

Breakfast Party at my Studio: The Multiplicity of Performance.

Dan James (Dan Untitled)



Fig. 1: Dan Untitled, *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, 2011, performance photograph: artist's studio, Wellington.¹

Just before 9 A.M. on the morning of 25 Mar 2011, a group of people gathered in my studio at Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand. At the same time but on the other side of the world (just before 9 P.M. on 24 March in that timezone), another group of people gathered in the basement of the museum of Modern Art Oxford. These two groups of people were the audiences for my multimedia performance piece *Breakfast Party at my Studio* (fig. 1).

At the outset of this discussion it is important to note that *Breakfast Party at my Studio* was a hybrid artwork - two key modes of digital-media performance practice were at play simultaneously. It was a live audiovisual performance (more specifically it was a live audiovisual mashup² remix piece), and it was also a networked performance (with audiences experiencing the artwork from two different locations, on opposite sides of the globe). It is important to examine each of these modes of cultural practice in turn, in order to provide a context to critically discuss my hybridised artwork.

¹ Photograph by Dominika Zielinska (<<http://www.dominikazielinska.com>>), used by permission.

² In music, 'mashup' is a specific sub-genre of remix in which two or more recognisable tracks are mixed together (usually in humorous and unexpected combinations), such as where the vocal melody from one track is combined with the instrumental music from another. In film/cinema, the term refers to editing and/or compositing together different pre-existing clips to create a new clip. The term 'mashup' is also in common use in web design, referring to data from two or more pre-existing websites combined to create a new site.

While both modes are still relatively new, audiovisual remix performance and networked performance each have well-established traditions from within in the broader field of creative practices that utilise digital media. To focus the scope of this discussion, I shall only refer to work by artists hailing from New Zealand. I provide a series of glimpses into some key projects by New Zealanders, but this is by no means a thorough and historically exhaustive survey of these practices locally. I highlight selected local projects and events in order to profile each of them in their own right, but predominantly in order to provide a context for *Breakfast Party at my Studio*.

My examples are local, but the underlying critical issues that they raise are global. The focus of this discussion is to investigate how these performance/remix practices interrogate and problematise how we understand the very term 'performance' itself. The cultural theorist Jon McKenzie - a thinker with a history of both hacktivism³ and performance scholarship - is well equipped to introduce the notion of performance as it intersects with technology in cultural practice. McKenzie discusses an unusual relationship between the term 'performance' as it is used in cultural, organisational, and technological contexts. The words 'perform' and 'performance' can variously be used to refer to the actions of an artist creating a live piece for an audience, to the ability of a business or organisation to achieve it's desired goals, or to the ability of a technological machine to behave in the way that it was designed to.⁴ In any of these three senses of the word, 'performance' assesses the extent that something or someone behaves in the way it is supposed to.⁵

The body of this discussion is presented in two sections. The first section addresses audiovisual performance and mashup remix practices by New Zealand artists. I will focus mainly on practices that integrate live video mixing with music.⁶ The second section examines networked performance by New Zealanders. In each of these two sections, I will provide glimpses into the history of these practices in New Zealand to provide a broader context, and I will then examine my own work (prior to *Breakfast Party in My Studio*) from within this context. Having located the key critical issues at play, I will conclude by reflecting on how these issues play out for my hybrid performance piece *Breakfast Party at my Studio*.

³ A hactivist, or politically motivated hacker, is someone who gains unauthorised entry into computer systems that are owned by another person or organisation for political reasons.

⁴ McKenzie, J. *Perform Or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. London, Routledge, 2001.

⁵ Performance, in McKenzie's expanded sense of the term, is about success and failure, dominance and subjugation. As such, McKenzie describes performance as a stratum of the French thinker Michel Foucault's notion of power-knowledge, and he makes the bold claim that, in an expanded sense, 'performance' will displace the Foucauldian notion of 'discipline'. Ibid, p. 18.

⁶ This limit to the discussion is not strict - I will discuss one artist in particular (the D.J. Felix Five) whose work is musical (radio, audio production and performances) but without integrating video content.

Live audiovisual performance and mashup remix practices in New Zealand

The marriage of moving image with live musical performance has a long and well-established history that dates back to the early days of cinema in the late 1800s. At this pioneering moment in cinema history, film projections were almost always accompanied by live musicians performing soundtracks. Likewise, the appropriation and recontextualisation of pre-existing cultural artefacts has a long and well-established history, with roots that can be traced to the early 1900s with the collage and assemblage works of the Dadaists, Surrealists and Futurists⁷ - techniques that also soon found parallels in the manipulation of pre-recorded audio to create art.⁸ With the advent of digital technology, sampling techniques began gaining momentum and pop-cultural currency in the Hip-Hop music of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Today, audiovisual performance (combining music with moving image in live performance) and mashup remix practices are diverse and heavily interrelated fields.

One of the early groups in New Zealand to integrate live video mixing with musical performance is a collective known as Fetus Productions.⁹ Evolving out of the post-punk musical group The Features, Fetus Productions were an interdisciplinary group who “created videos, screenprints and merchandise, and staged exhibitions and multi-media concerts”.¹⁰ In order to create their gritty, dark and dystopian aesthetic, they appropriated medical images and footage, and they integrated this visual material with bleak mechanical rhythms and other found sounds. Commencing with their first staged event in 1980, Fetus Productions were New Zealand pioneers in the integration of electronic music (using samplers, sequencers and synthesisers) with video (using projections of Super8, 16mm and VHS footage) in their performances.¹¹

A few years later, Mike Hodgson emerged as a key figure in what would become known as V.J. culture. He premiered the group Tinnitus (with Angus McNaughton) in 1992 at the first of the elaborate multimedia events called *Rotate Your State*.¹² At the end of the 1990s, Hodgson also established the *Soliton* events, using a similar structure, but presenting these events in nightclubs.¹³ Over this period, Hodgson also performed his video mixes with other

⁷ Collage and assemblage gained momentum as modes of creative practice for the Dadaists, Surrealists and Futurists in the 1910s.

