

In-Habit was an exceptional, inventively curated month-long series of eleven performance, live art and installation works situated in and around the Abbotsford Convent in the City of Yarra, Melbourne. Involving nine key artists, more than a dozen associate artists and numerous participants, these artworks emerged out of a collective residency at the Convent established by Punctum's Artistic Director Jude Anderson exploring site/place/space and cultural exchange.

In ***One Square Metre*** the Atherton Community Gardens in Fitzroy are opened to the public for a 'tour'. We are greeted in the heat and vibrancy of colour and scent amidst sixty garden beds by Zeynep, a Turkish Australian resident of nearby high rise flats and gardener here since 1969. Zeynep offers everyone dolmades, produce from her garden, *and* the recipe! Jude Anderson serves water and introduces the project and tour. Over twelve months Anderson has cultivated one square metre of garden according to some of the principles of French landscape architect Gilles Clément's notion of the 'Planetary Garden': use only seeds offered or found, and no planting — sew as the wind would sew. While also adopting and adapting existing rules and practices from the gardeners at Atherton, Anderson's alternative aesthetic, ethical and ecological practice brought her into immediate, humourous, productive 'conflict' and exchange with Zeynep and other Atherton gardeners: bed-ends framing their gardens, a living lattice of wild willow framing hers; theirs organized on pragmatic principles, hers a micro-cosmos of chaos. Anderson — the 'hopeless gardener'!

It is the fruits of these meetings with community members and the growth of their interactions over time that are made available to us on the tour. Zeynep leads as Anderson and others draw her into conversation. We are introduced to vagabond plants, 'weeds', not normally cultivated. Dandelion, for a peppery salad. An Italian woman attending the tour confides, "We survived the Second World War on it. Really, a whole population". Purslane, common in cracks in the pavement, we learn, is good for constipation. Something of a delicacy in Turkey, the Italians use it in a chicken breast salad. Another tour member tells us it is also being trialed in cardiovascular research. Ah, my vagabond heart! In a kind of culinary ecstasy, we taste, inquire after, debate and receive recipes for Black Sea Cabbage, Sawtooth Coriander, French Sorrel, Stinging Nettle and more.

The work of *One Square Metre* literally overflows its frame. It is a living artwork and residency in which Anderson creates the conditions for new encounters, competing knowledges, curiosity and exchange. The 'art' of the event surpasses her tiny plot of unruly garden, arises in layers of complexity, and finds form in genuine reciprocity and learning.

One Square Metre finds further form and resonance in a live performance and installation entitled ***I'm Dreaming of a French Meadow*** housed in an ex-dormitory of the Rosina building at the Abbotsford Convent. Jude Anderson and collaborating artists ingeniously link and fuse the Atherton Gardens, the dormitory and the Convent's own 'French Meadow' (visible from the Rosina building) in daydreams that traverse time and place.

Over twelve months Anderson, Jacques Soddell and Tara Gilbee recorded and photographed the mutable forms of light, sound and life at the Atherton gardens. Jude Anderson also produced monthly poetic observational ruminations which were forwarded to sound artist Cedric Peyronnet in France as provocations for imaginal 'field recordings' or reveries which, while fictional, arise out of the site and lived experience of the Atherton gardens. These compositions entwine and chatter, mixed live, with Soddell's post-processed on-site recordings for a one-off sound performance by Peyronnet and Soddell. They are also made available to individuals in the installation via headphones placed adjacent to 'floating' iron beds around the walls of the dormitory. Translucent plastic material shrouds the beds and hangs billowing at large open windows both animating the space and serving as an ambiguous site for Gilbee's projected images emanating from multiple sources hidden under the beds.

