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Editorial

In this issue's call for papers, we asked for submissions that that engaged with gender and performance on a number of levels: how performances affect our perception of gender identity, what the relationship was between theory and performance, whether or not considering the gender of practitioners and playwrights is still important, and to what extent is work by women in the theatre informed by gender and feminism? The articles that we received in response, and which make up this issue of *Platform*, both deal with these questions explicitly and, in some cases, raise new questions. It is not surprising, given the vast discourse with which they engage, that the pieces should in many ways speak to each other, while at the same time offering different, even contradictory, viewpoints.

Kerstin Buesgches's article details her 'dialectical' approach to feminist performance. Beginning with an account of a short piece of her own work which arose from Bobby Baker's *Box Story* workshop, Buesgches proceeds to describe a performance practice that seeks to confound audience expectations of the feminine while accounting for the specificities of class, sexuality, and age. Situating her work in both performative and theoretical contexts, she argues for an approach that engages with both post-Lacanian feminism and materialist philosophy. Alissa Clarke, also dealing with approaches to performance, argues against what she sees as the patriarchal domination of the psychophysical approach to performance training. Her article challenges the dominant discourses of the discipline, which articulate performer training in terms of a 'genealogy of sons and fathers' and follow a fundamentally male-biased model of transmission. As an alternative to this, Clarke identifies the growth of a new paradigm for performer training in the work of The Magdalena Project, and advocates a more supportive approach which, while still making use of the discourse of family, allows for varied forms of relationships between students and teachers.

Shonagh Hill, Courtney Elkin Mohler, and Siobhán O'Gorman have chosen to focus on theatrical works in their engagement with gender, and done so in markedly different ways. Hill's piece, 'Articulating the Abject' provides an alternative reading of Marina Carr's *The Mai* through the lens of Paul Ricoeur's work on myth. By considering The Mai's suicide as a transformative act, Hill argues that the play presents a positive view of creative female agency in a male dominated society. O'Gorman's piece also deals with Carr's work (in this case *Portia Coughlan*), comparing it with Suzan Lori-Parks's *In the Blood*. O'Gorman engages with these playwrights on the level of genre, tracking the trajectory of their work from absurdism and symbolism into more overtly mainstream forms, and poses the question of what (if any) potential realist theatre holds for the feminist movement. Between these two pieces comes Courtney Elkin Mohler's essay, 'Little (White) Women,' which compares Louisa May Alcott's famous *Little Women* to Split Britches' *Little Women, the Tragedy*. Locating both of these works in their historic context and moment, Mohler uses Split Britches' revisioning of Alcott's novel as a lens through which to examine some of the fissures that have existed within the feminist movement, and to highlight the assumption of – and even reliance on – whiteness as a signifier in many feminist works.

Finally, Matt Saltzberg's piece, 'Staging Humanity,' looks at gender from a different perspective, relating the complex process of constructing and performing a piece of theatre in which he assumes the role of the iconic Joan Crawford. This essay details the process of a male actor attempting a sensitive and serious portrayal

of an actor who is often portrayed in a satirical light. Like the articles by Buesgches and Clarke, Saltzman's piece represents a struggle to find an appropriate approach to gendered performance.

Many of this issue's articles engage with Butler's concept of gender *as* performance, which clearly remains a key tool in examining gender *in* performance. However, the variety of critical perspectives and theoretical standpoints from which these articles approach that work, and the ways in which it is blended with that of other scholars, makes clear the breadth of scholarship that exists on this topic, and demonstrates the continued vitality of gender scholarship in the performing arts.

In the previous issue of *Platform*, we started a 'Performance Response' section, which is envisaged as a space for critical, analytical reflection on and around a particular performance. In this issue, Kate Leader's piece, 'Tell her to be careful' approaches Caryl Churchill's recent, controversial *Seven Jewish Children*, considering the complex ways in which content, context and performance combine, and unpacking some of the problematics of this short, divisive production.

Thanks go to Oxford University Press, Routledge, Palgrave, and the University of Minnesota Press. As always, *Platform* remains indebted to the Department of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, our peer and academic reviewers, and to our contributors for their continued work and support.

Rachel Clements and Jim Ellison
(Issue Editors)

Notes on Contributors

Amanda Bolt is a performer and improviser and is currently engaged in a practice as research PhD in the Performing Arts Department at Winchester University. Her research focus is on the practice and philosophy of Keith Johnstone's method of performance improvisation and its implications for spontaneity and community. She has recently produced the London Theatresports cup and performs regularly with London improve companies Dance Monkey Dance and Impromptu Theatre.

Kerstin Bueschges is a senior lecturer in Drama & Performing Arts at Anglia Ruskin University. She is also an active practitioner in the field of live/performance art. She completed her PaR PhD at Lancaster University in 2007, and her current research investigates representations of femininity within contemporary performance practice. Her performance work includes *Mapping Maternity*, a 12-hour durational performance (2008/09), and *Bloody Rosa - Part 1*, a 5-hour durational, site-specific solo performance (first in a series of durational, site-specific performance interventions/events investigating representations of Rosa Luxemburg (2008)). She is founder member of Factory Floor, a new network of solo women performers and writers, a member of the international, interdisciplinary network MaMSIE (mapping maternity, subjectivity, identity and ethics), and co-organiser of the research unit Representation, Identity, Body (RIB) at Anglia Ruskin University.

Sarahleigh Castelyn is a practice-based researcher and is keen to develop an understanding of the body's political and social meanings in our globalised transnational society. She is currently completing her AHRC funded doctoral research project into South African Dance Theatre focusing on the issues of 'race,' gender, and nation in Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa. Sarahleigh also teaches and researches cross-cultural dance practices, popular dance forms, dance and the environment, community dance, and conditioning for dancers.

Alissa Clarke recently completed her AHRC-funded PhD in the department of Drama at the University of Exeter, where she has also been working as a teaching assistant. Her doctoral thesis explored the possibilities of creating embodied, performative writing with which to document the experiences of psychophysical performer trainings. These explorations were conducted in dialogue with Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva's theoretical writings. Alissa has been practising Phillip Zarrilli's psychophysical performer training since 2002 and has been involved with Sandra Reeve's 'Move into Life' work since 2005.

Stephe Harrop is an academic and theatre-maker, whose research explores the relationship between text and physical performance. She completed her practice-based PhD at Royal Holloway in 2007, and currently works at Goldsmiths College (University of London) and the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (University of Oxford). She is also co-editor (with Professor Edith Hall) of the forthcoming volume *Theorising Performance: Greek Drama, Cultural History, and Critical Practice.*

Shonagh Hill completed an MPhil in Irish Theatre and Film at Trinity College Dublin and is currently in the second year of her doctoral studies in Drama at Queen's University, Belfast. Her PhD research focuses on Irish women playwrights of the twentieth century and their use of mythology.

Kate Leader recently completed her PhD in Performance Studies at the University of Sydney. Her thesis examined the role of performance in the adversarial criminal trial, with a particular focus on the relationship between liveness and authenticity. She is currently living in London, developing her research in performance and law and into the notion of 'testimony' in museums and memorials addressing traumatic histories.

Alissa Mello is a theatre practitioner in the United States, and a doctoral candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her dissertation is an investigation of contemporary European adult puppet theatre workshop and rehearsal techniques of three leading companies: Compagnie Philippe Genty, Green Ginger, and Stuffed Puppet. The research will culminate with an original puppet theatre production, *The Good Wife* (working title), that examines contemporary women's stories through three mytho-historic female archetypes – Penelope, Scheherazade, and Mandodari. The premiere of *The Good Wife* is planned for 2010.

Courtney Elkin Mohler holds a Ph.D. in Critical Studies in Theatre from the University of California, Los Angeles where she was awarded the 2006-2007 Institute for American Cultures Pre-doctoral Fellowship in American Indian Studies. She specializes in United States Ethnic Theatre, utilizing Critical Race Theory, Cultural Studies, Historiography and Performance Studies in her research. She currently teaches courses in Theatre, Cultural Studies, Chicano and Native American Studies at California State University, Dominguez Hills, and directs and acts professionally in Los Angeles.

Siobhán O'Gorman is currently in her second year of a doctoral research project on canonicity and gender in contemporary theatre at NUIG. She completed an MA in Literature and Publishing at the National University of Ireland, Galway in 2006, at which time she was also part of the *ROPES* editorial team. *ROPES* is an annual literary journal published by NUIG's English department. She has reviewed productions for *Irish Theatre Magazine* and has also been commissioned to write a performance review for *Theatre Journal*. Her feature piece on the work of Marina Carr was published in *Verbal*, a monthly arts magazine distributed with the *Belfast Telegraph*, in March 2009.

Grant Tyler Peterson earned a MA from University of California at Los Angeles under the tutelage of Sue-Ellen Case. His researched focused on gender and sexuality within the choreographic histories of Los Angeles gay dance clubs. Currently, he is in the second year of a HEFCE funded research PhD at University of London, Royal Holloway, where he is examining one of England's oldest street theatre troupes, Bath's Natural Theatre Company. He is being advised by Dan Rebellato and Chris Megson. As a performer, Grant received Backstage's 2004 Garland for best performance in the one-man show, *Johnny Got His Gun*, which also received nominations for best revival from Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle and LA Weekly.

Matt Saltzberg is a third-year doctoral candidate in Theatre with an emphasis in Performance Studies and Religion at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He holds a BA in Theatre Performance from Susquehanna University and an MA in Theatre Arts from the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University. He has presented at Central States Communication Association on his solo performance work, and performed his piece 'Cranberry: The Human Revelation of Joan Crawford' at ATHE's 2008 microFringe Festival. He has published book reviews in *Ecumenica* and *Theatre Research International*, and recently presented at the Mid America Theatre Conference on his dissertation research: 'Sacred Theatre: An Auto/ Ethnographic Exploration of Suzuki/Viewpoints and Composition in Directing John Pielmeier's *Agnes of God*.'

Abstracts

Dialectical Images of Femininity – a strategy of resistance in performance practice
Kerstin Bueschges (Anglia Ruskin University)

As performance-practitioner, academic and pedagogue my interest lies within the development of strategies of resistance – in particular strategies of resisting femininity – in performance practice. Within the context my recent PaR PhD *On hair, fishtails and voices – resisting femininity in contemporary performance practice* I identified, investigated and developed three of these strategies: dialectical images of femininity; performing an abject body; fictionalising the body. This paper focuses on the first of those, namely the creation of dialectical images of femininity. Calling upon Peggy Phelan's notion of the unmarked and disappearance in tandem with Walter Benjamin's concept of a dialectical image, I investigate Bobby Baker's *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* as one example of the creation of a dialectical image of femininity, before turning my attention to my own practice in the context of Baker's workshop *Box Story*. I propose that placing Phelan's post-Lacanian feminist theory alongside a materialist dialectical approach results in a potent – if at times disharmonious – partnership. It enables an investigation of a woman performer's specificities often neglected in the abstract generalisations of a purely psychoanalytical feminism, such as Luce Irigaray's and/or Julia Kristeva's theories that lack explorations of differences in ethnicity, age, sexuality and economic status. Although this paper draws heavily on a theoretical framework, it is imperative to note that the identification, exploration and eventual application of dialectical images of femininity began in the actual performance space.

Family Roles and Paternal/Maternal Genealogies within and between Psychophysical Performer Trainings and their Documentation
Alissa Clarke (University of Exeter)

Where psychophysical performer trainings draw upon the inspiration of earlier psychophysical practices, one can situate the practitioners, their work, and the transmission and documentation of their work within a genealogical structure. In the twentieth century, male performer trainers dominated psychophysical fields of practice, and thus the content and authorship of writings, further transmitting these practices. However, the presence of, and knowledge about, women within these practices and writings is now becoming far more evident. Nevertheless, the practices and writings of those male performer trainers who began work in the twentieth-century are frequently treated as canonical, and this canonical positioning serves to discursively construct and uphold a dominant paradigm of a powerful 'genealogy of sons and fathers' (Irigaray qtd. in Whitford, 'Section 1' 23).

In this article, I argue that this dominant paternal paradigm cannot account for all the possible modes of transmission within and between psychophysical performer trainings and their documentation. I demonstrate how Julia Varley's work with The Magdalena Project and *The Open Page*, and the practices of Sandra Reeve and Phillip Zarrilli negotiate with and provide direct alternatives or opposition to this dominant genealogy. This material is placed in dialogue with Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray's depictions of subversive maternal genealogies and multiple and intermixed family roles. I argue that the maternal structures and discourses about the family created by these trainings offer valuable and non-essentialist ways of reflecting upon and utilising the positioning of gender and family roles within the processes, transmission and documentation of these trainings.

Articulating the Abject: Metamorphosis in Marina Carr's *The Mai*
Shonagh Hill (Queen's University Belfast)

Through exploration of the trope of metamorphosis in Marina Carr's *The Mai*, I will offer a positive interpretation of the central character's suicide as a creative process. Death has been interpreted in Carr's plays as an admission of defeat by the central women; however, examination of the staging of The Mai's suicide can enable a more positive reading. Irish women playwrights have a tradition of using myth to explore their role within the symbolic, and metamorphosis can enable an exploration of how cultural signification and corporeal performance create identity. I will examine metamorphosis in *The Mai* to address whether it can suggest an elsewhere which can accommodate female subjectivity. Through the lens of Judith Butler's theories of performativity, rematerialization and abjection, I will address possible strategies for subversion and sources of creativity for the female body within the constraints of patriarchal structures. Butler's theories are employed in tandem with Paul Ricoeur's work on myth which addresses the liberating possibilities of creating 'other possible worlds.' As an intersection of the material and the discursive, metamorphosis questions the stability of boundaries and social norms, but can it offer a radical transformation of both the metamorphosed person and the space around them? In order to address whether reinterpretation of *The Mai's* metamorphoses can enable a more positive reading of her suicide and afford her political agency, I will focus on the staging of these metamorphoses in three different productions: the 1994 Peacock Theatre Dublin production, the 1995 Abbey tour and the 1996 version at the McCarter Theater.

Little (White) Women: Locating Whiteness in (De)constructions of the American Female from Alcott to Split Britches
Courtney Elkin Mohler (California State University)

In 1988, the feminist/lesbian performance group Split Britches performed a deconstruction of Louisa May Alcott's canonical *Little Women*. Their play, *Little Women, the Tragedy* (*LWTT*) highlighted the division within the feminist movement at the time over pornography, and called into question the norms of morality and feminine virtue reflected in and by Alcott's classic 'American girls' novel.' The play, however, illustrates a problematic construction of feminist/lesbian identity as outside of racial discourse. This paper argues that feminist performances which aim to deconstruct gender and sexuality should also be examined in terms of racialization; the common omission of whiteness as a category of identification can undermine the political goals of feminists of colour and white feminists alike. I briefly describe how *Little Women* constructs the American female as moral, heterosexual *and* of 'white' European descent. The paper then illustrates how *LWTT* seems to ignore the actors'/characters' positions as belonging to the racial majority. This piece's ability to expose oppressive systems of identity construction relies on the whiteness of the actors' bodies and characterizations. This reliance indicates a critical gap between how feminists of colour and white feminists approached the performance of sexuality and morality during the 1980s, revealing historical and social inequities between groups of women.

Unconventional Femininity in the Works of Suzan-Lori Parks and Marina Carr
Siobhán O' Gorman (National University of Ireland Galway)

By examining the work of Marina Carr and Suzan-Lori Parks, this paper explores the ways in which women's writing within the western institution of theatre challenges our perceptions of femininity and exposes the performativity of gender. Each of these playwrights became more successful as her work moved towards more traditional styles of theatre. My argument is that, although the movement of these playwrights towards more 'patriarchal' styles can be viewed in a negative light from a feminist perspective, productive feminist meanings can still be provided by such works through their denaturalizations of gender. Drawing on Judith Butler's essay, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', the paper offers detailed analyses of Carr's *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and Parks's *In the Blood* (1999) in terms of unconventional femininity and performativity. This article argues that the protagonists of these plays fail to perform culturally acceptable femininity and consequentially suffer what Butler would consider to be the 'punitive' actions of society (reprimanding and social exclusion). These marginalized protagonists usurp cultural paradigms of femininity and ultimately reveal gender as a repetitious social performance. The use of realist conventions has contributed to the mainstream success of these playwrights, allowing such feminist themes to reach a wider audience.

Staging Humanity in *Cranberry: The Human Revelation of Joan Crawford*
Matt Saltzberg (University of Missouri-Columbia)

For the past two years, I have been developing and performing a solo performance piece entitled Cranberry: The Human Revelation of Joan Crawford, in which I play Academy Award-winner Joan Crawford. The text is based on an interview with Crawford conducted by entertainment journalist Arthur Unger, found among his papers at the University of Missouri-Columbia's Western Historical Manuscript Collection. Citing the work of Judith Butler, Jill Dolan, Laurence Senelick, and Esther Newton, the article discusses at length my performance of Joan Crawford, specifically in regards to my gender confounding, non-drag portrayal of the cinematic legend. Discovering, in the end, that my staging of the complexities of gender present neither man nor woman, but human, I dare to ask the audience to see Joan Crawford not as a glamorized monster, but as a living and breathing human being.

Dialectical Images of Femininity

Kerstin Bueschges (Anglia Ruskin University)

The After-Eight-Mint-Flour-Man

Hänschen Klein ging allein … I'm walking behind the audience's chairs, around them, towards the performance space with a table in the centre. There are two chairs either side of it. I position myself behind the chair to the left and stop. On the back of the chair hangs a white dress, in front of it is a pair of orange plateau sandals. I start taking off my clothes, placing them in an orderly fashion on the chair. I pick up the dress, pull it over my head, button it up. *Stock und Hut, steht ihm gut*. I slip into the orange shoes and walk behind the table. On the table are a box of after-eight mints and an orange hat filled with flour. I sprinkle some of the flour on the table, take the mints out of their paper pockets, place them on the flour and start kneading. *She 37, attractive, intelligent … no, not intelligent. She, in her 30s, gsoh … no …* I continue creating the perfect dating ad in my head, speaking it out aloud, whilst producing a mint-flour-dough. I make two balls out of the dough, one big, one half the size of the other. I place the little one on top of the bigger one. I roll the remaining dough into two small sausages, which I then break in half. I attach two halves right underneath the bigger ball and the other two either side of it. There, my little mint-man is finished. *Curvy Nicole Kidman version in her 30s, seeks … seeks intelligent George Clooney type for …* Satisfied with my creation, I pick up the hat with the flour and place it on my head. The flour pours over me, covering my hair, my face and most of my body in a powdery white. With care, I take the little mint-man in my left hand, sit down on the chair to the right of the table, and, for the first time, look at the audience. I smile. I look at their faces. Smile. I hold my man quite tenderly, being aware of his fragile state. *Hänsel and Gretel are alive and well and they're living in Berlin…* I keep looking at the audience, my eyes slowly wandering down the line. I smile. My left hand cautiously envelops my man.

They sit around at night now, drinking Schnaps and gin… Very carefully, in an attempt to avoid hurting my mint-man, I break off little pieces, place them in my mouth, while I continue singing the song about the angel flying backwards into the future. The smile never leaves my face. I swallow. Bit by bit I tear him apart. I place him gently in between my lips. I chew him with delight and pleasure, with a smile and a song. I swallow. The flour on my face itches. Every time I open my mouth tiny clouds form before me. I take pleasure in eating. I take pleasure in singing. I take pleasure in being watched and listened to. My eyes hold the eyes of those in front of me. I invite them in, ask them to take part in my pleasure, ask them to make me, make my action part of their desire. Do you want a piece of my man? Well, you can't have him, he's all mine. I created him, I'll eat him! ... *this storm is called progress*... My after-eight-mint-flour-man is gone, disappeared into my mouth behind my lips. My smile broadens. It's a pleasurable experience all together. A little pause before my lips part, let out the words in as caring a manner as I've eaten my man. *My mum always said: 'Kerstin, if you want a man, you've got to bake one yourself.'*

Fig 1 and 2. Courtesy of Geraldine Harris

This text describes my short solo piece in Bobby Baker's workshop *Box Story* from the performer's point of view. *Box Story*, one of a series of workshops within the context of *Women's Writing for Performance*,[1] emerged as the starting point for the development of one of my strategies of resisting femininity in performance practice: the creation of dialectical images of femininity. In this paper, I will call upon Peggy Phelan's notion of the unmarked (immaterial) and Walter Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image as a means to investigate this particular strategy in Bobby Baker's piece *Drawing on a Mother's Experience,* her workshop *Box Story* and my own performance practice.

