

Between You and Me: Two Intimate Body-Assemblages

Review by Ann Finegan

Intimacy is not necessarily a private thing, nor restricted to the physical exchanges between two lovers. Reflect a little on intimacy and what characterises it is a sense of the proximate, of being up close, of a kind of seeing and experience in which distance is abolished and the contact is, well, a breath away. In the words of an annoying pop song "it (still) takes two" in order to register that brush of the sensate skin of the other. Getting intimate with yourself is still perhaps a little sad - not bad - but, in general, to think of intimacy is to reflect on what takes place between a "you" and a "me", however you think it, a two-pronoun affair (even of "me with myself").

Brahma's Echo (Paul Greedy) and *no strings: pre cursive* (Ben Denham) brings a technological twist to Anneke Jaspers' curatorial premise of *between you and me*. They open up what passes in private to public space, in a paradoxical parading of intimacy of self with self. Greedy and Denham use technology to get up close in the very private respective registers of breath/sonification (literally visualizing Barthes' *Grain of the Voice*), and micro movements. Amplified across various screen and patterning devices intimate aspects of the body are on display.

Greedy's three-part installation consists of a live video projection of the space around a microphone, tuned very close to feedback frequency. This performance zone is, in turn, connected to a reflective pool of water, which breaks up into refraction patterns upon reception of the vibrations from the microphone's electronic signal. Gallery goers experiment with the mike. The disturbance patterns, inky black and sumptuous in the activated monochrome painting of the reflecting pool, are then superimposed on the video feed projected on the wall. Performers thus effectively engage in acts of self-erasure of their own image as the superimposed live action painting of watery disturbance is activated by the 'grain' of their voice.

As such *Brahma's Echo* revisits modernist painting: the monochrome pool responding to Malevich's black square as a sub-work in itself; the video projection to Jackson Pollack's abstract expressionism, with his gestural dripping and throwing of paint replaced by the action of the breath and the voice on still water. A more contemporary conversation with video art takes place with another work of subjective erasure, Bill Viola's *The Reflecting Pool* - Greedy's sonic vibrations countering the strokes of Viola's digital blur.

However, it's the intimacy of the sonic performance which strikes home in *Brahma's Echo*. There's still a very public awkwardness, even in hamming and playing up to the mike, in figuring out how to achieve the most powerful images of self-shattering. You're in an intimate relationship with your own breath and vocalization, tuned into a more than ordinary awareness of the modulations within your own exhalations. Greedy's title goes back to the Brahmins and the yogic technique of control of the breath, suggesting the projected echo is a visualization of overcoming selfhood in a bid for the nothing of transcendence.

As philosophers from Husserl to Derrida have argued, there's nothing as intimate as the voice, housed in the body, inside its vibrations. The 'hearing oneself speak' reverberates with a proximity that is closer to any of the mind's mirror reflections. Hence in respect of this installation the *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, (though not Brahmin/Hindu) comes to mind for its progress of shattering multiple stages of

reflections of the self. Whether of the occidental Sartrean version or Eastern transcendentalism, the heart of the subject is the void and this assemblage (video feed visualization-reflecting pool-breath/vocal sonification) cuts straight to its philosophic core: the confrontation of being and nothingness. (The title of one of Sartre's books.)

Yet there's nothing pretentious about Greedy's installation. A casual encounter is simply good fun, shattering the image of yourself and mates with some good quality guttural growl. [Om works well.] Tracking the *how-does-it-work* factor through the assemblage is satisfying enough. Even if you do twig to the title clue, *Braham's Echo*, [Brahma = breath, echoed in image], the modest low-tech aesthetic sits well with the intellectual depths.

On opening night Ben Denham performed *no strings: pre cursive* in another confrontation of body and screen. This time it's only Denham's body, not the audience's that drives the work. Post-performance the work exists as a two-screen documentation in which micro-movements of Denham's wired body face off against recorded computer drawings of his movements. What elevates Denham's body-drawings, translated through electronic sensors detecting his movement, is that he *hardly* moves.

Such barely perceptible movements would normally only register up close, in near body contact - in the exhibition's intimate terms of "between you and me". Sharing a cup of coffee, for example, you notice subtle shifts in posture, bodily ticks that define the person. We, the audience, are vicariously sharing this relationship with the computer-sensor assemblage, essentially one of self-representation (me by me, as in Greedy's work).

Motion is translated into an abstract portrait, in Deleuzian terms, of immanent relations traced through the body-software-computer assemblage rather than traditionally represented as in portraiture or life-drawing. The computer's tracking of motion becomes an updated version of abstract expressionism interpreted through the machine. [In interesting counterpoint to Greedy's assemblage].

However, in the opening night performance, Denham chose to write rather than draw. Scribbled and childlike because written by his body rather than with the finely-tuned instrument of the human hand, Denham's lower torso and legs wrote in micro-movements across two screens, left to right, and right to left (in the second screen, backwards), beginning at the top left and bottom right hand corners, respectively. In between the words 'audible' and 'line' the text jerked and gained and lost snippets of meaning, symbolic of a bodily expression short-circuiting the mind's intention to say.

This very different performance to the motion-translation drawings conveyed disrupted circuits, and drew attention back to the sensitivity of the motor-neural assemblage of hand, finger grip, and elbow pivot, through which we as humans usually write. Again, through an intense and up-close scrutiny, machine-enhanced, the audience was drawn to philosophically reflect on connections between body and being. What (body) writes when who (being) thinks? Between you and me, there's me and myself.

Between you and me

Ben Denham, Paul Greedy. Other work by Sarah Jamieson, Rachael Scott, Sam Smith.

Curated Anneke Jaspers

First Draft 116-8 Chalmers Street Surry Hills 31 October-17 November