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# BODY AND SELF

PERFORMANCE ART IN AUSTRALIA 1969 - 92 | ANNE MARSH

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# PERFORMANCE ART IN THE 1980S AND 1990S: ANALYSING THE SOCIAL BODY



***A cynicism of the 'already written', apparent in the Marxist-structuralist critique of the subject, tended to foreclose on an active role for the individual or group. Although structuralist theory effectively dismantled the humanist myth of 'man' at the centre of the universe, such a analysis tended to produce a mood of complacency and an acceptance of stasis. The decentring of the humanist doctrine of power, control and progress, was supposed to make a space in Western society for those individuals and groups who had been excluded. However, the idea that the subject was already spoken, in advance of his or her actions, became a kind of academic shorthand which effectively silenced minority groups who had life time existences outside theory, beyond the text.***

The position of the speaking-acting subject had always been a focus in performance art. However, in the 1980s a change in approach was apparent as artists moved away from the celebration of 'natural' difference and towards an exploration of the social construction of the subject. In Australia it is apparent that performance art, as it had been known in the 1970s, waned in the mid 1980s. However, it continued as an art form

throughout the decade, changing its focus from an expressive, cathartic practice to a more social appraisal of the body-subject. The surface (the look) and the structure of performance art changed in the 1980s. A new generation of artists moved freely between actions, art performance, video and theatre. It was no longer considered important to stress the difference between performance art and theatre. The realities of space and time, once seen as sites of 'authenticity', were reconsidered.

A new wave of performance artists emerged in the 1980s who were ready to address the critiques levelled at the performance art of an older generation. In response to theories of the gaze artists reassessed their position as authorial voice, primary maker of meaning, and turned to multi-layered productions, which would decentre the spectator's gaze away from the artist. Humour and political satire were reinstated by artists analysing media representations of cultural and sexual stereotypes.

Myths were still considered in performance art but they were scrutinised for their complicity with conventional metaphysics. Women's experience continued to be addressed but it was considered in terms of its social construction. Masculinity was analysed by male artists working in the field and new music performance events started to draw heavily on popular sounds. Pop art became a renewed area of interest for some performances artists.<sup>1</sup> When the body came back on the performance art agenda in the United States it was a female body which spoke in pornographic tongues against a patriarchal society. This generated a considerable amount of critical interest which revolved around feminist analyses of pornography. In Australia there was little evidence in the 1990s of a return to the cathartic modes of the 1970s, however, performance artists such as Linda Sproul began to incorporate overtly sexual imagery.

Paul Taylor, the editor of *Art & Text*, started to talk about a new wave of artists in the early 1980s; artists who were committed to the idea of a subculture rather than a counter culture. Taylor was talking about artists associated with the Clifton Hill Music Centre (including Philip Brophy, Maria Kozic, David Chesworth, Adrian Martin) and those connected with Art Projects (John Nixon, Jenny Watson, Peter Tyndall, John Dunkley-Smith, Imants Tillers, Lyndal Jones, Mike Parr). The new wave music-performance group *Tsch Tsch Tsch* (Philip Brophy, Maria Kozic, Ralph Traviato and Jane Stevenson sometimes joined by other artists) and performances by Lyndal Jones are representative of the shift in performance art in the 1980s. Writing about the early years of *Art & Text* (1981-3) Adrian Martin argued that the artists of the New Wave embraced a structuralist interpretation of the subject:

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***In place of the artist as pristine “self” — who felt, reflected, struggled to express — stood the artist as invaded, “divided”, “decentred” self, a pure surface crossed by cultural flows, a mere “effect” of everything around him or her. (Hence the proud slogan of the time: “I do not speak, I am spoken”) . . .<sup>2</sup>***

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However, as Martin points out, ‘theory’ as such was used by artists in a fairly eclectic way. The idea of a subculture assumed that resistance to dominant culture was possible at the margins of society.<sup>3</sup> The punk generation was just one of a long line of subversive groups who presented resistance through dress, fashion, body piercing and anti-social behaviour. Although some performance artists welcomed the idea of a subject already spoken and

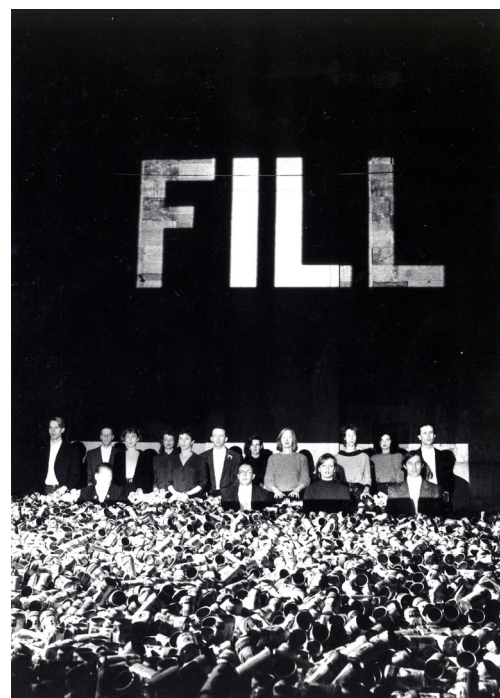
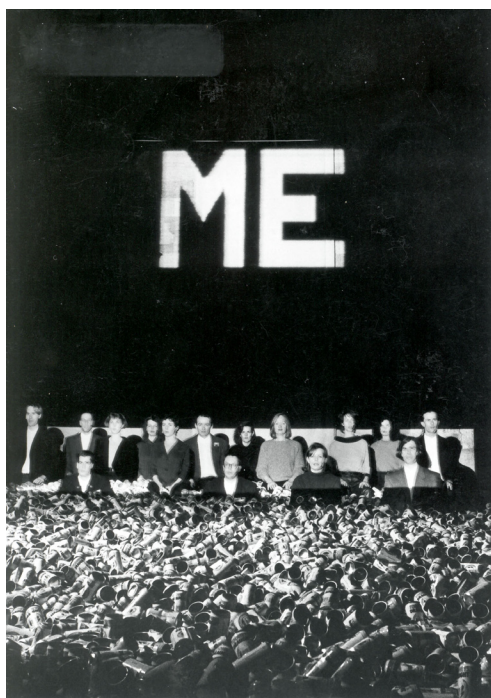
used this to address the ways in which cultural meanings were established, others sought to reposition a place for the active speaking subject.

The way in which the subject is represented by Lyndal Jones is of particular interest in an analysis of performance art in the 1980s. Memory plays an important role as a tool which aims to tease apart conscious and unconscious thoughts. The act of recollection, of memories and dreams, effectively decentres any notion of an absolute truth, or a definitive meaning. The use of a multi-layered environment makes this apparent to the spectator who is encouraged to contribute their own meaning to the work. In Jones’s performances one witnesses a change in methodology which sophisticates an earlier modernist notion of fragmentation.

Lyndal Jones spent several years in London from 1974 to 1976, the years in which a Marxist-structuralist interpretation of the subject was gaining strength in feminist circles. Interviewed in 1987, she said that theories of the male gaze espoused by critics like Laura Mulvey had a stifling effect on women’s performance.<sup>4</sup> Although Jones’s performances engage with feminist and structuralist interpretations of language, and all her works present gender as a social construction, she is also aware that this reading of the subject is narrow and potentially oppressive.<sup>5</sup> Jones has written extensively about her work and claims that she attempts to ‘challenge the constraints of a patriarchal control of language by representing woman as subject . . . able to manipulate materials, images and ideas.’<sup>6</sup> She is critical of performance art by women in the 1970s and insists that their approach was anti-intellectual and hides ‘a deep-seated fear of theory.’<sup>7</sup>

Jones, who has a background in theatre, started to present works in art galleries in the late 1970s. The performances use slide projection, video and sound with gesture, movement and scripted text in order to juxtapose conscious thought, memory and the unconscious disruptions associated with dreams. Many of them have been presented as lengthy, minimal events which stress repetition.

Lyndal Jones is interested in the boundaries between art, theatre and dance.<sup>8</sup> Her first series of works was titled *At Home* and was presented in alternative galleries and theatres in the late 1970s. *At Home, Coming and Going* (La Mama, 1977) was presented in an empty car park adjacent to the theatre and was reminiscent of the earlier happenings. Ten actors performed a sequence of events as Jones tore up sheets to decorate a wooden house-frame. Several



actors performed as workmen, building a fire in a nearby lane; another walked along the top of a high wall over-looking the car park; an argument could be heard inside the theatre; two people emerged and one left abruptly in a car; finally the workmen made their exit by scaling a ladder and departing across the roof-tops.<sup>9</sup> By this time Jones had finished decorating the house-frame and was lying down. In this early work the fragmentation of events, occurring at different sites within the vicinity of the car park, may have appeared bizarre, in the character of a happening, but the incidents witnessed by the audience cohered around the theme of work.

