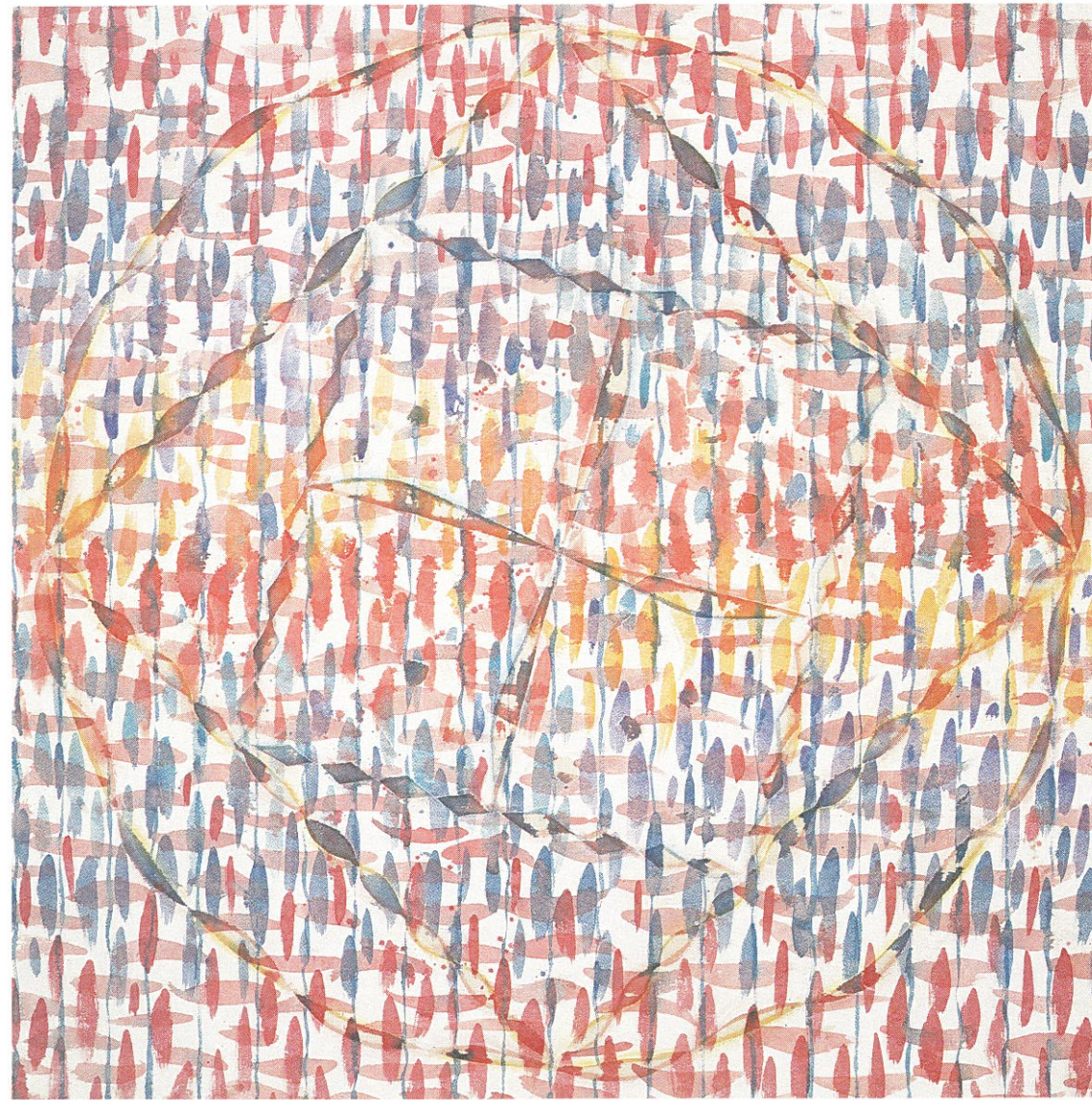


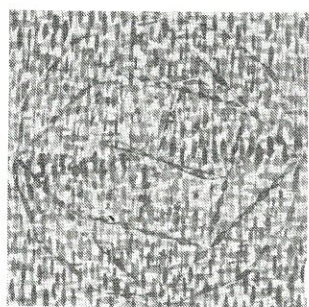
TRANSFORMING • ART •

VOL. 4 NUMBER 1 • 1992 • \$4.00

CREATIVITY • THE ARTS



• A NEW VISION OF NATURE •



Front cover: *The Fisherwoman and the Gardener: The Mirror* by Liz Coats 1990
107 X 107cms. Pigment and acrylic medium on cotton canvas. Photo credit: Tim Marshall

TRANSFORMING ART

ALL CORRESPONDENCE

P.O. Box 92,
Hazelbrook NSW 2779.

Tel. (047)586.373

Fax. (047)588.9431

EDITOR

Nigel Hoffmann

EDITORIAL ADVISORS

Mark Baxter

David Wansbrough

PRINTER

Printsmith, Sydney

ISSN 0817-2020

Transforming Art gratefully
acknowledges the assistance
of the Gavemer Foundation

• EDITORIAL •

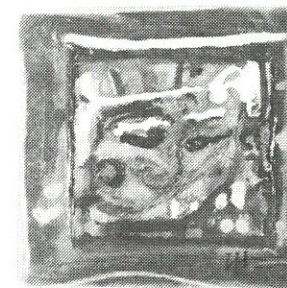
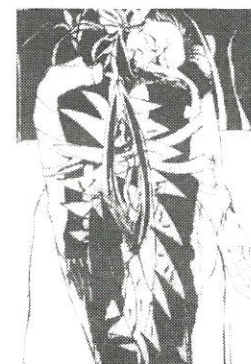
It is a truism that we need new ways of 'seeing' or 'understanding' nature; that need becomes more urgent the more we discover the destructive effects of the rift we have created between the human and natural worlds. It is usually said that this rift has resulted from our attitude of superiority to nature, from the idea that nature only exists to fulfil our needs. An alternative 'vision' is necessary, but if that is interpreted as something *we do to* nature then it is the old anthropocentrism reasserting itself again in a new guise, the result of the ingrained belief that everything revolves around the human consciousness. There is no 'leap' into a radically new perspective.

Yet is it conceivably possible to transcend the idea of the world as object to ourselves as subject? Dualistic thinking has divided up the whole world into opposites of which the humanity/nature division is but one example. Of particular relevance to art are the oppositions of spirit and matter, subject and object. The effects of dualistic thinking in general are currently being considered in relation to our ecological dilemma but it is of course easier to see the characteristics and effects of these oppositions than the means of overcoming them.

Yet dualism is only one form of world-conception. In traditional philosophy, both in the West and the East, there is the notion that the world is a *trinity*, that between all opposites there is a mediating intelligence or power. In the Christian Trinity only three can be 'whole' (Holy); the Holy Spirit is the mediating intelligence. This is linked with hermetic number philosophy where the 'Law of Three' is fundamental. The Hindu goddess Saraswati ('She of the stream') is a god of the 'between'; if Brahman is the created and uncreated world, She is its meaning. The ancient Greek god Eros was the power of love and wisdom, the archetypal harmoniser and creator, the reconciling power working between all things. As Plato said in *The Symposium*, "Do not suppose that...because Eros is not good and beautiful, he must on that account be ugly and bad, but rather that he is something between the two." Thus the image of the creator which appears in mythic form is a revealer of relationship and meaning.

I suggest that the rightful dwelling place of the artist is the realm 'in between'; that is true now and has always been so. We've come to conceptualise the world in black and white terms and part of the reason we've lost sight of the 'third' or reconciling force is that we've forgotten the myths and stories which brought it to expression. Yet that doesn't mean the arts have ceased to work in that way or that we cannot find new ways of articulating this role of the arts. For there can be no doubt that the arts have a vital part to play in the present transformation of our understanding of nature. Mythical thinking reveals that the responsibility of the artist as the harmoniser and reconciler is neither new nor of the past; it is everpresent.

Nigel Hoffmann



TRANSFORMING • ART •

LITERATURE

2 • LISTENING TO THE LAND
An interview with JAMES COWAN

12 • THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET
by PATTI MILLER

15 • AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE AS A SPIRITUAL PROBLEM
by DAVID TACEY

THE PERFORMING ARTS

22 • LUDDISM IN MUSIC
by LESLEY WHITE

28 • REFLECTIONS
by ROSS EDWARDS

THOUGHTS ON CREATING

32 • NATURE

BETWEEN THE ARTS

36 • INNER VISION
by STEPHEN CROSS

46 • ECOLOGY AND NARRATIVE
by MARILYN DENNES

THE VISUAL ARTS

50 • EXPLORING THE BURNING HOUSE
An interview with LIZ COATS

REVIEWS

57 • BOOK REVIEWS

TO CONTRIBUTORS

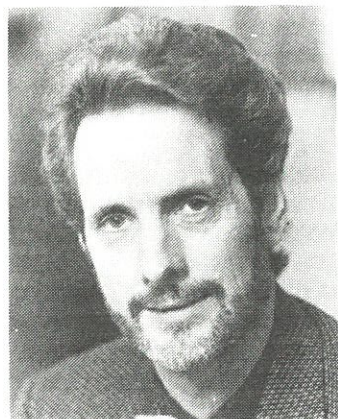
Please type contributions double space and send only photocopies of manuscripts. Preferably, contributions should be sent on a 3.5 inch disk with Apple Macintosh format. No responsibility can be taken for the loss or damage of any contribution, although every care will be taken.

• LISTENING TO THE LAND •

The Earth as a Post-modern Text

L I T E R A T U R E

An interview with JAMES COWAN



James Cowan is the author of a number of books on Aboriginal spirituality. For the past ten years he has worked among indigenous peoples in many parts of the world. His work attempts to explore the nexus between intellectuality, spirituality and nature. It is a concept that he believes indigenous peoples have always understood, and which we have lost sight of in the modern world. His books include *Mysteries of the Dreaming*, *The Aborigine Tradition*, *Letters from a Wild State* and *Sacred Places*.

Transforming Art: Could you talk about how you see yourself working as a writer in the future? I gather your attitude towards the validity of the traditional perspective, in the light of post-modernism, has changed somewhat.

James Cowan: Right now, I am conscious that there is no valid history that I can build upon as a writer any more. Indeed history as we know it is largely self-created. In a sense, it is its own dream. Acknowledging that history does not exist as an objective reality brings with it a certain kind of freedom, an exhilaration, of course. After a great deal of consideration, and in the light of my past respect for the traditional perspective (the metaphysical has been a cornerstone of my work), I began to see other opportunities opening up to me.

The challenge of the post-modern condition is to re-examine the nature of the past. Instead of seeing it as a fixed thing, it can also be seen as something fluid. For example, the Bible is no longer a 'complete' work, an historical milestone in terms of Christian metaphysics, but a book in which other Gospels have yet to be included. So far we have four Gospels as if implanted in psychic



Winbaraku, the sacred Dreaming centre devoted to the memory of Jarapiri, the Great Snake. He emerged from the ground here, in order to begin his world-creating journey north.

cement for two thousand years. No one has yet had the courage to write a fifth.

In other words, history should be a continuous process. It's not some point in time, a primary focus. In Islam, for example, the Koran was written in the 7th century, and after that all revelation has stopped. What comes after is exegesis, interpretation, re-evaluation. This is the nature of tradition, at least from a Western and Near-Eastern viewpoint — that all visionary knowledge is embalmed in time. It becomes history, text. This is the way it was done, and evermore shall be!

I now believe this way no longer provides the answers to the dilemma of contemporary thinking. The human spirit cannot be forced to remain in metaphysical moulds for so long. Such fundamentalism breeds fanaticism. The human spirit, however, though it cannot go backwards, cannot go 'forwards' either. These terms are meaningless, as they are the product of our lineal mode of thinking. They do not take into consideration cyclic modes of thought which we find in the East.

The whole idea is that there is an adventure on which we have embarked. We are not a ship permanently in dry-dock. As the poet Rilke

remarked: "A new start is a whole new beginning." The operative word here is 'beginning'.

TA: What do you think differentiates our culture from past centuries, even the beginning of this century? Why have we come to this point where we see history as dead?

JC: It's because we no longer hold to the validity of 'progress' any more. In the superficial sense, of course, in our technology and need for all things new, it still remains. But apart from this, we have no idea of where progress is taking us. There is no specified point in the future to which we are travelling. For instance, we've more or less discounted as fiction the idea a perfect society existing some time in the future, an Ideal City, so to speak. Without this point up ahead, there's no reason to accept history as the method by which we home in on this condition.

In the past, history affirmed the reality of an Ideal City, a Gold Age perhaps, as something to look forward to. But today that concept is no longer valid. We're no longer geared towards a particular point in time, the end of the Millennium, the Second Coming, say — these ideas which have actually given history its substance for past generations.

“Landscapes, I believe, don’t only give us woodchips and mineral ore-odes; they give us spiritual information, metaphysical knowledge. The great richness of the landscape, particularly the Aboriginal landscape of Australia, lies in its power to invoke gnosis — what I call chthonic gnosis.”

TA: Do you believe post-modern writers are aware of this?

JC: Very few of them. Most are still working in the area of nostalgia, which is a yearning for perceived certainties of the past. Much of today’s writing, satire in particular, is merely done as a *reaction* to the fact that there is no longer any history. Writers are saying: “We’re no longer moving towards an ideal future, so we will write novels or short stories or poems which celebrate something of the past.” I’m not talking about the actual content of the writing, but rather the implicit message. Many novels today might attempt to address the problem of spiritual malnourishment, but they do so by constantly referring to a past ‘ideal condition.’ In other words, they are not seriously trying to find new ways of addressing the problem.

TA: Most of your past writing has emerged from your explorations in the Australian landscape, and your contact with Aboriginal people. Often you seem nostalgic in the way you talk about it. Are your current ideas primarily a reaction to your former orientation and way of working?

JC: Exploring the landscape has been a part of my growth, yes. In acknowledging Aboriginality, I was attempting to return to roots which, as a child, I suspected were imbued with a certain perspective for me. Later, as a scholar and writer, I realised that certain aspects of this process could no longer sustain me. Returning to my roots in Aboriginality has, however, helped me to recognise important things along the way. Retracing my steps into my own origins as a ‘native being’, so to speak, into my Aboriginality, and exploring these through Aborigines, merely happened because these people were on my own doorstep. I could have easily done it through the Hottentot or the Iban people of Borneo!

The point is, I was no longer content with my Europeanness. It could not provide the answers I was looking for. I had to go beyond this state if I were to arrive at a state of being where I was able to re-Europeanise myself somewhere in the future. In other words, I felt that in Aboriginality lay the seeds to something *not yet achieved* by the modern psyche. Does this make sense?

TA: What kind of problems are you talking about?

JC: We as Europeans have been burdened with certain realities, in particular the Christian tradition of guilt and redemption, even our concept of Eden. The existence of a god-man called Christ is a part of our need to be saved. From what? one might ask. This set of ideas has been with us for a mere two thousand years. It’s a Johny-come-lately! Yet Aboriginality goes back perhaps hundreds of thousands of years. In other words, I too have recourse to this same experiential period in terms of my own growth. Therefore, why should my perception of humanity be confined to the past two thousand years? In exploring Aboriginality, I wanted to reach further back into my past. It was not so much nostalgic as necessary. I needed to understand what my foundations were made of.

TA: Did you believe that, the further you reached back, the more likely you were to discover something substantial and valuable? The idea that the ‘noble savage’ had something which we have lost?

JC: That was implicit in the search, yes. Though the idea of the ‘noble savage’ is again a part of nostalgia. My attitude towards Aboriginality is much more basic than that. I was trying to discover whether these people thought and perceived the nature of reality around them in a *fundamentally*

different way. I knew that Aborigines, indeed all aborigines of the world, had lived in their landscape for the past hundreds of thousands of years without over-exploiting it. Yet in the past two hundred years, we moderns have managed to change that equation altogether! It was clear that they thought of it in a way different from ourselves.

So by trying to understand how they conceived their landscape, and asking myself what was it that these people had seen *in* it in order to formulate their spiritual landscape, I was hoping to come to terms with their cosmology — and by implication, mine. In other words, I felt that the Dreaming was an objective condition in which I could participate along with Aborigines.

TA: Did you find what you were looking for?

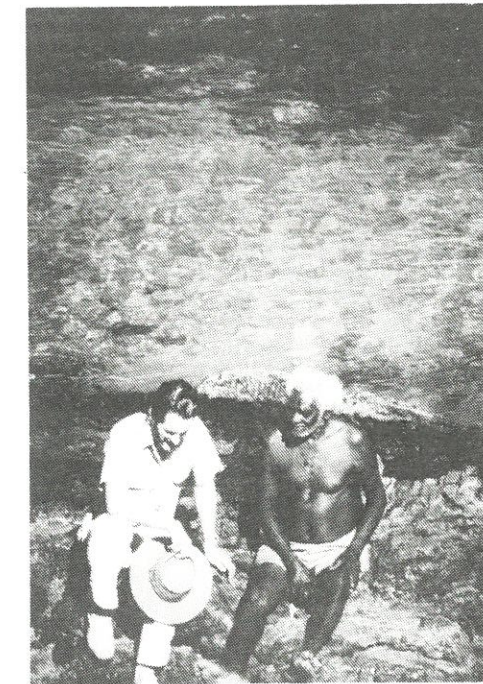
JC: Yes. I learnt to accept a reality about myself which was not possible to find by remaining exclusively European in my thinking. I realised that I was somehow much larger than a single culture, that I was the sum of all human experience going back to the origins of humanity. This was a significant revelation. Indeed, prior to this moment, I had seen myself as firmly a part of the European tradition, with everything outside of that

as being a kind of aberration of the human spirit.

For example, I might have considered Indian or Chinese culture as *interesting* but somehow not entirely valid when related to European culture. Now I see things differently. I am a part of a ‘world-being’ rather than being confined to some ethnic minority. The Aborigines taught me this, if not explicitly. Of course, they wouldn’t have argued in these terms. I simply learnt what they knew by rubbing shoulders with their primordial worldview.

In the process I discovered a new way of writing. I discovered that I had to be more extreme in my manner of working. I could not simply accept the comfort of desk and library as the engine-room of my work. I had to go out physically into the ‘plein air of the spirit’ and confront realities in a more rugged, sometimes difficult environment. In a sense, I felt I had to dig deeper, be more imaginative in my observations and assessments, allow myself to be hurt by experience, both physically and mentally. I am not talking here of *emotional* experience, but rather of experiencing true intellectual ascent.

Furthermore, I needed to travel into environments where it was possible to experience awe, to know fear, and so learn how to analyse



The author with a Ngaluma tribesman on the rocks at Pt Sampson, W.A.



Fertility figure, rock painting, Wellington Range, Arnhem land.

their effects upon me. Unlike a lot of contemporary writers, I strongly felt the need to enter into an experiential mode to complement my intellectual endeavours. I knew that living by proxy through TV had all but removed me from the prospect of confronting the inner turmoil of *not* knowing. As a writer, therefore, I needed to travel to Borneo, to Torres Strait or through the Australian Outback and talk with elders who possessed knowledge of the old ways. The last great journey for me, it seemed, was to travel back into *myth* where I could begin to experience those primordial realities contained therein.

These were the reasons for my journeying through the wild landscapes of the world.

TA: In a sense, our vast landscapes here in Australia lie there waiting for artists to make use of them. The great debate, however, is whether we should be leaving such environments untouched. Yet conversely this is a kind of exploitation of landscape, isn't it? At least it's not destructive.

JC: Landscapes, I believe, don't only give us woodchips and mineral ore-lodes; they give us spiritual information, metaphysical knowledge. The great richness of the landscape, particularly

the Aboriginal landscape of Australia, lies in its power to invoke gnosis — what I call chthonic gnosis. It is this great reservoir of earth wisdom that this country has to offer the world. In contrast, what we are so ready to ship off to the world is its minerals, what we find on or under the land. Yet what lies *in* the land we never see as a viable commodity, to put it in the crudest terms. In reality, however, it is this earth wisdom which could provide for us, and the world, in the way that it has provided spiritual wellbeing for the Aborigines for the past fifty or sixty thousands of years.

TA: Obviously that's what you've been trying to do in your work. It seems to be clear now why we haven't been able to tap into this resource; since the time of the first colony, we've been burdened with such a sense of separateness and difference from the Aborigines, and felt the land to be something alien and uncivilised. Have you found that a knowledge of metaphysical systems from other cultures has helped you 'dig' into our spiritual landscape?

JC: Of course. What you suggest is of real help in accessing the landscape. But in other ways, all we

have to do is to try to understand it as an Aborigine might. Aborigines, after all, have their traditions, and the tradition itself is derived from the land. The important point to realise is that the land is not impassive in this dialogue. The trouble is, we've lost the ability to listen to what it has to say. I mean, to listen with 'spirit ears', rather than ordinary ears.

I recall what an Aborigine said to me once when I was in a place called Winbaraku, a powerful sacred centre west of Haast Bluff. He said, "The reason why there's so few animals in the region now is because we don't sing the songs any more. Since we don't sing the songs, all the animals and birds have left." What this man was really telling me was that the songs of man, the ritual incantations, are as important to the wellbeing of the land as is the rain, wind and sun. In other words, the animals quit the region because there were no songs being sung to enhance *their* existence.

From such encounters I realised that the land or 'nature' is an active power capable of participating in a dialogue with man. It's not something passive, without a life of its own, a mere footpath. The other important lesson I learnt from Aborigines was that we are not *separate* entities within the landscape — but rather, we *are* the landscape looking at itself, contemplating itself. This is a fascinating concept indeed. In the Western tradition we see ourselves as separate from the landscape; hence we romanticise it. The Aborigines never romanticise it because they see themselves as a part of its chthonic field, its power.

So while Aborigines can recognise themselves as human identities as such, and of course say, "I'm an Aborigine, and that's a kangaroo," in a larger perspective, the sacred perspective, they are also able to see themselves as part of the metaphysical environment. Whereas we as Europeans are content to identify the kangaroo as a species, a non-placental animal, which reflects its Pleistocene origin etc., we also tend to see ourselves as placental beings with a soul. All these categories are part of a complexity of ideas which tend to separate us from our landscape, our spiritual terrain.

That the Aborigines choose not to see reality in this way came as a revelation to me. It freed me up to view the land in an entirely different way. Walking on it became an exhilarating, sometimes awe-filled experience. The power of place, what I call its telluric strength, began to resound within me like a bell. Everywhere I walked I could begin

to feel for the first time the power of the 'numen' at work within rock and earth.

