Campbell Drake

THE ACCUMULATION OF CYCLICAL OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The Accumulation of Cyclical Operations *examines how site-specific performances can activate engagement with the spatial politics of contested Australian landscapes. It describes a series of iterative performances situated in contested spatial contexts, each centred on the semiotic potential of pianos as cultural artefacts of European origins. Emerging from the iterative project work are a series of three operations:* Spatial Inversions, Instrumentalising *and* Spatial Tuning. *Synthesised as a concluding performance within Melbourne's decommissioned H.M. Pentridge Prison, the research offers this combined set of operations as a methodological contribution to the field of critical spatial practice, with capacity to activate new spatio-political formations and to critically engage in the spatial politics of contested landscapes.*

BIOGRAPHY

Educated in Australia and the UK, Campbell Drake is an architect, researcher and a senior lecturer in the School of Architecture at the University of Technology Sydney. His research is focused on intercultural creative practice and participatory design strategies for sustainable development within regional contexts. Drake has completed a PhD in the School of Architecture and Design at RMIT University and holds a Masters of Research Architecture from Goldsmiths University, University of London. Recent publications include Curatorial Design at the Cultural Interface: Mapping Culpra Station, *Curator Journal (2019),* Spatial Tuning, Performance, the Piano and the Spatial Politics of Waste Management, *SOPHIA Journal (2018) and* Instrumental: Performance and the Cumulative Potential of Distributed Sites *published in OAR: The Oxford Artistic Research Journal (2017).*

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PROJECT 01: DURATION.

This design research examines how site-specific performance can activate engagement with the spatial politics of contested landscapes through a series of iterative performances situated in various Australian contexts, each centred on the semiotic potential of the piano as a cultural artefact of European origins.

Originally focusing on iconic architectural spaces, the research evolved through two phases of project investigations. **Phase #01_Urban Landmarks**, begun in 2012, explores two nineteenth century landmark buildings; Melbourne's Flinders Street Station ballroom (*Duration*) and the Princess Street Theatre (*The Princess Theatre Inversion*). **Phase #02_Contested Australian Landscapes** engages with the spatial politics of Hobart's municipal rubbish dump (*Spatial Tuning*) and on a property acquired by the Indigenous Land Corporation as part of a land bank established for Aboriginal people (*Instrumental*).

Consistent throughout is an exploration of the performative relations between spectatorship, action, and spatial contexts. Emerging from this iterative project work are three operations: *Spatial Inversions*, *Instrumentalising* and *Spatial Tuning*. Synthesised as a concluding performance in Melbourne's decommissioned Pentridge Prison, these operations are offered here as a methodological contribution to the field of critical spatial practice,[01] with the capacity to activate new spatio-political formations and to critically engage in the spatial politics of contested landscapes.

PHASE #01 _ URBAN LANDMARKS, PROJECT 01: DURATION

Flinders Street Station is located in Melbourne on the corner of Swanston and Flinders Street. Running parallel to the Yarra River, the station covers two city blocks from Swanton Street in the North to Queen Street in the South. The Station serves the entire metropolitan rail network, including suburban and regional rail services, and is the busiest station in Melbourne, with over 100,000 entries per weekday.[02] Listed on the Victorian Heritage Register, Flinders Street Station was the first railway station in an Australian city and in the late 1920s was the world's busiest passenger station. The main station building, with its prominent dome, arched entrance, tower, and clocks was completed in 1909 and is a Melbourne cultural icon, and one of the city's most recognisable landmarks.[03] In the early 1900s, in addition to acting as Victoria's largest transport hub, the station was a hive of public activity, incorporating a ballroom, gymnasium and kindergarten. Following privatisation in the 1990s, almost half of the station complex had been cordoned off by 2012, and left to deteriorate. Of all these off-limit spaces, it is the ballroom that attracts public fascination. Since its conception as a concert hall in 1910, this space has hosted lectures, meetings, drama, opera, orchestra, and dance. Purpose built for performance, the ballroom's vaulted ceiling and double-glazed windows provide acoustics that are ideal for the performing arts.

In occupying the ballroom, *Duration* sought to reveal "the traces of people who have inhabited it in the past, the stories of partially erased or contested inhabitations – and to raise the issue of ownership."[04] According to Gay McAuley, "anyone setting out to make a site based performance must of necessity enter into negotiations with the owners of the site, those who currently occupy it, and those who have control over it,"[05] and in substantiating the performance design for *Duration*, Flinders Street Station was no exception. As we were the first group to be granted permission to use these spaces in nearly thirty years we had to factor in a number of contingencies. This constraint demonstrates that "a serious engagement with place necessitated by site based performance practice is likely to involve engagement with weighty matters which are themselves at the heart of major political conflicts."[06]

Funded by the City of Melbourne public art commission, *Duration* took place in the Flinders Street Station ballroom on the evening of the 19th October, 2012. Two pianists, Elizabeth Drake and Caroline Almonte, gave a 90-minute performance of Simeon Ten Holt's *Canto Ostinato* performed on two grand pianos. Health and safety constraints prevented a public audience. In their place, a film crew broadcasted the performance from the ballroom to the Federation Square screen, to the internet, and via the public announcement system to the stations' thirteen platforms and public concourse. Through the inversion of conventional spatial arrangements between the performers and audiences, *Duration* temporarily enabled the reactivation of privatized public infrastructure, returning the ballroom to the public realm for the first time in 29 years.

