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# BODY AND SELF

PERFORMANCE ART IN AUSTRALIA 1969 - 92 | ANNE MARSH

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## CHAPTER THREE

## BODY ART, SHAMANISM AND WESTERN RITUAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Parr's belief in catharsis was common amongst body artists. In fact many artists repeated similar actions. In Europe Gina Pane stuck thorns into her arm (*Sentimental Action*, 1973); inflicted wounds with a razor blade (*Psychic Action*, 1974); and repeatedly ascended a ladder prepared with tacks (*Escalade*, 1971). In America Chris Burden had himself shot in the arm (*Shoot*, 1971); lay in a pool of water surrounded by live electrical wires (*Prelude to 220 or 110*, 1971); and had himself crucified with nails driven through his hands (*Trans-Fixed*, 1974). Vito Acconci, another American artist, bit himself all over (*Trademarks*, 1970); punched out his own image in a mirror (*See Through*, 1969); and masturbated under a ramp in an art gallery (*Seedbed*, 1971). Mike Parr stuck drawing pins into his leg (*Tackline*, 1973); burned a spiral around his calf (*Leg Spiral*, 1971-2); and re-opened the scar of an old wound (*Subjective Self Circle Series*, 1973-4). Mike Parr notes that this 'doubling' of performances by the body artists was in a way inevitable: the intense focus on the psychological state of the individual would necessarily entail duplication of action and images<sup>13</sup>. This in turn presents the audience with a kind of evidence of a shared condition; the collectivity of the unconscious in the Western world.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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The transgression of social codes, through the expression of a would-be instinctual response, thus tended to affirm conventional stereotypes. The idea that one could get in contact with one's instincts was problematic. It presumed that in some way an instinctual existence (a kind of animalism) would be free of repression. However, the artist could only tap the imaginary<sup>26</sup> fears in the unconscious and these were necessarily read through the conscious mind.<sup>27</sup> These fears were part of a collective unconscious, what had been repressed by society: the fear of castration; the terror of woman (as all engulfing mother and castrated subject, evident in the bleeding wound of menstruation), and the anxiety associated with the fragmented body (described below) are images which surface again and again in body art.

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

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

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

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

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

The idea of sacrifice, as a transgressive act, is explicit in self-flagellation, which often involves a mix of sexual and spiritual pleasure.<sup>35</sup> In the tradition of Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty'<sup>36</sup> and the work of the Living Theatre in France in the 1960s<sup>37</sup>, some body artists continued a sacred-psychic use of the body. According to Artaud, the new theatre was supposed to create a sacred spectacle or carnival.<sup>38</sup> The actors of the Living Theatre have been described as priests, and audiences have been invited to have sexual intercourse with the 'holy men' as a way of sharing their sacred powers.<sup>39</sup> This sort of attempt to incarnate the sacred is the foundation for many of Hermann Nitsch's performances with the Orgy Mystery Theatre (OM Theatre). Nitsch is probably the most articulate spokesperson for this type of sacrificial event. The artist says he wants to re-enact the rituals associated with Dionysus, the ancient god of fertility.<sup>40</sup> Nitsch draws on a Nietzschean reading of the myth of Dionysus, where in a state of intoxication 'man' is: 'No longer the *artist*, he has himself become a *work of art*.'<sup>41</sup> Nitsch attempts to reinvest the orgiastic mayhem with a religious sentiment by making correlations between 'the Dionysian myth of redemption and Christ's death on the cross.'<sup>42</sup>

