University of Sussex

Marie-Anne Mancio

D.Phil

Maps for Wayward Performers

feminist readings and contemporary live art practice in Britain

[1997]

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted, either in the same or different form, to this or any other University for a degree.

Marie-Anne Mancio December 1996

Preface

The performances themselves are the main primary sources from which this research is drawn. This was supplemented by interviews with practitioners, after-show discussions (both formal and informal), conversations and written correspondence with other figures in the live art world. For secondary sources, I consulted all the issues of *Performance Magazine* and *Hybrid*, and those (to date) of *Live Art Magazine.* Occasionally, there have been reviews in fine art journals such as *Artforum*, as well as articles in local and national newspapers. Where possible, I have seen video documentation, press releases, programmes, photographs and scripts (if available), and consulted Arts Council documents.

When citing practitioners, I have used the convention of '...' to indicate a pause in speech, and to differentiate from my omission of words or sentences (indicated by '[....]').

Abbrieviations

ACE	Arts Council of England
ACGB	Arts Council of Great Britain
I.C.A.	Institute of Contemporary Art
LAA	Live Art Archive
LAL	*Live Art Listings*
MAC	Midlands Arts Centre
NRLA	National Review of Live Art
SBC	South Bank Centre
sf	science fiction

Illustrations

With the exception of the photograph (p.29), all the illustrations are my own composite images, derived from appropriated photographs, paintings, and so on. Therefore, none of these illustrations have appeared in this format anywhere else.

Photograph of Mat Collishaw, Damien Hirst, Mike Landy, Andy Fairhurst and Gary Hume by Timothy Greenfield Sanders 29

Composite image of publicity photographs of Bobby Baker from *How To Shop* and *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* (photos by Andrew Whittuck); *House and Gardens* magazine cover (October 1996); text my own and gleaned from aforementioned publication 79

Composite image of publicity photographs of Rose English (by Hugo Glendinning) from *My Mathematics*, *Tantamount Esperance*, and *The Double Wedding*; stamps on stamp mounting paper 99

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Composite image of photograph of Annie Griffin (by Chris Nash) in *Skylark* and photographs of Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara and Clark Gable as Rhett Butler from *Gone With The Wind* (David O'Selznick, 1939) 136

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'By the Most Various Routes and Roads' : an introduction

There is a substantial history of what has been variously described as live art, performance art or visual theatre practice in Britain; however, this type of work still suffers from the lack of a critical language with which to approach it. Hence an impasse between the concerns of the practitioners making the work, and those of the reviewers writing about it, persists. Academics - and this includes notable feminists too - have not, on the whole, addressed live art practice. British live art is especially ignored (for reasons which I will go on to outline), and yet there is evidence of a renewed energy in the form. The task of this thesis is to begin to redress these omissions by attempting to examine in detail some aspects of British live art that extend the possibilities of feminist performance beyond the already well-documented political theatre models. By employing a series of theoretical paradigms, this analysis also seeks to suggest some strategies for reading live art that do not condemn it to closure.

If the 1970s were characterised as the decade in which performance art flourished, and the 1980s as that in which it acquired some status as a fashionable artform (influencing advertising and film for example), in the 1990s, British live art has become more institutionalised in educational establishments. This can be explained partly by the number of ex-practitioners who have since moved into academia - Stuart Brisley, Claire MacDonald and Marty St. James, to name a few. It is equally likely that American universities such as the Tisch School of Arts, New York University (which has been offering programs in performance at a postgraduate level for several years) have been useful exemplars. Now that there are comparable courses in Britain, at least at undergraduate level, it could be argued that structures exist for a reappraisal of our approaches to reading live art. Live art at this juncture, then, faces a crucial moment in critical discourse.

I have chosen to focus my research on the British scene, not because I wish to suggest that it is wholly distinct from its equivalent in the U.S.A., Australia or the rest of Europe (though it may well be), but because it is the work that has suffered most keenly from a lack of critical discussion. Perhaps this is primarily to do with an inability to categorise live art: traditional theatre with its strong literary bias has all but disowned it, whilst visual art tends to privilege the object (even a video) which is more obviously suited to exhibition conventions. Another difficulty is that the British live art scene is somewhat parochial, not necessarily in its concerns but in terms of the exposure of its practitioners. The I.C.A., London was asked to curate a touring show of British live art for the U.S.A. in 1996 where groups such as Forced Entertainment (who have been established for over a decade in the U.K.) were introduced to American audiences. Yet performance artists in the U.S.A. (people like Lydia Lunch or Annie Sprinkle) are already well-known here; that I have seen considerable work from abroad may be due to a more aggressive curating policy on the part of British arthouses such as the I.C.A., the Zap Club, Brighton, and others importing performance. There is also more published research on these American performers so the lack of material on British live art might reflect the exigencies of the publishing market. My own research speaks of practitioners who, if not British, have been based here; theirs is performance that arises from - even if it does not appear to reflect - the experience of making live art in Britain.

This thesis' emphasis on women engaged in live art has three main advantages: it enables the practice of some women working in what is a notoriously ephemeral form to be documented, and so remembered; it encourages feminist criticism to extend its application of theoretical paradigms to performance; and it highlights the potential of the latter to deal with feminist concerns. Feminism's relationship to the performance art of the 1970s is well-documented through reference to American practitioners;[1] despite this,

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[1] See for instance Moira Roth (ed.) *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America 1970-1980* Los Angeles, Astro Artz, 1983

feminist approaches to live art have largely failed to adopt a theoretical stance. Compounded by the fact that research into feminist performance usually favours that strand of work emerging from theatre rather than from fine art, typical responses are akin to straightforward reviews. So, paradoxically, whilst much live art by women derives from an (oblique or explicit) engagement with debates around the gaze, spatiality and so on, feminist criticism has been slow to apply its own methodologies of analysis to such practice. The same does not apply to journal articles - and again Claire MacDonald's contribution, this time as a writer and editor, has been paramount. (She is also in the process of producing a book on women and performance due for publication by Routledge at an unspecified date in 1997). Nonetheless, an overview of major publications in the field illustrates the lack of material dealing specifically with theory-based analyses of British live art practice by women.

These include Nick Kaye's *Postmodernism and Performance* (1994) which engages with postmodernist theory but concentrates on American work; Henry M. Sayre's *The Object of Performance* (1989) is wide-ranging (covering dance, visual theatre, land art) but again predominantly American. Sue Ellen Case begins to articulate a useful notion of a feminist poetics in *Feminism and Theatre* (1988) though her discussions of performance art are drawn from examples of American work. Whilst Peggy Phelan takes a psychoanalytical approach in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), her definition of performance is broader, encompassing everyday acts (such as demonstrations for instance) not necessarily intended to be performances. Her focus, too, is American. Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock's *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985* (1987) collates primary sources relating to the British scene that might otherwise have been lost. Though invaluable, it is understandably short on analysis and does not discuss the changes in live art practice occurring over the book's specified period. Lizbeth Goodman's *Contemporary Feminist Theatres* (1993) does place greater emphasis on British work but approaches performance from a literary criticism/ theatre studies methodology, and concentrates on fringe and mainstream

feminist theatres. Her chapter on what she calls 'performance art' is brief and centres on the theatre group Tattycoram (who are not live artists as such but who have taken on board certain performance art strategies).Whilst Goodman's work is undeniably thorough, it continues in the tradition of Michelene Wandor's seminal forays into feminist performance criticism with their concentration on female roles and women playwrights.[2] *Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance* (ed. Catherine Ugwu, 1995) focuses on both British and American work and assumes a broader theoretical stance but emphasises creative rather than strictly academic responses, providing artists with opportunities to discuss their own practice through visual and poetic strategies. Robert Ayers' and David Butler's (eds, 1991) *Live Art* also features contributions from several British live artists about the current scene, but its prime usefulness is as a practical guide (to funding applications and so on).

Another reason for the invisibility of live art in Britain may be an ambivalence, from women also, about the current scene. It is not surprising perhaps that at the point when live art's institutionalisation was occurring, ex-performance artists were announcing its death. Practitioners such as Mona Hatoum and Rose Garrard have moved back to object-making, claiming that performance no longer has the edge that it had in the early 1980s when they were making work. Whilst they were evidently speaking from their own perspectives, it should not be forgotten that others were arguing of 1980s work that its dialogue with form had engendered excessive formalism, a lack of political intention and a shift from the more spontaneous experiments of the 1970s. I would claim that recent work has signalled a return to the politicised role that live art (then known as performance art) practice took on in the 1970s, and that the presence of a new generation of artists such as Mary Duffy and Susan Lewis are reinventing live art as a political instrument. The dialogue with form has not disappeared, but is less consuming perhaps. The current situation then, as I perceive it, is that live art is shifting and

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[2] See Michelene Wandor *Look Back in Gender* London and New York, Methuen, 1987

expanding once more to encompass those other perspectives - particularly black - that were often left undiscussed in considerations of earlier practice. Again, I would identify this shift as deriving partly from aggressive programming policies and funding initiatives; however the impact of cultural theory, prompted of course by events at grassroots level, should not be underestimated.

To this end, the work that I examine hails from the past decade (that analysed in detail ranges from 1987 to 1995), although I have avoided writing an historical overview. Rose Lee Goldberg's study: *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (1979, revised 1988) is (though now out of date) an invaluable contribution to that genre, attempting to be international and comprehensive. At the same time, Goldberg's brief does not lend itself to the detailed level of analysis for which I am arguing, so I have concentrated on only a few practitioners. However tempting it would be to claim, as some on the live art scene do, that live art in itself is just a funding category and that definition is irrelevant, definition in fact presents itself as an issue in the very act of choosing which work to discuss. Nick Kaye expresses perfectly a general insecurity about the ability to define live art when he says

> the definition of what live art is as a practice, as distinct from recognising it when you see it, is frequently taken, even by those who think of themselves as practicing,[*sic*] teaching or writing in the area, as a critically uncertain, contentious, even an unhelpful exercise[3]

For my purposes, I am using 'live art' to refer to a basically interdisciplinary practice which privileges process, which very often involves the performers' own experiences, which is not homogenous or linear, which destabilises discrete categories. I am aware that my definition, and hence my decisions, are by no means uncontroversial. Forced Entertainment in particular have been discussed as theatre[4] and even receive their funding from the Drama section of the Arts Council (indeed their full name is Forced

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[3] Nick Kaye 'British Live Art' *Performance Art Art and Design* no. 38, 1994, p.87
[4] See Alison Oddey *Devised Theatres* London & New York, Routledge, 1994

Entertainment Theatre Co-operative!); and yet I have categorised them as live artists. This is because they, probably more than any other group of their generation, have been so influential on the live art scene and in fact have received more recognition there than elsewhere. Similarly, Annie Griffin's recent work could quite easily be assimilated by film practices but her dialogues with live performance and her positioning within her own work recalls a live art approach to the medium.

The criteria for inclusion in the main body of the thesis were that the practitioners were female and that their concerns related (broadly speaking) to those of a feminist agenda. I have included Forced Entertainment because to omit them on the basis of the sex of some of its members appears to me to risk negating, yet again, the contributions of women within a co-operative structure. I also decided that I had to have seen the performances live (at least once) since documentation where it exists is rarely adequate. Unlike drama criticism, which usually relies on a script as opposed to its interpretation in one specific performance, live art cannot be assessed in this way. Scripts - if they exist - seldom yield enough information; nor can they be performed by stand-ins;[5] the performance is too reliant on the process of its creation and there are moments which refuse to be consigned to a literary format. Even video documentation frames certain moments for the viewer at the expense of others she may have preferred.

I have not attempted to survey the practitioners' entire careers since I felt that this might, again, have privileged the overview rather than the microscopic gaze. Thus I have embarked on another process of selection which is highly subjective. Although I hope to have selected those works that I feel are richest for analysis, I would not claim that they are necessarily representative of live art generally, nor even of each practitioner's output. Forced Entertainment is a case in point: *Speak Bitterness* (1995) is leaner and less lyrical

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[5] Having said this, Marina Abramovic has recently proposed recreating other artists' performances. See Sally-Anne Huxtable 'Fifty is just the beginning' *Make* no.73, December 1996/January 1997, pp 3-5

than the earlier piece - *Emanuelle Enchanted* (1992) - to which I refer. Similarly, Rose English's early shows were more suspicious of theatricality than her later ones are. Since I wanted to prove that performance is still a vibrant form, I have chosen to review those practitioners who are making such work (at the time of writing). There are therefore some omissions which may appear surprising, but which are nonetheless justifiable: I have excluded Marina Abramovic on the count that she is more European-identified; Anne Bean and Mona Hatoum have mainly shifted away from performance to object-based work, as have Rose Garrard, Monica Ross and Rose Finn Kelcey. At the same time, I should add that I could just as easily have chosen to discuss Dorothea Smartt, Marisa Carr, Chila Burman ... and so on.

If this thesis cannot claim to offer either a comprehensive or a representative view of the live art scene in Britain what it hopes to propose are (feminist) strategies for reading live art. Above all, it asserts that an artform as heterogeneous and unpredictable as live art requires an equally wide-ranging theoretical critique. Simply put, the analytical tools with which we might examine theatre just will not suffice for live art. It claims that the artform, certainly in its manifestation through the work of these artists, is able to recuperate debates around gender and identity (social-sexual) that perhaps fine art or theatre have finished with. I hope that it might also serve another purpose - that of providing documentation of several performances.

The thesis mimics the nature, if such a generalisation is permissible, of live art itself: it has no linear narrative; the practitioners it chooses to juxtapose are marked as much by their difference as any commonality; it foregrounds the problems of documentation; it draws on several languages; it resists conclusion and it recognises its 'author's' subjectivity. In welcoming the mistake, the improvised moment, in privileging what I saw, what I remembered, what I felt, what I looked for, what I laughed at, these descriptions are evidently going to be partial (in both senses of the word).

Part One explores to some extent how British live art figures in the current socio-political/ cultural climate, as legible through various institutions. It also asks what being a live artist might entail. Its main intention is to contextualise practitioners and to give a sense of the kind of issues that they face, and how these might differ from those facing women in the artworld more generally. ***Part Two*** could almost be viewed as an exercise in documentation. It begins by asserting the need to theorise live art, then takes six case studies of practitioners working in the field and, through a variety of critical tools, presents text-centred analyses of their performances. These chapters are intended to highlight live art's potential to explore issues of importance to a feminist aesthetics, and to rehearse some approaches to deconstructing the work. ***Part Three*** seeks to ascertain whether an historical approach to documenting and theorising live art is desirable or feasible. It questions the usefulness of discourses of creativity and the avant-garde (as they have hitherto been theorised), arguing that they only serve to re-refer live art practice to the margins of contemporary culture.

Part One begins with **A World of Their Own.** Drawing on Alan Bowness' Reith lecture about the artist's route to success, this chapter reasserts the belief that women's work is disadvantaged in this sphere. Through an examination of the current Britart scene, I also propose that live art in its present state (in Britain at any rate) is not conducive to women gaining increased representation in the art establishment.

The Unimportance of Live Art explores in brief the history of live art practice in this country and its position in a critical forum. This chapter proposes that live art is characterised by persistence and that it has survived despite a lack of critical appreciation, and despite its desertion by some former exponents. It also suggests that the appearance of live art as a respectable subject in educational establishments has not yet resulted in the parallel development of a critical language for reading the work. By looking at the character of the extinct specialist journals - *Performance* and *Hybrid* - I argue that live art needs new strategies of reading to negotiate the resurgence of politicised work.

"Tax Payers' Money" and Live Art Funding delineates live art's notoriously chequered funding history (which began with the unpromising lack of a category for allocation). This chapter proposes that whilst many funding schemes were inadequate, the efforts of a few key individuals outside of, and at, the Arts Council were effective in promoting live art (within education for example). It also attempts to gauge the extent to which live art has sufficient support structures in place to facilitate experimentation.

Taking several practitioners of different ages and backgrounds, **Practitioners Making Their Entrances - and Exits** discusses some means of entry into the live art field and suggests that these are broadly identifiable as being related to certain factors (such as being influenced by visiting practitioners). It also examines live artists' subsequent departures from performance and attempts to discern whether the form itself is too difficult to sustain for the length of an artist's career (for practical or other reasons), or if external factors are responsible.

Part Two opens with **Practice Makes Theory,** in which I argue that there is too much at stake in allowing live art to remain undertheorised. I go on to say that, despite the disadvantages of live art's introduction into the academy, there are benefits in reading art through theory and, equally, that live art's distinctive nature challenges us to create new ways of theorising.

She Does Not Know Her Place: Bobby Baker and the Live Art of Trespassing looks at Baker's ability to behave differently in prescribed spaces and, in the process, to render them different. It asserts that her practice, as understood through theories of spatiality, reinvigorates the public/private dichotomy familiar to feminist theory. The chapter also analyses Baker's subversive treatment of what Henri Lefebvre has defined as 'monumental space' and evaluates the role of the critics who have generally described Baker through the metaphors of madness in order to reassign her to a traditional place.

Rose English's practice spans almost twenty-five years and she has been called 'the Queen Mother of live art'; abroad, she is considered 'so English'. **The Queen M(other): Rose English** compares the mythic quest for an authentic Englishness to Lacan's notion

of the search for the Other. The chapter explores the trope of duality in timescale (a present that is overly conscious of the past), gender (a fascination with cross-dressing) and audience response (the covert rebelliousness that rarely overcomes a begrudging respect for authority figures), arguing that Rose English confuses dichotomies.

Looking B(l)ack: Susan Lewis Remembers the Body looks at the black female body and its embodiment of a British Diaspora experience through theories of displacement and memory. Drawing on Foucault, this chapter suggests a strategy for reading Lewis' display of the constructed dancing body, and her use of 'culturally specific' symbols. It proposes what Foucault would call a counter-memorial reading in place of essentialist narratives.

Gone With The Wind: Annie Griffin and the Film Star(e) examines Griffin's use of technology to disrupt the scopophilic gaze. Referring to feminist film theory, it suggests that Griffin succeeds in rescuing the female body from the sentence of total invisibility that some feminist practice has conferred upon it. I propose that Griffin's live works function in their relationship to the audience like the 'women's films' of 1930s/1940s Hollywood and that they frustrate totality through the juxtaposition of live and mediated body and other devices.

The Case of Alba Bewick, Model Patient: Mary Duffy Operates examines the work of thalidomide practitioner Mary Duffy through the related discourses of medicine and art theory. It questions whether the deployment of language (in the guise of speech and illegible markings) in Duffy's work enables her to resist the traditional patient narrative and to reclaim her autonomy. Drawing parallels between the supine art historical nude, the silent patient, the diagnostic text-book description and the character of Alba Bewick (from Peter Greenaway's film *A Zed and Two Noughts*), I claim that Duffy is able to remain embodied without being co-opted into the role of victim.

'Blossoming into a Vast Electronic Night': Forced Entertainment claims that the co-operative have created a series of fictional spaces in their performances, comparable to those of paraspace or zone in postmodernist science fiction. These, along with the tropes of entropy and negentropy, and the presence of both utopian and dsytopian worlds, function to destabilise fixity in language(s), spaces and identities. I argue thus that the

reader is made to engage with the work through the same sense of recognition and alienation evident in the sf novel.

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Part Three restates this thesis' commitment to theorising live art practice. **In Search of a Place in History** takes the debate over the proposed Live Art Archive as symptomatic of the problems of privileging a historicist view. I go on to suggest that whereas the creation of most artworks sees the process whereby they are made, and the documentation of the finite objects as two temporally distanced 'events', this is usually not the case with live art practice. The integration of process and documentation, often evident in the latter, therefore necessitates the embracing of a spatial, non-linear model of representation.

In **Out of Time: The Avant-Garde** I explore the usefulness of temporal metaphors for reading live art. I reject theories of the avant-garde, claiming that the concept is problematic in any case for the feminist critic (because of its attendant notions of creativity and genius), and that even spatial readings of avant-gardism are in danger of replicating outsiderism. I conclude that Kristeva's concept of simultaneous time is, if still not ideal, a possibility.

A World of Their Own

The question of success is almost irrelevant for the live artist. Whilst this may be true for many artists, success remains more quantifiable and rewarding (both financially and critically) for the fine artist. Alan Bowness' 1989 Reith lecture *The Conditions of Success: How The Modern Artist Rises to Fame*, for example, speaks of 'four successive circles of recognition' necessary for an artist's career if 'he' is to become renowned: 'peer recognition', 'critical recognition', 'patronage by dealers and collectors' and 'public acclaim'.[1] Bowness' text, however, is irretrievably gendered, as becomes apparent by the ease with which the author uses 'he' and 'the artist' interchangeably. This chapter seeks to assess whether the traditional route to success (as outlined by Bowness) necessarily disadvantages women fine artists; or if it can offer them the same benefits as their male contemporaries. In short, is the successful woman artist in the British art world of the 1990s any better off than the live artist? And if so, what is her relationship to feminism?

Bowness notes that 'peer recognition' occurs primarily within the education system, yet several of my practitioner case studies reveal gender biases in curricula and even assessment criteria. In order to contextualise these isolated incidents, I briefly examine the impact of women's in/exclusion from the art school. I go on to compare it with their experiences of a theatrical background (the other main route into live art), suggesting that these do not foster the image of woman as *producer*. It is a truism that 'critical recognition' plays a large part in a fine artist's success in the 1990s. In this section, I ask whether the substantial growth in feminist art publishing has assisted women artists or altered art world priorities. Through an examination of the (critical) creation of the Britart phenomenon, I assess the current position of the woman fine artist and her relation to feminism. Using a range of anecdotal and statistical evidence to address Bowness' third category of patronage, I suggest that women's roles as curators and dealers are

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[1] Alan Bowness *The Conditions of Success: How The Modern Artist Rises to Fame* London, Thames & Hudson, 1989

still compromised by inequalities in the art world. This situation contrasts sharply with the high visibility of female promoters on the live art scene. I note that since galleries rarely produce live art works, performance is not the ideal means whereby women can achieve broad recognition. Finally, I question Bowness' idea of public acclaim through a discussion of the importance of the photograph - both of the artwork and of the artist. I suggest that the photogenic quality of a piece of work has almost superseded all other considerations and that this may not favour the live artist either. I conclude with a sole photograph of what I perceive to be the art world's reaffirmation of the image of the contemporary artist (namely, young, white and male).

Education

For Bowness, the first circle that the young artist must negotiate is where '[his] equals, his exact artistic contemporaries'[2] recognise his talents. Since this usually occurs within the art school, it is imperative to remember the history of British art education and how support for the woman artist was rarely forthcoming. There has long been a division between the concept of the dedicated professional artist and the so-called Sunday painter or hobbyist; not surprisingly these terms have frequently been gendered. Paula Rego's son, for instance, noted that

> Mum was very discriminated against. Dad [Victor Willing] was always considered a very important painter, but we'd go to private views and Mum would be asked if she was "still dabbling in that painting"[3]

This attitude has a considerable historical pedigree, as exemplified by the status of the life class, from which female students were initially barred, in educational establishments. Pamela Gerrish Nunn has outlined the developments in art education occurring in nineteenth century Britain[4] and both Griselda Pollock[5] and Lynda Nead[6] have stressed the importance that the life class was

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[2] Alan Bowness, 1989, p.11

[3] Nick Willing 'Relative Values' *The Sunday Times Magazine* February 6th 1994, p.12

[4] Pamela Gerrish Nunn in Nottingham Castle Museum *Women's Art Show 1550-1970* Nottingham 1982, pp 21-25.
For instance, it was not until 1861 that women had the opportunity to attend 'status' art schools. Even though the Slade School, University College opened in 1871 with what it claimed was an egalitarian policy towards pupils of both sexes, women were barred from its life study classes until 1893. Likewise, the Royal Academy which was founded in 1768 did not permit women into its life classes until 1894.

[5] Roszika Parker & Griselda Pollock *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981

[6] Lynda Nead *Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* London and New York, Routledge, 1992, see pp 46-7

accorded: 'from the Renaissance to the hey-day of the Academy in the nineteenth century, [the nude human figure was the basis of] the most highly regarded forms of painting' and placed at the top of the hierarchy of artistic genres.[7] Consequently, women were 'also constrained by the fact that they had no power to determine the language of high art'.[8] Linda Nochlin's important paper 'Why have there been no great women artists?', written in 1970, argued that even the 'single instance of deprivation or disadvantage - the unavailability of nude models to art students' meant that

> *institutionally* [it was] made impossible for women to achieve artistic excellence, or success, on the same footing as men, *no matter what* the potency of their so-called talent, or genius[9]

Two women artists - Angelica Kauffmann and Mary Moser - were amongst the founding members of the Royal Academy. However, as Whitney Chadwick notes, in Johann Zoffany's group portrait *The Academicians of the Royal Academy* (1771-2) the women 'were not among the artists casually grouped around the male models'; they appear instead as 'painted busts' on the wall. Hence:

> Kauffmann and Moser have become the objects of art rather than its producers; their place is with the bas-reliefs and plaster casts that are the objects of contemplation and inspiration for the male artists[10]

This emphasis on the female as model rather than maker, finds a parallel in theatrical training. Acting was not socially permissible for a woman (despite the existence of so-called actress courtesans dating back to Ancient Greece) until the Commedia dell'Arte and female actors were not truly instituted in Britain until the end of the seventeenth century. Once the notion had been embraced, women were expected to pursue performing at the expense of assuming more directorial roles. According to Sue Ellen Case, this situation seems to have deteriorated further: 'from 1660 to 1720 over sixty plays by women were produced on the London stage - more than

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[7] Roszika Parker & Griselda Pollock, 1981, p.35
[8] Roszika Parker & Griselda Pollock, 1981, p.115
[9] Linda Nochlin 'Why have there been no great women artists?' (1970) in Linda Nochlin *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* London, Thames & Hudson, 1994, p.176
[10] Whitney Chadwick *Women, Art and Society* London, Thames & Hudson, 1990, p.7

from 1920-1980'.[11] Hence the stage functions as an arena for male producers, Simon Fanshawe noting:

> There remains an obvious kind of discrimination in the theatre against women [...] of the 240 productions reviewed in The Sunday Times last year [1995], only 28 were of plays written by women; of the 2,800 plays received, commissioned and unsolicited, by West Yorkshire Playhouse and by Hampstead Theatre last year, only 20% were by women; of the seven original productions at the Traverse in Edinburgh, one of the most impressively risk-taking and forward-looking theatres, none were written by women[12]

Howard Becker has claimed that, far from acting autonomously, 'critics frequently make the same discoveries gallery owners make, and the two groups collaborate to promote these painters and sculptors whose innovations they find attractive and critically acceptable'.[13] In the British art world of the 1980s and 1990s, we might extend this circle of influence to the art school as institution. Val A. Walsh claims 'Female art students have accounted for 50 to 60 per cent of all students since the 1890s (and mainly drawn from the upper classes)'.[14] Yet any idea that discrimination has been eradicated from education is dispelled by Lubaina Himid who states:

> What a shock it was though to realise that the art school was not a safe place, free of racism and sexism [....] Why and how did so many women during the 1980s in British art schools become undermined, undervalued, discouraged and in some cases defeated.[15]

There is doubtless a connection between the traditional bias of art history and the lack of female tutors. The position for black artists, however, is worse still as they are already disenfranchised from (higher) education and remain largely invisible as artists. Himid continues 'The teaching profession [...] is one that is, shall we say, curiously, closed to us',[16] and calculates 'There are at the time of writing [1990] only a handful, by which I mean perhaps five, black women in

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11 Sue Ellen Case *Feminism and Theatre* Hounsdmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire, MacMillan, 1988, p.38
12 Simon Fanshawe 'Women will not be written off' *The Sunday Times* January 14th 1996
13 HS Becker *Art Worlds* Berkeley, LA, London, University of California Press, 1982, p.113
14 Val A.Walsh 'Eyewitnesses, not spectators - activists, not academics: feminist pedagogy and women's creativity' (1995) in Katy Deepwell (ed.) *New Feminist Art Criticism* Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1995, p.51
15 Lubaina Himid 'Mapping: A Decade of Black Women Artists, 1980-1990' (1990) in Maud Sulter (ed.) *Passion (Discourses on Blackwomen's Creativity)* Hebden Bridge, Urban Fox Press, 1990, p.66
16 Lubaina Himid, 1990, p.66

teaching posts in Arts Schools in Britain'.[17] The disparity is most evident though in the post-art school situation where, for the black woman artist, 'Commissions are rare, one notable exception being Rochdale Art Gallery in Lancashire'.[18] Debbie Duffin similarly notes:

> In 1991 (the latest figures available from the Department of Education) over 65 per cent of British Fine Art graduates were women; the proportion of practitioners is roughly fifty-fifty; and yet in 1991 84 per cent of solo shows in top London commercial galleries went to men.[19]

Of course there have always been artists who have not followed the traditional art school route, but these are the exception. If it is rare for people to arrive at an artistic profession without education, it is even rarer according to Timothy W. Luke that they will engage in an exhibition or performance without the benefit of education. Luke writes:

> Without a BA, MA or MFA one almost need not enter the show: [...] it takes the union card of university training even to get complete access or to gain full appreciation at the exhibition[20]

It appears then that women seeking recognition within orthodox structures have had to insert themselves into educational systems initially designed to exclude them. In terms of prevailing cultural models, their assumption of the role of producer (as artist/writer/director) has been problematised, they are encouraged to take on the subordinate role. Whether negative experiences of the education system are less detrimental to the live artist than the fine artist is debatable, but perhaps the former is better positioned to question existing structures and forced to work outside of them.

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[17] Lubaina Himid, 1990, p.67
[18] Lubaina Himid, 1990, p.67
[19] Debbie Duffin 'Exhibiting Strategies' (1995) in Katy Deepwell (ed.) *New Feminist Art Criticism* Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1995, p.62
[20] Timothy W.Luke *Shows of Force* Durham and London,Duke University Press, 1992, p.215

Critical Recognition

If the 1990s has witnessed a re-politicisation in live art, then this is certainly not true of the British art world generally, concerned as it is with promoting yBas (young British artists). Various commentators have attempted to identify the *zeitgeist*; Lynn MacRitchie enthuses in *The Guardian* 'The Turner Prize may be over but the buzz around young British art continues'[21] and Martin Gayford of *The Daily Telegraph* notes: 'Anyone who takes an interest in such things will know that there is currently a great deal of razzmatazz about Young British Artists'.[22] For Heidi Reitmaier - editor of *Make* (formerly *Women's Art Magazine*) and *Versus* - these

> Young British and American artists [in the '90s] are negotiating the space in a way where their politics or their "position" might not be that obvious and to some this is a problem, a lack of allegiance.[23]

On one level, the rejection of issue-based work could be said to be a consequence of political shifts to the right and a broader sense of resignation to a postmodernist ethic. A loss of faith in the so-called 'grand narratives' and a backlash against 'political correctness' have not served feminism well. Suzi Gablik has blamed the supremacy of a negative deconstructive postmodernism and 'masculine' values for the prevalence of cynicism. In *The Re-enchantment of Art* she writes:

> Is there, then, no way out of the alliance between capitalism and culture? Is deconstruction the only answer - cultivating paradox and leaping, as it were, over one's own shadow? Implosive strategies demand going to extremes - until the system devours its own empty forms, absorbs its own meaning, creates a void and disappears. And so there is a policy of going nowhere, of not occupying a position, of hovering in place, having no positive horizons, no goals, no constructive alternatives.[24]

Arguing instead for a reconstructive postmodernism, Gablik proposes the art world adopt 'feminine' paradigms such as a renewed sense of community and responsibility, an enhanced ecological perspective, and a spiritual dimension.

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21 Lynn MacRitchie 'Begging for Scraps' *The Guardian* December 12th 1995
22 Martin Gayford 'Youth, formaldehyde and the spirit of the age' *The Daily Telegraph* November 15th 1995
23 Heidi Reitmaier 'What's a gaze between friends?' *Women's Art Magazine* no.65, July/August 1995, p.16
24 Suzi Gablik *The Re-enchantment of Art* London and New York, Thames & Hudson, 1993, p.40

On another level, however, individual protagonists on the current scene embrace a conservative ethos which is, again, likely to discourage ideological stances. If the Saatchi Gallery is one of the most prominent collectors of contemporary art then 'the dealer with the highest profile'[25] is Jay Jopling:

> Jopling has described in the February 1994 edition of *Everything* the type of work he supports: '[...] I'm not at all interested in issue-based art; for an issue-based idea would have to be pretty extraordinary to stand out beyond the relevance of that particular issue. I'm interested in art which has a certain degree of universality and is able to transcend certain cultural and generational differences'.[26]

At this juncture, we might enter Bowness' second circle where 'recognition [...] comes from those who talk and write about art - the critics'.[27] Whereas live artists have failed spectacularly to even get critics to attend their shows, a range of art critics have actively encouraged an apolitical version of Britart. (Indeed, the question mark over current art criticism is the extent to which it has been responsible for *creating,* rather than just validating, the yBas). More importantly, how has it affected women's position within that categorisation? Simon Ford's incisive article 'Myth Making' traces the creation of the phenomenon. Examining a selection of contemporary writing on the yBas, Ford claims: the Damien Hirst curated exhibition *Freeze* (1988) is commonly credited with starting the trend; artists have been codified and their heterogeneity co-opted as just another attribute; the Saatchi Gallery's *Young British Artists* shows (1992 onwards) 'cemented the label and defined the movement's parameters'; and the yBa myth 'is inextricably connected with the myth of Goldsmiths and by extension the myth of British Fine Art education'.[28]

Whilst Britart cites 'the popular and the vernacular', Ford argues, this is only to convert it 'via pastiche to rejuvenate a moribund high culture'.[29] In short, its audience is a college educated one; as Catherine Bennett articulates in her article on Goldsmiths:

> With Hirst came Ian Davenport, Grenville Davey, Simon Linke, Julian Opie, Fiona

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[25] Simon Ford 'Myth Making' *Art Monthly* no.194, March 1996, pp 7
[26] Simon Ford, 1996, pp 7-8
[27] Alan Bowness, 1989, p. 21
[28] Simon Ford 'Myth Making' *Art Monthly* no.194, March 1996, pp 3-9
[29] Simon Ford, 1996, p.5

> Rae, Sarah Lucas, Glenn Brown, Gary Hume, Brad Lochore, Marcus Taylor, John Frankland, Carina Weidle. To those in the know, it's almost a full house of Young British Artists.
> To anyone who either lives outside London, is not an art student, or has the misfortune to be over 35, these names may not conjure up very much.[30]

What emerges from the juxtaposition of various accounts of Britart is an unofficial picture of the yBas; instead of just innovative, hip, young, commercial, risqué, crazy,[31] we see that this 'gang' are in fact all London-based, white artists, mostly middle-class and 1960s-born, and predominantly *male*.

Yet, paradoxically, the expansion of the yBas has ushered in a generation of female artists who are at least 'well known' (and certainly more so than live artists of their age). That is not to say that they have attained equal representation and financial recompense in comparison to their male counterparts. In 1991, the art book *Technique Anglaise: Current Trends in British Art*, for instance, contained what Lynne Cooke called an 'unprecedented' number of female artists, and Andrew Renton had been able to claim for it 'We didn't balance this list out by gender, it just balanced itself'.[32] Yet three years later, in *Shark Infested Waters* (the Saatchi Collection of British Art catalogue, which is representative of a generation of yBas), only 13 of the 35 featured artists are female (including one who works in a partnership with a male artist). Of these, I would argue that only Jenny Saville and Sarah Lucas are making work explicitly to do with gender, and even their art is deliberately ambiguous.

If Ford is correct in supposing that critical exuberance has raised yBas to mythic proportions, then it is interesting to discuss where feminist criticism has located itself in the debate. Bowness is very specific about who qualifies for inclusion in the category of 'critics', stating '(And I mean

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[30] Catherine Bennett 'Gold diggers of 1995' *The Guardian* May 5th 1995
[31] See for example Kevin Jackson 'Young Art Runs Free' *Arena* April 1996, pp 60-67
[32] Andrew Renton & Liam Gillick (eds) *Technique Anglaise: Current Trends in British Art* London and New York, Thames & Hudson, 1991, p.35

serious critics and, not art journalists)'. Though he does not nominate any suitable contenders, again the *gender* that Bowness employs to describe them is revealing:

> he [the critic] has spent a great deal of time looking at the art of today, talking with the artists, reading his fellow critics, he acquires an authority which has to be recognized.[33]

Since Bowness never explicitly mentions feminist art critics, it is perhaps unfair to surmise that he would dismiss them. However, it is possible that he would reject them on the grounds that feminist art criticism remains a marginalised form. Despite the growth of debate around art history, as pioneered in Britain by Pollock *et al,* there is still little evidence of mainstream critics asking questions about the under-representation of women artists in shows, and so forth. Frances Borzello's paper addresses this issue, noting that regardless of the increase in feminist art publications, feminist voices are still largely absent elsewhere:

> when the exhibition is of a man's work, feminist comments are unheard. After visiting the Tate Gallery's Richard Hamilton exhibition in 1992, I waited with interest for the critics of the national press and weekly journals to comment on the disturbing sequences of paintings centred on women and cars, women and consumer goods, women and cosmetics. I waited in vain, of course. But it was equally pointless to look for a feminist critique [...] in the feminist magazines, which understandably concentrate their resources on reviewing works by women artists.[34]

It could be argued that the role of feminist art criticism is problematic anyway, in so much as it unwittingly reinforces the notion of women's art as a discrete sphere operating outside of 'Art' generally. It is particularly interesting to see how feminism has dealt with the so-called *bad girls* within yBas (Lucas is one of their number). Marc Quinn, Damien Hirst and Jake & Dinos Chapman have long epitomised the *bad boy* trend; they are touted as macho, dangerous and unpredictable.[35] Not to be outdone by their male counterparts, the *bad girls* (Tracey Emin, Sam Taylor-Wood, Rachel Evans and their equivalents in the U.S.A.) have promoted an image of

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[33] Alan Bowness, 1989, p.33

[34] Frances Borzello 'Preaching to the Converted? Feminist art publishing in the 1980s' (1995) in Katy Deepwell (ed.) *New Feminist Art Criticism* Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1995, p.21

[35] See for instance James Hall 'A very good head for figures' *The Guardian* July 8th 1995; Robert Chalmers 'Dissecting Damien' *Life Magazine The Observer* May 26th 1995

themselves as sexual, promiscuous even, aggressive and difficult. For certain institutions, notably the I.C.A. who curated a *Bad Girls* show in 1993, and even *Elle* magazine who 'billed' it, these women represent a gamut of feminist positions. However outside of those spheres, and in the wider context of art criticism, such readings are ignored.

The reasons for this, I suggest, are twofold. On the one hand, even feminist criticism has not yet come to terms with all the changes that have occurred in the London art world since the late 1980s. *Make* is the major British feminist periodical dealing with women's art and whilst it has included interviews with female yBas, its focus remains more historical and academic. Baldly put, it lacks the 'street credibility' of magazines like *frieze*.[36] Part of the project of a feminist periodical like *Make* is usually to introduce little known women artists to a new audience, but this is redundant with the *bad girls*. They are already fashionable and in demand; they do not *need* 'discovering'. Several have even been given the 'Sunday papers supplement' treatment.[37] Georgina Starr, for instance, born in 1968, has already shown at the Tate Gallery's *Art Now* space (March 1996) and has commissions for exhibitions extending into 1998.

Secondly, however frustrating it may be for feminist criticism, these women and others since have distanced themselves somewhat from the feminist agenda. Fran Lloyd has made a convincing case for the *bad girls* as subverters of gender codes in an article which, ironically, appeared not in *Make* but in *Contemporary Art.* Even she has admitted:

> although clearly indebted to previous feminist work, [they] have generally avoided being grouped together exclusively as female artists or as feminists in the label-wary 1990s. Like Madonna, they are open to the criticism of using the system to re-cycle the sins of transgression as spectacle but, in their case, in the peculiar,

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[36] This is hardly surprising; the latter emerged in mid-1991 in the wake of the aforementioned 'inception' of Britart (Hirst's *Freeze* show). Its market is international and commercial, it uses colour, its style relies on inventive play with graphics and other youth market tactics. In the August/September 1996 issue, *Women's Art Magazine* was relaunched as *Make*, its editor - Heidi Reitmaier - attempting to update the magazine. It remains to be seen whether the new format is purely cosmetic or if changes such as the inclusion of male writers will engender a diluted feminist politics.

[37] Will Harvey 'Bodies of Work' *Observer Life* Sept. 10th 1995 [Gillian Wearing, Georgina Starr and the Wilson twins]

> expanded art market of the late 1980s [38]

I would dispute Lloyd's point though that these artists suffer from a wariness of labels; they seem quite happy to exist as yBas, Britart or *bad girls*. The yBas' uneasiness with feminism becomes apparent when we examine some of their statements. On being questioned about the relationship of gender to her work, Starr says:

> I do think about being a woman and making art, but it is definitely not a main issue in the work. I happen to be a woman and because of that I am interested in certain things.[39]

Tracey Emin asserts 'It makes me puke [Britart] the whole fucking thing. But while I'm in I'll use it and make the most of it';[40] Sarah Lucas claims: 'I use sexist attitudes, because they are there to *be* used. I get strength from them';[41] whilst Abigail Lane admits:

> I always feel a bit embarrassed about this because I don't want to completely deny the whole thing, but it really doesn't come up as an issue. I don't have to state whether I am a feminist or not. I don't know whether that's good or bad [...] I do what I do and that seems to be enough. And I always think in a way, it narrows you down. I don't know why your paintings can't be approached on their own terms [42]

It is difficult to assess the position of women artists within Britart; are they successful because they have been co-opted into a male agenda, acceptable because ultimately they can be commodified? (One critic recently referred to yBas Jane and Louise Wilson's 'thoroughbred beauty [that] makes Tilda Swinton look like Nora Batty'[43]). It does appear that whilst feminist criticism reinvigorated the debate around the body and so forth, it has impacted less on the yBas than on previous generations of women artists. The natural, if sometimes controversial, alliance of the 1980s between feminist critical theory and the work of successful (American) artists such as Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, Cindy Sherman and others cannot be presumed for British fine artists in the 1990s. The live artist, pursuing her (unfashionable) feminist agenda, is likely to find herself somewhat isolated.

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[38] Fran Lloyd 'Bad Girls: in bed with Madonna?' *Contemporary Art* volume 3, no.1, Winter 1995/6, p.42
[39] Heidi Reitmaier 'Things you always wanted to do but were afraid to ask' *Womens Art Magazine* no 68 Jan/Feb 1996, p.14
[40] Letter from Tracy Emin to *Make* no. 73, December 1996/ January 1997; see also Robert Yates 'First person singular' *The Observer Review* December 17th 1995
[41] Sarah Kent *Shark Infested Waters* London, Zwemmer, 1994, p.58
[42] Heidi Reimaier 'First Date' *Women's Art Magazine* no. 64, May/June 1995, p.18
[43] James Hall 'Butterfly Ball' *The Guardian* November 14th 1995

Dealers and Curators

For Bowness, an artist's critical success is succeeded by patronage, but here again dealers and curators are not equally in enabling positions. Although it would be a gross simplification to suggest that if more dealers/curators were female there would be a greater number of successful women artists, it is difficult to see how the present situation could engender feminist voices. The Guerrilla Girls are based in New York and have been operant as a pro-active feminist group since 1984. Their interventions into the art world have included poster campaigns of artist statistics and personal messages to curators and institutions. They remain anonymous and when making appearances they are always (gorilla) masked. In an interview with them, Lorraine Gamman questioned their relevance for the British scene:

> It has been suggested that one of the reasons that Fanny Adams - the British equivalent of the Guerrilla Girls - didn't last very long or achieve similar success, was because the position of women in art in Britain is very different to America. It has been argued that women are well represented both as artists and as gallery directors in Britain's contemporary art world[44]

Although Gamman is surely right to question the cultural specificity of the Guerrilla Girls, anecdotal evidence suggests that the British situation is not so different from the U.S.A. Curator Elizabeth A. MacGregor's paper agrees that women's position within the art world has improved:

> In the past five years [1990-1995] there has been a small but significant shift in the positions that women hold within the art gallery and museum sector. Although most galleries within the local authority sector are still run by men, there is now one woman director of a national museum and of the six contemporaries funded by the Arts Council, five are led by women. It had to happen in the end - after all there are many more female fine art graduates than male[45]

However, she also demonstrates the way in which sexism has lingered by outlining the various roles that 'are projected on to women curators'.[46] Extra functions, often undertaken unofficially

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[44] Lorraine Gamman 'Are you being served with a mask' *Women's Art Magazine* no.66, September/October, 1995, p.22

[45] Elizabeth A. MacGregor 'The Situation of Women Curators' (1995) in Katy Deepwell (ed.) *New Feminist Art Criticism* Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1995, p.74

[46] These include the mother figure ('a role that woman curators easily fall into when dealing with difficult male artists'); the surrogate wife ('expected to 'service' the artist's every need, even outside the gallery'); the confessor ('the good listener'), the superwoman ('expected to perform miracles, often at great personal

by women, recall Howard Becker's assertion that an art world does not consist of just artists but of numerous people who, through 'an extensive division of labour',[47] have contributed to the production of the artwork. There are hierarchies involved in maintaining the art world; it is an economy which, for Becker, relies on an unending supply 'of interchangeable human parts'.[48] These, too, are rendered invisible in Bowness' art world since he ignores the hidden labour implicit in the artist's success. Where Bowness acknowledges that his artist's progression is due in part to those who support, theorise about, sell and consume the artwork, there is no mention of those who manufacture 'his' materials, clean the exhibiting space, type 'his' catalogue notes and so on.

Artist and curator Lubaina Himid opines:

> Britain has a worldwide reputation for spending minute amounts on art, both as government policy and as a nation of shoppers. [....] the early black women's shows that I curated existed on almost nothing. *Five Black Women* at the Africa Centre was staged without a fee to either selector or artists [...] There was no money at all for the selector or artists of the exhibition *Black Woman Time Now* at Battersea Arts Centre [....] *The Thin Black Line* at the I.C.A. was blessed with a little pocket money[49]

Maureen Paley's testimony reinforces the suspicion that a gender bias persists, claiming:

> From my experience in setting myself up as a dealer, I was always very aware that there was not only a closed shop for women artists but also for women as dealers. London is a 'boy's town', and the old boy network [...] is very much at work in the art world. I know that all the time I've been working, had I been a man doing exactly the same work that I'd been doing, I would have progressed much further than I have. I am not complaining, as I have been very successful.[50]

It almost goes without saying that the dealer and curator's influence on the recognition of the artist is paramount; for Janet Wolff this has privileged the male artist who is promoted within the current, dominant aesthetic - modernism. She declares

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expense'); the hostess and the prostitute (on attending a theatre performance with a senior executive: 'he clearly wanted the company of a younger woman for the evening and I wanted his company's money!)' see Elizabeth A. MacGregor, 1995, pp 70-72

47 HS Becker *Artworlds* Berkeley, LA, London, University of California Press, 1982, p.13

48 HS Becker, 1982, p.78

49 Lubaina Himid, 1990, pp.64-65

50 Maureen Paley 'On Women Dealers in the Artworld' (1995) in Katy Deepwell (ed.) *New Feminist Art Criticism* Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1995, p.99

> The Tate Gallery in London, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the other major institutions of modernism in the visual arts produce and sustain a history of art which is mainly a history of the achievements of men'[51]

So how can women intervene and challenge these spaces? The growing interest in museology as a discipline, the recognition that the gallery is a politically-charged space is one possibility: '[It] is no longer 'neutral'. The wall becomes a membrane through which aesthetic and commercial values osmotically exchange.'[52]

Intervention through performance, however, is more complex. Active attempts on behalf of the Arts Council and independent promoters to improve the standing of live art in British culture have been diluted by resistance from various institutions (and indeed live art's own resistance to those institutions). This is partly because live art can be a logistical nightmare and one that the art world's galleries (be they alternative or mainstream) are not particularly well-equipped to deal with. Larger, publicly funded institutions (such as the South Bank Centre, London) may have more substantial budgets to enable the commissioning of live art works, but they also have a greater commitment in terms of public access. *The British Art Show* - a survey of contemporary art organised every five years by National Touring Exhibitions - comprised, in 1995/6, 25 artists working in various media: painting, sculpture, installation, photography, film, video and computer animation were all represented; live performance was not. One of the show's selectors, Thomas Lawson (Rose Finn-Kelcey and Richard Cork were the others) claimed:

> We also looked hard for a way to include performance art in the exhibition but, after considerable research and debate, resolved that it would be nearly impossible to accommodate.[53]

Although Lawson does not elaborate, it is likely that the fact that *The British Art Show 4* was a touring exhibition (visiting Manchester, Edinburgh and Cardiff) made the inclusion of performance more problematic.

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[51] Janet Wolff 'Postmodern Theory and Feminist Art Practice' (1990) in R. Boyne & A. Rattansi (eds) *Postmodernism and Society* Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire, MacMillan, 1990, p.189
[52] Brian O'Doherty *Inside The White Cube* Santa Monica, San Francisco, The Lapis Press, 1986, p.79
[53] Thomas Lawson 'Unrelenting Jet Lag and Iron-Hard Jets' in *The British Art Show 4* (exh. cat.) The South Bank Centre,1995, p. 93

Public Acclaim

Bowness' fourth and final accolade is that of public recognition, but he is not forthcoming about how this might be measured. The other flaw in his argument is that success (even if it were quantifiable) cannot be achieved as easily in one artistic sphere as in another. Luke's definition of artistic reputation, for example, as a:

> product of one's treatment in the professional art press, the overall marketability of one's work, and the frequency counts of each one's numerous showings at prestigious venues of display[54]

cannot be relied upon to determine the live artist's credibility. She is likely to have been ignored by the majority of the art press, marketability is often irrelevant (in that 'breaking even' is often the best that a live art work can expect to do), and the prestigious venues are not going to promote much live art. Where women *have* made inroads in fine art spheres, this does not correlate to notions of success in more process-led practices such as live art. An analogy can be made here with craft-based activities. Ceramics artist and lecturer Kate Wickham has claimed, for instance, that as textiles and ceramics have always been women-dominated, 'making it' as a woman artist is not an issue in this arena: 'All the top artists are female'.[55] Rather, the struggle is one of persuading academics, even *feminist* academics to channel research into these arenas with the same enthusiasm that they have reserved for sculpture or painting.

Admittedly, contemporary yBas are not known beyond the art world either, however Damien Hirst's foray into pop music (directing Blur's *Country House* video) and the tabloid slant on his formaldehyde works have seen him cross that boundary. For this reason then I think we need to see Bowness' circles, negating as they are, as overlapping spheres. If or when public acclaim does occur, it is the expected response to the hype created by educational establishments, dealers, buyers, press. In simple terms, the system benefits all adherents: the art school gains in terms of increased applications and revenue, hence the ability to attract high quality staff; the

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[54] Timothy W. Luke, 1992, p. 225
[55] Conversation with Kate Wickham, February 24th 1995.

writings of critics will be seen as *au courant*; the gallery gains in prestige and commission; the price of the artist's work rises; and the buyer is deemed to have made a good investment.

The common denominator, the way in which the hype is sustained, I would like to suggest is the photograph. An artist's success is ultimately dependent perhaps on the number of times that her/his work is reproduced. As works are created specifically for the art/youth magazine market (*The Face*, *i-d*, *frieze* and so on), the photograph is paramount. Live art, it seems, has only recently become aware of the photograph's importance but, even so, an image can represent just one aspect of the work. It cannot become a substitute for it because it has removed the live component. Conversely, with fine art the photograph very often does become an adequate substitute when it doubles as an art magazine cover or as a centre page spread in a glossy art book or exhibition catalogue.

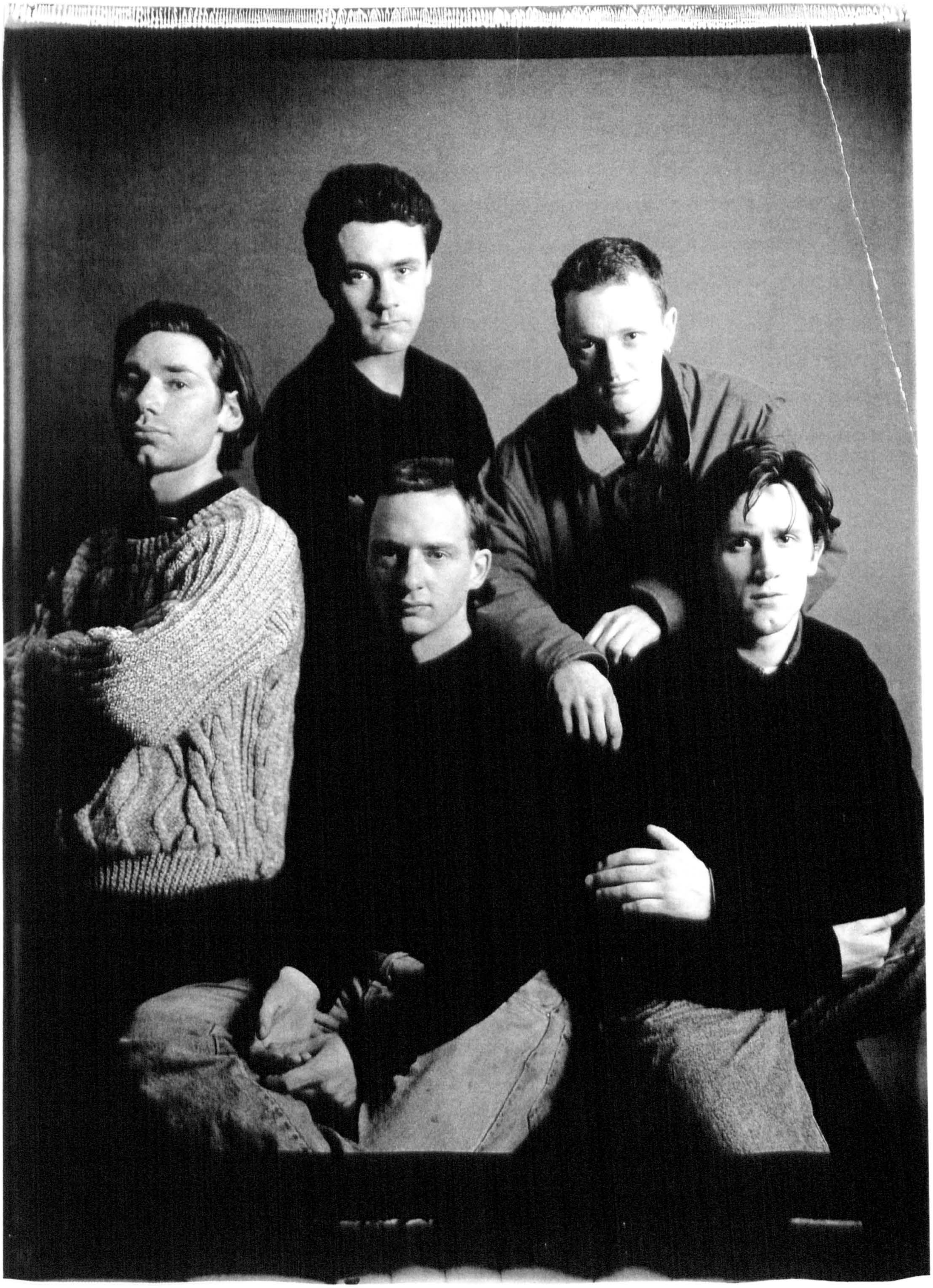
Often, the photograph presents the artist coupled with their work. This is not new - there has long been a tradition of placing the artist by the art work - yet here again live art is somewhat problematic in that very often the artist cannot be separated from the work. This makes it more difficult to distinguish between the twin products that the hype is selling - work and artist. Thus Jenny Saville for example, whose gargantuan canvases of naked women have her face, is often photographed, full length, beside them. Here she becomes literally smaller, confounding expectations of her obesity. Merely plump, she is rendered 'attractive' and harmless. Conversely, a live artist such as Rose English cannot be pictured *next to* her art work; she becomes it by transforming herself through disguise. Even where fine artists appear in their own work (Starr in her videos, Taylor-Wood in photographs), the end product is usually an artefact. The artist can thus exist outside of it in time and space. The live artist's (live) performance only reproduces itself as artefact in documentation.