For the live performance, the audience is seated dispersed throughout the dormitory. The darkness amplifies opaque, shifting light and shapes on walls that seem to rise from the 'heads' of the beds, as if tossing and turning in the night, restless, illuminated. Immersive sounds of nature, of birds and water rushing, sand or rice falling, and footsteps invade the space. Voices hinted at — 'foreign', ghosted and undecideable — morph into a hard, pulsing 'dialogue' of metallic humming, rising and falling like breath. I sense passions finding feet in the darkness, a long night, sleepless, wandering and charged; there are daydreams and night-terrors, secret gardens, desire and escape. I hear wings and hinges, static and the gentlest of melodies, soft, dancing in the distance. I hear thumping and pounding and imagine washing on laundry days past at the Convent, wooden and wet, or driving stakes into the earth at Atherton gardens, now. There's a chorus crying somewhere, outside, already escaped and a glass garden full of magic glass insects and the grasshoppers, giants, hover above me. My reveries.

Experiencing the installation alone the following day, there is the ambiguity of a powerful sense of absence in the space, but not of emptiness. I sit at a bedside, full of sounds in the 'closed' space between the headphones, a rustling wind-caught curtain swirling around and over my head and body. The re-remembered presences of 'wayward girls' or orphans (once housed in the dormitory) and their dreams, or the women and men of Atherton gardens and the rhythms of their daily work and conversation, broken, between languages — these presences re-animate the space. Reveries — but, it seems, not only 'mine' and not purely fictional. I remember the mass of people in the audience fanning themselves in oppressive heat the night before, lost in their own musings, and wonder if we might not all be the ghosts of a collective reverie — of others, elsewhere.

In ***Triangulation***, Jason Maling and Torie Nimmervoll are Colour Auditors. For twelve long days they conduct a 'prismatic audit' of the vast Abbotsford Convent. 'Audit kits' comprising small coloured flags on poles to be stuck outside room doors are distributed to residents at the Convent (staff, artists, health practitioners etc). Participants may change the colour of their flags at any time, on any impulse, for any reason. No prescription is given. At regular intervals throughout the day, Maling and Nimmervoll painstakingly collect and collate the 'data' (the colour of the flags) for individual rooms, different floors, separate wings and the Convent as a

whole. They fashion the results — sectioning, cross-referencing, averaging — into cumulative line graphs and pie charts and present their ‘findings’ to the fifty participants and public in twice-daily ‘briefings’.

These wry, deadpan, faux analyses of the changing colours of the community amuse in their ludicrous seriousness. A possible “politics of Orange” in the East Wing countered by, perhaps, a “collaborative gathering of Green” in the West Wing could, potentially, be the sign of a stand-off! Or the doubtful sighting by Maling of a blue-tongue lizard in the Convent grounds on the very day the data for the whole Convent came up Blue — well, “that was definitely a sign”! But there are no causes, only significances and these briefings are not the most significant site or aspect of the work. The frame slips. The public is perhaps incidental to *Triangulation’s* raison d’être which sets up structures that may generate, facilitate, ‘hold’, contain and make possible a range of meanings and significances engendered and embodied by participants in the project. As Convent participants are drawn into discussion and gregarious interaction with the performers, it becomes clear that these exchanges are made possible by the live, cumulative progress of the work in which the ‘audience’ have been participants and *themselves performers* — in chance encounters, meetings, discussions, email exchanges and (suspiciously) clandestine activities — for twelve days. Repetitive and ritual structures already dispersed throughout the project coalesce in these briefings as the participants congregate to share in and further create the work; less to ‘spectate’ or watch a performance work, than to keep the performance, and themselves, in play. The work finds its significance in the ‘community’ that it helps to form.

Katerina Kokkinos-Kennedy’s *Once* shifts the performative frame still further. It is a live art work for two people. Participants, strangers to each other, agree to meet in silence for ten minutes. They are then invited to share their experiences of the encounter in recorded conversations, separately, with two ‘ushers’.

There is a strange, aberrant tension in the site of the Bishop’s Parlour at the Abbotsford Convent. The age and restraint of the space and its imagined histories (vows of silence, ‘audiences’ with the Bishop) creep into the experience. I am seated by an usher at a small table with a lamp in the centre of the room. Left alone for a long moment, the tension is interrupted by the entrance of another. A woman sits and establishes direct eye contact. The lamp is flicked on by the usher. The shadows in the room retreat and harden. Silence.