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

poetry which represented an ‘original poetic impulse.’<sup>49</sup> The shaman ‘is the one who knows . . . Besides our eyes of flesh, there are eyes of fire that burn through the ordinariness of the world and perceive the wonders and terrors beyond.’<sup>50</sup> Norman O. Brown’s idea of magic and the occult as secret doctrines which liberate the soul<sup>51</sup> is echoed in this type of sentiment: the seduction of a truth in madness. However, the desire for an erotic and orgasmic revolt appears to be far removed from the political promises of the New Left; a participatory democracy born of onanistic pursuits presents a contradiction.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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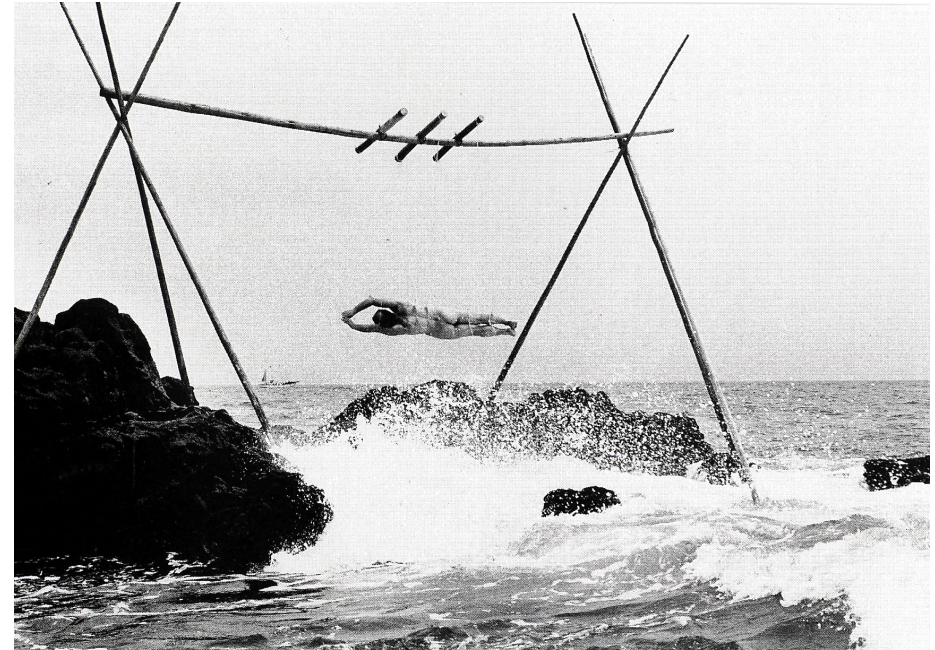
*Transgression piled upon transgression will never abolish the taboo, just as though the taboo were never anything but the means of cursing gloriously whatever it forbids . . . taboos founded on terror are not only there to be obeyed. There is always another side to the matter. It is always a temptation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

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

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

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



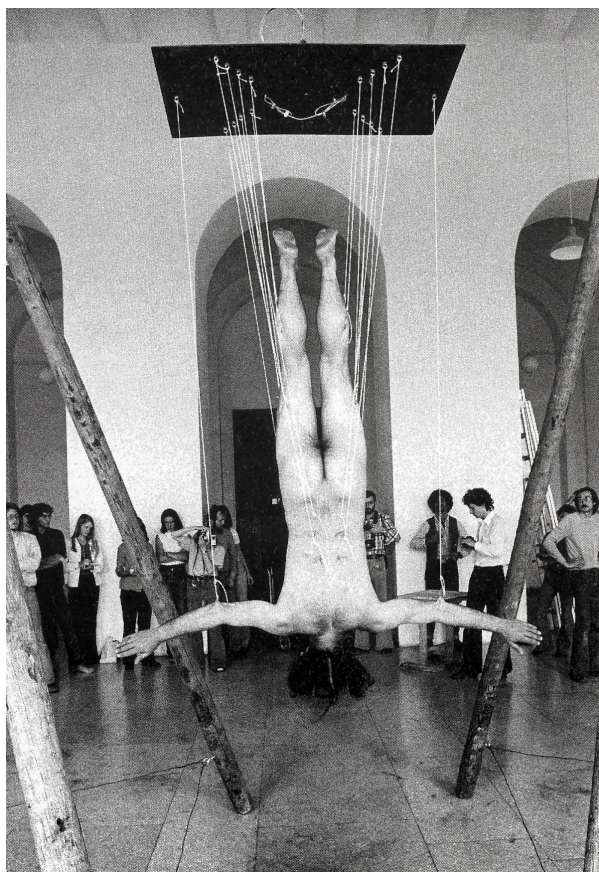
Stelarc claims that his work involves experimentation on 'the body', an objectified other rather than the body of the artist. The artist aims to stretch the skin as part of a master plan to re-invent the species. Internal organs which are subject to disease are obsolescent in Stelarc's proposed new world.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

Stelarc, *Seaside Suspension: Event for Wind and Waves*, Jogashima, Miura, Japan, 1981

Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Hiro Suzuki.



