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Editorial

In May 2008, a group of postgraduates organised a one-day conference, 'Objects of Engagement,' and this issue of *Platform* takes the same title, aiming to continue and develop ideas which were raised on the day. The issue opens with a critical response to the conference from some of its organisers, which provides a sense of the content and scope of the event, and reflections on the discourses and perspectives which it opened up. As the title suggests, 'Objects of Engagement' seeks to shed light to the different ways in which contemporary performance practice challenges and re-awakens audience perception by placing emphasis on the object's importance in the theatrical realm. The six articles in this issue propose diverse and original ways to probe different modes of audience engagement with objects, and pose questions about the object's status in various performance practices.

Bernadette Cronin's practice-based paper reflects on the development of *The Cabinet of Curiosities*, a work-in-progress which removes a host of objects from their quotidian contexts, and places them at the centre of the performance. As well as documenting the piece's genesis and evolution, it reflects on the ways in which objects in performance create stories, associations, and multiply meaning, becoming 'curious' compositions. Diego Pellecchia's paper revolves around the function of a very specific object: the fan of Noh theatre. By closely examining the fan's different uses and possible ways of interacting with the performer and the audience in Japanese Noh, Pellecchia vividly discusses how a single object can liberate meaning and ultimately become an object of encounter for both actors and audiences.

Mark Flisher's article uses his experience in *Opportunity Costs* as a framework for thinking about and critically approaching the object's relationship with the audience and performer. Considering the ways in which interactive performance might mobilise different kinds of engagement from both the audience and the performer, Flisher's piece aims to theorise the ways in which the object can be used to reconfigure the audience as '*part*icipant,' and the performer as 'facilitator.' In 'Seeing through the Wall: Objectification between Resistance and Acceptance,' Nesreen Hussein seeks to address how the body in performance can challenge its reified status. Drawing from the field of visual arts and specifically from the work of Yael Davids, this paper utilises phenomenology and psychoanalysis in order to demonstrate how Davids' groundbreaking work disrupts fixed boundaries between activity and passivity, subjects and objects, performers and audience.

Jenny Lawson's practice-based piece puts forward the question of the performer's physical engagement with objects. Lawson discusses the complex relationships related to women, food and consumption that haunt female domestic roles and ultimately explores ways of re-appropriating and disturbing cultural practices through her own performance practice. In the issue's final paper, Amanda Sue Konkle considers the phenomenon of the Marilyn Monroe impersonator in contemporary America. Using Diana Taylor's concepts of 'archive' and 'repertoire,' as well as interview material with a range of Monroe impersonators, Konkle demonstrates how the image of Monroe has been rendered safely desirable and non-threateningly sexual.

We are pleased to be able to publish such a range and diversity of papers in this issue. We're also particularly pleased that so many of these articles offer practice-based perspectives which explore how current researchers in the field intervene in theatre practice by offering new methodological discourses to approach contemporary theatre and performance. This issue also sees a new development for

Platform, a 'Performance Response' section. These pieces, which we hope to continue publishing in future issues, are not reviews but critical, analytical reflections which offer the reader a specific and academic response to a particular performance. James Reynolds' piece concludes this issue, and is an eloquent consideration of Robert Lepage's most recent work, *Lipsynch*, which assesses the effects of the piece's 'museum pace' and thematic connections and consolidations.

As ever, the editors would like to thank the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of Minnesota Press, University of Toronto Press and Palgrave. Our thanks also go to all of the peer and academic reviewers for their invaluable contributions to this issue, and continuing support for *Platform*.

Rachel Clements and Marissia Fragou
(Issue Editors)

Notes on Contributors

Rachel Clements is in her third year of AHRC-funded doctoral study at Royal Holloway. Her research focuses on hauntology, politics and history in contemporary British theatre. She is an editor of *Platform*, and is a postgraduate representative for TaPRA (Theatre and Performance Research Association).

Bernadette Cronin is an actor and part-time lecturer for Drama and Theatre Studies at University College Cork, Ireland. She is currently writing her PhD dissertation on Austrian experimental theatre for the University of Exeter. Recent acting credits include May/Amy and w1 in *Footfalls* and *Play* for an extension of Phillip Zarrilli's award-winning Beckett Project, and Mina Harker in a theatre adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. She is a member of GAITKRASH theatre company.

Mark Flisher is currently engaged in a Practice-as-Research PhD within the Performance Studies department of the University of Northampton. He is exploring the interactivity of the object within performance constructs and its relationship with space, identity and agency. Mark also has developing interests in the absence and presence of pervasive gaming and its relationship with the urban environment.

Philip Hager has recently completed his PhD in the department of Drama & Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London. His doctoral thesis explored the patterns of production and consumption of politically-engaged theatre in Greece during the dictatorship of the colonels, in the early 1970s. He holds a BA in Theatre Studies from the University of Patras, Greece and an MA in Performance and Culture from Goldsmiths, University of London.

Nesreen Hussein completed a BFA in Scenography and Interior Architecture at Faculty of Fine Arts, Helwan University in Cairo, Egypt, then an MA in Theatre and Drama Research at Royal Holloway. She is currently in the third year of a PhD research at Royal Holloway, funded by a College Research Studentship, in addition to receiving funds from University of London Central Research Fund and the Society of Theatre Research (the President's Fund). The research focuses on the interaction between the human body and physical material, looking at the unstable subject-object dialectic, how it is negotiated in performance to create meaning, and to critically evaluate human subjective experience. She is also a theatre designer and an 'occasional' performer.

Amanda Sue Konkle is a Ph.D. student at the University of Kentucky, with research interests in the Cold War period and postmodern representations of and responses to the Cold War. She earned her Master of Arts from Miami University of Ohio in 2008. Her other published work consists of "Adding Insult to Injury: The Role of Wounding Words in the Transatlantic Slave Trade," published in *Atlantikos*, Spring 2008.

Jenny Lawson is a performance maker, a cake lover, and is currently in the second year of her practice-as-research PhD in the School of Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds. She holds a BA in Theatre Studies from Lancaster University

and an MA in Theatre Studies from the University of Manchester. Her PhD investigates how performance practice can articulate the implications of popular cultural food performances for women and their relationship to food and the domestic. She first began exploring food in her practice with her Manchester based theatre company *Escape Theatre* in *Jenny and Krissi's Cake Show* (2006). She has continued investigating food in her solo work including, *I Wish I had a Kitchen* (2007) and *Dinner with Jenny* (2008).

Diego Pellecchia graduated from University of Verona, Italy. He has published articles on the influence of Noh theatre in Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* and produced the extras for the Italian edition of the film. As a Noh practitioner, he has been training in chant and dance both in Italy and in Japan with Monique Arnaud and Udaka Michishige (Kongoh School). In May 2007, he performed on the Kongoh Noh stage in Kyoto. Having been awarded a studentship at Royal Holloway (University of London), he is currently enrolled as PhD student, researching on the reception of Noh in Europe and its implementation by western practitioners, questioning the ethics of traditional training and its application to foreign cultural contexts. As a member of the International Noh Institute, he coaches Noh workshops both in Italy and in the UK.

Grant Tyler Peterson (Royal Holloway, University of London)
Grant holds a BA from University of California, Los Angeles's prestigious Ray Bolger Musical Theatre Program where he was on a Regent's Scholarship. He also earned a MA from UCLA's Theatre and Performance Studies under the tutelage of Sue-Ellen Case. Currently, he is in the second year of a HEFCE funded research PhD project at Royal Holloway, focusing on the performances of Bath's Natural Theatre Company, one of England's oldest street theatre groups. As a performer, he received Backstage's 2004 Garland for best performance in the one-man show, *Johnny Got His Gun*, which also received nominations for best revival from Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle and LA Weekly.

Victoria E. Price is a lecturer in early modern drama based in the Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies at University of Glasgow. Her research interests include: prostitution and theatre in Tudor and Stuart England; Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre and drama; the seventeenth-century masque (especially the female masquer); women's performance and cultural production. Victoria is currently writing a book on the relationship between prostitution and theatre in early modern England.

James Reynolds is currently researching a PhD in the devised theatre of Robert Lepage at Queen Mary, University of London. He has previously published on the work of Robert Lepage and Howard Barker.

Roberto Sánchez-Camus was awarded a Bachelor's in Fine Arts from School of Visual art in New York City and an MA in Scenography from Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design in London. He is in his second year PhD practice as research, supported by a College Research Studentship, investigating the aesthetics of applied live art. With a multi-media artistic background Roberto produces events, performances, and situations of relation aesthetics in a variety of international settings. Recent projects include Napoli

Scorticata in Naples, Italy and Youth Visions in Ghana, West Africa. He is currently working towards a new project about exchange and commodity in South Beirut, Lebanon. For more information please visit www.camusliveart.net

Abstracts

***The Cabinet of Curiosities*: Objects as Compositions**
Bernadette Cronin (University of Exeter)

The Cabinet of Curiosities is a performance piece I have created with the two other members of GAITKRASH, a small company based in the South of Ireland. The piece is a dialogue between the sound artist and the performers who manipulate objects with their hands from behind the backless cabinet. The 10ft x 5ft cabinet, mounted on a platform, contains 12 compartments or 'mini-stages,' six on either side, that are complete with individual pairs of red velour curtains and dimmer switches, which are controlled by the performers. What emerge from the dialogue are compositional objects made up of aural and visual elements. The objects presented to the spectator are never the same from one moment to the next as some part of the composition is always shifting, whether it be the sound, the intensity of illumination, or the position of the object in relation to the performer's hands or something else in the cabinet. In this article I investigate the journey things make on being lifted from their quotidian context, transformed into a 'curious object' in performance and culminating in the mind of the spectator. In the context of theories and artistic sources that have informed our work, I question the perception of objects as stable, bounded entities.

The Fan of Noh Theatre: Object of Encounter
Diego Pellecchia (Royal Holloway)

Japanese Noh theatre is characterized by the minimalism of its scenography, since the pine tree and bamboo painted on the back and side walls are the only most prominent fixed set-design. The spare properties, usually reduced in size, have a synecdochal function more than a realistic one. The fan (*ōgi*) carried by the actors is the most important property: painted with motives that allude to the status of the character, the fan is a multipurpose object, focus of the dance and catalyst of the attention of the audience. Through the fan, the character expresses actions, thoughts, feelings with movements that have different degrees of realism; at the same time the fan is the medium through which the character conveys and materializes his inner feelings, or the magic stick that blurs the edges of the bodily presence of the actor and the extra-ordinary universe of the character. The actor manipulates the fan through patterns of set movements called *kata*, which are usually multipurpose: the same *kata* can achieve different meanings depending on the context in which it is used and on the gaze that the spectator casts on it. Not having a fixed vocabulary through which the audience can read and translate the actor's symbolic system, the reading and interpretation of the *kata* is left to the audience. The undefined and the blanks of the text are regarded as opportunities for the spectator to encounter the character on stage. Being a Noh student and practitioner, I have the opportunity to closely study the use of the fan with Master-Actor Udaka Michishige of the Kongoh School and the International Noh Institute. The paper draws from this experience to explore how the fan of Noh theatre can engage a communication between the character, the performer and the audience. Taking on Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theories, this paper aims at highlighting the 'structures of indeterminacy' which make possible the encounter of audience and actors.

The Interactive Object: Undermining the Artist and Empowering the Audience.

Mark Flisher (University of Northampton)

This paper explores the object's relationship with the audience and performer. By examining the relationships in orthodox and non-orthodox performance constructs, I explore how the object undermines and de-centres the artist, and as a result, reconfigures the audience into the role of *part*icipant. The interactive performances used to frame the role of the object are primarily *Opportunity Costs* (2008), an interactive performance that uses an object to initiate performer and audience interaction, and Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke* (2007). Within this framework I will focus my discussion on two elements: how the object initiates a shift between artist and facilitator, and audience and *part*icipant; and how 'choice,' initiated by the object, can develop a conceptual performance space for the audience. This paper offers an alternative approach to the traditional performance constructs of performer, audience and object relationships. It identifies the need for the *part*icipant to engage with the object and develop personal narratives that undermine the role of the performer. This process of de-centralisation lifts the audience member out of passivity and invisibility, whilst simultaneously reconfiguring the artist into the role of facilitator; the creator of concept and not the creator of content.

Seeing through the Wall: Objectification between Resistance and Acceptance

Nesreen Hussein (Royal Holloway, University of London)

Through a recent example from performance art practice, the paper raises questions about the limits of objectification and the connection between representation and seeing when the live body is placed at the centre of a work of art. Yael Davids is a Jerusalem-born visual artist, whose performance installations create moments of engagement between the human body and physical objects, negotiating a shifting subject-object boundary. The paper explores Davids' work as an example of a representational economy that disrupts the conventional viewing experience and the stability of projection and identification. Her work constructs a mode of representation that resists the reduction of the apparently available body into a site of pleasure and fetishization, thus the utilization of objectification *empowers* the subject. Exploring such paradoxical dynamic is the main concern of this analysis. Drawing on my corporeal experience as a participant in one of Davids' pieces, I will try to argue through Lacan's theorization of 'the gaze,' Hegel's notion of 'negativity,' and Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh,' that the dynamic of representation in Davids' work occurs within a 'reversible' mode of objectification that affirms rather than denies subjective experience.

***Disturbing Objects*: Making, Eating and Watching Food in Popular Culture and Performance Practice**

Jenny Lawson (University of Leeds)

Journeying through cookbooks, the dinner table, a cake stand and a cake; as objects of fantasy, secrets and gifts, which can unsettle, oppress and *disturb,* this paper examines

how performance practice can intervene and *disturb* the objects of the everyday. The food we eat and the cooking and dining objects that we encounter are materials through which we construct identities, relationships and learn socially and culturally accepted norms of behaviour. Through the increasing saturation of the media by food, in television programmes, the rise in celebrity cooks, new concerns with 'eating well', and the growing fashion of gastronomy as recreational activity, food is now firmly embedded within popular culture. As a result, food and related objects are framed as if they are able to produce desirable lifestyles and consequently become convention. As a female practitioner-researcher with a love of food, my practice attempts to articulate the impact that popular cultural performances of food may have upon women and their relationship to food and the domestic. With particular reference to British female food figures such as Mrs Beeton and Nigella Lawson and two of my solo performance works *I Wish I had a Kitchen* (2007) and *Dinner with Jenny* (2008), this paper offers a performative reflection on food, cooking objects and my performance practice.

Gentlemen Still Prefer Blondes: The Persistent Presence of Marilyn Monroe Impersonators

Amanda Sue Konkle (University of Kentucky)

Hundreds of women in America earn their livings as Marilyn Monroe impersonators, performing not only at men's clubs or stage shows, but also (and in some cases, more often) at family and corporate functions. This paper explores what the image of Marilyn Monroe represents for these audiences through a discussion of Diana Taylor's categories of 'archive' and 'repertoire.' Making use of interviews with current Marilyn Monroe impersonators, I explore a number of reasons why audiences desire the image of Monroe brought out of the archive through the embodied performance of an impersonator. The paper proposes that impersonators of Marilyn Monroe serve as 'objects of engagement' by making present *the* representative body of non-threatening female sexuality, a body that is certain to go home alone at the end of the evening.

Response to *Objects of Engagement* Conference.
Royal Holloway, University of London. 12 June 2008.

Design by Jenna Rossi-Camus

Roberto Sánchez-Camus, Nesreen Hussein
and Grant Tyler Peterson
(Royal Holloway, University of London)

Objects of Engagement was a one-day conference held at Royal Holloway, University of London in June 2008. The emphasis of the event was placed on providing a space for exchange between emerging scholars and practitioners from various disciplines in theatre and performance. This piece is a reflection on the conference by its organising committee that offers a response to some of the primary issues raised by the event, the postgraduate contributions and the keynote speakers; Professors Richard Gough (University of Wales, Aberystwyth) and Pete Brooks (Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design).

Objects and Engagements

Fig 1. Professor Richard Gough. Photo by Roberto Sánchez-Camus

Richard Gough opened the conference, reading from a leather-bound book crowned with a stag's skull with twisted horns. As the opening address developed, items were revealed from under the table; an assemblage of objects and storytelling, part fact, part fiction, engaging our senses and awareness. The growing still life on the conference table resembled a cross between a Joel Peter Witkin photograph and a charity shop. Performative and reflexive, these words began the journey of the day. Perhaps testing the audience's objectivity, Gough broke some eggs on

the table, and then threw one towards the onlookers. The empty shell landed softly in the aisle, having been emptied of its contents for the effect. Was this object what we thought it was? What did the trick reveal? Does calculated artifice and context change an object? With these questions in mind, the conference began.

Presentations ranged topically from puppetry to the gaze, contraction in dance, and material bodies to performances on cancer, and the Noh fan, as well as a participatory piece developing assumed histories and identity. The wide variety of participating scholars and practitioners, who conduct research and produce work in a range of media, revealed the myriad ways in which human consciousness engages with materiality. Perhaps objects provide us with a platform in which to recognise our philosophies, our self-image and ourselves. The varied uses and interpretations of 'objects' at the conference seemed to demonstrate how these become imbued with the perspective of the subject, and are subsequently re-presented with the symbolic enhancement of the subject's lens. The lens itself is an external object, constituting a method of framing the object. The object then becomes the centre of the paradigm which Phillip Auslander describes as the mediated image representing the live and the live representing the mediated image (38-39). The object is no longer itself but an image of itself, a re-presentation of itself, an endless version.

The conference was concluded by Pete Brooks, who expanded on this significant thread that ran throughout the day's discussions of representation and mediation. Brooks termed the object a potential 'bridge to fiction' using the example of Margaret Laton's 17th century embroidered jacket that is on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The jacket is presented alongside a portrait painting of Margaret Laton (c. 1610) wearing the exact garment.[1] The object becomes a source of information and duplicity. The jacket is preserved as an artefact, and in the painting is presented in context, but what does the object become if

[1] For an image of the display see http://www.vam.ac.uk/images/image/12661-popup.html

we strip its context? Brooks postulated that this allows for a rebirth of the object, a new understanding of the potentialities of materiality. Just as computer avatars or puppets bridge the real and mediated, the object is animated by the subject yet retains an individual identity.

Objects

Objects of Engagement took the physical object in the widest sense as its starting point, placing it at the centre of academic dialogue. Rather than being perceived as passive products of consumption, silent, inert materials – often ignored or marginalised in subject-oriented critical discourse – were given voice and considered as embodiments of processes that reveal ontological aspects of the world, self and other. The positing of the object as entity, liberated from the tyranny of the subject, is vividly articulated in Peter Schumann's manifesto 'What, At the End of This Century, Is the Situation of Puppets and Performing Objects?' In his illustrated essay, Schumann questions the word 'object' when describing a thing's status, seeing it as a form of linguistic subjugation. He problematises the word itself as a reductive definition that perceives the object relationally within a hierarchical system of seeing that has no ideological justification, as he maintains, '[o]bject exists only because we are deceived into being subject' (48).

Fig 2. Objects from Lotos Collective practice workshop.

In the theatre, the marginalization of 'objects' is evident in how they are often perceived as static symbols rather than as mobile entities. In their opening of a special issue of *Performance Research*, 'On Objects,' Laurie Beth Clarke, Richard Gough and Daniel Watt argue that the theatre has annihilated the object by transforming its 'Thingness' into just another means by which the spectacle may be advanced. However, by carefully examining the

nature of the stage object, it may be revealed that 'through such a "thing" thinking may safeguard a certain condition of being' (1). Thus when objects are brought into view, and their material life recovered on stage, they can serve as dynamic vehicles embodied with the cultural, political and psychological projects that created them, uncovering ways by which we register ourselves as social beings. These arguments suggest that the object – in performance or non-performance contexts – needs to be considered for itself as an open, integral and revealing 'thing' that defies its own objectification under the subject's controlling gaze. Opening up such provocation was fundamental to the dialogue initiated by the conference.

Objects of Engagement aimed to continue the critique of the position of physical things in relation to ours, acknowledging a consciousness for the object that functions outside of and in tandem with that of the subject. In formulating a theme and a context for the conference, the focus was shifted from defining what we mean by 'objects,' towards a wider exploration and a deconstruction of the process of interchange between subject and object in its various manifestations in theatre, performance, live art and beyond. We hoped to supersede definitive boundaries, in order to inform and offer new methodologies for looking at theatre and performance through the subject-object dialectic whilst questioning the fixity of such division.

Engagement

The term engagement in the conference title requires an interrogation of its meaning as a term of action, as a term of promise, and as a term of growing global reflexivity. *Objects of Engagement* attempted to address and decipher these particular issues, which are increasingly on the minds of performance practitioners, scholars, and perhaps most provocatively, in the discourses of popular culture.

In the 2006 best seller *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink argues that we are entering a new era, which he calls 'the conceptual age.' As opposed to the industrial age and the information age, which valued physical strength and then sequential analytics, Pink proposes that 21st century western society is producing strategies of 'high concept and high touch.' In other words, things that combine seemingly unrelated ideas to create new inventions and designs, or which aim to empathize and interact on a more visceral level, are achieving an unprecedented dominance in contemporary culture.

Fig 3. Objects from Lotos Collective practice workshop

Although Pink's model is presented in a simplified and accessible manner, it could be seen as evidence of the increasing influence which performance and design strategies are having on cultural economies. Why is it now nearly compulsory for museums to have an interactive component to their exhibitions? What does it mean when top medical schools now require students to be trained in 'narrative medicine,' role playing and engaging with patients? Why is 'play' therapy as a part of job training becoming the standard rather than the exception?

Engagement tells us something about the doer and the receiver. The Oxford English Dictionary lists one of the early meanings of the word as 'the pledging of property.' In its most modern form, the term has lost much of its historical baggage of patriarchal traditions and dowry acquisition. Nonetheless, it is significant that a word that was first used for

economic transactions developed into a term for personal and romantic fulfillment, only to be most recently adopted as a term for fulfillment through public interaction.

Despite its long etymological journey, each rendition of the term *engagement* tends to maintain one common semantic thread: a promise. An engagement is, at the very least, a commitment of a relationship of one sort or the other, whether it is economic, personal, public or artistic. Interrogating this promise, and the promise that theatre and performance seem to make, was at the core of the dialogue at *Objects of Engagement*.

