



BODY AND SELF

PERFORMANCE ART IN AUSTRALIA 1969-92 | ANNE MARSH

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Monash University, PO Box 197,
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info@videoartchive.org.au

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INTRODUCTION

AND PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

PRELIMINARY COMMENTS

Body and Self: Performance Art in Australia 1969-1992 was initially written to fill a gap in Australian art history. Art practices that extended the boundaries of the art museum in the late 1960s and 1970s appeared to have been forgotten in the era of the 'post' (post-conceptualism, post-pop, post-feminism etc.). In the introduction to the 1993 edition of this book, I said that I wanted to reconstruct the development of performance art from circa 1969 to 1992 in an attempt to redress this cultural amnesia. Writing now, in 2011, this amnesia is still apparent in Australia, despite what has been termed a 'performative turn' in critical theory. A turn that Michel Benamou cites as "the unifying mode of the postmodern" and Erika Fischer-Lichte argues is the "prevailing culture" of the twentieth century.¹

In Europe and North America there has been some substantial work in the field since 1993. Peggy Phelan's book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), Amelia Jones's *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (1998), Kathy O'Dell's *Contract with the Skin* (1998), Jane Blocker's *What the Body Cost* (2004), and Erika Fischer-Lichte's *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2008) stand out in my mind as major contributions to the field but each from quite different perspectives. The merging of art history and performance studies has contributed to a critical mass with journals such as *The Drama Review* (TDR), *Performance Art Journal* (PAJ) and *Australasian Drama Studies* running papers on performance art. In Australia, Edward Scheer's monograph on Mike Parr, *The Infinity Machine* (2009), is representative of this merger.

INTRODUCTION

This on-line version of Body and Self is essentially an archival edition. The text has been edited, corrected and revised but the argument and content remains the same. The major difference is that, wherever possible, archival video imagery has been embedded together with the original black and white photographs. This has been made possible by a new research project which considers the documentation and remediation of performance art. The Australian Video Art Archive is part of this project and it has allowed for the conservation of old videotape, excerpts of which are included in this book.

Body and Self charts a course from the happenings of the 1960s, through body art in the 1970s, towards a more political body in the 1980s and 1990s. The text draws on contemporary theories of the subject and considers changes in art practice in conjunction with social critiques.

The performance art considered here had its genesis in the visual arts and emerged in relation to conceptual art, informal sculpture, earth art, environments, film, video, and popular culture.

It was a practice located in a specific time and place and usually involved the presence of the artist before his or her audience. Alternatively, the artist may have orchestrated an event in which the audience was involved in some way but the artist was physically absent.

The position of the individual in society is taken to be of paramount concern in performance art. If performance is different from other modes of art, it is invariably the presence of the artist before an audience that marks the distinction. The relationship with the viewer, sometimes the participant, is paramount. Chance, play, unscripted participation, various technological interventions (slides, video, computer interactions) and the literal absence of the artist, all engage with the problem of the artist's presence as the unique maker of meaning. Body art presents an important moment in the history of performance art because it often expresses individual psychological disturbances. Although this mode of performance has been criticized as self-obsessive, it often transgresses social laws or points to the fragility of human life.

Writers have claimed that performance art is concerned with place, space and time; that it is more concerned with process than with product, that it challenges dominant codes and represents a concerted attack on the museum.² Although these definitions are useful, they tend to be overly generalized observations which could be equally applicable to a range of works produced since the 1960s, such as conceptual art, earth art, sculptural installation, and video.³ In the following pages, in a more specific interpretation, I will try to situate performance art as a practice engaged with contemporary perceptions of the body and the self in the world.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

IN CHAPTER 1 I will examine the connection between art and life and analyze the late 1960s in Australia and the ways in which social issues became manifest in the art world. The relationship between Australian artists and their contemporaries overseas will be framed against a background of activities in Sydney and Melbourne between 1970 and 1973. I have included a lengthy discussion of events at Inhibodress artists' space in Woolloomooloo, since this helps to place Australian performance within a larger 'international' context. The role of critics, curators, exhibitions and alternative art spaces is considered in relation to the spread of performance art activities to other states.

CHAPTER 2 concentrates on experimental art in Australia and the problems associated with the concept of the avant-garde. I have chosen to concentrate on the debates which arose at the Experimental Art Foundation (EAF) in Adelaide. The EAF was the first experimental venue to receive recurrent government funding, which allowed it to host many interstate and overseas artists. This, together with the involvement of key figures, such as Donald Brook and Noel Sheridan, created a fertile space in which artists could develop their ideas.

CHAPTER 3 analyses the complexities of body art and attempts to highlight the problems associated with an 'instinctual revolt', one of the major strategies associated with a New Left program of 'revolution through lifestyle' which informed the counter-culture.⁴

IN CHAPTER 4 I consider ritual performance and how it addressed environmental and ecological issues. The discussion covers the difference between an ecological concern, which focuses on the biological body and its relationship to the natural environment, and an environmental concern, which looks at the devastation of the planet. The political motivation behind the latter is considered together with other activist performances.

At the end of the 1970s Australian performance artists started to reconsider the relationship between subjectivity and political activity. A shift from humanist to anti-humanist theories became evident as artists concerned with political issues started to question their role in promoting social change. The structuralist analysis of culture, which stressed the ideological workings of the unconscious, represented a dramatic change in the role that the individual could play in social change. The structuralists argued that individuality was a humanist myth and they insisted that the subject (once the individual) was *always already* spoken by language. In short, social structures (family, church, state) determined the

individual; there was no free will as such, nor any possibility of an instinctual response. Following on from Freud's anti-humanist thesis, 'man' was no longer seen as an individual in control of his own destiny. Thus the correlation between consciousness and action, which had formed the backbone of humanist interpretations of social change, was scrutinized. Freud's analysis of the social construction of the subject was re-read and annexed to a specifically political analysis by Marxists and feminists.⁵

CHAPTER 5 looks at the aftermath of the structuralist critique and how it affected performance art. The idea that the subject is already spoken rang a kind of death knell for some forms of performance art. This was particularly evident in body art, which focused on the authenticity of individual experience. The idea of instinctual response was replaced by an analysis of subjectivity which saw the body as a social construction. In the 1980s many performance artists started to examine body language as a way of underlining stereotypical behaviours. Artists addressing the social construction of femininity attempted to find a place in which women could speak about their gender difference without falling into the trap of celebrating biological specificity. The idea that woman is different had already been used for the interests of patriarchy: woman-nature-reproduction the binary of man-culture-production often saw women confined to the home to bring up children and nurture the family.

Body and Self is constructed both thematically and chronologically. It does not reproduce a linear history, but aims to interpret performance art within a socio-historic framework so that the changes in the artists' interpretations of the subject will emerge.

ENDNOTES

- 1 For a useful overview see Tracy C. Davis, 'Introduction: The Pirouette, Detour, Revolution, Deflection, Deviation, Tack, and Yaw of the Performative Turn', in T.C. Davis (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 1-10. Michel Benamou, 'Presence and Play', in M. Benamou and C. Caramello (eds.), *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, Coda Press, Madison, Wisconsin, 1977, p. 3. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*, Routledge, New York and London, 2005, p. 14.
- 2 These ideas are common in most texts on performance art; see for example G. Battcock and R. Nickas (eds.), *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, Dutton, New York, 1984; M. Benamou and C. Caramello (eds.), *Performance in Postmodern Culture*; and H. M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1989.
- 3 In regard to art in the 1960s and 1970s, see G. Celant, *Art Povera*, Studio Vista, London, 1969; G. Battcock (ed.), *New Artists Video: A Critical Anthology*, Dutton, New York, 1978; and R. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1977. The similarities and differences between performance and other modes of art in the 1960s and 1970s will be developed in the first part of this book.
- 4 See particularly H. Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, Beacon, Boston, 1955. Marcuse's works were widely read in the 1960s and 1970s and, although it is easier to establish a fairly direct influence on the counter-culture in America, it is also apparent that Marcuse was broadly accessible to a young generation in Australia. The absorption of Marcuse's thesis in Australia will be discussed in Chapter 1.
- 5 See particularly J. Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*, Vintage, New York, 1975; and L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971, especially the essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', pp. 127-86. Althusser's essay was the first widely read Marxist structuralist analysis of the subject to be translated into English.

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CHAPTER ONE

PERFORMANCE ART IN AUSTRALIA: 1969-73
PERFORMANCE ART: A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PRACTICE

Performance art can best be described as a form of art that happens at a particular time in a particular place where the artist engages in some sort of activity, usually before an audience.

The main difference between performance art and other modes of visual art practice, such as painting, photography, and sculpture, is that it is a temporal event or action. Although performance art may utilise many art forms — music, sound, movement, dance, language, sculptural objects and environments, masks, costumes, video, film — these things come together to make an ephemeral event which is presented live and usually once only. Conversely, performance art may be created without any art-related skills; for example, Chris Burden's 'Shoot' (1971), involved the artist being shot in the arm by a friend.

Performance art is generally, but not always, different from theatre. Most performance artists do not act out roles invented by other people, they do not perform within the context of a written script or narrative, and they are not necessarily skilled in dance, drama, cabaret, or any particular area of the performing arts.

Performance art draws on many sources in and beyond the arts and often questions the structure of art itself by focusing on the relationship between art and society or between the artist and the spectator or both. This is not to suggest that all performance artists are exclusively concerned with challenging conventional modes of art, or disrupting conventional ways of seeing or receiving art; however, the cross-disciplinary nature of the medium makes it difficult to categorise and assess and impossible to sell as a lasting object. This means that it cannot be collected except as documentation of an event in the past by photograph, text, video, or film.

The artist's act of appearing in the work, rather than making works in a studio which are then exhibited in a gallery for quiet contemplation, changes the relationship between the artist and the audience. The spectator is usually in the company of the artist, although there are instances where the artist engages in an activity which is then presented in his or her absence. The performance element in this instance is in the artist's doing, or in the artist having done something. Ivan Durrant's action of dumping the carcass of a dead cow outside the main entrance of the National Gallery of Victoria on the opening night of the *Modern Masters Exhibition* in 1975 was an activist performance (a public protest by the artist), which did not involve the presence of the artist throughout the event.

Some performance artists have made the assault on conventional art, galleries, and museums a paramount concern in their works. This has been achieved in various ways. The relationship between the artist and the audience, the context of the performance, and the content of the work are all used to question, investigate, and challenge conventional codes, languages, and disciplines.

Body artists who performed private acts in public, such as masturbation, copulation, or masochism, underlined the position of the spectator as voyeur. The happenings of the 1960s were collective events which challenged the hierarchical structure of art by making all the participants responsible for the work. Often there was no audience as such and the collective experience of

the participants became the performance. Activist performance art engaged with contemporary political issues, sometimes in the form of direct political action. *Child-care Isn't an Important Issue*, an activist performance by Jude Adams, began as a protest against the lack of child-care facilities during the Adelaide Festival of the Arts in 1980. Adams, Helen Sherriff and others took their domestic work and their children into the streets and suburban shopping centres to highlight the inadequate provision of child-care in Australian society in general. In Rundle Mall they pushed a lurid pink washing-machine full of nappies which displayed political statistics such as 'working class and migrant areas are often left with the least adequate child-care.' These were hung on a makeshift washing line and together with a group of infants, some in an old pram, they created the visual backdrop for the performance. Street theatre tactics were used as the artists made statements and sang songs about child-care.¹ Activist performance in the 1970s and the happenings in the 1960s often claimed to be 'democratising' art by breaking down its hierarchical structure: making art outside the gallery system, including the audience in the work (participatory performance), and attempting to reach a broader public through different contexts.

Performance art has also been considered as a form of art that represents what Lucy Lippard called the 'dematerialisation of the art object.'² In her book, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, Lippard discussed a range of art practices which challenged the status of the art object as a unique, precious, collectible item that was easily exploitable for its market value. Artists seeking to change the position of art in society started to make



art works which emphasised different qualities. Art made with non-precious materials, found objects, natural elements, or industrial refuse was termed *Arte Povera* (poor art) by the Italian critic Germano Celant.³ Land art or earth art turned its back on the museum and started to make monumental sculpture in the forest and the desert. Sculptural environments or installations were often on a smaller scale and shown in galleries as well as at outdoor sites, but like land and earth art they were ephemeral works which would be dismantled and the parts often discarded after the fact. The natural atrophy of land art and the impermanence of sculptural environments and installations meant that they could not be collected for posterity. As such these works presented a challenge to the established institutions of the artworld.

Jude Adams, *Child-care Isn't an Important Issue*, Rundle Street Mall, Adelaide, 1980.

Adams appears in the centre of this photograph. Photograph from the artist's collection.

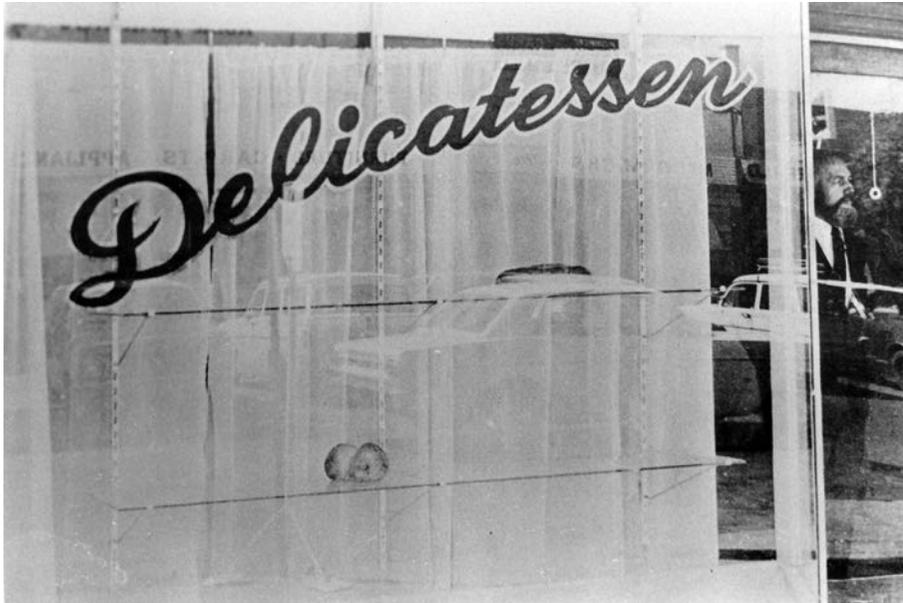
Conceptual artists also made works, which emphasised process rather than product. These artists were concerned primarily and often exclusively with the *idea*, suggesting works through written instructions or descriptions. The American conceptualist Robert Barry claimed that he had executed works which consisted of ‘forgotten thoughts, things in his unconscious, things not communicable, things unknowable, things not yet known.’⁴ Many conceptual works were language-based and contained no visual data; others presented image-text analysis such as Mel Ramsden’s *Secret Painting* (1967-8): a painted square with a photostat statement claiming that ‘the content of this painting is invisible: the character and dimensions of the content is to be kept permanently secret, known only to the artist.’⁵ Conceptual art was passionately political, addressing the conventions of art and its institutions in polemic essays against the art object and art market.⁶

The happenings and performance art in the 1960s and 1970s shared aspects with many of the other practices described by Lippard in terms of the ‘dematerialisation’ of the art object. The specificity of site in performance art was informed by sculptural installation, land and earth art. Turning to the land as site was also inspired by ecological issues and a desire to reinvest modern life with a ritual quality which had been lost due to the reign of rationality. Natural rhythms and processes were valued by many artists over and above mechanical means of production. The values enshrined by modernity were questioned and alternatives explored.

Many sculptors made performances during the 1970s. The German artist Joseph Beuys was one of the most productive performance artists in the Western artworld during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Beuys presented himself as a kind of shaman. Living in a society that had lost its spiritual roots, artists such as Beuys turned to ancient and largely forgotten rites in an attempt to reclaim a deeper meaning for life in a corporate, technological world. His efforts to communicate with a wild coyote whilst caged with the animal in an art gallery for a week (*I Like America, America Likes Me*, 1974), and his attempt to ‘explain pictures to a dead hare’ (*Explaining Pictures to a Dead Hare*, 1965) are just some examples of works which tried to reconstruct a more holistic life; a way of communicating with nature through intuition and instinct rather than rational or scientific discourse. Beuys’s continual references to his own journey of near death and recovery — due to the ‘primitive’ healing techniques of the Tartars, when his plane was shot down at the end of World War II — also points to the importance of autobiography in much of this work. In Australia the sculptor Kevin Mortensen has explored similar terrain but without the didacticism of Beuys. Mortensen, like many artists of his generation, was interested in Zen Buddhism.

Zen was popularised in the West by the writings of D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts,⁷ it was embraced by beat generation poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, and it was a major influence in John Cage’s music. Zen presented an unconventional philosophy to the West: its teachings favoured meditation and the development of intuition rather than scripture as a means to enlightenment and it focused its attention on everyday life and random methods of learning. Zen presented paradoxical teachings, saying: ‘those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know.’⁸ This appealed to a generation who had little faith in the rationality of Western thought or language. The principle of the illuminated commonplace⁹ meant that enlightenment could occur as if by chance whilst one was totally concerned with something else; the study of theology and scripture was not mandatory.

It is important to stress that the Zen popularised by Suzuki and Watts tended to be further simplified by artists. In his essay ‘Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen’, Watts accused Kerouac of confusing ‘anything goes’ at an existential level with ‘anything goes’ at the artistic and social levels; he argued that Beat Zen was ‘sowing confusion in idealising as art and life what is better kept to oneself as therapy.’¹⁰ Zen in the West served as an alternative but it quickly became just



one of an array of alternative religions, occult sects, psychological therapies and self-help remedies that proliferated throughout the counter-culture of the late 1960s and 1970s. Because of this network of ideas and beliefs it is difficult to point to any particular artwork and say definitively that it is informed exclusively by Zen.

Kevin Mortensen said that his sculptural installation and performance *The Delicatessen* (Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1975) was in some ways influenced by the story-telling of the Zen masters.¹¹ Paradoxical language and everyday life were certainly part of the event. Mortensen did not appear in the performance but collaborated with Eddie Rosser, an actor who took on the role of a returned veteran who had experienced the



atrocities of war. The shop was rented months before the exhibition opened and Rosser prepared for business throughout that time, conversing in a slightly confused and distressed way with local shoppers and associated business people. During trading hours Rosser measured up the shop for shelving, swept the front pavement and occasionally slept on a small stretcher bed. There was nothing to sell, although two whimsical sculptures, resembling the carcasses of animals, were hung above the counter. It was not clear that the event was art until the exhibition had opened and it became apparent to the local population that Rosser's presence was designed as art. The Zen idea of the illuminated commonplace could be seen to be at work in *The Delicatessen*; however, in art historical terms it could

Kevin Mortensen,
The Delicatessen,
Mildura Sculpture
Triennial, 1975.

Photograph
from the artist's
collection.

Kevin Mortensen,
The Rocking, Act 1,
1978.

Photograph from the
artist's collection.



also be associated with the bizarre chance methods employed by the dadaists or it could be interpreted as a dreamscape or exploration of the unconscious and be related to surrealism.

Kevin Mortensen described his 1978 performance *The Rocking (Act 1, Canberra)* as 'an attempt to duplicate the Zen technique by forcing concentration upon a forced breathing rhythm.'¹² The artist was strapped to a stretcher construction pivoted in the middle like a see-saw.¹³ An assistant rocked Mortensen up and down 'at a rate calculated to approximate normal breathing.'¹⁴ The action lasted for about twenty minutes and induced a state of heightened awareness; according to the artist he experienced 'vivid hallucinations for up to half an hour after the event.'¹⁵

Mortensen's documentation of *The Rocking* is a good example of how the artist values chance and accidental events. The image preferred by Mortensen as a record of the performance incorporates a technical fault.¹⁶ The film was accidentally superimposed upon itself during processing so that sprocket holes on the film appeared in the photograph. The 'mistake' created a space-age image as the sprocket holes appeared like the port-holes of an airplane or space craft.

Gary Willis, who was associated with The Yellow House in Sydney in the late 1960s, was also interested in Zen Buddhism and studied at a Japanese and a Thai monastery during 1974.¹⁷ Often working collaboratively with other artists Willis has presented happenings such as *The All Senses Ball* (Canberra, 1973, discussed below) and absurd performance art events. *ZZZZZ* (pronounced as a loud guttural snore) was presented in

collaboration with four other 'workers' in the Canberra City Plaza during 1973. At 5.05 p.m. on a working day a forestry truck arrived carrying five huge logs (6.5 feet in length and 2.5 feet in diameter) which were lowered from the truck and placed in a rough circular formation.¹⁸ A fire was lit in the centre of the circle and a billy set to boil. At this point each 'workman' produced a small hand-saw and proceeded to try to saw through his log. The work continued in earnest until the billy boiled and everyone stopped for tea.¹⁹ The performance lasted approximately thirty minutes; the logs and a sign reading 'ZZZZZ today tomorrow now — watching sawing being' remained on site, outside the David Jones department store, for five days.²⁰

Concentrating on the functional activity of work and turning the life experience into art were characteristics of Willis's performance works in the 1970s. In 1978 Willis and Simon Hopkinson produced *Art Work* for the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial. The performance involved the word 'ART' being laid in bricks by the 'artists' and the word 'WORK' being laid by Orio Gilardi, a professional bricklayer. The action neatly questioned the concepts of both art and work, focusing on the artist's privileged position as creator.

Performance artists present themselves to the audience in various ways. Sometimes the body of the artist is the focus, as with body art, at others a collective structure is used or several artists perform collaboratively. Artists producing performances and happenings in the 1960s and 1970s stressed the differences between their practice and that seen in conventional theatre. Performance art and happenings emphasised the reality of the event; real life and real time actions



Gary Willis, *ZZZZ*,
Canberra City
Plaza, 1973.

Photograph
from the artist's
collection.



Gary Willis and
Simon Hopkinson,
Art Work,
Mildura Sculpture
Triennial, 1978.

Photograph from the
artist's collection.



often became the content of the work. Body art, which must be seen as a particular genre of performance art, exhibited the body of the artist and performed actions on that body. These events sometimes involved self-inflicted pain, which was justified by artists as a kind of trial or initiation rite. Some insisted on the ritual aspects associated with such acts (a kind of modern 'primitivism'), others claimed to be analysing social rites and stereotypes. The division between private and public was tested and crossed as artists performed private rituals in public spaces, everyday life events became art, and artists became objects.

Lippard's concept of the dematerialisation of the art object is a useful umbrella terms which brings together a stream of diverse art practices that are seen to have something in common. All these practices (conceptual art, earth art, sculptural installations, performance art) ask questions about what art is: they interrogate the languages of art, present different paradigms of communication and create different spaces in which the spectator perceives art. Although the historian is presented with a plethora of different practices, sometimes called the 'anything goes' pluralism of the 1970's, this diversity is accountable for in terms of the ideologies and philosophies that informed it.

Sculptures produced by minimalists in the 1960s, such as Richard Serra and Robert Morris, changed the relationship between the spectator and the object of art. The architectural scale and site specificity of the works created a space within which the spectator perceived: no longer on the outside of the work looking in, now the viewer became part of the work. Explaining the new sculpture in 1966, Robert Morris said:

The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but just one of the terms in the newer aesthetic. It is in some way more reflexive because one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships.²¹

In 1968 the American critic Michael Fried published a famous criticism against minimalist sculpture, claiming that it was 'theatrical.'²² The physical presence of minimalism was criticised as 'literalist' by Fried, who argued that anything founded on this type of 'theatricality' was antithetical to modernist art. Fried preferred an art practice that suspended 'theatricality' by concentrating on those aspects internal to the medium; as a formalist critic he was committed to form — colour, shape, texture. Any external or relational characteristics — environmental context or placement which may shift the spectator's attention away from the internal qualities of art — were deemed to be superfluous or even dangerous to the continuation of modernist art.

The debates between the minimalists and the formalists at the end of the 1960s represent a decisive point in the history of post-war art. Minimalism, like pop art, represented a shift away from formalist concerns, which had influenced much of late modernism. Clement Greenberg, America's most prolific formalist critic, supported an autonomous position for the visual arts and reasserted an aesthetic hierarchy that valued abstract, nonrepresentational painting above other forms of art. The most significant art according to formalism was that which remained autonomous from society and concerned itself with its own internal, formal properties. Greenberg wanted to separate art from society in order to preserve a place for avant-garde art, which would not be infected by popular (kitsch) culture.²³ The minimalists' efforts to change the relationship between the spectator and the object and the pop artists' forays into popular culture through cartoon and advertising imagery (Lichtenstein, Warhol) represented a threat to formalist autonomy.

The debates between formalism, as espoused by Greenberg and Fried, and minimalism, pop art, earth art, conceptual art and performance art, continued into the 1970s as the Western artworld considered the shifts in practice. Donald Brook, writing about minimal sculpture and performance actions in his 1969 Power Lecture, 'Flight from the Object', argued that Fried's analysis of 'theatricality' was recognised by artists such as Robert Morris. However, he stressed that sculptors creating minimal works did not interpret it in a negative sense, since they clearly focused on the context in which the work of art was placed. Brook concluded his lecture by supporting Jack Burnham's thesis, arguing that 'we are now

in transition from an *object-oriented* to a *systems-oriented* culture. Here change emanates, not from things, but from *the way things are done*.²⁴ Other Australian writers, such as Graeme Sturgeon, found the 'dematerialisation' of the art object problematic, arguing that it left the artist with two alternatives:

*either to do something, which led to quasi-theatrical productions . . . legitimised by being carried out in an art context, or to do nothing, which produced what might be described as an investigation into the semantics of art terminology.*²⁵

In an essay on the American sculptor Robert Morris in 1970, Margaret Plant considered minimalism and its repercussions in Australia by discussing the works of Australian artists Ti Parks, Paul Partos and Guy Stuart together with works by Morris.²⁶ Plant's essay was part of an underlying critique of painting apparent in the shift towards new modes of art in the early 1970s. Plant quoted Paul Partos's statement, published on the invitation card distributed for his 1969 exhibition *Unspecified Lengths* at Gallery A in Sydney; the artist said:

*I am not much interested in painting any more, nor for that matter am I concerned with the notion that art must have 'quality' or some such thing . . . I am not much interested in the 'oneness' of a work of art; in the sense of its physical boundary; in its completeness and its conformity within its boundary, as a piece of real estate.*²⁷



Paul Partos,
Unspecified Lengths,
installation, gauze
and cardboard,
Gallery A, Sydney.

Photograph
by Margaret
Plant from her
collection.

Unspecified Lengths was an installation of small pieces of gauze mounted on cardboard and arranged in a grid format on the floor of the gallery. The idea that spectators should become involved in the work physically, through their movement in and around the environment, extended the viewer's perception of what art was. Plant argued that the point was 'to invite the viewer to assume (as it were) the shoes of the artist. . . [to] furnish spectator and artist alike with an awareness and direct involvement in creative events.'²⁸

Plant's essay is important for its recognition of a dual influence on the art of the 1960s and early 1970s in Australia. Minimalism shifted the relationship between object and perceiver by exploring the relativity of phenomenological space. Plant noted the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's thesis on the 'spatiality of the body' for artists such as Morris who quoted directly from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* in his 'Notes on Sculpture'.²⁹ Phenomenology is concerned with the study of appearances and the description of experiences as they relate to the body; in short it is centred on the experience of the individual in isolation from material circumstances.³⁰ The mobility of the body and its registration of sense experience was explored in minimalism as the spectator was contextualised within the sculptural environment.

Plant also argued that certain aspects of dada were being reinvigorated by artists. Dada's questioning of the position of the art object is well known through the readymades of Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray. Duchamp's action of submitting a urinal for exhibition in New York in 1917 (*Fountain*, signed R. Mutt) was a quintessential act of anarchy

against the precious status of the art object and its institutionalisation by the art museum.

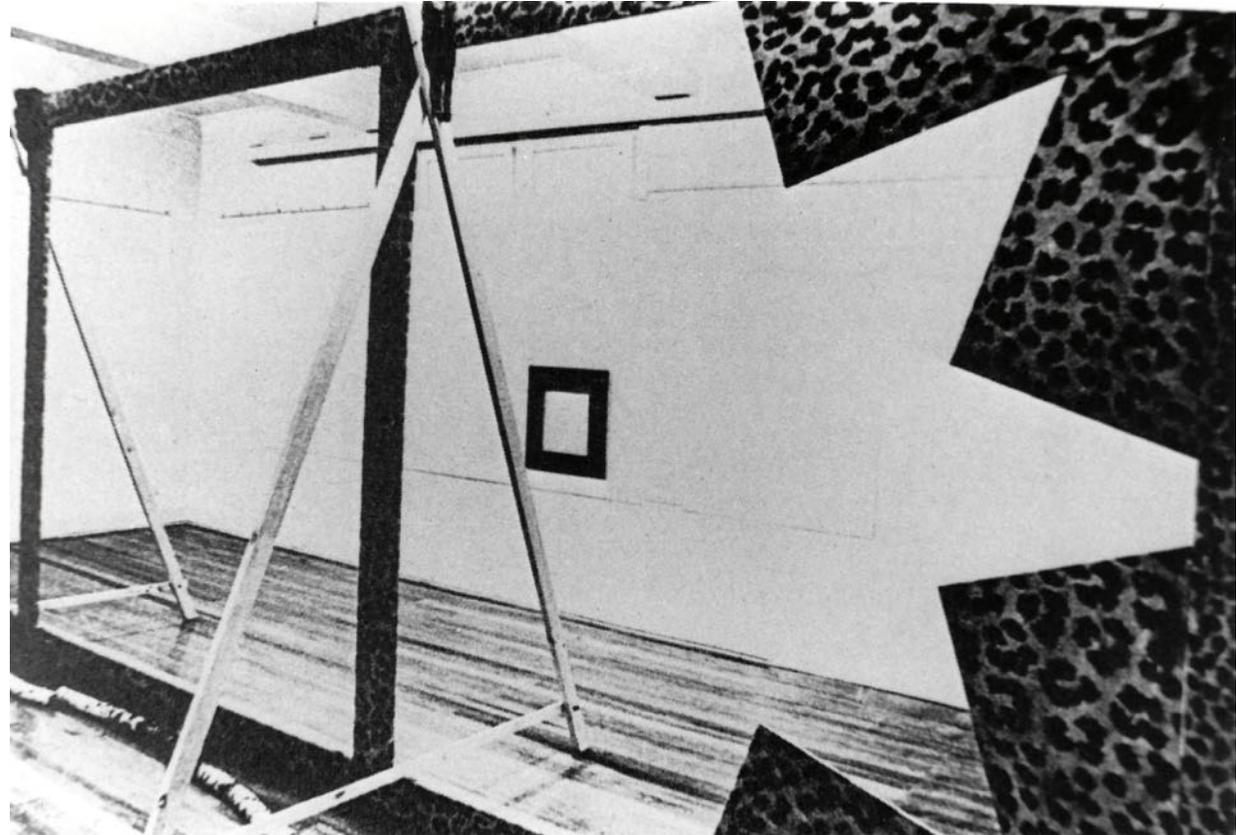
Many artists in the 1960s and 1970s operated across practices and particular styles of art, drawing on different sources as they saw fit. The reign of autonomous formalism was being undone by a new freedom to move beyond the confines of painting and sculpture, which had traditionally been shown on a pedestal.

Ti Parks became a charismatic figure in the Australian art scene in the early 1970s. Based in Melbourne, his approach to installation involved juxtaposing uncanny and humorous elements to produce witty environments; sometimes the work had a critical message, and at others the artist appeared simply to enjoy the visual contradictions he was producing for his audience. *Virginia's* (Tolarno Gallery, 1969) was an installation, which encouraged the spectator to walk through a huge, empty canvas stretcher, mounted across the exhibition space. The uprights were painted with a red-pink, leopard-skin design, as were eight triangles of wood which jutted out of each of the four corners. The fetishised, empty painting was complemented by a row of limp, stuffed rolls connected, at one end, to a motor which prompted the 'detumescent phalli' to move in a rather languid fashion along the floor.³¹ The stretcher was supported by two triangular braces, protected at the top by two fox furs. The visitor walked across and through this structure to encounter a vacant frame, which was itself framed by a red canvas hung in reverse. The participant was presented with an analysis of painting in the form of an installation that comprised a hollow stretcher canvas through which the spectator walked. Thus the viewers became the content of the imagined

painting as they walked through the gallery. This was a moving, perhaps even speaking, image which was not captured on a two dimensional surface. The point of the installation could not become clear without the activity of the spectator. The conventional canvas hung on the opposite wall; the 'painting', which the spectator finally encountered after passing through the stretcher, was reversed — a metaphor, perhaps, for the end of painting.

One Sunny Day (Watters Gallery, 1972) was a juxtaposition of 'romantic' and 'realistic' elements: the ambience of the 1930s wafted through the space with the melodies of Max Miller and Vera Lynn; a heater and an electric fan from the same period completed the picture for the audience. However, the image was shattered by the close proximity of three large drums of stagnant water and a hook provided to entice the spectator to fish for lost treasures. Kevin Mortensen, interviewed in 1987, remembered Parks's installation in detail, noting that the emergence of a dripping wet fox-fur cape produced a feeling of horror in the spectator.³²

In discussing performance as a cross-disciplinary activity it has been necessary to map the terrain of many different art practices. The happenings and performance art evolved at a time of questioning and reassessment in the artworld, a point at which formalism was being challenged. The attack on the original, autonomous art object was widespread and resulted in many different responses: a pluralism of styles.



Ti Parks, *Virginia's*, installation, mixed media, Torlano Gallery, Melbourne, 1969.

Photograph from Margaret Plant's collection.

SOCIAL BACKGROUND TO THE HAPPENINGS

The term performance art is relatively new; it is probable that the American artist Vito Acconci first used it in an essay titled 'Vito Acconci on Activity and Performance' published in Art and Artists in May 1970. The term is first listed in Art Index in 1972-3; before that date the happenings are listed as a subject title, with the addition of body art in 1970.³³ The difference between the happenings and performance art is often blurred in terms of theme and content, but there are aspects of presentation which are distinct to the happenings. Most importantly, the happenings were collective events in which the audience participated.

Happenings were prolific in America in the late 1950s and 1960s; they evolved against a background of social unrest and a counter-culture committed to the idea of revolution through lifestyle. They were collective, experiential events which hoped to 'raise the consciousness' of the people involved — in many cases there was no audience as such to look on from the outside. Allan Kaprow, who first used the term to describe his own work in 1959,³⁴ said that the happenings 'were a species of audience-involvement theatre . . . traceable to the guided tour, parade, carnival test of skill, secret society initiation, and popular texts on Zen.'³⁵ The happenings expressed a counter-cultural sensibility.

The idea of cultural rather than economic resistance was prescribed by New Left theorists and critics such as Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown and Theodore Roszak.³⁶ The counter-culture was that which resisted the mainstream (late capitalist, industrial, technological, patriarchal) society. All those who existed outside these categories and ideologies, and those who resisted from the inside, could become members of a counter-culture: a resistance through lifestyle. The writings of Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich, who proposed that the liberation of the instincts was a precondition for social revolution, appeared particularly relevant to the generation of the late 1960s and early 1970s.³⁷ Both the happenings and body art performances drew on such theories. However, notions of instinctual revolt developed by Herbert Marcuse in America in the late 1950s and 1960s were slow to be absorbed in Australia. Likewise Zen Buddhism, popularised in the writings of Alan Watts, and the radical implications of a liberated sexuality described in the works of Wilhelm Reich and Norman O. Brown, were not widely acknowledged in a country dominated by conservative Liberal Party rule since 1949.

American youth were 'tuning in' and 'dropping out' throughout the 1960s; student radicalism was dominant around the country; and resistance to the Vietnam War represented a concerted attack on American imperialism from within its own shores. In Australia Robert Menzies headed the ruling Liberal Party until 1966. That year the Labor Party, running a campaign against Australia's involvement in Vietnam, was defeated and not returned to power until 1972 under the leadership of Gough Whitlam.

The Vietnam issue was never as widely divisive in Australia as it was in the United States.³⁸ Although protests on Australian campuses from 1966 to 1972 caused eruptions on an otherwise calm sea of complacency, such activities were propagated by a minority.³⁹

Denis Altman, one of Australia's most prolific social critics in the 1970s, interpreted many of the major theories of the counter-culture and New Left for an Australian readership and confirmed the mood of the 1970s when he wrote: 'our society is based on the most severe restraints on gratification of pleasure in the name of duty, responsibility, decency, etc.'⁴⁰ Utilising the writings of Herbert Marcuse, Wilhelm Reich, and Timothy Leary (the cultural critic who valorised the type of 'enlightenment' achievable through psychedelic drugs), Altman argued for a utopian form of revolt through poetics and art. As a social critic he made direct correlations between a 'living theatre' prominent in Paris during the student uprisings of the late 1960s, and the strategies of an earlier avant-garde, notably the works of Apollinaire, Jarry and Tzara, which were made contemporary through the happenings.⁴¹ In Altman's scheme pop art destroyed the boundary between art and, life; drugs, sexual liberation and rock music constituted a counter-cultural revolt, and 'consciousness rather than social being' was asserted to be the key to a radical strategy.⁴²

Ian Burn, a conceptualist and minimalist associated with *Art and Language*, writing about the 'crisis of the '60s' in Australia, summarised the idea of revolt as 'a common attitude of anti-institutionalism'⁴³ and noted that the 'revolution was to happen by each of us transforming his or her own consciousness.'⁴⁴

The privatisation of 'revolution' was often manifested in expressions of sexual liberation seen as celebrations of the life force (eros). Such ideas, made popular by Herbert Marcuse, Wilhelm Reich and Norman O. Brown, were quickly absorbed into popular culture and disseminated across the Western world. Zen Buddhism was embraced by the beat generation of the late 1950s, but an exclusively hedonistic interpretation of sexuality, which became evident in the 1960s, tended to centre on the individual over the collective. Humility and simplicity, as advised in Zen culture, were easily lost to the ecstatic and Dionysian.

Counter-cultural ideas were disseminated through popular youth culture and the music industry. The psychedelic multi-media events by *Tribe* at La Mama in Melbourne, the contributions of Martin Sharp, Gary Shead and Mike Brown to *Oz* magazine in the 1960s, and exhibitions and activities at The Yellow House in Sydney, all reached an audience beyond the established artworld. Indeed, none of these things were taken seriously by the establishment; they were fringe activities which appealed to quite a different audience, one that sought alternatives to mainstream society — alternative lifestyles, alternative forms of expression and communication of ideas.

The most dominant cultural voice in the visual arts was that of the Antipodeans: Boyd, Nolan and Tucker. A younger generation, who produced hard-edge and abstract expressionism in Melbourne and Sydney, was only appreciated by a small critical audience in the 1960s.⁴⁵ Although Clement Greenberg's 1968 Power Lecture, 'Avant-garde Attitudes',⁴⁶ was intended to complement works by Australian artists shown in *The Field* exhibition (National Gallery of Victoria, 1968), even abstract painting, which had a long history and respectable position in New York, was resisted by an Australian audience more convinced by pictures of national myths. It is not surprising in this regard that younger artists, who were embracing more contemptuous forms of art, went unnoticed. For these artists the *Duchamp* exhibition of 1968 had more relevance than either *The Field* exhibition or Greenberg's visit.

It is apparent that artists presenting multi-media happenings and programmes of events housed in environments were reacting to a host of different influences, within both the artworld and a broader culture. The counterculture alternatives known widely through the popular press (the 'love-ins' of the Beatles and the 'sit-ins' at Berkeley in the 1960s) were as attractive as the antics of the pop

artists and the juxtaposition of weird imagery associated with dada and surrealist modes of art. In addition the rock music industry had given a greater degree of sexual licence to the younger generation.

The connection between art and protest is apparent in street theatre and activist performance which tended to focus on the collective or group in society rather than the individual. When Graeme Blundell and John Romeril wrote on activist street theatre in *Other Voices* in 1970, they were writing about activities emanating from La Mama in Melbourne. *Mr Big* (May Day, 1969), *The American Independence Hour* (1969) and *Dr Karl's Cure* (1970) were presented by a troupe, which later became known as the Australian Performance Group. The events addressed Australia's relationship to an imperialist American regime which was attempting to quell a Communist threat in a distant part of Asia (1959-75).⁴⁷ The utopian sentiment expressed by Blundell and Romeril was set against a background of activity that saw performance as being intrinsically connected to political issues. They wrote:

Increasingly, art is not for sale. Instead it is free, or else it is so bound to a particular time and place that it can't be carried off intact. Sometimes too it destroys itself for us, and the art has come to reside in the process.⁴⁸

The meeting of performance and political protest in Australia can also be seen in the theatrical happenings and public events co-ordinated by Barry Humphries in the 1950s. Humphries's re-enactment of the abduction of 'Miss Peteroff' by a Russian courier 'Mr Vasilie Stopalinsky' at the University

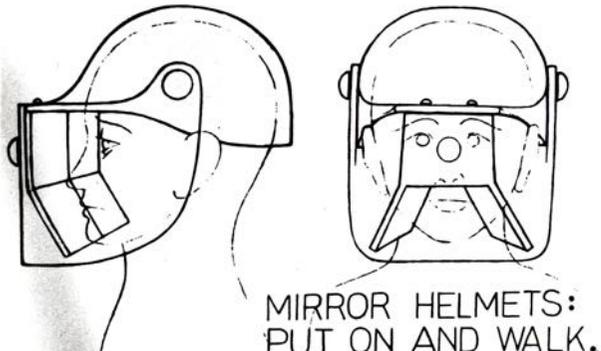
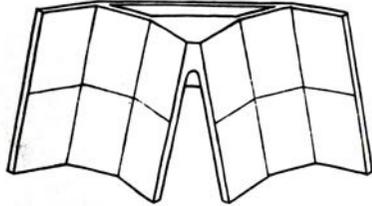


of Sydney in 1954 was one of many events which addressed controversial issues under the cloak of humour and satire. Amidst the controversy of the Petrov affair and the Cold War in Australia, Humphries's action stands as a bold political comment.⁴⁹ His activities can be seen in the context of street theatre and what was later called activist performance. However, the public site and the humour employed to get the political message across can also be seen to be related to dada and the happenings.

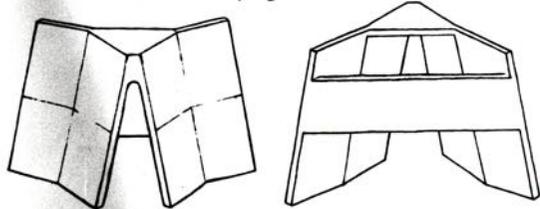
The Australian Performance Group, *Mr Big*, May Day, Melbourne, 1969.

Photograph from *Other Voice*, vol. 1, no. 3, Oct/Nov 1970, page 20.

3 DIFFERENT MIRROR CONFIGURATIONS.



MIRROR HELMETS:
PUT ON AND WALK.



MIRROR CONFIGURATIONS SPLIT BINOCULAR VISION.
VISUAL EFFECT: FRAGMENTED, SUPERIMPOSED IMAGES
CONSTANTLY CHANGING AS THE PERSON MOVES AROUND.

STELARC

Stelarc, artist's drawing for *Mirror Helmet: Put on and Walk*, 1970. Photograph from the artist's collection

HAPPENINGS AND RELATED EVENTS 1969-73

Stelarc produced one of the first performance events in Australia at Hamilton Gallery in Victoria in 1969.⁵⁰ Event from Micro to Macro and the Between incorporated computer-generated images projected onto three large screens. Three dancers, choreographed by the artist, performed in front of the images, and the audience was encouraged to wear specially designed helmets which were able to destroy binocular vision by superimposing fragmented images from the rear and to the sides of the wearer. In the following year Stelarc produced his inaugural suspension event, Sound Image Experience, at the Open Stage, Melbourne, in which his body was elevated by a harness while he was wearing one of the helmets, which were also made available to the audience.⁵¹

Stelarc's early works encouraged the audience to participate by giving them access to the performance equipment: they could see as the artist saw. Later works (which will be discussed in Chapter Three) concentrated more on the logistics of body suspension and on technological advancements, which would enhance the visual spectacle of the work. Later works also involved audience participation. In *Ping Body* (1995) a series of muscle stimulating electrodes were placed on the artist's body and activated by remote users who were able to log-in to the web interface for the performance. The performance was both live and webcast.



Stelarc, *Helmet no. 3: Put on and Walk*, 1970. Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Ray Griffiths

Several key venues and exhibitions were important in the development of the happenings and performance art in Australia. They provided the physical and intellectual spaces within which experimental work could flourish. The Yellow House, initially funded by the private fortune of Martin Sharp, operated in King's Cross in the heart of the 'R and R' district, which entertained soldiers on leave from Vietnam.⁵² Sharp and the underground filmmaker Albie Thoms ran an alternative art school (the Ginger Meggs Memorial School of Arts) where young artists studied film, dance, music, acting, writing and painting. The House and the School attracted a significant amount of attention, due to Sharp's illustrious connections with artists and the pop scene through his involvement with *Oz*. The magazine was particularly controversial at the time for its candid representations of sexuality, which resulted in Martin Sharp being gaoled in 1964 for his obscene drawings; criticism against the magazine continued into the 1970s.⁵³

In 1971 a new phase began at The Yellow House under the guidance of Sebastian Jorgensen, who changed the focus to a live-in commune where artists worked and attempted to integrate themselves into the local environment through children's theatre, acrobatic displays and similar activities. The concept of a 'total environment' continued throughout the House's history, as artists constructed room-size installations such as Martin Sharp's *Fantomas Hall*; his collaboration with Bruce Goold, *Magritte Room with Belgium Salon*; and Brett Whiteley's *Spookieland*.⁵⁴

The 'total environment' was also a feature of works produced at the Tin Sheds, Sydney, under the direction of Bert Flugelman, who ran an open studio programme. Established by Donald Brook and David Saunders in 1968, the Tin Sheds attracted artists like Marr and Joan Grounds (who had recently arrived from Berkeley University), Aleks Danko, Tim Burns, Guy Warren and Noel Hutchison, all of whom occupied studio space in exchange for a skills-sharing programme where the artists taught classes for younger students.

Flugelman's environment the *Black Box*, constructed at Oyster Bay in 1968, was an on-site construction similar to the rooms designed at The Yellow House. The audience entered through a tunnel, which diminished in size, and crawled into a dim, plastic enclosure filled with an assortment of found objects painted bright yellow. At the end of the encounter a large rotating broom, from a street-sweeping machine, extended from floor to ceiling. Reviewing the installation in the *Sunday Telegraph*, Daniel Thomas said: "There is a temptation to dance

orgiastically in the dark box, caress the balloons, and destroy them."⁵⁵

Artists associated with the Tin Sheds and The Yellow House imbued their work with a sense of humour, often stressing a political message. Some artists, like Neil Evans, moved from the humorous to the serious; however others, like Aleks Danko, continued to present works which appeared to be silly but maintained a social critique.

Evans was initially associated with SAVART, a group of artists who presented happenings at Watters Gallery, Sydney, in the early 1970s. *Sunbathing with SAVART* (Sydney, 1970) was an event where the audience was invited to attend in beach attire. The environment created a funky sensibility characteristic of the type of sexual liberation celebrated in the pages of *Oz* magazine. The gallery was filled with sand, and a portable swimming pool was installed at one end of the space. A naked woman, covered in shaving cream, exercised with a chest expander in the shallow pool as the audience, appropriately clad in bathing attire, looked on.⁵⁶

In 1972 Neil Evans invited his audience to a performance on the corner of Market and George Streets in Sydney. The art crowd arrived complete with cameras to document the 'event' but nothing happened; the point was, perhaps, that it was the making of a context for art that mattered rather than the production of the work itself. However, the audience, who had anticipated something 'happening', left rather disgruntled and were obviously not prepared to recognise their own presence at the site as the work of art.⁵⁷

The following year Tim Burns presented a controversial performance, titled *A Change of Plan*, during the exhibition *Recent Australian Art* (Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1973). Two people were enclosed in a room-sized box, connected to the outside by a closed-circuit television monitor which allowed two-way sound and vision. The couple in the box occasionally undressed to tantalise the spectators outside. However, on one occasion Burns left the enclosure and ventured into the gallery space beyond. The appearance of a nude male created a significant disturbance as gallery staff responded to the shocked reactions of the viewers. Debates about real rather than represented nudity filled the pages of the local press the following day. The difference between the TV representation, which allowed the audience to maintain a distance from the nudity within, and the abrupt appearance of the real nude was underlined in this event by breaking down the conventional boundaries between art and life.⁵⁸

Performing in the nude and representing overtly sexual themes was related to the works of the pop artists (such as the nudity in *Oz* magazine) and the shifting perceptions of sexual relations then current in youth culture. The promotion of a free sexuality beyond the confines of marriage and monogamy was connected to the counter-cultural concept of liberating repressed instincts. Such liberation was made more accessible through the availability of the contraceptive pill for women in the 1960s; however, it is apparent from cultural representations such as *Sunbathing with SAVART* that a feminist analysis was not widespread.

Some artists recognised that there were ideological problems associated with the objectification of sexuality, especially the representation of the female body. Aleks Danko performed *This Performance Is a Mistake* with Robyn Ravlich and Julie Ewington in 1973 (*Arts Projects Show*, Arts Centre, Ultimo) and politicised the representation of sexuality in a way that was to become characteristic of his later works with Joan Grounds. Three performers stood before the audience and described aspects of each other's physical appearance; they then changed clothes and described themselves, or the character they perceived in the dress that they wore; the process continued until each individual was back in his or her own social skin.⁵⁹ The performance acknowledged the social construction of gender as male and female changed roles. Although the event was underscored by the ridiculous as people grappled for each other's clothes, it also presented a political critique of dress and body language.

At *The All Senses Ball*, curated by Gary Willis, an attempt was made to recreate the type of party atmosphere that accompanied the Dada activities or Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich (1916). Students, artists and politicians were invited to attend the ball at the Albert Hall in



Silvia and the Synthetics, 'Lana Lunette' and 'Snow White'. Photographs from *Pol Magazine*, 1973. From Gary Willis' private collection.



Silvia and the Synthetics,
group photographs.
Photographs from *Digger*,
13-27 Jan 1974, page 3.

Canberra (1973). Simultaneous activities were programmed to produce a total environment for the audience. One of the highlights, presented by Silvia and the Synthetics, a group of drag queens and entertainers, was *The Housewife's Dream of Love*, a sleazy comedy routine which transformed an everyday vacuum cleaner into a sexual object through the fantasies of a bored housewife.⁶⁰

Muscle man wearing an eagle's mask during *The Opening Leg Show Bizarre*, Pinacotheca, Melbourne, 1972.

Photograph from the Kevin Mortensen's collection.



The Joe Bonomo Story (Watters Gallery, Sydney, 1972) and *The Political Dinner* (Central Street, Sydney, 1972) were both precursors of the type of performance art festivals that were to become standard venues for the presentation of performance art in the mid-1970s. Both events incorporated works by individual artists, activists, and others, who created 'acts' associated with the theme of the show. *The Joe Bonomo Story* celebrated the life of a Hollywood stuntman and body-builder. Paul Graham and his team of muscle-men opened the show, followed by the physical transformation of Alex Tzannes, whose long hair was cut and auctioned to the audience as he became the image of the Hollywood star. Other events included Imants Tillers's *Group Colour Technique*, which involved the artist directing three figures to create an experimental body painting.⁶¹

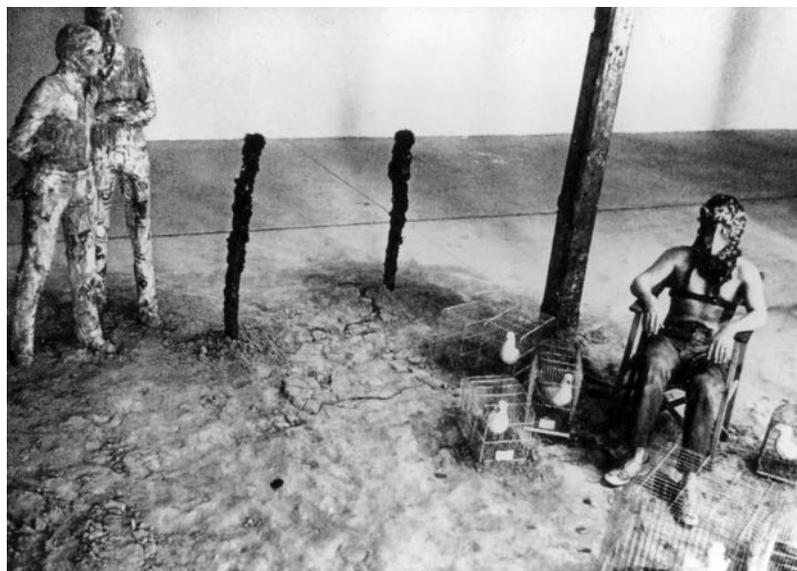
The Political Dinner, held on the eve of the election which saw the Labor Party returned to office, was co-ordinated by Noel Sheridan and Paul McGillick. Experimental film, noise-music soup and political speeches by leaders of Black and Gay Organisations made up the programme, which was both a satire and a serious political campaign.⁶²

In Melbourne in 1972 Kevin Mortensen, Russell Dreever and Mike Brown turned Pinacotheca into a total environment compartmentalised by corrugated sheets of metal. *The Opening Leg Show Bizarre* was both a party and a performance venue. In each 'room' different events were presented to an audience who had been advised to attend in fancy dress. A doctor performed bandaging techniques on a person wearing a bull's head mask; professional ballroom dancers danced to a strange sound-track created by Russell Dreever and Bob Thornycroft, and a local gymnasium instructor acted out a muscle-man routine wearing an eagle's head. Mortensen himself wore a head-dress which encased both his ears and housed a community of white moths. According to the artist, audience participation was diverse: an unknown drag queen continuously brushed 'her' teeth in the men's washroom, and the large queue of spectators waiting to enter the gallery were entertained by a local neighbour, who ran an open house which included a guided tour of his collection of cheap plastic icons. Visitors tended to think that the religious encounter was a planned part of the activities; however it was a totally spontaneous contribution.⁶³

The party atmosphere, collaborative structure and multiple events of *The Opening Leg Show Bizarre* place it within the category of the happening. However, in the previous year, Mortensen had produced a solo performance work which was set in a sculptural environment. In *The Seagull Salesman*,

His Stock and Visitors, or Figures of Identification (Pinacotheca, 1971) the artist sat wearing a bird mask amidst an installation of birds in cages and sculptured figures looking on as witnesses to a ritual enlivened by the presence of the artist. The artist claims that the performance was a comment on the ways in which artists are expected to 'hawk' their wares in galleries. The reference was to the art market system and how it exploits artists.

Kevin Mortensen is an important protagonist of Australian performance; his concept of 'animated sculpture' gives a clear indication of the relationship between sculpture and performance. His interest in Zen Buddhism and his commitment to alternative narratives highlight some of the major concerns associated with performance art in the 1970s. Although many performance artists emphasised the difference between conventional, narrative theatre and their own practices, in the realm of the visual arts it is apparent that some forms of performance art present a return to narrative after two decades of abstraction in painting. This is particularly evident in performances which concentrate on ritual processes, such as the re-enactment of 'primitive' or ancient rites; works where the artist acts out a position as shaman believing she or he can heal the sick society, and autobiographical works which present the life of the artist as art. In Mortensen's solo works the figure and the sculptural setting appear as a kind of tableau, there is no spoken language — 'he that speaks does not know' — yet Mortensen does present a story of sorts, a visual event.



Kevin Mortensen, *The Seagull Salesman, His Stock and Visitors, or Figures of Identification*, Pinacotheca, Melbourne, 1971. Photograph and detail from the artist's collection.



Kevin Mortensen (left) wearing headdress with caged moths, *Opening Leg Show Bizarre*, Pinacotheca, Melbourne, 1972. Photograph from the artist's collection.

Tim Johnson, *Dusting and Tickling*, 1972-3.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



Tim Johnson, *Light Event*. This version performed at Queensland University, 1972. The 'light events' were part of a series of installation-performances presented in 1971 and 1972.

Photograph from Contemporary Art Archives Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.



PERFORMANCE ART 1970-3

*In Australia it is impossible to separate the happenings from performance art in terms of decades. Until the mid 1970s Australian artists were operating within a conservative society and within the context of comparative cultural isolation. Mike Parr, Peter Kennedy and Tim Johnson, who established Inhibodress artists' space in Woolloomooloo in 1970, were amongst the first protagonists of experimental performance in Australia, but their position within the mainstream art world was tenuous. It is only in retrospect, and as a result of critical appraisal in Australia and overseas, that the works of these three artists gained a degree of acceptability.*⁶⁴

Tim Johnson's performances *Disclosures*, *Fittings* and *Dusting and Tickling* (1972-3) embraced the notion of sexual liberation characteristic of the counter-culture described by Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown, who insisted that the language of love, not reason, would create a poetic revolution.⁶⁵

Johnson's erotic performances involved the audience's group experience of sexual arousal, fitting three or more bodies into one pair of underpants, and the artist 'dusting and tickling' his naked wife.⁶⁶ Vivien Elliot theorised about the works in the preface to Johnson's book *Disclosures*:

The primary socialisation which has made us what we are now is as much an emotional as an intellectual process. Accordingly, the kind of exploration of human feeling with which these works are concerned has a place in the process of re-socialisation which is crucial to any significant personal transformation.⁶⁷

This type of work mirrored the philosophy of the counter-culture; the idea of revolt through lifestyle is clearly expressed. However, the *Disclosures* series is different from earlier performances, which involved such actions as the artist swinging illuminated light globes around the room and smashing them violently against the wall (Inhibodress, 1971). A similar performance on a suburban train led to Johnson's arrest in May 1971, since there was an obvious threat of physical injury to the audience.