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



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



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

Stelarc's particular man, his own body, is used in an act that involves incision into the skin and almost intolerable levels of pain<sup>66</sup>. *Event for Stretched Skin No. 4* (Art Academy, Munich, 1977), involved the body being suspended vertically for fifteen minutes, upside-down, by the insertion of eighteen hooks into the skin. *Event for Lateral Suspension* (Tamura Gallery, Tokyo, 1978) involved the suspension of the body in an upright position for sixty seconds. During *Event for Shaft Suspension* (Hardware Street Studio, Melbourne, 1980) the body was suspended in a horizontal position, hoisted up and lowered down an empty lift well (6 x 4.6 x 57 ft deep) over a period of thirty-two minutes. In this performance the body had to manoeuvre itself past various obstacles such as protruding beams and floor boards, pushing away the objects it encountered. The sheer physical endurance of these events test the limits of the body's capacity to survive and they also test the limits of the psyche: how much pain can the subject endure? The multiple incisions into the body foreground the aggressive tension within the subject. Freud notes that pain is at the threshold of the ego; breaking the barrier is thus proof that 'I' exist and have control over the fragmented body.<sup>67</sup> Stelarc, while pursuing sci-fi dreams on behalf of 'man' as an obsolete body, tests the corporeal limits of his own body.

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

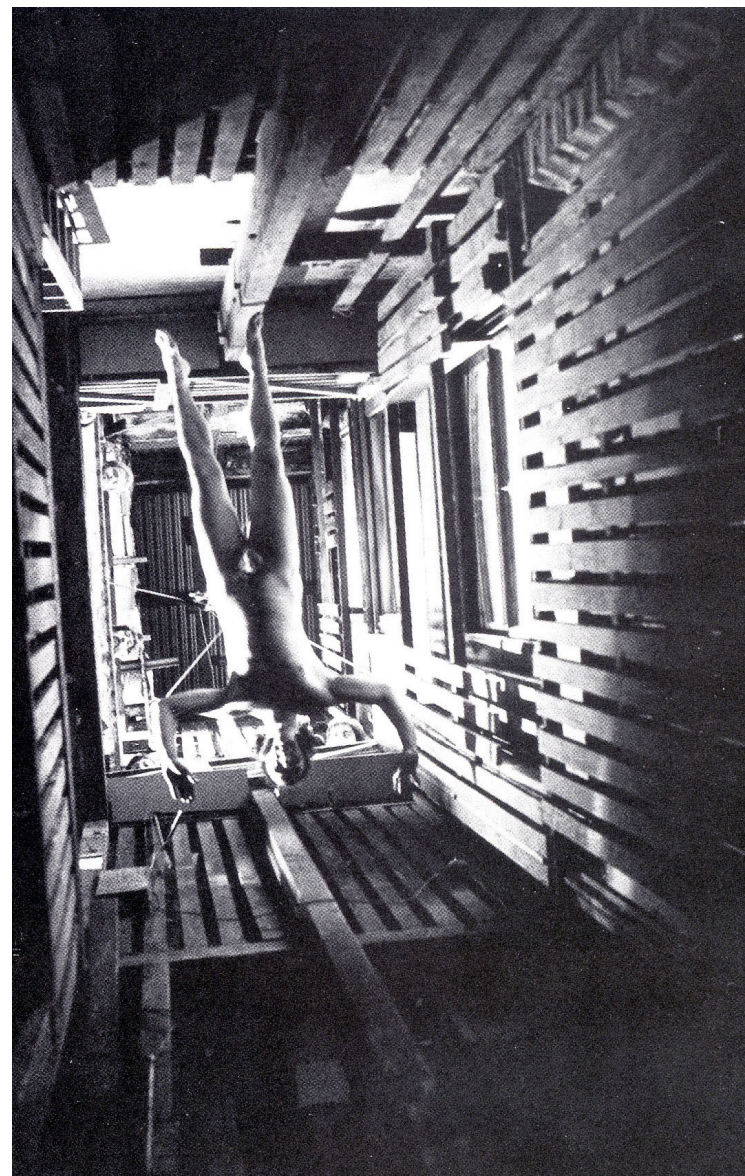
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***The psycho-social flowering of the human species has withered. We are in the twilight of our cerebral fantasies . . . We are at the end of philosophy and the human form as we know it . . . meaning now resides only in the network — the relationship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