Objects of Engagement

Objects of Engagement culminated in a series of inter-disciplinary threads woven into a single context. Each presentation negotiated the dialectics of objects and objectification as systems for assessing the self and social life, which is a process foundational to all forms of artistic practice. Fetishized, retrospective, absent, bodied, haunted, subverted, the various manifestations of objects that emerged throughout the day demonstrated material things' capacity to document how we register our presence, and position ourselves as practitioners and scholars of theatre and performance. It is not just that the object acts as agent, but acts as part of an unstable temporal process of creation and destruction occurring alongside the subject. This dialogue highlighted the need to engage with the issue of objects as more than a footnote or a visual apparatus. To return to Schumann's manifesto of 'things': 'they too defy their subservience and the ungodly meaninglessness to which they are delegated by the habits of the republic; they too are infested by the sourdough of cultural insurrection' (51). The aim

Fig 4. Objects from Lotos Collective practice workshop

of this revolution, and indeed, the conference, and the discourse it prompted, was to promote an equality and a dialectic of mutual dependency between persons and things, where the pertinence of their existence and meaning is equally acknowledged. [2]

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Victoria and Albert Museum, London. 10 Sep. 2008 <http://www.vam.ac.uk/images/image/12661-popup.html>.

[2] Readers are invited to participate in the current debate and presentations through the online forum **http://objectsofengagement.blogspot.com** created as an open source network to post ideas, performances, papers, provocations and queries.

The Cabinet of Curiosities: Objects as Compositions

Bernadette Cronin (University of Exeter)

On experiencing the multiple cabinets and gardens in the Jardin des Plantes in 1833, Ralph Waldo Emerson was struck by the affect the compositional structure had on him, noting in his journal: ‘How much finer things are in composition than alone. ‘Tis wise in man to make Cabinets’ (Brown 57). Emerson had already come to the conclusion that man only has to behold a star and immediately a process of ‘marriage’ between object and subject begins, but ‘[i]n Paris, Emerson found this “marriage” formalized in the systematic compositions of the […] various cabinets’(58). According to Brown, Emerson’s act of reading what his eye encountered in the Jardin des Plantes – creating series, form, organzisation, relation – related to the kind of synthesis or composition of ideas he strove for in his writing (58). I am a member of GAITKRASH, a small performance company, and in this article I will discuss our developing performance piece, *The Cabinet of Curiosities*. *The Cabinet of Curiosities* uses, and indeed focuses on, objects in and as performance, and I will discuss a selection of objects which have featured in the cabinet in the context of the theories and artistic sources that have informed our work. I will consider these objects in the light of Emerson’s sense of objects as compositions emerging from the marriage between object and subject. Central to this inquiry is the idea of porosity – the porosity of the artists to one another’s ideas, which gave rise to the composition that is the piece, and the porosity of the spectator’s perceptual powers to the visual and aural elements, giving rise to composite objects.[1]

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[1] Due to the medium in which I am presenting these ideas, it will not be possible to adequately convey a sense of the aural elements of the piece: I am asking the reader to make a leap of faith in this regard.

Fig. 1. The Cabinet, dvd still, 4 March 2007. Photo: Claire Guerin.

The Cabinet of Curiosities was the first piece of work to be devised and performed by GAITKRASH. We are a small performance company, based in Cork in the South of Ireland, consisting of a sound artist, Mick O'Shea, and two actors (Regina Crowley and myself). The piece is designed to tour, but our preferred site is a small, dark narrow space with an audience capacity of about twenty.[2] The set is a wooden cabinet, 10ft tall and 5ft wide, mounted on a platform. It consists of 12 individual compartments, 6 on either side. Each compartment is equipped with an individual dimmer switch, controlled by the performers, and a pair of red velour curtains, creating the effect of 12 individual mini-stages. The cabinet is backless, and the two performers are concealed behind it. The sound artist sits, with his table of instruments, to one side of the performance space, and has a clear view of what is happening in the cabinet. Once the

[2] To date, the piece has been performed at the Granary Theatre, Platform Artists Series, Cork, 18-19 May 2006; Impact Theatre, Limerick, Excursions Performance Festival, 3 December 2006; Perforum Series, Granary Studio, Cork, March 2007.

audience is seated in front of the cabinet, an attendant cues the performers by opening the cabinet. The performance lasts between 25 and 35 minutes, the attendant closing the cabinet again when cued by the sound artist. Using their hands, the performers engage with and manipulate objects in dialogue with the sound artist. The objects performed in this manner include 'found' inanimate objects, animal organs, fruit and vegetables, pieces of text, toys, minerals, liquids, among others. The sound artist's table of instruments is a collection of curiosities in its own right, including, for example, parts of musical instruments, battery-operated fans, mobile phones, wind-up toys, self-made instruments – all electronically amplified.

Fig. 2, Mick O'Shea, dvd still. Photo: Claire Guerin.

The initial impulse that gave rise to the project was the desire to find an artistic form that would reflect the conversations we had been having with each other on issues relating to the body. These could be broken down into three broad categories. First, we were interested in a sense of the sight and sound of the inner workings of the body. Like Michel Leiris, we are not interested in the body as 'only gross matter and a despicable

magma of viscera,' but as 'a mysterious theatre which provides a stage for all exchange – whether of matter, mind, or the sense between inner and outer worlds' (qtd in Ewing 386). Secondly, we wanted to question the idea of the skin as a boundary between outside and inside: the skin is commonly perceived as a container of a psychic space, but the body's orifices complicate this sense of the skin forming a boundary between outside and inside. Where, for example, does the outside of the lip end and the inside begin, what about the nostril? We speak of the outer ear, the middle ear and the inner ear, but where exactly is the boundary line between outside and inside? The same question could be applied to the eyes, the eyelids, the genitals etc. Thirdly, we wanted to explore the desire to break things down into their component parts, in order to uncover their mysteries.

We decided to base our performance on the model of a conversation: Regina and I offer the sound artist visual impulses to engage with and Mick offers us auditory impulses in response to what he sees. This results in compositions made up of aural and visual stimuli. These are offered to our audience to respond to in whatever way they choose: we offer no narratives, and although partly working with individual scores, the spectator is not aware of these. It was clear from the outset that improvisation had to be inherent in the performance. Coming from a more traditional, theatre-based approach to performance, whereby the ensemble works towards and contracts into a finished product, Regina and I were intrigued to be challenged by the sound artist, who found the idea of a fixed *mise en scène* an alien and uninteresting way of working. For Mick, it was essential that something 'new' should be happening in the moment of performance, so the three of us always prepared to lay ourselves open to surprises.

In the early stages of seeking a form for the visual representation, we played with the idea of the operating theatre and the anatomy table. We wanted organs to feature in the performance, invoking their Graeco-Roman mythological and symbolic connotations: the liver as the seat of love, the kidneys as the seat of the affections and so on.[3] We thought of using intestines as skipping ropes, playing ball with hearts and kidneys, ideas that were impractical, but residues of which remained and fed into later forms. We thought about the sounds that functioning innards make, and again we were back to the common perception of the body, specifically the trunk as a hollow container with the organs and innards fixed in the right places. How would we do justice to the fascinating mechanisms of the body in keeping with Michel Leiris' sense of the body as 'a mysterious theatre'?

The idea of having objects perform as a mode of representation came as we started to explore the performing of body parts in isolation, creating a kind of puppet theatre with hands, feet, the back of an upper arm, or certain sections of the face.[4] We began to move in and out of spaces carrying animal organs and body parts on shiny metal plates – heart, liver, kidney, a pig's ear, a cow's tongue – and displaying them on surfaces such as wooden benches. Then we began to add other objects that suggested themselves to form compositions, such as a large butcher's knife, a little articulated wooden man plucked from one of our gardens. This early experiment fed into the ultimate form we chose of moving objects in and out of the mini-theatres that made up the cabinet.

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[3] References to the mythological status of organs frequently feature in the plays of Shakespeare; see, for example, *Merry Wives of Windsor* where Pistol speaks of Falstaff as loving Ford's wife '[w]ith liver burning hot' (2.2.112). Freud has written extensively on mythology and the organs of the body. See also Joseph Campbell's work on mythology and his theory that the genesis of mythology is 'in the energies of the organs of the body in conflict with each other' in *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 39.
[4] We found that the full face was so linked to an identifiable subject that it didn't seem to read well as an object; it didn't disconnect so readily from the rest of the body as, say, a foot, a hand or the back of the upper arm in isolation.

As we began to pursue the idea of displaying individual objects for contemplation, transforming them into curious objects, it made more sense to take our performers' bodies in their entirety out of the picture. The idea of displaying curious objects took us to the concept of cabinets of curiosity or, in German, '*Wunderkammern*'. We liked the fact that the German word for cabinet of curiosity - '*Wunderkammer*'- takes us beyond mere curiosity, connoting the idea of wonder in the noun *Wunder*, surprise in the verb *sich wundern*, and strange or odd in the adjective *wunderlich*. What also appealed to us was the term '*Kunstkammer*,' used in the early Renaissance period, with its connotations of microcosm or theatre of the world and memory theatre (Fiorani 268). Most of the things that feature as objects or components of objects in the cabinet are not in themselves curious. In their quotidian context, they exist only to serve some banal function or be consumed, or as Pearson and Thomas say, 'they exist for us in a state of inconspicuous familiarity' (Pearson 157), only drawing attention to themselves when they break, go missing or become unsuitable for consumption, in the case of animal parts. But by being framed in a compartment of our cabinet – almost a miniature 'proscenium arch' – they acquire a 'watchability,' demanding to be looked at and contemplated.

Having decided to create a cabinet of curiosities we began to collect objects that might lend themselves to being performed in the cabinet and that were somehow linked to our areas of interest. Some we actively looked for, as when shopping in the market for fruit and vegetables: cabbages, peppers, aubergines, organs and innards. We searched among objects we already had in our possession, in boxes of odds and ends from our attics. And some items we simply stumbled upon at various sites, such as the beach, reflecting Kantor's idea of a found object being locatable somewhere between the

garbage and infinity (*The Theatre of Tadeusz Kantor*). However, we always worked with a sense of encounter or recognition: what seemed to be actively presenting itself to us or announcing its presence? For example, I came upon an old discolored rubber glove on a beach one day and wondered how an abandoned, useless rubber glove with holes in it, likely to be washed out to sea, might acquire a whole new significance when transformed into a curious object, perhaps placed on a shiny plate, lit with a certain intensity of light and bathed in the soundscape it inspired in the sound artist. Furthermore, in this new composition it might trigger a myriad of different associations in the imagination of an audience member regarding it, from films watched, novels read, and so on. It could become, for instance, the hand of the monster created by Victor Frankenstein. What an honour, we might say, for a lowly, disused rubber glove to have such an identity conferred upon it!

In this process of 'trying things out,' we became aware of the journeys that things took from the moment we chose them, and lifted them from their quotidian context, to their being performed in the cabinet. We began to develop a sense of the criteria by which we chose them – what was the object's scope for readability? – and of different ways of looking. For instance, when we purchased innards and organs in the market we became aware that our way of looking, and the vocabulary we were using to establish what we would accept and reject as items for purchase, was totally at odds with the perception of the person behind the counter doing the selling. As we discussed the visual impact of samples of liver, kidneys, hearts, and how we thought they would read in the cabinet, asking to view the pieces from various angles, we would suddenly realize that we were

trying the patience of the salesperson. At the tripe and drisheen[5] counter in Cork's renowned English Market, I once found myself almost having to tussle with the lady behind the counter to sell me the quantities and shapes I thought would work in the cabinet, as she went to slice off chunks, telling me in good natured tones that I'd never be able to eat such large quantities. The journey the tripe and the drisheen made from sitting anonymously with larger quantities in stainless steel bowls at the market to being performed in our cabinet was a journey of transformation, a process of individuation, of acquiring objectness. The same could be said for any of the other ordinary objects, the cabbages, peppers, passion fruits etc that have made their way into the cabinet. A pig's kidney is no longer simply a piece of meat lying in a stainless steel bowl, indistinguishable from the dozens of other kidneys surrounding it that will find their way into a plastic bag and then on to the pan, and so on; by being displayed,[6] by 'performing' in a microcosmic theatre it draws attention to itself. As Terry Eagleton would say of the words chosen to craft a poem, 'there is a disproportion between the signifier […] and the signified […]' (2). Moreover, in juxtaposition with the other objects in the cabinet it might signify many different things in the minds of individual spectators.

[5] Dried sheep's blood in a kind of sausage form.
[6] We used antique silver display units – often with a reveal element such as a sliding cover – to frame the organs as precious objects.

Fig. 3, pig's kidney performed in the cabinet, video still. Declan O' Meara.

The decision to use animal organs in the cabinet, such as the pig's kidney seen in the image above, was informed by our idea of rupturing the sense of boundary between inside and outside and the desire to contemplate the mysterious theatre of the inner forces of the body that usually remain invisible to the naked eye. This impulse was informed, for example, by the paintings of Francis Bacon, which visually represent the disruption of the idea of the skin as a barrier between inside and outside or of the body having discrete boundaries. As Giles Deleuze argues, 'what fascinates Bacon is not movement, but its effect on an immobile body: heads whipped by the wind or deformed by an aspiration, but also the interior forces that climb through the flesh' (xii). When we considered the ethics of 'using' the organs and body parts of defenceless - albeit dead - animals for our art, we assuaged our conscience with the knowledge that we were rescuing them from a moribund fate as meat for purchase and consumption, giving them a brief 'career' as dramatis personae in the theatre. To date, no audience member has objected to or expressed offence at our use of animal organs. Responses usually come in the form of visceral reactions, such as 'I felt like my liver was being stroked.'

Fig. 4, cabbage, video still. Declan O' Meara.

When fruit and vegetables feature in the cabinet they are often ripped apart, cut or squashed. We chose to 'dissect' the fruit and vegetables rather than the organs, as that would have referenced their moribund existence as meat. Interestingly, spectators frequently found the performance of the fruit and vegetables more disturbing as compared with that of the organs. These dismemberings tie in with our impulse to link our own curiosity to what seems to be man's insatiable need to take things apart to find out how they work, the endless quest to get inside things and reduce them to their component parts in order to get to the bottom of their mysteries. An influence in this instance was Tim Marshall's *Murdering to Dissect* which thematises how easily this drive can degenerate into destructiveness and criminal activity.[7] Marshall's study on grave-robbing takes its title from Wordsworth's 1798 poem 'The Tables Turned':

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[7] For example, Marshall outlines the case of the 19th century Edinburgh anatomist, Dr Robert Knox, who obtained fresh corpses by paying the infamous Irishmen William Burke and William Hare, who smothered their victims in a manner that left no signs of violence on the body.

> Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things;
> We murder to dissect. (qtd in Marshall 1)

This extract from Wordsworth's poem has also featured as an 'object' in our cabinet. [8]

Fig. 5. arms in isolation, video still.

Regina and I used our hands to animate and manipulate the objects in the cabinet. Our hands therefore became an intrinsic part of the performance, forming compositions with the objects. But they also featured as performed objects in isolation, as did our feet, and parts of our arms, legs and faces. This performance choice was informed by the photographs of Francesca Woodman. These give expression to the fragility of psycho-

[8] In the earlier performances Regina and I used radio-microphones during the performance to add text fragments to the soundscape at intervals chosen in the moment of performance. Further text fragments we used were taken, for example, from 'The Applicant' and 'Cut' by Silvia Plath, 'Ashputtle *or* The Mother's Ghost' by Angela Carter, 'Salt' by Pablo Neruda and 'The Nose' by Christian Morgenstern. For the later performances we decided to take our live voices out of the performance to avoid an association in the spectator's mind between us as performers and our body parts as 'objects' in performance.

corporeal boundaries, as the body of the artist – at once subject and object of her images – merges with and fades into disintegrating surfaces such as the cracked, crumbling walls of derelict houses and tombstones, behind strips of loose wallpaper; isolated limbs emerge from holes in porous walls. Other sources of inspiration for our use of our bodies included the photographs *Nude, Chairs, Arms and Legs* by Edward Weston or *Peek a Boo Fingers* by Ernestine Ruben, which present abstracted body parts in relation to the field and the frame of the image (Ewing 39; 41). Framing and performing abstracted body parts allows them to become synecdochic, acquiring properties of the whole, such as a personality, the ability to think and perceive, which resonates with Richard Schechner's argument that, 'the body is an organism of endless adaptability. A knee can think, a finger can laugh, a belly cry, a brain walk and a buttock listen' (132). Limbs or a mouth perceived thus, in abstraction, give the spectator the freedom to contemplate and imaginatively engage with the idea of a hand or a foot without having to negotiate the owner. This ensures that the spectator's focus is consistently on the contents of the cabinet and not on the performers concealed behind it.

As manipulators of the objects from behind the cabinet, we see nothing of what the audience sees and, with each successive performance, I have noticed that I work increasingly with a sense of looking and listening with my hands. I often close my eyes to help me to hear the soundscape created by the sound artist, and respond better with my hands. Because of the improvisatorial and abstract nature of the piece, it is always fascinating to hear how spectators respond to the objects, what journeys the objects take them on, what connections they make between objects in the cabinet in any given moment. The responses are rendered all the more diverse by virtue of the fact that, unlike

the traditional static cabinet of curiosity, this is a live, kinaesthetic cabinet. It is made up of composite elements that are constantly shifting under the spectators' gazes and the performers' manipulations. Even if the material objects remain still for a time, the soundscape that forms part of the composition is also constantly shifting. Sometimes we adjust the degree of light illuminating an object with the individual dimmer switches and again, the composite object becomes something slightly different.

The philosopher Michael Moreau argues that, 'the world seems to be full of objects that lack sharp boundaries and in this sense really are vague' (334).[9] He invites the reader to take any ordinary material object: on close inspection she will find that something is always tearing away or coming loose, microscopic particles are always wearing off at the edges or evaporating away. He takes the example of 'Tibbles the cat' whose loose whisker will ultimately drop off for good. This loose whisker is characterized as a 'questionable' part of Tibbles (334). Parts that detach combine with something else to form something new. Almost every object we can apprehend, therefore, is in a constant state of flux: as Morreau writes, 'composition is completely unrestricted' (337). It could be argued that *The Cabinet of Curiosities* is a theatricalised version of Moreau's ideas, in that it draws attention to, or formalizes, and performs this permanent state of flux that objects find themselves in. The shifting assemblages performed on the twelve mini-stages that are interpenetrated by the sound elements, and that in the course of the 30-minute performance form a kind of palimpsest, draw the spectator into an activity of 'completely unrestricted' composition. This brings us back to Emerson's idea of a process of marriage between object and subject.

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[5] Objects here can mean anything from organisms, cities, abstract entities to ordinary material objects and the objects are described as vague because their functional parts get lost *gradually*.

The Cabinet of Curiosities continues as a work-in-progress for GAITKRASH. To date, we have performed the piece just six times and with each successive performance we have learned to trust how our impulses respond in the moment, as well as the piece's capacity to engage our audiences. Spectators have commented that attending our performance is like having 'dream time,' allowing memory shards to float to the surface and connect with the objects in the cabinet in whatever way suggests itself. In this sense we could describe the piece as post-dramatic, since it relates to the spectator's sense of the world but presents no 'surveyable whole' (Lehmann 11). The spectator creates the piece out of her personal aggregation of narratives in combination with the visual and aural impulses offered in performance. The cabinet, although in itself a bounded entity or container, is full of gaps and holes, unmarked spaces, and this circumstance allows the piece to resonate with the spectator's inner landscape. According to Julie Salverson, it is these gaps in a non-literalistic representational form 'that hold […] the circle of knowing open,' that create space 'across which the familiar and the strange can gaze upon each other' (3).

In further phases of the work we plan to invite audience members to place things in a box before the performance that we will use as objects in the cabinet. We would like to gather stories in post-performance discussions about the new lives these things acquired in the minds of spectators as a result of 'objectifying them as foci of thought' (Pearson 159) and contemplation in performance. We also plan to travel with the piece, making it specific to the places it is performed in by filling the cabinet with objects we find locally, in markets, dustbins, skips, wherever an object beckons to us. As the project has evolved, the diversity of spectators' feedback on which objects have signified for

them personally has taught us that the lighter our touch and the more playful our approach to working the objects in the performance the more we set them free as objects of engagement for the watcher. We are learning to work with a sense that '[t]he material world around us is inherently to-be-interpreted' (Pearson 155) because, in Emerson's words, there is 'a radical correspondence between visible things and human thought' (Brown, 60).

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The Fan of Noh Theatre: Object of Encounter

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The Japanese Fan

The folding fan is probably one of the representative images that most commonly dwell in the gallery of picturesque metaphors of Japan. Whether in the hands of a beautiful *geisha* or a valiant *samurai*, the fan is one of those objects that the external gaze has understood as peculiar of Japanese culture and that more successfully made an impact on the construction of the myth of Japan. Through different interpretations and re-elaborations of its appearance and use, the fan has become, for the foreign observer, a stereotyped object, like the mandolin for the Italian or the *beret* for the French. However, in Japan the folding fan is still a rather common object and it constitutes an indispensable part the traditional outfit, a personal accessory that both men and women carry. Its functions are numerous and wide-ranging, and changed considerably through history, according to the evolution of its features. Unlike its more ancient cousin, the stiff, leaf-like fan (*uchiwa*), which has always been relegated to the accomplishment of practical tasks, such as ventilation or fly-whisking, the folding fan (*ōgi* or *sensu*) has developed a more sophisticated set of usages which frequently transcend its immediate material nature. While the *uchiwa* has Chinese origins – it was probably imported in Japan in the early 8th century – the birth of the *ōgi* is regarded as an original creation of the Japanese mind. [1] Nowadays, while the *uchiwa* is considered more as a household implement, the *ōgi* is an accessory that belongs to a person, not to a place. One of the theories regarding the origins of the folding fan sees the

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[1] For further readings about the history and usages of the Japanese fan please consult J.Hutt. *Ōgi: A History of the Japanese Fan* (London: Dauphin, 1997) and U. A. Casal, 'The Lore of the Japanese Fan' *Monumenta Nipponica* 16 .(1960): 54-117.

wooden tablet that *shinto* priests hold upright as its direct ancestor (Casal 73-74). 'Fans indicated social status or aesthetic sensitivity; they were (and continue to be) an essential part of the formal Japanese costume, and they are valued both as votive offerings and as art objects' (Bethe & Brazell 71).

