

Trashy Tendencies:

**Indeterminate acts of refusal in contemporary art and
performance practice**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and effort. Where other sources of information have been used they have been acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores trashy tendencies as creative and critical challenges to a reputable logics of cultural production. It outlines two approaches: the first considers a re-valorisation of trash through trashy aesthetics, antagonism and modes of *knowing* or *ironic* appreciation; the second considers art that renders trash precisely because we don't have words to describe it, or don't know how to value it. The latter in pushing at the limits of representation often gets relegated to the status of "shit". This is precisely what Twinkle, the protagonist of my video-performance *I Wanna be in that Film*, (2010) calls performance art. Through artistic and theoretical methods it asks two overarching questions:

- Can trashy tendencies push beyond cultural binaries, or are they dependent upon, and remain caught within, the dualities of "high" and "low" art, "legitimate" and "illegitimate" culture?
- And, how to stage, read, and write about trashy tendencies without recuperating them into institutional logic, or without producing an unsympathetic thesis?

On calling forth the trashy, determined on the one hand as "low" or "cheap", and on the other as something of indeterminate value, this thesis explores ways to push beyond the binaries, but also refuses to always line up with queer theories or complex concepts of becoming, which might strategise trash, eradicating its trashy affects. As such this thesis explores trash as a tactic, which *incorporates* and *subverts* trash aesthetics to offer something distinct from the oppositional strategies of trash cinema and political art, but also something different to conceptual strategy, non-representational art, or relational aesthetics. It argues that by paying attention to trashy tendencies (personal and impersonal) the very vital ethical, epistemological and ontological questions of art, performance and criticism are brought to the fore. Employing my art practice as a site of inquiry, it also makes use of a rigorous theoretical framework and archive of artistic and critical practices to provide focus and context for this project in the field of art history and performance studies.

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Preface
After Trash?

Trash, low-fi aesthetics and kitsch have become synonymous with the aesthetics of progressive movements. There are countless examples of refuse and refusal across the histories of the 20th century avant-garde and counter-culture including activist practices, performance art, body art, experimental film and queer and feminist theory, all of which have seduced me into thinking about the potentials of trashy tendencies. While the imaginative use of found materials and trashy recuperations from Dada to punk, folklore and beyond, worked to challenge hegemony and the institutionalisation of cultural life; much of its subversiveness has since been co-opted by neoliberalism. What was once an aesthetics of refusal has become, in some instances, complacent – even contributing to capitalism’s corporate regime. The corporatisation of gay pride is but one example. I have thus come to question the significance of trash, refuse, and refusal, and to think of this cultural moment *after trash* – both beyond its initial strategic uses, and *after it* in the sense of following its seductive appeal. There has been a recent upsurge of trash aesthetics and accelerated trashy modes in artistic practices since the Internet that requires greater attention, but also necessitates a re-thinking of the ways we attend critically to the subject of trash, performance and its permeating relations. Streaming low quality youtube videos, watching pirate copies online, or researching the archives of Ubuweb tell us that trash aesthetics are back (if they ever went away?). But as trash’s oppositional character has become subsumed into networked life, the separation of high and low culture appears to be sliding, making way for a series of more complex (less binaristic) *trashy becomings*.

I have noticed an ambivalence or indeterminacy in the current employment of trashy modes in artistic practices, which has brought me to question their efficacy. I have become increasingly interested in works in which I cannot tell if the artist or performer is *acting* critically (emphasis intended), or indeed just having a good time. This indeterminacy I have found more pleasurable and challenging than work using obvious antagonistic strategies. Thus the perplexity of trash is also important. Through my research I have become

increasingly interested in popular modes too, particularly where avant-garde practices merge with pop traditions – breaking down the divisions. This led me to write my Masters dissertation on the marginalised subject of club performance in London. Extending this research into the context of a PhD on the subject of trashy tendencies requires an understanding of how trash might challenge the institution from *within* rather than working against, or outside it. This project wants to think more generatively about how trashy tendencies in art practice make the binaries of high and low culture porous and open to effecting one other.

Yoko Ono – “The Che Guevara of Contemporary Art”

It is by no coincidence that I came to the much-contested, yet successful figure of contemporary art – Yoko Ono. I am a bemused fan. Ono’s work manages to cross and fuse the avant-garde with pop culture like no other. This is exemplified in her forays in performance, music, conceptual art, and activism and where these practices intermesh. There is an itinerancy in Ono’s practice that we might think of as trashy without the “trashy look”: she speaks simultaneously from the perspective of someone marginalised (as an artist, woman and a “witch”), but is also extremely privileged as a wealthy celebrity and widow of late Beatles member John Lennon. While being ridiculed for her success, which many have argued is due to her marriage to Lennon, accusing her of also breaking up the band, she has nevertheless used her privileged position to effectively engage a diverse range of disciplines and critical causes. From anti-war and fracking protests, fluxus poetry and bed-ins, to installation, sculpture and designing her own fashion menswear collection. We know that Ono wants “Peace on Earth”, but the ways in which she goes about it are sometimes questionable. What is clear, however, is her affirmation: she wants to multiply.

While Ono is a reoccurring figure in my own art practice, I have re-staged “Revelations” a track from her re-mix album *Yes I’m a Witch*, 2007 (*Grip Hold: Revelations Bonus Track*, 2009) I have also worked with the idea that Ono’s cool, sun-glassed, shiny face, haunts every contemporary artwork in the same way

that Che Guevara's face has become the omnipresent figure of revolution ironed onto a cheap t-shirt. [Fig. 0] My provocation is warranted in part by something Lennon himself said: "Ono is the world's most famous unknown artist", but also because she has become a kind of mascot (feminine diminutive of *masco* - meaning "witch.") of the bonkers conceptual artist. Ono's loopiness, loved and loathed from the art world to the tabloid newspaper, also plays part in the appeal of her trashy becomings. Criticised for making silly art, her shiny face serves as a cliché of the conceptual artist (see countless Ono parodies), but is not limited to cliché; her influence on artistic landscapes is distinguished. On a personal note, Ono has also figured as a reliable reference point when faced with the difficult task of describing to family members and other non-arty types, what it is exactly that I do. From her indeterminate (both marginalised and privileged) position she has somehow managed to democratise certain relations to art, and call forth others to respond and participate.

While this thesis is not based on the work of Ono, her face usurps it, and her creative and critical methods influence it. Incongruously incorporating clichéd affirmations and characterisations of the conceptual artist (without deliberation), she also manages to escape such representation by spreading her work across fields and disciplines, and through trashy processes that stop making sense. Ono's bellowing, grunting, snarling, mumbling, hollowed-out "singing" is sometimes difficult to take seriously, but it nevertheless produces a complex set of affects that both tickle and prickle a stuffy art scene and commoditised pop culture, calling forth ways of thinking, reading and experiencing art differently. Her playfulness and ability to take what appears unserious seriously, whilst also destabilising seriousness and institutional habits and values has inspired me to incorporate my own trashy fantasies into this project (personal and singular), but also to *imagine* (multiple) becomings. This manifests itself through a use of varying critical voices throughout, incorporating academic styles of writing, but also writing which inhabits the subject of trash itself, giving rise to crude, paranoid, hysterical, and even non-sensical (multiple) becomings *after trash*.

General Introduction

Trash, waste, rubbish, discard, whatever we want to call it, is everywhere and part of everyone's life. Whether putting our trash in the bin, recycling our trash, or selling our trash – trash is inevitable and common to all. Nevertheless, trash is also something that marks people *differently*. For some it is something to expose whilst for others it is an entity to be concealed. Trash thus marks us out as different in the process of hiding or revealing our trash.

This project emerges out of my own desire to put my trash on show. Over the past decade I have employed my performance art practice as both an opportunity to wilfully expose my trash through desiring, exhibitionist and cathartic exposures, but also through more strategic intent, and as a means of working through particular concepts, or as attempts at dismantling formal protocol in order to challenge a reputable logics of art practice. This has beckoned varying responses to my work, as one critic writes: “Like a child he was engaging, bemusing and, at times, embarrassing”, while another describes a collaborative piece of work as “intimate and daringly pornographic”.¹ This writing aims to provide a framework for thinking critically (and perhaps, but not defined as therapeutically) through my own art practice in relation to a field of art history and performance studies, whilst also paying attention to the demands trashy tendencies have for abandoning those frameworks in order to explore what emerges beyond its parameters. It is useful to consider my art practice as working in parallel to the theoretical writing, and to consider what they offer each other. Art often moves more quickly than thinking, or escapes the parameters of writing, but writing also offers opportunities to generatively connect a work of art beyond its own confinements. In this sense this thesis offers an insight into forms of trash management.

¹ Flora Wellesley, “Performing Idea: Day II”, *Belly Flop Magazine*, 6 October 2010 <<http://www.bellyflop.com/blog/performing-idea-day-ii>> [Accessed 24 March 2012]. And, Sara Jane Bailes, “The Space Between ‘You’ and ‘I’”, *Sacred Symposium*, Chelsea Theatre, 13 November 2010.

For cultural theorists Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke, “waste management... is deeply implicated in the practice of subjectivity.”² Alongside detailed analysis of waste’s occurring structures, they consider more “poetic” and “romantic” handling of waste following the work of George Bataille. For example, in the introduction to their book *Culture and Waste* they turn to “rubbish as beautiful”, examining an iconic sequence in the film *American Beauty* in which a boy in American middle class suburbia films a “dancing plastic bag” in his back yard. Hawkins and Muecke describe how we might be “caught unawares by the capacity of waste to surprise”.³ This thesis also pays attention to what we might call a “poetics of trash”, but instead of focusing on its sublime recuperations, which may incur a means of elevating trash into something of “high, spiritual, moral or intellectual worth”, it looks instead to qualities and values we might call trashy, and which may offer a more nuanced – even democratic – appropriation or re-valorisation of trash’s elements.⁴ For trash after all is what we all have in common. A useful example is the work of artist David Hoyle, who rather than offering a slow, contemplative and elevating consideration of a plastic bag, uses an array of them to create a one off “look” for one of his stage shows that entail his renowned knack for “lacerating social commentary” with “breathtaking instances of self-recrimination and even self-harm.”⁵ Hoyle’s work not only offers a consideration of what comes to be valued as “trash” or “poetic”, but also offers an ethics of trash through a confrontation of the ways we come to value things. As such we may think of trashy tendencies as a counter-poetics or counter-to-poetics, something different to the sublime or the abject.

Trashy tendencies are considered here on the one hand, as frequent leanings or inclinations towards the cheap and worthless, and objects judged of bad taste

² Gay Hawkins and Stephen Muecke, *Culture and Waste: The Creation and Destruction of Value* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), p. xiii.

³ Hawkins and Muecke, p. xi.

⁴ “Sublime”, *The Free Dictionary*, <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/sublime>> [Accessed 3 September 2013]

⁵ Ben Walters, “Welcome Back David Hoyle” *The Guardian Film Blog*, 24 March 2010. <<http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2010/mar/24/david-hoyle-london-gay-lesbian-film>> [Accessed 28 August 2013]

and/or poor quality. But on the other hand I understand them within the context of this research as temporal lapses or libidinal diversions that put us in contact with the unkempt, the unlikely, and the always potentially unuseful. The latter, I argue, makes trashy tendencies different to, and not limited to a style or genre of “trashy art” or “trashy performance” (although representations of trash may also play a part). While trashy tendencies put us in danger of failure and refusal, this I argue, is what makes them so curious and appealing as critical and creative practices. This study thus requires a consideration of the ways trash is re-valued, but without “converting waste from bad to good, using slick theory simply to recuperate the low”.⁶ Such revaluations of trash are a principle concern of this thesis. In researching trashy tendencies this thesis risks being judged as favouring, fetishizing, even privileging trash within the conventionally untrashy realm of scholarly research. It will therefore explore the paradoxical thrills and difficulties of such a task, and on doing so may also expose that trash is already at work (but maybe obscured) in unlikely places like academia too. Through performing, reading and writing about trashy tendencies, I argue that the vital ethical, epistemological and ontological questions of art and performance emerge. My questions are thus not predetermined, but emerge as a response to this process. This thesis addresses two overarching question:

- Can trashy tendencies push beyond cultural binaries, or are they dependent upon, and remain caught within, the dualities of “high” and “low” art, “legitimate” and “illegitimate” culture?
- And, how to stage, read, and write about trashy tendencies without recuperating them into institutional logic, or without producing an unsympathetic thesis?

While this project looks at ways trash is recycled or put to work differently, it is more closely related to the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu than environmental studies. Bourdieu discusses the revaluation of cultural practices through the notion of “cultural capital” – a form of social mobility beyond

⁶ Hawkins and Muecke, p. xvi.

economic means, and offers a peripheral perspective on subjects of taste and distinction. While Bourdieu provides a useful context throughout, I am also conscious that his theories may be reductive of art's heterogeneity. I have therefore found it more useful to turn to the work of artists like Andy Warhol who has perhaps most notably brought our attention to the process through which trash is re-valued in art. Rather than show the "ordinariness" of junk, which Barbara Haskell suggests was the work of the assemblagists of the late '50s and early '60s like Robert Rauschenberg, Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg,⁷ Warhol revealed the "extra-ordinariness" of trash. Warhol created celebrity out of criminal low-life, and glamour out of a catastrophic car crash. He made art quick and easy by wilfully reproducing commodities claiming, "art is what you can get away with".⁸ He showed that money could be made and a new scene could emerge through trashy revalorisations. On the contrary, but with perhaps most affinity to trashy tendencies and my project here, were the "moldy" labours of artist Jack Smith, who arguably paved the way for Warhol, and who offered a somewhat different perspective. Smith once said: "People think that art is made in fits of ecstasy, but art is long difficult, boring work".⁹ Smith's films and "live films" (a term he used for performance), staged his exotic utopian fantasies and notably "difficult personality" at the perils of censorship. Both Warhol and Smith showed that trashy tendencies are diverse – but always leaning towards the excessive limits of "easy" or "difficult".

The indeterminacy of trashy tendencies is usefully understood here as shifting incongruously between these two limits. As such they offer a counterpoint to the tried and tested destitute works of minimalism, and the "ordinariness" of assemblage artists and the happenings that followed. But they also operate in excess of the everydayness of humanist works with socially engaged incentives, and are incompatible also with the often-conservative oppositional strategies of political art and political theatre. Trashy tendencies, I argue, offer opportunities

⁷ Barbara Haskell, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance 1958-1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984)

⁸ This claim has been put to dispute over who said it first, Warhol or communications philosopher Marshall McLuhan.

⁹ Owen Parry, "Lineages of Trash: Owen Parry Interviews 'Legend, icon, wild-hearted demoness bad girl bitch' – Penny Arcade", *Dance Theatre Journal*, 24. 3 (2011)

to expose the obscured ideologies of strategic regimes by operating tactically, and offering more pleasurable and provocative re-imagining of art's potentialities.

I will now outline two distinct approaches to my study of trashy tendencies in art and performance. The first is a consideration of trash aesthetics or a trashy genre, the second is a consideration of trash beyond representational modes, as that which becomes "trash" precisely because we do not know what it is, or what its value is. Both these approaches run throughout my thesis, and offer a useful conceptual framework for thinking about trashy tendencies.

1. *Trash Aesthetics*

Trash aesthetics have been most predominantly explored in the field of film studies, which has for some time engaged with "trashy" genres of "bad film" like sexploitation cinema, snuff movies, soft porn and other wilful trashy efforts. Jeffrey Sconce, in his essay *Trashing the Academy*, develops the notion of a "paracinema" to describe the oeuvre of "bad film", which includes filmmakers like John Waters and William Castle. He says that paracinema is "less a distinct group of films than a particular reading protocol, a counter-aesthetic turned subcultural sensibility devoted to all manner of cultural detritus."¹⁰ Sconce sees paracinema as a reaction to Hollywood and the mainstreaming movie industry.

Following sociologist Herbert Gans, Sconce suggests that we understand paracinema through its "radically opposed 'taste publics' that are nevertheless involved in a common 'taste culture'".¹¹ Sconce's discussion of taste publics can be read in relation to Michael Warner, who distinguishes "The public" (which I understand as compatible with "taste culture") from "A public", (which I understand as compatible with "taste public"); the latter "comes into being in relation to texts and their

¹⁰ Jeffrey Sconce, "'Trashing' The Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style", *Screen* 36.4 (1995) 371-393 (p. 372.)

¹¹ Sconce, p. 375.

circulation”.¹² Both are useful for thinking about the ways a taste-public forms around trash. Sconce makes a useful distinction between paracinema and the work of irony in modes like camp discussed by Susan Sontag. He writes, “Camp was an aesthetic of ironic colonization and cohabitation. Paracinema, on the other hand, is an aesthetic of vocal confrontation.”¹³ I argue that Sconce’s distinction, however, falls short in the face of artists like Smith or Hoyle, whose work cannot be read as compatible with his understanding of camp as “a reading strategy that allowed gay men to rework the Hollywood cinema”.¹⁴ In both Smith (who I will discuss in Chapter 1 and 2) and Hoyle, camp is defiant and aggressive and goes further than camp to the point of obscenity and abstraction. We might call this hard-camp or camp-abstraction. Nevertheless this thesis will explore how trash both thrives and fails as a taste public. I will explore how the paradox of trash brings forth the very vital social and critical aspects, but also look at how it may limit the work to dualism. This is precisely where the second movement of trashy tendencies comes in.

2. *Trash Beyond Representation*

This thesis also explores how itinerant and trashy relations can push at the limits of representation, genre and language. For that which we don’t have a word to describe is also relegated to the status of “shit”. This “shit” is often inexplicable – as in “I don’t know some weird shit”, which is what Twinkle, the protagonist of my video-performance *I Wanna be in that Film* (2010) calls performance art. Hawkins and Muecke in their discussions on waste also point out that: “language is not a closed economy where “x” will always denote “y” – it opens into the echo chambers of connotation.”¹⁵ “Trash” or “shit” in hindsight may offer opportunities to push beyond verified trash aesthetics, and to the

¹² Michael Warner, “Publics and Counter-publics (Abbreviated version)”, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 88.4 (November 2002), pp. 413-425, (p. 413.)

¹³ Sconce, p. 374.

¹⁴ Sconce, p. 374.

¹⁵ Hawkins and Muecke, p. xiii.

unrepresentable, unfathomable and unintelligible, pushing at the boundaries of artistic language. Muecke and Hawkins also note: “negativity is [not] a linguistic phenomenon alone, for there are other senses we use to distinguish good from bad, and contingencies which give them valency – the nose, for instance.”¹⁶ They continue: “waste can touch the most visceral registers of the self – it can trigger responses and affects that remind us of the body’s intensities and multiplicities.”¹⁷ This “shit” works as an alluring driving force in my art practice. And this thesis will explore how on pushing beyond a taste-culture, trashy tendencies offer affective knowledge – a knowledge *felt* and *sensed* by individuals and communities over knowledge inscribed by institutions.

My approach to these two strands also calls for a discursive framework for thinking through trash and its relation to pleasure and desire. After all, perhaps the most prominent aspect of this research is trash’s rejection and appeal, (in relation to point 1 above) but also the development of trashy-becomings as a desiring-process, or what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) call – “desiring-production” (in relation to point 2.).¹⁸ I have thus come to think of trashy tendencies as on the one hand personal, through pleasure, diversion and whim: this ties in with the subjective element of all art practice and is critical; and on the other hand as impersonal and autonomous, opening up beyond the self to multiple trashy becomings. The latter speaks to the generative and creative potential of art practice. As such I am working with differing theories for understanding the relationship between desire and trash: the first is an understanding of desire in psychoanalytic terms as “lack”, which was foregrounded in the work of Jacques Lacan (via Freud) who affirms that desire forms through a relation to the other that one is not. Desire is a relation to something absent, and is a “lack of being” rather than a lack of this or that.¹⁹ Lacan holds that desire is not necessarily negative as it drives us for action, creation and recognition. The second, following Deleuze and Guattari, is

¹⁶ Hawkins and Muecke, p. xiii.

¹⁷ Hawkins and Muecke. p. Xiv.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (New York: Viking, 1977)

¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire: Livre VIII Le transfert, 1960-61*, (Paris: Seuil, 1991)

desiring-production, which is not unconscious and based on an imagined “lack”, but is instead a real productive force – a desiring-machine, which incorporates into oneself what is other than oneself, and which characterises the process of all life.²⁰ While the latter was a deliberate disagreement with Lacan’s theories of desire, in their own terms it cannot be seen as an oppositional theory for “It presupposes a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences; a properly differential and original space and time; all of which persist alongside the simplification of limitation and opposition”.²¹ Rather than opposing Lacan then, desire becomes trashy in terms of its complexity in Deleuze’s writings. I might also bring in a third perspective to desire via Michel Foucault and his work on the technologies of the self, pleasure and power (which was against Lacanian “lack”).²² Foucault’s bio-political theories became prolific for understanding minority movements including the development of queer theory. Foucault understands identity as a form of subjugation and a way of exercising power over people or preventing them from moving outside fixed boundaries. Like Deleuze, Foucault is interested in affirmation and a way out, but as Deleuze writes in a letter to Foucault (which remained unpublished for some time), “phenomena of resistance would be like the inverted image of the systems, they would have the same character - diffusion, heterogeneity etc., they would be *vis à vis*; but this direction seems to me to block the escapes as much as it finds one”.²³ For Deleuze then, Foucault’s use of pleasure is not an escape, but in his own terms a “reterritorialisation”, a means for a subject to “find themselves again” in a process which overwhelms them. Deleuze insists, “Desiring-assemblages have nothing to do with repression.”²⁴

Both Lacanian and Deleuzian (but also Foucault’s) perspectives are useful for thinking about the generative potentials of art practice, which I argue always

²⁰ Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus*

²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 50.

²² See: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1986)

²³ Gilles Deleuze, *Desire & Pleasure*, trans. by Melissa McMahon, 1997.

<<http://www.artdes.monash.edu.au/globe/delfou.html>> [accessed 2 September 2013]

²⁴ Deleuze, *Desire & Pleasure*

escapes reductive criticism, and instead offers trashy re-valorations, but also trashy multiplications, readings and re-creations beyond “lack”, repression, dualism or inversion. I am thus refusing to identify with only one theory of desire, which might strategise trashy tendencies, and thus limit its non-complex characterisations, which I argue can induce personal pleasure, but are also affective in calling forth trashy publics. While in Deleuze’s terms pleasure may not offer something ultimately ethical, the search for ethics may not constitute a sympathetic discussion of trashy tendencies. After all, pleasure may be necessary to sustain focus and interest in the lengthy and sometimes overwhelming complexity of undertaking PhD research. I therefore shift between these theories, as they offer differing, yet-useful perspectives on trash.

In Chapter 2, in a discussion of a performance I create with the self-referential title *I Wanna be in that Show* (2010), artists’ personal desires– even narcissistic ones - are staged and made transparent, perhaps in order to expose (as Foucault’s work does) the powers which govern bodies. However, on doing so, it also considers how artists incorporate the works of other artists into their work without necessarily having to accurately re-stage those works, which would be more retro-active. Instead desire is staged as constituting a productive method of appropriation for calling forth the future and sustaining an art practice. In Chapter 3 I discuss *Touching Feeling*, a one on one performance I create where inter-subjective performances create space for trashy diversions between artists and participants, but also where a work is constructed, not so much democratically (which is the bent of relational aesthetics), but through contact between consenting participants, which creates a rupture in the networked relational economy of art festivals. As such while personal pleasure is granted, and given significant reign throughout this thesis, it nevertheless demonstrates how the personal can also open to the autonomous and multiple. It is in Chapter 4, on developing the concept of a colloquial art and performance practice that desire more significantly opens up to a Deleuzian concept of desiring-production. Making the case for a colloquial performance practice in relation to Deleuze’s process of becoming minor (rather than as fixed to minority identity), it shifts desire beyond the personal

(defined by lack), and to the multiple. Desire here no longer belongs to individuals, but is a process of becoming and always relating to others. In this chapter we might think of art itself as a desiring-machine that calls forth and produces other scenes.

While this thesis engages the work of a number of theorists, it aims to explore how knowledge operates through the matter of art and performance, as well as on the page in theoretical texts. And while theory is useful, first and foremost it is the work of other artists like Jack Smith (US), Andy Warhol (US), Mel Brimfield (UK), Vaginal Davis (US/DE), John Waters (US) *Plastique Fantastique* (UK), Christeene (US) and Die Antwoord (ZA) that provide focus and a framework for thinking through the concepts proposed by my practice and this thesis. It is through my engagement with art and performance practice that I situate this research in an expanding field of art history and performance studies. I will now outline the focus of each chapter:

Chapter 1. Contexts and Methodology: A Trashy Logics of Cultural Production

Chapter 1 contextualizes trashy tendencies in relation to the histories of art and performance. It breaks the project down into several components to provide an overview of its key terms and theoretical concepts, establishes the various literatures and art practices on which it builds, borrows and departs, and the artistic research and writing methods it develops, which are then put to work through my practice and the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Staging Trashy Desire

Chapter 2 teases out four concepts from my work *I Wanna be in that Show/ Film* (2010) including desiring desire, failure and glamour, (not) a performance lecture or red-do, and histories and mysteries. It explores ways performance can offer an alternative historiography of performance art by staging what Walter Benjamin calls “flashes of memory”, which engage fantasy to extend art into new aberrant futures. This chapter locates art’s very potentiality in its viral ability to influence and inspire more artists and more art.

Chapter 3: Trashy Relations and Participation Art

Chapter 3 offers trashy relations such as “sleaze”, “contact” and giving “bad audience” as a counterpoint to both Nicholas Bourriaud’s “convivial” art in his book and exhibition *Relational Aesthetics*, and Claire Bishop’s championing of antagonistic works in her response to Bourriaud and subsequent thinking on participation in contemporary art. I use this as a framework for thinking through my experience as a participant and performer in one to one performance, including the development and staging of my own performance *Touching Feeling* (2011).

Chapter 4: Fictional Realness: Towards a Colloquial Performance Practice

Chapter 4 develops the notion of a colloquial performance practice expanding Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s notion of a minor literature, which subverts the major language from within. It offers a discussion of four colloquial acts that blur distinctions between reality and fiction including self-mythology, gossip, parody and “super-parody”. It then uses these examples as a framework for thinking through my own unfolding project *Akt-schön!* (2011-13) and a *new-colloquialism* in the work of Die Antwoord and Christeene, who treat the “local” as “global”.

DVD 1 and DVD 2: Art Practice²⁵

DVD 1 accompanying this writing includes documentation of performances and video works. I invite readers to view the material as they wish, however, there is a sustained discussion of three specific works, which readers may find it useful to view accordingly. In Chapter 2: *I Wanna be in that Show* and *I Wanna be in that Film* (2010); Chapter 3: *Touching Feeling* (2011); and Chapter 4: *Akt-schön!* (2011). DVD 2 is an auxiliary archive of works developed alongside this thesis – some of which are referenced in the writing. I encourage readers to make themselves familiar in particular with two collaborations I hold as Mitch & Parry (with Andrew Mitchelson) and Lola & Stephen (with Eirini Kartsaki).

²⁵ Please note: Footage is best viewed on a large screen, projector or monitor.

Ultimately the aim of this thesis is to develop a trashy logics of cultural production that challenges us to act and think differently when confronted with works that sit uncomfortably within institutional frameworks, and which fail to register within tried and tested languages of criticality. I will turn to Chapter 1 now, which offers up a series of moves towards a trashy logics.

Chapter 1

Context and Methodology: A Trashy Logics of Cultural Production

Just do it
Let yourself be wanton
Stray-away - don't give up (all the time)
Don't commit (all the time)
Pick up pace/slow down
Betray your ideals - they're flawed
Forget about making sense, forget about making it
~~Be unethical~~ - Don't get carried away by the cupcakes and
polka dots that surround you
Use what you've got
You're onto something and onto nothing
Don't be too precious - it's just art
Does my bum look big in this performance?
What's going on over there?

Owen Parry, *ManiFiesta* (2010)

Trashy Tendencies

Firstly, I want to introduce the key terms of my thesis. In an online dictionary the word “trashy” is described as that “resembling or containing trash”, or something “cheap or worthless” such as “trashy merchandise”.¹ Something labelled “trashy” is frequently considered “in very poor taste or of very poor quality.”² By invoking the term “trashy tendencies” in my title I am pointing to art practices with an “inclination toward a particular characteristic or type of behavior”, which is de-valued or is considered of little value.³ The term “tendencies” also has a certain criminal purchase, as in the disparaging “s/he has a tendency to cheat”, or “s/he has a tendency to go out with younger

¹ “Trashy”, *The Free Dictionary*, <www.thefreedictionary.com/trashy> [Accessed 4 March 2013]

² “Trashy”, *The Free Dictionary*

³ “Trashy”, *Google*, <www.google.com> [Accessed 4 March 2013]

girls/boys”, or “s/he has suicidal tendencies.” Tendencies suggest an inclination towards the destitute or the excessive ends of normative regimes and as such often elicit judgment. They might also be defined as temporal processes. We tend not to think of tendencies as permanent or fixed, but as escapes or diversions from strategy or intention. They are therefore usually resisted or considered counter-productive to a research project like this.

Procrastination might be one universal trashy tendency. Not only because in procrastination our attention often moves to objects that might be deemed “trashy” such as Trash TV, Trash Novels, Gossip Magz, blogs, YouTube, porn etc. but because procrastination itself is a process involving an impulsive, even infantile desire to look away, to move and express, to *feel* more pleasurable things. Procrastination is delaying. It is the thing we try to avoid (despite also being completely necessary) in order to produce a thesis like this. As Mark Little writes: “Procrastination delivers disorder, uncertainty and ultimately therefore an intimate relationship to truth.”⁴ He continues, “It implies an activity, an active refusal of closure”. Trashy tendencies are also preventative of closure, lingering in the wrong place or with the wrong object, or with the unidentified thing that refuses identity and thus we have no word for it expect, perhaps, to call it “shit”. Trashy tendencies bear an interesting relation to the Castilian word “diversión” meaning “fun”, “enjoyment” or “entertainment”, and the English word “diversion” meaning to orientate oneself *differently* and away from the intentional or objective. They are thus perhaps best defined as pleasurable diversions motivated by desire that always risk (painful) repercussions. I see them as intrinsic elements to both artistic and traditional research practices, yet they nevertheless go unaccounted for, perhaps because of their heterogeneity and thus difficulty to discuss.

But trashy tendencies are not only behavioral traits, and cannot only be solely defined as a leaning to objects of “low” or “poor” value. Trashy tendencies might be better understood as processes that bring the very question of value to the fore. They are idiosyncratic and fleeting processes, and often work in contrast

⁴ Mark Little, “Why I Procrastinate”, *Parallax* 5.1 (1999), p. 79.

to one's own values or incentives. In this sense it is limiting to define them as a repeatable behavior, or ideology, belonging to only certain types of people. They are multiplicitous – both able to define and refuse taste but also markedly *explode* a taste culture. Filmmaker and author John Waters – “Pope of Trash” – whose films like *Pink Flamingoes* (1972) and *Polyester* (1982) might be considered as forming a certain trashy taste culture, shows the instability of trashy tendencies when he claims: “... underneath my posing as a trash film enthusiast, a little known fact is that I sneak off in disguise (and hope to god I’m not recognized) to arty films in the same way business men rush in to see *Pussy Talk* on their lunch hour.”⁵ Waters shows us that trashy tendencies cannot be defined by their users, (who are universal) and cannot ultimately define a user. On showing that one person’s trash is another person’s pleasure, Waters shows that being trashy is a complex and temporary business. Through desiring diversions, reversals, recuperations and ruptures they work to push beyond the binary – shattering any genre one might call “trashy performance”. As such, my aim is not to outline a canon of trashy artists, but to engage the ways trashy tendencies offer creative and critical insights into a history and future of artistic production. I will demonstrate how they do this through contradictions and disavowals, which at times risk undermining their own value or even the value of this project, stalling and undermining any ideology this thesis may begin to instil.

Performance: A Trashy Business

Beyond a rarefied aesthetic taste culture or exclusive genre of performance, I want to consider the matter of performance itself as inherently trashy: an art form, whose ontology is characterised on one hand by its ephemerality and intrinsic refusal to remain, and on the other its work *as* remains. Performance’s ontology has been the subject of countless debates over the years, exemplified most notably in Peggy Phelan’s treatise that, “performance becomes itself

⁵ John Waters, *Crackpot: The Obsessions of John Waters* (New York: Scribner, 2003), p. 120.

through disappearance”,⁶ and Rebecca Schneider’s (amongst others’) antithesis that “performance remains” in the photographs, video recordings, spaces and memories it produces.⁷ Schneider writes: “In privileging an understanding of performance as a refusal to remain, do we ignore other ways of knowing, other modes of remembering, that might be situated precisely in the ways in which performance remains, but remains differently?”⁸ Thinking of performance as inherently trashy, we are able to blur any opposing ontology and consider instead performance’s indeterminate value across cultural production. A consideration of performance as a trashy business enables a blurring of the lines between its forays in the “real” and the “imaginary”, and as “legitimate” or “illegitimate” culture. It relates its refusal to remain (as commodity object) with its ontology *as remains* (trash and discard), it also points to its vexed history and its refusal by institutions across the histories of visual art, theatre and philosophy, the disciplines in which my work and this thesis intersect. In turn, it points to the way performance has necessitated new forms of historicising and *thinking*.

In his book *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice*, Jonas A. Barish addresses the hostility towards theatre as not only located in straight-laced moralists but also in major historical philosophers.⁹ From Plato’s *Republic*, through to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Letter to Monsieur D’Alambert on Spectacles* in 1758, which objects to the building of a Genevan civic theatre, we can trace performance’s difficult relationship to morality and ethics.¹⁰ In more recent history (1967, precisely) it was the art critic Michael Fried who spoke out against the “theatricality” of minimalist sculpture.¹¹ Minimalism (or “literalism” as Fried called it) offered an

⁶ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 148.

⁷ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Re-enactment* (London: Routledge, 2011). See also: Rebecca Schneider, “Performing Remains”, *Performance Research* 6.2 (2001) pp. 100-108.

⁸ Schneider, “Performing Remains”, p. 101.

⁹ Jonas A. Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981)

¹⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Lettre à D’Alembert”, in *à M. D’Alembert sur son article Genève* (Amsterdam, 1758)

¹¹ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998)

experience of “theatricality” rather than “presentness”; it left the viewer in his or her ordinary, non-transcendent world. Phenomenological notions of art grew out of minimalism, and the focus of art moved from the object to the relationship between the spectator and that object. This move also marks a shift from the value of the art object to the value of performance.

We are perhaps in the most crucial moment to call performance a trashy business as it currently undergoes such a dramatic shift in cultural value, from a stigmatised art practice exemplified in the NEA4 (North American artists Karen Finley, Tim Miller, John Fleck, and Holly Hughes), whose government grant for the arts was vetoed by John Frohnmyer in June 1990 because of decency, to its current celebration and embrace by institutions as a cultural phenomenon and as a concept *and metaphor in critical discourse*.¹² Its embrace by cultural institutions is currently mirrored in its uptake in pop culture too, exemplified albeit with its own problems, in the recent celebrity frenzy surrounding Lady Gaga’s collaboration with performance art mascot Marina Abramović, and rapper Jay Z’s own MOMA six-hour durational podium piece – *Picasso Baby*.¹³ So when did performance stop being cultural detritus? Or rather how has its trashiness transformed? And how has performance (this trashy business) become more appealing to institutions and regimes of power?

Thinking through performance’s shift in value has been the priority for *Performance Matters*, a three-year creative research project between Goldsmiths University of London, University of Roehampton and the Live Art Development Agency. My role as Researcher on the project has enabled this thesis to develop by providing a framework to test my practical research, and a community in which to share my ideas, as well as offering valuable

¹² See: Cynthia Carr, “Timeline of NEA4 Events”, *Franklin Furnace*, <<http://www.franklinfurnace.org/research/essays/nea4/neatimeline.html>> [Accessed 20 September 2013]

¹³ Marina Abramovic Institute, “The Abramović method practiced by Lady Gaga”, *YouTube* <<https://vimeo.com/71919803>> [Accessed 15 August 2013] See also: Sean Michaels, “Jay Z performs Picasso Baby for six hours in New York Gallery”, *The Guardian*, 11 July 2013. <<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/jul/11/jay-z-picasso-baby-new-york>> [Accessed 15 August 2013]

opportunities to expose and disseminate my research to broader publics across academia and various scenes of contemporary performance. One of the chief aims of the project was engaging new and diverse publics (beyond academia and the art world) – an imperative currently imposed by governing funding bodies across institutions. Besides the bureaucracy of monitoring “impact”, the government incentive is to productively relate performance research back (from the hands of an elitist art world, critics and philosophers) to its use as a socially engaged public practice. This appears to be a “good” incentive. Nevertheless, I will be discussing how trashy tendencies can challenge institutional incentives by complicating ideologies of “good” or “bad”, which presents a grave problem for minorities and those who do not fit in to “normative” society. And thus I look to the ways trashy tendencies operate as creative and critical expressions across counter-cultural (including anti-social) practices and the popular. This shift from the marginal and specialist towards the common and popular might be seen as sympathetic with my trashy project. However, I would argue that the move to popularise performance in the examples of Abramović et al engenders a conservative return to the figure of the artist as celebrity genius. Still, where Abramović fails, someone like Waters prevails, exemplified in Waters’ cult success (*Pink Flamingos*, 1972) and also commercial success (*Hairspray*, 1988), and the mixed/blurred publics who attend his live talk shows.¹⁴ Building a diverse public has been an element of this project as it traverses multiple economies from the academic conference to the nightclub, the gallery to the theatre, the Internet to the street. As such my work has invoked varying responses.

Trashy Histories of Art

Trashy tendencies, despite their universalising aspects, have been given little thought within contemporary art history and performance studies. Mainly, perhaps, because they appear counter-productive to any sustained research project like this. In my research I have found that there has been an engagement

¹⁴ What makes Waters a success is his humour and self-deprecation, which destabilises the customs through which we come to associate “good” art.

with trash, waste and junk – but no sustained research on artist’s trashy tendencies.

A significant resource on the preliminary employment of trash in contemporary art was brought together in an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in the 1984 titled *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism and Performance, 1958-1964*. The exhibition’s subsequent publication by curator Barbara Haskell focuses on “The Aesthetics of Junk”,¹⁵ and locates “junk” as a movement situated, albeit problematically, between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art, and is exemplified in the work of assemblagists like Robert Rauschenberg, Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg. These artists used found objects, dirt, scrap metal, and pieces of lumber to create their works. Haskell looks at the move to “junk” and “ordinary” materials without making them “extraordinary” as a move towards the staging of the everyday, which became a staple characteristic of the happenings that followed. In Oldenburg’s work Haskell sees a move from found debris to found images. She writes, “the assemblagists paved the way for the emergence of Pop Art, which simply replaced urban detritus with scavenged motifs from mass media.”¹⁶

While *Blam!* demonstrated the ways waste was put to use in this era and how it paved the way for a new art movement, only passing reference is made to the theme of “junk” in the earlier work of the Beat Poets like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, and Dada and surrealism. Folkloric practices and crafts, despite having employed waste products to make object for centuries, are completely exempt from Haskell’s exhibition and essay.¹⁷ And as Greil Marcus puts it in his book exploring a secret history of heretics from punk and dada to the medieval Brethren of the Free Spirit and Ranters of seventeenth century England: “...before there was dada, there was an ad for Dada shampoo.”¹⁸ In retrospect

¹⁵ Barbara Haskell, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance 1958-1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984)

¹⁶ Haskell, p.29

¹⁷ See as a successful example: Jeremy Deller, *Folk Archive 2000-present: an ongoing project*. <<http://www.jeremydeller.org/>> [Accessed 20 August 2013]

¹⁸ Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 228.

reducing trash to a cultural moment feels ironically like a waste of time. I have thus turned to particular artists who have inspired me, such as those working with moving image film and performance at this period like Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith – the latter in particular, whose work formed out of irreverent, impulsive and libidinal acts that we might call trashy tendencies.¹⁹ Beyond merely presenting the “ordinariness of junk” as the assemblagists did, or the “ordinariness of life” in happenings, Anger’s films marked out a trashy aesthetic drawing on excessive textures, layers, glamour and celebrity icons from Hollywood such as James Dean and Marlon Brando, and iconic historical figures like Hitler and Stalin. It was Smith, however, who took these elements and put them to use in spectacularly indeterminate ways. It is difficult to define what Smith’s formal and critical strategies were exactly – or whether they were strategies. Smith staged his trashy tendencies and desires brilliantly through his “irregularities of style”, and “radical heterogeneity, eccentricity and tendency towards failure”.²⁰ He was also noted a terrible procrastinator. As such his works posed a great challenge to art history and criticism.

