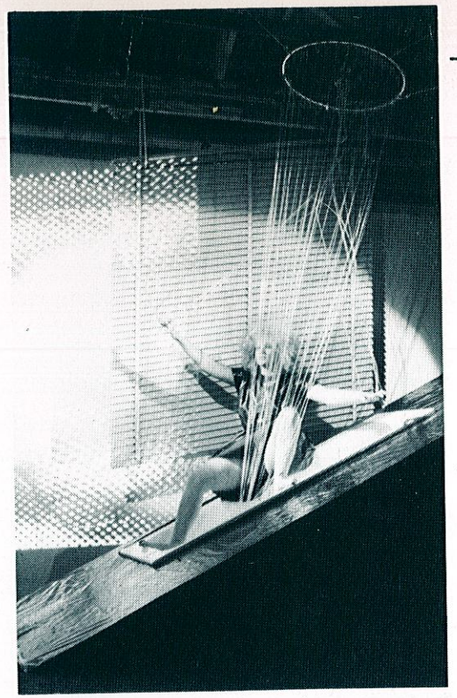

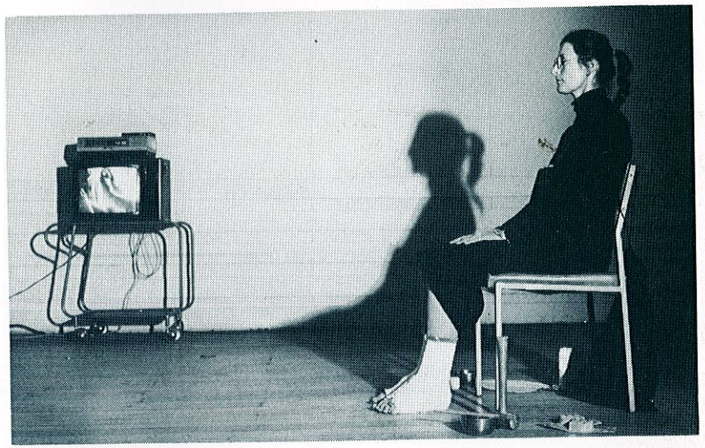

Top: Peggy Wallach, performance, Old Hobart Mail Exchange, May 1983.

Centre: Colleen Anstey, performance, completed at Old Hobart Mail Exchange May 1983.

Bottom: Rob McDonald, *Political Asylum, Political Island*, performance, Kelly's Steps, Salamanca Place, Hobart, May 1983.

ANZART
HOBART, 1983
A SURVEY

Supplement to *Island Magazine* 16, Spring 1983.

Editor JONATHAN HOLMES
Layout ALBAN JOHNSON
Typesetting PENNY HAWSON
Photography STEPHEN CARTER
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Cover: Richard Tipping, *Southern Crossing No.3*, installation, Mt Wellington, Hobart, 1983.

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THE ANZART-IN-HOBART ART ENCOUNTER, HOBART, MAY 1983

AN INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Holmes

This supplement to *Island Magazine* seeks to provide documentation of the artists' encounter, Anzart-in-Hobart, which occurred this year between 19 May and 12 June. As the acronym Anzart implies, the encounter was conceived as a means of establishing closer links between visual artists working in Australia and New Zealand. The success of the first Anzart, held in Christchurch between 17 and 30 August 1981, and the initiation of the second, can clearly be sheeted home to Wellington-based artist Ian Hunter whose energy and percipience have done much to determine the shape of both encounters. Unlike most large manifestations of contemporary visual arts occurring in Australia recently, which have been determined by curators for art-museums and for recognised contemporary art exhibition-spaces (with works of art being the pre-eminent concern), the basic aim of Anzart has been to bring artists to a particular location; in both encounters, rather than locking up large amounts of money in freight costs, there has been an emphasis upon providing artists with fares and fees, and this has meant that there has been a concomitant emphasis upon site-located installations, where the artist has relied upon easily obtained local materials and upon temporal or ephemeral artworks.

Hunter came through Hobart on his way to the Sydney Biennale, *Vision in Disbelief*, in April 1982 and he discussed the idea of holding Anzart in Hobart in 1983. The idea was suggested to the Visual Arts Board and was met with approval in principle. Leigh Hobba, who in 1982 was artist-in-residence at the University's Tasmanian School of Art, began corresponding with Hunter and made Anzart's Australian grant-applications during the year, even though he was not intending, at that time, to act as coordinator. It was only at the end of the year that he decided to take on the job.

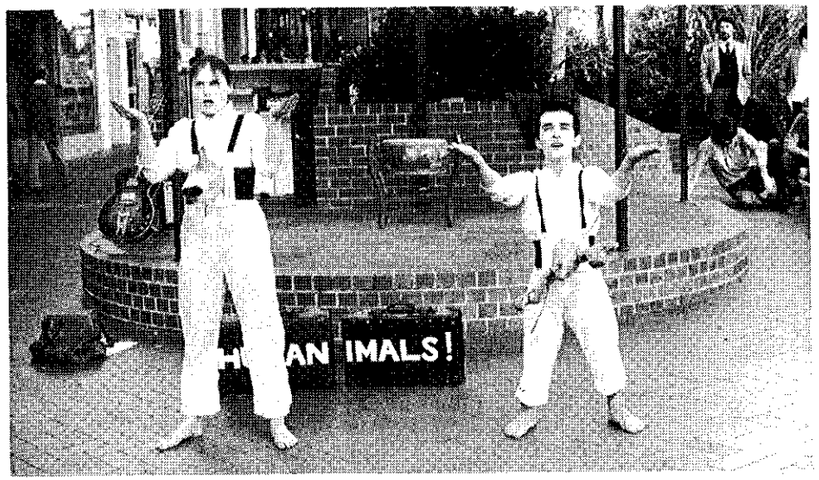
It was clear, however, that his imprint was on the Australian end of Anzart quite early in the piece. All of the artists travelling to Christchurch for the first Anzart had been nominees of the Visual Arts Board; for the second a grant of $18 000 for artists' fees and fares was made available to the Anzart organisation, and Hobba had in mind to devolve much of the selection of artists upon a number of alternative visual-arts spaces in the various states. While proposals were called for from groups *and* individuals, artists and works nominated through the alternative art-space network were to be in preponderance in Hobart. Artists from New Zealand were invited by a group of coordinators from Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington and Dunedin.

A small committee was set up in Hobart early in January 1983 under the chairmanship of Grace Cochrane. Leigh Hobba and Lyn Ingoldsby took full-time (but part-time paid) administrative positions. Protracted negotiations for a suitable exhibition-venue then began in earnest. Hopes had been held out for part of the superb waterfront factory-site, currently being renovated and soon to be occupied by the Tasmanian School of Art. When the use of this building proved to be unviable, negotiations were begun to acquire rent-free the buildings of the former

Adrian Hall and Tony Coleing, Dance, Dance, *performance, Hobart, 1983.*

Jonathan Holmes lectures in Art Theory at the Tasmanian School of Art. He has written recently for Island Magazine *and the* Australian Art Review.

Hobart Mail Exchange, also in Hobart's dock-area. Red tape spun the waiting time out over many weeks, and a decision was further delayed by the federal election: the organisers of Anzart were told quite early on that they could *rent* the building's ground-floor ($2300 for six weeks) but it became clear only three weeks or so before Anzart was to begin that there would be no rent-concession. This inexcusable procrastination by federal bureaucracy played havoc with the planning and publicity of Anzart and jeopardised the whole encounter. All this, despite repeated representations by politicians, members of the various arts-bureaucracies, and Hobba, Ingoldsby and Cochrane themselves. The Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board and the Visual Arts Board came to the rescue, generously providing enough money to cover the full rent.



Richard Von Sturmer and Charlotte Wrightson, Humanimals!, *performance, Hobart, 1983.*

The main contingent of New Zealand artists flew in from Christchurch on Saturday 14 May, and artists from around Australia began arriving in droves during the next few days. In the space of five days the Mail Exchange was transformed from a cold empty barn whose floors were covered in leaves and pigeon-shit, into an equally cold but considerably cleaner and visually striking exhibition-venue, the nature of which can be construed from the following pages.

The substance of the Anzart encounter was crammed into a ten-day period beginning 18 May with the opening of *Not a Picture Show* (reviewed) and ending on 27 May with the second of two forum-debates *Art Now* (the contents of which it was not possible to publish in this supplement). Anzart-in-Hobart was opened on Thursday 19 May by the governor of Tasmania, Sir James Plimsoll, who delivered a considered speech. The entire event was avoided by the media, except under extreme pressure, even though radio, television and the press were provided, several weeks in advance, with extensive information which was often brought up to date. The weekend, 20-22 May, was dominated by the Festival of Sound and Audio Art which was organised by Nicholas Zurbrugg and which featured Henri Chopin, French poet and acknowledged innovator in the field. A dizzying array of temporal works occurred in the days following the opening, some planned well before the event, others quite spontaneous. Criticism of Anzart for the insubstantial nature of many of the static works in the Mail Exchange (in this writer's view justified) must be weighed against the often subtle, usually economical and certainly substantial contribution of artists who performed temporal works. Readers will find comments on particular works spread throughout this supplement; originally it had been the intention to include a full review, by Leigh Hobba, of performance-work, but shortage of space has prevented the inclusion of his long article. Instead, substantial sections from the article have been placed in this introduction. All block-quotations in the following text are from this unpublished manuscript by Leigh Hobba.

Of the many works which caused considerable discussion, the performance of Adrian Hall and Tony Coleing proved to be the most debated. Hobba writes:

> *Dance, Dance* by Adrian Hall and Tony Coleing, with the collaboration of the Salamanca Ballroom Dancers, was a formally located work . . . The materials they chose were difficult to reconcile — the physical spectacle of eight ballroom-dancing couples moving through their practised routines, playing

against a sound-mix of aggressive, military and political content.

The sincerity of the dancers, their regimented actions, their formal sexuality, confronted the audience. Their movements and static moments were provocative. The static moments were perhaps the most provocative — they stood at one time for seven minutes fanned against the wall, watching the audience watching them. Their routines were also impressive — a conditioned response against the rest of the world gone mad . . .

Because of the severe criticism this work provoked ("the dancers were exploited"), I interviewed the dancers after the performance. Consistently they appeared to be confused to the point of non-concern by this response. They understood that they were reaching, with their hobby, an audience which would be in sympathy with their brand of theatre. The dancers had a slender grasp of the total esthetic as proposed by Hall and Coleing but during their collaboration the artists and dancers met at a point of mutual respect.

I thought the insecurities felt by the audience were displaced to the most convenient receptacle . . . and took the form of compassion for the defined social order as represented by the dancers.

Dance, Dance suffered from a number of physical problems, not the least of which were the annoying distortions in the barrage of sound; and the unplanned but necessary inclusion of a track to which the dancers could move (originally they were to go through their set unaided by cues) caused a hostile misreading of the work since it locked the dancers' movements to the fascist content of the soundtrack — precisely the opposite of Hall's and Coleing's original intention.

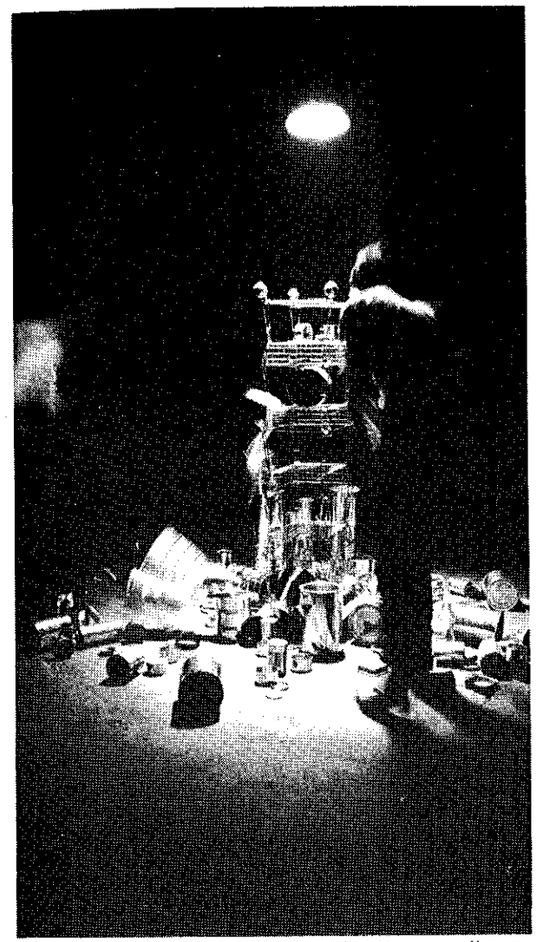
Sound played a very important part in Anzart, for example in the polished performance of the Belgium-based improvisational musicians Logos Duo. As well, David Watt and Adrian Jones gave a neatly conceived and marvellously anarchistic sound-performance in which a large number of variously sized gleaming tins were arranged in a circle around an upturned stainless-steel vegetable-trolley. The action consisted of the two artists moving around the perimeter stacking the tins at an ever-increasing pace. While the tins tumbled onto the ground a three-track film projection (two images of dancing couples and one of a swinging light bulb) and an audio-track of a simple piano-piece were played. The work, in the foyer of the Mail Exchange, an ideal concrete sound-box, involved a crescendo of sound which, when abruptly stopped, was cathartic.

Two artists, Jill Scott from Sydney and Philip Dadson from Auckland, used FM radio for their works. Hobba writes:

Scott used the radio station THE FM to call for collaborators and location-suggestions. Apart from the Blowhole at Blackman's Bay, all the locations were human-made constructions. Sounds integral to these locations were mixed with performed voice and wind-instruments during site-recordings and later as a studio-mix, her stated intention being "research into levels of decay-rates and echo-possibilities in both natural and human-made constructions".

Drawings made at each of the locations were added to during the performance — a series of naive oscilloscope-imitations (of the various recordings). Scott's revolving "desert simulator" (placed in front

Logos Duo, Belgian Improvisational Musicians, performance, Old Hobart Mail Exchange, Hobart, 1983.



David Watt and Adrian Jones, performance; trolley, tin cans, 3 super 8mm film loops and sound track, Old Hobart Mail Exchange, 1983.

of the large hanging drawings) is an intriguing sculpture. Nails, magnetised from underneath the revolving disc, scratched their way through a sandy landscape. Her use of the simulator in previous work has alluded to a timeless spaciousness that I found to be an effective contrast to claustrophobic Tasmania and the local environments she chose to document.

And of Dadson, he says:

Philip Dadson directed his main performance-work *Mayday, Dadsons Come In* through the radio station THE FM. His grandfather had left Tasmania for New Zealand some years before. As we were told, all Dadsons are related.

Through a mix of sounds generated on his arrival in Hobart (with a little pre-recorded help from *From Scratch* — Dadson's New Zealand-based percussion ensemble inspired by Cardew and Process Music) and live sounds, and pre-recorded telephone conversations, Dadson sent out a continuo through the air-waves, "Mayday, Dadsons Come In", a catchy riff, with other appeals in down-home rhyme.

"On the hunt for his genealogy
A Kiwi on the hunt for his family tree . . .
. . . hunting for relatives on THE FM . . .
I'm trying to catch my ancestry
To crack the family mystery."

The listener was taken on the trail via the pre-recorded telephone-calls. Dadson rang other Dadsons located through the telephone book, introduced himself and gradually began to piece together his lineage.

Dadson is a highly polished performer whose work is as well-received in the field of experimental music as it is in that of the visual arts. Like him, Richard von Sturmer and Charlotte Wrightson cross easily between disciplines — in their case, from theatre into the visual arts — although their work sits more comfortably in theatre. Their economically scripted and disciplined parables on the human condition were delivered with authority and engaging sensitivity and were among the most publicly accessible performances in Anzart.

Von Sturmer's and Wrightson's disciplined training in theatre was clearly evident in their performances: this couldn't be said of Rob McDonald's work *Political Island, Political Asylum*, which entered the realms of theatricality. McDonald, with Juilee Pryor, is the driving force behind the combative and energetic alternative-art-space Art Unit in Sydney.

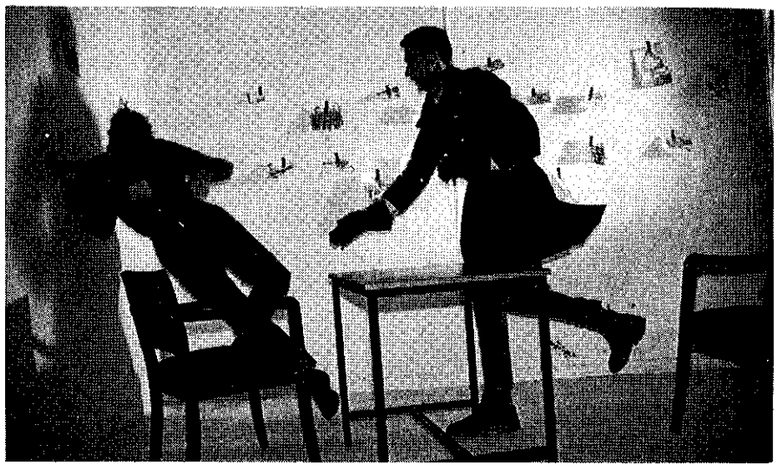
Hobba's comments on McDonald's major work in Anzart are an astute assessment of its qualities and failings. It was performed in a splendid and desolate walled site off Kelly's Steps, Salamanca Place:

A lone figure, strapped to an antiquated bathchair, marooned at the bottom of a bomb-crater, struggling to return to a desolated world. Three semi-automatic .22s, activated by a switch, were fired at intervals into projected street-scenes, while two figures snapped and growled around the outskirts of the bunker before the figure was liberated and obliterated (with the audience) by a dense smoke-bomb.

McDonald set his stark, uncompromising imagery very effectively. In his push for a conclusion, however, he crossed the line into an insecure theatre, with undisciplined prop-decisions. The animalised figures trivialised the imagery; the .22 rifles, though evocative machinery, left the impression of a sniper without a snipe — a popgun effectiveness, compared to the magnitude of our media-fed knowledge of, or in McDonald's case first-hand experience of, real killing war . . .

Hobba was critical of Steve Turpie's and Andrew Drummond's "restoration" of severely pruned plane-trees in Salamanca Place (see Daniel Thomas' article) on the grounds that it was politically misaligned — specialists have been treating the trees for saltwater poisoning for some time now. Elsewhere in his manuscript Hobba talks at some length about

the performances of: Ann Graham ("She set her work within an historical context, also regionally located . . . Honest, direct, economical and fragile, she offers no solutions"); Bonita Ely ("Her appearance as a coiffured business-worker was exactly right . . . Shredding and degenerating images of a now-flooded Lake Pedder within a not very accessible office-environment, the artist drew attention to the fact . . . that in these closets . . . our fate, our heritage, our futures, are being shredded as part of daily routine"); and Colleen Anstey, of whose performance he was quite critical ("Colleen Anstey began her performance in New Zealand where she had her feet encased in plaster and she travelled to Hobart similarly disadvantaged . . . What concerns me with an action like this is the necessity to put something on, albeit a metaphor, before you can take it off as an art-gesture . . . And Anstey's involvement in the performance extended through the journey from New Zealand to Hobart was not really projected at the show-and-tell hour that concluded the work").



Stephen Waymouth and Michael Halford, performance, Old Hobart Mail Exchange, Hobart, 1983.

Anzart was, in many ways, really rough at the edges, a fact commented upon by a number of the writers in this supplement, and one that must have been especially evident to those who had just flown in from *Perspecta '83* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the now well established biennial survey of contemporary Australian visual art, which has validated a whole range of new work by younger Australian visual artists. That Anzart had the capacity to shock was clearly due to its location, Hobart, which had never seen anything like the art *or* the artists before and whose population was nonplussed if not openly hostile to the imagery and life-style represented by the event; but there also appears to be enough good work emanating from genuinely *alternative* art-spaces to suggest that there is a viable *other* body of visual art that can call into serious question the structures of the dominant and validated systems that control the presentation and promulgation of visual art in this country. The work of the most aggressively challenging group to demonstrate this at Anzart, Hardened Arteries, has been commented upon by a number of writers in this supplement, but it is worth including Hobba's observations of the group:

> They responded perceptively to their relocation to Hobart. They were a conspicuous group on the streets of Hobart and made direct responses: lined up outside the offices of *The Mercury*, holding fixed smiles while one of the group negotiated with a reporter inside for a more positive, non-censorial reportage; or Stephen Waymouth, after an even-match arm-wrestle with Kathy Morgan, being flung to the wall by an officiously attired Michael Halford, and left as debris beneath images of aggressive military hardware. Consistently responsive, the full contribution made by Hardened Arteries was not appreciated until Hobart returned to its xenophobic self following the departure of artists after Anzart.

