



## **The Storyteller Enters the Marketplace: the first decade (and a half) of Urban Theatre Projects**

**By Paul Brown**

interviewing Christine Sammers, Kim Spinks, Alice Spizzo, Simon Orbell & Deborah Mills

Dedicated to the memory of Frank Maloney and Ben Grieve.  
Sincere thanks to Monica Nugent who transcribed all interviews.

### **Western Sydney, 1991**

We made Kahkwa Hakawati (the café of the storyteller) in the aftermath of the First Gulf War. In early 1991, everything was raw. Six weeks after hostilities ceased, broadcaster Andrew Olle went on air to admit, with remorse, the media had been horribly manipulated by the US military. Meanwhile, in Western Sydney, people were afraid to leave their homes. Women were having their hijab torn off in the street. Racist graffiti was on the walls, and kids were adorning their school bags with slogans variously pro or anti war.

Like all community theatre, the show was a rebellion in a neighbourhood. The common desire was peace, though we dealt daily with conflict and horror. It brought together the clever minds and the open hearts of experienced theatre workers, community leaders, students, teachers, and the people of the Arabic Australian communities in Auburn. We made new knowledge about the war, about diversity in Australia, about our values, and about *how* to tell a story – as an antidote to the manipulated version of the war the media was peddling.

As tradition has it, the storyteller strides into the market place of the Middle Eastern village, carrying a stick. The character is a political lightning rod for the issues of the day, and the partially improvised tales play out problems and solutions with poetry, humour, song, and participation of the neighbourhood. Our show drew on this tradition, with contributing songs, dialogues, poems, and other fragments played around the tables of a café, where the audience drank brewed coffee and conversed with the actors.

Deborah Mills: I'd never experienced anything like that before and I was absolutely thrilled... I remember being captivated by this new form of theatre... where virtuosity is defined by your capacity not only to conform to the classic rhythms and form of a particular style of poetry, but to improvise and 'rap' or extemporise on that on your feet... I thought it's happening, they've got it, they're changing the form.

Alissar Chidiac, central to the development of the play through her networks and research, was our 'Hakawati'. On the steering committee was the academic Ghassan Hage. Amidst extensive debate, much of it about the 'self-other' problems of cross-cultural work, he described the core company members as 'anglo super-heroes', thereby capturing and critiquing the key tension associated with our deliberate move into unknown territory. Death Defying Theatre (DDT), later renamed Urban Theatre Projects, was then in its tenth year.

### **Ten months earlier...**

The Board of DDT meets at a house in Leichhardt, with the ensemble members present. It's the middle of 1990. DDT has been put 'on notice' by its key funding body, The Australia Council for the Arts. It is a period when the Council's Performing Arts Board is obsessed with so-called 'excellence'. The quality and innovation of DDT's repertoire are in question, the energy of its people is running low. The vote is almost unanimous, to wind up the company.

With the clock at five minutes to midnight, and with just the rags of a budget, a report is researched and cobbled together. Titled 'A Report to the Board of DDT about changing the way the company works and moving the company to Western Sydney', it is prescriptive and bureaucratic – but then that's the name of the game. Across six weeks, more than fifty 'key informants' take part in debates about the viability of the company. Thirty one recommendations ensue.

The biggest change will be a move to Western Sydney, with Auburn mooted as the likely location (Fairfield wanting the company, though it's less convenient). There's a quaint recommendation, perhaps laced with nostalgia for the coast, that 'The Board and Working Company of DDT note the need to carefully plan for the 'distance factor''. Meanwhile policies which support a collective structure are completely overhauled in a parallel process. The reforms will institute a permanent artistic directorate and administration that will employ creative personnel project by project. New plays planned as ensemble touring shows are abandoned, as participatory projects using community theatre approaches are envisaged and pre-planned. A large scale outdoor piece titled 'Pacific Rim', scheduled for development around the company's existing home base at the Bondi Pavilion, morphs into ideas relating to Western Sydney places and issues. To those who know mostly the company's Sydney Festival work, the focus on the west seems revolutionary. It's a misconception: certainly the office is in the East, but substantial work has already been in Western Sydney, in shopping centres and local government festivals, including the streets of Macquarie Fields where the so-called riots happened, and Blacktown in the Housing Commission estates. Inside and outside the company there is widespread support for the changes, with certain provisos:

Deborah Mills: I remember feeling uncomfortable when I was told that DDT was transforming itself into a completely different style of operation where it was no longer an ensemble because the notion of an ensemble cast was, if you like, part of the ideology of community art & community theatre practice at that time.

