



# BODYANDSELF

PERFORMANCE ART IN AUSTRALIA 1969-92 | ANNE MARSH

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# BODY AND SELF

PERFORMANCE ART IN AUSTRALIA 1969 - 92 | ANNE MARSH

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## CONTENTS

4	<b>CHAPTER I</b> Performance Art in Australia: 1969-73 Performance Art: A Cross-disciplinary Practice
44	<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> Experimental Performance and Its Relationship to Conceptual, Post-Object and Avant-Garde Art
78	<b>CHAPTER THREE</b> Body Art, Shamanism and Western Ritual
112	<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> Ritual Performance and Ecology; Feminist and Activist Performance Ritual Performance and Ecological Issues
144	<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b> Performance Art in the 1980s and 1990s: Analysing the Social Body
172	<b>CONCLUSION</b> Shifts and Changes in Performance Art: Some Concluding Remarks

## CHAPTER ONE

# PERFORMANCE ART IN AUSTRALIA: 1969-73

## PERFORMANCE ART: A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PRACTICE



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

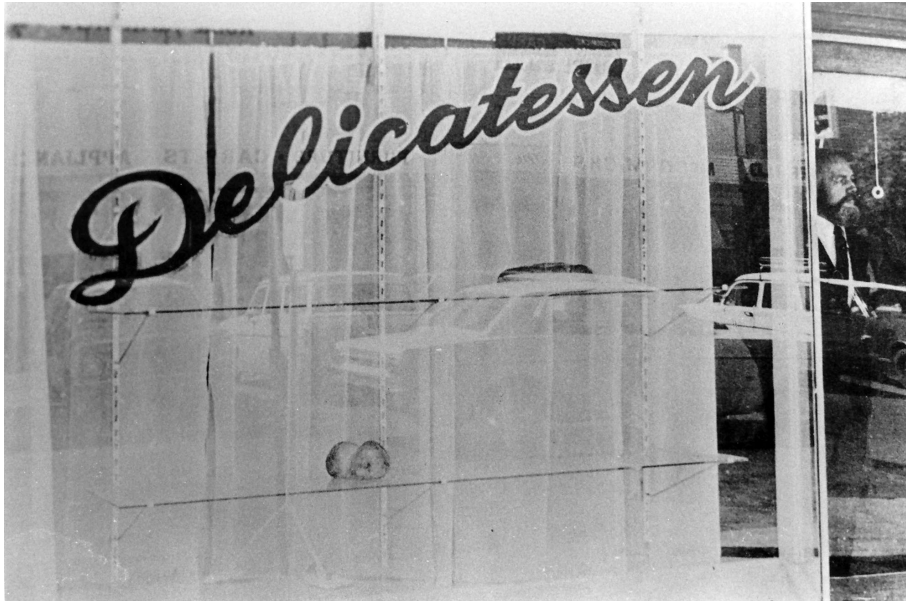
The happenings and performance art in the 1960s and 1970s shared aspects with many of the other practices described by Lippard in terms of the ‘dematerialisation’ of the art object. The specificity of site in performance art was informed by sculptural installation, land and earth art. Turning to the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

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

Zen was popularised in the West by the writings of D. T. Suzuki and Alan Watts,<sup>7</sup> it was embraced by beat generation poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, and it was a major influence in John Cage’s music. Zen presented an unconventional philosophy to the West: its teachings favoured meditation and the development of intuition rather than scripture as a means to enlightenment and it focused its attention on everyday life and random methods of learning. Zen presented paradoxical teachings, saying: ‘those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know.’<sup>8</sup> This appealed to a generation who had little faith in the rationality of Western thought or language. The principle of the illuminated commonplace<sup>9</sup> meant that enlightenment could occur as if by chance whilst one was totally concerned with something else; the study of theology and scripture was not mandatory.