The self and how it came to know the world became a central concern for many performance artists. The exploration of private and public space often involved intensive self-analysis on the part of the artist.



Tim Johnson, *Disclosures*.
This version performed
at the Sydney University
Fine Arts Workshop
1972.

Photograph from
Contemporary Art
Archives Collection,
Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Sydney.

In 1971 Mike Parr, initially a concrete poet,⁶⁸ started to write instructions to be acted out. In some ways the instructions were reminiscent of Allan Kaprow's details for happenings in the 1960s; however, Parr did not know of Kaprow's events at this time and notes that Lawrence Weiner's book of 'statements' was more influential.⁶⁹ Parr's work developed quickly and must be seen in relation to his later works in Europe and contact with the Viennese body artists. Although he never worked directly with these artists, he did participate in Nitsch's *Orgy Mystery Theatre* and became friendly with Arnulf Rainer and Valie Export. Parr says that he admired:

the courage of the Viennese, their refusal to be contained by orthodoxy and their sense of cultural criticism, transgression, a visionary sense of the new person.⁷⁰

150 Programmes and Investigations (1971-2) was concerned with the theatre of life — for example:

- Repeat as exactly as possible a holiday taken in your childhood.
- Bury a book of poetry in the ground.
Record the process of rot.
- In a moment of uncertainty say something very clearly.⁷¹

An interest in 'theories of audience participation, critical involvement [and] compulsive urges to act out' influenced Parr's movement from poetry to performance in 1971.⁷² His concept of community was intimately connected with an analysis of repression. Freud's theory that there can be no civilisation without discontent was explored by Parr in numerous actions.⁷³ The activities were structured variously; instructions were written to be acted out by the artist or the spectator(s). Later in his career, Parr constructed more elaborate settings for his work where the audience was framed as voyeur, looking into an enclosed space.⁷⁴

150 Programmes and Investigations progressed from the quiet poetic moment to the anxious existential quest characteristic of later works; he wrote:

- Drip blood from your finger onto the lens of a camera (until the lens is filled with blood).
- Cage a rat in an art gallery. Let the visitors to the gallery feed the rat (if they don't feed the rat it will starve to death).
- Hold your finger in a candle flame for as long as possible.
- Make up a branding iron with the word artist. Brand this on your body.⁷⁵

In a later series of works titled *Rules and Displacement Activities, Parts 1, 2 and 3* (1973-83), Mike Parr explored the psychoanalytic interpretation of character structure outlined by Wilhelm Reich. Writing about these performances in 1978 Parr said:

The underpinning for this work has to a large extent been provided by my reading of Freud and Reich. I was interested in Reich's concept of 'character structure' and his ideas of an analytic therapy that developed from symptom analysis to analysis of the personality as a whole.⁷⁶

Part I of the series continued many of the masochistic actions of *150 Programmes and Investigations* with audiences in Australia and Switzerland.⁷⁷ Parr argues that he 'took responsibility for perhaps the most extreme gestures ever made by an Australian artist by progressively revealing the depth of [his] impulses.'⁷⁸ Writing about his work in 1993 Parr clarified his earlier comment about Reich by saying:

The aspect of impulse is fundamental to my work. The works themselves entail a kind of immersion . . . it's a particular degree of subjectivity and I think it is necessary to the condensation of the impulse. Later (after the performance) I have to get out of this state because it is a spiral of dissociation . . . I am not an academic so that my use of theory is contaminated by the need, the state, that precipitates its use. I sense that the structure is essentially a paranoid one. Wilhelm Reich's early writings functioned like a mirror for me. They exacerbated my condition while forcing me to think deeply about it. Theory is my way of knitting the performances together but all my works are compulsions.⁷⁹

Rules and Displacement Activities, Parts 2 and 3, developed many of Parr's early concepts about socialisation and repression. The earlier works before 1973-4, when the artist was still in Australia, appear as anxious, existential actions. After 1973, when the artist had travelled to Europe and developed his performance in an environment more conducive to such work, the political and social dimensions of the activities became clearer. Writing in *Flash Art* in 1978, Parr outlined the shift in his own work by saying: 'I don't want to stop at gestures of existential alienation, but see each [event] manifest in a wider continuum of social and interpersonal behaviour.'⁸⁰

Contact with artists overseas was particularly important for Mike Parr and Peter Kennedy; both artists were working in a cultural vacuum as far as their desires to develop performance were concerned, and it was apparent that travel overseas and direct involvement with groups of like-minded artists in Europe and North America contributed significantly to the artists' later works.

Several exhibitions of performance art documentation from North America and Europe were shown at Inhibodress. In 1971 Tim Johnson facilitated the first exhibition titled *Activities*. Peter Kennedy, through his connections with a network of artists and writers, including Lucy Lippard in New York, organised *Trans-art 2 and 3*.⁸¹ And Mike Parr was responsible for the final *Trans-art* show titled *Communications 4: Catchword Potash Mine*. These early exhibitions and other performance events at Inhibodress have been well documented;⁸² they represent some of the first efforts by artists in this country to make links with

experimental artists in North America and Europe. In a letter to Lucy Lippard in 1971, Peter Kennedy, on behalf of Inhibodress, wrote:

Implicit in our intentions is a need to show overseas artists. Inhibodress intends to reconcile the local avant-garde with the most progressive international art. To implement this policy Inhibodress wishes to organise an exchange of information and work with any North American, European and British artists who might be interested in exhibiting 'non-bulk' art.⁸³

Kennedy's links with political artists in North America and Britain were consolidated in 1973 when he started to make his documentary film *Other than Art's Sake* (discussed below). This was also the year in which he met George Macunias, the founder of the Fluxus movement, and entered into an exchange of works with him. Fluxus was an international network; however, it developed in different directions in Europe and the United States. In North America artists associated with Fluxus (such as Charlotte Moorman, Nam June Paik, Dick Higgins) produced conceptual performance works which drew on developments in the happenings, new music, new writing and video. Their works blurred the distinction between art and life and were often imbued with an irreverent humour. In central Europe body art and ritual performances tended to stress a concern with the unconscious and social repression.⁸⁴

After the demise of Inhibodress, Mike Parr worked in Europe where he made contact with conceptual artists and was struck by the revelatory power of the *Weiner Aktionismus* in Vienna.⁸⁵ Explaining his position he said:

There is no question that the Weiner Aktionismus was a revelation to me, but it was primarily the depth of context that interested me since I understand that as the most effective answer to the mere codification and style of the international avant-garde. I had been interested in psychoanalysis since the late sixties and since Inhibodress I had been reading the Marxist theorists but unlike Kennedy I wanted to reconcile these extremes of 20th century thought.⁸⁶

The differences between Mike Parr and Peter Kennedy need to be stressed. Kennedy's work was influenced by conceptualism and new music, he was a member of AZ music led by David Ahern, and his performance *But the Fierce Blackman* (discussed below) was a performance-sound installation. Kennedy situated himself within a Marxist analysis of the arts and his ideas of social change were connected to raising people's awareness through community structures. Parr's idea of protest and resistance is different in that it focuses on the transgressive element within the individual and within society. He says:

I remain deeply suspicious of authority, particularly in its ideological form. It has been the impetus behind my attempt to understand psychopathology and so-called anti-social behaviour, it is the reason why I feel that the Wiener Aktionismus is enormously important because they show how the distortions of authority are introjected and amplified by all of us. It is a myth to believe that social structures can always be objectified, our pact with arbitrary authority is always sadomasochistic.⁸⁷

Parr is interested in the way in which ideological authority (including Marxism) gains a kind of God-like position in society. It is authority as such that Parr rebels against. The rational and logical structures of such systems of thought are seen as repressive and authoritarian; a kind of totalitarianism which dismisses the unconscious as a site of false consciousness.

Although Mike Parr argues, retrospectively, that he never experienced 'cultural isolation at Inhibodress',⁸⁸ it is apparent that there were concerted efforts to engage with experimental artists in America and Europe. The effort to link Australian works with an international scene was an attempt to break down the isolation experienced by artists working with new modes of art in the early 1970s. Interviewed in 1987, Peter Kennedy argued that Inhibodress's policy of importing works from overseas:

*was a case of trying to connect with something that was vibrant and exciting, not dull like the hard-edge school of Australian painting which was still influential, if not dominant at the time . . . it was an attempt to establish some links with artists overseas . . . It was an attempt to break down our isolation.*⁸⁹

Peter Kennedy presented performance works for a short time when he was closely associated with Inhibodress. After 1973 the works became more overtly political, at times extending the ideas of participation he had experimented with in his performance *But the Fierce Blackman* (1971). Kennedy's film *Other than Art's Sake* is a documentary on the works of seven British and American artists working with participatory structures outside the gallery or museum structure.⁹⁰ His main concern was to develop an art practice that was more democratic, one that would appeal to ordinary people.⁹¹ The artist's comments on political art, its relation to performance, and his acknowledgement that the artists at Inhibodress had an indirect understanding of the protest element involved in many of the American works, helps to explain the ways in which Australian performance developed in the 1970s:

*I was also influenced by the political art coming out of New York. I was very impressed by the work of Jean Toche and Jon Hendricks of the Guerilla Art Action Group . . . They sent out a tape for the Communications exhibition [Inhibodress, 1972] which was an attack on art . . . linking it up with the Vietnam War, they did a number of protests outside the Guggenheim.⁹² . . . It was an art about justice and equity, using democratic forms of one kind or another . . . that influenced my thinking . . . There was a lot floating around, it was a matter of how you managed to put it all together . . . Thinking about it now [1987] I think what the work lacked was a certain authenticity. It was still very much about importing ideas. Taking on board ideas which were not completely understood because we didn't understand the context that gave rise to them. It wasn't until I got to New York that I actually understood why certain examples of New York art actions looked and felt the way they did. Then it made real sense. I could see that there was a context informing it which we could never have fully understood in Sydney. I think there was still a cultural cringe operating, a belief that anything that came from overseas had to be better. The work we were doing wasn't coming out of a specifically Australian experience.*⁹³

Kennedy's comment about cultural cringe in Australia in the early 1970s is significant and touches on the issue analysed by Terry Smith in his seminal essay titled 'The Provincialism Problem' published in 1974.⁹⁴ The cultural isolation felt by Kennedy had a history in an artworld, which valued works from America and Europe above those produced in Australia. The 'myth makers' of the 1940s had disrupted this paradigm of acceptance to a certain degree by making works which expressed their experience as Australians, albeit white, Anglo-Saxon Australians. However, many of the younger generation of experimentalists in the 1970s were keen to see themselves in an international context.

Mike Parr argues that he never experienced cultural isolation at Inhibodress but admits that for him 'the dialogue with European artists has been fundamental.'⁹⁵

In the context of performance art one must remember that there were many approaches to the field. Indeed, it is possible to assert that many of the artists producing sculptural installation within which performances were presented did address specifically Australian contexts. Works by Kevin Mortensen, Jill Orr, Bonita Ely and Ralph Eberlein (all of whom will be discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4) were often situated within the Australian bush and often mythologised a kind of white 'primitivism'. Retrospectively, some of these projects appear to be celebrating a white aboriginality; a search for authenticity; however, the specificity of their Australian content is significant in relation to the kind of cultural cringe expressed by Kennedy.

Ecological issues were developed in works by Ely throughout the 1970s and early 1980s: the erosion of the landscape and the corporate invasion of mining and hydro-electric schemes were addressed in *Jabiluka U02* (1979) and *Controlled Atmosphere* (1983). Likewise, works by Eberlein, such as *Post-atomic Age* (1976), addressed ecological concerns within the setting of the Australian landscape. However, these artists were working in the mid-1970s and the 'provincialism problem' had been resolved to some extent by that time. The efforts of artists at Inhibodress to gain recognition for Australian experimental work and the forthcoming support of particular critics and curators (to be discussed below) helped to create a fertile environment within which Australian performance art could flourish.

In 1971-2 Kennedy and Parr operated as a dynamic team, brought together through a common position as adversaries in an artworld steeped in conservatism. Clarifying his position in 1987 Peter Kennedy said:

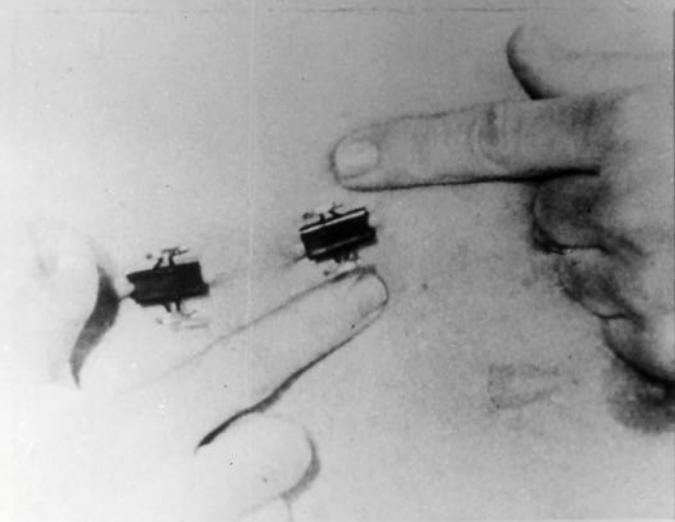
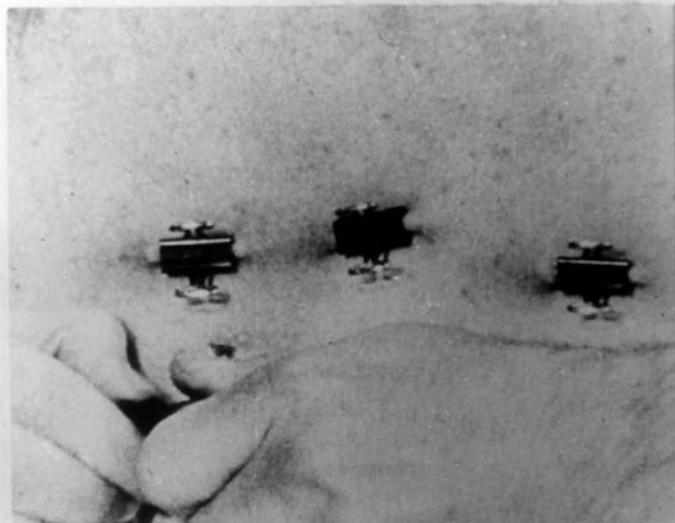
It seemed to me, that at that point [1972], one could still challenge the bourgeois notions of what art was . . . I was influenced by the then still powerful idea that the role of the true artist was that of confronting the bourgeoisie . . . Coming out of the '60s one was still imbued with a certain anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional attitude. The most dominant forces at work in the society at that time had got us into the Vietnam War and given us conscription . . . I was in the first batch of young, male, twenty-year-olds to be registered for call-up.⁹⁶

Parr and Kennedy collaborated on a series of events entitled *Idea Demonstrations* in 1972; the actions, filmed by the experimental filmmakers Aggy Read and Ian Stocks, were the first examples of monostructural (single action) body works by Australian artists to be written about in an international context.⁹⁷ The event — 'sitting before an audience . . . bare your shoulder [Parr] . . . let a friend [Kennedy] bite into your shoulder . . . until blood appears'⁹⁸ — caused considerable controversy in the local press as Donald Brook and Terry Smith debated the moral implications of such an act.⁹⁹ In 1981 Parr described these works as acts of 'extreme existentialism, charged with the suggestiveness of sadomasochistic desires.'¹⁰⁰ Terry Smith's description in the *Review* highlighted the anxiety of the audience. He wrote:

My own response moved through four, intermixing stages. It began with a recognition of the absurdity of the situation (two men before a battery of cameras and spotlights, sitting on chairs against the corner wall of a converted factory in Woolloomooloo, one biting the other), then amusement at this absurdity (obviously defensive). Then, as Parr's evident agony increased, disgust and repulsion, followed by nausea. At this moment two people fainted. My nausea was then modified by a rising feeling of something like admiration for a man pursuing to such lengths something very important to him (or was this a 'fearful awe' of pain?). At that moment the work finished amid stunned silence, and I have yet to formulate a coherent response to it.¹⁰¹

Peter Kennedy, *Idea Demonstrations: 'Put Steel Clips onto a Bare Chest ... Continue Putting Clips On and Squeezing Them Off, until the Flesh Is Lacerated and too Sore to Continue the Work'*, 1972.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



Smith went on to debate the issue of the responsibility of the artist to his audience and argued that the artist's justification for the work relied on the essentially romantic idea that the artist's 'self-expression is somehow, ultimately, beneficial to us all.'¹⁰² In the following year Donald Brook wrote about *Idea Demonstrations*, the film; he said: 'People have asked why Mike Parr allows Peter Kennedy to bite him so painfully . . . Mike Parr has asked why the audience allows Peter Kennedy to bite him.'¹⁰³ Parr explained the performance in relation to art and life and the idea of audience involvement in the work; the notion of real time and space was crucial to the action. The artist argued that the audience

... had to accept some sort of responsibility — they were culpable in a way, a part of what happened. It didn't matter if they walked out, attacked me or what. The idea of art being remote from you was over.¹⁰⁴

However, talking about the work in this way in 1974, Parr did not recognise the dominance of the artist's position. Before the performance he had told the audience that he did not regard the action which was to follow as masochistic; rather he considered it a revelatory work which would enlighten him, and he compared the action to rites of initiation [into manhood] in 'primitive' societies.'¹⁰⁵ Setting the 'artistic' agenda in this way, it is not surprising that the audience did not intervene; however, one must acknowledge, as did the artist and Donald Brook, that the concept of 'aesthetic disinterestedness' may have 'crippled' the audience, allowing 'Roman impulses' to operate 'under the licence of Eighteenth-century intellectualism.'¹⁰⁶

Kennedy's contributions to *Idea Demonstrations* also involved masochistic gestures — 'put steel clips onto a bare chest . . . continue putting clips on and squeezing them off, until the flesh is lacerated and too sore to continue the work' — was similarly centred on a type of self-inflicted pain. Kennedy had been producing this type of event before he started to work with Mike Parr on *Idea Demonstrations*. An earlier version of 'put steel clips on a bare chest . . .' was performed and recorded on 1/4 inch black and white video at Inhibidress in 1971.



Peter Kennedy,
But the Fierce Blackman,
Inhibodress, Sydney, 1971.

Peter Kennedy,
But the Fierce Blackman,
detail of the performance
showing stresses on
the body.

Peter Kennedy,
But the Fierce Blackman,
detail of the performance
showing stresses on the
body.

Photographs from the
artist's collection.

Kennedy's performance, *But the Fierce Blackman*, did involve physical restriction, but the stresses were not painful to the same extent as 'put steel clips onto a bare chest.' *But the Fierce Blackman* (performed at Inhibodress, 1971) was a low-tech sound installation which enticed participation from the audience. An electric fan, a television tuned to static, and the interception of radio signals from passing taxis, created a kind of visualised soundscape. At regular intervals the artist's amplified voice cut into the random sequence of sounds. Gagged in various ways, a muffled voice strained to pronounce the phrase 'but the fierce blackman', as if the silence of a racial minority was about to intercept the airwaves. Kennedy described the work as 'an oral composition for public or private performance.'¹⁰⁷

In the second version of *But the Fierce Blackman* (*Events/Structures*, Ewing and George Paton Galleries, University of Melbourne, 1974) there was no sound installation set up before the event. The audience was encouraged to participate through notes distributed by the artist, outlining the ways in which performers should proceed:

- Place a number of pieces of strong adhesive tape across your mouth so that you may speak only with extreme difficulty. Repeat the phrase until the adhesive tape comes away from the mouth or falls off.
- Place the palms of your hands against the wall and your feet at such a distance from the base of the wall that your body is at approximately 45 degrees and all weight supported by the arms. Repeat the phrase and continue doing so until it becomes intolerable for your body to remain in its present position.
- Choose a brief but strenuous activity that will leave you out of breath . . . begin repeating the phrase until breathing has returned to normal.
- Stuff a number of tissues into your mouth . . . so that there is some degree of discomfort.
- Place two fingers in your mouth . . . Repeat the process with an additional finger . . . Proceed in this manner until the number of fingers in your mouth causes some degree of discomfort.¹⁰⁸

But the Fierce Blackman was a new music event scored for audience participation. The influence of David Ahern and his troupe AZ Music, of which Kennedy was a member, incorporated many non-professionals and is important to an understanding of Peter Kennedy's work. Ahern, who performed regularly at Inhibodress, had returned from studies in Europe, where he had been associated with Cornelius Cardew and Karlheinz Stockhausen. His writings and the AZ Music productions gave an Australian audience the most direct representation of the shifts in musical performance in Europe. The concept of an open-ended score which emphasised present time and process, rather than the end result, was an essential component of the work. Ahern compared new music to the works of Allan Kaprow and recognised the influence of John Cage, who 'pioneered the concept of real time.'¹⁰⁹ In 1970 Ahern wrote:

I think that music is now able to be not so much 'listened to' but 'existed in'. One walks into a set of situations (art) just as one walks down the street (life).'¹¹⁰

The Zen idea of 'waking up to the very life we are living' was employed by John Cage in numerous events for new music and collaborations with the Merc Cunningham Dance Company. Cage's Zen interpretation of art and life, made accessible through his music and his writings, was inspirational for a generation exploring the alternatives to Western metaphysics. His technique, which was disseminated throughout Europe by Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez, influenced a new generation of composers and choreographers, and his book *Silence* (1961) was widely read in the 1960s.¹¹¹

Philippa Cullen, who died prematurely in 1975, worked in association with AZ Music and choreographed many dance works for a small group of unskilled dancers. She performed regularly at Inhibodress and she also took her work into the urban environment, performing in Martin Plaza and on the City Circle Line to an audience of commuters. Between 1971 and 1975 her performances represented the similarities between new dance and body art. *Utter*, first performed in 1972 in the Cellblock Theatre in collaboration with AZ Music, was a mix of natural bodily rhythm and indeterminate soundscape as the dancers moved, moaning, shouting and whispering, often in total darkness, as both musicians and dancers. The line between dance and music was obscured, as the performers, including members from AZ Music, became the source of both music and movement.¹¹² Cullen experimented with the use of sonic electrodes worn on the body, and in later works she incorporated bodily sounds in performances so that the audience could hear the movements of the inside of the body. In 1974 she wrote:

the aim is to unite dance with life, performance with process, art object with perceiver, fixed design with change, and to highlight the movement of natural activity such as cooking, walking, labour and office work.'¹¹³

In many ways Inhibodress owed its reputation to Donald Brook and Terry Smith, who wrote art criticism for the *Nation Review* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Both critics covered events by Mike Parr, Tim Johnson and Peter Kennedy with a sense of commitment rarely apparent in newspaper journalism. According to Peter Kennedy, Inhibodress represented something of a 'cause' to Brook and Smith.¹¹⁴

THE SPREAD OF IDEAS:
SPACES AND PATRONS SUPPORTING PERFORMANCE ART

*One can speak about the rise and fall of a first wave of performance activity in Australia within the span of three years. In 1970 Inhibodress was formed; it presented a programme of experimental events until its demise at the end of 1972. During this period, beginning in 1970, there was a plethora of happenings in Sydney and Melbourne; and in 1973 the National Gallery of Victoria interpreted the new modes of art being produced in an exhibition, curated by Brian Finemore, titled *Object and Idea*. The exhibition included works by Aleks Danko, Ti Parks, Imants Tillers, John Armstrong, Tony Coleing and Nigel Lendon who presented various forms of informal sculpture and documentation of events (*Tillers' Group Colour Technique* appeared in the catalogue) all of which challenged the conventional paradigms of painting and sculpture.*

The exhibition represented the first public, artworld acceptance of the new modes. Although it followed in the footsteps of smaller exhibitions like *Known Systems*, *Anonymous Gestures* (1970) and *The Situation Now* (1972), both exhibitions of conceptual art shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art — Central Street in Sydney, and numerous events by SAVART at Watters Gallery,¹¹⁵ the exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria homogenised these diverse activities for the gallery-going public.

The Mildura Sculpture Triennial also reflected the change of direction apparent in the artworld in 1973. *Sculpturescape '73*, under the direction of Tom McCullough, used the harsh bushland next to the gallery as a natural environment in which to show works of informal sculpture.¹¹⁶ McCullough, much like Brook and Smith, became a supporter of experimental modes of art and in 1976 he curated the Biennale of Sydney, which incorporated one of the largest contingents of European performance art to be shown in Australia.¹¹⁷

Critics and curators played a significant role in establishing the importance of new modes of art in the early 1970s. Their movements as well as the circulation of artists distributed ideas and strategies throughout Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. In 1974 Donald Brook moved to South Australia to take up a professorship in Visual Arts at Flinders University. Brook's reputation as a critic who actively supported new modes of art had preceded him; his meetings with local artists, some of whom held prominent positions in the artworld, such as Clifford Frith and Ian North, led to plans to establish the Experimental Art Foundation.¹¹⁸

Noel Sheridan, an Irish immigrant and an artist active in the experimental artworld in Sydney, was invited to take up the directorship of the Foundation. Sheridan's Irish charm, his charismatic personality, and his reputation as an experimental artist with international contacts injected a vitality into the Adelaide artworld which is still recognised today. Under Sheridan's direction the Foundation became an important centre for performance art; as a performance artist himself, he actively supported and imported works of conceptual and ephemeral art.

In Melbourne Bruce Pollard established Pinacotheca in a converted house in St Kilda in 1967. In 1970 the gallery moved to Richmond, where the director renovated a large warehouse. The new venue was more adaptable to experimental modes, as Kevin Mortensen demonstrated with his happening *The*

Opening Leg Show Bizarre in 1972. The shift in venue and direction reflected the concerns of local artists, who were moving away from abstract painting and towards installation, informal sculpture and performance. In the early years of Pinacotheca a mixture of abstraction and conceptual work was shown; however, Pollard was quick to respond to younger artists, who were engaged with the debates over formalism precipitated by Clement Greenberg's Power Lecture of 1968 and the support for formalist abstraction in painting as espoused by the Melbourne spokesman, Patrick McCaughey. Jonathan Sweet has documented the Melbourne scene in his publication, *Pinacotheca 1967-1973*,¹¹⁹ and has noted that after the shift to Richmond

... the exhibition programme progressively became more removed from traditional object art. The growing interest in conceptual art was fueled [sic] by the influence of New York and the spacious gallery suggested installations and performance work...¹²⁰

Although Pollard's curatorial direction was more focused on experimental modes of art after 1970, experimental art had been shown at the St Kilda venue. Dale Hickey's installation of fences at Pinacotheca at its St Kilda venue in 1969 consisted of various sizes of fence being constructed throughout the rooms of the gallery-house. Hickey contracted a carpenter to do the making and erecting of the work thus transferring the craft aspect of the artwork to someone else. The artist explained his installation in the context of a critique of painting: 'in the past, I have been mainly creating illusions by painting . . . , but if you're going to paint it, why not build it?'.¹²¹ Hickey's method of hiring a tradesman to build his installation highlighted the shift away from the artist's original 'mark-making' and underlined the conceptual role of the artist.

Under the direction of Bruce Pollard, who worked co-operatively with artists, Pinacotheca became the most prominent venue for experimental art in Melbourne (1967-1999).¹²² The establishment of avant-garde art spaces

in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide enabled a reciprocal relationship to be maintained between the states as artists and ideas moved around the country.

In Australia patronage of the arts had been slight compared to that in Europe and America; however, one patron stands apart in his contribution to the development of experimental art in this country. In 1969 John Kaldor commissioned Christo to wrap up Little Bay,¹²³ in the same year that Harald Szeemann's exhibition *Live in Your Head, when Attitudes Become Form* was being shown in Switzerland and London. The focus on Australia, through the work of Christo, was timely. Between 1969 and 1978 Kaldor financed numerous innovative international exhibits, many of which introduced prominent performance artists to Australia: Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, Richard Long, Les Levine and the celebrated British duo, Gilbert and George, all came under the auspices of John Kaldor's *Art Projects*.¹²⁴ To cap the success of the Christo project, Kaldor invited and financed Harald Szeemann to curate an exhibition of Australian art, which was shown at the Bonython Gallery and the National Gallery of Victoria in 1971. Preceding *Object and Idea* by two years, the exhibition stands as an important mark in the history of 1970s art in Australia.¹²⁵

It is apparent from the way in which performance art was supported by gallery directors, curators, critics and patrons that there was a particular interest in encouraging the production of experimental art in Australia. Although artists associated with Inhibodress were anxious to situate themselves within an international context by establishing links with artists in America and Europe, there were other artists who were either unaware of the greater claims for experimental works, or who consciously rejected the idea of the avant-garde on political grounds. Greenberg's rigorous attempts to separate the avant-garde from popular culture through formalist art theory discouraged many artists from associating themselves with the avant-garde.

CONCLUSION

Happenings and performance art presented contradictions: on one hand many of the works sought to create a cathartic experience for the artist or the audience or both; on the other, the participatory structures aimed to break down the heroic position of the artist as unique individual, and to create a democratic art in which numerous people could be involved. Although 'primitive' rituals and ancient ceremonies were a source of inspiration for some artists, the ritualised practice often focused on contemporary issues. This was particularly apparent in body art, in which the repression of sexuality in a civilised world was addressed. The philosophies of the counterculture, which were apparent in body art, incorporated a desire to return to a collective, symbolic culture, a pre-modern society free from the alienation of an advanced industrialised world.

A complex dialectic operates within and between various modes of performance art. Although body art could be seen as a return to the individual ego after a decade of participatory happenings, it is apparent that the body artists developed many of the themes which surfaced in the earlier works. The cathartic nature of the happenings, the focus on liberating sexuality and the concept of transgressing social codes were incorporated by the body artists, who often turned to various interpretations of psychoanalytic theory in the development of their performances.

Writing about the European performance artists Hermann Nitsch, Gunter Brus and Otto Muehl in 1978, Mike Parr said:

From the very beginning the work of these three artists was scatological and violently denunciatory of bourgeois realities, pushing the insights of Freud, Reich to extreme conclusions, emphasising the connection between repressed sexuality and the rigidity of the bourgeois character structure, and like the new left of the 'sixties generally, drawing on Marcusean notions of "polymorphous perversity" and "re-sexualisation" as political strategies in their own right.¹²⁶

The way in which body art and certain types of ritual became a preferred medium for artists and critics during the 1970s is connected to the ways in which the counter-culture interpreted New Left theories in terms of a humanist existence which cited 'man as the measure of all things.' In many ways the results were ironical, since the intention was to break down hierarchical structures; however, re-situating the importance of the individual, as the work became focused on the body and personality of the artist, eventually backfired. Despite some artists' claims that they were interrogating the structures of the ego by applying various restraints, the infliction of pain and the testing of will came to represent the heroic acts of the artist and grounded the work in narcissism. In many ways the quick absorption of 1970s modes of body art and ritual is evidence of the ways in which, especially the more sophisticated works, were misread by a dominant humanist interpretation in which the individual was central in the world. Mike Parr made a similar inference when he said that

one of the major problems 'was the way in which the virulence of performance was undermined by its acceptance. It was too quickly assimilated to the gallery structure.'¹²⁷

The dialectic between participatory happenings and body art in the early 1970s highlighted the differences in the artists' interpretations of self, body and society. The position of the body, which was often fractured, torn, and maimed, occupied a primary role in much early performance. Imaginary (or pre-Oedipal) images representing the fears and anxieties of the individual psyche became major themes in Mike Parr's monostructural (single-action) works. Catharsis through individual experience was the main concern of Tim Johnson's participatory performances produced in 1973, and Peter Kennedy's works appeared to operate between experience, catharsis and later the acknowledgement of the social construction of the self.

Part of the reason for the swift accommodation of body art is that this type of practice supported conventional notions of the artist's role, and underlined the significance of the binary oppositional structures of Western metaphysics: self/other, man/woman, good/bad, civilised/primitive, etc. Conceptual performance, which continued a type of semiotic investigation into art, by analysing what art is, did not highlight the presence of the artist; there was little spectacle in this sort of work and the audience needed to engage in an intellectual rather than an emotional way. Minimalism achieved similar ends by focusing on the spectator's movement within and around the work.

In relation to ritual performance, Lucy Lippard has analysed the influence of 'primitive' and ancient rites in the 1970s. Although it is clear that hybrid forms of art developed as artists interpreted myths and legends from the past, it is also apparent that artists were responding to the position of the individual in a world, which had lost its sense of community.¹²⁸

Many artists attempted to reinvest art with a mythical aura by turning to Eastern forms of enlightenment or trying to recapture an authentic 'primitivism' or instinctual way of life. This was evident in ritual performances produced by female artists who were responding to early feminist analyses which encouraged the expression of a female or feminine sensibility. The American artist Carolee Schneemann produced a ritual—happening in 1963 titled *Eye Body* where live snakes slithered across her naked body, which had been splattered with paint. This type of action represents a kind of sexual hedonism, but there is also terror.

The splattered paint and reptiles, surfacing as if from the body, are reminiscent of Gothic horror and the abject body as described by Julia Kristeva.¹²⁹ There is an attempt here to represent something instinctual or 'primitive'; the female body and live snakes conjure metaphors of ritualised sexuality, the type of event one may imagine experiencing at an ancient Dionysian ritual. The Austrian performance artist Hermann Nitsch used similar props and effects during his *Orgy Mystery Theatres* in the 1970s where animals were dissected and their parts used in ritual crucifixions of young men. Nitsch's works were elaborate productions often involving many participants. He believed that Western society had to recapture its 'primitive' roots and that ritualised slayings and events involving blood were cathartic social actions which could provide an alternative to war.¹³⁰ As such Nitsch presented himself as a shaman, who could heal society through his rituals.

The turning to the 'primitive' and Eastern esotericism has a long history in avant-garde art; such strategies were apparent in nineteenth-century romanticism and various avant-garde movements in the early twentieth century. However, the desire to re-mythologise art through shamanistic performances and participatory rituals in the 1960s and 1970s appears incongruous. Pop art, conceptual art, and minimalism had reduced the artist's conventional handling of materials; in these modes there was a clear shift in the artist's relationship to the crafting of his or her medium. Mirroring Walter Benjamin's famous pronouncement that 'mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual',¹³¹ such modes of art shifted the spectator's attention away from the rituals of the shaman-artist, and focused it instead on the social or intellectual structures being explored.

Zen Buddhism, which had influenced the beat poets and John Cage in the late 1950s and 1960s, was overshadowed by a host of other alternative codes and practices in the 1970s. The decentred explorations of chance associated with Cage and early American Fluxus events,¹³² which celebrated life for its multifarious discontinuity, were displaced by the focus on the self, the centring of the ego and the over-determination of a corporeal existence. The exoticism of the primitive, the difference of the East, the wild and untamed psyche of madness, and the freedom of the child, all of which had seduced the early avant-garde of the twentieth century, reached an impasse in the 1960s and 1970s.

ENDNOTES

- 1 J. Kent (ed.), *Setting the Pace: The Women's Art Movement 1980-1983*, Women's Art Movement, Adelaide, 1984, p. 3 and Art Network, no. 2, 1980, p. 44.
- 2 L. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, Studio Vista, London, 1973.
- 3 See C. Celant, *Arte Povera*, Studio Vista, London, 1969.
- 4 D. Jamieson, 'The Importance of Being Conceptual', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Winter, 1986, p. 121.
- 5 See I. Burn, 'Conceptual Art as Art', *Art and Australia*, vol. 8, no. 2, September 1970, pp. 166-70.
- 6 The Art and Language group in New York published three issues of *The Fox*, 1974-6; members of this group were also involved in Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, a group involved in various activist projects in the New York artworld. An anti-catalogue was published in 1976 when artists picketed the Whitney Museum in protest of the Bicentennial exhibition which was described as 'male and pale.' After 1976 the groups split and Provisional Art and Language, which advocated a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of cultural revolution, began a new journal titled Red Herring. See N. Marmer 'Art and Politics '77', *Art in America*, July 1977, and my article 'Political Practice: The Avant-garde and the Women's Art Movement' in J. Kent (ed.), *Setting the Pace*, pp. 84-7.
- 7 See A. W. Watts, *Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen*, City Lights Books, San Francisco, 1959; *Psychotherapy East and West*, Pantheon, New York, 1971; and *The Spirit of Zen*, Grove Press, New York, 1958. For an anthology of Suzuki's writings see W. Barrett (ed.), *Zen Buddhism*, Doubleday, New York, 1956.
- 8 T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Faber, London, 1970, p. 134.
- 9 T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, p. 131.
- 10 See A Watts. For further analysis of the relationship between Watts and the Beat Generation see T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, pp. 124-54.
- 11 Taped interview with Kevin Mortensen, 3 October 1987.
- 12 G. Sturgeon, 'Kevin Mortensen — Icons and Images', *Art and Australia*, vol. 17, no. 1, September 1979, p. 71.
- 13 G. Sturgeon, 'Kevin Mortensen', p. 71.
- 14 G. Sturgeon, 'Kevin Mortensen', p. 71.
- 15 G. Sturgeon, 'Kevin Mortensen', p. 71.
- 16 Taped interview with Kevin Mortensen, October 1987.
- 17 Correspondence with the artist, 1987.
- 18 See G. De Groen, 'Watching, Sawing, Being', *Canberra Times*, 25 May 1973, p. 11.
- 19 De Groen, 'Watching, Sawing, Being', p.11.
- 20 Gary Willis, artist's notes supplied for research purposes.
- 21 As quoted by Michael Fried (from an interview with the artist) 'Art and Objecthood' in G. Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, Dutton, New York, 1968, p. 125.
- 22 M. Fried, in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, pp. 116-47.
- 23 C. Greenberg, 'Avant-garde and Kitsch', *Partisan Review*, vol. 6, no. 6, Fall, 1939, pp. 34-49.
- 24 J. Burnham, 'Systems Aesthetics', *Artforum*, vol. 7, no. 1, September, 1968, p. 31, as quoted in D. Brook, 'Flight from the Object', in B. Smith (ed.), *Concerning Contemporary Art*, Oxford University Press, Sydney, 1975, pp. 16-34.
- 25 G. Sturgeon, *The Development of Australian Sculpture, 1788-1975*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1978, p. 226. Sturgeon used Lucy Lippard's term 'dematerialisation' to explain events in Australia in the 1970s: he wrote: Attempts have been made to categorise the complex of directions which developed in the late 1960s under a variety of labels, including anti-form, conceptual art, systems art, arte povera, dematerialised art, post-object art; but although each of these titles is convenient as a means of identifying a specific style or in establishing its position sequentially, no omnibus term can hope to encapsulate the diversity of approaches involved. Lucy Lippard's term 'dematerialised' is probably the most accurate one although, as she herself admits, it is open to almost limitless application. . . (p. 225). Accordingly, Sturgeon subtitled one of the last sections of his book 'Dematerialised and Non-sculpture: The Collapse of the Categories', pp. 225-8.
- 26 M. Plant, 'A Reading of Robert Morris (with notes on Paul Partos, Guy Stuart and Ti Parks)', *Other Voices*, vol. 1, no. 3, October-November 1970, pp. 36-42.
- 27 M. Plant, 'A Reading of Robert Morris', p. 39.
- 28 M. Plant, 'A Reading of Robert Morris', p. 38.

- 29 Published in *Artforum* between January 1966 and May 1970.
- 30 See M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1962, especially Chapter 3, 'The Spatiality of One's Body and Motility', pp. 98-147.
- 31 F. Lynn, 'Cool, Clear and it Leaves you Gasping', *Bulletin*, 9 August 1969, p. 48.
- 32 Taped interview with Kevin Mortensen, 3 October 1987. See also B. Adams, 'The Game is On', *Telegraph*, 20 April 1972, p. 3.
- 33 Kaprow's exhibition entitled '18 Happenings in 6 Parts at the Rubin Gallery', New York City, 1959, was probably the first time the word 'happening' was used. See A. Henri, *Environments and Happenings*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1974, pp. 189-190. See also B. Barber, 'INDEXING: Conditionalism and its Heretical Equivalents' in A. A. Bronson and P. Gale (eds.), *Performance by Artists*, Art Metropole, Toronto, 1979, pp. 183-204.
- 34 A. Henri, *Environments and Happenings*, pp. 189-90; and B. Barber, 'INDEXING', in Bronson and Gale, *Performance by Artists*, pp. 183-204.
- 35 A. Kaprow, 'Participation Performance', *Artforum*, March, 1977, p. 25.
- 36 See N. O. Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Conn., 1959, and *Love's Body*, Random House, New York, 1966. Of particular importance in the debates which followed between Marcuse and Brown was Brown's essay, 'Apocalypse: The Place of Mystery in the Life of the Mind', in S. R. Hooper and D. L. Miller (eds.), *Interpretation: The Poetry of Meaning*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1967, pp. 7-13. See also Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, and *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1978. In this latter book Marcuse includes a review of Brown's *Love's Body* titled 'Love Mystified: A Critique of Norman O. Brown', pp. 227-43. It was undoubtedly the social critic Theodore Roszak who made many of these ideas 'popular' in the early 1970s; see especially his *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Faber & Faber, London, 1970. Roszak argues convincingly that it was Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse who generated the idea of cultural resistance through lifestyle in the 1960s and 1970s. For an overview of the situation in Australia, see Ian Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath', *Art & Text*, Autumn 1981, pp. 49-65. I have written about the 'influence' of Marcuse and Brown within the context of performance art in my article, 'Ritual in Performance Art: Another Modernist Myth or a Post-modern Shift', *Eyeline*, no. 8, March 1989, pp. 10-11.
- 37 For relevant material by Wilhelm Reich, see 'The Discovery of the Orgone, 1', *The Function of the Orgasm*, Orgone Institute Press, New York, 1948.
- 38 A sound anti-communist platform, used by the Liberals throughout the 1950s and 1960s to defeat the Australian Labor Party, strengthened public opinion in support of the Vietnam war. By 1972, when Whitlam achieved victory for the Labor Party, the Australian press had changed their position on the Vietnam issue. The Tet Offensive of 1968, the opening of the Paris Peace Talks, and the resignation of President Johnson in America, forced even the most conservative voters to re-analyse the situation. See D. Altman, 'Australia and Vietnam: Some Preliminary Speculations', *The Australian Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 2, June 1970, p. 62.
- 39 For an overview of protests on Australian campuses, see 'The Trouble with Students: An Australia-wide Survey', *Bulletin*, 5 June 1969, pp. 24-30 (anonymous). It should be noted that defeating the myth of widespread revolt amongst the young presents problems. There is a certain 'image' of the 1960s and early 1970s as a period of revolt, and one usually associates such a concept with a majority: a proletarian uprising of some sort or another. However, the shift from a conventional Left programme to a New Left strategy can help to explain the unprecedented 'effect' of a minority. The report in the *Bulletin* stressed that many campus revolts were aimed at university administrations and hierarchical structures, which represented a resistance to institutionalisation as such. Although Australian youth may not have understood the political issues influencing events overseas (the more 'spectacular' revolts on American campuses, for example, which revolved around conscription and issues such as racial discrimination), their protests in Australia, which often focused on more immediate issues for the younger generation here, were equally valid in a New Left perspective. One may also suggest that their regionalised position, which marginalised them even further, contributed to the status of their revolts in the terms of the New Left. The concept of a pluralistic strategy for the Left exploded in the 1970s, as the New Left (against the background of the Cold War and the disillusionment experienced by a generation familiar with the failure of the Soviet model of communism under Stalin) moved away from the idea of revolt arising through a rigorous analysis of the economic structures of capitalism and towards the concept of cultural revolution through lifestyle and issue-based campaigns. In Marcuse's scheme there was no need for the student movement to seek the support of the working classes, since the disaffiliation of the workers did not exist: the 'mass' had already been absorbed into the capitalist machine. According to Marcuse, 'such disruptive characters as the artist, the prostitute, the adulteress, the great criminal and outcast, the warrior, the rebel-poet, the devil, the fool — those who don't earn a living' represent the most radical 'refusal', See H. Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, Beacon, Boston, 1964, P. 59. This

- type of romantic revolt of the individual was interpreted by the younger generation as a licence to rebel against repressive social mores.
- 40 D. Altman, 'The Politics of Cultural Change', *Other Voices*, vol. 1, no. 2, August-September, 1970, p. 23.
- 41 D. Altman, 'The Politics of Cultural Change', p. 25.
- 42 D. Altman, 'The Politics of Cultural Change', p. 27. It should be noted that, although Altman and others drew on the writings of Herbert Marcuse, Gregory Battcock has noted that Marcuse's theory of art was quite retrograde. He was only interested in the avant-garde of the turn of the century and, contrary to Altman's claims, was critical of the 'living theatre' and happenings. See C. Battcock, 'Aesthetics for Rebellion', *Art and Artists*, vol. 7, no. 10, January 1973, pp. 12-14. Both Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown were convinced that artists should revive the role of the romantic avant-garde and they gave little acknowledgment to the contemporary art of the 1960s.
- 43 I. Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath', p. 51.
- 44 I. Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath', p. 51.
- 45 See P. McCaughey, 'Introduction', *Central Street Gallery April 1966-June 1968*, exhibition catalogue, Central Street Gallery, Sydney, 1968, no pag.
- 46 Reprinted in Smith (ed.), *Concerning Contemporary Art*, pp. 1-5.
- 47 J. Romeril and G. Blundell, 'Street Theatre', *Other Voices*, 1, 3, October-November, 1970, pp. 16-24.
- 48 J. Romeril and G. Blundell, 'Street Theatre', p. 17.
- 49 For a discussion of Barry Humphries's dada activities in Australia, see Elwyn Lynn's introduction in *Annandale Imitation Realists*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art of Australia, 1962; also Pamela Ruskin, 'Ba- ha-ha-ha-harry Ha-ha-ha-Humphries: Cuckoo in the Nest', *Theatre Australia*, December 1977, pp. 13-15.
- 50 Stelarc was born Stellios Arcadiou.
- 51 Taped interview with Stelarc, 19 August 1987.
- 52 M. MacDonald, 'A House of Seduction', *Bulletin*, 4 December 1971, p. 36.
- 53 For an account of the court proceedings against Sharp, Brown et al., see Geoffrey Dutton, 'The Innovators: The Sydney Alternatives in the Rise of Modern Art', *Literature and Ideas*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 225-8.
- 54 M. MacDonald, 'A House of Seduction', p. 37. See also Noel Hutchison, 'The Spring Exhibition at The Yellow House', *Art and Australia*, December 1971, pp. 206-7, and *The Yellow House 1970-72*, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1990, which includes colour plates.
- 55 D. Thomas, 'Plastic Arts', *Sunday Telegraph*, 25 January 1970, p. 23.
- 56 For material on SAVART, I am indebted to Neil Howe, who made a draft copy of his unpublished manuscript, *A History of Australian Performance Art* (1981) available for research purposes; Howe's manuscript consists of an essay charting the emergence of performance art in Australia and a valuable 'artist's chronicle' section where individual artists have submitted documentary details of their works. This type of 'chronicle' section became a kind of genre in the 1970s and a considerable amount of performance activity was documented in this way. Lucy Lippard's *Six Years*, was designed in this way; the performance art magazine *High Performance* took the same format and produced a chronicle section in all its issues (beginning in 1978 - 1997); and many small press and mainstream publications on performance art in the 1970s continued a 'democratic' editorial programme where artists could submit material. Neil Howe's 'chronicle', or artists' section, is arranged in alphabetical order and includes one to eight pages listing the artist's performance works in chronological sequence, followed in some cases by descriptions of the works or 'notes by the artist'. This section of the manuscript is not paginated, although the four chapters written by Howe which precede the 'chronicle' are paginated. I will be referring to Chapter 4 of the manuscript exclusively; in the draft I have access to, Chapter 4 appears from p. 52 to 113.
- 57 See D. Brook, 'Down with Evans', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1972, p. 12.
- 58 See D. Brook, 'God help the Art Gallery of NSW', *Nation Review*, 9-15 November 1973, p. 128.
- 59 Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*, p. 80.
- 60 See B. Prothero, 'Putting in the High-heeled Boot', *Digger*, 13-27 January 1974, p. 3. Prothero described the performance as follows:
The housewife, a mouse of a thing in the style of circa 1943, appears with a vacuum cleaner to clean up the mess from the number before. She hovers away to the soul- soaring one-two-three of the Blue Danube, increasingly fascinated by the sexual potential of the bits and pieces of the cleaner. The music gets louder and the chorus, all doing their thing round about, are getting their gear off. The vacuum's accessories are pulled to bits and everyone's away, simulating fucking each other and having

themselves off with the extension tubes and winding suction hose. The mousey housewife sits in the midst of the hairy bottoms and sweaty groins, glassily enraptured with the immortal Strauss, quietly rubbing herself up and down on the main body of the machine.

Prothero noted that Silvia and the Synthetics were mostly 'stereotype queens' and that their performance and publicity were limited to gay venues. However, the presence of Bruce Goold, an artist associated with The Yellow House and the performance at The All Senses Ball suggest that the group was affiliated with the artworld in some way. The presentation of 'real violence', e.g. the line about 'eating your heart out' in the popular tune 'Coming of Age' prompted the singer to bite into a sheep's heart, and the description by members of the group of their performance as 'total theatre', is further evidence of contemporary art concepts influencing their work.

- 61 See J. Ewington, 'The Joe Bonomno Story — A Show of Strength', *Art and Australia*, January 1973, p. 240.
- 62 See Dr Doolittle, 'The Sydney Push me Pull you', *Digger*, 21 October-4 November 1973, p. 2.
- 63 Taped interview with Kevin Mortensen, 3 October 1987.
- 64 Donald Brook notes that it was Robert Hughes who coined the terminology 'body artists and video freaks' on a visit to Australia in 1972; Hughes was writing about the group of artists 'clustered around Inhibodress Gallery in Sydney.' See D. Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations: Body Art and "Video Freaks" in Sydney', *Studio international*, vol. 185, no. 956, June 1973, p. 269. Other members of Inhibodress included: Rolla Primrose, Terry English, Orest Keywan, David Ahem and as an ex-officio member Neil Evans.
- 65 N. O. Brown, 'Love Mystified: A Reply to Herbert Marcuse by Norman O. Brown', in H. Marcuse, *Negations*, p. 246.
- 66 See D. Brook, 'Considering Copulation as an Art Form', *Nation Review*, 5-11 January 1973, p. 371, and 'Getting Everybody Stoned', *Nation Review*, 25-3, 1 May 1973, p. 992.
- 67 As quoted by Brook in 'Getting Everybody Stoned', p. 992. Brook is quoting from Vivien Elliot's introduction to Tim Johnson's artist's book, *Disclosures*, Watters Gallery, Sydney, 1973, p. 3.
- 68 For a review of Parr's concrete poetry, see D. Brook, 'The New Spirit in Typewriter Art', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 February 1974, p. 14. For an intensive documentation of Parr's work see D. Bromfield, *Identities: A Critical Study of the Work of Mike Parr, 1970-1990*, University of Western Australia in collaboration with the Department of Fine Arts of the University of Western Australia and Mike Parr, Nedlands, WA, 1991. Also

E. Scheer, *The Infinity Machine: Mike Parr's Performance Art*, Schwartz Publishing, Melbourne, 2009.

- 69 M. Parr, letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 2. Parr notes also his interest in Robert Barry, Douglas Heubler, Vito Acconci and Dennis Oppenheim. Weiner, a conceptual artist, argued that:
1. The artist may construct the piece; 2. The piece may be fabricated; 3. The piece need not be built. Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon occasion of receivership.
- See 'Documentation in Conceptual Art' in G. Battcock (ed.), *Idea Art*, Dutton, New York, 1973.
- 70 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 2.
- 71 As documented in T. Smith, 'Getting Away from Objects', *The Review*, 3-9 June 1972, p. 937. Parr says that the first instruction is actually called *3 Weeks Annual Leave*, letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 3.
- 72 Mike Parr in answer to a questionnaire designed for this research project.
- 73 See S. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, Standard Edition, vol. 21, Hogarth Press, London, 1930, pp. 59 ff.
- 74 These later works, notably *Black Box Theatre of Self Correction*, 1979, will be discussed in Chapter 3.
- 75 See D. Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations', p.269, M. Parr, 'Mike Parr: Rules and Displacement Activities: Problems of Socialisation', *DATA*, Milan, 26, April-June 1977, pp. 74-8; and M. Parr, 'Photo(graphed)' in *Australia: Nine Contemporary Artists*, exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1984, p. 56.
- 76 See M. Parr, 'Mike Parr', *Flash Art*, 80-1, February- April 1978, p. 53.
- 77 M. Parr, 'Mike Parr', *Flash Art*, p. 53.
- 78 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 3.
- 79 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 3.
- 80 See M. Parr, 'Mike Parr', *Flash Art*, p. 53.
- 81 According to Kennedy he was linked into a network of about a thousand artists operating in North and South America and Europe. Mike Parr notes that David Mayor was the main source for international addresses used by the Inhibodress artists. *Trans-art: Idea Demonstrations* was a joint exhibition by Parr and Kennedy.

- 82 See especially S. Cramer, *Inhibodress*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1989. Cramer's documentary survey of Inhibodress is the most complete record thus far and was written to accompany an exhibition, *Inhibodress 1970-72*, which toured Australia in 1990. For a review of the exhibition, see N. Zurbrugg, 'Inhibodress 1970-72', *Art & Text*, 35, Summer 1990, pp. 144-8.
- 83 Excerpts from this letter are reprinted in P. Kennedy, 'Inhibodress: Just for the Record', *Art Network*, 6, Winter 1982, p. 50. As a result of the exchanges between Lippard and Inhibodress, several Australian artists were included in the anthology, edited by Lippard, *Six Years*, p. 199.
- 84 Fluxus was an international alternative network for experimental artists. Anyone could be part of Fluxus by simply claiming that they were: however, there were certain things that one needed to comply with (at least in theory). Basically, a commitment to experimental modes of art (i.e. not painting or sculpture) and a willingness to be part of an informal network. Dick Higgins maintained the American base of Fluxus whilst in Europe it tended to have no centre. At times this caused conflict as artists debated each other's status as 'true' Fluxus members. In many ways Fluxus duplicated the kind of anarchy one associates with dada and so it is always difficult to define. For details of Fluxus see *Flash Art*, 84-85, October-November 1978, where Ben Vautier argues that Duchamp, Cage and Zen were precursors of Fluxus and that neither Vostell nor Beuys were truly Fluxus artists, p. 52.
- 85 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 5.
- 86 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 5.
- 87 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 8.
- 88 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 8.
- 89 Taped interview with Peter Kennedy, 20 June 1987.
- 90 Artists documented included: Ian Breakwell, Steve Willats, David Medalla (UK); Hans Haacke, Charles Simons, Judy Chicago and Adrian Piper (USA), and art historian Arlene Raven.
- 91 Taped interview with Peter Kennedy, 20 June 1987.
- 92 Guerilla Art Action sent Kennedy a recording of an art action they presented in May 1970 on Radio WBAL, New York. Clarifying the radio work in 1993, Kennedy said:

Primarily it was an attack on art, artists and cultural institutions and linked these elements with such antisocial or anti-humanist impulses as racism, sexism, exploitation, alienation, US expansionism and the Vietnam War.
- [interview with the artist, 2 March 1993]
- The Guerilla Art Action Group performed anti-war actions at the Guggenheim and the Museum of Modern Art in New York; their action staged in front of Picasso's *Guernica* simply involved holding up posters (with images taken from media photographs) of victims of the Mi Lay massacre, see the front cover of *Studio International*, November 1970.
- 93 Taped interview with Peter Kennedy, 20 June 1987.
- 94 T. Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', *Artforum*, vol.13, no.1, September 1974, pp. 54-9.
- 95 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 8.
- 96 Taped interview with Peter Kennedy, 20 June 1987.
- 97 In D. Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations'.
- 98 D. Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations', pp. 269-70; see also T. Smith, 'Live Art's Effects and Defects', *Review*, 17-23, June 1972, p. 937.
- 99 Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations' and Smith, 'Live Art' Effects and Defects'.
- 100 In a letter to Neil Howe, sections of which are included in his unpublished manuscript, *A History of Australian Performance Art*, 'artist's chronicle' section, no pag.
- 101 T. Smith, 'Live Art's Effects and Defects'.
- 102 Smith, 'Live Art's Effects and Defects'.
- 103 D. Brook, 'Filming through a Lens filled with Blood', *Nation Review*, 16-22 February 1973, p. 548.
- 104 Mike Parr, quoted in L. Nicklin, 'Art without Canvas', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Weekend Magazine, 30 November 1974, p. 12.
- 105 See T. Smith, 'Live Art's Effects and Defects'.
- 106 D. Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations', p. 269.
- 107 Peter Kennedy in Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*, no pag.
- 108 Peter Kennedy describing his performance in N. Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*.
- 109 D. Ahem, 'Notes on Expansion', *Other Voices*, August-September 1970, pp. 34-5.
- 110 Ahem, 'Notes on Expansion', p. 35.

