

ANDREW JOHNSTON, ALEJANDRO ROLANDI, SAM CLARKSON

Encoded

2012 | *Carriageworks, Sydney*

This research is in the field of interaction design for live performance.

The use of multimedia technologies in dance has a long history dating back to the 19th Century. Since the 1980s, digital motion tracking technologies have become increasingly prevalent and performers are finding new ways to explore their use in live performance. Landmark works include David Rokeby's *Very Nervous System* (1986), *Glow* (2006) and *Mortal Engine* (2008) by Chunky Move (Australia) and works by Troika Ranch (USA) and Palindrome (Germany). All feature live motion tracking systems linked to computer systems that produce interactive graphics.

The hour-long interactive dance work, *Encoded*, developed in collaboration with Stalker Theatre, made use of large and small-scale projection technology and infra-red motion tracking techniques to produce an immersive environment for live performance.

Interactive real-time animations are projected onto and around the performance space. In addition, miniature 'pico' projectors project onto performers' bodies, allowing them to be effectively 'clothed' with light, exploring novel approaches to real-time costuming.

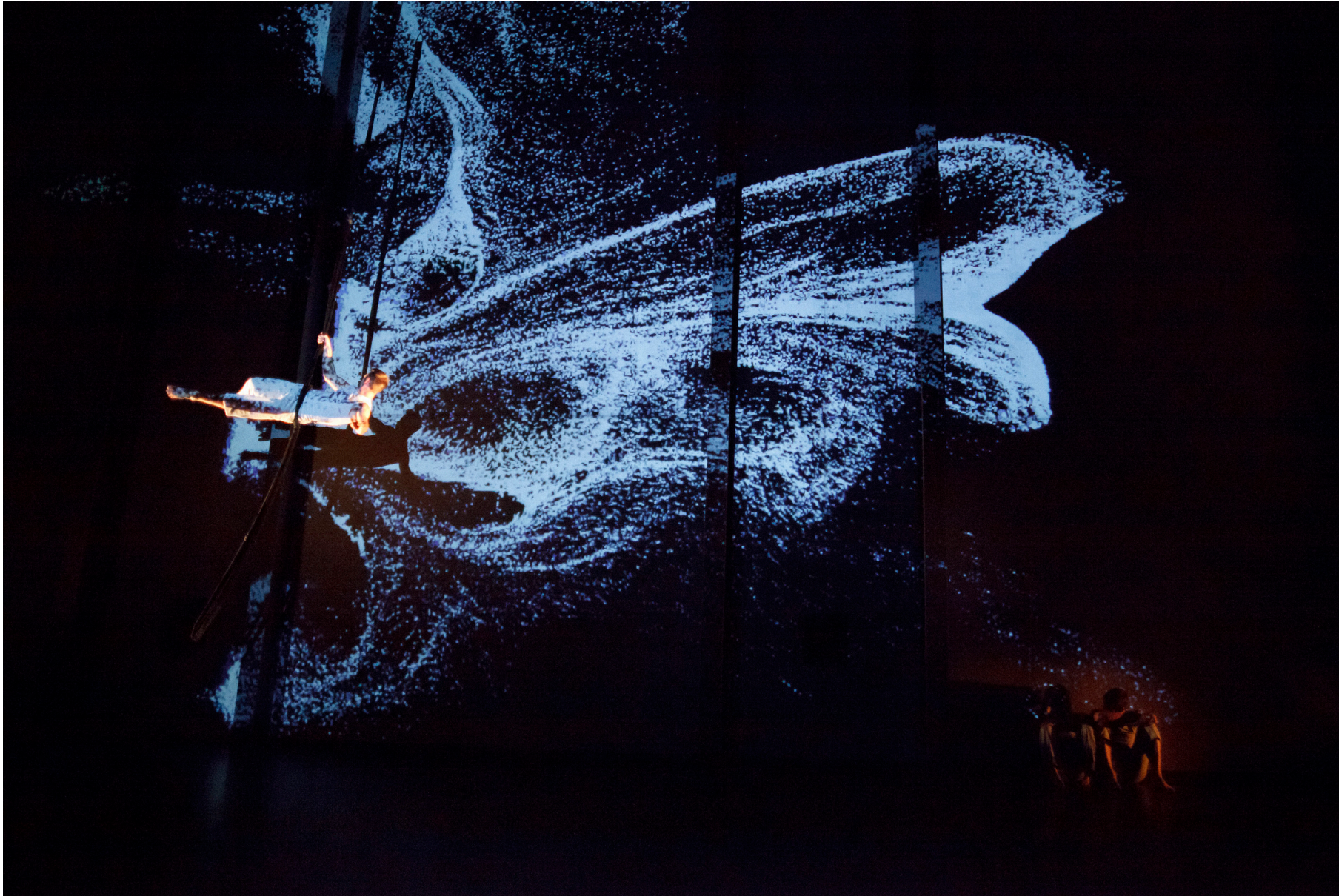
Encoded premiered at Carriageworks, Sydney November 28 – December 1, 2012. This work has subsequently toured internationally, with performances at festivals in the Netherlands (Noorderzon Festival Groningen, 22-25 August 2013) and South Korea (Gwacheon Festival, 26-28 September 2013, Suwon Hwaseong Fortress Theatre Festival, 24-28 May 2013). In 2014 performances were staged at Riverside Theatre, Parramatta and in a tour of regional Victoria.

