

SUBSTANCE

Edition 5 Spring 2003

An initiative of The City of Port Phillip's Local Drug Strategy

THE ECONOMY OF SATISFACTION

BY SALLY FINN

In a world where the dollar means everything, drugs mean more. On a window of a deserted shop are written the words HAND JOB \$40, HEAD JOB \$60, FUCK \$80. Then CHEAP SLUT is scrawled by a different hand underneath.

At 10:45pm a street sex worker pushes on the door of the needle syringe exchange. 'Bloody street is dead,' she says. 'I'm gunna be out all night at this rate.'

At 7:30am a taxi driver shakes his unhappy face when a girl tells him her fee for full sex is \$100.

On the footpaths of Grey and Greeves Streets, money takes on its own value. Sex workers and their punters create their own economy, full of ratios: supply and demand, bad press and no press, a regulatory system which is not Professor Fels of the ACCC but a whole group of social factors, including workers' levels of desperation. Perhaps the most startling similarity between an economy submerged in the illicit and one in the mainstream, is that both have their own inflation index.

THERE IS NO POINT IN DOING SOMETHING FOR NOTHING!

The mugs and the sex workers negotiate a price that keeps the customers coming back, and the sex workers deciding it's the best way to make big bucks quickly. Money comes and goes at a fast pace in the race for sex and drugs. One lot of people are prepared to pay for satisfaction, the other are prepared to perform in order to get satisfaction somewhere else. Almost a perfect combination, certainly a winning economic theory. The only down side you could say, is that this economy is built around something that's unstoreable: satisfaction! And it's the sort of satisfaction that costs a lot, not just money.

So the stakes are high! Sometimes tragically so. But the players inside the worlds of their own economy are aware of the risks and, of course, their need to be satisfied wins out. Money is a slippery commodity all must acquire first, before satisfaction can be bought. The chance to do the work is a chance to get on. Some say it's necessary for survival.

I WONDER IF ANYONE HAS EVER DIED FROM DRYING OUT!

Satisfaction, you could say, is a very strong drive in humans. So strong that inflation keeps the prices of indulgence only just affordable - that is if you get into the economy of satisfaction.



RELAPSE: HER STORY

The cycle begins...

I don't know who David is any more. We used to spend hours talking and laughing. We had a real connection. These days David's emotions range from sullen to agitated. He's shutting me out.

Something horrible is happening and I don't know how to stop it. He's started to lie to me. Last week he came in late, holding a bag in his hand that he presented it to me with a charming smile. It was a beautiful cashmere scarf but David has been broke lately. That's when it hit me; he had left on his bike and arrived without it.

The bike was stolen from outside the doctors. No big deal. No need to inform the police. Shit like that just happens. 'God, you're uptight', he told me. 'Don't appreciate anything I do for you'.

What's worse, I don't know who I am any more. I'm turning into this pathetic creature. I don't know what to believe, I've become a detective in my own home. He has covered all his bases. I search his eyes constantly.

'I know you keep looking at my eyes to see if I'm stoned', he snarled at me one night, 'you're not even subtle about it'. 'My eyes always look pinned even though I've been clean for five years', he said once.

I really want to believe him. He told me that his drug use was all behind him; a lifetime away.

Sometimes when I'm next to him, I notice small bruises on his skin. He's just a bit clumsy, I tell myself, but all the signs are there. Irritability, sniffles, silly fibs, lost money, no money at all.

I begin to mirror his feelings of helplessness and apathy. I should say something to him, but instead I just wrap my anger around me like armour. The tension between us grows. One night, he didn't turn up for dinner at my parents. No call, nothing. I was so embarrassed. When he arrives home, I blurt out my accusations. I'm too angry to care about the consequences.

To my surprise, he confesses everything. It's worse than I imagined. He has been using for about a year; daily for the last three months. It feels like the dam has finally broken. We stay up all night talking and crying. I'm confused.

Finally David has returned to me, vulnerable and contrite. How do I turn him away for being honest? He's nearly 40, something has to give soon; recovery or death. The thought of losing him makes me shudder. Together we will get through this...



