

## **Assessment**

Catherine Fargher's *BioHome: The Chromosome Knitting Project* is outstanding. It is compelling in performance and haunting in memory. I was privileged to be part of the audience when Catherine Fargher gave an acclaimed performance of *BioHome* on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2006 at the Playworks Conference, *Invisible Boxes*, at Drill Hall, Rushcutters Bay, NSW. The project website <<http://www.biohomeproject.com/history.html>> offers a stimulating and lucid account of the project's history and design, including Fargher's collaboration with sound designer, Terumi Narushima.

Imbricated in the inspiration, research and development of *BioHome* is Fargher's active interrogation of and engagement with both the science of biotechnology and a wide range of contemporary art practices that offer critiques of a science-mediated body / life / future. (A list of cited works would be valuable addition to the website.) In the section called "Installation," Fargher's descriptions evoke the meticulous and original design of the work.

In performance, Fargher's inspired choices and multi-layered juxtapositions make new colours from the performer's familiar palette of settings, objects, metonymy, actions, costume, lighting, projected images and recorded sounds, as well as varied performed behaviours, performance styles, modes of address and the power of a solo performer to move from persona to persona. Fargher invites the audience to enter the work through multiple channels as if we are at once: (not an exhaustive list) a bonded tour group enjoying our inspection of a radiant, science-solved present / future; students eager to discover how it feels to touch the instruments of knowledge; participants made powerful through our decision to accept the offer to don a costume / persona that grants a few lucky ones the right to manipulate those instruments; a jovial audience, tickled by irony, and reassured through our laughter of our existence as discerning, witty individuals; physical bodies wincing as if we are the knitted doll being subjected to clinical invasion; and, participants in an unsettling, even disturbing, trespass into a 'set' that is concomitantly domestic space, a dolls' house that ought to envelop us in familiar safety, and a laboratory / surgery, whose alchemical transformations lure us into a black hole where the displaced pain of domestic inadequacy is absorbed and intensified as a medically sanctioned procedure that will solve everything.

Catherine Fargher performs science as a trespass that appropriates the human face. In adopting what the script calls the Scientist Persona, Fargher represents, in performance, the scientist as a persona whose mask is the human face itself. The Scientist Persona becomes an arbiter of human destiny, not by assuming a material mask that appropriates attributes of gods, spirits, heroes, ancestors or animals, but by remaking the face itself as sophisticated achievement of science and its marriage with public relations. Fargher makes visible, and risible, the self-cloaked face of authority with its patina of certainty and security. At the same time Fargher's *tour-de-force* is to make visible through the sheen, the ought-to-be concealed emotions that

authority represses, such as doubt, cruelty and fear. It is a well-observed, compelling performance.

In her research, her written text, her successful collaboration and in her performance, Fargher demonstrates great skills, creativity and originality. The precision, coldness and vocabulary of the science of bio-technology collide with the softness, confusion and terror of the 'natural' world. There is brilliance in the ironies Fargher creates with the setting of one performed context against another. In short, I loved the work and the rich complexity of the world presented through an inventive interaction between live performance, projected performance and audience.

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