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## MAPPING STATES AND BODIES: COLLIDING WORLDS

- By Deborah Jowitt, The Village Voice, March 3rd, 2003



Matteson and Poulson in See Level  
(photo: Tom Brazil)

Sitting at the Kitchen, waiting for David Dorfman's new See Level to begin (it's there through March 8), I get dizzy staring at the soft-focus rippling water projected on a screen mounted in front of a clear plastic sheet. Then I notice that behind this in the dimness, people are lying on the floor, some with arms held up and tilting to one side. They look like beached crabs or sea grass. They begin to walk as the drowsy, almost imperceptible hum of Chris Nugent's electronic score (performed live) begins to build. When does the piece "start?" Maybe when the soothing, group-therapy voice says, "I'd like you to imagine that the edge of your body is the coastline of a nation." Can we also imagine that coastline joining with those of other nations, bays and peninsulas nestling together? Or would hostilities emerge and the entities repulse one another?

That's what this uncannily beautiful work seems to be about: our bodies as sovereign nations attempting or refusing to integrate. And how daringly Abby Crain, Paul

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Matteson, Jennifer Nugent, and Joseph Poulson do this. Leaping and plunging, twisting and rolling, sometimes in unison, they catapult fluidly yet wildly as free agents, but when they meet, skin presses into skin, bodies are canted into the air, joints bend to accommodate curious linkages. People are upside down as often as they're right side up in this quest for, or denial of, intimate union. Sometimes they try to copy one another's dancing, and when Dorfman appears he seems a wary outsider, imperfectly echoing something he sees and then retreating.

Video and designs by Samuael Topiary and lighting by Blu combine magically to drown the dancers in, say, patterned water that covers the back wall and white floor, or to open windows of light behind them, or turn their world momentarily sunlit. Peck's sound score is sometimes gentle, but more often overwhelming, catastrophic. Just as you think the performers are going to melt in the heat of it all, witty duets emerge. Nugent engages Matteson with the request, "I want you to imagine me." Matteson obliges. She disapproves. As she exhorts, he gets increasingly turned on by being her. Then she tries to be him, which works pretty well until she embraces Poulson, at which point Matteson insists, "That isn't me!" in a panic of sexual insecurity. This is all wonderfully wise and funny. Crain and Poulson later have a provocative dialogue of their own.

In the middle of the piece, Dorfman has a solitary, demented outburst, during which, shockingly, he reveals a black tongue. But at the end, after the orgies of dancing have finally quieted down, and the backdrop has shown for a few second not land masses and maps and seas but apartment buildings, he unobtrusively lines up beside the others. Would that nations tried so skillfully and doggedly to unite!