And for all of this we have to thank the artists, the various funding-bodies (including the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board which, contrary to the spurious and unsubstantiated claims of the editor of *Artlink* (Vol 3, no 3, July-August 1983, p 5), slapped no bans on the presentation of no-dams performances), Leigh Hobba and the Anzart Committee, the New Zealand coordinators (particularly Barbara Strathdee whose tireless organisation facilitated the exchange), and the Tasmanian School of Art which seems to have lent just about every piece of electronic equipment in its possession and, short of the director's desk, most of its furniture as well.

THE SCOPE OF ANZART
OBSERVATIONS
Daniel Thomas

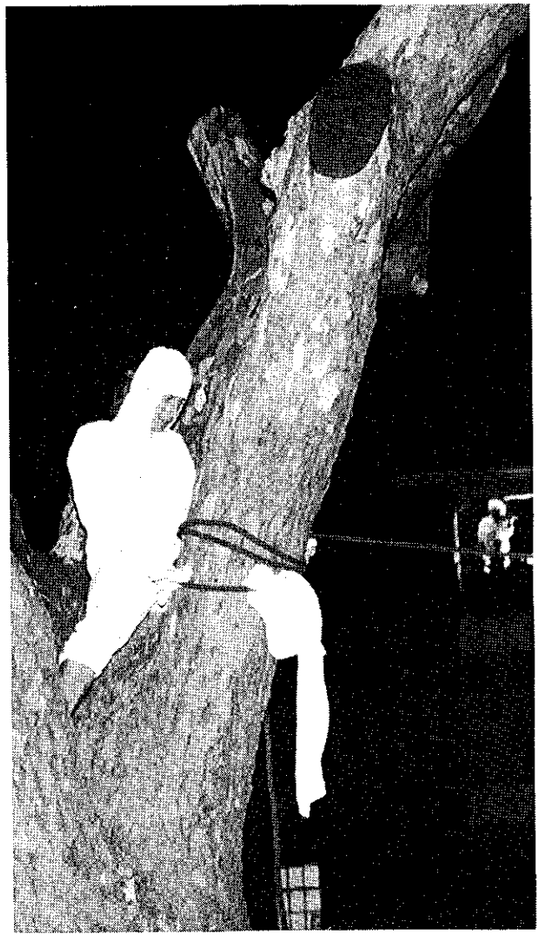
A historic event. The first significant presentation of avant-garde art in Tasmania. I don't count the long-standing annual Tasmanian Art Purchase exhibition of middle-of-the-road contemporary paintings and sculptures, organised by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart. I don't count occasional near-private avant-garde events organised by art students, such as the mid-1970's "pun-events" with Bruce Lamrock in Launceston.

The sense of occasion was emphasised by the official opening of this "second Australia-New Zealand artists' encounter" by Sir James Plimsoll, governor of Tasmania. I doubt that any other Australian vice-regal person has lent himself to such an occasion. Of course there was a large measure of government-support from New Zealand and Australia, in the form of money and in the form of the temporary presence in Hobart of many of each country's cultural officials. That was a diplomatic point which a former ambassador such as Plimsoll would appreciate. But it was nevertheless inspired of the organisers to invite him to perform the opening, and it was generous of him to accept. His opening address was entirely sensitive to the audience in front of him, and thus it compared more than favourably with the previous week's opening in Sydney of the *Australian Perspecta* exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. His Excellency thus made many friends in the young world of recession-art.

The local newspaper was observed (at least during Anzart's first five days, which I spent in Hobart) to have been rather unaware of this historic event in Hobart. The local establishment, apart from Mr and Mrs Claudio Alcorso and the staff of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, was conspicuously absent from the opening ceremony, but this was not surprising given the unfamiliar nature of the event and its completely unfamiliar headquarters. It was an abandoned mail-exchange building, but very conveniently situated at the side of the waterfront Parliament House, between the tourist area of Salamanca Place and the central business area. More surprising was the absence from the opening ceremony of the better-known local painters and sculptors.

Perhaps more of the local painters and sculptors and the local general public turned up as the three weeks continued, but even if they didn't I doubt that it matters. What was obviously of great value was the educational stimulus given to the local students, and the artistic stimulus caused by the coming together, for a few days, of the many experimental artists, young and old, from Tasmania and the mainland, and from New Zealand and Europe. Anzart was conceived in 1981 as an "artists' encounter" and that, triumphantly, is what seemed to have been achieved.

For example the unscheduled performance-pieces. Andrew Drummond (New Zealand) and Stephen Turpie (Victoria) at dusk on Monday 23 May performed the most

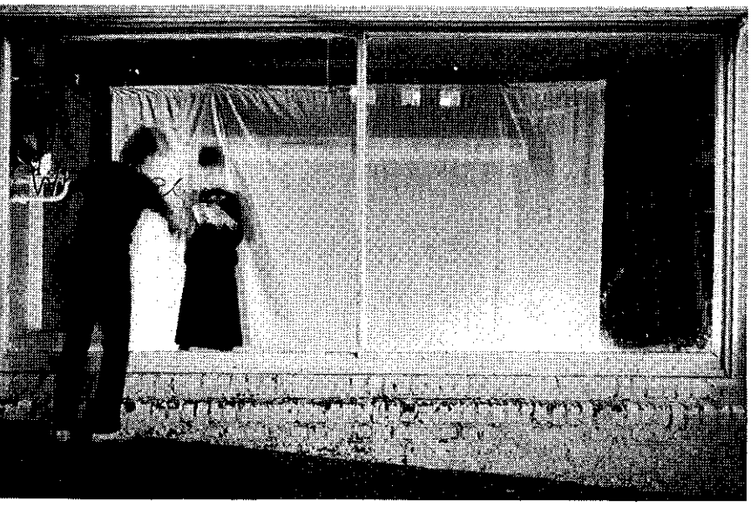


Andrew Drummond, Jon Rose and Stephen Turpie, performance, Salamanca Place, Hobart, 1983.

Daniel Thomas is Senior Curator at the Australian National Gallery and author of Outlines of Australian Art: The Joseph Brown Collection *(McMillan 1973).*

beautiful piece of those I saw. Accompanied from above by Jon Rose's cello-music in a high warehouse-window, they quietly climbed through the branches of a row of severely lopped ailing waterfront-trees on Salamanca Place, tying greenery to the stumps. In the dark, in their white boiler-suits, the two men's bodies, exactly in scale with the trees' heavy branches, became floating, luminous, healing spirits, the rhythms of their deliberate climbing-and-tying work producing a remarkably soothing and comforting experience.

Or, on the same night, a small impromptu piece by a Sydney teacher (male) and pupil (female), instigated by the latter. Adrian Hall and Adriane Boag painted onto a streetfront-window of the Mail Exchange, simultaneously from inside and from outside, the inscription "Who wears the trousers Adrian(e)?"



Adriane Boag and Adrian Hall, Who wears the trousers, Adrian(e)?, *performance, Old Hobart Mail Exchange, Hobart, 1983.*

Undoubtedly, performance art still lives. Perhaps those mid-1970s artists, such as Drummond, who took it up when it was new, will continue to produce the best work. For example Derek Kreckler's *Radioing, Sometimes Myth* was a planned and perfect performance-piece by an established artist. So was Bonita Ely's photocopying piece in unrecognisable secretarial guise.

But there was also a newer kind of performance art, by the younger members of recession art collectives such as Hardened Arteries and Art Unit, both of Sydney. Seldom poetic, soothing or long, their pieces are short, noisy and angry. Sometimes, as with *Killing time*, they have been devised primarily for urban-guerilla performance in working class pubs and trade union hangouts.

Recession art also means ephemeral installations of cheap materials. The Mail Exchange building, and the exhibition at the former Blundstone boot-factory which now houses the newly formed Chameleon Collective, were both notable for creative use of small closets and store-rooms for installation-pieces. Juilee Pryor's personal artists' books were set in a tableau filled with autumn leaves from the streets of Hobart. Rob McDonald's blood-and-book piece about genetic engineering occupied a shelved cupboard behind a closed door. Bo Jones and John Bennett, at Chameleon, filled a closet in the former boot-factory with a number of leatherworkers' obsolete sewing-machines whose spindles were connected by live audio-tape to a tape-recorder from which shy old men spoke of their past life in the factory.

Hardened Arteries and Art Unit are unfunded by any public agency. Some of these new collectives prefer not to seek funding. Certainly these collectives, with Chameleon, have produced some of the most interesting new art. They are not concerned solely with performance art and ephemeral installations. Michael Hill's walk-in installation was in effect a walk-in painting (a walk-in Philip Guston painting) and he is clearly very concerned with traditional painting-expression. So was Belinda Holland's painted self-portrait in a broadly executed wall-painting wasteland.

Only on my last night in Hobart, at the $3-a-head screening of the Victorian College of the Arts Gallery's travelling exhibition *Film as Art*, did the facts of life for recession-artists really hit. At interval-time it was plain that only the prosperous middle-aged art-teachers and curators were there. The young artists from the collectives might have made their way to Hobart from Sydney or Adelaide, but they couldn't afford $3 for *Film as Art*. I realised they were certainly not going to afford Terry Smith's $10 literary luncheon later that week either.

Object art of considerable beauty was also present in the workshop atmosphere of the Mail Exchange, but it would have gained by a traditional art-museum setting. If there had been advance knowledge of Hossein Valamanesh's lamp-lit tent-constructions (from Adelaide), or of John Hurrell's series of honey-coloured waxy lettered tablets, or of Vivian Lyn's cylindrical towers of paper (both from New Zealand), then these three very subtle works might have been negotiated for display in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. The non-involvement of the local art-museum was remarked on by the New Zealanders, who remembered the substantial involvement of the Robert McDougall Art Gallery at Christchurch during the previous Anzart.

There was also an object art exhibition, *Not a Picture Show: Exhibition of Usages of Photography*, held by Tasmanian artists in the Community and Art Centre premises in Salamanca Place. It served to underline the now well-known environmental concern of most Tasmanian artists, to show the work of the local artists most involved with Anzart-in-Hobart, and to display the first new works by John Armstrong seen for a couple of years – in short to display the special qualities of peculiarly Hobart art in works of sometimes considerable artistic excellence.

What else? It was good to spend time again with New Zealand art-critic and poet Wystan Curnow and worry about all those words in New Zealand painting (and in Olivier Burckardt's slide-projection performance). I put it down to literature – the most portable art-medium, being until recently the only art-form that could reach New Zealand (the end of the European world) in examples of the highest quality – and to painting, the least portable. It was good to see Arthur and Corinne Cantrill still at their unique film-art, good to see Richard Tipping still at his Southern Cross light-pieces, this time at dusk on the Organ Pipes near the top of Mount Wellington (typically it was the only piece the public and the media knew well; and not many locals actually looked uphill to see it on the mountain, but they did see it on television). It was good to find rare books and magazines from New Zealand, from Praxis (Perth) and from the Experimental Art Foundation (Adelaide) in the Anzart shop, and records by New Zealand's music-performance artist Philip Dadson. It was good to get a focus, for the first time, on the new recession art cooperatives, and to realise that a lot of their energy, now in Sydney and Hobart, is energy that has recently emigrated from Adelaide. That includes the Anzart-in-Hobart director, Leigh Hobba.

Most of all it was good to know that very good new work continues to be done by established experimental artists, for example Andrew Drummond, Bo Jones and Stephen Turpie (Turpie's installation-piece was one of a number of works to acknowledge the fishing industry, and in his case also the fishy smells, of Hobart). And it was good to know that new artists of considerable promise exist, and are toughing out the recession. Good luck to Juilee Pryor, Michael Hill, Rob McDonald and Belinda Holland, and to the many I didn't meet.

Maura Chamberlain and Derek Kreckler, Desire, Not a Dingo, *performance Old Hobart Mail Exchange, Hobart, 1983.*

Hardened Arteries, performance outside the Mercury *offices, Hobart, 1983.*

THE VOICE OF BARTHES
AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF SOUND POETRY

Nicholas Zurbrugg

Nicholas Zurbrugg lectures in Comparative Literature at Griffith University, Queensland. He edits the Sound Art journal Stereo Headphones.

> They are literary critics. That's what gets me . . . They shut the eyes, do nothing about the fact of writing . . . and avoid the issue. They forget that literature, like all other effects, by genius transcends the material, no matter what it is . . . Their duty is to conserve and explain in relation to established facts — that is all.

Thus spoke William Carlos Williams, in defence of Joyce, in 1929.[1] Williams' words are as potent today as they were half a century ago, reminding us as they do that, for all its virtues, criticism tends to forget "the fact of writing" in order to savour previous "established facts" which distract attention from the ways in which "genius transcends material", and reveals what Williams calls "valid technical innovations".[2] Williams probably refers here to poetic *technique*, rather than to what one might call "poetic *technology*". But, as certain artists and poets have emphasised from the beginning of the century, the most distinctive quality of the "genius" of twentieth-century creativity is its capacity to create works commensurate with the innovations that Moholy-Nagy associated with "a new dimension — the dimension of a new science and new technology which could be used for the realisation of all-embracing relationships".[3]

Jas H Duke

Sound-poetry or *poésie sonore* — a mode of poetic creativity that the French sound-poet Henri Chopin defines as being "made for and by the tape-recorder", as "a matter of vocal micro-particles, rather than the word as we know it", and as an art "more easily codified by machines and electricity . . . than by any means proper to writing"[4] — is perhaps one of the most important contemporary manifestations of such poetic technology. Chopin's definition derives from an article of 1968, in which he surveyed the work of the various pioneers of this new movement, a movement which can be traced back to the late fifties and the early sixties when a number of the poets, first published on LP record in Chopin's review *OU* (such as the Paris-based American poet Brion Gysin, the Belgian poet Paul de Vree, and Chopin and his fellow Parisians François Dufrêne and Bernard Heidsieck), all began their tape-recorded work.[5] The importance of these poets' experiments is at least twofold. Firstly, their work with the tape-recorder identified and employed new material, by recording and amplifying sounds hitherto inaudible, and by manipulating such sounds (along with more familiar modes of language) in phonomontages in which the recorded sound, like the cinematic recorded image, could be fragmented, superimposed, accelerated, decelerated, and so on.[6] Secondly, such recorded work introduced a new, unprecedentedly intimate transcription of the authorial voice. Thenceforth, a poet's work was not to be communicated simply by neutral typographic signs, but by the voice-print of the poet, with all its vocal idiosyncrasies and individual inflections. With such innovations in mind it might well be argued that the various possibilities of recorded and semi-recorded creativity peculiar to sound-poetry finally allow the poet to manipulate language with the same facility with which the cinema allows the artist to manipulate the visual image.

At the same time it might also be argued that the new creative possibilities peculiar to sound-poetry offer a certain technological consolation to the "crisis of language" that seems to haunt the consciousness of those twentieth-century writers such as Maurice Maeterlinck, Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett, whose disenchantment before the limits of language has moved some critics to speculate about the "death" of language and, more specifically, has precipitated such gloomy observations as: "In some strange way we devalue things as soon as we give utterance to them",[7] "What I write is different from what I say, what I say is different from what I think, what I think is different from what I ought to think and so it goes on",[8] and "There are many ways in which the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said".[9] For if statements such as these imply that twentieth-century reality has become too complicated and too terrible, and that writing has somehow come to an end, then the availability of the tape-recorder to some extent remedies these lingering doubts about the possibility of adequate expression, and, as that doyen of French theory, Jacques Derrida, has recently surmised, inaugurates a new, positive dimension of verbal utterance.

For in the course of an interview at the Collège de France in 1982, Derrida stirringly suggested that:

> Instead of thinking that we are living at the *end* of writing, I think that in another sense we are living in the extension — the overwhelming extension — of writing. At least in the new sense . . . I don't mean the alphabetic writing down, but in the sense of those writing-machines we're using now (eg the tape-recorder).[10]

This enthusiasm for tape-recorded creativity is of course identical to that nurtured and explored by the pioneer sound-poets from the early sixties, and somewhat more forcefully expressed in statements such as Brion Gysin's avowal that:

> I understand poetry . . . mostly as it is called in French, *poésie sonore*, and what I would preferably have called machine-poetry . . . I don't mean . . . declaiming it . . . but actually putting it through the changes that one can produce by tape-recording and all of . . . the minimal technology that one has had in one's hands in the last few years . . . all the rest is really a terrible waste of time.[11]

Brion Gysin's conclusion is of course a bit extreme, because few poets would countenance the view that all work bereft of "minimal technology" is a "terrible waste of time". Indeed, some sound-poets would probably argue that one of the advantages of technology, and of recordings of the human voice, is that they have alerted poets to the implications of "declaiming it" or, more specifically, to the neglected potency of the live, real-time human voice (as opposed to the edited, recorded, reel-time voice peculiar to the technology of the recording-studio). And in this respect, critics such as the late Michel Benamou have identified two main tendencies in sound poetry: "one shamanistic, the other futuristic".[12]

The first of these tendencies — "shamanistic" sound-poetry — might be associated with poems emphasising the sonority of their author's voice, the sonority of phonetic sounds or imaginary words, or the sonority of ritual chanting and "tribal" poetry. These experiments are not dependent upon technology for their production, though they are of course dependent upon recording-technology for their reproduction. Jerome Rothenberg, an American poet associated with ethnopoetic research, has very interestingly collected recent and ancient examples of such oral poetry in his anthology *Technicians of the Sacred*, and has discussed his concept of a tribal poetics in a number of his essays and prefaces.[13] As one might expect, the futuristic tendency in sound-poetry places antithetical emphasis upon technology, realising Marinetti's dream of a "radiophonic" poetry which might function by exploiting the "picking up, amplification and transfiguration of the vibrations emitted by living beings".[14] Henri Chopin's book *Poésie sonore internationale* provides an important introduction to these developments,[15] which, in Chopin's words, demonstrate that the poet has "conquered the machine", and that, by virtue of technological manipulation and superimposition, "the voice of just one being" may now explore "infinite possibilities of orchestration, timbre and sound".[16]

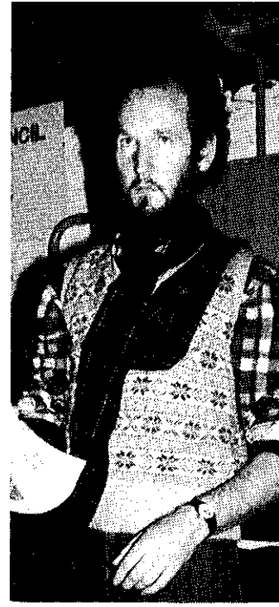
Ironically, if little critical attention has been given to the innovations of sound-poetry (be these the shamanistic poets' revised emphasis upon live, authorial utterance, or the futuristic poets' emphasis upon the technological orchestration of language and sound, and the creation of what the Swedish poet Bengt Emil Johnson defines as "a new art . . . stamped and partially created by new technology — one which endeavours to create new types of content for the new media"),[17] then this neglect springs precisely from the nefarious influence of literary critics and theorists who, in William Carlos Williams' terms, have preferred to discuss the "established facts" of literature, rather than analysing those innovations constituting the present "fact of writing" that "transcends" previous material.

Chief among these offenders are such structuralist and post-structuralist theorists as the late Roland Barthes and such Barthesian disciples as the American critic Jonathan Culler, whose obsession with the sacred cow of past texts, or "prior discourse", and whose absurd compulsion to avoid all reference to individual authors and literary innovation, appear to have distracted their attention from both the futuristic qualities of recorded language (which Derrida now appears to associate with the "extension . . . of writing"), and the shamanistic quality of live utterance (which Barthes' fellow-theorist, Julia Kristeva, has recently designated as one of the most important aspects of Barthes' own "discourse").[18]

According to Culler's argument, the critic should not so much focus attention upon individual authors or individual works (or "occupants" of "discursive spaces"), as attend to the conventions which permit a plurality of texts to be understood within a discursive space. Accordingly, Culler maintains that he is interested not in the individual or the new, but in the banal and the old, because the banal and the old best exemplify the general rules of language. Shamelessly conservative in his literary investigations, Culler explains:[19]

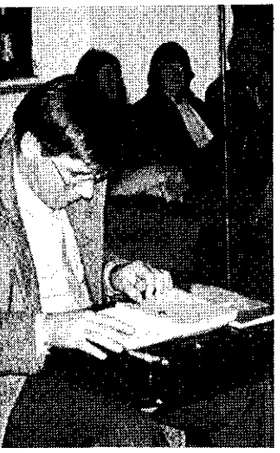
> The semiotician courts banality because he is committed to studying meanings already known or attested within a culture in the hope of formulating the conventions that members of that culture are following.