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

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



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

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

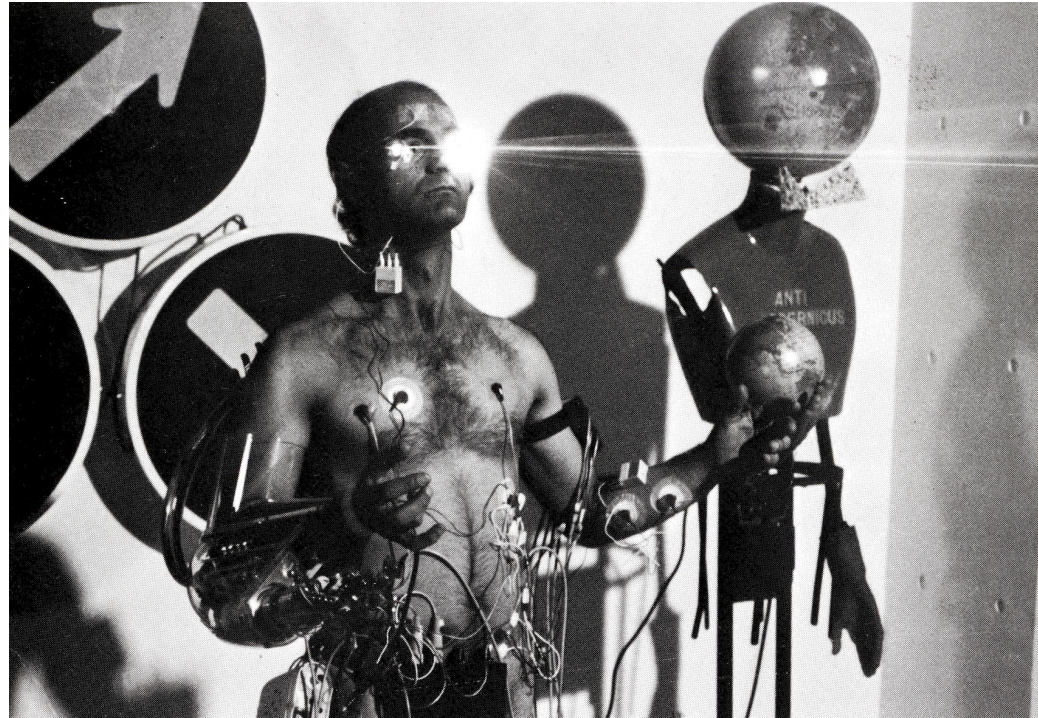
The artist insists that his experiments are concerned with structure, not self; that his strategies to redesign the body aim to create a better host for technology.<sup>71</sup> He argues that:

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

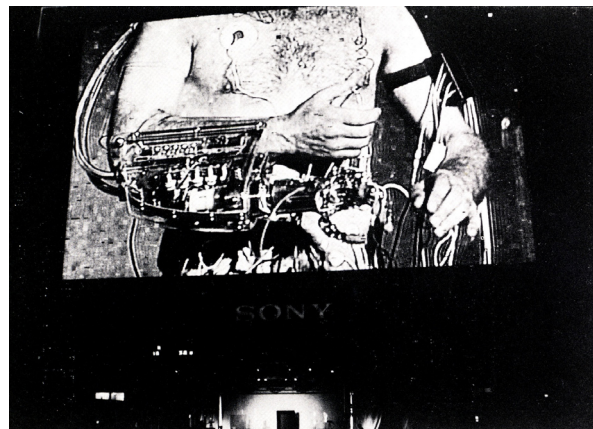
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Despite the artist's futuristic vision, his body is in the here and now; it bleeds and pulsates, experiencing the reality of pain. The machine becomes the interface between body and spectator in events such as *Amplified Body/Enhanced Image* (Science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



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

Photograph from the artist's collection.