RELAPSE: HIS STORY

The cycle continues...

My drug use started when I was so young that I didn't get a chance to establish myself in mainstream society. My involvement with drugs was the end of that idyllic, fresh youthful approach to living.

I gave up last time 'cos I got sick of the place heroin puts you in.

A place of fear.

Separate from too many things, always in a position where the police could pick me up. I was sick of being numb, always stoned.

I'd been straight for about 10 years. I was so relieved when I stopped and started to get on with life again. When you give up drugs, you also give up the stigma. A weight was lifted.

That changed about a year ago. I started to use again.

Unhappiness made me want to obtain an altered state. I just wanted to be in a



Artwork by Russel Cooper

comfort zone that was quiet and contained without involving other people in my pain.

The essence of the drug culture is separation. It is an experience that can only be had by the person using the drugs. The person becomes spilt from society due to the lifestyle.

It also creates splits within that person's psyche. It causes a person to live a dual life. You get unstuck through being caught out. Someone finds out you are using drugs when you have been trying to hide it from them.

Heroin alters relationships with people. It's hard to function to a timetable as supply can be unreliable. I become unreliable, always letting people down. Heroin also changes your senses and puts you into a state that's different from others, creating a barrier.

Being addicted to an illegal substance is taking up too much of my time and energy. I can't take advantage of opportunities coming my way. I just want to continue on with my life like it was before I became dependent again.

Any form of an addiction makes you its slave.

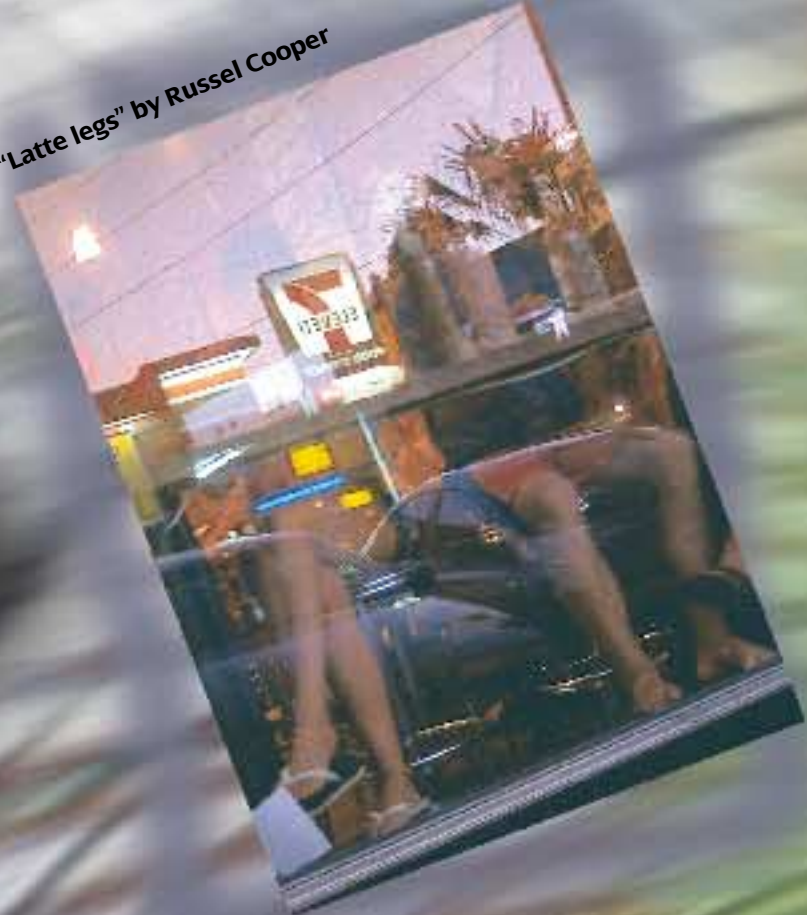
I've spent all my money on drugs, I'm homeless, I'm living with my girlfriend, well off her really. I'm doing things that I really don't want to be doing. It's so easy to just seek out relief.

When I first started to use again I wasn't very happy and I'm still not very happy. My girlfriend still believes in me, but how long can that last?

