

Liquid Architecture 8 Sydney

(250 words in total)

Background

2007 saw the opening of the new Carriageworks arts centre in Sydney. The Liquid Architecture festival was invited to move to this cavernous new venue, which provided new opportunities and challenges. The curators Shannon O'Neill and Ben Byrne sought to avoid complacency in this third year of the festival, by actively challenging audiences' expectations.

Contribution

The size of Carriageworks enabled Liquid Architecture to include a substantial exhibition of sound installations for the first time. This exhibition, 'Terminal' included several leading Australian sound and media artists, such as Wade Marynowsky, and was constructed as a site-specific composition through which audiences could move, creating their own mix of sounds. Another new dimension of the festival in 2007 was radio, with radiophonic works commissioned through a partnership with ABC Radio National's The Night Air. The performance program was particularly exciting and controversial, again expanding beyond previous boundaries, to engage with outsider artists and transgressive performance presentations. The highlight for many was live film/music performance by French collective Cellule d'Intervention Metamkine, which drew a capacity audience and drew Sydney's film community into the world of sound art.

Significance

Considering the deliberately challenging program, the festival received very positive reviews. Gail priest, writing in RealTime said, "The curation of Liquid Architecture Sydney this year was wily and thought provoking... Despite the suspicion that programming of extreme acts might repel some audiences, the festival was very well attended with the final night at capacity. Sadly Shannon O'Neill and Ben Byrne have called it quits for Liquid Architecture. It cannot be said that they went quietly."

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Festival website:

<http://www.liquidarchitecture.org.au/la8.htm>

Review by Gail Priest in RealTime issue #81 Oct-Nov 2007 pg. 46

<http://www.realttimearts.net/article/issue81/8731>

OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS THE SYDNEY DIRECTORS OF LIQUID ARCHITECTURE, SHANNON O'NEILL AND BEN BYRNE, HAVE CONSISTENTLY DEMONSTRATED A BOLD AND DISTINCTIVE CURATORIAL APPROACH. EACH EVENING IS NOT ONLY CLEARLY CRAFTED TO EXPLORE A PARTICULAR ASPECT OR FETISH OF AUDIO EXPLORATION, BUT TO "DO SOMETHING TO YOU." THE 2007 SYDNEY EVENT WAS THEIR MOST PROVOCATIVE YET.

surprise sounds

In a controversial move, the opening night seemed aimed at repelling audiences. The program notes claimed an exploration of popular music, but it felt more like a finger to the idea of scenes and acceptance: who is an outsider artist and who an insider; if it's all about self-expression why are some people perceived as artists, some not? Daniel Green has a developing reputation for his performative video work, and he took a brave leap in presenting a live version of his excruciatingly daggy style, opening with "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" from Cabaret, in enthusiastic yet shaky baritone accompanied by occasional noise bursts on a toy guitar.

The audience was split between aghast and amused. Green continued with a remix travesty of "Maria" from West Side Story with glitched minidisk backing and finished off with a fiendish version of "Tell Me More" from Grease, played from a commercial DVD that supplies sing-a-long karaoke text, to which Green only sang "blah blah." Knowing, and sometimes appreciating, Green's work for video, I found this interesting not so much as sonic exploration but rather as a performance work, but to those in the dark it must have been indeed perplexing.

This disorientation worsened with the introduction of Tony Mason-Cox and his accompanist Ann Onymous. Mason-Cox is an insurance salesman who likes to pen a tune or two, particularly a dirty ditty, and enthusiastically sing them in his stumbling way. His first few limericks were amusing, but he seems to have written hundreds and the overload became tortuous, particularly for those with delicate political constitutions. What was most interesting was when Mason-Cox sang a serious song about his stepfather, his voice now frail and uncertain. The sentiment was genuinely moving—which made the audience distinctly uncomfortable. Was Mason-Cox's inclusion in the program a challenge to sound art elitism or was he wilfully placed out of context? These conspicuously contentious questions charged the Sydney LA 8 opening evening. For those who hung on to the end, the glam rock mayhem of the band Winner was their clear reward.

actionist acts

In contrast, the second night promised to be truly terrifying with performances by actionist inspired artists Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock (one person actually, Rudolf Eb.er) and Dave Phillips from Switzerland and local artist Lucas Darklord (aka Thomas Knox Arnold). While Natasha Anderson on contrabass and garklein recorders with electronics might appear to be out of place in this industrial gothic line-up, her deft use of dynamics, texturing and attack gave her performance an intriguing brutality juxtaposed with fragility making her one of the most satisfying acts (conceptually and sonically) of the festival. Conversely, Lucas Darklord's appearance—militaristic jacket with spiked shoulder pads and half blackened face—promised something more gruesome than we actually experienced, which turned out to be a polite set of dark and murky glitches shifting in and out of a timid apocalypse.