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





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

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



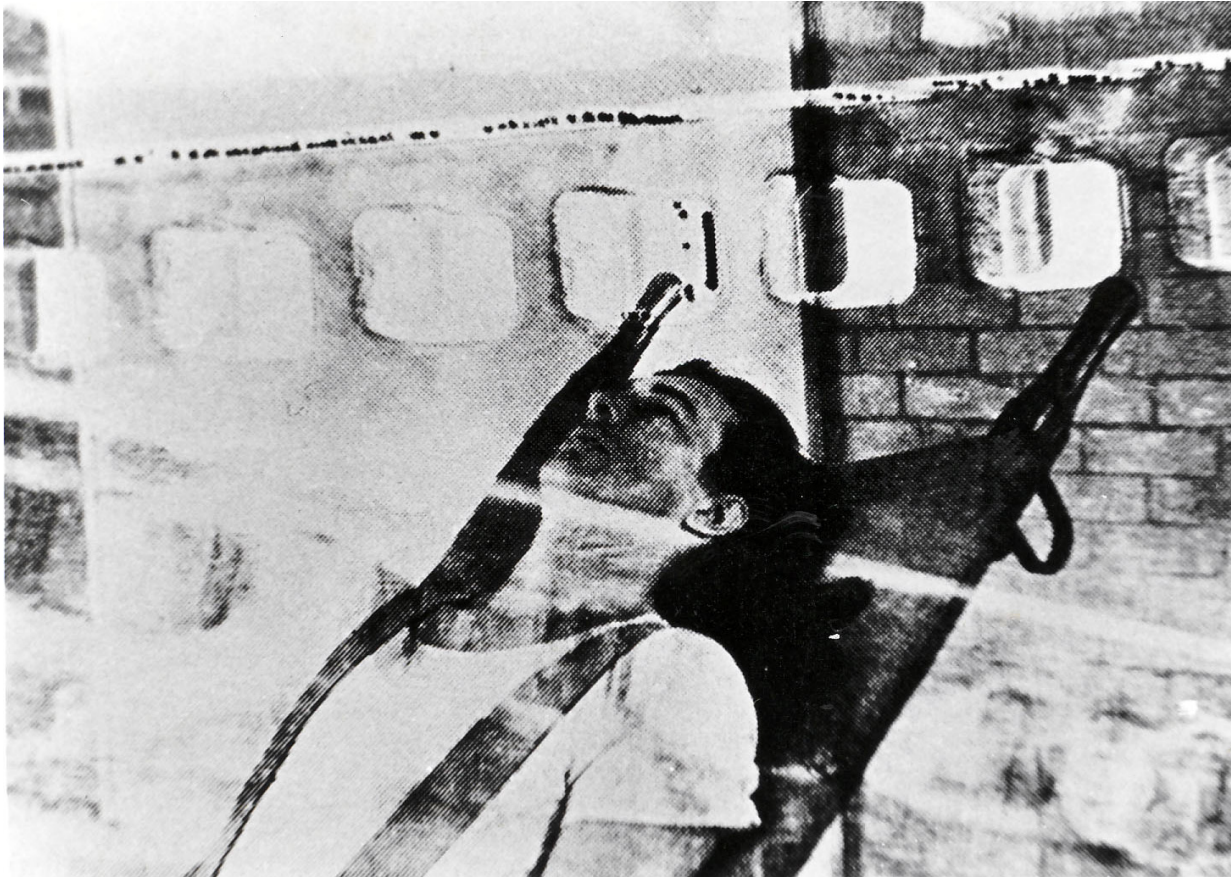
atrocities of war. The shop was rented months before the exhibition opened and Rosser prepared for business throughout that time, conversing in a slightly confused and distressed way with local shoppers and associated business people. During trading hours Rosser measured up the shop for shelving, swept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

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

Photograph  
from the artist's  
collection.

Kevin Mortensen,  
*The Rocking, Act 1*,  
1978.

Photograph from the  
artist's collection.



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

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

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

Gary Willis, who was associated with The Yellow House in Sydney in the late 1960s, was also interested in Zen Buddhism and studied at a Japanese and a Thai monastery during 1974.<sup>17</sup> Often working collaboratively with other artists Willis has presented happenings such as *The All Senses Ball* (Canberra, 1973, discussed below) and absurd performance art events. *ZZZZZ* (pronounced as a loud guttural snore) was presented in



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

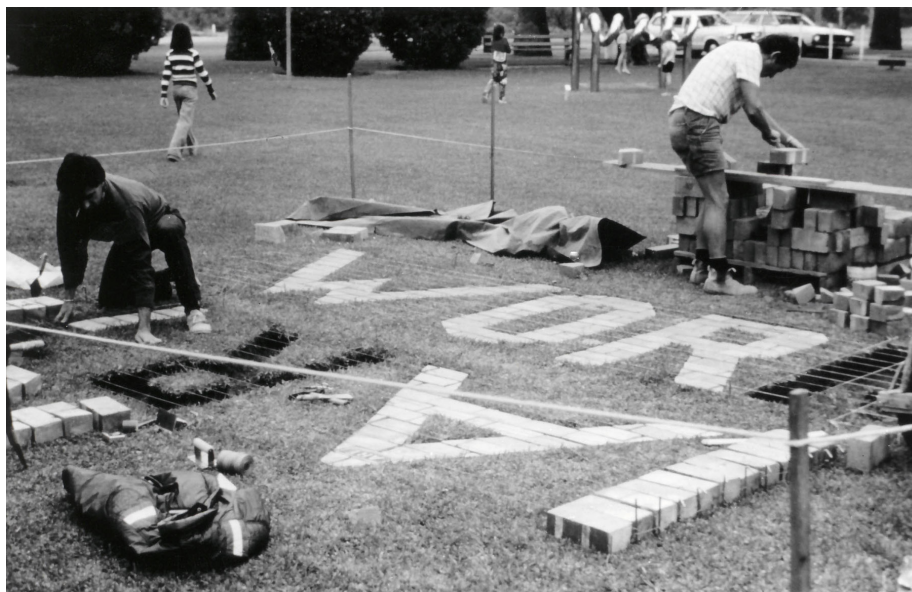
Concentrating on the functional activity of work and turning the life experience into art were characteristics of Willis's performance works in the 1970s. In 1978 Willis and Simon Hopkinson produced *Art Work* for the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial. The performance involved the word 'ART' being laid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

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



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

Photograph  
from the artist's  
collection.



