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BODYANDSELF

PERFORMANCE ART IN AUSTRALIA 1969-92 | ANNE MARSH

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CHAPTER FOUR

RITUAL PERFORMANCE AND ECOLOGY; FEMINIST AND ACTIVIST PERFORMANCE

RITUAL PERFORMANCE AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

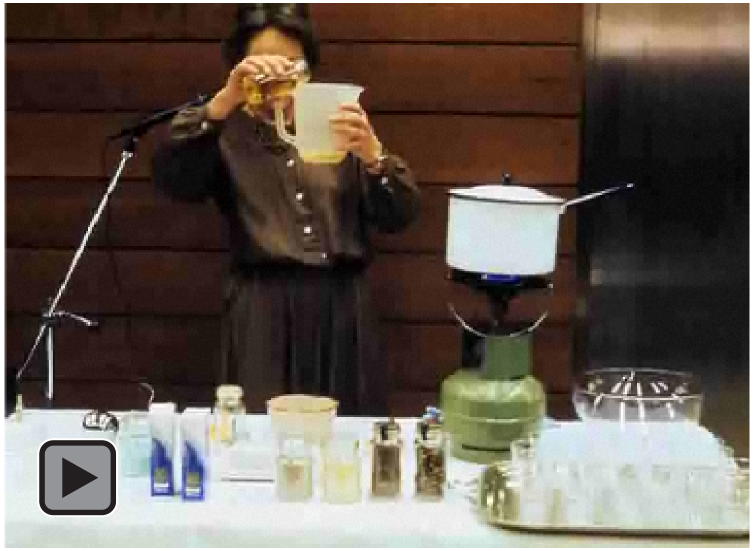
Although *Relics and Rituals* was an important exhibition in that it attempted to make connections between ephemeral sculpture, *arte povera*, ritual performance and body art, Lindsay's desire to catalogue the various art practices under the titles of 'new narrative realism' and 'new expressive Romanticism'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

The 'romantic' position of the artist is antagonistic to society; it frames the artist and the work in terms of the avant-garde. Although it is appropriate to interpret some of the body art actions in this way, it does not account for the activity of many of the artists. When Lindsay says the events and performances 'provide (often through a direct empathy with the performer) an understanding of an alternative set of attitudes or beliefs about Man and his environment'[6] he is closer to the aspirations of the artists producing ritual performance and ephemeral sculpture. However, this has little to do with the psychological investigations of the ego associated with body art (Mike Parr) or the futuristic vision apparent in Stelarc's bid to escape planet earth. Indeed, Stelarc does not fit comfortably in the exhibition; his willingness to embrace technology and replace the biological body with its technological double is the antithesis of sculptures by John Davis, which are made of natural materials, or performances by Jill Orr, which make direct links between the female body and the body of the earth. In the catalogue for the exhibition Orr wrote:

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

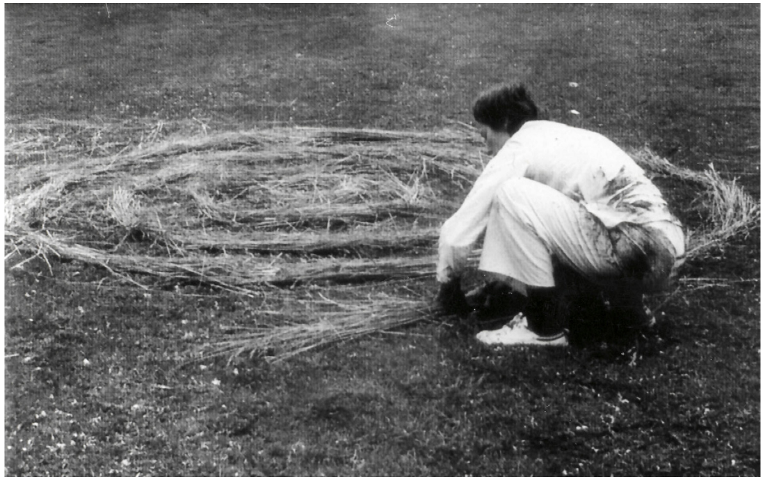
Bonita Ely's performances and sculptures are likewise concerned with the land and the re-evaluation of 'man's' place in the universe. The environment is interpreted through the work on both a political and a 'natural' level. In some performances there is evidence of a celebration of the female body as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

Murray River Punch (*Women at Work*, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, and Rundle Street Mall, Adelaide Festival of Arts, 1980) was a street theatre event in which the artist appeared as a cooking demonstrator; everything looked authentic until the recipe for the punch being made became explicit. Phosphate compound fertilisers, human faeces and agricultural chemicals were among the ingredients mixed in the artist's blender and offered, with a garnish of rabbit dung, to shoppers in a busy mall.[8] *Murray River Punch* was Ely's most public political statement on the pollution of the environment; however, other works concentrated on similar themes. *Controlled Atmosphere* (Anzart-in-Hobart, 1983); *Jabiluka* UO_2 (Preston Performance Festival, 1979); and the large-scale installation *Mount Feathertop* (Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1978) all presented environmental issues. *Jabiluka* UO_2 presented a narrative of environmental destruction as two men acting as surveyors cut through the spiral of earth and straw made by the artist. Other works focused on the personal experience of the artist made into a public spectacle. *Breadline* (Anzart-in-Christchurch, New Zealand, 1981) was an extensive ritual which involved making positive and negative impressions of the artist's body in bread dough. A feast of bread, milk and honey was shared after the body-moulding exercise and the audience watched as the artist bathed.[9] The dividing of the bread-body as a spiritual food was a rather contrived 'communion' without the poignancy apparent in Jill Orr's *Lunch with the Birds* (1979). Ely's interpretation of a similar theme demanded a god-like reverence from the spectator, rewarded through the consumption of



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

Photograph from the artist's collection.



Bonita Ely, *Jabiluka* UO_2, Preston Performance Festival, 1979.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

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

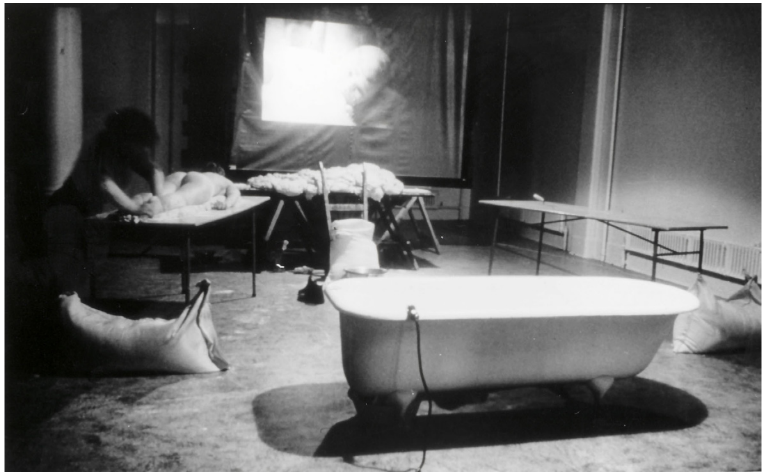
Photograph from the artist's collection.

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

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

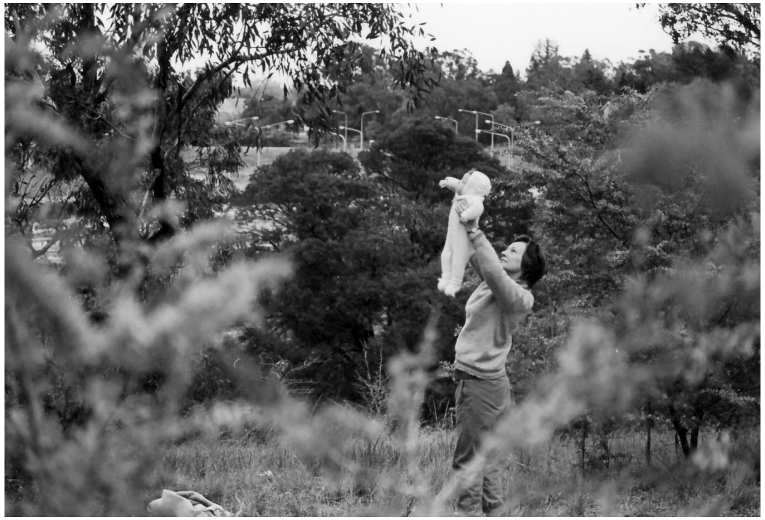
Dogwoman Communicates with the Younger Generation (Kunstlerhaus, Bethanien, West Berlin, 1982) and *A Mother Shows her Daughter to the Universe* (Act 3, Canberra, 1982) both expressed the artist's experience of pregnancy and birth. *A Mother Shows her Daughter to the Universe* was, according to the artist,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

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



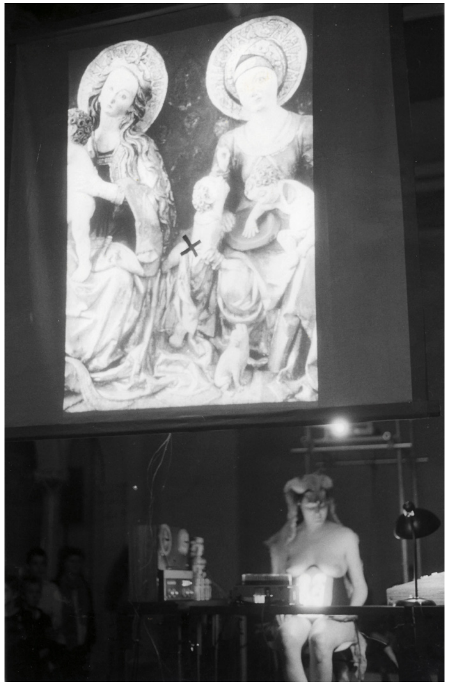
Bonita Ely, *Controlled Atmosphere*, Old Mail Exchange Building, Anzart-in-Hobart, 1983.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



