AFFECTIVE SPACE [looking back]

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University, 2006.
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

I would like to acknowledge the support of my supervisor Dr David Moody as well as the encouragement of Professor Vijay Mishra.
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This thesis is submitted under Research Degree Regulation 28 [b] which states that a thesis:

“May consist predominately of published work, provided that the thesis also includes material that provides coherence to the thesis as an integrated work”.

Initially my intention was to frame my thesis with a preface of fifteen hundred words and an introduction of six thousand words that would locate my previously produced theatre work within a discursive practice enabling it to be re-read through both a theoretical and artistic lens. To ensure that the thesis would be a coherent and integrated piece of work, the body of the thesis was to consist of approximately five chapters, each envisaged as an assemblage of a number of my theatre productions and supported by approximately 2000 words. The relevant productions would be drawn from my theatre practice over the last 25 years and all included on a supporting DVD.

The complexity and scope of the project has not only meant that the thesis has grown in word length but that the format has also changed. What has not altered is the attempt to re-read the work within a coherent praxiological frame.
ABSTRACT

“You can’t be a rationalist in an irrational world. It isn’t rational”

Joe Orton

It may be argued that a historically accepted model of an academic career begins with having completed a PhD and in so doing identifying a body of theory that will inform and constitute one’s practical academic work. While it may be an accepted model it does not necessarily take precedence as the only model. The relationship between theory and practice is symbiotic and as such it is possible, and indeed at times desirable, that practice inform theory. It is not advisable to be solely operating from a position of theory when making creative work; the risk is far too great. The gravitational force of theory can all too easily disturb the “fragile innocence” of creativity. Pulled and constrained by the logic of theory the work risks becoming too didactic and its creativity sacrificed for the sake of rationalism…a symptom almost diagnostic of our culture.

I appreciate that the term “creative” is open to a plethora of readings, each with their own cogent claim to usage. When I employ the term I am referring to a particular type of decision-making process involved in the solution of problems. I will argue that a creative decision differs from other types of decisions [such as, practical or scientific] in the way the resultant solution of the problem remains open to a greater number of potential readings. I will also argue that it is precisely in those heuristic moments of potential impasse, often associated with a problem’s resolution, where creativity hangs out.

In any creative venture, I have always been guided by the importance and significance of doing…in the doing is the theory. This is not meant to dismiss theory but simply to see it in much the same way as when we see objects in our peripheral vision. Just as objects in our peripheral vision do not take their place in our visual field, theory [for me] participates in creative processes by subconsciously serving as an early guiding system that helps monitor the work. In this age of

2 This concept is discussed as part of the Introduction.
3 The term visual field may be defined as the view seen by our two eyes without any movement of the head.
information we are no longer innocent of theory -it is ineluctable. What is crucial is that we have a command of theory in order that we may go through it and regain our *creative innocence*. If we do not, we only achieve an artificial innocence born of enthusiasm, exuberance and imprecision.

*Creative innocence* is re-found in *doing*. This assertion conceives of theory as participating as part of a *creative subconscious* and goes someway towards explaining the sudden epiphany of understanding that is frequently associated with prolonged and intense work, or the immense pleasure at retrospectively recognising the theory that seemed to have informed one’s work without being conscious of it -as if the theoretical component had always been there. This phenomenon is of fundamental concern to my thesis, especially when considering the theatre productions that constitute my creative oeuvre. Upon close inspection, my works ultimately reveal that the defining distance between a visceral creative decision [one whose manifestation is immediately felt as apposite] and one that is conceptualised as the illustration of a theory, is not that great…I just happen to begin working outside of the brackets of theoretical narration.

Throughout my thesis I will refer to all visuals as images but I will argue that there are specific types of images, namely *signs*, *symbols* and *metaphors*.

“In language the term ‘image’ can imply more than a verbal description of a purely visual experience; it can also mean the metaphoric, ornamental, rhetorical figurative use of language as opposed to its literal use.”

4

For the surrealists “*image*” meant more than the representation of an external thing in the material world, it also meant the revelation of an internal mental state, a psychological verity occluded from consciousness.

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5 In philosophy *representationism* refers to “the theory that our knowledge of material objects is gained through our direct perception of the private impressions or sense data which they cause us to experience and which, in some way or other, they resemble.” [Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen Eds. *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Harper Collins, London, 2000. p. 749.]
“Images [of this kind] were incandescent flashes linking two elements belonging to categories that are so far removed from each other that reason would fail to connect them and that require a momentary suspension of the critical attitude in order for them to be brought together.”

Having already built a body of practical work [spanning thirty years] the challenge was to see if it was possible to identify a coherent theory that consistently functioned as the catalyst of the work - albeit disparate in its nature. The analytical process proved to be the reverse of that which may be observed in the historically accepted model of academic discourse…where the process is cumulative. In this instance the process was deductive - a forensic assignment akin to tracing the diverse creative elements to their creative source or motivation. The venture proved illuminating in much the same way as when one is asked to crystallise a complex theoretical argument; you have to reinvent the argument in a way that helps to simplify its complexity without attenuating its integrity - a complexity that is well known to you but that eludes the uninitiated reader.

Whenever I try and think about my theatre practice I am vexed - particularly when I filter my own experiences and try and extract the meanings that seem genuinely inherent in them. At first glance it is satisfying because of a sense of coherence or pattern in a whole host of discrete events. However a closer inspection quickly reveals the fractal complexity of the pattern and demands a reappraisal of how we see and decipher it. Any attempt to understand its disparate nature by investigating one part in isolation from the whole proves initially unsatisfying and finally futile, for each part seems to be informed by and refer to other parts, as if participating in a greater organising principle; a principle that resists traditional cartography; one that is best seen as one sees the earth from outer space.

When the earth is seen from outer space one becomes aware of the greater organising principle [the universe] within which it functions. Similarly it is only when the topology of my work is seen from a distance that its coherence is apparent…the further away one is, the more clearly one recognises its constituent parts.


My conception of space is not one where the spectator is positioned outside and above the scene, “it is, rather, a space reckoned starting from me as the zero point or degree zero of spatiality, I do not see it according to its exterior envelope; I live it from the inside; I am immersed in it. After all, the world is all around me, not in front of me.” [Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Eye and Mind*, in *The Primacy of Perception*, Northwestern University Press, 1964. p. 178.]
“Despite our desire to lose ourselves in the living depths of a work, we are constrained to distance ourselves from it in order to speak of it. Why, then not deliberately establish a distance that will reveal to us, in a panoramic perspective, the surroundings with which the work is organically linked?”

When I am in the middle of a theatre production, I have only the slightest idea of how it will end; I trust in the doing, and at the end I am always surprised by what I have created. Ambiguity and paradox and consequently indeterminacy ultimately emerge as the common features of my work; they appear as sign posts that mark a way of finally mapping it. Each individual piece of work remains coherently intact despite its seemingly obscure coalescence with others, but it is when the works intersect at these points of commonality that one may observe the greater organising matrix.

“The phenomenological world is not a pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people’s intersect and engage each other like gears.”

“If the most unrelated things share a place, time, or odd similarity, there develop wonderful unities and peculiar relationships –and one thing reminds us of everything.”

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10 Novalis. From: Bernstein, J. M. Ed. Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics, New School University, New York, 2002. Reprinted in Kaltermann, Udo, Art and Life, Praeger, New York, 1971. p77. [Novalis (1772 –1801) was the pseudonym for Friedrich Leopold, a German poet whose work, Miscellaneous Observations (1798) was to have a great effect on later Romanticism].
INTRODUCTION [Part One]

“Art is the lie that reveals the truth.”
Pablo Picasso

I began my theatre work as a practitioner. I came to theory through practice; in so doing I quickly appreciated that the binary distinction between “practice” and “theory” was forced, that instead the two were inseparable components of a continuum. Initially the study of theatre praxis, as an academic discipline, was not yet available to me. The English departments of Australian universities concerned themselves with the literary study of theatre histories and traditions; specifically the literary canon of the occidental theatre tradition that oddly enough always seemed to stop at John Osborne’s play “Look Back in Anger”. Modernism was the dominant paradigm; Post-modernism, as an academic discipline, was only just beginning to “ironically” stir.

The study of theatre as a literary tradition felt curiously unsatisfying. Theatre, for me, was a way of speaking and of being heard; of being present in the world; of making the world smaller in order to understand it; of having a voice that was not merely given me. I shared this belief with a number of my peers. We simply made theatre; we, to use the vernacular of the time, “put on plays”. There was no prolonged discussion about who would do what task. Once we decided who would perform which character [guided by the principle of sharing -a sadly forgotten mode of cooperation], we simply went about doing whatever was necessary to realise our project. I hasten to add that this was not a model of the collaborative “collective” work of the nineteen sixties and seventies –one that is still adopted by a number of theatre groups today. I mention this merely to highlight a methodological thread in my thesis: namely, the potential of “practice” to inform “theory”; that, because they both coalesce on a continuum, in the “doing” is the theory.

Contemporary theatre practice has now established a dynamic relation between theory and practice that is in accord with this belief. A praxiological approach now guides the work of many theatre practitioners, including myself.

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In the past whenever I was asked to write about my theatre work, I would become conceptually unmoored. I used to think this was due to the impossibility of writing about theatre design — of writing words about pictures. I now appreciate that the impasse was more significant. No matter how many words I wrote, it was never satisfactory, never complete. Even when I did feel remotely satisfied it was always punctuated with a sense of having omitted something. There would always be a gap between what I was speaking about and the way I was speaking. I now understand that this gap can never be closed and is perhaps the one thing that enables both practice and theory to continue to exist independent of each other, yet inextricably linked. A longing for the other\(^{14}\) that will always remain an un Consummated desire. The American performance theoretician, Peggy Phelan speaks about the phenomenon in similar terms:

“Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once is does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.” \(^{15}\)

In order to speak more clearly about my theatre work, it would be worthwhile to trace my trajectory from my first interest in the aesthetic\(^{16}\) pursuits of painting to my current theatre practice. In my youth, I spent years studying the rules that informed the major art movements of the 20\(^{th}\) Century, a century that saw an upheaval in what was meant by art. The 20\(^{th}\) Century saw the birth of modernism — encompassing Impressionism, Cubism, Fauvism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Expressionism, to name but a few, and then of course the emergence of Post-modernism. \(^{17}\)

\(^{14}\) “In phenomenology ‘the Other’ is a constituting factor in the self image that a subject builds up. In the work of Sartre and of Merleau-Ponty, ‘the Other’ is the perceiving, conscious, meaning-conferring other person who helps, or forces, the conscious subject to define his [sic] own world-picture and his [sic] own view of his [sic] place in it.” [Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen Eds. The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought. Harper Collins, London, 2000. p. 620.]


\(^{16}\) Aesthetics… “is commonly held to be a style of perception concerned neither with the factual information to be gained from the things perceived, nor with their practical uses, but rather with the immediate qualities of the contemplative experience itself.” [Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen Eds. The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought. Harper Collins, London, 2000. p. 12.]

In the first half of the 20th Century, the theatre was often the forum for the major art movements of the day. Even as early as 1896, Alfred Jarry\(^1\) challenged the aesthetic conventions of Realism; his intentionally confrontational sets for his provocative \textit{Ubu Roi}, assaulted the senses of an unsuspecting public and almost unintentionally established Symbolism as an artistic language.

Pablo Picasso’s\(^{19}\) sets and costumes for the 1917 Ballets Russes production of Sergei Diaghilev’s\(^{20}\) \textit{Parade} afforded Cubism greater public visibility. In 1916 Oskar Kokoschka presented Expressionism on the stage\(^{21}\) and in the 1920’s the Bauhaus School\(^{22}\) found the stage an ideal site for their experiments in design. After the revolution the Russian Constructionists, in collaboration with the theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold,\(^{23}\) used the stage to their advantage. Tristan Tzara\(^{24}\) and Hugo Ball\(^{25}\) also found the stage a suitable place for their Dada provocations.

\begin{center}
\textbf{1} Alfred Jarry’s woodcut of \textit{Ubu}, the protagonist in his play \textit{Ubu Roi}.\(^{26}\) \textbf{2} Alfred Jarry’s poster for the 1896 production of \textit{Ubu Roi} \(^{27}\)
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{18} The French playwright and theatre director Alfred Jarry [1873-1907] is best known for his satirical and farcical play \textit{Ubu Roi} \textit{(King Ubu)}. The Theatre of the Absurd, Dadaism and Surrealism all found an important precursor in his anarchic work.

\textsuperscript{19} The Spanish painter Pablo Picasso [1881-1873] is considered one of the greatest artists of the 20th century. His enormous body of work, spanning over fifty years, is generally separated into three distinct phases, the \textit{Blue Period}, the \textit{Rose Period} and his most famous contribution to modern art, \textit{Cubism}.

\textsuperscript{20} The Russian, Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929) was responsible for the formation of the \textit{Ballets Russes} in 1911 as an independent private company. Despite the lack of Russian financial support, Diaghilev collaborated with the world’s most famous artists, composers and dancers of the period. His most successful works were the dance performances that Diaghilev began in Paris in 1909.

\textsuperscript{21} Oskar Kokoschka. [1886-1980] The Austrian painter, illustrator, poet and playwright, is credited with having founded Expressionist drama with his 1909 play, \textit{Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen} \textit{(Murderer the Woman’s Hope)}.

\textsuperscript{22} The German \textit{Bauhaus} school was founded in 1919, under the leadership of Walter Gropius. Its principle interest was the synthesis of architecture, technology and functionality. One of its main goals was the renewal of architecture as a dominant artistic discipline.

\textsuperscript{23} More information on Meyerhold and his theory of biomechanics may be found in: Symons, James. \textit{Meyerhold’s Theatre of the Grotesque}, Rivers Press, Cambridge, 1973. [Biomechanics begins with physical training. \textquote{The purpose of that training is however to develop a connection between mind and body, to \textquote{teach the body to think}.}]

\textsuperscript{24} The Romanian-born French poet and essayist, Tristan Tzara [1896-1963] is recognised mainly as a founding member of the anarchic artistic movement Dada, whose provocative theatrical forays were staged in the theatre/club, Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich.

\textsuperscript{25} Hugo Ball made an agreement with the owner of the tavern “Meierei” to use the backroom for a literary cabaret…Cabaret Voltaire. He argued that it would increase the sale of beer, sausages and sandwiches!


Picasso’s costume designs for Jean Cocteau's ballet *Parade.*

Oskar Kokoschka: Sketch for his production of *Mörder Hoffnung der Frauen* (‘Murderer the Woman’s Hope’) [1909]

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1. Picasso’s costume design for the role of the Frock-Coated Manager in Cocteau’s ballet *Parade*: worn by Leon Woizikowski.
3. Picasso’s costume design for Cocteau’s ballet *Parade*. The horse was danced by Oumansky and Novak.


Oskar Schlemmer: Three costume designs for his production *Triadic Ballet*, Bauhaus, (1926-27) [30]

Vsevolod Meyerhold: Set and costumes for *The Bathhouse* by Mayakovsky. 1930 [31]

1 Hugo Ball reading one of Tristan Tzara’s sound poems at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. [32]  
2 Tristan Tzara: *Le Coeur à gaz* (*The Gas Heart*) [1923] Costumes by Sonia Delaunay, Théâtre Michel. [33]

However in the middle of the 20th Century, despite glib assertions about breaking down the barriers between the different arts, artists seemed more content to remain within their own disciplines, and the artists of the stage were relegated to the enterprise of scenic decorators, with all the baggage that the term implies. Their function was to provide a pleasing backdrop for the prioritised work of the actor and more importantly the author and director. There were some notable exceptions:

Wassily Kandinsky,\(^{34}\) [who in addition to his theatre designs wrote a critical body of work on theater art]. Andre Masson,\(^{35}\) Alexander Calder,\(^{36}\) Joan Miro,\(^{37}\) Alberto Giacometti,\(^{38}\) Salvador Dali\(^{39}\) [who in 1948 designed the sets for Peter Brook’s *Salome* and in 1945 designed the dream set for Alfred Hitchcock’s *Spellbound*] and Jean Dubuffet\(^{40}\) [who in 1973 designed the set for his own play *Coucou Bazar*]. More recently Robert Rauschenberg\(^{41}\) worked for the dance choreographers John Cage \(^{42}\), Merce Cunningham\(^{43}\) and Trisha Brown,\(^{44}\) while Karel Appel\(^{45}\) designed the sets for the Butoh dance of Min Tanaka.

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34 The Russian born artist [1866-1844] is generally accepted as the first pure abstractionist in art….his forms evolved from fluid and organic to geometric and, finally, to pictographic. Kandinsky used colour in a theoretical and synesthetic way, associating tone with timbre, hue with pitch, and saturation with the volume of sound…when he saw colour he heard music.

35 A member of the Surrealist group, the French artist André Masson [1896-1987] experimented with automatic drawings and paintings. In 1933 he designed the sets and costumes for the Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.

36 An American Kinetic Artist [1898-1976]. In 1926, he created the assemblage Cirque Calder, which included miniature performers, animals, and props. Fashioned from wire and found materials it was designed to be operated manually by him. Every piece was small enough to be packed into a suitcase, enabling him to give performances anywhere. Later in his life, he designed the sets for *Happy as Larry*, a play directed by Burgess Meredith, and for *Nuclea*, a dance performance directed by Jean Vilar.

37 Joan Miro [1893-1983] was a Spanish painter, sculptor and theatre designer. He designed the set and costumes for a ballet based on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, by Serge Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes* in Monte Carlo [1926].

38 The Italian artist, Alberto Giacometti [1901-1966] was responsible for designing the set for his close friend Samuel Beckett’s Paris production of *Waiting for Godot*. [Paris 1963].

39 The Spanish painter Salvador Dali (1904-89) in collaboration with the director Luis Buñuel made the first Surrealist films, *Un chien andalou* [1929] and *L’Age d’or* [1930]. He also contributed a dream sequence to Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Spellbound* [1945].

40 Jean Dubuffet [1901-1985]. In 1935, the French artist moved to a house on Rue Lhomond, in Paris, where he began experimenting with different media. The house quickly became a studio and theatre where he regularly performed his own plays. *Coucou Bazar* is his most famous.

41 In 1952 Robert Rauschenberg participated in *Theatre Piece No.1* by John Cage, known as *The First Happening*. From 1954 to 1997 he maintained a strong working relationship with both the Merce Cunningham and Trisha Brown dance companies.

42 One of the great American musical innovators of the 20thCentury, Cage experimented with re-organized pianos, unorthodox percussion instruments, electronic sounds, natural ambience, and even the notation of silence. Accident and chance were incorporated as part of the performance of his “musical score.”

43 The choreographer Merce Cunningham was born April 16, 1919, and founded the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in 1953. He developed, in collaboration with John Cage, a creative method known as "Chance Operations", in which he would create a number of dance phrases by using such chance strategies as dice, cards, or flipping coins to determine the elements of his choreography.

44 The American born dancer and choreographer Trisha Brown (1936–) founded her own dance company in 1970. Her early works were characterised by the use of ropes and pulleys and often set on rooftops and the sides of buildings. Her later work has developed fixed and exacting formal structure.

45 In 1987, the Dutch painter, Karel Appel, designed the set for the Japanese Butoh dancer Min Tanaka’s production of *Peut-on danser le paysage? (Can one dance the Landscape?)*, at L’Opera de Paris.
The design work of David Hockney, Eduardo Arroyo and Jean Cocteau also need to be added to this list.


Alexander Calder: *Circus* and *Acrobats*, [1925].

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46 In 1981, David Hockney designed a number of the sets for the Metropolitan Opera, New York, including Jean Cocteau’s *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*. *The Breasts of Tiresias*.
47 The Spanish painter Eduardo Arroyo designed the set and costumes for the Spanish Theatre Madrid’s production of Calderon’s *Life is a Dream*. [1981]
48 Jean Cocteau [1889-1963] the French artist and writer made his name in poetry, film, ballet, painting and opera. In 1917, Sergei Diaghilev commissioned Cocteau to write a ballet for the Ballets Russes. The play, *Parade*, was produced by Diaghilev and designed by Pablo Picasso. Cocteau’s adaptation of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, was performed in 1922 with scenery by Picasso. In 1926 Cocteau designed the set for the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Claude Debussy. Cocteau also collaborated with Stravinsky on Sophocles’ *Oedipus-Rex*. In the 1930’s Cocteau made his first film, *The Blood of a Poet*. His most recognised play was *The Infernal Machine*, a work also based on *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles.
Joan Miro: Set Design for *Jeux d’Enfants*, Bizet/Massine, Théâtre de Monte Carlo. [1932] 51


Salvador Dali: Dream set for Alfred Hitchcock’s *Spellbound*. [1945] 54


Choreographed by Trisha Brown.


With Alex Hay and Carolyn Brown.

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David Hockney: Set design for Francis Poulenc’s *Les Mamelles de Tirisias*. Metropolitan Opera, New York. [1981]  


Jean Cocteau: Set and Costume designs for Stravinsky’s *Oedipus* [Opera-Oratorio]. [1927]. Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt.  

Jean Cocteau at Irène Lagut’s design for his *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*. [1921].

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57 ibid. p. 136.  
62 ibid. p. 74.
Despite these not insignificant forays onto the stage, many contemporary theatre directors are still resistant to the place of “art” in theatre. It is not surprising given the vitriolic resentment contained in the words of the American art critic Michael Fried:

1. “The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre.”

2. “Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre.”

3. “The concepts of quality and value—and the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within the individual arts. What lies between the arts is theatre.”  

Fried’s comments are made even more disturbing by his use of the completely impressionistic terms “quality” and “value” - these are nebulous terms that have no quantifiable meaning, and serve only to undermine his criticism.

While designing a production of David Williamson’s “Emerald City” for the Festival of Perth [1987] the director, when I insisted my designs’ reference to the aesthetic considerations of Surrealism was crucial to an articulate reading of the work, remarked that “the theatre was no place for art”.


But art is like theatre; you take things from the wings and put them on centre stage! It is theatrical.


Ostensibly, the director was implying that the role of “design” in the theatre making process should remain servile to the author’s text, and if it was to be granted any recognition at all, it was simply as a supportive role in the prioritising of the text. This model of theatre practice sees the text as the only site where meaning is to be found, and the responsibility of the director is to find and reverently extract it. The designer’s responsibility is to literally stage a concretised version of what the director extracts. Needless to say this was hardly satisfying or satisfactory. The writer may be the author of the text but that does not necessarily make s/he the master of its meaning.

…*the word is a small visible portion of a vast unseen formation.*

The director’s myopic opinion was anathema to me; my theatre work at the time was the final part of an artistic trajectory that had taken me from an interest in art as the application of paint on a two dimensional surface, to experimentations with the performativity of space, and finally, as we shall see, to art as the installation of theatre sets. It seemed to me that there was and still is a compositional relationship between stage pictures and art; decisions about setting, lighting, costumes, and properties, and the movement and grouping of actors involves an imaginative

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process of composition analogous to that engaged in by an artist. In both cases, the artist and the theatre practitioner perform a set of creative compositional acts in relation to framing, form, line, colour, texture, and so on. As such it did not seem too distant to conceive of the stage as a three dimensional artistic space.
ART: The Alternative Concretisations of the Lacunae of Indeterminacy

“Most of us expect artists to do irresponsible things, to be out of control. Somehow we believe that if you’re way down there, you’re going to bring something back for us, and we don’t have to make the trip. This is part of the tradition with artists; the problem with that is that you will have people who will write you a ticket to go to hell. Go to hell with gasoline drawers on and bring me back some chicken chow mein while you’re at it”

Tom Waits

It may be argued that our “western” understanding of what constitutes art has derived from the Greek tradition of aesthetic ideality; so received is this tradition that we rarely, if ever, question it. We forget that art existed, and continues to exist, in different aesthetic traditions: the art of the ancient Egyptians, for instance, existed in a realm of magical reality; the Indian tradition has employed art to lead the mind beyond itself to reach new realms of realisation; and the Japanese sought in their art a pantheistic balance with the natural world. However, regardless of the artistic tradition, the hermeneutic question “what constitutes art?” has always been a contentious one. The answer is illusive. I believe that theorising the difference between the frequently asserted concepts, “taste” and “choice” may go some way towards answering it. Trying to decide what constitutes art equipped only with the idea of good or bad “taste” strikes me as limiting. What we mean by the word “taste” is contingent upon our cultural [social, religious, and political] upbringing—culturally constructed it conditions us to make appraisals from within a set of received/taught “values”; “values” that more often than not remain unquestioned and impressionistic. On the other hand “choice”, implies a freedom that allows for the questioning of received values. Unencumbered by the constraints of cultural expectations the idea of “choice” opens “art” to new and unexpected possibilities. In this way, “art” becomes what we choose to frame as art.

In 1991 at the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam, the English filmmaker and artist Peter Greenaway, exhibited the billboard advertisement as part of an exhibition that focused on human corporeality, entitled *The Physical Self*.


There is a visual language that has been around for hundreds of years. It’s like music…it has rules…notes…and it is always silently speaking to us.


80 Entitled the *Flamme d’or*, the building was designed by the French architect Philippe Stark.


You can’t make a form with multiple arms and legs without being aware of Shiva; you can’t make an image of a person with a sword above their head without having heard of Damocles; you can’t create an image of a woman with snakes for hair and not know of Medusa, and you can’t paint a supermarket product without being aware of Warhol. If you do, you are dead in the water. As I have already said we are no longer innocent; we have to go through knowledge in order to regain our innocence. Without this “rite of passage” we only attain an artificial innocence.

What constitutes a work of art has been a contentious question that has preoccupied the thinking of artists and philosophers for centuries. There have been countless arguments about “high art” and “low art”; about “good art” and “bad art”; about “elitist art” and “popular art” for the masses. The significant thing is that there has never been a placatory answer for all parties. Whatever perspective we adopt we cannot deny that art has played a significant part in the way we see the world, and as the world redefines itself so does the way we define art. At the risk of appearing overly simplistic, I would like to proffer my point of view. I believe art is when you’re so startled by the connection you have made with something, that it changes the way you think about what it’s like to be alive. With this in mind it is perhaps more profitable to think of art not in terms of “what” but of “how”. As a holistic fusion of sensations, a work of art is more than a synergy of its parts; it is a subjective and creative condition that exists as an additional quality or connectivity that is not apparent in any of the individual parts. It “is a whole of its constituent parts but does not totalize them; it is a unity of its particular parts but it does not unify them; rather, it is added to them as a new part fabricated separately.”

84 The “rite of passage” ritual is discussed in the chapter: Liminality, Ambiguity and Paradox.
The chapter *Liminality, Ambiguity, and Paradox*, ends with a quote from Marcel Duchamp; “It’s not what you see that is art, art is the gap.” Duchamp, I believe, is suggesting art as the site of transubstantiation -where an object is transformed into a conveyer of meaning by the participation of the viewer. How this happens is worthy of consideration.

The work of the Polish theoretician Roman Ingarden in the field of aesthetics and ontology has had a significant impact on the way we view and interpret the meaning of a work of art. Much of Ingarden’s work concentrated on the ontological character of objects and the nature of their aesthetic value. Unfortunately the scope of this essay does not permit a comprehensive analysis of what is meant by ontology, but at the risk of over simplification, the term *ontology* refers to the branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being. For example, in a theatre performance, the ontology of the stage is different to the ontology of the auditorium; stage time and space is independent to “real” time and space. A brief foray into the central precepts of Ingarden’s work may help clarify this concept more precisely.

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87 Roman Ingarden’s major work focuses on an ontology concerned not so much with what actually exists, but with what could possibly exist; what it would take for objects of various kinds to exist. Ingarden’s world depends on consciousness for its existence; it exists only for consciousness and beyond that there is nothing...consciousness is all. For a comprehensive account of his work see: Ingarden Roman, *The Literary Work of Art*. [Trans. George Grabowicz], Northwestern University Press, Illinois, 1973., and Ingarden, Roman. *The Ontology of the Work of Art*. [Trans. Raymond Meyer and John T. Goldthwait], Ohio University Press, Ohio, 1989.

88 The term *aesthetics* is used to denote the study of the rules and principles of art. It is discussed in the chapter: *Image, Sign, Symbol and Metaphor."

89 In the field of art, *value* refers to the relative degree of lightness or darkness of a particular colour, and its use here is analogous to this.
Ingarden divides ontology into three parts: *formal* [processes and connectivities], *material* [physical objects that exist in “real” time and space] and *existential* [what Ingarden calls *modes of being*…different ways that entities may exist; contingent or necessary; real or ideal; concrete or abstract; dependent or independent]. Ingarden continues by identifying four modes of being:

*Absolute, Ideal, Real and Purely Intentional.* The *absolute mode* belongs to entities such as gods, who could exist even if nothing else ever did. The *ideal mode* of being is a timeless mode of existence mainly attributed to objects such as numbers and the alphabet. The *real mode* belongs to rocks and trees etc…to natural phenomena. The *purely intentional mode* belongs to objects whose existence is predicated by acts of consciousness.\(^\text{90}\) Ingarden considered works of art as *purely intentional objects*, because their existence is contingent upon the intentional acts of their creators and observers.

In the later part of his research, Ingarden expanded his examination of the ontology of art objects by focusing almost entirely on objects whose *modes of being* were purely intentional; specifically music, painting and architecture. His theories finally appeared as the first three essays of his book, *The Ontology of the Work of Art: The Musical Work, The Picture, and The Architectural Work.* Each chapter is an attempt to determine the ontological status of the work of art in question.

In the first chapter, Ingarden asserts that a *musical work* is distinct from the experiences of its composer and listeners; the physical object exists independent to them. As such he terms it a *purely intentional object*. Its genesis lies in the creative act of the composer but its physical presence resides in the score. As we all know the score is full of indeterminacies, such as how long a note is held, how soft, attack, diminution, etc. These indeterminacies are filled both by the members of the orchestra and conductor.

Similarly, in the second chapter Ingarden argues that a *picture* is distinct from the painted object hanging on the walls of a gallery because again it is a *purely intentional object*; the inert picture can only be seen from the painter’s perspective fixed in the picture. The painting however can be seen from any point of view in the gallery, even touched if one is permitted. In addition, Ingarden argues, to see a picture requires of the spectator a conscious frame of mind that is not required to see the painting.

Ingarden, in the third chapter, is quick to point out that the existence of an *architectural work* must be predicated by an architect’s intentional creative act, and not by mere natural phenomena. The Australian aboriginal sacred site Uluru, despite its awesome stature and sacred significance, is not an architectural work - neither is the Grand Canyon, but the Sydney Opera House is. Reiterating, an architectural work is a *purely intentional object*. However an architectural work also requires the participation of the observers in co-constituting not only its aesthetic value but also its physical properties...its function and use. As such, Ingarden argues, the work of architecture is a twice-founded object.

Ingarden’s theory of objects clearly distinguishes between *physical objects*, *works of art*, and *aesthetic objects*. *Physical objects* are just that; physical objects remain unary and inert. The *work of art* has what Ingarden calls a *schematic formation* that contains places of indeterminacy [*gaps/lacunae*] that are filled by individual interpretation or reinventions of the work. Filling in the

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indeterminacies by means of a reading, performance, or viewing is what is known as the concretisation of the work of art. Every work of art allows for a multiplicity of concretisations that, unlike the work of art itself, may vary for different spectators. If the concretisations have an aesthetic quality, then an aesthetic object is formed.

Multiple aesthetic objects may be based on one and the same work of art. In the following *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* example, the physical objects may be seen as the chairs, table, window, lamp etc. The work of art is the written text by Ray Lawler and the aesthetic object is the performance, achieved by the aesthetic concretisation of the lacunae in the work of art, by the artistic director.

There is any number of examples where different aesthetic objects have been concretised from the same work of art. I am immediately reminded of the numerous depictions of the death of Saint Sebastian and of the controversial reinterpretations of Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*. 

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92 See the chapter: Image, Sign, Symbol and Metaphor.


Renee Cox: *Yo Mamma’s Last Supper*. [1996] 95


95 ibid.
Corresponding to his distinction between physical object, work of art, and aesthetic object, Ingarden postulates a three-fold distinction among their properties. The physical object possesses only value-neutral properties. The work of art may possess both neutral properties such as patches of colour, complex lines, and shapes arranged in precise ways, and artistic values based on these, such as lucidity of expression, technical excellence, balance, composition, etc. Aesthetic values such as tranquillity, intensity, poignancy, spirituality, violence etc., though they may exist in the work of art, only manifest themselves in aesthetic objects created by means of concretising the work of art. Since numerous aesthetic objects may be based on the same work of art, their aesthetic value may differ. This may help account for the variety of aesthetic judgments that may be formed concerning the same work of art. Consider, for example, the three renderings of the Madonna and Child below.

96 Reprinted in Domus, Number 834, February 2001. Editoriale Domus, Milan. p20. [The Pitti Immagine group, working out of Florence, has been staging alternative fashion events for over ten years].
Ingarden is adamant about the role of consciousness in constituting aesthetic values. He rejects the idea of enthusiastic subjective pleasure as misleading because it dismisses the existence of a better or worse aesthetic judgment that is located in a considered position arrived at after consideration of all the available data. He argues that there are some concretisations comparatively better suited to a work's demands than others; praxiologically more able to bring out its potential aesthetic value. Their resulting aesthetic constituents are not random inventions, nor are they simply the result of enthusiastic pleasure derived from spontaneous experience; they are the result of competent and careful aesthetic observation of the work of art's neutral and artistic values.

Art: the alternative concretisations of the lacunae of indeterminacy.

“If we persist in our restless desire to know everything about the universe and ourselves then we must not be afraid of what the artist brings back from his [sic] voyage of discovery”

Herbert Read
INTRODUCTION [Part two]

“Genius is easy. Genius means that everybody isn’t an artist. Freedom means that everybody is an artist. I don’t believe in genius”

Damien Hirst 101

Returning to the beginning of my artistic trajectory into the theatrical arena, my misspent youth was consumed meticulously copying the works of Paul Cézanne102, Wassily Kandinsky, Salvador Dali, Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque103 and Rene Magritte104 amongst others. This was not in any way an attempt at the Quotational Art of such people of Mike Bidlo or Sherrie Levine,105 but as a discipline in which to develop and hone skills and techniques. My interest focused on not only why but also how these painters worked as they did; how they saw the world and gave it substance. In a sense I have always copied…never stopped copying…everything. Significantly it was an interest that was to inform not only my aesthetic sensibility at the time but the way I would continue to assemble form and colour into coherent images and complex signs.


102 The French painter, Paul Cézanne has often been called the father of Modernism. He returned to paint his favourite mountain, Mont Sainte Victoire more than sixty times.
103 The French painter, Georges Braque [1882-1963] in collaboration with Pablo Picasso, was recognised as the founder of cubism.
104 The Belgium Surrealist artist René Magritte [1898-1967] enjoyed challenging the spectators’ conscious perception of “reality” by the use of paradoxes and contrasts.
105 Mike Bidlo is best known for his appropriations; works that are based on the paintings and sculptures of some of the best-known artists in the last century. Since the early 1980’s, Sherrie Levine has made a career out of re-using famous works of art, often by making new versions of them by re-contextualising them. Levine has constantly created art based on works by prominent male artists from the early 20th century in order to highlight the relative absence of women in the art world of that period.
From there my interest was drawn to such artists as Jackson Pollack, Andy Warhol, and Mark Rothko, whose work provoked us to think and feel with our eyes. Questions as to “what was art?” reverberated throughout the art world at the time and were never more interrogated than by Marcel Duchamp and subsequently by Warhol. As a dadaist/surrealist, Duchamp worked with what he

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112 The American painter, Jackson Pollock [1912-1956] worked as an abstract expressionist, developing the action-painting technique where the artist drips paint from sticks onto expansive canvases stretched on the ground.
113 Andy Warhol [1928-1987] is considered as one of the most influential American artists of the second half of the 20th century. Warhol used commercial silk-screening techniques as part of his artistic work. His paintings of Campbell Soup Cans [1961], Coca-Cola Bottles [1962] and sculptures of Brillo Boxes [1964] brought him worldwide recognition as a Pop artist.
114 The Russian-born American artist, Mark Rothko [1903-1970] was associated with a group of New York painters who emerged during the 1940’s. He created a new form of abstract painting characterised by meticulous attention to the formal elements of colour, shape, balance, depth, composition, and scale.
called *ready-mades*. The *ready-made* may be distinguished from other art products by its method of production: “*It is about the physical transposition of an object from the continuum of reality into the fixed condition of the art image by a moment of isolation, or selection.*”  

Duchamp’s works were to serve as the precursor for a generation of artists, including Andy Warhol. Warhol’s training was in commercial art and it was his recognition that there were more artists employed in the commercial world than represented in art galleries that led him to argue that the supermarkets were the legitimate art galleries –where one could find row after row of Campbell Soup cans.
If an artist takes 200 Campbell soup cans and paints them on a canvas, it is not the visual that is of interest but the point of view that wants to do so. Warhol’s visual becomes a sign, a sign that requires our reading; that alerts us to the fact that mass production and mass media have changed our lives. Unlike most artists, who painted pictures for a small market of collectors and gallery visitors, Warhol, like the advertisers with their art in supermarkets, magazines, newspapers and billboards, used the printing press to get his message across to as large an audience as possible; print after print after print – to which he simply signed his name. Art had entered Walter Benjamin’s age of reproduction where the value and significance of originality and the art product itself were drawn into question. Art had come off the wall.

With the energy of a quantum leap, the 1960’s and 70’s saw a group of artists, under the banner “all art is a form of pollution”, declare that the traditional relationship between the idea and its expression in the work of art, had been altered in order to place the emphasis on the idea rather than the end product. The artwork was phased out in favour of a discussion of art in theoretical terms.

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119 The idea of what constitutes a sign is discussed in *Image, Sign, Symbol and Metaphor*
121 An expression used by a past colleague and close friend, Dr Evan Thomas, who taught at the London School of Art.
What emerged was Conceptual Art; once the event was over, the product did not exist—only debate. While drawn to the precepts of Conceptual Art, I was not prepared to dismiss the product completely. In the case of theatre it did exist [if only for the length of the production’s season], and its existence, I would like to think, encouraged explications of what it might have meant. However what Conceptual Art meant was a refusal to hide behind the comforting security of an obscurantist rhetoric that claimed private and exclusive artistic sensibility. The literary critic Fredric Jameson saw in conceptual art the potential to destabilise this private and privileged rhetoric.

“Conceptual Art may be described as a Kantian procedure whereby, on the occasion of what first seems to be an encounter with a work of art of some kind, the categories of the mind itself—normally not conscious, and inaccessible to any direct representation or to any thematisable self-consciousness or reflexivity—are flexed, their structuring presence now felt laterally by the viewer like musculature or nerves of which we normally remain insensible.” 122

What Jameson is implying is that Conceptual Art can trigger certain types of cerebral responses in us that normally lie undisturbed by our experience of conventional art products—responses more akin to involuntary actions such as a “flinch” rather than conscious action/movement. Whether one subscribed to this movement, one could not deny the effect that it had on the way the public now viewed and appreciated art. The experience of art was liberated from the art product and relocated in the space between the product and the observer. Art had not only come off the wall but had left the building.

This movement away from the gallery was to continue with the Performance Art work of such artists as Joseph Beuys123, Gilbert and George124, Abramovic and Ulay125,

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123 In the early 1960’s the German painter and theorist, Joseph Beuys [1921-1986] joined the Fluxus group. Their public “concerts” questioned the boundaries between literature, music, visual art, performance, and everyday life. Their ideas influenced Beuys’ own performances, which he called “actions”, as a way of drawing attention the fallacious separation between art and culture.
124 The Italian, Gilbert Proesch and the English George Pasmore began working together as performance artists in the late 1960’s, as “living sculptures.” Their confronting work explores themes of city life, religion, scatology, and homosexuality.
125 Marina Abramovic, born in Yugoslavia, and Ulay, born in Germany, started to co-operate as artists in 1976. They have always made themselves the topic of their performances and actions. The physical and psychic limits of gender specific roles and the borderline between art and life are always questions in their site-specific work.
Claes Oldenburg\textsuperscript{126}, Helen Chadwick\textsuperscript{127}, Hermann Nitsch\textsuperscript{128}, Tetsumi Kudo\textsuperscript{129}, Angelika Festa\textsuperscript{130}, Karen Finley\textsuperscript{131} and many others. As the nomenclature suggests the premise of \textit{Performance Art} was that the artist [as performer] was the viable artistic material at the centre of a spectrum of all possible materials. This premise grew out of the insight that the energising ingredient of the artistic process was, in fact, the artist as public persona. The artist was recognised by their conceptual stance and gained visibility in social consciousness by the praxiological choices used to present themselves, and not the art product terminating, and fallaciously inferred to be the purpose of their work. \textit{Process} had taken precedence over \textit{product} and the artist became the \textit{form} and \textit{content} of their work. Performance Art rested on the basic assumption that it was possible and indeed significantly important, to design a public event with material that was not held together by an explicit narrative or comprehensive theme. It asserted that the dynamics of timing and presentation, the potency of a visual in its own right [as \textit{signifier}], rather than as an illustration of a theme [\textit{signified}],\textsuperscript{132} constituted a tradition that could arouse and carry new acts of creativity. Eventually everything succumbs to signification, but what Performance Art recognised was the capacity for certain types of visuals to resist immediate signification and thus to potentially prompt new and unexpected encounters/connections between the visual and its spectators. Performance art found expression in a variety of artistic disciplines; painting, sculpture, architecture, dance, music, and theatre were all sites of experimentation and expression.

\textsuperscript{126} The Swedish Claes Oldenburg’s theatrically based experiments involved the creation of environments for performances, called \textit{Happenings} which were partly scripted, partly spontaneous theatrical events that removed the barriers between the art and the actual experience. He argued that the distinction between theatre and the visual arts was obsolete. His theatrical practice of placing objects within an environment has remained the approach of many artists today.

\textsuperscript{127} Chadwick’s installations and performances challenge stereotyped perceptions of the body. Chadwick refers to her installations as \textit{autobiographies of sensation}, attempts to find a resolution between transience and transcendence and catch the physical sensations passing across the body. [\textit{Art International}. Summer, 1989. Editor and Publisher: Michael Peppiatt. p41]

\textsuperscript{128} Hermann Nitsch’s performance of, \textit{The six-day-play} in Austria 1998 illustrated the \textit{Theatre of Orgies and Mysteries}, which Nitsch had consistently developed in the course of 40 years’ work.

\textsuperscript{129} Tetsumi Kudo belonged to a generation of Japanese artists for whom the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima was a constant point of reference for their art. His intimate installations and happenings combined a Zen aesthetic, kitsch humour, and committed environmental and political beliefs.

\textsuperscript{130} Festa’s performances explore the idea of appearance and disappearance; the more dramatic the appearance, the more intensely felt is its disappearance.

\textsuperscript{131} Finley’s startlingly visceral work exposes the insidiousness of censorship and prejudice, particularly when applied to the representation of women.

\textsuperscript{132} Both \textit{signifier} and \textit{signified} are discussed in the chapter: \textit{Image, Sign, Symbol and Metaphor}. 

Gilbert and George: *Underneath the Arches*. [1969] First performed in London. 134


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Marina Abramovic and Ulay: *Rest Energy*. [1980]\(^{136}\)

Marina Abramovic and Ulay: *Great Wall of China Project*. [1988]\(^{137}\)


Helen Chadwick: *Told by an Idiot*. [1988] Performance at Edge. [1988]\(^{139}\)

Hermann Nitsch: *Crucifixion*. [1967]\(^{140}\)

Hermann Nitsch: *48th Action*, Munich Modernes Theatre. [1974]\(^{141}\)

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137 Reprinted in: *Art International*, Summer 1989, Archives Press, Paris. p.44. [Having started at opposite ends, Marina Abramovic and Ulay completed their walk along the Great Wall of China, June 1988 by meeting in the middle.]


Angelika Festa: *You Are Obsessive, Eat Something*. [1984] 144

Susan Lingard: *Untitled*. Murdoch University. [1987] 145

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143 *Blue Woman* [1987] was presented as part of the Performance course at Murdoch University. Annette’s installations/performances challenged the environmental expectations of familiar spaces. Supervision by Serge Tampalini.
145 Susan Lingard’s work disrupts the gaze by the juxtapositioning of contradictory images to create signs that resists immediate closure. The performance piece was drawn from the theatre production, *Entropy Concerto* [June 1990] and presented at Murdoch University. Coordination: Serge Tampalini.
Importantly, these experimentations revealed that at times the boundaries between the disciplines were not only being progressively eroded, but simply disregarded, and more importantly, that the interstices between artistic disciplines were themselves being recognised as the sites where new forms of artistic expression such as assemblages and installations could emerge. Having left the building, art was beginning to hybridise and mutate. This was evident in the installation work of such artists as Allan Kaprow, Christo, Nam June Paik, Kevin Mortensen, Helen Chadwick, Peter Greenaway, as well as the photographic assemblages [joiners] of David Hockney. These artists were all influential in my continuing relationship with the theatre stage.

147 The performance group Omometatexts [Linda Rawlings, Sarah McNamara and Natasha Anders] grew out of a Murdoch University theatre performance entitled, 9 X 9, directed by Serge Tampalini. Similar to the work of Karen Finley, their visceral performances played with the idea of the abject body, and our society’s preoccupation with cleanliness as a means of exposing society’s sanitised controls on the way the female body is represented.
148 The American painter and theorist, Allan Kaprow moved from Abstract Expressionism to “happenings”; the first such work was called “18 Happenings in 6 parts” [1959 New York]. It is from this performance that the term “happening” is derived. Used originally to indicate a very determined, rehearsed and heterogenous production, the word has come to imply a spontaneous undirected occurrence.
149 Christo is a Bulgarian born American environmental artist. The sheer scale of Christo’s wrappings and installations connects them to monumental land art, but the emphasis put on the process of carrying out the work sets them apart as performances. His work reflects the nature of borders and the character of the land and demands the spectator’s participation by having to move through or around the work.
150 Since 1987, Nam June Paik’s vast array of installations, videotapes, global television productions, films and performances, has reformed our perception and acceptance of the electronic moving image in contemporary art; remaking the temporal image into an artist’s medium.
152 Peter Greenaway is more recognized as a filmmaker, but in 1991 he was the curator of an exhibition assembled from the collections of the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam. The exhibition entitled The Physical Self, focused on human corporeality. The unconventional taxonomy owed much to the project of installation. It was an argument about the physical human predicament as a measure of the rigor of our cultural, linguistic, political, religious and social and moral frontiers
153 Between the years of 1982 and 1987 Hockney experimented with photo-collage, developing works he calls joiners. A joiner consists of a series of photographs taken from different viewpoints, overlapped and arranged to form a single piece. Through Hockney’s joiners we begin to unravel what happens when we see. He works in much the same way as the cubists did, with multiple points of view being represented on the same canvas, as it were. What the traditional photograph fails to emulate is the movement of the eye at the time the photograph is taken. His joiners are aesthetically intriguing as well as simultaneously disorientating and demand longer viewing, whereas the photograph takes only a second. By allowing the spectator to explore and piece the joiner together, Hockney has introduced an element of time to his work.

Christo: *Packed Coast*. A little bay near Sydney. [1969] 155

Nam June Paik: *TV-Buddha*. [1974] 156

David Hockney: Installation based on his designs for Mozart’s Opera *The Magic Flute*. [1978] 157


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158 ibid. pp. 152-3
David Hockney’s *joiners* have an affinity with *Installation Art*; they allow the spectator, by presenting every aspect of the visual field, [framed by each individual yet interconnected Polaroid picture], to realise the space in its entirety. In so doing, Hockney’s work, like *Installation Art*, establishes a dialogue between the *object* and the *environment* in which it is seen. This ecology, by engaging the spectator’s subjective reading, not only participates in transforming *space* into *place*\(^\text{163}\) but also questions whether it is possible to view any object independently from its context.


\(^{163}\) I distinguish between *space* and *place* by regarding *space* as the interactions between the relationships of *places*...one does not replace the other.
Furthermore *Installation Art* infers that the relationships between objects and their surroundings can be read as a text; an inference that continues to make it especially suited to the project of theatre design.

“The reciprocal relationship between the object and its environment evolved into an abiding ethos - placing an ordinary object where precious objects are normally held causes one to reassess, if only briefly, the value of the object and the validity of the objects considered precious. Reciprocally placing an object which everyone recognises to be precious, in mundane surroundings will perhaps add prestige to the surroundings as well as make us view the object itself in a different light. Thus the object lends meaning to the space, the space lends meaning to the object. Completing the triangle, the space viewer is made to feel conscious of his or her precepts and misprisions. The condition of Installation reveals that the eye is never innocent, the place is never neutral and the object never hermetic. *Installation Art* is an activity that activates a space. It is less a style than an attitude, tendency and aesthetic strategy insofar as we now read every art object as inseparable from the location in which it is placed.”  

