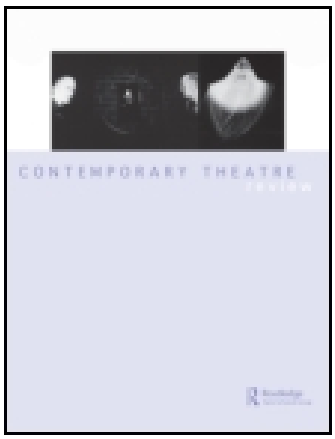
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# Screening Presence: The Builders Association and dbox, SUPER VISION (2005)

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# Screening Presence: The Builders Association and dbox, SUPER VISION (2005)[1]

**Nick Kaye**

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## *INTRODUCTION*

### *The Builders Association and dbox*

Since 1994, under the direction of Marianne Weems, The Builders Association, a New York-based performance and media company, has collaborated on nine large-scale theatre projects, including MASTER BUILDER (1994), THE WHITE ALBUM (1995), IMPERIAL MOTEL (FAUST) (1996), JUMP CUT (FAUST) (1997), JET LAG (1998–2000) with Diller + Scofidio, XTRAVAGANZA (2000–2001), ALLADEEN (2002–2005) with motiroti, AVANTI (2003–2005) and SUPER VISION with dbox (2005).

Directed by Marianne Weems, and developed through the company's close collaboration with James Gibbs, Matthew Bannister and Charles D'Autremont of the design and media studio dbox, SUPER VISION extends The Builders Association's engagement with a multimedia theatre in which the electronic mediation of performance, story, character and dramatic location are foregrounded. Interweaving three thematically related narratives, through a text developed in collaboration with Constance DeJong, SUPER VISION combines virtual sets, created in multiple and transforming high-definition projections, with live, mediated and recorded performance, as well as the real-time performance of its soundscape and supporting technologies. In keeping with all the company's major projects, SUPER VISION was developed through periods of rehearsal in which all elements of production – including live performance, the modelling and rendering of virtual sets by dbox, the composition of soundscape, projective video, set design, lighting and text – were developed simultaneously and in explicit conversation with one other. Through such extended exchanges, in which the design of the multimedia aspects of production find a voice equal to that of the performer, writer or designer, The Builders Association's work has come to be grounded not only in narrative and visual strategies, but in architectural and musical approaches to the integration of the live performer into simulated and mediated spaces and exchanges.

In this context, and while radically different in form, SUPER VISION brings forward underlying concerns within The Builders Association's work as a whole. Amongst these is an engagement with architectural concepts that may also serve to describe core aspects of the company's aesthetic, and which is reflected in their earliest work. Drawing in conception on the architectural deconstructions of the artist Gordon Matta-Clark,[2] the company's first production, MASTER BUILDER

1. This article was developed in part through an invitation lecture and public dialogue with Marianne Weems presented at the Martin E. Segal Theatre Centre, CUNY, New York, 23 October 2006. I am grateful to Professor Frank Henschker for the opportunity to present and develop these ideas through the Theatre Centre programme.

2. See, for example, P.M. Lee, *Object to be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (London: MIT Press, 2001).

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(1994), set a 'three-storey house'[3] onstage, in which Weems embedded a treatment of Ibsen's *The Master Builder*. In this production, in collaboration with the designer John Cleater, Weems responded to concerns in Matta-Clark's practices, and evident across contemporary 'theoretical' architectural projects by Vito Acconci[4], Bernard Tschumi[5], Peter Eisenman[6] and others, that, she recalls, 'had very little to do with actual buildings and much more to do with bodies and the perception and manipulation of space and how space is a system that is ideologically configured'.[7] Following Matta-Clark's explicit deconstruction of existing architectural spaces through built interventions, the performance of MASTER BUILDER thus extended to the physical reconstruction of the 'house' itself: to the opening and reconfiguration of the building, and to the creation of an architectural installation to be exhibited in its own right between performances. In the course of the production, Weems established a key point of departure for the company's future work. Of MASTER BUILDER, Weems notes:

> It was a dream-like, super-voyeuristic experience. And the house was lined with video and sound triggers, which the actors activated. After that, and in each succeeding project since then, my interest in physical edifices has receded, and what has emerged is the interest in the electronic network and how that too is a kind of architecture.[8]

Where the architectural critique to which Weems refers addressed the multiple spaces and practices in which built forms are used and defined, in The Builders Association's work the relationship between virtual and real architectures also defines the multiple structures in which the actor performs. Thus, in SUPER VISION, the family room to which the performance opens is explicitly constructed in a layering, through projection, of real, simulated and recorded spaces, which its actors' live and mediated performances variously traverse. Here, too, The Builders Association's collaboration with dbox, whose extensive commercial work includes the virtual modelling of architectural projects, builds on the company's earlier collaborations and practices. Following IMPERIAL MOTEL (FAUST) (1996) and JUMP CUT (FAUST) (1997), which realised texts by the writer and director John Jesurun through explicit juxtapositions between cinematic and stage spaces, the company collaborated with the architectural partnership Diller + Schofidio on JET LAG (1998–2000). Subsequently, ALLADEEN (2003–05) included design aspects by dbox, while AVANTI (2003–05) was the company's first site-specific performance. In these projects, the company's aesthetic was defined in part through relationships between an articulation of an 'electronic network' across the interface between 'real' and 'virtual' spaces and the resurgence of unifying dramaturgies, narratives and themes, articulated through this 'mediatic system'. It is in such tensions between the media's capacity to multiply and disperse its object and the interlacing of unifying narratives and dramaturgies, too, that SUPER VISION engages directly with urgent contemporary social and political themes – with identity theft, 'dataveillance', with virtual and 'natural' place, with dispersals of subjectivity and identity – in a performance which is visually seductive, musically and rhythmically complex, and yet that refuses, explicitly, to take sides.

These tensions also position SUPER VISION and the development of The Builders Association's work in a critical divergence from important aspects of multimedia theatrical performance. Contesting the proliferation of fragment and fracture evident in multimedia performance art and theatre, SUPER VISION exemplifies The Builders Association's emphasis on the recovery and complexity of 'human presence' in the transition and flow between live, mediated and recorded channels of address. In this context, the company's work has developed toward an emphasis on a live performance of mediation that amplifies the performer's *presentness* in this theatre's heightened and dissonant simulations of place and time. Here, too, The Builders Association's consistent emphasis on the articulation and recovery of performer presence through mediation and projection departs from significant aspects of performance theory, in which the technological mediation of live performance has been powerfully constructed as eliding presence. Thus, for Chantal Pontbriand,[9] Josette Féral,[10]

3. M. Weems in interview, recorded by Nick Kaye, New York, 5 December 2005.
4. See, for example, V. Acconci, *Vito Hannibal Acconci Studio* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani Barcelona, 2005).
5. See, for example, B. Tschumi, *The Manhattan Transcripts* (London: Academy Editions, 1994).
6. See, for example, P. Eisenman, *Moving Arrows, Eros and Other Errors: An Architecture of Absence* (London: Architectural Association, 1986).
7. M. Weems in interview, recorded by Nick Kaye.
8. M. Weems in interview, recorded by Nick Kaye.
9. C. Pontbriand, 'The Eye Finds No Fixed Point On Which To Rest', *Modern Drama*, 25 (1982), 154–162.
10. J. Féral, 'Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified', *Modern Drama*, 25 (1982), 170–181.

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Eleanor Fuchs[11] and, in response to these articles, Phillip Auslander,[12] technologies of mediation and reproduction have been linked to the critique of 'presence' in performance, where the construction of the 'aura' and so 'authority' of the performer might be exposed and denuded. Here, specifically, the 'expression' of performance through 'technical means'[13] has been proposed as effecting an interruption, or, Auslander suggests, 'a deconstruction of presence and of the structures of authority in performance', which, under the tactics of postmodernism, may be 'coupled with a refusal to offer ''alternative'' representations'.[14] Such positions, however, have not engaged with the capacity of media and mediation, themselves, to perform rather than denude both liveness and presence.