- 111 John Cage studied with D. T. Suzuki at Columbia University from 1945 to 1947; the Zen idea of 'waking up to the life we are living' informed Cage's music from that time. As musical director of the Mere Cunningham Dance Company in the late 1940s, Cage put many Zen ideas into practice. For an account of the Zen 'influence' on Cage, see C. Tomkins, *Ahead of the Game: Four Versions of the Avant-garde*, Penguin Books, Hannondsworth, 1968, pp. 97-8. See also J. Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writing*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Conn., 1961, and *M: Writings — 67-72*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Conn., 1973.
- 112 Barbara Hall, 'Philippa Cullen, 1950-1975', part of an essay prepared for a proposed publication 'Post Object Art', to be edited by Donald Brook. However, due to lack of funds the work was never published. Hall made a copy of her article available for research purposes.
- 113 Philippa Cullen as quoted by Hall, 'Philippa Cullen'.
- 114 Taped interview with Peter Kennedy, 20 June 1987.
- 115 For a survey of events at Central Street see Paul McGillick, 'The Institute of Contemporary Art Central Street Gallery', *Art Network*, 6, Winter 1982, pp. 48-9. *The Situation Now: Object or Post-object Art?*, 1972, was sponsored by the New South Wales Contemporary Art Society. An extensive catalogue was published with conversations and essays by Terry Smith, Tony McGillick, Bruce Pollard Noel Hutchison, Donald Brook, Mike Parr, Peter Kennedy, David Aspen, Aleks Danko, Clive Murray-White, Tim Johnson, Optronic Kinetics, Simon Close, John Fisher and Bill Gregory.
- 116 For a concise history of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, see G. Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura: The Story of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1961-1982*, Mildura City Council, Mildura, 1985.
- 117 See *Recent International Forms*, 2nd Biennale of Sydney, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1976.
- 118 For documentation of the establishment of the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide, see S. Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF: A History of the Experimental Art Foundation 1974-1984*, Experimental Art Foundation Press, Adelaide, 1984, especially Chapter 1, 'Mostly from Memory: Reminiscences by Noel Sheridan, Ian North, Donald Brook, Bert Flugelman, Richard Llewellyn, Clifford Smith, . . .', pp. 5-12.
- 119 J. Sweet, *Pinacotheca 1967-1973*, Prendergast Publishers, South Yarra, 1987.
- 120 J. Sweet, p. 20.
- 121 Dale Hickey, quoted in J. Larkin, 'A Fence is a Fence is a Fence, or was it?', *Age*, 23 October 1969, p. 2. I am indebted to Margaret Plant for drawing my attention to this work; for a more detailed discussion of Dale Hickey and the Pinacotheca group, see M. Plant, 'Dale Hickey' in *Dale Hickey: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Ballarat, 1988, pp. 1-11.
- 122 The Pinacotheca opened in May 1967 in Fitzroy Street in St Kilda and moved to Richmond in June 1970. The gallery closed in October 1999. However, the Pinacotheca re-opened in August 2002 for its very last exhibition. For details on the history of the Pinacotheca, see J. Sweet, *Pinacotheca*, Trevor Fuller, 'Bruce Pollard and Pinacotheca: Psychological Content', *Artlink*, vol.26, no.4, 2006, pp 92-93, and Charles Green, 'Pinacotheca: A Private Art History', *Art and Australia*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1997, pp 484-489.
- 123 Wrapped Coast consisted of one million square feet of erosion-control fabric and polypropylene rope; see D. Brook, 'The Little Bay Affair', *Art and Australia*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1969, pp. 230-4.
- 124 John Kaldor's Art Projects included: Christo, *Wrapped Coast*, Little Bay, 1969; Harald Szeemann, *Szeemann: I want to Leave a Nice Welldone Child Here*, an exhibition of twenty Australian artists at Bonython Art Gallery, Sydney, and at the National Gallery of Victoria, in 1971; Gilbert and George, Art Gallery of New South Wales, and at the National Gallery of Victoria, 1973; Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik, performances and videos at the Adelaide Festival of the Arts and Art Gallery of New South Wales in March and April 1976; Sol LeWitt, Art Gallery of New South Wales and National Gallery of Victoria, 1977; Richard Long, documentation of performance works, National Gallery of Victoria and Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1977-8; *An Australian Accent: Three Artists*, P.S.1 (Project Studios One), Institute of Art and Urban Resources Inc., New York, 1984, works by Mike Parr, Imants Tillers and Ken Unsworth. On this occasion avant-garde works were exported from Australia and shown in New York. For complete documentation, see *An Australian Accent*, pp. 86-7.
- 125 The artists included in the Szeemann exhibition were John Armstrong, Tony Bishop, Robert Boynes, Gunter Christmann, Tony Coleing, Aleks Danko, Margaret Dodd, Neil Evans, Ross Grounds, Dale Hickey, Tim Johnson, Peter Kennedy, Warren Knight, Nigel Lendon, Ian Milliss, Ti Parks, Mike Parr; a collaboration by the artists William Pidgeon, Brett Whiteley and Tony Woods; and individual works by Guy Stuart and Alex Tzannes. The exhibition was officially titled *Szeemann: I want to Leave a Nice Welldone Child Here*. This paternalistic title, with its implicit masochistic and culinary overtones, has been abandoned by Australian writers, who invariably refer to the exhibition simply as Harald Szeemann in Australia. However, the temptation to 'read' the title semiotically cannot

be overlooked, and one wonders why critics in the 1970s, especially those like Terry Smith, who would go on to write his seminal essay 'The Provincialism Problem', did not take the opportunity to critique the overt sexism in Szeemann's 'naming'. The implication of some sort of copulation, a sort of penetration of the 'master' into a virgin land, jumps from the page as the words are written. It is not surprising that Australian writers prior to Smith's critique of provincialism in the artworld saw fit to censor the implied 'rape' in the title. It is obvious in the 'naming' that Szeemann saw himself as a born-again Don Juan, capable of injecting life with the seed of his artworld credentials. For a review of the Szeemann exhibition which acknowledges this original title, see R. Lansell, 'Melbourne Commentary: Harald Szeemann in Australia', *Studio International*, vol. 183, no. 937, October 1971, p. 159.

- 126 M. Parr, 'Beyond the Pale — Reflections on Performance Art', *Aspect: Art and Literature*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1978, p. 7.
- 127 Mike Parr in answer to a questionnaire designed for research purposes.
- 128 See L. R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1983, especially the chapters 'Feminism and Prehistory', pp. 41- 76, and 'Ritual', pp. 159-96.
- 129 See J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982.
- 130 See K. Tsiakma, 'Hermann Nitsch: A Modern Ritual', *Studio International*, July-August, 1976, pp. 13-15.
- 131 W. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, Collins/Fontana, Glasgow, 1970, p. 226.
- 132 See *Flash Art*, vol. 84, no. 5, October-November 1978.

CHAPTER TWO

EXPERIMENTAL PERFORMANCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO
CONCEPTUAL, POST-OBJECT AND AVANT-GARDE ART

Performance art at the Experimental Art Foundation was multifarious. Sheridan was committed to the idea of international networking and brought a library of American and European documentation with him. Government funding also meant that Sheridan could host many artists from interstate and overseas. Mike Parr, Jill Orr, Peter Tyndal, Dale Frank, Ian Burn, Terry Smith, Jim Allen, Les Levine, Reindeer Werk,

Merc Cunningham, Germano Celant, Jack Burnham and Joseph Beuys were amongst the better known performance and conceptual artists and critics whose work was shown at the EAF.

The British artist, Stuart Brisley, was in residence at the EAF in 1976. He had performed in the 2nd Biennale of Sydney: Recent International Forms in Art (1976), and, with the assistance of a British Council grant, was touring Australia. During the Biennale Brisley built a cage in Hyde Park in which he spent several days before breaking out of his self-made confinement. Brisley was well known for his earlier cathartic rituals presented in Britain, many of which involved vomiting and excrement. In Adelaide he presented a twenty-six hour endurance piece: he roped off an area between four columns

in the basement of the EAF and covered the floor with white powder. This became a kind of canvas on which he drew arcs with his body, producing a ghostly white figure. Finally the artist cut off his clothing while walking rapidly around in a circular motion and had a bucket of black paint thrown over him.¹ Brisley's work addressed the position of the individual in society by

Alternative art spaces such as Inhibodress were important for performance artists during the 1970s providing supportive venues in which works could be shown. However, such spaces, run by artists, tended to be short-lived because they could not attract enough funding to sustain their activities. This situation changed in 1974 when the Experimental Art Foundation (EAF) in Adelaide, with the support of Donald Brook, managed to attract financial support from the Australia Council. In its early years (1974-79), under the directorship of Noel Sheridan, the Foundation provided a venue and a critical forum within which experimental art could develop. For Donald Brook the EAF provided a kind of theoretical laboratory within which he could test out his theory of experimental art. In the analysis of performance art, this chapter concentrates on the theory of post-object art, as developed by Brook, and activities at the Experimental Art Foundation.



Stuart Brisley, 26 Hour Endurance Piece, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, 1976.

Photograph from the Experimental Art Foundation collection.

concentrating on images of confinement and release, the abject eruption of bodily fluid and the expression of psychological states were clearly reminiscent of much European body art in the 1970s.

The difference between conceptual performance and body art and ritual performance is often foregrounded by critics seeking to explain different approaches to performance art. In pragmatic terms body art focuses on the body and psychological states experienced by the artist. Ritual performances tend to concentrate on the relationship between the body and the environment; they are often set in the landscape and use natural materials such as earth, fire and water. Both practices draw on myth and ancient rites as alternatives to Western culture, although body artists tend to combine these with various psychological theories such as Sigmund Freud's interpretation of the Oedipal myth. Conceptual performance, like conceptual art, analyses what art is. It tends to be concerned primarily with intellectual ideas about art: art and its theories.

Although it is useful to make distinctions between approaches when considering the development of performance art, it is inadvisable to construct definitive categories of practice since many artists moved freely between approaches. Writing about the performance art of Imants Tillers, Donald Brook emphasised the role of intelligence and imagination in a way that explains the meeting of conceptual and ritual practices:

I mean by "intelligence" the capacity to relate domains in an artistic construct: to revise an entire aesthetic epistemology, thinking about information instead of sense-impressions; to connect art with biology, with life and with the environment; to speculate that systems are more significant than relationships — in art as well as in life. I do not mean by "intelligence" the capacity to pass competitive examinations of a bookish sort . . . I mean the power of invention that continuously enlists imagery of every sort, even from such academically discreditable sources as the occult and magical, in the service of new constructs and analogies; and by 'imagination' I mean the capacity to think these themes through in concrete terms and to manifest them in the public forms of art.²

The idea that artists could draw from life to investigate living structures and processes opened up new possibilities and different means of representation as artists created works of art as moments in life. A temporal aspect was often stressed through ephemeral modes as a way of underlining the indeterminate nature of life. However, it must be acknowledged that it was the means of representation that changed: the way in which artists presented their ideas was different, not the issues they were exploring; magic, ritual, the occult, theosophy and various other ideas about physical or conceptual matters had been investigated by previous generations of artists. The new modes of presentation, which often appeared fragmented and incomplete to the spectator who was more accustomed to contemplating art objects, enabled different aspects of creation and invention to be investigated. This type of art practice, most evident in ephemeral sculpture and performance which emphasised the process of investigation, was connected to many of the ideas associated with the counter-culture.

Donald Brook insisted that conceptual art was a sub-group of what he called 'post-object art' and that the latter category was multifarious. In Brook's scheme, post-object art was recognisable as a reaction against mainstream modernism. As a mode of art it was more inclined to explore intellectual systems than sensory experience³ and its primary aim was to investigate ways of thinking: art as epistemology.

Writing about Imants Tillers's performance Enclosure (Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1973), Brook argued that Australian artists who produce post-object art recognise 'that artistic perception, like any other sort, is not a matter of

sensation-having but of information-getting, that art is ideologically continuous with life.⁴ However, this definition appears limited since it is clear that the getting and having of sensation was a primary focus in some performance art. The sensations aroused in Tim Johnson's *Disclosures* and the pain experienced by Stelarc in body suspensions, where the skin was pierced by hooks to enable its elevation, are just some examples of the way in which sensation was foregrounded (Stelarc's work will be discussed in detail in the following chapter). In claiming that post-object art was more concerned with information-getting Donald Brook was making a distinction between works which were conceptually based and those which focused on the emotion or sensation of the artist. Tillers's 1973 performance represented an investigative mode of art which sought to explore conceptual thought.

Tillers mapped out an area on the beach in Sydney and placed two tents on the perimeter of a circle. He then proceeded to dig out the mirror-image of one tent (producing a tent-shaped hole in the ground inside the structure) and fill the other tent on the opposite side of the circle with the sand extracted from the first. The performance/action was documented, showing the physical fatigue of the artist, and the same structure was recreated for the Mildura Sculpture Triennial with the presence of the artist only evident through photographs placed at intervals around the perimeter of the circle.⁵

The type of creative intelligence defined by Brook can be seen in the way in which artists used art to explore different physical and intellectual structures. This was not a new idea; conceptual artists had been involved with an analysis of art throughout the 1960s. However in the 1970s, investigations spread beyond the semiotic analysis of art and into a more physical-conceptual mode. Conceptual artists working in two-dimensional modes of art produced diagrammatic works and photographic documentation which analysed conventional art practices. Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden's *Text #3* from 'Proceedings' (1970) presented a dictionary definition of the word 'meaning' in the form of a document on a wall; as such it was a critique of the sort of painting that is supposed to represent a metaphysical meaning for the spectator. Conceptual performance art, like other modes of performance, existed in a specific time and place and usually involved the artist's presence in some way. As such it ventured into the physical arena and beyond the world of ideas in its purest sense. The American artist Robert Barry produced purely conceptual works such as *Psychic Series* (1969) which was simply a statement declaring

that the work was: 'Everything in the unconscious perceived by the senses but not noted by the conscious mind during trips to Baltimore during the summer of 1967.'⁶ Barry's work had no physical existence, it could not be perceived by the spectator. Performance works like Tillers's *Enclosure* existed in a physical sense on the axis between the conceptual and the physical world.

Although it is apparent that Australian artists drew on many sources, and that direct contact with artists from overseas was important, the type of art theory presented by Brook was significant. As an art critic he actively supported artists at Inhibodress, The Tin Sheds and later the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide. He interpreted their works seriously and tried to develop a theory of art which would accommodate the multifarious modes of the 1970s. Without Brook's critical appraisal of 'post-object art' many performance artists would probably have gone unnoticed in the greater text of Australian art history.

Brook tended to use the terms experimental art and post-object art interchangeably. He disliked the term conceptual art because he saw in examples such as Barry's *Psychic Series*, evidence that art, concerned exclusively with ideas, was becoming so self-conscious that it remained a totally private affair that did not participate in a public forum. Brook argued that works of experimental art were:

unspecific experimental models of possible forms of life, public in principle and functioning as regulative models in terms of which all social institutions may be modified or reconceived.

The term post-object art had little credibility outside Australia. In America and Europe terms such as: process art, documentation art, conceptual art, idea art, ephemeral art, informal sculpture, arte povera were used to describe what Brook preferred to call experimental or post-object art, the latter being slightly more specific in that it made it clear that the art object was somehow being displaced by artists.

In 1976 Brook outlined some of the qualities of post-object art in a paper delivered at the Experimental Art Foundation, he said:

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- Post-object art may be physically tenuous rather than solid (literally as thin as air) and indeed entirely non-physical in the sense in which poems, promises and abstractions generally are not physical.
 - Post-object art may tend, unlike object art, to require human activation or participation in order to constitute itself, and not merely in order to be appreciated . . .
 - Post-object art is very likely to rely heavily upon its physical, temporal, social, historical, economic (etc.) context and not, like object art, to prize its own hermetic autonomy. Hence (unlike object art) it will not even tend to formalism, nor will it invite the sort of attention that is characterised as ‘pure contemplation.’
 - Post-object art, if it is physical or makes use of physical elements, may tend to be distributed rather than unified, localised and compact.
 - Post-object art is very likely to be ephemeral, whereas object art characteristically had the ambition to be permanent.
 - Finally, post-object art will most likely not be elevated, either in a literal sense (on a pedestal, or framed) or even in a metaphysical sense. It may seem just to be a thing among other things . . . Works of post-object art like, say, acts of kindness, are not ‘framed’ by any customary device.⁸

Although Brook’s definition of post-object art attempts to accommodate a plethora of practices in the 1970s, many of the features outlined above can be seen in performance art. Brook’s definition of post-object art is particularly relevant to a discussion of experimental performance practices which do not fit into the categories of body art or ritual.

A fundamental feature of Brook’s writing was his insistence that the ‘institutional theory’ of art espoused by George Dickie and widely debated amongst aestheticians, who drew heavily on the later works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, had been proved wrong by the art of the late twentieth century.⁹ Indeed, one may summarise the main thrust of Brook’s theory as an unrelenting desire for a more active role for art which would refute the type of inertia that had resulted from the criticism waged against dada and pop art.

George Dickie argued that ‘a work of art in the descriptive sense is an artefact upon which some society or sub-group of a society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation.’¹⁰ Duchamp’s readymades, which were ordinary objects placed in an art gallery and renamed by the artist, forced the spectator to consider the object in its institutional context. According to Dickie, Duchamp’s status as an artist and his action of placing his readymades in established art galleries were what made the readymades art. The urinal became a work of art by being assigned status by the artist, the museum and, later, art history.

The institutional theory thus shifts debates on what art is away from the essential or exhibited qualities of art (the formal qualities of the art object) towards

an investigation of art's social properties.¹¹ The theory, developed in the 1950s, was an attempt by aestheticians to account for Duchamp's readymades and pop art,¹² which had exploited the structures of the institution by making mundane objects into art or taking popular cultural images and assigning them status as high art. In many ways Donald Brook's attempt to reassert another definition of art was an effort to go beyond what had become a rather predictable Duchampian strategy. Brook argued that the institutional theory failed in the late twentieth century as artists presented 'candidates for appreciation' which were not recognised by the endorsed language users (gallery directors, critics, etc.). Brook insisted that 'suitcases full of rotting cheese . . . or specifications for a hole in the ground'¹³ exploited the theory to the point of its demise.

In an attempt to refute the institutional theory of art which placed its emphasis on the status of the artist and established museums, Brook argued that experimental art was trans-institutional.¹⁴ Brook's most notorious example of a work of art that refuted the institutional theory was a quasi-terrorist bomb scare which resulted in forty-two Woolworths stores being searched and three 'bombs' de-activated in Adelaide in November and December 1979. The initial scare was reported on the front page of *The Advertiser* on Friday 30 November. The sensational caption read: "Threat to "gas-bomb" Woolworths stores — hundreds cleared from supermarkets — \$150,000 extortion demand." Five unemployed university graduates had devised a sophisticated plot geared to extract funds from a wealthy supermarket chain to finance their own business. The 'extortionists' planned to market and distribute



Anonymous, *Skunk Oil Action*, Woolworth's Stores, Adelaide, 1979.

Photograph from *The Advertiser*, Friday 30 November 1979.

a miniature battery which they claimed they had invented, a small, energy-efficient device more powerful than a car battery.

Senior Chief-Superintendent Lockwood was reported as saying: 'At this stage we are treating the matter very seriously . . . We have no indication as to the extent these people will go.'¹⁵ However, in the same report it was revealed that police were uncertain 'whether to treat the Woolworths "gas-bomb" affair as a serious extortion attempt or an elaborate prank.'¹⁶ After the letter from the 'extortionists' had been printed in the press, it became apparent that the 'scare' was most likely a prank. The Editor of *The Advertiser* argued that:

*If the full text of the letter had been released at the outset, it is hard to believe that citizens familiar with the work of humorists like Stephen Leacock, Damon Runyon and their many talented successors would not have reacted with instant and uproarious delight, smelling a rat, if not a skunk, from the beginning.*¹⁷

Several days later Donald Brook stepped into the fray to ‘endorse’ the incident as a ‘work of art.’¹⁸ In a letter to the Editor he announced that:

It would be as serious a mistake to suppose that skunk oil is a hoax as to imagine that it is a serious crime. It is both, and neither: it is in fact a work of art, and one of the most powerful to be made in Adelaide in this decade.¹⁹

Summoning a rhetoric familiar to his readers, Brook continued:

Serious works of art are new models of the world. They enable us to see things that we had not previously seen. Skunk oil shows us terrorist crime as a model of the capitalist system — a way of looking at it that many will reject, but most will not even have tried. Consider: we have alleged authors of the plot who are disappointed graduates, responsible for a great invention (a skunk oil battery!) that ‘the system’ will not buy. Hence they are driven to use the standard devices of the commercial market. They threaten to diminish the profits of a successful established corporation, Woolworths, by ingenious overt and covert manoeuvres (‘competition’). They seek assistance by extortion (business pressures towards rational co-operation restraining out-and-out conflict). Finally, they propose a merger of interest in which they will jointly exploit the public by profitably marketing skunk oil products (movement towards monopoly stage).²⁰

Brook concluded his letter with two suggestions:

***May I commend to your art critic, Mr Dolan, a work of far greater weight than the general run of silly pictures that he regularly reports to us?
May I also commend skunk oil to the Art Gallery of S.A. as the purchase of the year?***²¹

Needless to say, curators at the gallery did not take up Brook’s challenge, and after several controversial news items in the press the incident was forgotten, disclaimed as a joke. However, Brook’s campaign to have the work recognised as art appears to be incongruous and to support the same ‘institutional theory’ which he had previously argued was inappropriate and outdated.²² As an ‘endorsed language user’ (in George Dickie’s terminology) the Professor of Visual Arts, speaking from a position of authority, claimed the skunk oil affair to be art. Although Brook’s strategy succeeded in providing an example of his theory of ‘trans-institutional’ practices, one must question why the adventures of the skunk oil extortionists needed to be classified as a ‘serious work of art’, and given the elevated potential of guaranteed social status by being collected and housed in a museum.

Despite the trials and tribulations encountered by Donald Brook, his theory of post-object art was influential if somewhat misunderstood. The broad definition of experimental art as ‘unspecific models of possible forms of life’ which were, if successful, capable of modifying social institutions, was appealing to many artists. It is difficult to assess how much of Brook’s theory artists comprehended; however, it is evident that many artists knew of the ‘trans-institutional theory’ developed by the critic through public forums, papers published by the EAF and reviews in journals.²³

The EAF, more than any other group, tried to implement Brook's theory. The statement displayed in the foyer clearly indicated the theoretical framework of the organisation:

1. Our appreciation of the world is active, not passive, and art displays an emergent apprehension.
2. Art is only incidentally and not essentially aesthetic. Art is concerned with every kind of value and not particularly with beauty.
3. Art interrogates the status quo: it is essentially, and not incidentally, radical.
4. Art is experimental action: it models possible forms of life and makes them available to public criticism.²⁴

Although artists associated with the EAF appeared to be seduced by Brook's theory — he was the man considered to know what experimental art really was — their practical understanding of the critic's thesis may have been limited. Bob Ramsay, who probably understood Brook's theory more than the other artists (he took up its academic challenge and wrote a Master's thesis on the role of the institutions in relation to art, supervised by Donald Brook), argued that there was much misunderstanding of and some resentment toward Brook's theory amongst artists at the EAF.²⁵

Brook's thesis was open-ended, a theoretical web woven across a broad framework. The success of 'models' was to be agreed upon through public consensus. Although Brook instigated various discussions at the EAF, it is apparent that the authority of the critic overshadowed a broadly

democratic system. Indeed, disruptions and splits within the organisation were common as artists attempted to contest the validity of the 'Brookian model.' The debates which evolved in the late 1970s eventually led to a change in direction and director when Noel Sheridan resigned in 1980 to take up an academic position in Ireland and David Kerr took over. Writing about the new direction of the EAF Kerr said:

The programme of the first five years focused primarily on conceptual and performance art. In retrospect it appears these investigations were absorbed into the languages and experience of the bourgeois Art Institution. The language was enriched, but the base of the Institution of Art was otherwise unaffected by the challenge. Bourgeois art had weathered the lean years of ephemeral work, surviving on adaptations (reproduced documentation) for commercial souvenirs, and was striking back with object-oriented neo-expressionism. Fortunately there were other emergent tendencies growing through and from the post-object period of the 1970s. These concerns emerged in the next five years at the EAF. A study group in Ideology and Culture provided a parallel theoretical base to that of Brook's influence on the EAF. Ideology is inconsistent with Brook's thesis to the extent that it has a prescriptive component; but boundaries and limits were a compromise as soon as the EAF began operating in the world. The decision to add sub-clauses to the constitution's objectives, to prescribe that activities of the Foundation would not be fascist, racist or sexist in intent, further pointed up the inadequacies of the EAF's philosophical base in providing guidelines for action in the world. Generally speaking what subsequently emerged was an informal policy of initiating and promoting investigations and concerns that were progressive-left in content and context. The study group thus gave a possible theoretical direction for action and interaction, and it could co-exist with the interrogative model already adopted from Brook's work.²⁶

Donald Brook did include an analysis of the use-value of art in his theory, however, it was problematic in a practical sense. The idea that art objects and events needed to be 'subjected to an appraisal of their APTNESS FOR USE as HYPOTHETICAL OR PRESCRIPTIVE MODELS of the world or some part of it'²⁷ was an attempt to democratise art, whilst the concept of 'unspecific modelling' appeared to neglect the moral or political issues which may erupt as a result of a particular art event. Despite the contradictions which were apparent on a theoretical level, Brook's moral concern was projected into the public arena on several occasions. As the Chairman of the EAF, Brook was one of the major protagonists to argue against and withdraw support from Stelarc's proposed suspension performance in 1975. Brook signed the letter which stated that:

The Experimental Art Foundation has taken medical advice . . . In the light of that advice the executive of the Foundation is convinced that the performance should not take place. The Foundation declared that it no longer condones or lends support to the work in any way, and requests its members, and members of the general public, neither to participate in the work as assistants nor to condone it by witnessing the performance in the event that the artist should insist upon proceeding with it under his or any other auspices.²⁸

According to Stelarc, it is more than probable that Noel Sheridan, Director of the Foundation, and Donald Brook disagreed on the final decision which led to the cancellation of the performance.²⁹ Sheridan often argued against any censorship of the arts in public debates and was known, on at least one occasion, to try to incite censorship of his own work. Sheridan's controversial performance *Beyond the Fridge* (April/May Show, EAF, 1979) directly addressed the issue of censorship by presenting a work of art that had been excluded from the exhibition on the grounds that it was blatantly sexist. A refrigerator, which once occupied a local artist's kitchen and had the dual function of message board and cooling unit, was presented for inclusion in the April/May Show at the EAF. The graffiti on the outside of the refrigerator was explicitly sexist³⁰ and, more significantly in the local context, the comments were directed at specific female artists. The fridge dialogue, a group effort by local male artists, documented the sexual exploits of various individuals. It was a kind of 'boys' room' commentary on the sexual potential of various women. The executive of the EAF excluded the fridge on two grounds: first, it was sexist and the EAF had a policy not to show works of a sexist or racist nature (a battle hard-won by members associated with the Art and Culture group), and second, the executive feared that the individual women 'named' in the commentary may have been prompted to take legal action.

Noel Sheridan presented the fridge in its absence through photographic documentation. Fragments of the fridge were projected larger than life in a performance where Sheridan argued that the comments on the fridge were not derogatory but,



Noel Sheridan, *Beyond the Fridge*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, 1979.

Photograph from the Experimental Art Foundation collection.

on the contrary, they were clearly affirmative remarks about the sexual pleasures of men and women. Sheridan's performance was essentially an oratorical work, accompanied by slides; it relied quite heavily on the proverbial 'gift of the gab' for which the Irish artist was infamous. To crown the performance with a sense of irony, Sheridan documented the performance in one of the EAF's annual publications.³¹ The photographic representation shows Sheridan standing in front of a large refrigerator bearing the Australian flag of independence, the emblem used by Maoists. This final gesture was obviously a comment on political intervention in the arts and made reference, by association, to the Progressive Art Movement in Adelaide spearheaded by Brian Medlin, a prominent Maoist activist.

The difference between Donald Brook's positive affirmation of art as an experimental 'modelling' process geared to investigating 'possible forms of life', and Noel Sheridan's at times dogmatic insistence on an art practice divorced from socio-moral responsibility, highlights a particular issue which is connected to the problem of the avant-garde. As evident in the Stelarc performance and various comments he wrote about body art,³² Brook was not prepared to grant an independent position to art ('art is ideologically continuous with life').³³ Sheridan, however, argued that it was necessary to grant art certain privileges so that it could go 'beyond' the mundane socio-moral responsibilities that one associates with 'progressive' life-views. In short, experimental art is exempt from life-time responsibilities. In many respects the difference between the two points of view foregrounds the complexities associated with experimental modes

of art, especially performance, in the 1970s and the debates over body art in the late 1970s and 1980s. The difference is between accepting a philosophy which separates the artist from society and the desire of many artists and critics to bridge the divide between art and life by making art socially responsible. This is a complex debate and one which has yet to be resolved, since it is apparent that too much 'political' concern can produce a rather stagnant art which claims, in an arrogant voice, to speak for others. Sheridan's strategy of representing Beyond the Fridge with an Australian flag of independence was a poignant statement, albeit somewhat misdirected in the context of the performance.

Donald Brook recognised the difference between experimental art and the avant-garde; however, he did not successfully transmit this distinction to artists. The critic argued that:

It is important to recognise that the generation of new models, extending human language, by non-voluntary action, has little or nothing to do with the 'avant-garde' conception of art. Avant-gardism is a matter of the determined manipulation of recognised art forms within their various institutional parameters.³⁴

In 1988 Brook acknowledged that it was the failure to distance himself and his theory from the concept of the avant-garde that led to the demise of the experimental project at the EAF. He argued that:

We should have called it "object-indifferent" or something of the sort, to frustrate that reading [of the avant-garde]. We were neither careful enough to dissociate the position from avant-gardism on the one hand, nor to make sure that the muddle headed passion for pure mentalism or idealisation, under the rubric of "conceptualism", would be confined to a minor role as one of the zanier expressions of object-indifference.³⁵



Jim Allen, *Chainsaw*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, 1976.
Photograph from the Experimental Art Foundation collection.

During the 1970s, teasing out the distinction between experimental practice and avant-gardism was not a paramount concern. However, as the 1970s drew to a close and body art started to be criticised for representing a conventional Western, existential angst, the difference became crucial.³⁶

Performance works which centred on the violent responses of artists to the art establishment and to society in general did not appear to fulfil Brook's designs for an experimental practice. Jim Allen, who was Professor of Fine Art at Auckland University, spent a considerable amount of time at the EAF in 1976. *Chainsaw* was an angry and potentially violent work which involved the artist reading Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl* against the sound of a powered chainsaw.³⁷ Dale Franks (later Frank), who performed under the title MSPCCL (Masteroid Space Cama Control Council Propaganda Legion) was artist in residence at the EAF during 1979. Franks presented many disturbing actions, including: dragging his body along the gutter outside the EAF during peak-hour traffic, and shouting abuse at an embarrassed audience at the Art Gallery of South Australia whilst dressed in a military uniform. *Gaze: Bloody Minded* (EAF Performance Week at Carlew House, 1980) involved the artist sitting in a sunken area in a room in which straw had been burnt for several hours. As the audience became accustomed to the smoky environment their eyes focused on the artist who was cleaning a rifle; slowly and deliberately he sanded the various parts and applied creams and cleaners. One audience member, responding to the masturbatory action, shouted 'why don't you try K.Y. jelly'. Franks ignored the comment, however, the suggestion appeared to delight other members of the audience.

Robert McDonald was another angry young man associated with the EAF. In 1980 he shocked visitors at the Art Gallery of South Australia by posing around the galleries with part of his head shaved upon which was written 'Art Lobotomy'.³⁸ Although such actions are clearly anti-institutional, they tend to communicate a violent (at times military) image to an audience who may not be familiar with the reasons why such a response is felt to be appropriate by the artists.

There are several problems associated with aligning performance art in the 1970s with the concept of the avant-garde. RoseLee Goldberg wrote about the history of performance art at the end of the 1970s and attempted to map a linear progression.³⁹ Goldberg's shorthand version of her thesis, published in numerous essays, stated unequivocally that performance art was the 'avant-avant-garde'.⁴⁰ Goldberg argued that performance was an eruptive activity which preceded a change of 'style' or a shift from one movement or tendency to another. In presenting such an argument Goldberg attempts to make performance art acceptable by fitting it snugly within the parameters of the modernist avant-garde.

Although Goldberg addressed all those practices which Greenberg, as a formalist, had ignored (dada, surrealism, the Russian avant-garde), her insistence that performance art preceded shifts in style echoed Greenberg's linear interpretation of modernism. Greenberg claimed that modernist painting had developed in a linear way throughout the twentieth century to arrive at the point of pure abstraction in the 1950s. To make her argument relevant to the 1970s Goldberg needed to underline the multifarious nature of modernism and to stress that the anti-bourgeois stance taken by many of the

artists was in fact contradictory to the project of modernity. Some of the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century attempted to bridge the gap between art and society; some were anti-progress; some were disenchanted by Western democracy and its structures. However, even if Goldberg had succeeded in disrupting the linear paradigm of modernist art history, the problem of the institutionalisation of the avant-garde gesture would have persisted.

Greenberg believed that an avant-garde should be encouraged and maintained and that it should be protected from popular culture, kept separate from society. In the 1970s this scheme was in conflict with the aims of artists to create works which changed the relationship between object and perceiver; works which tried to make art more relevant for society, and those which continued the dada project of dismantling art from within by interrogating forms of representation.

Performance art in the 1970s was in a precarious historical position. On one hand the focus on the individual in body art tended to reinscribe the uniqueness of the artist's personality and to centre the individual thus reinscribing a humanist space for the subject. On the other hand many ritual and conceptual performances presented strong critiques of progress and technology, which were contrary to the utopian commitment to progress associated with both humanism and some modernist avant-garde movements such as futurism and the Bauhaus.

Performance was thus situated in a kind of no-man's land in the 1970s. Although performance art is difficult to categorise, most of the cross disciplinary practices that one encounters under the term performance art share in common an anti-formalist position. Most of the artists, if not all of them, were reacting against Greenberg's interpretation of modernism. Because of this it is more appropriate to situate performance under the umbrella of experimental art rather than trying to claim some status for it as an avant-garde.

A questioning of art and its structures (the art gallery, the museum) was a major feature of experimental art in the 1970s. Peter Burger who wrote about the avant-garde in the 1980s claimed that the critique of, what he termed 'the institution art', was a major characteristic of the avant-garde of the early twentieth century.⁴¹ It is this activist position that artists such as Mike Parr invoked when he called for artists to: 'complete the break with the art gallery system, the bullshit of Modernism, bullshit art criticism . . .'.⁴² However, in many ways the political critique of art and its institutions, which was associated with

actions such as Duchamp's readymades, had, by the 1970s, been absorbed by the very system it hoped to contest. The dada gesture had become part of the canon of art history and it was this that prompted Donald Brook to launch an attack on the institutional theory of art.

In 1968 the Italian critic Renato Poggioli argued that there were two major characteristics of the avant-garde: an agonistic or antagonistic tendency which was emotive — the artist as alienated outsider reacting against modern society — and an activist tendency which was more of an organised political strategy. These two tendencies collide and intersect throughout the history of Twentieth-century art and are apparent in the debates over experimental and socially committed art in the 1970s.

It is important to acknowledge that the personal experience of the individual was a major feature of cultural theory throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. One could argue that a rather subjective agonistic response was characteristic of the counter-culture. There was a utopian sentiment expressed by Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown, a kind of valorisation of the personal as the political which was behind the idea of cultural resistance through lifestyle.⁴³ The enmeshing of the personal and the political was later interpreted in a more sophisticated way as the Left started to analyse the concept of the individual as a cultural myth which supported social institutions. The idea of the unique individual reacting against society was replaced by an analysis of the 'subject' (once the individual) constructed through cultural structures and institutions, including language. The shift in theory, associated with Althusser and the rigorous structuralist analyses that preceded him, led to a rejection of a 1970's reading of experiential difference associated with the counter-culture and existentialism.⁴⁴ The structuralists presented a determinist theory and argued that the 'subject' was already written in language, inscribed by social codes. Althusser in a famous example said that as soon as a child is born it is coded by society; the first question is always: 'Is it a boy or a girl?', there can be nothing else: subjects are 'always, already' written into the masculine or feminine codes of the society into which they are born.⁴⁵ Such a determinist theory effectively displaced the utopian models of individual resistance characteristic of the 1960s and early 1970s.

The merging of experience and politics was highly problematic in the 1970s. Christopher Lasch's book *The Culture of Narcissism* clearly highlights the ways in which the merging of the personal and the political backfired.⁴⁶ Lasch argues that the persistent focus on individual experience during the 1970s produced a self-obsessed culture. However, Lasch takes a liberal position and, although his critique is rigorous, it tends to ignore the complexities of emerging issues. Feminism, which was also influenced by the experiential critiques of the 1970s, continued to analyse the idea that 'the personal is political', indeed this became a slogan for feminists.

Melanie Howard,
*Portrait of An Artist as
a Nude*, Experimental
Art Foundation,
Adelaide, 1977.
Photograph from the
author's collection.



Melanie Howard,
*Portrait of An Artist as
a Nude*, Experimental
Art Foundation,
Adelaide, 1977.
Photograph from the
author's collection.

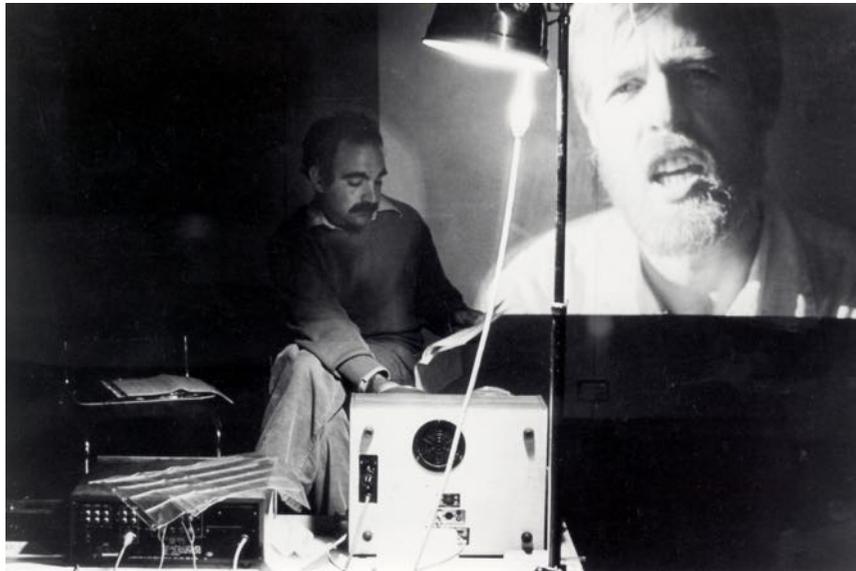


Melanie Howard, a conceptual artist working at the EAF who was instrumental in establishing the Women's Art Movement in Adelaide, addressed the question of female representation in a work titled *Portrait of An Artist as a Nude* (1977). Howard examined the way in which the female body became objectified by offering herself to artist-friends as their photographic model. Photographs taken by male and female artists were then presented as a slide-commentary performance during *The Women's Show* in an attempt to ascertain whether men and women objectified the female body in the same way. Howard was responding to feminist analyses of culture, which argued that visual representations of the female body underlined conventional stereotypes of femininity: woman was objectified to the extent that she became a sexual commodity on the commercial market.⁴⁷ Howard's *Portrait* clearly showed how the female body became an object of fantasy for the male artist. In the 1980s feminists committed to analysing the personal/political complex turned to a rereading of psychoanalysis in an attempt to chart a way out of a seemingly impossible theoretical position which left the 'subject' in a kind of academic cul-de-sac: already written, spoken before s/he speaks.⁴⁸

IN relation to performance art, which even in its most conceptual mode often relies on the artist's presence and their demonstrations of some sort of process through their actions or experience (the artist is always doing or experiencing something in front of the spectator), the personal-political issue erupts. This is apparent in the contests between Donald Brook and Brian Medlin at the EAF (private art vs social practice) and the various critiques of performance art which attempt to underline a difference between body art, ritual performances and conceptual practice⁴⁹. In the 1970s as the theoretical debates continued, artists, who were able to ignore what Brook called 'intelligence' of a 'bookish sort', often confounded the issues being debated by the critics or they made a mockery of them.

Sue Richter, *Internal Dialogues*,
Experimental Art Foundation,
Adelaide, 1979.

Photograph from the
Experimental Art Foundation
collection.



Sue Richter, an artist associated with the EAF in Adelaide in the late 1970s, experimented with technology as a way of presenting a multi-layered argument which spoke about theory and inserted the artist's internal thoughts on the issues being debated. In the performance *Internal Dialogues* (EAF, 1979), Richter, David Kerr and John Gasper presented an analysis of art integrated with an analysis of the self and how the individual reacts on a public as well as a private level.

Two slide projectors and two sound tracks, split through the left and right channels of a stereo system, were used in conjunction with the live conversation of the three artists. They spoke about post-object art and their doubts and fears were incorporated through technological devices so that an overlaid dialogue evolved. Selections from the script explain the way in which a multi-faceted language was achieved:

John [live]: What makes you want to be an artist?

David [live]: Oh, I came to art after having studied in the rigid disciplines of economics and politics. Art seemed a good way of creating new worlds through unspecific modelling.

Slide A/Speaker A (David): [laughing] I suppose that's what he wants me to say.

Slide B/Speaker B (John): Well, what's he doing making formalist sculpture?

Slide A/Speaker A (David): It's OK for him, he has a ticket, he's sort of recognised ... but I've still got to establish myself in the art community. He's had to play the game too.

David [live]: And how did you become involved?

John [live]: Well, I came to art through having been an architect.

Even then I had a very empiric approach to my work, but the architectural institution didn't encourage this. Artists seemed to use empiricism rather than negate it.

Slide B/Speaker B (John): Bullshit, I was unemployed and art seemed like a good way to waste some time [slide change] I wonder if he knows what I mean by empiricism?

[David leaves. Sue talks to John (live movement)]

Sue [live]: David says he's going to hang himself. Do you think he is taking Stelarc seriously? I can't see what he is going to achieve by it.⁵⁰

Richter's interest in the double language of social interaction (public and private) has often been presented with the use of video and life cast-sculpture. In the performance-installation *Rules of the Game* (Festival Centre Gallery, Adelaide, 1980) she used life-cast sculptures against the backdrop of a large video monitor. Describing the tableau in the magazine *Art Network* the artist said: 'The work centres around a simple conversation between two strangers — Narelle and John — and their rather ill-fated efforts to establish communication.'⁵¹ The characters (both life-casts, real people, and their projected images on video) played out a sequence of events prompted by five cards with five options. Richter wrote:

Given a basic conceptual framework, Mo Gordon (Narelle) and Gary Benson (John) improvised according to the options on the cards. Neither of the actors had seen the cards before. Point-of-view camera angles, extreme close-ups and internal dialogues were used in the video in an attempt to get an inside view of what was going on. In contrast to this the life-cast figures of Narelle and John within the sculptural environment were seen from the outside or as a wide shot in video terms.⁵²

Rules of the Game was presented in three different media: Narelle and John (life-casts) were seated at a table; an image reflected on the video screen behind the figures repeated the same gestures continuously throughout the event, and the two actors (Narelle and John) interacted with the setting, wheeling away the sculptures and re-enacting the life scene. *Rules of the Game* focused on the social rituals experienced by 'couples' trying to communicate. The choices scripted on the cards outlined various plays used to generate communication between people. Richter used a framework similar to that employed in *Internal Dialogues* as the actors spoke aloud their internal thoughts during the performance:

Card no. 2: John says aloud what he thought to himself when Narelle refused his offer of a cigarette.

Card no. 3: Narelle says aloud what she thought to herself when John laughed at her.⁵³

In this way the live performance acted by the 'real' couple created another dialogue; initially the actors played out the game on the cards which represented a clichéd form of social interaction. In the second sequence the actors performed the same gestures, but their language spoke of their individual fears.

Sue Richter is not primarily a performance artist; she prefers to work in various media. When she does incorporate 'actors' they are always juxtaposed with other elements. When the artist appears in the works herself she becomes part of a sequence, just one of the actors in the scene; there is no sense in which she focuses on her own presence in the way in which body artists explore structures of the self. Richter's analysis of the human psyche is carefully constructed within the ritual of the communication

Sue Richter, *Internal Dialogues*, Festival Centre Gallery, Adelaide, 1980.

Photograph from the artist's collection.





Sue Richter, *Internal Dialogues*, Festival Centre Gallery, Adelaide, 1980.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

process, in which language plays an important role and the memory (or internal dialogue) is presented as a second-order discourse. The ways in which technology can assist the artist's representation of the subject is most apparent in Richter's events, where the video operates as a mirror, used as an analytical tool, and sound tapes and loops enable a multi-layering of language.

Richter's work is endowed with a humorous edge, as the ridiculous side of human interaction becomes the focus of the event. The artist is critical of an over-determination of theory, yet she addresses the construction of the subject and the role of language in a serious way. Explaining the impetus behind her works, Richter makes reference to the writings of the novelist Joseph Heller:

*Joseph Heller in his book **Something Happened** talks about people having 'the whammy' on each other, indicating some inability to establish a reasonable communication with another human being for one reason or another. It seems that as long as one is unable to shift outside that circumstance one will continue to have 'the whammy' and not much can be done about it.*⁵⁴

Bob Ramsay, who was one of the major protagonists of post-object art at the EAF, presented seven performances between 1977 and 1979, all of which explored the notion of investigative intelligence described by Donald Brook. Although most of the works were concerned with intellectual rather than psychological or physical structures, and could

thus be described as conceptual performances, in one instance (*Of Voice to Sand*, discussed below) the artist confounded categorisation by exploring the rituals of the Navajo Indians. Ramsay, like Sue Ritcher, also produced performances which addressed the theoretical discussions then current at the EAF.

Read (EAF, December, 1977) is described by the artist as a metaphor for the position of conceptual artists working at the EAF.⁵⁵ The idea of continuously running to keep up was represented by the artist walking at a rapid pace on an exercising belt. Over a period of thirty-eight minutes the artist dressed and undressed himself in a series of T-shirts displaying words on the front and back. The messages read by the audience over the duration of the performance were concerned with the generation of ideas and the endurance of the artist:

Ideas lead to change and continue differing in direction.

This activity will lead to ideas.

It is possible for ideas to continue yet seem to get absolutely nowhere.

This activity will tend to change until all energy subsides.

To get ideas, change.

Ideas lead to change.

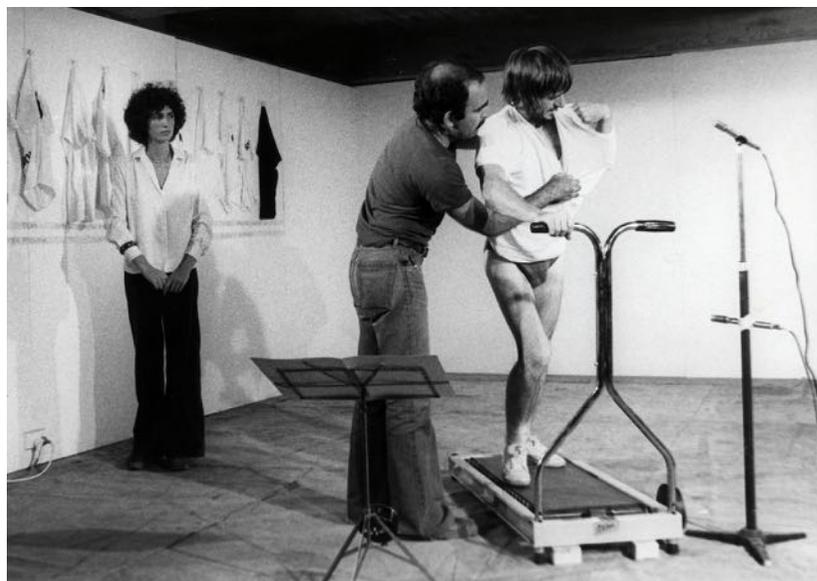
Change will tend to lead to ideas.

Continue until all ideas change.

Change will tend to lead to each revolution.

Each revolution will tend to lead to change.

Continue each revolution until all energy subsides.⁵⁶



Bob Ramsay, *Read*,
Experimental Art
Foundation, Adelaide,
1977.

Photograph from the
artist's collection

Peanuts (Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1978) utilised a similar word-image format. However, the Brisbane performance was more political and questioned the role of art in society. Both Peanuts and Read were scripted performances where the artist ‘read’ his actions from a score. Peanuts was presented in the context of an installation of newspaper clippings hung in large strips from the ceiling. The ‘news’ described various political activities in Queensland and the artist’s score, which began as a random sequence of words on the wall, was gradually transformed into a series of questions and statements: ‘Is the function of political activity to develop social alternatives?’, ‘Is it essential that artists start to question art?’, ‘Is art a private activity or does it have a public function?’ and so forth.⁵⁷ Over a period of fifty-two minutes Ramsay presented the spectator with an intellectual debate concerned with the function of art.

The Swing (Act 1, Canberra, 1978), Of Voice to Sand (EAF, 1979) and Eureka (April/May Show, EAF, 1979) all extended the investigative function of art while simultaneously introducing more visual elements some of which tended to underscore a ritualised practice. The Swing involved the artist swinging back and forth over the heads of the audience, oscillating between two slide screens, which displayed both visual images of swinging and suspended bodies and texts which defined the word ‘swing’ and its various metaphorical implications. Of Voice to Sand, one of Ramsay’s most elaborate productions, involved an installation of coloured sand in small pigskin sacks, a large drum made from animal hide, and a sound system which was set up to amplify the artist’s voice. The action occurred within a circle mapped out by sand and consisted

Bob Ramsay, Read, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1978.

Photographs from the artist’s collection.





of the artist making noises through the sound system in an attempt to move the sand. Ramsay, who was a secondary-school science teacher, was exploring both vibrational sound and its potential to change the physical environment, and the powers of the mind to implement similar activity. He says that he was inspired by stories he had read about the Navajo Indians and their rituals, and the accounts of psychics who claim to be able to bend spoons or break glass through a concentration of mind-power.⁵⁸

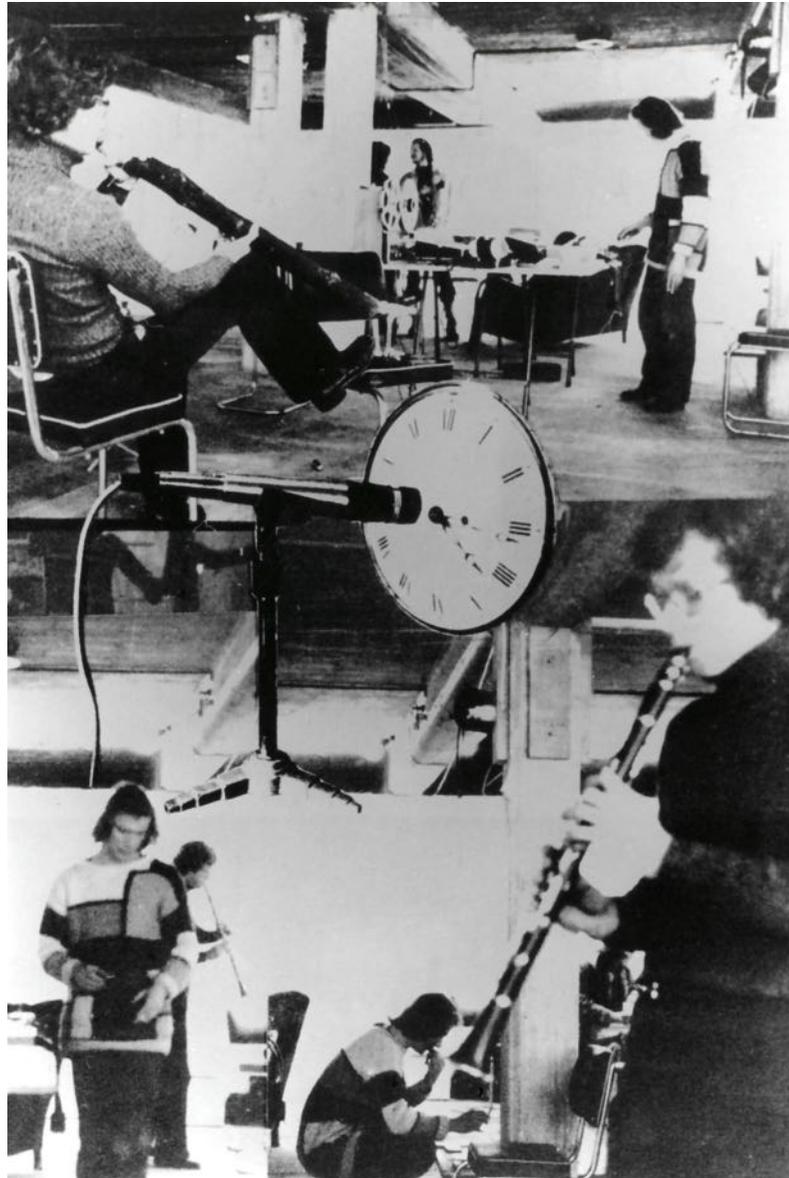
In *Of Voice to Sand* technology met the natural

environment and conceptual approaches to performance met ritual approaches. Earlier works like *Read and Peanuts* involved an intellectual analysis, and, in the example of *Read*, the artist's physical endurance. Although this type of work is conceptually based and has more to do with ideas than the expression of emotion or psychological states, it is apparent that an interrogative activity is informed by various sources; as Donald Brook noted about Imants Tillers, the occult and magical ways of interpreting the world and human experience are as appealing to artists as the intellectual concepts they seek to explore.⁵⁹

Bob Ramsay, *Of Voice to Sand*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, 1979.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

Leigh Hobba and
Ian de Gruchy,
Freeways,
Experimental
Art Foundation,
Adelaide, 1978.
Photograph from
the Experimental
Art Foundation
collection.



Other artists working at the EAF also investigated alternative structures of 'knowing' and 'being.' Leigh Hobba, who travelled Australia extensively to record the music of the Aboriginal peoples, utilised many of the rhythms and chants he had heard in the desert in his own music. *Freeways* (EAF, 1978) was a collaborative performance which explored the working relationship between two artists — Leigh Hobba (an experimental musician) and Ian de Gruchy (a conceptual artist). The performance involved the amplification and mixing of numerous sound sources collected by the artists, including: Indulkina Tribal Elders teaching singing to non-aboriginals; an eight channel recording of antique clocks and a music box; car and street sounds; noises collected from a creek, a meadow and a beach; various chants and songs from Africa and a skit by Spike Milligan. The soundscape was mixed during the performance and presented together with compositions for the didgeridoo and clarinet devised by Hobba.⁶⁰ The clarinet was played using the same circular breathing technique as that employed to play the didgeridoo.

