



TIME OUT

The Road From Pol Pot

In August Vietnam announced the beginning of its withdrawal from Kampuchea. The country's long nightmare, which started with Pol Pot's accession after 1975, may at last be drawing to a close. Carlotta McIntosh travelled across a country slowly regaining its memory.

"During the Pol Pot years, I learned to pretend that I knew nothing, saw nothing and heard nothing. Because I knew that to speak out, to be clever, was to die." Thlang Sarun is a survivor from the three years, eight months and 20 days of the Khmer Rouge regime. Now the Kampuchean Chief of External Relations in the Vietnamese-backed Phnom-Penh government, Sarun saw his family starve to death in a Cambodia that was once known as the rice bowl of Indochina. French speaking and university educated, Sarun is typical of the urban professionals of Kampuchea.

In 1975 the entire population of the capital, Phnom Penh, was forcibly evacuated by the People's National Liberation Armed Forces of Kampuchea. Sarun took along the family gold, but it wasn't enough to save his brothers, a sister and his children from starvation before the Vietnamese army drove the Khmer Rouge forces to the Thai border in 1979.

At the Chamcar Mon State Palace, built for his guests by Prince Sihanouk, the Vice-president of the Council of Ministers, Chea Soth, told journalists of the "rebirth" of Kampuchea. "The people have something to eat, somewhere to sleep and they can move freely throughout the country," he said. In answer to questions about the effect of the current drought, Soth said that Kampuchea is facing a rice deficit of 156,000 tons in 1988.

That evening, the tables in the palace dining hall were set with starched linen, silver cutlery and lavish plates of food — astonishing in a country where famine is imminent. Sarun recounted how, under Pol Pot, he was rationed to a spoonful of coffee a day, here was no rice except on holidays, and mostly he was forced to eat roots from the forest and to catch fish in the stream.

Soth invited journalists to "visit with their own eyes the free markets of Phnom Penh". In Kampuchea today, provincial officials speak proudly about newly built schools

and the increase in wet and dry rice production. The nightmare is in the past and yet the task of reconstruction is far from over. Famine waits patiently behind every rice paddy. Only fifty percent of the food target was reached in 1987; the rest was donated by Vietnam, the USSR and non-government agencies in the west.

The generous hospitality of our hosts can be easily mistaken for bad taste. How to explain to these representatives of the western media that you need help — without losing face? "Qu'est-ce-que sont les plus grands problèmes dans la ville?" I ask in my best school-girl French. I am face to face with a thin middle-aged man, the editor of the newspaper *Kampuchea*. It is the children, he tells me. We have so many children's diseases. What, I said desperately, throwing all my good manners away, do you need most? He seemed stunned by my antipodean directness. I don't know, but I will find out.

No one escapes the ritual visit to Tuol Sleng, the former headquarters of the infamous S21, the Khmer Rouge secret police. The former high school has been left almost as it was in 1979 when the S21 fled in disarray as the Vietnamese army pushed into Phnom Penh along with rebel remnants of the old Khmer Rouge forces. The barbed wire on the school verandahs serves as a reminder of the terrible atrocities that took place.

As resistance against Pol Pot's experiment in social engineering grew, so did the power of the secret police. Opposition to Pol Pot's policies sparked a violent purge within the government itself. The Minister for Information in Pol Pot's government confessed under torture at Tuol Sleng to being an agent of the KGB and the CIA.

It is Kampuchea's Auschwitz. We are shown the room where the confessions of the accused were stored. More than ten thousand people entered Tuol Sleng, only eight are known to have survived. Similar death prisons were discovered around the country. Important prisoners were chained to the floor in tiny cells. Large black and white

photographs of mangled bodies hang beside the iron beds where suspected traitors were tortured. The piles of clothes, the water cure closet and the photographs of the hapless victims, their faces frozen with fear, combine to produce a feeling of deep depression. We are told that no one in Kampuchea during that time escaped without losing at least one member of their immediate family. Kampuchean never seem to tire of telling foreigners about the genocide. The repetition grates on one of the western journalists. "Why," he asks, "do they keep harping on this stuff. Everybody knows about Pol Pot."