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

Photograph from the  
artist's collection.



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Potograph  
by Margaret  
Plant from her  
collection.

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

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

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

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

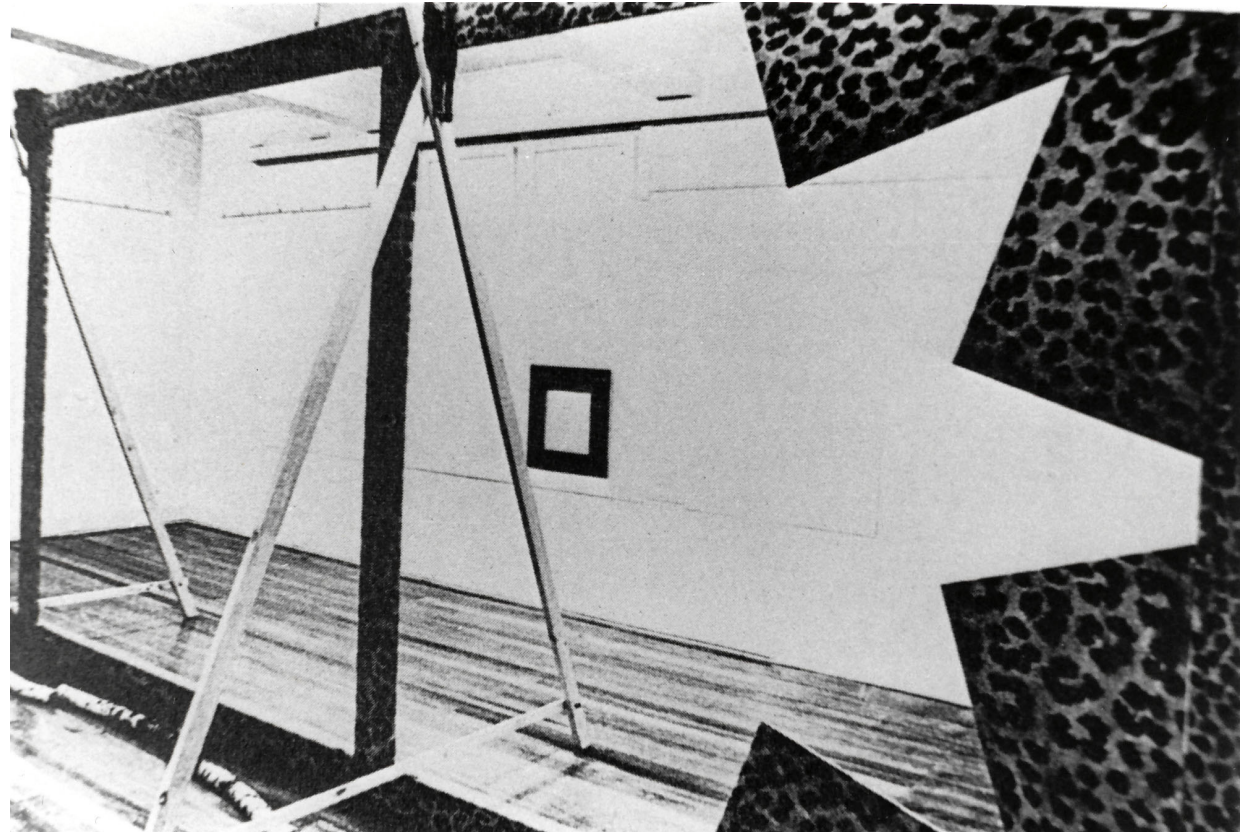
Many artists in the 1960s and 1970s operated across practices and particular styles of art, drawing on different sources as they saw fit. The reign of autonomous formalism was being undone by a new freedom to move beyond the confines of painting and sculpture, which had traditionally been shown on a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

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

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

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

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



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

Photograph from Margaret Plant's collection.



## SOCIAL BACKGROUND TO THE HAPPENINGS

*The term performance art is relatively new; it is probable that the American artist Vito Acconci first used it in an essay titled 'Vito Acconci on Activity and Performance' published in Art and Artists in May 1970. The term is first listed in Art Index in 1972-3; before that date the happenings are listed as a subject title, with the addition of body art in 1970.<sup>33</sup> The difference between the happenings and performance art is often blurred in terms of theme and content, but there are aspects of presentation which are distinct to the happenings. Most importantly, the happenings were collective events in which the audience participated.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