For the past ten years as a writer in Australia I have been trying to make contact with the spirit of landscape, the 'open-air cathedral' as I called it in *Mysteries of the Dreaming*. Discovering this mystery — this *mysterium* in the true sense of the word — has been immensely rewarding. But of course you reach a point where what you have learnt has to be used and applied. In my most recent book, *Letters from a Wild State*, I tried to cross over the boundary separating Aboriginality and our age. I tried to juxtapose the ancient tradition of Aboriginal spirituality and nature with the dilemmas of our time. Prior to that point, I think my other books explored these concepts, if in a more scholarly way, of what I had already begun to see and experience in the bush in the company of my Aboriginal friends.

TA: Staying for a minute with ways you researched in the landscape — did you, or do you wander randomly in a landscape? Or do you seek out places of specific interest and use them to work with in a particular kind of way?

JC: Both. I sought out places which I believed might have a powerful sense of numen — Aboriginal sacred places, for example; places which had a living tradition associated with them, where the Aborigines were still performing ritual renewal at given times. But I also sought out places where the tradition had died in order to see what might occur when I immersed myself there as an 'imaginative artefact', so to speak. I wanted to see whether such a 'dead' landscape still had the power to impose upon me its mythic reality, its verity. I deliberately did this in the hope of learning how to 're-sensitise' myself to a point where the landscape meant something significant to me. I wanted to see whether it was possible to re-invigorate the mythic reality lying dormant in the land itself.

So there were two approaches. I would travel to traditional sanctuaries with the Aborigines, and they would relate their myths and songs to me. In this way the land would become 'alive' in the sense that its mythic dimension would be realised in my mind as an imaginal experience. In the same way, I would go to places like Carnarvon Gorge in Queensland or Mootwingee in N.S.W. and spend time within that landscape, knowing that I had to imagine its metaphysical reality, so to speak, because these places were ritually 'dead.' Both methods yielded up rich new insights. Each

method has its own advantages.

TA: Moving on to this transition you have been going through recently — could you tell me more about how your new ideas have evolved out of your past explorations of landscape?

JC: Let's look at my most recent book, *Messengers of the Gods*. I wanted to explore the dilemmas facing indigenous peoples in the world. (They're over 250 million of them, by the way). I felt for some time that they were not included in the dialogue pertaining to their own destiny. First World economics and the pressure of survival in Third World countries were largely determining their fate. No one had asked them about how they felt about the environmental destruction going on around them. I wanted to experience their concerns and let them have their say in my book.

More specifically, I wanted to find out the relationship between culture loss and the decline of mythic reality. So I went to the Torres Strait, Borneo and the Kimberley — three entirely different environments and cultures. In Borneo the Iban people's myth life was involved with birds, and these were being destroyed along with the trees because of logging. In the Torres Strait, their myth life was linked to the sea — and this was being poisoned by heavy metals washed down the Fly River from Ok Tedi mine in New Guinea. In the Kimberley, of course, mining and pastoralism has all but destroyed the sacred realm of the Wandjina.

In the light of what I said earlier about the death of history, I wanted to see whether mythic history could still survive. Whether the verities locked in myth were still relevant. This is not to suggest that the Bible or the writings of Descartes or Nietzsche or any other text in our culture is *not* relevant; I merely wanted to ask myself why they are *so* relevant, as if there were some sort of 'conspiracy of relevance' at work which confirmed these texts as more significant, say, than mythic reality.

Furthermore, I wanted to ask myself why modern man locates revelation at a given point in time. Should not revelation be going on *all the time* (ie. in the eternal present)? Indigenous people have taught me that it *is* going on all the time, that the Dreaming isn't something that happened in a historical context. In fact, it's something that's occurring today, right now! In contrast we Europeans think that everything of significance happened at a certain point in time, and that we are merely moving on from that point.

This is the crux of my transition: examining both my attitude towards traditional texts and my own writing as a symptom of it. It's not so much a crisis, but a revelation that I'm experiencing. In this respect, I think my writing has changed considerably.

TA: The idea of finding a 'new vision of nature': does this relate at all to the process of reassessment?

JC: Yes, because I believe that we in the West have removed nature from the thought process. Our intellectual life, our metaphysical life — these have always been about man and his relationship with Deity or with himself. Such a mode of thought is too constricting; it has left out much of what makes up the world. I mean — what happens to an ant, or a bird, or a rock-face? Why are these not considered in the equation? What I'm saying is that the whole of the world, all its peoples, its species, and its wonders are engaged simultaneously in an adventure which makes them all equal participants, rather than us as humans being the selected ones. We've considered the birds, the animals, the minerals etc. as if they were there for our own use, there to fulfil our ambition in terms of history, rather than having their own destiny to achieve.

I no longer see it like that any more; I *can't* see it like that. From one point of view, this new insight makes the argument exciting again. In a sense, one is metaphysically shaking hands with one's dog because we recognise that we are both a part of the same process. It sounds crazy, but we've been conditioned to see the world in terms of our own spiritual life only — that the dog has no spiritual life at all. I think this is the primary reason why we find ourselves in such an ecological mess. We have neglected the voice of that other world, the world of nature. There are millions of species on this earth, and yet we have never seen them as equal players in the game of life, except in mechanistic terms.

TA: Christian theologians are increasingly talking about the unique role of humans as 'stewards' for the rest of God's creation, as if all other forms of life need our constant care and protection. Is this the kind of thing you are saying?

JC: In one sense, of course, everything does need looking after *by* us. But in another sense I believe nature is, in fact, looking after *us*! We have always

assumed that it is a one way process, that we're here to oversee nature, when in truth nature has been caring for us all along! Through modernism, we have separated ourselves so much from this concept, that we actually believe nature has nothing to do with us. Baudelaire felt this strongly. Hence the separateness, the alienation we feel in our relationship with the Australian landscape, with the bush.

The truth is, that left to its own devices, nature would get on very well without us — up to a certain point, anyway. Since we are both involved in the same cosmological adventure, we are both dependent upon one another. In terms of my work, this new understanding has made me realize how artificial modern literature is. For the most part it is a reflection of the individual ego, not any cosmological imperative. As a writer, then, I have tried to abstract myself as far as possible from my work. Somehow the words have to get on paper without me imposing myself too much on the process. It's difficult to achieve, but I think I'm getting there.

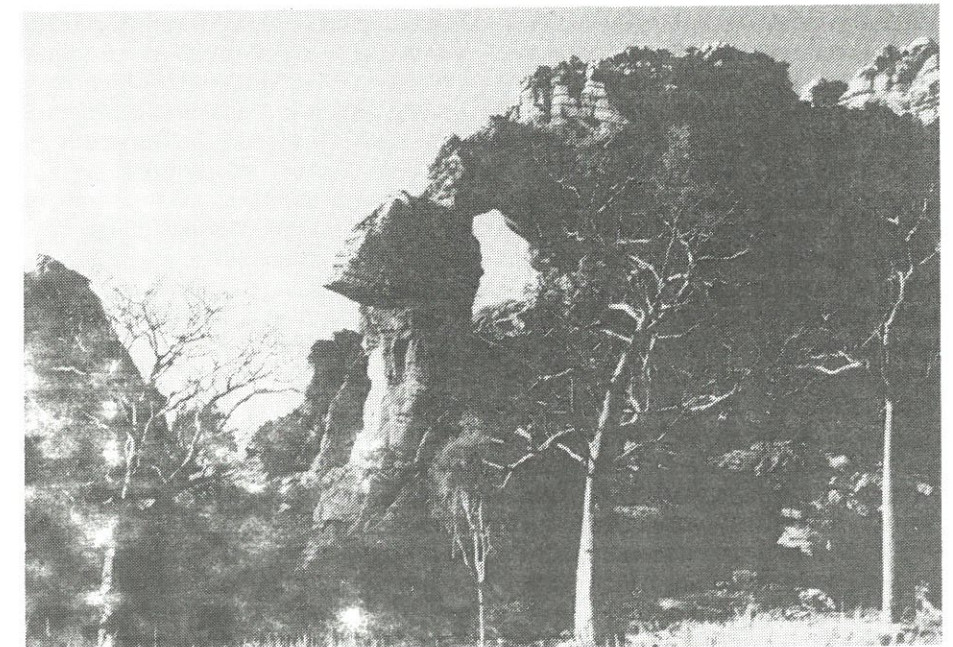
TA: Are you talking about the 'stream of consciousness technique' which has been used in all modern art, including 'action painting'?

JC: No. In fact, action painting conforms to the

Romantic ideal, since it implies the importance of the role of personality in the activity itself. I mean, my personality has no role to play in the writing process. Instead I become a conduit for certain verities and intensities that are not necessarily my own, but belong to all men. In a sense, one is writing as a collective, although through the individual, in a way that affirms the reality of revelation.

Aborigines, for example, taught me that the myth is both a creation of man and a creation of Deity. Man is only the conduit for this myth. The myth expresses a noetic reality for these people which was granted to them by the spirits, the Sky Heroes. The myth exists independently of any person, even though men constantly identify with it. That's what I want to achieve as a writer: a mythic quality. This is exciting to me because it suggests that there is no division between theology, revelation and literature. In a sense, it's putting the idea of Deity back into literature, which would be anathema to the modernist who sees God dead, in line with Nietzsche's pronouncement.

However, for a post-modernist, I think this is the only way to go if we are to circumvent the present impasse. Novels, for example, which constantly reiterate personal dilemmas in terms of



Section of the Dreaming track of Marlu, the Great Kangaroo, near Windjan Gorge, Kimberley region, W.A. Marlu moved across this country, disseminating law.

social values are already outdated. Though they may be 'modern' in one sense, in reality they are part of a yearning for the ideal of the apotheosis of the individual, which is very much a Romantic ideal.

TA: Do you subscribe to the view that the novel reached its pinnacle with writers like George Eliot and Dickens, and has been on the decline ever since?

JC: In a way, yes. The contemporary novel represents a lingering nostalgia for a composite view of the world. In reality we no longer believe in this any more. Perhaps we need to put the novel aside as a defunct medium, just as the epic lay was put aside by poets in the past. In any event, the novel today is an intimate cog in the economic wheel. It is there to make money, not to convey ideas. Defoe invented it; maybe it's time for someone to invent another literary form. Homer didn't write novels; he wrote divine spiritual tracts which others had placed before him in terms of folk literature. He merely acted as a conduit. Which reinforces what I'm saying: writers and painters need to give up their precious individual encounter with the world, and see it more in terms of its collective, or communal possibilities.

TA: One way I think of the modern movement is that of a vortex, a great sweeping movement which has cleared away the past, so that something new might emerge. In other words, it's more important for what it makes possible, than for what it is in itself. Does this relate at all to your own thinking on the arts?

JC: Yes. It is a moment of great challenge and liberation for the artist. Instead of seeing this point in time as a nadir, a time of impasse as expressed in Rothko's black paintings, we now need to see it as the moment when we grasp the flame again. Acknowledging the end of the technological society is a part of this challenge. From now on the writer and artist need to come up with new concepts, new beliefs, and new patterns if they are to provide sustenance for the future. To me, this makes our time extremely exciting. We're beginning again; the page is blank of text. We have enough information at our fingertips, the past is there to draw upon as an imaginative possibility, but we're not going to let either become a burden on our shoulders any more. Let's face it, we've been like Sisyphus for the past 2000 years! We've dragged

the stone up the hill and let it roll down to the bottom again. This tragedy has consumed us. My argument is that instead of letting the stone roll down, let's look for other possibilities for the human spirit. Instead of bearing this sense of guilt and evil, this sense of our fallen nature around with us all the time, let's leave it at the bottom!

When I talk with old people in indigenous societies, they never talk about carrying evil around, about their fallen condition. Of course, they know it exists in terms of their own faults, but they're not obsessed by it. They know there is a way of rapprochement — to invoke the gods, to enact the rituals, to involve themselves in a collective ceremony. I've learnt from these peoples that innocence does exist, even if it doesn't have to imply immortality. You can live innocently and yet die. Only we Europeans link mortality with evil.

TA: But the moderns thought that they had taken the risk, that they had gone as far out on the limb as possible. That's what the whole modern movement has been about — clearing the ground, breaking with tradition, with the established verities and ways of doing things. So what is the difference between what modernism has been about, and what you are saying is the possibility for post-modernism?

JC: Of course modernism has been exciting and challenging in its own way. But it did not *build* anything new; it broke things apart. From a traditional perspective it's important to build anew. I acknowledge that the moderns had a job to do. Before that it was the Romantics whose *crie de coeur* was that of confronting the Industrial Revolution, as well as the impoverished condition of neo-Classicism. They wanted to toss these aside. For us today, the challenge is to toss aside the facile certainties generated by technology and science and develop a *new* metaphysical perspective based on the great verities of the past, the non-historical past.

TA: Nature seems so soft in comparison to the world of technology. As well, the arts seem to be more fascinated with keeping up with technological changes than in seeking out a new vision of nature. Even though there is a great deal of talk about saving the environment, we seem to be heading into a future burdened with an even greater division between human society and nature than we have now.

JC: The idea that nature is soft is an illusion. It is a hard, tough thing. One earthquake, one typhoon can crush all machinery, all technology. Nature has its own armoury. More importantly, I was talking about the spiritual confrontation with nature. There were places out there in the bush, for example, which I found so powerful that it was impossible to sleep near them at night. The numinosity that arose out of these landscapes forced me to leave. This gave me a new respect for the Australian landscape. Unlike the industrialised landscape of England, say, where you realise that the land has died, or is in hibernation, the Australian landscape still has the power to express itself. In contrast, when you drive through New Jersey or the Ruhr, you know that the earth underneath is mummified, is in shrouds. But something inside tells you that one day it is going to rise up and push us all aside. It cannot stand the suffocation of existing in such a passive

environment. There's no ritual on such land, no incantation, no song. It's this side of tradition I still support and value — that man's relationship with the earth is a partnership. The only way we can come together is through ritual and song. Ritual is like the placenta between man and earth through which oxygen passes, spiritual oxygen. I don't know who created ritual in the first place — did the earth create ritual, or did man? It doesn't really matter. I see a passivity in a landscape like England because the great Druidic edifices or the churches are no longer populated by people who can make the songs, who can invigorate the spirit of the land.

This is the great challenge for the arts in Australia, and indeed the whole industrialised world — to bring back the songs. For people living here today the great teachers are the Aborigines. They alone hold the key to spiritual renewal and a renewal of the earth. ≈



Cecil Collins *The Wounded Angel*, Mixed media on board, 30 X 36ins, 1967.

• THE GROUND BENEATH MY FEET •

LITERATURE

by PATTI MILLER

The ground beneath my feet has gone. The literal ground I mean; the flat paddocks stretching back towards the egg-shaped rock, the dry creek with many names, the hills and red earth; my blood's country has been sold. It couldn't be helped, my father was ill for a long time and could no longer manage the heavy work of farming.

I am returning to that country to see if anything is left. As I drive westwards towards my place, I continually glance at the photograph taped to the dashboard, each glance taking in the paddocks and wheatshed and the Rock. The shape of this land was my place and my story; it told me that I was first and fundamentally an element of this landscape. I have been dispossessed and I am damaged, my flesh feels wrenched from my bones. I sob uselessly as I drive, wondering how my heart's place can be owned by another.

I didn't always know it as my place. As a child my mind was filled with green English tales, and when I set out across the spikey stubble of the wheat paddocks, I was searching for velvet meadows and merry streams. But from the beginning there was one place in that landscape which possessed me, although it was not described in any stories I had read. It was called Baron Rock, or that was what my family named it. I wish I knew what name the Wiradhuri people gave it.

The Rock was a basalt dome which rose unexpectedly out of the valley plain behind our farm and looked from the front like a huge bent egg. Approaching from the side, one could see it tapered out into a low rise so that it looked more

like an animal, head up and leaning back on its haunches. It could be climbed from the back, up its spine and along the ridge to where the dome reached high. Near the top there was a crack in the monolith. The first one across the frightening gap could sit in the natural throne formed by an impression in the rock at the summit. It looked as if a god had pressed a thumb into it while it was still molten. We, my brothers and I, walked towards it across our back paddock. We skirted along the edge of the oat paddock, climbed through the boundary fence and followed sheep paths through the burrs and lucerne. There was always an edge of excitement in our conversation, a feeling of anticipation of mysteries. Once we were over the creek which divided the further paddock we were in less familiar country.

Then we called out and the Rock called back to us.

"Hallo," we called.

"Hallo," answered Baron Rock.

"We are coming."

"We are coming," answered the Rock.

We laughed, delighted that the Rock spoke to us in cool sweet tones. We walked faster. We were coming nearer the only difference in the landscape for miles and miles. The heart's attraction towards difference in the landscape, a monolith disrupting the plain, a creek cutting through the paddock, must reflect the drawing power of hidden mysteries. Only where the fabric is torn, is there a chance of revelation.

Our hearts became lighter, our strides faster.

There was laughter and amazement at the magic of shouting rocks, and we exchanged childish theories on the working of echoes. Then we ran. One of us started to run, then we all raced, leaping over Bathurst burrs and skeleton weed, not noticing the scratches until later. It was impossible to saunter towards the Rock. It was as if it contained a magnet.

At the top it was always windy. It took your breath away. It struck you silent. The land lay below and all around. It breathed into you.

It puzzles me that I always submitted to its silence, that I never tried to possess it with picnics or inscribe it with names. Some places will have us listen to their songs despite the noisiest stories running through our heads.

It's only lately that I've discovered the stories which named the landscape around me, that could have helped me see each rock and low hill and gully, and the animals and birds which inhabited them. The original people of this landscape, the Wiradhuri, had stories which named everything. What would it have been like if I had heard their stories of our place first?

I wonder about the Wiradhuri who walked across the land before my family took the ground from under them. Not just the ground; their stories lost, their tongue embalmed, their sacred symbols hacked down. How did any of them survive? They were silenced by the loud European story, but they lived and found ways to speak in the silence. Their laughter in the streets of the town mocked all the white stories; and they walked loose-limbed as if they owned the place.

They belonged to this place before I did. I would like to be able to say "they are my ancestors". I want to weave my story back into theirs, mend the horrible gash. I want to find a place in which we both have known we were at home. I imagine an ancestor; his name is Kari Yalla, which means 'speaking the truth'.

Kari Yalla is walking past the kurrajong tree which still grows on the farm side of the creek. The air ripples, an undulation in the day like the wavy lines carved on his chest and a space opens in time. He lifts off the ground, hovers above it, his knees drawn up.

He moves higher over the trees. He sees patterns beneath him. The women and children sit around the smokey fire near the water-hole in a half circle. The smoke coils. The dry creek winds between the hills on the horizon. There are circles, waves, half-moons; from above the world is flat and

patterned. He is airy and sheathed in strength.

He moves higher over the Rock which rises massively out of the plain. It can be seen from a day's walk away. He is high like Mudgegong, the Eaglehawk, the destroyer. He knows Mudgegong's power and cruelty; he has seen him swoop on smaller birds, on animals, savouring the taste of blood. The destroyer; the darkness inside a man which wants to devour for the sake of possessing; in the soul of every man and woman lives Mudgegong who desires to destroy others to prove he exists.

Kari Yalla moves lower and touches down on the Rock. He sits in a curved hollow in the top of the Rock and gazes out over the land. He can see as far as he can walk in a day. The Rock rises in the centre of an oval plain which stretches to a low rim of hills. He can see and hear the whole land; the red earth where the creek makes a wound cutting through the grey-green trees; the low humming sound of the land, like bees murmuring of the she-oak shushing of next summer. He listens and touches all of it. He is still.

The wind high about the Rock blows cool on his skin. The tops of the trees wave in the wind like a stormy sea, the sea of the Dharuk people, the sea the giant white spirit-birds came floating across. The story had passed along to the Wiradhuri.

His heart is large and light-filled. He sings in a wailing voice to the spirit of the Rock. He isn't afraid of Mudgegong. His spirit is light. He lifts off the Rock and moves cleanly through the air, not floating as a feather does, but strongly, following his heart.

But still Kari Yalla lost everything. My family took it from him in the end. They were convicts who had been dispossessed of their own country, thrown out as refuse. And now it is taken from me. I cannot exist without my ground. I am returning to that country to see if there is anything left for me.

I drive out over the mountains towards the edge of the endless plains to the town, built at a place the Wiradhuri called Binjang. Then I drive out towards the land where I was born which has lost all the names I knew it by. Each turn of the road is utterly familiar. In childhood it was a narrow corridor of the known between the farm and town. I remember how close strangeness was; how one turn off the road could bring me into the unknown, into infinite possibility.

I stop the car and look at the Rock behind the farm and realise that I cannot see it. Its shape is

fundamental to me and so I cannot see what it looks like, just as I cannot see what my mother looks like. It is the shape without which I have no being.

I look at it again and realise the Rock has the shape of a lingham, a huge ellipsoid lingham, slightly off-centre, rising out of the ground. It is the Hindu symbol of primordial form; the sphere lengthening into an ellipsoid, an egg; the beginning of one dividing itself in two. For Hindus, it is the symbol of the beginning of creation, the first duality from which came all the multiplicity of things in the universe. I have learned it was the shape the Wiradhuri imprinted on the ground under their stamping feet in the bora circle which used to be on the land we both lost.

I turn down the lane into the farm and I feel the shape of the land enfold me. Here, the lie of the land is perfect. It is glad to see me. It doesn't care if I am not here, but it knows I belong. Nothing has been taken from me; I fit in this country.

I am vast as the land I was born in, as harsh

and cracked and impossibly beautiful. I contain creamy-yellow grasses and hills and dusty stringybarks along sandy creeks. I am full of space and often parched for water. I am occasionally fruitful. In me the line of low hills is drawn with exquisite clarity. My skin is an illusion for the landscape is within and without. I live in sunlight and shade, in storms and windless days, in flat despair and unspeakable beauty.

The unsymmetrical egg-shape of the Rock is the guardian of the land and everything within sight of it; it lies in the centre; it is under my mind and it means I am safe. It sings silently. It sings to me that I am part of its story. It doesn't care who owns it for it owns whomever it pleases. I take off my shoes and walk along the old wheel tracks leading to the house.

I can feel the hard red earth under my feet. ≈

Patti Miller is a writer who lives in the Blue Mountains near Sydney.



Enid Ratnam Keese *Mutation II*, paper drypoint.
78 X 53 cms, 1992.

• AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE AS A SPIRITUAL PROBLEM •

Lawrence and the Aboriginal Spirit of Place

L I T E R A T U R E

by DAVID TACEY

Dr. David Tacey is a senior lecturer in literature at La Trobe University, where he also teaches courses on Jungian psychology. David is co-director of the newly formed research-based Centre for Archetypal Studies at La Trobe. He is author of *Patrick White, Fiction and the Unconscious* (Oxford, 1988) and of many essays and articles which explore literature, culture and society through a Jungian perspective.

organic thing but that it hung as it were in mid-air, above the earth:

There was the vast town of Sydney. And it didn't seem to be real, it seemed to be sprinkled on the surface of a darkness into which it never penetrated. (p.8)¹

D.H. Lawrence saw non-Aboriginal Australians perched arrogantly, if rootlessly, upon ancient, archaic, sacred ground. He was wryly amused, when he visited here in the 1920s, by the contrast between the confidently secular, busy, yet spiritually hollow people and the still, silent, yet spiritually powerful landscape. He felt that Australian society was unreal, that it was not an

Elsewhere in *Kangaroo* (1923) he writes that, after dark, the spurious white society seemed to disappear into a void as the primal landscape reasserted itself: "As soon as night came, all the raggle-taggle of amorphous white settlements disappeared, and the continent of the kangaroo reassumed its strange, unvisited glamour, a kind of virgin sensual aloofness" (p.30).

Lawrence's great theme in all his writings, regardless of their geographical setting,

was the rootlessness and alienation of modern man. For Lawrence, humanity had attempted, in its intellectual arrogance and hubris, to cut itself off from nature and primal instinct. He felt, as did Freud and Jung, that consciousness had dangerously disengaged itself from the deep unconscious, and that it lacked any compensatory or grounding connection to the vital, life-sustaining world below the conscious mind. Western culture, for modernist writers and thinkers, had turned into T.S. Eliot's "unreal city" by virtue of its denial of the archaic, passionate ground of human existence. Lawrence, as several detractors of his Australian novels have pointed out, seized upon the evident discontinuity between Australian society and landscape in order to add further dimension to his universal theme. However the universality of this theme does not detract in any way from its local, and specifically Australian, significance. Far from imposing his vision artificially and externally upon the Australian scene, as some have asserted, it has always seemed to me that Lawrence understood Australia and Australians, despite his brief visit here, from within. He was no mere ordinary tourist, but a writer of acute sensibility and intuition, who could rapidly gain a personal understanding of the spirit of the place in which he was living.

For Lawrence, human society is nourished and fed by two sources: the spirit of nature (vital energy) and the spirit of culture (tradition). White Australian society, he argues in *Kangaroo* and in *The Boy in the Bush* (1924), has little or no access to either source. Australia has been unable to import its spirit from its European origins. Despite what Australian church leaders and promoters of high culture have believed, the spirit of culture and religion is not especially transportable or moveable. We have the outward trappings of European civilisation here, but the essence of it did not quite survive the journey. To Lawrence, Australian society seemed like an uninspired imitation or replica of life lived elsewhere:

Even the heart of Sydney itself — an imitation of London and New York — without any core or pith of meaning. Business going on full speed: but only because it is the other end of English and American business.

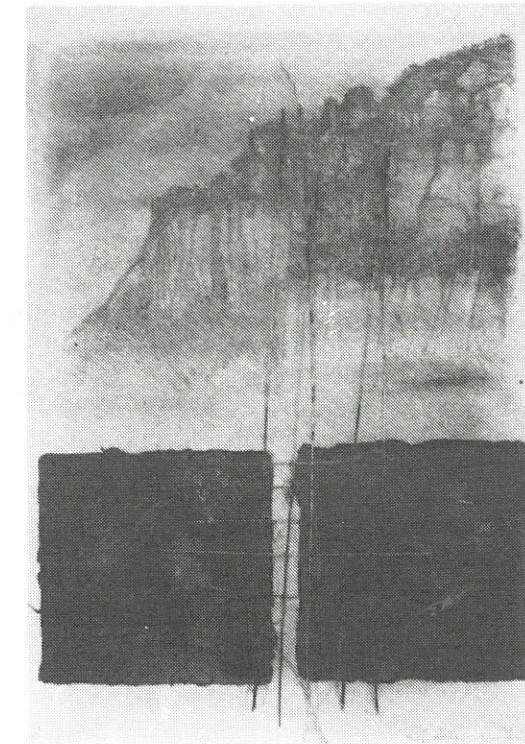
The absence of any inner meaning: and at the same time the great sense of vacant spaces. (p.24)

He went on to say that the "inside soul" of Euro-Australians "just withers and goes into the outside, and they're all just lusty robust hollow stalks of people" (p.143). As if to compensate for this felt hollowness, Australians seemed to Lawrence to be hell-bent on the pursuit of material wealth and consumer goods. Australians want more and more money and material security, as if transferring their desire for "more" life and spiritual substance into material terms. But for Lawrence, "even the rush for money has no real pip in it":

When all is said and done, even money is not much good where there is no genuine culture. Money is a means to rising to a higher, subtler, fuller state of consciousness, or nothing. (p.24)

The other source for spiritual nourishment is from "below", not from the "higher" world of religion, tradition, and culture, but from the lower world of nature, vital energy, and the earth. If we are unable to tap the higher sources of the Christian spirit (which for Lawrence had dried up in Europe itself), there is also the darker, pagan, chthonic spirit of nature. But the inorganic, artificial character of Australian society makes it difficult to draw anything from the earth beneath it or from the natural world around it. This, nevertheless, was the spiritual source which Australians would have to learn to tap, however problematical their current spiritual and psychosocial situation.

A further complication arises: the land itself, the aboriginal spirit of place, resists the society that has been foisted upon it. Not only are Euro-Australians unrelated to the land by their own doing, but they are spiritually shunned by the new-old land. Most Australians, Lawrence felt, are unaware of this deeper alienation or exclusion, but they would have to become aware of it in their ultimate quest for national identity and spiritual maturity. Lawrence continually commented on the "strange *unvisited* glamour" and on the "virgin sensual *aloofness*" of the landscape. In archetypal terms, Australia is constructed in ways reminiscent of the Greek deity Artemis, who was virginal, wild, untouchable, remote, steely, and resistant to the advances of men. Except that Australia is not youthful like Artemis, but archaic and old, like a virginal or untouched crone. A.D. Hope describes this double kore/crone aspect well when he writes of the land as "a breast / still tender but within the womb is dry".²



Inga Hunter *Rock Face* Handmade cast cotton paper, canvas, embroidery, paint, pastel, bracken stalks, 45 X 55 cms,

In *Kangaroo* Lawrence's fictional persona Richard Somers announces: "This land always gives me the feeling that it doesn't *want* to be touched, it doesn't *want* men to get hold of it" (p.312). In *The Boy in the Bush* Jack Grant declares that "Nobody could actually *belong* to the country" (p.8).³ Lawrence was aware, as Judith Wright became aware after him, that the conqueror of foreign ground cannot fully or finally conquer the *spirit* of the place that he has appropriated in political and material terms. At this deeper level he remains the outsider, and the spiritual curse upon the invader-conqueror is that he will never *feel* at home or at peace in the stolen territory. He will be plagued, as Jack Grant puts it, by the "feeling of remote unreality" (p.8). The obsessional pursuit of identity of many Australians, both before but especially after Lawrence's visit, is symptomatic of this cultural unease and spiritual malaise, and no nationalist program or intellectual formula will put an end to the restless search until the *spiritual* basis of the problem is confronted.

Lawrence responded with ambivalence to the spiritual otherness of Australia. On the one hand

he found it exhilarating, exotic, primeval. On the other hand he found it threatening, disintegrative, overwhelmingly "other". This ambivalence runs throughout both his Australian novels:

The distances were clear and mellow and beautiful, but soulless, and nobody alive in the world. The silent, lonely gruesomeness of Australia gave Jack the blues. (*Boy*, p.70)

And the vast, uninhabited land frightened him. It seemed so hoary and lost, so unapproachable. (*K*, p.8)

What I wish to emphasise is that Lawrence's characters, and Lawrence himself, felt and suffered from the spiritual alienation that is the subject of the Australian novels. It is not at all the case that Lawrence represented Euro-Australians as blind or ignorant, as victims of a spiritual malaise wholly of their own making. Australians are confronted by an inherently difficult psychospiritual situation, and Lawrence has no simple solution to present us.

Somers-Lawrence describes a moment of

"To fully experience Australian landscape, not merely to look at it as a tourist, but to experience its psychic atmosphere as a sensitive artist, is for Lawrence to encounter something strangely alien, something distantly remote and almost non- or even anti-human."

terror in the Western Australian landscape, which causes him to flee from those environs in a state of panic. (This fictional account is entirely autobiographical, as we learn from Lawrence's letter to Katherine Susannah Prichard.)⁴

It was so phantom-like, so ghostly, with its tall pale trees and many dead trees, like corpses, partly charred by bush fires: and then the foliage so dark, like grey-green iron. And then it was so deathly still. Even the few birds seemed to be swamped in silence.... He walked on, had walked a mile or so into the bush, and had just come to a clump of tall, nude, dead trees, shining almost phosphorescent with the moon, when the terror of the bush overcame him.... There was something among the trees, and his hair began to stir with terror, on his head. There was a presence. (p. 9)

It is too easy for intellectual readers to laugh dismissively at Lawrence's encounter with the spirit of place. It is, for a start, extremely difficult to present an experience such as this in fictional terms. How to capture the sense of a remote, "hoary", indifferent spirit of place without seeming to present this "presence" as a sort of literal ghost, or as a supernatural force, or a swamp-dwelling Bunyip? How to be true to one's intuitive feeling in the bush without creating ludicrous melodrama or an implausible "close encounter"? Still, plausible or not, Lawrence strove to present the ambivalent nature of *his* encounter with the Australian "spirit of place" (p. 9). To fully experience Australian landscape, not merely to look at it as a tourist, but to experience its psychic atmosphere as a sensitive artist, is for Lawrence to encounter something strangely alien, something distantly remote and almost non- or even anti-human.

There is an enormous psychic gap between the consciousness of Europeans and the primal reality of Australian landscape. The gap is so great that consciousness could be swallowed up if it attempted to cross the gap in search of psychic roots in the local soil. Australian literature is full of many examples of the fate of those "poor wretched souls" (as Lawson calls them) who fall into the gap and who become psychically and/or physically overwhelmed by place. Literary scholars can always find logical reasons for why these numerous characters go mad or disintegrate: it is said that they suffer from loneliness and human deprivation, from extreme isolation, from depression and melancholia, from "bush-

madness". But the poet Randolph Stow gets it right when he says that such figures "die of landscape".⁵ Or in my own language, they fall into the yawning gap that separates consciousness and society from the aboriginal spirit of place. They suffer such an onslaught from the primordial unconscious that the over-civilised and inorganic European consciousness is disintegrated. European consciousness has not, because of its long and slow development in European soil and relative independence from the lower depths of the unconscious, been exposed to such archaic levels for some time. Lawrence felt that the Australian spirit of place was "too far back" and that he could "not reach so awfully far". There is a great risk involved in crossing that gap, and Lawrence felt he was not, as artist or as man, equal to the task.

But the Euro-Australians who live here will have to risk the encounter. Robust poets such as Neilson, Judith Wright, and Les Murray have accepted the challenge and survived; more than survived, they have flourished. For once the archaic spirit of the continent is contacted it can act, not only as a force of disintegration, but as A.D. Hope knew, as a "savage and scarlet" spirit which is capable of bringing a profound psychical rebirth, a deepening, and regeneration. And it is a "savage and scarlet as no green hills dare"⁶; in other words, it brings a profound and primordial awakening which is not possible in the cultivated and developed mental climate of Europe. One has to dig too far down into European soil to find a similar, or equal, level of primordiality. It is Australia, not Britain, which will give rise to a future profound awakening of the indwelling spirit. Lawrence knew this, and although he felt "glad to have glimpsed it"⁷, he did not feel mentally or physically strong enough to participate in it himself.

Lawrence knew that a rapprochement with the spirit of place would necessitate real sacrifice:

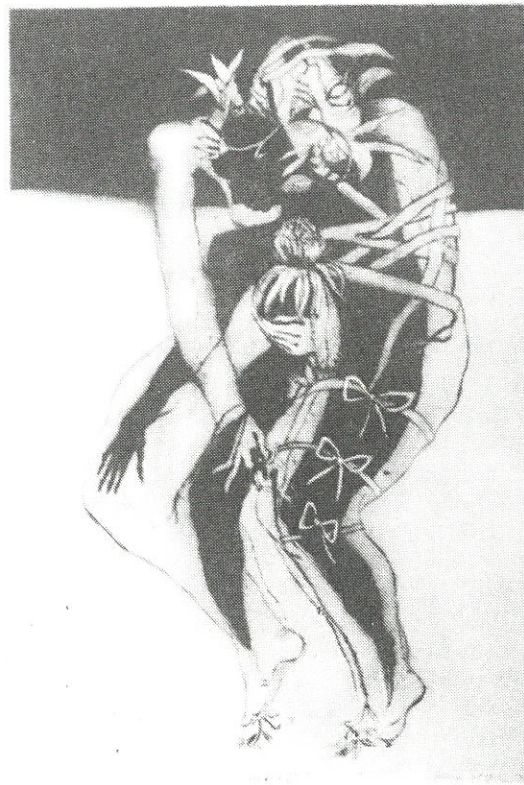
"It always seems to me" said Somers, "that somebody will have to water Australia with their blood before it's a real man's country. The soil, the very plants seem to be waiting for it". (p.82)

This is a controversial and much-discussed passage, which often seems to me to be misunderstood by Australian readers. Lawrence is not necessarily providing a rationale for ritual blood-sacrifices to the earth, either at Uluru, Hanging Rock, or elsewhere. He is speaking

metaphorically, poetically, and mythologically about the sacrifice that is required before real contact with the spirit of place is possible. "Blood" is a key Lawrentian symbol, and it generally means psychic energy, libido, the pulse of life. Something primal, red, and living in us will have to be offered to the earth before we can connect with its "savage and scarlet" spirit. Like must meet with like, and we will have to reach down into ourselves to find something which is parallel to what we have to come to terms with. Encountering the spirit of place is at once an encounter with our own lower depths; it necessitates a descent or *nekya* into the psychic underworld to find there the red primordial wellspring which can "meet" the genius of this country and heal the dissociation between society and nature.

From this perspective, the sacrifice required of Euro-Australians is the sacrifice of their obsessive attachment to what Lawrence calls "cerebral" or "mental consciousness".⁸ The contact with lower depths requires a certain psychic fluidity, a shift in human identity and a loosening of the tie to the rational and conscious mind. Not that the rational mind itself has to be sacrificed. Lawrence would have none of that and would have regarded it as cultural regression. It is simply the *attachment* to the rational mind which has to be sacrificed, so that a psychic journey and a deepening can begin, both for the individual and for Australian society as a whole. The rational mind and the ego have to remain intact as we deepen our lives and our culture in the direction of the dark primal ground. If ego-consciousness is not respected and maintained, then we fall into the gap because we are no longer grounded in social reality. We then become what Lawrence elsewhere calls "primitivists" and "cultural renegades".⁹ Lawrence himself is constructed as primitivist and renegade by those who fail to appreciate that he advocated both a descent to the unconscious and a maintaining of social and worldly consciousness. As I have indicated, however, Lawrence chose not to conduct his own descent here, but opted for New and Old Mexico, and various parts of Europe, to be the loci of his own psychic journeying.

But if Australians will not sacrifice for the sake of psychic deepening, they will perforce *be sacrificed* to a deepening gone wrong. This is Lawrence's chilling and cautionary warning to Euro-Australian society. If we do not voluntarily attempt to explore the psychic underworld, we will be involuntarily dragged into it, with destructive and negative consequences.



Enid Ratnam Keese *Mutation I*, paper drypoint, 1992.

What was the good of trying to be an alert conscious man here? You couldn't. Drift, drift into a sort of obscurity, backwards into a nameless past, hoary as the country is hoary. Strange old feelings wake in the soul: old, non-human feelings. And an old, old indifference, like a torpor, invades the spirit. (p. 198)

If Australians remain unaware of their need to make a spiritual adjustment to the land, the place itself will act like a lead weight upon consciousness, drawing it into inertia, indifference, and inactivity. This is what psychologist Ronald Conway calls the "Great Australian Stupor", and Conway's insights have, in turn, been influenced by Lawrence's writings.¹⁰ When Australians boast about their easy, relaxed, tensionless life-style "down under", they may well be celebrating their regression into a pre-conscious or twilight state. This is why Lawrence felt uneasy about Australian anti-intellectualism. On the face of it, Lawrence was himself anti-intellectual, advocating a return to eros and to "blood

consciousness". But he was worried by the unconsciousness with which Euro-Australians seemed to pursue their downward course. Lawrence wanted to see tension, nervous tension, between the longing for the psychic depths and the desire for a fully alert, adult, and mature consciousness. This was his own paradoxical position, which in many ways resembles Jung's concept of individuation as a pathway between the psychic opposites, between the demands of the primal unconscious and the duties and claims of consciousness.

Lawrence puts the vital question to Euro-Australian culture and society:

Would the people waken this ancient land, or would the land put them to sleep, drift them back into the torpid semi-consciousness of the world of the twilight. (p. 198)

Will we have in Australia an unconscious regression to the ancient past, to inactivity and mental stupor? Or will we make a *conscious*

connection with the "savage and scarlet" spirit of place and waken both ourselves and it in a new era of spiritual and cultural development? Lawrence got out of Australia, and so it is hard to see his actions as a vote of confidence for the possibility of spiritual regeneration. Still, we have the evidence of contemporary Australian poetry (Wright and Murray) and recent fiction (Malouf, Jolley, Murnane, among others) to support the view that regeneration is possible and that the construction of a new, deeper, more profound consciousness is already underway.

In *Kangaroo* Richard Somers felt the great Australian earth drawing him toward it with almost magnetic power. And he is, like Lawrence (in Australia, at least), at odds with himself. Intellectually he wants to "give in" to Australia, but emotionally he feels unable or unwillingly to make the descent that is required. Hence he is plagued by negative and morbid symptoms: "he felt the torpor coming over him" (p. 168); he thinks his mind is "melting away" (p. 375), that he is being Australianised "in his sleep" (p. 159). Somers puts his contrary feelings and impulses to his Welsh friend in New South Wales:

"I love it, Jaz. I don't love the people. But this place - it goes into my marrow, and makes me feel drunk. I love Australia.... [It] tempts me.... [but] I don't want to give in to the place. It's too strong. It would lure me quite away from myself.... It's too tempting. It's too big a stride, Jaz". (p. 389)

The similarity between the fictional Somers and Lawrence himself is strikingly revealed in a letter Lawrence wrote to the Australian Katherine Susannah Prichard, in which he tried to explain to this passionately nationalist writer why he could not remain in Australia.

Don't imagine either that I am bolting as fast as all that from Australia. We're not going till August 10th—and three months in one place isn't so bad. For some things too I love Australia: its weird, far-away natural beauty and its remote, almost coal-age pristine quality. Only it's too far for me. I can't reach so awfully far. Further than Egypt. I feel I slither on the edge of a gulf, reaching to grasp its atmosphere and spirit. It eludes me, and always would. It is too far back... strains my heart, reaching. But I am very glad to have glimpsed it.¹¹

For Lawrence, with his consumptive condition and frail body, the gulf between his own consciousness and the Australian spirit of place may indeed have been "too far". He did not want to risk linking his own genius with our *genius loci*. Even in the different atmosphere of North America, and later back in "over-upholstered Europe" (*K*, p. 169), he only lived for another eight years before dying of tuberculosis. But we need not begrudge Lawrence his right to bail out, or abuse him (as some have) for being a "whingeing Pom" who could not stand up to Aussie reality. We should only admire Lawrence for throwing so much psychological light upon the spiritual problems confronting Australian society. No writer, English or Australian, before him had made the inside life of the Australian psyche so clear and transparent; no-one had expressed the psychic difficulties and complexities with such human immediacy and with such poignant urgency. At the end of *Kangaroo*, Somers-Lawrence wistfully hears the "call" of Australia and wonders when it will be answered:

From far off, from down long fern-dark avenues there seemed to be the voice of Australia, calling low.... [He] knew [it] would go on calling for long ages before it got any adequate response, in human beings. (p. 383)≈

REFERENCES

1. D.H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (1923), Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1990 (corrected edition). All references are to this edition.
2. A.D. Hope, 'Australia' (1939, in *Collected Poems 1930-1970*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1977, p.13.
3. D.H. Lawrence, *The Boy in the Bush* (with Mollie Skinner), (1924), ed. Paul Eggert, Cambridge University Press, 1990. All references are to this edition.
4. See bibliographical reference in note 11.
5. Randolph Stow, 'The Singing Bones', in *Randolph Stow*, ed. Anthony J. Hassall, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1990, p. 207.
6. A.D. Hope, 'Australia', *op. cit.*
7. See note 11.
8. D.H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious* (1923), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971.
9. D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1971, p. 145.
10. Ronald Conway, *The Great Australian Stupor*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1985.
11. D.H. Lawrence, 'Letter to Katharine Throssell' (1922), in *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, Vol., IV, (letter 2550), ed. Roberts *et al.*, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

• LUDDISM IN MUSIC • A Defence of The Piano

THE PERFORMING ARTS

by LESLEY WHITE

Lesley White has a background in education, music and environmental science and is currently a lecturer at the Social Ecology Centre at the University of Western Sydney.

English artisans of the early nineteenth century, who raised riots for the destruction of the newly developing machinery of the time, were called 'Luddites'. 'Luddism' is a term now more generally applied to people seeking to obstruct technological progress. In this article I am assuming the role of a 'Luddite' in the area of music by defending the piano against more recent technological, piano-like ('pseudopianoic') innovations. While I really enjoy the piano — the sound of it, playing it, using it to make music with others — I have feelings of discomfort about electronic pianos, keyboards and synthesisers. My interest in exploring more deeply why I feel this way has led to the writing of this article.

On looking back through Western history, I find these feelings have been expressed by other people, in different ages, in relation to various other innovations in music. For example, the early Christian Church excluded musical instruments from Church services, considering only the human voice to be suitable for praising God. Clement of Alexandria (in the first century) stated:

We do not need the psalterium, the tuba, drum, and flute, which are liked by those who prepare themselves for war.....¹

More recently and on a broader level, Elizabeth

Athemeir has expressed concern that the continued implementation of new technologies, so easily accepted in our Western, scientifically dominated civilisation, will have grave repercussions for the whole of Nature (or Creation) and for the relationship of humanity to and within Nature:

God is a music lover....The difficulty is that we have interrupted the praise. We have interrupted it with the still sad song of humanity.²

Hence, while I present my reason for defending the piano against technological innovations which produce 'piano-like' instruments, I am really engaged in expressing concerns of a broader nature — concern for how we perceive life to be, how music, and more specifically how the technology involved in these musical innovations both reflects and shapes our perceptions of life. I see music as a way of 'knowing' which is different from 'knowing' through vision or written language. It is an important way of drawing out the subtleties and mystery of life, enabling a fuller, more wholistic understanding of Nature. I am not taking an across-the-board anti-technology position. Rather, I am saying — let us examine our technologies for how they affect us and our way of being in the world.