The Mekong River crossing is hot, dust and crowds. Trucks loaded with supplies from Ho Chi Minh City queue up to cross the river. Above the levee a huge crowd throngs this busy trading point between Kampuchea and Vietnam. They watch us as we walk about waiting for the ferry. The soldiers keep the people back. A bus with produce on its roof gets a tyre change. A Kampuchean official hustles and we jump the queue of trucks waiting for a place on the ferry. The ferry carries cars, trucks, buses and passengers swiftly across the muddy but majestic Mekong.

First stop across the border at the town of Svay Rien, a formal press conference with provincial chief Mouk Sim, who speaks in Kampuchean that sounds like bursts of automatic gunfire. The interpreter yells through a loud hailer. Questions about the food crop, public programs, education, then a trip to the toilets, scented wet towels, coffee, soda water, and back to the buses. We learn that some of the Kampuchean officials are journalists. Gracefully they hand out lunch of cold chicken, fruit, bread and lukewarm beer.

The road from Svay Rien Province to Phnom Penh crosses the safest region of the country. The potholed surface of the narrow road makes progress slow. In the rainy season, large tracts of Kampuchea are covered with water. In January, the paddy fields are brown although some lie under water, evidence that the fragile system of dams and dykes



The nightmare recedes: a Kampuchean soldier guards the road to Phnom Penh.

is slowly being repaired. The irrigation system was extensively damaged by US bombing attacks aimed at flushing out Viet Cong guerrilla units during the 1970-75 pro-US Lon Nol government. After 1975, a whole class of professionals were killed or fled the country and Pol Pot's peasant engineers were ill-equipped to direct the necessary reconstruction. The houses, poor by Vietnamese standards, stand on poles; boats tied up below wait for the rains to release them. As our caravan passes by the people stare with amazement. We are a rare spectacle.

"Under Pol Pot the people were starving because they were not permitted to plant, but now they can plant and harvest their own food." In Ho Chi Minh City, the day before, the Kampuchean Deputy Foreign Minister's words raised intriguing questions about communism in Kampuchea today. If forced collectivisation has been abandoned, has the notion of co-operative production also been abandoned? Are Kampuchean peasants free to dispose of the fruits of their labour as

they wish? Has the disastrous experience of Khmer Rouge communes completely erased any desire to experiment with communal farms? The brown paddy fields, partly under water, and fragile stilt houses surrounded by sugar palms give no answers to these questions.

Wheels are precious. Bicycles often carry two, three, or even four people each. The road is thick with traffic as peasants carry their wares to market. Trucks loaded with sacks and people on top trundle past towards the Vietnamese border. The black pyjamas of the Khmer Rouge are gone and, in their place, a riot of red and pink hats, woven Khmer headscarves and embroidered clothing enliven the dusty roadside. A Kampuchean journalist proudly dressed in a safari suit and wearing glasses tells us that such an outfit would have condemned him to death ten years ago.

The caravan stops. We scramble out to stretch our legs and take pictures. The Kampuchean soldiers spill out of the jeeps and stand guard. Slowly, children emerge from a nearby field. We watch and wave.

They advance slowly, their curiosity overcoming their shyness. They regard us gravely as we take pictures, but the unscheduled stop is not for your benefit. A journalist from Agence France Presse sustained a head wound when he stood up in the moving bus to get a better view of the countryside. As he is taken by ambulance to Phnom Penh, one old Indochina hand is heard to mutter, "Wait till he sees a Khmer hospital".

Sarun tells me that there were no hospitals as such during the Pol Pot years. Young soldiers untrained in medicine improvised with natural cures, but they knew nothing of sterilisation so they often caused more illnesses than they cured. The denial of knowledge was a principle that all soon learned to obey. "One saw nothing, one heard nothing, one knew nothing." Sarun's knowledge of French could have put his life in extreme danger.

With crazy urgency we press on despite the objections of journalists who want to stop to take pictures of the terrain most heavily bombed during the final years of Nixon's presidency.

In the concrete pagoda palace of Chamcar Mon, long white tables bearing exquisite food have been laid out for the foreign guests. At one end an incredible moving sculpture of tropical fruit with blinking coloured lights adorns the wall. Cymbals and gongs fill the warm air of the outside theatre courtyard with the sounds of Cambodian culture. A special concert has begun. The extravagance of the Khmer costumes and dance celebrates the fabled Kampuchea of Angkor.