*At Home — Ladies a Plate* (Ewing and George Paton Galleries, 1979) made direct reference to the Australian tradition of taking a plate of food to a party. Again Jones addressed women's domestic work, this time in a solo performance. *Ladies a Plate* involved the arranging and rearranging of seventy plates into various patterns on the floor. As the plates were being displayed, or gathered up to be arranged again, slides of the artist's house, a setting for a party, and stacks of dirty crockery were projected on to the wall. Jones occasionally spoke, as if to herself, about a garden party she had once held.

Derek Kreckler, *Fill*, 1990.

A sound performance consisting of 13 performers set amongst 28,000 beer cans. The cans remained mute throughout the performance, standing in as the residue of the spectacle; the football match, the cricket ground or a littered beach. Behind the performers a large video projection (15 x 22 metres) acted as a visual clock pacing the performers' voices with words and languages fragments. The performers were instructed to repeat the word 'everyone'; their utterance were to proceed from a silence mime, developing into a whisper and gradually becoming louder until it reached the maximum volume achievable by each performer. The signing of 'everyone', pictured against the language sequence – WORDS FILL ME – presents a mesmerized subject to the audience. A subject caught in language yet trying bravely to assert its collective subjecthood.



*At Home - On the Road Again*, (Act 2, Canberra School of Art Gallery, ANU, 1980) involved the artist in the continuous packing and unpacking of three suitcases, whilst a soundtrack and the artist's spoken interventions explained a journey taken on a train. Slides of the journey focused on views from the train window; blurred images of the landscape, urban stations, city and country vistas framed the artist's actions. The spoken narrative analysed the weight distribution of the suitcases and referred constantly to the placement and stress of the body. The images captured through the window of the train were enlarged and diminished; the narratives became more personalised as Jones recounted the memory of a peeping tom looking through the window of the stationary train; the image, blurred and unrecognisable, was recounted through a memory and the audience, who had looked on attentively as repetition replaced repetition, were suddenly 'framed' within the act of looking as voyeurs.

Jones tends to rely on the minimal gesture and repetition. All of her works have incorporated a type of Brechtian distancing, the idea that the audience should not be lulled into a passive receptive position by being presented with a theatrical illusion which depends on the 'suspension of belief.'<sup>10</sup> Images recur and written and spoken messages are repeated throughout the performances, often several versions of one performance will be presented at the same time. In this way the audience becomes familiar with the form and content of the work and they must look further into the structure of the performance, as active participants in the construction of meaning. There is no sequential narrative as such; no story with a conventional beginning, middle and end. Jones cites many influences in her works, especially the feminist and structuralist concerns of works made by the London Film-makers Co-op in the mid-1970s. The performances use the cut-up or montage method of structuralist film-making, which attempts to dissipate a central focus. The fragmentation and the repetition causes distraction and sometimes frustration in the audience; they are enticed to ask themselves questions about the event and its possible meanings.

Lyndal Jones has often used an installation format to present what she called 'versions' of her works; she has made versions of the performances specifically for video, and she has worked on large scale productions which include actors, stage design, script and sound-image overlays presented in theatres. Jones produces works which rely on theatrical skill, direction and production. The events are usually rehearsed and often repeated, although each performance is

slightly different. Lyndal Jones's performances reach a wide audience and the later works have been presented in conventional theatres.

The *Prediction Piece* series (1981-91) was concerned with the role of memory and how this might be interpreted to 'predict' future actions. Jones is committed to inserting art into a socio-political discourse and she says that the idea of the *Prediction Series* 'reflected the prevailing fear at that time [1981] that there might be no future, that the event of nuclear holocaust was a foregone conclusion.'<sup>11</sup> Although Jones has been described as a structuralist and a deconstructivist,<sup>12</sup> neither theory fits the practice adequately. Jones tries to reposition an active role for the subject, she is interested in the way in which people can change their lives and effect change on both a personal and a collective level.<sup>13</sup> She says:

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***Central to all the Prediction Pieces is an examination of the act(s) of prediction . . . the processes through which we arrange our future(s) within our minds, and hence, our ability to plan, to intervene. It is an examination of the foundations upon which we can organise and create change,***<sup>14</sup>

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The Prediction Pieces began as modest performances, presented in a gallery, usually involving only one or two performers (1—4) and evolved into elaborate productions staged in theatres with large casts of dancers, actors and visual artists (6 and 10). In Prediction Piece 1 (George Paton Gallery, Melbourne, 1981)<sup>15</sup> Jones set the scene for the forthcoming series. The artist sat at a desk with a typewriter and a tape recorder,

behind her messages (signs of what was to come) were projected on slides. She read a weather forecast aloud into the tape recorder and started to type. A woman's voice was heard over an amplified sound system: she was reading the predictions from the I Ching, tarot cards and astrology. Jones recorded the woman's voice and typed what she heard creating a fragmented text of predictions. Behind her the sign read: 'Watch this space'; 'You see it before it happens'; 'You act before it happens'; 'Try another direction.'<sup>16</sup> At the end of the performance Jones read her typewritten script to the audience. In the early works Jones used the tools of conceptual art — the typewriter and the word. She created multi-layered predictions rather than statements of intention characteristic of works scripted by Mike Parr,<sup>17</sup> rather it was an exploration of possibilities.

In *Prediction Piece 1* Jones used popular and clichéd methods of prediction, such as the tarot cards. In *Prediction Piece 2* (1981-2)<sup>18</sup> she used a video recording of the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana, a fantasy seen by millions. Jones sat watching the replay on a television screen. Mary Sitarenos sat behind the TV set elevated on a small stage. She played the role of the fortune teller. The two performers entered into a dialogue with one another. Each asked: 'What do you see?' Jones replied by predicting the next scene on the television screen. Sitarenos described the room that she saw reflected in a small mirror; what she saw or heard when looking into a cup; what she saw when her eyes were covered with her hands. Again the slide projector predicted the actions: 'You see it before it happens', 'Forewarned is forearmed.'<sup>19</sup>



Lyndal Jones,  
*Prediction Piece 1*,  
George Paton Gallery,  
Melbourne, 1981.  
Photograph from the  
artist's collection.



From 1983 onwards the *Prediction Pieces* became more complex and started to address broader political issues. In *Prediction Piece 5 (Continuum '83, Tokyo, 1983)* Jones was faced with the problem of presenting a performance in Japan. As a white Anglo-Saxon artist she was aware of the eroticisation of the East and the West's incorporation of Japanese style throughout the modernist period. Jones had to encounter the issue of cultural difference and the way it had been coded in oppositional terms by the West: the terror of the Other. Bridging such an opposition became the subject of the performance. Jones worked with two Japanese performers Haruyo Hickey and Michico Amail, and concentrated on the relationship between Australia and Japan by focusing on the woodchip industry (woodchips are a major export from Australia to Japan) and on technology (a market in which the Japanese are dominant).

Setting the scene for the gallery audience, Jones announced that the performance would take place in a large forest in a small clearing.<sup>20</sup> The artist predicted the action as large bags of woodchips were raked into patterns on the floor, resembling the ordered shape of a Japanese stone garden. Images shown on two video monitors predicted the actions to come: pre-recorded images of Hickey's face and of Jones raking leaves in a garden were followed by the live action of Hickey raking and Jones predicting the action on video. The relationship between electronic reproduction and the body action became the focus of the performance. Responding to theories of the media presented by the French critic Jean Baudrillard, who argued that the subject has become 'a switching centre for all the networks of influences'<sup>21</sup>, Lyndal Jones insisted on positioning

an active role for the subject. She did this by neutralising the power of the mass media (the video representation) that Baudrillard considered to be all consuming. Jones's actors struck up a relationship with their video doubles but they did so in the context of their own actions. Baudrillard's critiques of the media in late capitalist society were particularly bleak and they were well known to artists in Australia.<sup>22</sup> The critic argued that:

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***With the television image . . . our own body and the whole surrounding universe become a control screen . . . the psychological dimension has in a sense vanished . . . The subject himself, suddenly transformed, becomes a computer at the wheel . . . The vehicle now becomes a kind of capsule, its dashboard the brain, the surrounding landscape like a televised screen.***<sup>23</sup>

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Baudrillard's view of technology in the late twentieth century was apocalyptic; he described the dominance of the video, film and TV image over the individual subject. For Baudrillard everything had become a simulacra, a copy of the event, nothing was real and the subject, engulfed by a society that privileged electronic communication in all fields of life, could not act. For Lyndal Jones this was an anathema; a curse imposed on the subject which effectively foreclosed on action. *Prediction Piece 5* addressed such criticism, insisting that there was a space in which the subject could speak. In the performance event she created such a place and positioned the video as a tool, something to be used in the human endeavour to communicate across cultures. The performance was presented in both English and Japanese and depicted the relationship between the body of the actor and technology; it also addressed issues associated with the environment and finally ended with a humorous sign seen on the back of a road-workers' truck on an Australian highway. The sign read: 'The road to happiness is always under construction.'<sup>24</sup>