TECHNOLOGY AND AN ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

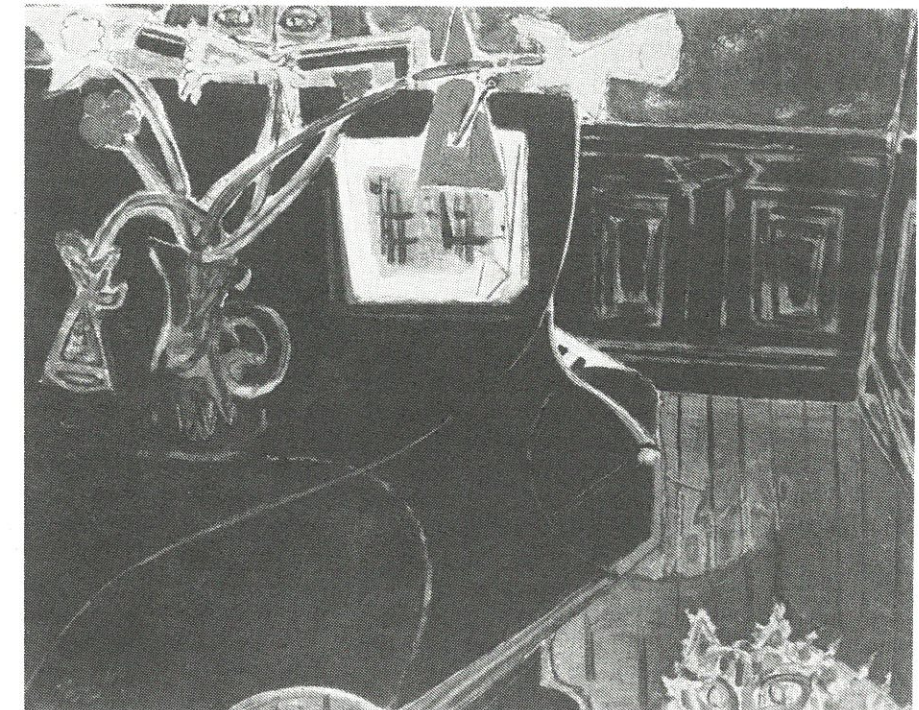
The current environmental crisis is predominantly a crisis in consciousness, a crisis which has

been brought about through the particular ways our society has conceptualised life and the relationships between people and the environment. It has resulted from the way we have literally 'built' our world. It is evident that our present Western society is characterised by a worldview which emphasises technological mastery of the earth; this view embodies the concept of objectivity, whereby people are seen to be separate from Nature and each other. It also embodies an hierarchical understanding, with people seen as being dominant over Nature. This attitude is then mirrored in situations throughout our society such as the domination of men over women, managers over workers. This has led to a situation where our technological mastery, while giving an illusion of mastery of our environment, is actually involved in generating unforeseen and essentially unknowable effects on our environment, often with disastrous results.

This awareness of the ways in which we have 'built' our world leads to the understanding that our world or reality is not just a 'given' (that is, an external reality having an objective existence which we can master) nor a construction of

consciousness (as in solipsism, which argues that the thoughts and feelings of each person construct an individual mental world, which is thought to be the primary reality) but that the world and language (or our perceptions) go together to reveal our known reality. So we can say that the way in which we make contact with and describe our world is how it then reveals itself to us. Language as the means by which we describe our world refers not only to our use of words to communicate and shape our perceptions, but to all the communicative activities we as people engage in, including our communication through the arts, our technologies and our music. I take the perspective that our 'doing' is our 'being'. The instruments that we invent and use reflect our attitudes and simultaneously shape our attitudes.

Our present ways of thinking and acting have brought us to the point where we now recognise that we are embedded in interlocking environmental and social dislocation. Since technology is one of the ways we 'make contact' with our world, the important question is — in what way does technology influence our perception of the relationships between ourselves and the rest of



Francis Tailleux *Le Piano* oil on canvas, 1947.

"I see music as a way of 'knowing' which is different from 'knowing' through vision or written language. It is an important way of drawing out the subtleties and mystery of life, enabling a fuller, more wholistic understanding of Nature."

Nature. The philosopher Martin Heidegger has talked about the possibility of a different attitude towards the world from that of technological mastery, a sense of being-in-the-world which implies a thoughtful and concerned attitude towards things. It is an attitude of letting things be what they essentially are; such an attitude implies an "ecologically harmonious sense of self", a new consciousness in which we see "care of nature as care of self"³. Heidegger asserts that only through a true consideration of our technological world, through insight into how it shapes us even while we are shaping it, will it be possible to develop such an authentic way of being-in-the world. For, as he says:

The power concealed in modern technology determines the relationship of man to that which exists. It rules the whole earth.⁴

Technology, for the purposes of this article, refers to the whole realm of artifacts that emerge with societies. The essence of these artifacts is understood as being an "expression of purpose"⁵. This understanding embodies far more than just the physical tools or implements which are commonly accepted as being "technologies". As Fisher states, technology is:

a quantitative expression of a particular perception of how to do something and of that something's environment. It is not, of course, restricted to the designer's expressions alone; those who interact with it also impress their own perceptions and purposes on it. Therefore a technology is more correctly a set of potentials for doing things.⁶

Heidegger, in his analysis of the Greek term *techne* which is the root of our word 'technology', makes clear the connection between technology as a potential for 'doing things' and the nature of this doing; he shows that it is a way of both revealing and structuring our understandings of life or being. Heidegger describes *techne* as *poiesis*, a type of 'disclosing' of the truth of things or bringing forth (creating) that craftsmen and poets engage in. For Heidegger, humans can be involved in *techne* which 'lets beings be what they are', or they can be involved in *techne* which subjugates the essence of other beings (the Being of beings) to human purposes (commonly economic purposes). As a case in point Heidegger contrasts the technology implicit in a windmill with a coal-fired power plant:

The windmill co-operates with the wind and hence lets it remain what it is. To fire the generating plant, however, human beings must aggressively expose the energy contained in the coal, they must rearrange and store it for future use.⁷

Authentic or true technology for Heidegger means allowing beings to manifest themselves as themselves, with as little interference and as much co-operation as possible. True technology from this perspective would not be just machines but would include all modes of knowing by which Nature is revealed. From this perspective 'technology' will include the rituals, poetry and religions of a culture: "rituals, poetry, religion are required to disclose most appropriately what beings are"⁸.

Now, based on the understanding that our 'reality', our knowing of the world or 'self understanding', comes forth through socially constructed relationships, our technology as our "potentials for doing things" will have arisen from within our social and cultural environmental experience. My particular concern is to question to what extent our recent piano-like electronic innovations encourage an attitude of mastery over nature and to what extent they frustrate the

development of a new vision of connectedness between humanity and the rest of nature.

TECHNOLOGY AND THE PIANO, ELECTRONIC KEYBOARD AND SYNTHESISER

I now offer a brief description of the technology involved in the piano, electronic-keyboard and synthesiser (computer) as a basis for comparing their potential to enhance or frustrate a new ecological consciousness. The piano is in fact a complex, technological artifact. Voltaire dismissed it as a "tinker's kettle" for being, like a kettle, a product of technology.⁹ However a comparison with the new electronic instruments reveals that the piano works in an altogether different way to these instruments and that it gives rise to different "potentials for doing things". For, while the piano is a complex technological artifact:

there is a difference between a participating technology which lets the human meaning of a subject's act stand out and the automated technology which conceals it, creating the illusion of autonomous functioning.¹⁰

In playing the piano, whether it is the pianist's ability to provide the lightness of touch required for a Chopin waltz or bring a feeling of depth and strength to a Beethoven Sonata, the human meaning of his/her participation with this technology stands out. In comparison, synthesisers and computerised music programs advocate their advantage as requiring less actual involvement by the player, with the technological hardware 'magically' allowing the player to produce music s/he would otherwise be incapable of.

With electronic keyboards and synthesisers, the 'machine' is capable of producing music that is difficult or impossible for people to play (for example - difficult cross rhythms or impossible-to-reach chords). Further consequences of such technological tyranny are that:

in the bewildering complexity of figuration, rhythm and metre are lost; the rapid succession of 'difficult' intervals means that frequently pitch seems contingent. Yet - as in much of the music of Boulez - the conductor gives the 'beat' with meticulous care and the musicians generally play prescribed (notated) pitches. Thus rationality comes to seem irrational and, in a strict sense, incredible. This

may be awe inspiring, but it is also mystification.¹¹

These effects have repercussions for how we perceive the world to be. Shepard in *Nature and Madness*¹² also articulates this idea of 'rationality' being seen to be 'irrational' when people live in an entirely man-made artifactual world. These instruments contribute to such a turn-around in our concepts of rational/irrational through their, in a sense, 'superior' skills in certain aspects. These skills are in no way related to the organic or the physical skill of the person, thus the person/Nature relationship is degraded. Further, the 'superior' abilities of these instruments reflect and substantiate our society's present concern with 'perfection' as an object in itself rather than a more experiential mode of being. As Kohak¹³ argues, each time we sacrifice the tangible goodness of self-labour for the perfection of such technological perfection we lose something of ourselves. The striving for perfection introduces a gap of alienation into our lives, reinforcing an 'objective' ('us' versus 'the others') view of Nature.

These technologies involve the subjugation of a more authentic musical experience which I see as occurring on three levels. At the most fundamental physical level, inauthenticity of music-making occurs through the mode by which the instrument creates sound. Sound is basically vibration of the air and the music (sound) from electronic instruments reaches the listener through movement of air which has not been directly instigated by the player. Rather, 'sound waves' (or air movements) are only caused when the 'sound' (that is, the signals produced by the oscillator) is amplified (electronically) by the loudspeaker. This sound originates as a musical abstraction which is then translated into electronic impulses, travels through circuitry, pre-amplifiers, amplifiers and into loud speakers, where it is converted into the mechanical vibrations of the speaker membranes and thereby transmitted through the air to our ears. With these electronic instruments there is a change in the very nature of sound itself, through a process of sonic reductionism¹⁴. Sound no longer has its source in vibrating matter but instead is generated in a world of circuitry which exists to create an electronic impression of a musical instrument. The sounds are produced as discrete packages in complete isolation from human players and their cultural reference point, musical instruments and the articulate expression of skilled musicians. In

the piano, sound is produced through the player's fingers striking a key which causes a felt-covered hammer to strike the metal strings. The vibrations from these strings are then amplified through the soundboard. So there is a direct relationship between the player and the generation of sound; the sound heard from the piano comes directly from the instrument through the air to our ears.

My second level of concern over inauthenticity is that with electronic keyboards, synthesisers and computers there is a removal of direct control of the person playing the instrument. With these types of instruments volume (or dynamic level) is adjusted by means of pedals, knobs, slides or keyboards rather than by the more direct body, hand and finger control required when playing a piano. The direct 'finger touch' control involved in playing the piano allows the transfer of felt emotion through the person, directly to the way in which the sound is shaped. The problem is amplified (excuse the pun!) by the technological complexity of synthesisers. It is interesting to note that the world's best selling synthesiser, the Yamaha DX-7, is virtually impossible for users to program. Users have to use special plug-in cards which give them access to hundreds of factory produced sounds¹⁶. Thus the manufacturers and promoters of this machine have control of or direct to some extent (discounting the ingenuity of the user) the music-making capacity of this instrument.

My third level of concern with the authenticity of musical experience is related to the idea of replication. Often when an electronic instrument is designed and used to replicate a musical instrument, the extent to which people are deceived into thinking they are listening to the 'real thing' is the criteria by which the instrument and its use are judged to be successful. A synthesiser in producing a 'piano' sound is still *not* a piano. That is true even with the new breed of synthesisers which work by electronically modifying and manipulating the recorded sounds of 'real' instruments. The richness of our enjoyment of music, I suggest, is thoroughly bound up with its cultural interweavings. The history of the piano, its perceived place in our world, our social interactions involving the piano, all contribute to our understanding of this phenomenon called 'piano'. The piano has had a long history in Western society, from the days of clavichords, virginals and spinets, to Cristofori's early pianos, the development of the grand, baby-

grand and upright pianos. Our pictures of the history of the piano subtly inform our relationship with the instrument today. What about the 'wood' smell of a piano and the subtle effects on a listener in knowing it is made of timber, a natural organic material, rather than just being a sophisticated piece of electronic circuitry and plastic? When listening to music we are curious about the performer and the occasion of the performance. For many people, the discovery that the music they are listening to has been created by a skilled technician using a computer, would bring the feeling of emptiness, of being cheated or 'conned'. This feeling can be compared to the effect of deception in our relationships with other people; we recognise that such deception causes feelings of uncertainty and mistrust, usually resulting in some estrangement to our relationship. Rather than feeling 'at one' with the other person, we feel mistrust and need to stand back and test for authenticity in our relationship.¹⁷ If, as I claim, reality and meaning are constructed socially, within particular cultures and environments, our sense of 'self' is reliant on how we perceive life to be, through these processes. Involvement in a world in which things 'pretend' to be other things, will seriously affect our sense of 'self'.

IN CONCLUSION

I therefore contend that the piano is an 'authentic' technology in Heidegger's sense — that it allows "the essence of beings" to be revealed. Just as the windmill's working with the wind is contrasted with the more aggressive energy transformations involved in firing a generating plant, so the sound production of a piano may be compared to that of electronic musical instruments. The piano allows the 'nature' of the performer to be directly perceived or experienced by the audience; there is no subjugation of the sound, nor a deception whereby the piano tries to pretend it is something which it is not. In comparing the piano with these new musical innovations I have not sought to discredit them thoroughly but rather to draw attention to the values and world-views inherent in these technologies. I have sought to discuss our participation with electronic musical technologies in the light of recognising true *techne* as a "letting things be", a revealing of Nature. Musicians, in Heidegger's sense of *techne*, are inherently technologists, participating in revealing and bringing forth our world. As Ludwig von Bertalanffy has said, artists are:

the hidden marionette players of history — those who create world views, values, problems and solutions; in short, that symbolic backdrop against which every scene of the great drama of history is enacted.¹⁸

My perspective is that music both reflects understandings of the relationship between people and their environment and also acts as a vehicle which extends perception. This is the reason why I consider it important to examine the potentiality of electronic musical innovations to either detract from or enhance an ecologically harmonious vision of the world. This, too, is the reason I have no qualms about calling myself a musical 'Luddite'. =

REFERENCES

1. Lang, P.H. *Music in Western Civilisation*, J.M. Dent & Sons, London, 1942.
2. Athemeir, E. *Preaching As Theology And Art*, Abingdon Press, 1984.
3. Shepard, P. *Nature And Madness*, Sierra Club, U.S.A. 1982.

4. Heidegger, M. *Existence And Being*, Vision Press, London 1956. p. 165.
5. Fisher, F. *Technology And The Loss Of Self - An Environmental Concern*, Memeo, Monash, Aust. 1988. p. 3.
6. *Ibid.* p. 3.
7. Zimmerman, M.E. "Towards a Heideggerian Ethos for Radical Environmentalism", in *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 5, pp 108-9, 1983.
8. *Ibid.* p.109.
9. Good, E.M. *Giraffes, Black Dragons And Other Pianos*, Stanford Uni. Press, U.S.A. 1982. p.1.
10. Kohak, E. *The Embers And The Stars*, Uni. of Chicago Press, U.S.A. 1984. p.25.
11. Ballantine, C. *Music And Its Social Meanings*, Gordon & Breach, Science Pub. U.S.A., 1984. p.95.
12. Shepard, op.cit.
13. Kohak, op.cit.
14. Hopper, J. *Pers Comm.* 1987.
15. Pree, R. 'Down Loading The Music' in *The Australian Computer Magazine*, 16.11.88. p.84.
17. See Dorey in Seamon, D. & Mugeraur, R. *Dwelling, Place And Environment*, Martinus N. Nijhoff Pub., The Netherlands, 1985. p.33 ff.
18. Quoted in Evernden, N. *The Natural Alien*, Uni. of Toronto Press, Canada, 1985. p.50 ff.



Kerry Johns Tree Painting gouache on paper, 1990

• REFLECTIONS •

THE PERFORMING ARTS

by ROSS EDWARDS

Composer Ross Edwards lives and works in Sydney. His recent orchestral work, *Symphony Da Pacem Domine*, was premiered in Perth on August 7th 1992 by the West Australian Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jorge Mester.

Looking back, I think the turning-point in my early life as a composer took place in a dank Notting Hill basement towards the end of 1970. I was a post-graduate student in London and I existed only for my work, living on bread and cheese and black coffee, chain-smoking Gauloises, writing music compulsively for twelve-hour stretches and taking pills to make me sleep. I clearly recall the moment when I suddenly found myself questioning the validity of this course of self-destruction and at the same time that of 'accredited' post-war European art music. What, ultimately, was the point of all those neurotic convulsions so meticulously ordered? Did they do anybody any good or were they just self-indulgent?

So ended my 'angry young man' phase. I'd been working for several months on a piano piece, a dense, savage interior monologue which, in the light of my moment of revelation, seemed like a hollow exercise in futility. I came to the conclusion that my music was suffering from claustrophobia, and to give it breathing space I moved to a remote Yorkshire farmhouse. But the bleak landscape had a paralysing effect and instead of finding a new direction I produced little, panicked over approaching deadlines and sank into depression.

There was, however, a positive outcome of this Yorkshire sojourn. Whereas I'd always been an

introspective person, living inside my head, I gradually began to acquire an external focus and an appreciation of the sights and sounds of the natural environment. On one occasion, while contemplating the shape of a dead tree, I experienced a feeling of detachment, of release from my torpid inner world — an augury, or so it seemed, of renewed vigour and enthusiasm. To reach those greener pastures, however, in the words of a gypsy palm-reader, I must first cross water.

Back in Australia in 1973 there were many things to distract me from the burning issue of how to regenerate my musical language. I taught at a university, got married, and settled into a routine of conjugal domesticity and spare-time composition. The first piece I completed after my return to Australia was *Mountain Village in a Clearing Mist*, for orchestra. A radical departure from my earlier style, this is a quiescent and understated piece in which sounds and silences are counterpoised. It has no apparent direction nor any sense of climax or resolution: the concept of music as psychological drama, as structured time, is quite foreign to its aesthetic and it ends as inexplicably as it begins. In composing it, I made a point of jettisoning the various rules and niggling stylistic mannerisms I'd acquired over the years, allowing my creative process to flow unimpeded. This proved to be a liberating experience and one I'd recommend to anyone with composer's block. In relinquishing a certain amount of control over my work — previously I'd aimed for total control — my subconscious mind reasserted itself and resumed its share of the work, whereas my conscious mind, unburdened of a disproportionately large amount

of responsibility, began to enjoy what it was doing instead of seizing up and going on strike. This is how I rationalised the new approach; at any rate it allowed me to find inner peace and a new direction for my work.

Mountain Village was composed in a room opening onto bushland. I worked mainly at night and there was a continuous interplay of insect and frog sounds outside the window. I don't know at what point I became aware of the extent to which these nocturnal sounds were determining the essential nature of the composition: its feeling of timelessness, its quirky rhythms and asymmetrical phrases and, above all, its implicit recognition of the fundamental mysteriousness of existence; but by the time I'd finished composing I recognised in them the elements of my new language.

I'd been working in a state of semi-trance: my mind was open and unfettered by preconceptions — the ideal conditions, surely, for a breakthrough — but several years would pass before I was able to refine the language to my satisfaction. I listened to insects and recorded them: I found the periodicity and texture of the insect chorus infinitely more subtle than that of any music and as a result I couldn't compose. I came to the conclusion that the present crisis of Western music is due to the fact that it's been feeding off itself for too long without pausing to renew contact with the sounds and patterns of the natural world which, after all, were the original source of music.

I borrowed the title *Mountain Village in a Clearing Mist* from a painting by a 13th century Chinese monk, Yü-Chien. I was interested in Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, especially the Zen-influenced 'calligraphic' style, and I wanted to evolve a musical equivalent of its technique of revelation through extreme economy of gesture. I had no illusions as to how difficult this might prove to be and I understood that to have any real value, it must be drawn in some way from my direct experience of the Australian landscape. One day, some five years after the composition of *Mountain Village*, I was sitting by myself in a dry creek bed lined with cabbage-tree palms. In the dim green atmosphere berries dropped, birds called, insects droned and I experienced one of those moments of awareness suggested in this Japanese *Zenrin Kushu* poem:

The wild geese do not intend to cast their reflection;
The water has no mind to receive their image.

Here, it seemed to me, was a revelation of the ideal state of balance between human beings and the natural world advocated by the ancient Taoist sages: nature doesn't exist for us to control, to ignore, to sentimentalise or reject — it's just there, and we are part of it.

I tried to convey this state of mind in my next piece, *The Tower of Remoteness* (1978), for clarinet

Intermezzo quasi Cadenza

Liberalemente, d.c. 60-72

senza sord.

Vln. Cdo.

f, intenso

mp

mf

f

mp

mf, dim.

mp

p

p

Ross Edwards Opening of Cadenza from Violin Concerto ('Maninyas'), 1988.

and piano. This austere work, although designed for the concert hall, actually has a dual purpose; I came to think of it as a musical contemplation object, and as such it's been compared with the 18th century *Kinko* repertoire of music for the Japanese *shakuhachi*, a vertical bamboo flute whose sound is traditionally associated with spiritual meditation. As this kind of music isn't normally encountered in Western concert halls I advised listeners at the first performances to forget about Western listening habits; instead of trying to keep track of a sequence of musical events in time in order to perceive an overall unity, they would do better to respond intuitively to the uniqueness and mysteriousness of each passing moment.

