

# Provocation

Barbara Campbell

## the movement of ghosts

In her durational performance, *1001 nights cast*, Barbara Campbell cast a story into the ether every night for 1001 nights from 21 June 2005 to 17 March 2008. Each story had been written for her during the day by a pool of (by the end) 243 writers scattered across the globe. With only a few hours to write and a limit of 1001 words, each writer was responding to a writing prompt Campbell had extracted from one of that day's newspaper stories about events in the Middle East. At sunset (according to Campbell's location), she opened the live webstream on the 1001 nights website [1001.net.au] and told the new story to unseen audiences in unknown locations. The stories, as spoken, could only be witnessed in real time, but in text form, they remain on the site's archive as ghosts of their one-time voicing.

In a faraway land a gentle man dies.  
His bride is bereft. She travels across continents  
looking for a reason to keep living.  
Every night at sunset she is greeted by  
a stranger who gives her a story to  
heal her heart and continue with her journey.  
She does so for 1001 nights.

This is what she had to do for 1001 nights; the number had been written down, passed to her. There was no question that she would not be faithful to the number.

And she was. And now that those nights have passed, she thinks about all of the strangers and how they gave her their stories, how it seemed like mouth-to-mouth resuscitation; that taking in each one was bringing her a little closer to a consciousness of the world outside herself; how the two—she and the world—had to find each other again.

But she remembers more than the taking in of the breath. There was the nightly exhaling too; breath vibrating with sound, and behind that, a force—something that pushed that breath through wires, through air, over vast stretches of water and land and into unseen dwelling places. She couldn't see the ends of her breath. She just had to imagine that it was going somewhere.

She breathed in and out for a 1001 nights...and now? Now she is resting. But what of the stories? Sometimes, she can see signs of their movement. It is like the movement of ghosts.

some  
kind of  
friend

What is the point of a ghost story that doesn't scare you out of your wits, that doesn't even raise the hairs on your neck or make you sleep with the lights on? What is the use of a ghost story that's as ordinary as shopping for groceries or listening to the radio in the car?

—from the story for night 661 by Kate Latimer

another  
ill phe-  
nomenon

I've been a liar and a thief, and I've been a criminal convicted of the oddest things. But none of it compares to the sight of you in that strange New York eatery, eyes blazing with anger at your computer.

—from the story for night 680 by Peter S. Petralia

paying  
for a  
bullet

The future—anything much above Krieg Strasse—was a complicated maze of new stores and incomprehensible roadblocks, easy to get lost in. Plus, it had a funny habit of turning into the past. Some old fucking corners came out of nowhere or bars/residences he didn't recognise at first but then like whoa. Aghh. Past. Past. Get out of there.

—from the story for night 878 by Tim Etchells

someone  
who was  
there

The ceiling above Mikhail's bed shed bits of plaster in his hair during the night. But he would not sleep on the floor under any condition.

—from the story for night 681 by Ella Longpre

shimmer-  
ing  
glass

I was behind her. I swear I remember this right. She was sitting on the bed with her back to me, holding up the Japanese doll and whispering to it, and when I put out my hand to flick the switch, she snapped, "Don't!" And for some reason, I knew immediately that this was directed to me, not the doll.

—from the story for night 935 by Jane Goodall

in the  
middle of  
a canal

Now Bertha is talking: "When I was watching you in the middle of the river from the bank on the far side, I saw a man coming towards me along the road. I called out to him to see if he could help. I approached him, but then he was gone and I felt a very cold shiver run through me." The ethnographer starts to smile, checks himself, looks to see how the other Bougainvilleans are responding to this story.

—from the story for night 961 by Paul Dwyer

some-  
thing for  
everyone

There were old people, I think, and young ones, too. Just—everyone, it seemed like. I didn't recognise faces. I don't know what they were waiting for. It was getting dark.

—from the story for night 810 by Robin Bale

*Barbara Campbell has performed in both hemispheres, in museums, galleries, public buildings, photographs, on film, video, radio, and the internet, in silence and with words, still and moving, since 1982.*