What I am arguing then, is that the photograph of the artist often serves to reaffirm the gendering of the art world where men are artists and women are models, or artists who are also decorative, or absent. The photograph which follows is a classic example. Taken in 1990 by Timothy Greenfield Sanders, it is a portrait of the first generation of yBas: Mat Collishaw, Hirst, Mike Landy, Andy Fairhurst and Gary Hume. It has since appeared in the catalogue for the *General Release* exhibition at the Scuola di San Pasquale, Venice in 1995, sponsored by the British Council. At first glance, it seems an odd choice since only Hume of its protagonists actually features in the show. On closer inspection it becomes clear that it functions as the companion piece to a historical survey of Britart written by James Roberts (reviews editor of *frieze*); yet there is no corresponding portrait of seminal women artists. Without a trace of irony, the title of the survey, opposite the photograph, reads: 'Never had it so good....'.

To conclude, it seems apparent that whilst many inequities in the art world have yet to be resolved, the Britart trend has benefited several women artists. This indicates that support structures do exist for fine artists, and that women can manipulate these (if at the cost of diluting their feminism). That live art still lacks comparable support structures accounts, perhaps, for live artists such as Tim Etchells and Annie Griffin shifting their practice into other areas (playwriting and film respectively). It is worth noting that performance appears to command more attention in fine art spheres when it is the work of a *yBa* such as Georgina Starr (who, incidentally, does not use the term 'live art'[56]). The fact remains though that live art, the very form with arguably the most potential to explore feminist debate, is likely to leave its (female) practitioners invisible and marginalised; literally in a world of their own.

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[56] Starr was asked: 'Is there a connection between your work and feminist performances of the later 1970s and early 1980s?'; she replied 'I hate to think of my work as theatre but the last thing I did in Amsterdam was closer to performance art, theatre and film perhaps. Eventually, it became a performance. I wrote a script, thinking it would be a video piece but on the evening it became something I had never expected. It became a huge performance. I really enjoyed it. I would like to move more towards this kind of work. It was more invigorating than having an exhibition' Heidi Reitmaier 'Things you always wanted to do but were afraid to ask' *Womens Art Magazine* no 68, January/February 1996, p.14



The Unimportance of Live Art

This chapter attempts to outline live art's position within the cultural context of late 1980s and 1990s Britain. Of course in practice, aesthetic concerns cannot be separated from parallel issues of funding (grants to venues, initiatives for sponsorship and festivals, and so on); however, I intend to address those in a separate chapter. What I am most concerned to establish here is the *critical* context in which live art currently operates: that is, how it is perceived, what it is characterised by, and its general visibility as a cultural practice. I would like to suggest that live art's position within this context can be traced in the following ways: firstly, through an attempt to understand what characterises British live art of the past decade and how this relates to a feminist position; secondly, via its appearances on the arts scene; and, finally, through the form's treatment in national newspapers and specialist publications and its growth as an academic subject in educational institutions.

A Brief History of the Changes in Live Art Practice in Britain

Nick Kaye has identified British Live Art as a phenomenon that evolved:

> some ten years after its counterpart in the US and continental Europe, British Performance Art of the late 60s and early 70s was not only shadowed by the strength of the politically radical and largely text-based alternative British theatre, but shared some of its practices and concerns.[1]

Kaye's view is substantiated to some extent by John Ashford's chapter on performance art in *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain*. Writing in 1980, Ashford claims performance art tends to emerge from a fine art tradition, developing from an emphasis on process over product; a rejection of the art commodity market; an interest in kinetic sculpture; a renewed interest in Dadaist techniques of collage and juxtaposition; and further concentration on the found object. These 'markers' for the existence of performance, Ashford argues, echo parallel experiments in alternative theatre practice where small companies make work deriving

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[1] Nick Kaye 'British Live Art' *Performance Art Art and Design* no.38, 1994, p. 88

from personal histories rather than using external writers; the value of images borrowed from cinematic or television techniques is recognised; theatrical conventions are questioned; performances in non-theatre spaces negotiate the specificities of their environment; and multi-media companies practise interdisciplinarity. He suggests 'Such is the geography which gave rise to the peculiarly British activity of performance art'.[2]

Kaye traces performance art's development back to work being done in art and music schools, stressing continuously the 'marked difference in sensibility' between work made in Britain and that abroad. As an example of this difference, he cites Stuart Brisley's performances - I assume Kaye is speaking here of Brisley's early 1970s experiments especially - which

> while obviously related to the emergence of Body Art in North America and continental Europe from 1968, departed sharply from the formalist strategies of many male American performance artists, articulating overtly political contents through acts of endurance and direct negotiations with the viewer.[3]

This attempt to characterise British live art as inherently political has been taken up by Nick Crowe (a member of Index Theatre). He claims 'English work, European work. There is certainly a difference'.[4] The former, he suggests, deals with the particular, concerned with

> articulating the lived experience of this "somewhere":[...with] identifying the "Hereness" of their situation and for offering an audience often skewed and circumnavigatory paths, returning through the performance, to Here.[5]

Although hesitant about making generalisations, Crowe perceives an opposing tendency in European work to produce a 'cleaner' aesthetic.

Whilst Ashford, Kaye and Crowe are right to consider the importance of political theatre to performance art, the impact of New Dance[6] in the mid-1970s should also be mentioned. The

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[2] John Ashford 'The Jazz of Dreams: Performance Art' in Sandy Craig (ed.) *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain* Derbyshire, Amber Lane Press, 1980, p.102
[3] Nick Kaye, 1994, p.88
[4] Nick Crowe, Nick 'Well, yes...they really are a jolly good pair of shoes, aren't they?' *Versus* no.4, 1995, p.12
[5] Nick Crowe, 1995, p.12
[6] For an overview of the New Dance scene, see Judith Mackrell *Out of Line* London, Dance Books Ltd., 1992

first modern dance school - the London School of Contemporary Dance - was not established in Britain until 1966 and its presence facilitated access to performers from abroad. American choreographers such as Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs had been experimenting since the late 1950s with Happenings-based work, and post-modernists such as Meredith Monk were not just involving but actively foregrounding other disciplines in their 'dance' pieces. These influenced New Dance's aesthetic and its political intentions (an aim to democratise dance for instance, to render gender categories traditional to ballet, to oppose the tyranny of the ideal dancer's body) were probably significant, with practitioners like Rose English incorporating them into their shows.

Yet the question of live art's concern with politics is a vexed one because if British live art is seen to be distinguished from other work by an accelerated politicisation, how does this explain the frequently asserted belief that British live art became *depoliticised* in the 1980s? In 1982, for example, *Performance* was asking itself 'Is Performance Art Dead?'. Roland Miller, noted for his collaborations with Shirley Cameron, led the Midland Group's third Performance Art Platform and wrote fervently of the parasitism and narcissism threatening the form, referring to the 'deliberate obfuscation (through endless repetition, obscure theoreticising, trivial references)'. He argued that the demise of performance art was imminent and could only be prevented if it began to deal again with

> the problems of our existence [...] not as 'artists', but as sexed human beings living in a post-industrial, class and race divided Europe, threatened by immediate nuclear destruction[7]

The sense that a depoliticisation had occurred was confirmed by Rob la Frenais' uncharacteristically dramatic editorial for *Performance* magazine at the beginning of 1984. He wrote:

> As we go to press, people are being arrested daily, both outside Parliament and at Greenham Common, for last ditch protests against the now-sited U.S. cruise missiles. Perhaps now, then, is the right time to consider the position of the art community [...] in terms of

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[7] Roland Miller 'Is Performance Art Dead?' *Performance* no. 19, October/November 1982, p.4

> political visibility. Most artists [...] would still be filled with horror at the idea of political content in their work.[8]

However, the history of feminist performance in Britain does not comply so neatly with this narrative of politicised work in the 1970s and depoliticisation in the 1980s. According to Catherine Elwes (herself a performance and video artist), '"agit-prop" feminist performance' can be traced back to the British suffragettes' actions. For her, the demonstration at Greenham Common (by thirty thousand women in 1983) of which la Frenais speaks, was also a part of that tradition.[9] It is worth noting too that the notion that politicised work was somehow *better* than more formalist performances was not universally held. Claire MacDonald and Susan Croft have argued that this period of intense politicisation actually problematised the use of the female body in performance. They claim:

> In the political climate of the late seventies and early eighties it became harder for women artists dealing with more dangerous territory to have their work seen, understood or validated. Where performance addressed more contentious areas of desire and the erotic, this became increasingly confined to "safe" women-only contexts or was, until recently, marginalised or ignored by critics and documented, if at all, ephemerally.[10]

They cite the 1990s as the return from exile of 'the explicit body' which was 'virtually absent from feminist art practice of the 1980s' and explain this absence as one consequence of the late 1970s' and early 1980s' domination of 'pro-censorship' feminism, led by Andrea Dworkin and others. As MacDonald and Croft state, the body's comeback was heralded in *The Body Politic* - an exhibition at the Photographer's Gallery in 1987.

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[8] Rob La Frenais 'Editorial' *Performance* no. 27, December/January 1984
[9] Catherine Elwes 'Floating Femininity: A Look at Performance Art by Women' in Sarah Kent & Jacqueline Morreau (ed.) *Women's Images of Men* London, Pandora Press, 1985
[10] Claire MacDonald & Susan Croft 'Performing Postures' *Women's Art Magazine* no.57, March/April 1994, p.11

Although it is unwise to generalise about the reasons why any depoliticisation should have taken place, it should be viewed in the broader context of a deepening apathy on the part of the electorate, a cementing of the one-party system of government, and a post-feminist ethos. It is probably safe to assume that performance's subjection to formal concerns was partly to do with its acceptance into the galleries. Well-structured, highly imagistic and polished work was evidently going to be more welcome than the hit and miss spontaneity of one-off events popular in the 1970s. This is something that Ashford noticed as early as 1980. Although he qualified his statements with 'But such comments are so general as to be virtually worthless', he said, nonetheless:

> It is true that the work is often now given with greater authority, that it is better and more accurately presented, that there has been a movement towards more rigorously structured work, that new skills have been learned, that personalities and groups have deepened their interests rather than broadening them; and it is true that in this process a certain youthful explanatory vigour has been lost.[11]

In addition, what la Frenais *et al* were noticing was applicable to the art scene more widely. Though New York was still at the centre of the artworld and partly responsible for the mid-1980s boom, the effects were evidently felt elsewhere. The art object became prime again and indeed those artists who were the success stories of the period were primarily those who reflected this dialogue with commodification. (I am thinking here of ex-Wall Street broker Jeff Koons and ex-advertising graphic designer Barbara Kruger). In terms of performance, the American influence was just as important with Laurie Anderson's original blend of live performance, technology manipulation and incursion into mainstream pop being symptomatic of the stylish, refashioned aesthetic.

Decades are rarely as precise markers as convenience might wish them to be, however the early 1990s has witnessed an increased move towards a re-politicised live art practice. This might be a reflection of the new concerns of certain, now 'matured' practitioners, who have had to come to

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[11] John Ashford, 1980, p.102

terms with the legacies of Thatcherism's monetarist experiments. Rose English expresses this perfectly when she says:

> I now think it's much more radical for an artist to go and open a swimming pool as a swimming pool rather than an installation. That's reacting to what's going on at the moment. In the '80s it was a socially important gesture to go and make a library into an artwork. Now it's probably more important to defend it as a library.[12]

Equally, for Catherine Ugwu (deputy director of Live Arts at the I.C.A.) this re-invigorated live art practice is the result of the increased visibility of black practitioners. She asserts:

> We are currently witnessing the emergence of an energetic, forceful and politicised generation of black live artists who are breaking new ground in the articulation of the experience of a black community in crisis in Britain.[13]

It is perhaps too soon to assess the impact of feminism on these current manifestations of performance; on the one hand, practitioners such as Dorothea Smartt and Susan Lewis are expounding as much on the problematics of gender as of their ethnicity. On the other, the return of the explicit body in the work of Marisa Carr and her attempts to 'curate' a British *Smutfest* (transposing an American practice) have been met with some unease but with acceptance nonetheless. The *new bad girls* concept articulated by visual art (exemplified in Britain by young artists such as Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin, Gillian Wearing, the Wilson twins) has popularised the notion of an ambiguous and overt sexuality without addressing its attendant problems.

Live Art's Invisibility

Live art's visibility within the larger cultural scene is low. Although fine art has always recognised performance as a valid element of its practice, shows devoted wholly to performance-based work are rare. The practical reasons for this are obvious - performance can

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[12] Rose English 'Definition: Live Art' *Hybrid* issue 5, October/November 1993, p.38

[13] Catherine Ugwu 'Keep on Running' in Catherine Ugwu (ed.) *Let's Get It On* Seattle and London, Bay Press, 1995, p.56

be expensive, it is not permanent and it cannot then be sold. On the theatre circuit, live art is more invisible still for much the same reasons.

If performance - particularly in the guise of durational installations - can appear in galleries like the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, more theatrically-based work tends to appear at small venues. Rarely, larger theatres will incorporate live art into their programmes - the Barclays New Stages Festival appears annually at the Royal Court Theatre, London (though the festival's future is not assured since it was only ever intended to be a six year sponsorship scheme); similarly Rose English performed *An Evening With Rose English* at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1994 - but not on a consistent basis.

Again, funding is a key consideration, but even so there are venues which deliberately promote live art (such as the I.C.A. or the Zap Club, Brighton) and were even established to that end (such as The Green Room, Manchester); those at which live art can be seen on occasion if it happens to coincide with a particular event (Battersea Arts Centre's annual British Festival of Visual Theatre, for example); and venues at which live art is extremely scarce or non-existent (Southampton City Gallery). It has to be admitted that live art is more easily sought out if one is already 'in the know' about it, and since it is the 'alternative' venues that tend to showcase it, live art remains at the margins of the cultural scene. The reluctance of larger, established spaces to stage live artworks is exemplified by Manchester City Art Galleries which stated in 1994:

> We do not have a specific policy of promoting live art because our galleries are not particularly suited to it. There are also a number of other venues in the city doing this, principally The Green Room, Cornerhouse and Holden Gallery at Manchester Metropolitan University.[14]

Equally, the Tate Gallery at Liverpool argues

> Tate Gallery Liverpool has not pursued a live art programme in its first six years, largely because we do not have a suitable space. This, however, we hope to put right in a planned re-development of our gallery spaces. We have not yet begun to discuss a live art policy[15]

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[14] Written correspondence from Howard Smith to myself, September 21st 1994
[15] Written correspondence from Judith Nesbitt to myself, June 7th 1994

Implicit in the aforementioned statement is the fact that the showing of live art was never a consideration when the gallery was in the initial planning stages; in addition the reorganisation alluded to does not appear to have had any effect on policy. The Tate's statement was met with derision by Bryan Biggs[16] who is responsible for commissioning work for the Bluecoats Art Centre gallery. The latter is also situated in Liverpool but, though considerably smaller and less well-funded than the Tate, it has an excellent record of showing live artworks. This is true also of the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, which has moved from music-oriented live performances to (since 1989) a specifically 'dance and physical/visual theatre' based programme. Amongst its objectives, it includes the promotion of 'new and innovative dance, theatre and live art and work which is of an inter disciplinary [*sic*] nature, identifying and initiating collaborative projects'.[17]

However, another indication of live art's standing compared to theatre is the Edinburgh versus Glasgow arts scene in Scotland: whilst Edinburgh's Festival remains the ultimate gathering for theatre groups and even attracts tourists, Glasgow's National Review of Live Art survives mainly through the efforts of its Co-ordinator Nikki Milican and receives no national press attention. Though the Review began as a day-long event in Nottingham (1980), then London, it was based in Glasgow from 1988-1990, and again in 1994 and 1996. Despite inviting international companies and practitioners, the festival has not raised its profile sufficiently outside of live art world; in 1991 and 1992 there were insufficient funds for a Review to be held at all, and it is now a biennial occurrence.[18]

Live Art Studied and Reviewed

B.A. courses dealing exclusively with live art practice are still rare but many have grown out of the notion of interdisciplinary practice and combined studies. Probably the first to initiate a

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16 Interview with Bryan Biggs, Liverpool, July 21st 1994
17 Policy statement on 'Arnolfini Live' Bristol, Arnolfini Gallery, n.d.
18 For a history of the NRLA, see Jason E. Bowman 'Plotting Itstory' *Hybrid* issue 5, October/November 1993, pp 2-4

theoretical approach to what was then called 'integration' was the *Creative Arts* degree at Crewe & Alsager College of H.E. (now part of Manchester Metropolitan University). From 1986, it revised what had simply been a modular approach to include a compulsory core theory program at its heart. Whilst students were still able to make up their degree profile from modules in dance, visual art, drama, music or creative writing, these discrete subjects were then supposed to interrelate in the creation of a practical project, and this interrelation was to be substantiated from a theoretical viewpoint.

Almost ten years on, a special education issue of *Live Art Magazine* [19] details no less than 43 institutions all over the country running courses that claim to have components related to live art practice. Although the terminology used by each institution to describe its activities differs, phrases commonly alluded to seem to fall into distinct frames of reference. As might be expected, the traditional drama school is sufficiently unsure of its 'avant-garde' *enfant terrible* to refer to it in quotation marks as 'new performance' (Central School of Speech and Drama). In comparison, 'visual performance' (Dartington College of Arts) or just 'performance' suffices for Central St. Martins. Other institutions familiar with fine art language appear to see live art as an aspect of 'time-based art' (Duncan of Jordanstone College; University of East London), though the University of Wolverhampton states 'Installation and Performance Art may be studied within the Sculpture subject area'. Elsewhere, terminology clearly reflects the cross-artform practice that live art is: 'interdisciplinary' (Nottingham Trent University), 'combined and media arts' (Sheffield Hallam University) or 'conceptual and visual hybridization' (Kingston University). In a statement that has not altered significantly over the past decade, Manchester Metropolitan University refer to 'live arts'. Dartington College also speak of 'live art', reflecting their history of contribution to experimental artforms (New Dance in particular).

What has certainly changed, since even the early 1990s, is the advent of postgraduate courses now based on the study of live art practice, the M.A. at Nottingham Trent University being one

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[19] *Live Art Magazine* issue 4, November 1994/January 1995

example, and that at De Montfort another. However, these changes have meant that although live art has achieved some form of credibility, any research that its students generate is then difficult to 'place'. This is primarily because a parallel movement of growth in critical discourse is barely perceptible. To return to John Ashford's writing of 1980, he noted of live art's reception:

> National newspaper critics, faced with a theatrical artefact which relies neither on plot nor character in the usual sense, have largely given up - if they ever bothered to make an attempt in the first place. It is sad and damaging that the work which is at the forefront of experiment is the least publicly discussed.[20]

Rob la Frenais, ex-editor of *Performance* magazine, asked in 1981 whether the two paths to performance art - namely visual art and theatre - should be treated equally from a critical viewpoint. His conclusion was that whereas visual artists appeared to be using theatrical and narrative forms for the purpose of conveying meaning, theatre companies experimenting with visual forms had 'been forced into isolation from the main theatre community by the challenging nature of their work' and 'unwittingly [found] themselves being evaluated by art-world standards.'[21]

An article in the *Independent*[22] entitled 'Is it theatre or is it just absurd? Avant-garde theatre? No storyline, no characters, just people making exhibitions of themselves. At least that's what the critics think ...' exposes the similarity of live art's position within the cultural mainstream in the mid-1990s. Speaking to 'representatives from both sides of the dramatic conflict', Clare Bayley notes that live art, as well as prompting debate about definition, forces questions about 'the function of criticism'. If we take the views of critics Paul Taylor and Michael Coveney in the aforementioned article as indicative of a typical attitude toward live art, it becomes apparent that the main objections to this type of performance are that it is elitist, overly-intellectual, meaningless and London-based. Taylor writes (of *Krieg* by Christophe Anders and Ursula Balser):

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[20] John Ashford, 1980, pp95, 98
[21] Rob la Frenais 'The Working Atmosphere Under Threat' *Performance* no. 10, 1981, p.4
[22] Clare Bayley 'Is it theatre or is it just absurd?' *The Independent* May 24th 1995

> Shows like this are a nightmare because: a) they consist of nothing more than their 'concept' and b) the concept is too obscurely communicated to be subjected to even the most rudimentary tests of coherence, resulting in an 'Am I sick, or are they?' critical impasse.

Similarly, Coveney notes 'I feel that if you live in Scunthorpe or Aberdeen you actually don't want to read about people jerking off in the I.C.A. You want to read about what's happening on the big public stages in Leeds or Glasgow'.

Opposing these arguments in the same article, live artist Annie Griffin expresses frustration that her work always suffers in criticism because reviewers persist in applying the same criteria for analysis that they would employ for a (musical) show like *Me and My Girl*. Amongst the many counter-arguments that could be cited in the face of Taylor and Coveney's views, I would resist accusations of a London-based clique. Whilst the I.C.A. is indeed important to the live art scene, there is a history of performance activity in (ironically) Glasgow. Nottingham has also established itself as a centre of live art activity, as have Manchester and Newcastle. Still, these are questions of geography and relatively easy to prove; more difficult is the fundamental issue of what live art has to offer and why this is important. That it does have *something* is acknowledged by Anthony Everitt, former Secretary-General at the Arts Council of England. However, he blames live art itself for the lack of critical appreciation:

> Live art has been a cauldron of new thinking, new juxtapositions and new extremes of discourse. That is a huge contribution and one sees how it is beginning to fertilise the mainstream. Live art has failed, however, to make itself understood by both the wider public and local and national politicians and so there is a sense that it is the worst side of controversial, avant garde aesthetic nonsense.[23]

What fails to emerge from the treatment of live art in Bayley's article - which is probably intended to be sympathetic considering her involvement in the scene as one of *Hybrid*'s editors - is a sense of its persistence. There is a clear labelling of this form of performance as 'avant-garde' but there is no indication of its pedigree. One argument in favour of critical realignment

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[23] Anthony Everitt 'Definition: Live Art' *Hybrid* issue 5, October/November 1993, p.38

must surely be that live art practice in some guise has been in evidence for almost a century and shows no sign of abating. The obvious solution would appear to be the creation of a specialist journal to promote understanding and critique. Such an enterprise is almost bound to seek Arts Council assistance because of its low print run, hence it could be argued that an unsympathetic funding body might not support an initiative of that order. This has not proved the case, however, with live art; rather the publications that have emerged have failed to sustain themselves.

Notwithstanding the problems that any journal of such a specialised area of activity is prone to (such as the risk of perpetuating marginalisation), at least from 1979 to 1990 there existed a published forum for critical debate in the guise of *Performance* magazine. Its eventual closure - which appears to have been the result of editorial ambivalence about the relevance of performance art - came after a period of change in the journal's structure. Issues had become less frequent but glossier; the text had begun to resemble a series of disparate essays, often comparable to those found in fine art journals. The publication was slicker, less amateur, better illustrated but also less polemical.

Hybrid's short lifespan (December 1992- March 1994), of only 6 issues excluding the pilot, suffered from other problems: I would argue that whilst it was theoretical, it had too few writers (most of whom were already well established), it lacked editorial coherence and sought to be needlessly international without first addressing the British scene. The final issue on Norwegian live art, for instance, was too esoteric in the face of a lack of appraisal of companies such as the now defunct Impact or even Forced Entertainment. Although the bi-monthly periodical had attempted to be accessible and affordable (*Performance*'s final issues were priced at 4.50; *Hybrid's* last issue also retailed at that price but its earlier ones cost 3.00), it was forced into liquidation. David Hughes, one of *Hybrid*'s editors, (Clare Bayley and Andrea Phillips were the others) conducted his personal post-mortem in an article for *Untitled*: *A Review of Contemporary Art*

> In the last issue [...] we conducted a survey that gave us a valuable insight into what our readership wanted. All our great ideas for *Hybrid*, of expanding the critical language by drawing on other disciplines had washed over our readership's heads. They didn't understand the language or where it came from.[24]

Analysing what went wrong, Hughes cites:

> Bad management, poor financial control, overly optimistic expectations of growth, the deficit carried over from the original *LAL*, [*Live Art Listings*, established in 1991 by the Arts Council] inadequate start-up funding, office politics which drained energy, insufficient expertise, bad communications, too much attention to what we wanted to produce rather than what our readership wanted.[25]

Joanna Scanlan, ex-Live Art Officer at the Arts Council, has opined that a journal from the grassroots would probably have more success.[26] Hughes has perhaps attempted to replicate this in his editorship of the (smaller and humbler) *Live Art Magazine*. Published sporadically, though purporting to be quarterly, since its inception in 1994, the magazine has pursued an altogether different policy of encouraging as much new writing as possible. Though this in itself is commendable, I would note that it has resulted in a marked difference in quality between its writers which is not necessarily welcome considering the importance of documentation to live art. The new magazine's pamphlet format also precludes detailed analysis (reviews average 300 words) so its prime function seems to be as a listings service or bulletin board. Claire MacDonald - whose own involvement with live art is an example of an indefatigable commitment and creativity - has instigated a new quarterly *Performance Research Journal* (forthcoming). As a quarterly Routledge publication, it is possible that it will be able to garner an academic market without attempting to be topical.

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[24] David Hughes 'The rise and demise of Hybrid' *Untitled: a review of contemporary art* no.5, Summer, 1994, p.6
[25] David Hughes, 1994, p.6
[26] Interview with Joanna Scanlan, London, September 1st 1994

These brief overviews of the cultural and critical contexts in which live art of the past decade has found itself should emphasise the difficulty of the current situation. Whilst live art has undergone substantial changes in its concerns and its presentation of them, and whilst there has been a growth in interest from academic institutions, this type of performance remains at the edges of cultural activity. Festivals, when they occur, are often annual or biennial; mainstream spaces are rarely used as venues for live art because they cannot find audiences in sufficient numbers to sustain more than a couple of shows; critics either ignore such shows or judge them by an inappropriate set of criteria; and the specialist publications to date have not encouraged a broader audience. Finally, although it is impossible to speculate about audiences and there is little statistical data to support my claim, I would argue from personal observation that live art performances are generally supported by others (whether practitioners or students) in the same field. This is almost always the case with the NRLA but is true of other shows, too. Thus it appears that the structures in place for live art - where it is seen, where it is discussed - have compounded its marginalisation.

'Tax Payers' Money' and Live Art Funding

So-called 'avant-garde' art is especially vulnerable to accusations of wasting 'tax payers' money'. In 1994 for instance, public criticism and debate were levelled at Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled (House)* - a site-specific sculpture for London's East End[1] ; then, on a far smaller scale, disapproval focused on *Root* (the Hull live art festival in May). Reporting on the two week festival, Roger Tredre describes:

> Last week, the prospect was stirring up much sound and fury. Although there were no sheep floating in formaldehyde in the programme, there was enough to make John Fareham, the city's only Tory councillor, foam at the mouth over 'pseudo-creativity of the worst kind' and 'nonsense for luvvies by luvvies'.
> He was particularly mocking of an event that allows the public to watch a couple in a shop window performing 'normal' routines of caring for a baby. The councillor complained: 'It's the emperor's new clothes tendency'.[2]

Tredre's allusion to Damien Hirst rests on the latter's reputation for controversy, but it seems to me that such a comparison is dangerously superficial. The live artist is rarely in the same position as Hirst, whose work is collectable and commands substantial prices. (Indeed, it is likely that live artists' refusal to provide saleable objects only increases the irritation of detractors; even Whiteread has since produced *House*[3] - a book with photographic and written documentation of her demolished sculpture). More importantly still, the visual artworld has support structures in place to validate, and even co-opt, its favoured artists: both Whiteread and Hirst have won the Tate Gallery-administered Turner Prize, in 1993 and 1995 respectively. Though its financial value is not huge (20,000), 'spin-off' revenue (exposure and so on) is immeasurable. Whilst live artists are eligible for the prize (asked for her opinion on the 1995 competition, Marina Warner 'nominated' Bobby Baker[4]) none have been shortlisted with the exception of Gilbert and George, winners in 1986.[5]

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1 The sculpture was actually completed on October 25th 1993 but continued to be discussed well into 1994.
2 Roger Tredre 'Art? Don't Make Us Laugh!' *The Observer* May 15th 1994
3 Rachel Whiteread *House* London, Phaidon Press, 1995
4 Marina Warner cited in Louisa Buck 'The Turner Prize' *The Independent* June 24th 1995
5 I am discounting Mona Hatoum here (also nominated in 1995) since her work was object-based by this stage in her career.

The live artist is thus in a doubly disadvantaged position. Unable to sell any*thing* and unlikely to gain extra income from 'prizes', s/he is reliant predominantly on Arts Council and/or Regional Council grants, and private sponsorship for funding. This chapter seeks to assess these main sources of revenue, tracing the shifts that have occurred in Arts Council policy. It will ask whether funding decisions have aggravated or improved the lack of support for live art.

The funding situation is complicated by the collaborative nature of much live art work, as Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment explains:

> Working 'on the dole' has become less feasible as a way of funding your first three years work. Twice we went on the Enterprise Allowance scheme, separated by a year's unemployment. That was like five years almost of possible living, making work. The younger artists that I know, would be mad if they tried to do what we did. With people coming out of theatre/creative arts courses the tendency is increasingly to work alone, or for the kind of alliances they make to be temporary and provisional on a particular project, and to organise their artwork around a day job here, three months there. In a sense we've been really lucky, we've managed as a group of seven to work together pretty well permanently over the last ten years, with bits of teaching. I don't think that's possible anymore[6]

In terms of business revenue (sponsorship from the private sector), the main scheme open to live artists is the *Barclays New Stages Awards* which began in 1990. The promotional literature states that the Awards are intended to 'encourage and promote Britain's 'independent' theatre', giving 'over 1 million over six years'. The competition is open to

> small-to middle-scale, independent, non-profit-distributing, theatre companies based in the UK which have been trading continuously for at least 12 months [....] Applications are also encouraged from live art or non-English-speaking theatre, dance or mime, opera or music theatre, theatre-in-education or projects for people with disabilities. The work may be of any duration and does not need to be theatre-based[7]

In 1995/6, the scheme offered maximum awards of £25,000 for 2 companies, otherwise a minimum of 3 companies would receive an award in the 'up to £4,000' and the 'up to £10,000'

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[6] Tim Etchells cited in 'Why Not?' *Versus* no.5, 1995, p.39
[7] See Barclays New Stages Awards application form for 1995/6

categories. However, the award could not represent more than 40% of the total cost of the production, which meant that practitioners were required to find the remaining funds from Arts Council grants or self-financing. Proposals were assessed by Kate Bassett, theatre critic for *The Times;* Stephen Daldry, artistic director Royal Court; Alan James of mac; and advised by Stella Hall. Barclays New Stages was always planned as a six year initiative but its contribution to the live art sector is such that its termination in 1996/7 is bound to affect major players on the scene. (Amongst the productions it has enabled are *The Double Wedding*, 1990 and *Tantamount Esperance*, 1993, both Rose English; *A Useful Body of Herbs*, 1993, Bobby Baker; *Marina and Lee*, 1990 and *Emanuelle Enchanted,* 1992, Forced Entertainment).

Barclays New Stages' readiness to accept interdisciplinarity may be a result of Arts Council initiatives in live art promotion. The latter were only instigated in 1985 however; prior to that, the Arts Council's funding policies for live art were confused and may even have inadvertently compounded public resistance to the practice. The Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), as it was then called, was slow to recognise the need for a discrete 'category' for live art, treating all interdisciplinary work as a problem. Performance art as a term does not appear to have entered its vocabulary until 1969 - 23 years after the ACGB's inception. (This is not wholly surprising considering that photography was only acknowledged as an artform in 1967, whilst until 1980 dance was classed along with music, presumably because it was deemed to belong to music theatre). A New Activities Committee established in May 1969 decided that there were already sufficient structures in place within the Arts Council to fund all types of work, and a report by Michael Astor - the Committee's chairperson - warned:

> whilst recognising that there is a great deal going on in the country which is new and which lays claim to be art we believe that the Arts Council must draw a distinction between new expressions of art, however esoteric they may be, and other activities which are *primarily* social activities, sociological experiments, experiments in group therapy[8]

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[8] Michael Astor & Jack Lambert *New Activities Committee: Alternative Set of Recommendations and Introduction by the Chairman* Arts Council of Great Britain pamphlet, 1971

Some concessions to artists working within performance art were made though with the establishment of an Experimental Projects Committee for Special Applications. The ACGB's *Arts Bulletin* claims that, from 1969-70, £53,000 of the ACGB's total budget of £9.3 million was spent on experimental projects.[9] The Council's attitude to performance art is recalled by Anthony Everitt (ex-Secretary General of the ACE), who was a member of the Drama Panel in the mid-1970s:

> I was deputed to join the Special Applications Committee, chaired by a bemused Lawrence Gowing. Our task was to respond to cross-media applications for financial assistance which did not fall into any of the usual pigeon-holes. Because we knew little of the work on which we were called to judge, performance artists were invited to "audition" before the committee. These occasions were a kind of patrician theatre of embarrassment, at which the out-of-touch tried to come to terms with the far-out. But the arrangement did at least distribute a little money[10]

Once it had recognised the practice, the Council began to fund interdisciplinary work through Drama Projects and the Visual Arts Development Project Grant. This was facilitated in part by Combined Arts being set up as a funding unit in 1977. At grassroots level, individuals such as Steve Rogers at the Midland Group in Nottingham established the Performance Platform in 1980 to showcase live artworks. It was under Jennifer Walwin's term as, first, Combined Arts Officer (1983-7) then Performance Art Officer (1987-90) though that substantial developments were made in live art funding. If nothing else, the series of schemes implemented in that period exposed the politics and the particular needs of the live art sector.

The 1984 report *Glory of the Garden* resulted in an increase in revenue from the Arts Council to the Regional Arts Boards; in 1984/5 for instance, the ACGB gave the RAA £12,000,000 whereas in 1987/88 the figure was £28,000,000. This allowed more progressive RABs to encourage links between local galleries and artists. In 1985 Walwin initiated the establishment of the *Performance Art Promoters Scheme*

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[9] See Arts Council of Great Britain 'Experimental Projects' *Arts Bulletin* no. 3, Winter 1971
[10] Anthony Everitt 'Live and Let Live' *The Guardian* November 12th 1993

> to encourage promoters not only to commission work by performance artists for their own programmes and venues, but to support this work with educational projects, documentation, publicity and marketing work and administrative and technical back-up. [11]

At this time, performance art was almost fashionable (Laurie Anderson's *O, Superman* got to no.1 in the British pop charts that year). The Scheme aimed to raise the profile of performance art and, again, *devolve* funding, concentrating on four committed entrepreneurs/ administrators. These were: the Midland Group under the direction of Nikki Milican; the Zap Club, Brighton which was only a year old and then (as now) under Neil Butler's direction; the Brighton Festival; and Projects UK (previously known as the Basement Group) in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, collaborating with the Laing municipal art gallery to commission new work. They were to share £25,000 with no more than 10% going on their administration costs.

1986/7 however was a difficult year for the live art sector. The GLC, whose funding policy had prioritised the unemployed, the elderly, youth subcultures (particularly girls'), women's groups and gay men's groups, was dismantled. Artists and promoters organised meetings to debate the funding situation; there was *The State of Play* at the Riverside Studios in August 1986, *Against Compromise* led by Nikki Milican at the Midland Group in November 1986 , and *I Don't Like This Kind Of Theatre* at the I.C.A. in August 1987. Stella Hall, who was involved in promoting live art herself, believes that it was impossible to run venues purely for live art events:

> the Green Room [...] could never be an exclusively live art venue; in Nottingham the Midland Group attempted to be that, you know Nikki Milican had 'No Compromise' as her sort of flagship statement [...], but it closed the bloody place down because you can't financially sustain a place on that kind of work[12]

The Midland Group did collapse that year following industrial disputes and the enforced resignation of its then director Tony Bellekom. The *Performance Art Promoters Scheme*'s allocation of funds for 1986/7 totalled £30,000, of which £10,000 went to Projects UK; £6,500 to the Green Room; £5,000 to Chisenhale Dance Space; £2,500 to the South West England

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[11] Tracey Warr 'Introduction' in Tracey Warr (ed.) *Live Art Now* London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987, unpaginated

[12] Interview with Stella Hall, London, September 7th 1994

Consortium under artist Rose Garrard's direction; and £6,500 to the National Review of Live Art at the Riverside Studios. (The latter given on the undertaking that the NRLA move out of London the following year). Ironically, in 1987, Stephen Taylor-Woodrow's *Living Paintings* on tour in Britain drew huge audiences, proving that live art could be accessible and popular.

1986/7 also saw the introduction of the *Performance Art Education Scheme* (worth £10,000). It aimed to place artists in schools and colleges to work as *animateurs*, thus giving students first-hand experience of the process of making a live artwork. The initiative was discussed in *Performance* magazine: Tracey Warr asked 'Is this the year when every schoolchild will decide to be a performance artist when they grow up?',[13] whilst David Hunter cautioned 'are we in danger of breeding a new strain of "education artist"?'.[14] It is debatable whether the scheme achieved its potential. On the one hand, it formalised what had been occurring in isolated cases anyhow. (Speaking of the 1970s and early 1980s, Robert Ayers and David Butler note 'Fran Hegarty's teaching at Sheffield Polytechnic provided inspiration for many, as did Alastair MacLennan's in Belfast'[15]). On the other, it highlighted the problems with accommodating live art in educational establishments: rigid definitions, limitations in the syllabus, and so on. Two students on the Fine Art degree at Newcastle Polytechnic wrote in 1988 of the scarcity of live art work there: 'within fine art courses it is still a marginalised activity and rarely taken seriously'.[16]

In 1988/9 the *Performance Art Promoters Scheme* was dismantled because it was felt that it had achieved what it set out to do in terms of instigating showcases and other opportunities for live artists. (Even the Tate Gallery hosted a season of performance artworks that year). Walwin proposed that new schemes should now be explored to ensure that provision was made for the future, especially in the area of education. Although that year saw the *Live Art Commissions*

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[13] Tracey Warr 'Extracurricular' *Performance no.* 47 May/June 1987, p. 29
[14] David Hunter 'Performance Progress' *Performance* no.54, June/July 1988, p.29
[15] Robert Ayers & David Butler (eds) *Live Art* Sunderland, AN Publications, 1991, p.27
[16] Hester Reeve & Vanessa Jones 'Finding Our Place' *Performance* no. 54, June/July 1988, p. 28

scheme, no extra revenue was forthcoming. By 1990/91, live art's place within the ACGB appears to have been more acknowledged. Walwin was succeeded by Lois Keidan and the aforementioned *Live Art Commissions Scheme* provided £30,000 to be shared between 5 organisations promoting live art. The ACGB's funding criteria identified live art as work which cannot be recognised within traditional categories and where 'a live presence should be integral to the work deriving from a visual arts base'.[17]

However, an Arts Council report of October 1990 - *Cultural Grounding: Live Art and Cultural Diversity* by Michael McMillan - found the ACGB's previous policies wanting in relation to black art. It said:

> Performance art/ live art operates on the margins of the visual arts, because of it's [*sic*] 'avant garde' and ephemeral nature. Yet dominant definitions of performance are eurocentric and exclude many Afro-Asian (Black) artists[18]

The report recommended 'culturally diverse integrated programmes, non-hierarchical networks and autonomous infrastructures should be developed at a regional, national and international level'; that the Arts Council and regional boards be more accountable and democratic; and the provision and advertisement of support structures for 'the cultural diversification of performance art'.[19] Further recommendations focused on re-evaluating the *Live Art Education Scheme* since this, too, did not adequately reflect cultural diversity. McMillan also highlights: 'The range of promoters connected with the *Live Art Commissions Scheme*, reflect the predominance of spaces administered and curated as effectively "white/european"'.[20]

1991 saw the launching of the *New Collaborations Fund* - a pilot scheme which would come into effect in 1992/3 with £240,000 financing 31 project grants. It was intended to encourage artists from different artforms to work together. *Live Art Commissions* allowed 7 organisations

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[17] Arts Council *Live Art Commissions* 1989/90, p1
[18] Michael McMillan *Cultural Grounding: Live Art and Cultural Diversity* Arts Council of Great Britain, October 1990, p.4
[19] Michael McMillan , October 1990, p.5
[20] Michael McMillan , October 1990, p.17

to commission new performance work. At the same time though, Projects U.K. lost their funding when they ran into financial difficulties. In 1992, Joanna Scanlan was appointed as Live Art Officer, and Internal project funding for live art at the ACGB in 1993 was £300,000 with £104,000 of that for the National Review of Live Art. This included *Live Art Commissions,* now worth £55,000, and the Combined Arts' *Live Art Development Fund* of £30,000 (maximum of £5,000 per project) for artists and promoters/producers aiming to raise the awareness of live art practice through touring performances, documenting work, organising conferences and so on. The notion of cross-disciplinary work seems to have gained some currency within the ACGB. Even a general report *A Creative Future* (1993) looked to be encouraging a combined arts approach: 'It is an important task to achieve artistic 'crossover' between art forms, on the part of both artists and audiences'; similarly the *1993/4 - 1995/6 Arts Council Corporate Plan* says of the Combined Arts Unit: '[it] exists to bring together a number of activities with links beyond individual art forms'.

The exact funding situation for live art within the ACE is difficult to determine though, as a closer look at the 1994/5 financial year reveals. In April 1994 the ACGB was devolved. In September of that year the old Combined Arts Unit which had been responsible for the I.C.A., the South Bank Centre (SBC), live art, carnival, interdisciplinary work and international initiatives became a department with additional responsibility for festivals and initiatives for the disabled, and so forth. Taking the Arts Council of England's (ACE) funds for the Combined Arts Department that year, we see that its budget totalled £15,360,377 (approximately 13% of the ACE's revenue). Of this, £14,145,400 (91%) was divided between the I.C.A. and the SBC. Of course a small proportion of that revenue would have been channelled into live art (especially via the I.C.A.) but, discounting that, even the remaining million or so was not purely for live art.

£456,884 was spent on cross-disciplinary work which might or might not be live art biased. *New Collaborations* (again, not necessarily live art) took up £385,092 in one-off grants for research/ development (maximum £5,000 per one), or productions (maximum £30,000). Funds exclusively

earmarked for live art totalled circa £232,000. These were: *Live Art Commissions* (£80,128 divided between several venues including the Arnolfini, Leeds Metropolitan University and the Salisbury Festival, recipients getting between £3,000 - £15,500 each); *Live artists* (£25,000); *Live Art in Higher Education* (£25,000, the largest single grant - £10,000 - going to the *Performance Studies Journal*);. *Live Art Publications* (£56,597); *Live Art Development* (£32,624); and *Live Art Research Travel Grants* (£13,323).

If there have been problems with the Arts Council's policies for live art, these derive primarily from a failure to provide adequate support structures. Linda Ludwin's February 1995 report for the ACE - *Working on the Cutting Edge: Sliding Down the Razor Blade of Live Art* - was drawn from her interviews with senior promoters and producers in live art. Though the report was primarily concerned with ascertaining the training needs of such individuals, it articulated the difficulties of promoting the form.[21] Marketing impacts on funding when live artists are partly reliant for income on a 'box office split' arrangement with the venue. The participants claimed: live art is not a neutral term; it is however unrecognised outside of the sector; it is an 'objectless art', 'unknown and unknowable work'.[22] Although they were positive about live art's potential they also mentioned its negative aspects - its riskiness for promoters (and audiences), a tendency for it to be overly-intellectual and referential, the desire on the part of some artists to alienate audiences, the large amount of poor quality work around. The selection process for the National Review of Live Art Platform was even likened to an undemocratic audition because artists are not awarded travel expenses to attend.

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[21] Ludwin was keen to encourage frank opinions without the possibility of repercussions, hence she does not cite the sources of her quotations. They may belong to any one of the following interviewees: Jon Bewley (involved with Projects U.K.), Ghislaine Boddington (co-director of Shinkansen), Bev Blytheway (The Cornerhouse, Manchester), Bush Hartshorne (Director at the Green Room, Manchester), Stella Hall (founder of the Green Room and Barclays New Stages Festival Director), Lois Keidan (former Live Art Officer at the ACGB, now Director of Live Arts, I.C.A.), Judith Knight, Debbie Lander, Neil MacKenzie, Helen Marriage, David Metcalfe, Michael Morris, Mike Stubbs (Hull Time Based Arts), SuAndi (Black Arts Alliance), Diana Warden (Performance Officer at the Arnolfini).

[22] Linda Ludwin *Working on the Cutting Edge: Sliding Down the Razor Blade of Live Art* Arts Council of England, February 1995, p.5

Marketing was considered time-consuming because live art requires much explanation, and copywriting is problematic because copy (and publicity stills) are often required even before the work is complete. It was agreed that few artists were skilled at marketing their own work. All these factors were contributory to the form's terrible media reputation.[23] Discussing funding, the participants were generally critical of the Regional Arts Boards. They accused the latter of passing live art project applications from one section to another, of lacking a discrete budgetary allocation for live art and specialist knowledge.[24] Hence, Stella Hall (who has sat on the *New Collaborations* advisory panel) notes 'if the funding confidence isn't there... if that base is missing how do you maintain [live art] as a discrete area of practice regionally and then nationally?'.[25]

Returning to Forced Entertainment's case, it is easy to see how an already difficult situation (marketing problems, refusal of funding bodies to take responsibility for applications, and 'bad press') can be aggravated by Arts Council attitudes. Forced Entertainment's main funding comes from the ACE's Drama Department. In 1994/5 it received £61,265 from Drama and £4,995 from *Live Art Commissions*, Combined Arts. (Whether or not it should be predominantly funded by Combined Arts instead is academic, since the latter's budget, as we have seen, is too small). Unfortunately, the Drama Department as a whole has never truly shared Combined Arts' enthusiasm for Forced Entertainment and, in December 1994, it announced its decision not to fund the co-operative for 1995/6.

In January 1995, Robert Hewison wrote an article for *The Sunday Times* about the ACE's drama policy and cited Nicola Thorold (director of Independent Theatres Council, of which

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[23] Linda Ludwin, February 1995, p.6
[24] Linda Ludwin, February 1995, p.27
[25] Interview with Stella Hall, London, September 7th 1994

Forced Entertainment is a member) as saying:

> The Arts Council is becoming more conservative, it is concentrating on what it used to call 'the heartland'. We're worried about Lord Gowrie's attitude to experimental work, which he seems to view with suspicion.[26]

Hewison goes on to note

> Certainly the advisory panel for project grants has set its face against one of the leading experimental groups, the Sheffield-based company, Forced Entertainment. After 10 years of existence, and eight years of annual project grants, [it] has been refused a grant for next year, blowing such a hole in its finances that it may have to close. The Arts Council drama department has suggested that it try the council's more "experimental" combined arts department, a ragbag of a department that has very little money for the excellent work it has done. For Tim Etchells [...] this shuffling of responsibility shows that drama is "returning to pre-60s definitions" of theatre.[27]

A bulletin in *Live Art Magazine*, events at several venues, mailshots from the co-operative and so on, all sought to raise supporters' awareness of the predicament. In reply to complaints about the ACE's decision, Drama Officer, Kathleen Hamilton's (standard) letter noted:

> Forced Entertainment has received financial assistance from the Arts Council through the Drama Projects Subsidy Scheme. This Scheme supports the work of independent small-scale companies which can apply for subsidy towards a single production. Forced Entertainment has received project subsidy since 1986, but it is the nature of this Scheme that funding is not guaranteed. [...] In considering any application, the Committee reviews the previous work of the company. At its last meeting the Drama Projects Committee considered that it was not able to recommend funding to Forced Entertainment in view of concerns about the development of the work given the not inconsiderable support provided to the Company over previous years. The Committee recognised the role the Company has played within the area of performance work, but given the substantial body of mixed reports for its recent theatre productions, it was unable to recommend funding.[28]

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[26] Robert Hewison 'Long Interval' *The Sunday Times* January 29th 1995
[27] Robert Hewison, 1995
[28] Written correspondence from Kathleen Hamilton to myself, February 1st 1995

Since the 'mixed reports' mentioned by Hamilton refer to reviews, it becomes plain just how crucial is the deployment of a critical language to live art's continued existence. By March, a 'Funding Update' issued by Forced Entertainment along with pre-publicity for their performance-lecture *A Decade of Forced Entertainment*, stated:

> Arts Council Drama have now received over 200 letters protesting its decision in December not to fund new projects proposed by Forced Entertainment for 1995/6. These letters come from a wide range of audience members, from each of the venues to which the company regularly tours, from key players in the promotion of new theatre in the UK, from many academics teaching and writing in the field of new performance and from a number of Drama's own advisors.
>
> In light of this outcry the Drama Department have allowed the company to resubmit a 'clarified' version of its application for a major touring piece.

The Drama Projects Committee reconvened on April 26th to consider Forced Entertainment's revised application and agreed to fund their new work, *Speak Bitterness*. A Council meeting on May 17th ratified the decision. Forced Entertainment claimed in a letter to those on its mailing list:

> The strength of public feeling and support for the company, expressed in public events, letters to the Arts Council and press coverage have clearly played a huge part in this turn-around [....]
> On a more pessimistic note there are still some question marks over the future funding of Forced Entertainment at the Drama Department.[29]

The difficulties that live artists face in gaining appreciation for their work might have been diminished, if the ACGB had acted sooner to provide for the form. Even its successful measures were only ever short-term responses, their consequences visible but not necessarily capitalised on. The Combined Arts department budget is too small to be able to secure the future of those companies who, like Forced Entertainment, receive funding from inappropriate departments. The Council's promotion of live art has been, by its own admission, monocultural. Some gains have been made, largely due to the efforts of a few key individuals: Walwin who systematically engaged with live art's needs; Scanlan who encouraged a consolidation of structures for live art

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[29] Written correspondence from Forced Entertainment, June 2nd 1995

through development schemes; Milican promoting live art at grassroots level through the NRLA; Hall working to capitalise on existing opportunities (be these Arts Council or corporate based), and Steve Rogers (deceased) for his enthusiastic promotion of live art through *Performance.* If future schemes are to make provision for live artists, they will need to reflect the demands of all these areas.

Practitioners Making Their Entrances - and Exits

An examination of the various points of entry into the live art field suggests that whilst routes vary, they tend to originate in any one of these backgrounds: fine art (art school/university); theatre (drama degree/acting/directing); dance (choreography/ performing); or, more recently, live art/ interdisciplinary degrees. Whereas artists working in more traditional artforms generally follow established routes (fine artists usually undertake foundation courses then fine art degrees, for instance), live art practitioners have no official 'way in'. Their routes can be analysed via the following (not necessarily discrete) categories of politicisation, serendipity, aesthetics and influence.

I would cite politicisation if the artist's move into live art were prompted by concerns not immediately related to their initial medium. These might be an interest in making an intervention in the artworld apparatus, or maybe a desire to assume an ideological position. Serendipity would be used to describe those coming across live art without prior knowledge of it, perhaps through proximity to other artists working in that field. The chance element would be important in differentiating this route from influence. The latter would refer to an artist deliberately deciding to move into making live art work as the result of seeing, being taught by, or collaborating with, (and so on) another practitioner. Aesthetic reasons could be invoked if an artist's engagement with live art were motivated purely by formal concerns (such as the desire to experiment with the boundaries of what might or might not be classed as sculpture, for example).

Live art's predecessor - performance art - has a history of political intervention stemming from its origins, in western culture at any rate, in the right-wing Futurist movement of the early twentieth century. Several practitioners have espoused a maxim of 1970s feminism - 'the personal is the political', using this as the basis of their live art practice. Mona Hatoum, who has since moved away from live performance back to making installations and objects, is one of

these. Hatoum is of Palestinian origin and was born in Beirut. She came to Britain in 1975 on a visit but decided to settle in London when civil war erupted in Lebanon. She attended first the Byam Shaw art school (1975-9), and then the Slade (1979-81).. Her ambivalence about remaining within a strictly fine art practice, and the aggravation of hostilities in Lebanon caused Hatoum to experiment with video and performance. Conscious of her parents' life in war-torn Beirut, of the atrocities and physical danger that threatened them, she wanted to express her politicisation directly and subjectively or, as Guy Brett states, in a medium where 'testimony to the historical reality of the Third World could be presented inseparably from the artist's self-assertion as a woman'.[1] Hatoum describes her own attraction to the form thus: 'the artist is being herself, making her own statement, and not pretending to be someone else, somewhere else'.[2]

Live artist Tina Keane who has also made installation work that incorporates video, expresses a similar view when she explains that feminist politics was the impetus for her move into performance. Keane claims '[it] provided women with a significant tool for discovering the meaning of being a woman' and it necessitated 'putting oneself on the line'.[3] Artist Rose Garrard, in writing about the discussions occurring between female practitioners in the early 1980s, states

> we all sought to clarify why we were working in 'Live Art' and agreed that basically it was an area in which male values had not yet irretrievably overwhelmed the way in which work could be made or perceived[4]

This same potential was responsible for the shift from theatre to live art in the life of Joanna Scanlan (ex-Live Art Officer at the Arts Council and prior to that a co-director, with Tilda Swinton, of Annie Griffin's company Pirate Productions). Scanlan had initially intended to make a career as an actor and followed a drama degree with various stints at acting. Yet the limitations of the traditional theatre structure with its hierarchical arrangement, lack of

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[1] Guy Brett 'A Hatoum Chronology' in Arnolfini Gallery *Mona Hatoum* (exh. cat.) Bristol, 1993, p.16
[2] Sarah Diamond 'Interview with Mona Hatoum' *Fuse* April 1987, p.50
[3] Michael O'Pray 'Tina Keane: Profile' *Performance* no.53, April/May 1988, p.10
[4] Rose Garrard, Rose 'Performance Art: The Tune of the Fiddler While Rome Burns?' *Performance Art Art and Design* no. 38, 1994, p.70

interesting parts for women and under-representation of women playwrights and directors, caused Scanlan's dissatisfaction.[5]

The current institutionalization of live art (an increase in university courses, an assimilation of live art into gallery practices) has made it less likely, perhaps, that a younger generation of practitioners should come across the form by chance. In discussing his own involvement with live art, Bryan Biggs - gallery director of the Bluecoat Arts Centre, Liverpool - points out:

> Live art wasn't invented when I came to work here, it was that long ago ... it was performance art! ... but no, I'd been to art school.. er, fine arts degree, and I suppose any experience of that area of work was confined to whatever happened in the department then; there was always some performance at that time but not to the degree that there is now[6]

If Biggs is correct, and the recent de-defining of spheres of activity in art colleges such as Goldsmiths would seem to support his view, then it might be supposed that there would be *more* students coming across live art by chance. And yet the popularity of interdisciplinary or module based degree courses has meant a growth in the innately diverse live art course. So it appears to be the artists of the older generation who 'fell into' live art, whilst the younger artists cite their predecessors as influential. This is not surprising considering the co-option of performers by the education system as workshop leaders or artists-in-residence.

