

**Eddie Paterson**

Bodies of Data:

## Informatics in Contemporary Performance

‘You were a multitude, and I but one.’

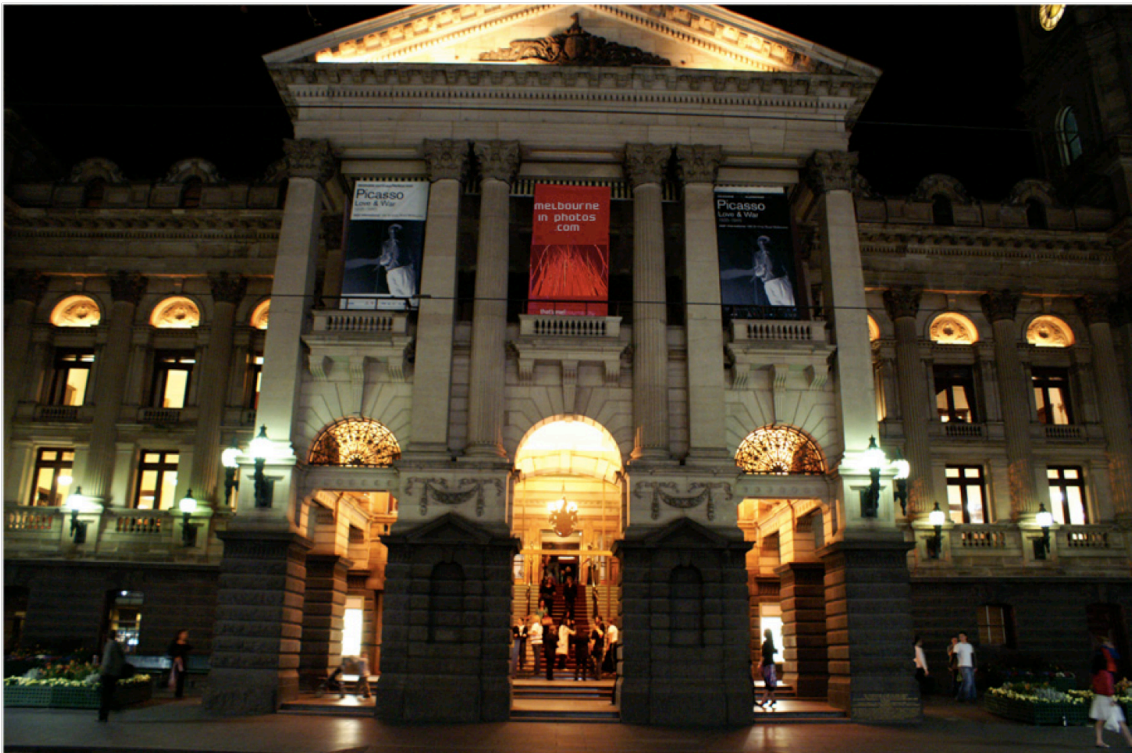
—Barabas, from *The Jew of Malta* (Marlowe 1.2. 179–80).

In a recent introduction to her works of ‘algorithmic theatre’, US theatre-maker Annie Dorsen argues for a new relationship between digital technology and performance. Dorsen suggests that analysis of the ‘dramaturgy of algorithms’ and the way they create order, generate meaning, and structure narrative, produces new provocations for our making and experience of live performance (2015: 133). The intersection between computer technologies and live performance has a rich genealogy (Dixon 2007). Indeed, Dorsen’s ‘A Piece of Work’ (2013)—in which the text of *Hamlet* was rearticulated through a computer algorithm—draws our attention to how digitally mediated data, in the form of algorithmic and statistical procedures, continues to challenge and (arguably) enhance how we think about that most stubbornly human-scale of art-forms, the theatre. In an era in which our relationship to data is fundamentally changing our world—the era of Big Data, high-speed processing, and the personal media device (Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier 2014)—our use and understandings of data becomes as much a part of addressing global problems like climate change and economic development, as it calibrates how we relate to one another in the everyday and, indeed, how the everyday makes its way onto the stage.