This paper will focus on one of the contexts in which the famous Japanese implement shows its most significant and sophisticated usages: Noh theatre. Even though the way the folding fan is used in Noh is rather unconventional, in this particular circumstance the fan best expresses its symbolic and evocative potential. I will explore how, in the context of a Noh performance, the fan transforms itself into an object of interaction: a means of communication between the actor and the audience. Since its origins, the fan has been used as an object through which relationships are established, a medium to enter in contact with other entities, a catalyst of energies: in other words, the fan has been a charged and powerful object of engagement. The folding fan is, then, not simply an ornament, as the Western observer might have received it at first, but something close to a precious tool, made to be touched and manipulated, or something with which to physically interact. In a more corporeal vision of it, the fan can be seen as an extension of one's body, a feature that becomes more visible when it is used for one of its most basic employments: pointing at things. As U. A. Casal notes, 'A closed folding-fan is best adapted to respectfully point at things; while one may also do so with a "relaxed" hand, the stiff index is vulgar' (95). The fan becomes a neutral means to engage in communication: what is pointing, if not the most basic means of interaction? From the most primal intention to the most sophisticated one, pointing is the most essential way to address one's reality. As the child points his finger to acknowledge his world, the sorcerer points the magic stick to transform it. The fan is thus a multipurpose object, but also a multilayered one: it

accomplishes practical tasks and, at the same time, it is imbued with other meanings. The Japanese folding fan is what Roland Barthes would probably call a *sign-function*, something that has ‘a substance of expression whose essence is not to signify […] an object of *everyday* use, used by society in a *derivative* way, to signify something’ (41; my italics). How is the process of investing the fan of ‘other meanings’ carried out in the case of Noh theatre? The Noh fan of is an implement which, besides being a refined artefact, is immediately associated with the peculiar movements of the actor: what is the invisible force that attracts the attention of the actor on the fan? In my training experience as a Noh practitioner with Udaka Michishige of the Kongoh School and the International Noh Institute in Kyoto, Japan, I have the opportunity to closely study the way Noh actors manipulate the fan and I am able to collect observations about the fan both from the spectator’s and the performer’s point of view. Drawing from this experience, in this paper I will try and suggest a critical perspective on the use of the fan in Noh, demonstrating how its multipurpose qualities are also present in the Noh context and exploring the underlying principle that touches on different aspects of Noh acting style, which allows to establish a communication between the performer and the audience through the poetic use of the fan.

The Fan of Noh Theatre

In Japan the fan has been – and to some extent still is – an everyday life item, a traditional but rather ordinary accessory. If not as common as it might have been before Japan’s adoption of Western fashion, the folding fan is still used and carried as part of the dress. In Noh, the most ancient of Japanese living theatre traditions, the folding fan, along with the white split-toe *tabi* socks, form the basic accessories that any practitioner, from the novice

to the master-actor, will wear and carry. In the Noh classes I attend in Kyoto with Udaka Michishige, I often notice how now it is a widely accepted custom for amateur practitioners not to change their Western-style clothes into the traditional *kimono* and *hakama* (split skirt) for their normal practice. Dressed in trousers and a jumper, the *tabi* and the fan are the unchanged signs that connect the modern times practice to the ancient world that Noh belongs to. In the immovability of the chest, forming a whole block with neck and hips, in the negated facial identity, converted in an expressionless face, the actor's hands and feet are the only sensorial extremities through which the signs of his human presence are still visible.

All the members of the cast involved in a performance normally carry a fan. While musicians, members of the chorus, and stage assistants carry a rather common and sober fan (*shizume-ōgi*), the actors use a special, richly decorated one (*chūkei*). As the former is never opened and is seldom manipulated when used by non-actors, the latter – different in shape and decoration – constitutes the fulcrum of the actor's actions.[2] Whatever its appearance or purpose, when brought on stage and set in a performative context, the verge of Barthes's *sign-function* between *everyday* use and *derivative* use starts to blur. After their entrance, once sitting at their place, the members of the chorus will place the fan in front of their knees only to lift it carefully with both hands when singing. From a practical point of view, the fan helps the singers of the chorus to set their arms in the shape of an 'O' a pose that influences the way the chant is delivered. The stage assistants sitting on the back of the stage will place the fane at their sides, ready to move quickly in case of

[2] The Noh fan and its patterns have been more technically analyzed by K. Komparu (1983) in *The Noh Theatre: Principles and Perspectives* (New York: Weatherhill/Tankosha, 1983) and M. Bethe and K. Brazell in *Dance in the Nō Theater Dance Analysis*. Vol. 1 of *Dance in the Nō Theater*. 3 Vols. East Asian Papers 29 (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1986).

emergency. Whatever its function or position might be, the fan is always manipulated with great care: the ordinary object has now entered the world of the extra-ordinary.

The fan of the main actor (*shite*) is the one in which this transfiguration most manifest. Noh theatre is famous for the minimalism of its scenography. In this centuries-old traditional art, the visuals are not determined by the choice of a director or a set designer, but prescribed by precise indications about stage properties, costumes, and masks which are part of each stylistic school's patrimony. The *shite*, who normally acts both as director and as a producer, will generate his personal interpretation of the play in terms of movement, music, text and set design, according to the tradition. In several cases, the tradition itself allows a choice of codified variations, so that a *shite* actor is able to perform the same play more than once in his life, albeit always introducing different elements, or at least changing the members of the cast. When the *shite* reaches a particularly high level of mastery and a respectable position in the professional community, it is even possible for the actor to introduce personal variations that could be considered as 'interpretations' of a moment in the play.

One of the peculiarities of Noh theatre is the modular structure that allows the members involved in a performance to train separately on texts that belong to a fixed canon, only to meet on stage for a unique performative event. This particular system aims at maintaining a high degree of freshness and impromptu on stage: the performance is not a mere reproduction of something that has been extensively rehearsed and perfected in detail, but the result of the encounter of those who will take part in it. Each performer, musician, stage assistant, and member of the chorus, will confront his own vision – if not interpretation – of the play, which in turn is the result of years of meticulous training.

When one dedicates his or her life only to the mastery of the art, only following the oral, individual instruction of a master, and not relating to a body of knowledge identical for every performer, the sensitivity of the performers heightens to the point that the slightest change in the interpretation of the text is felt as deeply significant. The one-to-one training that all Noh performers and musicians undertake entails not only a high sensitivity to one's own art, but also the openness which is necessary, once the cast meets on stage, to accept different interpretations of the same piece and to fluidly interact and integrate with them. It is now clear how the performance itself is a continuous dialogue between all its components. As a result, a Noh performance is successful when its partakers are able to mutually listen and communicate in the weaving of the thick waft of engagements of performers and audience.

Likewise, the stage props (*tsukurimono*) are often produced especially for one single performance, and later dismantled. Etymologically, the word *tsukurimono* (lit. decoration) suggests something which is created, manufactured, fabricated (the verb *tsukuru*, 'to make'). In the world of Noh, nothing is replicated: both audience and performers are engaged in an event that will remain unique in their memories. However, Noh theatre's set design does not aim to achieve the reproduction of a lifelike environment: spare elements that constitute the scenery are usually reduced in size and have more a metonymical or synecdochal function rather than a realistic one. A thin bamboo frame will suggest a boat; a small box-like structure could stand for a hut or a grave. Moreover, the majority of these stage props – such as the bell for *Dōjō-ji*, the brine pails for *Matsukaze* or the *torii* (gate of a Shinto shrine) for *Nonomiya* – are typical of a specific play and never used otherwise. Stage properties are not necessarily present in every play: in various cases, a play is staged without the use of scenography: the narration and depiction of the story is

left to chant and dance and, of course, to the imagination of the spectator. Especially in these cases, the paucity of the set-design, only inhabited by the unchanging pine-tree painted on the backdrop of the stage (*kagami-ita*), contrasts with the sumptuousness of the costumes, moving landscapes that recount the story of the character though their colours and patterns.

As part of the costume, the fan is also decorated with allusive motifs and illustrations, and it is chosen according to the nature of character that will appear on stage. The sun setting in the waves; scenes of Chinese court life; flowers on coloured background. In the sobriety of the set design, in the minimalism of the action, the fan of the main actor is the real core of the play and the centre of the attention of the audience. The *chūkei*, the fan of the main actor (*shite*) is the one in which the transfiguration of Barthes's *sign-function* is most manifest. The *fan* can become a sword, a cup, a pillow; at the same time, in a more abstract sense, the fan can be resentment, longing or bliss; it can be an instant on earth or eternity in the universe: vivid images and pure abstractions equally materialize in the fan. In the exceptional event of a Noh performance, in which secular and supernatural meet, the fan is not alluding anymore: it *is*. In addition to that, in the hands of the *shite* the fan is the sorcerer's magic stick: not only does it transform itself, it also transforms reality. Through his waving, scooping and pointing, the fan materializes the invisible: the moon disappearing in the clouds, the wind rippling the sea in a pine bay, a horde of ghost warriors in hell. Although the fan has a repertoire of canonical movements, new utilizations of the fan allow us to see how it can be vested with contemporary signifiers: for instance, in the recent 'contemporary Noh play' *The Diver*, by Noda Hideki and Colin Teevan, the fan still retains its allusive power, even if it is adapted to more contemporary usages, from

mobile phone to champagne glasses.[3] In this case, the content might have changed, yet the underlying principle governing the use of the Noh fan remains the same. In my view, the tradition is respected and maintained alive when contemporary elements are incorporated into traditional patterns.

The Empty Fan

The *shite* of Noh theatre uses the fan according to set movements called *kata*: these are fixed modules which are combined in longer sequences that constitute more complex dances. *Kata* can yield various degrees of realism, from a stylized gesture commonly used to express grief (*shiori*) to more abstract movements which gain more meaning or connotation only when combined with the text chanted by the actors or the chorus. It is this degree of abstraction that allows these latter movements to be multifunctional: they will acquire a meaning depending on the reading of the spectator in the context of the play. According to Giangiorgio Pasqualotto, these movements are 'beautiful because of their purity: because of their forgetfulness of any empirical determination, because of their distance from any realistic suggestion, because of their emptiness of mimetic intentions' (131; my translation). The most frequent among these non-realistic movements is to take four steps forward, opening the arms, then go back to the basic stance stepping back twice (*shikake hiraki*). This *kata* is the most common of the repertoire and the most engaging one at the same time: the actor points at something, establishes a contact, and then acknowledges it. In training, masters rarely provide explanations of the movements that they are teaching, since the knowledge of Noh is assimilated though exposure and imitation, rather than through analysis and intellectualization. The learning process is by no

[3] Hideki Noda and Colin Teevan, *The Diver*, dir. Hideki Noda, Soho Theatre, London, 12 Jul. 2008.

means rational from the trainee's viewpoint: there is no further re-elaboration of what is learnt just because it is learnt with a minimum filter of explanations or translations, both from the master and from the student. At first, teaching is not understood, rather, it is memorized. All of which constitutes a thought system, on which individual conjectures might be based, that has to be forgotten or at least restrained in its interpretative power. This does not mean, for example, that a movement that has been taught is devoid of meaning, but that the meaning is not taught contextually with the gesture. It will be up to the student, as it is to the master, to discover or to create the meaning of the gesture. Hence Noh theatre discloses its multifaceted and ever-changing nature.

I would like to extend this concept outside the teaching environment and to transpose it to the performance, where the communication I described before takes place between actor and audience. The movements of Noh, including those performed with the fan, are not part of a system of symbols. Noh is not a language that can be accurately translated or decoded once its grammar is mastered. 'Unlike the *mudra* hand language used in Indian traditional dance and theatre, *kata* in *nō* are largely without specific symbolic meaning' (Emmert 27). In Noh, the abstract movement is transmitted as pure *signifier*: its synchrony with a potential *signified* is a variable datum, and exclusively depends on one's personal vision of it. The *signifier* (movement, dance, play) possesses a degree of abstraction that allows it to evade a fixed synchrony to a given *signified*, as the same gesture engages different interpretations from those who watch it. Devoid of a defined code, the audience is naturally engaged in the construction of the images that the actor is suggesting. This engagement is thus triggered by a lack of information, and it is precisely into this blank space that the audience is introduced. In *The Implied Reader*, reader-

response critic Wolfgang Iser looks at vacancies in the literary text as 'blanks that allow the reader to bring a story to life, to assign meaning, and by making his decision he implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text' (280). According to Iser's analysis, the asynchrony between text and reader generates what he calls 'structures of indeterminacy,' negative instances 'which relate less to the text itself than to the conditions established between text and reader during the reading process. This kind of indeterminacy functions as propellant – it conditions the reader's 'formulation' of the text' (*The Act*, 183). The same perspective fits well with the vision of Noh theatre not as a one-way storytelling process, but as an event that unavoidably entails constant interplay between actors and audience. If, as Anne Ubersfeld has suggested, 'the act of filling the gap is the very source of theatrical pleasure' (129), the fan is one of the most powerful tools through which the Noh actor displays a vast range of semiotic absences, invitations for the audience to participate in the production of the theatrical text. The fan is not only an accessory completing the costume of a character: it is also used in an abstract way, to symbolize objects or concepts that are not concretely present on stage. During the dance, the *shite* detaches the fan from its physical bond to the character on stage and expands its function to the metaphoric universe belonging to the character.

The Fan of the Actor, the Fan of the Character

By displaying empty frames, the fan, here acting as transmitter and receiver, is charged with meaning in two ways: by the character's constellation of emotions and by the audience's attention and intention. In the special balance between abstraction and concreteness that constitutes Noh theatre, the fan stands on the verge between metaphor and materiality as it moves according to a force that is at once that of the actor and of the

character: in the fan, the two identities converge and reveal themselves. Is it the heart of the character or that of the actor that is unfolding in front of the spectators? When a Noh play begins the fan of the *shite* is closed, and the act of opening it usually takes place at a special moment in the play, such as the *kuse* dance,[4] where the conceptual core of the play is performed; likewise, at the very end of the play the fan is closed again, before the cast exits the stage.

Among the images that Udaka Michishige has offered me in order to help me visualize this intense movement, one has particularly struck me for its poetical resonances. Udaka-sensei speaks of how, at the end of the representation, all the emotions, the passions, the torments and the desires that were summoned on stage will be closed again in the fan, as the *shite* makes his way off the *hashigakari* bridge. This comment not only describes well the emotional intensity of this gesture, but also – expanding the symbolic significance of the fan – it connects the character's emotions with those of the actor, showing how the theatrical and quotidian aspects of performance constantly intertwine in Noh theatre. The word that indicates the main character, *shite*, maintains this critical verge, as it defines both the actor and the character (e.g. the person taking the leading role in a performance is called *shite*; at the same time the ghost of Taira no Kiyotsune is the *shite* of the play *Kiyotsune*).

In the short excerpts of Noh plays which are performed in recitals, the actors dance and sing without costumes, simply wearing *montsuki*[5] and *hakama*, and in several pieces the dance – in this case only a portion of a full play – does not formally begin before the fan is opened. When the character is not strongly portrayed by the mask and the costume,

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[4] The *kuse* is one of the core sections of a Noh play (see Komparu 284).
[5] Formal black kimono decorated with family crests *(mon)*.

the fan takes the role of transfiguring the actor or at least to blur the distinction between him or her and the character. The act of opening the fan is not a mechanical preparation for the dance, but a symbolically and emotionally charged moment of passage between the ordinary presence of the actor and the extra-ordinary presence of the character.[6]

The concentration of such a great dramatic power in the fan is not something that belongs exclusively to the so-called 'Japanese sensibility': Noh disposes empty signs, kinetic ideograms devoid of any contextual meaning, thus accessible for those who are capable of filling in its empty frames. Among the Western practitioners who have encountered Noh theatre, two Frenchmen have been captured by the catalytic power of the fan of Noh theatre. During a tour of Japan in 1960, Jean-Luis Barrault attended a Noh performance for the second time (the first was at the Théâtre des Nations in 1957). Struck by the interior, poetic charge that the fan was able to express, Barrault wrote:

> The *shite,* strikingly immobile, has opened wide his fan. His inner life is there offered to all: his soul unfolded. While the Chorus chants the torments of his character in unison, he makes his fan undulate and tremble. We have the impression that these emanations from the soul literally come from the object itself. The soul quivers. Our eyes are riveted on the fan. The actor's power of concentration is such that, from a distance, he can direct our attention upon this determined point. There is no lighting, yet it seems that the entire stage is plunged into darkness and only the fan is luminous. (Barrault qtd in Pronko 95)

Some years before Barrault, Paul Claudel had the chance to see Noh performed live during his stay in Tokyo as French ambassador between 1922 and 1928. In his eyes, the fan was

> the human foliage at the fringe of his arm; it imitates like a wing all the paces of the thought that beats, that seeks for the ground or that glides up and twirls in the sky. […] When the reed-cutter of the homonymous Noh play [*Ashikari*], finds again his

[6] These gestures are also performed differently in terms of quickness: to this respect, I find several parallelisms between these movements and the opening and closing of the *age-maku*, the coloured curtain that separates the *hashigakari* bridge and the mirror room. The opening and closing of the fan is not only symbolically reminiscent of the unveiling and hiding of the character, but is also performed with different speed and intensity according to the type of character which is entering, both physically and metaphorically, the stage.

> long-lost wife, their emotion is not uncovered but in a quiver of their fans that, only for an instant, confounds their breaths. (Claudel qtd in Savarese 185-186; my translation).

The touching descriptions of Barrault and Claudel show how the fan has been understood as a ‘universal’ means of expression, which goes beyond the specificity of a culturally connotated object. As a matter of fact, these poetic comments, as well as Udaka-sensei’s interpretation of the closing fan, are particularly striking because of the way the fan is depicted as an ambiguous entity which is associated in turn with both the character and the actor. It appears that the fan dwells in an undefined area between the world of the *performance* and the world of the *performer*. Perhaps the fan belongs neither to the actor, nor to the character, but instead constitutes a third dimension, an intersection between these two portions, a space in which the audience is engaged in a productive dialogue, a brush that both actors and spectators use to paint the character on the blank canvas of the empty stage.

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The Interactive Object – Undermining the Artist and Empowering the Audience.

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> [In interactive performance] the audience is lifted out of their seat of distanced contemplation and placed in the limelight of subjective physical involvement: addressed as a storyboard controller, co-author, actor or self-performer. (Zapp 77)

Interactive performance has developed significantly over the last century ranging from Duchamp's *Rotary Glass Plates (Precision Optics)* (1920) (Rush 201), which required the audience to revolve a metal axis and view the spinning plates from a metre away, to the performances of Stelarc's *Prosthetic Head* (2002) in which the spectators could engage in a dialogue with the object of Stelarc's art (Dixon 564). In more recent years the use of objects in interactive performance has enabled artists to question whether the audience's voice can be relocated into the performance constructs that traditionally avoid active participation. By 'objects' I mean artefacts that play a primary role in an artist's work, and 'interactive materials that place greater emphasis on audience and performer dialogue' (Fenemore 6) than on the more traditional performer-to-performer dialogic activity. In this framework the object is not just a functional artefact that supports the performance or artist; it acts as a catalyst that incites the audience to make artistic decisions that directly influence the performance. In this way, the object allows the audience to move away from 'distanced contemplation' (Zapp 77) in order to create a personal journey during the performance.

Because the object allows the audience to be lifted out of their voyeuristic role and shifted into the seat of the creator, the artist's role becomes increasingly more difficult to define, particularly when objects demand more attention than the performer. The shift from the 'traditional' performance roles is not necessarily the result of audience interaction with performers. Instead, the relationships between object and audience, and

object and performer, provide a performance interface that supports the audience's voice through the subjective engagement with an object.

Using the performance *Opportunity Costs* as a framework, this paper explores the role of the object and how it challenges the traditional performance construct of performer and audience. The definition of traditional performance constructs may usually be framed within the codes and conventions of the physical and metaphorical barrier located between the performer and the audience. However for the purpose of this paper, Anna Fenemore's analysis of viewing traditional performance articulates my definition better: 'spectators always look according to their individual preference/tastes, but at a more social level they know where to look in normative performance: straight ahead at the lighted patch. In doing so they make a conscious and intentional choice to "obey" [...]' (11).

The Object Shift in *Opportunity Costs*

In June 2008, Alison Llewellyn-Jones and I devised an interactive performance titled *Opportunity Costs*, at Kingston Communication Stadium (KC Stadium), Hull. The piece was commissioned for Hull's Business Week, an event that was used to celebrate business within the Humberside region. This celebration took place over seven days, with six-thousand business people (delegates) from Humberside invited to engage with events, conferences and network opportunities. The physical performance took place on the last day of the conference week and was placed within the boundaries of a pathway that was located between the conference centre and the KC Stadium. Our brief was to create an interactive performance that reflected the contemporary financial market. As artists we wanted *Opportunity Costs* to encourage the delegates of Hull's Business Week to take risks at a time when ventures were financially 'more risky' than usual.

Alison and I carried five-hundred balloons (our objects); besuited, we stood and faced the six-thousand delegates walking towards us, and waited to engage them. Even though, in our suits, we were indistinguishable from the mass of business bodies that surrounded us, we still had a presence. The balloons that hovered above us acted as a marker to our location, mapping our presence: 'a visual picture [was] created through the relationship of visual objects' (Fenemore 6). We engaged the delegates by 'selling' them our objects, but the exchange here had no monetary value. Instead, we offered the delegates the ability to make decisions that encourage a private performance, or to be more explicit, we offered the delegates the ability to create personal narratives. In return we required their time, the few accumulated seconds it would take to document their risk. Within the currency of these traded seconds, our aim was to encourage the delegates to write a risk on to our balloons which they felt to be achievable, if slightly too precarious to take, in our current financial climate.