In contrast, The Builders Association's emphasis on the live transmission and mediation of performance might be read against the philosopher Samuel Weber's analysis of television's transmitted image, which associates mediation with the effect of 'liveness' and a *presentness* of vision. Thus, in *Mass Mediaurus: Form, Technics, Media*[15] Weber argues that in its overcoming of distance television's operation confuses the relationship between representation and its object. Indeed, in bringing events 'closer', he argues, television sets before the viewer not simply *a representation* of the events it relays, but a 'transposition of vision itself',[16] and so a bringing closer of *a mode of perception – a view*. It is in this *transposition of vision* that television's transmitted image asserts a tension between 'the presentness associated with sense-perception'[17] and the absences in which representation conventionally functions. In this tension, Weber concludes, and so in its overcoming of distance, television's image occupies a place that is, properly, '*neither fully there nor entirely here*' (original emphasis).[18] Turning to the consequences of this dislocation, and the uncertainty it provokes in viewing, Weber notes that 'one does not usually speak, in English, of ''seeing'' television but rather of ''watching'' it . . . we *watch* events whose outcome is in doubt, like sporting events . . . . To watch is very close to *watching out for* or *looking out for*, that is being sensorially alert for something that *may* happen' (original emphasis).[19] The *mode of attention* Weber describes presses toward the terms of the 'ephemeral' and 'the live': a 'looking out for', an active projection toward that 'whose outcome is in doubt', an anticipation of that which 'may happen'. Rather than emphasise mediation's elision or erasure of 'the live', SUPER VISION is articulated through an analogous transmission of its various performances, as, for example, David Pence (John Fletcher Sr.), Moe Angelos (The Grandmother) and Tanya Selvaratnam (Jen), perform simultaneously toward 'live' and 'mediated' frames and spaces, amplifying an awareness and perception of their actions and presence *there* (onstage) and *here* (in projection; in the 'mediatic' system). Indeed, it is this transmission, this movement and deflection of performance and attention, that this performance's various architectures support. Thus, these dislocations *in live transmission* are amplified in SUPER VISION's layering of mediated images: in the high-definition projections that render the family room; in the live doubling and reproduction of performances; in the 'interactive' exchanges between 'real' and 'virtual' characters; in the illusions of depth and spatial transformations of its virtual architecture and animations. In this layering and modulation of projection, duplication and mediation – and in its circulation of the signs of 'liveness' and 'presence' – SUPER VISION explores a *return* of that which technologies of reproduction would seem to defeat: the performance of 'the live' in 'the mediated', the performance of presence across the absences of the screen.

11. E. Fuchs, 'Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Rethinking Theatre After Derrida', *Performing Arts Journal*, 26–27 (1985), 163–173.
12. P. Auslander, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).
13. Pontbraid, 'The Eye Finds No Fixed Point', p. 156.
14. Auslander, *Presence and Resistance*, p. 47.
15. S. Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media*, ed. A. Chholodenko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
16. Ibid., p. 116.
17. Ibid., pp. 116–117.
18. Ibid., p. 120.
19. Ibid., p. 118.

## *DOCUMENTING SUPER VISION*

This analytical documentation is edited from twelve separate interviews with company members and associates, recorded in December 2005 in New York at the time of the opening of SUPER VISION at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. All interviews recorded, documentation edited and commentary by Nick Kaye. Numbered narrative summaries and images reproduced courtesy of The Builders Association. Participants are:

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**Marianne Weems** (artistic director) has directed all of The Builders Association's productions. In addition to her work with the company, she recently completed a multimedia workshop with Disney Creative Entertainment and Walt Disney Imagineering, and is currently at work on a new theatre/music event with David Byrne and Fatboy Slim titled *Here Lies Love*. She serves on the board of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, is on the advisory committee of the Centre for Research in Engineering, Media and Performance at UCLA, and is the board president of Art Matters Inc. In the distant past, she also worked as a dramaturge with Susan Sontag, The Wooster Group, and others. She is the co-author of *Art Matters: How The Culture Wars Changed America* (NYU Press 2001).

**James Gibbs** (co-founder, dbox) has directed many of dbox's projects, including contributions to earlier productions by The Builders Association, as well as an innovative series of installation media works for the Japanese cosmetics company Shiseido and has had a key role in many of dbox's photographic projects.

**Moe Angelos** (performer: 'the Grandmother') is a writer and performer and has written six plays with her collaborative theatre company – The Five Lesbian Brothers. As a performer she has collaborated with a wide range of artists and companies.

**Kyle deCamp** (performer: 'Carol') has created a wide range of multi-genre performance works shown in the USA and Europe as well as collaborating with many artists, including Richard Foreman and John Jesurun.

**Constance DeJong** (text) is a writer and artist whose written and spoken texts have taken many forms, including performances, audio installations, video works and a series of talking objects.

**Dan Dobson** (sound design and original music composition) is a founder member of The Builders Association and has designed the sound for all their productions.

**Norman Frisch** is an independent dramaturge, performance curator and performer who has worked, among others, with the director Peter Sellars and the Wooster Group. With The Builders Association, he served as dramaturge for *Xtravaganza* and *Alladeen*.

**Allen Hahn** (associate lighting designer) has designed for productions at the Royal Danish Opera, Santa Fe Opera and New York City Opera as well as many productions in Europe, Asia and the United States.

**Stewart Laing** (set and costume design) directs and designs theatre as well as producing his own theatre projects. He has been a recipient of a Creative Scotland Award (2001) and a Tony Award (1997).

**Rizwan Mirza** (performer: 'the traveller') hails from New Delhi, India and New York City. He has performed on the New York arts scene for several years, as well as developing his own performances. He joined The Builders Association in 2002 with *Alladeen*.

**David Pence** (performer: 'John Fletcher Sr.') is a founding member of The Builders Association and has performed in seven of their major works since 1994.

**Tanya Selvaratnam** (performer: 'Jen'; the voice of Claritas$^{TM}$) is an artist and activist based in New York. Her recent performance work includes The Builders Association/motiroti's *Alladeen* and the Wooster Group's production *House/Lights*.

**The Builders Association** is a New York-based performance and media company that exploits the richness of contemporary technologies to extend the boundaries of theatre. Based on unusual collaborations and extensive periods of development, the company's productions feature a seamless blend of text, sound, architecture, video and stage performances that explore the impact of technology on human presence. Their OBIE award-winning work has been presented at venues including the Singapore Arts Festival, the Barbican Centre, Romaeuropa Festival, The Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro de Bogota, the Melbourne International Arts Festival among many others. For more information, visit The Builders Association's website at: http://www.thebuildersassociation.org

**dbox** is a studio of artists, illustrators, photographers, interactive designers and visual thinkers who together produce both commercial and independent visual art projects in various media. dbox was founded in 1996 by Matthew Bannister, Charles D'Autremont and James Gibbs. For more information visit: http://www.dbox.com

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## *SUPER VISION tells three stories:*

'1. A father covertly exploits his young son's personal data to meet the demands of the family's lifestyle. This ploy escalates beyond the father's control, until he is compelled to disappear. His wife and son are left with a starkly diminished data portrait, and his escape is shadowed by the long reach of the datasphere'.

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'2. As he crosses successive borders, a solitary traveller gradually is forced to reveal all of his personal information, until his identity becomes transparent, with no part of his life left outside the boundaries of datasurveillance'.
'3. A young woman, addicted to the white noise of constant connection, maintains a long-distance relationship with her Grandmother. As she makes efforts to digitally archive her Grandmother's past, the Grandmother slips into senility'.