PHASE #01 _ URBAN LANDMARKS, PROJECT 02: THE PRINCESS THEATRE INVERSION

The Princess Theatre is regarded as one of Melbourne's most spectacular landmarks. Opened in 1886 and designed in the style of the French Second Empire, the theatre has a symmetrical brick façade with three pavilion bays, each roofed with mansard domes crowned with elaborate cast iron crestings. The facade is adorned with urns, a frieze of festoons, and giant Corinthian pilasters and columns.[07] Re-appropriating this landmark, *The Princess Theatre Inversion* questions conventional socio-spatial structures by inverting the relationships between performers, audience and theatre, and exploring the activation of new socio-spatial formations by re-framing interactions between the piano as cultural artefact, an audience as community, and the Princess Theatre as an urban landmark.

Leading scholars writing on site-specific performances are quick to point out the limitations of engaging critically with the theatre;[08] however, *The Princess Theatre Inversion* contests this, and seeks to critique the proscenium theatre as a dominant site of cultural production. Rather than developing a narrative-based critique on stage with a live audience, the performance challenges the structure of traditional theatre space by destabilizing conventional social and architectural spatial relationships.

An invited audience of one hundred people were asked to queue up at the service entry on Little Bourke Street.
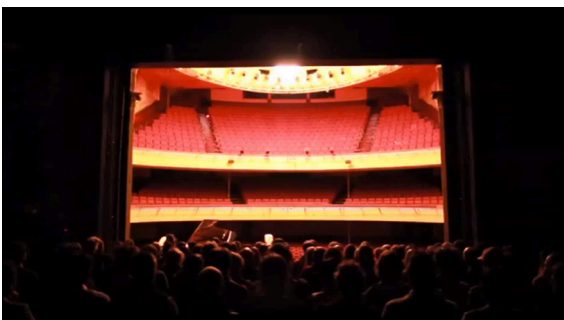
At exactly 20:00, the side door opened, and the audience moved into the loading dock. The intention was for the audience, clustered together, to be aware of what Fischer-Lichtes refers to as emergent community through the corporeality of performance.[09] While the audience waited in the loading dock, an usher announced the commencement of the performance, and requested that everyone remain silent while entering the theatre. Moving through the oversized steel doors to stage right, the audience were guided through darkness towards a hundred blue seats lit from above, lightly obscured in stage fog. Filing into the rows and instructed to leave no free seats, the audience took their places. Once seated, the spotlight above the audience gradually dimmed, leaving the audience in complete darkness, unknowingly facing the empty auditorium of the Princess Theatre.

In the darkness, pianists Elizabeth Drake and Vanessa Tomlinson made their way to two grand pianos interlocked on stage right. Taking their cue from a second spotlight, the performers commenced a twenty-minute recital of Reich's *Piano Phase*. As the music progressed and phased, synchronised lighting gradually introduced the audience to the empty auditorium. The lush red velvet seating and crystal chandelier emerging from the darkness as a foggy apparition, hyper-real under full house lights. According to one audience member, the theatre "slowly revealed itself and its architectural form as well as its decoration. The lighting highlighted areas that you would usually ignore or consider as a given." "The music had the drowsy mania of bees," another noted, "the chandelier the honey from the roof of the hive caught in the suspended moment before the fall. A poem in seeing what was already there, till my eyes closed from the lushness of the empty theatre. I didn't feel like talking. Just walking in the dark.[10] At the halfway point of the twenty-minute recital, the lighting sequence was reversed, removing definition from the auditorium once again and submerging the audience into darkness, the musical and light sequence completing with the spotlight again over the audience.

THE THEATRE AND SPATIAL POLITICS

In actively engaging with the spatial politics of the proscenium theatre, *The Princess Theatre Inversion* sought critical insights into a dominant space of cultural production. Exposing conventional arrangements of human (audience) and non-human (space) participants

PROJECT 02: THE PRINCESS THEATRE INVERSION.

by inverting conventional spatial relationships between performers, audience and the architectural environment questioned the spatio-political formations of the theatre. This revealed that despite inverting the physical relations between stage, audience, performers and auditorium, normative behaviour within this context was unaffected. The audience adopted their usual passive role, only seated on stage. In surveys conducted after the performance, it was noted that while half the audience had previously attended the Princess Theatre, over half had no idea they were sitting on the stage.

By shifting customary access to the auditorium (from the front door of Princess Street to the service entry of Little Bourke), and removing the visual cues provided by exit lights (blacked out to create complete darkness), the audience was unable to locate themselves. Some noted that they thought the performance was a prank, and that they had been led into a warehouse adjacent to the theatre. Re-appropriating normative architectural cues in this way provoked a dissociative impulse and a feeling of disorientation.

In a post-performance survey, one audience member noted: "The performance provoked a sensory engagement in which the architecture became dynamic in the participation of space. The work provoked me to reflect on myself as though the theatre was reconstructed as having eyes."[11] This reference to the theatre as 'having eyes' resonates with Jacques Rancière's description of 'a third thing'.[12] Rancière writes: "It is not the transmission of the artist's knowledge or inspiration to the spectator, it is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them."[13] While Rancière's 'Emancipated Spectator' is focused on hierarchical relationships and issues of equality played out between spectators and performers, *The Princess Theatre Inversion* extends this relational concern through its emphasis on a third performative agent: the built environment.