Culler's priorities appear to derive from Roland Barthes' famous suggestion, in "The Death of the Author", that lang-



Top:
Paul Thomas
Bottom:
Henri Chopin

Top:
Wystan Curnow
Bottom:
Derek Kreckler



uage is never really "new", and never really peculiar to any one writer, since its meanings always derive from previous writings embodying the "intertextual" codes that Culler defines as "the conventions that members of that culture are following". According to Barthes, "the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings".[20] In other words the writer cannot express *himself* – indeed the very concept of authorial expression seems sufficient to put a semiotician off his snails for weeks on end. For as Barthes unambiguously warns the confessional poet:[21]

> Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner "thing" he thinks to "translate" is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely.

In this respect, Barthes' theories seem to confirm such modernist philosphers as Fritz Mauthner, whose argument, paraphrased by Friedrich Marcus Huebner, maintained that "language . . . merely suffices to reach an agreement over the heads of things", and that "our experiences always end in errors, if we desire to ascertain them with words".[22] Huebner's account of Mauthner's argument is particularly interesting in that it accuses Mauthner of merely discussing the "material" function of language, and of neglecting the "magical" function that occurs when "words go beyond their purely rational tasks".[23] For, according to Huebner's mystical reasoning, language occasionally evinces "the essence of things, the epitome of things", when the speaker attains "living eloquence", within "a state of grace".[24] In such circumstances "living words come over man's lips" because he "lives with heart and soul in that which he says".[25] Put another way, such "living words" transcend the banality and the purely rational tasks that Culler and Huebner respectively associate with ordinary discourse, and reveal what Huebner defines as "the mediumistic qualities with which human speech captivates the hearer".[26]

The shamanistic concept of mediumistic speech is probably sufficient to make Barthes' shade chuckle with disapproval. Paradoxically, and with exemplary poetic justice, Julia Kristeva's reflections upon the death of Barthes and especially upon "The Voice of Barthes", assert that Barthes was perhaps most important of all as a vocal presence that captivated the hearer. For according to Kristeva, Barthes is not so much a writer whose significance is perfectly explicable in terms of what Barthes himself dubbed "words only explainable through other words", and in terms of what Culler cherishes as the "banality" of "conventions that members of that culture are following", as a writer whose significance is irreducible to dictionary-definitions and banal conventions, and inseparable from the phenomenon that Huebner defines as "living eloquence". Pondering upon the way in which she can still hear Barthes' voice, and slowly adumbrating this surprising definition of Barthes' significance, Kristeva reflects:[27]

> Is this because I have the impression that what this writer offers us is first and foremost *a voice*? The firm fragility of its timbre invests his immediate utterance, over and above the limits of conversation, and over and above all distance, with the impact of physical contact. This speaker offers us an utterance surpassing meaning. Merely by this tremulous vocal non-sense, this vocal beyond-sense, he reveals the entirety of his life and of his body.

This seems to be a momentous statement in the general context of structuralist theory, in that it emphasises the way in which the "entirety" of Barthes may apparently be communicated by a sonic utterance "surpassing meaning". Repeating this claim, and insisting once again upon the way in which the *sound* of Barthes' particular voice produced a highly individual, melodic mode of communication surpassing the conventions of semantic signification (and therefore appearing to be "atemporal", "unconscious", and "uncontourable"), Kristeva reflects upon her many conversations, classes and phone-calls with Barthes, and concludes:[28]

> All of that, which still echoes, once again, in the present, is inscribed in the fabric of sound and in the inflections of melody, reaching one before all signification, and beyond all signification. Establishing a sonic complicity, something atemporal and unconscious, this haunting voice becomes the uncontourable foundations for a fluctuating, mobile and radically anti-didactic form of instruction.

From this point on, Kristeva discusses the peculiar impact of Barthes' lectures, and his ability to offer "an exceptionally vocal form of instruction".[29] But for the purposes of this discussion of critical approaches to sound-poetry, Kristeva's reflections upon "The Voice of Barthes" are most significant in terms of the way in which they represent a volte-face from the puritanical, hyper-rational excesses of Barthes and Culler, and a move towards the heady mysticism of theorists such as Huebner, who believed that the banality and the anonymity of conventional rational discourse might be transcended by the kind of captivating "living eloquence" that Kristeva attributes to the voice of Barthes.

It is precisely this domain of potent sound that sound-poetry explores, either in poems using the live, authorial "fabric of sound" and "inflections of melody" to which Kristeva refers, or in complex technological

Alan Vizents

experiments which amplify the sonic effects that Kristeva associates with "the impact of physical contact".

It was also precisely these areas of literary exploration that the Anzart Sound-Festival attempted to explore, by bringing together poets, artists and musicians working with different kinds of sound-art, from Australia, New Zealand and Europe. My inspiration in proposing this event to Leigh Hobba was a photo of the Congress of International Progressive Artists, at Düsseldorf, in 1922, where a number of artists from Russia, France, Germany and Holland pooled ideas and then rapidly fell out, and rapidly fell in again, as artists are prone to do. The proposal hoped to bring together a variety of work by Anzart artists and, representing the European pioneers, by the French poet, Henri Chopin. If the conventions of the discursive space of sound-art still remain hazy, everyone seemed reasonably certain that this festival of current sound-art was enjoyable and successful.

Wystan Curnow, from Auckland, presented a number of cut-up and found texts, his most impressive work perhaps being a piece which recontextualised the clichés of a cowboy comic ("wall -- git them steers out of here!") in a highly formal and highly amusing reading. Jas H Duke from Melbourne, whose visiting-card introduces him as "poet, scientific observer, friend of the law of gravity", gave another masterly reading and – in every sense of the word – performance of his sound poems, which, though based on a single word or phrase, generated extraordinary power and energy through frantic repetition and permutation. Like Wystan Curnow, Jas Duke demonstrated the way in which the live authorial voice can be played, as Duke suggested, almost like a saxophone. Richard Tipping, from Sydney, presented a live text with tape-backing, as did Derek Kreckler, also from Sydney. While Tipping's piece was collaborative, Kreckler added live utterance to his own tapes, which perhaps veered more towards music than towards poetry. Jan Hubrechson, again from Sydney, also gave several performance-pieces involving live and taped materials presented with various gestures and actions, which, as Hubrechson remarked, were perhaps as much theatre as performance-poetry. Paul Thomas from the Media-Space group in Perth argued that his work, presented on tape but prepared for use with video, was more closely related to art and music than to sound-poetry. Alan Vizents, also from Media-Space in Perth, presented live, permutational texts, and a long sonic narrative concerned with the environment at Perth (works which are available on Media-Space cassettes from 47 Malcolm Street, West Perth, WA 6005). As became clear in the discussion-sessions, Media-Space are one of the few groups in Australia systematically issuing cassettes of sound-art. Chris Mann, from Melbourne, presented a number of highly accomplished readings, sometimes without any taped accompaniment, sometimes in a duet with tapes of manipulations of his texts. Once again Mann's work, like that of many of the other participants, defied instant categorisation in terms of the conventions of any particular prior "discourse", because, as Mann explained in conversation, his work has been presented both as experimental poetry and under the auspices of "new music" organisations. While Mann consciously exploited the Australian persona emerging from his colloquial ultra-ocker intonation, the sophistication of his work was also, as he remarked, "pretty hip" when compared with American and European experiments, confirming the suggestion of the European guest, Henri Chopin, that sound-poetry is without barriers, either generic or national. Chopin himself presented a number of tapes, sometimes improvising additional abstract sounds

Jan Hubrechson

with the microphone, sometimes conducting Leigh Hobba, who manipulated the volume of the stereo speakers, on each occasion revealing himself a virtuoso of his art.

The Sound-Art Festival was, I think, a great success. Ideas were exchanged; works were presented, compared and discussed; firm friendships were made which should lead to more festivals and more performances in Australia and Europe. It is only fitting that thanks be given to the enthusiasm and the dedication of all participants, to Leigh Hobba who blessed this project and worked so hard to raise money, and to all those bodies who so generously funded this Sound-Art Festival. May it be the first of many.

Top: Richard Tipping
Bottom: Chris Mann

Notes

1 William Carlos Williams, "A Point for American Criticism", collected in Samuel Beckett and others, *Our Exagmination Round his Factification of Work in Progress* (reprinted by Faber and Faber, London, 1972), pp171-85, 180-81.

2 Ibid, p178.

3 Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Theobald, Chicago, 1947), p10.

4 Henri Chopin, "Open Letter to Aphonic Musicians", *OU*, 33 (1968), pp11-23, 11. Translated by Jean Ratcliffe-Chopin.

5 Chopin traces the evolution of sound-poetry in his book *Poésie sonore internationale* (Jean-Michel Place, Paris, 1979). A briefer account of the evolution of sound-poetry, illustrated by seven LP records, appears in Arrigo Lora-Totino's *Futura: Poésia Sonora* (Cramps Records, Milan, 1978). Some interesting interviews with the poets Brion Gysin and Bernard Heidsieck trace the same events in Gerard-Georges Lemaire, William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *Le Colloque de Tanger* (Christian Bourgois, Paris, 1976).

6 The word "phonomontages" is formulated by L. Lipton in "William Burroughs — Revolution Master-Mind and Grand Panjandrum of the Cut-Up Coterie", *Los Angeles Free Press* ,7, No 28, 10 July 1970, p29.

7 Maurice Maeterlinck, quoted by Robert Musil in *Young Torless* (1906; reprinted by Signet, New York, 1964), p 5. Translated by Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser.

8 Franz Kafka, quoted by Richard Sheppard in "The Crisis of Language", in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds, *Modernism 1890-1930* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976), pp323-36. Letter of July 1914.

9 Samuel Beckett, "Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit", in *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (1949; reprinted by Calder and Boyars, London, 1970), pp95-126.

10 Jacques Derrida, "Excuse me, but I never said exactly so: yet another Derridean interview", interview with Paul Brennan (1982), *On the Beach*, No 1 (Autumn 1983), p43.

11 Brion Gysin, quoted in Brion Gysin and Terry Wilson, *Here to Go: Planet R-101*, Brion Gysin interviewed by Terry Wilson (Re/Search Publications, San Francisco, 1982), p49.

12 Michel Benamou, "Presence and Play", in Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello, eds, *Performance in Postmodern Culture* (Coda, Madison, 1976), pp3-7.

13 Jerome Rothenberg, ed, *Technicians of the Sacred* (Doubleday, New York, 1966).

14 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "La Radia", reprinted from the *Gazzetta del popolo* (October 1933), in Luigi Scrivo, ed, *Sintesi del FUTURISMO storia e documenti* (Mario Bulzoni, Rome, 1968), unpaginated. My translation with Joseph Gioscio.

15 See footnote 5.

16 Henri Chopin, "Machine Poem", *OU*, 20/21 (1964), unpaginated. My translation.

17 Bengt Emil Johnson, "Fylkingen's Group for Linguistic Arts and Text-Sound Compositions", *Fylkingen International Bulletin*, 2 (1969), 13-18, p13.

18 Julia Kristeva, "La voix de Barthes", *Communications*, 36 (1982), pp119-23.

19 Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981), p99.

20 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in *Image-Music-Text* , Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath (Fontana/Collins, Glasgow, 1977) pp142-48.

21 Ibid.

22 Friedrich Marcus Huebner, "The Road through the Word", *Transition*, 22 (1932), pp110-13, 110.

23 Ibid, p112.

24 Ibid, p111.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid, pp111-12.

27 Julia Kristeva, "La Voix de Barthes", op cit, p.119. My translation.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid, p120.

"LA NOUVELLE CUISINE"
THE OPEN SANDWICH CONFERENCE

Tamara Winikoff

Open Sandwich, the first national conference of alternative art spaces, was planned and organised by Stephanie Britton, Jude Adams, Christine Goodwin and Ken Bolton, of the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide. Financial support was provided by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, thus allowing many delegates to attend who would otherwise have been unable to do so. The conference was timed to coincide with Anzart-in-Hobart, the second encounter of Australian and New Zealand artists.

For those of us on a tight schedule this meant sandwiching encounters with art and artists between conference sessions. The artwork was largely contained and performed in the wharf area of Hobart and particularly in the old Mail Exchange building. Even for the greedy the treats were ladled out in almost indigestible quantities, and my four days were packed with incident.

The first day began with a series of introductory overviews of all the invited alternative art spaces. This was followed by three papers on the subject of "Continuation or Change" and then a forum to discuss "Serving the Needs of Artists".

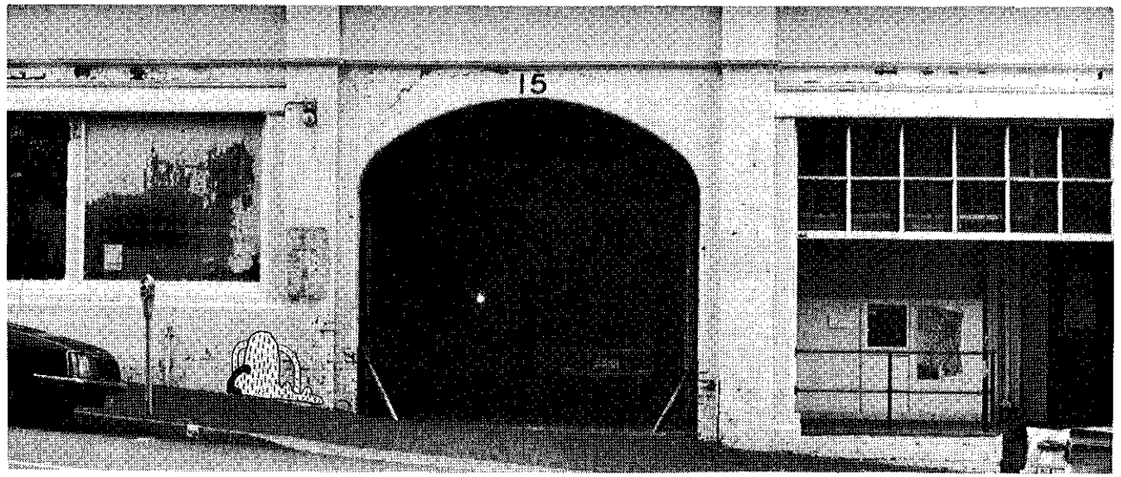
In the conference-room of the Town Hall the first session was attended by about 80 people, both conference-delegates and artists from Anzart. Bernice Murphy in her opening address outlined the history of the alternative art space movement in the USA and Australia, and referred to her recent articles on the subject in *Art Network*, quoting precedents for this activity in the 19th and early 20th century in Europe and Australia.

Murphy described the major shift in artists' work during the 70s, and their relationship with galleries, museums and other institutions during that time, when a challenge was offered against the control exercised by the "art market" over the production, promotion and appropriation of artists' ideas and work. This led to the artists' assertion of their right to control the type of patronage sought and accepted, the form of the work (often ephemeral or site-specific and therefore not collectable) and the context in which the work would appear.

Alternative spaces were characterised by Murphy as being artist run, and as having dissociated themselves from the objectives of museums and state and commercial galleries which collect and sell artworks. Their position was one of giving support to the kind of art which was not subsumed by the American-art juggernaut, and of challenging the role of media people as the dominant image makers of our time.

The next session offered a smorgasbord of information and ideologies. Reports were presented by all the invited delegates either in

Tamara Winikoff is Director of the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney. She co-edits the journal Photofile.



Exterior view of the Old Hobart Mail Exchange, Murray Street, Hobart; Avago Gallery is seen behind the railings.

person or by proxy. These reports generally dealt with the history, philosophy, structure, aims, activities and funding of each alternative art space, and demonstrated a remarkable level of energy, dedication and difference in contemporary art practice in Australia.

The keynote papers were presented in an atmosphere of relative calm. The subject of "Continuation or Change" was tackled by Judy Annear (Artspace, Sydney), Denise McGrath (George Paton Gallery, Melbourne) and Jude Adams (Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide).

The three speakers agreed that there was a need for both continuation and change. Flexibility would allow appropriate response to shifting requirements and circumstances, and should be built into the management-structure and objectives of each organisation. But it was suggested that, although some change was necessary, it had now become important, after the initial euphoria of the challenge provided to the mainstream of art by alternative spaces, to proceed to a more sober period of consolidation. This would counter the threat of debilitating marginalisation to ensure recognition of the role played by alternative art spaces as a support system for artists, in opposition or in addition to that provided by museums or dealer-galleries, and in educating audiences for this work, thus contributing to the evolution of our culture.

There was mention of the need for mutual support through the formation of a visual arts lobby, which foreshadowed a discussion on the following day. In the volatile exchanges which followed, there seemed to be a denial of the call from the three speakers to consolidate within the existing framework. An uncharitable view of these exchanges would be one which confirmed the reputation of the art world as being rent by ideological bickering, intellectual thuggery, territoriality and rivalry.

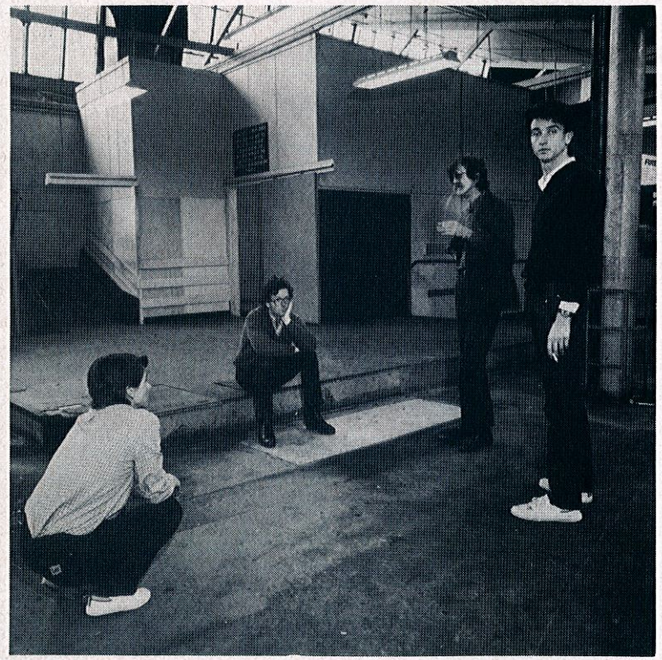
There was heated comment on the influence of art funding "as a stimulant or a drug". There also seemed to be at this stage an inability among some of the delegates to acknowledge the validity of different types of spaces, some of which are constituted simply as resource sharing centres, while others try to evolve a new philosophy and methodology.

After this session some groups and individuals protested by absenting themselves from the proceedings, preferring to go on hunger-strike rather than to partake any further of this tainted Lucullan fare.

In the discussion session, it was evident that there were differences of opinion about whether the existing contemporary art spaces, particularly the older, larger and more established ones, live up to the expectations of artists now. Some needs were expressed, such as the need for artists not to be managed by administrators but to keep total control of everything to do with their work, the need to resist pressure from the funding bodies to become fixed and clearly identifiable in form, aims and activity, and the need to maintain friction and difference. Some problems were aired, such as the continuing impoverishment of living and working conditions, especially for young emerging artists, and the continuing exploitation of artists. It was acknowledged that the expectations of audiences are changing.

As with all forums and conferences, the best discussions took place after the formal part was over, in small groups around the bar or at the old Mail Exchange. Then we went to catch a bit of the art, and the first day ended with heated debates about the exploitation of a group of ballroom dancers who were participants in a performance work by Adrian Hall and Tony Coleing. Undoubtedly they too must have been surreptitiously measuring a packed room of weary Anzartists against their own stereotypes.

On the second day of the conference the subject of "Networking" was addressed by Ian Hunter (NZ) and Grace Cochrane (Tasmania) who used their experience to comment on preferred systems of networking



At the Old Hobart Mail Exchange, from left to right: Lyn Ingoldsby, Leigh Hobba, Bo Jones and John Bennett.

and their effectiveness. Hunter affirmed his commitment to networking as an antidote to "prejudice, ignorance and negativism" and proposed artist exchange programs (instancing the New Zealand FI project) as the most fertile way of countering parochialism. He maintained that through these contacts artists establish an alternative communication system to the media monopolies.

Grace Cochrane described the remarkably ambitious and popular Art Forum series at the Tasmanian School of Art as another networking system, which brings mostly mainland specialists to Hobart to extend the experience of students and interested members of the general public through regular lectures and discussions.

Comments from the audience took up the issue of the use of new technology to facilitate networking. It was agreed that any consistent listing of information to be made available nationally would be a valuable resource, particularly to low budget groups with a similar interest.

The next major issue to be addressed was "Funding Strategies for the 80s". David Kerr (Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide) and Julian Goddard (Praxis, WA) deplored the continuous erosion since 1975 of funding for the visual arts, and the debilitating effect that this is having particularly on experimental artforms. They emphasised the iniquity of a situation where artists are being further divided from one another by being set in desperate competition for an ever-decreasing portion of what was a small pie to begin with.