This article will explore the use of informatics, as a means of assembling and processing data, and its relationship to live performance. Building on Rosemary Kilch and Edward Scheer’s work, I am interested in the dialectical relationship between the materiality of bodies on stage and the ways in which informatics assembles data on social or political bodies (2012: 80). In particular, I will explore some examples of how the dominant ideological processes of ordering, naming and cataloguing are being incorporated into contemporary performances. The collective body in question here is the population of Melbourne, a medium-sized city in South-Eastern Australia, and my analysis will contrast two models of performance notable for their collection and representation of demographic data: *100% Melbourne* (2012), part of the so-called ‘Reality Trend’ theatre of German-based collective Rimini Protokoll and their ongoing *100% City* series (2008-); and Melbourne performance ensemble rawcus’ recent work *Catalogue* (2015). I will investigate the ways in which these performances mobilise informatic techniques, through foregrounding the ordering and assembly of bodies and statistical data on stage,

and reflect upon Australia's most visible method of naming, counting and cataloguing: the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census, last undertaken at the time of writing in 2016. The recent census, the first to rely primarily on the digital collection of data, has been beset by controversy over the role of privacy, data protection and security, and the question of why a census is needed and how much, or little, population data the government has a right to access. Only hours after the census was launched on 9 August 2016 the site had to be shut down for 40 hours after persistent cyber attacks and concerns over the safety of data, with millions of Australian's unable to upload their information (Kozioł 2016). Following criticism of the 'failed' census by media commentators and data security experts (Martin 2016), and an imminent government inquiry, the role of the census and digital data collection and storage in Australian society is currently the subject of ongoing debate.

In this work, I suggest that the tension in these theatrical works between informatics and lived experience deepens our understanding of how data regulates and structures our everyday interactions—person to person, person to institution, citizen to State—within the Western context of contemporary Australian society. I will conclude that these live performances respond to what James C. Scott calls 'the logic of the grid', for the ways in which they play with different scales of data in order to question (state) projects of 'standardization and legibility' (1998: 57, 64). Indeed, in their attempts to 'stage data', I contend that these performances make visible the contested relationship between the grid-logic of the State and the far more contingent and complicated task of taking into account the human—a scale and focus that has been the historical concern of theatre.



**Fig 1. 100% Melbourne (2012), Melbourne Town Hall Façade. Photo © City of Melbourne**

### It Started with a Melburnian

Rimini Protokoll's *100% City* series—starting with Berlin in 2008, proceeding to over 30 cities since then—draws directly on statistical data as the basis for live performance, data that is represented on stage by 100 non-actor members of the community. Recent scholarship on the *100%* series addresses questions of dramaturgy (Hagiwara 2016, Mumford 2015), participation (Fragkou and Hager 2013) and governmentality (Zaiontz 2014), and is part of the significant academic attention Rimini Protokoll's work has received, particularly for their collaborations with non-professional performers and use of non-theatre spaces.<sup>1</sup> The Melbourne iteration in May 2012 was presented by the City of Melbourne in co-production with Rimini Protokoll, Arts Victoria, the Goethe-Institut Australien and the Hebbel Theatre Berlin. It ran over three nights at the Melbourne Town Hall, the central municipal building of the City of Melbourne, built in 1887 and located in the middle of the Melbourne CBD grid.

To quote the *100% Melbourne* program:

It started with a single Melburnian.

This Melburnian had 24 hours to recruit the next Melburnian, who then had 24 hours to choose the next, and so on, until 100 people were linked. These 100 people were chosen according to statistical criteria that reflect Melbourne's demographics from census data. Each individual represents roughly 41,000 Melburnians—that is, 1% of Melbourne's population of around 4.1 million people. (Cho et al. 2012: Back Cover).

The organisation of the performance is deceptively simple: participants are asked to introduce themselves to the audience, then the participants are asked questions about their views on certain issues (religion, crime, marriage and so on) after which they divide into groups on stage (yes or no) in a literal image of diversity. As co-director Stefan Kaegi states, 'We try to be a mirror to what the city does and then the rest of it is a sort of visible democracy' (Rimini Protokoll 2012). This dramaturgical template is enhanced by a large revolving circular stage, sophisticated projection technology, and a live band. The performance closes with questions from the cast to the audience, and *visa versa*.<sup>2</sup>

*100% Melbourne* is significant for its celebration of community engagement and active participation (Mumford, 2015). During my viewing of the work I am struck by how the performance effectively brings together community members, allows for new connections and collaborations, and showcases difference and everyday stories to an audience that combines, at least in my estimation, large numbers of friends and family along with other interested spectators. The audience demographic is seemingly far more diverse than typical main-stage or fringe productions in Melbourne. This celebration of ethnic, cultural and gender diversity is also in line with the City of Melbourne as a progressive and inclusive organisation. The CoM website frequently references its community building programs, ecological initiatives, the *Melbourne for All People Plan 2014–2017*, the *Homelessness Strategy 2011–2013*, the *Disability Action Plan 2010–2013* and so on, all

of which adds to the evidential case for Melbourne's typically high place in global 'most livable city' rankings (see City of Melbourne; Lucas 2015).