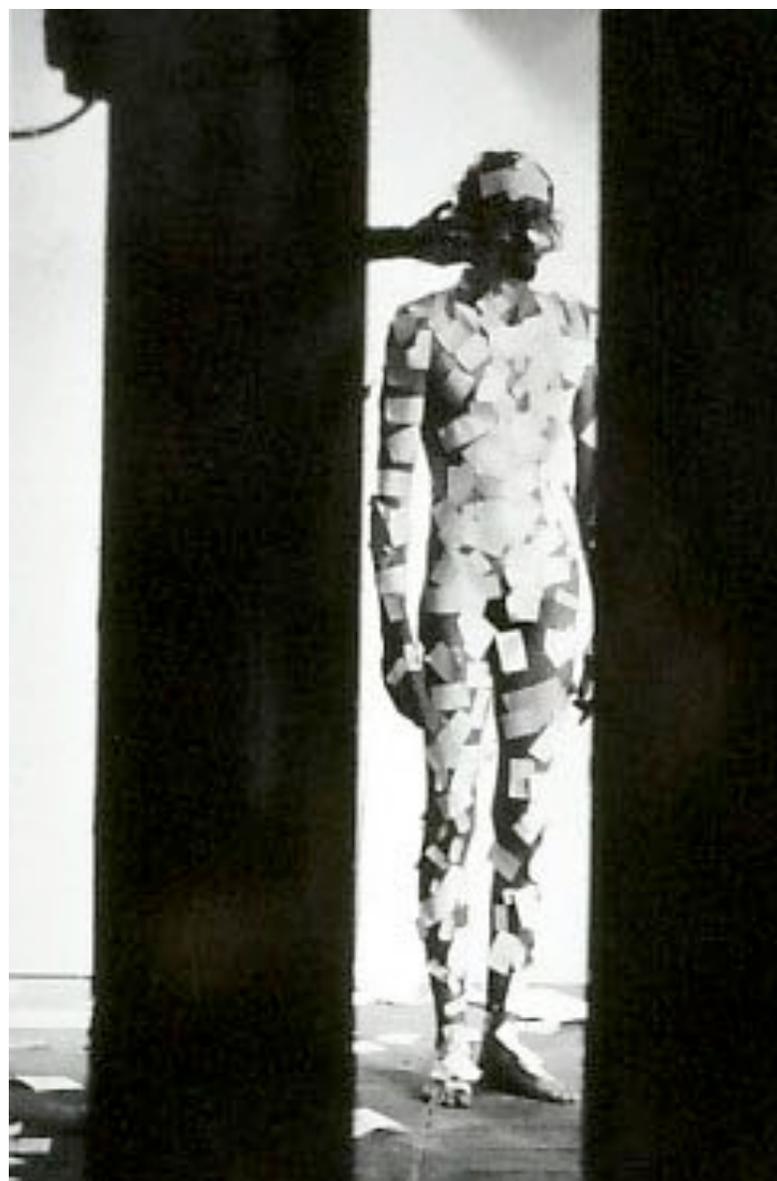
Jim Cowley, who produced performances in the late 1970s, also oscillated between conceptual and ritual productions. *Mentation* (EAF, 1978) involved a textual format similar to that used by Bob Ramsay in *Peanuts*; however, Cowley had the words attached to his body so that over a period of time the artist was glued to the wall with the letter-cards. Cowley became a papier-mâché figure encased in an elaborate art language.⁶¹

A younger generation of artists and art students started to present performances at the EAF in 1979-80. Arguments between those supporting

experimental practice for its own sake and those committed to a social function for art continued. Some of the younger artists, recognising the utopianism of a conventional Left programme for the arts, and its limitations, presented cynical or witty works which often addressed concepts of 'organisation' and hierarchical structures that appeared entrenched in the artworld. Peter Cheslyn's *The Meeting* (EAF, 1979) consisted of a grid of chairs and a group of people each in possession of a box of matches. The artist orchestrated a mock meeting; operating as 'chairman', he tapped a broom on the floor which indicated to the meeting that they could speak. Each participant recognised a type of pecking order which had been determined previously and began to speak on the command of the broom. As each person spoke they struck a match and as it burned out they fell into silence. This pattern was continued until all the matches had been burnt, signifying the end of the meeting.⁶²

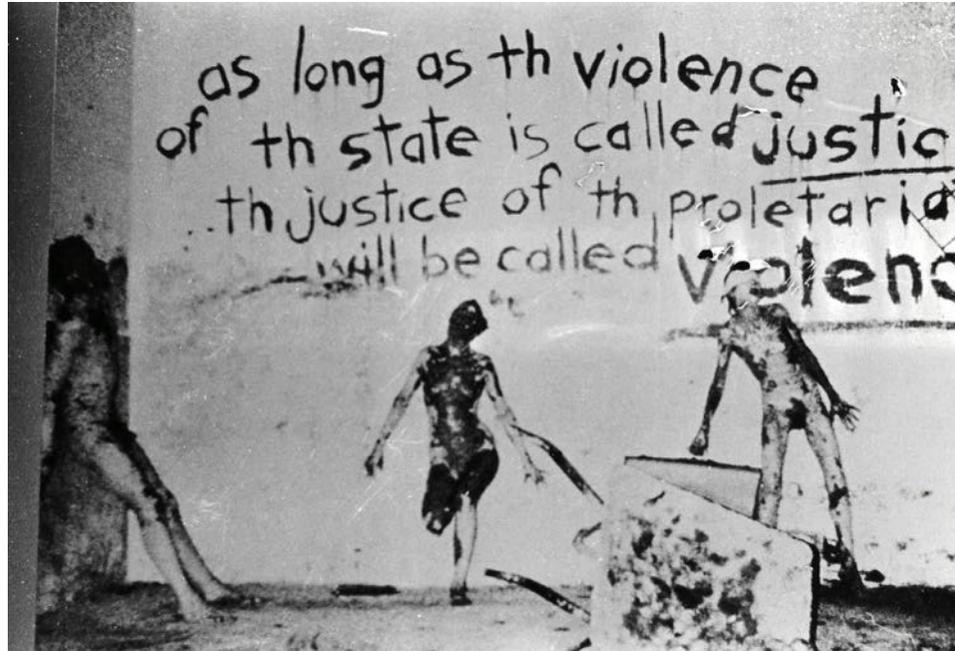
Peter Cheslyn, Robert McDonald (who later formed Art Unit, an artists' run space in Sydney⁶³), Alison Davey, David Watt, Derek Kreckler, Stephen Wigg, Richard Grayson and Michele Luke were the most prominent of the younger artists then in Adelaide.

Cheslyn, McDonald and Kreckler all worked in experimental theatre productions, primarily with the All Out Ensemble directed by Nicholas Tsoutas. The Ensemble presented productions by Australian writers which incorporated a significant contribution from the visual as well as the performing arts. Tsoutas preferred a multi-disciplinary approach, apparent in performances like *Basket Weaving for Amateurs* (a play about



Jim Cowley, *Mentation*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, 1978.

Photographs from the artist's collection.

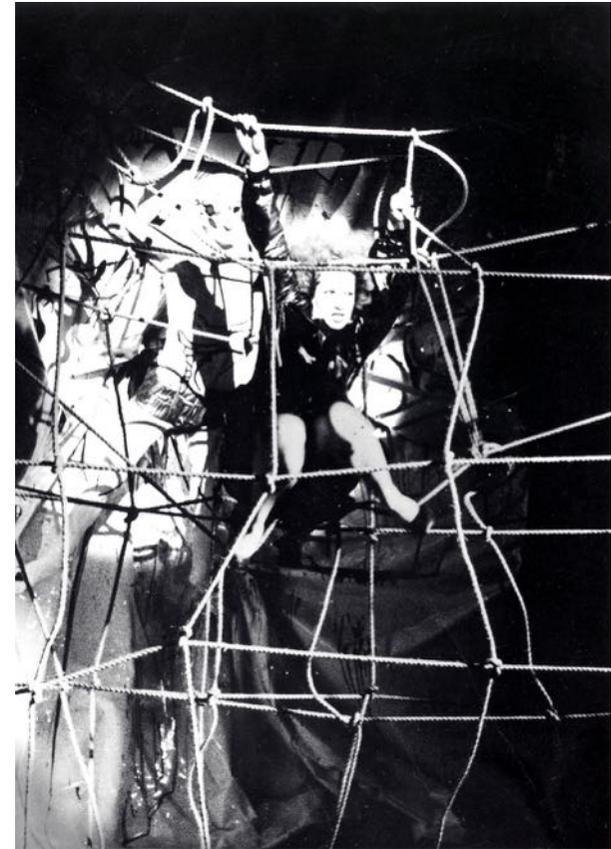


All Out Ensemble,
Last days of the
World, Experimental
Art Foundation,
Adelaide, 1983.
Photograph from the
Nicholas Tsoutas's
collection.

Margaret Preston) and Last days of the World (an apocalyptic production scripted by Christopher Barnett). In these and other productions a multi-media event was designed so that the audience moved through the performance, where simultaneous events were presented.

Many of the younger artists did not make a firm distinction between performance art and theatre. They had witnessed the self-referential nature of much experimental art and wanted to distance themselves from that type of practice. Richard Grayson who had been involved with the Basement Group in England, before he came to Australia in 1984, explained the shift in political

terms, arguing that the older generation of performance artists had concentrated on the existential quest of the individual. According to Grayson the younger generation questioned the political and cultural roots of such a philosophy.⁶⁴ Although a shift in theory is apparent in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and this in turn influenced the content of performance art (one witnesses a more structuralist-political interpretation of the individual's place in society), Grayson's comments on the 'older generation' are too generalised. There were many approaches to performance art which cannot be categorised in terms of the existential quest of the individual.

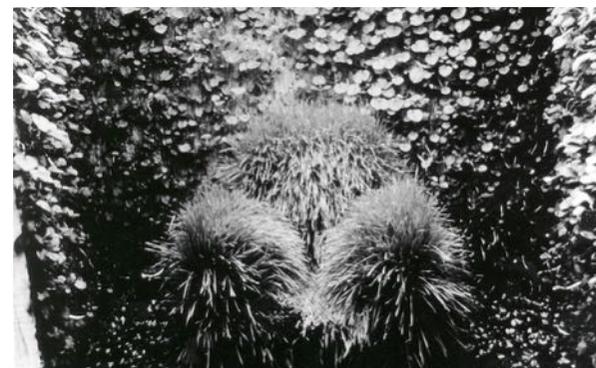


Peggy Wallach
performing in Basket
Weaving for Amateurs,
All Out Ensemble,
Roundspace, Adelaide,
1980. Photograph from
the artist's collection.



Aleks Danko's early works in collaboration with Joan Grounds brought a sense of fun into performance in order to make poignant social comments on sexuality. *We Should Call It a Living Room* (1975), an 'organic' performance on film, presented a 'growing room' complete with furniture. The 'room' and its contents were planted with grass and the process of growth recorded on time-lapse film. The lounge-

room setting anticipated occupation, perhaps by those who belonged to the furniture, those who would be startled by the 'organic' anarchy reigning within inanimate objects. As the space matured a naked woman took her place in one of the armchairs and, as the credits rolled across the screen, a group of similarly unclad men and women joined the 'organic' madness of a suburban interior.⁶⁵

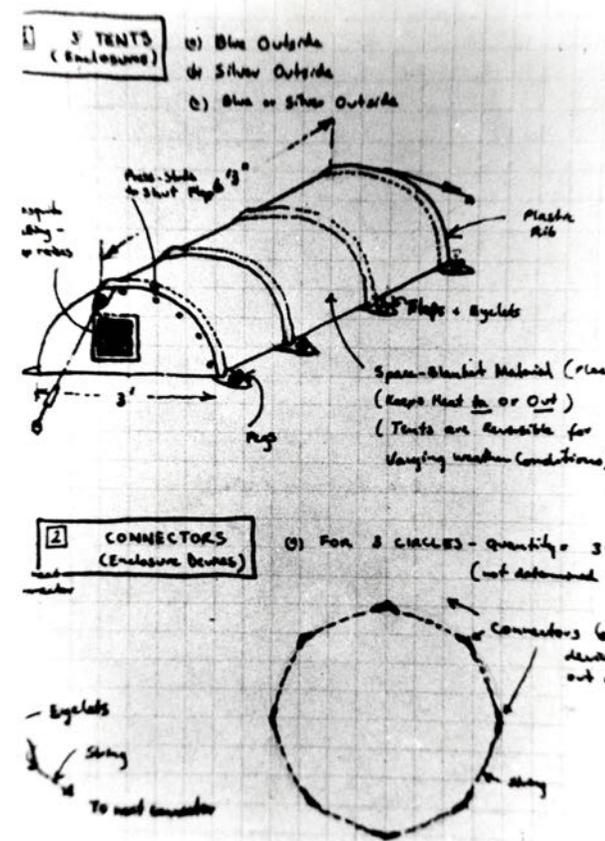
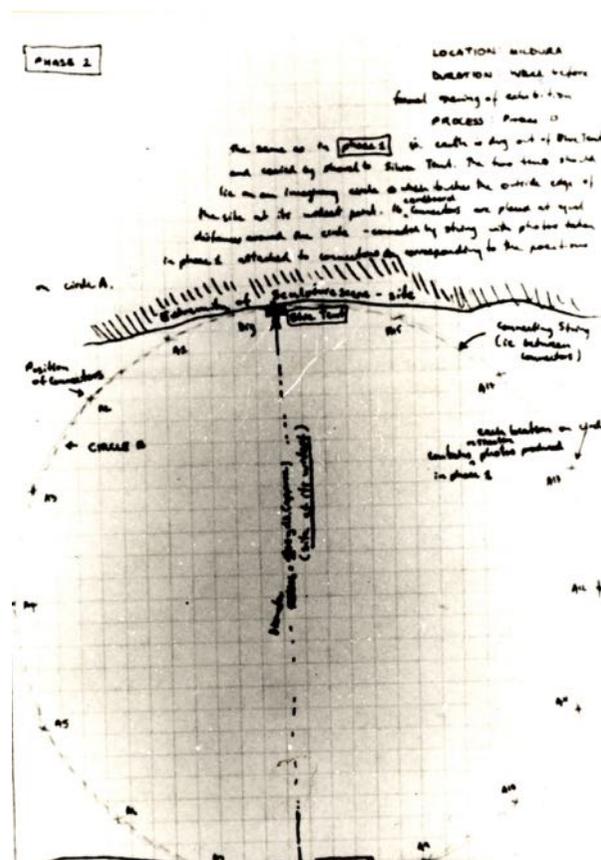


Aleks Danko and Joan Grounds, *We Should Call It a Living Room*, time-lapse film first shown at the Sydney Film Festival, 1975. Photograph from the artist's collection.

Jude Walton, who enlisted Danko as a set builder for Room (1982), concentrated on a similar theme. Suburban madness was created for an audience ushered into a large paper cube. Slides of domestic interiors projected from the outside depicted a 'reality' in crisis, as the washing-up appeared on the clothes-line, wearable garments were distracted from their mundane roles, and the noise of an ordered environment change into chaos. The audience taped into the 'room', trapped in the psychic space of housework gone haywire, could only stop the madness by breaking out. The participatory structure presented the audience with a decision: either they escaped or they remained locked within the neurosis of mundane work.

Like Danko, Peter Tyndall uses wit to analyse the social conventions of an art supposed to express a 'meaning.' The artist's critique of the gaze in the 1980s was precipitated by an opus of non-representational art and performance works which questioned the role of art and the position of the artist.

Tyndall's performances questioned art and its ritualised activities. Work in the mid-1970s, like *Performed in the Storm/Observed in the Calm*, or a *Windy Day for Art* (1976), which involved the artist clutching the drawing of an object being blown by the wind as friends watched from a warm lounge room,⁶⁶ and *All/This/Art/And/Not/A/Drop/To/Drink* (Apollo Bay, 1975), where the artist held 'word cards' against the panoramic backdrop of the ocean,⁶⁷ were simple actions presented in non-art contexts by 'an artist.'



Imants Tillers, *Enclosure*, performance / installation, Sydney beach, 1973. Photograph from *Art and Australia*, July/Sep 1975, page 55.

Imants Tillers, *Enclosure*, performance / installation, Sydney beach, 1973. Photograph from *Art and Australia*, July/Sep 1975, page 59.



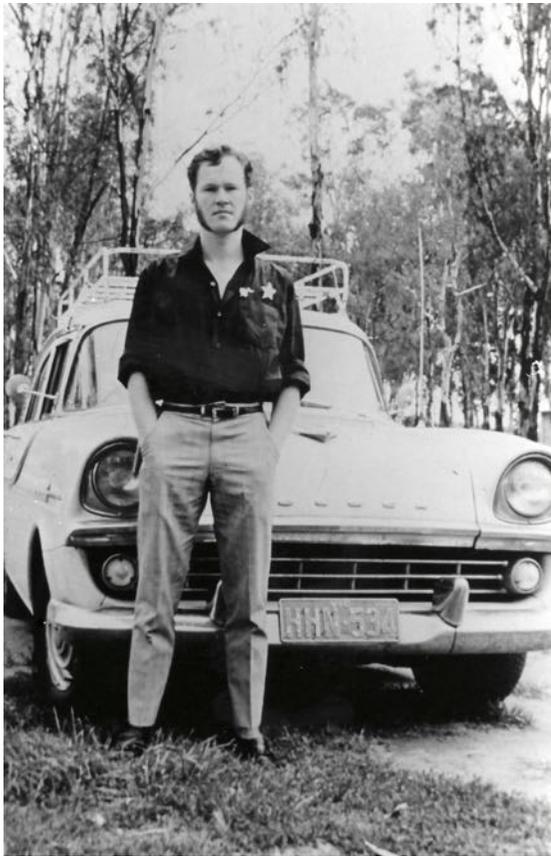
Peter Tyndall, *A Person Looks at a Work of Art / Someone Looks at Something ... Performed in the Storm / Observed in the Calm, or a Windy Day for Art*, 1976. Photograph from the artist's collection.



Peter Tyndall, *A Person Looks at a Work of Art / Someone Looks at Something ... Painting Red Poles White*, Monash University. Artists in Residence program 1975. Photograph from the artist's collection.

Painting Red Poles White (1975), where the artist simply photographed a workman changing the colours of a line of barrier poles set in a concrete grid,⁶⁸ recalls the readymade strategy of Duchamp. Tyndall borrowed an event from life and named it art. All of Tyndall's work to date has addressed the institutionalisation of art. The first series of works entitled *A Person Looks at a Work of Art* (1975) were photographs of the artist looking at paintings in the National Gallery of Victoria. There were no 'essential qualities' in these works; they functioned within a specific social context by unveiling the cultural rituals of the museum.

Peter Tyndall's most elaborate performance, *The Shooting Gallery*, was presented at the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial in 1978 and later in the same year at the Brisbane Festival of Arts. In Mildura the performance was shown daily, from 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., over a period of two months. *The Shooting Gallery* was a replica of a carnival side-show complete with an attendant (Tyndall) dressed as a 1950s-style rocker — greased hair, long sideburns, tight trousers and pointed shoes transformed the artist into a stereotyped fairground character. The 'gallery' within a gallery transformed the context of both venues through their juxtaposition, as the art gallery, traditionally but by no means exclusively reserved for works of serious intent, was confronted with the superficiality of the side-show. *The Shooting Gallery* was likewise reconstructed through its contextualisation. The artist performed all the traditional functions of a side-show attendant: he set up the targets, loaded the air rifle and invited the audience to shoot. However, there were no prizes to be won; instead the artist gave participants their targets after they had tested their



skills and proceeded to discuss the ritualised process of the game and the metaphors associated with guns, shooting and targets. Often these discussions were lengthy debates between the artist and his audience, and the event evolved, like most of Tyndall's work, into a semiotic analysis of art and its context. The Shooting Gallery enticed the audience to play the game, to become involved in a simple procedure that would extend before the eye into a conceptual discourse: *A Person Looks At A Work of Art/Someone Looks at Something . . .*

Peter Tyndall, *A Person Looks at a Work of Art / Someone Looks at Something . . . The Shooting Gallery, Ritual Significance or State Your Aim / Set Your Sights / Make Your Mark*, detail, 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1978. Photograph from the artist's collection.

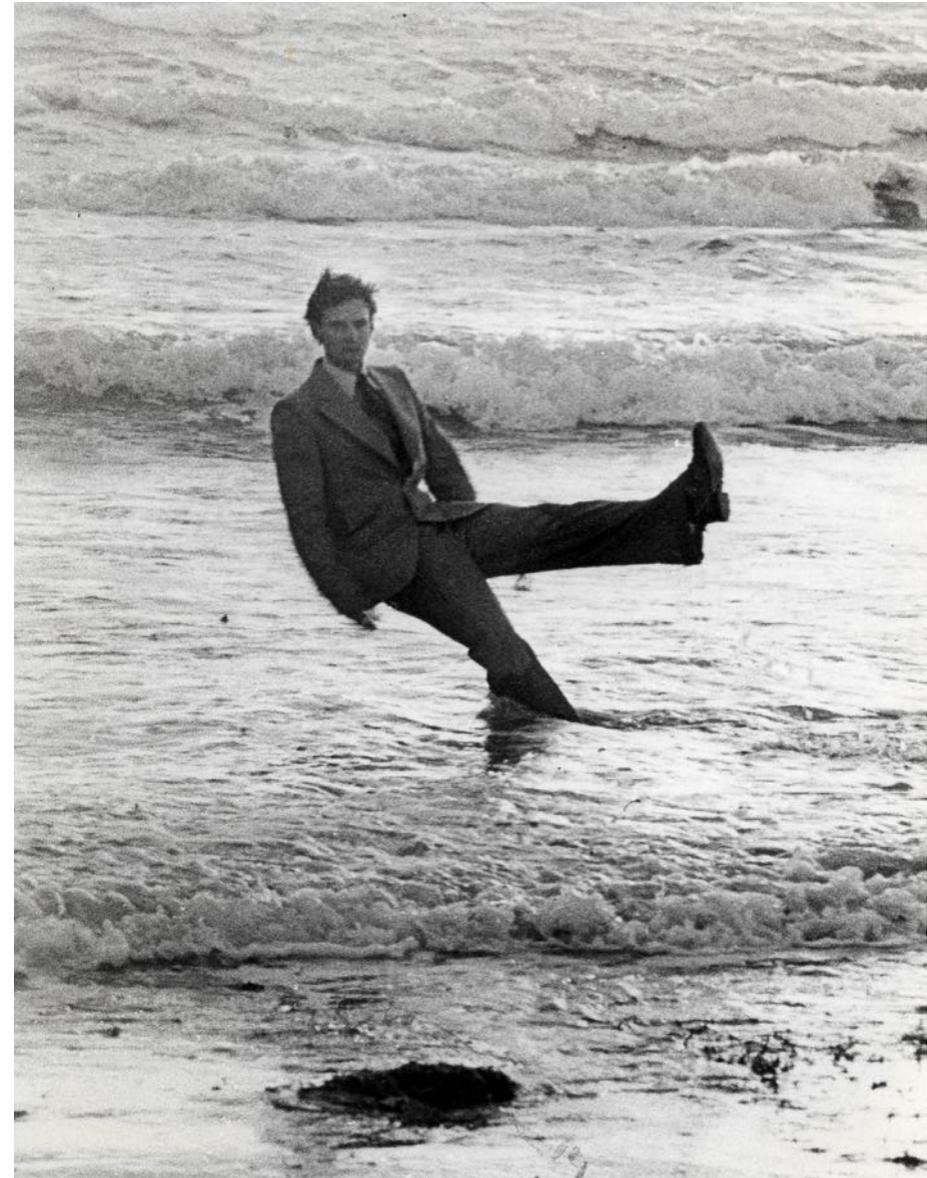
Peter Tyndall, *A Person Looks at a Work of Art / Someone Looks at Something . . .*, detail, Monash University, Department of Visual Art Gallery, 1975. Photograph from the artist's collection.



Performances by artists such as Danko and Tyndal offered a different role model to a younger generation of artists. The humour involved in such events helped to neutralise the high seriousness of experimental art. This in turn made the performances more widely accessible and, one could argue, more attuned to an Australian culture that had a history of satire dating back to Barry Humphries and earlier.

Derek Kreckler's *Wet Dream* (1980) was a performance in two parts. The title of the performance was sexually provocative yet the action was ridiculous. The artist, dressed in a new business suit, waded into the ocean and deliberately fell backwards into the water and floated along the beach. This part of the performance was documented on colour film from three angles. The second part of the performance was presented in an art gallery against an eighteen-metre white wall. A bed was placed in the centre and a man with a saxophone leant against the wall on the extreme left. After several minutes Kreckler entered, dressed in his suit, and got into the bed pulling the covers over his head and

Derek Kreckler, *Wet Dream*, SA School of Art, 1978. Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer James Cowley.



obscuring himself from the audience. At that point the lights went out; six slide projectors, operated by computer, started to show the panorama of the beach, and the saxophone player began the tune 'Beautiful Dreamer.' On the screen the audience witnessed the action at the beach: the man walked into the water, and as the image reached the centre of the screen, above the bed, he fell backwards into the sea. The saxophone player switched tunes to a version of 'Wake unto Me' and the action on the screen continued until the man in the ocean regained an upright position and walked off the right hand screen. At that instant the projectors were stopped, the lights were turned on and the saxophone player disappeared. Finally, Kreckler rose from his dream dripping wet; the 'bed' was actually a hollow structure full of water.

Derek Kreckler was part of a new generation of performance artists who started to produce works at the turn of the decade. Performance works by other artists associated with this generation will be considered in the final chapter of this book. Collaborations by Richard Grayson and Michele Luke; performances produced by Stephen Wigg and David Watt, and works by the Sydney-based group Grotosqui Monkey Choir are important because they deal with relationships between the sexes (Grayson/Luke, Grotosqui Monkey Choir), the sexual stereotypes of masculinity (Wigg/Watt, Mark Rogers) or both. Artists associated with the new generation of performance art were aware of the issues pertaining to experimental and post-object art in Australia. They were also aware of the problems associated with claiming an avant-garde status for performance.

Derek Kreckler does not deny the importance of the experimental generation that preceded him — he cites John Cage as a mentor⁶⁹ — but, like other artists of his generation, he is critical of the idea of the artist as a unique individual. Kreckler is committed to experimentation in the visual arts but he is politically aware of his position as an artist in a society that still values a humanist interpretation of the individual.

Although the experimental art of the 1970s is generally associated with a post-modern shift or a reaction against late modernism, it is apparent that experimentalism is in many ways an avant-garde concept. The avant-garde was committed to newness and progress in the arts, however, in Greenberg's interpretation of modernism this led to the idea that each new style or movement surpassed the preceding one. This reading of progress was contradictory to the pluralism of the 1970s that valued various cross-disciplinary approaches to the visual arts and was philosophically committed to a critique of 'progress for its own sake.' This was particularly apparent in ritual performances that focused on the devastation of the environment informed by a belief in humanist progress. 'Man' as 'the measure of all things' had destroyed the planet with toxic waste and plundered the world's natural resources for his own financial gain. Body artists were also aware that the humanist doctrine of power and control was misplaced. If 'man' was master of his own house (specifically his mind) why was there so much psychological disturbance? Body artists, exploring psychoanalytic concepts, attempted to reposition what had been repressed by society.

In the 1980s the Western artworld experienced a return to painting and to the established gallery and market system. At that time there were criticisms levelled at the experimental practices of the 1970s by critics such as Bonito Oliva who claimed that artists were tired of ideological interference in the arts, they wanted to return to a more subjective practice and emphasise their own centrality in the work.⁷⁰ According to Oliva:

The art of the immediate past [the 1970s] sought to take part in social change through the expansion of new processes and new materials, moving away from painting and from the static time of the work. Present art tends to discard illusions of what lies outside itself, and to turn back on its own footsteps.⁷¹

Oliva argued that experimentation and the 'hysteria for the new typical of the traditional avant-garde' had come under attack because of its association with progress in the Western world.⁷² However, the Italian critic still maintained the word avant-garde in his descriptive title for the new art, he called it the trans-avantgarde. Oliva's criticism is convoluted and one needs to be suspicious of its claims to suspend ideology as it clearly supports a return to the market after a decade of change where artists had sought to find alternative ways to produce and distribute their works. It is also apparent that a lot of the experimental modes of the 1970s were not concerned with 'new' materials. Some performance artists integrated video and amplified sound into their works but many turned to poor materials such as earth, sand or water. The use of the body in art is not new; figurative and narrative painting both focused on the body. In some ways it is possible to construct a continuum between the return to narrative and figuration in the 1980s and the kind of work being presented by the body artists. The destruction of the environment and the decay of Western society was addressed in narrative modes by body artists and those producing ritual performances. The return to the body and natural materials, an interest in ancient rites and alternative religions and therapies was an attempt to reclaim what had been lost: it was more a return to the past than a faith in the future that one associates with some aspects of an earlier avant-garde.

Responding to the type of criticism apparent in Oliva's thesis, the French critic Jean-Francois Lyotard argued that to reject experimentation was a conservative move. He said:

... in the diverse invitations to suspend artistic experimentation, there is an identical call for order, a desire for unity, for identity, for security, or popularity . . . Artists and writers must be brought back into the bosom of the community, or at least, if the latter is considered to be ill, they must be assigned the task of healing it. There is an irrefutable sign of this common disposition: it is that for all those writers nothing is more urgent than to liquidate the heritage of the avant-gardes.⁷³

Experimental art, as outlined in this chapter, was also criticised by political artists and critics who considered various modes of performance to be self-referential. Body art became the major focus of such criticisms at the end of the decade. Mary Kelly, a British artist concerned with the social construction of femininity, argued that body artists addressed 'the Husserlian body, discovered as what belongs to me . . . the body of the self-possessing artistic subject.'⁷⁴ A phenomenological interpretation of the body isolates the consciousness from the material world. Here the world is known through personal experience, how reality appears to be from a subjective point of view.⁷⁵ In Australia Terry Smith expressed a similar position when he withdrew work from the Act 1 exhibition because he objected to the title 'performance art.'⁷⁶

A survey of performance art in the 1970s shows that there were many approaches to the field and that body art should not be foregrounded. The body artists were concerned with the subjective space of the self; they believed that by focusing on repressed fears and desires that they could transgress the polite codes of a civilised society. The acceptance of this form of performance was consolidated in Australia in 1979 when European Dialogue: the 3rd Biennale of Sydney presented performances and documentation by Hermann Nitsch, Klaus Rinke, Jurgen Klauke and Mike Parr.⁷⁷ In many ways the transgressive response, especially evident in male artists' works, re-enacted a conventional Oedipal revolt: the desire of the sons to murder the fathers, but, it is also apparent that some of the most significant works of body art were concerned with the social construction of sexuality. In the following chapter it will be argued that a misreading has silenced this aspect of the work. Furthermore, a misreading of body art separates the body works from other practices of performance art. Artists cannot be neatly categorised into different performance art compartments, the complexities of a practice that focuses on the body need to be taken into account and placed within a socio-political context.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See S. Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF: A History of the Experimental Art Foundation, 1974-1984*, EAF Press, Adelaide, 1984, p. 37.
- 2 D. Brook, 'Imants Tillers and the Redefinition of Art in Australia', *Art and Australia*, July-September 1975, p. 55.
- 3 See D. Brook, 'From the Margin', *Agenda* vol. 1, no. 2, August 1988, special supplement *Art Papers*, pp. 8-10, and 'Towards a Definition of a "Conceptual Art"', *Leonardo*, no. 5, 1972, pp. 49-50.
- 4 D. Brook, 'Imants Tillers', p. 59.
- 5 D. Brook, 'Imants Tillers', pp. 56-8.
- 6 This example was used by Brook in his essay 'Post-object Art in Australia and New Zealand' 1976, published in S. Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF*, p. 21.
- 7 D. Brook, 'Art and the Social Institutions', in S. Britton, (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF*, p. 19.
- 8 D. Brook, 'Post-object Art', p. 24.
- 9 See D. Brook, 'A New Theory of Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1980, pp. 305-21. George Dickie's essay 'The Institutional Conception of Art' in B.R. Tilgmann (ed.), *Language and Aesthetics*, Kansas University Press, Kansas, 1973, pp. 21-30, caused considerable debate within the 'ordinary language' school of aestheticians. The essays collected in G. Dickie and R. Sclafani, (eds.), *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1977 present the most rigorous explications of the 'institutional' theory and its faults to date. See especially: A. Danto, 'The Artistic Enfranchisement of Real Objects: The Artworld', pp. 22-35; T. Cohen, 'A Critique of the Institutional Theory of Art: The Possibility of Art', pp. 183-95; G. Dickie, 'A Response to Cohen: The Actuality of Art', pp. 196-200; and M. Weitz, 'Wittgenstein's Aesthetics', pp. 474-83. The ordinary language aestheticians were applying their theories to the late works of Ludwig Wittgenstein, see C. Barrett, (ed.), *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, compiled from notes taken by Y. Smythies, R. Rhees and J. Taylor, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1967.
- 10 G. Dickie, 'A Response to Cohen', p. 196.
- 11 G. Dickie, 'The Institutional Conception of Art', p. 29. Considering Duchamp, Dickie wrote: 'Our attention is forced away from the object's obvious properties to a consideration of the objects and their social context.'
- 12 See especially T. Cohen, 'A Critique of the Institutional Theory of Art', pp. 183-95, where the author engages in a debate with Dickie's theory using Duchamp's ready-mades.
- 13 D. Brook, 'A New Theory of Art', p. 305.
- 14 See D. Brook, 'Art and the Social Institutions' (1977), in S. Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF*, pp. 16-20.
- 15 C. Brice, 'Police Dilemma in Bomb Case: An Extortion or a Prank?', *Advertiser*, 1 December 1979, p. 1.
- 16 C. Brice, 'Police Dilemma in Bomb Case'.
- 17 . The Editor, 'The Skunk Oil File', *Advertiser*, 4 December 1979, p. 5.
- 18 D. Brook, 'Skunk Oil "Work of Art"', Letters to the Editor, *Advertiser*, 6 December 1979, p. 5.
- 19 D. Brook, 'Skunk Oil'.
- 20 D. Brook, 'Skunk Oil'.
- 21 D. Brook, 'Skunk Oil'.
- 22 D. Brook, 'A New Theory of Art', p. 305.
- 23 The theoretical value or status of Brook's theory for artists associated with the Experimental Art Foundation is evident in their documentary publication, where Chapter 2, 'Theory', consists exclusively of reprints of Donald Brook's essays, some of which were first published as small press publications by the EAF. The editor introduced the essays saying: Donald Brook is recorded in Noel Sheridan's diary of 1975 as helping to build partitions and fix the wiring at the EAF; to put a theory into practice there must be a physical site for it, and luckily the most respected art theorist in Australia is also good with his hands. The theories that Donald Brook gave to those who came and listened, and to many others who read them in various forms, created the fundamental base on which the whole rationale for the Foundation rested. Five of the many papers he wrote, delivered and/or published during the period 1975-77 when he was working closely with the EAF are reproduced here.
- S. Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF*, (p. 16.)
- 24 This statement was displayed in the foyer of the EAF and was reprinted on the inside front cover of N. Sheridan (ed.), *The Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, South Australia*, EAF Press, Adelaide, 1979.
- 25 Taped interview with Bob Ramsay, March 1988.
- 26 See D. Kerr, 'A Seeker of New Meanings', in S. Britton (ed.), *A Decade of the EAF*, p. 14.
- 27 D. Brook, 'A New Theory of Art', p. 307.
- 28 Statement dated 21 August 1975, signed by Donald Brook as the Chairman of the Experimental Art Foundation, reprinted in S. Britton (ed.), p. 34.
- 29 Taped interview with Stelarc, 19 August 1987.
- 30 These observations are based on my own memory of the performance and the controversy that surrounded it, which generated debate in the days after the event. There is no documentation, as far as I am aware, which outlines the performance in any detail.
- 31 In N. Sheridan (ed.), no pag.
- 32 See especially his comments in 'Idea Demonstrations: Body Art and "Video Freaks" in Sydney', *Studio International*, vol. 185, no. 956, June 1973, p. 269, where he writes: 'Everywhere the question comes up: May I not butcher my enemies (or my friends, or strangers for that matter) as art?' and a little earlier in the article: 'One might well inquire whether the artistic doctrines of aesthetic disinterestedness and "physical distance"

- have crippled us, or whether we are secretly grateful for the opportunity to operate Roman appetites under an eighteenth-century rationalistic licence.’
- 33 D. Brook, ‘Imants Tillers and the Redefinition of Art in Australia’, p. 59.
- 34 D. Brook, ‘A New Theory of Art’, p. 321.
- 35 D. Brook, ‘From the Margin’, *Agenda*, vol. 1, no. 2, August 1988, *Art Papers*, special supplement, p. 8.
- 36 In Australia the published debates between Brian Medlin and Donald Brook concerning the social role of art, and Terry Smith’s criticism of body art, stand as important Australian documents which detail the arguments between the notion of an autonomous art and an art which accepts a degree of social responsibility. See B. Medlin, ‘Culture, Ideology and Power’, and D. Brook, ‘The Nature of Art and some Implications for Public Policy’ in N. Sheridan (ed.), *The Experimental Art Foundation*, and T. Smith, ‘Private Art and Public Work’, in *Act 1: An Exhibition of Performance and Participatory Art*, exhibition catalogue, Australian National University Arts Centre, Canberra, 1978, no pag.
- 37 See N. Sheridan and I. de Gruchy (eds.), *The Experimental Art Foundation*, EAF Press, Adelaide, 1976, no pag.
- 38 See S. Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF*, pp. 46-7.
- 39 See R. Goldberg, *Performance Art from Futurism to the Present*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1988, first published as *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1979.
- 40 See especially R. Goldberg, ‘Performance: A Hidden History’ in G. Battcock and R. Nickas, (eds.), *The Art of Performance: A Critical Anthology*, Dutton, New York, 1984, pp. 24-36.
- 41 See P. Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, tr. M. Shaw, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984.
- 42 M. Parr, *Pensees a la Carte*, artist’s broadsheet, 28 April 1975, as quoted by B. Murphy in *Some Recent Art in Adelaide, Project 18*, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1977, p. 3, note 3.
- 43 See H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1955 and *An Essay on Liberation*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969.
- 44 See L. Althusser, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’ in *Lenin and Philosophy*, tr. B. Brewster, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971, pp. 127-86.
- 45 L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp.127-86.
- 46 C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, Abacus, London, 1980.
- 47 See J. Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*, Marion Boyars, London, 1978.
- 48 The change of focus for 1980s feminism was undoubtedly precipitated by the growing interest within British Marxism in structuralist theories. One of the first books to analyse the significance of psychoanalysis for feminism was Juliet Mitchell’s influential text, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and women*, Vintage, New York, 1975. In the early 1980s a psychoanalytic interpretation was continued in J. Mitchell and J. Rose, (eds.), *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*, Macmillan, London, 1982, where the authors included valuable introductions to the texts of Lacan. In the same year Jane Gallop published *Feminism and Psychoanalysis — The Daughter’s Seduction*, Macmillan, London, 1982.
- 49 Body art will be considered in Chapter 3; ritual practices tend to be used by many performance artists — the reasons for this will be discussed in the following chapter and in Chapter 4, where an ecological philosophy will be considered.
- 50 Excerpts from script reprinted in N. Sheridan (ed.), *The Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, South Australia*, E.A.F. Press, Adelaide, 1979, no.pag.
- 51 S. Richter, ‘Rules of the game’, *Art Network*, no. 2, Spring 1980, p. 41.
- 52 S. Richter, *Art Network*, p.41.
- 53 S. Richter, *Art Network*, p.41.
- 54 S. Richter, *Art Network*, p.41.
- 55 Taped interview with Bob Ramsay, March 1988.
- 56 Information supplied by Bob Ramsay for research purposes.
- 57 Information supplied by Bob Ramsay for research purposes.
- 58 Taped interview with Bob Ramsay, March 1988.
- 59 D. Brook, ‘Imants Tillers and the Redefinition of Art in Australia’, p. 55.
- 60 See documentation of Hobba’s work in N. Sheridan, (ed.), and S. Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF*, p. 43.
- 61 Taped interview with Jim Cowley, March 1988; see also documentation in N. Sheridan (ed.), *The Experimental Art Foundation*.
- 62 Documentation in N. Sheridan (ed.), *The Experimental Art Foundation*.
- 63 See R. McDonald and J. Pryor (eds.), *Final Verse: Art Unit 82-85*, Sylvester Studios, Redfern, 1988. The then new generation of performance artists will be discussed in Chapter 5.
- 64 Taped interview with Richard Grayson, April 1988.
- 65 The film *We Should Call It a Living Room* was first shown at the Sydney Film Festival in 1975 and screened later that year in the *Performance, Documents, Film, Video* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria.
- 66 Peter Tyndall, in artists’ chronicle section in N. Howe, ‘A History of Australian Performance Art’, unpublished manuscript, no pag.
- 67 Peter Tyndall in N. Howe, ‘A History of Australian Performance Art’.
- 68 Peter Tyndall in N. Howe, ‘A History of Australian Performance Art’.
- 69 D. Kreckler, *Conceptual Theatres 1978-1990*, Master of Arts by Studio and Research Paper, Sydney College of the Arts, 1990.
- 70 See A. B. Oliva, ‘The International Trans-Avantgarde’, *Flash Art*, October-November, 1982, pp. 36-38.
- 71 B. Oliva, ‘The International Trans-Avantgarde’, p.36.
- 72 B. Oliva, ‘The International Trans-Avantgarde’, p. 36.

- 73 J-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, tr. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986, p. 73.
- 74 See M. Kelly, 'Re-viewing Modernist Criticism', *Screen*, vol. 22, no.3, August 1981, p. 54. Husserl is considered to be the 'father' of phenomenology; Merleau-Ponty, discussed in Chapter 1, continued work in the area and was contemporary in the 1950s and 1960s.
- 75 See J. Hospers., *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1956; rev. edn., 1981, p. 530-1.
- 76 Smith had been planning to exhibit a political community-based work, which would encourage participation from the local community in Canberra. His essay titled 'Private Art or Public Work' presents a strong critique of body art. See *Act 1: An Exhibition of Performance and Participatory Art*, exhibition catalogue, Australian National University Arts Centre, Canberra, no pag.
- 77 For an analysis of some of the works shown by these artists see M. Parr; 'Parallel Fictions: The Third Biennale of Sydney, 1979', *Art and Australia*, vol. 17, no. 2, December 1979, pp. 172-182.

CHAPTER THREE

BODY ART, SHAMANISM AND WESTERN RITUAL

Body art often depicts, in a most obsessive way, the crisis of the subject in an advanced technological age that appears to value progress and rationality above human emotions and psychological states. The term 'body art' is in some ways inadequate as a description since most artists working in performance make a physical appearance in their events. The way in which the artist appears in body art needs to be outlined to ascertain the difference between this and other forms of performance.

The physical and psychological *presence* of the artist is foregrounded in body art; the artist's body and the actions performed on that body become the major focus of the work. In many ways the concentration on the body and psyche presents a narcissistic relationship. The audience can interpret this focus on the artist as a heroic act which centres on the artist's ego and personality, however, in this chapter I want to suggest that the situation is more complex since it is apparent that what one sees is a representation of the split subject: a subject in crisis. The crisis that the subject experiences is brought about by what is rejected, denied and forgotten in Western culture. Memories of primal fears, anxieties associated with the socialisation of the individual, and the alienation of the mind from the body are all representative of what is lost. The following analysis draws on a psychoanalytic interpretation of narcissism (outlined below) which recognises that the ego is a mythical unity. The individual is not a unified whole but a fragmented subject. Body art represents this subject for the audience, often underlining self-hatred by inflicting pain on the body.

Many of the performances presented by the body artists were cathartic, existential and obsessive actions which sought to liberate a repressed sexuality or psyche entrapped within a body that had been codified by a rational society. Body art was deeply connected to the ideas of the 1960s and early 1970s, which proclaimed strategies for 'instinctual revolt' (Marcuse) and the liberating effects of abreactive therapy (Reich). Mike Parr, who was Australia's major protagonist in the field, read the works of Sigmund Freud, was interested in Reich's abreactive therapy and considered R.D. Laing's

analysis of schizophrenia important to his work.¹ In *150 Programmes and Investigations* (1971/72) and *Rules and Displacement Activities* (1973/78) there were numerous cathartic exercises and instructions designed to highlight the fragmentation of the subject. 'Wear strips of meat taped to the inside of your thighs . . . until the meat begins to rot' was, according to Parr, 'an ironical reverse therapy . . . a banalisation of decay, death in the genital area.'² 'Let a dog drink some of your blood' presented the bodily fluids of the man to the animal: it was a way of 'observing one's self turned into food.'³

Abreaction therapy addresses the notion of cathexis; it is argued that energy originating from the instincts can be discharged through the organism.⁴ In this way the subject can be liberated 'from the affect attached to the memory of a traumatic event.'⁵ Many of Mike Parr's works were compulsive urges to act, they were intensive psychological dramas which confronted the audience with what usually remains hidden or repressed.⁶ However, these works were not confined to the subjective responses of the artist, the acting out had an ideological subtext. David Bromfield notes that Wilhelm Reich's thesis which argued that social oppression was the consequence of psychological repression offered a rationale for body art as a revolutionary activity.⁷ Removing personal repression would thus lead to social liberation; Bromfield says: 'Reich helped Parr develop the idea of 'abreaction.'⁸

The meeting of psychological trauma and political resistance was made explicit in the performance *Totem Murder and Totem Meal* (1976) where the ideological fathers of patriarchy were set up as authoritative watch-dogs, overseeing the performance action. Posters of patriarchal heroes (Lenin, Marx, Mao) lined the performance room and 'presided over the decapitation of the rooster who was later eaten by the family.'⁹ Parr had grown up on a poultry farm and was accustomed to the killing of fowl, however, he notes that the performed action 'provoked all sorts of ambiguities and identifications' and had a traumatic effect on family members involved in the activity.¹⁰ After the slaughter of the fowl Parr was covered with the blood and feathers were poured over his body. In 1980 he described the performance by saying:

Totem Murder and Totem Meal . . . included the whole of my house as well as the performance room. Built around a core of activities and a lot of theorising associated with certain tenets of Freudian psychology. The 'Totem Murder' of the rooster (which we as a group preformed — a group that involved members of my family) was conceptualised as a displaced patricide (associated on my part with a castration complex involving the childhood and adolescent impact of my disability) [Parr's left arm is congenitally unformed].¹¹

The performance was a combination of highly personal memories, theoretical concepts and therapeutic action. Analysing the work in *DATA* magazine in 1977, Parr said that *Rules and Displacement Activities*, subtitled *Problems of Socialization*, was a way of trying to understand the earlier self-aggressive actions:

In retrospect, I realised that the self-aggression works concealed as much as they revealed: they were displacement activities pure and simple, and even though I had understood this to some extent at the time, I had been unable to analyse the process of projection and to comprehend it in terms of more basic motivation. During Part 2, I began to re-read aspects of Freud, Reich etcetera and as a consequence, the nature of my physical structure was made clear to me.¹²

Parr's belief in catharsis was common amongst body artists. In fact many artists repeated similar actions. In Europe Gina Pane stuck thorns into her arm (*Sentimental Action*, 1973); inflicted wounds with a razor blade (*Psychic Action*, 1974); and repeatedly ascended a ladder prepared with tacks (*Escalade*, 1971). In America Chris Burden had himself shot in the arm (*Shoot*, 1971); lay in a pool of water surrounded by live electrical wires (*Prelude to 220 or 110*, 1971); and had himself crucified with nails driven through his hands (*Trans-Fixed*, 1974). Vito Acconci, another American artist, bit himself all over (*Trademarks*, 1970); punched out his own image in a mirror (*See Through*, 1969); and masturbated under a ramp in an art gallery (*Seedbed*, 1971). Mike Parr stuck drawing pins into his leg (*Tackline*, 1973); burned a spiral around his calf (*Leg Spiral*, 1971-2); and re-opened the scar of an old wound (*Subjective Self Circle Series*, 1973-4). Mike Parr notes that this 'doubling' of performances by the body artists was in a way inevitable: the intense focus on the psychological state of the individual would necessarily entail duplication of action and images¹³. This in turn presents the audience with a kind of evidence of a shared condition; the collectivity of the unconscious in the Western world.

Marina Abramovic and Ulay worked individually and in collaboration during the 1970s and produced works involving physical pain.¹⁴ Asked about their work in 1976, Ulay said: 'I would call them "treatments" to liberate myself from traumas. I didn't want to exist with such traumas. My art was a kind of freeing.'¹⁵ Before working together the artists produced violent works alone.

Abramovic's solo work in the 1970s was clearly masochistic, in one event the artist presented her gallery audience with an assortment of weapons (knives, loaded guns and instruments of torture) and invited them to do what they wanted to her. As a result 'two men stabbed her in the throat. Then tried to put a gun in her mouth and make her pull the trigger.'¹⁶ Referring to this type of event, Marina said: 'In my work the pain was almost the message itself. I was cutting myself, whipping myself, and my body couldn't take it any more.'¹⁷

Marina Abramovic and Ulay visited Australia with documentation of their performances in 1981. At that time they spent four months in the Central and Western deserts amongst tribal Aborigines, collecting material to produce *Gold Found by the Artists* (Art Gallery of New South Wales, July 1981). In this performance, small nuggets of gold, which were known 'but traditionally, left untouched by Aboriginal tribal culture';¹⁸ a snake, symbolic of the Dreamtime; and a gilded boomerang, were the ingredients used by the artists. The artists fasted for sixteen days and sat motionless at either end of a long table on which these objects were displayed. A large colour photograph of the artists dancing the tango was hung between the pair during the performance. This event appeared to go beyond the type of abreactive works that the artists had

produced during the 1970s. The process of fasting and attempting to remain static throughout the event can be interpreted as a testing of the ego by imposing restraints on the body. However, this type of action, familiar in body art, was ritualised by the artists' use of Aboriginal motifs. The image of the dancing couple, framed on the wall, presented to the viewer the perfect body image, whilst the artists tried to resist the physical degeneration which would have ensued as part of the fasting process.

The transgression of taboo became a predictable part of body art in the 1970s, and, in many ways, such actions appeared to reinscribe conventional myths. However, the original impulse was often disruptive; writing about Vito Acconci in 1980, Germano Celant said: 'The intent is perhaps to insert a subversive element into the tidy, antiseptic and asexual paradise of art.'¹⁹ Despite such claims, many of these actions evoked psychosis: the British group Coum Transmissions proudly acclaimed acts of rape and murder as representative of performance art at its most transgressive.²⁰ Castration, crucifixion and the infliction of pain were recurring themes. Although, many body artists insisted that their acts of penance were not heroic events and that their assaults on the ego were attempts to disrupt identity, this was not always communicated to the audience. The idea of the masculine as master was still in place in many of these events: master of discourse, master of ceremonies and further, master of pain.

The presence of the artist as corporeal body focused on the individual self. The inscription of pain upon the body acted like a signature, an authenticating mark defining the experience of the artist.²¹ Lea Vergine argued that: 'the experiences we are dealing

with are authentic, and they are consequently cruel and painful. *Those who are in pain will tell you that they have the right to be taken seriously.*²² Throughout her book *Il corpo come linguaggio*, Vergine employs theories from psychoanalysis (Ernst Kris, Melanie Klein), existentialism (Jean-Paul Sartre), and neo-Nietzschean theories (Gilles Deleuze) to affirm the cathartic expressions of the artists.²³ Quoting the Marquis de Sade, Vergine argues: 'We have but two alternatives . . . either the crime that will make us happy or the noose that will put an end to our unhappiness.'²⁴

In the 1970s personal acts of transgression were considered to be a viable and necessary negation of a rational order which sought to repress instinctual response through implementing a civilising code. However, in 1974 it was already apparent to Vergine that much of the work depicted a profoundly masculine interpretation of the self:

Much of this art also includes a ferocious misogyny, and this is especially so in those scatological actions where the ingestion of urine, faeces and other products of elimination stands as a symbol for an envy of the womb and functions as a kind of exorcism of the terror of openly competing with the female genitals. This is thus true and proper gynophobia.²⁵

The transgression of social codes, through the expression of a would-be instinctual response, thus tended to affirm conventional stereotypes. The idea that one could get in contact with one's instincts was problematic. It presumed that in some way an instinctual existence (a kind of animalism) would be free of repression. However, the artist could only tap the imaginary²⁶ fears in the unconscious and these were necessarily read through the conscious mind.²⁷ These fears were part of a collective unconscious, what had been repressed by society: the fear of castration; the terror of woman (as all engulfing mother and castrated subject, evident in the bleeding wound of menstruation), and the anxiety associated with the fragmented body (described below) are images which surface again and again in body art.

The subject's hatred for what s/he loves is a commonplace fantasy in the psychoanalytic concept of narcissism. According to Jacques Lacan the formation of the ego begins at the 'mirror stage'.²⁸ The subject identifies 'the visual Gestalt of his own body'²⁹ and an ideal unity is constituted externally and an alienated self is reflected back to the subject. Thus Lacan argues that the ego is formed on the 'basis of an imaginary relationship of the subject with his own body'.³⁰ The wholeness perceived in the mirror is contrary to the child's experience, it is a mistaken recognition of unity in a visual representation which is other. The formation of the self-as-other creates an aggressive tension within the subject between an earlier fragmented state of the body (motivated by polymorphous drives or instincts)³¹ and the body ideal in the mirror. An erotic, narcissistic, relationship ensues as the subject idealises the imaginary self. Thus identity

for the subject is grounded in a love for the self which is other, a hateful love. The subject is already codified in the visual representation which is interpreted as a whole, unified image. When the child adopts language this codification is extended and the subject's desire is aligned with what the Other wants (Lacan uses the big Other to designate society, language, what he calls the Symbolic), however, there is always a tension, an anxiety, due to the love-hate relationship which develops with the formation of the ego. Body art often concentrates on this aggressivity within the subject and supports Lacan's notion that man 'constitutes his world by his suicide'.³²

In 1963 Levi-Strauss suggested some pertinent comparisons between shamanism and psychoanalytic therapy due to the process of abreaction common to both. He argued that the shaman relives certain events in all their 'vividness, originality, and violence' and then returns to his normal state at the end of the trance or séance; thus the shaman is involved in an abreactive process.³³ However, the anthropologist also stressed that shamanism and magic in 'primitive' societies were cultural codes and were not necessarily closer to some 'essential truth' about life.³⁴ Nevertheless the counter-culture valorised all things different in an attempt to find an alternative to modernisation and the corporate world. The attempt by body artists to express primal fears was in some instances an effort to get in contact with a more authentic experience. However, the pre-mirror stage — the pre-Oedipal states — are fragmented and polymorphous they do not represent an 'authenticity' for the subject; it is the ego that promises a mythical unity not the fragmented body.

Body art is a convoluted practice: on one hand the artist-as-hero presents a spectacle using his own body, sometimes presenting himself as a kind of shaman who can heal himself and/or the sick society in which he lives or both; on the other hand the body becomes the object of torture and is abused in an act of would-be liberation. The bid to reclaim what had been lost often got caught up in a predictable interpretation of the unconscious as a dark place full of fear; artist's representing imaginary fears became fixated on particular symptoms such as castration and the incest taboo. Those artists who presented this kind of interpretation exclusively, tended to adopt a rather conventional metaphor. Other artists who pursued their investigations beyond this point developed complex works which spoke in a more poetic visual language about the fragmentation of the subject and the workings of memory and dream. In Australia artists such as Mike Parr and Jill Orr (who will be discussed below)

worked through their ideas to produce a more sophisticated practice in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The idea of sacrifice, as a transgressive act, is explicit in self-flagellation, which often involves a mix of sexual and spiritual pleasure.³⁵ In the tradition of Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty'³⁶ and the work of the Living Theatre in France in the 1960s³⁷, some body artists continued a sacred-psychic use of the body. According to Artaud, the new theatre was supposed to create a sacred spectacle or carnival.³⁸ The actors of the Living Theatre have been described as priests, and audiences have been invited to have sexual intercourse with the 'holy men' as a way of sharing their sacred powers.³⁹ This sort of attempt to incarnate the sacred is the foundation for many of Hermann Nitsch's performances with the Orgy Mystery Theatre (OM Theatre). Nitsch is probably the most articulate spokesperson for this type of sacrificial event. The artist says he wants to re-enact the rituals associated with Dionysus, the ancient god of fertility.⁴⁰ Nitsch draws on a Nietzschean reading of the myth of Dionysus, where in a state of intoxication 'man' is: 'No longer the *artist*, he has himself become a *work of art*.'⁴¹ Nitsch attempts to reinvest the orgiastic mayhem with a religious sentiment by making correlations between 'the Dionysian myth of redemption and Christ's death on the cross.'⁴²

Carl Gustav Jung, who was arguably the most articulate psychoanalytic voice to address the necessity for a 'symbolic life', criticised Nietzsche's interpretation of the Dionysian myth by insisting that the philosopher aestheticised the ancient conflict between Apollo and Dionysus.⁴³ The psychoanalyst argued that:



Hermann Nitsch, *Action*, 1968.
Photograph from the artist's collection.



Hermann Nitsch, *Action*, 1968.
Photograph from the artist's collection.

in the Dionysian state the Greek was anything but a 'work of art'; on the contrary, he was gripped by his own barbarian nature, robbed of his individuality, dissolved into his collective components, made one with the collective unconscious . . . Supposing the instincts of civilised man were let loose! The culture-enthusiasts imagine that only sheer beauty would stem forth. This error is due to a profound lack of psychological knowledge. The dammed-up instinctual forces in civilised man are immensely destructive . . .⁴⁴

Jung's commitment to a 'symbolic life', by which he means a spiritual existence, refutes the type of free-flowing liberation of instinctual desire popular in the 1970s. The idea that a pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal, desire can be liberated and used to disrupt social codes can be a dangerous strategy for social liberation. The type of transgressive practice advocated by Coum Transmissions (murder and the infliction of pain) is evidence of the way in which such strategies can become destructive. Jung's idea that instinctual forces were dangerous could be misconstrued as a psychoanalytical plea for 'normalisation.' The point is that the eruption of such forces could lead to psychotic incidences which are not 'liberating' but terrifying for the subject. However, some artists in the 1970s were anxious to refute such an idea by looking long and hard at the collective unconscious. Attempts to represent imaginary fears were often efforts to resist normalisation and a way of transgressing social codes. Lea Vergine recognised the duality of the transgressive response when she said:

Two poles remain. On the one hand there is opposition (even if lived dramatically) and transgression (the totality of one's being, which is the being of a divided subject, is placed into question) that do not go past the state of paranoia, that do not connect the past to the future, and that thus move away from authentic possibilities of communitarian significance. On the other hand there is the possibility that the flow of revolutionary schizoid impulses could cause a great deal more than a simple confusion of superficial structures.⁴⁵

In the 1970s nature, whether in the form of the land or the body, was perceived as an original source of information and inspiration for many artists. There was a belief that nature was closer to the truth and that it alone could reveal a sympathetic world-view which, if adopted as an ideological programme, would create a harmonious and more democratic society. This was the basis of an ecological philosophy which developed in concert with the 'natural roots of man' ethos evident in instinctual response theories. There was a belief that nature held the answers to cultural conflict and that the body was primarily a biological vessel housing animal instincts that could be untapped. Writing in 1970 Theodore Roszak said:

The New Left that rebels against technocratic manipulation in the name of participative democracy draws, often without realising it, upon an anarchist tradition which has always championed the virtues of the primitive band, the tribe, the village . . . Their instinctive fascination with magic and ritual, tribal lore, and psychedelic experience attempts to resuscitate the defunct shamanism of the distant past . . . They give us back the image of the paleolithic band, where the community during its rituals stood in the presence of the sacred in a rude equality that predated class, state, status.⁴⁶

The idea that the artist should assume the role of shaman was popular in the 1970s; Jack Burnham argued that: 'It is precisely those artists involved in the most naked projections of their personalities who will contribute most to society's comprehension of itself.'⁴⁷ Likewise Roszak argued that a primitive pansacramental perception,⁴⁸ where everything has the potential to take on a sacred meaning, was evident in visionary and Romantic

poetry which represented an 'original poetic impulse.'⁴⁹ The shaman 'is the one who knows . . . Besides our eyes of flesh, there are eyes of fire that burn through the ordinariness of the world and perceive the wonders and terrors beyond.'⁵⁰ Norman O. Brown's idea of magic and the occult as secret doctrines which liberate the soul⁵¹ is echoed in this type of sentiment: the seduction of a truth in madness. However, the desire for an erotic and orgasmic revolt appears to be far removed from the political promises of the New Left; a participatory democracy born of onanistic pursuits presents a contradiction.