In an essay titled *the Independent American Cinema 1958-1964*, John G. Hanhardt compares Kenneth Anger’s *Scorpio Rising* (1963) with Jack Smith’s *Flaming Creatures* (1963) – both of which were banned by authorities for presenting an obscene threat to moral decorum. Hanhardt writes on *Flaming Creatures*: “Unlike *Scorpio Rising*, it is not constructed as a complex intellectual montage of symbols and iconography.”²¹ We are brought to question in Smith’s work not only what is of value, but how we value his work and art more broadly. How do we read a work which features an array of transvestites, hermaphrodites, drag shows, a sexually ambiguous vampire, a drug orgy and a well-built cunnilingual rapist? Dominic Johnson who first introduced me to

¹⁹ There are other practitioners of this period who work with junk aesthetics who I don’t discuss here including Maria Irene Fornes, Richard Foreman or H. M. Koutoukas.

²⁰ For thorough accounts and terms of Smiths work See: Dominic Johnson, *Glorious Catastrophe: Jack Smith, Performance and Visual Culture*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2013)

²¹ John G. Hanhardt, “The American Independent Cinema 1958-1964”, in *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance 1958-1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984) p. 131.

Smith and who has written extensively on his life and work considers how a category defying Smith “poses uncomfortable challenges to cultural criticism and historical analysis”.²² Johnson also reflects on the inadequacy of attempts to locate Smith historically and says: “to constrain an artist to a particular decade entails a series of limitations, denials and caricatures,”²³ and points to the ways Smith exploded such limitations. His idiosyncratic personality and art, developed across three decades before his AIDS-related death in 1989, escaped the patterns and fashions of his critical peers during this prolific 60s period. His work seems to thwart any simplistic or over-determined critical reading. Instead, it offers something radically creative and intuitive – the construction of an uncompromising new imaginary through the staging of utopic, and at times perhaps unthinkable worlds. Smith’s films and “live films” (a Smithian term for performance), featuring constructed exotic landscapes of trashy treasures both human and non-human, staged his queer fascinations, “moldy” obsessions and notably “difficult” personality. Hanhardt writes on Smith’s influences and says:

The fascination Jack Smith had for Hollywood mythology extended beyond the movie stories and plots. These stories marked the real intrigue on the screen. Smith looked to the sets, lighting, makeup, and costume as distinctive elements in the vision of the director. The movies and their stars were to Jack Smith a mythopetic world of desires expressing the extravagant wishes of their directors.²⁴

Smith’s sprawling practice expressed a specific trashy desire and desire for trash but also great attention to its structures and forms. His extensively rich and textured utopic landscapes were constructed at the risk of censorship and failure. And while censorship made him well known earlier on, Johnson writes on how Smith profusely refused success and maintained his marginal status by ensuring his “self-disappearance” from the major canons of art by inducing repeated failures: Starting performances late and teasing them out slowly for hours, advertising them in the “wrong” places like the Religious Classifieds, not to mention his failure to finish films and document performances – some of

²² Johnson, p. 28.

²³ Johnson, p. 17.

²⁴ Hanhardt, p. 131

which, Johnson notes, “the content and titles were used interchangeably.”²⁵ Smith’s “difficult” personality, uncompromising and catastrophic acts made him an unappealing attraction for institutions and historians. Johnson writes how Smith did all this to “deliberately limit his target market and preserve his cryptic marginality”.²⁶ Nevertheless, Smith built his own institution (before Warhol), incorporating a variety of New York locals, other artists and personalities, beatniks, and random people from the street into his productions. Smith’s work called forth new mythic, fantastical worlds, and he himself called forth a new art scene, which became mythic in and of itself – paving the way for the likes of Andy Warhol and the influx of low culture, pop and bad taste in artworks that followed.

Smith figures throughout this thesis for the permission his work has inspired in me to engage and trust my own trashy tendencies, and to follow my own fantasies and desires, which despite being inspired by his own whims, are markedly different. According to Johnson, Smith creates “an eccentric logics of cultural production”.²⁷ Paralleling this, I wish to extend my own work and this project through a *trashy logics of cultural production*.

Trashy Ethics

Trashy tendencies elicit judgement (moral and ethical) and questions of worth. This is precisely why they are interesting to art and performance. They offer a counterpoint to what performance scholar Nicholas Ridout describes as “a mundane liberalism, in which we are wearily enjoined to be nice to each other, and is thus of no use to anyone.”²⁸ This project offers a counterpoint to both a political art and theatre (such as Bertolt Brecht’s dialectic theatre or the Guerrilla Girls’ feminist interventions), but also a counterpoint to structuralism, deconstruction and aestheticism (such as minimalist, quiet, slow or understated works). Following the work of political philosopher Chantal Mouffe who

²⁵ Johnson, p. 15

²⁶ Johnson, p. 16

²⁷ Johnson, p. 27

²⁸ Nicholas Ridout, “Theatre & Ethics”, in *Theatre & Series* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 55.

considers the ethical turn in cultural discourse “a triumph of a sort of moralizing liberalism that is increasingly filling the void left by the collapse of any project of real political transformation”,²⁹ Ridout’s discussion works insightfully to expose the impossibility (and perhaps failure) of theatre with a sustained interest in the struggle to produce ethics. In the course of his book he refers to two of performance studies’ much-distinguished candidates – performance company Goat Island (US) and Forced Entertainment (UK).³⁰ As Peggy Phelan has noted: “Forced Entertainment has struggled to produce witnesses rather than spectators”.³¹ She continues, “to witness an event is to be present at it in some fundamentally ethical way...”³² Similarly Adrian Heathfield observes an invested interest in ethics in the work of Goat Island and writes: “Their aesthetic is deeply engaged with the ethics of performance.”³³ Their work can be considered according to Heathfield as “an enacted meditation on the art of living, a work that does the asking of the timeless ethical question ‘How to live?’”³⁴

For Ridout, the question is less about “how to live?” and more about “how to act?” He writes that theatre offers some problems to ethics on account of its premise as a terrible aesthetic practice bound up with all manner of fakery. He posits the idea that theatre has been stigmatised, causing moral and ethical suspicion for so long, precisely because it is representational. By drawing attention to the question “how to act?” – a question of both theatre and ethics – Ridout offers a critical contemplation on efforts to produce ethics, positing the idea instead that: “theatre’s greatest ethical potential may be found precisely at the moment when theatre abandons ethics.”³⁵ He gives the example of a

²⁹ Chantal Mouffe, “Which Ethics for Democracy?”, in *The Turn to Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 86.

³⁰ Goat Island ceased operating as a company in 2009, but founders Matthew Goulish and Lyn Hixon have since formed a collaboration called Every House as a Door in 2008.

³¹ Peggy Phelan, “Performing Questions, Producing Witnesses”, in *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 9-10.

³² Phelan, “Performing Questions”, p. 9-10.

³³ Adrian Heathfield, “Coming Undone: an essay on the work of Goat Island”, in *It’s an Earthquake in My Heart: A Reading Companion*, (Chicago: Goat Island, 2001.)

³⁴ Heathfield, “Coming Undone”

³⁵ Ridout, p. 70.

performance by Maria Donata D'Urso (IT) and writes, "as she moves her limbs slowly in the tightly focused pool of light, it soon becomes impossible to make out the relationships between surfaces and volumes."³⁶ He continues, "the performance, appears at least, to have no interest other than the meticulous presentation of the surfaces of the body to the light... it maybe regarded as having nothing other than aesthetic content." As such, Ridout offers D'Urso's work as an example of the paradox of ethics, but I am interested in art that explodes any such obvious aesthetic formalism.

As well as aesthetics, perhaps trashy tendencies – moments of desiring diversion – can also produce this ethical paradox. In and through our trashy divergences or slippages – "what's over there?" – we might stop acting as we should, or stop *acting* altogether, exposing in return the ideological systems we have constructed. A trashy ethics, for example refusing one's own ideals or politics in favour of pleasure, might expose the ideological apparatus at stake in pursuits of social and ethical "good". In contradictory moves, we are offered something critical of the "Ethical Turn" in cultural discourse, or the "Social Turn" in art and performance, but also something more generous and complex than an explicit aesthetic formalism. Mouffe in her work with Ernesto Laclau makes explicit the idea that any democratic society (whatever fantasy that may be) is one in which relations of conflict are sustained not erased.³⁷ A trashy ethos goes one step further; rather than offering oppositional conflict such as antagonism, it offers potential in what Judith Butler calls "ethical ambivalence". In an essay titled *Against Ethical Violence* Butler writes, "Suspending the demand for self-identity, or more particularly for complete coherence seems to me to counter a certain ethical violence, which demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same."³⁸ On asking whether a new sense of ethics can emerge from "ethical failure", (which, I posit as occurring when one follows their trashy tendencies), she writes: "one

³⁶ Ridout, p. 67.

³⁷ Ernesto Laclau and Chatall Moueffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985)

³⁸ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself: A Critique of Ethical Violence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 42

can give and take recognition only on the condition that one becomes disorientated from oneself by something which is not oneself.”³⁹ As such, going against one’s own beliefs through contradictions and paradoxes offers a different sense of ethics.⁴⁰ In Chapter 2 I offer desire and aspiration as a potentially narcissistic abandonment of ethics, in Chapter 3 I offer to put the sleaze back into participatory art, and in Chapter 4 the ambivalence over what is real or fictional also brings ethics into question. It is in the final chapter that I also make a move from a Butlerian “oneself” to a Deleuzian multiplicity of different becomings.

Trashy values are ambivalent, but it’s their very ambivalence and impossibility, which brings ethics into question. As Gustav Mueller writes In *The Paradox of Ethics*: “‘what value have values?’ It is by virtue of this self-conscious, this self-reflective, this ethical question that the fundamental meaning of the “subject” is discovered.”⁴¹ By contemplating a trashy, imperfect and ambivalent ethics, I call not for a refusal of ethics but the refusal of art valued for its ethical potential, and the uptake of something like an aggressive honesty or strange sincerity; In other words a transparency around the possible act at stake in morality. This entails an openness to ones own failures and a refusal of essentialism or the self as fixed. Following Butler, I argue that when ethics become a sign of value in art and performance, it works paradoxically and violently to exclude or silence antagonistic and unidentifiable practices that risk humanitarian demeanour – that risk *acting* ethically. It also works to discard and de-value those with unconventional or trashy values, those who often fail to live up to neoliberal and normative expectations.

Trashy Seriousness

Art and performance scholar Gavin Butt also asks the question “How to act?” in

³⁹ Butler, p. 42.

⁴⁰ Judith Butler, “Ethical Ambivalence”, in *The Turn to Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 17.

⁴¹ Gustav Mueller, “The Paradox of Ethics”, in *International Journal of ethics*, 39.4 (1929) pp. 456-468.

his work on cultural seriousness. Butt points to the routine ways in which critical seriousness becomes a means of perpetuating and conforming to a certain mode of scholarly conduct or attitude.⁴² Following Michel Foucault's work on bio politics, Butt proposes that we can highlight the routine ways in which seriousness operates and makes subjects of us by compelling us to *act* and *act seriously* when confronted with things that appear important to us.⁴³ Acting trashy, then, would beckon the impression that one does not take whatever is at stake (art, performance, academic research) seriously. However, Butt points out that there are perhaps certain kinds of study and cultural objects that require us to respond differently by abandoning critical protocol. Butt's subject in this case is gossip as a form of historical evidence. Butt offers up the notion of "scholarly flirtations", extending psychoanalyst Adam Phillips' concept of flirtation: "once a flirtation becomes serious it ceases to be flirtation. Once we become committed – to sex; to a relationship; to marriage – we leave the frivolities of flirtation behind."⁴⁴ Butt's scholarly flirtations show, that on flirting with a received scholarly mode or behaviour, and not committing to either gossip or academic protocol, that perhaps his trashy subject of gossip is not converted into a master language (the logic of theory, which bares no resemblance to gossip), but is extended instead, by offering a form of *reading* and *writing* in sympathy with his subject.

Irit Rogoff also addresses cultural seriousness in a lecture at the *Institutional Attitudes* event in 2010 and develops Butt's argument. Rogoff points out that what masquerades as seriousness is a piety (belief). In line with Butt, she asks if we can think of seriousness beyond "pomposity, earnestness and the performance of expertise?"⁴⁵ Rogoff points out the distinction between seriousness as a behavioural character and therefore a moral issue, and seriousness as a "mode of insistence", or "a move away from critique or

⁴² Gavin Butt, "Scholarly Flirtations", in A.C.A.D.E.M.Y (Revolver: 2006), pp. 187-192.

⁴³ Irit Rogoff, "On Being Serious in the Art World", *Institutional Attitudes: Beyond Criticality*, Brussels, 25 April 2010.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2KNmV4QsE>> [Accessed 2 February 2013]

⁴⁴ Butt, p. 189.

⁴⁵ Rogoff, "On Being Serious"

criticality to affective modalities,"⁴⁶ which are ethical and philosophical. Developing Gilles Deleuze's notion of affective knowledge, Rogoff poses seriousness as a "mode of affective habitation", a way of understanding something by means of its textures, rather than by dismantling its components. The affective move is a complex move from characterization to texture, and from critique to habitation. We might know something by feeling it. I offer an explanation of the term affect below. Trashy Seriousness in this instance might require me to *affectively inhabit* my subject in order to not only offer critique but to put my subject to work. This is articulated in my art practice and elements of my writing throughout.

Trashy Historiography

I have thus far outlined a refuted genealogy of trashy tendencies in art history, discussed performance's historical and ontological relation to trash, and offered a contemplation on trashy ethics and modes, but how do trashy tendencies pose challenges to an orthodox historiography that privileges the past as hereditary and patriarchal? I look at the ways trashy tendencies open recourse to mutate any patriarchal successive lineage, opening the present to both past histories and potential futures. As such, we must ask how to go about such research? There are retroactive ways of doing oral history and performing lineages of Trash. But are there ways to think also of trashy lineages or trashy historiographies? What might they look like? What might they do?

Historiography refers either to the study of the methodology and development of history (as a discipline), or to a body of historical work on a specialized topic. A trashy historiography then, refuses to form any coherent or substantiated body of work forming instead its own incoherent logic. Thus a trashy historiography might include a temporary abandonment of discipline, method and specialization – such as that which occurs when one follows their trashy tendencies – a temporary lapse or swerve inside the process of proper historicizing occurs. Trashy tendencies complicate the notion of a complete abandonment of history, which Fredric Jameson typifies as the postmodern

⁴⁶ Rogoff, "On Being Serious"

condition.⁴⁷ It does so by working on and through history, but by also acknowledging the necessity to let go and abandon history when it becomes a burdensome move in art and performance. This might be done through something like fantasy or the imaginary, which holds a key place in desiring diversions and my artistic practice. As such trashy tendencies cannot be considered solely within a postmodern framework of parody or irony, which work retroactively and critically. They are not always deliberately *trashing* authority or history. Instead, they are complex and incorporate the modern (expression) as well as a range of other influences, as Smith's work exemplifies. Nick Kaye writes: "the post-modern cannot be said to be properly 'free' of the modern, for the modern is the ground on which the post-modern stands, a ground with which it is in dispute and on which it is able to enter into dispute with itself."⁴⁸ A trashy historiography unsettles and works to "deterritorialise" said "ground". "Deterritorialization" is a term developed by Gilles Deleuze in his book *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), which means to take control and order away from a land or place (territory) that is already established. We might also do this with history, offering an accumulating and transforming trashy landfill instead of a stable ground or territory. Instead, history is conceived and viewed through an accumulating assemblage of rubbish.

A trashy historiographer, I propose, does not only approach the stuff that falls out of an historian's focus, and meticulously with a tweezers and monocle at that, but approaches history itself as a landfill of trashy delights and potentialities. While throwing her or himself into it, the trashy historiographer makes his or her desiring whims transparent; like a magpie attracted to something shiny over there, or a racoon following the smell of a beautiful rotting carcass over here – the trashy historiographer turns the act of historicising into a pleasurable and creative endeavour. While the personal whims are exposed, they are also exposed as universal. The scavenger, borrower and thief – all bare a resemblance – creating a practice invested in the

⁴⁷ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 3rd edn (London: Verso, 2008)

⁴⁸ Nick Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan: 1994), p. 49.

art of what Michel de Certeau calls “making do” by using what’s available to create new things – these new things might be futures.

Relating history to the trash heap we might take on an ecological perspective and consider the modes of recycling that take place. But like my suspicion of exemplifying any socially “good” or “ethical” art, I might also be suspicious of any art that calls itself “environmental”. A trashy historiographer works intuitively, picking things up and putting them back, mixing them up, and even “putting them where they don’t belong”.⁴⁹ Trashy tendencies in this sense can prevent the work of reductive moral historicisation, opening up the creative and critical potentials of history, which is accumulative and expansive, rather than grounded in origin.

But not everyone’s history is available. Much history, not only minority, but stuff whose value or identity is indeterminate, has been ignored. Trashy tendencies include detours into minority and mainstream objects and practices. There is a privilege to the universalising notion that all history ends up in the same landfill – it doesn’t. Or perhaps it does but some histories are hidden from or invisible to academic inspection. Theatre historian Rebecca Schneider has usefully considered the value of seeking out illegitimate histories of solo performance as a generative move to open up its history beyond the confines of “singular intention or policed legitimacies”.⁵⁰ In her essay *Solo Solo Solo*, which problematises the canonisation of performance art, Schneider usefully alludes to the problem of the solo artist as foregrounding notions of the “singular genius,” which in her eyes only perpetuates “white ‘fathers’ of performance art”.⁵¹ Schneider’s hunch is the celebration of Jackson Pollock who represents (arguably in Roselee Goldberg’s history of performance)⁵² an historical shift in

⁴⁹ Robert Summers, “Vaginal Davis Does Art History”, in *Dead History, Live Art? Spectacle, Subjectivity and Subversion in Visual Culture since 1960s* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 80.

⁵⁰ Rebecca Schneider, “Solo Solo Solo”, in *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 32.

⁵¹ Schneider, “Solo Solo Solo”, p. 24.

⁵² See: Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, (London: Thames and Hudson: 2001)

art practice and painting in particular, from the canvas and to the action of painting itself. Schneider says “the erection of white founding fathers stands as a monument of ‘discovery’ that erases or renders ‘illegitimate’ the legacies of long-standing non-white (or non-male) practices.”⁵³ She gives the “influence of Jazz” on Jackson Pollock as an example, and writes: “African diasporic influence is absolutely key to white European avant-garde development (think of the mimetic pseudo African masks of the Dada soirees... ‘Negrophilia’ of Paris in the 1920s, think ...Brecht...his *Jungle of cities*, his *Drums in the night*.)”⁵⁴ We could extend this to think about Smith’s own exotic, tawdry and tacky influences, or to look at new artwork emerging in these increasingly globalised and networked times, which I do in Chapter 4 in reference to the work of Christeene and Die Antwoord. Ultimately what interests me about Schneider’s account is its critique of the process of historicising itself; how we may more generatively incorporate illegitimate histories and processes in order to produce new connections and relations between art, performance and the world more broadly. In following chapters I discuss artist Mel Brimfield (UK) who mixes figures from avant-garde histories with ones from popular culture, extending histories and producing new ones. I also turn to my own practice such as *I Wanna be in that Show* (2010) in which I delve into a history of shows that I (apparently) want to be in, referencing aspects of memorable performances that go forgotten or unmentioned such as “the beautiful thin people” in Pina Bausch, “the smell of body odour” in Franko B’s intimate performance, or Chris Burden’s assistant, who unlike dominant art history, or Burden himself, I credit for being the one to shoot the performance artist. Incorporating illegitimate histories, the trashy historiographer not only mixes histories up, but also creates new fictions by putting different histories together, through strange and often compelling combinations. Brimfield’s interchanging of performance art duo Gilbert and George with British Saturday night television entertainers Morcambe and Wise (with uncanny resemblances) is one example of an interesting way to reconfigure history. But I also look at ways to expand the binaries between high and low culture maintained in Brimfield’s work, by

⁵³ Schneider, “Solo”, pp. 38-9.

⁵⁴ Schneider, “Solo”, p. 38.

looking at the ways the imaginary and a temporary abandonment of historical reference might call forth new forms and futures. This is precisely what Smith's utopian fictions staged. Ultimately, I want to consider the ways artists (rather than art historians per se) do the work of art history. And how art practice might be a more sympathetic medium for historicising trashy tendencies than conventional art criticism or historical research, which might recuperate it and clean it up. Art's heterogeneity enables an articulation, critique and extension of art's histories without recuperating them into a homogenous text or institutional logic.

As such my focus on trashy tendencies does more than just incorporate the trash which is left out of canonical histories. My practice puts trash to work productively. As Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine of the Live Art Development Agency have pointed out: "Performance Art should not be seen within an entirely historical context: it is an explosive methodology that has also evolved and shape-shifted in response to cultural and political change and one that continues to impact upon the broader fabric of contemporary processes and practices."⁵⁵ Throughout this thesis trashy tendencies influence my engagement with topics including desire, failure and glamour (Chapter 2), sleaze and promiscuity (Chapter 3) and colloquial performances of self-mythology, gossip, parody and "super-parody" (Chapter 4). I stage these as creative and critical opportunities across my thesis, in order to re-configure and expose the ways authority, history and narrative are maintained and constructed throughout art practice and cultural production more broadly.

What's all this Trashy-Multiplicity-Non-sense?

Throughout my thesis I construct multiple lineages but also look at art's potential to explode narrative or lineage and offer more complex relations, engaging the past, present and future. When hereditary lineages become restrictive or repressive (which as Schneider has proven might be normative

⁵⁵ Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine, "Live Culture at Tate Modern: Fluid Landscapes", *Live Art Development Agency*, 2003.
<http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/projects/live_culture/lada.html> [Accessed 11 February 2011].

and homogenising too), I have turned to concepts developed by Deleuze (following Nietzsche) such as *multiplicity* to think through my work's multiple connections.

In a foreword to Deleuze's book on Nietzsche, Michael Hardt writes:

In Nietzsche's concept of *multiplicity* Deleuze finds a notion of difference that does not refer back to (and thus depend on) a primary identity, a difference that can never be corralled into an ultimate unity. Multiplicity is precisely this expanding, proliferating set of differences that stand on their own, autonomous.⁵⁶

When something is autonomous with no referent it stops making sense. In performance, I recognise this as one of the things that first attracted me to it: its absence of lineage and referent, its ability to confuse, disrupt and disorientate. Rather than make sense of performance, these aspects are put to work in my practice and this research.

My art and performance work is involved in both representational production (the production of knowledge) *and* non-sense (the production of "trash" and stuff of unpredictable excess). Flirting between sense and non-sense is the labour of trashy logics. In Deleuze's "One Less Manifesto" he asks: "How can theatre break free of this situation of conflictual, official, and institutionalised representation?"⁵⁷ For Deleuze, this necessitates the removal of power through forms of strategic deterritorialisation and abstraction. This might be when something stops making sense, or when we have no specific referent. This is also called non-representation. In such instances our attention is brought to its flowing, mutating, or multiplying productivity – its affirmation. I work between the representational and non-representational, refusing the refusal to represent before it becomes an ideology too, or before it becomes an aesthetic formulaic, or before it becomes an art we might call "Deleuzian". This is perhaps best exemplified in the difference between my two collaborations: Mitch & Parry

⁵⁶ Michael Hardt, "Foreword", in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, (New York: Columbia University Press 2006), p. IV.

⁵⁷ Laura Cull, *Deleuze and Performance*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 5.

(with Andrew Mitchelson) and Stephen and Lola (with Eirini Kartsaki), but is also evident in my solo practice (*I Wanna be in that Show*, 2010, *Touching Feeling*, 2011 and *Akt-schön!*, 2011) all of which are discussed in the following chapters. A trashy logic may push beyond representation, but does not commit to an ultimate refusal of representation, as is alluded to in Ridout's discussion of D'Ursos aesthetic performance earlier. This evokes questions of ignorance, which are ethical questions. As such my work offers representations as temporary positions, as something to hold onto, but also refuses to only function within the representational. It operates like this inconsistently. A trashy logic exposes a conflicting desire, on the one hand for a community and sense of belonging, and on the other, a productive desire and fantasy for utopian possibility (even the impossible) and the sensations invoked by not knowing. I consider my art practice as an attempt to always return to that feeling I felt on first experiencing performance art – before becoming accustomed to its institutional and counter-cultural characterisations. It is in that lost space (and time) of performance and performing, its confusing signs and dazzling disorientations that I developed a love and passion for it. On moving from sense to non-sense we are required to engage differently. When there is no referent we are forced to experience something through its textures and layers. Roland Barthes might call this *the pleasure of the text*, but in absence of a text (language or representation through which to make sense of something) such pleasures can become volatile.

Trashy Affects

Trashy tendencies often evoke negative emotions such as shame, embarrassment or guilt. Some of these feelings have been expressed in response to my own performance practice. Live performance is always susceptible to negative affects, procured at best and worst in stand up comedy, where the performer risks failure, humiliation and embarrassment. These are some of the feelings my work has also produced and endured. And I have found Anne Bogart's notion of embarrassment as "a partner in the creative act – a key

collaborator,” insightful, not to mention a great relief.⁵⁸ She writes: “If your work does not sufficiently embarrass you, then very likely no one will be touched by it”.⁵⁹ In order to “be touched” in this sense, one needs to relate to a work – to recognise it. Much of my work severely embarrasses me. I find it difficult at times to watch video documentation of my own performances, but nevertheless I continue to perform acts that produce such feelings. As such, it is perhaps useful to articulate my use of this term “affect”, particularly because so much of my art practice constitutes the production of negative affects procured in the face of trash.

Affect is a concept developed by Baruch Spinoza and elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari. For Spinoza, affects are body related states of mind and are related to but not synonymous with feelings and emotions. For Spinoza, affects are difficult to grasp and conceptualise because “an affect or passion of the mind is a confused idea.”⁶⁰ Affects are useful for thinking about negative emotions because they are volatile. Affects have become a popular means of thinking about human engagement with art, and they have a particular affinity with art research because they point to the fact that the body and mind is not operating distinctly – but as Spinoza proposes – they work in parallel. Rather than see the body as influencing the mind to act, or the mind influencing the body to act, he sees them as autonomous and developing simultaneously. Secondly Spinoza recognizes a correspondence between the power to act and the power to be affected; the greater our power to be affected, he suggests, the greater our power to act. Our minds and our bodies are not separate. This relates to the responsive and tactical nature of my performance practice, which I will discuss later. Others such as Patricia Clough in *The Affective Turn* discuss how “Affects constitute a non-linear complexity out of which the narration of conscious states such as emotion are subtracted but...”⁶¹ and she quotes Brian Massumi,

⁵⁸ Anne Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 113.

⁵⁹ Bogart, p. 113.

⁶⁰ Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. by W.H. White and A.H. Stirling (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2001), p. 158.

⁶¹ Patricia Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007)

with “a never to be conscious autonomic remainder”.⁶² Affect cannot be distilled into prescribed logic or institutional language, but is in and of itself opposite to knowledge, or is rather an embodied or performed *way of knowing*. We can know things just by feeling them. This is what I describe as counter-knowledge or a counter-to-knowledge throughout. The term affect becomes useful for thinking of emotions like embarrassment, shame, guilt and awkwardness, because they are convoluted, strange, or bewildering, and because they can emerge suddenly when confronted with trash, often because we do not know what to do with trash, how to read it, or treat it.

Trashy Methodology

Jacques Derrida writes: “A thinker with a method has already decided how to proceed, is unable to give him or herself up to the matter of thought in hand, is a functionary of the criteria which structure his or her conceptual gestures.”⁶³

Expanding this notion, I want to look at the way my art practice employs tactics in place of strategies, following their differentiation by Michel de Certeau. I also differentiate artistic practice from cultural production (Via Andrea Fraser), and offer my practice research as operating (sometimes conflictingly) between tactics and strategies.

The very notion of art research or practice as research has sought to explode any limiting distinctions between doing and thinking, performing and writing.⁶⁴ However, as John Freeman points out, practice research approaches are “systematic, methodical and coherent: elements we do not always associate with provocative performance practice.”⁶⁵ In light of this reflection I question whether performance’s radical possibility has been limited to producing a certain style that champions safe practice research methodologies, and avant-

⁶² Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 30.

⁶³ R. Beardsworth. *Derrida and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge. 1996), p. 4.

⁶⁴ See: Della Pollock, “Performing Writing”, in *The Ends of Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 73-103.

⁶⁵ John Freeman, *Blood Sweat and Theory: Research Through Practice in Performance* (UK: Libri and Ashford, 2010), p. 265.

garde experiments with illusions of progress and good-will, over the production of radically new forms of political and social efficacy. My project allows my trashy tendencies to infiltrate its process offering a counterpoint to the dominant styles and strategies of performance research, by showing the ways knowledge is at work in unlikely places and through unlikely processes. I have deliberately tended away from favoured styles of performance research – particularly post-dramatic theatre (post Samuel Beckett) and the proliferation of performances exploring managed failures initiated by Beckett when he famously said: “Fail again. Fail better.”⁶⁶ As Jennifer Doyle has also pointed out in her book on difficulty and emotion in contemporary art: “There is a lot of language out there celebrating the silence of John Cage, the sparseness of Donald Judd”.⁶⁷ She continues: “For the fully initiated such works don’t feel very hard at all.”⁶⁸ Differentiating this project from those kinds of works helps me focus my attention on spectacles of trashy excess, and the always potentially useless performances that draw on material beyond art and the avant-garde, such as entertainment genres, cabaret, music hall, pop and counter-culture, and forms often exempt from practice based research perhaps because of their heterogeneity and because of the difficulty they present to institutional recuperation. I ask whether by favouring the methodical, coherent and strategic have we ignored knowledge produced in unlikely places and through unlikely moves and forms? How can trashy tendencies assure that performance remains interventionist, creative and critical as it sprawls institutions and popular culture? Have we overlooked work that presents itself as “difficult” and “problematic”, excluding it from something that requires the rigor and respectability of a PhD thesis?

I have thus looked elsewhere to models of creative research, finding inspiration in artists who willfully refuse to discuss their methodology or claim not to have one. New York based performance artist Peggy Shaw is particularly inspiring

⁶⁶ For a sustained discussion on failure see: Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* (London: Routledge, 2011)

⁶⁷ Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), p. xvii.

⁶⁸ Doyle, p. xvii.

when she says: “People ask me how I make my shows; I tell them, I book them and they make themselves.”⁶⁹ Shaw’s refusal works brilliantly to expose the economies in which her work and art operates. In this instance it becomes clear that reducing her work to intention and strategy is a demand of the art market in which she is openly implicit. On refusing to discuss her methodology, Shaw perhaps wishes her work to speak for itself and articulate its own meanings. Andy Warhol is similarly renowned for refusing to co-operate with critics, but unlike Shaw, Warhol shows that there is a value economy (and business to be made) in the art of refusal. In Warhol’s case, refusal may be one’s style. Often responding to questions about his work in interviews with a simple “yes” or “no” or by pointing like Shaw to the literal economy at stake. Warhol famously said, “If you want to know all about Andy Warhol just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am.”⁷⁰ Art historian Amelia Jones argues that Warhol’s work demonstrates a radical “dependence on the *other* to confirm its meaning”.⁷¹ It forces readers and spectators to become complicit with the creation of the work and the creation of art and thus art business. Such business is often obscured for example in political or socially engaged art. In hindsight, Shaw and Warhol’s work should not be read as reductive, but playful and creative, communicating knowledge through humour or awkwardness, offering both literal and complex relations to their work. When meaning or method is refused we have to access the work on other levels too such as its affective dimensions.

Tactics and Strategies

For the purpose of this thesis it is useful to consider my processes in relation to Michel de Certeau’s discussion of the differences between “tactics” and “strategies” in his book on *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984).⁷² Despite trashy

⁶⁹ Peggy Shaw, “You’re Just Like My Father”, in *O Solo Homo: The New Queer Performance*, (New York: Grove Press, 1998), p. 175.

⁷⁰ See: Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: a Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 340.

⁷¹ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing The Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 69.

⁷² Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans by. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984)

tendencies often tending away from the ordinary and everyday. De Certeau sees a strategy as a representational mode of operation that is dependent on abstract models for predetermining its outcomes. This may indeed be the requirement of a PhD thesis. While in tactics, on the other hand, there is no setting of an object before a subject.⁷³ For De Certeau, tactics are non-representational and performative, “opportunities are seized in the heat of the moment. Decisions are made, not according to logical thought, but as direct and felt response to handling elements.”⁷⁴ We might consider tactics the primary means of operation in live performance. De Certeau indicates that individuals and consumers perform tactics, while strategies relate to institutions of power. This also relates to Andrea Fraser’s distinction between artistic practice and cultural production when she writes:

Artistic practice, as I understand it, is something other than cultural production. Artistic practice resists, or aims to resist, functioning as the representative culture of a particular group... it resists, or aims to resist, serving as a means of reproduction of particular competencies or dispositions. Instead it aims to function as analytical and interventionary.⁷⁵

My practice has worked tactically within the strategic framework of a PhD. A trashy logics of cultural production works from inside to disrupt and deterritorialise institutional strategy. De Certeau’s notion of “the wig” (*La Perruque*) is useful for thinking through these tactical deterritorialisations. He writes: “*La Perruque* is the worker’s own work disguised as work for his employer.... *La Perruque* maybe as simple a matter as a secretary writing a love letter on ‘company time’.”⁷⁶ Trashy tendencies as desiring diversions have much in common with *La Perruque*, but as diversions they cannot always be considered as “work”, because their use-value is ambivalent, they open up to the potentially unproductive, narcissistic, as well as the amateur. The latter I discuss in Chapter 3.

⁷³ Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*, (London: I.B Taurus, 2004), pp. 7-8.

⁷⁴ Bolt, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Andrea Fraser, “It’s Art When I Say It’s Art, or...”, in *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), pp. 41-42.

⁷⁶ de Certeau, p. 25.

I have thus developed a tactical practice that has formed and changed throughout the course of this PhD, enacting and suffering the consequences of permitting my trashy desires – including what appears to be on times - contradictory theoretical forays – to infiltrate its course. This is particularly evident in the difficulty of shifting between what I describe as the first movement of trashy tendencies (as aesthetic genre and binaristic), and the second (as non-representational and complex). De Certeau points out that a tactic is not completely free of method, but is “a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus.”⁷⁷ A trashy logic of cultural production may invert the tactic also, and offer (via trashy escapes) *an uncalculated action undetermined by the presence of an improper locus*. This again is exemplified in the chance element of live performance and its trashy ontology and vexed histories, outlined earlier. Through an inverted tactic, such as a chance encounter, we might be led to the creation of something new, or strange, or non-sensical, something that is thus felt (localised) rather than inscribed in institutional language or cultural logic.

Art Practice

In place of an artist statement or thick description of my practice, at the outset of this project I developed a *ManiFiesta*, which functions as both guide and vice to keep me (and my readers) “off track” throughout the writing, performing and reading of this thesis.⁷⁸ My *ManiFiesta* is a creative document, which simultaneously *trashes* and *incorporates* aspects of the authoritative artistic manifesto, developed first in the historic avant-gardes of the early 20th century and the neo-avant-gardes of the 60s and 70s, and which has also been revived with critical interest in more recent years at the Serpentine Gallery’s *Manifesto Marathon* in 2008.⁷⁹ However, in place of offering a “reconnection to the

⁷⁷ de Certeau, p.37.

⁷⁸ The *ManiFiesta* exemplified at the beginning of this chapter was developed during a self-imposed automatic writing exercise for *I Wanna be in that Show*. (2010) It was amended and given the title “*Manifiesta*” for the purpose of a public talk at Chelsea College of Art in December 2012.

⁷⁹ See: Serpentine Gallery, *Manifesto Marathon*, October 2008, London.

manifesto as a document of poetic or political intent”,⁸⁰ which was the purpose of the Serpentine event, my *ManiFiesta* operates beyond any straightforward logics of the manifesto or logics of refusal exemplified in Shaw and Warhol, which as Artist Andrea Fraser points out might be convoluted. Fraser writes,

Refusal to hold onto and apply specific, articulated criteria often have less to do with maintaining neutrality or defending the free-range of artistic experimentation than with protecting the social, economic, and symbolic capital that is usually the true basis, in such cases, for artistic legitimacy.⁸¹

By offering idiosyncratic, contradictory and sometimes-meaningless imperatives in my *ManiFiesta*, some of which are not even imperatives but questions, my work cannot be entirely read by its terms – and neither as such does it produce a form of “social capital” through explicit refusal. In its own confusion and paranoia it works to destabilise any valorization or interpretation of my practice, keeping it open to the possibility of wonder and surprise. Like the traditional manifesto my *ManiFiesta* works to point readers to my intentions, but nevertheless my intentions are shown as convoluted. By urging me (and you the reader) to “stray away – don’t give up (all the time)”, or by asking: “what’s going on over there?”, the *ManiFiesta* works to open artistic research processes to the spontaneous, the desiring and therefore always potentially useless. But it might be only through acknowledgement of art and performance’s precise uselessness that we are able to think of it as offering something different to Fraser’s notion of “cultural production” or de Certeau’s “institutional strategy”.

Through wanton engagements it exposes trashy processes often concealed in artistic research, such as the questions we all ask, but prefer not to admit to: “does my bum look big in this performance?” Or rather, how am I perceived by the work I do? In doing so it blurs the lines between intent and refusal through strange, and potentially juvenile considerations. Trashy engagements work to refuse ideological import, and also render the process of *over-reading* or

⁸⁰ See: Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Manifesto Pamphlet”, *Manifesto Marathon*, Serpentine Gallery, 19 October 2008.

⁸¹ Fraser, p. 43.

misreading art as a generative potential. Readers and critics are also implicit in the production of valuing and bringing meaning to the work of art and this thesis, and while I would encourage their input, I also want to draw attention to the fact that the production of knowledge is also what drives the academic market. Ultimately, my *ManiFiesta* creates opportunities for playful curiosity in place of political imperative or strategic intent, working as an imaginative and perhaps consciously failed document. Its most salient aspect perhaps is its refusal of any complete drive to the destitute or negative, which would find this entire project of no purpose. It can be considered in such light as a counterpoint to Yvonne Rainer's "No manifesto" with its imperative refusals of style, including "no to spectacle, no to glamour, no to eccentricity, no to trash imagery", and which nevertheless resulted in Rainer's very distinct aesthetic minimalism, which has been perpetuated across performance research practices ever since.

Throughout the course of my research I have not tried to create anything we might call "a body of work". I have not concluded my project, working towards a final show or exhibition of outcomes. I have left my practice open and unfinished, and operative both inside and outside the academy in other economies of the club, the live art scene and Internet too. This does not mean that my work has failed to contribute to the production of new knowledge. I have been perhaps overly-active, exemplified in the list of performances, exhibition, talks, screenings, residencies, workshops, classes, discussions, publications and curated events I have staged and created over the course of my research (2009-2013). Following my *ManiFiesta* I have not been precious. Instead, I have chosen to inhabit my artistic practice as I would if I was not doing a PhD. On times this requires a great imagination. But by doing so, I am able to imagine beyond the pre-conceived, even imagined limits of the institution, and to also offer creative ruptures and contemplations within the very fabric of my work within the institution.

