epidemiological history. While we may see pre–modern European society as the victim of an endless series of demographic crises, in fact it was merely victim of its demographic success — large epidemics were only possible because of increasing population density. The disease material is followed by an interesting section on ‘Disaster’, covering the art and science of astrological divination. The final section on representations of death is also very good. Precisely because these last two sections are so good, one questions their placement at the very end of the last chapter. Most of the book is about death one way or another, and frequently alludes to theories of astrological causation. Since it is difficult to imagine most readers diligently beginning on page one and reading right through a book of such topical scope, many may miss these almost universally relevant sections.

This is an eminently respectable attempt at an ambitious project, whose wealth of detail fascinates. It is generously illustrated with more than seventy plates sourced from across Europe, from the late fifteenth century through the mid seventeenth, many of which are unlikely to have had much modern circulation. This reviewer was not ultimately convinced by the argument that the many crises of early modern Europe (‘above all’ the demographic) caused heightened interest in apocalyptic speculation. What must be respected, however, is the utterly defensible insistence on the potential for religious, political and demographic crises to be contained in this single contemporary explanatory frame. The pan–European scope of this book’s materials should mean there can hardly be a scholar for whom there is nothing new to be found here. In an increasingly specialised research community, for many it may be partly (R)evelatory.

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The Australian Performing Group (known as the APG) has been credited with instigating a revolution. This autonomous theatre collective was the most prolific participant in Melbourne’s New Wave theatre movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. At its home, the eponymous Pram Factory, and in streets, schools and factories, the APG performed the politics of the counter–culture. Importantly, the bulk of the APG’s productions were written by Australians and diverged from traditional dramatic forms. From 1967 until its demise in 1981, the APG produced a multitude of new Australian plays. The impact of this output and the experimental nature of the APG’s work is evident in the form and content of contemporary Australian drama.

In remembering the APG, most historians focus on the key playwrights who made their mark on Australian theatre, from Jack Hibberd and John Romeril to David Williamson. Tim Robertson’s The Pram Factory: The Australian Performing Group Recollected is the first comprehensive written study to privilege the APG’s performers. Robertson successfully justifies his chosen perspective. The performers were integral contributors to APG productions. As well as acting in the shows, they often devised the productions themselves through workshops in conjunction with APG dramatists and through improvisation. They tested innovative overseas techniques and eventually created a distinctive, indigenous performing style. Many of these performers are still active in Australian theatre including Graeme Blundell, Max Gillies and Evelyn Krape.

Robertson is well placed to author this work because of his first–hand experience of the APG. He abandoned a secure professional life as a drama teacher at Flinders University to

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1 The APG was first named the La Mama Group. The collective renamed the Group after its performances at the 1970 Perth Arts Festival.
4 Note the existence of the video by Anna Grieve and James Manche, Pram Factory (Melbourne: Film Australia, 1994). It contains interviews with former APG performers.
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become a stalwart member, writer and performer of the APG. Robertson captures the alluring euphoria of the APG in the late hippy era. He tells the story of its members’ communal living in Carlton, Fitzroy and in the Pram Factory itself, and their flirtation with the drugs, sex and rock ‘n’ roll that dominated this scene. Robertson documents their support for left-wing, anti-establishment politics and, notably, their experience of the drive to perform. *The Pram Factory* hurls us inside the soul of the APG. It records the APG productions by discussing the colourful personalities of the performers that created them. Robertson blends his own memories together with information gathered from interviews with ex-performers and from the APG archives.

The dominance of Robertson’s personal bias in *The Pram Factory* betrays significant insights into the APG itself. Although he speaks about himself in the third person, Robertson’s voice unashamedly pervades this story. His view of the APG’s internal politics holds sway. Robertson examines only some of the APG performers and presents only his own opinions about the love affairs and multiple factions that developed within the APG. His style of writing is poetic and his language is lyrical. The way in which the work flows between details of the APG performers conveys the inaccurate impression that the book is more reflective than critical, analytical or, indeed, prejudiced. All these factors are reminiscent of the introspective, self-aggrandizing world of the APG. For a time, for some APG members, the APG was all that mattered and everything else revolved around them. Their mythologizing of themselves is confirmed by Robertson’s capitalizing of words denoting aspects of the APG and its productions. A reader lacking background knowledge of the APG would have difficulty comprehending all the nuances and references embedded in the text. Ironically, Robertson denies the criticism often levelled at the APG that it had a closed-shop mentality.

Nevertheless, *The Pram Factory* draws together invaluable primary historical material about the APG. It records the different dramatic styles and overseas influences that were put on trial, the ambience of the spaces used by the APG, the incessant, self-conscious communications between APG members and the inspirations for their productions. The descriptions of APG personalities are vivid and entertaining, despite the partial prism through which they are remembered. Fabulous photos of APG productions and the wild cartoons of former APG member Barry Dickins adorn the pages. This book certainly conveys the uniqueness of the APG and its era. The absence of a conclusion to *The Pram Factory* is perhaps symbolic of APG performers’ (or at least Robertson’s) unwillingness to let go of a time that they recall as having been magical.

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*Fame Games,* as a survey of celebrity in Australia, is a thoughtful and critical engagement with Australian media and public relations practices. Notions of celebrity, publicity and ‘tabloidism’ are examined and discussed not in terms of a ‘failure’ to seriously discuss world events, but rather as aspects of a discourse with new and different intentions and objectives. Analysis of the construction and communication of celebrity news is primarily concerned with notions of the popular. This shift in focus from ‘hard’ to ‘soft’ news has developed a celebrity ‘industry’, where personality and image are valuable both as news, and as products to be carefully managed by the public relations industry. The management and generation of celebrity news has led to the development of new relationships between the public relations industries and the Australian media, ‘with celebrity being the new field of endeavour that has proliferated in Australian media, and celebrity being one of the principal commodities to be regularly produced from this industrial growth’ (178).

Turner, Bonner and Marshall open with the comment that they are examining a ‘major shift in how the Australian media now operates’ (1). Specifically, this work considers the changing role of the publicity and promotions industry, and in the news gathering and production practices in Australia. These changes are evident in shifts in news values — those