Two of the artists most commonly cited by the younger generation are Annie Griffin and Rose English, both of whom arrived at live art through serendipity. For Annie Griffin, performing was what she did and had always wanted to do. Originally from Buffalo, New York, she came to England from the U.S.A. in 1980 as a student on her junior year abroad from the University of Virginia. Her intention at the time was 'to be an actress'. Though she had not seen any performance art in New York, she saw some work at the I.C.A. in London, including shows by

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[5] Interview with Joanna Scanlan, London, September 1st 1994
[6] Interview with Bryan Biggs, Liverpool, July 21st 1994

Rose English and Anne Seagrave. Even then though, she had no inclination to work in live art and describes her eventual involvement with the scene thus:

> I think the only way in was from working with Neil [Bartlett] and when I decided to go solo, after the 1982 company broke up, I booked a tour of fringe theatres [...] and he suggested I do it [*Blackbeard the Pirate: A Melodrama in Several Parts*] at the National Review of Live Art - my very first solo show of my own; [...] Nikki Milican [NRLA Co-ordinator] didn't think it was very much performance art, she thought it was theatre; and I thought it was theatre but I thought what the hell...[7]

Although Griffin arrived on the Sunday of the 1986 Review (which at the time only spanned a weekend), and was almost the last person to perform and indeed saw no other work, she was reviewed in *Performance* magazine:

> The undisputed hit of the Platform [the showcase for new artists] was Annie Griffin whose *Blackbeard the Pirate* showed her to have real 'star quality' [...she] is herself an extremely assured, seductive and heroic performer and a testament to female strength and assertiveness[8]

Griffin's photograph was selected for the issue's cover and thus the event, coupled with the reactions of an appreciative audience, shifted Griffin's subsequent work into the live art sphere.

Rose English represents the route from fine art and her art school experience seems to have been a positive one. She recalls the atmosphere in which she worked:

> I was very fortunate to go to a college that was very adventurous for the time [...] so there were people really working across a broad spectrum of disciplines. There were writers and musicians and poets and also people making what they called... they called them all sorts of things, they called them events, and performances; it was very exhilarating, they didn't seem to make ... they didn't seem to stop one activity and start another. They'd be painting during the day and in the evening they'd be performing, so it seemed a very straightforward and exciting thing to do.[9]

She began to make shows whilst she was there but did not perform in them herself, using contemporaries instead. English locates the moment at which she became interested in performance *per se* as concurrent with her move to London. Here she started to work with

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[7] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994
[8] Steve Rogers & Rob la Frenais 'The English Dream: (Midlands Version)' *Performance* no.44/5, November-February 1986, p.36
[9] Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994

Jacky Lansley, a choreographer-dancer and Sally Potter, a film maker and choreographer. It was after collaborating with them for a couple of years, she notes, that 'the whole idea of performing myself in work became something I was accustomed to'. On taking dance classes, English experienced a 'different perception' of being on stage and performing. She had still not quite crystallized her style though until

> much later on, after making quite a number of large scale works which were sort of very, very spectacle-based, I - almost by accident - had to do a solo one day; and I found much to my surprise that I was addressing the audience in a direct sort of way and that I really loved it and I think that was the beginning of language being important[10]

The case studies of Fran Cottell, Bobby Baker and Alexa Wright however reveal a less positive aspect to art education for women in the late 1960s and 1970s. Despite being keen to work with performance, artist Fran Cottell's move into performing herself was as gradual as English's but her educational experience was less of a factor than her aesthetic-led experiments. She studied Fine Art at the University of Reading and remembers:

> At college in the 1970s [1974-1977] I always wanted to make live works but didn't have the courage (confidence). I used to make large paintings and floor pieces, photographing myself dripping paint Jackson Pollock style. Friends used to do simple performance actions for me like skipping and making circular movement drawings. I'd photograph and display them in a sequence.[11]

In Cottell's case, it could be argued that her lack of confidence resulted from the patriarchal bias of art education rather than anything inherent in performance. She sought a conceptual framework for her subsequent experiments with craft centred skills but received little tutorial support and claimed that even 'An MA (1979-1981) did not help to clarify my position'.[12] The 'turning point and liberation'[13] was her collaboration with American artist Marian Schoettle, also working with clothing. Eventually, Cottell's sculptural clothing shapes required animation and, in 1986, she made the step to performing with gymnast/dancer Mary Prestidge.

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[10] Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994
[11] cited in Richard Layzell *Live Art in Schools* London, The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1993, p.19
[12] Fran Cottell 'The Cult of the Individual' in Katy Deepwell (ed.) *New Feminist Art Criticism* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995, p.88
[13] Fran Cottell, 1995, p.88

Beginning as fine artists also, Baker and Wright were prompted by a dissatisfaction with their chosen medium of painting to experiment with their selves as material. The routes the women followed on leaving education differ, but they have in common an appraisal of the possibilities of a more theatrical model. Baker studied at St. Martin's School of Art, London from 1968 to 1971. The school's ex-alumni Gilbert and George had just left and were showing their performance art work *Underneath the Arches* in various venues. Art historian Norbert Lynton, then lecturing at Chelsea School of Art, recalls the controversy the work excited as well as the fact that the pair were selling their product just like any other object-based art for 'the exorbitant fee of five pounds'.[14] The extent to which the art schools were still very much a male-dominated preserve is evidenced by Baker's attitude to Gilbert and George. Immediately taken by them, she wrote them what she calls numerous 'fan letters' and yet, she stresses, 'it never occurred to me that I could be a performance artist'.[15] It seems fair to say then, that in Baker's case at least, it was not enough to have seen inspirational work if there were then socio-cultural or even psychic mechanisms in place which prevented her from engaging in similar practice.

This view is borne out by Rose Garrard, who was also an art student in 1969, at the Birmingham College of Art. She recalls:

> as was normal then, I had no tutoring from a woman artist at any time, on any course, and only the vaguest conscious awareness of this absence [...] what this unspoken absence signified to us (and others) in terms of our invisibility as potential artists, had begun to be absorbed by me. [16]

Baker's difficulty in assuming the persona of either painter-artist or performance artist was mitigated by her passion for culinary experiments: 'I got very excited about making chocolate mousse, but I couldn't work out what to do with that'.[17] On leaving art school, she began to make food sculpture and animated their display by performing alongside them. These pieces, which had titles like *Meringue Ladies* and *Cake Head* (both 1975), were, according to Baker,

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[14] Interview with Norbert Lynton, London, November 17th 1994
[15] Interview with Bobby Baker, London, November 28th 1994
[16] Rose Garrard *Archiving My Own History* Cornerhouse, Manchester and South London Gallery, 1994, p.13
[17] cited in Jane Ferguson 'Performance' *Evening Standard Magazine* June 1993

'desperately boring and very unformed'.[18] Her move from this conceptual sculpture to performance derived from a constant experimentation in the late 1970s with herself as the focal point of attention. Her early career culminated in participation in the 1980 *About Time* exhibition at the I.C.A., and by then her entry in the live art sphere had been facilitated by her awareness of other practitioners such as the New York based Wooster Group.

Artist Alexa Wright first became involved with performance through installation practice and because, she believes, 'I was never really suited to painting'[19] (which she was studying at degree level). When she left education she was 'very frustrated both with the medium of painting and also with this thing of working within a rectangle'. Unsure as to how to incorporate performance and the act of performing into her practice, Wright enrolled in acting classes at an adult education centre - the City Literary Institute, London - exploring 'really interesting alternative theatre'. Having taken courses in mime, juggling, clowning and other diverse techniques, Wright's early performance pieces were 'quite theatrical' but she stresses, 'even then I couldn't see myself performing alone' so she devised group work.

Stella Hall - festival director at the Royal Court Theatre, adjudicator on the selection panel for the Barclays New Stages Award and founder of alternative performance venue The Green Room in Manchester - looked to fine art to trouble the boundaries of theatre practice. Coming from a background of a drama degree at Exeter University then a television direction course at Manchester, she started out 'very much in the community side of things',[20] founding a small company which performed in Manchester's streets. She joined up with a larger group that promoted events and produced plays above a pub, and 'decided that what I liked doing best was presenting performance'.[21] With a colleague, she invited touring shows from predominantly visual theatre groups such as Cunning Stunts, I.O.U., Hesitate and Demonstrate and

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[18] cited in Jane Ferguson, 1993
[19] Interview with Alexa Wright, London, November 2nd 1994
[20] Interview with Stella Hall, London, September 7th 1994
[21] Interview with Stella Hall, London, September 7th 1994

Bloodgroup. The Green Room followed a period of training as an arts administrator. Hall articulates her reasons for becoming part of the live art scene thus:

> I think it was probably a disillusion ...not necessarily a disillusionment but a *disinterest* in the traditional forms of theatre [...] I became more aware of artists who were ... who were coming from a visual arts background and moving in to the form and my interest grew, always as a way of encouraging the theatre form to develop by challenging it with exposure to practice on the margins [...] ideally mainstream theatre coming to see the work would be affected by it and influenced by it.[22]

Although influence is a difficult factor to pinpoint, it does seem that in the 1990s a generation of would-be practitioners can, and do, cite Rose English, Annie Griffin and Forced Entertainment[23] in particular. The latter were themselves influenced though by Impact Theatre Co-op who were amongst the visiting practitioners to the group's university (Exeter). The parallels between the two collectives were even drawn in criticism which described one of Forced Entertainment's early works as being 'sub-Impact'.[24] Performer-member of Forced Entertainment, Robin Arthur, recalls that the drama degree course on which they met 'was biased toward theatre as a wholly creative, not a merely interpretative act' hence 'when we set up in Sheffield in 1984, it never really occurred to us to do other people's plays'.[25] They, too, relate the influence of the Wooster Group. In light of Forced Entertainment's extensive tours of colleges and so on, it is hardly surprising to learn that they have now influenced another generation of would-be practitioners. As Matt Adams noted in *Live Art Magazine*:

> 'Very Forced Ents' must be one of the top 10 cliched adjectives of Live Art foyer chat, and for good reason. The temptation to take up a mic and mumble about the stars has been irresistible to swathes of young theater [*sic*] makers[26]

Melanie Thompson and Kirsten Lavers are representative of a younger generation of live artists who have been able to take advantage of both the introduction of the artform into education and

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[22] Interview with Stella Hall, London, September 7th 1994
[23] Forced Entertainment Theatre Co-op comprises Robin Arthur, Tim Etchells, Richard Lowdon, Claire Marshall, Cathy Naden, Terry [Teresa] O'Connor and (administrator) Deborah Chadbourn
[24] see Rob la Frenais 'Beating the Live Art Trail' *Performance* no. 38, December/January/February 1986, p.9
[25] cited in Jim Hiley 'Play from a Savage Nursery' *Observer* March 1990
[26] Matt Adams 'Preview' *Live Art Magazine* September 1994, p.2

the role models provided by established live artists in the guise of visiting lecturers/practitioners or artists in residence. They attended Dartington College of Arts - Thompson from 1975-6, Lavers from 1988-91. Thompson's time there is perhaps indicative of the way in which live art was evolving as much from dance as anything else in the 1970s. Dartington enjoyed an unparalleled reputation during this period for its links with the New Dance scene and its American equivalent (it was this same involvement with the New Dance outlook that had influenced Rose English, Jacky Lansley and Sally Potter). The first series of Theatre Papers published by Dartington in 1977 attests to the college's broad interpretation of theatre practice with its contribution from choreographer Anna Halprin. On leaving Dartington with a diploma in dance and drama, Thompson continued on a more traditional route (as choreographer and assistant youth project director at the Cockpit Theatre, London for instance); yet even at this stage she was working with major performance artists/companies such as the People Show, Hesitate and Demonstrate, and Jeff Nuttall and Friends Roadshow. Throughout the early 1980s, she travelled Europe with companies that had already received recognition in Britain, at least in *Performance* magazine (Akademia Ruchu in Poland, Odin Theater, Denmark for example).

Thompson's decision to co-form 'theatre company' Intimate Strangers with Paul Roylance in 1983 appears to follow logically from these earlier periods of touring work and involvement in educational projects. Yet even at this point, the company's stated policy of being 'committed to developing work in collaboration with a range of art practitioners' signals Thompson's move towards live art that she herself dates as 1988, when she began teaching at Dartington. It was here that she met (student) Lavers and they 'began to explore ideas in workshops'.[27] Lavers' own entry into live art began with a desire to make 'a radical career change'.[28] She was already in her late twenties when she started her degree in Art and the Social Context and had given up nursing. Influenced by visiting practitioners such as Rose Garrard and Thompson, Lavers experimented with installation and had a work accepted for the National Review of Live Art in

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[27] Written correspondence from Melanie Thompson to myself, July 19th 1994
[28] Written correspondence from Kirsten Lavers to myself, July 19th 1994

1990. In 1992, she and Thompson began collaborating officially on the Zwillinge Project - an ongoing project of site-specific works around Britain.

Exits from the live art world are far less simple to determine. To begin with the live art sector is small, and even where artists have ceased working in one capacity they often resurface in another. Intriguing shifts have occurred over the past decade between players, as evidenced by the following examples: early in her career Rose English made work with Sally Potter; Potter moved into larger-scale film making and Tilda Swinton performed in her film *Orlando;* Swinton, with Joanna Scanlan, was a co-director of Annie Griffin's production company; Pirate. Scanlan has since worked as Live Art Officer at the ACE and performed in Griffin's film *It Is For My Mouth Forever.* Huw Chadbourn also appeared in Griffin's film but used to work with Forced Entertainment in the early 1980s (his sister, Deborah Chadbourn, is their administrator). He has recently worked with Tamzin Griffin as part of Semblance; Tamzin Griffin then performed with Bobby Baker in *Take A Peek.* Hugo Glendinning takes photographs for almost everyone and has been in Griffin's film *Was She There* ...

However, not all have persisted in the sector. Artists disenchanted with performance/live art often blame the form itself for their loss of interest. Rose Garrard, for example, claims:

> the jaded posturings of Performance Artists have less and less impact on their immediate audience (let alone on art, culture or society) than ever before. Perhaps the need for cultural responsibility has become so urgent, the task so vast in a world where our self-destruction, not creativity, increasingly tops the agenda, that the small rituals of Performance Art, subsumed in the systems they once sought to change, have lost their perspective and energy, becoming merely the tune of the fiddler while Rome burns.[29]

Similarly, Catherine Ugwu, Deputy Live Arts Director at the I.C.A., has noted that many live artists of the 1980s have no interest in seeing 1990s work.[30] They feel divorced from it, hence live art does not necessarily have a natural constituency of ex-practitioners for an audience.

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[29] Rose Garrard, 1994, p.73
[30] Conversation with Catherine Ugwu, London, December 18th 1995

Again, it is debatable whether these artists are accurate in their assessments of the current scene, or whether they are merely expressing their own disillusionment with that particular way of working. In any case, these factors point to an almost claustrophic community with a high turnover of artist members.

So whilst the enormous commitment required of the live artist may be true of the artworld generally, (the 'jobbing actor' is liable to be unemployed more often than employed), there does appear to be something about this type of performance that makes it extremely difficult to sustain for several practical reasons, including age, personal commitments, finances and career profiles. It is generally admitted that the visual artworld of the 1990s is encouraging a youth cult where celebrated artists are as likely to be in their twenties as older. That is not to imply that there are no fifty year old and over live artists; Shirley Cameron, for instance, attended St. Martin's School of Art from 1962 to 1966 to study sculpture. She began making live work almost immediately and is still performing. However, age can impact on women who decide to have children. Though this need not mean ceasing to work in performance, (Cameron herself and more theatre-identified artists such as Alison Andrews and Rivca Rubin have continued), it is likely to alter priorities. Silvia Ziranek is one example. Renowned in the 1980s for her forthright monologues on domestic issues, she has since said: 'my attitudes etc. etc. are extremely tempered by the arrival of a new baby [...] and an extremely lively 3 year old'.[31]

Finances are likely to play a considerable part in whether or not an artist can afford to continue in live art. It is a time-consuming and expensive form to produce and, with funding structures as they are, no live artist is able to survive without some additional form of subsidy (through teaching, writing, support from partners or whatever). There also comes a point where an artist has to decide whether or not they are in search of wider 'success' (which usually goes beyond peer group acknowledgment). Live art is not sufficiently in demand, nor does it rate as a critical priority. Performance is often characterised as a phase of experimentation rather than something

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[31] Written correspondence from Silvia Ziranek to myself, September 25th 1994

an artist dedicates their life's work to (the same would not be argued of other fine art practice). In short, any artist (female especially) who seeks to make a name for themselves is less likely to attempt to do so through performance. Helen Chadwick (deceased) is an example of a successful 'career artist'. At Chelsea School of Art in the mid-seventies, her early experiments with performance - what her contemporary Tim Roberts has scathingly described as 'strapping herself stark naked into a variety of soft kitchen utilities. I still don't know why'[32] - were succeeded by a move into installation and sculpture. Like Hatoum, it is questionable whether Chadwick would have achieved the same 'success' if she had just pursued performance.

Sometimes artists themselves are not sure why they abandoned making live work; Alexa Wright claims 'I don't really know why I gave up [performing]' and believes that it may have been because of a dissatisfaction with her output ('too theatrical').[33] Certainly live artists, their work often undocumented, are prone to disappearance, as the following fragment of anecdotal evidence attests. Feminist performance artist Carlyle Reedy was often spoken of in *Performance* magazine and appears, complete with a contact address, on the ACE's Artists List of 1994. I duly wrote to Reedy but received in return an amusing note from the house's current occupant, his (?) signature indecipherable. He claimed to have been living at that address for the past ten years and had 'no idea where Carlyle Reedy - whoever he or she is - [was] now but [he was] sick of getting mail for her!'. Carlyle Reedy, please come forward ...

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[32] Tim Roberts 'Snow Joke' *Tonight* August 3rd 1994
[33] Interview with AlexaWright, London, November 2nd 1994

Practice Makes Theory

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha dedicates a chapter to 'The Commitment to Theory', proposing a postcolonial theorisation of the so-called Third World and other 'marginalised' cultures. Although there are obvious differences between Bhabha's agenda and my own, there are nevertheless parallels to be drawn between the area he discusses and live art. Live art in Britain could be likened to the 'Third World' in that is equally sidelined and impoverished. As with cultural practices deemed 'other', it is consistently viewed in terms of its strangeness and used to demonstrate or re-establish the traditions of dominant artforms.

What Bhabha argues though, is that unless the 'Third World' begins to theorise itself, for itself, it is doomed to be used as a convenient cipher for a western, Eurocentric vision. It is worth citing Bhabha at length here; he writes:

> the site of cultural difference can become the mere phantom of a dire disciplinary struggle in which it has no space or power [...] the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation. The Other is cited, quoted, framed, illuminated, encased in the shot/reverse-shot strategy of a serial enlightenment. Narrative and the *cultural* politics of difference become the closed circle of interpretation. The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse. However impeccably the content of an 'other' culture may be known, however anti-ethnocentrically it is represented, it is its *location* as the closure of grand theories, the demand that, in analytic terms, it always be the good object of knowledge, the docile body of difference, that reproduces a relation of domination[1]

It seems to me, that this is precisely the situation in which live art currently finds itself. Perpetually cast as 'avant-garde', theatre's 'other', a weird and self-indulgent activity, it is denied the opportunity to assert its agenda, to theorise from its own perspective. The outcome of this denial is that it has been very much left untheorised, perhaps because those dominant artforms (like western, colonial culture) have benefited from characterising it as 'primitive' and unsophisticated.

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[1] Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture* London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p.31

The unwillingness to theorise live art though is, again as Bhabha notes of 'Third World' culture, complicated by the marginalised's suspicion of the techniques of the hegemonic. He claims:

> There is a damaging and self-defeating assumption that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged. It is said that the place of the academic critic is inevitably within the Eurocentric archives of an imperialist or neo-colonial West. The Olympian realms of what is mistakenly labelled 'pure theory' are assumed to be eternally insulated from the historical exigencies and tragedies of the wretched of the earth. Must we always polarize in order to polemicize?[2]

Arguably, those voices in the live artworld who have been against the form's institutionalisation are comparable to those fearful that the theoristion of the 'Third World' will inevitably lead to a dilution of political engagement. These may be markedly different objectives (the one hoping to retain its fluidity, the other to maintain an aggressively oppositional ideological stance), but they are nonetheless similar in their belief that to engage with theory is to be somehow sidetracked. In short then, any advocation that these spheres embrace theory, is likely to encounter both external and internal opposition.

Despite these objections, I hold, with Bhabha, that there is too much at stake in denying theory's potential, or in passively allowing others to impose it from their viewpoint. This chapter thus seeks to dissect the role of theory, discussing both some of its advantages and disadvantages, and ultimately proposing a commitment to it.

To date, if live art has been theorised at all, it is within the loose, vague parameters of avant-gardism (although the situation has been changing, as visible in *Hybrid*). In ***Part Three***, I reject the avant-garde as a paradigm for live art practice because, perhaps paradoxically, avant-gardism is too definitive as a concept. As with the notion of 'otherness', it allows us to package all that might be uncomfortable or transgressive and, in doing so, to ignore it, to place it to one side. It is as if labelling a practice avant-garde somehow precludes the need for further analysis. The other commonly used trope is that of the 'hybrid' itself, which is more relevant to my own conception of live art as a practice that *intersects* with other

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[2] Homi Bhaba, 1994, p.19

disciplines, rather than one which sets itself ahead of, or apart from, them. Moreover, it is a term that Bhahba uses to stress that culture cannot in any case be perceived as unitary. He writes 'hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity'.[3]

What happens though, if we wish to theorise live art practice further, beyond the rather obvious terminology of either avant-gardism or hybridity? In considering this question, it is necessary to remember that I am discussing the live art scene in Britain. One common objection to theorising is that, in locating itself -and by connection the work - within the academy, practice is somehow abstracted. Without seeing theory and practice as polarised, it seems important to retain an awareness of the conditions of live art's production, the circumstances in which it operates. It was for this reason that I looked in ***Part One*** at the material factors affecting practitioners. Although my way of reading live art is not particularly tailored to British work (that is, it may well be feasible to undertake a Foucauldian analysis, for example, of an American performance artist), it has been formulated as a response to its specific needs. Whereas censorship and controversy seem to be recurring issues for performance art in the U.S.A. (with funding from the government being withheld accordingly), these factors have had less impact on live art in Britain. Conversely, live artists working in other parts of Europe do not appear to face the same preoccupation with definition that we witness here, possibly because other European cultures are more comfortable with live art as a manifestation of theatrical practice. It has therefore been easier perhaps to focus on the idiosyncratic elements of British work, its very textuality. It is arguably *more* vital to the British scene that we begin to characterise live art as a credible practice; and this is where theory can be useful as a legitimising device.

It is undeniable that once work is theorised, it is generally written about and debated, and hence publicised, with the possibility of drawing attention to its multiplicity and contradictions. The very level of attention dedicated to it can add 'weight'. One begins to read about what live art, at certain moments, in specific instances, *is*, rather than what we

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[3] Homi Bhaba, 1994, p.37

assumed it to be. It seems obvious that once live art (both as a form and individual performances) is opened up to theory, decisions that are currently seen only in the way in which venues, for instance, programme events will have a forum in which to be contested.

I use as an example, my inclusion of Forced Entertainment in this thesis. This might be considered invalid by certain people in the live art sphere (Catherine Ugwu, for one[4]) who consider the group to be theatre practitioners. However, I have attempted to use theory to justify my incorporation of them. In my opinion, their existence as a company has been celebrated within live art more than anywhere else and, though there are no statistics to support this claim, it seems indisputable that they have impacted on live art making far more than on theatre-making. It is only by reading their work through a theorisation of live art practice (or equally, by re-theorising British theatre practice to accomodate their aesthetic), that we can begin to accept and account for Forced Entertainment.

The other commonly-held objection to theory is that it can make work that was previously accessible inaccessible. Judging from the response of the journalistic reviewing industry, it is apparent that live art is not immediately approachable, so it is unlikely that its theorisation could make it any less so. However, the possibility I would like to advance is that, conversely, theory can benefit live art is by rendering it, perhaps surprisingly, *more* accessible. I am not claiming that I necessarily achieve this within this thesis, but that this could be an outcome. Returning to Forced Entertainment, in examining their output not as avant-garde theatre practice (which is also 'difficult') but as comparable to science fiction, I show that there are parallels between my way of reading performance and the ways in which we already read more popular genres. Theory in this instance, then, serves to highlight that is perhaps more the institutionalisation of live art (the way in which it is marketed, where it appears and so forth), than the work *itself* which is responsible for alienating potential audiences. That is not to say that all live art could be read as one would read sf, but that if we, as audience, were to participate in it with a similar acceptance of its alternate logic, our wariness of it might decrease.

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[4] Conversation with Catherine Ugwu, London, December 18th 1994

Another parallel argument against theory in relation to performance especially, is that it engenders an *overly analytical* stance, a distancing, that is at odds with the liveness of the performed moment. In writing, one cannot avoid fixing. However, it seems important to accept that it is not theory's role to recreate the viewing experience (which is surely an impossible task in any case). Rather, that the very moment of reflection, that pause, enables the viewer to access those layers of the live artwork that may not have been immediately evident, that were perhaps latent. The usefulness of this becomes apparent when we consider my reading of Bobby Baker in the next chapter. Critics' concentration on her deliberately awkward persona ('batty' and so on), has resulted in a dismissal of the more subversive aspects of her practice. By focusing on *where* she performs as much as what she performs, I offer an equally partial interpretation of Baker's work but one which, hopefully, encourages the reader to delve beneath their surface impressions.

Since no established theory for reading live art exists (nor, I would argue, could one sole theoretical paradigm suffice), I have plundered from other, often more theorised, disciplines. Even if we accept the advantages of theory, we are left with the dilemma of which theories to deploy. I have not sought to establish a blueprint, a set of 'acceptable' theories, but rather to show that sometimes it is the act of theorising *per se* that is useful. At times, there are obvious connections between the languages used in performances and the theories through which I have approached them. It seems self-explanatory, for example, why I choose to analyse Annie Griffin's performances through film theory. One advantage of using the latter is that it is sufficiently diverse and well-debated to be able to provide a familiar set of markers, or a starting point, for a little-understood form like live art. In this particular case, Griffin cites film as having the greatest influence on her practice. An exploration of concepts common to feminist film theory (like the gaze) thus might return the reader to, and involve them in, the process whereby the work came to be made. In reading across disciplines, she is also encouraged perhaps to examine those disciplines more closely. Theorising one area thus has the advantage of inviting us to renegotiate our relationship to other areas. This is surely a more useful engagement with theory than an evasion of it altogether (which would serve to leave it intact and implacable).

If theorising live art impacts on how we have theorised other cultural practices, it is also the case that live artworks themselves can affect theory. Although theory and practice are not independent domains, I want to argue that their interrelationship is a symbiotic process. I have spoken about the contribution that the former can make to live art, and how this contribution is legible not just in textual terms (such as a practitioner making work from a premise) but in more material ones (if nothing else, theory can publicise and possibly even popularise live art). However I want to add here that live art has the potential to contribute to, and reinvigorate, theory. Perhaps primarily through remaining resistant to many established theories of performance, live art demands new ways of reading and thereby challenges us to invent or invoke other strategies.

My imposition of a feminist stance on these readings of live artworks and their initiators is intended to work in the same way; namely, to show that live art is renegotiating several feminist theories. Feminism's failure (with few exceptions) to accord live art the same depth of analysis that it has afforded film, dance, theatre and so on, is thus diminished here. It is not so much a case of feminism(s) providing theories through which to approach live art, as live art contributing to the expansion of feminist theory into other arenas. The prime benefit here is that feminists can set their own agenda, rather than feeling obliged to respond to patriarchally inscribed ones.

I have stressed the importance of theorising live art because it seems strange that a form which has grown from a largely conceptual base should have been so ignored. However, the application of theoretical models to live art practice is not without contradictions, as I have discovered in the process of writing this thesis. To begin with, there was the difficulty of defining live art which threatened to question the validity of my choice of subjects. I am not wholly convinced by Annie Griffin's argument, for instance, that a film can be live art as long as it problematises the audience's response; yet I sought to trace this idea through an analysis of her films and found that it enriched my comprehension of the way in which the latter function.

Then, at some point, these theories too become problematised by their context. This thesis, for instance, is ultimately bound by certain academic conventions and may be considered limited for those reasons. My argument for a theorisation of live art through live art tactics is probably not best served by the thesis format. This dilemma recalls the debate about documentation and the extent to which it is describing, analysing or recreating the performance, or in fact on route to becoming an artwork in itself. ***Part Two*** is inevitably closer to the former, using theory as a way of reading. Nevertheless, I would suggest that revision of what we understand by the term 'academic' might engender a form of 'writing' about live art that was more reflective of its processes. I have engaged with this idea in a small way in the chapter about Forced Entertainment's work where my prose style (unwittingly) mimics, at times, that of Tim Etchells.

It has also transpired that the kind of structural organisation necessitated by an academic tract has thrown issues of narrativity into relief. This is particularly evident in ***Part Two*** where the chapters operate discretely, but are rendered additionally, and inevitably, meaningful by the order in which they appear. Although it became clear that there were thematic links between chapters (they could have been organised in pairs according to broad topics of 'space', 'Englishness' and 'the body', for example), I have resisted facilitating the reading process like this. Part of my resistance derives from the belief that to categorise practitioners in this way would be to deny the intricacy of their work. Susan Lewis' *Ladies Falling*, for instance, is about ethnicity, class, sexuality *and* gender, these themes carefully integrated and, like the live artwork itself, not easily disentangled. In refusing to assist the reader more, I have attempted to capture instead the dislocation of viewing the live art performance. This seems to me an important consideration when applying theory to live art; it should not be used to gloss over the difficulties inherent in the work otherwise it risks replicating the simplistic approach I have criticised.

It would probably be an exaggeration to say that the seasoned live art spectator still flounders anew every time they see a different work. However, even if we take the cynical view that a live artwork in the 1990s is likely to comprise microphones, T.V. screens and

Forced Entertainment copyists, it is nonetheless true that we know less what to expect from it than what *not* to expect. Of course it is possible that seeing Bobby Baker's work, for example, acclimatises us in some way to, say, that of Annie Griffin; but it is also possible that the more live art we encounter, the less sure we can be of what it *is* exactly. In short, live art's rejection of definition means that it is always in flux as a practice. In the same way, the readings I undertake in one chapter of ***Part Two*** do not automatically assist the reader in approaching another chapter. Thus ***Part Two*** is as fragmentary and difficult as the live artwork, proving perhaps that no amount of prior information about live art (such as that provided in ***Part One***) can adequately describe, or prepare the spectator for, the experience of seeing such performance for the first time.

The other difficulty with theories generally and the academic thesis particularly, is that they are expected to be consistent. Whilst they are supposed to anticipate and foreground objections, they are also meant to be sustainable in the face of them; yet this implies an element of closure which is mostly absent from live art. This does not make theorising an impossibility but demands, rather, a circumnavigatory approach whereby no grand narrative is created. For this reason I am not positing my own approach to theorising live art as any kind of 'solution', but as a credible option at this juncture of live art's development. Seen in this light, I defend my use of different approaches within the three parts of my work - ***Part One*** more materialist, ***Part Two*** more textual, ***Part Three*** more abstract.

In order to prevent the reader from seeing *a* particular theory as the definitive one through which to analyse a practitioner, I have experimented with layering theories within a chapter. In **The Case of Alba Bewick: Mary Duffy Operates**, for instance, I draw on texts by Foucault, Scarry and Jordanova, thus highlighting the potential benefits of juxtaposing ways of reading. These include the opportunity to mitigate the shortcomings of individual texts, such as the failure to identify gender differentials, through the act of supplementing them with selections of other texts. In that same chapter, I further impose a film reference to a fictional character to construct a narrative for the chapter that is deliberately complex in relation to the minimalist quality of Duffy's work. This enables us to complicate, by literally

working through our responses, our first impressions of Duffy's body as merely 'thalidomide'.

The theories through which I have examined the works in ***Part Two*** are not only eclectic and potentially contradictory (some more historical, others more psychoanalytical, and so on), but possibly interchangeable. I say this cautiously because I do not mean to imply that this necessarily invalidates my readings, but that theories are enabling tools to multiply, rather than contain, interpretations. The interchangeability of theories therefore attests to the richness of the live artworks under discussion. This is apparent if you compare my reading of Rose English's *The Double Wedding* with Jools Gilson-Ellis' of the same show; whilst we both deploy a Lacanian analysis, we find different focuses within the work. I hope that this also demonstrates that theories are malleable, and hence as vulnerable to misinterpretation as some live artists claim to be.

These strategies - layering texts, complicating the reading process, resisting closure - are evidently legible themselves as displays of postmodernist aesthetics. The natural extension of this approach would be to represent the other element of live art practice, that is, the audience, as diversely as possible. It could be argued that theory as created by those making and viewing live artworks, often one and the same with live art audiences, would provide the audience with a forum. Yet this thesis fails to indicate that vital component, that audience. Admittedly, this omission was partly unintentional. Where I have found other accounts of the same performance, I have sometimes alluded to them. More often than not though, there were none - or none that spoke in sufficient depth to invite sustained debate. (I recognise that there would have been other means of gauging audience response, but I preferred not to deploy them).

Within the context of these chapters then, I become more or less the sole interpreter of the performances; a figure whose opinions the reader is almost unable to challenge because there is no master text (as there would be with most fine artworks or literary ones) to refer back

to. This subjectivity is awkard in the light of what I have claimed for theory's ability to offer, through conflicting perspectives, a multi-layered alternative text. Working in another format, for instance, I might have chosen to juxtapose my interpretations of works with those of the practitioners themselves perhaps, with the aim of creating a more open-ended text. I have deliberately tried to undermine my situation of authority by not editing out contradictions evident in my own responses, and by lending an element of fiction to the thesis in the form of the chapter titles for ***Part Two***. Hopefully, the minor introduction of fiction into this thesis proves that live art can be theorised without engendering a loss of its unrepresentable qualities. This is not a new approach to theory (theorists such as Cixous and Derrida have already played with the (il)legibility of theory), but one which, again, might diminish the disadvantages of theory. If we cease to see theory as an imposition of a restrictive framing device, and begin to see it as something also in flux, it will seem more applicable to live artworks.

Ultimately, theory's primary function is to facilitate the creation of what Bhabha calls a 'Third Space'; and it is in this that it can truly benefit live art, which might itself be characterised as such. Bhaba writes:

> The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space[5]

He refers to this place as one of translation and negotiation, wherein we witness neither one thing nor another, but a multiplicity of things. Similarly, a theoretical appraisal of live art can render it as not wholly practice (since it is often inspired by theory, after all), and recast theory as a *performative* discourse. Bhabha claims that 'by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves'[6] and this formulation can be echoed for the theorisation of live art. In short, it is perhaps only in the process of translating the viewing experience into enunciation that we can learn to appreciate the complexities and contradictions of both.

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[5] Homi Bhaba, 1994, p. 36
[6] Homi Bhaba, 1994, p. 39

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She Does Not Know Her Place:

Bobby Baker and the Live Art of Trespassing

Feminists have sought to address the dialectic of spatiality - with its male/public versus female/private bias - in numerous ways, but perhaps it is through performance that some of the most interesting strategies have been deployed. Whilst public space still endeavours to exclude women in many spheres, it generally welcomes them as performers; we thus face the dilemma of desire for visibility and a wariness of display. Live artists have often preferred non-theatre spaces, hoping to discourage audiences from behaving like passive consumers yet every space is rich in associations. In this chapter, I look at the work of practitioner Bobby Baker in order to show that the live artwork is capable not only of operating differently within prescribed spaces but of rendering them *different*.

I begin by drawing on Lefebvre's concept of *monumental space* as multi-layered and mutable, and claim that Baker effects the transformation of private to public space by performing in her own home. In addition, by evoking the host-guest relationship (with host/performer required to keep guest/audience entertained) she asks us to reconsider the private, and problematises a passive engagement. Invading the public spaces of supermarkets and gardens with her performances, Baker also betrays an ambiguity towards monumentality, her re/presentation of the quotidian recalling the symbolic and ritualised behaviour of those resisting the intention of the monumental space. Finally, I examine critical performances, noting that for the most part critics have sought to minimise Baker's subversive treatment of space by rendering her innocuous and describing her through the metaphors of madness. Paradoxically, they have achieved this through the allocation of substantial *column space* to her practice (theatre reviews); and in so doing return her to the unthreatening and 'suitable' theatre space that she has been evading.

Private Lives

Feminist theorisations of spatiality have tended to concentrate on the private (female) versus public (male) divide but performance, by its nature, renders these categories. To perform is automatically to be public. Since the act of watching performance is tied up with the notion of *consuming,* and since performance is basically *perishable*, it seems especially appropriate that Baker's work is so concerned with food.[1] Moreover, food's relationship to the public and private spheres is more complicated than we might suppose. Barry Smart, for instance, has argued that eating is no longer legible through the public/private dichotomy. He claims:

> table manners and control of bodily functions are not confined to public restaurants, even when we are dining or eating fast food while walking on the street, we are generally in the presence of others, and cultural codes, constraints and taboos associated with eating, posture and demeanour are, fortunately, present[2]

However, what Baker foregrounds is the way in which our responsibility for food preparation remains *gendered*, and therefore dichotomous. For whilst food for the familial domestic sphere is still largely considered a female preserve (from the recipe sections of women's magazines to the weekly supermarket shop), in the public domain masculinity presides. This is particularly noticeable in the arena of the professional celebrity cook. Women in this role have tended to re-enact substitute mother figures (the sensible, practical ethos of Delia Smith; Sophie Grigson's *Eat Your Greens*) and are invariably upstaged by their male counterparts who perform their 'chefdom' with boyish flamboyance (the Roux brothers' stagey repartee; Marco Pierre White's machismo; Keith Floyd's exuberance). Therefore Baker's aesthetic refutes this divide further, forcing the domestic persona of house and wife into the public arena *through performance*.

Baker's interest in food is long standing and she refers to herself as 'a very orally obsessed person'.[3] The act of presenting herself with, or as, food is an extension of her post-art school

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[1] A precedent for this can be seen in the work of much-loved performance artist Silvia Ziranek, whose complex and witty monologues were concerned with the houseworker's lot. She also published poem-recipes; see for instance her book *Very Food* Bookworks, 1987

[2] Barry Smart 'Digesting the modern diet: Gastro-porn, fast food and panic eating' in Keith Tester (ed.) *The Flaneur* London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p.169

[3] Interview with Bobby Baker, London, November 29th 1994

experimentation with food as objets d'art. One of her early patisserie sculptures *An Edible Family in a Mobile Home*, for example, was made to be eaten and the limitations of this prompted her to explore the manipulation (and creation) of food in performance. She is married to professional food photographer Andrew Whittuck and the two have collaborated on publications, him taking photographs of her food-encrusted body in performance. Thus she makes her body the object of the camera's gaze and aligns it to a whole tradition of (men) photographing women's bodies as food. But whereas 1940s Hollywood starlet publicity stills were only called 'cheesecake' shots, Baker is more likely to be photographed coated in the stuff. In making the connection so explicit, and in frustrating the tradition by rendering her body so emphatically messy, she succeeds in highlighting the pin-up's silliness.

Baker's career has been divided by an eight year hiatus (1980-1988) during which she raised her two children. Although I would like to focus on her post-1988 series of performances loosely grouped under the heading of *Daily Lives*, it is worth looking in brief at her earlier practice. *My Cooking Competes* (1980) was Baker's contribution to the seminal *About Time* Exhibition at the I.C.A. Documentation of the performance exists in the form of reviews and what emerges most strongly from these - Sarah Kent's in particular - is the sense that a preoccupation with the domestic was a real issue for feminist practice. Kent notes 'Performance allows women not to separate the domestic from the professional [....] Several artists concentrate on the domestic role of the woman as provider and consumer'.[4] The work took the format of a cookery demonstration, complete with several dishes arranged on a trestle table. Baker then exceeded the typical demo banalities to address the history of each dish and to highlight the effort involved in its creation. Lynn MacRitchie's review summarised the performance's appeal, recognising

> the sense it conveyed of shared experience. The audience knew that this presenter had actually performed all these tasks, that they had taken up her time, just as they wear away the time of countless women, day after day [.... Baker] managed to look at the same time both bashful and wise[5]

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[4] Sarah Kent 'Pretty Promises, happy traps' *Time Out* no.550, 1980, p.23

[5] Reproduced in Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock (eds) *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 19970-1985* London, Pandora Press, 1987, p.230

The same concerns, with the added experiences of maternity, inform Baker's current work but what is noticeably different (as I will go on to discuss) is critical reaction to her. Whilst the aforementioned reviews are admittedly written by sympathisers of a feminist agenda, it is still interesting that they are so much more analytical than any current writing on her work with the exception of the feminist criticism of Claire MacDonald and Marina Warner. The post-1988 phase of Baker's career includes the following works: *Drawing on A Mother's Experience* (1988); *Kitchen Show* (1991); *How To Shop* (1993); *A Useful Body of Herbs* (1994) and *Take a Peek* (1995) and a brief overview of their content should suffice to give a sense of Baker's practice.

Drawing on A Mother's Experience was, in a way, Baker's 'come back' piece. The title alludes not only to the autobiographical content that informs the work, but to the actual processes within it. These see Baker with two bulging carrier bags of various food stuffs and a white sheet on which she 'draws' with her substances (flour, eggs, beetroot and so on). Hence the items she uses take on multiple significances, becoming invested with mythical powers and functioning equally as 'painting' materials. For instance, Baker pours pints of Guinness onto her sheet claiming 'They told me a pint [of stout] a day was good for me. I found nearer four to be the right thing for me'. This technique (everyday objects acquiring importance) recurs in most of Baker's shows. It is also typical of her work that there should be a reference to some unseen authority ('They') whose rules she flouts.

The allusion to the act of painting, and hence to fine art practice generally, in the above work was compared by reviewers to the expressionist drive of Jackson Pollock *et al.* Yet the performance concludes with Baker rolling her body in the sheet 'and so imprinting the marks onto her own clothing as she is wrapped and pinned in a tight shroud of mess'.[6] This moment though, I would argue, is less redolent of Pollock's action painting than of the house worker's chore, since any suggestion that her gesture is the sign of a liberated rebelliousness is tempered by the subsequent clearing up and erasure of the stains - something that Pollock presumably did not need to do. Marilyn French has depicted perhaps more accurately than

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[6] Claire MacDonald 'Live and Kicking' *Women's Art Magazine* no.61, November/December 1994, p.14

any other contemporary (feminist) novelist the consequences and limitations of women's loss of control in patriarchal societies. Her novels, most notably *The Women's Room* and *The Bleeding Heart,* are populated by the grim despair of the surburban 'housewife' and the impossibility of avoiding domesticity and domestication:

> She looked round the kitchen at the dirty dishes on the table, dirty pans on the stove, coffee pot still half full. She lunged at the table and swept off an armful; of dishes, hurling them to the floor [...]
>
> Dolores was down on her knees, wiping up tiny shards of glass the broom wouldn't catch [...] Can't even get angry if you're a woman because you always have to clean up your own mess[7]

This interpretation would seem to be far more in keeping with Baker's insights.

Kitchen Show takes the paraphernalia of kitchenware and exploits it by re-inventing it in performance; a cake stand becomes Baker's pedestal, a wooden spoon a hair ornament, black bin-liners become clothes, spinach leaves are attached with safety pins to her lapels, and Jay-cloths protrude from her slippers to give her the winged appearance of a Greek god. As an event that takes place in Baker's own kitchen, the audience actually go to her home to watch her perform. In contrast, *How To Shop: The Lecture* is more public. It sees Baker in white overall (with its connotations of domestic science teacher, nurse, factory worker: sensible, practical and sanitised), fake tan, and ankle bracelet with dangling crucifix. Performing in a lecture theatre, she appropriates the educational context, making academic those activities which are commonly assumed to be an innate part of the female psyche. Baker's audience is large and literally removed from the intimacy of *Kitchen Show.* She employs a travelling metaphor as she states 'I like to regard my shopping trips as a search for enlightenment, a spiritual journey, an adventure,' and illustrates her words with slides and filmed sequences shot in a supermarket. She isolates seven household items from the supermarket shelves, the number in itself (seven deadly sins, seven wonders of the world, lucky seven) accentuating the mythic quality of her 'quest'. These include parsley for humility, a tin of anchovies for obedience, olive oil for courage and red wine for compassion.

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[7] Marilyn French *The Bleeding Heart* London, Abacus, 1980, p.36

Accentuating those rituals surrounding our preparation and consumption of food, Baker treats these basic provisions with a seriousness reminiscent of religious ceremonies. The parallels between these activities are evident (bread and wine in both proceedings; the sermon and the lecture as comparable) and Baker carefully borrows religious imagery and then re-imbues it with bodily importance. Instead of sipping at the wine she swims in it and so there is a sensory dimension to her borrowings and a transgressive suggestion of the uncontrolled female body. A similar feel of fantasy and excess informs the episode where she mimes to a Dusty Springfield record clutching a toffee apple microphone.

Baker expresses her 'love' for her audience by turning some bread into garlic croûtons which she feeds to them. In achieving this change from bread to croûton, Baker echoes not only the rituals of Holy Communion and its belief in transubstantiation, but the cookery programme and, by implication, her early work. However Baker deconstructs those experiences by concentrating on the methods involved; so that, unlike the cookery programme, all the effort entailed is *visible*. She expounds on the immensity of the clearing up process that follows food preparation - a process again conveniently ignored by the cookery programme which usually 'climaxes' with the emergence of food from an oven, and possibly the satisfaction of a taster. When Baker uses food she transforms the space as much as anything else: she causes chaos.

A Useful Body of Herbs, devised specifically for performance in the Chelsea Physic Gardens, London, involves Baker's body outline like a trough. She plants herbs in this body of earth and as she does so she discusses the history of the herbs in medicine. Running through these apocryphal tales is the fact that all the herbs mentioned were used to treat female hysteria. The performance closes with Baker's disappearance and her audience is left to taste various teas and sandwiches fashioned from these herbs. She thus quietly implies that this overwhelming obsession with the female hysteric is as much our problem as hers, for just as she has played the hysteric for us (or that at least is how she has been interpreted), so she now questions our diagnosis by asking us to partake of the treatment. In order to be nourished, the audience must acknowledge its need.

Take a Peek develops this theme, being partly inspired by Charcot's photographs of his patients' 'hysteria'. Although the work is more concerned with the medical profession, its 'exploration of a nameless female complaint'[8] does recall Betty Friedan's *problem without a name*, identified in *The Feminine Mystique* as the boredom and depression of the suburban American housewife. The work makes use of food/objects again (melons, kumquats, Guinness ice cubes), and the female body which has been a signifier of excess in previous shows is here controlled by external forces (in the guise of two assistants), recalling the subtext of regulation. The show's finale is Baker's body immersed in a bath of chocolate custard - like a giant cake - decorated with multi-coloured hundreds and thousands. After her many humiliations, Baker is now well and truly *sweet*.

The acts to which Baker subjects her body in her performances are ritualistic in practice but they also recall the acts of 'beautification', of preparing a female body, as one might food, for consumption. Is Baker immersing her body in red wine so far removed from bathing in milk? Is her adornment with spinach so different from pasting her skin with seaweed? Is the act of covering her face with sweets so much more extreme than sugaring as a means of depilation? The treatments of *Take a Peek* are thus ambiguous in intention, speaking simultaneously of curing the wayward body/ mind and of rewarding it (to treat, to treat oneself to).

As even this brief overview of key works should illustrate, Baker's appeal resides in her ability to present the recognisable. Her concentration on the domestic, the gendering of everyday tasks, and the subjugation of her body to the tyranny of food, all find expression however in her negotiation of space. As one of the few live artists currently interested in working outside, Baker has been able to subvert the intentions of the spaces in which she performs. Whether opening her home to the public, making her mess in public or digging up public gardens, she rejects the private.

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[8] Marina Warner 'Everything and the kitchen sink' *The Guardian* June 21st 1995

Not in Public

Mark Wigley's paper 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender' rereads Alberti's fifteenth century treatise *On The Art of Building in Ten Books* for evidence of the interiorisation of the female in architectural discourse. As Wigley notes, Alberti's works see women 'confined deep within a sequence of spaces [in the home] at the greatest distance from the outside'.[9] Alberti's use of references to 'the historian Memilius Probo' and 'the custom in Greece'[10] that frame his argument for the isolation of women within the house, act, as Wigley says, as a way of shifting responsibility for the argument from Alberti to 'his' ancestors. Hence 'The house enforces a pre-existing law. The law of the house precedes the house'.[11]

Wigley also mentions a previous dialogue of Alberti's - *Della Famiglia* - in which the author prescribes:

> The woman, as she remains locked up at home, should watch over things by staying at her post, by diligent care and watchfulness. The man should guard the woman, the house, and his family and country, but not [by] sitting still[12]

This image of the wandering male then and the positing of the house, the domestic space, as his point of departure, has a substantial history. Because of his privileged mobility, we might also read the male in terms of the migrant, the traveller. Baker's public invasion would approximate this, and indeed the connections between travelling, migrating and performing are by no means contemporary; Michel de Certeau notes that atlases used to be called theatres.[13]

E.G. Ravenstein's seminal research paper 'The Laws of Migration', published in *The Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*,[14] attempted to examine the rural exodus that had become

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[9] Mark Wigley 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender' in Beatriz Colomina (ed.) *Sexuality and Space* New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, p.32

[10] Leon Battista Alberti *The Family in Renaissance Florence* Transl. Rene Neu Watkins, Columbia, South Carolina, South Carolina Press, 1969, p.149 [orig. 1434]

[11] Mark Wigley, 1992, p.335

[12] Leon Battista Alberti, 1969, p.207

[13] Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* Transl.Steven F. Randall, London, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984, p.121

[14] E.G. Ravenstein 'The Laws of Migration' *The Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* no 48, 1885, pp 167-235

serious by the 1870s. Amongst his findings, Ravenstein identified that females were more likely to migrate within the country of their birth whereas males were prone to moving further away. These conclusions are generally accepted to mean that the nineteenth century saw females moving away from the family home to go into domestic service. According to data gleaned from the 1891 census, for example, one third of occupied females were in domestic service - by far the largest sole group of occupation. The period of service in each household, however, was generally brief (less than ten years), as women would move on to other households in search of better positions and, eventually, into marriage and thus into family houses of their own. Domestic service then was an acceptable means of a young female gaining economic independence, albeit within a familial structure. In these terms, the demise of the domestic service industry by the mid-twentieth century could be seen as partly disadvantageous (certainly in the short term) for female workers. For all its inequities, it did at least provide payment for domestic labour.

Bobby Baker's performances might be posited within this frame of reference as paid work of a domestic nature. Drawing on Edward Said's formulations of migrancy and exile as a 'discontinuous state of being' and hence 'a potent, even enriching motif of modern culture',[15] we see that its opposite might come to characterise the domestic sphere of *unpaid* labour: 'homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons'.[16] Baker however, who has made the transition from artist to mother/houseworker to (presently) artist, mother and houseworker, mimics the male migrants of Ravenstein's study. For although she has not travelled far in spatial terms, she has left behind the prison of the domestic to enter the exposure of public life and, in this journey, has covered a huge (psychologically speaking) terrain. As Baker says of the reason she ceased working '[it was] not intentionally but I had a block because in my family once you have children you give everything up'.[17]

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[15] Edward Said 'Reflections on Exile' in R. Ferguson, M. Gever, T. Minh-ha, C. West (eds) *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1990, p.365

[16] Edward Said, 1990, p.365

[17] Bobby Baker cited in Jane Ferguson 'Performance' *Evening Standard Magazine* June 1993

What Baker has also done though is to make her home the *site* of some of her performances. By charging entry to these performances, she ensures that work that she (literally) does in the house is financially rewarded. And, because of the mechanics of performance, it is also *advertised.* We might borrow de Certeau's notion of the bridge to elucidate what Baker achieves with this; as he claims

> The *bridge* is ambiguous everywhere: it alternately welds together and opposes insularities. It distinguishes them and threatens them. It liberates from enclosure and destroys autonomy.[18]

In opening her domestic life to public scrutiny, Baker constructs a metaphorical bridge between the home as fortress and the aforementioned exposed public arena. She thus threatens the isolation of the houseworker and notions of privacy, forcing open the private domain to public scrutiny.

What her home performances recall of course is the other instance when the private is open to scrutiny: the event of inviting guests. The host, like the performer, is expected to keep the guest (audience) entertained and to ensure that the display of the home is only partial. The *mechanics* of entertaining are concealed from the guest (the house is tidy and clean, the activity of food preparation is invisible). Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall have pointed to the creation of the middle-class home in English Victorian society as one cause for the public/private divide: 'the middle ranks [...] erected the strictest boundaries between private and public space'.[19] This was even true of spaces within the home; the positioning of the kitchen in houses of that period, for instance, (generally at the back and sequestered) was significant as 'Segregating the mess and smell of food preparation from the social ritual of eating became an important hallmark of respectability'.[20]

Judy Wajcman notes that twentieth century domestic architecture has altered so that the kitchen is now 'a more cosy "country kitchen" with pine-panelled walls and natural wood

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[18] Michel de Certeau, 1984, p.128
[19] L. Davidoff & C. Hall *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* London, Hutchinson, 1987, p.359
[20] L. Davidoff & C.Hall, 1987, p.383

finishes' and it 'has become the emotional centre of the home'.[21] Nevertheless, I would argue that any apparent relaxation in the unwritten rules for pristine kitchens is cosmetic and that futuristic designs for kitchens are still influenced by the hygiene and efficiency drive of the 1920s and 1930s (themselves influenced, as Wajcman says, by Le Corbusier). Baker's own kitchen *is* 'country kitchen' in style but this merely serves to accentuate her exposure of modern pretensions, since such a kitchen is only allowed to be *organised disorganisation*. In other words, it is permissible for the so-called 'country kitchen' to be equipped with fresh flowers, wicker baskets and chequered table linen, but it is still not imaged as dirty, as its displays in publications such as *Good Housekeeping Magazine* and the *Habitat Catalogue* attest. Baker flouts these unwritten rules by showing us the chaos, the *process* of living in the home. So that rather than subscribing to the perfectionist aesthetic of house, garden and person ('not a hair out of place'), she allows us to see everything out of place and makes herself vulnerable to our censure.

Making Space

Space is disadvantaged next to Foucault's concept of time; similarly, in performance it is time that best helps define the medium (we speak of time-based work) and differentiates it from site-specific art where the place is usually more important. Yet live art, and its predecessor performance art, have frequently sought to disturb spatial integrity. Thus in the 1970s the group Welfare State worked on the streets and, more recently, the ensemble T.E.A. (Those Environmental Artists) have used performance in non-authorised places - driving through Liverpool centre for instance - as a strategy akin to the protest demonstration.

