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ESSAY COVER SHEET

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**An exploration of the construction of a relationship between video
(videographer) and live performance (theatre-maker/performer)
and how the two art forms may inform each other.**

University of Cape Town

Abstract

It is my intention to use video in a theatre setting to make visible what is not, to provide alternate views of reality and live action, and to create a heightened awareness of the medium through its use in an unconventional setting and in ways different to those that we are familiar with. It is my hope that through careful negotiation with the theatre-maker/choreographer, its use with live action will have an enhancing effect, perhaps leading to a more visceral theatre.

The theory best serving to assist my attempts in terms of placing them into the academic continuum of other such endeavours and practitioners, is postmodern. Although the use of film and video in performance settings has become more general in the past three decades due to the accessibility of equipment, its use dates back to the beginning of film. This use has always been contentious, where it was often felt that the combining of a 'low' art, such as film was seen to be, with theatre, would have a diminishing effect on the latter. I would suggest that the growing popularity of the use of video in theatre is also the result of the collapsing of the boundaries between high and low art as espoused by postmodern theorists such as Fredric Jameson, and those writing specifically about film and television such as Lisa Cartwright and Mary Alemany-Galway, etc. The relationship between theory and practice is however bidirectional in terms of influence, where directions often blur. In other words, theory informs production while reporting on 'trends' in, and processes of production. This is much the same as the method that was employed in our production process in terms of how video and live action mutually informed and generated each other. I see similarities in the way The Builders Association works, where, for instance, Marianne Weems, a group member, writes that 'after initial periods of research, discussion and filming, (it was) sometimes hard to tell if the text leads the video or the video leads the text' (*Interview*, 2003).

It is precisely in the negotiation between live action and video, which is ongoing, till, and even after the actual performance, that the performance is born and reborn. This method of working is common to such groups as Forced Entertainment, The Wooster Group and Ex Machina. The performed product is the result of collaborations between writers, directors, videographers, editors, etc. Although all theatre is of course the

result of such collaboration, the influence is ‘multi-directional’ rather than there being a principal and unchangeable text that is adhered to, and in whose service, all parties work towards realizing and interpreting. Greg Giesekam writes that ‘the “constructability of imagery and image relations... (and) the presence of materials, or of cameras and editing facilities allows the creative team to process ongoing performance explorations, often encouraging the creation of work that is more oriented around discovering new relationships between images, texts, and performances through open-ended experiment’ (*Staging The Screen: The Use Of Film and Video in Theatre*, p. 14).

The showing of multiple points of view of the live action, where projected images make the unseen visible, where the interiority of live subjects and the subjectivity of performed actions is ‘shown’ through the use of video, the converging of multiple view points in the form of a video collage, the inclusion of performers as co-authors, the use of similar but disparate filmed images telling a different (hi)story, and citation from the classical film genres, art, etc, are all perfectly characteristic of postmodern cultural production.

Discussions of both postmodernism and television is pervaded by notions of society of the spectacle, the simulacrum, the disappearance of the referent of the sign, immersion in and seduction by images, and a waning of effect that arises from the proliferation of depthless pastiches of historical imagery, and so on.

- (*Ibid.*, p. 14).

Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord are two theorists whose writings lend themselves to an investigation of this nature. Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* quotes Kafka when he writes “we photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes” (p. 53).

My attempt is to rouse viewers/audiences through the use of filmed images in contexts and ways that they are not accustomed to. By releasing the image from the confines of the rectangular big or small screen, I hope to make the viewer see differently and exert agency in the meaning-making process. My attempt is to transform the viewer

'from a passive, monolithic voyeur, who is controlled by the looking structures embedded in a show, to a pluralistic, changing, interactive viewer' (Klaver, 'Spectatorial Theory in the Age of Media Culture', 1995, p. 311). I have implemented various strategies in my attempts at defamiliarisation of the mechanisms of screening and projection. These include three simultaneous video streams, projected by three mobile human video operators. This allows for 'roving' images that can be moved across the screen and strategically intersect, while different views and/or images can be beamed at the same time, creating not only a dialectic between live images and filmed ones, but also between multiple recorded images. I have also eliminated the 'classical' rectangular screen and opted to use the entire room as projection surface, as well as a creating a double intersecting screen which can be let down into the middle of the performance area. We have also chosen to use smaller screens such as wooden boxes and articles of clothing which naturally appear as props in our production. Filmed images have, to a certain extent, been released from the frame of the camera by choosing backgrounds that merge with the projection surface, making the images appear somewhat autonomous when moving. The Wooster Group and others have attempted defamiliarisation through the use of newsreel format in certain of their productions, while artists such as Tony Oursler have created installation pieces where he has projected 'dismembered' talking heads onto three dimensional conical objects which lie on the floor in a gallery space. Themes such as displacement and transformation are explored by Oursler and Robert Lepage. The latter-mentioned Canadian director/performer makes extensive use of video and technical 'tricks'.

Film plays both a role in locating action (scenographic and temporal), where sometimes markers are subtle, while at other times the goal is to make the performers appear to operate in the world of the film. Regardless, the combination is meant to be enhancing in terms of problematising what we take for granted as surface reality and images. Artists such as Robert Whitman, and theatre groups such as DV8 and Forced Entertainment have created perceptual challenges in their performances through discrepancies and simulations, while questioning notions of 'authenticity', the 'real', representation, and ones concerning historicity. Michel Foucault's discussion of heterotopias might be useful as it deals with a similar notion of independent, but interacting worlds. The theatre space with its screens, being both a physical structure and a liminal space, allows for constant reconfigurations and change, much like

Foucault's example of the airport.