Bobby Baker's dialectical imagery

Bobby Baker's personal approach to strategies of resistance might best be described as 'a "spectacular" demonstration of "failed" femininities' (Aston 278), where '"failed" femininities' are representations of women's roles within the realm of 'daily life' that have gone 'wrong' in relation to the normalcy of domesticity. Based on my experience of taking part in her workshop – and subsequent use of similar materials (food and kitchen utensils) in my own practice – I would argue that Baker's painting materials' colour, texture and smell are as integral to her work as the specificities of her body.

Most of Baker's performances from her *Daily Life* series (1991-2000) speak, first and foremost, to her audience's eyes and noses, emphasizing a visceral, sensory reception of her pieces rather than one dominated by narrative and dramaturgy. Looking at representations of femininity that initially seem to confirm their social roles – such as the housewife, the mother, the hostess and the carer – at the beginning, by the end of the pieces the audience find themselves confronted with a female body grotesquely

[1] This research project was led by Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris at the Lancaster Institute for the Contemporary Arts (LICA). For more information on the workshop series, the research project and its outcomes, please see http://www.lancs.ac.uk/depts/theatre/womenwriting/index.htm.

marked with the artist's preferred painting tools: food and kitchen utensils.[2] Baker's transformation from a clean, 'blank' canvas – indicated by her infamous white lab coat or overall – into an obscurely marked spectacle already indicates her image-driven approach and emphasis on the visual aesthetics of her practice.

Indeed, Baker usually addresses issues of a feminine and maternal body through her autobiographical food paintings and sculptures, whereby the tangibility of the imagery – probably better described as the performance's viscerality – is more important than narrative or dramaturgical coherence. Autobiography in Baker's work neither refers to a singular and/or linear sequence of events nor to one coherent subject position, but rather to a (re)presentation of multiple selves. Baker's art, anchored within personal experience, aims to 'avoid suggesting any simple relationship between "a life" and its representation' (Heddon 135). The autobiographical selves at work in her performances are often at odds with each other, indicating a dialectical imagery (Walter Benjamin) that materialises itself through incongruities in (re)presentation (Peggy Phelan).

Incongruities in representation

Incongruities in (re)presentation refers to Peggy Phelan's (1993) intertextual exploration of the status of Woman as unmarked and the notion of disappearance (immateriality) in contemporary performance as a potentially resistant art practice. In her interrogation of Western cultural reproduction she claims that '[t]he male is marked with value; the female is unmarked, lacking measured value and meaning. [...] He is the norm and therefore unremarkable; as the Other, it is she whom he marks' (7).

Phelan's description of the distinction between the two universalising categories

[2] The various roles Baker explores and challenges in her work have to be seen in their stereotyped perception that leaves no room for specificities within them, indicated here by the use of a generalising 'the.'

of Man and Woman is, hence, fundamentally linked with value and its distribution. Woman remains without value as long as she is not 'marked' by Man, the Subject who not only defines Woman, but also what is and is not valuable, what has and has no meaning. According to Phelan, this dependency implies ownership of the unmarked (no-value) by the marked (with value), as '[t]he image of woman is made to submit to the phallic function and is re-marked and revised as that which belongs to him' (17).

In the same way as Luce Irigaray identifies the male sex as the one 'that alone holds the monopoly on value' (69), Phelan decodes sexual difference within this framework of cultural reproduction as an illusion, since it poses a negative – as in oppositional – image of female sexuality rather than acknowledging an actual *difference*. Her 'being marked' becomes an act of the materialisation of femininity, which, in Irigaray's discourse, is determined as the 'masquerade of femininity' to be entered by women in order 'to *become* a woman, a "normal" one at that' (134).

In terms of (re)presentation, then, sexual difference remains unrepresentable and 'the visual perception of the Woman […] leads to her conversion into, more often than not, a fetish – a phallic substitute' (Phelan 6). To put it slightly differently, within this post-Lacanian feminist position, Woman is only perceivable when valued by Man, indicating a necessary commodification of women in order to enter the realm of visibility. Phelan concludes that women's 'representational visibility' runs the risk of being a 'fetishization of the image' (6). She suggests remaining unmarked (immaterial) as a possibility of resistance, since, to paraphrase Phelan, 'immaterial ghosts' (6) – those that become visible only within the confines of the concept of femininity – keep their ability to haunt their house(s) of construction.

With reference to performance practice, Phelan proposes that a break in the reciprocity of the gaze between performer and spectator as an '*active* [act] of vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility' (19) is potentially

resistant. In her interpretation of Angelika Festa's performance piece *Untitled Dance (with fish and others)*, for example, Phelan situates disappearance not in the actual absence of Festa's body, but rather in the spatial arrangement and the spectator's unreturned gaze. According to Phelan, Festa's refusal to engage in a visual exchange, due to her eyes being covered with silver tape, as well as the presence of multiple other sources of visual representation (video monitors), results in the perception of Festa's body as 'lost' (154), depicting an 'active vanishing' (19), an act of disappearance.

Yet what Phelan interprets as Festa's 'lost body' can arguably also be seen as an intensely present body, due to an unexpected representation, which draws a spectator's potentially scrutinising gaze toward the particularities of the body's unfamiliar display. The manifestation of disappearance as loss, therefore, might also be interpreted as a manifestation of an incongruity in (re)presentation. Combined with performance's ephemerality, this incongruity in (re)presentation points towards a potential resistance of commodification of both the work as well as the performer's – here a woman's – body within it.

The lack of the potential of commodification due to these incongruities in (re)presentation might be explored further in the context of Walter Benjamin's materialist historicity, particularly his notion of a dialectical image.

The dialectical image

With reference to Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* Elin Diamond (1997) describes a dialectical image as:

> a montage construction of forgotten objects or pieces of commodity culture that are 'blasted' out of history's continuum […] dialectical images challenge the myths of historical progress not because they exist ontologically, but because we *perform* that challenge in the disjunctive *'Jetztzeit'* or now-time of our reading. (147)

Jetztzeit is essential in the understanding of a dialectical image within Benjamin's

theory as it demonstrates what he defines as 'dialectics in stagnancy' (180). The significance lies in the dismantling of historical continuity by proposing an alternative temporality in order to challenge the notion of 'natural' progression and draw attention to that which has been absent from the historical tradition of Western cultural reproduction. Indeed, a dialectical image is an image that confronts its witnesses with a simultaneity of discordances, forcing them to adjust their gazes, their eyes/I's perspective. The impossibility to adopt a 'right' or 'proper' position emerges as crucial here, since this would imply a singular comprehensive reading in which the conflicting aspects of the image could be synthesised, moved 'toward [a final] resolution' (Buck-Morss 210). On the contrary, the juxtapositional characteristics of the 'forgotten objects or pieces of commodity' (Diamond 147) are essential in both the creation as well as the reception of a dialectical image.

In Benjamin's materialistic historicity these remnants of the past are tangible, echoing his view that 'history disintegrates into images, not into narratives' (596).[3] The tangibility of the past's leftovers guarantees a perception of historical detail outside its abstract continuum, and, away from their protective context – 'the myth of historical progress' (Diamond 147) – these forgotten remnants emerge as objects without value. The impossibility of harmonising these objects without value within a dialectical image is key to an unveiling of the conditions under which each of them has been read so far. As a result, in the framework of materialist historicity, it is not so much the objects that are under scrutiny, but rather the conditions of their evaluation, the laws of commodification.

Even though Benjamin's theory is not concerned with the representation of women as commodities, his metaphorical description of a dialectical image as 'an

[3] All quotations from Benjamin's work are taken from their German texts and have been translated by me. 'Materialist historicity' refers to the German concept of Historisierung, which Brecht defines as 'an observation of a specific social system from the perspective of another,' in order to engage in a dialectical perception of history itself (Brecht 653, my translation).

image [that] places commodity: as fetish per se. […] an image [that] places the whore, who is seller and commodity in one' (180) draws an important connection between women, commodity and the fetish. A dialectical image that reveals commodity as fetish holds the potential for resisting commodity's fetishisation due to its emphasis on the alterable conditions of its fetishisation. Hence, with reference to women's representation, a dialectical image that reveals women as fetishised commodities has the potential to resist women's fetishised representation as commodity due to its emphasis on the variable rules and norms of women's commodification. Or, as I would like to put it, a dialectical image of femininity draws attention to the norms and rules of the materialisation of femininity through incongruities in (re)presentation.

Crucial in this kind of resistant practice is the avoidance of synthesis, i.e. a persistence of incongruities in (re)presentation. These incongruities in (re)presentations are often achieved by placing equally valid components alongside or on top of each other, e.g. a simultaneous display of aspects stereotypically associated with maternal femininity and aspects associated with the feminine monstrous. It could be argued that this is one of the strategies employed by Baker in her piece *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*. Thus, combining Benjamin's notion of a dialectical image with Phelan's immaterial ghosts, what is at stake in this performance – similar to my own performance practice – is the creation and development of a dialectical image of femininity.

Drawing on a Mother's Experience – a dialectical image of femininity

> On a video screen a middle-aged woman dressed in a white overall and high heels comes into a bare room carrying two bulging carrier bags. Addressing the camera she introduces herself as the artist Bobby Baker and says that the space is her husband's studio where she will make this video of her performance *Drawing on a Mother's Experience*. We must forgive her, she says, because while she is a very experienced artist she is a little nervous in front of the camera. Protecting the floor with a layer of clear plastic covered with a double white sheet, bought, as she explains, in the sales, she turns away and begins to

> prepare for her performance, unpacking her bags and drawing out cans of Guinness, Tupperware boxes, a food mixer, bottles, jars and bowls, all the while addressing the camera and peppering her work with wry comments about life, art and food. (MacDonald 187)

Baker continues her performance by creating a 'Jackson Pollock styled food painting' (Aston 279), accompanied by her narration of the experience of giving birth twice. Covering the painting with layers of flour at the end, she rolls herself up in it and, after clumsily standing up, dances to Nina Simone's *My Baby Just Cares For Me*, before clearing the space, making sure there are not visible traces left, and then leaving the room.

Drawing on a Mother's Experience (1988) seems to be haunted by the attempt to merge the artist Bobby Baker with the mother Bobby Baker, an attempt that is never successfully accomplished. In the context of Phelan's claim that '[t]he male is marked with value; the female is unmarked, lacking measured value and meaning' (7), Baker could be seen to be mimicking the position of value (authority) as artist, whilst equally lacking value and meaning as mother. Whereas the artist delights in the colours and composition of her creation, the mother worries about nourishment and cleanliness. The silent artist – except for her little 'ahs' and 'ohs' as acknowledgment of the beauty of her artistic creation – invites me to look at her artwork, watch her in the process of making, recognise her authority (value) as artist who distributes meaning and value. The permanently chattering mother excuses herself frequently, makes sure that nothing spills, covers the 'mess' quite meticulously, hides inside it, telling me that the sheets will be washed later. I witness the struggle between an unmarked (immaterial/invisible) mother and a marking (material/visible) artist. Both are fighting for visibility against the confining rules of normalisation of each other's concepts, which guarantee their own visibility – namely materiality and value – but inevitably cancel the materialisation of the other within the confines of the hegemonic representations of artist and mother. The performance seems to imply the necessity of denying one role in favour of the

other in order to gain visibility and value. Yet Baker attempts to stay visible within the discrepancies of both fields, which results in (re)presentational incongruities. Indeed, even when seemingly favouring one role over the other, the disappearing part remains partially materialised, thereby ghosting the position favoured with value.

In *Drawing on a Mother's Experience* this ghosting becomes particularly prominent in/via the food that surfaces as two things at once: the artist's painting material, and the mother's pre- and postnatal nourishment. Food emerges as the dialectical device by/with which Baker's immaterial ghosts materialise. Taken out of its context, food comes into view as a painting tool, employed to leave marks, the material to ensure the creation of a valuable (commodified) object. Within the realm of the domestic, however, food manifests the material that through nourishment guarantees corporeal visibility via its own disappearance, since 'without eating, there's no body of which to speak' (Epstein 23). The discordances in the imagery emerge in the food as intensely present material/object in an unfamiliar, unexpected way.

In a similar fashion, Baker herself seems intensely present in her application of the material, whilst simultaneously seemingly disappearing next to these materials. Indeed, Baker's conflicting particularities as mother and artist alongside (or on top of) each other generate a hauntingly present body in its indecisiveness, echoed in the spatial arrangement. At the beginning of the piece it is the artist's sheet that takes centre stage, with the performer hovering around it, only stepping onto the sheet when absolutely necessary for the development of the food-painting. As artist, Baker positions her artwork as the visual focal point. As mother, however, she eventually obliterates the artwork by meticulously covering every inch of it with flour, following her intention of leaving no traces, cleaning up after herself. Yet the struggle is far from over at this point. At the end of the piece Baker steps into the frame, places herself within it, only to become (part of) the artwork herself. This final move seems to

harmonise mother with artist in/via the artwork itself. However, the gradual visibility of the material seeping through the sheet reveals synthesis as an illusion. Baker's threefold position as artist, mother and artwork asserts the impossibility of synthesis, whilst simultaneously insisting on the hopelessness of a clear division between each single one, creating 'a hiatus in iterability' (Harris 137). The artwork Bobby Baker remains haunted by artist and mother alike, with the stains becoming the markers of a materialised ghosting at play.

As a result neither artist, mother, nor artwork gain market value: they all disappear from visibility. This is mirrored in the ephemerality of the piece and the lack of any visible traces of Baker's presence once she has left the space. Baker's conflicting, complex and untamed imagery confronts me, her witness, with dialectical images of femininity that resist being merged into one comprehensive synthesis of representation, demanding my critical attention. I find myself in a position of dialectical stagnancy, a cliff-hanging thought process of oscillation.

The workshop

Echoing the creation of dialectical images of femininity in her own work, Baker's workshop encouraged its participants to develop their own dialectical imagery in performance. The artist's image-driven practice led one strand of the workshop structure, as she repeatedly set exercises in which the materials at our disposal became the starting points for devising work. Although familiar with an image-based approach, the specifics of Baker's workshop introduced me to a 'painting' material I had rarely used before: food. The most liberating experience in the workshop was the permission to play with food in a way usually disapproved of, if not chastised, by society. Some of the exercises and set tasks forced a perception of food out of its context as consumable nourishment, leading to an identification of food as my aesthetic material, the tool(s)

with which to paint my dialectical imagery.

The second strand in Baker's workshop was a series of exercises and tasks related to notions of self-referential (autobiographical) practices. These exercises encouraged me to experiment with various, often contradictory, 'self' representations, offering me the chance to playfully investigate and work with multiple 'selves' either in terms of temporal linearity (childhood memories, events from the past, present events and concerns) or in terms of seemingly conflicting aspects of my life, such as academic and/or artistic work in relation to representations of femininity within the domestic. In the context of this paper, I would like to call this exploration of multiple 'selves' a process of ghosting my practice (imagery).

The final aspect identified and developed in Baker's workshop was fundamentally the result of a – more or less – successful combination of a food-painterly approach with ghosting, arguably a recipe for the development of a dialectical image of femininity. As a means of briefly examining this aspect, I use my final workshop demonstration as illustrative example.

The dialectics of an after-eight-mint-flour-man

On Saturday evening of the workshop Bobby Baker asked us to devise a solo piece (five to ten minutes long) for the following day, based on the previous exercises and tasks and preferably using the material we had initially brought to and/or bought on the first day of the workshop.

My idea started with an image influenced by one of the previous exercises in which I had used some after-eight mints, a rolling pin, and flour. Informed by the colours of the materials (white, black) and my hair (red), I chose an additional white dress, orange plateau sandals, and an orange hat for the piece. As described at the start of this paper, I changed into the outfit in front of my audience and used the flour, mints

and rolling pint to create a little mint-flour-man, along with the 'perfect' dating-ad. As soon as I had finished the mint-man, I placed the hat onto my head. The remaining flour poured over my body, covered the floor and threatened to stain the people in front of me. I then sat down, ate the chocolate-man whilst singing Laurie Anderson's song *The Dream Before*.[4]

The image I wanted to create was supposed to be pleasing to the eye due to its colour composition – a play of orange and white – presenting my audience with an attractive portrayal of femininity. I then tried to slowly disintegrate this image by juxtaposing it with aspects that could be perceived as conflicting with the visual aesthetics. For example, with the text spoken during the creation of the chocolate-man I was hoping to draw attention to the relationship between (re)presentations of femininity and commodification. Audibly selling myself as a 'curvy Nicole Kidman version,' the aim was to portray my-'self' as marked with value, desirable to be looked at. In the context of Phelan's theory, it could be argued that I was mimicking the position of Man, materialising (evaluating) myself through the process of marking. With reference to Benjamin's dialectical image, I embodied 'seller and commodity in one' (180), confronting my audience with a simultaneity (side-by-side) of discordances. The eventual covering of my body with the remaining flour, perceived in this context, would transpire as an act of ghosted obliteration, in which the distinctions between seller and commodity become increasingly less discernible, while refusing to be synthesised into one harmonious image.

The final act of eating and singing was intended to add another ambivalent layer to the imagery. In contrast to the former visual representation of me as attractive, white, 'proper' femininity engaged in the domestic act of food preparation – the white dress in conjunction with the Children's song arguably an indication of innocence – the eating

[4] This song is dedicated to Walter Benjamin. It is Anderson's adaptation of Benjamin's metaphorical description of history, using Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus*.

could potentially be seen as conflicting action.

According to Rosalind Coward, '[o]ral pleasures are only really permissible when tied to the servicing of others in the production of a meal' (105). Yet the additional layer surfacing at this point was that of an indulging consumer. Still, it was not simply chocolate I was consuming, but a chocolate-flour mix deliberately formed into a figure. Eating, in relation to (re)presentations of femininity, has its rules and regulations. It does not include overindulgence (excess) or digesting potentially unpurified (polluted) food, as these are attributes usually pointing toward monstrosity and abjection respectively. Indeed, the ghosted obliteration of seller and commodity arguably made way for the emergence of an additional aspect within the image: an after-eight-mint-flour-man eating virginal monstrosity.

The deliberate simultaneity of discordances (seller, commodity, consumer), I would argue, emphasised the variable norms of women's fetishised commodification through representational incongruities. It threw a spanner in the works of (re)presentations of femininity, upsetting '[t]he image of woman […] as that which belongs to him' (Phelan 17).

Dialectical images of femininity as strategic tool

Whilst a considerable amount of contemporary performance work by women – particularly those engaged in self-referential practices – could arguably be seen to present their audiences with dialectical imagery, it is the deliberate application of this strategy that lies at the heart of my own academic, artistic and pedagogical practice.

With regard to the strategy as academic tool, I perceive the placing of post-Lacanian feminist theories alongside materialist dialectics as a potent – if at times disharmonious – partnership, as it permits a consideration of actual women performer's bodies.

In the context of my artistic practice, a further investigation has already taken place in *Bloody Rosa – Part 1*, the first piece in a series of site-specific, durational performance interventions/events. Here, dialectical imagery was explored with reference to the intertextuality of site, sight and citation. Specifically interesting in this context is the relationship between dialectical images of femininity and the historicity of temporality that I have begun investigating elsewhere.

Finally, in terms of its pedagogical use, the creation of dialectical imagery has emerged as a potent tool for students' critical investigation and development of a resistant art practice that enables a more detailed consideration of aesthetic choices rather than merely focusing on narrative and dramaturgical linearity.

In conclusion, I would argue that a deliberate creation of a dialectical image of femininity emerges as a potent and pleasurable strategy for contemporary performance practice by women within and outside the academy.

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Family Roles and Paternal/Maternal Genealogies within and between Psychophysical Performer Trainings and their Documentation[1]

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Where 'cross-fertilisation' and the influences of earlier psychophysical practices can be viewed within and between psychophysical performer trainings (Hodge 5), one can situate these trainings, their practitioners and the transmission of their work within genealogical structures. Within the socio-historical context of the last century, in which far fewer women than men held the position of authority of director or practitioner, male performer trainers like Grotowski, Barba, and Brook, dominated psychophysical fields of practice and the content and authorship of writings further transmitting these practices.[2] Indeed, Anna Cutler highlights how 'women and women's bodies have been poorly recorded' (111). Hence, it is not surprising that Grotowski emphasised paternal genealogy in the practice, and therefore also the writing, space, in his 1987 essay '"*Tu es le fils de quelqu'un"* (You Are Someone's Son).'.However, the psychophysical field is now in a process of change, and the presence of, and knowledge about, women within these practices and writings is becoming far more evident. Despite these developments, the practices and writings of those male performer trainers who began work in the twentieth-century are frequently accepted, and treated or revered as canonical. This serves to discursively construct and uphold a dominant paradigm of a powerful 'genealogy of sons and fathers' (Irigaray qtd. in Whitford, 'Section 1' 23).