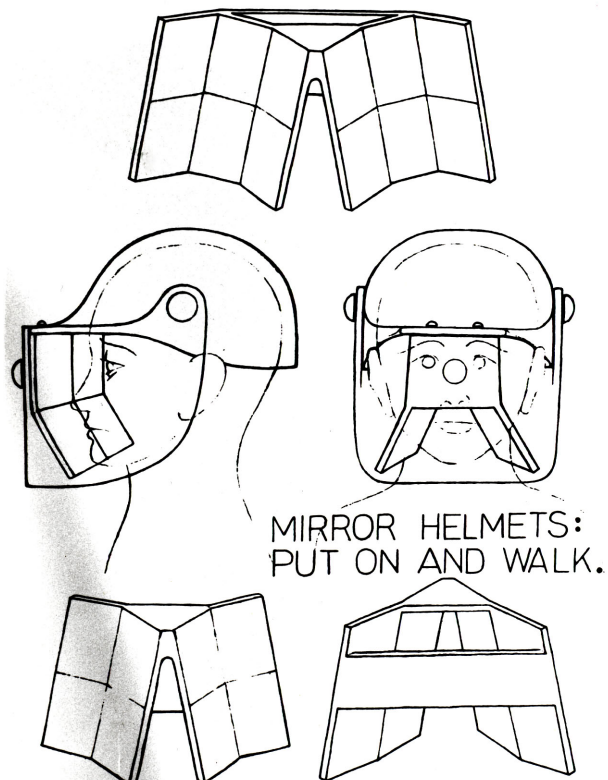
of Sydney in 1954 was one of many events which addressed controversial issues under the cloak of humour and satire. Amidst the controversy of the Petrov affair and the Cold War in Australia, Humphries's action stands as a bold political comment.<sup>49</sup> His activities can be seen in the context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

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

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



### 3 DIFFERENT MIRROR CONFIGURATIONS.



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

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

### HAPPENINGS AND RELATED EVENTS 1969-73

*Stelarc produced one of the first performance events in Australia at Hamilton Gallery in Victoria in 1969.<sup>50</sup> Event from Micro to Macro and the Between incorporated computer-generated images projected onto three large screens. Three dancers, choreographed by the artist, performed in front of the images, and the audience was encouraged to wear specially designed helmets which were able to destroy binocular vision by superimposing fragmented images from the rear and to the sides of the wearer. In the following year Stelarc produced his inaugural suspension event, *Sound Image Experience*, at the Open Stage, Melbourne, in which his body was elevated by a harness while he was wearing one of the helmets, which were also made available to the audience.<sup>51</sup>*

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



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

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

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

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

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

orgiastically in the dark box, caress the balloons, and destroy them.'<sup>55</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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





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

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

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

Photograph  
from the Kevin  
Mortensen's  
collection.



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

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

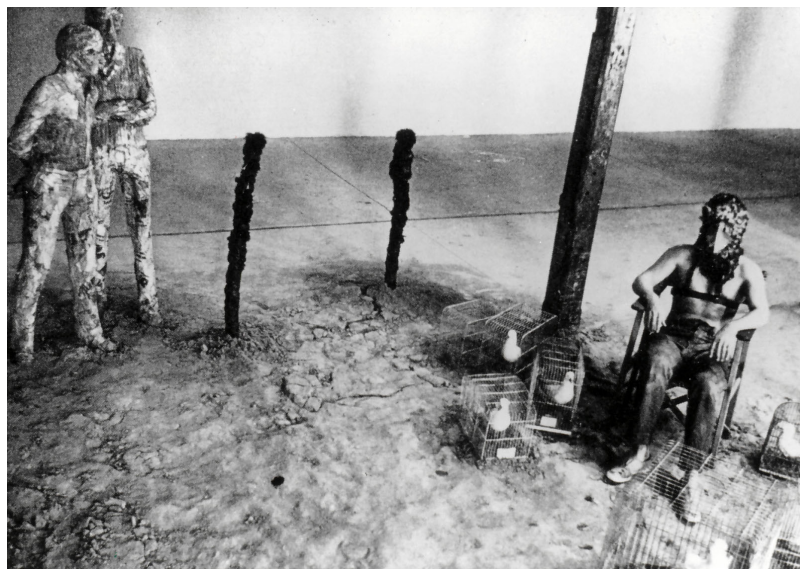
In Melbourne in 1972 Kevin Mortensen, Russell Dreever and Mike Brown turned Pinacotheca into a total environment compartmentalised by corrugated sheets of metal. *The Opening Leg Show Bizarre* was both a party and a performance venue. In each 'room' different events were presented to an audience who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

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



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

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



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



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



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

Photograph from the artist's collection.