Sexuality became the theme of *Prediction Piece 7* (Los Angeles, 1984)<sup>25</sup> as Jones once again presented a space in which the female voice could come to speech. Set in a cinema with slides projected onto the screen, Jones stood at a lectern and presented a lecture about the future and the act of prediction. The speech was delivered three times in succession. In the first version Jones

appeared dressed as a man, and, with the aid of a pre-recorded voice, she spoke as a male, gradually adding her own female voice. In the second version she wore an evening dress, high heels and carried a large bouquet of flowers, as if she were an actress receiving acclaim after a performance. The speech began with two voices, the male voice and her own, and ended with only her voice. In the third version she was dressed androgynously in black shirt and trousers; this time she read the speech alone. The performance ended when Jones fired a gun, an action that had been predicted on the slides shown throughout the performance.<sup>26</sup>

*Prediction Piece 8: Winter/Passion (Origins, Originality and Beyond*, 6<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, 1986)<sup>27</sup> addressed the issue of sexuality and its differences. Six actors alternated in playing a love scene which was interrupted: sometimes by a third person and continuously by stories told to the audience about passion, anger, love and personal alienation. The stories were scripted to reflect the varied cultural and ethnic background of the lovers and were spoken in Greek, Italian, French and English. The slide sequence, designed by John Dunkley-Smith, showed contrasting images of winter and summer landscapes, representing coldness and passion. *Winter/Passion* explored various sexual relationships as the actor-lovers presented heterosexual and homosexual coupling. In this work Jones addressed the issue of sexual difference through the intimate relationships of the lovers, pointing to the problems people experience in communicating with one another and the isolation of individuals within relationships. The narcissistic structure of the monogamous interaction was highlighted as the complexities



Lyndal Jones,  
*Prediction Piece 8:  
Winter/Passion,  
Origins, Originality  
and Beyond*, 6<sup>th</sup>  
Biennale of Sydney,  
1986.

Photograph from the  
artist's collection.



between self and other were explored. The act of being in-love was presented as both an engulfing experience, destroying individuality, and an obsessive relationship as the actors became fascinated by the exteriorised ideal of the other.<sup>28</sup>

In the large production *Prediction Piece 6 — Pipe Dreaming — A Performance about Optimism* (presented with Danceworks, Victorian Arts Centre, April 1989),<sup>29</sup> Jones was both theatrical director and performer. Slide sequences from previous versions were projected on the walls, ceiling and hands of the performers as three actors performed on a small platform which moved from centre stage to the wings of the theatre during five acts. The stage within a stage was decorated as a study. In the first study scene the actors were revolutionaries engaged in writing speeches, they quoted from Guy Debord’s ‘Instructions for Taking up Arms’<sup>30</sup> and presented themselves as idealists. The performance revolved around the statement ‘The writing is on the wall’ which was reminiscent of the closure associated with a structuralist philosophy where the subject is already spoken in advance of action. In the next study sequence the revolutionaries were exposed as artists and they quoted from Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, which focused on the failed attempts of its male protagonist to create a revolutionary theatre. In this way an idealistic interpretation of revolution was analysed and presented together with the actions of Danceworks. The dancers went through a similar ideological process. At first the image of China was romanticised, the image of the East exoticised for the West, however, over the length of the performance this changed. Young dancers rode their

bicycles across the stage ringing their bells loudly; a feeling of threat started to intervene in the optimism of the event as gunshots were heard. Jones appeared as both a blind-folded victim: her back against the wall as if facing a firing squad, and as an active subject continuously asking questions of another woman, blinded in the same way. She asked, ‘What do you see?’ and her companion answered, giving descriptive narratives of imagined scenes. Across a long wall (the Great Wall of China) statements were projected:

watch this space	take aim	FIRE
PREDICTION PIECE 6: PIPE DREAMING	the writing is on the wall	it could all end in tears
and, as the sun	I will melt	we will need to take steps
sinks slowly	I know I will just melt	three steps forward
on the West . . .	in my dream you are touching my breast	(and two backward)
the East is red	in my dream I am undressing you slowly	you will need to step forward
(the centre cannot hold)	I will feel the weight of you	there COULD be a happy ending
what do you see	we will fall to the ground together	your back is to the wall
FIRE	I will see red	10
is this a sign ?	you will see stars	9
I see no end to this	my hand will still contain the feel of the softness of the hair on your chest	8
I see no end to it	I want you to touch me	the end is near
. . . an endless vista . . .	I want to touch you	6
forewarned is forearmed	you will be up against the wall	5
a loaded gun will always fire		4
get ready		the end is VERY near
		2 <sup>31</sup>



Change and revolution were personalised in the messages projected on the wall as the political became the personal. Stories of revolutions snatched from historical texts were replaced by the personal memories of revolution as told by Chinese immigrants in Australia. Again the cultural opposition was undone as the other entered the space of the performance: no longer exoticised, the images of Lindy Lee's paintings presented by the artist herself replaced the central space of the actor-revolutionaries.

*Prediction Piece 6 - Pipe Dreaming* was Jones's first large-scale spectacle for the theatre and in many ways the complexities of the work were missed in a single viewing of the performance. Two weeks after the performance in Melbourne the youth of China rebelled against its communist fathers and many were slaughtered in Tiananmen Square. In the context of the real life happening the performance appeared to be idealistic; the response to a youthful optimism was predictably the power of the gun as military tanks fired on the crowd.<sup>32</sup>

Artists working in performance art in the 1980s and 1990s presented decentred and often dislocated representations which emphasised deconstruction rather than 'authentic' expression. This shift made performance art more difficult for both artist and audience in terms of interpretation. Deconstruction attempts to prise apart the binary oppositions in Western culture and instead of asserting the importance of the underprivileged position, as, for example, earlier feminist analysis and performance had done by celebrating woman's 'essential' difference, the deconstructivist opened the oppositions to encounter what exists in-between. This goes further than the structuralist method which drew critical attention to the oppositions and insisted that one term relied on its other for definition — so woman became the other of male desire, an object of his gaze. Lyndal Jones's performances employed a deconstructivist technique in some ways as they present many options to the audience. The repetitive nature of the productions asked the audience to remember what had been excluded. The artist attempted to leave the meaning open rather than presenting a didactic argument or narrative in the works. However, the method had its disadvantages as evident in the representation of images of revolution, it was difficult to be sure whether the artist was, in the final analysis, supporting romantic concepts of revolt or critiquing them. She was actually doing both and this created problems in the context of Tiananmen Square.

It is apparent that artists were more willing to consider theory in the 1980s and 1990s; however, they engaged with theory on various levels. It was no longer seen in terms of an 'absolute' but rather as a way of extending debates about the artist, the artist's role in society and the construction of meaning. The prevalence of theory and criticism written by artists in art journals during this time was evidence of this shift.<sup>33</sup> The 'anti-intellectualism' associated with the 1970s, a decade in which the instinctual or cathartic response of the artist was stressed, was been replaced by an idea of interpretation as a 'relative exercise.' In this questioning took precedence over the quest to find answers.

In performance art in the 1980s and 1990s, the most interesting works were concerned with the subject and his or her position in the world. Performance lent itself to this type of exploration because of the artist's and spectator's presence. Sophisticated practices, whether they were humorous or serious, addressed the subject's construction in language, and some artists presented an analysis of sexuality and desire in their works. The unconscious, language, memory and desire were all concepts which continued to interest performance artists in the 1980s and 1990s; however, all these things tend to be considered in terms of their social construction.

Performance art entered a more accessible area in terms of practice and reception in the 1990s. The distance between performance art and theatre dissolved in many respects. Artists no longer felt impelled to insist on a difference. The distinction

between 'real' life and the illusion associated with theatre dissolved against a background of theory which analysed both social construction, so that the subject had little authenticity, and the constant play of the signifier, so that all became interpretation. Add to this the dominance of theories of simulation and the simulacra, and the concern of artists like Allan Kaprow to make a distinction between 'acting' and 'non-acting'<sup>34</sup> appeared to have little contemporary relevance towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Melbourne-based dance performance presented by Jude Walton crosseed the boundary between contemporary dance and performance art. Although movement was still the focal point of Walton's performances she presented a contemporary dance which did not rely on narrative and she often worked with other artists practicing in different disciplines. Slide projection and sound-scape were often an integral part of the performances and Walton, like Lyndal Jones, addressed the issue of woman's representation.

In *Passion Lies Between the Black and the White* (1987) dissected fragments of a woman's body appeared in stark black and white images projected onto the flat surface of a stone wall. Three ominous male figures stood as witness, their physical presence and authoritative silence eclipsing the female body. Walton says she was rendered invisible through their presence.<sup>35</sup> *Passion* was concerned with the psychological space between the fragmented photo-projections of the cut-up body, the physical presence of the male voyeurs and the body of the female dancer. The male performers eventually left the stage and took up a position in the audience, thus implicating and framing the gaze



Jude Walton, publicity flyer for *Passion Lies Between the Black and the White*, 1987.