"The busiest squat in St. Kilda" by Greg



"Latte legs" by Russel Cooper



"Dog eat Dog" by Natasha E. Verrocchi



"Take Me Away" by Natalie E. Verrocchi

Stayin' Alive

Photo Expo

The 'Art of Staying Alive' Exhibition was displayed at the Global Garden Party in the St Kilda Botanical Gardens. The photos explored the concept of health and well being from a unique perspective. Our experience of health is shaped by the circumstances we live in. Feelings of well-being may come from the comfort of a soft toy, a chat over coffee, the oblivion provided by drugs or the beauty of a sunset. Contributing artists included sex workers documenting their sense of home, rooming house residents capturing contrasting aspects of their life and a whimsical look at life's pleasures and practicalities from local artists.

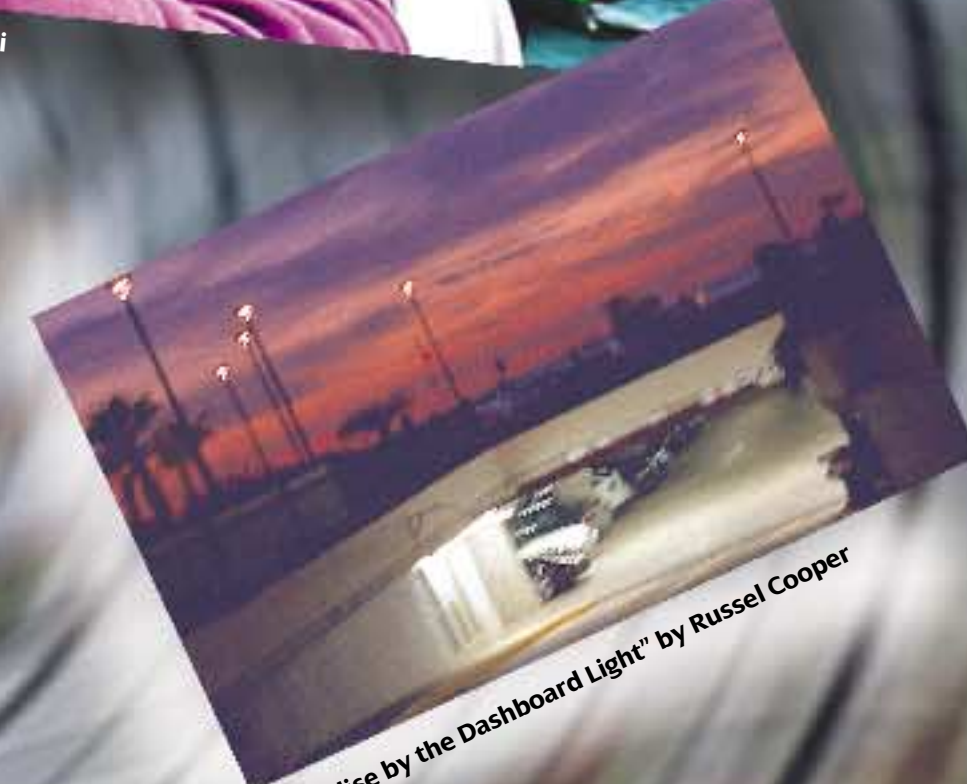
The exhibition was a project of Port Phillip's Local Drug Strategy.