The role of the object in *Opportunity Costs* is to aid the transmission between 'watcher' and 'doer': it allows the audience to customise their performance. The object is used as a guide, to establish or remind the audience of the rule of our performance, which is to use the balloon, 'the object,' as a chronological guide that counts down the time left to action the risk. We have no way of knowing whether the delegate has used the guide, however, we realised that this is not as important as the interaction and the claim of ownership the audience member experiences over the object.

Once the audience member has claimed ownership, by documenting their risk on to the balloon, two separate temporal structures are created; the *chronos (χρόνος)* and the *kairos (καιρός). Chronos* is the chronological measurement of our day-to-day living, the time spent engaged in our dialogic activities. Conversely *kairos* is the unmeasured time located 'outside [of] space-time' (Stone 1), it is the process of allowing narration; to

accumulate the *chronos* moments together in order to create small personal narratives. Despite their Greek origins, the terms are used in this paper as a way of identifying a dichotomy between the chronological and the metaphorical. The physical *chronos* time exists within the performance boundaries established by the performer; the subjective personal narratives that are created once the audience member engages with the object, are located within the *kairos* structure. The position of the object in relation to this dichotomy depends on who is claiming ownership of the balloons.

When the performer is claiming ownership, the object is located within a sequential *chronos* structure. The term '*chronos*' is appropriated in Robert Smithson's art where 'time is frequently represented as the quality of the mobility of discussion' (Coleman 5). This is understood further through the chronology of 'daily time' which Coleman identifies as Smithson's conversation with daily activities such as picking up the paper and staring out the bus window (5). In *Opportunity Costs* it reflects the fragility of conversation as the performers try to engage in dialogic activities with multiple prospective audience members. The performers never actually manage to conclude the performative action of discussion because the audience always moves on to experience their own personal narrative with the object.

Once the audience claims ownership of the balloons, after having written on the object and engaging with the *chronos* time structure, the object shifts into the *kairos* structure where the audience chooses the right time to act on their risk. This term can also be found in Smithson's work, where after he engaged and created his art, the collection shifted into an accumulated period of time in which Smithson's personal narratives could be viewed. In considering Smithson's personal narratives, Coleman's suggestion that '*[k]airos* can be further understood within its usage in the Greek phrase of "once upon a time": *mia fora kai ena kairo*' (17), indicates Smithson's metaphorical movement outside

of the boundaries of his established physical site. When the audience in *Opportunity Costs* decide to engage with the object, like Smithson, they make the decision to create their own narratives. These narratives are a result of the audience engagement with the accumulated seconds located in the *chronos* structure through the physical engagement with the object. The *kairos* timescape takes into consideration both the moment the decision is made to document on the balloon, and the personal narrative that still exists after this event.

After leaving the uncompleted work, audience members continue to engage with their object. Simultaneously, the performers engage with a new prospective audience, creating a cycle. The repetition of engaging with an audience and then losing them, so that they can continue their own private performance with their object not only emphasises Smithson's notion of fragmented discussion, but also places the artist in a slightly uncomfortable position. We are in a perpetual state of never completing work; there is no end to the performance; the subjective experience of 'feeling' like performers stops because we are not engaged in the development of a performance narrative. We realise that the object in this process problematizes the roles of performer and audience; when the object is removed from the sequential *chronos* site it undermines the performer by allowing the audience the choice to take creative power and consciously decide to disobey the traditional performance constructs.

Rachel Zerihan identifies the intimate nature of audience creative content, and contemplates how the 'One-to-One' performance construct echoes Barthes' 'Death of the Author.' Zerihan continues with her analysis of intimate performances and the role of the audience by suggesting that in 'One-to-One [performances] we are lifted out of the passive role of audience member and re-positioned into an activated state of witness or collaborator' (1). Although *Opportunity Costs* is not strictly a One-to-One performance,

as it continues outside of the performer's space, the same constructs that Zerihan highlights, particularly the re-positioning of audiences, exist in some form within *Opportunity Costs.* Although the term 're-positioning' suggests a movement away from traditional performance constructs, which *Opportunity Costs* adheres to, it also suggests a geographical location or point of view which may be indicative of One-to-One performance, where the artist is still the main presence within the work itself. However, the interactive performance of *Opportunity Costs*, and other works such as Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke* (2007), and Palmer and Popat's *Dancing in the Streets* (2005), create an engagement between audience and object that is more than a shift of intimate perspectives and re-positions: they empower the audience and move them into the new role of creator.

Zerihan's articulation of the term 'audience' suggests passivity and invisibility, and, if we compare both these terms to Steve Dixon's discussions of Cyber Theatre, we can suggest that both passivity and invisibility negate the performance constructs of interactive work because the audience's engagement is limited. The lack of engagement in traditional performance structures is due to the fact that 'the performance space [in interactive work] share[s] far more than in conventional performance environments, since the spectator is also a visible participator' (Dixon 509). Dixon's use of the term 'visible participator' is contentious; the term 'visible' could simply infer a presence within the performance. In traditional performance constructs the performer is able to adjust and develop techniques to manipulate the feeling of the audience; if the audience is not responsive the actor will manipulate his or her technique further. This dialogic activity, although not wholly associated with what we assume to be interactivity, does initiate a conversation that positions the audience 'visibly' within the space. Although on certain levels the audiences do participate and are 'visible' within traditional performance

structures, they are unable to enter into a *kairos* state; hence, they cannot significantly change the course of the performance, or develop a personal narrative, but remain un-activated. Conversely, if the performance construct does activate the audience and locates their voice (and not just their physical presence) within the work, they are then reconfigured into the role of creator; consequently the term audience then becomes redundant and a new terminology is needed to articulate their role within the performance.

An obvious term to adopt here would be Boal's concept of the 'spectactor.' The techniques associated with this term are employed in both 'Forum' and 'Invisible' Theatre, in which an interaction from the audience is required as the 'spectator ceases to delegate power […] and theatre is transformed from passivity into action' (Dixon 562). As Dixon observes, a shift of power from the performer to the audience is needed in order to reconfigure the passive audience into the active state of 'spectactor'; this shift of power from audience to performer is similar to that in O*pportunity Costs*. To make a direct comparison between Boal's concept of 'spectactor' and *Opportunity Costs*, we are able to see that both take into consideration the shift of power from performer to audience. This is particularly evident if we highlight Dixon's comment on Boal's views on the rejection of Aristotelian notions of theatre: the values of the world are imposed on the audience who project power onto the characters on stage (Dixon 562). This delegation of power hinders the audience's ability to choose,[1] which in turn negates the essence of the 'spectactor' and *Opportunity Costs.*

In *Opportunity Costs* and Boal's Forum Theatre, the audience thinks for himself, and because of this empowerment he has the ability to make choices. However, unlike

[1] Although the audience's ability to choose in traditional performance is hindered, it is not diminished. It should be noted that the audience can choose to stay or leave the performance. They can also choose to listen or ignore, but the difference between the choices in traditional performance and *Opportunity Costs* is that the audience are unable to enter into a *kairos* moment when engaged with the performance.

Forum Theatre, the object in *Opportunity Costs* allows the audience to continue their performance outside of the designated performance space. It should be noted, however, that the object's role in allowing a pluralism of performances is not consistent in all interactive performances that are object-oriented. Blast Theory's work, *Rider Spoke*, (2007), allows the participators to use a Nokia N800 (a Linux based internet tablet which functions as the object of engagement), and a Mountain Bike to navigate London. Via the Nokia N800, '[the participator is] given a question and invited to look for an appropriate hiding place where […] [they] will record the answer' (Blast Theory). Only when the rider has finished navigating the city, and has found a new location that has not been used by another rider, can they engage with the object and record the position of their location. The element of choice, or *kairos*, that the Nokia N800 allows does not exist outside of the artist's performance space. Therefore the object does not allow the audience (the cyclist) to make choices regarding their own performance outside of the artist's physical *chronos* infrastructure. For this reason, Boal's term 'spectactor' may be neatly applied to the audience members of *Rider Spoke* (2007) as although they are audience members who do not 'delegate power' to the performer, they are unable to complete a deep personal narrative with the object. 'Spectactor' therefore, does not accurately describe the audience in *Opportunity Costs*, because the term does not explicitly suggest the objects' ability to create a multitude of performances and performance sites that exist outside the artist's *chronos* infrastructure.

Taking into consideration the analysis of Boal's 'spectactor,' the new terminology needed should reflect the myriad of performers and performance spaces that the object allows. The term '*part*icipant' suggests a holistic performance concept that also implies that a myriad of subjective, individual performances is needed. In *Opportunity Costs*, when the audience removes the object from the adopted performance space, they are

reconfigured into the role of *part*icipant; the process allows them to become an active and visible member of the performance. The term *part*icipant highlights a micro-performance role located within the boundaries of a greater holistic conceptual performance. On their own, the *part*icipants engage in a performative action, but when placed within the conceptual frame of *Opportunity Costs*, they play one *part* of a performance that consists of five-hundred separate *part*s, located in a myriad of spaces, and not necessarily in the initial physical space of the KC Stadium.

Conversely, we, the performers, see ourselves as guides for the *part*icipants and we encourage an engagement with the object so that the *part*icipants can make choices that affect their own private performance. We help them to use the object to aid the shift from their *chronos* infrastructure to their *kairos* timescape. We do not see ourselves as artists or creators of content, but as *facilitators* of performance. The notion of the facilitator is important because it implies a third party that aids the development, rather than creates the journey, of the performance work. The facilitator acts as the communication bridge between object and *part*icipant, giving the *part*icipant the skills needed to engage fully with the object and thus allowing the performance to extend outside of the facilitator's performance space.

The Object: Reconfiguring the Accidental-*Part*icipant

As a result of the introduction of the object to the audience, the performance becomes the privilege of the *part*icipant, and exists outside of the facilitator's space. The object acts as an anchor which still defines the conceptual boundaries of the performance, whilst allowing the content of the *part*icipant's performance to exist and develop. This is also the case in Blast Theory's work with technology and mobile communication devices, which are customised for each participant. But what becomes even more interesting than

the personalisation of the object and the performance are the implications for artistic practice that the shift of control from artist to audience may have, and the role the object may play within this shift. Blast Theory's interest in the development of artistic practice through interactivity interrogates the traditional roles of performance, and enables the artist to explore the relationship between object, artist and participant, and the effect that this relationship has on the way traditional performance constructs are perceived.

Although the comparisons between the object in *Opportunity Costs* and *Rider Spoke* (2007) are limited in regards to the way they were used and their physical description, the objects in both performances pose two concerns: how do the companies see themselves as artists; and how is the audience voice to be incorporated into the performance structure via the process of undermining the performer. In an interview with Sabine Breitsameter for *AudioHyperspace* (2004), Matt Adams attempts to discuss his perception of the artistic role of Blast Theory and the incorporation of audience voice through interactive objects:

> [We] see [Blast Theory's work] on a number of levels. One has to do with undermining the artist as the central creative role in artistic production, and problematizing this idea that the artist is the central creative role. I have unease about the idea of professional artists and consumers of art and those kinds of polar oppositions that are often set up. Blast Theory have always been very fascinated in trying to bring the voices of our audience into our work, and enable structures that allow that to happen. (Breitsameter)

The 'de-centring,' or the undermining of the artist is crucial for the development of interactive performance and the object's relationship with the *part*icipant. Although problematizing the polarity of artist and consumer, which as Adams says forms part of the de-centring process, it is the element of audience choice through the engagement with the object that truly undermines the artist.

The element of audience choice is well positioned in Palmer and Popat's light installation titled *Dancing in the Streets* (2005). This performance involved the unaware

public in York shifting into the role of accidental-*part*icipants by interacting with light shapes projected onto the public streets.[2] This de-centring process allowed 'participants [to bring] their own independent choices and modes of engagement to the work as they [discovered] the rules and worked out how they wished to interact with them' (Palmer 308). The notion of accidental-*part*icipants was firmly established in Palmer and Popat's concept; the public were intentionally involved and deliberately framed within the artist's conceptual arena. Conversely, in Wang Jin's *Ice.96 Central China* (1996) this was not necessarily the case.

Wang Jin's thirty metre long ice wall, containing six hundred separate frozen blocks of ice, was unveiled in a public square in Zhengzhou, China opposite a newly built shopping mall. 'Encased within these ice blocks were more than a thousand commodity items, ranging from cell phones, cameras, TV sets, to watches, gold rings and perfume bottles' (Cheng 151). Jin's aim was to use the ice as a symbol of rationality, he wanted to purify the commodities (Jin 200) and in turn 'reference China's post-1978 push for modernisation, industrialisation and economic reform' (Cheng 152). This time-based art was designed to slowly disappear and leave the remaining commodities for passers by to pick up. *Ice.96 Central China* (1996) was in no way meant to be engaged with as an object-orientated interactive performance. However, what Jin had not taken into consideration was how the object, the ice wall and the commodities located within it, would undermine his creative authority. The ten-thousand spectators that came to view the unveiling engaged in a *chronos* time structure by arming themselves with hammers, rocks and other tools so that they could dismantle the ice blocks prematurely. Once they had freed the commodities, they entered into a *kairos* timescape and engaged in their own personal narrative by walking away and engaging with the object, which will then act as a

[2] The interactive lights were powered by heat sensitive cameras located in buildings looking over the street. The images the lights projected onto the floor included a football, butterflies and knots that interacted directly with the public when they walked through the sensors.

reminder of their performative actions.

The *kairos* time structure located within *Ice.96 Central China* (1996) allowed the accidental-*part*icipants to engage with personal narratives located within the process of competing for the 'prizes.' But it was the unintended 'choices' of the accidental-audience that made their dramatic movement to accidental-*part*icipant. As a result of this shift Jin was then reconfigured from artist to the – unintentional – accidental-facilitator. Although on the surface the choices of the accidental-*part*icipants might be viewed as blatant vandalism, their performative actions are still located within the conceptual framework that Jin was developing; the reference to post-1978 industrial China, which strengthened the accidental-audience's conceptual shift from within the performance. The audience's physical shift in *Ice.96 Central China* (1996) was further developed as the *part*icipant took the object and walked away from the site, leaving the space empty – the object essentially made the art itself disappear.

Once the balloons in *Opportunity Costs* and the commodities in *Ice.96 Central China* (1996) had initiated all shifts from artist to facilitator and audience to *part*icipant, the facilitator's role as the third party became surplus to the performance. The performance that we had created in the beginning finally disappeared. In our 'costumes' (used in the loosest sense of the term) we merge into the established environment of Hull Business Week: as the last few delegates, dressed in suits wander past the facilitators, we blend into the background, our suits and absence of balloons emphasise further our ability to be, simultaneously, absent and present.

Conclusion

Opportunity Costs is not a performance that was designed to be watched by an audience, but a performance that has been constructed as an experience to allow the voice of the

audience to be heard through the engagement of an object. Once the audience shifts into the role of performer the role of audience is removed. The performance was intended to empower the audience; to allow them to take ownership of the creative content that is usually developed, in traditional performance constructs, by the centralised artist or author. It is the object that gives the audience this power; however, it does not actively convince, it is not aggressive, and in *Opportunity Costs* it did not have a voice. But by the very act of writing on it, the object forces a shift from audience member to creator. As a result of this, the artists themselves are reconfigured into a third party that guides performance rather than performs it. The role of the facilitator and the *part*icipant's engagement with the object means that, although the artists own the concept, the creative content, is out of their artistic control.

Although the notion that the object undermines the artist has negative connotations, *Opportunity Costs* provides the facilitators with an unusual positive experience. The object provides us with an arena that allows the ability to experiment with what is meant by, 'to be a performer,' in the changing landscape of interactive performance. It helps to re-mold the titles that we had given ourselves. We feel uncomfortable with labels such as 'artists,' 'performers,' and 'directors,' not because we aim to demonise traditional performance constructs but because these terms suggest creativity within the conceptual framework. The term facilitator, however, allows us to 'open out' the performance structure and encourage the audience to become artists. We are not substituting the traditional performance constructs; we are proposing an alternative experience that initiates choice through the exchange of an object. As facilitators we provide the arena or interface and, in revisiting the words of Andrea Zapp, allow the audience to be 'placed in the limelight of subjective physical involvement: addressed as a storyboard controller, co-author, actor or self-performer' (77).

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Seeing through the Wall: Objectification between Resistance and Acceptance

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In May 2007 I took part in a performance installation by Jerusalem-born visual artist Yael Davids. The piece, titled *A Line, A Sentence, A Word,* was part of the group exhibition *Memorial to the Iraq War* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. The exhibition interrogated the notion of memorial to a conflict that has not yet ended, inviting twenty six artists from Europe, the U.S. and the Middle East to step into the future and propose responses 'that will encourage debate about what can or should be memorialised from this terrible episode' (Sladen). Davids' response was a performance installation that combined the notions of memorial and demonstration. It investigated the existential energy of expression in a situation when one cannot express and cannot protest, representing it in an architectural construction extended in time and space. Looking at Davids' work from the outside, as well as from within, initiated my attempt to examine the work's ability to offer a model of representational economy that functions within a 'reversible' mode of objectification. In other words, the paper will attempt to explore how the artist's work places the human body in a condition of objectification that affirms rather than denies subjective experience.

A Line, A Sentence, A Word was initially inspired by journalistic photographs of demonstrations and by Davids' memories as an individual growing up within the Palestine-Israel divide. The piece consisted of flat panels kept suspended in space by the mouths and hands of still and

A Line, A Sentence, A Word. ICA, London (2007)
Photo by Samantha Hart
(All images of Yael Davids' work courtesy of the artist and the ICA)

silent performers for the duration of approximately two hours interrupted by short breaks. In this seemingly simple position, performers – including myself – were confronted by the white surface of the panels placed inches away from their eyes which reduced their visual field to expanding whiteness; nothing was seen beyond blank 'white' like being on the verge of losing consciousness. Movement was restricted and intelligible speech was muted. Speaking was physically cut off in space, which was visually emphasised by the sight of human lips scattered on one side of the wall, slightly gaped as if in mid speech. On the other side of the wall performers were visibly holding onto the object, pressing their faces against it as if in a devotional ritual of solemn observance or in an act of desperate yearning that was blocked by the solid object. The result was an image of a confined subjectivity suspended in a vulnerable instance of metamorphosis between 'thingness' and 'nothingness;' speech and silence. The inability of the subject to secure an existence in either condition overlaid the work with a sense of nostalgia. The subjects appeared to be clenching to the object as if it was their only hope of reclaiming a lost state of being. The object as the paradoxical nexus of this subject-object dynamic prescribed the subject's relationship to itself and to its surrounding, rather than the other way round.

While being part of this work, my corporeal experience was deeply marked by a transient sense of aggression against my self. I was muted, almost blinded, restrained and provoked, but unable to fully react. The strain of trying to keep my still position ran through my body and my breathing got increasingly heavy. Spectators were tempted to touch and poke their fingers at my disembodied lips visible from one side of the wall. My body was invaded and the physical restriction left me passive, open and vulnerable.[1]

[1] The audience's interaction was not invited, nor was it openly prevented which raised issues of the ethics of action and passivity in the performer/spectator exchange. In her essay 'On Seeing the Invisible: Marina Abramović's *The House with the Ocean View*' (2004), Peggy Phelan touches on 'the ethics of the act' in relation to the audience's intervention during Marina Abramović's performance *Rhythm o* (1974). Phelan

The curious interventions emphasised my status as object; I was both passive and in control. My experience was a paradoxical act of 'becoming,' a body 'never finished, never completed,' as in Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the grotesque body, where the gaping mouth is emphasised as a site of bodily drama and accessibility (317). The openness and penetrability of my body connected it to the outside. Bakhtin argues that within such orifices as the mouth, the exchange of flesh occurs, which is characteristic of the life of the grotesque body, or in his words, 'the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world' (317). My sense of self was destabilised as a result of this corporeal juxtaposition, and the marked separation between myself as subject and the surrounding object was subverted; I became both.

By disrupting the relations of power and resistance between subject and object, the piece embodied the futility of protest and the impossibility of dialogue. The complex set of relations between subjectivity and objectification; between the experience of the performers and what the work raised for spectators, served as an existential meditation on the human condition in conflict. These notions were figuratively articulated through the metaphor of 'wall' negotiated in the piece, and that invoked images of various constructions of walls, lines or barriers that engage with human consciousness within different dynamics of segregation. The Israeli West-Bank barrier, the Berlin Wall and war memorial walls, are only few obvious examples of images of walls that carry powerful political connotations. The notion of objectification central to this dynamic, however, is not exclusive to the metaphor of political and social subjugation evident in Davids' piece, but it is one of the fundamental forces that govern the work's underlying structure and its representational capacities. Paradoxically, objectification is utilised as a

raises the following questions: 'what does it mean to act when full knowledge of the consequence of your act cannot be known in advance? What are the costs of refusing to act without such foreknowledge? What keeps us blind to the consequences of our action and our passivity?' (19). These important questions are also raised by the presence and accessibility of the live body in the gallery space in Davids' work, but they are not discussed in this essay due to space limitation.

representational device that *empowers* the subject. Such contradictory dynamic is at the heart of Davids' work, and is the main concern of this analysis that was explicated further through my presence as part of the performance. My condition as a subject assimilated into the object elucidated some of the implications entailed in placing the body at the centre of a work of art; a work that raises questions about the limits of objectification and about the presence of the body as a site of paradoxes and ambiguity in performance.