The Princess Theatre Inversion provokes a spatial condition in which the performers, the theatre and the audience might experience each other anew. By assigning the built environment an active role, the assumption that architectural environments are passive, static, and immobile is questioned, re-framed by the viewers' gaze to produce a heightened present.[14] By focusing attention on the empty auditorium and the pianists, the absence

that is the empty auditorium provokes a transformation in which spectators become aware of their own presence in relation to the performers, the audience and the built environment, or, as Gabriella Giannachi writes, "the listener is made to encounter what is in front or before them, so that they may become alert to what is around them... the subject relocates, re-presents in space and time in order to re-encounter themselves in the other or as the other."[15]

PHASE #02_CONTESTED AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPES, PROJECT 03: INSTRUMENTAL

The piano and music selected in *Duration* and *The Princess Theatre Inversion* are recognisable as belonging to a canon of minimalist composition, associated with a certain type of formalised spectatorship. Confirming this mode of spectatorship, Phase #01_Urban Landmarks explored unconventional spatial configurations between audience, performers, and space, enabling an interruption of normative modes of audience engagement. This interruption is enhanced by informing the audience of certain elements in the event dramaturgy in advance, such as the music selection (Reich/Glass) or the way in which to enter the space (side entry/silence). This advance information provokes a preconception of the way in which a performance may be conducted. Phase #01 sought to engage these preconceptions, then shift traditional modes of performance, forcing the audience to relocate themselves in relation to the performer, the space, and fellow audience members.

Through three regionally-situated piano experimentations, Phase #02_Contested Australian Landscapes sought to move away from the limited way in which *Duration* and *The Princess Theatre Inversion* engaged with the political implications of the piano. Working with these semiotic inflections, the projects in Phase #02 actively engage with these implications in a variety of contexts, including the piano's implied relation to Australian colonial history and the ongoing impact of colonialism. Breaking out of the urban context of Phase #01, Phase #02 explored contested Australian landscapes in Tasmania and New South Wales: a property acquired by the Indigenous Land Corporation as part of a land bank established for Aboriginal people for the project performance *Instrumental*; and Hobart's municipal rubbish dump for the project *Spatial Tuning*. These two projects develop

PROJECT 03: INSTRUMENTAL.

The placement of the piano inverts conventional tuning practice, repositioning pianist to piano (human to non-human) relations by assigning the environment (non-human) an active role in the tuning process.

A local piano tuner from Mildura , forty kilometers away, tunes the salvaged piano for thirty minutes (to the best of his ability) in the blazing midday sun.

As he toiled away, the piano resisted. It could not maintain harmony in a foreign environment. The concept of 'tuning space' emerges from the experience; the distance between passive spectators and constructed environments collapses, recalibrating the spatial temporal qualities of landscape.

a specific type of practice described by Jane Rendell as critical spatial practice—work that intervenes into a site in order to "critique and question" those "existing social and spatial orders" present.[16] Extending the semiotic, spatial and performative potentials of the piano, they explore how site-specific performance can activate engagement in the spatial politics of contested Australian landscapes.

Instrumental, the first of three spatial investigations, engages with the semiotic resonance of the piano as a critical instrument in activating spatial politics. The performance took place in 2015 within the critical mapping workshop *Interpretive Wonderings*.[17] *Instrumental* features a local tuner attempting to tune a broken upright piano outdoors on Culpra Station, on land intended to form part of a compensatory land bank for the dispossession of Aboriginal people. It provided an opportunity to explore the semiotic potential of the piano for engaging in the spatial politics of land, Indigenous Country and the ongoing impact of colonialism in Australia. The title of the work, *Instrumental*, is both a framing device and an operation. The operation of *Instrumentalising* actively engages with the spatial politics of Culpra Station through a sustained encounter with the spatio-temporal conditions of the duplicitous identity of a contested Australian landscape. Instrumentalising seeks to poetically problematize the instrumental logic of colonialism in Australia by reframing and assigning non-human agents an active role in the renegotiation and activation of new socio-political formations.

Reflected in the provenance of Culpra Station are traces of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous occupation and cultural practices dating back 20,000 years. The colonial and modern pastoralist histories have left some obvious marks on the land, including laser-levelled pastures, redundant irrigation channels, farming infrastructure, and the remnants of a former homestead. Alongside this pastoralist history, the land at Culpra Station has a number of significant Aboriginal historical and cultural sites, including burial sites, hearths, scarred trees, an ochre quarry, middens, and a fish trap.[18] In making reference to the provenance of Culpra Station in relation to Indigenous and non-Indigenous ownership and demarcation, it is interesting to consider Paul Groth's assertion that "landscape denotes the interaction of people and place: a social group and its spaces, particularly the spaces to which the group belongs and from which its members derive some part of their shared identity and meaning."[19]

THE SEMIOTIC REGISTER OF THE PIANO

The first piano arrived in Australia in 1788 with the first fleet, and was once considered the cultural heart and soul of the colonial home. It occupied the parlour, "a place for families and their guests to gather, entertain and socialise, as well as a place to retreat into private solace."[20] Historically an object of desire, status and 'civilization',[21] pianos have in recent times been replaced with alternate forms of screen-based entertainment, including television, personal computers and smart phones.[22] Whilst we might imagine the piano's place in the modern home has become redundant, and indeed these instruments are often gifted for free,[23] the symbolic recognition of the piano in Australia as part of a western cultural heritage has remained intact, with a perceived identity that is tied to a British colonial past.[24]

The move from iconic architectural spaces, purpose built for performance, to a landscape setting marked a methodological shift in this work, affecting both the type of piano selected and the mode of pianist-to-instrument interaction. The pianos selected for *Duration* and *The Princess Theatre Inversion* were concert grand pianos, upon which formal recitals were played by professional musicians. Moving from the environmental and political context of an urban to a rural setting, from controlled interiors to an externalized landscape condition, necessitated a shift from grand pianos to salvaged upright pianos, and in the mode of interaction with the piano from formal recital to a staged tuning. While it cannot be denied that certain pragmatic concerns influenced these decisions—availability, cost, permissions, and the logistics of transporting a grand piano to a remote region— this shift from grand to upright piano was also intended to highlight the spatial conventions associated with types of piano. The symbolic register of piano types and forms in relation to particular historical lineages is made clear in this shift; the grand piano as associated with cultural institutions of high art becomes clearly distinct from the upright piano found in more informal, domestic environments.[25] The formal, rehearsed performance of the ballroom or theatre gives way to the practiced negotiations between the piano and tuner, problematised and at once extended by demanding that instrument and actor also engage with the immediate environment.

