostess. While you wait for everyone to arrive, you sit by a fire in her living room and watch a home movie on TV. Then she invites you into her dining room to share a meal that she has cooked, and facilitates a conversation with you and your fellow diners in which you all share secrets. At the end of the meal she does something dreadfully unsettling that is dealt with politely and discreetly (as people do at a dinner party when a guest goes too far). You wonder if it really happened and query whether you should take action to remedy the gaffe or look away, and wait for social order to be restored by the hostess. Afterwards she takes you upstairs through her bedroom to a secret room and reveals "herself" and "her story." At the end of the performance she leads you downstairs and farewells you into the night and your own thoughts.

On another night at the same time, in your own house, you can log in to a website and watch the same performance in real time, but of course it's not the same performance because you are not part of it. You can download the script and listen to soundbytes. You become a voyeur, willing or unwilling, invariably implicated, an accidental mesmerised witness to another person's pain.

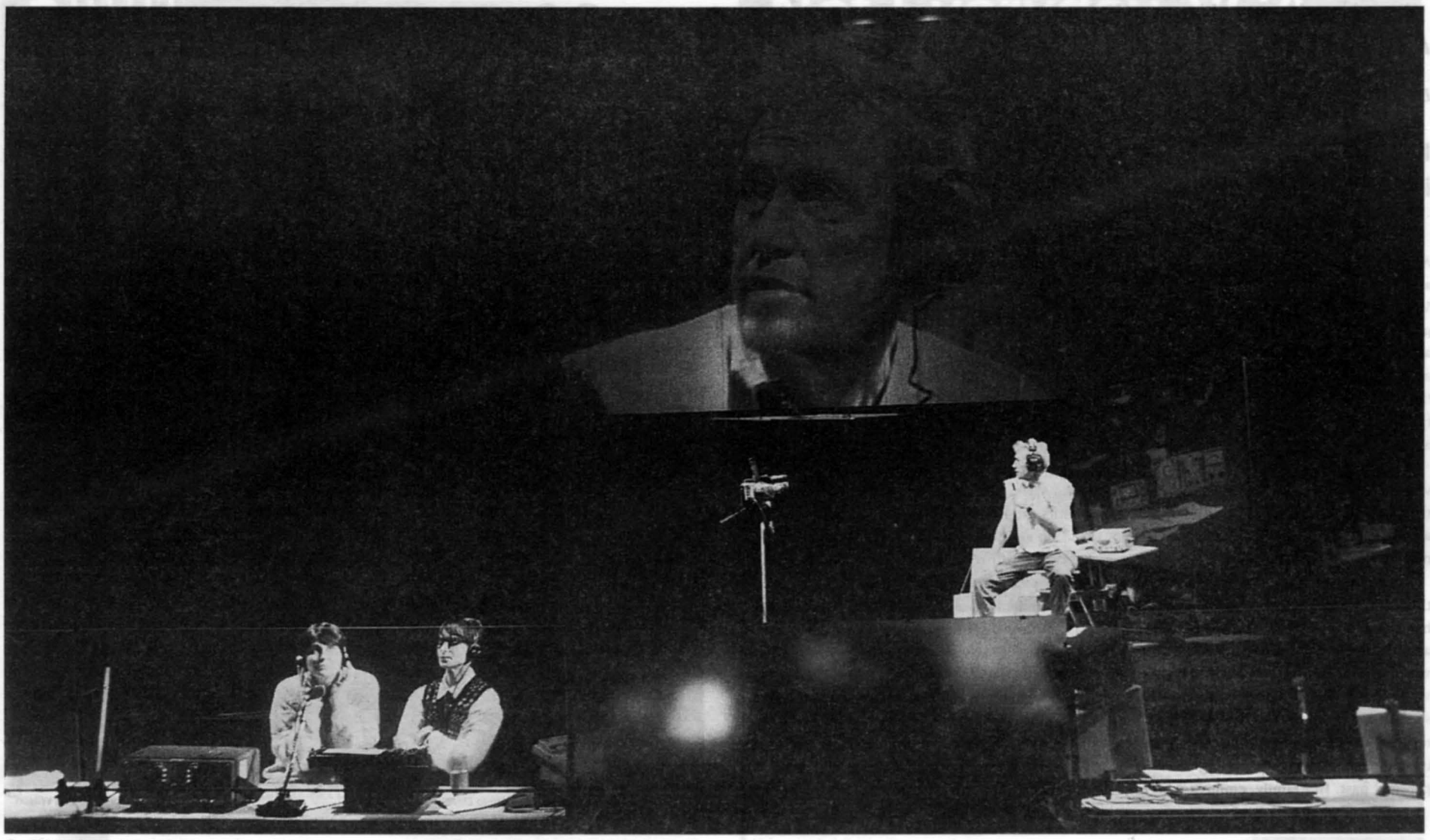
It is uncomfortable, disturbing, and calls up an ambiguous response because the boundaries are blurred between private life and public life, the domestic interior and the infinity of cyberspace, the performer and her life, the audience and the guest, intimates and strangers. Ultimately the audience is controlled by the mediations of the sites

Roberta Bosetti

of the performance and the complicity of director and partner Renato Cuocolo, the unseen operator of the video camera. The most disturbing element was my desire to know if it was "her" story or made up, a performance to seduce me into an overwhelming identification. The invitation to voyeurism is powerful and the only way to feel in control is to partake fully. I have kept the secret, it is now my secret, I have not talked about what I saw either privately or here, because the voyeur's pleasures must remain her own.

The Secret Room *is included in this year's Sydney Carnivalé, Oct 1 - Nov 5. Enquiries 9251 7974. Bookings 1800 064 534. Venue confirmed on booking.*

IRAA Theatre The Secret Room, *Melbourne, from June 8, Bookings 03 9349 5880.* info@iraatheatre.com.au
www.iraatheatre.com.au



The Builders Association, *Jet Lag*

Digital purgatory: the horrors of *Jet Lag*

Sophie Hansen

The BITE season at The Barbican Theatre in London is all about high quality international theatre. Alongside productions from greats like Laurie Anderson and Luc Bondy, there is cutting edge new work from rising stars such as The Builders Association (USA), who presented *Jet Lag*, their collaboration with architects Diller and Scofidio.

The Builders Association has a reputation for seamlessly merging technology with live action. This collaboration carried their trademark rigour. Chock full of effects, there was nothing gratuitous or showy. Every element of *Jet Lag* seemed to have been examined with the critical eye of the outsider, asking 'so what' questions about theatrical conventions, with a skilled theatre director similarly probing the dramatic intention of each multimedia tool.

The American actors projected their characters with vigour amidst the screens, monitors and microphones which littered the stage. In the first of the 2 true stories presented back to back in this 80 minute piece, the actor playing yachtsman Donald Crowhurst spoke only through his on-board communications equipment. He filmed himself for the television station tracking his competitive round the world voyage, he radioed his distant wife and made a video diary to chart his descent into paranoia and confusion. Crowhurst's fake voyage, ending with his mysterious disappearance, was packaged so tightly within the media which conveyed it, that his simple human tragedy hinted at universal meaning. Crowhurst's creative editing of his reports, the difficulties in their transmission and the spin put on their receipt by presenter and publicist all served to obscure the man behind the media. Part one fizzled out with an intense sense of loss.

Similarly, the protagonists of the second story were constantly mediated by technology. A sophisticated 3 dimensional computer environment moved constantly behind the characters, taking them through one never ending airport/airplane continuum. The flatness of the projected image, combined with grainy security camera footage of the pair struggling to sleep on vinyl chairs, trawling bags through barriers, communicated the purgatory of international travel.

Sarah Krassnoff crossed the Atlantic 167 consecutive times to flee the father seeking custody of her grandson. In 6 months they did not leave an airport and eventually Sarah died in transit, of jet lag. The nauseating statistics of this modern tale are announced with a monotone lack of drama as Sarah and grandson traipse wearily up another escalator; thousands of hours spent restrained by the seat belt, tens of days lost forever, tens more lived twice, hundreds of bags of peanuts consumed, hundreds of films viewed (each on average 22 times). Again, when Sarah expires, against an awesome rendering of an aircraft interior to live sound effects created by visible actors, her small soul departs without a whisper. The roar of the landing aircraft, like the buzz of Crowhurst's dead radio, wipes the stage clean of human presence. This intensely self conscious production buzzed mystery and meaning at the audience in a barrage of media which remained multiple, partial and inconclusive from first to final byte.

Jet Lag, *The Builders Association, Barbican Theatre, London, July 5-8*

Adelaide theatre: swinging 60s implosions

Dickon Oxenburgh

In a twist of zeitgeist the latest productions from two SA theatre companies tackle the underbelly of family life in the 60s.