Inside the company, there is significant unease about abandoning what had been a standing ensemble. But DDT's Board accepts the report and its recommendations in February 1991. Fiona Winning, recently appointed as the company's first Artistic Director, has the job of implementing the reforms. The process pacifies the funding bodies, taps their desires to shift resources into Western Sydney, and gives solidity to the airy nothingness of government proclamations about the West. If the report, its attendant debates, and some wheeling and dealing are successful in re-floating the company structurally and financially, the emotional drivers come from elsewhere. The report never mentions the First Gulf War, which saw the US invade Iraq in the same month DDT's Board considers the company's re-structure. That war provokes and challenges us all. In many ways it determines the company's future.

### **Two years earlier...**

The ensemble of actors are rehearsing under the trees in Centennial Park, just as the company has done for the last eight years. The glorious Bicentennial Year has just come and gone. There are festivals to play, tours all over the country on offer, and a thousand ideas for a show. The chosen vehicle is a street theatre play about the relationship between 'country' and 'city'. The chosen form is tried and true. Perhaps too tried and true: song and dance, juggling, bright costumes, some scripted pieces and a mobile set.

Across a three year period, 1985-88, Death Defying Theatre had consolidated itself as a subsidised arts organisation with an Administrator. It had a Board concerned about insurance, funding and legal identity; but as yet no Artistic Director. Until that time, the legal status of DDT had been a partnership between the three founding members, who among other things remained personally liable for the company's activities.

Simon Orbell: I remember going to a meeting and, without having anticipated it, ended up being the chairman of the first board. Initially we were more concerned with day to day things like making sure the finances made sense... Rather than debating big long term projects or pushing the company in any artistic direction. And it was essentially a

support mechanism for the performers.

There were dangers lurking in the transformation from an organisation which self-declared as a collective and an ensemble, yet had been in certain ways hierarchical. As Kim Spinks argues, by the mid 1980s, DDT had become 'captured by the notion of the ensemble'... when it never really was one. At least in part, it began as a business for the three of us who started it.

### **Far North Queensland 1985**

The coal mining community of Collinsville is the only Australian town where the post office has been stormed by blokes proclaiming the communist revolution, the red flag run up, and the police called in to restore 'democracy'. That was the sixties. Now it's 1985. DDT is at the Collinsville school performing its most bizarre show – 'The Really Interesting Gypsies'. A loose assembly of vaudevillian sketches and improvisation, it's a calling card, to let the town know we're there. But there's a more complex purpose. At stake is a new show about the town itself, an 'Art in Working Life' piece to be devised in conjunction with the miners' union.

Writer and Administrator have been there a few weeks in advance of the performers. A research package is ready, and there's a shell of a script. The Miners Federation has funded almost everything, from the house the company will occupy for six weeks, the piano needed by our composer, to the props and welded steel our designer requires. We've got union-supplied food vouchers for the co-op, and the Workers Club lays on the free Four Ex beer we will too often consume.

The project taps critical debate about the relationship between communities and outside artists, and the responsibilities of 'professional artswriters' for mediating ideas between communities and the broader public. One day we invite the coalminers in to be dramaturges and to critique the draft play and the rehearsals of it. They sit there and they love it and they clap. But then when we say well 'What's your view about this?', they reply 'Mate, when you start telling us how to mine coal, we're going to start telling you how to make theatre, now for Christ's sake get on and do this because you're in some ways responsible for our story and you'd better do it bloody well'.

By the time we're done, there's 'Coal Town'. It rolls off the side of the van, using the same set as a previous show, 'Living Newspaper'. It plays on the Collinsville football field, the best sports surface for thousands of miles, having been lovingly constructed using company equipment during a strike. The process and the show are filmed, and the company goes off on tour around a dozen north Queensland coal mining communities. Later the film plays the Sydney Film Festival and the play features at the 1985 Community Theatre Conference.