INSTRUMENTAL: THE EVENT

Instrumental was staged in an area of Culpra Station dominated by a ghostly forest of dead gum trees, which had suffered in the state-wide drought of the early 2000's. By situating the piano on the black soil surrounded by gnarled trees, I hoped to invoke a dialogue between the piano and environment of Indigenous Country in which the piano becomes vulnerable, poised to be subsumed by the Australian landscape. I commissioned a piano tuner from Mildura, forty kilometres away, to tune the salvaged piano on site for thirty minutes, to the best of his ability, in the blazing midday sun. The instrument had not been played in over fifty years, and had a cracked sound board. The act of tuning and tightening strings only put additional pressure on the internal mechanisms, which slid in and out of tune as the tuner moved through the keys. As he toiled away, the piano resisted. It denied its new situation, and could not maintain harmony in a foreign environment.

Swatting flies from their eyes, a small party of silent onlookers took shelter in the shade of nearby vehicles. One unfortunate spectator sitting on an ants' nest suppressed the urge to call out and disturb the meditative space produced as the tuner went about his futile task. The act of tuning could be conceived as re-enacting a colonial preoccupation with dominating land that was perceived as a hostile, harsh and foreign environment. In *Instrumental*, the tuner, a solitary figure in the landscape, is not a recognised "noise musician" or "sound performer" but becomes an almost absurd caricature of his colonial forbears. But more than this, the placement of the piano outdoors not only inverts conventional tuning practices, repositioning pianist-to-piano (human-to-non-human) interaction by assigning the environment (non-human) a more active role in the tuning process, it offers the landscape (or Country) a chance to be made manifest through the instrument. As one audience member observed, *Instrumental* "produced a space of meditative contemplation" in which "the act of tuning the piano allowed the landscape to speak through the instrument as the piano was tuned to the wind and the birds."[26]

Through tuning, the sonic and spatial qualities of a once-subjugated landscape – the acoustic ecology within which the tuner recalibrates the instrument – is given presence. The act of tuning the piano outdoors is therefore both a satirical commentary on the colonial desire to control the harsh landscape and conditions presented by Australian

Tuning re-enacts the colonial preoccupation with fighting what was perceived as a hostile, foreign environment.

As the tuner played and tuned each of the notes, the sounds of the landscape were seemingly amplified as a form of symphonic accompaniment.

PROJECT 04: SPATIAL TUNING.

Situated between environmental extremes of human consumption and natural landscape, the different sonic and visual frequencies combined to reveal the anthropocentric nature of contemporary society.

environments, and a means of highlighting "the duplicity of landscape," "the tension between thing and idea–matter and meaning, place and ideology."[27]

PHASE #02_CONTESTED AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPES, PROJECT 04: SPATIAL TUNING

The operation of *Spatial Tuning* emerged from the experience of conducting research in a specific place/space in the performance *Instrumental*. The distance between passive spectators and constructed environments collapsed, provoking an active engagement in the spatio-temporalities of the Australian landscape. Following *Instrumental*, a fourth performance entitled *Spatial Tuning* took place at a municipal landfill site in Hobart, Tasmania.[28] *Spatial Tuning* involved a second staged piano tuning, this time at the contested boundary between the Mount Wellington National Park and the McRobies Gully Waste Recycling Centre. In shifting emphasis from Indigenous to environmental politics, *Spatial Tuning* sought to explore the contingencies of different spatial contexts on the symbolic resonance of the piano.

On a cold winters day in June, 2016, an audience of eighteen people made up of members of the Performance Studies international (PSi) Performance + Design Working Group arrived at a predetermined meeting place at the top of the McRobies Gully southern escarpment. We set off down the road and up the fire break. I located the walking track and passed along the ridge and through a burnt-out patch of eucalyptus forest. Coming to a marker, we veered right, leaving the path and heading down the ridge. At this point, I realised the difficulties some audience members were having descending the hillside on an unmarked track, but we continued, picking our way through broken branches and the litter of the forest floor. From the valley floor, the sound of heavy vehicles could be heard dropping off and working piles of rubbish. As we moved closer to the site, we heard the sound of crows and notes from a piano being tuned in the distance.

Twenty chairs had been arranged in close proximity to the piano tuner, who sat with his back to the audience overlooking McRobies rubbish dump, framed by the forest of Mount Wellington National Park in the distance. The piano was perched against a gate next to a sign which read

'No Unauthorized Entry – Trespassing Prohibited' in bold red text.

Like *The Princess Theatre Inversion*, the audience were instructed to file into the seating without leaving a space. The ground was muddy, and the legs of the chairs slowly sank into the ground. To the right of the piano, in the middle distance, was the tip face, where an excavator picked at the rubbish next to a man unloading building waste. Their activity disturbed flocks of seagulls and crows eating at the tip face who took to the air in waves, like plumes of black and white smoke. For thirty minutes the audience sat, listened and observed the piano tuning, the machines of the tip, and the birds.