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

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



### PERFORMANCE ART 1970-3

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

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

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



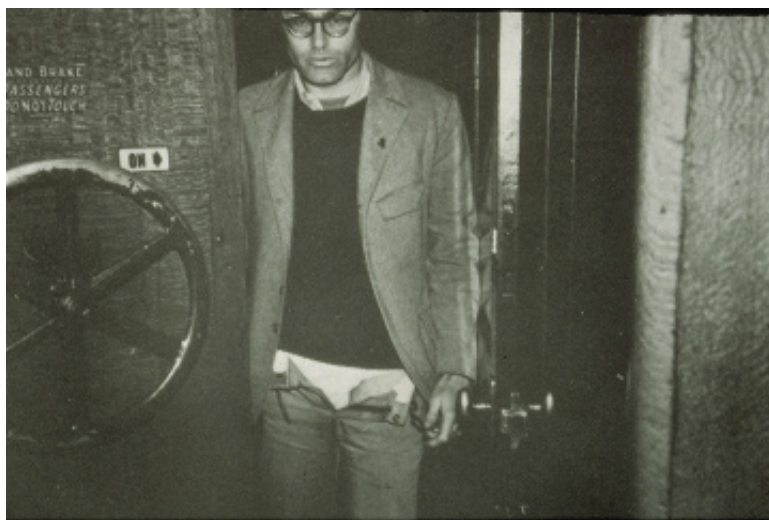
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***The primary socialisation which has made us what we are now is as much an emotional as an intellectual process. Accordingly, the kind of exploration of human feeling with which these works are concerned has a place in the process of re-socialisation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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

An interest in 'theories of audience participation, critical involvement [and] compulsive urges to act out' influenced Parr's movement from poetry to performance in 1971.<sup>72</sup> His concept of community was intimately connected with an analysis of repression. Freud's theory that there can be no civilisation without discontent was explored by Parr in numerous actions.<sup>73</sup> The activities were structured variously; instructions were written to be acted out by the artist or the spectator(s). Later in his career, Parr constructed more elaborate settings for his work where the audience was framed as voyeur, looking into an enclosed space.<sup>74</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Kennedy’s comment about cultural cringe in Australia in the early 1970s is significant and touches on the issue analysed by Terry Smith in his seminal essay titled ‘The Provincialism Problem’ published in 1974.<sup>94</sup> The cultural isolation felt by Kennedy had a history in an artworld, which valued works from America and Europe above those produced in Australia. The ‘myth makers’ of the 1940s had disrupted this paradigm of acceptance to a certain degree by making works which expressed their experience as Australians, albeit white, Anglo-Saxon Australians. However, many of the younger generation of experimentalists in the 1970s were keen to see themselves in an international context.

Mike Parr argues that he never experienced cultural isolation at Inhibodress but admits that for him ‘the dialogue with European artists has been fundamental.’<sup>95</sup>



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

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

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

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

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

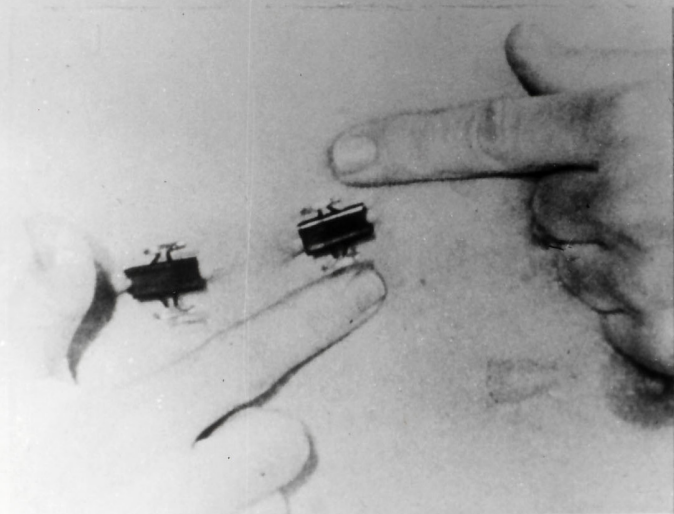
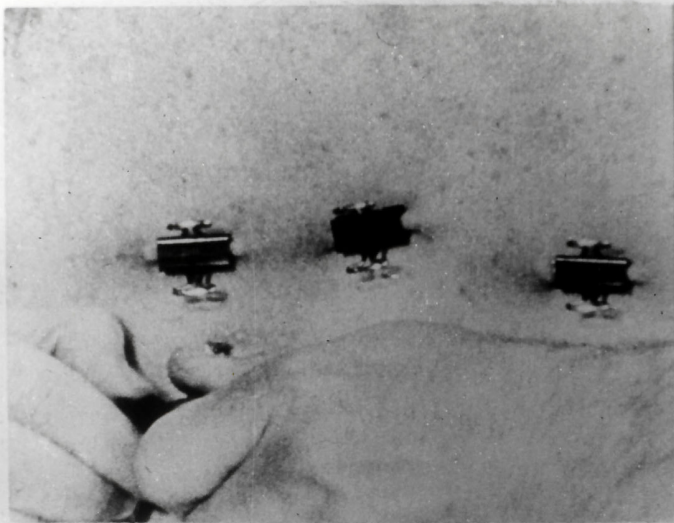
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*My own response moved through four, intermixing stages. It began with a recognition of the absurdity of the situation (two men before a battery of cameras and spotlights, sitting on chairs against the corner wall of a converted factory in Woolloomooloo,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

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

Photograph from the artist's collection.



