

EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD

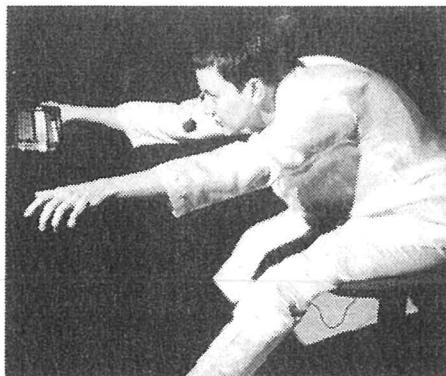
A survey of Performing Women

Virginia Baxter with Annemarie Jonson & Linda Wallace

BARBARA CAMPBELL

Barbara Campbell's *Backwash* is the kind of work that resonates long after it is first experienced — it seems to etch a mnemonic groove that flips now and then into spontaneous replay. *Backwash* weaves a loose intertextual narrative that takes in *Heart of Darkness*, *Apocalypse Now*, the 1937 Stinson plane crash in the rugged southern Queensland of the artist's youth, and Campbell's own recollection of childhood. Through devices such as the fetishistic recitation of lists (childhood scenic highlights of the artist's hometown, the list of all the men from Campbell's district killed in the Great War, the list of men in the Stinson search party) women's voices mark out moments that punctuate time, and remembered spaces of the tragic and mundane.

The tableau Campbell creates is at once melancholic, poignant and celebratory — it evokes that desire to repeat and retrace that is deeply embedded in children's chants, in poetic prosody, even in the organic rhythms of physiology. The 'banal' and 'historical' intersect in this text of retrospection: this is a place where men in boats and planes plunge into the spaces of nature and war to create the signposts of history, while women work the rescue switchboard. The cracked voice of Gracie Silcox tells the story of her role in the Stinson rescue, and Campbell tells how Gracie, after 60 years as district telephonist, had literally carved her own circuit of memory between



Barbara Campbell

Photo: Heidrun Löhr

connections on the switchboard, linking time, naming and space in the same way that memory forges neuronal circuits along which the backwashes of recollection flow.

Backwash, originally performed for the 1993 Australian Perspecta at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, has been adapted for radio and will be broadcast on ABC FM's *The Listening Room*, in May 1994.