⁸ The composer John Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* (1935), for example, is a seminal musical work in which two phonographs contribute audio to the composition.

⁹ Jed Town was the artist who primarily drove Fetus Productions, but at certain points Sarah Fort, Mike Broomfield and James Pinker also contributed to the project. Clifford, A. *Interdisciplinary Moments: A History in Glimpses*. In Brennan, S. and Ballard, S. *The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader*, p. 134. The now defunct *Club Bizarre* (a New Zealand music distribution and event promotion label, 1990 - 2007) archives a profile of the work of Fetus Productions on their official website: <<http://www.clubbizarre.co.nz/display.php?band=1101&sec=13>>.

¹⁰ Clifford, A. *Interdisciplinary Moments: A History in Glimpses*. In Brennan, S. and Ballard, S. (Eds.) *The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader*. Auckland, The Aotearoa Digital Arts Trust; Clouds, 2008, p. 134.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹³ *Ibid.*

musicians, projecting video content for bands such as the Headless Chickens, Supergroove, and a number of other notable local acts.¹⁴

Up until the early 1990s, Hodgson carried suitcases full of V.H.S. tapes around the country to perform.¹⁵ At the end of one event, an enthusiastic fan asked him what sort of computer software he used to trigger his samples.¹⁶ Hodgson responded “You mean you can use computers to do this?”. The fan was a programmer called Ross George, and their conversation led to a fruitful collaboration in which they developed a unique software platform for mixing and manipulating video samples.¹⁷

During the mid 1990s, a music festival called *The Gathering* celebrated the start of each New Year.¹⁸ *The Gathering* festivals (and also the later *Splore* festivals¹⁹) were notable for introducing a much broader public to the art of live-mixed video in New Zealand. Electronic dance music and rave culture were in rapid ascendance by this point, and these festivals attracted audiences numbering in the thousands.²⁰ There were numerous V.J.s performing at these events,²¹ and V.J.ing was gaining prominence as a cultural form. Most of the V.J.s, however, did not collaborate directly with the musical performers (musicians and D.J.s) in devising their visual content - the V.J.s largely improvised their mixes on the spot rather than coordinating their content in advance with the musical performers.

While most V.J.s were working independently from musical performers in New Zealand at this point, two tightly integrated audiovisual acts rose to prominence. Leading on from his work with Tinnitus, Mike Hodgson teamed up with the audio producer Paddy Free to form an integrated audiovisual duo called Pitch Black. They premiered their act at *The Gathering* in 1997.²² Using software and an array of hardware controller devices, the early Pitch Black performances delivered energetic and punchy mixes of their own original audiovisual content. Salmonella Dub,²³ another prominent act at the time, also integrated

¹⁴ Alongside his current work with the band Pitch Black (see below), Hodgson now currently works with the motion graphics studio The Darkroom (<<http://thedarkroom.tv>>, a company through which he specialises in event production and video mapping.

¹⁵ Public lecture at *The Mix and Mash Mini!* (webstock conference: <<http://www.webstock.org.nz/upcoming/mini-nov10.php>>). Wellington City Gallery, 3 November 2010.

¹⁶ *Ibid*; <<http://www.pitchblack.co.nz/?s1=about&s2=Michael%20Hodgson>>.

¹⁷ *Ibid* (both sources listed in footnote 16).

¹⁸ The first *The Gathering* festival was in 1996, and the final festival was in 2002. The official archival site for the festival is <<http://www.thegathering.co.nz>>.

¹⁹ *Splore* was founded in the late 1990s and the festival is still in operation. The official website for *Splore* is <<http://www.splore.net>>, but they do not provide archival details from the festivals of past years.

²⁰ According to the archive of the official festival website, the first ‘The Gathering’ was attended by somewhere between 4000 and 5000 people. <<http://www.thegathering.co.nz/96-97/index.html>>. Their official website does not publish figures for the final two festivals, but the millenium festival (the last one with published statistics) was attended by 15000 people. <<http://www.thegathering.co.nz/q2000/index.html>>.

²¹ There were 53 VJs performing at the festival by the time of their millenial event. <<http://www.thegathering.co.nz/q2000/facts-and-figures/index.html>>.

²² Pitch Black’s official website is <www.pitchblack.co.nz>.

²³ Salmonella Dub’s official website is <<http://www.salmonelladub.co.nz>>.

visuals with their music working closely with V.J. Helm.²⁴ The visual aesthetic in both bands was a combination of sampled and computer-generated imagery.