The plurality of signifiers, as well as the use of light, music, etc, lead to atmospheric shifts, expand on the resonances of certain movements, and sometimes provide ironic visual commentary. LeCompte from The Wooster Group, although markedly reserved about wanting to elaborate on the use of video in the group's work, says simply that it is 'just something that is part of the contemporary cultural context in which she works, which, therefore, should be available as a tool for her work' (A. Quick, *The Wooster Group Workbook*, 2007. p.273).

While a lot is written about media saturated contemporary audiences, leading to a certain lethargy when it comes to active spectatorship, this does come with a certain advantage in terms of the vast imagery reference memory bank we possess, which means that as an image maker, one can use a kind of *short hand*, so to speak, when wishing to trigger certain responses. Many such images are universally understood.

Introduction

“Reality changes and, in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change.”

- Bertoldt Brecht

My final piece of practical work towards the Master of Fine Art degree takes the form of a theatre piece. It is a collaborative venture with the theatre-maker Werner Marx. The piece that we have co-created is called *Vessel*. It consists of live action and video projection. The reason for our co-production is the desire to explore the effects of combining live action with pre-recorded video footage. We are investigating the relationship between filmed material and live action in terms of how the former might be enhancing in a theatre environment – possibly making theatre more emotionally charged, through showing what might not be seen without the use of the medium. For instance, a close up of a character’s face might reveal interiority (subjectivity) more easily and immediately than a long and wordy monologue or dialogue. The use of video might also allude to the possible constructed nature of such societal constructs as gender, social roles, etc. The use of video in theatre may also serve to destabilise supposedly ‘objective’ character portrayals and reveal more clandestine motives or duality.

Marx and I adopted a particular approach in the creation of *Vessel*, which we believed would serve us in the construction of a relationship between video and live performance. We isolated certain ‘primary image ideas’ which we then attempted to portray and explore both filmically and through the use of live action as performed by dancers/actors. These ‘primary image ideas’ include the cello, a vessel (ship), a wedding dress, a horse and the future. Our method of production was to be collaborative from the outset, and on multiple levels. Thus, while Marx’s role was that of director, the dancers often co-directed, playing a more central role in the portrayal and creation of certain segments, for instance, that of the wedding dress. The attempt was to draw on the cast members’ personal archive (memory and experience) and negotiate action and in that way, create a text, rather than working from one. Similarly, the use of video in some instances was primary while in others ‘took a back seat’, so to speak. Video images were a generative force at certain times, rather than

existing as purely scenographic device. Seen as such, the recorded image sometimes acts as the text in certain scenes, from, and around which, live action was created.

The endeavour to deconstruct was taken further on a technical level as well. The attempt, in at least some parts of the production, was to free the image from 'the big screen' and to work with more dynamic 'smaller' screens, which might take the form of the human body - for instance, the wedding dress in that particular segment of the production. Costume had to take these practical considerations into account and white fabric was chosen for this reason. Props were constructed to serve also as screens. As such, the use of video informed the physical structure of the piece in terms of these prop/screen objects, the more 'classical' deployment of screens, the movement of actors, as they interact with these props, etc.

Naturally, of course, the live action demanded certain filmic strategies for its purposes, this being a 'two-way street'. The main point being that the privileging of live action, as it is the case with the majority of theatre productions, was not standard with this production. While live action might be primary in some instances, there were others where video occupied the same status, and then others where we believe a truly symbiotic relationship between the two, was achieved.

These interactions were carefully negotiated and crafted so that the effect of combining the two performance forms, was indeed meant to be symbiotic and enhancing, rather than the projected video simply overpowering the live action as it often can, where it lessens the effect of the acting/dance, or where excessive video use makes the production appear almost to be an apology for it not being a film. On the other hand, to simply use video scenographically – as an inexpensive prop, is to not exploit the full potential of the medium. It is Susan Sontag's (1966) view, that :

...what distinguishes theatre from film is the treatment of space.
Theatre being confined to logical, continuous space, while cinema may
access alogical, discontinuous space.

- (p. 180).

Indeed this is true also for the temporal aspect as well. Seen as such, there are a great

many potentials to explore in terms of the use of film in theatre. Perhaps it is only fitting that just as early film and its conventions, were directly informed by those from the theatre, the medium would feed back and impact on live performance. A more experimental use of film/video in the theatre and dance productions, might have a positive impact on spectatorship, which is most welcome at a time where theatre has lost cultural cachet and sorely needs to attract younger more media-savvy audience members.

My previous experience of theatre was that of an audience-member. There was a certain awareness of the physical structure of the stage that the piece was taking place on and of the players as actors, due to the obvious similarity to that of the film set. The situation was not dissimilar for Marx, who had no practical filmmaking experience. We did share a deep interest in the human body as object and vehicle for action and physical movement – this being the locus of our exploration in terms of our individual areas of research. Marx and I had collaborated on a previous shorter piece, *Once Blind Now Seen* in 2007. This was a piece that Marx had created as part of his degree programme, which he invited me to create a visual counterpart for. As such, it was less of a collaboration. However, as we began the process of adding filmed footage to the live action, it became apparent that there was an openness to each others media and production processes that could, through a more lengthy and thorough collaboration, possibly lead to something that surpassed either product if used in its own. Essentially, this could only be achieved if there was a combined production process, which not only fully included each other's working methods, but also 'fed off' each other, so to speak. Marx's method was truly collaborative with his actors, which he describes in that particular production as his desire for his cast 'to engage physically and mentally with his ideas and see what shape the work would take'. He goes on to say:

The central idea of the work was to reclaim and reaffirm the commonality, which we as human beings (as well as the performers of *Once Blind Now Seen*), share. For us it included investigating the self and one's personal history; the idea being that the deeper we dug into our own memories, the more universal it became. The audience was presented with an opportunity of choosing to connect with their own

memories through vicariously experiencing the performance of *Once Blind Now Seen*.