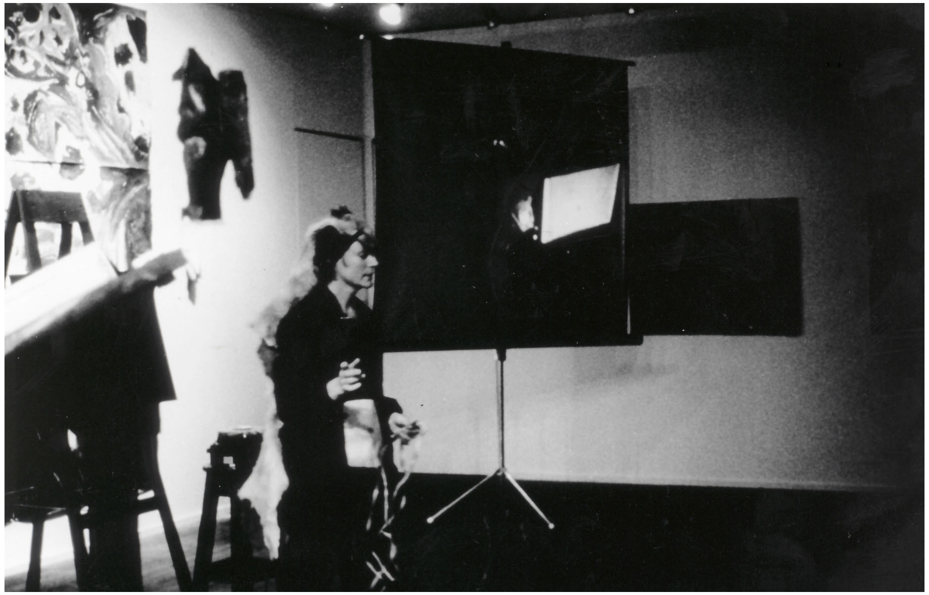
Bonita Ely, *A Mother Shows her Daughter to the Universe*, *Act 3*, Canberra, 1982.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



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

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



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

Photograph from the artist's collection.

Elizabeth Ruinard wrote about the performance in 1986:

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

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

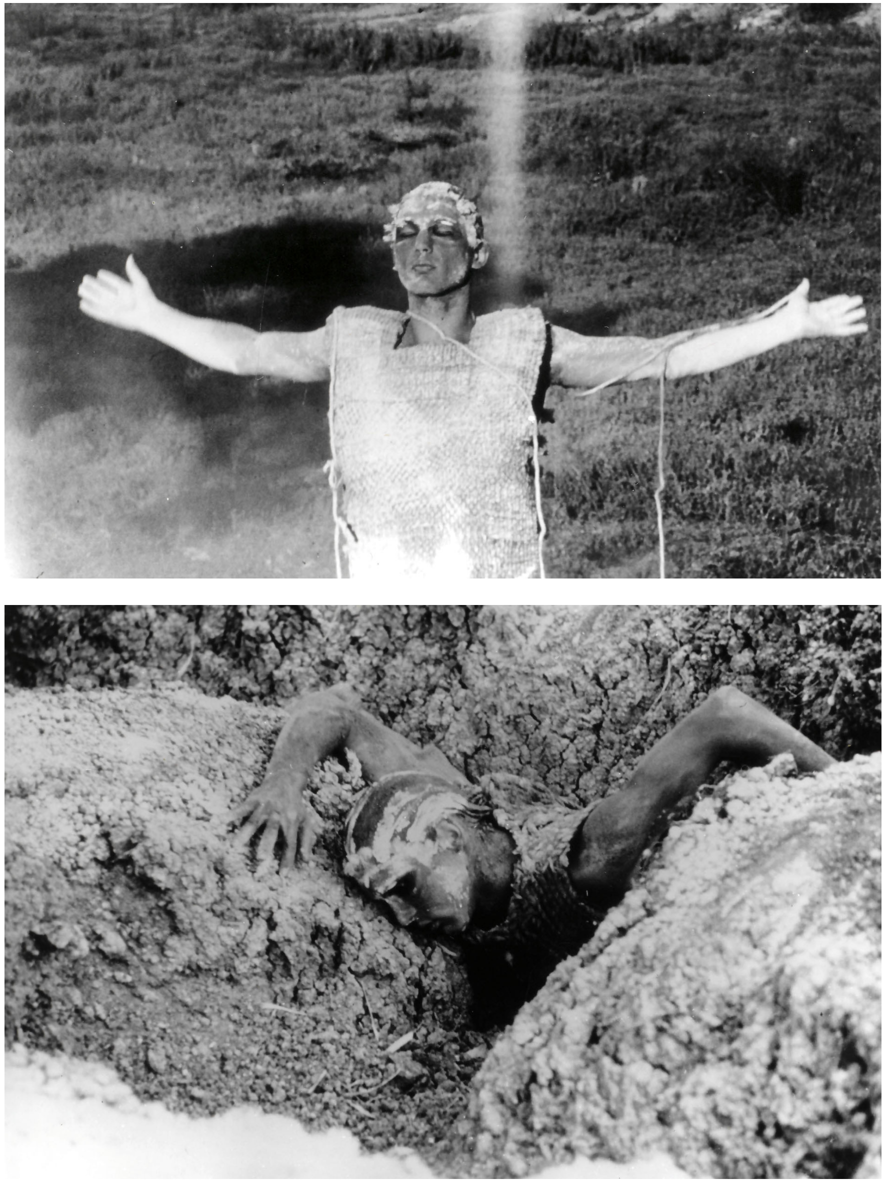
Ralph Eberlein, now a painter of mythical stories on both canvases and ceramic pots, produced performance works concerned with ecological issues in the 1970s. *Post-Atomic Age* (*2+3 Exhibition*, Mildura Arts Centre, 1976) was a four-part, two-hour ritual in bushland adjacent to the art gallery, with an accompanying display of remnants.[13] The artist presented a story of death and rebirth after the age of nuclear holocaust. Binding and embalming remnants from the landscape and using his own body, the artist appeared to be the epitome of a lost White tribalism.

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

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

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

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



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

Photograph from the artist’s collection.

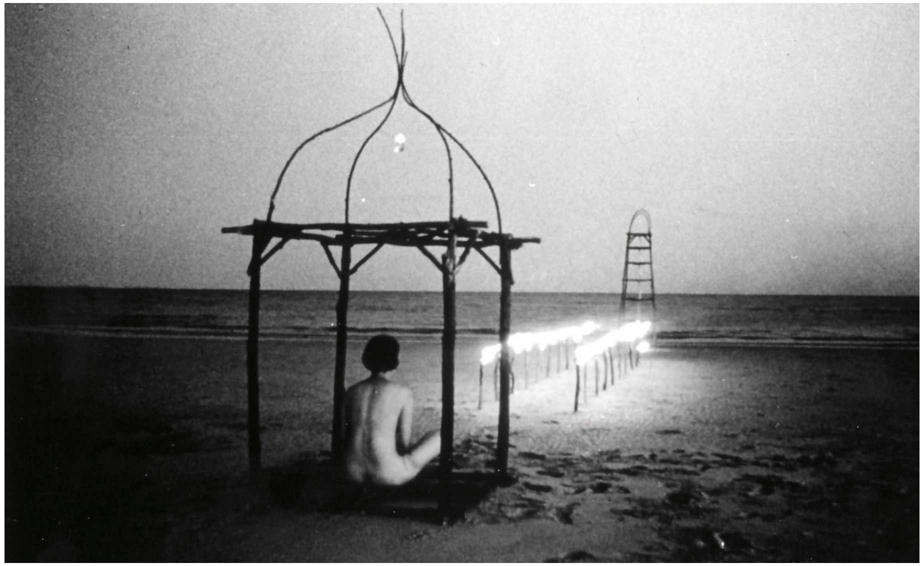
biological difference, the desire to return to one's instinctual or ancestral roots, and the heralding of a 'primitive' existence, which was free of social repression, were all considered to be ineffectual ways in which to promote social change. Such critiques were a shift from the concerns of the counter-culture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