Ros Kosal is 23, a journalist with *Pracheachon*, a weekly newspaper of the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party. Before he reached fourteen, his parents and seven brothers were killed by the Khmer Rouge. His country has been at war since he was five years old. Government ministers and officials are often young, like Ros, or over fifty. Why, he asks, did no one come to help the Kampuchean people? I don't know the answer to that question. I only know that, even now, the trauma of Kampuchea remains in the bottom drawer, an illegitimate sub-text to

our collective guilt about Indochina.

The next morning our scheduled stop at the old palace is cancelled. As our bus is about to leave the palace gates to take us to the airport, Ros is running, almost flying down the driveway, wearing an enormous smile on his face and waving a small piece of paper in his hand. It's my reply from the editor of the *Kampuchea*. It reads, in French: "Schoolbooks, coloured pencils, exercise books, powdered milk and compasses".

Angkor Wat. Built when the territory of Kampuchea stretched from deep inside Vietnam's present borders to well inside the current frontier with Thailand. A tangible sign that a long time ago Kampuchea was a rich and powerful country. The friezes worn shiny from the touch of human hands, the precious metals and priceless gems are long since gone. The paved corridors and inner hallways are concave with the footsteps of a thousand years of human passage. Desecrated statues are reminders of recent history.

The sound of distant gunfire tells us that we are near the border with Thailand. Most of the fighting in Kampuchea takes place near the border camps where the coalition troops of Norodom Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouge are based. Our guide tells us not to worry — it's just rifle practice.

As the Soviet piloted plane takes off from Siem Riep airport, it sways from left to right as if in a dog fight. The fancy flying is not meant to impress, it is simply standard procedure in case of Khmer Rouge attacks. Anti-aircraft guns on the tarmac are a reminder that, despite the imminent Vietnamese withdrawal, this still is a country at war. My Kampuchean guide explains that it's just a precaution. He is eager to practise his English. He had an Australian teacher of English before 1975 but, "my mind has been mixed up, I cannot remember his name".

CARLOTTA McINTOSH is a member of the Sydney ALR collective.

ANGKOR WAT- KAMPUCHEA. VIETNAM, LAOS.



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The Jackson Enigma

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A modern musician in the expressive Afro-American tradition whose unreal abilities as a singer and performer place him in a class of his own. Which is the real Michael Jackson? Is there a real Michael Jackson?

As a phenomenon of '80s popular culture, Michael Jackson's stardom has attained a strange kind of hyper-reality. The image is everywhere, on billboards, badges and T-shirts, in adverts, newspapers and magazines: it's hard to believe there might be a real person at the centre of the mythology created around this multi-media mega "personality". But then Michael Jackson is also the product of a unique career in the modern entertainment industry which began at age six when he fronted his brothers in the Jackson Five. A family group (like many black American musical acts), the Jacksons were moulded and initially managed by their father Joe, who left his job in a mid-west steel town to promote them into Motown's premier teenybopper group.

I Want You Back, a Jackson Five hit from 1970, has recently been in the charts again, but Michael has moved on from his working-class roots in Gary, Indiana. Some 20 years later, receiving an award at the White House, it's not clear who was upstaging or outperforming whom: the Hollywood actor turned politician or the Boy Who Fell to Earth? Only in America perhaps, but if Jackson's life story (as told in *Moonwalk*, his autobiography) tells us how one black boy entered the American dream, the question is how



can he escape when it turns into a nightmare? His next tune for the Pepsi advertising campaign is called *The Price of Fame* — he should know.

As a key icon of the '80s the focus of mass attention is on Michael Jackson's face. The cute child all got up in gaudy flower-power gear grew up into an image of profoundly post-modern peculiarity. As a star of the second time around, Jackson has redesigned his image, creating a spectacle of sexual and racial ambiguity: is he masculine or feminine, child or adult, black or white? Does it make any difference anyway?

With its mask-like unreality, the changing racial/facial features of this image have generated endless commentary, stories and speculation about his "true" identity.

