

# IN BETWEEN STATES: bodies\_disciplines\_spaces

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## ABSTRACTS

### IN BETWEEN STATES OF SUBJECTS/BODIES

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**David Cross:**

#### **Performance and Relationality**

For at least the last decade performance has had to negotiate the impact and legacy of relational aesthetics with its emphasis on conviviality and friendship culture. Nicolas Bourriaud's influential study of relational activities eschews the idea of critical transformation in favour of dialogue rendering inter-personal exchange an activity of consensus rather than antagonism. While Bourriaud does not directly discuss performance/live art in *Relational Aesthetics*, the myriad strands of performance art are at the same time everywhere in this treatise. Woven into the fabric of this model are a plethora of micro-performativities whereby artist and audience interact, engage, and work together to shape the meanings of art works. Artist and audience talk, maybe listen to music together, and might even share a beer and a meal. Yet what are the critical implications for this gregarious narrowing of the gap between art and life and how does this lurch towards a less onerous convivial experience locate the critical value of performance art? This paper will examine Bourriaud's fundamental ambivalence towards performance art and argue for the centrality of performance as a key modality that drives and critically reflects upon contemporary understandings of the body.

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**Chris Braddock:**

#### **The Artist Will be Present**

His paper contextualises my recent performative installation 'The Artist Will Be Present' (St Paul St, AUT University, 24 July-22 August 2008). In expanding on notions of the 'live' encounter, the project introduces the operations of mould and cast and videoed partial views 'documenting' my performing body, both serving as a critique of the supplement's complex relationship to the moment of the 'live.' The question of how the body/s of the audience become participatory (and embodied) is at the forefront of these operations. Via writers such as Jon McKenzie, emphasis is placed on a performative subject as fragmented rather than unified as well as performative objects as unstable rather than fixed. A pivotal visual arts work in the discussion is Hayley Newman's *Stealth* (22 November 1996) which itself problematises the category of the 'live' by never offering up the 'presence' of her body. In this sense the body of the artist is caught in a state of flux between a 'live' moment of performance and its repetition or documentation as 'performative.' Important in articulating a kind of 'fluidity' between 'liveness' and its documentation are film theorists such as Vivian Sobchack and Laura Marks who proffer the screen as a site of bodily (somatic) sensuality in difference to the screen as normally associated with scopophilic recognition. In this way I want to produce body/s that are up-close and disorientating, enabling the body/s of the audience to be performatively embodied in the work as sensate and reciprocal.

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**Mark Harvey:**

#### **Taking Off Underwear While Putting It On - Performing Unraveling While Raveling: Questioning Us Questioning 'It'**

While performance art can be visualized as an interdisciplinary site of questioning conventional creative disciplines in terms of ontologies and cultural and political norms, what becomes of it when it endlessly questions itself? Does it remain as performance art, or can it performatively become something else? *Taking Off Underwear While Putting It On* aims to explore the conditions of possibility that can be found in performance art that continuously unbinds itself, that is unfixed through its activation of Jacques Derrida's perspective of *différance* (1982). In *Margins of Philosophy* (1982) Derrida proposes that *différance* consists of that which endlessly defers its own definition through other terms, in addition to being constituted of what it is not. It will be proposed that performance art may become something else when it defers itself through other performance modalities such as psychoanalysis, sculpture, choreography and domestic hobbies, while being constituted through what many artists such as Mike Parr (*Performance Symposium*, Christchurch, 2000) have claimed is 'not performance art', that for instance involves theatricality. Towards exploring the *différance* of performance art, recent practices of Brent Harris (*Public End*, 2007) and myself (*Propositions to You*, 2007) will be considered. Through what appears to be clinical case studies, with comical sculptural antics and choreography, both our processes endeavor to hysterically and continually question what we perform within the site of the other, our spectators. Both Harris and I place before our spectators what we fantasize our performances might and yet might not become due to our questioning.

## IN BETWEEN STATES OF DISCIPLINES

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### **John Downie: What is a Theatre?**

Theatres', both West and East, have architectural, social, and aesthetic histories, and their changing shapes and functions express the symbiotic relationship between human consciousness and the performative - wasn't it Augusto Boal who suggested that "theatre is the first human invention"? But the 'performative' has become a major twenty-first century paradigm, replacing discrete and hierarchical notions of 'discipline' with a more osmotic sense of seepage between spectacle and reception, act and affect. Insofar as social and cultural change can be predicted into the near future, at least two current elements can be anticipated as continuing to contribute significantly to it. Principles of sustainability will suggest a particular tuning to ecologies, energies, and engineering, at all levels of society. And performative orientations will continue to be beset by the entanglements of the corporeal and the virtual. If urban conurbations into the immediate future are to still have the will and authority to provide specialised environments to examine and celebrate the performative in a spirit of civic conviviality and congregation (urguably still on the agenda for both good human and humanist reasons), then what kind of 'materials' need to be introduced to encourage some sense of the 'comprehensive' in this regard? What kind of investigative map might begin to be drawn?