Fast mind. Rapid passage of thoughts and images. Discomfort manifests in smiles and corseted laughs. We look at each other and away to the edges of the spongy darkness. Our gaze returns to the stranger opposite — often, more often. Time slows down. Somehow we begin a conversation in writing. Are we breaking the rules? What is forbidden? What is allowed? We relax into a playful meditation on the nature and quality of silence. An usher enters ... the stranger is gone.

Subsequently sharing experience with the usher is also charged — it too has its intimacies. Like the first stranger, the usher becomes the human face of an unknowable structure that refuses

revelation — of intent, meaning and significance. Here, the work of the piece continues and takes the form of a kind of ‘confession’ of experience and of unusually open avowal.

The silence, the site and the two meetings form and frame the ‘work’ of the piece and its artifice, the pretext of its enquiry. Beyond this, the piece works ‘in’ the participants. Each stranger themselves becomes the site at which a kind of alchemical fusion of projection and introspection lifts itself into consciousness. The work functions as a hiatus, a pause by means of which to see and experience another, to feel habitual avoidance, looking and being looked at, to sense movement towards and away from each other and all of the electricity, e-motion, ethics and responsibility of that ...just once.

In a space like the arched roof of a mouth — The Scullery at the Abbotsford Convent — bernie m janssen as ‘Mother Tongue’ presides over her *Tongue-atorium*; a laboratory, research collection, installation and site for ongoing investigations of all and everything ‘tongue’. Janssen has invited an extraordinary array of researchers, writers, translators, poets, visual and sound artists to contribute to this work. Open to the public across two weeks, all visitors are invited to add to its cumulative effect by bringing a poem, story, image or other offering of their own. Janssen also convenes (*M*)other Tongue Symposia, hosting ‘experts of the tongue’ to present and provoke on a range of topics in an open forum of discussion, debate and exchange for ten participants at a time.

On entering the Tongue-atorium in dim light, I am greeted by ‘Mother Tongue’ and given a ‘research tool’ in the form of a pen light and encouraged to conduct my own investigations. The torch finds a wall of shoe boxes stacked high and labeled with the names of the missing, incarcerated and murdered: South African writer and painter Breyten Breytenbach – imprisoned 1975, or Bulgarian dissident writer Georgi Markov – assassinated in 1978 with Ricin poison injected from the tip of an umbrella. If the tongues of the shoes of the censored or deceased could speak, they would conspire here in testimony and protest for the silenced ones. Beyond the wall, the beam illuminates a painful, beautiful and brittle poem by Dominique Hecq entitled ‘My Prosthetic Tongue’, in which writing takes the place of a tongue lost, smothered, along with the voice. More shoeboxes and the light passes over ‘Brillat-Savarin, 1825 – Physiology of Taste’ in homage to all things sensory and physical that the tongue might evoke. ‘Forked tongue – Enron’ extends the tongue in metaphor at the site of politics and events. Elsewhere in the space *Forked Tongue 1* and *2* are paintings by Ray Jones featuring Peter Garret with whale tale and a pinch-faced Kevin Rudd holding a fork.

At the symposium I attended, Elaine Lewis and Christine Matheui, ably and gregariously assisted by janssen, warm us up with tongue twisters in English and French – everyone trying, failing and laughing. Elaine and Christine then face off in a tongue twisting duel for which the group of participants devise judging criteria for degrees of difficulty including “full frontal placement of consonants”! It’s hard to tell who wins. The symposium ‘experts’ then make offerings for discussion. Christine focuses on French phrases referring to the tongue and Elaine rekindles an old controversy in voice production and singing. The conversation between all

participants that follows wanders from barriers to pronunciation in the teaching of languages to texting and email as productive new 'vocabularies'; from difficulties in translation and interpreting to sign language and synaesthesia; from scurrilous puns and word plays to ruptures in family communication for newly arrived immigrants. Like Anderson's *One Square Metre* and Maling's *Triangulation*, though in different ways, the work takes place here, or finds its voice, in the generous interactions of its participants. If all of the materials, artists and contributors to *Tongue-atorium* – including participants at the symposia – might be thought of as a collective tongue, then this tongue wagged.

