

CALL NOW*

DISLOCATIONS
NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA
JANUARY 1993

BOYCE

MURLEY

27 1988 1989 Appendix 10

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Uncertain Positions

The author explains the work of the court in the context of the development of a judicial system.



*RHETORICAL ONLY



Dislocations

body • memory • place

National Gallery of Victoria Access Gallery
 January 9 - February 2 1993

Uncertain Positions

This exhibition explores the work of ten gay male artists. Although it deals with a cluster of specific thematic issues it is predicated on showing the diversity of their work rather than the somewhat arbitrary tendency to seek a unifying sensibility amongst gay artists.

Gay men present an interesting anomaly in the construction of sexuality and gender in society. We are *visible* as men and thus linked to dominant systems of patriarchal power but only in so far as our sexuality is kept *invisible*. Once seen as gay we quickly become identified with the marginalised, the other. This complex dynamic of both incorporation by and alienation from society frames the development of a gay man's world view.

This ambiguous position is reflected in the art world's reaction to the work of the artists gathered here. Although a number of the artists are well known and well regarded in the canon of contemporary art there has been little attempt to explore the collective body of their work or the relevance of homosexual identity to their art practice. This is in marked contrast to the proliferation of exhibitions and critical writing regarding gender and sexuality in women's art, for example. Even the recent Eroticism Issue of *Art and Australia* dealt only cursorily with homoeroticism preferring to deal with it in a deflected form through the Anzac myth rather than engage with its expression in the work of contemporary artists.

For many gay men the body is often perceived as a site of conflict. Particularly as a child and consequently as an adult through the prism of memory, the desiring of other men's bodies is experienced as both energising and problematic. This sense of awkwardness, fear, alienation or dislocation of the body from its desires has often expressed itself in the motif of the wounded or fractured body in gay men's art. The wounded body has more recently become a particularly poignant symbol for a devastating reality in this age of AIDS and escalating violence against gay men.

However the historic construction of homosexuality as "other", as marginalised, categorised and (dis)placed can lead not just to an awkward or troublesome dislocation from society but an active and creative disengagement from prevalent patterns of thought. Simon Watney's delineation of an 'AIDS activist aesthetic' as a "a guerilla semiotics on all fronts, threatening 'normality' with a long, sustained, deliberate derangement of its 'common sense'" could

also be applied to the development of a radical gay aesthetic.

Interestingly, but not untypically in terms of contemporary art practice, many of the artists in this exhibition are concerned with questioning the certainty of received traditions. This is particularly noticeable in a number of pieces where the iconic certainty of religious art is subverted or undercut in some way. In their position as outsider the dislocated or marginal observer is aware that there is not just one perspective on the world but that truth is intrinsically plural.

Juan Davila is well known for his strong and provocative statements about homosexuality, but constant attention to the shock value of Davila's images prevents an understanding of the complexity of his compositions with their multi-layered referencing of different cultures and art traditions. *Ex Votto* refers to a tradition of votive or invocational painting most common in the religious art of Latin America but also known in Europe. In times of personal sickness or national disaster a painting was commissioned which in its narrative displayed both the nature of the pestilence and the religious figure (usually the virgin) whose assistance was being invoked. In *Ex Votto*, the virgin has become an unflattering self portrait as a middle-aged, mutilated, transvestite Ganymede, as if to suggest that relief from the present disaster is in the power not of an external deity but in a confrontation with the shadow self. For Davila the power of the Ganymede figure in traditional myth and art history suggests a certain continuity across time of the young, well proportioned, white male as an exclusionary paradigm of homoerotic desire. Such images which abound in current gay commercial publishing and some HIV/AIDS campaigns are seen as "totalitarian" images which have the hegemonic power of religious icons.

Ex Votto shifts constantly between its invocation of high and pop culture, between the world of pornography and the world of classical myth, between commerce and spirituality, between the modernist and classical traditions of art history, between the interior and the landscape, between the cultures of Latin America, Australia and Europe and between masculine and feminine identities. Davila's refusal to define a unifying perspective from which to view the painting is not just a postmodernist cliché but a powerful statement about the fluid nature of sexual and cultural identity.

Mathew Jones work draws from both the strategies of conceptual minimalism and of activist art. Although Jones work resembles activist sloganeering, he eschews the didacticism of the rhetorical for a more fluid view of sexual identities and a more complex understanding of the polyvalent nature of visual/verbal sign systems. The name scrawled on the wall will be known to some and not to other viewers. Murley was acquitted in a recent trial which raised many questions about gay identity and codes of visibility and invisibility used, or thought to be used, by gay men. But the piece works irrespective of whether the story of the trial is known or unknown, because in the context of this show the graffiti becomes, an ambiguous mark, a sexualised invitation, which is as much about the entrancing anonymity of the subject as it is about his identity.

Luke Roberts extravagant canvases with their campy metaphysics and many attachments are visually lush and full of ironic humour. Roberts grew up in the tiny outback Queensland town of Alpha. The Australian landscape and a search for an Australian myth are strong elements in his work - the deep organic orange of "Alpha dust" and rich desert sky blues are his characteristic colors. His alter-egos Pope Alice and St Luke of Alpha reflect his transformation of the Catholicism of his childhood into a series of uniquely personal emblems. *Exorcism I: Sky Painting/Inventing Infinity/The Festival Of Light* expresses Robert's characteristic tension between a search for absolute values and a fascination with the kitsch and temporal nature of the contemporary. For all its extravagance the painting has a sombre, almost funereal quality. The dismembered dolls act as signs of isolation within the vastness of the architectural/environmental grid of the painting, but the doll is also a perverse shamanistic accessory in Roberts' compote of spirituality. For Roberts the isolation of childhood is the crucible of an alchemic transformation which unleashes an adulthood in which transgressive behaviours become normative and secure because they have been so obsessively rehearsed in the privacy of the child's world.