## *SUPER VISION: SETTING THE SCENE*

### *Beginning the process*

**Marianne Weems:** The project began with James Gibbs and myself. dbox had contributed in a limited way to some of our past projects and I was eager to 'raise the bar.' We had a couple of conversations – mostly between myself, Dan Dobson, Jeff Webster,[20] and then James, Matthew Bannister and Charles D'Autremont from dbox. So it started as a kind of big think tank. James had suggested doing something about surveillance and the panoptical relationship to the theatre – an audience looking at the stage, and turning that back on the audience. But I felt that surveillance had been completely thrashed through – not in theatre per se, but certainly in the visual arts world since the '70s. So at that point we were doing a lot of research about surveillance – John Hanhardt, who is the curator of the Guggenheim, came in and gave us a kind of survey of artwork in surveillance over the last 25 years and showed us an interesting film called *The Giant* from Berlin. It was a very early example of using footage from the surveillance cameras that were all over Berlin at the time – a very beautiful art film. I finally came up with the idea of doing a piece about the invisible world of dataveillance. I think partly because there was so much in the air at the time – post-9/11 – about chatter and data and identity. So I brought that to the table. And one of the first books that I found really exciting – I mean there are millions of articles about identity theft – but I read John McGrath's book *Loving Big Brother*[21] in manuscript and I really enjoyed it. I felt some of it – for instance the section about 'reality television' and the viewer's almost activist desire to occupy the televisual space in a positive way as opposed to the typical, negative slant – was really smart and interesting. McGrath also mentioned, although it wasn't his primary focus, the phrase 'data body' and the idea that we are shadowed by an electronic doppelganger – that really grabbed me very, very strongly. Then I started looking at his sources, mostly David Lyon, a sociologist from Queens College in Canada, who coined the phrase 'data body' in the '70s – and the whole thing sprang from there. One of the ways McGrath described the data body, or rather the results of the body under surveillance, is as 'a disjointed, hybrid, prostheticised, multiple body, appearing and disappearing in the irregular, contradictory landscape of surveillance space', which is one of the quotes I brought to my collaborators to evoke the feeling I wanted in the piece.

### *A virtual architecture*

**Marianne Weems:** What I wanted to do in SUPER VISION – and what I kept saying to anybody who would listen to me – was that I wanted to enmesh the performers in the media. That was my goal – and Stewart Laing did that brilliantly by collapsing the video space into the stage space. So there wasn't the feeling that you had in our other performances where the viewer is tracking back and forth between the real live performer and the mediated image. It was really was about trying to combine those as intimately as possible.
**David Pence:** In this piece, probably more than half the time I'm being shot live by a camera (Image 1), and these live images carry a great deal of power. There are some quite dramatic close ups. So much so that I have to think in terms of moderating my performance – in other words, doing less. Anyway, during let's say 60 or 65% of my time onstage I can move very little. My whole performance is right here – the camera in close on my face – and for me it is a really interesting challenge to keep the character activated and flowing and yet be expressed through a range of what might be an inch and a half of head movement. Yet it's interesting also that there are moments when I break away from the camera and

20. Jeff Webster is a founding member of The Builders Association and has performed in the majority of the company's productions.

21. J. McGrath, *Loving Big Brother: Surveillance Culture and Performance Space* (London: Routledge, 2004).



Image 1 Onstage, left to right: image of John Fletcher Jr on screen; Kyle deCamp (Carol); David Pence, (John Fletcher Sr.) live and mediated in close-up. Photo by dbox

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can use my whole body. In other words, it's not only film, and it's not only theatre. It's a hybrid.

**Marianne Weems:** What we created was a virtual world that could be staged to interface with live performers in a convincing way. Specifically, what was so potent in this idea was that the live performer could be shadowed by their 'data body'. That seemed like a great place to start with dbox.

**Nick Kaye:** dbox is grounded in many ways in your [James Gibbs] architectural training, yet you have emphasised the importance of your interest in representation over resolving your work into built forms. Why this emphasis?

**James Gibbs:** I would say that we – Matthew Bannister, Charles D'Autremont and I – were all interested in narrative, which is a kind of a funny thing to be interested in if you are studying architecture. We got excited about the possibilities of trying to maintain narrative using architecture, or using architectural language and that pushed us more towards representation and drawing – and ultimately towards making drawings with computers – rather than to sticks and bricks. In the long run, that is probably something that led us into this kind of collaboration.

**Nick Kaye:** Maintaining a narrative might also imply an engagement with time.

**James Gibbs:** Time is not necessarily unusual for dbox, because we do time-based work – animation and movies. But working live – and working with a time that therefore has to be flexible – was fascinating for us. And the other thing was going back to working to scale – because we have been working outside of concepts of scale for so long. Here we are not building buildings, but we are dealing with one-to-one relationships with human bodies. That was another really exciting part of the experience.

## *THE FIRST NARRATIVE*

'A father covertly exploits his young son's personal data to meet the demands of the family's lifestyle. This ploy escalates beyond the father's control, until he is compelled to disappear. His wife and son are left with a starkly diminished data portrait, and his escape is shadowed by the long reach of the datasphere'.

### *The family*

**Marianne Weems:** James Gibbs and I spent a lot of time talking about the background and class of these people – we called them Bobos – Bourgeois Bohemians – i.e. upper-middle class people who have money but still like to think they are a little bit

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funky. It is about the right granite and slate and hardwoods and the right cappuccino maker and this absolutely pristine – I consider it somewhat sterile – but perfectly laid-out environment.

**Stewart Laing:** All those family scenes are about a sort of fantasy life. They are about an idealised way of living, so I think it is appropriate that they are that 'perfect'. We looked at a lot of paintings – we looked at Renaissance religious paintings where you get two or three scenes happening at once, for instance. In terms of diptychs, where David Pence is doing something in one room, while something else is still going on in the other room.

**Marianne Weems:** In the family scenes (Images 1 and 2), there is a nice layering of the real body and then the completely manufactured living room environment, and then the real photographed environment (the 'back yard') seen out of the windows behind them. And of course there's the insertion of the video boy actor moving between the animated and the photographed environments – and the live actors relate to the video boy as he moves between those various planes.

**Allen Hahn:** The most important thing was that each of the three story lines had its own visual language . . . so the lighting needed that as well. I think in the end there was a much more concerted effort into making the family seem part of the realistic space that was animated around and behind them. What that translates into is sort of pushing back the light levels to, at times, just on the edge of visibility, or just on the more present side of visibility against this luminous background.

## *The grid*

**Nick Kaye:** Were there specific issues around the staging that you needed to address in order to realise the virtual scenes?

**James Gibbs:** They were developed simultaneously with the performance and it is very hard to say what drove what. The example I would give in the family scene is this idea we had of making the den – this created abstract computer space – and then using that to enmesh John Fletcher Sr. in his data activities. That came fairly early on after being in meetings with Marianne Weems, Constance De-Jong and Stewart Laing and finding ourselves over and over again looping back to the den or study as being the place he created these manipulations – but wanting to physicalise electronic activity. We give him a space on stage that looks like a part of his activity with the computer. Then came the idea of creating what we always referred to as 'the crush', where his den expands and starts to destroy or crush part of the living room set. It came out of interactions – and perhaps out of David Pence's performance as the father – as the volume got turned up on that, the set could respond to it. So finally we have this moment where a virtual

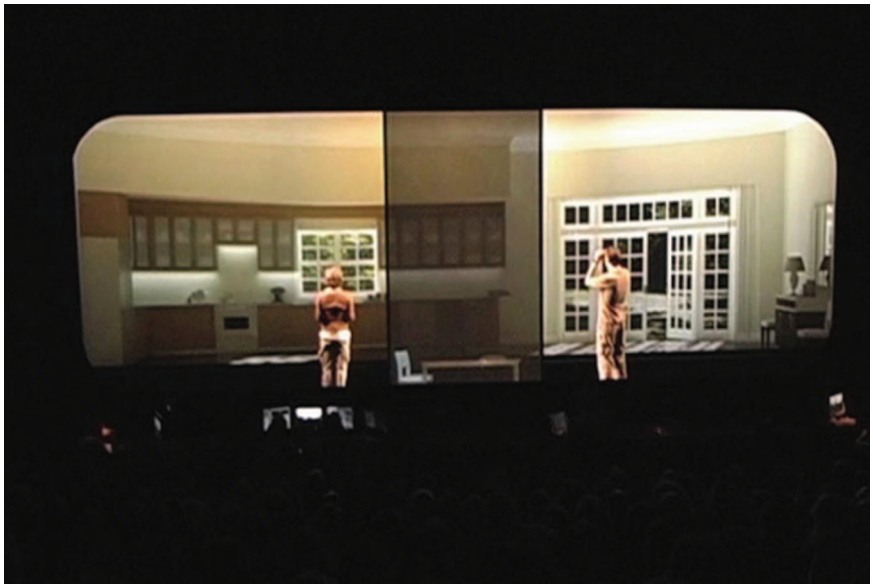


Image 2 Onstage, left to right: Kyle deCamp (Carol), David Pence (John Fletcher Sr.). Video still

space overwhelms a physical space, but the idea emerged from the process.