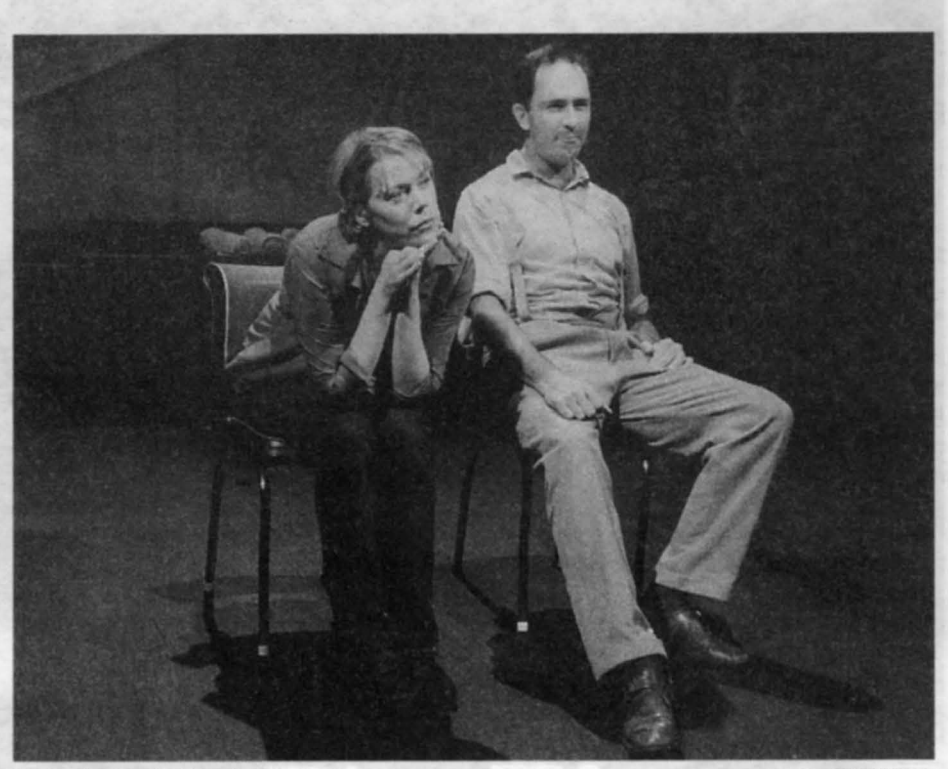
Both *Svetlana in Slingbacks* by South Australian playwright Valentina Levkowicz and *Learning to Drive* by American Paula Vogel explode the sentimental notion that growing up during the 'Swinging 60s' was all love and idealism; rather, for many it was a season in hell; in which the real revolution lay not out on the streets or the battlefields, but in that nest of ungrateful vipers known as 'family.'

Svetlana in Slingbacks is a result of 3 years development by Australia's only full time women's theatre company Vitalstatistix and further consolidates the company's commitment to new Australian theatre.

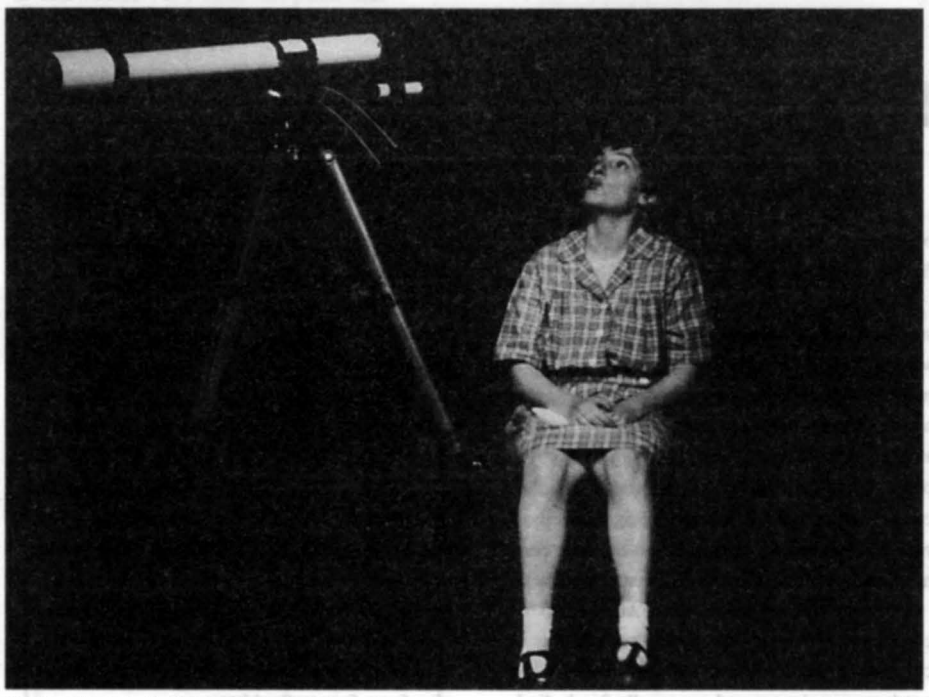
Playwright Levkowicz has established the right balance of humour and pathos in her characters' differing experiences of assimilation and alienation. The play is a wry, magic-realist look at migrant life in the western suburbs of Adelaide in the 60s as seen through the eyes of the central character Svetlana Fretlova—a young girl trying to imagine her future while coping with her parents' past. Her family, emigrés who have escaped from Cold War Russia, now find suburban life in Australia almost as oppressive.

The family is dominated by Boris (Michael Habib), a "good hard working man who wants only the best for his family." But the best is not always good enough. Boris looks on helplessly while his wife Ludmilla (Sheila Duncan) is torn apart by the ghosts of her Stalinist past. While Adelaide looks after its own backyard and basks in the glow of Maralinga and 60s sit-com TV, Ludmilla lifts the iron curtain on a lifetime of repression and lobotomises herself with an avalanche of prescription drugs. Unable to cope Boris retreats into work, chasing the Australian Dream, now a bitter irony.

The resulting emotional carnage is absorbed by Retlov's 2 baby-boom daughters, teenager Svetlana (Caroline Mignone) and her more adult sister Sonya (Jacqueline Cook). The girls react by escaping—Sonya into conventionality and marriage, while Svetlana casts herself adrift in deep space fantasy, her only companion Zorgon, Master of the Universe from the planet Alpha Gammadon (Nicola Tudini).



Lisa Hensley, Nicholas Eadie, *Learning to Drive* photo David Wilson



Caroline Mignone, *Svetlana in Slingbacks* photo Eric Alga

At the play's end author Levkowicz leaves Svetlana's life in the balance; a Slavic heritage of nostalgia and pessimism adrift under the Southern Cross. While some of the sub-plots and multiple roles could have been streamlined further, *Svetlana in Slingbacks*' brand of reflective narcissism was good for the soul.

The State Theatre Company's latest offering is Paula Vogel's Pulitzer Prize winning *Learning To Drive*, a confronting foray into "forbidden love and parallel parking." With searing insight the performance deconstructs America's psycho-sexual obsession with cars and girls, very young girls.

Invoked as a memory journey by the central character 'Lil Bit' (Lisa Hensley), *Learning To Drive* uses the process of Lil Bit's learning to drive as a brilliant metaphor for gaining personal empowerment. The twist is that underpinning the lessons is the complex web of manipulation and volition of a long term paedophilic relationship between Lil Bit and her mentor, alcoholic Uncle Peck (Nicholas Eadie).

The drama explores the relationship, deftly shifting gear through time and space, alternating between the lessons and scenes of domestic life with Lil Bit's grotesquely carnal family (Marlo Grocke, Penny Maegraith and Rory Walker). Finally the maze-like journey turns in on itself, and the beginning and the end of Lil Bit and Uncle Peck's ambiguous relationship, in a hotel room, a long way away from 'home.'

Strong performances abound, but Nicholas Eadie's performance deserves special note. Rather than demonizing the character, Eadie gives us a pathetic bewildered man-child, the kind of which is not uncommon, anywhere.

Svetlana in Slingbacks. *director Catherine Fitzgerald, Theatre 62, Hilton, May 27-June 17;* Learning To Drive, *writer Paula Vogel, director Rosalba Clemente, the Space, Adelaide Festival Centre, July 1-22; regional tour July 26-August 2.*

Carnivalé resurgent

Apparently unfazed by the dramas of its departing artistic director and manager, Carnivalé has resurrected itself under the directorship of Mishline Jammal and come up with a program that includes some adventurous theatre works for connoisseurs of the form. This year's celebration of multicultural Australia includes IRAA's highly acclaimed *The Secret Room* (see page 28) performed at a secret location in Leichhardt and Sidetrack's remarkable production of Theo Patrikareas' *The Promised Woman* (see review, RealTime 37) with Nick's International Boarding House erected inside The Studio at the Opera House; Theatre Physical directed by Carlos Gomez makes multimedia mayhem with the family album in *Overexposed* based on a text by Brazilian playwright Nelson Rodriguez; Shopfront Theatre collaborates with local youth refuges and a group of newly arrived migrants to investigate notions of emotional shelter in *Home*. Something to stay up for will be Multicultural Theatre Alliance's *Insomnia,* featuring 6 new writers from culturally diverse backgrounds creating short works on "sleep deprivation in the Olympic city"; *Mysteriyaki* is a comic solo written by Noelle Janaczewska and performed by Asako Izawa about an ordinary woman who doubles as a dial-a-clairvoyant. Playwright Duong Le Quy is on a run right now with his *Meat Party* included in the Melbourne Festival and 2 works featured in Carnivalé: *The Request of Spring,* a multi-artform production and *A Graveyard for the Living,* both presented in city venues by Vietnamese Arts Culture Exchange Project. Meanwhile CityMoon brings contemporary theatre with a Vietnamese-Australian bent in *The Monkey Mother*, "a whirl of legend and contemporary life". There's a cross-cultural showcase at Bankstown RSL featuring CityMoon, Birrong Boys Arabic Hip Hop Group, Bankstown Samoan Girls Choir and Urban Theatre Projects with participation of The Morning Star Vietnamese Traditional Dance Group. At the Parramatta Riverside Theatre, Leigh Warren & Dancers take on *Masterpieces of the 20th Century* while Anandavalli and the Lingalayam Dance Company lift the veil on brides of god in *The Temple Dancer*. Playworks hosts *Poor Relations*, an evening of readings and talks on matters multicultural at Pilgrim Theatre in Pitt Street, while at Artspace, *Rethinking History* explores the construction of Australian history and the contemporary processes of abstraction in a collaboration between Juan Davila, Constanze Zikos and Nikos Papastergiadis along with an online project by Brook Andrew and John Seally. There's an eclectic music program, an experimental short film and video festival at Valhalla co-ordinated by film-maker Mahmoud Yekta, a cyber magazine, performance poetry and much much more than we have space for here...Festival events will be located in both city and suburbs with satellite events in Newcastle and Hunter regions, Campbelltown, Blue Mountains and the Illawarra. See for yourself. RT

Carnivalé October 6 - 29. For full program details, tel 02 9251 7974, www.carnivale.com.au.