**Fig 2. Rimini Protokoll, *100% Melbourne* (2012), participants. Photo © City of Melbourne**

These aspirational aspects act as a background to the process of making *100% Melbourne*, in which Rimini Protokoll and their collaborators use data of various scales: from census statistics, to questionnaires, to individual interviews, to live first-person monologues and commentaries. Indeed, one of the most dynamic elements of *100% Melbourne* is during the commentaries and question time, in which the participants might improvise, or even admit to lying throughout the performance; or when spectators have the chance to interact with the participants, asking questions that may be then integrated into the next performance (see Garde 2015). Considering these participatory elements, *100% Melbourne* might be analysed in the terms of Nicolas Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics' whereby: '[T]he role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real' (2002: 13). As James Wilson argues, relational works are characterised by their use of dialogue and social engagement as key parts of the making of performance, in which 'artists define themselves as facilitators of social events as well as creators of objects' (2012: 111). Rimini Protokoll's *100%* model is grounded in participation and, while Bourriaud's concept of relational art has been much critiqued, Rimini's work continues to draw attention to the ways in which individuals are situated in relation to the collective body.

Indeed, if *100% Melbourne* can be said to be a sort of visible democracy, a reflection of the existing real in the city of Melbourne 2012, what does this tell us about the social and political order that governs our everyday? What does *100%* reveal about the tension between assemblages of data and lived experience?



## Populations and the Petri Dish

The demographic picture of Greater Melbourne in *100% Melbourne* is constructed around data most obviously drawn from the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census. This longstanding mechanism for gathering population data—the first national census took place in 1911—organises the over 4 million residents of the city by familiar categories: age, gender, family composition, ethnicity, dwelling, education, employment, income, motor vehicles and so on. The 2011 census also marked the last point at which Australian demographic monitoring might still be considered as a gathering of relatively small-scale data, big-ish but not Big, as opposed to the 2016 census which was digitised in response to the Big Data era in order to ‘produce and publish over 3 trillion cells of data’ (ABS).

The history of censuses, which can be traced back to ancient Egypt, China and then Renaissance Europe, reveals the complex and costly work of assembling data for the state (Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier 2014: 20). According to Scott, the development of patronymics, official languages and other state techniques of naming and counting are integral to how the state imagines, or interprets, a society.

State simplifications such as maps, censuses, cadastral lists, and standard units of measurement represent techniques for grasping a large and complex reality; in order for officials to be able to comprehend aspects of the ensemble, that complex reality must be reduced to schematic categories. The only way to accomplish this is to reduce an infinite array of detail to a set of categories that will facilitate summary descriptions, comparisons, and aggregation. (1998: 77)

Indeed, following Scott, while mechanisms such as the census are vital to providing a longitudinal overview of communities and understanding social change, and to shaping government policy at all levels, these assemblages or ensembles of data are also notorious for those aspects they do not incorporate. Historically, these include difficult to measure statistics such as homelessness and omissions on grounds of race, disability or (trans)gender—subjects that are marginalised or in-between are not easily quantified. This is also because, for Scott, any project of simplification and legibility is also a project that is never fully realised. In his words: ‘The data from which such simplifications arise are, to varying degrees, riddled with inaccuracies, omissions, faulty aggregations, fraud, negligence, political distortion, and so on’ (1998: 80). *100% Melbourne* then, which relies on informatic techniques to structure and define the parameters of its performance, also contains similar gaps and omissions. Rimini Protokoll are aware of this, as Kaegi goes so far as to celebrate these aspects, noting: ‘[I]t’s a game of truth and it’s a game with manipulation ... Reading, producing, falsifying, making decisions about statistics – that’s all one process’ (Bowen et al. 2015: 316).



**Fig 3. Rimini Protokoll, *100% Melbourne* (2012) – scales. Photo © City of Melbourne**

However, it is in the tension between scales—the big-ish data of the informatic assemblage vs the lived experience of a single human subject, or the vision of the state vs the view from the streets—that *100% Melbourne* begins to reveal counter-narratives to the project of legibility.

For example, considering the work is staged only half a block away from St. Paul's cathedral, a frequent gathering place for Melbourne's homeless population, it is cruelly ironic that no homeless subjects are made visible in the performance. Further, as a public space Melbourne's grid-like CBD, including Swanston Street onto which the Melbourne Town Hall faces and City Square, which is located next to the Town Hall directly across Collins Street, has witnessed several well-documented occurrences in which police power and more insidious methods of state counting has been used to suppress and control marginal groups. These examples include: moving homeless from the city streets and booking them into hotels and rooming houses during the Commonwealth Games in 2005, reported by *The Age* as a policy with the express purpose of hiding the homeless (Ker 2005); the decision to forcibly evict non-violent Occupy Melbourne protestors—including some homeless subjects—from City Square in preparation for a visit by the Queen in 2011 (Levy and Preiss 2011); and the Australian Border Force's recent 'Operation Fortitude', a planned co-action between Federal and State organisations to undertake 'random' visa checks of so-called 'illegals' in the Melbourne CBD that was later cancelled due to a rapid response via social media resulting in a citizen protest (Schetzer and Mills 2015).