**Marianne Weems:** The 'grid' (Image 3) which appears as an abstract space whenever the father is on his computer is a key component of the family scenes. As well as the floating credit card icons and all of the text that surrounds the father's computer activity. That came from a long set of discussions about representing data and what could be the signs – in this show – for data. It took a very long time for us to come up with that very simple image of the grid – a long time, let me tell you.

**Stewart Laing:** There is nothing true about the perspectives you see – they are all curved rather than straight lines.... I mean, the grids are all classical perspective, but the house is based on a slight curve.

**Nick Kaye:** So that also produces the sense of an embrace for the audience.

**Stewart Laing:** Yes, exactly.

## *PROJECTING PRESENCE*

In the family scenes, behaviour toward the virtual boy becomes the fulcrum of the Fletchers' relationship and the motor to the father's departure. The presence of the virtual boy, whose projection on the mobile fore-screen renders his image translucent, is articulated in the rhythms of the performers with whom he apparently interacts. In recording, the boy's 'performance' captures a sense of spontaneity and unity: a 'presentness' reinvented by his co-performers. In contrast, the father's performance is seen simultaneously on-stage and in 'live' mediation, and so in an explicit division of his present-tense performance. Here, David Pence's simultaneous presence across the real and virtual spaces in which SUPER VISION is articulated thematises his emotional displacement from his son, at once amplifying his actions and removing him from the apparent unity and consistency of the virtual boy's theatrical performance.

### *The virtual boy*

**David Pence:** Kyle deCamp and I – in working on the Fletchers' relationship, and with the projection of the boy (Image 4) – talked a lot in the beginning about how there were few opportunities for her and me to touch each other. There is an incidental moment in the first scene when we're standing stage left and the boy, John Fletcher Jr., comes up in the kitchen window and interrupts us and says he's bored, and she turns around to speak to him. Then I cross behind her to speak to him, and I just touch her shoulder. We talked quite a bit about the importance of a moment like that, because we



Image 3 Onstage: David Pence (John Fletcher Sr.). Photo by dbox

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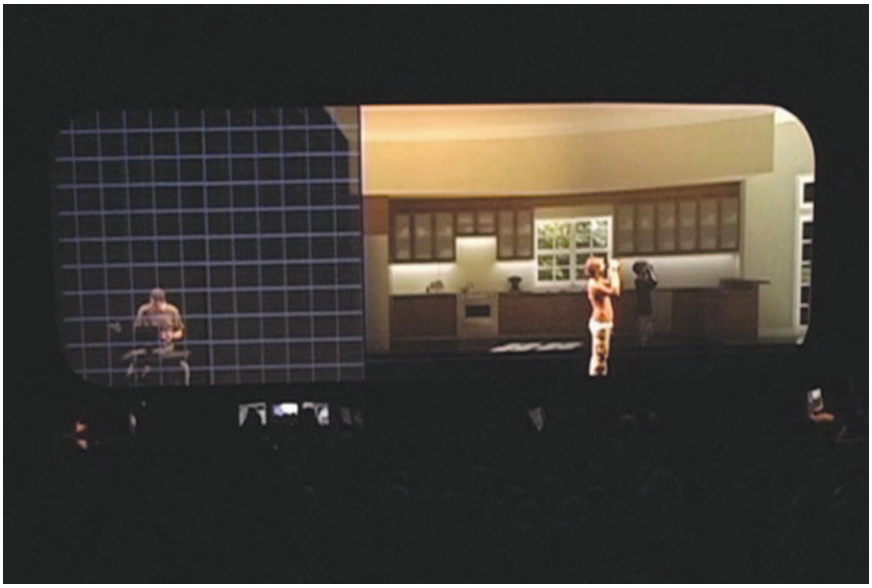


Image 4 Onstage, left to right: David Pence (John Fletcher Sr.), Kyle deCamp (Carol), Owen Philip (John Fletcher Jr.) in projection. Video still

didn't want John and Carol – however fucked up their marriage may be – we didn't want them to be cold and sexless. That would be too easy, and not as interesting for us as performers. We wanted to make a suggestion to the audience – if anybody chose to notice and think about such a small nuance – that what's missing in the family is something else.

**Kyle deCamp:** In this piece with The Builders I find myself making choices located in how not to reproduce what's already going on via other mediums, that hopefully add to the dynamic dissonances onstage. There's a lot of illusion and affect that I don't have to create in my performance: in Dan Dobson's soundscore, in the projected imagery of the house and its movement, in the narrative information and flow – they're all facets of how the story is told. I have to do a different kind of work as a performer in relation to the video-child (Images 4 and 5), because he's a flat projection, and the same every night. What a remarkably consistent little performer he is! So . . . somewhat ironically for me, it's the warmth of my performance that effectively animates him, although he appears to be an 'animation' onscreen. This feels quite normal for me. I've been working with live and pre-recorded video and film imagery – both as tools and as source material – as a central part of my theatrical vocabulary for a good 20 years now . . . . I animate our interactions through my moment-to-moment responses, and play it differently every night. I quickly discovered where I could inflect emotion, rhythmic pauses, overlaps, and play around with the movements between his projection, the moving projection screen, and myself. It sometimes feels like this very human play between a mother and child – even though he's a projection – is as real if not more humanly warm and 'real' than the relationship between the wife and husband, in a way that I hope resonates metaphorically within the story.

**David Pence:** Another provocative discovery for me was the idea that the son, John Fletcher Jr., is unreachable. He is embedded in the dbox imagery behind me, so I can reach out through space, but I can't get to him. So there is a kind of longing that is almost sensual, because I am poised between things that I cannot touch in this weird, confusing space of my own creation.

## *THE FATHER'S DEPARTURE*

As the family scenes progress – interleaved between the stories of the traveller and the grandmother – John Fletcher Sr. becomes unable to



Image 5 Onstage, left to right: Kyle deCamp (Carol); Owen Philip (John Fletcher Jr.) in projection. Video still

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conceal the debt incurred through the theft of his son's data identity. He leaves for the north.

### *Carol's monologue*

**David Pence:** When I first came in contact with the John Fletcher Sr. character, I immediately connected to him and felt that I understood him completely – and 'evil' was not the first word that came into my mind. Of course, I do understand the evil inflections people see in the character. But I felt that I knew how to play him in a way that would have those very dark tones as well as other qualities that people would recognise in themselves . . . . I believe John Fletcher Sr. acts out of a profound desire to protect his son. And part of that protection – ironically enough, given what he's doing to the boy's virtual identity – is keeping John Jr. away from his father.
**Constance DeJong:** Kyle deCamp, who plays Carol, the mother, has a very short monologue (Image 6). She is on stage alone and – for SUPER VISION – it is a very low-density moment in terms of sound and image. Do you remember – the backset has an illusion of moving forward, magnifying itself, until she is alone with the panes of the window, which are squared – a thematic element all through SUPER VISION.