"Pomance on the Pier" by Natasha E. Verrocchi



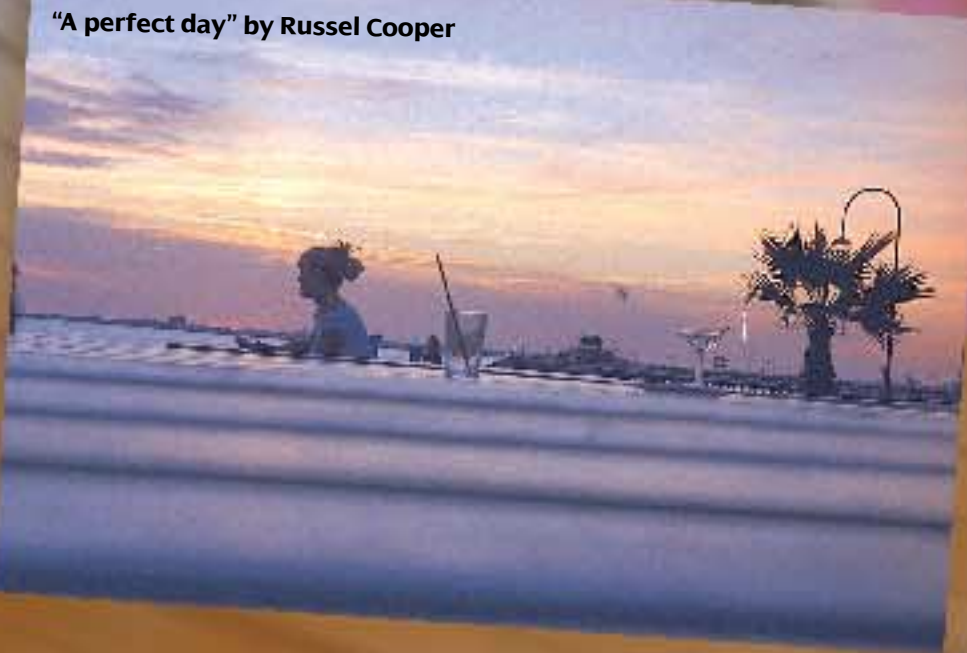
"The One That Got Away" by Natalie E. Verrocchi



"Paradise by the Dashboard Light" by Russel Cooper



"Getting ready" by Greg



"A perfect day" by Russel Cooper



"Four Beats of a Heart" by Russel Cooper



Photographer Bill McKenzie at the Global Garden Party

FAMILY AND FRIENDS DRUG SUPPORT GROUP

Do you have someone in the family or a friend who uses drugs?

Do you need to learn more about drugs and their effects?

Do you need some support and to talk to people in a similar position?

Supported by the State Government through the Port Phillip Local Drug Strategy and Family Drug Help.

The Families & Friends Drug Support Group offers practical assistance and information for drug specific issues and support within a friendly and informal atmosphere.

Some topics covered in previous meetings include:

- A personal experience of prison
- Personal power, changing peoples' perspectives
- Understanding the motivation and resistance in changing drug using behaviour

The Families & Friends Drug Support Group meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of the month at 7.30 pm in Elwood.

For further information, please phone Leigh Fisher on 9573 1777. Supported by the State Government through Port Phillip's Local Drug Strategy and Family Drug Help.

When you feel like your whole world is breaking down
When you can't stop the tears from revealing your wounds
When you're hurting so much your whole body aches
When you're so angry you tremble and shake

When you cease to function and can't stop crying
When all that's left is the thought of dying
When your heart is aching from so much pain
And you're convinced you're going insane

When the mind won't stop and sleep is elusive
When all is chaotic and nothing's conclusive
Cause you think there are no choices remaining
As you cling to a life you're barely sustaining

When you can't cope anymore and falling in a heap
Cause the pain's too intense and the secrets run deep
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All you can do is survive the day
And pray to God you find a way
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There will be good times amongst the bad
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You have to hold onto a vision of hope
Because inside us all we are able to cope
When your world seems too much to bear
Do not give in...do not despair

Jo Hennessy

HOPE



Artwork by Vadim Perov

Are you concerned about the impact that drugs are having on our community?

We invite you to join our Drugs and Community Partnerships Forum which meets monthly to discuss drug related issues and generate solutions to local problems.

The meetings are action focussed with people from all walks of life forming into action groups to work on issues including gaps in current services, community education, employment opportunities and prevention initiatives.

We also have a range of guest speakers each Forum speaking briefly about interesting topics, experiences and services.

The Drugs and Community Partnerships Forum occur the last Wednesday of every month at the St Kilda Town Hall at 12.30 – 2.30, corner of Carlisle Street and Brighton Road. For more information, please contact Robyn Szechtman on 9209 6694.