Encoded received funding of over \$120,000 in total from the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts NSW and Creative New Zealand.

Encoded performance view, detail

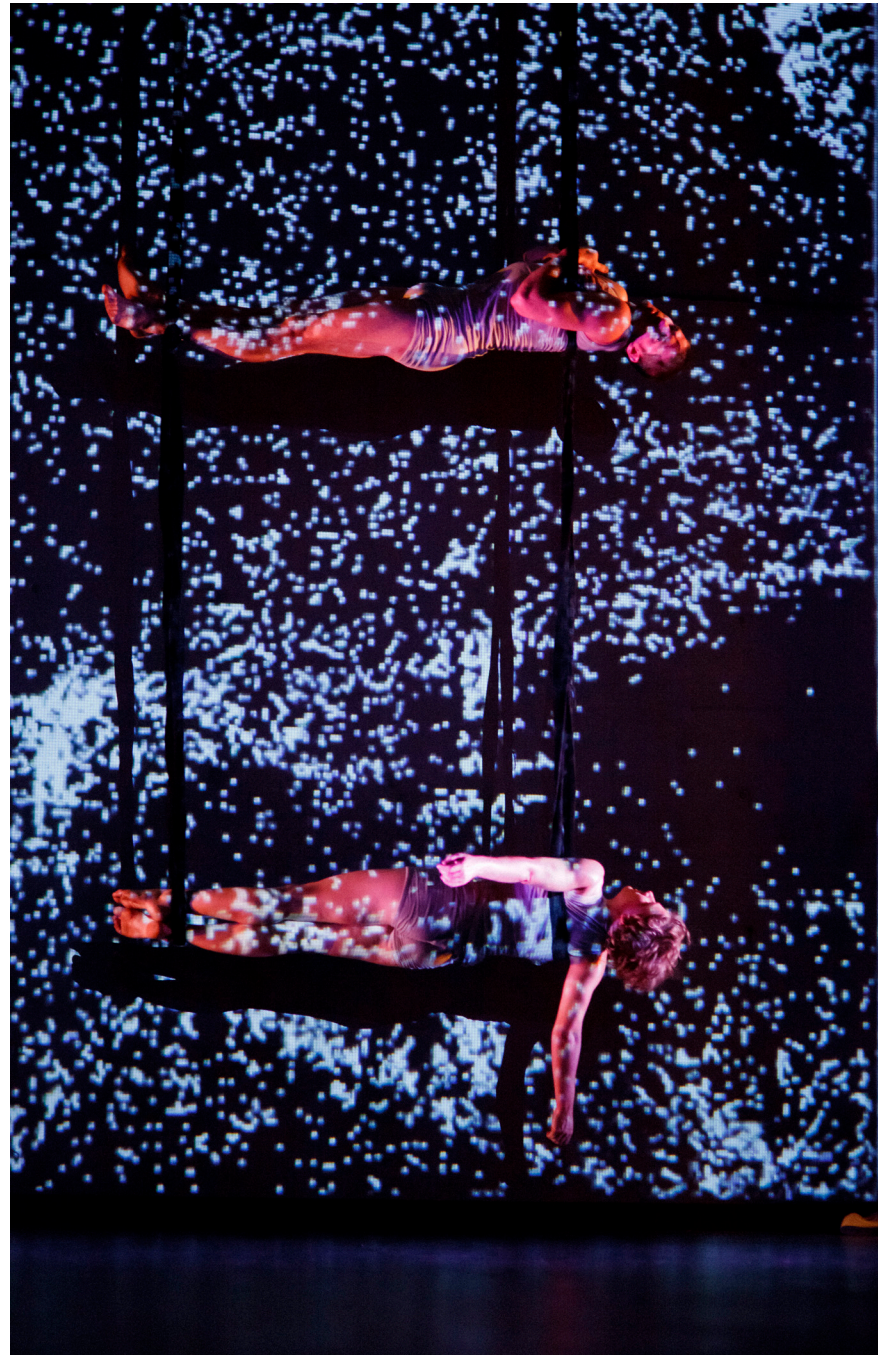


Performance view



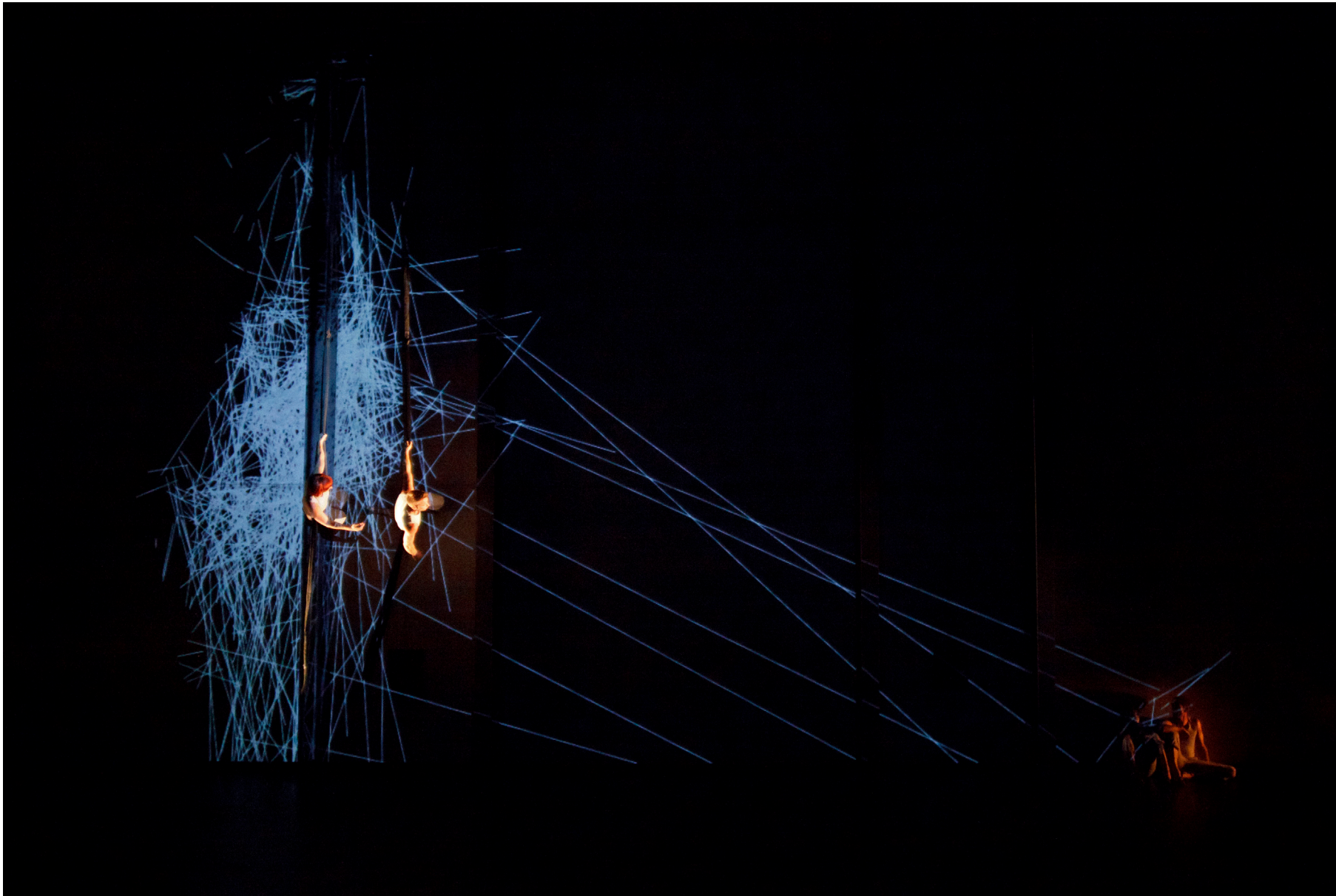
ANDREW JOHNSTON
Encoded

Performance view, details



ANDREW JOHNSTON
Encoded

Performance view



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Encoded

Performance view, details





Performance viewz



CARRIAGEWORKS

ENCODED

CARRIAGEWORKS AND STALKER THEATRE PRESENT

ENCODED

Using the latest interactive technologies, Stalker Theatre creates an immersive digital environment that responds to the movement of performers in this aerial dance installation and performance.

Carriageworks Resident Company Stalker Theatre makes contemporary physical theatre across a range of cultural, social and political contexts. Its challenging approach to physical performance draws on contemporary dance, martial arts, innovative approaches to dramaturgy, and inter-disciplinary and inter-cultural practices.

Image: © Stalker Theatre Photo: Matthew Syres

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Encoded, Carriageworks,