Trial by theatre: Ned Kelly

Jonathan Marshall

A mute, irreducible black form sits astride a horse—he is part *of* the horse—and through the slit in his post-box head you see the Australian landscape. So Nolan depicted Ned Kelly—not as a man, or even a myth, but a frame for colonial anxieties. Despite the imposing bulk of Melbourne's neo-classical Supreme Court, much of 1880s Victoria remained little more than a series of slab huts barely distinguishable from the menacing stringybark scrub they looked out upon.

Myth, art, history, empire: all attracted by the magnetism of Kelly's helmet. So too theatre and the law. Sentencing judge Barry admonished Kelly that the outlaw would go to Hell. Kelly retorted: "I will go further than that—I will see you there." This oratorical bushranger has entranced theatremakers (and filmmakers) such as Douglas Stewart and others. Law is always good theatre, be it sometime theatrical author Machiavelli's *discorsi* on the rhetorics of rule, *Rumpole*, or the gladiatorial combat of Parliamentary question time on television. Ritual, conflict, display, oratory: powerful languages Kelly drew upon through the symbolic potency of his largely non-utilitarian armour and renown as a will-o-the-wisp bushman.

So what of *this* staging of Kelly's trial today? There has been a vogue for retrials since the posthumous Lee Harvey Oswald tele-trial of the 1980s, and both this retrial and the *60 Minutes* report dramatised the poor performance of Kelly's young defence barrister Bindon. Even so, to layer theatrical sensibilities over an already theatrical event seems like gilding the lily. There is so much in Kelly that actor Peter Green's short musings as old Bindon cannot encompass, a fact highlighted by the *60 Minutes* report's cursory treatment of this section of the retrial. History as mere sepia-toned prologue. By contrast, the report's footage of Mick Jagger in the 1970 Tony Richardson film seemed impressive.

More significantly, theatre as *theatre*—as myth, magic, metaphor and poetics—has no interest in theatre as *the law* sees it. The courtroom, heavy with accretions of time, only reluctantly submits to the moody, low-light vision of retrial director Nick Harrington. The law wants to be seen under bright lights, in all its glory, so its pomp and ceremony can carry its full, iridescent force, and the baroque mouldings and rich, dark wood of the Supreme Court can speak their own articulate language.

Theatre as theatre has no stake in legalistic details such as Bindon's preparations, or how much ammunition the pursuing officers carried. Journalism on the other hand revels in the potential scandal hidden in such facts. These minutiae come to life under *judicial* scrutiny, in the eloquent mockery of modern defence barrister Michael Rozenes. Once theatre has had its say and the actors have spoken their prescribed lines, the *real* lawyers reclaim Kelly—real not because they are practicing 'silks,' but because they submit to the theatrics of the law. The improvised, verbal sparring of these bright, bewigged masters animates otherwise banal technicalities, both in the courtroom, and in its televisual and archival traces—a function doubled by the para-legal role of the journalist as an interpretive anchor for *60 Minutes*' televisual montage.

In this *aesthetic* victory of law over theatre, the law's involvement with Kelly focuses on the sole question of whether the outlaw was guilty of this specific charge of murder. Tele-journalism mediates this relationship between law and theatre, drawing on both. Thus at the very moment of judicial closure, Kelly slips beyond the reach of the law, and into the realm of myth and journalistic legend. Kelly never was, and never will be, described by a single crime.

The Queen versus Edward 'Ned' Kelly, *Victorian Bar Theatre Company, director Nicholas Harrington, writer/ dramaturg Tom Wright, Banco Court, Supreme Court of Victoria, May 19-20;* Consider Your Verdict: Ned Kelly goes on trial, *reporter Ellen Fanning, producer Stephen Taylor,* 60 Minutes, *Channel 9, May 28; the* 60 Minutes *poll found Ned Kelly not guilty of policeman Thomas Lonigan's murder 4,578 votes to 1,186.*

In RealTime 39

Sydney Performance feature: Blueprints and outcomes

The Kosky-Hughes-Seneca *Oedipus*, the Andrews-Wertenbaker-Marivaux *La Dispute*, the Enoch-Hughes-Euripides *Black Medea*, Nikki Heywood's *Inland Sea*, an interview with Robert *Oedipus* Menzies, PACT's *Replicant Hotel*, Carnivalé's theatre offerings, Performance Space's *Intersections* and the Benedict Andrews-Wesley Enoch *Blueprint* program for the Sydney Theatre Company...and Cultural Olympian Pina Bausch.

A revitalised Performance Space, a Sydney Theatre Company with some great productions and signs of vision, the Hydra collective newly housed in the Seymour Centre, an abundance of workshops and forums...what does it all add up to?

Text/art: an artist in the Olympics

Jacqueline Millner interviews Ruark Lewis

Ruark Lewis is a well-known practitioner on the Sydney art scene, both as visual artist and writer-performer. He has a particular interest in experimental literature and sound art, as well as a predilection for collaborative projects, most notably with Paul Carter. Over the last year, Lewis has exhibited in a number of forms, ranging from public art, to illustrated literature, to an installation that responds to a recent book.

Tell me how you came to develop your overarching artistic approach, this exploration of the relationship between text and image.

Very early on, while still at art school, I began writing poetry, verbal accounts of paintings by such artists as Arthur Boyd and Albert Tucker. Out of that, I eventually wrote a play about George Baldessin that I performed at the AGNSW for a Baldessin exhibition. I was drawn to text as a challenge. In some sense I thought that, for such a visual person as myself, a text was more difficult to grasp. I gradually tried to remove myself from the writing. I felt it was a more modest project, not creating grand expressive and biographical paintings. I became increasingly interested in the dysfunction of language, in disfiguring the text, in constructing false narratives, that is, texts that appear to be making sense, but really are not.

At the same time, I was interested in Constructivism, in Malevich, and in sound, in the synaesthesia of turning sound into form. I wanted to transcribe sound into visuals, experimenting for instance with automatic writing responses to musical scores. I sometimes say, 'Arthur Boyd taught me to play the piano', in that apparently Arthur, after the fashion of his father Merrick, would sit at the piano and madly bang away on it eliciting a cacophony of discordant, aleatory sound. I experimented with this musically unschooled approach to composition and performance. Partly I was inspired by my contact at art school with David Ahern, who had been an assistant to Stockhausen and had a highly sophisticated knowledge of modernist music and sound.

From an early interest in the Angry Penguins, I was drawn more and more to the Australian abstract painters, painters who historically remained very much the underdogs to the expressionists. And it was during the high point of neo-expressionism in the 1980s, when I was sharing a studio with a gestural painter, where I started to transcribe words into painting, as a reaction to this visual excess. I would not always use my own texts to transcribe…the process of selection then became an important aspect of my work, that I started to formalise a system that transcribed words and sound into paintings and drawings.

Raft, *one of your recent major projects, deals with issues of translation and transcription, focusing closely on European records of the lives of Central Australian Indigenous communities. What is the history of your engagement with this material?*

I was drawn to Australian Indigenous culture by chance…I found a watercolour, by Albert Namatjira's nephew Benjamin Landara, in the garbage in Dover Heights. I cleaned off the muck to discover this delicate, beautiful painting, which intrigued me into doing some research. I began doing traces of the paintings, trying to deconstruct them. It was while researching these early watercolours by Central Australian Aborigines that I came across the writings of T.G.H. Strehlow [linguist and Aboriginal classicist]…and I was instantly seduced by this voice, its sophistication, and anthropological perspective, so distinct from the writings, say, of Battarbee [who is famed for introducing Namatjira to watercolour technique and also wrote on these early Aboriginal western-style paintings]. Strehlow had a marvellous archive; a poet, he was also interested in music and sound…so he merged seamlessly with my interests.

[*Raft*, a long-term collaboration with Paul Carter, comprised an installation (first exhibited in 1995) of gesso-coated timber beams inscribed with continuous text which in 6 languages narrated the tragic story of Ted Strehlow's father Carl, a German missionary who died in Central Australia. The installation also involved audio-work, textile works and crayon text-paintings. Most recently, *Raft* has taken the shape of a book, which not only documents the installation, but also includes poetic reflections on the process of translation and the recording of 'history'. JM]

Your interest in the visual power of the word has also led you to produce an exquisite artist's book exhibited earlier this year, based on a play by French author, Nathalie Sarraute. Tell me about this project.

Back in 1991, I asked a friend, translator Kaye Mortley, whether she knew of any text that would lend itself to visual translation, and she suggested Nathalie Sarraute's *Pour oui ou pour non (Just for Nothing)*, originally published in 1981. It was a play principally for 2 players, although with 4 characters overall, in which the tone and the silences as well as the words themselves trace the realisation of a loss of intimacy between friends, one a failed Romantic, the other a family man. Kaye had translated the text, a long and subtle process whereby she attempted to intuit Nathalie's silences and ellipses as much as her words, and so began a collaborative project between Nathalie, Kaye and I.

The project began as an experiment in colour typography and chance procedures. The design leans towards Nathalie's theoretical ideas of sub-conversation and the new novel. I set the actors' speech in prose style to create, in effect, a visual Morse code of colours. I then made drawings intended to prepare the reader, to induce a hypnotic sort of mediation that is at once highly optical and essentially non-illustrative. In the final artist's book, 32 pages of polychromatic characters are fitted grid-like into each page of justified prose, punctuated by original drawings.