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[2] The positioning of women within the theatre has been extensively discussed in texts examining the beginnings of second wave feminist theatre. See Lizbeth Goodman's *Contemporary Feminist Theatres* (1993) for such an examination in a British context. Furthermore, Jennie Long's essay 'What Share of the Cake Now?' (1998) utilises statistics that display the situation of women in the English theatre at the end of the last century.

However, this dominant paternal paradigm cannot account for all the present and possible modes of, and roles involved in, transmitting knowledge within and between these practices and writings. This article, therefore, begins with an exploration of the dominant genealogy through the perceptions of Grotowski's work, and the negotiations with this genealogy offered by Phillip Zarrilli, and Suprapto Suryodarmo's practices and writings. I will then show how these negotiations are extended through the work of male and female psychophysical practitioners who provide direct alternatives or opposition to this dominant genealogy. I will specifically concentrate upon Julia Varley's work with The Magdalena Project and *The Open Page*, and upon the practices of Sandra Reeve and Phillip Zarrilli. I argue that the maternal structures and discourses about the family created by these trainings offer valuable and non-essentialist ways of reflecting upon and utilising the positioning of gender and family roles within the processes, transmission and documentation of these trainings. This argument is placed in dialogue with Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray's depictions of subversive maternal genealogies, and multiple and intermixed family roles. I use Cixous and Irigaray's theorised reconstruction of family roles as a means of drawing attention to and troubling the dominance of the paternal psychophysical genealogy. Cixous and Irigaray's gender-based theories are rooted within critical examination of the Freudian psychoanalytic concept, and the Lacanian post-structuralist interpretation, of the paternal, phallocentric structures of the Oedipus Complex. By exploring and playing with notions of embodiment and embodied writing, these gender-based theories open the way for useful interaction with the embodied transmission and documentation of the legacies of psychophysical performer trainings.

The Paternal Genealogy

A clear indication of the status and prominence of these male practitioners can be found in their overwhelming presence in the reading set for university modules focused on psychophysical trainings. These lists tend to focus upon texts like Barba's *The Paper Canoe* and *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*, Thomas Richards' *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions,* and essays taken from the heavily male-concentrated selection of articles within the key performer training anthologies: Phillip Zarrilli's *Acting (Re)Considered* and Alison Hodge's *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. The seminal status accorded these texts within and without the university sphere mean that readers may, for example, approvingly assimilate Grotowski's early emphasis upon the director and trainer as 'tyrant' (*Poor Theatre* 44) or 'strict' 'father' (*Poor Theatre* 48). Such approving assimilation further endorses the dominance of a genealogy of powerful patriarchs. However, such unknowing assimilation does not provide a full sense of the complexity and construction of this genealogy's dominant positioning. Therefore, as a means of exploring this complexity, this section will examine a few examples of the reproduction and manipulation of, and negotiations with, this paternal genealogy.

Where many of these psychophysical practitioners, like Phillip Zarrilli, Grotowski and Barba, have drawn from and written extensively about Asian trainings, it is useful to consider how the paternal traditions of these trainings may have influenced their practices. On the surface, Phillip Zarrilli's position and practice appears to adhere to the dominant male genealogical pattern. However, Zarrilli's reinterpretation of these Asian paternal traditions, accompanied by the deployment of the multiple and intermixed family roles that will be discussed at the end of this article, provide an alternative perspective rooted in his practice. Zarrilli's training is

based upon *taiquiquan*, 'Indian yoga and the closely related Indian martial art, *kalarippayattu*' (Zarrilli, 'Toward a Phenomenological' 661). Through a daily routine of repetitions, the forms and sequences from yoga, *taiquiquan* and *kalarippayattu* are ingrained into the participant's body-mind. These forms require co-ordination of breath with movement, lower abdominal support, balance, centring, correct spinal alignment and precise external focus. Zarrilli focuses upon the development of an 'interiority', an internal bodily 'relationship between the doer and the done' ('On the Edge' 191) of the forms, which is rooted in the circulation of energy and breath, internal focus, readiness and awareness.

In *When the Body Becomes All Eyes*, Zarrilli's ethnographic report of his participant-observation investigations of *kalarippayattu*, he describes how, participants were traditionally predominantly male and how, within the families of *kalarippayattu* masters, techniques were originally passed between uncle and nephew but, 'as the nuclear family emerged in the early twentieth century,' were then 'primarily' passed between father and son. ('When the Body' 260, n.46) ('When the Body' 260, n.46).[3] In contrast to this traditional mould of *kalarippayattu*, Zarrilli positions his own training as an 'intercultural translation' designed for a 'cosmopolitan, transnational, global culture, where the translation is between tradition and modernity, rather than East and West' ('Embodying Awareness'). Whilst, in the context of Kerala, first time *kalarippayattu* students are children with a natural aptitude for the practice, Zarrilli's training and teaching discourse is orientated towards adult, individual bodies of differing abilities within a modern context ('Embodying Awareness'). Many of his students, at all levels of advancement, including that of teacher, are female. Zarrilli's 'translation' is a 'political and

[3] Girls also participate within the training in Kerala. However, traditionally, they do not continue training beyond puberty (Psychophysical Performer Training 19 October 2005).

ideological decision' ('Embodying Awareness') stemming from his 'liberal politics' (Psychophysical Performer Training 6 October 2004), but is positioned as one choice or decision, rather than the right approach to the training.

Through this emphasis, and by carefully differentiating between his position and that of the dominant *kalarippayattu* master in India, Zarrilli's practice refuses the authority and power of the patriarch transmitting to the participant-son. This echoes Javanese movement artist Suprapto Suryodarmo's rejection of the titles 'Guru' and 'teacher' ('Discussion'). Suryodarmo's work, entitled 'Amerta Movement,' is, his student and fellow practitioner, Sandra Reeve explains, 'based on the basic movements of daily life: walking, sitting, standing, crawling and lying down and the transitions between them' ('The Next Step' 19-20, n.1). By 'guiding' movement through movement ('Guiding through Movement Seminar Presentation') and facilitating participants' exploration of 'the relationship of movement to mental attitudes, to the environment and to communication skills' (Reeve, 'Guiding through Movement' website), Suryodarmo supports the participants' developing consciousness of, and ability to evolve beyond, their movement habits. Through this supportive role of moving with the participant, Suryodarmo replaces the word 'guru' with the equality and dialogue displayed by the term 'sharer' ('Discussion'), and Reeve stresses that his practice 'comes from a very humble place' ('Interview').

However, whilst pursuing a role of 'sharer,' Reeve emphasises that it is impossible for the practitioner in the process of teaching and disseminating to completely distance themselves from the associations of power. Therefore, Reeve believes that 'acknowledgement of power is the first step of negotiating with it' ('Interview'). Such negotiations are particularly important when the practitioner is

male and many of his students are female and much younger than himself, as is the case with Zarrilli's university-based practice.

This negotiation could usefully travel both ways, as although Suryodarmo tells participants 'Don't put me in Guru' (Reeve, 'Interview'), one participant highlights the 'Guruism' (Participant 1) that still surrounds him. This Guruism derives not from Suryodarmo's behaviour but from the 'slavish way in which participants behaved towards him' (Participant 1). Whilst, as Reeve points out, Suryodarmo's overtly formless practice is very different to the structure and discipline of classical Javanese training, which can be compared to the traditions of *kalarippayattu* ('Interview'), this Guruism is shaped by a distorted impression of the treatment of Gurus of traditional Asian practices. This impression is rooted in what Reeve describes as the exoticisation of Suryodarmo's Javanese male body by European male and female participants ('Interview').

This distorted impression and construction of the practitioner as an exoticized patriarchal power is intensified through manipulation and exploitation of, what Cixous calls, 'the proper name' ('Mamae' 344). 'The proper name' refers to the power of the inherited male surname, 'the name of the father and the name of the son' ('Mamae' 343), which 'has the power to *survive,* to *outlive* the person who carries it' ('Mamae' 344). The attachment of proper names like Grotowski, Meyerhold and Barba to practice or documentation lends status to these creations and their creators. One result of the valuation of the proper name can be seen in the way in which, as Thomas Richards highlights, 'many people have experienced "Grotowski workshops" conducted by someone who studied with Grotowski in a session of five days, for example, twenty-five years ago. Such "instructors," of course, often pass on grave errors and misunderstandings' (qtd. in Wolford, 'Grotowski's Vision' 191).

Maternal Genealogies

Cixous and Irigaray critique the moment outlined within Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex when the bond is severed between mother and child, and women learn to devalue their own and other female bodies as 'lacking' as the 'little girl comes to devalue her own sex by devaluing her mother's' (Irigaray, *Speculum* 40). Cixous and Irigaray propose the rehabilitation of the loving, embodied relationship between mother and daughter through the creation and articulation of a subversive maternal genealogy (Irigaray, *Speculum* 76). Irigaray highlights the necessity for

> the sentences that translate the bond between [the mother's] body, ours, and that of our daughters. We have to discover a language (*langage*) which does not replace the bodily encounter, as paternal language (*langue*) attempts to do, but which can go along with it, words which do not bar the corporeal, but which speak corporeal. ('The Bodily Encounter' 43)

The creation and articulation of this maternal genealogy would provide the potential to undermine the oppressive dominance and authority of the paternal genealogy and its transmission, resulting, as Irigaray highlights, in 'the coexistence of *two* genealogies' (Whitford, 'Section 1' 23. Emphasis in original). Examples of supportive, collective maternal genealogies can be viewed in the discourses surrounding The Magdalena Project and *The Open Page*.

In *The Open Page* article 'Ants in a Carpet of Clouds,' the Odin Teatret psychophysical performer, Julia Varley, declares that:

> I believe in history, in the experience that is passed along the generations, in life that remains in the actions and body memory of those who follow, in the existence that becomes future behaviour and implicit knowledge. My way of being is the result of many women who have lived before me and my life will continue in the life of those who come after me. (100)

This belief in an embodied legacy passed between women was and is actualised through Varley's position as founding member of The Magdalena Project. The Magdalena Project: International Network of Women in Contemporary Theatre was

formed in 1986 in an attempt to give women from the performance world, particularly those from a body-based background, the space to share, create and discuss performance work and performer training together in a supportive environment (The Magdalena Project, 'About the Project: Introduction'). It works to

> increase the awareness of women's contribution to contemporary theatre; enable women to explore new approaches to theatre making that more profoundly reflect their own experience rather than that of men; create the fora that can give voice to the concerns of women working in theatre; encourage women to examine their role in the future of theatre and to question existing structures. (The Magdalena Project, 'About the Project: Aims)

Through its development and growth, The Magdalena Project has created the possibility of a maternal genealogy. Varley's position in the project of 'belonging to a third generation in relation to the younger women who approach me to learn from my experience as actor, director and organiser,' means that she is now 'considered a grandmother' to these women (Varley, 'Magdalena Grandmothers' 47).

The Magdalena Project has also laid the foundations for this maternal genealogy through textual documentation of female performance practice. Varley highlights how 'the general absence of women in theatre history books demands women practitioners take the responsibility of sharing their experiences in other ways than simply on stage,' or within the space of practice ('Magdalena Grandmothers' 48). Therefore, in 1994 The Magdalena Project set up *The Open Page* journal. '*The Open Page*' Varley, Geddy Aniksdal and Maggie Gale explain, 'seeks to give space to many different [female] voices, some of them dissident, others not,' to 'report on their work and express their thoughts, feelings and analysis about theatre, as a means of building their own memory and a critical perspective within theatre history' (Foreword). This supportive collective of diverse multivocality reverses Harold Bloom's presentation in *The Anxiety of Influence* of poet-sons battling with the precedent set by their precursors, their father-poets (Bloom 11). Indeed, the articles

within *The Open Page* can be viewed as mother/grandmother-texts, transmitting useful knowledge to their readers as daughters/granddaughters. Moreover, through the assimilation of influences from the practices and *The Open Page's* textual documentation of the practices of these female practitioners, a number of the articles within *The Open Page* can be viewed as daughters to other mother-articles or practitioners.

The participant-writer could usefully explore the supportive, connective maternal genealogical possibilities provided by Cixous and Irigaray, and by practitioners like Varley. However, the emphasis on the maternal can be viewed as essentialist, thus restricting these possibilities to women. Therefore, in the final part of this paper I will demonstrate how these maternal possibilities can be opened up to everyone. I will examine several specific practical examples of guiding or guidance that require male and female psychophysical practitioners and participants to reconsider or inhabit the roles of, and relationship between, mother and child.

Family Roles

In 'When our Lips Speak Together' Irigaray extends the maternal alternatives to the paternal genealogy with a complete rejection of all family positions and titles. She emphasises that these positions cannot escape the framework of the paternal genealogy, and that they serve to solidify phallocentric gender roles. Thus, writing as if from within a supportive feminine bodily encounter, and addressing the other woman involved in that encounter, Irigaray declares that such encounters produce the strength and experience of alternatives to these family roles and relationships:

> I love you who are neither mother (pardon me, mother, for I prefer a woman) nor sister, neither daughter nor son. I love you-and there, where I love you, I don't care about the lineage of our fathers and their desire for imitation men. And their genealogical institutions. Let's be neither husband nor wife, do

> without the family, without roles, functions, and their laws of reproduction. I love you: your body, here, there, now. ('When Our Lips' 72)

This rejection of family roles can similarly be traced within Reeve's instructions on how to approach the process of guiding movement through movement, and the bodily encounters that this process produces. Reeve deploys this Suryodarmo-influenced process within 'Move into Life,' her practice 'based on a variety of sources in psychophysical training which are in a constant state of dialogue with each other' (Reeve, 'The Next Step' 19, n.1.). These sources include: training 'with Jacques Gardel at Théâtre Onze in Switzerland,' in a form of physical theatre 'closely influenced by Grotowski' (Reeve, 'Performance'); qualifying as a Shiatsu practitioner and as a Dance Movement Therapist; Theravada Buddhist mindfulness practice; and, most particularly, ten years of studying with Suryodarmo. All these elements serve to shape Reeve's mode of guiding movement through movement. Through direct instruction, music, noise, action and gesture, Reeve guides participants through engaged free form movement that is receptive to the surrounding space and the other individuals within it. This free form movement stems from the participants' individual bodies, concerns, emotions, memories and dreams and is shaped by simple movement tasks or scores set by Reeve.

Reeve describes how, when taking the position of 'guide,' one adopts 'a role' ('Guiding through Movement Workshop'). Whilst Suryodarmo defined Reeve's role as 'the *kindergarten*' or 'babysitting,' both Suryodarmo and Reeve explain that this supportive role could not be one of 'mothering' or 'fathering' ('Guiding through Movement Workshop'). The adoption of either a parental or babysitting role would suggest a problematic placement of the mover as child or baby to the guide's adult. However, Suryodarmo deployed the terms '*kindergarten*' and 'babysitting' (without completely ridding the titles of their problematic connotations) in order to describe the

way in which Reeve 'supported the situation for the mover and made it safe for them' ('Guiding through Movement Workshop').

This form of guiding support without over-attachment to the mover is contrasted by Suryodarmo and Reeve with the way in which adoption of a parental role would reduce the autonomy of both mover and guide. Reeve stresses that 'what's important for me [as guide] is that I have my own creative process alongside the process of trying to offer something supportive for [the mover's] process. Otherwise, I'm just putting myself in the role of slave' ('Guiding through' DVD). Reeve's refusal of the role of overbearing slavish parent, and the over-dependence this induces in the mover as child, reflects Cixous and Irigaray's emphasis on the need to be careful when renewing the relationship between mother and daughter. When renewing this relationship, it is necessary to free 'the daughter from the icy grip of the merged and undifferentiated relationship' with the mother (Whitford, 'Section II' 77), by resisting a return to the pre-oedipal state of wholeness. One can review this state of female undifferentiation through Reeve's non-essentialised attribution of the problem to a position of over-bearing child-caring by male or female. This undifferentiation in the practice space results, according to Suryodarmo, in the participant 'copying' the 'parent' rather than 'find[ing] their own line' of movement ('Discussion'). Therefore the participant-writer could also deploy this rejection of family roles in the documentation of psychophysical performer trainings in order to prevent that documentation from further enhancing the dominant positioning of the paternal genealogy, and in order to similarly prioritise the bodily encounters specific to that practice and to pursue one's 'own line' within the writing.

However, the analogies evoked by these family roles can provide useful explanations of particular positions and emphases within these psychophysical

trainings and their documentation. Irigaray's solution to the 'undifferentiated relationship' between mother and daughter offers some suggestions for making use, whilst also rejecting the enculturated understanding and deployment, of these family roles and titles. Irigaray stresses that we must 'establish a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters' ('Women-Mothers' 50). This exchange of positions, or dual position, would enable the woman 'to "play" her role of mother without being totally assimilated by it' (Irigaray, *Speculum* 76).

Such reciprocation and literal playing of and with this role by both male and female is evident within the structured encounter of Zarrilli's 'umbilical cord' partner exercise. This partner exercise helps participants to gain a strong impression of what it feels like to move from the lower abdomen whilst carrying out the *kalarippayattu* lion steps. The *kalarippayattu* forms and sequences are based upon animal poses and kicks. With the lion steps, participants move forwards and backwards through a low centred pose where the spine is lengthened, hips face the front, knees are bent, one leg points forward, while the other leg is open to the side, so that the feet are at right angles to one another and the heels of the feet in line. With Zarrilli's partner exercise, the doer tightly ties a long-sleeved top around their lower abdomen and their helper winds the sleeves of the top around one another to create what Zarrilli jokingly calls an 'umbilical cord.' The helper takes a strong hold upon this cord as the doer moves forwards, so pushing the doer to focus upon and root their movement in the grounded power of lower abdominal engagement. In this exercise the helper participant, of either sex, through the connection of the 'umbilical cord,' might be viewed as mother to the doer participant. Thus, a reciprocal relationship between mother and child is

clearly displayed through the way in which both participants have a chance to play each family role.

While the exercise is conducted under the guidance of Zarrilli, who could be viewed as parent or grandparent to all these pairs, Zarrilli will often demonstrate the role of child-doer as well as that of parent-helper. Moreover, within this task the participants, rather than participants and practitioner, are positioned within a mother and child relationship. Therefore, whilst perhaps retaining the associations of these familial roles, this exercise could be seen to further separate the roles from the positions of authority and reliance traditionally bound up with that of teacher and student, or mother and child. The equalising possibilities of this reciprocal relationship are intensified through the way in which, where the balance of the exercise is retained through the right amount of grasp upon the cord and through the energised activity of the doer within that grasp, each person learns from and is reliant upon the other. Through this mutual support, both participants avoid the risk of the 'merged and undifferentiated relationship' of over-dependence. This mutual support between 'mother' and 'child' echoes the way in which Suryodarmo sees himself as 'learning with his students' (Reeve, 'Interview').

Following this, Cixous emphasises the necessity for women to rejuvenate and express their 'relation to childhood (the child that she was, that she is, that she makes, remakes, undoes, there at the point where, the same, she mothers herself)' ('The Laugh' 252). By experiencing the positions of both mother and child in the umbilical cord exercise, the participant embodies Cixous's emphasis and works towards providing their own mothering guidance. This self-mothering enables the participant to move from the lower abdomen with the remembered sensation, but without the need, of this external support. This form of guidance can be viewed through the

context of Reeve and Zarrilli's emphasis on facilitating the participant towards a state of self-facilitation.

Cixous reflects this process of being both mother and child in her portrayal of textual practice, emphasising that, whilst the writer is mother to the creative act/text, 'there is also a reversal in the maternal relation between child and mother, since life is exchanged' (*Three Steps* 78). The participant-writer can similarly operate as both mother and child to their textual documentation, constructing the text that will act as supportive and guiding mother, and so self-mother, to their practical process. In then receiving, and so rewriting, the documentation, participant and text can both be viewed as a fluid, interwoven mix of mother and child in a bodily encounter.