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REVIEW: Encoded | CarriageWorks, Sydney

Lloyd Bradford Syke | Dec 04, 2012 4:38PM | [EMAIL](#) | [PRINT](#)

A multi-media experience from CarriageWorks residents Stalker Theatre offers moments of breathtaking spectacle. And a little perspective on life.



CarriageWorks' Bay 12 seating was packed to capacity for the official opening night of the world premiere season of CarriageWorks' resident company Stalker Theatre's *Encoded*. Stalker has married physical theatre (mainly aerial dance and martial arts-influenced acrobatics) to cutting-edge interactive technologies (largely in the realm of 3D photogrammetric projections) to create a truly immersive, transcendent, mind-bending digital landscape that's responsive to the movement of performers.

The only negative legacy is that the technologies threaten to overwhelm the human performance: the latter seems to be in the service of the former, rather than the other way around, as you might reasonably expect. But, as my companion pointed out, we teeter on the brink of singularity, so why not reflect on the risk to man's dominion over machines in this way?

"Mired in flesh, tethered to our organs, we are coded into being and stagger forward on our bones into the crackling, jagged place where sensation and abstraction collide. Dreaming of edens, we build our fragile campsites from concrete and girder, and gaze through screens at our makings. The pixels shimmer, the atoms swirl. We move and our eddies sweep away our tenderly crafted spaces. We are haunted by the iron promise of dissolution."

This poetic rave, I think, comes from Stalker's artistic director and director of *Encoded*, David Clarkson. The iron promise of dissolution. I like that. Well, I like the linguistic construction, Not the promise, so much. But this would seem to concur with my friend's reading of the work. In days gone by (and still), it's nature that serves to remind us just how puny is our supposed, biblically-bestowed dominion. Hurricanes. Tsunamis. Earthquakes. Rising seas. Global warming. Any of these will suffice. But now there's a new cloud that stalks us and it's not the one where you store your data. Then again, perhaps it is. The monster of technology we've created and reinvent practically everyday is set to consume us.

