

Blackness does not spread out before me but touches me directly, envelops me, embraces me, even penetrates me, completely passes through me, so that one could almost say that while the ego is permeable by darkness it is not permeable by light. Eugène Minkowski

The technical evolution of the theatre has been a game played with darkness—not metaphorical or moral darkness (although that hasn't been lacking) but literally by depriving the audience of sight. It was Wagner, in pursuit of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, who plunged the public into darkness and left the stage prominently lit. Rather than watching each other, the audience had their attention forcibly, minutely directed onto the stage itself.

The bright lights directed into the proscenium stage distracted attention from the real space of performance, which was in the relative gloom of the stands, unfolding in real time in the tenebrious corpuscle of each individual seat, but this nineteenth century solution was ironically a partial one. The spatial separation of audience and floodlit stage culminates in the absurdity of the fourth wall, the imaginary window onto a private scene. In such theatre, the efficacy of the performance was buttressed by a ludicrous suspension of disbelief, demanding on the one hand the pretence that the actor is unaware of the presence of the audience, and on the other hand the convention that each audience member does not interact with their neighbour for the duration of the performance. Only by these frayed rules could a conventional performance achieve a cathartic end.

Breaking those rules meant an end to the cleansing power of catharsis. The Brechtian ideal of theatre was a boxing-ring, with a skeptical public 'smoking and observing'. Rather than hiding the mechanics of illusion, everything knowable was to be brought to light, with props and subtitles exposed to the gaze of a critical audience. The sequential revelations of such enlightened theatre might have reduced the scope of darkness, but also worked to intensify the shadows where they fell. Consequently, Brechtian theatre always feels conspiratorial, always refers to a structure off-stage, one that is sometimes called *power*, but never names itself.

As always, when art produces two such antithetical solutions to the same problem, there is a third solution latent within them both. Alex Davies knows the power of pitch blackness, the hallucinatory intensity brought on by sensory deprivation. Crepuscular blackness is not empty, it is dense. Blackness envelops our senses, depriving us of sight—an experience of being closed in or shut down—then it touches, rubs up against and pierces us. The initial enclosure of darkness becomes an opening, and blackness flows freely through us. Whereas the world of light is made of surfaces, skin, clothing, darkness floods the boundary that separates self from world. As Minkowski wrote, 'the ego is permeable by darkness'.

The Black Box Sessions dispenses with the prop of the fourth wall, and literally places the performer and the viewer together into a single intimate and enclosed space. What happens there is experienced through CCTV, through the surveillance system that defines the unsleeping power of an anonymous state. Mutually digitally digested, the performer and the viewer are trapped in a proximity that plays upon the voyeurism and vulnerability of the audience member who only wants to watch, but finds themselves suddenly outnumbered. Within the relative safety of performance, the uncanny force of a partially deconstructed reality exposes itself. Pressed up against a peephole, the skull of the viewer becomes itself a black box. We cannot promise that you will feel cleansed.

Adam Jasper 2011

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THE BLACK BOX SESSIONS

ALEX DAVIES

31 MAY - 15 JULY 2011

UTS
GALLERY



PERFORMERS



CELIA CURTIS

Your hostess Celia Curtis is a seasoned performer, whose career has spanned the far reaches of the globe, delighting and astounding audiences at every turn. The rigours of the road have not been kind, but we assure you her mind remains as sharp as a steel trap ready to guide you on your journey.



ANNABEL LINES

Darling of the cocktail set, Annabel Lines is the very epitome of the consummate cabaret artist. At one moment an enchantress, the very next a vision diabolique. Which will she be? Dare you find out?



CHAS GLOVER

After his crushing defeat at the hands of the Vladkovic twins, strongman juggernaut Chas Glover returns to Australia to dazzle you with feats of superhuman strength.



LAS VENUS

In the world of Las Venus life begins to spin like a magical melody carousel, an esoteric 78 turning endlessly under a crystal needle. Theremin and surf guitar interwoven as one. A moment of timeless beauty.



PATRICK HUBER

Genius or madman? Does he even know himself? The unpredictable Patrick Huber will unleash a maelstrom of creative energy in the tight confines of the performance space.



DIDI BRUCKMAYR

Performer, musician, dancing fool, Dr Didi Bruckmayr presents a range of traditional performances from his quaint and picturesque homeland. Try to be polite.



ROLAND PENZINGER

Professional clown, cook and ex-circus director, Roland clearly never listened to his career advisor. Despite this he has achieved greatness of sorts and will be cooking up a dizzying casserole of dexterous feats.



JUSTIN SHOULDER

Human-chameleon Justin Shoulder transforms himself via sculptural creature avatars. You may meet one of them. In the dark. Alone.



MATTHEW STEGH

Man of a thousand faces, Matthew Stegh puts the even the master Lon Cheney to shame in this classic show. Your face, dear Art Lover, will present but one expression – that of astonishment!



SCOTT SINCLARE

This guy is just weird. You'll see.

PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS

MIKE LIRA

ADAM MADA

MARTY JAY

BIG JUDY

AVANT LE MONDE

LIAN LOKE

LUCAS ABELA

* Note due to prior commitments, not all performers can be present at all times