Norman O. Brown's interpretation of magic and shamanism as esoteric disciplines relies on what Freud has termed the omnipotence of thought.⁵² A shaman can only influence those who believe in the powers of magic, in the power of the shaman to inflict his will.⁵³ Jung's warning about the aestheticisation of ritual is also pertinent: the loss of religious belief makes the ritual incomprehensible and meaningless as a 'symbolic act.'⁵⁴

In Levi-Strauss's topography magic corresponds to science, myth to literature and totemism to morality.⁵⁵ Such codes are culturally specific; the Western shaman, imitating ancient rites, cannot hope to extend the 'magical' powers of a 'primitive' society. In the body art of the 1970s, a quasi-'primitive' shamanism was imported into a profoundly humanist society that was already sceptical of its own religious belief. The humanist concept of 'man' at the centre of the universe presented a rational individual who was sceptical of the kind of blind faith necessary to support a purely religious experience. As Levi-Strauss was anxious to point out, 'primitive' man does not have

the same interpretation of self and he does not ask questions about his being; his place and purpose are 'symbolic' in the Jungian sense.⁵⁶ In the rituals of the Pueblo Indians there is a divine purpose: their reason for 'being' is to help 'the Father, the Sun . . . to rise over the horizon and to walk over Heaven.'⁵⁷ As Jung points out, this is not madness, there is no neurosis: they have a 'symbolic life.'⁵⁸ It is also a profoundly decentred existence which knows no 'I' in the Western, humanist sense. Members of the tribe do not ask questions about their purpose, they simply accept it. In Western society devout Catholicism operates under a similar premise: to question the myth of the Virgin Birth totally destroys the ritual of the mass; it is unimportant whether it is true or possible, what is fundamental to the whole religious enterprise is that the worshipper *believes*; then and only then will the magic be preserved and the religious experience fulfilled.⁵⁹

Artists presenting shamanistic rituals in the 1970s embraced magic, the occult and ancient myth; they attempted to use these ingredients to develop a different way of knowing and being in Western society. However, they were operating in a world which had lost its spiritual base, a world in which rationalism and science prevailed.

The body artists who concentrated on the torments of the individual psyche or focused on their own egos as representative of the 'human condition' invariably depicted the crisis of the humanist subject. The blurring of eroticism and penance evident in sado-masochist works represented the ancient struggle between a Dionysian excess and an Apollonian order; however, there was always a twist of fate apparent as the artist enforced 'intense superego restraints on the body.'⁶⁰ As Max Kozloff stressed in 1975: 'The artist teaches, perhaps involuntarily, that exemplary control of one's physical being requires a deadening of its instincts and nerves.'⁶¹

Ironically, this was the antithesis of the original impulse to transcend a repressive society and liberate desire. The audience is presented with a subject in distress as the body artist attempts to represent primal fears, what eventuates is a depiction of the split subject who is not in control.

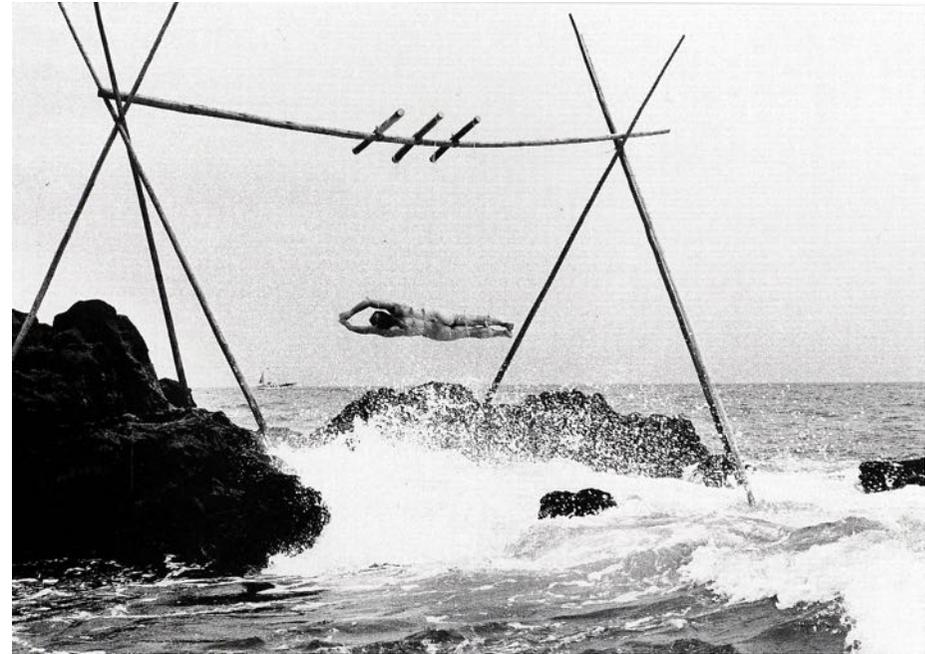
Furthermore, transgression is unthinkable without a code which inscribes the taboo in the first instance; there is an uncanny dependency between the social code and transgression. George Bataille has addressed such a conspiracy most lucidly:

*Transgression piled upon transgression will never abolish the taboo, just as though the taboo were never anything but the means of cursing gloriously whatever it forbids . . . taboos founded on terror are not only there to be obeyed. There is always another side to the matter. It is always a temptation to knock down a barrier; the forbidden action takes on a significance it lacks before fear widens the gap between us and it with an aura of excitement. 'There is nothing', writes de Sade, 'that can set bounds to licentiousness . . . The best way of enlarging and multiplying one's desires is to try to limit them.'*⁶²

The valorisation of 'man', God or nature, in expressive or quasi-religious form cannot avoid the various psychological or theological myths that already inscribe these concepts. Despite efforts to transgress the laws of society, acts of penance often reinscribe the system they try to dislodge. The fantasy of the body-in-pieces, re-enacted through multiple incisions, mutilation and dismemberment, is a collective myth. The repetition of so many similar actions by body artists throughout the Western world suggests a view in common: a subject which has to prove its own existence to itself and to society: a subject unsure of its own identity which hopes to authenticate its experience by reliving a mythical or instinctual scene.

Body works involving self-inflicted pain are successful in focusing on the narcissistic relationship which forms the 'I' of the ego in the first instance. The split in the subject, formed at the mirror stage, sets up an aggressive tension within the psyche between I and an other. However, it must be acknowledged that the image of the fragmented body is a retroactive formulation brought about by the sighting of the ego as a centred image. In Lacan's thesis the fantasy of the body-in-pieces is brought about by the infant's lack of control over its own body: a perceived disintegration of the body in comparison with the ordered and whole image in the mirror.⁶³

A narcissistic relationship is apparent in Stelarc's performance events. An aggressive tension is manifested as the body-as-other becomes the victim of the subject's aggressive response. A master-slave relationship is established between mind and body. Although Indian fakirs have been producing Stelarc-type rituals for centuries in an attempt to acquire spiritual enlightenment, Stelarc resists any suggestion that he performs as a shaman.⁶⁴



Stelarc claims that his work involves experimentation on 'the body', an objectified other rather than the body of the artist. The artist aims to stretch the skin as part of a master plan to re-invent the species. Internal organs which are subject to disease are obsolescent in Stelarc's proposed new world. Without the encumbrance of sickness 'the body' could be immortal. Stretching the skin is the first phase in the development of a species which could survive through photosynthesis.⁶⁵ The perfect body, capable of immortality through the interface of biology and technology, will, in Stelarc's view, catapult 'man' into the twenty-first century. Here body and machine will be united in a kind of transcendental wholeness which will have total

Stelarc, *Seaside Suspension: Event for Wind and Waves*, Jogashima, Miura, Japan, 1981
Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Hiro Suzuki.

Stelarc, *Event for Stretched Skin No. 4*, Art Academy, Munich, 1977. Photograph from the artist's collection.



Stelarc, *Event for Lateral Suspension*, Hardware Street Studio, Melbourne, 1980. Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Tony Figallo.



control. In some events such as *Seaside Suspension: Event for Wind and Waves* (1981) there is a quasi-meditative quality evident in the body suspended in the natural environment; however, this is always complicated by the techno-jargon which accompanies the event.

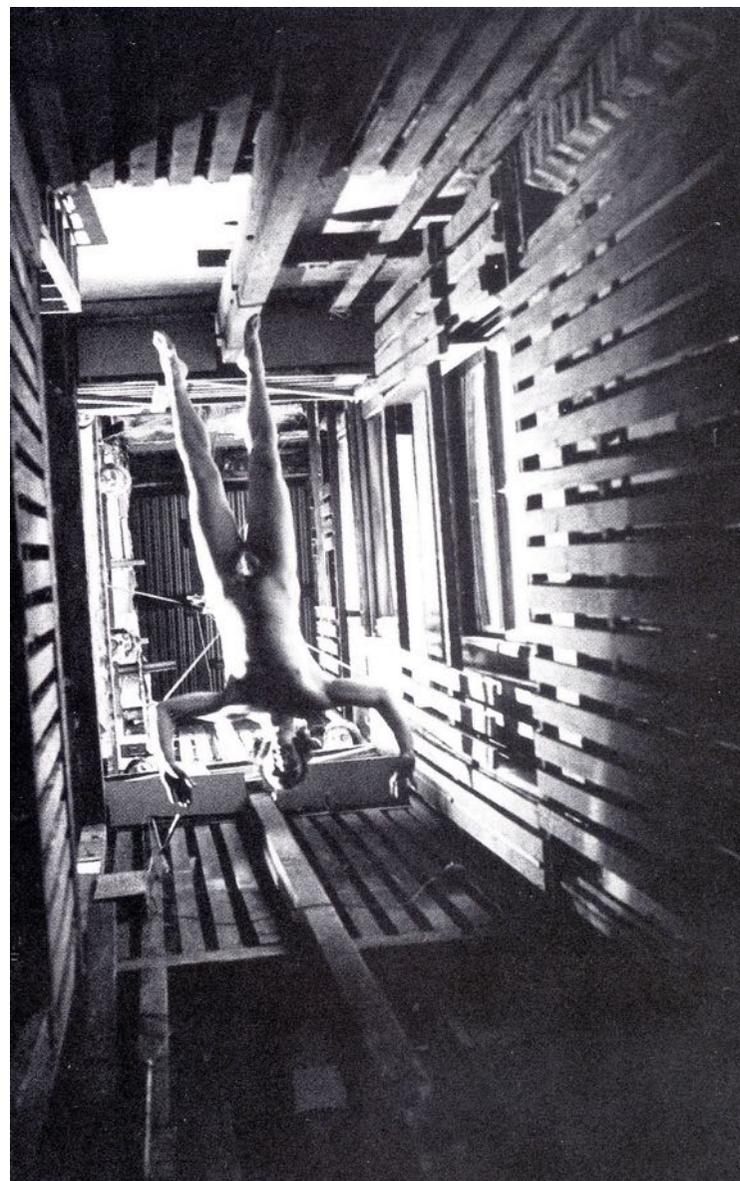
Stelarc's particular man, his own body, is used in an act that involves incision into the skin and almost intolerable levels of pain⁶⁶. *Event for Stretched Skin No. 4* (Art Academy, Munich, 1977), involved the body being suspended vertically for fifteen minutes, upside-down, by the insertion of eighteen hooks into the skin. *Event for Lateral Suspension* (Tamura Gallery, Tokyo, 1978) involved the suspension of the body in an upright position for sixty seconds. During *Event for Shaft Suspension* (Hardware Street Studio, Melbourne, 1980) the body was suspended in a horizontal position, hoisted up and lowered down an empty lift well (6 x 4.6 x 57 ft deep) over a period of thirty-two minutes. In this performance the body had to manoeuvre itself past various obstacles such as protruding beams and floor boards, pushing away the objects it encountered. The sheer physical endurance of these events test the limits of the body's capacity to survive and they also test the limits of the psyche: how much pain can the subject endure? The multiple incisions into the body foreground the aggressive tension within the subject. Freud notes that pain is at the threshold of the ego; breaking the barrier is thus proof that 'I exist and have control over the fragmented body.'⁶⁷ Stelarc, while pursuing sci-fi dreams on behalf of 'man' as an obsolete body, tests the corporeal limits of his own body.

In the late 1970s Stelarc, who was then living in Japan, started to build a robotic arm. Although he continued to produce suspension events in the 1980s he gradually started to introduce the robotic arm and other hi-tech components into the work. The relationship between the body and technology became the focus of the new work; the obsolete biological body was to be reinvigorated through a body-technology interface. The artist argued that:

The psycho-social flowering of the human species has withered. We are in the twilight of our cerebral fantasies . . . We are at the end of philosophy and the human form as we know it . . . meaning now resides only in the network — the relationship of the body with technology. ⁶⁸

According to Stelarc 'evolution ends when technology invades the body. It is no longer of any advantage to either remain human or to evolve as a species. Only the hum of the hybrid is heard.'⁶⁹ Stelarc's analysis of a biological-technological interface presents a kind of mind-body split, familiar in Western culture. The idea that 'the body' as a pure object is capable of becoming 'a post-evolutionary projectile accelerated to attain planetary escape velocity'⁷⁰ appears to inscribe the ultimate division where mind and body are permanently separated.

In the 1980s the artist emphasised the technological aspects of his work through various body amplifications. *Event for Anti-Copernicus Robot* (Newz Gallery, Tokyo, 1985) presented the body wired-up to enable internal body sounds (muscle movement, blood flow, heartbeat) to be heard. The artist performed wearing the robotic arm which was triggered by muscle sensors attached to the body. In his other hand Stelarc held a small globe and lasers were attached to his eyelids which threw pointed beams of light around the performance space. In this performance Stelarc suggests that the tyranny of humanist space, which places man at the centre of the universe, has been eclipsed by technology. On one level Stelarc's works are anti-humanist since the all-seeing, biological body has been invaded by technology thus dissipating the notion of humanist control. However, on another level, technology is the invention of 'man' and the performances represent a greater control for the human being who will be able (in Stelarc's plan) to leave the planet in a bio-technological form to conquer other worlds.



Stelarc, *Event for Shaft Suspension*, Hardware Street Studio, Melbourne, 1980.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Tony Figallo.

The artist insists that his experiments are concerned with structure, not self; that his strategies to redesign the body aim to create a better host for technology.⁷¹ He argues that:

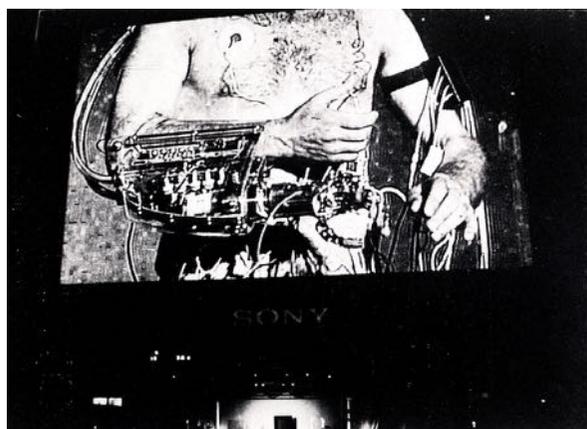
It is time to transcend human history, to attain planetary escape velocity, and to achieve post-human status. To be remembered is to remain embedded in human history. It is time to vanish. To be forgotten in the immensity of extraterrestrial space.⁷²

Despite the artist's futuristic vision, his body is in the here and now; it bleeds and pulsates, experiencing the reality of pain. The machine becomes the interface between body and spectator in events such as *Amplified Body/Enhanced Image* (Science Expo, Tsukuba, August 1985). In *Event for Video Shadow, Automatic Arm and Third Hand* (Caulfield Arts Complex, August 1988), the body, wired through digital feedback, created a spectacle by projecting the softness and wetness (blood flow, heartbeat, muscle contractions) of the inside onto the world around it. The final suspension event was presented in Japan in 1988. *Event for Stretched Skin/Third Hand* combined body suspension through hooks into the skin with the amplification of internal sounds and the activity of the third hand. The body was suspended in an abandoned-monorail station on a remote-controlled hoist. Stelarc operated the motorised controls so that the body ascended and descended over a period of approximately thirty-five minutes.



Stelarc, *Event for Anti-Copernicus Robot*, Newz Gallery, Tokyo, 1985.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



Stelarc, *Amplified Body/Enhanced Image*, Science Expo, Tsukuba, August 1985.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Takatoshi Shinoda.

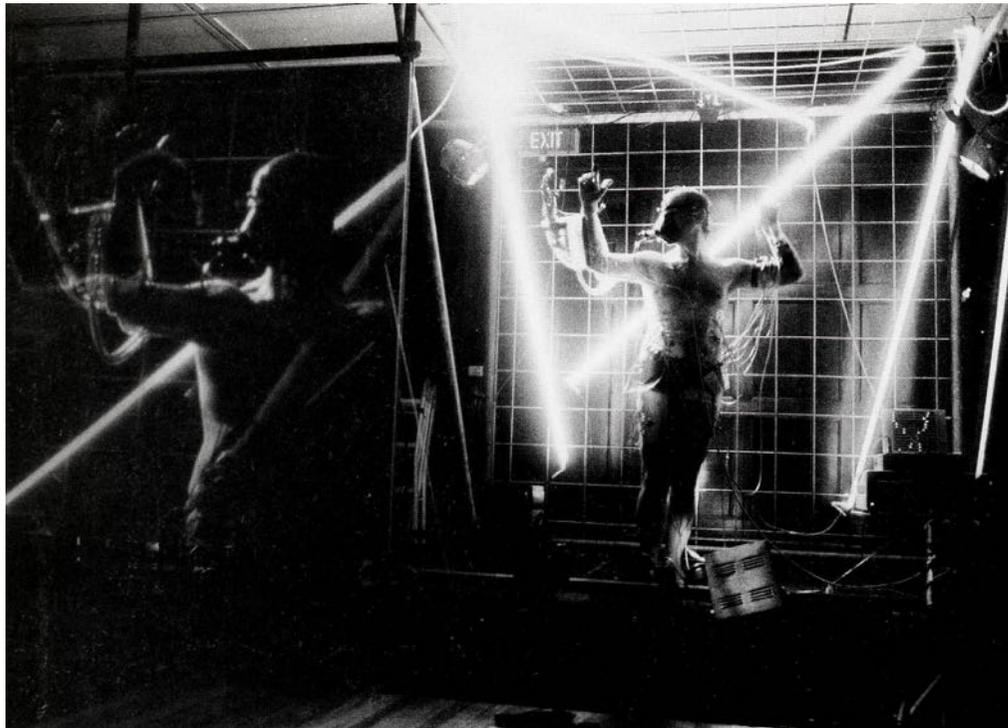
Stelarc, *Event for Video Shadow, Automatic Arm and Third Hand*, Caulfield Arts Complex, August 1988.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Tony Figallo.



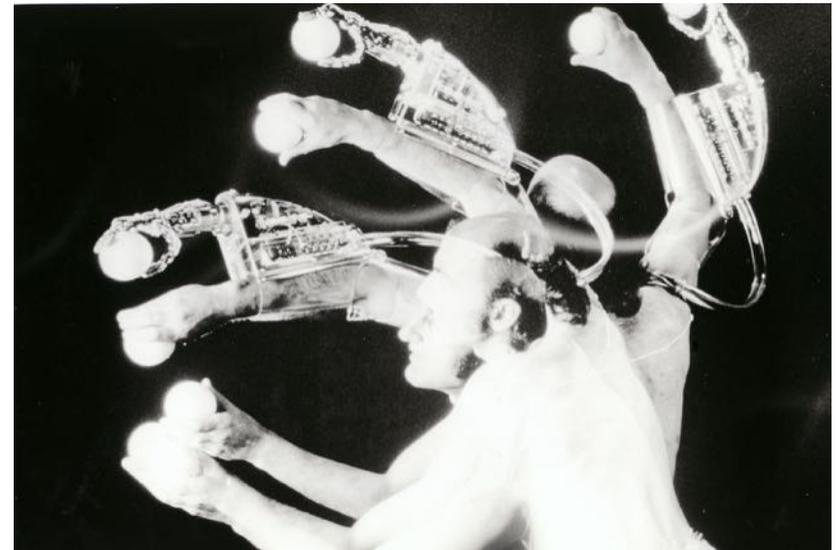
Stelarc, *Event for Stretched Skin/Third Hand*, 1988.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



Stelarc's thesis incorporates contradiction; the suspension events, the robotic experiments and body amplifications are all part of a total project to redesign the body (compare, for example, *Hands Writing*, Maki Gallery, Tokyo, 1982, and *City Suspension*, above the Royal Theatre, Copenhagen, June 1985). The suspensions evoke images of shamanism inscribed by sadomasochistic desire; the amplifications in contrast are experiments incorporating the most recent advances in robotics and medical technology (compare *Sitting/Swaying: Event for Rock Suspension*, Tamura Gallery, Tokyo, 1980, with *Amplified Body/Enhanced Image*, and *Event for Three Hands*, Roppongi Studio, Tokyo, 1983)

The Frankensteinian fear of the monster-machine appears to be re-enacted for the spectator in works by Stelarc in the late 1980s. The moral and biological position of the subject is eclipsed by the imaginary terror of a technology which invades

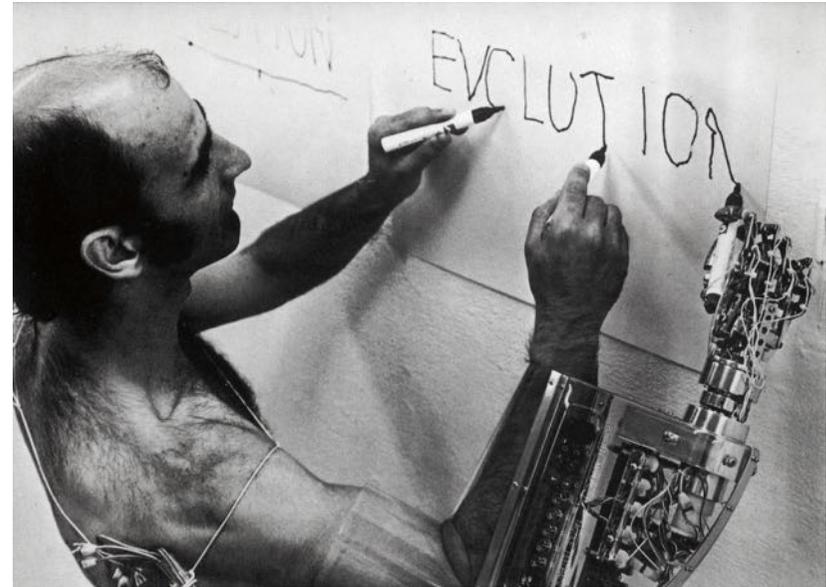


Stelarc, *Event for Three Hands*, Roppongi Studio, Tokyo, 1983.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer D. Ike.

Stelarc, *City Suspension*, above the Royal Theatre, Copenhagen, June 1985.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Morten Schandoff.



the body. Although the artist considers the invasion of technology into the body to be a positive step, and he cites the advances in medical technology which can extend the life of the subject (pace-makers, prosthetic limbs), his audience may not be convinced that such progress is advantageous. Stelarc appears to be committed to a modernist programme of technological advancement. He applied to be the first artist in outer space and, although his proposal was politely rejected by NASA, they were interested in his demonstration of his robotic arm as they thought such an idea could be adapted for astronauts required to do maintenance work in zero gravity conditions. The third arm operates as a kind of surrogate limb activated by external attachments to other parts of the body.



Stelarc, *Hands Writing*, Maki Gallery, Tokyo, 1982.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Akira Okada.

Stelarc, *Sitting/Swaying: Event for Rock Suspension*, Tamura Gallery, Tokyo, 1980.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer K. Nozawa.

The fragmented body, which Stelarc tries to obliterate by doing away with internal organs and metaphorically replacing them with technology, is considered with the aid of psychoanalytic theory by Mike Parr. The aggressivity apparent within the narcissistic relationship was explicit in *Cathartic Action, Social Gestus 5* (Sculpture Centre, Sydney and Paris Biennale, 1977 — the second version of the performance was titled *Spotlight (Myth as Haemorrhage)*. In the Sydney version Mike Parr screened the film of his performance works titled *Rules and Displacement Activities*, after the screening he appeared, wearing a life-like prosthesis on his left arm and sat at a small table. He then produced a meat cleaver and chopped off the 'arm.' In the Paris version a tape-recorded argument between the artist and his father and images of *Totem Murder*, showing Parr and his father posed between rows of decapitated fowls, replaced the film. Parr says that the performance is an 'abreaction of the gap' between the imaginary (the pre-Oedipal, fragmented state) and the symbolic (language, the social sphere).⁷³ This was emphasised for the audience in the second version of the performance where the language of his father stood in as representative of authority. Although the 'arm chop' was a simulated action, it had a profound effect on audience members who did not know that Parr had only one arm as they witnessed blood and guts spewing from the wound. Parr defends the action by saying that 'most of the audience probably knew that I had one arm. All should have realised it from the film, though I am very interested in the way in which people overlook such things.'⁷⁴

Cathartic Action can be read simply as the artist reliving his castration fears, an abreactive response which tried to relieve the subject of his trauma, however, it is also a performance that depicts the fragmented body. The terror of the action for the audience can be associated with the fear of fragmentation on a personal and a social level. The artist says:

I have always thought that the 'armchop' should be conceived of in terms of (a) an alienation of the symbolic structure and (b) as a cathartic invocation of the fragmented body.⁷⁵

During the same year Parr performed various versions of *The Emetics: Primary Vomit. I am Sick of Art (Red, Yellow and Blue)*, which involved the artist ingesting coloured food dye and vomiting in public places and art galleries. The abreactive nature of such events needs little explanation: they are provocative acts which insist that the audience recognises what has been forgotten and repressed, the abject body erupting in public space. The subtitle of the work also points to the artist's critique of art; inserting the abject into the art context is a way of insisting that the quiet contemplation associated with the quasi-religious status of the art museum be rejected in favour of a radical practice which brings the subject (both artist and audience) back onto the scene as active agents.

In 1978 Parr changed course with the performance *Dream 1* (Lake Burley Griffin, Act 1, Performance Festival, Canberra) in which the artist was cast afloat on the water at night and recounted his dreams to the audience the following morning.⁷⁶ This performance, like others which followed in the 1980s, was a reinterpretation by the artist of his own presence. The 'doing' of the action, the attempt to relive the trauma, was displaced by the telling. Parr says: 'It was the first of my performances conceived around the absence of the artist (when so much of my performance before then, and performance art generally, had been about presence or the personality of the performer and the solipsistic act in particular . . .).'⁷⁷ Four years later Parr developed this idea of the absence of the artist in a performance titled *Dream 2 (The Lights of Empedocles)* (Lake Burley Griffin, Act 3, Performance Festival, Canberra). Parr installed a remote-controlled blue light which sat on a blue chair in the bedroom of one of his friends who lived in Canberra. Over a period of several weeks the artist visited the lake on

irregular occasions and turned the light on, with the aid of a transmitter. The idea was that in some way Parr was sending thought messages to his friend; he cites the lake, a large body of water, as the archetype of the unconscious.⁷⁸ This activity preceded two connected events which were planned to occur during the performance festival. On one night a large bonfire was lit on the side of the lake and light messages were transmitted across the water. The following evening the art audience arrived at the gallery for the final part of *Dream 2*. They were confronted by a class of school children sitting in neat rows in their uniforms. Teachers were in attendance to enforce control. The children sat motionless as the audience entered the space. Behind them the flames of another fire could be seen in the courtyard. Diary entries recording the blue light-blue chair episode were hung around the gallery in which the original chair had been placed. The pedagogical chair, standing in for the artist, faced the children. As the bonfire outside subsided to a flicker the audience was asked to leave. *Dreams 1 and 2* clearly show a different approach to the unconscious, although the desire is still to probe what is forgotten and what lays dormant in the mind. Memory and dream have taken on a more meditative quality in these works.

In 1979 a culminative work was produced for the 3rd Biennale of Sydney: *European Dialogue. Black Box: Theatre of Self Correction* set many of the earlier works into a new context for the audience. Parr constructed a black box (14 ft long, 12 ft wide and 10 ft high) in the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Within this box another room was constructed as the performance area. Eight apertures were cut in the outside box which led, by way of black sleeving, to larger cut-outs around the interior room.⁷⁹ Parr produced six performances in the *Black Box* which were viewed through these peep-holes by the spectators standing outside. The viewer looking through the key-hole-like aperture became a voyeur, staring into the enclosed privacy of the interior room. The *Black Box* and the performances produced within it were an attempt to re-assess the relationship between the artist and his audience. Parr had been finalising the editing of his films documenting the *Rules and Activities* performances and had become aware of the problems associated with the camera's gaze and the editing process. The *Black Box* was a way of repositioning the audience and giving them the power over the editing process. Bromfield notes that Parr created the *Black Box* 'to resemble an experimental editing machine'; the apertures cut into the outside of the Box meant that 'the audience were being required to make their own movie.'⁸⁰

The *Black Box* was a way of creating a private theatre within the gallery space. Parr's concern with catharsis continued with the *Black Box*, which he had initially envisaged as a space for his *Cathartic Theatre of Memory* after reading works by Antonin Artaud and the Polish director Jerzy Grotowski.⁸¹ Later he renamed this concept '*The Theatre of Self Correction*.'

On the outside the box looked like a minimal sculpture, however, as the audience approached the space they became witness to the action within. Like Artaud, Parr exploited the idea of a revelatory theatre, arguing that 'The perverse and the mad [*sic*] are still capable of a pertinent contribution to clarity and meaning.'⁸² The idea that the artist's essential role was one of self-sacrifice and that performance was a kind of cathartic theatre of revelation was developed by Parr in the *Black Box* works.⁸³

A number of performances from *Rules and Displacement Activities* were recast in the *Black Box*. Earlier performances were represented photographically within the space by mounting large colour transparencies in some of the apertures. The 'theatre of memory' thus became a kind of self-referencing back in time and was met in the present by the live action. The 'theatre of memory' was a way of opening-up the gap between past and present and between imaginary and symbolic structures.

The mirrors positioned within the box allowed for a lyrical fragmentation which disrupted the gaze of the viewer. This was exploited further as the spectator was free to move around outside the box and chose different angles of vision. In this way each scene would be different. In one of the most complex

performances, during the exhibition, members of Parr's immediate family joined him inside the box. Mirrors were positioned so that the artist appeared in the body of his father or wearing the face of his brother. Green budgerigars, representative of 'souls', fly around the enclosure.⁸⁴ The family was seen to reflect self and other within its own structure, as identity became fragmented. However, this identity was always structured in relation to the patriarchal figure of authority. In a letter to Jill Scott in October 1979, Parr said:

Remember the whole drift of my work is to penetrate patriarchal structure in a highly specific way because I attach it to the fact of my disability . . . in other words I am using my art as a way to get people to look at my disability as well as follow the delights of phylogenetic/metapsychological structures. That is important. [It] Would be strange for a visual artist to leave something so visual as a missing arm out of his art.

Each of the 6 pieces [the performances within the Black Box is linked in obvious ways . . . gradually the whole family is introduced (except perhaps my mother who is conspicuous by her absence), but I agree with Freud, that it is patriarchy that is abstract, being based on a hypothesis . . . requiring inference and a premise . . . the mother side is visual, birth is obvious . . . therefore I am posing super-ego structures (all the pieces are about remaining still or frozen in time), but super-ego structures redolent of the instinctual structures because of colour, high key light (nowhere to hide), sibling relationships, totem murder etcetera . . . super-ego structures as indicative of father deification etcetera . . .⁸⁵

The absence of the mother figure in Parr's works is significant. He says she is conspicuous because of this, and that those things associated with the mother are evoked in some way through the visual elements in the performances. She remains a silent participant, mute in the action carried out by the father and son, but the female is present in other members of the family (sister, wife) and birth is evoked in the image of the child. A cyclical time of life, death and rebirth is seen within the *Black Box* as figures appear frozen by the camera-like gaze and are seen through large blocks of ice or fish tanks positioned across the viewing mechanism. The metaphor of the camera is present throughout the installation-performance and this must be seen in relation to later works produced in the 1980s. Parr says that his earlier works in the 1970s had been about 'being stared at. The eye of the audience was like the Eye of God.'⁸⁶ In the *Black Box* and the works which followed Parr addressed this problem by framing the gaze of the audience in a way which stressed their voyeurism. They were placed outside as others looking into the private space, but, at the same time, he provided the audience with a mobility which allowed them to create their own scenes by moving from aperture to aperture. The structure of Parr's work changed significantly with the *Black Box* and the installations which followed, but his major preoccupations remained the same; the obsessive and dramatic actions of previous performance works were recast for the audience but the attempt to speak the unspeakable remained. The artist says:

The Black Boxes (like all my installations) are Id Spaces, Black Holes, Bermuda Triangles, autistic dilemmas, linguistic double binds, paranoid projections, anuses, throats . . . (any fatal congruence). The audience are dragged into the centre (flies/webs) in order that I might escape . . . More and more the installations underline an absence in order to reveal a presence (a strategic double negative).⁸⁷

The drama of the individual psyche was also evident in performances by Jill Orr. Many of Orr's performances explored environmental issues, however, she also made various links between the body and nature. In the early works the dualism of woman-nature, man-culture was extended and conventional myths described, as the female body became the object of the gaze. In *Bleeding Trees* (3rd Biennale of Sydney: *European Dialogue* and Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1979) Orr drew attention to the devastation of the natural environment. However, the passive, living body became the focus of the gaze for the audience, not the dead tree. A mute and victimised body was strung up crucifixion-style, conjuring the image of an open wound. In another image from the same performance, a castrated body was shown, its head buried in the earth: the mouth 'an opening through which fear can pass.'⁸⁸ In *Do You Speak?* (Mixage Festival, Rotterdam, Holland, 1980) the artist stood in a white shroud, naked from the waist up. In an action which simulated the piercing of her tongue, the subject silenced herself by inflicting an injury.⁸⁹ A dirge, created by Orr's voice, repeated in thirty-two different languages: 'Milate Eiinika?, Parlate Italiano?, Sprechen Sie Deutsch?.'⁹⁰ Over and over the voice continued until it reached an hysterical pitch: the artist 'pierced her tongue' and blood trickled from the muteness of the wound.

In 1979 Mary Eagle described Jill Orr's performances as 'shrill rites of passage',⁹¹ suggesting that the artist was involved in some sort of initiation rite or shamanistic practice. Indeed, working in the late 1970s, Orr did appear as a kind of female shaman for a feminist audience committed to reclaiming a lost matriarchal culture.



Jill Orr, *Bleeding Trees*, 3rd Biennale of Sydney: *European Dialogue* and Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1979. Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Elizabeth Campbell.





Jill Orr, *Lunch with the Birds*, St Kilda Beach, Melbourne, 1979.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Elizabeth Campbell.

The correlation between woman and nature was not critically analysed at this time. The patriarchal myth of woman as a passive and receptive body, that became the object of the male gaze, was not addressed by a feminism which sought to celebrate feminine culture.

Orr represented the female condition under patriarchy in many performances. *Lunch with the Birds*, presented for the seagulls on St Kilda Beach in 1979, focused the spectators' attention on the cultivated image of woman. Dressed in white, the figure of woman — the virgin bride — was mythologised through the representation. Loaves and small fish covered the body, a flock of birds approached the figure: woman became a vessel, a myth to feed from. In *She Had Long Golden Hair*



(Adelaide Festival of Arts, EAF, 1980) Orr used a provocative sound-track of male voices jeering at women in the streets. As the callers chided 'Wanna fuck? Ya need a Man? . . . witch, bitch, moll, dyke . . .';⁹² an elegantly dressed woman entered and slowly tied her long hair to seven chains suspended above. The soundscape was interrupted by female voices narrating acts of punishment associated with head-shaving and other sacrifices. The hair, represented as fetish, was cut close to the head by members of the audience.

Jill Orr, *Do You Speak?*,
Mixage Festival,
Rotterdam, Holland,
1980.

Photograph from the
artist's collection.



Jill Orr, *She Had Long
Golden Hair*, Adelaide
Festival of Arts, EAF, 1980.

Photograph from the
artist's collection.



Photograph from the artist's collection Ritual practices were evoked in all of Jill Orr's works. The use of fire, earth and water, juxtaposed with images of sacrifice and endurance, permeated the performances. In *Split/Fragile Relationships* (*Women at Work*, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, 1980), Orr worked with Chris Mearing who was bound to a large pane of glass. Initially the glass pane was shrouded by a white cloth which acted as a projection screen. Slides of Orr's face, covered in clay, were super-imposed upon one another so that the face appeared distorted and doubled. Orr says that the performance was concerned with internal relationships, the fragility of identity, as well as relationships between people.⁹³ In the next part of the performance the white shroud was lifted and Mearing was untied, allowing the glass to fall and shatter across the floor. A real danger was apparent as the two performers (Mearing with the rope still attached to her waist) had a tug-of-war with each other across the shards of glass.⁹⁴

Jill Orr, *Split/Fragile Relationships*, *Women at Work*, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, 1980.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

Orr's body was also in jeopardy during the performance *Suspension* (Harbourfront, Gallery Theeboom, Amsterdam, Holland, 1981) where the artist was dunked in the harbour, witch-style, before being raised sixty feet in the air. In *Pain Melts 1* (Melbourne University, 1979) the body of the artist was still in a precarious position. Here she appeared as a kind of crucified martyr, suspended on ropes counter-balanced by blocks of ice hanging over small fires. As the ice melted the body dropped to the ground. *Headed South* (Salon O, Leiden, Holland, 1981) also showed the body at the mercy of a constructed balance, as sandbags, pierced with a knife, enabled the artist to be lowered slowly to the ground.

Jill Orr's performances are images she has imagined: glimpses of preconscious thoughts. She says: 'There is a structure set up so that me, this body, can just be simply a vehicle of energy that can go uninterfered with.'⁹⁵ The artist refers to 'gut reactions' and 'exorcisms of fear.'⁹⁶ She speaks of the performances as cathartic actions, ways of expressing private horrors.

Orr's work is not a feminist analysis of woman's position in the world; however the use of her own body underlines the issue of the sexed subject. The horror involved in this description of the female body is an anathema for some feminists. In *Bleeding Trees* the artist offers up her body to the gaze of the other as evidence of the terror lurking behind our pleasure. By representing the body of woman through preconscious thoughts and fears, Orr lays bare the ideology implicit on an unconscious level. In this scheme woman is defined as the other of man in terms of what he is not: constituted by her lack. Much of Orr's work does not exceed the phallic terms of sexuality, where woman is assigned to a position of fantasy; however, her work is most poignant in its capturing of the myth of woman. Undoubtedly, it was the artist's ability to create such images that made her one of the most popular performance artists in Australia.

The connection between ritual and the natural environment, apparent in the wrapping and binding techniques used in *Map of Transition (The Map Show)*, Ewing and George Paton Galleries, University of Melbourne, 1978) and the site-specificity of works presented in a landscape setting, can be misleading for the Australian spectator intent on interpreting such art within the context of the landscape tradition. Although the earth as life-force was important for many artists in the 1970s, the strategies of *arte povera* represented a political-ecological tendency which was not easily subsumed into traditional readings. *Walking on Planet Earth* (1989) clearly shows Orr's persistent concern with the state of the environment. This performance, made for the camera and shown to an audience through photographic documentation after the event, depicts the figure of a woman encountering a bulldozer which has been employed, in the interests of progress, to clear the land for construction. The fragile figure of a woman, dressed in a colonial costume, approaches the machine. Her physical power is obviously inadequate for the task and so she enlists the power of the shaman: the umbrella she holds is ablaze with fire, a symbol of destruction and resurrection — she conjures a kind of magic in an attempt to save the earth.

In the late 1980s Orr continued to juxtapose her body with nature, however, in *Love Songs* (Australian Centre of Contemporary Art, 1989) she contrasted this with an analysis of sexuality. A large video projection

Jill Orr, *Headed South, Women at Work*, Salon O, Leiden, Holland, 1981.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Celia Erins.



Jill Orr, *Walking on Planet Earth*, 1989.
Photograph from the artist's collection;
photographer Virginia Fraser.

showed the artist dressed as a man, and then as a woman, set against the panoramic backdrop of the ocean. Orr appeared in the same costumes within the performance space, setting up a narcissistic relationship between her female-male persona on screen and her male persona-female body in the gallery. A vocalist, positioned on one side of the performance space, interjected with clichéd one-liners from popular songs.

The juxtaposition between the body and its double, available through the mirroring quality of the camera provided the foundation for the performance. Narcissism, and its seductive love-hate disunity, was the focus of the work. However, the image of female masochism, evident in *Bleeding*





Trees and *Pain Melts*, was not duplicated. The cross-dressing in Orr's performance pointed to both a divided self, narcissistically entwined in its own relationship, and a polymorphous sexuality. In this performance Orr appeared to mock nature and pit it against the artificial pronouncements of popular culture.

Sexuality and eroticism continued as major themes in body art throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. It shifted from the funky pleasures of works by Tim Johnson (*Disclosures; Dusting and Tickling*), through the eruption of repressed desire evident in Mike Parr's performances to the representation of the myth of woman in Jill Orr's events.



Jill Orr, *Love Songs*, Australian Centre of Contemporary Art, 1989.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Virginia Fraser.

Many artists using their bodies as vehicles of expression maintained a profoundly serious practice; but there was laughter in some events. Disrupting the seriousness of the phallic signifier, Vito Acconci, produced two controversial works in 1980. *Gang Bang* (Spoleto Festival, Milan) was banned for its explicit sexual representation and its precarious participatory structure. The proposal involved ten drivers, each with a nine-foot-high inflatable mounted on the roof of the car. As the drivers accelerated, nine penises (in camouflage material) and one pink breast (made from parachute fabric) were inflated. A decrease in speed produced the reverse effect, so that the spectacle was in the chase.⁹⁷ In a gallery installation entitled *High Rise* during the same year, Acconci positioned himself in the shadow of the phallic signifier. The artist thrust back and forth on a small cart, straining to achieve the erection of a twenty-five-foot-high penis constructed of plastic stretched over wooden frames. The installation was also a participatory work; the penis was revealed as the spectator manipulated the apparatus. Acconci said the principle of the construction was like a carnival game: 'a test of strength (bang the hammer, ring the bell).'⁹⁸

A similar wit was employed in a less explicit way by Kevin Mortensen in the performance *The Rowing* (National Gallery of Victoria and Adelaide Festival of Arts, 1980, performed with Steve Turpie, Bruce Lamrock and Peter Hopcraft). The joke of *The Rowing* unveiled a patriarchal myth. Three naked oarsmen mounted an elaborate rowing skiff elevated above dry ground.⁹⁹ A blindfolded navigator accompanied the travellers on their journey. The oars were constructed in such a way that the effort to travel simply caused a large canvas blind to be raised and lowered. As the oarsmen thrust back and forth in an effort to row the blind, a complex system of pulleys effected the action. The notion of the blind 'cox', steering the others in a circular and rather futile enterprise, was rich in association. A play on words produced a multi-layered reading: the blind cox drives the others, straining to achieve the sustained erection (of the blind) which never comes.

Kevin Mortensen attempts to contradict himself and his own work;¹⁰⁰ the joke, the dreamscape and other uncanny juxtapositions are used as a way of disrupting the elements in the work. Often a disjunction between the physical, the spiritual and the sexual is evident. Some of the most successful works have interpreted the mystic through dream metaphors (*The Delicatessen*, discussed in Chapter 1) or redeployed the ritualisation of sexuality through humour (*The*

Kevin Mortensen,
The Rowing,
National Gallery
of Victoria, 1980.
Photograph
from the artist's
collection.

Rowing). Many of Mortensen's more elaborate performances have been collaborative events where the exchange of stories between artists has created a multi-layered chain of images and events. Mortensen's solo works tend to be situated within the category of the Western shaman and often atavism, the return to earlier ancestral types, has been valorised. Mortensen has always been interested in the relationship between life and death, interviewed by Sandra McGrath, he said:

When you find a dead bird on the beach, you don't cry your eyes out, you tend to look at the feathers. There is a distinction between life and death, but it is not as important a distinction as is normally assumed. Some things are dead when they appear alive, some are alive that appear dead. It's just the way things are; art basically reflects the nature of reality — making judgements about being alive or dead.¹⁰¹

Camp Atavism (First Australian Sculpture Triennial, La Trobe University, 1981) conflated the Aboriginal Dreamtime story of Thundering Geko with the artist's desire to revert to an earlier form of life. According to Mortensen, the story of Thundering Geko recounts the tale of how Geko stole a small boy from Emu; Emu found the boy and stole him back. Thundering Geko, frustrated by his unsuccessful attempts to recapture the boy, began thumping the ground and thus made thunder.¹⁰² The installation-performance was set in the bushland surrounding the university. A large tent contained the cut-out figure of a pregnant woman, visible at



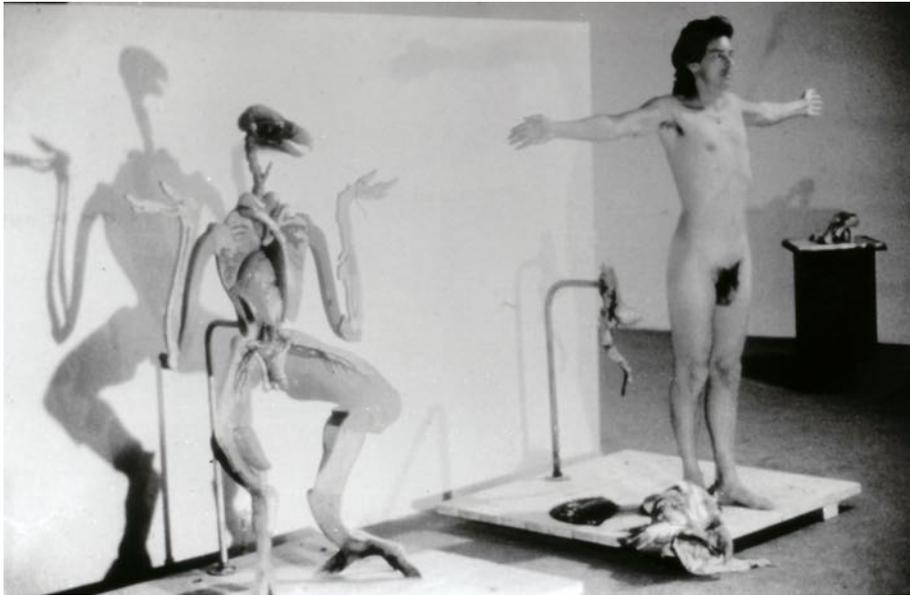
the window. The image of a large lizard was painted on an earth embankment nearby and, at night, a photographic image of the same lizard was projected onto the painting. Mortensen sat on a small stool wearing his bird mask and during the event, due to the illusion created by the light of the projector and the glare from a bomb fire, the woman appeared as if she were giving birth to the shaman figure. Mortensen's re-enactment of the birth of the boy, through the bird-man figure, shows a preoccupation with the mother who can give birth. Mortensen's story was complicated by his insertion of another narrative, in the exhibition catalogue he described the performance as: 'a pregnant woman in a bushfire waiting for an image of her dead brother to appear.'¹⁰³ The shaman figure was thus able to create the impossible by resurrecting life from death:

Kevin Mortensen, *Camp Atavism*, First Australian Sculpture Triennial, La Trobe University, 1981.

Detail showing title of performance projected on a rocky mound at night.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

Kevin Mortensen, *Even the Hairs on Your Forearms Grow in the Same Direction as Their Feathers*, Venice Biennale, 1980. Photograph from the artist's collection.



metaphorically, his actions reclaimed the small boy and the dead brother.

In *Even the Hairs on Your Forearms Grow in the Same Direction as Their Feathers* (Venice Biennale, 1980), the comparison between man and bird was repeated. Mortensen stood next to a sculpture of the bird-man and struck up poses in an attempt to mirror the sculpture. He said that the poses related to the way in which 'we operate somewhere between animals and sophisticated self-constructions of Western society.'¹⁰⁴ During the first set of poses the artist wore a business suit and said that he looked like a 'Japanese business-man posing as a shaman.'¹⁰⁵ The next set of poses was performed in the nude. Writing about the Venice performance, Mortensen said:

*I experienced a fine sense of being part of the world . . . I am something like the sculpture standing beside me, it casts a shadow the same as mine, we are both like birds, both like sculpture and yet neither of us are fully one thing or the other.'*¹⁰⁶

The sculpture beside the artist was a skeletal representation of man-bird in a particularly feminine pose: Mortensen imitated the female tendency with his own body. The metaphor of woman is conjured in the bird-man pose: an unconscious desire to become like a woman is evident in the work. *Even the Hairs on Your Forearms Grow in the Same Direction as Their Feathers*, is a work addressed to the male of the species, but the myth of woman is again heralded; the artist's language decoded might say, 'We are both like woman . . . and yet neither of us are fully one thing or the other.'

Ken Unsworth, *Five Secular Settings for Sculpture as Ritual*, Institute of Contemporary Art in Sydney, 1975. Photograph from the artist's collection.

Ken Unsworth, became known as a performance artist when he presented *Five Secular Settings for Sculpture as Ritual* and *Burial Piece* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Sydney in 1975. These performances involved the artist being hung and suspended in various positions; *Burial Piece* was a dramatic event where the artist was buried alive in a glass case which was filled with sand as his heart beat was amplified. The glass enclosure was filled slowly and the sand carefully levelled at the top before the whole structure was smashed to allow the artist to escape. Unsworth moved away from the spectacular use of the body and developed more sophisticated works later in the decade.¹⁰⁷ *A Different Drummer* (2nd Biennale of Sydney: *Recent International Forms in Art*, 1976) was the first of a new series of works for Unsworth. The performance created a tableau of domestic repetition: a motorised doll, beating a drum, was positioned on a wooden beam by the artist; as the doll fell to the ground it triggered the sound of a baby's cry. The artist's personality was absent from the scenario: he remained the manipulator of the action but never the dominant part. Likewise in *Rhythms of Childhood* (4th Biennale of Sydney: *Vision in Disbelief*,

1982), the artist was the outsider, looking into a situation as a ghostly absence. A circle of light illuminated a small rag doll at the edge of the circle. In the middle a ball bounced in perpetual motion, marking out time. A soundtrack of a child's hysterical laughter could be heard as the artist sat motionless in the corner wearing a life-cast of his own face. The audience was small, as only a few spectators could enter the room at any one time: ushered into the private life of a domestic scene. Both works were ambiguous; yet the repetition of loss clearly depicted some sort of crisis. In the dimly lit room(s) the audience witnessed a type of ritualised mourning: whether this was the lost object of desire, or quite literally the death of a child, remained uncertain.

It might be posited in conclusion that the most successful works of the body artists and those who used ritual in a shamanistic way were those that (mis) represented the subject: performances that spoke of an indeterminant sexuality or that misplaced identity through wit or uncanny disjunctions. Since shamanism relies on the audience's belief in the 'magic' being used, and in our society technology and the wonders of science are a sort of orthodoxy, it is apparent that Stelarc is the Western shaman *par excellence*. However, this creates a contradiction — the faith in technology and the future appears to be the antithesis of ritual and shamanism that are usually associated with distant cultures which do not have the 'enlightenment' associated in the West with science.

In regard to body art, it is evident that the infliction of pain upon the body presents the audience with a masochistic act, however, this is also an act of transgression which is often motivated by an urge to resist the repressions of polite society. Likewise the abject reactions of the artist, those which brought bodily fluids into the clean space of the gallery, can be seen to be violent disruptions of social codes. However, in acknowledging the critical edge of such events, it must also be recognised that the formation of the ego (the 'I' of the subject and thus the artist) erupts throughout such activity. Where there is an analysis of the ego structure, one which recognises the fundamental aggressivity inherent in the internal relationship, such events tend to underline the crisis of the Western subject and point to the downfall of humanist concepts of power and control, by presenting a fragmented psyche to the audience. When the transgression appears to be simply a tactic to shock the spectator, the political critique is lost to an onanistic pursuit which tends to reinscribe the very structure it seeks to attack.



Ken Unsworth,
*A Different
Drummer*, 2nd
Biennale of
Sydney: *Recent
International
Forms in Art*,
1976.

Photograph
from the artist's
collection;
photographer
Lynn Silverman.

Ken Unsworth, *Face to Face*, Entrith Street, Sydney, 1977.
Photograph from the artist's collection.

