P[R]

CROSSING BODY SHADOW:

[Crossing Body Shadow was devised by Serge Tampalini, Andrew Robinson, Gari-Emma Perry and Bronwyn Turnbull. It was first performed at the World Congress of University Theatre, Valleyfield, Canada, June 1997 and subsequently at the University of Malta Theatre, Valetta, Malta, in July 1997.]

The gathered data from Silent Moves became the energising ingredient for the final work in the trilogy Experiences of Identity, Crossing Body Shadow. [For this project, P[R] employed the services of Gari-Emma Perry and Bronwyn Turnbull.] The crossing of borders/boundaries/spaces has always preoccupied the work of performance practitioners. In so doing some practitioners have found that they not only modified the limits of their work, but the more important limits of their own consciousness -this was never truer than in the performance, Crossing Body Shadow.


Crossing Body Shadow may be best described as an ecology of identity, mortality, and acting. Like Silent Moves it gathered around investigations of internal and external corporeal modalities and explored their reverberations on and within disciplines of “performance”. In this work, P[R] moved towards drawing attention/focus/energy onto smaller more clearly defined energetics -which in turn presented work of much greater detail and depth.

In the belief that these smaller energetics could be performed as part of a larger work, the methodology employed was to attempt to move from an internal to an external corporeal modality, allowing visibility of the existence of other corporeal modalities along the continuum that both joins and separates them.
Improvisation on and around themes informed by the concept of “skin” became the agency into the matrix of physical, emotional and social intensities that was to be assembled as Crossing Body Shadow. Our skin both defines and divides the limits of our body; it is the surface boundary that traces the space in which our bodies are contained and it is the outer cover that protects that which it contains, and as such it is that which defines the limits of both the internal and external body. It is also a surface that can be marked by experience, and can be read -a surface that breathes and can be opened, that changes its appearance and is consumed by mortality.

Crossing Body Shadow is perhaps the most structured of P[R]’s work. Once again P[R] retained a number of the sites of transformation/energetics from previous work. Investigations into the notion of the "strange," that had occupied a significant portion of P[R]’s previous work was also prominent in Crossing Body Shadow. Each performer’s sense of personal identity was never allowed to collapse into a homogeneous social identity. The effect of this was to create a sense of alienation, a sense of separateness between the performers, as if all were strangers in a familiar world. It was the movement between remaining strangers and alluding to familiarity, by negotiating the changing relationship between each performer’s personal identities, that was the orchestration of the piece.

[“We had a different conception of the marvellous. We found that, when everything happened naturally, things were even more strange”. From:Cocteau, Jean. OPIUM, [Trans. Margaret Crosland and Sinclair Road], New English Library, London, 1968. p. 32.]

Crossing Body Shadow was assembled from investigations into:

1. PREPARATION AND TRAINING.
2. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CORPOREAL MODALITIES.
3. CHARACTERISATION.
4. FOUND BODIES.

- PREPARATION AND TRAINING:
Generally in a theatre performance the spectator's first encounter with the performer is as a character - a state arrived at through weeks of rehearsals. The stages of preparation and training are more often than not negated. Yet to witness the performers moving through these stages and arriving at the site where the performance resides seems an interesting and invaluable tool for potentially extending a spectator's reading of any performance work.

In Crossing Body Shadow no conscious attempt was made by the performers to separate themselves from the ontology of the spectators. The process of moving through preparation and training was incorporated into the work and constituted its first part.

Two major exercises characterised this part.

i] Toning: Primarily an exercise involving interventions into acts of habitual choice, toning consisted of identifying superfluous daily gestures and sounds, such as yawning, coughing and the extraneous pressures of day-to-day living, in an attempt to jettison them - thus effectively emptying the body of habitual acts in preparation for the “organic” work that followed.

ii] Organics: This exercise grew out of the work of a Melbourne-based performance practitioner Helen Sharp and draws upon the performance investigations of Zygmunt Molik.

[The Polish performance practitioner, Zygmunt Molik worked for 25 years as an actor and voice trainer for Jerzy Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium (Laboratory Theatre). His work focused on releasing the blocked voice and body energy of the actor.]