Yet, as Kaegi makes clear, in *100%* any ‘political reflection’ of the society arises from the informatic data and improvisations from the live participants, without significant intervention on the part of the collective (Bowen et al. 2015; Rimini Protokoll 2012). In short, the lack of visible homeless subjects in the performance or the relative absence of subjects with a disability or any ‘flattening’ of the lived experience of indigenous or refugee histories is directly related to the (approved and longstanding) process of state standardisation and aggregation.

Etymologically, the Latin origins of the *census* derive from term *censure* ‘to assess’, with this meaning underpinning the ABS definition of the Australian census as a method of statistical collection: ‘Its objective is to accurately measure the number and key characteristics of people who are in Australia on Census Night, and the dwellings in which they live’ (ABS, ‘Census Releases’). Yet the census, though etymologically distinct, also brings to mind another Latin term, *consensus*, and the notions of agreement and accord. A Derridean reading of these terms points to the moment at which the census enters into cons(c)ensus, as a method of counting that is both a statistical measurement and an implicit directive—we are not simply counted, but we agree to be counted in a certain way, and for our population to be framed accordingly.

The result sees Rimini shape and curate the material they are provided, including: the raw numbers, any additional filters (in Melbourne’s case extra demographic filters were added to include indigenous subjects and to highlight cultural and linguistic diversity), the opinions of the participants, and the questions from the audience; into an eminently transferable dramaturgical model, the model of the Petri dish.



**Fig 4.** Rimini Protokoll, *100% Melbourne* (2012) – Petri dish. Photo © City of Melbourne

As co-director Helgard Haug notes, the ‘Petri glass effect’ is an important aspect of the screen projection in the *100%* series, for its ability to provide a ‘broad perspective’ on the participants moving across the stage, ‘[l]ike a chemical process acting on the people’ (Bowen et al. 2015: 304). Meg Mumford elaborates:

The camera also captured bodies as they, for example, moved *en masse* from one cluster of respondents to another or danced in chain-like groups. In these instances the swarming bodies were turned into abstract patterns that recalled the movements of cells, small animals and germinating plants in Petri dishes ... bringing us closer to our molecular selves. (2015: 289)

Similarly, for me, the image of the Petri dish again highlights this integral element of the *100% City* series: scale. The Petri dish draws attention to how the informatic data works at different scales—from the distant numerical processes of the census results, to the human-scale representations of this population data on stage, to the more microscopic and cellular networks of data—the point at which informatics moves towards bioinformatics (a topic I will return to later in this article).

With this claim in mind, what we view initially in the Petri dish image is a kind of close-up vision of the consensual order under which we live. This might also be a vision of what Scott calls ‘state simplifications’ writ large. Indeed, *100% Melbourne* sees the literal embodiment of spatial distributions of the population, in which the aggregating and distribution of ‘standardised facts’ aids the state’s ‘project of legibility’. For Scott: ‘Each fact must be recuperated and brought back on stage, as it were, dressed in a new uniform of official weave – as part of [in the words of Benedict Anderson] “a series in a total classificatory grid”’ (1998: 80). Therefore, while *100% Melbourne* may contain creases in which the performance makes visible subjects of difference—including queer or transgendered subjects, a variety of ages, ethnicities and religions—the ultimate organisation of the work reflects the dominant consensual agreement: the legible and standardised arrangement of the census, the grid, and the state. The cons(c)ensus.

In Jacques Rancière’s terms *100% Melbourne* reveals the ‘self-evident facts’ that structure our relations—recalling Scott (and Eugenio Barba) this might be called a kind of dramaturgy of the ‘official weave’—and shows the population and community of Melbourne to be woven into a network of consensual regulation and compartmentalisation rather than agonistic public life (2011: 13). Importantly, these ‘self-evident’ facts are those produced by governmental regimes and the impression that they are indeed ‘self-evident’ is central to their effect. As such *100% Melbourne* reflects, and again I would argue that Rimini are aware of this to a large extent, an Australian culture of micropolitics and dispersal of action in which generally agreed objectives such as responsibility, difference, dialogue, inclusivity and participation are bound up in governmental regimes of legibility, rather than acting as catalysts for social change. However, as with the current controversy surrounding the 2016 census, it is at the point at which populations begin to question the ‘self-evidential’ effect of governmental categorisation that the official weave starts to become more visible. Similarly, by staging



official population data onstage, Rimini's performance visualises the grid-logic of the State. While *100% Melbourne* is never openly critical of the State categorisation—indeed, it could be said that in this work Rimini validates the State apparatus—this mimicking of consensual ordering also offers a means of making visible, and questioning, the 'self-evident' facts that underpin our everyday. To further analyse the use of informatic techniques in contemporary performance, I will now move from the Petri dish to another model of data representation, the box, and the recent work of Melbourne performance ensemble rawcus.