- ('The Revelation of the Personal Archive in Performance', p.25).

As a filmmaker I found this inclusive approach very appealing and it signaled to me that indeed a work relation between Marx and I could be negotiated (constructed) that would have the potential to explore and create a less mainstream film/live performance combined piece. It is precisely in the work relationship that we forged, and shared with our performers, that film and live action informed each other and led to our creative end product. A keen process-awareness was shared by all. In many regards the production of the live action and that of film shared many common traits – sections of the piece were worked on at different times and privileged over the others at that time. Film records and displays within a rectangular frame and in theatre the stage usually takes a similar shape – it is in this area that the action happens, both rely on scenic devices such as lighting, sound equipment, props, etc; and both have some sort of narrative structure which can only exist within some sort of temporal framework. These common traits were a good departure point for our process of production as these similarities created a certain familiarity with each other's media and work processes, while they also naturally highlighted the dissimilarities and restrictions of each other's mediums. Thus, theatre might also be able to access the 'alogical, discontinuous space' that Susan Sontag ascribes to film, through the latter's employment in the performance space. Film, on the other hand, might be released from its usual locus – the static and immobile screen, through its use in a space that changes structure frequently, as is the case in many live performance scenarios.

I have taken as my section headings the various parts from *Vessel* – the cello, the ship (vessel), the wedding dress, horse and the future(s). The endeavour is to elaborate on some of the processes of production and how these are translated into the creative products - film and live action. I will also attempt to situate this methodology within the historical continuum of previous such endeavours, looking at such practitioners as The Wooster Group, Robert Wilson, Pina Bausch, Forced Entertainment, DV8, etc. I felt that it was vital to be present at all rehearsals, as a collaboration was only possible if, as co-creators - Marx and I worked together with the actors, who in turn where

incorporated into the creation process, often being the triggers for both our ideas and the eventual decisions we made, in terms of the content of the production. The action of filming and the filmed material (product) were also important presences during this process, because we felt that filmed images could only act as a catalyst for action if their inclusion happened as frequently as possible.

The Wedding Dress

The wedding dress simply appeared as an image, or pure form. The attempt was then to substantiate this form and bring it to life. The animation process was initiated by Marx, who requested that our six actors work on creating individual pieces, exploring what the notion of ‘wedding dress/wedding’ meant for them. A text was put to paper by each performer and they were asked to create accompanying movement and voice pieces, and then perform them. Effectively what this meant was that each performer was a collaborator who co-wrote the particular segment. After these pieces were better-formed, Marx played the role of editor, taking what he believed would work for the production and eliminating what did not serve the larger narrative. Where pieces were felt to be more powerful, it was decided by him that they would be performed by not only the performer, who created that particular piece, but also by the rest of the group. This would make for more coherent moments for the audience, who did not have to watch all six of the performers simultaneously playing their individual pieces, but instead could enjoy a single narrative.

Ruth Zaporah, when describing her own working process says ‘I begin with a spontaneous action and then step by step build a scenario [...and] within it, I introduce characters, events and situations, that reflect the mingling of imagination, memories and sensory input’ (Albright, 2003, p. 21).

Jacques Derrida believed that ‘each work of literature *differs*, obviously, from other works; equally, however, it *defers* to them [i.e. relies on them for its distinctive meaning] (Derrida, 1967). This idea would have to call into question the traditional notions of what constitutes uniqueness in the arts and otherwise, and also causes a shift in the meaning-making process - a model that is more viewer dependent and temporally relevant would be essential (the moment of reception by the particular

viewer/audience). This of course also implies a certain demotion of the author, or at least a more democratic and inclusive notion of authorship. The rehearsal process was particularly interesting in this regard, where roles such as actor/performer and director/choreographer were incredibly fluid. Marx was being directed as a dancer by whoever's story was being taught to the group in this segment of *Vessel*. A filmic analogy works particularly well here – the director operates as a projector and the other players are the screens onto which their action/story is projected. These actors, in turn use their bodies as projectors, to whom the audience then ultimately reacts.

As this wedding dress segment is essentially a composite of various pieces, created by all involved in the rehearsal process, I felt that a series of stories needed to be told on a visual level. The rehearsal process and the project/screen analogy that it brought to mind, prompted certain choices. Marx and I decided that a series of smaller screens were in order for this purpose. Although, there are various larger screens present throughout the action, we wanted to do something a little more intimate, and that was perhaps also more dynamic and three-dimensional. This decision had great ramifications in terms of costume choice. It was decided to dress the performers in large semitransparent, hooped net under-skirts, unto which these stories would be projected. Similarly, off-white as the costume colour was the logical practical choice.

The use of the wedding dress as a screen was key in terms of our coming to see the wedding dress as animator. The notion of wedding dress breathed life in our actors' stories, and seen as such, was a great animator rather than simply being an inanimate object. The movements between real action and virtual action allude to the conceptual and socially constructed nature of such notions as marriage and such objects as the matrimonial gown. The virtual world might show interiority, and although not happening in real time, might be a more honest (and thus more real in a sense) reflection of fears, anxieties and emotions. While the brides wear the dress, it also wears the human under it, given that it comes so heavily laden with social and historical weight. This is the weight of centuries of subjugation for countless brides, of hegemonic gender constructions and of pairings that served patriarchal society, and is an arch symbol in terms of life transition (rite of passage), telling of great shifts in personal power relations. Just as one asks about 'Who wears the pants?', in a relationship, by extension, one could also ask "Who wore/wears the wedding dress?".