Just as these interwoven roles of mother and child within the practical and documentation space may be inhabited by male bodies, one student explained how when she first observed the training and saw Zarrilli teach, bending gently over his students to carefully adjust and check for energised activity within their bodies within the forms, he reassuringly made her think of her caring grandmother (Participant J). This highlights how transmission from or between males need not suggest the absolute or exclusive presence of a paternal genealogy and further shakes the biological specificity attributed by Cixous and Irigaray to maternal genealogies.

However, this non-essentialist example can also be viewed through Cixous's own emphasis on disturbing the singular patriarchal categorised roles of the nuclear family with a fuller description of these roles conveyed by multiplicity, heterogeneity and further intermixing. This multiplicity and intermixing also serves to shatter the hierarchical binary structure, which the sole pursuit of maternal genealogies still maintains. Thus, Cixous stresses that '[i]f we were not so lazy in language, we would weave more precise and more just family ties […] and we would not simply say

father, or mother. We could also say father-son, or son-father, or mother-son or mother-daughter. We would be more sensitive to the presence of several kinds of mothers in a mother' ('Mamae' 347-348). The participant-writer can usefully draw upon such lexical multiplicity and intermixing of roles. This would enable the participant-writer to allow for, question, and play with the changing and different perspectival interpretations of lineage and family roles within and between different practices and their documentation. It would also provide the means of expressing and exploring the embodied radical change and possibilities, potentially far more radical than sole pursuit of the subversions of a maternal genealogy, produced by the assimilation of traditionally paternal genealogical practices by female bodies.

There are now usually far more female than male participants in these practices. These women assimilate, teach and articulate these trainings through their individual evolving body-minds. This can lead to the extensive development of, and changes to, these practices' paternal genealogies. As a result of articulating and playing with these changing lineages and family roles, the participant-writer would then be able to draw from previous documentary examples and practical influences now perceived to be positioned within a shifting, intermixed, and non-essentialised structure and understanding of genealogy. This open genealogical structure would provide many possible places within which the participant-writer, of either sex, could situate their own writing.

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Articulating the Abject: Metamorphosis in Marina Carr's *The Mai*

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Marina Carr's plays have received criticism for their depiction of passive women, particularly the suicides in Carr's Midlands trilogy: *The Mai*, *Portia Coughlan* and *By The Bog of Cats.* The women have been accused of 'disappointingly, throw[ing] in the towel by committing suicide' (Wallace 435). In this paper, through an interpretation of the metamorphoses and transformations of the central character of *The Mai*, I will argue that the character does, in fact, have her own agency, and that her suicide can be reinterpreted as a creative act.

Drawing on the legacy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the trope of metamorphosis offers both myth and the body as sites of creative potential which enable exploration of the creation of identity through cultural signification and corporeal performance. In *Woman and Nation* C.L Innes traces the increasing idealization of Irish woman in literature from the nineteenth century through to the cultural nationalism of the early twentieth century which employed the female body as metonymic substitute for Ireland. Traditionally, the traits attributed to woman were passivity, asexuality, and domesticity, naturalized through the connection between woman and land. Both state law and the Catholic Church enforced nationalist patriarchal discourse which objectified and controlled the female body. Indeed, Article 41 of the 1937 Constitution, which remains unaltered, enshrined woman's place in the home and marked her role as reproducer of the nation:

> 2.1. In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.

> 2.2. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. ('Constitution of Ireland')

The Mai is set in 1979, following a period when advances were made in the realm of women's rights with 'the establishment of an ad hoc committee on women's rights in 1968, which resulted in the establishment of the First Committee on the Status of Women in 1970 and the formation of the Council of the Status of Women in 1972' (Ferriter 667). The 1980s witnessed the rejection of referenda on the legalization of abortion (1983) and divorce (1986). However, the premiere of *The Mai* in 1994, following Mary Robinson's election as President in 1990 and further referenda, was situated in a period of positive change for women. Referenda in 1992 saw the rejection of the legalization of abortion but ratified amendments which would allow women free access to information and freedom to travel to another state for an abortion. Furthermore, a referendum on divorce, which was approved in 1995, continued the debate over the construction of women's roles as mothers and wives. *The Mai* engages with concerns over the control of women's bodies by national patriarchal discourse, and with the ways in which social norms inform and perpetuate acceptable identities and bodies and exclude those deemed improper. The Mai's decision to commit suicide can be interpreted as reaffirming control over her body through exclusion and silencing, but more interesting are the ways in which the Mai's suicide and metamorphoses transgress the prescribed limits of the female body's signification to inhabit a creative female corporeality.

In order to examine whether metamorphosis has the potential to offer something new and invigorating to Carr's play, I will employ Judith Butler's theories of performativity, rematerialization and abjection, and discuss the staging of the Mai's

metamorphoses in three productions: the play's premiere at the Peacock Theatre in 1994, the Abbey touring production of 1995, and the McCarter Theater's 1996 production. Through an application of Butler's work, I will address whether metamorphosis is simply compelled within social norms, reinforcing the idealized and passive Irish woman, or is an unsettling process, which has the potential to explore and subvert the creation of identity. Similarly, myth has a janus-faced potential as it can suggest alternatives yet operates within the ideological domain, naturalizing its own agenda. I will argue that myth needs to be critically self-aware if it is to function as Paul Ricoeur's genuine myth 'which can be reinterpreted in terms of *liberation*' (485), rather than reinforcing ideology. The process of staging genuine myth requires engagement with the body as a 'site of intense inquiry, not in the hope of recovering an authentic female body unburdened of patriarchal assumptions, but in the full acknowledgement of the multiple and fluid possibilities of differential embodiment' (Price and Shildrick 12). The body thus becomes a site of perpetual contest which can offer alternatives to textual significations and narratively created identity.

Carr's earlier plays, such as *Low in the Dark* (1989) and *Ullaloo* (1991), have an absurdist dramatic form, but *The Mai* appears to move towards realism. However, Carr disrupts the conventions of realism through her non-linear chronology and the use of a narrator, the Mai's daughter Millie. Like her mother, Millie is a ghostly figure, moving between roles in the porous world of the play, as both thirty-year-old narrator of her memories and sixteen-year-old participant in the action. Though *The Mai* marks a shift in Carr's theatrical form, some of the themes and concerns of her earlier work reappear. *Low in the Dark* subverts both the Virgin myth and the idea of woman as reproducer of

the nation with Bender and Binder's continuous delivery of babies, and these stereotypes of femininity and maternity are engaged with in *The Mai* and the plays which follow, *Portia Coughlan* and *By the Bog of Cats*. Myth is a continuous process of retelling which relies on reperformance, and Carr continually engages with inherited myths throughout her work, offering her own resignifications. This echoes Butler's suggestion in *Gender Trouble* that gender performativity can both reinforce gendered identities and destabilize them through repetition. *The Mai* does not focus on a specific narrative but instead draws from, and creates, mythic echoes with several sources. The play opens with the return of the Mai's[1] husband Robert, for whom she has been waiting several years, echoing both the defiant Electra waiting for the return of her brother and 'a reversal of the Odysseus legend viewed from the perspective of Penelope' (Wallace 438). There are references to the Cinderella story, but, as the play charts the disintegration of their marriage, these are ironic: Robert has been having an affair, which reveals his failings as the heroic prince. Act one closes with the temporal endpoint of the play, the image of the Mai lying dead in Robert's arms, and we expect the Mai's narrative to be silenced. However, she subverts linear chronology and expectation by being resurrected in act two in the first of her metamorphoses. Millie foreshadows the Mai's death through narration of the myth of Coillte, who was abandoned by her lover and dissolves into a lake:

> One night, seizing a long awaited opportunity, the dark witch pushed Coillte into her lake of tears. When spring came round again Bláth was released from the dark witch's spell and he went in search of Coillte, only to be told that she had dissolved. (147)

[1] In order to reinforce the Mai's mythic status, she is referred to throughout the play as the Mai rather than just Mai.

This link enables us to interpret the Mai's death at the end of the play as a second metamorphosis where she too dissolves into Owl Lake, which functions as a space of creativity for her where no other is available.

Mythmaking needs to be a self-conscious process in order to avoid the pitfalls of repressive representations which fix rather than interrogate ideology. In *The Mai* the generations of Fraochlán women create and engage in a female world of storytelling. They retell and narrate the events and disappointments that have shaped their lives, and thus continually reshape their identities. The Fraochlán women narrate their own myths of origins in an effort to authenticate themselves and escape from the mundane realities of their lives, thus evoking a different future. *The Mai* engages with inherited narratives of myth, nation and gender, which are inscribed on the bodies of the women. All the women in *The Mai* are enthralled by romantic expectations and the desire for 'life to be huge and heroic and pure as in the days of yore' (Carr 163), but Western myths of romance expose the disjunction between the world of narratives and the women's material lives. The continual reperformance of gendered identities within the inherited significations of these myths gives rise to the reiteration of history across the generations from Millie to the Mai to Grandma Fraochlán. Robert's patriarchal claim that 'The Mai shuts down because the reality of everyday living is too complicated for The Mai' (Carr 172-3) pre-empts reactions to her suicide. The suggestion that her choice to leave the limits of the narratives and world she is trapped within means she no longer signifies, and belies her engagement with alternatives to the restrictive narratives of dominant national patriarchal discourse which placed woman within the home.

Roland Barthes suggests that 'the very principle of myth: [is that] it transforms history into nature' (129), and in order to negotiate a space to expose this process and create resignifications, Carr engages with inherited myths. This practice echoes Butler's theory of performativity, where gender is 'performatively constituted' (*Gender* 34) and compelled by regulatory norms. Butler's ideas on the constructed and performed body highlight the corporeal embodiment of the effects of power; bodies both produce and modify structures and themselves through the discursive realm of symbolic signification. Metamorphosis similarly brings identity into being through its discursive creation and corporeal performance. The Mai's metamorphosis into a lake is created through both Millie's narration of the Coillte myth and through the Mai's movement from the stage, which is followed by sounds of water off-stage to suggest her transformation. However, just as Butler clarifies that performativity is compelled within cultural norms, we have to question whether metamorphosis can allow transformations outside these norms and grant agency in the act of creation. The act of performativity reiterates identity, but can metamorphosis offer something new, liberating or challenging? Butler suggests that rematerialization can offer a way out of the bind of merely reiterating ideological boundaries as it is an incomplete process and subversive potential is located in its instabilities. Butler suggests that rematerializations can produce 'unexpected permutations' (*Bodies* 127) of cultural norms and can offer continued engagement with these norms, where '[t]he culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its "natural" past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities' (*Bodies* 127). Perhaps metamorphosis, as the conflict of woman's subjectivity with the dominant order, functions in *The Mai* as an 'unexpected permutation' of cultural norms.

Marina Warner suggests that metamorphosis is a clash of two cultural hegemonies (17-18) and this is certainly born out in *The Mai* where this clash is exposed in the material realities of the female characters' lives. The potential of performativity and rematerialization offers a means of subversion for the Mai through her metamorphic body.

The best known female metamorphosis in Irish theatre is arguably that of the eponymous Cathleen ni Houlihan in Gregory's and Yeats's play of 1902. Her metamorphosis is an example of a repressive transformation, or materialization, which fixes her as an idealized woman-nation symbol. Her metamorphosis occurs off-stage, rendering her potential for threatening fixed boundaries of identity less troubling. By contrast, the Mai's first metamorphosis is her disruptive resurrection and return on stage in act two after we have seen her dead body held in Robert's arms at the close of act one. The performativity of the Mai's dead body unsettles the iconography of the tragic dead female body as silenced victim to reveal a potential for creative resignification. Her dead body reiterates her powerlessness and silence as an objectified individual. Yet it also creates an alternative of creative potential by disrupting the narratives which control her, specifically Robert's dream of the Mai: 'I dreamt you were dead and my cello case was your coffin' (Carr 125). The gendered roles of Christianity and Irish cultural nationalism, of the male who is sacrificed to enable Cathleen ni Houlihan and the nation to be reborn, are reversed by the iconography of the framed image of Robert with the Mai's body in his arms. Similarly, in the Peacock Theatre's 2007 production of Carr's *Woman and Scarecrow*, director Selina Cartmell chose to conclude with a pietà tableau, in which death is not an act of finality but part of a creative process. Susan Cannon Harris argues

that within a twentieth century Irish context women are not eligible for the role of sacrificial victim. According to Harris, the materiality of the dead female body makes her resistant to idealization, functioning instead as the 'female counterpart - the mother/ wife/ lover who accepts the sacrifice and whose body can then fulfill the more "natural" role of transforming that death into a rebirth' (4). The female corpse of the pietà is not a signified victim but an unsettling resignification whose materiality frustrates idealization and refuses the role of the Virgin Mary. The performativity of the Mai's body at the end of act one serves to question control over women's bodies through an unsettling mimicry of the Christ-like male body's ability to be born again. Materialization stabilizes, but through rematerialization there is the possibility for the destabilization of norms:

> That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law. (*Bodies* 2)

The Mai's body becomes uncontrollable and threatening, a metamorphic body which unsettles the limits of identity and narrative convention through its rematerializations.

The generations of women presented on stage in *The Mai* expose the repeated acts of gender which they are forced to perform. In the 1994 premiere staging of *The Mai* in the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, Millie literally reperforms Grandma Fraochlán when she stands behind and copies her movements as Grandma Fraochlán retells and relives dancing with her husband at the Cleggan Fair. However, the Mai disrupts the expected repetition and reperformance of history and tragic destiny when her dead body is resurrected at the start of act two. Her second metamorphosis at the end of the play further disrupts the inherited narratives and corporeal roles which the other women of the

play remain caught in. Millie's narration of the Coillte myth reveals that Coillte was pushed into the lake, but the Mai is in control of her reperformance of the myth. The Mai's first death is narrated by her daughter Millie, but the Mai seizes control of her narrative at the end of the play, creatively resignifying her own dead and metamorphosed body and thus evading the fate of tragedy, a fate where woman is silenced and as a passive victim cannot control her signification. The Mai resists being caught in a cycle of repetition and her performance suggests 'other possible worlds,' beyond the limits of the one she is contained within on stage. Rematerialization exposes the potential creativity of her culturally constructed body. Drawing on Kristeva, Butler addresses abject bodies which have been excluded from signification and deemed unliveable, confronting, 'those boundaries of bodily life where abjected or delegitimated bodies fail to count as "bodies"' (*Bodies* 15). The subversive spaces which the abject haunts function as sites of possible disruption, supporting Butler's suggestion that the abject can be 'a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility' (*Bodies* 3).

Butler's use of the term abject has a material and political focus in the historical specificity of the unliveable body. This ensures that the abject is not a universalizing term but one which is regulated by the changing cultural forms which exclude certain bodies and deny them access to political status and ontology. The Mai adopts the roles available to her through inherited myths and narratives of romance but these do not offer a life she deems liveable; having built her house at Owl Lake to accommodate herself and her children, she says, '[i]t's the kind of house you build when you've nowhere left to go' (Carr 158). The Mai's tolerance of this space as home suggests her initial acceptance of

legitimated and liveable ways of being. However, through her metamorphosis, she engages with what she is forced to exclude as unliveable, namely a space beyond the stage and outside the house. Metamorphosis articulates the process of identity formation and thus becomes a way of enabling the abject to bear disruptively on social norms by haunting them from the borders and erupting through unsettling corporeal transformations to suggest other corporeal ways of being.

The resurrection of the Mai's body in act two serves to disrupt normative categories through reinsertion of an abject body, a corpse or resurrected body, into the limits of social norms and liveable bodies. Through her reappearance we witness the signification of a delegitimated body in the symbolic, a speaking abject body. The Mai's reappearance allows her to operate within dominant forms and to offer resistance to them. She is an educated, financially independent woman, who as a property-owner and head teacher works within the dominant order, but she still has to fight to wrest control of her body from her husband, who we see play her body like a cello. Despite the referenda of the 1980s, the period from the play's setting in 1979 through to the production in 1994 saw some positive changes in the laws pertaining to woman's role as mother and wife, thus augmenting Irish women's ownership of their bodies. In her resurrected and metamorphosed body of act two, the Mai regains her creativity and recaptures control of her ability to narrate herself corporeally when we see her play herself as a cello. More radical, though, is the Mai's second Ovidian metamorphosis which goes beyond operating within legitimate cultural forms to embrace her abject status and exclusion to 'those "unliveable" and "uninhabitable" zones' (*Bodies* 3).

Agency is located in the negotiation between freedom and constraint and this conflict is staged at the end of the play, when the Mai's final lines are juxtaposed with the energy and transformative power of her second metamorphosis. Whether this conflict is used to enable the abject body to expose the limits of signification depends on the staging of the play. Her final words appear to signal a hopeless resignation in the face of a life without Robert:

> THE MAI: People think I've no pride, no dignity, to stay in a situation like this, but I can't think of one reason for going on without him.
> MILLIE: Mom, you've never tried.
> THE MAI: I don't want to. (Carr 185-6)

However, this is in conflict with her body's movement away from the window, where she has stood waiting for Robert. She moves towards a place outside the stage space; a realm evoked by sounds and music, beyond the discursive order where bodies 'matter' and are made accessible through language. The 1994 Peacock production of *The Mai* was scored through much of the play by cello music composed by Michael O'Suilleabhain which drew attention to the Mai's creative silence, as she no longer plays the cello, while Robert does. However, the production used cello music, instead of the 'sounds of water' suggested in the stage directions, to intimate the Mai's final dissolution into the lake, and therefore suggest her regained control of her subjectivity and creativity. The 1995 Abbey touring production of *The Mai* emphasized the Mai's agency even more clearly as her ghostly figure walked offstage then across the window where she pauses to defiantly look back. The Mai's movement is underlined; she is no longer trapped behind the window looking out but is now able to look back in, and her potential status as a victim is challenged by her defiant stance. In contrast to the 1994 Peacock production's ending, which frustrates closure, the McCarter Theater's 1996 production reasserts a narrative of tragic destiny and dependency on Robert, as the play closes with him holding the Mai's body. This reiterates the end of act one, rather

than offering movement, change and metamorphosis. A review of the production comments on the composer Bakida Carroll's 'haunting sound effect to echo Millie's tale of the cry a swan releases when lamenting its fallen mate,' and the reviewer goes on to describe how this serves to 'underscore the ghostly image of Robert carrying the drowned body of Mai which ends each act' (Callaghan 373). The McCarter production's use of a haunting sound throughout, to evoke the keening swansong referred to in Millie's narration, further highlighting the Mai's tragic destiny and dependence on Robert.

The Mai's suicide is problematic with regard to her agency, as there is a theatrical tradition of female characters for whom transgression results in suicide and punishment by death**.** My positive reading of The Mai's suicide engages with death as an enabling process through creative metamorphosis, rather than a punitive inevitability. Carr's play *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006) explores the process of dying as a reflection of the way you have lived. If we apply this to the Mai's death we see agency in the act of her creative and imaginative metamorphosis, the suggestion that she has the potential to live her life 'huge and heroic' (Carr 163), but an alternative heroism of female mythmaking. As Melissa Sihra notes, '[d]eath on stage does not indicate finality, but movement; it is a poetic drive to excavate what it means to live' ('New Stages' 112). Ovid's *Metamorphoses* suggests that the spirit is rehoused in different bodies and the Mai's metamorphosis rehouses her spirit in the lake. The lake becomes a space of expression, an alternative version of home, where she can reshape inherited myths and corporeally gendered roles. Sihra describes this idea of woman changing herself and therefore the space around her: 'Carr's play shows the process of woman "rehousing" herself through the act of creation and storytelling' ('House of Woman' 207).

By the end of the play the Mai's metamorphosed body has outgrown the theatrical forms which contained her; new forms are needed to accommodate her transforming identities and the transformed space she inhabits. The Mai rewrites the mythic signification of woman as land to reshape the landscape, physical and theatrical, and suggest an alternative creative space for woman which opens up and enables the exploration of identity. Articulation of the abject offers the potential to disrupt cultural norms and expose the fact that it is not unliveable bodies that need to conform, but the world around them which needs to change to house these bodies. The Mai's body cites the objectification of woman as cello, pietà, and geographical entity to transgress social norms and through her suicide she corporeally suggests alternatives. The ending of the play leaves open the possibility for the body to shape a new language which can accommodate the Mai, as Carr offers alternative significations which could rehouse a female symbolic. However, this potential to engage with possible narratives of the future, counter to the notion that Carr's heroines have merely given up and submitted to their tragic destiny, can only be realized through the staging of the play.