Dave Phillips was certainly disturbing for many with his video collage of human cruelty to animals, accompanied by poetically accusatory aphorisms and unrelenting noise floor. While the piece by Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock—involving a camp-stove with a pot of boiling vinegar, pig nose and a

strap-on finger noise activator—looked ready to deliver on its threat of menace, the artist appeared gleeful in denying us any dramatic climax.

The evening ended with the video documentation of a performance by Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock involving a line-up of butoh inspired female performers drinking a variety of different coloured substances on cue to loud music and throwing up for a very long time. While outwardly a performance piece, its roots were in audio—by far the worst aspect of sitting through it was the sound of the women gagging, spitting and sticking their fingers further down their throats to prolong the action. As a very transparent “play” of manipulation and consensual subjugation, set very firmly within the extreme body zone of Japanese performance aesthetics, I was surprised by the agitated response to the piece as sexist by some in the audience. But then again not everyone has consensually subjugated themselves to a decade of performance art...

audio-visuality

The final evening concentrated on audiovisual explorations and did not seem planned to upset the audience, although excessive length did move it into the realm of endurance. The common theme, it seemed, was the re-emergence, for better or worse, of narrative in audiovisual works. Peter Newman has developed a distinctive style—intensely minimal visuals and dramatic bittersweet sounds—and he explored this further, pushing the sweet a little more than the bitter this time. Lloyd Barrett seems to use similar visual processing methods to Newman but opted for a (for some too) clear narrative using text panels to explicate his dream segments, creating a pithy short film feel to his set.

Kamusta (Chris Caines and Jessica Tyrrell) employed two screens—one a slowly setting sun, another a shifting melange of close-up street details—accompanied by a minimally developing soundscape and live voiceover by Caines. While all the elements were clear and considered, the piece as a whole did not develop beyond a kind of ambivalent ambience perhaps created by an unreconciled struggle with the figurative nature of text. Abject Leader introduced a performer to their 16mm film and audio set. There was potential in the beat poet flow of Jamie Hume’s offering, however the parodic gesture at character—safari suit, pith helmet and fake facial hair—felt underdeveloped and stylistically awkward, which along with some ornery projectors resulted in an overly long and difficultly paced set, although Joel Stern’s sounds maintained some momentum.

Cellule d’Intervention Metamkine, the team of French projection and sound artists came on at some time close to midnight for a 40-minute set when many of us in the audience had very little left to invest; however their dynamism was worth the wait. There is an orchestral quality, a Hitchcock-Herrmann grandeur to the work that is both perplexing and invigorating. The very hands-on manipulation of light is alchemical and magical, the structure of the set intriguing in its use of internal climactic steps and troughs. It felt like we were in the hands of dream masters...and when it was over we stumbled out shell-shocked and hazy, trying to remember our way home.

in situ

The festival also featured Terminal, installations by Jasper Streit, Natasha Anderson, Rik Rue and Wade Marynowksy, dotted around the CarriageWorks foyer. A potentially difficult venue due to sound bleed issues, the pieces were well-placed providing little islands of focus for audiences easily dissipated in the cavernous space. Marynowsky’s player piano automaton, Anderson’s abject testicular gloops and Streit’s minimal metal object provided as much visual as audio intrigue.

The curation of Liquid Architecture Sydney this year was wily and thought provoking, the experience of the whole festival being stronger and more satisfying perhaps than the individual performances. Despite the suspicion that programming of extreme acts might repel some audiences, the festival was very well attended with the final night at capacity. Sadly Shannon O’Neill and Ben Byrne have called it quits for Liquid Architecture. It cannot be said that they went quietly.

Liquid Architecture 8, Sydney directors Ben Byrne, Shannon O’Neill, national director Nat Bates; Performance Space at CarriageWorks, Sydney, June 28-30

Review by Melissa Lesnie in Resonate Magazine

<http://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/article/cinema-for-the-ears-music-for-the-eyes>

Cinema for the Ears, Music for the Eyes

To my ears, contemporary experimental electronic music seldom strays far from its revered musique concrète origins. Much of the sound art of recent years bears the indelible imprint of the tape-splicing generation epitomised by Cage and Varèse, an aesthetic now re-imagined for digital means. One might wonder whether using new technological resources to create effects so similar to earlier efforts can be considered innovative. Some may argue, then, that ‘laptop artists’ can no longer project to a live audience through sound alone and must adopt other modes of performance in order to engage listeners on a meaningful level.

Fortunately, this year’s Liquid Architecture festival (held in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane over two weeks) offered a feast for the eyes as well as the ears, with local and international acts exercising an all-inclusive approach to noise experimentation, visual media and performance art. Organisers of the Sydney gigs Ben Byrne and Shannon O’Neill must be praised for assembling such an eclectic array of artists – from an elderly purveyor of bawdy limericks (Tony Mason-Cox) to a postmodern glam-rock band (Winner) – all manipulating and interacting with sound in strikingly different ways. Throughout the sprawling Carriageworks interior, the sculptures and interactive artworks on display featured prominent aural components, emphasising the focus on sound design that has been the hallmark of Liquid Architecture for eight years running. Alongside the performances themselves, these installation pieces attest to the diverse trends now thriving in the realm of sonic experimentation, both in Australia and abroad.