Photograph from the artist's collection.



of the audience. Words flashed across the body on screen, passages appropriated from a novel by Marguerite Duras.<sup>36</sup> The text emphasised the authority of language yet a woman perpetrated the crime described in the text. Duras's murder mystery presented the female protagonist and Walton reinscribed the body in time and space, framing the male gaze. The question of who writes the body became the content of the work. Crimes of the flesh occupied two time zones: the 'real' crime, the murder, re-presented through the unauthorised rewriting and reproduction of another text, was confronted by the 'real-time' crime of the voyeur who stood as judge and witness. Walton said there was an 'illusion towards the pornographic'<sup>37</sup> structured in her choreography of the male figures. In the performance the implied violence of the gaze was juxtaposed with the brutality of the 'original' crime. The pleasure in the active position, the will to conquer, to capture and own the body, was staged in relation to the dance phrases of the female performer; according to the artist the EYE/I was 'rendered invisible through their presence.'<sup>38</sup>





Jude Walton, *No Hope No Reason*, Deutscher, Brunswick Street, 1991, slide installation by Ian De Gruchy.

Photograph from the artist's collection with thanks to Ian De Gruchy.

In *Remembering is Forgetting* (Performance Space, 1988) a narcissistic gaze was presented through the performance. The camera was used to capture what the dancer saw as she moved. In the privacy of her studio Walton created a super-8 film by strapping a movie camera to her head. She then choreographed the dance sequence as a duet performed with the projected film in front of an audience. The mirroring quality of the film was used not to capture the image of the artist but to present a trace of where her eye had been. Walton says much of her work is about 'visual kinaesthetics . . . it's what you see and then feel kinaesthetically.'<sup>39</sup>

*No Hope No Reason* (Deutscher, Brunswick Street, 1991) comprised a troupe of performers interacting with a technological environment which allowed

an articulation of memory and desire on multiple levels. Relationships between people were explored together with the internal dialogues that people have with themselves. The visual tools used to present the audience with the idea of a temporal and changing identity included: movement, dance, overlaid text (spoken and sung) and the use of slide projection to create an illusory physical space.

In Walton's performance, the environment created by a slide installation designed by Ian de Gruchy, operated as a transparent veil enveloping the performers in an illusory space projected on beams of light. A dream quality masked the performance; there was a sense in which one imagined oneself in a state of remembering as if the dream were re-enacting itself from memory. The time structure of the work, particularly the attention to the past, and the way in which the psyche articulates its memory, was exploited for its multi-relational properties throughout the performance. The narrative was one of interpersonal relationships, some were complex, almost imaginary; some held a degree of terror, others appeared conventionally romantic. The musical score composed by Hartley Newnham and the script, a collage of dream memories, fears and fantasies created by John Barbour, were interpreted by vocal three-part harmonies moving in and around the dancers. The movement of the dancers, acting out moments in the text, worked in juxtaposition with the song. The voices remained separate from the movements, pointing to the alienation of language that speaks the subject but never adequately expresses the corporeal life of the body.

Jude Walton, like Lyndal Jones, uses technology as a way of opening up a multi-layered language and visual experience for the viewer. In this way both artists try to open a place where memory and dream can be spoken. Technology is used by Walton to speak of absences, to create traces of a lost physicality.

Some performance artists working in the 1980s started to draw heavily on images from popular culture; the ways in which stereotypical types and behaviours had been supported in television sit-coms, serial dramas, comic book illustrations and popular songs were analysed by artists and often the content of these media were used in the performances. Artists not only attempted to bridge the gap between high and popular culture some of them actually crossed the divide and became popular performers themselves. The most prominent example of this tendency in Australia was the group *Tsch Tsch Tsch*, the name of which was designated by three arrows and pronounced with three sharp clicks of the tongue.

*Tsch Tsch Tsch* (Philip Brophy, Maria Kozic, Jane Stevenson and Ralph Traviato) worked at the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre and presented their 'new wave' performances in art galleries, pubs and clubs. The group was formed in 1977 and originally included Leigh Parkhill who subsequently left the band. Philip Brophy was the theorist behind *Tsch Tsch Tsch* and he has written extensively about their aims and objectives.<sup>40</sup> Primarily the group presented performances and installations that addressed the encoding of meaning in popular culture. They saw themselves as semioticians and deconstructors of social signs, and drew on the works of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco.

*Asphyxiation: What Is This Thing Called 'Disco'?* (George Paton Gallery, 1980) was set within an installation consisting of six alcoves, each housing a painting which was a copy of a fashion model from *Vogue* magazine hung at an obscure angle, an aluminium frame covered with clear plastic, a fluorescent tube, a musical instrument, and various sound systems and amplifiers. The instruments were displayed on pedestals as if they were sculptures and the musician's voice was represented by a bottle of Listerine mouth wash. A sound track, amplified throughout the space, played the fragmented sounds of *Tsch Tsch Tsch*.<sup>41</sup> The performance also employed the method of copying from copies (the paintings of the photographs) but in the live event the group mimed to the pre-recorded sounds of their own voices at low speed, accompanied by the camped-up gestures of the singer-musicians. Slides ran throughout the performances showing snippets from fashion magazines. The deconstructivist method presented a kind of love-hate relationship between the artists and disco music. On one hand the artists appeared to critique popular culture by producing irreverent copies and analysing the ideology behind disco, where everything is blended into a kind of nothingness with the dance beat being the most prominent element. On the other, this process of copying and the hybrid form of disco style was embraced as a kind of new-wave methodology.



*Tsch Tsch Tsch* (Philip Brophy, Maria Kozic, Jane Stevenson and Ralph Traviato), *Asphyxiation: What Is This Thing Called 'Disco'?*, George Paton Gallery, 1980. Photograph from the artists' collection.



Steven Wigg and David Watt, *Was That the Human Thing to Do?*, various venues, 1987. Photograph from the artists' collection.

Recurring images from popular culture and an analysis of the ways in which such representations spoke and wrote the subject can be seen in a variety of works. Some of these performances were humorous and drew on a tradition of political satire, extending the antics of the Pop artists into live performance.

Steven Wigg and the late David Watt (1952-1998) produced hilarious images of men in an attempt to address the construction of masculinity. In many ways they appeared to use the technique of 'living sculpture' pioneered by the British artists Gilbert and George, who simply presented themselves as art in the 1970s.<sup>42</sup> However, Wigg and Watt attempted to deconstruct the stereotype of heterosexual masculinity, whereas Gilbert and George presented a very camp, homosexual couple to the public.

*Was That the Human Thing to Do?* (1987) used images of men from the popular press of the 1950s and imitated the actions in a kind of stand-up comedy routine. The performance analysed the humanist subject in control of his environment; the master of his own house. The body language of males became the major theme of the work. *Was that the human thing to do?* presented the pipe-smoking male. He pats himself on the chest, fumbles in his pockets, finds his pipe, and another pipe; pats himself on the chest, reassures himself of his power in the world through the gestures of his body. However, the artists turn this around by overstating every action, the image reproduced here shows Wigg in a state of absolute satiation with six pipes stuffed in his mouth.

*In the Individual on the Move* (Moving Performances, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1989) Wigg and Watt appeared as corporate businessmen. They were waiting somewhere for somebody or something to arrive or happen. Again the performance was presented as a comedy routine. The two men tried to remain inconspicuous in their sameness as they performed their body language to the rising sounds of Peer Gynt. As the music got louder and faster the artists adjusted their belts, looked at their watches, fiddled with their jackets, scratched their noses, ears and finally their genitals in perfectly choreographed unison. The artists say they took their actions from photographs, assuming 'that the photographic image represents a moment in a performed action . . . The performances present the body as object within a field of objects, reduced to its commodified reality.'<sup>43</sup>

Michele Luke has produced many performances that analyse popular cultural myths as they affect women. In *Cry for the Moon* (Australian Perspecta, Performance Space, Sydney, 1985) the artist addressed the ways in which the myth of romantic love restricted women. The pressure to lure a man, to find a husband who will take over the role of the paternal father as protector of the female, was explored in a multi-layered performance which presented the mythology and the commercialisation of the love game. An audio tape played



a medley of popular love songs such as 'Stand by Your Man', 'The Lady is a Tramp' and 'My Girl.' A dummy, a life-sized 'paper sally' doll, complete with flashing heartbeat stood in for the body of the artist throughout the event. The dummy was mounted on a revolving disc and slides of wallpaper and fashion models were projected onto its body. Luke performed the role of dresser and changed the clothing on the model to suit the narrative of the song. In another version of the same performance (Club Foote, Adelaide) a storyline from a Mills and Boon novel was added by the late Jenny Boulton (1951-2005) reading from the sidelines:

- 
- Was it just another flash in the pan?
  - She picked out a dress she knew Paul admired,
  - the smooth dark lines of it clinging to her,
  - moulding her body to a long, lithe line
  - from breast to thigh . . . How do I look?  
She asked . . .<sup>44</sup>
- 

Luke addressed the position of women in the 1960s and 1970s in Australia, women isolated in suburban families with only the media to represent their role in society. The images of wallpaper depicted a domestic entrapment, as did the coding made explicit in the songs. Luke says the performance was autobiographical in a sense because it drew on her own experience.<sup>45</sup> In the artist's words: it was a performance that explored 'the romantic notions of young catholic girls, it was a performance that exposed the societal female indoctrination of love/romance/rejection as perceived by me in my teens.'<sup>46</sup>



*In Tripping the Light Fantastic (SA Light, Union Gallery, University of Adelaide, 1986)* Michele Luke performed a tap-dance routine with Pamela Harris. Both artists wore large white boxes, surrogate TV screens, upon which slides and texts were projected. The performance addressed the theme of light in the history of South Australia. Colonel Light, the founder of the city, was revealed as the agent of the Crown, of Christianity and European civilisation in the antipodes. Establishing the scene through slides, text and sound projection the political satire evolved as a semiotic deconstruction of the word light and all its transcendental and fundamental interpretations, including quotes from The Festival of Light (a Christian fundamentalist group) which was uncovered as a harbourer of restrictive and misogynist morals. The dialogue between the TV screens was complemented by slide projections behind the dancers as they 'tripped the light fantastic' complete with twinkling fairy lights on their hands and toes.