Bánh Chu'ng is a play in four episodes written and directed by Chi Vu. It shifts in time and place between Ancient Vietnam, the Vietnam War in 1968 and contemporary Australia. Bánh Chu'ng is a savoury rice cake filled with pork and mung bean and wrapped in bamboo leaf. It is prepared, sometimes across twenty four hours, in celebration of Tet or the Vietnamese Lunar New Year.

In the opening episode, we learn from young Vietnamese Australians something of the rituals of Tet including prayer and gestures to gods and ancestors, the clearing of personal debts prior to the New Year, and the preparation of Bánh Chu'ng. Debt, transposed in metaphor, provokes the broader notion that 'debts' for that which comes to us from those who come before, are debts to them – to ancestors who, acknowledged in the rituals of say, New Year, yet persist here in the present: the contemporary world infused with the old.

A trickster figure appears – the Earth god Ong Dia – and conjures a 'theatre' of origins of Bánh Chu'ng that quickly transports us back in time to Ancient Vietnam. Two sons vie for approval of their father, the King, in a cooking competition. The poorest son, with meager ingredients, invents Bánh Chu'ng and pleases the King most. Jump forward to the Vietnam War and a mother sacrifices her fourteen year old son to the conflict and Bánh Chu'ng is eaten as the only sustenance for a family in poverty and distress. Return again to the present, where the legacies of these pasts are re-embodied in the careful preparation and cooking of Bánh Chu'ng for Tet in Australia.

Adjacent to the stage is a delicate installation by Naomi Ota. Vietnamese hats are inverted and suspended in cane tripod structures. There are paper boats in lucky red and gold. Lights buried in precious rice bathe the work in a gentle glow. The installation and performance both suggest complex and unstable place and time in which Vietnamese Australians negotiate personal and cultural experiences that might be thought of as turned upside down or 'between worlds'. Bánh Chu'ng and its rituals serve as a site of continuity and cohesion within this instability.

Carl Pannuzzo's choral composition for pre-recorded and live sound and voice takes its audience down, under and in to a subterranean world of aural and spatial play and exploration. In **City of Voices**, performed in a Collingwood underground carpark, a diverse group of people from the City of Yarra (formed by open invitation) come together to work with and question the

specificity and individuality of the voice in particular locations and spaces. How can the voice inhabit space? How might the voice contribute to inhabiting a sense of self — individually and collectively?

It's hot. The audience is seated in disparate array in a forward section of the immense concrete, pillared space which, further into its depths, serves as a community visual art studio and boxing gym. The group of performers walk around and through the audience, constantly shifting perspective and perception of individual vocalizations and their relationship to a whole. The 'body' of sound changes shape and leads the attention to different locations within the immediate space. The performers' careful listening teaches by example and I begin to discern particular textures and qualities of voice, produced at a distance, but 'heard' nearby. The group moves again, reconfigured, and what was intimately available floats away into ostensibly uninhabited space. Multiple walking feet orchestrate the piece with pedestrian rhythm: Carl Pannuzzo's feet sticking to his sandals, sandals sticking to the floor. There is thunder above as cars drive up ramps to the open air carpark and way off in the darkness concrete cracks and echoes as it expands in sweltering heat. I can't be sure but I can hear children playing in the Housing estate playground as if just here behind pillars and in unseen corners.

While the context and certain imaginal terrains in *City of Voices* are thoroughly under-worldly, the voices are of higher, airy spaces and realms. We learn later that initial investigations and research included experimentation and recording in the Rosina building at the Abbotsford Convent, at a playground elsewhere in the City of Yarra, as well as here at the underground carpark. This brings a dynamic, vertical tension and temporal ambiguity to the work. The most affecting part of the performance occurred when, having emptied the space leaving only pre-recorded sounds audible (of Rosina, the playground, and the carpark itself), the performers re-enter, their live voices merging with these sounds played from the furthest possible corner of the carpark. The voices blend uncertainly at first, then 'perfectly' as a quotient of the aural balance with sounds from elsewhere. There is a present moment of coming together, a harmonizing of site, place and space in a strange loop — voices returning the initial work of investigation to the here and now, in answer to its questions.