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OutLaw

An Outreach Legal Service for Drug Users

By Gavin Green

Drug users often run into the long arm of the law. Finding an affordable and accessible lawyer to assist can sometimes be a problem.

Drug users who live, work or play in the City of Port Phillip now have easy access to lawyers due to a new program run out of St Kilda Legal Service. A Drug Outreach Lawyer now provides free legal advice and support at various locations in the local area, including rooming houses, health services, free meal providers and rehabilitation services.

The lawyer can assist with a wide range of legal problems including police charges, fines and family law. The following are examples of how this program can be of real benefit to drug users who may not otherwise find timely and effective legal help.

Carol is 24 and has schizophrenia. Every now and then she works as a street prostitute. Carol uses amphetamines to balance out the dope of her anti-psychotic medication. Carol lives in a rooming house and keeps to herself.

One of Carol's old client's began to harass her on the streets, demanding a relationship and free sex. Carol felt threatened and unsafe. She didn't want to go to the police because they had outstanding warrants for loitering, use and possession of speed. Carol didn't show at her last court date and knew bail would be refused if the police picked her up.

It took a number of meetings with the lawyer at different health services before Carol developed enough trust to tell him that she had been assaulted and continually harassed by one of her former clients. The lawyer advised Carol about her rights to obtain an intervention order and assisted her to apply at the Magistrates' Court.

Ultimately, the drug outreach lawyer assisted Carol to apply for Legal Aid and obtained a barrister to represent her during the final contested hearing for an intervention order. Carol was successful in obtaining an order and was able to get on with her life without constant fear of attack or ongoing

harassment.

As a result, Carol was better able to address issues around her drug use and followed through on the lawyer's referral to an outreach drug and alcohol counselling service. When Carol next appeared at court, she was prepared and legally represented, this time armed with letters from her drug counsellor.

Brian is 28 and has led a chaotic life since starting heavy heroin use six years ago. Last year, Brian spent about six months in residential drug rehab. After leaving, Brian maintained a drug free lifestyle until he was assaulted by a group of former associates. This assault put Brian into hospital for a few days. On leaving hospital, Brian spiralled back into using heroin and developed a transient lifestyle. Brian first met the drug outreach lawyer at an emergency housing provider where he sought advice about charges of theft and receiving stolen goods. Brian met the lawyer again at a local drug detox centre where he disclosed information about the impact of his assault. Brian said that he could no longer walk down the street without looking over his shoulder, and suffered nightmares and panic attacks, all as a result of his being assaulted. The drug outreach lawyer negotiated with the police to reopen their investigation into the assaults and commenced an application for compensation through the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal. He also arranged for Brian to commence counselling through the Victims Assistance and Referral Service.

Brian and Carol both obtained free legal advice and support from the new drug outreach lawyer from St Kilda Legal Service. Please call 9534 0777 to make an appointment or to find out the drug outreach lawyer's outreach times and locations.

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Photo of Gavin Green by Russel Cooper

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A STROLL DOWN GREY ST

Darcy snatched a peek at herself, reflected in the glass of the fish and chip shop window, as she walked along Fitzroy St. She wasn't a vain person, but any time she came across the sight of herself like that, unexpectedly, in the shiny curve of a soup spoon or the side mirror of a parked car, she would always have to look. These things served to remind her of who she was. A young woman with thin arms and a face as round as a lolly pop on a stick.

There I am.
That's who I am.

She was always a little surprised to see herself candidly plonked amongst the traffic lights and bustle of the street. Proving that she was one of the characters in the scene and took up as much space, more or less as the other players. The muttering lady pushing her clinking jeep full of bottles, that three legged dog, those skinny cats skittling through laneways, the old man with his walking frame, the cocky young boys darting by on their skateboards.

I can see them.
And they can see me.

She knew this was true through the evidence of reflections. Nonetheless, the person she saw looking back through her same eyes, bore little resemblance to the person she felt inside.

Darcy still felt like the six-year-old schoolgirl she'd been a decade before. One of the children marching into school, sitting cross legged in her too short summer dress on nylon classroom carpet. She had a brown mole on the inside of her knee that she felt was the embodiment of ugliness. Like a splotch of shit. Something dirty and shameful. She'd rest her notebook over it to hide it away.

