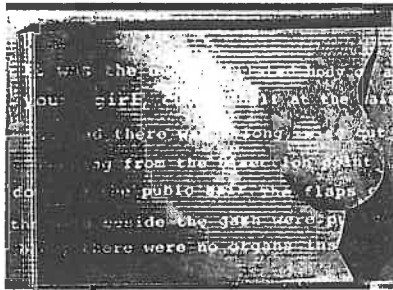


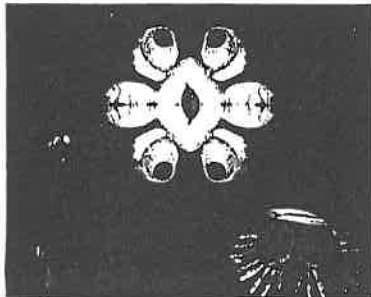
# outer body experience



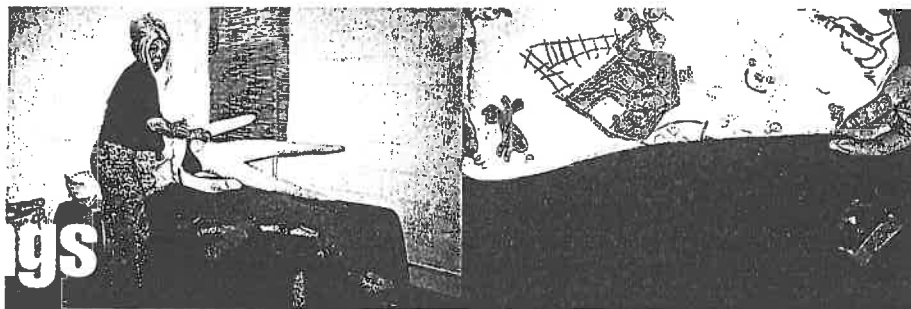
With a myriad of new technologies prising their way into the most intimate processes of everyday life, the image-driven universe continues to expand at an exponential rate. But should we relish the interaction between ourselves and cyberspace? Or fear for our lives as opossums on the information super-highway? Fear not, for art is at hand. In a world where the body and technology are increasingly forced into new and perplexing forms of co-existence, a new breed of artists from numerous disciplines are devoting their energies to the exploration of the brave new cyber interface. With the interactive emphasis of many of the installations, the *Electronic Bodyscapes* exhibition of local and international artists at Auckland's Artspace is compelling evidence of this. The exhibition, which runs in two parts from July 31 to August 16 and August 21 to September 6, includes an array of multimedia presentations, video installations, CD ROM publications, digital imaging and *Electronic Body Experience*, an all night high tech dance party organised in association with the

Moving Image Centre. Apart from the attendant disembodiment of all-night events, the exhibition itself will grapple with changing ideas about the physical limits of the body, its dislocation and the murky role of censorship in new media. Contributions to watch for include Linda Dement's *Cyberflash Girl Monsters* CD-ROM, where scanned body parts and sound bytes can be selected and reconstructed by the viewer into one of many composite 'monsters' from a wealth of CD-ROM and digital recordings from over 30 women donors. French performance artist Orlan has already achieved some degree of infamy with her much publicised self-reconstruction through plastic surgery. Via live satellite link-ups, audiences worldwide have witnessed her performances beneath the surgeon's knife as she progressively realises her quest to emulate and deconstruct the 'ideal woman'. With the chin of Botticelli's Venus, the eyes of Gerome's *Psyche* and the forehead of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Orlan has pushed the proverbial envelope inside out. And Australia's 'Bionic Man' Stelarc has proposed an inventive Internet-specific piece called *Ping Body*. On the local front, Kirsty Cameron and Vivienne Stone have coordinated a collaborative CD-ROM project involving several artists under the working title *Pheromone*. The various images have been collaged and manipulated, playing with the collapse of stable identity in cyberspace, with an emphasis on queer experience or physicality. Other local contributors include Sean Kerr, Keri Whaiteri, Terrence Handscomb and Paul Swadel. Curator Deborah Lawler-Dormer stresses the colourful divergence and user-friendly components of each installation. Rather than a forbidding bank of computers, she promises "a highly interactive experience, where the role and experience of the viewer is dictated by your own pathway through it." *Michael Keall*

from top: Terrence Handscomb *Still from Before Information...*, computer installation, Seductor Productions / Mediatix still from 'Pheromone' CD ROM project, Linda Dement still from 'Cyberflash Girl Monsters'



## drive -by



In the world today, the most interesting photography has betrayed theory and converted to social life. Which is why Ann Shelton's flash-lit wake-up calls, soon to be published as the book *Red Eye*, illuminate an incandescent new age of Auckland social existence and propagandise its ripe credibility.

Shelton's new book is part fashion, part accident and part sheer embarrassment. Her idiosyncratic version of the photographic portrait hones in on the people of a nonsensical culture of "experimentalism", an excessive yet mannered avant-garde of gender-bending, faux glam and self-mutilation which chokes on foundation whilst desperately trying to swallow art theory.

*Red Eye* downloads 64 images gleaned from a cast of thousands collected over the past two years. What Shelton modestly terms a "social diary" is really a charismatic exposé of the hideous truths and self-conscious mythologies of unemployed psychopaths who frequent Verona café and actually believe in drag. Shelton's is an eye-in-the-pie snap-shot voyeurism. In short, she's outed everyone who'd probably have preferred to remain invisible. In Shelton's drive-by shootings, we don't get the authorised 'celebs'. Instead, we get the feigned theatre of cruelty paraded at the Hell for Leather parties and the André Breton lookalike competitions regularly held at Teststrip gallery on Karangahape Road.

Of course it all amounts to the same thing: that glamour is a regime perpetrated by photography. And it's only glamour which sustains those tenured aesthetes of sadism. It's almost as though Shelton has realised that we need

photography as much as we need drugs and alcohol.

Up until recently the term 'documentary photography' has been uttered in critical anguish. Shelton's work, perhaps more by circumstance than by choice, makes us rethink this unnecessary cultural cringe. Shelton insists on a premise at the very heart of photography: people are good to look at. What's more, she provides us with work which entertains and titillates as much as it scandalises.

Shelton poses new meaning for the words 'celebrity' and 'beauty'. Her dark, brittle and transitory accounts of Auckland are undoubtedly beautiful. They envision a population which we know is condemned to obscurity, not to mention old age, premature death and a whole host of other attendant mediocrities. But in the meantime there's the instant space of now.

Documentary photography should be reminded of the superficial thrill of 'now', beyond the interstices of politics and event, and it is the obscene, shilling beauty of the present which is captured by Shelton's pictures. She perceives the alluring marketability of the raw moment and the bizarre familiarity of the stranger. In *Red Eye*, the idea of the celebrity meets the idea of the nobody. Character explodes into art. Rather than make you remember and feel concern, Shelton's photography makes you forget you cared in the first place. Instead, simply enjoy the densely blinding results of the optical and social pleasures which she puts before us. *Giovanni Intra*

## DRIVE-BY SHOOTINGS GIOVANNI INTRA

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