More recently the work of the English artists Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, have renewed my interest in *Installation Art*. Hirst’s extension of *installations* to embrace public spaces has led to his 1997 opening of a restaurant in London, called *Pharmacy*, while Tracey Emin’s work highlights the precarious distinction between art and the memorabilia of the famous.

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165 The English artist Damien Hirst has established an infamous reputation as the *enfant terrible* of the English contemporary art scene. He is probably best known for his Natural History series - dead animals [such as a shark, sheep or a cow], suspended, and preserved in formaldehyde. [Hirst’s restaurant, *Pharmacy* closed on 2003 and the furniture and fittings were all sold at auction as pieces of art.]
It is with the project of *Installation Art* that my current theatre work finds its greatest affinity. I think of my theatre designs as extending the project of *installation* to include a metatheatrical component, affectively transforming *space* into a *conceptual place*; a place not unlike Hirst’s places, where people can reside, if only for a brief transitory time. As a member of the Bauhaus group Oskar Schlemmer suggested:

“If we go so far as to break the narrow confines of the stage and extend the drama to include the building itself, not only the interior but the building as an architectural whole…might we demonstrate to a hitherto unknown extent that validity of the space-stage as idea.”

I find myself drawn to the concept of *stage-space as idea*, for what is of significance after the viewing of a piece theatre is not the overt “social” behaviour of the spectators but rather what they have experienced and continue to think and talk about. The more intense the theatrical experience the more intense its absence is felt and, hopefully, the resultant effect will be to heighten the spatial and temporal dimensions of each spectator’s personal experiences.

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166 Reprinted in: Hirst, Damien and Burn, Gordon. *On the Way to Work*, Faber and Faber, London, 2004, p47. [The functioning restaurant *Pharmacy* (1997 to 2003), from which the installation was derived, contained aspirin-shaped bar stools, and conical flask light fittings.]


169 The concept is taken-up in the chapter, *Sight*.
“I want to push people to thinking ahead; to think more than they might think they’re capable of. I want to get them to the limit, but I don’t want to get them beyond that. I mean, I don’t want to start speaking a language they can’t understand. I want to speak a language they can understand and communicate things that they think they are probably not quite capable of receiving, but can with a bit of effort. Things they think they don’t want to know about, but that I want to know about. Things that I think are important that they might not necessarily”.

Like Hirst, I think of my theatre works as provocations that attempt to elicit responses of consideration and reinterpretation from the spectators. I endeavour to disrupt their pre-conditioned expectations by intentionally keeping my work ambiguous. In so doing the potential for alternative readings of my work may, [albeit optimistically], be only ever contingent upon the number of spectators. I want to recruit spectators not only into moments of recognitions that evoke memories, but also into moments of encounters that may [or may not] result in them making new and unexpected meanings.

“Letting something be encountered is primarily circumspective; it is not just sensing something, or staring at it. It implies circumspective concern.”


My use of the word “potential” here is intentional; it infers a state between possibility and actuality. It suggests a liminal space of balanced potentiality where objects may appear as subjects in the spectator’s memories but where their future has not yet begun. [The concept of “liminal space” was first used by the anthropologist Victor Turner to denote a phase in a rite of passage ritual process in which the participants are involved in a change of social status.] Just when elements of my designs are caught [remembered] by the spectator’s gaze, they mutate and become something else. In theoretical terms, I am more interested in what something might become rather than what it is; more interested in holding open an object’s potential to make different meanings, rather than closing its potentiality by concretising it into a form that is immediately recognisable and as such is relegated to the realm of the semantic [recognised], where it is reduced to a singular meaning.

173 The term liminal is comprehensively discussed in the chapter: Liminality, Ambiguity and Paradox. It is used here to denote an intermediate space.
There is something curiously satisfying about an incomplete world, a world of potential; it is a world that impels the participation of the spectator’s imagination. It is a world that demands we reconsider the coherent [normalised] nature of reality; a world that also asks us to be reflexive…to be conscious of our consciousness. According to the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz [1646-1716], reflexivity is a condition of a mental state known as apperception, where “the perceiver is aware of the perceived object as well as the fact that they are perceiving.”

“Analytical reflection starts from our experience of the world and goes back to the subject as to a condition of possibility distinct from that experience, revealing the all-embracing synthesis as that without which there would be no world.”

It could be argued that art and philosophy share a common ambition. Philosophy and art, like science and religion, all serve to ameliorate the human condition of existential uncertainty. It may also be argued that the object of philosophy is to create concepts. Art is an equally creative function of thought and neither discipline has privilege over the other; to create a concept is neither more difficult nor more abstract than to create works of art, and as Daniel Smith suggests in his

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175 Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen Eds. *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*. Harper Collins, London, 2000. p. 43. (“This idea was first proffered by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz [1646-1716] and his definition is presented in section 4 of his *Principles of Nature and of Grace* (1714), where Leibniz says that apperception is consciousness, or the reflective knowledge of this internal state.”)

introduction to Deleuze’s book on Francis Bacon, it is no easier to read works of art than it is to understand concepts. How we create and read works of art needs to be considered carefully. I create art by taking objects from life and, changing them as little as possible, reassemble them. However, at the same time as wanting to make my intervention into the creative act as unobtrusive as possible, I am drawn to the idea of personal abstraction...I like to include a little bit of myself. In order to understand what I mean it will be necessary to re-examine the mechanics of seeing and the domain of perception.

“Everything in today's world is stylised and packaged, and Emin and Hirst are trying to say, this is a bed, this is death, this is a body. They are trying to redefine the basic elements of reality, to recapture them from the ad men who have hijacked our world...I don’t think it's possible to touch people’s imagination today by aesthetic means. Emin's bed, Hirst's sheep...are psychological provocations, mental tests where the aesthetic elements are no more than a framing device.”

J.G. Ballard.

SIGHT: Seeing, Vision, Perception and Identity

“The naive person may argue that there is only one true way of seeing the world; the one through his own immediate vision. But this is untrue. We see what we learn to see and vision becomes a habit, a convention, a partial selection of all there is to see and a distorted summary of the rest. We see what we want to see and what we want to see is determined not by the inevitable laws of optics or by instinct for survival but by the desire to discover or construct a credible world. What we see must be made real. Art in that way becomes the construction of reality.”

Herbert Read

In his book *Downcast Eyes*, Martin Jay suggests that “vision could be construed as either the allegedly pure sight of perfect and immobile forms with “the eye of the mind” or as the impure but immediately experienced sight of the actual two eyes…” He continues by arguing that this construal:

“was an ambiguity that also had a correlate in the way light itself was conceptualized for a long time in Western thought. Light could be understood according to the model of geometric rays that Greek optics had privileged… Light in this sense became known as lumen. An alternative version of light, known as lux, emphasized instead the actual experience of human sight. This dual concept of light nicely complemented the dual concept of vision, even if they weren’t perfectly congruent. What might be called the alternating traditions of ‘speculation’ with the eye of the mind and’ observation’ with the two eyes of the body…” ‘Speculation’ can be construed as the rational perception of clear and distinct forms with the unclouded eye of the mind or as the irrational and ecstatic dazzlement by the blinding light of God, the “vision” of the seer… ‘Observation’ could be understood as the unmediated assimilation of stimuli from without, the collapse of perception into pure sensation. Or it could be construed as a more complicated interaction of sensations and the shaping or judging capacity of the mind, which provided the Gestalt-like structures that made

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181 A model commonly associated with the theory of “extramission”, where light rays were thought to emanate from the eyes.
183 These structures are referred to later in the chapter.
observation more than a purely passive phenomenon... In all of them, however, something called ‘sight’ was accorded a fundamental place in our knowledge of the world.”

With Jay’s observation in mind, let’s begin by speculating about something simple, something we have all experienced: REALITY.

“There certainly is a real world of trees and people and cars and even books, and it has a great deal to do with our experience of these objects. However, we have no direct immediate access to the world, nor to any of its properties. What we know about reality has been mediated not only by the organs of sense but by complex systems which interpret and reinterpret sensory information...”

What is being implied in the above quote from Herbert Read, is that we construct the world through our senses and that our contact with the “real” world is mediated and not directly available to us.

“My field of perception is constantly filled with a play of colours, noises and fleeting tactile sensations which I cannot relate precisely to the context of my clearly perceived world, yet which I nevertheless immediately ‘place’ in the world, without ever confusing them with my daydreams. Equally constantly I weave dreams round things. I imagine people and things whose presence is not incompatible with the context, yet who are not in fact involved in it: they are ahead of reality, in the realm of the imaginary. If the reality of my perception were based solely on the intrinsic coherence of ‘representations’, it ought to be forever hesitant and, being wrapped up in my conjectures on probabilities, I ought to be ceaselessly taking apart misleading syntheses, and reinstating in reality stray phenomena which I had excluded in the first place. But this does not happen. The real is a closely woven fabric. It does not await our judgement before incorporating the most surprising phenomena, or before rejecting the most plausible figments of our imagination.”

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Reality…let’s say for argument’s sake the material world [the world of matter] of which we are a part, has always been a slippery concept that has preoccupied the thinking of philosophers and others for centuries. Suffice to say there has always been the world/reality and there has been the innumerable ways that we have attempted to speak about it. Some may even argue that reality may only ever exist in the ways we can speak about it. Whether we agree or not, the trick is to not get the two of them confused. Take for example the descriptive attempt at reality: “watching the sun set”. This is misleading, for in the material world the sun never sets…it is the earth that turns away from it. Despite our knowledge of this we habitually accept this metaphor as accurately representing reality. Another example is the use of the word “falling” to describe what happens when an object is pulled towards the centre of the earth by the earth’s gravity. The complexity of trying to talk about reality is made even more problematic when we realise that words themselves are already metaphoric. They take the place of that of which we speak. When we use the word “tree” to indicate an object in our visual field, the word itself looks nothing like a tree. In this sense, it is a metaphor. [I hasten to add that Semiotics offers a more complex analysis, and is discussed in the chapter Images, Signs, Symbols and Metaphors –the analogy is used here simply to make a point]. “Art” is cognisant of our metaphoric relationship with reality and sets about exploiting it.

Ciò non è la mia mano. [2003]. Serge Tampalini.

I appreciate that I am limiting the semiotic reading of the example, but I do so simply in order to illustrate a point.
At the risk of sounding overly simplistic, “art” seems to be the object of one of the numerous and distinct sets of decisions [what I call creative aesthetic acts] that we perform on our world/reality, in order to be able to talk about it; to make it easier to encounter and understand. In attempting to represent and understand their world dancers, singers, writers and painters all make creative decisions on “reality”. In the same way that dancers believe that the world may be understood through movement, singers believe that they can make sense of the world through song; actors believe that all the world’s a stage; and writers believe that the world can be translated through stories and myths. Similarly painters believe that the world can be understood through pictures. As alluded to above, it is critical to remember that art is only one particular way, out of a plethora of ways, of constructing the world –only one particular way of organising the world and talking about it.

A distinctive capacity of the human race is its reflexivity; that is, its ability to be conscious of its own consciousness and as a consequence to conceptualise a “self” to whom this ontological consciousness may be attributed.\(^\text{188}\) It may be argued that it has been this unique capacity that has enabled us to conceive of the organisational strategy of art. The same argument may be applied to dance, music, theatre, literature, etc. Art attempts to make the world smaller, to organise it in ways that facilitate our understanding of it; in this sense the art of the theatre, shares this same

organisational strategy. The configuration of the stage space is organised in such a way as to facilitate the spectator’s receptivity of the chaotic sign systems operating in the course of any theatre production.

An adaptation of the J. G. Ballard novel CRASH by Serge Tampalini and Tanya Vísovec. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini

It may be axiomatic to say that an awareness of the complexity implicit in the reading of any sign system in our image-based culture is founded upon an understanding of the physiological apparatus and processes that constitute the “simple” act of seeing. However, expedient attempts at explaining the complex mechanism of the eye have often been inaccurate and misleading, none more so than its confused comparison with the workings of a camera. If the eye were like a camera we would require another eye somewhere in our brain to see the images on our retinas, and another eye to see those images and so on in a succession of receding images and eyes. Obviously this is not the case. We do not see the images focused on the retinas; what occurs is retinal stimulation that is in turn relayed, by the transducing of the energy of the stimulus into electrochemical signals, through the optic nerve by interconnected nerve cells on the retina to thirty different visual areas at the back of the brain where it is analysed and interpreted. Furthermore the camera analogy falters because the brain creates an active three-dimensional moving picture of the visual field as opposed to the two-dimensional images on the retinas. The images projected on our retinas are constantly changing. If our eyes were cameras, not only would the world rock crazily at every shift of an eyeball, but the
size of objects would also change in an unnerving way. When we see people walking towards us we do not perceive them as getting bigger even though their image on the retina does. The colour red is perceived as red in bright sunlight as well as in a dimly lit or dark room. This suggests that our visual system is not merely passively recording pictures [as a camera does] but actively selecting, filtering and constructing a stable world.

In addition, the operation of the eyes are never atemporal [an idea to which the *joiner* works of David Hockney attest\(^\text{189}\)]…or static -the eyes operate most effectively by being in constant motion; they either move in a series of rapid jumps [*saccadic movements*] or they follow moving objects in our visual field. Furthermore, the eye’s *vestibulo-ocular reflex* turns the eyes in the opposite direction of the rapidly turning head and the *vergence system* constantly adjusts for short and long-range focus. This phenomenon helps explain the difficulty and strain we experience when fixing our gaze for a long period of time.

\[\begin{quote}
As a diurnal animal standing on its hind legs, the early human being developed its sensorium in such a way as to give sight an ability to differentiate and assimilate most external stimuli in a way superior to the other four senses. Smell, which is so important for animals on all fours, was reduced in importance…vision was the last of the human senses to develop fully, its very complexity always proving a difficult case for incremental theories of evolution. It also remains the last of the senses to develop in the foetus, only in fact gaining its true importance for the survival of the neonate sometime after birth.”\(\text{190}\)
\end{quote}\]

It’s easy to assume that seeing is instantaneous but in fact it is not. How we see “…appears all the more puzzling when we learn that the neural information related to form, motion, and color is

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\(^{189}\) See: Introduction [part 2]

carried not by one single hierarchical pathway or processing stream, but by at least three (and possibly more) parallel and interacting processing pathways in the brain".  

It has been argued, by neuroscientists, that the human brain is the most complexly organised structure in the universe. The brain is made up of a hundred billion neurons [nerve cells], the basic structural units of the nervous system. It is possible for each neuron to make thousands of contacts with other neurons at points called synapses, where information is exchanged. According to the neuroscientist Vilayanur S. Ramachandran the possible permutations and combinations of these contacts has been calculated to exceed the number of elementary particles in the known universe. He also states:

“Even though it’s common knowledge these days, it never ceases to amaze me that all the richness of our mental life - all our feelings, our emotions, our thoughts, our ambitions, our love of life, our religious sentiments and even what each of us regards as his own intimate private self - is simply the activity of these little specks of jelly in your head, in your brain. There is nothing else.”

What is still not known is how these components are brought together and synthesised into a unified image. An understanding of the binding problem may help explain two of the most complex processes associated with seeing: attention and consciousness.

How the brain constructs a consciously perceived world from sensory information is partially answered by the research into selective attention [that is, how one object is identified separately from all the other objects in our visual field] undertaken by Ann Treisman and Bella Julezs. Extrapolating from their observed data, Treisman and Julezs suggest that there are two independent processes involved in visual perception, firstly a pre-attentive process, which quickly scans for the

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192 Vilayanur S. Ramachandran is the Director of the Centre for Brain and Cognition and Professor with the Psychology Department and the Neurosciences Program at the University of California, San Diego.
broad outlines of the object and, secondly an *attentive process* which scans for details such as *form, movement, colour and position*.

A quick scan of the image in the Figure 1 below identifies it as Leonardo da Vinci’s painting, *The Mona Lisa*. A closer more attentive examination reveals that the painting has been dramatically altered. [This is clearly discernible if seen the right way up.] An attentive examination of Figure 2 reveals that it is a composite image of David Bowie and Katherine Hepburn. A more attentive examination of Figure 3 exposes the furtive glance of one of the faces.

According to Treisman and Julezs’s research, the details of *form, movement, colour and position* are all coded into what they call *feature maps* which are all referenced in the formation of a *master map*. An account of their work suggests that:

“Treisman has proposed that different properties are encoded in different *feature maps* in different brain regions. To solve the binding problem, Treisman has postulated that there may be a *master map* or *saliency map* that codes only for key aspects of the image. The master map receives input from all feature maps but retains only those features that distinguish the object of attention from its surround. Once these salient features have been represented in the master map, the detailed

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information associated with each feature can be retrieved by referring back to the individual feature maps. In this way the master map can combine details from the feature maps that are essential for recognition. Recognition thus occurs when salient features in different feature maps are associated or bound together.” 197

As I have said before, seeing is only ever a partial solution to our visual field; recognition is the end product of a filtering process that involves the auditioning of all available data and the selection of only what is necessary to complete the visual task at hand. What we need to ask is how and where does this take place? It would be easy to assert that all the visual areas [feature maps] inform a central area [master map] where the image is finally and conclusively synthesised. However it appears to be much more complicated than that. The neuroscientist Semir Zeki explains:

…there is no single cortical area to which all other cortical areas report exclusively, either in the visual or in any other system. In sum the cortex must be using a different strategy for the integrated visual image.” 198

What Zeki implies is that the synthesis of the image is not achieved in an ultimate decisive gathering of all data, but by a “multi-staged” process where data from all the visual areas is continually being cross referenced, backwards and forwards, from the feature maps to the master map, until a synthesised image is eventually recognised and recorded. A demonstration of this process might be the example of jigsaw puzzles; in trying to fit the pieces into the bigger picture we are continuously crosschecking size, colour, shape, and position.

Once the image is recognised in the brain, the message then goes to a structure called the amygdala, sometimes referred to as the gateway to the limbic system [the emotional core of your brain] where what we see is given an emotional value. The limbic system allows us to monitor the emotional

198 A comprehensive account of this theory may be found in: Zeki, S. A Vision of the Brain, Blackwell, London, 1993.
register of what we see in our visual field: friend or foe! Obviously this response is significant for one’s survival but the existence of the connections between visual brain centres and the limbic system is of more important significance and raises a complex question: given that art involves both aesthetic and emotional responses to visual stimulus, how does the brain respond to art? Just as answers to questions about the meaning of life remain inconclusive, questions about the relationship between art and consciousness may also be only partially answered. At present the way the brain responds to art cannot be adequately explained.

“People are afraid of Art. Everybody’s afraid of Art. Everybody’s always been afraid of Art”.

“It’s a waste of money, but it’s fabulous. It brings happiness when you look at it”.

“I believe true art offers the greatest reflection the world can have of itself. It is concise and brutally honest”.

“...the planes hitting the World Trade Centre towers was the ultimate work of art: we can perceive the collapse of the WTC towers as the climactic conclusion of twentieth-century art’s ‘passion for the real’ – the ‘terrorists’ themselves did not do it primarily to provoke real material damage, but for the spectacular effect of it.”

Photograph from Abu Ghraib prison, Afghanistan. [2004]

Cildo Meireles: Ethics as Aesthetics/Aesthetics as Ethics. [1996]

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203. Reprinted in: Adbusters, September/October, 2005. Vol 13 Number 5. [Meireles’s work shows how the shantytown gangs in Rio de Janerio exhibit their ethic and aesthetic sensibility by displaying their victims for full effect.]
I suggest that one way of dealing with the conundrum of how the brain deals with art would be by first considering what happens when we make the simple conscious decision to see. Ignoring what is in our visual field, if we become mindful of the physiology of seeing, we find that our sight is made up of a central portion which is in focus and as we, without moving our eyes, shift our attention out towards the edges of our sight, we notice that it becomes less and less focused. The edges of our sight have come to be known as our peripheral vision. In fact we do not use our peripheral vision to see, we use it to distinguish movement—a sort of alarm mechanism.

What is fascinating is that in order to focus the central portion of our sight so that we can see, we must make a conscious decision to do so. According to the German philosopher Martin Heidegger we begin to think only when we are compelled to do so; because “we are not yet thinking…the opposite of thought is not error but, convention, taste, clichés, indifference, fear and habit…” The same analogy may be applied to seeing. We choose to see because we are not yet seeing, and the opposite of seeing is similarly not blindness but habit, convention and indifference.
What of a baby who has not yet learnt to see? According to John Berger “seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak”. How a child recognises is worthy of deliberation. A child begins by seeing a form, which is unknown, but as the baby sees it again and again at different times, the more familiar [known] the form becomes. Even without any knowledge of the form’s purpose or use, it is its “familiarity” that the child first encounters. After some time, and not without guidance from the child’s carers, familiarity turns to recognition as the child begins to see the world conditioned by what they have been taught and learnt themselves by observing the form’s position and function in the material world. In so doing the child develops a habitual way of seeing; a way of seeing that is not contingent upon having to become conscious of the act of seeing—an understandable process, as the perception of a stable familiar world we see “out there” seems to reassure, by its very stability and separateness, our confidence in the reality of our private selves. While this habitual way of seeing may be our visual system’s safety mechanism against madness, it also begs the mystifying question about what is meant by “consciousness”.

“The failure to recognize the central role of consciousness in reality and thus to treat the physical world as an independent, external, and alien object has been a chronic problem throughout the modern era of scientific discovery, since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and has reached a critical stage in the 20th Century with its unconscionable, and largely unconscious, ravaging of the environment.”

“In modern times, our lost sense of synthesis or connection has become intellectualized as an assumption about reality that it is separate and independent of our inner mental world and, in fact, subsumes that inner world, which is therefore not real.”

207 The questions that need to be asked are who, what, or where is consciousness to be found? According to current neurological studies there is no part of the brain that may be attributed this function. An emerging belief is that the single cell may very well be the ultimate observing consciousness.
209 ibid. p. 68.
This certainly has not been the case for past [or remote] societies who saw themselves as part of the cosmos -even to the point where they perceived a connection between somatic organs and celestial bodies.

“…they felt a kind of extrasensory, but conscious, connection to the plants and animals around them, to the heavenly objects, to the very elements and minerals of the earth itself.” 210

The physicist Dr Roger Jones eloquently argues what he regards as the evolution of consciousness. He establishes a dialectic between the world and consciousness, explicating that one cannot exist without the auxiliary support of the other.

“Since there is no way to separate our knowledge of the world from our consciousness of it, changes in either world or mind must be understood as changes in both. World and mind are seemingly different, perhaps complementary, aspects of the same thing. Thus a different view of the world held by earlier peoples, one which to us is simpler and more naive than our own, is not a reflection of inferior knowledge, but of a different metaphoric expression of the world resulting from a different state of consciousness. The evolution of consciousness then follows from the inseparability of mind and matter and from the recognition that other people have experienced the world differently from ourselves. This requires that we accept a ‘primitive’ world-view as a serious, sympathetic, and accurate description of an earlier experience rather than as uninformed, superstitious, or inferior. If experience has changed and if consciousness is inseparable from reality, then there has been an evolution of consciousness/reality.” 211

A more prosaic expression of what constitutes consciousness may be found in the example of simultaneously driving a car and listening to the radio; it is possible to negotiate a number of complex procedures like avoiding other cars, stopping at lights, indicating and turning, keeping track of direction and even talking on a mobile phone without being conscious of what we are

210 ibid. p. 59.
211 ibid. p. 68.
doing. I am sure that we have all had this experience. Yet strangely, when we have to read a street
directory, we need to turn the radio down or off and need to desist with any conversation in order to
concentrate. Why is it that certain computations require consciousness and others do not? What are
the computations that require consciousness and what are those that do not? Once we have the
answers to these questions, we might come closer to answering why consciousness evolved and
what its function might be.

Despite historically held beliefs that consciousness was to be found in various organs of the
body\textsuperscript{212}, we now believe that the origin of consciousness is in the brain. Ever since the Viennese
physician Franz-Joseph Gall [1758-1828] claimed there were around 26 “organs” on the surface of
the brain which affected the contour of the skull, and that studying the structure of the skull could
determine a person’s emotional and intellectual functions, we have been fascinated with the idea of
scrutinising the brain’s activity. In 1815, Thomas Foster called the work of Gall “phrenology”
[from the Greek, \textit{phrenos} -mind) and the name remains.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Phrenology_Head.png}
\caption{\textit{Phrenology Head}. [Used for teaching] Circa: late1800 to early 1900. German. [Head and drawing from the author’s collection].}
\end{figure}

Currently neurologists like Ramachandran believe that there are certain circuits in the brain that are
conscious and \textit{“that there are many components to this problem of consciousness like: What is self-
awareness? What is abstract thinking? What is free will?”} \textsuperscript{213}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{212} Aristotle believed that the heart was one of the organs where consciousness could be experienced. It was a belief that was to last for
centuries.
Philosophy.}
\end{flushleft}
The last fifty years has seen a great deal of experimental research into what constitutes consciousness. With the advent of PET scans and other brain scanning procedures, research has intensified. Consider: If, as part of PET scan procedure, you are asked to move your index finger, two areas in the brain light up. One is called the motor cortex, which sends messages to the appropriate muscles to move your finger and the other to the pre-frontal cortex that prepares you to move your finger. What the PET scan shows is that the pre-frontal cortex of the brain registers a signal prior to motor cortex’s command to execute the movement. [This registration varies amongst participants, between 0.5 and 1 sec]. What is fascinating is that even though the brain’s motor cortex function kicks-in approximately one second prior to the moving of the finger, consciousness of having moved the finger corresponds to the actual execution of the movement. This suggests that there is an unavoidable neural delay between the signal in the brain and the message to move your finger.

According to Ramachandran, “there’s going to be a delay because of neural processing - just like the satellite interviews on TV which you’ve all been watching. So natural selection has ensured that the subjective sensation of willing [?] is delayed deliberately to coincide not with the onset of the brain commands but with the actual execution of the command by your finger, so that you feel you’re moving it.” 215

The PET scan experiment demonstrates that consciousness is firstly negotiated temporally and only after that is it directed to participate in the action-reaction processes that constitute conscious reality. So there exists a liminal space before consciousness is achieved. It is this liminal space that is of significance to artists, for it is here where it may be possible to intervene in the way consciousness may be created, and potentially allow us to occupy new states of consciousness. The researcher Benjamin Libet, who actually performed the above PET scan experiment, proposed: “we may exert free will not by initiating intentions but by vetoing, acceding or otherwise responding to

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214 For centuries, scientists have dreamt of being able to look into the human brain as it performs various activities: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or touching. Now several imaging techniques such as PET (positron emission tomography) and the newer fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) make it possible to observe human brains at work.

them after they arise". This insight is discussed in the appendix on the work of the theatre company Performance [Re]Search.

While considering "consciousness", one of the most consistent and baffling questions is: “How do we come to know the world?” A metaphysicist’s answer might be that we are born with some knowledge of the world. An empiricist might disagree and suggest that all knowledge is gained from sensory experience. A psychologist might answer by first questioning the possibility of perceiving before we have learned how to perceive. However all would agree that the senses do not directly give us a picture of the world, they merely give us a set of criteria with which to evaluate our perception of it…a way of organising and monitoring how we are present in and experience the world. Perception may be defined as the awareness and appreciation of objects or situations, usually by the senses. Our senses are not totally absorbent -we do not see, hear, or feel everything, we filter what we experience and what is allowed into consciousness is contingent upon the relation between what we sense and how we finally come to recognise it.

Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca.1995] Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.

It is generally accepted that there are two dominant readings on perception: [1] that perceptions are *selections of reality* and they are intrinsically the same as the objects of the material world, and [2] that perceptions are not a selection of reality, but are rather *accounts/descriptions* or, most interesting, *hypotheses, of the object world*.217

“*Perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions.*” 218

“The status of perception may be very like that of scientific hypotheses. What we see is affected by what is likely; and we can be driven into error by following assumptions, which are not appropriate for the available sensory data. This is a development of the notion of German physiologist Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-94) that perceptions are unconscious inferences from sensory and memory data. Some illusions may be fallacies of perceptual inference. Furthermore there has been considerable dispute as to the status of perception. One school (Empirist) stresses that perceptions are built up through slow, gradual, complex, acquired learning processes. Another (Gestalt) sees perceptual organization as more innate and holistic.” 219

The story of Virgil in Oliver Sacks’ *An Anthropologist on Mars* 220 is pertinent to our consideration of perception and consciousness. Virgil, blind from birth, had his sight restored late in life. What was remarkable about the way the blind Virgil made sense of the world was his perception of it. Being blind meant that his perception of the world was constructed in touch and time, whereas our sighted world is constructed in space and time. Gaining sight proved to be exceedingly complicated for Virgil; his retina began emitting electrical impulses [neurological codes] that were unfamiliar to his brain -his brain found no coherence in them and as a consequence was unable to decode them.

Virgil had not developed the habitual way of seeing to which we have become so accustomed in the
sighted world.

Finally being able to see, Virgil had to begin constructing his vision of a new alien world of space
and time. As Oliver Sacks points out Virgil found this, at times, “intricate and frightening”. The
insecurity that the sighted world left him with made him feel anxious and depressed, as if he no
longer existed and at times Virgil lost the desire to live. The inference is that the world that one
perceives or constructs is not the world but one’s own version of it…and Virgil had lost contact
with his. He saw but what he saw had no coherence.

“What Sacks is asserting is that one’s vision of the world is not sensed in isolation and that
perception is always inextricably linked to behaviour and movement, to actively exploring the

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221 ibid. p. 129.
world. Sacks is suggesting a direct connection between seeing and identity. The story of Virgil alerts us to the fact that seeing is not without perception and perception is not without identity. The value of this aphorism is contingent upon understanding the distinctions between seeing, vision, perception and identity.

Firstly seeing and vision are not the same; seeing is physiological and vision is learnt. However, I want to argue that there is a continuum linking seeing and vision, which extends to include both perception, and identity.

Seeing is physiological and apart from visual impairments such as colour blindness and astigmatism etc., we all see in the same way - with the exception of the unresolved question of cultural specificity. The extent to which seeing is culturally specific has been a contentious issue.

SEEING    VISION    PERCEPTION    IDENTITY

Seeing is physiological and apart from visual impairments such as colour blindness and astigmatism etc., we all see in the same way - with the exception of the unresolved question of cultural specificity. The extent to which seeing is culturally specific has been a contentious issue.


222 A common defect in the physiology of seeing that is more accurately described as colour confusion as the defect confuses our ability to distinguish between certain colours due to the absence of particular receptors [cones] on the retinas. For more information see: Gregory, R. L. Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing, World University Library, London, 1966. p. 126.

that continues to divide the opinion of psychologists. Some believe that seeing does not vary significantly between cultures, whereas the psychologist James Gibson, suggests it does:

“Gibson contrasts two basic visual practices, which produce what he calls the ‘visual world’ and the ‘visual field.’ In the former, sight is ecologically intertwined with the other senses to generate the experience of ‘depth shapes,’ whereas in the latter, sight is detached by fixating the eyes to produce ‘projected shapes’ instead. A plate, for example, will be experienced as round in the ‘visual world,’ but as an ellipse in the ‘visual field’, where the rules of perspectival representation prevail. The implication of Gibson’s argument is that vision is normally crossed with the other senses, but it can be artificially separated out. Thus, cultures might be differentiated according to how radically they distinguish between the visual field and the visual world.”

I am not disputing Gibson’s perspective; I am simply leading to the assertion that seeing is never experienced in isolation from the other points on the continuum. Seeing has become so naturalised that it takes a conscious concerted effort to intervene into the habitual way we see, before we are aware of the problems associated with it. When we see an object in our visual field there is more to the experience than meets the eye; our previous experience actively participates in what we see - taste, colour, pleasure, pain etc. are all involved. If all our senses agree, then we recognise; if they conflict then we are in variance with the material world. Ultimately everything in our visual field transcends the experience of seeing and becomes part of our understanding of our world by taking its place in our vision. It is from this point onwards in the continuum that idiosyncratic differences begin to appear in individuals. Vision is the rational part of seeing that attaches what we see to the brain [i.e. what we have come to know]. What constitutes vision has always been a matter of conjecture; historically, one opinion has always been replaced by another and I am sure that current opinion will also be superseded.

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“Although there is much to be learned from experiments in the mechanics and physiognomics of sight, that complex mix of natural and cultural phenomena called visuality defies reduction to any normative model based on scientific data alone. Indeed, it is precisely the proliferation of models of visuality that the antiocularcentric discourse, for all its fury against the ones it distrusts, tacitly encourages. Ocular-eccentricity rather than blindness, it might be argued, is the antidote to privileging any one visual order or scopic regime. What might be called “the dialectics of seeing” precludes the reification of scopic regimes. Rather than calling for the exorbitation or enucleation of “the eye,” it is better to encourage the multiplication of a thousand eyes…” 225

Perhaps it is just when the normal functioning of the senses become disordered that the full wonder of vision becomes apparent: for it is now unmistakably clear that we do not look out at the world through two windows in our skulls, but that we participate at every moment in creating an experience of the world ‘out there’ [body], and of ourselves ‘in here’ [mind]. This is our perception of the world. [Lurking behind all this is the old “mind-body” dichotomy, which some philosophers and some psychologists assure us has ceased to exist, but which yet somehow refuses to go away.] 226] Perception occurs when the brain synthesises complex sensory information and is best understood as internal sensory representation. It involves the filtering, decoding and partial selection of all the available sensory data. We construct our world with sight, sound, touch, pain, smell, taste and the sensation of body movements but the sensory data we receive is of a different order.

“We receive electromagnetic waves of different frequencies but we perceive colors. We receive pressure waves but we hear words and music. We come in contact with a myriad of chemical compounds dissolved in air or water but we experience smells and tastes. Colors, sounds, smells,

225 ibid. p. 309.
226 The ‘mind-body’ dichotomy has come into philosophy through the writings of René Descartes (1596-1650) and is expressed in his now infamous phrase ‘I think, therefore I am’. Descartes thought of the mind as conscious and of body as occupying space — the former always infallibly and the latter fallibly. [Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen. Eds. The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, Harper Collins, London, 2000. p. 240.] Traditionally, there have been four main attitudes: (1) Physical monism: believing that all phenomena of mind and of nature can be reduced to the laws of physics and biology. (2) Neutral monism: holds that all is mind, and that the concept of nature is itself a construct of mind that can only be known through hypotheses tested by reference to experience. (3) Interactionism: holds that there are two interacting spheres, mind and body: a view that received its first definitive elaboration in the writings of Descartes. (4) The classical doctrine of psychophysical parallelism, usually attributed to Leibniz, is the view that physical and psychical events run a parallel course without affecting each other. [ibid. p. 531.] For a more comprehensive account of this dualism see: Descartes, René. Discourse on Method and Meditations, The Liberal Arts Press, New York, 1960. pp. 81-91.
and tastes are mental constructions created in the brain by sensory processing. They do not exist, as such, outside of the brain.” 227

The implication is that our perceptions are not direct registerings of the world but are structured internally by the capabilities and limitations of our nervous system. Although sensory reception differs for each of the senses, three steps were found by a number of neurologists to be common to all.

1. A physical stimulus.
2. A set of events by which the stimulus is transduced into a neural code.
3. A response to the stimulus…a perception or inner sensation.

Our response differs qualitatively from the physical stimulus because “the nervous system extracts only certain information, and then interprets this information in the context of earlier experience.” 228 It is precisely at this point in the perception process that it is possible to intervene in the rationalising constraints of vision and affectively modify the limits of what we have come to know and accept as conscious perception.

Finally, the idea of perception is clearly even more complex when we consider “the permeability of the boundary between the "natural" and the "cultural" component in what we call vision. Although perception is intimately tied up with language as a generic phenomenon, different peoples of course speak different tongues. As a result, the universality of visual experience cannot be automatically assumed, if that experience is in part mediated linguistically. Natural science, therefore, itself suggests the possibility of cultural variables, at least to some degree. It implies, in other words, the inevitable entanglement of vision and what has been called ‘visuality’ -the distinct historical manifestations of visual experience in all its possible modes. Observation, to put it another way, means observing the tacit cultural rules of different scopic regimes.” 229

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228 ibid.
The polysemous nature of *Identity*, means it is more difficult to pin down; it may be thought of as the *lens* through which we perceive and at the same time as a *construct* of our perception; it is the source of its own creation and as such is capable of transgressing and transforming itself. Our “identity”, as the story of Virgil implies, is socially constructed and continually renegotiated as it comes into contact with others. A phenomenological perspective allows us to see that the simple act of seeing is not so simple. The more times we are conscious of ourselves seeing the more we become aware of the discrete processes involved.

As I have said before, seeing involves more than merely passively recording pictures. How the brain, with all its allied social and cultural baggage, cooperates with what is admitted into consciousness is worthy of reflection. When it comes to vision the brain is always actively participating with the senses in establishing a coherent world. Illusions, that are the brain’s

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230 The performance of “identity” is taken up in the appendix on the work of the theatre company, *Performance (Re)Search*.  
231 Phenomenology: (1) *In PHILOSOPHY*, a method of enquiry elaborated by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). It takes philosophy to begin from an exact, attentive inspection of one’s mental, particularly intellectual, processes in which all assumptions about the causes, consequences and wider significance of the mental process under inspection are eliminated (‘bracketed’). (2) *In the PSYCHOLOGY OF PERCEPTION*, a doctrine or school which postulates that the significant role of sense data lies in the form of the object as perceived, however erroneously or distorted, by the individual, and not in the object itself nor in material descriptions, locations or identifications of the object that follow the rules of physical science. (3) *In SOCIOLOGY*, phenomenologists have concentrated on the way in which commonsense knowledge about society feeds back, through social action into the moulding of society itself. Other developments range from highly generalized descriptions of how people in different types of society think and feel about the world and their place in it, to analyses of the unconscious routines by which people manage their interpersonal contacts.” [Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen Eds. *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Harper Collins, London, 2000. pp. 645-646].
misreading of visual stimulus, help to illustrate how the brain, by making certain assumptions about the visual world, participates in what is allowed into consciousness.

[1] The brain organises complex sensory data so that we can more easily make sense of it.

As we stare at the first figure we find that we unconsciously arrange the squares into rows, columns or grouping. As we stare at the second figure we find that we form different geometric configurations of the visual data. The brain, faced with complex stimuli, begins to organise the data into a more readily accessible format.

[2] The brain fills in details by using information that lies outside of the data available to us in our visual field.
Confronted with limited visual data the brain draws upon our previous experience of the world to complete the picture. A classic example of this attribute may be found in the work of cartoonists.

[3] The brain’s perceptivity necessitates more than a simple interpretation of the visual data. “Perception” is not simply determined by the patterns of stimulation on our retinas but by the search for the best interpretation of the available data and can best be understood as a perceptual hypothesis. Strange sights, shadows, familiar objects seen from a different perspective are all subjected to the brain assembling an acceptable view of the world. Even looking at a simple scene involves a complex hierarchy of seeing, a stage by stage process of recognition; not dissimilar to the experience of watching a Polaroid photograph develop. At every stage in the developmental hierarchy, as partial objects are first discovered and then recognised, we derive pleasure from it. According to work carried out in the newly evolving field of Neuro-aesthetics the wiring of the visual centres to the emotional centres ensures that the very act of searching for the solution is pleasurable. This may go someway towards explaining why certain people find jigsaw puzzles so addictive.

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232 A term coined by the neuroscientist Semir Zeki, to describe his research into how the different parts of our brain participate in our appreciation of art by directly studying the brain empirically.


234 Postcard: Fundación Gala: Salvador Dalí, Figueras. (First version). [If you squint or look at the picture from a distance, it becomes the head of Abraham Lincoln]
In order to better understand “perception” we need to get rid of the idea of images in the brain and think instead of neurological representations of objects and events in the external world. In the same way that the word “tree” represents a tree, even though it does not physically look like a tree, so too do the actions of nerve cells in your brain represent objects and events in the external world - even though they do not in any way look like what is out there. The way words are represented and read using the Braille alphabet may, in many ways, be seen as analogous to the way objects in our visual field are represented in the form of neural codes in the brain. The same analogy may be drawn with a sheet of music where people able to read musical notation as sound, hear marks on a piece of paper.

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236 An extract from: Rachmaninoff Piano Concerto 3, Opus 30. Boosey and Hawkes, London, 1963. p. 88. [Rachmaninoff’s concerto is regarded by many pianists as the most difficult piano concerto to play.]
At the risk of sounding repetitive, “visual perception is the brain's synthesis of a coherent image from a series of discrete neural codes”\(^\text{237}\). Our “visual perception” is destabilised when what we see is improbable. It is difficult to find a better example of this phenomenon than the Ames room and for that reason I have adapted it below. The American psychologist and painter, A. Ames, created a series of startling perceptual demonstrations. His most recognised, the *Distorted Room*, confirms our belief that perception is conditioned by our previous experiences.

The above figure [left] is a picture of a scaled model of a normal size room. The back-wall however slopes back on one side, so that it is not parallel to the observer’s wall [right]. The visual trick of perspective is used to make this abnormally shaped room give the same retinal image as a normal rectangular room. We are so accustomed to rooms being rectangular that looking at the figure on the left one immediately assumes that one doll is much bigger than the other, yet, in material reality, they are both the same size.\(^\text{239}\)

Impossible objects [like the one below] also have the same destabilising effect on our perception. These objects can be drawn, and an image registered on the retina, but cannot take their place in the external world.


\(^{238}\) Picture from the writer’s personal collection; origin unknown.

Our perceptual system, in having to build up a three-dimensional image of the object from two-dimensional data, is faced with a problem; the information about the three dimensional object is incompatible with our knowledge of the three dimensional world, and there is no discrete solution to the problem. In the above example the eye overworks, feeding back one instruction, then another, until the mind can work out the visual confusion. The same operation occurs when we look at an example from the graphic works of the Dutch artist, Maurits Escher.

Light also plays a significant part in our perceptual system. In the following figure, despite the fact that one photograph is simply an upside down version of the other, the satellite photograph of a

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hurricane is perceived as either concave or convex because the brain automatically assumes that there is only one light source.

Satellite photograph of Hurricane Mitch.241

Concave. Convex.

In the following example the brain’s assumption of a single source of light creates the perception of a three-dimensional wall of square recesses, not dissimilar to looking at the windows of a high-rise building. A startling feature of this example is that the light source may suddenly change and we find ourselves looking down into recesses on the ground. This phenomenon, where something is seen as one thing and then another, [known as aspect perception] was incorporated as part of the set design for David Williamson’s play, Sons of Cain, whose themes explored the blurred lines between journalistic truth and fiction.

Sons of Cain. Detail from a painting by Serge Tampalini.

David Williamson: Sons of Cain [1988]

As I have argued above, our visual field consists of a central portion that is in focus and it requires a conscious decision in order to focus our attention. “*Focused attention and conscious awareness is one of the great unsolved problems in perception.*” 242 We do know that a lot of the sensory information is filtered out…how much is filtered out is dependent on the mechanism of *focused attention.* This filtering process occurs in much the same way as when we focus on a figure and disregard the background of our visual field. Consider the following examples: in the figure below [left] it is possible to perceive either a pair of faces in profile or a vase, depending on what we perceive as foreground or background. A similar effect may be observed in the Salvador Dali painting [right]; we either see a man’s head or numerous figures in a landscape. Interestingly, it is impossible to hold both perceptions visually present at the same time.

![An adaptation of the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin’s pair of faces or vase figure.](image1)


In the next example, the circles’ contours are subjective; they do not exist. An image of what we are seeing is unable to be completed using the available data; consequently the brain completing the picture compensates our perception. A similar effect may be perceived in the painting *Kandinsky’s*

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Moon, where there appears to be a solid path between the white circle and the yellow and dark blue circle.

As a final example, the well-known “arrow” illusion below clearly demonstrates that perceived length can differ from measured length. The left-hand figure can be interpreted as the near outside corner of a building, the right-hand figure as the far inside corner of a room. We therefore “shrink” the “nearer” vertical line and “expand” the “further” one, to offset the effect of distance and the result is that we see the two lines as different in length.
The view that perception is more than passively registering the world and involved active creative process was first developed by Gestalt psychology. The founding German psychologists, Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, and Wolfgang Köhler, argued that the brain builds an image of an object by searching for the details that most satisfactorily correspond to the object in the real world. It does this partly by making certain assumptions that it knows about the object and partly as a consequence of the neural “hard-wiring” for vision.

“At critical stages of prenatal and early postnatal development the integrated action of the brain – in fact the details of its wiring - depends on specific interactions between the organism and its environment. The influence of the environment on the brain, and therefore on behaviour, changes with age. Abnormal environmental experiences usually have more profound effect during early stages of postnatal development than in adult-hood. It is an accepted fact amongst neurologists that early sensory deprivation alters perception, indeed synaptic connections can be modified throughout life by neural activity induced by experience.” 244

The French philosopher Merleau-Ponty, like the Gestaltists, also believed that the mind actively participated in our perception of the world and argued that the structural dimension of perception and its meaningfulness were interrelated.

“The natural ‘thing’, the organism, the behavior of others and my own behavior exist only by their meaning,” and that “this meaning which springs forth in them is not yet a Kantian object; the intentional life which constitutes them is not yet a representation; and the ‘comprehension which gives access to them is not yet an intellect.” 245

This belief fits neatly with the French philosopher Henri Bergson’s idea that perception is active, rather than pensive. 246 The critical point to remember is that with all the above examples the neural

input to the brain [i.e. the image on the retina] remains constant, but we create alternative worlds out of it. The constancy of the neural input is a significant factor in visual illusions because it suggests that how we finally see an object is located not in the object itself but in us; the catalytic role of the participant observer is seen as primary.

[4] The brain has to capacity to temporarily suspend processing visual data from the retina. I am sure we have all had the experience of motionlessly staring without being consciously aware of what constitutes our visual field. It is as if the brain has suspended visual consciousness while it focuses its attention on other matters. We return to visual consciousness either when something disturbs [enters] our visual field, or when an apperceptive state slowly returns us to consciousness.

[5] The brain sometimes makes mistakes in processing the visual data; when it does so, it hallucinates. This occurs when the eye and the brain arrive at the wrong conclusion. As I have already mentioned, the brain is always active, but normally its activity is checked by sensory information. However when these are cut off by accidents or impaired by drugs, isolation, sleep deprivation, stress, fear, or extreme emotional states, the brain’s activity can run wild. If we imagine something we don't confuse it with reality; that’s because our brain, aware of the command from our imagination, monitors our response. If the monitoring system in our brain becomes defective, then suddenly we can’t tell the difference between what we’re imagining and what we’re actually seeing. In other words, we hallucinate; fantasy and reality become interchangeable. To mystics, hallucinations are insights into another level of reality, but for many neurologists and philosophers, a traumatized brain is unreliable. Not so for the French playwright Antonin Artaud,247 who plagued by a life of mental pain, regarded the spontaneous activities of the nervous system bereft of sensory restraint as the source of inspiration and creativity.

“The Nurse no longer has any breasts. Her front is completely flat. At this moment The Knight comes out and throws himself on The Nurse, shaking her violently.

THE NIGHT (in a threatening voice): Where have you put it? Give me my Gruyère!

THE NURSE (cheerfully): Here you are. (She lifts her dress. The Young Man tries to flee but freezes at the sight like a petrified marionette.)

THE YOUNG MAN (as if suspended in mid-air and with the voice of a ventriloquist’s dummy):
Don’t hurt Mommy.

THE KNIGHT: Accursed woman! (He covers his face.)

An army of scorpions comes out from under The Nurse’s dress and swarms over his sex, which swells up and bursts becoming glassy and shining like a sun.” 248

The now infamous ten Rorschach Ink Blots can be seen as mirrors for the unchecked psychic imagination. Many people project different images onto the blot, and quite often a traumatised brain will perceive disturbing pictures reflected back at them.

[6] Because our visual field also has depth, our brain compensates for same size objects that lie at differing points in the depth of field. The size of an object doubles whenever its distance is halved and yet it looks the same size. This is because of the phenomenon of constancy. Even as early as

1637 René Descartes implied, in his *Dioptrics*, that there is a scaling system which makes objects placed at different distances appear almost equal in size, so long as we are not deceived by distance. This explains why someone walking towards us does not grow in size and also explains why when we look at our face in a mirror it looks face size, and yet if we trace the outline of what we see, we find we have traced something about the size of a saucer. All this contributes to our *perception of space* - the visual process by which we locate the positions, sizes and distance of objects in external world. This is a complicated process because the size of a retinal image may be created by a small near object or by a larger more distant object. It follows that the size of retinal image is not sufficient data to determine how large or how distant an object is, or appears. This implies that the brain must participate in determining scale by carrying complex calculations.

The retinal image of a person doubles whenever its distance is halved - but a person does not grow in stature as they walk towards us.

Interestingly, as the research into perception conducted by the physiologist R. L. Gregory points out, studies of people living in dense forest [without any large clearances] have shown that these people do not experience distant objects. When they are taken out of the forest and shown distant objects they do not see them as distant, only small.