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

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

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

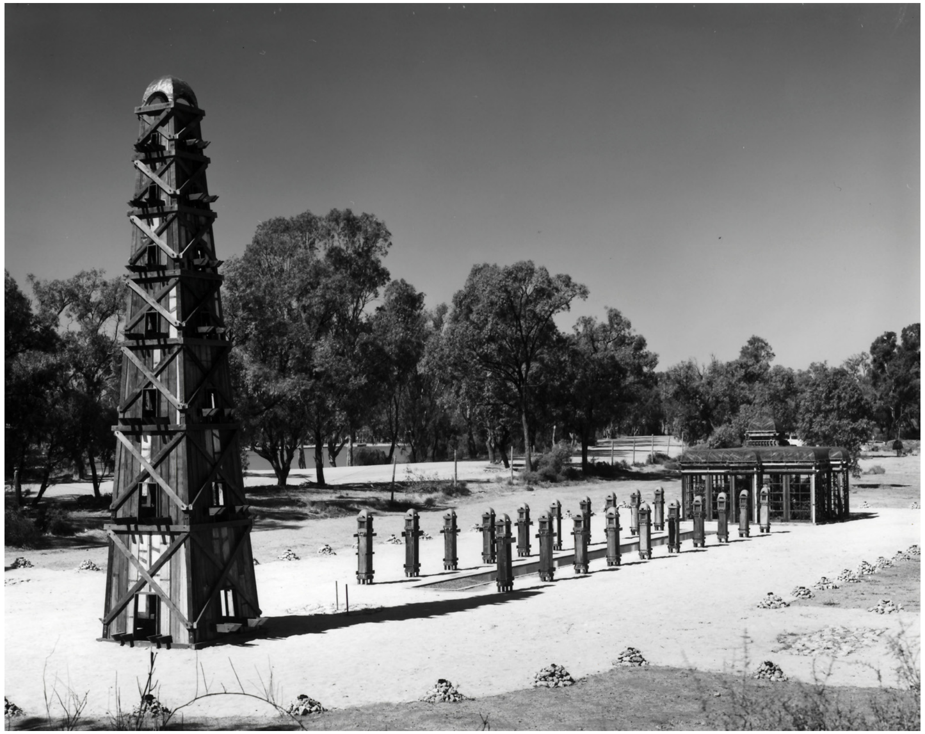
Milani started to produce rituals in the landscape in 1983. Selecting a secluded spot in Beachmere, the artist and friends acted out celebrations of the changing seasons, choosing to commemorate the summer solstice and the spring and autumn equinox.[19] Erecting temple structures in the ocean and burning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



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

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

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



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

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

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

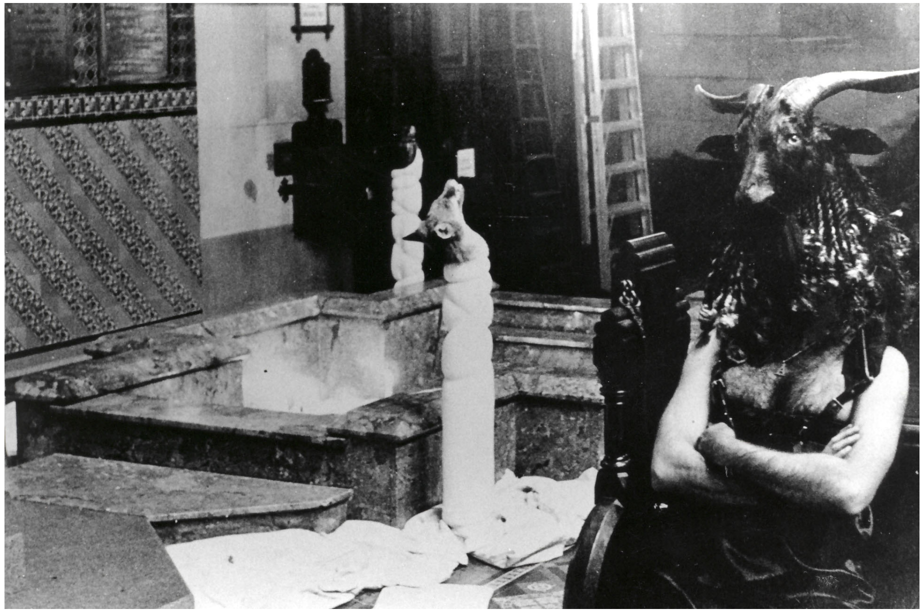
Wattamolla provided a hectare of stage for T.R.E.E. productions, comprising beach, lagoon, cliffs, rocks, and earth banks. *Echoes and Star Tides* (1983) was a visual and technological spectacle. Films were projected on rock surfaces, divers from the CSIRO at Cronulla performed an underwater dance show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

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

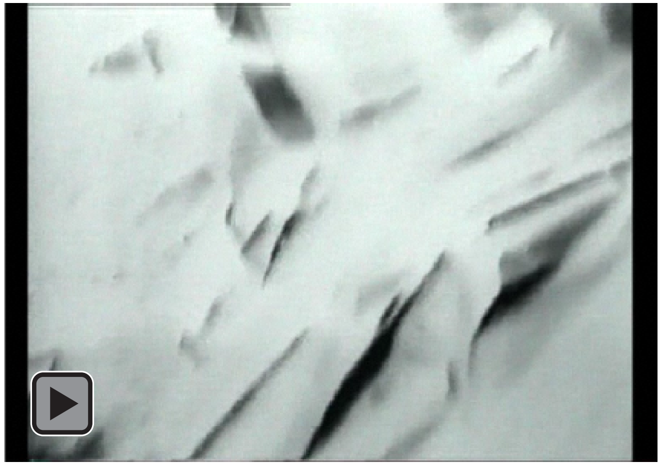
Performances that celebrate the changes associated with the seasonal equinox and solstice, recognise alternative festivals. In this sense they are cross-cultural: they do not privilege any particular religion or spiritual belief. They circumvent such specificity by celebrating the natural rhythms of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

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

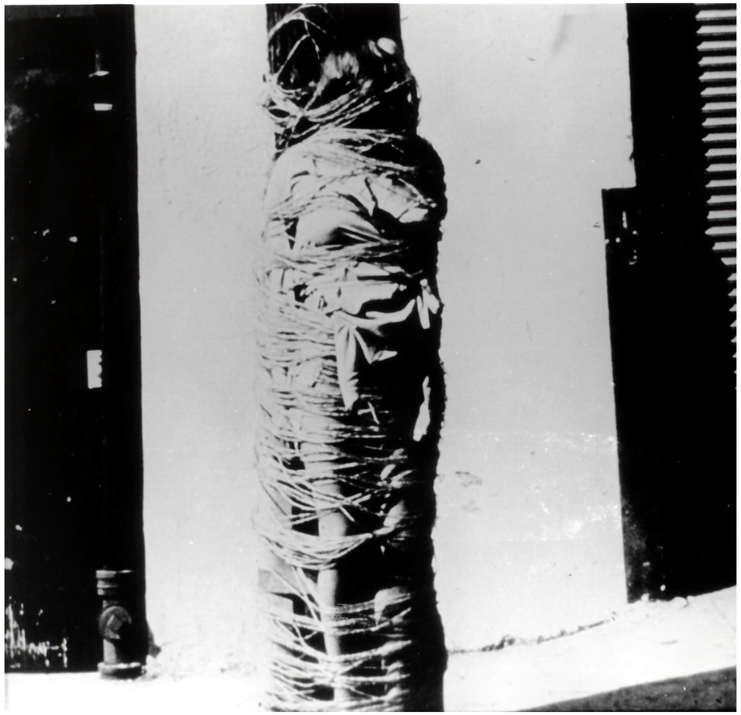
Gabrielle Dalton and George Gittoes, on the cliff at Wattamolla, preparing for a T.R. E. E. production. Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Jon Lewis.



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



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



Jill Scott, *Tied*, telephone pole, San Francisco, 1976.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

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

Jill Scott, who lived in California from 1972 to 1982 has worked in performance and video, combining the two media in installation-performance since the late 1970s. Scott's early performances *Taped* (building wall, San Francisco, 1975); *Boxed* (San Francisco, 1975); *Tied* (telephone pole, San Francisco); and *Strung* (Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, 1976), were all works in which the body was bound or confined. *Taped* involved Scott being stuck to the outside of a city building with yards of adhesive tape; in *Tied* the body was tied to a telephone pole; and *Strung* repeated the same action on a bridge. Towards the end of the 1970s Scott became more involved with ritual performance and drew on her Australian experience. Images of the desert (sand), the movement of insects (bees) on a video monitor, and the sounds of a didgeridoo played by the artist were included in *SAND the Stimulant* (80 Langton Street, San Francisco, 1982). Scott used an array of constructed instruments to create sounds with the sand: 'Revolving Desert Simulators' (small and large metal discs, onto which sand was poured from above through funnels) were amplified to create the natural rhythms of wind. Robert Atkins, reviewing the performance in *Artforum*, noted the meeting of action and installation where the 'handmade and the high tech amiably coexist.'[25]

Jill Scott, *SAND the Stimulant*, Langton Street artists' space, San Francisco, 1982.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

Jill Scott, detail of *Revolving Desert Simulators*, from Constriction, Part 4, Act 3, Canberra, 1982.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

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

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

Scott's installation *Machine Dreams* (8th Biennale of Sydney: *The Readymade Boomerang: Certain Relations in 20th Century Art*, 1990) involved photographs of herself manipulated by computer, columns displaying household items painted matt black (sewing machine, typewriter, Mixmaster and a Commander telephone), and a sophisticated video-camera installation which focused on the audience-as-participants and generated a soundscape. In this work the artist attempted to address the division of the subject in relation to technology. Writing in the catalogue Scott said:

