

## **The Theatre of live art**

by Theron Schmidt

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When we were trying to decide which shows we might want to see and write about, one of my fellow writers on this project said she wanted to avoid anything "overly indebted to theatre (capital T)". I think I know what she means. Part of what's been exciting for me about the discovery of work called 'live art' is its revolt against the assumptions and expectations of theatre, its invention of new forms of encounter with performing bodies, and its affirmation of the visceral as equal partner to the cerebral. And yet, I'm also struck by how what goes around comes around. [...]

Augusto Corrieri's *Quartet* (for Anna Akhmatova), though thoroughly immersed in the contrivances of the theatrical, has been one of the most 'live' works I've seen. *Quartet* begins with Corrieri introducing to the audience what he's about to do. He talks about his discovery of a story of something which happened at Milan's La Scala opera house in 1913, in which the orchestra conductor failed to start the music for a solo dance sequence by visiting ballerina Anna Akhmatova. She performed her routine in silence, and when she left the stage, the music began, playing to an empty stage the score that was intended to accompany her.

Corrieri's telling of this story is just a casual introduction, the sort of thing that happens all the time as audiences sit comfortably in their theatre seats—and yet his gracious, attentive manner creates a real sense of openness and a gentle feeling of co-presence.

As expected, *Quartet* takes place in four parts, each introduced by Corrieri. The lights go down and come up between each part, but otherwise there are no lighting effects and no surprises—nothing but the bare stage, a microphone on a stand, a tennis ball, a glass of water, and Corrieri himself. In the first part, *The Movements*, Corrieri stands and moves on the stage through a series of mimes, pauses, indecipherable gestures and minimal dances. He interacts with the objects but does not move them—for example, he reaches for the cup of water and leaves it where it sits while miming raising it to his lips and drinking. In the second part, *The Objects*, only the objects move. Of course, they won't move on their own, so Corrieri has to manipulate them, but he does this while standing to one side of them, moving beside the trace of his previous movements. In this section, for example, he raises the cup of water but at arm's length, and pours it where his lips previously were but where now there is nothing but air.

In the third section, *The Music*, three music tracks play, as Corrieri stands to one side. And when the final section is revealed to be *The Words*, I expect everything to be recovered, to be packaged up and made sensical. Partly, this is what happens; some of the more bizarre movements are given a somewhat plausible rationale by the accompanying text. But mostly what is striking is the way that the text keeps opening outward, referring to stories of events, stories told by other people, memories half-forgotten, and dreams and fragments linked only through their performance. "Everything around us is possibly on the verge of disappearing. Only a few things make it into memory," Corrieri says (at least as I remember it). "This movement. This microphone stand. This shirt. This. This. This", he says, without gesturing to anything. "This. This. This. This."

I'm pretty sure that this suddenly wide-open space—written and overwritten with traces of presence and representation, what I saw and what I thought I saw—is Theatre (capital T).