## *NARRATIVE*

While The Builders Association's productions are explicitly shaped around narrative arcs and structures, the company's work does not subordinate each element of production to a narrative unity or closure. Instead, its stories are articulated through structures that emphasise the interweaving of narrative, visual and sonic components through tone, rhythm, transposition and flow.

### *Rhythmic structure*

**Nick Kaye:** It seems to me that you are looking for a very specific quality of narrative in the work.
**Marianne Weems:** What quality would that be?
**Nick Kaye:** On one level the narratives are immediately understandable and engaging and at another level the three stories hold something back in some way – they don't come down to a complete resolution, so something is left hanging. Also, in the emotional quality of the narrative there is an important level of ambiguity.
**Marianne Weems:** Interesting. Yes, I think that is all true. At the same time it was a goal of mine to try to have stories with beginnings, middles and ends. These three stories resolve more than stories in our other shows, but they don't resolve each other, or fold into each other, which of course is

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Image 6 Onstage: Kyle deCamp (Carol). Photo by dbox

always a wish from an audience. I am not sure if that really means that there is resolution, but they land somewhere identifiable at the end of each.

**Constance DeJong:** I wanted the sense that the three stories were interwoven, not going 1, 2, 3 – 1, 2, 3 – 1, 2, 3. The structure had another element added to it, which became these visual interludes that James Gibbs and dbox made where all the front screens are closed across the stage and there are these more virtual, visual moments which add another possibility for sequencing the scenes (Images 7 and 8). For either keeping the flow or changing the tempo or variegating the sequential nature of theatre, so that you don't feel you are in a 1, 2, 3 – 1, 2, 3 locked step with the stories . . . . I ended up finding that inclusion of the stage projection very important to this structuring of the story arcs, because they brought in yet another motif and respite for the house. You kind of left one story and re-entered another, as opposed to having the two stories bang up against each other, which we tried. We tried a different kind of flow. What I feel about the structure now is that flow is achieved through this synchronicity of sound and image – speech drops aside, another scene comes on. That there is a continuous flow to the piece.

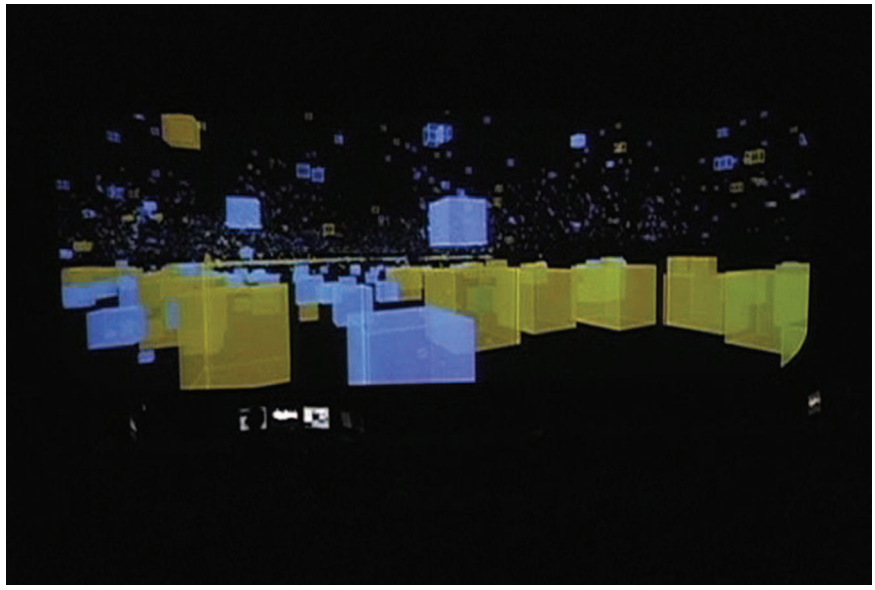
## *THE SECOND NARRATIVE*

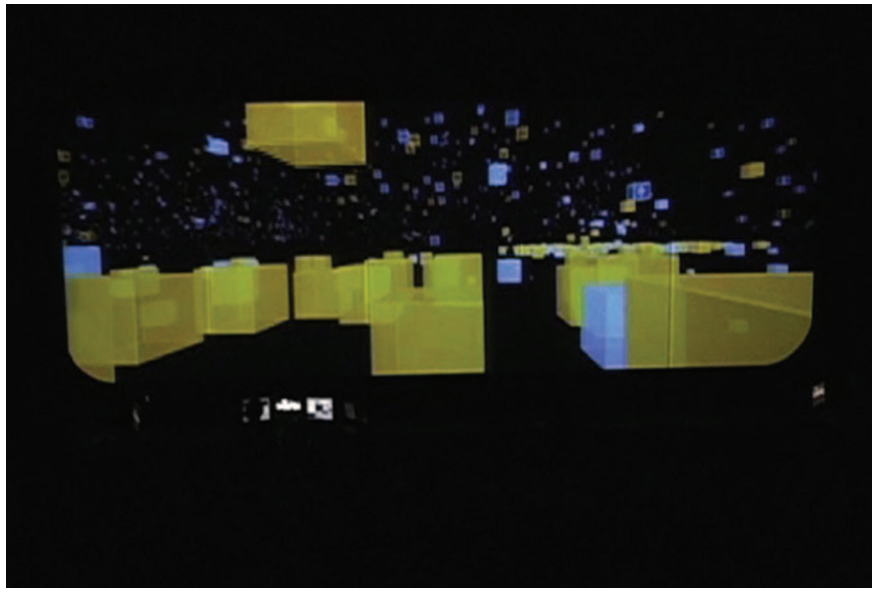
'As he crosses successive borders, a solitary traveller gradually is forced to reveal all of his personal information, until his identity becomes transparent, with no part of his life left outside the boundaries of datasurveillance'.

The traveller exemplifies the progressive dissolution of identity into data and the play of media. Passing, in each subsequent scene, through a border control in which his records are tested, re-examined and further compiled, the traveller is constituted as a virtual presence visualised in the increasingly complex augmentation of Rizwan Mirza's performance.

### *The traveller*

**Rizwan Mirza:** Marianne had an idea about a travelling character (Image 9) – and the airports. I had come up with the idea of playing a South Asian or Indian character, but one who had never been really to India. A character that didn't identify with being Indian, culturally, that was, in fact, Ugandan, being born and raised in Uganda. My role before





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Images 7 and 8 'Data' animations. Video stills

this, in ALLADEEN [2002–2005], was an Indian from Bangalore, India, so I wanted to stretch it a little bit. The traveller is an individual crossing these international borders and national American borders – who is suspect. Partly because of the colour of his skin, or, in this particular case, his name is similar to a person who had been convicted of something or suspected of something – of some kind of terrorist activity, more than likely. I wanted the character to be sympathetic, but to seem a little bit shady, a little bit dodgy, at times. So the audience would say, well, wait a second; I am looking at these things that seem to be mapping out a particular pattern of strange activity. Then to bring them back to; 'oh no, no, he's fine'. I think that is a theme that goes through The Builders Association's shows – not to take sides. Hopefully it doesn't – it steps back from it.

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Image 9 Rizwan Mirza (the traveller). Image by dbox

**Allen Hahn:** In the story of the traveller, there was a lot of talk about the traveller becoming less material as his story progressed. That he should become less of a physical presence and more of a presence defined in the body of data that accumulates around him.
**Rizwan Mirza:** I think my particular story is very clear. It is layered, but you know what is going on. It is concise – people can relate to it very quickly. They know they have seen this before. They have points of references from past two years – with what is happening not just in America, but all over the world. We are not far from what we portray in this show.

## *DISTRIBUTING PRESENCE*

In SUPER VISION, 'presence' is not assigned to any one aspect of performance. In this networked performance, 'performer presence' is explicitly articulated and amplified in spaces of difference: in the mirroring and amplification of David Pence's performance to camera; in the presence of the operators – and performers – at the desk before the 'stage-space' into which they intervene; in the traveller's multiplication before and behind the screen. Here, and echoing the other rhythmic structures that carry the performance forward, the signs of presence 'flow through the system'[22] and are subject to repetition, simultaneity, variation and recapitulation.