One such trend, championed by several artists involved in the festival, mingles new technology with archaic, outmoded equipment, endowing the antiquated elements with a fresh and distinctive voice. Melbourne-based artist Natasha Anderson explored this confluence of ancient and modern in an electroacoustic performance combining Renaissance-style contrabass and garklein (piccolo) recorders, electronics, and experimental vocal techniques. Wielding a towering bass recorder whose deep, mellow tone was processed beyond recognition, she constructed a churning, nebulous soundscape punctuated by panoply of squelches, shrieks, and other unusual noises. Anderson’s treatment of the instrument was rather like the taming of a wild beast. Motion sensors added a dynamic visual element to the fray, enabling her to exploit the recorder in a more percussive role and to trigger sounds by enacting a sequence of stylised, almost violent, bodily gestures. Natasha Anderson’s work embraces juxtaposition; of the old and the new, of the high and low frequencies emanating from her exotic breeds of recorder, of intense physicality and aural events.

Wade Marynowsky’s sound sculpture, *Ever Evolving Tracks of Delayed [Train] Lines*, continued the theme of the new reinvigorating the old. Taking Nancarrow’s experiments with player piano to the next technological stratum, the work consists of a disembowelled antique pianola fitted with an internal computer. Dissonant fragments of music, played by the pianola and generated by Marynowsky’s software, seem to rewrite themselves ad infinitum, lending a mechanistic perspective to the notion of improvised performance.

Audiovisual works form an integral part of Liquid Architecture’s line-up from year to year, encouraging artists to explore colour and texture in relation to music, to tap into visual narrative, or to gear the nexus between imagery and sound to reflect a political stance. Liquid Architecture 8 presented a host of performers sensitive to the versatility of cross-disciplinary media. Brisbane-based artist Lloyd Barrett wove his Kandinskyan pastels into the glassy sounds of an Ebow, while whimsical text added a narrative element to the dreamscape.

Demonstrating a thoroughly different approach, French guests *Cellule d’Intervention Metamkine* used no less than six 16mm film projectors and a series of mirrors to edit their visual acrobatics in real time. An improvised soundtrack, constructed using an arsenal of analogue synthesisers, crowned the unique audiovisual experience for which they are internationally renowned.

Swiss artist and activist Dave Phillips harnessed the power of imagery, text and sound to express his own ethical convictions, unleashing a confronting tirade against animal cruelty. Nightmarish footage of abuse and systematic slaughter rolled over distorted dog barks, torturous squeals and Phillips's own visceral vocals. Spliced subliminal text, urging members of the audience to examine their role in the carnage, completed the ideological onslaught. Through intricately combined technological resources, Phillips delivered a probing indictment of a society's willingness to look the other way.

Unlike the overt vegan propaganda dispensed by his fellow Swiss artist, the works of Runzelstirn and Gurgelstock (a.k.a. Rudolf Eb.er) are ambiguous in content and meaning, though by no means less unsettling. In the same way that Natasha Anderson's sharp gestures imbued her act with a sense of immediacy, his boldly physical performance art held the audience enthralled. Decked out in forbidding black latex (he is perhaps best described as the Marilyn Manson of the art world), breathing heavily through a gas mask and shackled to his own audio equipment, R&G cued raucous industrial sounds through hand-held triggers that he pointed at members of the audience as if to shoot them. A pot of vinegar, set at centre stage and brought gradually to boiling point during this volatile display, kept everyone on edge; I began to wish I'd sat a few rows back.

The raw, unflinching intensity of his first act seemed rather tame compared to the finale. The screening of a filmed R&G performance piece drew Liquid Architecture attendees into a disturbing spectacle. The artist issued three rounds of coloured liquids to three young Japanese women clad in ghostly white. After dutifully guzzling the beverages, and with ritualistic drums urging them on, the girls vomited onstage into plastic basins for the best part of half an hour. Close-up shots and gratuitous noises captured the event in all its grotesque intimacy, causing widespread offence among viewers and provoking complaints that reached far beyond mere loss of appetite. From booing and pointed walk-outs (the audience was vastly depleted by the end of the evening) to verbal protest ('you sexist fuckers!'), there can be no denying that Runzelstirn and Gurgelstock sparked controversy.