Drawing inspiration from the early performances of Pitch Black and Salmonella Dub's work with V.J. Helm, Mike Busy²⁵ began performing in 1997 and he founded a group of V.J.s called Tube A.V.G.²⁶ During the 2000's, Busy extended his work into audiovisual performance. Amongst his projects, he created visuals for the band Fly My Pretties²⁷ (working with them from concept through to the performance series), he formed an audiovisual (D.J./V.J.) duo called The Supervisors with Lakshman Anandanayagam, and he collaborated with the producer/performer Module²⁸ on an ongoing basis. Busy identifies that he "has lots of interests" aesthetically, but that amongst these he "like[s] the Hip-Hop ethos of sampling from different sources and redefining the context of sources to make some thing original".²⁹ This appropriated/sampled aesthetic is especially apparent in his performances in The Supervisors, and also in some of the material used in his collaborations with Module.³⁰

The use of sampling was widespread in New Zealand music by the 2000's too, but the D.J. Felix Five is notable for his contribution to mashup culture in New Zealand. As opposed to sampling shorter motifs or loops and integrating them into new musical creations (which was a very common musical strategy by this point) - the mashup style is distinctive for its use of large and easily recognisable chunks of other people's material. Five's radio career in New Zealand spans 10 years.³¹ He started playing musical mashups on his *Drive* slot on Wellington's Radio Active during the 2000s, he went on to found the Saturday afternoon radio show *Messed Up* (exclusively playing mashups), and he started digitally producing his own mashup mixes too.³² Built upon the popularity of his radio shows, Five began to

²⁴ Pitch Black's Paddy Free also did audio production for Salmonella Dub on a number of their releases, including his award-winning co-production work on their album *Inside the Dub Plates* (2001).

²⁵ Mike Busy is a pseudonym for the artist Mike Bridgeman. His official website is <www.nektar.co.nz> (a site which predominantly profiles his commercial film-making work and his more recent venue installation and video mapping work).

²⁶ At The Gathering in 1997, Hodgson was in charge of coordinating and scheduling all V.J.s for the festival (besides premiering his own act Pitch Black). Hodgson gave Tube A.V.G. the responsibility for managing the Drum and Bass tent for the duration of the festival. According to Busy, "This was huge at the time, for where we were at technically." In personal communication: email interview with the artist, 20 April 2011.

²⁷ Fly My Pretties is a collaboration between a number of prominent Wellington musicians (coordinated by Barnaby Weir, frontman to the band The Blackseeds). The lineup of Fly My Pretties is different for each incarnation. See, for example, <<http://www.amplifier.co.nz/artist/17586/fly-my-pretties.html>>.

²⁸ Module is the musician and producer Jeremiah Ross. His official website is <<http://www.module.co.nz>>

²⁹ Busy has a background in graphic design, so there is a graphic look to some of his work, but he also has a film background that lends itself to more sequential work. In personal communication: email interview with the artist, 20 April 2011.

³⁰ One example of Busy's mashup footage is the content used for Module's track *Rock My Computer* (2008). In this track, Module sampled and remixed the sounds of the Microsoft Windows error messages, and Busy made matched visuals with images of the face of Microsoft C.E.O. Bill Gates, roughly and obviously composited onto the bodies of people breakdancing. This footage was mixed live for performances, but Module also uploaded it as a clip to YouTube (accessible at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HB3gTNxEh0>).

³¹ In personal communication: recorded face-to-face interview with the artist, 21 April 2011.

³² Ibid. The 'Drive' show is a 4-7 P.M. weekday radio slot on Radio Active (the official website for the radio station is <<http://www.radioactive.co.nz>>). *Messed Up* is a 2 hour show on Saturdays from 4-7, which includes *10 Past 5 Tequilas* a dose of hyped mashup mixes (commencing at 5:10 P.M.).

coordinate (and perform at) public events called *Messed Up*, and he also started the popular *WTFFF* parties.³³

As a mode of cultural practice, mashups conflate together multiple (and commonly conflicting or opposing) themes, but the artists themselves tend to remain silent on the themes that may be evoked by mixing these different sources together. Even if the artists do not explicitly make comment themselves, some mashups highlight musical similarities (such as lyrical similarities, or scenarios where one artist has stolen a riff, motif or melody from another artist). Other mashups highlight difference (such as divergent lyrical thematics, divergent or conflicting genres, or divergent approaches to the commercial facets of the music industry). The vast majority of mashups, however, do not have a clear logic behind the combination, and that is precisely the point. Pre-existing cultural products are combined into new products simply because they can be. In musical mashups, if the melodies, rhythms and chord progressions of the tunes match closely enough, then the dominant attitudes seem to be 'the more the merrier' and 'the wierder the better'.

While Five's radio work brought popular attention to musical mashups in New Zealand, the most notable cinema mashup to come from New Zealand shores is a short video produced by the collective Misshapen Features,³⁴ a clip entitled *Starlords* (2005).³⁵ *Starlords* samples footage from two immediately recognisable fantasy series: George Lucas' *Star Wars* sexology³⁶ and the New Zealander Peter Jackson's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. In *Starlords*, shots from each fantasy series are edited together in quick succession. The edits juxtapose the films and thus invite critical comparisons - emphasising similarities in the composition and framing in general, the narrative content of the shots, and the gesture and facial expressions of characters.³⁷ While the video *Starlords* was initially posted as an online video and not performed as a live mix,³⁸ the piece is still important to mashup culture in New Zealand in general, and the piece is especially notable for its criticality about the interplay between audio and video.

³³ In personal communication, recorded interview with the artist, 21 April 2011.

³⁴ While members of the group are known to me personally, Misshapen Features retain anonymity in their online presence.

³⁵ The video was first posted on their own site (<www.misshapenfeatures.com>, a site which is now defunct), and also on YouTube. The first uploaded copy was taken offline due to a copyright complaint for their use of the audio track *It's Just Begun*, but it was more recently re-uploaded at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiD6zdgKFlc>> and <<http://vimeo.com/13004005>>.

³⁶ Wherever I identify the samples used in variant works in this discussion, I do not provide full reference details for the source materials sampled. If I deem it notable to specify the sources sampled, then these sources will generally already be well-known, iconic and easily sourced cultural artefacts. My primary interest is in researching the *new, variant works* that have been created, not in archiving the publication details for each and every one of the sources that were sampled.