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250 René Descartes published a treatise on science under the title *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* in 1637. Three appendices to this work were *La Dioptrique*, *Les Météores*, and *La Géométrie*. *Dioptrique* is a work on optics. For a comprehensive account of Descartes’ work see: Scott J. F., *The Scientific Work of René Descartes*, Taylor and Francis, London, 1952.

One of the most astonishing attributes of the brain is its ability to construct what I call synesthetic metaphors. As part of his research into human intelligence, the 19th Century Victorian scientist Francis Galton [1822-1911] found that certain people whenever they heard a specific tone experienced a specific colour. He called this crossing of the senses, synesthesia. To some extent we all experience synesthesia; for example when we refer to the pain we are experiencing as hot; the light as harsh; the image as violent; a taste as sharp or when we speak of the light and dark shades of music. By using such synesthetic metaphors we extend the available readings of an expression or visual image. It is now an accepted fact that synesthesia is most common among artists and writers. [I’m sure we all remember endlessly studying the poetic device of onomatopoeia!] Having already acknowledged the metaphorical composition of language, artists and writers tend to heighten their use of language by employing metaphors as energising components of their artistic expression, effectively linking seemingly unrelated concepts in the brain. Shakespeare was a master at this. I remember reading for the first time, Horatio’s line [Hamlet: Act 1, Scene1] when he is speaking to the ghost of Hamlet’s father: “Stay illusion.” I remember being alerted by the words, startled out of the indifference of my reading. It was as if my attachment to reality had been unexpectedly unmoored by the metaphor. How could Horatio ask of a ghost [“illusion”] to stay? If the ghost did remain, then it never was an illusion...not in the semantic sense that is. Was this intentional on the part of Shakespeare? What Shakespeare’s metaphor suggests is the possibility of seeing life as an illusion, and once we see life as an illusion then it is not long before we see that Shakespeare may have been suggesting that it is we, not the ghosts, who are ‘illusions’.

In my theatre work, I have always been conscious of the potential for “sensory crossings” to absorb the attention of spectators in a playful search for alternate meaning. I have tried to extend the practice of synesthetic metaphors by asserting that a concept or idea may be received and understood, not within the linguistic frame by which it is presented, but through its immediate

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252 An explorer and anthropologist, Francis Galton is recognized for his innovative studies into human intelligence. He devoted the latter part of his life to ‘eugenics’ [a term introduced by Galton to describe the science of improving humankind through selective breeding] - with particular reference to selected parenthood. For more information see: Galton, Francis. Sir. Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development, E.P. Dutton, London, 1907.

253 The concept of metaphor is discussed as part of the chapter: Image, Sign, Symbol and Metaphor.
concretisation into a composite image. I have also argued that the reverse -when an image is immediately read as a concept or a theoretical discourse- is also possible. This premise is an extension of a similar one prefigured in Umberto Eco’s account of the theory of sign production, where he refers to “ideas as signs”. He quotes Charles Peirce as saying that “these ideas are the first logical intrepretants of the phenomena that suggest them, and which, as suggesting them, are signs, of which they are the…interpretants”. If we see an object that we do not recognise, we generally ask what is it? What Peirce is suggesting is that there are some unfamiliar objects that require we ask, what does it mean? In so doing we perceive the object [sign] as an idea.

“What is an idea? It is an image that paints itself in my brain…the most abstract ideas are the consequences of all the objects I’ve perceived…I’ve ideas only because I’ve images in my head.”

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In the preceding example from *Pax Americana*, the apotheosis of George Washington and infamous characters of the John Kennedy era of American politics are rendered as cartoon cut-outs—an allusion to the blurred distinction between fantasy and reality associated with the 1960’s fascination with fame, as exemplified in the work of Andy Warhol.

Implicit in these examples is the eidetic belief that it is possible, and indeed desirable, to be able to think in pictures. Consider the example that I have called the Mona Lisa connection. Anyone who is familiar with the geographical location of da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre will appreciate the absurdity of what happens when large numbers of tourists are allowed to descend on her in order to record their visitation on film. Despite her colossal reputation, the *Mona Lisa* is a mere 31 inches by 21 inches [approx 79cm by 53cm]...smaller than the posters of her available at the Louvre shop. She is hung in the Salle des Etats into which there is only one entrance. She is kept behind bullet-proof glass and, when necessary, behind an electronically drawn black curtain. Painted on a poplar wood panel, her dark mist-filled atmosphere is attributed to da Vinci’s *sfumato* effect. Because of the effect’s fragility, one is not permitted to photograph the painting. However this does not deter the enthusiastic faithful who religiously snap away, as the gallery official barks out the *fiat* that

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256 There were two painting techniques predominately used in the Renaissance. *Chiaroscuro*, meaning “light and dark”, and *sfumato*, meaning, “smoke”. *Chiaroscuro* was used to blend figures with their surroundings as if coming out of the darkness into the light. *Sfumato* was used to create a more subtle atmospheric effect that softened the edges of a figure unifying it with its background.
unless all photography ceases the curtain will be drawn closed. Despite the officials’ best efforts the order has no affect, and the curtain is drawn closed. Five minutes later the curtain is once again opened, and almost immediately the cameras start clicking away and the whole process is repeated again and again. It is not long into the process when one is reminded of the anthropologist Victor Turner’s theory of social drama [in which he distinguishes the notion of breach, crisis, redressive action and reintegration] and the whole phenomenon becomes a reificatory scene from a ritualistic drama, intended as meta-theatrical reflection on the absurdity of existence.

Another example of synesthetic metaphor may by found in the chapter Language, Text and Performance, where I consider a hypothetical setting for Chekov’s play “The Three Sisters”. Knowing that Chekov’s narrative deals with the three sisters’ dream of one day leaving the monotony of country existence for the excitement of a new and promising life in Moscow, but that this longing will always remain just a dream, the walls of the country house are rendered as skeletal and the solid reliable floor turned to sand.

I am not alone in this project. The English artist Damien Hirst and the Polish theatre director Tadeusz Kantor also make use of synesthetic metaphors.

Damien Hirst: A Thousand Years. [1990].
Damien Hirst: An Unreasonable Fear of Death and Dying. [2000].

Victor Turner has suggested that human behaviour may be seen as performatice. In so doing he has proposed that its performativity may be observed in four stages. Turner’s concept of social dramas is discussed in the chapter: Liminality, Ambiguity and Paradox. A more comprehensive account of Turner’s theory may be found in: Turner, Victor. From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play, PAJ, New York, 1982.


ibid. p. 142.
Hirst’s *A Thousand Years* is an installation in a vitrine with two compartments; in one flies are born and are attracted to the other [through a small connecting hole], by the scent of a decomposing severed cow’s head and an awaiting electric fly killer. The idea is clear. Not dissimilar is his *An Unreasonable Fear of Death and Dying*; once again we have a vitrine with two compartments -in one we have a living room, in the other a toilet. This may be read as an existentialist metaphor that sees us living in an alien and futile universe which offers us little succour or hope, and above all, no meaning or purpose.

“Where’s God now. God’s fucked off. So all the big issues, like art and science and cancer, are all clambering about on this barren landscape where God used to live.”  

In 2001, as part of the project *Beckett on Film*, Damien Hirst was commissioned to make the film of Samuel Beckett’s *Breath*. Beckett’s text can be read in less than a minute and has no dialogue; his stage directions are very specific: first we hear the cry of a new-born baby and as the curtain rises, the sound of an inhalation. Debris fills the stage. Finally the curtain descends to the sound of an exhalation. Beckett’s existential nightmare is reinterpreted by Hirst as a collection of obstetric paraphernalia twirling through a limitless space, bound together by form and colour yet signifying “nothing”.

The Czechoslovakian theatre director, Tadeusz Kantor, working with what he calls “*Emballage*”, exhibits a similar interest to Hirst. The “*emballage*” is Kantor’s contribution to the empire of the sign. They take form as constructions of immense variety, assembled out of simple material of ordinary status, “primitively” constructed. For example, in 1968 the Warsaw Pact armies marched into Czechoslovakia. Kantor responded through a work entitled, “*A little Cosmetic Operation*” in which a poet sat naked on a stool reading his poems aloud. Meanwhile Kantor slowly and scrupulously wound bandages around the man’s body, closed his ears with cotton wool, taped his mouth shut, and once he was totally covered so that he could no longer read, sprayed him

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260 ibid. p. 211.
261 The *Beckett on Film* was a unique project; all of Samuel Beckett’s 19 works were filmed in a major RTE co-production with BBC Channel 4 and the Irish Film Board.
completely with shaving cream and left. Visually obtuse, Kantor’s *emballage* requires that we participate in the unravelling of its meaning. While Kantor’s poet is being wound with bandages he is revealed as just one of the many casualties of the Warsaw Pact army. What is being implied is that the 1968 military intervention was just *a little cosmetic operation* that merely changed the surface appearance of Czechoslovakian politics and rendered the “thinking person” silent.

The fundamental feature, in all the *synesthetic metaphor* examples, is the way the concretised form always retains and preserves the dimension of an idea…its connectivity to thinking.

In concluding this chapter, the critical question that needs to be asked is “are the connections and pathways in the brain that carry information about our world ‘hard wired’ and immutable?”

“One of the things we were all taught as medical students is that connections in the brain are laid down in the foetus or in early infancy, and once they are laid down, there is nothing much you can do to change these connections in the adult and that’s why when there’s damage to the nervous system as in a stroke, there is such little recovery of function and why neurological ailments are so notoriously difficult to treat. What I am saying is that’s wrong. In fact there’s a tremendous amount of plasticity or malleability even in the adult brain…” 262

What I am arguing, by quoting the neurologist Ramachandran, is that not all the information pathways and connections in the brain are hardwired at birth. If my argument is indeed true [and a lot of current neurological research suggests it is 263], then it is not inconceivable that the maturing human brain is, at any stage in its continuing development, capable of reorganising the way it makes sense of the material world. The significance of the observation becomes apparent when we reconsider the continuum:

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SEEING < > VISION < > PERCEPTION < > IDENTITY
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If the cerebral pathways carrying information are not “hardwired, then it is plausible that certain types of activities [such as chess, cryptic crosswords and card and computer games] that stimulate mental processes may activate new neural connections in the brain. If this is indeed the case then it may be argued that our vision, perception and identity are not only learnt, but may be re-learnt.

We maintain that the brain is an instrument of action, and not of representation. 

Henri Bergson.264

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IMAGE, SIGN, SYMBOL and METAPHOR

“We are surrounded by emptiness but it is an emptiness filled with signs”

Henri Lefebvre


Every object in our visual field may be considered an image. However some *images* remain *images*, and their connection to their referents in reality remain unary, while others achieve the status of *signs*, *symbols* and *metaphors*, where their resultant connectivity to reality is considerably more complex. How and why this occurs is worthy of consideration.

It is difficult to effectively consider the difference between how *images*, *signs*, *symbols* and *metaphors* operate, without first having a basic frame of reference within which they may be examined. Narrowing down the field in which such phenomena function not only provides this frame but also allows for a more detailed analysis. While acknowledging their existence and importance as cultural signifiers, it is their participation within the discipline of *aesthetics*, and as conveyors of meaning, that is of primary concern to theatre practitioners. *Aesthetics* may be considered both a branch of philosophy concerned with the idea of beauty and the principles of “good taste” and, more importantly, the study of the rules and principles of art. It is the latter definition that is of interest to this thesis. According the Collins English Dictionary its etymological

roots are to be found in the 18th Century Greek *aisthētikos*, perceptible by the senses, and from *aísthesthai*, to perceive.  

Any discussion on aesthetics inevitably turns its attention to the contribution that *semiotics*, and its evolutionary partner *semiology*, have made to its appreciation and understanding. Conceived by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and developed by numerous academics and philosophers, *semiotics* and *semiology* are best defined as theories of signs. In both semiotics and semiology a sign is commonly constructed within the relationship between a *signifier* and the *signified* and is most simply represented by the equation: \( \text{signifier} + \text{signified} = \text{sign} \). Significantly, the relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified* is never automatic but is established through convention, in much the same way as language may be seen as a set of conventional signs. For example: black marks on a white background [signifier], through established convention, may be read as words/language [signified].

“Saussure described the unit of language (the sign) as being composed of a mental component (or concept) which he called the signified, and a sound-image or written form, which he called the signifier. Thus, the signifier ‘tree’ will call into the mind of one who hears or reads it the concept ‘tree’. His crucial point was that there is no necessary relationship, no natural connection, between a signifier and the signified.”

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268 French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s work has often been considered as the foundations of semiology. He pointed out that language is not composed of individual units, with discrete meaning, but is a design of phonetic and semantic differences. Saussure saw it as a science that studied the life and laws of all signs not just linguistic signs. He argued that linguistics would be but a part of semiology; a new science that would not restrict itself to verbal signs. For more information see: [http://www.cultssock.nadirect.co.uk/MU/Home/cshtml/index.html](http://www.cultssock.nadirect.co.uk/MU/Home/cshtml/index.html) [Accessed on April 4 2005].


In the same way Marlon Brando’s tight T-shirt signifies more than the cloth from which it is cut, and the recent Pope John XXXIII’s plain wooden coffin should not be confused with the material from which it is made; it has additional properties that are to be found in the cerebral acts of the community that accepts it as a sign of their faith.

\[
\text{WHITE T-SHIRT \hspace{1cm} SEXUALLY UNINHIBITED and REBELLIOUS} = \]
\[
\begin{array}{c|c}
\text{Signifier} & \text{Signified} \\
\hline
\text{T-shirt} & \text{Sexually uninhibited and rebellious} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\text{PLAIN WOODEN COFFIN \hspace{1cm} HUMILITY IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD} = \]
\[
\begin{array}{c|c}
\text{Signifier} & \text{Signified} \\
\hline
\text{Wooden coffin} & \text{Humility in the presence of God} \\
\end{array}
\]

The difference between “semiotics” and “semiology” is not simply one of words. At the risk of over simplifying both practices, my use of “semiotics” may be read as the study of how signs are constructed within the relationship between the signifier and the signified, and my use of “semiology” may be seen as extending this relationship to include that in which the sign refers/functions. Much has been written about this distinction, but interestingly any historical analysis that includes a comparison between the work of Saussure’s “semiology” and the American philosopher Charles Peirce’s “semiotics”, reveals that at certain times the two have been curiously

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272 Detail of a photograph from the Australian newspaper, Weekend Australian, April 2005.

273 Semiology: The science of signs: systems of signification, means by which human beings -individually or in groups -communicate or attempt to communicate by signal: gestures, advertisements, language itself, food, objects, clothes, music, and the many other things that qualify. Semiotics: The study of patterned human behaviour in communication in all its modes. The most important mode is the auditory/vocal, which constitutes the primary subject of linguistics. Semiotics can also mean the study of sign and symbol systems in general. [Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen Eds. The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, Harper Collins, London, 2000. pp. 783-784.]
confused. Be that as it may, it is semiology that is of especial interest to theatre practitioners; particularly the way aesthetics functions as part of it. Before undertaking the more complex task of examining the semiological relationships between *images, signs, symbols* and *metaphors*, let us first consider a simple lexicon of the sign.

Peirce suggests that a “sign” may be classified as an *icon*, an *index*, or a *symbol*. According to Peirce, an *icon* is a sign which represents its object primarily by its similarity to it; the relationship between signifier and signified is not arbitrary but is one of resemblance; for example, a photograph. *Icons* can be divided into two sub-classes: *images* and *diagrams*. Images are alike through basic qualities and diagrams are alike because of the relations between the components.

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*Iconographic images*: Serge Tampalini.

*Diagram*: Birthday invitation. Design by Serge Tampalini. [2003]


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An *index* is a sign where the relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified* is by an accepted inferred connection between itself and its referent, such as the movement of smoke as a sign for the direction of the wind or falling leaves as a sign of the changing seasons. A *symbolic* sign needs neither resemblance to its object nor any link with it. The relationship between the *signifier* and the

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275 Printed in the Western Australian newspaper, *The West Australian*. [July 16 2005].
signified is through convention - for example: the “scales of justice”, the raised “clenched fist” or the “two fingers” sign.

It is important to note that Peirce did not consider the classifications mutually exclusive. All three categories frequently overlap and are regularly co-present. Significantly for theatre practitioners, it is this overlapping which creates the density of signs present in a theatre performance. Peirce believed that in the most effective of signs the iconic, the indexical, and the symbolic are present in equal proportions. The poster for 1984, the 1984 Murdoch University Theatre in Education programme, incorporates the head of Ronald Reagan, the eyes of Karl Marx, the nose of Mahatma Gandhi, the mouth of Margaret Thatcher and the coat of Mao Tze-tung. The logos of the major multi-national companies of the day complete the work.


Cognisant of the work of Peirce and Saussure, the French semiotician Roland Barthes extended their work by proposing semiotics as a signifying system that could be interpreted on three levels, with each level generating its own type of meaning. The first level functioned as part of the signifying practice that saw a clear relationship between the sign and its referent in reality - between the signifier and the signified. This practice was/is known as *signification*. In the second level the signifying practice is also known as “signification” but the relationship between the signifier and the signified is symbolic. Third level semiotics involves a signifying practice that resists signification - a level where the relationship between the signifier and the signified is disrupted in favour of polysemy … or a stream of signifiers.

At the first level, meaning is generated as information. The sign’s meaning is unary and provokes only a general or technical interest. The dialectic between the signifier and signified is clear and the resultant signification is recreated in action - we see, we recognise and we act.

According to Barthes the conditional relationship between the signifier and the signified may be semantic: how a sign relates to which it refers [interpretation], pragmatic: how a sign relates to its use [function], and syntactic: how a sign relates to other signs [position].
At the second level, meaning is generated symbolically. According to Barthes, it is at this level that *myths* are made; *myths* are never spoken, they appear as the prevailing rhetoric of common sense, insidiously organised into normalised and universally “given” notions. By accepting something as “given” it is effectively rendered invisible; by questioning the systematically organised conventions of the ‘given’ we can expose the inherent myth. The way “myths” are constructed is plainly evident in the following examples from the *Time* magazine covers for 2003/2004 and 1950.

In the December 2003/ January 2004 *Time* magazine cover, the three American soldiers appear to stand proudly, half smiling, cradling their weapons: “We are young, good looking and your

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heroes!!” It is the masculine myth of heroism and bravery that hides the human cost. In both the 2003/2004 and 1950’s *Time* magazine covers, women are clearly not seen as war heroes; women are seen as prizes. The only significant difference between the two *Time* magazine covers is the placatory change of the word “man” to “person”…itself mythologising.

Another example of how *myth* is constructed and operates may be seen in the following newspaper advertisement for Jaguar cars. When you buy a Jaguar car, the advertisement assures us, you are buying [into the myth of] “individuality and success”; you are buying “cool exclusivity.” The operative words in the advertisement are “*the new*… generation”, “X-Type”, “membership” and “*the art of performance*”…all ideologically loaded terms.

Mythology has always been allied to ideology.\(^{280}\) The ubiquity of ideology means that every object may be viewed as a sign that functions at Barthes’ second level of meaning, that we respond to objects by means of the ideology involved in their manufacture, and the insidiousness of ideology means that, at times, it is unconsciously assimilated into our cultural practices. Ideological

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\(^{280}\) The term ideology is used here to indicate a set of rules by which society orders reality so as to make it intelligible; a set of ideals that reflects the beliefs of a society. All “points of views” may be seen as representative of an ideological perspective.
industries, such as schools and universities, can carry with them implicit ideological assumptions [myths] that are literally built into their architecture. As the cultural critic Dick Hebdige suggests: “These [architectural] decisions help to set the limits not only on what is taught but on how it is taught. Here the buildings literally reproduce in concrete terms prevailing [ideological] notions about what education is and it is through this process that the educational structure, which can of course, be altered, is placed beyond questions and appears to us as given [immutable].”

What Hebdige is also implying is that, within schools and universities, the departmentalising of different academic disciples into different buildings located in separated areas of the campuses, affirms their fallacious status as separate and autonomous bodies of knowledge. In addition, his implication suggests that the structure of the teaching space itself, also contributes to the way

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283 The imposing structure dwarfs the human figure, commanding respect and awe.


knowledge is received; all the recipients sit quietly, tiered and facing a central figure who from a fixed single point of authority disseminates information outwards. Hebdige is drawing our attention to the contentious relationship between ideas and the way ideas are expressed; between content and form. He reminds us that the relationship between the two is symbiotic and inseparable -there is no form without content, just as there is no content without form.

In today’s hyper-real world, it may be axiomatic to say that ideas and meaning [content] are received through the forms in which they are presented. However what is not so obvious is that these apparently inert forms are not innocent. When interrogated they reveal themselves, and thus their content, as ideologically constructed. This observation is not meant to anticipate a detailed discussion on ideological industries but merely to highlight the inextricable link between the means of representation [form] and the object represented [content]. We are well aware that the employed “form” imposes quite strict limitations on what can be said. Marshall McLuhan’s now famous phrase “the medium is the massage,” alerted us to the disappearance of any absolute distinction between “form” and “content”. A master of puns, McLuhan’s phrase is ambiguous; perhaps he was commenting on the way media manipulates us, or maybe he was identifying the arrival of a new mass-age. In any case the implicit idea is that the message is significantly impacted by the delivery system; what we say is of little importance -only how we choose to deliver it. McLuhan believed that “we shape our tools and they in turn shape us.”

The dichotomy between “form” and “content” has always been debatable. Any assertion that it is indeed possible to literally insert a discrete “content” into an impartial and inert “form” without any consideration of ideology or acknowledgement of the “point of view” that wants to do so, seems questionable. A bizarre demonstration of this literal connectivity may be seen in the some

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286 “Owing especially to the electronic media, it is argued, our world has become so saturated with images and symbols that a new ‘electronic reality’ has been created, whose effect is to obliterate any sense of an objective reality lying behind the images and symbols. In this ‘simulated’ world, images become objects, rather than reflecting or representing them; reality becomes ‘hyper-reality’. In ‘hyper-reality’ it is no longer possible to distinguish the imaginary from the real, the sign from its referent, the true from the false. It is a world of simulacra or images, but images or copies ‘of which the originals have been lost’, as described by the French theorist Jean Baudrillard.” [Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen Eds. The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, Harper Collins, London, 2000, p. 409.]

287 Marshall McLuhan [1911-1980] has often been called the “oracle of the electronic age”. He is perhaps best remembered for his phrase and best selling book, The Medium is the Massage. In his book Understanding Media, McLuhan argued that the electronic media, as extensions of our nervous system, directly influenced the psyche of the user.

of the work of the English criminologist Havelock Ellis [1859-1939] and the English scientist Francis Galton. Stolid Victorian literalness “logically” argued that personality is found within the brain, the brain is in the head, so the head shape must affect the type of brain and personality.

Encouragingly however, there have been a number of historical examples where the relationship between “form” and “content” has been deliberately subverted. The precursor of this type of approach may be clearly seen in the work of the 1960’s situationists; their so-called détournements appropriated mainstream culture and subverted it by turning it into something unexpected and, more often then not, with a social or political edge. In the following examples the “form” appropriated from one ideological frame has been ascribed an alternative “content” simply by replacing one set of ideological values with another. The French playwright Jean Genet [1919-1986], having been arrested for the “crime” of homosexuality [itself the breaking of the dominant ideological codes of his time] displayed a fascination with deviant behaviour. As a prisoner he would inform on his fellow inmates, then while returning to his cell he would allow them to signal their contempt by spitting on him. Genet, a Catholic by birth, would later confess that their emits fell on him like rose petals. The utilitarian safety pin was appropriated by the punk movement as a

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290 Ibid. p. 12.
291 Détournement is usually translated into English as ‘diversion’ and was the method of artistic creation used by the situationists. It was, in effect, plagiarism where both the source and the meaning of the original work was subverted to create a new work. In the SI’s own words ‘there is no situationist art, only situationist uses of art.’ Detournement is distinct from ‘theft’ plagiarism, which only subverts the source of the material and post-modern ‘ironic quotation’ plagiarism which only subverts the meaning of the material, the source becoming the meaning. The SI used detournement in films, art, graphics for their journal and in posters that detourned comics during the events of May ’68. http://www.barbelith.com/cgi-bin/articles/00000011.shtml [Accessed 6 March 2006].
sartorial accoutrement equivalent to swearing; the once pejorative term “queer” has been assimilated into the academic rubric *Queer Theory*; the pop singer Madonna used religious iconography as jewellery and decoration; the once *enfant terrible* of the fashion industry, designer Jean Paul Gaultier, used cultural iconography for his women’s clothing, and skirts and dresses for men; the political subtext of the work of Cindy Sherman questioned representation and gender; and the collaborative mixed genre work of Pierre [photography] and Giles [painting] irreverently juxtaposed conflicting iconography in an explosion of kitsch exuberance. Marilyn Monroe’s infamous dress from the film, *The Seven Year Itch*, was unashamedly appropriated, in the theatre production, *Ophelia Conspiracy*, in order to problematise the representation of femininity.

David Anderson: *His Master’s Voice*. [1985]  
Acme Cards. [1984]  
[A military ammunition case serves as a fashion accessory]

Jean Paul Gautier. [1992-3 Collection]  
Detail from a London postcard.


Jean Paul Gaultier collection. [Spring-Summer, 1998] ²⁹⁵

Jean Paul Gaultier collection. [Spring-Summer, 1996] ²⁹⁷

Jean Paul Gaultier collection. [Autumn-Winter, 1994-95] ²⁹⁵

Cindy Sherman: from the Hollywood woman series. ²⁹⁸

Untitled. ²⁹⁸

Untitled. ²⁹⁸

The pop star Kylie Minogue is cast as 
Sainète Marie Mac Killop by Pierre and Giles ²⁹⁹


²⁹⁵ ibid. pp. 94 and 66.
²⁹⁶ ibid. p. 68.
²⁹⁷ ibid. p. 38.
More recently, the political signs and symbols that make up the dominant ideological code of the “western capitalist regime” have been appropriated and assimilated into the work of culture jammers.

“Culture Jamming is the manipulation of the mass media by artists and activists. Jamming is part of the secret history of what Greil Marcus calls the ‘politics of subversive quotation’, in which the signs and symbols of the dominant culture are pried loose from their original contexts and used to tell the stories of the mute and the marginalized.”

As well as the work of the Billboard Liberation Front with their use of the ubiquitous advertising billboards, culture jamming has become a means of expression for people without access to resources.

At Barthes’ third level semiotics, instead of meaning being deferred to some final epiphany of signification, it is negotiated within a constant stream of signifiers that, by refusing to succumb to easy signification, generate what Barthes call the “third ‘obtuse’ meaning.” At this level, we are concerned not so much by what things are but how they fit into the existing frame of things; how their meaning is to be uncovered. Eventually everything succumbs to signification, this is ineluctable; revolt always turns into style…but it is in the moment of refusal, before signification, that the potential for alternative modes of meaning may be found. Just as it requires

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302 Within months after the emergence of the Punk musical movement as an enigmatic cultural force [epitomised by such musical groups as the Sex Pistols, The Stranglers and The Clash], their confrontational and scatological aesthetics were readily available in expensive designer label shops. The movement’s paragons of fashion, Vivien Westwood and Malcolm McLaren were quick to take advantage of this. Westwood dresses have been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and McLaren has pontificated on the emergence of punk while touring the international lecture circuit.
something to “break down” before we are forced to consider how it works, it is only when something refuses to make sense, that we consider the “given” constructs and expectations of our conventional mode of meaning making. At the third level, conventions become inadequate and obsolete; at this level the polysemy of signifiers behave like a virus genetically coded to change its appearance; just when we think we can identify them [locate their meaning] they mutate. Passed through the distorting lens of a stream of signifiers, meaning is subjected to acts of transformation and constant states of assemblage that refract the coherence of discontinuity, ambiguity and paradox. The signifier absolved from its semiotic responsibility to signify, behaves like a semiotic delinquent deliberately flaunting its resistance to conventionalised modes of meaning making and reception.

Much of the research into this third level is commonly allied with the work of the linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva and her association with the now defunct Tel Quel group in France. Kristeva’s research into the disruptive potential of poetic language identified it as a “place where the social code is destroyed and renewed”. What Kristeva is implying is that at a certain point semantic language ceases to be of any use and we turn to poetry as a site where the subtle nuances of meanings may be found or made. Methodologically her work was less interested in the final structure of meaning, and more interested in the processes involved in making meaning. This methodology has often been naively interpreted as the triumph of “process” over “product”, instead it may be more accordantly interpreted as the inclusion of “process” as part of the ethos of production. Dick Hebdige succinctly summarises the methodology:

“This approach sees language as an active, transitive force which shapes and positions the ‘subject’ [as speaker, writer, reader] while always itself remaining ‘in process’ capable of infinite adaptation. This emphasis on signifying practice is accompanied by a polemical insistence that art

303 The work of the French literary intellectual group and publishing team Tel Quel had a profound impact on literary and cultural debate in the 1960s and 70s. From its beginning in 1960 to its closure in 1982, it published some of the key essays of major poststructuralist figures from Roland Barthes to Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva. A comprehensive account of the work of the group may be found in the book, The Tel Quel Reader. [Patrick Fréchon and Roland-François Lack Eds.]


305 The writings of Julia Kristeva were a significant influence on the work of the theatre group Performance [Re]search. For more information on this connection see the section in the chapter on Performance [Re]search, dealing with the performance Crossing Body Shadow.
represents the triumph of process over fixity, disruption over unity, ‘collision’ over ‘linkage’- the triumph, that is, of the signifier over the signified”.

In contrast to signification, that refers to the work of the signified, Kristeva has introduced the term signifiance to describe the work of the signifier.

“What we call signifiance, then is precisely this unlimited and unbound generating process, this unceasing operation of the drives toward, in and through language; toward, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists…”

Kristeva’s distinction between the two signifying practices is clearly identified by Roland Barthes:

“Signifiance is a process in the course of which the ‘subject’ of the text, escaping (conventional logic) and engaging in other logics (of the signifier, of contradiction) struggles with meaning and is deconstructed (‘lost’); signifiance -and this is what immediately distinguishes it from signification - is thus precisely a work; not the work by which the (intact and exterior) subject might try to master the language [...] but that radical work (leaving nothing intact) through which the subject explores - entering not observing -how the language works and undoes him or her [...] Contrary to signification, signifiance cannot be reduced therefore, to communication, representation, expression: it places the subject (of writer, reader) in the text not as a projection ... but as a ‘loss’, a ‘disappearance’.”

At the risk of damaging its coherence by simply extracting pieces, third level semiotics works against signification by offering “no guarantee of its intentionality” Here we experience semiotic uncertainties and contradictions that hold open the gap between the object and its meaning. An example of this may be found in the Japanese dance form Butoh, where the Beshimi Kata facial
expression refuses an expeditious reading of it; refuses to cohere around a set of organising values and in so doing frustrates our sense of certainty. Abstracted and de-contextualised, it gives us no indication of its origin…it gestures towards nothingness; it signifies only itself. It is a signifier that prevents the sign from reaching an immediate and satisfying closure. In so doing it disorientates us and we lose any direction of sense.

A comparable sense of disorientation is also felt when we are confronted by ambiguous images, similarly they resist immediate signification. They appear to reside in an uncertain present, unmediated by a past or future and in so doing possess a logic that lies outside of our rationalising vision.

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312 The photograph was taken while auditing the work of the Butoh dancer Min Tanaka and his Mia Juku Dance Company. The company worked out of a centre known as Bodyweather Farm.
So far our consideration of semiotics has concerned itself with signs whose *signification* or *significance* is predicated on *recognition*. As we have seen neurological research into visual *perception* defines recognition as the result of the brain’s synthesis of a coherent image from discrete neural signals carrying form, position, motion, and colour information.\(^{313}\) Once the brain has synthesized the signals into a coherent image, we experience the sensation of *recognition*. There is nothing unusual about this; it is something that we have all experienced. However, even as early as Plato,\(^{314}\) philosophers have asserted that there exist images that give rise to a second kind of sensation: a sensation that disturbs our sense of coherence. According to the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze\(^{315}\) this is a direct result of a particular type of image, a *sign*—a *sign* whose strength is not necessarily connected to its content. What makes the “image” a “*sign*” is its *intensity*—a feeling or sensing that precedes systematic reasoning, whose enduring affect initially bypasses the brain and acts directly on the nervous system. It is important to appreciate the distinction between the two types of images.

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\(^{314}\) Plato, *The Republic*, [Ed. James Adam], Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,1963. [In his *Republic*, Plato argues that the lowest level of reality are *shadows and pictures*; they provide only the most basic concepts. The next level, the visible realm, contains *physical objects* that refine our conception of the nature and relationship of temporal things. Moving up we come to simple *Forms* through which we can attain systematic knowledge. Finally, at the highest level of all, are the more significant *Forms*—*Beauty, Truth, and Good*; these are the true nature of reality and directly apprehended by the capacity of human reason.

\(^{315}\) For more information on Gilles Deleuze’s notion of a *sign* see the chapter on *The Affective*. 
A *sign*, implies Deleuze, ceases to be the object of *recognition*, and becomes the object of *encounter*. A *sign* separates itself…presents as a visible construction…a loaded choice that draws attention to itself by appearing as an ambiguous problem that requires our solution. The status of a *sign* is as a form of refusal; always in a state of flux; always in relation to something else. As a species we are driven by a propensity to understand, to resolve ambiguities; our sensibility needs to be assured by understanding. In order to understand the ambiguity of *signs*, we must first free aesthetics from the confines of recognition. *Signs* do not seek to be understood in the traditional way that “images” do; yet they possess a logic; a logic which is the sense of something outside of our rationalising vision.
Following on from the work of the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard, Deleuze clearly distinguishes between what he calls *figuration* [which refers to the sign’s “form” that is related to the object it is suppose to represent] and the *figural* [a term coined by Lyotard to describe the sign’s “form” that is related to a sensation that directly affects the nervous system]. I believe *figuration* belongs to the domain of the “image”; by literally relating the form to its referent in reality, an “image” relegates the eye solely to the mode of recognition, thereby limiting the potential of the form to create meanings that lie outside the constraints of reason, effectively reducing the role of the spectator to passive recipient. The danger with *figuration* is that as a form of representation it is illustrative and consequently suggests an obvious narrative. The *figural* has no manifest narrative; it is experienced as a sensation of *encounter*. It engages the spectator by requiring their participation in the unravelling of its meaning.

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316 Photographs by kind permission of Shimoyama.
317 Jean-Francois Lyotard was born in France, 1924. He is considered one of the principal philosophers of “Postmodernity”. His *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [1984] originally published in Paris in 1979, was instrumental in establishing his reputation. The book deals with the status and development of knowledge, science, and technology within the broader context of sociology. He argues that knowledge is altered/transformed by the means of its production.

Deleuze adds that signs may be experienced through four special kinds of sensations. A sign may be an object of pure sensibility [figure 1], experienced in terms of difference in intensity; a sign may be the object of pure memory [figure 2], experienced as temporal displacement; a sign may be the object of pure imagination [figure 3] felt as simulacra; and signs may be experienced as objects of pure thought [figure 4], experienced as ideas. Deleuze, not unlike Peirce and his triadic model of the sign, believes that in the most affective signs, all sensations are present in differing proportions.


Deleuze continues his critique of signs by identifying three types of modalities of sensation: vibration, resonance and forced movement. These “modalities” have what I call in reference to my work on affective space, an excessive condition; a condition, which appears to be, more than the sum of the elements responsible for the sign’s construction. The implementation of these modalities in my theatre work is not meant simply as acts of contradictions; they are constructed as meaningful provocations of a more complex dialectic between the spectator’s objective agreement [recognition] and their subjective discord [encounter]. As such they beg the questions, how do they work and how are they constructed?

Vibration may best be understood as an invisible sensation that is more nervous than cerebral. It is experienced as a modulation of intensity. According to the English painter, Francis Bacon: “…some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells the story in a long diatribe through the brain.”

Resonance occurs when two seemingly disparate objects appear together. The imagined effect is not attributable to either of the objects; it materialises as something additional. However, if the objects are too dissimilar, so that the space between them cannot be imagined, the result will be inefficacious.

318 For a more comprehensive account of the phenomena of the terms, “affective space” and “excessive condition” see: The Affective.
Forced movement is achieved when two or more objects share a unity that is not accomplished by their juxtapositioning but by their deliberate separation. The objects lose their relational axis and are connected only by the space that separates them; the space between them becomes the figural.

In addition to Deleuze’s modalities of sensation, my theatre practice has identified the additional modes of: discordant harmony, repetition, silence, disturbance, and accident. Methodologically these “modes” became the tools employed in the construction of what I called the “architexture” of the work; that is, the complex interpretative matrix supported by the relationship between the signs.

Discordant Harmony may be understood as the confluence of dissimilar objects. It is composed of two or more disparate forms concatenated not by their design, but their intended signification. Locating William Congreve’s play *The Way of the World* [1700] in a geometrically stylised and vibrantly coloured world [with a “hard-edge” aesthetic], draws attention not only to the chess-like mechanisations of its themes, but also to Congreve’s acerbic wit. In addition it attempts to signify the contemporaneous nature of the play’s social mores with those of today.

![Image](image-url)


Repetition of a form without variation [or varying only in colour or size] produces a peculiar sense of unity. Unaccustomed to exact repetition in our material world, we immediately question the reason for its existence, and attempt to understand the consciousness that constructed it. It is the understanding of the meaning behind the repeated form that generates its sense of unity. In the example of the set design for *Bukowski OK* below, the wall-papered face of the author and the
patterned curtains, serve to reminds us not only of the drab sameness of the world of doss-houses but also to remind us of the omnipresence of the author.

Silence is the product of minimalist aesthetics. It is achieved by positioning objects so as to draw attention to the negative space that surrounds them. It is a tangible silence that is not solely heard, it is felt, experienced…a silence that is not filled with emptiness [despite containing little concrete form] but a dynamic silence that seeks the spectator’s meditation.
**Disturbance** is attained when ostensibly incompatible objects are assembled so that there appears to be no connection between them, or any relationship suggested by the space that both joins and separates them. Confronted with irreconcilable difference, the spectator’s imagination is forced to confront its own limits and, without memory to comment on the imagination, meaning is found obliquely in a visual cacophony of elision, truncation, and convergence. In these liminal spaces, the spectators are subjected to familiar objects in defamiliarised contexts. New meaning is found in the unexpected and accidental combination of familiar objects.

![Image of a theatrical set with multiple faces, indicating a scene from a performance](image)


**Accidents** occur when things arbitrarily enter the theatre frame and are read as part of the *mise en scène* of the performance. They are part of an aleatory practice or tradition in the arts that allows an element of chance to be involved. A hypothetical example of this may be when an actor, playing Antigone, has a broken leg but continues to perform in the cast [!] -unaware of the actor’s misfortune, some spectators read this as a sign of the struggle that awaits her character. Similarly when actors forget their lines, but remain in character…their extemporary dialogue may be sometimes read as part of the play’s dialogue. Further examples may be seen in the performance component of the Honours work of Naomi Mathias and Katrina Allen. Mathias’s work, *Metamorphoses* [example below], involved the use of live video projection and from various points in the auditorium multiple versions of the same character were visible, unexpectedly reinforcing the fictive nature of representation and supporting Mathias’s argument for the need of a more complex

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320 My use of the term, *mise en scène*, refers to all the creative decisions made on the script/text during its transformation into a performance. These include decision in, lighting, sound, set, costumes, proxemics and acting.
performance matrix in which women may be seen. Allen’s work, *Queer Sisters* [below], in keeping with the open-ended nature of queer theatre practice, intentionally obscured meaning in a playfully layered performance, in which the representation of character and identity were denied any sense of coherence and structure. Occasionally this intentionality was accidentally affirmed by the surprise appearance of shadow figures.

Another example may be seen in the production *Silent Moves* [below]; a theatre/dance piece, gathered around the idea of “shadow bodies”. At times randomly projected images, from previously recorded work, were surprisingly indistinguishable from the “real” performers.

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321 Presented as part of her Honours, *Metamorphoses* critiqued the representation of women in contemporary Australian performance from the work of Dorothy Hewitt to the present day. [Supervised by Serge Tampalini and Dr Helena Grehan]
322 Presented as part of Honours. [Supervised by Serge Tampalini and Dr Helena Grehan]
323 The concept of “shadow bodies” is discussed in the appendix *Performance [Re]Search*. 
The “accident” results in the destruction of existing codes and the formation of new ones. Accidents hold open the world of objects to new and sometimes covertly oppositional readings that potentially allow for new levels of conscious awareness. Accidents are accepted not by default, but by choice; a conscious choice that includes and accepts accidents as a part of the performance ethos.324

Clearer concretisations of what is meant by accident are often produced outside of the theatre frame. In the example below the unintentional [accidental] juxtapositioning of one billboard next to the other results in a semiotic reading that, as Deleuze might have it, is not attributable to either of the two objects but is read as something additional.

Photograph by Serge Tampalini. [Perth, 2005]

The affect of the accident is more clearly felt when the words are removed; when its meaning is no longer tethered to their prioritised semantic reading.

324 For more information on the mode of accident see the section on the Squat Theatre Company in the chapter Liminality, Ambiguity and Signs.
It is clear that semiotics, caught between sobriety and chaos, needs the auxiliary support of a contextual framework. This “need” perhaps helps to explain the evolution of semiology. The French performance theoretician, Patrice Pavis asserts that semiology, in particular theatre semiology is “a method of analysing text and/or performance that focuses on the formal organisation of the text or the show as a whole, on the internal organization of those signifying systems that make up both text and performance, on the dynamics of the processes of meaning and establishment of sense through the participation of theatre practitioners and audience”. Pavis also suggests that it does not seek to find meaning but concerns itself with “the mode of production of that meaning throughout the theatrical process, beginning with the director’s reading of the script through to the interpreting task of the spectator.”

My immediate inclination is to correct Pavis by maintaining the writer as part of the process. However I am sure that Pavis has excluded the writer by having located them within literature, thus specifically identifying the mise en scène as a dramaturgy comprising a set of creative decisions performed on the writer’s text during its transformation into performance. Whether we agree or not is a discussion that lies outside the scope of this thesis.

326 ibid.
While Pavis’s understated assertion that theatre semiology has provided a way of understanding how a performance is constructed free from the restrictions imposed on it by literature may be true, it is also true that it has made the reading of a performance fraught with difficulty.


As Elaine Aston points out in her book *Theatre as Sign System*, the difficulties with the semiology of theatre lie in the polysemic nature of its sign systems. Theatre draws on a number of complex sign systems whose codes, while homologous with the main concerns or themes of the text, unfold independently and in ways that are not necessarily congruent. An understanding of the way codes are constructed, function and decoded is paramount.

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If semiotics sought to uncover the concealed fundamentals of how signs are constructed, then semiology seeks to include an understanding of the relationship between signs and their reception. Semiology suggests that meaning is to be found in the relationship between signs and maintains that meaning is embedded in this relationship by a set of rules—a code. By focusing attention on decoding the relationship between the signs, semiology tries to manifest that latent meaning. Given that a code is a set of rules that governs the relationship between signs, unless we understand these rules, and in particularly their implementation and function, our reception of their code is condemned to a reliance on nebulous intuition, and fleeting subjective impressions. The semiotician Anne Ubersfeld\(^\text{328}\) proposes that part of the theatrical pleasure of an audience lies in decoding the relationship between signs.

In theatre the writer may be seen as being responsible for the codification of the written text [sometimes referred to as the *linguistic sign system*] for the director to read, and generally it is the director who has the responsibility of codifying the performance text [or the *theatrical sign system*] for the spectator to read. In creating a performance text, the director’s responsibility is to establish a hierarchy of watching [or a *diachronic code*] and an itinerary of seeing [a *synchronic code*], both of which are concerned with directing the audience’s reading of the performance text by punctuating

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328 See the chapter: *Pleasure and the Spectator.*
the performance with the *signifying systems* [what I call *theatre languages*] such as dialogue, lighting, scenography, costumes, sound, movement, gesture and including publicity. This process has often been confused with the simple “transcodification” of one sign system into another. This is misleading as it implies that the *written text* is the same as the *performance text*. Clearly this is not the case, as the *mise en scène* that appears as part of the theatrical sign system does not appear in the linguistic sign system and vice versa. In this context the term *mise en scène* is best understood as the final performance code that accounts for all the signifying systems: lighting, scenography, costumes, etc. The two “texts” are interdependent. The simple idea of the “transcodification” from one sign system to another is inaccurate because it is actually another text that is constructed, a text that employs different rules and consequently constructs a different code.

“What we have, then, is a relationship of mutual and shifting constraints between two kinds of text, neither of which is prior and neither of which is precisely ‘immanent’ within the other, since each text is radically transformed by its relations with the other (the written text, for example, ceases to be written within the domain of the performance text, and the non-linguistic elements of the performance text are not ‘present’ within the written text but remain as mere memories or potentialities).” 329

So theatre semiology is primarily concerned with the way the *performance text* is encoded by a range of *signifying systems* [*theatre languages*]. Even though the *signifying systems* remain constant across a multiplicity of theatre types, it would be foolish to speak specifically of a topology of signs that could suit all types; signs are not that malleable or adaptable. Each type of theatre codes its own signs that may only be read with an appreciation of the rules that constructed them. Not understanding that can be disconcerting -like trying to read poetry armed only with the strict rules of grammar; or attending a piece of *agit prop*330 theatre and complaining about its blatant political message; or attending different productions of the same play and being confused by their disparate

330 “*Agit prop*” is an abbreviation of *agitation propaganda*…a term commonly used to describe political theatre.
appearance.\textsuperscript{331} Once again the example of two productions of Ray Lawler’s \textit{Summer of the Seventeenth Doll} effectively illustrates this point.

Returning abruptly to the difference between \textit{images, signs, symbols and metaphors}, the place and function of \textit{symbols} in the project of theatre is a more intricate question; a question that requires careful consideration in order to avoid the trap of simply reading all theatre signs as symbols. At a fundamental level, Elaine Aston and George Savona\textsuperscript{332} talk about theatre design operating on four distinct and interdependent levels: \textit{functional, sociometric, atmospheric and symbolic}.

\textbf{Functional}: In Shakespeare’s play \textit{Hamlet}, Ophelia is required to be buried, so the designer’s task is a practical one…we need a grave. Stephen Poliakoff’s \textit{Breaking the Silence} requires a decaying 1914 Russian Imperial Railway carriage.

\textsuperscript{331} Reference to these ideas may be found in: In\textit{garden, Roman. The Literary Work of Art}, [Trans. George G. Grabowicz], Northwestern University Press, Illinois, 1973. and In\textit{garden, Roman. The Ontology of the Work of Art}, [Trans. Raymond Meyer and John T. Goldthwait], Ohio University Press, Ohio, 1989. They are comprehensively discussed in the chapter: \textit{Art: the alternative concretisations of the lacunae of indeterminacy.}

There are also times when a designer’s practical skill is needed to resolve the text’s demand of a visible and seamless shift from one setting to another [as in the example of *A Map of the World*, below] or to accommodate two productions in repertory – for example *Oedipus* and *Manual of Trench Warfare*, where the vast desolate landscape of Thebes needed to be turned into a claustrophobic trench in a barren Gallipoli landscape, where two men huddle - a microcosm of a meaningless existence.
Sociometric: At this level the designer’s task is to signify status, nobility, wealth, poverty etc. This is generally achieved through the use of established conventions such as furnishings, clothing, accoutrements, even family crests if needs be.
**Atmospheric:** At this level the designer’s task is to create an emotional ambience or mood for each of the play’s scenes. Expressionistic techniques and effects are applied to setting, sound, lighting, and even properties and costumes to amplify the desired effect.


**Symbolic:** At this level the designers’ task is more subjective; according to Aston and Savona “metaphoric representation” is used to heighten the primary themes of the text. In the example of Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* [below], the mansion *Tara* from the film “Gone with the Wind” is used as a symbol of the impossible dream and imaginary world of the central figure [the mother] in the play. The larger than life painted representations of Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall and Clark Gable symbolise the aspirations she has for her daughter and son, while the socio-iconographic furniture and properties are used as symbols to reveal the mother’s “real” social and economic circumstances.
I agree that such distinctions are indeed useful as lenses through which to focus the designer’s [and spectator’s] attention, however conceiving of these levels as rigid and fixed categories is conceptually problematic, as it does not allow for the indeterminacy of signs. [I am sure Aston and Savona would agree that in effective theatre design all levels are present in varying proportions.] In addition, Aston and Savona assert that it is at the “symbolic” level where we find “metaphoric representation.” ¹³³ I am not convinced. While agreeing that the *symbolic* and the *metaphoric* share a similar assignment, they have different conceptual frameworks. Having already distinguished between *images* and *signs*, I would now like to look at how *symbols* and their partners *metaphors* differ and function as part of my theatre work.