"Everybody's approach differs, and mine, to put it briefly, is a search for the pure organicity - how to breathe with the whole body, not only one part of the body; how to think with the whole body and not only one part. In other words, how to integrate the whole organism into how you are speaking or how you are singing. Another idea I have is that you should sing as if you were speaking and speak as if you were singing - so the approach is to find the music in your singing. This is not achieved through exercise. I used to make the mistake of asking people to do exercises, of locating the correct resonators, etc., but the result had no musical life in it. In my approach the main thing is to find the life; how to find something that can be sung out, that can be spoken out. This is the biggest point and the biggest problem. I could tell you that you have found the right resonator, that the sound has a good, open and full vibration through the whole body, so that you could say the whole body is singing, and that the chant is coming out from you - but man [sic] does not consist only of voice and body but also a soul, meaning a heart, meaning some thinking force. That is always the question when we are doing our research."


I believe Molik is referring to that part of the performer's work that is greater than the sum total of all their learnt techniques and skills; that part of their work that transcends the practical by adding a dimension to their work that, if we are open to it, may only be felt. When the performers have attained this dimension, then watching their work is like watching an intense light that, as it moves, leaves behind a glowing trace of where it has been. The distinction is analogous to the enigmatic ideas on acting expressed by the Japanese Noh Theatre practitioner Zeami Motokiyo [1363-1443]. In his Kyūi. Zeami identifies nine levels of acting,
where level nine is the lowest. At Level Nine the performer does not exceed his natural ability; their acting is
course and unrefined. At Level One the work of the actor is such that the spectator is not even aware that
the actor is acting. It is Level Four that is of immediate interest, for at this level the actors “displays a
luminosity characteristic of creative energy” and their “controlled spontaneity is a synthesis that permits the
Fourth Level actor to produce sustained theatrical effects that are radiant and vivid”. At this level the actor
can “call upon his [sic] creative energy, control its flow, and determine its effect.”
[Zeami’s Kyûi is a treatise on acting consisting of a sequence of nine levels. Reprinted in: Nearman, J, Mark.
Zeami’s Kyû: A Pedagogical Guide for Teachers of Acting.]

Both Toning and Organics served not only as the markers of preparation and training but were also employed
by the performers as the points of departure into the multiplicity of performative modalities released by
them.

2. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CORPOREAL MODALITIES:

THE INTERNAL BODY

P[R] found that the energetic of the internal body could be distinguished from other modalities by the
heightened sense of listening required for its corporeal presence. The choice to act or move within the
internal body site was found to be motivated by impulse. Four specific strategies were employed to arrive at
this energetic:

1] Imaging. [Adapted from the work of Min Tanaka and his dance company Mai-Juku, at Body Weather Farm,
Yamanashi, Japan.]

This strategy was an extension of the imaging work from Living is a Horizontal Fall and the term “image” is
used in the same manner. Similarly to the work in Living is a Horizontal Fall, the performers focused on the
internalisation of pre-selected images and their corporeal externalisation. They moved from one image to
another as the impulse arose and was directed into action. Once again the performer’s attention was given to
a sense of flowing, of continual movement through the images.

- An ant enters your mouth, crawls around inside and leaves.
- A snake moves up and down your spine.
- Your stomach is moving and growing in size.
- Fluid is running out of the orifices of your head.
- You take a deep breath and your body organs become empty like a cave.
- Your bones absorb water and expand out like cotton wool, floating in meat.
- You carry a pelvis full of hot golden oil -with each step it spills/dribbles/flows down your legs.
- Your navel is a magnet that attracts all the cells in your body towards it...until it becomes your entire
  sensory system, guiding movement from the solar plexus.
- You feel your bones rust and flake away - soft cartilage hardening until it chips away with any
  movement.
- An electric pulse radiates down your body and is grounded through your feet.
- Your skin slowly peels back, to leave you raw in the air.
- Your breath moves in a figure eight inside you and never leaves.
- A volcano erupts inside you and you cannot move.
- You look into the distance but see a memory of your childhood.
A drip of water runs from the top of your spine to its base and gradually becomes a stream.