³⁷ The video is entertaining, but unlike a lot of mashup production, the critical reflection of this piece is also readily apparent. For example, it is interesting to note the selection of musical track in the second section of *Starlords*. The creators identify that *It's Just Begun* is "one of the most sampled musical tracks of all time". (Initially noted on their own (now defunct) website, now also noted in the online description for their YouTube upload: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiD6zdgKFlc>>). In *Starlords*, this musical track is not remixed - it is presented in its full length as accompaniment to all of the other (heavily remixed) visual material.

³⁸ At a later point, however, The Supervisors did mix the material live in some of their performances. Other performers will have undoubtedly done so too.

The interrelated modes of audiovisual performance and mashup remix raise a cluster of interesting critical issues surrounding McKenzie's expanded conception of the term 'performance'. Broadly speaking, these interrelated cultural fields emphasise the complex hybridity of 'performance' as a field of inquiry. As McKenzie highlights, the term can denote a cultural construct, an organisational construct, and a technical construct. In the field of audiovisual/mashup performance practice these three understandings of the term play out all at the same time. We can consider the act of an artist performing a mix (cultural performance), the logistics of getting creative work out to the public (organisational performance), and the performance of the technologies that enable these artists use to create their work (technological performance).

When a musician or visual artist 'performs' a mix, they take pre-existing cultural forms, and they combine these forms to create something new, and the meanings vary according to shifts in context. For example, when Han Solo turns his head to look at something during a shot in one of the original *Star Wars* films, it conveys very specific narrative information inside that film. When this same clip is sampled and recontextualised in *Starlords* (seen in quick succession alongside numerous other characters performing the same gesture), the meaning of the clip changes significantly. In the latter context, the viewer becomes critical of how meaning mediated (in this case, the viewer becomes implicitly aware of the construction of fantasy fiction narratives). The artists who perform such manipulations of context perform a gesture of criticality towards the media they use. The gesture of recontextualisation is a gesture of cultural criticality, but it can also be seen as an instance of musical performance - a particular sample becomes a musical note and/or a rhythm to be played musically in conjunction with other notes and/or rhythms.

'Performance' can also be understood as an organisational construct. Artists work together to coordinate public events (such as *Rotate your State* and *The Gathering* festivals), and there are administrative goals inherent to such endeavours. An organisational performance goal (such as achieving high attendance at an event) does not *necessarily* align with a cultural performance goal (such as the goal of creating engaging art experiences). I raise this point in order to highlight the fact that in McKenzie's framework, high performance in one sense does not necessarily equate to high performance in another.

When we speak of technological performance, we could refer to the video manipulation software created by Hodgson in collaboration with George, and discuss the 'performance' of the software itself in technical terms (such as how quickly it processes data, at what resolution, using what compression, and so forth). Just because the loop performs well in a technical sense (it plays back smoothly) does not automatically mean that it performs well

culturally.³⁹ Conversely, even if a loop does not perform well technically (it glitches and stutters), this slippage could create a desired and deliberate aesthetic outcome (an instance of high cultural performance) as is the case with glitch electronic music.

I commenced my own work in audiovisual performance with two projects concurrently, the bands The Axis of Weevils and Anaesthesia Associates. The Axis of Weevils (Fig. 2) was a relatively short-lived project⁴⁰ comprised of seven members - five musicians and two V.J.s. It was a side project for all members, since each of us were working on a number of other projects at that point too.⁴¹ I did not touch the digital technology in this band, I played the bass guitar. In the band as a whole, however, there were digitally produced beats triggered live, digital synthesisers, and digital video projections (live mixed animations and other video loops, projected onto two adjacent screens). The aesthetic of this band was not dominantly sample based. The music had electronic beats, but the samples were not easily identifiable as lifted from other sources. The music was infused with dub and world music influences as well as down-tempo electronic music. Visually, the projections were mostly comprised of hand-drawn animations mixed with colourful abstract video textures.



Fig. 2: The Axis of Weevils, 2008, performance still taken from video documentation: Taranaki Festival of Lights, Taranaki.⁴²

³⁹ In the case of Hodgson's work, in my opinion his loops invariably perform well in both senses of the word, but that is beside the point here. The key issue is that the goals in each of the two senses do not necessarily align with one another.

⁴⁰ The project was in existence between 2005-2008, but I joined in late 2006.

⁴¹ The musical members of the Axis of Weevils were Tui Mamaki and Monsieur Escargot (who performed vocals and keyboards respectively, and also from the band the Mamaku Project: <<http://www.mamakuproject.com>>); Jeremy Cloake (who played live percussion, and who also performs with Resonance: <<http://www.resonance.co.nz>>); Mic Watts (who played electronic beats and live effects, and who also produced electronic music and visual art under a number of other pseudonyms: <<http://www.nommoantenna.net>>); and myself (playing the fretless bass guitar). The visual members were Paul Bradley (who also V.J.s with a number of other acts, is a painter, animator and commercial illustrator: <<http://www.lupavision.net>>), and Kim Newell (who has been V.J.ing since the late 1990s). The dancer/choreographer and electronic musician Joshua Rutter was also a past member (but we only played one gig together in that group before he left due to other commitments).

⁴² Video documentation captured by the artists, used by permission.