A tram shimmer hammered by and the soles of her boots slid over the slimy Fitzroy St bitumen. She bit her lip and winced, a sour smile twisting her lips, at the thought of it. She had been such a neurotic kid. Little things upset her. Darcy turned into Grey Street. The asphalt was slick and black. St Kilda must have been a glamorous place. She walked past gorgeous mansions, now cheap rooms for rent. Still grand, grotty, as derelicts in dinner suits. Cars cruised, odd intervals along the road, separate and shiny as beads of oil in a sink of dirty dishwasher.

It felt awkward walking up this strip. Prostitutes and curb crawling cars. While the men made no impression, the women fascinated her. She still found it sort of shocking, they seemed so tough, open, brave. She avoided making any eye contact passing them. Didn't want them to think that she was judging them, worried a bit about how they might judge her.

She stumbled through a puddle and oily water seeped through the suede of her boot. A brown station wagon pulled to a halt beside her. Subtly, without turning her head, she checked out the driver from the corner of her eye. A grey haired man. His clean-shaven neck, a fat pink sausage hanging over the collar of his shirt. She dipped her head, a subtle nod and slipped through the passenger door and sat on the wide vinyl seat. She ran her fingernails over the stitching in the seams making a flickering sound.

Darcy wasn't like the other girls on Grey Street. She would never stand around like that for hours in the cold. Like I'm asking for it. She'd casually walk along. Before she even got as far as Barkly Street, she would be in a car and off.

The man pulled into a laneway. Darcy cupped her hand around the warm fleshy tumour hanging out of the fly of his pants. Her fingers were cold and he reacted with a sharp inhale of breath. For that instant she felt big. Cruel and strong.

Darcy began to work her hand to the rhythm of a skipping chant, at the same time scooping the notes off the seat and cramming them into her boot. Had a little motorcar, 1964 and it took around the cor-or-or-na, and we put on the breaks but the breaks didn't work so we took around the.... She always used this tune. It worked. Freed her mind to think of other things.



Photo by Russel Cooper



Photo by Russel Cooper



Matters of Substance

Artwork by Russel Cooper

You know, some days I try so hard, I try to be patient. I try to remember, it's just a clerk on the other side of the counter. She's probably been screamed at a dozen times today and they've only been open a couple of hours. She doesn't remember me from yesterday, nor the day before, or the day before that. I'll have to tell her again, reliving the whole poisoning event. I stop mid sentence in a desperate attempt to remain composed, grateful if no more than tears well up in my eyes.

A little more of my soul breaks free, runs down my cheek before helplessly tumbling towards the ground. Spent and spoilt in a pool of contempt. A little more of who I am gone, and a little more of who I'm becoming, overwhelming me. I'm half the man I used to be. I can't help but wonder if she thinks the look of disgust on my face is at her, her employer or something I just swallowed.