[Sarraute (1900-1999) was a French writer renowned as a pioneer in the creation of the nouveau roman ('new novel'), a phenomenon characterised by anti-formalism and an emphasis on the underlying, ineffable 'movements' which drive everyday lives. As Sarraute explained in the foreword to her *Tropisms* (first published in 1939), "The dramatic situations constituted by these invisible actions interested me as such. Nothing could distract my attention from them and nothing should distract that of the reader; neither the personality of the characters, nor the plot…The barely visible, anonymous character was to serve as a mere prop for these movements…" JM]

This experiment with the colour-coded layout of text is also evident in your most recent major work, Relay, *another collaboration with Paul Carter, and part of the Olympic public art program unveiled in March this year.*

Relay is a prose poem engraved over the distance of one kilometre in a set of granite steps ensconced between the Aquatic Centre and Stadium Australia in Homebush Bay. It was a truly collaborative project, realised with the assistance of a team of architects, draftspeople and stonemasons.

The work reflects a certain aversion to 'space' in preference to 'place.' We wanted to make 'place' Indigenous, by drawing not only on historical evocations of the Olympics but also on a series of Australian inflections. The text is divided into themes, corresponding with a tier of steps, and a colour—red, blue, yellow, or green—which also triggers certain associations. The themes include early Australian Olympians—for instance, the amiable story of Edwin Flack, the runner who got lost during the marathon of 1896—the contribution of women to Australian Olympic achievements, the 'living greats' who competed in the last Olympics on Australian soil, the role of 'the harbour city' and the imaginings for the Olympics of the future. Within the sequence of words are hidden colour-coded messages. The words run into each other; sometimes one word will lend a letter to the next, so that what is created is a sense of a relay, a cycle that comes back to the beginning to start again.

Ruark Lewis, *Cats Cradle for Alice Springs*, performance 1997

[*Relay* is an elegant and quietly provocative work, whose multiple layering of texts and architectural lines attempt to embody, in Paul Carter's words, that "sport is not about infinite progress, but about harmony, tension, balance." JM]

Depth of Translation: The Book of Raft, *Paul Carter and Ruark Lewis, NMA Publications, 1999;* Just for Nothing, *artist's book, edition of 200, published by BARBERism, 1997, exhibited at Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney, April 2000;* Relay, *with Paul Carter, unveiled March 2000, Olympic Site, Homebush Bay.*

The underneath

Virginia Baxter

You enter Trent Parke and Narelle Autio's breathtaking exhibition at Stills Gallery to the sound of waves.

There are 30 pictures. Some are standard size and framed. Others are over a metre long digital panoramas formed from 2 conjoined images and pinned to the wall. All are black and white, all untitled. All belong to that burgeoning photographic genre (especially in Sydney) of people on beaches. More interestingly, the effect of these photographs is to give the viewer an immersive experience of water.

From the walls of the gallery, water spews from lips, curls through hair. Arms open to receive it, heads push against its weight, limbs plough through, torsos tumble in it. It becomes a liquid landscape for glorious and gawky choeographies. A heavy man hangs calmly seated in the air, with no fear of what he's falling into. A hand dramatically breaks the surface, reaching just short of the inverting body beneath. A monumental head breaches a wave. Like lips, a woman's outstretched arms becalm the water's tension. Headless bodies dangle in underwater light. Another ascends to what looks like the heavens but is probably just some ocean pool somewhere. An old man surrenders himself to the dark below, his head slightly bowed, arms outstretched. He makes Bill Viola's *Messenger* appear restless by comparison.

As much as it's about water, this is also an exhibition about photography. It's about hexagonal droplets on lenses, grains of black and gelatin silver, about film pushed to its limits to fix light, and eyes for composition that seem unerringly sharp.

In the accompanying notes, Narelle Autio describes the photographers' 2 very different experiences of water. "The Newcastle beaches of Trent Parke's childhood situated on the east coast and open to the huge energy of the South Pacific gave him an immediate sense of the power and danger of the ocean. Growing up in Adelaide with the protection of a peninsula, the sea for me was more often than not, flat and without any sense of treachery."

Narelle Autio, from *The Seventh Wave*

In *The Seventh Wave* ("they say it's the biggest") we experience this serendipidous dichotomy and the fearful calm of a couple of photographers holding their breath as they hover with their Nikons as long as they dare in the depths. Catch it.

The Seventh Wave, *Trent Parke and Narelle Autio, Stills Gallery, July 12 - August 12. Also published as* The Seventh Wave, *Hot Chilli Press, Sydney 2000.*

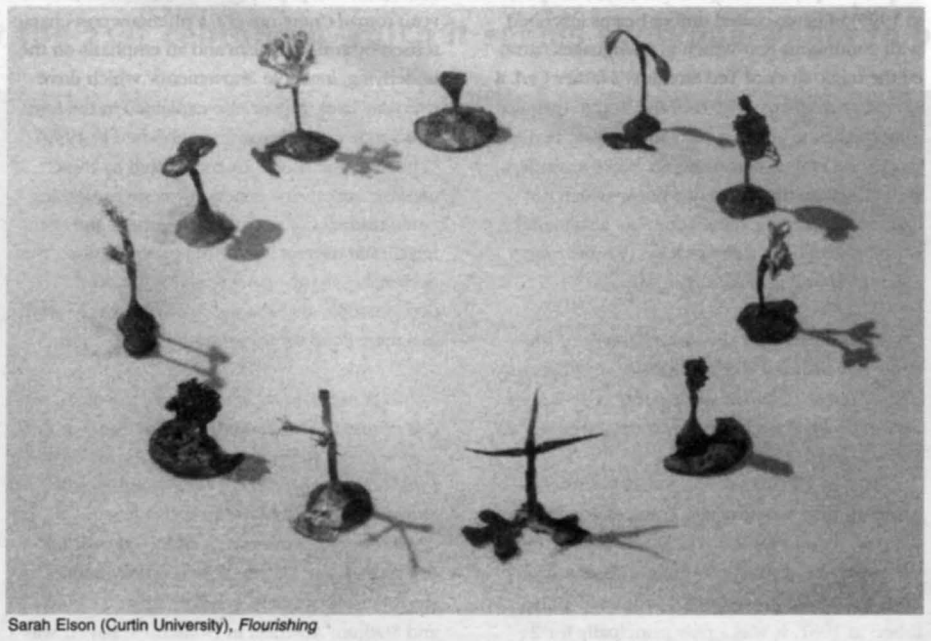
Hatched 2000: lime-green, blood red & rusted

Bec Dean

Tall glass cylinders filled with incremental variations on a hue of lime-green paint, from "Acid Rock" to "Glacier Sand", snake tidily through the PICA main space like laboratory samples in a crucial mixing experiment.

Each colour in extreme close-up is individually captured by video camera, and instantly replayed through monitors sitting beside the original, Pyrex containers. This is real-time, live camera action. This is *Drying Paint*, an electronic meditation on boredom at the nexus of art and technology.

Drying Paint effectively strips all sense of romanticism from the idea that technology enhances and improves our experience of the world, as each camera's increasingly lurid interpretation of the potted colour is expressed via the television's inaccurate composite. West Australian artist Tremaine Egan's confident, equipment-intensive work dominates the central space of the *Hatched*: Healthways National Graduate Show. It is undermined only, but pointedly, by the approaching obsolescence of its own technologies.



Sarah Elson (Curtin University), *Flourishing*

Egan's commitment to confronting discourses surrounding representation in the age of economic and technological imperatives is matched in strength by only a handful of the 65 graduates represented in the exhibition. Trepidation and anxiety about addressing current social and cultural issues are revealed by the proliferation of artists in this year's survey show who chose the path of least resistance by revisiting first-wave, middle-class feminism, reconstructing perspectives of historical events, or merely demonstrating techniques that result in aesthetically pleasing, but shallow work.

The plethora of works in *Hatched* addressing issues of domestic and corporeal power-relations reference not only the histories of such decorative textiles practices as crochet and needlepoint, but activities assigned to the realm of the household chore. There are several works that stand-out from these largely didactic, object-based exhibits. Video artist Elizabeth Anne Gratwick takes the closeted, private anxieties normally relegated to the realm of the domestic, to the street. Her *Performance Series* is a collection of videotapes both projected against a wall and screened on a series of small TVs in a darkened corner of PICA.

Gratwick sits wraith-like at the corner of a CBD intersection, applying fake blood to her clothing whilst apparently sewing herself into the same white frock. Another tape depicts the artist lying, as if entombed, upon the sump-oil stain of a parking bay. Her total introspection and focused actions, like repetitive remonstrations of piety, are recognised and abruptly ignored by successive passers-by, as if they were programmed to deflect public manifestations of madness or religious fervour (particularly those of a woman whose crotch is stained red).

The bloodstained, white dress reappears as the remnant of a performance and part of the installation, *Mother*, by Monika Tichacek. A video replays the painful embrace of 2 women after one, pierced hundreds of times by pearl-tipped pins demarcating and defining areas of her body, is unpinned by the other. The impact of this documentation is somewhat reduced by the obviousness of the series of sculptural works surrounding it. Luscious, pink and red folds of velvet are formed into labial, uterine mounds, and synthesised with disembodied fragments of the Hollywood sex-siren: long, blonde hair, stockings, and pearls.

In *Small Lives*, Jodie Maurer takes only the fishy dish-cloth out of the kitchen, leaving its politics behind. Dioramas of amoebic fictions are enacted on the surface of a series of used sponges, with tiny white train-set figurines sprouting like fungus from the shrunken surfaces. Set on the top of tall, perspex vitrines larger figures on the turf-side of scouring pads are placed into narratives of potential abuse, murder and conflict in seemingly picturesque settings. The final piece of the series has an old man trundling a wheelbarrow behind a grazing cow, a fine closure to a dark investigation of cultural growth that follows human evolution from crawling out of the mire of bacteria, to shovelling the shit of our own making.