In ***The Shirt Off My Back***, Jude Anderson installs a 'shirt exchange shop' in the front space at Off the Kerb Gallery in Collingwood. Anderson met Sia Yang via one of her daughters who has a garden plot at Atherton community gardens — the site of Anderson's *One Square Metre* project. Sia Yang is a Hmong embroiderer and migrant refugee from Laos. Sia, another of her daughters, Jer, and choreographer/ animator Megan Beckwith inhabit the gallery shop front as if in a lived-in lounge room in which Sia passes time embroidering in the tradition of Hmong artisan culture. There are racks of shirts for women and men intricately and brightly embroidered by Sia — shirts previously unadorned and left by others in exchange for one of Sia's offerings.

A bell rings at the top of the door as I enter the calm and cool of the room. With minimal fuss the mystery of the process of selecting an embroidered shirt for me begins. A few moments of

untranslated Hmong language between mother and daughter and I am presented with a shirt laid out in front of me and asked to unbutton it. A video camera connected to a computer records this action. I am lead upstairs by Megan Beckwith. The video of my hands unbuttoning the shirt is projected on a large screen as I'm directed behind the screen to change into my new, embroidered shirt and give Beckwith the shirt off my back. With my old shirt draped around her, Megan Beckwith takes the movements of my hands on video into her body and performs a brief dance for me. It is a small gift that elevates a feeling of ritual in the experience. What is given up or offered? What received? What is being exchanged?

Talking and joking with Sia and Jer downstairs, I ask Sia (who speaks little English) how she chooses a particular shirt for a person. Laughter between mother and daughter, a brief conversation, and Jer translates – 'by looking at the person's facial structure, their bone structure'. I consider my shirt. Blue and brown checks. Hmm. What does she see? Unprompted, through Jer, Sia offers, 'sometimes the people don't like what I choose. But this is how it is. What can I do?' More laughter falls away and a lengthy, comfortable conversation develops about Sia and her 14 children. I learn that Jer, never having done so, is learning to embroider from her mother in the long hours they share in the gallery. What is given, received and exchanged in this work moves in more than one direction.

Ernesto Rios has collaborated with seven artists who walk the City of Yarra at different locations, documenting their wanderings in text, sound and on video. These field recordings are post-produced and re-presented in multiple interactive selections laid over maps of the area and marked with the trajectory of the walks. **Yarra**, presented at Off the Kerb Gallery in Collingwood (and also as a stand-alone website), draws on Situationist notions of the *dérive*, psychogeography and also the concept and practice of *flâneury*. To walk aimlessly, or drift, in urban environments is to problematise subject-object relations in the experience of a city. It is, potentially, to disrupt the 'given' trajectories of a built environment and open them to the critical consciousness of the human subject while availing the drifter of alternatives. In this sense, the *dérive* is both a politics and a tool or technique for artistic experimentation.

Seven maps are available for selection in the installation. The click of a mouse atop a simple plinth connected via computer and projector to a wall-sized screen opens, for example, Fitzroy, Abbotsford or Yarra Bend Park for interaction. Further possible selections at specific points along the route of a particular artist's *dérive* open small windows of edited video footage and sound from that part of the walk. These can be simultaneously open and in play and can be turned on or off at the whim of the participant.

At the first level of play (beyond the *derive* itself) – that of post-production by Ernesto Rios – the maps locate and situate the viewer. But wandering cameras, multiple points of view hyper-animated in the edit suite and strangely 'empty' streetscapes (bereft, for the most part, of people) undo, to some extent, this location and a sense of familiar, recognisable place. A curious kind of re-mapping occurs that neither orients nor completely disorients. Place is re-

cognised visually and aurally and this is consistent with the creative aspirations of the work inspired by the Situationists. In this context, video footage of the sound artists or writer's themselves *in situ* has a peculiar distancing effect that nevertheless 'tunes' me in to a mystery that won't be heard and can't be seen in its first manifestation as experienced by the walker. It is an imaginal temptation that invites me to play.