Our initial thought was to have three permanent static screens, which would serve the production scenographically - being the surface that changing backdrops could be projected onto and interacted with. However, they were also to interface and dialogue with both the production and the players, producing certain physical effects. For instance, the scale of the screens seemed to suggest, during the wedding dress scene; when the bride nears his/her wedding ceremony and some sort of transformation is in order; that a scale change could aesthetically be conceivable through some sort of elevation. The mode of union (marriage) was then decided to come into effect through one of the partners hoisting up the other – and two became one, so to speak (union). The result was both dazzling and otherworldly, and this in turn led to a series of changes and a bolder and more radical use of projection, with all of the implications for the physical space.

While lighting the brides for filming, who were on their grooms' shoulders, we were captivated by the shadows that were cast on the surrounding walls. We decided to film these and use them as a possible counterpart to the parallel live action, albeit obviously not in sync, as the shadows would be pre-recorded. This would suggest *doppelgangers*, who had lives of their own. We tried out this pairing during a rehearsal, but found it visually bland as video was merely mimicking light in terms of shadows being cast on walls. We then decided to have multiple shadows on different walls, which meant a radical reconfiguration of space, where the live action happened in the centre of the theatre space with seats on the periphery of the theatre surrounding the action and the entire wall space being used for mobile projection.

In terms of the decision-making process, it must be said that ultimately it is not an intellectual process, but rather one borne out of aesthetic considerations. An initial seminal idea, in this segment led to series of visual and movement sequences, which 'felt and looked right'. The process was not so much about agreeing or disagreeing, but rather one that was formulated until both parties felt that the segment was complete. Marx and I then kept on working with, and coming back to the segment. In the greater context of the piece, a change was initiated with sometimes the same ramifications - further changes for other segments. This simply because the piece seemed to demand it. This process of building and breaking down and rebuilding is

much the same as the film editing process, where there is an amount of pre-captured material, which is configured and reconfigured until ‘the flow is best’. I believe that my knowledge of film aided the process, and in certain regards shaped the live action. For instance, the placement of actors and props on the stage had to be mindful of the projection areas. In other instances, the projection areas of the room had to accommodate the performers who needed lighting, which sometimes made projection tricky, and necessitated a change in strategy. Regardless, there was an ongoing dialectic between the two processes, which eventually became so inclusive of one another that they seemed to merge into one.

Vessel

In true postmodern fashion, the idea for the vessel was inspired by Robert Wilson’s *Knee Plays* (1988), which was created as short performance pieces that were to be staged in between the larger theatre pieces that were to have made up his *Civil Wars*. While this project never came to fruition, David Byrne, who collaborated on some of the pieces, did subsequently release a CD with an accompanying DVD showing parts of the piece. Ironically, due to the fact that the *Civil Wars* was never fully conceived or performed, we were actually viewing a ‘non-piece’, in a sense. What was most fascinating about the project was that it was unfinished and thus ‘open-ended’. The images on the DVD were both ravishing and provocative and the initial inspiration, or at least point of departure, for the construction of the actual vessel and “The Future” segment, which I shall later discuss more fully.

Vessel is both about processes of memory, and those of production. The latter process is the area of focus for this paper, while Marx’s exploration centres on the notion of the cellular body as the receptacle of ultimate knowledge (memory). We both thought that a ship, inspired by the one to be seen on the *Knee Plays* DVD was a potent and apt main prop. The ship was to be instrumental in terms of being a physical manifestation of the actual vessel, which gives the performance its name. Marx was very keen that performers be able to assemble and deconstruct this vessel. It was decided that the design would be modular for that purpose – making it both moveable and allowing for performer interaction with it, in its states of full and partial assembly.

The piece had not been fully scripted, choreographed or 'thought out' prior to the ship's building, and as such the actual structure became a strong presence during the rehearsal and inception process. This object had an inherent set of qualities (physical attributes), which acted as both a restraint (obstruction) and a 'guiding light' at different junctures of the process. The material that we chose to build the ship with was plywood due to it being relatively lightweight, allowing for easy lifting by the performers, while being strong enough to carry the weight of the performers. Wood is of course also a popular ship building material, and thus 'felt right' for the particular object. The forty-eight cubes that make up the ship are hollow allowing for almost complete transparency, in terms of projection through the vessel, and allowing the live action, when happening behind them, to be clearly seen by the audience. The assembly of the vessel did however require a certain amount of co-operation between the players, as it was nonetheless a lengthy and somewhat strenuous process. It seemed natural to break this up into sections.

The initial part of the shipbuilding process was inspired by an image we came across. The image is that of many dancers climbing onto an elongated, and slightly raised narrow structure, while being helped by those already on board. This image was appealing because of its almost archetypal nature – it was reminiscent of countless images seen on the news and film of immigrants, refugees, shipwrecked victims, etc desperately trying to get onto ships, while being helped by familiars or strangers. What is strangely disturbing about the image is that it is sometimes hard to read if those trying to board, are being helped onto the 'vessel' or being pushed/pulled off it. This segment, we felt would be aided by film, because the image we wanted to create was both chaotic and required a larger cast than we had at our disposal. We thus pre-filmed the sequence and decided to project this as an accompaniment to the live action, hoping that the result would have a magnifying effect, creating a 'special effect', albeit of a simple nature, where the dancers were encouraged to create more air-born sequences to compliment and exaggerate the movement being played during the performance. Naturally, for the recorded images to enhance and interact with the live action, it was required that the live action happens in front of a screen(s).