ii] Repetitive Gestures.
Each performer independently selected a sequence of three or four social gestures, such as waving, brushing dust from a sleeve, shaking hands, hailing a cab, folding arms, etc. They began the exercise by simultaneously moving from one side of the performance space and stopping in the middle, where they silently carried out their gestures. No attention was given to adding any sense of “character” to the gestures; initially the focus was simply on the act of repetition. They then move off to the other side of the space and returning once again to the centre, repeated their gestures. The whole process was repeated again and again. As the exercise progressed, the appearance of the work was changed and shaped by the impulses released by the repetition -so much so that each performer developed a unique persona; a persona that was modified within the subtle nuances of the changing relationship between each other. Like toning and organics this was used as the agency into the performance spaces released by the intensity of repetition.

iii] Body Mind Centring. [BMC]
“BMC is a study. Its subject is movement. By watching the movement of the body, we can see the movement of the mind. The mind of a physical form is the moving quality of the form, its inherent intelligence down to a cellular level. BMC is not a technique. It is a changing framework for perceiving change, a state of mind that allows for a spontaneous and open perception of a bodily mind.
BMC merges the conceptual and the experiential, shifting between observing and embodying. From this union arises an understanding from the inside out and the outside in of how an individual is doing or being anything.”

Beginning by lying on the floor, the performers follow their internal journey through the following developmental stages:

i] Pre-vertebrate development: molecular level / unorganised / unformed -merging with the atomic-molecular structure of the universe / space and vibration within and between the smallest units of life.
ii] Cellular breathing: cellular fluid / transfer of oxygen / waste from cell-intercellular fluid / oceanic consciousness / fluid ground from which all life-movement arises.
iii] Pulsation: simplest organisation of cells / jelly fish / beginning of circulatory system, including heart, blood, lungs, breath / general distinction between inner and outer.
iv] Radial symmetry: formation of limbs / six pointed starfish -head, arms, legs, tail / organised around central mouth-navel / beginning of directed movement away from and toward a central mouth / curiosity / intention.
v] Bi-lateral/bi-polar symmetry: mouth-sucking-swallowing / appetite / desire / mouth as limb / worm-like body created by tube from mouth through digestive system to anus / anus as mouth / other organs - kidney, liver etc.

iv] Texts.
Each performer drew not only upon “embedded texts” [texts that had be selected prior to the work], but also “found texts”; random pieces of texts remembered in the spaces opened up by the intensity of their work. No attempt was made to resist these texts -they were incorporated into the work as shadows narratives...as tangents whose trajectories quite often returned back to the main body of the work at a later stage.

THE EXTERNAL BODY
The occupation of the external body was distinguished from the internal body by the performer’s sense of being acted upon. The choice to act or move within the external body site was found to be motivated by stimulus. Four specific strategies were developed to assist the performer’s arrival at this corporeal modality:

i] Imaging. [Adapted from the work of Min Tanaka and his dance company Mai-Juku, at Body Weather Farm, Yamanashi, Japan.]
Guided by the sense of being acted upon the performers once again consciously avoided any propensity to remain within any particular image. Like the imaging work associated with the internal body the focus was given to passing through the image and generating a sense of constant change...of metamorphosis.

- Your body is suspended from its joints by string from the sky and something is moving them.
- There are curtains of smoke in front of you -you pass through without disturbing them and you become the smoke.
• To your side there is a wall -you enter it and your own bedroom is on the other side.
• You leave the wall and enter the air -your body becomes the air.
• Your hair is blown by the wind in a single direction and you feel your head being turned.
• A large window is in front of you -all of your body rests against the window.
• You pass through the window and into rain.
• The rain is absorbed by your body, which becomes like soggy paper.
• Your soggy torso is hanging on a coat hanger.
• There is a fire in front of you -your body takes the warmth from the fire.

ii] The wind is stronger than the imagination.
Once again drawn from the work of Min Tanaka, this exercise focused on disciplining the body to reside in a state devoid of images. At the centre of the work is the idea of the performer following the passage of wind entering the body through one point and exiting through another. Attention is given to making visible the point through which the wind both enters and leaves the body.

iii] The Three Spheres.
The performer's physical body is conceptualised as three spheres resting on top of each other [the head, the upper torso and the lower torso], each spinning in the opposite direction to the one immediately above or below it. The performers explore the external physicality of the body when attempting to move up and down the three spheres.

iv] Texts.
The texts for the external body site were pre-selected by the performers and became one of the many strands that could be opened up in the work. The speaking of the texts was contingent upon whether they were found during their work; that is to say, the texts were only spoken when the performers were corporeally present within the energetic. The selection of the texts was informed by their connection to the surface of bodies -such as descriptions of cosmetic surgery, and meteorological discourses.