Kim Spinks: We had always been trying to work with the unions from the very early days. We had this sense that the work we did went everywhere and it should be in people's working lives as well, and that fitted with the community cultural development trend at the time, which was Art and Working Life. And so we were already working in that area. We didn't have a lot of success, partly because it was treated as a kind of tokenism... you'd go to the factory and you'd perform at lunch-time and nobody really gave a shit. And actually we always used to feel quite uncomfortable about it.

Although DDT had worked in community contexts to some extent, it had been almost always taking a show to the community. Coal Town was the first production made *with* a community.

Deborah Mills: The point was it engaged the audience because they weren't alienated by the form of the work. And I contrast that with some of the less fortunate ventures by earnest, well-meaning, politically committed theatre workers who kept producing a style of theatre that was still essentially middle class and wondering why it didn't work... And DDT wasn't there to say, you know, 'the miners are sitting on the right hand side of God and they're perfect'. Because there were tensions in that community. There was domestic violence, there was substance abuse, there was unemployment, especially for the young people, and boredom... and the play actually talked about those things. I could feel a kind of squirming, especially when you gave voice to the young peoples' views.

## Discipline and Punish

In 1982, DDT conducted an experiment. Everything was at stake.

As a small business, we needed to keep flexible shows on the road, playing festivals, shopping centres, housing estates, local government gigs, schools and occasionally institutions such as prisons and hospitals. Then in our second year of operations, we were doing upwards of three hundred shows a year, with two outdoor shows in rep: 'Living Newspaper' and the gambling show 'Riff Raffle' (for which the audience chose the routines by the turn of a chocolate wheel). Occasionally we fired up our most flexible offering 'The Really Interesting Gypsies', and we worked street busking gigs with songs, physical routines and other fragments from all these shows.

But as Kim Spinks says, we were also 'theatre people', wanting to innovate, and aware of the possibilities of 'the stage'. That desire drove our exploration of a dense and misunderstood text by philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault, juxtaposed with researched historical and contemporary views of prisons in Australia. Playing at the Seymour Centre downstairs, 'Discipline and Punish' combined physical theatre with storytelling, expressionistic dance, 'new' music, and ultimately a scene that dismantled the entire theatre space, seats and all, as a metaphor for the breaking down of the prison system.

Kim Spinks: I think the notion of trying to dramatise Foucault is perhaps now seen as old hat but I don't think it was in 1982. We came out of theatre at a time when all art forms and theatre were about radical ideas, social change, engaging the audiences, empowering people, politicising. We're not that far away from the kind of revolutions of theatre in the 70's really.

One 'Discipline and Punish' sequence leads the audience promenade-style around a series of 'little theatres of punishment'. In one space, they view on a tiny screen a slideshow of ancient instruments of torture and prison architecture. Eight years later, this will be echoed in scale, content and form by a particular scene in 'Kahkwa Hakawati', in which back projections of shadow puppets on a tiny screen dramatise the horror of a woman having her hijab torn off. In both plays the most horrific of circumstances is boiled down to the miniscule, perhaps as a way of asserting our responsibility for and control over such outrages, as citizens.

The comparison between the two plays almost a decade apart is a reminder that 'the experimental' is an enduring characteristic of DDT/UTP work. Just as 'Discipline and Punish' prefigured later work, it also followed a continuum of experimental indoor productions which had cemented the working relationship of DDT's founding members. We had all worked on earlier shows with Rex Cramphorn, and his influence helped determine our approach to text based scenes which DDT included, for the first time, in Discipline and Punish. The project was satisfying for its linkage of scholarly research and knowledge-making about Australian prisons with all the magic of theatre.

But when the season was over, we made a sad decision. Box office had been woeful. We laid on extra busking shows to manage the deficit. And the majority of us voted to shelve further plans for indoor experimental works, and to focus on what was then the more lucrative street theatre. It was a decision largely responsible for the departure of the first of our founders:

Christine Sammers: I was interested in form, experimenting with form. But street theatre, because of its very nature, is much more limited... Working as a collective nurtured a lot of us as we were developing our theatrical sensibilities and skills. But I also think it can be quite destructive. I remember really feeling it was time to leave DDT when we argued about a simple blocking maneuver and it did not take four people to argue over blocking. What becomes at stake is your sense of self within a group. As it always happens, by the time we were leaving the company we were getting the first lots of little government grants... which took the financial pressure off having to make that money from straight sales of the shows.