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

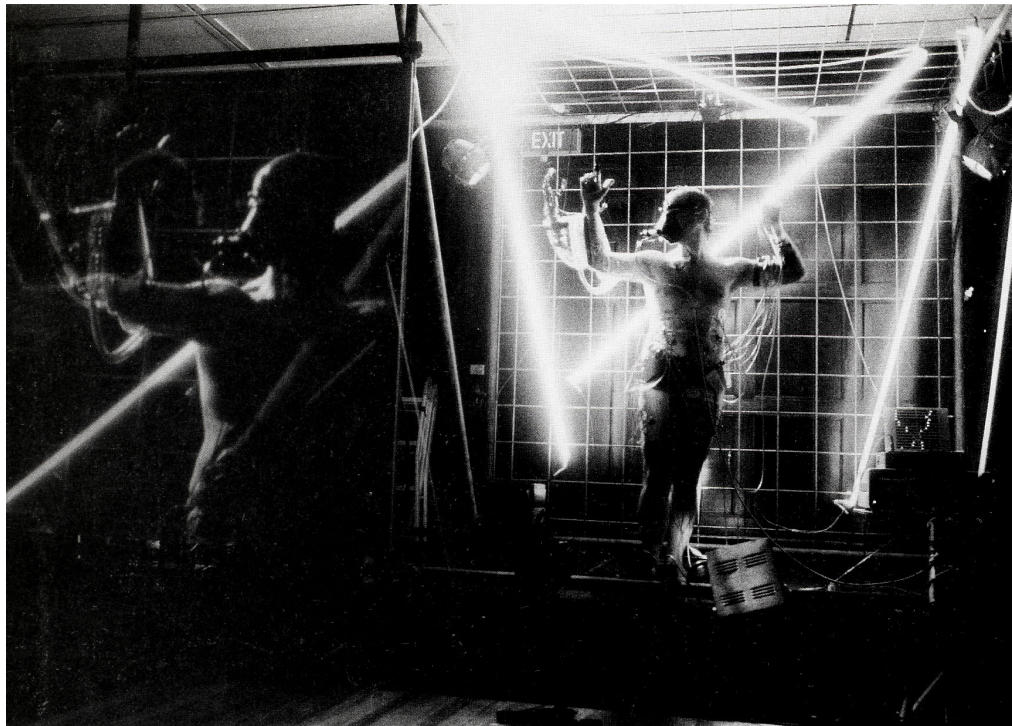
Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Takatoshi Shinoda.



Stelarc, *Event for Video Shadow, Automatic Arm and Third Hand*, Caulfield Arts Complex, August 1988.  
 Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer Tony Figallo.

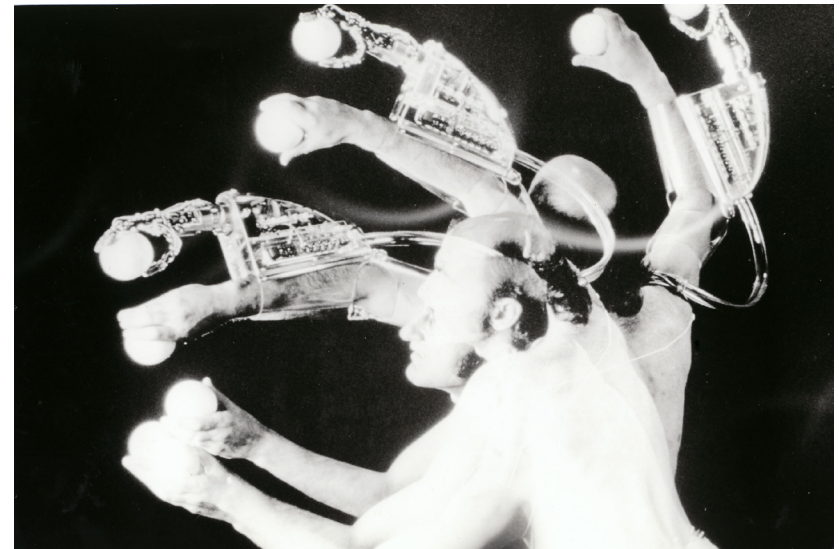


Stelarc, *Event for Stretched Skin/Third Hand*, 1988.  
 Photograph from the artist's collection.