TUNING (IN)

Providing a theoretical framework for *Spatial Tuning*, the term 'tuning' is presented as a concept, a process and a framing device. While the common definition of tuning—"the action or process of tuning something and the extent to which a musical instrument, performance, or ensemble is in tune"—is at the centre of the performance, a secondary definition of 'tuning', to "adjust or adapt (something) to a particular purpose or situation," is equally relevant.[29] The 'something' that is adjusted or adapted within the performance is both the piano and the spatial context; the 'purpose' is to bring an audience into close proximity with the adulterated landscape; and the 'situation' is the environmental impact of human consumption. So too, the notion of being 'tuned in', of being "sensitive to or able to understand something," and 'tuning into', or " becoming sensitive to," resonates with the aim of the performance: exposing normally passive spectators to the environmental and spatio-temporal conditions of a landscape.

The reflections of the spectators described how *Spatial Tuning* as an operation fostered new perceptions of the relationships between landscape and bodily absence, enabling close encounters with previously distanced landscapes. One response noted that the performance "attuned us to that which was out of tune with the natural environment," while making them "more attuned to a certain theatrics of an environment simultaneously in and out of tune."[30] Others stated that "the performance invited us, the audience, to collaborate in attuning ourselves to the contested location of the tip," and that the overall

perception was "more of being the thing being tuned." Seeking to explore how the audience perceived the role of the landscape I asked if they considered the landscape to have performed. The answers were unanimously affirmative, however the ways in which the landscape was perceived to have done so varied. One audience member suggested that the landscape was "an immersive and troubled player," while another thought "the (problematic) spatial and performative agency of the tip was amplified/intensified through the piano tuning and collective witnessing." Another audience response reframed the landscape as a fragmented, pluralistic and performative condition, stating: "I think it (the landscape) exists on many levels. It is the naturally occurring landscape of the park, but it also contains the human interventions of the tip." Another noted, "In the moment, I sensed two landscapes: that of the tip and that of the forest surrounding it. The landscape as forest performed the wind and rustling. To me, the landscape under the tip was performed upon as though it was a body anesthetised and being cut into."

These responses perceive the landscape as dynamic; the national park and the rubbish dump are reframed by the viewers' gaze, temporarily collapsing the distance between spectator and environment. This 'collapsing' of audience and landscape through the performance facilitated a prolonged encounter with the rubbish dump at a proximity that is both uncommon and unfamiliar to contemporary society. The performance provoked a temporal disorientation in which a sense of being-present is intensified through a recalibration of normative modes of human and non-human interaction, of a coexistence which normally extends no further than discarding rubbish in a bin or putting bins out for collection. In redefining these normative modes, *Spatial Tuning* has the potential to open up a transformative encounter between the tuning, the landscape and the audience, in which the perception of the situated audience may oscillate from the meditative drone of the piano tuning to a renewed sense of embodied presence with the surrounding landscape.

By focusing on the rubbish dump and the piano tuning, *Spatial Tuning* sought to provoke a temporal transformation in which spectators become aware of their own presence in relation to the performance, the audience and the landscape. Using the post-performance surveys to qualify such a claim, I asked the audience if during the performance, whilst seated at the performance site, they imagined or 'projected' themselves into the tip

I sensed two landscapes: that of the tip and that of the surrounding forest, which performed the wind. The landscape of the tip was operated upon, as though it were an anesthetised body being cut.

In the middle distance was the tip face, where an excavator picked at rubbish and a man unloaded building waste. They disturbed flocks of birds eating at the tip face, who took to the air like plumes of smoke.

The piano was first tuned to 440 Hz (the frequency commonly used for contemporary orchestras) and then down to 432 Hz (a popularhistorical frequency). Tuning, in effect, became a turning back of the clock.

or the forest beyond, looking back at themselves seated in the audience?' One audience member responded: "I experienced my own presence and agency in the site sharply, because I was confronted with my own complicity... in the making of such spaces... the agency of making such [a] site-responsive performance is how it can amplify/intensify the politics of a specific location... mobilise a collective experience of witnessing — the tip became a shared location for participants to critically reflect on questions of environmental justice.[31]

PROJECT 05: THE ACCUMULATION OF CYCLICAL OPERATIONS

The spatial operations *Spatial Inversions*, *Instrumentalising* and *Spatial Tuning* which emerged from these two phases of iterative performances revealed a particular potential for performance to activate engagement in the spatial politics of contested sites of national significance. Consistent with the practice-led mode of enquiry, a final summative performance was undertaken to draw together these operations, to explore the potential of these accumulating cyclical operations for a critical spatial practice. This performance, entitled *The Accumulation of Cyclical Operations*, was staged on the morning of 18th October, 2017, in D-Division of the former HM Pentridge Prison complex in Coburg. Structured in two acts, *The Accumulation of Cyclical Operations* offers an intensification of the previous research and performances through an embodied encounter with the critical spatial operations of *Spatial Inversions*, *Intrumentalising* and *Spatial Tuning*.

Nicknamed the 'Bluestone College', Her Majesties' Pentridge Prison was established in 1851 in response to increased pressure on the penal system arising from the gold rush. According to the Victorian Heritage Register, the former prison buildings are of historical significance as the biggest prison complex built in Victoria in the nineteenth century, and of architectural significance due to their monumental size and the austere 19th century Classical style of their grim and imposing bluestone walls and towers. In 1924, Pentridge replaced the Melbourne Gaol as the main remand and reception prison for the metropolitan area. The bodies of a number of prisoners executed at the Melbourne Gaol were exhumed and relocated to Pentridge, where they were reburied. Pentridge also became the venue for all subsequent

hangings, until the last Australian prisoner to suffer the death penalty, Ronald Ryan, was executed in D-Division in 1967. HM Pentridge Prison officially closed in 1997, following the transfer of most of the prisoners to Barwon Prison.[32] In line with the 1990's trend for privatization, the land was released for development. D-Division is a three-storey blue stone building located on the southern edge of the former prison complex. Constructed in 1894 as a women's prison, the building became dedicated to remanding prisoners in 1956 until it closed in 1999. Relocated from the Old Melbourne Gaol, and still intact within D-Division, is the infamous hanging beam.