### **The Catalogue is Box Shaped**

Rawcus theatre's *Catalogue* provides a different perspective on compartmentalisation and the process of state ordering: one that complicates notions of visibility, mobility and categorisation. It explores how the catalogue, as a kind of list, collection or vehicle for advertisement, is fundamentally boxed shaped. Rawcus are an inclusive performance company made up of performers with and without disabilities. Formed in 2001, they are well known within the city of Melbourne and throughout Australia for their atmospheric and visually stunning works of physical theatre and dance. *Catalogue*, like all of rawcus' work, was the result of a long period of collaborative workshopping and development by the ensemble.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as distinct from globally visible companies such as Rimini Protokoll, their work rarely tours due primarily to the way rawcus relies heavily on the particular idiosyncrasies of each ensemble member, meaning it is problematic to alter the casting due to access limitations or other challenges of touring. *Catalogue* was staged as part of the 2015 Dance Massive program, a co-production with Arts House, at the Meat Market performance space in North Melbourne—a large former indoor market, with a bluestone cobble floor and ornate iron-framed pillars and windows.

The audience for *Catalogue* enters and is seated on a tiered seating bank at the far end of the Meat Market building. The performance space is in black out. As with *100% Melbourne* the audience seems diverse, though the range of different abilities is more pronounced. For example, I see several familiar faces from Back to Back theatre, one of Australia's premiere performance companies and a company, like rawcus, made up of people perceived to have a disability, as well as other members of the Melbourne arts and disability community.

The performance begins with the stage still in darkness and a voice-over from Danielle von der Borch (Danni): 'I have always wanted to tell you every single detail of every adventure or person or situation I've been in. You tell me where to start...' (*Catalogue* Unpublished Script 2015). Lights snap on to reveal a body (of Hannah Bradsworth) running in an open fronted cube, seemingly suspended in darkness above the stage floor. The light snaps off, and then over the next minutes a complex lighting and music sequence reveals members of the rawcus ensemble to be performing from within eight open-fronted cubes, measuring roughly 2 metres by 2 metres, stacked four on four.



**Fig 5. rawcus, *Catalogue* (2015). Photo © Paul Dunn and rawcus**

Throughout the performance, the boxes typically contain a single performer, though occasionally duets take place in which two performers interact within a box. This staging draws obvious attention to the metaphor of the box: ‘Don’t put me in a box’, a sign of social marginalisation whereby subjects are ordered, categorised and ‘boxed-in’ based on preexisting assumptions.

For the rawcus ensemble, the aesthetic of the box—an image also used in Back to Back theatre’s *The Democratic Set* (2009-) (Grehan 2013)—sits in contrast to the Petri dish projections of population seen in *100% Melbourne*. The boxes are far more human in scale, though a box can just as easily resemble a cell as a room or a frame. The movement of the cast between the boxes acts as an opportunity for individual voice, humour and confession—such as when ensemble members deliver direct-address autobiographical monologues, or sing and dance along to Pink, or lip-sync along to John Farnham’s 1986 anthem ‘You’re the Voice’—in a way that openly recalls photographer Gillian Wearing’s ‘confessional’ portraits, in which anonymous strangers in the streets were asked to hold up paper signs with personal messages written on them.

However, as the work progresses, the boxes also become a means to reflect on how the processes of social and economic ordering, like the gathering of census data and the filling out of Department of Human Services paperwork, is one of box-ticking, categorisation and, inevitably, state simplification.