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

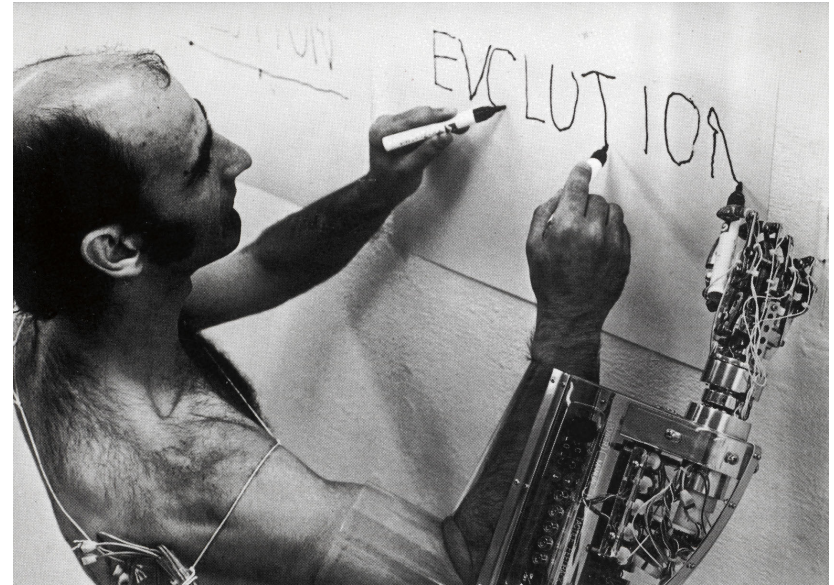
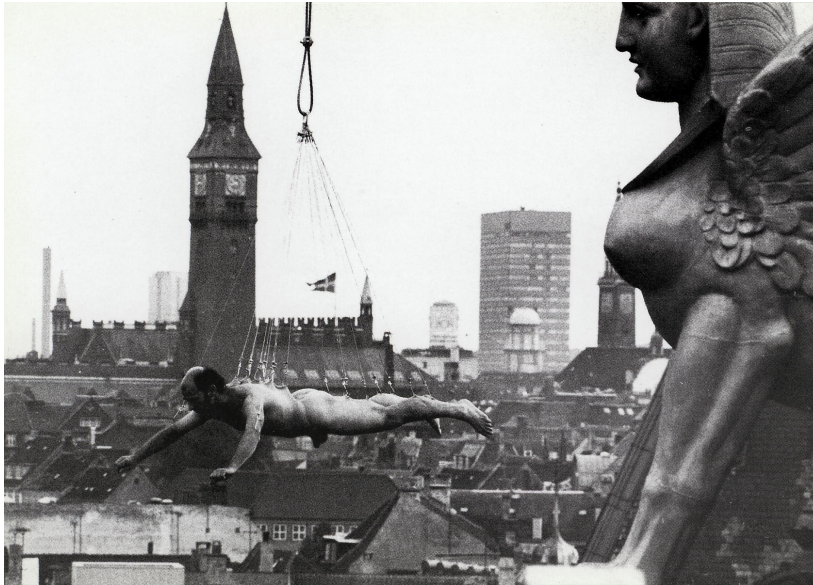
The Frankensteinian fear of the monster-machine appears to be re-enacted for the spectator in works by Stelarc in the late 1980s. The moral and biological position of the subject is eclipsed by the imaginary terror of a technology which invades



Stelarc, *Event for Three Hands*, Roppongi Studio, Tokyo, 1983.  
 Photograph from the artist's collection; photographer D. Ike.

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

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



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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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***I have always thought that the ‘armchop’ should be conceived of in terms of (a) an alienation of the symbolic structure and (b) as a cathartic invocation of the fragmented body.***<sup>75</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

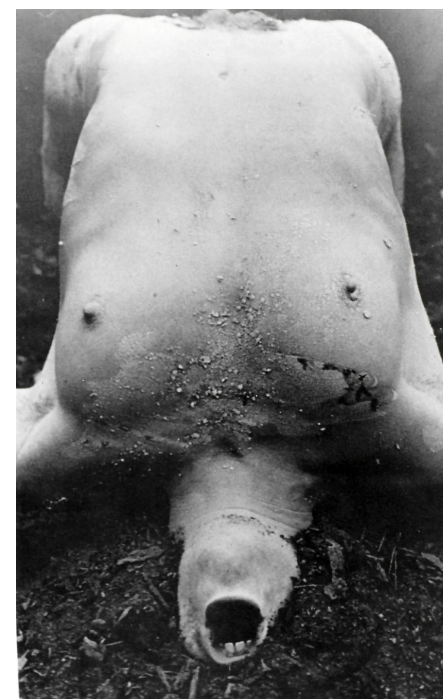
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The drama of the individual psyche was also evident in performances by Jill Orr. Many of Orr's performances explored environmental issues, however, she also made various links between the body and nature. In the early works the dualism of woman-nature,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