**Symbology** may be understood as the study or interpretation of symbols and the representation and expression by means of symbols. It is important to keep in mind that however expressive symbols might be, they can never be the things that they stand for - they serve only as ladders connecting different levels in the narrative structure. In the case of symbols the connecting ladders, as it were, remain for others to use and for us to climb back down. Anthropologists, including Victor Turner, have suggested that there are two ways symbols operate within narrative structures: *phonetic* and *phonemic*. *Etic* refers to the ways symbols are read from *outside* the narrative and comment upon it [reflective]. ³³⁴

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¹³³ ibid.
³³⁴ See: Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, PJA Publications, New York, 1982. p. 65. [“In linguistics, terms ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ are used to characterize opposed approaches to the study of linguistic data. An ‘etic’ approach is one where the physical patterns of language are described with a minimum of reference to their function within the language system, whereas an ‘emic’ approach takes full account of functional relationships, setting up minimal contrastive units as the basis of a description. only those features of the pitch pattern which are used to signal meanings.” Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen Eds. *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, Harper Collins, London, 2000. p. 266.]
In *The Marriage of Figaro* example below, multiple reflections are used as *phonetic* symbols of the themes of duplicity and deception; they make us reflect on how these themes are deployed as part of the play’s narrative.

![Image of a theatrical production](image)


**Emic** refers to the way symbols are read *within* the narrative and comment upon it. In addition, *emic* also refers to the way symbols draw our attention to how/why we have read them; they make us conscious of our own consciousness. [*reflexive*]. In the Samuel Beckett *Endgame* example below, the characters Hamm and Clov’s “slapstick” fascination with “time” is represented by the *phonemic* symbols of the clock and large wristwatch. These symbols not only comment upon the characters fascination with time, but also on our own preoccupation with time; they make us reflexive of how “time” asserts itself on our lives.

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335 ibid.
“Symbols, both as sensorily perceptible vehicles [signifiants] and as sets of ‘meanings’ [signifiés] are essentially involved in multiple variability, the variability of the essentially living, conscious, emotional, and volitional creatures who employ them not only to give order to the universe they inhabit, but creatively to make use also of disorder, both by overcoming or reducing it in particular cases and by its means questioning former axiomatic principles that have become a fetter on the understanding and manipulation of contemporary things.” 336

Implicit in Turner’s observation is the insight that symbols may be used not only to order one’s world [a reflective project] but also to disrupt given assumptions of how our world is constructed [a reflexive project]. While I appreciate Turner’s insightful analysis of symbols, I believe that in our haste to construct a credible world we are apt to conflate the difference. What I am alluding to is this: just as there are different types of images, so too are there different types of symbols. What I am arguing is that a metaphor is a specific type of symbol, and that symbols trigger reflectivity and metaphors trigger reflexivity. As I have already explained symbols have an etic function, we perceive their connectivity within the narrative, and immediately respond. Metaphors have an emic function; we also respond to their connectivity within the narrative, but they have an added

336 ibid. p23.
dimension—they compel us to become reflexive of their connectivity with our lives outside the theatre. As in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, metaphors work by substituting an external [physical] landscape for an internal [mental] world. In a similar way the set design for Lorca’s *Bodas de Sangre* metaphorically prefigures the tragic chaos that is spilled when the traditional laws of religion and blood-line are severed and, in addition, alerts us to the potential devastating affect it can have on our own lives.

![Set Design: Act 1 and Act 2](image)

**Act 1.**

**Act 2.**

Metaphors project forms that deliberately lack any clear division between fantasy and fact and have a healthy disregard for the constraints of time, which can expand, contract or fold back on itself. Like symbols, they serve as ladders connecting narrative structures; however unlike symbols, once we have climbed the ladder it is taken away.

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337 Kafka, Franz. *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, [Tran. Willa and Edwin Muir], Penguin, England, 1983. In Franz Fafka’s short story *Metamorphosis*, the protagonist Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning to discover, without any prior warning, that he is a beetle. Kafka’s metaphor connects one reality to another without offering any chance of return. Thus like Gregor we are condemned to accept this metamorphosis and spend the rest of the story believing he is a beetle.
As violations of semantic order metaphors hold open the gap between the sign and its potential meaning; meaning is always in dispute and “reality” is projected as a condition of becoming, of potential, of possibilities. Denied the traditional position of knowing, the spectator is forced, by having to construct meaning out of fragments, to operate in a tradition outside their familiar framework. Metaphors are not so much concerned with reproducing the visible as they are with rendering visible the forces that lie beneath it. Like myth and ideology, metaphors creatively flourish beneath consciousness.
As a theatre practitioner, I am as much interested in the way people think as I am in what stimulates thinking. I like to consider my theatre works as provocations that draw attention to what resides unspoken behind our thinking, behind our histories. They are not illustrative or explanatory; they invite encounter in order to prompt new or unexpected insights, so to speak. Given the polysemic nature of theatre’s sign systems [languages] the spectator’s attention is constantly adjusting as it elides from one sign system to another. As spectators we never simply look at one thing; we are constantly relating what we see in one part of our visual field to what we see in other parts. Space metamorphosises, time slips and actors move in and out; all this complexity is not arbitrary; apart from aleatoric exceptions, it is the product of all the theatre languages and is contingent upon a set of rules.

“…not to render the visible, but to render visible”

Paul Klee 338

“To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein


Ever since Richard Wagner’s notion of gesamtkunstwerk envisaged opera as a synthesis of the words, music and spectacle, theatre practitioners and theorists have embraced Wagner’s theory by acknowledging, in varying degrees, the service of all the theatre signifying systems in the construction of the theatre production’s mise-en-scène. An awareness of the disparity and complexity of the signifying systems that participate in the construction of a production’s mise-en-scène [namely, the script, lighting, sound, set design, costume design, make-up, acting, directing, public relations, production management and audience reception] may be clearly seen in the work of Patrice Pavis, David Birch, and Elaine Aston, all of whom have recognised and

340 Reprinted in Fuerst, Walter René and Hume, Samuel J. Twentieth-Century Stage Decorations, Dover, New York, 1967. Plate 35. [The four operas in the Ring Cycle are: Das Rheingold (The Rhinegold); Die Walküre (The Valkyrie); Siegfried and Götterdämmerung (Twilight of the Gods)]
acknowledged these systems as sites where interventions into the way we conceive, construct, and critique theatre may be made. The term “mise-en-scène” refers to the sum total all the decisions that have been made on the written text [script] during its transformation into the performance text. The French semiotician, Patrice Pavis sees the “mise-en-scène” as the “confrontation of text and performance” and the “bringing together or confrontation, in a given space and time, of different signifying systems, for an audience.”

At this point it is conceptually useful to think of these signifying systems as languages, especially since they can be used to either “anchor” or “convey” meaning. However just as the meaning of a word [“parole” –signifier (speech)] is limited until it is organised into a signifying system [“langue” –signified (language)], so too are the syntactic apparatus of all the theatre languages. If and only when these languages are clearly “uttered” do they begin to construct their own “texts” that can be read independently of each other. It is in this way that theatre languages operate as signifying systems in the performance of the productions mise-en-scène.

It is exceedingly important to remember that each language has its own rules of articulation and we need to understand and respect them. Consider: In 1985, I was directing a theatre production for an established theatre company in Western Australia. The company was in the process of moving to new premises. The general manager of the company asked the company’s artistic director to make a number of crucial artistic decisions on the production, in order for him to successfully complete his part in the process. In response to the manager’s genuine request, the artistic director wrote him a poem. I hasten to add the artistic director’s response was also

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347 Utterances are usually considered as emissions of sounds, but one may enlarge this notion and consider as ‘utterances’ any production of signals. Thus I utter when I draw an image, when I make a purposeful gesture or when I produce an object that, besides its technical function, aims to communicate something.” [Eco, Umberto. The Theory of Semiotics, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1979. p. 151.]
genuine. Despite the genuine intent of both parties, it struck me that the rules of each other’s language were being misunderstood. If, as Pavis might suggest, theatre is an arena in which artists give up the safety and calm of their private studio for the chaos of the rehearsal floor; where the director, actor, lighting designer, writers, composers, designers and publicists etc. all negotiate for authority over the written text’s transformation into the performance text, then it should also be a space where there is to be found a lingua franca.

Perhaps in an attempt to identify a lingua franca David Birch, in his book The Languages of Drama, suggests that such categories as “the writer” and “the play” are problematic. He is quick to point out, that he is not dismissing them; he is merely asserting that as such given and conventionalised categories, they deflect analysis. Birch implies that a common language may best be understood if we think of them as performances.

“That does not mean that there is no place for writing and writers in drama praxis - far from it - what it means is that as critical/theoretical categories “the play” and “the writer” are beyond analysis. What we can handle, I would suggest, with varying degrees of confidence, is the concept of drama texts in terms of: the performance of writing; the performance of reading; the performance of analysis; the performance of rehearsal; the performance of production; the performance of reception.”

What Birch is clearly implying is that not only are theatre languages intrinsically performative but that the written text is only one of the languages that tries to be heard in the struggle for power over the performance text. Assembling the participation of all the “performances” into a seamless performance text is the role of today’s theatre director.

“…the word is a small visible portion of a vast unseen formation.

Peter Brook.

349 For a more detailed discussion on the idea of the performative see the Chapter: Performing Theatre.
The role of the director is made more complex [and I would argue more exciting] by the fact that it is impossible to work on refining one of the languages without considering the effect that this is having on another. In order to become more articulate, each language must be aware of the existence of the other and adjust itself in relation to the other’s emergence. For example the language of design cannot be refined without consideration of the language of acting; acting cannot be refined in isolation from directing, or directing from design and so forth. Consider the previously used example from Shakespeare’s Hamlet, when Horatio asks of the ghost of Hamlet’s father to “stay illusion”. We immediately encounter interpretative problems that require the service of all the languages of theatre to resolve. Firstly, what does Horatio mean by “stay illusion”? How is it to be uttered? Shakespeare gives us no indication. What does an “illusion” look like? Where is Horatio when he speaks these words? What is his temperament? How is he dressed? It is precisely the concretisation of these indeterminate lacunae as part of the mise-en-scène that is the function of all the theatre languages and the responsibility of the artistic director.

What is significant in this symbiotic process, as Pavis has indicated, is that the mise-en-scène [the synthesis of all the languages] exists as a structural entity, “only when received and reconstructed by a spectator from the production.” 351 Pavis is implying that at the same time as we are refining all the languages associated with the construction of the performance text we are also refining the

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audience who will participate in its reception, or [as Birch would have it] who will participate in the
performance of reception.

Without dismissing the significance of the audience in the theatrical experience [which is taken
up in the chapter *Pleasure and the Spectator*], I want to focus specifically on the way the
language of “design” participates in the construction of a production’s *mise-en-scène*. When I use
the term design, I am referring to the *visual text* that includes *set, costume* and *lighting* design. I
am not dismissing *sound* design, as I am conscious how sounds impacts on the way we see, I am
merely acknowledging it as another language with a distinctly different set of rules. Dictated by
history and tradition the *visual text* was generally inferred to be at the service of the *written text*,
and the *written text* unconditionally accepted as the site where all the needs and solutions to the
design requirements were to be found. As such the role of the *visual text* was seen as supportive -
to literally illustrate the *written text*. In so doing it was relegated to the order of decoration, where
its function was unary. The French semiotician Roland Barthes refers to a photograph as unary
“When it emphatically transforms ‘reality’ without doubling it”. The same may be said of
design as decoration; it transforms reality simply by its appearance in a theatre frame, yet its
meaning remains anchored by its literal referent in reality. It may be argued that design as
decoration concerns itself with *images* that have not yet achieved the status of *signs*; *images*
remain unary and *signs* transform reality by doubling its meaning.

Despite the visual splendour of much decorative work, it was always at the service of the narratives
they were meant to illustrate. It would be all too easy and glib to assert that *design as decoration*
was only the concern of designers who were bereft of intelligence; intelligence had nothing to do
with it, it emerged as a dominant style because it was an integrant of a model of theatre that not
only prioritised the written text but also a psychological model of acting, that found its authority in
the “method style of acting” established by the Russian realist actor and director Constantin

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signs are discussed in the chapter *The Pleasure and the Spectator.*]
353 For a clear distinction between “images” and “signs” see the chapter: *Images, Signs, Symbols and Metaphors.*
Stanislavski’s theories were later adapted by both Lee Strasberg, in his Actor’s Studio, and Stella Adler in her Group Theatre, in New York.

Ironically, Stanislavski in his desire for realism in the theatre was to enthusiastically search all of Moscow looking for “real” stage properties for his plays, oblivious to the fact that the appearance on the stage of objects from material reality pointed only to the stage’s inauthenticity. [As I have argued earlier, a unary object located within the theatre frame somehow changes the object’s ontological status.] In his search for authenticity, Stanislavski was adamant that the scene should appear as if it were real, and we as voyeurs watched as if through a non-existent fourth wall, while the actors behaved as if we were not there. Anything that broke the tension established by this convention was considered undesirable and eschewed. A practical example of this may be found not only in the rejection of anachronistic stage properties, but also in the rules of lighting at the time. Shadows falling on walls, that may potentially distract the spectator’s attention and thus

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355 Lee Strasberg was instrumental in continuing Stanislavski’s work through the establishment of his acting school in New York, known as The Actors Studio. He trained actors in the realistic style of acting developed by Constantin Stanislavski that was later refined into what was to become known as “method acting”.

356 The Group Theatre was a cooperative ensemble dedicated to producing plays about contemporary social issues. The group utilised the psychological model of acting developed by Stanislavski as a means of exploring the depths of the soul.

disrupt their belief in the “real” world on the stage, were to be washed out by cross-lighting and fill-lighting. In retrospect it was not so much “reality” that Stanislavski desired but his own heightened version of it.

So as not to imply that it was only other designers that committed the indiscretion of decorating the stage, I have cited an example of one of my early theatre productions.


“Realism”, in the theatre, was always in danger of being strangled by its own conventions, and for those of us who wanted to breathe without having to be prompted, an alternative to realism seemed a necessary evolutionary stage. Despite the fact that there were precursors to this evolution, notably the French anarchist theatre practitioner Alfred Jarry [1873-1907] and the Russian constructionist theatre director, Vsevolod Meyerhold [1874-1940], this was to take decades to completely evolve.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ A detailed survey of the history of theatre design is outside the scope of this work, however a brief overview of the stage design is given in the Introduction. For more information see: Rowell, Kenneth. Stage Design, Studio Vista, London, 1971.
The prevailing rhetoric of theatre designers over the last twenty years, and I allude specifically to my theatre work, has been to speak of creating designs that encourage the audience’s critical reception and response, necessitating them to both feel and think with their eyes.

“Terms such as ‘paranoia’, ‘narcissism’, and ‘exhibitionism’ suggest how powerfully visual experience, both directed and received, can be tied to our psychological processes…vision has been frequently linked by psychologists to the ‘normal’ emotions of desire, curiosity, hostility, and fear. The remarkable ability of images originally construed as mimetic representations or aesthetic ornaments to be transformed into totemic objects of worship in their own right also bespeaks vision’s power to evoke hypnotic fascination. And scopophilic and scopophobic inclinations have also been widely acknowledged as fundamental aspects of the human psyche.” 359

By seeking the audience’s critical response to my designs, I was asserting, as I have argued before, that design could be uttered as a “visual text” – a “text” that could be read not in the same way as the “written text” but in congruence. This notion fits neatly with the idea of intertextuality – “a term coined by Julia Kristeva to describe the necessary interdependence that any literary text has with a mass of others which preceded it. A literary text is not an isolated phenomenon, it is constructed from a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.” 360

The implication is that the “visual text” is not [although I appreciate that it can be] oppositional to the “written text”, it functions in relation to it; in fact it is in this relational axis that there may be found the potential for destabilising received ways that both texts may be made to mean.

Whether or not we agree, we cannot deny that in this age of post-modernity, the privileged position of the written text has been displaced by the audience’s propensity to make and transform new meanings outside of conventional narrative structures. This is not a capacity found only in theatre; it extends to the way we construct meaningful lives. In the words of the contemporary ethnographer James Clifford:

“Twentieth-century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions. Everywhere individuals and groups improvise local performances from (re)collected pasts, drawing on foreign media, symbols, and languages”.

“... ‘culture’ is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitively interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal, and emergent.” 361

What Clifford is suggesting is that any attempt to conceive of culture as a stable unary entity is destined to fail. The same may be said of theatre; any attempt to restrict the polysemy of theatrical sign systems to a fixed and unary reading is equally doomed. Conscious of this, my recent theatre

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works have aimed at creating ontological spaces that facilitate each spectator’s differing perceptual frame; effectively allowing for each of them to make and transform their own independent meaning…while at the same time not attenuating the integrity of the written text.

In order to achieve this aim, competence in the use of all the disparate theatre languages employed in the construction of performance text is crucial. Even when employed solely as a designer, I would approach the work cognisant of all the participatory languages. Despite Jerzy Grotowski’s “Towards a Poor Theatre” assertion that an actor and an audience are all that is required for a theatre performance, it would be difficult to agree with his vision without conceding the need for a space in which the actors could be seen [the language of design]; without decisions as to what the actors would wear -even as naked actors they would be dressed [the language of costuming]; without lights to facilitate seeing [the language of lighting] and without giving the work some public visibility in order to attract an audience [the language of the publicity].

As I have said before all the theatre languages [i.e. the written text, lighting, sound, set design, costume design, make-up, acting, directing, public relations, production management and audience reception] participate in a way that is not simply perfunctory; they are instrumental in codifying the mise en scène of the “performance text” and each has its own independent code. The “visual text” is encoded with a hierarchy of signs that is organised as part of an itinerary of watching for the audience. It is conceived as a compeer to the written text, one that amplifies and “feeds back” its embedded meaning, effectively multiplying the audience’s potential to make new meanings.

Consider the production of Shakespeare’s Hamlet [below] in which Hamlet, during the travelling players’ performance of the “Mousetrap”, has dressed the duplicitous Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in false nose-glasses-moustache-eyebrows masks, Claudius in a fool’s cap, Gertrude in a feather boa, Polonius in a trick “knife-through-the-head”, while one of the attendants is made to carry a puppet…the meaning of the visual text is clear.

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In the following example of Joe Orton’s *Entertaining Mr Sloane* the visual text is assembled so as to provoke specific readings and responses from the spectators; the omnipresent authors’ cynical face wallpapers the room and couch, pictures of the royal family [along with a glow-in-the-dark icon of Christ on the cross] ironically grace the walls, a concave mirror distorts any reflection of the room’s inhabitants, while kitsch “orientalist” standard lamps frame the stage picture. Stage right and left are filled with visual reminders not only of Orton’s conscious theatricality but also of the theatricality of his life. Remnants from other plays, including his own, litter the extremities of the stage. On stage right can be seen the ironing board -a visual reference to John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*, and closer scrutiny reveals a reference to the skull from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In an attempt to metaphorically provoke a connection between the ontology of the stage and that of the audience, on stage right one of the ornamental flying ducks that make their appearance on the central part of the set may also be seen. The ladder on stage left alludes to the *deus ex machina* ending to Orton’s play *What the Butler Saw*, while the hammer embedded in the doll’s head alludes to Orton’s tragic death at the hands of his lover.
More recently, my theatre designs have concerned themselves with assemblages that have the potential to trigger unexpected and alternative readings to those encoded into the visual text. Not only do they function as texts that can be read concurrently with the other texts but they also assume an additional excessive condition\textsuperscript{363} that has the potential to elicit unexpected synesthetic connections.\textsuperscript{364} The word potential is worth considering: standing in the middle between possibility and actuality it suggests a liminal space.

This method of working is predicated on two primary considerations; firstly an interest in what something might become rather than what it is; an interest in creating objects whose indeterminacy multiplies their meaning rather than reducing it to a singular semantic reading, and

\textsuperscript{363} An account of what is meant by excessive condition is given in the chapter: Affective Space.

\textsuperscript{364} This idea is taken up in the chapter, Sight.
secondly a conviction to design as a protagonist in the performance. In the chapter Performing Theatre I distinguish between the nomenclatures, perform, performance and performing. I argue that performance is a site where a performer could exist [i.e. perform] “at the edge of the future where the present is created”, and that to remain performing required one to make subjective choices. Thus the nomenclature “perform” refers to the act of making choices –“and as we are aware whenever we make choices we create meaning.” What I am suggesting, in this instance, is that the spectator in those moments of encounter with indeterminate objects, that refuse to yield immediate meaning, is forced to make their own meaning by making subjective choices…in other words, to perform. Following this logic it is not difficult to extend the analogy to include the object as an integral part of the encounter, to see it also as a protagonist in performance.

The fecundity of this work is contingent upon the intensity of the object and its duration. I have found that the organisational and compositional strategies of ambiguity and paradox multiply an object’s meaning and thus are useful tools in ensuring the work’s intensity. In the words of Anne Ubersfeld:

“When he [sic] is faced with signs which he does not understand, to which he cannot give a name (objects, gestures, discourse), which do not refer to anything in his experience, or, more simply which pose a problem for him, the spectator’s own inventiveness is stimulated and it is up to him to manufacture the relationship between the sign and its intelligibility, or its relationship to the world...”  

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365 An account of what is meant by intensity is given in the chapter: Affective Space.  
366 Both ambiguity and paradox are discussed at length in the chapter: Liminality, Ambiguity and Paradox.  
As a way of clarifying how ambiguity and paradox contribute to the intensity of a work, let us begin by considering Peter Brook’s idea of a stage as an *empty space*. Already, as Brook argues, the “empty space” is meaningful, simply because it is now read within the additional frame of a stage and as such the space is charged with the *performance* of expectation. This idea is usefully illustrated by borrowing the concept of *figure* and *background* from Gestalt psychology as described by Merleau-Ponty.

"Let us imagine a white patch on a homogeneous background. All the points in the patch have a certain ‘function’ in common, that of forming themselves into a ‘shape’. The colour of the shape is more intense, and as it were more resistant than that of the background; the edges of the white patch ‘belong’ to it, and are not part of the background although they adjoin it: the patch appears

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to be placed on the background and does not break it up. Each part arouses the expectation of more than it contains, and this elementary perception is therefore already charged with a meaning. When Gestalt theory informs us that a figure on a background is the simplest sense-given available to us, we reply that this is not a contingent characteristic of factual perception, which leaves us free, in an ideal analysis, to bring in the notion of impressions. It is the very definition of the phenomenon of perception, that without which a phenomenon cannot be said to be perception at all. The perceptual ‘something’ is always in the middle of something else, it always forms part of a ‘field’."

Returning to Brook’s empty stage we find, despite its ontological status, it is as yet not very articulate. Consider what happens if we place a dining room chair in the middle of the stage. We immediately start making decisions [meaning], because the chair is in dialogue with all the “other” chairs that are part of our past experience. Nothing is ever seen in isolation; it is always conditioned by its relationship to something else that we know. However, once again, it is still not very articulate. Now consider moving the chair say to the back corner of the stage; or half off stage; or lying upside down or inexplicably just visibly hanging from the ceiling. Something happens to the space…its concerns appear to be more than reason and function. It attains the “excessive condition” that I referred to above. While participating in the conventions of space and time, it appears to disregard the constraints of their logic. In so doing it begins to warp the space, to fold it, as if it is still the initial space but with another space layered on top of it.

Return the chair to centre stage: consider the addition of a table and more chairs, right down to the damask table cloth, silver ware, crystal wine glasses and candelabra. The once empty space now becomes a familiar place –where a formal dinner party might be performed. What we now have is the image of a dinner party setting that we all recognise; it is literal, coherent, and meaningful. It is an image of a dinner party that, like the chair’s appearance, is in dialogue with all the dinner parties that we may have, or have not, attended. We could continue this example by completing the setting with walls, paintings, sideboards and French windows, etc…and perhaps

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music. Instead, let’s fill the stage floor with sand that in some parts almost buries the furniture. We continue to recognise but what we recognise is no longer coherent, and its meaning no longer certain, especially when the performers enter and appear to be oblivious to the sand. It is not that the space has lost all meaning but that now, ambiguous and paradoxical, it seems to be full of meaning. This, in a sense, is the geometry of excessive condition I spoke of before. Faced with this condition, we look for a context in which to harbour its chaos. Meaning, having become unmoored, is finally anchored [as Barthes would have us believe] by the title of the play we are about watch: Chekhov’s The Three Sisters. Within this contextualisation we once again begin to make subjective choices; we begin to participate in the visual text’s performance. Chekhov’s play deals with the lives and desires, as its title suggests, of three sisters, all of whom dream of one day leaving the suffocating boredom of country existence for the excitement and promise of a new life in the city. As the text unfolds we find that their dreams remain just dreams; dreams that are buried by the country that holds them.

The following example of Ray Lawler’s Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, exhibits a similar excessive condition. The once comfortable and reliable working-class Melbourne Terrace house, so indicative of 1950’s Australia, has been rendered to stone. The sturdy walls, turned to columns, onto which bas-reliefs of bacchanalian figures from Norman Lindsay paintings have been moulded, encroach on the furnishings -petrifying them into a setting for a ritual that has been performed for the last seventeen years. Behind the columns, sixteen larger than life “kewpie” dolls, like some demented Greek chorus, knowingly look over the events that are about to unfold…each a foreboding sign of the profanation of the ritual that is a central theme in Lawler’s text.

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371 This type of design assemblage is comprehensively discussed in the chapter: Sight, under synesthetic metaphor.
372 Norman Lindsay [1879 -1969] was an Australian writer, artists and sculptor, whose depiction of sumptuous nudes were highly controversial for his day.
I hasten to add that it is not expected of the spectators to read all of the visual text; it is offered as part of the overall narrative texture of the performance. As Anne Ubersfeld alerts us:

“Clearly, the possibilities of the spectator's semantic invention are not unlimited: they are dependent upon the nature of the public and its theatre-going habits.” 373

However, I like to assemble visual texts that do not limit the way spectators may respond to them. Like Damien Hirst, I too like the idea of pushing people to think in ways that they may not have thought they could, where their memory and description of how they are affected may be seen as a performance of the text…the performance of reception as David Birch would have it. The fact that the individual memories vary so dramatically, speaks not so much about the distortion of memory but of the underlying subjective nature of the relation between the visual text and spectator. Designs, which do not have a literal connection between the objects and its referents in reality, serve as better triggers for the subjective responses in the spectators.

“It is not so much the painting that excites me as that the painting unlocks all kinds of values of sensation within me which returns me to life more violently”

Francis Bacon

PERFORMING THEATRE

“Performance seeks a kind of psychic and political efficacy, which is to say, performance makes a claim about the Real-impossible”

Peggy Phelan

I think my theatre work may be more clearly understood when seen as a vector of the more complex matrix of performance. Like performing, it gestures towards the value of experiences which leave no visible trace of their subjective encounters, relying solely on the intensity of their appearance for the strength of their affect. The more intense their appearance, the more intensely their disappearance is felt. The “after-effect of disappearance is the experience of subjectivity itself.” The American performance theorist Peggy Phelan’s use of the term “after effect” is a reference to a visual phenomenon associated with our perception of colour. When two colours of the same tone and hue appear in close proximity they produce a flicker. The intensity of this effect can induce an after image; i.e. a colour patch that seems to float in front of our eyes. The more intense the effect the longer the after image remains.


1789…and all that. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.

ibid. p. 148.
The phenomenon of “after affect” is discussed in the chapter: Colour.
I am interested in precisely these kinds of triggers; whose “affect effect” can stimulate subjective responses. As such my work shares the same assignment as performance. A brief foray into the performance arena may help to clarify the connection.

My use of the term *performance* embraces not only the structured performances that are set aside for such events as theatre, musical concerts and dance, but also the anthropological performances of everyday human activity as we go about making our histories. [I will discuss the *performative* nature of human behaviour at a later stage in this chapter.] Brooks McNamara and Richard Schechner comprehensively identified the divergence associated with this phenomenon called *performance*:

“What is a performance? A play? Dancers dancing? A concert? What you see on TV? Circus and Carnival? A press conference by whoever is President? The shooting of the Pope as portrayed by media-or the instant replays of Lee Harvey Oswald being shot? And do these events have anything to do with ritual, a week with Grotowski in the woods outside of Wroclaw, or a Topeng masked dance drama as performed in Peliatan, Bali? Performance is no longer easy to define or locate: the concept and structure has spread all over the place. It is ethnic and intercultural, historical and ahistorical, aesthetic and ritual, sociological and political. Performance is a mode of behavior, an approach to experience; it is play, sport, aesthetics, popular entertainments, experimental theatre, and more”.

“Performance”, as McNamara and Schechner suggest, continually redefines itself as it embraces the appearance of new hybrid forms. This ambiguous and indeterminate ontological status of performance separates it from any of the other creative arts and as such it is difficult to conceptually locate and define. We need to be circumspect about our use of the terms *perform*, *performative*, *performing*, and *performativity*, since these terms are apt to become synonymous - and in so doing obscure any endeavour to speak clearly and precisely about *performance*. The

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cultural anthropologist Victor Turner’s derivation of the word “performance” is a useful point from which to start our consideration.

“Performance is derived from the Middle English *parfournen*, later, *parfourmen*, which is itself from the Old French *parfournir* ['thoroughly'] plus *fournir* ['to furnish'] - hence performance does not necessarily have the structuralist implication of manifesting form, but rather the processual sense of ‘bringing to completion’ or ‘accomplishing’. To perform is thus to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act.” 379

As humans, we are often distinguished from other species by our ability to reflect upon our actions and in so doing modify our behaviour. It is the modification of behaviour that is of interest, for a phenomenological perspective reveals the reflective modification of human behaviour as fundamentally *performative*. The cultural anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff argues:

“…they are ‘reflective’ in the sense of showing ourselves to ourselves. They are also capable of being ‘reflexive’, arousing consciousness of ourselves as we see ourselves. As heroes in our own dramas, we are made self aware, conscious of our consciousness. At once actor and audience, we may then come into the fullness of our human capability -and perhaps human desire to watch ourselves and enjoy knowing that we know.” 380

ANZAC Day memorial Dawn Service. 381 [Western Australia, April 25, 2005]. Photographs by Serge Tampalini.

381 Renovations to the War Memorial were not completed in time for the 2005 ceremony; so several video screens were erected to cater for the largest number of spectators in the history of the event. With regard to the safety of the spectators, the memorial was fenced off.
As I have mentioned, Turner believes that the intrinsically performative nature of human behaviour may be read as a four-phase dramatic sequence: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration. Turner refers to this schema as “social drama.” I have elaborated on his view in the chapter Liminality, Ambiguity and Paradox. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz effectively summarises Turner’s scheme:

“For Turner, social dramas occur on all levels of social organization from state to family. They arise out of conflict situations - a village falls into factions, a husband beats a wife, a region rises against the state-and proceed to their denouements through publicly performed conventionalized behavior. As the conflict swells to crises and the excited fluidity of heightened emotion, where people feel at once more enclosed in a common mood and loosened from their social moorings, ritualized forms of authority-litigation, feud, sacrifice, prayer - are invoked to contain it and render it orderly. If they succeed, the breach is healed and the status quo, or something resembling it, is restored; if they do not, it is accepted as incapable of remedy and things fall apart into various sorts of unhappy endings: migrations, divorces, or murders in the cathedral.”  

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What is interesting about both Turner and Myerhoff’s observations is the implication that there is an inherent connection between the performative nature of human behaviour and the propensity for humans to create specific performance events [such as theatre, dance, sport, etc.]. The implication is affirmed and extended by the performance theorist Elin Diamond who argues that:

“Performance, as I have tried to suggest, is precisely the site in which concealed or dissimulated conventions might be investigated. [...] When ‘being’ is de-essentialized, when gender and even race are understood as fictional ontologies, modes of expression without true substance, the idea of performance comes to the fore.” 383

What Diamond clearly does suggest is that we are able to use “performance” as the site where received notions of “gender” and “race” [as well as a myriad of other human temperaments] may be interrogated. The fact that these temperaments are always devised and rehearsed within a social frame suggests that they are always performative. It is this performativity that makes human behaviour ideally suited to the discursive practices of performance.

“As soon as performativity comes to rest on a performance, questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations, of emotional and political effects, become discussable.” 384

The performance research work of Peggy Phelan shares similar interests. In addition to the work of Diamond, Phelan clearly distinguishes the ontology of performance from the ontology of the other creative arts. Phelan argues that most creative arts [film, writing, painting etc.] freeze time in a repeatable now, while performance transforms time in an ever disappearing present.

“Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance”. 385

384 ibid.
“Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance...performance occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as “different”. The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present.” 386

While I find Phelan’s conception of performance persuasive, I am not totally convinced. It seems to me that it is the more intricate moments of performing, not the performance event, that marks itself through disappearance. My use of the term performing is best understood by re-thinking performance [as Diamond would have it] as the site in which performing takes place. This site may be reproduced each night, photographed or recorded on film, but those moments of performing resist reproduction.387 A similar dissatisfaction with Phelan’s position is expressed by Philip Auslander in his book, Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture, in which he argues against Phelan’s view in Unmarked: The Politics of Performance, that “the value of live performance resides in its very resistance to the market and the media, the dominant culture they represent, and the regime of cultural production that supports them.” 388

“I have already suggested that live performance is becoming progressively less independent of media technology. Phelan's claim that performance is linguistically independent from mass reproduction is based on a tautological argument. Phelan posits performance as nonreproductive and writing as a form of reproduction, allowing her to conclude that writing (language) cannot capture performance. To the extent, however, that mediatization, the technology of reproduction, is embedded within the language of live performance itself, performance cannot claim linguistic independence from mass reproduction, either. It interests me that although Phelan discusses performance artist Angelika Festa’s ‘Untitled Dance [with fish and others]’ [1987] in the context of her argument concerning the ontology of performance, she does not specifically address the encroachment of technologies of reproduction on this piece, in which Festa made extensive use of video technology to construct the images Phelan analyzes. It is ironic that the video camera, perhaps the sine qua non of the pressures

386 ibid.
387 A more comprehensive account of “performing” may be found in the appendix on the work of the theatre company, Performance (Re)Search.
that Phelan sees as compromising the ontological integrity of performance, is itself integral to the performance in question.” 389

In response to Auslander, Phelan is quick to point out that she is not blind to the role of technology [“mediated forms”] in performance.

“...I am not so stupid as to think live performance eschews technology. Performance is a technology. Medieval theatre was a technology. It was not the new technology, not, say, electronic technology, but it was technology: a plank and two boards, the definition of theatre. That's a technology!” 390

My impression is that Auslander falls into the same trap as Phelan –he too unintentionally conflates performing with performance. In an interview with Marquard Smith for the Journal of Visual Culture, Phelan states what she was trying to do, was ontologically distinguish performance from the photographic and recording arts.

“No we have streaming video, web casts, all sorts of media capable of recording and circulating live events. They can give us something that closely resembles the live event but they nonetheless remain something other than live performance. But these are very useful and very interesting tools and I am not against their use at all. But in terms of the ontological question, it's simply not the same thing. For me, live performance remains an interesting art form because it contains the possibility of both the actor and the spectator becoming transformed during the event’s unfolding. [It is precisely this transformation that I argue transpires during those moments of performing.] Of course, people can have significant and meaningful experiences of spectatorship watching film or streaming video and so on. But these experiences are less interesting to me because the spectator's response cannot alter the pre-recorded or remotely transmitted performance, and in this fundamental sense, these representations are indifferent to the response of the other. In live

389 ibid. p. 40.
performance, the potential for the event to be transformed by those participating in it makes it more exciting to me - this is precisely where the ‘liveness’ of live performance matters. Of course, a lot of live performance does not approach this potential at all, and of course many spectators and many actors are incapable of being open to it anyway. But this potential, this seductive promise of possibility of mutual transformation is extraordinarily important because this is the point where the aesthetic joins the ethical.”

In the appendix on the theatre research company Performance [Re]Search, I argue that to remain performing requires one to make subjective choices, and that the term perform references that specific moment of making a choice. Data gathered by P[R] suggests performance as a site wherein it is possible for each performer, by always viewing their objective actions through the lens of their subjectivity, to create a performing-self, and that the sustained existence of this performing-self is reliant upon the ability of the performer to consciously hold open the liminal space between themselves as subjects and themselves as objects.


391 ibid.
Returning abruptly to the project of my theatre work, I want to equate the liminal space between the performer as object and as subject to [in semiotic terms] the liminal space between the signifier and the signified. In a similar way that the performer’s holding open of the space between themselves as object and subject, allows for multiple subjective realities to be potentially visible, the holding open of the space between the signifier and the signified increases the signifier’s potential to generate new and unexpected meanings for a reader. The methodology employed in the “performing” model is the performer’s subjectivity; in the semiotic model the methodology is one of paradoxes and ambiguity that requires the audience’s subjective choices for their resolution.

“…ambiguous perceptions emerge as explicit acts: perceptions, that is, to which we ourselves give a significance through the attitude which we take up, or which answer questions which we put to ourselves.”

Whenever I make a theatre piece, I first work out several trajectories of potential meaning, and when they are there I know there are numerous others. I trust that. As I have said before, my

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392 For more information see the chapter: *Image, Sign and Symbol.*
393 This concept is discussed and explained in the chapter: *Performance [Re]Search.*
394 For more information see the chapter: *Liminality, Ambiguity and Paradox.*
interest lies in trying to find ways of making people think outside their usual parameters; paradoxes and ambiguity are productive tools for achieving this. I am as much interested in an audience’s reaction to my work as I am in the work itself; as much interested in what something might become as I am in what it is; more interested in increasing the potential for an audience to create alternative meanings, rather than limiting them to ones embedded by me. The triggers that allow spectators to do this are worthy of consideration.


“To perform is thus to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act.” 396

“...not to render the visible, but to render visible”

Paul Klee 397

LIMINALITY, AMBIGUITY and PARADOX  [the usual suspects]

“Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow”

T. S. Eliott

The French painter Paul Cézanne [1839–1906] has often been referred to as the founder of Modernism. Whether we agree or not, we cannot deny that he has had a major influence on the way artists see the world today. As an artist he retreated from the world and dedicated his life to what seemed then an astonishing and unacceptably new way of describing the impact of the world around him. Living in the south of France, he was to use his favourite mountain in the area, La Montagne Sainte Victoire, as a motif in his paintings no less than sixty times. It was how light played on the mountain that returned Cézanne to it. How Cézanne perceived light was how he perceived the world and how he painted light was how he conveyed his vision of the world to us.


Views of the mountain were left deliberately incomplete so that they could be completed in the imagination of the spectator. Cézanne wanted to avoid the interpretive activity that intervened between the visual event and the act of realizing the vision. What Cézanne desired to paint was the world seen objectively. The French philosopher, Merleau-Ponty in his article, “Cézanne Doubts”

identifies this “desire” as synonymous with “what recent psychologists have come to formulate: the ‘lived perspective’ -that which we actually perceive, is not a geometric or photographic one.” 402

According to Martin Jay, “this ‘lived perspective’ was in fact rooted in an experience prior to the artificial isolation of the senses and the hegemonic autonomy of sight.” 403

Cézanne showed us this ‘lived perspective’, by attempting to present all the objects in our visual field to all the senses at once.

“We see the depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects. Cézanne even claimed that we see their odor.” 404

In most instances before Cézanne, in order to solve such a problem the artist either adopted a fixed viewpoint and turned the painting into a window or used perspective –a scientific trick.

Perspective, as we know it in Western Art, did not emerge as a device until the Italian Renaissance. It relied on a fixed relationship between the viewer and the viewed. It was a device that meant that the visible world was arranged with a single spectator in mind. In such a view the viewing point was fixed and immovable, affirming the centrality of a single perception and suggesting a coherent unified spectator. This perception was inextricably tied to the belief that “man,” as the pinnacle of creation and at the centre of the universe, was the measure of all things …then Copernicus let it slip that the Earth revolved around the sun! Today we know that even our wondrous sun is only an inconsequential star amongst billions. But in AD1600, as Galileo under the threat of torture was eventually forced to acknowledge, 405 God was the measure of the ordered world and the earth was the centre of the universe. This fixed and single point of view was affirmed by the use of perspective.

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405 Galileo’s support for the heliocentric theory incurred the wrath of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1633, under the threat of torture, the Inquisition convicted him of heresy and forced him to recant his support of Copernicus.
The subconscious project of perspective was to make us unequivocally accept just one of the infinite set of possible interpretations of the visible world as the only one. In contrast, consider the drawings below in which we have multiple points of view [perspectives] which appear predicated by the idea that the artist was physically present in the landscape; by the artist’s constantly changing relationship [position] to the building.

Map drawing by Julian Tampalini at age 10. [1992] Detail: showing differing points of view contingent upon the “lived perspective” allied with being physically present at different points in the landscape.

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“The key difference to these two types of vision may be called epistemological [wanting to know something with certainty] and ontological [questioning the distinction between ideas and what is real]... the difference between the two concerns the spectatorial distance of the former in comparison with the embeddedness of the latter” 408

This distinction is reinforced by Martin Heidegger in Being and Time when he wrote:

“The basic state of sight shows itself in a tendency of Being which belongs to the everydayness –the tendency towards ‘seeing’. We designate this tendency by the term ‘curiosity’, which characteristically is not confined to seeing, but expresses the tendency towards a peculiar way of letting the world be encountered by us in perception” 409

Another way of appreciating the difference is suggested in the distinction that David Levin makes, in his book The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation, between assertoric [factual] and aletheic [conceptual] gaze. 410 Martin Jay encapsulates Levin’s distinction when he writes:

“The former is abstracted, monocular, inflexible, unmoving, rigid, ego-logical, and exclusionary; the latter is multiple, aware of its context, inclusionary, horizontal, and caring.” 411

The philosophical, scientific, and artistic paradigm shifts of the 20th Century were to quickly put an end to the belief in a well-ordered world. The then “East” German Philosopher, Walter Benjamin 412 asserted that before the invention of the still camera an image was fixed and so was its meaning. Now that it can be reproduced its meaning multiplies and multiplies into many meanings. The

invention of the movie camera was also to have the same disquieting affect on the idea of a fixed point of view from which to view the visible world. It exposed the certainty associated with a fixed point of view as fictive. Quantum physics and Postmodernism challenged the historically accepted perception of “man” at the centre of an ordered universe and argued that such a perception was misleading; instead we are merely the products of chance and coincidence, adrift in an infinitesimal corner of the universe. At the centre of quantum physics is the uncertainty or indeterminacy principle. In 1927, Werner Heisenberg claimed that it was impossible to simultaneously determine the position and speed of a moving electron. He argued that the frequency of the light required for us to observe an electron, actually interfered with the observation by altering its position. The implication was that it was impossible to know the world without affecting it. This conceptual stance is best illustrated by the thought experiment known as Schrödinger’s Cat -so called after the quantum physicist Edwin Schrödinger. Consider: A cat is placed in a box with a phial of poison, a small sample of a radioactive substance and a Geiger counter, arranged so that when one of the atoms decays, its decay will be detected by the counter, the phial of poison will be broken, and the cat will die. After a period of time, we are asked the question “is the cat alive or dead?” If we try and answer, without being allowed to open the box, we are immediately confronted by uncertainty. Surely, paradoxically, the cat is equally alive and dead! It is only when we open the box, [effectively participating in the thought experiment], that we can determine the cat’s true ontological status. It is interesting to contemplate, if upon opening the box we find that the cat is dead, what happened to the “live” cat that existed with equal potentiality prior to the box being opened. The Many Worlds Theory of quantum physics argues that the “live” cat continues to exist in a parallel universe.

“…Many Worlds Theory in which the world is continuously splitting into separate and mutually inaccessible branches, each of which contains different editions of the same actors performing different acts at the same time on different stages which somehow are located in the same place”

413

But that’s another story best left to those more qualified. What is significant is the implication that every time we make a choice, the world doubles and as a consequence so does its meaning. What is paramount is the participant observation of the spectator in a world constructed of possibilities and uncertainties; indeterminate and subject to chance.

At the same time as scientists were discovering the dual nature of light, thus giving rise to quantum physics, Cézanne was discovering that his beloved mountain changed according to the different ways light fell on it. Light was perceived as vibrations of colour and these vibrations defined the experience of the world he saw. Both Cézanne and the scientists agreed that the old way of seeing the world, grounded in 19th Century Realism and Newtonian Physics, was inadequate and more importantly inaccurate --for it was not a representation of how the world was, but of how we have come to know the world should be. Both unknowingly agreed that the significance of the observer was paramount. Cézanne told us to paint the world as we see it, and that even a simple movement of the head dramatically altered not only the appearance of a scene but also how one is present in it. It was not a “view” that Cézanne desired in his work but a suggestion of being physically present in the landscape. In so doing, he was exploring a paradox in the very process of art --the desire to render an image of what one sees without any falsity due to emotion, intellect, or accident.

“In so doing, Cezanne wanted to overcome the very distance between viewer and viewed, thus shattering the window's glass separating beholder from the scene on the other side. His task, therefore, was the recapturing of the very moment when the world was new, before it was fractured into dualisms of subject and object or the modalities of separate senses.”

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414 For hundreds of years scientists have been perplexed about two characteristics of light that appear to contradict each other. Light sometimes behaves like a wave and sometimes it behaves like a stream of particles that Max Plank [1900] described as photons. In 1704 Isaac Newton used the particle theory to explain the spectrum. The wave theory of light seems to be confirmed by the scientist Thomas Young’s [1801] observations of the patterns of refracted light. This dual nature can also be observed in the behaviour of electrons. Comprehensive research into the dual nature of light and other theories of Quantum Mechanics, may be found in the work of Professor Amit Goswami: *The Self-Aware Universe, Quantum Creativity, Physics of the Soul,* and *The Visionary Window.*

A visual exploration of this dualistic separation may also be seen in the work of the French Surrealist painter René Magritte.

“Cézanne has been credited with going beyond the Impressionist’s goal of capturing one fleeting moment in a still spatialized time and achieving instead ‘with varying intensity and success the pictorial realization of time as duration rather than as instantaneous succession.’ Although there is no evidence that the painter had read the philosopher [Merleau-Ponty], Cézanne’s carefully constructed works can be understood as an attempt less to catch flux on the canvas than to reanimate in the beholder the experience of the artist’s own endured time.”

According to Cézanne, painters must obey the laws of optics not the logic of the brain; what painting is about is primarily what the eyes think. When he said that art was “a construction after nature” he was implying that you do not paint nature, you represent it. The artistic movement known as Cubism was to take up Cézanne’s discoveries. With the belief that we construct a coherent world not by establishing a fixed point from which to view it but by the synthesis of a

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number of views from different points, the Cubists were to represent multiple points of view on the one canvas.

The belief in an uncertain and indeterminate world was not only the province of art and quantum physics. The Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup also encountered “uncertainty” in her work. During her ethnographic research, into the *huldufólk* [“hidden people”] of Nordic legend, high in the Danish mountains, she experienced an irrational event that resisted her goal for empirical analysis. Her work suggests that once we have experienced the *unreal* and sensed the limits of the *known*, we are faced with the uncertain problem of how to identify our data; in other words how to talk about it.

“In the field we are directly confronted with extraordinary events, be they instances of mind-reading, appearance of ghosts, powers of healing, or alien ways of seeing and knowing. We are not normally supposed to include our experience of the irrational in our scientific reports in other than

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strictly scholarly terms. However, in many instances the quality of ethnographic description stems from an admittance of the truth of unreality.”

“The empirical material in anthropology, or its ‘object’ if you wish, is to a large extent brought home by individual anthropologists. Fieldwork is the distinctive method to collect it, but anthropology is the means to carry it home, as it were. Thus, already when leaving the field we are directly confronted with the question of what ‘empirical’ should mean. Where and what is reality if it can be transplanted from context to text? As we know, fieldwork is a very strong personal experience, which transcends the limits of the known reality. Thus, in the process of fieldwork the very concept of reality will of necessity change. The unreal becomes empirical through personal experience; the distinction between materiality and unreality dissolves when the unreal materializes itself”. 420

Significantly, for my line of argument, Hastrup and Heisenberg like Cézanne, have all identified the existence of a space in which the subject/spectator understands that they can no longer conceptualize experience in the same way that they did in the gridded space of space/time…once again, a conceptually liminal space.

As I have already mentioned, the concept of liminal space was first used in association with liminality, itself initially used to describe a phase in a ritual process – specifically a rite of passage ritual. [Both “liminal” and “liminality” are derived from the Latin “limen”, meaning “threshold” 421]. The term “rite of passage” refers to rituals in which the participants are involved in a change of social status. Revolutions are readily identifiable examples of liminality, as are the diverse celebrations of Carnivale in which communities suspend their daily behaviour allowing anarchic exuberance to reign. It is also connected with seasonal transition rituals that involve entire

communities. The cultural anthropologist Arnold van Gennep identifies three stages in a rite of passage:

1. separation - used to signify a sacred space and time as distinct from the secular space and time. It includes symbolic behaviour, loss of previous status, and distortion of time;

2. transition - used to signify a period of ambiguity that does not hold any of the attributes of the preceding phase or the one to come;

3. incorporation - used to signify a stage where symbolic actions are employed to represent the return of the participants to a new and stable position in the total community.