Like Roberts Rod McLiesh is concerned to articulate a postmodern position about the contemporary absence of certainty. By the casual unframed placement of the simply drawn segments of *A Fall From Place* McLiesh draws attention to our unanchored position in an age which has outgrown any purely metaphysical understanding of reality. The computer generated figure, whose pixilated form also reminds us of the viral micro-organisms (dis)covered but not controlled nor fully explained by science, tumbles through a scene dominated by the icons of ancient Egyptian certainty.

Ross Moore's exploration of sexual and cultural traditions is complex. An interest in the body is explored through an individualistic adaptation of tribal iconography. In Moore's personal cosmology traditional divisions between the heavens and the underworld, between the body and the earth, between the modern and the primordial, between the conscious and the unconscious are disturbed. The distorted figures in *The Royal Tombs of Ur* can be read as embryonic or mummified forms, the jig saw of interlocking shapes is at once a clutter of limbs and organs and an inert landscape of stone, the central ominous tower has the ancient resonance of the phallus as well as the contemporaneity of science fiction.

At first the strong silent abstractions of Brent Harris seem only to celebrate the beauty of a minimalist aesthetic with little overt content little alone any gay content. Once identified with a metaphysical abstraction concerned with the transcendent he prefers now to talk of the psychological rather than the sacred. For Harris each form has psychological as well as material shape and a particular emotional resonance. His *Another Dead Bunny* can be read as an interesting contrast of organic and geometric shapes or as reference to the prevalence of death in the gay community as we confront AIDS. The series of silk screen prints, *Otherness*, are equivocal and may be read as either positive or negative shapes or as mercurial outlines whose contours constantly invert. These prints celebrate the oddity of their forms and here as in much of his work Harris seductively poses the question of difference.

Ross Watson's ability as a photo realist painter with a strong interest in the male figure and classical form has made his work popular amongst gay men. Although he is associated with a realist style Watson has always demonstrated an interest in surrealist imagery with unusual juxtapositioning of isolated objects creating a strong sense of the mysterious in his work. In this most recent work Watson gives us a realist detail through the view finder of a silhouette set against a simple under-worked backdrop. The richness of the regal and ecclesiastical imagery is framed by the shadow of the sexual. The intensity of that captured moment, that singular view, is contrasted with the decorative motifs and icons of the everyday which occupy the pale backgrounds. In this instance the isolation of a detail is not about objectification or limitation of the image it is about the distillation of its essential emotional power. This work speaks of the complexity of representing the body and how details can wake us to a deeper understanding of the whole - a phenomena on which both philosophers and fetishists would agree.

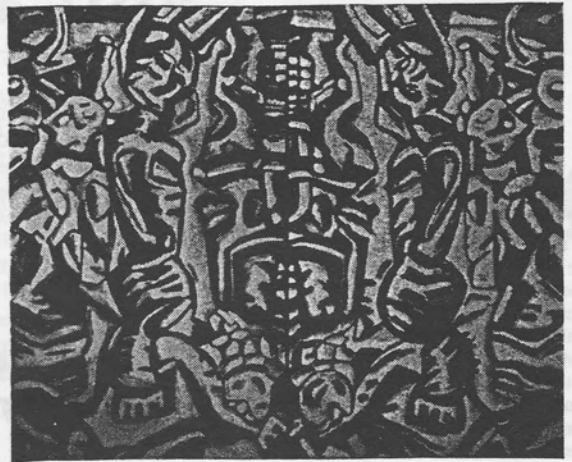
Ross T. Smith's fragile forms emerge out of a dense velvety surface of black and are subtly, almost subliminally toned in blues and purples. Like many post modern photographers there is a tension in Smith's work between an aesthetic of beauty (obvious in the lush quality of the prints) and ideas of temporality and fragility (equally obvious in the assemblage and the treatment of the image). At first sight his image of the pregnant female body may seem to have little to do with the stated concerns of this show however it serves as a potent symbol of the way the mother has been problematized and co-opted as part of the gay male body in the psychoanalytic discourse of homosexuality. In broad psychological terms he reminds us that our primary sense of dislocation is our displacement from the mother. The work as a whole deals with questions of mortality and has a melancholic air as it struggles to come to terms with the tenuousness of our grip on life.

Lex Middleton often uses re-photographed original video images in his multipaneled pieces. Video style is used generally as a metaphor for the contemporary but in particular as a symbol of the way sexuality is constructed by advertising and the electronic media. *Homage to the Quilt* takes its cue from the AIDS memorial quilt but unlike the quaint original panels with their roots in domestic and community art this highly technologically mediated statement has an emotive power which is at once sinister and sincere. The shadowy images of a shielded face are combined with the vibrancy of the floral motif which reminds us of the traditional wreath but in its saturated color and pixelation also strongly references the viral.