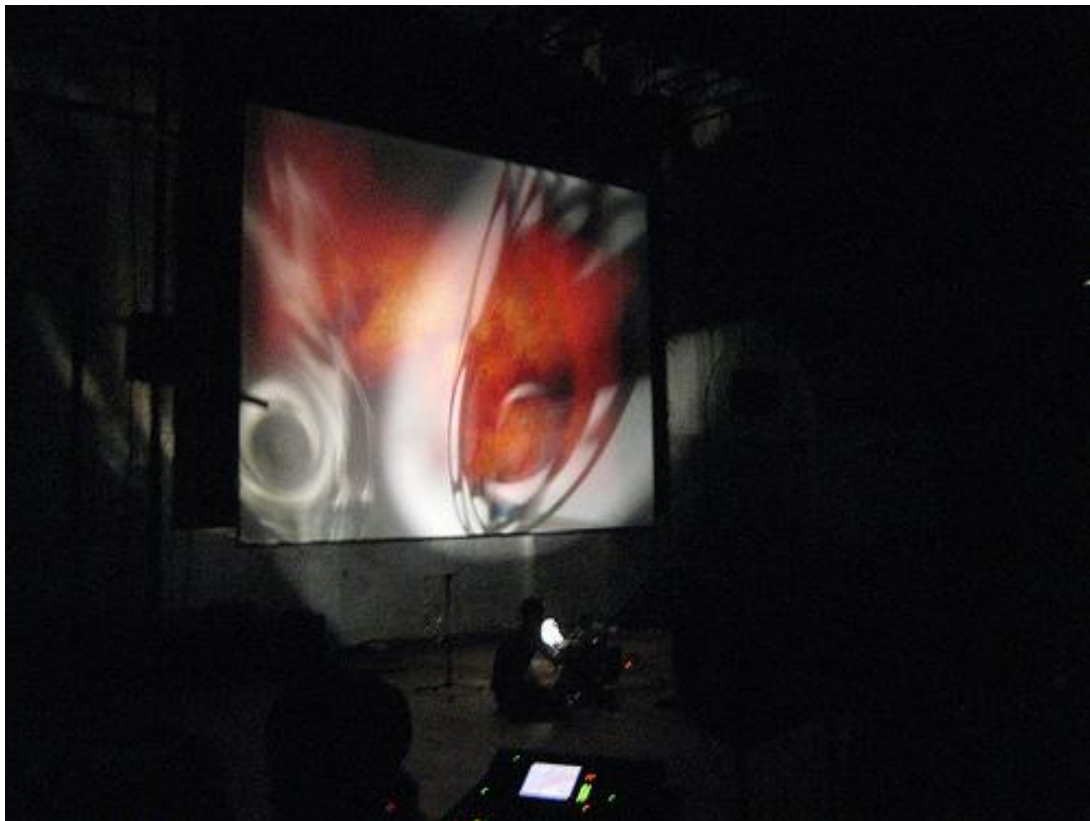
For me, the range of reactions was far more interesting than the performance itself. Gross-out factor aside, most detractors of the work adopted a feminist stance, likening the artist's supposed violation of his subjects to pornography. Others expressed admiration of the women's dedication to the task and their openness to extreme life experiences. But the question of artistic intent remains: can a performance specifically designed to sicken and disgust be termed 'art' on polemical grounds, and can a viewer transcend gut reaction (excuse the pun) to arrive at a layer of meaning more profound than what shock value alone can ascribe?

Runzelstirn and Gurgelstock's inflammatory piece bears witness, at least, to a community of Sydneysiders passionately engaged in discussing and supporting a wide range of electroacoustic, audiovisual and performance projects. The Brisbane and Melbourne branches of LA8, too, each featured a diverse selection of local and international acts, catering to crowds equally devoted to experimental art forms. Along with the annual Electrofringe and NOW Now festivals, Liquid Architecture provides one of the most important forums for the exploration of Australia's emerging and evolving sound culture.



Runzelstim & Gurglestock

IMAGES OF



Cellule d'Intervention Metamkine

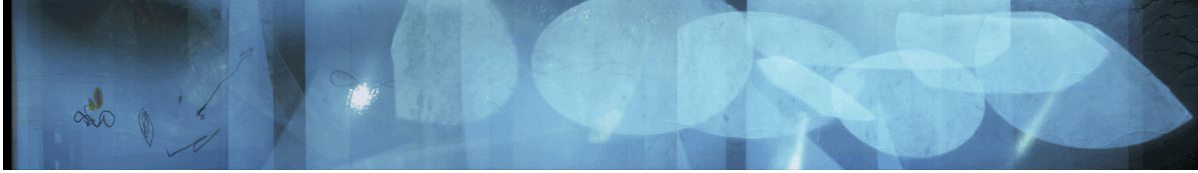
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WORK



LIQUID ARCHITECTURE 8

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fins light :: James Geurts

Listen. Deeply.

Liquid Architecture, Australia's premier sound-arts festival, celebrates its eighth consecutive year with concerts, artist talks, workshops, forums, live performances, exhibitions, installations, audio-visuals and recorded work. Featuring our most imaginative musicians, composers, film-sound designers and media artists in a sense-specific feast for the ears.

What is 'Sound Art'?

"For many, it refers to sound-based art work (or at least art work where the principal focus is on sound) across the broad gamut of performance, installation and broadcast contexts, which departs from both traditional musical instrumentation and notational methods and frequently employs electronic media. Others may see it as an intersecting space with roots in post-Cageian music practice, or indeed 'post-phonographic' music practice, and installation art."