The contemplative, meditative works of Sarah Elson and Claire Conroy focus the attention of the viewer to the ground, and furthermore to the processes of growth and renewal. Elson's *Flourishing*, fantastical silver casts of augmented plant matter, are combined with wax, foam, and semi-precious stones, and set into a ritualistic circle. Conroy's *Ponder* also utilises the properties of processed mineral elements, wrongly perceived to exist outside the natural processes of decay. Water drips from suspended buckets, eroding the steel plates below in a circle of rust. With a stethoscope nearby, the viewer is invited to place its membrane on the cold, hard steel, and listen to the beating heart of a thing that never lived.

Hatched: *Healthway National Graduate Show 2000, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, May 12 - June 25*

Minister of Fate cuts globalist ribbon

Chris Reid

Identity arises from an accretion of nature, nurture and culture. Korean performance and installation artist Ahn Pil yun explored identity and cultural tension in 2 memorable performances in Adelaide.

At the Contemporary Art Centre of SA, Ahn had lined the rear room with mirror plastic printed with drawings of scissors. Inflatable plastic scissors bearing Korean seals, and a rug woven from plastic, hung from the ceiling. In the centre room, which was strewn with cardboard strips, 6 monitors showed her video *Password*. In it an extension cord coils snake-like around an apple, the plug's two pins repeatedly penetrating the fruit (the bite as copulation) followed successively by images of other performances, Korean street scenes, geometric patterns. Pairs of wrought metal scissors festoon the front room.

Ahn Pil yun in performance photo Alan Cruickshank

Suddenly a long white wedding dress enters the gallery—lavish, sequined, red roses for the bride's head—emitting recorded pop radio and traditional music. The dress swishes about on its motorised frame, bumping into walls and onlookers, interrupting the opening speeches.

Ahn, in shaman costume, face painted white, runs in, then runs out the side door, in the front door again, calling out. Stopping, she earnestly takes an onlooker's hand, begging "has it finished?", runs another lap and accosts another onlooker. After many laps she collapses exhausted, sighing "finished!"

Assistant Professor of Art at Kunggi University, Seoul, Ahn Pil yun has shown widely in Europe and Asia, and has designed major public artworks. She is also a shaman, with both Catholic and shamanic ancestry. Her work blends art with shamanism, colliding Korean and Western culture. She is a "stop-daughter." The characters printed on her scissors are stop-daughter names, given to girls in the hope that the next child will be male. The wedding dress is her own.

Scissors symbolise the creation of new elements, enabling extension. Present in all Ahn's work, they seem oppositional, as yin/yang. In Korea, scissors are hung on the wall of a house that's been sold. In another video she emerges from a cake as a bride and cuts her hair; onlookers cut her clothes. The electrical cord is an extension, babies/reproduction are an extension, clothes an extension, her performance extends Korea into Australia. Her mirrors both double and extend images and reverse their meaning.

In her second performance her shaman costume is draped with plastic scissors. She ritually distributes candles around the courtyard, 2 artificial rocks nearby. Then one rock moves by itself. She avoids it but it chases her. Taking courage she pushes the second rock after the first. She whispers to an onlooker to pass on the message "she really knows" through the crowd. The battle of animated rocks continues until she falls exhausted, crying "it's finished."

The boulders symbolise viewpoints, grindstones, spirits, cultural clash, transformation. Ahn's audiences embody friend/enemy, judge/accessory—custodians of tradition. Ahn, wielding her magic symbols, depicts cultural (ex)tension through her own fragmented identity. Her performances portray a resolution of this tension, a healing or 'finish.' But this climax can't be realised by the actor alone—we custodians must accept her and her intervention.

Extension, *Ahn Pil yun, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, June 2; Lion Arts Centre Courtyard, Adelaide, June 7*

Custom made confessions at CCP

Ned Rossiter

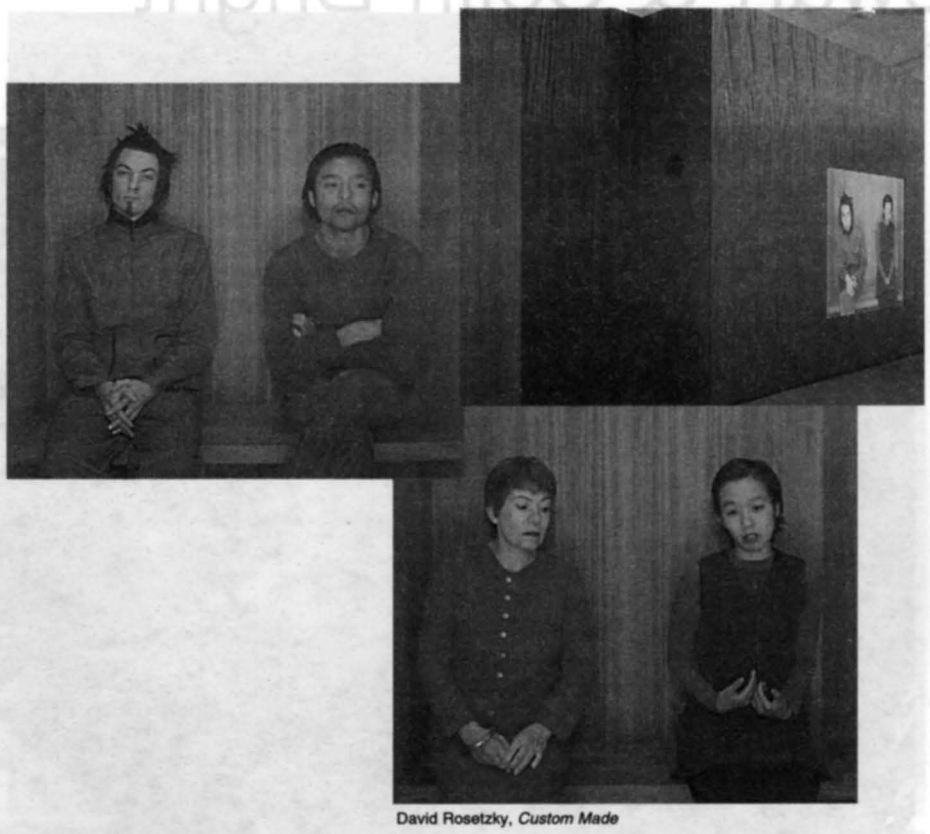
There's a certain banality in discourse that disinvests an emotional disclosure of its intense affective dimension. The syntactical range in which utterance takes form to give emotive presence its line of reason is so often limited, repetitive and hackneyed. A making conscious of the unconscious. Expression bound by genre. And this can be brutal. For me, it's the accumulation of exchanged little gestures of expression—a glance, the brush of fur on the back of a neck, the smell of skin, a crack in the road witnessed together, the murmur of sleep—that imbues a discourse on love with seemingly unbounded resonance. Intimate exchange is effectively attenuated when the singularity of love extends its circuit into gossip, for instance. Bodies become lost in the disfiguring work of narration.

Three shows at the Centre for Contemporary Photography engage with such a thematic, staging private intimacies as public confessions, but here I'll focus on one. David Rosetzky's *Custom Made* is an installation consisting of 2 exteriorly placed video projectors whose image is interiorly set on single translucent screens within 2 large wood veneer panels. Bench seats for viewing are fixed in alcoves opposite the image-screen. Audio speakers are embedded on either side of these booths. This half-enclosed chamber of sound and vision repeats itself with one image panel the inverse of the other, one soundtrack echoing in the booth diagonally opposite. While not strictly an exhibition of photographs, this installation is curiously photographic in its resemblance to the 18th century proto-photographic apparatus of the camera obscura.

As you sit in the alcove a drum, bass and synth groove girdled by the noise of a bustling suburbia intussuscepts a series of monologue confessions by various social 'types' projected as a video-loop. Like the seated viewer, each subject sits against a wood veneer wall. We are positioned as an addressee as they engage with the camera and hence bound, however fleeting and tenuous, in some relationship of complicity or dialogue. In another sense, as with the camera obscura, we are positioned as the very image which passes through the hole of the dark interior. Still again, the pew we occupy and the confession we hear are not so different from those techniques of social redemption and ecclesia characteristic of the church. Ideology, as French marxist philosopher and troubled Catholic Louis Althusser knew well, needs to be inscribed across social institutions in order to do its work of reproduction.

Placed to one side of the screen, a pubescent girl with red hair speaks fondly of her best friend at school. An older, darker girl fades up next to her. The redhead dissolves, while the new girl speaks of the incapacity of boys to articulate their emotions and acknowledge the significance of a relationship. A guy wearing a Mao-style jacket and ubiquitous 'Japanese' fishing hat—2 key signals of the interchangeable fashion of globalised contemporary urban youth—speaks of a reconciliation between father and son, or maybe it's between friends. It's often unclear who is being referred to in these confessions. A slightly anxious man in his late 30s or early 40s who might have a diet of booze, coffee, fags and hard work is dressed in a snappy powder blue safari shirt and has a bit of a stale punk-rocker hairdo. He's a gentle guy and distinctly troubled by his estranged relationship with his father, son, or lover. Again, it's unclear.

A 20-something tanned Japanese guy with slicked back hair and a Ché-style growth of beard speaks dearly of how he and his English speaking girlfriend overcome the difficulties of different languages. He fades and is replaced by a kind of zany post-Calvin Klein Vincent Gallo 20-something guy who waxes lyrical on his remarkable attraction to opposites—in his case, a girl introduced to him by a mutual friend. An Australian-Vietnamese girl decked out in op-shop chic delivers the next monologue on screen-right. She speaks of her great love of all things plastic, ruminating on how her friend, mother or maybe grandmother just can't understand what she gets off on, surmising that this has something to do with a difference in values.



David Rosetzky, *Custom Made*

In many respects these monologues are easy to dismiss for the earnest banality of their youthful angst. But this overlooks the range of ages and cultural backgrounds of the subjects. Nicer, perhaps, is to see the expression of intensity of the relationships for all of these people as relative to their type. You know, a different strokes for different folks kind of thing.