### *Electronic network*

**Marianne Weems:** In every performance, in all of our shows, for me it is about the performers being really isolated physically, but we are mediating them electronically and so what the audience sees is the network that is joining them all. None of the performers ever really look at each other – Joe Silovsky and Rizwan Mirza are a perfect example of that in this show (Image 10). What is being staged is the network. They are in very isolated worlds, coming together in that bigger stage picture – that is really key.
**Rizwan Mirza:** It is interesting, because I am never really looking at Joe Silovsky, who plays the border agent. I am not even looking directly at his projection because I'm standing behind the texta-line screen, so it's faded. So I am looking at a general idea of his face. I can't see every expression he has – and I have learnt to just act with that. It helped me in this particular situation because the traveller is confronting someone who doesn't really see him for who he is . . . . So that disconnect has helped. Where I feel like I am trying to connect sometimes – through the screen, to him, as a character, to the person that is his character – I think that helped. The relationship between the traveller, who is being asked so many questions, and this TSA agent – there is a tension there – a disconnect in the relationship itself. So it really worked out.

### *Live media*

**Nick Kaye:** Norman Frisch suggested that when you are given the choice between playing the technology live or running sound or images as recorded elements you always choose to play them live.
**Marianne Weems:** Absolutely. That is one of the key things that distinguishes this from a movie or some other 'fixed' mediatic experience. With any multimedia performance, one can certainly tell when somebody is doing something to a pre-recorded

22. See, in comparison, John Cage's requirement that in *Variations V* (1965) sound should 'flow through the system', while accepting 'leakage' and 'feedback'. In J. Cage, *Variations V: Thirty Seven Remarks Re An Audio-Visual Performance* (New York: Henmar Press, 1965).




Image 10 Onstage, left to right: Joe Silovsky (the TSA agent) mediated live, Rizwan Mirza (the traveller) live and in close-up. Forestage, far right: Joe Silovsky. Photo by dbox

track. It has a kind of deadened quality, I think, that you can sense as an audience member, and there are inevitable glitches, or moments out of synch, etc. As an ensemble, I think that's why people stick with these shows even though they tour for years and constantly disrupt everyone's lives. It's the pleasure of being in an ensemble – of really playing this new set of 'instruments' live, from night to night. It is also the terror of it.

**James Gibbs:** It is impossible to capture the fidelity of the imagery when you collapse it down to a single DVD – what is up there on stage is actually beyond HDTV resolution. On the other hand, if you just take any one of the virtual elements on their own, outside of the performance, they mean almost nothing. The performance is in all those elements at play, together, live.

**Dan Dobson:** The technology is as much a player as the actors. They are cuing off us – we are cuing off them. Everybody is doing their thing and it's never just press play and walk away. That always allows it to expand – people pick up on new things and things can change – [August 2006] since our interview everyone has gotten very comfortable with their score and now subtleties have been developed in my running the show with the actors' performances. It's fun working on these little things that are not so blatant but work really well in the overall flow of the piece. . . .

## *Acting*

**Nick Kaye:** When you were developing the character [the traveller], were you thinking of him as separate from the technology, or as constituted in the technology around you and through which you perform?

**Rizwan Mirza:** It is an interesting question. I think that in The Builders' shows it's like being in a theatre piece and film at the same time. I studied conventional theatre, where there was the whole idea of theatre voice and theatre presence. In The Builders at times you have to really rein it in even if you are playing in front of a house of a thousand, because you are on camera a lot of the time. The wonderful thing for me as an actor, and the thing that is very fulfilling, is that the slightest nuance of any eye movement or facial twitch reads in the theatre. That is incredibly freeing. When you see a Builders' show there is a muted resonance to them.

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Almost like a computer screen, with different boxes popping up, and a sound here and there. You feel part of it. I think you get the sense, certainly, of technology playing a part, but it never overshadows the humanity of the performers. I think Marianne Weems is very careful with that. Even in scenes when there is a certain – hollowness – like in the family scenes – David Pence and Kyle deCamp are doing a certain stylised type of acting, which is underlining the whole idea of a family that is living through what they buy. They are hollow, but the acting must be approached in that way – sort of acting within the character and without. I think there is a certain haunting loneliness about the quality of The Builders' shows. Even when they are funny. I think in their funniest moments there is a lonely quality.

## *THE THIRD NARRATIVE*

'A young woman, addicted to the white noise of constant connection, maintains a long-distance relationship with her Grandmother. As she makes efforts to digitally archive her Grandmother's past, the Grandmother slips into senility'.

Where the 'electronic network' through which SUPER VISION operates and is performed separates performers from each other, so the actors' simultaneous performance to live and mediated spaces may also divide their action from itself. In the third narrative, this division provides a thematic underpinning to a long-distance relationship. Looking out toward each other and the audience only by looking into the camera (Image 11), the Grandmother and Jen conduct a series of exchanges marked by erasures and mistaken memories.

### *The Grandmother/Jen*

**Moe Angelos:** I am in my little world – in Sri Lanka – far away from where the action is supposed to be taking place, in New York, where Jen lives. I think that is partially the character development of the Grandma, just being someone who is older and losing her grip on reality, nattering on about food, getting really fixated on something like old food – old recipes – which are such a pleasure still. She has her own little world, her magazines, and she seems quite happy there. It is like a little bubble. So I am in this little bubble over there, downstage right, in my own little world.

**Tanya Selvaratnam:** From the very beginning, even with the pre-show music, it totally sucks me into the mood I should be in because Dan Dobson has basically downloaded a bunch of hold messages

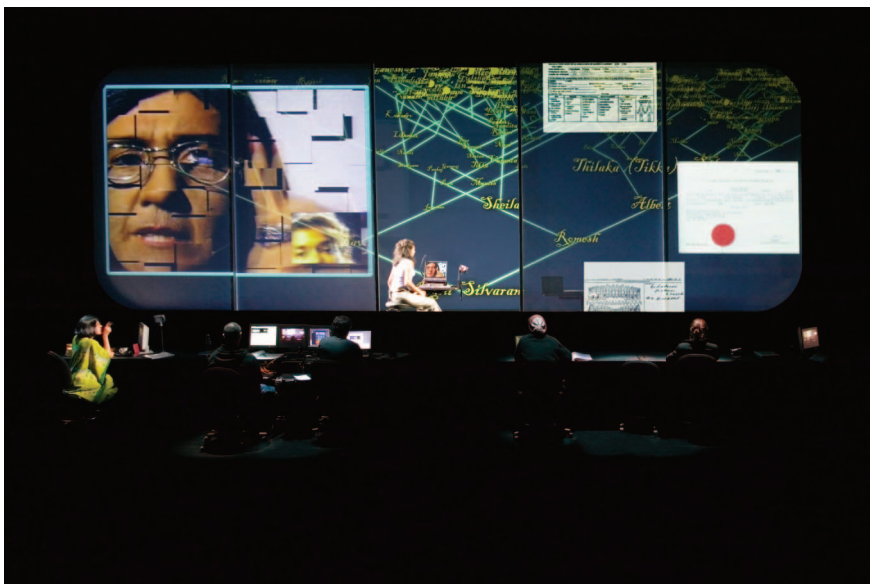



Image 11 Forestage, left: Moe Angelos (the Grandmother). Onstage, left to right: Moe Angelos, mediated in close up; Tanya Selvaratnam (Jen, the Granddaughter) mediated to window and live, centre; Moe Angelos, mediated on computer screen. Photo by dbox

and tones when people are waiting. Then I become very aware, once the prologue is finished and I am in silence, and it actually takes me a while to get out of that – because I feel so alone up there. But once I hear the family I become aware of this virtual world; the rhythm implies a kind of virtual world – an oversaturated world. And because the rhythms between the three stories are so different I think that helps the seamlessness of the show . . . . I am aware of what kind of rhythm I have to be in, because of the rhythm he has assigned – I mean, he determines how I move. I start pacing when he moves faster. It is an instinctive thing he does with how a scene should sound that affects the way I act.