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Photographs from the  
artist's collection.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

THE SPREAD OF IDEAS:  
SPACES AND PATRONS SUPPORTING PERFORMANCE ART

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## ENDNOTES

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



- 29 Published in *Artforum* between January 1966 and May 1970.
- 30 See M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1962, especially Chapter 3, 'The Spatiality of One's Body and Motility', pp. 98-147.
- 31 F. Lynn, 'Cool, Clear and it Leaves you Gasping', *Bulletin*, 9 August 1969, p. 48.
- 32 Taped interview with Kevin Mortensen, 3 October 1987. See also B. Adams, 'The Game is On', *Telegraph*, 20 April 1972, p. 3.
- 33 Kaprow's exhibition entitled '18 Happenings in 6 Parts at the Rubin Gallery', New York City, 1959, was probably the first time the word 'happening' was used. See A. Henri, *Environments and Happenings*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1974, pp. 189-190. See also B. Barber, 'INDEXING: Conditionalism and its Heretical Equivalents' in A. A. Bronson and P. Gale (eds.), *Performance by Artists*, Art Metropole, Toronto, 1979, pp. 183-204.
- 34 A. Henri, *Environments and Happenings*, pp. 189-90; and B. Barber, 'INDEXING', in Bronson and Gale, *Performance by Artists*, pp. 183-204.
- 35 A. Kaprow, 'Participation Performance', *Artforum*, March, 1977, p. 25.
- 36 See N. O. Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Conn., 1959, and *Love's Body*, Random House, New York, 1966. Of particular importance in the debates which followed between Marcuse and Brown was Brown's essay, 'Apocalypse: The Place of Mystery in the Life of the Mind', in S. R. Hooper and D. L. Miller (eds.), *Interpretation: The Poetry of Meaning*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1967, pp. 7-13. See also Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, and *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1978. In this latter book Marcuse includes a review of Brown's *Love's Body* titled 'Love Mystified: A Critique of Norman O. Brown', pp. 227- 43. It was undoubtedly the social critic Theodore Roszak who made many of these ideas 'popular' in the early 1970s; see especially his *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Faber & Faber, London, 1970. Roszak argues convincingly that it was Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse who generated the idea of cultural resistance through lifestyle in the 1960s and 1970s. For an overview of the situation in Australia, see Ian Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath', *Art & Text*, Autumn 1981, pp. 49-65. I have written about the 'influence' of Marcuse and Brown within the context of performance art in my article, 'Ritual in Performance Art: Another Modernist Myth or a Post-modern Shift', *Eyeline*, no. 8, March 1989, pp. 10-11.

- 37 For relevant material by Wilhelm Reich, see 'The Discovery of the Orgone, 1', *The Function of the Orgasm*, Orgone Institute Press, New York, 1948.
- 38 A sound anti-communist platform, used by the Liberals throughout the 1950s and 1960s to defeat the Australian Labor Party, strengthened public opinion in support of the Vietnam war. By 1972, when Whitlam achieved victory for the Labor Party, the Australian press had changed their position on the Vietnam issue. The Tet Offensive of 1968, the opening of the Paris Peace Talks, and the resignation of President Johnson in America, forced even the most conservative voters to re-analyse the situation. See D. Altman, 'Australia and Vietnam: Some Preliminary Speculations', *The Australian Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 2, June 1970, p. 62.
- 39 For an overview of protests on Australian campuses, see 'The Trouble with Students: An Australia-wide Survey', *Bulletin*, 5 June 1969, pp. 24-30 (anonymous). It should be noted that defeating the myth of widespread revolt amongst the young presents problems. There is a certain 'image' of the 1960s and early 1970s as a period of revolt, and one usually associates such a concept with a majority: a proletarian uprising of some sort or another. However, the shift from a conventional Left programme to a New Left strategy can help to explain the unprecedented 'effect' of a minority. The report in the *Bulletin* stressed that many campus revolts were aimed at university administrations and hierarchical structures, which represented a resistance to institutionalisation as such. Although Australian youth may not have understood the political issues influencing events overseas (the more 'spectacular' revolts on American campuses, for example, which revolved around conscription and issues such as racial discrimination), their protests in Australia, which often focused on more immediate issues for the younger generation here, were equally valid in a New Left perspective. One may also suggest that their regionalised position, which marginalised them even further, contributed to the status of their revolts in the terms of the New Left. The concept of a pluralistic strategy for the Left exploded in the 1970s, as the New Left (against the background of the Cold War and the disillusionment experienced by a generation familiar with the failure of the Soviet model of communism under Stalin) moved away from the idea of revolt arising through a rigorous analysis of the economic structures of capitalism and towards the concept of cultural revolution through lifestyle and issue-based campaigns. In Marcuse's scheme there was no need for the student movement to seek the support of the working classes, since the disaffiliation of the workers did not exist: the 'mass' had already been absorbed into the capitalist machine. According to Marcuse, 'such disruptive characters as the artist, the prostitute, the adulteress, the great criminal and outcast, the warrior, the rebel-poet, the devil, the fool — those who don't earn a living' represent the most radical 'refusal', See H. Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, Beacon, Boston, 1964, P. 59. This