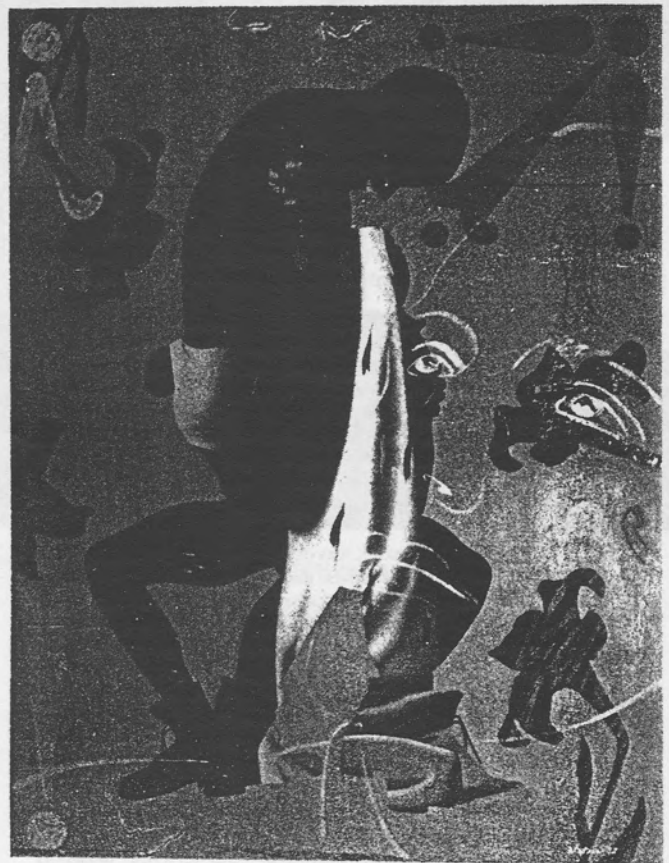
Simon Carver's *Is the Anus a Grave* is a simple but evocative statement about the pathologising of the gay male body in the age of AIDS. The raw earth, heaped anus like and red lipped amidst the clinically white cotton sheet and ceramic tiles, makes obvious reference to the current medicalisation of gay sexuality, however it also speak more generally of the tensions between the chaotic and the ordering aspects of desire.

Through a variety of formal structures each of the artists in the exhibition make individual but complementary statements about the body and a gay sense of otherness. The work shows a tentative mapping of a psychological space which is secure because it is claimed as one's own but is gladly without the assurance of certainty which stems from adherence to an absolute moral order.

Marcus O'Donnell
Curator



Ross Moore, *The Royal Tombs of Ur* 1986.
Oil on Linen



Ross Watson, *Self Series V (For my beloved Swan King)* 1992. Oil and mixed media on board

Cover Image: Juan Davila, *Ex Votto* 1992.
Oil on canvas

YOU ARE HERE

AGLASSOFWATER PROJECT

BASHIR BARAKI, LEONARD BROWN, PETER COOLEY, JUAN DAVILA,
BRENT HARRIS, MATHEW JONES, DAVID MCDIARMID, SCOTT REDFORD,
LUKE ROBERTS, HIRAM TO, PETER TULLY, ROSS WALLACE.

CURATORS, LUKE ROBERTS & SCOTT REDFORD
A.C.C.A., MELBOURNE

DISLOCATIONS BODY, MEMORY, PLACE

SIMON CARVER, JUAN DAVILA, BRENT HARRIS, MATHEW JONES,
ROD MCLEISH, LEX MIDDLETON, ROSS MOORE, LUKE ROBERTS,
ROSS T. SMITH, ROSS WATSON.

CURATOR, MARCUS O'DONNELL
ACCESS GALLERY, NGV

ROBERT SCHUBERT

Questions which surround the production and reception of 'gay art' have been raised, once again, by two exhibitions of art by gay men in the last few months. Inevitably, the questions converge on the issues of gay identity within the duration of a crisis which has seen our bodies maligned, and manipulated for better or for worse, as much by the media as by the medical profession and infuriatingly conservative bureaucracies. This is not to suggest that other sexual positions are exempt from such ideological strictures nor, as one illustrious Australian suggested, that the gay lobby (including visibly gay artists) has hijacked the HIV/AIDS agenda, but that representations of our collective body have an urgency about them which is both devastatingly disheartening and awesome. Unequivocally, our art is a matter of life and death.¹

Both exhibitions include works by Juan Davila, Mathew Jones, Luke Roberts and Brent Harris, but the two curatorial projects are not equally successful. Whereas 'YOU ARE HERE' sets up strategies for living and intervening in the global and local exchange of signs, and succeeds in providing conceptual support for such tactics, 'Dislocations' wavers between this imperative and a contentment with (un)fashionable postmodern otherness.

The works in 'Dislocation' hung like so many instances of distinct personalities, dissociated in their specificity. Where Roberts and Redford had managed to maintain a sense of theoretical drive, O'Donnell seemed to let the works float in a vacuum of vagaries, producing a sense of aimlessness. While O'Donnell's curatorial rationale was predicated on diversity and not on a common sensibility aligned with a gay aesthetic, the subsumption of what might constitute gay difference under the formidable postmodern trope of arbitrariness begs the question of the purpose of the show. Is it not, in the end, a constitutive gay art and a unified gay artist which links the works together?

The problem with 'Dislocations' was one of framing a 'radical gay aesthetic' within the mainstay of otherness that dominates postmodern visual discourse. The exhibition was in the Access Gallery of the NGV.² The gallery space was an architectural reminder of the ease with which a centre can be invoked (in this case, heterosexualised art with its psycho-sexual and socio-economic dominants in tact) by a counter-logic presumed as the bearer and guarantee of the centre's otherness. Gay artists and, through a kind of ontomimetic logic, gay art is truly other, or so O'Donnell reasons. Being gay and being other, the gay artist is assured of producing a radical aesthetic by recourse to his status as sexual other without mapping the points by which this other is contiguously constituted. In a flourish of confused historicism, the modern desire for an *avant-garde* seeps in. Outsiderisms abound.³

Nonetheless, there are works in 'Dislocations' which do articulate a complex desire to render the gay man's position in terms not strictly limited to the discourse of otherness.