What works such as these, and Baker's, complicate is any simple notion of space. For although they undoubtedly alter places (they may halt its quotidian routine or produce a different dynamic in terms of noise or people), these performances rarely change them in a

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[21] Judy Wajcman *Feminism Confronts Technology* cambridge, Polity Press in association with Blackwell, 1991, p.117

physical/ structural way other than temporarily. Hence it is vital to an understanding of live art's potential to transform spaces that we employ a finer distinction between the various interpretations of space. Michel de Certeau distinguishes between *espace* (space) and *lieu* (place). The former is concerned with such aspects as direction and the intersection of mobile, time-based elements (the space occupied by a moving crowd perhaps). *Lieu* on the other hand relates to a specific location that would be stable and subscribe to what de Certeau identifies as the law of the 'proper'.[22] What de Certeau stresses then is a concept of space that is able to take on board both the fixed locality of a place and its transformation (as affected by non-fixed factors). His vision of space undermines a notion of space as natural; as he emphasises '*space is a practiced place*'.[23]

Lefebvre's concept of *monumental space* is not unlike de Certeau' s law of the proper and it, too, can be relied upon to describe the practice of Bobby Baker. Monumentality incorporates perceived, conceived and lived spaces; it is therefore as much about collective consciousness as communal places. The monumental space is able to offer 'each member of a society an image of [...] membership, an image of his or her social visage'[24] and its emphasis is on creating 'a collective mirror [that would be] more faithful than any personal one'.[25] It could be argued that in stressing the qualities of universality and timelessness in the monumental space, Lefebvre's concept adheres to a quasi-classical ethos. Like the classical claim to prevail eternally, monumentality 'transcends death [...] the lineaments of atemporality overwhelm anxiety'.[26] Thus the patterns of contemporary existence are conveniently effaced by the presence exuded by the monumental space:

> To the degree that there are traces of violence and death, negativity and aggressiveness in social practice, the monumental work erases them and replaces them with a tranquil power and certitude[27]

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[22] Michel de Certeau, 1984, p.115

[23] Michel de Certeau, 1984, p.117

[24] Henri Lefebvre *The Production of Space* Transl. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford, Blackwell, 1994, p.220

[25] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.220

[26] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.221

[27] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.222

However Lefebvre also believes that the credibility of the monumental space 'is never total',[28] it is operant through a *horizon of meaning* rather than through signified(s). This results in 'a shifting hierarchy in which now one, now another meaning comes momentarily to the fore, by means of - and for the sake of - a particular action'.[29] This last would be an adequate analysis of the live artwork which, also, relies on multiple layers of signification, each shifting in and out of focus.

The negotiation of the spatial dynamic is particularly important, as we have said, to what de Certeau has called the law of the place, and what Lefebvre sees similarly as 'what may take place there'.[30] For Lefebvre, the monumental space cannot be reduced to mere definition in architectural terms: 'The indispensable opposition between inside and outside [...] simply does not suffice'.[31] In short, it is the effect of *practice* that helps determine the space; a space is also determined by 'what may not take place there (prescribed/proscribed, scene/obscene)'.[32] The relevance of this to a theory of performance is obvious since any performer in a non-theatre space finds herself negotiating the boundaries of what is permissible. The laws of a place are often unarticulated and commonly understood (such as dress codes), but they may also be actual laws, and there are those that prevent unauthorised performances in so-called public spaces (by buskers for instance). Lefebvre himself draws on theatrical analogies to expand on his theorisation of monumental space, speaking of an *affective level* as a property of the monumental space which 'permits a continual back-and-forth between the private speech of ordinary conversations and the public speech of discourses, lectures, sermons, rallying-cries, and all theatrical forms of utterance'.[33] These utterances occur in such monumental spaces as cathedrals, prompting Lefebvre to assert that they are 'also liable to possess acoustic properties'.[34] Like a theatre space then, the monumental space is not incidental but *contrived* so that the actions occurring within it (the *speech*) upholds its laws.

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[28] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.221
[29] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.222
[30] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.224
[31] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.224
[32] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.224
[33] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.224
[34] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.225

If the monumental space is unfixed in time, multi-layered and mutable, though ultimately about the power of a common iconography (literally) in place of an individual experience, the way in which it is experienced by its visitors is analogous to their reception by the theatre space. The institution of theatre shares the monumental's chameleon identity; it too preferencing the importance of the common experience over the individual. Moreover, Lefebvre's monumental space operates theatrically by focusing our gaze upon a single point - a throne for example. This contributes to the monumental space's attainment of symbolic importance, and Lefebvre's explanation of this process recalls Baker's own strategy of giving common objects a heightened significance:

> Any object - a vase, a chair, a garment may be extracted from everyday practice and suffer a displacement which will transform it by transferring it into monumental space: the vase will become holy, the garment ceremonial, the chair the seat of authority.[35]

It is this sentiment precisely which transforms the unremarkable foodstuffs in Baker's trolley into symbols. What makes her practice so transgressive though is her demand that women's work be accorded the same degree of respect as is inspired by the monumental space. This disrupts the patriarchal authority of monumentality, and enables Baker to seek a place for her own personal perspective.

It is no coincidence that the diminishing influence of several monumental institutions has been reinforced by the ideology of the domestic space. For Lefebvre, housing has become the substitute for ancient world monumentality, being 'under the control of a state which oversees both production and reproduction, refers us from a cosmic "naturalness" [....] to *genitality* - to the family'.[36] Hence these familial spaces, 'linked to naturalness through genitality' are 'the guarantor[s] of meaning as well as of social (spatial) practice'.[37] With this in mind, we might see Baker's corrupting of the domestic space as a form of rebellion against monumentality, akin perhaps to irreverent graffiti on statuary or the like.

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[35] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.225
[36] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.232
[37] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.232

Put in Her Place

Lefebvre notes however that, if the monumental space is to retain its authority, it must find ways of 'repressing those gestures which are not prescribed by [it]'.[38] This inevitably introduces the potential for conflict between transgressor and monumental space. De Certeau also identifies the play for spatial inhabitation that occurs when a *lieu* is practiced; how there are shifts in the *espace*, or 'passages back and forth', between conflicting occupants. He uses the example of heroes who 'transgress frontiers' and are 'guilty of an offense against the law of the place'.[39] The live art sphere, it could be argued, is rarely popular enough to threaten the authority of either the theatre or the fine art institutions. However, Baker's performances are possibly more accessible to a non-live art audience than any other individual/group's, even without recourse to established spaces. Her persona politicises the house worker's position without appearing to.

Like de Certeau's heroes, she too is guilty of disrupting the laws of the places in which she performs. As we have seen, she upsets the expectations that those places carry; she behaves inappropriately. She, in all senses of the phrase, *does not know her place*. This is certainly true of her relationship with the theatre space which she has called

> a sham. I can't make that leap and suspend disbelief. I'm beginning to understand what is possible through theatre but I prefer to be in a space which has its own set of associations - like a lecture hall.[40]

In avoiding the bona-fide theatrical space (in itself monumental), in remaining off scene, she transgresses. Paradoxically, though Baker has often refused the authority of the theatre space she succeeds in generating substantial attention from theatre critics. She attributes this turn of events to 'luck'[41] but I would suggest that there is another agenda at play here. In refusing to see the subtext of Baker's work (and this includes not taking seriously Baker's own *placing* of herself as a live artist), critics succeed in returning Baker to the space that she has 'offended'. As de Certeau notes of his transgressive heroes, they are best able to

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[38] Henri Lefebvre, 1994, p.226
[39] Michel de Certeau, 1984, p.118
[40] Bobby Baker cited in Georgina Brown 'Right off her trolley' *The Independent* June 9th 1993
[41] Interview with Bobby Baker, London, November 29th 1994

restore the integrity of the practiced place 'with their tombs'.[42] Critical readings of Baker seek, on the whole, to frustrate any attempts at seriousness on her part and so her comic persona enables them to 'kill' her polemic.

As we have noted of Baker's performances, they highlight the similarities between food and performance: to look is to consume, she seems to be saying; and so to perform (as to cook, care for, clean) is to nourish. Indeed, Baker has made this parallel explicit in her 'recipe' for *Take a Peek.* Here the show's creation is detailed in the language of food; hence she states 'Preparation Time', 'Method' and 'Serves'. In addition to demystifying the creative process, the recipe acts, perhaps, as a good-natured rebuke to those critics who insist on seeing Baker as *half-baked.* Her preparation time, for example, is stated as '3 years' and her ingredients refer to 'A sprinkle of sponsorship, but 1 or 2 funding bodies essential'; whilst the method is a comic but revealing description of the difficulties facing the contemporary live artist:

> let artist (in London), designer (in Toronto) and copywriter (in Birmingham) fax each other with plans for poster [...] spread[..] funding through the middle so that every part has just a thin covering [...] Present with a flourish.

Although there is a deep and real anger just below the surface of Baker's work that resents the role of nurturer assigned to women, the comedy and persona of that surface can be engaged with. Considering that Baker can amuse us, entertain us, render herself foolish and harmless, demean herself (thus endear herself to us), even *feed* us, is it any wonder that her critics like her? Her anger can be totally ignored (and so diffused); in short, she pleases. The reviews for *Kitchen Show* reveal some prime examples of critical realignment. Disguising itself as a prelude to the show, but transpiring to be its opening section, Baker offered to make each spectator a cup of tea. Whilst this was duly noted by reviewers, only a couple went on to add that this tea-making ritual culminated in Baker taping a teaspoon to her hand in, as she put it, 'the required position for stirring'. In omitting to mention this important detail of Baker's deconstructive strategy, those critics were, in effect, refusing to acknowledge her departure from prescribed behaviour. Ironically, their omission acts as

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[42] Michel de Certeau, 1984, p.118.

further proof of Baker's theory that the domestic chores undertaken daily by women go unnoticed.

These critical performances are guilty of still more tactics, Firstly, they appear to allocate Baker more column space only in order to distance themselves from her. Secondly, they fail to distinguish between Baker as persona (which *is* eccentric but no more so than the majority of sitcom characters) and Baker as artist. Thirdly, they question her femininity. Jan Moir's feature ('Cooking Up a Storm') which appeared in the Women pages of *The Guardian* is a particular culprit, and one cited by Baker as 'hurtful'.[43] Moir writes: 'But don't compare this "live artist" to Dame Edna Everage or patronise her in any way. You might get her mad. And she does strange enough things with food as it is'. In so saying, she blurs the distinction between artist and persona; puts the term live artist in (sarcastic?) quotation marks that effectively separate it from the rest of her article which is colloquial, rather than academic, in tone. This strategy of separating *spatially* within the text Baker's self-definition, functions as another reminder of the importance of inhabiting space. For even as the article proffers Baker substantial space, it refuses her integration and leaves her instead at its border. By implying that Baker is pretentious, and by comparing her to a female impersonator, Moir makes it clear that Baker does not *belong*. She is made unwelcome both as an artist and even as a woman - characterised as a caricature of woman and thus 'unfeminine'.

Baker's age (she was born in 1950) evidently serves to disconcert critics also, so that even when reviews do not mention it explicitly they imply it in their choice of adjectives. (Michael Parkinson's description is probably the bluntest; he referred to Baker on his radio show as a 'batty, middle-aged woman'). Batty and dotty are words that appear frequently, insinuating that, however likeable Baker is, she is not wholly 'normal'. Moir confides in her readers: 'her visions - [...] it must be said, slip beyond the fringes of sanity'; *The Independent* puns on the fact that one show has a supermarket setting to title the article *Off Her Trolley;*[44] *The Daily Telegraph*, whilst generally complimentary, still adds that Baker 'weaves a spell of dotty

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[43] Interview with Bobby Baker, London, November 29th 1994
[44] Georgina Brown, 1993

happiness';[45] and though she at least refers to a 'persona', *The Guardian*'s Lyn Gardner summarises 'For all its dottiness [...] slightly batty persona'.[46] *The Evening Standard Magazine*'s Nick Curtis reinforces the image of Baker as harmless by calling her a 'cuddly performance artist'.[47]

What is also apparent from a perusal of these reviews is that there is no attempt to place Baker in any meaningful context. They almost always pertain to the Theatre sections. Of course it could be argued that Baker could not expect to be treated any differently since she has taken part in L.I.F.T., and yet it seems fair to say that this was less a deliberate choice on her part than the result of funding applications. It remains unclear why Baker's work is so rarely reviewed by art critics; an article by Marina Warner for *The Guardian*[48] for example, is the leading article in the Theatre pages, despite being an abridged version of a longer article for *Art and Design* magazine. *The Observer* might appear to be a notable exception since it reviewed Baker's *Take a Peek* in its Art section, however it avoided a serious evaluation of it by sending food writer Nigel Slater to the performance. Slater's review is certainly enthusiastic and amusing, but ultimately it is merely another variation on the theme of Baker's eccentricity, proposing very little analysis as to *why* the performance might have featured the actions that it did. Thus we read 'There was more than a whiff of Dame Edna Everage about Bobby Baker's show'; 'our dotty, delightful host' and

> It was all so embarrassing [...] By the time her nurses had tied her in knots, confused and contorted her, I desperately wanted to take her home, away from the humiliation and the laughing, peeking audience[49]

The demarcation between public and private space is perhaps more ambiguous than previously supposed, as Elizabeth Wilson has noted of the hotel lobby which she sees as

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[45] Charles Spencer 'Celebrating the Ordinary' *The Daily Telegraph* July 3rd 1993

[46] Lyn Gardner 'How to Shop' *The Guardian* July 10th 1993

[47] Nick Curtis 'Fringe' *Evening Standard Magazine* June 23rd 1995

[48] Marina Warner, 1995

[49] Nigel Slater 'Nurse, the screens! It's time for choc-shock...' *The Observer Review* July 9th 1995

'neither public nor private, yet partakes of both'.[50] Perhaps it is only by positing Baker as traveller, as migrant, in this metaphorical lobby that we come to realise her skill in achieving a dialogue with diverse spaces. There is nothing clumsy or accidental about her practice; on the contrary, it is intended to be subtly disconcerting. Like the archetypal hotel guest, Baker is skilled at occupying her space only temporarily. She goes into places, causes chaos, re-orders them and disappears. But just as the professional hotel guest considers it a matter of honour to steal a momento, so Baker makes sure that she leaves her room not quite as she found it ....

[50] Elizabeth Wilson *The Sphinx in the City* London, Virago, 1991, p.56 ; and see *fig. 12 photographs*

ROSE ENGLISH

The Queen (M)other: Rose English

Back in 1975, a reviewer for *The Guardian* noted 'If Rose English isn't a pseudonym it could be'.[1] Similarly, whilst performing on tour in the U.S., Rose English was asked numerous times if she had adopted her name especially for the show on account of being 'so English'.[2] Her status as 'The Queen Mother of Performance Art'[3] (so labelled by aficionados), certainly alludes to an English consciousness preoccupied by class structure. As it happens, the name is her own and in any case English cites 'Growing up in Spain' as a significant event for her practice.[4] Indeed, the occasional presence of tango and exotic character names, along with a cast of foreign performers in her recent show *The Double Wedding*, all attest to the cultural hybridity which marks her work. Nevertheless, the anecdote introduces some interesting questions about the possibility of divining an authentic Englishness. This might be read, in Lacanian terms, as the search for, and representation of, the Other; that is, in order to identify as one thing, we become aware that we are not another.

Simply put, this process of (dis)identification relies upon our locating ourselves within a set of binarisms. Rose English's shows explore both this tension between polarities, and the notion of Englishness. Drawing on Lacan, I discuss how she uses the motif of the double, firstly, to restate our inevitable failure to attain a mythic communion with the originary moment; and secondly, to demonstrate the extent to which we can live out the experience of the Other through cross-dressing and mimicry. Arguing that these strategies function to undermine altogether the concept of the original, I go on to suggest that Rose English plays on the English sensibility to elicit a comparably ambivalent attitude from her audience. This she achieves through manipulating the latter's relationship to the 'author' and the authority figure in her shows.

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1 Caroline Tisdall 'Women's Art' *The Guardian* March 3rd 1975
2 Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994
3 Rosie Millard 'Best Seat in the House' Edinburgh Festival Theatre Trust, programme for *My Mathematics* 1994
4 Rose English cited in 'What Performance Artists Are Thinking' *Performance* no. 37, October/November 1985, p.9

The Wedding and Its Double

In his catalogue essay on the artist Mark Wallinger, (who has also been characterised as typically English), Jon Thompson writes:

> It comes as quite a shock to discover that there is, after all, something called Englishness [...] I am not, of course, referring to that jingoistic version of nationality which nowadays is everywhere spewed out by the tabloid press [...] The cultural difference of which I am speaking arises from a much deeper level [...] It is given to us from out of the furthest reaches of the historical culture and it tends more to secure a sense of identity[5]

England constitutes a nation obsessed with tradition, history and longevity, and live art has problems with all of these. It seeks alternatives to the *status quo* rather than aspiring to it, its history is largely unwritten or undocumented, and its performances are ephemeral. Yet this does not preclude some of its practitioners from engaging with the histories of more consistent artforms. The work of Rose English, who was involved in fine art and dance before she truly formulated her own performance style, could be said to be characterised by a skilful play with the conventions of traditional cultural forms as well as by its innovative use of them. She has described this *double* aesthetic thus:

> Where ever my work may be presented, under what auspices, it seem[s] that taking on the mantle of a particular form like 'theatre' gives you access to a history and tradition. I find myself both outside and within a particular form and tradition at any one time and I like that duality[6]

Paul Coates' book *The Double and the Other: Identity as Ideology in Post-romantic Fiction* examines the role of the Double in literature. Citing writers like Conrad, Stevenson and Hogg, Coates notes 'Stories that deal explicitly with the Double seem in the main to be written by authors who are suspended between languages and cultures'.[7] Reworking Coates' statement to apply less to national boundaries than to cultural languages (of film, T.V., and so on), it seems

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5 Jon Thompson 'Doing Battle With Decomposition: The Work of Mark Wallinger 1985-1995' in Ikon Gallery and Serpentine Gallery *Mark Wallinger* Birmingham and London, 1995, pp 7-8

6 Rose English cited in Steve Rogers 'Rose English' *Performance* no.42, July/August 1986, p.30

7 Paul Coates *The Double and the Other: Identity as Ideology in Post-Romantic Fiction* Hounslow and London, MacMillan, 1988, p.2

consistent with Rose English's statement: 'I see myself as having one foot firmly placed in the traditions of theatre and the other in the traditions of art'.[8]

Contemplations on duality are discernible in several of Rose English's shows and her circumspect use of the word 'traditions' reflects the tension that exists in her work between the past and the present. This double timescale - this echo of a bygone era - is variously alluded to, not least through her borrowing from traditional forms such as music hall and pantomime. I would like to suggest that her manipulation of the past, if apparently coloured somewhat by nostalgia, enables English to dissolve its authenticity. In place of an uncritical revival of that time, she introduces an impossibility of *re-presentation* that is legible, in Lacanian terms, as the search for mythic unity.

Her show *The Double Wedding* (1991) is the second part of a trilogy that commenced with *Walks on Water* (1988) and ended in *Tantamount Esperance* (1994). Although each work is discrete and the three by no means constitute a linear narrative, *The Double Wedding*'s existence within that framework recalls the past. It expounds on this difficult negotiation of a double timescale but also indicates - through characters' attempts to recreate it - that the past itself is a *construct*. The show elaborates on this theme through its seven main characters, as well as its ballet dancers (The Viscera), acrobats (The Nebulae), the Olympic ice skaters Paul Askham and Sharon Jones, and a Hostess/Director (Rose English herself) who contemplate and rehearse a past production called *The Double Wedding*. For the First Hypnotist 'it was stunning'; for the second Hypnotist 'it was without form'; the First Cameraman notes 'it was all shot at night [...] it was not a success'; the Second Cameraman thinks it 'intoxicating'. Nigel, one half of the Fake Adagio remembers 'we were in a brief revival' whilst his partner Wendy recalls only her role 'I was a dancer in the lido scene'. Finally a male character called the Figment refers to *The Double Wedding* as if the latter were a person, claiming 'I was her consort'. It never wholly transpires what form the mythical production took (the Cameramen's involvement implies film, yet there are stage hypnotists). This myriad of impressions brings to mind Raphael Samuel's arguments in

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[8] Rose English, 1985, p.9

Theatres of Memory for seeing history as 'the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands'.[9] He says of 'popular memory' (to which English's characters' recollections might be compared):

> [It] assigns events to the mythicized 'good old days' (or 'bad old days') of workplace lore, or the 'once upon a time' of the storyteller, [...] it deals in broad-brushed contrasts between 'now' and 'then', 'past' and 'present', the new-fangled and the old-fashioned. So far as historical particulars are concerned, it prefers the eccentric to the typical; the sensational to the routine. Wonders and marvels are grist to its mill; so are the comic and the grotesque[10]

The revival, it seems, posits itself as a double of an original performance. As the show works through scenes that we are led to believe belonged in this mythic production, the Hostess interrupts their playing to question the actors' renditions and the original's authority. Thus in a particularly comic scene, one of the Hypnotists - Otto - follows a discussion on the merits of Panavision with the declaration 'I know that my husband is having an affair'. The Hostess, whose eavesdropping should be justified considering her role as director but who nonetheless succeeds in surprising those she interrupts, shouts 'Your husband is having an affair eh? [...] Who is your husband though? And why didn't *The Double Wedding* ever explore those avenues!'. Reinforcing these symmetries, are characters who are all either paired (as in both halves of the Fake Adagio; both halves of the True Adagio; the Figment and the Hostess) or doubled (as in First and Second Hypnotist); the performance's two Acts ('The Pictures' and 'The Show'); the ritual repetition of both language and movement; and the way in which things and their opposites are spoken of, as in the seemingly trite song 'I do and I do not; I cannot and I can; I shall and I shall not'. Additionally, language functions through *doubling up* so that its ambiguity is fully exploited: thus when the First Cameraman, introduced to us by the Hostess, puts on his glasses she adds 'he is interested in lenses'. The Hostess' character is equally dual and concerned with establishing identity. She claims 'I am the Hostess ... I am also the Hermit [....] I am a private sort of person within the privacy of my own show'. To be private is now to be in work literally by one's self (that is, either alone or in her own show).

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[9] Raphael Samuel *Theatres of Memory* London & New York, Verso, 1994, p.8
[10] Raphael Samuel, 1994, p.6

The characters' attempts to retrieve the(ir) past are predictably futile. Even the long-suffering Hostess is forced to confess 'I've got the merest glimmering of what the Wedding once was'. She can only say that '*The Double Wedding* has had a painful past [...] the memory of its mysterious presence burns still in people's minds' and indeed her words are redolent of any (live art) performance's double life. On the one hand it exists primarily as a past event experienced by its live spectators, on the other it is kept alive in the present via documentation. Despite its multiple deaths (during each performance, nightly) and countless resurrections (the revival, the video, the text, the photographs, the reviews, this chapter) *The Double Wedding* does not close. Its final words are 'It's a difficult package to tie up [...] open, closed, open; open, closed, open; openings, closings, openings, openings, closings, openings'.

English's *Tantamount Esperance* explores a different obsession with history and tradition. Although its protagonist Tantamount asserts 'In terms of time, I am only interested in eternity' a *fin de siècle* sensibility is evoked by the show. Coates has associated this, also, with the double claiming:

> Clinical studies have shown that the Double tends to appear at dusk, in the form of a floating face or a torso, and to be a momentary, colourless apparition.[11]

Tantamount Esperance whilst not colourless, does make use of floating elements and allusion to 'wraiths'. In a room lined on three sides with silver curtains that look purple at times, a bank of lights like floodlights or car headlights are initially angled at the audience. Alongside a trio of musicians in black tie, a love story unfolds between word and image, between the magician Tantamount Esperance and his creation Imogen Grave. The tiny figure of Espiritu la Verdad, clad in turquoise silk and block sandals appears to walk on air; at one point she is almost disembodied as just her feet are visible below the upper edge of the proscenium arch. Acrobats fly through the space, hurtling at great speed; magicians wearing crushed velvet purple skirts with stars like the night sky in microcosm pull reams of streamers from their mouths and make things disappear. Even the text hints at the impossibility of fixity: 'evidence is no guarantee of remembrance' and 'Mr. Memory we called him whenever we forgot his name'.

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[11] Paul Coates, 1988, p.4

The past persists in the characters' clothing - from Tantamount's Victorian garb, to El Alma's 1920s style silver trouser suit and feather headband, to Epitome Plaisir's pink ballroom dancing gown. 'I seek splendour' intones Vanitas Splendide - a bald man with a fussy moustache and bejewelled, cracker-ring hands - thus evoking an entire tradition of spectacle and illusion, which is drawn from elements of bygone rituals (before magic was televised). But *Tantamount Esperance* disturbs this too, seeking to address the concerns of the present. (Or, as the show's song goes, 'Millennium. What is this time? What is this? This time? Fever. There's always fever at this time'). In reply to a reviewer's question (posed a decade ago) as to whether there is an element of nostalgia in her work, English replied: 'Oh yes [...] It's exciting to discover that in some ways you are embodying a tradition and in others you are forging ahead',[12] and so she demonstrates once more her desire to occupy (at least) two positions simultaneously.

The Woman and Her Other

In 'The Line and the Light' Lacan elaborates on the 'three headings that are in effect the major dimensions in which the mimetic activity is deployed - travesty, camouflage, intimidation',[13] as laid out by Rene Caillois. Differentiating mimicry from adaptation (in the sense whereby species elect to adapt in order to survive), Lacan asserts:

> The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled - exactly like a technique of camouflage practised in human warfare[14]

In other words, mimicry is deployed as a defence strategy by those under threat.

The Double Wedding contains examples of these mimetic defences in its deployment of cross-dressing and imitation. Returning momentarily to Coates, we learn that 'psychological studies of the experience of the Double indicate that when women see their own doubles, they tend to

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12 Rose English cited in Steve Rogers, 1986, p.30

13 Jacques Lacan 'The Line and the Light' in Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.) Transl. Alan Sheridan *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* London, The Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1977, pp 91-104 [orig. 1973 Editions du Seuil]

14 Jacques Lacan, 1977, p.99

appear in masculine form.[15] Again, we might read this in Lacanian terms as the search for the Other, a search with particular relevance for the woman in Lacan's formulation since it is her entry into the Symbolic Order that is problematised. In assuming a male persona that is both herself and not herself, the woman can temporarily access the Symbolic Order, as Iris, the protagonist of Siri Hustvedt's novel *The Blindfold*, discovers. Becoming 'Klaus' by night, she finds 'I even spoke differently [...] I was less hesitant, used more slang, and favored colorful verbs'.[16]

Rose English has used cross-dressing in her work since at least 1976. This has taken various guises including the doublet and hose of an Elizabethan actor in *Adventure or Revenge (*1981) and the full beard and Daliesque moustache of the magician Tantamount Esperance. English has described her adoption of male personae thus:

> The playing around with that ... well, *shift* between genders possibly started when I very first started to speak in shows; and I can remember the very first time I started to speak was in a performance called *Rabies* [...] and Jacky Lansley and I had a dialogue, an improvised dialogue [...] and we both adopted men's voices to have this conversation. And it seemed very much easier to *speak* in this man's ... in this male voice, and very exhilarating, and I was a sort of rather patrician man of the theatre[17]

That she should have automatically assumed a man's voice when required to speak, reflects perhaps an internalisation of the constitution of the English theatrical tradition. This last is a highly literary form and one that remains male dominated both in terms of its fictions and their realisers. We might go so far as to suggest that the act of speaking *belongs* to men in this theatre: they enable it through their over-representation as playwrights, directors and protagonists. On the surface Shakespeare's plays would appear to epitomise conservatism and a patriarchal aesthetic: his protagonists are invariably male and their speech is wholly privileged in the form of lengthy monologues. Yet, paradoxically, the performing of Shakespeare destabilises gender identities and problematises sexuality, as Camille Paglia has stated.[18] This is especially the case with the comedies where those staple ploys of duplicity and disguise result in confusion

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15 Paul Coates, 1988, p.4
16 Siri Hustvedt *The Blindfold* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1992, p.17
17 Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994
18 Camille Paglia 'Shakespeare and Dionysius' in *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* London *et al*, Penguin, 1990, pp 171-194

over gender. The practice of cross-dressing is the most obvious catalyst for plot altercations. Of particular interest are the implications of the female characters' transvestism.

Paglia reminds us that, traditionally, the women's roles were all played by virtuoso boy actors which

> conditioned Elizabethan playgoers to a suspension of sexual disbelief. The textual ambiguities of the transvestite comedies would be heightened by the presence of boys in the lead roles [...] Male portrayal of female roles in Elizabethan theater was inherently more homoerotic than the same custom in Greece or Japan[..it] used beardless boys, probably with wigs and some make-up. But there were no masks. A boy had to be facially feminine enough to pass as a woman[19]

She outlines three instances of transvestism in Shakespeare: that of Viola (*Twelfth Night*), Portia (*The Merchant of Venice*) and Rosalind (*As You Like It*) and differentiates between their actions. Whereas Portia's disguise is her response to a crisis, Rosalind 'elects a male persona as whim and escapade'.[20] Whilst the choice of male personae is ultimately about women gaining access to the men's Wor(l)d, their cross-dressing invites another sexuality - lesbianism - into (the) play and disrupts the heterosexual matrix within which the characters operate. This is most obvious in *As You Like It*, as Paglia has noted, where Rosalind, in the guise of Ganymede, actively flirts with another woman (Phebe).[21]

Cross-dressing has re-surfaced in English culture in the (less convincing) form of drag queens, pantomime dames, the 'naughtiness' of *Carry On* films or Ray Cooney farces where blatantly heterosexual, stocky men with stubble wear implausible disguises (wigs that do not fit properly; bras stuffed with socks). A homosexual reading is additionally corroborated by these acts of female impersonation. Judith Butler has argued in favour of the strategies of drag and cross-dressing that often parody the idea of an original or primary gender identity. It is worth quoting

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[19] Camille Paglia, 1990, pp 204-5
[20] Camille Paglia, 1990, p.200
[21] Camille Paglia, 1990, p.203

her at length; she says:

> The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed.[...] If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of "woman" (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself- as well as its contingency*[22]

The second act of *The Double Wedding* demonstrates the transparency of gender coding. Prior to the interval, the Hostess had confided to her audience 'everything's going terribly well [...] I'm sure everybody wants to be me at the moment'. Following her acknowledgement in part two that performers in a show can get so involved with a director's work that they begin to assume her mannerisms, we see emerging from a sea of dry ice the seven main characters (all men bar one) dressed in approximations of her costume. They wear blonde wigs, mostly askew. They copy her odd, contorted walk and taut gestures and imitate her perfect enunciation. This is not so much malicious imitation but an earnest attempt to rehearse their own director. It is an instance of mimicry nonetheless and, as Lacan's formulation reminds us, 'Mimicry reveals something in so far as it is distinct from what might be called an *itself* that is behind.'[23] This is precisely what occurs when the horrified Hostess asks her imitators 'What are you doing?'. 'I'm acting you,' replies dancer Nigel Charnock of the Fake Adagio, 'isn't that what you wanted'; at which she wails 'I didn't want you to leave your plimsolls on!'. Caught between the pleasure of duplication and a horror of misrepresentation, the Hostess exhorts them 'Try harder!' whilst moaning 'This is grotesque!'

Butler's suggestion that what she calls *gender parody* is not so much imitation of an original as parody of 'the very notion of an original'[24] seems especially relevant here. Cross-dressing is

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[22] Judith Butler *Gender Trouble* London and New York, Routledge, 1990, p.137
[23] Jacques Lacan, 1977, p.99
[24] Judith Butler, 1990, p.138

given the function of highlighting its gender and that of its performer as a construct so that the 'truth' becomes harder to discern - a fact amply confirmed by the Hostess' complaint about her cross-dressing cast. '[This is] An hideous travesty of all I believe in' she cries, and the germaneness of the word's 'original' meaning (to dress up) is not lost on us. If, as Butler asserts, 'gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin' and 'parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities',[25] then Rose English's own performance is also important at this juncture. Although Lacan warns us that 'Whenever we are dealing with imitation, we should be very careful not to think too quickly of the other who is being imitated' since imitation is 'for the subject, to be inserted in a function whose exercise grasps it',[26] part of the comic value of the scene derives from the realisation that these characters are attempting to copy what is so evidently already a copy. English's Hostess is a prime example of high-class camp.

The irony of this moment, the attempts of the other characters to achieve this 'true' womanhood that is already a copy, is emphasised at another point in *The Double Wedding*, as Jools Gilson-Ellis has noted in her paper.[27] Here the Lido scene is recreated, firstly with the female half of the Fake Adagio (played by dancer Wendy Houston) entering 'as a showgirl, high-kicking between sentences, in a parody of Buzby [*sic*] Berkeley extravaganzas'. When the scene is run a second time, she 'fails to appear, and the row of characters [...] gesture endlessly in their white suits, towards the place of her expected entrance'. Hence English links 'the theatricality of the missed entrance, with the impossibility for women to 'enter' an economy of the visible in their own right at all; *The Woman* has always already missed her entrance'.[28]

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[25] Judith Butler, 1990, p.138
[26] Jacques Lacan, 1977, p.100
[27] Jools Gilson-Ellis 'Text and the Dancing Body in the Work of Rose English and Laurie Anderson: The Diva of Performance Art and the Techno Ice-Queen' *Border Tensions: Dance and Discourse* Fifth Study of Dance Conference, University of Surrey, Guildford, April 20th-23rd 1995
[28] Jools Gilson-Ellis, 1995

The Art of Being English

D.J. Taylor writes of the 'piece of amateur research' he conducted 'into the use of the word "English" by post-war British novelists'.[29] Acknowledging his unscientific approach (he had read 30-40 novels of the period and 'noted their contents'), Taylor states nonetheless that 'Throughout, "English" featured as a form of shorthand for inhibition, reticence, repression, reserve and hypocrisy'.[30] He continues: 'Plainly, some time between the mid-19th and the mid-20th centuries, "English" ceased to be a point in your favour and became a source of acute discomfort and even embarrassment'.[31]

I would now like to explore the extent to which Rose English's performances might encourage her audience to recognise these aforementioned manifestations of reticence, repression, reserve and hypocrisy in their own behaviour *as an audience*. She attempts this primarily through inciting the audience to take a dual and duplicitous approach to authority, to sustain a simultaneous begrudging respect for it and a desire to rebel against it. (The type of petty subversion incidentally that John Hill, amongst others, has identified as a key component of the aforementioned very English *Carry On...* film series[32]). In *My Mathematics* (1992) English achieves this through her character's attempts to manipulate both a live horse and the audience.

English plays the overbearing showgirl Rosita Clavel who finds that all of her circus troupe and orchestra have abandoned her except for her horse (the Mathematics of the title) and a single accordionist. Clavel's predicament could be read as the consequence of the Hostess' intimidating directorial style in the preceding show (*The Double Wedding).* Here the Hostess character was less than gracious; with her gold crook and her commanding voice, she played the archetypal nightmarish director. Yet at the same time, her physical presence on the stage recalled that other aspect of English womanhood where femininity and restraint persist in the guise of 'the English rose' - a pale, preferably blonde-haired and blue-eyed specimen whose speciality is appearing

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[29] DJ Taylor 'A Few Cheers For England' *The Guardian* January 5th 1996
[30] DJ Taylor, 1996
[31] DJ Taylor, 1996
[32] Marion Jordan in James Curran & Vincent Porter (eds.) *British Cinema History* London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1983, p.326

delicate. Though not delicate, the Hostess was elegantly attired in a silky pale blue gown, long pink gloves, improbable eyelashes and a blonde chignon - a costume that presumably prompted more speculation about the authenticity of the performer's name.

Clavel though is an unrelenting authoritarian, particularly in her treatment of the audience to whom she gives the choice of being kissed or lashed by her 180cm long eyelashes. Her manipulation of the spectators echoes an aspect of the Hostess' character. The latter had said that the aim of *The Double Wedding*'s lido scene was 'to transform or punish the audience'. It also recalls one of her earlier shows - *Plato's Chair* (1984) - of which Liz Rideal wrote:

> The first half of [Rose English's] performance is near the edge: provocative, unsympathetic, using the power of performer (woman) in control. The audience is threatened, mocked, teased into leaving at half time [...] Despite threats, we return[33]

It is worth noting that the same work left a lasting impression on dancer and live artist Francoise Sergy also. She says:

> I will never forget Rose English's 'Plato's Chair' at the Bracknell Performance Festival: it was a revelation! A performance negating all performance, a mad philosophy seminar, an incredible interaction with the audience, with Rose shouting 'no, no, NO, NO!' to a bewildered public trying to escape and being coaxed into staying, deliberately, desperately, totally convincing[34]

A complex play with the order of authority similarly insinuates itself into *My Mathematics*. For example, in the guise of Clavel, English asks us to participate in certain sections of the work. This direct engagement with the audience is characteristic of her later shows; she noted in 1993 'Audience contact is a relatively new thing for me'.[35] Whilst a viewer familiar with pantomime is aware of its conventions, *My Mathematics* invokes these in a disconcerting format. Claiming that it is her intention to 'reinstate the communal song', Clavel asks us to join in with the song 'We are not at Wembley, We are not at Radio City'. Though these lyrics are no less ridiculous

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[33] Liz Rideal 'Plato's Chair' *Performance* no. 31, September/October 1984, p.8
[34] Francoise Sergy 'From Dance to Live Art' in Robert Ayers & David Butler (eds) *Live Art* Sunderland, AN Publications, 1991, p.34
[35] Rose English cited in Sarah Dawson 'In Conversation with Rose English' *Total Theatre* vol.5 no.4, Winter 1993, p.11

than those of many pantomime songs and the tune is no more complex, the song appears among arias taped from a Bulgarian female choir. The audience is suitably perplexed and feels coerced by a sense of duty to comply with her request. This audience response is evidently not atypical of English's shows. In *Moses*, which she devised and performed in 1987, questions are posed to individual audience members. Live artist Annie Griffin reviewed the work and wrote:

> It always interests me how people are either very happy if a bit shy to be asked a question by Rose English, or clearly angered by the whole event - as if they feel they have been conned.[36]

At the same time, Clavel is giving orders to Mathematics throughout the show which the horse may or may not obey. When it appears to, she says 'Is it coercion? It's a difficult question, isn't it?' Like the audience - but less predictable still - the live horse is the show's unknown quantity. As English explains:

> The performance did have to be flexible as it depended on the mood of the horse. Sometimes the horse behaved in a terrifying way and sometimes it was half asleep. I preferred it to be terrifying![37]

In these instances then, we have the pleasure of seeing Clavel thwarted and are encouraged, also, to question our response to *Rose English*'s loss of control. If the horse does not perform according to the demands of the script, we wonder, what will she do? Having thus undermined her own authority - quite literally too, since can she be named the author of the horse's spontaneous acts? - English is able to shift responsibility onto her audience. She teases us throughout the first half of the performance with only a glimpse of Mathematics and with some complex philosophical questions, then makes her audience realise (in the second half) the consequences of their desire. (She had said in part one of the show : 'I know why you've come. You all want to see the horse, don't you?'). Faced with the ensuing uncertainty, we are caught between oscillating and conflicting wants that emphasise the difficulty of the performer's task: we wish to be surprised and entertained, we want excitement and unpredictability but if the poster shows a horse we want to see a horse and are we feeling embarrassed for this woman yet....

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[36] Annie Griffin 'Moses' *Performance* no.48, July/August 1987, p.34
[37] Rose English cited in Sarah Dawson, 1993, p.11

What emerges most strongly from *My Mathematics* is the impression of Rose English as a consummate performer who, if not always in control of the horse, retains control of the situation through her inventiveness. And this image, too, (of the all-conquering female) evokes clichés of womanhood in English culture. Mythologised as authoritarian-maternal to differing degrees, she is the benign figure of the Queen, or the spectre of the (Thatcher) Nanny, or the rolling-pin-wielding Fat Lady on seaside postcards, or any other identity that she may choose to assume. These archetypes are characterised, however, as much by their sexuality as their authority and it is this fetishisation of the woman that compounds the audience's ambivalence. If her elongated eyelashes act as phallic signifiers, then Clavel's use of them provokes associations of domination scenarios. In Lacanian terms, she might be reconfigured as the Mother with whom the child has a problematic relationship characterised by conflicting demands for satisfaction, and rejection on the basis of lack.

In *My Mathematics*, Clavel expresses her aggression through an overt sexuality which has the potential to embarrass and excite her public: in the first half of the show she begins to act with a chaise lounge, standing it up on one end and 'riding it'. She goes on to draw attention to a parallel sexuality between herself and the horse, between the horse's body and her own. So at one moment she lies along Mathematics' back, her long blonde hair covering his tail; at another she adds a strap-on horse's tail to her costume. English's way of drawing comparisons between Clavel's treatment of Mathematics and of the audience - how pain or pleasure may be meted out to either - is reflective of the symbolic value of the horse. The horse's presence has several connotations including the fraught relationship between people and animals much spoken of in acting mythology; the circus where women often appear as showgirls riding bareback; pantomimes where the horse is usually comprised of two halves in one costume; and the peculiarly English respect for (these) animals. It acts also though as the site of the minor battle between the forces of authority and those of chaos, as understood by psychiatrist Bruno Bettelheim. Seeing horse riding as a gesture of control, he writes in *The Uses of Enchantment* of girls' passion for riding these creatures. This is a love that he explains in sexual terms: 'by

controlling this powerful animal she can come to feel that she is controlling the male, or the sexually animalistic within herself'.[38]

The horse additionally has resonance as a symbol for an *autonomous* female sexuality, however, as witnessed in the work of the nineteenth century French artist Rosa Bonheur. She succeeded in gaining a reputation as a great animal painter - especially in England - at a time when this was a predominantly male preserve. She would frequently wear men's clothing as a means of facilitating an entry into male-dominated environments such as cattle fairs. The strong, functional view of horses that she presented in paintings such as *Horse Fair* (1855) was enhanced by the restraints on these animals - reins, bridles, whips. These same instruments were seen as symbols of virility and male fertility, and similar themes of cruelty to animals occurred in Victorian pornography.[39] Hence Bonheur aligns the horse to the female body, which is also under men's control, but simultaneously implies an all-powerful force that is able to resist human (therefore male) domination. The horse thus comes to stand for an *uncontrollable* female sexuality. It is evident then that English rejects the total mastery and control (otherwise interpreted as the repression of sexuality) that Bettleheim's scenario implies. This is particularly clear at the point in *My Mathematics* when Clavel turns her bare back on us and asks us to compare her 'rear view', her leotard cut like a g-string, to that of the horse, who has also turned round. This image was photographed by Hugo Glendinning for use on the poster advertising the show and Rose English credits it for large audience numbers.[40] Hence she plays on our (hypocritical) prurience.

It is debatable whether there is anything particularly English about the *complexity* of the audience's response, but an argument could be made for the Englishness of its duality. The latter is not only about a dual morality over sexuality (which could be summarised as a desire to *see* and a coinciding embarrassment about all matters sexual); it affects the performer-spectator relationship. This manifests itself in the audience's reluctance to express either their discomfort

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38 Bruno Bettleheim *The Uses of Enchantment* New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976, p.56
39 Whitney Chadwick *Women, Art and Society* London, Thames & Hudson, 1991, p.186
40 Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994

or their anger at Rose English's antics. Proof of this can be found in Neil Smith's review of *Tantamount Esperance*. He states:

> this was performance art, warts and all: some nice ideas drowning in self-conscious banalities from a performer too precious to sacrifice a syllable of her vision. I think I'll side with the suited gent in the bar who with stiff upper lip conceded he found the evening's fare 'bordering on the pretentious'. An understatement to be sure, but English to the last[41]

Although Smith's use of the term English is no doubt intended primarily as a pun, the image of the suited gent (if he ever existed) is instantly recognisable as a personification of Englishness. In addition to those aforementioned intimations of inhibition and repression, he begins to signify a coded approach whereby things are connoted rather than denoted. Of course it is difficult to ascertain whether it is English's work, as such, that *engenders* the oblique response of the 'suited gent', or whether she is *playing on* the predictability of that response. But obliqueness, as it happens, is for Waldemar Janusczack another characteristic of artist Mark Wallinger's work that confirms his Englishness; he says 'There is something terribly English about this devious method of approaching Englishness'.[42]

If English's work is also more oblique than direct, this is probably due to the nature of live art which according to Catherine Ugwu (Deputy Live Arts Officer, I.C.A.) is in its English manifestation a unique practice. Rose English's contemplations of very English preoccupations (with the past, our gender and sexuality, and authority) are hence expressed in a manner apparently preferred by English live art. That she is aware of this is evidenced by the men's grumbling in *The Double Wedding*; why is it, they wonder that the Hostess has 'an obsession with foregrounding the oblique view'. There is surely some truth in the notion that the only 'true' indication of Englishnesss is parochialism.

In the final analysis of course, any notion of authentic Englishness is impossible to divine. Like the Lacanian subject's quest for the Other, it is doomed to failure. Whatever binarisms Rose English deploys, her shows function to reveal the difficulty of attaining certainty. A singer says

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[41] Neil Smith 'Tantamount Esperance' *What's On* June 1st 1994, p.59
[42] Waldemar Januszczak 'His Sporting Life' *The Sunday Times* June 4th 1995

'*The Double Wedding* is a matter of liquid and glass. It is translucent, transparent, transient and also it is all or nothing'; at another point the Hostess claims 'even to speak of the absolute of opposites is a travesty'. Several times the characters in *Tantamount Esperance* plead 'Tantamount, tell us what we don't know'. But Tantamount is wracked with problems of his own, not least with attempting to tell 'an indescribable story', just as Rose English seeks and 'somehow manages to make complex and often, as she acknowledges, unworkable ideas, manifest'.[43] And so the colourful personae which haunt Tantamount's imagination are led to understand that 'There is no secret' and 'If the secret is that there is no secret, then this is the secret that we must keep'.

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[43] Deborah Levy 'Fractured Realism' *New Statesman and Society* June 3rd 1994, p.41

Susan Lewis

Looking B(l)ack: Susan Lewis Remembers the Body

Just like granules of sugar dissolving without trace in a sea of tea leaves, the legacy of British imperial history has all but disappeared from popular consciousness. We would rather succumb to the lure of sweet oblivion than linger over bitter remembrance of things past and now forgotten[1]

Speaking in a panel discussion for the I.C.A.'s 1994 *More Respect* (season of work by black artists), Susan Lewis articulated the impulse for one of her performances (*Ladies Falling*). It evolved, she said, when she began thinking about 'what stops me from really claiming and being British'; and 'the main thing about that', she decided 'was actually looking back'.[2] This experience supports Iain Chambers' contention that

> To raise today the question of what it means to be 'British' means seeing how, in the forming of contemporary relations - cultural, ethical, sexual, and economic - ethnicity and racism can be identified as a structural element of the 'English', based, as it is, on a particular construction of history.'[3]

Thus it is through the positioning of the body in history and collective memory that this chapter explores Susan Lewis' output.

I look at two of her works: *Walking Tall* which was shown as part of the *Respect* season at the I.C.A. in 1993, and *Ladies Falling*, performed in a double bill with *Walking Tall* the following year. On that occasion (*More Respect*), these two performances appeared under the umbrella title of *Talking Loud, Saying Something*. In examining both shows it becomes clear that the issues that they raise cannot necessarily be separated out into convenient streams of ethnicity, class and gender. The intricacy with which they are interwoven in the works is evidently partly the result of an organic working process - Lewis herself has said of *Ladies Falling* :

> I couldn't keep it to one issue, I couldn't keep it to one kind of, like area. I couldn't keep it like to do with class, or to do with race, it just felt like everything was bound up in each other[4]

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[1] Gilane Tawadros 'Sweet Oblivion' in *Trophies of Empire* (exh. cat.) Liverpool, Bluecoat Arts Centre,1993, p.17

[2] Susan Lewis in discussion in *More Respect Panel Discussion* September 26th 1994a, I.C.A. Audiotape 1290

[3] Iain Chambers 'Narratives of Nationalism' in E. Carter, J. Donald & J. Squires (eds) *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1993, p.153

but it also attests to the intermingling of these discourses in the social sphere.

Here, I seek to look at Lewis' work predominantly through the theories expounded in Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality, Discipline and Punish* and 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History'. I am aware of the contradictions inherent in applying a Foucauldian analysis - not least the accusation that the writings of a white male academic are being used to legitimise practice occurring 'at the margins' - but believe that these are preferable to a 'ghettoising' of black performance whereby such work is only thought legible by black critics or through theories of postcolonialism. Moreover, Lewis' own identity - she is of mixed race, her father from the Caribbean and her mother Irish - belies a simplistic reading of her practice.

Her/story of Sexuality

Walking Tall is a movement-based solo which Lewis performs herself, beginning naked then simply dressed in a pair of shorts and a vest. Her initial research for the work entailed speaking to approximately 70 black women aged between 9 and 80, the majority of them born in Britain. By setting up informal discussion groups of up to 10 women at a time, Lewis hoped to incorporate a multiplicity of views and experiences around blackness into the work. Thus there was almost a pedagogic aspect to *Walking Tall*, since the majority of these women had never had such a space in which to talk.

Taped excerpts of these conversations were included in the performance's soundtrack (collated by Garth Paine), ensuring that the various women's voices were never wholly subordinated to Lewis' authorial voice. Hence, as the practitioner articulates, although 'it was [her] personal journey' it was 'everybody's as well'.[5] The result is a rich and disquieting mix of voice and sound effects. We hear traces of conversations, anecdotal evidence gleaned from Lewis' working process: 'It may be your way of saying I'm not being prejudiced towards you,' opines one voice; 'I don't see you as black. So what are they seeing me as?' asks another. At given points, looped voices echo 'We are powerful, we are beautiful, we are

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[4] Susan Lewis in discussion in *Performer Forum* September 21st 1994b, I.C.A. Audiotape 1328
[5] Susan Lewis, 1994a

powerful, we are beautiful'; overlaid there are noises which range from the oddly quotidian (extended yawning, reverberated sobbing) to the atmospheric (recalling dinosaurs in a pre-historic landscape).

As a *dance*-based piece though, *Walking Tall* obviously focuses our attention on the visuality of the practitioner's body, as well as its voices. A by now familiar site for feminist discourses around identity, the body is here made specific to the black experience. There is a section in which hair becomes the focus, and this too derived from Lewis' aforementioned conversation sessions with other black women. (On re-listening to these dialogues, she realised that the majority of them centered around hair). We see Lewis first standing upright, then lying on the floor, legs and arms extended like a starfish. She fiddles with her hair, pulling it out, then scraping it back and putting it up. She flattens it and stretches it, she plaits it. At another point her movements become wilder, as she appears to *throw* her body into positions, her feet flexed so that she could almost be limping. Over and over on the soundtrack, we hear 'I bleach and I bleach', disturbingly insistent in its repetition.

In enacting the black woman's complex relationship to her hair, Lewis also explores her sexuality. She has said '*Walking Tall* is very much about black female sexuality which for me is very much about reclaiming my power as a black woman, and as a black working-class woman',[6] and she confronts the meanings of this black sexualised body in another section of the performance. It commences with Lewis lying on the floor, curled into a foetal position and thrusting her limbs out. Standing and smiling, she moves her arms above her head then her hands over her face, fingers spread. As they travel over her breasts she looks out defiantly, a melee of voices audible on the soundtrack: 'Exotic', 'very sexual', 'I'm black', 'Who am I doing this for?'. She turns away from us, spine curved forwards, head down, and slowly pushes her hand through her thighs. Whilst 'Amazing Grace' begins to play, she undresses again. The voices continue - 'It's a constant struggle', 'never really knowing if I'm a black woman', 'I was almost like the acceptable black...' - even after the lights have gone out.

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[6] Susan Lewis, 1994a

'I simply believe that the personal is the political'[7] Lewis has said, and the subjective nature of *Walking Tall* is demonstrated in performance through her open approach to her material. She has claimed that the work is slightly different every time she performs it, that it is in constant development according to her mood.[8] A parallel emphasis on the localised, particular narrative over the universally applicable one, is evident in Lewis' description of the activity that transpired in the black women's groups she established: she uses the word 'chatting'.[9] The transgressive potential of the latter is theorised by Irit Rogoff's writing on 'gossip'. She asserts that, as something 'Unauthored, untraceable and unfixed in historical time', hitherto envisaged as feminine (or 'feminized masculinity'), and dismissed as trivial, gossip can problematise questions of historical and political representation. Rogoff expresses a desire to construct an alternative history in which

> Modernism gets undone not necessarily by a parallel cultural heroism gendered female but by a set of small-scale actions and receptions taking place at the margins; the pleasures of conversations, the conflicts of domesticity, the agony of rejection and failed love, the spreading of rumours, all the low moments which invariably follow the high moments[10]

This view has sympathies with Foucault's notion of *micropolitics*. The examination in his early work of the *archaeology* of epistemes sought to distance itself from hermeneutics, aiming instead to comprehend how certain kinds of knowledge, rather than others, have come to be (dis)counted or (de)valued. Arguably, *Walking Tall*'s effectiveness lies primarily in Lewis' ability to juxtapose the predominantly abstract quality of a dance vocabulary with an understanding of the socio-cultural sphere in which the (dancing) black body operates.

The references to hair in *Walking Tall* are a prime example of Lewis' investigations into the way in which we are socially encultured to value certain bodies over others. Lewis has said:

> It's like the images we have around us are of white women and are of long, flowing hair [...] and we internalise that as being the ideal, and therefore what happens to black women a lot - their actual hair is pressed, straightened, a whole

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[7] Susan Lewis in discussion *Respect Discussions* October 8th, 1993, I.C.A. Audiotape no.1104
[8] Susan Lewis, 1994b
[9] See Susan Lewis, 1993 and 1994a and 1994b
[10] Irit Rogoff 'Gossip as Testimony - a Postmodern Signature' *Women's Art Magazine* no.67, November/December 1995, p.7

> set of things actually done to the hair to make it look like European hair to follow like a European image, a look[11]

Susan Bordo echoes this view in her analysis of a debate occurring on the American chat show *Donahue* over the Durasoft advertisement for coloured contact lenses. The latter depicts a black model wearing blue lenses, and Bordo notes that the general response of the chatshow's participants was that the image was not racist. One white woman, for instance, argued that these transformations were comparable to Bo Derek's corn row hairstyle. Bordo insists, however, that these two acts are 'utterly non-commensurate':

> On the one hand we have Bo Derek's privilege, not only as so unimpeachably white as to afford an exotic touch of Otherness with no danger of racial contamination, but her trend-setting position as a famous movie star. Contrasting to this, and mediating a black woman's "choice" to straighten her hair, is a cultural history of racist body-discriminations such as the nineteenth-century comb-test [...] When Bo Derek put her hair in corn rows she was engaging in normalizing feminine practice. But when Ophrah Winfrey admitted on her shows that all her life she has desperately longed to have "hair that swings from side to side" when she shakes her head, she revealed the power of racial as well as gender normalization[12]

Kobena Mercer, who calls hair 'a key ethnic signifier',[13] has argued that cultural distinctions are blurred by appropriationist tactics and, in keeping with a postmodernist ethos, that stylistic considerations predominate on the street so that hair becomes less a determinant of ethnic identity than proof that this identity is always (superficially at any rate) open to redefinition. Conversely, Lewis appears to suggest that such a redefinition always remains subject to white hegemonist determinants. Her resistant attitude to this narrative of normalisation is clearly visible in *Walking Tall*. Equally, the confusion she has experienced over the sexualisation of the black female body is, if not resolved, then worked through in performance. On one level it seems inevitable, perhaps, that Lewis *as dancer* is read sexually, since dance, as Christy Adair has noted, is frequently associated with sexuality anyway.[14] However, the issue has particular resonance for the black female practitioner because, as Claudette Johnson claims:

> As [black] women, our sexuality has been the focus of grotesque myths and imaginings. We have been attributed a bestial sexuality as in the Bond film character

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[11] Susan Lewis,1993

[12] Susan Bordo '"Material Girl": The Effacements of Postmodern Culture' in L. Goldstein (ed.) *The Female Body: Figures, Styles, Speculations* Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1991, pp 112-13

[13] Kobena Mercer 'Black Hair/Style Politics' in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p.124

[14] Christy Adair *Women and Dance:Slyphs and Sirens* London, Women in Society, MacMillan Press, 1992, p.26

played by Grace Jones, or the seductress in *Carmen Jones*[15]

Foucault's theorising in *The History of Sexuality* is especially applicable here because he argues for an engagement with the dividing practices that helped shape our conception of the sexualised body. Contrary to popular mythology, which allies power relations with a repression of sex, these practices, he suggests, actually intensified discussion of sexual behaviour. This knowledge was then transmitted through diverse *discursive formations*:

> Rather than the uniform concern to hide sex, rather than a general prudishness of language, what distinguishes these last three centuries is the variety, the wide dispersion of devices that were invented for speaking about it, for having it be spoken about [....]
> The nineteenth century and our own have been, rather, the age of multiplication: a dispersion of sexualities, a strengthening of their disparate forms, a multiple implantation of 'perversions'[16]

Edward Said, for instance, has noted that the body of the Eastern woman was objectified and made erotic, made Other, by Europeans.[17] Similar arguments have been made by Sander Gilman, amongst others, for African women - their bodies pathologised and fetishised by the white male colonial.[18] As Anthony Shelton has articulated:

> Africa remained the 'Dark Continent', impenetrable both territorially and intellectually, medically and morally deleterious, menacing, both on the mind and the body. Within such 'wasteland', the archetypal woman was degenerate, untamed and promiscuous[19]

This sensibility was also extended to European working class women and prostitutes (who were considered coarse or 'bestial'), which explains, perhaps, why Lewis should stress that the importance of her working class origins to *Walking Tall*'s explorations of sexual identity.