Fig. 3: Anaesthesia Associates: *The Best Air Guitar Album in the World, Ever, Vol. II*, 2007, performance photograph: N.Z. Film Archive, Wellington.⁴³

Concurrently to the Axis of Weevils, but performing on a more regular basis, I collaborated with Paul Bradley⁴⁴ in an audiovisual duo called Anaesthesia Associates. Anaesthesia Associates was originally a solo glitch/ambient music act that I had been performing since 2004. While I had used sampling all along, my music production gradually became more up-tempo and explicitly sample-based. Bradley joined me in early 2006, and Anaesthesia Associates became an integrated audiovisual act. The samples in our audiovisual production gradually became more easily recognisable, and in 2007 we did our first full-blown mashup performance - an artwork entitled *The Best Air Guitar Album in the World*,

⁴³ Photograph by Helen Varley Jameison, used by permission.

⁴⁴ Bradley was also a member of the Axis of Weevils, see above.

Ever, Vol II (Fig. 2). In this piece we performed a live remix of audio samples lifted from various iconic glam rock anthems, mixing this audio with video clips of air guitarists strutting their stuff. *The Best Air Guitar Album...* was also our first foray into networked performance. The piece was presented at the NZ Film Archive gallery (Wellington), simultaneously for an audience onsite, and also a live online audience.

Thematically, the piece initiated a broad field of interest that has stuck for me ever since - showy, over the top performance work that directly addresses performance and performativity as subject matter. In *The Best Air Guitar Album...*, we dressed up as glam rock stars, wearing tight leather pants with big-hair wigs (Fig. 1), and we had the posturing to match. At one point during the performance, I triggered samples from my laptop whilst holding it behind my head. My avatar⁴⁵ repeatedly exclaimed "MAKE SOME FUCKIN' NOISE!" during our piece. Embedded in the playfully ostentatious hype, *The Best Air Guitar Album...* presented audiences with a thematic interplay between virtual and real (the interrelationship between online and onsite audiences; the visual motif of an air guitarist pretending to play as opposed to an actual musician).

Anaesthesia Associates has been my main mashup project⁴⁶ since *The Best Air Guitar Album...*, and the thematic interest in 'performance about performance' has recurred throughout our collaborative work right up until we disbanded the project in 2011. Speaking more broadly, Anaesthesia Associates' performances were heavily self-referential, presenting images of performance itself. The aspiration to perform - the desire for attention and adoration - was encapsulated/exaggerated in samples of air guitarists, which were juxtaposed with 'real' musicians, samples of mainstream hit music, samples of dancers, dancing and dance lessons, and samples of film and television actors playing their roles. Since our initial networked piece, we have predominantly played at bars, clubs, galleries and festivals for onsite local audiences - but as a duo we have also presented one other series of networked performances⁴⁷ which I will discuss briefly at the end of the next section.

⁴⁵ An avatar is a graphical representation in cyberspace. My avatar for this performance was a figure with my face crudely photoshopped onto an image of the Guns 'n' Roses lead vocalist Axl Rose's body.

⁴⁶ There have been two other mashup projects besides Anaesthesia Associates. I developed a D.J. pseudonym Copycat Crime, which remained relatively low-key and mostly existed as a persona that I used for performances at private parties - I only ever did a handful of public gigs under that name. After Anaesthesia Associates disbanded late last year, I started a new solo mashup project called Übermahlung und Frottage, in which I manipulate samples, scratch on a turntable and play the bass guitar all at the same time. Due to other projects I have only performed with this project a few times to date.

⁴⁷ *I Miss You, Great to See You Again* (2007) and *I Miss You, Great to See You Again 2.0* (2008).

Networked Performance Practices in New Zealand

Sending artifacts of visual art, music, sound art, poetry and so forth through a network is well as a established creative strategy. In the 1960's, artists used the international postal system as their network of choice, firmly establishing mail art as a cultural movement.⁴⁸ Artists have also variously used shortwave radio, telephones, facsimile machines and satellite technologies as modes of creative practice.⁴⁹

One early example of networked performance taking place in New Zealand is the project *Burntime* (1991). The visiting North American artists Cheryl Casteen and Charles Flickinger facilitated artists established this project at Artspace gallery in Auckland, inviting artists and the public to engage in an international exchange that took place over facsimile and telephone.⁵⁰

New Zealand's first documented webcast event took place while the internet was still young in the public consciousness. In 1994, Richard Naylor webcast the Tawa Schools Music Festival from the Michael Fowler centre in Wellington, reaching audiences in a dozen countries.⁵¹

Adam Hyde is another streaming media pioneer hailing from New Zealand. Hyde's background in radio led him to numerous projects in broadcasting and networking.⁵² He collaborated with another New Zealander Honor Harger and formed Radioqualia in 1998 to focus on the use of streaming media technologies to create art outcomes.⁵³ Radioqualia's major project *Radio Astronomy* (2004-present), for example, allows listeners to hear broadcasts of astronomical space - converting data from radio telescopes into audible sound, and broadcasting this audio over the internet.⁵⁴ More recently, Hyde focussed his attention on offering 'how-to' documentation for emergent technologies, founding F.L.O.S.S. Manuals in 2007.⁵⁵

The New Zealander Helen Varley Jamieson (currently Munich-based) is at the forefront of what she terms 'cyberformance'. She uses the term to describe emergent cultural practices where live performers come together in real-time over the internet to create

⁴⁸ Artists such as Ray Johnson, On Kawara, Ben Vautier were at the forefront of this movement.

⁴⁹ Jameison, H.V. *Real Time, Virtual Space, Live Theatre*. In Brennan, S. and Ballard, S. (Eds.), *The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader*. Auckland, The Aotearoa Digital Arts Trust; Clouds, 2008, p. 48.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² See <<http://www.furtherfield.org/user/adam-hyde>> and <<http://www.kunstradio.at/BIOS/hydebio.html>> for example.

