

Harvest Moon: Plant transplant 4 the collaborative actions



This project arose out of a couple of things... First, clavichords. James and I found these at a friend's house and as he began to play, I began to move. He has a good sense of sound (I think this derives from an understanding of materials and spiritual action). It reminded me of Noh and Suzuki training so I started to do some stomps to the clavichord. This small action opened up a the possibility of a performance of this kind together,,

Then along came Remedy¹, and James wanted to do a demonstration of a plant transplant. His work lends itself to this kind of demonstration and I had been eager to see him do this kind of thing. I had been doing some movement/stretching/dancing that was kind of evolving into a personal movement vocabulary. James asked me to dance as part of his plant transplant performance.

The day before Remedy was sunny and clear, so we took the

clavichord to the Botanic Gardens. This is a really great environment to work in. We have spent a lot of time there and it feels peaceful. So, James started to play the clavichord and I started to dance. There wasn't any discussion, it was intuitive and improvisational – I think that both of us just started to experiment based on this understanding. I think this was really effective – to just act automatically and to produce something that responded to the environment we were in and that used the energy that was available to us to explore something new.

Being in that sort of environment made me feel a compulsion to respond to/interact with the ground. All the interconnection of roots underneath the surface of the lawn, and all the life it produces above it, is quite an overwhelming idea. And movement in that context owes something to the energy of the ground. I did cartwheels and began to roll and without being conscious of it I was working through an idea

of circularity. I guess this comes from a sense of connectivity, continuum, development. (It also may have to do to exposure to James' recent drawings which use the circular line in a way that is almost hypnotising). I guess another thing is the energy that circularity creates – the focus of energy in a circular form is quite intense. It is as though the energy that occurs in the circular creates a whirlpool.

James suggested that once the transplant was complete, the plant should form a centre and that the dance, to entice it to grow, should be conducted around a focus on the plant. He threw an Iced Green Tea bottle into the middle of the area of grass I was working in. We continued, but then I did a cartwheel and put my hand on a bee and got stung. After this, some friends arrived so we stopped working.

A couple of hours before Remedy, James and I met up and went to look for a plant, as the one that he originally intended to put into the oven-baked clay coil pot looked too good in the Iced Green Tea bottle. So we walked around the outside of the Bot. James found some white flowers (à la Chanel necklace) and some pink flowers (the ones that I find funny because they grow from a ground creeper and it looks like they're just popping straight up from the soil) and some paler ones (taken from the border of the Governor's residence). But he decided this wasn't what he wanted so he replanted them back into the ground. Then he walked into a garden bed and found an above-ground root that had a plant growing from it. It was quite amazing! The root was strong, so lucky I carry scissors on me, he he. This was great. It was tall and quite thin and its situation (growing out of another tree's root) seemed unique.

In James' studio, he plaited my hair. They were the best plaits he's ever done. I felt like a pot of Spinifex! Upon request, he drew marijuana leaves on my bandaids because he didn't have any of the ones from Hong Kong left,, I think these ones are really nice. Alex Vivian performed first @ Remedy. It was a really relaxed environment that was conducive to performing (and accessing ideas). I was concerned about being involved but not being from VCA but it didn't matter,, I enjoyed Alex's performance – his organisation of the space was really nice, and lying on his stomach made it quite informal and pleasant to watch. His singing really impressed me. I have heard him sing many times before but this was really great.

James set up the space and prepared it for the transplant. He remembered that he had the marijuana leaf candle from Off Ya Tree in his bag and lit it and put it on his workbox. Incredible,,* !! There was a microphone on the stage so he picked it up and told everybody what he was doing. This was a really good decision. I didn't know he was going to do this, I don't know if he did either. But as he talked through what he was doing, where the plant came from, how he'd care for it after it had been transplanted, etc, it all made sense. Because I already knew this information, I took it for granted. But it made me realise that his actions and processes and the origins of his materials/plants/ideas are really important to his work. By addressing these things,

he did not demystify the work, rather, he gave the audience an opportunity to access another level of meaning and understanding. This was really GrEat!! *.* Jon Campbell spoke to him about this afterwards and commented that the deadpan delivery was really effective. I agree. I think James' openness to use environments and to experiment with what's available informs his work in a positive way. After all, 'Chance favours the prepared mind.'

After the transplant I did a dance for the plant. I was trying to harness energy and deliver it to the plant. Having the water bottle and the candle (fire) with the plant creating a triangular connection was effective. I felt as though I was working towards some elemental understanding which would fuse these things and stimulate growth. I also think the fire and water were important because we were in a concrete gallery space, not a botanic garden. It reminded people about what forces were at work. (For this exact reason, I shouldn't have removed the plant and water so quickly at the end,, >.<)

This project was an ongoing investigation that was really an extension of spontaneous interaction with the world and ourselves. I think it benefited from the constant accumulation and improvisation (i.e. James deciding to use the candle and microphone). I have just spoken to James and he says the plant is GrOwiNg!!)_._(

Olivia Barrett lives in Melbourne and believes that tanuki play tricks on humans. She released a turtle into its natural habitat in Singapore with James in July of 2005.

Notes

1. Remedy, as far as we know, is organised by Jon Campbell and the VCA gallery staff. It's once a month on a Thursday night and gives artists/students a chance to perform.