Michele Luke, *Cry for the Moon, Australian Perspecta*, Performance Space, Sydney, 1985. Photograph from the artist's collection.

Michele Luke and Richard Grayson, *The A-Z of Cowardice*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1989. Photograph from the artists' collection.



Michele Luke also collaborated with Richard Grayson during the 1980s and together they presented analyses of heterosexual relationships. In *Micky and Dickie Get Laid* (*Moving Performances*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1989) a hostile couple opposed each other from either end of the gallery. Walking in a straight line they intercepted each other on a carpet of white feathers: the common ground of surrender. A small mechanical skating bear, playing an incessant lullaby, became their substitute child. The couple played out their charade of domestic and sexual violence almost oblivious to the common concern they shared for the toy-child. Gestures of conflict were repeated in

the performance *The A-Z of Cowardice*, also shown at *Moving Performances*. In this performance the couple acted out their masculine and feminine roles as they had been written in the pages of an elementary reading book for children, drawing the audience's attention to the way in which language codes sexuality and gender difference.

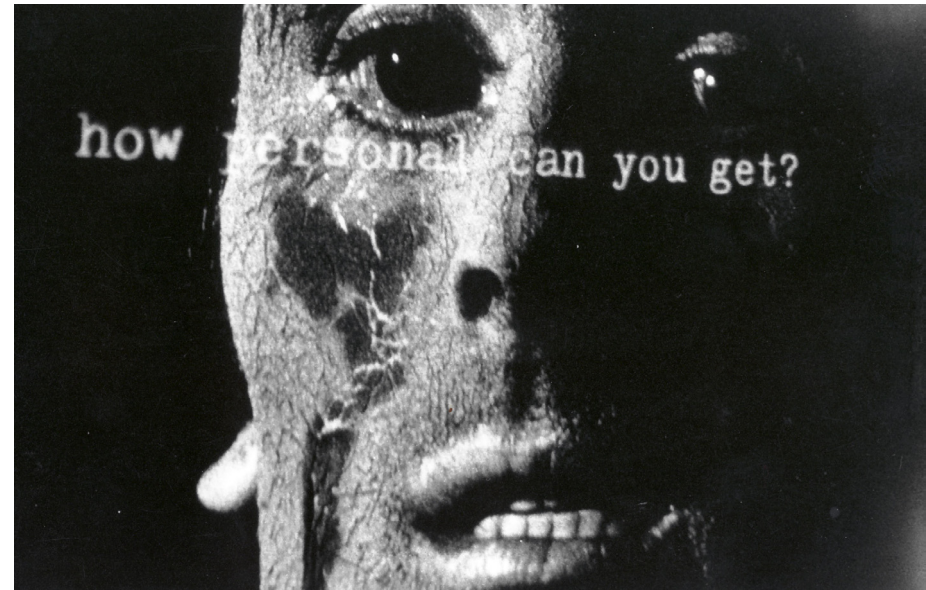
The analysis of gender difference was also apparent in works by Grotesqui Monkey Choir (Mark Rogers, Louise Smith, Martin Hayward and Marion Redpath). Working in Sydney in the early 1980s the group moved from street theatre into performance in 1983.<sup>47</sup> Large-scale performance-installation works such as *Ice Carving in Mexico* (Art Unit, 1984) addressed issues concerned with inner city living and the plight of the individual subject. In a later series of works titled *The Projectionist* Mark Rogers and Louise Smith started to consider criticisms of the cinema presented by writers such as Laura Mulvey and they attempted to address the issue

of the male gaze. The performance series titled *The Projectionist* involved the artists performing with their doubles on film. The film-performance events showed the stereotype of masculinity and patriarchal power. Rogers, dressed in black with sunglasses, became a dominant image on the screen; he was also 'the projectionist' standing and watching his own image. Smith played out the role of submissive or restricted woman under the powerful gaze of the male.

*I See Said the Blind Man* (Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1989) was a solo performance by Mark Rogers which used film to reflect an image of the self back to the artist. The film showed his private fantasies as he stood next to the projector tap dancing, quietly at first then gradually increasing the rhythm. All the time he was saying aloud to the audience ‘I, I’m a unique, worthwhile, interesting human being; boy do I feel good.’ A silent narrative fractured the film, which showed Rogers’s private self as a reflective typescript moved across the screen. The film image moved from sharp focus to over-exposure as the body of the male disintegrated; the text read, ‘The body ripples and then cracks.’ Throughout the chant of an Egyptian love song droned on and the narrative shifted as the fantasies became clearer. He dreamt of his lover kissing another woman, and wanted to place himself in her position, to be like the woman. *I See Said the Blind Man* was a poetic deconstruction of fantasy and desire, presenting the image of a fractured subject to the audience.

A reassessment of the humanist paradigm of the subject led many performance artists to reconsider the unconscious. Instead of it being a dark and secretive place full of fears and anxieties which could not be understood, a new wave of artists started to consider the ways in which such fantasies actually contribute to ideological constructs in society. The artists discussed so far in this chapter analyse gender difference and its patriarchal signification. In the late 1980s some performance artists in America returned to the body, drawing on the body art of a previous generation. Performance works by the New York artist Karen Finley created a great deal of publicity. In the 1990s the corporeality of the body was reconsidered by artists, especially female artists who were beginning to reject the stricture of a feminist-structuralist analysis which tended to take the female body off the art agenda because of the problems associated with the male gaze.

Addressing the representation of woman in performance art in the 1970s and 80s, Elinor Fuchs argued that the sacred, ritualised body had been ‘replaced by the obscene body — aggressive, scatological, and sometimes pornographic.’<sup>48</sup> Writing about American performance art, Fuchs compared Carolee Schneemann’s infamous 1963 performance *Eye Body*, where the artist appeared naked, splashed in paint, with live snakes slithering across her body to works by Karen Finley.



Although Fuchs made distinctions between the 1970s ‘celebration’ of erotica and a more up-front, pornographic discourse in Finley’s works, there were similarities to be made between these interpretations of the body and sexuality. Fuchs said ‘Schneemann has written of the “ritual aspect of the process” that could put her in a “trancelike state”’.<sup>49</sup> When interviewed in 1988, Karen Finley, New York’s wicked woman of performance, expressed similar concerns when she said:

I do go into somewhat of a trance because when I perform I want it to be different than acting ... I’m really interested in being a medium, and I have done a lot of psychic type of work. I put myself in a state, for some reason it’s important, so that things come in and out of me, I’m almost like a vehicle. And so when I’m talking it’s just coming through me.<sup>50</sup>

Mark Rogers, *I See Said the Blind Man*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1989.

Photograph from the artist’s collection.



There are other similarities to be stressed between the performance art of the 1960s and 1970s and the re-emergence of sex as a major theme in the 1980s and 1990s. The infliction of pain in the 1970s by body artists such as Vito Acconci, Gina Pane, and Mike Parr, often put sexuality on the agenda in a poignant way. Likewise, the ritualisation of pain — sacrifice, penance — by artists such as Hermann Nitsch, Stuart Brisley, and Jill Orr had a kind of sacred sex-sacrifice sub-text.<sup>51</sup>

Although acknowledging similar themes, it must be stressed that sexuality in earlier works by body artists, was often interpreted from a masculine point of view. Lea Vergine acknowledged this when she described such works as misogynous.<sup>52</sup>

Until the 1980s and 1990s female representations tended to fall into two categories: either the ritualised celebration of female nature (earth-goddess or reproductive mother-nurturer or both) or the more psychological-political analysis of sexuality in a patriarchal world presented by feminists such as Mary Kelly in Britain, Suzanne Lacy in the USA, and Lyndal Jones in Australia.

The ‘bad girls’ of performance, such as Karen Finley, rebelled against the serious theoretical feminism of artists like Mary Kelly and appeared to have more in common with the sexual liberation of an earlier decade than the cool, structuralist analysis of the late 1970s and 1980s. However, a close analysis suggests that later works re-read sexual liberation through a screen of theory. Indeed, one could suggest that the licence for *women* to perform such acts in the artworld depended in some way on the theoretical discourse which surrounded such works and made them ‘serious art’ rather than trash culture.