I will conclude by focusing on the question of whether the Mai can produce a 'radical rearticulation of the symbolic horizon in which bodies come to matter at all' (*Bodies* 23) through her metamorphoses and therefore reveal other possible liveable bodies. Butler suggests that cultural norms should be dismantled from within, but the Mai ultimately removes herself from the realms of signification. There is no suggestion that she has any future political agency; rather, agency is located in the process of metamorphosis and the possibilities of resignification, in the dislocations of the dominant order rather than an end result. Butler addresses the need to engage with the systems that

perpetuate cultural norms, 'to invoke the category, and hence, provisionally to institute an identity and at the same time to open the category as a site of permanent political contest' (*Bodies* 221-2). The performativity of myth holds the creative potential for Butler's 'permanent political contest' through reperformance and resignification of identities, and the metamorphic process embodies the struggle for articulation of the abject. The abject exposes the tension between the corporeal and the limits of signification to question the inherited roles which constitute liveable lives and evoke other possibilities. The Mai's metamorphoses suggest an alternative, fluid world which promotes exploration of woman as process and allows the corporeal to invigorate the language of female mythmaking. Ultimately, it is through the staging of metamorphosis and of the possibilities for the articulation of the abject that the means of controlling, exploring, and exceeding the body within a patriarchal world are offered to the Mai.

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Little (White) Women: Locating Whiteness in (De)constructions of the American Female from Alcott to Split Britches

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In her introduction to the Modern Library's 1983 edition of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, Madelon Bedell argues that the novel has 'a quality of universality,' and proposes that it may be '*the* American female myth,' (xi, italics hers). In the twentieth century, Alcott's novel became a popular subject for feminist critical analysis of the construction of gender roles in American literature (Eiselein 68-72). These analyses often overlook the inextricable ties between gender construction, class, and racialization.[1] This paper will begin with a brief analysis of how Alcott's canonical work constructs the American female as moral, heterosexual *and* of 'white' European descent. I will then move my focus to a creative deconstruction of *Little Women* located in the lesbian/feminist performance group Split Britches' play *Little Women, The Tragedy* (*LWTT*). I will illustrate that although the 1988 production of *LWTT* calls into question the norms of morality and womanhood set forth by the popular novel, the play omits race as a category of identification and intersecting mode of oppression for women. Notably, the abilty of this theatre piece to expose oppressive systems of identity construction, I argue, relies on the whiteness of the actors' bodies.

My concern with the assumed signification of universal womanhood as white in such canonical works as *Little Women* originates from the recognition that women are affected by many intersecting modes of oppression, which are created by and create constructions of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nation (Brown 93; Joseph 2).

[1] By racialisation I mean: the process by which an individual or group of individuals self-identify or are identified according to phenotype or other perceived shared attributes.

Unfortunately, feminists have often failed to examine their own racialized identification, particularly when participating in the naturalized dominant group. Too often, feminist discourse does not negotiate social inequities between groups of women, as if gender relations exist independently of racial relations. In 1987, feminist social activist and Ethnic Studies Professor bell hooks pointed out that many people think of feminism 'as a movement that aims to make women the social equals of men[….][But] men are not equals in white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class structure' (62-3). hooks continues to ask her fellow feminists to remember social, economic and cultural differences experienced by women of colour as they fight for all women's rights. This paper seeks to examine how both the classic and the post-modern lesbian version of *Little Women* are indeed 'raced,' and to illuminate some of the ways whiteness shapes these two works.

Alcott's *Little Women* seeks to be radical (for its time), although it is the 'radicalism of philanthropy,' which depends on the hardship of others to be articulated (Stimpson 72). Throughout the book, an intellectual, middle-class whiteness is signified by the March daughters' concerns: Meg is plagued by her lack of fashionable clothes; Amy whines over her unfortunate relationships with her teacher and the girls at school; Jo is obsessed with publishing her stories; and Beth's one desire is to have a grand piano. Alcott depicts Marmee as saintly for continually assisting the more severely impoverished Hummel family. In spite of minor hardships, the March family is privileged, cultured, educated, and well loved, particularly when compared to the lives of their female African American contemporaries who struggled daily for survival against the horrors of slavery.

Although the term 'race' and the issue of slavery are seemingly left out of the novel, *Little Women* 'provides an exemplary model for the wartime nation, its metaphoric frame now shifted from the locus of the body to that of the household' (Young 101). Marmee instructs her girls to be soldiers of morality, efficiently training her daughters to become skilled mistresses of the domestic sphere. Despite even Jo's resistance, by the end of the novel all of the March girls have entered the 'domestic cult of true womanhood, which is always already white womanhood,' because of its dependency on its members' positions as mothers and wives to white males (Brown qtd. Davy 196). The novel illustrates the impact of the Civil War on the white middle-class American female without one direct reference to an African-American or enslaved African presence. The absence of an 'Africanist'[2] presence in *Little Women*, when the story takes place during a time of extreme national and racial tension over the issue of black slavery, invents a construct of 'Americanness' which is synonymous with whiteness (Morrison 47).

The March women are heroines of great morality because they are trained in the 'sweetness of self-denial,' make personal sacrifices to help the poor and the sick, and show unwavering commitment to their Unionist soldiers (Alcott 113). Alcott even hints that her little women are sympathetic to the abolitionist cause when Jo refers to Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for a lesson in morality. She says to her sisters, '…just say to us, as old Chloe did in *Uncle Tom*, "Tink ob yer marcies, chillin! tink ob yer marcies!"'(Alcott 66). The novel illustrates an idyllic representation of Northern white female character and virtue. However, the privileged

[2] Toni Morrison creates the term 'Africanist' in *Playing in the Dark,* to mean the 'four-hundred-year-old presence of, first Africans, then African Americans in the United States' (5).

position Alcott's characters occupy, as educated, moral, abolitionist American women, depends on the poverty and racial oppression of others.

The novel's fixation on morality plays a central role in its construction of gendered American whiteness. This bourgeois obsession with morality, and specifically, with protecting female virtue, becomes evident as Alcott's little women fight their 'bosom enemies': Meg's vanity, Jo's anger, Amy's selfishness, and Beth's shyness (11). While this morality seems racially unmarked, the novel describes a type of womanhood that was only accessible to middle-class white women; the most important facet of female virtue in 'the cult of true womanhood' in nineteenth century America was the woman's role as mother and wife (Davis 5). 'Woman' became synonymous with 'mother' and 'housewife,' but among black female slaves, this vocabulary was nowhere to be found (Davis 12). The famous speech known as 'Ain't I a Woman?' given by feminist abolitionist Sojourner Truth at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio in 1851 offers a stark comparison between the concerns and lifestyle of the mythologized March family and those of African American women during the Civil War. While Marmee teaches her daughters reverence for marriage, motherhood and domestic work, Truth points out the privilege implicit in such lessons. Truth says, 'I have borned thirteen chilern and see 'em mos' all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out in a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard – and ain't I a woman?' (134). Truth's words illustrate that the domestic sphere in itself is a privileged one which offers the luxury of privacy and a sanctioned space for rest and leisure. It is a protected zone, away from the harsh and unfeminine realities of manual labour and work outside of one's own home. The morality Alcott constructs is specific to white American middle-class women, and therefore the

identities constructed should be interrogated along the converging axes of gender, class, and *race*. [3]

In order to contextualize the gap between analysis of gender construction and the critical studies of race, I turn my attention to a theatrical deconstruction of Alcott's 'timeless' women's novel. Feminist/lesbian performance company Split Britches wrote, produced, directed, and performed *Little Women, The Tragedy* at WOW (Women's One World Café), in 1988.[4] This fascinating play explores Alcott's life in relation to the story of *Little Women* as actor Lois Weaver switches between the characters Jo March and Louisa May Alcott. *LWTT* deconstructs Alcott's static binary of middle-class morality versus 'immoral' displays of desire and sexuality. At the same time, it incorporates the theme of censorship, shedding light on the funding cuts of the United States' National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) and the feminist anti-pornography debates prevalent at that time.

While I make no claims about the authorial intentions of either work, I argue that, just as *Little Women* speaks to and for white American women, *LWTT* speaks to and for white feminists and lesbians. Despite the work's efforts to dethrone the process of identity construction, the play ignores the characters' (and performers') positions as racialized (white) bodies. This omission is significant because the production thoroughly interrogates the stifling constructions of middle-class, hetero-normative feminine morality, which have always been linked to whiteness, without directly addressing that linkage. I argue that this omission is a reflection of the time and social climate in which

[3] It should be apparent that 'race' here includes 'whiteness,' and that both of these words imply systems of identity construction.

[4] I will be citing quotations directly from the play-text as published in, *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice/Feminist Performance,* Ed. Sue-Ellen Case, (119-148) and referencing a video recording of a performance.

the piece was produced, and that it illustrates how gender performativity may register differently for women of colour and white women.

Many feminist scholars and activists recall that the 1980s were a painful time, full of emotionally and politically charged debate. This pain can be linked to the jaggedness of the multiple schisms in the feminist movement. As Sue-Ellen Case relates in her introduction to *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice/Feminist Performance*, at the time this play was produced there was a 'rift in feminist circles around the anti-pornography debates' (25). This division was exemplified and perhaps exasperated by a painful confrontation at the Barnard Conference of 1982 'between s/m lesbians who were pro-sex, erotics, even pornography and the feminists who were anti-porn' (Case 25). At the same time, women of colour challenged the feminist tendency to present the white middle class perspective as *the* definitive experience of all women. Radical feminists began to dismiss the liberal feminist notion of 'social equality' since it seemed to ignore race, class and sexuality as intersecting factors which determine oppression. Feminists of colour asked their white counterparts to take responsibility for recognizing and organizing against racism (Cuomo 5; hooks 62-3).

Answering this call, many white feminists made efforts to evaluate their own racial position, and to extend feminism as a form of combating all modes of oppression. There were still many white and lesbian feminists, however, who felt that sexism and homophobia needed to remain in the forefront of feminist practice (Russo 304). This rising division was complicated further by the aggressively hetero-normative communities of colour nationalist movements, which alienated both white feminists and lesbians (Combahee 368).

Split Britches formed during this tumultuous period, and developed as 'an all-white, but increasingly lesbian-focused theatre practice' (Case 5). Split Britches' *LWTT* spins a tale about 'morality' that cannot be separated from the political and social factors of this divisive time in the feminist movement. In her first speech, Weaver plays a character that is a hybrid of the actor Lois Weaver as herself and Louisa May Alcott. She highlights the themes of pornography and morality within the play, '…then we got interested in censorship, and pornography, and morality as it was represented by set design during the Italian Renaissance…' (120).[5] Immediately, the performers warn the audience that the play will highlight the political anti-pornography debates; however, the audience is not likely to see the other major feminist debate (between women of colour and white feminists) represented within this speech nor within the rest of the play as it unfolds.

In her article, 'Outing Whiteness: A Feminist/Lesbian Project,' Kate Davy examines the lack of African American women within the collective at WOW, the performance venue founded by Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw, where *LWTT* was originally produced. This article illuminates historical and ideological factors that contributed to the absence of women of colour at WOW specifically, and within feminist and lesbian performance more generally. Davy notes that the performances at WOW are largely concerned with 'intervening in the normative, naturalizing, and mystifying representational codes that produce "woman" as an ideological construct and heterosexuality as a psychological, social, and cultural imperative' (191). *LWTT* fits this description, dismantling the constructed nature of 'woman,' but omitting the element of

[5] Split Britches' acting style does not rely heavily on the convention of the "fourth wall". Often the actors will slip in and out of characters and address the audience as themselves.

racialisation as a converging factor in gender construction. I argue that *LWTT*'s ability to subvert normalizing constructions of gender, however, depends on the actors' whiteness. This point indicates that the strategies of resistance available for white women may have been different from those available to women of colour.

The possibility of representing and deconstructing what Davy identifies as 'the good-girl syndrome,' is not as readily available to women of colour as it is to white women (193). Deb Margolin's portrayal of Khurve, a burlesque dancer, Peggy Shaw's butch version of an evangelist Christian preacher, Hilarious, and Lois Weaver's representation of Louisa May Alcott as a sexual – possibly homosexual – woman, contrast with Victorian (and post-Victorian) notions of proper feminine propriety and morality. These counter-hegemonic representations of 'woman' challenge the norm of the heterosexual middle-class good-girl. In order to upset the good-girl syndrome, the actors' bodies must first contain the possibility of assuming the hegemonic roles the performance aims to deconstruct. To paraphrase Davy, it is by virtue of Split Britches' position of privilege as an all white performance group that this site of resistance is readable (193).

Conversely, women of colour, and specifically African American women, have been constructed historically as lascivious, with 'immoderate and overabundant sexuality' (Hartman 86). While white women in the early nineteenth century suffered under the weight of maintaining middle-class propriety and morality, black women were seen as temptresses of their white masters, whose economic power legitimized unlimited access to enslaved African women's bodies (Davis 175). Stereotyped as sexually voracious and promiscuous, black women were regarded as immoral, in opposition to the idealized pristine character of white women. The narrative of the immoral, over-sexed

black woman still exists today, continually reinforced by the commercial rap industry. One only needs to watch 'MTV Jams,' or any number of music videos featuring young black female dancers to see the contemporary cultural appropriations of such a myth (Rose 169). Performing sexuality excessively, thus subverting restrictive codes of feminine morality, would not register as a constructive strategy for black women who have already been culturally marked as immoral and sexually excessive. *LWTT* tears down the 'ideology of true womanhood,' an ideology always already denied to black women.

Split Britches' version of the ultimate 'female myth' incorporates the theatrical genre of morality plays as the backdrop for subverting the production of white female subjectivity. By repositioning sexuality as a source of empowerment for women, Split Britches indicate that 'morality' and 'righteousness' do not necessarily equate to goodness, and sexuality and desire are not innately immoral. Performing the rejection of traditional feminine mores reads as an effective strategy because the actors are white; however, this strategy of resistance, in part, relies on the invisibility of their whiteness. The audience may not 'notice' the performers' race nor the many markers of white culture within the play itself, but this 'not seeing' whiteness or not seeing white as 'race' illustrates white cultural dominance, as it is taken for granted, naturalized and 'unmarked' (Frankenburg 5).

Although race is not directly addressed at any point within *LWTT*, several aspects of it speak exclusively to and about white feminists and lesbians. I will touch on these aspects in an attempt to make the whiteness performed in this work visible through analysis, and to explore the relationship between white identity and feminist discourse

within this production. First of all, the play illustrates that heterosexuality and sexual piety are assumed in the Victorian narrative of morality, a narrative assigned to middle-class white women. Secondly, the display of alternative and excessive sexualities as a mode of deconstructing gender roles and 'morality' is a strategy that relies on the whiteness of the performers and characters. And finally, the specific qualities of the play's material elements – such as characters/actors, design, plot, and music – telegraph whiteness through the use of American and European cultural markers.

The set design of the 1988 production references traditional European morality plays in which the concepts of Heaven and Hell are dramatized, debated, and staged. Case describes the set design for *LWTT*: 'Heaven and Hell are the[…]limits of the stage, situating all action specifically on the spectrum between' (26). In the tradition of the morality play, there is a manifestation of an angel (Shaw's zealous preacher, Hilarious) and a devil (Margolin's 'strumpet' Khurve). However, these seemingly concrete personifications of good versus evil are complicated by contradictions within the characters and how each relates to the notion of morality, which itself is slippery. The tragedy of the play is located in Louisa's extreme sadness, and she is dynamically portrayed as being torn between her reputation as a moral Victorian American women's writer, and her desire to break with that construction and, as the character states, write 'in a voice more intimate, more seductive, more passionate…more culturally marginal…'(127). As the plot unfolds, the opposing sides of Louisa's identity, (Devil/strumpet/Khurve/Desirous and Angel/Preacher/Hilarious/Moral) challenge each other, revealing the interaction between the elements of desire and morality. This process subsequently disentangles the notion of consensus from that of censorship, as it asserts

the constructed nature of such binaries as morality/desire, pornography/decency, masculine/feminine, sexual/righteous (Case 25).

Peggy Shaw, well known at WOW Café as a butch lesbian actor, appears to be playing Hilarious as a male preacher. When Louisa imagines a possible dialogue between her right hand (Hilarious) and her left hand (Khurve), she refers to Hilarious as 'she' (127-29). Hilarious is endowed with 'masculine' qualities, but as Louisa's speech indicates, Hilarious's primary function is to personify Louisa's right hand of morality. This creates an interesting slippage: Shaw could be playing Hilarious as a male, or possibly, she may be playing Hilarious as a butch lesbian, subverting the traditional mores of Christianity from the outset. Read as an extension of the female author, Hilarious is the side of Louisa so obsessed with adhering to the codes of morality within the hegemony of white, Christian, American, heterosexual males, that 'she' is constructed as 'he.'

During a long, passionate evangelical speech, Hilarious' words smack of this patriarchal brand of morality. 'Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! I am talking about the Truth!' 'he' says. A few lines later he seems to comment on the nature of that 'Truth' with, 'Please stand back, I spit when I talk!'(129). Shaw's character is the quintessential 'moral' hypocrite. He judges those who 'go in and see the black crook dance and the hips that jiggle with nothing to wear,' but is seduced by Khurve's burlesque dancing (130). He swaggers into the audience and in a Film Noir-meets-carnival-master-of-ceremonies style, says:

> Hello, sweetheart, don't be afraid. Aren't you a little darling? It's nice to see you tonight! *(She crosses back to center stage, speaking loudly)* Step right up, step right up! Let us be in Heaven together! …Hilarious B. Hooves, that's my name! Hilarious, my given name, named after my first mother. Of course, we all have

> only one mother, the mother of God! *(She pulls a small statue of the Virgin Mary from her pocket and displays it),* (129).

Shaw's vocal delivery, gestures, and appearance, as well as the character's name, language, and praising of Mother Mary imply whiteness. Hilarious is obsessed with maintaining morality and decency through self-denial in a way that seems puritanical, evoking the southern white American evangelist tradition. Shaw's short blonde hair, cream suit, light skin, and charisma evoke the infamous white televangelists of the 1970s and 1980s, known for their aggressively conservative social politics, ability to procure funds from their 'flock,' and their reputation for involvement with multiple (homo)sexual and extortion scandals.[6]

Because *LWTT* is not a realistic play, and Split Britches certainly do not draw upon psychological realism as an acting style, the butch lesbian persona of Peggy Shaw is always present in her depiction of Hilarious. Hilarious exalts himself as righteous by describing his suppression of sexual desire, '…it's easier to see the will of God than to act on it! The woman in the church with the silk scarf! I let her go! After one song I knew every shadow of the blue of her eye, and I let her go!' (137). In this way, Hilarious, who is constantly struggling to repress his/her own sexual desires, represents how Christian bourgeois morality forbids sexuality, and specifically, homosexuality. Whether Hilarious is male or butch lesbian, the character desires a blue-eyed churchwoman wearing a 'silk scarf.' In order to maintain Christian ideals of morality, which have been historically assigned to white Americans, Hilarious cannot have his blue-eyed fantasy.

Recognizing that his Heaven is not what he had imagined, Hilarious breaks with his 'morality' once again, in rage: 'I believed all the things I said to people! I believed I

[6] Jim and Tammy Bakker and Billy James Hargis are examples of evangelist American preachers, whose hypocritical actions were revealed in 1970s and 1980s. Both stories erupted into public scandal.

would go to Heaven and that the heavenly kingdom was the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Jesus Christ his one and only son! I believed that! [...] And I was a liar!' (136). Hilarious's brand of fire-and-brimstone morality deteriorates by the play's end into something like a bitter-sweet peace, a queer satisfaction that comes with finally letting go of the constricting ideals that have always contained painful, suppressed doubt.

Khurve also reverses the Victorian brand of morality that was assigned to the white middle-class. She represents the gazed upon body; she is the burlesque dancer, who fluctuates between loving her lifestyle and hating herself because she understands that others regard her as immoral. Khurve represents pornography and nakedness, both literally and metaphorically. She is honest, forthright, and unapologetic in her aggressive display of sexuality, saying 'I got nothin' to apologize for. I never made no deals. I did what I did and I never asked nothin' and I never tried to hide from anyone anything,' (137). This is in complete opposition to Hilarious's hypocrisy, regret, and self-hatred. In effect, her virtue appears more intact than his; and so the Victorian bourgeois boundaries of morality and immorality crumble.