⁵³ <<http://www.radioqualia.net>>.

⁵⁴ <<http://www.radioqualia.net/telemetry/frame.html>>.

⁵⁵ <<http://en.flossmanuals.net/>>. See also <<http://vimeo.com/4078924>> for an in-depth interview with the artist. I referred to Hyde's free documentation heavily (F.L.O.S.S. Manuals, and also the now defunct 'Streaming Suitcase' site) in the development of my own early webcast projects (see below).

performance works.⁵⁶ The globally dispersed cyberperformance troupe she founded, Avatar Body *Collision*,⁵⁷ use the internet as a platform to approach the challenge that this dispersed simultaneity poses for contemporary live theatre. Avatar Body *Collision* are four women based in different cities from one another.⁵⁸ Without ever all being in the same place at the same time (some members have never even met each other face to face), the troupe have collaborated to produce ten shows over the years - presenting their work at festivals, galleries and conferences all around the world.⁵⁹ The platforms that they use include UpStage, which is some purpose-built online performance software which members of the troupe collaborated to develop.⁶⁰ Their practice thematically explores the relationship of the body to the machine, and what it means to be human in a world of intelligent machines.

In my own work in the field of live online performance, I operate in multiple capacities. I have presented artworks as performer,⁶¹ I have presented projects as curator/co-curator,⁶² and I have been involved in a number of networked performance/lectures.⁶³

Jamieson and I commenced a working relationship in 2005 when I curated the performance event *Indeterminacy and Interface*, and we have been friends and collaborators ever since. The following year we worked together on a performance/installation event that I curated entitled *Intimacy and In.yer.face*. *Intimacy and In.yer.face* was a webcast event that took place in multiple locations simultaneously. Four artists/groups presented artworks which all took place at the same time. Live webcasts streamed out video feeds from a number of locations in the old Museum of Wellington building (now part of Massey University's Wellington campus) and a webcast also streamed in from an undisclosed location in Paris.

⁵⁶ See <<http://www.cyberperformance.org>> for more information.

⁵⁷ The italics on the word 'collision' are a typographical part of the name of the performance troupe.

⁵⁸ The four members of Avatar Body *Collision* are Helen Varley Jameison (Munich), Vicki Smith (Harihari), Leena Saarinen (Helsinki), and Karla Ptacek (London). The performance troupe are now on hiatus, but their official website is <<http://www.avatarbodycollision.org>>.

⁵⁹ Jameison, 2008, p. 50.

⁶⁰ UpStage is a purpose-built platform for live online performance that was developed by Helen Varley Jameison and Vicki Smith in collaboration with the artist and programmer Douglas Bagnall. The platform enables text chat in real time with the audience, as well as graphics, moving image (animations, video), audio, and real-time drawing tools. The text typed into a chat pane by performers is converted into audible voices by text-to-speech software. The official website for the project is <<http://www.upstage.org.nz>>.

⁶¹ Prior to *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, my work with the duo Anaesthesia Associates has resulted in the mashup pieces *The Best Air Guitar Album in the World, Ever, Vol. II* (2007), *I Miss You, Great to See You Again* (2007), *I Miss You, Great to See You Again 2.0* (2008).

⁶² I curated the events *Indeterminacy and Interface* (2005) *Intimacy and In.yer.face* (2006), *Séance for Nam June Paik* (2007), and I co-curated the *080808 UpStage Festival* and the *090909 UpStage Festival*. All of these projects had live online components.

⁶³ For example, I was part of the panel discussion *Shareware: The Online Subject* (2008) in which avatars for online participants were projected behind me as I spoke. The piece was presented to an audience at the Adam Art Gallery in Wellington. The online participants (Jameison and Smith) were akin to misbehaving students at the back of a classroom - Jameison and Smith's characters playfully challenged and undermined whatever I said. In a later piece with a group of collaborators (based respectively in Harihari, Brisbane, Georgia and Mexico city), I performed online for the hybrid performance/lecture *Enacting Collective Intelligence: A Hybrid Mashup of Theatre and Theory* (2009), which was presented to an onsite audience at the Govett Brewster gallery in New Plymouth. In this Dadaesque parody of academia, a number of people gave simultaneous lectures on different subjects - all at the same time. An onsite performer (Jameison) attempted to channel the content that was being delivered - she spoke with the tone and demeanour of a normal lecturer, attempting to make sense out of content that became increasingly fragmented and nonsensical.

When viewed online, audiences could navigate between multiple pages on the project website⁶⁴ to experience different pieces. Most of these pages had a live video stream. Avatar Body Collision's artwork for *Intimacy and In.yer.face* was a piece entitled *Familiar Features*. This artwork involved text chat and graphics/avatars in Upstage on one page, and a webcast video signal on another.⁶⁵

In 2007, Jamieson and (fellow Collider) Vicki Smith curated a festival of live online performance entitled the *070707 UpStage Festival* (7 July 2007), the first of a number of annual festivals in which all performances were presented in the UpStage platform.⁶⁶ As mentioned earlier, Anaesthesia Associates presented *The Best Air Guitar Album...* in the *070707 UpStage Festival*, and this piece was my first foray into live online performance in the capacity of performer (as opposed to my prior work in this field as curator). Jamieson, Smith and I went on to co-curate two subsequent festivals of cyberperformance - the *080808 UpStage Festival* (8 August 2008) and the *090909 UpStage Festival* (9 September 2009).⁶⁷ Each of these festivals featured numerous performers working together in real-time across different timezones, there were physical venues that audiences could attend in a number of different cities, and the festivals had a live online audience who could be accessing the performances from anywhere at any given point.⁶⁸

In December 2007, Anaesthesia Associates presented our next networked performance piece. In this artwork, entitled *I Miss You, Great to See You Again*, I performed onsite to an audience in London,⁶⁹ and Bradley performed live over the internet from New Zealand.⁷⁰ In *I Miss You...*, we thematically focused our attention samples from well known love songs and cheesy romantic comedies. The performance mashed up and juxtaposed numerous different clichéd pop-cultural representations of sexuality and gender - further extending our interest in performance about performance itself.⁷¹

My role in the *080808 UpStage Festival* was hybrid - I was co-curator for the festival as a whole, I was onsite in the Engine Room gallery in Wellington as a host, and I was also a performer in the Anaesthesia Associates sequel piece *I Miss You, Great to See You Again 2.0*

⁶⁴ The website from this project is now offline.

