



Thursday, November 03, 2005

De Quincey: Nerve 9

De Quincey: Nerve 9; **Where:** North Melbourne Arts House; **When:** till 12 November; **Running time:** 1 hour
Writer: Hilary Crampton

Who are we, what are we without the gift of speech? How does speech become language? And how does language function as a tool of both power and oppression? All these questions emerge out of **Tess De Quincey's Nerve 9**, drawing on the feminist writings of **Julia Kristeva**.

Nerve 9 refers to the 9th cranial nerve which is involved the functions of the oral cavity – stimulating the fleshly mechanisms by which we create utterances from pre-verbal states to fully developed speech. **Tess De Quincey** takes her audience on a dark and strenuous journey through nine episodes that excavate, investigate and expose the connection between flesh, emotion and mind in relation to speech. A sound score that blends ambient noise, stuttered syllables, and statements that speak of both beauty and power supports her. The voices are always female. Visual projections emphasise or counter her actions – scenes of industrial sites, the busy confusion of electronic snow, and words that tumble chaotically, stream across the screen and her body, or move in orderly ranks.

This is an extraordinary performance. **De Quincey's** movement has a viscerality that awakens an equally visceral response from the onlooker. From her first tense, asymmetric distortions – like a rock that is threatening to burst asunder, **De Quincey** moves through what seems to be a progressive development – emulating infantile gestures, seeking instinctively for sensory stimuli like a new born marsupial finding its way out of the pouch, then moving on – exemplifying growth in a simple but also astonishing transition to full height.

She plays with space and her relationship to us – at times approaching so close, that it is almost invasive, as she undulates, mouth agape, eyes closed. She counters this intimacy with a retreat up stage, becoming remote, diminished by the projections on the screen, pressed down to the ground. In the dark space only one element of colour is present – a touch of red – a long string captured at one end in her mouth that could be interpreted in many ways relating to life, to connections to others or to loss. It stretches across the space ultimately entangling her.

De Quincey has been well served by her collaborators – **Amanda Stewart** who provided poetry, vocals and visual poems, audio-visual designer **Debra Petrovitch**, **Francesca da Rimini** for text, and **Russell Emerson** and **Richard Manner** for additional design elements.

This is a powerful work built on serious intellectual content. There is potential for profound emotional impact. It is not an easy journey for audiences, but perhaps exemplifies that fundamental core of any art work – it evokes responses beyond the verbal, the rational, the reasonable – awakening those feelings of shared but unacknowledged experiences by which we are able to empathise with others.

Venue: Arts House | North Melbourne Town Hall, Errol St, Nth Melbourne; **Performance Dates:** 2 - 12 November, 2005;
Performance Times: 7.30 pm; **Bookings:** 9685 5111 or www.northmelbournetownhall.com.au;
Further Information: www.northmelbournetownhall.com.au