Mathew Jones's large advertising sign battled on two fronts in this respect. It read: 'Robert Boyce Murley, 27 Mill Street, Ascendale, Phone 580 4617, Call Now!' Although coded like an advertisement, it also referenced the less familiar and culturally specific lavatory scribble in which anonymous assignations are made. For those familiar with the Robert Murley case,⁴ and, more particularly with Jones's analysis of it,⁵ the piece is both the sign of the hetero/homosexual binary shifting territories, and a site of possible protest. The telephone becomes a quotidian weapon if one dares. Its power to intercede was tangibly felt by the legal problems which the work confronted. Was it legal to reproduce the phone number? Does Murley have a right to anonymity when all legal options are foreclosed, his acquittal being beyond appeal?

Simon Carver's *Is the Anus a Grave* carried the overdetermined sense of mourning and loss that pervades our lives, daily. A white bed sits on white tiles and in its centre is a hollowed cone of dirt, brown on the outer but reddish at the centre. Carver has carnalised a kind of Foucauldian idea of power as it moves through the gay body at two dominant but not exclusive levels. The ambiguous physicality of anality (the anus as socially abject and site of love) against the purity of the sheets (the reason of medical science) is not merely metaphoric but corporeal. More than any other work in the show, Carver's installation brings home the sensual extraordinariness of gay male desire, confused as it is between the pleasure we seek and the clinicalisation we know to be moving through that desire.

Juan Davila's *Interior with Built-In Bar* best illustrates the curatorial complexity of 'YOU ARE HERE'. Compared with *Ex Votto* in 'Dislocations', *Interior with Built-In Bar* is not vintage Davila. *Interior with Built-In Bar* is a

domestic tableau, mundane to the point of absurdity given the Arkley-ness of his colour. Nothing in Davila's print points to an aggrandised otherness unsullied by the mark of inherent sexual difference. To the contrary, it suggests that any idea of a 'gay' man, aesthetic or culture is constituted by the not-so-other or the overbearing normality of domesticity. In a word, not otherness, but the same.

If Davila shows the constitution of gay sexuality within the not-so-other of the domestic realm, Mathew Jones's *The Family Car . . . Usually Belongs to Someone Else* is critical of the alignment of gay culture with the cosy milieu of the happy family, complete with substitute offspring. Jones has appropriated an advertising image in which the happy family is switched for a gay couple – it is no longer Daddy, Mummy and me, but Daddy, Daddy and Fido who fit the 'Brady Bunch' mould. Jones's texts and images might suggest that the price paid for such substitutes is not simply that of a new car, but the diminution of gay difference by the power of the commodity. But they also suggest that gay identity is never exempt from consumerist desires, or indeed, from the same middle-class aspirations that characterise the *status quo*.

Again, it is not otherness that is the issue, but points of confluence between gay otherness and social and cultural normality.

- 1 Noel Frankham notes in his *YOU ARE HERE* catalogue introduction that it 'used to be flamboyance that characterised the connection between art and homosexuality, now it is HIV/AIDS . . . Pandemic is now determining creativity'. p2. *YOU ARE HERE* is an Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane touring exhibition.
- 2 This small space functions as a gallery for community groups.
- 3 O'Donnell writes that 'the historic construction of homosexuality as "other", as marginalised, categorised and (dis)placed can lead not just to an awkward or troublesome dislocation from society but an active and creative disengagement from prevalent patterns of thought. Simon Watney's delineation of an "AIDS activist aesthetic" as a "guerrilla semiotics on all fronts, threatening "normality" with a long, sustained, deliberate derangement of its

- 'common sense' could be also applied to the development of a radical gay aesthetic.' 'Uncertain Positions', catalogue essay.
- 4 In 1992, a Victorian Supreme Court found Robert Murley not guilty of manslaughter or murder. Murley had stabbed a 65 year old man 17 times and then cut his throat. The basis for the acquittal was that the dead man's sexuality was a provocation to murder. This was in spite of the fact that the dead man's sexual identity could not be proven as gay, and while there was enough evidence to suggest that Murley's sexual orientation was other than heterosexual.
 - 5 Jones gave a paper *in absentia*, at the CCP which was accompanied by 69 photographs plotting the less than straightforward logic of the heterosexual/homosexual, visible/invisible binary.

"DISLOCATIONS: BODY, MEMORY, PLACE"

National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne
January 9 - February 2, 1993

This exhibition occupied an area of the National Gallery of Victoria set aside as an access gallery for community groups whose cultural activities might not be recognized. In this instance, curator Marcus O'Donnell brought together the work of ten gay male artists to advance a "queer" aesthetic. The curatorial premise and the context of the exhibition clearly suggested a political agenda: to make the marginal, dislocated experiences of homosexual men more visible.

Exploring this approach, O'Donnell selected artists with a wide variety of formal and conceptual concerns, and discussed the "uncertain positions" taken up by gay men. With the exception of Luke Roberts, the participants are all Melbourne-based artists: Simon Carver, Juan Davila, Brent Harris, Mathew Jones, Rod McLiesh, Lex Middleton, Ross Moore, Ross T. Smith, and Ross Watson.

In his catalogue essay O'Donnell argues that each of the artists expresses a "fluid identity," or a questioning of absolute values. For instance, displacing metaphysical purity with quirky outlines and aberrant blotches. Harris plays with the ambiguity between the intimate and the abstract. In a similar vein, Moore's monochrome paintings invent a personal cosmology by rearranging fragmented hieroglyphs and primordial forms. While these two artists tinker with the psycho-spiritual language of abstraction, Watson, Roberts and Davila problematize accepted

"straight" icons. Moore's campy palimpsests grant an ecclesiastical order to pornography and ornament, turning gay sexuality into a playful pageantry. Roberts, a Christ-cum-drag queen, consecrates mawkish curios to give mystical significance to private experiences. And with the urgency of someone whose foreign tongue(s) cannot be understood, Davila assembles a makeshift language by quoting from incongruent cultural traditions.