Karen Finley’s 1986 performance *Constant State of Desire* was performed in clubs and art venues in New York. It is an example of pornographic language being used by an artist to address the position of woman in a patriarchal world. Finley appeared before her audience in her underwear; she filled a large plastic bag with raw eggs and smashed it across the floor. The egg mixture was then lathered onto the body with soft toys. Finley then threw glitter on her prepared sticky skin, rapped tinsel around her neck and proceeded to present a

monologue to the audience. The speech was angry and used abusive and pornographic metaphors to get the message across. There have been several versions of the same performance, and it is clear that Finley did get herself into a frantic state during the presentations. Most of the performances were concerned with the sexual abuse of women. Incest was presented in graphic dialogue as the following excerpt demonstrates:

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***So my daddy plays behind the icebox door. Then he opens up the vegetable bin and takes out the carrots, the celery, the zucchini, and cucumbers. Then he starts working on my little hole. Starts working my little hole. “Showing me what it’s like to be a mama,” he says. “Showing me what it’s like to be a woman. To be loved. That’s a daddy’s job”, he tells me.***<sup>53</sup>

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In *The Constant State of Desire* Finley shifted between genders and power positions. Sometimes the narrative projected the voice of a woman, at others the speech of a man: ‘I cum real quick. Cuz I’m a quick working man’; then again she presented the position of the child: ‘Next thing I know I’m in bed crying. I got my dollies and animals with me. And I’ve got bandaids between their legs. They couldn’t protect me but I’ll protect them.’ Finley never spoke exclusively about herself but orchestrated a collection of stories and fantasies where she was free to oscillate between positions of self and other; there was no fixed position of identity.<sup>54</sup>

Performance works which attempt to address woman's desire, to answer the interminable question posed by the fathers: 'What does woman want?', get caught up in a nexus of desire, fantasy and perversion.<sup>55</sup> The psychoanalyst Parveen Adams re-reads Freud's 1919 analysis of perversion to account for masculine and feminine sexual identity and hetero and homosexual object choice.<sup>56</sup> Using Freud's example Adams argues that 'sex, sexuality, and gender form a knot from which sexuality cannot be easily extricated',<sup>57</sup> and, that within the sexual fantasy the subject has access to multiple identifications.

The boundary between art, pornography and sexual transgression has been on the performance art agenda for some time. As outlined in Chapter 3, Genesis P-Orridge and Peter Christopherson framed pornography and criminal violence in terms of performance art, in their 1976 article titled 'Annihilating Reality'.<sup>58</sup> The authors made continual reference to Lea Vergine's book *Il corpo come linguaggio*, quoting statements by Urs Luthi, Hermann Nitsch, Arnulf Rainer, Vito Acconci and Rudolf Schwarzkogler in juxtaposition to comments by Charles Manson and other infamous mass murderers and sex offenders. Photographs of Schwarzkogler's sensational simulation of castration;<sup>59</sup> Gina Pane's *Psychic Action*, which involved the artist inflicting wounds on her body with a razor blade, and the trans-sexual self portraits of Urs Luthi were published together with photographs of sex offenders, rubber fetishists and other porno stars.

Sexual desire is conventionally framed in the realm of the irrational. As Georges Bataille has argued the opposition control-beyond control only arises once

control has been imposed.<sup>60</sup> The 'beyond control' is necessarily defined by what it is not: socially organised sexuality;<sup>61</sup> once this difference becomes categorised and its cult value is institutionalised it gains status as a subculture and loses its transgressive role.<sup>62</sup> Elizabeth Cowie explains the situation lucidly when she writes:

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*Desire . . . is most truly itself when it is most "other" to social norms, when it transgresses the limits and exceeds the proper . . . it is characterised not only by the now more conventionally acceptable transgression of barriers of race or class, but by the transgression of the barriers of disgust — in which the dirty and execrable in our bodily functions becomes a focus of sexual desire.*<sup>63</sup>

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In some ways this explains the power of performance works which upset the aseptic realm of the art gallery with abject confrontation. However, it should be noted that the avant-garde has always been a haven for transgression: the Oedipal revolt of the sons against the fathers is a predictable part of its structure. Female artists are thus faced with the inscription of transgression as it has already been written. Karen Finley's performances which employed a language of disgust, together with the eruption of bodily function,<sup>64</sup> incorporated a political critique of abuse. Although the works were often autobiographical like much of the body art of the 1970s, Finley addressed the abuse of woman and took an angry stance against victimisation. This makes her work different from the body art produced by artists such as Gina Pane; however, Finley's work is still cathartic in the character of much body art.



*Which Side Do You Dress?*, a series of performance works by Melbourne based artist Linda Sproul (Linden Gallery, October 1992), considered the surface of the body and its construction as a social sign. Sproul focused on the stereotypical bodily gestures of men and women, mixing and matching movements with fragments of popular culture. Quotations from film, television and advertising punctuated the performance. Advertising images from the 1950s showing domestic appliances with the brand name 'Linda' were used to introduce the events. The advertisements read 'Linda's Hot' (an electric blanket); 'Linda Toasts' (an electric toaster) and 'Linda Boils' (an electric jug).

The performances were usually presented in two parts; the first sequence depicted the artist's male persona in a transparent business suite with her female body visible beneath. The second segment showed the stereotype of the female body as fantasised by men. In the first part of the performance Sproul imitated the body language of men, expressing the bodily gestures of the players and umpires during games of football and cricket. Films of the games were projected behind the artist as she performed the male rituals of touching and signing on the field. In the second part of the performance Sproul was dressed in the attire of the nightclub *artiste* complete with g-string, stilettos, choker, chains and ostrich feathers. She walked slowly into the performance space carrying a small lantern and approached members of the audience in a seductive way, touching their bodies and rubbing up against them. She wore the signs of sado-masochism on her body (chains and nipple clamps) and her feet were tied together with a plait of hair, indicating that her body was a fetish for the viewer.

Linda Sproul, *Which Side Do You Dress (Part One – Victor)*, Linden Gallery, St Kilda, part of *Experimenta*, 1992.

Photograph from the artist's collection.

She performed the body movements of the stripper suspended from a rope and then she returned to the personal space of the audience and handed out small funeral cards with an inscription which read: 'words cannot express' and 'ever remembered' suggesting perhaps the death of stereotypes.

Despite the erotic 'signing' in *Which Side Do You Dress?* the performance stayed quite clearly within a contemporary socio-political discourse which attempted to address the erotic and pornographic. There was no nostalgia for the abject body in Sproul's 1992 performance. The explosions of 'filth' associated with earlier performance and the desire for a cathartic experience, evident in Finley's work, were absent. Sproul spoke around and about these issues, creating a semiotic analysis which retained some distance from the corporeal body. However, in later works as such *Listen*, 1993-4, Sproul would exploit abjection and inflict pain on her own body for political affect.

In 1991 Barbara Campbell used a pornographic text *La Godmiche Royale* (The Royal Dildo) as the basis for a performance soundtrack. In part it read:

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*May they [the lovers] come immediately, my twat well-washed, my shirt and my skirts lifted high, and the cum running out of my cunt in buckets full, will be believed by morals to be a new deluge.*<sup>65</sup>

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*The Diamond Necklace Affair*<sup>66</sup> was inspired by the life of Marie-Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI, and 'focussed on changing attitudes towards the Queen's sexuality from "child bride" to "Austrian whore"'.<sup>67</sup> The title of the performance was taken from a scandalous episode in which members of the court



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Linda Sproul,  
*Which Side Do You Dress (Part Two – Victoria)*,  
Linden Gallery,  
St Kilda, October  
1992.

Photograph  
from the artist's  
collection.





Barbara Campbell,  
*The Diamond  
Necklace Affair*,  
Artspace at Pier  
4/5, Sydney, 1991.

Photograph  
from the artist's  
collection.



used an expensive piece of jewellery, a gift from a lover, to win higher status for themselves. It became a commodity with which they could bargain, a form of blackmail. Shortly after the infamous affair many pornographic libels were published against the Queen.

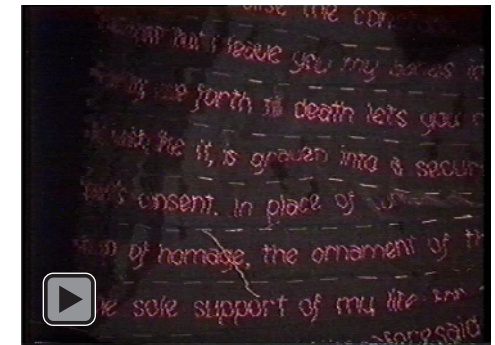
Campbell used a computer generated image of the jewelled necklace which was filmed and projected on a screen and she skipped continuously for ten minutes as the pornographic sound-track in the original French seduced the audience. Campbell was interested in the way in which particular movement traces could be understood as contributing to the mythologising of certain female figures.<sup>68</sup> In this performance skipping was used as a metaphor for the Queen's lightness of step which had become a legend. The artist notes that this myth was so powerful that: 'As legend has it, she sprang lightly from the cart that carried her to the guillotine.'<sup>69</sup>

Campbell is interested in aspects of translation and the interpretation of history. She argues that it is impossible to comprehend history as truth and says she used the pornographic text in French so that it would be indecipherable for most Australians in the audience.<sup>70</sup> It was a way of thwarting the audience's desire to understand. Although the text was extremely libellous, the listener was captivated by the French language which provided the rhythm during the skipping performance.