Our questioning the physical structure of the play was ongoing, as we felt that we were adhering to a far too conventional performance layout strategy than we had

initially intended, or that suited the intentions of the production and our fields of exploration. Effectively we were turning our venue, which is not a theatre space into a very classical one, with rows of chairs for the audience at one end, and screens at the other, in front of which the action was staged. In part the screens and our desire to merge live and virtual actors and action, led to this placement. This coupled with the fact that we felt that projectors needed to be in a fixed position. A rethink of all of our preconceived ideas, and more interesting solutions was in order.

We decided to abandon conventional screens altogether and treat the entire room as a series of projection areas which made up a single and fluid screen. This required that all the discontinuous areas of wall in the room; that is, those with windows, doors, etc; be lined with white fabric. This meant that projection could be focused on any of the wall surfaces. This led to our rethinking the fixed mounting of projectors, and we decided that rather than have projectors mounted at all, we might have completely mobile ones that were operated manually by a group of dedicated technicians who would function as additional players. They would operate on the periphery and attempt to be discreet so as not to detract from the action. Moving images could thus be beamed onto walls, ceiling and floor, while being moved around and across the room, and the images from one projector could interface with one(s) cast by other projector(s). While these projector operators would be on the periphery of the action, they would be able to swing the projectors as required, as we wanted them to clutter the space as little as possible and, of course, cables were a practical consideration. We decided to dress our projector operators in black, so as to make them as invisible as possible. We also decided that, as the projection and the live action was happening 'in the round', so too should be the audience seating configurations. We opted to have four clusters of chairs in each of the four corners of the venue, allowing for the greatest amount of viewing surfaces/angles for the audience members from any given seating area, while the action took place in the centre of the venue.

In practical terms this meant that, for instance, the scene previously described - that of the initial embarking of the vessel - would take place in the centre of the venue with the filmed material concurrently being beamed onto the various wall surfaces, while interacting with and amplifying the live action as previously described. The viewer would have a different view depending on where they were seated, as the filmed

material would sometimes comprise of different footage, although be simultaneously shown. The material filmed for the opening sequence of the wedding dress segment, prompted us to use the floor as an additional viewing surface, as this initial image is of smoke-, or, specter-like beings - rising images that become our brides. These appear to almost be rising out of the floor. They would then appear to slowly dance around all of the room (and floor), before fading as their incarnated counterparts take centre stage. The audience placement would also allow for the brides to go quite close up to the audience and possibly allow their bridal gowns to brush past some audience members, allowing for a somewhat haptic experience.

Postmodernity tends to distrust metanarratives and questions the nature and authenticity of linear and historical time. Kaye writes that art 'itself had turned toward process-based and durational concerns' (*Multi-Media: Video Installation Performance*, p. 64). The media of video and film allowed for almost limitless possibility for image manipulation, transformation and temporal reconfiguration. Gunter Berghaus in *Avant-Garde Performance: Live Events and Electronic Technologies* reflects that:

In a video performance, a stage action is confronted with an electronically mediated image of the same event, and both are exhibited to the audience. Two separate but interconnected discourses take place at the same time, enabled by the instant relay property of the video camera. The monitor displays sequences of images that are an objective refraction or a distorted manipulation of the live performance. The discourse of the body is combined with the discourse of the electronic medium. The juxtaposition of the two information systems allows the audience to compare and critically assess the two simultaneous presentations of an organic body and its artificial image.

- (p. 184).

The other visual motives used in this segment are moving images of trees and human body parts – both function as vessels for movement. The former is an attempt to turn the static theatre space into a dynamic one. Trees are projected around the room by the projector operators, making the audience feel that they are in a moving vehicle.

This comes after the ship is built on stage and we are set assail, so to speak. Marx wanted the performers here to enter a different phase of the piece, one where they would have less physical agency, which meant that there was a greater need for more dynamic visuals.

The act of dislocation can be very powerful. Seeing the oversized backdrop of a tree's branches moving in the wind in slightly slowed motion, in the form of projection in a theatre can have quite a mesmerising effect, especially if coupled with certain sounds and perhaps a performer making certain movements. The dislocation would result firstly from the fact that the tree is isolated and seen in an unreal setting, and perhaps also because the wind blowing the tree's branches and leaves in slow motion dislocates it from the 'natural' flow of time as our senses have come to perceive things. Through notions of identity, reality and temporality being altered, the viewer's awareness of the ordinary may be made more acute. Pina Bausch is a dance theatre choreographer who is keenly aware of space and the use of ordinary human gesture in their extra contextual forms, to create strong visceral effects. Her work is often based on landscape, where the piece might be borne out of a particular dancer's interaction with a specific environment and then re-assembled for the piece, where objects from that environment are brought into the performance space. These might include water, rocks, flowers, etc. Soil, although physical might refer to her scratching 'into the soil of human nature'. Govan, Nicholson and Normington further write that:

Bausch's use of environments seeks to collapse many of the traditional expectations of dance. Her stages are obstacles for dancers and her montages build in ways that are antithetical to traditional form.

- (*Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*, p. 111).

I believe that what is exceptional about Pina Bausch, is that the resultant works are both dance and theatre, rather than one being contained in the other. The struggle that the binary that theatre and dance often generates, is not felt, in much the same way that the dancers' real experience and the performed one seem one and the same. I hope that such a binary opposition between real and virtual actors, objects, etc in *Vessel* might also have been made to dissipate and the distinction between the filmed

and the real subject and material, disappear. It is this that Marx and I worked towards, and we allowed one media ascendancy over the other in terms of our immediate aims, where the larger common goal was of primary import.

