

our own reflection is as old as the Narcissus myth, but far from being capable of breaking the gaze, our worst instincts have been enabled to run riot. We go about building faulty pedestals for celebutantes to fall off, waiting eagerly in the front row with our cameras, ready to capture the up-skirt, to sell to the highest bidder. The talk show hosts wait with open arms to capture the sympathetic confessional; the reality TV producers with chequebook and camera, ready for the come back special.

Performance and video have currency in our culture: we have come to understand ourselves through a combination of the two. This presents both a challenge and strength for the art form which also combines them.

Commodification of identity in this environment is rife, and Video art's use of performance has typically been geared to providing alternatives, sometimes within the paradigm, sometimes without. It's potential to critique, respond to, alter and enhance the public discourse is immense and vital. However, the accessibility and ubiquity which stimulate and enable the genre to address contemporary théâtromanie³ so directly, can also render it difficult to see.

Not quite of the popular culture, and not quite central to the mainstream maelstrom of video, performance based video art is nonetheless acted upon by the same epochal influences, and emerges in the same environment, engaged in a constant aesthetic exchange with the mainstream. Its ability to stand out in this crowd is a constant, if not acknowledged, problem.

Perhaps because of this, more than ever, we need to find white walls (figurative, if not always literal) on which it may throw up its responses. We need to make more room for that conversation (or debate, or smack down) with contemporary identity which performative video alone, of all contemporary art forms, is most fit to have.

Jessie Scott, 2011

- 1 SeedBed, Performance installation and video by Vito Acconci, 1972 at Sonnabend Gallery in New York.
- 2 As discussed in "The Origin of Human Behaviour: Critique of the Models and Their Test Implications", Christopher S. Henshilwood and Curtis W. Marean, Current Anthropology, Vol 44, No 5, 2003.
- 3 Théâtromanie: phenomenon of 18th century France, whereby the culture surrounding the theatre and theatre going became an all-consuming lifestyle, over and above simple appreciation of the art form.

Cover
Wil Box
Water Work (still), 2011
Video installation

Inside Pages, Left to Right
Clare Rae
Tumbler (still), 2011
Stop-motion video
Image courtesy of the Artist and Beam Contemporary, Melbourne

Cassandra Tytler
What I want to say ... What I'm trying to say (still), 2011
HD video

Dominic Redfern
Pretend (still), 2011
Video

Jessica McElhinney
Oscar (still), 2011
Video transferred to PAL 16:9 DVD

PROJECT SPACE/SPARE ROOM

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ADMINISTRATOR/WEB DESIGN Andrew Tetzlaff **GRAPHIC DESIGN** Gracia Haby & Louise Jennison

EMAIL schoolofartgalleries@rmit.edu.au **WEB** www.schoolofartgalleries.dsc.rmit.edu.au

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PROJECT SPACE/SPARE ROOM



It's Not You, It's Me

WIL BOX

JESSICA MCELHINNEY

CLARE RAE [Co-curator]

DOMINIC REDFERN [Co-curator]

CASSANDRA TYTLER

FRIDAY 1 APRIL TO THURSDAY 21 APRIL 2011

OPENING THURSDAY 31 MARCH 5-7PM

FLOOR TALK THURSDAY 7 APRIL 1-1.30PM

One long, lanky man ... marked out the places on the ground where Boggs stood and where Sherburn stood, and the people following him around from one place to t'other and watching everything he done, and bobbing their heads to show they understood ... and then he stood up straight and stiff where Sherburn had stood ... and sung out, "Boggs!" and then Sherburn had stood slow to a level, and says "Bang!" staggered backwards, says "Bang!" again, and fell down flat on his back. The people that had seen the thing said he done it perfect; said it was just exactly the way it all happened.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain

Attraction/Repulsion and Video Art

Performances of all kinds: from the animist rituals of our paleolithic ancestors, to the green screen digital composites (part man, part screen) of contemporary film; have always been instrumental in the creation, management and negotiation of identity.

Performance art is the art of identity; and Video, with its instant association with immediacy and witness, veracity and cheapness, has been the perfect technology to transport the actions of performance artists beyond the moment.

However, 40 years after "SeedBed"¹, If you pick up a handycam and film yourself peeing - far from creating a scintillating provocation that will cut through conservative social mores - you

will simply find yourself getting in line behind the b grade reality stars, online porn producers, amateur web-cam enthusiasts and lets face it, other crappy video artists, who got there before you.

Video and the internet have become extensively available, ubiquitous and entangled. The dreamed-of democratization of media trumpeted by early media collectives has arrived. Amateurs, enthusiasts, professionals and artists alike are now using the same tools, in the same environments. Viral Video, dirty, cheap and everywhere, infects us all. It gets its hooks in, reproduces itself endlessly, and when combined with social media, encourages us to perform ourselves to each other on a daily basis. Youtube is stuffed full of video responses to responses to videos which are themselves post-modern mélanges of cultural references. Video today, in direct contrast to its origins, is subjective, opinionated, self-consciously constructed, and above all - performative.

This advancement via technology belies primal urges at its core. Performance and display are inherent behaviours: classically animal, old as dirt. They are behaviours which partly define us as human² in fact. And over time, we have consistently sought ever more interconnected media to facilitate this compulsive elevation and contemplation of the performed banalities of our lives - from theatre to cinema; television to video; and the many conflation thereof to be found on the internet.

What is clear, is that central to this progression, is a powerful attraction/repulsion complex with our own navel gazing tendencies. Public revulsion at this compulsion to drown in