Ken Unsworth,
Burial Piece
Institute of
Contemporary Art,
Sydney, 1975.
Photograph
from the artist's
collection.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Parr discusses his interest in Reich in 'Mike Parr', *Flash Art*, no. 80-1, February-April 1978, p. 53; in a response to the questionnaire designed for this project Parr says he was interested in abreaction therapy; his interest in Laing was communicated in a letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p.10.
- 2 Mike Parr letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 11.
- 3 This interpretation of the work comes from Parr, letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 11. For more examples from *150 Programmes and Investigations* and *Rules and Displacement Activities* see Mike Parr, 'Photo(graphed)' in *Australia: Nine Contemporary Artists*, exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1984, p 56, and Donald Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations: Body Art and "Video Freaks" in Sydney', *Studio International* June 1973, pp. 269-73.
- 4 J. Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Hogarth, London, 1980, p. 64.
- 5 Laplanche and Pontalis, p 1.
- 6 Mike Parr in response to a questionnaire designed for this research.
- 7 D. Bromfield, *Identities: A Critical Study of the Works of Mike Parr, 1970-1990*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA, 1991, p. 85. Bromfield's monograph on Parr is an intensive documentation of the artist's work.
- 8 D. Bromfield, *Identities*, p. 85.
- 9 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 12. The series of performances *Rules and Displacement Activities* (1973-1977) were presented in a performance room built in Parr's house; the last performance was presented in 1977 but documentation of the series (Part 3) was not completed until 1983. The performance room, a private theatre in which family and friends participated, was an attempt to re-think the relationship between the artist and his 'audience'; Parr's *Black Boxes* can be seen as extensions of this idea into a more 'public' arena where the *Black Box* becomes the 'theatre'. For a full account see D. Bromfield, *Identities*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA, 1991, pp. 169-187.
- 10 Mike Parr writing in Neil Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*, artists' chronicle, unpublished manuscript, no pag.
- 11 Mike Parr in N. Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*.
- 12 Mike Parr, 'Mike Parr', *DATA* no. 26, 1977, p. 77.
- 13 Mike Parr Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 12.
- 14 See H. Kontova, 'Marina Abramovic-Ulay, an interview', *Flash Art* February-April 1978, p. 43. Performing together the couple often played out a type of psychic war between the sexes: for example *Light-Dark* (1977) where each slapped the face of the other until exhausted. See also Antje von Graevenitz, 'Then and Now: Performing Art in Holland', *Studio International*, July-August 1976, pp. 49-53. Marina Abramovic is a Yugoslav artist; Uwe Laysiepen (Ulay) is a German artist. Both lived and worked in Amsterdam in the mid-1970s; in the late 1980s they visited Australia as artists-in-residence for four months and spent time in the Central and Western Deserts in direct contact with tribal Aboriginal people at Papunya. See B. Murphy, 'Gold Found by the Artists', *Art and Australia*, vol. 19, no. 3, Autumn 1982, p. 340.
- 15 Ulay in Kontova, 'Marina Abramovic-Ulay, an interview' with H. Kontova, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
- 16 G. P-Orridge and P. Christopherson, 'Annihilating Reality' *Studio International*, July-August, 1976, p. 46.
- 17 See H. Kontova, 'Marina Abramovic-Ulay, an interview', p 43.
- 18 B. Murphy, 'Gold Found by the Artists', p. 340
- 19 G. Celant, 'Dirty Acconci', *Artforum*, November 1980, p. 79.
- 20 See G. P. Orridge and P. Christopherson, 'Annihilating Reality', pp. 44-8.
- 21 M. Kelly, 'Reviewing Modernist Criticism', *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 3, Aug. 1981, p. 54.
- 22 L. Vergine, *Il corpo come linguaggio (la 'Body-art' e storie simili)*, Gianpaolo Prearo Editore, Milan, 1974, p. 5.
- 23 Vergine, *Il corpo come linguaggio [passim]*.
- 24 Vergine, *Il corpo come linguaggio*, p. 21.
- 25 Vergine, *Il corpo come linguaggio*, p. 25.
- 26 Lacan uses the term imaginary in his discussion of the formation of the ego. The ego is formed as part of a narcissistic relationship between self and other. The imaginary denotes the way in which the subject is seduced by the image of otherness (initially the mirror reflection of the body) and takes this image as a representation of the self. Lacan's concept of the imaginary is similar to Freud's idea of the pre-Oedipal.
- 27 See J. Lacan, 'The Freudian Unconscious and Ours', in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psych-Analysis*, tr. Alan Sheridan, Penguin, London, 1979, p. 20 where he argues that the 'unconscious is structured like a language'; this is discussed at length in 'The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason

- since Freud', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, tr. A. Sheridan, Norton, New York and London, 1977, pp. 146-175.
- 28 J. Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalysis' (1949) in *Ecrits: A Selection*, pp. 1-7. Between the ages of six and eighteen months the infant acknowledges its separation from the mother through recognising its own image. The mirror reflection of the body is a unified image, contrary to the child's uncoordinated state. The mirror image becomes the other; the ideal which the child has yet to achieve (B. Benvenuto and R. Kennedy, 'The Mirror Stage' in *The Works of Jacques Lacan*, Free Association Press, London, 1986, p. 54).
- 29 J. Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, pp. 18-19.
- 30 B. Benvenuto and R. Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan*, p. 55.
- 31 In English translations of Freud's theories of the instincts no distinction is made between drives or urges (*trieb*) and instinct (*instinkt*) itself which tends to stress a hereditary or biological relationship. However, in 1905 Freud defined instinct as 'lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical', and stressed a dualistic relationship between sexual and ego instincts. Fifteen years later he contrasted the life and death instincts and postulated that these instincts regulate the activity of the organism. This theory was posited in contrast to the earlier theory which recognised the instincts as motivating forces. One may conclude that the drives (instincts) are both biological and psychical, and that the relationship between them is antagonistic (hunger and love; love and discord). See S. Freud 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905), first English translation, 1949, *Standard Edition*, VII and 'New Introductory Lecturers on Psycho-Analysis' (1932-33), *Standard Edition*, XXII. For a discussion see J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, pp. 215-16.
- 32 J. Lacan, 'Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis' (1948), in *Ecrits: A Selection*, p. 28.
- 33 C. Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, tr. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf, Basic Books, New York and London, 1963, p. 181.
- 34 C. Levi-Strauss, *Totemism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1969. The anthropologist argues that the totemic code represents 'a linguistic means of communication in culture ... [based on] a homology between two "systems of differences."' (p. 150).
- 35 See J. Chaluppecky, 'Art and Sacrifice', *Flash Art*, February-April 1978, pp. 33-5. Also M. Kozloff, 'Pygmalion Reversed', *Artforum* XIV, November 1975, pp. 30-8. For a lucid analysis of pleasure and sacrifice see G. Bataille, *Eroticism*, Marion Boyars, London and New York, 1987, first English translation 1962).
- 36 Many references are made in the literature on body art to the writings of Antonin Artaud, see especially his *The Theatre and Its Double*, Grove Press, New York, 1958. In this collection the essay, 'The Theatre of Cruelty', is the most popular among performance artists. Artaud argues for a writerless theatre where performers are directors and the action creates a religious or magical catharsis for the audience. Artaud speaks of the cruelty of life which is 'not sadistic or bloody, at least not exclusively so, I do not systematically create horror' (p. 79). Artaud was associated with the Surrealists from 1924 to 1929; however, he was expelled by Andre Breton for being an Expressionist; see M. Esslin, *Artaud*, Fontana/Collins, Glasgow, 1976, p. 27.
- 37 Writing about the Living Theatre, Judith Malina said: 'We are trying ... with our voices and bodies to influence the spectator, to do as if we were presenting him with a gift and suffering for him', in Jean-Jacques Lebel, 'Entretiens avec le Living Theatre', as quoted in J. Chaluppecky, 'Art and Sacrifice', pp. 34-5. It is interesting to note that Gilles Deleuze, co-author of *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Viking Press, New York, 1977, was an 'accomplice' in many of the happenings co-ordinated by Lebel, who is considered one of the founders of the movement in Paris in the late 1950s. Lebel speaks at length about his works using Deleuzian terminology: the happenings are described in terms of an: "'exploding desire:" ... the free flow of energies which mix and clash; a kind of brewing motion of desire. An avalanche of language, in which the ecstatic body explodes ... Art is but a remaining trace of a moment of awakening.' See B. Blistene, 'Jean-Jacques Lebel: An Interview', *Flash Art*, October-November 1978, p. 61.
- 38 A. Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, *passim*.
- 39 J. Chaluppecky, 'Art and Sacrifice', p. 35.
- 40 K. Tsiakma, 'Hermann Nitsch: A Modern Ritual', p. 14.
- 41 F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, Doubleday/Anchor, New York, 1956, p. 24.
- 42 Nitsch, quoted by Tsiakma, 'Hermann Nitsch: A Modern Ritual', p. 15.
- 43 C. G. Jung, 'The Apollonian and the Dionysian' in *Psychological Types*, vol. 6, *The Collected Works*, a revision by R.F.C. Hull of tr. by H.G. Baynes, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1971, p. 140. Nietzsche's 'aestheticisation' of excess, echoed in Artaud, is clearly the type of impulse that encouraged performance artists to attempt to transgress the social code. In *The Gay Science*, (1887), Random House, New York, 1974, Nietzsche recognised the ambiguity between two conflicting desires: 'the desire for motionlessness, immortalisation, *being*, or ... the desire for destruction, change, future, the new *becoming*' (p. 370). The latter

- desire he called 'Dionysian' since it expressed 'an overflowing strength pregnant with future' (p. 370). In the same passage Nietzsche also makes a distinction between the romantic pessimist who enforces his image and his torment on the audience, and another Dionysian pessimism, which is more concerned with the future. Nietzsche's distinction is pertinent when considering the ways in which artists have interpreted the excess of a Dionysian 'truth': the personalisation of a would-be unconscious or 'instinctual' response, is not the new beginning of a future pessimism which assaults the Law; on the contrary, it is the other side of the Law it seeks to disrupt.
- 44 C. G. Jung, 'The Apollonian and the Dionysian', p. 140.
- 45 L. Vergine, *Il corpo come linguaggio*, p. 39.
- 46 T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Faber & Faber, London, 1970, pp. 264-5.
- 47 J. Burnham, *Great Western Saltworks: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art*, George Braziller, New York, 1974, p. 140.
- 48 T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, p. 248. Roszak is using the term 'pansacramental' following Martin Buber, who wrote: 'Primitive man is a naive pansacramentalist. Everything is to him full of sacramental substance ... Each thing and each function is ever ready to light up into a sacrament for him.' See M. Buber, *Hasidism*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1948, p. 133.
- 49 T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, p. 248.
- 50 T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, p. 248.
- 51 See N. O. Brown, 'Apocalypse: The Place of Mystery in the Life of the Mind', p. 7.
- 52 See S. Freud, 'Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts' in *Totem and Taboo* (1913-1914), *Standard Edition*, vol XIII, Hogarth, London, 1955-1974), pp. 75-99.
- 53 S. Freud, 'Animism, Magic and the Omnipotence of Thoughts', p. 83.
- 54 C. G. Jung, *The Symbolic Life: Miscellaneous Writings*, vol. 18, *The Collected Works*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977, pp. 267-81.
- 55 See C. Levi-Strauss, *Totemism*.
- 56 C. G. Jung, *The Symbolic Life*, pp. 274-5.
- 57 C. G. Jung, *The Symbolic Life*, pp. 274-5.
- 58 C. G. Jung, *The Symbolic Life*, pp. 274-5.
- 59 C. G. Jung, *The Symbolic Life*, p. 271.
- 60 M. Kozloff, 'Pygmalion Reversed', *Artforum*, 14, November 1975, p. 36.
- 61 M. Kozloff, 'Pygmalion Reversed', p. 36.
- 62 G. Bataille, *Eroticism*, p. 48. Bataille is quoting de Sade from the introduction to *Les Cent-vingt Journees de Sodome, Oeuvres completes*, Paris, 1948.
- 63 See J. Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalysis', pp. 1-7.
- 64 Taped interview with the artist, 19 August 1987.
- 65 Stelarc quoted in *Australia: Nine Contemporary Artists*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1984, p. 74.
- 66 Taped interview with Stelarc, 19 August 1987.
- 67 J. Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1976, p. 82.
- 68 Stelarc, 'Post-Evolutionary Desires: Attaining Planetary Escape Velocity', Yokohama, 1987, unpublished paper.
- 69 Stelarc, 'Strategies in Redesigning the Body', *Lot's Wife*, vol. 28, no. 9, 22 June 1988, p. 7.
- 70 Stelarc, 'Strategies in Redesigning the Body', p. 7.
- 71 Stelarc, 'Post-Evolutionary Desires.'
- 72 Stelarc, 'Post-Evolutionary Desires.'
- 73 Mike Parr, letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 12. 'The "Cathartic Action" is quite simply an abreaction of the "gap"...as "social gestus" it carries that gap into the symbolic, linguistic structure.'
- 74 Parr quoted from research material made available by Neil Howe. See also Mike Parr, 'Rules and Displacement Activities: Problems of Socialisation', *DATA* no. 26, April-June 1977, pp. 74-8, and the artist's statement in *Flash Art* No. 80-1, February-April 1978, p. 53.
- 75 Mike Parr, letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 12.
- 76 See Mike Parr, *Dream (the Lights of Empedocles)*, in *Act 3: Ten Australian Performance Artists*, exhibition catalogue, Canberra School of Art Gallery, ANU, Canberra, 1982, loose-bound folder, n.p.

- 77 Mike Parr statement in *Act 3*.
- 78 Mike Parr statement in *Act 3*.
- 79 For a detailed explanation see M. Parr 'Interstices 1 - 6 (Theatre of Self Correction)', *Flash Art*, nos. 90-1, June-July, 1979, p. 17.
- 80 D. Bromfield, *Identities*, p. 177. Bromfield is quoting the artist.
- 81 D. Bromfield, *Identities*, p. 171.
- 82 M. Parr, as quoted in D. Bromfield, *Identities*, p. 172. Parr was discussing other performance works in the Biennale but the comment is equally applicable to his own works and shows the continued concern on the part of the artist to represent the margins of consciousness and what lies beyond.
- 83 The *Black Boxes* become a serialised production like other works by the artist. See D. Bromfield, *Identities*, pp. 169-187.
- 84 Mike Parr, as quoted by D. Bromfield, *Identities*, p. 180.
- 85 Mike Parr as quoted in D. Bromfield, *Identities*, p. 182.
- 86 M. Parr, 'Photo(graphed)', *Australia: Nine Contemporary Artists*, p. 57.
- 87 M. Parr, artist's statement in *Presence and Absence: Survey of Contemporary Australian Art, No. 1*, Installation, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA, 1983, p. 36.
- 88 Jill Orr, artist's statement in *Act 3*.
- 89 In this performance Orr had decided to pierce her tongue with a needle; however, she decided against this action after canvassing opinion from both doctors and needle manufacturers. The simulated action performed instead involved biting on a capsule of blood that had been drawn from the artist's arm before the performance.
- 90 Taped interview with Jill Orr, 24 June 1987.
- 91 See Mary Eagle, 'Shrill Rites and Quiet Reflection', *The Age*, 14 November 1979, p. 14.
- 92 Excerpts from the script courtesy of Jill Orr.
- 93 Conversation with Jill Orr, 20th January 1993.
- 94 See *Women at Work: A Post-Event Publication* George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, 1980, p. 30.
- 95 Taped interview with Jill Orr, 24 June 1987.
- 96 Taped interview with Jill Orr, 24 June 1987.
- 97 See C. Rickey, 'Vito Acconci: The Body Impolitic', *Art in America*, October 1980, p. 122.
- 98 Vito Acconci, quoted in G. Celant, 'Dirty Acconci', p. 83.
- 99 For a survey of Mortensen's performance works in the 1970s, see my essay 'Performance Art in the 1970s', *Art and Australia*, vol. 26, no. 3, Autumn, 1989, pp. 412-18.
- 100 Mortensen said: 'I have forced myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste', as quoted by Graeme Sturgeon, 'Kevin Mortensen — Icons and Images', *Art and Australia*, vol. 17, no. 1, September 1979, p. 71, note 2.
- 101 Quoted by Sandra McGrath, 'Cockatoos and Carcasses', *The Australian, Weekend Magazine*, 10-11 February 1979, p. 7.
- 102 Second taped interview with Kevin Mortensen, 26 June 1988.
- 103 *First Australian Sculpture Triennial*, Preston Institute of Technology and La Trobe University, Melbourne, 1981, p. 187.
- 104 N. Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*.
- 105 N. Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*.
- 106 N. Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*.
- 107 Unsworth talks about the shift to a more poetic practice in J. Watkins, 'Interview with Ken Unsworth', *Art and Australia*, vol. 20, no. 3, Autumn, 1982, pp. 379-82.

CHAPTER FOUR

RITUAL PERFORMANCE AND ECOLOGY;
FEMINIST AND ACTIVIST PERFORMANCE

RITUAL PERFORMANCE AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

Performance artists who presented rituals using natural materials such as earth, fire and water were often inspired by ecological and environmental concerns. These issues became increasingly important throughout the 1960s and 1970s in juxtaposition with an evolving political analysis which stressed the personal responsibility of the active subject, at the same time as it valued personal experience and the liberation of the instincts.

In its efforts to democratise society the counter-culture valued the feminine term (the underprivileged position) implied in all binary oppositions by inverting the positions in the hierarchical structure. In the oppositions masculine-feminine, culture-nature, aggressivity-passivity, war-peace, rationality-irrationality, the 'negative term' was embraced by the alternative movement. Collectives were organised to protect the wilderness against urban destruction; the local environment was defended against the nation-state. The re-evaluation of locale and community contributed to the renewed interest in regional difference set against the impending sameness of international culture. In this way a feminine sensibility, attuned to the eco-system through natural or biological connections rather than mechanical manipulation, became the ultimate defence against progress, exploitation and alienation.

Lucy Lippard has written extensively about ritual and performance, arguing that: 'ritual is not just a passive repetition but the acting out of collective needs.'¹ Lippard insists on community participation and the establishment of some sort of tradition:

When a ritual doesn't work, it becomes an empty, self-conscious act, an exclusive object involving only the performer, and it is often embarrassing for anyone else to witness. When a ritual does work it is inclusive, and leaves the viewer with a need to participate again . . . Art that is called ritual but is never repeated is finally an isolated gesture rather than a communal process.²

Lippard has in mind the type of rituals associated with ancient Celtic myths, street processions and community celebrations. The critic is committed to a type of community art: 'the concept of knowing through doing and communicating through participating.'³ The concept of ritual as collective action is reminiscent of Jung's thesis on the 'symbolic life'; however, the implications of a Western shamanism need to be stressed. Re-enacting a 'primitive' past appears arrogant if the Western artist simply borrows from other cultures without analysing his or her position. As noted in Chapter 3, 'primitive' societies do not value individuality; the Western artists' attempts to use ritual and shamanism to analyse their own psychological neuroses misplaces the collective ritual and centres it on the ego of the subject.

In 1981 the National Gallery of Victoria staged the exhibition *Relics and Rituals*, which included works by Kevin Mortensen, Jill Orr, Mike Parr, Stelarc, and Ken Unsworth, together with sculpture and mixed media works.⁴ The curator of the exhibition, Robert Lindsay argued that:

There has been in recent Art a return to narrative content through realism, which allows a direct empathy with the actions or objects as well as the symbols in the artist's work . . . In rejecting the cool intellectual stance of the art of the previous decade [conceptualism] which relied on its attached philosophies and concepts about the nature of Art the new narrative realism has created a new expressive Romanticism.⁵

Although *Relics and Rituals* was an important exhibition in that it attempted to make connections between ephemeral sculpture, *arte povera*, ritual performance and body art, Lindsay's desire to catalogue the various art practices under the titles of 'new narrative realism' and 'new expressive Romanticism' tended to deny the political or transgressive impetus behind much of the work.

The 'romantic' position of the artist is antagonistic to society; it frames the artist and the work in terms of the avant-garde. Although it is appropriate to interpret some of the body art actions in this way, it does not account for the activity of many of the artists. When Lindsay says the events and performances 'provide (often through a direct empathy with the performer) an understanding of an alternative set of attitudes or beliefs about Man and his environment'⁶ he is closer to the aspirations of the artists producing ritual performance and ephemeral sculpture. However, this has little to

do with the psychological investigations of the ego associated with body art (Mike Parr) or the futuristic vision apparent in Stelarc's bid to escape planet earth. Indeed, Stelarc does not fit comfortably in the exhibition; his willingness to embrace technology and replace the biological body with its technological double is the antithesis of sculptures by John Davis, which are made of natural materials, or performances by Jill Orr, which make direct links between the female body and the body of the earth. In the catalogue for the exhibition Orr wrote:

I am always aware of a connection with the earth; things born of the earth, return to the earth, life needing the earth, but also its femaleness, mother-earth, upon which we establish rituals of living and coping: surviving.⁷

Bonita Ely's performances and sculptures are likewise concerned with the land and the re-evaluation of 'man's' place in the universe. The environment is interpreted through the work on both a political and a 'natural' level. In some performances there is evidence of a celebration of the female body as part of nature, however, much of Ely's work addresses environmental issues.

Murray River Punch (*Women at Work*, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, and Rundle Street Mall, Adelaide Festival of Arts, 1980) was a street theatre event in which the artist appeared as a cooking demonstrator; everything looked authentic until the recipe for the punch being made became explicit. Phosphate compound fertilisers, human faeces and agricultural chemicals were among the ingredients mixed in the artist's blender and

offered, with a garnish of rabbit dung, to shoppers in a busy mall.⁸ *Murray River Punch* was Ely's most public political statement on the pollution of the environment; however, other works concentrated on similar themes. *Controlled Atmosphere* (Anzart-in-Hobart, 1983); *Jabiluka UO₂* (Preston Performance Festival, 1979); and the large-scale installation *Mount Feathertop* (Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1978) all presented environmental issues. *Jabiluka UO₂* presented a narrative of environmental destruction as two men acting as surveyors cut through the spiral of earth and straw made by the artist. Other works focused on the personal experience of the artist made into a public spectacle. *Breadline* (Anzart-in-Christchurch, New Zealand, 1981) was an extensive ritual which involved making positive and negative impressions of the artist's body in bread dough. A feast of bread, milk and honey was shared after the body-moulding exercise and the audience watched as the artist bathed.⁹ The dividing of the bread-body as a spiritual food was a rather contrived 'communion' without the poignancy apparent in Jill Orr's *Lunch with the Birds* (1979). Ely's interpretation of a similar theme demanded a god-like reverence from the spectator, rewarded through the consumption of



Bonita Ely, *Murray River Punch*, Rundle Street Mall, Adelaide Festival of Arts, 1980.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

Bonita Ely, *Jabiluka UO₂*, Preston Performance Festival, 1979.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

Bonita Ely, *Breadline*, Anzart-in-Christchurch, New Zealand, 1981.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



the divine body. Orr's performance was more memorable for its resignation: a passive body, bared for the pleasure of the birds, there was also a sense of horror in Orr's performance as the birds encroached on the body to feed from it.

Controlled Atmosphere (1983) was presented in the old Mail Exchange Building in Hobart. The artist set herself up as a secretary in one of the disused offices where she photocopied a colour image of Lake Peddar that was about to be dammed by the Hydro-Electric Commission, a corporation responsible for much of the devastation of the Tasmanian wilderness. Ely photocopied the image and then re-photocopied it in triplicate, stamped each with the title Lake Peddar, then signed each copy. One of the three images thus produced was shredded and the shreds were copied again in triplicate. Each copy was then filed into pigeon holes marked alphabetically to denote environmental issues, such as 'U' for uranium. The process continued until the image of the lake gradually faded.

Dogwoman Communicates with the Younger Generation (Kunstlerhaus, Bethanien, West Berlin, 1982) and *A Mother Shows her Daughter to the Universe* (Act 3, Canberra, 1982) both expressed the artist's experience of pregnancy and birth. *A Mother Shows her Daughter to the Universe* was, according to the artist, a ritual devised to 'fill the gap left by [her] disassociation with the traditional Christian ritual for parents and their newborn.'¹⁰ Ely made an elaborate mandala of wheat, which formed a spiral pattern in the earth and danced around the spiral showing her child to the heavens.

The *Dogwoman* series (1982-1988) gradually progressed from a celebratory event to a paradoxical



Bonita Ely, *Controlled Atmosphere*, Old Mail Exchange Building, Anzart-in-Hobart, 1983.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



Bonita Ely, *Dogwoman Communicates with the Younger Generation*, Kunstlerhaus, Bethanien, West Berlin, 1982. Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Karin Charlet.

analysis of woman. Humour was reinstated as woman and dog became synonymous. In *Dogwoman Makes History* (Copenhagen, 1985) the story of art from a feminist perspective was retold through canine representations. In 1988 Ely performed *Dogwoman Makes History* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne. In this version of the performance Ely performed wearing a fox fur complete with fox-face which draped over her own head. She stood behind a lectern ready to give a lecture. Slides of women and dogs, some from different eras in art history, others from the popular press and slides she had made herself were projected on all the walls of the small gallery as Ely read from her prepared notes. But the artist delivered the lecture in dog language, 'Ruff, ruff, bark, bark', gesturing to the images on the wall and making pointed inflections with her voice. Woman as the 'underdog', represented in her absence but always present in the picture, as an object of art rather than an active subject, became the focal point of an irreverent history.¹¹

Elizabeth Ruinard wrote about the performance in 1986:

*In a mode of proceeding that might be termed "bricolage" and must also be read as postmodern . . . we construct Dogwoman's story, and so make room for the saga of this Etrangere to take its place in the mainstream (male, among other things) discourse.*¹²

Ruinard was using the word 'bricolage' (following Levi-Strauss's use of the term) to describe artists as eclectic practitioners. It became popular in the artworld in the late 1970s and 1980s as a way of explaining a new methodology, which allowed artists to shift and change style. This helped to distinguish post-modernism from late modernism which emphasised a continuum.

Ralph Eberlein, now a painter of mythical stories on both canvases and ceramic pots, produced performance works concerned with ecological issues in the 1970s. *Post-Atomic Age (2+3 Exhibition, Mildura Arts Centre, 1976)* was a

four-part, two-hour ritual in bushland adjacent to the art gallery, with an accompanying display of remnants.¹³ The artist presented a story of death and rebirth after the age of nuclear holocaust. Binding and embalming remnants from the landscape and using his own body, the artist appeared to be the epitome of a lost White tribalism.

Eberlein says that his works were a rejection of the American school of hard-edge abstraction, he was more interested in an earlier generation of Australian artists such as Arthur Boyd and John Perceval because they were always 'dealing with the landscape and the human figure in isolation or in groups.'¹⁴



Bonita Ely, *Dogwoman Makes History*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1988.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

Robert Lindsay's insistence that ritual works represent a return to narrative seems to be supported by Eberlein's comments about his work. During the much-celebrated return to figuration in painting during the early 1980s, which also marked its difference from abstraction and conceptualism, it seemed preferable to forget this aspect of performance art. It is not coincidental that many of the performance artists presenting rituals and body art produced expressionist paintings and drawings during the 1980s (Mike Parr, Jill Orr, Ralph Eberlein). There was obviously continuum of sorts, but a certain amnesia reigned as some critics tried to separate the decades.

Eberlein also admits to the self-centred nature of much performance art. Referring to his generation as 'television children', influenced by rock music spectacles, he describes himself and his peers as 'art stars'.¹⁵ He says: 'I went inside myself, like a self-nurturing process, the discovery of my own richness . . . I always strove for the fantastic, the beautiful, the dramatic . . . I tried to imbue it with emotion and spectacle.'¹⁶ Despite the anti-nuclear position apparent in *Post-Atomic Age*, Eberlein says that his work was not political. He says he was criticised because the performances lacked any form of audience participation.¹⁷ Such criticisms came from a Left analysis of ritual, such as Lucy Lippard's, which wanted to democratise art through participatory structures. In Australia the works of Peter Kennedy and a host of community art workers that followed the same philosophy presented a similar opinion.

Ritual performance that celebrated nature and the biological body was criticised by Marxists and feminists within the artworld. The celebration of



Ralph Eberlein, *Post-Atomic Age, 2+3 Exhibition*, Mildura Arts Centre (bushland adjacent to the gallery), 1976.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



biological difference, the desire to return to one's instinctual or ancestral roots, and the heralding of a 'primitive' existence, which was free of social repression, were all considered to be ineffectual ways in which to promote social change. Such critiques were a shift from the concerns of the counter-culture where change was to be implemented through lifestyle and alternative culture(s).

Marxist feminists were particularly concerned about the representation of the female body in performance art. They argued that many of these works effectively reinscribed a conventional place for women in society by aligning woman with nature and man with culture. The objectification of women's bodies, especially when the female body was presented in a state of nudity, positioned the female within a patriarchal framework: woman was once again objectified as an object to be consumed by the male gaze. However, it is apparent that this type of critique did not affect some artists.

Ecological issues were also apparent in performance works produced by the Queensland sculptor Lyndall Milani, since the relationship between the body and nature was a primary concern. The loss of a 'symbolic' life and the devastation of the planet was addressed throughout the elaborate productions. In 1985 the artist wrote:

My work at the moment is concerned with the situation of humanity — we have lost the roots that bind us to the earth — we have lost the sense of our dependence upon the earth and our responsibility in the maintenance of the natural order — the perpetuation of the balance. We are the caretakers of the future. We must understand our terminal nature in relationship to the eternal — the continuum.¹⁸

Milani started to produce rituals in the landscape in 1983. Selecting a secluded spot in Beachmere, the artist and friends acted out celebrations of the changing seasons, choosing to commemorate the summer solstice and the spring and autumn equinox.¹⁹ Erecting temple structures in the ocean and burning long fire sticks at dawn and dusk, the rituals were simple and private activities performed by the participants. There was no audience as such, although the works were documented for exhibition in galleries after the event.



Landscape No. 4 — Temple of the Living Spirit (Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1988) was an elaborate installation including a tower (2 metres x 2 metres x 10 metres); a temple (5 metres x 5 metres x 3.75 metres with four alcoves); twenty shrines with ceramic domes (1.6 metres x 3 metres x 4 metres) which lined the path between temple and tower; a pool placed midway between the two structures, decorated with terracotta tiles; eighty fire beacons; a sundial; and two rock platforms. The performance involved nine participants: seven to light the fires in the tower, the temple and the surrounding beacons and two who provided sound accompaniment on gong and drum. After the fires were lit, Milani climbed the tower and waited for the sun and moon to perform their natural functions, whilst another participant sat in the temple.²⁰ The ritual was repeated three times over the Easter

Lyndall Milani, *Performance in the Landscape: Temple*, Beachmere, Queensland, Spring equinox, 1988. Photograph from the artist's collection.

Lyndall Milani, *Post-Atomic Age, Landscape No. 4 — Temple of the Living Spirit*, Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1988. Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Gary Summerfeld.



long weekend. Milani's work continues the type of ecological concerns evident in performances by Jill Orr. However, Milani's works are often collaborative rituals and the body is not dramatised in the same way; she positions herself as a figure in the landscape rather than inscribing her body in any particular way or presenting the myth of woman.

The multi-media performance art group T.R.E.E. (Theatre Reaching Environments Everywhere) staged spectacular happenings between 1979 and 1984 at Wattamolla Beach in the Royal National Park, south of Sydney. Co-ordinated by George Gittoes and Gabrielle Dalton, and performed annually over several nights during the vernal equinox in the summer, the events involved over one hundred and thirty participants, with capacity audiences of three to six thousand people. Explaining the motivation behind T.R.E.E., Dalton Said:

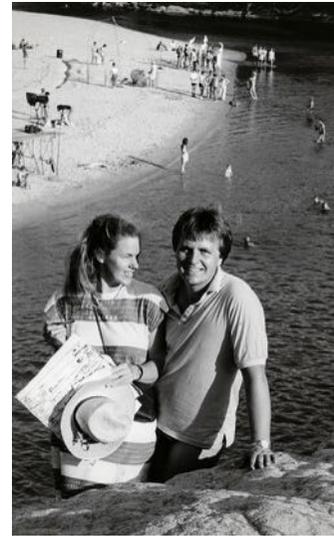
In my view the whole period of art since the 'sixties has really been a process of artists trying to seek a new place for themselves in a society which has changed so radically over the last century, that the traditional forms of art, and therefore, the traditional functions of the artist in society have been superseded. But, by what? We have been struggling with this question, through the Post Object and other movements which have followed since that time. These movements have been interesting and relevant to artists themselves . . . but they have led to art and artists making themselves separate, and anti public. The artists have worked themselves into a tiny white room, clinging to their own inner reflections Meanwhile, outside, I see life full of people, manipulated and overexposed to an artless mass media . . . I see a great need for artists to go back out into life, to act as creative catalysts, using the ingredients they find there to make art meaningful and relevant to people again — to place it in the mainstream of life.²¹

Wattamolla provided a hectare of stage for T.R.E.E. productions, comprising beach, lagoon, cliffs, rocks, and earth banks. *Echoes and Star Tides* (1983) was a visual and technological spectacle. Films were projected on rock surfaces, divers from the CSIRO at Cronulla performed an underwater dance show in the lagoon, Aboriginal children from the Kirinari Hostel created the dance of the Southern Cross, and a host of other participants contributed to the various dances and processions which made up the total event over ninety minutes. Stage management involved the local bush fire brigade with a network of walkie-talkies directing events over the hectare site. The performance was prepared during workshops over two months before its public presentation and relied heavily on local community support.

Dalton and Gittoes say that they attempt to create a new form of participatory cultural event in Australia; a kind of community festival or ceremony which 'allows people to express the spiritual and artistic side of themselves and of life.'²² This type of community spectacle, occurring on a regular basis, is the kind of ritual that, in Lucy Lippard's opinion, 'does work', since it is 'inclusive and leaves the viewer with a need to participate again.'²³

Performances that celebrate the changes associated with the seasonal equinox and solstice, recognise alternative festivals. In this sense they are cross-cultural: they do not privilege any particular religion or spiritual belief. They circumvent such specificity by celebrating the natural rhythms of the earth and the sun. Such performances in the 1980s and 1990s are associated with what has become known as a New Age philosophy. This borrows from many of the ideas of the counter-culture but the New Age is not associated with a New Left politic. The adoption of alternative rituals and lifestyles rejects the values of progress and rationality associated with late capitalist society and embraces a more holistic life in tune with nature.

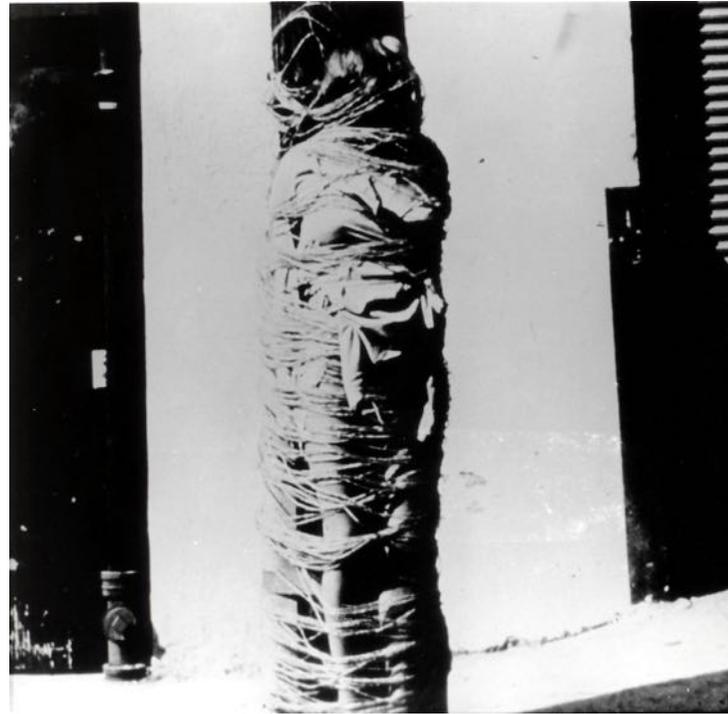
Some artists working within the artworld have analysed the myths and rituals associated with conventional religions by employing humour and uncanny displacements. Kevin Mortensen and John Davis performed as part of a religious ceremony at St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, in 1973. Over a ten-day period, Mortensen sat at the back of the church wearing a goat's head. Davis had installed a range of 'prayer mats' and animal heads on small columns surrounding the baptismal font, and lit the area with candles and oil lamps. The figure sitting in the last pew, bathed in light from the installation behind,



Gabrielle Dalton and George Gittoes, on the cliff at Wattamolla, preparing for a T.R. E. E. production. Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Jon Lewis.

Kevin Mortensen and John Davis, untitled performance and installation, St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, 1973. Photograph from Kevin Mortensen's collection.





Jill Scott, *Tied*, telephone pole, San Francisco, 1976. Photograph from the artist's collection.

Jill Scott, *Taped*, building wall, San Francisco, 1975. Photograph from the artist's collection.

represented an 'evil' element as far as the local press was concerned;²⁴ however, neither the clergy nor the congregation appeared to notice as the goat figure became part of the 'normal' ceremony.

Jill Scott, who lived in California from 1972 to 1982 has worked in performance and video, combining the two media in installation-performance since the late 1970s. Scott's early performances *Taped* (building wall, San Francisco, 1975); *Boxed* (San Francisco, 1975); *Tied* (telephone pole, San Francisco); and *Strung* (Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, 1976), were all works in which the body

was bound or confined. *Taped* involved Scott being stuck to the outside of a city building with yards of adhesive tape; in *Tied* the body was tied to a telephone pole; and *Strung* repeated the same action on a bridge. Towards the end of the 1970s Scott became more involved with ritual performance and drew on her Australian experience. Images of the desert (sand), the movement of insects (bees) on a video monitor, and the sounds of a didgeridoo played by the artist were included in *SAND the Stimulant* (80 Langton Street, San Francisco, 1982). Scott used an array of constructed instruments to create sounds with the sand: 'Revolving Desert Simulators' (small and large metal discs, onto which sand was poured from above through funnels) were amplified to create the natural rhythms of wind. Robert Atkins, reviewing the performance in *Artforum*, noted the meeting of action and installation where the 'handmade and the high tech amiably coexist.'²⁵

Jill Scott, *SAND the Stimulant*, Langton Street artists' space, San Francisco, 1982. Photograph from the artist's collection.



Jill Scott, detail of *Revolving Desert Simulators*, from *Constriction*, Part 4, Act 3, Canberra, 1982. Photograph from the artist's collection.



SAND the Stimulant had both a mythical, dream-like quality, as the artist appeared to stimulate a drone of bees on the video screen with the aid of a didgeridoo, and an image of impending urban disaster as power stations and other 'man-made' constructions were projected on the walls of the venue. The natural environment meets technology throughout Scott's *oeuvre* and she uses the juxtaposition to focus on the fragmentation of the 'human condition.' The works have often focused on the memory of the subject, as the 'natural' is portrayed as a lost element.

Persist the Memory (The Farm, San Francisco, 1979) was a simple display of the concepts that have concerned the artist for many years. In this performance a slide of a woman embracing a horse was projected on the wall; the audience was ushered into the space and seated on revolving stools in the centre of the floor. Scott emerged through the screen on horseback and circled the audience; a sound track of amplified bird calls and horses' hoofs accompanied the action. After two revolutions of the space, the artist dismounted and a large area of growing grass was illuminated by spotlight. The horse proceeded to eat the grass, spraying earth around the space as it separated the roots from the food. The horse's munching was amplified and the artist opened a large door onto the outside world, where the roar of freeway traffic combined with the bird sounds and the horse's noise; beyond the freeway a baseball event was in progress on a grassy oval.²⁶ The artist remounted the horse, circled the audience and left the venue.

Scott's installation *Machine Dreams* (8th Biennale of Sydney: *The Readymade Boomerang: Certain Relations in 20th Century Art*, 1990) involved

photographs of herself manipulated by computer, columns displaying household items painted matt black (sewing machine, typewriter, Mixmaster and a Commander telephone), and a sophisticated video-camera installation which focused on the audience-as-participants and generated a soundscape. In this work the artist attempted to address the division of the subject in relation to technology. Writing in the catalogue Scott said:

She locates four items of technology — machine dreams. They are chorused by sounds of their own making. Their surfaces are irradiated with industrial cancer. Digits from the divided-self, herself. Readymades in chaos, disorder compounded from ideas of order.²⁷

Scott's work in performance and installation has moved through several stages where a difference in focus or concept is apparent. The early works where the body was bound or tied represented the subject at the mercy of the world, the soft body exposed to the coldness of an industrial society. These works tended to represent the subject as victim; however, later works extended the concepts behind such images and brought them into a more rigorous analysis. The most recent works, where the artist is represented in her absence through photography, but is still the manipulator, include the audience as participants. People moving around the installation trigger the soundscape and make the objects come to life in an audible montage. Although the work is an installation, the audience brings the tableau to life in the absence of the artist. *Machine Dreams* is a sophisticated technological installation which

positions the spectator as performer: the temptation to make the artwork live is irresistible, as one becomes an actor in a tableau which reacts to the movements of one's own body. Such works need to be documented over a period of time as proof of the interactive elements in 'play', since the spectator becomes a dancer; moving in and out of the technological landscape with others, the audience becomes the performance.

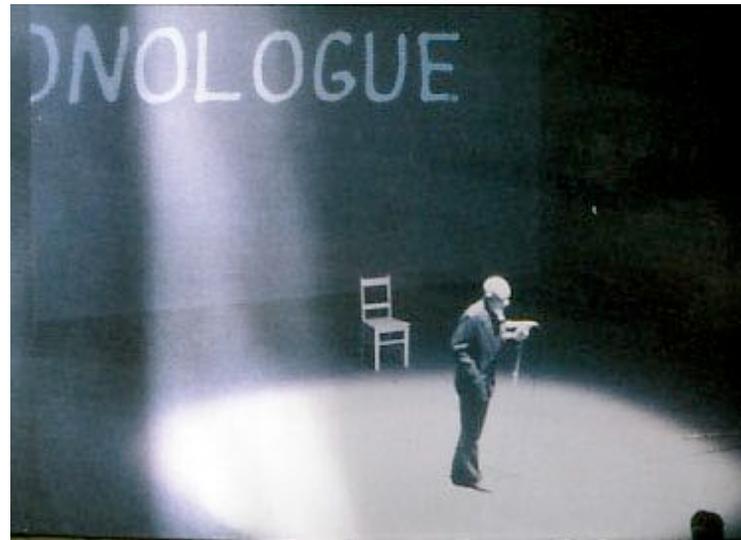
Jill Scott's performances and participatory installations focus on the position of the subject in the world. Early works centred on the artist's body as representative of the individual confined in urban spaces. The ritual performances that used references to Aboriginal culture were experimental sound performances much like the works of Leigh Hobba and Ian de Gruchy (discussed in Chapter Two) which explored different sound sources. More recent works address the relationship between the body and technology. Although the computer-generated soundscape is sophisticated, technology is placed in an historical context and domesticated through the soft technology of household appliances. There is an irreverent and ironical twist in the works which generate laughter as the audience moves in and around the un-dated implements of the past to create a techno-environment in the present.

Arthur Wicks produces humorous events in natural and urban environments and constructs witty machines that have little use outside the realms of art. He sees himself as an observer rather than a manipulator in the world²⁸ and his activities have been described as a kind of alchemy.²⁹ Some of the works such as the 1982 *Solstice Project* celebrate natural occurrences, whilst others critique the advancements of Western society. The *Solstice Project* involved the artist mapping the solstice points from the roof-tops of galleries in Sydney, Berlin, and Hamburg. Living in a small tent for twenty-four hours the artist produced 'local astronomical clocks' which he considered to be links between the modern and ancient times.³⁰ Writing about the work in 1982 Wicks said:

This activity of identifying and predicting sunrise and sunset points is very old: witness Stonehenge and Avebury in England and Carnac in France. But to apply the same process to a highly developed 20th century city, and reduce it to a series of basic marks indicating sunrise and sunset points, is an ironic and destructive gesture.³¹



In *Measuring Stick* (Glenelg Beach, Adelaide Festival of Arts, 1980), the artist was handcuffed to an anchor in the tidal channel of Glenelg Beach, as people gathered to see the figure of a businessman slowly swamped by the incoming tide.³² *Boatman* (First Australian Sculpture Triennial, 1981), a site-specific sculptural installation and performance on the moat at La Trobe University, comprised a small shelter built of sandbags in the centre of the moat, and a lone oarsman who would occasionally row visitors out to the habitat and leave them there. There was no guarantee of a return journey, the boatman did not engage in conversation, and he was the only means of transport.³³ The artist says that ‘people tend to accept their reality and their place in it without question’ and adds that his aim is to ‘destabilise that equilibrium.’³⁴ *Survival Boat* (1985) is the artist’s contribution to the energy crisis in the Western world; a rather cumbersome boat for dry land, operating on tram or train tracks, was demonstrated for public consideration in Melbourne as an alternative commuter system. Machine sculptures which



Arthur Wicks,
Measuring Stick,
Glenelg Beach,
Adelaide Festival of
Arts, 1980.

Photograph from the
artist’s collection.

Arthur Wicks, *Escape
of the Solstice Voyeur*,
Woop Woop National
Performance Event,
Adelaide, 1987.

Photograph from the
artist’s collection.

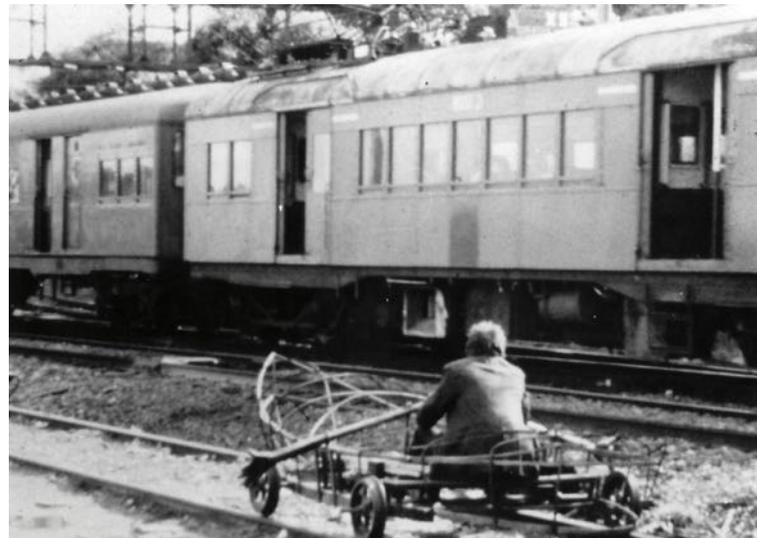
Arthur Wicks, *Survival Boat*, Melbourne, 1985.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

Arthur Wicks, *Survival Boat*, Melbourne, 1985.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

may be operated by the artist or anyone else have appeared in several performance works as whimsical comments on the fate of 'man' addicted to the mechanics of modernisation (for example, *Mobile Observatory*, Willans Hill, Wagga Wagga, and *Escape of the Solstice Voyeur*, Woop Woop National Performance Event, Adelaide, 1987). The machine, which has become an old and clumsy friend in Wicks's *oeuvre*, makes a mockery of technology while celebrating the most basic of mechanical achievements. The artist does not valorise nature over culture; his work represents an easy integration which blurs binary opposition. Wicks has been aptly described as a court jester, the fool who taunts and tantalises his audience while clouding his social commentary in irony and wit.³⁵



Arthur Wicks, *Boatman*, First Australian Sculpture Triennial, 1981.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



Arthur Wicks, *Mobile Observatory*, Willans Hill, Wagga Wagga, NSW, 1987.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

ACTIVIST PERFORMANCE ART

In the late 1970s and 1980s some artists and theorists criticised the way in which ritual and myth were represented in performance and other modes of art. Such practices were interpreted as a denial of multifarious difference and an attempt to make unity out of sameness. Ritual was seen to be apolitical and a-historical; the efforts of the counter-culture (in the 1980s the New Age) appeared to be utopian. They did not address political issues directly and the effort to present alternative ways of being and knowing was criticised because it appeared to be a kind of panacea. Such critiques drew on a Marxist doctrine which saw religion as a kind of anaesthetic, a way of controlling and suppressing the majority. As a result artists started to question the structure of identity and belief hidden by an ideology which was 'felt' rather than known.³⁶

After 1981 the influence of structuralism and psychoanalysis, imported through magazines like *Block*, *Screen* and *October*, became apparent in local journals as Australia experienced an explosion of theory.³⁷ In the 1981/82 issue of *LIP*, Judith Barry's and Sandy Flitterman's article, 'Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art-Making' was republished.³⁸ The authors launched a critique on body art by women; artists such as Gina Pane were attacked for their complicity with Western metaphysics and the way in which such work centred the 'male gaze.' Barry and Flitterman drew on Althusserian-Marxism and psychoanalysis to argue that women artists had represented themselves in concert with patriarchal myths which constructed woman-as-the-other of male desire. According to the authors, the focus on the self prioritised experiential difference, and thus reinforced the binary oppositional structure of Western metaphysics. They wrote, in one of the most quotable passages of the decade:

Within the context of a logic that reduces the multiplicity of difference to the opposition of two positivities, feminist essentialism in art simply reverses the terms of dominance and subordination. Instead of the male supremacy of patriarchal culture, the female (the essential feminine) is elevated to primary status.³⁹

In direct contrast to Lucy Lippard's celebration of matriarchal myth, the authors announced the continuation of a patriarchal conspiracy within the practices which sought to dislodge male dominance. After a decade of cultural feminism, Barry's and Flitterman's essay was widely acclaimed as a lucid analysis of why essentialism failed. All those practices in the arts that attempted to get in contact with some original or authentic source, an 'essential' or fundamental element, were deemed to be a-political and naive by a new band of critics who drew on a structuralist-Marxist theory which insisted that everything was culturally coded in language: language speaks the subject. Jargon proliferated and bamboozled many artists and their publics. The insights of structuralism were not new but they were taken on board by certain sectors of the artworld as if a sudden flash of clarity had appeared to resolve all past confusion. In many ways Lippard's book on contemporary art and prehistory published in 1983, three years after Barry and Flitterman's article, attempted to assert the importance of ritual and myth in a society that had lost faith in institutionalised religions.⁴⁰ However, Lippard did not directly address the criticisms levelled at this sort of practice.

The debate on sexual politics and representation had already been established in film criticism. Laura Mulvey's famous essay, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', published in 1975, introduced a Lacanian analysis of the gaze, and operated as a catalyst in the 'difference debate'.⁴¹ However, in the complex arguments that followed Mulvey's analysis, it became apparent that the debate between free will and determinism would continue for some time. According to some theorists, little had been gained by the application of structural concepts; once biology determined sexual difference, and now language determined the subject.⁴²

Structuralist analysis is important because it stresses the conspiracy between law (the symbolic, language, patriarchy) and the subject's desire. The complicity between patriarchal society and the desire of the subject is seen to be a result of the formation of identity for the subject. Firstly the subject is split at the mirror stage where an imaginary wholeness is reflected back to the subject. However, this mirror image is also a projection of the subject's desire, a desire for unity and wholeness. The ideal ego which exists outside the subject becomes the subject's first other. Secondly, the child is split when it adopts the language of society, the name-of-the-father. The child 'resolves' the Oedipus complex by moving away from the mother (the imaginary realm) and into the social sphere of the father (the symbolic). To communicate in society the child must adopt society's language. Lacan makes a distinction between the other — the realm of the imaginary where the other is the mirror image of the self — and the big Other — all those others surrounding the child who are already socialised into language. The big Other represents

the name-of-the-father (language), and designates, what Lacan calls, the symbolic realm. Because of the intricate relations between self and other/Other Lacan argues that 'I is an Other';⁴³ and outlines the way in which identity is established in the relationship between the self and the symbolic code. The child desires the name-of-the-father because here (in the Symbolic) s/he appears to have control over the imaginary. However, as the body artists showed, that which is repressed in this scheme returns, again and again: 'the return of the repressed' which unsettles such control and normalisation.

The celebration of woman-as-nature, evident in ritual performances by Jill Orr, Lyndal Milani and Bonita Ely, where the female artist mimics the role of a goddess or creates a spectacle of the female body, was interpreted by structuralist critics as a simple reversal of the male/female hierarchy. Such practices did not analyse femininity or consider how nature itself was socially and historically constructed. The body of woman projected the desire of the Other and presented an image of the female body for the consumption of the male gaze. The notion of a pure, natural difference failed to recognise the place of an active ideology which interprets reality.⁴⁴ Performance art that celebrated nature and biological difference did not acknowledge that such difference was itself culturally coded: aligning woman with nature reinforced a patriarchal myth which allocated women to a subservient position by virtue of her natural biological capacity to bare and nurture children, the concept of mother-earth did likewise. However, writing in 1980, Hester Eisenstein argued that 'it is not difference in itself that has been dangerous to women and other oppressed groups, but the political uses to which the idea of difference has been put'.⁴⁵

Between 1975 and 1979 the 'difference debate' erupted in feminist theory.⁴⁶ Early 1970s feminism had campaigned for equal rights for women by arguing that the differences between the sexes had been exaggerated and that women had been allocated an inferior role in society by virtue of their position as the 'second' (weaker) sex. Following Simone de Beauvoir's thesis that woman is not born but rather becomes female in a society constructed around patriarchal values, feminists like Kate Millet and Elizabeth Janeway argued that gender was learned or acquired as a result of social conditioning evident in 'sex role' behaviour.⁴⁷ Following such theses, feminists aimed to reform society through anti-sexist education and social justice programmes which would alleviate the inequality between the sexes. However, such strategies revolved around the concept of liberal individualism, so that equality was designed for woman moulded in a masculine

image.⁴⁸ Reducing the differences between the sexes effectively ignored sexual difference by insisting that, if women had equal rights, they could be the same as men. Furthermore, such programmes did not address the continuance of a corporate, patriarchal society. Given their new-found freedom, women were able to compete equally in a ‘man’s world.’

At the same time, and in contradiction to social reform, ‘women’s studies’ was instituted as an academic discipline. Scholars researched the contribution of women to society by mapping a different history: the ‘herstory’ of the second sex. The women’s movement, operating under a similar scheme, attempted to collectivise women’s experience through ‘consciousness raising’, so that women could identify and develop the qualities that united them.⁴⁹ In the artworld women artists campaigned for equal representation in survey shows, and feminist art historians researched hitherto unknown or undervalued contributions by female artists. The discovery of ‘great’ women artists and the quest to define a feminine aesthetic emphasised woman’s right to be equal and simultaneously celebrated her difference.

The pendulum swing between same and different (other) has plagued feminist theory and practice since the late 1960s, and the ‘difference debate’ continued in the 1990s as post-structuralist feminism sought to redefine woman’s difference. A Left analysis of the social construction of gender is confounded by the shift associated with ‘women’s studies’: a woman-centred perspective aims to reclaim difference by challenging the patriarchal power to assign privilege through a system of hierarchical oppositions. The dualism of nature and culture is considered to be the foundation stone of patriarchy, which equates nature with regression and culture with progression.

In performance art that addressed the position of woman, the difference between the cultural construction of gender and the celebration of a natural identity was evident. Feminists who focused on the social position of woman continued a Marxist analysis of the subject, moving from humanist to structuralist analysis as the 1970s drew to a close. However, artists rarely present consistent theories and tend to shift between discourses as the work demands. This is apparent in works by Bonita Ely and Jill Orr; depending on the interpretation of the spectator, the works may be read as feminist analyses or celebrations of natural difference. The two sides of the pendulum swing interact in the works of an individual artist and between the works of different artists.

In America critics have stressed the important role of feminist performance art in shifting practice from the personal, individual ego towards a recognition of the political in personal relations. The feminist focus on autobiographical works (in all art mediums) and activist performance art by women is perceived as a shift orchestrated by women artists in the mid 1970s.⁵⁰ In Australia, the formation of the first Women’s Art Movement in Sydney in 1974 represents the beginning of an organised feminist discourse in the arts. However, there was no particular mode of art associated with this ‘movement’; feminist concerns were mediated throughout the visual disciplines. There was no Feminist Art Programme to promote the political benefits of a live art practice.⁵¹ Feminists associated with the Women’s Building in Los Angeles and others involved in the Feminist Art Programme at Fresno argued that performance art was an attractive medium for female artists because it was not entrenched within the art world hierarchy and as a new medium could be used by women to analyse their position in society.

The Women’s Art Movements in Australia were diverse in theory and practice, representing various liberal, cultural, and socialist interpretations of feminism. Barbara Hall, who was associated with the first Women’s Art Movement in Sydney and with the artists at Inhibodress, notes that there were few women involved in the ‘new’ art practices of the early 1970s.⁵² However, news of feminist performance in America was transmitted through Peter Kennedy’s connection with Lucy Lippard in New York. The exhibition *Trans-Art 3: Communications* (Inhibodress, 1973), curated by Kennedy, was the first comprehensive display of political, performance documentation to reach Australia.⁵³

IN 1975 Lucy Lippard gave the Power Lecture and toured Australia promoting the project, West-East Bag, which aimed to weave a network of women's slide archives across the world linked, predictably, with New York. Lippard's visit inspired feminists working in the visual arts in Australia, and within two years various women's studies-type programmes were instituted in the visual arts to document the 'significant' contributions of women artists to the history of art.⁵⁴ Lippard also showed documentation of women's performance art from the Women's Building in Los Angeles and the Feminist Art Programme, originally pioneered by Judy Chicago in Fresno.⁵⁵ Members of the Women's Art Movement in Adelaide made links with the Los Angeles Women's Building in the early 1980s. The performance festival presented by women artists in Adelaide can be seen as a result of these links and also as a response to the type of experimental art being presented at the Experimental Art Foundation.⁵⁶

In feminist writing on the visual arts in the 1970s, performance was often promoted as a new art form, free from the cumbersome, 'master-craftsman'-type tradition of more established modes. Performance, it was argued, was adaptable to both a 'feminine sensibility', evident in autobiographical work, and a feminist strategy for activist art.⁵⁷ Both terms of reference were appealing to the generation of the 1970s.

The link between feminism and socialism is paramount in an understanding of activist modes of performance. A feminist discourse in the visual arts, in its organised and analytic rather than celebratory mode, is connected to various Marxist initiatives in

the early 1970s. Lippard was associated with a Marxist analysis of the artworld in New York and her *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* was much cited.⁵⁸ Groups like Art and Language, Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, the Art Workers' Coalition, and the Art Workers' Union in America, Britain and later Australia⁵⁹ were all concerned to analyse the structures of the artworld and to lobby for reform. Feminist art programmes, beginning with *Heresies* in 1977, were break-away projects from what was then considered the 'male-dominated', Marxist-Leninist Left.⁶⁰ Various individuals pioneered the New York Marxist art connection with Australia. Peter Kennedy, Terry Smith and Ian Burn were all involved with the political analysis of art developing in America.⁶¹ Organised protests against museums and survey exhibitions in Australia took much the same form as they did in New York.⁶²

The Left analysis of the arts, which reacted against body art and other forms exploring personal sites of resistance, effectively ignored the radical impetus which informed much of this work. The 'return of the repressed' (the defilements of the abject body, the fragmentation of identity and the ritual enactment of various taboos associated with body art) was not considered to be 'political', however, much of this work drew on Herbert Marcuse's programme for revolt which presented a marriage between Marxism and psychoanalysis. In the 1980s the links between structuralist-Marxism (Althusser) and psychoanalysis presented a different interpretation: an anti-humanist position which put more emphasis on the social construction of the subject.

As a Marxist-structuralist reading of the subject gained strength, the problem for performance art intensified, especially for women artists. The American model of ecological feminism, which celebrated woman's experience and her biological difference, and was connected to a counter-cultural interpretation of the body, was criticised for its essentialism. Ecological feminism (sometimes, ironically, called 'cultural' feminism), which was seen to reaffirm the binary opposition nature-culture, was criticised as a biologically determined discourse. However, despite a more sophisticated theory, the body and the notion of a corporeal existence returned for analysis in the 1980s. The examination of the social construction of gender difference which dominated cultural theory (as opposed to 'cultural' feminism) in the late 1970s and early 1980s was re-analysed as theorists recognised the cultural silence once again imposed on the body.

In the Australian context the body as social text was addressed by feminists working in performance art in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The exhibition *Women at Work*, curated by Kiffy Rubbo (George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, 1980), represented the double focus in women's performance. Jill Orr, Catherine Cherry now and Jan Hunter continued to represent the body of woman in dramatic poses, enticing criticisms of essentialism; however, Joan Grounds, Bonita Ely and Ann Fogarty were concerned with representing particular political issues which affect women in society.