While it may be argued that all of the three stages are inseparable and of equal importance, it is the “transitional” stage that best illustrates liminality, for it is here that the participants engage in “a present unmediated by a past or a future.” Interestingly, according to van Gennep, “ritual symbols in this phase fall into two types: those of effacement and those of ambiguity and paradox.” The term “effacement” is used to describe symbolic processes that make one inconspicuous or humble and modest.

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423 This ontological status is taken up as part of what I call affective space as discussed in the chapter: Affective.

The terms “ambiguity” and “paradox” denote moments where any precise meaning is uncertain; where symbols, exhibiting seemingly contradictory characteristics may be interpreted in more than one way.

Continuing the work of van Gennep into social rituals, the anthropologist Victor Turner adds that:

“In tribal societies and other pre-industrial social formations, liminality, provides a propitious setting for the development of [these] direct, immediate, and total confrontations of human identities. In industrial societies, it is within leisure, and sometimes aided by the projections of art that this way of experiencing one’s fellows can be portrayed, grasped, and sometimes realised.” 425

He also argues “liminality” “as the setting(s) in which new models, symbols, paradigms, etc., arise as the seedbeds of cultural creativity” and that it is “the analysis of culture into factors and their free or ‘ludic’ recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird, that is of the essence of liminality, liminality par excellence.” 426

Extending his anthropological research of social rituals into social conflicts, Turner [as I have previously alluded to] sees the primary feature in all kinds of social conflict as a four-phase dramatic sequence: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration -this is what he calls “social drama.” 427 Social dramas work themselves out the way a dramatic plot works and are replicated in both classical and modern occidental drama. What is significant is that Turner’s notion of social drama may be seen as analogous to the way I approach my theatre work. Spectators confronted with ambiguous and paradoxical signs that do not or will not conform to their normalised way of making meaning, sense a breach. The spectator’s cerebral and sensory faculties conflict and they experience crisis. In an attempt to redress the crisis they are forced to call upon the transcendental project of their imagination. If successful they will resolve the conflict into a new coherence that

425 Turner, Victor. From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play, PAJ, New York, 1982. p. 46. [Turner is quick to distinguish between liminal and liminoid. For Turner, liminal is a symbolic system generally associated with agrarian cultures, as distinct from the liminoid that focuses on genres, belonging to cultures that have developed after the industrial revolution, such as theatre, sport, or Carnivale].
426 ibid. p. 28.
427 Reference to Turner’s work may be found in the chapters: Sight, Performing Theatre, and the appendix on Performance [Re]Search.
will eventually be reintegrated into the expositional narrative of the performance. There are two things held in critical balance in this process: the intensity of the breach and the recombination stage. Without intensity the spectators may remain disinterested, however if the intensity is too great, [too paradoxical, too ambiguous], the spectator may simply be overwhelmed by its complexity, lose interest out of frustration, and finally, refuse to participate in the recombination stage and leave the theatre. The “recombination stage” does not imply the closure of spectator’s subjective participation, but the spectator’s willing reconnection with their individual interpretive processes.

The concept of “liminality” may be expanded to include a spatial dimension. This is especially evident [as I have already suggested] in the South American festival of Carnivale. Reiterating, Carnivale is a celebration of transgression in which communities are given licence, over several days, to suspend the rules that govern their normal “day-to-day” behaviour and replace them with anarchic exuberance. After the event, however, they are expected to dutifully return to the suspended rules. As Turner says:

“Meaning in culture tends to be generated at the interfaces between established cultural subsystems, though meanings are then institutionalized and consolidated at the centers of such
Julia Kristeva refers to Carnivale as “…a spectacle, but without a stage; a game, but also an undertaking; a signifier, but also a signified…the scene of the carnival, where there is no stage, no “theatre”, is thus both stage and life, game and dream, discourse and spectacle”

Kristeva’s implication that liminality may be found in the space between art and life is also contained in the Theatrum Mundi metaphor, which can be traced all the way back to Plato as well as found in the writings of Shakespeare.

“All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players.”

Shakespeare: As You Like It. [Act 2, Scene 7]

More recently another metaphor has replaced the Theatrum Mundi metaphor, namely “all of life is performance.” This metaphor has been dramatically demonstrated by the work of the New York based theatre company, Squat.

Squat began work in Hungary, eventually moving to a disused building in New York in 1977. The ground floor of their building was converted into a shopfront theatre with space for about sixty-five spectators sitting facing the window looking out onto the street. Large portions of Squat’s shows take advantage of this spatial configuration. On the street side of the window there is “life”; on the inside there is “art.” What Squat plays with, is the moving back and forth from one side to the other; people walking by, who stop to stare in the window, are unknowingly usurped as part of the

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431 The theatrum mundi or “the world as stage” metaphor, derives from classical sources such as Plato and Horace and from early Christian writers such as Saint Paul. Playwrights such as Molière and Shakespeare, and more recent writers such as Tom Stoppard and Samuel Beckett have used the motif in their works to emphasize the close relationship between the stage [read “art”] and life.

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performance by the amused insiders who see the outsiders as unable to frame what they [the insiders] are seeing. Sometimes Squat deliberately frames the street as part of the performance -as when an actor, seemingly being chased, runs past the window, and then a shot is heard. The work and conceptual stance of Squat is best illustrated by an example of the work, cited by Richard Schechner.433

As part of the production Mr Dead and Mrs Free...a jeep drives up on the sidewalk and stops close to the glass door adjoining the storefront window. Two soldiers in battle dress unload a bloody passenger from the back seat and carry him through the door into the theatre. They put him in a hammock. A priest and nurse attend him. Spectators gather outside the theatre, peering in and staring at the jeep on the sidewalk. Soon a police car arrives. [It is an actual New York City police car. Why did it arrive? Did someone in the theatre call for it? Or did a passerby? Do the police come every night? Don't they know that a ‘play’ is going on? It (‘Mr. Dead and Mrs. Free’) has been running more than a month when I saw it. Does Squat have permission to use Twenty-third Street? To drive a jeep onto the sidewalk?] Two cops get out of the car and talk to the performers next to the jeep. Then the cops enter the theatre through the glass door. The audience laughs. They laugh some more, and gasp, when a city ambulance, with all its lights flashing, drives up nose to nose with the police car. The cops confer with the performers in the theatre; one cop writes in his notebook. They leave. The ambulance leaves. The cop car drives off. Then the jeep drives away. The cops and the ambulance are ‘life’-but when the cops enter the theatre they are also ‘art.’ The jeep on the sidewalk is ‘art’ but to some passers-by it is ‘life.”

Squat deliberately problematises the categories of “art” and “life” to make us consider what their differences might be. They suggest that spectating is not an innocent act; by spectating we frame, redefine, and change that which we are seeing.

Thus it is not long into the practice of theatre/performance before we become conscious of its affiliation with the anthropologist’s use of the term *liminality*. For what is performance if not a state of “*liminal consciousness*” holding us suspended between illusion and reality, and what is a stage if not a space set aside from the secular. In the words of the performance theorist Richard Schechner “*performance is a paradigm of liminality.*” 435 It is precisely this concept of liminality that plays a principal part in the way I direct and design for theatre. I use it specifically to blur and merge the audiences’ visual distinctions; to create, in the words of Turner, “…*an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance.*” 436

> “When symbols are rigidified into logical operators and subordinated to implicit syntax-like rules, we become blind to the creative or innovative potential of symbols as factors in human action. By contextualizing symbols in the concrete, historical fields of their use they act, react, transact, and interact socially. Even when the symbolic is the inverse of the pragmatic reality, it remains

434 The final section of *Disappearances* could be viewed by the audience inside the theater, and through the windows by passersby outside.
intimately in touch with it, affects and is affected by it, provides the positive figure with its negative ground, thereby delimiting each, and winning for "cosmos" a new territory." ⁴³⁷

What I am arguing is that the creation of liminal spaces allows spectators the possibility of materialising something that exceeds their imagined modes of understanding and meaning making. I like to think of my works as pleasurably ambiguous; so much so that each spectator is encouraged and hopefully willingly participates in the unravelling of the ambiguity and in making sense of it in ways they may not as yet have thought possible. When I create a theatre design I am as much interested in the audiences’ reaction to it, as I am in its use by the director and actors.


“...in other words, in liminality people ‘play’ with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarise them. Novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements.” ⁴³⁸

It is important to keep in mind that liminal spaces may be induced by a multiplicity of simultaneously contributing forces. In the chapter, *Languages, Text and Performances*, I discussed theatrical lighting as one of the languages at the disposal of the director and of course, the lighting

⁴³⁷ ibid. p. 23.
⁴³⁸ ibid. p. 27.
designer. I would like to return to the language of lighting, particularly to see how colour, functioning as part of it, contributes to the creation of liminal spaces.

“It’s not what you see that is art, art is the gap”

Marcel Duchamp

COLOUR

“I saw all my colours in my mind: they stood before my eyes. Wild, almost crazy lines were sketched in front of me. It became... quite clear to me... that painting could develop just such powers as music possesses.”

Wassily Kandinsky

Most of our impressions of the world and even our memory of it seem to be based on sight. How do we see form? How do we perceive the movement of objects in space? How do we perceive colour? Colour is all pervasive; it infringes not only on our waking life but also on our dreams. The fact that we are able to dream in colour raises fundamental questions about what constitutes our colour vision. Despite being able to elicit sensory responses by directly acting on our nervous system and affecting us emotionally, our colour vision is curiously taken for granted. Colour exists as electromagnetic waves; different wavelengths and frequencies equal different colours. The wavelength of different colours is measured in nanometers and their frequency in hertz.

How we perceive colour is not as simple as it seems; an object’s colour is not perceived independently of its form, movement and its spatial configuration within our visual field. This phenomenon has been discussed in the chapter Sight.

“...there is no single cortical area to which all others report exclusively, either in the visual or in any other system.”

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441 A nanometer is one-billionth of a metre.
442 One hertz equals one cycle of the wavelength per second.
How we see colour is determined by the existence of the light receptors, *cones* and *rods*, on our retinas. *Cones* function in daylight conditions and give colour vision [*photopic vision*] and *rods* function under low light and allow us to see shades of grey [*scotopic vision*].\(^{444}\) [According to the neural scientists Kandel and Schwarts, the superiority of colour vision over brightness is evidenced by the fact that we can discern 7 million variations of colour and only 500 variations of brightness.\(^ {445}\)] At this point it is expedient to consider the distinction of colour as *light, pigment, sensation* and *information*.

**Colour as light:** The relationship between light and colour has fascinated scientists and artists for centuries. Any discussion on the colour theory of light must acknowledge the work carried out by Thomas Young [1773–1829] and further developed by Young and Herman von Helmholtz [1821-94].\(^{446}\) While their methodological practices varied greatly, they both agreed that colour is a *sensation*, and both argued that the explanation for the sensation of colour is not to be found in nature, but in humans. The Young-Helmholtz theory maintains that there are only three colour receptors [*cones*] that respond to red, green, and blue. [Colour blindness occurs when people are missing either all or some of the red, green or blue cones.] We now accept that the three primary colours are red, green and blue. The theory of trivariant colour vision attributes colour perception to the blending of three primary colours. This explains why the combination of all three colours is seen as white [figure 1].

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\(^{446}\) An introduction to their work may be found in Gregory, R. L. *Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing*, World University Library, London, 1966. pp. 90-118. [Helmholtz’s work *Physiological Optics* is still considered by many scientist as the most important research into vision].
Interestingly, when two sounds are mixed they do not produce a different pure third sound, but two colours can be mixed to give a third colour in which the two constituents cannot be identified. For example there are no separate receptors on our retinas sensitive to yellow light, so the receptors sensitive to green and red light combine giving us the sensation of yellow [figure 4]. [While we also perceive all the secondary and tertiary colours as “combinations”, curiously yellow is acknowledged as a primary colour]. However, trivariancy alone does not explain the three most significant features of colour perception: colour opponency, simultaneous colour contrast, and colour constancy.447

Colour opponency refers to the fact that certain colours are never perceived in combination. For example we cannot perceive reddish-green or bluish-yellow, even though we can easily see bluish-green [figure 2-cyan] reddish-blue [figure 3-magenta], or even reddish-yellow (orange), greenish-yellow (chartreuse). As indicated above red and green lights can be mixed so that all traces of them are replaced with pure yellow [figure 4]: yellow and blue can be mixed to produce white without any trace of the original colours [figure 5].

Simultaneous colour contrast occurs when opponent colours\textsuperscript{448} emanate from adjacent points in space, such as a figure and its background. A green figure stands out more against a background of red than blue. More dramatic examples of this phenomenon may be observed when a grey figure, seen against a red background, appears to have a green trace and against a green background seems to have a red tinge. Yet another example is when a grey figure is seen against differing shades of the same colour, it appears to be either lighter or darker depending on its background.

\textit{Colour constancy}, despite its recurrent participation in the way we see colour, is the most taken for granted. We perceive the colour of an object as comparatively constant despite enormous variation in the ambient light. We recognise the colour red in bright sunlight and in dark spaces.

\textsuperscript{448} \textit{Opponent colours} are colours that are opposite each other on the colour wheel. See the colour wheel figure below.
Colour as pigment: It is critical for us to remember that pigment is both absorbed and reflected light; the surface of an object absorbs all the wavelengths of light except the reflected wavelength of its colour that we see. The three primary pigments [reflected colours] are red, blue, and yellow. It is important to understand that the colour theory for “pigment” [reflected light] is not the same as that for “light” [refracted light]. The two are independent.

Colour wheel of pigment mixtures. Mixing the primary hues [1] will produce the secondary hues [2] and in turn, mixing the secondary hues will produce tertiary hues [3].
**Colour as sensation:** The idea of *colour as sensation* is critical to an understanding of how colour acts upon us. Colour does not exist until the code carrying colour data reaches the brain and is decoded; what we receive is electromagnetic waves of differing frequency, yet the sensation we experience is that of colour. This effect is amplified in Gustav Klimt’s, *Schloss Kammer on the Attersee III* [1910]. Our vision tells us we are seeing a painting of a building beside a river. Yet if we look attentively, we realize that what we are actually seeing is a collection of juxtaposed coloured dots that give us the impression of the scene; what we see is what we perceive. We are able to perceive the building and the river because we can draw on our past experience of them. The implication is that all objects have a past and a future…but this is not always the case. Consider the perception of someone who has never seen a river or a building made of stone…the picture is quite a different one indeed.

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**Colour as information:** We use colour to identify objects, and to distinguish objects from their background. In figure 2 [below], a grey scale version of figure 1, we almost completely lose our ability to discern the human shape that is clearly apparent in figure 1. Having almost all colour removed from the *India Song* example [below], makes it difficult to distinguish that there are three figures in the picture. A grey scale reproduction of Seurat’s painting, *A Sunday Afternoon on the*
**Island of La Grande Jatte.** not only loses the aesthetic and emotional intensity of the work, but we also lose a lot of information content about the landscape and its inhabitants. A similar effect is felt in the final example where the grey scale version of an image dramatically loses its emotional impact.

1 Coloured image. 2 Same image in grey scale. 450  


1984: Detail from a photographic installation by Serge Tampalini. [1984]

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Certain colours can confuse our perception of distance. Our perception of colours as near or far away is conditional on the colours next to them. Colours with the same hue\(^{452}\) and value\(^{453}\) as their backgrounds will appear as if on the same plane. In the example below the face on the horizon is larger in size than the faces on the dominant figures yet, because it is the same hue and value as the colours next to it, we read it as being further away. In addition, our knowledge that objects on the horizon always appear smaller than objects near us also overrides our perception of size.


As we know from the chapter *Sight*, an object’s form, motion, colour, and position are carried by at least three parallel and interacting processing pathways in the brain. The American Edwin Land’s\(^{454}\) investigation of the intricate neural activity involved in the perceptions of objects focused specifically on trying to understand the way the brain processes colour information. His experiments surveyed the processes in our colour vision when we are confronted with complex pieces of colour such as photographs. Data from Land’s experiments suggested that not only were

\(^{452}\) Hue refers to the colour’s saturation...it enables us to perceive the lightest pink through to darkest red and excludes black, white or grey. Tone is the amount of white or black that the colour contains.

\(^{453}\) Value refers to the amount of light reflected back from a colour.

\(^{454}\) The American Edwin Land invented the Polaroid camera and later the Land camera. His experiments into how the brain participates in the way we see colour are still considered significant today.
there parallel pathways carrying the codes of form, motion, colour and position to the brain, but that they were independently decoded. More significantly the code carrying colour may not be deciphered independently of the codes carrying form, position and movement.

“…any simple account of colour vision is doomed to failure: colour depends not only on the stimulus wavelengths and intensities, but also on whether the patterns are accepted as representing objects, and this involves high-level processes in the brain which are extremely difficult to investigate.”


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Human beings have developed a highly sophisticated colour sense that seems a biological luxury - valued by us as intellectual, spiritual and artistic beings, but completely superfluous to our survival as an animal. The reason for this evolutionary phenomenon has preoccupied the work of neurologists and philosophers alike, and while there has been no conclusive answer, it is of particular significance to our current project. However, given the vast and disparate body of work on colour theory, any attempt at a detailed critique of how and why certain colours elicit emotional, psychological, or spiritual responses would prove futile within the compass of this thesis.

Nevertheless a brief foray into the work on colour by the Russian constructionist painter and theatre practitioner Wassily Kandinsky may help to explicate how certain colours indirectly or directly affect us.

Kandinsky asserted that along with the other formal elements, such as line, shape, form and texture, colour evoked emotions and was a language that spoke to all of us.

“Colour is power which directly influences the soul. Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another to cause vibrations in the soul.”


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Kandinsky believed his experience of synaesthesia, the phenomena when one ‘hears’ colours and ‘sees’ sounds, was inherently connected to spiritualism; his use of colour suggested a transcendental relationship between the material world and the spiritual realm. Ordinarily the mind’s eye concerns itself with such problems as time and place, but in the spiritual experience the mind is preoccupied by the intensity of existence, profound import, and relationships within patterns and textures. Kandinsky was convinced of a “universally perceptible harmony” underlying the chaos of the natural world and it was this harmony that he sought to reveal with colour. He envisaged colour as acting as a kind of bridge between the spectator and the spiritual realm. He considered each colour as having an intrinsic effect that was created by its proximity to other colours, and in certain combinations, colour[s] could impart an emotion or idea to the spectator. Kandinsky argued that the ability of colour to affect an individual was inextricably linked to an individual’s level of spiritual development. An individual at a lower level of spirituality experienced only the superficial effects of colour, while those at a higher level experienced “a more profound effect, which occasions a deep emotional response.” In such individuals, colour is felt as vibrations. One is immediately reminded of the work of such artists as Paul Cézanne [whose work we have already discussed], Mark Rothko [1903-1970], Vincent van Gogh [1853-1890], Pablo Picasso and Marc Chagall [1887-1985]. Interestingly Rothko’s work on colour is so precise that it is exceedingly difficult to faithfully reproduce his work in printed form. Marc Chagall in his

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459 The synesthetic experience is discussed in the chapter: Sight.
460 See: Colour Theory according to Wassily Kandinsky, from Concerning the Spiritual in Art [1912] [The full text of Concerning the Spiritual in Art may be found at: http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phil%20of%20art/kandinskytext.htm] [Accessed 4 April 2005.]
461 ibid.
462 ibid.
463 A comprehensive study of the work of Mark Rothko may be found in: Waldman, Diane. Mark Rothko, Thames and Hudson, London, 1978
painting, *My Village and I*, has painted his face green to show his longing for the green of his Russian landscape. Green, for Chagall was the colour of serenity.

Kandinsky is not alone in this belief; Rudolf Steiner, a contemporary of Kandinsky, also argued that people with a heightened sense of awareness, could experience colour, sound and

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468 Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was a philosopher and educator. His peers claimed that he had the ability to perceive spiritual realities beyond the world of our ordinary senses. Using this ability he developed a method of investigating spiritual realities in a scientific way, which he called anthroposophy. *The Story of My Life*, by Rudolf Steiner may be found at: [http://wn.elib.com/Steiner/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_index.html](http://wn.elib.com/Steiner/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_index.html) [Accessed November 2004]
smell as manifestations of the spiritual realm independent of their perfunctory role in reality. The work of Steiner was well known to Kandinsky.

So much has been written about Kandinsky’s colour theory that I am determined to avoid merely adding another critique to the already vast body of work. It seems more sensible to simply present a brief review of some of Kandinsky’s work on colour, [more as a factual exercise rather than an interpretive one], in order to establish the existence of creditable research into the synesthetic effects of colour.\footnote{An extensive bibliography on the psychology of colour may be found in: Byrne, Alex and Hilbert, David. \textit{A Bibliography of Color and Philosophy}, in \textit{Readings on Color, Volume 1: The Philosophy of Color}, MIT Press, New York, 1997, and also at \url{http://web.mit.edu/philos/www/color-biblio.html} } I hasten to add that this is not intended as a definitive exposé of his work on colour, but a fortuitous opportunity to briefly comment upon it. The intrinsic ability of colours to elicit emotional responses from observers was referred to by Kandinsky as their “natures” -a term that immediately alerts us to his preoccupation with the spiritual realm.

Oddly Kandinsky has not considered cultural specificity in any part of his analysis. As we are well aware people respond to different colors in different ways, and these responses take place on a subconscious, emotional level that are subject to different cultural readings. In occidental cultures, black has long been associated with death, while white is thought of as signifying purity. In China, however, white is the traditional colour of mourning. In addition I would suggest that most occidentalists would associate trust and stability with the color dark blue [we only have to think of the colour of the couture wore by the legal profession to affirm this association], yet Koreans have the same association with the colour pink and other pastel colours.

“\textit{Just as language exists anterior to the subject’s relation to it, so too does the marked visual field exist anterior to the spectator’s relation to it. [And just as different languages employ different grammars, so too do visual fields, cross-culturally and across genres.]}”\footnote{Phelan, Peggy. \textit{Unmarked: the politics of performance}, Routledge, New York, 1993. p. 41.}
It is with Peggy Phelan’s cautionary observation in mind that this introductory analysis of Kandinsky’s *natures* of colour is presented.471 Kandinsky’s observations are not presented in any topological scheme.

**Yellow:** While being warm and exciting, yellow is often experienced as disturbing. In respect to one’s mood, yellow has “the effect of representing madness, even an attack of blind rage.” 472

![Bukowski OK](image) [1979]. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.

In a number of Asian cultures yellow is frequently associated with dead and, curiously, with geomantic blessings.473

**Blue:** Blue is commonly experienced as deep, inner, supernatural and peaceful. “Sinking towards black, it has the overtone of a mourning that is not human.” 474 However as I have already mentioned, blue may be subject to distinctively different cultural readings.

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472 See: [http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phi%20of%20art/kandinskytext.htm](http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phi%20of%20art/kandinskytext.htm) [Accessed: May 14 2005]
474 See: [http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phi%20of%20art/kandinskytext.htm](http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phi%20of%20art/kandinskytext.htm) [Accessed: May 14 2005]
Green: Green is associated with stillness and peace, but it may also be felt as passive strength.

Kandinsky hated light green: “Green is like a fat, very healthy cow lying still and unmoving, only capable of chewing the cud, regarding the world with stupid dull eyes.” 475 In the India Song example below the green reflects the quiet strength of the characters and in the next example from Bodas de Sangre, the still green of the forest betrays the danger of its shadows and what awaits its inhabitants.

475 ibid.


In a number of Celtic myths the “Green-man” was the God of fertility. In Early Christian times, green was banned because of its association with pagan ceremonies. Green, for the Early Egyptians, was a sacred colour representing the hope and joy of spring, and green is still a sacred colour to Moslems throughout the world. 476

**White**: White is associated with harmony and silence. “*It is not a dead silence, but one pregnant with possibilities.*” 477


477 See: [http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phil%20of%20art/kandinskytext.htm](http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phil%20of%20art/kandinskytext.htm) [Accessed: May 14 2005]
As I have previously stated, white has a number of alternative culturally specific readings; in India, even in Christian weddings, though most brides wear white, there is usually a touch of some other colour. If a married woman wears just white, she is inviting widowhood and unhappiness.  

Black: Black is felt as immovable and extinguished and belonging to another world. “Not without possibilities [...] like an eternal silence, without future and hope.” In the example of Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, the character Pearl is dressed in black to signify not only that she is a widow, [a signifying custom shared by many European countries], but that she is the intruder who profanes the ritual of the other character’s summer vacation -against the white we sense her extinguishing of hope. In the Noir Soiree example the entire set and properties were painted black in a surrealist attempt at disassociating the action from the setting, in order to create a seemingly generic world.

In India black is a colour most associated with knowledge and mourning, and in China it is often used to signify penance and self-cultivation. Some oriental traditions connect the colour black to evil influences, while Muslim communities regard black as respectful. 

Grey: A mixture of white and black is experienced as soundless as opposed to silence; an “immovability which is hopeless”. 481

Red: Red is felt as alive, restless, “confidently striving towards a goal”, glowing, “maturity”. 482
Light warm red radiates strength, energy, joy, while light cold red radiates youthful, pure joy. In the example of Breaking the Silence red is used to reflect the ironic demise of a once prosperous and assured time in Russian history. In the production of Samuel Beckett’s Come and Go, red is used to highlight the close friendship and the fading memories of unrealised dreams in the lives of three female protagonists.

481 See: http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phil%20of%20art/kandinskytext.htm [Accessed: May 14 2005]

482 ibid.
In China red also has a positive spin; it is used to signify happiness, prosperity and marriage. 483

**Brown:** As a mixture of red and black, brown is experienced as “**dull, hard and inhibited.**” 484 Yet for Indian women, and also within the Moslem cultural tradition, red/brown [the colour of rich henna] is valued for its medicinal, strengthening and beautifying qualities.


Detail of photograph by Vincent Long. 485

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Orange: A mixture of red and yellow that produces a sense of “healthy radiance”.486

Ray Lawler: *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. [1988]
Direction: Raymond Omodei. Design: Serge Tampalini.

Design: Serge Tampalini.

Violet: Violet is experienced as “morbid and sad” 487, as a sense of hopelessness.


**Entropy Concerto** [1990]. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini, Susan Lingard and David Moody.

It is now commonly accepted amongst neural scientists that colour directly participates in the way we psychologically, emotionally and spiritually, perceive and experience our physical world.

According to Kandel and Schwartz:

487 ibid.
“Color vision does not simply record the physical parameters of the light reflected from the object’s surface. Rather, like the perception of form and motion, color perception involves a sophisticated abstracting process. The brain must somehow analyze the object in relation to its background.”

I believe that Kandel and Schwartz’s observation on the complexity of colour perception may be extended to include not only the background but also objects in the immediate vicinity of the colour; the proximity of objects to each other contributes to the way we perceive colour.

**Mishima**: Collage by Serge Tampalini. [Each brown and blue colour band is uniformly coloured yet we perceive the top of each band as darker]

When two colours of the same tone and hue appear in close proximity they produce a *flicker*. This feature is often employed as a desired effect in advertising, where the immediate attention of the spectator is required.

**Drawing by Serge Tampalini.**

**Detail from *Truth and Illusion*. [1982]**

**Book cover design: Serge Tampalini.**

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The intensity of this effect can induce an after image; i.e. a colour patch that seems to float in front of the eyes when they are overly stimulated for a period of time. After-images occur when the cones in the retinas become accustomed to the stimulation of a particular colour and then the colour is immediately replaced by a white surface. The eyes fail to respond to the sudden shift and see white minus the stimulus colour that is replaced by its *complementary colour*. The complementary colour of a primary colour (red, blue, and yellow) is the colour you get by mixing the other two primary colours. For example, a blue patch will appear if the eye is stimulated with red, and an orange patch will appear if the eye is stimulated by blue. Significantly the after-images remain visible even when the eyes are closed.

[Focus visually on the centre of the figure for 30secs, without moving your eyes…then look at the white space to the right of the figure.]

The English artist Bridget Riley’s optically vibrant paintings clearly demonstrate that even when black and white lines are placed in close proximity the effect on colour perception is startling.

Drawing by Serge Tampalini.

Bridget Riley: *Fall*. 489

In the spaces between the lines and curves we are able to perceive pastel colours, yet quite clearly the drawings and thus the images on our retinas contain no such colours. The critical implication is that, like Young and Helmholtz’s theory of colour as sensation, the explanation of this phenomenon is not to be found in nature but in the human brain; an implication that has import not only in the way we see but also, I will continue to suggest, in the way we perceive.

“The visible world is no longer a reality and the unseen world no longer a dream”

William Butler Yeats

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AFFECTIVE SPACE

All along the physicist has searched for the ultimate substance of matter and viewed empty space as simply the stage of the material world...but with the advent of the new physics the stage itself becomes one of the actors.

Sir Edmund Whittaker

When I use the expression “I see” to indicate my understanding of something, what I am saying is that after having filtered through all the available data I have come to this understanding. However it is only ever a partial understanding. “Seeing” is a misleading assertion that implies the world can be subjugated merely by looking. The deception lies in our visual field. We respond to our visual field as if we have “taken in” everything we see, even when we know that our brain filters our visual field and selects only what is essential to accomplish a particular task. Seeing is only ever a partial solution to our visual field.

The significance of this insight lies in its implicit questioning of the certainty associated with seeing. The dual nature of light, discussed earlier, affirms the tenuous nature of this certainty. The consensus amongst quantum physicists is that when we are looking at light, it is particles; when we are not looking, it is waves.

If, as I have tentatively begun to argue above, “seeing” is only ever a selective practice, then strategies that intentionally disrupt the unquestioned activities and conventions associated with “seeing” may serve as triggers for alternative ways of responding to what we see. The compositional and organizational practice of “affective space” is one such strategy. In order to begin our understanding of affective space we must rethink the concept of space.

492 Reiterating, the visual field may be defined as the view seen by our two eyes without any movement of the head.
“Space is not the setting (real or logical) in which things are arranged, but the means whereby the positing of things becomes possible. This means that instead of imagining it as a sort of ether in which all things float, or conceiving it abstractly as a characteristic that they have in common, we must think of it as the universal power enabling them to be connected. Therefore, either I do not reflect, but live among things and vaguely regard space at one moment as the setting for things, at another as their common attribute -or else I do reflect: I catch space at its source, and now think the relationship which underlies this word, realizing then that they live only through the medium of a subject who describes and sustains them; and pass from spatialized to spatializing space.”  

Disappearances was the first work in a trilogy (loosely framed by the title Experiences of Identity) that explored elements of human experience and the ways in which they are translated or communicated through acts of performance, particularly focussing on those elements of experience that resist being reproduced or mediated. It explored emotional, physical, and sensual absences and disappearances through subtle motifs as well as extremes of experience-in a journey aimed at extending the range of what is communicable between performer and audience.  

Spatializing space implies [as do the joiner works of David Hockney] the inclusion of time in our participation with space...time as duration rather than instantaneous.


As a way of understanding what is meant by “affective space”, consider the example of when, in “unguarded moments” [moments when we are not conscious of being conscious...like when we are diverted by exhaustion or waking from a deep sleep] our immediate surroundings appear strange

See footnote: 154.
and unfamiliar to us. It is as if we have become strangers in our own world. For an instant our normally stable world/reality collapses. Sensory data about our reality becomes at best unreliable and at worst alienating. What is remarkable is how easily this feeling of uncertainty may be triggered and by such seemingly mundane events -like when trying to open a door, we “push” instead of “pull” or when the world reflected in pools of water temporarily suspends the sovereignty of our ordered world.

What is more remarkable is despite being cognisant of our fragile grasp on reality we persist in existing as if the world is fixed and stable, oblivious to the possibility that at any moment everything might suddenly collapse. The French dramatist and actor, Antonin Artaud, in the stage directions for his play “Jet of Blood” is quick to alert us to the precarious nature of our relationship with reality.

THE YOUNG MAN: We are intense. Ah, how well ordered this world is!

A pause. Something that sounds like an immense wheel turning and blowing out air is heard. A hurricane separates the two. At this moment two stars crash into each other, and we see a number of live pieces of human bodies falling down: hands, feet, scalps, masks,

497 In the winter of 1990 I spent three months in Hakshu, Yamanashi, Japan, auditing the work of the Butoh dancer Min Tanaka and his Mia Juku Dance Company. The photographs were taken during a workshop run by Min Tanaka on the Bodyweather Farm Earth Stage.
colonnades, porches, temples, and alembics, which, however, fall more and more slowly, as if they were falling in a vacuum. Three scorpions fall down, one after the other, and finally a frog and a beetle, which sets itself down with a maddening, vomit-inducing slowness.

THE YOUNG MAN: [Shouting as loud as he can.] The sky has gone mad!

[He looks at the sky.]

THE YOUNG MAN: Let's get out of here.

[He pushes The Young Girl out before him.]

In the unfamiliar and heightened sensory state of these “unguarded moments”, when the “flipside” of reality, as it were, penetrates our instinctual defences, our customary stable way of inhabiting consciousness seems no longer reliable.⁵⁰⁰ [This phenomenon is not dissimilar to the experience of aspect perception -where the viewer first sees something as one thing and then suddenly sees it as another]

As our new “reality” refuses to yield any immediate sense, we are forced to re-engage our once familiar world in the same way as when we encounter something for the first time. Ordinarily all the things that we allow into consciousness have passed through a rationalising filter, inured by

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⁵⁰⁰ Research into states of consciousness can no longer be regarded as curiosity. The burgeoning literature on alternate states of consciousness by such people as Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, Claudio Naranjo and others necessitates more serious consideration. For more information see: Huxley, Aldous. The Doors of Perception, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1959, and Watts, Alan. The Book on the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are, Abacus, Great Britain, 1973. [Neurological research has shown that some of the more complex components of consciousness include: volition, intention and self-awareness. For more information see: Kandel, Eric R., Schwartz, James H., Jessell, Thomas M. Essentials of Neural Science and Behaviour, Appleton and Lance, New York, 1995, p. 375.]
what we have learnt. In those “unguarded moments” when they are not, we are startled. What I am alluding to is that we are similarly startled when we find objects in our visual field without having been consciously aware of them. Once aware of them, the objects appear as if they have been there all the time waiting for us to see them. A phenomenological perspective reveals that: “The world is there before any possible analysis of mine.”

Now consciously looking at the objects we find, perhaps because of their familiarity made strange by their unexpected appearance, that we experience them as “looking back” at us. It is this “looking back” that I want to posit as the energising ingredient of “affective space”.

David George: DylanScapes. [1982] Direction: David George. Design: Serge Tampalini. [The face of Bob Dylan may be clearly seen in the picture on the right.]


Traditionally, sight is understood in terms of vision. When I use the term vision, I mean that particular characteristic of sight which connects seeing to thinking; that rationalizing vision that is both indicative and resultant of the habitual way of seeing the world that was fostered by our parents when we were babies, and developed by us as children. A way of looking that defines a relationship between a subject [which does the looking] and object [which is being looked at]. Consider, once again, what happens if the object were to appear to suddenly look back at the subject? In the introduction to Signs, Merleau-Ponty asks:

“What is it like when one of the others turns upon me, meets my gaze, and fastens his [sic] own upon my body and my face?” Their response is “unless we have recourse to the ruse of speech, putting a common domain of thoughts between us and a third party, the experience is intolerable. There is nothing left to look at but a look. Seer and seen are exactly interchangeable.”

I’m sure we have all had the experience of being caught looking at someone, when suddenly we become aware that they are “looking back” at us. We are changed in someway, more consciously aware, embarrassed even and our emotions are heightened. It’s like having to negotiate a moment of our reality, which under “normal” conditions would not present any problems, however faced with the predicament of being caught unaware, we are forced to quickly assimilate this “other” space, as it were, into our familiar subjective reality. This is the experiential nature of the “affective”. I believe that it is precisely in those moments that there exists the potential for us to revaluate what is meant by consciousness – a goal that shares an affinity with project of phenomenology…

“…a philosophy for which the world is always ‘already there’ before reflection begins -as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world…”


A possible first step in conceptualizing this “other” space would be to try and detach what one sees from what one knows—the eye from the brain; to intervene in the rationalizing vision associated with habit, in order to have...

“...a space which does not skate over appearances, which indeed takes root in them and is dependent upon them, yet which is nevertheless not given along with them in any realist way, and can ... survive their complete disorganization. We have to look for the first-hand experience of space on the hither side of the distinction between form and content.” 504

A second step would be to inscribe space in such a way as to give it the potential of “looking back.” All theatre design may be said to be already inscribed; doors, tables, chairs, stage properties etc. are already a kind of inscription/label. We do not see a chair, without relating it to the idea of a chair. We do not see a setting without relating it to remembrances of experiences past. This type of inscription functions as part of what I call effective space, and is exploited by the practice of design as decoration.505

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504 ibid. p. 248.
505 The idea of design as decoration is discussed in the Introduction.
In order to have a “looking back” we need to rethink the idea of inscription…we need to create an affective space. The inscriptions of affective space are twice removed from their counterparts in reality. Their concerns are more than reason, meaning and function. Affective space has what might be called an excessive condition; one that participates in the conventions of space and time, but that seems to be full of them -an excessive condition of time and space. It is not that affective space has lost all meaning but that it seems to be full of meaning. This, in a sense, is the geometry of excessive condition.
In *affective space*, we understand that we can no longer conceptualise experience in the same way that we did in the gridded space of space/time. Once the space becomes *affective*, inscribed with an “*other*” logic, one which is no longer compliant with the rationalizing vision of the brain, then
reason becomes detached from vision. While we can still comprehend the space in terms of its function and structure, somehow reason has become detached from the effective condition of seeing.


This begins to produce a space that “looks back”; a space that gives the impression of having order even though it does not appear to mean anything. It does not petition to be understood in the traditional way, yet it possesses a logic that is the sense of something outside of our rationalising vision.

When Andy Warhol produced his canvases entirely filled with cans of Campbell soup, or with repetitions of the face of Marilyn Monroe, or silk-screened reproductions of newspaper photographs of car accidents, we were more interested in the point of view that wanted to do so, rather than the work itself. “Looking back” educes a similar response; aware of the space’s excessive condition, we turn our attention to the consciousness that constructed it.


*Effective space* alludes to a literal [once removed] connection between the object in reality and its representation. One way of inscribing *affective space* is to free aesthetics from the conventions of *effective space*. Abstraction is one method of doing this.

It would be foolish to try and conceive of Abstraction as a homogenous concept; its construction and function varies significantly. For example, the abstraction of Wassily Kandinsky rejects classical figuration but tries to refine sensation by retaining abstract forms, but the abstraction of Jackson Pollock [more commonly referred to as abstract expressionism] discards all “form” in favour of an active and chaotic texture of lines and colour. Put another way, abstraction attempts to free “form” from illustrative conventions, and abstract expressionism attempts to liberate “matter” in a fluid disorder. Significantly both Kandinsky and Pollack believed in the hylomorphic model of the universe\(^\text{506}\) and that the task of art was to impose “form” on “matter”.\(^\text{507}\)

Despite the differing temperament of their work, I am sure that Kandinsky and Pollock would have agreed that the most general aspiration of art is to produce a sensation; to create, in Deleuze’s terms a “pure being of sensation”.\(^\text{510}\) Deleuze speaks of it in this way:

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\(^{506}\) A hylomorphic model of the universe is one that regards matter as the first cause of the universe.

\(^{507}\) As the quantum physicists have made us aware both “form” and “matter” are transformations of space by the participant observer. The quantum universe is only space…beautiful chaotic space…with everything interconnected, with multiple copies of everything, everywhere. We as the observer are God. The way we experience the universe is the way we construct…the way we give shape to space…the transubstantiation of space into matter. For more information see: Davies, Paul. *Other Worlds*, Abacus, London, 1981.


\(^{509}\) Kultermann, Udo. *Art and Life*, Praeger, New York, 1971. p. 18. [Pollock with his action painting technique was the first person to deliberately create a distance between the brush and the canvas.]

“If force [intensity] is the condition of sensation, it is nonetheless not the force which is sensed, since the sensation ‘gives’ something completely different from the forces that condition it. So the question is: How will the sensation be able to turn in upon itself, extend or contract itself sufficiently, in order to capture, in what is given to us, forces that are not given, in order to make us sense these unsensible forces, and elevate itself to its own conditions?”  511

As a way of responding, the Swiss painter, Paul Klee argued that in order to produce a complex sensation, in order to “harness the forces of the cosmos” and give them visibility, we must concern ourselves with decisions that filter and simplify.

“If one multiplies the lines, if one elaborates too rich and complex material, the claim is that one is opening up oneself to all events, to all interruptions of force, but in fact one can merely wind up producing nothing but a scribble that effaces all lines, a “sloppiness” that in fact effaces the sensation”. 513

Conscious of Klee’s cautionary note I tried to push abstraction in my theatre work, to a point where what remained was the least amount of information required for the ontology of my work to be readable. In so doing it had to be strong, clear and immediately recognisable. Reducing an idea to the utmost limit of recognition means that every smallest detail, every imperceptible difference

511 ibid. p. 42.
becomes decisive - exuberance can tolerate imprecision, rigour cannot. In the design for William Congreve’s play *The Way of the World*, I reduced the aesthetic and architectural conventions of the Restoration period to a point where what remained was just the suggestion of the playful wit and flamboyance of the era.


More often than not I would do a certain amount of work on a project, and then unexpectedly something would happen that was completely out of my control… and the project was a million
times more affective. When I was working on the set design for Willy Russell’s *Shirley Valentine*, I found myself misguided and frustrated by the conventions of *effective space*. What the script geographically called for was a flat in Liverpool [England] for Act 1, and a Greek island for Act 2. I struggled for days trying to meticulously reproduce the flat and make rocks for the island out of polystyrene and fibreglass. I walked away from the work and when I came back, there it was...*abstraction*, beautiful, startling *minimalist abstraction*.

It was at that moment that I realised I was not inventing things, I was finding them, and when I did, I would simply assemble them in unexpected ways. Minimalist abstraction implies such confidence. I found that I could work most affectively with already existing objects. Like Rauschenberg, who in the 1950’s worked with found objects, I re-arranged already existing objects so they would say what I want to say. It seemed to me that there was so much fiction in the world that we didn’t have to invent it. [Clearly, this work is conceptually similar to the work of Marcel DuChamp’s ready-mades referred to in Introduction (Part 2).]

\[The sins of the father pass down to the son.\] [2004] Sculpture by Serge Tampalini.

What began as strategies of abstraction quickly mutated into strategies of what I call disrupted expectation; where the ordinary becomes extraordinary, the familiar strange, and where we are encouraged to think with our eyes.

Conventionally our view of reality is based on a visual language that configures the world within syntagmatic [i.e. the relation between one object and the objects that surround it] and paradigmatic [models of the world suggested by this relationship] frames. In the affective spaces generated by disrupted expectation the basic syntagmatic structures have not been altered, there are just different
paradigmatic selections that seem to disrupt established notions of how the world means. Consider the example of René Magritte painting, *Les Valeurs personnelles (Personal Values)* below: except for changes in size, the syntagmatic relationships between the objects in the painting remain the same, however the paradigmatic model of the room in the painting has been distorted. The same contrivance may be seen in the following example...an example that owes much to Magritte’s work.

René Magritte: *Les Valeurs personnelles (Personal Values)*. [1952] Private Collection, Yorktown, New York.\(^{514}\)

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These disruptions create not simply a picture of an already existing reality but just one of the many possible ways of reinventing it. What is significant about this insight is that it implies that everything is fictional according to the particular frame that constructed it.


By employing the model of disrupted expectation in my theatre work, I have deliberately tried to avoid the organisational conventions of effective space; theatre is a far too useful a tool to be constrained by its limiting expectations. Instead of following the historically established conventions of space and time associated with effective space, my theatre designs have turned their
attention to a play with history’s poetic partners: memory and myth. In so doing they allude to an “otherness” -a strangely familiar place that like a silent movie, attempts to reach out across the semantic wasteland and quietly remind us of the ancestral reservoir from which we can all draw creativity and solace.


The potency of affective space is not determined by its literal connection to conventional meaning [content]. Its potency is discernible by its “intensity”. If there is a connection between the two it is of another order that requires we bypass the expectations of our rationalising vision and seek the transcendental potential of our nervous system. In so doing we are able to affectively connect that which we would normally regard as separate. It is in this way that intensity is a measure of the space’s affectivity.

515 My use of my term “memory” alludes to the shadow of history in T. S. Eliot’s poem The Hollow Men, [“between the emotion and the response- falls the shadow”, [Eliot, T. S. Selected Poems, Faber and Faber, London, 1967. p. 80] and “myth” the liminal space between history and its writing. The memory of which I speak shares no affinity with its surrogate partner nostalgia, which [for me] distorts memory.
It would be all too easy to fall into the trap of equating affective with emotional content, but as Brian Massumi[^517] is quick to point out, theorising the difference between “affect” and “emotion” is crucial:

[^516]: The figure was assembled from two Greek Gods: Hypnos, the Greek God of Dreams, who often appears winged, and his son Morpheus the Greek god of dreams. Morpheus appears in the dreams of humans in the shape of a man.

“Affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion. But emotion and affect - if affect is intensity - follow different logics and pertain to different orders. An emotion is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativisable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized. Affect is unqualified. As such, it is not ownable or recognisable, and thus resistant to critique”.

David George: *You can call me Nonno*. [1990]. Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini.

The “affective” is never continuous or stable; it has an idiosyncratic mode of revelation, where it appears and disappears back from where it materialized, soliciting our attention, enticing us to enter undiscovered regions at the limits of our understanding and the adits of our imagination. Its ontology is one of fluid geometry, temporal modulations, layerings, and appearances and disappearances that give rise to an elaborate play between the observers received notions of

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518 ibid. p. 219. [“Intensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin - at the surface of the body, at its interface with things. Depth reactions belong more to the form/content (qualification) level, even though they also involve autonomic functions such as heartbeat and breathing. The reason may be that they are associated with expectation, which depends on consciously positioning oneself in a line of narrative continuity. Modulations of heartbeat and breathing mark a reflux of consciousness into the autonomic depths, coterminal with a rise of the autonomic into consciousness. They are a conscious-autonomic mix, a measure of their participation in one another. Intensity is beside that loop, a non-conscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder. It is outside expectation and adaptation, as disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration, as it is from vital function. It is narratively de-localized, spreading over the generalized body surface, like a lateral backwash from the function-meaning interloops travelling the vertical path between head and heart.”]
consciousness and those released/offered by the space. It involves the willing suspension of the expectations allied with “cause and effect” and linear temporality.

“To have an original, extraordinary, and perhaps even immortal idea, one has to isolate oneself from the world for a few moments so completely that the most commonplace happenings appear to be new and unfamiliar, and in this way reveal their true essence” 519


“All art constantly aspires to the condition of music”

Walter Pater 520

“Quantum Mechanics can tell us how a group of particles will behave, but the only thing it can tell us about an individual particle is how it probably will behave.”

Gary Zukav


Why people make theatre has been of academic interest for centuries. Why people create fictitious worlds, occupy them in the clothes of others, speak the words of others, imitate the behaviour of others, tell their histories, and then finally ask people to pay to come and watch them do it, strikes me as a very peculiar activity indeed. It would be one that I could easily dismiss as decadent and worthless if not for the fact that I find it pleasurable.

It is impossible to speak of pleasure outside of the experience of it. The research into what constitutes “experience” by the German philosopher and cultural historian Wilhelm Dilthey [1833-

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has had a continuing influence on contemporary thinking. According to Dilthey an experience has five discrete features:

1. A perceptual core where pleasure or pain are felt more intensely than in everyday situations.
2. Images of past experiences are induced with clarity and force.
3. Past events remain inert unless the feelings originally bound up with them can be fully revived.
4. “Meaning” is generated within the relationship between past and present events. [Dilthey distinguishes between “meaning” and “value”. “Value” belongs to the experience of the affective pleasure of the conscious present. “Values” are not connected with other “values”, past or present. However “meaning” inheres within this relationship.]
5. An experience is completed when it is expressed, when it is coherently communicated to others.

What I understand Dilthey to be suggesting is that “communication” is the apposite finale of experiential pleasure. This may go someway towards explaining why we feel so compelled to share our experiences; either by diarising or recording them for our future remembrances, immediately communicating them to someone, or in the case of artists by creating works of art that may been seen, heard, or read. This desire is experienced as much in life as it is in the art arena. How often have we heard a spectator or friend say with exhilaration, “did you see that?” It is a spontaneous expression/performance of authentic pleasure.