The Cello

The instrument was the point of departure here. We enlisted the help of cellist Ariella Caira, who played at initial rehearsals while the movement and images were formulated. She composed a cello piece for this segment of the production, which was of primary importance in terms of what the piece became both in terms of mood and visual character. This was 'translated' into movement by Marx. This movement had close parallels to the composition in terms of tempo and pace. Dancers move slowly across the central stage area in a huddled group while one deviates from the group, transgressing in terms of movement, spatial use and pace/tempo, before rejoining the group and 'restoring order'. Subtlety is key here, as well as a unified harmony coupled with these 'controlled transgressions'. As the movement mirrors the music, we decided the use of filmed images should be both simple and understated, and thus not detracting from the dance.

The visuals that I opted for were images of dancing and distorting sound waves, while moving across the film's frame. The attempt was a direct extension of Marx's choreographic attempts to make the unseen seen. Our performers are activated by sound and both their movement and the sounds that they produce are the extension of the visual counterpart of the cello piece. The wave visuals are choreographed to rise and diminish in size and intensity as the live cello piece rises in crescendo and then starts its descent. These dynamic images are beamed onto walls around the venue by the three projector operators, suggesting that these waves are vibrant and autonomous. They rest on dancers at given moments and 'provoke' them into non-compliance or compliance. As the audio counterpart, performers hum and sing to the musical piece, which initially seems to simply emulate it, but rises in pitch and individual vocal expression, until there is a sense of disease and even menace. This starkly contrasts with the nature of the movement, which is relatively uniform in pace.

The use of monitors and rear video projection has allowed for complex and more abundant depictions of the directors' visions and actors/artists' interior states and psychological processes, which in turn made for a more moving performance. For instance *Einstein on the Beach*, by Robert Wilson makes use of rear projection behind live action in order to express 'conversations and images that had been brewing in ... (his) ... mind for quite some time and expressed his fascination with the effect of Einstein's relativity theories on the contemporary world' (*Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present*, p. 124-125). Besides the use of computerised technologies and video in 1976 when the piece was first performed, Wilson collaborated with the musician Philip Glass and dancers/choreographers Lucinda Childs and Andrew deGroat. The idea was to make more visceral and engaging theatre through the use of other mediums – Wilson talks about the 'unification of the arts', and refers to these works as operas. 'Narrative in any medium is a double process of what is told, the represented story, and how it is told, the narrated story.'

So, while the 'unification' that Wilson talks about refers to the merging of art forms that traditionally were deemed as separate, it also refers to the double process of narration which is always a unification of actual story (linear or otherwise) and form of narration with its devices. One could, as other critics have, draw parallels between this double encoding with that of the Structuralist ideas of the linguist Ferdinand Saussure or those adapted from these ideas by anthropologist Levi-Strauss and concerning myth. 'Saussure's model of language (also operates) according to a set of codes and conventions ... each utterance (*parole*), in this case each single version of myth, conforms to the overall symbolic system (*langue*), the language or group of myths and all the rules that govern its permutations' (*The Cinema Book*, p. 328). If we are to read *langue* as referring to the various art forms/disciplines able to aid the narrative processes, then each new unification or pairing is simply another permutation that exists as part of a known mythology, or 'grid of other cultural texts' (*The Cinema Book*, p. 331).

Berghaus writes that in a Post-modern age:

... artists began to take serious interest in the performing body irrespective of its narrative or theatrical framework. Voice, gesture and

movement came to be used not only as a means of conveying storylines, dramatic conflicts and intellectual concepts, but also as scenic elements with a visceral quality in their own right.

- (p. 184).

New 'stage and grammars' (and narrative devices) were constructed throughout the twentieth century by the Expressionists, Futurists, Dadaists, Constructivists, etc. Each group had its particular set of ideologies that resulted in certain areas of focus and led to the use of specific additional media being incorporated into their shows/ productions, as best served their agendas. 'Unifications' were constantly being negotiated. It might even be said the twentieth century was all about the blurring of boundaries and the perpetual reconstitution of art forms. Artists such as Yves Klein used the human body as a paintbrush, while meticulously documenting the painting process, signalling a definite movement towards the recording of the artistic process rather than the usual focus on end product. So, while theatre took from the fine arts, painting and sculpture took on many performative attributes. Nam June Paik is one such performance artist who has enjoyed a long and prolific career. His *Zen for Head* (1962) performance places the human body at the centre of the creative act. The emphasis on the human body attempted to create an immediate physical effect where spectators were more directly involved in the theatrical experience (the action) rather than being mere passive consumers – the process rather than the outcome.

Without wanting to labour the point, I would reiterate here that both Marx's choreography and the film material used in this Cello segment of the production, were borne out of the shared desire to make sound more sensual – to make it manifest in the realm of the visual and perhaps thereby trigger a sensory response in both dancers and viewers. Somewhat like the patterns that form in sand when sound causes vibration on a metal plate, the invisible is made visible by virtue of film and performers.

Horse

Actions and strategies such as the relocation of a natural object in an indoor environment or, the coupling of performers from different parts of the world into a single performance via the Internet, the fragmentation of the identity, questions of historicity and notions regarding the constructed nature of all space, are called into question. There are many artists/groups who endeavour to reappropriate social spaces in our globalised culture. The intentions might be explore notions of gender or racial identity – such artists as Berni Searle, Yinka Shonibare and Santu Mofokeng come to mind. The use of an environment not usually used for performance, or one reconstituted without the usual occupants, can have certain effects on the individual. Auge speaks about ‘non-places’, which would include airports, stores, etc. He says that they put ‘the individual in contact with another image of himself’ (p. 78). Confronting ‘the other’ in the form of the self can be a very uneasy experience. The UK branch of the international *Space Hijackers*,

... are itinerant art activists and refer to themselves as anarchists who are opposed to the hierarchy that is enforced by architects, planners and owners of space. They perceive that public space is being eroded and many of their recent projects have focused on the lack of places to gather. They also ‘oppose the blanding out and destruction of local culture in the name of global economic progress.