Joan Grounds, who had previously worked in collaboration with Aleks Danko, started to produce solo works in 1980.⁶³ *Stinky* was the first of a series of works 'specifically concerned with fear and the oppression of women.'⁶⁴ Grounds re-enacted the sequence of events associated with the notorious Bay Area rapist who had terrorised women in California. The artist presented a dual role by dressing as the rapist and covering herself with creosote. A pungent smell wafted through the performance area as pre-recorded tape narrated the victim's only recollection of the perpetrator: the smell. Grounds also appeared as the victim, sitting, waiting for the sound of an intruder. Woman's body as socially inscribed — the victim of a dominant body, the body of the attacker — was represented in the understated action where the smell was the most violent element — a visual absence. The artist says that she wanted to present 'a personalised, subjective, experiential account in as stark and crisp a way as possible. Hopefully the work presented this particular solitary female fear and the subject of that fear in a non-titillating way.'⁶⁵



Joan Grounds,
*Stinky, Women
at Work*, George
Paton Gallery,
University of
Melbourne, 1980.

Photograph
from the artist's
collection.

The recognition of the problem of representing woman is apparent in Grounds's statement about the work. The discourse on the 'male gaze' had permeated the Australian artworld and was of particular relevance to female performance artists using their own bodies as a medium. However, in the early 1980s there was already a resistance to the deterministic interpretations associated with some structuralist critiques. Reflecting the opinions of American feminists, Grounds wrote:

*It seems to me that in Australia, and perhaps elsewhere, performance is still relatively loosely defined and free of many of the patriarchal and sexist critiques which plague women's art in other forms. The more women take up performance, the greater the chances that the forms and ideals of feminism will be incorporated into the forms of performance.*⁶⁶

Leftist criticisms of performance art, which focused on body art as if it were the only form of performance art, effectively foreclosed on other practices which were overtly political. Many of these political works successfully bridged the gap between the social and the biological interpretations of the body. Feminist art was at the forefront of such developments; however, it is unfortunate that the dominant Left discourse, at the time, failed to acknowledge these contributions to critical debate. Terry Smith's 1978 critique of performance art would have benefited from an acknowledgement of the type of performance which was not engrossed in 'personal' expression. Exhibitions at Inhibodress, of which Smith was aware, included documentation of works by the Guerilla Art Action Group, the activist arm of the Art Workers' Coalition in New York. Their infamous performance protest against the Song-My massacre, where they displayed enlarged news images of the atrocities committed against women and children during the Vietnam war in front of Picasso's *Guernica* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1970, had been widely documented in the arts press by 1978.⁶⁷

Producing works on the boundary between personal experience and political issues, feminists concentrated on the rituals of everyday life. Domestic duty was often targeted in performances about women's work. The American artist, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, was a pioneer in this type of work, producing various 'maintenance works' in the early 1970s,⁶⁸ and progressing to much larger

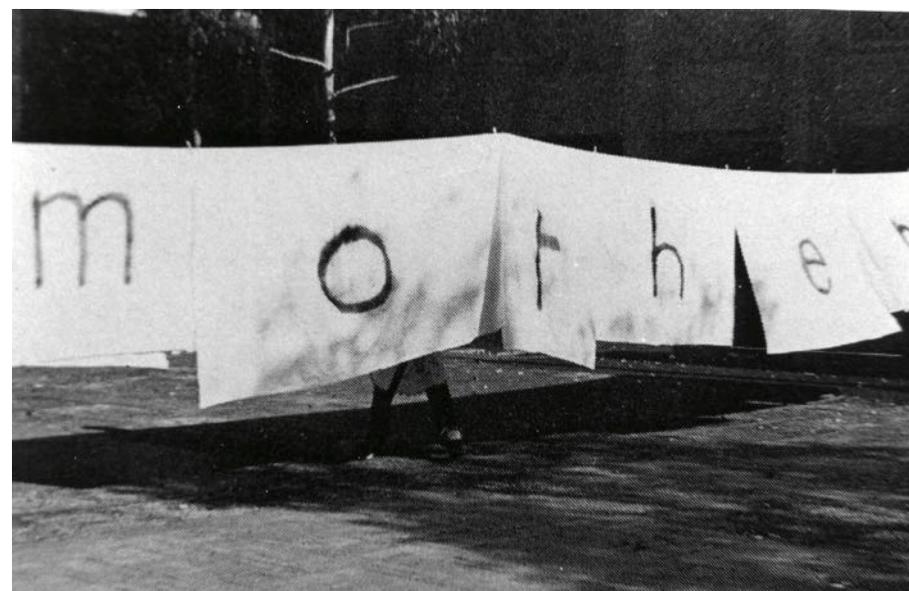


Jude Adams,
Washing Performance,
Experimental Art
Foundation, Adelaide,
1979.
Photograph from the
artist's collection.

community actions later in the decade.⁶⁹ In Australia Jude Adams produced works on a smaller scale concerned with housework and childcare. *Washing Performance* (Experimental Art Foundation, 1979) infiltrated the hallowed halls of avant-garde activity by turning the experimental venue into a laundry. Adams washed dozens of soiled baby's nappies, on a full-time basis, over three days. On the walls behind the washing machine and the piles of nappies in various washed and unwashed stages, the viewer encountered an intellectual analysis in word and image as the artist presented the washing of nappies in various 'experimental' modes: sequences of nappies on washing lines; nappies used over a particular time period, dated and documented; and so forth, in an irreverent analysis of conceptual art which brought the personal experience of women's everyday life into the gallery.⁷⁰



Joan Grounds, *Mother, Women at Work*, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, 1980. Photograph from the artist's collection.



Ann Fogarty's 1980 performance *Mother (Women at Work)* (George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne) concentrated on a similar theme in a more public venue. The artist simulated the washing of bed sheets with the aid of an old-fashioned mangle. On one side letters spelled out the title of the performance; on the reverse side photo-silkscreen images of women and texts concerned with an analysis or description of domestic work were displayed. Presented in the main courtyard of the campus, the performance represented the public presentation of a personal-political duty, as woman's place as keeper of hearth and home infiltrated the institution committed to serious analysis.⁷¹ Such work exploits the divide between personal and political experience by insisting that 'the personal is political.'

The body as social text was also analysed by male artists. Graeme Davis, like many other artists discussed in this book, can be seen as operating between categories of performance art. Some events explore the abject reactions of the body. *Fragrance — Fragrance* (Ewing and George Paton Galleries, 1981) involved the artist obsessively washing his arms and hands in a basin for ten

minutes. He then turned his attention to a hospital bed covered in excreta which he camouflaged with talcum powder. *An Invalid Product as Subject* (Botanic Gardens, as part of the Experimental Art Foundation's Performance Week, Adelaide Festival of Arts, 1980) drew on Davis's experiences as a psychiatric nurse. Over a five-day period the artist paced up and down, between two designated points, mirroring the restless movement of sedated patients and etching a track in the grass. Davis interacted with people passing by and recorded their comments in response to a question he posed to them, he asked: 'What is the end result of effort what remains?'. A gardener from the Botanic Gardens participated by whistling a crystal clear rendition of 'Love is a Beautiful Song', in memory of a friend who



Graeme Davis, *An Invalid Product as Subject*, Botanic Gardens, as part of the Experimental Art Foundation's Performance Week, Adelaide Festival of Arts, 1980. Photograph from the artist's collection.

had recently died. Davis incorporated this as the only sound element in the performance for the next three days.⁷²

Davis's performance *Surrogate* (1981) was an analysis of the hopes and fears of the male when positioned in the place of the mother (as single parent). Davis projected slides of himself and his infant daughter over which the word 'surrogate' had been written. He sat against the wall on a stool at one side of the projected images. Behind him the audience could see a small mirror (reflecting himself as Other-m(o)ther) and a picture of the Virgin Mary. Litanies of the Virgin Mother were played throughout the event. Naked from the waist up the artist performed a kind of mother-surrogate ritual. He attached a baby bottle teat to each of his nipples, sewing them onto his body with a needle and thread. He then smoked a cigarette, implying a relationship between suckling and smoking, and used it to burn the teats off producing a pungent-smelling smoke.⁷³ Davis's performances are not didactically political, but they do draw the audience's attention to various social problems and political situations. Like the body artist he often attempts to represent what is supposed to remain repressed; like the activist he inserts himself and his art into contemporary issues.

Activist performance in Australia, as elsewhere, took two forms. On one hand, the strategy to politicise art and contest the elite culture of the artworld incorporated a programme of democratisation which moved from participatory works to community-based projects. On the other hand, artists working individually or in groups operated as political activists by demonstrating against museum policy or creating works concerned with particular political issues.

Graeme Davis, *Fragrance — Fragrance*, Ewing and George Paton Galleries, 1981.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



Graeme Davis, *Surrogate*, Experimental Art Foundation, 1981.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

Jane Kent, *World Dream*, Adelaide Festival of Arts, 1982.

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Anne Marsh.



Jane Kent and Mike Mullins have both been involved with this dual strategy since the late 1970s. Both artists worked with a participating audience, as a way of breaking down the artist's authorial role, and both produced protest events. Kent's early work often involved the audience in a collective dialogue — a reciprocal language exchange. The parameters of the performance works were wide, as interjections and refusals by the 'spectators' became

part of the event. The most successful works engaged an audience outside the artworld or extended the art audience beyond its conventional parameters. *Blood Performance* (1981) involved the artist dyeing the Victoria Square and War Memorial fountains in Adelaide a crimson red. The organic dye was designed to fade after 24 hours. *Blood Performance* was directly concerned with the corporeal body as it would be affected by the atrocious neutron bomb, designed to kill people and preserve property.⁷⁴ The artist says she deliberately titled the work to evoke a multiple reading. As a huge gush of blood appeared from the body of the earth, the spectator was confronted with a tormented nature. Blood

is always associated with the body: the bleeding earth is used as a metaphor for woman. Here the body is spoken in its absence, the blood of the earth (the [m]other, menstruation) erupts in phallic 'style.' *Blood Performance* was both a vigilante action and a poignant representation of a body, both natural and social, rebelling against the determinism of a society bent on destruction.

Kent's work often focused on the threat of nuclear destruction. *Yellow Cake* (1980) was a protest on the steps of Parliament House, Adelaide, incorporating large bags of burning sulphur and graffiti statements presented to Saturday-morning shoppers. *World Dream* (Adelaide Festival of Arts, 1982) created a warm environment or shelter which consisted of three parachutes and a bank of twenty-four coloured spotlights beaming down on the structure; the 'performance' was simply the gathering of people to discuss the future of the world. *Future Potentials* (1982) mobilised an audience by transporting them on a large bus into the city; the participants were encouraged to engage the public in debate concerning the nuclear issue by handing out propaganda and discussing the issues. This event incorporated a collective strategy in which participants were supported by a group structure. Kent used the 'consciousness raising' methodology of the women's movement in the art context; she hoped to make her audience more aware of political issues by creating activist performances in which they would be involved.

Mike Mullins also worked more successfully in a broader community than in the conventional gallery space. His most public spectacle, *The Invasion of No-one* (Orange Arts Festival, 1985), involved one hundred and thirty teenagers dressed

anonymously with their heads wrapped in gauze. After workshoping the performance for several weeks, and integrating the opinions of local teenagers, Mullins launched a sophisticated publicity campaign on radio, television and in the local press, announcing the coming of no-one; 'No-one is coming: No-one wants you' was the double message spread throughout the town.⁷⁵ Gradually, over a period of sixteen days, 'No-one' started to appear. Individually and in small groups, identical figures, static and silent, positioned themselves on the streets. Ken Wark wrote: 'No-one is the blankness, the alienated nature of the collective subjectivity [presented] to us as our Other.'⁷⁶ Many of Mullins's works concentrated on similar themes and he often used the no-one persona to represent the blank subject manipulated by the world; however, he usually placed 'No-one' in an active position: the subject able to speak even in its designated anonymity.

According to structuralist-Marxist criticism such practices were utopian and relied on the idea that people, through collective action, could effect change in society. Structuralism, as it developed in France, was taken on by the Left as a response to the failure of the student-worker uprising in May 1968 which was informed by New Left strategies of revolt. Structuralism shifted Left analysis away from activism (where ideology was considered to be conscious) by insisting that ideology was unconscious, formed in the Imaginary realm, based on the split between self and other, so that it became a kind of screen through which the subject saw the world.⁷⁷

The major problem with activist performance art, according to some critics, was its tendency to consider ideology in terms of 'false consciousness.'⁷⁸ The artist's role was didactic; s/he was to educate people so that they would come to understand various political issues. However, the feminist concern with raising the consciousness of individual women was an attempt to uncover the way in which the 'personal was political.' Consciousness raising groups proliferated the women's movement; they were small discussion groups that encouraged women to speak out about their personal experiences of rape, domestic violence, childcare responsibilities and sexuality. This was a kind of alternative, self-empowering therapy, designed on a collective level which was not didactic. It was a form of self-help therapy which insisted that women share experiences in common; and that those experiences that were 'felt' could be turned around so the individual women need not be isolated: they could come to 'know' their oppression under a patriarchal society. Although the structuralists' insistence

on the dominance of the social sphere was well founded, it is apparent that movements which stressed the personal or the experiential were not necessarily essentialist. To insist that the 'personal is political' is not the same as saying the personal is biological.

Although it is apparent that some performance artists who explored their own personal experiences did at times reinscribe conventional myths, especially when the female body was displayed for the male gaze, it is also apparent that much of this work either addressed what had been repressed by patriarchal society or it considered personal experience as political. The Marxist-structuralist position, although insightful on some levels, tended to reimpose a dominant, rationalising, and normalising discourse. Furthermore, the type of language that came with the theory, which stated categorically that 'language speaks the subject'; that the subject is 'always, already there, written and coded in advance', effectively foreclosed on an active position for the subject. It became a kind of academic cul-de-sac which silenced all action, all speech.

In the 1960s and 1970s artists believed they could change the structure of the art world and produce an art that was more relevant for people. Body art, ritual and activist performance art all positioned the subject as active, a speaking subject with a productive desire that could break through the imposed strictures of society.

Two readings of desire started to conflict in contemporary theory as the war between Apollo and Dionysus continued. On one hand desire was considered to be the desire of the Other. This says a lot about how society was structured but it eventually put the subject in a passive position. On the other hand desire was urged to be productive and the subject active but often in the Dionysian sense of the abject, the excessive, the psychotic. On the side of Apollo one encountered Plato, Freud and Lacan; on the Dionysian side one encountered Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze.

Deleuze was associated with the happenings of Jean-Jacques Lebel in Paris in the late 1960s. Lebel used Deleuzian terminology to describe his work when he said: "The happening is a *modus operandi*, a way of seeing and of being, a *schizoid creativity*."⁷⁹ Deleuze recognises the social imposition of the language of the father, the law, what he calls the *socius*, but insists that there are moments when this is destabilised.⁸⁰

The expression of repressed desires does not concern the activist performance artist. They attempt to reassert a position for the active, speaking subject in another way. They speak about the social sphere, the symbolic, and try to ascertain why certain prejudices exist (against women, blacks, homosexuals). They want people to become conscious of their actions and responsible for their motivations. In some ways this type of performance tends to rely on the idea of a humanist subject who can be in control of their actions.

A reassessment of the humanist paradigm led some feminists to reconsider psychoanalysis in the late 1970s and 1980s. This was particularly apparent in Britain where artists and theorists joined forces to insist that feminism consider the unconscious nature of ideology. Mary Kelly's project *Post-Partum Document* (discussed below) appeared as the visual art component of a Lacanian feminist interpretation of subjectivity and sexuality one year after the publication of Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* and Laura Mulvey's article, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.'⁸¹ The British artist Mary Kelly became the most respected and celebrated feminist artist in the 1980s. Her three-year project titled *Post-Partum Document* (1973-6, shown at the 4th Biennale of Sydney: *Visions in Disbelief* and the Ewing and George Paton Galleries in 1982) was considered to be one of the most rigorous criticisms within art practice of the notion of 'natural' or essential sexual identity.

Post-Partum Document was a series of diary entries of Kelly's personal experience of mothering, juxtaposed with the artist's Lacanian analysis of her feelings and desires and fragments from her child's

life (comforters that he may have used, scribbling, nappy liners etc). In this way Kelly documented the first six years of her son's life, tracing a journey from his birth, through the formation of the ego (mirror stage), to the positioning of the child's sexuality and the inscription into language (castration and Oedipus complex) as defined by a patriarchal society. The artist represented the mother-child relationship and its implicit narcissistic structure: the desire of the mother to possess the child, her inability to accept his separation from her body, and her (mis)recognition of the child as her own phallus: a phallus she desires in order to supplement her negative place as castrated subject. *Post-Partum Document* was also concerned with the formation of femininity, as the mother replayed her childhood experience of castration. The way in which the symbolic ascribes identity to the subject is the major feature of the work. The way in which law and desire are intimately entwined is documented throughout the journey of the child. The imaginary unity of mother and child is a fantasy that must be broken so that the child can have an identity of his own and take up a position as a speaking subject within the symbolic.⁸²

Post-Partum Document was a work of art that denied the gaze by abandoning any representation of the body as such. Although the body of the child was seen through fragments, objects he had once owned or loved, he was not represented as a 'whole' body image and neither was his mother. Kelly responded to Laura Mulvey's analysis of the gaze by taking the body of woman out of the art. This strategy was not appealing to most performance artists who usually appear in their works in one-way or another.

Although theory tended to over shadow contemporary art practice in Australia in the 1980s, and it contributed to a re-analysis of the body and the self in society, it is also apparent that most performance artists were not attracted by the idea of making works in which the body was absent. Some performance artists such as Lyndal Jones addressed the criticisms of Mulvey, Kelly et. al. by trying to find a place from which women could speak. Other, younger artists (Michele Luke and Richard Grayson), started to analyse sexual relationships between men and women, whilst artists like Steve Wigg, David Watt and Mark Rogers considered the social construction of masculinity.

The scatological body returned in the mid-late 1980s in body art performances by women. Performances by Karen Finley in New York became infamous and news of her assaults on society spread through the performance art-world very quickly. Her works were banned in America as they spoke in a pornographic language of disgust against society and its strictures. By the end of the 1980s, similar works were being produced in Australia by artists such as Linda Sproul and Maude Davey. These younger artists had witnessed the silencing of the abject body associated with Marxist-structuralism, and they knew about Laura Mulvey's critique of the gaze which effectively put the female body in a closet. Artists rebelled against the dominance of this type of theory and turned to other interpretations which spoke of eroticism and masochism. These works which acknowledge the social construction of the subject and simultaneously try to find a space for the body to speak will be considered in detail in the following chapter.

ENDNOTES

- 1 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1983, p.163.
- 2 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay*, p.160.
- 3 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay*, p. 160.
- 4 I have highlighted the performance artists included. Sculpture and mixed media works were also exhibited by: Tom Arthur, Warren Breninger, Peter Cole, Peter Cripps, Ewa Pachucka, David Ryan, Peter Taylor, Stephen Turpie and Hossein Valamanesh.
- 5 R. Lindsay, *Relics and Rituals, Survey 15*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, 17/7-13/9/81. Reprinted in P. Taylor, (ed.), *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970-1980*, Art & Text, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 108-115.
- 6 P. Taylor, (ed.), *Anything Goes*, pp. 108-115.
- 7 J. Orr artist's statement in R. Lindsay, *Relics and Rituals*, no. pag.
- 8 The recipe for *Murray River Punch* was published with five etchings of the Murray in *LIP*, 1980, p. 56.
- 9 See Bonita Ely interviewed by Kiki Martins in *Act 3: Ten Australian Performance Artists*, exhibition catalogue, Canberra School of Art Gallery, Canberra, 1982, loose-leaf folder, no pag.
- 10 Bonita Ely artist's statement, reproduced in N. Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*, artists' chronicle section, unpublished manuscript, no pag.
- 11 See E. Ruinard, 'Dogwoman Makes History' in *Bonita Ely: Dogwoman Makes History*, exhibition catalogue, First Draft, Chippendale, NSW, June 1986, no pag.
- 12 E. Ruinard, 'Dogwoman Makes History'
- 13 Taped interview with Ralph Eberlein, 18 April 1988.
- 14 Taped interview with Ralph Eberlein, 18 April 1988.
- 15 Taped interview with Ralph Eberlein, 18 April 1988.
- 16 Taped interview with Ralph Eberlein, 18 April 1988.
- 17 Taped interview with Ralph Eberlein, 18 April 1988.
- 18 Artist's statement written to accompany *Landscape no. 2, Sentinel*, Queensland Art Gallery, Nov. 1985-Jan. 1986; material provided by the artist for research purposes.
- 19 Taped interview with Lyndall Milani, 8 September 1988.
- 20 Taped interview with Lyndall Milani, 8 September 1988, and written details supplied by the artist.
- 21 Gabrielle Dalton, artist's statement sent to the author.
- 22 Gabrielle Dalton, artist's statement sent to the author.
- 23 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay*, p. 160.
- 24 Taped interview with Kevin Mortensen, 3 October 1988. See also A. Marsh, 'Performance Art in the 1970s', *Art and Australia*, vol. 26, no. 3, Autumn 1989, pp. 412-418.
- 25 R. Atkins, 'San Francisco: Jill Scott, "Sand the Stimulant", 80 Langton St.', *Artforum*, September 1982, p. 84.
- 26 Documented in the artist's book, J. Scott, *Characters in Motion*, Straw Man Press, San Francisco, 1980, p. 47.
- 27 *The Readymade Boomerang: Certain Relations in 20th Century Art*, The 8th Biennale of Sydney, exhibition catalogue Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1990, p. 392.
- 28 Taped interview with Arthur Wicks, 19 April 1988.
- 29 M. Haerdtter, in A. Wicks, *Berlin Notizen und Andreas*, Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 1983, p. 5.
- 30 Arthur Wicks, letter to the author, June 1983.
- 31 Arthur Wicks, letter to the author, June 1983.
- 32 C. Ashton, 'Art's Court Jester Seeks to Taunt and Tanalise', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5/11/85, p. 16.
- 33 A. Wicks, 'Boatman' in J. Kent and A. Marsh, (eds.), *Live Art: Australia and America*, the editors, Adelaide, 1984, p. 95.
- 34 C. Ashton, 'Art's Court Jester.'
- 35 C. Ashton, 'Art's Court Jester.'
- 36 See G. Pollock, 'Issue: An Exhibition of Social Strategies by Women Artists', *Spare Rib*, no. 103, 1981, pp. 49-51.
- 37 *Art Network* began publication in 1979 and ran until 1986; *LIP* ran from 1976 to 1984 with a distinct change of emphasis in 1981, when more theoretical and discursive criticism appeared; before 1981 *LIP* had concentrated on chronicling the activities of women artists. The major new magazine to reach the public was *Art & Text*, which incorporated many articles on 'new theory'; much of the 'new' theory condemned activism

- and insisted on a close reading of social texts instead. This was in direct contrast to a revolution in lifestyle precipitated by the counter-culture, where everyone could participate. However, in the early years of *Art & Text* there was a commitment to, what was called a *bricolage* methodology (a kind of eclecticism in the arts; what I have called simply — cross-disciplinary practice). Young artists' involvement in a 'new subculture' was also informed in various ways by a Gramscian Marxist analysis. The Gramscian position still allowed for a place for an active subject; political activism through culture was maintained and 'organic' intellectuals (in Gramsci's terms those arising from the middle and lower classes) were expected to educate the masses. See A. Martin, 'Before and After *Art & Text*', *Agenda Contemporary Art*, Melbourne, vol. 2, no. 1, August 1988, (Art Papers — Special Supplement), pp. 15-19. Martin argues that in the early years the magazine was not theoretical but committed to a 'subcultural style.' In saying this Martin evokes Dick Hebdige's book *Subculture the Meaning of Style* which analysed the Beats, Teddy Boys, Punks etc as subcultural forces of resistance, Hebdidge drew on Gramsci.
- 38 'Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making' was originally published in *Screen*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1980, pp. 35-48. Later it was republished in *LIP*.
- 39 J. Barry and S. Flitterman, 'Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making', *LIP*, 1981/82, p. 30.
- 40 L.R. Lippard, *Overlay*, p. 160.
- 41 In relation to what has been termed the 'difference debate', the arguments between a socially constructed sexuality and an innate sexual difference (to suggest only the polarities of the debate) see the special issue of *Screen: Deconstructing 'Difference'*, vol 28, no. 1, Winter 1987, especially Mandy Merek's introduction, pp. 2-9, which maps the shifts in theoretical positions from Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay to her article, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by *Duel in the Sun*', *Framework*, nos 15-17, 1981, pp. 12-15.
- 42 Many critics of psychoanalysis continued to argue that, despite Lacan's incorporation of a structuralist, linguistic analysis, the underlying thesis on sexuality had not changed since Freud's 1925 essay on the anatomical distinction between the sexes outlined in *Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes* (1925), *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, pp. 248-60. The 'difference debate' revolves around theories of masculine and feminine sexuality and how these positions are attained through the symbolic castration of the subject who experiences the Oedipus complex.
- 43 J. Lacan, 'Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis' (1948), in *Ecrit: A Selection*, p.23.
- 44 See L. Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', *Lenin and Philosophy*, translated B. Brester, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971), pp. 127-86.
- 45 H. Eisenstein in H. Eisenstein and A. Jardine (eds.), *The Future of Difference*, Barnard College Women's Centre, Boston, 1980, p. xxiii.
- 46 See M. Merek, 'Introduction', *Screen: Deconstructing 'Difference'*, vol 28, no. 1, Winter 1987, pp. 2-9, and G. Greene and C. Kahn, 'Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Women' in G. Green and C. Kahn, (eds.), *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, Methuen, London and New York, 1985, pp. 1-36.
- 47 See also K. Millet, *Sexual Politics*, Doubleday, New York, 1969 and E. Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology*, William Morrow, New York, 1971.
- 48 See A. Game, 'Affirmative Action: Liberal Rationality or Challenge to Patriarchy?', *Legal Services Bulletin*, December 1984, pp. 7-10
- 49 For a lucid analysis of women's studies and the fight for equality, see Hester Eisenstein's introduction to H. Eisenstein and A. Jardine (eds.), *The Future of Difference*, pp. xv-xxiv.
- 50 See especially M. Roth (ed.), *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America, 1970-1980*, Astro Artz, Los Angeles, 1983, and H. M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1989, pp. 66-100. See also C. Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism' in B. Wallis, (ed.), *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984, pp. 203-35.
- 51 The Feminist Art Program was initiated by Judy Chicago at Fresno State and Cal Arts in 1970 and 1971, when Chicago was on the faculty. See J. Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist*, Anchor Books/Doubleday, New York, 1977, especially the chapters 'Fresno and the Women's Program', 'Returning to Los Angeles' and 'Womanhouse — Performances', pp. 70-132.
- 52 Taped interview with Barbara Hall, 23 July 1987.
- 53 The *Trans-Art* exhibitions (four in total) were organised by Peter Kennedy and aimed to show non-bulk documentation by local and overseas artists. The lightweight of the exhibitions enabled easy handling and freight for an artist's space running on a meagre budget. *Trans-Art 3: Communications* was an exhibition of performance art documentation from New York; it included works by Eleonor Antin, Adrian Piper, Dan Graham and The Guerilla Art Action Group.

- 54 The Women's Art Register Extension project was established in Melbourne at the Carringbush Library, Richmond, Victoria, in 1977 and continues to date; the Women's Art Movement Registry was established in Adelaide in 1977 and is now housed at The Women's Studies Research Centre, Department of Education, Wakefield Street, Adelaide. These are the two largest collections in Australia. Lippard showed many examples of political performance by American artists. Candice Compton from the Los Angeles Women's Video Centre toured Australia in 1979 under the auspices of the George Paton Gallery and showed video tapes made by artists from the Women's Building in Los Angeles. See M. Eagle, 'Art', *Age*, 6/9/79, p. 2. Jill Scott, an Australian artist living in the United States in the late 1970s, continued the exchange between Australia and America in 1979. Scott toured Australia showing documentation of American performance art and collected a reciprocal exhibition entitled *Contemporary Australian Artists: A Survey*, which toured American alternative art spaces from November 1979 to May 1980. The artists included were: Marr Grounds, Mike Parr, John Davis, Bonita Ely, Jill Orr, Anne Marsh, Ken Unsworth, Imants Tillers, Tim Burns, Noel Sheridan, Jane Kent, Terry Smith, Bob Ramsay, Arthur Wicks, Peter Tyndall, John Nixon, Frank Bendinelli, Ray Woolard and others.
- 55 See note 51 above for details of the Feminist Art Programme pioneered by Judy Chicago. Similar programmes continue to be run at the Women's Building in Los Angeles. Lippard showed documentation of this later generation including works by Suzanne Lacy, Leslie Labowitz, The Feminist Art Workers, The Waitresses, Nancy Angelo, Nancy Buchanan and Judith Barry. See M. Roth, (ed.), *The Amazing Decade*.
- 56 See J. Kent and A. Marsh, *Live Art: Australia and America*, the editors, Adelaide, 1984. The book includes an artists' chronicle which presents activist and ritual performances by feminists.
- 57 See especially Moira Roth's introductory essay in M. Roth, *The Amazing Decade*, pp. 14-41.
- 58 L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, Studio Vista, New York, 1973.
- 59 See L. R. Lippard, 'The Art Workers' Coalition: Not a History', *Studio International*, Nov, 1970, pp. 171-4, and N. Marmer, 'Art and Politics '77', *Art in America*, July 1977, pp. 64-6.
- 60 See L. R. Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, Dutton, New York, 1976, 'Sexual Politics: Art Style', pp. 28-37.
- 61 For an overview see T. Smith, 'Art Criticism in Australia: The mid-1970s Movement', *Agenda*, vol. 1, no. 2, Aug. 1988 (Art Papers, special supplement), pp. 12-13.
- 62 The magazine *White Elephant or Red Herring?*, produced by protesters against the 3rd Biennale of Sydney: *European Dialogue* in 1979, documents a Marxist campaign which lobbied for equal representation for women and Australian artists. Similar protests were organised by the Art Workers' Coalition against the Museum of Modern Art and the Witney Museum, see L. R. Lippard, 'The Art Workers' Coalition', and by the same author, *Get the Message: A Decade of Art for Social Change*, Dutton, New York, 1984.
- 63 J. Grounds, 'Stinky', *Women at Work*, exhibition catalogue, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, 1980, p. 23.
- 64 J. Grounds, 'Stinky', *Women at Work*, p. 23.
- 65 J. Grounds, 'Stinky', *Women at Work*, p. 23.
- 66 J. Grounds, 'Stinky', *Women at Work*, p. 23.
- 67 L. R. Lippard, 'The Art Workers' Coalition', p. 173.
- 68 Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Maintenance Art Activity III*, was performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, on 22 July 1973. The performance, one of a series of works, involved the artist washing and rewashing the floor of the museum throughout the day. I have used this example of Ukeles's early work since it is the most documented action; see L. R. Lippard, *From the Center*, p. 60.
- 69 Later works on a larger scale included *Touch Sanitation* (1979), a year-long public awareness project involving the artist in the daily work routine of garbage collection with the 8500 garbage collectors of New York City. *Touch Sanitation* is a documented history of the work environment and the social issues affecting the workers. See *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists*, exhibition catalogue, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1980, no pag.
- 70 See N. Sheridan, (ed.), *The Experimental Art Foundation: Adelaide, South Australia*, EAF Press, Adelaide, 1979, no pag.
- 71 See *Women at Work*, p. 22.
- 72 See N. Sheridan (ed.), *Experimental Art Foundation Performance Week, March 1980*, EAF Press, Adelaide, 1980, no pag.
- 73 Taped interview with Graeme Davis, February 1988.
- 74 Taped interview with Jane Kent, 16 June 1989.
- 75 See K. Wark, 'Mike Mullins - The Invasion of No-One', *Art Network*, no. 16, Winter 1985, p. 56.
- 76 K. Wark, 'Mike Mullins - The Invasion of No-One', p.56.

- 77 V. Burgin, *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* Macmillan, London, 1986, p. 196.
- 78 V. Burgin, *The End of Art Theory*, p. 195.
- 79 In 'Jean-Jacques Lebel: An Interview', *Flash Art*, no. 84-85, October-November 1978, p. 60, my emphasis.
- 80 See G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Viking Press, New York, 1977. First published in French in 1972.
- 81 J. Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women*, Vintage Books, New York, 1975; L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, Autumn 1975, pp. 6-18.
- 82 See M. Kelly, *Post-Partum Document*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983; also K. Linker, 'Representation and Sexuality' in B. Wallis (ed.), *Art After Modernism*, pp. 391-415.

CHAPTER FIVE

**PERFORMANCE ART IN THE 1980S AND 1990S:
ANALYSING THE SOCIAL BODY**

A cynicism of the 'already written', apparent in the Marxist-structuralist critique of the subject, tended to foreclose on an active role for the individual or group. Although structuralist theory effectively dismantled the humanist myth of 'man' at the centre of the universe, such a analysis tended to produce a mood of complacency and an acceptance of stasis. The decentring of the humanist doctrine of power, control and progress, was supposed to make a space in Western society for those individuals and groups who had been excluded. However, the idea that the subject was already spoken, in advance of his or her actions, became a kind of academic shorthand which effectively silenced minority groups who had life time existences outside theory, beyond the text.

The position of the speaking-acting subject had always been a focus in performance art. However, in the 1980s a change in approach was apparent as artists moved away from the celebration of 'natural' difference and towards an exploration of the social construction of the subject. In Australia it is apparent that performance art, as it had been known in the 1970s, waned in the mid 1980s. However, it continued as an art form

throughout the decade, changing its focus from an expressive, cathartic practice to a more social appraisal of the body-subject. The surface (the look) and the structure of performance art changed in the 1980s. A new generation of artists moved freely between actions, art performance, video and theatre. It was no longer considered important to stress the difference between performance art and theatre. The realities of space and time, once seen as sites of 'authenticity', were reconsidered.

A new wave of performance artists emerged in the 1980s who were ready to address the critiques levelled at the performance art of an older generation. In response to theories of the gaze artists reassessed their position as authorial voice, primary maker of meaning, and turned to multi-layered productions, which would decentre the spectator's gaze away from the artist. Humour and political satire were reinstated by artists analysing media representations of cultural and sexual stereotypes.

Myths were still considered in performance art but they were scrutinised for their complicity with conventional metaphysics. Women's experience continued to be addressed but it was considered in terms of its social construction. Masculinity was analysed by male artists working in the field and new music performance events started to draw heavily on popular sounds. Pop art became a renewed area of interest for some performances artists.¹ When the body came back on the performance art agenda in the United States it was a female body which spoke in pornographic tongues against a patriarchal society. This generated a considerable amount of critical interest which revolved around feminist analyses of pornography. In Australia there was little evidence in the 1990s of a return to the cathartic modes of the 1970s, however, performance artists such as Linda Sproul began to incorporate overtly sexual imagery.

Paul Taylor, the editor of *Art & Text*, started to talk about a new wave of artists in the early 1980s; artists who were committed to the idea of a subculture rather than a counter culture. Taylor was talking about artists associated with the Clifton Hill Music Centre (including Philip Brophy, Maria Kozic, David Chesworth, Adrian Martin) and those connected with Art Projects (John Nixon, Jenny Watson, Peter Tyndall, John Dunkley-Smith, Imants Tillers, Lyndal Jones, Mike Parr). The new wave music-performance group *Tsch Tsch Tsch* (Philip Brophy, Maria Kozic, Ralph Traviato and Jane Stevenson sometimes joined by other artists) and performances by Lyndal Jones are representative of the shift in performance art in the 1980s. Writing about the early years of *Art & Text* (1981-3) Adrian Martin argued that the artists of the New Wave embraced a structuralist interpretation of the subject:

In place of the artist as pristine “self” — who felt, reflected, struggled to express — stood the artist as invaded, “divided”, “decentred” self, a pure surface crossed by cultural flows, a mere “effect” of everything around him or her. (Hence the proud slogan of the time: “I do not speak, I am spoken”) . . .²

However, as Martin points out, ‘theory’ as such was used by artists in a fairly eclectic way. The idea of a subculture assumed that resistance to dominant culture was possible at the margins of society.³ The punk generation was just one of a long line of subversive groups who presented resistance through dress, fashion, body piercing and anti-social behaviour. Although some performance artists welcomed the idea of a subject already spoken and

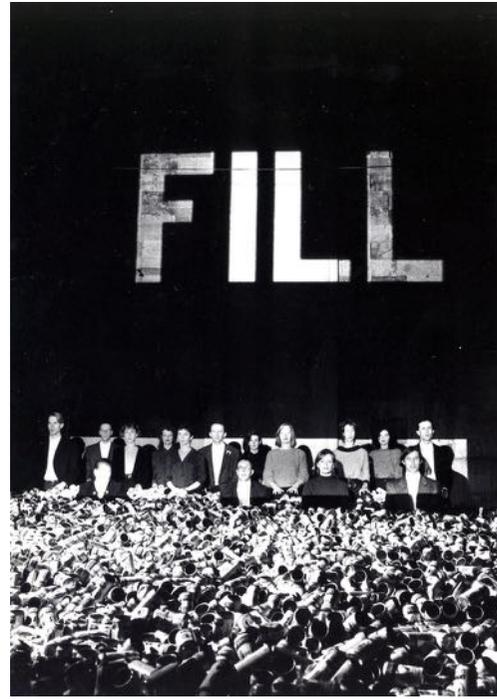
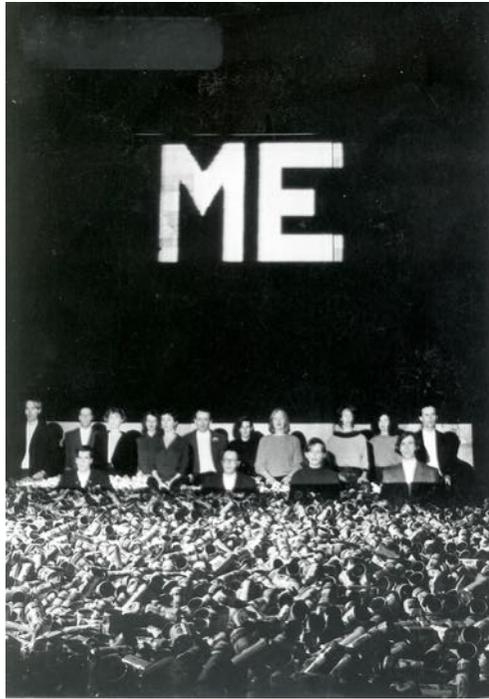
used this to address the ways in which cultural meanings were established, others sought to reposition a place for the active speaking subject.

The way in which the subject is represented by Lyndal Jones is of particular interest in an analysis of performance art in the 1980s. Memory plays an important role as a tool which aims to tease apart conscious and unconscious thoughts. The act of recollection, of memories and dreams, effectively decentres any notion of an absolute truth, or a definitive meaning. The use of a multi-layered environment makes this apparent to the spectator who is encouraged to contribute their own meaning to the work. In Jones’s performances one witnesses a change in methodology which sophisticates an earlier modernist notion of fragmentation.

Lyndal Jones spent several years in London from 1974 to 1976, the years in which a Marxist-structuralist interpretation of the subject was gaining strength in feminist circles. Interviewed in 1987, she said that theories of the male gaze espoused by critics like Laura Mulvey had a stifling effect on women’s performance.⁴ Although Jones’s performances engage with feminist and structuralist interpretations of language, and all her works present gender as a social construction, she is also aware that this reading of the subject is narrow and potentially oppressive.⁵ Jones has written extensively about her work and claims that she attempts to ‘challenge the constraints of a patriarchal control of language by representing woman as subject . . . able to manipulate materials, images and ideas.’⁶ She is critical of performance art by women in the 1970s and insists that their approach was anti-intellectual and hides ‘a deep-seated fear of theory.’⁷

Jones, who has a background in theatre, started to present works in art galleries in the late 1970s. The performances use slide projection, video and sound with gesture, movement and scripted text in order to juxtapose conscious thought, memory and the unconscious disruptions associated with dreams. Many of them have been presented as lengthy, minimal events which stress repetition.

Lyndal Jones is interested in the boundaries between art, theatre and dance.⁸ Her first series of works was titled *At Home* and was presented in alternative galleries and theatres in the late 1970s. *At Home, Coming and Going* (La Mama, 1977) was presented in an empty car park adjacent to the theatre and was reminiscent of the earlier happenings. Ten actors performed a sequence of events as Jones tore up sheets to decorate a wooden house-frame. Several



actors performed as workmen, building a fire in a nearby lane; another walked along the top of a high wall over-looking the car park; an argument could be heard inside the theatre; two people emerged and one left abruptly in a car; finally the workmen made their exit by scaling a ladder and departing across the roof-tops.⁹ By this time Jones had finished decorating the house-frame and was lying down. In this early work the fragmentation of events, occurring at different sites within the vicinity of the car park, may have appeared bizarre, in the character of a happening, but the incidents witnessed by the audience cohered around the theme of work.

At Home — Ladies a Plate (Ewing and George Paton Galleries, 1979) made direct reference to the Australian tradition of taking a plate of food to a party. Again Jones addressed women's domestic work, this time in a solo performance. *Ladies a Plate* involved the arranging and rearranging of seventy plates into various patterns on the floor. As the plates were being displayed, or gathered up to be arranged again, slides of the artist's house, a setting for a party, and stacks of dirty crockery were projected on to the wall. Jones occasionally spoke, as if to herself, about a garden party she had once held.

Derek Kreckler, *Fill*, 1990.

A sound performance consisting of 13 performers set amongst 28,000 beer cans. The cans remained mute throughout the performance, standing in as the residue of the spectacle; the football match, the cricket ground or a littered beach. Behind the performers a large video projection (15 x 22 metres) acted as a visual clock pacing the performers' voices with words and languages fragments. The performers were instructed to repeat the word 'everyone'; their utterance were to proceed from a silence mime, developing into a whisper and gradually becoming louder until it reached the maximum volume achievable by each performer. The signing of 'everyone', pictured against the language sequence – WORDS FILL ME – presents a mesmerized subject to the audience. A subject caught in language yet trying bravely to assert its collective subjecthood.

At Home - On the Road Again, (Act 2, Canberra School of Art Gallery, ANU, 1980) involved the artist in the continuous packing and unpacking of three suitcases, whilst a soundtrack and the artist's spoken interventions explained a journey taken on a train. Slides of the journey focused on views from the train window; blurred images of the landscape, urban stations, city and country vistas framed the artist's actions. The spoken narrative analysed the weight distribution of the suitcases and referred constantly to the placement and stress of the body. The images captured through the window of the train were enlarged and diminished; the narratives became more personalised as Jones recounted the memory of a peeping tom looking through the window of the stationary train; the image, blurred and unrecognisable, was recounted through a memory and the audience, who had looked on attentively as repetition replaced repetition, were suddenly 'framed' within the act of looking as voyeurs.

Jones tends to rely on the minimal gesture and repetition. All of her works have incorporated a type of Brechtian distancing, the idea that the audience should not be lulled into a passive receptive position by being presented with a theatrical illusion which depends on the 'suspension of belief.'¹⁰ Images recur and written and spoken messages are repeated throughout the performances, often several versions of one performance will be presented at the same time. In this way the audience becomes familiar with the form and content of the work and they must look further into the structure of the performance, as active participants in the construction of meaning. There is no sequential narrative as such; no story with a conventional beginning, middle and end. Jones cites many influences in her works, especially the feminist and structuralist concerns of works made by the London Film-makers Co-op in the mid-1970s. The performances use the cut-up or montage method of structuralist film-making, which attempts to dissipate a central focus. The fragmentation and the repetition causes distraction and sometimes frustration in the audience; they are enticed to ask themselves questions about the event and its possible meanings.

Lyndal Jones has often used an installation format to present what she called 'versions' of her works; she has made versions of the performances specifically for video, and she has worked on large scale productions which include actors, stage design, script and sound-image overlays presented in theatres. Jones produces works which rely on theatrical skill, direction and production. The events are usually rehearsed and often repeated, although each performance is

slightly different. Lyndal Jones's performances reach a wide audience and the later works have been presented in conventional theatres.

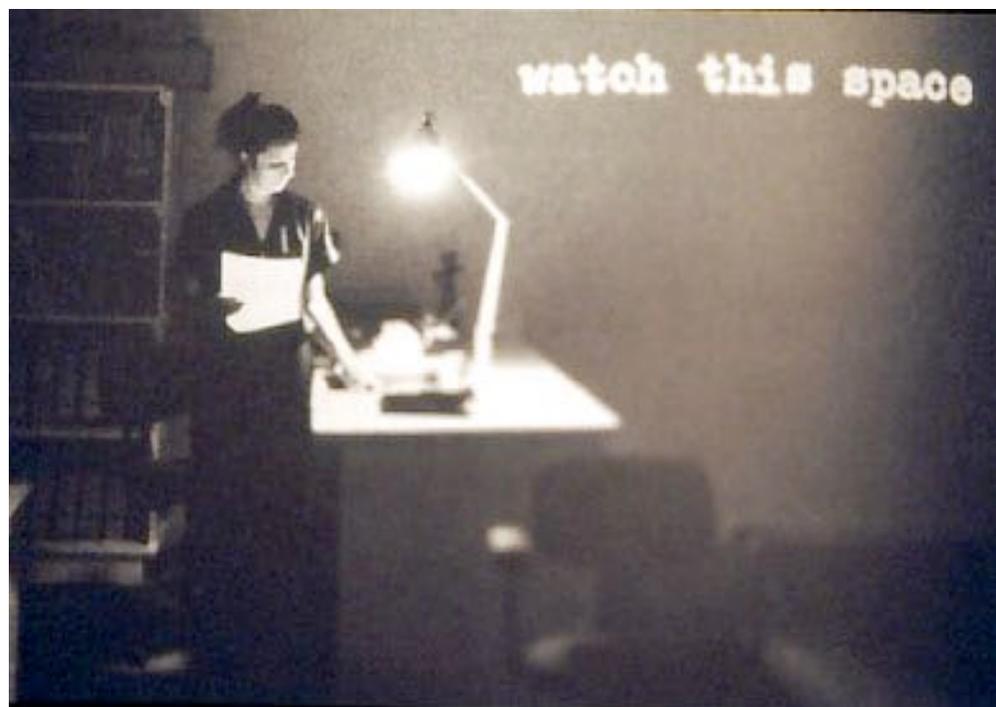
The *Prediction Piece* series (1981-91) was concerned with the role of memory and how this might be interpreted to 'predict' future actions. Jones is committed to inserting art into a socio-political discourse and she says that the idea of the *Prediction Series* 'reflected the prevailing fear at that time [1981] that there might be no future, that the event of nuclear holocaust was a foregone conclusion.'¹¹ Although Jones has been described as a structuralist and a deconstructivist,¹² neither theory fits the practice adequately. Jones tries to reposition an active role for the subject, she is interested in the way in which people can change their lives and effect change on both a personal and a collective level.¹³ She says:

Central to all the Prediction Pieces is an examination of the act(s) of prediction . . . the processes through which we arrange our future(s) within our minds, and hence, our ability to plan, to intervene. It is an examination of the foundations upon which we can organise and create change,¹⁴

The Prediction Pieces began as modest performances, presented in a gallery, usually involving only one or two performers (1—4) and evolved into elaborate productions staged in theatres with large casts of dancers, actors and visual artists (6 and 10). In Prediction Piece 1 (George Paton Gallery, Melbourne, 1981)¹⁵ Jones set the scene for the forthcoming series. The artist sat at a desk with a typewriter and a tape recorder,

behind her messages (signs of what was to come) were projected on slides. She read a weather forecast aloud into the tape recorder and started to type. A woman's voice was heard over an amplified sound system: she was reading the predictions from the I Ching, tarot cards and astrology. Jones recorded the woman's voice and typed what she heard creating a fragmented text of predictions. Behind her the sign read: 'Watch this space'; 'You see it before it happens'; 'You act before it happens'; 'Try another direction.'¹⁶ At the end of the performance Jones read her typewritten script to the audience. In the early works Jones used the tools of conceptual art — the typewriter and the word. She created multi-layered predictions rather than statements of intention characteristic of works scripted by Mike Parr,¹⁷ rather it was an exploration of possibilities.

In *Prediction Piece 1* Jones used popular and clichéd methods of prediction, such as the tarot cards. In *Prediction Piece 2* (1981-2)¹⁸ she used a video recording of the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana, a fantasy seen by millions. Jones sat watching the replay on a television screen. Mary Sitarenos sat behind the TV set elevated on a small stage. She played the role of the fortune teller. The two performers entered into a dialogue with one another. Each asked: 'What do you see?' Jones replied by predicting the next scene on the television screen. Sitarenos described the room that she saw reflected in a small mirror; what she saw or heard when looking into a cup; what she saw when her eyes were covered with her hands. Again the slide projector predicted the actions: 'You see it before it happens', 'Forewarned is forearmed.'¹⁹



Lyndal Jones,
Prediction Piece 1,
George Paton Gallery,
Melbourne, 1981.
Photograph from the
artist's collection.



From 1983 onwards the *Prediction Pieces* became more complex and started to address broader political issues. In *Prediction Piece 5 (Continuum '83, Tokyo, 1983)* Jones was faced with the problem of presenting a performance in Japan. As a white Anglo-Saxon artist she was aware of the eroticisation of the East and the West's incorporation of Japanese style throughout the modernist period. Jones had to encounter the issue of cultural difference and the way it had been coded in oppositional terms by the West: the terror of the Other. Bridging such an opposition became the subject of the performance. Jones worked with two Japanese performers Haruyo Hickey and Michico Amail, and concentrated on the relationship between Australia and Japan by focusing on the woodchip industry (woodchips are a major export from Australia to Japan) and on technology (a market in which the Japanese are dominant).

Setting the scene for the gallery audience, Jones announced that the performance would take place in a large forest in a small clearing.²⁰ The artist predicted the action as large bags of woodchips were raked into patterns on the floor, resembling the ordered shape of a Japanese stone garden. Images shown on two video monitors predicted the actions to come: pre-recorded images of Hickey's face and of Jones raking leaves in a garden were followed by the live action of Hickey raking and Jones predicting the action on video. The relationship between electronic reproduction and the body action became the focus of the performance. Responding to theories of the media presented by the French critic Jean Baudrillard, who argued that the subject has become 'a switching centre for all the networks of influences'²¹, Lyndal Jones insisted on positioning

an active role for the subject. She did this by neutralising the power of the mass media (the video representation) that Baudrillard considered to be all consuming. Jones's actors struck up a relationship with their video doubles but they did so in the context of their own actions. Baudrillard's critiques of the media in late capitalist society were particularly bleak and they were well known to artists in Australia.²² The critic argued that:

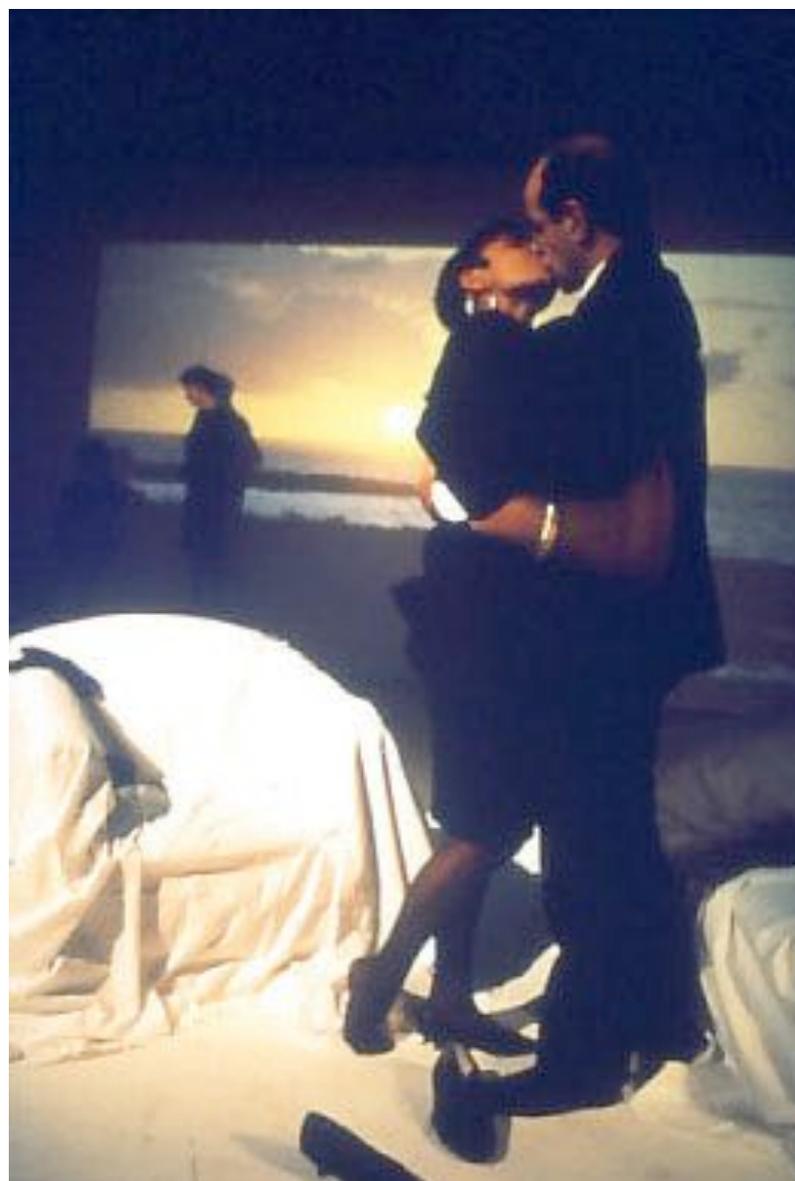
With the television image . . . our own body and the whole surrounding universe become a control screen . . . the psychological dimension has in a sense vanished . . . The subject himself, suddenly transformed, becomes a computer at the wheel . . . The vehicle now becomes a kind of capsule, its dashboard the brain, the surrounding landscape like a televised screen.²³

Baudrillard's view of technology in the late twentieth century was apocalyptic; he described the dominance of the video, film and TV image over the individual subject. For Baudrillard everything had become a simulacra, a copy of the event, nothing was real and the subject, engulfed by a society that privileged electronic communication in all fields of life, could not act. For Lyndal Jones this was an anathema; a curse imposed on the subject which effectively foreclosed on action. *Prediction Piece 5* addressed such criticism, insisting that there was a space in which the subject could speak. In the performance event she created such a place and positioned the video as a tool, something to be used in the human endeavour to communicate across cultures. The performance was presented in both English and Japanese and depicted the relationship between the body of the actor and technology; it also addressed issues associated with the environment and finally ended with a humorous sign seen on the back of a road-workers' truck on an Australian highway. The sign read: 'The road to happiness is always under construction.'²⁴

Sexuality became the theme of *Prediction Piece 7* (Los Angeles, 1984)²⁵ as Jones once again presented a space in which the female voice could come to speech. Set in a cinema with slides projected onto the screen, Jones stood at a lectern and presented a lecture about the future and the act of prediction. The speech was delivered three times in succession. In the first version Jones

appeared dressed as a man, and, with the aid of a pre-recorded voice, she spoke as a male, gradually adding her own female voice. In the second version she wore an evening dress, high heels and carried a large bouquet of flowers, as if she were an actress receiving acclaim after a performance. The speech began with two voices, the male voice and her own, and ended with only her voice. In the third version she was dressed androgynously in black shirt and trousers; this time she read the speech alone. The performance ended when Jones fired a gun, an action that had been predicted on the slides shown throughout the performance.²⁶

*Prediction Piece 8: Winter/Passion (Origins, Originality and Beyond, 6th Biennale of Sydney, 1986)*²⁷ addressed the issue of sexuality and its differences. Six actors alternated in playing a love scene which was interrupted: sometimes by a third person and continuously by stories told to the audience about passion, anger, love and personal alienation. The stories were scripted to reflect the varied cultural and ethnic background of the lovers and were spoken in Greek, Italian, French and English. The slide sequence, designed by John Dunkley-Smith, showed contrasting images of winter and summer landscapes, representing coldness and passion. *Winter/Passion* explored various sexual relationships as the actor-lovers presented heterosexual and homosexual coupling. In this work Jones addressed the issue of sexual difference through the intimate relationships of the lovers, pointing to the problems people experience in communicating with one another and the isolation of individuals within relationships. The narcissistic structure of the monogamous interaction was highlighted as the complexities



Lyndal Jones,
*Prediction Piece 8:
Winter/Passion,
Origins, Originality
and Beyond, 6th
Biennale of Sydney,
1986.*

Photograph from the
artist's collection.

between self and other were explored. The act of being in-love was presented as both an engulfing experience, destroying individuality, and an obsessive relationship as the actors became fascinated by the exteriorised ideal of the other.²⁸

In the large production *Prediction Piece 6 — Pipe Dreaming — A Performance about Optimism* (presented with Danceworks, Victorian Arts Centre, April 1989),²⁹ Jones was both theatrical director and performer. Slide sequences from previous versions were projected on the walls, ceiling and hands of the performers as three actors performed on a small platform which moved from centre stage to the wings of the theatre during five acts. The stage within a stage was decorated as a study. In the first study scene the actors were revolutionaries engaged in writing speeches, they quoted from Guy Debord's 'Instructions for Taking up Arms'³⁰ and presented themselves as idealists. The performance revolved around the statement 'The writing is on the wall' which was reminiscent of the closure associated with a structuralist philosophy where the subject is already spoken in advance of action. In the next study sequence the revolutionaries were exposed as artists and they quoted from Chekhov's *The Seagull*, which focused on the failed attempts of its male protagonist to create a revolutionary theatre. In this way an idealistic interpretation of revolution was analysed and presented together with the actions of Danceworks. The dancers went through a similar ideological process. At first the image of China was romanticised, the image of the East exoticised for the West, however, over the length of the performance this changed. Young dancers rode their

bicycles across the stage ringing their bells loudly; a feeling of threat started to intervene in the optimism of the event as gunshots were heard. Jones appeared as both a blind-folded victim: her back against the wall as if facing a firing squad, and as an active subject continuously asking questions of another woman, blinded in the same way. She asked, 'What do you see?' and her companion answered, giving descriptive narratives of imagined scenes. Across a long wall (the Great Wall of China) statements were projected:

watch this space

PREDICTION PIECE 6: PIPE
DREAMING

and, as the sun

sinks slowly

on the West . . .

the East is red

(the centre cannot hold)

what do you see

FIRE

is this a sign ?