The composition of this relatively short work presented me with a considerable technical challenge: I had to capture the essence of a complex sound environment on two separate planes represented by the two instruments, the clarinet and the piano; and these two planes, related only by their co-existence in time and space, must at the same time create an impression of perfect and inevitable fusion. (I should explain that these were the dictates of my subconscious mind and that they became manifest only after I'd started to compose. Such an approach, consciously formalised in advance, could never work for me). Ten years later, while re-visiting the place where I'd written it, I realised with some surprise that the work's initial motive had been subconsciously modelled on a bird call. Apart from that, the characteristic patterns and shapes of *The Tower of Remoteness* are essentially abstractions from those of *Mountain Village*. There are no transcriptions, literal or oblique, from nature. My intention had not been to catalogue events but rather, to imitate the manner in which they occur — hence the near-symmetries, the inconsistently varied repetitions, often quite close to our inherited musical syntax but eventually, with a quirkish twist, retreating into that mysterious world which passes all understanding.

The Tower of Remoteness belongs to a group of my compositions sometimes referred to as my *Sacred Series* because of the meditational quality of the music. These pieces are interspersed through my catalogue of works and they all relate back to the seminal *Mountain Village* of 1973, the most recent of them being *Yarrageh, Nocturne for Solo Percussion and Orchestra*, composed in 1989. *Yarrageh* is an aboriginal word meaning 'the spirit of spring', the music having been conceived during a walk through a spring landscape. Motivic shapes

in this work are still largely modelled on the *Mountain Village* archetypes which, for me, have retained over the years a symbolic association with Australia's eastern seaboard terrain. A new dimension has been introduced by my request that the music be performed in near darkness, thus introducing to the concert hall (and its traditional audience) an atmosphere suited to contemplative, as opposed to old-style 'analytical' listening — something I'd been wanting to do for years.

About 1980, recognising my inability to work solely on a disembodied spiritual plane but unwilling to relax the gnomic severity of the *Sacred Series*, I responded with enthusiasm to my own impulse to leap in a new direction and compose exuberant dance music. Surprised and delighted by this unexpected development, I began to produce works in what was to become known as my *Maninya* style, addressing a new audience of people wanting to be more than just passive listeners and for whom utilitarianism is gradually being reinstated, after an absence of some five hundred years, as a significant criterion of excellence in Western art music. (I think that interest in art for its own sake will gradually decline, and although most of my music has been commissioned for the concert hall, I've always been mindful of its potential in other contexts: the dual function of the *Sacred Series* has already been described and the *Maninya* pieces naturally invite choreography).

A final word about the *Maninya* style, now well established as the extraverted antithesis to the *Sacred* style. The word *maninya* originated in a nonsense text arbitrarily conceived for one of my vocal works and has since acquired the connotation of rhythmic buoyancy, a primary characteristic of the music. There are manifold traces of non-Western influence; African *mbira* music, for example, may have contributed to the characteristic terseness and angularity of the melodic shapes; the heterophonic interweaving of the lines sometimes produces a *gamelan* — like texture; the harmony is static and drone-based; and there is much use of scales from India, Indonesia and Japan. Discerning listeners, however, will discover that these exotic trappings are founded upon structural principles essentially the same as those of the *Sacred Series*; that the quirkish dance rhythms resemble accelerated insect patterns; and that even at this more abstract level, the real progenitor of my music is still the timeless continuum of nature, as I expect it always will be. ≈

THE SHAKUHACHI FLUTE

a tube of quivering sound
 this membrane thins
 skins itself
 inverts itself
 narrowly
 self answering
 reveals its wet and tender inwardness
 and fans out
 billowingly
 in consummation

this reed of sound
 elongates
 and moves along its viscous stalk
 tensing and flooding
 so that the feelings
 hidden unacknowledged unnamed
 edged with horror, linen
 and the fringe of willows
 fields, birdcalls and
 the sea on the east coast
 rise in the mouth
 out of the inner passages of our
 forgotten
 experience filled
 bodies.

Julia White

• NATURE •

THOUGHTS ON CREATING

“He to whom Nature begins to reveal her open secret will feel an irresistible yearning for her most worthy interpreter, Art”.

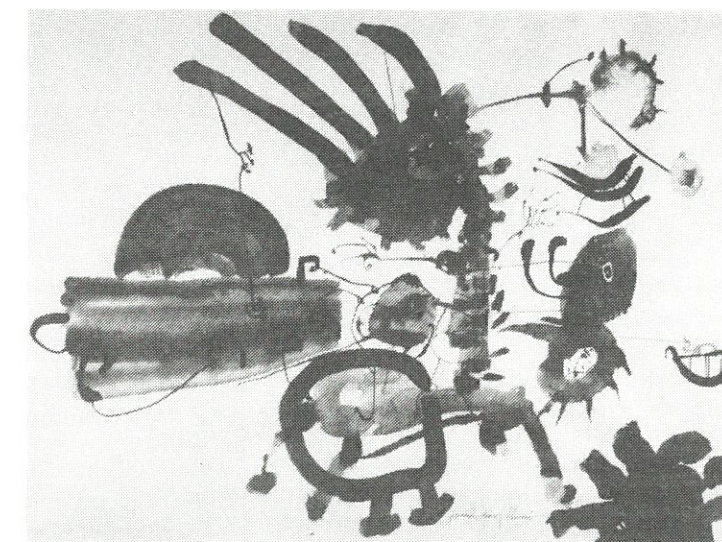
Goethe



1991. Lindsay Hunt *Japan* 20 X 20 inches, mixed media on paper, 1992.

“The spirit of the valley never dies. This is called the mysterious female. The gateway of the mysterious female Is called the root of heaven and earth. Dimly visible, it seems as if it were there, Yet use will never drain it.”
from the *Tao Te Ching*

“Culture is reverence of Light. Culture is love of humanity. Culture is fragrance, the unity of life and beauty. Culture is the synthesis of uplifting and sensitive attainments. Culture is the armour of Light. Culture is salvation. Culture is the motivating power. Culture is the Heart.”
from *Culture and Peace* by Nicholas Roerich, 1932.

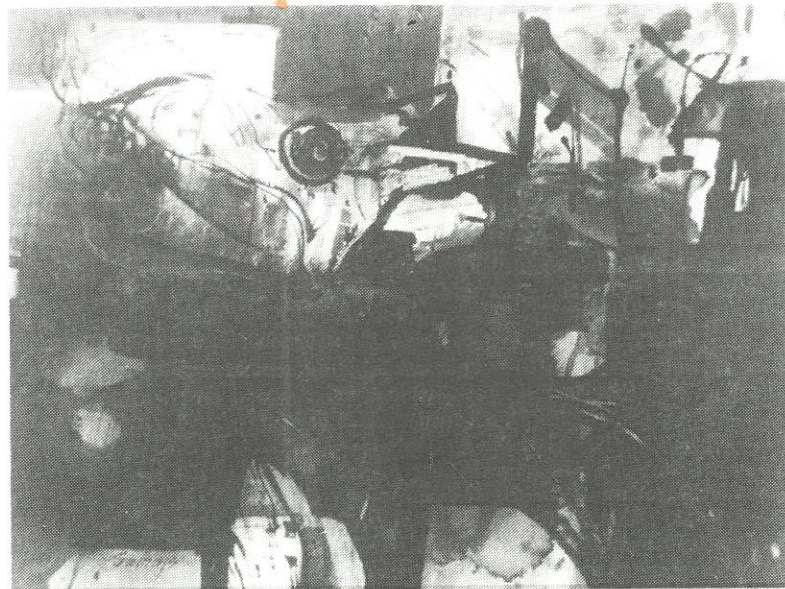


Lindsay Hunt. *Making Charms for the Sky People* Watercolour and Ink on Paper, 1990.

“Nature is the soul of the earth. Through nature — as Soul — with all that she bestows, the soul of man finds its way to the Spirit of the universe and the Spirit of the universe finds its way into the human heart — the “mother of god” as Thomas Aquinas beautifully called it.

Sleeping and waking are the rhythmic out-and-in-breathing of the spiritual part of us. They perform the separating and uniting of our “Light” and “Gravity”. Our life of sleep is intuitive and inspiring; and what we unconsciously experience then returns to us in waking, although clouded by the density of the bodily life. But our sleep experiences are the source of Art. And I believe that our “intimations of immortality” are the dim memories of pre-natal life in the spirit, renewed

during the hours of deep sleep. What man creates as works of art in the physical world are the “images” which he sees with his soul of the cosmic processes which have created his own earthly being. In sleep we look upon ourselves from “outside” and see how the heavens mirror themselves in our bodies — rhythm, planetary movements, life, the elements of warmth, air, fluids, and the spatially-conditioned structures arising from their interplay under the rulership of the stars. We see the circulation, the breathing, the processes of secretion and metabolism as spiritual activity within the architecture of the body, reflecting the life and form of the universe.”
from *Art, Its Occult Basis and Healing Value* by Eleanor C. Merry, 1961.



Venita Salnajs *The Wolf* 45 X 60 cms. Mixed media on paper, 1992.

“If we could speed up the cycle of an annual plant, we would see a perpetual dance of inward motion and outward expression, of birth and growth, death and resurrection. The first step of this dance is marked by the seed in its outer passivity and inner activity. In the second step, as the seed breaks out of its shell and anchors itself to the soil, the movement shifts from inner to outer life; the seed is sacrificed to become a specific and actual form. The third step is abundant, celebratory, formal manifestation. And in the fourth, the plant surrenders itself and dies willingly in order to nourish a new birth. The end is the beginning.

If we could see the unfolding of an idea apart from other activities and influences, we would notice a process similar to that of the plant. An entrepreneur, for example, envisions a product or a service, works out a business plan, offers the product to his/her community, and celebrates its success through profits, satisfied employees and customers. Or we would see an artist entering into silence, shedding physical, emotional and mental preoccupations in order to receive the gift of an insight. The artist knows that on the deepest level the work does not originate with the self but rather is a gift. The artist then becomes a host to this new insight and begins to integrate and humanise it through sketches, through symbolic formulations which are artistic equivalents to a business plan. Such sketches are roots, anchoring the new insight

so it cannot be blown away. To honour the gift, the artist then magnifies it by crafting it. And finally, the artist presents the gift to others, for it began as a gift. By performing it or showing it in an exhibit, the artist enriches the community and makes space for something new; the work is shared with others so the artist can empty the psyche in order to begin the process anew. In our times, of course, art has become a commodity to be sold; this is just how our culture works. But just as selling the work is necessary for livelihood, so giving it away spiritually is necessary for creativity.

It can be said that the cycle of creative action begins with an insight within the individual and ends with insights which that individual's creation fosters in others. In this way the individual insight becomes a common perception for society.”



From Milenko Matanovic 'The Ecology of Creative Action' in *Meandering Rivers and Square Tomatoes*. (The Art of Crafting Visions) Morningtown Press, 1988.

“The establishment view of nature provides no explanation as to how nature could be art; indeed it leaves very little room for human art. Yet the art-making of nature is everywhere evident, in the streamlining of forms, graceful and integrated structures, colour and shape. The streamlining effect is not the automatic result of functional efficiency; nature must be inherently congenial to the aesthetic process and the dominant aesthetic appeal of nature should therefore be seen as the expression of its capacity for art. It is surprising how strong resistance is to the idea that nature is art. The late Renaissance may be in part responsible, because of its insistence on the 'individual' creative stamp of the artist. But the real blockage comes from the belief that no substance can create art without a human agent. The concept that the Universe could be self-creative has never been part of Western thought. The dismissal of a Creator has left the Universe without any means of teleological guidance”

“Nature is art, and in time a humanised, creative primate had to emerge because of an inherent aesthetic potential in matter. No more than a few decades ago to propose the hypothesis of enlightened materialism, which included the aesthetic faculty, would have been regarded as preposterous. But recent discoveries in physics, the science most equipped to deal with matter, has made such conjecture legitimate.”
from *Art as Revelation. The Role of Art in Human Existence* by Frank Avray Wilson, 1981.

“It is wrongheaded to separate earth and world, as if one could speak about earthly things (such as animals and plants) wholly apart from any consideration about their relation to a historical world. Earth and world are different and irreducible, but they are internally related, always contending with one another. Rightly understood, *physis* [nature] names both the earthly and the worldly dimension of things. *Physis* names the self-generating bringing-forth of living things, but also names the presencing by virtue of which such things come into appearance within a world. *Physis*, then, is not only generative but also disclosive. *Physis* brings forth the humans necessary to disclose what *physis* brings forth. The self-producing dimension of *physis* at work in living things resists the intrusions of the disclosive dimension of *physis* at work through human existence. The producing done by humans is radically dependent on both aspects of *physis*; the self-producing aspect involved in the emergence of things of the earth, on the one hand, and the disclosive aspect involved in letting those things appear within a world. The name for *physis* in human existence in *poiesis*, the disclosiveness (art in its broadest sense) which makes bringing-forth (producing of all kinds) possible.”
from *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity. Technology, Politics and Art* by Michael E. Zimmerman, 1990.

• INNER VISION • The Traditional View of Art

BETWEEN THE ARTS

by STEPHEN CROSS



Cecil Collins *Angel of the Flowing Light*, 48 X 41 ins 1968.

Stephen Cross was born in England and has directed a number of films on the arts for the BBC, the Arts Council, and other organisations in Britain. He now lives in Sydney and writes on traditional thought and culture, with particular reference to the civilisations of South Asia. He is a contributor to *Temenos* in Great Britain and *Avaloka* in America.

Is the future of the arts, and of painting in particular, to be found in a new vision of Nature? Before we can answer this question we must determine where the arts stand at the present moment. Although the sense of a crisis in the development of the modern world has become pervasive, this perception has not generally included the arts. The arts are often thought of as standing outside the processes of the modern world, reflecting other and more permanent values. There is a sense, as we

shall see, in which this is true. Yet it is also realised that the arts reflect their period and are often its most accurate expression — we have only to think of the convulsive art movements accompanying the break up of the European social and political order in the first decades of this century. The arts do indeed reflect the modern world, and they do so to a greater extent than we have perhaps suspected. They are not an exception. They share in its crisis in full measure.

It is not only the arts which have been conditioned in this way, but also our understanding of them. To grasp this fully it is necessary to seek a broader picture of their meaning and purpose than we have become accustomed to. We must look again at what was abandoned when the arts were drawn into the magic circle of the modern

world. We must compare our present understanding of the arts to that of the past — of medieval Europe, of surviving traditional and 'primitive' societies, and of the ancient world. We shall find in these societies a single view which, although strange and surprising to the modern world, has been that of the great majority of mankind for the greater part of time. This is the traditional view of art, the view which was held by Plato, Plotinus, Dante, Eckhart, by the old Chinese, Hindu and Buddhist sources, and by traditional peoples throughout the world. It can lay claim to being a norm, a universal and perennial philosophy of art which has been progressively forgotten as the modern world developed. Though widely recognised by scholars working in special fields, this earlier and traditional understanding of art was studied most comprehensively by the art historian and author A.K. Coomaraswamy, who died in 1947. The description which follows is much indebted to his essay *The Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, published in the book of the same name.¹

ART IS NOT ABOUT AESTHETICS

The first thing we need to understand, Coomaraswamy tells us, is that the traditional understanding of art is quite different from the humanistic philosophies of art we are used to. Before turning to what this art is, we must know what it is *not*.

First, traditional art is not centrally concerned with aesthetic qualities. A certain magic has gathered round the word *aesthetic*. Although the concept of beauty was in effect banished by the founders of modernism, the aesthetic at once took its place as the mystical validator of art. This was not an advance. The Greek word *aisthesis* simply means sensation or sensory perception. Stripped of its mystical aura, the aesthetic is that which pleases the senses, and nothing more. As such, it is not without value; it has its place in art. But to promote it to first place, to the be-all-and-end-all of art, is a distortion: Coomaraswamy writes, "The greater part of our boasted 'love of art' is nothing but the enjoyment of comfortable feelings".² The emphasis upon aesthetic qualities, in effect the promotion of sense pleasure to first place at the cost of intellectual and spiritual elements, is the counterpart in art of materialism. Art is not a matter of our likes and dislikes, dignified as 'aesthetic reactions'. Art is more serious than this, at once more definite and concrete, and more

"The artist in a traditional culture is not concerned to exhibit himself; indeed, his whole purpose is to be liberated from himself. Posthumous fame is not his motive. "To wish that it may be made known that *I was the author* is the thought of a man not yet adult", as the Buddhist *Dhammapada* expresses it."

intellectual and abstract than we have come to think.

ART IS NOT ABOUT ORIGINALITY

Second, art is not about originality. From the standpoint of traditional art this is one of the profoundest errors of modernism. The doctrine of originality, rooted in Renaissance humanism and Romantic individualism, is one of the major causes of the decline of art. Appearing at first as a stimulus, it has instead produced a progressive fragmentation and dispersal which is only too evident in twentieth century painting. It is the equivalent in the arts of the idea of Progress. It is in fact the reversal of the traditional doctrine, which has always been to look towards the universal experience of mankind and to the great figures of the past (sometimes symbolised as the Golden Age) for guidance.

ART IS NOT ABOUT INDIVIDUALISM

Third, art in traditional societies is not concerned with 'self-expression'. It is not about personality or individual style. "Our conception of art as essentially the expression of a personality", writes Coomaraswamy, "our whole view of genius, our impertinent curiosities about the artist's private life, all these things are the products of a perverted



Christ Enthroned. s. Apollinaire Nuovo, Ravenna.

individualism and prevent our understanding of the nature of medieval and oriental art".³

The artist in a traditional culture is not concerned to exhibit himself; indeed, his whole purpose is to be liberated from himself. Posthumous fame is not his motive. "To wish that it may be made known that *I was the author* is the thought of a man not yet adult", as the Buddhist *Dhammapada* expresses it.⁴ The anonymity of traditional art is not accidental. Such art does not derive from the individual. It is what is conveyed, not who conveys it, which is important.

For the same reason, when a person is portrayed he or she is represented primarily as a type — king or queen, soldier, merchant, bishop, shepherd, smith — "not as he is but as he ought to be", in Coomaraswamy's phrase. This idealisation has nothing to do with a failure of observation or technical inability: it arises from a conscious desire to identify, not with the imperfections of the individual, but with the archetype behind him. It is what the Chinese call *fu shen* — "portraying the divine image in a man".⁵ It recognises that our greatness lies outside and beyond our

individuality; a fact recognised by Schelling when he wrote, "What is highest in all works — both of art and science — arises precisely because the impersonal is operative in them".⁶

When, contrary to this, the artist exploits his own personality and becomes an exhibitionist, it is a sign of the decline of art. The real meaning and purpose has been lost. The modern emphasis on the individual qualities of artists, and the whole concern with style, Coomaraswamy asserts, is mistaken.⁷ Style, the basis of our histories of art, are the accident and by no means the essence of art. Style derives from human idiosyncrasy, and this, in the traditional view, is precisely what art is *not* about.

This falling away from the earlier conception of art was well observed by Taine in the nineteenth century: "The sculptor speaks no more to a religious city, but to a crowd of inquisitive individuals; he ceases to be, for his part, citizen and priest — he is only a man and artist. He insists upon the anatomical detail which will attract the connoisseur and on the striking expression which will be understood by the ignorant. He is a superior

kind of shopkeeper, who wishes to compel public attention and to keep it ... The spectator pays him in praise and he pays the spectator in pleasure".⁸ But we do not wish to suggest that the art of the modern period has no achievements to show. The twentieth century, like those before it, has its artists of merit. However, the question which must be asked is whether the works they have left us were produced *because of* or *in spite of* the movements within which they worked; whether their output was enhanced or diminished by the theoretical framework and the practices of the modern movement.

ART IS A FORM OF KNOWLEDGE

Coomaraswamy writes that, "As humanists and individualists it flatters us to think that art is an expression of personal feelings and sentiments, preference and free choice, unfettered by the sciences of mathematics and cosmology". The truth, however, is different: "One might as well attempt the study of Christian or Buddhist art without a knowledge of the corresponding philosophies as attempt the study of a mathematical papyrus without the knowledge of mathematics".⁹

In the traditional view the question *What does it mean?* in relation to a work of art is not only legitimate: it is of first importance. That we have been led to believe that such questions are 'irrelevant' is an outcome of modern reductionism. Amongst the nihilistic theorists of the early twentieth century the idea that art points towards transcendent realities was not acceptable, so the question *What does it mean?* was simply banned. Yet in reality, this question is of first importance for the understanding of art — which is not to say that the answer can be reduced to a simple verbal formula. As the English painter, Cecil Collins, has said, can one really believe for a moment that the subject was irrelevant to a Rembrandt or a Michelangelo? Art is a form of knowledge, and the antithesis between it and science is a false one. If science is the reference of all particulars to unifying principles, then art too is science for it seeks just this. The real difference is that art seeks for unifying knowledge inwardly and spiritually, while science (as we at present understand it) seeks it externally and physically.

Art is intimately related to metaphysical knowledge and to man's spiritual aspirations. It picks out the eternal Idea or archetype in phenomena. "All poetry is the image of the eternal

in time", Schopenhauer jotted in his notebooks; and five hundred years earlier the same vision was expressed in Persia by the sufi poet, Shabistari:

Descending to the earth,
That strange intoxicating beauty of the unseen
world
Lurks in the elements of Nature.
And the soul of man,
Who has attained the rightful balance,
Becoming aware of this hidden joy,
Straightway is enamoured and bewitched.
And from this mystic marriage are born
The poets' songs, inner knowledge,
The language of the heart, virtuous living,
And the fair child Beauty.
And the Great Soul gives to man as dowry
The hidden glory of the world.¹⁰

Blake was voicing the same idea when he declared that he who does not see more vividly and clearly than this perishing mortal eye can see does not see creatively at all.¹¹ Only the lowest art — hardly worthy of the name — remains at the level of the emotional and sensual life. A writer often quoted by Coomaraswamy, Walter Andrae, sums up the traditional concept as follows: "To make the primordial truth intelligible, to make the unheard audible, to enunciate the primordial word, to represent the archetype, such is the task of art, or it is not art".¹²

ART AS SYMBOLISM

In seeking to convey this content art has one essential means, and it is symbolism. It is in symbolism, not in representation or the communication of emotional states, that the roots of art lie. There is no other way in which we can speak of realities of another order. To traditional man the physical world is essentially symbolic. This, says Coomaraswamy, was the way in which Neolithic man perceived the world,¹³ and it is still found in what remains of the 'primitive' cultures of today. "The whole man is naturally a metaphysician", he writes; his reasoning is by analogy, symbol, myth. Primitive man did not have merely functional arts. Whatever its function, a truly made object had always a spiritual meaning. It was inconceivable to such a man that a thing should have a 'use' and not a meaning.¹⁴ Everything had a meaning: every object in nature, every form of the landscape, every change of the weather or in the heavens. It was this vision which, in the nineteenth

century, the French Symbolist poets and painters attempted to recapture, as in the famous lines of Baudelaire:

La Nature est un temple ou de vivants piliers
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
 L'homme y passe a travers des forêts de symboles
 Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.¹⁵

Among the Symbolist painters it was perhaps Odilon Redon who, together with Gauguin, came closest to a traditional art. In the twentieth century the English painter Cecil Collins consistently produced images of a traditional nature. Although such artists cannot be called traditional in the full sense — for the simple reason that, if Christianity was excluded, there was no broadly accepted metaphysical tradition upon which they could draw — both succeeded in

discovering in the depths of their own being an essentially traditional imagery. A similar awareness of the metaphysical transparency of the world, and in consequence a keen sense of the sanctity of nature, is characteristic of traditional societies. We need think only of the Australian Aborigines, the North American Indians, or of the art of China and Japan.¹⁶ In a parallel manner, events in the life of a people were not valued and preserved for themselves, i.e. as history, but as symbolising lasting truths: that is to say, they were turned into myth. For such a man it was a mortal sin to fail to see the real behind the changing forms, the myth in the historical anecdote, his immortal Self in the transient human individual. Thus, Cooma-raswamy tells us, Neolithic man lived in a hut that symbolised the cosmos (as did the tent of the North American Indian): "he identified the column of smoke that rose from his hearth to disappear from view



Standing Buddha, detail, from Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, ca. 6th century.