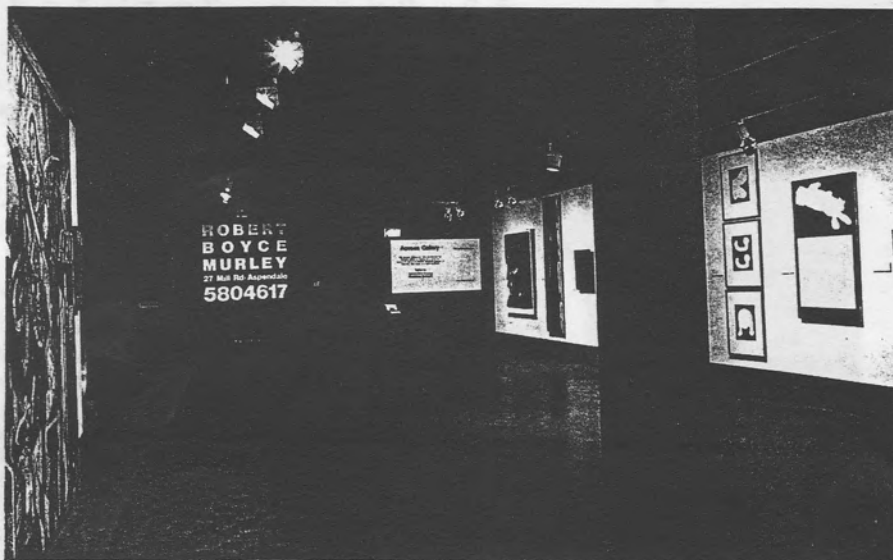
A wide range of formal differences and subjective divergences are circulated, but this surely begs the question: Does heterogeneity in itself challenge social discrimination or cultural prejudice? One of the more challenging and controversial works in the show is the installation by Mathew Jones, precisely because he generates incertitude outside the safety net of the curatorial premise.

With the simplicity of a signwriter Jones uses vinyl lettering to print the address and phone number of a Robert Murley on the gallery wall, followed by the instruction to "Call Now." Murley was recently on trial in Melbourne for the brutal slaying of a supposedly gay, retired sailor. Using the "homosexual panic" plea as defense, Murley was acquitted of these charges and walked free. Those who haven't heard of Murley probably assume that Jones's installation is a personal classified. Those who recall the court case might realize that calling the number would confront Murley with his violent act. Jones asks us to take up a position, but the nature of that position is not stipulated. There is something at stake in this uncertainty because it engages our desires with issues outside the gallery. This was evident when Jones was asked to amend the details of his installation after a gallery director inquisitively dialed the number to check its authenticity.

Diverse levels of gay experience should not be

homogenized, as Marcus O'Donnell demonstrates. Furthermore, we might expect activists to generate incertitude *strategically*. Mathew Jones is not the only artist to be effective in this regard, but his work raises a pertinent point for exhibitions that follow a crooked path: indeterminacy only becomes politically significant when it questions values of social consequence.

STEPHEN O'CONNELL



"Dislocations: Body, Memory, Place," installation view, National Gallery of Victoria.

Here's Looking at You Kid

Mathew Jones

I'm going to talk about a group of 69 photographs. They are all of a corpse, which kind of makes this a perfect compliment to the *After the Fact* exhibition of forensic photographs [CCP Oct/Nov 1992]. Especially since the photos of this corpse are ones I haven't seen, not yet. People always seem to be making connections of all kinds between photography and death. The standard is that a photo is always of something necessarily passed and lost to us forever. Photography itself thereby resembles death. But some deaths resemble photographs, at least this particular death resembles the photos in *After the Fact*. Not that I'm talking about this particular death because it illuminates the nature of photography but because my sense of identity is tied up in it.

'This particular death' is kind of an awkward phrase to use, but I can't really say anything else. That's one of the interesting things about this. Although there's no way this person's death was natural – he was definitely killed by someone else's hand – it doesn't fall into the categories of misadventure or murder or manslaughter. It somehow evades all the categories that are supposed to have everything covered. And because of this the actuality of the death becomes unreal. That's what I mean by it resembling the photos in *After the Fact*; what haunts them is the absence of the body that occasioned them. That's why I say 'a particular death', because I'd like to emphasise its particularity, to bring this corpse back, to *identify* it.

This is how I first heard of it; an article dated June 12, 1992 from *The Melbourne Star Observer*. It runs:

Free to Kill! Cuts gay man's throat and gets off. It is not murder for a straight man to kill a gay man who makes a sexual advance at him. That was the verdict of a Victorian Supreme Court jury on 28th May. The jury found a 23 yr-old man who stabbed a 65

*This paper was accompanied by 24 slides of another man doing various things unrelated to the text: dressing, reading, eating, looking at the camera, grooming, drinking stubbies and holding a knife and smiling.