They questioned the way that Australia is being encouraged to try to follow the American model, to look to the private sector for support, when it is obvious that for contemporary oppositional art there are few alternatives to government support, because this type of art is not often bought or exhibited by collectors, state institutions or dealer galleries. Even with government funding agencies this type of art is the least attractive because it is difficult to understand and to display, it is mostly not collectable and it is often extremely disquieting in form and content.

In my paper on the proposal to form a visual-arts lobby I emphasised the seriousness of the situation for the visual arts generally, using the meagre statistics available which show clearly the decline in support since the comparatively halcyon days of the Whitlam government. I pointed to the success enjoyed by the performing arts since the formation of CAPPA in achieving a high public profile and attracting major financial support. Although there are great differences in philosophy, aims and work-method across the spectrum of visual arts activity, there are overriding common problems faced by everyone. A lobby could research and put this case to all levels of government and its appointed agencies. The proposal aroused considerable interest, although it was obvious that many issues would need to be solved, eg representation, structure and priorities.

The second half of the conference was taken up with trying to reach a consensus on areas of common concern and to evolve a strategy to deal with them. The method used, the search process, is probably familiar to seasoned conference goers, but it seemed to me to be an odd mixture of Harvard Business School psychology and flower-power nostalgia.

Under the guidance of Jane Foley and Malcolm Wells the group which attended was asked to volunteer grossly generalised opinions on the climate in Australia for working as an artist. Hardly surprisingly most of the comments were fairly cynical and negative. We were then directed to discuss a desired future and the action necessary to bring this about. The admonition at the end of the day made by our group leaders was that we were not listening to one another's points of view. So after writing, on cards, topics for discussion for the next day, we dashed off to the University for the evening forum on

Interior view of the Old Hobart Mail Exchange, Murray Street, Hobart.

"Nationalism and Culture".

Terry Smith and Adrian Martin (with a tangential contribution from Wystan Curnow) performed sharply opposed arguments about the direction of contemporary art practice in Australia and New Zealand, the one of the socially redemptive school and the other a seductively eloquent exponent of the absconding amoral dilettante mode of the new wave practitioners and critics. Subsequent questions elicited a level of critical debate between these two speakers which was piquant with ironic sparring innuendo.

This stimulated (at least in the group of ageing reprobates with whom I spent the next few hours) heated discussion on the future of art in Australia and on the complex fabric of art structures, power-politics, the impact of tall poppies, guerilla tactics, imagery sources and artist-survival techniques.

The following morning delegates responded bleakly to the homilies contained in the Carlos Castaneda quote which we were handed at the outset of the next search-process session. Nevertheless talk proceeded relentlessly, and the findings were reported back to the plenary session.

One group concluded that the aims of alternative art spaces could be defined as:

i The promotion of contemporary and experimental art in the community.

ii The provision of a support system for practitioners, including
- space to work;
- employment, eg artist-placement in spaces, schools, universities, colleges, local communities and factories;
- participation in decision making affecting public life, eg in education, TV programs and architecture.

iii Providing public venues for viewing such work and engaging in a dialogue about art theory.

The other group suggested that it was necessary for alternative art spaces to frequently reassess their aims, and to re-evaluate their management structures. There was an acknowledgement that alternative art spaces encompass a range of structural forms which could broadly be described as:

i Those which are managed by, and serve, only the members.

ii Those which are managed by member-representatives where membership is open, and access is provided for non-members to information, facilities, services, consultancy and project participation.

iii Those which are managed by non-member appointees. (These were considered to be actually part of the mainstream).

The conclusions reached at the plenary session by most of those attending were that:

i The name, Alternative Spaces, be changed to "Contemporary Art Spaces of Australia". (Perhaps in retrospect it was a mistake to relinquish the word "alternative" which states a position rather than a speciality).

ii Different types of organisations can be identified as co-existing under the umbrella title (as previously detailed).

iii All spaces should develop and periodically reassess their policy and aims by consultation with artists and users.

iv A policy statement on the basis of this conference would be developed and circulated by David Kerr (EAF).

v The alternative art spaces should be represented on the Visual Arts Lobby.

vi A network of communication should be established using new technology wherever possible.

vii The next national conference would be planned to coincide with artists' week at the Adelaide Festival in 1984.

viii A statement of policy, accompanied by a recommendation that a new funding-category be established to support the work of alternative art spaces, would be forwarded to the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council.

The conference undoubtedly provided a marvellous opportunity to meet people whose eyes would not become glazed at the mention of contemporary art, and gave at least a taste of the range and quality of work being produced by emerging Australian and New Zealand artists.

But I cannot help feeling, despite the great energy, productivity and integrity being displayed by young artists and administrators, that without a strong lobby to press for moral and financial support we all face a future of living on a diet of bread along.

The following spaces were represented: Art Network, Artspace, Art Unit, Australian Centre for Photography, Chameleon, Clifton Hill Music Centre, Cockatoo, Experimental Art Foundation, George Paton Gallery, Institute of Modern Art, Iceburg, Media Space, One Flat Exhibit, Praxis, South Australian Workshop, Taco, Women's Art Movement.

NATIONALISM & CULTURE FORUM

AN INTRODUCTION

THE SENSE OF PLACE

Mick Carter

"I don't believe there are any Russians,
I don't believe there are any Yanks,
There's just corporate criminals playing around with tanks."

Popular Song

The three papers published below first saw the light of day at the *Nationalism and Culture* forum, held on a bitterly cold evening in the cheerful anonymity of the University of Tasmania. As it turned out the speakers provided us with a particularly clear picture of a number of important differences that were to be found surfacing throughout the two weeks of Anzart. It wasn't just that the protagonists disagreed over this particular issue – that was to be expected – it was the way in which certain strategies were selected *to write* these differences. Conceived as an intellectual questionnaire, the various parties to the debate marked their cards accordingly. But it was as textual strategies, or rather speaking modes, that the contributors made clear what they thought cultural analysis entailed at this juncture. Much of the individual timbre of the deliveries is lost in the shift from speech to page, but enough remains to impart some of the flavour of the evening. The order of the papers here follows the order in which they were presented on the night.

Mick Carter, Senior Lecturer in Art Theory, Newcastle CAE, has recently written for Art and Text *and* Art Network.

In retrospect, the papers most divergent, those of Martin and Smith, form an exemplary couplet; almost as if in writing their own position they were writing out their opposite. And this is as it should be in any informed polemic. My own view is that they are not as incommensurable as they might at first appear – and this is not an attempt on the part of the chairman belatedly to impose a form of neutered consensus on what was, at the time, an 'enthusiastic' exchange. Re-readings of these presentations have uncovered a number of secret affinities – both inhabit the absences of each other's discourse. The time can't be long coming when both have to face some pretty heavy intellectual decisions, and in this we are all implicated because they are *our* decisions as well. Anyway intelligent mud-slinging is the stuff of life and should be applauded. Its present reduction to *ad hominem* remarks is certainly a major deficiency in contemporary Australian intellectual life, where the privacy of smoke-filled rooms is often preferred to the publicly wielded scalpel.

Martin instances the moment of consumption, Smith that of production, and both of these sit uneasily within the categories of the nation and culture. In fact both authors write this into their deliveries quite explicitly. Martin with the 'mix-and-match' vortex of the signifier, slipping and sliding across the porous political frontiers of the nation; Smith, tracing the lineaments of a classic marxism, driving beyond 'mere appearance' in his desire to locate the site and source of the mirage. The one delirious on the fix on an internationalised consumption, the other disturbed by the enforced exile of the apparatus of production. The point in all this is to determine whether either of these modern forms of production and consumption are at all compatible with the nation or culture. No matter which end you set off from, neither of them appears to fit easily into their synthesis, a national culture.

Consumption first – Martin, quite rightly, I feel, pitches the argument at its true level by declaring that 'I live in the West'. Discrete areas of consumption, whether they be hard-ware or cultural artefacts, have long ceased to be coterminous with the boundaries set by national units, if in fact they ever were. From the perspective of the nation, it is cultural obsolescence, not viability, which confronts us. It is not good enough, as I have seen argued, to bolster up a resurgent Australian nationalism by appeals to national struggles in the Third World. The bourgeoisie of this country never was, and never will be, equivalent to Bolivian tin miners. Besides, many of those struggles are in deep trouble, faced as they are by a spiralling indebtedness to the West, or with having to accept the clapped-out technology of the Soviet Union and its allies. Culturally the options aren't much better – incorporation into the dizzying whirligig of the western spectacle or into an equally clapped-out socialist realism. To be passed over as a *nation* by either of these options amounts these days to nothing less than a gross insult.

No . . . the problem with Martin's position doesn't lie here, but in his very accuracy. He accepts the 'West' as his territory, but can't give any coherent reasons why this is the case. 'Post-political' he might be, but it is precisely politics which determines his menu of signifiers. This blindness leads him to maintain that, after the 'West', the next rung down in the hierarchy is that of sub-cultures. The lack of 'politics' means he is unable to theorise any stage above street level; those clusterings based on kinship, class, religion, region, even *politics*, are erased as hollow

shams, kitsch remnants of a time gone by. But if anything it's the West that is the sham today – as *Time Magazine* noted, American capital was being laundered into Vietnam even before the last troops withdrew. Have a look at the figures for the Polish foreign debt – "Vodka-cola", indeed. We live in the world economy, not the Western one.

At the other end don't imagine the nation is dead. It's the emotional resources that it can still draw on that are deadening, kitsch as Martin calls it. Archaic as these units might appear and as embarrassing as they undoubtedly are to their squeaky-clean bourgeois internationalists, the native populations persist in replaying the old tribal rites and no amount of post-punk bromides will still the fires.

The category of culture is more difficult, especially given its populist connotations and its belated nod in the direction of mass-culture. (Baudrillard is heady stuff, but like many of the French heavy gang he lacks the common touch -- his usage of culture should start with a 'k'). Martin's prediliction for American cinema, English music, French ideas, and Italian take-aways indicates that even within the promiscuous shuttling to-and-fro of cultural artefacts there are particular national inflections being made of signification. But what are these inflections? What do they consist of? They are not unitary or homogeneous fields, but amalgams, bricolages of a multitude of class cultural fragments, that have managed to achieve a degree of hegemony within the structures of their particular national Capitals. The public face of a nation, as Martin argues, may *solicit* us through, say, the eyes of those "Singapore girls" but the message is really very different. That familiar image of the U.K., the London "Bobby", for instance, might appear all sweetness and light on the tourist posters, but just watch the glint come into their eyes when the leash is slipped and they can get stuck into some real, old fashioned head-banging. Remember, what we prize in Martin's "invaders" and "agents of foreign intrigue" is the flavour imparted to them by their 'national' contexts as they push against the dominant grain. British popular music, a central component in Martin's hagiography, is the way it is in inverse proportion to the contempt it heaps upon its 'national culture'. Appearances *are* manufactured, and those good ol' boys of capitalism – accumulation, surplus value and wage labour – still apply. Their manufacturers don't give a damn if the by-product is authentic or schizoid, or whether the pleasures doled out are radical, emergent or residual – it's all grist to the same mill.

Terry Smith's position is equally partial, and he gives the game away by his use of the term *multi-nationals,* the ultimate authors of the modern world since the almighty snuffed it. The Nation was only temporarily the home of modern capital's productive structures and the multi-nationals are well on the way to becoming just "multis". When the material conditions were ready, the rats left the ship (the nation) to form those vast networks of robotoid bureaucracies, corporations with no real country, no real side in any war, no specific face or heritage.

The desire to construct the nation (or is it the people?) as the domain of authenticity at the level of production can't hold out against the existent relations. You can't herd the rats back onto the 'ship', nations have been turned into casinos run by 'mafias'. But any change has to come in at *that level*, otherwise you are on course for a national disaster, one which in recent times only the Germans know the full power of. The return of the repressed here will be a populist nostalgia and we all know what company that keeps.

The nation never was, nor never has been the site of cultural authenticity because it never could be the site of a political or economic authenticity. It was always an imaginary. That's precisely where nationalism's strength has lain, in that it was always on hand, ready to be converted into the common coinage of mediocrity and deceit. Neither the enthusiastic populisms of Hitler and Roosevelt, nor the stifling intertias of the old capitalist nations, could turn back the inexorable increase in the organic composition of capital and its heady internationalism, although they could do an awful lot of damage in their all-or-bust death games. To try and reclaim the actual productive base of the nation-state can only mean the substitution of the compradors with an 'authentic', militant bourgeoisie sworn to die for the old country and honest profits – in fact all the tired old clichés of Social Democracy and its sham promises of nationalisation. The inevitable deflection of militant nationalism will result in one thing – the sacrifice of the class in the name of modernisation, which is where Smith begins his analysis. Everything can be bought these days, even an industrial revolution, but only at the price of giving up on the dream of national sovereignty.

So where does all this leave us? During the last great attempt to pull out of the world economy in favour of the volk, Europe drowned in blood. On the way it ensured the end of the Labour movement as an effective opposition for the next twenty-five years. The murderous distinctions let loose at *that* time – Kulture against Western Civilisation, soul against society, spirituality against politics, genius against intellect, mystique against rationalism, straight lines and right angles versus the messy processes of everyday life – are all still there radiating with latent promise. What makes my hair stand on end is that as soon as the *nation* and *cultural authenticity* get twinned, the above little list starts to congregate like flies around shit. At this stage, I'm not sure which is the more frightening – the prospect of a never-ending trip on the back of a rudderless signifier or a wide-eyed innocent Labour Nationalism. Detritus forever shuttling back and forth between the lost and found departments of modern politics. Fakes we may be, but at least we don't go around pretending we are real fakes.

FOREIGN INTRIGUE
Adrian Martin

In *Cinema Papers* a while back, I turned a page to encounter a declaration in bold type: "Eighty years on, the culture still cringes". Cultural cringe: how shameful, how wimpy, how recessive, how little self-determined. We all believe in the sad phenomenon of the cultural cringe, we all remind each other of its constant presence, we all pick up, vigilantly, on its instances, its symptoms, and we diligently write these up in the pages of *Art Network* or *Filmnews.* Eighty years later the culture still cringes, condemned to that all-too-material history.

Cultural cringe: that might mean bowing to the influences that emanate from elsewhere. It might mean the downplaying of our unique artistic history in favour of comparisons with grander overseas models. It might indicate our excessive identification with foreign images, caught in the mirror of a Big Daddy Other. Backed up by a whole array of social, political and economic facts -- the proof of one sort of imperialism – the cultural cringe thesis plumps for a scenario of mind-control, brutal seduction and diffusion of power. This is a complementary imperialism which manages its deadly tie-up with the first kind, a malignant invasion of the body-snatchers, all-pervasive, schematic. It makes sense.

Adrian Martin, Lecturer in Film Studies at Melbourne State College, has written for Art and Text *and* Art Network.

Eighty years later the culture still cringes. What if I said that we still *believe* that the culture cringes? And what if I then suggested that you can keep on believing something not necessarily because it's true but because it's useful for you to be able to tell, over and over again, your fine story of immaculate social concern? The condition of cultural cringe is not a state of paralysis, because the belief in it, the imaginary resistance to it, is boundlessly productive: productive of magazines, conferences, works, alternative art spaces, meetings, bureaucracies, festivals, information-networks and camaraderie. The image of cultural cringe as something evil and diseased is an alibi for nationalism.

I have only one desire here: to speak for those people, that powerfully indifferent silent majority, who care not a fig for nations, nationality or nationalism, the people for whom these concepts signify or catalyse nothing, except the occasion for a different kind of pained and embarrassed cringe. No chance of a rallying cry here, I'm afraid. Only the opportunity to catch, if you can, a glimpse of these people stealing back quickly into the real world, a mad, modernist Western world which has little to do with the materiality of national boundaries.

The background for my opinions is essentially the experience of having taught film-studies for a number of years in tertiary institutions. No arena is more overrun with a trendy, mock-sophisticated radical nationalism than the ball-park of modern Australian film. The analysis of this area divides into, on the one hand, a policing and condemnation of the ubiquitous "cultural cringe" in "official", big-budget, contaminated Australian films like *Gallipoli* or *Breaker Morant*; and on the other hand, the ruthless promotion and hysterical celebration of the brave independent film-work that is grappling with "the cultural production of a national identity", an extremely "problematised" and "strategic" business, so we hear. An example is the pseudo-leftist academic hype which currently surrounds Helen Grace and Erika Addis' film *Serious Undertakings.*

Now, for me, teaching film, standing before the vast field of international film-production past and present, and constrained by only three terms in which to impart something intelligent on the topic of film criticism, I really wonder why I should have a bad conscience over not devoting a third of that time to the noble, pressing area of Australian film. But I couldn't care less about Australian film. It, and its attendant nationalist discourses, can't generate a single thing in me – no sparks, no inspiration, no excitement. Yet so many voices on the cultural left would want anyone in my position to justify this absence, this apathy and this complicity. I know of quite a few people in my position who submit to that kind of pressure, and then submit their poor students to an incredibly relevant and increasingly boring journey through the wilderness of Australian film. It's a walk-about I'd rather skip.

Let me tell you a story. Teaching film in Australia, I see all these people from overseas pouring into local academic positions. Down to the last one, each reproduces the same little cultural psychodrama. They arrive and then lie low, surveying the scene for a period of six months. Always six months. They suss out the local intricacies, the provincial concerns, the nationalist obsessions of the cultural left. And then they arise and make good, pledging their allegiance to a new flag and proving how goddam specific and relevant they can be to Australian academic life by publishing an

article, in either of the veins described, on *Breaker Morant, Gallipoli, Chain Reaction*, or Arthur and Corinne Cantrill. That's what *I* call a cultural cringe.

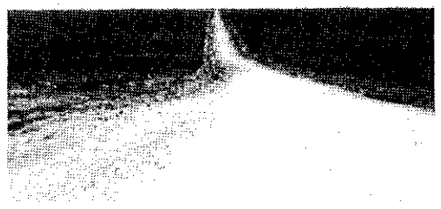
Why be afraid of the facts? As far as I'm concerned I don't live in Australia. I live in the West. The West as a bizarre, confused and absolutely invigorating perpetual exchange of images, sounds, fictions, stereotypes, materials and money-flows. The buck stops nowhere. Like the people I choose to care about, my fix is foreign intrigue. I have the amused sense of speaking for a whole post-political generation who like their films American, their music British, their ideas French, and their take-away food Italian. But that's already a joke, because musical styles, for instance, can't be said to absolutely originate anywhere these days: it all slips and slides. There aren't nations any more. There are only the corny remains of the images of nations, such as Singapore girls on television ads, and the huge floating icons of exotica in the polygot Los Angeles of *Blade Runner*. I feel like the two guys in Wim Wenders' film *Kings of the Road*, wandering in a truck through a deserted, blasted German fatherland, playing American rock-and-roll records, singing along with lyrics they can't even understand, saying, with no particular sadness or shame, "The Americans have colonised our subconscious." I am imperialised. So what, if I welcome my invaders with open arms? The modern condition of popular culture has nothing to do with false consciousness or alienation.

There have always been a few nationalisms. I am not so concerned here with establishment, institutional nationalism, like the leaden art histories of Australian painting or sculpture that are valiantly mounted and promoted. Whatever travelling exhibitions Mollison or McCaughey send out, they are likely to travel right past me. But the point I want to make is my sense of a collusion, a deadly crushing affinity, between this traditional nationalism and the so-called radical nationalism that purports to be a critique of its bad parent. It's a deconstruction of nationalism that's still totally and fixatedly nationalistic. Nothing much changes, and just as much energy is wasted.

Moving in the precious, self-important realms of the artistic avant-garde and the cultural left, I have to deal with an identity-crisis. Or rather, I am put upon to simulate, hallucinate, internalise, a fake identity crisis, a crisis of nationalism. Nationalism demands its own image, its true reflection. It conjures a psycho-fiction based on the trauma of self and other. In this scenario I am supposed to feel guilty about being other-centered, identifying my local self in foreign matter, seeing myself in false foreign images. Nationalism demands that an Australian culture be visible and perhaps even exclusive. This culture needs to be unique and specific, and recognisably so, arranging its identification-marks in the light of day. At certain times this culture needs to be produced, at others merely recovered, buried as it is under the suppressions of an imperialist history. But, just what this uniquely Australian art might look or sound or feel like, rather in the tradition of a uniquely feminine art or a uniquely primitive art, is best left suspended as a radical dreamtime, because when it emerges it's sure to be instant cornball, like some tacky Ned Kelly by Sidney Nolan.