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It seems axiomatic to say that pleasure is derived from our senses. Nevertheless how we as spectators derive sensorial pleasure from the theatrical experience is an important consideration. It is now an accepted fact amongst the neuroscientific community\textsuperscript{523} that there are five major sensory modalities: \textit{vision}, \textit{hearing}, \textit{touch}, \textit{taste}, and \textit{smell}. Our sensory systems receive information from the environment and transmit it to the central nervous system where, in turn, it is passed [as we have seen before] by multiple parallel and interconnected pathways to the brain where it is finally decoded.\textsuperscript{524} We also receive information from within the body, such as blood vessels, heart rate, skin and muscles, however we are not normally conscious of this happening. The \textit{intensity} of the sensation is dependant on the strength of the stimulus. The lowest and highest limit of the intensity is often referred to as the \textit{sensory threshold}. Obviously these can vary; when we expect loud music our threshold seems higher, when it arrives unexpected we are violently startled. When we attend an “R” rated film our threshold for sex and violence is higher than when violence is juxtaposition with serenity. The \textit{duration} of the sensation is both a function of the duration and of the strength of the stimulus. If the duration is overly long then the sensation attenuates. This is known as \textit{adaptation}. The longer the period of time the greater the chances are that that the stimulus will fall below the \textit{sensory threshold} and be no longer felt. Of course this varies from spectator to spectator.

\textsuperscript{524} This process is comprehensively discussed in the chapter: \textit{Sight}. 
What I am intrinsically arguing is that the pleasure of the theatrical experience is fundamental to the role of the spectator. In her article, *The Pleasure of the Spectator*, the semiotician Anne Ubersfeld also affirms the primacy of pleasure for the spectator.

“One can say almost anything about the spectator's pleasure, and the most contradictory formulas can appear valid: the pleasure of liking and of disliking; the pleasure of understanding and of not understanding; the pleasure of maintaining an intellectual distance and of being carried away by one's emotions; the pleasure of following a story [“and what happens next?’ the child asks] and of looking at a tableau; the pleasure of laughing and of crying; the pleasure of dreaming and of knowing; the pleasure of enjoying oneself and of suffering; the pleasure of desiring and of being protected from passions.” 525

Ubersfeld implies that theatrical pleasure is not a singular or pure pleasure; it is a multiform pleasure that involves a complex set of negotiations that may be measured as much in the solitary sigh of a single spectator as in the spontaneous laughter of the collective members of the audience. Just as it is impossible to speak of a topology of signs applicable to all types of theatre, it is equally impossible to speak of a homogenised pleasure that applies to all theatrical forms. Theatrical pleasure varies from that derived from its intrinsic ambiguous *presence/absence* dichotomy, to the joy of experiencing the theatre as material reality. It is experienced as much in the decoding of abstract signs that are resistant to the seductive advances of meaning, as in the recognition of transparent signs whose meaning is directly related to their referents in reality. It is never passive; as it is always subject to transformations in the memory and imagination of the spectator.

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The identification and reading of signs seems the most basic of all pleasures. From our joyous hedonistic experiences as a baby to the complex cerebral process of adult life, our pleasure is contingent on our ability to replace the space occupied by a sign with meaning. For a baby, the sign *mother* signifies gratification and love. For Oedipus the sign *mother* was to assume a more sinister signification, one in which we as spectators of Sophocles’ play derive pleasure from knowing in advance.


**Entropy Concerto.** [1990]
Direction and design: Serge Tampalini, David Moody and Susan Lingard.


In his book, “Camera Lucida”, the French semiotician Roland Barthes offers us a subjective insight into the way photography works for him and in so doing extends its relevance into the realm of the “sign”, but more importantly identifies the sign as a form of semiotic pleasure. As such his book speaks as much about spectating as it does about photography. “Camera Lucida” is without doubt one of the most sensible books on photography I have read.

According to Barthes the photograph is the product of three practices: “to do; to undergo; to look.”

In Barthes’ taxonomy of photography, the photographer is the operator [the one who directs the camera], we are the spectators, and the thing being photographed is the target…the referent in reality, a simulacrum. It is not difficult to see Barthes’ observations on photography as analogous to the practice of theatre, for theatre too has spectators and what are the actors if not simulacra, and it too is the product of the same three practices.

Cognitive of this correlation, Barthes’ exposé on photography offers a unique perspective on how signs are pleasured within the theatre frame. Like a photograph the theatrical sign inheres within the relationship between two languages, one creative, and the other reductive. Barthes is quick to identify that there are some photographs that only slightly interest [read pleasure] him and some that interest him more powerfully. “Adventure” is what distinguishes the two. “This picture advenes, that one doesn’t.” The distinction is not dissimilar to what we experience when we are shown “holiday-snaps”…there are instances when we indifferently turn over photograph after photograph.

Moreover, cases occur where the photograph leaves me so indifferent that I do not even bother to see it ‘as an image.’ The photograph is vaguely constituted as an object, and the persons who figure there are certainly constituted as persons, but only because of their resemblance to human

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527 ibid. p. 19.
beings, without any special intentionality. They drift between the shores of perception, between sign and image, without ever approaching either."  

In the words of the French existentialist novelist Marcel Proust there are some “photographs of a being before which one recalls less of that being than by merely, thinking of him or her.” Proust is referring to the numerous photographs of people that remind us of them merely by resemblance, but do not elicit emotional or any other response in us. Inert and unary, these photographs serve only to indifferently remind us of their referent in reality.

Occasionally one photograph arouses us from our indifference and we experience something pleasurable that was not present in any of the other pictures. It is this experience that interests Barthes and is of significance to us as theatre practitioners.

“In this glum desert, suddenly a specific photograph reaches me; it animates me, and I animate it.
So that is how I must name the attraction which makes it exist: an animation. The photograph itself

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is in no way animated [I do not believe in ‘lifelike’ photographs], but it animates me: this is what creates every adventure".\(^{530}\)

What Barthes wants to desperately find in a photograph is its “affective intentionality”,\(^{531}\) where the photograph as an “antiphon of ‘look’”,\(^{532}\) is steeped in “desire” and “euphoria” that was intentionally embedded by the operator.

“As Spectator I was interested in Photography only for ‘sentimental’ reasons; I wanted to explore it not as a question but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think.”\(^{533}\)

An understanding of Barthes’ use of the term “wound” is crucial to appreciating the way certain photographs affect us. The average affect that most photographs have on us is what Barthes calls their *studium*. Generally newspaper photographs work this way; unary photographs that are of technical or cultural interest only.

As I have already stated, Barthes asserts that a *photograph is unary when it emphatically transforms "reality" without doubling it*\(^{535}\) …when the target has a literal connection to its counterpart in reality. In Deleuze’s terms Barthes is referring to the difference between an *image*

\(^{531}\) ibid. p. 21.
\(^{532}\) ibid. p. 5.
\(^{533}\) ibid. p. 21.
\(^{534}\) Blast victim of the attack on Kings Cross Station, London.
\(^{535}\) ibid. p. 41.
and a *sign*; once again reiterating, an *image* remains unary and a *sign* transforms reality by doubling its meaning.

However certain photographs contain an element “*that punctuates the studium*” that, at the risk of sounding repetitive, “arouses us from our indifference”…“*which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.*” 536 [They wound us.]

> “This second element which will disturb the *studium* I shall therefore call *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole -and also a cast of the dice. A photograph's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).” 538

According to Barthes “*the studium is ultimately always coded, the punctum is not.*” 539 That is to say the *studium* is planned while the “*accident*” is that which allows the punctum to arrive into affective consciousness of its own accord. However in the theatrical realm it is possible to create the potential for “accidents”. By designing paradoxical and ambiguous spaces [what I have termed *affective spaces* 540] the expectations of our normally coherent world are disrupted, and in those

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538 ibid. p. 27.
539 ibid. p. 51.
540 This is comprehensively discussed in the: *The Affective*. 
moments there exists the possibility for us to be wounded by the unexpected. This wounding affectively doubles the space’s potential meaning.


Interestingly a sign’s punctum may not always be felt immediately. There are some occasions when the punctum is felt after the event. Like when having seen a performance it is not until the next morning, when we think back on it, that we are “wounded” by what we saw. This form of pleasure may be seen, in the vocabulary of the neurological studies mentioned earlier, to be contingent upon the sign’s intensity and duration.

Timberlake Wertenbaker: *The Love of the Nightingale*. [2005] Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini. [The cutting out of a character’s tongue is intensified by a falling red curtain that occupied the whole width and height of the stage.]

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541 A foreboding expressionist moment is revealed by the unexpected juxtaposition of a larger than life “kewpie” doll [a fairground doll from which the title of the play is derived] that augurs not only a sense of hopelessness but also the demise of the summer ritual that has been a central part in the lives of the characters.
The polysemic nature of the theatre’s sign systems means that the spectator’s pleasure is not solely confined to a single signifying system; the spectator’s pleasure is continually being simultaneously modulated by number of signifying systems. Arguably the most simple and yet primary pleasure in theatre is to be found in listening to a story. From the beginnings of our occidental theatre tradition and across cultural styles, story telling has always been a primary objective. Despite Postmodernism’s deconstructive interventions into the structure and appearance of the narrative, story telling has always remained as the gratifying product of our imagination. Narrative abstraction has never meant the subjugation of story telling. The pleasure of listening to a story is equally experienced in the anticipation and suspense felt when listening to a new story as it is in the hearing of old favourites. It is not surprising then that the telling of history is, and has always been, a mixture of fact and fiction; when it is told to us solely as fact, we quickly lose interest. Consider for example an extract from the play, *1789 and all that*; a play about the French Revolution, whose plot, I’m sure is familiar to all of us.  

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542 Jacques Derrida often referred to as the high priest of deconstructionism “showed that, by taking an unspoken or unformulated proposition of a text literally, by showing the gaps and supplements, the subtle internal self contradictions, the text can be shown to be saying something quite other than what it appears to be saying. In fact, in a certain sense, the text can be shown not to be ‘saying something’ at all, but many different things, some of which subtly subvert the conscious intentions of the writer. A new text thus gradually begins to emerge, but this text too is subtly at variance with itself, and the deconstruction continues in what could be an infinite regress of dialectical readings. The main effect of Derrida's deconstructive teaching has been to destroy the naive assumption that a text has ‘a’ meaning, which industry, application and attentive good faith will eventually winnow out…” [Bullock, Alan and Trombley, Stephen Eds. *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*. Harper Collins, London, 2000. pp. 202-203.]  

Regisseur: Let me introduce you to the two main characters in our play, the play of the revolution ... no, not the King and Marat, not Danton and Robespierre, not Babeuf and Napoleon - you'll meet all them later. No, the two main characters in the Revolution, in any revolution are...

[He gestures: enter the Historian stage right: academic gown; he carries piles of books, he takes up a lecturer’s pose, and begins to blow soap-bubbles].

Regisseur: ... the one who wrote about it,

[The Regisseur turns and gestures], and ... the one who did it…[Pause, then louder],

…the one who did it ...[Cuing]…the one who ...
[Sound of a snore from behind the pedestal]
What?
[The Regisseur drags out the Revolutionary: he is limp, like a rag-doll].

David George: 1789 …and all that [1989]. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.

Even though we are familiar with the events of the French Revolution, 1789 unfolds as an
dialectical argument between the Revolutionary and the Historian, between fact and fiction, and by
the time we reach the end of the play there is no certainty as to who is who or what really happened.

As well as the pleasures derived from hearing, there are also the pleasures aroused by bodies,
design [set and costumes], colour, and lights; these are pleasures derived from the sensory modality
of seeing.
As the neuroscientists have shown us, in the sighted world, the two are never experienced independently of each other. Ubersfeld indicates that the significance of the pleasures associated with hearing and seeing lies in the fact that they are all derived from a density of signs. It is impossible to register all the signs at once, so the theatrical pleasure of seeing and hearing is selective...it is constructed one element at a time according to the itinerary of watching prioritised by the director.

“As a matter of fact, there is no time to waste: the image is snatched from the torrent of signs, stolen from time; it is being done and undone at the same time, and the construction of the theatrical image (audio-visual) is an acrobatic pleasure. The performance is ever in flight, and in the work of staging a play there is perhaps a dialectic between the wealth of signs and the perceptive capacities of the spectator: if the spectator drowns, his pleasure stops.”  

Theatre signs are never read in isolation; they are always identified within the spectator’s memory of past experiences. The act of identification, a product of memory, is the catalyst that leads to the spectator’s cathartic pleasure of understanding. We all need to understand -western culture is almost defined by it. In theatre, understanding is not a passive pursuit but an active one that relies

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on the decoding of the semiotic code that constructs the production’s *mise en scène*.\(^{545}\) If we are successful in decoding, we experience the pleasure of understanding. Ubersfeld is quick to point out that what the spectators will understand cannot be predicted. Thus the critical thing to be conscious of is that while we are constructing the semiotic code, we are also constructing the audience capable of receiving and decoding it. For example if we are preparing a piece of political theatre critiquing the social structures oppressing the working class, then it would be fatuous to expect a rapturous reception of the work at a right-wing “fundraiser” event. The experiential expertise of the targeted spectators makes them incapable of empathy, and thus unable to experience any pleasure.\(^{546}\) Similarly, there are instances where the experiential expertise of the targeted spectators makes them incapable of empathy because the intended signification of the production is so literal that it leaves little or no room for the interpretive participation of the spectator.

Conscious of the imaginative capacity of their audience, a number of contemporary dramatist and directors, as well as filmmakers,\(^{547}\) have devised works that allow for the spectator to assemble the density of signs in ways that lie outside the director and designer’s itinerary. This may be seen as the pleasure of *transgression*; deviant behaviour has always held a peculiar kind of attraction. In so doing the spectator enjoys their individual combination of signs, and participates in what Ubersfeld calls the “pleasure of *bricolage*”.\(^{548}\)

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\(^{545}\) This is comprehensively discussed in the chapter: *Image, Sign, Symbol and Metaphor.*

\(^{546}\) De Marinis, Marco. *Dramaturgy of the Spectator, The Drama Review*, MIT Press New York University, New York, Summer, 1987, p. 104. [“On the one hand, there are avant-garde or experimental performance texts whose “openness” -their highly indeterminate makeup and loose fixing of reading strategies -does not correspond to any real increase in the range and type of desired spectator, but which leads rather to a more or less drastic reduction in range. This reduction occurs when the cooperation asked of an audience in filling in “gaps” in the performance text -thus, actualizing the text’s semantic and communicative potential -also requires a spectator to possess a range of encyclopaedic, intertextual, and ideological competence which is anything but standard. On the other hand, we also find performance texts and theatre forms where this opening up of interpretive possibilities does correspond to a real openness of reception; the openness leads to a real increase in the number of “authorized” spectators and in the types of reception allowed for and compatible with the performance text that construct performances which allow a real plurality of reception or viewings which are equal to one another.”]

\(^{547}\) I am thinking specifically of dramatists such as Robert Wilson, Howard Barker, Karen Finley, Jenny Kemp, and filmmakers such as David Lynch and Peter Greenaway.

\(^{548}\) Ubersfeld, Anne. *The Pleasure of the Spectator*, [Trans. Pierre Boaillaguet and Charles Jose], *Modern Drama*, 25.1, 1982, pp. 127-139. [Originally a billiards term used to denote when the cue ball, after striking a ball, hits the cushion and then cannons into another ball, it has been appropriated by literary criticism to reference the eclectic association of ideas.]
Pleasure, oddly enough like humour, is a by-product of thinking; it’s about finding old and new relationships between things. Finding things in unexpected places can be disturbingly pleasurable and can somehow make us see the things more clearly...make us more alert and attentive.

“The neuronal mechanisms of attention and awareness are now emerging as one of the unresolved problems in perception. Cellular studies of visual attention have shown that attention involves either enhanced firing of cells that respond to the object of interest or attenuated firing of cells that respond to objects that are being ignored.”

The kind of triggers that precipitate “attention” and “awareness” has been the focus of the work carried out by the psychologist Daniel Berlyne. His research into the types of events that stimulate active attention has managed to isolate the following constants: *novelty, surprise, complexity, and oddity.*

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Similarly, the Italian semiotician Marco De Marinis extends the work of Berlyne by suggesting:

“…the spectator's attention appears to be the product of a certain type of psychophysiological disposition which, in the appropriate scientific literature, goes under various names: arousal, excitation, curiosity, interest, etc. Among other things this disposition is signalled by several neurophysiological activities, such as characteristic changes in electroencephalogram levels (EEG), sweating, changes in heartbeat, muscular tension, pupil dilation, etc. This state leading up to the actual focusing of attention can be termed a “state of interest.” In turn, this state of interest seems to be aroused by another, more basic psychophysiological state which may be called surprise or amazement. Thus we have the sequence: surprise – interest – attention [with the obvious possibility of feedback].” 551

Both Berlyne and De Marinis imply that to arouse and direct the spectator's attention, the performance must first disrupt the established expectations of the audience. This disruptive strategy may be implemented even before the performance begins. Consider the title of a production of mine, Richard III ...a Bollywood Musical: Already the Shakespearean conventions of dramatic presentation, dictated by history and tradition, have been disrupted. Consider also the surprise of the audience at the oddity of the opening scene of the production in which they witnessed a Bollywood style dance, mixed with contemporary rappers that laid out the plot to follow. Another production, Wittgenstein...the musical, elicited a similar response from its potential audience; the expectations and assumptions normally associated with the dense and almost impenetrably serious philosophical investigations of the German philosopher were deliberately disrupted by his work being located within the playful musical frame.


Wittgenstein the musical [2000]. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.

Intentional disruptive devices may also be employed throughout the performance. I am referring specifically to the periodic disruption of the audience’s expectations by scene changes. The Howard Barker play, *Scenes from an Execution* moves through twenty scenes that include seven locations, one of which is a prison that is almost entirely black.

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Prologue.

Galactia’s Studio.

The Palace.

Military Barracks’ studio.

A Church.
Alternative settings for *The Military Barracks’ studio*.

I am also referring to the more dramatic interventions of sudden atmospheric leaps, tonal shifts, unexpected appearances, rhythmical modulations, and even simply loud noises. In this way, *oddity, novelty* and *surprise* constantly renew the audience’s interest and attention.
The character Prodo [a war veteran] has an arrow embedded in his head and the movement of his bowel is clearly visible.

The character Suffici [a naval admiral] is ornately tattooed and appears elsewhere in the play in an elaborate wig topped with a ship.

In the *Shirley Valentine* production the dramatic atmospheric transformation from Act 1 [a Liverpool flat] to Act 2 [a Greek Island] ensured the revitalisation of the spectator’s attention, especially since the change occurred in front of them and took less than 30 seconds. It was accompanied by flashes of lighting and thunder crashes all supported by the loud sounds of balalaika music.

![Image of Shirley Valentine production](image1)

Willy Russell: *Shirley Valentine*. [1987].
Direction: Raymond Omodei. Design: Serge Tampalini.

In *Entrophy Concerto* sudden tonal shifts, from subdued to angry and back again, served to startle the spectator’s attention, while in *back to beckett* the odd surprise appearance of two people in dust bins aroused the audience’s curiosity. In *The Glass Menagerie* the sudden rhythmic shift into an expressionist tableau focused the spectators’ attention onto the internal emotional states of the character.

![Image of Entrophy Concerto](image2)


Narrative complexity also works in much the same way; it is the energising ingredient of the “who-done-it” genre, amongst others. In the example of *Entropy Concert* [itself a fractal assemblage of writings by Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, Peter Greenaway, Alan Bennett, Harold Pinter, Jean Paul Sartre, David Moody and Steven Joyce], the spectators are confronted with a scene in which the certainty of death is being debated by two seemingly detached characters who, in front of an ever-changing fractal projection, are playing a game of chance over Samuel Beckett’s coffin. The complexity is clear.


Marco De Marinis continues his analysis of theatrical pleasure by arguing that:

“More important from a theoretical viewpoint, seems to be an acceptance that theatrical pleasure arises and is maintained in an unbroken dialectic between the frustration and satisfaction of expectations. The fragile balance is kept between the pleasure of discovery, the unexpected, and the unusual, on one hand, and the pleasure of recognition, and the anticipation on the other.”

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The German playwright and social dramatist, Bertolt Brecht was a master at this. His sudden and at times violent breaks with linear narrative progression became known as the “alienation effect.” Initially intended as a distancing device to induce the spectator’s objective critical reasoning by denying them the possibility of subjectively identifying with the characters or action, it eventually became a pleasurable device that was simply enjoyed for its own sake. Today, part of the spectator’s pleasure is to be found in their ability to move between analytical distance and subjective identification. “Maaahvellous daahling…loved your alienation effect.”

Considerations of the pleasure of the spectator have led theatre practitioners to considerations about their inclusion within the performance event. The arrangement of the performance space and the placement of the spectators in relation to it have been of concern to theatre practitioners for the best part of the last century, and continues to be today. It is central to the way a performance is received. Traditionally a performance was considered as a unitary event intended to be received as a coherent and unified whole. Experimentation with the configuration of the spectators meant that it was possible to offer different members of the audience different perspectives on the performance and thus effectively intervene in its singular and unified interpretation. In some instances the spectators were so configured that each member literally received a different performance. The work of Ariane Mnouchkine is an excellent example of alternative audience configuration. In her Theatre du Soleil production of “1793” [1970], she positioned her audience in the middle of the theatre space while the performance took place, sometimes simultaneously, on stages erected around them.

In the following example of the production *Dada and the French Revolution*, the performance took place amongst the spectators, again sometimes simultaneously, effectively appropriating them.

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556 Postcard from the Theatre du Soleil production.
557 Performed at the Fly-by-night Club, Fremantle, Western Australia, in a setting suggestive of the 1920’s Zurich dada nightclub, Cabaret Voltaire.
both as patrons of the dada club Cabaret Voltaire setting, and co-conspirators in the staging of the revolution.

The decentring of the stage implied a decentring of the position where meaning could be found. Instead of meaning being fixed and rigid it afforded the spectators the pleasure of negotiating their own meaning. This idea was extended by one of the leading exponents of theatre in the 1960’s, namely the Polish playwright and theatre director Jerzy Grotowski. In order to heighten the spectator's subjective involvement they were appropriated into the dramatic fiction and given a role within the performance itself. In his Theatre Laboratory performances of “Faust” (1960), the spectators were guests at Faust's table; in “Kordian” (1962) they were the inmates of the psychiatric ward; and in “Akropolis” (1962) they became the survivors of the gas chambers.

One of the more bizarre attempts at audience involvement was perpetrated by Julian Beck and Judith Malina’s theatre company, Living Theatre in their production of Sophocles’ “Antigone” they encouraged the spectators, framed and positioned as the people of Argus, to literally go out into the streets and start the revolution.

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560 Needless to say this did not happen. The inability of spectators to carry emotions across from one ontology to another suggests that the emotions are distinctly different and independent. Perhaps this implies that theatre may not an efficient tool for achieving political change.
Experimentations with the placement of the spectator and the configuration of the theatrical space were, and still are, simply strategies for redirecting the spectator’s passive attention to one that may be referred to as active. What the experimenters failed to appreciate was that both states are simply two sides of the same coin and more importantly, that being passive is not any more or less pleasurable for the spectator, than being active.

Despite the fact that pleasure is a fundamental need in our lives, we are curiously restricted when it comes to the range of feelings and emotions that we are allowed to find pleasurable. There are some emotions we are suppose to eschew, just as there are some topics we are not meant to find funny. It is not surprising that a great deal of social, religious and political criticism is to be found in comedy. Surely if you distinguish between what you can laugh at and what you can not, then there is no point in laughing at all. Humour must be able to go anywhere.

The Epilogue from Peter Barnes’s play Laughter effectively illustrates this point. The extract is offered in its entirety in order to preserve the integrity and poignancy of the writing.

**Announcer's Voice:** Stop. Don't leave. The best is yet to come. Our final number. The Prisoners Advisory Committee of Block B, Auschwitz II, proudly present as the climax of this Extermination Camp Christmas Concert, the farewell appearance of the Boffo Boys of Birkenau, Abe Bimko and Hymie Bieberstein – “Bimko and Bieberstein!”

*Introductory music. Applause. A follow spot picks out two hollow-eyed comics, Bimko and Bieberstein as they enter dancing, Stage Right, dressed in shapeless concentration camp, striped prison uniforms with the yellow Star of David pinned on their threadbare tunics, wooden clogs, and undertakers top hats complete with ribbon. Carrying a small cane each, they perform a simple dance and patter routine, to the tune of “On the Sunny Side of the Street”.*

**Bieberstein:** Bernie Litvinoff just died.

**Bimko:** Well if he had a chance to better himself.

**Bieberstein:** Drunk a whole bottle of varnish. Awful sight, but a beautiful finish. Everyone knew he was dead. He didn't move when they kicked him. He's already in the ovens.

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Bimko: Poke him up then, this is a very cold block house.

Bieberstein: They're sending his ashes to his widow. She's going to keep them in an hour-glass.

Bimko: So she's finally getting him to work for a living.

Bieberstein: The Campo Foreman kept hitting me with a rubber truncheon yesterday - hit, hit, hit. I said, “You hitting me for a joke or on purpose?” “On purpose!” he yelled. Hit, hit, hit. “Good,” I said, “because such jokes I don't like.”

Bimko: According to the latest statistics, one man dies in this camp every time I breathe.

Bieberstein: Have you tried toothpaste?

Bimko: No, the Dental Officer said my teeth were fine, only the gums have to come out.

Bieberstein: Be grateful. The doctor told Fleischmann he needed to lose ten pounds of ugly fat, so they cut off his head.

The music has faded out imperceptibly into a hissing sound. The Follow Spot begins to turn blue. They stop dancing.

Bimko: I'm sure I've got leprosy.

Bieberstein: Devil's Island's the place for leprosy.

Bimko: It's good?

Bieberstein: It's where I got mine.

Bimko: Can I stay and watch you rot?

They cough and stagger.

Bieberstein: I could be wrong but I think this act is dying.

Bimko: The way to beat hydro-cyanide gas is by holding your breath for five minutes. It's just a question of mind over matter. They don't mind and we don't matter.

They fall to their knees.

Bieberstein: Those foul, polluted German bastardized ...

Bimko: Hymie, Hymie, please; what you want to do - cause trouble?

They collapse on the floor, gasping.

Bieberstein: To my beloved wife Rachel I leave my Swiss bank account. To my son Julius who I love and cherish, like he was my son, I leave my business. To my daughter I leave one hundred thousand marks in Trust. And to my no-good brother-in-law Louie who said I'd never remember him in my will - Hello Louie!

Bimko: Dear Lord God, you help strangers so why shouldn't you help us? We're the chosen people.

Bieberstein: Abe, so what did we have to do to be chosen?

Bimko: Do me a favour, don't ask. Whatever it was it was too much ... Hymie you were right, this act's dead on its feet.

The spot fades out.
**Bieberstein:** Oh mother ...

*They die in darkness.*

The juxtapositioning of a Jewish “stand-up-comedy” act and the gas ovens of Auschwitz, makes us excruciatingly aware of the power of laughter and how it can become a valuable weapon in the hands of an astute playwright.

Oddly enough our occidental theatre tradition has always censored the topics and emotions that may be represented within the theatrical frame. While some are deemed pleasurable, and therefore acceptable, others are not. In the 1960’s, the musical *Hair* outraged the public with manifestos of free-love and sexual liberation. In the 1970’s Peter Shaffer’s play *Equus*, openly used homosexuality and nudity to problematise psychiatry and religion’s questionable readings of “normality” and “morality”. [In the Western Australian production of the play the principal actor was arrested for indecent exposure. Interestingly it was not the character but the actor who was arrested]. The contemporary English playwright Howard Barker’s ideologically challenging and speculative work about the ecstasy of moral uncertainty continues to polarise audience’s opinions and reception of his work. And despite Sophocles’ tale of incest and parricide any attempt to represent acts of masochism or incest, or paedophilia for that matter, is regarded with suspicion by the Pharisees of moral orthodoxy. [I am immediately reminded of the hostile reception that the work of Los Angeles artists Bob Flanagan (a life long sufferer of cystic fibrosis) received; his confronting and inspirational installations and performances have been uncompromisingly recorded in the Kirby Dick documentary *Sick*. Just as the distinction between “taste” and “choice” conditions the way we make aesthetic decisions, this myopic morality may easily be dismissed as a consequence of the same distinction. However I suspect it is more complex and at the same time simpler than that. An explanation may be found outside our occidental theatre tradition.

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The Indian Sanskrit theatre scholar Bharata in his reading of the *Natyasastra*\(^{563}\) distinguishes between two types of feelings, namely *bhāva* and *rasa*. “Bhāva”, Bharata states, are the feelings we experience from events in real life and “rasa” the feelings that we experience from their vicarious aesthetic counterparts. According to Bharata, *pure rasa* is achieved by a balance of *bhāva*, *vibhāva* [a knowledge of feelings] and *anubhāva* [a knowledge of their consequences]; the significance of the distinction between “bhāva” and “rasa” is in the way it allows the spectator the theatrical pleasure of moving back and forth across the liminal space between “real-life” emotions and those associated with art…between reality and fiction. It is important that we do not confuse the two; mistaking one emotional state with another may not only have disturbing emotional consequences but may result in ignorant censorship.

“*Censorship typically insists that an image’s meaning is fixed and locatable – this is Obscenity*” the censor argues, nothing more or less. As an art historian, I try to attend to the formal and symbolic nuances of the controversial works of art, to how they inevitably exceed the verdicts rendered against them. *But I am also interested in how censorship itself provokes responses, especially in subsequent works of art, whether by the artist under attack or by other practitioners. Censorship generates limits but also reactions to those limits; the silence it imposes provokes its own responses.*”\(^{564}\)

Bharata’s theory goes some way towards establishing a general theory of artistic pleasure; it helps explicate how we can find theatrical pleasure and beauty in violence; how we can watch people being blown up; how we can find pleasure in observing hate, love, laughter, crying and death. It may also help explain why the *Living Theatre*’s audience were unable to transpose their feelings of revolt felt inside the theatre to the outside.

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\(^{563}\) The *Natyasastra* was composed around the fourth century A.D. and is regarded as the primary source for classical Indian dramaturgy. The book comprises a detailed account of the function and movement of all body parts [including the eyes] as instruments of expression. Interestingly, in the Indian dance tradition of Kathakali and other Indian dance styles, crying is expressed through an intricate gestural language; in Western drama [with the exception of mime], when we want to show crying, we cry. For an introductory account of Indian dance drama see: George, E. R. David, *India: Three Ritual Dance Dramas*, Chadwyck-Healey, U.K. 1986.

\(^{564}\) Richard Meyer, reprinted in *Adbusters*, September/October 2005. Vol 13, number 5. [Richard Meyer is Associate Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of Southern California.]
Finally, perhaps because my theatre work has always been a combination of design and direction, the pinnacle of theatrical pleasure for me has been theatre’s ability to transform the Cartesian matrix of time and space. We can fold space, move back and forth through time, listen and talk to people living and dead [real and imaginary], create contradictory and fantastic worlds that are not restricted by logic or reason, and escape our corporeal confines. Moreover these transformations are never fixed but are in a constant state of flux. Reality is being played with here; if only for an instant our seemingly impossible desire to escape the limits of our reality may be satisfied.

*fuckCRASH*. [1999]. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini

The limits of theatrical pleasure, Ubersfeld suggests, are to be found in our movement through the liminal space between fiction and reality. “If there is a passion proper to theatre, it resides in this uninterrupted flight.” 565

“And at this point the semiologist, faced with what refuses to yield meaning, falls silent”.

Anne Ubersfeld 566

566 ibid.
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[The full text of Concerning the Spiritual in Art may also be found at: http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/phil%20of%20art/kandinskytext.htm] [Accessed 4 April 2005.]


PERFORMANCE [RE]SEARCH

The work of Performance [Re]Search was a marked departure from other theatre work. It focused on the intricate spatial and temporal exchanges involved in the relationship between a performer and spectator.

At the same time as attempting to extend the range of what is communicable between a performer and spectator, P[R] tried to affectively modify the limits of what we have come to know and accept as conscious perception. The unstructured nature of P[R]’s work quite often meant that the performer’s subjective investigations were prioritised over the participation/involvement of the spectator. Conventional narrative was given over to complex narrative assemblages and conceptual leaps into more often than not unfamiliar, and at times inhospitable, worlds for spectators.

In laboratory research it is important that experiments be repeated, to look again at the discoveries that first astonished us - to repeat an experiment is critical. P[R] believed it was the form that is repeated and that the content is [or should] always be born anew.
“Performance, on the other hand, has been honored with dismantling textual authority, illusionism, and the canonical actor in favour of the polymorphous body of the performer. Refusing the conventions of role-playing, the performer presents herself/himself as a sexual, permeable, tactile body, scourging audience narrativity along with the barrier between stage and spectator.”

Elin Diamond

Performance [Re]Search was established in February 1994 by Serge Tampalini, Andrew Robinson and Sarah Cullity and incorporated in March 1995. Even though the company existed as a formal structure, its hierarchy was kept deliberately fluid so as to allow its directors and performers the flexibility to accommodate disparate, and at times, simultaneous research projects.

The desire for the establishment of the company was three fold. Firstly, research into performance practices seemed always to be encumbered by a propensity to investigate past performances by the application of an established methodology that was asserted as viable by tradition; a methodology that saw performance primarily as a “point of departure” for written analysis. The use of this sort of methodology was proving increasingly inadequate when applied to performance works in progress, as they limited the potential of the process in much the same way as when we set about trying to define a word -already knowing its meaning, the exercise becomes tautological. Performance seemed a far too useful tool to be placed solely at the disposal of detached analysis. Thus the development of an alternative methodology was one of the underlying premises behind the establishment of Performance (Re)Search; a methodology that saw performance not simply as the end product terminating the work process but as a mode of discourse capable of its own analysis -as scholarly research in its own right.

The second reason for the emergence of P[R] stemmed from the inability of commercially driven theatre, especially in a small population centre like Perth, to cope with the rapid developments and

expansion of theoretical speculation and performance praxis that was [and still is] happening constantly worldwide. The problem was dramatically highlighted in an institution like Murdoch University where there has always been a genuine awareness of the potential for creating new performance forms and synthesising new theatrical understandings, but where the inspiration and audience for this work was often obscured by indifferent attitudes that surrounded it. This did not mean the inspiration and the audience did not exist but that a great deal of effort needed to be put into bringing them together in a way that was consistent and, more importantly, sustainable.

The potential for doing exciting performance research work had existed at Murdoch University for many years. That these works may be critically successful, and valuable experiences for the staff and students involved, but will often not receive the broader attention that they might otherwise claim, was generally an accepted condition under which they were developed.

Thirdly, P[R] was formed in order to explore the boundaries of performance practices -particularly as these practices are challenged by the emergence of technologies that allow explicit interaction between “audiences” and “performers” in ways that hitherto, were the sole province of “live” theatre or performance. The work centred on using the body of the performer, as an instrument of writing, to investigate and create new spaces within current performance paradigms.

“The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different, whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity.”

At the beginning of all P[R]’s projects, we were careful not to discard or censor any ideas, but to accept all ideas equally; as part of a working ethos that valued their potential. It was considered important not to constrain them in the realm of the rational, but to allow them the freedom to transgress order and to resist immediate structuring. It was very much a collision of thoughts that was central to P[R]’s performance ethos. The enterprise of P[R]’s work was driven by a commitment to making work through processes that were viable within the terms of their chosen conceptual ground and made apparent within the impetus of subjectively triggered response and reaction; the rush of the real. The rational was seen only as accidental, the accidental as intentional.
P[R]’s work began not from a method or plan, but from fragments of subjective reality, and meaning emerged at the times when the mind was able to perceive relations. To perform in this way was to accept risk not by default, but by choice, to include risk as a part of the performance ethos.
P[R] asked the question if it is indeed possible that the performer’s subjectivity, rather than the performer’s ability to represent another subjectivity, could constitute a praxis that could arouse and carry new vigorous acts of creativity. It asserted that the performer, at the centre of their own work process, becomes by measure and extent of their capacity for creativity, the content, and form of their work.

What was this way of working? What drew us to it?

“Performance [Re]Search began without boundaries beyond those imposed by being at a particular place at a particular time. This does not mean that this place and time was not circumscribed by intention but that the intention was to create a place and time where intention could operate without certain boundaries. It seems to me that these boundaries, that were there to

be avoided, consisted mainly in the practice of arriving at the knowledge of the end of a process before that process has even physically begun. It quickly becomes clear that this desire to hold off outcomes is rather like beginning to tell a joke without knowing the punch line - the further it goes the more difficult it is not to collapse into that moment of release. If however one says that one is going to tell a joke but instead starts to tell an incredibly complex tale of tragedy and woe, then after a while the lack of humour may itself become painfully funny - if the story continues then the joke will pass and something else remain - the difficulty is still manyfold - what is this joke that is not a joke and has no ending? Who is the person who could stand to tell this endless shaggy dog story? Who are the people who will listen beyond the point that they realise they have been lured into an impossible conundrum - to stay and feel the pain of separation - or leave and lose all possibility of eventually finding satisfaction?

The funny thing is that once a boundary-less process begins it also begins to have boundaries. The question for Performance [Re]Search has continued to be whether it is possible to allow these boundaries to exist without them becoming rigid enough to stop sudden diversions and slow grinds in radically different directions. It is an interesting question.  

This question may be best answered by first conceiving of P[R]'s methodology as one that relied not on a single method, or the implementation of a pre-determined ordered process, but on a symphony of as many different methods that could be sustained by the number of people working together, around a set of common practices. Whenever someone new joined P[R], the work adjusted to accommodate their idiosyncratic subjective input and methodology.

TOWARDS A NEW METHODOLOGY:

“Scientific points of view, according to which my existence is a moment of the world’s, are always both naive and at the same time dishonest, because they take for granted, without explicitly mentioning it, the other point of view, namely that of consciousness, through which from the outset a world forms itself round me and begins to exist for me. To return to things themselves is to return

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569 Founding Member of Performance [Re]Search: from Research Report August 1996.
to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as is geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.”

Consider: A “body” is seen entering and occupying part of a performance space. Temporal and spatial exchanges between this “body” and the spectator identify it as belonging to a performer. The problem now is who or what is this “performer”. A phenomenological perspective quickly reveals a problematic knot: we are unable to separate the performer as subject from the performer as object; both remain inextricably tied together. As spectators we are unable to see the character [object] without simultaneously being conscious of the actor and person [subject]. Given this awareness P[R] clearly distinguished “performing” as the act that spatially and temporally hyphenates [not separates] the performer as object from the performer as subject.

P[R] was conscious of the distinction between *performance* and *performing*. *Performing* is best understood by re-thinking *performance* as the site in which *performing* takes place. The *performance* may be reproduced each night or documented in any number of ways, but *performing* resists reproduction...its presence is marked through disappearance.

Given that the *past* is irretrievable, the *future* indeterminable, the things that we may effectively influence, and thus are of genuine use to us as humans, are the moments that constitute the *present*. P[R] conceived of *performance* as a site where one may move towards the possibility of existing at the edge of the future, at the moment where the future arrives and where the present is created, and *performing* as remaining subjectively present in that moment. To remain *performing* requires one to make subjective choices, “that hold open those moments in performance that effectively redefine not only what one can do, but the way in which one creates the idea that precedes the possibility of doing”.571 [The trick is not to clutter the path of the future with our enthusiasm to make contact with it.] In this way the term *perform* references the act of making choices and, as we are well aware, whenever we make choices we make meaning. The fecundity of the process is primarily contingent upon the performer’s ability to remain subjectively present during those moments. P[R] showed that this was attainable by employing strategies that layered the work of the performer with the performer’s subjective realities [personal stories] –not the “personal stories” that actors drawn upon to empathise with their characters, but narratives that become part of the performance text. This meant that each performer was able to employ their “self” 572 as the source of their vocal and gestural creativity.

Data gathered by P[R] suggested that the relationship between the performer as *subject* and as *object* could be seen as the performer’s *identity*; an *identity* continuously redefined within the ever changing context of the performer’s relationship with other performers; an *identity* held in a constant state of potentiality—always *becoming*. P[R] argued that it is possible for each performer,

571 Andrew Robinson, founding member of Performance [Re]Search.
572 For a comprehensive account on the idea of “self” see: Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday: Garden City, New York, 1959. In this book, Goffman argues that there is no intrinsic entity as the “self” just a series of roles we play. His later research finds problems with his initial assertion and his views were more in line with the phenomenologists, who would have us believe, there is such a thing as the “self” and the way we come to know it, is through the numerous social roles it performs. The more “social roles” we see an individual perform the more we come to know the individual’s “self”;}
by always viewing their objective actions through the lens of their subjective consciousness, to create a *performing-self*, if you like, that was capable of transgressing and transforming the *identity* that created it. The creation of a *performing self* was reliant upon the ability of the performer to consciously hold open the liminal space between themselves as *subjects* and themselves as *objects*. Employing the *performing self* as the primary motivator of action, uncovered it as an agency of consciousness - at times a seemingly volatile agent capable of extreme states of visibility. By doing so P[R] tried to theoretically subvert historically established conventions of “identity” as fixed and constant.

![Image of performance](image-url)  

A performer’s appearance in a performance space implies a desire to be seen; it is this “desire” that was of interest to P[R]—especially within the knowledge that the existence of this desire cannot be denied, yet at the same time it is resistant to any immediate understanding or explanation. P[R] was concerned with how the performer’s desire to be seen, to have a voice, to be heard and finally to communicate was negotiated. It is the desire to act, rather than the act itself that also needs to be considered when assessing creativity. It was the replacement of *habit* with *choice*, and an

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573 For a more detailed discussion on the *liminal* and *liminality* see the chapter: *Liminality, Ambiguity and Paradox.*
acknowledgement of action as a site where desire could be made visible, that led P[R] to suggest the triadic model of desire-choice-action as a paradigm for performing. It was what moved people to move that was of interest to P[R]. This was not intended as the opening up of some deep psychological trajectory, but as a recognition and celebration of each performer's subjective consciousness.

LIVING IS A HORIZONTAL FALL:

The work of P[R] began formally with a presentation of Living Is A Horizontal Fall that was designed and produced as part of the International Theatre Festival in Casablanca, Maroc [September, 1995]. The first performance of the work was given at the Murdoch University Theatre, August 1995.

The title Living Is A Horizontal Fall was drawn from Jean Cocteau’s novel OPIUM: The Diary Of A Cure; a text P[R] used as source material for the performance, in parallel with the physical and theoretical investigations outlined below. OPIUM loosely describes Cocteau's journey from

574 Living Is A Horizontal Fall was a theatrical adaptation of the Jean Cocteau novel “Opium” by Serge Tampalini and Andrew Robinson at Murdoch University Theatre, and performed by Andrew Robinson and Sarah Cullity. They were joined by Bouchra Ijourk, Aziz Rajil and Mounir Fatmi at the Theatre De Sidi Belyout and the Institut Francais, Casablanca, Maroc, September, 1995. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.

addiction to cure, touching along the way on the nature of creativity and the human need for certainty in an uncertain existence. The fragmented structure of the novel, and its deviation from conventional narrative, meant that it was ideally suited to become one of the multiple strands drawn out by P[R], in this performance process.

P[R] attempted to develop a performance practice that could both generate and make use of “states of flux” [what were to become know as sites of transformation and finally energetics] that were directly related to contemporary social discourse interwoven with the tangled webs of information, communication, and relationship, that involve us all. The concept of energetics is explained and discussed later in this report but may usefully be thought of as a state of heightened awareness characterised by an intensification of sensory input and processing.

Living Is A Horizontal Fall took these energetics and attempted to present them in a highly developed form that allowed for full audience engagement, at the same time as remaining open to the possibility of their transformation and for the emergence of new energetics within the performance itself. In order to accomplish this, a conceptual performance structure seemed necessary; a structure capable of linking the audience's ontology with the extremely complex ontological matrix of the central part of Living is a Horizontal Fall.

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576 The term site is borrowed from its use in archaeology where it is employed to denote a place where there is evidence of human behaviour.
Conceptualising the performance as a map proved beneficial; a map at first unmarked, but upon which the performers moved from one place to another, guided by their internal (subjective) journey -leaving behind traces of where they had been. Often returning by different routes to the same places, their traces would begin to build a pattern that would eventually, slowly, release the individual stories of each of the nomadic inhabitants; individual stories that remained both disparate and connected as the inhabitants remained both strangers and allies on this strangely familiar landscape.

P[R] conceived a “place” on the map, as an established site of transformation/energetic, in which a specific performance activity, developed during rehearsals, was embedded. Only by being spatially and temporally present in these “places” could the performer engage the specific performance activity embedded there. The action of moving from “place” to “place”, was seen as part of a continual metamorphosis between “becoming” and “being” -arriving and residing, all consumed by the ineluctable constancy of change. The overriding direction of the work was to give visibility to this “constancy of change.” Even when the performers resided at a place on the map where they had
been before, the different choices made on their journey transformed it—in much the same way as one’s favourite city is transformed each time we return to it. P[R] worked towards mapping both the internal landscape of the performer and the terrain on/in, which they worked. It focused on exploring the temporal and spatial exchanges negotiated by the performer, highlighting their appearance and disappearance central to performance itself, and integral to the spectator’s experience of conscious perception.

Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

P[R] argued that there existed a form of communication that preceded the need for semantic meaning; a language [as it were] whose closure was not to be found in understanding, but in satisfaction—a language that both the “spoken” and the “written” can only represent. While acknowledging an awareness of this language, P[R] focused on using the performer’s body as an agency for giving visibility to the physical states it conjured. Previously, performers were accustomed to a set of established conventions out of which “ideal” bodies were constructed. By resisting these conventions, P[R] found that the body was at times able to give visibility to unpredictable volatile states.
The “performance map” for *Living is a Horizontal Fall* was drawn from the following performance activities developed and assembled during training and rehearsals.

**THE PLACE: Prologue: The Opium Ship.**

*Living is a Horizontal Fall*. [Casablanca, 1995].

**PRETEXT:**

I believe it was Marguerite Duras who first spoke of the necessity for a theatre audience to be carefully brought to the site where the performance could take place; where they could engage with it free of the violence inherent in an abrupt start. It was with this in mind that the place, *The Opium Ship* was devised.

**CONTEXT:**

Using the selected extract from the source text [below] the performers began, from separate parts of the auditorium, by speaking the text in English, Berber, Arabic, or French -or a mixture of all the languages. They slowly made their way to the front of the stage, where once having arrived they evoked the presence of a ship [referred to in the extract], through ambient soundings that in turn

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578 The Berbers are an ethnic group indigenous to Northwest Africa, speaking the Berber languages of the Afroasiatic family.
slowly mutated into music, then song, and finally into a *site of transformation/energetic* which the performers used as the agency into the complex performative modalities of the central part of the work.

**TEXT:**

“I close my eyes, I see again the boys’ berths on board the X..., one of the largest steamers on the Marseilles-Saigon line. The X was waiting to get under way. The purser, one of my opium smoking friends, had suggested the escapade to me. At eleven o’clock at night we crossed the deserted docks and climbed up the ladder onto the deck. We had to follow our guide at full speed and avoid the watch. We climbed over cables, worked around columns and Greek temples, crossed public squares, labyrinths of machines, shadow and moonlight, we mixed up the companion ways and the corridors so much and so well that our poor guide began to lose his head, until, softly, that powerful strange smell put us on the right path.

Imagine enormous berths, four or five dormitories, where sixty “boys” lay smoking on two tiers of planks. In each dormitory a long table filled up the empty space. Standing on these tables, and cut in two by a flat, unmoving cloud half way up the room, the latecomers were undressing, tying up the cords where they liked to hang up their washing, gently rubbing their shoulders. The scene was lit by the dim lights of the lamps, and on top of them burnt the spluttering drug. The bodies were wedged against each other and without causing the slightest surprise, or the slightest ungraciousness, we took our place where there was really no place left, with our legs doubled up and our heads resting on stools. The noise we made did not even disturb one of the boys who was sleeping with his head against mine. A nightmare convulsed him: he had sunk to the bottom of the sleep that stifled him, entering into him through his mouth, his large nostrils and his ears, which stood out from his head. His swollen face was closed like an angry fist, he sweated, turned over and tore at his silken rags. He looked as though a stroke of the lancet would deliver him and bring forth the nightmare. His grimaces formed an extraordinary contrast with the calm of the others, a vegetable calm, a calm which reminded me of something familiar. What was it? On those planks lay the twisted bodies in which the skeletons, visible through the pale skin, were no more than the delicate armatures of a dream. In fact, it was the olive trees of Provence which those young
sleepers evoked in me, the twisted olive trees on the flat red earth, their silver clouds hanging in the air.

In that place I could almost believe that it was all this profound lightness that alone kept this monumental ship floating on the water.\(^{579}\)

\[\text{THE PLACE: Writing with the Head.}\]

\[\text{Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]}\]

\[\text{PRETEXT:}\]

We are so accustomed to the process associated with communication, that we forget the facilitating structures involved. The luxuriant marks on paper, the evocative movements of the head, the shaping of the lips, and the uttered sounds, all seem to have been unintentionally overlooked by our enthusiasm for the conscious end product of communication. This place investigated the intricate vocal and physical rhythms and textures inherent in acts of communication.

\[\text{CONTEXT:}\]

Keeping their bodies neutral and looking straight ahead (either standing or sitting) the performers, using only the heads, focus on writing a sentence which they have independently selected from the source text by tracing the letters directly in front of their eyes. At the same time as each letter is traced, they are also sounded. This process is repeated, until the sentence is both written and sounded fluently. Meaning emerges from unprecedented combinations of shapes and sounds.