### *Playing to camera*

**Moe Angelos:** I am looking at a monitor almost the entire time. And since I am doing a 'webcam performance', it is sort of 'real', because that is what you do when you are chatting to someone on a webcam. You are sitting at your computer, looking at this little eye that is the camera, and you are watching them and they are watching you. So my situation replicates reality in a certain way . . . . On my monitor is a very long shot from the back of the house, so I can see the whole stage; I am seeing what the audience sees, basically. When I am projected, I can see myself.
**Nick Kaye:** So you're watching the outcome of your own performance.
**Moe Angelos:** Yes, I am. It is odd, but I use it to frame myself, which is a very, very important part of being in a Builders' show.
**Nick Kaye:** How does watching yourself in mediation affect your performance?
**Tanya Selvaratnam:** I am doubly aware because I am looking at myself to see how I look on camera – and I am also trying to be unconscious of myself. . . .
**Moe Angelos:** [I]t is strangely voyeuristic, or narcissistic, in a certain way, because I am just looking at myself in the same way as when we walk past a mirror. It's the same thing. I am sitting there, and I catch myself looking at myself – watching to see where I am: am I framed properly?

## *RHYTHMIC STRUCTURE*

SUPER VISION's filtering of media through live performance, and elaboration of the live in mediation, draws on musical and rhythmic structures and organisation. It is in this context that The Builders Association's work places such a strong emphasis on the soundscapes composed by Dan Dobson and played, wherever possible, live in performance. Here, too, the relationship between the orchestration of media and music reflects the frequently hidden roots of video art itself, which, in its earliest forms – in the work of Nam June Paik for example – were defined in explicit transpositions of experimental musical practices into the new visual medium.[23]

### *Musicality*

**Nick Kaye:** In seeing the performance three times, I find myself listening to it as I might listen to a piece of music. There is also a very musical aspect to the tone, to the use of tone of voice between Kyle deCamp and David Pence, for example, which seems almost like a separation of the voice from what you see in the performance – it is quite a specific tone that plays on the microphone very strongly, and that plays on a kind of lilting, almost domestic, film-like quality. It is like watching a film where the narrative is in recollection, like a soundtrack. David Pence was talking about the process by which he had come to place what he was saying, quite a complex process of working out precisely who he was speaking to. This is because there is a lot of ambiguity in his monologues: is he speaking to himself? Is he speaking to his son, John Jnr? I think in part that his placing of his speech has produced this effect, as if his voice is recollecting – as if he is performing a film score over a set of images.
**Marianne Weems:** I think that is brilliant. It definitely does have to do with it being a kind of subliminal, emotional, cinematic sound score. Ultimately I don't know if Dan Dobson sees it like that, but I perceive the final tracks in that way. Also, I have heard David Pence rhythmically repeat lines until he and Dan have – over time – created very complex scores in terms of the measures where he starts a certain line. 'She knows' is this big moment at the top of the 'crush' scene (Image 12), where the video and lights come up, and an underlying beat, then David places the line 'she knows', then Dan sneaks in an eerie electronic guitar loop. It took them four months to work out – semi-consciously – the exact, musical placement of that

23. See, for example, N. Kaye, *Multi-media: video – installation – performance* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 37–58.

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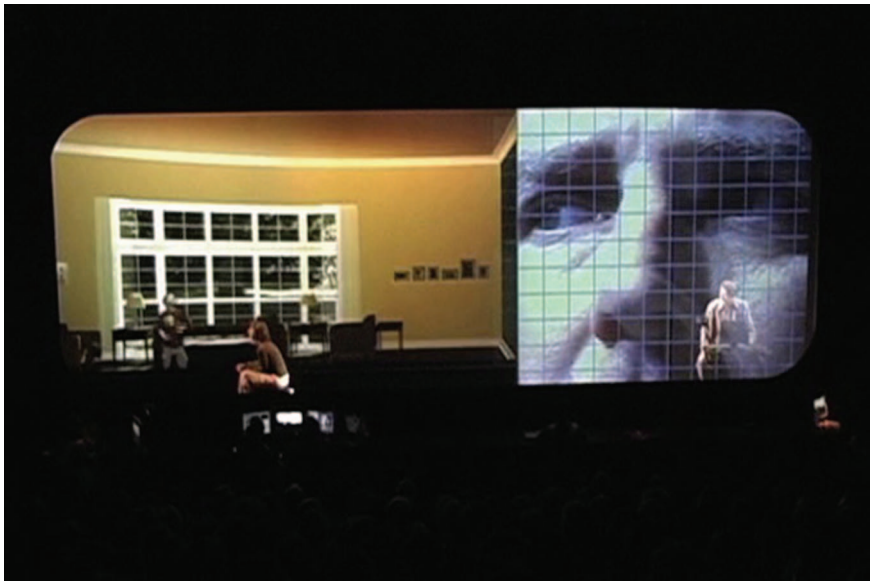


Image 12 The 'crush' scene, as the projected grid moves left diminishing the projection of the room. Onstage, left to right: Owen Philip (John Fletcher Jr.), in projection; Kyle deCamp (Carol); David Pence (John Fletcher Sr.) live and in mediated close-up. Video still

line. But it wasn't like anybody ever consciously said anything.

**David Pence:** As the group has gotten more sophisticated about technology, the tools have changed. We used corded microphones at the beginning, then cordless microphones. Now each of us performs with a tiny microphone on a stem attached to his ear. I feel Dan Dobson right here, almost at my lips – he's right inside the tip of that microphone. That's partly a manifestation of the technology, but it's also specific to the way Dan works. He isn't merely an operator up there in the dark behind the audience – he really feels like a performer to me, and there is continual give and take between us. I can't see him from the stage, but I feel him reacting to me. I can hear my voice grow a little more present. I can sometimes feel him pulling me back a little. It's very sensual. He is playing me, and I am reacting to him.

**Marianne Weems:** Dan Dobson's sound is the underpinning, the emotional foundation of the whole piece and also each scene. The sound is in 'dialogue' with the content of each scene – not just reinforcing what the audience 'should feel'. It is also something that fills and drives the scene so that when we are rehearsing we really can't stand to run any rehearsal without the music .... Everything is scored to the music, and Dan is constantly changing and adding based on what happens in rehearsal.

**Nick Kaye:** One of the things that you are clearly able to do is to bring people with a very strong sense of their own work together to create something that is very coherent – which is synthesised. I wonder if the capacity to think of things in terms of those musical structures is one of the things that permits or facilitates these strong collaborations.

**Marianne Weems:** That could be because there is something about composing discrete lines into these larger movements, where they are not expected to mould into each other or merge. Each line of information is very discrete, each part of the picture. Perhaps that's partly why we also manage to do this with a variety of different types of egos, because I think people still feel that their contribution has some internal consistency, but is being staged in relation to a bigger frame of other material.

**Nick Kaye:** In relation to the live performance of technology, I recall that John Cage said of his early electronic music – which he could clearly have run on tape – that you must always play it live, because when it is live it gains presence.[24]

24. See John Cage, in J. Cage and D. Charles, *For the Birds: John Cage in Conversation With Daniel Charles* (London: Marion Boyars, 1981), p. 137.

**Norman Frisch:** Although I don't think she publicly references him a lot, Cage is a huge influence on Marianne's aesthetic and also, I think, her working strategies, because Cage was responding all the time to collaborators whose needs were utterly distinct. I think that is one of the things that Marianne is carrying on – it is something in the spirit of those Cage, Cunningham and Rauschenberg collaborations – although, in certain ways, they took the easy way out and Marianne is choosing not to do that. Young artists today are weaned on that simultaneity, they are able to master it, or at least move through that very early in their development. By the time they are thirty years old it is the coordination that interests them more than the space between.