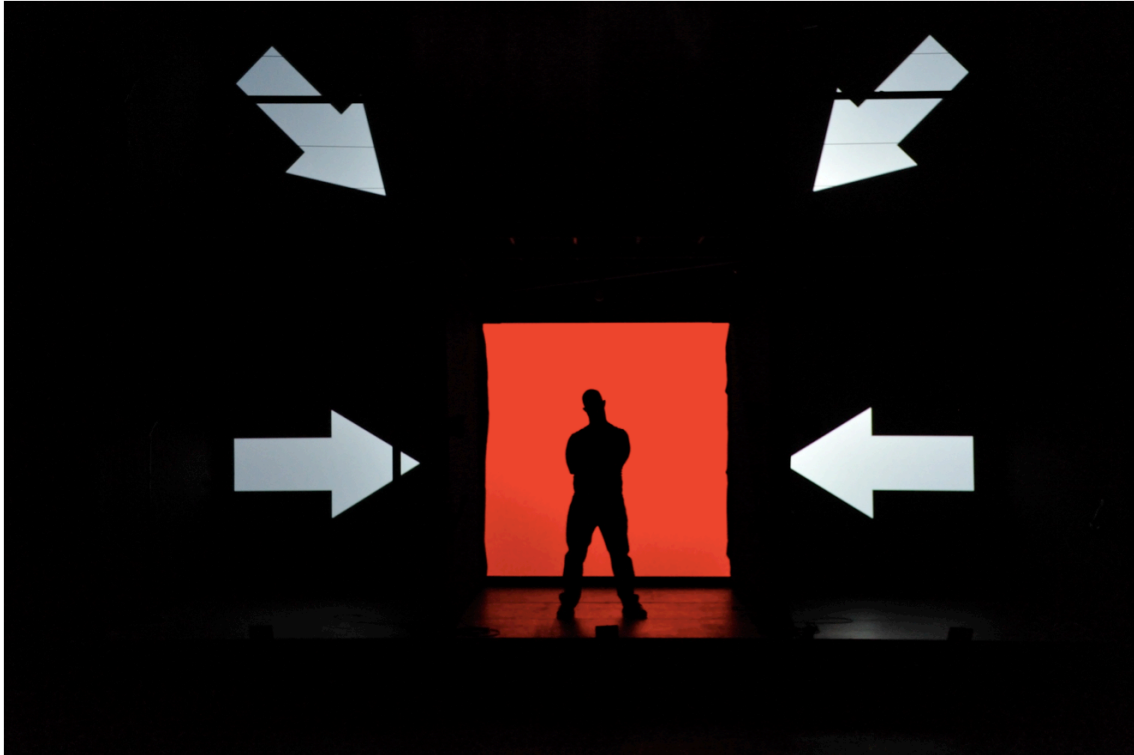


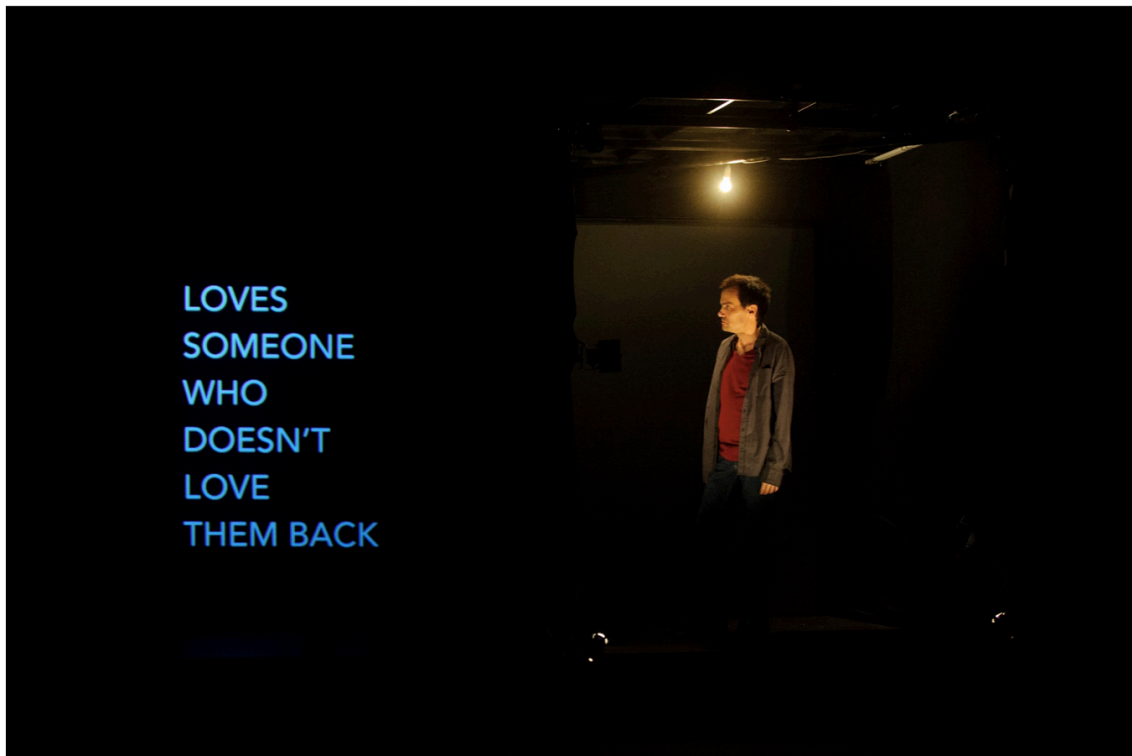
Fig. 6. rawcus, *Catalogue* (2015). Photo © Paul Dunn and rawcus