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



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





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

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

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

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



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

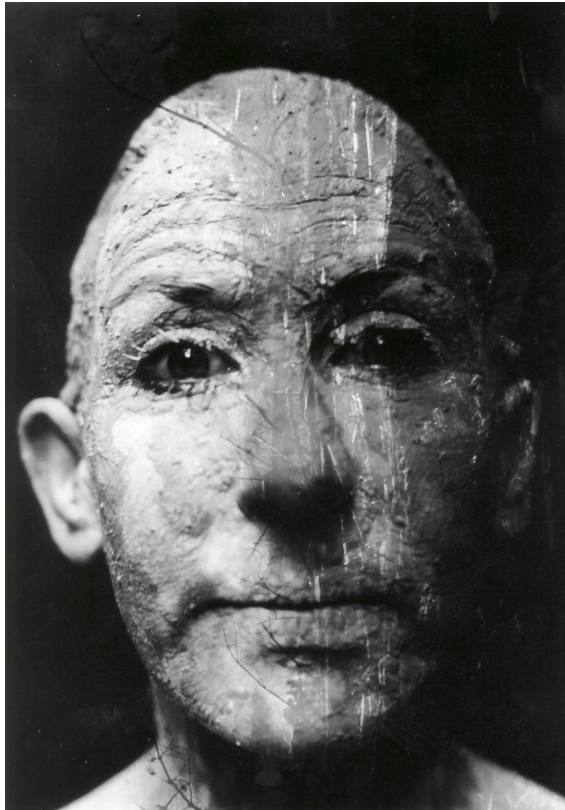
Jill Orr, *Do You Speak?*,  
Mixage Festival,  
Rotterdam, Holland,  
1980.

Photograph from the  
artist's collection.



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

Photograph from the  
artist's collection.



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

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

Photograph from the artist's collection.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



Jill Orr, *Walking on Planet Earth*, 1989.

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

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

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





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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

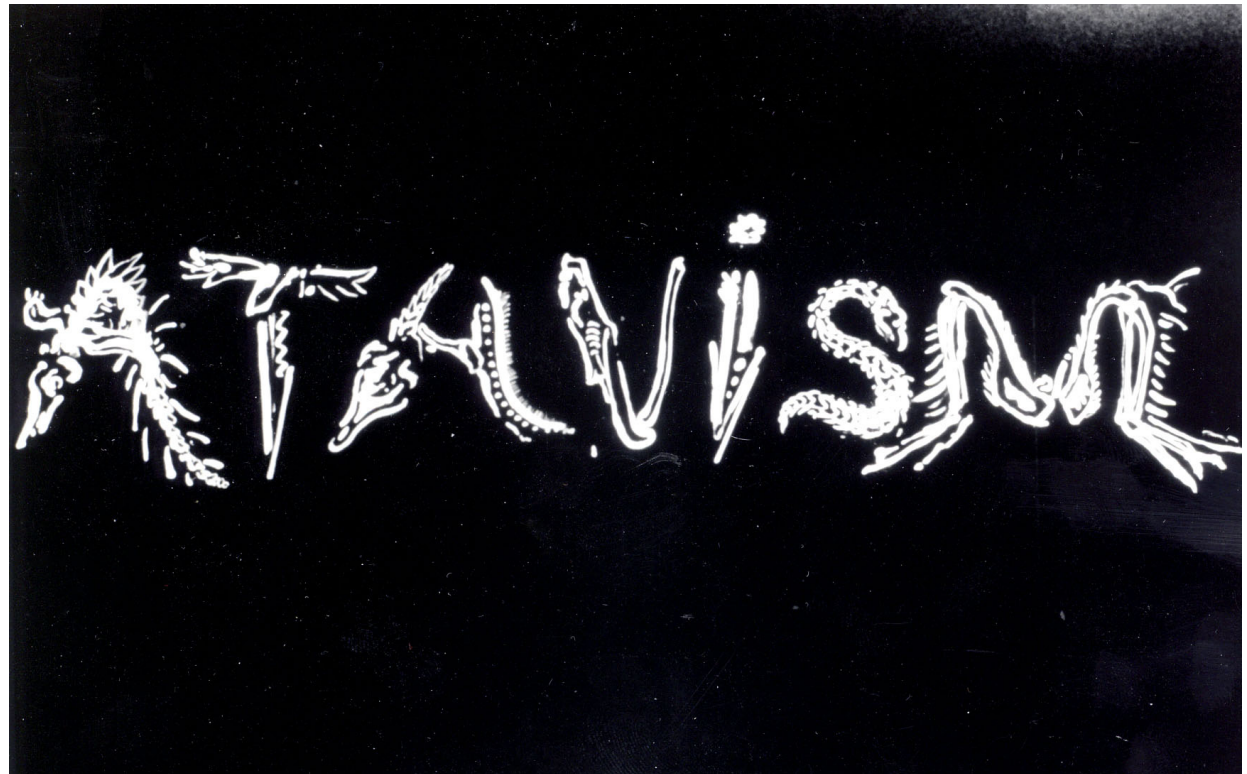
Rowing). Many of Mortensen's more elaborate performances have been collaborative events where the exchange of stories between artists has created a multi-layered chain of images and events. Mortensen's solo works tend to be situated within the category of the Western shaman and often atavism, the return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