Why would we possibly need to see ourselves in authenticated cultural mirrors? The social self today is blasted, scattered and comes together from moment to moment from all over the place. That's the scandal, for the cultural left, of great films such as *Mad Max I* and *II* which see in the Australian landscape and the Australian character only an opportune stage for the playing out of half a dozen American genre-formulae: the revenge story, the western, the gang-war film, the car chase scene, etc. It's an impotent criticism to object that the film-makers involved live their lives through dreams provided by Steven Spielberg, and that they probably want to *be* Steven Spielberg, because that description would also cover a good deal of the Australian population. There's nothing fake, inauthentic or unreal about the stereotyped fictions that come to us from America or elsewhere: they are in many ways the most real things in the West, the most useful props in the theatre of everyday life, accessories to all kinds of desire, humour and insight. Fictions, like jokes, belong to us all, and the question of their origin is a non-question.

We live in an age of all-out pirating, the mix-and-match practices of popular culture, in a wild hypermarket of misquotation, abbreviation and appropriation; and when I see Adam Ant, Falco or Culture Club on *Countdown* I know I'm in touch with a social situation much more radical and comprehensive than anything ever dreamed by the political avant-garde spaced-out on the love-drugs of modernism. The only consistency in that dream of pleasure is in its measure of resistance -- resistance to an imagined parent culture such as America's resistance to an imperialist history, resistance to an imported mainstream. But that's all just an easy alibi for a radicalism that's struggling hard to focus in, because the centre, any centre, blinked out long ago.



Arthur and Corinne Cantrill, Two Stills from Passage, *16mm movie, 1983.*

photos: Arthur and Corinne Cantrill

It's easy to see, when radical nationalism does appear, that it too is borrowing and appropriating, but in a safe and concealed way, trying not to be noticed. When I saw on television the band No Fixed Address playing Bob Marley's "Stand up for Your Rights" at a royal charity performance, I wondered if they weren't so much subverting the occasion as subverting themselves and their own cultural nationalism. For the connection is too safe, too clean: Aboriginal struggle, to black culture, to authentic political music, to Bob Marley reggae. Why not think that borrowing is arbitrary and go for disco-funk instead? Or go for anything, as in Malcolm McLaren's "Buffalo Girls"?

In magazines like *Local Consumption* and *Intervention*, which agonise so much about the political relevance and specificity of using imported ideas, all the earnest editorial disclaimers about publishing translations of Roland Barthes or Jean Baudrillard seem a disingenuous, forced act of repression in the face of a vast overseas of ideas and writings that are as lovable for their own sakes as they are useful for our sakes. Why limit the options? Why fix the rules of a game?

When people become obsessed by nationalism as a "problem", I think they are still in its grip, still hallucinating feverishly. Listen to this example from a recent article: "Being an Australian is as much a problem as being whichever gender you are. The serious undertaking here is not to settle either problem but to show *how* they are problems, and to unsettle audiences, indefinitely, with respect to both."[1] But what if it's *not* a problem for a whole lot of people who, not "settled" in their nationality or gender, in the first place, would scarcely appreciate the radical energy expended in the hope of unsettling them? What a creepshow, nothing but comic-book phantoms and illusions here. In the wild and woolly west, it's assuredly different.

I think people live in two different overlapping worlds, a micro and a macro, neither of which is commensurate with national boundaries. The macro, as I have suggested, is something like the West. Micro-worlds exist on the level of small and sometimes scattered communities, secret societies, subcultures. Now, everybody is into subcultures. Since Dick Hebdidge's book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* everybody knows about punks and mods and hippies, everybody mouths off about diversity, plurality, specificity and difference. There's even a catch-phrase for a new and hopeful post-Marxism: "the politics of difference". Yet, as I've often heard here at Anzart during the alternative art spaces seminar, differences are asserted and allowed, only to be tied up again at another level of solidarity, in a fringe art network of the left, united in resistance, working for a better world. So it's hello, yet again, to nationalism. And if that's not nationalism, why all the paranoia about overseas comparisons? Why all the precious guff about "art serving the community"? Why all the heavy theorising about "cultural production"? If you tried to hit the community with all that rhetoric lodged in your head, you'd miss the target completely, precisely because there is no target of that description any more. Community, class, gender, age: just too-simple divisions and mirrors of the nation, ineffective and ineffectual as categories.

The membership of subcultures, as I understand them, is much stranger and less easily identifiable than that. A secondary-school teacher in the western suburbs of Melbourne put it to me better than anything I've ever read: "Out here, every street is a subculture." There are subcultures within all the currently recognised ones, and some that haven't even been recognised yet.

I'll give an arty example of subculture, from my own experience. I'm involved in two kinds of scenes in Melbourne -- the super-8 film-making scene and, for want of a better name, the alternative-music scene. Both of these are small and very intense communities. People drift in and out of them. They could fall apart at any time into their individual components. There's an obstinate pride that fuels the stance of some of these people: pride that they've never been affiliated with an art-workers' union or a film-makers' co-op, pride that their lifestyle resists easy currency as a label or stereotype. For a lot of them, including me, nationalism is absurd, a running joke; nationalism is The Goanna Band on *Countdown* getting an Aborigine to blow a didgeridoo which is mysteriously faded out of the mix a few seconds into their song "Solid Rock"; nationalism is the collusion between that band and Manning Clark, doing his bit for popular culture by writing the liner-notes on their album.

What we do in our work, on the contrary, has nothing to do with nationalism or with serving some imaginary community in need of artistic help. It has to do with our own embedding in the archeology of culture, our everyday saturation by American movies, new-wave music and fashion-magazines. We work not just for ourselves or each other: we throw things out for whomever they might concern, whoever can connect with it. Audiences, even potential audiences, are too heterogeneous to pin down. They are composed of individuals who recompose themselves into chains, threads, affinities, right across and right against nations. Every day there's a new, bizarre connection to make. It's a process, but it's not a practice, and it can scarcely hope to be one despite what radical art/theory will tell you.

Nationalism hopes to see everything straight, without filters, without overseas interference. It wants to act within an Australia that is real and specific, not a layering of influences and images from other places. It pines for authenticity. But the West is just a world of fakes, stretching for ever, through which you must navigate your own way. Nationalism talks about the facts of "cultural production", and calls up a dreary consensus of "resistances" to the mainstream, but it can't put a finger on what culture is, where the mainstream is,

or how things are produced. I recall the words of Jean Baudrillard: "The very ideology of 'cultural production' is, in any case, antithetical to culture . . . for culture is a precinct of secrecy, seduction, initiation and symbolic exchange, highly ritualised and restrained. It can't be helped. Too bad for populism." 2

Secrecy, seduction, fascinations that are private yet filtered through secret societies and subcults: nationalism could never get in on such things, with its dreary fix on visibility and recognition, and the witch-hunt mentality so characteristic of the warrior-gangs on the cultural left. The people who are elsewhere won't let themselves be caught because they won't let themselves be seen; they refuse the injunction that they must produce or must identify true images of themselves. Identification with images, for most people, is nothing like a mirror phase. Me, I want to be Rachel the replicant in *Bladerunner,* I want to be Daffy Duck Dodgers in the twenty-fourth and a half century, I want to be Terence Hill whose name is nobody in an Italian western, and – why not? – I want to be Mad Max dubbed in American for screening at a Texas drive-in. I want to be human and android and cartoon, with no voice, no name, no body I need to call my own. Against that kind of foreign intrigue, nationalism of any kind can register only as a joke or as a bore.

Notes:

1 S Lawson,"Seriously Undertaken" *Film News,* March 1983, p 11

2 J Baudrillard,"The Beaubourg Effect", *October,* Spring 1982, p 5

ON THE MARGIN
Wystan Curnow

New Zealand is destined to a giant's career. It is a youth-ful Hercules that will throttle the snakes about its cradle. The climate, the soil, the waters, the interconnection between the noblest children of civilisation, and by very much of the noblest race of savages in the world – these great advantages, combined with two others – the first being that a large proportion of capitalists will be concerned in this colonial edifice and the second that convicts will be excluded – compose a body of inauguration for this enterprise which wears a promise hardly within the compass of disappointment.

Thomas de Quincey,
The Opium Question, 1840

The New Zealand government's hopes for a revival of the country's economy depend heavily on the success of a number of so-called "think big" industrial projects. These include various oil and gas developments in and around New Plymouth. But some of these projects, such as the Aramoana aluminium-smelter, have failed, as they say, to get off the ground.

During the last three months of 1980 a very successful exhibition, *Europe and America – A Century of Modern Masters,* toured the main centres, including Dunedin on whose harbour the smelter was to be put. The works in this exhibition were drawn exclusively from the collection of Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza, principal shareholder in Alusuisse, the overseas partner in the Aramoana smelter consortium. According to *Interview* magazine, "Thyssen was once quoted as saying that when it comes to paintings he can't help himself, that it's a mania with him, a vice, that he chases works of art the way others chase *les jolies maitresses.*"

The New Zealand government took an unusual interest in this exhibition. Not only did it provide a Royal New Zealand Air Force Hercules to fly it from venue to venue, but, more importantly, it covered the insurance-costs. Before the Thyssen show it had turned a deaf ear to art gallery calls for indemnification for major visiting exhibitions.

photo: Wystan Curnow

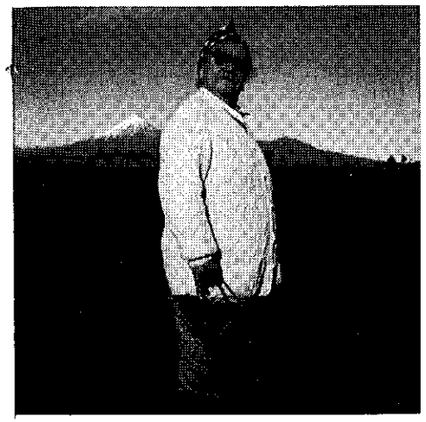
Andrew Drummond, Filter Action, *Aramoana, performance, 1980.*

ANDREW DRUMMOND, *FILTER ACTION, ARAMOANA,* MARCH 1980.

The basis of the piece lies in the swamp/marsh being a filter. It starts as I traverse the location going from swamp to marsh to the estuary proper where I select the "right spot" and proceed to do the "action". The ground-filters were laid out in the circle using an E-W line. The chimes I used to signal time and sequence were on the muslin ground-filters at certain times, on the mud at others. The three kidneys were used as follows: one I put in my hand while walking around the circle and then into the hole in the centre of the circle. The second I put in my mouth and then spat into the hole and the third I held at a distance from my body on a string and dropped in the hole . . .

Letter to the author, 1980

In spite of the increasingly depressed state of the aluminium market and the controversy stirred up by the threat to the environment posed by the smelter, the government persisted in its support for the project. But finally, in October of 1981, as a result of the consortium's failure to reach agreement with the government on electricity-charges, Alusuisse withdrew. No replacement for Alusuisse has appeared on the horizon and the smelter-project now appears doomed.



FIONA CLARK, *WERENIA PAPAKURA,* 1982.

This photograph is from Clark's Taranaki calendar for 1983, *Nga Whaea O Te Moana Taranaki.* Each is accompanied by a text, in this instance:

> Auntie Ivy stands on her *kawa* (traditional home) at Waiwakaiho, where she learnt of the importance of the sea from her *tipuna* (elders). She has fond memories from her childhood of the *mataitai* (seafood) from the Waiwakaiho River and *kawa.* When she heard that the New Plymouth City Council planned a new outfall over her *kawa,* she began a chain of events that led to the winning of a land-based treatment-plant for New Plymouth. This took three years. She is caretaker of the women's rest-rooms at Waitara.
>
> Historically, the people of the Te Atiawa view themselves as followers of Te Whiti O Rongomai. He believed when a photograph was taken, part of the soul was removed. . . . This teaching has lasted to the present. As Aila Taylor says: *"Taking photographs is not our way."*

> I have spent many hours talking with Aila, the people in the photographs and the elders about this. The result of those discussions is that they see these photographs as special and of considerable importance in their fight to retain their culture . . .
>
> *Fiona Clark, in* Views/Exposures, *Ten Contemporary New Zealand Photographers, National Art Gallery, 1982.*

> Thus you are *out there,* humanly, in the vastness of the Pacific, truly a human dream in a seemingly eternity of endlessly moving *water.* I realised that no one of you ever lives so far from it that it is not a daily, substantive, reality.
>
> *Robert Creeley, "A Note",* Hello, *Hawk Press, 1976 - - poems written in New Zealand.*

LEN LYE

The two years Len spent with his family at the Cape Campbell light-house on the north-east tip of the South Island constitute one of the most intense formative periods of his life. Len was seven when they moved there from Wellington.

The sea was a constant presence, and Lye's fascination for waves, the look and sound of them and their feeling of energy, is reflected again and again in his work. Animated wave-forms zip up and over, this way and that, to drum-beats in several of his earlier films. And in his sculpture he worked out a method for conveying the feeling of the movement of waves using two large metal plates. His writing is full of close observations on wave-motion: "A wave-motion seeps into my shoulder blades . . . it is as if I am turning a large water-wheel, turning, turning . . . and tense it there, over, over . . ."

Wystan Curnow is a poet and critic and teaches English at the University of Auckland.

> In later years Len liked to think of the lighthouse as a kind of giant kinetic sculpture. Built in 1905, the lighthouse then was an iron tower, 73 feet high, with an incandescent lamp whose light was enormously magnified by the glass lens of the dome. The flashing effect – with the light sending its beam out into the night every minute or so – was created by a revolving clockwork that had to be wound up periodically by one of the keepers. The flashing effect distinguished the light from other shore-lights.
>
> *From unpublished notes by Roger Horrocks.*

New Zealand, New Plymouth, Europe, America, Aramoana, Dunedin, Taranaki, Waiwakaiho, Waitara, Cape Campbell, South Island, Wellington, Polynesia, Auckland, China, Japan, Australia, Pacific.

Maori for the Pacific:
Te Moana nui a Kiwa.
(The wide open arms of the sea.)

RICHARD KILLEEN, *BLACK GRID,* 1977.
(Not illustrated)

Many of Killeen's grid-paintings suggest tapa-cloth designs. Of *Tukutuku,* 1974, he says:

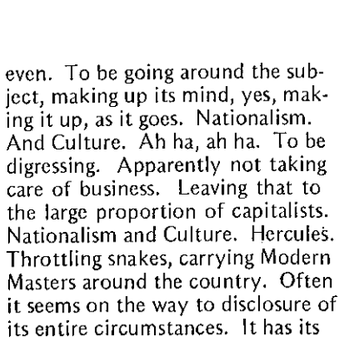
> It is not actually a tukutuku panel, it's just a kind of geometric motif . . . It's not as if I saw a tukutuku panel and said I'll do that. It just grew out of what I was doing and then I related it to tukutuku because all those patterns appear in Polynesia's art. I was conscious of living in the Pacific and it was part of my background. I saw a connection between patterns of Polynesian art and grids. But, strangely, it's only now when I have been doing research into all those (Polynesian) things that I found out what I was doing.
>
> *The Grid,* Auckland City Art Gallery, 1983.

Criticism-at-the-boundaries: it wants to slip out of categories. Into something more comfortable. It wants to be beside the point, off it

even. To be going around the subject, making up its mind, yes, making it up, as it goes. Nationalism. And Culture. Ah ha, ah ha. To be digressing. Apparently not taking care of business. Leaving that to the large proportion of capitalists. Nationalism and Culture. Hercules. Throttling snakes, carrying Modern Masters around the country. Often it seems on the way to disclosure of its entire circumstances. It has its greatest appeal in those marginal territories in which events do for structures, networks do for highways and geography does for history.

FROM SCRATCH, *GUNG HO 1, 2, 3D.* 1982.

> The visual structure of this piece is based on an ancient symbol of strength and unity — the triangle within the circle. The triangle is the most simple of the natural self-repeating building-blocks, and the main dynamic of the performance is the replication of triangles and circles out of the initiating "cell" . . .



> The music remained unnamed until we learned of a workers'-cooperative movement established in China during the late 1930s by the New Zealander Rewi Alley. During the war-years in China, Alley's co-operatives were designed to replicate easily until they formed small industrial units in every Chinese village. The working spirit of the cooperatives, with equal share-holding and responsibility, matched the ideals of From Scratch. Coincidentally the symbol of the cooperative movement was the same ancient sign, the triangle within the circle. It enclosed the Chinese ideogram *Gung Ho*, meaning "work together".
>
> *From Scratch, program-notes, 1982*

Images, meanings, picked up from around the Pacific, before or after the event, coincidentally. Not appropriated. The exercise of acute peripheral vision. Beach-combing. Scatterbrained.

Musical open-mindedness has come about in this century in Europe, both East and West, in the Americas, in Japan, Australia, and perhaps New Zealand.

John Cage

Richard Killeen's more recent paintings come in boxes, each containing a heap of painted metal cut-outs. Each heap is a list of images from which many sentences might be made. Killeen took up cut-outs so as to make his works, as he puts it, "more democratic and less hierarchical in their organisation than conventional framed paintings. Each image is a movable object that is out of the compositional control of the artist." Each work is an eclectic bundle of images, each a collection made up of items from various different collections, classifications, morphologies. Divorced from their original contexts, these items begin to read like arbitrary signs, eager, as in their circumstances they must be, to form defacto relationships with one another.

> The relationships between the images rely upon all the meanings, associations and collected experiences that any viewer[s] use to structure and understand the reality they live in.
>
> *Seven Painters: The Eighties,* Sarjeant Art Gallery, 1982.

These paintings help us to learn to work the margins for what they are worth, and so become the kind of scatterbrains which, given the terms of our culture, we increasingly need to be.

"LET'S DANCE"

Terry Smith

One of the most popular songs in Australia at the moment is David Bowie's "Let's Dance". Like most rock-and-roll of the past decade it depends for its effectiveness (marketability) not only on the staples of regular beat, inane lyrics and usefulness at parties, but also on its visuality. The videodisc of "Let's Dance" takes us immediately to a host of questions around nationalism and culture, about the ways one is formed inside the other at the moment.

Consider first a more typical (if that's possible) Bowie treatment — that of the song "Heroes". Dressed in a deep-grey designer-jumpsuit (probably Parachute at $900 a pair), Bowie sings directly into the fixed camera, a light shining through his legs, its glare helping to obliterate the dark-alley studio-space. The only editing is the intercutting of closeups of the singer's face. Such a treatment is typical of a recent minimalist tendency in the USA, especially in New York music — it tidies up the filmed live performance which still remains the basis of many tapes. The other, "Australian", treatment could not be in greater contrast. Like all these tapes it picks out for illustration the narrative fragments of the lyrics, it repeatedly shows the star singing, it throws in associative material to increase semantic density, and it demonstrates by ostentation how to dance to the music. But it does all this in settings as various as an outback pub, the Blue Mountains, Darwin and Sydney.

The music begins with the same crescendo that introduced "Let's Go To The Hop" but abruptly switches to the disco three-four beat which is maintained for the rest of the song:

Let's Dance	Put on your red shoes and dance the blues
Let's Dance	To the song they're playing on the radio
Let's Sway	While colour lights up your face
Let's Sway	Sway through the crowd to an empty space
	If you say run, I'll run with you
	If you say hide, we'll hide,
	Because my love for you
	Would break my heart in two.
	If you should fall into my arms
	And tremble like a flower.
Let's Dance	For fear your grace should fall
Let's Dance	For fear tonight is all
Let's Sway	You could look into my eyes
Let's Sway	Under the moonlight, this serious moonlight.

Anybody who could produce a line like this last can't be all bad.

The clip opens with a wide-angled shot of the bar of an outback pub, the patrons beginning to dance happily. The panning camera gradually picks out the faded, wasted, white English singer leaning casually against the wall. The first of many references, intentional or not, to Australian-British films — in this case *Wake in Fright* — a blond English teacher succumbs to Broken Hill. As Bowie mouths the song, the patrons dance and we gradually recognise a range of types, such as those who populated the Rocks pub in *Starstruck* (indeed, the visual style of the clip is very close to Gillian Armstrong's), including an Aboriginal girl wearing one of those 'Australia' T-shirts, and a truckie who tips the wink to his companion about Bowie's oddity.

Cut into this straightforward stuff is a brief sequence showing a group of Aboriginal teenagers shuffling to the music on a plateau — the sky behind them solarises and a nuclear explosion appears. One of the teenagers becomes a machine-operator, whom Bowie-the-boss sends out into the streets lugging his huge machine behind him. Another is next seen scrubbing clean the verandah of the boss' white house as a white woman in red shoes strides quickly past her. As the song repeats, the girl puts on the red dancing-shoes and the two go through a dream-sequence of luxury living: with ease and grace they visit the Strand Arcade, buy an Angus and Coote diamond ring with an American Express card, dine out, walk on Bondi Beach, and do a traditional snake-painting on an art gallery wall below a Picasso. The dream breaks: the boy drags his machine to the intersection where the girl is scrubbing the pedestrian-crossing; passing white motorists stare at the impasse. The girl, now amid her group, stamps on the red shoes (as she might — in Grimm, she loses her feet), and they all walk angrily into the bush. Eventually two remain: the boy and the girl climb a sand-dune; the camera pans up to reveal Sydney from the Heads; in the sky above the bridge there glows the singing head of Bowie (like Chou En-lai ascendant in Chinese musicals). Cut to a helicopter flying by the gorge, and then a view back, recalling the sacrifice scene in *Jedda*. As the music dies away, Bowie appears, walking across the desert "playing" his guitar. It's only rock-and-roll, after all.