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## *THE FATHER TRAVELS NORTH*

In its penultimate scene, SUPER VISION reveals John Fletcher Sr., now set against the backdrop of the Arctic (Image 13). Echoing references in the first family scenes, a flock of birds appear in the distance, slowly gathering and moving towards the still figure of the father.

### *Landscape*

**David Pence:** [A]fter I realise that I have to leave and get to some empty place where I can be at peace, again I find myself alone in a kind of physical limbo. And again I have an impulse to reach out and guide that boy – but still I can't get to him.
**Nick Kaye:** Dan Dobson talked about the presence of the birds, which John Fletcher Sr. and Carol refer to in the first scene, in relation to the sound score and the representation of data. The scene in the north when the birds are finally seen, however distant, is very powerful. You seem to go to the north to escape, but also to be in a 'real' place. The appearance of the flock of birds in the distance, then coming closer, relates visually to the dbox imagery of the data breaking up and coming back in the visual interludes between scenes. So there is something there about an overlapping of imagery and references about all the webs – the web of virtual imagery, the web environment, the data environment in which everybody in the show is somehow being constituted. Then you find – in this beautiful simulation of a natural environment, in the visual score – that they are just there. There are all those implicit references, but then it is not really resolved. The birds appear, and then they are gone. There is some kind of equation the piece is making – in the way it's told as well – between this virtual landscape and the natural.



Image 13 Onstage: David Pence (John Fletcher Sr.). Video still

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**David Pence:** I'm fascinated that Dan Dobson talked about the birds. They seem to be there in one form or another in all of the important moments of our narrative. Carol (Kyle deCamp) and I talk about birds in the first scene. Then there's that beautiful passage with John Fletcher Jr. and Carol calling, 'I'm here, I'm here'. From my character's point of view, Carol has a very important speech in the first scene in which she talks about 'the dread'. It's a scene in which essentially I'm trying to get her to leave the house and go to the park so I can get back on the web. I am urging her out the door, and she has this speech about the dread. Even though I need to turn away from her to the computer, I made a choice as an actor to really listen to that speech and really take it in, because I allude to the dread after I go north. In the Arctic landscape, I see birds through the binoculars, and I remember Johnny and apologise to him. I use myself as a model for him, saying 'You will find a new way, just like me – like your warblers. They get the signal and they go'. The dread. So that extraordinary moment of regret and guidance is delivered through the imagery of the birds.

## *THE FINAL SCENE*

As SUPER VISION closes, the final visual play articulates the traveller's dissolution into his data identity. In multiplying Rizwan Mirza's performance, the accumulating projection creates a spectacular layering of the real body, the projected body and the data body. Here, too, as elsewhere, the relationship between the light of the projected video and the theatrical lighting alters and confuses the sense of the materiality of the projected and real people.

### *Data body*

**Nick Kaye:** Throughout the performance, but especially in its final scene, there is a tremendously strong visual play around the traveller (Images 14 and 15), through front and rear projection, as his data accumulates.

**Rizwan Mirza:** It's about him being revealed and becoming more a part of the system. At the end he is enveloped with data. He has revealed everything. He is happy to part of the system, to buy into the consumer American dream. He has his platinum flying card. They know he took a defensive driving course. He has got credit lines that have been




Image 14 The traveller (Rizwan Mirza). Image by dbox




Image 15 Onstage, left to right: Rizwan Mirza (the traveller) in projection, and live; Joe Silovsky (the TSA agent) in live mediation. Forestage: Joe Silovsky. Photo

extended everywhere. He is really part of the system and he is quite happy about it.

**Moe Angelos:** When Rizwan Mirza has the full body scan, there is a live, life-size video image of him standing next to him. You see the real Rizwan lit in profile, while you see a frontal shot of him in video – and it is eerie. Sometimes in rehearsal I will crawl out into the house and watch that part, because it is very compelling. It is him, and the lighting is the same, but it's – where is the real Rizwan? I also love the end, when he is slowly walking across the stage and the data is falling out behind him, following him. It is a wonderful representation of being followed by these data clouds. It's a great visual representation of that. These things do trail us.

## *SCREENING PRESENCE*

Onstage, The Builders Association performs 'live presence' in and against its 'screening'. On screen, in 'real time' 'live' mediation, SUPER VISION takes its cue from and provokes performance onstage. In the 'electronic network' that enables this movement of the performer's action, and so of the spectator's eye from the live to the mediated to the live, the signs of 'performer-presence' are frequently amplified and modulated as they shift between modes of representation.

### *On stage*

**Nick Kaye:** Is an address to presence an explicit part of your thinking in your work with The Builders Association?

**Marianne Weems:** Yes. So many people have asked me – why don't you just do film? But clearly it is partly the pleasure of staging the idea of presence – and what is happening to these very strong performers in a very strong media environment, and how their presence is either – as you say – extended in some ways and amplified or compromised or endangered. And the frictions in there are really what to me is the most fascinating thing about presence on the stage. No performer in this project, I think, is ever really fully present in an unmediatised way. There is always some encroachment. And some audience members receive that as being very cold. But there is a kind of virtuosity in the play between image and performers, and the tension and excitement of unfolding this mediatic spectacle live in front of an audience . . . . There is a kind of a Brechtian moment where you get to see the live performer and then you see the tools that are being used to complete the magnification. For me, the pleasure is in looking at both of those things. The skill that the performers bring to using the technology is quite virtuosic – the way that Joe Silovsky can actually 'talk' to Rizwan Mirza on camera even though his live face is two inches from a wall. It's an added layer of performance that I find very entertaining – actually seeing the tools of the production constantly being used. The real team players, the people who are in this ensemble, understand that they are a part of this larger stage picture and this stage picture is contributing to their performance. I think it tends to heighten the presence of the performers.

### *On camera*

**Marianne Weems:** I have worked with people who have said: 'Nobody is going to be looking at me, they are just going to be looking at the screen. . . ' .

**Nick Kaye:** That is often the assumption, but I think curiously, also, when, Moe Angelos has her back to you, yet the screen refers to her (Image 16), it seems to amplify her live presence, or your focus on her live presence.

**Marianne Weems:** Yes, absolutely. The subtlety of her live presence draws your focus because she's not jumping up and down saying 'look at me!'. What distinguishes this work, as you say, is that the performers are engaged in the whole web of making the show; everything around them brings them out, brings their 'humanness' out in a different way than if they were just on stage alone. It is in dialogue with the whole machine that surrounds them – their presence does become more articulated and magnified. . ..

**Nick Kaye:** Do you feel your presence as a performer in the technology? Or do you feel separate from it?

**David Pence:** I think I'm aware of both almost continuously. I am aware of myself as a physical human being in the way any actor in a show feels himself on the stage: light on my skin, a lot of people out there, another actor to look at or talk to – maybe. Those are really the tactile realities that are just about being alive onstage. But also, I feel that I am inside that technology and being delivered through that technology. And this is a

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Image 16 Forestage: Moe Angelos (the grandmother). Onstage: Tanya Selvaratnam (Jen, the Granddaughter); Moe Angelos, mediated. Photo by dbox

sensation I don't want to lose, because I treasure it. I feel – and again I sort of personalise it – I feel safe, as if Marianne is presenting me. It's like I'm part of a beautiful machine.

**Marianne Weems:** This complicating the presence of the performers has always been our direction, and this piece in particular succeeded. And it was also made very palpable for the audience – you could feel that the performers were really being extended into the media and vice versa, because of the way that they are lined up on a one-to-one scale.... Again, what came first in SUPER VISION was the idea that we are dragging another body behind us – this electronic network that is extending out of us in some way or flying around us constantly – and how to make that palpable and visual. The more it seemed like the performers were really being invaded by that – or overlapping with the electronics – the more interesting it became.

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