I see no end to this

I see no end to it

. . . an endless vista . . .

forewarned is forearmed

a loaded gun will always fire

get ready

take aim

the writing is on the wall

I will melt

I know I will just melt

in my dream you are touching
my breast

in my dream I am undressing
you slowly

I will feel the weight of you

we will fall to the ground together

I will see red

you will see stars

my hand will still contain the
feel of the softness of the hair
on your chest

I want you to touch me

I want to touch you

you will be up against the wall

FIRE

it could all end in tears

we will need to take steps

three steps forward
(and two backward)

you will need to step forward

there COULD be a happy ending

your back is to the wall

10

9

8

the end is near

6

5

4

the end is VERY near

2³¹

Change and revolution were personalised in the messages projected on the wall as the political became the personal. Stories of revolutions snatched from historical texts were replaced by the personal memories of revolution as told by Chinese immigrants in Australia. Again the cultural opposition was undone as the other entered the space of the performance: no longer exoticised, the images of Lindy Lee's paintings presented by the artist herself replaced the central space of the actor-revolutionaries.

Prediction Piece 6 - Pipe Dreaming was Jones's first large-scale spectacle for the theatre and in many ways the complexities of the work were missed in a single viewing of the performance. Two weeks after the performance in Melbourne the youth of China rebelled against its communist fathers and many were slaughtered in Tiananmen Square. In the context of the real life happening the performance appeared to be idealistic; the response to a youthful optimism was predictably the power of the gun as military tanks fired on the crowd.³²

Artists working in performance art in the 1980s and 1990s presented decentred and often dislocated representations which emphasised deconstruction rather than 'authentic' expression. This shift made performance art more difficult for both artist and audience in terms of interpretation. Deconstruction attempts to prise apart the binary oppositions in Western culture and instead of asserting the importance of the underprivileged position, as, for example, earlier feminist analysis and performance had done by celebrating woman's 'essential' difference, the deconstructivist opened the oppositions to encounter what exists in-between. This goes further than the structuralist method which drew critical attention to the oppositions and insisted that one term relied on its other for definition — so woman became the other of male desire, an object of his gaze. Lyndal Jones's performances employed a deconstructivist technique in some ways as they present many options to the audience. The repetitive nature of the productions asked the audience to remember what had been excluded. The artist attempted to leave the meaning open rather than presenting a didactic argument or narrative in the works. However, the method had its disadvantages as evident in the representation of images of revolution, it was difficult to be sure whether the artist was, in the final analysis, supporting romantic concepts of revolt or critiquing them. She was actually doing both and this created problems in the context of Tiananmen Square.

It is apparent that artists were more willing to consider theory in the 1980s and 1990s; however, they engaged with theory on various levels. It was no longer seen in terms of an 'absolute' but rather as a way of extending debates about the artist, the artist's role in society and the construction of meaning. The prevalence of theory and criticism written by artists in art journals during this time was evidence of this shift.³³ The 'anti-intellectualism' associated with the 1970s, a decade in which the instinctual or cathartic response of the artist was stressed, was replaced by an idea of interpretation as a 'relative exercise.' In this questioning took precedence over the quest to find answers.

In performance art in the 1980s and 1990s, the most interesting works were concerned with the subject and his or her position in the world. Performance lent itself to this type of exploration because of the artist's and spectator's presence. Sophisticated practices, whether they were humorous or serious, addressed the subject's construction in language, and some artists presented an analysis of sexuality and desire in their works. The unconscious, language, memory and desire were all concepts which continued to interest performance artists in the 1980s and 1990s; however, all these things tend to be considered in terms of their social construction.

Performance art entered a more accessible area in terms of practice and reception in the 1990s. The distance between performance art and theatre dissolved in many respects. Artists no longer felt impelled to insist on a difference. The distinction

between 'real' life and the illusion associated with theatre dissolved against a background of theory which analysed both social construction, so that the subject had little authenticity, and the constant play of the signifier, so that all became interpretation. Add to this the dominance of theories of simulation and the simulacra, and the concern of artists like Allan Kaprow to make a distinction between 'acting' and 'non-acting'³⁴ appeared to have little contemporary relevance towards the end of the 20th century.

The Melbourne-based dance performance presented by Jude Walton crossed the boundary between contemporary dance and performance art. Although movement was still the focal point of Walton's performances she presented a contemporary dance which did not rely on narrative and she often worked with other artists practicing in different disciplines. Slide projection and sound-scape were often an integral part of the performances and Walton, like Lyndal Jones, addressed the issue of woman's representation.

In *Passion Lies Between the Black and the White* (1987) dissected fragments of a woman's body appeared in stark black and white images projected onto the flat surface of a stone wall. Three ominous male figures stood as witness, their physical presence and authoritative silence eclipsing the female body. Walton says she was rendered invisible through their presence.³⁵ *Passion* was concerned with the psychological space between the fragmented photo-projections of the cut-up body, the physical presence of the male voyeurs and the body of the female dancer. The male performers eventually left the stage and took up a position in the audience, thus implicating and framing the gaze



Jude Walton, publicity flyer for *Passion Lies Between the Black and the White*, 1987.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

of the audience. Words flashed across the body on screen, passages appropriated from a novel by Marguerite Duras.³⁶ The text emphasised the authority of language yet a woman perpetrated the crime described in the text. Duras's murder mystery presented the female protagonist and Walton reinscribed the body in time and space, framing the male gaze. The question of who writes the body became the content of the work. Crimes of the flesh occupied two time zones: the 'real' crime, the murder, re-presented through the unauthorised rewriting and reproduction of another text, was confronted by the 'real-time' crime of the voyeur who stood as judge and witness. Walton said there was an 'illusion towards the pornographic'³⁷ structured in her choreography of the male figures. In the performance the implied violence of the gaze was juxtaposed with the brutality of the 'original' crime. The pleasure in the active position, the will to conquer, to capture and own the body, was staged in relation to the dance phrases of the female performer; according to the artist the EYE/I was 'rendered invisible through their presence.'³⁸

Jude Walton, *No Hope No Reason*, Deutscher, Brunswick Street, 1991, slide installation by Ian De Gruchy.

Photograph from the artist's collection with thanks to Ian De Gruchy.

In *Remembering is Forgetting* (Performance Space, 1988) a narcissistic gaze was presented through the performance. The camera was used to capture what the dancer saw as she moved. In the privacy of her studio Walton created a super-8 film by strapping a movie camera to her head. She then choreographed the dance sequence as a duet performed with the projected film in front of an audience. The mirroring quality of the film was used not to capture the image of the artist but to present a trace of where her eye had been. Walton says much of her work is about 'visual kinaesthetics . . . it's what you see and then feel kinaesthetically.'³⁹

No Hope No Reason (Deutscher, Brunswick Street, 1991) comprised a troupe of performers interacting with a technological environment which allowed

an articulation of memory and desire on multiple levels. Relationships between people were explored together with the internal dialogues that people have with themselves. The visual tools used to present the audience with the idea of a temporal and changing identity included: movement, dance, overlaid text (spoken and sung) and the use of slide projection to create an illusory physical space.

In Walton's performance, the environment created by a slide installation designed by Ian de Gruchy, operated as a transparent veil enveloping the performers in an illusionary space projected on beams of light. A dream quality masked the performance; there was a sense in which one imagined oneself in a state of remembering as if the dream were re-enacting itself from memory. The time structure of the work, particularly the attention to the past, and the way in which the psyche articulates its memory, was exploited for its multi-relational properties throughout the performance. The narrative was one of interpersonal relationships, some were complex, almost imaginary; some held a degree of terror, others appeared conventionally romantic. The musical score composed by Hartley Newnham and the script, a collage of dream memories, fears and fantasies created by John Barbour, were interpreted by vocal three-part harmonies moving in and around the dancers. The movement of the dancers, acting out moments in the text, worked in juxtaposition with the song. The voices remained separate from the movements, pointing to the alienation of language that speaks the subject but never adequately expresses the corporeal life of the body.

Jude Walton, like Lyndal Jones, uses technology as a way of opening up a multi-layered language and visual experience for the viewer. In this way both artists try to open a place where memory and dream can be spoken. Technology is used by Walton to speak of absences, to create traces of a lost physicality.

Some performance artists working in the 1980s started to draw heavily on images from popular culture; the ways in which stereotypical types and behaviours had been supported in television sit-coms, serial dramas, comic book illustrations and popular songs were analysed by artists and often the content of these media were used in the performances. Artists not only attempted to bridge the gap between high and popular culture some of them actually crossed the divide and became popular performers themselves. The most prominent example of this tendency in Australia was the group *Tsch Tsch Tsch*, the name of which was designated by three arrows and pronounced with three sharp clicks of the tongue.

Tsch Tsch Tsch (Philip Brophy, Maria Kozic, Jane Stevenson and Ralph Traviato) worked at the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre and presented their 'new wave' performances in art galleries, pubs and clubs. The group was formed in 1977 and originally included Leigh Parkhill who subsequently left the band. Philip Brophy was the theorist behind *Tsch Tsch Tsch* and he has written extensively about their aims and objectives.⁴⁰ Primarily the group presented performances and installations that addressed the encoding of meaning in popular culture. They saw themselves as semioticians and deconstructors of social signs, and drew on the works of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco.

Asphyxiation: What Is This Thing Called 'Disco'? (George Paton Gallery, 1980) was set within an installation consisting of six alcoves, each housing a painting which was a copy of a fashion model from *Vogue* magazine hung at an obscure angle, an aluminium frame covered with clear plastic, a fluorescent tube, a musical instrument, and various sound systems and amplifiers. The instruments were displayed on pedestals as if they were sculptures and the musician's voice was represented by a bottle of Listerine mouth wash. A sound track, amplified throughout the space, played the fragmented sounds of *Tsch Tsch Tsch*.⁴¹ The performance also employed the method of copying from copies (the paintings of the photographs) but in the live event the group mimed to the pre-recorded sounds of their own voices at low speed, accompanied by the camped-up gestures of the singer-musicians. Slides ran throughout the performances showing snippets from fashion magazines. The deconstructivist method presented a kind of love-hate relationship between the artists and disco music. On one hand the artists appeared to critique popular culture by producing irreverent copies and analysing the ideology behind disco, where everything is blended into a kind of nothingness with the dance beat being the most prominent element. On the other, this process of copying and the hybrid form of disco style was embraced as a kind of new-wave methodology.



Tsch Tsch Tsch (Philip Brophy, Maria Kozic, Jane Stevenson and Ralph Traviato), *Asphyxiation: What Is This Thing Called 'Disco'?*, George Paton Gallery, 1980. Photograph from the artists' collection.



Steven Wigg and David Watt, *Was That the Human Thing to Do?*, various venues, 1987. Photograph from the artists' collection.

Recurring images from popular culture and an analysis of the ways in which such representations spoke and wrote the subject can be seen in a variety of works. Some of these performances were humorous and drew on a tradition of political satire, extending the antics of the Pop artists into live performance.

Steven Wigg and the late David Watt (1952-1998) produced hilarious images of men in an attempt to address the construction of masculinity. In many ways they appeared to use the technique of 'living sculpture' pioneered by the British artists Gilbert and George, who simply presented themselves as art in the 1970s.⁴² However, Wigg and Watt attempted to deconstruct the stereotype of heterosexual masculinity, whereas Gilbert and George presented a very camp, homosexual couple to the public.

Was That the Human Thing to Do? (1987) used images of men from the popular press of the 1950s and imitated the actions in a kind of stand-up comedy routine. The performance analysed the humanist subject in control of his environment; the master of his own house. The body language of males became the major theme of the work. *Was that the human thing to do?* presented the pipe-smoking male. He pats himself on the chest, fumbles in his pockets, finds his pipe, and another pipe; pats himself on the chest, reassures himself of his power in the world through the gestures of his body. However, the artists turn this around by overstating every action, the image reproduced here shows Wigg in a state of absolute satiation with six pipes stuffed in his mouth.

In the Individual on the Move (Moving Performances, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1989) Wigg and Watt appeared as corporate businessmen. They were waiting somewhere for somebody or something to arrive or happen. Again the performance was presented as a comedy routine. The two men tried to remain inconspicuous in their sameness as they performed their body language to the rising sounds of Peer Gynt. As the music got louder and faster the artists adjusted their belts, looked at their watches, fiddled with their jackets, scratched their noses, ears and finally their genitals in perfectly choreographed unison. The artists say they took their actions from photographs, assuming 'that the photographic image represents a moment in a performed action . . . The performances present the body as object within a field of objects, reduced to its commodified reality.'⁴³

Michele Luke has produced many performances that analyse popular cultural myths as they affect women. In *Cry for the Moon* (Australian Perspecta, Performance Space, Sydney, 1985) the artist addressed the ways in which the myth of romantic love restricted women. The pressure to lure a man, to find a husband who will take over the role of the paternal father as protector of the female, was explored in a multi-layered performance which presented the mythology and the commercialisation of the love game. An audio tape played

a medley of popular love songs such as 'Stand by Your Man', 'The Lady is a Tramp' and 'My Girl.' A dummy, a life-sized 'paper sally' doll, complete with flashing heartbeat stood in for the body of the artist throughout the event. The dummy was mounted on a revolving disc and slides of wallpaper and fashion models were projected onto its body. Luke performed the role of dresser and changed the clothing on the model to suit the narrative of the song. In another version of the same performance (Club Foote, Adelaide) a storyline from a Mills and Boon novel was added by the late Jenny Boulton (1951-2005) reading from the sidelines:

-
- Was it just another flash in the pan?
 - She picked out a dress she knew Paul admired,
 - the smooth dark lines of it clinging to her,
 - moulding her body to a long, lithe line
 - from breast to thigh . . . How do I look?
She asked . . .⁴⁴
-

Luke addressed the position of women in the 1960s and 1970s in Australia, women isolated in suburban families with only the media to represent their role in society. The images of wallpaper depicted a domestic entrapment, as did the coding made explicit in the songs. Luke says the performance was autobiographical in a sense because it drew on her own experience.⁴⁵ In the artist's words: it was a performance that explored 'the romantic notions of young catholic girls, it was a performance that exposed the societal female indoctrination of love/romance/rejection as perceived by me in my teens.'⁴⁶



In Tripping the Light Fantastic (SA Light, Union Gallery, University of Adelaide, 1986) Michele Luke performed a tap-dance routine with Pamela Harris. Both artists wore large white boxes, surrogate TV screens, upon which slides and texts were projected. The performance addressed the theme of light in the history of South Australia. Colonel Light, the founder of the city, was revealed as the agent of the Crown, of Christianity and European civilisation in the antipodes. Establishing the scene through slides, text and sound projection the political satire evolved as a semiotic deconstruction of the word light and all its transcendental and fundamental interpretations, including quotes from The Festival of Light (a Christian fundamentalist group) which was uncovered as a harbourer of restrictive and misogynist morals. The dialogue between the TV screens was complemented by slide projections behind the dancers as they 'tripped the light fantastic' complete with twinkling fairy lights on their hands and toes.

Michele Luke, *Cry for the Moon, Australian Perspecta, Performance Space, Sydney, 1985.*
Photograph from the artist's collection.

Michele Luke and Richard Grayson, *The A-Z of Cowardice*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1989. Photograph from the artists' collection.



Michele Luke also collaborated with Richard Grayson during the 1980s and together they presented analyses of heterosexual relationships. In *Micky and Dickie Get Laid* (*Moving Performances*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1989) a hostile couple opposed each other from either end of the gallery. Walking in a straight line they intercepted each other on a carpet of white feathers: the common ground of surrender. A small mechanical skating bear, playing an incessant lullaby, became their substitute child. The couple played out their charade of domestic and sexual violence almost oblivious to the common concern they shared for the toy-child. Gestures of conflict were repeated in

the performance *The A-Z of Cowardice*, also shown at *Moving Performances*. In this performance the couple acted out their masculine and feminine roles as they had been written in the pages of an elementary reading book for children, drawing the audience's attention to the way in which language codes sexuality and gender difference.

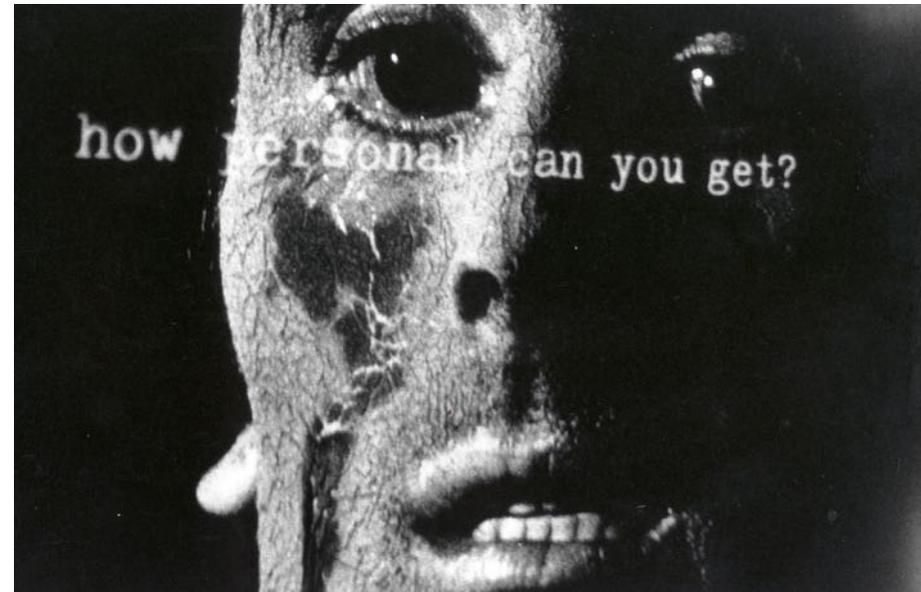
The analysis of gender difference was also apparent in works by Grotosqui Monkey Choir (Mark Rogers, Louise Smith, Martin Hayward and Marion Redpath). Working in Sydney in the early 1980s the group moved from street theatre into performance in 1983.⁴⁷ Large-scale performance-installation works such as *Ice Carving in Mexico* (Art Unit, 1984) addressed issues concerned with inner city living and the plight of the individual subject. In a later series of works titled *The Projectionist* Mark Rogers and Louise Smith started to consider criticisms of the cinema presented by writers such as Laura Mulvey and they attempted to address the issue

of the male gaze. The performance series titled *The Projectionist* involved the artists performing with their doubles on film. The film-performance events showed the stereotype of masculinity and patriarchal power. Rogers, dressed in black with sunglasses, became a dominant image on the screen; he was also 'the projectionist' standing and watching his own image. Smith played out the role of submissive or restricted woman under the powerful gaze of the male.

I See Said the Blind Man (Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1989) was a solo performance by Mark Rogers which used film to reflect an image of the self back to the artist. The film showed his private fantasies as he stood next to the projector tap dancing, quietly at first then gradually increasing the rhythm. All the time he was saying aloud to the audience ‘I, I’m a unique, worthwhile, interesting human being; boy do I feel good.’ A silent narrative fractured the film, which showed Rogers’s private self as a reflective typescript moved across the screen. The film image moved from sharp focus to over-exposure as the body of the male disintegrated; the text read, ‘The body ripples and then cracks.’ Throughout the chant of an Egyptian love song droned on and the narrative shifted as the fantasies became clearer. He dreamt of his lover kissing another woman, and wanted to place himself in her position, to be like the woman. *I See Said the Blind Man* was a poetic deconstruction of fantasy and desire, presenting the image of a fractured subject to the audience.

A reassessment of the humanist paradigm of the subject led many performance artists to reconsider the unconscious. Instead of it being a dark and secretive place full of fears and anxieties which could not be understood, a new wave of artists started to consider the ways in which such fantasies actually contribute to ideological constructs in society. The artists discussed so far in this chapter analyse gender difference and its patriarchal signification. In the late 1980s some performance artists in America returned to the body, drawing on the body art of a previous generation. Performance works by the New York artist Karen Finley created a great deal of publicity. In the 1990s the corporeality of the body was reconsidered by artists, especially female artists who were beginning to reject the stricture of a feminist-structuralist analysis which tended to take the female body off the art agenda because of the problems associated with the male gaze.

Addressing the representation of woman in performance art in the 1970s and 80s, Elinor Fuchs argued that the sacred, ritualised body had been ‘replaced by the obscene body — aggressive, scatological, and sometimes pornographic.’⁴⁸ Writing about American performance art, Fuchs compared Carolee Schneemann’s infamous 1963 performance *Eye Body*, where the artist appeared naked, splashed in paint, with live snakes slithering across her body to works by Karen Finley.



Although Fuchs made distinctions between the 1970s ‘celebration’ of erotica and a more up-front, pornographic discourse in Finley’s works, there were similarities to be made between these interpretations of the body and sexuality. Fuchs said ‘Schneemann has written of the “ritual aspect of the process” that could put her in a “trancelike state”’.⁴⁹ When interviewed in 1988, Karen Finley, New York’s wicked woman of performance, expressed similar concerns when she said:

I do go into somewhat of a trance because when I perform I want it to be different than acting . . . I’m really interested in being a medium, and I have done a lot of psychic type of work. I put myself in a state, for some reason it’s important, so that things come in and out of me, I’m almost like a vehicle. And so when I’m talking it’s just coming through me.⁵⁰

Mark Rogers, *I See Said the Blind Man*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1989.

Photograph from the artist’s collection.

There are other similarities to be stressed between the performance art of the 1960s and 1970s and the re-emergence of sex as a major theme in the 1980s and 1990s. The infliction of pain in the 1970s by body artists such as Vito Acconci, Gina Pane, and Mike Parr, often put sexuality on the agenda in a poignant way. Likewise, the ritualisation of pain — sacrifice, penance — by artists such as Hermann Nitsch, Stuart Brisley, and Jill Orr had a kind of sacred sex-sacrifice sub-text.⁵¹

Although acknowledging similar themes, it must be stressed that sexuality in earlier works by body artists, was often interpreted from a masculine point of view. Lea Vergine acknowledged this when she described such works as misogynous.⁵²

Until the 1980s and 1990s female representations tended to fall into two categories: either the ritualised celebration of female nature (earth-goddess or reproductive mother-nurturer or both) or the more psychological-political analysis of sexuality in a patriarchal world presented by feminists such as Mary Kelly in Britain, Suzanne Lacy in the USA, and Lyndal Jones in Australia.

The ‘bad girls’ of performance, such as Karen Finley, rebelled against the serious theoretical feminism of artists like Mary Kelly and appeared to have more in common with the sexual liberation of an earlier decade than the cool, structuralist analysis of the late 1970s and 1980s. However, a close analysis suggests that later works re-read sexual liberation through a screen of theory. Indeed, one could suggest that the licence for *women* to perform such acts in the artworld depended in some way on the theoretical discourse which surrounded such works and made them ‘serious art’ rather than trash culture.

Karen Finley’s 1986 performance *Constant State of Desire* was performed in clubs and art venues in New York. It is an example of pornographic language being used by an artist to address the position of woman in a patriarchal world. Finley appeared before her audience in her underwear; she filled a large plastic bag with raw eggs and smashed it across the floor. The egg mixture was then lathered onto the body with soft toys. Finley then threw glitter on her prepared sticky skin, rapped tinsel around her neck and proceeded to present a

monologue to the audience. The speech was angry and used abusive and pornographic metaphors to get the message across. There have been several versions of the same performance, and it is clear that Finley did get herself into a frantic state during the presentations. Most of the performances were concerned with the sexual abuse of women. Incest was presented in graphic dialogue as the following excerpt demonstrates:

So my daddy plays behind the icebox door. Then he opens up the vegetable bin and takes out the carrots, the celery, the zucchini, and cucumbers. Then he starts working on my little hole. Starts working my little hole. “Showing me what it’s like to be a mama,” he says. “Showing me what it’s like to be a woman. To be loved. That’s a daddy’s job”, he tells me.

In *The Constant State of Desire* Finley shifted between genders and power positions. Sometimes the narrative projected the voice of a woman, at others the speech of a man: ‘I cum real quick. Cuz I’m a quick working man’; then again she presented the position of the child: ‘Next thing I know I’m in bed crying. I got my dollies and animals with me. And I’ve got bandaids between their legs. They couldn’t protect me but I’ll protect them.’ Finley never spoke exclusively about herself but orchestrated a collection of stories and fantasies where she was free to oscillate between positions of self and other; there was no fixed position of identity.⁵⁴

Performance works which attempt to address woman's desire, to answer the interminable question posed by the fathers: 'What does woman want?', get caught up in a nexus of desire, fantasy and perversion.⁵⁵ The psychoanalyst Parveen Adams re-reads Freud's 1919 analysis of perversion to account for masculine and feminine sexual identity and hetero and homosexual object choice.⁵⁶ Using Freud's example Adams argues that 'sex, sexuality, and gender form a knot from which sexuality cannot be easily extricated',⁵⁷ and, that within the sexual fantasy the subject has access to multiple identifications.

The boundary between art, pornography and sexual transgression has been on the performance art agenda for some time. As outlined in Chapter 3, Genesis P-Orridge and Peter Christopherson framed pornography and criminal violence in terms of performance art, in their 1976 article titled 'Annihilating Reality'.⁵⁸ The authors made continual reference to Lea Vergine's book *Il corpo come linguaggio*, quoting statements by Urs Luthi, Hermann Nitsch, Arnulf Rainer, Vito Acconci and Rudolf Schwarzkogler in juxtaposition to comments by Charles Manson and other infamous mass murderers and sex offenders. Photographs of Schwarzkogler's sensational simulation of castration;⁵⁹ Gina Pane's *Psychic Action*, which involved the artist inflicting wounds on her body with a razor blade, and the trans-sexual self portraits of Urs Luthi were published together with photographs of sex offenders, rubber fetishists and other porno stars.

Sexual desire is conventionally framed in the realm of the irrational. As Georges Bataille has argued the opposition control-beyond control only arises once

control has been imposed.⁶⁰ The 'beyond control' is necessarily defined by what it is not: socially organised sexuality,⁶¹ once this difference becomes categorised and its cult value is institutionalised it gains status as a subculture and loses its transgressive role.⁶² Elizabeth Cowie explains the situation lucidly when she writes:

Desire . . . is most truly itself when it is most "other" to social norms, when it transgresses the limits and exceeds the proper . . . it is characterised not only by the now more conventionally acceptable transgression of barriers of race or class, but by the transgression of the barriers of disgust — in which the dirty and execrable in our bodily functions becomes a focus of sexual desire.⁶³

In some ways this explains the power of performance works which upset the aseptic realm of the art gallery with abject confrontation. However, it should be noted that the avant-garde has always been a haven for transgression: the Oedipal revolt of the sons against the fathers is a predictable part of its structure. Female artists are thus faced with the inscription of transgression as it has already been written. Karen Finley's performances which employed a language of disgust, together with the eruption of bodily function,⁶⁴ incorporated a political critique of abuse. Although the works were often autobiographical like much of the body art of the 1970s, Finley addressed the abuse of woman and took an angry stance against victimisation. This makes her work different from the body art produced by artists such as Gina Pane; however, Finley's work is still cathartic in the character of much body art.



Which Side Do You Dress?, a series of performance works by Melbourne based artist Linda Sproul (Linden Gallery, October 1992), considered the surface of the body and its construction as a social sign. Sproul focused on the stereotypical bodily gestures of men and women, mixing and matching movements with fragments of popular culture. Quotations from film, television and advertising punctuated the performance. Advertising images from the 1950s showing domestic appliances with the brand name 'Linda' were used to introduce the events. The advertisements read 'Linda's Hot' (an electric blanket); 'Linda Toasts' (an electric toaster) and 'Linda Boils' (an electric jug).

The performances were usually presented in two parts; the first sequence depicted the artist's male persona in a transparent business suite with her female body visible beneath. The second segment showed the stereotype of the female body as fantasised by men. In the first part of the performance Sproul imitated the body language of men, expressing the bodily gestures of the players and umpires during games of football and cricket. Films of the games were projected behind the artist as she performed the male rituals of touching and signing on the field. In the second part of the performance Sproul was dressed in the attire of the nightclub *artiste* complete with g-string, stilettos, choker, chains and ostrich feathers. She walked slowly into the performance space carrying a small lantern and approached members of the audience in a seductive way, touching their bodies and rubbing up against them. She wore the signs of sado-masochism on her body (chains and nipple clamps) and her feet were tied together with a plait of hair, indicating that her body was a fetish for the viewer.

Linda Sproul, *Which Side Do You Dress (Part One - Victor)*, Linden Gallery, St Kilda, part of *Experimenta*, 1992.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

She performed the body movements of the stripper suspended from a rope and then she returned to the personal space of the audience and handed out small funeral cards with an inscription which read: 'words cannot express' and 'ever remembered' suggesting perhaps the death of stereotypes.

Despite the erotic 'signing' in *Which Side Do You Dress?* the performance stayed quite clearly within a contemporary socio-political discourse which attempted to address the erotic and pornographic. There was no nostalgia for the abject body in Sproul's 1992 performance. The explosions of 'filth' associated with earlier performance and the desire for a cathartic experience, evident in Finley's work, were absent. Sproul spoke around and about these issues, creating a semiotic analysis which retained some distance from the corporeal body. However, in later works as such *Listen*, 1993-4, Sproul would exploit abjection and inflict pain on her own body for political affect.

In 1991 Barbara Campbell used a pornographic text *La Godmiche Royale* (The Royal Dildo) as the basis for a performance soundtrack. In part it read:

May they [the lovers] come immediately, my twat well-washed, my shirt and my skirts lifted high, and the cum running out of my cunt in buckets full, will be believed by morals to be a new deluge.⁶⁵

*The Diamond Necklace Affair*⁶⁶ was inspired by the life of Marie-Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI, and 'focussed on changing attitudes towards the Queen's sexuality from "child bride" to "Austrian whore"'.⁶⁷ The title of the performance was taken from a scandalous episode in which members of the court



Linda Sproul,
Which Side Do You Dress (Part Two - Victoria),
Linden Gallery,
St Kilda, October
1992.

Photograph
from the artist's
collection.



Barbara Campbell,
*The Diamond
Necklace Affair*,
Artspace at Pier
4/5, Sydney, 1991.

Photograph
from the artist's
collection.

used an expensive piece of jewellery, a gift from a lover, to win higher status for themselves. It became a commodity with which they could bargain, a form of blackmail. Shortly after the infamous affair many pornographic libels were published against the Queen.

Campbell used a computer generated image of the jewelled necklace which was filmed and projected on a screen and she skipped continuously for ten minutes as the pornographic sound-track in the original French seduced the audience. Campbell was interested in the way in which particular movement traces could be understood as contributing to the mythologising of certain female figures.⁶⁸ In this performance skipping was used as a metaphor for the Queen's lightness of step which had become a legend. The artist notes that this myth was so powerful that: 'As legend has it, she sprang lightly from the cart that carried her to the guillotine.'⁶⁹

Campbell is interested in aspects of translation and the interpretation of history. She argues that it is impossible to comprehend history as truth and says she used the pornographic text in French so that it would be indecipherable for most Australians in the audience.⁷⁰ It was a way of thwarting the audience's desire to understand. Although the text was extremely libellous, the listener was captivated by the French language which provided the rhythm during the skipping performance.

Cries from the Tower (The Tower, Queen's College, University of Melbourne as part of *Experimenta*, 1992)⁷¹ looked at the mythology associated with Mary Queen of Scots. A video projection of the artist's body, dressed in an elaborate period costume, was relayed live from the tower upstairs into the room below. A super-8 film was projected onto a small circular screen above the video, the sort of frame used for *petit-point* needlework. The film flashed on and off randomly and showed a close-up of the artist's hand as she carefully sewed along her heart line, head line and line of fate as designated by palm readers. Initially the video showed the silhouette of the artist's body complete with neck ruffle and full skirt, however, the camera moved quite quickly into a close-up image of the dress. On the skirt the artist had painstakingly embroidered a controversial letter supposedly penned by Mary. The letter (casket letter no. 8 or 3, depending on the historical source) was presented as part of the evidence to implicate Mary in the murder of her second husband in collusion with her third husband.⁷² Although it was a trumped-up charge, it meant that Mary Queen of Scots spent the next nineteen years of her life locked up in a tower.

The letter in its original French, in its old Gallic translation (used in the trial), and in a modern English translation was sewn around and around the large skirt. The video projection of the artist's actions showed her gradually undoing the skirt by pulling out the tacking which held it together. The image on the screen showed the viewer close-ups of the letters and phrases on the skirt. The fabric thus unravelled gradually fell into the space below. Throughout the performance the artist's physical body was absent, it was kept out of reach, in the tower, as a way of pointing to the fetishisation of that which is kept secret.⁷³ The action, the undoing of the skirt and the occasional glimpse of flesh, was also seductive for the audience.

The masochistic act of sewing into her own skin presented the audience with something that was difficult to watch and it set up a contrast between the pleasure of looking, associated with the dress fabric, and an image of pain. Campbell says that she was aware that she was dealing with a figure with whom the audience would feel sympathy and that she wanted to turn this around by presenting another image, one difficult to watch.⁷⁴ However, such a juxtaposition also points to the self obsession of the masochistic act: the female myth (Mary Queen of Scots) is framed within the context of masochism. Campbell presents a deconstruction of the myth of the feminine hero for her audience. This is not the simple celebration of the myth, rather it is an analysis which tries to tease apart the complexities associated with the historical figure. The Queen is both heroic and self-obsessed.



Barbara Campbell, *Cries from the Tower*, The Tower, Queen's College, University of Melbourne as part of *Experimenta*, 1992. Photographer Ponch Hawkes.

In the 1980s and 1990s many artists abandoned the use of the body as an authenticating site of experience and started to concentrate on the social construction of the body and sexuality. There was certainly evidence of a renewed interest in the corporeal body, however, this tended to be positioned against a background of theory which stressed the social construction of the subject.

In Karen Finley's performances there was evidence of a return to a cathartic practice characteristic of earlier body art and critics read these works in relation to transgression and the scatological body. In some respects it appeared as if performance art in the 1990s returned to the issues of the 1970s where the abject body encountered the museum. Although this is apparent, artists were also performing in clubs outside the art world and so their message reached another public. In these venues audiences are not shocked by the content of the work, they saw the performances as critical assaults on society.⁷⁵ The new body performance used many of the strategies associated with body art and the historical link should not be forgotten, however the self-obsessive acts of earlier works were not encountered in the same degree.

Linda Sproul wore the cultural signs of sado-masochism, and in readings (of scripts yet to be designed as performance) the artist referred directly to her own experiences of sexual abuse as a child and made links between this and sado-masochism in her adult life. Sproul talked about female masochism as a result of female experiences, however, the infliction of pain was not the primary message in her early works. The performances could not be read as the violent reaction of Oedipal revolt familiar to an

earlier avant-garde; the artist spoke loudly about abuse and situated her works within contemporary political issues. In some ways both Sproul and Finley presented experiential works which addressed a personalised body, however, they also responded to the patriarchal construction of society.

In the 1990s some feminist theorists reconsidered sexuality and reassessed their position in relation to issues of pornography. This type of criticism reassessed transgression as a possible site of resistance and tried to manoeuvre theory out of a structuralist cul-de-sac where subjectivity was already written. The 'sex war' debates created lively discussion in feminist circles as sex workers and porn stars asserted their right to choose. Sex came back on the feminist agenda, both in art and in theory. The position of the speaking subject was at the centre of these debates.

In relation to performance art it is important to note the ways in which this discourse has been presented. The artists discussed in the final part of this chapter speak about sexual abuse (Finley, Sproul), erotic coding (Sproul, Campbell) and feminine mythology (Campbell). Finley was undoubtedly the angriest voice but she was joined by other American artists, such as the late writer Kathy Acker (1947-1997), who also used pornographic language, and, the performance artist Holly Hughes, who spoke openly about her homosexuality. These and other American artists had their grants revoked as a result of the content of their works. The rise of the New Right and Christian fundamentalist groups created a particularly conservative situation against which artists battled for many years.

In Australia censorship came slightly later. Andreas Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987) was attacked with a hammer by two youths at the National Gallery of Victoria when it was exhibited in a retrospective in 1997. More recently there has been public outcry concerning the photographs of Bill Henson who sometimes includes naked adolescents in his work.⁷⁶ Polixeni Papapetrou's photographs have also come under public scrutiny despite the fact that she mostly photographs her own children.⁷⁷ In all these cases the images under discussion have been photographs. In the public imagination photographs resonate with reality, and, although they are performative representations, issues of power collide when adults take photographs of children.

In relation to performance art, especially body work which concerns itself with abjection and catharsis, it is important to stress the historical context: body art in the 1970s was not censored in this way. Artists returning to an analysis of the body in the 1980s and 1990s faced a different audience in the art world (one more aware of social theory), but in the USA and later Australia, they encountered a conservative backlash, hence the censorship. In many respects this was, initially, the result of a reactionary moral panic that swept the Western world as a result of the AIDS pandemic, which saw the sick homosexual body as front-page news, but this ran parallel with an increasing social concern in the 1990s about child abuse and paedophilia.⁷⁸ These and other issues pertaining to the return of the abject body will be discussed in the following chapter.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The *Popism* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1982 combined the works of two groups of artists, those who had been working with Pop and Conceptual modes in the 1970s (Robert Rooney, Imants Tillers, Peter Tyndall) and a new group of artists associated with what the curator, Paul Taylor, called the 'new wave' (Maria Kozic, Jenny Watson, Richard Dunn, Howard Arkley, Juan Davila, *Tsch Tsch Tsch*). The exhibition also included works by David Chesworth, Ian Cox, Paul Fletcher, Jane Steverson, The Society for Other Photography.
- 2 A. Martin, 'Before and After *Art & Text*', *Agenda Contemporary Art*, vol. 2, no. 1, August 1988, Art Papers - special supplement, p. 16.
- 3 D. Hebdige's book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Methuen, London, 1979, analysed the margins of culture from the Beat generation to the Punks.
- 4 Taped interview with Lyndal Jones, 7 August 1987, see also L. Jones, 'A Question of Representation', *Spectator Burns*, (Sydney), no. 2, 1988, pp 23-27.
- 5 See S. Cramer 'An Introduction to the Prediction Pieces' in S. Cramer and L. Jones (eds.), *Lyndal Jones: The Prediction Pieces 1981-1991*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, 1991, p. 9. Throughout my discussion on the *Prediction Pieces* I draw heavily on the published descriptions of the work presented by Jones and Cramer.
- 6 L. Jones, *Australia: Nine Contemporary Artists*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1984, p. 40.
- 7 L. Jones, 'Performance, Feminism and *Women at Work*', *LIP*, 1981-82, p. 35.
- 8 Taped interview with Lyndal Jones, August 1987.
- 9 See L. Jones and S. Spinner, 'At Home a Series of Five Solo Performances by Lyndal Jones (1977-80)', *LIP*, 1980, p. 101.
- 10 S. Cramer, 'An Introduction to the Prediction Pieces', p. 9 and taped interview with Lyndal Jones, August 1987.
- 11 S. Cramer, 'An Introduction to the Prediction Pieces', p. 8.
- 12 See P. Taylor 'The Strategy of Presence in two works at the Triennial', *Art Network*, nos 3-4, 1981, pp. 30-31.
- 13 S. Cramer, 'An Introduction to the Prediction Pieces', p. 8.
- 14 This statement accompanies all the *Prediction Pieces* 1981-1991, reproduced in S. Cramer, 'An Introduction to the Prediction Pieces', p. 8.
- 15 All the *Prediction Pieces* were presented more than once and each time the 'version' shown was slightly different. No. 1 was also shown at *Act 3 - Ten Australian Performance Artists*, Canberra School of Art, Canberra and a video version of the same work was exhibited at the George Paton Gallery later in the year (1981) [camera John Dunkley-Smith].
- 16 S. Cramer and L. Jones (eds.), *Lyndal Jones: The Prediction Pieces*, p. 13.
- 17 M. Parr from *150 Programmes and Investigations* (1971-72).
- 18 No. 2 was also shown at *Act 3*, and a video version was exhibited in *Works by Australian Video Artists* which toured Japan in 1983 [camera - John Dunkley-Smith].
- 19 S. Cramer and L. Jones (eds.), *Lyndal Jones: The Prediction Pieces*, p. 16.
- 20 S. Cramer and L. Jones (eds.), *Lyndal Jones: The Prediction Pieces*, p. 19.
- 21 J. Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication' in Hal Foster, (ed.), *Postmodern Culture*, Pluto Press, London and Sydney 1985, p 133.
- 22 Baudrillard came to Australia in 1984 to participate in the Futur*Fall conference and his essays have been widely translated and published in this country. See E.A. Grosz, T. Threadgold *et al.* (eds.), *Futur* Fall: Excursions into Post-Modernity*, Power Institute of Arts, University of Sydney, 1986.
- 23 J. Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication', p. 127.
- 24 S. Cramer and L. Jones (eds.), *Lyndal Jones*, p. 19.
- 25 Shown as part of the exhibition *Australia: Nine Contemporary Artists* and later at *Meaning and Excellence* (Anzart in Edinburgh, 1984). An installation version was included in *The Politics of Picturing* shown at the Tasmanian School of Art Gallery and the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane (1984). In 1985 the performance was repeated for the University Art Gallery, University of Melbourne.
- 26 S. Cramer and L. Jones, (eds.), *Lyndal Jones*, p. 19.
- 27 Also shown at the Athenaeum Theatre, Melbourne in the same year.
- 28 The actors were: Kylie Belling, David Garlick, Evdokia Katahanas, Angela Seward, Vince Vaccari and Lyndal Jones.
- 29 Performers: Lyndal Jones, David Latham, Lindy Lee, Richard Murphet, Judith Stratford. *Danceworks*: Nanette Hassall with Mathew Roland Bergan, Jon Burt, Sean Curham, Delia Hall, Carolyn Hammer, Felicity Macdonald, Trevor Patrick, Linda Sastradipradja. Music: Richard Vella, costumes: Amanda Johnson.

- 30 Published in the *Situationist International* no. 6, August 1961.
- 31 S. Cramer and L. Jones, (eds.), *Lyndal Jones*, p. 49.
- 32 Reviewing this work in 1989, three weeks after the performance and one week after the Tiananmen Square massacre I described the work as overly optimistic, a romantic re-enactment of revolution. See A. Marsh, 'Blinding Optimism', *Agenda Contemporary Art*, no. 5, June 1989, pp 24-25; and Lyndal Jones's reply L. Jones, Letter, *Agenda*, nos. 7-8, October 1989, p. 33.
- 33 In Australia the magazine *Art & Text* was the first journal to publish a substantial amount of material submitted by artists. Imants Tillers, Juan Davila, Julia Brown-Rrap, and members of the 'new music' scene associated with the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre (Phillip Brophy, David Chesworth in particular) all wrote for *Art & Text* at various stages of their careers.
- 34 A. Kaprow, 'Non-Theatrical Performance', *Artforum*, May 1976, pp. 45-51.
- 35 Taped interview with Jude Walton, May 1992.
- 36 The performance was advertised as 'a reading rewriting of *L'Amante Anglaise* by Marguerite Duras.'
- 37 Taped interview with Jude Walton May 1992.
- 38 Taped interview with Jude Walton May 1992.
- 39 Taped interview with Jude Walton May 1992.
- 40 P. Brophy, 'Asphyxiation: What is this Thing called "Disco"?', *Art & Text* no. 3, Spring, 1981, pp. 59-66.
- 41 R. Rooney, *The Age*, 16 July, 1980.
- 42 Gilbert and George visited Australia in 1973 and performed at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria. They were a 'camp act' and played on the ridiculous whilst under-pinning their works with a political message. See C. Hector 'They Keep Stiff for Hours', *Nation Review*, August 31 - September 6, 1973, p. 1457 and D. Brook, 'Blur between Art and Life', in the same issue, p. 1456.
- 43 Notes supplied by the artists.
- 44 Performance notes supplied by Michele Luke, August 1988.
- 45 Taped interview with Michele Luke, August 1988.
- 46 Performance notes supplied by Michele Luke.
- 47 Taped interview with Mark Rogers, 1988.
- 48 E. Fuchs, 'Staging the Obscene Body', *The Drama Review*, vol. 33, No. 1, Spring, 1989, p. 33.
- 49 E. Fuchs, 'Staging the Obscene Body', p. 33.
- 50 K. Finley, 'A Constant State of Becoming', an interview with Richard Schechner, *The Drama Review*, vol. 32, Spring 1988, p. 154.
- 51 For further analysis see K. Tsiakma, 'Hermann Nitsch: A Modern Ritual', *Studio International*, July/August, 1976, pp. 13-15; C. Tisdall, 'Stuart Brisley and Marc Chaimowicz', *op. cit.*, pp. 16-18. Works by these artists have been considered in chapters two and three of this book.
- 52 See L. Vergine, *Il corpo come linguaggio (la 'Body-art' e storie simili)*, Gianpaolo Prearo Editore, Milan, 1974, p. 25.
- 53 K. Finley, 'The Constant State of Desire', *The Drama Review*, vol. 32, 1988, p. 148.
- 54 For an analysis of the shifting positions in sexual fantasy see J. Laplanche and J-B Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 49, 1968, pp. 1-18.
- 55 Indeed some feminists have argued that Freud's theory of sexuality is a theory of perversion, see L. Williams, 'Pornographies on/scene or Different Strokes for Different Folks' in L. Segal and M. McIntosh (eds.), *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* (London: Virago, 1992), p. 237.
- 56 S. Freud, 'A Child is Being Beaten: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversion' (1919), *Standard Edition*, vol. XVII, pp. 179-204. See L. Williams discussion of Adams' paper, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-250 and Adams, P., 'Of Female Bondage', in T. Brennan (ed.), *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, pp. 247-265. For an extended psychoanalytic interpretation of performance and pornography by women artists see my article 'Wicked Women in Performance', *Agenda: Contemporary Art*, special issue (no. 28, Summer 1992/93), pp. 45-52.
- 57 P. Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 247.
- 58 P-Orridge, G. and Christopherson, P., 'Annihilating Reality', *Studio International*, July/August, 1976, pp. 44-48.
- 59 The performance was reported as a 'real' event resulting in the death of the artist in the international press. For an Australian response see D. Brook, 'Reaching the Fatal Zenith of Body Art', *Nation Review*, December 29, 1972 - January 4, 1973, p. 345 and 'Dividing the Single Skin of Color into Two', *Nation Review*, June 8-14 1973, p. 1056.

- 60 G. Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. M. Dalwood, Marion Boyars, London and New York, 1987, p. 48 (first published in French, 1975).
- 61 E. Cowie, 'Pornography and Fantasy: Psychoanalytic Perspectives' in L. Segal and M. McIntosh (eds.), *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, Virago, London 1992, p. 134.
- 62 The neutralisation of difference in relation to style has been analysed by Dick Hebdidge in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.
- 63 D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, p. 134.
- 64 Fuch's documents events by the artist where she has periodically emptied her 'diarrhetic guts into a bucket on stage.' E. Fuch, 'Staging the Obscene Body', p.48.
- 65 In the original French: 'Qu'ils paraissent soudain, ma motte bien lavée, ma chemise et mes jupes hautement retroussés, et le foutre coulant de mon con à plein seau, sera cru des mortels un déluge nouveau.'
- 66 Artspace at Pier 4/5, Sydney; The Greater Western, Melbourne; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. Sound composition - Jamie Fielding; sound engineering - Shane Fahey; voice - Selene Alcock; costume - Annemaree Dalziel; film assistance - Gary Warner, Virginia Hillyard and Nick Meyers; translations - Christopher Allen.
- 67 Programme notes provided by Barbara Campbell.
- 68 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell, November 1992.
- 69 Programme notes provided by Barbara Campbell.
- 70 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell.
- 71 Also shown at the ABC Ultimo Centre for the Third International Symposium on Electronic Arts.
- 72 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell.
- 73 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell.
- 74 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell.
- 75 Karen Finley's performance *Constant State of Desire* is included on the video *Mondo New York*, available at many video stores. In this version of the performance the artist is performing in a club. On other occasions she has performed in sex clubs where men have shouted abuse at her.
- 76 For an overview see D. Marr, *The Henson Case*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2008.
- 77 The controversy concerning Papapetrou arose as a result of a special issue of *Art Monthly* (Australia), no. 211, July 2008, which addressed censorship issues in the arts and ran Papapetrou's photograph *Olympia as Lewis Carroll's Beatrice Hatch before White Cliffs* (2003) on its front cover.
- 78 For an extended discussion see A. Marsh, *The Dark Room: Photography and the Theatre of Desire*, Macmillan, South Yarra, 2003, especially pp. 211-224.

**SHIFTS AND CHANGES IN PERFORMANCE ART:
SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Performance art questions the conventional relationship between artist and spectator and takes art beyond the museum, sometimes blurring the distinction between high and popular culture. Performance artists present a plurality of approaches for their audiences and many insist that art should become more democratic, that it should reach a wider audience. Performance also questions conventional paradigms of art by using different contexts and materials (video, film, computers). However, the use of new materials is not mandatory; many performance artists use found or poor materials or both. Apart from the example of Stelarc, there are no artists that value progress and technology for its own sake. Thus performance as a cross-disciplinary practice in the visual arts is an anti-formalist practice situated within a postmodern era.

However, in the 1970s some performance artists were anxious to associate themselves with the concept of the avant-garde. The revolt against mainstream, late capitalist, bourgeois society was characteristic of much body art. The revolt of a younger generation, dissatisfied and disgusted by the society they had inherited, must be set in its historical context: it was part of the ethos of the 1960s and 1970s to rebel against society in an expressive and sometimes violent way. Such a strategy can be aligned with a modernist notion of the avant-garde, but as discussed in Chapter Two, the 'avant-garde' that attracted the attention of performance artists was not the late modernist avant-garde associated with Clement Greenberg and committed to an art that was autonomous and separate from society. Performance artists were more attracted to the generation of the 1910s and 1920s, to the irreverent practices of dada and surrealist interpretations of the dream.

Retrospectively artists and critics have recognised the difficulties associated with the avant-garde. Although much body art appears as a revolt of the sons against the fathers, it is also evident that the artists associated with body art expressed the position of a fragmented subject. In some instances the fragmented subject in body art expresses an existential position and the focus on the abject appears self-obsessive; in other examples a serious analysis of unconscious structures is presented to the audience. Body art is difficult to analyse because of the ways in which it assaults the body as a way of assaulting society: the issues become conflated so that body art appears to work against itself.

The existential self associated with body art tends to focus on aspects of a 'real', lived experience. The concept of the real as given, a site which is authentic in some respects at least, becomes problematic when one considers advances in theories of subjectivity which recognise the role that language plays in the constitution of the subject. This shift creates a crisis for performance art, especially those modes that rely on notions of an authentic self or experience attainable through catharsis, or both.

It is undoubtedly the case that ritual and body art represented the concerns of a specific period and generation. The focus on the self and on the personal interpretation of the world tended to concentrate on an abreactive response which was intended to release repression through catharsis.

The ideas of fragmentation, multi-layering and chance encounters which represent the radical edge of an earlier modernist project (dada, surrealism) — ideas which were incorporated into the happenings — were forgotten in the haste to establish an alternative culture and experience. The focus on individual experience tended to reinforce conventional ideas about individuality in the Western world. Although the search for alternatives associated with the counter-culture attempted to open a discourse on otherness, the pitfalls associated with such a programme were not addressed until the end of the decade.

The briefly celebrated return to figuration in painting in the 1980s is falsely constructed as a reaction against the 1970s, if one considers the dominance of the body in performance art.

Indeed, one could present a convincing argument that would establish body art and ritual as precursors of a return to narrative in the early 1980s. The existential subject of body art often expressed an apocalyptic theme; all memory was conceived in terms of the *angst* of the subject, a remembrance of a distant disturbance. The plight of the individual in an alien world is reasserted in neo-expressionist paintings; again the dream image is terrifying, the urban environment threatening, and doom encroaches on an organic life. The romantic heroism of the artist saturates the canvas in the same way as the gestures of the body artist erupted in time and space. The message is the same, although the media are different. Body art is a more immediate expression and it addresses the relationship between artist and audience; it actually puts the abject responses of the body into the museum it presents rather than represents the plight of the subject in the world.

To explain the prevalence of body art and ritual in the 1970s, one needs to address a much wider discourse, one that positions the expression of the individual as a paramount concern in humanist societies. The lone artist, lost and anguished within an alien world which threatens to engulf the subject, is a familiar theme and an idea which resonates in the spectator's mind. This romantic concept of the self has a wide acceptance; everyone considers themselves to be alone, and experiences the anguish associated with the lack of origin or authenticity. Expressive modes of art feed the anxiety of the spectator, creating an empathy with an imaginary vision. The fixations of the artist thus come to represent aspects of a collective unconscious.

Throughout this book an effort has been made to highlight the differences of approach to performance art. An analysis of body art (Chapter Three) has been juxtaposed with an analysis of the social construction of the body/self (Chapter Four). The return of the body in the late 1980s and 1990s had aspects in common with earlier body art. However, Linda Sproul and Karen Finley spoke out about the abuse of women. These works were autobiographical and in some instances cathartic but the reference to masochism was placed within a social context rather than privatised as it was in earlier works.

The self, the subject and the psyche are dominant themes in performance art; but they have not been read by artists in an exclusively humanist framework. It is apparent that artists have been grappling with ways in which to analyse the position of the subject in society and explore different aspects of subjectivity. An anti-humanist approach which began with Freud's recognition of the unconscious is apparent in much of this work.

The decentred nature of participatory works, initially pioneered by Allan Kaprow but evident throughout the 1970s; the ecological performance works which concerned themselves with the eco-system and 'man's' relationship to nature; conceptual and political works which focused on the social construction of the subject and conventional ways of knowing the world, all rejected the concept of a humanist subject-in-control. The idea that the artist was in a position of power was undermined by the means employed by the artist. Chance, play, and the fractured nature of identity were presented

by the artists in an attempt to destabilise the notion that 'man' is at the centre of the universe. Although some examples of body art and ritual tend to reinscribe convention by setting up a familiar binary opposition, it is apparent that the 'original intention' was to transgress a repressive cultural code or displace the power relations of an industrial corporate world. This was particularly evident in environmental and ecological works which contested the privileged position of Western knowledge systems. In retrospect one can point to the errors implicit in such works, since they tend to stress a position of 'other-ness' which has been easily absorbed. However, in the 1970s the utopianism of 'alternatives' was not considered as part of a greater system that relies on its other in order to maintain power. Thus early 'feminist' performance presented the biological difference of woman in a celebratory way; some ecological works valorised the difference of the East or Aboriginal culture without analysing the position of the Anglo-Celtic artist; and body art (re)presented the conflicts of a troubled psyche.

The aim of this book has been to open up the discourse on performance art and to insist on various streams of practice. If one denies the dominance of a humanist desire to control, in both theory and practice, it is possible to produce a more complex interpretation. It is apparent in the late 1980s and 1990s that artists tried to break away from the strictures imposed by a structuralist thesis which insisted that the subject was already written. Here one encounters a renewed hope for resistance and a re-analysis of transgression. Subcultures became a focus of attention for some performance artists: Tsch Tsch Tsch entered the popular music scene with their deconstructions of disco; later, artists from the same group (Philip Brophy and Maria Kozic) continued to analyse trash culture and horror movies. In the late 1980s Jill Orr started to focus on cross-dressing and sexuality and Linda Sproul put sado-masochism and sexual exploitation on the agenda in a way that did not make moral denouncements. In a bid to find new places from which to speak Lyndal Jones incorporated the voices of many cultures into her performances. This was not the celebration of the other associated with earlier works, rather it was a way of insisting on the plurality within.

Practice and theory overlap in performance art, artists are not easily categorised, individual works shift and slide between the dominant themes, and one is left with a fractured picture where a both/and rather than an either/or thesis exists in various shades of grey. In short, there are no conclusive statements to be made; historical overviews of particular art practices are fraught with problems. I have attempted to analyse Australian performance art in an effort to tease apart the differences. The research suggests that the artists concerned have shifted significantly over the last two decades. Performance art has changed over the last twenty years, but major themes persist as artists continue to analyse aspects of the body and the self.