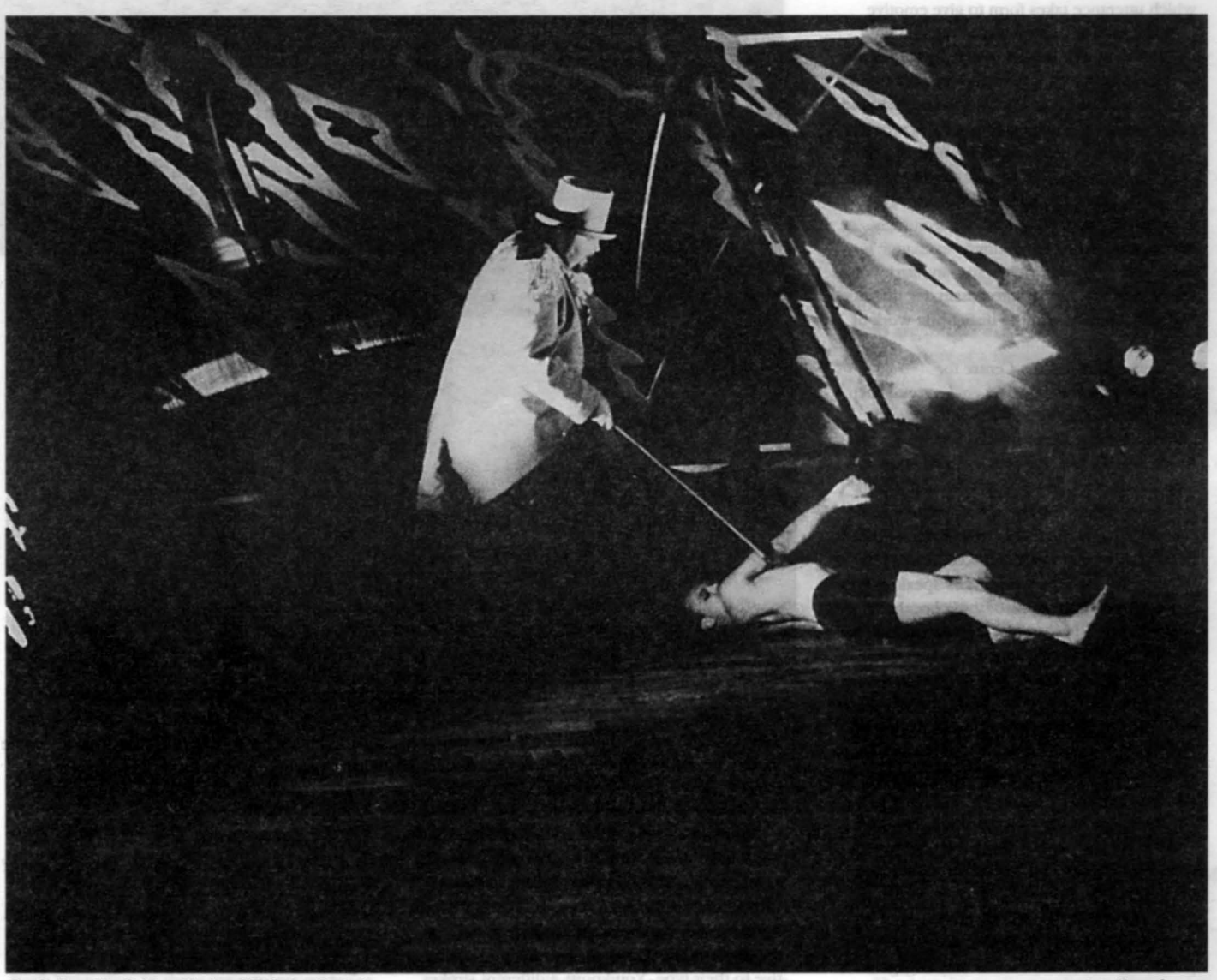
What is interesting about this choreographed staging of confession as real is the way a desire for presence is played out in the installation as a whole. Here, I think the model of the camera obscura again has something to offer. Writing on the use of the camera obscura as a metaphor for ideological consciousness in Marx, the unconscious in Freud, and forgetting in Nietzsche, Sarah Kofman notes how for all these key modern thinkers there is a fascination with the corruption of the real through "reflections of reflections, simulacra, fetishes", all of which are severed in some way from their source (*Camera Obscura of Ideology*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 1998). Reading Marx, Kofman suggests "the camera obscura functions, not as a specific technical object whose effect is to present, in inverted form, real relationships, but, rather, as an apparatus for occultation, which plunges consciousness into darkness, evil and error, which makes it become dizzy and lose its balance. It is an apparatus which renders real relationships elusive and secret."

While there may be a will to transparency and desire for presence intrinsic to the model of vision of the camera obscura, Rosetzky's *Custom Made* underscores such surety with distinct ambivalence. The wood veneer chamber signals its objectness as something already past: as a building material, the wood veneer—a thinly applied surface to a cheap wood composite—is of the kind found in caravans, boats and those 70s games rooms in modest suburban homes, homes whose once outer-fringe locations have since been demolished or become the interior of a greater suburban sprawl. Furthermore, there's nothing stable to the translucent projections: just as the images dissolve beside each other, the monologues might as well be rehearsals of any TV soapie beamed in from out there. *Custom Made* suggests our sense of reality is constituted precisely in the refigurings we make of mediatised commercial culture.

David Rosetzky, Custom Made, *Gallery One, Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP), Melbourne, June 9 —July 1.*

Opera activists: Amanda Stewart & Colin Bright

Harriet Cunningham



The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior, 1997 Sydney Festival photo Karen Somma

The Greenpeace volunteers are back on the streets, ready to tweak the consciences of Sydneysiders on their best Olympics behaviour. "Do you like whales?" asks a well-scrubbed face with a clipboard. Being 8 months pregnant, it's hard to resist being glib. "No, but I know how they feel when they get beached." The environment is an undeniably worthy cause, deserving urgent attention, but this activist's overt reminder backfires—it's all too earnest, too emotive, too much of an invasion of my personal and psychological space.

What hope then, for artists seeking to communicate an issue through their art? Is it an instant turn-off, or a chance to interrogate difficult subjects with a little more distance? I spoke to composer Colin Bright and poet Amanda Stewart about their opera *The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior* which is based on the scandalous "L'Affaire Greenpeace."

The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior was originally commissioned in 1990 as part of the Australian Music Centre's one-act opera project. It took another 6 years before the work reached the public in a spectacular outdoor performance against the backdrop of HMS Vampire, staged by Nigel Kellaway for the 1997 Sydney Festival. In 2000, after much editing by Bright, Stewart and ABC producer Andrew McLennan, a radiophonic version has been broadcast on ABC Classic FM and will be released on CD on the Australian Music Centre's label, Vox Australis. The CD release brings the project full circle and, by a happy accident, also coincides with a visit from Greenpeace's flagship, Rainbow Warrior, during the Olympics. It makes for a satisfying resonance between the events and the work.

The proximity between artefact and fact-fact has proved to be one of Bright and Stewart's biggest artistic challenges. As Amanda Stewart explains, "It's very powerful writing an opera about something which is still very fresh in people's minds. You have to treat the story with the utmost humility but at the same time bring forth what you believe: simultaneous empathy and detachment."

Talking with Colin Bright about his musical inspiration exposes a raw sensibility which, he admits, many critics and commentators find hard to take. An unrepentant activist, much of his music is driven by sociopolitical issues including the environment, Aboriginal affairs and gay discrimination. It was his idea to explore the story of the Rainbow Warrior because it was such a significant turning point in the history of the Pacific: "It was like a moment where Australia lost its naivety. We realised that a friend and ally would betray a fellow ally. It was a coming of age."

The collaborative process of composing an opera was a key to balancing the raw and the detached. Amanda Stewart's journalist background (which includes making a documentary film about the development of sub-atomic physics with Nicolette Freeman in 1983) gave her a huge reservoir of facts to draw on. For Colin Bright, it was more a gut reaction. As she explains, "Funnily enough, he'd often want to be more literal and narrative-driven than me. It's important that Colin's passion for the ideas was knitted in there. It was thus he had the stamina to go on. He writes very directly and passionately. I tend to be more elusive."

Stewart adds, "...it is appropriate that the writer has distance, and the composer has more passion. Just to deal with the issue—on a purely passionate level—could have degenerated into didactic opera. The writer has to look at the skeleton, the bare bones and have some responses to these structures. I am passionate about these issues, particularly about how the Pacific has been used as a laboratory...But when presenting something in public one has the responsibility to reveal deeper structures as well as unfortunate manifestations. L'Affaire Greenpeace is not an isolated incident. It is representative of many."

This tussle with real life and art produced a work which is resonant on many levels. The need for distance, combined with a tight budget, resulted in the story being distilled into a narrative for 6 characters who each represent a summary of the many activists, journalists, lawyers and onlookers involved. Fernando Pereira, the Greenpeace photographer who was trapped aboard the Rainbow Warrior when she sank at her mooring, is invoked as the narrator. Beyond his literal role in the event, however, he is also an archetype, the betrayed warrior who cannot rest, haunting the present in his search for vengeance.

"The underworld idea in opera has many parallels," says Stewart. "Fernando is seen and unseen; the dead survive in the will of the living, and the effects are carried in people's hearts. Thus you interrogate the tension between myth and history, you find structures in people's behaviour and undercurrents which lead to particular events...Originally opera was a form of ritual—ritualising events, displacing familiarity. We had to make [*The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior*] complex and multilayered rather than simple. It appeals to the intellect. Hopefully, it's not emotionally void, but that's not its backbone."

And does this dense, intellectual web of references make for a successful work, dramatically and musically? Stewart admits, "It's quite a hard listen, not an easy work. A new opera is very difficult." Bright views these difficulties as symptomatic of the subject matter rather than the genre. Like much of his work, this opera does not fit easily into an establishment venue. He often writes for alternative outlets—free outdoor performances, CD-ROMs, electroacoustic and collaborative works. However, as he observes, operating outside traditional confines makes establishment support harder to come by: the funding bodies and the general public do not seem to value free, grass roots, community-based works of art as they do high opera.