What has this to say about nationalism and culture now? Just about everything. To start with, the differences between the two videos of essentially similar songs indicate how neatly multi-national cultural producers can fit their products to the specificities of quite distinct national cultures. But it is important to recognise that this is a double effect: the "minimal" version works to sell the record in New York (although its soft style will be found thin by some), yet is more effective as marketing in selling Bowie with a New York-look in Europe. Similarly the "Australian" version may help sales here (although it will get up many noses), yet its strongest appeal will be in America and Europe, where it will seem as exotic as the Duran Duran Sri Lankan tapes, but more apparently "meaningful" because Aborigines are featured actors.

Terry Smith lectures at the Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney University.

The two tapes thus show the first major structural quality of nationalism today: its imagery can not only be *recruited* by this kind of multinational corporatism, it is frequently *constructed* by it. National behaviours, sentiments and imagery are importantly activated within an internationally circulating pool, and control of the circulation rests only partly in national hands. This leads towards a superficial diversity of imagery while at the same time there is a tendency towards simplicity, repetition, order and monopolisation in the underlying distributive structures. The clearest example among visual imagery is the mass-production of nationally distinct airport-souvenir art. Another is the rapidity with which new styles are duplicated around the world in "high art" — national in form, international in their vacuity of content. The same principle applies to the presumed "universality" of popular lyrics and of television series: *Kojak* is set in New York and filmed in Los Angeles, and it exports US law and order. The New York art-world is as provincial as any other, but it remains as one of the centres with the power to export its provinciality as global. [1]

Mostly, then, multinational capital works to create not the cultural homogeneity that used to be feared, but national difference within a system of corporate similarity. But often the structures will declare themselves in a way that overrides the local. The Bowie album has a neo-expressionist painting by ex-pop-artist Derek Boshier on its cover. We see Benson & Hedges' sophisticated surrealism, developed to claim space amidst the erudite environment of the London Underground, shining forth in all its obscurity on a billboard in Leichhardt. The same advertisement will also appear in Brixton, in Kingston, in the barrios above

Rio de Janeiro, and in the Bronx. Indecipherable to those who live among these images, nonetheless they signify the power of the foreign voice, its power to speak so visibly in our midst but not speak to us, except of a power we do not have, or might not want: BUGA-UP speaks for many in this.

Another side of this internationalism, the complementary face, is the complicity of certain locals in their external definition. In usual cultural-imperialism analysis, every client-state has its compradors, those who survive by facilitating the exploitation of their fellows by foreign economic and cultural power.

Conservative governments in this country have done so, none more strenuously than those of Menzies, Fraser, Court and Bjelke-Petersen, all in the name of the necessity of foreign capital investment.

In the Bowie clip, comprador-complicity appears in the delivery of the Aboriginal people to EMI. Aborigines in the outback, the most obviously unique Australian fauna, have had a long history of exploitation, and a recent one too. It is, precisely, the airport-souvenir relationship. It delivers a landscape peopled with Aborigines such that they, like the bridge, signify "made in Australia". And the landscape is Australia as constructed in the 1970s' rash of feature-films. Bowie Inc is being sold not just the chance to film here, but our film industry's own recently created national image. This is redolent with that sickening phenomenon, *the* pathetic fallacy of the cultural cringe.

This disgusting little phrase reminds us that the multinationals do not come from a historical no-place, that they emerge from a history of imperialism which included our colonisation, one which still affects us. Compare, for example, the representation of landscape in the paintings of the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s to that in feature-films of the 1970s and 1980s. After Buvelot elevated the local landscape to the status of a symbolic form, Streeton, Roberts and others delivered a familiarising imagery of the Australian bush to their city audiences by rendering it a domain of local history. The near-city countryside was peopled with incident from the recent past. It was as thoroughly colonised as any stretch of olde England, although *differently* colonised. Both local and British audiences needed to recognise differences, then as now. In recent films, however, a similar historicising process has the opposite effect: it attempts to render the bush, the outback particularly, strange. A domain of mystery, alienating all those who enter it from outside, the Other which haunts us, an unknowable unconscious, a repository of private fears and past crimes, a foreign space on the edges of which we tremble unstably, striving to maintain a civilised order which we feel deeply may be a fragile sham. [2]

This, too, is a colonising consciousness. It incessantly reconquers the Aboriginal inhabitants every time they are assigned to the distanced, invisible, utterly other domain. It also systematically disengages cinema-audiences by rendering the outback as a field of exotic beauty (*We of the Never Never*) or, doubly foreign, as an arena for the enactment of myths of other societies (the US frontier myth in the pathetically trumped-up *Man From Snowy River*). These films make *Sunday Too Far Away*, for all its fears of a cinema emptying as people rush home to glue themselves to US-organised television, look more than half resistant.[3]. Similarly, *Skin Deep* questions New Zealand's past in ways that more apparently aggressive films, featuring Jack Thompson as individualism rampant, do not.

The point is that a *de*-colonising art is possible. Indeed, it is always necessary to keep recommitting our work to such a critical stance. This is not simply a matter of asserting defiantly, even comfortably, an anti-nationalism, a local chauvinism: the recently revived cry that we are better *because* we are isolated. Self-deceiving rubbish. Rather, it is a complex, conscious struggle within and against the multi-nationalist trap. It projects, for example, a very different set of relationships to the landscape: the films *Dirt Cheap* and *Two Laws* recognise it as a domain of ownerships, of tradition, of exploitation, as containing potent sites of struggle, as inscribed by different laws, medicines, ways of establishing sexual difference, and so on. It is still very much other, but it is potentially knowable in specific ways, as long as its differences are respected. Keeping it utterly strange is merely the opposite exploitation to demanding assimilation to the dominant codes.

I know of almost no use of Aboriginal imagery by a white Australian artist during the recent, current and seemingly expanding fashion, which is not tainted by this kind of exploitation. Jeff Stewart's relationship to this material has evolved over the years in an exemplary, because always critical, way. Tim Johnson's paintings of his visits to Papunya may also be an exception, although their modesty is subject to the inevitably problematic development of the market for Papunya paintings. (Although what can I say about what various Aboriginal peoples decide on as their decolonising strategies? Can I speak on this at all? There are vexations here.) Why has Aboriginal Australia become so fashionable among white artists, particularly males of non-immigrant background? Could it be that Aboriginal Australia was the object of interest to so many visiting artists, so many Biennale tourists, so assimilable as a local version of the primitivising imagery of neo-expressionism that it became foreign enough to be useful within the alienated domains of international avant-gardism?[4] Or could it be that the demands for land-rights have penetrated even our esoteric spheres, such that the presence of Aboriginality has to be registered in however attentuated a fashion?

There are no simple pathways in any of these questions of nationalism and culture. Rather, we seem to be engaged in contestations across various sites, pulled this way and that by tendencies which are both colonising and decolonising in their direction (and sometimes, seemingly, both at once). Within nationalism, multiculturalism is obviously an ideological trap for our immigrant groups, denying their internal differences, but at least it can permit useful social space to pursue these differences critically (and it gives

the rest of us vastly improved television, albeit mostly from outside Australia). National imagery has been debased from its history of radical use when it once seemed the property of the labour and republican movements, through its incorporation into the bourgeois nationalist campaigns of ocker advertising (John Singleton), classy fashion (Katie Pye) and states' rights (Robin Gray), and as a smokescreen by international exploiters such as Utah and their political servants such as Malcolm Fraser. Remember the struggle between the two distinct images of the interior being projected by the mining companies and the anti-uranium and land-rights movements in the 1970s? Think of the havoc which this battle wrought within community murals during the same period. A measure of just how divided and dispersed we are was the success of the Hawke election-program of national reconstruction and reconciliation: this post-war rhetoric succeeded because it offered nothing but itself as rhetoric, nothing but the possibility of a state beyond the warring situation we are now in.

Questions about the nature of the national also preoccupy the semiotic project of *Art & Text*, precisely because of its excessive dependency on overseas models of artistic and critical practice. Its most trivial version is a wallowing in second-handedness, such as Paul Taylor's claim that the art in his *Popism* exhibition (National Gallery of Victoria, June-July 1982) was "an ab-original antipodean reflection . . . *Popism*, like the Aboriginal nomads, can therefore find a metaphor for itself in its existence on the surface and edges of the existing landscape. It is not coincidental that *Popism*, like the Australian population, has foresaken an interior and clung to the outside, emptying itself continuously of its valuable resources, its oil and uranium, and turning over its centre to American missile and surveillance bases. In this new scenario, Australian art can become the well-paid beneficiary of its timely, profound and radical superficiality. Our artists are researchers waiting for sponsors". [5] Whatever the intended ironies, this is a pathetic retreat, sell-out, critical collapse at the knees. Fortunately, some of the artists involved search through these spaces a little more responsibly, for example the essays by Richard Dunn and Imants Tillers in *Art & Text* no.6 and certain tapes by →↑→.[6]

There is no position outside these debates from which we can pronounce that solution-X is preferred as the most responsible. Certainly no simple "nationalism" or "internationalism" will do. It never did. Even formula-combinations such as "national in form, international in content" are interpreted differently by, say, a Maoist and a Popist. Rather, we are willy-nilly located within a circle of problematic sites, and there is no escaping the fact that occupying these sites entails continual contestation. It is the quality of this contestation which establishes the validity of our art, not a submission to internationalism nor a flag-waving assertion of nationalism (both are appeals to other, absent authorities). I, too, like British music, French theory and American television, but I also admire British theory, European film and Australian music. More to the point, I value relationships rather than media-delivered cultural monoliths. I admire those who fight to keep possibilities open, who refuse external definitions of nationality, sex and class, who seek to recover local histories of struggle, who try to secure spaces for minority expression, who link up with others doing similar things elsewhere in the world, who can wince or laugh at the contradictions in all this but still keep at it. We no longer need metropolitan visitors to assure us that our art is as good, our conversation as subtle, as anywhere in the world (although it is of welcome interest when others engaged in decolonising their cultures make this sort of observation). [7]

International tourist media desperately need the subcultural inventiveness of Tanzanian Swahili pop, for example, to maintain its striving towards monopoly. [8] This is a battle it will always win, but a war it will always lose. Men at Work's album made world number-one, but the hit-song was a send-up of travelling from *Down Under*.

Notes

1 See my "The Provincialism Problem", *Artforum* (Feb 1975), revised in Charles Merewether and Ann Stephen, eds, *The Great Divide* (Melbourne, 1977). Carter Ratcliff's recent *Artforum* study of Bowie is coincidental in regard to my intentions, but not in regard to how they are organised.

2 Ross Gibson, "Camera Natura — Landscape in Australian Feature-Films", *On the Beach* , 1 (Autumn 1983): a fine evocation of the outback void, but mistaken in seeing it as a pre-modernist domain. Modernism has been obsessed with the primitive. For Bernard Smith this has become a pointer to the dream of cultural convergence (See his book, *The Spectre of Trucanini*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 1980).

3 I am indebted here to an essay by one of the most consistently penetrating writers on Australian film, Sylvia Lawson, "Towards Decolonisation: Film History in Australia", in Susan Dermody, John Docker and Drusilla Modjeska, eds, *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends* (Kibble Books, Melbourne, 1982).

4 "But if anything has determined the dynamic of modern art it is the iron grip of the primitivistic . . . But a preference for the apparent and even the fake primitive in place of the truly primitive may mean that the passion for the primitive is at last waning." Bernard Smith, "The Myth of Isolation" (1961), in *The Antipodean Manifesto* (OUP, Melbourne, 1975), p69.

5 "Popism — the Art of White Aborigines", *On the Beach*, 1 (Autumn 1983), p32.

6 Tillers' argument that "locality fails" because of inexplicable correspondences is amusing but thin, needing development to be effective.

7 Bruce Ferguson, "International Exhibitions, Part 2", *Fuse*, 6 (Mar/Apr 1983), pp325-6. On the Sydney Biennale 1982.

8 Roger Wallis, *Big Sounds From Small Peoples* (Constable, London, 1983), part of the Music Industry in Small Countries research project, Box 1225, S-111 82 Stockholm, Sweden.

HEY! MR POSTMAN LOOK AND SEE

INSTALLATIONS AT ANZART

Lutz Presser

Installations have been some of the most important art works of the 20th century, and from the outset have been used as visually or aurally aggressive means to assail the viewer's sensibilities, because other more traditional media failed to attract the attention of the viewer in a particular way. For example there were Duchamp's controversial installations for the surrealist exhibitions of 1938 and 1942 where, among other things, he used suspended hessian coalbags and obstructive string. From such early beginnings there have been many equally powerful pieces, particularly those by the generation of the 60s and 70s including Oldenburg, Kaprow, Nevelson, Kienholz, Kusama, Flavin and others. Installations, by their very nature, combine several traditional media or disciplines such as sculpture and painting, with more recent ones such as still-photography, cine-photography, video, sound and performance, into a powerful artistic statement.

Australian and New Zealand artists produced a number of static, kinetic and performance-oriented installations housed in Hobart's old Mail Exchange. In this reviewer's opinion most of the installations and tableaux failed dismally, largely because they could not maintain their presence in the space provided, or because they were too unresolved, visually uninteresting, tacky or too arty. If one is going to produce an installation a fundamental consideration must be the space it is going to occupy. In some cases the vestiges of the former function of the Mail Exchange dominated the visual field to such a degree that they either swamped the art or were energised into appearing as art in their own right. I am referring in particular to the city mail-sorting guide situated high up near the saw-tooth roof of the main exhibition-hall, and the shower-cubicles piled full of furniture left open to view between other exhibits in one of the side-rooms. One could have read so many profundities, suitably couched these observations in art-jargon and imbued these relics with significance far beyond their true position. If an installation is to look at home in its space, this can be achieved by either designing a piece for a specific space or radically changing that space to suit the work.

Debra Bustin opted for the latter approach by painting her area, including the floor, white, thus completely neutralising the area and its obtrusive pillars, pipes and wiring. Within this empty canvas she set up four stylistically interrelated kinetic tableaux. The most explicit of these was of a prone terrified female about to be ravished by three males with jiggling erections. The implications of rape, vulnerability, bestiality, and the act of group-aggression on an individual, were extremely powerful. The other tableaux were less literal but they energised the space with their thin pointy papier-mâché shapes and high-key colour. One could say that Bustin's work is reminiscent of Miro and Calder, even perhaps of Leunig.

Her manipulation of the picture-plane, sculptural space and air is original and accomplished.

Michael Hill, a member of Art Unit, produced a walk-in painted-paper environment whose success, unlike Bustin's work, was achieved by producing a totally unified new space whose internal integrity referred only to itself and not to the larger space outside it. It was like a series of short caverns, wherein walls, ceiling, floor and the objects in the nooks and crannies were all covered with the same painted pattern. One criticism I would make of it is that it looked too much like a three-dimensional version of Philip Guston's late figurative paintings. The only thing missing was the oft-depicted hobnailed boot.

Another successful body of work, rather than installation, was Hossein Valamanesh's pyramids which incorporated a small central flame in each of the two larger pieces. The room was darkened and its grottiness seemed to work well with Valamanesh's use of sticks, string, sand and bricks. The quiet strength and mystery that emanated from these works conjured up magical rites. That effect was tried desperately by other exhibits, such as Vivian Lyn's translucent trunk pillars with a small but significant slab covered in hanks of hair, but they fell into that realm of pretentious vacuousness that only some art manages to attain.

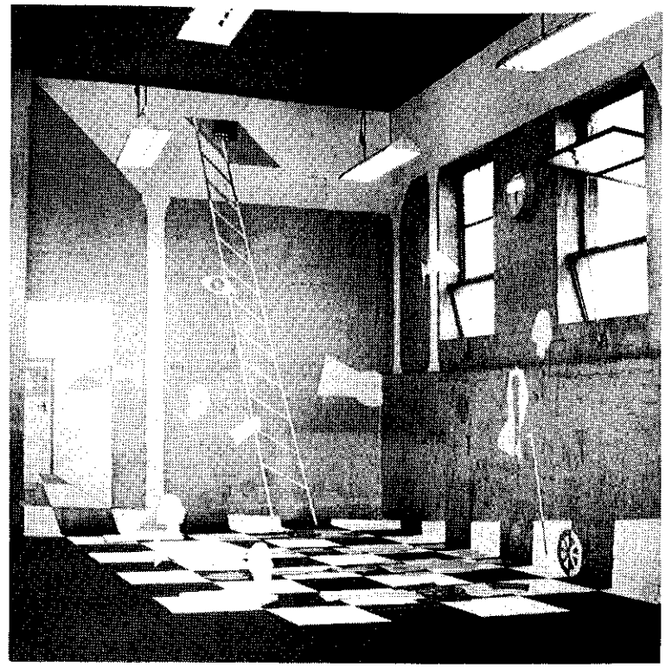
Judie Lovell and Stephen Turpie's *Proposition for Takers* was another of the few pieces that used well a given space, and partly for this reason it became interesting art.

Theo Koning's *Le Cabaret Fantaisie* suffered from too much gravity. Although his use of the given space was considered, it failed partly because of the flimsiness of the cut-out shapes and because of the pastel colour.

Dave James' *Clouds* of wire and dowel was so insensitively placed that it was precisely for that reason that I even noticed it. It was one piece that needed nothing around it but air, or implied air by painting out a large space to suit it. It also needed to be either a lot bigger or off the ground.

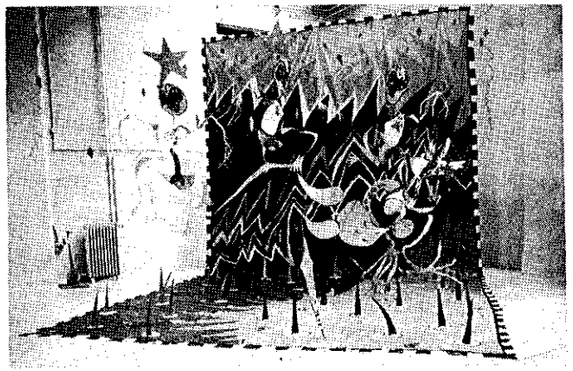
Grant Corbishley stated that *Space to Person I* "is a construction of a perfect world" and that *Space to Person II* "is an expression of my attempt to enter that world", which sounds more interesting than the interconnected works themselves. In fact they looked like watered-down de-energised versions of Judy Pfaff installations. The mere traversing of space with coloured string, wire and tubular plastic, plus a good idea, do not automatically produce a good work. Moreover, Corbishley's manufactured mess inadvertently demonstrated how much energy there exists outside the work of art, because the art itself possessed none. But in his *Response to Avago* he explained in some detail what he was trying to do with the other works, which he set up as a sort of vibe-reflector of the Anzart participants' inter-relationships. It was for this reason that *Space to Person I* was covered with the negative shroud of black plastic which showed signs of erosion as the situation improved. The Avago piece was successful for all the reasons that the larger pieces failed, namely scale, materials and concept combined homogenously to produce an unpretentious visually stimulating work.

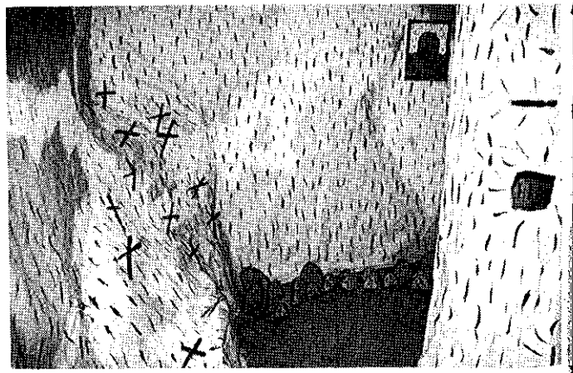
Lutz Presser, a painter and Lecturer at the Tasmanian School of Art, exhibited in Australian Perspecta '81 *and* Sydney Biennale, 1982.