It is the ethnic indeterminacy — "He used to be black", as one 11-year-old fan said to me — that has captured the public imagination. It has been said that he's had plastic surgery to make himself look "more white", although he admits only to a couple of nose jobs and the insertion of a cleft chin: "I have never had my cheeks altered, nor have I had dermabrasion or a skin peel. It's my face and I know", he protests, pointing out that many white stars have had cosmetic surgery without provoking such a fuss. People have tended to respond to the results with bemused fascination or sheer horror. Among some black people the apparent deracination of his identity is interpreted as more than a mere "sell out", it's seen as an expression of self-negation, a morbid desire to erase his blackness and "become white".

With each calibration of the visual signs of "race" (hair, skin, face) his image has acquired more gender instability, more androgyny. Many have noticed more than a passing resemblance to his one-time mentor at Motown — Diana Ross. The element of gender ambiguity has encouraged gossipy speculation about his private life: is he homosexual or asexual, somehow pre-sexual or maybe post-sexual? The public persona of a non-

threatening, neutralised Peter Pan figure is accompanied by the proliferation of quasi-psychiatric interpretations: "Mad, Bad or Sad?" ask the tabloids. And in his autobiography, Jackson himself exacerbates the mythology, portraying himself as the loneliest boy in the world, trapped in the tragic narrative of the child star, encapsulated in his poignant identification with Liz Taylor, Liza Minelli, Brook Shields and Tatum O'Neal: all born in a trunk, like himself.

Indeed, the show business environment in which he grew up was not that "normal". How many teenagers have a fear of being crushed by crowds of screaming fans, how many could wake up on Saturday morning, turn on the TV and say: "I'm a cartoon!"? Jackson acknowledges that he has a problem about his identity, and yet this was brought on by one of the most ordinary rites of adolescence, acne. "I became subconsciously scarred by this experience with my skin, I got very shy and my appearance began to depress me."

Alternatively, the strangeness of Michael Jackson's looks may be evaluated as part of a calculated "crossover" marketing strategy. "He's the youngest child I know and the oldest man I know", comments Quincy Jones, producer of *Bad* and *Thriller* — which remains the largest-selling LP in the history of pop. This comment alludes to another Michael Jackson behind the image, a person whose experience has equipped him with astute business sense about the machinations of corporate capital in the world of entertainment. As a perfectionist pop professional, Jackson's ambiguous identity can be appreciated as a crafty piece of post-industrial design; the aesthetic reconstruction of his face promoting a sophisticated marketing strategy.

Capitalism has always had a weird relationship to black culture and its musical creativity. Popular entertainment has been dependent upon black innovation, yet black artists have rarely enjoyed the profits of their labour as the mass culture industries have been largely

controlled by whites. The racial hierarchy of music markets creates a double bind in which "authentic" expression is marginalised (yet also exploited as a source of new sounds) while black artists who "cross over" from minority to mainstream audiences do so only by being a one-off novelty (reggae is still marketed in this way, as Aswad might tell you); fulfilling stereotypical images (Charlie Parker and Jimi Hendrix — the drug-wrecked genius "type") or by adapting to mainstream norms (Nat King Cole or Diana Ross).

Jackson's star-image incorporates a bit of all three played to the max and inflected with a concern for the visual look of things. Chuck Berry was a cross-over hit because, on radio, he "sounded white". Michael Jackson, on the other hand, resembles Lena Horne or Dorothy Dandridge as black stars who negotiated their way into the mainstream by "looking white". But unlike earlier generations of performers who were ruthlessly ripped off by Tin Pan Alley, he is in control of his own bank balance. Whereas Little Richard screams and shouts, quite rightly, about his overdue royalties, Jackson *owns* the publishing rights on The Beatles' back-catalogue. To borrow a line from his sister Janet's record: "He's in control", an ideal held dear by many of the British post-punk bands. It was in the early '80s when video became essential to the remapping of music markets that Jackson himself designed the corporate marketing campaign for *Thriller*.

As a soundscape, *Thriller* was designed so that every track could be released as a single, and each song appears to be targeted at a discrete generic market: ballads, disco, rock, pop, everything except country and western. But most of all it was the visual that mattered: the three videos — *Billy Jean*, *Beat It* and *Thriller* — were, he says: "All part of my original concept for the album. I was determined to present this music as visually as possible".