*Catalogue* draws particular attention to these informatic processes in a section titled ‘Data Sequence’. Here, six cast members stand alone in their boxes, while a statement is projected onto one of the empty spaces. In correspondence with the series of projected statements, the single figures are lit by a lone light bulb as if reimagining the census as a gameshow:

Over 30	6 boxed figures lit in the affirmative
Female	4 affirmative lights
Gay	0 lights

These statements are ‘factual’ assemblages of information and recall the official weave of state simplification, though many of the statements are personal and playful, perhaps even resisting to some extent the total classificatory grid. According to Chantal Mouffe, contemporary artistic and cultural practices that bring about the cultivation and release of *affects* ‘constitute a crucial site of intervention for counter-hegemonic practices’, because of the ways they can help to imagine and enhance the antagonistic dimensions of everyday life (2013: xvii). Therefore, while the ABS data shows that in 2009, there were 5.44 million Victorians, and of these, one million were people with a disability (making 18.4 percent of the population), and that six percent of the total Victorian population (338,200 people) have a profound or severe disability, this normative data does little to imagine the affective experiences of people with a disability, nor their family, nor carers (ABS ‘Disability’; Department of Human Services).

<i>Has buried a Pet</i>	4 lights
<i>Believes in ghosts</i>	5 lights
<i>Believes in God</i>	1 light
<i>Has a credit card</i>	2 lights
<i>Lives with an ongoing illness</i>	2 lights



**Fig. 7. rawcus, *Catalogue* (2015). Photo © Paul Dunn and rawcus**

In contrast, while several statements from *Catalogue* are markedly similar to the ABS surveys and the questions structuring *100% Melbourne*, as the sequence builds the questions and their relationship to the performers onstage begins to draw attention to the affective dimension of everyday life that is frequently missing from data sets: experiences of discrimination, or omission, or of the lived-experiences of disability. As Mouffe suggests, 'The critical dimension [of art] consists in making visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate' (2013: 93). As if to make visible these missing dimensions, during Data Sequence rawcus highlights the affective dimensions of everyday life, in particular love as an everyday experience:

<i>Loves someone who doesn't love them back</i>	1 light
<i>Is loved</i>	5 lights
<i>Into love song dedications</i>	4 lights.

This sequence foregrounds subjective experiences of difference, but these experiences that are nonetheless telling for the ways in which they are absent from normative understandings of population data. For example: according to the Reserve Bank of Australia, in 2016 there were over 16 million credit card accounts and 41 million debit



cards in a population of 23.13 million (Finder). Yet of the cast members featured in *Data Sequence* only two have a credit card. This simple statistic has an affective impact on me as a spectator, as it reveals the numerous other seemingly small, but ultimately violent barriers that underpin economic exclusion from capital—which, in contemporary Australian society, is also an exclusion from political and social agency—all of which are part of the consensual organisation and distribution of populations and data. The regulation of bodies and situating of citizens in box-like systems of categorisation is part of this regime.

### The Logic of the Grid

In the final moments of *Catalogue* the focus on individual lived-experience as seen in *Data Sequence*—and otherwise present during the work in the form of monologic confessions or physical exchanges between partners or as solo actions—begins to give way to an exploration of how the individual relates to the multitude. Large close-up images of the faces of the rawcus ensemble are projected onto the back walls of the boxes, making a grid or patchwork of faces.



**Fig. 8.** rawcus, *Catalogue* (2015). Photo © Paul Dunn and rawcus

This patchwork projection grows as the faces start to multiply and new faces are introduced. Initially, my reading of these multiplying faces was to see them as a collapse of social difference and implicit in this reading was that the faces were also a representation of community. There was a foregrounding of diversity (both the diversity of disability experiences and other types of ethnic or gender diversity) along with a celebration of public visibility. In contrast to *100% Melbourne*, where the projected

images of the 100 non-professional performers often acted as a kind of macro-rendering of population data, the close-up faces of rawcus seem to suggest a recognition of the individual and the other within the midst of the multitude.

An alternative reading of the patchwork of faces in *Catalogue* also recalls a process of counting and the images closely resemble a grid of passport photos or other images of official documentation. As such, these faces can be read as part of the official weave of the state. As Scott points out:

If you wish to have any standing in law, you must have a document that officials accept as evidence of citizenship, be that document a birth certificate, passport, or identity card. The categories used by state agents are not merely means to make their environment legible; they are an authoritative tune to which most of the population must dance. (1998: 83)

Therefore, while the projected faces might be read as an image of diversity and heterogeneity, the grid-like format is historically associated with notions of uniformity and order.

