

## **The National Young Writers' Festival - Get Crack!ing**

**Written by Rachel Morley**

**Images courtesy of** Chris Currie, Kirsty Altis, Jess Cook and Brown Council, (from "Milkshake" - single channel video work (2007))

*National Young Writers' Festival*, September 27-October 1, Newcastle  
FREE: Panels, workshops, debates, roundtables, interventionist theatre, installations and random acts of madness

[www.youngwritersfestival.org](http://www.youngwritersfestival.org)

(Part of the This is Not Art Festival umbrella)

Four women sporting comb-overs, a spoken word poet with a penchant for ginger beer, a typewriter called Mademoiselle, and a Tom Waits fan determined to bring back the art of the novella. They're just some of the people you can expect to meet if you take the fast train to Newcastle this October long weekend for the 2007 National Young Writers' Festival.

Heralded as Australia's premier event for emerging writers, artists, publishers, performers and rabble-rousers, the NYWF is a free, five-day creative bender that focuses on craft and literary skills, and the cultural, political scene of writing.

This year's festival features the biggest showcase of independent books and publications in the southern hemisphere, video and sound installations, a comprehensive workshop and masterclass program, and a range of vibrant, in-depth collaborations, discussions and showdowns.

Dis-organised random acts of chaos also form part of the agenda with Sydney-based theatre troupe, Brown Council, wreaking havoc during Crack! - the Festival's hit-and-run interventionist theatre program, which includes fake discussion panels, fire-alarm evacuation dances and visits from the anti-terror squad.

Other program highlights include: Speechless (a showcase of cutting edge, cross genre spoken word performances); extended panel discussions on topics such as writing and public dissent, the bitchy art of reviewing, the rise of the white trash bogan in the arts and literature; and special guests Shaun Tan, Anna Funder, Sam Wagan Watson and Henry Reynolds.

It's a combination of cutting-edge performances, panels, collaborations, experiments, workshops and parties. It's unique. And, best of all, it's free!

Here are four reasons why you should cancel the October long weekend barbie and book a passage to Newcastle.

### **Profiles**

#### **Brown Council - performance and video installations**

**Bio:** Brown Council is the collaborative practice of artists Kelly Doley, Di Smith, Kate Blackmore and Fran Barrett. They create cracking live performance and video installations.

You can find Brown Council at Crack!, a program of dis-organised interventionist hit-and-run theatre and writing performances.

**Why Brown Council?**

For us, the title Brown Council is donned like an aged suit, or an oiled comb-over. The name developed from the urge to use an official and boring title, which was also suggestive of collaboration. For this, 'council' seemed appropriate. When we added 'Brown', it seemed to taint 'Council' with ugliness, and to undermine its authority.

**What's the toughest thing about being in the Australian independent arts scene (and the best)?**

One of the reasons we began working with video was the lack of opportunity for performance within Sydney, where spaces and venues continue to be closed down. Despite this, there is currently a heightened interest in both performance and video, which has provided us with new opportunities.

**Why should people check you out at NYWF?**

At NYWF we will be performing in hidden spaces embedded somewhere within the festival, hopefully creating revealing moments and intimate exchanges. People should come and find us for the chance to 'connect' with a Councilor. Or at least for the opportunity to see four women sporting impressive comb-overs.

**Chris Currie - writer, publisher, editor**

**Bio:** Chris Currie is a 25 year-old writer from Brisbane. He has recently been published in *Love and Desire: Four Modern Australian Novellas* (Five Mile Press) and co-edits the online journal [eatbooks.com](http://eatbooks.com). He is a passionate advocate of the idea that no-one should write anything longer than 30,000 words.

Chris can be found at 'How to Stop Writing Your First Novel' and 'Afternoon Offerings: Novels'.

**Why are you so passionate about novellas?**

Because, for me, great novellas stay in my head far longer than novels do. The distillation of powerful ideas into the shortest possible form is, for me, truly genius fiction.

**Who do you want to meet at the 2007 NYWF?**

Anyone and everyone. It's going to be an exciting few days. So much talent, so little time...

**Describe the NYWF using three song titles**

(by Tom Waits that contain parentheses... Sorry, I felt like a challenge...)

The Piano Has Been Drinking (Not Me)

Old Shoes (& Picture Postcards)

(Looking For) The Heart of a Saturday Night

**Kirsty Altis - zines and poetry**

A poet and zinester, Kirsty has been published in many local and international publications. She regularly appears at writers' festivals where she and her typewriter, Mademoiselle, write personalised love poetry for unsuspecting

members of the public. Her zine is called brandnewarmour. Kirsty appears at the 'Academy of DIY', 'Zinefair', 'Poetry Reading' and 'Ways Into Writing/Let Me In'.

#### **How did you meet Mademoiselle?**

Mademoiselle and I are inseparable now, but we weren't all that close at first. I started chatting to her in some bar after noticing her black glossy curves from afar. We hit it off immediately, and after a few stiff drinks she even showed me her keys. I needed to type some things up, so we went back to her case and I immediately fell in love with her ding.

#### **Tell us about brandnewarmour**

My zine, Brandnewarmour started as an illicit experiment in the teacher's photocopier room, after hours at my high-school. I lifted the name from a Speedstar song and the content is almost as emo. It's still going after 5 years, emo as ever. It's an unusual little zine, full of nice paper, folds and dried rose petals, often hidden under park benches and in hotel foyers

#### **What does the NYWF mean to you?**

The NYWF is probably the only working holiday I'll ever have as a writer. The forums, the fairs, the people, provide a place where young writers are treated with respect, rather than novelty or pity...the festival is also a good place to share two-minute noodle recipes with other broke writers.

#### **Jess Cook - spoken word**

**Bio:** Jess Cook has been working under the guise of Cooknkitch since 2004, performing her poetry around Australia and the world. She is a resident artist of The Frequency Lab and is currently working on her second album 'I OBJECTIVE'. Jess is part of the Token Imagination Collective, which hosts Token Word. Catch Cooknkitch at Speechless.

#### **Why spoken word?**

I love the musicality of language. It has a mecca of notes and keys and throws, rhythms, tones, meanings and bendings. The spoken word is so immediate. It is a skill we use everyday to communicate. I guess it's the natural irregularities of the voice that excites me to explore possible combinations and placement of sound.

#### **How hard is it to break into the spoken word scene?**

Well, we didn't even know one existed! When we started running Token Word we had no idea about any other nights so we thought we would start our own. As it grew, we met new folks and started to meet the rest of the community. Back in the early days we informed some folks what we were about .... and they snubbed us! Anyhow, the politics of it all are not what interest Token Imagination. Token Word has always been about all art forms. Its main thread is creative collaboration.

#### **Why do you think people should come to the 2007 NYWF?**

Because it involves so many talented contemporary artists who are emerging or established in their fields of work. The buzz and humming dialogue of all the different venues is exciting. The selection of artists are cutting edge and upfront. TINA as a whole does not have the usual starch of Art Festivals. It really is a show case of amazing talent! But all that aside it's just a fine time to chat with folks and drink ginger beer.