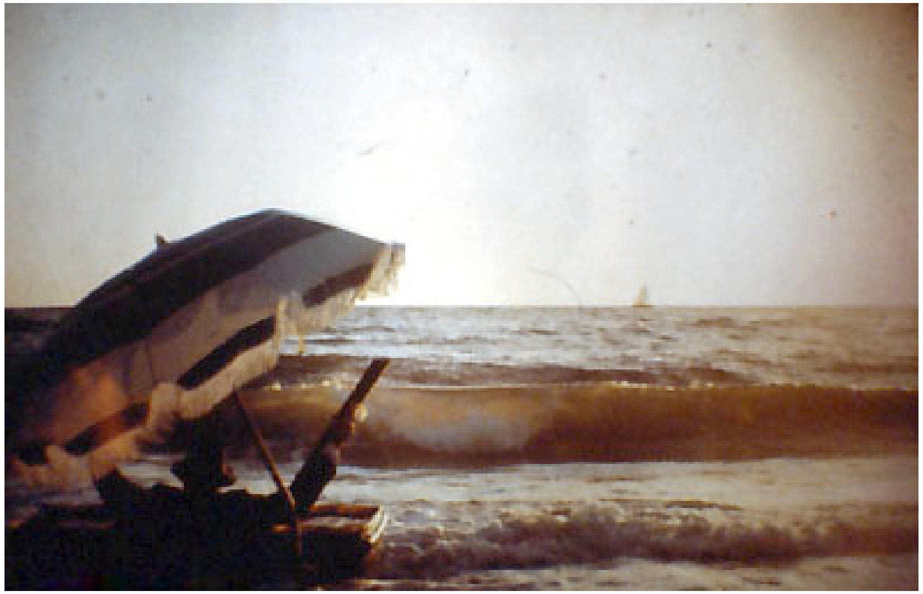
> ***She locates four items of technology — machine dreams. They are chorused by sounds of their own making. Their surfaces are irradiated with industrial cancer. Digits from the divided-self, herself. Readymades in chaos, disorder compounded from ideas of order.***[27]

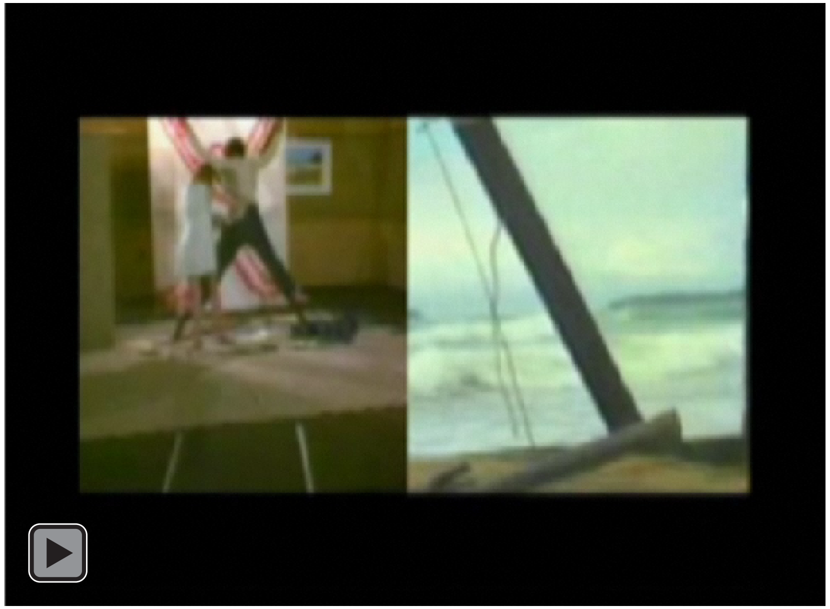
Scott's work in performance and installation has moved through several stages where a difference in focus or concept is apparent. The early works where the body was bound or tied represented the subject at the mercy of the world, the soft body exposed to the coldness of an industrial society. These works tended to represent the subject as victim; however, later works extended the concepts behind such images and brought them into a more rigorous analysis. The most recent works, where the artist is represented in her absence through photography, but is still the manipulator, include the audience as participants. People moving around the installation trigger the soundscape and make the objects come to life in an audible montage. Although the work is an installation, the audience brings the tableau to life in the absence of the artist. *Machine Dreams* is a sophisticated technological installation which positions the spectator as performer: the temptation to make the artwork live is irresistible, as one becomes an actor in a tableau which reacts to the movements of one's own body. Such works need to be documented over a period of time as proof of the interactive elements in 'play', since the spectator becomes a dancer; moving in and out of the technological landscape with others, the audience becomes the performance.

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

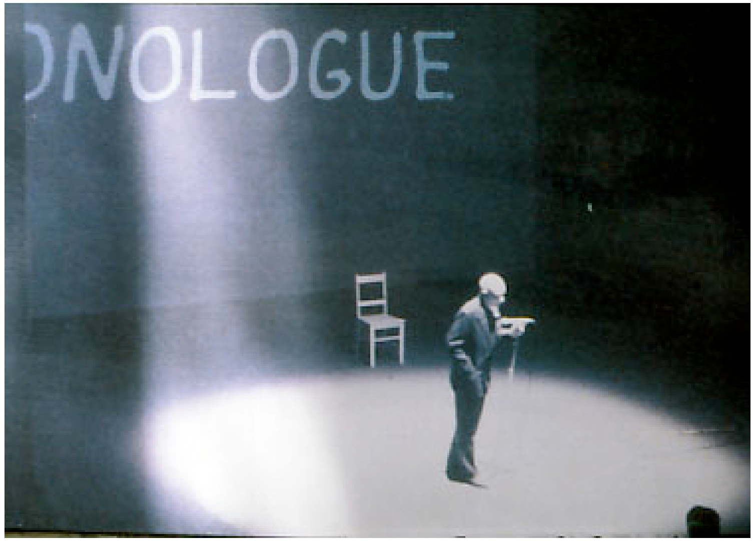
Arthur Wicks produces humorous events in natural and urban environments and constructs witty machines that have little use outside the realms of art. He sees himself as an observer rather than a manipulator in the world[28] and his activities have been described as a kind of alchemy.[29] Some of the works such as the 1982 *Solstice Project* celebrate natural occurrences, whilst others critique the advancements of Western society. The *Solstice Project* involved the artist mapping the solstice points from the roof-tops of galleries in Sydney, Berlin, and Hamburg. Living in a small tent for twenty-four hours the artist produced 'local astronomical clocks' which he considered to be links between the modern and ancient times.[30] Writing about the work in 1982 Wicks said:

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





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



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

Photograph from the artist's collection.

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

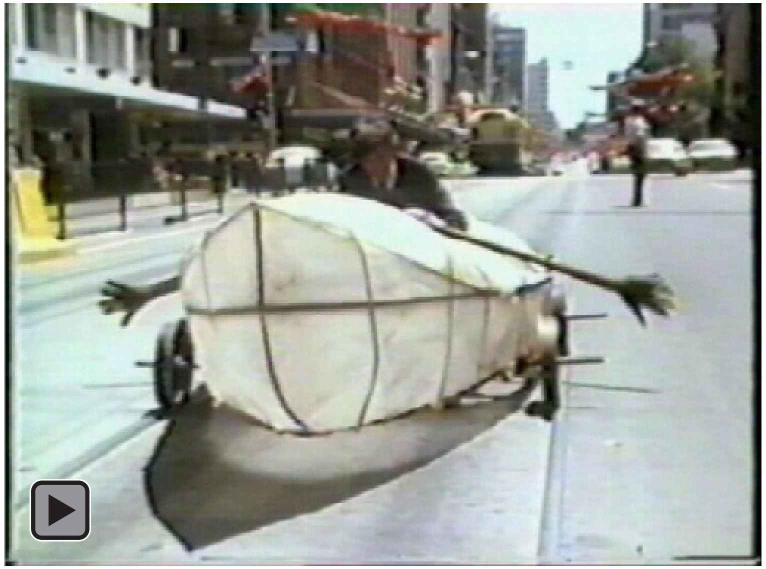
Photograph from the artist's collection.

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

Photograph from the artist's collection.

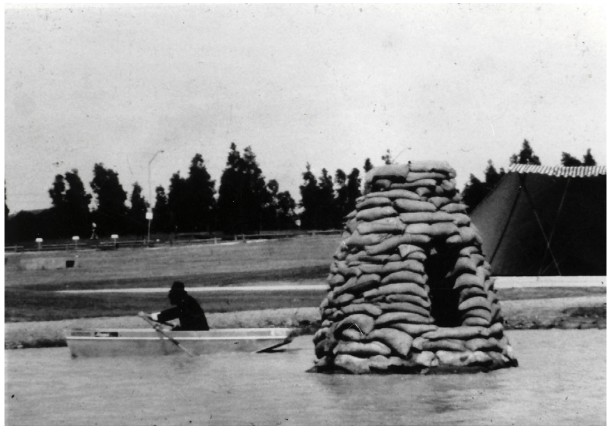
Arthur Wicks, *Survival Boat*, Melbourne, 1985.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

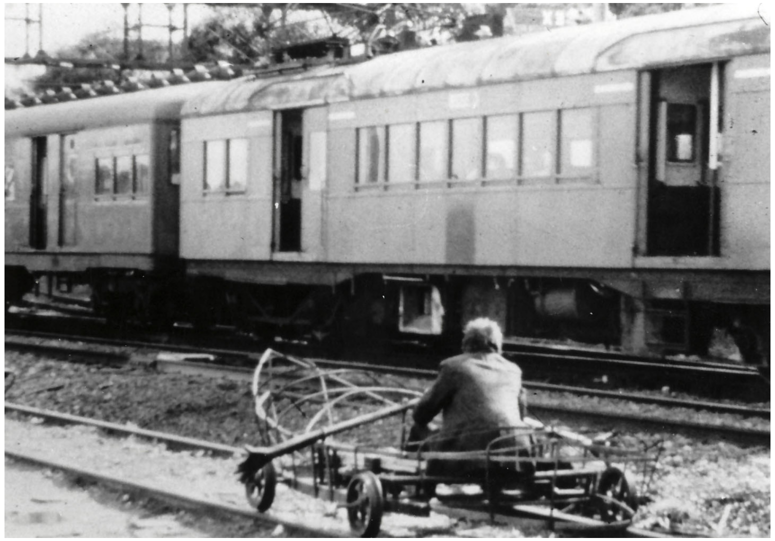


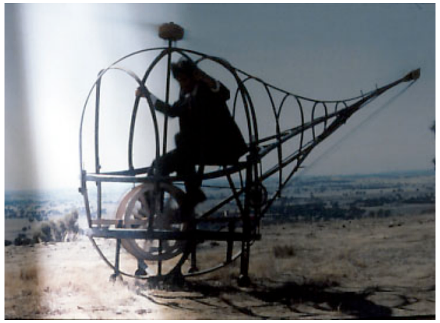
Arthur Wicks, *Boatman*, First Australian Sculpture Triennial, 1981.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



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





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

Photograph from the artist's collection.

