

Enduring Parallels

Ineke Dane

There is no past present or future. Using tenses to divide time is like making chalk marks on water.

Janet Frame¹

The Lock-Up² is a historic building that lives in the industrial east-coast town of Newcastle, New South Wales, where the experience of time for detainees is preserved as ‘wall fives’ scratched into the painted brick. The fives have become traces of time, of people deprived of freedom, where days are reduced to undifferentiated marks. These notions of time and liberty formed the cornerstone of artists’ responses to a provocation put forward by myself and co-curator Lottie Consalvo (who also performed) for the exhibition *Enduring parallels*. With the artists—Michaela Gleave, Nicholas Shearer, Adam Geczy, Rowena Foong, Jodie Whalen, Jacobus Capone, Anastasia Klose, Todd McMillan and Sarah Mosca—we began a discussion about restriction as it might be portrayed in performance art. These artistic translations reached towards the emotional, political, economic, social and cultural. The resultant performances took place simultaneously over one weekend at The Lock-Up contemporary art space in Newcastle (four hours on the Friday night, seven hours on the Saturday and seven hours on Sunday), in late November 2014. The following are descriptions of the live works.

In Cell A, Lottie Consalvo sang together with a recording she had



- 3.81 Lottie Consalvo, *Near your sorrow*, 2014. 18-hour durational performance, The Lock-Up, Newcastle, 28–30 November 2014. Photograph: Jamieson Moore.
- 3.82 Michaela Gleave, *Doing time/time doing*, 2014. 48-hour endurance performance executed in former police detention cell: clocks, CCTV cameras, video monitors, live web feed, camping equipment and supplies. Installation view, The Lock-up, Newcastle, 28–30 November 2014. Photograph: Jamieson Moore. Image courtesy the artist and Anna Pappas Gallery, Melbourne.
- 3.83 Nicholas Shearer, *boots*, 2014. 18-hour durational performance, The Lock-Up, Newcastle, 28–30 November 2014. Photograph: Jamieson Moore.
- 3.84 Adam Geczy, *Big arms*, 2014. 18-hour durational performance, The Lock-Up, Newcastle, 28–30 November 2014. Photograph: Jamieson Moore. Image courtesy of Chalk Horse Gallery and the artist.

found of her late sister singing in the car. *Near your sorrow*, a work continuing Consalvo's artistic exploration of desire and longing, expressed the futility of now trying to meet her sister again. A smoke-like whisper became the song lyrics: 'It's that ole devil called love again / Gets behind me and keeps giving me the shove again / Putting rain in my eyes, tears in my dreams / And rocks in my heart ...'³ The thirty-second fragment was sung repetitively over the duration of the exhibition, the two voices heard in harmony, if only a trace, everywhere throughout The Lock-Up. They often merged, sometimes one dominating, sometimes the other. Many people were overcome with emotion when they sat in this cell (fig. 3.81).

Cell B housed Michaela Gleave for forty-eight continuous hours. In her performance *Doing time/Time doing* she was locked inside with only a mattress, toilet and basic camping supplies (fig. 3.82). At certain intervals Gleave turned the hands of a clock to reflect her estimation of the passage of time. A CCTV camera documented the process, allowing visitors a voyeuristic view of the cell via a small screen tacked, at eye level, to the closed door. Next to another monitor displaying Gleave's inner clock was one that showed 'real time'. Then there was a live-streaming of the dual clocks via YouTube, where the immediate, quantitative value of time was made less exigent by others watching in different time zones. Seeing Gleave pace in the cell gave a very real sense of spatial and psychological restriction: confined, bored, claustrophobic.

The solitary confinement Cell C is in near original condition, padded floor to ceiling in leather. Sitting on a chair, repeatedly pulling on and off a worn pair of Baxter boots, Nicholas Shearer enacted one of the rituals of getting ready for and returning home from work (fig. 3.83). The performance, titled *Boots*, spoke precisely of an insane repetitious action that found its labour parallel in Fordism. Reduced to a machine, Shearer's leather boot scent mingled with the leather-clad cell, whose potent musk had not been diminished by time.

In a similar echoing of history and place, *Big arms*, by Adam Geczy, was performed in the old lock-up exercise yard (fig. 3.84). Stationed on a black weights bench, Geczy alternated between doing sit-ups and arm curls, enumerating his progress in chalk 'wall fives': sit-ups red, curls white. In the artist's words: 'The collapsing of all curls into general equivalence equates with the tenet that, for a prisoner, time is of a different order, and that the prisoner is depersonalised through routine and reduced to a number ... The work also comments on the ways in which sports are today's ersatz religions, and have become a replacement for reflective thought.'⁴ The mantra resonated strongly in the performance: bodily perfection, mathematically formulated, is



today packaged and sold on an industrial scale and consumed dogmatically.

In Cell D Rowena Foong relentlessly spun discarded fabric onto a series of wooden spindles that hung from the ceiling, turning piles of material waste into something of worth and beauty (fig. 3.85). Titled *With strings attached*, Foong's life as an artisan was evident through her dexterity with fabric and thread. The work was calming and distressing at once: the spinning monotonous and mesmerising, the cocoon spindles and fabric piles constantly changing shape, reminiscent of the lithosphere.