3] CHARACTERISATION:

Initially intended as a disruptive device in the somatic nature of the narrative structuring, characterisation evolved and was utilised as an intermediate site in the transitions from the internal and external body.

Adhering to the conventions of traditional actor training model, each performer built a “character” during the rehearsal process. The performers’ attention was focused on the surfaces of the character’s identity, such as voice, gesture, posture, and idiosyncratic movement. At first the character appeared as a visual anachronism within the somatic nature of the work. However as the work progressed, the character’s identity was continually refined and redefined by the performers’ forays into their internal and external corporeal modalities; so much so that, at times, the character’s identity became the agency through which both the...
internal and external corporeal sites could be entered, experienced and expressed.

4] FOUND BODIES:

The work on the internal and external corporeal modalities was extended to include considerations about the relationship between identity and physical appearance. “Identity” is often ascribed to the surface of the body. It is not considered unusual for someone to be missing an internal organ, but if one is without a nose, ear or seriously scarred then one’s identity is felt by many to be significantly altered.

All of the texts used in Crossing Body Shadow changed considerably with each performance. The written texts below formed a basis from which the performative expression was built.

Extracts from “A Stretch Of The Imagination” by Jack Hibberd: Text used by Andrew Robinson for the site of Characterisation:


- “When I first came to one tree hill there was this one tall tree. Nothing else. A hairy tree. Conspicuous, almost outlandish. Not wishing to advertise my presence, I took an axe and chopped it down. Thud. I looked at the tree...and the uproar was immense. Every cockatoo, crow, emu and rosella in the kingdom had taken to the heavens filling them with spleen and indignation. Lesser men would have regarded this as a harbinger and knelt down in supplication. Not me. I seized the old shot gun and fired salvo after salvo at the demented pricks.”


- “I myself have taken the liberty of excavating for myself a grave...over there...on the slope...looking east. The traditional six feet with smooth walls of baked clay and an inner spring of silk on the floor. Yes, I shall crawl, on my last legs, to its edge, cast a fleeting but longing look over the pastures, then tumble in...fall onto the mattress, not quite dead...I shall lay there a while, breathing my last, listening to the corpuscles choke, ruminante on life and gaze up at the lowering sky, for it shall be evening, and discern that lurid neon...the Southern cross, laugh a little...blaspheme that icon of it all ...and feel the clay cave in...croak.”
Crossing


Excerpts from “In Camera” by Jean-Paul Sartre: Text used by Gari-Emma Perry for the site of Characterisation:

- “I lost my parents when I was a kid and I had my younger brother to bring up. We were terribly poor and when an old friend of the family asked me to marry him, I said “yes”. He was very well off and quite nice. My brother was a very delicate child and needed all sorts of attention, so really that was the right thing for me to do. Don’t you agree? My husband was old enough to be my father, but for six years we had a happy married life. Then two years ago I met the man I was fated to love. We knew it the moment we set eyes on each other. He asked me to run away with him and I refused. Then I got pneumonia and it finished me. That’s the whole story. No doubt, by certain standards, I did wrong to sacrifice my youth to a man nearly three times my age. Do you think that could be called a sin?”


- “I need a glass. Any sort of glass, a pocket mirror will do. How tiresome. I feel so queer. When I can’t see myself I begin to wonder if I really and truly exist. I pat myself just to make sure, but it doesn’t help much. Everything that goes into ones head is so vague. It makes one want to go to sleep.”


- “I’ve six big mirrors in my house. There they are! I can see them. But they do not see me. They’re reflecting the carpet, the settee, the window. But how empty it is, a glass in which I am absent. No! I can’t do without a looking glass forever and ever. I simply can’t.”