ACTIVIST PERFORMANCE ART

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

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

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

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

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

Structuralist analysis is important because it stresses the conspiracy between law (the symbolic, language, patriarchy) and the subject's desire. The complicity between patriarchal society and the desire of the subject is seen to be a result of the formation of identity for the subject. Firstly the subject is split at the mirror stage where an imaginary wholeness is reflected back to the subject. However, this mirror image is also a projection of the subject's desire, a desire for unity and wholeness. The ideal ego which exists outside the subject becomes the subject's first other. Secondly, the child is split when it adopts the language of society, the-name-of-the-father. The child 'resolves' the Oedipus complex by moving away from the mother (the imaginary realm) and into the social sphere of the father (the symbolic). To communicate in society the child must adopt society's language. Lacan makes a distinction between the other — the realm of the imaginary where the other is the mirror image of the self — and the big Other — all those others surrounding the child who are already socialised into language. The big Other represents the name-of-the-father (language), and designates, what Lacan calls, the symbolic realm. Because of the intricate relations between self and other/Other Lacan argues that 'I is an Other',[43] and outlines the way in which identity is established in the relationship between the self and the symbolic code. The child desires the name-of-the-father because here (in the Symbolic) s/he appears to have control over the imaginary. However, as the body artists showed, that which is repressed in this scheme returns, again and again: 'the return of the repressed' which unsettles such control and normalisation.

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

Between 1975 and 1979 the 'difference debate' erupted in feminist theory.[46] Early 1970s feminism had campaigned for equal rights for women by arguing that the differences between the sexes had been exaggerated and that women had been allocated an inferior role in society by virtue of their position as the 'second' (weaker) sex. Following Simone de Beauvoir's thesis that woman is not born but rather becomes female in a society constructed around patriarchal values, feminists like Kate Millet and Elizabeth Janeway argued that gender was learned or acquired as a result of social conditioning evident in 'sex role' behaviour.[47] Following such theses, feminists aimed to reform society through anti-sexist education and social justice programmes which would alleviate the inequality between the sexes. However, such strategies revolved around the concept of liberal individualism, so that equality was designed for woman moulded in a masculine image.[48] Reducing the differences between the sexes effectively ignored sexual difference by insisting that, if women had equal rights, they could be the same as men. Furthermore, such programmes did not address the continuance of a corporate, patriarchal society. Given their new-found freedom, women were able to compete equally in a 'man's world.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

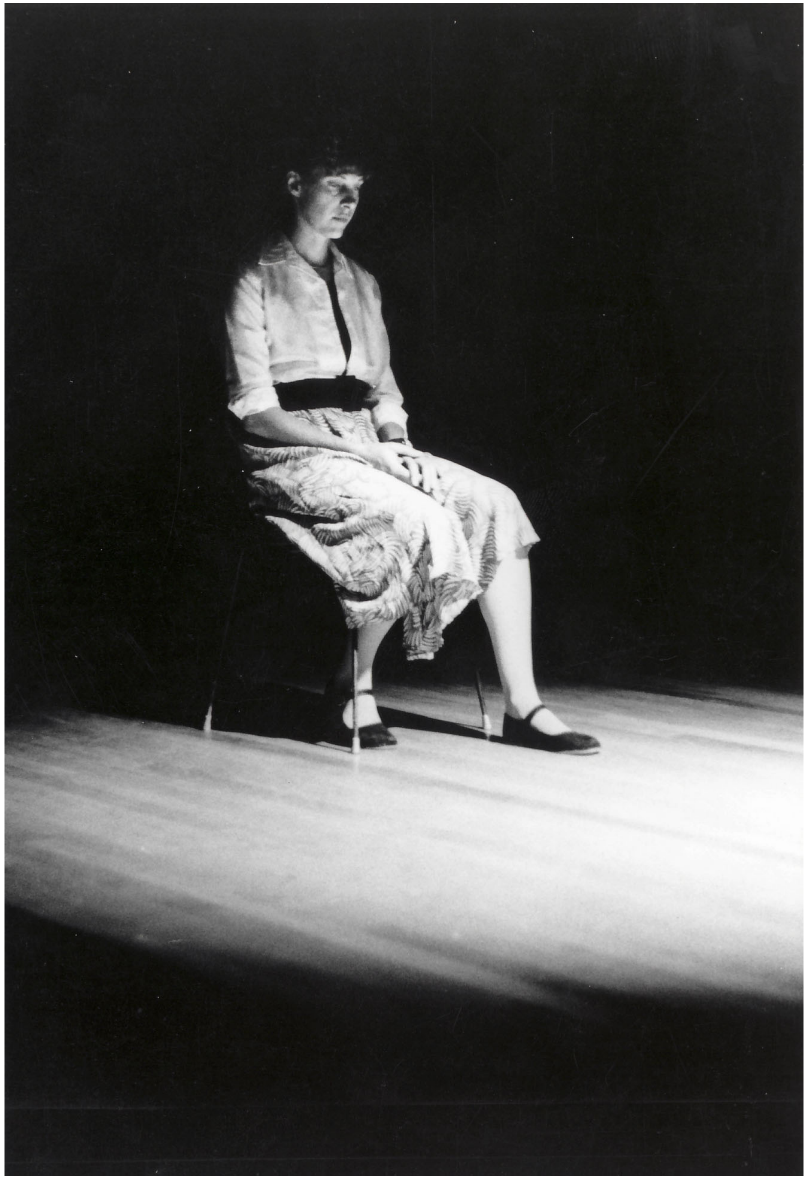
The link between feminism and socialism is paramount in an understanding of activist modes of performance. A feminist discourse in the visual arts, in its organised and analytic rather than celebratory mode, is connected to various Marxist initiatives in the early 1970s. Lippard was associated with a Marxist analysis of the artworld in New York and her *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* was much cited.[58] Groups like Art and Language, Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, the Art Workers' Coalition, and the Art Workers' Union in America, Britain and later Australia[59] were all concerned to analyse the structures of the artworld and to lobby for reform. Feminist art programmes, beginning with *Heresies* in 1977, were break-away projects from what was then considered the 'male-dominated', Marxist-Leninist Left.[60] Various individuals pioneered the New York Marxist art connection with Australia. Peter Kennedy, Terry Smith and Ian Burn were all involved with the political analysis of art developing in America.[61] Organised protests against museums and survey exhibitions in Australia took much the same form as they did in New York.[62]

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

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

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

Joan Grounds, who had previously worked in collaboration with Aleks Danko, started to produce solo works in 1980.[63] *Stinky* was the first of a series of works 'specifically concerned with fear and the oppression of women.'[64] Grounds re-enacted the sequence of events associated with the notorious Bay Area rapist who had terrorised women in California. The artist presented a dual role by dressing as the rapist and covering herself with creosote. A pungent smell wafted through the performance area as pre-recorded tape narrated the victim's only recollection of the perpetrator: the smell. Grounds also appeared as the victim, sitting, waiting for the sound of an intruder. Woman's body as socially inscribed — the victim of a dominant body, the body of the attacker — was represented in the understated action where the smell was the most violent element — a visual absence. The artist says that she wanted to present 'a personalised, subjective, experiential account in as stark and crisp a way as possible. Hopefully the work presented this particular solitary female fear and the subject of that fear in a non-titillating way.'[65]



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

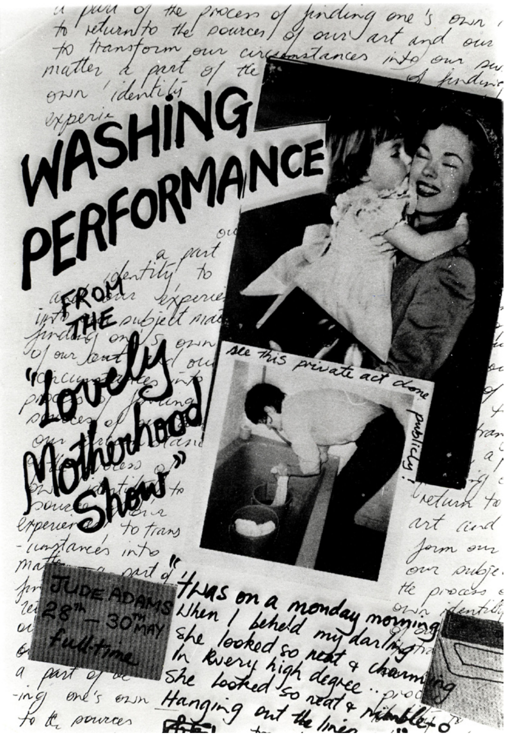
Photograph from the artist's collection.