Khurve is the most embodied character in the play by virtue of her profession, costume, language, and bold display of sexuality. Her costume is a red, tight, skimpy teddy. She makes her living in a branch of performance that caters to the white bourgeois elite. Burlesque cannot be separated from its European origin, marking the audience members as middle-class men, and the dancers as 'fallen-women.' Davy writes:

> White women signify hegemonic, institutionalized whiteness by virtue of their association with a pure, chaste, asexual before-the-fall-womanhood […] attained and maintained via middle-class respectability, with its implicit heterosexuality. At the same time, white women signify an uncontrolled after-the-fall-sexuality, or fallen woman status, embodied by some white women (prostitutes, white trash, lesbians) and all women of color. (197)

Khurve most obviously subverts the moral hierarchies that construct 'woman' as moral and sexually pure. Khurve, in fact, has more integrity than Hilarious, and at least as much clout; they both, after all, end up somewhere between Heaven and Hell. Khurve is able to use her sexuality as a form of empowerment, which is evidenced by her soul escaping damnation despite her rebellious, embodied profession, in part because she is phenotypically 'white.' Had Khurve been played by an African American woman, the character may have run the risk of reinforcing the problematic historical construction of black women as sexually promiscuous. Margolin as Khurve conveys a transgressive female identity in part due to the juxtaposition her bold sexuality poses to the Victorian ideal of white female virtue.

Khurve's necessary whiteness is made apparent when she performs the burlesque song and dance number 'Adam and Eve:'

> I'm sure you've heard the story of Adam and Eve
> When Adam was tempted by an apple, I believe,
> But between me and you, that rumor is viscous
> Adam was tempted all right, but not by a golden delicious
> It was a pair, a peachy pair, *(she cups her breasts indicating which 'pair')*
> Made Adam aware he was there…

This particular burlesque number comments on the female as temptress and the female body as the cause for original sin. She is more embodied than sexually pious Hilarious or repressed Louisa, but somehow appears empowered by this embodiment. Khurve smiles, dances, and appears to be in control of her performance, her profession, and she ardently defends her choice to 'make love movies,' and show her 'body to people who wanted to see it!' (137-8). In this song, Khurve depicts biblical Eve as possessing power over Adam and, indeed, mankind. Eve, then, is characterized as powerful through her sexuality (which white middle-class mores deem 'immoral').

This can be compared with another point made by Sojourner Truth, who fought to include women of colour within the first wave of the American feminist movement: 'Den dat little man in black over dar, he say women can't have as much rights as man, 'cause Christ want a woman! Whar did your Christ come from? ...Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with Him' (135). Truth, like Khurve, positions women as powerful through a Christian narrative. However, these are two very different representations: Khurve subverts 'white morality,' while Truth's specific social positionality requires her to maintain it. Truth connects women's empowerment to their role as mothers, appealing to white feminists in 1851 by advocating the extreme morality and propriety that marked the early women's movement. She countered the image of black women as sexually voracious by asserting that a woman's power is obtained through the central role she plays in maintaining morality in the family and in the community. Much of the modern women of colour branch of feminism, for which she has become an icon, is also invested in this notion: unfortunately, impressions of African American women as overtly sexual and innately immoral linger, and much contemporary counter-hegemonic performance by African American women must therefore first address these stereotypes. Khurve approaches female power from the opposite direction, promoting Eve's sexuality as powerful. The possibility for Khurve to show 'woman' as empowered through sexuality relies on her ability to register first as a 'good girl,' which is readable because of her whiteness.

At the start of the play Khurve and Hilarious seem to assume opposite ends of the spectrum of morality due to their professions and costumes: Hilarious is presented as highly moral and Khurve, highly immoral. As the play develops, these two extremes

seem to bend further towards each other, converging, centre stage, on Weaver's Jo/Louisa. Jo/Louisa is both Khurve and Hilarious; she is both 'moral' and 'corrupt' at once, which calls the binary between the moral and corrupt into question. The implicit message dramatized through the actions of this three-in-one character is that sexuality, morality, desire, gender, and class are socially constructed.

As this lesbian/feminist rendition of the classic (white) girls' novel effectively deconstructs gender and class, it also represents whiteness. Whiteness is inherent in the play's reference to Italian Renaissance architecture, Burlesque, and morality plays, which evoke their European place of origin. Whiteness is obvious in the characterizations (a Burlesque dancer, an evangelist Christian preacher, a nineteenth century bourgeois female writer), and implicit in the subject matter (anti-porn and pro-sex debates). The morality deconstructed is that assigned to the white middle-class of Alcott's time, and the white anti-pornography feminists of the 1980s. And finally, *LWTT* successfully deconstructs the cult of 'true womanhood' through a process that implicitly relies on the performers' whiteness.

LWTT reveals tension between feminists over the role of sexuality in feminist politics and its relationship with morality in the 1980s. Alcott developed an idealized 'American' female character of exemplary moral conduct and domestic skill during the Civil War. Both of these works therefore reflect the time periods in which they were written and performed respectively, and also function as 'timely' feminist interventions which highlight specific concerns over dominant norms of femininity and womanhood. .This may explain why Alcott's 'little women,' whose 'womanly goodness' relied heavily on maintaining Victorian values of heterosexual marriage and motherhood within the

privileged site of the home, were not the black or the poor on whom their 'radicalism of philanthropy' relied (Stimpson 72). It also explains why *LWTT*'s Khurve, who subverts the notion that sexually promiscuous behaviour is immoral, and Hilarious, who illustrates the hypocrisy often connected with external displays of righteousness, are not the women of colour demanding to be recognized and included within the feminist movement.

The ability to subvert 'feminine' mores through bold and/or alternative displays of sexuality highlights the different historical experiences of women of colour and white women, reminding us to carefully consider the myriad nuances of privilege and oppression that make up women's experience. This paper has attempted to make visible the white identity present in these important women's works, which have often been examined only in terms of how each treats the idea of 'woman.' We must explore the presence and position of white identity in works that might unquestioningly or accidentally naturalize *the* women's experience as white and, in effect, reinforce the absence or erasure of racial and social inequities critically identified within feminist circles and discourse.

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Unconventional Femininity in the work of Suzan-Lori Parks and Marina Carr

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Introduction

Scholars have tended to locate and discuss the works of Irish dramatist Marina Carr and African-American playwright Suzan-Lori Parks within their national contexts.[1] This paper, however, will not address such contexts. Instead, by means of a comparative analysis of the work of these two successful female playwrights, I will investigate the ways in which realist drama can destabilise dominant conceptions of gender by subverting and disturbing culturally prescribed conventions of femininity.

The ways in which the careers and writing styles of Carr and Parks have developed have a great deal in common. Both had their plays first performed in the 1980s, and initially each playwright created absurdist, experimental pieces. More recently, Carr and Parks have both moved towards more traditional realist forms, and both have also garnered considerable critical recognition. In 2002, Parks became the first black female playwright to win a Pulitzer Prize. Carr won the E. M. Foster Award from the American Academy for Arts and Letters in 2001, and the AIF Literary Award in 2004. The shift to a more realist style, which seems to have contributed to the increased critical acclaim these women have received both nationally and internationally, and to their canonization, might be seen as problematic from a feminist perspective. However, I wish to argue that moving towards more patriarchal forms has allowed Parks and Carr to challenge the cultural construct of femininity from within the canon. This paper explores how both playwrights provide

[1] For example, Carr's work has been read in its national context by scholars such as Lisa Fitzpatrick and Anthony Roche; Parks's by Robert Baker-White and Aja Marneweck,

feminist resistance and destabilize identity categorisations by challenging the authoritative fixities of gender, staging alternative femininities and by revealing gender as a cultural performance through the creation of successful, accessible dramas.

Feminism and Realism

In the 1980s, feminists began to problematize the use of realist conventions in drama. In her introduction to *Feminist Theatre and Theory*, Helene Keyssar summarises the feminist arguments against realism. She cites Janelle Reinelt, who has struggled to see how '"any kind of feminist statement" could be expressed in theatre in "traditional realistic terms"' (6). Critics of realism take issue, for example, with the way in which the realist form attempts to mirror the audience's reality; from some feminist perspectives, this re-inscribes the dominant patriarchal order. Elaine Aston explains that:

> In contemporary feminist theatre where women have been seeking to take up a subject position they have looked to the 'interrogative' style of text and performance practice, in which the contradiction of the subject is split open in the interests of challenging and changing the symbolic or social orders. What women have contested and resisted are the oppressive systems of symbolic closure which, for example, characterise the dominant theatrical traditions of staging realism. (38).

Aston goes on to describe the theories of the French Feminists Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, who advocate an explosion of conventional language usage and form to create a sense of circularity (as opposed to linearity) which would more accurately represent women's experiences (45-56).

However, other feminists, such as Michelene Wandor, have identified the positive potential of the often co-dependent concepts of 'realistic' and 'mainstream'

theatre. To demonstrate this possible value of the mainstream, Keyssar refers to Wandor's advocacy of realist conventions:

> Critics hostile to realism argue that realism obliterates or disguises the construction of the world — all appears seamless and 'natural', and therefore appropriate. For Wandor, this is potentially a political good: it allows an audience of ordinary working-class and middle-class people to be at ease with the theatre and thus to be more receptive to political and social ideas and behaviours that they might otherwise avoid. (5)

Although the early, avant-garde plays of both Carr and Parks accord more with French Feminism and anti-realist theories, the feminist potential of their more mainstream pieces *Portia Coughlan* and *In the Blood* (which will be examined in the course of this paper), might be seen to have more impact because they reach a wider and more varied audience.,.

Shifting Styles: From Experimental to Traditional

Carr's early, absurdist plays such as *Low in the Dark* (1989), *Ullaloo* (1989) and *This Love Thing* (1991) resist the realist model; these repetitive dramas lack any plot or character development. Similarly, the characters of Parks's early plays such as *Betting on the Dust Commander* (1987) *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* (1989) and *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (1990) are symbolic rather than realistic; these plays are also repetitive, as well as fragmented in structure. The stylistic shift in Carr's writing was quite abrupt, beginning with the first play in what has become known as her 'Midlands Trilogy,' *The Mai* (1994). Despite revelations of tragic outcomes in the middle of *The Mai* and Carr's subsequent work *Portia Coughlan* (1996), these plays ultimately lean towards a realist model of theatre, especially in terms of their psychological characterisations and recognisable language and settings. Maria Doyle identifies *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* as 'the plays that solidified her reputation' (41). In her analysis, Doyle focuses on the way in

which Carr interrupts realist linearity by staging her protagonists' dead bodies before the end in these two plays; this paper examines *Portia Coughlan* in order to explore performativity and its feminist meanings in spite of — or perhaps because of — the use of realist conventions.

Compared with Carr, Parks's shift towards the traditional realist model was more gradual; *Topdog/Underdog* (2001) appears to conform more to realism than her previous work. However, Parks's move towards linear narrative began with her Obie Award winning *Venus* (1996), which stages her fictionalized reinterpretation of the story of Saartjee Baartman (also known as the Venus Hottentot, a nineteenth century African woman who was brought to England and exhibited because of her 'unusually large' posterior). Carol Schafer points out that the play 'has much in common' with Parks's earlier work, but that 'it serves as a transition to *In the Blood* and *Fucking A*' (181). Although the character of The Negro Resurrectionist reveals the tragic outcome at the beginning of the play, telling the audience that 'thuh Venus Hottentot iz dead' (3) the narrative develops in a linear fashion in comparison to her earlier, more fragmented works. Parks further refined her use of linear, tragic narrative with *In the Blood* (1999), which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. This paper focuses on *In the Blood* in order to show how, despite its realism, the play challenges cultural constructions of femininity.

At an early stage in Parks's career, Alisa Solomon predicted that as the playwright becomes 'increasingly recognised, she too — as she well knows — will run the risk of seeing white institutions want to fix that flattening –d onto her roun writing' ('Signifying' 80). Parks's subsequent movement towards more realistic tragedy could certainly be viewed as confirmation of Solomon's prediction, particularly since she went on to win the Pulitzer Prize for a play that was, arguably,

her most 'mainstream' to date in terms of its tense, plot-driven and ultimately tragic psychological study of the relationship between two poverty-stricken brothers: *Topdog/Underdog*. In her discussion of *Topdog/Underdog*, Deborah R. Geis explores the apprehension with which the play was received by reviewers, noting that 'it became time to worry that the dramatist had sold out by leaving the avant-garde and entering the Broadway mainstream' (112).

Similarly, academics link Carr's movement towards a more traditional model of theatre to her increased popularity and critical acclaim. Paula Murphy admits that this dramatist's 'change of direction […] has not been adequately explained, but what is certain is that it moved her firmly into the mainstream, where she began to attract more critical attention' (389). It is possible that Carr began to conform to more conservative dramatic traditions in order to be accepted by a wider audience and to appeal to the critics, but as Claire Wallace notes, '[f]rom the perspective of positive, politically aggressive feminism, Carr's work might be said to have developed in a negative sense veering from a playful satirical feminism to grim patriarchal tragedy' (87). Nevertheless, I wish to argue that despite Carr's and Parks's stylistic shift towards a more 'patriarchal' model of tragedy in the plays in question, which may have been instrumental in their respective 'acceptances' into the theatrical canon, productive feminist meanings may still be extracted from these works — particularly in terms of how such dramas reveal the performativity of gender.

Performativity and Gender Transgressions

Characters who are unwilling or unable to conform to their culturally prescribed roles are prominent in the more realist plays of both Carr and Parks. Analysis of the function of characters who, often violently, resist gendered cultural expectations can

add to our understanding of how theatre can intervene in our perceptions of gender. Judith Butler argues that gender is performative, rather than innate, and that it is constructed through the repetition of gender 'acts' (154). According to Butler, 'gender is a project which has cultural survival at its end […and] those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished' (156-157). If failing to act one's gender means non-conformance to socio-cultural codes of behaviour, resulting in punitive action such as reprimanding by others and cultural exclusion, then Butler's theory is particularly relevant to the ways in which the protagonists of these plays fail to fulfil acceptable feminine paradigms and, consequently, suffer punishment.

Portia Coughlan

The National Maternity Hospital in Dublin commissioned Carr's *Portia Coughlan*; Garry Hynes directed the first productions of the play at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin and, subsequently, at the Royal Court Theatre, London in 1996. Most recently, Bluepatch Productions staged *Portia Coughlan* at the New Theatre, Dublin, in February 2009, under the directorship of Aoife Connolly. Throughout *Portia Coughlan*, members of Portia's family beseech her to behave as a 'normal' woman would. Instead, Portia resists this role: she is foul-mouthed, she attempts to seduce the local barman Fintan, has been having a long-term extramarital affair with another local man, Damus Halion, and, it transpires, had regular sexual relations with her twin brother Gabriel before he died. Her unfeminine vulgarity and promiscuity, along with her breaking of the incest taboo, mark her difference from her community.

From the beginning of the play, Portia transgresses the norms of her role as a homemaker. In the first scene, her husband Raphael points out her failings as a wife and mother with reference to her drinking in the morning, her refusal to partake in

domestic activities such as housework, and her apparent inability or unwillingness to adequately care for her children (193-194). Throughout the play, Carr dramatises the tormented psyche of Portia, who is involved in passionate psychological struggles with many of the other characters, especially those who coax her to conform. In the original script, Carr used phonetic spelling to accurately convey the flat Midlands accent; it is through the use of this distinctly rural Irish accent that Portia communicates her frustration with and rejection of the role society enforces upon her, exacerbated by the paucity and isolation of the play's pastoral setting.. When the play is staged in Ireland, the audiences' familiarity with its language allows the communication of its disruptive thematic content.

Scene five is a telling scene in terms of Portia's resistance to her feminine role. Her mother, Marianne, refers to the untidiness of Portia's home, claiming that her daughter resists the example of feminine behaviour that she has set for her: 'You'd swear you were never taught how to hoover a room or dust a mantel; bloody disgrace that's what ya are' (209). The stage directions reveal that as Marianne attempts to tidy the house 'with impotent rage,' Portia 'undoes what she does' (209). Actions speak louder than words in this scene, as Portia's actions nullify those of her mother; this reflects Portia's desire not only to erase what she now sees as mistakes (marrying Raphael, having children and failing to follow through on her suicide pact with her twin brother fifteen years before), but also to revise the historical, familial roots of the acquisition of the gender role that she now finds so stifling. Butler refers to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in order to explain that, rather than a natural fact, gender is a historical situation:

> As an intentionally organised materiality, the body is always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body *is* a historical situation, as de Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatising and *reproducing* a historical situation. (156)

Marianne tries to mould Portia into a reproduction of this 'historical' construction of femininity through her own exemplary actions, circumscribed by society's threat of punishment for resistance. According to Butler, gender is performed under a 'situation of duress […] with clearly punitive consequences' (156-157). Marianne herself follows through on society's punitive threat by reprimanding her daughter for her unconventional behaviour.

The final act of *Portia Coughlan* takes us back to the end of act one, before Portia's suicide. At the end of the penultimate scene of the play, Portia puts on the dress that her parents have bought her for her thirtieth birthday. In the final scene, the stage directions tell us that she 'sets the table, lights candles, opens wine, pours a glass, puts on diamond bracelet' (252). The diamond bracelet was a birthday present from Raphael. Portia's actions in this scene are usually viewed as her final (and, of course, tragic) attempts to be happy. In her review of the 1996 production of the play at the Royal Court Theatre in London, Joan Fitzpatrick Dean tells us that Portia, '[t]ransformed by the beautiful dress that her mother gives her for her birthday […] momentarily flirts with happiness' (234). However, Bluepatch's more recent production of the play approached this moment differently. Portia's actions and the dress became cultural significations that accord with her family's — and indeed, society's — conceptions of femininity. According to Butler:

> The act that gender is, the act that embodied agents *are* inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, *wear* certain cultural significations, is clearly not one's act alone. Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one's gender, but *that* one does it, and that one does it *in accord with* certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not a fully individual matter. (160)

Playing Portia in the Bluepatch production, Andrea Scott wore the purple dress, which may be viewed as a symbol of the kind of femininity Portia's parents have envisioned for her, *over* the long, red dress that she had been wearing throughout the

performance. The red dress could be seen to represent Portia's individuality or passion; in a way, this exposed the identity that the new dress represents as, to use Solomon's phrase, 'a disguise, a set of effects' (*Re-Dressing the Canon* 7). In addition, Scott performed Portia's actions and delivered the character's dialogue in a weary, forced and explicitly 'performed' way during this scene. Thus, Portia's apparent grasp at happiness is transformed into an affected attempt to conform to the socially acceptable paradigm of femininity that the other characters have been urging her to adopt. In this way, Scott's performance of Carr's text further reveals the performativity of gender.

According to Lisa Fitzpatrick, Carr and her Irish contemporaries Christina Reid and Anne Devlin 'challenge totalizing conceptions of identity by asserting the presence of difference in communities conceived as homogenous' (332). This is certainly true in *Portia Coughlan*, as Portia marks her difference from her family and friends through her unconventional actions and desires. However, Carr's play goes further than the work of her contemporaries; she uses her characterisation of 'difference' to demonstrate the deconstructive idea of femininity as a performance, both in the play text itself and in the opportunities it provides for the stage.

In the Blood

The promiscuous behaviours of the female protagonists in *Portia Coughlan* and *In the Blood* appear as deviant acts against cultural constructions of idealized femininity. In *Portia Coughlan*, having witnessed one of Portia's clandestine meetings with Damus, her father Sly urges her to 'put a halter on [her] wayward arse' (214). In Parks's *In the Blood*, Hester's promiscuity similarly contributes to her social exclusion throughout the play — even though the most prominent members of her hypocritical society all

contribute to her sexual exploitation. In the play's prologue, the chorus, representing the society which punitively excludes Hester, refers to her as a 'SLUT,' a 'HUSSY' and a 'BURDEN TO SOCIETY' (7). In the first scene, Hester and her son Jabber talk about the graffiti that has been scrawled on the wall of their 'home' under the bridge. Hester, who is illiterate, cannot read the word 'SLUT' which has been written on the wall; she asks her son Jabber to do so and he touchingly refuses in order to protect his mother's feelings (9). It is this word — with which society has branded Hester as a promiscuous outcast — that leads to her eventual murder of Jabber when he finally reads and repeats the word for her (104-106). In relation to this play and Parks's other, more Brechtian 'Hester' play *Fucking A* (2000), Verna A. Foster points out that '[b]oth Hesters attempt to conform to the conventional model of "good mother" [but] [t]he strain of doing so without any support contributes to their fatal actions' (77). However, this conventional model of the good mother also means a married mother. In the prologue of *In the Blood*, the chorus refers to Hester's five children as 'BASTARDS' (7). Hester's status as a social outcast partly results from the fact that, according to the chorus, 'SHE OUGHTA BE MARRIED' (5), but she is not.