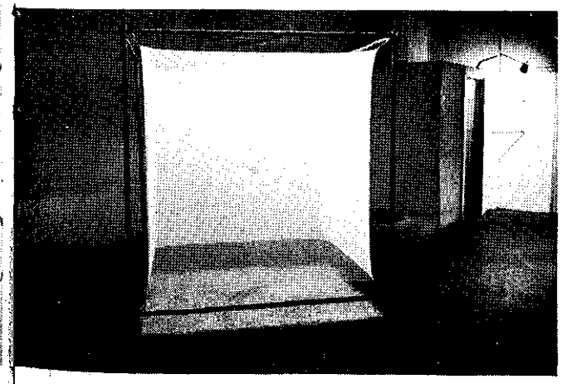


Theo Koning, Le Cabaret Fantaisie, *installation, Old Hobart Mail Exchange, 1983.*

Left: Debra Bustin, installation detail. Centre: Michael Hill, installation detail. Right: Hossein Valamanesh, Light Within *installation. All at Old Hobart Mail Exchange, 1983.*







AVAGO IN 'OBART

ANZART'S SHOP WINDOW

David Watt

David Watt is a sculptor and performance artist currently undertaking postgraduate studies at the Tasmanian School of Art.

Left: Janice Hunter, Little Aussie Jugglers, *wood, fabric and paper, 51.5cm x 57cm x 46.5cm, Avago in 'Obart, 1983*

Right: Gayle Pollard, The World, synthetic grass, mirrors and polychromed ply, 51.5cm x 57cm x 46.5cm, Avago in 'Obart, 1983.

Avago-in-'Obart, billed as the "last gallery before the South Pole, smallest gallery in the southern hemisphere and eighteenth best artwork in the whole world", opened amid great ceremony along with the rest of Anzart in the presence of the governor of Tasmania on 19 May. Modelled on its Sydney counterpart and curated by John Bennett, it was installed in the old Mail Exchange building, from where it proceeded, in its own small way, to make its presence felt throughout the proceedings.

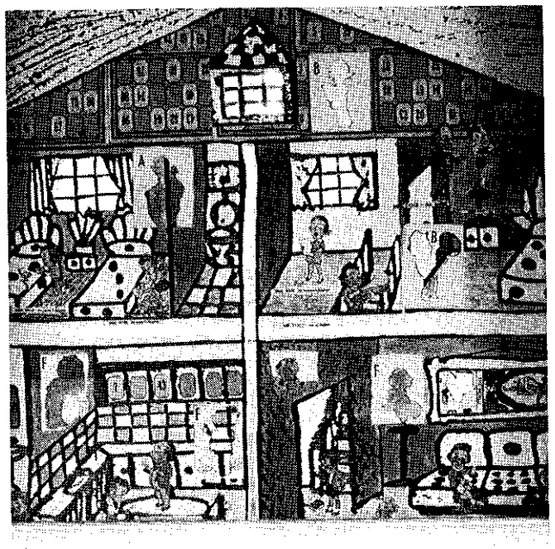
It was more than appropriate, given that much of the emphasis of Anzart was on alternative spaces, that this, the smallest of them, should be present and active. It has the benefits of an intimacy of scale, of which the best of the works shown made good use, and its shop-window access to the streets which allows more public exposure.

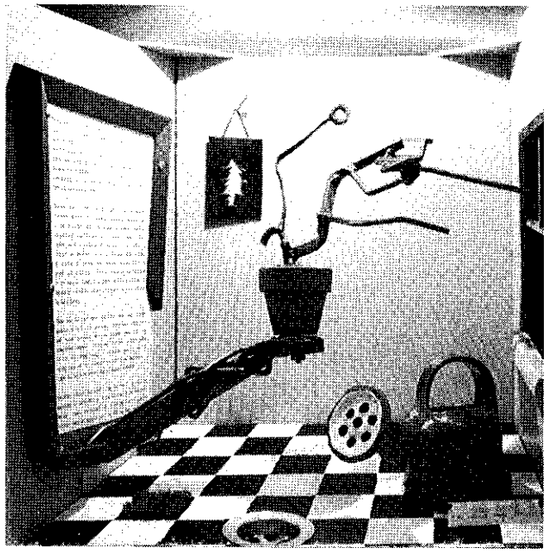
From the opening night onwards there appeared almost daily a new work by an Australian or New Zealand artist. Reflecting Anzart proper these works represented a range of approaches which achieved varying degrees of success. Among the best were works by Jan Hunter, Gayle Pollard, Lutz Presser and Evan Webb, although the works by Glenn Puster, Adrian Jones, Loris Button, Ruth Gall, Debra Petrovich, David Keeling and Grant Corbishley were also successful in various ways.

New Zealander Evan Webb's *Flying the Flag*, a kinetic work in the form of an absurd machine, was an appropriate choice for the opening night, mimicking the vice-regal opening which was taking place in the building at the time. The machine raised and lowered the Australian flag in a rather tentative, geriatric fashion. As Avago's contribution to the evening's festivities it worked remarkably well and was one of the best uses of Avago's potential for humour.

In a different manner, Jan Hunter's *Little Aussie Jugglers* was also one of the more successful works. The play on the little-Aussie-battler notion which the title offers worked well with the clown-images and more serious aspects of the texts. The work consisted of five wooden female dolls dressed in clown-outfits, with painted faces and fixed expressions. Scattered around them, in the wood-shavings which covered the floor, were the trappings of circus-jugglers: clubs, balls and hoops. The three walls behind and to either side were covered with newspaper-clippings which were related to problems encountered by Australian women. The mute attention of the group of figures belied the real problems and actions to which they referred, namely the juggling of priorities that is necessary for many in simply coming to terms with the contradictions in everyday existence.

At first glance, as it was approached, Lutz Presser's work *The Skin of St Bar-*





Left: Glenn Puster, To Create False Perspective, *ceramic, steel and painted particle board, 51.5 cm x 57cm x 46.5 cm, Avago in 'Obart, 1983.*

Right: Loris Button, Persecution Mask, *acrylic on paper, backed by canvas, installation 51.5cm x 57cm x 46.5cm, Avago in 'Obart, 1983.*

tholemew took on an appearance akin to an elegant window-display in a jeweller's shop window, with its soft circle of purple neon on a cushioned surface, but closer inspection shifted one's thoughts from the commercial to the religious with the realisation that it was actually the grizzled skin of the Saint's penis, and the neon was its aura. This realisation brought into play a whole series of connotations, while the initial reaction to its commercial quality somehow still formed a background to the reading of the images.

Gayle Pollard's *World* offered a very different use of the space again, in that it reversed many of the expectations of the internal space itself. Externally, it was a painting of the interior of a doll's house; in the windows were small holes. Drawn by the image, and by the light emanating from it, the viewer's natural response was to peer through them; this opened up a limited and fragmented view of the interior which used mirrors, prismatic light-effects, and a myriad of images caused by the repeated reflection of the objects within, to deny the sense of interiority. The prism-effect split the internal light into bands of colour, further fragmenting the inner space and adding a magical, kaleidoscopic, looking-glass quality to the overall effect, which was full of sometimes puzzling and sometimes accessible images.

Glenn Puster's *Creating a False Perspective* used as its starting-point a circular which he received from a commercial gallery praising the benefits of buying small sculpture, and comparing the advantages of the sculptures over indoor plants. This text was mounted on one wall of a distorted room. Around it was a welded steel frame which grew towards the centre of the room and supported a flowerpot, out of which grew fantastic welded-steel plant-forms. The room came complete with watering-can for both growing and rusting the sculpture. It was a good play between Avago as a place for small artworks and the economic manipulation of an audience for sculpture.

Memorial to a Poor Dead Dog by Adrian Jones was in the end too elegant for its subject-matter. The combination of materials – concrete, skin, brass, polished bone and plastic – was intended to evoke the appearance of an absurd department-store display in memory of an unknown dead dog, but it would have gone closer to its intentions without the references to Aborigines, which tended to upset this balance. The previously unknown, uncared-for dog was transformed by the inclusion of a very well known and cared-about cultural image, and because of this the absurdity of the window-dressing took on different connotations.

Loris Button's *Mask of Persecution* was a strong image. The face sewn onto canvas, with its eyes sewn up, and a heart-shaped beauty-spot sewn into one cheek, contrasted with the warm pinks and fleshtones used in the painting and the interior of the box. It achieved a deathmask quality, the face of a figure whose senses are completely nullified.

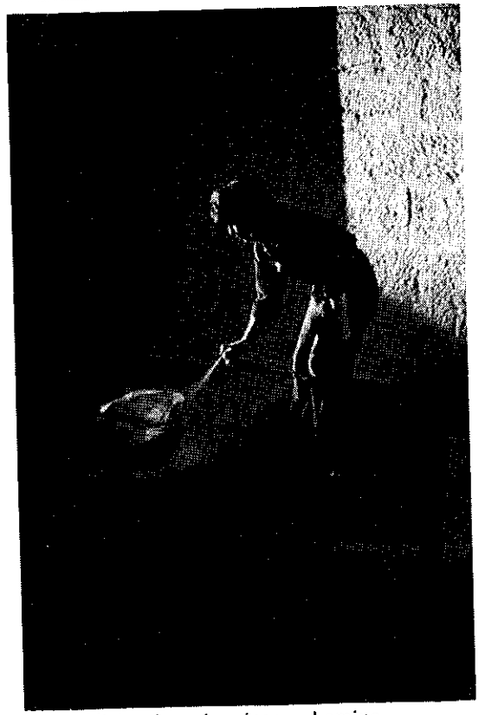
Ruth Gall and Debra Petrovich, each in a different way, talked about male sexuality. Ruth Gall's *Portrait of a Young Man, '82* used a poem mounted on the glass window and a box containing a duelling-pistol made out of pine, along with photographs to allude to notions of a "dance of life". Debra Petrovich's installation, *Conversation between Eve and the Devil*, contrasted a knife and a mutilated apple to small naively carved animal-

forms, one of which was hanging from a scaffold. In front of the scaffold two small wax human forms were lying one on top of the other.

Grant Corbishley and David Keeling's works were initially quite intriguing but did not sustain their intrigue. Corbishley's small figure made out of electrical wire stood facing a text written in diary form on the back wall. The text took the form of observations about Anzart itself, observations which in the long run were simply his dissatisfactions. David Keeling's *Vanishing Point* was a painted sculpture with comic-book overtones and with a vaguely tropical, holiday atmosphere about it, but some of the forms, in particular a cloud-shape on the back wall, were not easily read.

Avago seemed to attract good audience-responses over the first week or so of Anzart. In some ways this was let down, in some of the work, by a patchiness which seemed to stem from the expectation that the good characteristics of the space would carry anything. In fact those works which were successful were so because of the conscious manipulation of those characteristics.

I cannot help feeling that there should be an Avago in every city, perhaps a whole franchise of them, because their size, accessibility and low material-requirements make them a unique venue to which artists have access.



Top: Vivian Lyn, Laminar – Lamina – Lamella, *installation, Hobart, 1983.*
Bottom: Di Ffrench, Asters, *performance, Old Hobart Mail Exchange, Hobart, 1983.*

THE FEMALE EXCHANGE

WOMEN'S WORK AT ANZART

Deborah St Leger

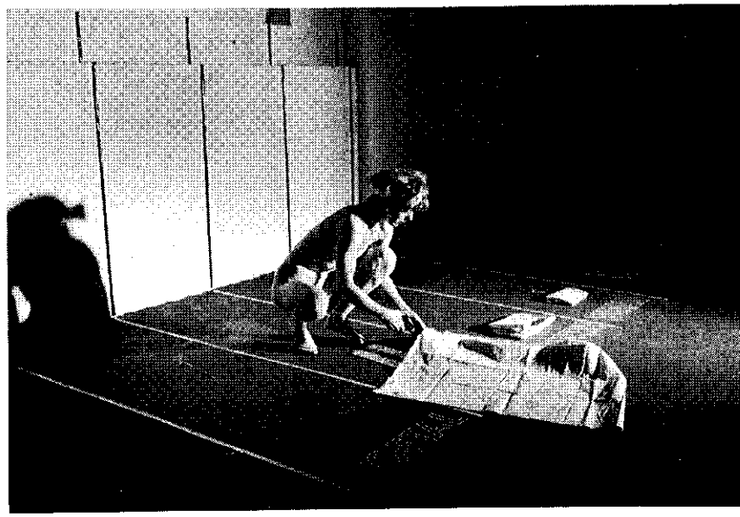
Anzart, designed as an encounter and an exchange between artists, rather than as a comprehensive exhibition of individual excellence, provided a major influx of artists and a diversity of art activities to a community starved of major art events. To me, a female artist who has lived and worked all her life in this community, the prospect of Anzart-in-Hobart was undeniably an exciting one. It afforded the unique opportunity of observing and participating in a range of activities, in particular the concerns and work of other female artists from all over Australia and New Zealand.

An unavoidable issue when discussing women's art at any major art-event is equal participation, and Anzart was no exception. Women comprised only a third of the New Zealand contingent, despite the incessant pressure for greater participation by Barbara Strathdee who helped co-ordinate the New Zealand section. Furthermore, the activity which severely lacked female participation was sound-poetry. This raises two questions: Are there any women working in this form? If so, is their work of such an inadequate standard that it warrants total exclusion from the Anzart encounter?

Much of the New Zealand women's work evoked a sense of establishing and demonstrating identity within a traditional feminist mode: the universal concerns pertaining to women's experience, which have been dealt with by many women artists of the 70s. This in no way invalidates the work. But it does, along with the problems in the selection process, provide an insight into conditions that may still prevail in the New Zealand situation. Isolation, both geographical and cultural, may have caused women artists to lack the necessary recognition, and deny them much of the consciousness-raising feminist debate within the visual arts that has occurred in other centres. There was little evidence in the work of social, political or environmental concerns that would identify the country of origin, no attempt at site-located work in or around Hobart, or work that addressed issues of concern in Tasmania. But much of the work showed sensitive artistic competence. Vivian Lyn's installation, with its tall cylindrical forms of textured paper, emitted an authoritative presence, yet maintained a feeling of fragility. Debra Bustin's ambitious display of exuberance and vitality was one of the few installations that countered the awesome nature of the old Mail Exchange building. The elements in Di Ffrench's installation also fused convincingly with their surroundings. Unfortunately her performance was rather disjointed, lacking any positive statement, acting more as an adjunct to the installation, imbuing it with a powerful mystique.

The externalisation of the personal and introspective was not the preserve of the New Zealand women alone. Exhibits from the Women's Art Movement, and some of the women's work in the exhibition *Not a Picture Show*, displayed similar concerns. In the latter, notable was the work of Ann Harris and Karin Hauser, whose use of the female body, that potent reinforcement of womanhood, was manipulated in powerful and compelling ways. Similar elements were evident in the photo-plus-text installations of Ann Graham, one of which had historical references to the colonisation of the Australian woman. The other dealt with the restraining forces exerted over the body by clothing and other adornments.

There was women's work, mainly from the Australian contingent, that addressed the more social, political and environmental issues in our community. Jane Kent's work consciously avoided the art-audience and surreptitiously coerced individual members of the public into confronting a delicate, deeply felt social issue – racism. Grace Cochrane's imaginative use of hand-coloured photographs and text presented a vehement statement about the blockade in the South-West of Tasmania. There was the refined and informed performance-installation of Bonita Ely, *Controlled Atmosphere Inc*, in which the terminology itself is a delusion, designed by institutions within society to control and disguise the true effects of their activities. Her citing, in the performance, of the Lake Pedder issue, referred to the irretrievable and continuing damage to the environment, symbolised by the degeneration of the image of Lake Pedder by repeated photocopying. The role of the female in this environment is itself a product of the controlling mechanisms



Ann Graham, Escalation, *performance, Old Hobart Mail Exchange, Hobart, 1983.*

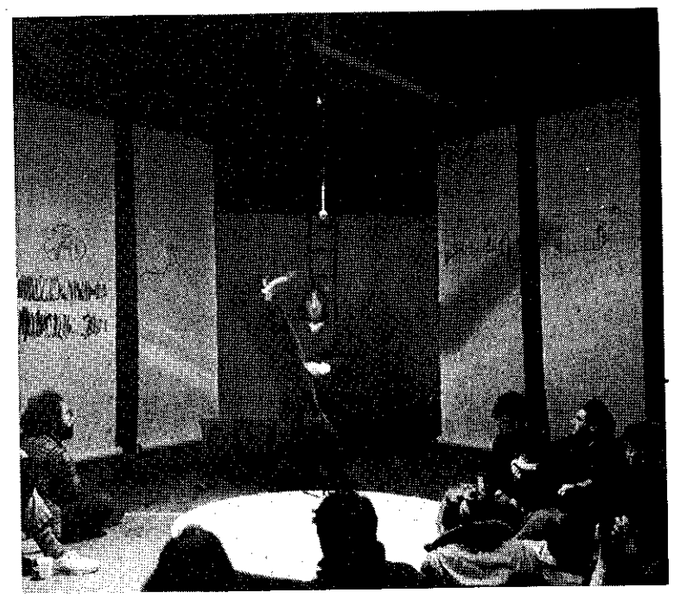
at work. Comfortable and secure in this situation, she dutifully and unquestioningly performs the tasks required of her, unconsciously perpetuating the whole destructive process. The ironic contrast was provided by the music of Sibelius: the music that accompanies Olegas Truchanas' audiovisual display of South-West Tasmania. The juxtapositions of other elements – the environmental impact statement on the boss' wall, the building-blocks in his desk, the shredded images in the labelled pigeonholes behind the front desk, the dead pot-plant and the venetian blinds – were all tinged with that ironic, inimitable Ely humour.

As mentioned, there was little site-located work attempted by women. Jill Scott

Deborah St Leger is a painter currently undertaking postgraduate studies at the Tasmanian School of Art.

exploited sound-distorting chambers located around Hobart in the production of the soundtrack that determined the structure of her performance. The fascinating and multi-faceted work by Karen Turner was another example with allusions to Tasmania's energy-debate. The series of relatively simple wind-installations scattered about in a variety of locations had complex implications about environmental, historical and mythological concerns, and was enhanced and extended by the accompanying documentation. (Perhaps the more apt location for the windsock would have been atop the HEC building). This work was in stark contrast to, say, Richard Tipping's *Southern Crossing No 3* on Mt Wellington's Organ-Pipes, with its logistical problems caused by its sheer size and location. This grand illuminating display of a nationally recognised symbol far exceeded the complexity of the concept, which remained comparatively slight. The associated display of posters and postcards was imbued with a separate identity that was tainted by commercialism.

Much of the static work by women was visually low-key, often relying on text, but simultaneously infused with a complexity that engaged the viewer at a personal and often intimate level, involving a layering of meaning. This intimacy was evident in the work of Barbara Strathdee, with its highly personal format of family photo-album and personally addressed letters. This had the effect of placing the viewer in the invidious position of violating personal privacy.



Jill Scott, Delay The Decay, *performance, Old Hobart Mail Exchange, Hobart, 1983.*

In complete antipathy to Strathdee's work was the art of Hardened Arteries, with their high-energy self-referential confrontational attacks. Unfortunately these initially refreshing acts eventually became tedious and predictable. Some of the performances by the female members were pointed and succinct, but the enthusiasm and spontaneity they contained were no substitute for depth of consideration and refinement of execution.

Such was the scope of Anzart that it is impossible to encompass the entire range of activities in which women were involved. In general, the concept of Anzart seems to have left the Hobart community bemused and bewildered. What is now needed is the establishment of a regular Anzart-type event. This would inject that vital stimulation, experienced so rarely here, created by the concentration of artists and art-related activities, and would thus maintain a beneficial continuity.

NOT A PICTURE SHOW (CALLING THE SHOTS)

Marion Hardman

Not a Picture Show was curated by Gayle Pollard and Glenn Puster, formerly of Art/Empire/Industry, Sydney. The exhibitors were John Armstrong, Grace Cochrane, Kathie Crawford, Brucce Dolby, Ruth Frost, Ann Harris, Karin Hauser, Graeme Johnson, Andrew Kelly, Geoff Parr, Scott Russell and David Stephenson.

Most of the artists dealt with a variety of contemporary photographic practices (bromides, collages, transparencies) with diverse solutions (plastic bags, light-boxes, installations) which gave the works authority yet excluded the preciousness so regrettably common in much photographic work. More importantly, most of the artists dealt with issues, rather than with artefact-making. The subjects of their work were of four kinds:

Political statements: Armstrong, Cochrane, Parr, Russell and Stephenson.
Sexuality: Harris, Hauser, Kelly and Dolby.
Metaphors for states of mind: Harris and Frost.
Awareness of place: Cochrane, Stephenson, Johnson and Crawford.

I found problems in the work of Hauser and Armstrong. Karin Hauser, an artist of considerable facility, produced her most refined set of images with *Shower Sequence II*. Their degree of visual intrigue and facility made for a seductive piece. Yet one was left pondering what lay beyond the making of the artefact and what, if any, aspects of female sexuality were under discussion. Together with Cochrane, Parr and Armstrong these works differed the most from conventional photographic practice.