A second level or layer is engaged in interacting with the work. Selecting and deselecting video/audio from points on the maps, I orchestrate a cacophony of ducks, insects and metallic yawnings at Yarra Bend park, beer kegs in military procession straighten me up at an Abbotsford brewery and strained slow walking mixed against rapid tensile clinking of a wire fence on a pole in Fitzroy leave me a little melancholy. It is possible for *me* to 'wander', digress, return, linger, layer-up and compose aural and visual landscapes of my own from given sources. More poetics than politics, active effort and engagement with the work rewards with pleasure.

On a cold, dark night under a full moon, Mandy Thomas's (nee Nicholson) ***Living Culture*** project, subtitled *Murrenda yurrong wandamba* (alive, go on, proceed, renew), brought to an end the month-long series of works under the *In-Habit* banner.

We are met warmly by Mandy Thomas in the fading twilight under an enormous oak tree in the grounds of the Abbotsford Convent. Smoking gum leaves in her hands, Thomas leads us in a welcome ceremony – cleansing smoke trailing over and around our bodies – to the beginning of a photographic and sculpture walk she has constructed among gardens further down the hill. Photographs of children, members of Mandy Thomas's immediate and extended family, are interspersed with sculptures in stone placed at intervals along the path. The artworks are lit simply with candles and by torchlight as Thomas narrates some of the significances of the works as we encounter them.

There are images of children caught in moments of delight and discovery on the banks of Birrarung (the Yarra River) as they paint ochre on their faces in preparation for dances they will devise together. Many of the children have never danced and 'paint-up' is a first experience, the photographs catching rising pride and anticipation in their eyes and faces. Thomas generously offers brief accounts of inspirations for the sculptural works including water in droplets forming rivers, sustaining life; indigenous design patterns, researched via Bunjilaka at the Museum of Victoria, drawn from shields of particular aboriginal groups from her Wurundjeri country; shapes left in scar trees, the trees having survived, signifying renewal.

The walk finishes. From the darkness of a nearby rotunda emerges Jamie Thomas (associate artist and Mandy Thomas's partner) and four children painted up and ready to dance. Jamie Thomas sings in Woi wurrung language, naming things, punctuating dynamic sections of dance with hissing exhalations. He and his young son provide rhythm for the dancers with ceremonial Wangims (boomerang clap-sticks). Mandy joins three young girls in dances they have devised together. Up close at the edge of the rotunda in thoroughly intimate engagement – the

performers lit only with torches – we are offered dances animated by the Black Cockatoo, the Platypus, Birrarung and the gum trees whose leaves are used in the smoking ceremony. Mandy Thomas's approach has been to take the children to her country around Healseville for inspiration: to look carefully, and to listen, to make up dances from this place – new dances, now, created by these kids and for them.

At the end of the evening as Jamie Thomas lugs the sculptures to a trailer to be taken away, I learn that Mandy and Jamie are studying and employed in archaeology. Both speak of stone trade between indigenous groups before European settlement. Jamie enthuses about the science of archaeology opening up a living cultural history of indigenous people. The smallest stone flake, found now, sometimes many hundreds of kilometers from its source, embodying a whole line of exchange, trade and interaction. A living history, on the record, and *still here* in the hands of Mandy and Jamie Thomas – passed on to these children.

With *In-Habit*, Jude Anderson, in close collaboration with key artists, achieves an exciting balance between contemporary art, community project and cultural exchange. The project's success to date is in its 'smarts': an articulate, self-questioning agenda which sets up structures with fluid, mutable frames that generate, 'hold' and make possible a range of encounters and events with art-making at their heart. The work is engendered and embodied by the network of participants involved — in a particular project, at a specific site, in an existing community, or in those still in formation.

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