- (www.spacehijackers.co.uk).

Essentially when these ‘non-places’ are used for activities such as performance they are recoded with new experiences and memories. They are “reanimate(d) and narrativise(d) (the) endeavour (being) to ‘create myths within space that then go on to become part of that space, which works against the clinical solitude of the non-place” (Govan et al, p. 130). This act of reclamation can be more or less subtle – the choice of non-spaces as subjects for video to be used in a performance production can have similar results as the actual staging of a piece in an alleyway for instance. In our century new loci are constantly being sought, and where, more than ever, the effect of the Diaspora informs social consciousness. This impacts on what constitutes the social group, from the larger sociopolitical implications to the micro community in

which the individual lives. Film and performance are the perfect vehicles to explore these ruptures. Editing is one such rupture and by the strategic manipulation of the filmed material, in combination with performance, simulations similar to memory are possible. Pluralities of time and place are a filmic norm and distances are traversed by virtue of oppositions artificially established - those between then and now, light and dark, here and there, this and other. Nick Kaye in *Multi-media: Video Installation Performance* notes that these experiments and new forms of representation parallel the crises of linear temporal representation (history), that postmodern novelists such as Jorge Luis Borges and Vladimir Nabokov, etc have responded to, namely “‘single-point perspective and unified time/space’” (p. 59).

In the horse segment the blocks that made up the ship (vessel) are reconfigured to become horse and a platform. The myths connected to horses informed our exploration here. Marx was particularly interested in the movement of horses, while my contribution was a desire to elaborate on the story of the Trojan Horse. Having opted for an inclusive process of production, we accepted that there were many stories to tell, and strove to be of service to each other in realizing these stories. So while I provided a moving nature visual for Marx’s horse performance in the form of moving road footage, we got some of our performers to enter the horse and wait for action, as in the abovementioned Greek story. We got the remaining two video operators to project images of these performers onto the sides of the horse where they were lying in the wooden structure. This functioned like an X-ray, making the concealed visible and thereby problematising notions of identity, subjectivity and historicity (in terms of the story), while exploring the mechanics of film creation and projection.

A unified linear narrative in an isolated past time frame would exclude the present and reader/viewer’s participation in the meaning-making process. The alternative, namely that of ‘rhythmic time’, would ideally have the present as the locus of its action(s), be mutable and process-based. Kaye quotes Ermarth when he writes:

Narrative no longer inscribes the time that makes possible the perception of invariant identities like ‘subject’ and ‘object’; instead it concentrates phenomenologically on the reader-events that collapse the distances between object and subject, inside and outside.

This would tie in perfectly with the notion of postmodern subjectivity, which is one that is sans subject. Many post-modern theorists including Jean Baudrillard have spoken about the subject dispersed in the global community rather than occupying a central place in local community, as was the case in our pre-industrial past. Video, the film creation process, the coupling of real and projected subjects (human and other) is such a dispersal, while at the same time the intentions of such endeavours might be a gesture of reclamation – one that is unifying. Perhaps multiple points of view lead to a unified and more complete point of view – one that is inclusive and not static, lending itself to reversal and reworking. The combination of the live and the recorded, directly inquire into how the subject is constituted, and the role of mediation raises questions of how identity is constructed. Just as the modern subject is less substantial, the image of the self conforms more and more closely to the Baudrillardian notion of the *simulacra* which he ‘defines’ as ‘a model of a real without origin or reality: a hyper real’ (*Simulation and Simulacra*, p. 145). Sean Cubitt writes that:

The lens, after all, is only one of the technologies available to video for generating images: by now the majority of images on television are created by the electronic manipulation of previously existing images, whether produced by film and graphics. Even if the manipulation of the image is as simple as a telecine transfer from film to tape we still have to register that this represents an image of an image, and that ... (this) image is then one further remove from the real world whose light activated the photosensitive molecules of the filmstrip.

- (*Videography: Video Media as Art and Culture*, p. 176).

The Future(s)

Once again, *The Future(s)* is a segment that is very collaborative in terms of how it was conceived and created. Taken from the song *In The Future* by David Byrne, the idea here was that Marx got the six performers (himself included) to write down a list of ideas about what they perceived the(ir) future(s) to be. The brief was deliberately vague and thus open to personal interpretation. While some spoke about more general environmental, political and social concerns, others spoke about far more intimate and personal, or trivial and quotidian ones. Some spoke about more distant futures, while others spoke about the immediate future. A unique mix was offered, one that showed how subjective projecting what the future might be, is.

The filmmaking and showing process was an unavoidable and apparent analogy. The performers when asked about how they foresee the future, look to a different time and imagine scenarios based on present information, gained from past experience. In a sense film is also a certain set of past images or experiences that are (re)interpreted by the viewer differently each time that it is seen and by each individual who watches it. As such the experience of watching is deeply personal and subjective, and the image has life beyond the past, as it lends itself to constant reinterpretation and revision in the future, quite like memory. I wanted this idea to come through in the production, so while Marx was keen that the performers each have the opportunity to tell their future stories, I felt that it was important that these stories should be concurrently told and have visual counterparts that were as subjective and personal, and thus open to interpretation, while getting the audience to negotiate meaning from that.