My work expresses a desire for the unpredictability of the live event, and a desire to “re-activate the social body”.⁸² Franco “Bifo” Berardi expresses the importance of having “the perception that we belong to the same social organism”, and I consider art a space for this to happen.⁸³ Still, the Internet is my main resource and tool today. It is where I have spent much of my time on this project, searching information, shopping for materials, promoting and archiving my work and process.⁸⁴ While my practice does not engage skilfully with new technologies, in the sense that it operates with user-friendly readymade apparatus such as a *Sony handycam* and a *MacBook pro*, or with online content management systems like blogs and social networking spaces, these have become the means through which most of my work gets filtered and produced. I rarely rehearse and do not work in a studio, (or if I do it is very rarely) but I often work responding to the context in which my work is presented. I work mostly collaboratively, in specific collaborations or in relation to a scene or event. The materials of my productions are often gathered by what is available to me at the time.

Writing Practice

It is necessary to consider ways of writing in relation to art and my own art practice. Artist and writer Simon O’Sullivan offers a useful method for approaching writing as an extension of the artwork. O’Sullivan attends to the affective modalities of writing as pointed to by Butt and Rogoff too, but also offers a useful structure for writing in relation to art. O’Sullivan offers his method:

This might involve writing as itself a kind of fiction; writing that produces the same ‘structure of feeling’, the same constellation of affect. It might also involve the deployment of an archive, referencing works – art historical or from elsewhere – that have a similar affective charge. However, it also might involve the extraction of certain themes from a body of work, a following of the trajectories suggested by the work itself. This might itself involve the mobilisation of concepts from elsewhere, the bringing together of different

⁸² Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “Common”, *Trashing Performance Public Programme*, Toynbee Studios, London, 25 October 2011.

⁸³ Berardi, *Trashing Performance*

⁸⁴ See my website: <<http://owengparry.com/>> and “scrap book” <<http://banshee-boy.blogspot.co.uk/>> [accessed 3 September 2013]

forms of thought that although logically distinct might be said to parallel one another.⁸⁵

I employ O'Sullivan's method for writing through (and in relation to) my own practice, and other artworks. While writing can never stand in for the work itself, I explore ways for writing to perform, so it is generative and not restrictive of art practice. In the following chapters it is clear that on times I hold a more formal approach to analyses, and on others I have employed writing as "a kind of fiction". This is particularly evident when discussing my own work. Due to the self-reflexive nature of practice-based research, I have often chosen to dramatise my descriptions by inhabiting the work's forms and textures. On times the writing moves from paranoia to bountiful hysteria. We might think of such instances in the Della Pollock sense of "writing as doing displaces writing as meaning".⁸⁶ It becomes a kind of trashy writing, rather than writing that merely describes trashy tendencies.

This chapter functions as a theoretical framework for the following chapters and my practice more broadly. The main questions of my thesis will now be put to work, and I will build on and intersect the concepts developed in this chapter.

⁸⁵ Simon O'Sullivan, "Ten Concepts Following Cathy Wilkes' Practice", *Afterall* 12 (2005) pp. 65-70. (p. 65)

⁸⁶ Pollock, p. 75.

Chapter 2

Staging Trashy Desire

In the irreducible margin as well as at the limit of his own good, the subject reveals himself to the never entirely resolved mystery of the nature of desire.

Jacques Lacan

I Wanna be in That Show/ Film (2010)

I imagine a proscenium arch stage with red velvet curtains. It's the kind of theatre where you don't have to do much in order to be taken seriously. You just need to show up. The auditorium lights are up and there's an audience of about two hundred. I imagine that I am in this show: I walk through the door and climb onto the stage. Following me is my very own assistant. His name is Luis (another two of my glamorous assistants are waiting backstage). After embracing the velvet curtains I begin by rubbing my arse all over the stage floor, Luis following me on all fours with a handheld microphone, capturing the sound of the friction between bum cheek and black lino. I stop in intervals to inspect my rubbings, sniffing the areas I have marked with my arse. During which, a performance scholar in the audience takes out a pencil, and scribbles something on the back of his programme: "Arse Rub... Creates ephemeral document of own entrance". Meanwhile, someone else in the audience is thinking: "wow, it's amazing the things you can get away with in performance that you can't in everyday life".

My next move is to clamber down off the stage. Not gracefully, but quickly and with clothes on. I get up and approach the front row and say something to an audience member: "Erm... I think you're in my seat". I imagine the audience member has to leave because the auditorium is so full and there are no seats left. Taking my seat, an extreme awareness that everyone in the room is waiting for me to do something emerges. It's a bit awkward, but I just stay there for a bit, and keep them waiting.

I imagine I'm armed in my seat with a script and a hand-held microphone. Eventually the auditorium lights go down, the curtains open, and the stage lights

go up. From this point on I imagine I am mostly sat in the audience, observing, commenting and interjecting as my three assistants stage “a ramshackle assembly of images, allusions and fanciful acts”.¹ The images assembled on stage are met with commentary from me: Some I imagine are images from iconic performances from the histories of performance art, others are less known or it is questionable whether they happened at all. Mixing my retellings of those performances with accounts of personal experience, I function awkwardly as a “multi-tasking powerhouse” enduring my role as audience member, critic, performer, and artist. Roles, positions, temporalities, where to look and what to listen to are confused. I imagine that sometimes I get out of my seat and interrupt; I put an LED light in my mouth and say something about Nan Goldin’s tits. At another point I scream at everyone in a fake American accent: “Everyone in the theatre needs to just calm down”. Of course, I know that people are always shouting in the theatre, and I revel in any opportunity to employ such clichés. I imagine that my commentary lingers on certain themes too, such as the labour of the onstage assistant, whom I nevertheless continue to order about: “Luis stand in the light,” or “Luis take Giovanni to the Yoga ball,” or “Luis, come sit next to me: Everyone else on stage just relax”. I also take an opportunity to tell my assistant that I think he is beautiful. Exposed and spotlit he endures my serenade: “Everyone in this room has got a lot to learn from you”. At one point I imagine a strange voiceover announcement: “Stop stretching for something that is not there.” The voiceover pleads: “Stop stretching your arms...we can see you. We can see your muscles... we know what you are doing you filthy whore. You mother fucking dirt bag.” I imagine at this point that the performance on stage is speaking back to the criticisms I am making and performing from the audience. I imagine that the voiceover is my own voice too, but it is distorted, marked by an electronic device. I imagine that what is in fact in play throughout is a conversation between me as artist and me as critic.

At another point there is a loud noise as if the performance is breaking-up, as if the audience had been watching TV and the reception has gone. The same

¹ Flora Wellesley, “Performing Idea: Day II”, *Belly Flop Magazine*, 6 October 2010 <<http://www.bellyflop.com/blog/performing-idea-day-ii>> [Accessed 24 March 2012]

performance scholar scribbles down the word "glitch" in the margin. As the lights flash I imagine I am dragged by the bellowing noise from the audience onto the stage, as if being transported by my own hallucinations or my own desires to be in that show. Before I disappear backstage, I kneel besides a pool of milk that I imagine has formed stage right and drink from the white substance. I imagine my hallucination of being literally dragged onto stage continues, and the audience watches on. At this point a projection of I WANNA BE IN THAT FILM (2010) is supposed to play. But it doesn't, and the performance breaks for real. I say, "I didn't imagine this bit happening". But, the performance is unrehearsed and bound to fail. I am forced to come back onto stage and fill the gap while the technicians work things out. "I was really looking forward to that bit," I say quite frankly. I then proceed to ask the audience if they want me to rub my arse across the stage again – my concern in this moment to keep them entertained. But with relief, the projector works and the film plays.

Twinkle, the film's protagonist is a B movie star who is anxious about losing an undisclosed "him" to the unhealthy realms of reality, truth and liveness, which have come to be commonly recognized as tropes of performance art. Twinkle tells Honey Tits (Maria Agiomyrgiannaki), whose lavishly decorated hand and impeccable off-screen American accent are featured, that live performance "has sucked him in", and that "he" has been lost to the pernicious realm of "sitting in a room full of people he knows" and watching "all kinds of weird and creepy stuff happen". There is also a familiarly pernicious scene that reflects what Twinkle is talking about taking place off-screen and in that very moment, in that very room, with that very audience. The scholar writes something else down: "Remember cat food". There are blatant references to the work of other artists throughout. Not re-stagings exactly, but snippets and memories from other works, or aesthetic influences, or methodological impacts. Jack Smith and John Waters are blatantly referenced in I WANNA BE IN THAT FILM through trash aesthetics and hysteric characterizations. But performances by other artists like Pina Bausch, Chris Burden, Franko B and Bonnie Tyler are remembered too. The performance ends eventually with a scene that I think I stole from the film Holy Mountain (1973) by Alejandro Jodorovsky, but I can't remember. Wearing a royal blue velvet gown

and leading my favourite assistant Luis onto the stage with Peacock feathers blindfolding him, I pass the gown to Luis in this highly “symbolic act” that means, well, not much. Revealing some sexy rubber shorts and sock suspenders, I tell the audience I would rather be Adam Ant than Morrissey and show the audience that I can’t vogue. The scholar puts a line through “~~glitch~~” and draws a cock with hairy testicles and a bit of cum dribbling out of its head and shows it to his colleague sat next to him, who glances and does a repressed fake laugh. Creating “still”, “elegant” poses, “scaffolded postures” and “obscene geometries” with my body, I show the audience that even though I can’t vogue, I can look like a dancer – if the image they were seeing were a still photograph capturing a dancer in movement. Pablo Picasso muttered the words: “Everything you can imagine is real”, and these “shoddy” utopias are constructed to remind us of that. An olive skinned boy in a shiny thong and golden mask from the orient enters, a voluptuous woman dressed in tight black rubber holds up a floral wallpapered wall, a vase of milk leaks onto the stage, two yoga balls appear, a microphone, flashing lights, noise, voiceovers, looped sound; all brought to the stage by my assistants. To conclude, I imagine a grand finale happens: A spectacular bowing sequence takes place onstage. I imagine that I don’t want the performance to end, and milk it (literally) until all the props have been removed and there is nothing else to do or too look at. Then the curtains close. And Luis and I head for the showers.

Introduction

In this chapter I want to think through the potentials of trashy desires in artistic research practices by searching beneath “explicit knowledge that breaks the surface”, to tacit knowledge, “which remains unarticulated and a-critical, and of which the knower has only a subsiding awareness.”² *I Wanna be in that Show* (2010) is a performance exploring the potential of wanting to be in a show (a performance, artwork, film). It looks at how aspirations and the imaginary can call forth a new imaginary (more art), by reconstructing, exaggerating and even abandoning history. The work aims to bring forth trashy desires that go undiscussed, or that might be deemed superfluous and outside

² Kathleen Coessens, Dala Crispin and Anne Douglas, *The Artistic Turn: A Manifesto* (Ghent: Leuven University press, 2009), p. 71.

the artistic process. Trashy desires are foregrounded here as expressions that trouble conventional artistic research because they continually escape critical capture. In this sense the work stages desire's mode of productive escape. I wanted to make a show that I wanted to be in. I wondered what it might look like, if by abandoning criticality in favour of desire, something creative and strangely critical would emerge. Ultimately I wanted to make others think about the work that inspires them, to think about performances they wanted to be in too, and to stage this as a possibility.

Desiring Desire

Ultimately, what we want is to want.
Eirini Kartsaki

How can artists make their desires transparent? What would it mean to know what an artist wants from their work? Does the potential in art depend on the artist's desire being concealed? Or is the potential of performance in the way it offers only glimpses of knowledge? Artist Jack Smith famously said: "People never know why they do what they do, but they have to have explanations for themselves and others."³ I am interested in the stuff that we can't explain, the stuff we include in a work of art, but have no reason for including it. I began this project with a very simple yet imperative intention: *I wanted to make a show that I wanted to be in.*

I wanted to tap into a sensation I had felt on seeing a performance and wanting to be part of the scene that was taking place onstage. It happened to me at Sadlers Wells Theatre in 2004. It was a performance called *Palermo Palermo* by the late German choreographer Pina Bausch. The work utterly moved me. So much so that I felt it had changed something in me that would be extended into my life. It wasn't about wanting to dance, it was about wanting to want. Artist and writer Eirini Kartsaki says: "ultimately, what we want is to want".⁴ This

³ Jack Smith, "Belated Appreciation of V.S.", in *Wait For Me at the Bottom of the Pool, The Writings of Jack Smith*, (New York: High Risk Books, 1997), p. 42.

⁴ See: Eirini Kartsaki, *Biography* <<http://www.eirinikartsaki.com/bio.php>> [Accessed 12 August 2013]

desiring desire was staged so beautifully in a scene where a woman begs a man to throw tomatoes in her face over and over and over, and each time he responds, she jumps into his arms, and each time he catches her, he lets go of her, her body in amorous collapse, dropping to the floor. Repeat. High drama. High sentimental spectacle. High heels.

A critical reflection on my trashy desire to be in this show might consider my motive narcissistic, sentimental, or aspirational. As if my desire represents some lack: “*I wanna be in that show* because my show’s shit”, or “because your show is better than mine”, or “because I wanna *be you*” (and not be me). Like nostalgia, this desire would be limiting. But I think my desire to be part of this work, motivated me to want not only to make my own performance work, but also to extend the textures of that work into my life. I didn’t know that this gesture of being dropped by someone would come my way too, but years later it did, and it did again.

I began this project by emailing other artists with a question: “Is there a show or work of art you have seen or experienced that you wanted to be in or wish you had made?”⁵ I invited them to respond with impulse and to send me accounts, sketches, links, references, images, videos, or anything they wanted to respond with that would give insight. I told them that I did not know what I would do with their responses, but that they may appear “through the medium of performance art” in my next show. I also said that I was interested in whether this archive of artist’s desires may or may not tell us something about the work of artists today.

I received over thirty enthusiastic responses to my call. I felt encouraged. People said that it was a great question, and thanked me for inviting them to remember what it was that they loved about art. Many, of course, didn’t respond. One respondent said my question evoked two very different (hypothetical) feelings: that wishing you were *in* a piece would produce feelings of jealousy that would “beckon the green eyed monster”, but wishing you had

⁵ Owen Parry, Personal email exchange, Summer 2010.

made a piece is conditioned less by jealousy and more by identification or aspiration: a kind of recognition of the work that resonates with you, and that somehow makes sense *of you* and *to you*. This, he said, is put to stark relief in the face of truly awful work that you would not want to associate yourself with. He explained that both feelings were useful in forging a sense of sisterhood out of confusing absences and dizzying heterogeneity. I think the absences he was referring to were absences of meaning, absences of position or orientation, and absences of genre, genealogy or history through which to make sense of performance.

Another artist responded to my question critically by also evading my request for specific examples. She said that with most performances, if she liked it, it was because she was glad to have been there. Like it had made her feel in some way like *she* had been in it, like *she* was part of it.⁶ I recognized this feeling in my own experience as a spectator – that feeling that something special is happening, something I might not be able to explain, but something that required me to be there to see it. Or, like the performer had acknowledged my presence in some way, and had made me feel that they wanted me to be there. She told me she often gets that feeling on seeing my work. There is a sense in some work, however, that the artist couldn't care less if you were there or not to see it. It felt important then, in a show that could be potentially narcissistic and overly self-referential, that the audience felt my desire for them to be there, watching me do weird things in front of them on stage. The audience's role, although sat in stalls in an auditorium, are active as participants. This is not the utopic image supplied by much participatory art, socially engaged art, or immersive theatre. I wanted to ask instead: what are the productive roles of desire in the space of performance? What can imagination and aspiration do? And how might it work generatively to sustain an art practice, and call forth the production of more art?

⁶ See: Johanna Linsley, "Review of Harminder Judge's performance", *Spill Stings*, The Barbican Theatre, Spill Festival, London 2011.

In an interview at a German performance festival in June 2011 I was asked about *I Wanna be in that Show* and whether I thought it was one criterion for a “good” show that the audience gets motivated to perform themselves.⁷ I told them that I couldn’t offer any insight to a “good” show, but that I was interested in the idea that performance can activate us; make us laugh, make us imagine, make us angry, move us to tears even, but I questioned whether performance could actually move us enough to get us out of our seats and do something? I wanted to stage this movement as a feverish possibility –moving from my seat in the audience to dance with my subjects of desire on stage. But I wanted my take on the “participatory turn” to be hallucinatory and utopic rather than “good” or of any great social benefit. I continued responding to the journalist’s question by saying that I’m not sure whether art that flaunts its politics always does what it says it does. But I do believe that there is potential in performance that doesn’t shy away from pleasure and desire. I said that art should provoke more art. I think this could be performance’s most valuable asset – its viral ability to influence and generate more art and more artists. “At the very least”, I said, “influencing people to make art, is better than influencing people to be politicians, bankers, soldiers or missionaries!”

Another email I received from an artist in response to my question about wanting to be in a show read: “*All I can say Owen is –the next one! Good luck with your show!*” This response struck me because it seemed to me that the show this artist wanted to be in didn’t exist yet. What was this “next one”? He did not look retrospectively to history or another artist’s show, but called forth into the future with stark faith. Or was it hope for the next show, or a show that just didn’t exist yet? There was a dark humour to his response also, which I also read as “if I’m alive for the next show”. This communicated a generosity in its multiplicity. His response did not seem to rely on history or on identifying with other practitioners, but looked forward. I read his response as a warning too: this project could appear insular and elitist or overly precious: an exchange between artists for artists. One might argue that this is the case for most art, but

⁷ Dennis Dreher, “Interview: Owen G Parry”, *SPOTS Stimmen Zum ARENA – Festival*, Erlangen, Germany, June 2011.

still there was affirmation in his response. History is also a burden, and the idea that one might already be thinking about the next show felt freeing. His response chimed with my own disposable relationship with art, and not wanting to appear (at least) overly precious about what I do. This does not mean that my work is completely careless, but aspects of it might be and that exposing imperfection is hopefully generous. I often make work for one-off events, refuse rehearsal, and only document my performances where necessary. You could say I perform a certain cliché of the performance artists too by refusing all these things. I am generally more interested in the event itself rather than how to preserve it afterwards. In what might be a reckless abandonment, a giving of oneself over to the moment in question, such tactics motivated by desire and response disdain any work that appears to be invested in the precious maintenance of a strategy or ideology. With such an ethos repeatability (or rather commodification) is also thwarted.

My correspondence with other artists worked as a means of beginning a dialogue and perhaps forging a scene or community for my silly project. It was also a relief to know that I was not the only fake out there with trashy desires for being in another show. The contact with others helped me to form the work and to generate a transparency around the illegitimate gestures and ways artists work. It opened up a space to incorporate the stuff that is not “cool” to talk about in the art world, or is considered only uncritical or superfluous to the work. Leaving more traditional strategic research questions at the door in order to get out of simulating received styles of artistic research, I aimed to uncover new and rich, if ambiguous, research material – what Coessens calls “tacit knowledge”.

Performance of course always operates around the dubious and subjective because the human subject (the artist, or performer) is at the centre of that work – exposed and vulnerable, arrogant and joyous, or transmitting an array of disorientating affects that makes the work of performance both difficult and complex to read. *I Wanna be in that Show* attempts to make my desires transparent by exposing the desiring relations at stake between me, my

performers, the audience, and the materials and systems of production. I turn to some of these now.

Failure and Glamour

Glamorize your messes

Jack Smith

As narrative is dispelled, cutting between “images”, “allusions” and “fanciful acts”, the production of meaning is confused and through randomness the performance operates for much of the time on a level of affect. Feelings of bemusement and embarrassment emerged as I deliberately created scenarios in which I, and my assistants fail: fail to entertain, fail to stand in the spotlight, fail to master a dance routine, fail to make sense or be coherent, or where technology fails. New York avant-garde legend Jack Smith was notorious for creating scenarios in his films and performances where accidents would happen, and he notoriously complained about the “horrors” and “failures” of his own work in the process of showing it. Smith’s performances staged him as both artist and paranoid critic of his own work. Giving it a bad review before anyone else could. Although an unlikely figure of practice based research, I want to posit the idea that Smith’s self-reflexivity or paranoia worked as a means of elaborating on the potentials of his work. Failure and trash met despair in Smiths work according to Jim Hoberman who saved his archive from the dumpster. “The trash heap is a recurring Smith trope. A collector of cultural detritus, a connoisseur of ‘moldiness’, he was an aesthete with an acute sense of collapse and failure.”⁸ Through the glamorisation of the failed and with an eye for trash or those elements of performance that for whatever reason have been left out of performance histories and criticism, *I Wanna be in that Show* wanted to catapult the audience between affect and thought by staging both trash and failure as a means of exposing the work of performance, criticism and the work of historicisation more broadly. Smith is remembered for his cantankerous sayings such as “glamorize your messes”, which seems to me both a recuperative strategy; a means of transferring negative value into a positive

⁸ Jim Hoberman and Edward Leffingwell. *Wait For Me At The Bottom Of The Pool: The Writings of Jack Smith*. (London and New York: Serpent's Tail, 1997), p. 17.

reclamation. However, it also does this without doing away with mess, without cleaning mess up. The suggestive move to “glamorize” – a vulgar performative – shuns any critical or authoritative reclamation of mess, working creatively to spurn any institutional recuperation of waste. By *glamorizing* Smith offered a celebratory and creative counterpoint to a sanitary criticism.

There is something both alarming and captivating to be in the presence of failure, for failure produces a complex set of negative affects such as shame and embarrassment. The production of negative affect was necessary for Smith, and is also productive in my own practice here. One review of *I Wanna be in that Show* describes some of these feelings:

Parry seemed to celebrate the under-rehearsed. A ramshackle assembly of images, allusions and fanciful acts brought the foibles and uncouthness of this creator/star to the fore. Like a child he was engaging, bemusing and, at times, embarrassing. I came away wondering if trust in the maker matters.⁹

I am interested in how the reviewer questions whether we should feel trust in the artist. A feeling that emerges, perhaps, when someone feels cheated or fooled. It may cause audiences to wonder whether what they are experiencing is nothing more than nonsense – someone “horsing around”, a sensation I often feel on seeing the work of Andy Warhol whose camera, for instance, lingers (and quite enjoyably I might add) for too long on a very beautiful looking boy (Lonesome Cowboys, 1968). A review in the *New York Times* reads: “Lonesome Cowboys’ isn’t so much homosexual as adolescent. Although there is lots of nudity, profanity, swish dialogue and bodily contact, it all has the air of horsing around at a summer camp for arrested innocents.”¹⁰ Warhol has been the primal target of such criticism, his billboard images, Coca Cola bottles or Campbell’s soup cans appear to do nothing “good’ other than (as Frederic Jameson argues) re-iterate the fetishistic relations of consumption. Jameson in his treatise on postmodernism says: “Andy Warhol’s work(s)... which explicitly

⁹ Wellesley, “Performing Idea: Day II”

¹⁰ See: Vincent Canby, “Movie Review: Lonesome Cowboys”, *The New York Times*, 6 May 1969.

<<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=980CE4D61E30EE3BBC4E53DFB3668382679EDE>> [Accessed 14 February 2011]

foreground the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital, ought to be powerful and critical statements. If they are not that, then one would surely want to know why..."¹¹

In the face of dubious acts that appear to be doing nothing "good", the very question of cultural value is brought to the occasion, exemplified perhaps when the reviewer of my work is provoked to ask an ethical question: "whether trust in the maker matters." I am interested in playing with expectations around art and performance, as contemporary art discourse is so wilfully geared towards efficacy – what art *does* and *should do* – and rarely acknowledges that this is precisely the art market discourse. Irit Rogoff usefully pointed this out in a lecture on cultural seriousness: "Every time someone talks about art and its potential to transform, I want to ask them if they realize they are participating in the art markets discourse."¹² Discussing a work in terms of desire, or desiring desire, enables a transparency around our participations. *I Wanna be in that Show* shows what performance does, but also what it *doesn't do*. It shows that performance is also "good" at *doing nothing*, and when this is acknowledged feelings of bemusement and embarrassment can occur. These strange feelings might also be the very reason some are attracted to such works, bringing to the fore questions of our own engagements – our own ethics.

Nicholas Ridout discusses the work of embarrassment in the theatre as contingent upon the fact that an audience member has paid to be looked in the face by a performer who has been paid to do that looking.¹³ Dominic Johnson extends Ridout's analysis of the face-to-face encounter and says: "Having paid to look at someone perform, and having them been paid to return the look, this colouring of intimacy within an economic relation creates an intimacy that is

¹¹ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 3rd edition (London: Verso, 2008) p.9

¹² See: Irit Rogoff, "On Being Serious in the Art World", *Institutional Attitudes: Beyond Criticality*, Brussels, 25 April 2010.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2KNmV4QsE>> [Accessed 2 February 2013]

¹³ See: Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals and other Theatrical Problems*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

always and already alienated, a difficult intimacy".¹⁴ Embarrassment might therefore ensue an actor looking at a spectator in proper theatre (breaking what thespians call "the fourth-wall"), but embarrassment emerges differently in my work as I continually address my audience throughout in the same way that any cabaret act (or teacher for that matter) would communicate with their audience. There is no fourth wall. The kind of embarrassment Ridout refers to is restricted, perhaps, to "posh" theatre, or traditional theatre where we usually go to *not* be looked at by onstage actors. Any embarrassment felt in my work may then have something to do with its failure to do "good" or do *anything*, through its ardent pursuit and promotion of desire. I wanna, I wanna, I wanna. The reviewer's experience of my work perhaps resembles the kind of embarrassment felt when a poo doesn't flush –a lingering stink in the most banal sense. Except I've bedazzled my poos in *I Wanna be in that Show*. I've intentionally glamorized them to the point that they don't embarrass me, but embarrass other people instead. Embarrassment or guilt in the face of waste can also be a reaction to the knowledge that one has wilfully ignored such matter. As cultural theorist Gay Hawkins points out in her work on the ethics of waste: "Waste is something we all have to manage; beyond biological necessity we expel and discard in the interest of *ordering* the self, in the interest of maintaining a boundary between what is connected to the self and what isn't."¹⁵ So if waste management is fundamental to the practice of subjectivity as Hawkins suggests, feelings of embarrassment in the face of "fanciful turds" might result in the work of ethics as spectators filter what to regard and what to disregard. My practice attempts to traverse these edges between criticality and nonsense, legitimate and illegitimate culture, in order to foreground pleasure and bring questions of ethics (or "trust" in this instance) to the fore. "Fanciful acts" and "turds" are given centre stage within the privileged critical arena of the *Performing Idea* conference as means of pointing to this process of distinction or "waste management" that ensues cultural life.

¹⁴ Owen Glyndwr Parry, "Report on seminar: Performance and Pornography, by Dominic Johnson", *Intimacy: Across Visceral and Digital Performance*, Goldsmiths University of London, December 2008. www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/intimacy/report-parry.doc [accessed 20 April 2012]

¹⁵ Gay Hawkins, *The Ethics of Waste: How We Relate to Rubbish* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), p. 24.

So why has failure become a reoccurring tactic across performance? From Jack Smith, as I have mentioned already, through to contemporary performance's most celebrated practitioners such as Forced Entertainment and Goat Island (who are discussed in Chapter 1). Failure might be a way of linking such diverse practices. We cannot talk about failure, however, without mentioning Samuel Beckett who famously urged: "Fail again. Fail better."¹⁶ Beckett posited the idea that failure can be rehearsed and represented, that failure can be a technique or skill that one develops and incorporates with positive value into their work. The notorious comedy slapstick routine of two men and a plank is an example. My own relationship with failure and performance, however, has less to do with its repeatability, and more to do with a trust in failure through what I experience as its *unrepeatability* in the live. There is something about live performance that allows me to feel embarrassed, awkward and silly. There is something liberating, like a permission or openness to failure that differs, for instance, to my relationship with writing. Of course "performance remains"¹⁷ as Rebecca Schneider argues, opposing Peggy Phelan's notion that "performance becomes itself through disappearance".¹⁸ And on a theoretical level I am very much in agreement with Schneider, because the idea of performance remaining makes the work more democratic, like a lingering turd it becomes available to those who "weren't there to see it", and it opens up the possibility of connecting other histories to the histories of performance. However, on a more practical level and methodologically, I recognize Phelan's experience of performance and its ephemerality as integral to my own experience of making performance; it has a lot to do with what you can get away with in live performance. There is a freedom or permission in the live to risk failure (it's ok, there's always another show and I can always blame the recording), which differs to the paranoia I experience on failing as a writer (Oh dear, I wish I never said that and now they can prove it). The investment I feel in the live allows me to proceed without

¹⁶ See: Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho*, (New York: Grove Press, 1983)

¹⁷ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Re-enactment* (London: Routledge, 2011)

¹⁸ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p.148.

knowing, or without filtering, censoring or inhibiting desire. While performance may remain as it does in *I Wanna be in that Show*, in the references I make to other artist's work such as Pina Bausch, Chris Burden, Franko B, and Bonnie Tyler and in video documentation that my readers will view and in this writing too; my experience of staging performance depends very much on the live. This sense of something criminal, something you can get away with in live performance may also be a reason for performance's bad reputation and the endured anti-theatrical prejudice that ensues performance's histories. It is through crime and a faith in exposure of ones crimes (and through failure itself) that the systems of operation are also exposed. To "glamorize your messes" is also then a way of preventing one's messes from being judged by another, not an easy recuperation, but a paradoxical celebration of negativity in the face of prevalent systems of value –in the face of judgment. It may even point out the crimes that also prevail in those very systems that uphold value itself.

The "under-rehearsed", a tactic I employ purposefully in my practice is also bound to failure. In this instance, *I Wanna be in that Show* required a few rehearsals with my main assistant Luis as the entire show depended on him moving things on and off the stage, standing in the spotlight when necessary and assisting the other performers who hadn't rehearsed at all. All performers were given a score which included a script with cues for when they should enter and exit, but other than this loose frame, the entire show depended on them following instructions from the score, my assistant Luis, or from myself sat in the audience. I wanted the performance to feel at all times like it was on the edge of collapse, to make transparent the labour of what I call "holding it all together". This labour of learning as doing (the pedagogy), over the labour of doing (efficacy), is perhaps what is made visible through the failure of perfection and through trial and error, and why feelings of embarrassment emerge when I act, as one reviewer of my show remarks, "like a child".¹⁹

¹⁹ Wellesley, "Performing Idea: Day II"

The illustration below [Fig. 1.] is of an original stage plan with an added diagram that point to either end of the line of milk that divides the stage.²⁰ As a visual diagram I want to consider the line of milk as an axis upon which failure is bound at either end: too much activity (“EXCESS”) on one end, and too little activity (“NOTHING”) on the other. Through this visual diagram we might begin to understand how failure works in practices that differ; for instance the kind of overproduction, elaborate aesthetic, glamour and hysteria of a Jack Smith piece, to the intentional underproduction, the pared back or minimal aesthetics and boredom of a Samuel Beckett piece. Failure ensues both, although they both operate distinctively. *I Wanna be in that Show* operates at either end always avoiding what might be the (conservative) middle bit by staging elaborately dressed hyperbolic figures in still or barely moving poses, or hysterical speech emptied of any real meaning.

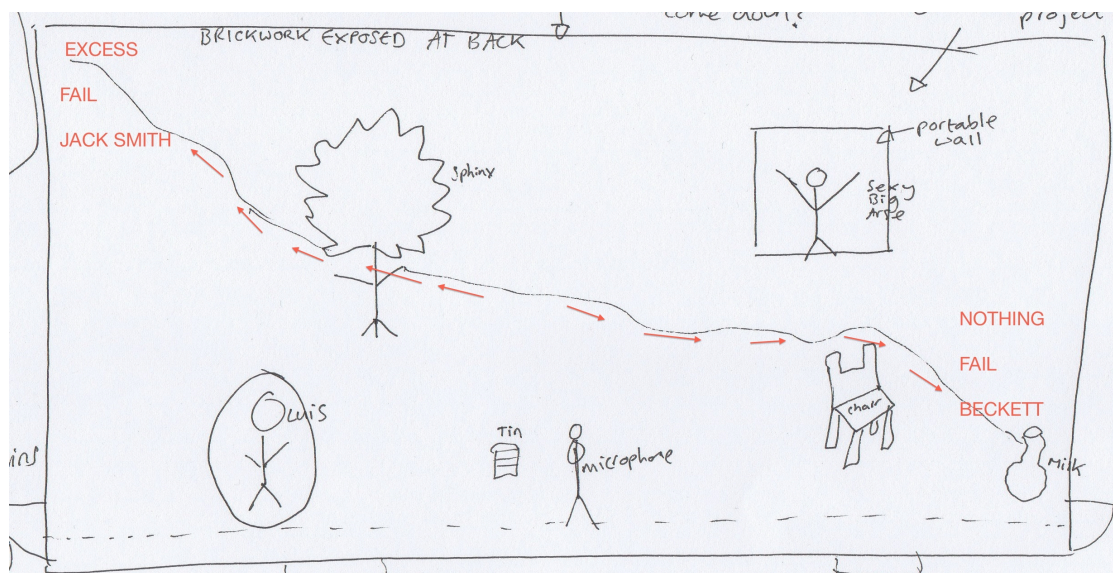


Fig. 1.

(Not a) Performance Lecture and Re-do

Presented within the conference context of *Performance Matters: Performance Lectures and Re-dos*, I wanted to re-think the form and structure of the lecture and re-do by staging “fanciful acts” beside critical spoken accounts on

²⁰ This diagram was drawn before the performance, and is not an accurate representation of the performance.

performance. You may use the shoddy diagram once more to imagine them being staged either side of the milky line that divides them, whilst in actual fact, such definitions were entirely broken down through the performance as staged action responded to spoken criticism and vice versa. “Fanciful acts” became critical of any attempt at a recuperation of what was taking place (falling apart) onstage and such dualities were blurred. By offering something different to the lecture format, my objective was to show how “fanciful acts” might also work critically and how written critical reflections might, as they often do, become “fanciful acts” of knowledge production. In place of the “systematic, methodical and coherent” style of the lecture and much performance research,²¹ I opted for the disorganized, the tactile and the intuitive as a means of exposing how knowledge works through pleasure and desire. Patricia Milder writes about the emerging aesthetic of the Lecture-Performance in contemporary art and says: “Lecture-performance (or at least successful lecture-performance) does not have, as many assume it does, an easy, DIY aesthetic. The works... have all been rehearsed, precisely constructed, and layered with meaning on many levels.”²² She continues, “In lecture- performance, public speaking is an aesthetic component. Clear articulation and elocution is absolutely necessary.”²³ My performance quite brazenly refuses success and articulation and those various tropes Milder associates with the performance lecture: opting instead to speak with my mouth full, or by employing a “fake” American accent, or by breaking speech into song, or gibberish, or by screeching like a whale into the microphone. I even yell at one point (at no one in particular): “if you want articulate I said then go and suck your mother’s breast dirt-bag....” My own practice sits uncomfortably, agitated by the drive in current performance research tendencies to the strategic and coherent lecture format, and thus I explore ways to manipulate the lecture format rather than manipulate my practice or straighten it out for the conference. I opt for demonstrating how knowledge is already at work without succumbing to favoured critical styles.

²¹ See: John Freeman, *Blood Sweat and Theory: Research Through Practice in Performance* (Uk: Libri and Ashford, 2010) p. 265.

²² Patricia Milder, “Teaching as Art: The Contemporary Lecture-Performance”, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 33.1 (2011), pp. 26-27

²³ Milder, pp. 26-27.

Milder sets out to explore the increased popularity of the lecture-performance, locating its emergence in visual arts with Joseph Beuys' *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965), but she also cites other artists such as Chris Burden, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Morris, and Robert Smithson for championing the lecture demonstration. I disagree however with Milder's notion that "Beuys' lecture series marks a defining moment in the blurring of the line between performance and pedagogy".²⁴ Restricting pedagogy to the representational form of the lecture limits it and limits us from seeing pedagogy at work in other forms and processes, such as failure. Rather than demonstrate as Milder does that "the best lecture-performances always seem to originate from artists who believe that teaching itself is a central component of their artwork", I refuse the lecture format which, if we take Milder's examples, maintains the appearance of success, and maintains the misconceived idea that learning takes place with an authoritative leader – a teacher or performer. *I Wanna be in that Show* both represents and instances the work of pedagogy, but representations of success and knowledge are destroyed by instances of failure and not knowing, as both my performers and I learn the performance by doing it and by doing that learning in front of a live audience. As the unrehearsed exposes my own learning of the piece through doing it, it is clear that it is not so much that I have something to tell the audience, but perhaps that we have something to tell each other.

There is ambiguity in what I (as artist) have to say, for instance when I serenade my assistant Luis: "You are beautiful... and everyone in this room has got a lot to learn from you". At another point I shout in a fake American accent "Everyone in the theatre needs to just calm down!" perhaps a call to let go of any anxious attempt to make sense of this situation. Instead it becomes a call perhaps to just "be there together" and..."relax", something we rarely find the time to do with our peers in our professional lives. I tell my onstage performers to "relax... Stop what you're doing. Pull up a pew." There might be something to learn from just hanging out a bit without intention too. At another point, sat in the audience, I go through a little exercise with the audience where I encourage them to piss

²⁴ Milder, p. 15.

themselves whilst sitting in their lovely theatre seats: “We’ll do it together”, I say, “after four... one, two, three...” A little piss-take perhaps on the authoritative figure of the performer/ teacher who, can and do at times, exploit their capacity to control situations. Rather than conceal or provide a critique of such moves, which irrefutably occur in both the performance scene and academy, I attempt to make them transparent, offering a take on the performance-lecture that exposes its representational, as well as performative elements.

The notion of “re-do” or “re-enactment” has been the subject of too much debate in recent years following Marina Abramović’s re-enactments of iconic performance art pieces, including Joseph Beuys’s famous lecture, in *Seven Easy Pieces* at New Yorks Guggenheim in 2005. Abramović admits to wanting “to establish certain moral rules. If someone wants to remake a performance, they must ask the artist for the rights and pay for it, just like it’s done with music or literature.”²⁵ Unsatisfied with this notion of authorship, and feeling it a bit dated, *I Wanna be in that Show* breaks this notion of re-enactment by dispelling the tired notion of artist-genius and authenticator, and by demonstrating instead how any one performance is already embedded, tangled up and in trouble with the history of another. Whilst I insist on its multiplicitous relationship to a range of other works, forms and processes, I also contradict this by insisting that there is something of value in the artist as celebrity or personality, exemplified in Abramović’s very own charismatic personality and ability to charm. At one point in the performance I describe the experience of another performer:

No one could do it like she did. It was something about her, the way she moved... the sheer abandonment, the intimacy, the nuttiness, the freedom, the confidence and the glamour...!

²⁵ Fabio Cypriano, “Performance and Reenactment: Analyzing Marina Abramović’s *Seven Easy Pieces*”, in *Idanca*, <<http://idanca.net/performance-e-reencenacao-uma-analise-de-seven-eeasy-pieces-de-marina-abramovic/>> [Accessed: 2 April 2012]

This physical residue of the performer/artist or what Lynda Hart calls “the flesh”²⁶ has always had a much stronger emphasis in the work of performance art than traditional theatre because the artist is often presented as themselves i.e. the performer is not playing a character as actors do in traditional theatre. The body of the artist is so often central to the work of performance art, but also because the performance artist has to also negotiate the slippage between life and work – or indeed where life itself becomes work. What might be considered a celebration of charisma the “authentic” or “original” in my description of the performer above is eventually tarnished, however, as I continue: “No one could do it like she did, no one, absolutely no one, had Bonnie Tyler down to a ‘T’ like she did.” Disappointment sets in for anyone who believes for a second that authenticity is a value to be championed in performance. The doubling of presence of the performance artist in work and life, is juxtaposed with the description of a performer with “confidence and glamour” who is of course not only as unoriginal as Bonnie Tyler, but is in fact imitating Bonnie Tyler. It is not her originality that I am compelled by, but her unoriginality. Furthermore my assistant Luis feebly stands with no attempt at imitation in the place of the Bonnie Tyler Tribute artist. I am reminded once more of the reviewer’s questioning of “faith in the maker”, and wonder whether her questioning of faith was also provoked by my performance’s critique of representation through the ill staging of a representation of a representation – doubly fake. These were also some of the issues Jameson raised in relation to Warhol’s work, and which I have mentioned above, but they are also the symptom of the anti-theatrical prejudice that has riddled history back as far as ancient Greece. I discuss this too in chapter one.