Since one is able to observe that a great deal of art is only about artefact-making and does not address itself seriously to anything else, Hauser is in considerable and often well-respected company.

John Armstrong, an Australian representative in the 1980 Paris Biennale, is an artist who has integrity in his political concerns and an admirable desire not to make precious objects. He produced a self-conscious series of works. The complex integration of photographs, drawings, text and found objects was yet to be resolved, but the most problematic element was the political content, which appeared contrived. This problem was also apparent in Tony Coleing's *Lebanon — 1982* which was exhibited in *Perspecta '83*. In contrast, Geoff Parr's *Chelsea Morning* took an equally broad political issue but dealt with it in succinct manner. The piece provoked a series of questions by visually offering the innocence of the Chelsea Flower Show with the simultaneous activity in the Falklands, represented in text by the Thatcher propaganda, "Geographically distant though they may be they are but a heartbeat away". David Stephenson was more low-key with his panoramas of technological development within the New Zealand landscape, the ugliness of which indicts that activity. Despite the substantial nature of this work it lacked the elegance, power and persuasiveness of his pieces in *Perspecta '83*.

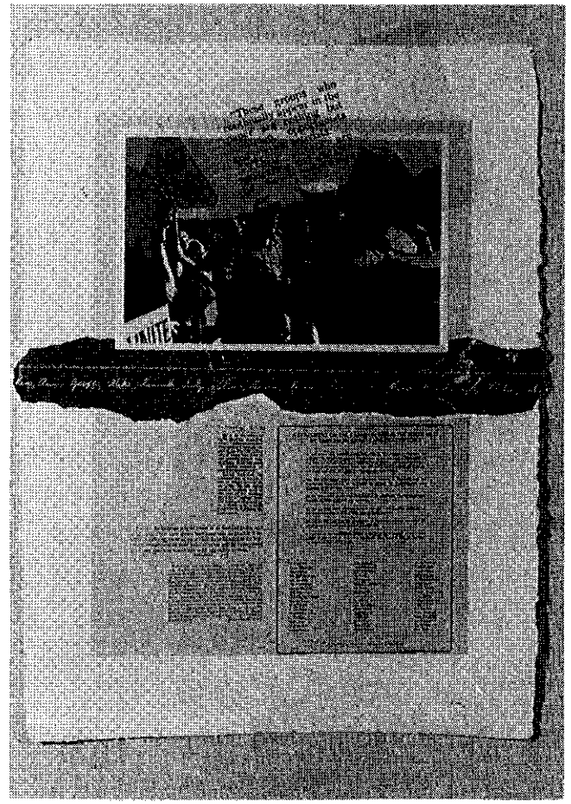
The Gordon-below-Franklin dam issue, the polarisation of Tasmanians, and the diminishment of our civil liberties, were taken up through the personal experience of Grace Cochrane who with many artists, some of whom were in this show, was arrested for trespass in the South-West of Tasmania. The seventeen images combined hand-coloured photographs of the peaceful demonstration, newspaper texts and political propaganda which described the protesters as violent irresponsible subversives, and geographical data of the area. These were assembled on large sheets of handmade paper placed in deluxe cellophane folders and individually suspended.

Perception of photographs is all too often limited to the obvious – the direct, apparently representational image. For many people, the familiarity of the photograph, their acceptance of its realism, the descriptive quality of the medium, and what I feel is an inherently subtle and complex photographic language, lead to the dismissal of much important work.

Ruth Frost's untitled series of bromides was a set of direct, highly ambiguous images. They contained the element of time and the feeling of time-displacement; they contained human activity and influence, although the human figure, a child, appears only twice; and they contained a strong feeling of disturbance and threat, suggested partly by the apparently fleeing child. At times, soft focus and blurring were used to create a feeling of fantasy or nightmare, but the feeling persisted, to my mind even more strongly, in the straight, sharply focused prints. Frost's fictional works posed questions about reality and its perception, and about the veracity of the photographic image. Ann Harris' works were complex and powerful portraits dealing with duality and self-doubt. The shattered faces contained in plastic, further disfigured by wild and violent stitching, became a metaphor for the disparity between what woman actually is and what man would prefer her to be. The questioning of womanhood was reinforced by her other images. The resolutions of Harris' work are becoming less conventional and are moving towards the combination of two-dimensional and three-dimensional solutions within the single piece.

Lack of space does not permit dis-

Photographer and Lecturer at the Tasmanian School of Art, Marion Hardman is author of Practical Dreams *(Hobart, 1980).*



Grace Cochrane, At the Crotty Road, *1 page of 18 hand-coloured photographs and text, each 55cm x 70cm, 1983.*

photo: Grace Cochrane

cussion of the work of Crawford, Kelly, Johnson and Russell. This is not a reflection of the merit of their work; I have chosen the concerns that are more immediately contentious in the photographic debate. The unfortunate conglomerations of Brucce Dolby do not merit consideration in the light of the maturity, comprehension and visual sophistication of his fellow exhibitors.

Not a Picture Show was a thoughtful curatorial endeavour in a state so lacking in such activities. Its initiative enabled artists to make work which in some cases would not otherwise have been made and which in all cases would have remained unexhibited and unappraised in Tasmania. The consequences of that vacuum would have been that issues of content and media-use remain undebated and the process of learning and analysis inhibited.

Geoff Parr, Chelsea Morning, *7 cibachrome transparencies, lightboxes and 3 canvases, approx. dimensions 300cm x 300cm, 1983.*

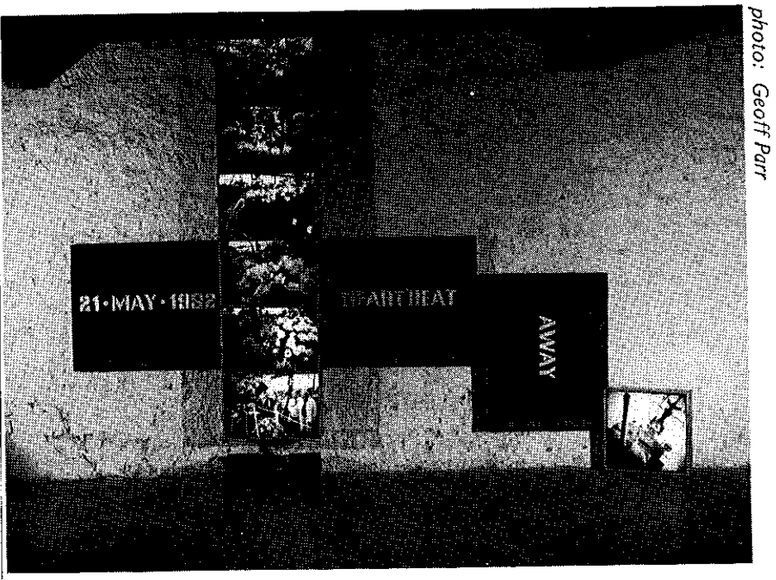


photo: Geoff Parr

BOOTS AND ALL
THE CHAMELEON COLLECTIVE
Christopher Coventry

Christopher Coventry a painter and writer, was recently curator-in-residence at the Tasmanian School of Art.

The part of Anzart most significant for Hobart was the Chameleon exhibition, because that group stays here and maintains much of the spirit of the conference.

Chameleon Inc is a cooperative of artists which leases the old Blundstone boot-factory in the city for studio, workshop and gallery space. The issue of artists'-collective organisations, which is about an alternative economics for artists, increasingly built on strategies for the getting of grants from government arts-funding bodies, became the major focus of the Anzart dialogue. Initially, alternative economics arose from the need of artists to share the costs of studio-workshop space and equipment, which was allied to moves to set up gallery-spaces to show work that, for political or aesthetic reasons, couldn't or wouldn't go into establishment galleries. When the arts-funding bodies started to give support to these co-ops, that became another reason for artists to band together: for a better chance of winning something in the funding-lottery. The funding-bodies recognised these collectives as possible images of themselves, and encourage the likeness: the more they get the right look, the more money they get.

The individual artist says that the trouble with poverty is that it takes up all of his time. The trouble with group-funding is that not only do you spend all your time working out strategies for getting it, you also, if you do get it, have to work out how to use it and how to continue getting it. Anzart's dialogue was so locked into this program that its reason for being was far less about art than it was about finance.

The art in Anzart reflected the dominant theme of the conference – survival – not only in the quality of the work but also in the expression of the work. It is not just that survival-before-art means you're too fucked to make it and it takes up all your time, it is that the stress of survival directs imagination: you end up making art about survival. The tendency to dwell on this theme of anxiety is heightened by the pressure of trying to make ambitious art, especially in places lacking the support of numbers of like artists: the lack of dialogue.

The importance of Chameleon Inc to Hobart is that it extends the dialogue of contemporary art, a dialogue which for this city exists only in the cloisters of the Tasmanian School of Art. Without this dialogue it can be counted on that the death-rate and exodus of artists concerned with ambitious art will totally eliminate the possibility of a local brand of that sort of art. In any city there is enormous pressure on graduates coming out of the protective custody of art school, facing virtually nothing in the way of moral support, and seeing nothing to go for.

What Chameleon does in Hobart is to give its members an identity, a community authenticity: the boot-factory becomes an art-factory and the artists become art-workers. Like Anzart, here the nostalgic search for a place in the community comes with an overriding feeling of depressing pessimism. Maybe somewhere in the Anzart conference there was some art celebrating hope and joy, solution and resolution, for humanity. That it wasn't evident was illustrated by the Chameleon show.

The problem with group-shows is that the pieces interact often to the extent of unintentionally drawing out a general mood or expression which has little or nothing to do with the concerns of some of the individual works. In this show the phenomenon created a feeling of creeping horror that came to override the whole exhibition. This feeling stemmed from the dank reek of nostalgia pervading the room from some of the work and from the environment itself, and from the preponderance of pieces dealing with nightmarish themes. The gloomy, dissatisfied determination of these artists to make horror-stories is the product of a kind of boredom: they cultivate their psychosis because every more conventional response has been drained of significance by a sophisticated world, unshockable and totally permissive.

In the 1970s it appeared that there was a collapse of all the traditions and beliefs that supported art, and everyone went looking for new emphases. By the 1980s it seemed that the new consideration was firmly ethical as opposed to aesthetic. If the formalist was always in danger of being an interior decorator, then the moralists begin to look like evangelists, or propagandists, or social workers. The way out of this bind has increasingly been for the artist to try and create art from scratch by deliberately using it to create his/her own identity. Art becomes a question not of form but of psychic exploration, not of artefact but of the artist's identity. There is no clear distinction between a critical and an existential judgment. It is a matter not of skill but of priorities. Lola Burrows' work, *Traces and Opportunities*, is an example. It is an arrangement of various elements, papers on a wall, juxtaposed in the simplest form, naively, to give emphasis to ideas rather than to aesthetics. A diary-like page of text, hung in a little K-Mart frame, is a recollection of a first-year anatomy class in Hobart High in 1957:

> One day our lecturer brought into class some skeletal remains she had been given by an old Hobart doctor. They were part of the skull of a Tasmanian Aboriginal woman and part of the skull of a Tasmanian Aboriginal child. She also had the complete arm of an Aboriginal child. The veins and arteries had been filled with different-coloured fluids, and as the flesh dried and shrank, the whole blood-supply system could be seen. As I remember.

This is the key to the rest of the work a series of snapshots of two happy-family children growing up, from infancy to adolescence; and above, parallel in the same sort of strung-out line, were the handprints of various children representing each age of the cycle of child-maturation, in paint on paper, signed, dated and unmounted. This work is about personal experience; it is a response of despair and fear to the possible horrors for our children. Lola Burrows handled her work of despair objectively, intelligently, accurately, with contempt and without art; but the work has far more power than the jokesy attempts at similar horrors that have come closer to art: the aesthetic *Black Line* tableau by David Moses, a design of the great Tasmanian round-up; and the polaroid comedy-strip of Nazi humour, by Milan Milojevic. These artists are too detached to be offering warnings (Nolan reckons that art often acts as an early-warning system). Rather, the work hints at a kind of voyeurism, a Warholian decadence where art trivialises everything.

Artists in Tasmania seem to have no qualms about taking the risk of dealing with such touchy, violent, horrific material. Mixing art-aesthetics with real-life horrors in a kind of schizophrenic detachment, they look to the past and the place for identity and authenticity. Too many artists here offer no hope for art or for anything else. They look back in horror and in protest, and eternally drag out Truganini's guts for display, ignoring who is left, offering no solutions, no respect.

> Don't let them cut me up;
> bury me behind the mountains.
> (Truganini)

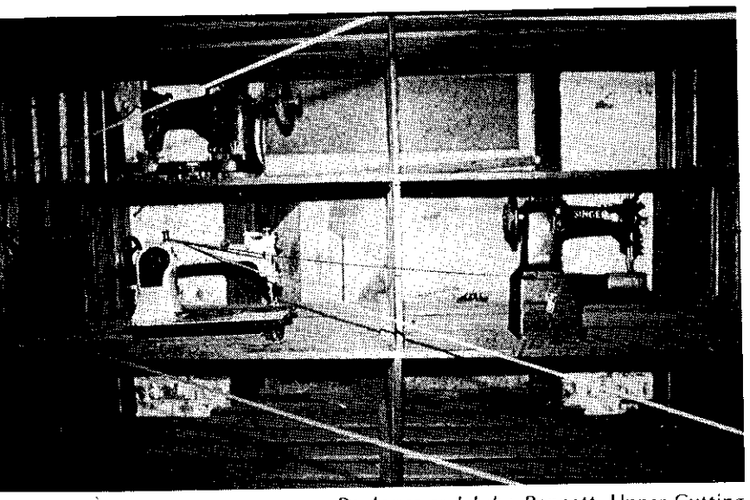
The work that was the most complete as art, concentrated as it was with simplicity,

Installation photograph, Chameleon Gallery, Hobart, 1983.

sensitivity, humour and, above all, imagination, was the *Upper-cutting and Closing Department*, a sound-installation by John Bennett and Bo Jones in a room of their own, a shallow store-room with its original shelving covering the walls, where the artists placed an array of old Singer boot-sewing machines. The sewing-machines were attached to a tape-recorder in the corner-shelves of the room, by a looped tape running from each sewing-machine reel to tape-recorder reel, to play the voices of old boot-makers who had worked in the factory for decades past, reminiscing about how it was. Behind the voices could be heard the sounds of the factory. In the corner opposite that set-up was a chair placed under the only light, a single globe. In the semi-darkness you could sit alone and listen to the recording, which ran for a couple of minutes continuously, and watch the old machines' phantom-run.

Even though this work might conjure up horrors of the factory, it at least offers the possibility of the romantic notion that art is magic, that by imagination the audience is stimulated to take part in the making of art. Somewhere in the process of art the audience must be accounted for, not as dummies to be manipulated, as in propaganda, but to be given the opportunity to be an accomplice.

Art now has gone past the concept of being seen to be merely about its internal dynamic or dialectic, without responding to social, economic and political developments of society. But still, art is required to be tricky to make a magical view.



Bo Jones and John Bennett, Upper Cutting and Closing Department, *installation, Chameleon Gallery, Hobart, 1983.*

BROADCASTING THE MESSAGE

ARTISTS' VIDEOS FOR THE ABC

Peter Callas

One of the unexpected activities associated with the recent Anzart encounter in Hobart was a plan to put to air some of the videotapes by artists represented in the general exhibition. The ABC agreed to compile a half-hour program of three tapes which would serve as an introduction to the independent use of a medium which is usually conceived and received only as a mass-audience proposition.

Surprisingly this is one of the few times any Australian television audience has had the opportunity to view video art.[1] Although the impending introduction of community television stations in Melbourne and Sydney will make the Hobart broadcast less of a rarity, the ABC here should at least be applauded for its willingness to venture into new territory. Broadcasting networks in larger Australian cities have remained resistant to the suggestion that they should air work by artists, on the grounds that such art doesn't have the requisite mass appeal. [2] In fact while it is planned to excerpt for *Sunday Spectrum* parts of a general documentary on Anzart which is also being produced by the ABC in Hobart, there is no possibility of the video art program being passed on to the mainland network, because the works themselves, being temporal media, can't be excerpted. Presumably even half an hour of video art is impossible to program into any pre-existing television structure.

One of the paradoxes of television is that although it is so often thought of as a mass medium it is essentially a private medium in the way it is received. The television set itself, and the message it exudes, are both part of the private domestic environment constructed by ourselves and our families, sometimes dangerously so. If one accepts this premise it might seem that there is really no problem in the idea of privately conceived and independently produced video material being aired on national television. The problem of course is that the process of privatisation and the popularity of television are largely dependent on the regularity and familiarity of its highly structured programming, eliminating the possibility of experimentation outside existing program formats.

Only one of the works selected for the video art program was actually designed for television. This is the tape *Aural/Oral Risk* by →↑→ who, in the guise of a pseudo-disco group called Asphyxiation, go through the motions of producing a typical *Countdown*-style clip. It is a tape which keeps surfacing in different contexts: it was first seen on Channel 0/28's *Rock Around the World* program in 1982 and was shown in the *Australian Perspecta* exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW earlier this year. After it appears in Hobart it will be next seen in SCAN Video Gallery in Japan as part of the *Continuum '83* exhibition of contemporary Australian art. No-one would be particularly surprised to see Asphyxiation on *Countdown* itself, though it is, as its title suggests, subversive to the industry to which that program caters.

It is rare for video art to have such a chameleon character. The choice of venue for artists working in this medium is usually limited to multi-media events, art galleries and video festivals. Of course not all artists involved in video want airtime. Video art is multi-faceted, differing from other media in that it has the potential to be broadcast as it is, rather than being documented and thus transcribed as must any other art medium which is presented on television. Video installations and the use of video in sculptural contexts, which cannot be broadcast, are specifically designed to reach a smaller audience.

Nevertheless some of the most fruitful work in video and video installation in Australia in this decade has been by artists who direct their work in some way to the various modes by which television is currently structured, rather than approach video art as a medium totally divorced from television. Inevitably any audience brings to the viewing of video art a certain set of expectations based on many hours of watching television. By restructuring the audiovisual language of television and recontextualising recognised images or modes of behaviour, this type of video art aims at challenging our aesthetic and ethical expectations of the medium and its relationship to the real world.

This pattern of working is especially evident in Jill Scott's tape *Constriction*, a 20-minute tableau in which an exquisitely patterned boa constrictor slithers with malevolent grace through a glass-fronted miniature set. The other occupants of this set, which is partitioned into camouflaged and non-camouflaged sectors, are several innocents: white mice which clamber curiously over and around the body of their destroyer. The artist, none too subtly, draws a parallel between the situation being witnessed and the destructive threat of nuclear power by intercutting an image of the Harrisburg reactor. The artist herself also appears lying supine beneath a large pane of glass. The condensation from her breath obscures her face as she attempts an action which mimics that of the snake: to swallow the white mice which wander on top of the glass.

Scott's use of glass as both barrier and container draws an interesting parallel with the "function" of the glass screen on a television-set, through which we see not only these actions but all images on television. In the opening sequence the constrictor is seen coiled atop a television set on which the tape itself is playing. In a sense these metaphoric devices are borrowed from literature and theatre (the book within the book and the play within the play) but the presentation of a disturbingly real event such as a snake swallowing a mouse, followed by the structured undermining realisation that we are powerless to prevent the "real" actions we are witnessing, amounts to a subtle but powerful questioning of the role television plays in our lives.

The final work in the program, Marr Ground's *Austausch/Exchange*, draws on similar themes of barriers and powerlessness. The fact that it was originated on 16mm film rather than on videotape makes it an example of artist's documentation rather than of video art. In this case the project related to a prepared action involving a blowlamp integrated with a series of images Grounds had painted on the Berlin wall. Although it is certainly no less contrived for deliberate effect than are the tapes by Scott and →↑→, its motivation is more ambiguous.

Interestingly, the ABC itself has already publicly criticised, on its *Nationwide* program, the Anzart project for its exclusivity at public expense. The question of to whom art should ultimately be addressed has never been resolved in this country, but it would seem that the broadcast of privately conceived video works might provide an interesting testing ground, not so much for the nature of art as for television itself.

Notes

1 Previous examples which come to mind are the broadcast of American video-artist Les Levine's *Koala Bear Tapes* during the 1979 Sydney Biennale, and of Gary Willis & Eva Schramm's *Is This What You Call Love?* as part of the 1979 Adelaide Arts Festival. Read *Art Network* , Spring 1980, p66.

2 An example was the unsuccessful attempt in 1981 by artist and critic Douglas Davis to involve ABN-2 in a three-country satellite television exchange between artists.

Lecturer at the Tasmanian School of Art, Peter Callas exhibited videos in the Sydney Biennale, 1982 *and* Australian Perspecta '81.