I allowed all of the performers a *handy cam* for a certain amount of time, asking them to film images that informed their visions of the future. I then edited the footage and created a collage of their futures. Marx and I then negotiated a strategy for these futures to be told to the audience, which largely emerged from the performance space layout. It was decided that performers would move around the room and simultaneously address a particular audience segment (corner), while their visual stories would be projected onto a screen which would be let down from the ceiling. The projecting/viewing mechanics are visually simple – the screen being a double intersecting one, forming a cross. This means that while a particular filmed sequence

is projected onto it from across the room, the image is viewable equally well from either side of the room, due to the semitransparent nature of the screen. Another projector will beam its image onto the diagonally intersecting part of selfsame screen. What this means is that if viewed other than full frontally (directly head-on), the image on half of the screen is from a different projection source than the other half, and so, as you move around the screen, different composites emerge. Thus the same projection leads to different visual variants, depending on the viewing angle.

The attempt here was to deconstruct notions of what the future is, the mechanisms of projection (both human and that of the projector/camera), how temporality is represented and the power relations are inherent in all visual constructions.

Tony Oursler has been working with video since the 1960s. His art also is process and medium conscious. He tries to demystify the camera and video equipment, insisting that they should be visible and he sees them as part of the artwork. He believes that ‘not only the way we see, but also the ways images are constructed’ are important (*Tony Oursler*, Janus and Moure, p. 47). While embracing all the contemporary technologies, he seeks also to inquire into the effect they have on us. Janus writes that:

In his videos and video installations, Oursler uses a formal vocabulary that is deceptively simple, inspired as it is by the codes found in the popular films and television programmes that permeate contemporary culture but he reworks them in such a way that we must consider not only the complexities of perception and the politics of control but that more elusive power that popular culture has to take us away from the banality of our everyday lives

- (p. 53).

Similarities in his method exist to Brecht and his exposing of behind-the-scene structures, or Stan Brakhage’s drawing directly onto film, both drawing attention to the art (artifice) of the process of illusion making. As Oursler’s concerns became more focused on man in the twenty-first century his installations became more fragmentary in nature. For instance, his piece *Through the Hole* (2000) features a oval disk lying on its side in a glassed wooden cabinet, in the front of which there is a stills

projector which is casting the image of a face onto the disk. This would surely be the artistic embodiment of Baudrillard's notion of "ecstasy of communication", meaning that 'the subject is in close proximity to instantaneous images and information, in an overexposed and transparent world. In this situation, the subject "becomes a pure screen, a pure absorption and resorption surface of the influent networks"' ('Jean Baudrillard' in *Postmodernism: The Key Figures*, p. 53).

CONCLUSION

Lisa Cartwright writes that:

... media convergence is not a new phenomenon, film has never been an autonomous medium or industry. ... the film industry's intersections with television, consumer goods (through product tie-ins), to electrical and lighting industries, and even the make up and fashion industries since the cinema's inception in the late nineteenth century all have been well documented.

- ('Film studies in the Era of Convergence'
in *The Visual Culture Reader*, p. 417).

What is perhaps most significant now is the 'bi-directionality' of the flow of influences and the degree to which boundaries and hierarchies have been completely collapsed. In other words, where a few decades ago the fashion industry provided wardrobe, pretty faces, and perhaps storyline for cinema, today film serves to sell fashion for couturiers. Theatre-makers like Robert Wilson get to do Giorgio Armani retrospectives at art museums, star directors such as Baz Luhrman direct advertisements for the House of Chanel, etc. Cartwright goes as far as asking 'if film studies is really about the study of film' (ibid, p. 419). Although she poses the question in her attempt to find film's place in the digital age with reference to other media, the question is a more generally pertinent one and one that can be asked about any of the previously compartmentalized art and performance forms. To make any of these studies medium-specific would most likely be limiting and not actual.

In terms of how the collaborative relationship between Marx, as theatre-maker, and myself, as videographer, came together, I would have to say that the actual processes of production specific to the theatre/performance and to that of film production, as well as the mechanics of the media, greatly informed this process. In other words, film needs a screen or projection surface, much like dance and theatre need a performance area. The primary desire, common to both art forms, is to communicate a story or idea. Using these as departure points and desiring to critically examine and depart from norms, was our initial point of entry. We necessarily had to state our over-riding main intentions and dreams. Commonality had to be carefully and honestly formulated as a grid around which we worked. We realized that the ongoing decision-making process would have to be constantly negotiated and renegotiated, and that the overall product would have to appeal to both of us, and that if there was not joint appeal there would be an energetic imbalance that would be perceptible.

This was the intention and naturally it was not always fully realized. Mostly, however, stories were told that either allowed for the two mediums' intersections and the visions of those of their creators. If your point of theoretical departure is, as was the case in this venture, that all convention is open to deconstruction and reconstitution, that all stories have many tellers and that they are heard in different but universal ways, and that through receptivity and openness something other (greater) can be born; then essentially you can begin to build. Perkins writes that:

Once the created event is recognized, films begin to acquire many of the characteristics of novels or plays. What is presented becomes part of the manner of representation. Events, personalities and motives are subject to control alongside movement, pattern and rhythm.

- (*Film as Film*, p. 25).

During our production process, I feel that there were far fewer compromises to be made for me as a filmmaker than has ever been the case on any film set that I have encountered, where conventions are far more entrenched in the production process, and any one person has far less agency. There is often a slavishly prescriptive use of the equipment to both capture and display what has been meticulously planned.

Ironically, this is coupled with a strong self-effacing urge – one that tries to hide its mediated nature and that of the mechanics of its production. If one compares this to the history of painting then we could possibly argue that film is still largely arrested in the realist tradition. I believe that through intersections and collaborations such as this one, endless permutations are possible, ones that could allow for new impressions in both theatre and film. Impressions that include, rather than deny viewers' identities, allow agency in the meaning-making process, and are inclusive of a multiplicity of stories and viewpoints.

... I dismiss all knowledge, all culture I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own.

- (*Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes, p. 51).

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