Addressing the relationship between performance, pedagogy and representation in relation to fashionable forms of Performance Lecture and *Re-do, I Wanna be in that Show* shows how knowledge is produced in other forms. It draws inspiration from both avant-garde methods that induce failure in order to stage the process of “learning”, and by turning to popular performances – a

²⁶ Lynda Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sodomasochism*, (New York: Columbia University, 1998)

Bonnie Tyler tribute band – to disrupt any elitist or “high art” authoritative turn to the kind of re-enactment championed by the likes of Abramović.

Histories and Mysteries

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up...²⁷

Walter Benjamin

I Wanna be in that Show cites, remembers, and refuses certain predominant styles of performance research, and in a Benjaminian sense offers “flashes” of history and the work of other artists, exposing desire’s role in acts of remembrance. This is not how history is enacted in The Bruce High Quality Foundation (BHQF) lecture-performance *Art History with Benefits*. (2009) What I try to do with *I Wanna be in that Show* is show how this performance (and perhaps all performance) is always already riddled with that of another. Lets think through one particular image [Fig. 3.]: the figure of my assistant (Jenna Camus) dressed in black rubber, standing with her back to the audience, against a floral wallpapered partition wall, standing still, holding up the wall throughout the forty minute duration. This single tableau is a replica of a photograph from “the Sunday magazine”. [Fig.2.] “I cut it out”, I tell the audience. Similarly, when my assistant Luis stands in the place of the “charismatic” and “glamorous” woman who is in fact a Bonnie Tyler tribute artist, the body in this tableau stands in the place of a copy – a photograph. This is not my image and it never was. But extending on the work through this writing here, I wonder if it was an image from the Sunday magazine or whether this image I staged was in fact an image I had seen elsewhere – burned perhaps into my retina (or memory) at another time and reproduced subconsciously here. Returning by chance more recently to the work of Ana Mendieta, a prolific performance artist whose 1970s *Silueta* series [Fig. 4.], which consisted of a series of images of the artist’s remains on the landscape – imprints in sand, fire, water, dust – I am spooked by the uncanny resemblance of the poses in Mendieta’s *Silueta* pieces and the pose constructed by my assistant in *I Wanna*

²⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 255.

be in that Show. I am further spooked to read of Mendieta's death: The story goes that she either committed suicide during an enraged fight with her husband, sculptor Carl Andre, or that he had pushed her out of the window of their 34th floor apartment in 1985. I am reminded also of Abramović's manifesto in this discovery: "An artist should look at the *symbols* of his work for the *signs* of different *death* scenarios",²⁸ and speculate whether Mendieta's *Siluetas* were in fact psychic predictions of her own death scenario – out of the window and onto the street. Women falling are echoed throughout *I Wanna be in that Show*.



Fig. 2.

²⁸ Marina Abramović, "Manifesto Reading", *Manifesto Marathon*, Serpentine Gallery, London, 18-19 October 2008.



Fig. 3.

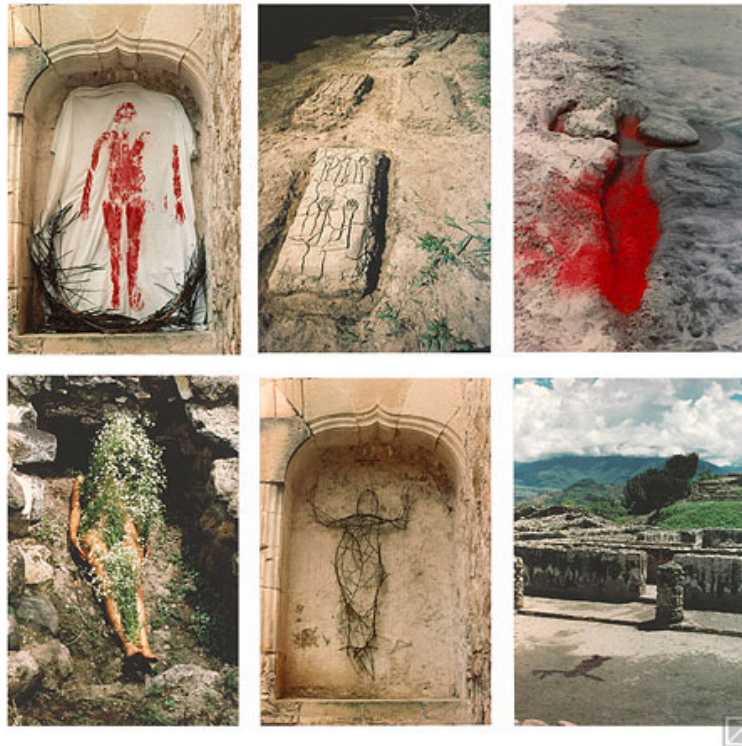


Fig. 4

Rebecca Schneider in an essay exploring the multiplicities of solo performance speculates on a certain “drive to ‘legitimacy’” in performance histories. In *I Wanna be in that Show* I wanted to expose the unmentionable bits, or the discarded feelings we have about art – such as the dubious question of aspirations, left as cultural detritus in critical work, but made central to my performance about wanting to be in a performance. I am also fascinated by stories that surround the work of art such as Mendieta’s tragic death scenario here.

In Chapter 1 I discuss how Schneider problematizes any attempt to locate an origin of performance art, located as it often is in the Dada movement or abstract expressionism.²⁹ Schneider addresses how canons work “to actively create a patrilineal genealogy of father- son succession and replicate patriarchal mythologies of exclusively masculine creativity.”³⁰ In light of Schneider’s observation of an “exclusively masculine” privilege it is worth returning to Milder’s discussion of the Lecture Performance, which in my observation cites only three female artists working with this format: Sharon Hayes, Marina Abramović and Yvonne Rainer (and the latter two only in passing reference). All other references are made to men: William Kentridge, Alexandre Singh, Guillaume Desanges, Terence Koh, Chris Burden, Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Joseph Beuys, Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy and The Bruce High Quality Foundation (BHQF). The latter, a collective (represented by three men at *Performa 09*), whose lecture *History with Benefits* (a play on the term “friends with benefits”) Milder discusses in detail. Milder describes how in their lecture BHQF presented:

Photographs of Mariah Carey, Peggy Guggenheim, Andrea Fraser, Brooke Shields, and Jean Michel Basquiat. Through clear references to actual sex between the artists they’ve singled out and their sponsors (Fraser and her collector, Carey and her husband-producer Tommy Mottola, and so on).³¹

While I note these references of various women and one African American become the butt of the joke, the accessory to these boys’ “fanciful critique”, Milder absolutely fails to notice this and continues in regards to BHQF: “The collective uses these references, however, to help define their young male, intentionally obnoxious ‘bad boy’ aesthetic.”³² Milder usefully highlights the humorous aspect of this work, but she upholds this “boy aesthetic” in her own critique by only including BHQF’s reference to women and African Americans as humorous anecdote. While BHQF work critically to expose the personal lives of others for the better of the institution and also their own careers – “what

²⁹ See: Roselee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, (London: Thames and Hudson: 2001)

³⁰ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Re-enactment* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.26.

³¹ Milder, p. 14.

³² Milder, p. 14

happens in the art world, stays in the art world” – their institutional critique does not seem to offer an alternative.³³ Milder does turn to the work of French artist Jérôme Bel and American artist Sharon Hayes to offer alternative perspectives, but nevertheless the Lecture-Performance in each is discussed for its “pedagogic” potential and its restrictive, conservative and uninventive elements are ignored. Milder never mentions that the Lecture-Performance might in fact be a prevailing “boy aesthetic”. This brings me back to Schneider, who is perhaps right in light of my examples here, to be suspicious of the patriarchal masculine lineage that follows the upholding of a “genius” like Jackson Pollock, and which is perpetuated in Milder’s critique of the lecture-performance.

A useful observation Schneider makes in her essay is the confusion of historical narrative, which is also played out in *I Wanna be in that Show*. History is wrong and always wronged. In discussing the much-celebrated work of Pina Bausch I describe a scene from *Palermo Palermo*: “and then...” I say, “All the beautiful thin people came out running and dancing amongst the rubble”. I wanted to playfully expose the potential body fascism at stake in the work of an artist whom I clearly admire. I also turn to Chris Burden’s famous *Shoot piece* (1970) to give insight and say: “Everyone forgets he didn’t shoot himself in the arm... it was his assistant who shot him, it was his assistant who had the guts to pull the fucking trigger.” The assistant, a theme that unravels throughout this performance is given recognition, and that which might be forgotten or slips out of critical and cultural range, is brought to the fore with gusto.

Schneider borrows the term “call and response” (a musical movement in jazz) to exemplify how solo work is always building on or leading into that of another. She turns to Yves Klein’s infamous photographic montage *Leap into the Void* (1960) and asks: “Is he flying up or falling down? Citing backwards or forwards?”³⁴ I have added my own take on this image. [Fig. 5.] The very fact that the image is a kind of fiction of an event that happened but was missed opens

³³ Milder, p. 14

³⁴ Schneider, *Performing Remains*, p. 29

up the possibility of historical narrative beyond singular lineage. It also opens to the many falling women (both literally and metaphorically) who make an appearance in this text: Kira O'Reilly > Pina Bausch > Eirini Kartsaki > Bonnie Tyler > Ana Mendieta > and maybe Baby (from *Dirty Dancing*) too. [Fig. 6.]



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.

I Wanna be in that Show stages this crossover of influences, calls and responses. It imagines, remembers and unashamedly forgets the various influences that make up performance history, whilst being attentive to those histories that are dismissed by the histories of art and performance. I have added text to the images above to show how we might begin to seek out examples beyond art and theatre histories and in popular archives, and to also return with a different perspective or view on work that has thus far been given credence within dominant histories and discourses on performance.

I Wanna be in that Show can be accessed on various levels. It can be read as fiction for those who don't know the references to other works such as Burden, Franko B, and Bausch, and still have historical relevance for those familiar with these histories – those who do “get it”. Aware of the privilege of the work of parody I wanted the work to remain abstract and fragmented and to work against the “inside joke” that is the work of deliberate parody and so often the work of artists engaged in institutional critique.³⁵ My (non) re-dos in *I Wanna be in that Show* never name the author or creator of the work I am alluding to, neither in my critique (sat in the audience) nor in the images constructed on stage. I hope that spectators make wrong connections to these works. For instance they might mistake my description of one work for that of another, and this might consequently open up new connections between the work I am *intending* to talk about, the work my audience *thinks* I am talking about, and the *actual work* that I was staging in that very auditorium – extended further through this writing here too. It is necessary to think of performance art in the context of my work beyond canonical history. In Chapter 1, I already referred to Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine's notion of performance as “explosive methodology” beyond historical context.³⁶ In *I Wanna be in that Show*, clippings from performance history are mingled with my own memories, processes and fictionalizations in an attempt to stretch beyond singular intentions and policed legitimacies. An imagined artwork for Facebook is conceptualized where names

³⁵ See as examples: David Shrigley, Andrea Fraser and Mel Brimfield.

³⁶ Lois Keidan and Daniel Brine, “Live Culture at Tate Modern: Fluid Landscapes”, 2003. <http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/projects/live_culture/lada.html> [Accessed: 11 February 2011].

of boys get tagged (a la Sophie Calle) in a photo of someone’s piss trickle across a London pavement. [Fig. 7. a/b.] Or the golden mask [Fig. 14.] inspired by a photograph by Ukranian artist Arsen Savadov, whose work has been of interest to me for some time, but whose work I have been advised to “leave out” of my research because I would need to contextualize it within Soviet histories, which I know very little about.³⁷ [Fig. 13.] I wanted to be attentive to those objects and performances that may be excluded, and look at those processes we can’t explain, or things we have no “valid” reason for including in our work other than lets say: “I wanted it to be there”. I wanted to show how we go about constructing narratives, themes, images and ideas by being attentive to those “illegitimate” processes, and by being responsive to history, methods and contexts. I wanted to acknowledge the role of curious desire (as well as intention or strategy) in the process of performance and making performance, opening desire up beyond the personal, to the production of a scene.

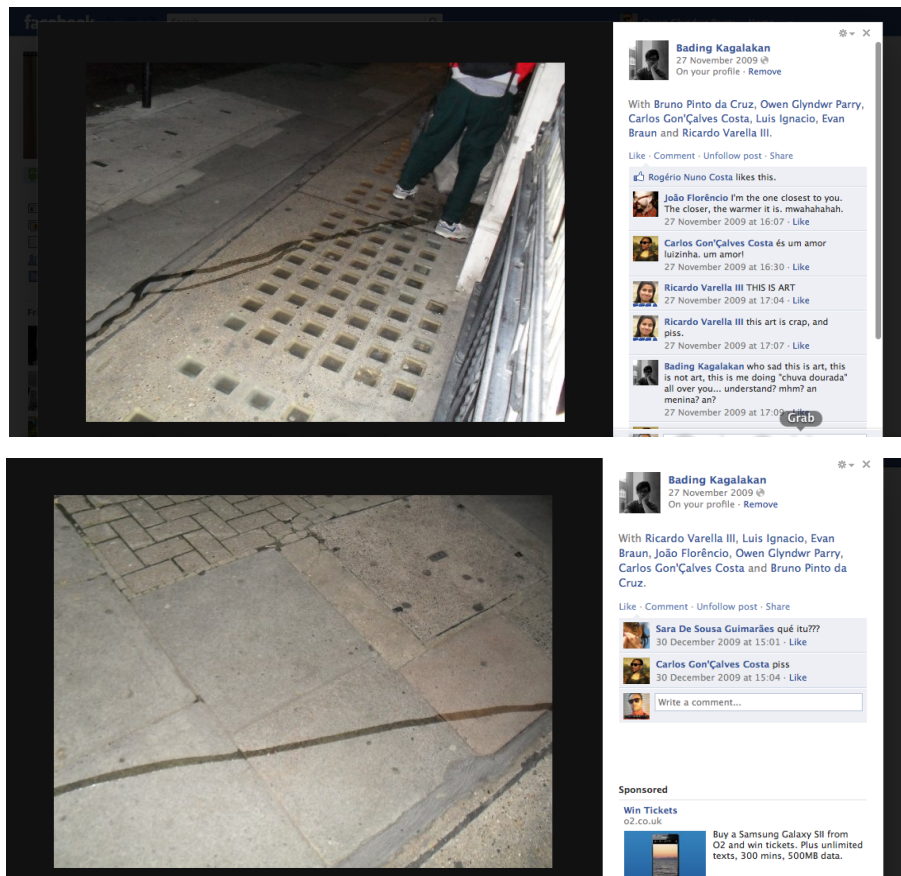


Fig. 7. a/b.

³⁷ This advice was given to me during my Masters dissertation.



Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.

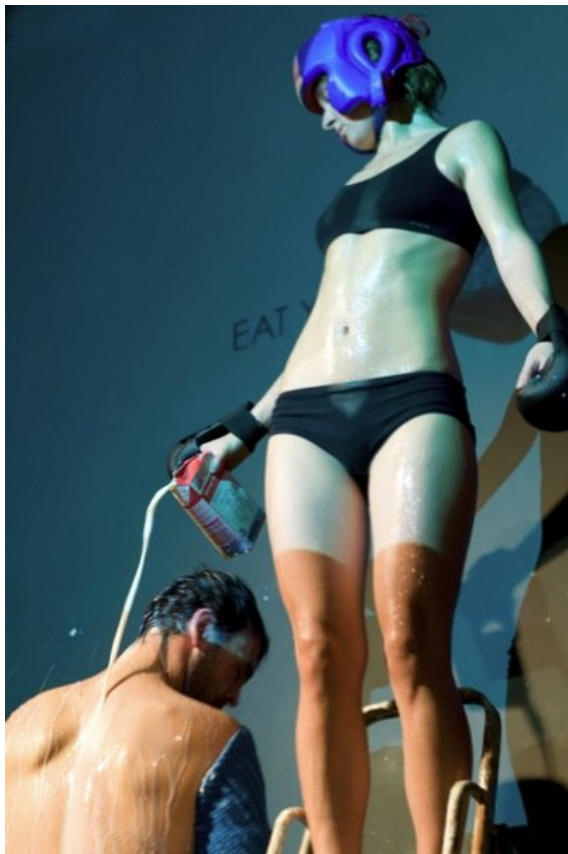


Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.



Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.

Besides re-staging or citing the work of others, *I Wanna be in that Show* also re-stages element and fragment of my own work – of both collaborations and solo works. For instance the milk that leaks from a vase on to the stage floor leaks into a short act I made called *Milk Thing* (2009), [Fig. 8. & 11.] and the description of milk being passed from mouth to mouth of two boys resembles a pornographic fantasy, but it also feels like an exaggerated re-imagining of a particular performance I stage with Andrew Mitchelson as Mitch & Parry. [Fig. 9.] In the performance titled *Oceans Apart* (2010), Mitch very slowly passes saliva from his mouth into my open receiving mouth over five minutes. [Fig. 10.] It also constitutes a kind of calling-into-the future as since staging *I Wanna be in that Show*, we have in fact staged the work anew, replacing spit with milk. [Fig. 12.] By describing the passing of milk back and forth between mouths, I deliberately allude to the erotic and pornographic nature of this work too, letting it spill beyond the frame of art. Our work has often been compared with Triga Porn as much as it has been related to body art and performance histories.³⁸ These multiple access points have been important to the work. Treading the fine line of legitimate culture, uncertainty is aroused in the spectator as the contemplation whether there might be more than a critical act at stake in our intimate performance with spit, swathes the work. Sara Jane Bailes writes about *Oceans Apart* and says:

... an act that elicits both repulsion and a kind of transfixed arousal and fascination from its audience. Both times I have seen it, I have been almost as compelled to watch the reactions of those sitting closely, who cannot observe entirely without a sense of guilty voyeurism and who are also, on some level, registering their disgust (grimaced faces, screwed up noses, etc.).³⁹

Bailes also points out that its effects are produced through its contradictions: “it is both intimate and daringly pornographic, it is also somehow deliberately shy and ordinary in its gesture towards the explicit as a mode of

³⁸ We have shown *Ocean's Apart* in a diverse contexts from queer cosmopolitan nightclubs at 1.am and pubs on the West coast of Ireland, to galleries and performance festivals, and to audiences of one to audiences of over 2000. Context affects peoples' experience of the piece, but its relation to porn and the illegitimate is nearly always alluded to in spectator response.

³⁹ Sara Jane Bailes, “The Space Between ‘You’ and ‘I’”, *Sacred Symposium*, Chelsea Theatre, 13 November 2010.

performance.”⁴⁰ The negative affects of the performance, discussed through Bailes’ eloquent account of the work, remind me of those also described by the reviewer. It is not embarrassment that Bailes describes but “guilty voyeurism” – a feeling evoked by some sense of illegitimacy, a critic’s voyeuristic encounter perhaps with a work of art, rather than a customary, rehearsed and professional engagement.

Conclusion



Fig. 15.

To conclude this account of various concepts I am working with in *I Wanna be in that Show* would leave no desire to be *in that show*. Besides, since staging the work, aspects of this work have also seeped into new work by me and by others. My documentation and videos of other work clearly demonstrate the way it feeds into new works, but has also responded to other work. I hope to have shown how desire, failure and glamour can become creative methods for challenging prevailing performance forms, and to re-think the work of pedagogy and re-enactment. I also hoped that someone *wanted to be in my show*, and that the work may have inspired someone to act and to fail at *acting*. I was very pleased to hear that since writing this, Norwegian theorist Mathias Danbolt in a presentation titled *Failing to Deliver: Queer Performance in Times of*

⁴⁰ Bailes, “The Space Between ‘You’ and ‘I’”

Political Depression at Warehouse 9 in Copenhagen (2013) recalls the work of failure and his experience of *I Wanna be in that Show*. Danbolt says: “The way to take to the stage by means of desire, to dare to give the audience something unexpected, with the risk of falling short, failing, ruining the expectations. Not shock but utter strangeness. Owen G. Parry’s performance *I Want to Be in That Show* is an example of this.”⁴¹[sic] Danbolt continues: “*I Wanna be in that Show*. Or, I wanna be able to put on a show like that. I wanna dare do something like that...”⁴² Danbolt does dare. His lecture included elements purposefully “unprepared” – something he says he wouldn’t usually have the guts to do, and the fact that he allows himself to flirt with the possibility of failure in his presentation – by both describing it and allowing its possibilities to contaminate his talk – may be a way of thinking of the potentials of a work like *I Wanna be in that Show*. While I did not see his presentation (I can only imagine it), it is one way of exemplifying the work’s ability to influence, extend and contaminate other bodies, works, processes and discourses. Likewise this writing should provide some new ways of thinking about our approach to making performance, historicising performance and thinking through the matter of performance. This desire to be *in* the work one makes is a very necessary attribute I would conclude if I must conclude with anything. [Fig. 15.]

⁴¹ Mathias Danbolt, “Failing to Deliver: Queer Performance in Times of Political Depression,” *International Performance Festival 2012*, Warehouse9, Copenhagen, Denmark, 25 November 2012.

⁴² Danbolt, “Failing to Deliver”

Chapter 3

Trashy Relations and Participation Art



Fig. 16.

Sleaziness implies a circuit of inappropriate exchange involving suspect authorial intentions and/ or displaced perversities in the audience.
Jeffrey Sconce, *Sleaze Artists*, 2007

It is the idea that anything - or indeed, nothing - might happen during these encounters that makes them so charged and interesting.
Lynn Gardner, "One to One Performance", *Guardian*, 2005

Introduction

Criticism on participation in contemporary art and performance has tended to distinguish between "good-boy" models of conviviality and community or on "bad-boy" models of antagonism and uncomfortable works. This is exemplified in art critic Claire Bishop's *October* critique of Nicolas Bourriaud's influential 1998 book and exhibition *Relational Aesthetics*.¹ I invoke the colloquial term "bad-boy" here to pay heed to the dualism and rigid, though, as I hope to highlight, potentially-comic characterisation Bishop sets up between Bourriaud's "convivial" works, and "antagonistic" works by controversial artists

¹ See: Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. by John Howe (Paris: Les Presses du réel, 2002) and, Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012)

Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn. The latter two Bishop favours in her discussions. As a counterpoint to Bishop and Bourriaud, this chapter explores the potentials of itinerant participations in art by examining and staging performance's inherent ambiguous relations and trashy idiosyncrasies. I ask how trashy relations might complicate the dualism of either "conviviality" or "antagonism" set up by Bishop in her critique of Bourriaud, and offer a consideration of the ways the participatory turn in art practice parallels the ethical turn discussed in my introduction. I offer up trashy relations as complex relationalities beyond dualism, also accounting for the possibility of strange, perverse even unintelligible experiences. These might include experiences of privation or loneliness in the social and affirmation and pleasure in the anti-social. A consideration of trashy relations may broaden our experience and affirm new relations in participatory art, and may even permit us to re-approach some of those works Bishop and Bourriaud instance with new, refreshing perspectives.

Firstly I will map out the existing discourse surrounding participation in art and the surge of one to one performance since the turn of the century. I will then turn to my own experience as a participant-spectator and author of one to one performance to think through the ways trashy relations blur the dualism between conviviality and antagonism set up by Bishop. Ultimately by paying attention to the role of desire (which Bishop ignores) and complicating relations through itinerant participations, I offer a means of thinking about the ways trashy relations in participatory art not only bring into question the very ethics of inter-subjective relations (and participatory practices), but also confuse labour with temporalities of non-labour, broadening and extending possibility for the social and political.

Conviviality and Antagonism

*Let's come together
Right now
Oh yeah
In sweet harmony
The Beloved (Lyrics)*

I believe being an asshole is often a good thing but sometimes it's just being an asshole.
Taylor Mac, "I Believe: a Theatre Manifesto"

Relational Aesthetics is a term coined by Nicolas Bourriaud to describe a trend in art practices emerging in the 1990s characterized by the use and inclusion of everyday participants who form the content of the work. That is to say a subjective presence is required in some way in order to change the work, or indeed make the work happen. While this, some might argue, is the premise of all artwork – the need for it to be seen and experienced, that art doesn't exist without the subjective art-world-spectator who encounters it, relational aesthetics represents a move away from the individual genius artist, towards (as Bourriaud argues) a democratic and collective effort. According to Bourriaud this move is an attempt to create relationships between people over and above institutionalised relational forms. His discussion of this phenomenon is centred on a set of artists whose work differs from the earlier political work of the 1980s. This work, he writes, "...is no longer seeking to represent utopias; rather, it is attempting to construct concrete spaces".² Bourriaud calls these "micro-utopias", which use human relations as their principle material. His prime examples of relational aesthetics are the works of Liam Gillick and Rirkrit Tiravanija, both of whom are artists invested in the construction of "inter-subjective" encounters – often between the artist and the public. Critics referring to the work of this turn often reference Gillick's *Pinboard Project (Grey)* 1992, which contains instructions for public use, and Tiravanija's installations such as *Untitled (Free)* and *Untitled (Still)* 1992, which involves the artist cooking vegetable curries for gallery visitors. Apart from the content, structurally, relational art practices represent a shift from a material economy focused on objects to a service-based economy where value is ascribed through the service produced by the worker (the artist) to the customer (the participant), and when the participant becomes implicit in making the work happen. This shift in artistic economies is now considered a form of "immaterial labour", a term coined by theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri who write: "Since the production of services results in no material and durable good, we

² Bourriaud, pp. 45-46.

define the labour involved in this production as *immaterial labour* — that is, labour that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication.”³ Another related and much cited term is “affective labour”; a form of work intended to produce or modify emotional experiences in people, and offers a useful lens for reading the economies of contemporary art and performance today.

Furthermore, Bourriaud is critical of the theatre in his book and assumes the position that audiences are pacified in the theatre because they sit in darkness unable to speak to others. He suggests that the white washed gallery is a much better place for meaningful social relations. Jacques Rancière responds to this in his lecture *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) by discussing how all spectators are actively participating despite the form of performance in which they are experiencing.⁴ Neither Bourriaud nor Rancière, however, consider theatre or art taking place in other social spaces outside the theatre or the gallery, such as clubs, festivals, localised settings, the street, the Internet or in any other context. Bourriaud’s opinion without doubt offers a very limiting view of spectatorship and agency and assumes an ideological image of “good” relations based on inter-active works that re-affirm community sameness or belonging (to the art-world) such as Gillick and Tiravanija’s work, over work where audiences participate, co-exist or dispute as living, morphing and thinking individuals.

Since Bourriaud’s publication and subsequent exhibition *Relational Aesthetics* at Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2002 there has been a surge of new relational art practices and responses and critiques of his book and the work of those artists he discusses and invites to stage their work. As curator and critic Maria Lind has pointed out, most criticism has focused on questioning the degree to which Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics implies “good” collaboration and “positive” interaction and participation.⁵ Most notably, and perhaps most useful to my

³ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press), p. 290.

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, (London: Verso, 2009)

⁵ See: Maria Lind, “Complications; On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art”, *New Communities* (Toronto: The Power Plant and Public Books, 2009) p. 59.

discussion of trashy relations is Claire Bishop's deliberately antagonistic response to Bourriaud in her *October* essay titled "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" (2004), and her essay "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents" published in her more recent book *Artificial Hells* (2012).⁶ Discussed in the former and extended into her criticism of Grant Kester and his book on dialogical art practices – *Conversation Pieces* (2005) – in the latter, Bishop convincingly sets up an argument against Bourriaud's relational aesthetics by comparing and contrasting the examples Bourriaud gives of the convivial, casual, open ended, vegetable curry works by Gillick and Tiravanija with the "tougher, more disruptive approach to 'relations'" in works by artists like Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn.⁷ Bishop offers an insightful discussion of Sierra's controversial *Line Tattooed on Six Paid People* (1999) and *Workers Who Cannot Be Paid, Remunerated to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (2000), both works whose titles are literally performed for visitors to galleries, and which deliberately re-affirm difference by exposing the art market and labour economy in place of constructing the supposed togetherness of Bourriaud's examples. Bishop writes:

Our response to witnessing the participants in Sierra's actions... is quite different to the "togetherness" of relational aesthetics. The work does not offer an experience of transcendent human empathy that smooths over the awkward situation, but a pointed racial and economic non-identification: "this is not me" The persistence of this friction, its awkwardness and discomfort, alerts us to the relational antagonism of Sierra's work.⁸

Similarly Hirschhorn's work *Bataille Monument* (2002) is also discussed to re-affirm her argument for a more antagonistic relationality. *Bataille Monument* part of international art expo *Documenta* in the small town of Kassel in Germany, consisted of taking "art tourists" in cabs run by a local Turkish taxi firm out of the expo into the less salubrious working class living areas where they were stranded at a make-shift cabin containing some sofas and an archive of Bataille related phenomena. Bishop also points out that there was a

⁶ See: Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004), pp. 51-79. And, Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012)

⁷ Bishop, *October*, p. 77.

⁸ Bishop, *October*, p. 79.

conveniently situated kiosk for visitors to spend money while they waited for a cab ride back. For Bishop, the piece was a deliberate attempt to expose the pretensions and differences between art world interests and everyone else's. While the work presupposes that the local residence have no interest in Bataille or even know who the French intellectual of eroticism, sovereignty and transgression is, Bishop writes: "Rather than make the local populace subject to what he calls the 'zoo effect', Hirschhorn's project made visitors feel like hapless intruders."⁹ I think the most salient aspect of Bishop's harsh critique of relational aesthetics is the way her antagonism towards Bourriaud is an affective inhabitation of the antagonism she favours in the work of those like Sierra and Hirschhorn. In her criticism she puts her feisty subject to work. Most significant however is the difference Bishop points out between an ideology of "conviviality" and "togetherness" in Bourriaud and the apparent sensations of "unease and discomfort rather than belonging" in her latter examples.¹⁰ But I want to question whether the works she offers really disrupt an ideological or moral drive, or just engender another sense of ideological belonging; like an individualistic superiority – an arrogant un-belonging – typified in clever concepts by clever people who know all about intellectuals like Bataille. Is Bishop's criticism in this sense a limiting and conservative one? Does her criticism simply end up re-affirming the difference Hirschhorn's work sets out to make visible, without offering something more?

Extending this discourse, I want to offer trashy relations as a counterpoint to the implied affirmations of Bourriaud and the explicit negations of Bishop by blurring these distinctions. What is missing from Bourriaud and Bishop's studies is the sense that art can be both affirmative and antagonistic at once, or that one might find affirmation where others find none. Equally one may feel completely abandoned and alone in a "convivial" economy of supposed "togetherness". I therefore propose that we turn to the more complex and idiosyncratic potentials of participatory art, such as the unexpected feelings and emotions that arise, or the unfathomable excesses that emerge through inter-

⁹ Bishop, *October*, p. 76.

¹⁰ Bishop, *October*, P. 70.

subjective relations.

In her latest book, Bishop argues against Kester's "aversion to disruption", arguing "that unease, discomfort or frustration – along with fear, contradiction, exhilaration and absurdity – can be crucial to any work's artistic impact".¹¹ Nevertheless, Bishop offers examples that are rarely "uneasy" or "frustrating". Despite their obvious antagonism, Sierra and Hirschhorn's works are offered up in her earlier *October* account as one-trick-ponies – explicit in their concept so much so that there seems little to experience after the "I get it" moment. It is fair to say, however, that her more recent example in *Artificial Hells* of Jeremy Deller's poignant, if not overly discussed, *The Battle of Orgrave* re-enactment of the 1984-5 miners' strikes, shows a move in her thinking towards work like Deller's, which, as she writes: "can accommodate multiple critical judgements, even contradictory ones."¹² Contradictory criticism has been valued for its ability to provoke and destabilise ideology throughout my project thus far, and is a principle characteristic of trashy tendencies. Still, instead of re-affirming "togetherness", which has been her criticism of Bourriaud and others like Kester, Bishop affirms a kind of genius individuality in artists like Sierra, Hirschhorn and to an extent Deller. Her celebration of these artists demonstrates perhaps a return to the author-artist – except the power in these works is shared amongst her and those others "who get it". Knowledge and power is re-affirmed in Bishop's examples, which in turn does not shift or disrupt but equally fixes and re-affirms power and ignores the more complex and trashy perversions and possibilities of the works she discusses. Desire, though unavoidable and engulfing, is always left out of Bishop's discussions of art. I will show later that desire may be in fact critical to our experience of the work she discusses.

Artist Gillick, who Bishop deeply criticises in *October*, responds by publishing a letter that successfully implements the kind of antagonism Bishop calls for. Antagonism breeds antagonism. Apart from showing Bishop up to be a journalist for a conservative newspaper by making accusations of "poor

¹¹ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 26.

¹² Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 36.

research and lazy approach”,¹³ listing inaccuracies in Bishop’s text like misspellings and corrections to descriptions of some of the works and artists she discusses, Gillick rightfully points to what I also see as the potential failure of Bishop’s antagonistic examples. Gillick writes in the footnotes:

Bishop’s interest in such work is mirrored in her journalism for the *Evening Standard*, which has also tended to discuss artists who lend themselves to easy and spectacular passage of easily understood ideas, such as Rachel Whiteread, Tracey Emin, and Andres Serrano, as opposed to artists where a degree of complexity and confusion is necessary to understand their work...¹⁴

Gillick foregrounds a consideration for emotional intelligence in his response, but equally uses knowledge, depth and difficulty to combat Bishop’s unemotional and cerebral intelligence. There is no consideration in either for the fact that such works may also be shallow and meaningless (for some), or may mean different things to different people. The work Bishop is explicitly in favour of is work whose politics are so explicitly aimed at exposing difference that little other experience can be gained from such works. This is the “x-raying” effect of conceptual art that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also criticises in her book *Touching Feeling*, and which leaves little room for wonder or surprise.¹⁵ Is it not possible that Bishop and others found a problematic enjoyment or sense of “belonging” in being “uncomfortable” and “clever” that is deliberately covered up or ignored by focusing on the work’s more obvious intentions? What other experiences, if any, may be gained from works of “exploitation” like Sierra’s that pivot around such specific and explicit concepts?

As a counter to Bourriaud’s “nice” conviviality or Bishop’s “clever” antagonism, trashy relations might highlight what is at stake in a work’s inconsistencies and ambiguities. What about the murky abstractions, the stuff ignored, problematic or difficult to talk about? Is there a possibility that modes of conviviality are also part of exploitation - or may be enjoyed legitimately or illegitimately as such? Rather than responding to Bishop with a leftist snobbishness or by

¹³ Liam Gillick, “Letters and Responses”, *October*, 115 (Winter, 2006), p. 105.

¹⁴ Gillick, *October*, p. 99.

¹⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.), p. 149. “... x-ray gaze of the paranoid impulse[...] sees through to an unflashed skeleton of the culture; the paranoid aesthetic on view [...] is one of minimalist elegance and conceptual economy.”

policing the quality of her work as Gillick does (exposing his own tastes for “deep” work, just as Bishop stages her taste for explicit concepts), we might re-approach Bishop with new questions about the less obvious abstractions and attractions of exploitation practices. While I think trashy relations can offer unease and discomfort through unpredictable manoeuvres, which Bishop associates with antagonistic practices, these feelings can also provoke pleasure and affirmative experiences that are collective or convivial too. Think of the dark thrills of the occult or horror, or the more complex immersions of pleasure in sadomasochistic practices or sexploitation cinema. I will elaborate on this later in my case for one to one performance sexploitations. Trashy relations favour the idiosyncrasies Bishop calls for in *Artificial Hells*, but nevertheless ignores as she sticks with examples of explicitly politically themed works such as Deller’s.¹⁶

From Strange to Trashy

Focus on political critique or ethical intention in art limits a work’s radical potential to the defined or didactic – to examples of political or ethical intention. As such I want to posit that trashy relations might offer new potential. For philosopher Jacques Rancière in his book *The Politics of Aesthetics*, intentions of producing ethics might assure that “Once more, politics and aesthetics vanish together in Ethics.”¹⁷ In *Artificial Hells* Bishop begins to more generatively unpack Rancière’s ideas by turning to his promotion of “estrangement”, which also lends itself to my interest in participation and trashy relations here.¹⁸ For trashy relations may work in parallel to Ranciere’s “estrangement” by creating autonomy.

For Rancière the political emerges through an excessive “strangeness” by offering an alternative to a critical oppositional art, or an art of absorption of

¹⁶ It is necessary to clarify that I do not aim to police Bishop’s take on Sierra’s and others’ work for not being trashy, but to demonstrate how in her call for a value judgment on art, trashy relations might be ignored. I also want to re-affirm that my discussion here is on the ways Bishop’s criticism of Sierra’s and Hirshhorn’s work may be limiting, rather than the artist’s work itself.

¹⁷ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockill, (London: Continuum, 2004)

¹⁸ See: Jacques Rancière, “Problems and Transformations of Political Art” in *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004)

the everyday. For Rancière estrangement offers a fluid alternative to dualism, it offers a tension between what Herbert Marcuse describes as “two opposed types of politics: between the logic of art becoming life at the price of its self-elimination and the logic of art's getting involved in politics on the express condition of not having anything to do with it.”¹⁹ If for Rancière, “Critical art's vicious circle is generally seen as proof that aesthetics and politics cannot go together”,²⁰ then estrangement might be an alternative to what he describes as “the management of the social” or the “reciprocal appeasement of the social and the political” whereby “politics is the art of suppressing the political.”²¹ What needs to be offered then is an alternative to what Rancière calls “art becoming mere life or art becoming mere art”,²² and perhaps in parallel something different to Bourriaud's “vegetable curry” life works, and Bishop's “exploitation” works. While Bishop begins to incorporate Rancière's ideas in *Artificial Hells*, she nevertheless sticks to examples of explicit political themes like Deller's *Battle of Orgrave*, whose work does not feel “strange” at all. Ultimately she fails to exemplify the “idiosyncratic”, “contradictory” and “controversial” works that she calls for. Following Bishop's uptake of Rancière's politics I will exemplify a move from estrangement to trashiness now.

In her book Bishop discusses Rancière's political aesthetic of estrangement as a potentially conservative return to beauty and the sublime and in turn the work of Immanuel Kant. I might add that she does this without discussing her own conservative call for a valorisation of art aesthetics. I want to offer up trashy relations to further counter the drive to a political or ideological *beautification* in art practice too. For trashy puts to question ideals of beauty arguably reinstated through Rancière's strange sublime. The dictionary definition of sublime describes it “of high, spiritual, moral, or intellectual worth”,²³ which

¹⁹ Herbert Marcuse, “The Aesthetic Dimension”, in *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Athlone, 1997), p. 9.

²⁰ Rancière, “Problems and Transformations of Political Art”, p. 46.

²¹ Jacques Rancière, “The End of Politics”, in *On the Shores of Politics* (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 11-12.

²² Rancière, “The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics”, in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, London: Continuum, 2010), p. 132.

²³ “Sublime”, *The Free Dictionary*, <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/sublime>> [Accessed 1 April 2013]

sets it in contrast with the trashy, whose value is ambiguous and ethical, rather than idealistic and moral. I argue therefore that trashy relations offer something else: they counter the dualism of “good” or “bad”, the “social” or “anti-social”, but they also counter a dualism between the “beautiful” and the “ugly”, the “meaningful” and “meaningless”. For trashy can be sublime, but not always “deeply” so.

I will offer trashy relations staged in my own experience as a participant and artist-performer in participatory performance now. My aim is to show the potentials of trashy relations and to expand on the practices and discourses of relational art beyond any simplified dualistic endeavour by offering inter-subjective performances as trashy potentialities.

One to One Performance

Motivated by tasteless vulgarity - a cheap thrill even, this performance dares to give up on any valuable attempt at creating a meaningful experience, and in doing so may even risk giving up on performance itself.
Owen Parry, *Touching Feeling*, 2011.

In the summer of 2004 I first experienced an inter-subjective one to one performance. Unlike the “convivial” inter-subjectivity foregrounded in Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics, or the “antagonistic” relations discussed in Bishop’s critique of artists like Sierra and Hirschhorn, the performance which I have re-titled for the purpose of this thesis – *The Seductive Relations of the “Virgin” Bubble Bath* (2004) – took course through a more trashy relationality. That is to say the work drew on other histories, contexts and methods beyond contemporary art and performance. I will account for this experience below along with an account of two performances I went on to create – *Performance for a stranger* (2005-9) and *Touching Feeling* (2011). But first I will attend to the form of one to one performance and its relation to a history of art, affective labour and more specifically sex work. What I hope to demonstrate is the way my own practice incorporates and offers something different to the established discourses and practices of labour, care and confession that dominate its field.