The faces, which recall photos of official documentation, may also evoke images of victims of atrocity as shown in museums or at memorials. The archetypal examples of this are the images of Holocaust victims—including the many Jews, homosexuals and persons with a disability—that were targeted by the Nazi regime in Germany. These photographic images of victims of trauma and genocide are frequently displayed in grids. Yet, as performance scholar Laurie Beth Clark argues, while these head-shot images are meant to humanise the victims for the viewer, ‘their uniformity confuses our responses [and] this is compounded by the grid structure which keeps the victims’ images within an institutional frame when they are meant to reach out to us’ (2016; Williams 2007). In short, what Scott calls the ‘logic of the grid’, refers not only to the geometric order of city streets (the Melbourne CBD) but also the ways in which grid-like logics enables the state to view the population as uniform and ordered—the rank multitude as a utopian catalogue. History suggests that such utopian visions have at their core an exclusion of difference, with rawcus’ work animating the tension between the lived experience of daily life (a representation of diversity), and the informatic techniques of the state (the box, the grid).

### **To Close**

Finally, I’d like to briefly return to zoom in on the image of the Petri dish from *100% Melbourne*. The Petri dish is a paradigmatic example of 20th-century scientific achievement, a shallow glass dish used by microbiologists to study cell-cultures. In the 21st century, however, the Petri dish also suggests the movement towards genomics, the human-genome project, and the applications of DNA sequencing and bioinformatics that are perhaps the ultimate examples of how Big Data has the potential to radically alter our world (Stevens 2013). Through the combination of high-speed computer processing, software development and new methods of ‘data driven’ statistical management,

bioinformatics is aiding study into DNA sequencing of populations and species, including personal genomics companies such as US based 23andMe that offer DNA sequencing tests for ancestry, health, phenotype traits (such as height), and disability. Read against this image of scientific innovation, the data sequence of *Catalogue* begins to take on further dimensions.

If the grid of faces arguably recalls images of the Holocaust, a deeper reading of the Petri dish and data sequence suggests that the ultimate ramifications of state simplifications—informatic assemblages of statistics and demographics—may be seen at a cellular level. Indeed, disability scholars such as Tom Shakespeare draw attention to the ways in which the legacy of the so-called ‘medical model’ of disability—including the history of eugenics and simplistic ‘cultural constructions’ of disability—continues to persist in debates concerning disability and genetics (Shakespeare 1999). The contrasting images of the dish, the grid, and the sequence suggests that contemporary performances such as *100% Melbourne* and *Catalogue* reveal the different scales and complicated interactions between bodies on stage and informatic techniques, the way our everyday experiences intersect with, or resist, state models of legibility.

In different ways, *100% Melbourne* and *Catalogue* reveal the workings of the practices and institutions that create social order through the collection, manipulation and assembly of data. These performances make visible the ordering of bodies and subjectivities. Rather than a ‘dramaturgy of algorithms’, this analysis of the ways informatic assemblages create order, meaning, and structure narrative shows that consensual data gathering can obscure growing inequalities in income, education and health or ongoing discrimination due to race, ethnicity, gender, and disability.

However, these performances also lead me to suggest that the ordering of populations within consensual democratic structures might be challenged, not simply by including marginal subjects like persons with a disability or Melbourne’s homeless into existing networks of power—such as the Census, or the City planning and engagement policies—but by addressing why and how such networks of data might be interrogated through live performance. In the case of these performances, their arguably agonistic counter-narratives are also inflected by their relationship to informatic techniques of data processing. Indeed, by placing that ancient technology of the body on stage alongside bodies of data, these contemporary performances compel us to try to understand how the informatic processes that increasingly underpin our social relations are structured and how they structure our lives.

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## Notes

1. See Birgfeld, Mumford and Garde (2015); Dreyse and Malzacher (2008); Ferdman (2014); Hahn (2014); Martin (2013; 2014); Roselt (2015); Laera (2011).

2. Rather than repeating detailed descriptions of the 100% performance structure and content, I draw your attention to excellent accounts by Meg Mumford (2015), Keren Zaiontz (2014), and Marissa Fragkou and Phillip Hager (2012).

3. I was present during the development process for *Catalogue*, sitting in on a rehearsal and interviewing Artistic Director Kate Sulan, and company members Hannah Bradsworth and Nilgun Guven as part of the *Beyond Access* research project (2015). The interview can be found at: <http://www.artsaccess.com.au/beyond-access-case-studies/>

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