*Cries from the Tower* (The Tower, Queen's College, University of Melbourne as part of *Experimenta*, 1992)<sup>71</sup> looked at the mythology associated with Mary Queen of Scots. A video projection of the artist's body, dressed in an elaborate period costume, was relayed live from the tower upstairs into the room below. A super-8 film was projected onto a small circular screen above the video, the sort of frame used for *petit-point* needlework. The film flashed on and off randomly and showed a close-up of the artist's hand as she carefully sewed along her heart line, head line and line of fate as designated by palm readers. Initially the video showed the silhouette of the artist's body complete with neck ruffle and full skirt, however, the camera moved quite quickly into a close-up image of the dress. On the skirt the artist had painstakingly embroidered a controversial letter supposedly penned by Mary. The letter (casket letter no. 8 or 3, depending on the historical source) was presented as part of the evidence to implicate Mary in the murder of her second husband in collusion with her third husband.<sup>72</sup> Although it was a trumped-up charge, it meant that Mary Queen of Scots spent the next nineteen years of her life locked up in a tower.

The letter in its original French, in its old Gallic translation (used in the trial), and in a modern English translation was sewn around and around the large skirt. The video projection of the artist's actions showed her gradually undoing the skirt by pulling out the tacking which held it together. The image on the screen showed the viewer close-ups of the letters and phrases on the skirt. The fabric thus unravelled gradually fell into the space below. Throughout the performance the artist's physical body was absent, it was kept out of reach, in the tower, as a way of pointing to the fetishisation of that which is kept secret.<sup>73</sup> The action, the undoing of the skirt and the occasional glimpse of flesh, was also seductive for the audience.

The masochistic act of sewing into her own skin presented the audience with something that was difficult to watch and it set up a contrast between the pleasure of looking, associated with the dress fabric, and an image of pain. Campbell says that she was aware that she was dealing with a figure with whom the audience would feel sympathy and that she wanted to turn this around by presenting another image, one difficult to watch.<sup>74</sup> However, such a juxtaposition also points to the self obsession of the masochistic act: the female myth (Mary Queen of Scots) is framed within the context of masochism. Campbell presents a deconstruction of the myth of the feminine hero for her audience. This is not the simple celebration of the myth, rather it is an analysis which tries to tease apart the complexities associated with the historical figure. The Queen is both heroic and self-obsessed.



Barbara Campbell, *Cries from the Tower*, The Tower, Queen's College, University of Melbourne as part of *Experimenta*, 1992. Photographer Ponch Hawkes.

**I**n the 1980s and 1990s many artists abandoned the use of the body as an authenticating site of experience and started to concentrate on the social construction of the body and sexuality. There was certainly evidence of a renewed interest in the corporeal body, however, this tended to be positioned against a background of theory which stressed the social construction of the subject.

In Karen Finley's performances there was evidence of a return to a cathartic practice characteristic of earlier body art and critics read these works in relation to transgression and the scatological body. In some respects it appeared as if performance art in the 1990s returned to the issues of the 1970s where the abject body encountered the museum. Although this is apparent, artists were also performing in clubs outside the art world and so their message reached another public. In these venues audiences are not shocked by the content of the work, they saw the performances as critical assaults on society.<sup>75</sup> The new body performance used many of the strategies associated with body art and the historical link should not be forgotten, however the self-obsessive acts of earlier works were not encountered in the same degree.

Linda Sproul wore the cultural signs of sado-masochism, and in readings (of scripts yet to be designed as performance) the artist referred directly to her own experiences of sexual abuse as a child and made links between this and sado-masochism in her adult life. Sproul talked about female masochism as a result of female experiences, however, the infliction of pain was not the primary message in her early works. The performances could not be read as the violent reaction of Oedipal revolt familiar to an

earlier avant-garde; the artist spoke loudly about abuse and situated her works within contemporary political issues. In some ways both Sproul and Finley presented experiential works which addressed a personalised body, however, they also responded to the patriarchal construction of society.

In the 1990s some feminist theorists reconsidered sexuality and reassessed their position in relation to issues of pornography. This type of criticism reassessed transgression as a possible site of resistance and tried to manoeuvre theory out of a structuralist cul-de-sac where subjectivity was already written. The 'sex war' debates created lively discussion in feminist circles as sex workers and porn stars asserted their right to choose. Sex came back on the feminist agenda, both in art and in theory. The position of the speaking subject was at the centre of these debates.

In relation to performance art it is important to note the ways in which this discourse has been presented. The artists discussed in the final part of this chapter speak about sexual abuse (Finley, Sproul), erotic coding (Sproul, Campbell) and feminine mythology (Campbell). Finley was undoubtedly the angriest voice but she was joined by other American artists, such as the late writer Kathy Acker (1947-1997), who also used pornographic language, and, the performance artist Holly Hughes, who spoke openly about her homosexuality. These and other American artists had their grants revoked as a result of the content of their works. The rise of the New Right and Christian fundamentalist groups created a particularly conservative situation against which artists battled for many years.

In Australia censorship came slightly later. Andreas Serrano's *Piss Christ* (1987) was attacked with a hammer by two youths at the National Gallery of Victoria when it was exhibited in a retrospective in 1997. More recently there has been public outcry concerning the photographs of Bill Henson who sometimes includes naked adolescents in his work.<sup>76</sup> Polixeni Papapetrou's photographs have also come under public scrutiny despite the fact that she mostly photographs her own children.<sup>77</sup> In all these cases the images under discussion have been photographs. In the public imagination photographs resonate with reality, and, although they are performative representations, issues of power collide when adults take photographs of children.

In relation to performance art, especially body work which concerns itself with abjection and catharsis, it is important to stress the historical context: body art in the 1970s was not censored in this way. Artists returning to an analysis of the body in the 1980s and 1990s faced a different audience in the art world (one more aware of social theory), but in the USA and later Australia, they encountered a conservative backlash, hence the censorship. In many respects this was, initially, the result of a reactionary moral panic that swept the Western world as a result of the AIDS pandemic, which saw the sick homosexual body as front-page news, but this ran parallel with an increasing social concern in the 1990s about child abuse and paedophilia.<sup>78</sup> These and other issues pertaining to the return of the abject body will be discussed in the following chapter.



## ENDNOTES

- 1 The *Popism* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1982 combined the works of two groups of artists, those who had been working with Pop and Conceptual modes in the 1970s (Robert Rooney, Imants Tillers, Peter Tyndall) and a new group of artists associated with what the curator, Paul Taylor, called the 'new wave' (Maria Kozic, Jenny Watson, Richard Dunn, Howard Arkley, Juan Davila, *Tsch Tsch Tsch*). The exhibition also included works by David Chesworth, Ian Cox, Paul Fletcher, Jane Stevensen, The Society for Other Photography.
- 2 A. Martin, 'Before and After *Art & Text*', *Agenda Contemporary Art*, vol. 2, no. 1, August 1988, Art Papers - special supplement, p. 16.
- 3 D. Hebdige's book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Methuen, London, 1979, analysed the margins of culture from the Beat generation to the Punks.
- 4 Taped interview with Lyndal Jones, 7 August 1987, see also L. Jones, 'A Question of Representation', *Spectator Burns*, (Sydney), no. 2, 1988, pp 23-27.
- 5 See S. Cramer 'An Introduction to the Prediction Pieces' in S. Cramer and L. Jones (eds.), *Lyndal Jones: The Prediction Pieces 1981-1991*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, 1991, p. 9. Throughout my discussion on the *Prediction Pieces* I draw heavily on the published descriptions of the work presented by Jones and Cramer.
- 6 L. Jones, *Australia: Nine Contemporary Artists*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1984, p. 40.
- 7 L. Jones, 'Performance, Feminism and *Women at Work*', *LIP*, 1981-82, p. 35.
- 8 Taped interview with Lyndal Jones, August 1987.
- 9 See L. Jones and S. Spinner, 'At Home a Series of Five Solo Performances by Lyndal Jones (1977-80)', *LIP*, 1980, p. 101.
- 10 S. Cramer, 'An Introduction to the Prediction Pieces', p. 9 and taped interview with Lyndal Jones, August 1987.
- 11 S. Cramer, 'An Introduction to the Prediction Pieces', p. 8.
- 12 See P. Taylor 'The Strategy of Presence in two works at the Triennial', *Art Network*, nos 3-4, 1981, pp. 30-31.
- 13 S. Cramer, 'An Introduction to the Prediction Pieces', p. 8.
- 14 This statement accompanies all the *Prediction Pieces* 1981-1991, reproduced in S. Cramer, 'An Introduction to the Prediction Pieces', p. 8.
- 15 All the *Prediction Pieces* were presented more than once and each time the 'version' shown was slightly different. No. 1 was also shown at *Act 3 - Ten Australian Performance Artists*, Canberra School of Art, Canberra and a video version of the same work was exhibited at the George Paton Gallery later in the year (1981) [camera John Dunkley-Smith].
- 16 S. Cramer and L. Jones (eds.), *Lyndal Jones: The Prediction Pieces*, p. 13.
- 17 M. Parr from *150 Programmes and Investigations* (1971-72).
- 18 No. 2 was also shown at *Act 3*, and a video version was exhibited in *Works by Australian Video Artists* which toured Japan in 1983 [camera - John Dunkley-Smith].
- 19 S. Cramer and L. Jones (eds.), *Lyndal Jones: The Prediction Pieces*, p. 16.
- 20 S. Cramer and L. Jones (eds.), *Lyndal Jones: The Prediction Pieces*, p. 19.
- 21 J. Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication' in Hal Foster, (ed.), *Postmodern Culture*, Pluto Press, London and Sydney 1985, p 133.
- 22 Baudrillard came to Australia in 1984 to participate in the Futur\*Fall conference and his essays have been widely translated and published in this country. See E.A. Grosz, T. Threadgold *et al.* (eds.), *Futur\* Fall: Excursions into Post-Modernity*, Power Institute of Arts, University of Sydney, 1986.
- 23 J. Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication', p. 127.
- 24 S. Cramer and L. Jones (eds.), *Lyndal Jones*, p. 19.
- 25 Shown as part of the exhibition *Australia: Nine Contemporary Artists* and later at *Meaning and Excellence* (Anzart in Edinburgh, 1984). An installation version was included in *The Politics of Picturing* shown at the Tasmanian School of Art Gallery and the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane (1984). In 1985 the performance was repeated for the University Art Gallery, University of Melbourne.
- 26 S. Cramer and L. Jones, (eds.), *Lyndal Jones*, p. 19.
- 27 Also shown at the Athenaeum Theatre, Melbourne in the same year.
- 28 The actors were: Kylie Belling, David Garlick, Evdokia Katahanas, Angela Seward, Vince Vaccari and Lyndal Jones.
- 29 Performers: Lyndal Jones, David Latham, Lindy Lee, Richard Murphet, Judith Stratford. *Danceworks*: Nanette Hassall with Mathew Roland Bergan, Jon Burt, Sean Curham, Delia Hall, Carolyn Hammer, Felicity Macdonald, Trevor Patrick, Linda Sastradipradja. Music: Richard Vella, costumes: Amanda Johnson.