This issue is not confined to Bright and Stewart's collaboration. As Stewart points out, "Opera is meant to resonate, but Australian operas don't have an infrastructure to fit into...People writing new operas mostly would be aware of European traditions, but there's no obligation to obey that tradition. There is the excitement that one can deal with issues that are local, using that form [opera] but twisting it to define our own cultural priorities." Looking at other operas emerging in Australia, it is interesting to observe the number inspired by recent cultural issues: Andrew Schultz's *Black River* (Indigenous imprisonment), Martin Wesley-Smith's *Quito* (East Timor) and the un-produced *Lindy* [Chamberlain] by Moya Henderson. None are comfortable works and, especially in the case of *Lindy*, all have faced ongoing problems to find a relevant context for presentation.

So *The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior* returns, not on stage but as a radiophonic presentation, complete with sound effects and archival recordings from Australian, New Zealand and French reportage of the time. As an alternative to the staged version (spectacularly realised in 1997 on Darling Harbour outside the National Maritme Museum, Sydney and performed on ships, docks and in the water) it will hopefully ensure many broadcasts—there is already strong interest in the work from New Zealand and Canada.

Is it, however, a loss for opera and an admission that "high" artforms cannot carry a political message in Australia? Although it is disappointing that the original work is unlikely to have another live performance in the short term, both Bright and Stewart are relieved that the work has been distilled into an accessible medium. For, as Bright points out, "I used to think [art] could change things. But it's more like it creates a vibrancy in society. I think that's what it can do."

The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior *by Colin Bright and Amanda Stewart, broadcast ABC Classic FM, July 19; CD release August 12 at a concert by the Song Company, who appear on the recording and performed in the original Nigel Kellaway production. The CD will be reviewed in* RealTime *39.*

Libra Ensemble: traversing the limits of modernism?

Jonathan Marshall

While modernism frequently conforms to classical Aristotlean poetics, radically postmodernist music is antithetical to such ideals—US minimalism aside. Beauty, symmetry, harmony—and their extension into deeper, metaphoric, emotional or conceptual harmonies through the interplay of dissonance, polyphony, etc—remain central to both classicism and modernism. Postmodernist classical or ensemble music therefore represents a paradox, hence perhaps the interpenetration of modernist sonorities and musical ideas throughout Libra Ensemble's recent profile of 20th century music.

Co-artistic Director Carl Rosman disavows "any grand portentous statements" on the history of music. Even so, the relative paucity of fiercely anti-classicist avant-garde works from Dada, Futurism or Fluxus seemed idiosyncratic. Consequently much of the series produced the sense of an energetic, talented pantheon circling the dark, cold star of 20th century modernism. As Richard Toop observed in his program essay: "If recent works in this series are anything to go by, [contemporary composers] are 're-modernising'," a trend echoed in Dillon, Dench, Takemitsu, Boulez and others. Nevertheless at the moment of *audience*, this heritage remains compelling.

The most fascinating works however are those which go beyond, traversing the limits of modernity by actively inhabiting and sono-musically embodying modernist finitude and collapse. Peter Maxwell Davies *Hymnos* extends the (late) modernist approach of molecularizing and individuating sonic musical fragments such that traditional syntax breaks down. Today, historical musical forms droop under the weight of predetermined affective responses: melancholy natural landscapes and mountains for Romanticism; dizzying, angry, angst-driven urban worlds of psycho-sexual alienation for Modernism. These models of emotional signification do not apply to Davies' radically de-structured sounds however, as sono-musical separations become replaced by explosive conflation and combination, piano and clarinet transformed into pure noise machines. The different strategies of Young, Gerhard, Ricketson and Yee (notably micro-tonalism) produce similar ruptures.

Libra's tendency towards high modernism also restricted the concerts' performative qualities. Dressed in black, the unassuming musicians came across as living embodiments of the anti-visual aesthetics underlying chic, black sound systems. No Cage or Beuys here. Richard Barrett's "Interference" was in this sense a superlative exception. This Terry-Gilliam-esque piece of avant-garde sideshow featured Rosman screaming in Latin across nearly five octaves, dropping into death-metal growls, and intermittently punctuating his speech with a comically booming pedal drum, before undulating as his ululations were redirected through great, brassy loops of the contrabass clarinet. By vocalising into its coils as one would a didgeridoo, Rosman transformed instrument into prosthesis, the sounds of the body extended into gleaming metal in a way akin to Ujino Muneteru's *Love Arm* (Muneteru is a Japanese 'cabaret' artist and half of the band Gorgeous).

Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge* echoes these binary contradictions that dog Modernity. As musique concrete—composed from that most material of objects: magnetic tape—Stockhausen's work gestures towards a spiritual evanescence, a transcendence of materiality through the processes of the ethereally-endowed, electronic mechanism. In doing so, performance and history themselves evaporate. Yet as Ian Penman observed of dub, the 'ghost' of the past—a spectral, Heideggerian haunting of the zeitgeist—remains in the echo, the extruded sound, and the original process of montage (Penman, "Klang! Garvey's Ghost meets Heidegger's Gesit, or How dub became everyone's soundtrack already, always & forever more", Cinesonic Conference, July 1). If modernist spiritualism is haunted by materialist alienation, then postmodernist classicism remains deeply complicit in modernist musical structures.

Once Upon A Time: A journey through the music of the 20th century, *a four concert series from the Libra Ensemble, Iwaki Auditorium, Victorian Arts Centre and North Melbourne Town Hall, May - July*

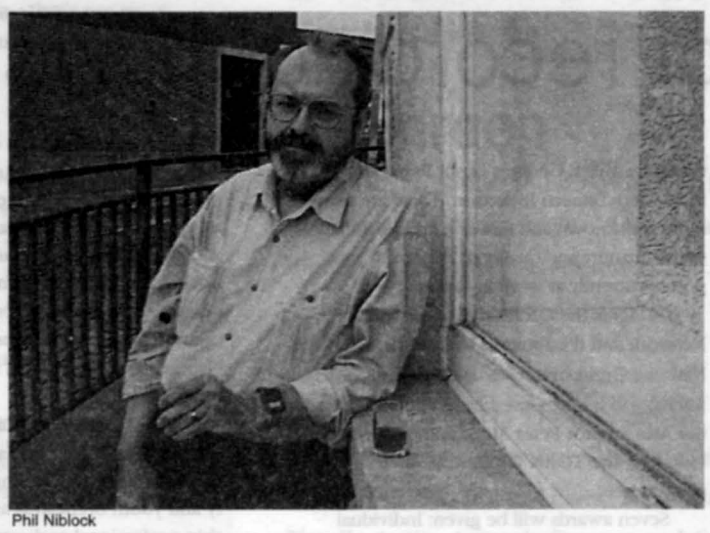
Phil Niblock: composer with laptop

caleb k

This Artspace evening commenced with a less than typical Phil Niblock work, the collage piece *Ghosts and Others*. We entered the space with the work in full progress, clashes and bangs, loud and hard to take, 3 guitarists improvising with/over the piece while images of workers were projected on 2 of the walls.

Niblock is known as a second generation minimalist who, since the 60s, has been composing as well as making film. *Guitar Too, For Four* (1996) was the focus of the evening. The piece is for 3 guitars (performed by Oren Ambarchi, David Haines and Julian Knowles) played with bows to enable continuous and sustained tones, and laptop (Niblock). The sounds play in a phantom space filled with microtones. That is, the sounds, though extremely simple, create a space filled with overtones, sum and difference tones, and interference patterns, which have the effect of creating a soundspace which suggests many more notes and tones along with rhythms in a complex space—both in the architecture of the room and in your head. The work requires the room be reflective as the notes bounce around and off each other. Beating drones take on a life of their own as they are let out into the acoustics of the space which becomes immersive and extremely dense. When it was finished, there was a a sense of loss, one which I found very hard to shake off.

The performance is centred on pre-recorded tones which have been slightly bent in pitch. These are then played on a laptop which Niblock has real-time control over, layering the sounds along with the live performers. The guitarists improvise around a few notes, bending pitches, changing octaves, hitting harmonics all in their own style and in conjunction with each other and Niblock. From something so simple comes an extremely complex array of sounds.



Phil Niblock

This is loud. With volume the sound becomes architectural. It is interesting to note that Phil Niblock says his hearing hasn't been affected by years of exposure to these often around 110 decibels sounds. His work calls for very good amplification and speaker systems, something which has only become readily accessible in recent years.

During the performance Niblock has his back to the audience, working the tones. As the guitarists leave so does most of the audience, missing the other works which Niblock played and a once-off opportunity to see and hear the unassuming Niblock at work. Why does the audience need to see 'performers'? What does it mean to perform with a laptop? The question of performance in the face of the ubiquitous PowerBook is at present being wrestled with as performers go to new extremes with the tool. Phil Niblock's characterful music cannot be underestimated, as those who have come across him and his music well know.

Phil Niblock with Oren Ambarchi, David Haines and Julian Knowles, Artspace, Sydney, April 20

New Music Notes

The New Music Network is about telling audiences and performers where, when and how to hear the best in new music performance around Australia. Visit the NMN website for more performance details and a full calendar.

August - September

Dominating the contemporary music calendar is the **11th Sydney Spring Festival of New Music.** The festival will play host to the 2nd Annual **Peggy Glanville-Hicks Address** by eminent composer **Barry Conyngham** on the eve of his departure from Australia to take up the Chair of Australian Studies at Harvard University. Studio Foyer, Sydney Opera House, Sunday August13, 2pm. That's on the final day of the Sydney Spring Festival, also the day of two **New Music Forum** sessions: **Elena Kats-Chernin**, **Richard Vella** and **Teresa Crea** share insights into recent collaborations; and speakers from a variety of musical backgrounds discuss: **Is Chamber Music Dead?**, chaired by **Barry Plews**, Executive Producer of the Spring Festival.