Kim Spinks: The founding members only lasted three years, although the real life was much longer because we'd had four or five years before that, so the whole thing really lasted maybe... six years. And the last year was horrible... not knowing what I should do and where was it all going and what decisions should I be making, and really going along in a fairly stressed, unhappy kind of fog.

By the end of 1984 the company had lost all three of its founding members.

### **1982: You're in character until you're back in the van**

Kim Spinks: If you were making a film of DDT in the first three years, there would be a hell of a lot of shots of a white van screaming down Edgecliff Rd with a man, bare-chested driving. And if he gets out, he's got stripey pantaloons on. And another one would be sitting in the front, putting a whole lot of black eye-liner on her face and wearing a very loud top. Then they pick up a third person wearing a fat suit outside a reasonably prosperous, middle class block of flats in Edgecliff, and drive off to collect everyone else... An enormous amount of time was spent in the van, often driving to western Sydney.

1982 was the first full year of the company's operation. In January we played the Sydney Festival for the first time in the new guise of Death Defying Theatre. We had auditioned and employed a company of eight performers in November the previous year, and had devised our first performance, 'Dr Floyd's Fly By Night Medicine Show'. We toured Adelaide for the 1982 festival, played Sydney's Easter Show, toured to Brisbane for its festival, and made the show fit a vast range of other venues. 'Dr Floyd' was flexible, with a Vaudevillian repertoire of sketches, juggling acts, dance, song, magic tricks and improvised bull shit. Every piece of paraphernalia we needed traveled in a collapsable wooden cart.

The form of 'Dr Floyd' was driven by the need to be bold and bright on the streets. An eight person busking troupe was almost unheard of in Australia, but that size cast, the costuming, plus loud instruments and movement and music meant we could compete with the distractions of the city. Everyone in the company had a character that became 'theirs', capable of improvisation with the audience, and because there was no traditional entrance or exit point, performers were always 'on'. From the moment someone left the van until they got back in it, we were in character.

Christine Sammers: It was like going on a family holiday every day. Packing and unpacking the van. And the costumes I think we took to the next level. I've got very fond memories of sewing it all together... late hours, buying fabric and designing the various shows. And the joy and the pain of wearing those costumes... years and years we seemed to be in and out of the same costumes... and being seen, and being photographed, and feeling like you're in a hundred thousand Japanese photo albums!

Alice Spizzo: You could never wear half your costume. You either wore all of it and you were in character, or no costume. We were pretty strict about all that which I can understand. Otherwise you don't have quite a character or you don't have quite the person. We had lots of rules like that. They were 'guidelines for a travelling street theatre company'.

For 'Dr Floyd', the topic was the health care system and in particular the problems of over-servicing by doctors and the lack of recognition for the nursing profession. We once received hate mail from a doctor who had seen our show, describing it as the greatest set back for the community's trust in the medical system he'd ever seen. Mission accomplished.

Christine Sammers: There was the thrill of having all the jokes work and all the political nuances received and understood. Our shows were pitched such that they could be accepted on a very simple level, with the music and the colour and the movement and the funny looking people, and the humour. But they were also quite politically sophisticated. I remember particular performances when the buttons seemed to be pushed on every level. When that happened, I remember it being a really exciting and thrilling show.

By the end of 1982 we were devising what can only be described as the hallmark production of the company's first decade, 'Living Newspaper' The idea came from a tradition of American travelling troupes who performed the daily news during the Depression. We weren't so much performing the news, as satirising the role of the media. The show's themes included media monopolies, press misrepresentation, and the problem of editorial control.

Like all DDT shows of this era, 'Living Newspaper' was strongly research based, though in style it remained a flexible

assemblage of song, dance, juggling, and acrobatics with archetypal characters (the Media Magnate, the Reporter, the Newsboy, etc). Christine Sammers, always the driving force behind DDT's costumes, drew inspiration from Maleviche's constructivist, cubist style, producing everything in black, red and white geometric patterns, designed to stand out against the rostra, staircases, and rooftop platforms that folded off the side of our van.