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

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

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

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

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

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



- 82 See especially S. Cramer, *Inhibodress*, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1989. Cramer's documentary survey of Inhibodress is the most complete record thus far and was written to accompany an exhibition, *Inhibodress 1970-72*, which toured Australia in 1990. For a review of the exhibition, see N. Zurbrugg, 'Inhibodress 1970-72', *Art & Text*, 35, Summer 1990, pp. 144-8.
- 83 Excerpts from this letter are reprinted in P. Kennedy, 'Inhibodress: Just for the Record', *Art Network*, 6, Winter 1982, p. 50. As a result of the exchanges between Lippard and Inhibodress, several Australian artists were included in the anthology, edited by Lippard, *Six Years*, p. 199.
- 84 Fluxus was an international alternative network for experimental artists. Anyone could be part of Fluxus by simply claiming that they were: however, there were certain things that one needed to comply with (at least in theory). Basically, a commitment to experimental modes of art (i.e. not painting or sculpture) and a willingness to be part of an informal network. Dick Higgins maintained the American base of Fluxus whilst in Europe it tended to have no centre. At times this caused conflict as artists debated each other's status as 'true' Fluxus members. In many ways Fluxus duplicated the kind of anarchy one associates with dada and so it is always difficult to define. For details of Fluxus see *Flash Art*, 84-85, October-November 1978, where Ben Vautier argues that Duchamp, Cage and Zen were precursors of Fluxus and that neither Vostell nor Beuys were truly Fluxus artists, p. 52.
- 85 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 5.
- 86 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 5.
- 87 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 8.
- 88 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 8.
- 89 Taped interview with Peter Kennedy, 20 June 1987.
- 90 Artists documented included: Ian Breakwell, Steve Willats, David Medalla (UK); Hans Haacke, Charles Simons, Judy Chicago and Adrian Piper (USA), and art historian Arlene Raven.
- 91 Taped interview with Peter Kennedy, 20 June 1987.
- 92 Guerilla Art Action sent Kennedy a recording of an art action they presented in May 1970 on Radio WBAI, New York. Clarifying the radio work in 1993, Kennedy said:
- Primarily it was an attack on art, artists and cultural institutions and linked these elements with such antisocial or anti-humanist impulses as racism, sexism, exploitation, alienation, US expansionism and the Vietnam War.
- [interview with the artist, 2 March 1993]
- The Guerilla Art Action Group performed anti-war actions at the Guggenheim and the Museum of Modern Art in New York; their action staged in front of Picasso's *Guernica* simply involved holding up posters (with images taken from media photographs) of victims of the Mi Lay massacre, see the front cover of *Studio International*, November 1970.
- 93 Taped interview with Peter Kennedy, 20 June 1987.
- 94 T. Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', *Artforum*, vol.13, no.1, September 1974, pp. 54-9.
- 95 Letter to the author, 2 March 1993, p. 8.
- 96 Taped interview with Peter Kennedy, 20 June 1987.
- 97 In D. Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations'.
- 98 D. Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations', pp. 269-70; see also T. Smith, 'Live Art's Effects and Defects', *Review*, 17-23, June 1972, p. 937.
- 99 Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations' and Smith, 'Live Art' Effects and Defects'.
- 100 In a letter to Neil Howe, sections of which are included in his unpublished manuscript, *A History of Australian Performance Art*, 'artist's chronicle' section, no pag.
- 101 T. Smith, 'Live Art's Effects and Defects'.
- 102 Smith, 'Live Art's Effects and Defects'.
- 103 D. Brook, 'Filming through a Lens filled with Blood', *Nation Review*, 16-22 February 1973, p. 548.
- 104 Mike Parr, quoted in L. Nicklin, 'Art without Canvas', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Weekend Magazine, 30 November 1974, p. 12.
- 105 See T. Smith, 'Live Art's Effects and Defects'.
- 106 D. Brook, 'Idea Demonstrations', p. 269.
- 107 Peter Kennedy in Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*, no pag.
- 108 Peter Kennedy describing his performance in N. Howe, *A History of Australian Performance Art*.
- 109 D. Ahem, 'Notes on Expansion', *Other Voices*, August-September 1970, pp. 34-5.
- 110 Ahem, 'Notes on Expansion', p. 35.

