

CHAMBER
MADE
OPERA

THUR 18 FEB – SUN 21 FEB 2016 8PM

ANOTHER OTHER

MEAT MARKET, 5 BLACKWOOD STREET, NORTH MELBOURNE

NATASHA ANDERSON · SABINA MASELLI
ANTHONY PATERAS · ERKKI VELTHEIM



Chamber Made Opera presents
the premiere season of

ANOTHER OTHER

18 – 21
FEBRUARY 2016
8PM

CREATED AND PERFORMED BY

Natasha Anderson, Sabina Maselli,
Anthony Pateras & Erkki Veltheim

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT/AUDIO

Byron Scullin

LIGHTING DESIGN Jenny Hector

CREW Marco Cher-Gibard

ANOTHER OTHER was commissioned by Chamber Made Opera with support from the Australia Council for the Arts, Creative Victoria, Sue Kirkham and Charles Davidson. It had a preview season at Punctum Inc.'s ICU, Castlemaine in December 2014, with Punctum's Artistic Director Jude Anderson providing dramaturgical assistance.

THANK YOU

Artist Film Workshop

Jude Anderson

Ben Byrne

Clinton Green

Harris family

Miyuki Jokiranta

Andrea Maselli

Simon Tregear

Punctum

Melbourne Theatre Company

Meat Market

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ANOTHER OTHER: BODIES OF MATERIAL

Ben Byrne

A cadaver wrapped in black plastic twitches in the corner like a snake with its head cut off. Ticking erratically, this animated corpse offers a counterpoint to the digital clocks at opposite ends of the space. Facing each other these clocks mark the time passed and time to come. *Another Other* opens with a montage formed from the faces of the artists, layered and blurred together in classic black and white, mirroring an iconic shot from the film *Persona*. The show is perhaps best described as a critical interpretation of the film, which was written and directed by Ingmar Bergman and released in 1966.

The word persona comes from ancient Greek, meaning literally 'by-sound'. It refers to the masks worn by theatre players so that they would not be recognised and could take on the characters at hand. The film, fittingly given its title, centres on the psychological relationship between two women, a mute actor and her nurse. Gradually there is a blurring of their identities, as there is with the voices of the artists behind *Another Other* – Natasha Anderson, Sabina Maselli, Anthony Pateras and Erkki Veltheim.

In Bergman's essay 'The Snakeskin', written the year before the film was released and now included as a prologue to the screenplay, he describes art as akin to a snake skin full of ants – 'the snake itself is long since dead, eaten out from within, deprived of its poison; but the skin moves, filled with busy life'¹. Knowing this, it seems that the body in the corner is that of art itself, at least art as a sphere of importance to public life. Art as it existed when tied to the ritual of religion and the representation of the world, prior to the death of god and installation of capital in his place. Art before the failure of modernism. Art continues and is still worthwhile, the director argues, but 'the artist is on an equal footing with every other creature who exists for his own sake...in selfish fellowship on the warm, dirty earth, under a cold and empty sky'². Although structured according to the scenes of the film, and matching its duration exactly, *Another Other* takes little of the film's content. Instead, it replaces that content with a work focused on the formal interplay of sound and light that questions the politics of art, gender and identity running through both it and its forebear. The quartet question their identities and the relevance of the arts today, along the way raising questions about the nature of identity itself. Taking up an invitation included in the screenplay for readers and spectators to do as they wish with the material the film provides, they fill the role of the ants, eating out the director's work from within such that all that remains is its skin.

Another Other is a deeply collaborative work but nonetheless the artists assume particular roles. Maselli manipulates projections on multiple screens, including live processing of 16mm film, as well as controlling an array of lights positioned around the space while Veltheim, Anderson and Pateras contribute sound. Veltheim plays violin with some processing using the software MAX/MSP. Anderson, similarly, performs on contrabass and garklein recorders, also using the same software. Pateras, meanwhile, uses a Doepfer A-100 modular synthesiser and manipulates his own sounds, prerecorded sounds and those of the others, using a Revox B77 reel-to-reel tape recorder. All contribute vocals in varying ways.

The complexity of each artist's role along with the shifting relationships between them lend a powerful ambiguity to the work. Sound and light approximate the film's central characters, Alma and Elisabet, mirroring each other and intertwining so as to become indivisible. Anderson and Veltheim offer pensive solos and duos that meld with Maselli's projections, all brought together by Pateras's deft manipulations and abrupt interjections. The layers of processing and shifting hierarchies produce an ongoing metastasis of forms and identities, ambiguous bodies composed of sound and light.

Early in the piece a brief respite comes in the form of a recital of the Chaconne from Bach's *Partita for Violin No. 2*. This is accompanied by a montage of shots of the four artists reminiscent of those used in television soap operas. A piece widely considered one of the most beautiful and structurally perfect in all music scoring impressions of one of the lowest and yet popular of cultural forms. A momentary rest in the familiar made strange.

Gradually recognisable bodies emerge in the projections. A camera pans slowly across a woman's legs stretched out on a textural backdrop. Layers of hands and faces follow. Bodies are presented as landscapes. Layered with other landscapes and visual effects, these bodies appear weathered, perhaps traumatised. All of the artists' bodies are featured in the video but this is lost on me until I am told afterward. It may be my knowledge of the film or simply my performance of a typically male gaze but either way the bodies appear feminine to me. The focus on Alma and Elisabet in *Persona* is presented in an assaying of their bodies by the camera and Maselli's video, similarly, draws my attention to the female body. The effect is one of figure and ground collapsing, figures becoming ground.