Kim Spinks: There are genius things in the company, and one of the genius things was getting Eamon Darcy to do the 'Living Newspaper' set. And if ever there was a person who demonstrated what design was about it was him, saying 'Well you've got no money, what's your best asset?' And us saying 'Ooh our van!' And he said 'Right'... and he designed a set that incorporated the van. And I always, to this day, think that was one of the cleverest things because we were never very good at making a space beyond the space we would create with our bodies and the natural arrangements the audience would make outdoors. And that was the first time we genuinely created a clearly defined space for the show.

'Living Newspaper', with its use of the van as the stage, became our 'standing show', and we sold it mostly to festivals which could afford to engage us for two or three set shows in a day.

### **An Honest Conversation**

In its earliest years, with the need to keep afloat a company of between six and eight people, financial imperatives dictated that roving busking shows remained important to the repertoire, and we needed to keep both 'Dr Floyd' and 'The Really Interesting Gypsies' on the boil.

Busking shows were utterly surprising. Anything could happen. In a pub Alice Spizzo was almost decapitated by a ceiling fan while dancing on the bar in a parrot costume. In a shopping centre an audience member handed us a real knife to spice up our mock wrestling act. In Pitt Street, Christine Sammers once threw herself to the ground writhing, all part of a gypsy fortune telling routine. We knew all the characters of the Sydney streets: the gentle giant whose feet had deteriorated and outgrown his thongs, the stooped man who pushed a barrow and wore a construction helmet, and the homeless woman Sally, herself always in a bright costume not unlike our own, who was ever ready for a dance.

Counting the pre-DDT years, we worked seven Sydney Festivals in a row, every January for thirty one days, two if not three shows every day. Our contract was to perform for whatever events needed street theatre. That meant New Years Eve with drunks leaping into the harbour while we sang, the ferries, the buses, the parades, and the big events in Hyde Park and the Domain, including the outdoor Opera and the Ballet and the Jazz. Almost every day we took parading shows through the streets of the city. We felt like we owned Sydney, and we ourselves became street people.

That prompted much talk about 'Level Zero'. Kim Spinks describes it as the moment where audience members wanted to engage with you around the performance, not during the performance. We had to gauge when to stop being in character and become ourselves, in a moment of real person to person communication. It became a matter of on-going debate within the company, and an important part of how we operated.

Kim Spinks: Having to have a very different relationship with your public, has stood the company in very good stead all its years. And I think it came out of that early value. That everybody was entitled, if they sought it, to an honest conversation.

### **1981 and the Business of Theatre**

One of the 'rules' of DDT, implemented at this earliest stage, was that funding sources must be diversified. By the mid 1980s this would become a '50 percent' rule, declaring that no more than half the company's income should derive from government subsidy. This approach made DDT adept at tapping varied income sources, ahead of many other arts organisations, some of which failed when their subsidy was suddenly withdrawn. When we started, the imperative was to launch the ship and stay afloat. As a busking troupe reliant on a paying audience, or selling shows to festivals and other venues, DDT made us small business people.

Kim Spinks: We were employers and therefore had obligations to hire and fire. On our first tour, I remember sitting at a picnic table in a camping ground watching one of our performers heading to the showers at about six o'clock in the morning with a bottle of Cinzano under his arm. And Christine and I looking at one another and, without saying a word, both thinking 'He's going to have to go'. And me realising, 'We're an employer and we're going to have to sack him'.

But if Death Defying Theatre was a business, what passed for 'vision' in the business plan? The answer is a curious document, titled 'Death Defying Polemic', written as a three act play for imaginary characters in heated debate about the history and the vision of radical theatre at the end of the 1970s. This 'play' rails against what Peter Brook had called 'Deadly Theatre' – the sterile house-bound forms of mainstage performance preoccupied with naturalism – that had dominated the Twentieth Century. Brook's descriptor gave us our first company name, since 'Death Defying Theatre' expressed both our opposition to Deadly Theatre, and our intention to employ physical and vaudevillian styles.