**ROBERT
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Mathew Jones, *Call Now*, 1993
From *Dislocations*, Access Gallery, National Gallery of Victoria.

yr-old man 17 times and then cut his throat not guilty of both murder and manslaughter. The accused man claimed that a sexual advance from the older man was 'provocation' and that he acted in 'self defence'. Robert Murley, 23, of Aspendale, was charged with the murder of Phillip Henry Montague known as Joe Godfrey, a 65 yr-old retired seaman of Parkdale. The facts of the case were not in dispute, and Murley's claim that he acted in self defence rested solely on his own unsworn testimony on which he could not be cross-examined. There was no evidence produced that Godfrey had acted violently. The only defence witness was a psychologist who testified about Murley's hostile attitude towards gay men. The provocation defence to a charge of murder is intended to cover situations which would momentarily deprive a reasonable man of his reason. A successful plea of provocation usually results in a conviction for manslaughter, not an acquittal. The Crown cannot appeal against a jury's decision.

There are a few inaccuracies here, but the last is a salient point; there was no miscarriage of justice here. This is the way things work. Nothing can be done about it.

Obviously from the overdetermined use of gay man/straight man as distinct identities in this report, it is from a gay newspaper. I doubt if any gay man uses the notion of gay identity unselfconsciously and the attempt to enforce the opposition of gay/straight is merely an expression of the outrage felt or of the desire to claim Godfrey's body, to regain it. It's an opposition that subsequent media coverage and activist responses and a greater knowledge of the trial can't sustain, but we'll come to that.

Nevertheless, definition of gay identity is happening here, within the trial. Any discussion of provocation or of self defence makes no sense unless one man is straight and the other gay. In a sense these identities create the desire which is supposed to have occasioned the death.

It's meant to be the other way around, of course. The desire is meant to occasion the identity. At least that's what people are often telling me, both straights and gays; that gayness only really emerges in sexual acts. There's a bit in Eric Michaels' AIDS diary where he muses on this and asks 'If I don't now do any of those things, if I can't even jerk off, to what extent can I be said to be gay?'

What the reduction of gay identity to some potentially evershifting desire masks is this whole other realm which includes both the reading and the writing of Michaels' diary and which provides points of imaginary identification. I experience Joe Godfrey's death and also the

trial, the press coverage and the activist response as all profoundly constitutive of my identity as a gay man.

Which is not to say that my relationship with it is clear or simple or straightforwardly oppositional – I feel somehow ... implicated. Because along with the outrage, I experience the same sense of *impasse* that seems to have afflicted everyone. I mean, if the outrage is the attempt to embody Godfrey, to identify the corpse, the *impasse* is the feeling of not knowing how to go about it.

Identification is meant to work in two ways, either the reflexive one of saying, 'that's like me, I'm like that' or the transitive one of saying 'that's not me, I'm not like that'. Here, I oscillate between doing both and doing neither. Despite my outrage, I can't identify transitively because it's impossible to isolate an enemy here. The activist group BAD, which grew out of this case, put a poster round town which was in Q&A form. Question: Who killed Joe Godfrey? And the multiple choice answer: Robert Murley; the legal system; the Shadow Attorney General; the State Government; all of the above. Nobody ticked any boxes because it was 'all of the above' and more.

And it's also not easy for me to identify reflexively *with* Godfrey. I don't really think 'that could have been me'. Cause as you'll see there's not much evidence Godfrey was gay and there's just as much evidence Murley was as gay as Godfrey.

There's a bit in the judge's summation where he advises the jury to take into account the fact 'that the facial features of the accused [Murley] were such as to make it understandable that men could, although wrongly, assess him as being homosexual'. This threw me – still does – because I'm always hearing the opposite; that you can't tell if someone's gay just by looking at them. I wish I could. Sometimes I think I can, but it always provokes a challenge. I mean, there's no way I could look at this audience and say, *without anyone challenging me*, that it is, or is not made up of predominantly gay men, the way I can say it is 40% or 60% or 20% women. (Perhaps if gay men were a slightly different colour, a nice pale mauve or something ...). Anyway to want to be able to do this is a kind of pining for essentialism which doesn't make much sense because the gender thing isn't essentialist; it's very easy to look *like* a woman.

In the same way I wish I could say this is a photo of a gay man. Perhaps it is, but what *makes* it a photo of a gay man? How is it *shown*? In an old *Life* magazine article from the 60s about the invisible menace of homosexuality, it says 9 out of 10 homosexuals are 'nearly impossible to detect'. The only signs of homosexual difference are 'the failure to cast the ordinary man's admiring glance at every pretty girl who walks by' and

'a very subtle tendency to over-meticulous grooming'! The latter, I suspect, especially in the case of either Murley or Godfrey, is wishful thinking.

Nevertheless, this idea that gay identity is invisible is what is operating across their bodies (Murley and Godfrey's), as well as mine and yours; that homosexual difference *can't be* seen which is different to censorship, different to *may not* be seen (although depending on where you stand they might be mutually implicated). Which is simply to say, there are conditions to visibility; it's a socially determined thing. I wish I had some special insight into this but I don't because the way I look at *him*, and the way I look at myself is structured by these same *visibilities* (a word coined by Deleuze in describing Foucault as an historian not of what was seen but of what *could be* seen).

It's a bit more complicated than that though, because as the *Life* magazine article recognises, homosexual difference is 'nearly impossible to detect'. The *homosexual body* is seen; it's a spectacle rather than something lived, and it's always seen *as* invisible. Throughout the 70s visibility was the keyword in gay politics, just as 'identity' is the keyword of the groovy new queer politics. One had to be Out, to be ostensibly gay, to be visible, as an oppositional tactic to being told one was invisible. But one was always already seen. Because of this history, I, like many gay men I suppose, still experience 'visibility' very anxiously, as something tried and failed. Subjectively, I sometimes have the weird feeling I never really have Come Out, or rather, that I never really can. In other words I wish I could see myself as a gay man.

