

## 10.2 On Form Abstracts

'The Empty Space is a Wall'

**Paul Carter**

A multilingual (English, German, Polish and Russian) stage adaptation of *What Is Your Name* (a radio script by Paul Carter, originally broadcast in Australia in 1986 and in 1990 in the then West Germany), made in Berlin in June 2004, is described using a 'creative research' model. This model treats the production process as a tool of social research. Three features of the script were perceived to be particularly apposite to an understanding of Berlin's cultural and political 'situation' in 2004. The original script arranges translation of phrases attributed to nineteenth Indigenous speakers. These phrases, elicited under interrogation, are the only sources for some Victorian languages, but they lack historical or linguistic authority. The translation workshops convened for the 2004 production similarly deconstructed the authority of German in contemporary multilingual Berlin. The lines of *What Is Your Name* are unassigned: actors create the roles of interrogator and 'victim' when they try to make dramatic sense of the lines. This 'interrogation' of the script necessarily interpellates its sense. In this way, the clarification that theatre calls for recapitulates the techniques capitalist media use benignly, and totalitarian bureaucracies malignly, to subjugate difference. Finally, *What Is Your Name* uses a post-representational schema to evoke themes of colonisation and genocide. Comparably, in Berlin, the Nazi legacy is now mainly present mediately, through acts of symbolic affiliation; eye-witness theatre is replaced by the 'not theatre' of mourning.

.'MÉDÉE MATÉRIAU Or the assassination of the Spectator'

**Nataliya Golofastova**

This contribution to *Performance Research* aims to explore the intense effects within the perception field caused by the specific structure of transgressive performances dealing with the issues of trauma and taboo. A case study of the performance *Médée Matériau* by Russian director Anatoli Vassiliev forms the basis of an analytical journey into the hermetic world of the madness of a mother murderer. *Médée Matériau* is the offspring of different times and cultures, and deals with a significant ethnological myth of West European society concerning the taboo on filicide. Moreover it represents an outstanding narrative which is not just about taboo and trauma of transgression, but is deployed on stage by means of the tactics of traumatic narration. The distinctive value of the performance was strengthened by an incident of filicide that preceded the premiere in Netherlands. Commotion in the Netherlands triggered by this performance exposed wider ripples in the surface of culture, leading to the space of painful fraction: culture confronted with transgression of taboo and trauma (traumatic narration).

To clarify why performances like *Médée Matériau* are experienced as moments of rupture and reach this space of fraction three steps are taken. A semiotic study of the performative structure: the content and the formal devices used to narrate the story on the stage. To see how such narration is working within the perception field a second road is followed: analysis of the spectators actual responses through critical reviews. The study of the internal codes within the theatrical situation will be extended with a study of the external culture-historical frames of reference. Finally it is revealed how the formal, subjective, and social-historical structures can condition the negative experience of the spectators, and how these influence the way the performance is received. Such an approach can broaden the way for an understanding of extended social / cultural value of an asocial traumatic narration created within the aesthetic discourse.

'Aspects of Form and its Significance in Contemporary Music'

**Catherine Laws**

Recent musicology is finally paying attention to contemporary developments in wider cultural and critical theory. However, little of the debate has focused upon contemporary music, other than in the field of pop music studies. Discussions of recent music still tend to define postmodernism solely in terms of a pastiche of earlier styles that rejects the elitist alienation it associates with modernism and exposes a "crisis of representation". As a result, an uncritical equating of postmodernism with pastiche, tonality and, by implication, conservatism, is fairly standard. The sounding surface of the music is viewed as the defining factor; postmodernism is considered a musical style rather than a

mode of practice, and other significant aspects of the music pass ignored. Such simplistic labeling does little to enhance our understanding of recent music or its relationship to debates in contemporary theory and practice.

Through an analysis of music by composer and improviser Richard Barrett, this paper explores the complexities of these issues, arguing that approaches to form are often more central than sounding style to an understanding of processes of musical meaning.

'Lumpen Design, Penis Fashion and Body-Part Amplifiers. Artistic Responses to the New Image-Environments in Former Socialist Countries since 1989'

**Anna Schober**

The text explores how artists, designers and political activists react to the new "body-presses" composed of pictures and media that have been set up so massively in public spaces in former socialist countries (especially: Serbia, Moldova and Siberia) since what has been called the "velvet revolution". It focuses on the aesthetic rebuilding of cities via media such as *MTV* and *Fashion-TV*, but also via glossy posters, a new stratification of architecture, different styles of clothing and changed forms of hygiene, body care and nutrition, and analyses them in relation to aesthetic interventions that in themselves again concentrate on body training, dress styles and the performances of the self. The text thus "visits" various artists, performance groups and design collectives who through their actions and with their productions bring bodies onto the stage of their cities – in other forms and bewitched by various aesthetic tricks – in order to shift the common re-modelling of bodies in some directions and to contest common options.

During its "visits" the text thus identifies several formal tricks that have been used by such groups and artists and analyses them in their double-edged effects: the aesthetic techniques of montage, of parody, of exaggeration/ alienation and of understatement. All these aesthetic tricks emerge as a means for trying to find a precise answer to the provocations and inspirations disseminated by the new media vehicles and the images, sounds, various surfaces and tastes present there. They try to calculate the incalculability of significant moments of perception inside a terrain that, in a new way, is a highly contested one. It is shown that these aesthetic interventions thereby produce as many stories as they command impacts, thus acting as links between these stories and in this way participating in the alteration of an aesthetic hegemony.

'Heiner Müller and Martin Wuttke: Staging new images in a time of change.'

**Denise Varney**

During the extended prologue of the Berliner Ensemble's 1995 production of Bertolt Brecht's The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, directed by Heiner Müller, actor Martin Wuttke's Arturo Ui moves around the stage like a salivating dog. Bare-chested and in military breeches, with white gloves making paws of his hands, and with his tongue stained red and hanging out, Wuttke's body, is part pointer-dog, part-wolf, panting, impatient and on guard. The following year Müller's final work, Germania 3 Ghosts at Dead Man, is staged at the BE and directed by Wuttke. In the first scene, two male performers in top hats, black T-shirts, jackets with tails and bare feet, enter the stage. They could be clowns or Shakespearian grave diggers. They stare out at the auditorium and deliver the play's opening line – 'The mausoleum of German Socialism. Here is where it's been buried'.

This article explores the performative representations of post-reunification German theatre through an analysis of the textual, visual and aural image-making of these two Berliner Ensemble productions. It suggests that the theatrical representation of historical and legendary twentieth century figures, that we find in these performances, such as Hitler and Stalin, old communist leaders and the mythical Erbkönig, form part of the re-mapping and re-configuring of culture that is taking place in contemporary Germany. This is especially so in regard to the inter-relations between the past and the changing political borders in the present that connect with the broader historical transitions affecting 'east' and 'west' Europe. These include the end of the Cold War, the eastwards expansion of the European Union and the movement into a globalised economy.

This article contends that Müller's post-reunification theatrical offerings at the Berliner Ensemble, now separated from the state that funded it, are acutely and tellingly situated at the intersection of culture and politics.