By examining Davids' current and previous work, it appeared that it has been created within a dynamic of representation that does not guarantee assurance of resemblance nor political fetishization, thus resisting the reproduction of otherness. This goes against the common view that representational visibility reinforces rather than challenges problematic aspects of reception that participates in the phallocentric dynamic of fetishism.[2] This view, as Amelia Jones explains, was typical of 1980s art critical discourse. Both feminist and otherwise, this discourse marked a shift away from appreciating the enactment of an artist's body. The criticism was particularly strong towards women artists who deployed their bodies as and in a work of art (Jones 22-4) especially in 1960s and 1970s performance art practices by women artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Yayoi Kusama (Jones 1-9) and Marina Abramović. As a way of dissolving the representation of women's bodies as objects of the gaze, this critique necessitated the removal of the female body from representation, or using what feminist art historian Griselda Pollock describes as Brechtian 'distanciation' (163) that comes from a Marxist distrust of art forms that engage spectators as passive consumers rather

[2] I am employing the notion of visibility as negotiated in Peggy Phelan's critique of the ideology of representational visibility in contemporary culture in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993). In this seminal text, Phelan problematizes the connection between representation and seeing and between visibility and power when the boundary between subject and object is blurred. She argues that representational visibility is no guarantee of power; rather it should be questioned to see what kind of power is involved and what its implications are. This text is useful for my assessment of the visible representation of the body in Davids' work and how its value lies in the unseen within it.

than as active participants.[3] Davids, on the other hand, uses a strategy of resistance that does not eliminate the presence of the body in the frame of the artwork. The body is visibly present, while at the same time it defies the reproduction of metaphors (of identity, sexuality and gender) imposed by hierarchical systems of value and condemned by the former critical discourse.

Pillar. Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam (1995) Photos by Andre van Bergen

Resisting the Look

Davids emerges artistically from the mid 1990s, a decade that witnessed a regenerated concern with the implications of representing the embodied subject in art practices as fragmented, dispersed and particularized.[4] As in Amelia Jones' contextualisation of this body of work, it stresses 'the subject's interrelatedness with the world (of others as well as things)' and its inevitable simultaneous existence as subject and object (18). The interdependence between the body and material environment is demonstrated in Davids' consistent experimentations with the relationship between the body and domestic objects such as chairs, tables and walls. Since 1994, the artist has been presenting hybrid forms of objectified bodies or bodied objects housed by performers for relatively long durations. Those works, which she defines as 'performances without true beginnings or definite ends' (*No Object* 6), share the idea of

[3] While I acknowledge this established and well-grounded critical project, like Jones, I am confronted by my sense of unease towards interpreting the representation of the body (in all its forms) through a hierarchical system of value that predetermines the ideological effects of such representation on the spectator. Such definitive evaluation of works of art in terms of an externally conceived structure of valuation, as Jones argues (25), reiterates the modernist authoritative critique that feminist theorists tried to dissolve. It overlooks the ability of works by artists like Schneemann to challenge the disembodied consciousness and the gender bias entailed in the disinterested Cartesian conception of self embedded in modernist art. These artists, through their works, attempted to question the reductive modernist mode of reception by presenting the fully embodied subjects in their particularities within an intersubjective dynamic of production and reception.

[4] This came after the period mentioned above that was largely characterised by a turn away from representing the live body in art practices in an attempt to resist the fetishizing effects of the male gaze.

absence that is contained within the present body and share a consistent sense of loss. In works such as *Pillar* (1995), *No Body at Home* (1996), *Body Parts* (2001) and *Cupboard* (2001), Davids tries to enact the diffused contemporary subject by literally presenting the body as fragmented, abject and vulnerable with no coherent subject to be assumed. The scattered bodies reflect the spectator's own incoherence, a self caught in a moment of being and becoming, as 'a point of transition in a life eternally renewed, the inexhaustible vessel of death and conception' (Bakhtin 318). The performative installations confront spectators with a destabilizing experience by questioning the familiar demarcation of body and object and by negotiating a presence and absence dialectic.

No Body at Home: Chair. Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam (1996).
Photo by Andre van Bergen.

No Body at Home: Stool. Video still (1996).
Photo by Andre van Bergen.

The unsettling image of David's own body in *No Body at Home: Stool* for example immediately lends itself to the logic of opposites, which is one of the typical features of the grotesque life of the body for Bakhtin, 'the essential topographical element of the bodily hierarchy turned upside down; the lower stratum replaces the upper stratum' (Bakhtin 309). By constructing a different relation between the looking

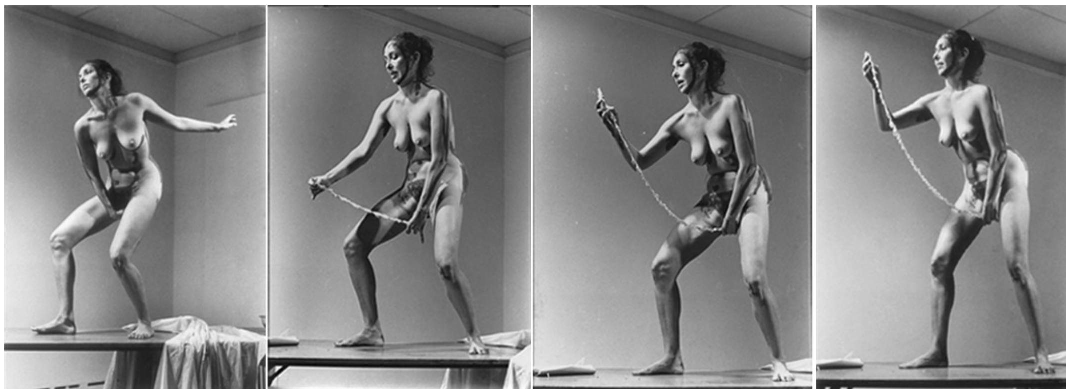
subject and the image of the other, the conventional viewing experience and the stability of projection, identification and objectification are disrupted. In spite of a body being objectified and visibly displayed, it resists being represented as an object of consumption. The focus on the human form does not satisfy a fascination with likeness and identification that encourages fetishistic looking. The female body, with its subverted parts and contorted position, its ambiguous relationship with its surroundings, disrupts the process of looking as Jacques Lacan identified it in the mirror stage.[5] Far from being an image of a body as a totality, it becomes '[an] image of the body in bits and pieces' (Lacan, 'Some Reflections' 13) as that which appears in dreams and fantasies as a result of disruption in the early stages of ego formation during the mirror stage, and which Lacan compared with the grotesque figures in Hieronymus Bosch's paintings (*Écrits* 4). The failure to recognize a familiar physicality is emphasized by the inevitable failure to meet the gaze of the performer, marking the status of the body as hidden, not really there; unmarked. No particular body is assumed. The lack of reciprocal gaze between the body and the spectator eliminates the onlooker's illusion of mastery over the image, thus displacing the Lacanian experience of recognition.

Peggy Phelan argues that all Western representation exploits the capacity of 'looking,' or the exchange of gaze through looking, to inform the desire to see the self through the image of the other (*Unmarked* 16). The gaze represents a point of identification in which the spectator invests her/himself in the image, which turns looking into a form of self-representation: 'one needs always the eye of the other to recognize (and name) oneself' (Phelan, *Unmarked* 15). According to Phelan's psychoanalytic reading, this proposition is itself differently marked for men and women. She suggests that 'when the unmarked woman looks at the marked man she sees a man;

[5] The moment a child recognizes an image of its body as a totality in a mirror that is crucial for the ego formation. The image of the body in Davids' piece is an inversion of that moment.

but she sees herself as other, as negative-man.' The image of the woman is located within the frame of the phallic function as an image of the 'not all' which belongs to the man (*Unmarked* 17).

Davids in *No Body at Home: Stool* made a strategic use of this formulation of the gaze in an ironic allusion to the phallocentric dynamic of looking: the viewer is confronted by female genitals looking back where one would expect a male face of a body (gender is assumed from the way the figure is dressed, and as suggested in Davids, *No Object* 128). She enacted on her figure a subverted projection of the forces of desire of the man who is seeing her. Thus the piece breaks the reciprocity of the visual exchange disrupting the psychic and aesthetic dynamic of the masculinised gaze which turns the visible image of the other into a sign for the looking self. Davids turns the pleasure in looking into the shock of realization, reclaiming authority over her image. The image of the female body in *No Body at Home: Stool* (and to a degree, the body in *No Body at Home: Chair*) seduces spectators into a close examination of such extraordinary body, but at the same time, it resists the consuming gaze. The performer's body becomes active in its vulnerability through negotiating the invisible within the visible, or in Davids' own words, presenting 'the rules of the visible that render invisible' (*No Object* 110).



Carolee Schneemann. *Interior Scroll.* East Hampton, New York and Telluride Film Festival, Colorado (1975).
Photographs by Anthony McGall

Other performance artists used the particulars of their female bodies as architectural referents, exploring the politics of the body to confront the dominant patriarchal moralities of Western culture (Yeon Kim 205). In a well known performance titled *Interior Scroll* (1975), Carolee Schneemann pulled out a paper scroll out of her vagina to read a male critic's attack on her work. To challenge masculinised reception, and its modes of evaluation, Schneemann performed herself as embodied subject who is also an object in relation to the audience. She deployed her sexualized body in and as the artwork against the grain of masculinist assumptions that govern the modernist artist (Jones 2-3). By enacting an intersubjective exchange of reception and production,[6] Schneemann compromised the disinterested attitude of art criticism and modern practice, exposing the fact that she is not a lacking subject; not an image of the 'not all.'[7]

Davids also negotiated the shift between the interior and the exterior of her female body, thinking of the vagina as a sculptural form, but unlike Schneemann, Davids did not project herself within an erotically charged narrative of pleasure. The strategic exchange of desire and identification negotiated in Schneemann's performance is not dealt with in Davids' whose extremely defamiliarized body is not represented as a site of pleasurable looking. The body is displayed as still, silent, absent from expression and from its own subjectivity, a kind of a stoic body or a sacrificial object.[8] The piece

[6] The phenomenological notion of 'intersubjectivity' views existence as a condition of reciprocality; an experience of the world as directly available not only to oneself, but also to the Other. The field of intersubjectivity, for Edmund Husserl, constitutes 'not only the internal coherence of one ego's experiences, but also the external coherence of one ego's experiences with those of another' (Laporte 341). This suggests experiencing oneself as different from the Other and at the same time available to her/him.

[7] In a later example, performance artist and sex trade worker Annie Sprinkle invited the audience to examine her cervix through a speculum in *A Public Cervix Announcement* (Sprinkle). The performance was an attempt to undermine the traditional masculine erotization of female genitalia and to challenge the fetishistic myth constructed around the female body.

[8] Even though the body in the piece belongs to Davids, but its identification as particularly hers is not emphasised, giving the sense that the work can be performed by any female body. This underscores the absence of subjective expression as a constituent of representation in this work.

confronts the gaze with an uncompromising image of an exposed body that defies its own vulnerability and abjection. The body claims its own authority almost aggressively by facing the spectator with an object of desire and consumption in a volatile and destabilizing form.

Resisting Erasure

In *A Line, A Sentence, A Word*, as well as in her former works, Davids claims that the body is systematically placed in situations where it is denied the ability of expression, where the self is negated. For her, 'objectness' in those works is to negate the 'I' of the subject, and to perform an act of erasing that strips the body from its ego, its history and its meaning to locate something new (Davids, 'Interview'). This is often indicated by concealing direct human references and by negotiating the tension embedded in existing in simultaneous opposite states: present/absent; inside/outside; up/down; occupied/vacant. Fragmented body parts, unseen faces, concealed eyes; something is always hidden from the body in almost all of Davids' work, the body never appears in its entirety, it never appears coherent. There is always something bitten off the body by the object turning it into 'a wounded language' (Davids, 'Interview').[9] The ambivalence towards human subjectivity, and the attempt to transcend the body from personality is reminiscent of Modernist art practices where a recurrent desire to denaturalise the body; to present it as something other than itself was manifest (Garner 53-63). Davids in turn creates moments of engagement between body and object in a dynamic of reciprocal transcendence as an attempt to inscribe both entities with new connotations. The discursive acts of *erasing* and *denial* that she describes occurring in the durational

[9] Especially the eyes very rarely confront the spectator. They are mostly invisible as in *No Body at Home: Mirror* (1996), *Corner* (1997), *Table* (1998), *Mattress* (1998) *Pillow* (2001), *Face* (2000-01) and *Music Box* (2003). In those works the face is either buried inside pieces of furniture or concealed by objects. Davids represents the face as 'a negated object of seeing' (Davids, *No Object* 121) that signifies the loss of language.

process of creating the work are embodied in language for her. The Hebrew word for 'abstract' literally means 'naked,' so by representing the body as abstract at its meeting with the object, it is stripped naked into a state of pureness (Davids, 'Interview'). However, what the work actually offers is an experience of subjectivity as embodied rather than as transcendental; as transformative, interconnected with the world. The subject is conceived as simultaneously decentred; never fully coherent and also embodied; not purely 'abstracted.'

The work as I read it, and indeed as I experienced it, does not wholly function within a dynamic of reduction or erasure as suggested above. For, while represented as object, the body defies its own objectification. This could be explained in terms of a dialectic of negativity as framed by Julia Kristeva in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) as 'the mediation, the supersession of the "pure abstractions" of being and nothingness in the concrete where they are both only moments' (109). Kristeva reads Hegelian negativity as a contemplative system that links the objective and the subjective, and although it is objectivity itself, negativity is at the same time the 'free subject' of Hegelian aesthetic. It is freedom 'for itself' that is the highest form of nothingness; negativity that goes as deep into itself as possible, and is itself affirmation (Kristeva 110). Thus the contradictions become transcended; Being and Nothing are both contradictory and at the same time inseparable, this thesis prevents the closing up of the subject within an abstract understanding, concluding with what Kristeva termed as *affirmative negativity* (113). This concept, established by the Hegelian dialectic, is understood as a

No Body at Home: Mirror. Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam (1996).
Photos by Andre van Bergen.

process that constitutes identity and freedom of subject in place of perceiving Being and Nothing separately as abstract, static identities. The process is founded on a fundamental reorganization of oppositions while maintaining those oppositions (Kristeva 113). Thus negativity recasts the thesis of contradictions; of being and nothingness; outside and inside; negation and affirmation. Accordingly, meaning in Davids' work lies in the moment of 'Becoming' caught in a divergent state of denial and affirmation within a dialectical process of appearance and disappearance that produces a subject in process. A moment of '[...] *Becoming* that subordinates, indeed erases, the moment of rupture' (Kristeva 113).

While being part of *A Line, A Sentence, A Word*, my fluctuation between contradictory states became strikingly manifest when my lips were touched in a shocking instance of realization that I became a work of art.[10] However, that same act of objectification extended the boundaries of my body, connecting it to the surrounding and highlighting its phenomenological presence. The open flesh blends with the object and with the external world, defying its own boundaries. Maurice Merleau-Ponty contextualised the intersubjective exchange between self and other in terms of a carnal being, at once subjective and objectified. He argued that vision is embedded in touch and touch in vision, and their chiasmic crossing is the flesh of the world,

> If [the body] touches [the objects] and sees them, this is only because [...] it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other; because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh. (Merleau-Ponty 137)

Merleau-Ponty suggested through the notion of flesh a two-sided boundary; that the body is both subject and object, visible and tangible, and it uses its own thingness to gain access to the world. There is a reversibility of 'insertion and intertwining' between

[10] A moment of invasive physical intervention also occurred in *No Body at Home: Stool* when a spectator touched the exposed genitals in one of the exhibition spaces where the piece was displayed (Davids, 'Interview').

the seeing body and the visible body; between the touching and the touched, which crosses the boundary between the body and the world, since 'the world is flesh' (Merleau-Ponty 138). So being touched by spectators highlighted my status as object, but it also simultaneously emphasised my subjectivity. The interdependence of tactile experiences between my body and the spectator's reminded me of my fully embodied subjectivity within that moment of objectification. The relation to the self, to the other, and to the world was affirmed. I am therefore suggesting, as explained through Merleau-Ponty's concept of flesh, that the reduction of the body to an image in Davids' live installation is defied through negotiating the limits of objectification. The latter notion is negotiated to insist on the body's status as Being. By enacting objectification, objectification itself is contested.

Conclusion: Accepting Objectification

While performing myself as part of a work of art I wondered: am I a subject? Am I an object? These two questions were at the heart of my phenomenological experience in *A Line, A Sentence, A Word.* The paradoxes embodied in the piece ruptured my conception of my own subjectivity and at the same time enacted the pain inherent in subjectivity. It highlighted the sense of loss at the heart of human consciousness in its fluctuation between subjectivity and thingness. This paradox is implied in Phelan's comment on the capability of performance to use the body 'to frame the lack of Being promised by and through the body' (151), and Davids enacts this lack of Being through the staging of otherness and mis-recognition. The body is represented as a site of displacement and absence instead of seeing it as a site of pleasure and desire as in mainstream forms of representation.

Davids' work disrupts the stability of projection and identification through experimenting with structures of seeing and visibility. My body was visibly present to be looked at, and sometimes to be touched, but by re-plotting the relationships between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, the traditional complicity of visual exchange between the seen and the seer is challenged, and the act of looking as a site of desire and objectification is questioned. As I suggested in the opening of this paper, the paradox of seeing objectification as a force of empowerment is fundamental to this work: only by acknowledging my vulnerability as objectified could my presence as free subject verify itself, and the fragility of 'looking' is unveiled. This dialectic of negativity gives power to the invisible within the visible, or in Phelan's words 'the blind spots laced through the visual field' (1). Davids' work actually lies in those blind spots where the gaze of the spectator is invited, as she articulates, '[t]he "thought body" refracts objectivity and transfers its visibility to the process of representation itself. The object loses its objectivity and the body its physicality' (*No Object* 130).

The 'wall' in *A Line, A Sentence, A Word* is not just a symbol of political and social segregation, but it also stands as a marker of the tensions caused by paradoxical human experiences. The subjects' engagement with this object/wall signifies their oscillation between an act of denial and that of acceptance; a contradiction fundamental to our existence.

A Line, A Sentence, A Word. ICA, London (2007). Photo by Samantha Hart

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Disturbing Objects: Making, Eating and Watching Food in Popular Culture and Performance Practice.

Jenny Lawson (University of Leeds)

I like baking cakes. I have been baking cakes for a long time. I try to take a cake with me wherever I go. My cakes have travelled to Lancaster, Manchester, Bracknell, Leeds, Sheffield, Surrey, Norwich, Gothenburg and Ulverston. I am going to bake you a cake and I am going to give it to you in a moment.

A Journey through Food

I love food; making it, eating it and now I also love watching it. My performance practice investigates food in contemporary culture, and this article is an attempt to journey through food, cooking objects and my practice, both contextualising and creatively documenting my engagements with cakes, kitchens and the dinner table. In this paper, my documentary elements are – as above – in italics. Cooking materials and foodstuffs play an essential role in everyday food practices and contribute to the formation of identities, relationships and socially and culturally accepted behaviour. My interest lies with the relationship between women and food. If we look at the influences of popular culture in the current climate, for instance the rise in food and lifestyle television programming and celebrity cooks (of which there are considerably more male than female), these popular food performances can be seen as indicative of contemporary attitudes governing food and female domestic practice. I am proposing that there is a space for performance practice to address the ramifications of popular cultural food performances to explore our relationship with food and its materiality in contemporary culture.

The work of performance artist Bobby Baker is crucial in understanding how feminist performance practice can re-position female identity in relation to food and the

domestic.[1] Developing from Baker and others working in this field,[2] my practice attempts both to articulate the implications of popular cultural food performances, and to disrupt the representations of food and women they enact and promote. One of the key arguments raised in this article concerns the notion of 'domestic fantasy' that prevails in popular cultural food performance. It is necessary for me to outline *both* my 'real' and subjective position inside the 'domestic fantasy' *and* my motivation, as a practitioner-researcher, to articulate this bind and to disrupt it. The italicised documentation in this article is a means through which I can *both* occupy and objectify the 'domestic fantasy' in order to make my critique.

The Cookbook

The Cookbook is a source of essential cooking information and guidance. Cookbooks outline a set of rules and practices that enable the reader to produce particular foods/households/lifestyles that are representative of the domestic and culinary ethos of the cookbook/author. Mrs Beeton is a cultural icon in the UK and her well known *Book of Household Management,* first published in 1861 and produced by her husband, offered women a guide to running a Victorian household. John. L Smith suggests that her book was a reaction against new 'venues for eating out [that] were tempting the middle-class menfolk away from their homes' (188) and cites her statement:

> Men are now so well served out of doors, - at their clubs, well-ordered taverns, and dining-houses, that in order to compete with the attractions of these places, a mistress must be thoroughly acquainted with the theory and practice of cookery, as well as be perfectly conversant with all the other arts of making and keeping a comfortable home. (Smith 188)

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[1] Baker's practice is rooted in the domestic and through her use of food in performance she communicates her 'everyday' experiences as a wife, mother and an artist.

[2] Female artists such as Alicia Rios, Karen Finley and Judy Chicago engage with food and the body in their practice.

Beeton's statement aligns a cultural expectation of female domestic servitude with gaining the love and respect of a male partner in order for women to 'compete' with the 'attractions' outside the home. Her book is offered as a potential antidote to this anxiety and the cooking practices outlined act as strategies for women to achieve domestic and marital happiness.

The philosophies communicated through the Mrs Beeton persona are reflective of the dominant patriarchal attitudes of the time,[3] and contrast with the contemporary attitudes adopted by cookery writer and celebrity television cook Nigella Lawson. In her cookbook *Feast* (2006), Nigella[4] advocates self satisfaction and independence: 'when it comes to eating, I am all for solitary pleasures. […] At its most basic, perhaps, is the quiet satisfaction of knowing one is fending for oneself, the instrument of one's own survival' (341). For Joanne Hollows, Nigella 'attempts to negotiate the demands of both pleasing the self and pleasing and caring for others, addressing the anxieties associated with cooking that frequently arise from a fear of being judged as "improperly" feminine' (186). The assumed female responsibilities of 'feeding the family'[5] have come to determine that which is supposedly inherently 'womanly' and 'feminine.' Failure to comply with the expected duties of the 'wife' and the 'mother' can lead to a judgment of the female as failing in her role of 'woman' and so becoming 'improperly feminine.' Ashley et al. also discuss the 'anxiety and guilt' that women experience fearing judgement, 'for their failure to live up to the idealized images of family life' (131).