Entering the building for the first time during a preliminary site visit in 2017, D-Division struck me as the most disciplining kind of architecture, through "its expression of the requirements of containment and order."[33] The Victorian architecture struck me as both inhumane and ethereal, with its long central axis, central crossing, and three-storey vaulted ceiling lit by clerestory windows, washing the internal atrium with a church-like atmosphere. Set against this lightness, the weighty slabs of blue stone are skilfully laid throughout the ground floor. In each of the cramped cells is a single tiny window; with the knowledge that cells had been originally designed to house the inmates for a 23-hour day, the unattainable, light-filled void outside the prison doors was a constant, painful reminder of the outside world.

ACT 1: TUNING

The performance commenced at 05:45. An invited audience of fifty people were asked to assemble in the darkness at the front gates of HM Pentridge Prison. The audience was led to a prison yard where an upright piano had been positioned in front of a block of fifty deck chairs, all facing the prison wall. The yards had originally been divided into five sections, with a watch-tower located on the first floor of the main building as a kind of half-panopticon. In the twentieth century, with increased prisoner numbers and penal reforms that no longer permitted prisoners to be locked in their cells for twenty-three hours a day, these outdoor spaces were reconfigured into three larger yards by the removal of two sections of the original walls.

Despite the modifications, the yards were no less forbidding. On one side, the yard was enclosed by formidable blue stone masonry three storeys high, punctuated with the tiny barred windows of the prison cells. Bounded by concrete walls adorned with razor wire and rusted metal spikes, the yards had a covered seating area and a decaying basketball hoop along one wall. The wall behind the piano was around five metres high, with the first four metres built of solid bluestone capped with a later addition of red brick. The piano had been salvaged from a group of local musicians who were moving house due to rental increases; while it was relatively in tune, the structural integrity of the instrument had been seriously compromised by termites that had hollowed out the timber base, which now appeared to be held together by the thin veneer of the piano's varnish.

Drawing on the *Instrumental* and *Spatial Tuning* performances, the audience were presented with a man tuning a piano. Taking their seats, the audience sat in silence, listening and watching the tuner go about his task. In a symbolic, material and sonic dialogue, the tuner sat facing away from the audience in close proximity to the bluestone and brick wall. In the early dawn, the sunrise gave orange highlights to a purple sky, and a fast wind in the troposphere blew clouds across the sky. Birds flew around in the breeze, and weeds popping through the concrete swayed. A beam of sunlight shot from the clouds, momentarily lighting a section of the razor wire with a distinct gold. The audience sat in a bus-like configuration, and while they were stationary the wind-directed movement above evoked a certain forward momentum, as though the tuner was driving the performance into and through the wall.

Through the non-musical, systemic atonal quality of the tuning the ear of the audience members dialled into both the discordant sound itself and the sounds of the prison yard, of the "constant, unnerving threat of violence as abhorrent and meaningless as humans are able to create" that still permeated that space.[34] According to one audience member: "We were in this courtyard environment which had the most disciplining kind of architecture, hard and arresting. The barbed wire at the top, the blank wall, and I felt like we were bound to these seats. It was an uncomfortable experience. But as the piece went on and it was quite mesmeric."[35]

Understood through Murray Schafer's theory of acoustic ecologies—defined as a discipline studying the relationship mediated through sound between human

PROJECT 05: THE ACCUMULATION OF
CYCLICAL OPERATIONS.

We were in this courtyard environment which had the most disciplining kind of architecture, hard and arresting. The barbed wire at the top, the blank wall, and I felt like we were bound to these seats. It was an uncomfortable experience. But as the piece went on and it was quite mesmeric.

The background keynotes of the first Act were defined by the morning bird song, the buzzing of insects, the wind, and the sound of mounting traffic in the distance. The foregrounded signal sounds were dominated by the acoustic discipline of tuning the instrument that really didn't want to be restrained.

beings and their environments— the performance brought background sounds or 'keynotes,' foreground sounds as 'signal sounds', and those sounds particularly regarded by a community defined as 'soundmarks' together in one performance.[36] Employing Schafer's terminology we see how the performance begins to express a particular locality and spatial identity through sound, to the extent that a site can be read and characterised by sound. The background keynotes of Act 1 were morning bird song, the buzzing of insects, the wind, and the sound of mounting traffic in the distance. The foreground signal sounds were dominated by the acoustic discipline of tuning the instrument that really didn't want to be restrained. The echoes and reverberations that reflected from the hard and arresting surfaces of the prison yard were amplified by the bluestone and concrete before they escaped and were whisked away by the turbulent air above. Together, this ecology of sound reveals tensions latent within the space of the prison yard, but also the possibility of hearing a space in a way that unsettles these tensions, that situates space and politics within a landscape, no matter how visually remote.

ACT 2: PHASING

After being seated for twenty minutes, the daylight in the courtyard had brightened considerably, and the audience was encouraged to move back into the building for the second act. On the ground floor inside D-Division, two pianists sat in position at two interlocked grand pianos.