In developing our style of political theatre and collective process, we were strongly aware of other Australian companies following more or less comparable paths. Sydney's Sidetrack Theatre, Melbourne's Australian Performing Group, and Brisbane's Popular Theatre Troupe were all models which we investigated. We'd been inspired by the simultaneous establishment of four community based companies in and around Melbourne at points north, south, east and west, populated by graduates of the Victorian College of the Arts. Meanwhile in Sydney, the Pippi Storm ensemble was growing in parallel with DDT, with a mix of indoor experimental shows and outreach community work. International influences included the San Francisco Mime Troupe, John McGrath's 7:84 companies, and European travelling troupes which played a plethora of city festivals with mobile sets.

From early DDT days we always felt we had a clear philosophical and political mandate that the company has pursued without being apologetic, throughout its history. As Christine Sammers recalls, the company engaged in the profound consideration of where – the context and the site; *who* – who did it; *how* – the method of making theatre; *what* it was and *why*.

Christine Sammers: But I also think we had a little bit of ambition and a bit of tenacity and wished for a bit of longevity. We had already been performing together for about three or four years before that, and so it was like a crystallisation of ambitions that had already started. I think we thought we had a similarity of view, and we made a commitment to each other to go for three years and see what happened

### **Ultimate Origins: Is Mal so cocksure with his pants down?**

The Sydney academic Tim Fitzpatrick needs including in the story of DDT/UTP, since his influence was felt indirectly well into the first decade of the company. In the mid 1970s, Tim was a tutor in the School of Drama at University of New South Wales. Determined to mix theatre practice with what was then mostly theoretical pedagogy, he invited student participation in an experimental and flexible work based on 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. With devotees of that project in tow, in 1976 Tim set up a Commedia dell'Arte company at UNSW. Its members included all three of DDT's founders. In that framework of stylised and stereotypical characters capable of improvisation, we devised weekly performances which played on the Library Lawn and in other outdoor spaces.

Launching out from that, we established the forerunner of DDT, Cartwheel Theatre, as a permanent student theatre company, and we made that run for three years as a semi-professional outfit. Although we sold shows off campus, to schools and festivals, core business remained the weekly improvised lunchtime show on the UNSW Library lawn. The topic for each week was left to the audience to nominate in advance. One such show was built around the question: 'Is Mal So Cocksure with his Pants Down?' In this show we dramatised, Commedia style, the highly publicised misadventures of newly elected Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, caught roaming half dressed one night in a Memphis motel.

A decade and a half later, after the experience of moving DDT to Western Sydney, and the making of Kahkwa Hakawati, those of us who had lived with the company through its early years would join its audience. And in some cases we

would play certain indirect roles in the company's development – for example as arts bureaucrats, or as participants in ongoing critical debate about community cultural development. The company was to survive because, like all social movements, it remained capable of generating new knowledge. Through its experiments with process, its commitment to new form, ambition to work in new spatial and demographic contexts... in all those areas the company was and still is figuring out how to do things, which is its way of generating knowledge.

Kim Spinks: What is interesting about Urban Theatre Projects now is that the very things that we did in the beginning have shaped the company, but in ways that have allowed the people who've come afterwards to benefit from them and grow them and develop them and shift. Rather than to be constrained by them. And I always attribute the company to re-igniting my interest in theatre from the fact that Christine and Paul made me go to 'Hip Hopera' out at Casula and I didn't really want to go. I had a small baby and I just was thinking I can't do this, I'm too tired and old and I'm not really interested and I don't have anything to do with the company anymore. From the moment I got there, I was reminded of why we started the company in the first place. It was just teeming with young people, it was wall to wall testosterone, it was, hundreds, it felt like hundreds, of girls' navels cause it was the beginning of the show-your-navel, low-rise pants. And loud, pumping music and sweat and security guards and it was so full-on and funky. And I thought 'Theatre can be all the things that we thought that it could be when we originally started the company!'... that it could have ideas in it, it can be totally engaged with contemporary culture, it can be in any site, it can empower people. Because hip hop was young then in Australia, so it was kind of a raw voice. And it made me think, yeah, I'm not going to work in the restaurant anymore, I'm definitely going to work in theatre again.