The Image of Music, an exhibition of contemporary composer and performer portraits by **Bridget Elliot** will be launched in The Studio foyer by **Elizabeth Ann Macgregor** of the MCA, Wednesday August 2, 6pm. All of the New Music Network events in Sydney Spring are FREE! You could spend the whole of Sunday 13th in The Studio: hearing the Young Composer and Young Performer Salons, the NMN Forums and Address, checking out the exhibition and then finishing the day by purchasing tickets for the festival's grand finale, ***Sur Incises*** by **Pierre Boulez**, conducted by Roland Peelman with an outstanding ensemble.

There are too many Spring Festival highlights to mention: **Claire Edwardes** fresh from Rotterdam Conservatorium gives a solo performance of contemporary works for percussion; the launch of **The Sinking of the Rainbow Warrior** CD-ROM. The full festival program is available on our website. All bookings are through the Sydney Opera House.

That "tight-knit new music commando force", **Sydney Alpha Ensemble**, will present another wonderful program of contemporary works, ***Across Generations***, featuring works by composers **Damien Ricketson**, **Michael Smetanin**, **Michael Finnissy**, **Matthew Shlomowitz** and **Brian Ferneyhough**. Damien Ricketson will give a pre-concert talk at 7.15pm and the concert will commence 8pm in the Eugene Goossens Hall, ABC Centre Ultimo, September 1. Tickets $20 adult/$12 student; **$15 for NMN members.**

Composer Richard Vella's book ***Musical Environments*** is now available from Currency Press, a good read for anyone interested in the processes of making music. Visit Currency's website at www.currency.com.au for more information and ordering. An exciting new CD release is **DRIVE** featuring the talents of James Nightingale and Kerry Yong. For information and ordering go to: http://jump.to/drivecdrom.

For more info on times, prices and venues visit our website: **www.nmn.org.au** and if you need more information call the NMN office on (02) 9281 5939...

Elision: the art of infectious interference

Richard Wilding

The Queensland Art Gallery is a noisy place on a Sunday. The concrete halls and open spaces echo with the fragmented sounds of people chatting, the voiceovers on cycling video exhibits and children being kids—almost a shopping mall effect. Into this sea of ambience, members of the Elision contemporary music ensemble injected some of their own sounds including a new work by European composer Richard Barrett, aptly titled *Interference*.

Scored for contrabass clarinet, voice and pedal bass drum, *Interference* tested the talents of solo performer Carl Rosman. Beginning with a falsetto Latin sprechstimme set to a fragment by the poet Lucretius, it descended gradually to a baritone vocal growl before launching into a virtuosic exploration of the sonorous qualities of the contrabass clarinet all accompanied by the sporadic punctuations of Rosman's right foot on the bass drum pedal. An earlier collaboration by Barrett and Elision, *Transmisi*, managed to play with resonances in the cavernous space of Brisbane's derelict Tennyson power station to great effect. Similarly, *Interference* wove its way through the general background ambience of the gallery, echoing through the space and attracting a curious crowd of onlookers.

The premiere of this new work by Barrett is just the tip of the iceberg as *Interference* is part of a larger installation work, *Dark Matter*, which will involve an international collaboration between the composer, Elision, artist Per Inge Bjørlo and the Cikada Ensemble of Oslo.

Another solo piece followed, with Ben Marks performing Klaus K Hübler's *Cercar* for trombone. Like Barrett's work, *Cercar* was an exploration of the sonorities and exhalations of the instrument. Marks' trombone gave itself up to a wide range of textures from rich blasts to muted melodic tones which perfectly suited the acoustics of the space.

But perhaps the real treat was left to last with an improvisation between saxophonist Timothy O'Dwyer and percussionist Ken Edie. O'Dwyer's strange instrumental meanderings and outbursts were the perfect companion to Edie's array of metal jetsam, flowerpots and

Daryl Buckley, Artistic Director, Elision contemporary music ensemble

home handyman artefacts. Serious music was never so much fun. I had to control an impulse to jump out of my seat and rattle a coffee pot.

Each of these pieces brought the respective performer's virtuosity to the fore but did so without dry or indulgent displays of technique and the members of Elision reciprocated by communicating an enthusiasm for the works that was infectious. This last aspect was especially appreciated by the audience who, due to the very public setting, consisted of more than just the usual suspects who attend new music performances. I suspect that some of the kids who listened will discover a whole new world of sonorous potential in the pots and pans cupboard at home.

The performance as a whole stayed well clear of tonal centres instead allowing the varying timbres of the instruments to become the focus of attention as they deftly navigated through the sea of ambience which suffused the gallery. The title of Barrett's work takes its cue from the interference patterns produced in the interaction of wave phenomena and we can think of it as a metaphor for the performance itself as the soundwaves from the pieces interacted with and explored the gallery's acoustical and social spaces. This is a type of interference that can be constructive, resulting in expanding wavefronts of creative interaction.

Elision contemporary music ensemble, *Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, May 14*

Other ways of recording music

In a fit of intense documention and celebration of Australian contemporary music, and concurrent with the the indefatigable annual Sydney Spring Festival, the New Music Network, photographer Bridget Eliot and curator Lisa Herbert, with the support of the Australian Music Centre, are displaying over 40 of Eliot's portraits of composers, artists and music 'movers' in the foyer of The Studio at the Sydney Opera House.

The exhibition is titled *The Image Of Music* and is arranged in groups of four, each group constituting a 'story.' The title plates will focus on the links between the subjects in each group, with an underlying theme being participation and/or association with the Sydney Spring Festival.

Here are a few of the 14 groupings: *Advocates, Commissioners, Movers & Shakers*: Roger Woodward, Marshall McGuire, Roland Peelman, Barry Conyngham; *Young Performers*, Claire Edwardes, Alison Eddington, Simon Tedeschi, Philip Arkinstall; *A Russian Connection*, Elena Kats-Chernin, Tamara Cislowska, Philip Shovk, Michael Smetanin; *An American Connection*, Matthew Shlomowitz and Australians who live in the US, Lisa Moore and Vincent Plush; *An English Connection*, Andrew Ford, David Lumsdaine, Piers Lane; *Younger Composers*, Gretchen Miller, Georges Lentz, Raffaele Marcellino, Damien Ricketson. There are many more well-known and newer names, a testament to the quantity and quality of artists and composers currently at work in Australia.

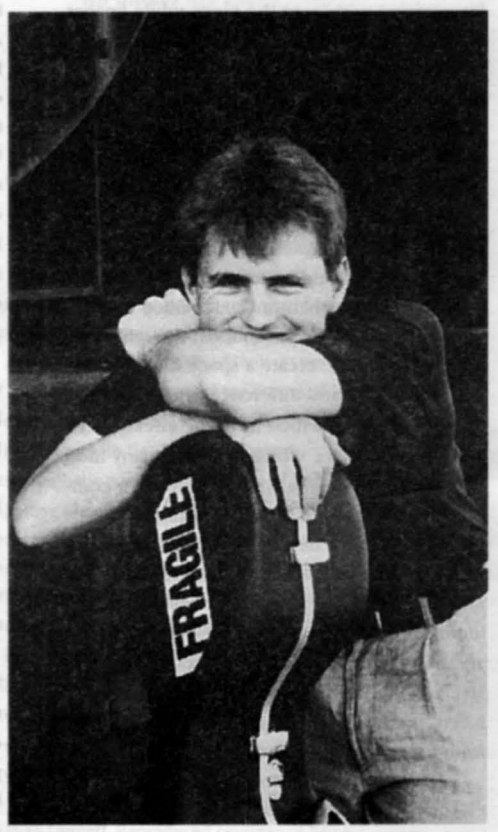
TOAN is the Orchestras of Australia Network and it's about to launch the 1st National Orchestral Awards on August 5th. The Award will be presented by Federal Minister for the Arts Senator Peter McGauran and will be followed by the TOAN Orchestras Alive Conference.

Seven awards will be given: Individual Awards (2) to a person who has fostered excellence, innovation and creativity in an Orchestra in a regional area, and in a metropolitan area (individual nominees are Martin Jarvis, Gary Stavrou and Martin Smith). Orchestral Awards (3) to a Professional, Community and Youth Orchestra, which has extended the public's perception of Orchestras (nominees are The Australian Brandenberg Orchestra, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Penrith Symphony Orchestra, Darwin Symphony Orchestra, Orange Symphony Orchestra and Sydney Youth Philharmonic Orchestra. Youth orchestra nominations are Cairns Youth Orchestra, Australian Youth Orchestra Camerata and Nova Youth Orchestra). Enlightened Support Award to an individual, a company or organisation which has provided enlightened or exceptional support to an Orchestra (nominees are Penrith City Council and Willoughby City Council). Lifetime Achievement Award to an individual for prolonged achievement in, or contribution to, the orchestral sphere (nominees are Barbara Cran, George Szekeres, Donald Hazelwood and John Keller).

TOAN Chair Anne Cahill says "...it's amazing there have not been any awards for orchestras until now. By creating awards for community and youth orchestras as well as for our flagship professional orchestras, the TOAN awards show how important orchestral music is to hundreds of thousands of people across Australia...With all the talk of amalgamations and downsizing and so called 'efficiencies' in the arts, there's never been a better time to celebrate the role that orchestral music plays in all our lives and the importance in Australia today of the people who make it happen."

The Image of Music, *The Studio Foyer, Sydney Opera House, July 31 - August 14.*

The TOAN 1st National Orchestral Awards ceremony takes place at the ACO Studio, Opera Quays, Saturday August 5, 6pm.



Geoff Gartner photo Bridget Elliot

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