



Andrew Burrell and Kerreen Ely-Harper *Making the green one red (Virtual Macbeth)* 2012. Screen capture of virtual environment.

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Andrew Burrell and Kerreen Ely-Harper *Making the green one red (Virtual Macbeth)* 2012. Performance photo. Photography by Keith Novak.

THE TEAM

A mixed reality project by Kerreen Ely-Harper and Andrew Burrell

Curatorial Team – Lubi Thomas and Rachael Parsons
 Assistant Curatorial (Intern) Team – Caitlin Wood, Ashlee Sang and Leonarda van der Kolk

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MAKING THE GREEN ONE RED (VIRTUAL MACBETH)

Making the green one red (Virtual Macbeth): from the proscenium arch to the maze

Making the green one red (Virtual Macbeth) is an exploration through the lens of digital media into how traditional cultural content - in this case Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* - can be re-contextualised, re-purposed and re-presented to facilitate new readings and engagement opportunities for an evolving audience. In this third iteration, the project moves from the black box theatre setting (with a situated audience and linear story-telling frame); to the black box gallery, where a transient audience, both playing the role of viewer and actor, activates a spatial and fleeting story line.

Making the green one red (Virtual Macbeth) is a project that investigates the implications, frames and freedoms that the two main stages of cultural presentation, the theatre and the gallery, offer.

Lubi Thomas, QUT Precincts Senior Curator (Digital Media)

**Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.**

***Macbeth*, Act 2, Scene 2**

Making the green one red suggests transformation. Our title comes from a point in the text of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, just after Macbeth kills Duncan, a vital step in the self-fulfilment of the Witches meddlesome prophecy. In a scene that pre-empt's Lady Macbeth's famous descent into guilt ridden madness, we find Macbeth trying to rid himself of the ever-increasing remorse of his recent crimes. The vast green waters of the ocean are turned to blood in a process that should be one of cleansing and washing away, but which ultimately becomes one of transubstantiation. Text becomes action, actions transform flesh, flesh bleeds and flows, yet its trace never disappears completely. The water into which it flows does not dilute the blood; instead the water itself is fundamentally changed through the infusion. The entire process is mediated by text - the data of the play itself.

In our adaption of *Macbeth*, the text is the voice of the witches. They exist outside of time, are ingrained within the narrative, and exist within a meta-narrative of their own. They pre-tell, tell and re-tell. They are caught in a loop of their own creation. Their reality consists of - and exists solely as a result of - the text that they speak. This is also the space that the audiences are invited to inhabit. Visitors become audience, actor, narrator - they exist on the delicate membrane between the physical and the virtual; between their own self-devised narrative and one the Witches have created for them.

When we first started working on this project we knew that we did not want to create a scene-by-scene reinterpretation of what is one of Shakespeare's best-known plays. Instead we wanted to work with the text of the play to discover our own subtext; to become complicit in the pre-telling, telling and re-telling of the Witches' narrative.

Making the green one red is part of an extended investigation to bring the play of *Macbeth* into a virtual environment. It is the penultimate stage in what has been an ongoing creative development in text adaptation, live theatre, and visual and multimedia performance. Its development has offered us an opportunity to explore theatrical conventions in and across a physical and networked virtual environment and challenge traditional notions of performing Shakespeare.

In our investigation the witches perform all the parts. Embodying Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and others - the live actors pre-recorded sequences are embedded within the virtual environment. As the 'weird sisters' they play-act the contrasting and conflicting aspects of Shakespeare's troubled characters. Through these virtual ghostly traces of the Elizabethan past in our present we probe the dualities of self and other, physical and virtual, and body and data. But as memory and imagination collide in the present we find the dualities become a mirage from which emerges a mixed reality with a multitudinously faceted surface.

Within selected fragments from the pre-existing *Macbeth* text we uncover an underlying narrative – creating new spaces for the actors to inhabit as they permeate the interface between physical and virtual environments.