Julian Knowles then Professor of Music and Head of the School of Music and Drama at the University of Wollongong, in an article entitled Sound Practice, Sound Thesis in [RealTime](#) No68, August / September 2005

What is Liquid Architecture?

Liquid Architecture is a *sense specific* festival, as opposed to art form specific. Occurring annually since 2000, Liquid Architecture celebrates the diverse methods of sound making and sound theory. It is our belief that listening is a vital activity, and one that is often overlooked within the dominance of visual media in our environment.

What will I hear?

A key objective is the promotion of artists practicing on the periphery of music and sound culture, particularly those with an experimental aesthetic and a critical approach to (media) cultures. The artistic content of the festival focuses upon and privileges sound practice in all its manifestations but, due to the cross disciplinary potential of sound, many other art practices are included in the festival. Liquid Architecture focuses on any and all art forms involving particular emphasis on the auditory, including an exciting mix of musical performance, AV presentations and installation work, along with a strong critical element involving panels, workshops and artist talks.

Who's it for?

Now coming into its eighth consecutive year, Liquid Architecture strives to combine the fragmented communities in which sound arts practices occurs, striving for cross disciplinary appreciation and critique. The practical objective of this strategy is to popularise and publicise sound culture through greater aggregate audience size and a higher profile, and to make sound culture more accessible to the community, particularly to youth and student audiences. Audiences currently include those engaged with contemporary creative practice, sound arts practitioners, music industry professionals, electronic music concert goers, academics, cultural theorists and students (post & undergraduate), youth audiences and enthusiasts of adventurous popular music.

Liquid Architecture aims to popularise sound culture, particularly with young/emerging content producers within Australia's active student culture, in order to build not only future audiences but also future artists. Our rationale reflects an intense engagement with specialist and broader cultures, and the desire to make a contribution to those cultures. Sound practice is often cross disciplinary and the festival should reflect that, not only in the work presented but in the broad range of audiences it attracts.

The opportunities to network with national and international artists are an important means of generating future initiatives and cross cultural collaborations. The community is being exposed to some of the most exciting explorations occurring within sound culture that also happen to intersect with the media and fine arts. The exposure generated by Liquid Architecture is crucial in developing new audiences for the many discreet sound and experimental music communities currently operating around the country, and internationally.

Who's responsible?

Liquid Architecture is curated by practicing sound artists. Directed by Nat Bates, who heads the ((tRansMIT)) sound collective, and co-directed with Ben Byrne and Shannon O'Neill from [alias frequencies](#) and Lawrence English from [ROOM40](#). The Artefacts of Australian Experimental Music CD launch is presented by [Shame File Music](#).

Ben and Shannon have fostered a Sydney home at the Performance Space, Lawrence works closely with the Brisbane Powerhouse, and in Melbourne the festival is once again supported by RMIT Union Arts and returns again to the Arts House at the North Melbourne Town Hall.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the [Australia Council](#), its principal arts funding and advisory body. The Sydney season is supported by Arts NSW, Melbourne by Arts Victoria.

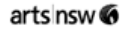
[Pauline Oliveros](#) and [Ione](#)'s visit has been made possible through the [Alt.Music Festival](#) under [The Audio Foundation](#) New Zealand, and in co-operation with the [Fulbright](#) association.

[Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock](#) and [Dave Philips](#)' visit is supported by Pro Helvetia and dual plover.

[Cellule d'Intervention Metamkine](#)'s visit is supported by the French Embassy and [Alliance Francaise](#).



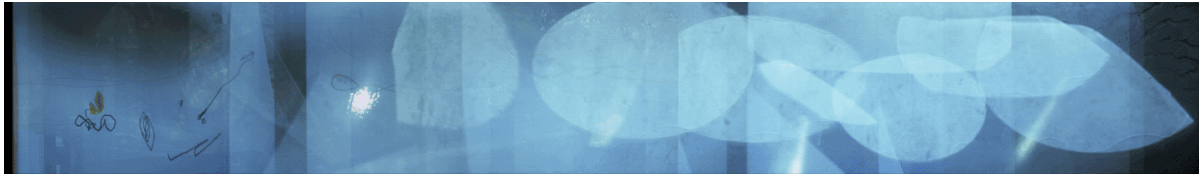
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fins light :: James Geurts

Listen. Deeply.

LIQUID ARCHITECTURE 8 [SYDNEY](#) :: [BRISBANE](#) :: [MELBOURNE](#)

SYDNEY Performance Space at Carriageworks

Thursday June 28 – Saturday June 30

TICKETS :: [moshtix](#)

Thursday June 28 from 8pm – Gala Opening!

\$10/\$8

WINNER

[TONY MASON-COX WITH ANN ONYMOUS](#)

[THE DANIEL GREEN TRIBUTE SHOW](#)

+ Very Special Guests!