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

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



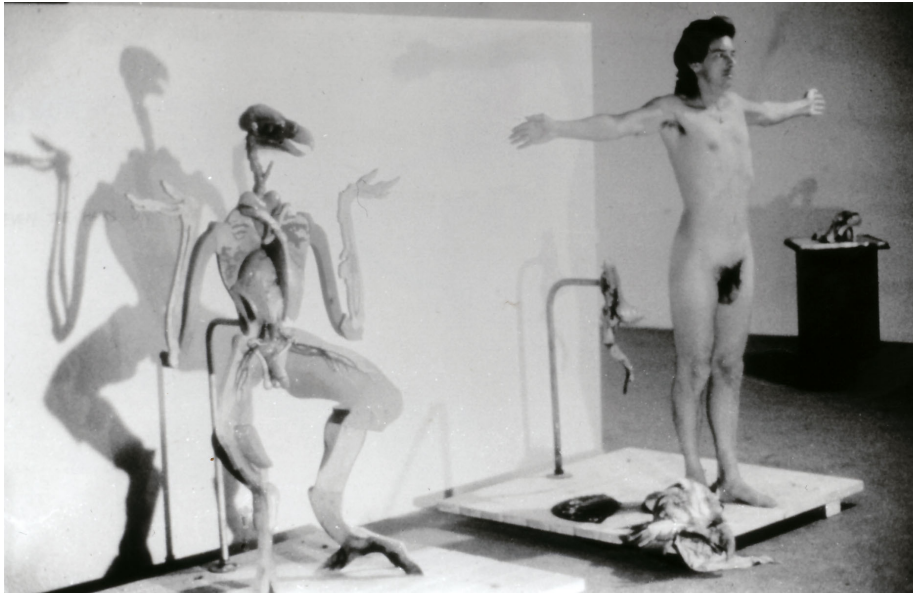
the window. The image of a large lizard was painted on an earth embankment nearby and, at night, a photographic image of the same lizard was projected onto the painting. Mortensen sat on a small stool wearing his bird mask and during the event, due to the illusion created by the light of the projector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

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

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

Photograph from the artist's collection.

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

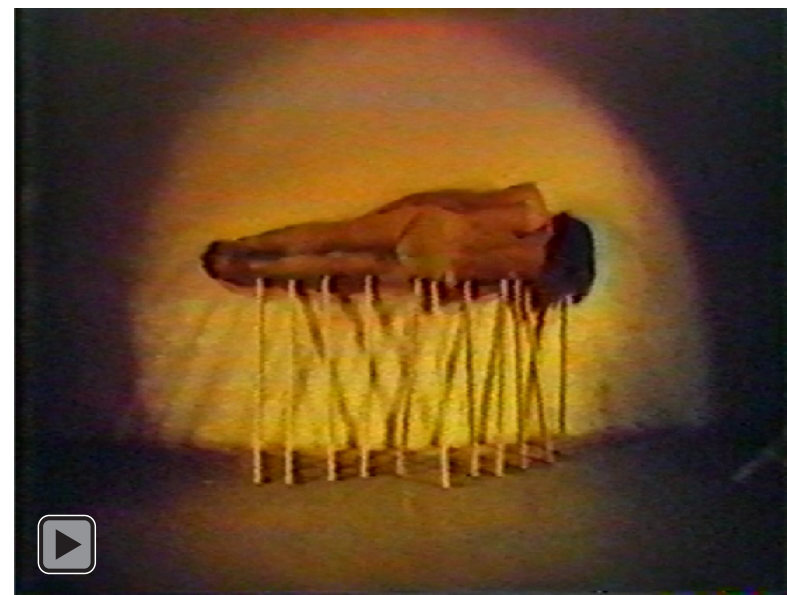


Ken Unsworth,  
*A Different  
Drummer*, 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Biennale of  
Sydney: *Recent  
International  
Forms in Art*,  
1976.

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



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



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

## ENDNOTES

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

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

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

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