The participants filed into preconfigured seating beneath the octagonal atrium, on either side of the instruments. According to one audience member, the pianos were "hugged together with the lids propped up; they looked almost like insects in a kind of embrace ritual around one another."[37] The spectators were presented with clear views of the ornate Victorian skylight, from which light filtered down through the suspended corridors on the two levels above. From one side, the hanging beam was clearly visible, overlooked by a fortified observation box that sat awkwardly at the eastern end of the atrium. On the opposite side, behind the second group of audience members, thick metal bars and a padlocked gate cordoned off half the complex. Once seated, a minute's silence was held, while the audience listened to the continued tuning in the courtyard outside, now accompanied by morning song echoing from the birds roosting in the skylight above.

Breaking the silence, the pianists commenced a 25-minute recital of Steve Reich's *Piano Phase*. Written in 1968, *Piano Phase* is a minimalist composition that is commonly referred to as 'process music'. According to Reich, process music is defined "as pieces of music that are, literally, processes;" he writes: "the distinctive thing about musical processes is that they determine all the note-to-note (sound-to-sound) details and the overall form simultaneously."[38] Reich's phasing works generally have two identical lines of music, which begin synchronously, but slowly become out of phase with one another as one of them speeds up. In *Piano Phase*, Reich subdivides the work into three sections, with each section taking the same basic pattern, played rapidly by both pianists. The music is made up, therefore, by phasing the initial twelve-note melody.[39] Reich called the unexpected ways change occurred via the process 'by-products', formed by the superimposition of patterns. The superimpositions form sub-melodies, often spontaneously due to echo, resonance, dynamics, and tempo, and the general perception of the listener.[40]

Once seated for Act 2, the defining keynotes shifted to the single notes of the prison yard tuning accompanied by the morning bird song above. For twenty-five minutes of the second act, the audience were drowned in the signal sounds of *Piano Phase* that, according to one audience member, began to "transform the interior" through a "complete inversion, where I suddenly saw the piano as something different, and the human interaction with the piano suddenly became this moment of freedom where the acoustics were liberated by that interaction."[41]

This audience account registers a *Spatial Inversion* that was potentially caused by the sonic, material and spatial phasing between the outdoor piano tuning and the indoor recital. The audience, I suggest, in phasing between the spaces of confinement was first attuned to the single notes of the upright piano, and subsequently—despite their relocation for the recital of Act 2—remained attuned to these original environmental sounds. This provoked a cross referencing between instruments and the sonic practices presented within each act.

By phasing between the highly orchestrated, disciplining interior space of the abandoned prison and the exposed prison yard, where the tuner battled the decrepit piano, wind and non-human actants, the performance evoked resonances of "disciplinary and knowledge practices between ongoing colonial regimes and Indigenous Australians"[42] perhaps provoked by an awareness of the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous incarceration in Australia.[43]

THE ACCUMULATION OF CYCLICAL OPERATIONS

While *Spatial Inversions*, *Instrumentalising* and *Spatial Tuning* have been described separately and sequentially, their formation was by no means linear or independent. Rather, these operations run through the projects, resurfacing and recombining in cumulative and cyclical ways.

Informed by the reflective and iterative processes specific to artistic and practice-based research, the different performance sites overlap to create a discursive framework that operates across traditional and non-traditional research platforms. Emerging from this discursive framework are different forms of knowledge that reach diverse audiences within academic and non-academic contexts. Each subsequent iteration provides opportunities for critical reflection informed by modes of interaction, engagement and spectatorship, suggesting that the efficacy of practice-based research is defined by the convergence of sites of research production and research output in a cumulative field of discursive operations.

The final summative performance—*The Accumulation of Cyclical Operations*—offers these cumulative cyclical operations as a set of working methods for activating critical engagements with the spatial politics of contested landscapes and sites. By actively engaging in the relations between aesthetic practices, human and non-human interaction, and spatial politics, *The Accumulation of Cyclical Operations* questions how performance and architectural practices can be used to understand the issues of "how we are positioned at the interface of different knowledge systems, histories, traditions and practices."[44]

The act of accumulating these conceptual operations of *Spatial Inversions*, *Instrumentalising* and *Spatial Tuning* within one site provides insights into the limitations of traditional architectural and musical practices to control the dynamics of 'natural' environmental systems. Through an active engagement with the spatial politics of this

the tuning of the colonial instrument outdoors within the prison yard brought into focus the entanglement of Indigenous and western knowledge systems and disciplinary regimes.

By phasing between the interior of the abandoned prison and the yard, where a tuner battled against the decaying, decrepit piano, the swirling wind and non-human actants, the performance evoked resonances of 'disciplinary and knowledge practices between ongoing colonial regimes and Indigenous Australians.

contested urban landscape, *The Accumulation of Cyclical Operations* reinforces a critical standpoint that seeks not only to reflect and describe our relation to the order of things as validated by western knowledge systems, but also to transform and imagine something different.

DRAWING ON ⌐

NOTES

01 The author draws on Jane Rendell's definition of '*critical spatial practice*' with the aim of transgressing the limits of art and architecture to engage "with both the social and the aesthetic." See Rendell, Jane. 2006. *Art and Architecture: A Place Between*. London: I. B. Tauris.

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04 McAuley, Gay. 2005. "Site-Specific Performance: Place, Memory and the Creative Agency of the Spectator," *Arts Journal of the Sydney University Arts Association*, Vol.27, p.30.

05 McAuley, 2005, "Site-Specific Performance," p.30.

06 McAuley, 2005, "Site-Specific Performance," p.31.

07 Heritage Council of Victoria. 2008. *Victorian Heritage Database Report: Princess Theatre*. *Statement of Significance*. Available at: ‹https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/805/download-report› (Accessed 14th July, 2020).