O. Redon "The lost angel then opened black wings".
 Lithograph from *La Nuit*, 1886.

through a hole in the roof with the Axis of the Universe, saw in this luffer an image of the Heavenly Door, and in his hearth the Navel of the Earth, formulae that we at the present day are hardly capable of understanding".¹⁷ All traditional architecture derives from this cosmic pattern. The dome is the great vault of heaven. The smoke-hole of a Neolithic hut — which symbolised the sun-door giving access to transcendence — is preserved in the lantern which still crowns almost every dome. The rectangular space below it is the wide-stretched earth, stable and solid, anchored by the four points of the compass. And the space between, that indefinite, indeterminate area where circle merges into rectangle, represents the intermediate realm of mental and psychic influences.

For traditional man meaning was not something added to useful objects. It was inherent in them: "his weapons, clothing, vehicles and house were all of them imitations of divine prototypes, and were to him even more what they meant than what they were in themselves".¹⁸ There is a symbolism of weaving and embroidery, of the sword, of archery and other martial arts and in many forms of folklore and traditional entertainments.¹⁹ Every craft had its own symbolism, and could become a vehicle for

contemplation. Daily activity never needed to be meaningless. Even a humble pot had profound metaphysical meaning, symbolising that principle which gives form to inchoate matter.²⁰

During the 18th and 19th centuries all of this was reduced to 'superstition'. The word is a revealing one. It comes from the Latin *super-stitio*, meaning that which 'stands over' when the original meaning of something has been lost. We have lost the sense of metaphysical insight, of the transparency of things, on which art formerly drew. "It is this way of life that our civilisation denies to the vast majority of men," writes Coomaswamy, "and in this respect that it is notably inferior to even the most primitive or savage societies with which it can be contrasted.... We have killed the metaphysical man and shut ourselves up in the dismal cave of functional and economic determinism".²¹

ART AND LIFE

Next, in our survey of the traditional doctrine of art, is the question of its purpose. The function of art, in this view, is to further the development of man's inward being.²² Art is a means; not an end in itself. As Coomaswamy puts it, art is for the

man and not the man for art. The human being should not be swallowed up by his art. The idea of the artist as a sort of moral grotesque, absolved in some mysterious way from the norms of human behaviour, has its origins (like so much other 'modern' thought) in the Romantic era. It is the result of a confusion between art and ethics. The poet or painter's task as an artist is to express what he has to tell us as perfectly as possible. His task as a man is to choose well what it is that he expresses. This latter is an ethical, not an artistic, judgement. The two spheres are not to be confused. A work can be at the same time admirable as art, but ethically and socially disastrous; thus Confucius speaks of a Succession Dance as being "at the same time perfect beauty and perfect goodness", and of the War Dance as being "perfect beauty but not perfect goodness".²³ The one sphere does not validate the other: neither does the ethically valuable become for that reason significant art (a 19th century fallacy), nor does the artistically accomplished become for that reason ethically and socially valuable (our own fallacy). To confuse the two, as we commonly do at present, is destructive of both spheres. Although today the condemnation of any form of censorship has become an article of faith, Coomaraswamy was not of this view. If we truly believe that art has value, and is not at bottom a mere amusement, i.e. that it affects us and can change us, then censorship of some sort is the logical corollary of this. If art can be of value, it can also do harm. To maintain that there should be no censorship is in reality to devalue art, to believe in our hearts that it doesn't matter. Of course, if art were always true to itself, always conformed to the traditional pattern and the highest ideal, then censorship would indeed be an imposition — but can we pretend that this is the case?

THE INNER VISION

As we have seen, the truly creative artist is not 'original'. Rather, in St. Augustine's words, "he sees within what he has to do without".²⁴ No artist who does this merely copies another man's work. He works from his own inward vision. That this should be alive for him, and that he should be true to it, is what matters; and if, as frequently happens with traditional art, the result is close to that of another artist, that, far from being a criticism, merely confirms the rightness of his vision. So Coomaraswamy can say, "No matter how many times they may already have been 'applied' by

others, whoever conforms himself to an idea and so makes it his own, will be working originally".²⁵

The artist conforms *himself* to the idea which he will represent; he enters into it and becomes one with it, understands its meaning, lives it inwardly. In this way his activity is a rite; a matter not of thought, but of contemplation. The Indian actor prepares by prayer. The Indian architect is often spoken of as visiting heaven and imitating the forms he sees there.²⁶ There is nothing magical or strange about this. It is from the supra-individual life of the artist himself (as opposed to his personality or individual self) that the vitality of the work is derived. The idea of the thing to be made is not invented, but found and brought to life within the artist. The model is not extrinsic to himself; hence, even when he conforms closely to an iconographic type, his freedom is not impaired. Nor is the artist passive; his inner man actively and consciously uses the psycho-physical man as an instrument. After the vision, the physical work can proceed: he makes "what was shown him upon the Mount".²⁷

GENIUS

This brings us to that mysterious quality called 'genius'. Genius is not, as many have come to suppose, the exploitation of an exceptionally developed individuality. It is, on the contrary, the appearance and action of the non-individual, the *daimon*, the immanent spirit. Inspiration is not the uprush of an instinctive and subconscious will. It is precisely the leaving of the will and the "elevation of the artist's being to superconscious and supra-individual levels.... to raise our level of reference from the empirical to the ideal, from observation to vision, from auditory sensation to audition".²⁸ "I am one," declared Dante, "who when Love inspires me takes note, and go setting it forth in such wise as He dictates within me".²⁹ And a modern painter, Mondrian, has written: "the universal, although its germ is already in us, towers far above us, and just as far above us is that art which directly expresses the universal"; and again, "Through our intuition the universal within us can become so active that it pushes aside our individuality. Then art can reveal itself".³⁰ This is the secret of genius.

THE MODERN SITUATION

Although this is an intensely personal process, it is also a communal one. The image which an artist in

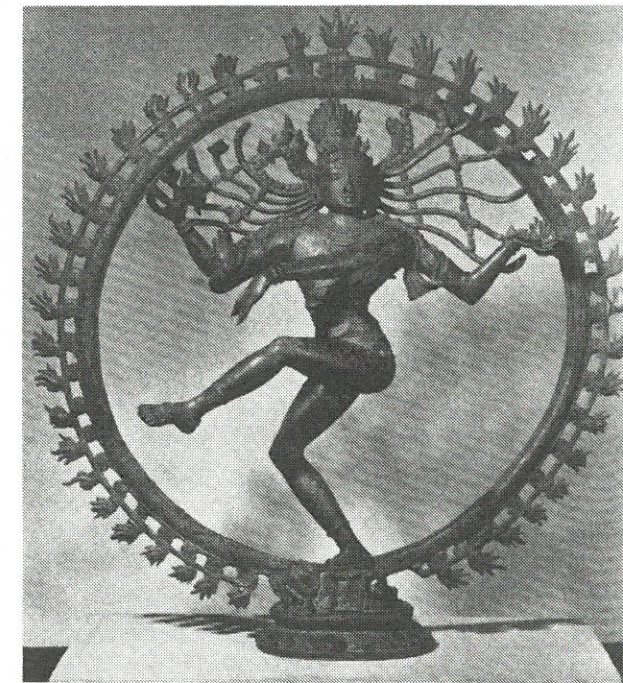
a traditional society, whether it be central Australia or medieval Europe, brings to life within himself is not a private one, but a communal and collective one: others can relate to it in the same way as he did. Another way of defining genius is as that quality which identifies more deeply with, and penetrates further into, the collective images of a culture, and so renews or extends their meaning. This is where the modern artist suffers his most crippling disadvantage. He too, like Mondrian, Rothko, and many others, may follow the same process of turning inwards, but unless he is able to draw on the vital collective imagery of a culture his visions, however inspired, will remain private. Perhaps, if he is fortunate, the meaning of his imagery will become known to a few connoisseurs; even, in time, to a small educated public. But it can never speak to a whole people, to an entire civilisation, with the splendour and authority of a traditional image.

What conclusions can we draw from this brief survey of the traditional philosophy of art? We have seen that our ideas about art are more closely conditioned by the concepts of the modern world than we had suspected, and that they deviate

markedly from the traditional view. Our art, 'modern art', is the mirror image of our civilisation: secular, individualistic, emotionally-indulgent, disoriented. As Coomaraswamy has put it: "In speaking of the decadence of art, it is really the decadence of man from intellectual to sentimental interests that we mean".³¹ It is as a residue from the traditional understanding that art today derives its tremendous prestige. But the prestige is all that remains. The reality that gave birth to it is no longer present. Art, as we now have it, has become a superstition.

A NEW VISION OF NATURE?

Finally, we may return to the question with which we started: is the way forward for art, and especially painting, to be found in a new vision of nature? It is now clear that everything hinges on how we understand 'nature'. If we interpret the word simplistically and take it to mean the appearances of the natural world, then it would seem improbable that this can be a way forward. It would point, rather, to a return to the nineteenth century. But if by 'nature' we mean something



Siva Nataraja (Lord of the Dance),
from Kondavittantidal, Madras, ca. 13th century.

“Art is essentially symbolic, and painting is that art which employs the forms of the natural world so as to symbolise those realities which stand behind it. It is this understanding of the essentially symbolic nature of art which has been obscured.”

more than this, if we mean *inner* nature, the nature *behind* the forms of the natural world and behind man himself, then indeed possibilities begin to appear. As Kathleen Raine has written, “Not outer, but inner space promises to be the theme of a new age”.³²

The belief that the arts — and the art of painting in particular — draw their inspiration from nature is a mistaken one. Art is not *essentially* concerned with the natural world. We have the natural world before us: we do not need painting or any other art to present it to us. But we do need art to interpret it to us. Representation is not the purpose of painting, but its method. In the long run painting cannot do without representation, but it is its means and not its end. Moreover, because painting is not about representation it does not follow, as the modern movement has at times seemed to suppose, that it is not about meaning. Painting, like all the arts, is concerned with ultimate truth, with transcendent reality, and since that is formless, the arts use symbols and metaphor to suggest it. It is only in this way that art can be said to extend our experience, to enlarge our consciousness. Art is essentially symbolic, and painting is that art which employs the forms of the natural world so as to symbolise those realities which stand behind it. It is this understanding of the essentially symbolic nature of art which has been obscured, and it is a restoration of this knowledge, rather than any naturalism as such, which can renew art. In the words of Heidegger, we live between the gods which have flown and those which are yet to come. ≈

NOTES

1. *Christian & Oriental Philosophy of Art*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1974.
2. *Ibid.*, p.27.
3. *Ibid.*, p.39.
4. *Dhammapada*, 74. Quoted in Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p.41.
5. A.K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1974, p.203.
6. *Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, translated by R.W. Stripling, privately printed, 1992, p.ii.
7. *Christian & Oriental Philosophy of Art*, p.39.
8. *Voyage en Italie*, vol.2, p.165.
9. *Christian & Oriental Philosophy of Art*, pp. 29 & 48. See also the well known study by Emile Male, *The Gothic Image*, in which it is repeatedly emphasised that: “The art of the Middle Ages is first and foremost a sacred writing of which every artist must learn the characters”.
10. *The Secret Rose Garden of Mahmud Shabistari*,



O. Redon *Light*, lithograph, 1893.

translated by Florence Lederer, Ashraf Press, Lahore, p.34.

11. Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p.35.

12. Quoted in Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p.55.

13. “The fact remains that symbolism is of an immemorial antiquity.... many of the Vedic symbols, that of the tracking of the Hidden Light by its footprints, for example, imply a hunting culture antecedent to the beginning of agriculture.” Coomaraswamy, ‘Buddhist Art’ in *Selected Papers*, Vol. 1, Bollingen Series, Princeton, 1977, p.173.

14. *Ibid.*, pp.173-175.

15. “Nature is a temple wherein living pillars sometimes murmur indistinct words. Man passes, through forests of symbols which watch him with familiar glances” (from *Correspondances*).

16. “In the art of the Far East, especially in the Taoist and Zen traditions, paintings of natural scenes are veritable icons. They do not just evoke a sentimental pleasure in the onlooker but convey grace, and are a means of communion with transcendental reality”. S.H. Nasr, *Man and Nature*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1976, p. 83.

17. Coomaraswamy, *Christian & Oriental Philosophy of Art*, pp. 32-33.

18. *Ibid.*, p.32.

19. *Ibid.*, pp.40-41.

20. Water, which a pot contains and therefore shapes, symbolises the formless state of matter prior to creation. This is the significance of much of the ornamentation - the frequent wavy horizontal lines, etc. - found on ancient pottery.

21. Op. cit., pp. 26 and 33.

22. “The whole work was undertaken not for a speculative but a practical end.... to remove those who are living in this life from the state of wretchedness and to lead them to the state of blessedness”, wrote Dante of his great poem. Similarly, the Buddhist, Ashvaghosha, wrote of his work, one of the masterpieces of Sanskrit literature: “This poem, pregnant with the burden of Liberation, has been composed by me in the poetic manner, not for the sake of giving pleasure, but for the sake of giving peace”. Both quoted in Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p.54.

23. *Analects*, III, 25. Quoted in Coomaraswamy, op. cit., p.28.

24. *Confessions*, XI, 5. Quoted op. cit., p.38.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, p.32. The historian of Indian art, E.B. Havell, writes: “Indian art is essentially idealistic, mystic, symbolic, and transcendental. The artist is both priest and poet. In this respect Indian art is closely allied to the Gothic art of Europe” (*Indian Sculpture and Painting*, London, 1928, p.10).

27. Coomaraswamy, op. cit., pp. 36-37.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

29. *Purgatorio*, XXIV, 52-54. Quoted *ibid.*, p.37.

30. Quoted in Roger Lipsey, *An Art of Our Own*, Shambhala, Boston, 1989, p.67.

31. Op. cit., p.47.

32. Kathleen Raine, *The Inner Journey of the Poet*, Golgonooza Press, Ipswich, 1976, p.13.

• ECOLOGY AND NARRATIVE •

BETWEEN THE ARTS

by MARILYN DENNES



The author at Seven Mile Beach

Marilyn Dennes has studied and worked both in the biological sciences and the visual arts. Currently she is facilitating creativity therapy workshops.

Narratives tell of the way we have experienced the world, our perceptions and reflections of reality. The narrative is not just an accumulation of the images we construct from our experiences — it is the way those images can be seen and heard by others and also the ways they are recounted by others. Through the threading together of these different aspects of experience our narratives become our daily language, our ways of expression.

Beaches are special places for me, so I offer this narrative of a beach environment and painting *The Three Bluebottles*....

I run along the sweeping curve of the beach which has been mapped as Seven Mile — that is one of the ways I know it. I know this beach by studying its

map, by visiting its ends and its middle, by swimming in its water, by sunning-walking-sculpting-picnicing-playing-loving-gathering-running on its sand, by watching its birds and fish and dolphins, by recognising its flowers, trees and grasses, by smoothing its driftwood with my fingers, by sitting its shell on my table.

This beach is my nexus. It connects my marine biologist and my artist and my runner and my writer and my child and my adult. It allows these different parts of myself to find one another.

I run along the seven miles connected with the huge sandplay of the cosmos — a chaos of pieces of things from the ocean which are distributed by their relative densities and the tides and the wind in an uncertain array. I remember to look for changes in the chaos and to notice the interdependence between phenomena. As I watch where I'm running the flotsam joins with the tracks on the sand and shows me where the sea has been.

The place where I run is the edge of the sea and

the edge of the land. I am drawn into both contexts by the surprising relationships along my track, by the co-relation of the seaweed and the scraps of cloth, the empty crab-shell and the cork, the bluebottle and the brown bottle, the opal pearl abalone and the dark grey feather — objects so ordinary in their own place with their own uses.

On the corner of my inner city street someone had dumped a large sheet of wood — an old table top or the back of something — some urban driftwood. We carried it home to my studio where it only just fits. I have made a painting called *The Three Bluebottles* on this wood — the runner's eye view of the beach.

There are three bluebottles whose foam-light translucent bodies have come to a resting place at the edge of the latest and longest wave. Their toxic tails are swept into the curve of each subsequent flow and almost always point out to sea. Three bluebottles are painted onto my urban driftwood — three for a totemic completeness? When I run these are things I know with my body and my various icons appear and are recognised as surely as the physiological functions of locomotion.

I run past and around the three blue-bottles and their co-relatives and a meaning of the experience becomes manifest when my 'seven mile knowing' leaches onto the several square metres of oil and cloth and crayon and cork covered urban salvage.

Along the bottom lefthand corner of the painting lies an ancient and archaeological 'knowing'. Here there are levels of skeletal forms and middens and the fossil beds in the rock platforms of the South Coast, the bits that were once something else and became a deeper part of the earth — a geological insight. From the middle and moving across to the right are the tiny scampering tracks that accompany me as I run, as we scuttle and trot up into uncertainty, in the top corner on the right.

The ecology of the edge between sea and shore that we follow and explore for our various needs is deeply social; the other trackmakers and I are in an inextricable relationship.

Now the painting is finished. I have painted it to completion yet it continues because I still interact with it each time I go into the studio and at my exhibition I will extend invitations to others to know *The Three Bluebottles*, to know Seven Mile Beach and something of what happens to a runner along its curve. It is the invitation to know and to experience the public/private nexus of an artist. The narrative is never complete.....

This story is an ecological metaphor; it is the accumulation of a story about a story, a description of a description of relationships and experiences in a particular environment. If we want to picture an interaction on a particle level there is an equivalence of space and time in the story given to us through modern physics. As Fritjof Capra writes, we can picture it "in one four dimensional snapshot covering the whole span of time and well as the whole region of space".¹ To extend out from the particle level to our world of experience, to the interactions between story and interpretation and between image and audience, these interactions are not suspended in space or fixed in time but are more akin to the four dimensional snapshot Capra refers to. Just so, the stories we tell about our ecology do not describe a fixed or closed system limited to one place at one time. Rather, our stories can be read as boundless metaphor. If we lose this flux and approximation in our stories and images they become endangered species which get locked away and labelled as 'truth'.

The use of narrative is important for the artist-as-ecologist, not only to elaborate on what is claimed to be 'first principle knowledge' of nature, but to access, encourage and explore narrative as human experience and construction. It is not about rule-making, law-proclaiming and principle-gathering but alternatively the encouragement of "intractable involvement"² with an environment and involvement with all that is re-told, re-sung, re-drawn, re-visited, re-constructed.

My story of the beach can be re-constructed in an infinite number of ways as can any story. This is not only an illustration of the complexity of possibilities of narrative but also an illustration of the complexity of the notion of ecosystem and a critique of the limiting view of much of current science in the naming and bounding of entities called 'ecosystems'. So by re-constructing stories and images we do not provide mere labels for making distinctions but instead illustrate diversity and possibility and 'seamlessness'. We celebrate the subjectivity of an ecosystem. The two parts of the word 'ecosystem' come from two different Greek words — *oiko* (eco) meaning house, and *systema* (system) meaning organised whole. This could be translated as anything from "getting one's house in order" to the "collective and interdependent body of humanity"³ or "the natural biological surroundings of ... human animals"⁴ or even an "immediate circle of self."⁵

The description of ecosystems in science textbooks is usually of a closed system rather than

being an exploration of environmental holism which would be open to difference, diversity and flux. The infinite complexity of interactions in the beach story, for example, demonstrates an openness of flow which extends far beyond the mechanistic ideas of input and output of matter and energy. It includes the totality of possibilities. The people who visit Seven Mile Beach and their daily stories, for example, are no less or more a part of the beach ecosystem than are the banksia trees, the sun, the saltwater or the honeycomb weathering.

When we paint, narrate or listen to stories and describe them in the context of an ecosystem, we do so in relation to all that they do *not* say about that ecosystem. In this way the stories can be in constant re-creation. The narrator, the teller or the reader of stories and images, may become strengthened and experience greater self-realisation by the reflexive interaction of the self with the infinite complexity of the narrative. For example, I interact with the narrative as a woman, as an artist, as a runner, as an ecologist and each of these interactions engages with a different telling of the story and another aspect of the image.

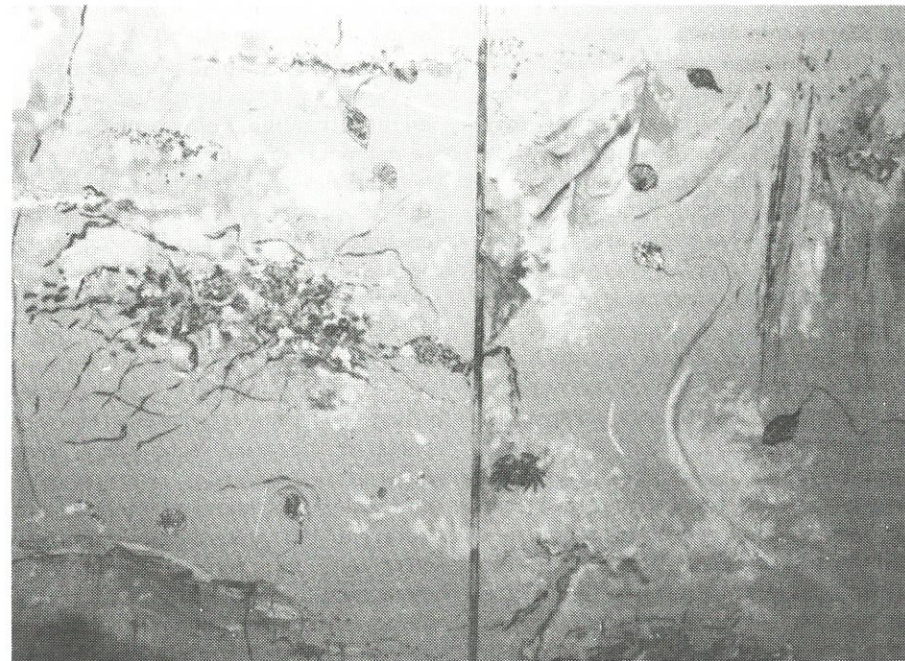
Narrative, then, is about a cross-section of experience. To explore narrative as involving continually new aspects of space-time, as with my

painting of *The Three Bluebottles* and any story which attempts to describe 'seamlessness', allows each of us who is a participant access to "the widest possible circles of being"⁶. We become embedded in our ecology through our description of our experience.