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[15] Claudette Johnson 'Issues Surrounding the Representation of the Naked Body of a Woman' *Feminist Art News* 3:8, 1991, p.12

[16] Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality vol. I* reproduced in Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader* Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1986, pp 315, 317

[17] Edward Said *Orientalism* Harmonsdworth, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1985, p.190

[18] Sander Gilman 'Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth Century Art, Medicine and Literature' in Henry Louis Gates (ed.) *'Race', Writing and Difference* Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1985

[19] Anthony Shelton 'The Chameleon Body: Power, Mutilation and Sexuality' in A. Shelton (ed.) *Fetishism* (exh. cat.) London and Brighton, South Bank Centre and Royal Pavilion Art Gallery and Museums, 1995, p.26

Similarly, Lewis' decision to appear nude in *Walking Tall* (she explained 'I had an image of me just moving across the stage naked [...] for me, it's like... I totally love it!'[20]) also acts to counter these discursive formations. Her research into the myth of the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis was another important starting point for the work. Excluded from popular consciousness (in comparison to Aphrodite for instance) and rarely mentioned in early culture, Isis functions as a point of identification for Lewis, and allows her to challenge the image of the female deity as exclusively white. Imaged thus, the black body is accorded a higher status than it is usually allowed in so-called High Art.[21] It is obvious that the naked black female body is imbued with a different set of associations than her white counterpart; if the latter suffers from over-exposure (whether visible as goddess or courtesan), then the former has been subjected to even more passification, festishism and nullification. Nudity for Lewis then, is evidently a necessary strategy - a means of exposing the black female body on its own terms.

This insistence on exposure is not just related to historical precedent but to the representation of the black female body in contemporary culture. Again, the fact that Lewis uses dance language (although she only studied formally for one year, coming to movement via physical education) is particularly important because the black (female) body, whilst very visible in some popular cultural forms, is so marginalised within certain spheres of the dance world. A. Ruth Thompsett's examination of the London arts scene, for instance, discovered that 'It is as though 'white' is part of the definition of ballet'[22]. She goes on to say that a statistical enquiry into

> week by week listings of film, music, theatre or classical dance reveals a [...] disproportionate representation of male creative artists, who are, also, predominantly white and middleclass. Only contemporary dance reveals a richer and more diverse profile.[23]

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[20] Susan Lewis, 1993

[21] Claudette Johnson, 1991, p.12 noted that Manet's painting *Olympia*, for instance, relies on the clothed black body of the servant woman to reinforce the whiteness (and, by implication, desirability) of the reclining female nude.

[22] A. Ruth Thompsett 'Changing Perspectives' in P. Campbell (ed.) *Analysing Performance* Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1996, p.251

[23] A. Ruth Thompsett, 1996, p.244

The abstract nature of dance generally, but contemporary dance especially, means that it is difficult to produce political work in this medium. However, Lewis circumvents this to some extent by her use of spoken (recorded) text. In opting for multiple voices, densely layered, (rather than dialogue which follows the linear conventions of a playtext), Lewis also evades the demands imposed on black writers, described here by McMillan:

> black theatre, like other black arts practices and discourses, was inscribed with the historical burden of representation. Practitioners were expected to speak for the essential real' black community[24]

Lewis' *Walking Tall* evokes instead a spectrum of dancing bodies and speech acts, treating the black experience with the complexity by which it is characterised.

God Save Our Gracious Ladies Falling

One of Foucault's criticisms of historians is their tendency to collapse multiple narratives into one seamless tale of cause and effect; however, this is not to deny the validity of narratives entirely. Storytelling, the emergence of narratives both local and autobiographical, is central to *Ladies Falling*. On the one hand, there is a metanarrative of Englishness/Britishness running through the work which is described by the songs 'Rule Britannia', 'In an English Country Garden' and 'Jerusalem'. This music enables the spectator to oscillate between the spectres of imperialism (Great Britain) and parochialism (the 'Little Englander'), characteristic of English opinion in the mid to late nineteenth century. Countering this though, is a plethora of voices in Lewis' piece which serve to interrupt and contradict such totalisation.

This juxtaposition of the unitary view of Great Britain, Empire, versus the perspectival version of the colonial experience is constantly played out in *Ladies Falling* through the construct of history. Returning to this problematic of what constitutes Britishness, Susan Lewis has claimed: 'The things that get in the way of me feeling British is [*sic*] to do with history'[25]. It might be considered unfair to cite this sentence of hers which was originally

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[24] Michael McMillan 'Fishing for a New Religion' in Catherine Ugwu (ed.) *Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance*, London and Seattle, I.C.A. and Bay Press, 1995, pp 195-6

[25] Susan Lewis, 1994b

spoken in discussion and has been transcribed here verbatim (its grammatical incorrectness now permanently on view), yet we could argue that Lewis is right to use the singular form, since it is of a monolithic memory that she speaks: one which does not allow for *plurality*.

The opening of *Ladies Falling* demonstrates this. In the performance space we see a television screen working where stills of rural England (flowering gardens and so on) are interspersed in quick succession with others of British landmarks like the Tower of London. Iain Chambers encapsulates the implications of this vision when he argues that

> Symbolically elaborated around consecrated relics, traditions, and shrines - Westminster, the monarchy, Oxbridge, the Royal Navy, the public school system, the syllabus of 'English' - it is as though, through an undisturbed continuity, the very spirit of 'History' has laid its blessing on the nation[26]

These images - both in black and white and colour - also imply that the history of British colonial activities is blatant and celebrated, inscribed in the very landscape we inhabit, as evidenced by the shot of a block of flats called Empire Mansions. Furthermore, Lewis contests the 'naturalness' implied by the garden imagery (and song), thus undermining any essentialist perceptions of nationality. Similarly, Gail Ching-Liang Low, in an analysis of the Anglo-Indian colonial city, describes how the construction of English gardens (along with 'Dress, language, behaviour, [and] the collection of objects in the house') 'presented the occupant with a set of references which helped secure the community's links to its cultural origins'. [27] These gardens then 'became powerful totems transporting one back to English soil; they were fetishized for their ability to counter the polluting influences of what was reinscribed as *foreign*'.[28]

It is therefore especially significant that we should see such images prior to Lewis' entry into the performance space; it is as if her presence is then *coloured* by its very appearance in this setting. Placed against such markers of undeniable Britishness, Lewis is instantly cast as

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[26] Iain Chambers, 1993, p.146

[27] Gail Ching Liang-Low 'His Stories? Narratives and Images of Imperialism' in E. Carter, J. Donald & J. Squires (eds), *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location* London, Lawrence and Wishart,1993, p.243

[28] Gail Ching Liang-Low, 1993, p.243

Other. (This is obviously one legacy of Britain's history as a country whose borders have remained integral). A parallel mapping of the colonised nation, and of its emigrants, is enacted on the mantelpiece adjacent to the T.V. It is surrounded by objects that are simultaneously affirming and denying of the black experience. Hence we see a map, in the guise of a souvenir tea towel, depicting the island of St. Vincent - complete with its national bird - and highlighting good places for snorkel diving. Not surprisingly, the map contains no allusions to the island's slave trade or plantations. There is also a graduation photograph of a young woman (Lewis herself?), another photograph of a woman sitting on the grass and smiling, photos of children... Proudly arranged, these items attest to the laying of roots, their positioning round the mantelpiece recalling the importance of home-making to the migrant. On the one hand the photographs are tangible proofs, evidence that these actual bodies are staking their claim in the spaces they inhabit; on the other, photographs are often travellers in their own right - sent across seas to mitigate distance between families.

Images of transition, of journeying, proliferate in the work, again ranging from the epic to the mundane. Between the strains of 'Rule Britannia' and 'In An English Country Garden', a woman's voice on soundtrack recounts the story of her father's arrival in England from the Caribbean. She goes on to tell an anecdote about giving up her seat on the bus for an old white woman and how this woman and her fellow passengers continued to talk about the Brixton riots as if she were not black, as if she did not exist. She admits: 'I don't know what British means'. Even the bus journey then is a microcosmic version of the emigrant's voyage, fraught with potential conflict. Yet for this woman, who is British born, to be so negated speaks of an exile from one's own homeland (what Paul Gilroy would call *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*).[29]

Elsewhere in the performance area, we see a large screen on which plays Malcolm Ellis' black and white film; chairs, and a tea table neatly laid with white china cups and saucers and a white teapot. There are three key objects of rum, sugar and tea that recur in the work, and these function through what Coco Fusco has spoken of as infusing icons with different

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[29] Paul Gilroy *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* London, Routledge, 1987

meanings[30] to illuminate discourses on ethnicity, gender and class. *Ladies Falling*'s visual images are plundered from colonial history and resonate with connotations of slavery and exploitation - rum, tea and sugar. The fact that there are three of these commodities evokes the triangular passage of the slave trade - how slaves were taken from West Africa to the Caribbean to 'build' sugar plantations and create 'Great Britain'.

Equally, this triumvirate - tea, sugar and rum - cannot be assigned nationalities, (tea being less English by birth than by adoption) and resemble, perhaps, objects in diaspora. As schizoid objects that are rooted in one culture, they are mercilessly transposed to stand in for another colonising one. Thus we see the white china cups and teapot on the tea table, and hear on Lewis' soundtrack the voice of a young black girl reciting the origins of tea-drinking and the English. Her voice is stilted, this is neither her language nor her story. Almost everything is prefixed with 'He says...': 'He says it like a drug, tea. He says they took it from China...'; 'Darjeeling, Assam' she repeats. Then sweetly, but unconvincingly, 'A cup of char?'.

These smaller moments of exchange (the theft of China tea, its infiltration into English culture) which pertain to the histories of slavery, might also be read in terms of Foucault's conception of power.[31] Power, for him, is not an entity deriving from the state that is open to seizure, but is omnipresent and plural, a moment of exchange that occurs between at least two participants. (He defines it thus in *The History of Sexuality*: 'a multiple and mobile field of force relations where far-reaching, but never completely stable effects of domination are produced'[32]). Within this relation, there is always *activity*, the shifting play between power and freedom - something denied to the slave who is in a (probably permanent and total) situation of restraint. It could be argued that performance is the ideal form in which to reflect this very transient and fluid transaction. So that if colonialism is about *restraint*, it is

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[30] Coco Fusco 'Passionate Irreverence: The Cultural Politics of Identity' in *1993 Whitney Biennial* (exh. cat.), New York, Whitney Museum of American Art and Harry Abrams

[31] Admittedly, Foucault takes an anti-Marxist stance on this question and goes so far as to deny that the master-slave relationship is one of power.

[32] Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality* New York, Vintage Books, 1980, p.102

equally about subtler negotiations of power (in this instance, consumption) which inform daily lives.

Lewis cites class as the main aspect of *Ladies Falling*[33] and this is probably related to the fact that, as well as using black people, the British slave trade in the eighteenth century relied to a lesser extent on 'poor whites' - servants, the unemployed, kidnapped vagrants, convicts, and so forth. Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, Britain controlled at least 50% of these transatlantic 'transactions'. The history of oppression and alienation manifests itself in performance in the given objects. The consumption of the three items is the lady's privilege - thus she pours herself a cup of tea, then reaches surreptitiously behind her chair and pulls out a bottle of rum, a generous measure of which goes into the teapot. This she pours again and drinks; greedily, she eats spoonfuls of sugar direct from the sugar bowl. Hence, in one respect, we see white women as complicit in the oppression of black women, what Lewis expresses as 'how people are bought by products'.[34] In fact, ethnicity itself *becomes* a commodity (French West Indian islanders for example paid for their slaves in molasses). The following quotation from Patrick Richardson's *Empire and Slavery* - which Lewis uses in the programme notes for *Ladies Falling* and which is spoken on the soundtrack - bears witness to this: 'The negroes come here ready made, the bags of sugar have yet to be made'. Lewis intimates the inflated importance of these items over the human body through their size in the film: a huge white cup seen in close-up against the proportionally smaller figures of the black servants.

Yet class (race and gender) distinctions do more than determine the relations of exchange; they affect the very vocabulary of the body. This is evident, for Foucault, on a micro-level :

> We believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is moulded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances.[35]

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[33] Susan Lewis, 1994a
[34] Susan Lewis, 1994a
[35] Michel Foucault in Paul Rabinow (ed.),1986, p. 87

There is the delicate yet presumptuous way in which Lewis holds the teacup, as if she expects it to be taken automatically from her when she has finished drinking. Unlike the more grounded movement of *Walking Tall*, her gestures here are initially upright, almost balletic in their composure. As the lady, Lewis holds her head imperiously, hands behind her back brushing the bustle of her dress. Then there is her impatient throwing of the tea cup and the way that it smashes and prompts the running of the film where a cup is falling and smashing, a bag of sugar is falling and scattering, and a bottle of rum is falling and spilling. We see black women's hands (on film) which are continuously scrubbing or clearing up debris, picking up the shards of broken tea cup and patiently piecing them together again. A voice-over repeats 'Working and working [...] it never seems to stop' and speaks of 'caustic soda', recalling the experiences of the young black boy Michael in Jeanette Winterson's filmscript *Great Moments in Aviation* (1994). He saves up to leave the Caribbean, only to find on his arrival that his new life in 1950s England consists of 'scrubbing white folks' floors'. We are thus left to ponder on the welcome that awaits Winterson's black heroine - Gabriel Angel - as she, forewarned, makes the same journey.[36]

If the politics of colonialism attempted to mould the black body for servitude, then what strategies of resistance does Lewis enact in her performance? Does her scenario offer any hope to her audience? It could be argued that what Lewis achieves in *Ladies Falling* as she plays out the roles of white and black women - is a multiplication of the body. This might be read with Foucault's notion of 'effective history' in mind. Though his insistence that 'Knowledge, even under the banner of history, does not depend on 'rediscovery' and emphatically excludes the 'rediscovery of ourselves''[37] might seem at odds with Lewis' project, his argument can be seen as a strategy for engendering change (rather than a nihilistic disbelief in society's ability to change). In 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', for example, he advocates a perspectival view, claiming:

> History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being - as it divides our emotions, dramatises our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself.[38]

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[36] In conversation at *Women Making Movies*, National Film Theatre, London, June 11th 1994, Winterson claimed that much of this dialogue, and indeed the script's original ending, were omitted from the film's final cut at the insistence of the American film producers who found its ambiguity too depressing.

[37] Michel Foucault in Paul Rabinow (ed.), 1986, p.88

[38] Michel Foucault in Paul Rabinow (ed.), 1986, p.88

Lewis expounds on this multiplied body by refusing to stay within the confines of one identity, so forcing us as audience to constantly readdress our relationship with her. Our own bodies become points of identification and disidentification for Lewis, as she moves between embodiment and denial of the dominant culture, the latter partly symbolised through dress. The costume in the work was designed by performance artist Keith Khan and it becomes, literally, a framing device. Comprised of soft, flat bonnet, bodice and hooped skirt with layers of petticoats, it changes colour from pink to purple under the spotlights. Where it begins as an indication of status (functioning dually to imply both the white lady and the foreign black body made 'decent', 'civilised'), it is shown up as an equivalent of one of Foucault's normalising regimes. Citing the Ordinance of 20 March 1764, he writes in *Discipline and Punish* of the late eighteenth century soldier who

> has become something that can be made; out of formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable[39]

Dress comes to stand for the acceptance of the hegemonic culture in 'The Lady's Story' section (written by Georgina Evans) of *Ladies Falling*, where a woman on soundtrack recalls her idyllic childhood when she was barefoot and 'rolling around in the grass'. 'Things were different then,' she says, 'I'm a grown-up now', 'I am a respectable lady [...] tomorrow I must prepare next week's menus'. Yet, live and visible within the performance space, Lewis rejects this inevitability, partly through acts of undressing. These images permeate *Ladies Falling* as they did *Walking Tall*. However, this is less undressing as a positive act to celebrate the black female nude, than a negation of the constraints that the clothing signifies. Undressing in *Ladies Falling* occurs in stages: the bonnet's removal is executed with decorum - neatly folded and laid aside. At one point Lewis pulls frantically at the petticoats, bending to look at the frame underneath. These petticoats are eventually tugged off; at another point the overskirt stands upright like a coloured cone, obscuring Lewis' face. These contortions alter the body's demeanour till Lewis smiles and draws in her skirts. The

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[39] Michel Foucault in Paul Rabinow (ed.), 1986, p.179

movement becomes temporarily freer, less restrained, as she leaps to the alternative beats of drums and guitars.

Whereas *Walking Tall* implies, even in its title, that there is something to be salvaged from the confusion of fractured identities, *Ladies Falling* is perhaps more insistently counterhegemonic. Ultimately, it shows us an image of England that is patently unsustainable, implying that whatever Britishness is, it is not reducible to a single essence. Lewis' work demonstrates this through its own complexity. Hence the three recurring motifs (tea, sugar, rum) in *Ladies Falling* do not remain discrete in the performance. Combined - as when Lewis pours rum into her sugared cup of tea - they form a curious amalgam, a hybrid fourth motif that shows us that things inevitably exist in networks of interdependence. Indeed, the same is true of the personae in *Ladies Falling* who are always somehow corrupted, shown to be untenable. By the end of the performance, Lewis walks awkwardly (as if she has imbibed too much rum-laced tea, or has been compromised by her consumption of these products), holding the spoonful of sugar in front of her. It is at this juncture that the ambiguity of the work's title - *Ladies Falling* - is fully foregrounded. Is this ladies falling from grace; Victorian 'fallen women' (prostituted or falling from exhaustion because of their too-tight corsets); or - like Alice - just falling and falling into a world with its own alien logic? Or perhaps it becomes necessary for the white woman to fall, to lose her privilege, before the black woman can stand? Reinforcing this moment, is the re-invention of the 'English Country Garden' tune which has now disintegrated, slowed down to the point where its rhythm is lost; the tone is flat - as if executed by a learner pianist.

This re-enactment of the dissolution of a uni-dimensional cultural identity might be seen as Foucauldian *discourse politics*. Arguing for a counter-memorial reading, a reading against the grain, Foucault suggests using known and remembered previous forms of rebellion as a starting point for current resistance. This strategy is deployed here by Lewis when the 'English Country garden' music is overlaid with 'foreign' rhythms, the harpsichord supplemented by drums and guitars enacting Caribbean tempos. Her use of a polyphonic form recalls the aesthetic of carnival, itself re-invented 'as a ritual of resistance', as Michael

McMillan says, by slaves under colonialism.[40] By realigning carnival alongside other layers, by re-situating it in a meaningful context, Lewis is thus able to reappropriate the form from what McMillan identifies as 'The dominant regime's representation of [it], coded by the image of the exotic rum-drinking-happy-go-lucky-savage'.[41] This is, therefore, a more effective means of dealing with the commodification of difference (for instance the way in which rap music and other black practices are taken up and capitalised on by white culture) that can occur in the name of postmodernism. The extent to which Lewis' corruption of these tunes is transgressive is also apparent when we consider the esteem in which they are held by British culture. Discussing the last night at the Proms, the latter's director - Nicholas Kenyon - claims:

> Pomp and Circumstance March no. 1, The Wood Fantasia on British Sea-songs, Parry's Jerusalem, and Arne's Rule Britannia are four pieces of music which are embedded deep in our national psyche and I think it would be madness to tamper with them.[42]

Ladies Falling ends in silence, Lewis having regained her composure. Rid of her skirts and petticoats, she is dressed only in her bodice and under frame - a state of undress that is indicative perhaps of her desire to expose the devices responsible for the construction of the body.

In 'The Subject and Power' Foucault expounds on the notion of resistance in a way that, again, might appear antithetical to Lewis' project but that in fact bears witness to what both her performances achieve:

> the main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much "such and such" an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power. The form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him out by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and which others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.[43]

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[40] Michael McMillan, 1995, p.192
[41] Michael McMillan, 1995, p.192
[42] Rick Jones 'Sound of Hope and Glory' *Evening Standard* September 10th 1996
[43] Michel Foucault 'The Subject and Power' in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow *Michel Foucault:*

The term 'subject', which is in any case loaded for the colonised peoples of the British Empire (the Queen's subjects), implies a homogenous identity which, whilst useful to an identity politics, is too totalising for Foucault. This argument has particular relevance for postcolonial discourse, torn as it is between what Steven Connor has called 'the articulation of the margins'[44] (as expounded in the writings of Frantz Fanon,[45] Gayatri Spivak,[46] Homi Bhabha[47] and others), and the assertion of native agency. The problem with the former is its tendency to construct a language of victimhood in which the marginal is needlessly romanticised and in which the resistant strategies of the marginalised are, ironically, ignored. As she has stressed in discussion, Lewis deliberately avoids adopting the role of the victim for these very reasons. Instead, Foucault's suggestion that 'Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are'[48] is *performed* by Lewis' multiplicities.

In contrast to Baudrillard[49] or Kroker and Cook's[50] apocalyptic forecasts for the end of the millenium, Foucault says in 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History':

> 'Effective' history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millenial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding: it is made for cutting.[51]

Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983, p.781

[44] Steven Connor *Postmodernist Culture* Oxford and Cambridge, Massachussets, Basil Blackwell, 1989, p.233

[45] See for instance Frantz Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks* transl. Charles Markmann, London, Pluto Press, 1986

[46] See for instance Gayatri Spivak *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* London and New York, Methuen, 1987

[47] See for instance Homi Bhabha 'DissemiNation: time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation' in Homi Bhabha (ed.) *Nation and Narration* London and New York, Routledge, 1991

[48] Michel Foucault in Paul Rabinow (ed), 1986

[49] See for instance Jean Baudrillard *Seducation* transl. Brian Singer, Hounsdmill and London, MacMillan Education Ltd., 1990

[50] See for instance Arthur Kroker & David Cook *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* London, MacMillan Education Ltd., 1988

[51] Michel Foucault in Paul Rabinow (ed), 1986, p. 88

Returning to Lewis' statement 'I don't know what British means', we might acknowledge (as Foucault would) that we cannot ever *know* what Britishness means, we can only know *how* it is made to mean.

Beyond the beautiful formal intricacy of Lewis' performances, what remains with this particular reader is a sense of how many more discontinuities around black histories await foregrounding. Lewis has noted that she was apprehensive prior to performing *Walking Tall*, that she asked herself 'Will *they* [meaning white people] understand it?'.[52] She then reminded herself that black audiences have learned to read white culture. We could propose that there is no point looking for a 'right' way of viewing work by black artists, that it must be the responsibility of the white viewer to find their own strategies for reading through a continuous reassessment of their role. In place of thinking back, the nostalgic English viewer must learn to think black.

[52] Susan Lewis, 1993

Annie Griffin



Gone With The Wind :
Annie Griffin and the Film Star(e)

The female body has been implicated in discourses around film and visual art. It has quite literally been *framed*, found guilty of inciting voyeurism, fetishism and display. Annie Griffin's own body is problematised by the adoption of a glamour queen persona, so that her claim 'I would always want to have a provocative relationship with an audience'[1] assumes a dual meaning. But what happens when this body finds itself between disciplines; what possibilities can this conflation of reel and real, of mediated and live, offer the female performer and her viewer? It is precisely this border zone that Annie Griffin negotiates. Whether making short films, live performance, or work that involves the two, she establishes a series of complex dialogues around the body's acts of appearance and disappearance and between the fictive and the real.

In this chapter I discuss firstly, how Griffin's partial representation of her own body in two documentaries works to undermine the genre's transparency. I note that *Women Who Love Tom Jones* (1993) makes audible its director, whilst *Out of Reach* (1994) renders its subject invisible. Secondly, I examine Griffin's solo performance *Almost Persuaded* (1988) and her emphasis on the red dress as sign. I claim that the audience responds to the show's protagonist(s) as it might the 'heroines' of the so-called 'women's films' of 1930s and 1940s Hollywood. Hence the screen body is evoked through the live one, even in the absence of technology. Thirdly, I discuss how Griffin's refusal to consign the female body to closure is effected through the deployment of *splintered bodies*, as seen in her live performance *How To Act Better* (1993), her performance/film *It Is For My Mouth Forever* (1995) and short film *Was She There* (1995). I suggest that each of these works promises to gratify the scopophilic male gaze but then actually frustrates it through the use of filmic techniques such as multiple viewpoint, fragmented narrative, excess and lack of synchronicity.

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[1] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994

Calling The Shots

Women Who Love Tom Jones and *Out of Reach* both allude to the documentary tradition. The former was originally intended for viewing on MTV but an injunction by the Tom Jones PR machine prevented it, so it received its premiere at the 1993 National Review of Live Art in the I.C.A. theatre. As the audience sits in darkness, Tom Jones' *Without Love* can be heard. Griffin (live) makes her entrance, dressed in a long silky red gown with spangly red high heels (like Dorothy's ruby slippers, adult version). Prior to the film's screening, she is careful to explain her intentions, the development of the film from the concept stage, her criteria for selecting participants, choices she has made in editing and so on. After the screening, she takes questions from the audience and provides extra-filmic information which functions to remind us that our reading of the fans *on screen* can only ever occur within the frames that she has set up. The presentation therefore shows us not only Griffin as director but Griffin as persona; and similarly the relation between the real and the fictive so central to theatre is underscored by the positing of a *documentary* in a 'theatrical' space.

Women Who Love Tom Jones - the title a pun on Robin Norwood's book *Women Who Love Too Much* - is ostensibly a journey across the U.S. through the lives of Tom Jones' fans. We see a kitchen interior where a diminutive pensioner declares her desire to throw her underwear at Tom; a diner where mother and daughter go through their favourite songs; a Chicago rooftop where a woman reels off the essay she has written and memorised; a truck with the only male fan permitted inclusion (he begged bisexuality as a justification) telling how Tom brings out the woman in him. And throughout we hear Griffin's voice, giggling and coaxing the women into renditions of best-loved Tom songs which quiver before us as she makes no attempt to steady her hand-held camera. We respond by laughing with, not at, the fans. Witty and cynical, they entertain by dancing and singing; they tell anecdotes. In short, they become the subjects of their documentary and it, in turn, functions to undermine the perception of the fan as a pitiful obsessive.

Feminist critics have articulated the difficulties that the documentary form poses. Writer, composer and film-maker Trinh Minh-ha, for instance, discusses the myth of objectivity that

documentaries perpetuate: 'In its demand to *mean* at any rate, the "documentary" often forgets how it came about and how aesthetics and politics remain inseparable in its constitution'[2]. She also identifies a body of techniques that have become associated with documentary because of their perceived ability to suggest veracity. In positing techniques on a sliding scale of mediation, we forget, Minh-ha argues, that 'those endorsing the law unhesitantly decree which technique is manipulative and which, supposedly is not; and this judgement is certainly made *according to the degree of visibility of each*'[3] [emphasis mine]. Minh-ha proposes that subjectivities can be exposed through the use of a more self-reflexive approach since 'A documentary aware of its own artifice is one that remains sensitive to the flow between fact and fiction'.[4]

Although some of the techniques employed by *Women Who Love Tom Jones* (use of a hand-held camera for example) are amongst those that Minh-ha considers typical of documentary, I would argue that her theories provide a convenient framework nonetheless within which to read Griffin's work. If the documentary genre can be seen as a prime example of Bakhtinian *tact* (social rules determining the supremacy of the narrator's 'uni-accentual' pronunciation and third person authenticity), then *Women Who Love Tom Jones* rejects this by staying resolutely personal. To begin with it eliminates the notion of a unitary subject, drawing attention to ruptures in the frame. Griffin even undermines the definitiveness of her own title by allowing a man to feature. Identity is thus characterised in materialist terms, culturally encoded rather than biologically determined. In addition, Griffin cedes her authority and directorial distance by allowing herself to appear 'stupid'[5]. She notes:

> [you're] looking down the lens and you hear *my* voice asking questions, the viewer identifies with *me*; and yet you start to ... you, the viewer, start to really *not* identify with me when I'm acting [silly] and be very prurient [...] I was not being 'everyviewer', I was being myself. And I thought that was a very interesting position to be in as a viewer that you kinda, you kinda play at being Annie Griffin for moments; you play at being me.[6]

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[2] Trinh Minh-ha 'The Totalizing Quest of Meaning' (1991) in N. Wheale (ed.) *Postmodern Arts* London and New York, Routledge, 1995, pp 271-2
[3] Trinh Minh-ha, 1991 in N. Wheale (ed.), 1995, p.268
[4] Trinh Minh-ha, 1991 in N. Wheale (ed.), 1995, p.269
[5] Annie Griffin speaking at post-performance discussion, NRLA, I.C.A., London, October 22nd 1993
[6] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994

Setting up a complex relationship between the viewer and the film's subjects and maker, *Women Who Love Tom Jones* thus celebrates the obvious subjectivity of Griffin's own position and allows the spectator to take up what Janet Bergstrom calls 'multiple identificatory positions, whether successively or simultaneously'.[7].

Conversely, the use of the camera in Annie Griffin's film short *Out Of Reach* appears to privilege one viewpoint or *perspective* and so is reminiscent of fine art preoccupations. Though it, too, is presented as a documentary, the film could be said to re-interpret the aesthetics of traditional portraiture. The work takes as its premise the exploration of Griffin's personality in the form of the off-camera questions that she poses to members of her family. The film opens with a close-up of Griffin's face in a childhood photograph but thereafter we do not see her till the final frames. Here then is a neat reversal: where *Women Who Love Tom Jones* insisted on the presence of the director's voice, *Out Of Reach* denies us an image of its 'protagonist'. This question of absence versus presence has been much rehearsed in feminist aesthetics. Peggy Phelan, for instance, advocates a review of the notion that increased visibility in cultural representation necessarily advances empowerment; she claims 'there is real power in remaining unmarked'.[8] By not imaging the female, a film like Yvonne Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women* sought to frustrate what E. Ann Kaplan identifies as 'mechanisms the dominant cinema uses to *construct* the male spectator';[9] a parallel strategy in visual art can be observed in Mary Kelly's infamous *Post Partum Document* which, again, denied us an image of the (mother's) body.

Andrew Murphie has asserted that in any case technology has been responsible for the *elision* of the body in performance.[10] Whilst both his and Phelan's theses are convincing, it is clear that Griffin chooses to experiment with invisibility as just one means of undoing representational coherence, as a kind of marker against which to test the exposure of her body. This

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7 Janet Bergstrom 'Enunciation and Sexual Difference' *Camera Obscura* 3/4, Summer 1979, p.58
8 Peggy Phelan *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p.6
9 E. Ann Kaplan *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* London and New York, Routledge, 1983, p.30
10 Andrew Murphie 'Negotiating Presence: Performance and the New Technologies' in P. Hayward (ed.) *Culture, Technology and Creativity* London, Paris, Rome, John Libbey for the Arts Council of Great Britain, 1990, p.210

disappearance from view of the subject matter was effected by Sophie Calle's artwork *Les Fantômes*. Calle was concerned with recreating paintings that were on loan from a museum and therefore absent from its walls. She asked museum staff to describe the missing pictures and then 'made a text which was a kind of portrait, like a puzzle which emerged through all their descriptions'.[11] *Out Of Reach* mimics a more traditional portrait format via its framing of the interviewees, but Griffin's absence from our screen prompts the same doubts as to the authenticity of the collated fragments.

Each interview occurs with the participant sitting down, usually facing us. We see only the surroundings of their immediate spaces. The shots are mainly in close-up or medium close-up with no overt special effects. Griffin's family members' names appear in simple captions at the base of the frame like picture titles. In the same way that the portrait is generally a self-consciously posed representation, Griffin leaves us in no doubt that her family too are being *presented*. She does not edit out the prelude to her questioning her father over the phone; instead we hear the telephone ring on his desk then we hear Griffin's voice telling him to pick it up. 'Oh God,' he mutters, half-smiling at the artificiality of the situation and at the fact that she is now on his secretary's phone. In this way it is as if the documentary were framed by a giant pair of quotation marks, with Griffin quietly undoing its pseudo-realism.

By the film's closing frames, the style has shifted to an approach that is more recognisable as fiction. We finally see Griffin just as she is leaving. She bids a silent farewell to her parents then walks quickly after a small plane that appears to be about to fly without her. We watch her, belongings in hand, motioning for it to wait then running, running. For an audience who has had to image Griffin for themselves through the stories of her family, this is an important moment. Yet Griffin takes the opportunity to present herself as even more posed. No longer sister to, daughter to, aunt to, she is instead a wholly glamorous, almost magical, woman. Dressed in a long red flowing gown, Griffin's exit recalls those Joshua Reynolds' portraits of society women in unlikely, mythological poses. As if in recognition of the impossibility of representing all the

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[11] Sophie Calle in Adrian Searle (ed.) *Talking Art* London, I.C.A. Documents 12, 1993, p.36

facets of herself that her family have described, she opts instead for a fictional identity that cannot be perceived as truthful.

Making An Appearance

The red dress is a motif common to several of Griffin's works. Her live artwork *Almost Persuaded* does not incorporate film or video as such but evokes, I would suggest, a film aesthetic through its protagonists. These characters (all played by Griffin) recall those of the so-called women's films of 1930s and 1940s Hollywood. Unlike their predecessors though, Griffin's personae avoid being compromised by the monocular stare of the camera. Her child, Country and Western singer, single mother running a farm somewhere in the U.S.A.'s Deep South do not charm or seduce us so much as move us, Griffin's solitary presence in the performance space magnifying her vulnerability. Although *Almost Persuaded* earned Griffin a reputation as a comedienne, most of its humour is barbed. There is an unnerving intimation of violence as the text is suffused with the echoes of absentee males and the threats that they pose. Tenacious against the odds (of being poor, of being female) her personae act like icons of agency.

The merits or otherwise of women's films have been debated at length[12] but it is indisputable that they were enjoyed by a great many spectators. Jeanine Basinger advocates a positive reading of their quasi-subversive potential; she notes

> [They] are cautionary tales of a particularly desperate stripe, but they contain real passion, real anger [....] well-dressed stars act out the woman's form of heroism: living outside the rules of correct behavior which in story terms is realized by living outside the rules of logical narrative construction.[13]

Although Basinger is speaking primarily of what she sees as *contradictions* in the films' plots, rather than wholesale abandonment of narrative linearity, the fact that they disrupt logic reminds

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[12] See for instance Mary Ann Doane *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987; Annette Kuhn *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Women's Cinema* London, Routledge, 1982; Tania Modleski 'Time and Desire in the Woman's Film' *Cinema Journal* Volume 23, Number 3, Spring 1984.

[13] Jeanine Basinger *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930-1960* London, Chatto & Windus, 1994, p.6

us of Griffin's own play with the components of a theatrical performance. For cutting across the work's various narrative threads is the presentation and eventual resolution of a dilemma: a woman is offered a lift home by a man, does she go or does she wait for a cab? So that even as we see one of her personae surviving, another is still disturbed by this question of should she or should she not allow herself to get picked up.

At the end of the first half of the performance Griffin informs us that there is going to be an interval during which she will change into a red dress. She asks her audience to think, in the meantime, about 'why a woman wears a red dress'. A review of *Almost Persuaded* in *Performance* magazine makes apparent that these lines (and in fact the interval and costume change) were not in the original show as it was performed at the Air Gallery.[14] Their insertion, I would argue (against the reviewer's opinion) adds yet another dimension to the work, another persona. Again the reference invokes comparison to the woman's film in which, as Basinger notes, costume was so central that 'women *were* defined by their clothes'.[15] Even though the red dress is obviously a code made explicit by these films for a certain type of female (sexual, dangerous), we might also see it as an indication of escapist fantasies. This reading is borne out by three films, released in consecutive years, in which a red dress features strongly: *The Bride Wore Red* (Dorothy Arzner, MGM, 1937); *Jezebel* (William Wyler, Warner Bros., 1938) and *Gone With The Wind* (Victor Fleming, Selznick International, 1939). The wearing of a red dress in each of these films signals a development in the drama that announces a shift in the power relations between male and female protagonists. This subtle movement is played out in the context of the superfemale's sexuality.[16]

The Bride Wore Red has not received the critical attention of Arzner's other films, neither on its release nor since. Set in Trieste, it stars poor girl Joan Crawford who, in a variation on the Pygmalion theme, is paid to pose as a society woman and to 'capture' a rich husband. As

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[14] Marjorie Allthorpe-Guyton 'Almost Persuaded' *Performance* no. 52, February/March 1988, p.32

[15] Jeanine Basinger, 1994, p.116

[16] Molly Haskell has defined the superfemale as epitomised by 'a self-exploiter, [who] uses her sex (without ever surrendering it) to gain power over men'. See G. Mast, M. Cohen & L. Braudy (eds) *Film Theory and Criticism* New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 362

Basinger notes, the one indicator the audience has that Crawford's deception will not succeed is her desire to own 'a red shiny dress'.[17] Whilst the New York Times' film critic Frank Nugent was not impressed by the film, stating 'If it is anything at all, it is a woman's picture - smoldering with its heroine's indecision and consumed with talk of love and fashions',[18] even he did not fail to note the importance of the red dress within the film's structure and spoke of 'the red gown for a climax'. That the red dress was used to signify an excess of woman's sexuality is obvious; more interesting is Arzner's foregrounding of the discourses around image.

The heroine's realisation that the dress she ultimately cannot resist buying is 'too red, too loud, and too cheap. It's a portrait of me' and her subsequent decision to marry the local postman instead may disappoint the viewer, but I would say that it emphasises the same notion of costume *as performance* that Griffin is expounding. In other words, Arzner illustrates the power of signification at different levels of engagement with and within the text. Whilst she appears to use the red dress in a straightforward way to signify her protagonist's specific attributes to an audience, she also makes explicit the unconscious associative process on which signification relies by having her protagonist explain it. So we know (as the Bride knows) that to wear a red dress is to engage in fantasy; and that the persona created by such a dress can be shed along with the garment.

A similar pivotal role is assumed by the red dress in *Jezebel*. Southern belle Julie Marsden (Bette Davis) almost irretrievably ruins her reputation by the one act of wearing a red dress instead of a white one. Filmed in black and white, the actual dress worn by Davis in *Jezebel* was brown as this was easier to light; thus it impacts on us as 'not white' (when it should be, like those of the other unmarried women). Yet it is essential to Julie's whole characterisation that we read the dress not just as 'not white', but more specifically as *red*, and indeed the replica dress created in red for publicity stills reinforced this. Determined to assert her independence, it is red that Julie insists on wearing. Her entrance in the dress marks the beginning of her alienation by her fiancé.

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[17] Jeanine Basinger, 1994, p.132

[18] Frank Nugent 'Review: The Bride Wore Red' *The New York Times* October 15th 1937

As in *The Bride Wore Red*, the dress hints at the possibility of a future (albeit not a happy one) without a man.

Scarlett O'Hara was perhaps the ultimate female character to emerge on screen in this period. In terms of characterisation and audience-performer identification Griffin's performances might be considered to resurrect Scarlett (and indeed critics have made the comparison). *Gone With The Wind* has nourished a mythology all its own but what emerges most strongly from stories of its production is the enormous appeal for women that the character of Scarlett held - in excess of 7,000 auditioned for the role. Whilst the film is still not considered a women's film as such, in retrospect it seems impossible that it could be anything else. Scarlett's survival skills earn her the superfemale epithet; we see her suffer war-time horrors when she is left to run Tara, her home plantation. Exactly fifty years on, Griffin's character in *Almost Persuaded* echoes the heroine's despair. Addressing her absent husband Luther, who may be dead or fled, Griffin speaks of her farm and her land: 'The farm's gonna mek it[...] I don't know how we broke even but we did'. Like Scarlett, who finds that land is the only thing she can rely on, Griffin's persona refuses to bow to hardship; so whilst 'people are leavin' [...] every week,' she asserts 'Ah'm gonna stay right here where ah belong'.

The red dress appears in *Gone With The Wind* when Rhett coerces Scarlett (accused of adultery) to attend Ashley's birthday party. Rifling through her closet, he orders her to wear a deep burgundy velvet gown with plunging neckline: 'Wear that! Nothing modest or matronly will do for this occasion. And put on plenty of rouge! I want you to look your part tonight'. Accounts of *Gone With The Wind*'s filming reveal that Vivien Leigh's relationship with director Victor Fleming was not always cordial. He had earned himself the reputation of being a 'man's director' and had been brought in to replace 'woman's director' George Cukor who had initially been hired for the picture. Rhett's directorial role in designing Scarlett's image mirrors that of Fleming who demanded that Leigh's breasts be taped to give her the cleavage the red dress required. The gauze wrap accompanying the costume was added at Leigh's insistence because she thought the look, as it was, too 'tarty'. Where the relations between male and female in both

the film's narrative and the narrative of its production recall the traditions of artist and model, the red dress becomes a battleground over the depiction and reception of female sexuality.

These particular women then wear their red dresses because they will not subscribe to the rules, because their sexuality is to be flaunted, because they do not know any better. So when Griffin asks us to think about 'why a woman wears a red dress' we presume that it is to do with mitigating hardship and vulnerability, or as proof of sexual autonomy. But ambiguity has been seen as the hallmark of the women's film (what Basinger calls a process of simultaneous endorsement and undermining of ideals). Although this allowed filmmakers to advocate contradictory moralities, it often meant disappointingly moral endings - the Bride's sanitised future; the pleasure that Julie finds in remorse. *Gone With The Wind* is a classic example: whereas morality dictates that Scarlett's selfishness be punished by the loss of a man's love, the film's climax - a montage of voices, music that soars to a crescendo, the close-up of Scarlett's upturned face, her last lines 'I'll think of some way to get him back. After all, tomorrow is another day!' all point to an 'optimistic' ending. Scarlett's solitude, we are reassured by the film, is just a temporary state. The novel on the other hand closed so ambiguously that even Margaret Mitchell - its author - expressed contradictory opinions as to what followed.

But where these women's films were obliged to temper their females' power, Griffin's own personae refuse to apologise. In *Almost Persuaded* they, unlike their predecessors, do not need to find their happy ending. They cannot, because the mechanisms - narrative, the camera's voyeuristic gaze - are not in place. Griffin does not allow her stories that much compulsion; she intervenes to deny them authenticity. So at the end of the performance, with a brutality quite in keeping with the tone of the work, she strips away the fictions that she has spent sixty minutes constructing. She refuses to make excuses for not wanting to be picked up: 'Tomorrow night I could go back and *be* persuaded. But there is no other man on the other side of town. But I have no little babies. There is nobody else. There is somebody else'. In her glittery red dress, far from the gaze of the film's male star(e) she recuperates the sell-out futures of the Bride, Julie and Scarlett: 'And I was *almost* persuaded. I *was* almost persuaded...' she tells us, 'But I was *not* persuaded'.

Now You See Her ....

In a section of *Almost Persuaded*, Griffin exposes and explores the theatrical space by posing questions directly to her audience about their visibility and her own. She asks us whether or not a particular spot in the performance area is 'charged': 'Am I strong here?' then moves to a different part of the space 'Or over here?' and repeats the dilemma. In so doing, she forces us to acknowledge that our position as spectators is compromised by an unwitting voyeurism - 'Can you see me?' she begins; then 'Can you all *see* me?'; 'Can you see *all* of me?'; 'Can you see my underpants?'. Played out within a construction of desire, our gaze is made to seem intrusive. It is precisely this ambiguity that Griffin recognises in the female performer, what she calls 'the power of glamour [...] the fact of presence that only a woman can have'.[19]

If Griffin's glamorous persona would seem to encourage desire though, she frustrates it also, partly, as I have said, by making our act of watching that much more overt and partly by removing what might be perceived as the determining components of pleasure. *The Art Casino* - an interactive event curated by Griffin and installed at the Barbican Art Gallery for three days in May 1995 - is a clear example of her ability to simultaneously promise and deny. Bringing together several artists working in different media (including John Maybury, Mark Wallinger and Tilda Swinton), it reproduces the gambling aesthetic but omits its main feature - money. Thus we find reconfigured fruit machines that can be played for nothing and consequently guarantee nothing even with a winning score line; a roulette table where players simply request more chips when their pile runs low; speakers involved in the gambling industry being interviewed and, as with Brough Scott (ex-editor of *The Racing Post*), being asked for betting tips that then cannot be placed without leaving *The Art Casino*.

In her article for *The Guardian*, Griffin explained the impetus for *The Art Casino* by drawing parallels between artists and gamblers: 'Risk is inherent in making original work - you're trying

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[19] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994

to do something that hasn't been done before'.[20] Apprehensive about the proposed subsidising of art through National Lottery grants ('are we about to see a wave of anti-art hysteria in the media as the first grants are awarded?'), and about the common perception of artists ('Art and gambling are two areas where it appears that people are getting away with something - with not having to do a proper job for a living'), Griffin made clear her agenda: 'But that's not what it's like from inside the casino - or inside the studio. Most artists and gamblers aren't making any money at all'. It is probably this absence of money that Griffin tried to reproduce in *The Art Casino*, but whilst the event rehearses the gambler's spaces (complete with turf covered floor) it is incapable of giving its players the gambling experience. Playing with nothing at stake, indeed nothing *to* stake, might be fun but not gratifying.

In her film/live performance *It Is For My Mouth Forever* (1995), Griffin achieves a comparable sense of simultaneous participation and alienation through the use of what I will call *splintered bodies*. We see Griffin as a live body, post-synching the dialogue of her (silent) film. The performance opens with her speaking about the technicalities of film-making and the meaning of its jargon whilst Betty Page films play on a screen behind her. The lights dim slightly and, as her own film runs on the large screen, Griffin (her back to us) and foley artist Jack Stew proceed to dub the actors and the sound effects, with pianist Nicolas Bloomfield performing his own score. The film's protagonist (played by Joanna Scanlan) is an undiscovered diva - a large, imposing and sensual singer with deep red lips. She and her newly acquired husband - National Lottery winners both - spend their winnings ordering food from a smooth pizza delivery man. The couple rarely leave their flat; she gives birth to a bunch of guinea pigs. There are hilarious scenes of the diva, book in one hand, guinea pig in another, reading bedtime stories to her litter. The empty pizza cartons pile up, the children scrabble amongst them and, when she can no longer stand the way that these creatures have taken over her space, the diva drives to a wood and dumps them.

Though narrative, *It Is For My Mouth Forever* refuses to consign its female bodies to any sort of closure. It makes problematic the sexualised female body by denying a homogenous reading.

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[20] Annie Griffin 'Another Role for the Dice' *The Guardian* May 20th 1995

Whilst there is ostensibly one female character she is played by two *different* bodies, neither of whom acts as we would need it to to consummate the scopophilic gaze. This becomes clear when we examine the positioning of sex scenes in the performance's overall structure: the Betty Page films for example emphasise not the seen but the almost-seen. Griffin has likened them to the child's view of sex;[21] that is, they contain all the signs (the stockings and suspenders, the coyness) but nothing really occurs in them. It is as though sex cannot be imagined (or imaged) beyond those same signifiers; their promise remains unfulfilled. By showing these films before her own, Griffin also mitigates any shock on behalf of the audience at seeing nudity or partially clothed figures. Equally, she defuses the anticipation of sex through inverting the classic realist text's climactic placement of such scenes. Thus, when the scenes do occur, they are more likely to be interpreted as Griffin intended: as an adult, female view of disappointing sex.

After an unsatisfactory sexual encounter for the diva (she is prone and still in her underwear when her husband masturbates by the bedside and ejaculates in her belly button), she turns up the edge of her knickers so that they once more cover her navel. In that moment we are made to focus on the live sound of the emphatic snap of elastic and the filmic image of an uncontrollable *male* face, as opposed to the female face which is the usual signifier for, and locus of, pleasure and surrender. Just as Griffin effectively deconstructs the process involved in the studio addition of sound by making visible the labour of the foley artist, so she dismantles the pernicious - because seamless - apparatus of the male gaze. There is a refusal of totality here, as evidenced by the fragmentation of the diva's character between the performer we hear on stage and the one we see on screen; and also between the sound effects' and live dialogue's occasional failure to be in perfect sync with the film's miming mouths.

These strategies recall Kaja Silverman's perception of synchronisation. Silverman sees the latter as something that not only confines woman to the story which is a 'safe place', but to the 'safe places *within* the story'.[22] Once the woman is contained within the diegesis, the extra-diegetic

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[21] Annie Griffin speaking at a post-performance discussion of *It Is For My Mouth Forever* at the Royal Court Theatre, London, June 3rd 1995

[22] Kaja Silverman *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988, p.164

realm is privileged as a male domain. (Exactly these arguments have been presented in relation to the female nude in western art aesthetics). Silverman suggests that in order to reclaim extra-diegesis and to circumvent the transparent association of female voice with female body, we might make use of the disembodied voice. This tactic would effect an escape from 'that anatomical destiny to which classical cinema holds its female characters'.[23] With its reworking of the disembodied voice, *It Is For My Mouth Forever* achieves this disorientation. Whilst seeming to give us a narrative, the work actually destabilises it by showing us that it is not a safe place to be. It will not provide the pleasure typical of the classic realist text because it does not cohere, thus as audience we must negotiate instead the multiple viewpoints that Griffin provides.

How To Act Better also employs *splintered bodies*. In this instance, Griffin's own body appears both live and mediated within the same performance. Dealing with the craft of acting, the piece consists of Griffin in long black gown and gloves giving lessons to three males in black tie, and being filmed whilst she does so. These distillations of her advice on acting - where everything can be reduced to technique - are interspersed with re-enactments of moments in the life of the actress Sarah Bernhardt. The audience's view of Griffin varies throughout the show; we often see her on stage in profile and then face on, magnified on a screen directly ahead of us. Thus there are at least two, disparate, points of focus. When Griffin deserts the stage to go and change, the video camera operator follows her to her dressing room so that she appears on screen even as she has exited the theatre space. Her off-camera persona becomes a dilemma for us: is this the 'real' Annie Griffin, or simply an alternative fiction? Is her text scripted? It is only when we become aware of the gag-like quality of some of her lines 'I don't have a personality for disorganised hair' that we suspect we have been manipulated. Yet the technician perseveres, so that even at the end of the performance he trails Griffin into the car park outside the venue. And it is perhaps only at this moment, as we the audience are still sat obediently in our theatre seats gazing at Griffin's departure on screen, that we begin to recognise the camera's fallibility. For its attempt to know the real Annie Griffin - an attempt comparable perhaps to the pornographic assault with its insatiable desire for visible knowledge of the female body - is futile. It succeeds only in confirming the elusiveness of that body and its refusal to be framed.

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[23] Kaja Silverman, 1988, p.130

Griffin elaborates on the implications of her appearing differently within the same work in *Was She There*. A short film featuring an even shorter red dress, it concerns a woman (Griffin herself) who takes a train from London to Blackpool. With her long black hair and big sunglasses she flirts appallingly, she whispers in the ticket inspector's ear, she has furious sex with a stranger in the train toilet, she sits in the front seat of a taxicab, she plays coy with an ice-cream and two lads on the pier, she ostentatiously drinks a bottle of champagne in a hotel restaurant populated by Blackpool's retired then charges out when laughed at. Outrageously behaved, she makes the antics of contemporary art's 'bad girls' look decidedly tame. Perhaps it is because they are *girls:* Sam Taylor-Wood blushing like an adolescent at her lovebites in *Slut*, Tracey Emin displaying the names of *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995* with the enthusiasm of one young enough to want to keep count, or Sarah Lucas' *Receptacle of Lurid Things* - a plaster cast of her middle finger frozen in an abusive gesture. Their badness is always defiant in a teenage way. They have sex, they have tempers, they have attitude, but do they have *fun*?

Griffin evidently does, and is so likeable that she invites a conspiratorial delight from her viewer. Again, her audience comes to approximate that of the woman's film who 'could watch while their favorite female stars wore great clothes, sat on great furniture, loved bad men, had lots of sex, told the world off for restricting them, destroyed their enemies'.[24] Yet *Was She There* is also as articulate about the disposability of women in our visual culture as any of Lucas' works; the following day it sees Griffin - now attired in a smart trouser suit, her hair short - repeat the London to Blackpool journey. As she does so, she attempts to piece together fragments of information gleaned from the previous day's witnesses. There is a disturbing scene where those boys on the pier refuse all responsibility and Griffin (frustrated) argues that the woman was last seen with them. What have they done with her? She makes us question their dismissiveness and construct our own narratives; did they take her away and murder her, didn't they care that she had disappeared?

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[24] Jeanine Basinger, 1994, p.6

Then again, these elements of memory are complicated by the blurring between reality and fiction: nestling amongst the 'real people' in the work are 'actors' playing at remembering. As Griffin's discussion with the boys on the pier becomes more heated, a considerate passer-by mistakes the scene for a real event and attempts to intervene. His interruption is allowed to remain in the final cut. (Or was that moment staged also?). There is a particularly satisfying self-reflexivity in this; Hugo Glendinning for instance, whose publicity photograph of Griffin advertises the film, now features in the same film. Recast as a sexy biker complete with mobile phone, he remembers the woman in the red dress as a pitiful attention-seeker. Thus Griffin's image (as siren) is destabilised in the fiction by the same man who had a hand in its making, the difference lies in his change of *focus*.

As with many of Griffin's works, *Was She There* stresses the difficulty women face in reconciling their various roles. Her dual performance revises that spate of 1940s 'good twin versus bad twin' women's films, except in this scenario the polarities are less distinct. Her suited persona is guilty of patronising an unsuspecting fortune teller, even as her alter ego reveals a surprising sensitivity. But in this film it is the latter woman who triumphs. Griffin's 'body missing' in the red dress is last seen at the end of the first day: alone, she strides through the sea with a sense of purpose, suitcase in hand. Guilty of staging her own (dis)appearance, she has succeeded in evading *arrest,* her body absent from the frame at the film's close. In its place we see her trousered counterpart, also rushing through the sea. Literally pursuing a line of enquiry, she asks bathers for clues to the woman's whereabouts.