TEXT:
Independently selected sentences from the source text.

THE PLACE: Conversations.

*Living is a Horizontal Fall.* [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:
At first seemingly disconnected voices intersect the performance space. Gradually a sense of their connectivity is found in what appears to be a curiously common theme. What we eventually hear is a conversation; what we do not see is its instigator or its receiver. What we witness is a conversation that has escaped its context. In this *place*, the spectators are subjected to familiar words in defamiliarised contexts. New meanings may be found in their unexpected and accidental connections. Meaning is being played with here.

CONTEXT:
The performers may choose to speak [by instigating or answering] in French, Arabic, English, or Berber. Sometimes the instigated conversation remains unanswered, sometimes incomplete, but always dislocated from whatever other performance work is taking place. The conversations are seen as accidental intersections. It is at the intersections where new meanings may be found.
TEXT:

Conversation One:

Voice One: *Why live this existence? It would be better to throw yourself out of the window.*

Voice Two: *Impossible, I am floating.*

Voice One: *Your body will quickly reach the bottom.*

Voice Two: *I shall arrive slowly after it.* 580

Conversation Two:

Voice One: *This telegram is dead.*

Voice Two: *It's just because it's dead that everyone understands it.* 581

THE PLACE: *Sound-Sense-Meaning-Song.*

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580 ibid. p. 80.
PRETEXT:
The performance activity associated with Sound-Sense-Meaning-Song clearly illustrates what P[R] refers to as a “form of communication that precedes meaning”. All vocal communication begins with sound. As an agent of communication, sound moves towards “meaning” through an infinite series of minute transformations. However before becoming “meaning”, sound may be invested with “sense”; a quality that alludes to meaning without being replaced by it. This place attempts to give shape and form to the stages of transformation associated with the production of verbal meaning. Sometimes in the communication process, words become inadequate -they are unable to convey the nuances of our intended meaning. At this point we need another level of communication; a level beyond the purely semantic realm becomes necessary.\(^{582}\)

CONTEXT:
The performers independently select a sentence from the source text. They begin by lying on their backs on the floor and envisage they are lying at the bottom of a body of water. Slowly, very slowly, rising they begin vocally exploring all the disparate sounds that constitute their sentence. At the same time they explore how the sound impacts on the movement of the body. The closer they get to the surface of the water, the more their sentence is allowed to take on the “sense” that it holds for each individual performer. As the surface approaches so does the “meaning” of the sentence, until finally as the surface is broken the semantic meaning of the sentence is heard. Once through the surface of the imagined body of water, each performer continually repeats their sentence…a repetition that mutates meaning into rhythms. Through subtle vocal shifts the performer’s rhythms begin to orchestrate themselves into at first an individual song, and finally a group “song” -that in turn becomes the energetic that moves the performer to another place on the performance map.

TEXT:
Independently selected lines from the source text.

\(^{582}\) This idea is discussed in relationship to work of Julia Kristeva and Tel Quel group in the chapter: Image, Sign, Symbol and Metaphor.
THE PLACE: Improbable Places.

"Living is a Horizontal Fall." [Casablanca, 1995] Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.

PRETEXT:
There is an undeniable fascination held by a body suspended in a position or shape that seems in opposition to its natural laws. In such positions, the body can be the site of unexpected strength and emotional intensities. "Balance" is one such possible site.

CONTEXT:
The performers begin by exploring states of physical balance and extending them to their limits. When a state is found, it is held, still, and its physical nuances explored in detail so that this “state of balance” is in a sense finely tuned. Finally each performer adds a vocal sound/note that does not disturb the body’s balance. It is as if the vocalisation is the point or edge on which the body is balanced. In this delicate balance, not only is the body’s physicality made apparent but the emotional intensities of the performer may also be visible.

TEXT:
The performer's body and their independently selected vocalisations.
**THE PLACE:** Falling down.

*Living is a Horizontal Fall.* [Casablanca, 1995]

**PRETEXT:**

The absurdity of life is not expressed in nihilism but in the impossibility for anyone to simply do nothing. Betrayed by a need to create a meaningful existence, we are condemned to a Sisyphean-like fate of always needing to act. Sisyphus was, according to Homer, a wise mortal who scorned the Gods, loved life, hated death, and for this was punished to a life in the Underworld where he was given the absurd task of spending eternity pushing a large boulder up a hill, only to find that when he finally reached the top it rolled back down and he had to begin his task again. It didn’t take Sisyphus long to realise that this was absurd, but his realisation that all of life’s tasks were equally as absurd, because they were all subject to death, gave Sisyphus victory over his jailer. Aware of the absurdity of life we, like Sisyphus, must be happy in the knowledge that we have escaped the dilemma of this existence.

**CONTEXT:**

The performers concentrate on falling to the floor as if unable to counter the force of gravity. They fall towards a state of rest, but just at that moment when rest might be attained, they are propelled back into action, only to find themselves once again drawn to collapsing. This rising and falling is

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repeated, and during the time available in the liminal space between falling and being propelled into action, the performers attempt to speak selected extracts from source text.

**TEXT:**

1. “Satie wanted to make a theatre for dogs. The curtain rises. The set consists of a bone.” 584

2. “In England they have just made a film for dogs. The hundred and fifty dogs who were invited hurled themselves at the screen and tore it to pieces.” 585

3. “When I was staying at No.45 rue La Bruyere with my grandfather who hated dogs and had a mania for tidiness, I went out for a walk (I was then fourteen) with a fox terrier of a year and a half old, which was just tolerated. At the bottom of the white steps in the hall my terrier arched his back and relieved himself. I rushed forward, ready to strike him. Agony dilated the poor beast's eyes; he ate his droppings and sat up begging.” 586

4. “At the clinic, at five o'clock, the old bull-dog who is dying is given a fatal injection of morphine. One hour later he is playing in the garden, jumping and rolling about. The following day, at five, he scratched at the doctor's door and asked for his injection.” 587

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585 ibid.
586 ibid.
587 ibid. pp. 61-62.
THE PLACE: The Public Prosecutor.

Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]

PRETEXT:

“Legend gathers round poets who live in glass houses. If they hide and live in some unknown cellar, the public thinks: ‘You’re hiding; you want us to believe there is something where there is nothing’. On the other hand, if they look at the glass house, the public thinks: ‘You are deceiving us, you are mystifying us’, and everyone begins to guess, distort, interpret, search, find, symbolise, and mystify.” 588

Sometimes we must give evidence in our defence; sometimes we must redeem the moments in our lives that have been claimed by others –if only to satisfy our sense of self and assure our place in an often uncertain existence.

588 ibid. p. 113.
CONTEXT:

The exercise is devised for two performers. The attention of performer one is focused on delivering their lines in the quality of voice imagined as belonging to someone giving evidence in a court of law in which their life is on trial. However they must attempt to remain as detached and objective as possible - they remain still; their work is vocal. At the same time performer two focuses on trying to externalise the internal state that the narrative of the performer one evokes in them - they are animated; their work is physical. As part of the exercise, the performers counterpoint their work, so that the performer who is initially still and vocal, will eventually become animated and physical, and vice versa.

TEXT:

“I do not give evidence, I do not plead. I do not pass judgement. I merely produce documents, for and against.” 589

THE PLACE: Rooms within houses.

Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]

589 ibid. p. 15.
PRETEXT:

“Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system. When I walk round my flat, the various aspects in which it presents itself to me could not possibly appear as views of one and the same thing if I did not know that each of them represents the flat seen from one spot or another, and if I were unaware of my own movements, and of my body as retaining its identity through the stages of those movements. I can of course take a mental bird’s eye view of the flat, visualize it or draw a plan of it on paper, but in this case too I could not grasp the unity of the object without the mediation of bodily experience, for what I call a plan is only a more comprehensive perspective: it is the flat ‘seen from above’, and the fact that I am able to draw together in it all habitual perspectives is dependent on my knowing that one and the same embodied subject can view successively from various positions.” 590

We intimately know the rooms of our homes. They are filled with memories. Sometimes these memories are released as we enter the rooms. It is a familiar world. Consider: What happens when we find ourselves lost in it, when we, perhaps even sometimes along with others, appear as strangers?

CONTEXT:

Prior to beginning this exercise, each performer has selected a number of short extracts from the source text, and has mentally placed them in private places, in specific rooms of their individual homes. The exercise begins by each performer moving from one room to another, by way of an imaginary map of their homes on the performance space floor. Each performer's imaginary map takes up the whole floor, so that conceptually they are layered on top of each other. This intentional structuring provokes not only the possibility, as each performer moves from one room to another, of meeting a stranger in one’s own house, but of becoming lost in one’s own familiar world.

The exercise proceeds in four stages.

1. The performers move through the map of the house, from room to room. Attention is initially given solely to evoking the presence of the room.

2. Once having established their rooms, the performers respond to the memories of each room through a refined/minimal set of gestures associated with them.

3. Next the activity is layered with the performers speaking either all or traces of the text that they have placed in each of their rooms.

4. The final stage of the exercise involves the concentration of the work by slowly restricting the size of the floor space on which the performers have imaged their maps. This reduction of space refocuses the work of the performers off the physical concretisation of their individual rooms and houses, onto the corporeal spaces opened up by the negotiation of spatial exchanges between the performers.

TEXT:
Independently selected passages from the source text.

THE PLACE: Peripheral vision.

*Living is a Horizontal Fall.* [Casablanca, 1995]
Traditionally, as I have discussed in the chapter *Sight*, seeing is generally only associated with the central portion of our vision. Its periphery is in most instances ignored, thus significantly limiting the ways we respond to what we see. By being consciously aware of our peripheral vision we may attain a way of seeing that gives equal emphasis to both the centre and extremities of our visual field, affectively allowing us to consciously respond to what we see in ways that are unavailable to us in the traditional/habitual way of seeing.

This exercise is potentially active throughout the whole performance. Within the *place* of peripheral vision the performers are able to visually follow and engage each other’s work, without any predetermined rules of collaboration. With the performers constantly alert to the possibility of working in this way, the *place* exists in a state of potentiality that may, at any time, be filled with a mirroring and reflecting of each other’s gestures, or with a doubling of each other’s movement that alludes to a pre-existent order, and yet is only in that instant constructing itself. The exercise also allows the performers and audience the surprise experience of brief transitory moments of unity.

The performer's peripheral vision.
THE PLACE: The Island.

Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995]

PRETEXT:
Each of us has a part of ourselves “which we have inhabited ever since we were born and which we cannot leave” — an island; a private place that we long to share. We are used to it; we endure it, even if it pains us. Sometimes we need the “report from a tourist”, one that speaks our language; to help us understand our isolation. Our physical bodies too are islands, both personal and public, private and shared, protected and penetrated.

CONTEXT:
In the first part of this work, the performers, motivated only by having to remain at the furthermost distance from each other, move around the performance space trying to pass, unobstructed, through its centre. Gradually the space, in which they move is restricted; shrunk as a deliberate provocation.

592 Ibid.
of the moment when it is physically impossible to avoid each other. Its aim is to release the physical and emotional intensities discovered during the first part of the work.

TEXT:

“Monsieur Teste would like to explore the desert island which I have inhabited ever since I was born and which I cannot leave now. Sometimes he reaches the shore and wanders about, trying to overcome the deadly sleep that emanates from the outer trees. It is a moment, after dinner, when Madame Teste watches him move away, still seated, leaving in the armchair only a great empty smoking mass.

If I, a man from the centre, were to venture out, I would be able to see him a long way off leaning up against a tree, resembling his column in the Opera House. But it frightens me to leave the middle of the island and then, what is the use of it? I put up with it. I need a report from a tourist, from a Teste, and a Teste does not penetrate into it.” 593

THE PLACE: Memory.

Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

593 ibid.
PRETEXT:
The world of memory implies a desire to make present an irretrievable past. In this place the performers, through sound and gestures, attempt to give visibility to this desire.

CONTEXT:
The exercise was devised for two performers. Performer one speaks the selected extract that tells of a person slowly remembering their youth. As the memories slowly return, the performers simultaneously explore how their embodiment of the memories, impacts on their corporeal modalities. What we witness is a counterpoint between their memory and their physicality…the shape of desire, perhaps. By vocally exploring the quality of “memory sounds” associated with the nostalgic emanations of a gramophone, performer two opens up a memory space that travels parallel to and supports performer one’s narrative…the sound of desire, perhaps.

TEXT:
“One day, I was going to the rue Henner, passing the rue La Bruyere, where I had spent my youth at number 45, a house where my grand-parents lived on the first floor while we lived on the mezzanine floor (the ground floor, consisting of store rooms and the hall, including only a study looking on to the courtyard and the trees of the Jardin Pleyel). I decided to overcome the anguish which usually made me run along this street like a man both deaf and blind. Since the main gates of number 45 were half open, I went in under the archway. I looked with surprise at the trees in the courtyard where I used to spend the summer bicycling and decorating Punch and Judy shows, when a suspicious concierge, appearing from a high attic window which had been kept closed in the past, asked me what I was doing there. When I replied that I had come to have a look at the house of my childhood, she said: “You surprise me”; left the window, came through the hall to join me, inspected me, refused to be convinced by any proof, threw me out and banged the gates, giving rise, with this sound of distant cannon fire, to a host of new memories.

After this setback, I thought of going along the street from Rue Blanche to number 45, closing my eyes and letting my right hand trail along the houses and the lamp-posts as I always used to do

594 A “corporeal modality” may best be thought of as a particular way of being present in one’s body—a mode of being, experiencing and expressing.
when I came back from school. The experience did not yield very much and I realised that at the time I was small and that now my hand was placed higher and no longer encountered the same shapes. I began the manoeuvre again.

Thanks to a mere difference of level, and through a phenomenon similar to that whereby a needle rubs against the grooves of a gramophone record, I obtained the music of memory and I discovered everything again: my cape, my leather satchel, the name of our teacher, some precise phrases I had said, the marbled cover of my notebook, the timbre of my grand-father’s voice, the smell of his beard and the material of the dresses worn by my sister and mother, who were at home on Tuesdays."  

THE PLACE: The Nurse.

Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:
In our traditional experience of theatre, we are accustomed to furniture and objects either having been set before the show or carried onto the stage without any sense of them having a history or existential significance. We do not expect them to be meaningful in themselves; we do not expect
them to be performers. This place explores the transient ambience suggested by the presence on stage of a single suitcase. It is about forgotten hotel rooms, dreams of empty cities, lost love and sunsets - about a suitcase and a sense of the past and an uncertain future.

CONTEXT:
As part of the prologue [The Opium Ship] an old suitcase is ceremoniously brought onto the performance space by one of the performers. It is the single, most present signifier in the space. As the performers find themselves next to it, they incorporate it as part of the work. It is from this place that the selected extracts from the source text, may be spoken.

TEXT:
1. “Those small hotel rooms in which I have camped for so many years, rooms to make love in, but where I make friends unceasingly, an occupation a thousand times more exhausting than making love.”

2. “There is one kind nurse, a war widow from the North. At table her colleagues question her about the German occupation during the war. They sip their coffee and wait for the horrors.

    ‘They were very kind’ she replies, ‘they used to share their crusts of bread with my little boy and even if one of them did behave incorrectly, one did not dare to complain to the Kommandatura, because they were punished too severely. If they pestered a woman they were tied to a tree for two days.’ This reply dismays the table. The widow is suspect. She is called the Boche. She cries and little by little she changes her memories, she slips in a little horror. She wants to live.”

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596 This idea is discussed in the chapters: Performing Theatre and The Affective.
598 ibid. p. 51.
THE PLACE: Characterisation

*Living is a Horizontal Fall.* [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:

Work on character development in contemporary dramaturgy has more often than not acknowledged it as a site of unity. The implication is that “character” is a singular, fixed and stable entity. This is supported by a cultural tradition that sees our personal identity as also singular and constant. [The idea of “characterisation” is discussed and critiqued as part of the performance *Crossing Body Shadow.*] In this place P[R] has conceived of “characterisation” as capable of accommodating a plurality of constantly changing identities and is acknowledged as only one of the multiple ways of dramatic representation.

CONTEXT:

The performers independently select an extract from the source text that is character driven. Through the traditional dramaturgical conventions of selection, internalisation and externalisation, a character is invented. Each time the performers return to this place the dramaturgy is repeated and the character reinvented. Significantly, each time the character is reinvented it is ineluctably changed by the performer’s experiences that led them back to the place. The assertion is that “character” like “identity” is never constant and fixed, it is always negotiated.

TEXT [One Example only]:

“It is impossible for me to remember any first meeting with Proust. Our group has always treated him as a famous man. I see him, with a beard, seated on the red cushions at Larue’s. I see him, without a beard, at Madame Alphonse Daudet’s, plagued by Jammes as by a gad-fly. I find him again, dead, with the beard he had at the start. I see him, with and without a beard, in that room of
cork, dust and phials, either in bed, wearing gloves, or standing up in a washroom like a magistrate’s office, buttoning a velvet waistcoat over a poor square torso which seemed to contain his mechanisms, and eating noodles standing up.

I see him among the dustsheets. They lay over the chandelier and the armchairs. The naphthalene lit up the shadows. He stood erect against the chimney-piece in the drawing room of the Nautilus like a character out of Jules Verne, or else, near a picture hung with crepe, in a dress-coat, like Carnot dead.

Once announced by Celeste’s voice on the telephone, he came to collect me at three in the afternoon so that I could go with him to the Louvre to see Mantegna’s St Sebastion. This canvas then occupied a place in the same room as Madame Riviere, Olympia and Le Bain Turc. Proust was like a lamp lit in broad daylight, the ringing of a telephone in an empty house.

Another time he was supposed to come (perhaps) at about 11 o’clock at night. I was with my neighbour on the first floor, she of whom he wrote to me: “When I was twenty she refused to love me: now that I am forty and have been the delight of the Duchesse de G..., must she refuse to read me? ”

At midnight I went back upstairs. I found him on my landing. He was waiting for me, sitting on a seat in the darkness. “Marcel”, I cried, “why didn’t you at least go in and wait for me? You know the door is left ajar.” “Dear Jean”, he replied, in a voice that was a moan, a laugh –“dear Jean, Napoleon had a man killed because he had waited for him in his room. Of course I would only have read Larousse, but there could have been letters and so on lying about.”

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599 ibid. pp. 80-81.
THE PLACE: Imaging.

Living is a Horizontal Fall. [Casablanca, 1995].

PRETEXT:

My use of the term “image”, in this context, is not to be confused with my use of the term when distinguishing between images, signs, symbols and metaphors. It is being used, here, as an expedient way of referring to an imagined visual impetus or stimulus. A belief in the ability of images to engender somatic responses in the performer [potent responses that act directly upon the spectator’s nervous system,] was fundamental to the performance work embedded in this place. Informed by one of the energising principles of Butoh,600 the performers focus on the external expression of internal corporeal modalities engendered by a series of images; not as final products, but rather as a constantly mutating sequence of energetic states. The work was held together not by an explicit narrative, but simply by the fact that the images were drawn from a common text.

CONTEXT:
An assemblage of images, drawn from the source text, is common to all the performers.
Simultaneously the performers randomly draw on the images as the source of their corporeal movement. It is critical that each performer does not reside in/on an image long enough for it to establish any narrative connectivity, but that they move through them in a constant state of visual metamorphosis. As each image arrives, it suspends the continuity of each performer’s movement and it veers off to become something else; each suspension is a critical point, a point of bifurcation. At each point we get a flash of the real that leaves its trace like an “after image.” This point perhaps best illustrates what P[R] posits as performing, for it is here that one is at the edge of the future, where the present is being created; where the real, unencumbered by learnt cerebral responses, may be glimpsed and where the distinction between virtual and actual is rendered obsolete.

TEXT: [from which the physical expression is built]

- You take a deep breath and the air turns solid in your mouth.
- You watch a wound growing on your arm in slow motion.
- You are an egg being held up by a fountain of water.
- A black curtain of smoke creeps tightly around your neck.
- Your legs slowly collapse as gravity pulls you down.
- Your body diffuses in water like Chinese ink
- You are a snake drinking from a bowl of milk.
- You open a tiny window that overlooks acres of abandoned garden.
- Your mind spreads out and you watch it do so.
- You rise like a balloon but are pulled weakly back to a cold moon.
- Urine runs down your legs and it smells like violets.
- You have a very ancient book in your hands and you slowly turn the pages.
- You dance with your own shadow.
- You are a mirror that falls and shatters on the ground.
- You see flashes like moire before your eyes and you are startled.
- Tiny steps appear all around you as you continue to climb.
• An express train rushes behind your head.
• You put your hand in a spinning fan and it passes right through.
• You are a bull rushing into the ring and come to a sudden halt.
• You are a peacock and you close your tail with a Spanish gesture.
• You have a sea sponge in your hands -you squeeze it and words come out.
• You fall to the ground in a state of euphoria.

**THE PLACE: Epilogue.**

*Living is a Horizontal Fall.* [Casablanca, 1995].

**PRETEXT:**

Just as it was important for the audience to be brought to the ontological space where the performance could be experienced, so it was equally important that they be returned to the world whence they came.
CONTEXT:

From the front of the stage, facing the audience [echoing the position of their first entrance onto the stage], the performers slowly recede to its back, while delivering selected extracts from the source text. The exercise is completed, by a layering of independently selected lines from the extracts, to form a vocal collage that slowly fades to silence, stillness…darkness.

TEXT:

**Voice One:** “The tables turn. The sleepers speak. This is a fact. It is revolting to deny it.” 601

**Voice Two:** “I have lived each period of my life so passionately and blindly that I have completely forgotten one of them. An object or a person, which typified it leaps into my memory without an anchor. Where did it come from? I search. I do not find. The background has disappeared.” 602

**Voice Three:** “One must never get excited about mystery, so that mystery may come on its own and not find the path confused by our impatience to make contact with it.” 603

**Voice Four:** “Now that I am cured, I feel empty, poor, heart-broken and ill. I float. The day after tomorrow I leave the clinic. Where should I go? Three weeks ago, I felt a sort of pleasure. I was asking M..., questions about altitude and about little hotels in the snow. I was going to come out. But it was a book that was going to come out. A book is coming out, is going to come out, as the publishers say. It is not I. I could die...the book does not care. The same game always begins again and every time one allows oneself to be taken in. It was difficult to foresee a book written in seventeen days. I had the illusion that it was a question of myself. The work which exploits me needed opium; it needed me to leave opium; once more, I will be taken in. And I was wondering, shall I take opium or not? It is

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602 ibid. p. 115.
603 ibid. p. 36.
useless to put on a carefree air, dear poet. I will take it if my work wants me to. And if opium wants me to.”

Voice Five: “One must leave behind a trace of the journey which memory forgets.”

In his review of *LIVING IS A HORIZONTAL FALL*, the theatre critic for the Maroc national newspaper, *Liberation*, Driss Ksikes offered his impression of the work:

“...Sarah Cullity and Andrew Robinson and two Moroccan academics, Aziz and Bouchra: improvisation was the order of the day. Meaning had to be inferred by the spectators at each and every moment for them to forge a pattern out of fragments and to integrate them into a coherent whole. Through gesture and mood the director, Serge, gave visible shape to meanings emanating from the body. He gave audible shape to internal rhythms, turning sensation into sound. He enveloped it all in incense. And he expressed virtual or latent meaning by endless falls, which becoming commonplace, paradoxically expressed the drive to live through words by the very desire to communicate without the mental obstacle of language.”

“As the aim of the director is not to condition characters but to let beings produce meanings by exposing themselves without artifice, he opted for a double challenge. The first is to communicate the essence of a text without reproducing it in its textual integrity. And the second is to rely on the capacity of actors to rid themselves of theatrical reflexes in order to let meanings become apparent through their bodies. This is one way of exploring the limits of the self and of the communicative being. His ambition is to restore the power of the sensual as potent metalanguage between humans. It’s a yogi’s wager which refuses the intellect as a barrier to sensual perception. The actors were able to speak in Arabic, French, English or in Berber. This was enormously important for the creation of unconscious signposts in the spectators’ unconscious. But what mattered most was intonation, the sensation of sound accompanying the words. And, stemming from that, was the

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604 ibid. p. 125.
605 ibid. p. 20.
"effect created by the diverse movements produced by the four shadows on stage. Experimental theatre from start to finish."

DISAPPEARENCES:

The second formal work of P[R] was *Disappeariences*. *Disappeariences* was the first work in a trilogy (loosely framed by the title *Experiences of Identity*) that explored elements of human experience and the ways in which they are translated or communicated through acts of performance, particularly focussing on those elements of experience that resist being reproduced or mediated. It explored emotional, physical, and sensual absences and disappearances -through subtle motifs as well as extremes of experience, in a journey aimed at extending the range of what is communicable between performer and audience.

*Disappeariences*. [1996] Performers: *Andrew Robinson* and *Sarah Cullity*. Direction and design: *Serge Tampalini*

*Disappeariences* focussed on the moments of *performing*; moments, as discussed above, that only ever exist in a continually disappearing present, and perhaps only ever perceivable in and through the ways we attempt to make their disappearance visible. P[R] was committed to experimenting with the ways we make visible these moments. *Disappeariences* began with investigations into the concept of “speed” that was opened-up, but not fully developed, in *Living is a Horizontal Fall*. It grew out of the insight that all things, both material and immaterial, are subject to constant change -

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606 *Disappeariences* was an assemblage of writings from Gaston Bacheland, Carmel Bird, Judith Butler, Angela Carter, Marguerite Duras, Janet Frame, Elizabeth Grosz, Martin Heidegger, Ted Hughes, Luce Irigaray, Drusilla Modjeska, Peggy Phelan and Gisele Prassinos, by Serge Tampalini, Andrew Robinson and Sarah Cullity. Blue Room Theatre, May/June 1996. Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.
that nothing is ever still. The “speed” of something was seen as the measure of the rate of this change and as such, was a measure of the nature of both its life…and mortality. Anger, love and desire too, all have their own “speed”. That “speed” was thought of as the starting point is only significant in so far as it highlights P[R]’s commitment to developing work that builds upon previous research.

“Everything is a question of speed. Beyond plants, whose speed is different from our own, revealing only a relative immobility, and the speed of metals, which show us an even greater relative immobility, lie other realms, whose speed is too slow or too fast for us even to see them or be seen by them.”

Our bodies have their own “speed”; the “speed” of fingernails, hair, skin and of course mortality. The concept of “speed” was recognised as an energetic –once again characterised by a heightened state of corporeal awareness triggered by the intensification of sensory input and processing.

Establishing an energetic required the performer to negotiate two distinctively different tasks:

1) RECEPTION: receiving energy from the performance space.
2] PROJECTION: giving the energy shape and form (visibility) by way of the performer's corporeal reception of it.

Disappearances. [1996]

**P[R]** asserted that an *energetic* was to be found in the relationship between the performer’s physical body and its double [*the performed body*]. How these *energetics* were motivated, and from where, became a primary concern of **P[R]**’s work. Specific attention was given to investigating the sites in the body from which the *energetics* originated. Two methodological models emerged.

1. The performers first worked through a pre-established physical routine or actions, until they reached a corporeally recognisable and constant *energetic*. This *energetic* was then allowed to slowly, carefully, dissipate as the individual performer followed the traces of its disappearance back to its possible corporeal site of origin. The performers then used this corporeal site as their point of departure, to see if it was possible to re-find the same *energetic*.

2. A specific corporeal site was chosen in order to explore it as a possible origin for an as yet unknown *energetic*. Having arrived at a recognisable and constant *energetic* it was, as before, allowed to slowly dissipate as the performers followed the traces of its disappearance in an attempt to return to the site in the body of its origin.
Both methodological models were subjected to the same three questions. Once having established an energetic was it possible: (a) to speak from the energetic?, (b) to speak about the experience of the energetic while being corporeally present? and (c) to speak a text that had been, prior to commencing the work, embedded in the energetic?

All three were found to be possible - furthermore P[R] found, within each energetic, that the performers experienced an ineluctable desire to be seen, to have a voice, to speak and finally to communicate. What was significant was that within the first moments of the performer’s experience of desire, there also appeared the first traces of its disappearance.
Disappearances was a presentation in three movements. Each movement was assembled from physical, emotional and social intensities, discovered during the rehearsal process. The 1st movement or assemblage investigated a structured pattern of performance sites, the 2nd reassembled these sites through the lens of each performer’s subjectivity, and the 3rd took these sites and used them as the agency into the multiplicity of performative modalities released by the journey through the first two movements.

“In Disappearances, Sarah Cullity, Andrew Robinson and Serge Tampalini pushed the boundaries, taking the audience in promenade beyond banality and into an exciting world of fragmented sound, movement and emotion. Suspensions from the window frame of the high first floor and the manic movement sometimes seeming dangerously close to audience members made this ‘edge-of-the-seat’ theatre, with a design element that was at times breathtaking. I want more of this.”

[Tony Osborne: Theatre Critic for Real Time, May 1996]
“Cullity and Robinson were at pains to discard ‘straight’ acting that is the apple itself. Their unwavering vitality was the most memorable aspect of the piece. They rolled on floors, sidled along walls, hung out of windows, climbed on furniture and configured themselves into uncomfortable and, at times, disquieting, shapes in the realm of experimental, un-choreographed dance. This was mutated Theatre of Cruelty, too -the performers were masochistically cruel and probably felt the effects afterwards. It was that degree of excess -and the parity of skilfulness between the two -that compelled attention and ultimately lead to the show’s success. That they journeyed to four different areas, snared the audience on a winding staircase, were lit by ambient effects and abstractly explored absences and disappearances in the emotional, physical and sensual worlds were secondary to the dynamic they created with the audience. This was not a piece to be understood, in the traditional way, but to be comprehended in its own terms of expression.”

[David Harris: Theatre Critic for The Western Review, June 1996]

SILENT MOVES:

“…aesthetic perception too opens up a new spatiality, that the picture as a work of art is not in the space which it inhabits as a physical thing and as a coloured canvas. That the dance evolves in an aimless and unorientated space, that it is a suspension of our history, that in the dance the subject and his world are no longer in opposition, no longer stand out one against the background of the other, that in consequence the parts of the body are no longer thrown into relief as in natural experience: the trunk is no longer the ground from which movements arise and to which they sink back once performed; it now governs the dance –the movements of the limbs are its auxiliaries.”  

The second work in the trilogy was Silent Moves. For this work P[R] was joined by the Dutch dancer and teacher, Frank Van de Ven.


Silent Moves was an assemblage of ideas and performances opened up during two weeks of collaborative workshopping that gathered around speculations about internal and external corporeal modalities. Attention was given to differentiating between impetus –seen as the motivator for the internal body, and stimulus –seen as the catalyst for the external body. The difference between impetus and stimulus is clarified later in this section. It was thought conceivable that in the crossing from the internal body to the external body, yet unmarked bodies were to be discovered. It was found that in so doing the performers were able to experience “shadow bodies”; bodies found under the surface of conscious awareness and perception.
These *shadow bodies* were accepted and explored as tangents to the work and always returned the performer back to it. Like a strange attractor\[610\] the work reproduced these tangents as fractal narratives whose meaning escaped the central narrative of the work but always travelled parallel to it.

“Our own body, then, is the one we have and the history of the ones we’ve lost. Our body is both internal and external, invisible and visible, living and dead. Noncontinuous, full of jerks and rears, the body moves, like an awkward dancer trying to partner someone she can never see or lay hold of.” \[611\]

**CROSSING BODY SHADOW:**

The gathered data from *Silent Moves* became the energising ingredient for the final work in the trilogy *Experiences of Identity, Crossing Body Shadow*\[612\]. [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.*

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\[612\] *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.

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,” ⁶¹³ 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.

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⁶¹³ *“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.

1. **PREPARATION AND TRAINING:**

![Image](image.png)

*Crossing Body Shadow* [Malta 1996].

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. 614

> “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 part of the body; how to think with the whole body and not only part of it. 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.” 615

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

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614 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.

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 analogues to the enigmatic ideas on acting expressed by the Japanese Noh Theatre practitioner Zeami Motokiyo [1363-1443].

In his Kyūi. 616 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 coarse 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.” 617

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:

Crossing Body Shadow. [Malta, 1996].

616 Zeami’s Kyūi is a treatise on acting consisting of a sequence of nine levels. Reprinted in: Nearman, J, Mark. Zeami’s Kyūi: A Pedagogical Guide for Teachers of Acting.
617 ibid. p. 317.
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:

i] Imaging

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.

618 Adapted from the work of Min Tanaka and his dance company Mai-Juku, at Body Weather Farm, Yamanashi, Japan.
• 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.

vi] **Cerebral spinal fluid**: fluid surrounding spinal cord and brain / serpentine / different viscosity of other fluids -lighter, more conductive / movement-direction up and out / upward-outward attention / peripheral vision.


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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.

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.

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620 Once again adapted from the work of Min Tanaka and his dance company Mai-Juku at Body Weather Farm, Yamanashi, Japan.
• 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.

621 Min Tanaka and his dance company Mai-Juku co-operatively live and work at Body Weather Farm, Yamanashi, Japan.
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:

undertaker. On his death bed. He used to be a butcher. An expert with a carcass. Until he lost all his fingers that is. Housewives always spoke elatedly about his sausage.”

2. “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.”

3. “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, ruminate 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.”

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

1. “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

624 ibid. p. 46.
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?” 625

2. “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.” 626

3. “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.” 627

4. “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.” 628

626 ibid. p. 167.
627 ibid.
628 ibid. p. 175.

She wanted a friend so she put an egg in the drawer. It cracked…it stank…it went rancid. Grandma was very upset. Oh yes grandma came back yes I was way way gone, off to la la land la la, loop loop, whoop whoop, grandma’s not coming home you know…no its gone.

Oh they’re just talking through me the whole time, mess up the cells they did…there was a vacuum cleaner, there was a washing machine and they were messing up my cells.

He took my heart, he really did. I loved him and he took my heart and broke it…that’s what happens to people when they take things, they always give them back buggered and broken…didn’t fit, square peg in a round hole you know, get a dog up ya, get over it, get a perm, get a real life, get a job, get it, get it…it doesn’t matter, mind over matter.

Oh yes people do steal things you know. I remember the cake, don’t remember the sex though, shame, can’t remember the sex on my wedding night. Oh yes all chromed up, nice and shining he was. Someone’s there you know…don’t trust a man with a long neck and white shoes. No. But we got married, and there we were by the harbour looking over, and I saw the bobbing things, sponges they were, you know animal sponges, sponges are animals, but I didn’t have a sponge in my sponge bag, tried to find it, but I couldn’t find it anywhere…grandma found it by the towels and the talcum powder, baby talcum powder, don’t know where my baby is either, never had a baby, but…
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].

1. **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…**

2. **…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].

1. **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.**

2. **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.**
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].

1 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.”

2 She felt the wind caressing her skin. Creature of the surface, the edge -skin -
surface. Shattering fear.

3 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.

4 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.

5 She lost her soul, so she resided on the edge.

6 The mothering earth is dark and deep within me. I am dark.

7 The robe is the mere envelope of the body -but beneath that our skin itself is a final
envelope, with its own ego.

8 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.

9 I saw a face become a mask, a gap opened up. Sshh, here he comes, put on the mask, hide behind the door.

Text used for the site of **External Corporeal Modality** by Gari-Emma Perry: 629

1 “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.”

2 “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.”

3 “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.”

4 “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

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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:

630 Text by Gari-Emma Perry.
“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.” 631

“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.” 632

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.]

1 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.

2 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.

3 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.

632 ibid.
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?

4  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.
Appendix B

DVD PRODUCTION NOTES

1970

FANGHORN by David Pinner.
Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini.
Old Dolphin Theatre, University of Western Australia. September, 1970.

CAST: Chris Jones, Neil Harrison, Cynthia Lyon, Wendy Evans, Helen McCarthy.


The design for *Fanghorn* remains unary, and provokes only a general interest in the sociometric function of the objects. Reiterating the thoughts of Roland Barthes, objects remain unary when they “*emphatically transform*[s] *‘reality’ without doubling it*”.633 That is to say the connection to their referents in reality is only once removed; their intention is not as a participant in the narrative but as a back-drop against which the narrative may unfold and the behaviour of its occupants be seen.

In this case the design establishes the occupants as “successful” and “sophisticated” people, whose choice of art and furniture identifies them as inhabitants of a “modern” world…a world in which the topic of lesbianism [an underlying theme of the text, that in 1970’s Australia, was still socially polemic] may be openly discussed.

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BUKOWSKI OK

Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini.
The Streetlight Theatre Ensemble.


CAST: Peter Hardy, Steve Froudist, Ian David, Ray Bluett, Jenny Dunstone, Sally Crawford, Sally Hillier.


I suppose some may be offended by some of the lines which are quite crude and pornographic[ sic].
But this production is dealing with a writer who pinpoints with uncanny accuracy people and how they behave. They are served to us as they are - stripped of all pretence. There are tender moments, vicious moments and humorous moments.

It is an enlightening piece of theatre that should not be missed – if you are an adult and have been around a bit.

Barry Robertson: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, The West Australian. [August 2 1979]

This production was important for two reasons: Firstly it provided the opportunity to introduce Perth audiences to the writings of Charles Bukowski and for those who were familiar with his
work, the opportunity to see them performed live. Secondly it facilitated an experiment in theatrical production that focused on the representation of facets of Bukowski's personality through images and people. In a sense Bukowski was a legend in his time, a madman, a recluse, a lover -tender, vicious- his stories are exceptional stories that come pounding out of his violent and depraved life. Who's to say which one is the real Bukowski -the hostile drunk or the humble diffident poet? It doesn't matter, for Bukowski's characters are more real than the Empire State Building.

1982

*DYLANSCAPES* by David George.
Direction: David George and Serge Tampalini. Design: Serge Tampalini.
Art Gallery of Western Australia. 1982.

*Dylanscapes* may be best described as a political and social revue of the 1960’s.

Presented as part of the Experimental Theatre Unit at Murdoch University.

LEAN THE MONOLOGUE - an adaptation of Shakespeare’s Lear by David George.
Western Australian Art Gallery.


DVD MUSIC: Goodman, Greg. U dag from The Construction of Ruins [The Australian Site],
The Beck Doctor, Los Angeles, 1982.

In this production, the character of Lear was supported only by his fool. The fool’s presence is
discerned as sound from a prepared piano whose sounding was altered by the attachment of various
objects either to its strings [or in some instances, its hammers] that intentionally disrupt the
listener’s expectation of the sound of a piano.

“LEAR - the Monologue” looks like being the Festival’s most revolutionary theatrical venture.

[12 February, 1982]

Experimental theatre by its very nature is a risk. New, different, untried...it must either succeed or
fail in the accepted terms of theatre. Its raison d’etre is just that essential element of uncertainty, of
trial, which stimulates the questioning mind. Without it the whole concept of theatre would die in its
tracks.

Donna Sadka: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, The West Australian.
[7 February, 1982]
The design for Lear the Monologue owes much to the work of the Spanish surrealist painter, Joan Miró. Miró’s work draws on memory, fantasy, and the irrational to create works of art that are visual analogues of surrealist poetry…spontaneous, abstract and whimsical. His distorted organic shapes, and peculiar geometric constructions were arranged against flat neutral backgrounds and painted in bright colours. Amorphous amoebic shapes mutated into sharp lines, multiplying into spots and curlicues, all seemingly positioned with serendipity, yet alluding to an order—an order that lies outside the realm of the rational mind.

Whatever my intentions are when making a theatre design, they are totally changed by the design appearance in front of an audience. What I make is a work of art—I expect and accept no other result. That’s what I am concerned with and that what’s will occur. Finally I am as much interested in the audience reaction to it as I am in the work itself.

Serge Tampalini [from the designer’s programme notes]

The visual impact of it all is excellent, and a really strong point. The stage, a sweeping spiral encompassing a grand piano, is alive with movement and light. The use of sand in a simulated desert extends the area of acting into the audience, and provides an unexpected exit which left first night audience wondering for a few moments.

Leslie Anderson: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, The Sunday Times. [12 February, 1982]
MISHIMA…confessions of a mask.
Adaptation: David George.
Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini and David George.

Dramatizations of: *The Sailor who Fell from Grace with the Sea, Hanjo, Confessions of a Mask* and *Death in Midsummer*.

Presented as part of the Experimental Theatre Unit at Murdoch University.


*Mishima…confessions of a mask* was a theatrical experiment not only with plays that are culturally foreign in their plots and characters, but also with performance techniques that necessitate a radically different relationship between language and action—the “actor” and the “role”.

The stories of the Japanese writer and Nobel prize winner Yukio Mishima’s ambivalent sexuality, masochistic fantasies and so-called romantic agony provided a causeway from Asian theatre sensibility to the Anglo-European one.

Mishima's life and theories were mirrored in dramatisations designed for small audiences of 60, seated around a raked stylised L-shaped Noh Theatre stage. The background panels suggested a traditional Japanese fan that gradually shifted colour from brown [earth/body] to blue [sky/spirit,] in keeping with Mishima’s belief that the body mirrors its spiritual identity.

Mishima depicted his own life and death first in a short story [Patriotism\textsuperscript{634}] then acted it in a film version [Rite of Love and Death\textsuperscript{635}] and finally performed it on life's stage in 1970 by disembowelling himself. On November 25, he stunned the world with his dramatic takeover of army headquarters in Tokyo, his strident appeal to the army to revolt, and his subsequent public ritual suicide and decapitation by a follower.

Assisted by the sensitive direction and simple but superb stage sets of Serge Tampalini, the small cast moved with dreamlike fluidity through the fantasies and realities of Mishima's life.

The audience learnt of Mishima's love of death, his childhood fantasies about fairytale princes which grew into an adult love of men, his romantic agonies and his ultimate pain.

[Photographs by kind permission of Shimoyama] [May 26, 1983]

A MANUAL OF TRENCH WARFARE by Clem Gorman.
Hole in the Wall Theatre.

CAST: Peter Hardy, Bill Dunstone, Rod Hall, Gerald Hitchcock. Ramon Tuck


As the set design suggests, the play is metaphorical and not at all naturalistic. It is not about manuals, or trenches or for that matter, warfare. Clem Gorman’s script delicately balances two kinds of love and, at the end of the play, the participants transform into allegorical figures around whom the trench becomes a metaphor of society that exposes how individuals fight for success, supremacy and survival.

**OEDIPUS REX** by Sophocles.
Hole in the Wall Theatre.
Festival of Perth, February 1983.

CAST: Peter Hardy, Bill Dunstone, Gerald Hitchcock, Rod Hall.

In a production of this quality it is difficult to know who should be given credit, but honors must be shared between director Raymond Omodei, whose concept it was, and designer Serge Tampalini. His sombre, evocative set and stunning masks added much to the production.


The plagued and barren lands of Thebes have been related to Australia with Serge Tampalini's brilliantly stark and ominous set and the use of masks formed largely of rusted metal. These indicate the silent decay of Thebes even before the characters speak of the city’s heartbreak.


On Serge Tampalini’s startling stage design, costumes and props collated from industrial relics, rags, bones and rusty bits over flagstones indicate former splendour and decline. Blood-red rivulets in the cracks cry “foul murder.”

Peter Kemeny: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper *The West Australian*. [11 February 1983]

The following are extracts from an interview for the Festival of Perth with Donna Sadka: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, *The West Australian*. [5 February 1983].

Donna Sadka: When Serge Tampalin began work on his designs for the settings and costumes for the Hole in the Wall’s Festival production of “Oedipus the King,” the creative process began when images and memories from his Kalgoorlie childhood sprang to mind. This background association has plainly been an important source for his designs: cracked clay earth, shards of rag snagged on weathered rafters, rusted iron pipes and a corrugated iron lean-to have all been grist to his mill. But not in their conventional form.
The responsibility of the designer is not just to set up a stage in which the audience feels comfortable and says “Ah yes, I recognise all that ... now I can forget it and watch the play.” I don't see any point in having a set that doesn't allow the audience the possibility for it to become something new. It's that moment of freshness I'm after, when familiar things take on new meaning and suddenly you realise that long-known shapes and objects now suggest something else, as if you're seeing them for the first time.

When I design a play I like to begin with an environment that's affectively different from environments with which we are familiar and in which we feel comfortable…and build from there.

Donna Sadka: *The flat, barren, Kalgoorlie landscape and wide, desolate skies offered that basis and he has used the shapes, colours and textures to give it a new form which is evocative and timeless. The characters in Oedipus he sees as having grown out of this world, almost as if the landscape is speaking. Back again to Kalgoorlie.*

In the play, the priest represents the people. Sitting on the ground in his brown cloak and rusty metal collar with a piece of a tree for his staff he is almost part of the earth -like the old men I used to see sitting by the sheds in the Kalgoorlie outback.

Donna Sadka: *Trees, a symbol of growth, are an important element in the design -but they are not thick and green. The part of a tree used in Jocasta's costume is gnarled and slightly withered, indicating, said Tampalini, that she is beyond bearing fruit. In its branch which forms her mask there is a spider's web, an image of the incestuous life-pattern of insects, which mirrors Jocasta's fate.*

There is a single tree on stage, its existence signifying that Thebes had once prospered. Now it is stunted -growth has stopped, and the metal caught in its branches rusts. I have used rust not only as an image of the plague that has devastated Thebes, and also of the ineluctable laws of the gods.
Donna Sadka: Civilisations may come and may go, the designer seems to imply, but the world of the gods is immutable.

1984

1984 by David George.
Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini.
A Theatre-in-Education adaptation of George Orwell’s novel of the same name.
Metropolitan State High Schools, 1984 academic year.

CAST: Judy Todman, David Watson, Fleck, Noel Ress-Hatton. VIDEO: Andrew Ogilvie.

Proof that we don’t live in an age of Orwell’s nightmare vision of a totally controlled society, where not only are our individual actions under surveillance but where even our mind and thoughts are controlled [largely by the control of language], is that we can put on a play about it.

“Totalitarian” governments have always harboured a deep suspicion of theatre. However it is not beyond comprehension that a sagacious totalitarian system would permit the performance of plays, especially those that appear to criticise it, in order to prove that we are free and thus nullify its message. The best way to control criticism is to co-opt it. This insight, into the insidiousness of the rapidly escalating political forces, became the catalyst for this production of 1984.
**PAX AMERICANA** by Ron Elisha.
Hole in the Wall Theatre.

CAST: Steve Jodrell, Rod Hall, Bernie Davis, Rosemary Barr, Maggie King, Neville Teede, Geoffrey Atkins, Polly Low, Gerald Hitchcock, James Bean.


*Serge Tampalini, tongue firmly in cheek, has designed a satirical set with a huge cardboard cutout of the apotheosis of George Washington dominating the action.*

Leslie Anderson: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, The Sunday Times. [February 12, 1984]

*It is America from the word go. The stage is carpeted with stars and stripes and are evident on the furniture and graffiti on the back walls.*


**Pax Americana** is not simply a play about anti-Americanism, it speaks about the universal human condition and our willingness to embrace the fictive shadow rather than the real substance of political events. The Australian playwright Ron Elisha links words, sequences and characters in a historical collage that slips in and out of chronological time. The design re-enforces the fractured nature of the narrative; a depiction of the apotheosis of George Washington and infamous characters of the Kennedy era of American politics are rendered as cartoon cut-outs –an allusion to the blurred distinction between fantasy and reality associated with the 1960’s fascination with fame.
and the famous as exemplified in the work of Andy Warhol. The side walls were cheekily wallpapered with backsides “mooning” the audience and the back of the auditorium graffitied with the patois of the period.

**NOIR SOIREE…play the piano like a percussion instrument til’ your fingers bleed a bit.**
Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini.

A collage of Surrealist theatre texts by Apollinaire, Artaud, Anouilh, Dumal and Cocteau -as well as works written by the performers, Rob Housley, Grant Davis, Andrew Ogilvie, Mona Neumann, Jessica Machim, Paul Gurd. Presented as part of the Experimental Theatre Unit at Murdoch University.

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Acknowledging its predecessors, Dada and Surrealism, the auditorium was set-up as a café reminiscent of the 1916 Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich. In keeping with the ethos of Cabaret Voltaire the first part, assembled form the writings of Apollinaire, Artaud, Anouilh, Dumal and Cocteau and framed as a retrospective look at the anarchic performances, was devised to ridicule, shock and offend “good taste” and destroy the outdated concepts and “values” of art. It made its statements through paintings, poetry and audio-visual works.

The second part, written and produced by the performers, was designed with an almost graffitti-like sensibility that culminated with the audience being encouraged to lob sliced bread into a basket that was irreverently laid out in front of a huge projection of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper.*
Spawn from ‘non-art’ surrealism makes conventional criticism irrelevant. When anything goes and nothing is deemed better or worse than something else, subjectivity seems the only peg on which to hang a critic’s hat.