In the Blood was first produced at The Joseph Papp Public Theatre in November 1999 with Charlayne Woodard in the lead role. In his review of the performance, David Krasner identifies the presentation of a wedding gown to the protagonist and her subsequent wearing of this gown (both in scene 7) as moments that demonstrate the play's potential in performance, although he criticises the 'unimaginative' staging of this particular scene (567). In this scene — as with the final scene of *Portia Coughlan* — clothing becomes an important object in the performance of culturally acceptable femininity. The action involves the return of Chilli, Hester's first love and the father of her firstborn. Chilli carries with him a

basket of 'props' including the wedding dress, a veil, and a ring. These props represent the idealised version of femininity that he wishes Hester to adopt. According to the stage directions, Chilli puts the wedding dress on Hester 'right over her old clothes' (90). Like the image of Portia in Bluepatch's production of *Portia Coughlan*, this moment suggests that Chilli's socially acceptable notion of gender is a set of effects that conceal the 'real' Hester. It is clear from the dialogue as well as the stage directions that this scene in particular has disruptive potency in relation to totalising conceptions of femininity.

Through Chilli's actions and dialogue, scene 7 exposes what Verna A. Foster refers to as the conventional model of good mother, and by extension of femininity, as a 'cultural fiction' (Butler 157). He tells Hester that 'I carried around this picture of you. Sad and lonely with our child on yr hip. Struggling to make do. Struggling against all odds. And triumphant. Triumphant against everything. Like—hell, like Jesus and Mary. And if they could do it so could my Hester. My dear Hester' (96). This speech suggests that it is not Hester he wishes to marry but his own culturally informed fiction of what she should be.

Idealised icons of women and, in particular, religious iconography of the Virgin Mary inform Chilli's image of the mother as an almost virginal martyr. However, the embodiments of Hester's promiscuity — her four children by fathers other than Chilli — again lead to punitive consequences for the protagonist. When Chilli finds out about these children, he rejects Hester because of her inability to live up to the feminine paradigm based on purity and heterosexual monogamy which both he and society ultimately value. Chilli proceeds to take all his props — the ring, the dress, the veil — and to pack up his basket; despite Hester's pleas, he apologises and exits (96). Hester's final opportunity to be happy — or, her last chance to conform to

the model of long-term heterosexual union and to perform as an acceptable wife and mother — vanishes with Chilli's departure.

Examining the play's use of the structure of classical tragedy, Schafer identifies Hester's tragic flaw as her 'error to distinguish that love is separable from the act of love making' (192). According to Schafer:

> As representative of the chorus, the patriarchal Chilli invites the audience to imagine Hester as innocent and then see her as she is. Her tragic flaw is illuminated by the audience's recognition that Hester can never be the idealized object of the gaze. (193).

In addition, the fact that Hester's promiscuity prevents her from embodying socially acceptable femininity demonstrates a punitive social response in accord with Butler's theories. Chilli's, and indeed society's, rejection of Hester shows how 'culture so readily punishes or marginalises those who fail to perform the illusion of gender essentialism' or 'to do their gender right' (Butler 162, 157). In this way, *In the Blood* reveals gender as culturally constituted and, therefore, 'capable of being constituted differently' (155). Although *In the Blood* has, for the most part, a linear, tragic and 'patriarchal' form, the play contains the feminist potential to interrogate valued conceptions of femininity, thereby encouraging readers and audience members to consider alternatives to these valued and restrictive conceptions.

Conclusion

A sense of the protagonist's exclusion is common to both of the plays discussed in this paper. Hester La Negrita of Parks's *In the Blood* is ostracized and experiences punitive consequences mainly because of her socio-economic status as a black woman with five children of varying parentage – the physical symbols of her promiscuity – supported by social welfare. .Carr's iconoclastic Portia Coughlan is socially excluded because she breaks taboos and usurps the conventions of wife and mother. Both

playwrights employ some of the features of conventional patriarchal tragedy such as realistic settings, psychological character studies and plot-driven narratives, but use these to imagine alternatives to conventional femininity. According to Lynda Hart, in realistic theatre, female characters often 'get raped, go crazy and die' (5). In particular, the character of Portia Coughlan challenges this model. She is sexually promiscuous — predatory, even; rather than 'going crazy,' she acts against stifling codes of behaviour. Ultimately, by portraying characters who oppose the dominant cultural ideals of femininity, Parks's *In the Blood* and Carr's *Portia Coughlan* expose conventional femininity as a performative cultural construct.

Realist drama invites audience identification and attempts to mirror the audience's reality. Although the early plays of Parks and Carr accord more with the anti-realist circularity put forward by French feminist theory, their uses of realist conventions, such as psychological characterisation and realistic settings and language, allow them to reflect the performance of gender in contemporary culture. Parks's *In the Blood* and Carr's *Portia Coughlan* expose the culturally constituted nature of gender. The act of showing that gender is performative has, in itself, transformative possibilities; according to Butler, if we consider gender to be constituted, then it is capable of being constituted differently (155). The plays in question therefore contain productive feminist meanings, despite their use of realist conventions. In addition, Wandor's notion of the radical possibilities of realism can be applied to the plays this paper has examined. Through the realistic characterisation of alternative femininities, Parks and Carr deconstruct gender from within the canon. They thereby present gender-conscious enquiry in an accessible way to a much wider audience, which ultimately justifies their adoption of realist conventions and subsequent entrance into the mainstream. Parks and Carr may no longer be 'in exile'

from the canon since they adopted more conventional styles, but their more stylistically 'mainstream' dramas stage characters who are in exile from mainstream culture and who contest accepted, but restrictive, cultural constructions of femininity.

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Staging Humanity in *Cranberry: The Human Revelation of Joan Crawford*

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'Everyone wants to be right. Since that's impossible let's just settle for being human.'
Joan Crawford, *A Portrait of Joan* (122)

Beginnings

At the same time as I was enrolled in an auto/biographical performance course at the University of Missouri-Columbia, my colleague Kevin Babbitt was working with the archived papers of Arthur Unger, an entertainment journalist perhaps best remembered as the television critic for the *Christian Science Monitor*. When Babbitt came to speak with my class about his process, he jokingly referenced a transcript of Unger's interview with Academy Award-winning American actress Joan Crawford, the star of such iconic films as *The Women*, *Mildred Pierce*, and *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*, who is remembered by most for her infamous feud with rival Bette Davis, her daughter Christina's book *Mommie Dearest*, and its subsequent feature film adaptation that shattered Crawford's professional and personal reputation. The casual mention of the Crawford interview prompted my classmates to implore me to 'do Joan Crawford!' I eventually relented, thinking it would be fun to jump on the *Mommie Dearest* bandwagon and develop a drag performance of Joan Crawford, playing her in all her Hollywood glory.

However, I derailed my original plans after reading the archived materials. Unger interviewed Crawford at her Manhattan apartment in 1958 for a special feature in *Datebook*, a now-defunct magazine for teenage girls. After initial reluctance, Crawford agreed to do the interview on Unger's promise that he wouldn't publish her words unless

they actually proved constructive for young girls. Although Unger left with the realization that he did not have a story for his magazine, he transcribed his notes and edited them into narrative form. According to Unger, in the interview, Crawford spoke candidly and sometimes tearfully about her difficulties with her adopted children Christina and Christopher, as well as her own troubled childhood. The more I read, the more I found myself agreeing with Unger about the 'fascinating and revealing' nature of the interview, becoming more and more engrossed in this rare glimpse into the normally guarded life of a movie star (Letter). I thought that by breathing life into the pages of this forgotten, dust-laden manuscript I might, even in some small way, move people to see a tarnished screen legend in a light different to that which has been cast on her. The manner through which I might communicate this sensibility in a concrete, tangible way to an audience became the focus of the adaptation and staging process.

Reconstruction

The piece itself, a forty minute play entitled *Cranberry: The Human Revelation of Joan Crawford*, consists of two characters – Arthur Unger and Joan Crawford – to be played by one actor, only differentiated through changes in voice and physicality. As in the original manuscript, the Unger character functions in two separate frames: one in which he speaks with Crawford in her apartment in 1958, and another in which he speaks with the audience in the present, commenting on his 'scenes' with Crawford. Crawford, however, only appears in the 1958 frame.

I began the adaptation process armed with the knowledge that I wanted to feature as many of Crawford's words in the performance as possible. Structurally, the interview

lent itself to being transformed into a dramatic work, since Unger's thirty-page manuscript was not a direct word-for-word transcription. Although the entirety of my piece comes from Unger's manuscript, I do not perform the manuscript verbatim nor do I perform it in its entirety: I rearranged and, at times, reappropriated action and dialogue, to solidify the structure and maximize what I saw as the manuscript's full dramatic potential. As I combed through the interview, I initially chose to include dialogue that appealed to my emotions: comments made by Crawford that, based on my research, I thought were intriguing and would play well in a theatrical setting.

Throughout the writing process, I constantly had to make decisions about what to include in my text and what to leave out. Though my own bias towards Crawford grew exponentially, I'd like to think that *Cranberry* presented a somewhat balanced Crawford, as I did not shy away from embracing, for example, her sometimes harsh words in reference to Christina and Christopher, which could potentially cast her in a negative light. In 'Searching for the Real Calamity Jane,' M. Heather Carver acknowledges the difficulties of portraying an infamous historical figure, but states that 'it is more important to show the complexities of the self in performance' (97). If I was going to show Crawford in all her complexity, as Carver suggests, then it would be anathema to erase the nuances reported by Unger. Instead, I chose, in Carver's words, to 'engage in raising questions about identity rather than [make] authoritative statements about historical or personal narratives' ('Risky Business' 27). As opposed to merely revisiting the historicized Joan Crawford, I sought to look at her through the new lens provided by Unger's manuscript, in an attempt to chip away at her monster-mommy status and restore her humanity.

Empathy

This notion of humanity – the condition of *being human* – became increasingly important in my work with Crawford, as I laboured with my own understanding of what humanity is: a stripping away, a vulnerability, a laying bare, a nakedness. Thus, I began my project by submersing myself in the panoply of material on Crawford's life and career, excavating the material for all I deemed useful. I read several biographies, including those by Laurence J. Quirk and William Schoell, Charlotte Chandler, and David Bret;,Crawford's autobiography, *A Portrait of Joan*, Roy Newquists's interview collection *Conversations with Joan Crawford*, Christina Crawford's ubiquitous *Mommie Dearest*, and watched the retrospective documentary *Joan Crawford, Always the Star*. Investigating these items exposed the fact that there is little unbiased, critical interrogation of Crawford's personal and professional life. Thus, it became clear that I would have to make fundamental decisions based on my own interpretation of this research. Submerging myself in all things Crawford allowed several personal connections between Crawford and myself to bubble to the surface, causing an unexpected sense of empathy to rise within me. I found myself relating to her difficult and disjointed childhood, her intense desire to be taken seriously as an artist, her persistent work ethic, and her deep yearning to give and receive love and forge honest human connections.

Performance artist Anna Deavere Smith, famous for her portrayals of real-life and historical individuals, tells us that 'an ability to identify with the other is called empathy. That empathy is a proof of humanity' (*Talk to Me* 71). 'Acting,' she says elsewhere, 'is the ability to believe that you are someone else: that you could be in someone else's shoes. It is the ability to create with your body an image of that person that resonates

through your attempt to *feel* as that person' (*Letters* 140). While Smith's notion of performing the other is powerful, I wanted to move beyond merely being in Crawford's shoes. Experimental theatre director Anne Bogart takes Smith's ideas a step further, writing:

> Empathy allows an audience not only to enjoy the big theatrical brushstrokes but also to identify and relate to the event personally. The human heartbeat serves as the red thread through any theatrical labyrinth and will lead to the vulnerability at [the] center of the event. This humanity allows an audience to access the experience personally and intimately. Empathy is the ability to identify and understand another person's situation or to transfer your own feelings and emotions to them […] When we lose our capacity to empathize, we lose an essential part of our humanity. (65-7)

If empathy is the ability to allow the other in, to feel what the other is feeling, then it was my hope that, through *my* ability to let Crawford in, through *my* willingness to lay bare Crawford's 'human heartbeat' and see her as more vulnerable, audiences might experience in their own way what I had already been feeling.

In my effort to communicate my newfound personal and professional respect and admiration for Crawford, I made the choice to take the following partisan statement from Quirk and Schoell's 'essential' biography as a touchstone:

> Joan was not a perfect human being – who is? – but for her hard work alone she deserves better than what she has gotten since the publication of *Mommie Dearest*. Being a movie star was serious business to her, and she worked harder at her career and at her acting than perhaps any other star in Hollywood. She was in no way a freak or a monster, and she does not deserve to be a national joke [...] [A] career like hers deserves to be looked at with objectivity, her abilities analyzed honestly. (xi)

Of course, through my decision to support this statement, my performance work would, necessarily, be far from 'objective,' and 'honesty' is a problematic idea when venturing to portray a historical figure. Nevertheless, the sensibility of what Quirk and Schoell

suggest – the revisioning of an important American cultural icon – is what I sought to achieve with my performance piece.

Fig 1.In this monologue, Crawford remembers her daughter Christina asking for help rehearsing lines for a school play. Crawford admits it was one of the few times she felt her daughter really respected her. Photo by Ryan McNeil.

Images

Understanding that my performance would be my version of Unger's version of Crawford, I entered the rehearsal space for the first time with the notion of 'raising questions about identity', wanting to bring audiences close to Crawford, making transparent her outer veneer of 'movie star,' and allowing a glimpse into her humanness.

Finally faced with the immense task of putting Crawford 'on her feet,' I was struck by an all-important question: If I was attempting to revitalize a much-satirized American icon, how do I, a short, stocky man, endeavour to portray her without further proliferating her commonly accepted artificial, affected persona?

The photographic retrospective *Legends: Joan Crawford* contains a picture taken by George Hurrell for 1935's *I Live My Life*. It is an image of Crawford's face, framed – nearly obscured – by total darkness. The picture is an extreme close-up in which Crawford is wearing no make-up; all her normally concealed blemishes, wrinkles, and freckles are laid bare. Although photographs are open to individual interpretation, what I saw in this rare, naked image of Crawford was a glimpse of that illusive sense of humanity my performance was attempting to enact. How do I get at this bareness, at this sense of simplicity, I asked myself. How do I strip away the cultural baggage that has accumulated on the Crawford persona, and present *this* image of Crawford in which, I felt, she was asking to be seen as a human being rather than a commodity or a mere image on a screen?

What is also striking about the picture is that the photograph virtually erases Crawford's outward femininity. Indeed, if taken out of context, the gender of the figure in the photo might not be readily apparent. This was a key discovery, as Crawford herself, well known for her close relationships with homosexual men, embodied a complex gender identity. She was a rumoured bisexual; several Crawford biographers, including Bret, and Quirk and Schoell report on intimate affairs with actresses Barbara Stanwyck and Tallulah Bankhead. Furthermore, Crawford was a pioneer in her adoption of children while unmarried, and in the intensity with which she drove her career, refusing to be

relegated to the role of the typically marginalized woman of her era. An examination of Crawford's film career uncovers what Quirk and Schoell term a 'masculine approach' to her roles, displaying in such films as *Johnny Guitar* and *Autumn Leaves* a toughness and a 'steely outer shell' that masked 'the insecure woman underneath' (176, 193). In her essay 'Gender Impersonation Onstage,' feminist scholar Jill Dolan explores the plasticity of gender identity. She challenges the role of the stage as a mirror that reflects cultural and social organization, recognizing that 'the stage, then, is a proper place to explore gender ambiguity, not to expunge it cathartically from society but to play with, confound, and deconstruct gender categories […] If we stop considering the stage as a mirror of reality, we can use it as a laboratory in which to reconstruct new […] identities' (8). Perhaps, by highlighting the fact that I was a gay man willing to play an oft-parodied female cultural icon *outside* the realm of satire, I might demonstrate for spectators my notion of humanity by experimenting with confounding gender identities.

Drag

Drag has roots in theatrical conventions that can be traced back to classical Greece. 'In particular,' says gender and performance scholar Lesley Ferris, 'the comedies of Aristophanes use the charade of gender costume – specifically the dress of women – as a wild comic device,' in which the physical attributes of the characters were exaggerated and made grotesque (20-1). Two millennia later, some drag performers of Crawford's era, such as T.C. Jones and Charles Pierce similarly considered their work a gimmick, 'always in the service of satire' (Senelick, *Changing Room* 386). However, the idea of a comical, hyperbolized Joan Crawford is the exact opposite of what I was seeking to

conjure. Dolan takes the argument a step further by pointing out drag's camp context, which she feels removes female impersonation from 'the realm of serious gender play and deconstruction' (5). 'Women are nonexistent in drag performance,' Dolan continues, 'but woman-as-myth, as a cultural, ideological object, is constructed […] Male drag mirrors women's socially constructed roles' (6).

Moreover, even though contemporary drag performers, such as Craig Russell and Jim Bailey, repudiate the term 'female impersonator' and seek not to impersonate, but to *recreate* out of a genuine sense of care for their subjects, I had to consider the researcher's reflexivity. The damage to Crawford's reputation has been done. I realized that no matter how carefully I endeavoured to portray her, the minute I stepped onto the stage in heels and a wig, I would be dragging that stigma onto the stage with me. I felt if I appeared in full Crawford regalia, many would not be able to see past the female costume on the male body, and into the inner layer of Crawford's humanity I intended to capture through my performative choices.

I therefore decided to use as neutral a costume as possible: I chose clothing that was neither decidedly masculine nor feminine, in an effort to project an unadorned blank slate that aided in the transformation of my body into the gender-conflating threshold I aimed to create.. Based on the sleek darkness of Hurrell's photo, I decided on non-gender specific black slacks and a simple black turtleneck shirt. Rather than donning a pair of shoes, which can be extremely gender specific, I felt the nakedness of my feet allowed me to return to a more primal state in which I was connected with the natural world, as I attempted to present 'human,' rather than a gendered, sexualized construction.

Technique

In his introduction to *Gender in Performance*, Laurence Senelick employs anthropologist Victor Turner's theory of the *liminal*, a period of time when a person is betwixt and between social categories or personal identities,. Problematizing the relationship between gender and performance, Senelick states that, because the theatre has been a safe-house for unconventional behaviour, 'commonly accepted reality may be inverted […] within this space' (xi). Accordingly, by embodying a plastic notion of gender, in which I was neither male *nor* female, I sought to revision the humanity of Joan Crawford *through* the denaturalization of socially accepted norms of gender.

Here, it is helpful to bring into the discussion how I used the Suzuki method to help achieve what I consider a liminal threshold in my performance. A physically rigorous technique founded on the codified forms of *kabuki* and martial arts and the metaphysical aesthetics of *noh*, the Suzuki forms, called the 'grammar of the feet,' are executed barefoot, in an effort to gather energy from the earth. Furthermore, by reconnecting the actor to his/her primal energy, Suzuki training transforms the actor into a threshold, or a *limen* (to borrow a term from Turner), a thin passageway between places rather than a place itself, linking one space to another, an 'instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance' ('Liminal to Liminoid' 206). In ritual performance, the thin space of the limen is widened, both actually and conceptually: what is usually a go-between becomes the site of the action, containing freedom and the potentiality for the formation of new ideas, symbols, models, and beliefs. Turner called this liberation from the constraints of ordinary life 'anti-structure' (*Ritual Process* 127-28). One of the tenets of Suzuki training is that it pushes actors beyond the

confines of their perceived limitations, connecting them to a higher, liminal plane of seeing, feeling, and understanding. This connection between the mundane world and a more holistic mode of awareness allowed me to liberate gender from its constraints and push *it* beyond its perceived limitations. Thus, through the ritual of embodying the Crawford character in performance, I allowed my body to form new ideas and become the site of a 'new' model of gender, and thus a 'new,' humanized Joan Crawford.