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[3] Note the precarious authorship of the *Book of Household Management;* Mrs Beeton's recipes were compiled through processes of editing and selecting from other sources (Hughes 206) and the book was produced and then reproduced in varying forms and editions by her husband (Hughes 383).

[4] More so than her full name, the word *Nigella* alone, is representative of her media persona based on a version of her identity. In using her first name, I distinguish her media persona as the concern of this article. The same will later apply to Delia Smith.

[5] This term is used by Marjorie Devault in her book, *Feeding the Family* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991).

Bobby Baker has brought recognition to women's 'everyday' domestic responsibilities through her practice. In *Kitchen Show* (1991) Baker confesses her anxiety about wanting to please other people in her kitchen and demonstrates her various 'acts' of defiance. She releases her anger and frustration by throwing a pear against her kitchen cupboard; the 'disruption of that metaphor of women's fruitfulness' (Pollock 181). In contemporary culture, Nigella Lawson has also 'disrupted' notions of female care and responsibility in the kitchen by embracing self-satisfaction and indulgence. Although the different gendered attitudes and approaches to female domestic practice from Mrs Beeton and Nigella are not surprising, it points up a history in which cookbooks not only disseminate cooking methods and ideologies underpinning female domestic practice, but also offer readers a strategy to emulate and construct a particular lifestyle. My interest here is to unpick how these 'lifestyles' that are available to women in contemporary culture are produced/performed and question what is implicated for women and their relationship with food and the domestic.

The Object of my Desire

In contemporary culture, food personalities have considerable influence. In an article in the *Observer*, David Smith describes the success of the two television cooks, Delia Smith and Nigella Lawson:

> The term 'Delia effect' entered the Collins English Dictionary in 2001. The phenomenon was evident when she was seen using cranberries on TV and, a day later, sales rose by 200 per cent […]. Since then the 'Delia effect' has been shorthand for a celebrity endorsement that prompts a shopper stampede. Sales of goose fat rocketed when the product was championed by Lawson as the essential Christmas cooking ingredient.

Food personalities and their cooking practices are admired, followed and become convention. Raymond Williams' 'dominant/residual/emergent' model of cultural processes can inform how they have established new codes of practice (121-127). From the late seventies and onwards, Delia Smith was the 'dominant' female food figure in the British media and her persona was defined by her methodical and didactic approach to cookery, such as her three part cookery book and television series, *How to Cook* (1998). The title of Nigella's cookbook *How to Eat,* released in the same year, indicated her fun and indulgent cooking ethos. In contrast to Delia's image of 'perfection,' Nigella makes a virtue out of her flaws and in her television programmes she abandons the 'traditional' and 'proper' methods of cooking and adopts an 'anything goes' attitude. Nigella's persona is founded on her fallibility as a cook; she is messy and she describes herself as 'lazy', 'greedy' and 'clumsy' in her television series *Nigella Bites* (2000). This self-confessed incompetence re-appropriates those assumed negative traits and they become qualities that are enjoyed and even admired in Nigella. This shift in the female role operates in accordance with Williams' 'emergent' cultural process in which 'new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships are continually being created' (123). Nigella promotes fantasies of domestic pleasure and perfection on her *own* terms and she has renegotiated what it means to be a public woman disseminating cooking practices and altered the 'dominant' relationship between women and food.

However, I would argue that Nigella's success as a female figure is a result of the 'residual' culture on which her 'domestic goddess' persona is founded. Williams' term 'residual' has been defined by Laurie Cohen as 'an expression of tradition […which] has

been brought forward from the past, is reconstituted and remains active in the present' (193). For Hollows, Nigella's 'domestic goddess' ethos is founded on 'nostalgia for an imagined "golden age"' (188) which was criticised by the British press 'as indicative of a prefeminist 1950s' (90). This nostalgia can evidence a 'residual' culture that Nigella has ironically re-fashioned to produce a female identity that has elements of both the postfeminist and the domestic housewife. [6]

A Cake Stand

I always place my cakes onto a cake stand. I have collected a few over the years but my favourite has to be Nigella's simple but elegant cream cake stand. I find that cake stands elevate cakes into perfect creations of domestic wonder and give them the importance that they deserve.

Fig.1. Nigella's Cake Stand

Hollows suggests that Nigella 'offers a point of identification in fantasy' (194), and this 'fantasy' and lifestyle is made available through the cooking materials and objects that represent her image. Nigella's own brand of kitchenware entitled *Living* is available in department stores across the UK. The 2006 product brochure states that her All Purpose Cooking Pot 'turns any kitchen into the heart of the home' and her Pestle and Mortar 'looks beautiful on a kitchen surface and is a joy to use' (Lawson, *Living Kitchen* 1-5). These beautiful objects along with her cookbooks, her food, her style of dress, can all be

[6] I am using the term postfeminism here in its historical sense in accordance with Hollows' perspective that 'Nigella's conception of cookery is historically *post* – 1970's feminism' (181). See also Charlotte Brunsdon who situates Nigella within a category of domestic television personalities that negotiate the 'structure of being and not being a feminist' (45).

accessed and reproduced and make tangible the ‘domestic goddess’ fantasy. I too have participated in this fantasy through my fascination with Nigella (sometimes delighting in her food and her products). For Hollows, ‘the domestic goddess is presented as an imagined and unfixed position’: integral to the Nigella persona is the acknowledgement ‘that it *is* a fantasy’ (190). Hollows here refers to Len Ang’s positive claim that ‘fantasy offers the opportunity to experience feminine identities “without having to experience their actual consequences”’ (190). This is certainly true if the engagement with a figure like Nigella is a distant one; and one that only *entertains* the notion of her reality. Yet I have engaged with Nigella in my own kitchen; her cookbooks line my top shelf and her kitchenware decorates my surfaces, becoming part of my aesthetic and ‘performance’ of daily life. However, I admit that when I bake one of Nigella’s cakes I do not feel *okay* if it sinks in the middle, even if I can display it on her beautiful cake stand. By becoming part of cultural convention, the self-conscious gap between Nigella’s ‘domestic fantasy’ and ‘domestic reality’ becomes smaller. Perhaps what I am describing is not so much a concern with failing to be ‘properly feminine,’ but the ‘reality’ of dealing with the consequences of a failed ‘domestic fantasy.’

I wish I had a Kitchen

Have you ever dreamed of having your perfect kitchen? Have you stared longingly at those beautiful kitchen brochures and imagined yourself inside those miniature kitchen worlds? Do you know what it takes to exist in ‘Elemental Walnut and Zinc’ or to go dancing in ‘Savannah Shaker?’ I don’t have my own kitchen and I certainly don’t have my ‘dream kitchen’, but I can show you how to create your perfect kitchen – even when you don’t have one.

1pm-2pm: Elemental Walnut and Zinc[7]

Fig.2. *I Wish I had a Kitchen,* Re-creating the kitchens.

'Two elements of earth combine to create an irresistible environment; vegetable and mineral' (Plain & Simple Kitchens 24).

Required
Tahini paste
Walnut oil
Nuts & seeds
Zinc supplement tablets.

3pm-4pm: The Cottage Cream Country Kitchen[8]

Fig.3. *I Wish I had a kitchen,* Cottage Cream Country.

[7] See *Plain & Simple Kitchens* brochure (24).
[8] See *The book of kitchens* brochure (20).

Think yellow, think bright, think farmhouse, think English, think home baking.

Required
Lemons
Flour
Hearty Lamb Stew
Traditional clotted Cream

Fig.4. *I Wish I had a Kitchen,* Smothering my face with my kitchen 'fantasy.'

I felt nauseous from the food smells. The balsamic vinegar made my eyes water, the lemon and salt stung my face, and the tahini paste and stilton cheese felt thick and uncomfortable on my skin.

Fig.5. *I Wish I had a Kitchen,* Posing inside my 'Vintage Kitchen.'

After five long hours my kitchens were created. You can picture me inside my kitchen fantasy wearing my best 'domestic goddess' smile.

Fantasy Objects

Beginning with my fantasy of having my 'dream kitchen,' *I Wish I had a Kitchen* (2007) investigated how I could isolate and embody the components of my 'kitchen fantasy' and disturb popular cultural representations of the kitchen space. I attempted to disrupt my delight in the beautiful kitchen objects that represent domestic fantasies of 'joy' and 'balance and serenity' (Plain & Simple Kitchens). I appeared as a soiled female, representing my discomfort inside the 'dream kitchens,' and used the objects to create mess and chaos which is often left out of media representation. Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror*, states that, '[i]t is […] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules' (4). For Nick Mansfield, abjection 'unleashes […] the internal ambiguity and uncertainty that logical systems try to deny or disguise;' he describes 'our individual shame and disgust at the flows that accompany bodily life' (85). If spaces such as the kitchen house the materials of 'bodily life' then we can recognise how those materials have become subject to 'borders, positions, rules' that work in accordance with the 'system and order' that defines socially and culturally prescribed patterns of behaviour and exists in opposition to the abject.

In my performance, I released the food and objects that make up the 'dream kitchen' from their neat, contained and beautifully packaged forms. As a point of comparison, in her *Kitchen Show* (1991) Baker performs her exaggerated delight in the appearance of food, such as the joy she expresses in a new tub of margarine with its 'satisfying nipple' peak in the centre. Baker's confessional tone also implies the apprehension of regret, having to spoil the neatly packaged product through the process

of consumption. Helen Iball observes Baker's 'preoccupation with food packaging' throughout her performance work, stating that 'it is almost as if she cannot wait to consume [the food] but paradoxically, the packaging also sustains the "moment before" consumption' (75). For me, the popular kitchen designs and objects also exist in that 'moment before;' they function to *suggest* a space and time that *could* be, which is part of their perpetuating appeal. The 'dream kitchen' is an impossible place that is destroyed through the (bodily) process of realising it.

With this in mind, I wanted to explore how I could engage physically with my 'kitchen fantasy' through my practice. I put myself inside the kitchens that I had recreated and covered my body in the substances that are presented so appealingly in popular kitchen representations. This enabled me to embody my 'kitchen fantasies' and the 'desirable' foods and objects in their altered (imperfect) state. As well as the moments of discomfort, exhaustion and frustration that I felt during the performance, I also found pleasure in the immersive experience. In destroying my fantasy I got as close as I could to the 'dream kitchen.' The tension between 'domestic reality' (physical) and 'domestic fantasy' (metaphysical) that I have begun to outline here is echoed in the complex relationship between the body, food and practices of consumption, which will be discussed below.

Cake

Sometimes it seems a shame to eat a cake and destroy it when it looks so beautiful. At my grandparents' 60th wedding anniversary celebration they had two cakes with photographs transposed onto each; one taken on their wedding day and one of them now, much older of course. The cakes were cut into little portions and by coincidence I was given my grandmother's face. I could not bring myself to bite into the cake and destroy the image of my grandmother. While no one was looking I wrapped the cake in my napkin and placed it in my handbag. This cake is kept inside a wooden box in my bedroom.

Emma Govan and Dan Rebellato use Kristeva in their article 'Foodscares' to explore cultural problems with food consumption stating that '[a]bjection appears when food […] threatens to disrupt the integrity of the body, when the boundary between self and other, between what you are and what you eat, is unsettled' (33). Perhaps the possibility of consuming my grandmother's cake became problematic because the boundaries between the cake, my grandmother, and me were disturbed; for Kristeva the human corpse is the 'utmost of abjection' (5) and perhaps through symbolising my grandmother's death the cake too became abject. Govan and Rebellato ask the question,

> Are our most disgusted reactions not reactions to finding *our own bodies* in the food we eat? The mucosity of uncooked egg-white; the hairy skin on a peach […] all these foods recall the body. In response to this impossible doubling, our bodies double over, the food repeats on us, the abjection and slippage of the boundaries of the body have their direct counterpart in the retching, heaving and gagging of the body in crisis. (33)

I am 'in crisis' over my grandmother's cake; maybe it would have been right to eat this cake, to ingest the body that I am already a part of, but perhaps I am disturbed to find my 'own body' in the cake and I am not able to do so.

The Dinner Table

The dinner table is the place, historically, in western culture, where we first experience the complex set of rules and practices that govern the act of eating. The dinner table is prescribed with many rules that contain and control bodily functions and a physical contact with food. Stephen Mennel states that, 'notions of propriety and good taste developed around eating practices and table manners as part of the "civilising" of European society' and that at the dinner table 'good manners' involved a controlling and restraining of the body (qtd in Lupton 20). The physical codes of conduct such as, 'not to

speak when you have your mouth full, not to eat noisily and to keep "all uncooked joints" (i.e. elbows) off the table are all subtle ways of teaching children to manage their bodies' (Bell and Valentine 64). This socialising and ritualising of the dinner table becomes a 'performance' that arguably detracts from the act of consumption and opposes Bakhtin's notion of the 'grotesque body,' which 'is frequently associated with food. It is a devouring body, a body in the process of over-indulging, eating, drinking, vomiting and defecating' (Ashley *et al.* 43). However, the practices in place at the dinner table function to deny the 'grotesque.' Ashley *et al.* citing Burch Donald, reference the longstanding rituals employed at the dinner table. The extensive list of cutlery and crockery that has been required can evidence 'increasingly mediated and complex forms of contact between the body and items of food' (54) and these objects further disassociate the body from the act of consumption.

Bakhtin describes the grotesque body as, 'a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed' (317). Baker's work explores this notion of an open, fluid and incomplete body which can disturb conventional practices of food and the body. In *Table Occasions* (2000) Baker plays out the anxieties, social inscriptions and cultural practices of the dinner table onto her own body. Balancing precariously in her heels on top of the table, Baker's body is stretched and pulled into awkward positions and the dinner table becomes a site of potential hazard. Bearing the weight of her soiled table cloth at the end of the show, Baker appears vulnerable, exposed and ridiculous. By rendering her own body grotesque, Baker foregrounds the female labour, responsibility and anxiety connected with the dinner table space.

Dinner with Jenny

I would like to introduce you to George, my special dinner table for one on wheels…

Fig.6. *Dinner with Jenny,* George.

A photograph (taken from above) of my dinner table set beautifully for dinner is transposed onto the surface. I gesture to the image of the table objects such as the knife and fork, as if they are actually there. A large mirror is suspended above the dinner table positioned at an angle, so that it reflects the table image to the audience.

Fig.7. *Dinner with Jenny,* photograph of the table set for dinner which was transposed onto the table surface.

Set the table by learning how to place knife, fork, wine glass, napkin and candlestick.

Guest List
Mrs Beeton (underneath)
Fanny Cradock (standing to my left hand side)
Nigella Lawson (on top)

As hostess I am responsible for the presentation, the decoration, the cooking, the serving, the drinking, the eating, the table turning, the conversation, the entertainment, the gossip, the drunken spillages, the clearing away, and the after dinner speeches. Hosting dinner is like a kind of solo dance….

Figs 8 - 10. *Dinner with Jenny,* Engaging with the dinner table.

Disturbing Objects

Dinner with Jenny attempted to disturb the normative rituals of the dinner table. The missing objects were gradually placed onto the table (filling in the photograph) and I struggled to control and move it around the performance space; the dinner table became an unstable, ‘fraught space’, to use Rebecca Schneider’s term (53).

In *The Book of Household Management*, Mrs Beeton disparages women who fail to keep the household in order and identifies the half an hour before the evening meal as the most difficult time:

> The Half-hour before dinner has always been considered as the great ordeal through which the mistress, in giving a dinner-party, will either pass with flying colours, or lose many of her laurels. The anxiety to receive her guests, her hope that all will be present in due time, her trust in the skill of her cook, and the attention of the other domestics – all tend to make those few minutes a trying time. (11)

This can evidence a history of a 'fraught' relationship between women and domestic materials; everyday foods, cooking and dining objects can signify the responsibility and expectation inherent in assumed domestic practices and cause anxiety. The construction of Delia Smith as exemplary image in contemporary culture can act to exclude those who do not live up to her standards. Delia was named 'the nation's official domestic science teacher' (Ashely *et.al* 175) and a spokesperson from the BBC stated that her television series *How to Cook* was intended to help people who 'didn't learn from their mothers' (Ashely *et.al.* 174). This rationale for deployment of the Delia image is indicative of a cultural dissatisfaction with the female role and the use of media performance as a strategy to reassert conventional, female, domestic responsibilities.

In *Dinner with Jenny,* Mrs Beeton, Fanny Cradock,[9] and Nigella Lawson were the imaginary cooking idols seated at different places around my table, watching over my dinner. I used these imaginary figures to restrict the way I negotiated my body and the table space. I embodied their cooking and dining actions and re-presented them as extreme and obsessive patterns of behaviour in abstract repetitive sequences. These engagements were designed to problematize the ideal representations of the female food personalities, champions of the 'domestic fantasy,' and unsettle their eating and dining conventions.

Gift Objects

In the final moment of giving a cake I always make sure that I make an entrance. This attracts attention and gives my cakes their own special moment of glory. Nigella has stated that 'one of the reasons cake baking is so satisfying is that the effort required is so much less than the gratitude conferred' (Domestic Goddess vii) *and this is why I like*

[9] Appearing in 1955 Fanny Cradock was one of the earliest television chefs in the UK renowned for her extravagant appearance and her elaborate food.

people to clap, cheer and take time to admire the cake and congratulate me for my efforts.

The gift of food can be as disturbing as it can be pleasurable and it is not always appropriate to offer food. Govan and Rebellato acknowledge a cultural concern with knowing the origin and identity of the person giving food (36), which is perhaps reflected in the phenomenon of the food *personality*. In 2007 I attended Nigella's book signing event in Manchester. A woman in the queue told me that she had intended to bake Nigella some cookies, but decided against it because her brother had warned that it was not book-signing etiquette to bring food, as Nigella would not be able to accept it. For all her construction as a woman amongst equals, Nigella is also constructed as a celebrity. As such, she is not available for real acts of domestic reciprocity. Accepting food from an unknown source would risk *cultural* contamination. I hope to have suggested in the foregoing that my own practice is itself a kind of cultural contamination. It is designed to mess with – to disturb by inserting itself in – the constructions of women in relation to food in mass culture. It is itself a sort of gift.

I hope you will accept your cake - don't worry - they say that the first bite is with the eye…

Fig.11.*Giving Cake*, Royal Holloway College, University of London, June 2008.

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Gentlemen Still Prefer Blondes: The Persistent Presence of Marilyn Monroe Impersonators

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A quick Google search for Marilyn Monroe impersonators in America returns over 30,000 results.[1] One might expect these impersonators to perform only at bachelor parties or men's clubs, but, surprisingly, the larger market for Marilyn Monroe impersonators includes such family events as bar mitzvahs and birthday parties, business functions (such as trade shows and corporate conventions), as well as stage shows. This iconic *sex* symbol is more than welcome in front of audiences consisting of men, women, and children. Why are so many people still fascinated with Marilyn Monroe, 45 years after her death? And what is Monroe doing at family functions and corporate events, anyway? For many audiences, Monroe truly serves as an 'object of engagement:' through impersonations, she has become an image with which modern audiences can engage. My correspondence with impersonators Jami Edwards, Jodi Fleisher, and Karen Motherway sheds interesting light on the experiences of impersonators and audiences of impersonations.[2] This paper sets out to explore the persistent iterations of Marilyn Monroe through impersonators, proposing that these impersonators serve to make the *body* of non-threatening sexuality *present* to contemporary audiences.

[1] A similar search for Monroe impersonators in Europe returns over 15,000 hits, and one for Monroe impersonators in Asia returns over 10,000 hits. Exploring Monroe impersonation as an international phenomenon is outside of the scope of this essay, but remains an interesting area for future study.

[2] All three impersonators are currently working, and all three have demonstrations of their performances available online. While this is undoubtedly a small group, many of the things they had to say are similar enough to indicate that this group is a representative sample. Edwards has spent years perfecting her craft and only impersonates Monroe. Fleisher is a professional actress with a long list of television, film, and theatre credits who has been officially approved by the Marilyn Monroe estate as a Monroe impersonator. Motherway performs as Monroe across the nation and was voted 'Marilyn Monroe's Perfect Body Double' in a Ripley's Believe-it-or-Not contest.

Diana Taylor has identified two categories for cultural memory: the archive (in the form of static documents) and the repertoire (memories enacted and made present through a body). Marilyn Monroe, as a continually reiterated iconic image, has become part of both the archive and the repertoire. Indeed, upon hearing Marilyn Monroe's name, one of a few images of her probably entered your mind: Marilyn in the white halter dress, air blowing up her skirt, as made famous by publicity for *The Seven Year Itch*, Marilyn in the skin-tight pink satin gown of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Marilyn singing to JFK, or nude Marilyn posed for a calendar in an image titled *Golden Dreams*. These images have become part of what Diana Taylor calls '"archival" memory:' 'documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change' (19). Archival images of Monroe can be returned to again and again, always certain of what they will find. Because these images are archival, those who use them to create embodied performances of Marilyn Monroe have the same file of images on which to base their representations, allowing for continual reiterations of the same images in live, contemporary bodies. Impersonator Jami Edwards confirms, '[t]he famous white halter dress and the pink "diamonds" dress are the most recognized' Marilyn Monroe dresses (email interview). By taking Marilyn Monroe out of the archive of static images and unchanging movie clips, impersonators place her in the repertoire of embodied performances. More than watching a film of this vulnerable all-American sex symbol, Marilyn Monroe impersonators make that vulnerability, sexiness, scandal, and history *present* to today's audiences.

Marilyn Monroe has become associated with just a few iconic images, safely tucked away in the archive. As an image, she 'orchestrates a gaze, a limit, and its pleasurable

transgression' (Doane 133). The transgression in Monroe's image lies in the fact that audiences feel entitled to look upon her vulnerability: her iconic image communicates what Laura Mulvey terms 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (116). This archive of images is necessary for cultural recognition of Monroe and her impersonators; Diana Taylor tells us that 'performance becomes visible, meaningful, within the context of a phantasmagoric repertoire of repeats. […] We see only what we have been conditioned to see: that which we have seen before' (144). In order to recognize what it is we are looking at, we must have seen it before. Audiences viewing Monroe impersonations recognize within the performance an iteration of feminine vulnerability, because they have seen it reiterated in so many places, both within and beyond the cinema, since Monroe's original performances.