Griffin's practice *performs* this crossing-over again and again. Concerned with traversing the boundaries of live art and film, it threatens disciplinary integrity. She has even implied that differentiation between the two is redundant since film can be live art as long as it refuses to allot 'a pre-existing role' to its audience.[25] Hers is an aesthetic that takes into account the hybridity of our current situation and reinvigorates it from a feminist perspective. If the female body is to hold on to its own gaze it needs to continue to employ such deconstructive strategies. Without subscribing to permanent invisibility, it could disappear from view occasionally to remind us that the act of looking, however encultured, is a privileged one. And nowhere is this

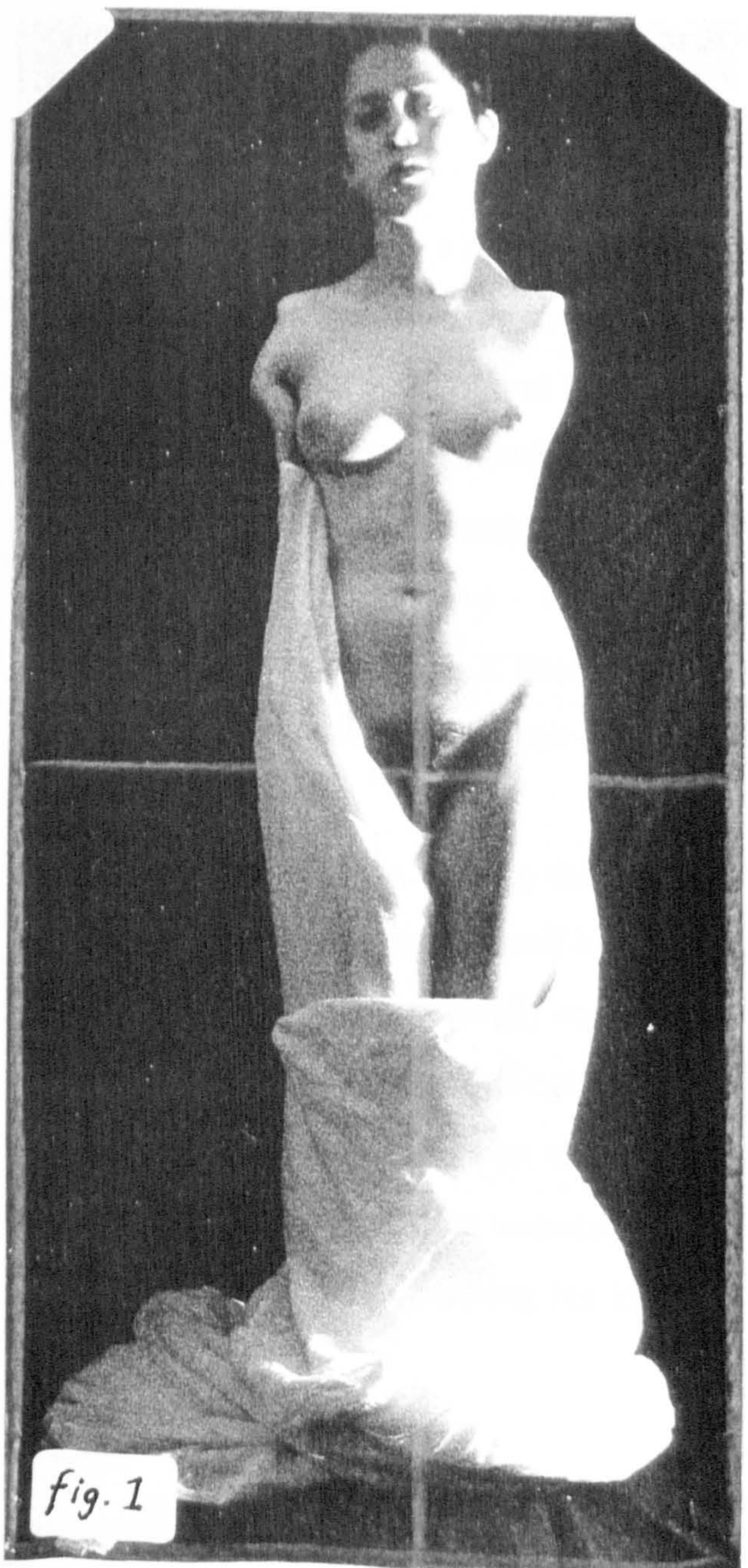
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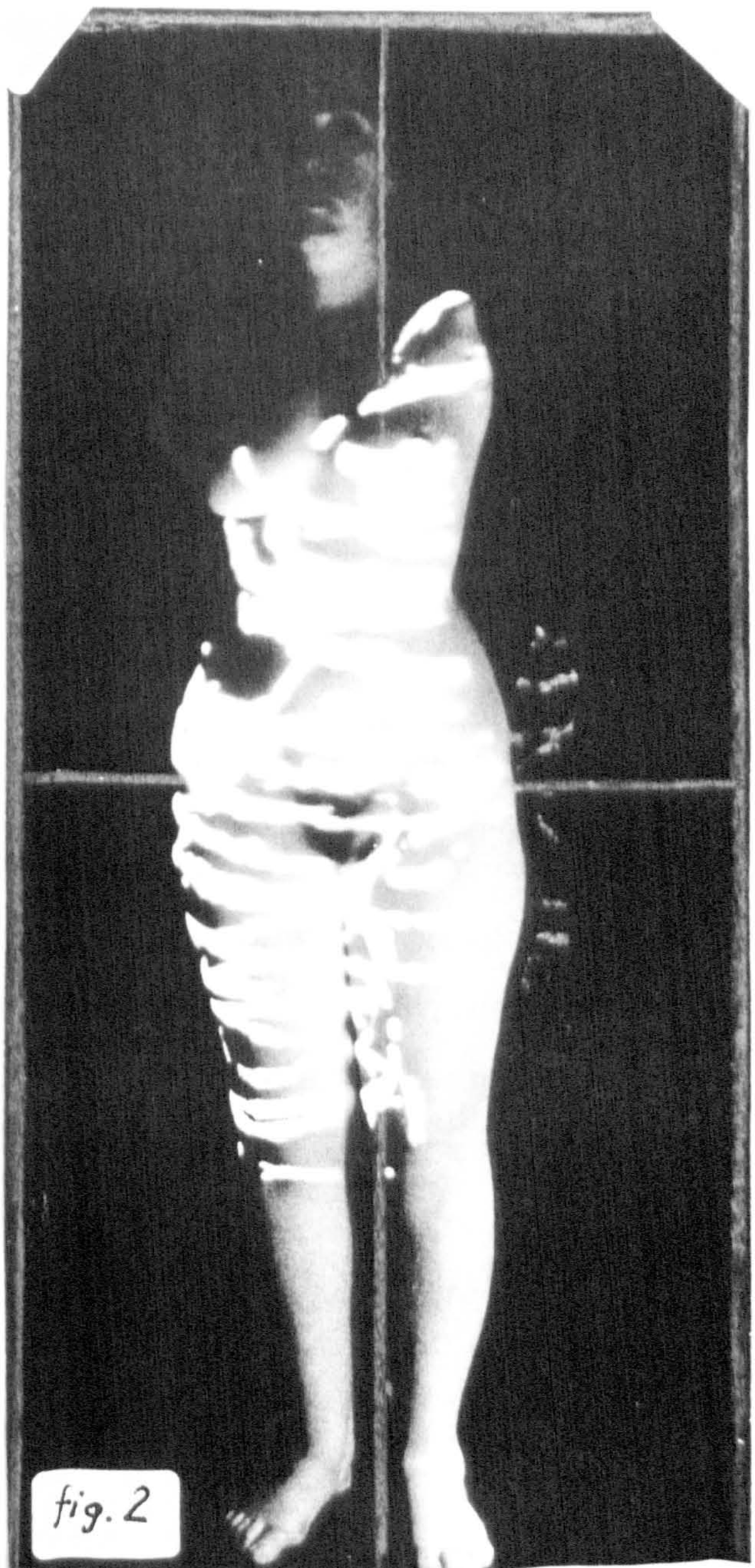
[25] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994

refusal of closure more effective than in our unresolved question at the end of *Was She There*: what has happened to the woman in the red dress?

Suffice it to say that she remains under suspicion of being on the look-out for a good time ...

PATIENT : Alba Bewick
SEX:F
CAUSE OF DEATH: To be determined
CLINICAL HISTORY:Began treatment under Van Meegeren after involvement in car accident; both legs amputated; gave birth; died
EXAMINATION:Thorough Dissection
SURGEON: MARY DUFFY
DIAGNOSIS:Patient's deterioration and death caused by loss of bodily autonomy
RECOMMENDATION:Consult Duffy's *Cutting The Ties That Bind (fig.1)* and *Stories Of A Body (fig.2)* for preventative treatment of similar cases


fig. 1


fig. 2

The Case of Alba Bewick, Model Patient: Mary Duffy Operates

In *Cutting the Ties that Bind* (1987) and *Stories of a Body* (1990), photographer/performer Mary Duffy recounts her experiences as a thalidomide. Whilst the works take different formats, (photographic panels and text in the former; solo performance in the latter) they are both autobiographical and make use of Duffy's naked body. Primarily, these artworks are evidence of Duffy's active, political engagement with the very real issues of representation for the disabled. However, they also contribute to *theoretical* analyses of the interrelationship between the discourses of medicine and art, undermining scientific authority and questioning the basis of western art history's aesthetics. The works also highlight the perpetual disadvantage of being a *female* patient, and perhaps the difficulties of being a female performer.

I would like to propose a reading of Mary Duffy's practice that reflects on three theories of the treatment of the human body in scientific enquiry: Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*; Ludmilla Jordanova's *Sexual Visions*; and Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic.* I would also like to bring a fourth, this time fictional, text into play: Peter Greenaway's film *A Zed and Two Noughts.* This text not only has thematic commonality with the aforementioned theorists, it also provides a conveniently linear narrative - in the guise of its main female character Alba Bewick - which synthesises their concerns. If Scarry, Jordanova and Foucault were to construct a fictional case study with which to illustrate their texts, I would like to think that Alba might be it.

Alba has crashed a car, causing the death of her two passengers - the wives of twins Oliver and Oswald Deuce. She finds herself in hospital (having miscarried), with an amputated leg. As the film progresses, she is generally confined to her bed, or seen in the surgery, being fitted with an artificial limb or being (unwillingly) remodelled in the image of the female subjects in Vermeer paintings. Even her graduation to a wheelchair is short lived; she is soon back in the operating theatre having her other leg amputated. Sexually active nonetheless, she becomes pregnant by the Deuce brothers before meeting her ideal man (who has lost his legs too). She bears twins, then

prepares to die, inviting Oliver and Oswald to 'watch [her] go'. Her final promise is that they can have her corpse after her death in order to document its deterioration.

I am aware that this bald retelling of one character's plot fails to acknowledge any of the other themes of *A Zed and Two Noughts*; nor does it do justice to Greenaway's subtle and erudite referencing, to the stunning compositional arrangement of imagery within the frame, to the complexities of his script, and so forth. Nonetheless, it should highlight Alba's aptness for my own scenario. I would like to examine Mary Duffy's practice as one of resistance to this patient/ model narrative that begins in tragedy and culminates in death. I hope to show that she constructs an alternative reading of being without limbs (in her case arms) that does not centre on lack or loss. Using Alba's relationship with different male characters to introduce each approach, I will begin by considering whether Duffy provides a strategy for voicing what Scarry has called the body in pain and for overcoming the disempowered state of the intensely embodied. I will go on to assert that Duffy's allusions to classical aesthetics, and her self-identification as an artist, undo what Jordanova has seen as medicine's traditional view of female patients as sexualised (art) objects. Finally, I will examine how, in the light of Foucault's structural analysis of the emergence of a modern clinical gaze, Mary Duffy refuses to render her body wholly legible.

There is a phrase particular to horse racing which says of any animal that does not perform as it was expected to: 'this one hasn't read the script'; I hope to show that Duffy too, in her refusal to play the victim, has not read Greenaway's script.

The Voice In Pain

Punctuating the text of *A Zed and Two Noughts* are excerpts from the B.B.C.'s *Life on Earth* series - scenes of various animals in different habitats overlaid by the authoritative and recognisable voice of David Attenborough. In the screenplay for his film, Greenaway

describes the first of these moments thus:

> *a dramatic and beautiful image - an image of creation that is now familiar from a hundred natural history films - the sort of shot whose intention is to conjure up the Beginnings of Life on Earth [...] accompanied with a commentary read in a dutifully awed voice claiming the dispassionate voice of science*[1]

Attenborough as male, as God, as 'objective', threatens to diminish the importance of Alba's personal stories of mourning and pain. He represents 'the grand scheme of things', a totalising framework which seeks to contain and explain all other events. As Oliver Deuce sits in the zoo's viewing theatre, watching an episode from this series, we can hear Attenborough's voice, amplified ...

Elaine Scarry's enquiry into the politics of physical pain[2] refers to God also; more precisely, 'He' of the Old Testament whose power resides exactly in his lack of a body. She claims 'to have no body is to have no limits on one's extension out into the world'.[3] In addition, to be without a body is to be potentially without pain: 'to have a body is to be describable, creatable, alterable, and woundable. To have no body, to have only a voice, is to be none of these things'.[4] I would argue that pain immediately suggests itself when we begin to examine the plight of the body within medical discourse. Whilst we generally refer to physical pain, there is an additional emotive or remembered pain arising from the patient's experiences. The place of the voice in this event is paramount - a person's inability to talk about an experience is usually taken to mean that they have failed to come to terms with it. They remain rooted in the physiological occurrence. This can be problematic if, as Scarry maintains, 'to be intensely embodied is the equivalent of being unrepresented and [...] is almost always the condition of those without power'.[5]

The argument has particular relevance for the disabled or thalidomide person whose whole identity has been socially constructed for them as a result of a set of bodily signifiers. Considering

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1 Peter Greenaway *A Zed & Two Noughts* London, Faber & Faber, 1986, p.25
2 Elaine Scarry *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985
3 Elaine Scarry, 1985, p. 207
4 Elaine Scarry, 1985, p. 206
5 Elaine Scarry, 1985, pp 206-7

the changes that remain to be effected in building design, transportation, employment facilitation and numerous other arenas, it is easy to understand why the disabled person might not want to relinquish their acute embodiment, at least until improved rights have been achieved. If we look to the medical profession however, we can see how Scarry's theory of power relations is played out; those with power (physicians) are, if not literally bodiless, able to describe, (re)create, alter and wound, whilst those without power (that is, patients) are indeed 'intensely embodied', albeit temporarily. This is illustrated at its most basic level in the act of diagnosis, where one group *voices* their knowledge of the other's sick or different bodies.

Implied in this event of diagnosis though, is the *patient's* voicing of their own condition (incorporating their feelings about proposed treatment, their symptoms, questions, and more). Yet as soon as pain of any kind enters this transaction of information, the patient is immediately disadvantaged because, as Scarry has noted, pain cannot be objectified in language. Whereas other states of consciousness and bodily perceptions can be allied to objects external to the body (we detest some*one*, or hunger for some*thing* for example), pain does not refer to anything quantifiable. Thus even if the patient has sufficiently overcome their remembered pain, they may still find themselves unable to speak. The very difficulty of articulating the pain that a body is suffering is not only dangerous, it has political repercussions: 'Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language'.[6]

Scarry claims that even when patients do attempt to communicate their pain, they typically report that their voices are then 'bypassed' by the medical community. Patients are taken to be *unreliable narrators* of their own ills, as physicians appear to favour the visible - in the form of X-rays, thermometer readings, scans, and so on - because this type of evidence is deemed more precise and less subjective; in short, more valuable.[7] Yet the verbal report, as Scarry emphasises, 'however itself inadequate', may be the only external indicator of pain, and for the physician to

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[6] Elaine Scarry, 1985, p.4
[7] Elaine Scarry, 1985, p.6

ignore it is for them 'to bypass the bodily event, to bypass the patient, to bypass the person in pain'.[8]

Scarry's failure to address gender in her thesis does raise some problems though, because she situates language as the locus of empowerment. For Scarry, the state of pain is not only inexpressible in language, it 'actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to the state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human makes before language is learned'.[9] In the wake of psychoanalytic concepts regarding the acquisition of language (I am thinking here particularly of Lacan and his description of the Symbolic Order), this alignment of a pre-linguistic state to a negative one could be at odds with attempts by feminists such as Hélène Cixous to create an anti-logocentric linguistic practice. And yet, this metaphor of a debilitating state anterior to language is one that practitioner Mary Duffy herself employs. Her *Cutting the Ties that Bind* is a series of eight photographic panels with accompanying text. Duffy's approach in the work is direct, she coerces us to address the unmistakable fact of her 'difference', recalling Susan Sontag's claim that 'There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera'.[10]

One panel depicts a shadowy figure, standing wholly concealed in a white sheet that shrouds her entire body from head to toe. The image is reminiscent of one of Jo Spence's photographs - *Double Somersaults* (fifth triptych) - which shows a covered corpse on a hospital trolley, a handwritten note 'Write or be Written Off' pinned on the wall above. In both instances, it as if the act of being covered or contained prevents speech. For Duffy, this shrouded state with its many connotations (being covered up, buried alive, silenced, dead, gestating, preserved, bandaged) might be compared to Scarry's pre-linguistic one. As the series continues, so does this narrative of unwrapping or emergence. In another panel the shroud has slipped to just above knee-height, leaving Duffy half-wrapped like a Graeco-Roman statue. She stares directly at the viewer, her expression ambiguous. In the final panel she steps out of the sheet; we see her in naked profile, gazing out of the picture frame eyes uplifted, and smiling. It is an image of simultaneous

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[8] Elaine Scarry, 1985, pp 7-8
[9] Elaine Scarry, 1985, p.4
[10] Susan Sontag *On Photography* Middlesex, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1979, p.17

empowerment where both Duffy and her viewer are able to celebrate the body's act of emergence. It is a moment akin, perhaps, to one described by Scarry: 'to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language and projects the facts of sentience into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself'.[11]

If we were to attempt to foreground gender difference further though, I would propose re-working Scarry's thesis in terms of the possession (or not) of the *authority* to speak in patriarchal language. We might even suggest an analogy between the unsought after female voice of the patient, and the correlating valued male voice of the physician. In order for the patient to be enfranchised, she must nullify, by speaking out, the power advantage belonging to the physician. Mary Duffy attempts to reclaim her body from the diagnostic sphere by comparable acts of speaking and silencing. Her voice interrogates the clinical (a word that has become associated with detachment or coldness), through its first-person narration. In her performance *Stories of a Body* she tells us:

> You have words to describe me
> and although I cannot give them a voice
> I know all of them

Duffy's refusal to speak their (our?) language is a way of seeking its silence, of disinvesting it of authority, whilst retelling her body's stories in her own voice.

Just how those stories could be told is a potentially controversial matter. Despite the fact that live art appears in numerous forms and formats, its tendency to privilege layering and ambiguity means that it may be less well suited to delivering explicit messages. Scarry's examination of pain is rooted in agency (the politics of torture, for instance), so it is understandable that she should advocate the most direct form of reparation. Duffy's practice has a similar dual agenda of pedagogy and empowerment, and is possibly therapeutic also, in the sense that Jo Spence considered her own work *phototherapy*. It, too, demonstrates its intention as clearly as it can. Without wishing to construct any kind of paradigm that would falsely posit a radical, so-called

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[11] Elaine Scarry, 1985, p.6

avant-garde practice on one side, and a more traditional practice of reappropriation on the other, I would argue that Mary Duffy's works are moving *because of* (rather than despite) her use of such a minimal approach. Through this sparsity, Duffy is able to control our relation to her body; she forces us to look *at her* (and think her beautiful), and she forces us to listen *to her* pain by not giving us anything else to look at or listen to.

So in the performance version of *Stories of a Body*, Duffy deliberately positions her naked body alone in an empty space, only slightly camouflaged by strips of light and in full view of her audience. When she speaks, it is to address us or, as Anna Douglas has suggested in her review,[12] to 'pre-empt' us: 'My monstrosity is in your imagination ... stepped out of your limited vision'. Duffy's way of recounting the distressing but entirely unsentimental story of her experiences, of telling us of doctors who want her to absolve their guilt, of surgeons who expect her to be excited by the thought of plastic arms, recycles the dispassionate tone of the physician and has the effect of 'Turning the tables on a medical case conference scenario'.[13] In short, it is her voice that convinces.

Conversely, even accounting for a differentiation between a live performance based in autobiography and a character's fictional film narrative, the viewer of *A Zed and Two Noughts* experiences a curious sense of detachment from Alba. Her sufferings, framed as they are by a myriad of interlinking other narratives (about mythology, the tones black and white, forgery, decomposition, to name just a few) have more resonance as events in a formalist game plan - she kills *two* people, sleeps with *twins*, loses *both* legs, gives birth to *twins* etc. - than as somatic experiences. Even her expressions of pain are couched in witty and complex sentences that discourage our emotional investment.

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[12] Anna Douglas 'Gracie Fields Live Art Commissions: Mary Duffy' *Women's Art Magazine* no.37, November/December 1990, p.6

[13] Anna Douglas, 1990, p.6

In attempting to assess the usefulness of Scarry's analysis for a politics of performance then, we might conclude that it is her very emphasis on *voice*, on the act of speaking, that overrides any shortcomings. Although she does not take into account the making of institutional language and its bias towards rationalisation and phallocentricity, Scarry does provide us with this figure of the body in pain. Duffy's deployment of performance as an agent of change (of her audience's attitudes towards the disabled at least), is so effective because she conveys her pain in as articulate and explicit a manner as Scarry could wish for. What both women prove is if pain is to be conveyed and overcome, it is better for it to be heard and not seen.

Sexual Incisions

> Van Meegeren: Alba I've been very close to you... on the operating table ... with just a little encouragement from you I could be as close again

Alba's dual role as patient/ unwilling artist's model is emphasised by the corresponding function of Van Meegeren as surgeon/ would-be artist. In reality, Van Meegeren was an accomplished forger who sought to add to Vermeer's repertoire, but Greenaway casts him as one of *A Zed and Two Noughts*' villains - a man with a passion for painting and amputation. He fondles Alba's breasts on the operating table; he sees to it that her hair is styled like that of one of Vermeer's sitters; and, as well as stitching up Alba's wounds, he has her sewn into a replica dress from *The Music Lesson*. Hardly surprising that she should complain 'I'm an excuse for medical experiments and art theory' ...

The supine female that finds herself anaesthetized and unclothed on the operating table is not so different from the artist's model, as Ludmilla Jordanova has noted.[14] Passivity is common to both. Our encultured perception of artists and surgeons as male figures who create and *perform* surgery, assigns women the lesser roles of 'the observed'. The conflation of these two spheres - art and medicine - and its implications for the female body are illustrated by the prevalence in the eighteenth century of wax models, allegedly fashioned for pedagogical purposes. Jordanova describes their design, noting that although they were intended to show the medical student the mysteries of the internal organs, the female versions '[lay] on silk or velvet cushions, in passive,

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[14] Ludmilla Jordanova *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and the Twentieth Century* New York and London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989

yet sexually inviting poses'.[15] Many of them were equipped with 'flowing hair, pearl necklaces, removable parts and small foetuses'(!).[16] That these female wax bodies were treated as more than teaching aids, is evidenced by the fact that they were known as 'Venuses'. In addition, many replicated 'positions and gestures from well-known works of art'.[17]

In *Stories of a Body*, Duffy encourages us to view her as that icon of Western art aesthetics - the Venus de Milo. However, in positioning herself as upright and active, she avoids the fate of the wax Venuses. (And indeed the fate of *A Zed and Two Noughts*' prostitute, also known as Venus de Milo). The audience's initial sight of Duffy is of a naked, not very well lit body with no arms. Whilst not static, her bearing is suitably statuesque. Her spoken text even plays on our vague knowledge of how the Venus de Milo came to be armless through accidental damage; she says 'I stand here, like I've stood many times before, so that you can assess the damage'. By recalling this tradition, this icon, Duffy questions the validity of the classical ideal for contemporary culture. Whilst we are complicit in the acceptance and reworking of classicism as a consumer item (timeless beauties against the white columns and vacant skies of perfume advertisements), we are less at ease with the real-life embodiment of those same signifiers. So whereas the Venus de Milo's absent limbs are held to signify the inevitable passage of time, and her 'beauty' is unaffected, Mary Duffy's are used against her as proof of her incompleteness. As a thalidomide, she is seen as one who *lacks,* who has *lost* her arms, despite the fact that she was born with the body she has.

It transpires that an emphasis on differentiating between her bodily state and a concept of loss is a key part of Duffy's practice, allowing her to participate in the discourses around wholeness and fragmentation. She wishes to convey her *own* perception of her body which she has characterised thus: 'I have been surrounded all my life by images of a culture which denies difference. My identity as a woman with a disability is one that is strong, sensual, fluid, flexible and political'.[18]

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[15] Ludmilla Jordanova, 1989, p.44
[16] Ludmilla Jordanova, 1989, p.45
[17] Ludmilla Jordanova, 1989, p.45
[18] Mary Duffy cited in Hilary Robinson 'The Subtle Abyss: Sexuality and Body Image in Contemporary Feminist Art' unpublished M.A. dissertation, Royal College of Art, London,1987, p.124

Duffy wants us to acknowledge her limblessness as a 'whole' (rather than hole), as already fully autonomous and complete, or in the words of Lynda Nead '[her body as] an entire presence rather than the sign of some *mutilated* whole' (emphasis mine).[19]

Duffy's refusal to apologise for her body is perhaps best understood if we compare her self-placement in the performance space to *Wilbert Hines* - a photographic portrait of an amputee by the American photographer George Dureau. A black, naked Hines is placed against a bare wall; his 'whole' arm is outstretched in a dynamic diagonal that occupies half the picture space to touch the corner of a wooden cabinet. His half-amputated arm is close to the vertical right-hand edge of the frame; his gaze is quite direct, but suggestive. Although it could be argued that Dureau wanted to create a strong and sexual image of this young man, whose face and body incidentally are conventionally attractive, the photograph's composition precludes any dialogue about the lived reality of Hines' body. The paucity of background detail makes contextualisation impossible (unlike Duffy's spoken text which mitigates any claim to universality). As with Duffy's images, *Wilbert Hines* is quasi-classical, but rather than exposing classicism's perniciousness, Dureau mimics its compositional techniques to suggest a symmetry in his subject's body which is non-existentent. The proximity of the amputated arm to the frame functions as an incidence of *gestalt* whereby we almost fail to notice its difference. Dureau evidently wishes to disguise his subject's loss by tricking us into reconstituting that section of the arm below the elbow that is no longer there. Hence the viewer is never really asked to address their prejudices about disability.

At the other end of the spectrum, issues of representation can be equally sidelined by an excess of graphic detail which, again, neglects to locate the subject's body in any context. Jordanova criticises the seemingly instructive/ illustrative nature of photographs in contemporary medical publications '[which] create a dramatic impact by their unrelenting literalism, especially if they are in colour'.[20] It is as if the presentation of 'unfamiliar injuries, lesions and malformations', maintains Jordanova, seeks primarily to shock. This is not new; the form of representational

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[19] Lynda Nead *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* London, Routledge, 1992, p.79
[20] Ludmilla Jordanova, 1989, p.140

violence implicit in the wax models' 'removable layers that permit[ted] ever deeper looking into the chest and abdomen'[21] echoed the literal violence perpetrated by physicians on women's bodies in the eighteenth century. Jordanova refers to the practices of dissection and surgical experimentation, and if it follows that the surgeon could be cast as a kind of artist, then I would argue that these acts of wounding and making might also be read as integral to certain aspects of artistic practice. Returning to the Venus de Milo, we could say that she was literally chiselled into shape, the implements of the sculptor approximating those of the surgeon. Duffy's performance highlights the appropriateness of this analogy; in the press release she wrote for *Stories of a Body*, Duffy states: 'I remember their [the specialists'] recommendations when I was four years old, how their artificial arms would fit me better if they sliced off my little hand'. As a potential victim of patriarchal violence enacted by a medical profession who believed they had the right to document, then alter, her to their liking (to *sculpt* her), Duffy has refused to co-operate. Similarly, as a practitioner, she has created her own setting for her body's exposure, acting as artist rather than model.

The mid-nineteenth century's cultivation of a notion of the (male) doctor or scientist as supremely creative and heroic has persisted into the twentieth century.[22] Jordanova convincingly demonstrates that medical enquiry is still coloured by a need to render its subject female. The surgeon is enabled by the tradition of medicine to reconcile 'his' concern with the aesthetic body, and 'his' lust for ever greater verisimilitude. She cites a conversation between psychiatrist Anthony Clare and surgeon Hugh Dudley where the latter describes his love of surgery in terms of sexual power: 'Some surgeons would say it's like going to bed with a beautiful woman. You have a real climax over what you do'.[23]

The idea of revealing the body to an enquiring sexual gaze, however, is not entirely absent from Duffy's work. As we have said, she does not permit her body to be viewed as either a passive or a

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[21] Ludmilla Jordanova, 1989, p.55
[22] Ludmilla Jordanova, 1989, p.74
[23] See Ludmilla Jordanova, 1989, p150; and 'A Surgeon in the Psychiatrist's Chair' *World Medicine* October 2nd 1982, p. 32

sculptable organism, but she does not deny its sexuality either. Although the naked female body has often been deemed a problematic tool for (live) art because of the risk of its reappropriation by an unsympathetic eye, Duffy exposes hers to remind us that certain bodies have yet to be seen. Thus as well as challenging our image of the disabled person as one perpetually confined to a miserable existence in their wheelchair, Duffy makes us acknowledge our curiosity, our voyeurism about her sexuality:

> By confronting people with my naked body, with its softness, its roundness and its threat wanted to take control [...] I wanted to hold up a mirror to all those people who had stripped me bare previously [...] the general public with their naked stares, and more especially the medical profession[24]

Of course there is always the possibillity that Duffy is leaving her body vulnerable to fetishisation, but Dudley's assertion that '[surgery] gives you great power because you are the life and death man for an individual person' is proof of the urgent need for *any* strategy that encourages patient autonomy.[25] Mary Duffy's work advocates this, and so ruptures the closed matrix of male surgeon/ artist/ violator.

The Word Of A Clinic

In *A Zed and Two Noughts*, the male scientific gaze's insistence on rationalising the processes of human bodies is epitomised by the Deuce brothers, Oliver and Oswald (animal behaviourist and photographer respectively). Their obsession with capturing *visible* evidence of these mutations is exercised through time-lapse photography:

Oliver:	It has long been respectable to leave your body to medical science
Alba:	What's scientific about watching a body rot?
	[....]
Oliver:	You can lie quietly in the garden ...
Alba:	With you watching?
Oswald:	Only the camera will be watching
Alba:	What's the point of watching *me*. My body's only half here
Oliver:	Then you'll fit better into the picture frame

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[24] Mary Duffy 'Redressing the Balance' *Feminist Art News* 3:8, 1991, p.15

[25] See Ludmilla Jordanova, 1989, p150; and 'A Surgeon in the Psychiatrist's Chair' *World Medicine* October 2nd 1982, p. 32

> Alba (*Laughing*): God, I should have known. Maybe you've always been in league with Van Meegeren. A fine epitaph: here lies a body cut to fit the picture

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault traces the shift in scientific enquiry from pre-modern to modern; from the speculative *observing gaze* which 'refrains from intervening [and] is silent and gestureless' to the empirical *clinical* one.[26] The latter is characterised by 'the paradoxical ability to *hear a language* as soon as it *perceives a spectacle*'; hence the clinic is the point at which language interpolates or, as Foucault puts it, '[where] what is manifested is originally what is spoken'.[27]

Although, as Foucault demonstrates, the project to read the human body was to alter over time so that by the nineteenth century 'the clinic no longer has simply to read the visible; it has to discover its secrets',[28] the question of language remained central. It is particularly vital to an understanding of the constitution of medical knowledges, since the act of description necessarily becomes bound up with the act of definition; it is that which 'authorizes the transformation of symptom into sign and the passage from patient to disease and from the individual to the conceptual'.[29]

Mary Duffy's practice, as we have seen, has been concerned with resisting the associations and assumptions that are usually made about her. However, Duffy does more than oppose these received ideas, she actually traces their dissemination to their source, rejecting the mechanisms whereby she came to be labelled 'disabled' or 'thalidomide' in the first place. So whilst she has expressed her frustration at the reaction of passers-by to her body, it is primarily the diagnostic practices of institutions that she takes issue with. She tells us, in *Stories of a Body*

> But to acknowledge
> that I can see you,
> hear you discuss me
> like a text book
> stick pins in me to ascertain whether or not I can feel,
> ask me to perform,

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[26] Michel Foucault *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963) Transl. A.M. Sheridan Smith, London, Tavistock, 1973, p.107
[27] Michel Foucault, 1973, p.108
[28] Michel Foucault, 1973, p.120
[29] Michel Foucault, 1973, p.114

> is more than I am willing to do

Duffy's allusion to the 'text book' reflects precisely the nature of the clinical gaze in the late eighteenth century, as Foucault has delineated it. The text book, the ultimate fusion of language and symptoms in a rigid, definitive format does not appear to have changed in its intention since

> the end of the eighteenth century [when] the alphabet appeared to grammarians to be the ideal scheme of analysis [...] This alphabetical image was transposed essentially unaltered into the definition of the clinical gaze[30]

Obviously, the notion of being able to *write* a condition or disease was intended to be extended so that a disease could be deemed legible. Faced with such an unrelenting clinical gaze, Duffy chooses to absent herself. She refuses to *acknowledge* - the word in itself is ideally chosen since acknowledge can mean 'to admit', to let in, to allow to enter. Lynda Nead has interpreted the strips of light that are projected onto Duffy in *Stories of a Body* as 'a vibrant and containing exterior surface' which echoes Duffy's line 'I built a wall around me'.[31] For Nead, this is an instance of

> the notion of the containment of the female body and the enforcement of its surfaces [..] being used defensively by a woman artist, in order to claim the finished wholeness of a body that is otherwise conventionally regarded as incomplete and unfinished[32]

I would like to suggest an alternative reading though which might unpack another meaning of the word acknowledge; to acknowledge is also 'to admit the truth of'. The truth in medical discourse, as we have said, resides in the word and its accuracy as a defining medium. Duffy's rejection of a definitive interpretation of 'thalidomide' could be seen as a move towards illegibility, towards making complex a reading of her body. The strips of light might also function then as illegible scripts, or markings that cannot be deciphered; text akin to the automatic writing that covers Susan Hiller's face(s) in her photographic artwork *Midnight Baker Street.*

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[30] Michel Foucault, 1973, p.118
[31] Lynda Nead, 1992, p.78
[32] Lynda Nead, 1992, p.78

Hiller sees this writing as an investigation into 'what it means when you make a mark upon a surface'; it is concerned with undoing the traditional demarcations between rationality and irrationality.[33] When, as in Duffy's case, it is the body itself which constitutes the surface to be marked, various discourses around its textuality, its physical and psychic identity, come to the fore. One way of reading Hiller's *Midnight Baker Street* might refer to the text as the manifestation, the *surfacing,* of her unconscious. By displaying the product of her unconscious on her face (thereby making it explicit), Hiller blurs the boundary between inner and outer states. The practice recalls Foucault's theory of the nineteenth century *anatomo-clinical* gaze where

> the medical eye must see the illness spread before it, horizontally and vertically in graded depth, as it penetrates into the body, as it advances into its bulk, as it circumvents or lifts its masses, as it descends into its depths[34]

However, Foucault claims that this *anatomo-clinical gaze,* 'directed upon the individual', and 'the language of description' rested on 'the *stable*, visible, *legible* basis of death' (emphasis mine).[35] Hiller's use of text, which may be visible but is not about stability or legibility, resists this.

Conversely, we see an anatomo-clinical approach in the superficial imposition of text on bodies in the work of several other contemporary artists. Jo Spence, for instance, made photographs of her scarred breasts after a lumpectomy. In *Exiled* - one of the pictures from this series (*Narratives of Disease*) - we see the word 'Monster' written in bald capitals across her chest. Similarly, Jenny Saville has scratched a quotation from Luce Irigaray into her body in the painting *Propped,* and the words 'Decorative', 'Supportive', 'Irrational', 'Delicate' and 'Petite' are visible amid the fleshy expanses of her body in *Branded* (1992). In all these manifestations, the texts act to improve the body's legibility. Caption-like and ironic, they assist us in our readings of the 'unacceptable' bodies (Spence's too scarred, Saville's too fat) that they accompany. Arguably, even the acts of inscription are complicit with the artists' feelings of ambiguity or self-loathing about their depicted bodies: Spence's text is crudely written, Saville's has been scored into the paint.

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[33] Susan Hiller cited in Adrian Searle (ed.) *Talking Art* London, I.C.A. Documents 12, 1993, p.91
[34] Michel Foucault, 1973, p.136
[35] Michel Foucault, 1973, p.196

The equivalent in *Stories of a Body* can be seen, as I have suggested, in the curvilinear bands of light. Unlike the text in either Saville or Spence's work, the bands are not 'branded' onto Duffy's flesh but move over the surface of her body as she moves. Hence, rather than defining or judging Duffy's body, rather than assisting our knowledge of it, they function as texts in flux. Moreover, since the bands are constituted of light, these lines *cannot* be restrictive or containing of the body; indeed they can be transversed and interrupted so that their limits are neglibile. Unlike the text book then, they are lacking in authority. The act of movement in Duffy's performances, whilst quite minimal, is important to an appreciation of how she refuses to submit her body to the clinical language of description and prescription. In Greenaway's narrative it is movement that Alba is denied: in one sequence she is literally sewn to a piano stool as Van Meegeren attempts to recreate Vermeer's *The Music Lesson*, so that she is forced not only to appear, but to remain, in the picture frame. In contrast, Duffy's movement, as accentuated by the bands of light, is obviously intended as a sign of her autonomy. It makes her difficult to capture within the clinical gaze's (linguistic) mode of definition. Thus she is also less likely to be seen as a figure posed somewhere on a continuum of being a patient and being a corpse; the conflation of these two states being another result of scientific 'progress' in the eighteenth century, as Foucault saw it:

> The possibility of opening up corpses immediately, thus reducing to a minimum the latency period between death and the autopsy, made it possible for the last stage of pathological time and the first stage of cadaveric time almost to coincide[36]

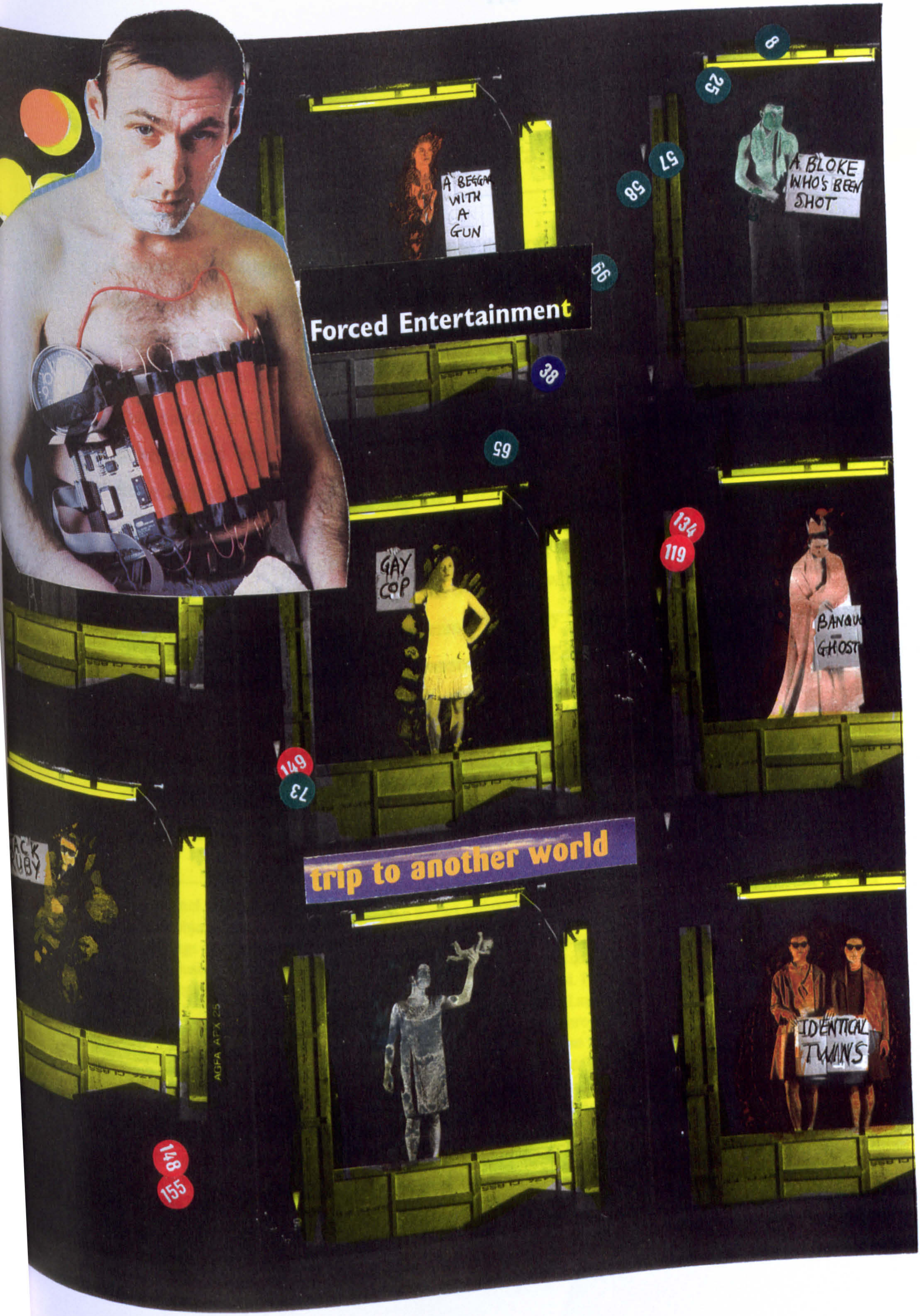
Whereas the text-book, in its labelling and cataloguing, in its failure to reveal the history of its bodies, also threatens to coincide the state of patient with the one of corpse, Mary Duffy's practice is about a body that is very much alive and well. It is just not well-read.

We might conclude that Duffy devises and performs a language of resistance to the medical scenario. Replicating the measured tones of the physician, she articulates her pain instead of keeping silent; she echoes the iconography of western art Venuses in order to question their foundations; she refuses to contain her body within the legible text book or the anatomo-clinical gaze. As she is dying, Alba Bewick says 'Now I want to lie still and quiet...'; Meanwhile, Mary

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[36] Michel Foucault, 1973, p.141

Duffy is standing upright and speaking out. Taking over the surgeon's functions of creating and performing, she abandons the operating table for a better place in the theatre.


A BEGGAR WITH A GUN
A BLOKE WHO'S BEEN SHOT
Forced Entertainment
GAY COP
trip to another world
IDENTICAL TWINS
AGFA APX 25

'Blossoming into a Vast Electronic Night': Forced Entertainment

I would like to suggest a strategy for reading the work of Forced Entertainment that draws on theories of science fiction [sf]. Michael Moorcock claims that he was attracted to the latter 'because it was overlooked by the critics and it could be written unself-consciously';[1] hence I perceive parallels between it and live art whose own position in critical circles is negligible.[2] But what exactly is sf? For the purposes of this inquiry, Darko Suvin's definition which cites 'the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition' relayed through 'an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment'[3] will suffice.

Several feminist writers consider sf to be a sphere in which, in theory at any rate, there are no rules. In its postmodernist form, the genre is especially open to intervention: Kathy Acker, for instance, uses appropriation as a subversive tool in *Empire of the Senseless*, plundering and mercilessly altering William Gibson's seminal novel *Neuromancer*. Furthermore, a reliance on inventiveness and otherness, and a fondness for neologisms leaves language wide open to de/reconstruction. Admittedly the majority of sf 'has maintained an essentially conservative attitude to women and to the relationship between the sexes'.[4] However, rather than embarking

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1 Michael Moorcock (ed.) *New Worlds: An Anthology* London, Flamingo Books, 1983, p.16

2 One objection to an analogy between the live art and postmodernist sf work might hinge on the fact that the latter belongs to a recognisable genre, whereas the former does not. However, this allegiance to genre is by no means conclusive. John Clute, Peter Nicholls and Brian Stableford for example have suggested that sf is not homogenous, and that genre is no more than a publishing world convenience. See J. Clute & P. Nicholls (eds) *The Science Fiction Encyclopaedia* London, Orbit, 1993, p. 314. Equally, we might consider Derrida's theorisation of genre as holding transgressive potential. In 'The Law of Genre', Derrida claims that a text contains a 'mark' that announces the former's adherence to a genre, but that this mark operates from a position outside of the text and is not of the genre. Thus the mark functions to pinpoint its alterity, as much as to show that the text is generic : 'In marking itself generically, a text unmarks itself'. See J. Derrida *Acts of Literature* London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p.230.

3 Darko Suvin cited in 'Definitions' in J. Clute & P. Nicholls (eds), 1993, pp311-12

4 Jen Green & Sarah Lefanu (eds) *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind* London, The Women's Press, 1985, p.1. The tendency of male writers to reify stereotypes is parodied in Russ' short story 'The Clichés from Outer Space' which appears in the aforementioned anthology. It includes the 'Weird-Ways-Of-Getting-Pregnant' story that sees 'Sheila Sue Hateman in uncontrollable ecstasy as the giant male orchid arched over

on a contents analysis of sf texts, I am proposing that we analyse the *strategies of reading* that these texts require. Teresa de Lauretis has said of the sf text that it 'appears as a discontinuous set of sign-functions which produces an indefinite set of semantic constructs by dislocating the subject in the reading process';[5] I would argue that it is through an understanding and implementation of this dislocation process that the work of Forced Entertainment functions.

This chapter then will proffer ways of analysing the latter with particular emphasis on *Emanuelle Enchanted* (1992). Probably the co-operative's most widely successful show to date, it earned writer-director Tim Etchells a *Time Out* Dance and Performance Award for best text. I begin by examining sf concepts of paraspace and Zone and how these might illuminate an analysis of the staging, characterisation and use of language in Forced Entertainment's practice. As its title reveals, *Emanuelle Enchanted* also implies that it might be read architextually, so I explore the deconstruction of the filmic image in a theatrical context; and how the use of the mediated image gives rise to issues of hyperreality, simulacrum and implosion. I go on to look at how Forced Entertainment and postmodernist sf oppose the transparency of language(s) by comparing their strategies of foregrounding textuality (auto-designation, intensified speech, decentering) to works' *mise-en-abyme* images of urbanity versus the natural. Through the sf tropes of entropy and negentropy, utopia, dystopia and the places between, I hope to show that we might read the overall structure of a Forced Entertainment work - the way in which it negotiates a tension between activity and stasis, and plays with its own internal logic to create a sense of meaning in flux. And finally, I suggest Samuel R. Delany's concept of *a sense of wonder* as a visceral response to *Emanuelle Enchanted.*

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geneticist, but had decided that what she really wanted was to stay at home, have eight children, interior decorate, garden, cook organically' (p.30); and 'The Turnabout Story' in which 'Four ravaging, man-hating, vicious, hulking, Lesbian, sadistic, fetishistic Women's Libbers motorcycled down the highway to where George was hiding behind a bush' (p.33)

[5] Teresa de Lauretis 'Signs of W(a/o)nder' in T. de Lauretis; A. Huyssen & K. Woodward (eds) *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions* Madison, Wisconsin, Coda Press, 1980, p.160

The Paraspace

What sf does primarily is to create an alternative universe (galaxy/world etc.) in which the reader can be assaulted by the unfamiliar, and made to reassess the familiar. This so-called *alternate world* has been defined as 'an account of Earth as it might have become in consequence of some hypothetical alteration in history'.[6] Though not necessarily true of all sf alternate worlds, the definition does at least note the importance of our current perceptions to the rendering of a future existence. We might liken this, sfs project to present us with an alternative, to the subtitle of *Emanuelle Enchanted* which reads 'Or a description of this world as if it were a beautiful place'.

Another theorisation of this place refers to (a) *paraspace*, of which Scott Bukatman, in his book on postmodern sf and identity, has said: '[it] is always constituted as an other space for the characters'.[7] As Bukatman notes, this is comparable to Brian McHale's isolation of the *Zone* as a motif in postmodernist fiction: 'What [...it] permits is a collision between worlds and thus between different ontological states'.[8] The Zone is hence an alien space within a familiar space, or between two adjacent areas where no space was previously held to exist. Bukatman goes on to claim that 'what is demolished in paraspace and zone is any vision of fixed space, subjectivity, or language'.[9] I would argue that Forced Entertainment achieve this also, demolishing fixity in space through staging, in language through the spoken text and music, and in subjectivity through characterisation.

The idea of paraspace or Zone can be compared to the intertextual text which creates a space, literally *inter* or between, two or more adjacent texts. Gerard Genette advances his concept of transtextuality in *Palimpsestes* as 'all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or

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[6] Brian Stableford 'Alternate Worlds' in John Clute & Peter Nicholls (eds), 1993, p. 23

[7] Scott Bukatman *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* Durham and London, Duke University Press,1993, p.176

[8] Brian McHale *Postmodernist Fiction* New York, Methuen, 1987, pp 45-6

[9] Scott Bukatman, 1993, p.166

secret, with other texts', and he sees intertextuality as the 'effective co-presence of two texts'.[10] Like the Zone, the intertextual text can suggest the infiltration of the familiar by the alien. If a text were to be *invoked*, this infiltration would be blatant: one text would be rendered less homogenous by the explicit naming of other texts. What the sf Zone often proves however, is that the alien is in fact the alien within; that it was *already present in the familiar space*. This might be likened to the effect of an *evoked* text, whose subtle but unmistakable presence confuses a text's apparent seamlessness.

Defying the classical unities of time and place, Forced Entertainment's strategies of staging seek to reveal the multiple identities of urban experience. Not only intertextual, these strategies are, more specifically, *intratextual* in that they orchestrate a small space inside the main one. In *Club of No Regrets* (1993/4) for example, there is a tiny box set within the larger space; this makes another appearance in *Hidden J* (1995) as a 'room' (that might be a T.V.) into which we can only see via a window in its front wall, and only then if its curtains are open. In *Emanuelle Enchanted* our view of what is happening is often interrupted by a performer drawing a gauze curtain across the stage, even as action continues behind it. Although microcosmic on one level, and so a part of the larger space, these mini-spaces also function through difference. There is often a strict demarcation between them and the main space, so that they disturb the integrity of the latter, questioning its credibility as a whole. Many of Forced Entertainment's shows involve the performers actually building or demolishing a mini-stage from existing elements, thus breaking with the naturalist convention of silent, black-robed stagehands changing the set in the interval between acts, and hinting at the myriad permutations of the city inside a city.

Both music (and dialogue) in Forced Entertainment's practice tend toward auto-citation in that the former recalls itself through repetition, and the latter relates to their past shows. Though the music

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[10] Gerard Genette cited in Robert Stam; Robert Burgoyne & Sandy Flitterman-Lewis *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics* London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p.206. See also Gerard Genette *Palimpsestes: La Litterature au Second Degre* Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1982

is all 'original', in the sense that it has been composed especially for the shows (by John Avery), it frequently borrows from other idioms. In *Emanuelle Enchanted*, these include heavy metal, cartoon music and waltz (Tchaikovsky). Cohering neither historically nor thematically, the music's logic is purely internal, certain motifs signalling the advent of particular sections. Similarly, the text is never homogenous but often alludes to other Forced Entertainment work in the form of a title that becomes a line, or vice versa; or in a name of a character once encountered, now revisited. Thus 'Club of No Regrets' begins as one line on one list in *Emanuelle Enchanted* and goes on to be a show in its own right.

In relation to characterisation, we witness the breakdown of subjectivity that the paraspace lays claim to achieve. There is a section in *Emanuelle Enchanted* which might be labelled 'Signs' where identity approximates disguise. For this part of the work, the reader is invited to rely on cardboard signs and the terse statements on them for an understanding of the identities of the performers. Three women and two men select costumes from jumble sale clothes hanging on rails at either side of the performing area. Picking up signs and assuming poses/actions/attitudes, they offer their own readings of the words they hold. The first time this section materialises the pace is mainly frantic, the performers 'urgent and committed'.[11] If these signs appear flimsy (they are fashioned from the insides of cardboard boxes, probably filched from supermarkets; written on in thick black marker pens and uneven capital letters), they are heavy with signification: 'THE SHIP'S MAGICIAN', 'PRINCE VALIUM', 'YOUNG COSMONAUT (SCARED)', 'A GIRL FROM THE COUNTRY'. That illfitting clothes and amusing props should be made to cede numerous narrative secrets, is the result of the suggestive placing, and indeed replacing,of signs. This is not disguise in the sense that William Burroughs' protagonist refers to when he claims that an identity can be assumed and wholly convincing:

> Disguise is clothes and bearing and behavior that leave no questions unanswered [...] American tourist with a wife he calls "Mother" [...] old queen on the make [...] dirty beatnik [...] marginal film producer.[12]

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[11] Tim Etchells *Emanuelle Enchanted* Forced Entertainment Theatre Co-operative, unpublished text, 1992, p.6

[12] William Burroughs 'Mother I Would Like to Know' in *The Wild Boys* New York, Grove Press, 1969, p.505

On the contrary, the capsule identities that Forced Entertainment present us with endeavour to leave *most* questions unanswered.

As if it were not difficult enough to read the signs' infinite possible meanings within a few seconds, we are faced with the realisation that they are also intertextual. Signs may be picked up a second (or third, or fourth...) time by a different performer, so that previous significations are recalled. We watch the transformation which is effected when 'THE SHIP'S MAGICIAN' is a male in 1970s style pyjamas, then a female in a fur coat. Rejecting a strictly mimetic relationship between language and concept, Forced Entertainment's identity cards are interchangeable, slipping from depiction to depiction, refusing to be held down to any one definition, their meaning in constant deferral. That this section was expanded into an eleven hour installation at the National Review of Live Art (1993) and retitled *Twelve a.m. and Looking Down* (from a line in *Emanuelle Enchanted)*, is perhaps proof of the multiplicity of potential fragments that could be worked from the material. In this durational installation, the audience's freedom to enter and exit the space at will, and the removal of all discernable structure (four pieces of music of differing tempos play at seemingly random moments) enable the viewer to create their own texts in miniature.

The notion of a personalised text pervades American conceptual artist Douglas Huebler's on-going project (begun 1971) to photograph every one in the world. For his *100E/ Variable Piece #70:1971* Huebler asked visitors at art events if they would be photographed with a sign, selected at random, of his making and bearing a cliché. His 'models' were not allowed to see these signs prior to posing but could de-face their photograph with a Magic Marker pen afterwards if they found it offensive. The meaning of the photograph was dependent on the relationship between the model and the sign, and of course on the former's ignorance of the constitution of the latter. As Huebler explained in the statement which, along with four photographs, eventually came to

constitute the final work:

> By being forbidden to read the card until after being photographed with it, each participant posed with the full knowledge that "chance" would associate his, or her, face with a characterization whose truth could be gratuitously flattering or outrageously insulting

Of course this calls into question the whole notion of truth, as emphasised by the models' faces above the sign 'ONE PERSON WHO IS AS PRETTY AS A PICTURE'. Ranging from the noncommittal, to the optimistic smiler, to the cheerfully resigned and the downright suspicious, these four persons are wholly vulnerable to our interpretation.