To see narrative in this way, to use it as a process for acknowledging and integrating difference, can begin to conjure new possibilities for interaction and problem-solving around so-called 'environmental issues'. If we accept as fundamental the infinite diversity of stories about a beach or a National Park, we may allow ourselves decisions more inclusive of real needs. ≈

REFERENCES

1. Capra, Fritjof: *The Tao of Physics*, 1975. p.205.
2. Gough, Noel: *Narrative and Nature — unsustainable fictions in environmental education*. 1991. p.3.
3. Gough, Noel: 'Healing the Earth Within Us — Environmental Education as Cultural Criticism' *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 1990. p.14.
4. Bateson, Gregory: *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* 1972, p.430.
5. Matthews, Freya: 'Conservation and Self-Realisation — A Deep Ecology Perspective' in *Environmental Ethics* Vol.10 No.4 1988. p.353.
6. *ibid.* p.354.



Marilyn Dennes *The Three Bluebottles* 3 X 2 m, mixed media on wood, 1990

MERLIN AT OKARITO

One

I've become accustomed to
kahikatea,
matai,
the celestory
vaulting of these tree-ferns;
at first so different
from the oak-groves of Broveliande;
yet familiar,
when I felt another
presence at the margins of my mind,
awakening.

Here also,
then,
in every gully of this country
is a girl,
emerging
from the shadow.

In every gully...

Ah, but none in Niniane.

Two

Tentative...this becoming
in me of the twilight children
of the forest;

but from them
I've learned the sacred names,
beginning:
*te kore, te kore,
te kore-tua-tahi*

I've listened to the shifting
patterns of their voices
in the tympanum
of light;

to the tactus
of their muttered invocations
in the cloistered night.
They have called me:
koekoea;
long-tailed cuckoo
come from elsewhere.

Out of that first void...

Homeless.

Three

And I've watched the shadows
in the limestone caves;
and read the intricate intaglio
of lichen

written on the stone;
and heard the chanting
in the bones,

precipitate
of their ancestral memory.
Beside the pool

I sensed
the ritual resonance of limbs
dividing

light from air;
her image on the silvered
surfaces...

My mind knows I'm alone.
I hear the night:
te po, te po.

Shadows in a cave...

Four

My sole companions are the kotuku
nesting in the kamihi
and kowhai

near the black lagoon.
They haunt my eyes,
their guttural denunciations
grate inside
my skull.

At dusk they loom
white towards my darkness,
dwellers on a threshold
I shall never cross
again.

I would have flown with them.
But the shape-shifting
is over.

I remain
forever here and nowhere...

Captive in a tower of air.

John Allison

• EXPLORING THE BURNING HOUSE •

THE VISUAL ARTS

An interview with LIZ COATS



Liz Coats is a non-figurative painter living in Sydney. Her most recent paintings, *Cicadas*, were shown at Annandale Galleries in June, 1992.

"One senses a potential of infinity in interior space if one can suspend rationality as the images unfold, without tumbling into dispersal and the utterly unnameable. Those substances which congregate in a painting emerge as patterns of energy. They can offer a glimpse of intuitions which are barely formed in fleeting experience or are constant when one is in a state of incapacity to describe them. Associations are relative. Patterns of order and disorder; beautiful meetings, bright flares, slow dances. The painting emerges as recognition rather than memory. Art which is co-existent in its responsive capacity without being illustrative. The house is burning and I am still here!" Artist's statement from 'Frames of Reference' Exhibition, The Wharf, Sydney, 1991.

Transforming Art: Tell me about the way in which you came to create your new paintings, *Cicadas*?

Liz Coats: I began to work with layers of colour brushmarks in 1975. At that time I was starting from nothing. I used very simple means; square canvasses; one colour one layer; directional contrasts in the mark-making linking the underlayers to the top layers; no obliterations, no corrections. Various levels of friction or dissolve occur amongst the colour contrasts according to their opacity or transparency, directional tendencies and the brusqueness or fullness of the marks. I began to notice the emergence of patterns and rhythms which I have come to acknowledge as the structures inherent in the work. I also realised that in the congregations of particles I could imagine possibilities of sound. Later, in 1984/5 I made a group of paintings called *Soundings* which developed this sense of vibration as an extension of spatial repetitions and frictions. I knew then that I would like to work with this speculation further.

With the *Cicadas* I was experimenting with old structures in new combinations which encouraged a swelling and expansive volume as well as visual shifts and patterns of circulation. I had already made several of these paintings in the spring of 1991, when I was in the bush with a friend. We came across a cicada which was about to emerge

from its shell. I could see a small split opening in the dusty brown casing and we crouched there watching for at least half an hour while the insect emerged. Every change in the sequence could be seen clearly, while also seeming to be framed in stillness. One could easily imagine a liquid energy pulsing though the creature, forcing it to expand and change through every point of its body. Simultaneously it was changing colour from the inside with patches of light brown to limey green. Bumps on either side of the abdomen began to lengthen and unfurl into transparent and veined wings which extended beyond the length of the body. It finally shed the hard shell of its underground form and clung there on a piece of burnt wood, strengthening and firming in the sun.

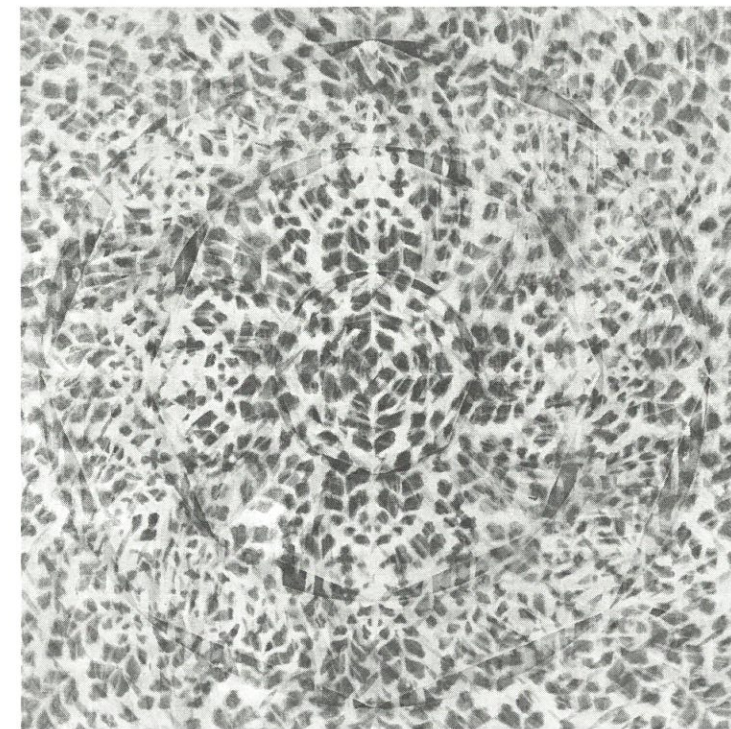
At home I realised that it was entirely appropriate to connect this observation of the emerging cicada with the paintings I was doing. I was also reminded of the experience of being enveloped in the massed sound of hidden cicadas in mid-summer — those swelling and receding waves of sound which penetrate the ears and body of even the most resistant person. Walking through these zones of sound in sunlit bush, the intense vibration resounds through one's body and touches against

its very solidity. The dynamic particles of which one is made seem to surge to meet the sound in an autonomous exchange quite apart from one's will.

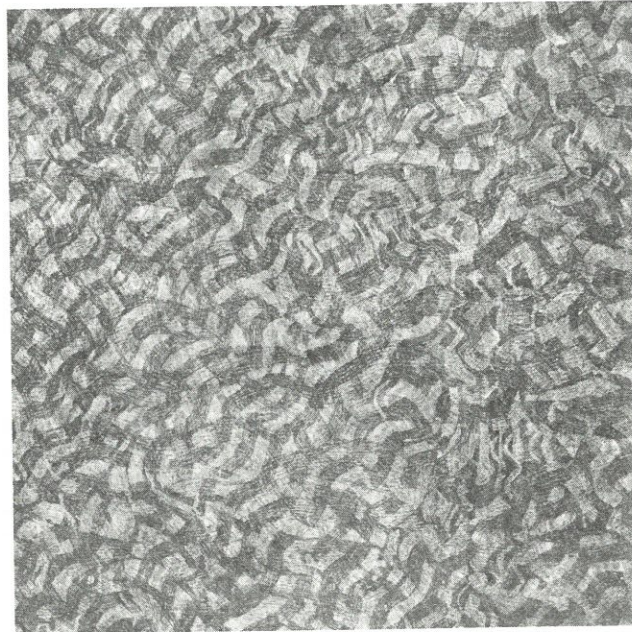
TA: Was it just the particular fascination of those experiences of cicadas that was significant for you or does it have a meaning which goes beyond that?

LC: It took a few years for me to realise that the paintings I was making mirrored for me a sense of life force or energy which was occurring inside my body. Previously I had only observed the outer extensions of my inner vulnerability — sensations of pleasure or discomfort in responding to outer stimuli — without reflecting on the totality of the body as a receptor in all its complexity.

The way I work is to follow a strict discipline of repetitions of structural/colour layers without trying to describe or illustrate anything beyond paying attention to the evolving possibilities of the work itself. From the beginning of my work as an artist my intention was simply to keep the painting alive. What I began to discover was that it was not the type of imagery emerging, nor its density, but that with a certain persistence of working with the surface and a process approach



Liz Coats *Cicadas B1*, 112 X 112 cms, Pigments and acrylic medium on cotton canvas, 1992. Photo: Liz Coats Photo: Liz Coats



Liz Coats *Chameleon 12*, 78 X 78 cms, Acrylic on cotton canvas, 1977.
Photo: Liz Coats

where one makes choices in a consecutive and considered way, one can bring forth emotionally powerful and tensioned forms. Ultimately, it was the patterns of energy which emerged out of the layering process which impressed me. I knew that this could only be achieved by slow and indirect means; that this quality was apart from drawing or iconographic skills and related in part to the maker's emotional and physiological balance. Somehow in the intensity of the work, it became a private investigation into the cohesion of matter.

Reflecting on the feeling of energy moving in the body I do not feel a liquid flow. Perhaps there is resistance but I sense a multitude of points combining in variable pulses in a continuous circulation. I experience a dynamic space which sits behind form and language, a space which surrounds me, is within me, and in which I can move. I can find no adequate verbal container or constant visual image to describe this dimensional space. It is a felt experience which guides me to apply colour as structure and to construct surfaces as containers for light. At an energetic level, a completed painting presents a complex of structure and flux which is beyond verbalisation.

TA: But there is a perceivable geometry within your paintings. It's like a grid or a frame within which everything else is occurring.

LC: I found the way to really strengthen the impact of the visual image was through a containing geometry. One defines edges in order to apply focus, to assist gravity. The idea of edge and fluidity, as an osmosis of colour flowing through resistant surfaces, often seems attractive to women. It suggests the desire for an intuitive relationship with one's surroundings, to experience one's body as a receptor through which one's experiences are refracted.

I have studied the historical development of abstraction, particularly its geometric form and that history has offered useful insights. However, my concern with women's sensibility meant that I had to search for a sustaining emotional and personal base for my exploration rather than accepting analytical or formalist methods per se. The implications of my process, by logical extension, would force transformation of the outer form.

Texts on the transformational process use the metaphor of a vessel, a container in which heat condenses and expands, for instance. That inner expansion meets an edge, and then perhaps through a struggle, an inner friction, the impulse that causes the friction might become conscious. It is important for me that this inner recognition comes from feeling sensation in the body.

TA: Could you say something more about how your work relates to the women's art movement?

LC: It has slowly become clearer to me as I have paid more attention to my functioning, both internally and in society, to my emotional responses and my body sensations, that there are patterns of growth and change within my body, the kinds of processes which are connected with what were once called 'mysteries'. The understanding of a mystery implies a healing, an unfoldment or 'passage'. My reflections on the notion of 'passage' suggested that it is an experience of conscious unfolding into a greater expansiveness and connectedness. I think what many artists have intuited but perhaps not understood is that artists are the communicators of the 'mysteries'. That is their social role and the essential nature of their so-called radicalness is the necessity for them to remain alert and responsive at all times to their present experience, while honouring their connection to history.

Many creative women at present are looking to ancient sources for images of the cycles of living, of our connection to nature and the grief and joy one finds in relationships. Old history sometimes looks more secure than the present. We look at these symbols of another time and we absorb the stories which describe the condition or experience. Jungians go further by saying interesting things like: 'the gods have become our diseases'. In other words, those involuntary cycles in which our being remains in perpetuity — breathing, the circulation of blood, aging, our ability to form fresh human lives within our bodies, are barely connected any more to a consciousness of 'passage' within our social life or our cultural thinking.

TA: All your work has a highly abstract form. I'm wondering if you ever feel the desire for it to become so formed as to become more directly representative of something; for instance, the 'mysteries' or ancient symbols you are talking about?

LC: I can only work from my own experience. Constructing an image identified with a figurative symbol would seem like an outer shell and I have no intention of illustrating or describing anything literal during the making of my paintings. I am seeking subtle colour changes and enigmatic binding of structures for my own interest. I observe the sequences of colour marks as they settle, creating their own spatial order, fusing and

resisting to the point where they vibrate or rotate within their own quality. This is not predetermined but it can be recognised. We are so overloaded with visual symbols; mostly they trigger a language response and the experiential base of their connectedness is overlooked. My interest and instinct proposes more abstract and energetic solutions. The abstraction cuts through general cultural conditioning and the energetic connects below the head to the emotional 'centres' of the body.

Amongst feminists, formalism as in abstraction has been seen to reject content in favour of stylistic refinement. It was seen as a development out of the work of certain modern masters which allowed for a limited range of solutions requiring consolidation through certain critics, galleries and magazines. Any emotional content in abstract work was seen to indicate uncertainty because the aim was to remove anything impure (meaning subjective qualities) from the object. In those terms, nothing could be more objectionable to feminist experience. However I think that the underlying issue in so-called 'purified' form which has been so strongly criticised, is that it can be reflective of a condition of personal evolution. The clarified form works in parallel to a personal experience of purification. This is not a moral paradigm; the necessity for clarification demands a burning, a melt-down of resistant and non-personal frames of reference in the body.

My reading of artists such as Mondrian or Ad Reinhardt suggested that the evolution of their work was highly self-referential although their most successful works reveal clarity beyond the emotional self. At that level the work cannot be understood from a cool, analytical point of view. It is useful to view abstract work with the understanding that it was made with a particular passion of concentration towards an inner necessity.

TA: So your concern is with an inner observation of sensation, not simply with the expression of emotion but an understanding of the actual dynamic of emotional energy?

LC: I must separate here observations of the complexity of inner experience and the process of making a painting. I have been trying to say that the receptivity of the artist, combined with a disciplined approach to process, might allow for the emergence of an energetic quality in the work

in as much as that awareness exists in the body. Then, depending on the clarity and balance of the structure, the viewer can share in the experience. It is for the viewer to recognise and participate independently in the qualities of aliveness.

I would like to speculate here on the continuing relevance of some forms of devotional art. For instance, with Tantric art the intention is to affect a transference, to trigger an emotional projection from a viewer who is in a state of openness, so that the image may 'come alive'. It may draw to the attention of the viewer an inner reality which is constant and which may not otherwise have been perceived. This has a positive and health-maintaining aspect in contrast to that common sense of isolation people feel within contracted boundaries. I think that an artist having experienced a significant coalescing of emotional energy will make of that experience a visual form within the known boundaries of the technology and aesthetic of her or his culture. Its form and character are constructed out of the acuteness of the containing involvement of that experience. The image gains symbolic stature as it is repeated by other artists and accepted collectively for its effectiveness and guidance towards a particular devotional practice.

I might add that I don't think that energy has a definite form; it becomes shaped by your response to and experience of it. I think a possible achievement of any kind of visual image-making is that one can actually create images, whether they are figurative or abstract, which display an inner energy which is part of the process of forming that image. That comes close to a sense of living experience.

TA: What about a painter in the Western tradition like Cezanne, who remained attached in his work to the outer appearances of nature and forms but also tending those forms towards an abstract expression? Does his work have any of that energetic quality you have been talking about?

LC: I think his work is much more radical than most people realise, particularly his late watercolours. He was actually seeing light spectra, painting colour in light. At the same time his extraordinary discipline and respect for the painting tradition kept him grounded and connected to the outer form of the images he was constructing. He ties this intense and prolonged experience of the nature of light to images in the natural world. At the same time the colour marks

are moving and vibrating and collecting and associating in a way that is quite detached; that's why he's so radical. Colour is structure; it is detached from the fixed edge of things so that objects are not solids.

Cezanne leaves it to the viewer to come to conclusions about the nature of the adherence of the parts to the whole and the gatherings of energy which might hold them together. With the fineness of his observations on the nature of matter, he cannot afford to let go of attention to the outer form of the containing structure for a moment, lest he lose the holding tension of all the parts. This tension in the observation and practice is enormous for the artist. I think that he and other artists at the beginning of modernism were working for more and more subtlety in the connection between the parts rather than considering other elements that might emerge. They were watching the subtle interactions between the parts, particularly the volatility of colour and how this operated apart from composition and drawing.

One of the driving forces in the tradition of geometric abstraction is the desire to achieve stillness, an absence of emotive elements. There is also a tradition of private 'self work' practised by committed abstractionists. One works on oneself in order to keep disorder or subjective impulses out of the work. The idea is that the inner quality or 'nature of things', apart from the personality of the artist, might show through in the abstraction if it is reduced to an absolute of stillness. Understanding ultimately that objective stillness is impossible forces a tension which magnifies the difference between 'pure' substance in its stillness and vibrant elements which might emerge.

I am concerned with recognising the body in this process. In fact I find it impossible not to acknowledge the flow through of instinct into the working process. I acknowledge the value of stillness in the work as much as I value the inner calm which one might enjoy in the body. But I also understand this inner calm can be experienced as a platform, or a divide perhaps, in which the stilling becomes simply a means for rational observation of this domain of inner and outer; for selective discriminations about one's condition; for listening to one's deeper signals.

TA: Tell me about your relationship to forms of art which go back beyond the modern period; what kind of images are you most connected with?

LC: I can mention several historical visual forms

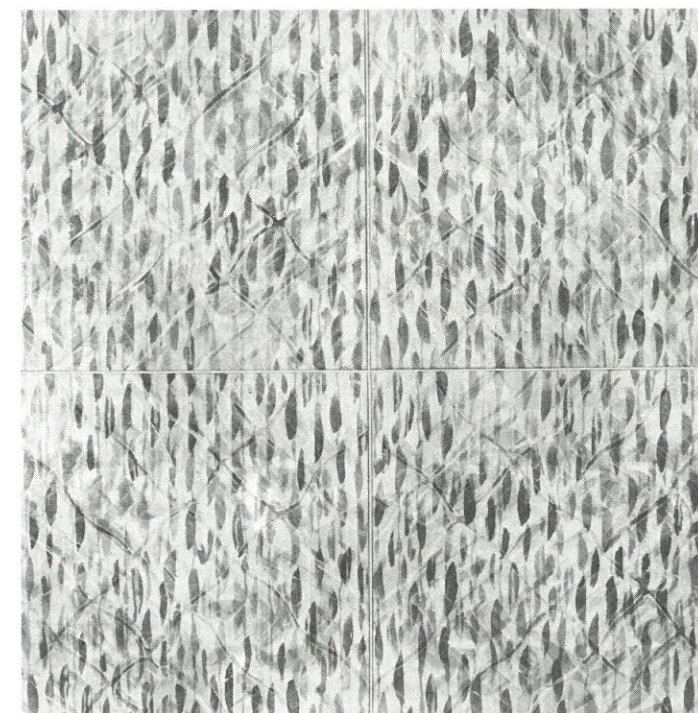
which have become interesting to me in recent years; for instance Byzantine icons. The traditional forms were repeated over hundreds of years but I had previously never asked why these images survived. I talked before about tantric images in general terms, in relation to emotional transference. I think something similar occurs in Mary and the infant Jesus images in the Christian icon tradition. The form usually appears simple, without close attention to realistic detail or perspective. Great attention is paid, however, to subtle directional impulses in the outline drawing; the way it weaves across the body implying gesture through folds of the fabric; the way the faces of the mother and child incline towards each other while one or the other glances out of the picture. There are no disjunctions in the bodies, however concealed under the clothes. One intuitively knows how the inner energy flows. When one connects with that, through belief in the image and its emotional familiarity, the viewer is able to collect the experience into a state of equilibrium and feel a sense of expanding compassion.

Of course these images suffer through constant repetition over time. The tenderness of the artist toward the subject, the artist's technical confidence and a sense of the universality of com-

passion connected to personal experience, condition the impact of the icon. As with Tantric images, these paintings were believed to contain 'mana'. They were thought to be containers for the spirit of that devotional discipline. They were also intentionally portable. We have become accustomed to thinking of art images which have age or monetary value as being rare and valuable objects rather than asking why these objects have survived, what was their purpose.

It has also become clearer to me that the stained glass windows of medieval cathedrals have a clearly conceived emotional content. Because of the proliferation of visual images in modern times the compelling nature of these windows doesn't seem so extraordinary to us. They are constructed with a geometric balance, but they also contain a flow of integrated movements which develop between the colour fragments. It seems to me that the rose windows in particular are images of emotional expansiveness. They are images of the heart, the opening of the heart, and there is nothing exclusive about this experience.

TA: That theme or activity in art which is concerned with the 'opening of the heart'; that is something which hasn't been carried through into the modern tradition, at least not in any overt way.



Liz Coats *Magnetism* 143 X 143 cms, Pigments and acrylic medium on cotton canvas, 1991.