In 2008 the first stage of *Virtual Macbeth* was developed in Second Life (SL), an online virtual world in collaboration with Dr Angela Thomas and multi-media artist Kate Richards. *Foul Whisperings*, *Strange Matters* – an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in SL – was developed and produced with funds from LAMP (Laboratory of Advanced Media Production), AFTRS (Australian Film Television and Radio School), the Australia Council's Story of the Future: Making for Markets, and US-based New Media Consortium. *Foul Whisperings*, *Strange Matters* was released to the general public in September, 2008. In June 2009 the project received another grant from the Australia Council's Major Performing Arts Board: Arts Content in the Digital Era - Digital strategy. This grant supported further work in developing actor (real and virtual) performance; investigating new modes of multimedia and mixed reality performance; and undertaking audience research.

In 2011, we began working a new vision for *Virtual Macbeth*. One that highlights the screen as site of intersection between the virtual and the physical, where body and text, self and narrative, imagined and remembered all begin to merge. In December of 2011 we staged a production of *Virtual Macbeth* for invited audiences at QUT's Loft theatre. Many aspects of these performances (and their development) have informed the current work.

The virtual environment becomes an extension of the characters' personas, an environment that allows their entire psychology to be explored, in its fullest and where we emphasize concepts of duality, mirrored selves, imagined outcomes and reflexive relationships.

We would like to thank Lubi Thomas at QUT Precincts, and Dianne Eden at QUT Acting for their generous support in enabling this project to be realised. We would also like to thank the technical and curatorial staff at QUT Precincts for their ongoing support.

We are indebted to the cast, Andrew Den, Alec Snow and Isabella Tannock for their generosity of spirit and enthusiasm in throwing caution to the wind. Without the actors' willingness to engage in the devising process this current work would not have been possible.

Kerreen Ely-Harper & Andrew Burrell, *Making the green one red* creative team.

Additional Credits

The first virtual iteration of the *Virtual Macbeth* project, *Foul Whisperings*, *Strange Matters*, was developed in Second Life in collaboration with content designer Angela Thomas and multimedia artist and producer Kate Richards. Funding was provided by the Literature Board, the Australia Council and investor partner, the New Media Consortium (NMC).

Voiceover Actors:

Maggie Blinco

Boris Brkic

Christopher Morris

Ophelia Of The Spirits

Alice Parkinson

Evelyn Parsonage

Recorded at Megaphone Studios

Engineer: Shane Fahey

Elizabethan Ruffs by Rudolf Ramseyer



Kerreen Ely-Harper is a theatre director and filmmaker. Her passion for Shakespeare's texts has led her to direct a number of re-workings: *When The Eye Winks At The Hand*, *SL Macbeth*, *Machinima*; *Embrace*, a dance film based on *Hamlet*; and *Brave New World*, a theatrical adaptation of *The Tempest* - both projects were funded by Australia Council. A graduate from the Victorian College of Arts, School of Performing Arts (Theatre) and School of Film & Television, Kerreen is currently a PhD candidate at Macquarie University. Her area of research is the creative re-construction of family memory narratives on film. Kerreen is a teaching artist with Bell Shakespeare and on-line Education Resources Writer for the Sydney Theatre Company.



Dr Andrew Burrell is an independent contemporary arts practitioner, with a strong history in real time 3D and interactive audio installation. He is exploring notions of self and narrative and the implications of virtual worlds and artificial life systems upon an individual's sense of identity.

A unifying thread throughout his practice of the last years has been one of exploring and searching for a potential site of the self – and to even dare to wonder if this site exists at all. In observing the natural history of the real world, and in asking what a natural history a virtual environment may be, he has been extending this ongoing investigation. He has also been creating fanciful structures that investigate new possibilities for a post-human self, and narrative constructs in which to contain them.

He holds a PhD from the University of Sydney, his research having focused on philosophical and poetic connections between memory, the collected object and narrative. In 2008 he was awarded the Australia Council for the Arts MMUVE-IT! grant for developing the mixed reality project *mellifera* with Dr Trish Adams, which was exhibited in 2009 with the support of QUT Creative Industries Precinct.

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