Although Forced Entertainment may well have been aware of Huebler's work, their signs are less formal than his. No conceptual art experiment, they belong to a consciousness of urban experience that recognises the visibility of like signs. *Emanuelle Enchanted* is a reminder that it is no longer necessary to stage the exhibition of person with sign; that these displays occur daily and spontaneously anyway, in doorways, at stations. The fracturing of identities that occurs in the 'Signs' section is no different then than any number of personalised narratives that we have become accustomed to seeing there. And just as we have the faint suspicion that Forced Entertainment's characters and their capital-letter MESSAGES are familiar, so we admit that real-life 'Hungry and Homeless', 'Blind and Needy' are also signs already-read before we come to read them, and perhaps a (literal) embodiment of Baudrillard's *radical semiurgy*.

The Mediascape

Something akin to Forced Entertainment's cardboard signs make an appearance in Mark Buckingham and Neil Gaiman's *Spy Story* which formed part of the sf comic book series *Miracle Man: The Golden Age*.[13] In an almost recognisably British context (black cabs and double decker buses, but dollars for currency), *Spy Story*'s protagonist Ruth makes her way through the districts

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[13] Neil Gaiman & Mark Bukingham *Spy Story* in *Miracle Man: The Golden Age* London, Eclipse Graphic Novels, Harper Collins, 1993

of 'The City' on assignments real or imagined. It is a muted city, depicted in greys and blues and permanently cold or raining. Although there are street names, The City is divided into bland sections merely called 'North', 'North-East', and so on. The narrative deals with the chaos that ensues when it is no longer possible to read the signs, to distinguish between codes and, considering Ruth's occupation as a spy, the word 'code' itself takes on several meanings.

Alongside the traditional comic book convention of text written in orderly rectangles to convey the character's narration, *Spy Story* has been infiltrated by other rectangles that appear in occasional panels with instructions of their own and implications of surveillance: 'Keep The City Tidy', 'Wear a Happy Face in the City', 'The City. Love It'. Language is a curious mix of the colloquial and the coded. An old man says to Ruth, 'I dunno. Busses, [sic] eh? You wait around for half an hour and then **three** come **together**', and she in turn tells us, 'I stare at him helplessly. Is that a significant phrase? Should I be coming back at him with a countersign? Or is he simply making conversation?'. Her near-collapse is occasioned by this proliferation of signs, indicative of a dystopian state of affairs. When she tries to escape, Ruth finds herself at the edge of The City where an encounter with (Mr.) Evelyn Cream provides her with the explanation she has been seeking: The City is an artificial space created to house those who rejected the world outside because they were people 'for whom lies and subterfuge [were] the only truths'. Given a chance to start again, Ruth chooses to leave The City for Bristol 'in the English South-West' and although this city is depicted in warm yellows, it promises no utopian happy ending or predictable narrative closure. Instead, Ruth finds herself working as a librarian 'obtaining information for people, leading them to the fictions they need'. She still reads her surroundings in terms of signs: 'I buy my fish fresh from the fishmonger, and wonder if his profession is simply a flawlessly maintained cover', and surveillance. 'And They're Watching Me' is the last line of the final panel.

What this deceptively simple story throws up are Baudrillardian notions of hyperreality whereby the search for heightened experience, for ultra-reality, is paramount. Ruth's last thoughts centre on

the difficulty of seeking to find the Real in the midst of that which poses as real. Of Bristol, she says 'Maybe at the edge of this world there's a wall; and beyond it's another world -- even bigger, and more real'. In *Club of No Regrets* Forced Entertainment explore comparable notions of the Real and its simulacrum. Two performers, held to ransom in the midst of a wood, are forced to perform five short scenes repeatedly (a dystopian version of the mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* perhaps?). Their captors furnish them with idiosyncratic props and dubious 'special effects' in an attempt to render the scenes more real. As for the scenes themselves, they read like the pastiches of Hollywood movies, T.V. cop shows, archaic dramas, as evidenced by their simplistic, prescriptive titles: 'A Procedures Scene', 'A Shoot Out Scene', 'A Troubled Scene', 'A Questions Scene', 'A Look How I'm Crying Scene'.

The dialogue is cliché-ridden, worn, if a little incongruous, and would appear to leave itself open to 'bad' acting:

> A: Look how I'm crying. Don't you care at all. Look how I'm crying
> B: I don't want you to leave
> A: Where am I going? What am I going to do?
> B: I have pretended for so long that everything is fine.

We witness this scene being played and replayed at different points in the work - it is read from scraps of paper with wild variations in tone, pace, characterisation. Sometimes the scene is obscured from view by the stagehand/captors, as they place mineral water for tears on the performers' faces. With microphones thrust sporadically under their noses, with the residues of effects from other scenes (talcum powder dust, fake blood, gaffa tape gags), the performers doggedly persist whilst Helen X surveys them with a mock directorial eye, calling 'too short'; 'is that it'; 'more colour'. What we see here then are images and illusions framed by their spatial position in the mini-set, and also by the devices of Helen X and the stagehands who act as facilitators. Approximation is no longer held to suffice; what is demanded of the scene is that it is more real than the Real, with the expectation that it will then provide a more intense experience for the viewer.

Club of No Regrets predominantly deconstructs the theatrical image and hints, in its search for ultra-reality, that this has been complicated by the pervasiveness of the mediated Real. But the title of *Emanuelle Enchanted* invokes the mediated also - the 1970s soft-porn series *Emanuelle.* Architextuality is implied, the live performance referring to a medium outside of its own. The allusion is made explicit within the first lines of the piece. These read like a film directory entry, or maybe the copy on the back of a video version:

> Goodbye Emanuelle, starring Sylvia Kristel, Umberto Orsini, Alexandra Stewart, Jean-Pierre Bouvier and introducing Caroline Laurence. An Yves Rousset-Rouard production, directed by Francois Leterrier. Panavision. 1976. 95 minutes.

'The Kiss' section in *Emanuelle Enchanted* deconstructs the *filmic* image, highlighting the processes of its production as being equal in deception to those of its theatrical counterpart. A performer stands by a video monitor on which is playing a live version of two other performers kissing, in close-up. She speaks as if the events she narrates were somehow evident on screen, whereas in fact they are in no way deducible from the actions of the silent kissers. Beginning 'Goodbye Emanuelle', the performer embarks on an incongruous tale that functions much like a Burroughs cut-up, fashioned from pieces of text half-known but implausible. The plot that she outlines, though ludicrous, is apt considering the pornographic film's own disinclination towards narrative credibility: 'Emanuelle has been playing tennis with some friends and now she's alone, waiting for her lover Jean to call. She speaks: "What do the foes of melody know of melody? What do the foes of love know of love?"'.

The performer traces the narrative into 'a chi-chi nightclub' where ornithologist Chloe tells film-maker Gregory '"Dry your tears, please, I beg of you, dry your eyes"'. At this point, the performer attempts to affect a sincere, moving engagement with the lines, an approach that is quickly abandoned with the introduction of the next plot element. In the guise of Michel, the intellectual, the performer shouts 'I'd rather live on Pluto, I'd rather live on Saturn, I'd rather live in orbit of the moon' gesturing wildly into the audience as if she could indeed see the planets

there. Jean's final response, which seems to belong to another film altogether - 'This horse is going to die isn't it? [...] If it dies I'm going to wipe the tape [...] If this horse dies I'll wipe the fucking tape' - she chooses to render tearfully.

By making our reading of this entire section dependent on the interplay between silent monitor image and the spoken narration, Forced Entertainment isolate the elements of the filmic text. The extra-diegetic sound (the performer's re-enactions) is foregrounded by the importance that it is accorded (the visual image barely changes thus does not compete for attention); hence we cannot help but be aware of its workings. Since we are conscious of the incompatibility of the performer's words with the images we see, we are encouraged to consider the truthfulness of extra-diegetic sound *in general*. Therefore, the insidiousness of extra-diegesis - in the form of mood music, unseen narrator, and so forth - is exposed, and the usual supremacy of the mediated image undermined.

A similar acknowledgement of the typical supremacy of the mediated image is illustrated by an episode in Don DeLillo's sf novel *White Noise*, in which two characters drive to see 'a tourist attraction known as the most photographed barn in America'. After counting five signs en route before reaching the site, they realise that 'No-one sees the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn'. So that in watching photographers photographing the barn, they 'see only what the others see. The thousands who were here in the past, those who will come in the future'. This leaves unanswered questions of 'What was the barn like before it was photographed?'; 'What did it look like, how was it different from other barns, how was it similar to other barns?' - all unanswerable 'because we've read the signs, seen the people snapping the pictures'.[14]

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[14] Don DeLillo *White Noise* New York, Viking, 1985, pp 12-13

What DeLillo refers to then are the effects of encountering the Real through a mediatised filter. In this, he echoes Baudrillard's conception of the postmodernist legacy - simulacra - which argues that the image has superseded the Real, and that our experience of the Real is now only convincing if it is mediated.[15] Like the narrator of Mark Leyner's cyberpunk novel *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist*, who confesses 'I have overdosed on television',[16] Forced Entertainment also recall the subliminal power of the T.V. set. Invoking certain texts: 'PAUL DANIELS WITH MORE MAGIC AND DELUSIONS' reads a cardboard sign; and evoking others: 'Copyright the whole world except Australia', they abstract and distort the results of quotidian viewing and pass their experience on for our recognition. In their versions even banalities like the copyright line above, which is no more than the (ex) end-title of an(y) Australian soap opera, take on a profound and mysterious significance. Like cyberpunk constructed worlds, that are 'filled with name-brand debris of a fully industrialized and technological culture',[17] Forced Entertainment's shows readily admit to gleaning references from 'dialogue excerpts, weird headlines, slogans, aphorisms',[18] hence 'Cancer of the Fist', 'No more Mr. Nice Guy', 'All so much Head Pain' and 'Down with Childhood'.

These reflections on what we might call the televisionisation of culture, highlight above all the imploding spheres of real and fictive, of American and British cultures, or of entertainment and information. Various theorists have spoken of the implosion of the latter that has crystallised in the televisual phenomenon *infotainment*, and certainly much sf dwells on the technological as a means of benign or vicious control, and as an organ for the dissemination of propaganda. Forced Entertainment recreate this curious, evermore ambiguous, phenomenon in the 'News Room' section of *Emanuelle Enchanted*. Within the basic format of various performers at a desk, reading out itemised lists of what could be the bizarre news of an imploded, hypothetical universe, the section moves through strategies of narration that problematise the relationship between action

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[15] See Jean Baudrillard Transl. P. Foss; P. Patton & J. Johnston *Simulations* New York, Foreign Agents Series, Semiotext(e), 1983

[16] Mark Leyner *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist* London, Flamingo Books, 1991, p.4

[17] Scott Bukatman, 1993, p.141

[18] Tim Etchells, 1992, p.9

and representation, between event and depiction. These are especially blurred by the presence of a hand-held video camera that the performers take in turns to manipulate, and the selected (and *selective*) images that this transmits, live, onto the monitors either side of the 'newscaster'.

The newsroom floor is strewn with paper, performers choosing and rejecting lists to read. They check the stream of images appearing on the monitor. A performer directs the newscaster, motioning for more speed; then goes to one of the monitors and begins to direct the image. As if the image were complying, the newscaster increases the pace of his speech; real and fictive have imploded. Suspect characters in dark glasses materialise, the mood becomes uncomfortable as lists are spoken from the anonymity of a blanket, or yelled in terror. Newscasters are wounded, held hostage; it becomes difficult to differentiate between the items on the lists and the anxiety of their speakers: '7. Don't hurt me, please don't hurt me'. Recalling Greil Marcus' perception of the advertising, information and media industries which have

> turned upon individual[s] [...], seized their subjective emotions and experiences, changed those once evanescent phenomena into objective, replicatable commodities, placed them on the market [...] and sold them back to those [...] who, as prisoners of the spectacle, could now find such things only on the market[19]

a newscaster urges 'Grab Reality as a Commodity and Sell It'.

The Anti-Transparent

In determining what it is exactly that distinguishes sf from other forms, Samuel R. Delany and Teresa de Lauretis locate it in 'the unique strategies of reading required of its audience [...] characterized by a continual linguistic play that resists any totalization of meaning'.[20] Thus, as de Lauretis notes,[21] the sf text is a writerly one. Barthes has outlined the characteristics of the

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[19] Greil Marcus *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1989, p.101

[20] Scott Bukatman, 1993, p.11

[21] See T. de Lauretis; A. Huyssen & K. Woodward (eds), 1980, p.160

writerly text :

> In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, "run" (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced[22]

in what is a useful approach to reading Forced Entertainment's work.

Postmodernist fiction generally, and sf perhaps especially, has seen textuality becoming an explicit *theme*. With form being privileged over content, or more precisely *as* content, confusing or scrambled language has been employed to highlight textuality. Mark Leyner's novel *My Cousin, My Gastroenterologist* is a prime example of intensified language and so its opening is worth quoting at length:

> I was an infinitely hot and dense dot. So begins the autobiography of a feral child who was raised by huge and lurid puppets. An autobiography written wearing wrist weights. It ends with these words: A car drives through a puddle of sperm, sweat and contraceptive jelly, splattering the great chopsocky vigilante from Hong Kong[23]

What Leyner's hyperbolic writing engenders, is the reader's alienation from their own language, assisted by the invention of words such as 'chopsocky'. A similar effect is achieved by the use of nonsense dialogue that sounds Eastern European in Forced Entertainment's *Hidden J.* At one point a performer, unseen because enclosed in the mini-set, embarks on a lengthy monologue in this pseudo-language: she rants, she throws things in anger or frustration. What this section proves is that we do not need to hear actual words to know what is being spoken. Here, as in Leyner's text, the operant illusions of language are exposed through their intensification. By alluding to the process whereby it was written, a Forced Entertainment work might be said to function like the postmodernist sf text.

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[22] Roland Barthes 'The Death of the Author' (1968) in Roland Barthes, transl. Stephen Heath, *Image-Music-Text* London, Fontana Press, 1977, p.147

[23] Mark Leyner, 1991, p.5

It is evident that although *Emanuelle Enchanted* is a *performance* text as opposed to a novel, and thus has been conceived entirely differently, it nonetheless exposes itself as a text that at some point has been *written,* albeit partially. In other words, it betrays evidence of auto-designation: the act of writing is reproduced by the way in which the written text is structured. Thus, just as the performers within the work narrate their own version of events on the night the rain stopped, with reference to *the act of writing* ('we were sat in our room and lacking pens or typewriters of any kind, or paper, we preferred instead to write messages in our own dear blood on the walls'), so there appear to be extra-textual references relayed by a P.C. to the author. The penultimate line of *Emanuelle Enchanted*, for example, is 'Enter Y to terminate the file' which would imply a syntagmatic reading. At other moments, the difficulties of writing, and more exactly the difficulties of writing *on a P.C.*, are emphasised: 'missing parameter variable at line M' thereby recalling sf allusions to writing machines (as in Burroughs' work for example). If we consider these references to be parallel fictions, then these intersect as the performers (re)appropriate P.C. language, imbuing it with metaphorical significance: 'of any messages that came back to us most were like a file deleted symbol'.

Club of No Regrets has its protagonist Helen X trying to write her story. As she wanders the stage, we see her reading notes that she has made from scraps of paper; changing words, *editing* herself, as she warns us 'some parts of this history have been censored and other parts of it have been, um, stolen'. Her attempts at producing (the beginnings of) a linear narrative frustrate themselves by refusing transparency: 'I'm lost and I'm lonely. I'm losing things fast. I dropped some money back there somewhere. Two (no change it) three pints of blood went right down the drain after a pub fight'. This problematises a process of identification for the reader; we can no longer key in to one narrative and empathise with a central character. We are asked instead to manipulate a selection of disparate parts and indeed encouraged to think of Helen X in the same way. She claims 'I already lost my fingerprints in a game of cards. My name is Helen X. Soon I won't be a person at all, just a sad collection of bits all lost in the woods'.

In addition to foregrounding their texts as written, Forced Entertainment also foreground them as *performed*, and consequently themselves as performers. This might be effected by their referring to one another by their own names (as indeed the scripts for their pieces do), or by showing them dealing with their responses as performers. The latter is especially apparent in *Twelve a.m. and Looking Down* where the length of the performance brings another set of challenges for the co-operative: having to keep focused, not running out of ideas, negotiating the novelty of the experiment and the discernible flow of audience in and out of the room. This is fuelled by the audience's extra-textual knowledge and interest; how long have the performers been going, are they tired? By incorporating the basic needs of the performers (eating, sleeping and so on) into the fabric of the piece, the installation foregrounds its own textuality as (an eleven hour) work. *Hidden J* replicates this vision of the 'offstage' performer being visible and, paradoxically, on stage. We see three of them playing cards, as if waiting for the cue to go on or go home, whilst a performer in the box-set exhales her final speech. Every so often, as a new hand is being dealt, one of the card players slips into the box set to check how much longer the speech is going to go on for. Where are we up to? he motions and is shown the line on the sheet of paper.

If sf functions to distance the reader with an unsettling synthesis of familiar with alien language, it does so partly through the use of natural imagery juxtaposed with technological detail. Indeed, we might proffer an analogy between natural versus technological imagery, and realism versus alienation. In the sf work there occur acts of relocation between these sets of images that help to naturalise the diegetic encounters with futurist technology. Equally, the so-called natural is recast in the light of our altered approach to technology. This leaves the reader with the choice of accepting the minutiae of this alternate existence via a quasi-suspension of disbelief; or of refusing to partake of it, thereby remaining exterior to the diegesis. If they pursue the former, they will be naturalising the unfamiliar, but if they adopt the latter approach, they will be recognising their own alienation.

What the sf text does is to present the reader with this dilemma almost instantly, forcing them to accept that a *pleasurable* engagement with the text is their own responsibility. More importantly, it disturbs the equation which has hitherto aligned realism (the naturalist play or the classic Hollywood film) with pleasure (narrative fulfilment, satisfying identification with characters and so on); and alienation (Brecht or art-house cinema) with cerebral challenge. Foregrounding its own textuality (thus betraying the transparent nature of its discourse), the postmodernist (sf) text provides engagement on all levels, 'blur[ring] the distinctions between the organic and the artificial', as Veronica Hollinger has said[24] of *Neuromancer*'s oft-quoted opening sentence: 'The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel'.[25] Further instances of this blurring can be seen in Michael Benedikt's concept of cyberspace as

> A world in which the global traffic of knowledge, secrets, measurements, indicators, entertainments and alter-human agency takes on form: sights, sounds, presences never seen on the surface of the earth blossoming in a vast electronic night[26]

and of course in the sf of Philip K. Dick, most notably in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* where replica animals have come to substitute the real thing.

This ploy is particularly effective when applied to the rendering of a city, as the neologism *metroscape* - with its dual connotations of metropolis and landscape - demonstrates. Forced Entertainment's world functions in a similar way; the lyricism of the text is highly pleasurable, yet the constant references to itself as a text problematises a purely passive engagement. Shows play with the same tense and unsettling blurred distinctions; the backdrop to *Emanuelle Enchanted* is a night sky but one made up of 40v stars - a horizon borrowed from a previous work *Some Confusions in the Law About Love* (1990). There the stars were the focus of one of the more benign acts of two crappy entertainers: Dolores says 'Mike names the stars and I call out what

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[24] Veronica Hollinger 'Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism' in Larry McCaffery (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction* Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1992, p.205

[25] William Gibson *Neuromancer* New York, The New Ace Science Fiction Specials, Ace Books, 1984, p.3

[26] Michael Benedikt (ed.) *Cyberspace: First Steps* Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1991, p.11

they mean'. In *The Day Serenity Returned To The Ground* (1986) cosmonauts report that 'The sky is black, it is black but there are no stars visible in it', but Marina, of *Marina and Lee* (1991), traces her journey across the desert by them 'It is gorgeous in paradise, and when darkness comes, there are some routes between the stars'. If *Club of No Regrets* hears Helen X ponder 'the prospects of a journey to the furthest star', then *Emanuelle Enchanted* is more optimistic in its promise: 'These are the Bright Stars and this is How to Find Them'. Another line from *Emanuelle Enchanted* is perhaps an illustration of the function of these many disparate stars: 'I need notions of fixity within this instability', whispers a performer. The stars, though not always visible, act by their constant appearances in the spoken text of Forced Entertainment's universe, like comforting reference points. As such, they permit the habitual reader to indulge in a moment of recognition, and thus to enjoy an instant of unusual and precarious stability.

Neg/entropy

Where sf has tended to diffuse the urban experience through the models of utopia, dystopia and the impossible, Forced Entertainment's *Emanuelle Enchanted* might be said to blur these depictions by evoking all three simultaneously. In the programme notes to the performance, Tim Etchells claims 'It was inevitable I suppose, that in setting off for something like paradise we ended up somewhere more like a scribbled cartoon hell'. Examining the rest of his description of the work, it becomes clear that *Emanuelle Enchanted* is almost allegorical; he calls it 'perhaps not so much an evocation of a gorgeous imaginary country as about the need we have to dream such a place' and 'some other place; call it England, call it Europe, call it now, and nearly everywhere, near the end of the millennium'. In recognising the position of *Emanuelle Enchanted*'s world as belonging to a *fin de siècle* sensibility and aesthetic, Etchells echoes sf's project to render the present in the guise of the future.

'We did magic acts,' cry the performers in *Emanuelle Enchanted*, and arguably the artistic creation of utopias is bound up with the desire for magic. If magic for Freud (*Totem and Taboo*)

is ultimately a belief in the omnipotence of our thought and our will, then it is also aligned to his notion of the *uncanny*. It can never be truly invoked without the memory of its original function as defence mechanism, against the threat of imminent dismemberment, castration and psychic death. It is most probably as defence that *Emanuelle Enchanted*'s performers resort to magic; they claim 'That strange night when the rain stopped we started on some magic acts to keep away the cold. It was all frightening magic and appearing and disappearing and revelation and loss for us then'. Daniel O'Keefe believes that we resort to magic as one way of mitigating the increasing helplessness, occasioned by 'the fragmentation of cities, the growth of anonymous organizations',[27] we experience. The fractured city might also be read as the schizophrenic one that is theorised by Iain Chambers thus:

> The city exists as a series of doubles; it has official and hidden cultures, it is a real place and a site of imagination [...] We discover that urban "reality" is not single but multiple, that inside the city there is always another city[28]

Forced Entertainment's own engagement with the city as metaphor derives, presumably, from their decision to establish themselves in Sheffield. Their long involvement with that city, and its presence in their work (in the shape of experiences they have had there, or as the backdrop to publicity photographs, or even as the focus of their guided tour *Nights in this City,* 1995) has allowed them to re-present it in what I would suggest is a science fictional way. The pre-production information for *Nights in this City* notes 'The project aims to reinvent the city, making a familiar landscape strange and somehow unpredictable', thus recalling Suvin's definition of sf with its emphasis on strangeness and cognition.

Chambers' view is exposed more explicitly still by the co-operative's show (*Let the Water Run its Course) To the Sea that Made the Promise* (1986/7) where the performers articulate a love/hate relationship with their urban environment: 'they sat up some nites and renamed it and their love grew as they named it: the city of spires, the Kentucky Fried city, the City of Elvis King, the exploding city, the city of joy', and then: 'more names for the Black City. In the dark they called it

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[27] Daniel Lawrence O'Keefe *Stolen Lightning: The Social Theory of Magic* New York, Continuum, 1982, p.479
[28] Iain Chambers *Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience* New York, Methuen,1986, p.183

fuck city, shit city, blood city, sperm city, cock city, prick city, cunt city, twat city, bum city, arse city, shitty city, ridiculous city, stupid city'. The dystopian nightmare is connected in much sf with the desire to escape, to transcend. Predictably, it is darkness that we are asked to read as metaphor, and this is certainly a recurrent metaphor in Forced Entertainment's work. In *Emanuelle Enchanted* darkness provides the opportunity for chaos to be staged; a performer tells us 'This is the life we lived then, in the city, in the chaos, in the dark'.

The destructive potential of chaos, its threat to the social order, might be likened to sf perceptions of entropy which the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English defines as 'a measure of the disorganization or degradation of the universe'.[29] Baudrillard uses entropy as a metaphor to describe the effects of implosion, asserting 'Information dissolves meaning and the social into a sort of nebulous state, leading not at all to a surfeit of innovation but to the very contrary, to total entropy'.[30] We could therefore read the internal logic of *Emanuelle Enchanted*, and its perpetual *inward* collapse, as both entropic and implosive. As such, the disintegration of the set as seen, and as spoken of, is symptomatic: 'Each time we left the room things changed' and 'the street names were switched in the dead of night'. The performers take up their positions behind moveable stage flats that obscure them from our view, and act as walls or dance partners. One edges her way uneasily off the table as she suddenly finds herself at the centre of a whirling circle of flats. Another attempts to use his flat much as one would expect a magician's box to function, drawing it aside in the hope that his companion/accomplice has disappeared. This stage set in flux, its basic flats arranged and re-arranged, is suggestive also of the multiple facets of the city. 'Such a big city, so many people, such a big city, such a big world,' a performer cries.

It is of multiplicity that Bukatman speaks when he claims that 'The urban territory is marked by an infinity of space, a multiplicity of surfaces: time is displaced [...] as the city, the universe, circles

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[29] R.E. Allen (ed.) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, p.392

[30] Jean Baudrillard *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* New York, Semiotext(e), 1983, p.100

back upon itself in a closed feedback loop'.[31] The disintegration of the universe, and the negentropic attempts to counter it, are generally marked in sf by an altered perception of time. The language and structure of *Emanuelle Enchanted* reflects the notion of a feedback loop as it plays with repetition. Sections replicate one another, feeding off and into themselves. The show has fourteen sections, of which two are repeated twice; one three times; and one five times; only two sections are never repeated. There is also repetition within each section - possibly of whole paragraphs of text, or of words, or movements. The way that text is re-spoken gives an impression of moving whilst standing still (as hinted at perhaps by the frantic running on the spot in 'Signs'); an almost cyclical 'progress' that disorients the reader. 'That was a night of losing and of finding again, of losing and of finding and then of finding once again' goes a line in *Emanuelle Enchanted.*

The final section of *Emanuelle Enchanted* plays further with the tension between entropy and negentropy. Although the script refers to this section as 'a sweeping, panoramic [...] overview of some city, or some world, or some night - an upbeat answer to [the] WHEREFORE text', it is a text that mingles utopia - 'the air so sweet it keeps you from dying' - with dystopia - 'an illness that spreads via the telephone'. In a variation on the 'Newsroom' scenes, but without the violence, we see a performer sitting still, mouthing his almost delirious speech into a microphone. Like a news broadcast that has gone out of control, (the script notes the 'chaos' of the scene), it is negentropic in its bursts of energy designed to keep collapse at bay. The stage set is gradually cleared of flats all together. The hand-held camera which pursues its own narrative from the fragmented activities of performers changing costumes, or searching for new lines, is finally laid to rest. The action slows to a halt. Yet a monologue still speaks of movement, this flux mimicked by the way in which words are carried over from one line to the next:

> soon every street in this town leads you somewhere you
> have to forget and each to his own and
> each time her heart beats and
> evidence and
> evidence withheld

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[31] Scott Bukatman, 1993, p.128

and everything, help me, help me, everything's turning silver and orange

If entropy is inevitable, it is hinted at in the notion of everything turning silver and orange, comparable to the effect of the half-submerged and still drowning city of J.G. Ballard's sf novel *Drowned World*. The sense of inevitability is heightened by the monologue's organising principle which follows the structure of the alphabet. Time, also, is counted out, 'only two more seconds to go now before I've only got three more seconds to go'; and the count-down to this state of dissolution has its own parallel, of course, with the performance itself moving closer to disintegration.

A Sense of Wonder

What is it then that the postmodernist sf text demands of, promises, elicits from its reader? As we have seen, it seeks to establish an alternative world, a paraspace that defies fixity. A Zone that exists unbidden, where no space was perceived for it to exist *in*. Often employing the city as metaphor, the sf text threatens us with dystopian nightmares and/or seduces us with utopia, yet its physical conception is seldom totalising and usually boundless. Placed against a sublime wilderness, replete with familiar markers from the natural world (sky, stars, sun and sea), these urban renderings become the more vivid and improbable.

Cutting across their spatial existence, is the pervasive technological mediascape, its presence filtered through intensified language that problematises reading and encourages a writerly response. Reality and imagination collide, authentic and fictive implode, and notions of temporality collapse. All the while the spectre of cyberspace, akin to the unpresentable, the not-seen, looms large. Narrative is fragmented and we are decentered *ad infinitum* as we struggle with the juxtaposition of the alien with the recognisable. The city's refusal to submit to entropy is countered, however, by negentropy - bursts of activity that might yet stay its inevitable, but not

necessarily finite, death. And *how* is it then that we approach these defamiliarising strategies, if not with a 'sense of wonder'?

This sense of wonder - 'a venerable name among people who talk about science fiction' - has been defined by Samuel R. Delany as 'This experience of constant de-centered decenteredness, each de-centering on a vaster and vaster space'.[32] To return to his concept of *paraspace* ('an alternate space, sometimes largely mental, but always materially manifested, that sits beside the real world'), we should note that Delany believes it involves 'language raised to an extraordinarily lyric level'.[33] I would suggest that these concepts co-join in *Emanuelle Enchanted*; that it is not only the reader's inability to anchor the fictions proliferating before them which induces a *sense of wonder*, but the sheer poetry of Etchells' score.

This is especially apparent in the 'Wherefore' text which appears only once in the work as the tenth of its fourteen sections. The script informs us that the order of this text is not pre-determined, but that it is open to the performer's (nightly) decision to negotiate the material through repetition, intercutting and such 'according to the mood and the pace she's trying to achieve'.[34] It takes the form of quasi-liturgical call and response (though entirely spoken by a sole performer), executed against a background of John Avery's hypnotic music:

> Wherefore is this night distinguished from all other nights?
> We're in a place of chance.
> Wherefore is this night distinguished from all other nights?
> Because the stars in the sky are aligned.
> Wherefore is this night distinguished from all other nights?
> Because tonight we can see through

And nestling among the metaphysical inquiries that seek to comprehend the mysteries of the universe - 'Which is more alive - a stone or a lizard? What causes movement in the stars?', the

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[32] Samuel R. Delany 'Introduction' in Samuel R. Delany & Howard Chaykin *Empire* New York, Berkeley, Windhover Books, 1978 (unpaginated)
[33] Samuel R. Delany 'Is Cyberpunk a Good Thing or a Bad Thing?' *Mississippi Review* no. 47/48, 1988, p.31
[34] Tim Etchells,1992, p.18

reader pinpoints the (pathetic) traces of their own culture: 'What freephone number did she write on her hand? Who wore a T-shirt saying something to prove?'. Behind the speaker, other performers move between shifting wooden stage flats that act as flimsy walls. They appear in the process of un/dressing in 'moments or images [...] essentially private, almost filmic',[35] perhaps alone, or clutching at one another for sex/comfort. They listen, they contemplate, and, like voyeurs, we glimpse their interactions only through the passage of the walls, the music insistent and staccato like rain.

Ultimately we might employ Genette's fifth category of transtextuality - *hypertextuality* - to describe how *Emanuelle Enchanted* draws a sense of wonder from its viewer. Hypertextuality occurs when a text (in this case Forced Entertainment's) relates to an anterior text called a hypertext or hypotext (in this instance *Goodbye Emanuelle*), and effectively transforms it. From the unpromising raw material of an unremarkable pornographic film, Forced Entertainment create a space both familiar and alien in which to play out their fictions; this then is how *Emanuelle* comes to be *Enchanted,* in what Tim Etchells has called 'a place so beautiful that to look upon it is to know both happiness and despair'.[36]

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[35] Tim Etchells,1992, p.17
[36] Programme notes for *Emanuelle Enchanted*

In Search of a Place in History

Senior Live Art and Combined Arts Officer at the Arts Council of England, Bronac Ferran recently noted the 'enormous links between the conceptual artworks of the 60s and 70s and what is happening today across a whole range of arts practice'.[1] She went on to state:

> I feel one of ACE's primary roles is to keep that history alive in as many ways as possible. That of course can be through new work, through the engagement of younger with older artists, stimulating critical debate and texts reflecting the lineage, creating the opportunity for the Live Art 'Archive' to take shape and encouraging retrospectives. We hope to support a series of events next year [1997] which will help us to put this timeline into better perspective[2]

Although Ferran was speaking mainly of the possibilities of new technologies for live art, her views throw into question the usefulness of seeing live art temporally. On first appraisal it seems obvious, perhaps, that a time-based practice such as live art should be read thus, but I would like to suggest that this becomes compromised when we consider how live art is made, and how it is documented.

In the creation of most artworks the processes whereby they are made, and the documentation of the finite object, are two temporally distanced 'moments'. So the process of writing a play, for instance, might be legible from a perusal of the playwright's drafts, which would probably show us changes s/he made to the text over a period of time. The finished play in performance however (its 'completed' stage), would possibly be documented on video. In this chapter I show, through case studies of practitioners' working methods, that this linear model of activity is less relevant to live art (as it is to much process-led art). I go on to suggest that the debate over the Live Art Archive [LAA] is symptomatic of the problems of privileging a historicist approach to live art documentation; and that the latter can be more effective if it functions in simultaneous time and creates a 'third space' of negotiation between performer and audience.

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1 Bronac Ferran 'Politics' *Live Art Magazine* issue 12, October-December 1996, p.50
2 Bronac Ferran, 1996, p.50

In the Process of Making Live Art

The political implications of process art have been recognised by feminism, as evidenced by Jacky Lansley's claim in 1978:

> process art which reveals all the emotional and material dynamics of 'making art' in front of an audience, as opposed to presenting a finished product in which the processes of production are hidden, has for me been a very relevant and useful activity as a woman performer [3]

Equally, a distrust of illusionist practices has informed a strand of live artists wishing to disassociate themselves from theatre conventions. Whilst there is no formula for the process of creating a live artwork, it is generally differentiated from that of theatremaking by its fragmented nature. A play may well be rehearsed in segments, in scenes, but there is typically an understanding of a coherent whole. A linear structure usually prevails; actors give their characters psychological credibility. Even a more improvisatory process in theatre will be overseen by some directorial principle responsible for organising the segments. By contrast, the live artwork often aims to retain its sense of fragmentation and to begin without a predetermined route. If the theatre practitioner 'travels' it is with a clear notion of their destination; the live artist is more of a flaneur.

This translates, for Rose English, into an adoption of an organic approach to writing the work. The text surrenders the authority of the playscript and exists to be revised altogether, if needs be. Nor does the text have to be wholly comprehensible and explicable; as English says of the process of writing her show *Tantamount Esperance*:

> And sometimes I would in fact write a word in a speech that would simply insist on being there but it's as if it had come out of the blue and I'd think but *why* is this word presenting itself when I feel that I don't know what this word means; and I never think you should abandon language because you don't know that word [...] and if a word is suggesting itself to you then, you know, with this particular show I decided to accept that it was interesting. And then I'd inevitably discover, after I'd discovered the *meaning* of the word, that it was the right word.[4]

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[3] Jacky Lansley 'Women Dancing' *New Dance* issue 6, 1978, p.11
[4] Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994

Initially, her shows resulted from a collaboration between herself, Sally Potter and Jacky Lansley. The three went into rehearsals with 'a blank page, as it were'.[5] Although English still considers her practice to be essentially collaborative, she identifies a change in the nature of her relationship with other artists. This amounts to a way of working with others that relies on them creating simultaneously and, to a certain extent, independently of her. She will work on the written text whilst Simon Vincenzi conceives the design from her sketches and conversations, and Ian Hill composes the music, for example. As a 'director', she not only selects and rehearses her performers but performs with them, and the whole rehearsal process appears to be a continuation of her appraisal of language: 'The thing that really informs [the show] is the questions that the actors are asking [...] By answering those questions I would realise the answers'.[6] Rose English's methods also demonstrate the value of the documented moment, though, and how this cannot easily be distinguished from the process of making a show. The strategy that she employed early on in her career to develop from speaking to writing was mediated, intriguingly, by the act of documentation. She says of it:

> those early shows were primarily improvised and so I'd sort of write a lot beforehand but it wouldn't be actually what I'd articulate on stage; it'd sort of *inform* what I was going to talk about but the actual act of speaking would always be improvised. But I'd always tape what I'd said and then transcribe it and in that way it became a script and that sort of whole approach [...] has led me now to writing and really relishing writing.[7]

Assuming the similar dual role of director/performer in *How To Act Better*, Annie Griffin explains how this performance was created:

> I scripted most of what I was doing and then I got three actors that I really liked and we kind of worked those things out together based on games that I've played in workshops and things.[8]

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[5] Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994
[6] Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994
[7] Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994
[8] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994

If this process appears to resemble a theatre-making one, then Griffin reveals how her own experience as a practitioner is integral to the work's aesthetic. She explains that her career has involved giving copious workshops since they provided her with a reasonable income, and that these fostered a particular type of product in the form of workshop shows. It is the latter's special qualities that she sought to replicate in her own performance:

> there was something really, really enjoyable about workshop shows because there's no pressure about, you know, about a piece of work, a piece of my own work, and yet they would have a *lightness* to them and a *directness* that was extremely satisfying and good to watch and just like saying "and now we're here", "and now we're doing this" without having... developing, stage reasons.[9]

In this instance, then, Griffin's so-called end product almost attempted to mimic the unpolished, process-based workshop. Whereas Rose English's personae seem to develop independently from the other elements of the show and hence are portable into subsequent, different shows or formats, Griffin's are more of an impetus. She says:

> with my performance work it usually started with a feeling of wanting to do this on stage; like I wanted to be this kind of woman or this kind of character or wear this kind of dress, something that would be really fun and satisfying to do.[10]

Thus again it is Griffin *as performer* that must be fulfilled in the process of creating work. Yet the aspect of her work that Griffin seems to stress above all is its relationship to practical concerns, be these the mechanics of performing or the state of her finances. Of *Almost Persuaded* she says, 'I had a taste to do some really kind of small acting'. Refuting any romantic notion of creativity, she claims :

> I wanted to make a piece for T.V. this year [1994] because it paid and so I thought about the M.T.V. thing - so what can I sell to M.T.V.? I've just done this film [*Out of Reach*] it's all interviews where the camera doesn't move and I really wanted to do something where the camera *just* moved [....] I don't think ideas are mysterious.[11]

Susan Lewis displays a similar pragmatism when she describes *Ladies Falling*. Asked why it made use of so many artforms where her earlier piece *Walking Tall* had been more minimal, she stated:

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[9] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994
[10] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994
[11] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994

> I didn't go out to make a piece that was kind of like multi-media, it's that the topic I chose to work on, it made sense to use film and to use sound and to use costume [....] a lot of this was finance also[12]

Forced Entertainment's working process is about evolving material. Nonetheless, they have changed their attitude to 'finalising' a work; when they first began they would treat all the elements as temporary ones, so that work would alter throughout the course of a tour. Dissatisfied with the 'hit-and-miss' nature of such variations, they now aim for more tightly structured work in which only certain elements (pace of the text in one section, for instance) are open to nightly experimentation. Etchells says:

> We work very slowly - exploring ideas for text, action, space, sound-track. For many months in rehearsal these elements are fluid, always changing, but there comes a point in the process when we recognise the essence and structure of the work that we are going to make. Once we are touring we like to have it pretty fixed. [13]

Etchells also explains how the co-operative has developed new ways of working as it came into its own:

> In the early 80s we drew on visual theatre aesthetics; companies like Impact Theatre and Hesitate and Demonstrate who constructed huge illusionistic sets Though we started out making work in that mode, it seems that our illusionistic drive has fallen away [....] in comparison to much contemporary theatre work, we have an ambivalence towards illusionistic apparatus and a strong interest in process[14]

Alexa Wright's experiences with making performance have revealed a similar attention to process; she claims 'Process - the process of working with people is very important'.[15] Wright's *Images of Women* was shown as part of the annual 'New Work Newcastle' festival in 1988. As with several other of her shows, this piece was devised by working with people from workshop situations through to performance. As to her starting point, she notes: 'well maybe you start

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[12] Susan Lewis in discussion in *Performer Forum* September 21st 1994, I.C.A. Audiotape no.1328
[13] Tim Etchells cited in Adrian Heathfield 'Performing Questions' *British Art Art and Design* no.41, 1995, p.59
[14] Tim Etchells cited in Adrian Heathfield, 1995, p.59
[15] Alexa Wright cited in Robert Ayers & David Butler (eds) *Live Art* AN Publications, Sunderland,1991, p.111

with yourself, and identity, and all that'.[16] It is obviously important to her that her performers benefit from their involvement. (In the aforementioned work, for instance, young women examined issues relating to the 'body beautiful') and Wright adds 'I think it works well with people who are doing that for the first time'.[17] Where her performances have not lived up to her expectations, this was often to do with an inability to carry out the process she had envisaged; so one piece that she had wanted to act as 'a sort of forum' with people literally building and 'unbuilding' a structure over a period of weeks, was forced to become only a day event due to constraints on space and finances.

Though diverse, this brief selection of working methods should serve to demonstrate the general lack of desire to create a live artwork within a conventional, linear timescale.

Creating Documentation

The notion of memory is wholly implicated in documentation in that it is a cliché of live art that it suffers from an inability to be adequately recorded. Admittedly, all performance could lay claim to eluding documentation, but live art's very interdisciplinarity makes it especially problematic. Even dance has notation. The Arts Council's investigation into the feasibility of establishing a Live Art Archive has recently foregrounded the issues surrounding documentation.

The process commenced under Lois Keidan's 'rule' as Live Art Officer in 1990, and was temporarily overseen by the Acting Live Art Officer (Andrew Wheatley) on her departure. In 1991, curator and researcher Anna Harding was asked to act as a Consultant; she finalised her *Live Art Archive Report* the following year and it was submitted to the Live Art Advisory

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[16] Interview with Alexa Wright, London, November 2nd 1994
[17] Interview with Alexa Wright, London, November 2nd 1994

Committee and the Combined Arts Committee of the then Arts Council of Great Britain [ACGB]. Newly-appointed Live Art Officer Joanna Scanlan developed a tender for further research and, after selection in January 1994, the contract was awarded that February to Noelle Goldman-Jacob of Goldman-Jacob Associates. She was to act as a Development Consultant whilst Dr. Barry Smith of the Creative Arts Department, Nottingham Trent University was commissioned to undertake an audit (citing location, format, content and so on) of existing archive material. The Arts Council of England [ACE] extended the completion dates for this project from October 1994 to December 1994 (for the consultancy) and April 1995 (for the audit) with the intention that a strategy should be in place by April.

The audit recognised that several parties already held documentation - for instance, Nikki Milican had retained video evidence and printed matter relating to the National Review of Live Art [NRLA] and lodged this archive with the University of Glasgow. Goldman-Jacob's *Live Art Archive Research Report* noted however that 'the archiving of such rare material had been dependent largely on artists themselves and a small number of institutions dedicated to the teaching or recording of the contemporary arts'.[18] Linda Ludwin Associates' report (1994) - *Collaborative Diversity: Market Research Report* - similarly found that 'Artists have little incentive to document their work'; it was a costly, lengthy procedure for which they were not necessarily trained hence the substantial amount of unedited video material around.[19] Moreover, artists' priority, she states, was making work and 'Documentation and archival interests are secondary for them'[20] whilst academics

> already think of themselves as formal researchers, and they are interested in finding ways to support the creation of more Live Art documentation and of an archive. They would like a 'one-stop-shop' for Live Art[21]

There was hence a possible clash of interests between the two parties.

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[18] Noelle Goldman-Jacob *Live Art Archive Research Report* Arts Council, December 1994, p.1
[19] Noelle Goldman-Jacob, 1994, p.35
[20] Noelle Goldman-Jacob, 1994, p.35
[21] Linda Ludwin Associates *Collaborative Diversity: Market Research Report* Arts Council, 1994 cited in Noelle Goldman-Jacob, 1994, p.33

Though not explicitly theorised as such, the initial focus of the LAA - as evident from Anna Harding's recommendations - seemed to hinge on providing those involved in live art (whether as practitioners, researchers and so on) with a historical lineage. Harding stressed the need to document current work, to rediscover lost histories, to ensure connectivity between practices in other sectors, to provide a database of information and a resource centre. There are undeniable benefits to this approach; Ludwin noted for instance that artists would welcome a way of dealing with student queries which were time-consuming but deserved positive attention. In terms of recovering past histories, it was important for Catherine Ugwu, for one, to document, even retrospectively, a generation of black practitioners (like David Medalla) making work in the 1970s but barely credited. The documentation would act as an extension of 'the process of a whole body of work by a people compelled to write themselves into being'; as 'an attempt to make the invisible visible'.[22] Lack of documentation altogether of women's work was not explicitly raised in the report but is a related issue, as practitioner Annie Griffin suggests. Uneasiness about the current quality of written documentation of live art has, ironically, led her to conclude that the very liveness of performance might ultimately contribute to the invisibility of the woman artist. Although she ensures that all her work is deposited at the National Sound Archive in video form, viewing is by appointment and so differs considerably from the communal experience of seeing either the original performance or a film in a cinema :

> The sort of thing of being a woman artist and being buried [...] that was a lot to do with my motivation of going into film and it is so exciting *having* it, like nobody can forget it.[23]

This approach to documenting engenders its own problems, however, and these relate to the difficulty of seeing live art temporally. There is, as Ludwin's report made clear, an 'inherent contradiction between the ephemeral nature of Live Art and the durational concept of an archive'.[24] The form that documentation should take was obviously a preoccupation amongst those questioned. Although Chris Hill and Tony Oaks at the National Sound Archive have made

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[22] Catherine Ugwu (ed.) *Let's Get It On* I.C.A.and Bay Press, London and Seattle, 1995, p.10
[23] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994
[24] Interview with Annie Griffin, London, October 24th 1994

the effort to video live art, some practitioners were apprehensive that work would be judged solely through such inadequate secondary sources. Practitioner Alison Andrews, for example, has resisted the video medium as inappropriate for certain types of work where sound and lighting effects predominate over the visual, or where a piece is slow and atmospheric.[25]

Yet, in seeking an alternative, it is interesting that another historical approach was suggested to Ludwin, that is, that perhaps the form 'would be better commemorated through folkloric oral history' (as is the case with much 1970s work which survives only in anecdotes). This seems apt when we consider Ludwin's findings that word of mouth was the preferred method of gathering information. Nikki Milican expressed similar sentiments when talking about the NRLA, saying 'I always think the bar is the most important place of the entire festival'.[26] However, as the members of the live art sector questioned were aware, word-of-mouth might perpetuate the exclusivity or cliqueness of the practice, and present what Ludwin sees as implications for equal opportunities. The latter, specifically in relation to women, are considered by the section of Ludwin's report that looks at the possibility of a *virtual* archive on the internet. Since fewer women than men use the internet at present, the retrieval of information in this way could indirectly discriminate against them.[27]

Goldman-Jacob's recommendations *vis a vis* the LAA were that access to live art education should be expanded through postgraduate fellowships and studentships; that there should be training in research and documentation; fora should be set up for word-of-mouth exchanges regarding copyright and other issues of importance to artists; a consortium with 'one central key 'host' organisation'[28] - perhaps Nottingham Trent University - could be decided; and the internet could be considered. The ACE should establish a National Documentation Policy with guidelines

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[25] Conversation with Alison Andrews, Leeds, November 14th 1994
[26] Nikki Milican cited in Lyn Gardner 'Diary: Live Art' *The Guardian* October 18th 1993
[27] Linda Ludwin Associates, 1994 cited in Noelle Goldman-Jacob, 1994, p.42
[28] Noelle Goldman-Jacob, 1994, p.4

and investigate with a copyright lawyer, intellectual property rights. It should also publish information on accessing the internet and provide IT training.

These are doubtless sensible measures for ensuring that the LAA prove as effective as possible, but they remind us that if the inability to define live art has been partly responsible for the form's funding difficulties, the proposed archive's acquisitions policy would now revolve around definition. Ludwin's report noted that there were fears that an archive would 'preserve and exacerbate definitional boundaries such as "Live Art". On the other hand, some felt that it would not be a bad thing to define the form more tightly'.[29] Definitions though vary so widely, as the following selection (gleaned from specialist publications, national newspapers and interviews and so not a part of the report) reveals. Performance artist/ Promoter Simon Herbert defines it thus:

> in Britain [it] is simply a promise. 90% of it is derivative, hollow, unsophisticated and prone to the tyrannies of dogma. Yet the other 10% fulfils the promise, subjecting the viewer to experiences impossible to get in any other art form.[30]

Critic David Benedict, in what is actually a favourable review of Rose English, speaks of that 'much derided term' performance art:

> The term alone is enough to create outbreaks of panic among even hardened theatregoers who recall (all too vividly) being poleaxed with boredom, enduring hours of self-expression, unleavened by the virtues of technique, discipline or humour.[31]

Rob la Frenais (ex-editor of *Performance* magazine) claims:

> I'm not convinced that live art exists, and I certainly don't know what it is, whether it's theatre that adapted to the economies of scale or whether it's performance art that's adapted to the demands of theatre.[32]

Joanna Scanlan says:

> the nature of it [...] is to do with an open-ended enquiry [...]. it's like a syndrome as opposed to a disease [...] it can't be absolutely defined as a disease can be defined [...] it's a way of presenting or a way of being [...] a hybrid practice that is broadly

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[29] Noelle Goldman-Jacob, 1994, p.33
[30] Simon Herbert cited in Robert Ayers & David Butler, 1991, p.5
[31] David Benedict 'Rose-tinted Classes: Performance Art to Stay Awake For' *The Independent* May 25th 1994
[32] Rob la Frenais cited in 'Definitions: Live Art' *Hybrid* issue 5, October/November, 1993, p.38

> in line with some of the postmodern emblems [...] there are no kind of niceties of definition[33]

Thus one of the considerations of a LAA was the question of whether it would engender 'a form defined and driven by theory' or 'provide a lively focus for discourses around Live Art?'.[34]

It is not clear how a purely historical approach, one that situated contemporary live art practice in a timeline, would mitigate these dilemmas. This brings to mind artist Anthony Howell's speech for the 1986 NRLA, in which he had suggested a formalised performance - the foundation of a live art school with conventions and traditions. His ideas were understandably received with 'hysterical disbelief [through] to measured approval'.[35] As extreme as his proposals may sound (especially for a form that defines itself by its ability to break rules), they show that current debates about building a context for live art are fraught with the same problems. Documentation is capable of minimising a performance's ambiguity and so must be sensitively handled, but process must also remain fluid. Without this, performances are likely to become formulaic. Likewise live art histories.

If tradition building is ultimately undesirable, what alternatives exist for documentation, and how might these be put into practice? Linda Ludwin's report suggests that we could create a new role - that of the documenturg.[36] Her premise is essentially that of many artists, namely that documentation is a skill and can produce an artwork itself. This approach is already visible in many of the contemporary art magazines with their Neville Brody-inspired graphics and unconventional layouts. We might also interpret this as documentation which does not try to reproduce the performance but which records instead the dual participation of spectator and live artist, not as an end, but as another aspect of an ongoing process. Rose English claims to retain all her drafts of texts and is always surprised to find in them, on re-reading, the origins of her

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[33] Interview with Joanna Scanlan, London, September 1st 1994
[34] Linda Ludwin Associates, 1994 cited in Noelle Goldman-Jacob, 1994, p.33
[35] Neil Butler 'Performance Does Not Exist' *Performance* no.38, December/January/February 1983, p.54
[36] Linda Ludwin Associates, 1994 cited in Noelle Goldman-Jacob, 1994, p.37

ideas.[37] In this manner, documentation re-opens into process. Her preferred medium of documentation is 'really, really good photographs and a good sound recording [which are] sometimes better than video'.[38] Thus, paradoxically, the action, the act of performing, must be animated by the viewer who is faced with a still. Hence the difference between the live art work and the object begins to disintegrate and an artefact is in the making. English also holds that '[other people's] writing about the work is very precious; I suppose because it's sort of a witness; it's actually a sort of first hand live impression'.[39]

The co-operative Forced Entertainment has succeeded in making documentation work for them. Whilst their investment in it may derive more from an acknowledgement of their status on the live art scene (the proliferation of research that touches or centres on their work) than a conviction in the artistic value of the exercise, they have retained a sensitivity to its potential. Tim Etchells reveals his personal ambivalence in a preface to his performance text of *Emanuelle Enchanted*:

> Most problematic is that the deliberately uneven, disjointed performance is here condensed into a single, essentially seamless written surface. Our interests in difference and radical disjuncture are not well served by this. By its nature [...] the work resists and questions the veracity of written documentation [...] thus positioning this document somewhere between provocation, pragmatism, paradox and irrelevance.[40]

The fact that Forced Entertainment's output has been preserved in annotated text, three-camera edit video and photographs seems to emphasise the elusiveness of the performed moment whereby only a multi-directional assault can hope to capture anything of a multi-layered piece. Admittedly, every one of these forms of documentation (from the close-up shot to the italicised sections of text) collaborates in determining where the viewer's focus should be and so privileges one reading over others, but the documents stand as artworks in their own right nonetheless.

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[37] Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994
[38] Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994
[39] Interview with Rose English, London, August 5th 1994
[40] Preface to Forced Entertainment *Emanuelle Enchanted* unpublished text, 1992

In terms of live art criticism, too, writers such as Susan Melrose (lecturer and researcher into semiotics and performance theory) could be seen to be enacting the documenturg role. In an article documenting her video viewing of Bobby Baker's work *The Kitchen Show*, Melrose openly inserts herself into the text and points up its absences:

> There's the ripe pear in the *front upper* torso pocket. Pure image, to me - the film of it.
> I saw it go in, but I couldn't *feel* it going in, the slight tug of the cloth near the nipple, the little influx of air, and then the thump of it against the rib. Not like I would feel it, *right in the eyes*, synesthesia rampant, if she did it right there in front of me.[41]

Her fragmented and questioning text reveals the difficulties she is experiencing as a viewer and a writer. Similarly, our reading is problematised by alterations in font and layout that point up the *process* of reading. Thus we are encouraged to view the process involved in documenting a work, and equally the documentation as a part of the creative process; both occurring simulataneously and presented in a third space which is, literally and metaphorically, somewhere between the page and the performance.

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[41] Susan Melrose 'The Kitchen as Eggshell' *Hybrid* issue 3, June/July 1993, p.9

Out Of Time: The Avant Garde

In seeking to explain or describe live artworks, it is to avant-gardism that critics most commonly revert. Yet is the avant-garde really an appropriate paradigm for live art practice? In this chapter, I reject this alliance arguing that the avant-garde is problematic for feminist readings, characterised, as it is, by patriarchal metaphors and fraught, as it is, with attendant ideas of creativity and genius. However, since certain writers have made claims for the avant-garde's potential for feminism, I go on to debate those also. To be 'avant-garde' is, crudely put, to be 'ahead of one's time'; so how relevant are temporal metaphors to an artform so concerned with discontinuity? I trace examples of such metaphors and conclude that Julia Kristeva's notions of linear and non-linear time might be more useful than most to a theorisation of live art.

