

Three Possibilities Walk Into A Bar (TONIGHT reprise)

The following text first appeared as the program notes for the premiere season of TONIGHT at Sophiensaele, Berlin, June 2019.

The TONIGHT series of performance and video works is a questioning of the strange, cynical and glorious phenomenon that is Pop Music. I was interested in making a series of works in a time of escalating populism that would investigate the power of pop cultural poetics. How they imprint in our bodies, how they manipulate our desires, how they both give and withhold pleasure.

As an evening length choreographic work, TONIGHT was influenced by the writings of Mark Fisher in many ways. Fisher's thinking affirmed my experience of the importance of music and music video for me growing up in a small town white Tasmanian household that understood its identity primarily through working class values and my father's obsession with rock, pop, garage punk and indie. Music was never not playing in our house. Music video in this 1980's context served as a source of possibility and most importantly as a magic device that allowed me to rehearse insistently fantastic future versions of myself with no resource besides my imagination and my burning desire. During these dedicated stagings – which would usually take place alone in my bedroom for hours and hours after school each

night – I would act out music videos and concert performances of the songs which I truly adored. Whenever these songs contained the lyric ‘tonight’ I would be transported to a very specific and charged future place – one which held immense promise: romantic promise, revolutionary promise. Tonight’s the night. Perhaps you know the feeling of this space too?

In TONIGHT, as an act of love and of critique, I question how pop aesthetics can simultaneously mean so much and yet nothing at all. I was interested in the capability of pop and music video to work with three temporalities at once: Clock Time, Lived Time and Cosmic Time. With Clock Time being a uniformly agreed upon measurement: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, year - a pop song typically running 3.5 minutes in length. Understanding Lived Time as the subjective experience of time as it passes - that same pop song might feel endlessly long and uneventful to one person, and far too short and fleeting to another. Lived Time can be looped. And finally reading Cosmic Time as the immensity of time as a context; when that pop song is played, it forms less than a drop in the ocean of an existential phenomenon that traces from the Big Bang into tomorrow. The distinction between these three temporalities is the degree to which they are elastic.

With TONIGHT, I wanted to make a critical case for the use of the ‘tonight’ poetic as heavy commodification of the ancient Greek concept of Kairos – the elusive magic moment. I also wanted to make a case for the pleasures of pop in the everyday as a space in which we might imagine ourselves with spectacular agency. And in how the 3 minute pop song or music video contains multitudes - resisting linear narrative and insisting on the performativity of ‘the self’. Pop is a capitalist machine, yet it produces space for encountering entanglement with queer time and queer subjectivities.

TONIGHT is in many ways a performance about performing. It is an invitation to surrender – to nostalgia as a material, to affect as an apparatus, to rehearsal as a strategy of becoming, and to refusing ironic distance because it can so easily become an expensive violence against feeling and caring.

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‘Three Possibilities Walk Into A Bar (TONIGHT reprise)’ has been made as a music video for a performance text from the above described TONIGHT choreographic work. It imagines TONIGHT is a pop song. Its three possibilities - A Lover, An Entertainer, and A Revolution - walk into a bar as three archetypes that pop offers up to any listener to make out with, dance real close to, or try on.

Melanie Jame Wolf works with performance, text, video and installation making projects for theater, gallery and screen spaces. Her work deals with the poetics and problematics of ghosts, class, sensuality, gender, narratology, and the body as a political riddle. Through this lens, she pursues and ongoing interest in analysing the idea of performance-as-labour in artistic, popular entertainment, and everyday contexts. Her work often produces taxonomies of performance techniques, for example: of impersonation, melodrama, or stand up. She does this in order to understand performance as a potential technology of survival, and as an engine for fluidity of subjectivity from a queer feminist perspective. With a background in theater and dance, she approaches her work with video and installation as an expanded choreographic practice. Leaning into a hyper-stylised pop aesthetic, she is invested in humour as a strategy for critical possibility, and in working with language in subliminal and surprising ways. Melanie Jame currently lives and works in Berlin.

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Bus Projects acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate: the Wurundjeri people and Elders past and present of the Kulin nations.

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