In Cell E Jodie Whalen explored the parameters of love once domesticity takes hold. Sparked by a phrase her parents often say when referring to the length of their marriage, 'You don't get this many years for murder', Whalen and her husband, Heath Franco, sought to challenge a cynical indifference that can come with being married for a considerable time. Sitting in silence at opposite ends of a long table, the couple wrote declarations of love to one another. The task: write one per hour, eighteen in total. At a quarter to the hour Whalen rang a small brass bell and the couple walked down a long hall—momentarily transformed into an ad hoc aisle—to a separate gallery space set up with flowers and vases, alter-like. Here Whalen and Franco stood opposite each other, notebooks in hand, framed by flowers, and read aloud their words from the hour prior (fig. 3.86). At once funny, lachrymose, poetic and pragmatic, their sentiment was unavoidably infectious to onlookers, who

3.85

Rowena Foong, *With strings attached*, 2014. 18-hour durational performance, The Lock-Up, Newcastle, 28–30 November 2014. Photograph: Jamieson Moore.



3.86

Jodie Whalen, *Between husband and wife*, 2014. 8-hour durational performance, The Lock-Up, Newcastle, 28–30 November 2014. Photograph: Jamieson Moore.

3.87

Jacobus Capone, *Silent elegy, act 1: convergences*, 2014. 18-hour durational performance, The Lock-Up, Newcastle, 28–30 November 2014. Photograph: Jamieson Moore.

3.88

Jacobus Capone, *Silent elegy, act 3: clearlit*, 2014. Performance still, 18-hour durational performance, The Lock-Up, Newcastle, 28–30 November 2014. Photograph: Jamieson Moore.

3.89

Anastasia Klose, *Your drunken fortune*, 2014. 18-hour durational performance, The Lock-Up, Newcastle, 28–30 November 2014. Photograph: Jamieson Moore. Image courtesy of Tolarno Galleries and the artist.

became witnesses and guests. The performance was intimate; the pair, wearing white—Whalen in a nightgown and Franco in longjohns and singlet—endearing and vulnerable. In the silence of the cell Whalen and Franco were surrounded by shrines, each made by one for the other and consisting of their wedding costumes, favourite foods and nostalgic items. Theirs was an attempt to cheat any potential decay of love borne from longevity.

Jacobus Capone divided his performance *Silent elegy* into three acts, one each day, seeking a Buddhist infinity in elements (meteorite, fire and sea water) and where ‘the celestial, the unfathomable, and earth [are] linked by the body’.⁵ He lay with a meteorite placed over his eye for the duration of *Act 1: convergences* (fig. 3.87). Here the optic organ was used as a portal, grafting the meteorite which represented matter, formation and time in a space external to earth; a passage to oblivion. Capone says that ‘contemplating the reverse journey of a meteorite starts with acknowledging its impact with earth. From this point back, through the layers of Earth’s atmosphere we reach space, the universe, something that becomes entirely unfathomable regardless of how much science, religion, symbols and language condition our comprehension of it’.⁶ *Act 2: crystalisations* involved Capone striking a match, ‘piercing darkness with light’⁷, letting the match burn to the fingertips, then dropping it, extinguished, to the ground. Throughout this action, visibility in Cell F continuously oscillated from pitch black to a brief yellow glow. For *Act 3: clearlit*, water had been collected in a stone urn from the Pacific Ocean. Capone repeatedly submerged his face and head while kneeling over the vessel, in a position indicative of either ignominy or humbleness, hands resting on either side (fig. 3.88). Water ran over his face and returned to its origin, like a river running to the sea, in drips. At the end of the performance the water was returned to the Pacific.

Progressively becoming drunk in a cell where people were formerly thrown for being so, Anastasia Klose asked from her audience three questions before telling their fortunes (fig. 3.89). Klose wilted visibly as her performance in Cell G, *Your drunken fortune*, progressed. Despite her disclaimer that she was not a professional reader—‘I often provide this service for my friends when I am drunk. Do not expect accuracy. Treat this as you would a party trick’⁸—many could not help entering with sincerity and honesty after a lengthy wait in line at her cell door. Trust in a complete stranger, drunk no less. The allure was perhaps indicative of society’s willingness to place their future in the hands of another. Sitting casually at a card table with candles, crystal and a glass of red wine (continually replenished), with Farnsworth, her dotting basset hound alongside, Klose was the only performer to invite audience interaction.

With *Enduring parallels* we hoped to generate a sense of excitement around performance art in a satellite town known colloquially for its blue-collar workforce and coal mining. Our attempt was to put form and shape to the ineffable, to place a finger on the point where one cycle ends and another begins. In an ode to the elasticity of time, we hope emotions provoked by the performances are being stirred in the outside world. *There is no past present or future*—performance art reflects this compellingly.

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| 1 | J. Frame, <i>Faces in the Water</i> , George Braziller Inc., New York, NY, 1961, p. 27. | Cultural Centre, Newcastle, 2014. |
| 5 | | ibid. |
| 2 | The Lock-Up is a former police station and gaol. It was used for this purpose until 1982. Today the building is a contemporary art space. | 6 ibid. 7 ibid. 8 ibid. |
| 3 | Lyrics are from ‘That ole devil called love’, written in 1944 by Allan Roberts and Doris Fisher, first recorded by Billie Holiday. | |
| 4 | Artist statement, <i>Enduring parallels</i> , exh. cat., The Lock-Up | |