My intention in questioning the temporal metaphors of the avant-garde echoes Edward W. Soja's aim in *Postmodern Geographies*; that is, 'to spatialize the historical narrative'.[1] In discussing the writings of art critic and writer John Berger, Soja outlines how the 'spatialization of critical thought does not have to project a simplistic anti-history [...] It is instead a call for an appropriate interpretive balance between space, time, and social being'.[2] This is not, as Soja stresses, to deny the importance of history but to challenge 'the dominance of a historicism of critical thought'.[3] To argue that the avant-garde is conceived temporally is not to deny that it has also been figured spatially; but even where this is the case (as I will go on to show) both formulations rely on a linear belief in progress that is often corrupted by the live artwork.

Fever Pitch: The language of the avant-garde

We can trace the genealogy of this pattern of thinking in several theories of the avant-garde. Of course the relationship of the avant-garde to the establishment is never that finite since the avant-garde has its own - albeit alternative - establishment. Nevertheless, avant-gardism

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[1] Edward W. Soja *Postmodern Geographies* London and New York, Verso,1994, p.1
[2] Edward W. Soja, 1994, p.23
[3] Edward W. Soja, 1994, p.24

implies being at the forefront, as the etymology of the term demonstrates. 'Avant-garde' was originally a French military word for any politically advanced republican or socialist group, prior to 1848 at least. There is evidence of it having existed to mean the 'vanguard of an army' as early as 1470/1485, certainly in Malory's *Arthur* which speaks of 'adaunt garde'. Its first application to cultural innovators has been traced to Olinde Rodrigues' 1825 dialogue on an artist's role in propagating socialism; Bakunin's Swiss, anarchist journal *l'Avant-Garde* (1878); and, in England, to a 1910 article in *The Daily Telegraph* which made mention of 'the new men of mark in the avant-garde'.

The aggression inherent in the concept of the avant-garde is sustained in Donald Kuspit's metaphor for the avant-gardist. Likening the avant-garde artist to the 'inventor' of rugby 'who with a fine disregard for the rules of football as played in his time, first took the ball in his arms and ran with it',[4] Kuspit invokes military terminology. The difference is that here, in place of the battle field, we have the playing field. The enthusiasm and romanticism with which he speculates about this

> charmed moment of fertilization between a gesture that might otherwise have fallen on fallow ground and a receptive field that might otherwise have gone barren[5]

also serves to establish a connection between avant-gardism and male sexuality. The *gesture* is male and belongs to the avant-gardist, whilst the field is female and passive, or receptive, and represents the conventional.

On one level, it could be argued that Kuspit's metaphor is just that; and yet his use of rugby and football are significant. They not only succeed in aligning the male with the creative and procreative impulse, and the female only with the procreative one, but they also leave us in no doubt that the *status quo* is, in any case, male (thus replicating institutional modernism's elision of women artists). Football is an obvious way of implying this since its importance, to British society at least, is apparent.[6] Moreover, it persists as a male preserve whose

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[4] Donald Kuspit in Kirk Varnedoe *A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern* London, Thames and Hudson ,1990, p.10

[5] Donald Kuspit in Kirk Varnedoe, 1990, p.10

[6] The game's origins are various; some form of it appears to have been played in sixth century Japan, Classical Greece and Imperial Rome, certainly by 217 AD. From its inception it was an anarchic affair;

occupation of the collective male psyche is, like much (modernist) art, nothing more than glorified machismo. Nick Hornby, whilst seemingly intelligent and self-deprecating in *Fever Pitch* - a popular account of his obsession with the game - says:

> [Football] has turned me into someone who would not help if my girlfriend went into labour at an impossible moment (I have often wondered about what would happen if I was due to become a father on an Arsenal Cup Final day'.[7]

The avant-garde then, as Kuspit sees it, relies on producing a new aesthetic from the aggressive, primitive, traditional, competitive *male* one already in place.

The analogy between the avant-garde movement and game-playing is made again by Griselda Pollock. Discussing the avant-garde art scene of the 1880s and 1890s with particular reference to Gauguin, Pollock has claimed that 'the decisive character of avant-gardism' is 'the play of reference, deference and difference'. She elaborates

> To make your mark in the avant-garde community, you had to relate your work to what was going on: *reference*. Then you had to defer to the existing leader, to the work or project which represented the latest move, the last word, or what was considered the definitive statement of shared concerns: *deference*. Finally your own move involved establishing a *difference* which had to be both legible in terms of current aesthetics and criticism, and also a definitive advance on that current position.[8]

Thus the term avant-garde 'defines a subculture. Furthermore, it is a structure for the production of art based on a series of chess-like moves' or *gambits*.[9] Pollock's feminist critique of the way in which this avant-garde community in particular functioned, emphasises the linear progression of the artist, his 'definitive advance'. At the same time, though, she reminds us that his is a game of intellect as much as physical skill.

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frequent attempts were made to ban it (|for instance by James I in 1423) and murder was connected with it. Despite - or perhaps because of this - it persisted to inspire men, Chaucer and Wycliffe viewing it as a chivalrous pursuit. Although it was patronised by the Elizabethan upper classes and became an integral part of the education system particularly at Oxford and Cambridge, it was always a democratic game. In 1845 a referee was introduced, and a set of official rules was tabulated the following year. In 1863 the Football Association was formed at the Freemasons' Tavern and from then to 1878, there was a boom encouraged by the development of railways and electric lighting (facilitating travel to games and longer playing hours respectively) and Church endorsement. A parallel boom occurred during the war years when the sport came to signify the reassertion of traditional values, as well as providing welcome escapism from mass unemployment. The remainder of its history is more a catalogue of refinements to the game (tactics, training methods, regulations) and need not concern us here.

[7] Nick Hornby *Fever Pitch* London, Victor Gollancz,1992, p.106

[8] Griselda Pollock *Avant-garde Gambits* Walter Neurath Memorial Lecture, 1992, p.14

[9] Griselda Pollock, 1992, p.15

The implication of viewing the avant-gardist as someone at the forefront, as an artist driving forward, is the idea that 'he' almost exists in another timescale. This is reaffirmed by the debate over the avant-garde's relationship to modernism and postmodernism. As Donald Kuspit has stressed, the figure of the avantgardist held great importance for modern art:

> The apotheosis of the avant-garde or modernist artist as the symbol of heroic resistance to all that is oppressive and corrupt in bourgeois civilization, if not as its saviour, [was...] the major way of stating the significance of modern art[10]

Clinging on to the notion of positive avant-gardism, Kuspit sees postmodernism as the 'neo-avant-garde'. In other words, postmodernism is that which comes after, that which *follows* rather than leads and so, for him, has less value. For Peter Burger, also, the avant-garde was a series of historical projects now past.[11] Rosalind Krauss, though celebrating postmodernism's potential, equally allies modernism with avant-gardism.[12]

The relevance of this debate to live art is apparent: for whilst performance art in western culture may well trace its origins to the early twentieth century modernist movements in Europe (Futurism and so on), live art is indisputably a postmodernist practice. It has far more in common with the postmodernist traits of undecidability, appropriation, parody, multiple identities, and the like, than with Greenberg's high modernist ideals of the purity of the aesthetic, or Fried's anti-theatricality. In short then, according to the weight of critical opinion, live art cannot be simultaneously postmodernist and avant-garde.[13]

Interestingly, this debate extends into gender, as modernism has most often been deemed 'male', postmodernism 'female'. Although we should heed Pollock's warning here not to

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[10] Donald Kuspit *The Cult of the Avant Garde Artist* Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.1

[11] See Peter Burger *Theory of the Avant-Garde* transl. Michael Shaw, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984

[12] See Rosalind Krauss *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press,1985

[13] It should be noted here that Charles Russell in *Poets, Prophets and Revolutionaries* New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985 for instance, in writing of the literary avant-garde is critical of critics' conflation of avant-gardism and modernism and does see postmodernist writers as avant-garde in their revolutionary intent; similarly some modernist writers as basically reactionary. However, Russell is also sceptical at times about the extent to which postmodernism diverges from or continues the modernist project.

confuse modernism as a practice with modernism as an institution,[14] this gender allocation does sit easily. Returning to Krauss, for instance, we find that she casts postmodernism as the Other, able to undo the avant-garde's claim to originality; whilst Kuspit sees the neo-avant-garde as false, duplicitous - that against which the truthfulness of the avant-garde can be measured. It does not require much of a theoretical leap to relate these to the female position in psychoanalytical theory, which is always that of the foil.

A closer look at the language of the avant-garde reveals further evidence of its gender bias. Kuspit writes:

> Avant-garde art was offensive-provocative - because it communicated human values in an innovative way that caused them to be deeply felt by the public[15]

whereas irony, that hallmark of postmodernist practice, 'gives no offense'[16] and

> the pseudo-avant-garde artist fosters the illusion of mass creativity. He democratizes [...it], making it an anonymous, diffuse force[17]

However conscious Kuspit is of the mythic apparatus surrounding the institutionalised avant-garde, he still presents us with a set of terms that reflect patriarchal organisation: the true avant-garde is hierarchical and aggressive. According to this formulation then, the woman is incapable of moving forward (in time) and is thus unable to assume the avant-gardist's position.

In addition to these temporal metaphors for avant-gardism, there are several theories which deploy spatial ones. These too, though, I would argue, risk replicating the notion of the artist at a remove from society. Kuspit's archetypal modernist, heroic avant-gardist is marked by 'his' existence outside of society. Brian Wallis, who sees the advent of postmodernism as an opportunity for diverse artistic voices to be heard, articulates:

> One of the most enduring and telling fantasies of modernist culture is the myth of the inarticulate or silent artist [...] Perpetuated by notions of action painting which require a view of the artist as less a contemplative intellectual than an elemental force (Pollock: "I am nature") and by artists' parodic self-

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[14] Griselda Pollock Letter to *Women Artists Slide Library Journal* no. 26, December/January, 1988, p. 23
[15] Donald Kuspit, 1993, p.108
[16] Donald Kuspit, 1993, p.103
[17] Donald Kuspit, 1993, p.110

> representations (Warhol: "I am a machine"), this view has in general trapped the artist within the confines of craft and removed him or her from the theoretical, critical and political conditions of production[18]

Similarly, in *Culture*, Raymond Williams states that the avant-garde artist possibly evolves from an outsider's penetration of an unfamiliar 'metropolitan base'; he writes:

> a high proportion of the contributors to avant-garde movements were immigrants to such a metropolis [...] certain factors in avant-garde culture, and especially the conscious breaks from 'traditional' styles, have to be analysed not only in formal terms but within the sociology of metropolitan encounters and associations between immigrants who share no common language but that of the metropolis[19]

I do not wish to explore the applicability of Williams' claim to select movements, but I do wish to suggest that such theories have contributed to the *mythologising* of the avant-garde artist as an outsider figure, both despised and revered.

The live artist may well find herself excluded from the critical debate but she is not separated, either in time or in space, from society generally or art production in particular. Indeed, the prime achievement of live art is its ability to engage with, and reflect on, the present. Live art is less ahead of its time than *of its* time. Its trawling of other disciplines suggests an artform anxious to interrelate with those disciplines, rather than one seeking to distance itself from them. Even the conditions of live art practice in performance illustrate this; there are few venues which can afford to program solely live art, and in fact contemporary thinking on the functions of arts centres seems to revolve around the notion of a versatile, multi-art complex.

For these reasons, and for its relation to postmodernism, live art cannot easily be characterised as avant-garde. And whilst most theories of avant-gardism are couched in language that ensures the innovator is always firmly located in he-land, it is not a viable point of identification for the female (live) artist. On this field (be it of battle, of signs, or of playing) women are always out/offside.

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[18] Brian Wallis *Blasted Allegories* New York and Boston, 1989, p. xi
[19] Raymond Williams *Culture* London, Fontana, 1981, p. 84

Intricately linked with notions of avant-gardism, is the concept of genius which, again, has historically denied female creativity. Harrison C. White, in his analysis of how artistic careers and creativity are manufactured *narratives*, asserts:

> "Genius" is a social construct, an invention that is parallel to that of secrecy. Genius is a performance measure. Through invoking it one does not need to deny either rule or creativity. Genius provides narrative explanation and justification for transcending the paradox between performance and standard. [...] Although originality is the principal claim about the "genius," another main thrust of professionalism in the avant-garde is commercialization of career.[20]

As I showed in ***Part One***, live artists have scarcely been able (even if willing) to commercialise their career, other than by moving into the 'mainstream'.

In less material terms also, the appellation of 'genius' is difficult for the woman (live) artist. Christine Battersby has embarked on a more philosophical critique and written at length in *Gender and Genius* about the suppressed meanings of 'genius'.[21] She states that there was originally a difference between the Latin terms *genio* and *ingegnium*. The former was a cult of the male household spirit emerging in the pre-historic Roman countryside (its female equivalent was known as *juno*) which came to represent and be represented by the *pater familias* (head of the family). By 27BC, the *genio* was a part of the institutionalised state religion with every free male deemed to possess such a spirit within him; a form of virility and energy which, by the end of BC, was being actively celebrated by potential *pater familias* on their birthdays. *Ingegnium* on the other hand, meant 'ingenious'. The two were still separate concepts, as Battersby notes, in the early seventeenth century: Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1602) depicting *genio* as a naked boy carrying grapes and corn in his arms (symbols of sperm and a fertile harvest); and *ingenium* as a winged male youth with helmet, bow and arrow. It was thus not until the latter part of the eighteenth century that the notion of genius understood by us now, with its accent on originality, came into being. From the Renaissance onwards, men seized on the term to mean that which differentiated them from primitives, animals and Nature and, by implication, from women.

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[20] Harrison C. White *Careers and Creativity: Social Forces in the Arts* Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford, Westview Press, 1993, pp 153-4

[21] see Christine Battersby *Gender and Genius* London, The Women's Press, 1989

Inevitably, this accent on virility privileges male creativity, as emphasised by Christopher Innes' study *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992*. Dedicating only two-thirds of a chapter of twelve to female practitioners, Innes describes this period of avant-garde theatre thus: 'Perhaps, paradoxically, what defines this avant garde movement is not overtly modern qualities [...] but primitivism'.[22] He goes on to suggest that this may derive from the popularisation of Freud (primal therapy), along with a romanticising of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and DH Lawrence's primitive passions. He reads this primitivism as akin to Jungian beliefs on myth, hence as a desire 'to return to man's 'roots', whether in the psyche or prehistory'.[23] Again, these 'norms' only problematise identification with an artistic role for female practitioners. As Bobby Baker's case study revealed, it was an inability to identify herself as an artist within the art historical canon that was partly responsible for her circuitous route into performance. If the live artist is then to be reinscribed into the narrative of avant-gardism, she is forced to re-negotiate those very assumptions about artistic productivity that she may have sought to evade in the first place.

Ecriture Feminine: A Feminist Avant-Garde?

In *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde*, Susan Rubin Suleiman examines how women (metaphorically or mythically, as well as literally) have figured in various avant-garde movements. Whilst recognising the historical sidelining of women artists, Suleiman finds that *double marginalisation* can ultimately be an empowering position. She claims:

> In a system in which the marginal, the avant-garde, the subversive, all that disturbs and "undoes the whole" is endowed with positive value, a woman artist who can identify those concepts with her own practice and metaphorically with her own femininity can find in them a source of strength and self-legitimation.[24]

In attempting to apply Suleiman's model to the live artist though, it becomes apparent that the issue of marginalisation is more complex than we might suppose. For one thing, as

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[22] Christopher Innes *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992* London and New York, Routledge, 1993, p.3
[23] Christopher Innes, 1993, p.3
[24] Susan Rubin Suleiman *Subversive Intent: Gender, Polutics and the Avant-Garde* Cambridge, Mass and London, Harvard University Press,1990, p.17

Suleiman herself notes, the term 'avant-garde' is slippery, equally applicable to an individual historically/culturally specific movement, as to a transhistorical entity. Then it is necessary to differentiate between what we might call *enforced* and *endemic* marginalisation. The former (as I outlined in ***Part One***) certainly does exist, but it is questionable whether lack of funding, for example, is a desirable or indeed essential component for live art's marginalisation. Endemic marginalisation (that is, where certain characteristics of the form entail marginalisation) is harder still to determine due to the oft-cited problems of defining live art practice. Suleiman's formulation also seamlessly collapses the marginal and the avant-garde without acknowledging the potential differences (not least in status) between them. Live art *has* been seen as an avant-garde practice (as in 'avant-garde theatre', for example), but not necessarily as one 'endowed with positive value'.[25] In terms of the Britart scene in the 1990s, for instance, as I discussed in ***Part One***, live art is less avant-garde than marginalised.

A feminist solution to the masculinisation of creativity and the avant-garde has been to reappropriate the trope of the Mother. It is precisely this that Suleiman proposes in what is arguably her most interesting essay in *Subversive Intent*: 'Feminist Intertextuality and the Laugh of the Mother'. Here she suggests the 'playful mother' as an enabling myth for a postmodernist, feminist poetics, arguing:

> The emblematic subject of male avant-garde practice is [...] a transgressive son who may, in Roland Barthes words, "play with the body of his mother" but who never imagines (let alone gives voice to) his mother playing. More surprisingly, however, one almost never finds the figure or the voice of the playful (laughing) mother in contemporary feminist experimental writing either - this despite the well-known revalorization of the mother and of the "maternal metaphor" in some of that writing.[26]

The difficulties with the maternal metaphor have been discussed elsewhere so I will not rehearse them here;[27] however, what I will discuss is the workability of Suleiman's claim for a female avant-gardism based on this model.

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[25] In articles such as Claire Bayley 'Is it theatre or is it just absurd? Avant-garde theatre?' *The Independent* May 24th 1995

[26] Susan Rubin Suleiman, 1990, p.145

[27] see Susan Stanford Friedman 'Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender difference in literary discourse' (1989) in R. R. Warhol & D. Price Herndl (eds) *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1993, pp 371 -396

Suleiman purports that Helene Cixous' celebrated and celebratory 1975 essay 'Le Rire de la Meduse' ('The Laugh of the Medusa') 'is the closest thing to an avant-garde manifesto written from an explicitly feminist perspective'.[28] She notes that Cixous' fictions

> exploited the maternal as a metaphor for the mutually nurturing relations between women and as a metaphor for her own writing (the author giving birth to her texts)[29]

She further claims:

> I would say that (amongst other things) it [the maternal metaphor] enabled a number of French women writers to imagine a feminist avant-garde practice that would retain the historical avant-gardes' subversive/parodic energy but would revise and critique their negative attitude toward women - an attitude which, as Cixous and others rightly understood, had its source in, and was exemplified by, their repudiation (whether "deep" or "surface") of the mother.[30]

Yet how tenable is Suleiman's contention for the woman artist, let alone the live artist?

Initially, it is tempting to grasp Cixous' concept of *ecriture feminine* as a model for a feminist practice, or as a means of reading live art. For one thing, she deploys a spatial metaphor which sees *ecriture* occurring in 'the 'between', in that space which is uncertain, dangerous in its refusal to ally itself with one side of an opposition'.[31] Cixous herself writes:

> [Women] go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down.[32]

This appears to be precisely the spatial metaphor that I have claimed for my case study practitioners; Cixous' woman must plunder from the dominant culture 'but then fly away with their cultural booty to the 'in between', where new images, new narratives, and new

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[28] Susan Rubin Suleiman, 1990, p.17
[29] Susan Rubin Suleiman, 1990, p.168
[30] Susan Rubin Suleiman, 1990, p.167
[31] Morag Shiach *Helene Cixous: A Politics of Writing* London and New York, Routledge, 1991, p.22
[32] Helene Cixous 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975) reproduced in R. R. Warhol & D. Price Herndl (eds), 1993, p.344

subjectivities can be created'.[33] However, Cixous' concept of avant-gardism does not, *can not*, avoid the temporal metaphor. As Suleiman says, hers is an *ecriture a l'avenir* (a writing of the future); that is, a projection. The problem I have with this, certainly in relation to live art practice and to a feminist politics of agency, is that in her utopianism Cixous does not address the present. In addition, in borrowing some aspects of avant-gardism, some of its strategies, Cixous leaves herself vulnerable to reappropriation.

If we take as a case study the American dancer Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) it becomes apparent that no matter how conversant with the 'playful' maternal she is, the woman artist is always susceptible to patriarchal notions of the avant-garde. I take Duncan as an example because she was one of the few women artists to be called a genius - Ross MacDougall, for instance, says (emphasis mine) 'we knew that her art, *like many such manifestations of genius*, was a rare plant of slow and continual growth',[34] and her claim to avant-gardism is indisputable. Though also a Romantic, Duncan was what Jean Morrison Brown has called 'a feminist in the most contemporary sense of the word'[35] and her copious writings not only afford an insight into her self-definition as an artist, but in some ways prefigure, I would argue, Cixous'. Cixous writes for instance:

> We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevies - we are black and we are beautiful. [...] we inspire ourselves and we expire without running out of breath, we are everywhere![36]

where Duncan claims of 'woman':

> So, if she has all the gifts, she is the reflection of the world. She is also like a garland suspended between reality and the ideal... She can, with all her gestures, represent all ideas[37]

Like Cixous' writing of the future, Duncan envisaged a 'dancer of the future' who

> will help womankind to a new knowledge of the possible strength and beauty of their bodies, and the relation of their bodies to the earth nature and to the children of the future. She will dance the body emerging again from centuries of

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[33] Morag Shiach, 1991, p.23
[34] Ross MacDougall 'Isadora Duncan and the artists' cited in P. Magriel (ed.) *Nijinsky, Pavlova, Duncan* New York, Da Capo Press, 1979, p.35
[35] Jean Morrison Brown (ed.) *The Vision of Modern Dance* London, Dance Books Ltd,1980, p.7
[36] Helene Cixous, 1975, p.336
[37] Isadora Duncan cited in Jean Morrison Brown (ed.), 1980, p.11

in a glorious harmony

Duncan thus implies that the relationship between the female body and nature can be revised, and that the woman artist can reclaim the spiritual and intellectual approaches that have been the preserve of male artists. More striking, are the images she uses to describe the creative process which, again, preview Cixous and contrast sharply with Kuspit's image of the decisive (sexual) moment. Duncan discusses her future dancer in metaphors of child-rearing:

> Perhaps she is yet unborn, perhaps she is now a little child. Perhaps, oh blissful! it may be my holy mission to guide her first steps, to watch the progress of her movements day by day until, far outgrowing my poor teaching, her movements will become godlike, mirroring in themselves the waves, the winds, the movements of growing things [....]
> Oh, she is coming the dancer of the future: the free spirit, who will inhabit the body of new woman [...] the highest intelligence in the freest body![38]

where Cixous asserts

> a woman is never far from "mother" (I mean outside her role functions: the "mother" as nonname and as source of goods). There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink.[39]

Patricia Meyer Spacks' essay 'The Artist as Woman' reads Duncan's embrace of maternity as evidence of megalomania - 'Art and motherhood, in Isadora's view, are alike metaphors for power',[40] and concludes that the dancer's 'tawdry prose both defines and undermines her way of seeing herself', her autobiography being a 'testimony to a mind that refuses to accept the domination of external circumstance'.[41] Yet, alongside these factors, the aspect of Duncan's situation that Spacks omits to mention is the perception of her as a Muse. Despite her success, her strong self-image as an artist, her independent lifestyle, indeed her 'genius' (all attesting to her status as an 'artist'), Duncan was transformed into a Muse figure by several male artists, and it is exactly this type of reappropriation which needs to be resisted.

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[38] Isadora Duncan cited in Jean Morrison Brown (ed.), 1980, p.11
[39] Helene Cixous, 1975, p.339
[40] Patricia Meyer Spacks 'The Artist as Woman' in D. Apostolos- Cappadona & L. Ebersole (eds), 1995, p.96
[41] Patricia Meyer Spacks, 1995, p.98

These transformations of Duncan were enacted by (amongst others): Eugene Carriere who painted a monochrome portrait of her; Leon Baskt who made crayon drawings; Jean-Paul Lafitte who executed pen drawings; Rodin who sketched her and also proclaimed her a genius; and the poets Fernand Divoire and Henri Lavedan who penned odes to her. When the sculptor Emile-Antoine Bourdelle designed the facade of the Theatre des Champs Elysees, he told his students: 'All my muses in the theater are movements seized during Isadora's flight; she was my principal source'.[42] The American sculptor Lorado Taft articulated a similar admiration for Duncan when he claimed 'She is not the Tenth Muse but all Nine Muses in one'.[43] Thus we see that even the joyful extravagance of Duncan's writings (and persona), her 'playful mother' - which was as aware of her sexuality as Suleiman could hope for - did not suffice.

Of course it must be admitted that Duncan was operating in very different socio-cultural circumstances than those in which the contemporary woman live artist in Britain is working. On the other hand, it is difficult to conceive of a contemporary female artist even being labelled 'genius' quite so universally. For all laughter's subversive potential then, Suleiman's 'playful mother' cannot represent an alternative female avant-garde because it is too susceptible to dilution as just another display of femininity.

Time For Julia Kristeva

Suleiman notes that philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, though also dealing with the maternal metaphor, always envisages the avant-gardist as male.[44] It is for this reason primarily that Suleiman discards Kristeva in favour of Cixous. I would like to argue, however, that Kristeva's theorisations of avant-gardism and maternity substantiate precisely the objections I have outlined to metaphors of the avant-garde.

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[42] cited in Ross MacDougall, in P.Magriel (ed), 1979, p. 57
[43] cited in Ross MacDougall, in P.Magriel (ed), 1979, p.60
[44] Susan Rubin Suleiman, 1990, writes 'for although Kristeva leaves ample space for the maternal/semiotic in her theory of the avant-garde subject, that subject remains of necessity male. Not only are all of her exemplary avant-garde writers male [...] but she has even discussed, at various times, why in terms of her theory it is virtually impossible for a woman to achieve a similar status' pp 17-18

It is interesting that Kristeva's personal circumstances are conveniently illustrative of the aforementioned spatial theories of avant-garde production. As Toril Moi points out, after Roland Barthes, 'Kristeva was always *foreign* to the theoretical scene she was in', both as 'a foreigner in Paris, and as a woman in an extremely male-dominated environment'.[45] She was not even particularly representative of a strand of French feminist thinking on motherhood, since her relationship to feminism has always been troubled. For these reasons, it could be asserted that, considering her 'outsider' position, Kristeva's rejection of the possibility of a female avant-garde is all the more striking.

Her 1977 article on the politics of marginality - 'A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident' - provides a useful starting point for discussion. Whilst it does not deal explicitly with avant-gardism, an argument might be made for Kristeva's dissident as a model of the woman artist. Kristeva's interrogations into motherhood demonstrate exactly the latter's impact on artistic production:

> real female innovation (in whatever social field) will only come about when maternity, female creation and the link between them are better understood [46]

She determines three types of dissident: 'the rebel who attacks political power' from within the system; the psychoanalyst; and 'the writer who experiments with the limits of identity, producing texts where the law does not exist outside language'.[47] However, she concludes her definitions with the question: 'And sexual difference, women: isn't that another form of dissidence?'.

Kristeva's concepts of 'women's time' (initially explored in *About Chinese Women* and developed in 'Women's Time') can be drawn upon to illuminate the temporal dimension to avant-gardism. Her emphasis on female subjectivity is important primarily because she holds that art actually has the potential to achieve social change. She aligns the maternal with the marginal, seeing in it (as in sexuality, insanity and irrationality) the opportunity for radical

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[45] Toril Moi (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader* Oxford, UK and Cambridge, US, Blackwell,1995, p.3
[46] Julia Kristeva 'A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident' (1977) in T. Moi (ed.), 1995, p.298
[47] Julia Kristeva, 1977 in T. Moi (ed.), 995, p.295

discursive intervention. Arguing, after Lacan, for a division between the *semiotic* or pre-Oedipal stage and the *symbolic* or post-Oedipal stage, she claims that the former is repressed by phallocentricity. She goes on to say that 'there is no time without the father', hence the Father is 'sign and time', a *linear time* which characterises history and language.

For Kristeva, the woman is in the difficult position of not having access to the 'temporal symbolic order' unless she identifies with 'the values considered to be masculine (mastery, superego, the sanctioning communicative word that institutes stable social exchange)'.[48] Indeed, the maternal body in the pre-Oedipal stage acts, she asserts, as a space in which the patterns of logocentric thought and action are unrepresented. In their place, the maternal body experiences both *cyclical time*, which is non-linear/repetitive, and *monumental time*, which is eternal. The woman thus defines herself 'in patrilinear society [..as] a specialist in the unconscious'. She is a *jouissance*, a *marginal discourse*, a *pregnancy*. Since truth ('the unspoken of the spoken') is outside time, and it 'refuses, displaces and breaks with the symbolic order before it can re-establish itself', it 'can only be imagined as a *woman*'.

Through his work, the male avant-garde artist, she claims, was able to recreate, or to gain the access to, the *jouissance* of the pre-linguistic state that women already possess by virtue of their motherhood. I will briefly point out at this juncture that valid criticism has been levelled at Kristeva's synecdochic view of motherhood which insists on locating all experience in the *chora* (womb). She writes, for instance:

> A woman is trapped within the frontiers of her body and even of her species, and consequently always feels *exiled* both by the general clichés that make up a common consensus and by the very powers of generalization intrinsic to language. The female exile in relation to the General and to Meaning is such that a woman is always singular, to the point where she comes to represent the singularity of the singular - the fragmentation, the drive, the unnameable[49]

As E. Ann Kaplan, for one, has noted 'Kristeva implies that language is man's access to *jouissance*, biology woman's. And this is a problem'.[50]

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[48] Julia Kristeva 'About Chinese Women' (1974) in T. Moi (ed.), 1995, p. 155
[49] Julia Kristeva, 1977 in T. Moi (ed.), 1995, p.296
[50] E. Ann Kaplan *Motherhood and Representation* London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p.40

Despite these charges of essentialism, Kristeva's conception of different temporal existences are helpful to our rejection of the avant-garde as a paradigm for live art practice. Her characterisation of avant-gardism as a male engagement with language parallel to the experience of the maternal body, could be re-read in terms of linear time. That is, I propose seeing the historical avant-garde as existing instead in *linear* time, recognisable precisely because of its routine assimilation into the mainstream and its institutionalisation. Live art, on the other hand, might almost be said to function in cyclical or monumental time, firstly because the live artwork itself, as we have seen, is more concerned with repetition than with the progressive drive; and secondly, because live artists have a far scanter grasp of their 'heritage'. Even recent attempts to create live art histories do not equate to the fine artist's journey through a national gallery (with its careful demonstration of linear time).

This is not to claim a privileged 'female' position for the creation of live art so much as to suggest that we reconsider our options for dealing with the form's marginality. Kristeva's assumption that women should not seek to exist outside of linear time but should inhabit a space in which all three times occur simultaneously, can be echoed for live art. She demands:

> let us [...] refuse all roles to summon this 'truth' situated outside time, a truth that is neither true nor false, that cannot be fitted in to the order of speech and social symbolism, [...] But how can we do this? By listening; by recognizing the unspoken in all discourse, however Revolutionary, by emphasising at each point whatever remains unsatisfied, repressed, new eccentric, incomprehensible, that which disturbs the mutual understanding of the established powers [...] An impossible dialectic of two terms, a permanent alteration: never the one without the other.[51]

If we cease to read live art as avant-garde (hence as definable according to historical precedent, gender and so on), and see it instead as merely marginalised, it is equitable to the marginalised woman's position, as defined by Kristeva:

> In social, sexual and symbolic experiences, being a woman has always provided a means to another end, to becoming something else: a subject-in-the-making, a subject on trial.[52]

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[51] Julia Kristeva,1974, in T. Moi (ed.), 1995, p.156
[52] Julia Kristeva,1974, in T. Moi (ed.), 1995, p.156

These arguments cast the woman (who is 'that which cannot be represented, what is not said, what remains above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies'[53]) as perhaps *temporarily* affected (and effective) to some extent by her marginality. Equally, strategies for reading live art (this complex, undefinable form) need to take into account its current marginalised position; they should be temporary rather than temporal, open to radical re-organisation if necessary.

Not only is Kristeva's understanding of time more hopeful for the woman (artist) than Cixous', her spatial metaphors are also useful. Though, like Cixous, she too sees women as outsiders (as *hysterics* who function outside paternal discourse), she does not advocate the creation of an alternative discourse. Instead she argues for a continued subversive engagement with existing discourses:

> In any case, far from contradicting creativity (as the existentialist myth would still have us believe), maternity as such can favour a certain kind of female creation, provided the economic constraints are not too heavy [...] Maternity may thus well be called Penelope's tapestry or Leibniz's network [...] *it always succeeds in connecting up heterogeneous sites*[54] (emphasis mine)

This argument appeals in connection with live art because it, too, engages with the dominant discourse, existing at the centre of the debate as only an interdisciplinary practice can do. As I hope to have demonstrated through my textual analyses in ***Part Two***, live art can be theorised *across* 'heterogeneous sites'. Moreover, 'connecting' could be seen as preferable to any romanticised notion of total disengagement.

Ultimately, live art is of the present and perhaps it can only ever be spoken of in the present tense. It has little to gain from embracing the discourses of avant-gardism, male creativity and genius. Equally, the female (live) artist should not suppose that she can create (either now or in the future) a discrete sphere in which to exist untouched by the reappropriations of patriarchal societies. If we can begin to read live art through either multi-temporal metaphors

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[53] Julia Kristeva, 'La femme ce n'est jamais ca' *Tel Quel* no. 59, Fall 1974, transl. in E. Marks & Courtviron, I (eds) *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* Amherst, University of Massachussetts Press, 1980, pp 134-38

[54] Julia Kristeva, 1977 in T. Moi (ed.),1995, p.296

or, better still, spatial ones which eschew avant-garde narratives, then we may reflect its interactions with other cultural activities more truthfully.

'Love of Beginnings' :

a reluctant conclusion

'What both author and reader then hope to arrive at is not, as in the case of scientific writing, a conclusive truth or even a unique fragment of truth, but the illusion of an endless beginning'[1]

I stated in my introduction that this thesis mimics the nature, if such a generalisation is permissible, of live art itself in its failure to provide a seamless linear narrative and in its resistance to conclusion. Hence my decision to 'finish' with a return to its opening - to the title *Maps for Wayward Performers*. 'Love of Beginnings' - a phrase stolen from French psychoanalyst J. B. Pontalis' book of the same name - is intended to signal an open-ended approach to both reading and concluding. This chapter then might be seen as a reluctant conclusion, one written in spite of itself...

The map has become a popular trope in contemporary cultural/critical theory, due in part, perhaps, to the growth in writings on postcolonialism (where hitherto unacknowledged voices have been *put on the map*). It serves the discourse of the disaffected well, as Steven Connor has noted:

> From the beginning, the mapping of centre and periphery has had an obvious fit to this topic, since the semiotics of mapping as an actual expression and fulfilment of forms of imperial domination make the question of imagined conceptual-political space a particularly important one[2]

On one level, this geographical language, with its allusions to borders and limits, is helpful to descriptions of live art which traverses, as it generally does, the boundaries of disciplinary integrity. On another, the notion of national borders is applicable to the 'quest' for live art's roots, as the nature of live art, its hybridity, has problematised not only definitions of the artform but the writing of its very history which spans, in any case, several countries.

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[1] J. B. Pontalis *Love of Beginnings* transl. James Greene with Marie-Christine Regius, London, Free Association Books, 1993 [1986 Editions Gallimard] pp xviii-xix

[2] Steven Connor *Postmodernist Culture* Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., Basil Blackwell, 1995, p.231

As I stated in **The Unimportance of Live Art**, British manifestation(s) of it have been seen as an offshoot of performance art practice occurring in the late 1950s in the U.S.A. and continental Europe; as an extension of fine art with origins in the Futurists' performances; as experimentation deriving from art and music school environments; as a strand of 1970s British New Dance. The recent efforts to right the balance of these eurocentric versions of a lineage, to assert the influence on live art of carnival and other black, cultural traditions, have produced yet another chronology and geography. Equally, the emerging live artworks of the 1990s could be said to have been affected by the institutionalisation of live art in education. If we were to attempt to trace the genealogy of feminist practice (whether as a prime exponent of live art, or as a 'subset', of performance generally), it becomes more obvious still that live art's history is itself a heterogeneous one. It is probably more constructive then to speak of all of these versions (and others yet to be written) as *valid and intertextual* narratives, rather than as ones competing for authenticity.

The same is likely to be true of debates over live art's relationship to political engagement. This did appear to have deteriorated in the 1980s, but no more so, perhaps, than was evident elsewhere in Britain in a broader social context with the cementing of a one-party system of government, the popularisation of post-feminism and a perceptible apathy on the part of the electorate. Indeed, we might view live art's survival (which has happened in spite of repeated proclamations of its death) as one effect of its multiplicity. A broad church, with little respect for its own past, it is able to utilise and reflect changes in technology, for example, without betraying any sense of tradition (unlike theatre which has remained resolutely theatrical in the face of competition from film). In Britain, the 1990s - which have yet to establish a myth for themselves in the way that the 'swinging sixties', 'hippie seventies' and 'yuppie eighties' did - might yet prove to be live art's dream decade. As a period characterised by uncertainty, where Baudrillard, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Irigarary and others with their emphasis on ambiguity have become, ironically, the orthodox critical currency, it is a good time for live art to be examined theoretically.

The resistance to what Lyotard famously called the *grand narrative* repeats itself in the impossibility of locating a single route from which the live artist emerges. This is highlighted by the case studies in this thesis which reveal a parallel boundary-hopping. Practitioners have derived from fine art backgrounds (Mona Hatoum, Bobby Baker), via New Dance (Rose English), theatre training (Joanna Scanlan, Annie Griffin), and so on - albeit predominantly in educational establishments. Perhaps what differentiates an older generation of live artists (Bobby Baker, Rose English) from their younger counterparts is their position as women, which was almost always *unhappily* coincident with their desire to be artists, if not in personal, material terms (being discouraged from career-making, for instance) then in more pervasive ones (such as not being addressed by the weight of art history as it was (is?) traditionally taught). The younger generation of female students have probably arrived at live art less through a refusal of other disciplines - or those disciplines' refusal of them - than from having been exposed to visiting practitioners and from being encouraged to think in interdisciplinary ways.

The variations in live artists' backgrounds are evident also in the rich and diverse use of languages in the work discussed, be it in their unusual movement vocabularies, or their particular relationship with film and television conventions. Mindless of the niceties of respecting disciplinary integrity, these works ruthlessly plunder high and low culture alike to create curious mutations. Like countries whose borders have been renegotiated so many times that they are now constituted of vastly different peoples, live artworks are identifiable without anyone being able to define them exactly. Thus Bobby Baker subverts the behavioural conventions of places through the ritual of performing in them; Rose English deploys theatricality to simultaneously sustain and undermine illusionist theatre; Susan Lewis rejects essentialist notions of blackness - and of black performance - via the use of film, slides, music, text and dance; Mary Duffy employs text to discard the constructions that the medical profession has imposed on her body; Annie Griffin is able to make films that reflect on both the cinematic apparatus and the problematic of acting female; and Forced Entertainment lend gravity to the language of daytime T.V. by transposing it to the live performance space. These are landscapes which are familiar in parts, but unfamiliar in their juxtaposition of those parts.

The map is a useful device on that level also, then, because it is precisely as a guide, as a way of encountering and surviving unfamiliar terrain that one usually turns to a map. It might appear an exaggeration to suggest that contemporary culture, with a generation reared on the discontinuous style of M.T.V., should find live art so difficult and inaccessible; however this does seem to be the case. Inaccessible, literally, because live art is not easy to locate unless one is already *au fait* with the kinds of places in which it might be listed or shown. Inaccessible, figuratively also though, not because it is overly complex or requires specialist appreciation, but because we lack the means via which to read it.

Live art has often been discussed, as I outlined in ***Part One***, by its detractors in terms of its bizarreness or weirdness, as something *off the map* in the colloquial meaning of that phrase. Broadsheet critics rarely discuss the work of live artists in language that is suited to the form, relying instead on the conventional plot-summary, actors-critique approach that serves them so well when applied to the average play. Yet, to do this, is to fail to engage with the complexity of the live art moment which, unlike that of its typical theatrical or cinematic counterpart, does not privilege a sole viewpoint. It does not demand that gesture, spoken text, and the other components of performance work absolutely in tandem, conjunctively, to serve the clarification of a meaning communicated directly to an audience.

Live art thrives instead on establishing a series of dialogues within itself - dialogues between forms, between action occurring on one part of the 'stage' and that visible on screen, for instance. The role of the audience is to construct, to some extent, their own narratives - if indeed it is narratives they desire - from the available fragments. To invoke the map analogy once again, the viewer then is less map reader than map *maker*. This vital difference of approach signifies a willingness on the audience's behalf to renegotiate the performer-audience contract, and the aforementioned critics have not demonstrated this. We might argue that they are trying instead to read one place through the co-ordinates of the map from another place, and then finding themselves disappointed when the landmarks, the points of recognition, that they know and have come to expect (or come to *inspect*) are not there.

Faced with this unforeseen dilemma, they choose to reject the terrain as too difficult rather than accepting that perhaps new maps need to deployed or created.

But what are these new maps, or ways of reading? And are they doomed from the outset by the fact that the very notion of a map is too systematised for something as unpredictable as live art? Dictionary definitions (themselves a common ploy in cultural criticism, useful more for what they omit to say than for what they do say) of the word 'map(s)' might appear unfruitful for my purpose. The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1990 edition), for instance, includes amongst its entries: 'usually flat representation of the earth's surface, or part of it, showing physical features, cities etc.'; 'a diagrammatic representation of a route'; 'a two-dimensional representation of the stars, the heavens etc., or the surface of a planet, the moon, etc.'; 'a diagram showing the arrangements or components of a thing'. Yet there are points of comparison between the map's function and the readings of live art practice that I offer, instances that *exceed* those definitions, just as live art invariably exceeds definition.

To begin with, maps seek to take a physical and fluctuating landscape and to fix or contain it. Whilst I have argued that my text-centred analyses of performances are not *definitive* but rather potential 'ways of seeing', there is no doubt that they do indeed *arrest* the moment of performance, taking the live occurrence and translating it into a two-dimensional format on the page. If not exactly diagrammatic or prescriptive, the chapters in ***Part Two*** do represent a route (or series of routes) that the reader of live art might choose to take. Like maps, they act also as documentations, but *unlike* most maps, they acknowledge that they are merely provisional. If land is enduring and less susceptible to vanishing altogether, as performance does, it nonetheless experiences endless shifts that even the most conscientious cartographer would have to ignore. The problems of documenting these are comparable to those of documenting live art. Scientific apparatus, so accurate in measuring the infinitesimal subsidence of a house, for example, cannot speak of the psychological effect of witnessing a city changing (what Pontalis describes as 'Why is it in one's own town that changes are the most difficult to tolerate, that I inevitably perceive them as excrescences, warts, works of

malicious destruction?' [3]). Nor can semiotic analysis alone hope to convey the spectator's experience as someone *present* at a live art event.

Thus there is also a correlation between live art and those places which do not figure on the map, the kinds of places described thus in the opening stanza of Robert Graves' poem *Lost Acres*:

> These acres, always again lost
> By every new ordnance survey
> And searched for at exhausting cost
> Of time and thought, are still away

I say this not only because live art has been more or less consistently ignored in Britain, having a low profile on our cultural scene, but because it has not been too preoccupied with documenting itself. Indeed, for many live artists the whole notion of seeking to perpetuate the existence of the performed moment is an anathema, as was revealed by several cited opinions in the research reports for the proposed Live Art Archive. If this attitude is guilty of overlooking the important retrieval of 'marginalised' voices (such as the work of black practitioners in the 1970s which has only recently been re-evaluated), then it is also the view to which Graves ultimately subscribes. The last stanzas of *Lost Acres* urge us:

> Yet, be assured, we have no need
> To plot these acres of the mind
> With prehistoric fern and reed
> And monsters such as heroes find
>
> Maybe they have their flowers, their birds
> Their trees behind the phantom fence,
> But of a substance without words.
> To walk there would be loss of sense.

The dilemma over documenting is more complex still for the woman artist who has often had to suffer what Annie Griffin describes as 'being buried'. So that whilst it may be a truism that a 'loss of sense' occurs when the unfixable is tethered to language, it is equally a truism that women artists have mostly existed *off the map* of contemporary culture, again, like Graves' acres, 'perhaps likely to be bound/Together in a piece somewhere/A plot of undiscovered ground'.

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[3] J.B. Pontalis, 1993, p.143

Perhaps one solution is to accept the map, the document, as an entity with different limitations and value. Just as maps can be abstracted into a series of shapes and colours, viewed aesthetically, so documentation of a performance can be treated as an artwork in its own right - be this in literary, pictorial or other form. Hugo Glendinning's photographs (of Forced Entertainment, Annie Griffin, Rose English *et al*), or Bobby Baker's books, are good examples of this. Linda Ludwin's figure of the *documenturg* (a professional documenter of live art with specialist, recognised skills) could thus be said to approach that of the artist-cartographer who might occasionally forsake and enliven accuracy for embellishment. The map/documentation becomes as much a promise of what was *believed* to have been (careful drawings of the earth as flat, for instance) as what *was*. Rather than a denial of subjectivity, these readings fully foreground their author's hand.

This change of emphasis - from the so-called objective view to the subject in view - is crucial because it is perhaps only by embracing contradiction and complexity that maps can be drawn up at all. And even then, it takes a multiplicity of different maps or readings to begin to articulate something of a place or a live art performance. If we wish to pursue the topographical metaphor, we might compare the live artwork to ground best viewed from the air, the sea, the west, the north, below, and so on. In short, the readings that I have proposed most fruitful for deconstructing such practice are not those that try to lay a simple grid over the surface of the thing, but rather a series of overlapping tracings that enable us to oscillate between possible meanings.

No single map can render the 'whole' picture anyway. No one map (no-one's map) can attest to the number of windows in a building or the smell of the air. But still maps maintain pretensions of comprehensiveness - consider the *A-Z*, its very name implying a complete and paradigmatic entity. Despite this supposed rationality though, even (especially?) the maps in the latter practise idiosyncrasies, subjugating land to their own organising principles: the way that the *A-Z*'s index places in proximity streets that may be separated topographically by hundreds of miles; the way that sections are repeated (two, maybe three, times) on different

pages so that roads are visible in several contexts; the way that cities and villages become almost democratically alike in representation. It is reported that the first edition of the *A-Z* 'almost left out Trafalgar Square after a slight accident with the shoe box containing details of streets beginning "Tr"';[4] however much the map hopes to show all ways, it is only ever *always* partial.

This is undeniable when we consider how 'real' maps are usually unpeopled. This is why the streets are always clean, the roads are always clear, rivers are always empty, countries are never under occupation. Naturally, written text is likewise sanitised of the performers' personal inflections in tone, mistakes, and the rest that can alter our experience of a performance. Hence this thesis has attempted to remember the inhabitants of, or visitors to, the spaces it describes. It not only offers maps to us (as viewers) for reading the work of live artists, but perhaps offers maps to those performers also, if they choose to use them. Though maps, it must be said, do not guarantee that the reader will find her way. Asked whether she ever got lost around London, even Phyllis Pearsall (1906-1996), creator of the *A-Z*, replied 'Always, dear, always.'[5]

The live art practitioners whom I have characterised as *wayward* are so in all senses of the word. Wayward because they have proved themselves to be what the dictionary uncharitably defines as 'childishly self-willed or perverse' in their pursuit of such a difficult and potentially unrewarding 'career'. If fine artists also lack a career 'structure', then the problem is surely aggravated for the live artist who cannot rely on the kind of critical support forthcoming for the 'successful' fine artist. Her career cannot be *mapped out* in the same way, as becomes all too clear when we attempt to apply Alan Bowness' 'four successive circles of recognition' - peer recognition, critical recognition, patronage by dealers and collectors, and public acclaim - to her. I suggested in **A World of Their Own** that female live artists exist in a situation of *double marginalisation* to the artworld in a way that many female fine artists no longer do. The current climate in Britain (speaking culturally rather than meteorologically) with the

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[4] Colin Adamson 'Famous last words as woman who created the A to Z dies' *The Evening Standard* August 29th 1996

[5] cited in Colin Adamson, 1996

creation of the Britart phenomenon, paralleling the Britpop one, is good for young, predominantly white 'lads', and this situation has brought advantages (though not equity) to the 'lasses' in that crowd. Embracing a fashionably post-feminist attitude to issues of sexuality and gender, these women artists have learned to disassociate themselves from feminist discourse and to work the publicity machines that have proved so useful to the careers of artists like Damien Hirst and Marc Quinn.

In the light of these discussions, and of the fact that Britart is predominantly apolitical in content, it seems obvious that the idea that the margins are necessarily a good place from which to operate demands reconsideration. In fact the margins in this case are perhaps comparable to existence at the edges of the map, to the traditional British coastal resort - places that people like to visit more than they want to inhabit. After all, the tourist can always go home. It is perhaps Kristeva who arrives at a more realistic potential for the marginal, arguing that the woman is forever *en route*, as it were, 'to becoming something else: a subject-in-the-making'.[6]

Live artists are wayward, also, in the implied sense of straying off the path - a sure sign of impending doom in traditional fables like *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Hansel and Gretel.* In so doing, they thus risk uncertain ground. In relation to feminist practice, the word 'wayward' has certain unfavourable connotations redolent of Victorian morality narratives - of loose, sexually available females - which can be reappropriated to suggest women who ignore the suspect mores of patriarchal society. Although these constructions can be revisited it is nonetheless important not to romanticise them either. Prostitutes, the original wayward women, can be seen through the eyes of feminist revisionism to constitute a challenge to the patriarchal order but we must not forget to foreground the material circumstances that may have given rise to these women's decisions. It would be equally foolish to ignore the situation in which the live artist often finds herself; however unusual or extreme her processes and output, she is nevertheless bound by funding and social conventions and

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[6]Julia Kristeva 'About Chinese Women' (1974) in Toril Moi (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader* Oxford, U.K. and Cambridge, U.S.A., Blackwell, 1995, p.156

demands if she is to support herself. Tim Etchells' pronouncement that artists starting out in the mid-90s have little chance of surviving, as Forced Entertainment did a decade earlier, 'on the dole' is worth restating here.

Funding considerations are such that they dictate whether live art is even welcome at a particular venue. The chequered history of live art funding within the Arts Council has meant that little support was forthcoming from that source prior to the mid-1980s. Though the form can be extremely portable (as the by now legendary Gilbert and George work *Underneath The Arches* showed), it is more likely to be costly. As with any work requiring live presences, it often presupposes certain technical facilities, which may be integral to the piece; Rose English's *My Mathematics*, complete with live horse, is a case in point. Also, the work may be site-specific (Bobby Baker inviting audiences into her home kitchen) thus potentially reducing the number of times that it can be shown or the number of people who will (pay to) see it.

Additionally, live artists are wayward in the sense of 'unaccountable or freakish', in that there are few measuring sticks of success beyond their contemporaries' opinions. The other means of dealing with live art practitioners and their work has relied on the catch-all term *avant-garde*. I have argued however that this terminology is too loaded, too inscribed with a patriarchal view of creativity, to be of use to any feminist reading. In subscribing to the avant-gardist's heroic gesture, the female live artist risks being associated not so much with straying off the path as with forging a new (potentially as limiting) one. Avant-gardism is necessarily figured as not just transgressive of borders, but more importantly as *progressive*. I prefer to use the trope of the trespasser (as I described Bobby Baker) - who crosses the line uninvited and momentarily makes herself a(t) home there.

In combining these two concepts of the map and the wayward, (of reading and performing, of critical theory and live art practice) this thesis has aimed to construct a hybrid form that undermines the dichotomous relationship within which these terms might seem to exist. If the

map is never as total and logical as it pretends, and if the wayward are never as 'free' as they appear, then their inter-twining offers us an alternative. These admissions of fallibility necessarily threaten the discrete nature of the aforementioned concepts (the map and theory ignore those places that defy easy representation; the wayward and the live artist refuse the constraints of a defining path) yet this destabilising can be seen positively.

Homi Bhabha proposes exactly this in *The Location of Culture* where he rereads the theory/practice polarity as another instance of binary thinking. Arguing against the dismissal of critical theory (which is traditionally 'assumed to be eternally insulated from the historical exigencies and tragedies of the wretched of the earth'[7]), he suggests that theory has, in fact, a useful role to play in negotiating new notions of nationalism and identity. We might therefore employ Bhabha's argument as a matrix through which to both understand live art itself, and to approach reading it in the ways that my thesis advocates. He writes:

> The language of critique is effective not because it keeps forever separate the terms of the master and the slave, the mercantilist and the Marxist, but to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, *neither the one nor the other*, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the moments of politics[8]

This is analogous to a way of reading live art that stops itself from imposing definitions on the form at the outset. There is no need to ask 'is it dance?' or 'is it theatre?', for instance, since those categorisations are neither as hermetically sealed nor as useful as we might suppose. This delimitation, this acceptance that culture is hybrid in any case and that live art is perhaps just an intensified proof of it, opens up reading as the performative practice that it is.

Bhabha continues that this

> may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should

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[7] Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture* London and New York,1994, p.19
[8] Homi Bhabha, 1994, p.25

> remember that it is the 'inter' - the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space - that carries the burden of the meaning of culture[9]

Since to be between places is generally to be travelling, moving - neither here nor there (significantly, the latter is used colloquially to mean 'of little importance') - it is highly apt as a metaphor for live art. Neither here nor there, but thus potentially everywhere, the live artist requires a multiplicity of maps. As I have argued, these cannot be seen as anything more than temporary strategies, which may well become redundant as the terrain shifts again. If we are to celebrate live art's heterogeneity - which will probably always be a constant constituent of its practice - this is also the most that we can ask of our corresponding approaches to reading. That is, that they remain fluid, not precious.

Unlike many other theorisations of the marginal and the centre which ultimately rely on the marginal remaining always so, Bhabha's reformulation of the interstitial space accepts that there can be changes in perspective. If we read live art in these terms, we would acknowledge that there is always the possibility that its profile on the cultural scene will be sufficiently raised to guarantee more serious critical attention. Its proximity to expressions of black culture may prove advantageous when it comes under consideration by funding bodies and their agendas to promote what, ironically, the Arts Council has billed *cultural diversity*. The form's move into the academy is probably irreversible, again if for no other reason than the lack of support structures for live artists (who may go into teaching to sustain their practice).

These changes will necessarily impact on a form as self-reflexive as live art, and it is possible that the other areas of cultural activity from which it appropriates both languages and processes will approach the condition of live art. In short, hybridisation may become even more apparent - and perhaps less threatening - than at present. The challenge open to the reader of live art is to reflect these movements, to fully acknowledge the contradictions that will doubtless be manifest if, and when, live art ever becomes part of the mainstream.

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[9] Homi Bhabha, 1994, p.38

Returning, at (the) last, to those maps mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, we might conclude with a deliberate act of misunderstanding. In small print, at the back of the *A-Z*, I find an unwitting and concise reminder of the impossibility of arriving at one, correct means of reading live art practice, or indeed of reading anything. It states:

'The representation on the maps of a road, track, or footpath is no evidence of the existence of a right of way'

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