Clarkson's starting point for this work was space exploration; more specifically, to probe how our notions and perceptions of space have altered over time and how that has affected our identity and sense of being. So, not only do we find ourselves in one of the immense performance spaces of CarriageWorks, but thrust into virtual space, by clever electronic means.

There are strange, metallic, bug-like beings that look like they've been subject to the experiments of a sadistic Nazi orthodontist, or orthopaedic surgeon. I found myself uncertain of their role in this parallel universe, but they did look very fragile; as if a single, well-placed blow could crush them as surely as a steel-capped boot a cookie. Perhaps they are a kind of high-tech cookie, save for the fact they didn't scuttle about; far from it, they moved very deliberately and conservatively indeed.

Performers are dressed in virtual, fluid, geometric costumes and there are vast plays of atoms and stars sweeping across the walls, these infinitesimal and astral bodies effectively controlled by the motion human ones, in whose wake they abide.

Technically, it's all terribly sophisticated: the simulations described triggered by infrared tracking of the performers. I'd love to remain blasé, but the wow factor Clarkson predicted would inspire the audience even contaminated me, the try-hard, diehard cynic. In the end, though, it's not the technology but philosophy, if you will, that impresses. Amidst this intimation of the infinite, we can see ourselves; the performers become our surrogates, seeking to find and make connections in a disparate, exponentially entropic environment. They look tiny, dwarfed, pathetic. Not even Tonka toys in God's sandpit. It's a timely reminder of our actual size, since we spend so much of our time and energy operating in a grid of our own making, in which we are not to scale. It allows us to occupy a delusional space, in which we spiral deeper and deeper into a vortex of hedonism and vacuous, "please please me!" individuation, the converse of which is disconnection.

Yes, Stalker's *Encoded* can give us a little perspective.

Quite apart from that, it's a trip. It plays with the very fundamentals of one's perceptions, such that it becomes easy (especially after a sweltering Sydney summer's eve) to lapse, very willingly, into an almost dream-like state. I did, however, feel Paul Selwyn Norton's choreography was a little too static, at times, notwithstanding an elegant vision being applied overall and moments of breathtaking spectacularity. The digital design collaboration between Alejandro Rolandi, Andrew Johnston and Sam Clarkson was, however, superlative. And precisely executed.

Encoded is a sensory captivation, an emotional one, to some extent an intellectual one, if not entirely a performative one.

The details: *Encoded* played CarriageWorks' Bay 12 from November 28 to December 1.



← → 1/7 IMAGES | VIDEO

Encoded | Creative Team

Conception & Direction
David Clarkson

Digital artists
Andrew Johnston (interactive systems),
Alejandro Rolandi (virtual costumes),
Sam Clarkson (architectural mapping)

Choreographer
Paul Selwyn Norton

Composer
Peter Kennard

Costume Design
Annemaree Dalziel

Multimedia Dramaturg
Kate Richards

Lighting Designer
Mike Smith

Performers
Kathryn Puie, Lee-Anne Litton, Rick
Everett, Timothy Ohl

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1. REVIEW: Encoded | CarriageWorks, Sydney, Llyod Bradford Syke,

<http://blogs.crikey.com.au/curtain-call/2012/12/04/review-encoded-carriageworks-sydney/>

2. Encoded: Creative Team, Stalker Theatre,

<http://www.stalker.com.au/?productions=encoded>

Encoded

LYNNE LANCASTER

TUESDAY 28 OCTOBER, 2014

A strange, haunting blend of dance and technology.



Image credit: www.riversideparramatta.com.au
(file:///C:/Users/Madeleine/Desktop/Madeleine/www.riversideparramatta.com.au%20)

Encoded is a revival of the astonishing work directed by David Clarkson and choreographed by Paul Selwyn Norton, originally performed at Carriageworks in 2012. This October, it was presented at Parramatta Riverside as part of the Form dance series by Stalker Theatre.