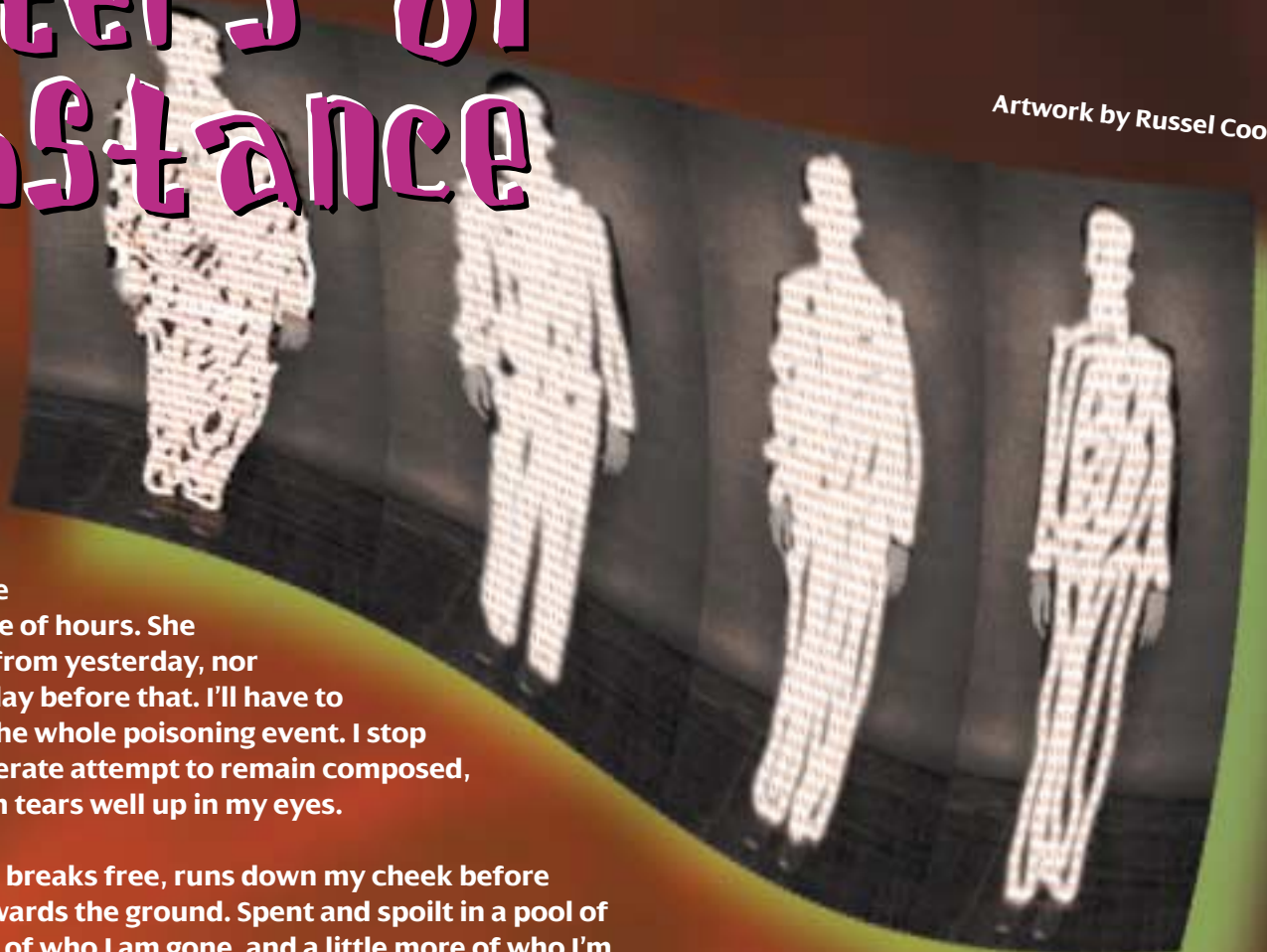
The truth is, every time I retell my story, a little more of my pride and self-respect dies. The disgust, well, that's all mine because I know that she's going to go and get someone else that "can help me". So far it's been three years of waiting, regular appointments, an hour of talking without saying a thing.

The dribble directs my thoughts back and forth and round the bend, confusing the confusion. If there's a hint that I'm aware of what's going on, suddenly its "thanks for coming in, it won't be too much longer, we will keep in touch. By the way, I think you really need some medication for the severe depression you are suffering from...".

"But, but, hang on, I don't really understa..."
"Would you like to make another appointment?
I can fit you in, lets see, how's Friday the 21st sound?"
"Friday the 21st next week," I ask?
" Ohh heavens no, Friday the 21st of March, another 2 months. I know you're in a severe crisis but it's really the earliest available appointment I have. I can give you the suicide prevention line number if you like?"

"Thanks for coming!!"

Peter Williams



Special Thanks to:

The Editorial Working Group, Robin Stewart, Peter Streker, Natalie E. Verocchi

Substance Coordinator: Robyn Szechtman 9209 6694

Photography: Russel Cooper

Thanks to all members of the Community Education Action Group from the Drugs and Community Partnerships Forum

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This newsletter is an initiative of Port Phillip's Local Drug Strategy