⁶⁵ Space does not permit me to expand on the nature of this piece in any level of detail here, but in essence audience members (both onsite and online) were prompted to try and discover a password. Once they had obtained this password, they could enter another area. For audience members onsite, they could enter a passageway with an interactive video projection. For audience members viewing online, the password gave access to a new webpage featuring a webcast from the same physical passageway.

⁶⁶ See footnote 60.

⁶⁷ Jameison and Smith also curated the *101010 UpStage Festival* in October 2010 (I could not collaborate in this capacity due to other commitments, but I was a host for the Wellington node).

⁶⁸ Details of all four fests. Big footnote.

⁶⁹ The piece was presented in London for a conference at Goldsmiths College entitled *Intimacy: Across Digital and Visceral Performance*.

⁷⁰ Bradley performed early in the morning in New Zealand, with no audience present on his end, for an early evening performance in U.K. time.

⁷¹ Space does not permit me to expand on the interrelationship between performance and gender here. It will suffice to say here that gender was a major theme for Foucault (from whom McKenzie took his point of departure). McKenzie accordingly discusses gender theory in depth in numerous places throughout his 2001 book.

(2008). In this sequel version the thematic focus was the same, but in this piece we were both performing in the same room as each other again (in Wellington, to both an onsite audience and an online audience).

One crucial facet of live online performance is the simultaneous interconnection that occurs between people in multiple times and places. On occasion, the effect of being simultaneously interconnected with people in other places can be highly dramatic. During the *101010 UpStage Festival*, for example, one of the physical node venues was the Museum of Science and Technology in Belgrade - we had audience members there, and artists performing from onsite at that venue. Right in the middle of the festival (approximately 2 P.M. local time in Belgrade, violent rioting broke out in the street outside the venue.⁷² Fearing for their lives, the performers, audience and museum staff locked themselves inside the venue, whilst rioters outside in the streets threw bottles and Molotov cocktails. These frightened performers and audience members found solace in the inter-human connection with people in other places, and conversely, the turn of events influenced the tone of the cyberperformances that took place for the remaining duration of the festival too.

As with audiovisual/mashup performance, in networked art the implications of the term 'performance' are also complex and multiple. In a cultural sense, the traditional notion of a 'performer' on stage in front of an audience collapses - audiences are physically situated in more than one location, and as such the performer cannot engage with them using the traditional strategies of a stage performer (body language, eye contact and so forth). The relationship between performer and audience is further complicated by the fact that in some instances audience members themselves perform. In Avatar Body *Collision's* performances and other UpStage performances, audience members chat in real-time with the performers. In some instances (taking advantage of the anonymity of the online space), audience members assume imagined personae of their own creation, and thus the line between audience and performer is blurred - the audience become characters in their own right who improvise and perform in the live theatre that is taking place.⁷³

Organisationally speaking, the 'performance' is also complex and multiple. To curate and manage the UpStage festivals of live online performance, the team must manage and coordinate artists in multiple timezones, venues in multiple cities, publicity material (and also performances themselves) in multiple languages. Working from within these logistical

⁷² The rioting was a Neo-Nazi attack upon a gay pride march, and the violence made the international news at the time.

⁷³ This is actually the case with all work presented online using the platform UpStage. In almost every performance I have ever seen in UpStage, at least one audience member will assume a persona and talks to the performers whilst 'in character' as that constructed persona.

complexities, contributors also commonly occupy numerous roles simultaneously.⁷⁴ Further, as I demonstrated with the tragic and disturbing example of the Belgrade riots, real life events (and the logistical complications that they cause) are taken into account and assimilated into the performances themselves as fast as the events themselves take place. The 'performance' in an organisational sense is deeply intertwined with the 'performance' in a cultural sense.

Finally, in a technological sense, the issue of 'performance' again becomes complex and multiple. Hyde's shift from creating innovative art projects to providing free documentation, for example, could be understood as a hybridisation of organisational and technological performance. He (and his FLOSS Manuals collaborators) apply an administrative, organisational ethos to their work - an ethos which can be roughly paraphrased as 'people need to be able to access information in order to do their tasks properly'. This ethos is applied to technology: 'what can this tool do, and what are different ways in which we can make it perform?'

In my own work the most obvious hybridisation is between cultural and technological performance. In networked performance, there are a number of technical factors at play: the speed of the internet connection (for the performers and for the audiences), and also the file-size, compression and other nuances specific to the data transfer. As such, internet connections invariably lag and glitch from time to time, servers crash and connections drop. These instances of low performance in a technical sense can become instances of high performance in a cultural sense. When such mishaps occur, the artists improvise, which makes each artwork different every time.