The film was written by Bergman in hospital while seriously ill and questioning his very life, work and identity, as is demonstrated by his essay. These questions, however, are represented with female characters, projected onto female bodies. Perhaps, then, given the ongoing hegemonic power of men in society, he found it easier to question the ego, the foundations of human identity, through the female? *Another Other* questions the gender politics of the film, and indeed of identity itself, in this way but leaves it to audiences to find answers.

In her book *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Luce Irigaray notes the attention paid to the erection in Western sexuality³. This is demonstrated in two sequences frequently cut from the film, an erect penis that flashes past in the opening montage and Alma's monologue in which she recounts a sexual encounter with another woman and two boys on a beach. A focus on the phallic, Irigaray finds, is driven by male rivalry and a preoccupation

with penetration that she explains as an attempt to exert power over the feminine as maternal, the ground for human being⁴. 'Woman', she writes, 'in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies'⁵.

Alma's monologue shows her off as an object of male desire and creation. 'It was last summer' she begins, detailing how she had sunbathed naked with another woman before two young boys came along, the girls calling them over and sharing the boys. 'I was all ready somehow and came almost at once, can you believe it?', she continues, 'I was just going to say be careful, so that I don't get a baby, when he came too, and I felt it, I've never felt it in all my life before or since, how he shot it into me'. She is a desirous and desirable woman imagined by a man – young, attractive, naked, promiscuous and fertile. A woman as an available female body. Drawing attention to this, in *Another Other* Alma's monologue is replaced with a series of sexual fantasies, male fantasies expressed with female voices and vice versa.

Elisabet, meanwhile, is characterised as an artist who has refused her role, both as an actor and as a mother. That is, she has rejected the identities available to her. She questions her place as Anderson, Maselli, Pateras and Veltheim question theirs.

Slowly the psychological tension of *Another Other* builds to trauma. Anderson and Veltheim's high frequency drama magnified by Maselli's treated projections and Pateras's auditory fragmentations, building into a rhythmic urgency. The emotional weight of the episodic scenes heightened by the eschewing of narrative and awareness of duration imposed by the subtle but forceful push of the clocks. Time is both marked as movement forward and as something running out so as to produce a sense of claustrophobia, of being contained in something not fully comprehensible.

Susan Sontag remarks of Bergman's approach to *Persona*, 'instead of a full-blown story, he presents something that is, in one sense, cruder and, in another, more abstract: a body of material, a subject'⁶. *Another Other*, in a similar but distinct way, uses the form of the film to produce amorphous bodies of material. The work is not so much a piece as many pieces, pieces that never quite form a whole and yet are not really separable – subjects presented through the formal interplay of mutually constitutive forms.

Another Other implicates audiences by placing them within the work. Seated looking through a semi-transparent screen at the performers before another screen behind them and other audience members beyond that, surrounded by speakers and suffused with sound and light, as an audience member I cannot separate myself from what is going on. Rather my perception of it is limited by proximity and so itself made material. It is hard to identify many of the sounds and images and so also to distinguish my place in what is unfolding.

Witnessing the work draws my attention to the limitations of my own perception. I become aware that I, like others in the audience, see and hear only parts of the whole. This self-awareness – addressing myself from outside – is, of course, only possible by treating myself as a subject, a subject that is itself subject to its surroundings. Like the characters in the film, the self with which I identify is external to me, a construction that is not as individual as I might like to think. I am a player who wears a persona, or rather many personas that, like *Another Other*, cannot be experienced completely. Michel Serres writes, playing with the nuances of French, 'the I is nobody in particular, it is not a singularity, it has no contours, it is the blankness of all colors and all nuances, an open and translucent welcome of a multiplicity of thoughts...I am nobody'⁷. The French for nobody is *personne*. I am, this I write with is, not myself – I am another, other, nobody. The film finishes with a flash of light followed by the unspooling of film and a young boy reaching out to the blurred image of a woman's face, someone familiar but out of reach. The show, meanwhile, ends in darkness with Maselli turning off her projector and packing up the film. The clocks tick slowly up and down until they have reversed positions.

Notes

1. Bergman, I. 1972. 'The Snakeskin' in *Persona and Shame: the screenplays of Ingmar Bergman*, Bradfield, K. (Trans.), Calder and Boyars, London, p.13.
2. Bergman, I. 1972. 'The Snakeskin' in *Persona and Shame: the screenplays of Ingmar Bergman*, Bradfield, K. (Trans.), Calder and Boyars, London, p.15.
3. Irigaray, L. 1985. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, p.24.
4. Irigaray, L. 1985. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, p.24-25.
5. Irigaray, L. 1985. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, p.25.
6. Sontag, S. 1969. 'Bergman's Persona' in *Styles of Radical Will*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, NY, p.70.
7. Serres, M. 1997. *Genesis*, James, G. & Nielson, J. (Trans.), University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, p.31.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Chamber Made Opera is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria and the City of Melbourne through the Arts and Culture Triennial Funding Program.

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