08 McAuley, 2005, "Site-Specific Performance," p.27.

09 Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 2008. *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. New York: Routledge.

10 Audience response, *The Princess Theatre Inversion* post-performance survey. May, 2014.

11 Audience response, *The Princess Theatre Inversion* post-performance survey. May, 2014.

12 Rancière, Jacques. 2011. *The Emancipated Spectator*. Translated by Gregory Elliot. London, New York: Verso, p.15

13 Rancière, 2011, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p.15.

14 Rancière, 2011, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p.15.

15 Giannachi, Gabriella. 2012. *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being*. London, New York: Routledge, p.56. See particularly Chapter 3: Environmental Presence.

16 Rendell, Jane. 2009. "Constellations (or the Reassertion of Time into Critical Spatial Practice)," in Cross, David and Doherty, Claire (eds.) *One Day Sculpture*. Bielefeld, Germany: Kerber Verlag, p.22. The performances extend Ross Bolleter's Ruined Pianos (2000) and Richard McLester's The Piano is the Sea (2008) which engage the politics of a given spatial context by leveraging symbolic connotations of the piano. See also Andrea Buttner's recent show, which speaks of pianos, destruction and masculinity: http://en.artcontemporain-languedocroussillon.fr/evenement-939.html (Accessed 3rd July, 2020).

17 The workshop Interpretive Wonderings emerged through discussions with Barry Pearce, Aboriginal Elder and secretary of the Culpra Mill Aboriginal Corporation, in which he expressed a desire to develop representations of Culpra Station expressing an Indigenous perspective of land and Country. See: Drake, Campbell and Gilbert, Jock. 2016. "Interpretive Wonderings." *Field Work : Unlikely Journal for Creative Arts*, Issue 2. Available at ‹https://unlikely.net.au/issue-2/interpretive-wonderings› (Accessed 3rd July, 2020); and Drake, Campbell. 2017. "Instrumental: Performance and the Cumulative Potential of Distributed Sites." *OAR: The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Platform*, Issue 1, pp.96–110.

18 Environment and Heritage Management Plan (DRAFT), Culpra Station, NSW, 39-40. Prepared by Sunraysia Environmental, 2013.

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21 See Douglas Gordan's *The End of Civilisation*. Available at 'Art on Fire: Douglas Gordon's T*he End of Civilisation*', *The Guardian* Tuesday 3rd July, 2012. Available at: ‹https://www.theguardian.com/culture/video/2012/jul/03/douglas-gordon-cultural-olympiad-video› (Accessed 3rd July, 2020).

22 The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) estimate 99% of Australian homes have a working Television set. See: ACMA. 2012. 'TV Sets in Australian Households.' Available at: ‹http://www.acma.gov.au/theACMA/Library/researchacma/Snapshots-and-presentations/tv-sets-in-australian-households-research-library-landing-page› (Accessed 18th March, 2018).

23 On the 3rd July, 2020, Gumtree listed eighty four free upright pianos available in Australia (https://www.gumtree.com.au/s-upright+piano+free/k0?sort=price_asc).

24 See Jane Campion's 1993 film *The Piano* (New Zealand: Jan Chapman Productions, CiBy 2000).

25 Wolfe, Jocelyn. 2016. "Pioneers, Parlours and Pianos," pp.9-11.

26 *Instrumental* post-performance survey (Response 23), November, 2015.

27 Chaudhuri, Una and Fuchs, Eleanor (eds.). 2002. *Land/Scape/Theatre*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

28 For details of *Spatial Tuning*, including audience reception, see: Drake, Campbell. 2018. "Spatial Tuning: Performance, The Piano and the Spatial Politics of Waste Management." *Sophia Peer Review Journal*, Vol. 3 Issue 01. Available at: ‹https://www.sophiajournal.net/sophia-3-spatial-tuning-by-campbell-drake› (Accessed 3rd July, 2020).

29 "tuning." Lexico.com. 2020. https://www.lexico.com/definition/tuning. 5th July, 2020.

30 *This and the following audience responses are taken from post-performance surveys conducted following the Spatial Tuning event in August, 2016 (Responses 8, 9, 11, 12, 16 and 24).*

31 *Spatial Tuning* post-performance survey (Response 09), August, 2016.

32 Heritage Council of Victoria. 1998. *Victorian Heritage Database Report: HM Prison Pentridge*. Available at: ‹https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/183557/download-report› (Accessed 5th July, 2020).

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37 *The Accumulation of Cyclical Operations* post-performance survey (Response 29), October, 2017.

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39 Reich, "Music as a Gradual Process," pp.34-36

40 Epstein, Paul. 1986. "Pattern Structure and Process in Steve Reich's Piano Phase," *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol.LXXII Issue 4, pp.494-502.

41 *The Accumulation of Cyclical Operations* post-performance survey (Response 30), October, 2017.

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43 Indigenous representation within the prison system exceeds twenty eight percent, despite being only three percent of the Australian population. Korff, Jens. 2020. "Aboriginal Prison Rates." Available at: <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/law/aboriginal-prison-rates> (Accessed 5th July, 2020).

44 Nakata, 2007, *Disciplining the Savages, Savaging the Disciplines*, p.12.

FIGURES

Project 01: *Duration*. Flinders Street Station Ballroom, 2012, Photographs: Greta Costello. Reproduced with Permission.

Project 03: *Instrumental*, Culpra Station, 2015. Photographs: Greta Costello. Reproduced with Permission.

Project_05: *The Accumulation of Cyclical Operations*, HM Pentridge Prison, 2017. Photographs: Greta Costello. Reproduced with Permission.

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