Unethical Spectators: Some Exceptions

We are all ethical spectators aren't we? We don't participate in the festival of cruelty taking place on our TV screens. We offer an informed critique and then retire to our offices and living rooms. But isn't restricting oneself to spectatorship precisely an unethical activity in the age of compassion fatigue and distant suffering? How can aesthetic activity offer a useful perspective on these dynamics of state power and the production of a “mass mediated machining synonymous with distress and despair”? (Guattari)

This panel aims to interrogation these dynamics through analysis of a diverse range of performance works in which the possibility of the ethical response is directly broached or even structurally implicated in the work itself. We ask whether this is efficacious or what if any ethical functions can performance play in the contemporary political moment?

The proponents of the panel, and their proposed contributions are

Dr Helena Grehan (Murdoch University): Seduction and Estrangement: Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age, drawing upon examples including “Genesi” by Romeo Castellucci and The Soicetas Raffaello Sanzio, “Sandakan Threnody” by Ong Keng Sen and Jonathan Mills, “The Career Highlights of the MAMU” by Andrew Ross and Black Swan Theatre company, and “The Opera Three Tales” by Steve Reich and Beryl Korot;

Dr Peter Eckersall (Melbourne University), presenting on Not Yet It's Difficult’s “Blowback”: Ethics, Biopower and Staging the Global State of War; and

Dr Ed Scheer (UNSW): Kingdom Come. Or Punch Holes in the Body Politic (April 8-10 2005), which will look at Mike Parr’s performance at ArtSpace in April 2005.

Other contributions are welcome—please contact Helena Grehan if you would like to be included. The intention is to circulate papers between participants prior to the presentation. The format of the presentation will be determined by the number of potential contributors.

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