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

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

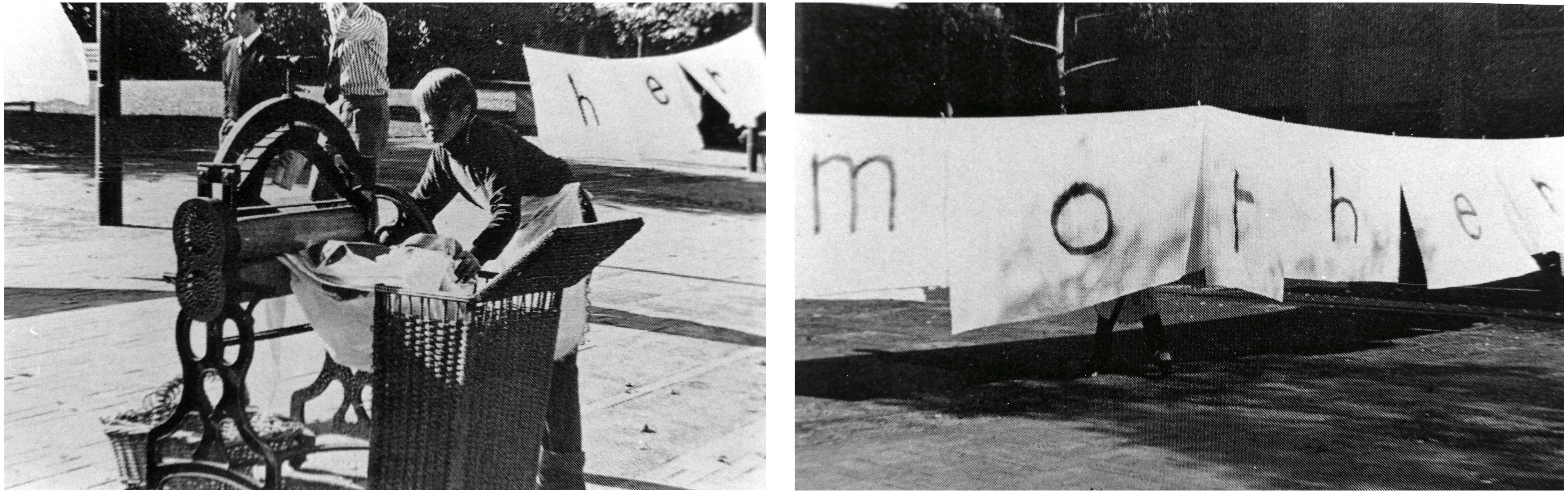
Leftist criticisms of performance art, which focused on body art as if it were the only form of performance art, effectively foreclosed on other practices which were overtly political. Many of these political works successfully bridged the gap between the social and the biological interpretations of the body. Feminist art was at the forefront of such developments; however, it is unfortunate that the dominant Left discourse, at the time, failed to acknowledge these contributions to critical debate. Terry Smith's 1978 critique of performance art would have benefited from an acknowledgement of the type of performance which was not engrossed in 'personal' expression. Exhibitions at Inhibodress, of which Smith was aware, included documentation of works by the Guerilla Art Action Group, the activist arm of the Art Workers' Coalition in New York. Their infamous performance protest against the Song-My massacre, where they displayed enlarged news images of the atrocities committed against women and children during the Vietnam war in front of Picasso's *Guernica* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1970, had been widely documented in the arts press by 1978.[67]

Producing works on the boundary between personal experience and political issues, feminists concentrated on the rituals of everyday life. Domestic duty was often targeted in performances about women's work. The American artist, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, was a pioneer in this type of work, producing various 'maintenance works' in the early 1970s,[68] and progressing to much larger community actions later in the decade.[69] In Australia Jude Adams produced works on a smaller scale concerned with housework and childcare. *Washing Performance* (Experimental Art Foundation, 1979) infiltrated the hallowed halls of avant-garde activity by turning the experimental venue into a laundry. Adams washed dozens of soiled baby's nappies, on a full-time basis, over three days. On the walls behind the washing machine and the piles of nappies in various washed and unwashed stages, the viewer encountered an intellectual analysis in word and image as the artist presented the washing of nappies in various 'experimental' modes: sequences of nappies on washing lines; nappies used over a particular time period, dated and documented; and so forth, in an irreverent analysis of conceptual art which brought the personal experience of women's everyday life into the gallery.[70]


WASHING PERFORMANCE
FROM THE "Lovely Motherhood Show"
see this private act done publicly!
JUDE ADAMS 28th – 30th MAY full-time
It was on a monday morning When I beheld my darling She looked so neat & charming In every high degree... She looked so neat & nimble-o Hanging out the linen

Jude Adams,
Washing Performance,
Experimental Art
Foundation, Adelaide,
1979.

Photograph from the
artist's collection.



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

Photograph from the artist's collection.

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

The body as social text was also analysed by male artists. Graeme Davis, like many other artists discussed in this book, can be seen as operating between categories of performance art. Some events explore the abject reactions of the body. *Fragrance — Fragrance* (Ewing and George Paton Galleries, 1981) involved the artist obsessively washing his arms and hands in a basin for ten minutes. He then turned his attention to a hospital bed covered in excreta which he camouflaged with talcum powder. *An Invalid Product as Subject* (Botanic Gardens, as part of the Experimental Art Foundation's Performance Week, Adelaide Festival of Arts, 1980) drew on Davis's experiences as a psychiatric nurse. Over a five-day period the artist paced up and down, between two designated points, mirroring the restless movement of sedated patients and etching a track in the grass. Davis interacted with people passing by and recorded their comments in response to a question he posed to them, he asked: 'What is the end result of effort what remains?.' A gardener from the Botanic Gardens participated by whistling a crystal clear rendition of 'Love is a Beautiful Song', in memory of a friend who

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

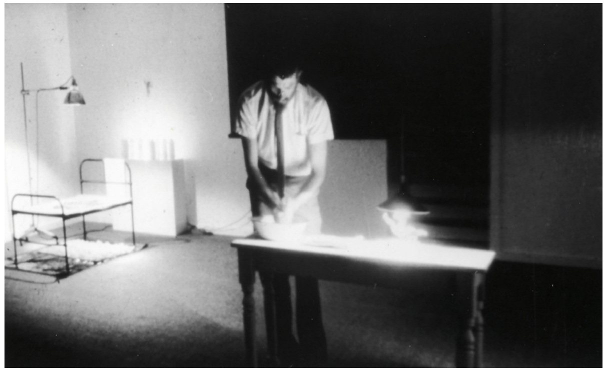
had recently died. Davis incorporated this as the only sound element in the performance for the next three days.[72]

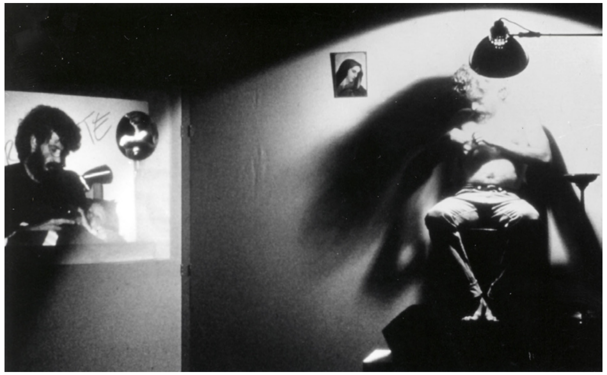
Davis's performance *Surrogate* (1981) was an analysis of the hopes and fears of the male when positioned in the place of the mother (as single parent). Davis projected slides of himself and his infant daughter over which the word 'surrogate' had been written. He sat against the wall on a stool at one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