Friday June 29 from 8pm – Main Concert One

\$15/\$12

[RUNZELSTIRN & GURGELSTOCK \(SWITZERLAND\)](#)

[DAVE PHILLIPS \(SWITZERLAND\)](#)

[NATASHA ANDERSON \(MELBOURNE\)](#)

[THOMAS KNOX ARNOLD](#)

Saturday June 30 from 8pm – Main Concert Two

\$15/\$12

[CELLULE D'INTERVENTION METAMKINE \(FRANCE\)](#)

[LLOYD BARRETT \(BRISBANE\)](#)

[ABJECT LEADER \(BRISBANE\)](#)

[KAMUSTA](#)

[PETER NEWMAN](#)

+ 'TERMINAL' Exhibition

Artists Include:

[NATASHA ANDERSON](#)

[JASPER STREIT](#)

[RIK RUE](#)

[WADE MARYNOWSKY](#)

Season Passes - \$30/\$25

TICKETS :: [moshtix](#)

BRISBANE

Visy Theatre, Brisbane Powerhouse

Friday 6 July – Saturday 7 July

TICKETS :: [Brisbane Powerhouse](#)

Friday 6 July 7.30pm

\$15/\$13

[CELLULE D'INTERVENTION METAMKINE \(FRANCE\)](#)

[NIGEL WRIGHT \(NEW ZEALAND\)](#)

[ROBIN FOX \(MELBOURNE\)](#) Artefacts of Australian Electronic Music CD Launch, presented by [Shame File Music](#)

[SOUNDING WIVENHOE \(ERIK GRISWOLD + Guests\)](#) Sounding the Powerhouse

Saturday 7 July 7.30pm

\$15/\$13

[PAULINE OLIVEROS + IONE \(US\)](#)

[PIMMON \(SYDNEY\)](#)

[CAMILLA HANNAN](#)

Season Passes - \$25/\$20

TICKETS :: [Brisbane Powerhouse](#)

MELBOURNE

Wednesday 11 July – Saturday 14 July

TICKETS :: [moshtix](#)

Arts House North Melbourne Town Hall

Wednesday 11 July 7.30pm

\$10/\$8

CELLULE D'INTERVENTION METAMKINE (FRANCE)

ABJECT LEADER (BRISBANE)

M. ROSNER (PERTH) + SHOEB AHMAD (CANBERRA) + SIMON HAMPSON

Arts House North Melbourne Town Hall

Thursday 12 July 7.30pm

\$15/\$12

PAULINE OLIVEROS + IONE (US)

Arts House North Melbourne Town Hall

Friday 13 July 7.30pm

\$10/\$8

ROBIN FOX Artefacts of Australian Electronic Music CD Launch, presented by Shame File Music

incl. Panel Discussion: "Is there a tradition of experimental music that influences contemporary practitioners?"

With Pauline Oliveros, Warren Burt, Rainer Linz & Robin Fox.

NIGEL WRIGHT (NEW ZEALAND)

CAMILLA HANNAN (BRISBANE)

DEAN LINGUEY

RMIT Spiritual Centre, Building 11B, RMIT City Campus, Cnr Swanston and La Trobe Streets, Melbourne.

Saturday 14 July 2pm

Free

FREE Deep Listening Meditation Workshop

Please bring a pillow or a yoga mat.

Bookings essential to [Bianca.Durrant\(at\)rmit.edu.au](mailto:Bianca.Durrant@rmit.edu.au)

PAULINE OLIVEROS + IONE (US)

RMIT Kaleide Theatre

Saturday 14 July 7.30pm

\$10/\$8

RUNZELSTIRN & GURGELSTOCK (SWITZERLAND)

DAVE PHILLIPS (SWITZERLAND)

JUSTICE YELDHAM & THE DYNAMIC RIBBON DEVICE (SYDNEY)

ABE SADA (CAT HOPE (PERTH) + Guests)

Season Passes - \$40/\$30

TICKETS :: [moshtix](#)



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



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31 July 2007

Cinema for the Ears, Music for the Eyes

Liquid Architecture 8 // Nat. // 28-30.06.07

by [Melissa Lesnie](#)

Image: Performance by Runzelstirn and Gurgelstock

© Shannon O'Neill

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Swiss artist and activist Dave Phillips harnessed the power of imagery, text and sound to express his own ethical convictions, unleashing a confronting tirade against animal cruelty. Nightmarish footage of abuse and systematic slaughter rolled over distorted dog barks, torturous squeals and Phillips's own visceral vocals. Spliced subliminal text, urging members of the audience to examine their role in the carnage, completed the ideological onslaught. Through intricately combined technological resources, Phillips delivered a probing indictment of a society's willingness to look the other way.