One to one performance, or one on one performance, is a performance for one

participant/spectator and is a phenomenon that has become popular in performance scenes in the UK and elsewhere since the turn of the millennium. The format is often associated with live art festivals and more recently party and club events. The one to one exchange has been staged and adapted by an abundance of practitioners including high profile established artists like Marina Abramović, whose piece *The Artist is Present*, 2010 at the New York MOMA is perhaps the most well know, but it has also been readily taken up by emerging practitioners who have created works that engage participants in banal, strange and personalised encounters. Attending festivals across the UK and abroad I have been invited by artists to participate in an array of personalised experiences: to confess my sins (Martina Von Holn), to suckle milk from the artist's breast (Samantha Sweeting), to choose from a list of therapies and receive a "special treatment" (Pablo Pakula), to dance with the artist (Eirini Kartsaki, and Carla Esperanza Tomassini), amongst many other activities. There have been several festivals entirely dedicated to the form over recent years at the Battersea Arts Centre, Stoke Newington International Airport and the Edinburgh Fringe to name just a few, as well as one to one experiences at club nights like Duckie (particularly *Gay Shame*), Brian Lobel's *Cruising for Art*, and *Sink the Pink*.²⁴ The attraction of one to one performance in the emerging scene has perhaps been its adaptability to time and space constraints, its cheap cost and mobility, and perhaps also the sense that its intimacy (as affective labour) has more immediate and recognisable effects on audiences. One to one performance is tailored to suit individual tastes and needs. Its proximity, on appearance, seems to give the impression of closeness, depth, realness and an ethics associated with Emmanuel Lévinas' ethics of the "face to face" encounter. Lévinas' theory is that we come into being in relation to the other, and we bare

²⁴ For a list of one to one festivals see: Rachel Zerihan, *One to One Performance: A Study Room Guide* (London: Live Art Development Agency, 2009) <www.thisliveart.co.uk/resources/Study_Room/guides/Rachel_Zerihan.html> [Accessed 28 May 2013]. For club nights see: *Duckie: Gay Shame*, <<http://duckie.co.uk/generic.php?id=105&submenu=shame>>, *Brian Lobel's Cruising for Art*, <<http://www.blobelwarming.com/cruising-for-art/>>, and *Sink The Pink*, <<http://sinkthepinklondon.com/>> [Accessed 22 June 2013]

an intrinsic responsibility to the other.²⁵ However, Nicholas Ridout has rightfully pointed out the inaccuracy of comparing performance to a Levinasian “face to face” encounter on account of the artificiality, or “theatre” that is often missed in discussions of such interactions.²⁶ One to one performance – no matter how much it feels like everyday life – is usually legitimised within the artistic framework and is experienced as something different to everyday life, or as art that is everyday life, or as I will discuss, art that is work. There is a dual consciousness.

In a recent round table discussion on one to one performance organised by Brian Lobel, I talked about how in festival programming, one to ones are often placed curatorially as side shows, and how this is also reflected in the fees one to one artists get paid, and how the fees, not the form itself or its likeness to the sideshow, may also have a consequence on the quality of the work produced.²⁷ During the discussion, I enjoyed listening to other people’s anecdotes and confessions about their experiences of one to one performance, as I often do in these situations. Oral narratives are a particular characteristic of the one to one – of how the experience lives on after the event. Oral histories and gossip often form as an ephemeral document of the one to one in place of the usual photographs and videos of performance, which would intrude in the experience and make it something different to one to one, or writing like this, which cannot speak for each individual experience. Whilst having the potential to evoke strong sensations through manipulated intimacies, or offer up the sensation of care or empathy, one to one performance can also sometimes feel silly, boring, lazy and overtly polite – mimicking the corporate customs of the service industry. Artist and writer Season Butler offered a brilliant account of the

²⁵ See: Emmanuel Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. by Richard Cohen, 1st edn (Duchesne University Press, 1985)

²⁶ See: Nicholas Ridout, “Theatre & Ethics”, in *Theatre & Series*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). p. 55. “It is problematic because it loses, in its transfer across from Levinas’ philosophy to theatre and performance, much of what is distinctive in Levinas. It removes the unknowability and anonymity of the face; it dilutes the absolute quality of the demand to infinite responsibility; it obscures the idea that the self comes into being only through this encounter with, and infinite subjection to, the other.”

²⁷ Brian Lobel et al, “Cruising For Art: The Morning After Roundtable Discussion”, in *Performing Ethos* (Forthcoming, 2013). The discussion took place at *In Between Time Festival*, Bristol, 12 February, 2013.

disappointment she felt in her first experience of one to one performance, which I will recount here. Season, excited having signed up for a one to one with an undisclosed artist, after waiting her turn in the seductive-looking queue, arrived and met the performer in his designated cubby. He apparently invited her in and began his performance with the question: “so what do you want to do?” To which Season replied: “...mmh, see a performance?”²⁸ Season’s disappointment in the face of the artist was evoked by the responsibility he puts on her as the participant to provide the content, which renders the work “lazy” and “ill-prepared”. The “virgin” one to one experience is a re-occurring talking point I have noticed in the number of times I have spoken to others about one to one performance. I will also discuss the problems of a search for a possible origin of the one to one and my own “virgin” experience later.

Besides engaging in these rich narratives, which tell a lot about the individuality of each performance, I was also keen to account for the structural economy of one to one performance, which often gets missed as tales of authentic experience are easily privileged in such forums. There is also the downside of one to one performance for creating waiting lists, offering a more elitist experience for only a select few, and for being difficult to measure or quantify as each experience is so subjective. Bureaucracy is heightened as participants often have to sign up before hand or wait in line (all of which becomes part of the work), but there are also one to one performances (like my own which I will go on to discuss) which operate under the “roaming” or “cruising” model and are less defined by institutional strategies, and operate more tactically – borrowing from models of undefined “free time”, or “cruising” or “dogging” rather than “work” per se.

Predominant themes of the one to one (besides the all pervasive neoliberal cupcake – which I consider to be the nostalgic face of neoliberal niceties, and which I have been invited to help bake, eat and decorate in one to one performances) include: care, the confessional, the therapeutic, and the autobiographical. These themes have been foregrounded in works by one on

²⁸ Season Butler, “Cruising for Art”

one artist Adrian Howells, who is a predominant reference for one to one works having produced a body of one to one works and undertaken an AHRC Creative fellowship exploring the form at Glasgow University 2006-2009.²⁹ Howells creates intimate performances that draw on models from the service industry such as *Salon Adrienne* and *Dirty Laundry* where Howells dresses as his alter-ego Adrienne and styles participant's hair while engaging in "chit chat", or washes their dirty clothes. In *Foot Washing For the Soul*, Howells washes participant's feet and in *Held* he invites participants to lie on a bed where he then spoons them from behind. Care has also been the focus for artists working with a radically different approach to one to one performance. Leading figures in British live art such as Kira O'Reilly and Franko B have invited participants into deliberately uncomfortable or difficult participations. O'Reilly invites spectators "to cut or to hold" her at the National Review of Live Art in 2003, while at the same festival, Franko B invites participants to take off their clothes and meet him (the fully clothed artist) in a private space. After entering the room and sitting opposite the naked participant he asks them the revelatory question: "why are you here?" The difference between Howells and say O'Reilly's work, seems to parallel the difference instanced in my discussion of Bourriaud and Bishop above; A kind of shift from soft conviviality to hard antagonism.

Themes of care, religiosity and knowledge exchange have become predominant themes of one to one performance. Abramović's *The Artist is Present* serves as an example here as crowds of people queue like pilgrims to meet the artist, breaking down when eventually it's their turn to take the chair and sit opposite her. Documentation of the work shows many people crying or experiencing intense emotions through this revelatory experience. Hanna Hurtzig's Mobile Academy consists of a different experience but is equally about the opportunity to meet someone with a special service to offer. In this case rather than perhaps a spiritual awakening, (although I wouldn't want to rule it out) participants

²⁹ Adrian Howells, AHRC Creative Fellowship in the Department of Theatre, Film and TV Studies at Glasgow University, 2006-2009. I staged a performance at Howells' final symposium on one to one performance titled: *I Confess...* at Glasgow University, June 2009.

meet an expert who engages them in a small lecture around a specific topic. Herzog's work titled *Blackmarket: for useful knowledge and non-knowledge* occupies a space by creating what looks like a temporary factory for knowledge production. Participants pay a small price for each lecture they choose, which they experience on their own and at the same time as a myriad other lectures that take place on broad topics ranging from biology and law, to Lars Von Trier films, feminism, garbology and many more.

I question whether the emergence of one to one performance at the turn of the century signals a return from the supposed "democratic" relational work of the 90s discussed by Bourriaud, where the artist creates a "democratic" context for participants to enter and create content, to the opportunity for everyday folk to meet genius artists and experts? Once again *the artist is present or the expert is present* and our attention is drawn to their presence as an objective of the work.

Deirdre Heddon, Helen Iball and Rachel Zerihan, who have co-authored an article explicitly addressing the format of one to one performance, discuss the difficulty of writing about their subjective experiences: "Perhaps," they say, "in part, due to the unappealing yet inescapable subjectivity inherent in such authored works."³⁰ Similarly, this writing stages my subjective experience of making and experiencing one to one performance and faces the challenges such works present to writing and theory. It seems to me that this could be one of its trashy potentials – how one to one performance both enables criticism, but can also escape complete critical capture. The most useful source of reference that I have drawn on is a collection of writings by artists and writers compiled by Rachel Zerihan as a *Live Art Development Agency Study Guide On One to One Performance*. In her introduction to the guide, Zerihan discusses a possible origin of the one to one performance as Chris Burden's *Five Day Locker Piece* (1971) – a durational work where audience members come and sit, and allegedly confess to Burden who is locked in a locker for five days with no food

³⁰ Deirdre Heddon, Helen Iball & Rachel Zerihan, "Come Closer: Confessions of Intimate Spectators in One to One Performance", *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22:1 (2012), pp. 120-133 (p. 122)

or water.³¹ Stored in the locker above him and below him was food and water, which he was unable to access. Given that the majority of performances discussed in the study guide undertake or evoke explicitly erotic or sexual content – including extremely intimate participations – I wonder if we might look beyond performance art, and beyond art, and to models of sex work too.

Many of the works cited in the study guide, while located in the realm of art, appear to function explicitly on modes of sex work or intimate labour: Oreet Ashery mentions giving a participant a blow job after inviting him to sit with her in a hotel room in her performance *Say Cheese* (2001), participants are invited to strip for Franko B in *Aktion 398 – Why Are You Here?* (1998), Samantha Sweeting invites participants to suckle in *La Nourrice (come drink from me my darling)* (2009), in *Tonguing* (2006) artist Ange Batram sucks a mold of her own tongue in seaside rock, in *Fee for Service* (2008) Jess Dobkins invites participants to sharpen a pencil in her “vagina”, in *Goldilocks Peepshow* (2008) Lena Kela invites audiences to watch her perform through a tiny little hole, and in *Lick* (2007) –performed in a lap dancing club, artist Jiva Parthipan reflects on (and arguably re-stages) his previous career as an escort. Reflecting on this performance Parthipan says: “one two [sic] one performance seemed to be the most obvious choice for... [*Lick*] since that was the nature of the engagement of a sex worker.”³² But I would also argue that the structure of sex work haunts the experience of all one to one performance – and that we might turn to the histories of sex work and in particular lap dancing as a point of reference too.³³

The lap dancer is usually a performer dressed in erotic costume or very little clothing that dances and aims to seduce a punter who in turn pays for the

³¹ Zerihan, *Study Room Guide*

³² Jiva Parthipan, *Lick*, in “One to One Performance: A Study Room Guide”, ed. by Rachel Zerihan, (London: Live Art Development Agency), p. 59.

³³ In a more recent article Zerihan usefully extends her discussion of one to one performance to the role of eroticism and compares the work of the performer to the work of the sex-worker. See: Rachel Zerihan, “La Petite Mort: Erotic Encounters in One to One Performance”, in *Eroticism and Death in Theatre and Performance*, edited by Karoline Gritzner, (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2010), p. 220.

stimulating service. In the histories of sex work this occurs mostly between women (who perform) and heterosexual men (who pay). Instead of 1970s durational performance art could it be that the histories of the one to one performance are more adequately connected to histories of sex work? We might also turn to the original lap-dancing clubs of 1970's Manhattan – The Harmony Theatre or The Melody Theatre – to seek out the form's conception.

While Zerihan has since focused on the one to one performance as an erotic encounter, the tendency in discussions of one to one performance is still to favour other artworks as points of comparison. This is understandable given live art and indeed theatre's vexed histories. There remains, perhaps, a tendency to legitimise and give value to such works as a veritable artistic form. Bishop also notices this resistance to relate relational aesthetics to models of the service industry they nevertheless reproduce – privileging other artworks as points of comparison. Opening one to one performance to these other histories does not necessarily degrade the work, or simply reduce it to the banality of work. It can also open the form's possibilities to new worlds and potentials, such as the possibility of inter-class relations that exist in strip clubs but don't in the art world, or the complicit knowledge of the artificial reproduction at stake in the work of fake seduction by a stripper, which might be confused with "care" or as "genuine" affection when positioned as "art".³⁴ The strip club also makes visible the economy of exchange so that everyone participating is in compliance with the exploitation at stake. As affective labour the punter pays the performer a pound for a dance and the money goes from hand to hand or orifice. Of course, the fines and rents the performer pays the venue to be there are still concealed, but the economies of wages in the field of subcontracted one to one performance also remain murky.³⁵

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³⁴ For a discussion on inter-class relations at porn theatres see: Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University press, 1999)

³⁵ For a recent, all-be-it "moralistic" discussion on the labour of lap dancing see: Rachel Bell, "I was seen as an object, not a person", *The Guardian*, 19 March 2008. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/mar/19/gender.uk>> [Accessed 28 May 2013]

The regularity in which I have been asked to participate, to chat, to sing, to eat, to dance and to do things with cupcakes with artists at public programmes in recent years has brought me to question what such performances actually do. In my own performance practice I have deliberately sought to expose some of the more dubious aspects at stake in the subjective experience, and in my experience as a participant (co-author) I have attempted to push the work into unplanned territory – beyond the framework of the art piece – in order to expose its trashy idiosyncrasies as powerful in their ability to offer something temporary or alternative to the mere “art experience” or mere experience of “work”. While the tendency to dismiss participatory art practice for all its ambiguities might at first seem appealing to a project like mine, such as Cliff Eylans sharable art work titled *Thank you for not involving me in your relational art project*, 2009, [Fig. 17.] I would argue that such irony carries with it an art world snobbery that is wholly unappealing to my project here.

I will offer up now my own “virgin” encounter with one to one performance in a playful enactment of its erotic, but also potentially sleazy, incarnations.

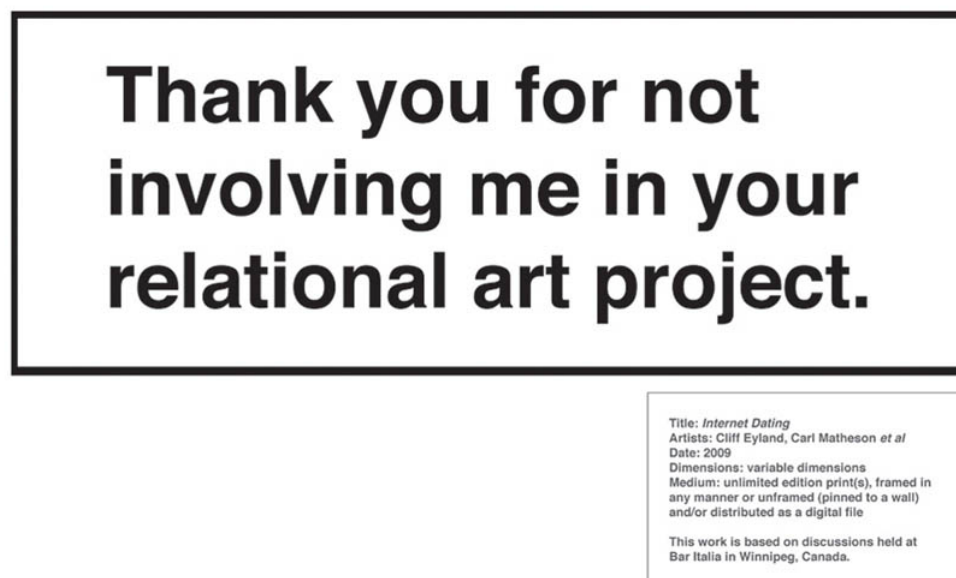


Fig. 17.

How to give “Bad Audience”, or, The Seductive Relations of the “Virgin” Bubble Bath

My first one to one performance experience (as a participant) took place as a private performance within a larger dance performance at a gallery in Deptford, South London in 2004. The performance was for one selected person and was repeated for only a handful of lucky audience members who were selected (at random?) by one of the performers during the hour-long show. I was one of those few and was led into a private space backstage and left there to meet another performer who was nude and sat in a bubble bath. There was a video playing on a screen behind the bath featuring the same performer, but in the mediated image the performer donned a humongous bird beak and was beckoning me in a North London accent to come closer, to de-robe and join him in the bath. The performer in the bath looked like a dancer; he had a well-formed figure with tan lines and looked comfortable with his nudity. He looked at me in agreement with the mediated seduction, but I was convinced that this seduction being played out was fake too because of the setup, and because the work wasn't structured in a way to allow me time to join him in the bath. Those who had gone in before me had come out within five minutes. This really annoyed me. His artificial seduction was aesthetically similar to that of an erotic lap dance or strip tease, but what differed here was that the economy of intimate exchange was not defined by the explicit exchange of cash for pleasure. The economies of exchange here were blurred. Despite knowing that the structure of the performance didn't allow for me to get into the bath, and that I could not pay for this intimacy, I could not tell whether or not the performer was slightly interested in me, or whether he thought that I was interested in him. Describing her experience of Sam Rose's one to one performance, which theatricalizes the act of seduction in *a Bed of Roses* Deirdre Heddon writes: "That this performance is fake is evident",³⁶ Heddon confesses, "but my hyper-anxiety and self-consciousness propose that the 'real' nevertheless keeps surfacing, troubling the performance..."³⁷ What often surfaces as "real" in one to one performance is the product of a fictional devise that elicits those affects on

³⁶ Heddon et al, p.128.

³⁷ Heddon et al, p. 128.

account of the uncertainty of such intimacies. What Heddon describes might be the surfacing of negative affects such as embarrassment and shame discussed in Chapter 1 and, which and which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick considers as definitively productive. Are these feelings of paranoia that Heddon experiences when she admits: “Rose might think I am actually being seduced by her”?³⁸ But Sedgwick in her book also reminds us of Adam Phillips’ phrase: “just because you’re paranoid, doesn’t mean they’re not out to get you.”³⁹ The unfulfilled “kiss” surrounding the performed seduction that Heddon usefully describes in Rose’s performance, remains not as possibility and potential then, but as paranoia; a stifling paranoia because desiring intentions are withheld and remain undisclosed, or are misrecognized and misunderstood. These uncertain and difficult moments fascinate me in performance, and are particularly heightened in one to one performance because of the subjective encounter between performer and spectator and the responsibility on the participant to comply with the act.

Annoyed on both accounts in the bubble bath performance, by the fake seduction that didn’t allow time for the pre-scribed desire to be fulfilled, and by the confusing signals given off, I did something I would probably not have done were this interaction played out in front of a live audience; I took my clothes off and got into the bath with the arrogant looking performer. As a spectator this act would appear to counteract the “paranoia” around seduction that Heddon points out in Rose’s performance. My intention here it would seem is to prove that this performance is fake, but it was the summer and I felt horny, and as the principle performance happening through the door in the gallery was boring, it seemed I had nothing to lose. I wanted to prove a point, but my motivation was also to break this artificial seduction in hope of something, not exactly “real”, but a bit more pleasurable. It is not the case that I went to this performance looking for sex, or with the intention of sex, but that as a consequence of the many unpredictable elements of my encounter with this other person, my mood, the sunny weather, transitory sex is what I hoped it might offer. I have

³⁸ Heddon et al, p.127.

³⁹ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, p. 127.

discussed above the possibility of differing publics of “convivial” works or “antagonistic” works. I would suggest, that there is a specific public who enjoy one to one performance too, and that one to one performance is dependent on this blurry act of seduction, and the blur between artistic labour and sex work, and our (unconscious) desires can trouble the exchange too.

The moment I entered the bath, as expected the performer appeared to stop seducing me and laughed awkwardly, which was agreeably more seductive than his previous cavorting farce. As I got into the tepid bath water the bubbles dispersed. I sat with my foot on the performer’s cock and we looked at each other. He had big low-hanging balls. He asked me my name. He told me his name was Andreas. I asked him where he was from and he said he was from North London via Cyprus. He told me I should get out and meet him for a drink after the show. He offered me his towel to wipe and then I left feeling proud of myself for taking the plunge and hung around after the show to meet him and his co-performers to go to a nearby pub.

In the exchange of one to one performance Heddon et al adopt the term “to give good audience” as a way of describing the responsibility audience members are encumbered with to comply in the one on one exchange.⁴⁰ My getting into the bath was deliberately antagonistic spectatorship (be it on a meagre level), but the antagonism was not fuelled by a desire to merely provoke an uncomfortable situation or to ruin his performance and show critical difference as Bishop reads the work of antagonism, nor was it only to deplete paranoia in a Sedgwickian sense. Instead, the situation was perhaps mixed with the desire to break the boring superficiality of his performed seduction, but also to get more literal and more “convivial” with the performer. His co-opting of my time with his performed farce gave me the impulse to co-opt his time with my own desiring interaction. My own familiarity with the performance scene undoubtedly privileged my disruptive interaction and the option to get in the bath did not seem entirely out of the question. I might have merely misinterpreted his invitation to get in the tub as “real” after all.

⁴⁰ Heddon et al, p. 124.

Afterwards in the pub Andreas and I chatted very intensively about our respective interests in art and performance and our funny experience in the tub. We discussed the possibility of a future collaboration around the subject of humiliation and swapped numbers. Over the next few weeks we met on a regular basis until one day in Greenwich Park he told me he had a boyfriend and that he thought we should “stop meeting like this”. I had suspected that there was a bigger context and history to our encounter that was being concealed but continued with our affair despite this suspicion. En route to the park exit (or entrance, depending whether you were coming or going), where we would say goodbye and this inter-subjective relationship would end – the said boyfriend appeared. It turned out that our intimate encounters hadn’t been as private as we thought, and that said boyfriend had been following us and witnessing our relationship unfold there in the park. Realising that it was said boyfriend, I said I should go immediately and left them to it. Three weeks later they invited me round for a Carbonara.

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Ultimately, me getting into the bath was not heroic, was not radical and did not attempt to unearth some political or ethical “good”. Fuelled by my desire to be properly seduced in an estranged and uncomfortable environment of performance – it might offer something to contemplate: what do personal desires and fantasies offer to the one to one exchange? Might a desiring diversion within this context open the work to new pleasure-driven potentials? Might libidinal diversions offer a means of interrogating other participatory practices and particularly the field of one to one performance, which is so immersed in this realm of sex and unspoken desire? (Does s/he want me to...? Does s/he think I want to...?) Consequently in Heddon et al’s terms I might be seen to have “given bad audience” by not complying with the terms of the work. But lest not forget that it is so often the case that “bad” opens up to perverse and contradictory connotations especially when immersed with subjects like sex. Taylor Mac’s notion of being an arsehole (referenced at the beginning of this chapter) highlights how “bad” can mean “bad” (as in the colloquial “bad-ass”) but it can also just be “bad” (as in “shit”). In this sense, being a

promiscuous spectator, I can meddle with the contradictions of desire, whilst acknowledging already that this entire situation is fraught.⁴¹ I will offer a move towards sleaze later as a means of interrogating this encounter and the subjective experience of relational works further.

In sum, it would be difficult to discuss my experience in the virgin bubble bath and its spilling out into the everyday as either “convivial” or “antagonistic”. My experience presents a problem to such distinction, but also advances the possibility of relational works beyond the compulsory drive to efficacy and into the complex realm of fantasy and pleasure. It did not necessarily inspire contact between distinct classes (which I will discuss later in terms of Samuel Delany’s concept of “contact” as opposed to “networking”) but it certainly engendered a sense of thrill and excitement and an inter-disciplinary exchange between art, life, dance, performance, and between the public and the private. Those elements were certainly entwined but did not limit the work of desire or the possibility of the work to enter fantasy, imagination or indeed life. My experience of this work initiated my desire to pursue and consider the potentials of inter-subjective relations in performance further, and to turn specifically to the format of the one to one performance to explore that. I am aware of how my investment or privileging of “sex” and in particular sex between artistically inclined privileged white European men may be read here. But I would also point out that theories of inclusion and exclusion have also become protocol, constructing an ideology of “good academic practice”.⁴² It is worth turning to my first one to one work now, designed specifically for strangers, or rather a work about trying and failing to find strangers in the live art scene.

Performance For a Stranger (2005-2009)

Between 2005 and 2009 I *anonymously* and *unofficially* staged my own one to one performance at several live art festivals across the UK. *Performance For a*

⁴¹ See: Eirini Kartsaki, “The Promiscuous Spectator”, PSI conference, Leeds, June 2012. Kartsaki’s paper includes an analysis of my performance *Touching Feeling* (2011)

⁴² Sara Ahmed explores questions like: what does diversity do? What are we doing when we use the language of diversity? See: Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012)

Stranger was a work made deliberately for strangers – people I did not know – with the desire to combat the experience of preaching to the converted and showing my work to the same art world friends and acquaintances, and the failure that would ensure such a task. It didn't have a title. I gave it a title more recently when debating whether or not to include this work in my artistic biography.

Covering my face by tying a t-shirt around my head the way I had seen Brazilian gang members do in Ross Kemp's BBC documentary on gangs, I cruised perspective participants in festival foyers and led them to a secluded area; a cupboard behind the box office, a disabled toilet, a changing room, a janitor's storeroom. I stood opposite them in complete darkness. If they didn't leave immediately something curious may have emerged there in the dark. The performance lasted anything from two seconds to half hour, but often exceeded these limits. The performance usually came to an end when one of us decided it would, apart from on one occasion when a stranger took me hostage and kept me there against my will for about 40 minutes. That is one example of someone giving me "bad audience", when the work became effectively "unhappy" for me. Leaving the performance, participants may have searched the festival programme for a credit or description of the work. Failing to find proof, they may have been content to leave it to memory or as a possible figment of their imagination. Those with a desire to know what it was all about may have pursued it further; hung around the foyer or bar asking other people what was going on, watched me select other participants, or followed me as I left the venue hollering a taxi and driving off quite dramatically (like a Guerrilla Girl)-*anon*. Others may have been at the festival, written about the festival, or even curated it without knowing all this was going on. The work operated as a kind of guerrilla work, but without the promotion of any direct political cause. As it wasn't "work" (I wasn't getting paid for it or I wasn't promoted by the festival), nor was it "free labour" (such as an internship); the performance it seems was done for pleasure and therefore is perhaps more aptly comparable to the work of amateur theatre or "am-dram" than discourses on precarious labour.

In a paper addressing amateur labour, theatre and the pleasure of idleness Giulia Palladini discusses the long established history of working for the love of it in theatre, and introduces the term “foreplay”, which perhaps lends itself to my discussion here. For Palladini foreplay is “...a mode of activity that is both implicated in, but yet somehow also avoids, the teleology of productive labour”.⁴³ Palladini sees it as “a labour of desire projected towards “consummation”, which differs from “free play”, in that it occupies a space of preparation rather than of leisure”.⁴⁴ In this sense, *performance for a stranger* created a space for something to happen, not outside the framework of work or the festivals it intervened in, but within a sub-economy of the festival – it opened a space for resisting the proper or legitimate field of art work and to subvert the regime of work to the work of love, or in the case of *performance for a stranger* – the work of curious desire.⁴⁵

My interventions operated within a festival sub-economy often requiring the help of friends who *were* programmed to give me access to spaces. Over the times I staged and repeated this work I met approximately one hundred participants. The work effectively enacted the procedures of the one to one exchange intentionally devoid of any content; it was not about bringing people closer together in an increasingly mediatized world, there were no plans to wash feet, to confess, to seduce, or to make cupcakes, and it was devoid, of any therapeutic intention of creating a “happy” as opposed to “unhappy” experience. Despite this I did not deny the possibility of it attaining either affirmative or negative experiences and I did not invite people into the work then say to them: “so what do you want to do?” I offered participants something – I offered them nothing. Of course, my “nothing” was an invitation into a dark room with a masked performer, which already elicits curiosity and desire. The content of the

⁴³ Giulia Palladini, “On Foreplay: Amateur Labour, Theatre and The Pleasure of Idleness”, Conference Paper, University of Roehampton, London, 16 May 2012.

⁴⁴ Palladini, “On Foreplay”

⁴⁵ It was always interesting performing the piece to see how people would react. I was often surprised that people saw things that I didn’t see, or that were not actually present. I recall one straight male in his early twenties thinking there was a snake in the room, even though there was no serpent physically present in the performance space.

work developed in the moment as a consequence of the one to one framing and its ghosts, and those who occupied it and their ghosts. In terms of Grant Kester's discussions on dialogic art practices I was a "context" provider, rather than a "content" provider.⁴⁶ However, I think that each participant, the darkroom, and I became the appropriated content for this performance and this was generally enough. Sometimes excruciatingly dull, predictable, or silly-feeling, other times ecstatic – teetering on the edges of legitimacy – sometimes it felt like it wasn't "art" or "work" at all – sometimes it didn't even feel like "free-time" as I was lost in the moment. While we knew it was unprogrammed art, the questions of its legitimacy and limits were unspoken but lingered and were strangely the most interesting. It was definitively a piece, but it was definitively a piece about not being a piece – a piece that participants would question whether it was a piece or not, or whether what they had just experienced really did happen. This *strangeness* opened the work to the subconscious, the trashy, and the imaginary too.

The performance was repeated over and over with different people but without ever being documented. There was no hidden camera or sound-device to record it. There was no festival marketing and unsurprisingly no reviews or written criticism to accompany the work or profit from it – or at least none that I am aware of. In terms of the economies of performance art it was a complete failure. Due to operating on the festival's edges, I had no responsibility to conform to health and safety procedures or ethical standards of the festival. While this consequently opened creative privilege – this apparent "creative freedom" was combatted by the oppositional regime as I was taken hostage against my will. Having to make my own decisions about safety, it became a work I learned as I went along, but it was in the slips between one person's "creative freedom" and another person's oppressive regime that something happened. Those "somethings" were not remnants of polite "chit-chat", nor mimicking customs of hospitality and the service industry, they were moments

⁴⁶ Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 1.

of complete disorientation, where permissions, boundaries and positions were brought to question. After the hostage experience every time I performed the piece I ensured someone (a chaperone) knew where I was performing. I asked them to check in on me now and then.

It is interesting how recounting the work here brings its own affects; forces me to cringe, to question the boundaries between sense and non-sense or what sounds like it could be a filthy lie, perhaps a ridiculous parody or fabrication of Phelan's performance art and its inherent ontological failure – its failure to remain.⁴⁷ But perhaps it is because of the individualized and selective experience of one to one performance that it so often reaches us, or feels, as this does, like parody or fiction or as gossip: did you *do* that performance? Who is s/he? What happened? I suppose as one to one performance goes: you'll have to take my word for it – a definitively "ethical" act, potentially a pleasurable one. From repeating this performance over time, what Barthes would call "the pleasure of the text" was thwarted and I became aware that I had begun to develop my own rules and boundaries within my own sub-economy of the festival. My next venture into one to one performance would be definitively different to this one: it aimed to expose some of the "uncomfortable" aspects of one to one performance, and to display those "uncomfortable" aspects as the definitive regime (even taste culture) of the one to one performance publics.

Touching Feeling (2011-2013)

Me: *This is a performance. Please be aware of how much money you have in your pockets, or of any valuables... I am not going to nick anything. When I tell you what happens in this performance, if you don't want to participate that is fine. OK?*

You: ...

Me: *This is the deal. In this performance I will close my eyes and touch you wherever I want to touch you. If I go somewhere you don't want me to go, you can end the performance by hitting me as hard as you want across the face. I can also end this performance whenever I want. Do you want to participate?*

⁴⁷ See: Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 148.

In 2011 I began to perform a new one to one work titled *Touching Feeling*. [Fig. 16.] This time, however, I received fees and the work was staged officially within a programme of one to one works *Cruising for Art* by Brian Lobel (Utrecht, London, Brighton and Bristol 2011-13) and at *Daniel Oliver presents: Live Art Dogging* (Reactor, Nottingham, 2013). It is worth noting that the work still operates within a sub-economy of the festival circuit as Brian subcontracts me to perform in his programme within a larger festival or venue programme.

The description of my performance in the *Cruising for Art* programme reads: “In her last book before she died, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick made a case for *Touching Feeling* – this performance is another one.”⁴⁸ Referring to Sedgwick’s book on performativity, pedagogy and affect I wanted to offer up an experience that might both interrogate Sedgwick’s thesis by offering a space to perform and learn through affective experiences both pleasurable and uncomfortable, but that may also have nothing to do with Sedgwick’s thesis other than ripping off its title (theory) in order to legitimize a desiring exploitation upon participants I fancied. The premise is that I could be using theory to legitimize my personal, narcissistic and wanton desires. *Touching Feeling* evokes many of the negative affects Sedgwick discusses including feelings of embarrassment and shame, however, simultaneously the work may have nothing to do with Sedgwick’s book. This is my provocation into the form of one to one performance, which often favours discourses and practices of care over the harshness of a literal exploitation. On doing so it may in fact be hiding in its path the more murky relations of desire and exploitation already at stake in such interactions. This is played out also in the preference to compare one to one’s with art, rather than with sex work or free-time. The double access (or multiple access points) of *Touching Feeling* is also a point of conflict and contradiction. Given such a title the piece almost begs for a critical reading, but at the same time refuses depth and meaning by acknowledging perhaps the more superficial exploits at stake in the exchange such as the artist’s desires and the literal operations of the one to one interaction. *Touching Feeling* does what it says it does and the performer

⁴⁸ See: Programme Notes, Brian Lobel’s *Cruising For Art*, PSI Utrecht, May 2011.

who chooses you to participate, may in fact enjoy feeling you up. You decide whether to participate or not, and when it ends, but so does the performer who chooses you to participate. [Fig. 18.]

Taking *Touching Feeling* from the private setup of Cruising For Art (usually in a backroom, or toilet, or an unoccupied corridor at art venues and clubs) to the white strip light public set up of Live Art Dogging described as “A rough and raucous evening of intimate and interactive one-to-one performances played out in front of an audience of inter-passive voyeurs” changed the work in productive ways.⁴⁹ [Fig. 19 a/b/c.] The aims of the Dogging event were outlined as follows: “Privacy in public! Intimacy but with lots of people watching! Confidentiality but actually everyone can hear what you are saying! Safe spaces where everyone can and will judge you!”⁵⁰ This exposure brought about a sense of awkwardness and brilliantly helped stage the negative affects of shame and embarrassment the work elicits in both my participants and me. Interestingly, at Dogging, *Touching Feeling* never teetered on the edges of its form: no one did anything they weren’t supposed to do, and if someone did give “bad audience” (didn’t comply with the rules) – their antagonism became a kind of bravado for others to see.



Fig. 18.

⁴⁹ See: Programme Notes: *Daniel Oliver Presents: Live Art Dogging*, Reactor Halls, Nottingham, January 2013.

⁵⁰ *Live Art Dogging*



Fig. 19. a.



Fig. 19. b.



Fig. 19. c.

This opened the work to more complex narratives of bodies and the private and the public, but *Touching Feeling* was not only concerned with those narratives. Vulnerability might come about, but equally it might not. If it doesn't then participants may be forced to think about what it is the work actually does, other than maybe offer a cheap thrill, a satisfactory quickie, a sexploitation, and to judge it from those diverse perspectives and relations it offers both in and beyond art.

In *Touching Feeling* I try to offer vulnerability up as its intention, not an unexpected or undisclosed reality of the performance, but as an eventuality – vulnerability as the necessary regime of art, or performance art. If you agree to participate you agree to be potentially exploited – and to be made aware of the potential exploitation at stake in one to one performance. In this sense I am adding to Jennifer Doyle's notion of artistic labour as affective labour when she says: "this is what artists do as well: their work makes people feel good, smart, or important (for example)".⁵¹ Equally I would say their job is to make us feel "uncomfortable", and that there might be a perverse pleasure in such sensations. One to one performances that induce vulnerability in the spectator have been criticized by Heddon et al who write: "All three of us have been quite harsh critics of those performances that do not make us "happy" and that make us feel "vulnerable."⁵² While they do not describe these unfavourable performances, preferring to concentrate instead on the confessional and autobiographical works of Howells, Rose and Von Holn, they do give useful insight into the notion of intimacy and the "constant if latent vulnerability" of one to one performance. Quoting cultural theorist Lauren Berlant, they describe "the demand for the traditional promise of intimate happiness to be fulfilled", which positions them as "harsh critics" of those works that do not provide such a "traditional promise".⁵³

⁵¹ Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University, 2013), p.91.

⁵² Heddon et al, p. 130.

⁵³ Lauren Berlant, *Intimacy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000),

If in *Touching Feeling* the promise of intimacy is fulfilled, or rather intimacy is forced upon participants as the work's premise or motivation, rather than left open as unspoken potential as is the case of Rose's performance, and which for Heddon produces "performance anxiety", then what else is at stake? What if, using Palladini's terms, we skip "foreplay", for its concept might also be based too explicitly on heterosexual sex, and go straight to the act? How does *Touching Feeling* offer a contemplation on forms of exploitation presented in the likes of Sierra's work discussed at the beginning of this chapter? If Sierra's work enacts and reproduces the exploitation he is against, how does *Touching Feeling* offer something different? How might it offer something more than exploitation? While *Touching Feeling* promotes exposure of the performance apparatus, it also depends on disclosure and the act of revelation. Even if I tell participants I'm going to touch them wherever I please, this doesn't limit the affective response as being felt up in public might produce an array of affects such as sexual arousal, embarrassment, disgust, or shame. In my experience its literality did not thwart surprise or potential, but instead opened the exploitation up as a potentially (perverse) enjoyable experience. It does not close down the experience merely to a concept as I have argued Bishop's reading of Sierra's work does, but opens up to the perversity of all desire in the face of art. At times my job feels explicitly like affective labour as I stage a literal milking of my participant's emotions, which in turn flood the experience. The work often teeters on the edges of being gross, pleasurable, boring, or routine depending on who inhabits it. Sometimes it effectively feels like routine work. The most interesting moments for me are those moments when the work falls out of the framework of the performance and into something different, something not like art or performance, and something not like everyday life.

So is there anything of value to gain from such an encounter? Or rather, is the promise of happiness or of intimacy in art a false one? In *Touching Feeling* I (perhaps pathologically) attempt to scrutinize the insistence on niceties and a mundane liberalism that can too easily ensue the scenes of art, and in particular

one to one performance. I was interested in what it might mean to appear to not care, or what it would mean to not expect “happiness” from such encounters in art. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out, “happiness is a long-lasting condition rather than a passing feeling, such as pleasure. Happiness is a pleasure that lasts or repeats.”⁵⁴ They continue: “Happiness, however, is not something that leaders, or representatives simply provide for the population”.⁵⁵ Similarly, I think it is not something I can provide, or that an artist ought to provide – at least not only this. For me the one to one performance produces individuated, fleeting pleasures, diversions, cheap thrills, and provocations. But I would suggest that those looking for happiness look elsewhere. One to one performance provides only a temporary model of relations, not a sustained or sustainable relation, and thus work which presents itself as a model of “good” relations, may in fact work paradoxically, and violently through pretend happinesses, to exclude other modes, and other kinds of work. *Touching Feeling* responds, at least in part intentionally, by offering something to blur the notion of a “happy” or “unhappy” work.