LC: No. This is what I have found so surprising. I and other students with whom I studied art were always trying to understand and articulate what were the special qualities we were trying to evoke. We never seemed to fundamentally understand those qualities in so-called 'great' works which are carried through from century to century. I knew there was something there which I couldn't see and it has taken me all this time to begin to articulate what it might be. It now seems to me that an understanding occurs though one's experience in one's own body — not just through emotional intensity but the conscious unfolding of the nature of the body over time. And I think — why, with all the information that we have, why is all this natural, obvious, fundamental understanding so difficult to access? I now know that what I am experiencing is part of history and I feel angry at how difficult it has been to find conscious access to these simple 'places' that are common to us all but so rarely spoken of. One's formal education must

be turned inside out to gain a sense of continuity in living that is human and sensible.

I can respond to art which is intense, beautiful and absorbing, but as a practitioner I must ask myself — what is this tradition that I am maintaining? I'm really a novice at this and I can only talk from my own experience but it seems that if one can develop an emotional engagement with art works which are recognised as central to a particular tradition, or become involved in devotional practice which maintains a vivid practical base as well as having a strong historical background and relate this to everyday life, there can somehow begin to occur the unlocking of these inner processes. I'm just talking about glimpses of the notion of fullness rather than its achievement. At the very least one might treat one's discipline with the greatest respect as if it might make a contribution to the community apart from any return or self-gratification. ≈

BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE

\$4.00 each (includes postage)

VOLUME 1 NO. 1 1986.

- 'The Crisis in the Arts' by Mark Baxter.
- 'Art as Reflection and Prophecy.' An interview with the sculptor Tom Bass.
- 'A Musical Philosophy of Australian Landscape' by Graham Pont.
- 'Creativity: A Way to the Self' by Nigel Hoffmann.

VOLUME 1 NO. 2 1986.

- 'On Cultivating the Spirit' by Chas Read.
- 'The Source of Creative Power' by Scott Washington.
- 'The Nostalgia for Paradise.' An interview with mosaic artist Mary Hall.
- 'The Piano as Microcosm of Musical Space' by Dane Rudhyar.

VOLUME 1 NO. 3 1986.

- 'The Spirit of Contemporary Stained Glass.' An interview with artist Terrance Plowright.
- 'Art: A New Understanding.' From the School of Cultural and Traditional Studies.
- 'The Traditions of Wholeness in Architecture.' An interview with the architect Keith Critchlow.
- 'Transcending the Division between Art and Science' by Anthony Coronos.

VOLUME 2 NO. 1. 1987.

- 'Wholeness and Natural Science.' An interview with the biologist Dr. Jochen Bochemuhl.
- 'Creative Fields' by Jane Reeves.
- 'On the Emergence of PLANET ART.' An interview with the artist/historian José Argüelles.
- 'Rock and Roll, Ecstatic Transformation and Shamanism' by Shaun McNiff.

VOLUME 2 NO. 2 1987.

- 'What is Art For?' by Suzi Gablik.
- 'Creativity and a Creation Centred Spirituality' by Veronica Green.
- 'Holonomics. A Science/Art' by Nigel Hoffmann.
- 'The Art and Spirit of a Community.' An interview with community artist Ronaldo Cameron.

VOLUME 3 NO. 1 1988.

- 'The Arts and a Post Material Culture' by Charles Johnston.

- 'Thoughts on Creating.' An interview with painter David Wansbrough.
- 'The Nature and Power of Creating' by Dickinson Crompton.
- 'In Search of Sacred Painting' by John Lane.
- 'Future Art Forms.' An interview with composer Ian Frederick.
- 'Six Levels of Art Activity' by Dane Rudhyar.

VOLUME 3 NO. 2. 1989.

- 'The Essential Radianca' by Peter Brook.
- 'Simply Sounding.' An interview with the artist/performer Colin Offord.
- 'The Painter Paints Reality' by Peter Rogers.
- 'The House as Centre' by Harry Remde.
- 'Living Architecture.' An interview with the architects Gregory Burgess and David Mayes.

VOLUME 3 NO. 3 1989.

- 'Theatre and Culture' by Antonin Artaud.
- 'A Sense of Fibre and Fabric.' An interview with Ann and Kathleen Burney.
- 'The Clearing of Vision' by Amanda Yorke.
- 'The Work of the Gardener' by Jeremy Naydler.
- 'Intuition into Form'. An interview with the architect Feiko Bouman.

VOLUME 3 NO. 4. 1990.

- 'Dance of the Heart.' An interview with dancer Ruth Galene.
- 'The Arts and Planetary Survival' by Denys Trussell.
- 'This Earth. What She is to Me' by Susan Griffin.
- 'The Shared Symbolic Order' by Heather Elyard.
- 'Collaborate, Design or Die!' by Ann Martin.
- 'A City is a Living Thing' by David Week.
- 'Community Arts in Western Sydney' by Maria Guppy.

VOLUME 3 NO. 5. 1991.

- 'Artists' Communities. Yugoslavia and Australia' by Nigel Hoffmann.
- 'The Rebirth of Central Europe' by Georg Kühlewind.
- 'The Muse Revisited' by Mihai Tropa.
- 'Organic Architecture in Europe.' An interview with Imre Makovecz.
- 'The Gate of the Cemetery, Kaposvár' by Ferenc Lorincz.
- 'Mankind and Architecture' by David Morgan.
- 'The Future of Czech Theatre.' An interview with Petr Ostly.
- 'Theatre with a Slavic Soul.' An interview with Katerina Ivak.

TRANSFORMING ART, P.O. BOX 92, HAZELBROOK NSW 2779.

REVIEWS



PERFORMANCE
Revealing the Orpheus Within
Anthony Rooley
Element Books, Longmead, 1990

It is good to know when reading a book like this that the author is actually a practitioner of the ideas he is talking about, for his theories could easily become overly abstract and abstruse. No insult to the scholars intended but the book has obviously been informed by a lot more than just erudition; it has real zest in spite of the fact that it is intensely philosophical. This is refreshing considering the number of books on the philosophy of music which are so dry and hard to digest including several in this author's own bibliography. (Rooley is a lutenist, sculptor, writer and director of the *Consort of Musicke*, a Renaissance group which he founded in 1969.) He has gone out of his way to transmute the ideas he presents into something which will excite and inspire people; the book is directed not towards scholars but to performers. He wants to help very ancient ideas come alive in the present.

For indeed the myth of Orpheus goes back a very long way in our cultural history and has no known origin; Homer is believed to be the first to have written about it. Rooley discusses the Greek myth of Orpheus and the interpretations which have been made of it down the centuries, but his main focus is the Renaissance period when the myth had popular revival, mainly through the work of the Italian musician and philosopher Marcilio Ficino and to a lesser extent the English Neo-platonic philosopher and musician John Dowland (who was dubbed 'the English Orpheus.')

Rooley obviously feels strongly connected to this tradition of philosopher-musicians which modernism has more or less forgotten about. In the 16th century it was considered normal for a philosopher to be also a musician and Ficino's ideas were influential throughout Europe. Rooley would have the modern performer, whose artistic education probably had nothing to do with mystical let alone 'magical' ideas, discover why the Orphic myth and associated philosophies rose to such prominence during the Renaissance period.

The essential point is that Orpheus is not significant as an historical figure but as a quality which may be revealed in every person; Orpheus is the archetypal performer receiving his inspiration directly from the Divine. Therefore the 'Orphic' quality which may be revealed through any person's performance is inspired and carries a special wit and energy. Rooley writes that, "the archetypal image or symbol has power precisely because we carry it imprinted in us in some way." That quality is revealed in a person not so much through *what* they do but *how* they do it; it is the experience of an 'enthusiasm', the result of which is a performance which carries an altogether new power. The special experience of performance, the heightened state that it can induce, becomes "a ritual which has relevance for our entire lives if we choose to see it that way."

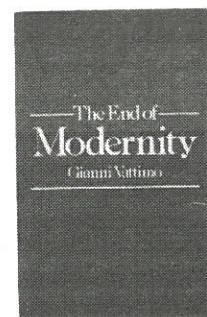
Rooley, delving into the nature of this 'quality', finds three principle aspects which have been described by the Italian Platonic poet Pietro Bembo in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*. The first is *decoro* which is 'outward show', the appearance of things which the assiduous student (of life or the performing arts) can control and study, develop and refine. The balancing principle to *decoro* is *sprezzatura* — a lightning-like energy which carries courage, excitement, even rashness. It is a quality which cannot be practised; it's the love of improvisation or 'calculated carelessness.' Yet both *decoro* and *sprezzatura* bow down in submission to *grazia*, which is something like our meaning of 'grace' without any Christian associations. This a quality from the Divine, uncontrollable, unownable, without limit, belonging to no-one. It comes as a gift. As Rooley points out, *grazia* cannot manifest itself on request yet its

presence is felt immediately. It is noticed first in the spaces between the notes, in the silences rather than the sounds. Some composers are able to aid its manifestation more than others and Rooley mentions Josquin, Monteverdi, Bach and Mozart as examples. The 'Orphic' performance manifests the most perfect balance of these three qualities.

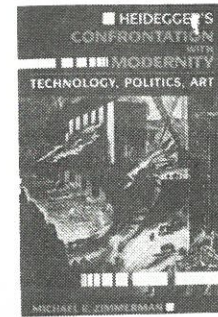
Rooley moves through a number of issues relating to how, or in what circumstances, these qualities are evoked and how a balance between them is achieved. For example, there is the question of the role of the audience; also the importance of characterisation or 'entering' the quality of the music or whatever is being performed. The performer becomes the 'servant' of the work, the work's mouth-piece; the role of the performer is essentially dutiful according to Rooley, full of love and admiration for the work (if not, then perhaps the performer should not be performing that work.) The meaning of the Greek word *temenos* (sacred space) is also discussed; that is, the transformed experience of space which occurs, for both performer and audience, when "Orpheus makes his appearance." In connection with this Rooley draws an interesting comparison of the present-day conception of 'the artist' with that of the Renaissance. These days people call themselves 'artists' as soon as they leave art-school and hold their first exhibition or performance. In the 16th century the title 'artist' was bestowed with considerably more care. 'Craftsman' was the usual designation for the worker in the arts and was never confused with the 'artist' who was understood to have achieved a special level of inspiration. Michelangelo, for one, was called 'Il Divino'. Rooley doesn't omit to mention the dangers of this way of thinking, which are self-identification or a person taking unto themselves powers and qualities which were bestowed on them as gifts. The idea of the unfolding of a 'higher' quality lying in potential in every person (which is the whole significance of the Orphic tradition) is something which modern artistic culture either dismissed or has forgotten about.

I feel one of the problems of the book is that, for all its enthusiasm, it does very little to address particular issues concerning the modern performing arts. It does little more than criticise them through drawing unfavourable comparisons with tradition. This is perhaps not surprising from a writer whose obvious principal fascination is the music and philosophy of the Renaissance period and the 'perennial tradition' in general. Another deficiency is that there is no examination of how

the modern movement of art arose out of or is organically connected to the 'perennial tradition'. If the Orphic tradition can be reestablished in the modern era, will it be through the overcoming of modernism or will it be through building upon the achievements of modernism? Such questions are not asked, even in the last chapter which is entitled 'An outline for a future course in music study' and which draws primarily from Neo-platonic philosophy and the tradition of *musica speculativa*. Perhaps he is leaving the work of reconciling tradition and modernism to others or perhaps he intends to tackle it in a future work of his own. He points to either possibility at the very end of the book where he says, "a fuller understanding of the [Orphic] mystery will be ours as we engage in the work that still lies ahead."



THE END OF MODERNITY
Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture
Gianni Vattimo
The Johns Hopkins University Press
Baltimore 1991



HEIDEGGER'S CONFRONTATION WITH MODERNITY
Technology, Politics, Art
Michael E. Zimmerman
Indiana University Press,
Bloomington & Indianapolis 1990.

These two books have been taken together for review because they are both primarily concerned with the ideas of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and specifically with his ideas about art in the postmodern world in relationship to technology and the history of metaphysics. In many other respects, however, these books are quite different; each appropriates

Heidegger's ideas into quite different 'styles of thinking'. Vattimo theorises in a post-modern theoretical style which can be related to the work of Derrida, Gadamer, Gehlen, Rorty and others. He is interested in the decline of modernist art and the possible ways art can 'be' within post-modernism. He believes that the current of nihilism in modern culture which has produced this decline is not merely a negation but can lead to something positive, to a new, truly secular culture. Zimmerman's style of thinking, on the other hand, derives from a more defined commitment or desire; his stated concern is for the fate of humanity and the earth in our age of ever-increasing technological domination of nature. He finds that Heidegger's solutions come close to what the world religions, for example Buddhism, have described as 'enlightenment' or the 'release' from a dependent relationship or identification with the things of the world (and concomitantly the need to dominate them.)

The End of Modernity consists of a collection of essays by Vattimo grouped around the themes 'Nihilism and Destiny', 'The Truth of Art' and 'The End of Modernity'. In each essay Heidegger's ideas are constantly referred to and elaborated upon. Vattimo also makes reference to other philosophers, in particular Nietzsche, in whose conception of deconstruction he sees the beginning of postmodernism. Deconstruction is the cultural project which aims to dissect and dissolve all forms metaphysical thought. Deconstructive philosophy contends that all thought which pretends to discover 'truth' is delusory, that all 'truth' is subjective and that everything we encounter in the world is not 'fact' but interpretation. The difference between deconstruction and conventional critique, in Vattimo's view, is that deconstruction, unlike critique, cannot call on some other, supposedly superior form of 'truth' to take the place of what has been dissolved, for this would be to remain in the mode of modernity and metaphysical thinking. The 'accomplished nihilism' which Nietzsche had first talked about and is continued in Heidegger's conception of *Abgrund* is not a new 'truth' or foundation for thinking. As Vattimo says, "Heidegger's [conception of] *Abgrund* calls us to a fictionalised experience of reality which is also our only possibility of freedom." (p.29) Vattimo suggests that a positive outcome of postmodernism will come only through a deeper understanding of the implications of nihilism. Modernism (embracing the phenomenon of modern technology) is spec-

ifically a development out of the history of metaphysics and the principles of rationalism. Vattimo says (following Heidegger) that logic is in fact only a kind of rhetoric, that all thought that pretends to discover 'truth' is an expression of the 'will to power'. Postmodern thinking or 'accomplished nihilism' reveals the quest for 'the new' in modernity, the ideal of progress, as hollow because the ultimate value of progress is simply, "to create conditions in which further progress is possible in a guise that is always new." (p.8)

The key way in which the postmodern situation shows itself, according to Vattimo (and Heidegger) is through art. Vattimo says, "Post-modern art appears as the most advanced point at which the process of secularisation...has arrived" and "for the arts, the value of the new, once it has been radically unveiled, loses all possibility of foundation or value." (p.106.) How does this dissolutive art work in a way which differentiates it from the early twentieth century avant-garde movements? According to Vattimo (interpreting Heidegger and drawing from Derrida) not by attempting to *overcome* anything, to assert any new 'truth' or value, but by re-collecting or remembering the 'traces' and 'residues' of the history of metaphysics and through greater insight which gradually dissolves from culture those last residues of magical and mythical thought. An art stripped of all claims to represent the 'real' or the 'eternal' — that for Vattimo represents the condition of art in the postmodern age.

Zimmerman begins his *Confrontation with Modernity* by examining how Heidegger's philosophy was connected to the rise of National Socialism in Germany between the Wars. In this period, more than in other European countries, there was an apprehension about the growing power of international technological industrialism and the associated loss of workers' traditional ties with the earth. There was a strong movement in Germany for the reinstatement of *Volk* culture as a way of combating the perceived evils of modern technology and this was the doctrine upon which Hitler rode to power and gained the support of many philosophers including Heidegger. After the Second World War Heidegger broadened his critique from the context of the German *Volk* to the effects of technology on the whole of human culture and 'nature'. He traced the origin of modern technology to the 'productionist metaphysics' of the Ancient Greeks, to the notion that for something to 'be' it is produced, created from an

eternal model (such as Plato's 'archetypal forms'). This was later taken over by the Christian idea of a creative God but the 'productionist metaphysics' is the same and it remains at the heart of modern technological thinking. Heidegger shows that in the development of the metaphysical tradition the Greek word *techne* becomes modern 'technology' which defines all things within the mode of production and consumption; it becomes the 'framing' (*Ge-stell*) which is Heidegger's word for the rationalistic manipulation (knowledge) and associated technological manipulation of things.

Art was vitally important in Heidegger's critique of technology because he sees the way art comes into being and the way 'truth' is disclosed in the work (as opposed to the coming into being of a factual 'truth') as the way to an authentic understanding of *techne*. The 'happening' of truth in art is not the *production* of something in the mode of 'productionist metaphysics'; it is a disclosure of the being of a thing, the 'clearing' which allows the nature of the thing to come to presence. The work of art reveals the nature of things as they already are but which we are usually blind to. Heidegger saw art as that "which could reveal things *as things*, in their individuality, their depth, their being — other than commodities." (p.237) Because he saw the primary meaning of *techne* as 'art' or the capacity to disclose something, even modern technology is a mode of artistic disclosure although a highly constricted one. Heidegger envisioned the possibility that modern technology could assume a genuine mode of 'disclosing' which preserves and guards things instead of exploiting and dominating them.

However, according to Heidegger, a culture beyond technology and modernism is not something that can be achieved through the *overcoming* of technology for such forcefulness would be merely the perpetuation of the exploitative character of technology or metaphysical consciousness. There is, however, the possibility of a 'turning' from within the heart of technology if it is penetrated through insight, if its core assumptions are deconstructed. Heidegger originally thought the mood of the poetry of Hölderlin could engender the possibility of such a 'turning', in particular within German culture. Later in his life when his thinking became more global he conceded that the traditional art forms may not have the inspiring and transformation producing effect he had originally conceived. He never lost his faith in the possibility that art could reveal the true mode of *techne* but he realised that

many forms of human activity could function in that way, including modes of working with the body (and his ideas in this direction have been developed by writers such as David Michael Levin, Paul Shepherd, Norman O. Brown and Rosemary Radford Ruether.)

As general discussions of the ideas of Martin Heidegger both of these books have a great deal to offer but if we are looking for a full assessment of Heidegger's philosophical mission I think Zimmerman's book is superior. Vattimo may well be developing his own conclusions out of Heidegger's ideas and making original observations about the relationship of Heidegger to other philosophers, but he writes continuously within the framework of Heidegger's philosophy. His is not a critique of the philosophy of Heidegger but an elaboration of it. Therefore it seems to me strange that he only develops Heidegger's ideas in a partial way — he is basically concerned with the deconstruction and dissolution of metaphysics and modern technological culture. Yet, as Zimmerman says, "Heidegger believed that his task was not only to deconstruct the history of productionist metaphysics, but also to prepare the way for an alternative to that history". (p.222) That 'preparation' aspect is thoroughly described in Zimmerman's book but only hinted at in Vattimo's; it is Heidegger's elaboration of the notion of an authentic *techne* and the ways in which it can be disclosed in art. Vattimo never states why he neglects this aspect of Heidegger's philosophy; one has to assume that he is not personally interested in it. It could also be that such speculations take him into a realm where, as he writes, there is "a risk of seeing it as opening onto possibilities which are too clearly mystical". (p.80) A disdain for the 'mystical' is something he has in common with philosophers such as Derrida; it would be almost unthinkable within their secular, theoretical 'style of thinking' to talk in any direct, unreserved way about matters such as the fate of the earth, (the plants and the animals together with the humans) the total and mysterious power of Being which determines the ontological and temporal perimeters of human culture. Yet to do that would be to remain true to Heidegger's own 'style of thinking' and underlying beliefs.

Nigel Hoffmann

CENTRE FOR ARCHETYPAL STUDIES

THE NEWLY FORMED CENTRE FOR
ARCHETYPAL STUDIES
AT LA TROBE UNIVERSITY WISHES TO
ANNOUNCE THAT ITS INAUGURAL
CONFERENCE WILL BE HELD FROM
November 27-29 1992 at Menzies College
Conference Centre, La Trobe University,
Bundoora, Victoria. The conference will be called:
"JUNG AND THE AUSTRALIAN PSYCHE".
Papers and forums will address a variety of issues,
including the status of Jungian thought in
Australia, Australian literature and landscape,
Aboriginality, education theory, and concepts of
Australian identity. Presenters will include Peter
O'Conner, Bernie Neville, Peter Bishop, among
others. A formal application form will be available
soon and any enquiries can be directed to:
Dr. David Tacey, School of Humanities, La Trobe
University, Bundoora, Victoria, 3083.



L'ATELIER
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR THE ARTS INC.



L'Atelier is an association of professional artists devoted to the success of this enterprise.
L'Atelier Art Studio
84 Glebe Point Road
GLEBE SYDNEY NSW 2037
Telephone: (02) 692-9128
Fax: (02) 692-0908

TO SUPPORT, ENABLE AND
DEVELOP CREATIVITY

What is L'Atelier

"There is a country made of all the countries in the world,
and in this country there is a city made of all the cities in the country,
and in this city there is a street made of all the streets in the city,
and in this street there is a house made of all the houses in the street." (Volin)

... it's L'ATELIER

What L'Atelier Offers

L'Atelier Art Studio offers Classes,
Workshops and Performance Space.

THEATRE

Acting Speech Set Design
Mask Poetry Costume
Script Reading Storytelling

MOVEMENT

Mime Dance Eurythmy
Yoga Tai-Chi Chi-kung

MUSIC

Classical Ethnic Contemporary
Recording Sound and Production

VISUAL ARTS & CRAFTS

Painting Sculpture Photography
Screen Printing Gentle Arts
Film and Video Production

More information, calendar and class schedule is available from L'Atelier.

Tom Bass SCULPTURE SCHOOL

For an experience of really seeing form and making sculpture, both modelling, carving and construction — to engage in a thorough intensive study of the life figure in drawing and sculpture — to learn the skills and craft of mould making and casting, speak to:

Tom Bass of
159 Broadway, Sydney 2007
Ph. (02) 212 3153 or 660 2170

Day and evening classes

ARCHITEXT

Tusculum
3 Manning St, Potts Point NSW 2011
Tel. (02) 356 2022
176 Bouverie St, Carlton VIC. 3053
Tel. (03) 347 2894 or 008 333 240. For mail order contact Carlton shop.

- Best selection of Architectural Publications.
- We specialize in architecture, interior design, urban design and landscape design.
- Discounts for students and RAI A Members

THE RAI A BOOKSHOP