Unlike the overt vegan propaganda dispensed by his fellow Swiss artist, the works of Runzelstirn and Gurgelstock (a.k.a. Rudolf Eb.er) are ambiguous in content and meaning, though by no means less unsettling. In the same way that Natasha Anderson's sharp gestures imbued her act with a sense of immediacy, his boldly physical performance art held the audience enthralled. Decked out in forbidding black latex (he is perhaps best described as the Marilyn Manson of the art world), breathing heavily through a gas mask and shackled to his own audio equipment, R&G cued raucous industrial sounds through hand-held triggers that he pointed at members of the audience as if to shoot them. A pot of vinegar, set at centre stage and brought gradually to boiling point during this volatile display, kept everyone on edge; I began to wish I'd sat a few rows back.

The raw, unflinching intensity of his first act seemed rather tame compared to the finale. The screening of a filmed R&G performance piece drew Liquid Architecture attendees into a disturbing spectacle. The artist issued three rounds of coloured liquids to three young Japanese women clad in ghostly white. After dutifully guzzling the beverages, and with ritualistic drums urging them on, the girls vomited onstage into plastic basins for the best part of half an hour. Close-up shots and gratuitous noises captured the event in all its grotesque intimacy, causing widespread offence among viewers and provoking complaints that reached far beyond mere loss of appetite. From booing and pointed walk-outs (the audience was vastly depleted by the end of the evening) to verbal protest ('you sexist fuckers!'), there can be no denying that Runzelstirn and Gurgelstock sparked controversy.

For me, the range of reactions was far more interesting than the performance itself. Gross-out factor aside, most detractors of the work adopted a feminist stance, likening the artist's supposed violation of his subjects to pornography. Others expressed admiration of the women's dedication to the task and their openness to extreme life experiences. But the question of artistic intent remains: can a performance specifically designed to sicken and disgust be termed 'art' on polemical grounds, and can a viewer transcend gut reaction (excuse the pun) to arrive at a layer of meaning more profound than what shock value alone can ascribe?

Runzelstirn and Gurgelstock's inflammatory piece bears witness, at least, to a community of Sydneysiders passionately engaged in discussing and supporting a wide range of electroacoustic, audiovisual and performance projects. The Brisbane and Melbourne branches of LA8, too, each featured a diverse selection of local and international acts, catering to crowds equally devoted to experimental art forms. Along with the annual Electrofringe and NOW Now festivals, Liquid Architecture provides one of the most important forums for the exploration of Australia's emerging and evolving sound culture.

Performance Details

Liquid Architecture, Sydney Performance Space, Carriageworks, Sydney
28th–30th June, 2007

Featuring Abject Leader, Natasha Anderson, Lloyd Barrett, Cellule d'Intervention Metamkine, Tony Mason-Cox with Ann Onymous, The Daniel Green Tribute Show, Lucas Darklord, Kamusta, Wade Marynowsky, Peter Newman, Dave Phillips, Rik Rue, Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock, Jasper Streit, and Winner.

Further Links

Liquid Architecture (www.liquidarchitecture.org.au)

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Tony Mason-Cox and Ann Onymous, Liquid Architecture 8, Sydney
photo Shannon O'Neill

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OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS THE SYDNEY DIRECTORS OF LIQUID ARCHITECTURE, SHANNON O'NEILL AND BEN BYRNE, HAVE CONSISTENTLY DEMONSTRATED A BOLD AND DISTINCTIVE CURATORIAL APPROACH. EACH EVENING IS NOT ONLY CLEARLY CRAFTED TO EXPLORE A PARTICULAR ASPECT OR FETISH OF AUDIO EXPLORATION, BUT TO "DO SOMETHING TO YOU." THE 2007 SYDNEY EVENT WAS THEIR MOST PROVOCATIVE YET.

surprise sounds

In a controversial move, the opening night seemed aimed at repelling audiences. The program notes claimed an exploration of popular music, but it felt more like a finger to the idea of scenes and acceptance: who is an outsider artist and who an insider; if it's all about self-expression why are some people perceived as artists, some not? Daniel Green has a developing reputation for his performative video work, and he took a brave leap in presenting a live version of his excruciatingly daggy style, opening with "Tomorrow Belongs to Me" from Cabaret, in enthusiastic yet shaky baritone accompanied by occasional noise bursts on a toy guitar.

The audience was split between aghast and amused. Green continued with a remix travesty of "Maria" from West Side Story with glitched minidisk backing and finished off with a fiendish version of "Tell Me More" from Grease, played from a commercial DVD that supplies sing-a-long karaoke text, to which Green only sang "blah blah." Knowing, and sometimes appreciating, Green's work for video, I found this interesting not so much as sonic exploration but rather as a performance work, but to those in the dark it must have been indeed perplexing.

This disorientation worsened with the introduction of Tony Mason-Cox and his accompanist Ann Onymous. Mason-Cox is an insurance salesman who likes to pen a tune or two, particularly a dirty ditty, and enthusiastically sing them in his stumbling way. His first few limericks were amusing, but he seems to have written hundreds and the overload became tortuous, particularly for those with delicate political constitutions. What was most interesting was when Mason-Cox sang a serious song about his stepfather, his voice now frail and uncertain. The sentiment was genuinely moving—which made the audience distinctly uncomfortable. Was Mason-Cox's inclusion in the program a challenge to sound art elitism or was he wilfully placed out

of context? These conspicuously contentious questions charged the Sydney LA 8 opening evening. For those who hung on to the end, the glam rock mayhem of the band Winner was their clear reward.

Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock, Liquid Architecture 8, Sydney
photo Shannon O'Neill

actionist acts

In contrast, the second night promised to be truly terrifying with performances by actionist inspired artists Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock (one person actually, Rudolf Eb.er) and Dave Phillips from Switzerland and local artist Lucas Darklord (aka Thomas Knox Arnold). While Natasha Anderson on contrabass and garklein recorders with electronics might appear to be out of place in this industrial gothic line-up, her deft use of dynamics, texturing and attack gave her performance an intriguing brutality juxtaposed with fragility making her one of the most satisfying acts (conceptually and sonically) of the festival. Conversely, Lucas Darklord's appearance—militaristic jacket with spiked shoulder pads and half blackened face—promised something more gruesome than we actually experienced, which turned out to be a polite set of dark and murky glitches shifting in and out of a timid apocalypse.

Dave Phillips was certainly disturbing for many with his video collage of human cruelty to animals, accompanied by poetically accusatory aphorisms and unrelenting noise floor. While the piece by Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock—involving a camp-stove with a pot of boiling vinegar, pig nose and a strap-on finger noise activator—looked ready to deliver on its threat of menace, the artist appeared gleeful in denying us any dramatic climax.

The evening ended with the video documentation of a performance by Runzelstirn & Gurgelstock involving a line-up of butoh inspired female performers drinking a variety of different coloured substances on cue to loud music and throwing up for a very long time. While outwardly a performance piece, its roots were in audio—by far the worst aspect of sitting through it was the sound of the women gagging, spitting and sticking their fingers further down their throats to prolong the action. As a very transparent “play” of manipulation and consensual subjugation, set very firmly within the extreme body zone of Japanese performance aesthetics, I was surprised by the agitated response to the piece as sexist by some in the audience. But then again not everyone has consensually subjugated themselves to a decade of performance art...

audio-visuality

The final evening concentrated on audiovisual explorations and did not seem planned to upset the audience, although excessive length did move it into the realm of endurance. The common theme, it seemed, was the re-emergence, for better or worse, of narrative in audiovisual works. Peter Newman has developed a distinctive style—intensely minimal visuals and dramatic bittersweet sounds—and he explored this further, pushing the sweet a little more than the bitter this time. Lloyd Barrett seems to use similar visual processing methods to Newman but opted for a (for some too) clear narrative using text panels to explicate his dream segments, creating a pithy short film feel to his set.

Kamusta (Chris Caines and Jessica Tyrrell) employed two screens—one a slowly setting sun, another a shifting melange of close-up street details—accompanied by a minimally developing soundscape and live voiceover by Caines. While all the elements were clear and considered, the piece as a whole did not develop beyond a kind of ambivalent ambience perhaps created by an unreconciled struggle with the figurative nature of text. Abject Leader introduced a performer to their 16mm film and

audio set. There was potential in the beat poet flow of Jamie Hume's offering, however the parodic gesture at character—safari suit, pith helmet and fake facial hair—felt underdeveloped and stylistically awkward, which along with some ornery projectors resulted in an overly long and difficultly paced set, although Joel Stern's sounds maintained some momentum.

Cellule d'Intervention Metamkine, the team of French projection and sound artists came on at some time close to midnight for a 40-minute set when many of us in the audience had very little left to invest; however their dynamism was worth the wait. There is an orchestral quality, a Hitchcock-Herrmann grandeur to the work that is both perplexing and invigorating. The very hands-on manipulation of light is alchemical and magical, the structure of the set intriguing in its use of internal climactic steps and troughs. It felt like we were in the hands of dream masters...and when it was over we stumbled out shell-shocked and hazy, trying to remember our way home.

in situ

The festival also featured Terminal, installations by Jasper Streit, Natasha Anderson, Rik Rue and Wade Marynowksy, dotted around the CarriageWorks foyer. A potentially difficult venue due to sound bleed issues, the pieces were well-placed providing little islands of focus for audiences easily dissipated in the cavernous space. Marynowsky's player piano automaton, Anderson's abject testicular gloops and Streit's minimal metal object provided as much visual as audio intrigue.

The curation of Liquid Architecture Sydney this year was wily and thought provoking, the experience of the whole festival being stronger and more satisfying perhaps than the individual performances. Despite the suspicion that programming of extreme acts might repel some audiences, the festival was very well attended with the final night at capacity. Sadly Shannon O'Neill and Ben Byrne have called it quits for Liquid Architecture. It cannot be said that they went quietly.

Liquid Architecture 8, Sydney directors Ben Byrne, Shannon O'Neill, national director Nat Bates; Performance Space at CarriageWorks, Sydney, June 28-30

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