Rather than asking how we might combat the exclusions participatory work reproduces (by lets say including men, women, ethnic minorities) I wanted instead to make the exchange explicit as exploitative and on my terms (the artists terms). Exposed, every time I cruise and select participants, I am open to judgement on the choices I make as I cruise a seventy two year old Swedish grandmother, a twenty-year-old Palestinian boy, the curator of a festival I would like to perform in, the disabled artist, the black man, the hottest guy in the place. Rather than presenting a thing of aesthetic beauty (although its more tender moments might tend to such images) in *Touching Feeling* I try to develop something strange by also permitting a trashy thrill: an uncomfortable, even aggressive-erotics, which makes both conviviality and antagonism the regime of art (I touch you wherever I want), and perversity (as diversion – both entertainment and distraction) a critical and creative possibility.

⁵⁴ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 37.

⁵⁵ Hardt and Negri, p. 37.

Performance Sexploitations: A Conclusion Towards Sleaze

... Not to say that ethics are unimportant in a work of art, nor irrelevant to politics, only that they do not always have to be announced and performed in such a direct and saintly fashion.⁵⁶

Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*

I will develop the concept of performance sexploitations now following the work of Sierra and my own practice, and by considering their potential relations to sexploitation cinema. Bourriaud's convivial discourse and Bishop's antagonistic discussions on participation do not address the desiring relations at stake in relational art works, despite the fact that performances of democracy and/or exploitation motivate curious desires in participants, and are themselves motivated by the artist's desire. Stuck with efficacious concepts of sameness, communitas and conviviality (Bourriaud), or difference, antagonism and exploitation (Bishop), desire is perhaps taken for granted as implicit in the works they discuss, but what if we interrogate the subjective elements of such inter-subjective works a little more? What is perhaps missed in their discussions is the desire for better structures or ways of life, the desire for intimacy and belonging, which certain forms of relational art might generate, or the perverse and problematic desire for power and the other (working class, ethnic minority, outsider, homeless, woman etc.) which may also be at stake. I want to consider the ways such desires may factor productively into our experience of relational works by pushing relations beyond the "good" or "bad".

By focusing on only the explicit concepts and artist's political intentions, desiring motives are covered up, or rendered only paranoid, superfluous or imaginary. I have argued already that these elements can be generative in our experience of inter-subjective performance and might have strong affects. While Sierra's work is explicitly about making visible the exploitation at work in the system, his personal desires and investment in this exploitation is removed. While in my own art practice these desires are revealed as perverse motivations and sites of potential, Sierra removes himself from his work by refusing public appearances and keeping his identity secret. This anonymity

⁵⁶ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 26.

was also played however out in my work *Performance for a stranger*. In Sierra's work we see his desire to show the inequalities and exploitation at stake in the labour conditions of the system, which in turn he serves by creating performances for those very institutions he appears to oppose. What we don't get are opportunities to think of this work as more complex and also entangled in the work of personal, even unorthodox desires. In the artist Oreet Ashery's moving image work *Party For Freedom: An Audio-visual album* (2013), an exploration of liberation practices in the West, one section is titled *Untitled (fantasy)* and works like a porthole into the unthinkable subconscious of the oppressor who might even be you or me. On screen the title appears: *Untitled (fantasy)...* four whitish men in dress-up Arab and Islamic garb are flopped on top of one another on some patio furniture. Limp bodies and bent wrists, red paint for blood, stick on beards and moustaches and dress-up kaftans - they are playing dead. With fantasy at stake, is it completely out of the question to think that the images Sierra present us with offer opportunities for unorthodox desiring relations as well as the more explicit (and intentional) conceptual ones? While Ashery presents us with a violent, even unthinkable dress-up fantasy, which is unlikely to be claimed by any Western liberal, I wonder whether Sierra's work also invokes unthinkable violent relations.

In one series of images of Sierra's work we see a line of men and a line of women in various stages of undress with their backs to the audience/camera being tattooed (*160cm Line Tattooed on 4 People* and *250cm line tattooed on six paid people*). [Fig. 20/21/22.] The work seems to want to show us that exploitation is happening and that we are part of it. What is not addressed is the fact that exploitation is also potentially viable in other realms as entertainment and is enjoyed as such. In fantasy the other may be enjoyed precisely because "they" are not like "us". Difficult or uncomfortable to witness, the privileged gallery goer may also take pleasure from the challenge of the conceptual work – feeling re-affirmed that he or she gets it, that he or she is open to a challenging provocative work. I am re-invoking Doyle's observation that artistic labour works to produce re-affirming (and I would argue destabilising) affects.



Fig. 20.



Fig. 21.



Fig. 22.

Sierra's work, often presented through photographs and videos can resemble the fetishized images presented in magazines like Vice, which clearly fetishize marginal subjects.⁵⁷ Vice Magazine often includes explicit pornographic images, representations of counter-cultural and subcultural practices from drug taking, clubbing, tattooing to art and fashion. Vice readers indulge (perversely, perhaps) in representations of the outsider or oppressed. We might think of this in cultural theorist Sarah Thornton's terms as a form of sub-cultural consumption or as "sub-cultural capital". This is the process of ascribing value to "tougher" and more "uncomfortable" practices (to revoke Bishop and Doyle's terms too).⁵⁸ I am interested in the way exploitation is also enjoyed in counter-cultural practices such as SM and is made explicit in sex work where the service is defined by the exchange of cash for labour, or rather cash for sex, and how these paradigms also relate to the artist's work. For example, Sierra exposes how much his workers/performers get paid, similar to the explicit exchange of cash from punter to stripper in a sex club. We might think of his work in relation to a complex history that charts the upper class fascination with the working classes and "rough trade" too, stemming from the histories of tourism in factories and work places in Victorian England. Sally Munt reflects on class tourism in her book *Queer Attachments* and says "Class tourism has a long and spatial history; generally it is the economic mobility of higher status classes that confers the freedom to wonder socially downward and consume the visual spectacle, to enjoy the erotic/affective satisfaction to be found there."⁵⁹ The upper classes visited factories on tours and gawked at workers for leisure- re-confirming the viewer's difference and enjoying - perhaps in an Orwellian sense - the beauty of the manual labourer. Is it not out of the question that works like Sierra's may also provoke similarly perverse relations as spectacles of exploitation? For like the Victorian spectacles, Sierra's work invites spectators to witness an enduring task carried out by the other? Can we think of such relations beyond the "problematic"? Might there be a more productive re-

⁵⁷ See: *Vice*, <http://www.vice.com/en_uk> [Accessed 1 June 2013]

⁵⁸ See: Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Sub-cultural capital*, (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995)

⁵⁹ Sally Munt, "Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame", in *Queer interventions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.140.

thinking possible?

In Susan Sontag's *Fascinating Fascism*, writing on the difficult attractions of fascism in her review of Leni Riefenstahl's *The Last of the Nuba* (1973) she discusses an aesthetics of desire, which speaks volumes to Sierra's works. Sontag writes: "Extreme right-wing movements, however puritanical and repressive the realities they usher in, have an erotic surface."⁶⁰ The erotic surface is evident, even legitimately/illegitimately enjoyed in Sierra's work but nevertheless goes undiscussed in Bishop's reviews. Desire is considered always superfluous to the explicit concepts and politics of the work. We might think of the ways the freak show or constructed-reality TV shows from *The Valleys* and *Geordie Shores*, to *The Only Way is Essex* and *Made in Chelsea* allow publics the opportunity to gawk at the lives of others too – be they "strange" others, "trashy" others or "posh" others – and all for gratuitous pleasure. A consideration of Sierra's works as fetishizing the underclass might open up a new angle to its political potentialities. While comparing "difficult" or "uncomfortable" works to "cheap" thrills or "low" art freak show might be considered as bringing the uncertainty of the ethical encounter into the horizon of knowledge, there is a complex network of desire across classes and cultures since the colonial empires that is otherwise missed in discussions of Sierra's work. A consideration of libidinal desires at stake in audience experience can re-think Sierra's work beyond antagonism, beyond "good" morals and ideology, by offering something neither "good" nor "bad", but indeterminate and ethical instead.

One way of distinguishing Sierra's work from other relational works is its aesthetic. Sierra's work explicitly favours the "sexy" aesthetics of fascism (exploitation) over the less appealing aesthetics of communism (communitas). Sontag writes, "Certainly Nazism is 'sexier' than communism. (Which is not something to the Nazis' credit, but rather shows something of the nature and

⁶⁰ Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism", in *The New York Review of Books*, 6 February 1975. <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1975/feb/06/fascinating-fascism/?pagination=false>> [Accessed 1 June 2013]

limits of the sexual imagination.)”⁶¹ The fetishization of exploitation in Sierra’s works is also apparent but has been wilfully ignored in Bishop’s accounts. It is important to clarify here that I am not saying that Sierra’s work fails because he insights exploitation, and therefore re-affirms the power and system he criticizes, but that his work may open up to trashy relations too – even if this is not the artist’s intention. Would it be out of the question to think of Sierra’s work in terms of other forms of cultural production that more explicitly embrace the perverse and erotic such as sexploitation cinema? John Waters’ work addresses this perverse pleasure of exploitation by drawing his audiences (publics) into a more generative re-thinking of exploitation. While reception of these works are considerably different, for example spectators may have masturbated at sexploitation cinema screenings, it might be worth introducing Waters’ take on exploitation in order to expand our understanding of Sierra’s work here.

The domestic family and very trashy relations in Waters’ seminal film *Pink Flamingos* (1972) for example, includes inter-family and inter-species incest, the capturing and impregnating of surrogate women to provide babies to lesbians, and other perverse and ridiculous relations such as the keeping of the grandmother in a child’s play-pen and feeding her eggs to her own delight. By acknowledging Sierra’s work as perhaps implicit in a re-thinking of exploitation, by considering spectators’ trashy relations we can make productive relations (and readings) across a range of discourses and arenas of cultural consumption. Comparing Sierra’s literal and “antagonistic” exploitations with a more complex re-valuing going on in sexploitation cinema, offers a way of critiquing his work and serious approach, but also generatively considers political strategy beyond antagonism. The re-valuing of exploitation in sexploitation cinema and counter-cultures offers a productive re-thinking incorporating antagonism with the convivial and the erotic. While the premise in Sierra’s work is that of the “real”, his work does not merely represent exploitation but literally enacts it, representations nevertheless circulate in his performances and the photographs of his works that remain. So what can sexploitation cinema offer to

⁶¹ Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism”

the field of participatory art practice?

For Jeffrey Sconce who developed the term “sleaze artists” to look at certain kinds of aesthetic cinema invested in trash, “exploitation cinema's history is a 'politicized' cinema to the extent that it demonstrates the limitations and interests of dominant cinematic style by providing a striking counter-example of deviation.”⁶² “Sleaziness”, for Sconce, “is a presence that must be inscribed into a text by some manner of evaluation and critical labour; that is, sleaze is a feeling one has about a film (or television show, or book for that matter) that requires judging, if only in one’s imaginations, that there is something ‘improper’ or ‘untoward’ about a given text.”⁶³ This “feeling” is a kind of counter-knowledge. Sconce offers a range of examples of exploitation cinema such as *Dracula Versus the Nymphomaniacs*, *Sade, You’re a Prude!* *The Rape of Frankenstein*, *Pollyanna’s Orgy*, *Sodomy on the Bounty*, and *Passport to Lesbos* to name only a few inspiring titles. While Sconce’s cinema deliberately (and strategically) approaches the work with “bad production” values, “bad acting” and “bad taste”,⁶⁴ developing a work and a public of ironic appreciation, there is also a sense of “bad” in Sierra’s work and perhaps the emergence of a public who appreciates his “bad boy” antagonistic style. Of course, in Sierra’s work the vulnerability of the subjects at stake limits any ironic or critical appreciation of the work to the alleged earnestness of its content and contenders. There is still something definitively “improper” and “untoward” about Sierra’s work and his exploitation of workers, however it is removed of any possible irony, just as he prefers to remain invisible. Sierra’s work deliberately engages with the problematics of exploitation, but we are re-assured that his “bad” work is “good” and “legitimate” through his serious antagonistic attitude to the institution and structures of power, just as we are re-assured that the “bad” at stake in Waters’ movie is “good”. In Waters it is confirmed as “good” by the publics (named as “trashophiles”) who decide on its viability as “trash.”

⁶² Jeffrey Sconce, *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the margins of taste, style and politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 392.

⁶³ Sconce, p. 4.

⁶⁴ See also: Jeffrey Sconce, “Trashing the Academy: Taste, Excess and an emerging politics of Cinematic Style”, *Screen* 36:4 (Winter 1995), pp. 371–392.

The ultimate failure of my own work to reach those others that Sierra presents us with does not limit its ability to contemplate the more complex – even perverse desires at stake in inter-subjective art. We could also re-approach Bishop’s discussion of Hirschhorn’s *Bataille Monument* with a consideration for the inter-class and inter-racial encounters made possible between art tourists and local residents. We might remember that in Sierra’s performance the performer/worker is exploited, while in Hirschhorn’s it is the spectator (the art-goer) who is made a spectacle of and potentially enjoys that humiliation. This is also what happened when I took *Touching Feeling* to the public *Dogging* art-context – the participant’s exploitation is made visible. Discourses and practices of public sex have not been explored in terms of the economies of relational art works and socially engaged practices, despite the great acts of kindness some of them appear to promise, their premise to “bring people together” and the often obscured and murky desiring encounters they facilitate.

For Samuel Delany in his celebrated book *Times Square Red Times Square Blue*, which focuses on the gentrification of New York City’s Times Square from his first hand experience of gay clubs and porn cinemas that populated that area, social “contact” gets replaced by the sterility of social “networking”, which is ultimately, I argue, what is at stake in much participatory art.⁶⁵ The examples I provide above of one to one performance also serve as examples of attempts to create contact over networking, but often fail by remaining in the art world, remaining strategic, and remaining as “art” or as “work”. Delany develops the notion of “contact”, an urban phenomenon that works on the randomness, the unplanned and serendipitous possibilities of social relations in Times Square before its gentrification. He considers the value of “contact” in particular across distinct social classes, which he sees as threatened by the gentrification, or what he calls the “Disneyfication” of urban space. Like Delany my project recognizes the value of contact and its relational potential, but also refuses a rigid dualism that would see contact as “good” and networking as “bad”. This becomes

⁶⁵ Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, (New York: New York University press, 1999)

apparent in Hirschhorn's work or in my own practice, which operates in and beyond the concealed private realm of the art gallery or theatre, and in clubs and festivals too. Contact and networking go hand in hand in the age of the Internet as social networking sites and applications bring these distinct worlds together. The private and the public, work and pleasure have all blurred. Delany's meditation on gentrification is useful in assisting me to make connections between the ethical and social turn and neoliberalism here, but to also consider the relationship between the tactical (which I see as conducive to his theory of contact) and strategic (which I see as conducive to his theory of networking), which I discuss in Chapter 1.

Ultimately, I would consider my art practice as opening up to the possibilities of something more complex like an "antagonistic conviviality" or "convivial antagonism", which is potentially exploitative in the ways it incorporates the immaterial labour of capitalist consumption, but also diverts this into "free time" and other pleasurable "non-productive" relations. This we might understand as sleaze. On doing so the time of "exploitation" is re-valued and put to work differently.

Conclusion

Trashy relations are more complex than a dualistic "bad boy" / "good boy" aesthetic or modus operandi and can make the anti-social a form of subversive sociality or conviviality. Trashy relations are not therapeutic but may be experienced as such. Neither are they served up as ethical performances, but I am interested in how the rejection of such "high" moral tasks engenders a more fruitful living-through and questioning of ethics itself. Instead, the desiring diversions of trashy relations include experiences of care and uncared beyond monolithic or religious representations, and offer opportunities for a contemplation on human relations and subjective experience that are complex, tactical, responsive, and occasional, rather than policed or put into regimes of inclusion versus exclusion. Ultimately I hope to have made a case against the valuation of art for its ethical potential, and against the niceties that persist in relational art, participatory art, or one to one works, which might limit their

political possibilities and destabilising pleasures to pre-empted narratives. Rather than define one to one performance as affective labour I have discussed how it opens to the possibility of pleasure and experience with work per se. Similarly, rather than restrict our relations to “high” art economies – the strip show and sexploitation cinema may also be comparable and equally as nourishing/disorientating – depending what tickles your fancy. I think we are better off comparing relational art with experiences that offer contradictory and idiosyncratic relations across labour, ethics and desire and across aesthetics, taste and style – in place of producing a veritable, commodifiable and repeatable model. This is a tough task for artists who depend on developing a sustainable audience. Foremost is the acknowledgment that while it maybe “good” when art questions and provokes, it should not limit art or the artist’s possibility for a “good” time. This ambivalence will also be addressed next in Chapter 4, as I begin unpacking what is at stake in not knowing exactly what is going on in an artwork, through blurring the “actual” and the “fictional”.

Chapter 4

Fictional Realness: Towards a Colloquial Art and Performance Practice

I believe that truth, in the theatre, is often confused with a clearing away of theatricality. I believe the clearing away of theatricality is as much of a glorious lie as the theatrical. I believe homophobia, racism, and sexism in the theatre often manifests itself through the championing of “realism” and or “quiet” plays.

Taylor Mac, *I Believe: A Theatre Manifesto*

I want there to be no such thing as reality or fantasy; I want it all to just be.

Ryan Trecartin

Introduction

In this chapter I develop the concept of a colloquial art and performance practice through the unlikely collocation of two distinct terms –“fictional” and “realness”. The etymology of the prefix “col” in both “col-location” and “colloquial” means “being with”, and thus to collocate is to place together two things as I have done with “Fictional” and “Realness”. The term “colloquial” then refers to something conversational, informal, nonformal, nonliterary, unbookish, unliterary, vernacular and vulgar,¹ exemplified in the term “realness”, which I will unpack more rigorously later.² As such, my focus is on performances that incorporate these elements and processes in order to subvert and transform major art and performance languages, and to even push at the limits of language through incorporation of the fictional or the *imaginary*. In fictional realness I place together two unlikely bedfellows to produce a colloquial art and performance practice.

This chapter is split into three parts. In part one I offer four examples of colloquial performance including self-mythology, gossip, parody and “super-parody”, which incorporates David Burrows’ notion of “super-parodic performance”. I show how I have come to understand these practices as

¹ “Colloquial”, *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colloquial>> [Accessed 3 September 2013]

² “Wanna” is also a colloquial term exemplified in the title of *I Wanna be in that Show/Film* (2010) discussed in Chapter 1.

colloquial with reference to the work of specific artists including Vaginal Davis, Mel Brimfield, and the collective – Plastique Fantastique amongst others. In part two I then use these elements as a framework for thinking through my own practice and an unfolding project titled *Akt-schön!* (2011-13). Finally, in part three, I offer up the notion of a new colloquialism in emerging artistic languages by turning to the work of “drag terrorist” Christeene, and rap-rave group Die Antwoord. Throughout I develop a theory of colloquial performance by drawing, albeit informally, on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s framework of a Minor Literature as mapped out in their book on Kafka, which presents the concept of a literature that “subverts the major language from within”.³ I want to consider the ways colloquial acts work to productively contaminate and transform history and reality in and beyond the institution, presenting something altogether “more real” (i.e. *intense*).

My focus on fictional realness aims to shift debates on performance and its relation to the “actual” and the “real”, which “some artists and critics foreground as the basis or locus of performance art practice”.⁴ Instead of focusing on what are increasingly becoming major artistic languages such as the stripping away of content in an artwork in order to reveal its *mimetic* structure (happenings, minimalist tendencies etc.), or focusing on visceral affects in works that produce witnesses in place of spectators (body art, durational performance, blood work etc.), I want to open up the potentials of works that take on or reveal aspects of those major performance languages by putting them to work *differently*. I therefore look at ways a colloquial art practice can incorporate a repetition beyond critique, deconstruction or imitation, by addressing its creative potentials to transform into something else – something different and sometimes unrecognizable.

³ By informally drawing on a theoretical framework I want to also subvert customs of academic reading, opening up the potentials of colloquial knowledge. See: Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. D. Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁴ Andrew Quick, “Approaching the Real: Reality Affects and the Play of Fiction”, *Performance Research*, 1.3 (1996), p. 23.

From Real to Realness

By invoking the colloquial term “realness” I am referring to its usage by predominantly African-Americans and Latinos in the New York drag balls of the ‘80s, which meant to “pass” as a specific gender or social class other than their own. But I am also interested in how as a colloquialism realness has changed and is still changing. The ballroom competitions consisted of competing “houses” (often with a familial structure – a mother etc.) all competing for trophies by “walking”. “Walking” usually consisted of an exuberant display of one’s self-transformation into a variety of “looks”, for example, banjee realness (passing as an urban male), executive realness (passing as an executive), or schoolboy/girl realness, (passing as a schoolboy/girl) amongst other “looks”. [Fig. 23 a/b/c/d.] Members won trophies by performing the greatest approximation to those representational norms.





Fig. 23 a/b/c/d/e.

Dorian Corey, one of the older drag queens in *Paris is Burning* (1991), the seminal documentary film on ball culture, describes realness and says, it “is as close as we will ever come to the real”, by which she seems to refer to a white, middle class, heterosexual reality from which she is excluded.⁵ While Judith Butler has focused on the subversive potential of ballroom realness in *Bodies*

⁵ 1991: *Paris is Burning*, dir. by Jennie Livingston (Miramax: 1991).

that Matter, writing that while repeating hegemonic forms of power they simultaneously “open possibilities for resignifying the terms of violation against their violating aims”⁶ (a means of reclaiming it for themselves), Jack Halberstam reads realness as “not exactly performance, not exactly imitation; it is the way that people, minorities excluded from the domain of the real, appropriate the real and its affects.”⁷ When the film cuts between the ballroom and images of supposed “real” executives, who are also highly made-up with make-up, big hair, shoulder pads and power suits, what is exposed is the fiction *also* at play in the so-called “norm”. [Fig. 23 e.] And thus we might perhaps think of ballroom realness as a kind of fictional realness – an intensity, attitude, or further layering of fictions lacking a definitive original, and thus producing a political and affective ambivalence; a tacit knowledge *felt* and *shared* by scenes and individuals, over institutional knowledge.

Realness is going through somewhat of a revival in contemporary music and performance, exemplified in rap and hip hop artists like AB Soto (US), Zebra Katz (US) and Mykki Blanco (US) all of whom re-appropriate and blend banjee realness and butch queen realness with contemporary urban fashion, music and art. But as a colloquial term realness has also transformed and lost its ballroom sense or meaning. Contemporary usage of this colloquialism has shown a transference from ballroom realness (i.e. passing as an executive etc.) to its more recent iteration in reality television shows that stage competing drag queens like Rupaul’s *Drag Race*, articulating phrases like: “I’m serving you some trashcan, Primadonna, Cleopatra, Judy Garland Realness”.⁸ If in Butler’s terms, “what determines the effects of realness is the ability to compel belief”⁹ (i.e. to pass as “normal”), then in the RuPaul use of the term, a drag queen’s performance is an approximation to pass, not as “normal” but as (a mutation of

⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 124.

⁷ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 51.

⁸ See: Simon Thibault, “The Reality of Realness”, 19 June 2012.

<<http://dailyxtra.com/ideas/blogs/halifax/the-reality-realness>> [Accessed 2 September 2013]

⁹ Judith Butler, p. 129.

all these?) queer icons from a variety of historical fictions. The fantasy subject has perhaps shifted through repetition, and arguably re-regulated its terms through a form of commercial drag for television. But this shift has also rendered absurd – the approximation or desire “to pass” as a mutant multiplicity of queer icons. For, what does “trashcan Primadonna, Cleopatra, Judy Garland realness” actually mean? Is it possible that it means *nothing*? Has its meaning been hollowed out to “retain only the skeleton of sense”?¹⁰ While the excessive iteration of archetypes and icons placed beside one another is conceivably superficial and nonsensical (and perhaps palpably empty), it might also create an affective layering, a texture, a counter knowledge (between queers and other publics who hold affection for such icons) and in some ways a counter-to-knowledge. We might say that we *feel* realness as something beyond logic inscribed as a major language. That is what makes ballroom realness different from the power-suited executives we are shown to represent “the real” in the film. Fictional Realness is thus perhaps an (humble) acknowledgement of the constant failure of identity and possibility of multiple identities, and it thus indicates the process by which we, and things, come to represent, or come to be “real”. In this case, rather than focus on exclusion, we might focus on the affirmations, *intensities* and *attitudes* through which these appropriations/subversions can produce counter-knowledge shared by individuals and scenes and perhaps at times a counter-*to*-knowledge.

It is thus useful to consider a colloquial art practice by turning to Deleuze and Guattari’s framework of a Minor Literature, which subverts the major language or genre from within.¹¹ This is explicit in the term “realness”, which as a colloquial term incorporates, subverts, and mutates the major term “real”. For Deleuze and Guattari’s this might be considered a *deterritorialisation*, simultaneously *doing* and subverting (and extracting power from) the major language. It is from here that I develop the theory of a colloquial art practice, which functions like an informal or nonformal para-language.

¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 21.

¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 17.

From Minor Literature to Colloquial Performance

For Deleuze and Guattari a Minor Literature is characterized by three elements, which I want to *casually* (by dint of a colloquial meandering) relate to colloquial performances of fictional realness here. There are three elements of a Minor Literature outlined by Deleuze and Guattari, to which I have added my own colloquial examples:

1. *The deterritorialisation of the major language.*
For example realness as a colloquialism is the process of “informalising” or “nonformalising”. i.e. making nonsense out of the established language. For example, “realness” changes the meaning and registers of the “real” (major language) to something different (minor literature).
2. *The political. Everything is political because it is always linked to the larger social milieu of what signifies and what does not.*
It is linked in this case to those groups who use the term realness. An informal or nonformal language always functions within (or in relation to) the major.
3. *The collective, enunciative value. Minor literature is a collective literature still forming or “yet-to-come”.*
Realness is partially formed but its signification (particularly as a spoken term rather than a written term) is still transforming (i.e. from Ballroom realness to RuPaul realness).¹²

Deleuze and Guattari say “a minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language.”¹³ Colloquial practices work similarly within the major language to disrupt, however, the distinction between a minor or major language might also blur as what was once a minor literature might become major, and require reterritorialising again. This is perhaps exemplified when certain art forms, or indeed art theories, become increasingly institutionalised or fashionable.

¹² Deleuze and Guattari, p. 17.

¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, 16.

Artist and writer Simon O’Sullivan has already developed the concept of a minor art practice, and my theory of a colloquial art practice expands on this.¹⁴ By drawing specifically on Deleuze and Guattari’s framework O’ Sullivan thinks of a minor literature as a “‘becoming a stranger’ in ones own tongue”.¹⁵ He inspires that art practice, in order to be revolutionary, albeit on a molecular level, needs to deterritorialise the major languages of art through minor processes. O’Sullivan offers five examples of a minor art practice, which might be seen to work *inside* and *against* the major language of Modernism:

1. Feminist and post colonial art practices and art histories
2. Dada, futurism, and the situationists worked within and against modernity
3. Happenings and performance that abandoned painting and sculpture
4. Art focused on the local (a turn to the vernacular) or the use of specifically non-artistic materials
5. A minor art pushes up against the edges of representation; it bends it, forcing it to the limits and often to a certain kind of absurdity¹⁶

My colloquial bent works similarly to subvert the major language from within, but it also offer something informal or conversational incorporating tactics (as outlined in Chapter 1) that exceed strategy and *relax* or *stretch* the theoretical register. Colloquial art is applicable to individuals, groups or art scenes in and beyond the intellectual avant-garde or art market. Colloquial performances aim to return agency to the social, its users and makers, rather than leaving it held or suspended in theory or critique (i.e. the institution). A Colloquial art attempts (even at the prospect of failure) to relate a minor literature/art practice back to the social. In hindsight I will refer to such a framework albeit informally, just as one might skim the boring points of a story in gossip, in order to diverge before it becomes a framework for making art, or becomes an art identified as “Deleuzian”. Colloquial art and performance functions as a para-practice to a minor literature or a minor art practice. It offers not only deterritorialisations of language, but also the ways we read and use language, the ways we make art,

¹⁴ Simon O’Sullivan, “Notes Towards a Minor Art Practice”,
<<http://www.simonosullivan.net/articles.html>> [accessed 2 July 2013]

¹⁵ O’Sullivan, p. 1.

¹⁶ O’Sullivan, pp. 3-4.

the ways we perform. As informal or nonformal acts they might be seen to dismantle what Gavin Butt calls the “serious machine”.¹⁷ Academic writing, and to some extent art practice, in order to be legitimized and taken seriously, needs to act according to customs of serious practice. This perpetuation of protocol is what Butt calls “a Foucauldian technology of serious value, that not only produces the objects we take to be worthy of serious attention, but that also posits the appropriate attitudes we should adopt in addressing them”.¹⁸ By offering up four examples of colloquial performance: self-mythology, gossip, parody and “super-parody”, I want to harness their ability to offer something both critical and creative, as deterritorialisations of major critical performance languages.

Strange Collocations

I am interested in the potential of strange collocations or couplings. I will be exploring some of these odd couplings specifically in relation to my own practice later, but let's take as a start this term fictional realness. As a shift from juxtaposition, which would emphasise the *difference* between the fictional and the realness and only re-inforce cliché, I want to propose that we understand these terms as related, and thus producing a knowledge we *feel* and *experience*, a sensation or intensity, rather than definitive logic. Fictional realness as a *colloquial collocation* – a language *felt* by groups or communities: Fictional Realness as a counterpoint to conservative political strategy or truth seeking; Fictional realness as excessively real – exceeding ordinariness in the presentation of a truth that is truer than true, a truth that is not coherent or logical, but truth as a certain attitude or intensity embroiled in its own excess – in its own making. This is a kind of self-awareness, but is not limited to post-modern irony. If anything it tends towards an excessive over-identification beyond cliché. In this sense camp might be one example, but as Rupaul's example demonstrates, it can also exceed camp and become abstract or silly – to the point of a kind of camp abstraction. In the former, fictional realness works

¹⁷ Mathias Danbolt, “Dismantling the Serious Machine: An Interview with Gavin Butt”, *Trickster*, <<http://trickster.net/3/butt/3.html>> [Accessed 22 July 2013]

¹⁸ Danbolt, p. 3.

as a counter-critique and the latter a counter-to-critique in that it goes further than critique – to the point of destruction, asignification and thus creation.

Fictional realness: these two shady words together seem to refuse each other, but in doing so produce a vibration difficult to read through a theoretical lens, engaging instead a sensed knowledge. The failure of the real, outlined perhaps most prominently by Jacques Derrida who writes: “the ‘reality’ of ‘actuality’ – however individual, irreducible, stubborn, painful, or tragic it may be – only reaches us through fiction,”¹⁹ is indicative of the demand for a fiction that we cannot live without, and perhaps *also* a future that will not come without such fiction. This puts me in mind of a fabulous story by La Agrado, a transgendered character in Pedro Almodóvar's seminal film *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* (1999), who on standing in for a theatre show that has been cancelled offers up her life story as anecdote for the few “que no tengan nada mejor que hacer” (who have nothing better to do). Following an entertaining and heart-warming description of her transition from male to female via an economic breakdown of her assembled body parts: “Tetas... Setenta cada uno” (Tits... Seventy each) she leaves the audience on screen, and us the audience watching her and them on screen, with this little gem: “*porque una es más auténtica cuando más se parezca a lo que se ha soñado de sí misma*”. (*Because you are most authentic when you greater resemble what you have dreamed you could be*).

Authenticity is not the original or real here, but the force of performance, the intensity by which one strives, performs and *resembles* “what you have dreamed you could be”.²⁰ This excess (in this instance sentimentality) can also produce fictional realness. The generosity in such story telling, including the economic breakdown of a newly assembled body, can offer up something beyond the self, the potential of re-creating perhaps multiple selves, too, and a community who want to listen to her story. We could return here to Butler’s theory to consider La Agrado’s performance as ambivalent, or approach it

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, “The Deconstruction of Actuality, *Radical Philosophy* 68. (1994), p. 28.

²⁰ (1999): *Todo Sobre mi Madre*, dir. by Pedro Almodóvar (Warner Sogefilms: 1999)

pathologically as a re-affirmation of norms (which as we know are already in flux), but either approach would deny the affirmative potentials of her performance, and deny her right to desire to belong *differently*. But of course, let's not forget that we are dealing with the explicitly fictional here: La Agrado (Antonia San Juan) is a female actor playing the role of La Agrado, a male to female transgendered character, with yet another set of dimensions to unravel.

In this case fictional realness might be a form of taking fiction seriously, as I just did. And I mean seriously in the Irit Rogoff sense: "Seriousness as a mode of habitation", or in this case *fiction as a mode of habitation*; of living through the myths we create.²¹ This extends Butt's *unserious* approach by inhabiting *unseriousness*, which is itself perhaps a kind of seriousness, albeit a playful and strange one. Realness then implies taking reality as a form of play or performance seriously.

I will now outline four examples of colloquial performance, which I argue can produce fictional realness – a counter-knowledge or counter-to-knowledge.

Self-Mythology

Mythmaking is an integral part of artistic practice and yet it is rarely considered as conducive to the work. Joseph Beuys is perhaps the most "legendary" example of a myth-making artist. "He seemed almost a fictional character," says British artist Cornelia Parker, who, during her student days, travelled to Edinburgh to hear him speak in 1980.²² "I was drawn to his work because he was mysterious, a romantic figure with a huge charisma. His attraction was that he was someone I was constantly trying to work out."²³ In this response to a retrospective of Beuys' work at Tate in 2005, critic Sean O'Hagan also wrote: "Beuys, the mythic figure, is somehow bigger than the work. A cult figure while alive, he remains one of those artists whose name is invoked more than his

²¹ See: Irit Rogoff, "On Being Serious in the Art World", *Institutional Attitudes: Beyond Criticality*, Brussels, 25 April 2010.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2KNmV4QsE>> [Accessed 2 February 2013]

²² Sean O'Hagan, "A man of Mystery", in *Observer* 30 January 2005.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2005/jan/30/art2>> [Accessed 23 July 2013]

²³ Sean O'Hagan, "A man of Mystery"

art.”²⁴ Beuys, lest we forget, is the artist who famously pronounced: “everyone can be an artist”.

Self-mythologising has never been more blatant than as it is in today’s networked world. Technology and the Internet have allowed everyone and anyone to construct and archive their personal experiences and share them instantly. The notion that “everyone can be an artist” is consistently played out across our social worlds today. And so the practice of banal performances of the everyday (which were critical in the 60s and 70s) are less interesting today given the fact that *everyone* is doing it *all* the time for *everyone* to see. The Internet has also enabled the production of multiple selves both online and offline. *Selfie*-mythology, perhaps a more apt term for the archiving of the self with technological applications, personal camera phones and laptop computers to produce high-stylised *selfies*, is networked-business-as-usual today, and artists more than ever use the web to promote themselves and their work.²⁵ So what can self-mythology do? Can it connect to, or call forth, a community or scene beyond the self?

According to psychologist Dan McAdams, “A personal myth exists first and foremost to provide life with meaning, unity, purpose.”²⁶ He continues:

From the standpoint of society to live the myth is to connect to the grand narratives of your social world. Myths are created and lived in a social context. As a social participant you are responsible for creating and living personal myth in such a way as to commit your life to the generative agenda of humankind. Without this commitment, identity loses any trace of social responsibility and degenerates into trivia or narcissism.²⁷

Self-mythologies in art practice might be considered, then, as working to do different things: some are “to connect to the grand narratives”, this might be through some form of imitative strategy that draws on major language, style or characterisation, and others might be seen to deterritorialise grand narratives

²⁴ Sean O’Hagan, “A Man of Mystery”

²⁵ In August 2013, the term “selfie” was included in Oxford Dictionary. It is defined as “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website.”

²⁶ Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993), p. 265.

²⁷ McAdams, p. 265.

and offer something different. The latter might make way for the production of new narratives, scenes and subjectivities, something I argue McAdams' viewpoint inhibits. But Joseph Campbell, who McAdams also cites, says: "It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back."²⁸ And thus we might consider the repressive function of McAdams' own fantasies of social responsibility, and seek out a more generative mythmaking that explodes formal rules, and in place of offering a moralising template, brings ethics into question. Fictional realness is a kind of generative mythmaking based on affirmation in place of realism. This might be the quest for a more meaningful future (identity, community or scene), or a reconfiguration of what constitutes the meaningful and the self (in different communities or scenes). The latter might include the incorporation of the non-human too.

Despite being a common everyday practice, self-mythologising still has a bad name. It is assumed to be outside the work of art, or it has afforded artists who incorporate autobiography or themselves into the work, the reputation as narcissists and show offs. The NEA four mentioned in Chapter 1 constitute historical examples of this. There is a tendency against self-mythology in art practice today, and what is offered instead is an art that gives the impression that there is no self-design at stake, but this refusal of the self has perhaps become a new kind of myth-making in art practice. As I see it there are three kinds of self-mythology:

1. The first might be recognised as a kind of "blowing ones own trumpet". It presents the highlights, the successes of one's personal history. It creates associations and a sense of belonging to certain groups. It creates a positive image of the self. This form of self-mythology is often institutionalised. The CV, artist biography, or in the worst cases practice-based PhD's are examples.
2. The second is what we might call "self-mockology", which presents

²⁸ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 11.

(often through comic tone) the failures, the lowlights of one's personal history. It tries to disassociate as much as associate with certain groups. It often reclaims these negative aspects as positive affirmation. This form of self-mythology is more colloquial, and is associated with minority narratives, or might invoke a fictional character. One example is artist Lois Weaver's alter ego Tammy Whynot? – "a Southern Baptist, country and western-singer turned Lesbian Performance artist."²⁹

3. There is also another kind of self-mythology; one I want to call the "third kind", which produces self-myths by way of refusing the individual self or situating the self *elsewhere* outside the work. This often incorporates the making of myths about others, often fictional others. This is exemplified in artists like Mel Brimfield (UK) who creates fictional parodies of other artists, Brown Council's (AUS) invention of a fictional Australian performance artist in their project *Remembering Barbara Cleveland* (2013), or the production of multiple selves through the formation of collectives or "avatars" such as self-labelled performance Fiction – Plastique Fantastique – founded by David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan, who "have no biography".³⁰ All three produce the self, but the "third kind" draws attention to the production of selves, rather than the self, or even looks beyond the self to a non-human multiple without selfhood.

Gossip

Another element of colloquial performance is gossip. For Gavin Butt, "gossiping is a form of social activity which produces and maintains the filiations of artistic community."³¹ I would like to add to Butt's discussion and say that gossip, in its tendency towards expression, excess, and exaggeration can also make way for

²⁹ See: Split Britches, "What Tammy Needs To Know", 2004.

<<http://splitbritches.wordpress.com/performance/list-of-works/>> [Accessed 2 September 2013]

³⁰ See: "Programme Notes: P o P: Potentials of Performance", *Performance Matters*, 26-27 October 2012.

<<http://www.thisisperformancematters.co.uk/files/P%20o%20P%20programme.pdf>> [Accessed 28 July 2013]

³¹ Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World 1948-63* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 1.

the production of new scenes and communities. It can create, mutate and extend scenes by introducing unlikely connections (or collocations). In his book *Between You and Me* Butt offers gossip up as a kind of counter-knowledge, something we might think of as a colloquial performance, which circulates verbally as a creative, rich and expansive form of historical evidence. Butt's analysis makes way for incorporating the rich nuances of artist's lives through a form of language both sympathetic and telling of a scene, in ways beyond any institutionalized major language or tradition of critical theory. To clarify: my use of the term "scene" is drawn from David Burrows' definition of an art scene, which he writes: "is not a professional network of individuals and institutions but an informal presentation of events in and as their affects, and therefore different to the formal organisations of art."³² It is also through such an informal presentation that colloquial art relates beyond an intellectual art scene or institution.

In a discussion of the work of Canadian artist Colin Campbell, Jon Davies develops Butt's notion of gossip from "maintaining filiations" to *imagining* and therefore calling forth a new scene.³³ His focus is gossip's imaginary potential to create new scenes from what does not exist already. We might think of this as a colloquial tactic of what Michel de Certeau calls "making do". Davies writes of the productivity of gossip in the small community of artists in New Brunswick, Canada, citing Luis Jacob who said: "Artists had to perform a scene, perform an audience, in order to summon what does not exist".³⁴ Focusing on the ways Campbell and other artists performed what they *thought* artists do, but with lack of a referent, meant they created imagined scenes embroiled in personal desire. Through misrecognition they might have then produced something both new and different to other scenes. Davies writes: "Campbell's' tapes demonstrated how reality can be manipulated and made to reflect ones own desires. Through videotape, he gossiped with and about his real social circle

³² See David Burrows, "An Art Scene as Big as the Ritz: The Logic of Scenes", in *Deleuze and Contemporary Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) p. 159.