In the US each of the videos was played in heavy rotation on MTV and this was important as Jackson was the first black act to get over the

channel's unspoken WASP policy.

The real coup, however, was the mini-film for *Thriller*, directed by John Landis, which retains a world record for the biggest-selling music video. A pastiche of the B-movie horror genre, Jackson's enactment of the teenage werewolf transformation can be read as an allegory of the cosmetic reconstruction of his face, parodying the "horrified" reaction at his changing looks.

In the marketing of *Thriller* Jackson became the prototype for a new species of pop star in the '80s — the *designer-hybrid*. By dissolving rigid sexual and racial identities, his reconstituted image could take on a multiplicity of meanings for different markets. The essence of the designer-

hybrid is to "play" with these identities so that the image will be whatever you want it to be.

The designer-hybrid aesthetic brings diverse ethnic audiences together *as consumers* but, unlike '60s bands like Sly and the Family Stone, there is no political ideology except that of multinational capitalism. Rigid ethnic identities, like national boundaries, hinder rather than help the free flow of cultural commodities — what better then than a design aesthetic that dissolves race, ethnicity and gender as fixed identities? This is not so hypothetical once we consider the way Michael Jackson's world tour follows the path of multinational capital. In recent years significant

markets have developed in Latin America and South-East Asia. And Jackson's ambiguous star-image with its free-floating identity, can appeal to both.

Children form a large contingent of Jackson's fans and an important market segment as far as singles are concerned. His appeal here may be attributed less to the racial ambiguity than to the larger-than-life, cartoon-like fantasy figure that Jackson embodies. This is not to take a dim view of children consumers but to emphasise that, unlike art school-trained pop professionals, Jackson expresses himself through references to the visual culture of Hollywood. Given his experience, where else would such references come from?

The boy in the bubble assembles his iconography from the Hollyweird world of "that's entertainment". The fedora hat that stylises his dazzling "moonwalk" dance is pure Judy Garland and his book is dedicated to Fred Astaire. Jackson, it seems, has crossed over so far he's struggling to get back into the real world. And this is the real tragedy: his music has become boring and mechanical, his videos repetitive scenarios of masculine anxieties. In the meantime he's on permanent display at Madame Tussaud's and at Disneyworld.

Ultimately, Michael Jackson is symptomatic of what has been described as the fragmentation of identity in post-modern consumer culture. On the one hand, there is a creeping smell of decay about his unreal image — a nagging question about how far he can go. On the other, there is something potentially subversive about the ethnic androgyny, something waiting to be politicised. And there is that undeniable talent, the sensual voice and the ethereal dancer, the lithe and graceful body in motion that promises the angelic reconciliation of the sexes.

Kobena Mercer

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Hip Hop Shock

When leading New York hip hop duo Public Enemy toured England in May, the fabled British tabloids almost lost their marbles. They and their fans were blamed for everything from the graffiti on the Underground to a novel form of mobile mass mugging known as "steaming".

In the same month Run DMC, their stablemates on the premier hip hop record label Def Jam Records, were banned from performing at the Wembley Arena and a number of other major London music venues. "If you listen to the lyrics of hip hop," claimed one Sergeant Steve Hill of Notting Hill police station, "they actually *revere* crime." Like rock'n'roll in the 'fifties and 'sixties before it, hip hop became a *bona fide* moral panic.

Public Enemy won't be touring Australia this year; perhaps not surprisingly. But Run DMC, undoubtedly the world's number one hip hop act, will — in November. And so will a star-studded line-up including Eric B and Rakim (fresh from a number one hit in the British Charts, *Paid in Full*) and Britain's first homegrown hip hop star, Derek B. Australia may be about to join the hip hop panic.