Of what does this available, vulnerable, desirable, non-threatening sexuality consist? Monroe, to prevent any sexual power she might have from overcoming spectators, comes, of course, with a breathy innocent voice. This innocence also implies that femininity is associated with vulnerability; Marge Piercy tells us that 'part of what men read into her and what indeed she presented was a child in a woman's body—the breathy voice that so famously embodies that vulnerability, the inability to protect herself' (104). Richard Dyer concurs: 'Besides blondeness, Monroe also had, or seemed to have, several personality traits that together sum up female desirability […]. She looks like she's no trouble, she is vulnerable, and she appears to offer herself to the viewer, to be available' (45). Thus, while Marilyn Monroe may be a woman of many contradictions (as is evidenced by the multitude of works that have been written on her),[3] she is also an easily

[3] For some interesting discussions of Marilyn Monroe that don't fit the scope of this essay, see, for example, Gloria Steinem's *Marilyn* (London: Routledge, 1997) for a feminist reading of Monroe or Sarah Churchwell's *The Many Lives of Marilyn Monroe* (New York: Picador, 2004) for a discussion of the contested aspects of Monroe's life.

recognizable representative of an available, vulnerable, desirable, non-threatening female sexuality.

The case of Monroe illustrates that, for many audiences, femininity involves sanitized sexual power: the virgin and the whore, the innocent and vulnerable but available. Dyer argues that 'the Monroe image clearly offered itself to be read in terms of (benign) naturalness' (34). In other words, Monroe was available, because cultural values suggested that women were 'naturally' available and vulnerable. As a sex symbol, then, Marilyn Monroe must represent sex and sex alone. She is a sex symbol without control over the deployment of her sexuality – a sexuality that is available to anyone with access to media. Dyer asserts that Marilyn Monroe's desirability is also tied to her whiteness. He says that 'the typical playmate is white, and most often blonde; and of course, so is Monroe' (44). Blonde and white are essential to Marilyn Monroe, and therefore to those who impersonate her, but blonde and white signify innocence, and therefore the male power inherent in deflowering the virgin. Postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak suggests that the category of 'woman' is already figured as so much 'unlike (nonidentical with)' the condition of 'man' that a racially 'other' woman would be too much for men to consider in their fantasies of safe, available women (340). Blonde and white are only appearances, but these appearances are what make Monroe an image of 'safe' sex; 'Monroe's vulnerability is […] confirmed by aspects of her off-screen image, which could, indeed, be read as a never-ending series of testimonials to how easily, and frequently, she is hurt' (Dyer 48). Monroe had to emphasize her vulnerability to demonstrate that any man could handle her. Dyer tells us, 'Monroe takes the sting out of anything that her sexuality seems likely to stir up' (46). Likewise, Kate Millett asserts that Marilyn was 'female inferiority incorporated in female flesh:' as a

'bimbo,' she was 'so stupid, so contemptible, one is scarcely aware of the power of her carnality. It is defused, turned to plastic' (79). Monroe's performances of sexuality are wholesome because she doesn't seem capable of realizing her own sexual power—and therefore poses no threat. Therein lies the factor that makes Monroe truly an *object* of engagement—her performances have always implied an aspect of commodification.

While Marilyn Monroe has come to signify the ever-available, non-threatening, ultimate femininity, it is important to remember that Monroe herself was a performance: from her hair to her voice to her walk. Monroe impersonators, then, impersonate the *performance* of Monroe rather than Monroe as a person. According to the Dallas Morning News, impersonator Jami Edwards's 'blond[e] 'do [also] requires weekly peroxide applications' (Menzer).[4] Louise Kaplan reminds us, with a Baudrillardian[5] twist, that Marilyn Monroe herself was always already a copy of something that didn't really exist – she was a copy of a copy of femininity, and her impersonators are further iterations of this copying. Kaplan posits, 'Marilyn Monroe is the cultural commodity. But where is Norma Jeane? The virtual annihilation of the abandoned and abused child who was Norma Jeane is "a prerequisite" for the manufacturing of the sex goddess who is Marilyn Monroe' (462). Anything aberrant about Monroe's sexuality has to be erased – as a Hollywood film star of the 1950s, aberrance didn't fit the script (or pass the censors). As a cultural icon of the 21st century, aberrance still doesn't fit the script of normative femininity.

How has the sex symbol aspect of Marilyn Monroe become so ingrained in the American consciousness that audiences automatically interpret her and her impersonators

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[4] Article and images available at http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/localnews/statefair/stories/100806dnmetmarilyn.2d46e8e.html.

[5] See 'The Precession of Simulacra' for a discussion of the copy with no original. Baudrillard theorizes that 'signs' of the real have now been substituted 'for the real itself' (254).

as purely sexual? Through a long-line of iterations of very specific images of Monroe, she has come to signify sex in all subsequent iterations, even if the performance is more about 'singing [Monroe's] songs and borrowing from her comedic style' (Motherway, email interview). The sexual energy associated with the image of Marilyn Monroe becomes evident in the way her impersonators are sometimes treated by their audiences. Impersonator Jodi Fleisher has portrayed both Marilyn Monroe and Princess Fiona, an ogre from the film *Shrek*, at theme parks. She argues that 'Marilyn gets harassed a lot in the theme park atmosphere where as Fiona is more in charge and earthy so I could be myself, and more tough. Marilyn is very vulnerable' (email interview). Marilyn Monroe, as the normative representation of femininity, is vulnerable, while Princess Fiona, the subversive representation of femininity, can take control of the situation. Fleisher explains that, as Marilyn, she could often feel 'lustful energy […] crawl over [her] skin, […] mak[ing] her feel dirty and disrespected' (email interview). Such 'lustful energy' is elicited by Monroe's image because, to many spectators, she seems to be always 'asking for it.' In her movies, Marilyn Monroe represents the beautiful, desirable woman who wants *you*. By representing Monroe's available vulnerability to modern audiences, her impersonators make the object of an available Monroe present again. Even to today's audiences, Marilyn Monroe represents the ultimate female because she is available to all males – even those who aren't the ultimate male. Albert Mobilio reminds us: 'If, in movies, she had dallied with men who "strut around like tigers," as she describes them, […] it would have spoiled the fantasy that she was attainable for all of us nervous Nellies off in our corners' (59).

So, the image of sexuality Monroe represents is a scripted image in many senses of the word, a performance for the sake of repetition. Judith Butler has argued that

'performativity is not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition' (*Bodies* 12). Impersonations of Monroe hide the fact that the Monroe of films and public appearances was an empty performance, staged for the public eye, with little semblance to an actual human life. While each individual impersonator creates her own performance of Monroe through songs, comedy, and audience interaction, their performances prove that 'performance and performativity are braided together by virtue of iteration; the copy renders the performance authentic and allows the spectator to find in the performer "presence"' (Phelan 10). By copying Monroe's blonde hair, iconic dresses, and breathy voice, the impersonator's performance seems like 'the real thing.' Of course, 'the real thing' was far from real herself – she was a dissimulation of the lives of real American women even in the 1950s. Only by virtue of reiteration of the original fabrication can these performers embody the 'presence' of Marilyn Monroe.

Monroe is continually present because her image is so easily scripted. It would seem as though Marilyn Monroe's version of femininity either stems from her own inclinations to deny the aberrant, or from the studio's desire to construct her as the ideal female. To return to Butler, 'there is a tendency to think that sexuality is either constructed or determined; to think that if it is constructed, it is in some sense free, and if it is determined, it is in some sense fixed' (*Gender* 94). Sexuality as represented by Marilyn Monroe complicates either notion of sexuality, whether as constructed or determined. If her sexuality was constructed, it can hardly be that Monroe was in full control of that construction herself – for her sexuality includes her abandonment and abuse, as well as her

failed marriages, but these aspects of her life are not communicated in her image. As Kaplan asserts about Monroe and her impersonators, 'if these female, female impersonators are our sex goddesses, we must also wonder if they might not be the glaring white lies that distract us from any potentially traumatic knowledge of actual female sexuality' (473). Rather, Monroe and her normative[6] impersonators have to present the image of femininity expected of them to be considered actual Marilyns. Through what Butler terms 'ritualized production,' these performers repeat Monroe's script of femininity and sexuality, stripped of trauma, 'under and through constraint' (*Gender* 95).[7] This is the real cultural function of Marilyn Monroe impersonators: to distract from the realities of living a tough life—abuse, abortion, loneliness—and to present the sexual being only in bodily form, stripped of the complications that accompany sexuality. Marilyn Monroe represents the ideal femininity, and as such, this femininity is ultimately unattainable, even for Monroe herself. In order to fit the ideal, Monroe has been dehumanized, transformed into nothing more than a series of iterable images of femininity.

The images of Marilyn Monroe remain static, but interpretations of her have changed with changing cultural needs and values. As Taylor asserts, 'archival memory works across distance, over time and space,' so any investigator can go back and examine the archival images, but 'what changes over time is […] the meaning of the archive' (19). Because she is such an appropriable sign, Monroe can easily step out of the archive of images into the repertoire of embodied performances. Her many impersonators bring the images of the archive to life, moving them out of the static past into the present. The

[6] Drag performers are freer to reject the normative script, but then, they're not performing at nearly as many corporate events or bar mitzvahs as normative Marilyns.

[7] Certainly, drag performances of this femininity might be expected to rebel against this script, but there is a certain danger inherent in rebelling against expected scripts of femininity even for those who are more likely to fit conventional gender binaries.

images stay the same, but what those images communicate to audiences changes as times change. Thus, what Marilyn Monroe impersonators embody in their performances now may not be the same aspect of Monroe that was embodied by impersonators twenty years ago, and it certainly isn't the same interpretation of those images that is embodied by drag impersonators. For Taylor, this is what makes the repertoire so meaningful: as 'embodied memory,' the repertoire 'allows for individual agency' and 'requires presence' (20). The images in the archive, then, are there for anyone to go back and examine if they so choose, but the images always remain the same. The performances in the repertoire, however, may be replicated and altered, may be 'in a constant state of againness,' but they also 'generate, record, and transmit knowledge' through their presence (21). The archive and the repertoire work together to create cultural knowledge, but embodied performances are bound to have a different effect than static images in the archive.

Monroe impersonators feel as though they have become the sex symbol brought to life, that they are objects re-presented, and their audiences respond to them in kind. Karen Motherway notices a kind of magic happening for herself and her audiences when she impersonates Monroe:

> I could bring the president of a huge corporation to the stage and ask him his name and he won't even remember it! It's really just like you would see in a Monroe film when the men just melt and will do anything for her. This is not something I have ever had the ability to do to men in my personal life, but something Marilyn's character seems to bring out. (email interview)

Perhaps this spell arises from Monroe's own iconic personality, but that personality was certainly a construction. Norma Jeane Baker did not have the confidence of Monroe: Monroe was the movie star, Baker the human being. As Walter Benjamin posits, 'the cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura

of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony smell of a commodity' (231). It's easy to see that Marilyn Monroe's image has become a commodity; sitting in my apartment right now, I can look at my Marilyn Monroe purse, see her face in pop art on my wall, and look at her image in magnet form on my refrigerator. But the spell of Monroe's personality, of course, doesn't come across in such static commodities as photos on bags or refrigerator magnets. For that, we need impersonators; iterations of the live Marilyn Monroe, stepping out of the archive and into the repertoire of embodied experience. Perhaps presence, then, provides the missing link to fill the gap in the explanation of the need for Marilyn Monroe impersonators. Impersonator Karen Motherway says:

> Many people only know Marilyn as a photographic image. They have never seen her act or sing and know absolutely nothing about her personal life other than her alleged affair with JFK. […] Once they have begun to believe they are in the same room with Marilyn Monroe the audience changes, they begin to respond to Marilyn and that is really when the magic happens. (email interview)

For most people, Monroe is nothing more than an image—but for those who witness an impersonation, Monroe becomes a live object with which to engage.

Diana Taylor explains this as embodiment's ability to make 'visible (for an instant, live, now) that which is always already there: the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life' (143). The shadow of Monroe's photographic image is always present, as well as the myths about her death and alleged affair with JFK, in scripts of femininity and American consciousness. As S. Paige Baty contends, 'her name may be invoked by guests on talk shows, newspaper reporters […] as an instantly recognizable expression of a mood, an era, a sexuality' (39). Impersonators bring Monroe's image out of the archive into the repertoire of embodiment, but these embodiments most often serve to rebury the ghosts of her reality, in order to re-emphasize how wholesome and

pure American women have always been. Audiences seek Marilyn Monroe impersonators to achieve the feeling of standing next to fame, or mystery, or beauty, or sex when they stand next to an embodied performance of the archival image of Marilyn Monroe – not to stand next to an abused, lonely, addicted woman.

Marilyn Monroe impersonators, by embodying the archival representation of Monroe, become live, present Marilyns. The question remains: why does an audience seek a live, present Marilyn Monroe? By hiring a Marilyn Monroe impersonator for their events, people are bringing the past back to life, so they can talk to it, dance with it, and tell it goodbye at the end of the evening. Dennis Grunes describes the era that Monroe embodies as 'an anxious present that turned out to be a fantastic respite before an all-too-real future of presidential assassination, civil rights upheaval, and […] war without the clarity of moral coordinates to locate its necessity in the blunt American consciousness' (193). While much upheaval followed Monroe's death, then, her heyday was an era of calm before the storm. Monroe impersonators can bring that calm back to life in a modern America also facing civil rights crises and uncertain, unnecessary wars. Impersonator Jami Edwards has titled her website, 'Modern Marilyn,' which suggests some of what Diana Taylor has said about embodied performances that step out of the archive: 'They are […] always in situ: intelligible in the framework of the immediate environments and issues surrounding them' (3). Baty posits that Marilyn Monroe 'allows for a dislocation and relocation of the present through the circulation of an image that collapses notions of subjects frozen in linear time' (34).[8] Cultural history and 1950s American identity come back to life in order to be recirculated in the present; they are no longer trapped in their historical time and place. Of

[8] See Baty's *American Monroe* for a discussion of Monroe as a representative character that is essential to the formation of the postmodern body politic, a topic which, unfortunately, exceeded the scope of this essay.

course, the 1950s weren't really so calm. Like Monroe, they have become sanitized: stripped of all controversy and molded into the glittering image of all that could be right with the world.

Monroe, stripped of trauma, is nothing more than a sex symbol – a desirable body to have around for men to flirt with, for women to be jealous of, and for all to prove that they can resist the ultimate temptation. The idea that impersonators represent Marilyn Monroe as no longer trapped in the historical past becomes particularly interesting when we consider the reactions of older gentlemen who may actually remember the 'real' Marilyn Monroe. Impersonator Jami Edwards says, 'Marilyn would be eighty-one this year, and so people of that certain age group definitely know her best' (email interview). She continues: 'to see their faces light up when they talk about how much they loved her, or how much it means to dance with an older man because he always had a dream of dancing with Marilyn, is the best reward you can ask for' (email interview). Certainly, for people of an older generation, Marilyn Monroe impersonators provide the opportunity to bring their fantasies to life. A CNN.com article on Strom Thurmond's one-hundredth birthday party in 2002 remarks that Strom 'relishes his reputation as a ladies man, flirting with women young enough to be his great-granddaughters,' and that 'he brightened when a buxom Marilyn Monroe impersonator came up to his wheelchair and sang "Happy Birthday[,]" […] reach[ing] out to the woman' (Loughlin).[9] Likewise, in a video entitled, 'Mr. Frisky's 90th Birthday Party with Marilyn,' impersonator Karen Motherway plays Marilyn Monroe for an older gentleman, whose face beams with the realization of a long-

[9] Article and images available at http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/12/05/thurmond.birthday/index.html.

held fantasy as he caresses her shoulder in the backseat of a 1950s model car, and at one point even gestures to onlookers to get a look at his date.[10]

Those who don't remember Marilyn can also get the idea of the past brought back to life, even for just a moment. The fact that Marilyn Monroe impersonators are often hired to perform at events that already feature a solid community, like a birthday party or a dentist's convention, only serves to reinforce 'the sense of community' that 'arises from being part of an audience, and the quality of the experience of community derives from the specific audience situation, not from the spectacle for which that audience has gathered' (Auslander 56). In other words, the sense of community derives from the group getting together, who the group is, and their purpose for gathering, not from what they've come to see. But it still remains interesting that so many of these groups have chosen to see Marilyn Monroe impersonators. Baty theorizes that Monroe 'allows an audience to draw from a common ground of memory in understanding the subject at hand,' but this time around, the audience has some control over Monroe's performance, because they choose to have her there, and then to send her home (40). For impersonators, the embodied image of Marilyn Monroe is capable of providing something for everyone. Impersonator Karen Motherway says that to little girls she represents 'a great big Barbie doll' (email interview). Jodi Fleisher is 'always sure to give the women attention too, compliment them, pose with them, let them feel sexy, not like [she is] stealing their men' (email interview). All of these acts represent the non-threatening, available-to-everyone Monroe, not the abused child or the failed wife.

While the Marilyn Monroe impersonators I spoke with might strive to overcome the sex symbol image of Monroe by emphasizing her talent as a singer and comedienne, most

[10] Video available on youtube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogQmlHdCN48.

audiences don't see Monroe as more than sex, because that isn't what they've sought in the impersonation. Impersonator Jodi Fleisher has been asked 'where the "fan" is to blow up [her] dress,' and at bar-mitzvahs, some 'grandparents have […] tried to cop a feel' (email interview). And while the impersonators I've spoken with 'take great pride in breaking [the] stereotype' that Marilyn Monroe 'was a dumb no talent who slept her way to the top,' (Motherway, email interview), they do admit that 'some impersonators […] force men's heads into [their] cleavage or [make] dirty jokes at public events' (Fleisher, email interview). However, this is all part of a performance, and the impersonators know that they are being paid to represent Monroe in a certain way.[11] The 'real' Monroe, and any threat that she might carry, is safely lost to the past; these Marilyns will say goodbye at the end of the evening, not threatening anyone's marriage, not corrupting anyone's children. Marilyn Monroe impersonators may be invited to family functions and corporate events as an opportunity for audiences to confront the past, to neutralize Monroe's excessive sexuality by containing her in an ultimately safe environment. Marilyn Monroe impersonators, as embodiments of the ideal, normative femininity scripted by the historical representations of Marilyn Monroe, represent a femininity that 'inhabits its mark at a critical distance, with […] some mixture of anxiety and desire' (Butler, *Bodies* 104). This critical distance allows audiences to overcome their anxieties and embrace their desires. Audiences who witness Marilyn Monroe brought to life through an impersonation can feel as if they've touched the past, as well as sexuality in its rawest form, and yet their lives and families have emerged unscathed. In doing so, they can definitively reject the sex symbol for the family and the home they return to after their evening with Marilyn Monroe.

[11] Certainly, some performances of Monroe are highly sexualized. However, even these performances are under the control of a paying customer, and, unless they have hired a prostitute dressed like Monroe, the encounter is sure to end at an appointed time, and certain acts are forbidden.

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***Barbarous Play: Race on the Renaissance Stage* by Lara Bovilsky**
Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 218 pp. (paperback)

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In this extraordinarily rich and impressive book, Bovilsky attentively considers representations and understandings of race in early modern English drama. Her purpose, as stated in the introduction, is to argue that 'early modern racial logics have much in common with modern and contemporary ones, including most of all those elements that make racial identities unstable and incoherent, elements long believed specific to the earlier period' (3). Utilising as case studies plays by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster and Middleton, she demonstrates how racial meanings are informed by 'narratives of fluidity and boundary crossing,' especially miscegenation, religious conversion, class transgression, 'troubled national boundaries,' and moral and physical degeneracy (3). Bovilsky's aim is to reveal the ways in which the interrelation of race with 'proximate, identity-forming categories' may be used to unravel racial content in the period (8).

The book begins with an intelligent introduction that outlines the critical history of race studies within early modern literary criticism. It then highlights the English Renaissance period's inconsistent terminology, especially focusing on the various usages of the word 'black.' Here Bovilsky makes a compelling case for allowing for 'broader definitions of blackness and of race' and for recognising the 'repeated shifts in English and non-English and partially English racial identities and identifications' (19). The author goes on to remind her reader that race is a social construct and that racial classifications and hierarchies – both early modern and modern - are informed by numerous discourses, not just scientific ones. She concludes

her introduction by foregrounding fluidity as a characteristic feature of racial signification.

The chapters that follow are organised around the interrelation of race with the other categories that underpin racial identities and tensions in early modern drama. Chapter 1, 'Desdemona's Blackness,' offers a stimulating discussion of the way in which male characters in *Othello* refer to Desdemona in a racially charged language as a result of the agency that she experiences in defying her father and marrying Othello. Emphasising the English Renaissance association of female unchastity with blackness and tracing the trajectory of the play's racialisation of Desdemona, Bovilsky reveals how the character's transition from 'fair' daughter to 'begrimed and black' wife is indicative of how discourses and ideologies of race and gender intersect in the period. The second chapter, 'Exemplary Jews and the Logic of Gentility,' focuses on the racial and class components of religious identity. Paying particular attention to *The Merchant of Venice*, it examines the way in which fantasies of familial negation and disowning manifest themselves within narratives of Jewish conversion and transformation. Particularly striking is the analysis of how Jewishness is differently and variably racialised in the dramatic constructions of different Jewish characters: here Shylock's role in signifying Jewishness is considered in relation to other characters, principally Marlowe's Barabas and Shakespeare's Jessica.

Chapter 3, 'The English Italian,' considers Jacobean ideas about Italians and the implications of Italian identification for English subjects. It begins by discussing Italianness as a determinant in Portia's identity in *The Merchant of Venice* and goes on to explore the physical and moral blackness structuring Webster's representations of Italians in *The White Devil*. Central to this chapter, then, is the racial component of nationality; the cross-racial figurations of Portia and Vittoria signal the way in which

English Italianate dramas reflect experiences of diversity and promote fluid transnational and transracial identifications. Bovilsky's final foray into the period's dramatic constructions of difference draws on Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* in order to think through the racialisation of other Mediterranean nations. This chapter, entitled 'Race, Science, and Aversion,' considers expressions of desire and aversion that result from individual humoral physiology and generate racially inflected tensions.