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

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

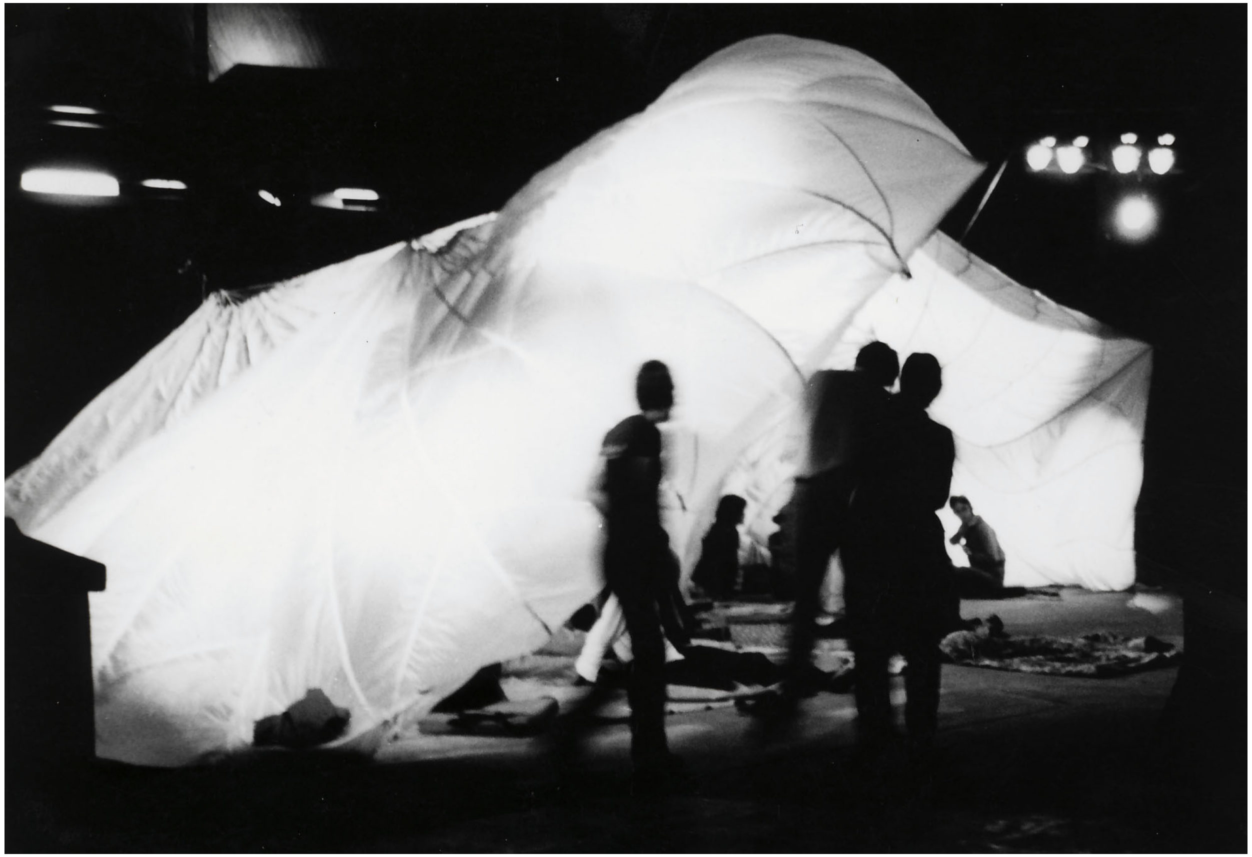
Photograph from the artist's collection.





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

Photograph from the artist's collection.



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

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

Jane Kent and Mike Mullins have both been involved with this dual strategy since the late 1970s. Both artists worked with a participating audience, as a way of breaking down the artist's authorial role, and both produced protest events. Kent's early work often involved the audience in a collective dialogue — a reciprocal language exchange. The parameters of the performance works were wide, as interjections and refusals by the 'spectators' became part of the event. The most successful works engaged an audience outside the artworld or extended the art audience beyond its conventional parameters. *Blood Performance* (1981) involved the artist dyeing the Victoria Square and War Memorial fountains in Adelaide a crimson red. The organic dye was designed to fade after 24 hours. *Blood Performance* was directly concerned with the corporeal body as it would be affected by the atrocious neutron bomb, designed to kill people and preserve property.[74] The artist says she deliberately titled the work to evoke a multiple reading. As a huge gush of blood appeared from the body of the earth, the spectator was confronted with a tormented nature. Blood is always associated with the body: the bleeding earth is used as a metaphor for woman. Here the body is spoken in its absence, the blood of the earth (the [m]other, menstruation) erupts in phallic 'style.' *Blood Performance* was both a vigilante action and a poignant representation of a body, both natural and social, rebelling against the determinism of a society bent on destruction.

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

Mike Mullins also worked more successfully in a broader community then in the conventional gallery space. His most public spectacle, *The Invasion of No-one* (Orange Arts Festival, 1985), involved one hundred and thirty teenagers dressed anonymously with their heads wrapped in gauze. After workshopping the performance for several weeks, and integrating the opinions of local teenagers, Mullins launched a sophisticated publicity campaign on radio, television and in the local press, announcing the coming of no-one; 'No-one is coming: No-one wants you' was the double message spread throughout the town.[75] Gradually, over a period of sixteen days, 'No-one' started to appear. Individually and in small groups, identical figures, static and silent, positioned themselves on the streets. Ken Wark wrote: 'No-one is the blankness, the alienated nature of the collective subjectivity [presented] to us as our Other.'[76] Many of Mullins's works concentrated on similar themes and he often used the no-one persona to represent the blank subject manipulated by the world; however, he usually placed 'No-one' in an active position: the subject able to speak even in its designated anonymity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ENDNOTES

1 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory,* Pantheon Books, New York, 1983, p.163.

2 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay*, p.160.

3 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay*, p. 160.

4 I have highlighted the performance artists included. Sculpture and mixed media works were also exhibited by: Tom Arthur, Warren Breninger, Peter Cole, Peter Cripps, Ewa Pachucka, David Ryan, Peter Taylor, Stephen Turpie and Hossein Valamanesh.

5 R. Lindsay, *Relics and Rituals*, *Survey 15*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, 17/7-13/9/81. Reprinted in P. Taylor, (ed.), *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970-1980,* Art & Text, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 108-115.

6 P. Taylor, (ed.), *Anything Goes*, pp. 108-115.

7 J. Orr artist's statement in R. Lindsay, *Relics and Rituals*, no. pag.

8 The recipe for *Murray River Punch* was published with five etchings of the Murray in *LIP*, 1980, p. 56.

9 See Bonita Ely interviewed by Kiki Martins in *Act 3: Ten Australian Performance Artists*, exhibition catalogue, Canberra School of Art Gallery, Canberra, 1982, loose-leaf folder, no pag.

10 Bonita Ely artist's statement, reproduced in N. Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*, artists' chronicle section, unpublished manuscript, no pag.

11 See E. Ruinard, 'Dogwoman Makes History' in *Bonita Ely: Dogwoman Makes History*, exhibition catalogue, First Draft, Chippendale, NSW, June 1986, no pag.

12 E. Ruinard, 'Dogwoman Makes History'

13 Taped interview with Ralph Eberlein, 18 April 1988.

14 Taped interview with Ralph Eberlein,18 April 1988.

15 Taped interview with Ralph Eberlein, 18 April 1988.

16 Taped interview with Ralph Eberlein, 18 April 1988.

17 Taped interview with Ralph Eberlein, 18 April 1988.

18 Artist's statement written to accompany *Landscape no. 2, Sentinel*, Queensland Art Gallery, Nov. 1985-Jan. 1986; material provided by the artist for research purposes.

19 Taped interview with Lyndall Milani, 8 September 1988.

20 Taped interview with Lyndall Milani, 8 September 1988, and written details supplied by the artist.

21 Gabrielle Dalton, artist's statement sent to the author.

22 Gabrielle Dalton, artist's statement sent to the author.

23 L. R. Lippard, *Overlay,* p. 160.

24 Taped interview with Kevin Mortensen, 3 October 1988. See also A. Marsh, 'Performance Art in the 1970s', *Art and Australia,* vol. 26, no. 3, Autumn 1989, pp. 412-418.

25 R. Atkins, 'San Francisco: Jill Scott, "Sand the Stimulant", 80 Langton St.', *Artformum,* September 1982, p. 84.

26 Documented in the artist's book, J. Scott, *Characters in Motion,* Straw Man Press, San Francisco, 1980, p. 47.

27 *The Readymade Boomerang: Certain Relations in 20th Century Art,* The 8th Biennale of Sydney, exhibition catalogue Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1990, p. 392.

28 Taped interview with Arthur Wicks, 19 April 1988.

29 M. Haerdter, in A. Wicks, *Berlin Notizen und Andreas,* Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 1983, p. 5.

30 Arthur Wicks, letter to the author, June 1983.

31 Arthur Wicks, letter to the author, June 1983.

32 C. Ashton, 'Art's Court Jester Seeks to Taunt and Tanalise', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5/11/85, p. 16.

33 A. Wicks, 'Boatman' in J. Kent and A. Marsh, (eds.), *Live Art: Australia and America,* the editors, Adelaide, 1984, p. 95.

34 C. Ashton, 'Art's Court Jester.'

35 C. Ashton, 'Art's Court Jester.'

36 See G. Pollock, 'Issue: An Exhibition of Social Strategies by Women Artists', *Spare Rib,* no. 103, 1981, pp. 49-51.

37 *Art Network* began publication in 1979 and ran until 1986; *LIP* ran from 1976 to 1984 with a distinct change of emphasis in 1981, when more theoretical and discursive criticism appeared; before 1981 *LIP* had concentrated on chronicling the activities of women artists. The major new magazine to reach the public was *Art & Text*, which incorporated many articles on 'new theory'; much of the 'new' theory condemned activism

and insisted on a close reading of social texts instead. This was in direct contrast to a revolution in lifestyle precipitated by the counter-culture, where everyone could participate. However, in the early years of *Art & Text* there was a commitment to, what was called a *bricolage* methodology (a kind of eclecticism in the arts; what I have called simply — cross-disciplinary practice). Young artists' involvement in a 'new subculture' was also informed in various ways by a Gramscian Marxist analysis. The Gramscian position still allowed for a place for an active subject; political activism through culture was maintained and 'organic' intellectuals (in Gramsci's terms those arising from the middle and lower classes) were expected to educate the masses. See A. Martin, 'Before and After *Art & Text*', *Agenda Contemporary Art,* Melbourne, vol. 2, no. 1, August 1988, (Art Papers — Special Supplement), pp. 15-19. Martin argues that in the early years the magazine was not theoretical but committed to a 'subcultural style.' In saying this Martin evokes Dick Hebdige's book *Subculture the Meaning of Style* which analysed the Beats, Teddy Boys, Punks etc as subcultural forces of resistance, Hebdidge drew on Gramsci.