Hip hop originated at the beginning of the decade in New York, most prominently on the records of the Sugarhill Gang, an all-black label whose most famous offspring was Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. Their singles "The Message", "White Lines" (an anti-drugs anthem) and "New York New York" defined a hip hop — or, as it was then more widely known, rap — style. The keynote was the spoken vocals, rushed in a funky monotone which doubled as the rhythm while a bass and a drum machine thumped out a beat. On record, hip hop can be monotonous: the lyrics lean to macho posturing and grandiloquent self-promotion;



The New Style: Run DMC are touring in November.

the rhythm can become predictable; the beat is angry but often repetitive. On the dance floor the effect is different: the spoken lyrics strain against the beat, producing a sound so insistent yet complex that it takes a furious dance style to keep up with it. Hence the popularity of "breakdancing", the street dancing style which gained a certain voyeuristic celebrity in the early 'eighties, particularly among tourists to North American cities.

Nowadays, hip hop has "crossed over" in the United States. Run DMC have become airplay material on AM radio: their first big hit, "Walk This Way", was a tongue-in-cheek duet with heavy-metal veterans Aerosmith, calculated for appeal to Middle America. It was a shrewd gesture: hip hop's bastions among black ghetto youth in some ways parallel the young blue-collar white male constituency of heavy metal (and Run DMC often borrow a kitschy version of heavy metal's over-the-top bass guitar sound). Hip hop's only white stars, the Beastie Boys, compromise between the two

genres with a vocal delivery which can only be described as "spoiled brat". Yet while heavy metal serves up stylised violent catharsis to its fans, the essence of hip hop's style is *cool*. The video for "Walk This Way" proved the point: Aerosmith self-parodically thumped and shook their manes; Run DMC, in basic black, were coolly disdainful. For young New York blacks, hip hop is the New Style.

In Britain, and to a rather lesser extent in Australia, hip hop has made its entree in a very different context: the similarly style-conscious, but predominantly white, dance club scene. Here it has become one ingredient in a cocktail of musical styles ranging from the gay-scene-derived Hi NRG through to House music (originally from Chicago, but highly popular in England) and the currently fashionable Acid House (which borrows, as the name suggests, from psychedelia as well as the 'eighties dance floor drug Ecstasy).

Recently, "Push It" by New York female hip hop stars

Salt'n'Pepe, hit the mainstream charts in Australia; a sign of the growing sophistication of pop's wider public. "Push It" combined an aggressively self-confident female sexuality with a loping rhythm quite unlike hip hop's usual stabbing beat. It could be interpreted as a jaunty two-fingered riposte to the monotonous misogyny of the likes of Public Enemy — and it was eminently danceable.

Hip hop has made inroads, too, into the dance party scene, where the style-conscious young and gay scene collide. At Sydney's Darling Harbour or Hordern Pavilion, hip hop's beat has entered the repertoire of swirling rhythms suffusing the dusk-to-dawn dance floors. However, at the Eat Rat party which recently raised sizeable sums for

Ethiopia in Sydney, hip hop's street-smart cynicism was upstaged by some of the sentiment older nostalgics suppose its generation to have abandoned. The most popular number of the night wasn't by Salt'n'Pepe or Run DMC: it was the Special AKA's "Free Nelson Mandela" — a song which hasn't been in the charts for quite a few years.

ALR's Dancefloor Selection:

1. Sxpress, *Theme from Sxpress*
2. Salt'n'Pepe, *Push It*
3. Beatmasters and the Cookie Crew, *Rock Da House*.
4. Bomb the Bass, *Beat Dis*
5. Eric B and Rakim, *Paid In Full (The Coldecut Remix)*.

David Burchell

Interfacing for '88

Postmodernism or propaganda? When the Bicentennial Travelling Exhibition passed through Brisbane, Colin Mercer dropped by for a look.

"The drama, spectacle and wit of this Exhibition will heighten awareness of our national identity" says Melbourne architect Daryl Jackson, designer of the "Tent City" which is the Australian Bicentennial Exhibition (ABE). Rationalising the main "concept" of the exhibition as embodying the "atmosphere associated with the establishment of a settlement", he explains that he "felt the concept should convey a sense of community that is part of the Australian psyche". And then, "this ... emphasis on community and strong social networks is at the core of the Australian spirit of mateship". This is a populist exhibition.