Running through all the chapters is a concern with the 'blackening' of unruly women - with the racial language that is used to police the bodies of female characters experiencing agency. Each chapter is convincingly argued and set against a wider socio-historical context. Throughout this authoritative work, Bovilsky provides ingenious insights and excellent local observations about her chosen play-texts, teasing out the manifold implications of entrenched words and constructions. The close textual analysis of the plays, combined with the wealth of lucid and insightful contextual information, enables Bovilsky to yield exciting and fruitful readings.

My main quibble with *Barbarous Play* is that it seems curious to me that, in a book featuring the subtitle 'Race on the Renaissance Stage,' no attention has been given to the early modern masquing stage. I am thinking here primarily of Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* which is central to a consideration of representations of race on the early modern stage. The absence of any discussion of race on the masquing stage is especially surprising given the image selected for the cover of the book: Inigo Jones' costume design for a female masquer performing the role of a "Daughter of Niger" in Jonson's *Blackness*. Throughout her study Bovilsky adopts a predominantly literary approach, and in several places a more in-depth consideration of performance factors would have further drawn out the complexities of the figurations of race

contained in her selected plays. Nevertheless, Bovilsky does make up for this oversight in the book's overall accomplishments and felicities.

Barbarous Play is a critical work of a high order. Bovilsky provides a fascinating, if sometimes densely written, account of the conceptions of racial alterity articulated in English Renaissance drama. In emphasising the parallels between early modern and contemporary racial logics, the author is able to point to how 'the conflation of natural and social kinds in our own culture has grown so extreme as to blind us to the centrality of the imprecision, illogic, and inconsistency in our own views and narratives about race' (160). As she astutely comments, 'we have unwisely given modern science pride of place as the origin and engine of racism' (161). This book not only constitutes an interesting and valuable addition to the existing body of scholarship on race in early modern English literature, but also provides its reader with a meaningful and memorable read.

City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City **by Michael McKinnie**

Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2007, 178 pp. (Hardback)

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> [Individual plays and individual people] are always a part of greater political, economic, and cultural processes. (McKinnie 134)
>
> Given that we cannot escape the [context] problem, can we provide innovative solutions to it? (Davis 209)

If the theatrical event is the product of a variety of processes at work within a given context, how can one reconstruct this context in order to inform the interpretation of the (ephemeral) theatrical event? How do we identify the gaps in (theatre) historiography and how do we respond to them? These questions reflect the 'context

problem' as it is described by Tracy Davis. Davis calls for innovative solutions, and Michael McKinnie's *City Stages* provides one by offering a fragmented account of the theatrical developments in Toronto from the late 1960s until the 1990s. The work's scope is defined by the relationship between the urban and the theatrical space; between the political economy and the geography of the city.

McKinnie does not limit his study to the discussion of Canadian theatre as a product of the nation; he rather argues that theatre is a product of the specific economy and geography of Toronto as a global city. While delineating the transition of the political economy of Toronto from Fordism to Post-Fordism, he examines the ways in which theatre and the city adapted to it. McKinnie offers a convincing interpretation of the change of theatre and the city by using a primarily materialist critical apparatus, which seeks to investigate theatre history through its intersection with urban geography and political economy. In his introduction, the author clarifies that *City Stages* is not a historical survey of venues and companies, but looks into the ways in which specific examples map discourses and 'elaborate key concerns' (16).

City Stages is divided into two parts that focus on specific aspects of the relationship between theatre, geography and the political economy of Toronto. The first part discusses the 'Civic Development' of the city, and the ways in which civic ideology has been made manifest in the relationship between theatre and the gentrification of the urban environment of Toronto in the last four decades.

In chapter one, McKinnie explicates the link between cultural institution-building and the shift from national to transnational urban political economies. He focuses on the buildings of the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts (SLC) and the Ford Centre as examples of the transformations of the civic imagining of Toronto. In chapter two he describes how theatre has been used in discourses supporting a 'new

urbanism' in the Post-Fordist era, which promoted a new image of the city in the transformation of the Central Industrial District (the old and 'desolate' image of the urban environment) into the Entertainment District (the new, clean and safe image of the city). McKinnie suggests that this transformation implies a shift in the fundamental aspects of the political economy of Toronto and a parallel shift in the streetscapes and their use by the consumers.

The second part discusses 'The Edifice Complex' and its consequences on small and medium sized theatre companies in Toronto. Here, the author discusses the relationship of selected theatre companies (the Theatre Passe Muraille, the Toronto Workshop Productions, Necessary Angel and Buddies in Bad Times) with their owned spaces, or their relationship with the idea of space ownership.

Chapters three and four closely examine how Theatre Passe Muraille and Toronto Workshop Productions (TWP) negotiate the issue of ownership of theatrical space and discuss how theatre buildings embody each company's identity. Theatre Passe Muraille used its 'building to relocate spatial concerns from an artistic ideal to the administration of its labour process' (90) and ownership came to imply stability and connected the building's history with that of the company. Owned property was the marker of the company's legitimacy and provided the 'spatial means by which the theatre event blurred histories, and invented and reproduced cultural tradition' (90). TWP developed a similar relationship with its building and was eventually trapped in a contradictory discourse that led the company in decline: 'in order to attempt to preserve itself from the market economy, TWP was forced to enter the market through private property and ownership' (115). McKinnie suggests that the bond between the building and the company was undermined by its membership in the real estate economy.

Chapter five focuses on a different understanding of the relationship between companies and theatre spaces/urban geography. The two examples used (Necessary Angel and Buddies in Bad Times) illustrate how cultural legitimacy can be achieved in terms of urban geography rather than property ownership. Necessary Angel claimed temporary monopoly over specific spaces, manifesting a different connection to the built environment – 'linking dramaturgy with geography' (132). Buddies occupied a property formerly used and owned by TWP and claimed this space as their home not in terms of the property itself, but in terms of its position within the urban geography of Toronto. The two examples in this chapter illustrate a different understanding and connection with the city and its geography: rather than using ownership as a calculus for cultural legitimacy, these two companies employed the geographical particularities of the city in order to establish themselves through 'inventive uses of space and, at the same time, sophisticated modes of geographical self-fashioning' (132).

Overall, *City Stages* provides an extremely useful and interesting analysis of the interaction between theatre and the city in Toronto after 1967. It sheds light on the developments that shaped the image of the city and the identity of its stages. McKinnie admits his privileging of a specific type of critical instruments over others, thus acknowledging his conscious methodological choices. The book's structure guides the reader through a clear application of the methodological solutions devised for the narration of the theatrical history of Toronto. In his conclusion, the author argues that this analytical model can be further used to examine 'city stages in other times and spaces' and invites the reader to work in a similar way with other case studies, in order to establish a 'wider geography of theatre in urban space' (135). This book offers not only interesting conclusions about the theatre in Toronto, but also a

solid methodological solution to Davis' 'context problem' – a methodology that can be applied in other cases and generate a wider understanding of the processes that govern the relationships between theatres and cities.

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Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain: New Writing: 1995-2005 **by Amelia Howe Kritzer**

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 239 pp. (hardback)

Rachel Clements (Royal Holloway, University of London)

In 2001, Aleks Sierz cemented the phrase 'in-yer-face' as a descriptor of the 'dominant theatrical style' of the 1990s (4), and since then, the decade and its theatre have been ripe for further consideration, reappraisal, and sustained critical reflection. Unsurprisingly, the number of books published in this area has seen a marked increase over the past couple of years: Rebecca D'Monté and Graham Saunders' edited collection, *Cool Britannia? British Political Drama in the 1990s* (2008); monographs on Sarah Kane and Martin Crimp by, respectively, Saunders and Sierz; and Mireia Aragay et al's *British Theatre of the 1990s* (2008), to name just a couple of the more prominent. Amelia Howe Kritzer's addition to the Palgrave 'Performance Interventions' series, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain: New Writing: 1995-2005*, initially looks like an interesting contribution to this body of work, both

because of its apparent focus on the political in terms of content and context, and because its time-frame moves out of the '90s, making it more current.

Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain surveys, and provides useful overview of, a broad range of contemporary plays. Over the course of its seven chapters, Kritzer discusses nearly eighty works by over fifty writers, a considerable number of which have so far received little or no other critical attention. Kritzer's aim is to demonstrate the resurgence of the 'political' within British theatre. The opening chapter provides a sweeping consideration of politics, British theatre, and political theatre, which should provide an unfamiliar reader with a range of ideas and contexts for consideration and further study. Defining political plays as 'those which attempt to create political meaning by making visible and/or interpreting particular social phenomena as public problems or issues' (10), *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain* provides a summary of recent works which could be categorised as containing issue-based material.

Chapter 2, 'Generational Politics: The In-Yer-Face Plays,' looks at works by Kane, Ravenhill, Penhall, Upton, McDonagh, et al, but doesn't particularly extend or deepen the analysis given to them by Sierz. Eliding the fact that many of these writers can only be partially subsumed into the 'in-yer-face' category, Kritzer problematically describes the playwrights as a 'cohort' conditioned by a range of '[t]raumatic events' (29). Chapter 3, 'Intergenerational Dialogue,' (which starts with a discussion of the recent work of the protean, influential Caryl Churchill) broadens the scope. In a section on the theatrical representation of race and ethnicity, Kritzner looks at plays by Roy Williams, Ayub Khan-Din, Tanika Gupta, Doňa Daley and Kwame Kwei-Armah, before turning to a cluster of works which address the 'post-Thatcher working class' (96). In the following three chapters, Kritzer moves away from a generational

historiography, explicitly focusing on the particular issues and concerns which dog contemporary Britain, and these chapters are stronger for their clearer thematic underpinning. Using her content-led approach, Kritzer finds examples of plays which have dealt with a wide range of current social and political issues, from those of gender, race, class and religion, to those of political leadership, individualism, collective identity; from the broad issues of history and globalisation, to specifics such as the situation in Northern Ireland, privatization, and the war in Iraq. Kritzer explores the ways in which such current concerns have appeared in various ways and forms on the British stage, including discussions of verbatim plays, mainstream successes (Bennett's *The History Boys*; Frayn's *Copenhagen*) and the more recent works of both established 'political' playwrights (Hare; Brenton) and some of the 'in-yer-face' "generation" (McDonagh; Ravenhill).

Concluding with the short chapter, 'Political Theatre in an Era of Disengagement,' Kritzer argues that recent 'political' plays on the British stage often 'begin with a rejection of idealism' and frequently replace this with a 'pragmatic humanism' which locates meaning in a 'connection to others in family or community' (219). Less persuasive is Kritzer's assertion that '[p]olitical plays have helped to define post-Thatcher politics through the issues and themes they have brought to visibility,' (218) a statement which is not sufficiently substantiated. Kritzer demonstrates that new writing in contemporary Britain engages with current events and issues, but, apart from in the examples of the Tribunal plays (which she discusses in the book's strongest chapter, 'Issues for Post-Thatcher Britain'), there is little evidence to substantiate the idea that theatre's bringing-to-visibility is demonstrably responsible for any consequential shift. Theatre's efficacy is, once again, hard to prove.

There are a number of major problems with this book: of context, content, and approach. In terms of the work's context, Kritzer's choice of the term 'post-Thatcher' is misleading. It seems more that she's chosen this phrase because it's the neatest descriptor for her time-frame (which does, after all, start two years before Britain became 'Blairite'), than because she wants to shed light on the term. Any discussion about what makes British society 'post-Thatcher,' or how contemporary political theatre might be meaningfully labelled like this is cursory and generalized. Kritzer quotes some famously Thatcherite statements, but provides little specific or detailed context which might help the reader to understand what she understands Thatcherism, or its political (and theatrical) descendents, to be. This might sound like a request for stating the obvious, but current undergraduates (who this book is clearly geared towards) were born as late as 1990: post-Thatcher, indeed – but it seems, in the light of this, not unreasonable to suggest that some of these contexts might benefit from more thorough explanation.

In terms of its content, despite this book's scope, and its cover-claims of comprehensiveness, there are some noteworthy omissions. Martin Crimp is name-dropped but none of his works are discussed, though there's a strong case for considering his work as some of the most interestingly politically engaged of recent years. David Harrower, David Greig and Dennis Kelly, three prominent 'new writing' voices, whose works might easily fit Kritzer's definition of 'political theatre,' are nowhere to be seen. Kritzer clearly had to put limitations on her material somewhere, and her subtitle 'New Writing' demarks where this containing boundary lies, but she writes as though the pieces which she is discussing are the only 'political' pieces of performance on the British scene. In *Staging the UK* (2005), Jen Harvie argues that attention could usefully be moved away from the 'wave' of new writing in the 1990s,

pointing to the limitations and prejudices that 'British theatre's dominant literary narrative [….] produces and naturalises' (119). Kritzer's decision to focus solely on new writing is not sufficiently articulated or critically positioned to be able to avoid the pitfalls which Harvie points to.

Kritzer's range and scope are broad, and this is the book's strength, but her treatment consistently skims the surface of this content, so that this simultaneously constitutes its most significant flaw. Her approach, in almost every instance, is to offer a short plot-synopsis, and although these descriptions provide adequate glosses of the plays, there's little room for detailed critical discussion of or sustained engagement with the works in question. Kritzer only occasionally supports her narrative with textual or performative examples, and where she does, there is often insufficient distinction between a textual given and a directorial decision. There's also only limited consideration of the reception contexts of the pieces, which is surprising, given Kritzer's assertions that political plays might somehow be conditioning the world outside the theatre and 'making an impact on current understandings of society and politics' (26).

There is certainly currently the space and interest for fresh analyses and discussions of the theatrical output of the 1990s and early 2000s, and a thorough investigation of its major playwrights and practitioners would be welcome. *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain* in some senses begins this task. Although its critical and theoretical analysis is not especially rigorous, there is little doubt that, given this book's title and premise, it will make it into libraries and onto reading lists. And, as a survey of much of the new writing landscape of the past decade, and as a first consideration of some of the plays of the early 2000s, this book contains useful material for further and future consideration.

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Hard Work: Robert Lepage's *Lipsynch* and the Pleasures of Responsibility

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Robert Lepage's *Lipsynch* received its official world premiere at the Barbican in London on September 6, 2008. *Lipsynch* investigates the 'specific signification [and] interaction' of voice, speech and language in 'modern human expression' (Lepage, 'Note' 6). But according to one of its collaborators, Rebecca Blankenship, it was a *visual* resource which initiated the production (Blankenship). This resource, a drawing by Lepage, was translated directly into the first dramatic image of *Lipsynch*, following Blankenship's emotive opening of the production (an aria from Gorecki's *Symphony #3*). Lepage's drawing showed two figures in the interior of an aeroplane. One is an adult sitting in club-class, in possession of a cultured voice, and the other is a screaming child at the back of the plane. The question of how to connect the drawing's figures and understand the 'journey' of a human voice created a double fascination for Lepage. Indeed, the child (Jeremy), his mother (Lupe), and the 'cultured voice' (Ada) provide a structuring triad. Jeremy is adopted as a baby by Ada after Lupe dies. *Lipsynch's* contemporary mythology largely stems from Jeremy's quest in later life to discover his mother's identity.

It is important to recognize that the image encapsulates both *Lipsynch's* core narrative *and* its conceptual under-pinning, because this reveals that the dual nature of the experience that *Lipsynch* creates in performance was intrinsic from inception to realisation. Lepage's assembled company of nine international collaborators do indeed present an exploration of the intricate and integral role that voice, speech and language play in shaping lives. And this is accomplished in nine contrasting but connected ways. Each performer leads one section of the narrative (in order – 'Ada,' 'Thomas,' 'Sarah,'

'Jeremy,' 'Marie,' 'Jackson,' 'Sebastian,' 'Michelle,' 'Lupe'), which partly explains *Lipsynch's* variations in style. 'Ada' is operatic: 'Jeremy' cinematic; 'Sebastian' comic, and so on. Each section is, however, developed collaboratively. Therefore, Lepage's reflection that *Lipsynch's* 'characters seem to have emerged from a place that is more profound' seems to conceal the decisive contribution of his drawing in establishing both narrative and conceptual direction, and thereby his responsibility for *Lipsynch's* successes and failures (Lepage, 'Note' 6). Because what *Lipsynch uses* – voice, speech and language – does not reveal what *Lipsynch* actually *does* – an important consideration in assessing its value.

Marie Gignac, one of Lepage's regular collaborators, contributed to the development process of *Lipsynch,* but transferred her performance role to Frédérike Bédard during the process. Gignac, however, continued to collaborate on *Lipsynch*. Significantly, Gignac recognises that, while voice, speech and language provide the thematic material and ideation for *Lipsynch*, they also provide 'a select locus of identity and emotion' (Gignac 12). When *Lipsynch* is successful it is because it explores voice, identity and emotion *simultaneously*. Put another way, *Lipsynch* is successful when the thematic blends seamlessly with narrative and character – as in Lepage's original drawing. When character dominates the thematic, as in the section 'Sebastian,' or the thematic dominates character, as in the section 'Jackson,' *Lipsynch* seems to be a glass distinctly half-empty.

It is not only the drawing upon which *Lipsynch* is based that predates its Barbican premiere. *Lipsynch* has played in Tenerife and Montreal. And a shorter, antecedent version was also presented at Northern Stage, in a week of development-through-performance (Newcastle, February 2007). *Lipsynch* at Northern Stage was radically unfinished, and provided a significant (and worthwhile) challenge to its

audience to find meaning and value. *Lipsynch* at the Barbican offered the same test at a lower level of difficulty. The degree of difficulty provided by Lepage's work is determined by the degree of responsibility allocated to the spectator for the production of meaning. At Northern Stage, *Lipsynch* only worked if you worked hard on it. At the Barbican meaning was easier (not easy) to read. While significantly different materially, the approach to the audience was very similar. The challenges of Lipsynch's thematic continuities establish it as *the same work, in a different condition.* Such a distinction may help critical reading by counteracting the exaggeratedly fluid status Lepage attributes to performance.

Lepage seeks to make the spectator active in the production of meaning, but in doing so, the spectator is actually handed responsibility for meaning. Read alone, sections like *Sebastian* and *Jackson* do not seem to be an integral part of *Lipsynch* in terms of core narrative material. But they can be 'rescued' from such drift – if the spectator chooses – by an effort to connect them synchronically and diachronically with the thematic. This enhanced productive role relies upon – and risks – the spectator's patience.

Lepage believes that his work stimulates the 'gymnastic minds' and 'gymnastic understanding' of his audience, whose ways of seeing are shaped by the pace of perception demanded by cinematic editing (Lepage, 'Conversation' 148). But what elevates *Lipsynch* above the ordinary is the spectator who gives it a whole day. The spectator *trusts* – not that *Lipsynch* is worth the money, but that it is worth the time. The contract of trust which Lepage's monumental pieces make with the spectator – that there will be an eventual thematic consolidation of the material – represents an act of patience, and even one of faith. Building up to thematic consolidation requires the mental work of the spectator. The pace of the experience is not determined by the

material, but by the slow recognition of its meanings. Rather than a cinematic pace of perception, *Lipsynch* establishes a *museum* pace. This mode of spectatorship functions through the accumulation of perceptions from different angles. *Lipsynch* is a slow 'walk' around a thematic assemblage of meanings that appears (deceptively) purposeless in its early stages. But ultimately, such interiorisation creates the pleasurable impression of having gained a multi-dimensional perspective upon a complex and fundamental element of identity, emotion and performance.

And it is *torture*. Not actual torture (although at the Barbican *Lipsynch* the spectator on my right walked out early), but torture in a different sense. The museum pace of spectatorship created by Lepage's theatre generates an effect similar to what Erwin Panofsky describes as the 'torturing quality of the three-dimensional.' This is most evident in Mannerist sculpture, where the viewer sees the limitations of a single, fixed angle of perspective upon a sculpture and is forced into *chasing* the sculpture's other dimensions. And this,

> far from allowing the beholder's eye to rest upon one predominant and satisfactory view....seems gradually to turn round so as to display, not one view, but a hundred or more...Each of these views being just as interesting and, on the other hand, just as incomplete as the other, the beholder feels indeed compelled to circulate around the statue. (Panofsky 175)

Each of *Lipsynch*'s nine sections present and compel a different perspective on the material and its meanings. The resolution of this tension through thematic consolidation was achieved at the very end of the Barbican *Lipsynch*. Jeremy and Ada follow each other in holding Lupe, in a reversal of the traditional Pietà, accompanied only by music. This sculptural image of parent and sacrificed child is emotive in itself. But it also re-iterates the structuring triad of the absent parent mythology introduced at the beginning of *Lipsynch*. The barriers of time and space are dissolved: neither Jeremy nor Ada knew Lupe as a person. The circularity of the structure connects the characters physically.

This invites both the chain of existence presented, and the multiple perspectives upon it, to be read through this consolidated image. At Northern Stage, *Lipsynch* had no formal resolution as such. The Barbican ending functioned as a resolution because it invited thematic consolidation.

If you can read theatre in this way, and choose to, it is a moment of great pleasure that works the same way as a chocolate orange. Thematic consolidation functions as a jolt, a sharp blow that relieves the torture of holding together *Lipsynch's* 'segments' – its accumulated and multiple angles of perspective. This is a cathartic release of tension. It creates a sensation of everything falling into place, an impression of a holistic awareness of *Lipsynch's* full meaning. Describing this as a sensation or impression is necessary, as many things remain out of place, and, as in Lepage's other productions, comprehensive description of a take-home meaning is elusive. Lepage's methods of signification come without guarantees. Particularly if you cannot, do not, or will not, read theatre in this way. For me, the spectator who initially sat on my right hand side at the Barbican (who walked out), and the spectator who subsequently occupied their vacant seat (and sobbed joyfully through the standing ovation), demonstrate the knife-edge Lepage's theatre balances on. One spectator's boredom is another's epiphany...

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