**A MAP OF THE WORLD** by David Hare.
Direction: Serge Tampalini and David George. Design: Serge Tampalini.
Maltings Theatre.

CAST: Peter Hardy, Glen D’Cruz, Turipi, Nicki Wendt, Shirley Van Sanden, James Eade, Fleck.
Supported by: Grant Davis, Basil Galati, Marina Hasim, Natasha Stone, Steven Tate, Simon Walsh.

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*That the way we see the rest of the world is a fiction and that fiction mirrors and distorts reality is highlighted by counterpointing the confrontation with the making, years later, of a film of the Indian writer’s novel based on just these events. A brilliant ploy.*


David Hare’s *A Map of the World* brings together, an African politician, an Indian novelist, an English journalist, an American actress and a UN conference on world poverty in a dramatic clash of cultures, politics and mores. Using a theatrical device of shifting perspectives it not only
challenges the assumptions of what the audience are witnessing, but exposes the way the conference is appropriated by some of the delegates and manipulated by the media.

The stage design, at once both a film set, a bedroom and the plush lobby of the Bombay hotel in which the conference is being held, allows for the action to mutate back and forth, exposing along the way the schemes, intrigues, conspiracies, tactics, and political manoeuvrings at play in both the conference, its reporting, and its film adaptation. The stage design may be read as a visual metaphor that heightens the themes of David Hare’s text.

1985

THE COLLECTOR By Glen d’Cruz.
Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini.
A Theatre in Education adaptation of John Fowles’s novel of the same name.
Metropolitan State High Schools, 1985 academic year.

CAST: David Watson, Jon Hanson, Debbie Bryan.


Theatre in Education is the interaction of the content and processes of theatre with the content and processes of education. Theatre performances should always be examplars of education. Theatre entertains, instructs, reflects on social, moral and economic conditions; philosophises; documents; challenges; experiments; and stimulates emotionally and intellectually. Written, designed and
produced for an audience to examine both the implicit issues of the novel and the society in which they live. *The Collector*’s principle aim was not to reconstruct the novel but to serve as a bridge between the reader and the literary text. The text’s themes coupled with the formal structure and story of the play problematised contemporary issues which were, and continue to be, relevant to the study of drama, society and politics on a personal and general level.

The metatheatrical nature of the formal structure of the play sees it built around the idea of a theatre-in-education team rehearsing a theatre-in-education production of *The Collector*. Its formal structure is exposed as an authorial device intended to expose how the themes of control and oppression perpetrated on the John Fowles’ character Miranda, surface as the themes exerted on the only female actor by the director.

The omnipresent director is visible at the side of the set and periodically interrupts the rehearsal to offer his interpretation and suggestions to the actors - another authorial device that serves to remind us of the interpretive nature of the reading of any text.

**BREAKING THE SILENCE** by Stephen Poliakoff.

![Wassily Kandinsky: Little Dream in Red. (1925)](image)

CAST: Andy King, Barbara Dennis, Rod Hall, Sally Sanders, Bernie Davis, Peter Stewart, John Low.

The set, designed by Serge Tampalini, is superb with, every aspect of the decaying elegance of the "drawing room" of an imperial railway carriage lovingly detailed down to faded tapestry and mouldering blinds.


The critic does not appreciate that the attention to detail is a deliberate device employed to lull the spectator into believing in the “reality” of the narrative events. What the critic fails to see is that the details, when seen against the overall structure of the set, are illusory. The imperial railway carriage contains gaps and incomplete structural representations. In addition behind the set, and seen through the gaps, is a vast depiction of the Russian constructionist painter Kandinsky’s *Little Dream in Red*, reminding us of the violence and terror that followed Russia’s 1917 revolution. The implication is that history is itself partly illusory, and its events like the details of the set, may only be subjectively read.

**FASSBINDER AND FRIENDS** by David George.
Direction: Serge Tampalini and David George. Design: Serge Tampalini

*Fassbinder and Friends* a theatrical collage of extracts from the texts of the German playwright and filmmaker, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, was presented as part of the Experimental Theatre Unit at Murdoch University.
At the beginning of the play glass frames marked and divided the space between the audience and the actors, defining the line between art and reality and also creating the illusion of a cinema screen.

“Art” and “reality” have always preoccupied the interest of filmmakers and Fassbinder was no exception. The trick however is not to get the two of them confused. For the prolific Fassbinder there was no difference; the distinction between art and life was rendered obsolete when it was life that was being framed and filmed as art…when the personal stories and lives of the actors became the narrative and action of the characters in his films. *Fassbinder and Friends* was not only a play about the life and works of an enigmatic cultural figure, but also a production that played with the subjective constructs of “truth” and “illusion” – actor and character.

**SALONIKA** by Louise Page.

CAST: Peter Stewart, Nita Pannell, Faith Clayton, Rod Hall, Andy King.

**DVD MUSIC:** Arvo Pärt. *Spiegel Im Spiegel* from *Alina*. ECM Records, Munchen, 1999.
Serge Tampalini has provided a splendid set which manages to mix myth and reality in a striking manner.

[August 2, 1985]

Serge Tampalini has produced a splendid set of white sand and real turquoise water backed by blow-ups of the chiselled sensuality of classical Greek statues.

Mardy Amos: Theatre Critic for the Australian newspaper, The Australian.  
[August 4, 1985]

Set design by Serge Tampalini is startlingly appropriate: sharp reality with a mythic veil.

David Britton: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, The West Australian.  
[August 1, 1985]

Serge Tampalini’s beach setting with its geometric designs and echoes of ancient Greece, allow us glimpses into the mystical, magical world where reality and illusion merge with dreamlike fluidity.

[August 2, 1985]

Louise Page plays “sleight-of-mind” tricks with age and time and in so doing brings us frighteningly close to the fears and uncertainties of the human condition that is shared by both young and old. Themes of sex, love and death are drawn out like the threads spun, measured, and cut by the Fates from Greek and Roman mythology -these may be seen, if one looks closely, in the lengths of string strung between the earth and sky of the stage.

**HIS MASTER’S VOICE** by David Anderson.  
Actors Company.  
CAST: Andy Copeland, John Crooks, Nigel Davenport, Jonny Leopard, Andrew Lewis, Caroline McKenzie, Kelly Newton, Tina Williamson.


*His Master’s Voice* was a musical packed with songs that ranged from *fifties to funk, new wave to scat, country and western to punk*. The action revolved around a working class family where the father is a staunch Labor man and the mother a socialite conservative. Their son is a singer in a punk band, and is seen, by the mercenary music industry promoters, as a lucrative talent. David Anderson rips the lid off the music industry and reveals the financial and social manipulations that lie within. At the same time he has also written a social-realist drama that examines how social and economic politics can effect and destroy the aspirations and dreams of a family.

Iconographic images of the 1940’s, 50’s, 60’s, 70’s and 80’s musical legends [themselves also products of the “music machine”] frame the stage, while its centre is taken-up by a poster of the revolutionary Karl Marx. Graffitied names of the then contemporary punk bands completes the stage design. It is an anarchistic design that not only references the aesthetics of the “revolutionary” punk movement, but that also alludes to the chaotic politics of family life under the strain of uncertain economic pressures.
1986

**THE WAY OF THE WORLD** by William Congreve.


William Congreve’s play *The Way of the World* [1700] is a delicate balanced game of words and manners that is as relevant today as it was then. It is a play to be enjoyed as much for its wit as it is for its insightful critique of “the ways of the world”.

*Set designer Serge Tampalini places them [the actors] on a stage marked out in checks and directs them, sometimes gracefully, sometimes frenetically, across the squares. It is like a game of chess.*


Locating a play, written in 1700, in a geometrically stylised and vibrantly coloured world [with a “hard-edge” aesthetic] was an attempt to draw attention not only to the chess-like machinations of its themes, but also to Congreve’s acerbic wit and the contemporaneous nature of the play’s social mores with those of today.
The Director has placed his cast on a brilliant, stylised set by Serge Tampalini, with connotations of a chess game.

Leslie Anderson: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, *The Sunday Times.*
[August 31, 1986]

This design was an attempt at minimalism: By reducing the aesthetic and architectural conventions of the Restoration period to a point where what remained was just the suggestion of the playful wit and flamboyance of the era, implied that the play’s themes were applicable to any historical period.

**THE TAMING OF THE SHREW** by William Shakespeare.
New Fortune Theatre, University of Western Australia. January/February, 1986.


DVD MUSIC: Clooney, Rosemary. *Mambo Italiano* from the soundtrack to the film *Big Night.*
DVD Soundtrax, Australia, 1996.

This production of *The Taming of the Shrew* added some new twists to the classic war between the sexes. While the amateur dramatic society of an Australian-Italian country town tries to get its version of “*The Shrew*” onto the boards, our “real” Kate and Petruchio fight out the preliminary battles of the war that will be their marriage. Against the backdrop of Kate's home-town, the rep's rehearsals and Petruchio's feisty courtship of the Shrew become hilariously entangled.
The three levels of the Shakespearian New Fortune Theatre become the three floors of a country town hotel, complete with wrought iron balconies. The New Fortune Theatre is the only theatre in the world built to the known dimensions of the Elizabethian stage playhouse to which Shakespeare tailored most of his plays.

**XEROX** by Norrie.

Direction: Serge Tampalini. Design Joseph Traffimov and Serge Tampalini.

Dolphin Theatre, University of Western Australia. May, 1986.

![Xerox](image)

*Xerox* was presented as part of the Experimental Theatre unit at Murdoch University.

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*XEROX in its present copy has grown out of a play of the same name by Norrie. The themes of the initial play were identified and workshopped. What developed was a central theme of prejudice and persecution, that best theatricalised itself by the weaving of the three literary and dramatic genres; Naturalism, Expressionism and Absurdism. The conceptualisation, scripting and directing have all grown out of the workshop process and “Xerox” owes its present form to ensemble work.*

[Serge Tampalini: Director’s programme notes]

A mild fascination with the conventions of Horror films, and a continuing attraction to the rules of Cubism and Expressionism, saw the stage design develop into an assemblage that triggered shifts in the audience’s visual perspectives, suggesting multiple points of views, and heightening the emotional intensities and perceptual distortions of it characters.
Don’t go along to the play expecting the same sort of theatre we’ve been seeing for years, but rather with an open mind and a willingness to enjoy the experimental. This type of theatre is providing a long-awaited and very viable alternative to the ‘norm’.


THE TEMPEST
An adaptation of William Shakespeare’s The Tempest by David George and Serge Tampalini.

CAST: [Bali] Peter Hardy -with support from the candidates of the Murdoch University, Experimental Productions Unit.


The Tempest in Bali may seem, on the surface, to be an arbitrary relocation, motivated solely by Australia’s geography. The original idea of using shadow-play techniques was motivated, however, by practical considerations: how to present the storm-scene and then provide visual support for the long exposition. The solution of using shadows then led, inexorably, to the idea of extending the shadow puppets (Wayang Kulit) into marionette theatre (Wayang Golek) and then Wayang Wong.636

636 The term wayang wong comes from the two words wayang meaning shadow and wong meaning man.
The result was not only a stylistic line but a thematic line as well: a progress from shadow birth to marionette existence to life. The result is a new reading of Prospero’s power and, beyond that, of his and human fate...

David George: Extracts from the programme notes.

There is no doubt in my mind at all that creative or experimental theatre has to challenge existing values, otherwise it has no right to exist at all. David George and Serge Tampalini issue such challenges every time they team up. They are the artists whose work cannot be measured on the normal scale. All artists have an internal pressure that forces them to produce. This is their right and privilege. After all one never knows if at the end they will turn out to be pioneers, and will find their acceptance and justification in the future as, just to drop a few names from different areas, Picasso, Bartok, Stravinski, Beckett and Ionesco and many others did.

Peter Kemeny: Extract from a review broadcast on the Western Australian radio station 6NR. [November 2, 1986]

ANTIGONE by Sophocles.
Hole in the Wall Theatre.

CAST: Helen O’Connor, Rod Hall, Bernie Davis, Peter Hardy, Gerald Hitchcock, Peter Stewart.

Serge Tampalini has provided a superb set which reeks with the detritus of a city which has just been involved in a bloody civil war.


The design for Antigone shares an affinity with that of mine for Oedipus...both draw on the intensely evocative landscape that surrounds the once prosperous Western Australian gold mining town of Kalgoorlie. The tragedy of Oedipus, Antigone’s father, still haunts Thebes. Shreds of the previous production of Oedipus - masks, corrugated iron and the altar of Apollo, are strewn on the sandy periphery of the Antigone set. A massive symbol of oppression dominates the entire stage and forces the eye to the upstage corner of the set which becomes an endless dark corridor through which the actors ominously enter and exit.

An almost palpable contradiction between grace and power is felt within the tension created by the juxtaposition of the harshness and decay with the center piece of the set, an elegant antique wooden desk and chair.

David Britton: From an interview for the Western Australian newspaper, The West Australian. [March 8, 1996]

AWAY by Michael Gow.
Hole in the Wall Theatre.

DVD MUSIC: St Germain. What you think about… from Tourist, Blue Note, France, 1999.

Michael Gow’s play explores themes of loneliness, dislocation and bitterness that lay underneath the surface of family life in isolated Australian towns in the 1960’s. We witness how these forces are brought to the surface when one family goes “away” on their annual holiday. In a rite-of-passage ritual, [more like an exorcism], the holiday-makers are forced to confront these forces. The minimalist design of the set ensures that the narrative may be read on any of the subjective levels that are released by the experiences and memories of the spectators.

A magical set by designer Serge Tampalini serves to put the audience in the right frame of mind for this fascinating Michael Gow play. Strands of string -like the warp on a loom are stretched to form semi-transparent screens which rise to sail-like sheets suspended above a background of dark green and black fluid shapes, which could be trees or rocks, or seaweed or water, while a painted line of foam edges the stage.

Mardy Amos: Theatre Critic for the Australian Newspaper: The Australian. [August 4 1986]

Ray Omodei’s direction and Serge Tampalini’s design are perfect examples of “minimal” at its best.

Sian Martin: Theatre Critic for the Western Australin newspaper: The Daily News. [July 31 1986]
There is not one weak link in the production. Serge Tampalini has provided a breathtakingly beautiful set.

Leslie Anderson: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian Newspaper: The Sunday Times. [August 3 1986]

1987

EMERALD CITY by David Williamson.
Hole in the Wall Theatre.


The design for this production owes much to the work of the French surrealist painter René Magritte. In his painting 'Personal Values' [1952] he achieves his curious effect, as Lewis Carroll did in Alice in Wonderland, by a deliberate distortion of scale. A glass, a comb, a shaving-brush, a pin-cushion, a match, completely fill a room whose walls are formed by the sky. The rational mind is turned against itself and the apparent realism of the objects is shown to be illusory and, the picture itself can only be “understood” as a fantasy.

David Williamson’s play examines the at times antagonistic rivalry between the two, most generally regarded sophisticated cities of Australia -Melbourne and Sydney. He uses this rivalry as
a way into a debate on middle-class morality and hypocrisy. Finally the rivalry is exposed as illusory as the objects of Magritte’s painting and, like the title of the play suggests, may only be “understood” as fantasy.

Serge Tampalini has created a practical but evocative set characterising middle-class life and a hint of waterside views.

David Britton: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, The West Australian. [February, 1987]

**HAMLET** by William Shakespeare.


In keeping with the idea of design as text, this production of *Hamlet* is punctuated with a number of significant symbols. As I mentioned in the chapter, *Language, Texts and Performances*, during the travelling players’ performance of the “Mousetrap”, Hamlet has dressed the duplicitous Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in false nose-glasses-moustache-eyebrows masks, Claudius in a fool’s cap, Gertrude in a feather boa, Polonius in a trick “knife-through-the-head”, while one of the attendants is made to carry a puppet.

The structure that dominated the centre of the set design was not design merely as a public symbol of the State but as the metaphor of lustful power. It “created an almost palpable atmosphere of
violence and tension” as it brazenly spread itself open to the penetrating gaze of the audience and the seductive lure of usurped power until finally, as Hamlet is flown to his rest, it splits open and crashes onto the corridors of the stage.

...modernly dressed the costumes evoke the world of military terrorism in which there are no heroes.


**THE GLASS MENAGERIE** by Tennessee Williams.


*Serge Tampalini’s set creates separate worlds. Movie stars of the 30’s fill one wall, the facade of a Tara-type mansion another. The fire escape becomes another escape - the companionway of a ship and Laura's collection of fragile glass animals (her menagerie) glitters in the foreground, while the jazz and blues of the era play a musical background.*

In an attempt to heighten the primary themes of the text, the mansion *Tara* from the film “Gone with the Wind” was used as a symbol of the impossible dream and imaginary world of the central figure [the mother] in the play. The larger than life painted representations of Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall and Clarke Gable symbolised the aspirations she has for her daughter and son, while the socio-iconographic furniture and properties were used as symbols to reveal the mother’s “real” social and economic circumstances.

*On a strikingly variable set Serge Tampalini sets out to explore, through expressionism, the entangled relationships of an emotionally damaged family.*

Leslie Anderson: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, *The Sunday Times.*  
[July 29, 1987]

There is a second “glass menagerie” referenced by the design; what cannot be seen in the photographs is the hundreds of glass wine bottles that surround [and constrict] the set, reminding us of the ever present absent father, and inferring, perhaps, the reason for the family’s demise.

*Regular theatregoers will know that Serge Tampaini’s sets are more than mere backdrops to the dramatic action. Invariably, the Perth designer uses the visual impact of his sets to pose puzzles complementary to the themes of the play.*

David Britton: Theatre Critic for the the Western Australian newspaper, *The West Australian.*  

The design for Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie* was informed by the precepts of Expressionism [1890 -1940] –an artistic movement that sought to express mental states, often neurotic and distorted, rather than objective external reality. This design attempted to achieve emotive distortions by juxtaposing natural forms with abstract shapes and in so doing attempted to express the unease and terror, which one may feel in the midst of a fundamentally hostile and inhuman society. In such a society a clear view of what is subjectively “real” is almost impossible - and one's desire for it is manifested in an unhealthy play of fantasy; everything becomes weird and behind all seemingly lifeless acts lurks an eerie spectre of “another” life.
Serge Tampalini’s spacious set makes splendid, multi-level use of the stage. A billboard-sized profile of Bogart, Bacall and Gable on one side and on the other an equally-scaled facade of a mansion redolent of Southern comfort, enclose a number of memory cells in which are recalled significant moments in the family drama. Several of the set’s features have been distorted to underline an expressionistic landscape of loneliness and hostility.


Finally this design sought to extend the symbolist and expressionist elements of the text in an attempt to reveal more fully the depressions of the Wingfield family –the protagonists in the play.

**KAFKA’S DICK** by Alan Bennett.
Direction: Serge Tampalini. Design: Serge Tampalini in collaboration with the cast.

Presented as part of the Experimental Theatre Unit at Murdoch University.

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The design functions in much the same way as Kafka’s beetle metaphor does in his short story *Metamorphosis*—without an explanation the internal [mental] world of the central figure is replaced with an external [physical] world. The set projects forms that deliberately lack any clear division between fantasy and fact and have a healthy disregard for the constraints of time, which expands, contracts and folds back on itself; space metamorphoses, time slips and actors move in and out, and all this complexity is not arbitrary!
SHIRLEY VALENTINE by Willy Russell.

CAST: Amanda Muggleton.

CAST: Amanda Muggleton.


Serge Tampalini’s startling set makes a smooth and brilliant transition from drab suburban kitchen to brilliant Greek island - and even provides a rock for Shirley to talk to in place of a wall.

Mardy Amos: Theatre Critic for the Australian newspaper, The Australian. [November 6, 1987]

In practical terms, Willy Russell’s Shirley Valentine, geographically calls for a flat in Liverpool [England] for Act 1, and a Greek island for Act 2. Act one was assembled from ideas triggered by the austere beauty of the English industrial landscapes depicted in the paintings of the English abstract artist Laurence S. Lowry [1887-1976].

L. S. Lowry: Our Town. [1941]
The design for Act 2 was dominated by a huge figure assembled from two Greek Gods: *Hypnos*, the Greek God of sleep, who often appears winged, and his son *Morpheus* the Greek god of dreams. *Morpheus* was said to appear in the dreams of humans in the shape of a man.

Thus the once problematic transition from Act 1 to Act 2 became, in design terms, one of most visually creative moments in the performance that alluded to the dreamlike mythical dimension of Valentine’s flight to Greece. The transition was made all the more dramatic by it taking place in front of the audience and lasting less than 30 seconds. It was accompanied by flashes of lighting and thunder crashes all supported by the loud sound of balalaika music.

1988

**JIGSAW** by Jennifer Rogers.
Hole in the Wall Theatre.

CAST: Rosemary Barr, Sally Sanders, Leith Taylor, Margaret Anketell, Lucinda Armour.
We have ourselves a female David Williamson in Australia - a contemporary playwright who, in Jigsaw, targets women in our society with an unerring aim.


The design owes much to the work of the Russian born French painter Marc Chagall [1887-1985] – particularly his painting The Promenade. [1917-1918] The design uses this painting as its point of departure; the space between the floating woman and the grounded man is opened-up and filled with the intricate jigsaw like complexities of human relationships. The painting also appears on the set and alludes to the meta-theatricality of the play’s themes.

SUMMER OF THE SEVENTEENTH DOLL by Ray Lawler.

CAST: Leith Taylor, Jill Perryman, Peter Hardy, Kevan Johnston, Nita Pannell, Alinta Carroll, Jeremy Callaghan.


The production of theatrical designs should not always be reproduction – theatre is a far too useful tool to be limited to the reproduction of historical causations of time and place. The design for this
“Summer of the Seventeenth Doll” played with history’s poetic partners -memory and myth; memory was seen as the shadow of history and myth the space between history and literature. It was located within the context of Greek tragedy with hubris punished by the ever-present Gods.

This view is reinforced by a set of panels with art deco-style representations of a Bacchanal, behind which spread the gauzy skirts of the kewpie dolls.

Mardy Amos: Theatre Critic for the Australian newspaper, The Australian. [April 19 1988]

Serge Tampalini’s stylised set and costumes - mainly white, cream and black - speak of moods and values rather than time and place.

David Britton: Theatre Critic for Western Australian newspaper, The West Australian. [April 18 1988]

“The once comfortable and reliable working-class Melbourne Terrace house, so indicative of 1950’s Australia, has been rendered to stone. The sturdy walls turned to columns, onto which bas-reliefs of bacchanalian figures from Norman Lindsay paintings have been moulded, encroach on the furnishings, petrifying them into a setting for a ritual that has been performed for the last seventeen years. Behind the columns, sixteen larger than life “Kewpie” [Cupid] dolls, [a fairground doll from which the title of the play is derived] like some demented Greek chorus, knowingly look over the events that are about to unfold…all a foreboding sign that augurs not only a sense of hopelessness but also the demise of the summer ritual that has been a central part in the lives of the characters.”

[From the chapter: Language, Text and Performance].

Instead we have panels with art deco-style life-size figures engaged in Bacchanalian antics, behind which cut-out Kewpie (Cupid) dolls of the title spread their see-through crinolines. Costumes, set and props (Serge Tampalini) in shades of black, cream and white are occasionally shot with color by Jake Newby's lighting design.

Mardy Amos: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, The Sunday Times. [April 17 1988]
SMASH-HIT by Carolyn Burns.


Smash-Hit was presented as a theatre-in-education performance, by the Acting Out component of the Western Australian Theatre Company, to raise awareness of the dangers associated with the practice of drinking and driving.

[This production was supported by: Australian College for Emergency; Ministry of Education [Western Australia]; Health Promotion Service Branch; Health Department of Western Australia; The National Safety Council of W.A. Inc.; Police Department of Western Australia; St. John Ambulance Association; W.A. Alcohol and Drug Authority.]
SONS OF CAIN by David Williamson.  


The tiered set design for David Williamson’s Sons of Cain, with its vomitorium leading onto center stage, mirrors the already existing vomitorium of the Hole in the Wall Theatre building; an intentional device that reminds us of the liminal space between art and life. It is also a design that may be read as a colosseum in which journalists are required to fight against the forces of corruption…and where actors may speak the “truth”.  

Designer Serge Tampalini’s tiered set -papered with newsprint, conveys the hierarchical structure of the newspaper world.  

Mardy Amos: Theatre Critic for the Australian newspaper, The Australian.  
[August 17 1988]  

That the way the events of the world are reported is a fiction that distorts reality, is heightened by the visual design technique applied to the walls of the stage. As a visual illusion that is capable of eliciting subjective shifts in the audience visual perspective, its intention was to raise questions about the assumptions of what the audience were witnessing; about the blurred lines between journalistic truth and fiction.
ENTERTAINING MR SLOANE by Joe Orton.

CAST: Jenny McNae, Jeremy Callaghan, Bernie Davis, Geoffrey Atkins.


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Serge Tampalini's chewy pop art dressing of the set for ‘Entertaining Mr Sloane’ is as mesmerising and overbearing as the theatre of Joe Orton itself. Above the shabby archaeology of a 1950s working class lounge room, Orton's face stares out in cheeky Warhol multiples. Hail Orton! Lest we forget.

Mike Van Niekerk: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, The West Australian. [July 19, 1988]

Serge Tampalini's clever [sic] set design features dozens of black and white portraits of Orton, like a Warhol pop painting, smiling sardonically down at the action.

Mardy Amos: Theatre Critic for the Australian newspaper, The Australian. [18 July, 1998]

The elements of this design are united by their ironic “dig” at the sensibilities of the inhabitants of the abode. “The omnipresent author’s face wallpapers the walls and couch, pictures of the royal family [along with a glow-in-the-dark icon of Christ on the cross] ironically grace the walls, a concave mirror distorts any reflection of the room’s inhabitants, while kitsch “orientalist” standard lamps frame the stage picture. Stage right and left are filled with visual reminders, not only of Orton’s conscious theatricality, but also of the theatricality of his life. Remnants from his and other
writer’s plays litter the extremities of the stage. On stage right can be seen the ironing board from John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*, and closer scrutiny reveals the skull from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In an attempt to metaphorically provoke a connection between the ontology of the stage and that of the audience, on stage right, one of the ornamental flying ducks that make their appearance on the central part of the set may also be seen. The ladder on stage right alludes to the *deus ex machina* ending to Orton’s play *What the Butler Saw*, while the hammer embedded in the dolls head refers to Orton’s tragic death at the hands of his lover.” [From the chapter: *Languages, Texts and Performances*].

**1789 …and all that** by David George.
Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini.
Dolphin Theatre, University of Western Australia.

Presented by the Alliance Francaise de Perth in association with Murdoch University and The University of Western Australia as part of the bicentenary celebrations of the French Revolution.

CAST: Peter Hardy, Robert Paton, Francesca Meehan, Victoria Astill-Smith.

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**DVD MUSIC:** Lully, Jean-Baptiste. *Ouverture de la Marche des Bruits d (I)*, Naxos, Germany, 1990.

Even though we are familiar with the events of the French Revolution, *1789* dialectically unfolded as a argument between the “Revolutionary” [the one who was there] and the “Historian” [the one who wrote about it]; between fact and fiction, and by the time we reach the end of the play there
was no certainty as to who was who, or what really happened. History is always part fact and part fiction; part truth and part good story –if it were not so, we would quickly lose interest.

*1789* attempted to deconstruct history by locating it within the context of new historicism, where tangential personal accounts and individual stories refracted the themes of its linear narrative. Images from the French revolution were juxtaposed with images from more current political and social insurrections, affectively connecting the play’s ontology with that of the contemporary world.

**PARTAGE DE MIDI** by Paul Claudel. [Translation by Lisette Nigott]
Hole in the Wall Theatre.

CAST: Michele Stayner, Bill McCluskey, Rod Langlands, Robert Van Macklenberg.

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The challenge associated with designing *Partage De Midi* is clearly evident in its disparate settings; it begins at sea on an ocean liner and ends in the apocalyptic destruction of its world amidst an omega grave in China.
Serge Tampalini’s design combines economy and imagination and works extremely well with the various locations set within a huge oriental style archway.

Mardy Amos: Theatre Critic for the Australian newspaper, The Australian.
[February 7, 1989]

Ray Omodei has often worked with designer Serge Tampalini whose visual puzzles have complemented the director’s search for meaning. Working sometimes with lighting designer, Jake Newby, they have given the Hole a heightened house-style, a flourish. In “Break Of Noon”, this flourish underlines the already strident symbolism -a dangerous trait in a work which teeters between the revelatory and the ridiculous.

So we have a stage set caught between the pincers of a glowing Omega sign. The end is nigh. In a final scene of contrition we are asked to see the power of Christ’s suffering, death and redeeming spirit -to understand that there is hope. This production attempts to reinforce these ideas through sacred music, twinkling stars and video images of religious art and Christ crucified.

David Britton: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, The West Australian.
[February 6, 1989]

The poetic life of this play is as much in its imagery, symbols and vision of creation as in its language. The images arch from the most visible and immediate to the cosmic and universal. The only female character Yse, in act one is associated with the sun at the noon of life -the “break of noon”. In act two she is associated with the moon and stars in the dark sky of profound night -the apocalyptic “break of midnight”. It is in Act two that the images of destruction and “break” are let loose. The themes of sin and redemption, despair and hope, love and the flesh -the dualities and enigmas that confront our humanity and create our myths, are the territory and challenges of this complex narrative.
OPHELIA CONSPIRACY by Serge Tampalini, David Moody and Susan Broadhurst.
Direction: Serge Tampalini, David Moody and Susan Broadhurst. Design: Serge Tampalini.
Murdoch University Theatre. November, 1989

A Post-Modern adaptation of the Heiner Muller play “Hamlet Machine”. Presented as part of the Experimental Theatre Unit at Murdoch University.


Ophelia Conspiracy was a theatre performance that used the texts, "Hamlet" by William Shakespeare and "Hamlet Machine" by Heiner Müller as its point of departure.

As Barnardo says to Francisco in the opening lines of Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”, “Who’s there?”
Who’s there indeed. Hamlet in drag? Hamlet as hitman? Hamlet as confirmed misogynist? Hamlet in mid-life crisis? Or just Hamlet as “ham”? Who is Hamlet? Can we ever know? And who is Ophelia? Victim or vamp? Ruthless terrorist or flower-child? Trapped in a web of power or the ultimate avenging spider-woman? And who are the travelling players? Vaudeville or villians? Guerrillas or greenies? And what is "performance" anyway? Play, illusion, power, ritual or simply the practice of everyday life?

[Dr David Moody: From the programme notes]

The final format of this production was assembled from improvisations on speculations about these questions. Instead of a reverent reproduction of the then East German playwright Heiner Muller’s Hamlet Machine [itself a political deconstruction of Shakespeare’s text Hamlet] it focused on the
political deconstruction of Muller’s text. Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” text was also used as additional source material.

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais.
Direction: David George. Set design: Serge Tampalini. Costume design: Magdalena Koman.
Dolphin Theatre, University of Western Australia. August, 1989.

Presented by the Alliance Francaise de Perth in association with Murdoch University and The University of Western Australia as part of the bicentenary celebrations of the French Revolution.


The design for Beaumarchais’s *The Marriage of Figaro* was framed by a series of receding mirrors. The multiple reflections were intended to function as etic symbols of the play’s themes of duplicity and deception that, in turn, would prompt the audience to reflect on how these themes are deployed as part of the play’s narrative.

1990

YOU CAN CALL ME NONNO [*Finita la Guerra*] by David George.
Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini.
Presented as part of the “Gemellaggio” -Joining of Cultures Fremantle/Italian Festival. A City of Fremantle and Italian Consulate Joint Project. This project was made possible by the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs -Cultural Affairs Division -through the Italian Consulate in Perth.

CAST: Peter De Bari, Emilio Franz, Ainslie Hodgkinson, Paul Tassone, Francesca Meehan


1990 offered an anniversary: the 50th of the Italo-Australian War, the internment of Australian Italians and their mass migration -You Can Call Me Nonno [*Finita la Guerra*] was a response to that moment in our history.

*Finita la Guerra* [“the war has finished”] recalls the memories of Nonno [“grandfather”], an Italian migrant who seeks to make contact with his grandson: years ago he had refused to let his own son marry an Australian girl but now he has no-one to tell the story of his life, the wisdom he has learnt.

It is a story of pain, of prejudice but also one of courage, success, and of eventual reconciliation - not only between the very human characters themselves but between the cultures they represent.

Through several flashbacks, in which Nonno’s life as an immigrant; his family life and, particularly, his grief over losing one son and having his family tradition threatened are recalled, the play’s themes expand to include the clash of cultures, the gap between modern ideas and ethnic tradition, and the ethics of child surrogacy.

You Can Call Me Nonno is unashamedly nostalgic, interestingly and entertainingly written and, with Serge Tampalini’s direction and design, a delight to look at. It celebrates the place, not always
easy, of Italians within Australian culture, details the history of their migration to this country and probes into the differences between the two cultures/peoples.

Donna Sadka: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, *The West Australian*. [December 2, 1990]

The stage was deliberately kept sparse; apart from an old photograph album with its contents projected onto a plain screen that stretched across the entire length of the stage, a kitchen table and chairs and two old suitcases, the stage was bare. The actors wearing Commedia del Arte style masks solved the problem associated with representing the flashbacks.

*This is a very beautiful production with a film-like feel to it. Operatic music is used constantly to link scenes and add poignancy to the story, but more importantly to draw a parallel between the theme of the opera whence it came and the theme being opened up by the moment in the play. Its use doubles the story line without it ever intruding on the dialogue, which is partly in Italian.*

Donna Sadka: Theatre Critic for the Western Australian newspaper, *The West Australian*. [December 2, 1990]

**ENTROPY CONCERTO: a true story.**

Direction: Serge Tampalini, David Moody and Susan Lingard.

Design: Serge Tampalini.


An “absurd” assemblage of writings by Albert Camus, Samuel Beckett, Edward Albee, Peter Greenaway. Alan Bennett, Harold Pinter, Jean Paul Sartre, David Moody and Steven Joyce.

Presented as part of the Advanced Production Unit at Murdoch University.
Absurd Theatre evolved out of a crisis in the literary and artistic movement of Modernism, becoming most influential in the early decades of the 20th Century. Economic and political upheaval, lasting roughly from the rise of Hitler to the death of Stalin forced the movement into decline. However it was to re-emerge in the 1950’s through the 60’s and even into the early 70’s. Absurd Theatre tried to speak to a deeper level of the audiences’ consciousness; its staging was usually very funny and very terrifying. It challenged the audience to make sense of non-sense, to face the existential predicament of life consciously rather than feel it vaguely, and perceive, with laughter, its fundamental absurdity. Such a theatre was involved in the relatively few problems that remained: life, death, and the isolation we feel through lack of communication! The critical thing to keep-in-mind, especially when considering Entropy Concerto: a true story, is that these problems were presented as only one personal intuitive vision of the world. The task of assembling writings around the idea of “Absurdity” is in itself absurd. “Absurdity” cannot be defined or explained, it can merely be observed and demonstrated.

Entropy Concerto: a true story, was a celebration of "Absurdity"; an adventure that began in the chaos of experience, divested of any setting and relegated to the realm of incoherence. The title itself contains an absurdity -not only in the tongue-in-cheek implication of its subtitle, but also in the contradiction between the chaos implied by the term Entropy, and the strict structural order of a concerto. [The use of the term entropy may be best understood, as the measure of the degree of disorder and randomness of a system.] Entropy Concerto, was presented in the formal three part structure of a concerto: First Movement [Allegro Ma Non Troppo], Second Movement [Adagio

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Molto E Cantabile], with its sound only available via simultaneous broadcasting on radio, and the Third Movement [Presto E Forte].

It may be true that all of us, at some time, have felt a longing for coherence and meaning in our lives; humanity is almost defined by its blind headlong rush towards some explanation, order, ultimate truth, a “God” if you wish. However “Absurdity” does not see “God” as proof of the existence of a higher order, but as a byproduct of this one. In this way, Entropy Concerto was a challenge to see if one could identify some sense of order in the chaos of entropy…in the complex matrix of the selected texts.

Entropy Concerto combines Camus and Chaos Theory, questions Koestler and quantum physics, adds angst to Albee and conducts absurdism in perfect time. It asks all the “big questions”, and asks them with style: why is Hamlet standing over Beckett’s grave? What are Kafka and Genet doing in Algiers? What is David Moody doing to Harold Pinter? Are Sartre and Ionesco waiting for Godot, or for their scripts? Where is the director? Is there structure in decay? Is there harmony in chance? Has death forgotten its lines.

David Moody [From the theatre programme notes]

1991

Presented as part of the Experimental Theatre Unit at Murdoch University.

*In addition to the DVD of India Song, the production soundscape is also included as part of the documentation.*


Making memory work for theatre:

Marguerite Duras’s theatre text, *India Song* is the story of a love affair that takes place in India, in a densely populated city on the banks of the Ganges. It is the story of the love affair of Anne-Marie Stretter. It is also a story about voices - voices without bodies, invisible voices; voices that desperately desire to remember the past.

My production of *India Song* needs to be seen and understood within a conceptual process that involves three [and perhaps four] evolutionary stages. The first of the four stages was not directly influential, as my connection to the work of Marguerite Duras began with her text of *India Song*. This point will become more apparent as we progress.

My interest in staging any text has never been motivated by a reverent desire to faithfully reproduce the text; instead my interest lies in attempting to make the text a creative vehicle capable of expressing personal and cultural connections that might be of interest to a contemporary audience. I begin by trying to identity and then distil the themes of the text in order to arrive at a primary subjective connection and response to it. In order to arrive at this primary connection, it was necessary to return to the beginnings of Duras’s *India Song*...to the first of the four stages mentioned above.

In the introduction to her text Duras says that: “*In fact, ‘India Song’ follows on from ‘The Woman of the Ganges’, [a previous story by Duras]. If The Woman of the Gange’s hadn’t been written, neither would ‘India Song’.*” What is significant about her comment is the implication that any

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work is always part of a greater, albeit at times sub-conscious, project -that it is simply one stage in a continuous creative process. This insight was to become the catalyst for my production of Duras’s text.

Duras continues in her introduction: “What was a sufficient reason [for ‘India Song’] was the discovery, in ‘The Woman of the Ganges’, of the means of exploration, revelation: the voices external to the narrative. This discovery made it possible to let the narrative be forgotten and put at the disposal of memories other than that of the author: memories which might remember, in the same way, any other love story. Memories that distort. That create.”  

Nothing is spoken on the stage. The external voices belong to the soundtrack. We enter the stage world through VOICES 1 and 2; young women’s voices. Some of the voices from The Woman of the Ganges, and their words, have been used by Duras. The voices are inextricably linked together by a love story. Voice 1 is in danger of being consumed by the love story in India Song and Voice 2 is in danger of being consumed by her love for Voice 1. VOICES 3 and 4 are men’s voices. The thing that connects them with the voices of the women is their captivation by the story of the lovers of the Ganges. They are heard later in the narrative.

Thus in Duras’s India Song she opens up two simultaneous paths for us; one is the sound track of the disembodied voices, the other is the visuals of voiceless bodies. This deliberate split raises doubts about coherence on a structural level, and by putting the narrative at the disposal of memories; “…memories that distort, that create” raises questions about coherence on a narrative level. However there always remains a relationship between the voices and the visuals. When the voices remember and speak of the love story, we see it unfolding on stage. What is significant is that their memory is able to call forth the inhabitants of the place and we as spectators see, witness and recognise...they bear the names spoken by the voices and we assume them to be

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642 ibid.
643 ibid.
whom they once were. As the narrative unfolds, the connection is affirmed and we are content with what the voices are able to recall before us.

Consider: As we move away from the time of any narrative event, its details become less and less recallable. Eventually, at the edge of our memory, the details are in danger of disappearing. No longer confident of the details, our memory returns only traces -strangely familiar emotions and incomplete pictures constructed out of fragments. Duras followed her film version of India Song644 with what became known as the “second India Song”: Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert645 [Her Venetian Name in Deserted Calcutta] which used exactly the same soundtrack as India Song, only the images were different. Here the images were of ruins, uninhabitable…“the swallowing up by death of places and people.” 646 Here the voices could no longer evoke the inhabitants, no revenant returned to the chateau in which Anne Marie Stretter once lived; only the decaying geography of the place remained -in which the voices resounded.

Consider: If we were to continue to move through time, further and further away from the time of the narrative, we would eventually arrive at a point where no amount of memorial assistance would recall the event. At this point our inefficacious memory not only fails to bring before us the details that we so desire but it is now incapable of restoring even the locus of the narrative. At this point it is as if our unmoored memory drifts through time, subject only to hallucinations. This is the primary preface of my production of India Song; here there is no longer any accord between sound and image.

So my production of India Song begins with a place of “forgetting and faltering memory...a place with uneven lighting...with shadowy holes and breaks, where things might happen that would not be announced.” 647 Once again there are two paths. The voices and the images, but this time: “the
image can only exist immemorially, and its violence comes from that single moment of its apparition which arrests the fascination for the absent figure.” 648

The one object that remains always visible throughout the play, if initially inexplicable, is a surveyor’s theodolite. Its presence implies that the place is being excavated. Perhaps it is the disturbance of the place that releases the long buried memories that now return to us as hallucinations.

“Only a vacuous human race survives the obliteration of the individual, the one who "hunts in the warm waters of the Delta," the singing idiocy of a neolithic humanity brought back to the truth of its origins before illusion, before the great wandering of civilisation that will end up in a search after reasons to live. At this point, in submitting to cosmos - chaos - cosmos turned into chaotic falseness - no remedy, no outcome, no hope is admissible. Only a new innocence, perhaps ... But as there has never been innocence, it can't be called new. There is nothing to wait for; or only the signs that would announce the coming of an irresponsible humanity. Mutation.

Dionys Mascolo 649

1999


fuckCRASH a multi-media theatrical adaptation of the David Cronenberg’s screen play Crash,\textsuperscript{650} itself adapted from the J.G. Ballard novel of the same name,\textsuperscript{651} was presented as part of the Advanced Production Unit at Murdoch University.

The play explored the bleak impassive world of cars, freeways and tired flesh. Searching for an authentic experience the protagonists allow themselves to be driven down the nightmare highways of crash scenes where blood, semen and engine oil intermingle in erotic atrocities. In so doing they sought sexual release from their numb bodies and a new union between flesh and metal, between human and machine.

2000

WITTGENSTEIN…the musical.
An adaptation of the English film maker Derek Jarman’s screenplay from the Terry Eagleton script titled Wittgenstein.
Direction and design: Serge Tampalini. Musical direction and Choreography: Simon Yam.
Nexus Theatre, Murdoch University. [2000].

Presented as part of the Advanced Production unit at Murdoch University.

The expectations and assumptions normally associated with the dense and almost impenetrably serious philosophical investigations of the German philosopher were deliberately disrupted by his work being located within a playful musical frame.

Wittgenstein was to spend a lifetime investigating the relationship between language and the world. His first view of the principle of a perfect language [contained in his classic work *Tractatus Logici-Philosophicus*] was to be abandoned in his later work [*Philosophical Investigations*] in favour of a set of social activities or “language games”. In order to highlight the differing philosophical views the character of Wittgenstein was played by two actors – the “rational” Wittgenstein was played by a male and the “playful” Wittgenstein by a female. However both the “rational” and “playful” Wittgenstein were always present throughout the play.

2001

**back to beckett**

Direction and Design: Serge Tampalini.


Presented as part of the Advanced Production Unit at Murdoch University.

**DVD MUSIC:** Cowboy Junkies. *I Don’t Get It* from *The Trinity Session*, BMG Music, Canada, 1988.

After many years of Samuel Beckett’s plays, we are now so familiar with his characters that sometimes it is impossible to think of his Krapp [*Krapp’s Last Tape*] without thinking of Vladimir and Estragon [*Waiting for Godot*] or Winnie and Willie [*Happy Days*] or Hamm and Clov [*Endgame*], or any other of Beckett’s isolated individuals -today the world of Beckett is full of his
characters. This insight was the point of departure for *back to beckett*. It was devised as an absurdist musical foray into the uncertain, inexpressibly, grimly bleak and wildly hilarious world of Beckett’s imagination - where all Beckett’s characters appear to speak not only to themselves, but also “optimistically” to each other. Not one of his plays was presented in full, instead we were guided through Beckett’s existential terrain, by a group of itinerant actors, via a collage of his works including: *Breath, Act Without Words 2, Not I, Waiting for Godot, Play, Happy Days, Endgame, Come and Go, Rockaby, and Krapp’s Last Tape*.

Along the way we wondered at Winnie’s longing to feast on Willie; we laughed at Krapp as he struggled to remember the best parts of his life; we reminisced the “sawdust days” of Hamm’s mum and dad [whom he now keeps in “wheelie bins”]; we shared all the characters’ desire to be loved and needed; we watched them sing, dance and die, but never really found out what Lucky was doing in drag.

2002

**BODAS DE SANGRE** by Federico Garcia Lorca.

Presented as part of the Advanced Production Unit at Murdoch University.

This production of Lorca’s *Bodas de Sangre* was both a searing tragedy of desire and revenge, and a celebration of humanity’s determination and need for survival. In these confusing times of political insensitivity towards the ever-increasing number of dislocated individuals and nations, this
production of Lorca’s play was a cautionary reminder of humanity’s need for love, at whatever cost. Has there ever been a time when relationships have been more sorely amiss at home and abroad? Industrialised countries seek individual expansion at the same time as tightening their borders -cutting off at times, our humanity.

Like the design for Kafka’s Dick, the design for Bodas de Sangre focused on substituting an external landscape for an internal world and is so doing metaphorically prefigured the tragic chaos that was to be spilled when the traditional laws of religion and bloodline were severed.

2003

RICHARD III

Presented as part of the Advanced Production Unit at Murdoch University.

This production was designed as both a celebration of the influence that “Bollywood” has had on contemporary music and performance, and an exposé of the insidious appearance of the “bully” as a privileged protagonist in the machinations of world politics. It was intended as a timely indictment of the current world political forces that masquerade as democratic freedom while oppressing those they claim to liberate.

Standing at the beginning of a new millennium we appear to have reached a moment in our history where “lies” have unashamedly replaced the “truth” –where our ability to discern the difference is
obscured by the Orwellian rhetoric that pervades every moment of our lives. Politics, business and war are packaged by PR companies and sold to us as entertainment. Chorus lines of “Dicks” take to the world political stages and openly sing and dance their way through dazzlingly orchestrated and choreographed routines, while it is back stage where the “real” performances are taking place. It is not difficult to see this view of our present world political condition as analogous to the artistic and commercial concerns of the Bollywood film studios –studios that turn out more films in a month than Hollywood does in a year. The difference lies in the fact that Bollywood does not masquerade as reality. The characters in Richard III…a Bollywood Musical, like their counterparts in reality, sing and dance their way through the deceptive and treacherous world of the manipulative Richard.

Richard III…a Bollywood Musical owes much to the Ian McKellen & Richard Loncraine screenplay adaptation for 1995 film version of Shakespeare’s play. The full text of the screenplay is available at:


2004

SCENES FROM AN EXECUTION by Howard Barker.
Howard Barker’s ideologically challenging and speculative play uncompromisingly examines the conflicting relationship between moral responsibility and personal ambition, revealing the way in which rhetoric has blatantly usurped truth and replaced it with the *spin* of the dominant ideology of the day – a *spin* that sees “truth” as a series of political negotiations. Moving through twenty scenes that include seven locations, one of which is a prison that is almost entirely black, the paradigmatic structure of the play reinforces its central theme, namely, that everything [truth included] is fictional according to the particular frame that constructed it.

**2005**

**THE LOVE OF THE NIGHTINGALE** by Timberlake Wertenbaker.
Direction and design: Serge Tampalini.
The Love of the Nightingale is a contemporary reworking of the ancient Greek myth of Philomela, from Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*. However metatheatrical performances from Euripides’ *Hippolytis* and *The Bacchae* impact upon its narrative and serve as cautionary parallel tales.

The play, in which the ideals of freedom and love collide with forces of violence and revenge, places two sides of human nature in cruel opposition; the rational and civilised side, on which large communities like cities depend, and the instinctive side, guided by the irrational life of the senses. When the civilised grows too arrogant and powerful it is betrayed by the bestial, when the bestial is unleashed it is capable of inexplicably terrifying acts. The play questions whether uncontrolled passion is justification enough for the violence that is generated when humanity denies either of the two sides of its nature and reflects on the power of words and the price and horror of silence. It is a timely indictment of the rapidly escalating political forces that pay “lip-service” to democratic freedom and invoke the laws of “god[s]” at the same time as claiming and maintaining power at any cost. In the shadow of the recent acts of terrorism the play asks the increasingly imperative question; “What happens when the powerless and the silenced feel they have no recourse left but violence?”