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### **Sam Trubridge: "Coming To Sleep"**

The movement between sleeping and waking is a transition we make daily between states of performance. Whilst it is asleep, the body does not perform. Yet upon waking it begins to assume guises, and begins to prepare itself to 'take the stage' in the complex social situations that are encountered in waking life. This dichotomy of wakefulness and sleep, performance and nonperformance, active and passive, seems clear at first. However, dreaming, as a form of internal performance, complicates this model. Similarly the waking mind is often rendered passive, pulled off-stage, and 'put to sleep' by similar mechanisms operating in the media, politics, and even theatre. This paper investigates the phenomena of the sleeping body in relation to structures of performance operating in social and political situations. The sleeping body is paralysed during REM sleep (dreaming) whilst certain parts of the brain are hyperactivated whilst other parts are suppressed. The discourse suggests that societal paradigms operate in similar ways to the internal mechanisms of the sleeping body: where biological events render the body physically inactive, passive, and therefore receptive to dreaming processes. To illustrate this discourse the presentation will use scientific data and imagery generated from the rehearsal and performance of Sleep/Wake: a 'live art' production that explored these concepts on stage in collaboration with Massey University's Sleep/Wake Research Centre in January 2008, Wellington, New Zealand.

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### **Sue Gallagher: Home Body.**

Sue Gallagher will discuss the scenographic strategies of repetition, delay, and disorientation in relation to three of her performative video and light installation works: WAKE, SUGAR, & SPACE INVADER. These works are concerned with an extended moment of interregnum, as is experienced in grief, particularly when a disbelief in death results in a dramatic limbo. A dead space where bodies are caught in frenzied motion and ultimately caught in a space of paralysis. This paper seeks to trace the confounded unfolding of disruption and disorientation in relation to these works, in order to arrive at some understanding of dead space, nothingness, paralysed thought and suspended animation.

## IN BETWEEN STATES OF GEOGRAPHIES/SPACES

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**Catherine Bagnall:**

### **Looking as an agent for feeling in the Wilderness Dressing Room.**

In the wilderness landscape of New Zealand I dress up. I hike and ramble through the National Parks, wearing a collection of old ball gowns, wedding dresses and animal suits (clothing normally associated with 'dressing up', but not hiking). I encounter other hikers on my tramps and surprise them appearing on some steep snow path in a beautiful dress. There is a performative element to my process but mostly I am dressing up for myself. I archive these hikes and wanderings using photography and video. This paper/performance sets out to investigate looking as an agent for feeling and draws on my experiences of using the wilderness as a dressing room to explore how a woman looks rather than how a woman is looked at. Jennifer Friedlander asks that the political question is "how should a woman look, in the sense of what it means to look as woman rather than at woman. How woman can look without the distance that is a foreclosure to pleasure. The 'dressing up' and looking at myself is a vital aspect of this project. It enables me to experience different ways of being through feeling and seeing and moments of enjoyment and visual pleasure that dressing up and looking can afford.

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**Emma Willis:**

### **Doing again what has already been done: restoration and authenticity in concentration camp tourism**

This paper is principally concerned with the reconstruction of concentration camps, largely as an affordance for tourists. This 'rebuilding' effort foregrounds tension between authenticity and representation, originality and mediation, and knowledge and ignorance. I intend to use Jacques Ranciere's article, "The Emancipated Spectator" to interrogate the role of spectatorship within these settings. By examining the status of the tourist as spectator I will articulate a dramaturgical framework which governs the visit, paying particular attention to relationships between tourists, guides and site as analogous to Ranciere's theatrical configuration. While Ranciere's argument offers an approach to the figure of the tourist which expands upon the concept of 'sight-seeing', this new reading is problematic. Led by the acts of appropriation which he calls for. The concept of appropriation in this circumstance reveals a key conflict between 'historical' authenticity and acts of reconstruction. This tension also reflects a broader problem of how to view or access acts carried out within a 'state of exception.' Therefore I will finally ask whether Ranciere's conception of a "new stage of equality" is possible within the exceptional setting of the camp. To illustrate the complications of 'rebuilding' I will discuss a video work by Polish artist, Artur Zmijewski, *80064*, which centres around the 'renovation' of an elderly Auschwitz survivor's tattooed prisoner number. The questions which the short film raises, about authenticity, suffering and identity, and the public's need for spectacles of reproduction, are a useful basis for expanding upon the tension between aestheticization and authenticity discussed in the paper.

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**Dorita Hannah:**

### **Black Box – Black Wi(n)dow: Architecture of the Void.**

The 'black-box' is the seemingly indestructible object which remains after an airplane crash, tracking its history towards the disaster. It is also the parenthesized warning appended to a pharmaceutical advertisement, explaining the dangers and side effects of medication. In performance it is the ubiquitous space for experimental theatre that appeared in the second half of the twentieth century. All three are linked to a notion of catastrophe, and the ultimate spatial limit of annihilation. Giorgio Agamben locates *interregnum* as a spatiotemporal site of mourning declared in response to a catastrophe. As a 'state of exception' it establishes a dramatic limbo in which rules are suspended or altered and power structures shift. This paper examines the persistent model of the Black Box theatre as a spatial interregnum - built as an architectural void that suspends notions of time and place - negating the object of architecture itself. It offers a symbolic location cut off from the concrete world, which has sought to construct emptiness, silence and lack. However an investigation of the physical and discursive absences inherent to the Black Box suggests that its apparent 'lack' veils a surplus of meaning. Such gaps and their associations with theatrical production reveal complicated links to the space of human reproduction and its attendant excesses which, in turn, leads to a distinctive link between the black-box and Plato's notion of 'chora'. This uncovering of material through the im-material, proposes a more embodied and performative approach to theatre space played out in the dance-architecture events of the Black Window: Black Window project; an ongoing collaboration between NZ-based designer Dorita Hannah and UK-based choreographer Carol Brown, whose work challenges the experimental studio and the disciplinary modernist auditorium with a more material and labyrinthine architecture of the void, which is simultaneously actual and virtual.