## 1975

It was the year Gough Whitlam was sacked. As a postgraduate student at the University of New South Wales, I occupied a seventh floor office of the Applied Science building. There I studied microscope slides of ancient seafloor basalts, pondered over statistics and geological papers, made maps and talked dirt and rock with the other geology PhD students. I was busy making scientific knowledge about a 400 million year old world.

My window overlooked what used to be the Drama Lawn, where the Io Myers Theatre now stands at UNSW. Students from the School of Drama would have their tutorials on the lawn, and from where I sat it looked like fun. One day...

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>All interviews were in September 2006 and transcripts are available from UTP. Christine Sammers, Kim Spinks and Paul Brown founded Death Defying Theatre in 1981, after working together from 1976 in a succession of street theatre and experimental theatre projects. Alice Spizzo and Simon Orbell were members of the first ensemble. Deborah Mills was Director of the Australia Council's Community Cultural Development Unit.

<sup>2</sup>Alissar Chidiac is now reviewing the long term outcomes of Kahkwa Hakawati.

<sup>3</sup>The Director of Kahkwa Hakawati was Robin Laurie of Circus Oz fame. Paul Brown was the writer, and Fiona Winning played a consulting director's role. Ghassan Hage has written extensively about cultural issues, and was a prominent spokesperson at the time of the Gulf War.

<sup>4</sup>The name change came in 1997.

<sup>5</sup>Paul Brown, then a DDT Board member, was researcher and author of this report.

<sup>6</sup>Kim Spinks undertook this re-write of the policies on behalf of the Board.

<sup>7</sup>The first home base was at the Village Church in Paddington, with an office that was literally a cupboard. By the end of the 1980s the Bondi Pavilion provided more substantial office space.



<sup>8</sup>Pat Parker, one of Australia's earliest Community Arts Officers, at Blacktown, facilitated the company's first community development work in Western Sydney.

<sup>9</sup>Fiona Winning, from Queensland company Street Arts, was ready to take forward a strong vision of community theatre, and to do so with enormous energy.

<sup>10</sup> The ensemble included Penny Macdonald, Amanda Davies, Guy Hooper, Annie Davey, David Aldrich and Michael Andrews. Other artists were designer Melody Cooper, composer Sarah De Jong tour manager Richard Collins, writer Paul Brown, administrator Frank Maloney, dramaturg Kim Spinks, and filmmakers Phillip Bull and Paul Findlay.

<sup>11</sup> Held at Sidetrack Theatre's premises in Sydney's inner west.

<sup>12</sup> Art and Working Life became an Australia Council priority in the 1980s, supported by the Australian Council of Trade Unions. It reflected a century-old tradition of trade union arts.

<sup>13</sup> Foucault's 'Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison' (1975) gives every grim detail about the prison system, while suggesting overall 'society is prison' – a phrase which titled one of our songs.

<sup>14</sup> Rex Cramphorn is widely regarded as one of the most innovative Australian theatre directors. DDT founding members established close working relationships with Rex from 1977.

<sup>15</sup> Nominally there were no specialised roles. The first members were Peter Callan, Tim Scally, Robert Stephens, Alice Spizzo, Melissa Mitchell, Kim Spinks, Christine Sammers and Paul Brown.

<sup>16</sup> DDT toured to Adelaide for several festivals with a mix of paid shows and busking, picking up other work in rural towns en route.

<sup>17</sup> Eamon Darcy is a well known Sydney theatre designer.

<sup>18</sup> Brisbane's Popular Theatre Troupe was a 1980s victim in this regard.

<sup>19</sup> See various analyses of Australian community theatre by David Watt.

<sup>20</sup> Cartwheel Theatre also brought in Amanda Davies who joined the DDT ensemble in the mid 1980s.

<sup>21</sup> Theories of why social movements, such as Civil Rights, Environmental or Feminist, survive include the proposal that making knowledge keeps them alive. See work by Andrew Jamison.

<sup>22</sup> Hip Hopera was made in 1995.

<sup>23</sup> In what is arguably Australia's most famous Twentieth Century political incident, the Governor General dismissed Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam after what can only be described as a 'dirty tricks' campaign by the conservative opposition led by Malcolm Fraser.