38 'Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making' was originally published in *Screen,* vol. 21, no. 2, 1980, pp. 35-48. Later it was republished in *LIP*.

39 J. Barry and S. Flitterman, 'Textual Strategies: The Politics of Art Making', *LIP,* 1981/82, p. 30.

40 L.R. Lippard, *Overlay,* p. 160.

41 In relation to what has been termed the 'difference debate', the arguments between a socially constructed sexuality and an innate sexual difference (to suggest only the polarities of the debate) see the special issue of *Screen: Deconstructing 'Difference',* vol 28, no. 1, Winter 1987, especially Mandy Merek's introduction, pp. 2-9, which maps the shifts in theoretical positions from Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay to her article, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by *Duel in the Sun*', *Framework,* nos 15-17, 1981, pp. 12-15.

42 Many critics of psychoanalysis continued to argue that, despite Lacan's incorporation of a structuralist, linguistic analysis, the underlying thesis on sexuality had not changed since Freud's 1925 essay on the anatomical distinction between the sexes outlined in *Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes* (1925), *Standard Edition*, vol. 19, pp. 248-60. The 'difference debate' revolves around theories of masculine and feminine sexuality and how these positions are attained through the symbolic castration of the subject who experiences the Oedipus complex.

43 J. Lacan, 'Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis' (1948), in *Ecrit: A Selection*, p.23.

44 See L. Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', *Lenin and Philosophy*, translated B. Brester, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1971), pp. 127-86.

45 H. Eisenstein in H. Eisenstein and A. Jardine (eds.), *The Future of Difference,* Barnard College Women's Centre, Boston, 1980, p. xxiii.

46 See M. Merek, 'Introduction', *Screen: Deconstructing 'Difference',* vol 28, no. 1, Winter 1987, pp. 2-9, and G. Greene and C. Kahn, 'Feminist Scholarship and the Social Construction of Women' in G. Green and C. Kahn, (eds.), *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism,* Methuen, London and New York, 1985, pp. 1-36.

47 See also K. Millet, *Sexual Politics,* Doubleday, New York, 1969 and E. Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology,* William Morrow, New York, 1971.

48 See A. Game, 'Affirmative Action: Liberal Rationality or Challenge to Patriarchy?', *Legal Services Bulletin,* December 1984, pp. 7-10

49 For a lucid analysis of women's studies and the fight for equality, see Hester Eisenstein's introduction to H. Eisenstein and A. Jardine (eds.), *The Future of Difference*, pp. xv-xxiv.

50 See especially M. Roth (ed.), *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America, 1970-1980,* Astro Artz, Los Angeles, 1983, and H. M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1989, pp. 66-100. See also C. Owens, 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism' in B. Wallis, (ed.), *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation,* New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984, pp. 203-35.

51 The Feminist Art Program was initiated by Judy Chicago at Fresno State and Cal Arts in 1970 and 1971, when Chicago was on the faculty. See J. Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist,* Anchor Books/Doubleday, New York, 1977, especially the chapters 'Fresno and the Women's Program', 'Returning to Los Angeles' and 'Womanhouse — Performances', pp. 70-132.

52 Taped interview with Barbara Hall, 23 July 1987.

53 The *Trans-Art* exhibitions (four in total) were organised by Peter Kennedy and aimed to show non-bulk documentation by local and overseas artists. The lightweight of the exhibitions enabled easy handling and freight for an artist's space running on a meagre budget. *Trans-Art 3: Communications* was an exhibition of performance art documentation from New York; it included works by Eleonor Antin, Adrian Piper, Dan Graham and The Guerilla Art Action Group.

54 The Women's Art Register Extension project was established in Melbourne at the Carringbush Library, Richmond, Victoria, in 1977 and continues to date; the Women's Art Movement Registry was established in Adelaide in 1977 and is now housed at The Women's Studies Research Centre, Department of Education, Wakefield Street, Adelaide. These are the two largest collections in Australia. Lippard showed many examples of political performance by American artists. Candice Compton from the Los Angles Women's Video Centre toured Australia in 1979 under the auspices of the George Paton Gallery and showed video tapes made by artists from the Women's Building in Los Angeles. See M. Eagle, 'Art', *Age*, 6/9/79, p. 2. Jill Scott, an Australian artist living in the United States in the late 1970s, continued the exchange between Australia and America in 1979. Scott toured Australia showing documentation of American performance art and collected a reciprocal exhibition entitled *Contemporary Australian Artists: A Survey*, which toured American alternative art spaces from November 1979 to May 1980. The artists included were: Marr Grounds, Mike Parr, John Davis, Bonita Ely, Jill Orr, Anne Marsh, Ken Unsworth, Imants Tillers, Tim Burns, Noel Sheridan, Jane Kent, Terry Smith, Bob Ramsay, Arthur Wicks, Peter Tyndall, John Nixon, Frank Bendinelli, Ray Woolard and others.

55 See note 51 above for details of the Feminist Art Programme pioneered by Judy Chicago. Similar programmes continue to be run at the Women's Building in Los Angeles. Lippard showed documentation of this later generation including works by Suzanne Lacy, Leslie Labowitz, The Feminist Art Workers, The Waitresses, Nancy Angelo, Nancy Buchanan and Judith Barry. See M. Roth, (ed.), *The Amazing Decade.*

56 See J. Kent and A. Marsh, *Live Art: Australia and America,* the editors, Adelaide, 1984. The book includes an artists' chronicle which presents activist and ritual performances by feminists.

57 See especially Moira Roth's introductory essay in M. Roth, *The Amazing Decade*, pp. 14-41.

58 L. R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object,* Studio Vista, New York, 1973.

59 See L. R. Lippard, 'The Art Workers' Coalition: Not a History', *Studio International,* Nov, 1970, pp. 171-4, and N. Marmer, 'Art and Politics '77', *Art in America,* July 1977, pp. 64-6.

60 See L. R. Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art,* Dutton, New York, 1976, 'Sexual Politics: Art Style', pp. 28-37.

61 For an overview see T. Smith, 'Art Criticism in Australia: The mid-1970s Movement', *Agenda,* vol. 1, no. 2, Aug. 1988 (Art Papers, special supplement), pp. 12-13.

62 The magazine *White Elephant or Red Herring?*, produced by protesters against the 3rd Biennale of Sydney: *European Dialogue* in 1979, documents a Marxist campaign which lobbied for equal representation for women and Australian artists. Similar protests were organised by the Art Workers' Coalition against the Museum of Modern Art and the Witney Museum, see L. R. Lippard, 'The Art Workers' Coalition', and by the same author, *Get the Message: A Decade of Art for Social Change,* Dutton, New York, 1984.

63 J. Grounds, 'Stinky', *Women at Work*, exhibition catalogue, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne, 1980, p. 23.

64 J. Grounds, 'Stinky', *Women at Work*, p. 23.

65 J. Grounds, 'Stinky', *Women at Work*, p. 23.

66 J. Grounds, 'Stinky', *Women at Work*, p. 23.

67 L. R. Lippard, 'The Art Workers' Coalition', p. 173.

68 Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Washing, Tracks, Maintenance: Maintenance Art Activity III*, was performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, on 22 July 1973. The performance, one of a series of works, involved the artist washing and rewashing the floor of the museum throughout the day. I have used this example of Ukeles's early work since it is the most documented action; see L. R. Lippard, *From the Center*, p. 60.

69 Later works on a larger scale included *Touch Sanitation* (1979), a year-long public awareness project involving the artist in the daily work routine of garbage collection with the 8500 garbage collectors of New York City. *Touch Sanitation* is a documented history of the work environment and the social issues affecting the workers. See *Issue: Social Strategies by Women Artists*, exhibition catalogue, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 1980, no pag.

70 See N. Sheridan, (ed.), *The Experimental Art Foundation: Adelaide, South Australia,* EAF Press, Adelaide, 1979, no pag.

71 See *Women at Work*, p. 22.

72 See N. Sheridan (ed.), *Experimental Art Foundation Performance Week, March 1980,* EAF Press, Adelaide, 1980, no pag.

73 Taped interview with Graeme Davis, February 1988.

74 Taped interview with Jane Kent, 16 June 1989.

75 See K. Wark, 'Mike Mullins - The Invasion of No-One', *Art Network,* no. 16, Winter 1985, p. 56.

76 K. Wark, 'Mike Mullins - The Invasion of No-One', p.56.

77 V. Burgin, *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Postmodernity* Macmillan, London, 1986, p. 196.

78 V. Burgin, *The End of Art Theory, p. 195.*

79 In 'Jean-Jacques Lebel: An Interview', *Flash Art,* no. 84-85, October-November 1978, p. 60, my emphasis.

80 See G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* Viking Press, New York, 1977. First published in French in 1972.

81 J. Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women,* Vintage Books, New York, 1975; L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen,* vol. 16, no. 3, Autumn 1975, pp. 6-18.

82 See M. Kelly, *Post-Partum Document,* Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983; also K. Linker, 'Representation and Sexuality' in B. Wallis (ed.), *Art After Modernism*, pp. 391-415.