- 30 Published in the *Situationist International* no. 6, August 1961.
- 31 S. Cramer and L. Jones, (eds.), *Lyndal Jones*, p. 49.
- 32 Reviewing this work in 1989, three weeks after the performance and one week after the Tiananmen Square massacre I described the work as overly optimistic, a romantic re-enactment of revolution. See A. Marsh, 'Blinding Optimism', *Agenda Contemporary Art*, no. 5, June 1989, pp 24-25; and Lyndal Jones's reply L. Jones, Letter, *Agenda*, nos. 7-8, October 1989, p. 33.
- 33 In Australia the magazine *Art & Text* was the first journal to publish a substantial amount of material submitted by artists. Imants Tillers, Juan Davila, Julia Brown-Rrap, and members of the 'new music' scene associated with the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre (Phillip Brophy, David Chesworth in particular) all wrote for *Art & Text* at various stages of their careers.
- 34 A. Kaprow, 'Non-Theatrical Performance', *Artforum*, May 1976, pp. 45-51.
- 35 Taped interview with Jude Walton, May 1992.
- 36 The performance was advertised as 'a reading rewriting of *L'Amante Anglaise* by Marguerite Duras.'
- 37 Taped interview with Jude Walton May 1992.
- 38 Taped interview with Jude Walton May 1992.
- 39 Taped interview with Jude Walton May 1992.
- 40 P. Brophy, 'Asphyxiation: What is this Thing called "Disco"?', *Art & Text* no. 3, Spring, 1981, pp. 59-66.
- 41 R. Rooney, *The Age*, 16 July, 1980.
- 42 Gilbert and George visited Australia in 1973 and performed at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria. They were a 'camp act' and played on the ridiculous whilst under-pinning their works with a political message. See C. Hector 'They Keep Stiff for Hours', *Nation Review*, August 31 - September 6, 1973, p. 1457 and D. Brook, 'Blur between Art and Life', in the same issue, p. 1456.
- 43 Notes supplied by the artists.
- 44 Performance notes supplied by Michele Luke, August 1988.
- 45 Taped interview with Michele Luke, August 1988.
- 46 Performance notes supplied by Michele Luke.
- 47 Taped interview with Mark Rogers, 1988.
- 48 E. Fuchs, 'Staging the Obscene Body', *The Drama Review*, vol. 33, No. 1, Spring, 1989, p. 33.
- 49 E. Fuchs, 'Staging the Obscene Body', p. 33.
- 50 K. Finley, 'A Constant State of Becoming', an interview with Richard Schechner, *The Drama Review*, vol. 32, Spring 1988, p. 154.
- 51 For further analysis see K. Tsiakma, 'Hermann Nitsch: A Modern Ritual', *Studio International*, July/August, 1976, pp. 13-15; C. Tisdall, 'Stuart Brisley and Marc Chaimowicz', *op. cit.*, pp. 16-18. Works by these artists have been considered in chapters two and three of this book.
- 52 See L. Vergine, *Il corpo come linguaggio (la 'Body-art' e storie simili)*, Gianpaolo Prearo Editore, Milan, 1974, p. 25.
- 53 K. Finley, 'The Constant State of Desire', *The Drama Review*, vol. 32, 1988, p. 148.
- 54 For an analysis of the shifting positions in sexual fantasy see J. Laplanche and J-B Pontalis, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 49, 1968, pp. 1-18.
- 55 Indeed some feminists have argued that Freud's theory of sexuality is a theory of perversion, see L. Williams, 'Pornographies on/scene or Different Strokes for Different Folks' in L. Segal and M. McIntosh (eds.), *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* (London: Virago, 1992), p. 237.
- 56 S. Freud, 'A Child is Being Beaten: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversion' (1919), *Standard Edition*, vol. XVII, pp. 179-204. See L. Williams discussion of Adams' paper, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-250 and Adams, P., 'Of Female Bondage', in T. Brennan (ed.), *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Routledge, London and New York, 1989, pp. 247-265. For an extended psychoanalytic interpretation of performance and pornography by women artists see my article 'Wicked Women in Performance', *Agenda: Contemporary Art*, special issue (no. 28, Summer 1992/93), pp. 45-52.
- 57 P. Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 247.
- 58 P-Orridge, G. and Christopherson, P., 'Annihilating Reality', *Studio International*, July/August, 1976, pp. 44-48.
- 59 The performance was reported as a 'real' event resulting in the death of the artist in the international press. For an Australian response see D. Brook, 'Reaching the Fatal Zenith of Body Art', *Nation Review*, December 29, 1972 - January 4, 1973, p. 345 and 'Dividing the Single Skin of Color into Two', *Nation Review*, June 8-14 1973, p. 1056.

- 60 G. Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. M. Dalwood, Marion Boyars, London and New York, 1987, p. 48 (first published in French, 1975).
- 61 E. Cowie, 'Pornography and Fantasy: Psychoanalytic Perspectives' in L. Segal and M. McIntosh (eds.), *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, Virago, London 1992, p. 134.
- 62 The neutralisation of difference in relation to style has been analysed by Dick Hebdige in his book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.
- 63 D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, p. 134.
- 64 Fuch's documents events by the artist where she has periodically emptied her 'diarrhetic guts into a bucket on stage.' E. Fuch, 'Staging the Obscene Body', p.48.
- 65 In the original French: 'Qu'ils paraissent soudain, ma motte bien lavée, ma chemise et mes jupes hautement retroussés, et le foutre coulant de mon con à plein seau, sera cru des mortels un déluge nouveau.'
- 66 Artspace at Pier 4/5, Sydney; The Greater Western, Melbourne; Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. Sound composition - Jamie Fielding; sound engineering - Shane Fahey; voice - Selene Alcock; costume - Annemaree Dalziel; film assistance - Gary Warner, Virginia Hillyard and Nick Meyers; translations - Christopher Allen.
- 67 Programme notes provided by Barbara Campbell.
- 68 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell, November 1992.
- 69 Programme notes provided by Barbara Campbell.
- 70 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell.
- 71 Also shown at the ABC Ultimo Centre for the Third International Symposium on Electronic Arts.
- 72 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell.
- 73 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell.
- 74 Taped interview with Barbara Campbell.
- 75 Karen Finley's performance *Constant State of Desire* is included on the video *Mondo New York*, available at many video stores. In this version of the performance the artist is performing in a club. On other occasions she has performed in sex clubs where men have shouted abuse at her.
- 76 For an overview see D. Marr, *The Henson Case*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2008.
- 77 The controversy concerning Papapetrou arose as a result of a special issue of *Art Monthly* (Australia), no. 211, July 2008, which addressed censorship issues in the arts and ran Papapetrou's photograph *Olympia as Lewis Carroll's Beatrice Hatch before White Cliffs* (2003) on its front cover.
- 78 For an extended discussion see A. Marsh, *The Dark Room: Photography and the Theatre of Desire*, Macmillan, South Yarra, 2003, especially pp. 211-224.