- 111 John Cage studied with D. T. Suzuki at Columbia University from 1945 to 1947; the Zen idea of 'waking up to the life we are living' informed Cage's music from that time. As musical director of the Mere Cunningham Dance Company in the late 1940s, Cage put many Zen ideas into practice. For an account of the Zen 'influence' on Cage, see C. Tomkins, *Ahead of the Game: Four Versions of the Avant-garde*, Penguin Books, Hannondsworth, 1968, pp. 97-8. See also J. Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writing*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Conn., 1961, and *M: Writings — 67-72*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Conn., 1973.
- 112 Barbara Hall, 'Philippa Cullen, 1950-1975', part of an essay prepared for a proposed publication 'Post Object Art', to be edited by Donald Brook. However, due to lack of funds the work was never published. Hall made a copy of her article available for research purposes.
- 113 Philippa Cullen as quoted by Hall, 'Philippa Cullen'.
- 114 Taped interview with Peter Kennedy, 20 June 1987.
- 115 For a survey of events at Central Street see Paul McGillick, 'The Institute of Contemporary Art Central Street Gallery', *Art Network*, 6, Winter 1982, pp. 48-9. *The Situation Now: Object or Post-object Art?*, 1972, was sponsored by the New South Wales Contemporary Art Society. An extensive catalogue was published with conversations and essays by Terry Smith, Tony McGillick, Bruce Pollard Noel Hutchison, Donald Brook, Mike Parr, Peter Kennedy, David Aspen, Aleks Danko, Clive Murray-White, Tim Johnson, Optronic Kinetics, Simon Close, John Fisher and Bill Gregory.
- 116 For a concise history of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, see G. Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura: The Story of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1961-1982*, Mildura City Council, Mildura, 1985.
- 117 See *Recent International Forms*, 2nd Biennale of Sydney, exhibition catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1976.
- 118 For documentation of the establishment of the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide, see S. Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the EAF: A History of the Experimental Art Foundation 1974-1984*, Experimental Art Foundation Press, Adelaide, 1984, especially Chapter 1, 'Mostly from Memory: Reminiscences by Noel Sheridan, Ian North, Donald Brook, Bert Flugelman, Richard Llewellyn, Clifford Smith, . . .', pp. 5-12.
- 119 J. Sweet, *Pinacotheca 1967-1973*, Prendergast Publishers, South Yarra, 1987.
- 120 J. Sweet, p. 20.
- 121 Dale Hickey, quoted in J. Larkin, 'A Fence is a Fence is a Fence, or was it?',

*Age*, 23 October 1969, p. 2. I am indebted to Margaret Plant for drawing my attention to this work; for a more detailed discussion of Dale Hickey and the Pinacotheca group, see M. Plant, 'Dale Hickey' in *Dale Hickey: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Ballarat, 1988, pp. 1-11.

- 122 The Pinacotheca opened in May 1967 in Fitzroy Street in St Kilda and moved to Richmond in June 1970. The gallery closed in October 1999. However, the Pinacotheca re-opened in August 2002 for its very last exhibition. For details on the history of the Pinacotheca, see J. Sweet, *Pinacotheca*, Trevor Fuller, 'Bruce Pollard and Pinacotheca: Psychological Content', *Artlink*, vol.26, no.4, 2006, pp 92-93, and Charles Green, 'Pinacotheca: A Private Art History', *Art and Australia*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1997, pp 484-489.
- 123 Wrapped Coast consisted of one million square feet of erosion-control fabric and polypropylene rope; see D. Brook, 'The Little Bay Affair', *Art and Australia*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1969, pp. 230-4.
- 124 John Kaldor's Art Projects included: Christo, *Wrapped Coast*, Little Bay, 1969; Harald Szeemann, *Szeemann: I want to Leave a Nice Welldone Child Here*, an exhibition of twenty Australian artists at Bonython Art Gallery, Sydney, and at the National Gallery of Victoria, in 1971; Gilbert and George, Art Gallery of New South Wales, and at the National Gallery of Victoria, 1973; Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik, performances and videos at the Adelaide Festival of the Arts and Art Gallery of New South Wales in March and April 1976; Sol LeWitt, Art Gallery of New South Wales and National Gallery of Victoria, 1977; Richard Long, documentation of performance works, National Gallery of Victoria and Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1977-8; *An Australian Accent: Three Artists*, P.S.1 (Project Studios One), Institute of Art and Urban Resources Inc., New York, 1984, works by Mike Parr, Imants Tillers and Ken Unsworth. On this occasion avant-garde works were exported from Australia and shown in New York. For complete documentation, see *An Australian Accent*, pp. 86-7.
- 125 The artists included in the Szeemann exhibition were John Armstrong, Tony Bishop, Robert Boynes, Gunter Christmann, Tony Coleing, Aleks Danko, Margaret Dodd, Neil Evans, Ross Grounds, Dale Hickey, Tim Johnson, Peter Kennedy, Warren Knight, Nigel London, Ian Milliss, Ti Parks, Mike Parr; a collaboration by the artists William Pidgeon, Brett Whiteley and Tony Woods; and individual works by Guy Stuart and Alex Tzannes. The exhibition was officially titled *Szeemann: I want to Leave a Nice Welldone Child Here*. This paternalistic title, with its implicit masochistic and culinary overtones, has been abandoned by Australian writers, who invariably refer to the exhibition simply as Harald Szeemann in Australia. However, the temptation to 'read' the title semiotically cannot

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

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