There's a real confusion in everything I've said so far, between homosexual desires, and the homosexual body as spectacle, and some sort of self-defined gay identity, and how all of these things enter the realm of the visible as it is determined socially. I haven't been able to sort it out as I've been writing this, but then, it's the same confusion that operates throughout the transcript and the press coverage and the statements by BAD, so I can live with that. Maybe that's my point, I *do* live with that.

And there must be *some* kind of consensus around cause everyone's involvement in this death – mine, the court's, BAD's, Murley's – hinges on the assumption that at some moment Godfrey's desire for Murley was made *evident*, and his identity *with* a gay man was revealed. And that revelation produced a shock so profound as to 'momentarily deprive a reasonable man of his reason'. And somehow the shock of the affair lies in the disclosure of what should have been known in advance. At least that's what the defence counsel argues saying Murley, whilst himself undeniably looking like a poof, had no idea Godfrey was one.

Transcripts are there not to record the evidence the jury heard or saw but to record judicial procedure, so I don't know everything the jury knows but I do know some of the exchanges between judge and counsels that the jury didn't hear. From the transcript it's pretty obvious that the judge and both defence counsel and prosecution were anticipating a verdict of manslaughter. Murley was charged with murder and pleaded not guilty on the basis of provocation and self defence. Whilst self defence is a lawful excuse which will acquit one of both murder and manslaughter, provocation is merely a limited excuse which reduces the charge to manslaughter. It is seen as relevant to rape cases or cases where a parent has just witnessed the death of his or her child. The prosecution focussed, unsuccessfully, on eliminating any reasonable doubt that the injuries which caused death were inflicted when the deceased was, in fact helpless, thereby eliminating self-defence. The defence however dominated the court's time and concentrated on establishing provocation.

This was done not by proving Godfrey's actions, but by proving Murley's homophobia. The provocation Godfrey represented was inherent in Murley's homophobia. So much so that an internal logic was created which not only acquitted Murley of murder but also of manslaughter. In other words, when Godfrey's sexual identity was revealed, made evident, became visible, the court held that the shock produced was so profound as to constitute a threat not merely to Murley's sanity but to his life.

There is one point on which I can readily identify with Godfrey, the deceased: Robert Boyce Murley, or Rob, as he's called, was, *is*, my type of guy! Twenty-two at the time, with what the witnesses and the defence and the judge *kept* describing as 'boyish good looks', marred by a lazy eye when tired, with a taste for alcohol and downers, seemingly constantly on the verge of tears about something or other, and having 'a dark sense of humour'.

He spent Wednesday 21st March 1991, having a Bar B Q with his mates Rodney & Wayne. They drank a dozen bottles and Murley took a handful of Rohypnols. Then about 8pm they dropped Rob off at the Bistro Bar of the Mordiallic Hotel. Not his regular pub, because it was a bit too glossy ... over-meticulous grooming perhaps. When I read of the case the first thing I wondered was – suspicious me – 'Was it a gay bar?' Did Murley go out looking for a poof? Rob went up to the barmaid and ordered the first of 6 Scotch & Cokes (followed by an unknown number of Slippery Nipples) and asked 'Is this a gay bar?' Murley explained later, that all the men had *looked at him* and he thought it was a bit strange.

Witnesses testified that it became a talking point throughout the Bistro Bar, the back Bar (Sneaky Pete's), and the bottleshop, that there was a fag

in the pub. They meant Murley! Their inference was drawn from his having asked the question. That and the fact, reinforced by the judge, 'that the facial features of the accused were such as to make it understandable that men could, although wrongly, assess him as being homosexual'.

Murley proceeded to drink himself stupid, fall off barstools, ask everyone for cigarettes, break a beer glass, fall asleep, meet Joe Godfrey who came there most nights, meet everyone else, pinch 50 bucks off Godfrey, suggest to another patron they 'roll' Godfrey, ask this guy if he had a knife he could borrow, and three hours later, when Godfrey put his hand on Rob's arse and asked if he had anywhere to stay for the night, accept the invitation 'because I like talking to older people, they have got a lot more to say'. Much fuss was made about whether Godfrey put his hand on Murley's arse as one barman testified or on the small of his back. Normal men don't touch arses nor let them be touched and the defence could not allow the moment when Godfrey's desire became visible to predate the loss of Murley's sanity by several hours.

As I've said a majority of the court time was spent establishing that Murley was homophobic. Personally I think he'd done a fine job on his own. The idea was that all his life guys had been coming on to Murley and finally with Godfrey, he lost it, he snapped. Despite all the testimonies it's still a bit unclear, but there was a guy in a lane when Murley was 10 who said he was a policeman and the other kids said 'Run Rob run', and then there was a guy when Murley was 13 and doing a paper round who asked if he could come too, so Rob and his brother made nunchaka and went out looking for him. And then when he was 16 he used to stay at a friend's house, and this guy, inexplicably nicknamed 'Eyes' - who was 27 and lived with his girlfriend - suggested a jerkoff session. And then the greatest treachery of all was when Rob's best friend Greg, only months beforehand, had suggested giving Rob a blow-job! Rob jumped out the kitchen window and never spoke to Greg again. Now Greg was called to testify and denied it emphatically ... why would he agree when his own girlfriend was in the next room? Murley was never sexually molested but the shock of the revelation was constantly reiterated; what looked normal was revealed suddenly, treacherously, to be homosexual. 'Greg's got a lot of tattoos ... you don't expect someone to be homosexual if they are covered with tattoos!' Homosexual desire suddenly becomes unmistakably evident in a way which shatters the rules of visibility.