- “He wanted me to have a baby! I certainly did not. But the baby came, worse luck. I went to Switzerland for five months. No one knew...anything. It was a girl. Roger was with me when it happened, when she was born. It pleased him no end, having a daughter. It did not please me. There was a balcony overlooking the lake. I brought a big stone. He could see what I was up to, and he kept on shouting “Estelle, for god sake don’t”. I hated him then. He saw it all. He was leaning over the balcony and he saw the ring spreading on the water. That’s all. My husband never suspected anything.”


Text used for the site of Characterisation by Bronwyn Turnbull: [The source of this text is unknown, but is offered here to illustrate the diversity of the work as and in no way does its appearance lay claim to authorship].

- Green linoleum dirty shag-pile carpet.

Text used for the site of Internal Corporeal Modality by Bronwyn Turnbull: [The source of this text is unknown, but once again it is offered here to illustrate the diversity of the work as and in no way does its appearance lay claim to authorship].

- By the time the heartstring become loose, you can rewind it round the neck of a bobbin and pull it tight...tight...tight...snap...a heartstring just like that easily. Pull it tight around the neck of the bobbin and you can find any length of heart that you desire...
…they desired pieces of her; they wanted fragments of her body. This resulted in the loss of her hand and her jaw and her left eye. Someone had obtained her neck so that it lay disconnected from the rest of her body on the crimson pillow. A wound inflicted by an angel spear many years before was selected out and was put on display in the foyer of the hospital in which Teresa was born.

Text used for the site of Internal Corporeal Modality by Andrew Robinson: [The source of this text is unknown, but as before, it is offered here to illustrate the diversity of the work as and in no way does its appearance lay claim to authorship].

- He listens to voices behind closed doors in the corridor. The voices rise and fall interminably like bumble bees caught against a glass, starting and stopping and starting again. He knows that they mean something to him but he can't understand a word they're saying. He follows the cracks in the linoleum, dust in the cracks. He likes to look at the shoes in the laundry and imagine the people wearing them, so many pairs of shoes.

- The green and white striped canvas awning. He runs down the garden path past the peach tree, the garden shed, feeling the long grass whipping against his legs. He stands at the hole in the fence with one foot in the neighbour's yard and one foot in his own, feeling the pull of the house behind him, feeling the pull of the world outside him. He hears voices of other children in other yards, behind other fences. Sometimes he thinks he hears someone call his name but he doesn't answer. He listens to the cars on the main road outside the house, always going somewhere, and he isn't alone. He never sees her clearly. Only when she is so far away or so close that he can smell her hair, feel the warmth of her breath on his body. He draws pictures in the dust underneath the bed. Outside in the garden there are almond trees, and a willow tree, and a rusty garden swing.

Text used for the site of Internal Corporeal Modality by Gari-Emma Perry: [Once again, the source of this text is uncertain, but is offered here to illustrate the diversity of the work as and in no way does its appearance lay claim to authorship].

- She raved, you know, when she was sick. About another, a heavenly place. But a monk said, reproaching her, “not for you, sinners don’t go to heaven.”
- She felt the wind caressing her skin. Creature of the surface, the edge -skin -surface. Shattering fear.
- Her body burns, organs ignite, purging the darkness from her soul. The wickedness concealed underneath her skin can no longer remain. Melting, dead wood igniting.
- Fire wraps around her soul as if punishment for concealed secrets and false pretences. For the first time she touched her soul. The first time as if it was igniting, shattering the surface into a million pieces.
- She lost her soul, so she resided on the edge.
- The mothering earth is dark and deep within me. I am dark.
- The robe is the mere envelope of the body -but beneath that our skin itself is a final envelope, with its own ego.
- The skin is deceptive. In life one only has one's skin...there is an error in human relations because one never is what one has. I have an angel’s skin but I am a jackal...a crocodile's skin but I am a puppy...a black skin but I am white...a woman's skin but I am a man. I never have the skin of what I am. There is no exception to this rule because I am never what I am.
- I saw a face become a mask, a gap opened up. Sshh, here he comes, put on the mask, hide behind the door.