⁷⁴ In the UpStage festivals, Jameison, Smith and I all occupy multiple roles that are embedded into our roles as co-curators. During the festivals themselves we are curators, hosts to both online and onsite audiences, and also live performers in our own artworks; leading up to and after the festivals we occupy additional roles such as publicity agents, technical advisors and mentors to the artists, and we manage other tasks such as graphics and animation production for the festival as a whole, web maintenance, video editing and so forth.

Breakfast Party at my Studio

In light of these critical issues surrounding McKenzie's expanded framework for performance, I would like to discuss *Breakfast Party at my Studio*. I will not offer a singular and conclusive interpretation of what the piece means - my artwork was multiple and hybrid. The promotional blurb and my spoken introduction each framed the piece as addressing themes surrounding waking up, the dawning of a new day and consuming breakfast - but I will not expand directly on any of this thematic content beyond that preliminary information. Instead, I would like to offer a series of reflections that provide a framework for critically approaching the piece. The interpretation of the sequences of images and the music is entirely up to my audience.

Firstly, this piece was characterised by juxtapositions and dislocations of time. Some audience members experienced the piece in the morning (fig. 4). Others experienced the artwork in the evening. As such, the reception would undoubtedly have been different for each of these two parties. The time of day that an artwork is experienced affects the mood of the audience, and as such it clearly has a pronounced effect upon performance.



Fig. 4: Dan Untitled, *Breakfast Party at my Studio*, 2011, performance photograph: artist's studio, Wellington.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Photograph by Dominika Zielinska (<<http://www.dominikazielinska.com>>), used by permission.

Differences in place (New Zealand and U.K.) also implicate the reception of the piece. One facet of this disjuncture is how readily the audiences recognise and draw associations from the samples used. For example, at one point in the audiovisual mix, I played a track called *Get Out of Your Lazy Bed*.⁷⁶ Audiences in Oxford would experience this snippet of music as a thematically relevant selection, but not much beyond that. For almost all audience members who grew up in New Zealand, however, this piece of music would be instantly recognisable as the theme song to the highly popular Saturday morning children's television programme *What Now?*⁷⁷ Hearing a snippet of the tune would bring countless childhood memories flooding back. Towards the end of the piece, I mixed together a sequence of appropriated images from newscasts of current events. In amongst the sequence, there were images of the city of Christchurch, devastated by recent earthquakes and aftershocks.⁷⁸ Again, these samples would have had a far more poignant effect upon New Zealanders than they would have for U.K. audience members (who are unlikely to have such a strong personal connection to the city). Place, like time, has an integral effect upon performance.

There are also variations in the context in which the piece was presented. Audience members in New Zealand experienced this piece in a relatively informal setting - they were invited into my studio (a semi-private space that became public for the piece).⁷⁹ Audience members in the U.K., conversely, experienced this piece in a more formal setting. The venue in Oxford was an established and high-profile art gallery (the museum of Modern Art Oxford), and the piece was presented in conjunction with a workshop through a well-respected university (Oxford Internet Institute). Audiences experiencing the work in one context would undoubtedly have had different experiences from audiences situated in the other context. Context is a major factor in performance.

There was no singular and 'authentic' experience of possible for *Breakfast Party at my Studio*. Variations in time, place and context change the passage of experience that this piece offers for each different audience member. What this piece means, then, will have been different in each and every case.

In terms of 'performance' in a cultural sense, my artwork can be clearly located as a hybridised piece that draws on the traditions of audiovisual remix/mashup performance and networked performance. I performed as D.J., V.J. and networked performance artist all at the same time - that much is patently obvious. There was also a pronounced theatricality

⁷⁶ Matt Bianco and Basia, 1984.

⁷⁷ *What Now?* premiered in 1981, and the show was cancelled in 2004. *Get Out of Your Lazy Bed* was the theme song for much of this period.

⁷⁸ A number of major earthquakes had struck the city of Christchurch during the months prior to my performance, and there were numerous aftershocks still taking place on an ongoing basis at the time of the piece.

⁷⁹ Due to the time of day of the event, there were also very few audience members attending in Wellington who were complete strangers to me personally. My audience onsite was largely comprised of friends, colleagues, and some of my students.

to the piece. I performed as host to the event, but the boundaries between artist and audience become blurred at this point. The audience in Wellington were on camera for the audience in Oxford. People behave differently when a camera is pointed at them, so the Wellington audience also became theatrical 'performers' to a degree too.

I will deviate from the ordering of McKenzie's framework, and address organisational performance in a moment. Technological performance was a vital issue in bringing *Breakfast Party in my Studio* into fruition in the first place, but also in determining the aesthetic of the piece itself. On one hand, I used an array of fancy (high performance) equipment to perform the piece.⁸⁰ On the other hand, webcast signals need to be lower resolution than other forms of broadcast because of bandwidth issues, so compression artifacts in the webcast audiovisual signal were a natural and inescapable part of the piece. These compression artifacts are instances of low technological performance, but they were deliberately integrated into the glitchy aesthetic aesthetic of my piece and became a desired outcome in terms of cultural performance. The piece created a deliberate a tension between low and high technological performance, and this tension contributed to the performance outcome as a hybridised whole.

I would like to conclude by reflecting on 'performance' in an organisational sense of the term. After I had been invited to contribute in the *Remix Cinema* workshop, I applied to a New Zealand arts funding body to request financial support for my proposed travel. *Breakfast Party at my Studio* came about, fundamentally, because my proposal was declined. My funding application did not perform well, in an organisational sense of the term. I decided to hold my chin high, respond to what life had served me, and create a performance.

⁸⁰ Technically speaking, my performance rig was comprised of the following equipment: two computers, two D.V.J.s, an audio mixer, a video mixer, a turntable, three digital cameras and a large flatscreen television set.