To a certain extent Rob blamed himself. Or rather, his face. 'I was wondering why it was me all the time. I even contemplated putting a big

scar down my face.' Rob was not gay but looked it. To his mind his attractiveness, his desirability rather than his desire, identified him.

Despite the constant variation in the number and nature of the supposed 'homosexual attacks' it was clearly established that Murley had, in the words of the expert psychologist, 'a pathological condition in relation to being characterised as homosexual' which was permanent not transient. Pathological but, and I quote the expert again, 'it is not psychosis this abhorrence because it is commonplace'. This is the root of the sense of impasse, and why you don't get anywhere by accusing Murley or the legal system of homophobia because the trial already recognises homophobia is both deeply felt and endemic. It was constantly reinforced that Murley was normal because 'the provocation must be such that an ordinary person placed in the same position as the accused might have been caused to react in the same way'.

So how did he react and to what? Well it's almost impossible to say. We only have Murley's unsworn testimony and the various tales he told different friends, all of which give incomplete and contradictory scenarios.

Godfrey and Murley went back to Godfrey's flat and drank stubbies in the lounge-room for about an hour. Then they went into the kitchen to get more stubbies, and Murley thought of leaving and Godfrey said he'd get into something more comfortable and supposedly reappeared in a bathrobe with a hard-on and said 'Come Here' and Murley thought 'No, no, couldn't be'; the moment of revelation. This is the point of provocation and also the point where Murley's self defence began. He grabbed a knife from the bench behind him. There is a beautiful bit in the judge's summation where he explains to the jury that within the definition of normal reactions there exist a range of behaviours and he quotes a previous judge saying that 'it is very difficult to think clearly under the point of a raised knife'. He was referring to Murley's state of mind when confronted by Godfrey's erection, not to the knife raised in Murley's hand.

So anyway, Murley grabbed a knife from the bench behind him and cut or stabbed Godfrey's back and head and throat either once or 17 times, and Godfrey was either still coming at him, or lying on the floor moaning, evacuating his bowels and bladder as Murley later told his brother, so Murley ran into the hallway and either Godfrey - drunk, 65 and stabbed - was still coming at him or Murley dragged him feet first into the hallway as the bloodstains might suggest, and then Murley punched him or already had and booted him in the face, stabbed him some more and picked up a chair and smashed it over his head, and hit

him with a stubby which broke, maybe a glass and probably the telephone so hard that he smashed it, and then, because 'I *had* to stop him breathing' and he didn't want to go to jail because they would rape him in there, Murley went to the kitchen, got a tea towel and another knife, a serrated one, went back and with seven distinct cuts attempted to decapitate Godfrey, severing all but the vertebrae. He then wiped the place of fingerprints, stole some jewellery, lit a fire in the corner of the lounge room to 'destroy the evidence', as he puts it, and caught a taxi home.

I couldn't follow the forensic evidence, there were more than fifty distinct wounds making it impossible to determine the cause of death. Godfrey was, however, still alive, if dying, at the time of the decapitation. This meant that all previous injuries could still conceivably, if not credibly, have been inflicted in self-defence. As long as Godfrey was breathing he was still a threat.

It comes as quite a shock at the end of the 366 pages of the transcript to realise there is absolutely no evidence, except Murley's own unsworn testimony, that Godfrey made any sexual advance on Murley at all. Nor is there any attempt by Murley's defence to establish the exact nature of the supposed sexual advance.

There is, I suppose, the fact that Godfrey's corpse was wearing a bathrobe. There is the barman who saw Godfrey touch Murley's bum and offer him a place to stay for the night. However, as the defence counsel saw acutely, if this was to be a revelation of Godfrey's sexuality then it indicted Murley more than it did Godfrey.

There is nothing presented to the court to suggest Godfrey had ever sexually desired another man in his life, and nothing more conclusive than the subsequent reports in the gay press that Murley had on three occasions had consensual sex with other men whilst on remand at Pentridge.

If I started out talking about the intersection of identity and visibility, and how problematic gay identity is and so on, what I end up wondering about after looking at the transcript, even though it really seems to lend itself perfectly to that sort of visual arts/film theory stuff informed by feminism and psychoanalysis, is just how much that theory empowers *me*, how much it helps me in trying to undermine the verdict.

I'm not trying to be anti-theory. I'm not trying to take some pro-activist, anti-theory stance. It's just that I sometimes think, if that whole body of theoretical work that ties visibilities in with gender and empowerment didn't have poofs, it'd have to invent them just to satisfy its own structural need for the dynamic of homophobia.

In a sense the sort of clarity that critical theory is meant to lend is superfluous here. The jury's verdict, although unexpected, wasn't bizarre; it was analytical. It recognised an internal logic in the anxious contradictions of the trial. It's all so overt in the transcript, moreso than I've had time to relate here. The trial is masculinity policing the borders at which it is definitionally produced. Poofs are the abject, that which destabilizes that identity, because they – as well as me – are meant to have a foot both in and out of the male gender, simultaneously visible and invisible. Homophobia is the anal sadistic casting-out from the body of masculinity, of its mortality and its openings: the shit; the wounds; the corpses. In this case, the corpse just happens to be literally Godfrey's.

Such theorizing is precisely no different to the dynamic of the trial where it is only the defence counsel's success in establishing Murley's homophobia that constructs Godfrey's identity as that of a gay man. It leaves no space for a poof's perspective to be voiced, just as the trial had no place for information about Godfrey himself; not just his actions on the night, but his past, his sexuality, his life.

That's why I began by saying I was talking about the 69 photos – the forensic photos of the wounds. That's not just a rhetorical flourish, because for me they are evidence of a materiality which is entirely *aside* from their signification as *that on which* Murley *exercised* his homophobia.