- “We live in our skin -it is the living boundary that separates what's inside our body from the outside world. The skin is a remarkable organ, and it is the body's largest. It totals between 1 and 2 square metres in area and accounts for 12% of our body weight.”
- “A microscopic look at the cross-section of skin would reveal that it has several layers. The three main layers are the epidermis at the top, under which lies the dermis and, under this the subcutis. The thickness of each layer varies over different parts of the body. For example, the epidermis and dermis are both thickest on the palm of the hands and on the soles of the feet and thinnest on the eyelids.”
- “The nose plays a very special role in our body-image. Our facial features are strongly determined by the look of the nose and personal identity is often thought to be psychologically linked to the nose. When a person perceives something wrong with their nose it can cause depression, anxiety and lack of self-confidence.”
- “People have been shown to start disliking their nose as young as four. Yet changing the shape or size of one's nose can be rather a risky business because many studies have shown that a disproportionate number of patients remain unhappy with their rhinoplasties, which, by all surgical standards, are good
ones. In fact, the body-image disturbances which can result from surgery that permanently alters a person’s appearance are most frequently associated with rhinoplasty. The condition of the mouth at the time of the surgery is very important. As this type of surgery is mainly done through the mouth your gums must be free of periodontal disease and gingivitis and you must have no untreated cavities. If you are a smoker it is vitally important that you stop before and after surgery to reduce the risk of infection. The surgery, if performed on its own, is usually performed on an outpatient basis in hospital or in a day-surgery centre or the surgeon’s own facilities, using local anaesthetic and sedation. It takes about 30 minutes to one hour; longer if done in conjunction with other procedures.”

- “In a normal implant procedure, an incision is made in the skin under your chin or inside your lower lip. The tissues are lifted off the bones to make a space for the implant to fit. After the implant is stitched into place, the incision is sutured. Your chin is strapped with tape to help control swelling and to support it when eating and talking. Some people require surgical alteration of the chinbone prior to the implant going in. For example, where one side of the chin is more prominent the bone may need to be shaved down. When the chin sticks out too far a surgeon will simply cut off some of the jaw. This is usually done through incisions made inside the lower lip with a small saw.”

- “Surgery on the skin reflects what’s happening to the surface of the earth. Natural is no longer beautiful. Cosmetic surgery, cut, slice, scrape, reshape, fake. Yes, now it’s perfect! We humans need to control the surface in order to construct our identity.”

Excerpts from Beyond The Pleasure Principle, a radio essay by Gregory Whitehead: Text used for the site of External Corporeal Modality by Bronwyn Turnbull:

- “No wound ever speaks for itself. The only thing which you will find emerging spontaneously from a wound is blood. If you’re interested in the deeper significance, wounds have to be read; they have to interpreted, deciphered.”

- “Stopping the bleeding has really nothing to do with treating the wound. Treating the wound is an interpretative process; attempting to understand and decipher what the wound is.”

Text used for the site of External Corporeal Modality by Andrew Robinson: [Inspired by literature about El Nino and climatic change issued by the Department of Meteorology, 1997.]

- The world is shaped by the interactions of forces that are well beyond anything that can be encompassed by the thoughts of human beings. The twists and turns in, the on-going dialogue between ocean and atmosphere can have sweeping effects in far flung regions of the globe.

- Imagine enormous streams of air flowing constantly across the earth and oceans, their currents diverted by dense tropical rain clouds 10 - 15 kilometres above the level of the sea. This is the breath of the earth that becomes known as El Nino, the child. A breath that determines the position of monsoons, storm tracks and jet streams, which in turn decide the fate of millions of lives through flood, famine and drought.

- We rest lightly on the body of the earth, precariously balanced and then destroyed by the slightest twitch, a ripple of tectonic muscle, a cough, a sigh, a scream. The core of the earth bubbles with its own dreams that have nothing to do with human reason or easy compassion. The layers of skin and membrane that we call home are the after thoughts of a power we have little conception of and no control over. Isn’t it strange that we struggle to make our existence even more precarious by filling the world with pollutants and denuding the earth of vegetation that in turn allows the earth to blow away?

- Hark! Shhh! Hear the present ocean past. Not the tick tock of ratchets and cogs, but a continuous and silent avalanche. We don’t move forward. We merely mark time. All progress is an illusion. Our great advance into the vacuum is also an illusion, so cheer up.