Described as a 'meditation of fragility,' *Encoded* is a strange, haunting blend of dance and technology that is futuristic and mesmerising. It creates 'an immersive aerial dance installation and performance that uses the latest interactive technologies to build a

projected digital environment.' Images dissolve and reform as the performers sweep across the space, with digital technology designed to 'responds to the movements of the performers.'

While cold and abstract, it is simultaneously powerful, futuristic and hypnotic, as if the dancers have become enmeshed in the computer world and at times it became quite trance like.

It challenges our preconceived ideas regarding digital media, dance and the body. Selwyn Norton's very demanding choreography incorporates everyday movements and develops them, for example the simple act of walking.

Some of the lifts were most unusual and the partnering challenging, with unexpected and unusual balances. Dramatic aerialist working with straps were featured and at one point the cast was seen 'flying' into the audience. They also appeared to walk on the walls and vanish optically into the projections.

Norton's choreography is performed fluidly, with enormous control and precision, incorporating martial arts-like acrobatics, yet remaining coldly abstracted as the cast performed with 'neutral' expressions. The performers hung like sleeping bats, resembling sides of meat. They curled and rolled, performed handstands, and used the aerial strap as a neck rest. They soared, twisted, unrolled with a snap, performing dangerous headstands.

In another of the aerial acrobatics sections, the cast was positioned horizontally, looming above the stage. Stylistically, a section was quite reminiscent of Bonachela's work, with a later section resembling Wayne Macgregor's.

Peter Kennard's soundscape throbs, thrums, pulsates and electronically beeps and crashes, and Mike Smith's lighting was eerie and ominous. The stage was stripped back to the bare walls and 'corridors' of light were used most effectively. Wonderful projections looked like the inside of a computer or swirling, dusty stars and galaxies. At one point, with bleak, spare lighting, the cast were caught frieze-like against the wall. Later, dandelion like patterns appeared in the lighting, followed by another section with long sharp thin lines, then projections that resembled a studded wall in a lift. Eventually, a blank wall with dotted squares appeared.

At the beginning and the conclusion of *Encoded*, the cast wore special 'virtual costumes' that appeared heavy and cumbersome. Viewed from the back they were amazing, with special lighting headgear and computer props transforming the cast into insect-like alien beings. For most of the performance however, they wore grey sleeveless tops or casual t-shirts and leggings, later removing the

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Encoded, Lynne Lancaster,
<http://performing.artshub.com.au/news-article/reviews/performing-arts/encoded-246300>

ANDREW JOHNSTON
Encoded

pants to reveal underwear-like costumes, giving a short leotard-like line.

The interactive, fluid simulations on the back screen were triggered by the infrared tracking of dancers and aerialists. They also used some very sophisticated VJ software to capture the wall they performed on. The mix of technology and the wonderful virtual costumes, complete self-mounted laser projectors, meant that performers continually changed before your eyes.

Rating; 4 out of 5 stars

Encoded

Conception and Direction: David Clarkson

Choreographer: Paul Selwyn Norton

Cast: Kathryn Puie, Joshua Thomson, Timothy Ohl, and Miranda Wheen.

Digital Artists: Andrew Johnston Alejandro Rolandi, Sam Clarkson

Composer: Peter Kennard

Costume Designer: Annemm Aree Dalziel

Multi-media Dramaturg: Kate Richards

Lighting Design: Mike Smith

Stalker Theatre, at Parramatta Riverside

23 - 25 October

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynne Lancaster is a Sydney based arts writer who has previously worked for Ticketek, Tickemaster and the Sydney Theatre Company. She has an MA in Theatre from UNSW, and when living in the UK completed the dance criticism course at Sadlers Wells, linked in with Chichester University.

Encoded, Lynne Lancaster,
<http://performing.artshub.com.au/news-article/reviews/performing-arts/encoded-246300>