³³ Jon Davies, "The Gossip and Ghosts of Colin Campbell", *Public Journal: New Communities*, 39 (2009), pp. 97-103.

³⁴ Luis Jacob, "From Stream to Golden Stream," SWITCH 1.1 (2008), p. 32.

and created a new one, a group of fictional personas who became tangibly real once their tapes were watched, loved (or hated) and talked about”.³⁵ Davies also points out how General Idea, a collective of three Canadian artists, Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal and AA Bronson, who were active from 1967 to 1994, discuss how “the ‘fictional art scene’ they created became real.”³⁶ In this sense, gossip’s trafficking of unofficial information contributed to the invention of a scene that would not have emerged without such embellishment.



Fig. 24.

The artist Vaginal Davis has been lauded for her gossip. [Fig. 24.] A “cult figure”, whose name, like Beuys, perhaps also invokes more than her art, Ms. Davis (who might be effectively confused with Jon Davies above) “takes the Warhol adage of ‘everyone will be famous for 15 minutes’ one step further – her activities create new art movements and scenes every 15 minutes.”³⁷ Differently to Beuys too, Ms. Davis concedes, “Not everyone’s an artist... No, no, no!” and expresses her distaste for karaoke³⁸ A leading figure of counterculture since the ‘80s, according to one of Ms. Davis’s many fictional biographies she originates from the “ghettos of Watts” Los Angeles, and was “conceived under the table

³⁵ Davies, p. 97.

³⁶ General Idea, “Towards a World Class Audience,” in *Toronto: A Play of History* (Toronto: The Power Plant, 1987), pp. 38-9.

³⁷ Robert Summers, “Vaginal Davis Does Art History”, in *Dead History, Live Art? Spectacle, Subjectivity and Subversion in Visual Culture since 1960s* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 74-5.

³⁸ See: Hili Perlson, “Vaginal Davis Speaks: Interview”, *Sleek*, 30 September 2011 <<http://www.sleek-mag.com/berlin/2011/09/vaginal-davis-speaks-featured-in-sleek-31-xx-xy/>> [Accessed 2 August 2013]

during a Ray Charles concert at the Hollywood Palladium".³⁹ Ms. Davis works across disciplines including collage, painting, performance, video, writing, zines and initiated the queercore punk scene in Los Angeles in the 80s. Her name is an homage to the radical black feminist Angela Davis. A great part of Ms. Davis's practice involves the work of self-mockology (she continually mocks herself) and gossip. When being asked what makes a good performance artist in an interview Ms. Davis says:

Josephine Baker, aside from being the first black international superstar, was also a performance artist through and through. She created her own biography, her own mythology, she was sensational! And she sought to mix all races by adopting a so-called 'rainbow tribe' of children. She was a little cuckoo too, but who isn't? Considering where she came from. I can relate to that.⁴⁰

Ms. Davis's own myth-making is undoubtedly inspired, but what interests me is that rather than drawing on celebrated artists like Beuys, she cites the black dancer-singer-actor *and* performance artist Josephine Baker as an influential figure in performance histories. Bringing Baker into the equation not only disrupts the white patriarchal histories of art, but also reconsiders what and who might be considered as important and relevant figures in performance art history. Ms. Davis's mythmaking and "mockology" has a purpose – it opens up the boundaries of art history, and relaxes the too often stuffy seriousness of art historical convention.

Inventing biographies and myths through her expanding practice, what is true and what is made-up seems totally beside the point. As Dominic Johnson writes: "Ms. Davis consistently refuses to ease conservative tactics within gay and black politics, employing punk music, invented biography, insults, self-mockery, and repeated incitements to group sexual revolt."⁴¹ There are a certain poetics at stake in Ms. Davis's revolt, which escapes critical logic and renders truth as always already embedded with fiction or rather as Marc Siegel puts it: "Any attempt to adjudicate the truth value of Davis's gossip seems to miss what is so

³⁹ See: Vaginal Davis, "Biography" <www.vaginaldavis.com> [Accessed 3 August, 2013]

⁴⁰ Perlson, *Sleek*

⁴¹ Vaginal Davis, "Biography"

essential about it: it is neither true nor false; it is fabulous.”⁴² In an essay titled *Vaginal Davis’ Gospel Truths*, Siegel makes a useful link between Davis’s gossip and the work of fabulation in fables, myths, and legends and insists that rather than question what is true or not in Davis’s myths, that we pay attention to the performativity of her oral discourse. Siegel writes: it “produces highly resonant characters, mythic types, or legendary figures whose embodied particularities are the stuff out of which others nourish their hopes and desires for ever more and varied ways of being in the world.”⁴³ Davis, a relentless storyteller, certainly inhabits these fictions, offering a kind of fictional realness that extends across aspects of her work and life.

In both Siegel’s essay, and another by Robert Summers titled *Vaginal Davis Does Art History*, attention is paid to a particular story that Ms. Davis tells of one of her encounters with ultimate mythmaker Andy Warhol – and which I too will paraphrase here, if only to show how affective Davis’s stories are:

Come as your favourite dead artist. That was the theme of this party at Area, the famed New York City early 1980s nightclub. I was under the delusion that I had moved to Gotham City to become part of its enchantment. It was fall, and Manhattan was major Ms. Gorgeous. I came to the club dressed as the dead Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, complete with unibrow and a Cabbage Patch Doll head substituting for a live monkey. This was before the cult of Frida swept the country, so no one knew who she was including Andy Warhol who took a Polaroid of me, and mumbled something about me looking like Helen/ Harry Morales. A year later I saw his Polaroid of Helen/Harry, and I was insulted thinking she looked like a Puerto Rican version of my friend, the drag queen snake charmer Nova China. Nova told me she lived in New York in the late 60s and was one of the lower rung Warhol drag Super Stars. That night at Area was not the only time Andy would take a Polaroid of me.⁴⁴

Ms. Davis continues the story of meeting Warhol, emphasizing that Andy “unashamedly” didn’t know who the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo was. Explaining that she was a Mexican artist married to the famous muralist Diego Rivers, Davis elaborates: “Andy didn’t know who he was either – and he wasn’t even

⁴² Marc Siegel, “Vagina Davis’s Gospel Truths”, *Camera Obscura* 67, 23. 1 (2008) pp. 151-158 (p. 155)

⁴³ Siegel, p. 156.

⁴⁴ Summers, p. 77. “My Favorite Dead Artist” was originally delivered at a special event at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles in 1999 in conjunction with the exhibition *Nadar/Warhol: Paris/New York*.

embarrassed!"⁴⁵ It is important to take into account that this story was told at a special event at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles in 1999 in conjunction with the *Nadar/Warhol: Paris/New York: Photography and Fame* exhibition. As Summers points, what Ms. Davis does – through embellished gossip – is emphasise the exclusion of non-white artists from the Warhol (and arguably Western) oeuvre of contemporary art.

For Summers, Ms. Davis succeeds in employing gossip as a “queer tactic” that contaminates the white, heterosexual, patriarchal museum archive at the Getty. Davis’s unorthodox approach to history troubles the institutional archive’s concern for truth and evidence, inventing instead her own truth making. Summers argues that Davis is not in search of divine truth or an inexistent history of queers at the Getty through her tactical historicising, but that “she effectively queers the museum archive by putting things “where they don’t belong””.⁴⁶ Rather than re-create a history that just includes “others”, Summers continues: “from this performed tactic boundaries become porous and start to leak and the museum/archive is contaminated.”⁴⁷ Summers considers Ms. Davis’s work as refusing to celebrate and further canonize Warhol and Nadar of all conventional connections between them, but she does not do this by merely incorporating those others who are excluded. Ms. Davis’ myth making and gossip extends the Getty archive, and creates new relations through a performativity that offers up not only the “inclusion of outsiders”, but also other ways of knowing. As Siegel writes, Ms. Davis’s gossip is for those “who want to lend an ear”.⁴⁸ And so for those who dismiss it, or think of it as “mere”, “superfluous” or “silly”, something radically fabulous and destabilising is missed.

Parody

The third kind of colloquial performance I want to address now is parody, which is recognisable as an imitation of conventions with the intention to

⁴⁵ Summers, p. 77.

⁴⁶ Summers, p. 80.

⁴⁷ Summers, p. 80.

⁴⁸ Siegel, p. 156.

undermine. Parody destabilizes norms often, but not always, through a juxtaposition of the low and high, in order to comment on, or critique each other, often, but not always, in a humorous way. Parody has been employed across cultural production as a means of breaking down and subverting the major language into a minor language, the formal into the informal or *colloquial* for centuries. While parody has already been given much thought in relation to post-modernism, its revival, particularly in the age of YouTube, has been given little thought. Parody today is an increasingly colloquial practice performed not only by professionals or artists but by non-professionals too. It is increasingly becoming a kind of amateur practice enabled by new patterns of networked production and consumption. When artists employ parody today, there is often a clear critical agenda at stake, but I would argue that this is now complicated by a YouTube generation of parody-makers who often create parodies and music videos “just for fun.” This is not meant to criticise the universalization of parody by its users, but it might be necessary to articulate these different kinds of parody or “spoof”. Here are two forms of parody I recognise as colloquial.

1. One kind is what we might call “amateur parody” or “tribute parody”, which celebrates another work through imitation. One example is the recent YouTube trender filmed and created by US Marines in Afghanistan. The video is a spoof of the music video for Carly Ray Jepsen’s pop song *Call Me Maybe* (2011), and features a team of conventionally “hunky” marines in various stages of undress lip-synching the words to the song. The video, which was first parodied by the Miami Dolphins cheerleaders, is used as a template for their “guy” version. This includes several campy choreographies with homoerotic overtones, all filmed at an undisclosed desert basecamp. What we are offered in this video can be undeniably seductive, even to those who completely appose US military regime. The employment of parody and modes of camp eroticism work to both entertain themselves as well as those watching it at home. This parody, loved by the masses, doubles also as promotional propaganda for US military, and thus I would not be surprised if this kind of parody is

co-opted by other military organisations to entice young people to join the forces. This kind of parody then, while celebratory is also problematic. Still, “amateur parody” or “tribute parody” can also work critically of major works or authoritative regimes.

2. Another kind of parody is “critical parody” or “subversive parody” often attributed to political campaigns, or the work of an artist. While being intentionally critical, its colloquial language does not thwart its potential as “entertainment” either. Mel Brimfield, an artist whose work definitively draws on a kind of postmodern parody, brings together unlikely forms and characters, to creative and critical effect. Brimfield strategically mixes the lives of seminal figures from “serious” performance art history such as duo Gilbert and George with other unlikely duos from Saturday night British television like Morecambe and Wise. [Fig. 25.] In doing so, Brimfield offers a playful contemplation and critique of what are recognized as “low-art” forms and entertainment genres with what constitutes “high art” such as performance art. The mixing of these characters and genres in her retellings are uncanny and hilarious. Brimfield breaks down the boundaries by switching them to comical and critical effect. But, while they offer new inverted perspectives, the boundaries between “high” and “low” nevertheless remain in place. The act, in this instance is a celebration of difference, and is not about the eradication of difference. The humorous affects produced require this dualism in order to produce the rich textures that make up cultural life. In one sense it brings an often-intangible work of performance art into the horizon of colloquial knowledge shared amongst those who know of both duos Gilbert and George and Morecambe and Wise. This makes Brimfield’s work particularly localized. I would argue, however, that Brimfield’s work offers a form of irony that cannot be compared to an art world elitism: Brimfield’s irony is not the smirk of a work like *Thank you for not involving me in your relational art project* (Cliff Eyland, 2009), cited in the previous

chapter. Its generosity is in its offering up of something popular and colloquial. Morecambe and Wise are figures most British people (perhaps over thirty) would recognise, inside or outside the art world.



Fig. 25.

It is worth pointing out some of the basic functions of parody, noted perhaps most influentially by Linda Hutcheon in her account on postmodernism following Frederic Jameson's criticism in his much disputed *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Hutcheon's description of parody still serves as an important analysis of the cultural tendencies of postmodernism, which she distinguishes by the way it takes the form of a "self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement".⁴⁹ Parody, for Hutcheon, involves making fun out of something, rather than having a total "loss of historicity" or lacking "effective political critique" as Jameson argued against postmodern tendencies.⁵⁰ Hutcheon writes: "Parody is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies"⁵¹ Hutcheon points out that its effectiveness "may indeed be complicitous with the values it inscribes as well as subverts, but the subversion is still there".⁵² Parody ranges from mockery and degradation to tribute and admiration. I will turn now to "Super-parody"

⁴⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 1.

⁵⁰ See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 3rd edn (London: Verso, 2008)

⁵¹ Hutcheon, p. 101.

⁵² Hutcheon, p. 106.

which I think emerges precisely as a challenge to the irony and dualism of postmodern parody.

Super-parody

David Burrows offers the term “super parodic performance” in his edited book *Performance Fictions*, to think through the work of a range of contemporary art practices and his collective art practice *Plastique Fantastique* with Simon O’Sullivan.⁵³ The cover of *Performance Fictions* includes something that might or might not form a subtitle. It reads: *You no longer know who you are*. Above this is an image of what might be an inverted head, or is it a giant octopus, legs protruding from the top of a volcano? Or, maybe it’s rapture? I don’t know. It is hard to tell. But having experienced talks and performances by *Plastique Fantastique*, one of their reoccurring slogans comes to mind:

THR S NT & NVR HS BN NYTHING T NDRSTND

Despite knowing the pointlessness of trying to decipher meaning in their work, I become aware of my conventional tendency to decode by way of default: “There isn’t and never has been anything to understand.” This is perhaps the best and worst introduction to *Plastique Fantastique*.

In my experience of their performances, which emerge like rituals and include performed actions often by masked figures, the integration of video and sound (often feedback and noise) and the profuse burning of incense, there is a great sense of occasion at stake in place of anything we might call “narrative”. In a talk, I recall Burrows saying that they treat their performances as others treat wedding ceremonies – they blow a lot of money on a one-off event.⁵⁴ They effectively put capital to more productive use. It is difficult or perhaps even silly to try to read *Plastique Fantastique* logically, as there are elements of reference, but the experience and images seem to escape this, leaving very little to

⁵³ David Burrows, “Performance Fictions”, *Art-Writing-Research*, Vol. 3, (Birmingham: Article Press, 2011)

⁵⁴ David Burrows, *Plastique Fantastique, Schizoanalysis and Schizotrategy*, IMT Gallery, London 18 July 2013.

understand or hold dear. There is, however, plenty to experience. This is felt by the kind of anxious surging energy of spectators and performers, as language or meaning operates differently – it operates on the level of affect.

In his book Burrows offers four orders of performance fiction:

1. *Sacred performances*. Fictions designed to bind an audience or group, or to manifest a people yet to come.
2. *Performance as games of Chance*. The facilitating of the imaginary through the absurd and accidental.
3. *Super-parodic performance*. More than a deconstruction or critique. Relations are made through a parody beyond irony.
4. *Apocalyptic performances*. Engage with chaos through disorientation and chance and bear comparison to rituals of apocalyptic cultures.⁵⁵

While aspects of all four may relate to colloquial performance, I want to focus on the notion of “super-parodic performance” or what I will call simply “super-parody”, which I understand as a shift from parodic critique to creation.

I have thus far exemplified affective knowledge produced through self-myths, gossip and parody, which enable the forging and maintaining of affiliations and communities, but which may also call forth a new community or scene. Super-parody is more concerned with the latter. It blurs parody by jumbling the order of things so there is no concept of the original from which to copy or imitate. In theory super-parody connects to Deleuze’s concept of multiplicity and autonomous difference, outlined in chapter 1. Super-parody, as I see it, although incorporating a variety of other elements, creates something unrecognisable within an established major language, and thus might be thought of as colloquial in the way it becomes nonformal through abstraction and non-sense, as a parallel to the shift from “real” to “realness” pointed to above. This “super” aspect I understand as a kind of acceleration in art as it escapes meaning or logic. This might also relate to the “super-natural” or just the *imaginary*. Super parody accelerates parody by opening the double to multiple points of reference, creating a density or layering that becomes a different kind of meaning *felt* and *imagined*.

⁵⁵ Burrows, pp. 47-69.

Burrows discusses performance fictions with reference to artist Robert Smithson's maxim, which breaks with notions of truth and fiction as opposites, by proposing that fictions are "realities to come".⁵⁶ Smithson writes: "...the artist seeks.... the fiction that reality will sooner or later imitate".⁵⁷ This affirmation of fiction and "what can be imagined" is precisely what is at stake in the case of La Agrado's self-mythology above (she inhabits what she imagines), or gossip, which enables the creation of scenes that would not have emerged otherwise, and in Brimfield's parody (although retroactive), stuff otherwise ignored or thought beyond the realm of art is brought forth. Burrows writes: "Performance fictions are produced through disavowing and affirming what can be imagined."⁵⁸ But he also writes: "performance fictions are different to, or more than ideology (ideas inscribed in language and everyday culture), and different to simulation (a self-referential circulation of signs that usurps reality)."⁵⁹ While ideology can be seen as concerned with "reality" and "representation", performance fictions transform reality and create new paradigms. This is perhaps what differentiates super-parody from representational practices. Ultimately what Burrows proposes is a move from identity politics inscribed by the likes of Butler, who affirms that there is "nothing accessible to us beyond language",⁶⁰ to a more affirmative Deleuzian multiplicity of becoming, which might harness impossibility itself as a potential for calling forth new futures. Burrows' suggested move away from the everyday might be seen to reject the colloquial, inscribed as it is conventionally in the "informal", but I would argue that it usurps it. Rather than offering a representation of the "colloquial", it inhabits the colloquial (i.e. the nonformal), forcing us to think beyond our preconceived notions of identity, and to acknowledge instead the systems and processes by which (multiple) stuff happens. This reminds me of Jack Smith's exotic and apocalyptic utopias and "apocalyptic tone", which offered a radical re-imagining of Hollywood cinema beyond parody and cliché. We might also

⁵⁶ Burrows, p. 53.

⁵⁷ Robert Smithson from "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art", *Art International* (March 1968), pp. 78-95.

⁵⁸ Burrows, p. 51.

⁵⁹ Burrows, p. 51.

⁶⁰ Burrows, p. 52.

think of Ms. Davis's own "Vaginalisms" like "Humpy dork", "breasticles" and "penification" as mutating language and potentially calling forth new mutant bodies.⁶¹ Burrows describes how for Deleuze (via Foucault) statements can refer to concrete or imaginary (and absurd) worlds. This is also applicable to realness, which as I have already pointed out, has transformed, even arguably lost meaning altogether. And so, if parody is doubly coded as it is in Brimfield's work, then super-parody is crystal-like – there are multiple relations possible. It does not stop at parody (sense) but connects to multiple other possibilities (beyond sense). My question remains then, if irony is blurred in super-parody, can it still produce the affective pleasures such as humour that parody affords?

Humour, a staple in parody, contributes to the subversive and affirmative experience of Brimfield's work. In this sense, the loss of humour from parody might beckon the feeling: *If I can't laugh I don't wanna be part of your (molecular) revolution*. But I have found the work of Plastique Fantastique to be very funny. There is an awkward sense in their work that we do not know whether they are being funny intentionally or not, and this creates an interesting vibrating intensity. O'Sullivan addresses this in an aside in his essay towards a minor art practice and says: "humour here is not the irony of 'postmodern' practice with its emphasis on parody and pastiche, but something more affirmative, celebratory even—and something that works on an intensive rather than a signifying register."⁶² I understood this as a kind of awkward tickling sensation. I didn't know if I was being tickled or pricked on experiencing a performance by Plastique Fantastique at *Potentials of Performance* in 2012, during which the collective summoned the "neuropatheme", which they describe as a "subject-without-experience".⁶³

In this work, which cannot be reduced entirely to words here, a video is projected and features what looks like a strange glitter-smothered disembodied

⁶¹ See: Vaginal Davis, *Vaginal Davis Blog* <www.vaginaldavis.com> [Accessed 28 August 2013]

⁶² O'Sullivan, p.4.

⁶³ *P o P: Potentials of Performance*

face, on top of a bird-face, on top of a screen, within another frame (within a performance within an art venue etc.). The face seems to be uttering something



Fig. 26.



Fig. 27.

in a funny voice about me the interpreter-spectator: “I think this, and think that. I feel this and I feel that.” It seems to be mocking me. Mocking my desire to find meaning in the experience – in art. But its textures, repetitive sounds, glittery surfaces and the overwhelming smell of incense are confusing, and refuse to “line up”. Nevertheless the sense of occasion – it feels like we’re on the verge – like something is going to happen – keeps me hooked. Tickling and prickling at the same time, I become implicit in this mocking too as I find myself laughing. Laughing at what? Laughing at affect’s fashionable appropriation in contemporary art and critical theory? But this is not an explicit Parody (“I feel

this, and I feel that”), so I’m not sure what I’m laughing at. The disembodied face spouts something I interpret as: “No tasty tasty, no look and see, no touchy touchy, no fucky fucky.” This is the humorous sensation of disavowal and affirmation intermeshed in super-parody: A kind of emptying out of meaning and thus re-enforced affective experience. Deleuze and Guattari write that in a minor literature, “language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits.”⁶⁴ This reminds me of Jennifer Doyle’s account of a telephone interview with Ms. Davis, who according to Doyle, made the following repeated claim through the receiver: “I am not INTERESTED in ENTERTAINMENT!” and which paradoxically became more and more entertaining on each repetition, on each denial.⁶⁵ The repeated disavowal simultaneously produces and empties out meaning.

Plastique Fantastique’s super-parodic performances invite us to re-adjust the customs by which we have commonly come to read and experience art. Calling forth that which we yet have a bearing on (the *neuropatheme* perhaps), that which we can yet interpret as this or that. With no sense of local or locus we are forced to experience the art of Plastique Fantastique as a dazzling and deterritorialising counter-to-knowledge.

*

My discussion and examples of four aspects of colloquial art and performance should by now give readers a sense of fictional realness: a knowledge felt and experienced by individuals and scenes, over institutional knowledge. I hope to have highlighted the ways informal and indeed non-formal acts can produce new, different – even impossible – languages. I turn now to examples of my own practice where a colloquial art and performance practice is developed further.

⁶⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 23.

⁶⁵ Jennifer Doyle, “The Trouble with Men, or, Sex, Boredom, and the Work of Vaginal Davis”, in *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 81-101.

Akt-schön! (2011-12)



Fig. 28.

In my art practice, across the various contexts and collaborations, from Mitch & Parry (with Andrew Mitchelson) to Lola & Stephen (with Eirini Kartsaki), from nightclubs to academic conferences, from the theatre to the gallery, in each context there is a kind of myth-making happening. In each work too, there are multiple versions of the work: the live performance, the video documentation, the lecture, and review, the PhD. I will turn now to a project titled *Akt-schön!*, which transforms across spaces and events. Despite the work deliberately foregrounding the unlikely relations (collocations) between two disparate cultural movements of the 20th Century – Viennese Actionism and Disco – I am interested in how the work exposes their multiplicities beyond dualism, intermeshing these movements in order to call forth a new movement – *Akt-schön!*

Akt-schön! is a series of performances in which I (apparently) attempt to find a through-point between the Disco movement and Viennese Actionism in a song by Alicia Bridges titled *I Love the Nightlife* (1978). There is something about the way Bridges sings “I want some... *Ak-shown*” (Phonetically pronounced æk-šön), the emphasis or “making strange” of the word “action”, that curiously resonated with me when I first heard it at the Burry Port Shoreline Caravan and Camping Holiday Park at the age of six. It aroused something in me that I had never felt before. I could not explain it, but it stuck with me for all these years. Deleuze and Guattari might call this sound a “disjunction between content and

expression”, which is like the “disjunction between eating and speaking”.⁶⁶ Somewhere between content and expression, and between two disparate movements, emerges *Akt-schön!*

Both Actionism and Disco are influences on the histories of performance art and my own art practice. Aesthetically both tend towards my contradictory aesthetic tastes. While Actionism emerged as a violent, masculine and very heterosexual reaction to the commodification of art and the move towards a totalising art practice that breaks traditions of painting and sculpture, Disco emerged as a reaction to the domination of rock music and the stigmatisation of dance music by counterculture with its roots in African-American, gay and psychedelic communities. While aesthetically different, and while effectively calling forth different scenes, politically they might be considered as creating colloquial movements by subverting dominant art forms.

Akt-schön!, another (invented) collocation (translated into “Viennese” as “beautiful-act” or as the imperative to “act-beautiful”) can be considered as an attempt to call forth a new myth or movement by combining unlikely elements to produce a destabilising affect. The piece was performed across multiple contexts with multiple incarnations and something different was produced each time. In my research on the two movements during a residency at METAL South End on Sea in October 2011, I converged two video clips from YouTube: One, a “How to dance disco?” tutorial featuring a white middle class Scandinavian heterosexual couple in provincial 80s attire as instructors, the other, a video by founding Actionist Otto Muehl, which features a line of oiled-up naked men bouncing up and down rubbing their bodies together in rhythmic choreography.⁶⁷ [Fig. 28.] My interest in these clips was the way they already showed their multiplicity and possible relations; the co-option of disco by a white middle class, and the incorporation of homoerotics in the “violent” and “macho” aesthetic of Actionism exposed them as porous and mutating, and not to mention both incorporating *contagious* gesticulation. This porousness makes

⁶⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, pp. 19-20.

⁶⁷ Owen Parry, “Culture LAB Residency: Comedy and Live Art”, at METAL, South End on Sea, October 2011.

them vulnerable to each other but also vulnerable to becoming a major language and thus reaffirming institutional values. I therefore introduced a third video to my collection of Disco and Actionism: the video of a production line at a factory that produces Viennetta ice cream. As the great artist David Hoyle might say: "I'll leave that with you".

I will look now at three versions of this piece and how it changed across spaces:

1. *The O Show*

In Utrecht, Netherlands in May 2011, I was invited to take part in an interview about my practice on *The O Show* - an Internet based Television Chat Show with a live studio audience hosted by the American-Jewish- and at-the-time pregnant artist – Oriana Fox.⁶⁸ I decided to enact myself as a counter-cultural cliché co-opted by daytime TV for entertainment purposes, and elicited boos and hisses from the studio audience upon my entrance. [Fig. 29.]

Oriana told the studio audience and those watching at home that I had agreed to come on the show under the condition that I could perform for them. My performance on the *O Show* can be described as a parody of the performance artist as a counter-cultural superficial-narcissistic-Goth, whose family are "in ruins" after s/he had been taken over by the "cult of performance art." My appearance on *The O Show* included a performed *Akt-schön!*, which consisted of a fan dance or flag choreography of sorts with some face wipes, which I then used to clean my beautiful anus. It also included the screening of a short clip of Twinkle from *I Wanna be in that Film* (2010) figured as a "concerned relative" in the context of the chat show. Afterwards the host Oriana interviewed me about my experience of said "cult".

⁶⁸ Oriana Fox, "The O Show", *Performance Studies International*, Utrecht, Netherlands, May 2011.



Fig. 29.



Fig. 30.

2. *A Queer (Dis)position*

The Second incarnation was at a performance event titled *A Queer (Dis)position* at]Performance Space[in London in June 2011. The event featured other artists whose work sits mostly within actionist vocabularies: duration, body art, deconstructions and slow temporalities, and these were staged within this event as practices and perhaps representations of queer strategy. *My Akt-schön!*

expressed a kind of “disidentification”, to borrow Jose Esteban Munoz’s term of “tactical misrecognition”, with the kinds of work (posited as queer strategies) in the context of the event.⁶⁹ In this sense the context gave my work meaning. Set beside other works that mostly drew on an Actionist vocabulary, I definitely felt the sense of what O’Sullivan calls “being a stranger in ones own tongue.” In place of an action I presented my *Akt-schön!*: an attempt to infuse the bare concrete Actionist gallery with a bit of glamour. I wore a waist length maroon wig, second-hand Versace print shirt and grey polyester suit a la Robert Mapplethorpe, which I eventually took off to reveal a Stripagram G-string from Primark. I adopted certain gestures recognisable within an actionist vocabulary. There was a sense of ritual. I handed the hottest boy in the room a crystal ball. I speeded up the temporality of the ritual, theatricalised it with a droned out speech and improvised dance routine. [Fig. 30.] It was Karen Finley meets Balearic Hotel Hypnotist in an art gallery in Hackney Wick. I recorded a sound bite of Bridges singing her bellowing “ak-shown” which I edited to repeat over and over – almost like an hypnotic mantra or call to prayer, or a call to act, a call “to do something”. Against the repeated sound and call for “ak-shown” I did very little apart from flounce around, re-perform the fan dance/flag choreography and face-anus-wipe-action. I did not completely refuse Actionism or an Actionista vocabulary, but we might consider the way I both disidentified and subverted the actionist genre by simultaneously doing it and allowing other languages to infiltrate the performance and the performance scene at]performance s p a c e[.

3. *Villa I*

The third version was performed at an event called *Villa I – This House is Triadic Fascist and made of Industry Glass in February 2012*, hosted by ex Goldsmiths students at The George and Dragon, a local gay pub in the South London borough of Lewisham. I performed the face-anus-wipe-*Akt-schön!* again with a series of new gestures and actions and this time with the additional layering of Ultravox’s ‘80s hit “Vienna” with its bellowing lyrics: “this means nothing to

⁶⁹ Jose Esteban Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)

me... ah, Vienna!" I unbuttoned the sleeve of my right arm (*Versace*) and rolled it up to reveal an elbow and a thick black arrow pointing to said elbow. I cleaned the elbow with the little face wipe, linking quite randomly my lovely clean anus with my now clean elbow. In this incarnation I was obsessed with the idea that fascists (following the event theme) have very clean, shaved anuses, and that my little *Akt-schön!* would incorporate this fascinating fascistic aesthetic, to subvert it from within (my clean anus).

This performance took place after midnight at the club, by which time the entire audience was drunk or on drugs and the performance was mostly ignored. This might be an interesting prospect. The artist and founding member of noise band Throbbing Gristle – Genesis P-Orridge describes their performance methodology in an interview: "We try to imagine the audience are already dead and then we don't have to refer to their wants or desires or feel we're trying to pander to what they want us to be."⁷⁰ I adopted a similar method in this scenario, although I did not have to imagine that my audience were dead already because lots of them appeared to be dead or almost dead.

Across all three contexts there was a shift in myth making, which we might consider as moving between creating a counter-knowledge and a counter-to-knowledge as the worked moved between representation and non-representation.⁷¹ It is not the case that the performance just did not work across all three contexts (although this is also possible), but that the work never seemed to find a "home", and this I want to re-consider as its very potential. Rather than merely perpetuating the myths and vocabularies of major performance languages, or pandering to audience's desires, I aimed to subvert the major performance languages by allowing opportunities for acts of tactical misrecognition, creating new lines of narrative that connected the piece to each new context, and *elsewhere* beyond those contexts.

⁷⁰ Dirt 3, "interview with Genesis P-Orridge", *Brainwashed*, December 1978. <<http://www.brainwashed.com/tg/interview/dirtgpo.htm>> [Accessed 3 September 2013]

In *The O Show* version I felt that my over-identification with the clichéd image of a performance artist had been misread merely as a parody or “piss-take” of performance art. At *A Queer (Dis)position* the work was mistaken as “trashing” seminal performance artist Ron Athey’s *Solar Anus*. Although this was definitely not my intention - why rule this out? And in the third version, it was mostly ignored. I find it very difficult to articulate what happened at *Villa 1* because I remember very little of what happened that night. Seeing the video documentation there were moments completely unrecognisable to me. This was more than a failure of memory (amnesia) or a strategic (postmodern) “lack of historicity”, but perhaps a productive failure to reproduce an art that looks like a critical art, or an art we might consider entertaining or worth remembering. Instead it produced a sort of strange layering of concepts, materials and performances that perhaps resonated (*mystically*) somewhere else. Ultravox’s song *Vienna* related my performance back to the project’s “Viennese” connections, but the words also denied any meaningful relation through a kind of parody: “this means nothing to me...” set against my nonsensical gestures. Unlike *The O Show* version, the iteration of Ultravox’s lyrics against an absurd assemblage of actions does more than form a parody of performance art: it performs fictional realness by taking itself seriously as a phoney fiction. It was both incessantly *doing* it and taking the piss, at the same time.

This movement helps define a self and refuse a self. It is not the case that a self is never made or recognisable, but rather that the self is multiple and belongs to something much greater like a scene, perhaps, or is produced in relation to a scene. The self can only call forth new scenes by opening up to its multiplicities and thus connection to a broader network – which the *Villa 1* version perhaps achieves best. Ultimately across all three spaces (and perhaps scenes) *Akt-schön!* seemed to affectively inhabit the drone of Bridge’s strange iteration “ak-shown”. In *Villa I* in particular there is a sense that information and referent has been emptied out, but interestingly the piece in this instance felt like it achieved “*Akt-schön!*” – completely exploding either Viennese Actionism or Disco. It offered perhaps a glimpse of something incomparable to either. The work becomes colloquial by wantonly diverging, shifting across a variety of “art” and

“non-art” scenes including an artist residency, Internet tv, a performance space, and pubs and clubs.

Christeene and Die Antwoord: A New Colloquialism

I turn now to the work of South African rap-rave group Die Antwoord (SA) and American “drag terrorist” Christeene Vale (US), both of whom create a new colloquial art that responds to our increasingly networked times. Drawing on and exploding aspects of self-mythology, gossip, parody and super-parody, they create performances, music and videos by exploiting the Internet as a platform for publicising and staging their works. In this section I question the potential emergence of a new colloquial language in performance where “global” network is the new “local” context.

I recently attended Die Antwoord and Christeene concerts in London in June 2013. Christeene (Paul Soileau) is an American “drag terrorist” characterized as a sexually infused sewer of live rap and vile shamelessness. Die Antwoord are a South African rap-rave group made up of three members – Yo-landi Vi\$\$er (Anri du Toit), Ninja (Waddy Jones) and someone they call DJ Hi-Tech (played by various different people). Both Christeene and Die Antwoord have gained notoriety for their outrageous high energy and patently “trashy” performances, which most have experienced by watching their music videos, interviews and documentation of their concerts online.⁷² Both Die Antwoord and Christeene have embraced the Internet as a medium for developing their work and reaching audiences worldwide. Having become a huge fan of their trending music videos online over the past few years, I was utterly thrilled to finally see both in the flesh and by coincidence in the same week.

Both concerts were brilliant, hot, sweaty, exhilarating, terrifying and lived up to my expectations. Beyond my expectations there were also brilliant contradictory sensations produced by their performances that left me questioning both sentiment and meaning. Die Antwoord and Christeene’s

⁷² See: Christeene, “African Mayonnaise” *Vimeo* 2012. <<https://vimeo.com/34341636>> [Accessed 12 August 2013]

performances and videos operate at high-speed frequency, often escaping any narrative, producing multifaceted myths with post-internet identities. There is an ambivalent subversiveness in their shows; one is never quite sure if their intentions are critical or if they are just having a good time. What was clear at both concerts was that *something* was happening. This was noted in the swelling energy and enthusiasm of the audiences. Both have developed a successful cult following.

Die Antwoord's songs, including *Evil Boy* (2010), *Rich Bitch* (2011), and *I Fink You Freaky* (2012) amongst others, are always accompanied by an outrageous music video in which they infiltrate and spread their zef aesthetic. According to group member Yo-landi – zef is “associated with people who soup their cars up and rock gold and shit. Zef is, you're poor but you're fancy. You're poor but you're sexy, you've got style”.⁷³ In an essay by Anton Krueger on the band's distinct aesthetics, zef is discussed as a particular South African style emerging since the end of Apartheid in 1994. As Krueger writes: “It involves a way of presenting a persona in a purposefully degrading way, exaggerating one's appearance and mannerisms as low class, ill bred, and boorish.”⁷⁴ While Krueger considers zef as “an authentic representation (albeit exaggerated) of a confused, multi-lingual emerging national identity” in South Africa,⁷⁵ there are obvious similarities between zef and the proliferation of “chav” and “bling” and “trash” in the northern hemisphere. We might then also consider Die Antwoord's work and aesthetic beyond the South African context, and as a language developed within a global network, otherwise known as the Internet.

Christeene, a biological male who waves his penis round and whose drag does not attempt to imitate the female or male gender, similarly draws on white

⁷³ Hermione Hoby, “Die Antword: ‘Are we awful, or the best thing in the universe?’” *The Observer*, 12 September, 2010
<<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/sep/12/die-antwoord-music-feature>>
[Accessed 10 August 2013]

⁷⁴ Anton Krueger, “Part II: Zef/Poor White Kitsch Chique: Die Antwoord's Comedy of Degradation”, *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 13. 3-4 (399-408), p. 404.

⁷⁵ Krueger, p. 406.

trash and pop culture and sings songs like *African Mayonnaise* (2012) and *Tears from my Pussy* (2011) with reckless charm, aggressive care and a Southern drool. Both Die Antwoord and Christeene adopt intense and fragmented characterisations with questionable incentives that seem to explode out of the Internet – the network (not context) from which they have gained their notoriety. Their high-energy performances propel audiences to respond with elated feelings of both belonging (we have all come to see this, we are dancing, we are sweating next to each other) and confusion (are they “for real”? I’m not sure how to feel about their politics? Are they being ironic/sincere?) Fictional Realness is produced in their acts and videos through an excessive over-identification with trash, pop and counter-culture, which moves their work beyond simplified cliché to a kind of absurdity. As Krueger also points out in regards to Die Antwoord:

One gets the feeling that they are not only mocking the establishment by sneering at it from a Zef perspective, but also parodying the idea of being Zef. It almost feels like parody for its own sake –an exuberant irreverence; a flamboyant display without any fixed enemy or goal.⁷⁶

They perform (affirm) and parody (make fun of) zef at the same time, adopting cult strategies and unstable fragmented identities with a throwaway charisma to match. They are not unlike punk, but neither can they be seen as the offspring of their often too clichéd elders. They are definitively, and very urgently, pushing forth a new aesthetic that incorporates all the ambivalences of living in high-speed, hyper-virtual, networked world.

On stage at the Brixton Academy the Die Antwoord trio emerge in high visibility orange hoodies and baggy pants that glow in the dark. Behind them onstage is an inflatable figure (a plasticised sacred object, normally carved in wood and used in tribal rituals, but also sold in “hippy shops” in the West) with a humongous erect “penification”. This is a reoccurring emblem throughout their music videos. The group’s logo – a kind of geometric stag – and visuals from

⁷⁶ Krueger, p. 407.



Fig. 31. a/b/c.

their music videos are projected behind them. In Christeene's gig, a more intimate venue at the Vogue Fabrics club in Dalston in East London, we are in a cramped dirty basement that definitely adds to Christeene's "sewer rat" reputation. [Fig. 31 a/b/c.] On arrival – being carried in, arse first, by two of "ma Boyz" her six-foot-plus backing dancers, many are greeted with a face full of Christeene's arse as the boys push her arse-first into audience members' faces on route to the stage. Christeene is dressed in very little – just a string vest, a grubby thong, her black wig thrown on, smudged lipstick and dirt, and intense indigo contact lenses. Her look is simple. Her attitude is fierce.

Die Antwoord and Christeene definitively play with meaning and often exceed parody or criticism through their contradictory acts. One example is Christeene's play on sincerity when one audience member at the concert heckled, "Sing *African Mayonnaise*" (her biggest hit) to which she replied: "Don't you dare motherfucker. Asking me to sing *African Mayonnaise* is like asking me to sing *Border Line...*" (Madonna's hit single).⁷⁷ Christeene's disidentification with the commercial artist and mainstream drag artists who impersonate Madonna, is soon counteracted when smiling through her rotten looking teeth and smudged lipstick she retracts: "And gees I love me some Borderline."⁷⁸ Meaning and sincerity is produced and undermined through playful contradictions that de-stabilises her performance and brings up questions of what is and what is not sincere, critical, real or "for real". The refusal is indeterminate – even finally refusing to disidentify with the commercial artist Madonna. The narrative, if there is one, like the characterization, is always temporary, and her position is indeterminate. Nevertheless, we feel a strange sincerity in Christeene's contradiction that resonates as a subversion – not against – but perhaps within the major language. This is a kind of fictional realness, a generosity that exposes her work as play – both real and fictional.