On a cold, windy and rainy day in Toowoomba, the "Garden City" of Queensland's Darling Downs, it had all the appearance of a large country fair complete with local exhibits of arts and crafts, flower arrangements, a rather sad "living" exhibition of a

dead local coal mine and so on. The main difference was the fleet of Kenworth Pantechnicons, the prime movers of this touring display of national icons and "concepts". It's a touchie-feelie exhibition. You don't just look, you interact. You don't walk through, you experience. The senior curator, Pete Emmett, formerly of the NSW Crafts Council and the Centre Gallery at The Rocks in Sydney, wants "to encourage visitors to ask themselves 'Where do I stand?' " In a queue of about two hundred schoolchildren the question was sometimes redundant but, nonetheless, this made clear the essentially pedagogical nature of the exhibition. It's a distinctively modern pedagogy: "it demanded an evocative and expressive approach, in preference to a documentary presentation." (Emmett again.) And, in these terms, it works pretty well, notwithstanding the rate at which you are forced to move through the

exhibits by the ushered flow of school kids.

There are six main exhibits — tent modules built around one of the pantechnicons — in the "National Arcade". Each of these is structured around a theme — *Journeys, Environment, Together, Identity, Today, Futures* — and they are probably best described as a sort of anthropology of the present; the bits and pieces of national life that you would show to the proverbial Martian if asked to explain what Australia is. This is a moveable museum of national memory. And, to give due credit to the organisers and curators, the "selective historical remembrance" which has traditionally marked national exhibitions in Australia and elsewhere has been extended here to include some of those points of conflict which are frequently edited out. These include the themes of contact with Aboriginal culture and its effects, the emergence of the labour movement, women's rights, struggles over the environment, hard options in the development of new technologies and so on. All of this is ranged alongside the more official *bric-a-brac* of national history — relics from Captain Cook's voyages (a telescope, two pairs of shoe buckles and a compass!), copies of the Constitution, pictures of the Anzacs, models of the new Parliament House and so on.

In between the indigenous and the official there is the crucial buffer zone of the popular: Ginger Meggs Chesty Bond, Ben Chifley's gardening hat, the FJ Holden, Ned Kelly's armour, Mo McCaughey, Bunyip Bluegum, Dawn Fraser's medal and the 1956 Olympic torch. All of this can be found in the *identity* exhibit, which I found the most interesting partly because it emphasises the ways in which forms of national and ethnic identity are consolidated at the level of popular culture. This is not a *nationalist* exhibit, but it does demonstrate how, in the formation of a national culture, *anything*, from a beer bottle to a sporting hero, is potential grist to the mill. We are not dealing with elaborated political philosophies

here but with the daily, repetitive and ephemeral forms of popular culture shaped and organised into icons of nationhood. It's a useful reminder for those who are interested in reshaping the contours of national identity that nationalism is not just a hand-me-down intellectual movement but also has firm roots in the objects and symbols of popular experience. And, if this exhibit — and the exhibition as a whole — demonstrate one thing, appropriate to its nature as a museum form, then that is that the question of nationalism is as much an "anthropological" question as a political one. It is about the continuous and repetitive customs and rituals, the institutions, both public and private, which support those practices (the media, the family, the market) which make up what Benedict Anderson has called the "imagined community" of the nation.

All of the exhibits in the National Arcade, with the exception of *Futures*, have determined their forms of classification by starting from the familiar, the everyday and the ephemeral, building them up into particular arrangements which are, in the trendy language of the organisers, "concepts" or "themes" provided by even trendier sounding design companies like Upset Pty. Ltd., Audience Motivation Pty. Ltd., Sound Design Studio, Stage Arts Pty. Ltd. This gives some indication that the organisation of the ABE and its chosen forms of classification and emphasis are very much the products of a post-1960s generation of curators and cultural entrepreneurs.

Interaction and interface are the names of the game and it is especially clear here, given the level of private sector involvement, that (as Wendy McCarthy of the Bicentennial Authority said at the beginning of

1988) this is "not a party put on by the government". This double distancing, both economic and ideological, from the "official nation" opens up some contradictions in the exhibition itself. On the one hand, there are some distinctive reminders of a Coca Cola concept of the community in a purely celebratory mode. On the other hand, though, there is sufficient flexibility in some of the exhibits to enable a more active and critical consideration of "Australianness" to take place. In the end, though, that will depend on what the local communities and, especially the schools, do with their day's outing once the panttechnicons have moved on.

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