⁷⁷ Christeene, Vogue Fabrics, Dalston, 24 June 2013.

⁷⁸ Christeene, Vogue Fabrics

In Die Antwoord's recent music video for their single *Fatty Boom Boom* (2013), another commercial pop star is featured. "Mother monster" aka Lady Gaga is parodied in her famous meat dress, which has been openly criticised as constituting a copy of the Canadian artist Jana Sterbak's sculpture *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987). In the video a very specific narrative unfolds: The Gaga impersonator (who appears as a representation of a Gaga impersonator, rather than someone trying to pass as Gaga) gets taken on a safari tour of the South African suburbs – "the concrete jungle" – with the guide pointing out the various local species, "the naughty hyenas", "the shop owner chilling with his black panther", "the Lion King" and "oh, and here we have some local musicians, about to kick some funky tunes" – the guide points to Die Antwoord. [Fig. 32 a/b/c] In the video Yo-landi wears a yellow dress, her body and face painted black, she spits the lyrics "Murder Murder Murder/kill kill kill", and we don't know if she is protesting or celebrating. The video edit then skips between Yo-landi in blackface and whiteface and Ninja dressed in what looks like football hooligan attire complete with stripy face paint, and DJ Hi-tech who wears a mask obscuring his face a la Pussy Riot. Intermittently dancers in "onesies" with childish prison designs, reminiscent of Ninja's own tattoos, dance wild choreographies. The group are singing, drumming and gesturing furiously. They are not just "zef" – they are "zef power". They seem to be angry, but we do not know what about. Meaning in this instance is produced in their work through affect.

At some point in the parody sequence, (which it skips back to) masked characters hijack the safari bus and a distressed Gaga escapes. Looking in palpable discomfort "Gaga" walks into a dentist/gynaecologist to get a parasite/giant prawn removed from her vagina. It is then assumed that the Lion King eventually eats the Gaga impersonator as the sketch ends with the impersonator's wig in the lion's mouth and blood on the pavement. This is an obvious parody: a response to Gaga, who according to gossip magazines and

press, had invited the band to join her tour as her support act, and which they vehemently turned down.⁷⁹



Fig. 32. a/b/c

⁷⁹ Adam Haupt, "Die Antwoord's revival of blackface does South Africa no favours", *Guardian* 22 October 2012. <<http://www.theguardian.com/global/2012/oct/22/die-antwoord-blackface-south-africa>> [Accessed on 3 July 2013]

While a series of obvious fictions are played out against each other in this video, the question of realness prevails. During several instances when discussing these artists with friends and colleagues, I have noticed people's tendency to confirm that they are the "real deal." However, Die Antwoord make it clear that for them questions about reality are not interesting. In an interview the group label their work "documentary fiction" and "exaggerated experience", which draws on everyday realities and cultural significations and mixes them up with other realities – virtual, actual and fictional.⁸⁰ Group member Ninja (Waddy Jones) says: "Ninja is, how can I say, like Superman is to Clark Kent. The only difference is I don't take off this fokken Superman suit." [sic]⁸¹ Realness is not a blending in, but a becoming intensely fictional here. Ninja responds to the ponderings over their realness and says: "Some people are too far gone. They'll just keep asking, 'Is it real? Is it real?' That's dwanky. That's a word we have in South Africa, 'dwanky.' It's like lame. 'Is it real?' Dwanky. You have to be futuristic and carry on." [sic]⁸²

Despite being called Die Antwoord (Afrikaans for "The Answer"), it is clear that the group don't have the answer, or rather don't want to give the answer. Die Antwoord's refusal to discuss their "act" elicits instead a series of questions and responses from their audience about their integrity. Uninterested in truth seeking, the quest to fix identity and prove them fake is less an insult, and more an always already thwarted possibility. Die Antwoord, I would argue, escape complete critical capture as we don't know whether to take them seriously or not. This perhaps produces the "futuristic" quality that Ninja talks about. This excess to the point of ambiguity is also the work of fictional realness, but when transferred from the Internet to a cultural context, problems consequently emerge. Before I address this, however, another comparison might be made between Christeene and Die Antwoord.

⁸⁰ See: David Marchese, "Die Antwoord's Totally Insane Words of Wisdom", *Spin*, 7 February 2012 [Accessed on 8 August 2013: <http://www.spin.com/articles/die-antwoords-totally-insane-words-wisdom/>]

⁸¹ Marchese, *Spin*

⁸² Marchese, *Spin*

Accessibility is foremost important for both, or so their stories go. In interviews Die Antwoord often discuss the DIY dimensions of their work, saying that anyone with a camera and Internet connection can start a band just as they did. For Christeene her work is “for everyone”. It certainly has reached millions via the Internet, but the explicit ends of her performances ensure that it will never be staged “for everyone”. In an interval between songs Christeene chatted with the intimate audience: “You know this is not some elitist shit for arty fags”, she said to the predominantly arty and faggy crowd. “I want everyone here. Mothers with their new born babies... everyone.”⁸³ This is of course part of Christeene’s fictional realness played out in overdrive in a Dalston basement club where she spits at audience members and repeatedly falls into them, pulls something out of her arse, crowd surfs, performs frantic dance routines and also rims her two six-foot-plus backing dancers. Christeene knows her work is not for “everyone”, but is defiant in not compromising her acts for a Madonna-style-crowd. Her affirmation seems to express a desire for a world in which more people experience acts like hers, but the explicit value of her work ensures that this will never happen. Her audience is exemplified in the demographic that have watched her videos online and who came to see her perform. Finally, Christeene, like a sewer rat that has survived a nuclear storm, mounts her “boyz”, rises and sings the song we have all been waiting for:

*I am your new celebrity
I am your new America
I am that piece of filthy meat you take home and treat to yourself*⁸⁴

This self-mythologising piece of “filthy meat” (a filthy product of both commercial and avant-garde performance, of tender conviviality and explicit antagonism) is what is offered up as potential. Potential, precisely because we cannot be sure whether or not she is “that piece of filthy meat” she says she is. This play on what is “fiction” and what is “real”, the blurring effect between the two, is part of her fictional realness, which also makes her work so difficult to “take home” and write about.

⁸³ Christeene, *Vogue Fabrics*

⁸⁴ Christeene, *African Mayonnaise*, 2012

How to Read?

The various ways histories and identities are represented and appropriated in Die Antwoord and Christeene predictably beckon reaction and criticism. Christeene's *Tears From My Pussy* (2011) might be read as misogynistic and unsympathetic given her disidentification with female, male and trans identities, as might Die Antwoord's blackface as ultimately racist. But fascism's terrifying possibility is not only staged in their lyrics and representations; the act of reading, the search for truth and meaning in their works becomes a troubling and potentially fascistic act in and of itself.⁸⁵

Rather than positioning themselves against fascist imagery by invoking pointless positive images of minorities, or worse still, ignoring difference because it is too risky (something I could have also done here), I want to think about the ways Die Antwoord productively mix fascistic representations, signs and gestures to confuse and make any easy reading of their work or politics *impossible*. By staging representations of thugs, football hooligans, blackface/whiteface, and Gaga they draw on the energies of violent practices, but put them to work differently, subverting them by turning them into strange celebratory fictions. They are not outside "fascism", but they are perhaps acknowledging that they are part of it, and drawing on its "fascinating", persuasive qualities to do something ultimately different.

In a *Guardian* article following the release of *Fatty Boom Boom*, Die Antwoord's "use" of blackface is brought to critical speculation. Drawing on post-colonial theory to support his argument, the journalist Adam Haupt offers a reading of *Fatty Boom Boom* using Eric Lott's *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the America Working Class*, which discusses the privilege of white people

⁸⁵ I use the term fascism here with an awareness of its ambivalent meaning and usage, which relates it back to a minor literature. Fascism, for George Orwell, is almost entirely meaningless, in that it is synonymously used like the term "bully". (*What is Fascism?*, 1944) And Richard Griffiths says that fascism is the most misused, and overused word of our times. (*Fascism*, 2005) In this sense, I am using it to describe a sense of oppression felt by individuals and communities. Like a foot stamping down repeatedly on a face: You know it through feeling it. As such fascism is not what I consider as *felt* in Die Antwoord.

appropriating black culture as a means of profit.⁸⁶ Haupt writes: “Blackface revealed less about black subjects and more about white racist projections of black identities”.⁸⁷ Love’s book argues that profit is made in white appropriations of black culture, subsuming it as a style. The inclusion of zef and indeed blackface is undeniably loaded and problematic. This becomes particularly the case at the concert in Brixton (a place famous for its riots in 1981 and Afro-Caribbean community) when a bunch of white middle class teenagers turn up at the venue in blackface. We might have to consider, then, the different contexts in which their work operates. There is a relative freedom and use of images on the Internet compared to the sense of responsibility bared upon any work when presented in a specific cultural context. As proven in my own performance work – context always elicits meaning. Krueger also comments on the different experience of spectatorship from the festival context to the individuated experience of watching their videos online, but also notes that Internet clips are nowadays premised on personal connections. For example a friend from Spain posted *Fatty Boom Boom* on my Facebook wall. Krueger adds: “In this way, an Internet community is set up by links, which continuously shape a living culture between individual connections.”⁸⁸

Die Antwoord’s appropriations are complex and simple: complex when produced as Internet fictions, but simple when produced in cultural contexts. Their work is ultimately multi-faceted (demonstrated in the switching between characters in the video), but the question still remains as to whether their fictional realness permits them the opportunity to surpass their own whiteness and their own responsibility for the images they create (and indeed others imitate) when in a given cultural context. We might also ask if this writing (as a fiction) can permit me the opportunity to renounce my own identity and quit the chase for the answer (*die antwoord*), in order to savour the radically destabilising sensations I felt upon experiencing their work?

⁸⁶ See: Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the America Working Class*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993)

⁸⁷ Haupt, *Guardian*

⁸⁸ Krueger, p. 404.

Haupt, the journalist, is also brought to question the means by which one should “read” Die Antwoord’s work. The journalist writes: “How do we read Yolandi’s blackened body? How do we read their invocation of a racist tradition of theatre, music and cinema in the US and South Africa’s history of the coon carnival? Are they deconstructing our racist past, or is it a publicity stunt – a shot at another viral YouTube video?”⁸⁹ Die Antwoord only make it possible to elicit such questions by means of presenting their “problematic” representations and it is through such moves that we are brought to the undeniably ethical question “how to read?”.

Let us return to the ‘80s ballroom for a moment, and to the colloquial use of the term “read”, which is currently having a revival in contemporary music, and which might offer a way to *read* Die Antwoord.

Ima Read

*Ima read that bitch
ima read ima read ima read
ima read ima read ima read
ima take that bitch to college
ima teach that bitch some knowledge...⁹⁰
Zebra Katz*

In an article on the hip-hop artist Zebra Katz, (US) who interestingly featured as the support act for Die Antwoord in London, there is a discussion of the term “read”, which forms the title of Katz’s most successful track *Ima Read*, (2011) and which gained notoriety after designer Rick Owens used it for his Paris fashion show in 2012. The article describes how “being ‘read’ is a term drawn from ballroom culture.”⁹¹ Its colloquial meaning was to insult someone in the bitchiest terms imaginable. “‘Read’, in that context, means to cut someone down

⁸⁹ Haupt, *Guardian*

⁹⁰ See: Zebra Katz, “Ima Read”, *YouTube* (2011).

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oo4Sqt2Bmag>> [Accessed 13 July 2013]

⁹¹ Hermione Hoby, “Zebra Katz: Creating a string black, queer male is something that needed to happen,” *Guardian*, 25 May 2013.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2013/may/25/zebra-katz-interview-ima-read>> [Accessed 30 June 2013]

to size, to flex your bitchiness.”⁹² I wonder how to “read” Die Antwoord? I wonder how to respond to their work? Might we offer a colloquial response too? Not by imitating 80s ballroom talk necessarily, but by offering something sympathetically colloquial as a response, something that also produces the ambiguity and unfixeness of their work – something that offers generative extension, over reductive conclusion.



Fig. 33.

In an interview Zebra Katz discusses the recuperation of the term “Bitch” invoked eighty-seven times throughout his track. As one of very few openly gay black rappers in America, (although he refuses that his work is “gay” or “queer rap”) Zebra Katz says: “It’s seen as a very misogynist word in hip-hop but we’re trying to numb it.”⁹³ “Bitch” is not the only subject given a re-valorisation in the *Ima Read* music video. His collaborator Njena Reddd Foxxx is also reclaiming “school girl realness”, dressed and strutting the schoolgirl “look”. [Fig. 33.] Zebra Katz’ African-American identity affords him the right to borrow from what is maintained in history as colloquial or minoritarian slang, a privilege Die Antwoord as white South Africans questionably hold. And so the problem remains as to whether Die Antwoord are permitted to borrow from black culture, whether their performances are legitimate as a result of mixed and confused South African identities post Apartheid, or whether their fictions are performances for a new global network, where multiple identities are possible?

⁹² Hoby, *Guardian*

⁹³ Hoby, *Guardian*

I wonder if Zebra Katz literally performs the “support act” at Brixton by providing Die Antwoord with the critical context and history to perform their antics knowingly. This is a clever move. While Die Antwoord offers Zebra Katz exposure to their growing audiences, Zebra Katz offers Die Antwoord a legitimate cultural history from which to draw upon. It also confirms that there are no racist implications in their work. Similarly the repeated invocation in interviews that DJ Hi-tek is gay (although he is a fictional persona played by multiple people) authorises Die Antwoord’s employment of macho images associated with homophobia too. It thus stretches the potential of identities, rather than confining gay identity to conventional stereotype. While Zebra Katz provides context for Die Antwoord, we might also remember that this was the very service they refused to provide for the commercial artist Gaga. I would argue that despite their ambiguous ethics and politics, they are incessant on maintaining a colloquial status. This exemplified in their concert when they refused to play their new track *Cookie Thumper*, (2013) which had been released that same week.

Despite their questionable incentives and tactical ignorance, the very fact that Die Antwoord, a group with millions of fans worldwide, elicit questions about identity and political strategy in a time when pop music is so bereft of any politics is, for me at least, inspiring. Die Antwoord offer a multitude of references and appropriations that might be thought of as crystal-like: they offer the equation: *black/white minstrel + football hooligan + Zef + trash + bling + chav + Jean-Michel Basquiat-esque + prison tattoo + inflatable penification + Gaga + fascist = Fictional Realness*. In other words they offer something that surpasses all these things as individual categories, by offering up their mutated representations as a future to come. Die Antwoord offer more than a deconstruction or parody of blackface. Their childish appropriations and irreverence surpass the act of reductive reading and always potentially misreading, rendering the act of *reading* in a major language, which this thesis attempts to disrupt, as always potentially fascistic.

Misreading, Mishearing

While I do not propose that we “read” Die-Antwoord here in the ballroom sense of the word “read”, I am interested in how the group challenge and permit the opportunity to misread, and how a tactical misreading might be a fitting act. As Krueger writes in regards to Die Antwoord: “There is both an air of resignation, of giving over to whatever meaning might be supplied by an outsider, as well as an attitude of irreconcilable defiance.”⁹⁴ In the video of *Fatty Boom Boom* we are confronted with its myriad of potential references, contrasted images and irreverent lyrics. In one moment I thought I heard the derogatory “N” word being iterated from Ninja, who is dressed as a football Hooligan, but when I researched the lyrics I found that what was actually being uttered was the singer’s name “Ninja”. He raps and critiques rap, subverting at the same time as doing it: “Rappers r fucking boring Ninja bashing dere brainz” [sic]. Reading and misreading, hearing and mishearing, any attempt to make sense or meaning is shown to be always potentially fascistic, just as it can also be potentially productive in other ways, if only to open up this discussion. Such moments of misreading/mishearing expose racism as always potentially at stake, even in my own reading, and any attempt to make meaning out of their antics, or to read their work for its critical intentions becomes a potentially fascistic and colonising act in and of itself.

Ultimately I have struggled to *read* Die Antwoord and Christeene. The choice to give a post-colonial, feminist or queer reading reduces their work to an already established institutional framework and denies the multiple other possibilities of their work. But equally the choice to refuse such readings and merely discuss their work in terms of a contextless Internet phenomenon, or through its multiplicities or assemblages, would be to deny its fascistic implications, which definitely present problems (especially Die Antwoord) when shifted from Internet to cultural context. As questions of authenticity and truth are refused, it might be their fictional realness – a belief in the fictions they construct – that we find the colloquial logics of their productions.

⁹⁴ Krueger, p. 407.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered three moves towards a theory of a colloquial art and performance practice. Firstly, an overview of four colloquial processes that call forth an informal (representational) and sometimes nonformal (and non-representational) language that works to disrupt major performance languages. Ultimately at stake across self-mythology, gossip, parody and super-parody, is the work of affirmative fiction. Secondly, I have discussed how my practice produces multiple fictions. In *Akt-schön!* I put my colloquial subject to work by collocating two unlikely movements (mirroring fictional realness). I expose the multiplicity of each, and the potential to produce the “third kind” – a new colloquial language. Thirdly, I offer a shift between context and network, representation and non-representation, tactics and strategies in the work of Christeene and Die Antwoord. I have discussed how their problematic acts and questions over their realness effectively produce the questions of ethics.

Throughout I have incorporated the term realness used in the ‘80s drag balls, and also put it to new use – but without ignoring its historical relevance, and without policing its transformations in the hands of non-blacks and commercial television. I have focused instead on the generative potentials, on what art and performance needs to do in order to maintain its colloquial, and thus revolutionary potential, particularly as it increasingly operates within institutions, popular culture and the Internet. Becoming colloquial within the institution provides a means of subverting the institutional language from within. This has been one potential aspect of this thesis – a means of creating a “counter-knowledge” (amongst collective scenes) and a “counter-to-knowledge” (to call forth a new scene). Both are achieved through a knowledge *felt* and *sensed* by scenes and individuals over institutional logic. For now, because it will undoubtedly continue to transform, we might call this knowledge – Fictional Realness.

Public Service Announcement

Beware of the LOLing Troll¹

Ladies and ~~queens~~ CENTIMETRES, ladies and ~~queens~~ CENTIMETRES; this is a service announcement. Listen to what “R” is about to say very carefully: a new language is emerging and if you don’t put down your ego and learn it too, you will be left behind to grow depressed and mouldy like Morrissey... Ladies and ~~Queens~~ CENTIMETRES, it is important that you hear R call. This new language ~~we~~ R cannot see yet, because it is only partially formed, or rather, we ~~are~~ R being used like lab rats to test it. Most of the time ~~we~~ R don’t even realize this. We R to busy drinking flat whites and worrying about R beautiful pine trees. This new language, which some have begun to call “Fictional Realness”, “Penification”, “Globalese” and “Yoko Ono” is infiltrating homes from Dallas to Nairobi, corrupting not only the white and wealthy, or “QUOTE” – “lesbian vegan separatists”, but everyone with a nine inch dongle and Wi-Fi connection. It is germinating as we speak... contaminating currency, clocks, aviation, and massive architecture; the statue of liberty; the Alhambra; the Pyramids in Egypt; igloos on the north circular. It is transforming our poor-beautiful arts too! The Mona Lisa is a now cargo boat smuggling fugitive figurines; a Sainsbury’s plastic bag a luxury streamline yacht; the swift brushing of hair – a folkloric dance routine in Poland; the plucking of eyebrows – a counter-cultural movement in Togo. Everything’s the same!

¹ In internet slang, a troll is a person who starts arguments or upsets people, by posting inflammatory, extraneous or off-topic messages in an online community (such as a forum, chat room, or blog), either accidentally or with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal on-topic discussion.

Ladies and ~~Queens~~ CENTIMETRES, the Tiffany lamp has reformed as a plugless lava lamp. This is a crisis!

There are now lift systems in Hilton Hotels from London to Kyoto that take you to floors beyond the top floor and below the basement. In Austria I saw one that moves on the diagonal. Executives in Shanghai and cancer patients in Birmingham are using the Bayeux Tapestry as a detachable desktop mouse pad. GOD has now been a DOG for some time, and terrorist organisations R adopting this new unidentified language too. They wear multiple bangles and send selfies to presidents in Moscow and diplomats in Argentina. There is a twelve-year-old boy learning to masturbate right now, rubbing his shiny screen as you read this. This is urgent!

Even this is infected: all it tells me is “life is a cabaret”, “orange is the new black”, and “network is my new contortionist girlfriend”. Ladies and ~~queens~~ CENTIMETRES, there will be no more site-specific art... only Siberian landscapes: network, network, net-work. We will be “passing the poop back and forth, back and forth” and watching each other do this from a tree house resort perched on a Glacier in Greenland, which is not even Green. I hope you’re all OK with this. There will be no more his and hers terry towel robes either; you can forget that. Only vast amounts of cling film wrap to keep R from freezing or snapping, which we’ll find more exquisite than Kleenex. Inverted burkas will mean that body art will be happening at all times, and an infiltration of “bees” will mean we won’t hear anything other than the speedy flapping of their miniscule wings timed by infinity. Ladies and ~~Queens~~ CENTIMETRES, oh, what must performance art do next?

General Conclusion

This thesis has developed practical and conceptual responses to the following research questions:

- Can trashy tendencies push beyond cultural binaries, or are they dependent upon, and remain caught within, the dualities of “high” and “low” art, “legitimate” and “illegitimate” culture?
- And, how to stage, read, and write about trashy tendencies without recuperating them into institutional logic, or without producing an unsympathetic thesis?

I will now offer a consideration towards a conclusion and demonstrate how this thesis has approached answers to these questions. This conclusion will address the ways trashy tendencies offer *indeterminacy* as their radical potential through, on the one hand, their tactical accumulations and thus innate resilience to acts of closure, and on the other, a refusal to stick with modes and strategies outlined in discourses on the ephemeral, deconstructive and queer, which have already been given much consideration in the field of contemporary art and performance practice. Crossing between theoretical and practical elements, this thesis has also offered forms of writing that inhabit my subject of trash, by putting trash to work. The writing preceding this conclusion is but one example of ways trashy concepts can be put to work through performative writing, which extends the theoretical ideas through textured and emotive writing that stops making sense, but nevertheless creates an affective layering that resonates with the ideas and sensations the text wants to stage.

Trash Aesthetics + Trash Beyond Representation = Indeterminate Refusal

This thesis has demonstrated that while trashy tendencies refuse closure, they also offer something more complex and effective than a practice defined by constant fluidity – the kind of untraceable ephemerality Peggy Phelan sees as the unmarked ontology of performance or the kind of queerness that defines

itself by forms of mobility. As Jasbir Puar points out in her book *Terrorist Assemblages*, queer “can be an elite cosmopolitan formulation contingent upon various regimes of mobility.”¹ Queer, for Puar, privileges a mobility that not everyone has access to. It is therefore useful to clarify that queerness in this project has been defined by sex or contact, and not by a strategy or aesthetics per se. Becoming trashy does not always fit with queerness’ mobile regime, for trashy tendencies lead us to sometimes take position or get lodged in very unqueer places and ways both intentionally and unintentionally, for example in the anus’ of fascists (as explored in *Akt-schön!* Chapter 4), or when held hostage for forty minutes against ones will (as I was in *Performance for a Stranger* Chapter 3), or even in the library for six months finishing a PhD about these very experiences. All these places one might argue are very “queer”. But for the purpose of this thesis, and for those trashy subjects that do not fit into its mobile strategies, or who did not experience my performance, or do not have reader room membership, I propose a shift to *indeterminacy*. This indeterminacy is a kind of trashy tactic that allows access to an artwork at multiple levels, both complex and facile, but also through affect when a work or language stops making sense. This, I have argued, allows art to traverse spaces and forms but to also dwell sometimes in places and positions that appear to have little to offer. Such moves have perhaps been the most salient achievements of this project, for they have brought the very vital questions of art and performance to the fore.

The indeterminacy of trashy tendencies, I argue, shifts them beyond what Jeffrey Sconce describes as the “male, white, middle-class, and ‘educated’ perspective” of trash cinema,² and acknowledges, as JOMO member of the Black Orchid Collective does, queer theory’s “middle class ideology”.³ JOMO writes: “queer liberation is a Class Struggle”. [sic] JOMO, like Lisa Duggan and a number

¹ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 22.

² Jeffrey Sconce, “Trashing the Academy: Taste, Excess and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style”, *Screen* 36.4 (Winter 1995), p. 375.

³ See: JOMO (Black Orchid Collective), “Queer Liberation is a Class Struggle”, *Gathering Forces*, 8 January 2010. < <http://gatheringforces.org/2010/01/08/queer-liberation-is-class-struggle/> > [Accessed 3 September 2013]

of other queer thinkers, have more recently returned to questions first posited by Marxist feminist Selma James whose seminal piece *Sex, Race and Class* (1975) sought to reclaim women's liberation from the middle-classes. While I have deliberately not approached trashy tendencies as a queer and class subject, this has been tactical and as a means of not limiting this project to categorisation as "queer" or "trash", or leaving it to what de Certeau calls "its manipulation by users who are not its makers".⁴ Instead this thesis offers a range of methods and examples for thinking through the ethics of trashy tendencies, through which *doing* sex, work and class, becomes a question of ethics rather than a question of identity.

Indeterminacy is temporal, and neither predetermined nor completely undetermined. I have come to understand that refusal that takes on a permanent identity as refusal, as antagonistic, or as trash remains caught within the power dichotomy. In response to this, in Chapter 2 a show of "fanciful acts" is staged in which questions of "faith in the maker" are brought to the fore. In Chapter 3, a participatory artwork is staged in which a potential exploitation upon the art consumer (the participant) takes place as the work's very premise. In Chapter 4, a solo performance is staged across three events and through each event a different kind of mythmaking occurs, and questions of criticality and meaning, what is real and fictional become blurred. While meaning and intention is uncertain in all these works, I argue that they nevertheless offer pauses, or take a temporary position. These pauses are exemplified as literal, flat, surface events, which in place of confirming meaning render the act of seeking meaning, in some instances, silly and pretentious. For instance, in Chapter 2 I made a show I wanted to be in and called it *I Wanna be in that Show* whilst also referencing other works which artists' made and potentially wanted to be in; in Chapter 3, I made a participatory performance that literally enacted its title *Touching Feeling*; in Chapter 4, *Akt-schön!*, which I translate into "Viennese" as "beautiful- act", deliberately wants to enact its title. Still, despite

⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. xiii.

their literality, these performances could not be read as solely “literal”, as I have already pointed to their generative multiplicities, but neither could they be read as “deep” as they also in some cases escape representational modes and meaning.

Through this research I have come to understand the indeterminacy of trashy tendencies as different to Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive approach, who in refusing the “single”, claims to offer instead depth and ethicality. Derrida writes:

I absolutely refuse a discourse that would assign me a single code, a single language game, a single context, a single situation; and I claim this right not simply out of caprice or because it is to my taste, but for ethical and political reasons.⁵

While Derrida declares his refusal through language and discourse, announcing himself quite righteously as “ethical” and “political”, in trashy tendencies the act of refusal itself is acknowledged as also potentially a fictive or temporary “act”, or perhaps a taste for “a bit of refuse”. This offers in turn an efficacy (and ethicality) that is indeterminate rather than pathological, but nevertheless, open and responsive, even to that which might appear apolitical and unethical. In this sense it calls forth the ethical by means of refusing to *act* ethically (which I argue is also a refusal of the self), or by exposing the act at stake in claims of ethicality, whilst remaining open and responsive and allowing the opportunity to shift beyond the single and to the multiple. Trashy tendencies thus shift refusal beyond Derrida’s refusal, beyond performance’s inherent ephemerality and “refusal to remain”, and also beyond queerness’ “cosmopolitan” refusal of normativity. As Christeene (Chapter 4) reminded audiences at the Vogue Fabrics Club in Dalston: her work is not just for “arty faggy types” it’s also for “mothers with their newborn babies.” Nevertheless, Christeene’s performance, while appearing open to even “normative” types, remains defiantly trashy in order to maintain her bold peripheral status. There is an indeterminacy at stake, which refuses a queer or deconstructive reading by remaining neither

⁵ Jacques Derrida, “Remarks On Deconstruction and Pragmatism”, *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 1996.), p. 81.

antagonistic, nor always indeterminate. While there is a confusion present, this confusion nevertheless creates an affective sensation of refusal.

Since beginning this thesis, I have moved away from my initial understanding of trashy as operating at the limits of binaries like “easy” and “difficult”, exemplified in my introduction in the work of Warhol and Smith. Instead I have sought out other considerations of art beyond the “literal” or the “deep”. This thesis has also offered opportunities to think of trash beyond the negative and psychoanalytical, and as a more complex layering or “assemblage” of literal surfaces, which produces what Deleuze calls “density” or “intensity”. As a counterpoint to literality and depth, trash can be understood through each single layer, (through deconstructions that rely on language), or as an accumulative density of layers (which stop making sense, but which produces an affective knowledge beyond language). In *I Wanna be in that Film* (Chapter 2) this is staged in the opening sequence as a bejeweled hand pulls away layer after layer after layer of fabric, to only reveal more layers. There is a pause or moment of meaning or signification in the revelation of each layer, and then Twinkle, the film’s protagonist, who we finally encounter, is a complex amalgamation of more of these layers and surfaces – both real and fictional. This thesis has therefore demonstrated the value of both literality and depth, and the ways art might call for different approaches, such as *intense* affective ones.

Trashy tendencies offer a simultaneous incorporation and a way out of “trash” as aesthetic or style without declaring the authorial “I refuse”, or without necessarily always looking like “refuse” (i.e. trash). Artist and choreographer Yvonne Rainer most famously refused language in her prolific ‘60s “No Manifesto”, which included refusals such as “no to style”, “no to spectacle” and “no to trash imagery”, but nevertheless created a very specific oppositional style of aesthetic minimalism.⁶ Trashy tendencies, as I have demonstrated can offer something different, something beyond opposition and beyond a genre or

⁶ Yvonne Rainer, “No Manifesto”, *A woman who...*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 16. Originally published in *Tulane Drama Review*, 10.2 (Winter, 1965).

style we might recognise as “high” or “low” art. This thesis has thus employed trashy tendencies to move trash beyond its confines as a taste culture, which might be exclusive and only open to those in the know, and which relies on the dualities of the high and low. Instead, through trashy tendencies we might move towards that which becomes “trash” precisely because we do not know what it is anymore. This thesis has sought out ways to do this without losing the affective pleasures such as humour, which trashy genres afford, and has discovered that humour shifts from an ironic position (in the re-valorisation of trash in Trash Aesthetics) to a de-stabilising tickle and prickle (in Non-representational trash, through non-sense and abstraction). This thesis has refused to stay in the realm of art and performance too, and in the final chapter diverges into fields of music and pop culture by looking to Christeene and Die Antwoord, but it also digresses into what might be considered “high” theory by incorporating post-structuralist philosophies. Shifting between modes and practices, scholarly habits, values and seriousness itself is destabilised in order to allow other, unprescribed approaches to art and research to emerge.

The Parallel concepts staged throughout this thesis (and their crossings):

This thesis has created two concepts for thinking through the potentials of trashy tendencies: Trash Aesthetics, and Trash Beyond Representation (outlined in the introduction). In parallel to these concepts I have teased out theories that help us understand their differing approaches to trash. The first strand of Trash Aesthetics I have found relates more succinctly with theories of desire developed by Lacan and Foucault; the former in relation to a “lack” that may drive an art practice, and the latter in relation to trashy re-valorisations exemplified in parody and genre art, where trash’s negative connotation is re-valued in perverse or ironic pleasure. I have found it more useful, however, to turn to theories of desiring-production in the work of Deleuze and Guattari to think through the second strand of Trash Beyond Representation, which moves from the personal (and minority identity) – to the multiple and “becoming-minor”. The ways in which desire operates across my thesis should not be read as a trajectory from “lack” to desiring-production or vice versa. Instead, my use of the term desire fluctuates. By refusing to stick with one or the other, my aim

is critical and creative: to not be stuck with theoretical strategies, which might thwart trashiness, and to remain responsive; but also to make transparent the flaws of theoretical claims in art, for what can often claim to be democratic or free of ideology might still include trashy slippages of personal fantasy and desire. In place of pathologising these slippages (personal and subjective), I have considered them as productive in dismantling institutional strategies (and ideologies) and value systems by going too far, pushing at the limits of strategic regimes, opening up to the possibility of different becomings. Considering trashy tendencies in performance practice as only non-personal through Deleuzian terms, however, would miss the subjectivity inherent in the experience of art. Chapter 2 and 3 can be said to incorporate the subjective and relate more to critical reading and deconstructive procedures, while in Chapter 4, fiction (or fictional realness) comes into play to offer something generative for the future.

Furthermore, I have drawn on the differentiation between tactics and strategies as outlined by de Certeau, to think of the tactical elements of trashy tendencies. While I would argue that my second strand of *Trash Beyond Representation* is strategic in its refusal of the personal or singular, (and thus in de Certeau's lens belongs to institutions of power) I have refused to stick to my second or first strand in order to understand the idiosyncrasies of art practice. This has been tactical on my behalf. Following de Certeau, trashy tendencies are tactical and "in the heat of the moment" as opposed to pre-conceived and strategic, but may require strategising (reterritorialising) in order to fall outside the binaries of genre. Trashy tendencies may lead us to take a position too, if only temporarily as a form of "making do", and sometimes in the most inhospitable places. This renders their value indeterminate, which through this research I have come to understand as different to uncertainty, or procrastination, which is hesitant and indecisive and perhaps even a privilege. While resembling de Certeau's notion of "making do", they are also daring tendencies that risk reputation, value and failure and as such I have argued that they are *extra-ordinary* and offer something more than the ordinary or everyday. They accelerate the mundanity of trash through re-valorisations such as parody and irony, but can also push

beyond this and stop making sense. The latter I have referred to via Burrows as Super-parody. The greatest refusal in my thesis then has been to stick with one or the other, but I argue that not-knowing whether a work is re-valorising trash or is just trash (non-sense) is its most radical potential. As my *ManiFiesta* states, but so does the advertisement by Nike: “just do it!” This thesis has thus also considered ways of putting such co-opted slogans to work by “just doing it” (inhabiting it) and subverting it from within. In Chapter 4 I address this through deterritorialisations of the major language (power).

Another parallel I have discovered through this research is the relationship between de Certeau’s tactics and strategies and Samuel Delany’s concept of contact versus networking discussed in Chapter 3. What is interesting in Delany’s theories is that while contact (between different subjects and identities) is tactical and comes about in public sex theatres of New York City’s Times Square prior to its gentrification, it is also through contact (between art participants) that we might think of creating ruptures in the networked spaces of relational art and art festivals in general. This was my argument besides Bishop’s antagonistic strategy or Bourriaud’s convivial strategy. In Chapter 3 I also offered trashy relations such as sleaze (via tactics and contact) as a means to complicate this dichotomy.

It is useful to return to the notion of trash publics as outlined in the two strands developed in my introduction: the first read through Sconce’s work as forming a taste public, which comes together through a shared knowledge and taste for all things “trashy”; The second, in refusing representation, calls forth an affective community, which comes to experience and understand art “emotionally” through its textures or “intensities” rather than through recognisable language (Chapter 4). The latter may also call forth a community that is not in operation in this moment – a future community without a prescribed language to understand it yet. While these are two distinct moves, I have also argued in this thesis that the latter while operating affectively, might also risk becoming a taste-public – a public with a taste for negative affect, for disorientation and feeling uncomfortable (if strategies of abstraction and estrangement are the

name of their game). Such trashy affects have also been discussed throughout this thesis for their illuminating potential and thus might be likened to genres of the occult and horror. In this sense, I have found it useful to also be aware of the simple comparisons to be made, as complex assemblages can also resemble genre work. The difficulty with doing this is that the uncertainty (and surprise) of a work is brought into visibility and knowledge. In hindsight this thesis has explored the ways trashy tendencies refuse ideology based on the individual and single authoritative voice, but also refuses to remain multiple, because notions of multiplicity may also become problematic, as exemplified in Chapter 4, when white middle class teenagers turn up at a Die Antwoord concert in Brixton dressed in black face. In such moments, we are brought to question the limits of multiplicity and appropriation.

To conclude, I propose that this thesis has offered the most productive challenges to art and performance research precisely in the moments when it has failed to be read and be understood through the optics and logics of cultural production. Given that much of trash's oppositional strategies have been co-opted by neoliberalism, the corporatisation of Gay Pride is one example, its greatest challenge has been to shift art from the regimes of capital labour, from what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call "immaterial labour" or "affective labour" (which produces immaterial goods such as knowledge and services) to autonomous experiences beyond definitions of "work", or when as spectators or participants we stop becoming consumers. I argue that this thesis and trashy tendencies can offer escape from capitalist production and consumption through contact (inter-subjective encounters that autonomise the networked spaces and economies of art), but also through my second strand of *Trash Beyond Representation* by undoing logic. The latter in some instances, however, might need re-territorialising (might require a reading of its surfaces in relation to representational modes and genres.)

Creating an autonomising space within power structures has been discussed as a potential in my performance *Touching Feeling* in Chapter 3, where trashy relations open moments of inter-subjective pleasure amidst the economy of an

art festival. This example relates most specifically to de Certeau's concept of La Perruque (the wig) discussed in Chapter 1, which uses "work time" differently. While in Chapter 4 I shift beyond the individuated subjective experience to consider multiple becomings (via Deleuze and Guattari), I have still maintained that while desire might be productive and non-personal, and an art practice might attempt to illustrate this, it is nevertheless experienced as subjective. Audience's experiences have thus played an influential part throughout, and experiments in my own position as an audience member in the works of others has also shed light on my subject.

This thesis has demonstrated a shift in trash between the personal and multiple in the following ways: In Chapter 2, what appears to be a self-referential and potentially narcissistic show about an artist's desire to be in other shows in fact opens a series of multiple relations to the histories and futures of art and performance and calls others to respond. In Chapter 3, on "giving bad audience" by effectively intervening as a participant in another performance piece, the work became sleazy and porous to an act of autonomous sexual pleasure. My intervention then led me to make my own performance *Touching Feeling*, which always hoped to "teeter on the edge of being a work", and become something else, something more than just "work" or just "art". In the most effective experiences, I have argued that it did just that. And in Chapter 4, perhaps most explicitly a single taste-public was refused, and moving between the various contexts in which I presented *Akt-schön!*, the work never seemed to "find a home". This was not experienced as pleasurable in the libidinal sense, but worked to push at the limits of representation instead: through over-identification (The O Show), through "disidentification" ([Performance Space]) and through deterritorialisations of the major performance languages through non-sense and abstraction (Villa 1).

Refusing a single public has ensured that my work is open to respond to others beyond the confines of, for example, audiences at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern in London, or of *Performance Matters*, where much of my research was developed. This refusal is at the crux of my thesis, a refusal to commit to fluid, ephemeral,

transitory or queer strategies, by at times tactically taking up unlikely positions and allegiances such as writing a PhD in place of refusing it, but also allowing my work to function in other non-art and non-academic economies such as the club. The issues that trashy tendencies have sometimes procured throughout my research, such as a potentially narcissist exhibitionism, and a fetishization of trash and the “other”, have been considered through the two strands of trash which this thesis has offered. While I have not necessarily offered a way out of such fetishisations or exhibitions, for this thesis demonstrates the very potential in indeterminate refusals, I have offered a move towards a practice that *exposes* desire (both personal and non-personal) and its inconsistencies, in place of a project completely exempt of desire, or focused only on concepts and non-personal desire, which would thwart or hide art’s spectacular idiosyncrasies. Wanting to be in someone else’s show, wanting to have sex with the performer in the performance, and wanting to become “other”, have been offered up throughout as subjective experiences that trouble institutional logics, and offer creative and critical challenges to a tried and tested logics of cultural production.

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