Body

Although I chose *not* to perform in drag, I did choose to approximate Crawford's vocal and physical mannerisms. I played with gender by not *formalizing* that play: I entered the rehearsal space without a set plan, allowing my imagination and creativity to flow freely, deliberately choosing to not to focus all my attention on the fact that I was an effete man layering on the corporeal particularities of a mannish woman. Rather than concern myself with reconstituting the societal construct of 'woman,' I was attempting to find my way into the internal image of Crawford exposed in Hurrell's bare photograph. My thought process was that if I 'just did it,' if I just let my own features speak for Crawford within the threshold of my body, I could force spectators to see beyond the mannered persona of Crawford they were likely expecting and discover my notion of Crawford's *humanity*.

> Highly influential gender and performance scholar Judith Butler writes that
>
> gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (191)

My body is certainly stylized in my performance of Crawford. Well aware that I was recreating Crawford's physical and vocal idiosyncrasies, I watched a plethora of her films

(including *Straight Jacket*, *Mildred Pierce*, *Susan and God*, *The Women*, *The Story of Esther Costello*, *Strange Cargo*, *Queen Bee*, *A Woman's Face*, *Rain*, and *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?*).Focusing especially on those in which she played a mother, I looked for vocal and physical similarities, attempting to capture what John Gentile calls a person's 'elusive essence,' using 'the potency of suggestion as a technique to convey the spirit of [a] character' (143-44). I attempted to imitate her voice, with its husky pitch and perfect diction, and her physicality, with its sharp, direct movements. I attempted to recreate the angle at which she held her head, with her chin slightly pointed up, as well as her brisk, direct, chest-first manner of walking. The movement of her arms was also important, as they are usually held in tension: down at her sides with her fists clenched, clasped tightly in front of her, or with one arm across her midsection, and the other resting on it in a ninety-degree angle, allowing her hand to gesture or lie on her sternum.

Butler writes that,

> such [stylized] acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs […] That the gendered body is performative suggests that is has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (185)

If it is true that gender only exists in relation to the actions the body endeavours to perform, then as a gay man hazarding to enact a 'straight' portrayal of a female personage relegated to the realm satire, I exposed the illusion of a socially constructed, gendered self through the stylization of my body. Agreeing with Butler that '[t]he body is not a "being," but a variable boundary,' I dared to make visible within the liminal threshold of my body the entirely *human* side of Joan Crawford so vividly captured in Hurrell's picture (189). Rather than presenting a decidedly male or female construct, I necessarily

blended Crawford's masculine femininity with my feminine masculinity, exposing what Butler calls the 'construction of coherence' that 'conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally,' a 'fiction that disguises itself as a developmental law regulating the sexual field that it purports to describe' (185).

Performance

In actual performance, I was aided in my explication of the plasticity of gender by the fact that I was required to play both Crawford *and* Unger, himself an effete homosexual. Thus, not only was I able to confound gender while embodying the Crawford character, I was also able to confound gender by *shifting* character. These shifts are done simply, and are enacted *only* through the physical movements of my body. There is no better example of this transformation than Crawford's first appearance. After Unger, a small, hunched, high-voiced, frenetic character, discusses his arrival at Crawford's apartment, the audience watches as he slowly morphs into the iconic Joan Crawford. In an instant, I present the audience two apparently conflicting notions of gender that dart across the threshold of the same body, harkening back to Turner's notion of the *liminal*. The entire performance unfolds as a series of these transformations, demonstrating Butler's dictum that 'the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and […] true gender […] a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies' (186).

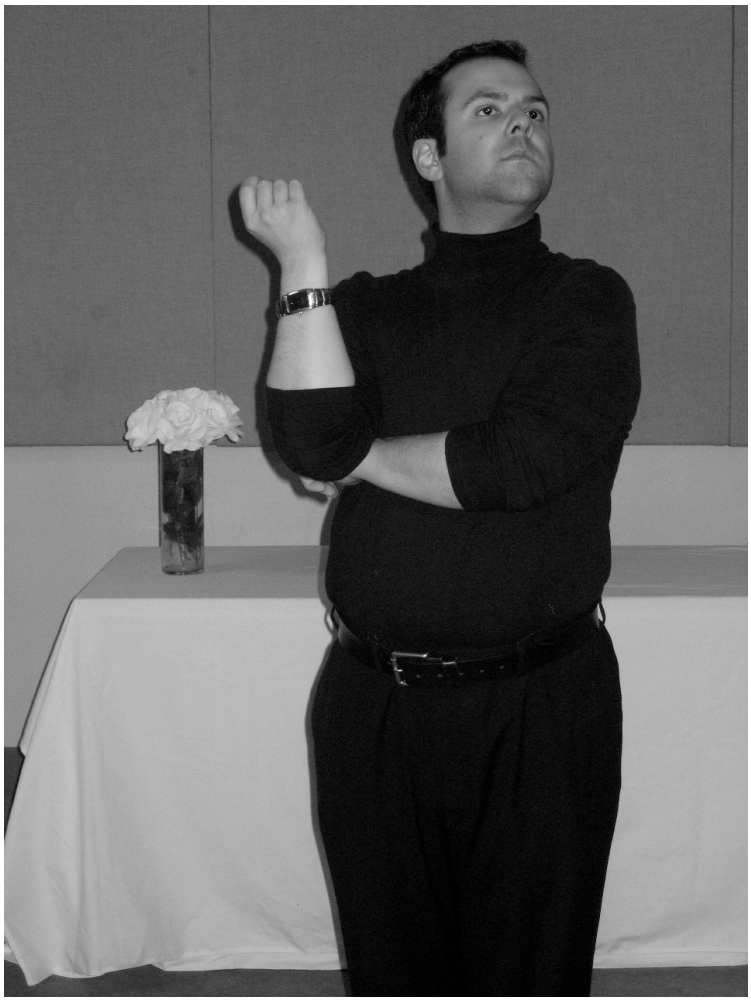

Fig. 2. Crawford's first appearance. My rigid posture, angled gesture, and sharp gaze are enacted with an effort to render Crawford powerful and iconic.
Photo by Ryan McNeil.

Conclusions

My experience from performing this piece has led me to agree with Anna Deavere Smith, who believes that performance artists, as caretakers and creators of culture and the human condition, give 'us the allowance to imagine things another way;' (*Letters* 6). How we live and how we treat each other is what should be at stake in the artist's work. Smith writes: 'One of the best things about being an artist […] is […] sharing vulnerabilities, sharing the things that make us human […] We take a chance, and walk with […] the

pain of others – in order to tell their stories perhaps – to let them know someone understands' (*Letters* 45, 166). Thus, my gender-confounding work with Crawford showed me that part of being human means we must see beyond socially constructed roles. By 'proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality,' says Butler, 'gender can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically *incredible*' (192-3). Towards this end, perhaps my work has rescued the complexity of Crawford that Unger never found.

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Reasoning Madness: The Reception and Performance of Euripides' **Herakles by Kathleen Riley.**

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 367 pp. (hardback)

Stephe Harrop (University of Oxford and Goldsmith's College, University of London)

Euripides' *Herakles* is a structurally challenging play, with a family-in-peril first movement that seems to be resolved by the timely return of a triumphant Herakles. This comfortingly predictable narrative is shattered by the appearance of Iris (Hera's vengeful emissary) and Lyssa ('frenzy'), who transform the returned Herakles into a crazed, delusional killer who murders his own wife and children.

In *Reasoning Madness*, Kathleen Riley is keen to counter the assumption of Euripides' structural detractors that the explanation for Herakles' crimes ought to be inherent in the legitimised violence of his earlier heroics, electing rather to 'search for meaning in the play's structural dislocation' (23). She argues that 'a strategy of disunity is essential to Euripides' ground-breaking externalization of Herakles' madness and to his even more ground-breaking humanization of Herakles' heroism' (24). In Riley's interpretation of *Herakles*, the drama concludes with an effectively 'demythologized' hero, 'who protests against divine amoral indifference' and belatedly recognises that 'only human endurance and human *philia* matter' (45). This reading invests the grieving Herakles with a distinctly humane grandeur, realised in opposition to a pagan pantheon wreaking unpredictable havoc in human lives. Reasoning madness, the author suggests, is precisely what Euripides *does not do* in his handling of the Herakles myth.

Riley thus discerns a crucial distinction between the Herakles of Euripides and his subsequent stage incarnations, the majority of which, she argues, are fundamentally informed by 'a process of reasoning the madness and psychologising

the hero' which begins in the first century AD with Seneca's *Hercules Furens* (45). Chapter 2 ('Seneca and the Internalization of Imperial *Furor'*) places *Hercules Furens* within the context of Imperial Rome and 'the ambivalent achievement of Empire,' highlighting Seneca's un-Euripidean emphasis upon psychological causality, and the way in which the Roman Hercules' tragedy stems from a personality 'unbalanced by megalomania' (54). Speculating intriguingly that Seneca might have conceived his reworking of Euripides 'as a seasonable and salutary warning' to an adolescent Nero about 'the importance of moderate government and self-restraint' (57), Riley suggests that this is the moment at which Herakles' madness shifts from being the external work of malicious immortals to become the inevitable psychological outcome of 'the *furor* of imperial achievement and absolute power ... unmitigated by self-knowledge or self-mastery' (90).

The volume proposes and analyses several other key moments in the reception and transformation of the Euripidean Herakles. Chapter 4 explores 'Herculean Selfhood on the Elizabethan Stage,' sketching the theatre's enthusiastic adoption of Seneca's self-aggrandising over-reacher as a 'psychological portrait of power' in an age of self-fashioning Tudor monarchs wielding 'unprecedented authority' (118), characterising Othello and Nick Bottom as two contradictory currents within a general stream of Senecan, rather than Euripdean, dramaturgy. Chapter 6 ('The Browning Version') presents Robert Browning as a solitary and under-appreciated defender of Euripides' original design, restoring the play's 'dramatic and moral essence' in his 1875 *Aristophanes' Apology* (206). Chapter 7 ('Herakles' Lost Self and the Creation of *Nervenkunst*') plunges the reader into *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, where avant-garde aesthetics coalesce with nascent Freudian psychoanalysis in the fascinated contemplation of a 'dark and dangerous Heraklean psychology,' the development of a

'Herakles complex' (278), and the diagnosis of the modernist Herakles with the same neurotic symptoms as the protagonists of von Hofmannsthal's *Nervenkunst* Elektra (208).

Chapters 9 and 10, focussed on the more recent life of *Herakles* in performance, continue the theme of the theatrical preference for Senecan psychologising over Euripides' supernatural explanation for the hero's violent madness. Riley analyses Archibald McLeish's 1965 *Herakles* as an exploration of Cold War fears about technology, masculinity, militarisation and the terrifying ease with which lethal destruction can be unloosed on both a personal and planetary scale (302). Her discussion of Simon Armitage's 2001 *Mister Hercules* reveals that many of the same preoccupations continue to define the performance reception of *Herakles* today, which is predominantly concerned with exploring 'the cultural psychology of militarism and masculinity and the problem, above all, of trained killers adapting to civilized and civilian society' (314). These and other recent reworkings of Euripides' *Herakles*, Riley contends, 'have substantially reconfigured the madness itself, internalizing and rationalizing it,' causing the Greek hero to assume 'an intriguing un-Hellenic aspect' as an ambivalent figure of latent violence, repressed trauma and 'neo-Senecan' mental unbalance (337).

Although *Reasoning Madness* is described as a history of Euripides' *Herakles*, it's Seneca's more troubled, troubling hero who seems to occupy the bulk of the book's analysis. As Riley concedes, 'it is actually the Romanized Greek hero, the morally and psychologically problematic Senecan Herakles that appears to have caught the cultural imagination of the early twenty-first century, and to have become a potent emblem for the new nihilism and humanity's age-old capacity for self-destruction' (348). Throughout the book, a striking rift between academy and

dramaturgy is in evidence, with a classicist's reading of Euripides' dramatic purpose at odds with the demands of the contemporary stage for a psychologically plausible neo-Senecan Herakles to function as a locus for explorations of 'the hero's habitual aggression,' and the 'particular cultural imperatives' which cause him to be 'at war with himself, his dependants, and his society' (281).

Whilst acknowledging a personal preference for the Euripidean Herakles, Riley's wide-ranging and thoughtful narrative examines the multiple frames of cultural reference which have re-defined the ancient drama in different times and places. Descriptive rather than dogmatic, *Reasoning Madness* provides a fascinating account of the ongoing negotiation between scholarship and stage regarding the nature and meaning of Herakles' tragic madness.

The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities by Ramsay Burt

Second Edition, New York: Routledge, 2007, 228 pp. (paperback)

Grant Tyler Peterson (Royal Holloway, University of London)

In 1995, Routledge published Ramsay Burt's *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities* which quickly became essential reading for the developing fields of dance studies and gender studies. Burt's interrogation of the male dancer in western professional dance traditions, starting with Diaghilev, offered one of the first theoretical accounts examining the socio-historical tensions surrounding masculinity, homosexuality and the spectatorship of male dancers. Burt's 2007 revised edition represents a promising development from his original work, yet, at the same time, stages a curious retreat from some of his earlier convictions.

Despite the plethora of books now available on gender and sexuality, *The Male Dancer* still offers one of the most comprehensive studies of the masculinity of

auteur dancers of the twentieth century. By no means an exhaustive account, it nonetheless covers some of the most critically received dancers of the twentieth century, including Nijinsky, Bill T Jones, Mark Morris, Steve Paxton, Jose Limón, Alvin Ailey, Joe Goode, and many more.

The opening chapter on Nijinsky, 'The Trouble with the Male Dancer,' remains relatively unchanged since the first edition, despite a shift in order and the subtraction of psychoanalysis. Building on Nancy Chodorow's theories, Burt once claimed masculine identity had its 'roots in repressed memories of developmental stages' (198). In the new version however, Burt writes, 'I have cut all the references to psychoanalysis' not because it lacks value, but because it receives resistance and 'this is not the best place to advocate it' (xi). Burt's exclusion of psychoanalysis, I would argue, sharpens his analysis, which is more about the cultural frames of spectatorship, rather than individual psyches or an artist's 'choreographer-oriented approach' (xii). Indeed, Burt's ambitious project succeeds most when it focuses on how perceptions of the male dancer expose fissures within larger societal notions of heterorthodoxy.

The second chapter, 'Looking at the Male,' is particularly enhanced with new scholarship and an acute sense of the challenge facing performance scholars. For example, '[t]he signs and traces of embodied behaviour,' Burt writes, 'which inform the conventions of theatre dance, may not be reducible to language, but they only signify meaning because they constitute a non-verbal discourse' (40). Burt also uses elements of queer theory and performative speech act theory to further untangle the knots of gender and sexuality. But his use of queer theory is limited here especially when compared to his impressive (and more thorough) chapter, 'Dissolving in

Pleasure: The Threat of the Queer Male Dancing Body' published in Jane Desmond's *Dancing Desires* (2001).

The middle chapters are a combination of the old edition and new scholarship. 'American Men' (chapter four) looks at Ted Shawn, Martha Graham's men, and Jose Limón. 'Dancing in the City' (chapter five) is a lively discussion that places the works of Merce Cunningham, Alvin Ailey and Steve Paxton in relation to metropolitan life. 'Masculinity and Liberation' (chapter six) and 'Identity Politics' (chapter seven) are both refreshing additions and respond to more recent discussions on HIV, gender and dance. It is, perhaps, Burt's chapter on identity politics which is the most provocative: 'While neither [Joe Goode's] *29 Effeminate Gestures* nor DV8's *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* directly addressed the issue of AIDS,' Burt writes, 'both were clearly produced when that was on of the most urgent issues facing gay men' (172). Here, Burt begins to identify the lack of overt politicalization of HIV and male sexuality within 1990s dance.

During this time, Burt writes, Mark Morris 'no longer felt pressed . . . to make overt gender statements as he once did' and pieces like Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* were 'playing down sexuality,' effectively undoing 'all the advances which other gay artists had made in the previous decade' (177-178). In exchange for explicit expressions of political affirmation, Burt contends, dance pieces of the 1990s and early 2000s presented a challenge to 'the spectator to actively engage in finding new ways of interpreting their performances' (180). Despite identifying the de-politicization of male dance during this time and how previous gay "advances" were forsaken, Burt seems to accept this change as an inevitable 'post-men' aesthetic rather than a gesture of self-censorship under the pressures of heterosexism.

In the preface of the new edition, Burt's similarly de-politicized stance – and the book's conclusion – is foreshadowed when he suggests, 'it no longer seems appropriate to single out male gender and sexuality for special treatment.' He hopes, instead, that his work will lead to deeper examinations of gender and sexuality within broader social and political contexts (xii). Although Burt's latter point is salient, as indeed, *The Male Dancer* significantly contributes to a range of academic fields, the comment which seems to dismiss the 'special treatment' of gender and sexuality is puzzling. Burt's new position undermines the importance he once invested in his first edition which alerted us to the 'dangerous lack' of scholarship on male gender. Granted, the field of gender and sexuality studies has mushroomed since then, so perhaps Burt is now calling for the privileging of other under-examined areas. Nonetheless, in an updated book which pays special attention to gender and sexuality, Burt's stance is somewhat contradictory.

Burt's final chapter, 'Post Men,' is similar to the preface in that he continues to dismiss the stigma still surrounding male dancers. On the contrary, he contends, 'male dancers are no longer the source of anxiety that they have been in the recent past' (208). Burt suggests instead that male dance should be 'part of the wider project of understanding how intimately theatre dance is linked to the society which produces and consumes it' (208). With such a positive conclusion, one wonders how a consideration of recent developments in televised theatrical dance might enrich or complicate Burt's project.

One striking example is the wildly popular American TV competition show, *So You Think You Can Dance*, where young males are derided when their dance movements are perceived as being too feminine. Other examples come from reality-audition TV shows, particularly those for musicals like *Oliver!* (*I'd Do Anything*),

which often feature narratives of boys who are stigmatized at home because of their dance affiliations. Surely, this makes the case that anxieties around males dancing still proliferate and deserve 'special attention.' On one level, such shows reflect a broader inclusiveness of non-normative male gender expression, but they by no means signal the end of the cultural and scholarly projects devoted to rescuing non-normative gender from the marginalizing restrictions of homophobia and heterosexism.

Conversely, I would argue that as certain forms of male dance are increasingly absorbed into mainstream culture, it becomes more important to apply critical scrutiny to notions of gender and sexuality. These recent examples are out of the scope of Burt's project but significantly problematize some of his assertions. Nevertheless, Burt's classic and now rejuvenated *The Male Dancer* still represents a valuable contribution to gender and sexuality studies and does not fail to inspire the continued scholarly attention that gender and sexuality still demand.

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Performance Practice and Process: Contemporary [Women] Practitioners **by Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris**

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 194 pp. (paperback)

Amanda Bolt (University of Winchester)

The overarching theme of this work is that of the joy, necessity and reciprocity of [women's] creative collaboration. *Performance Practice and Process: Contemporary*

[Women] Practitioners is a successful attempt to "get inside" the practice of eight [female] practitioners who work and write for a range of performance disciplines. The use of square brackets indicates the gendered terminology of 'woman' as an 'expansive and contingent category' (1) and the term 'writing' is widely applied – 'beyond text' – from scriptwriting for radio to body-based live art. Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris's practice-based methodology emerged out of a three year AHRC-funded project researching 'the performance-making strategies of a number of artists for whom resistant gender practice is in some way important to their creativity' (1). This 'insider' research was conducted through a series of practitioner-led workshops as well as artist interviews.

The book details the experience of eight practitioner-led workshops, providing insight into the creative methods of each of the following: live-artist Bobby Baker; performance artists Helen Paris and Leslie Hill, who together form Curious; performance poet SuAndi; radio playwright Sarah Daniels; performance company Split Britches; playwright Rebecca Prichard; storyteller Vayu Naidu; and stand-up comic Jenny Eclair. Each practitioner has their own chapter, and all the discussion is framed within the theoretical position of resistant gendered practice. The research is unprecedented in the access it provides into the creative processes of these artists through Aston and Harris's position as participant observers.

The material in the book will serve as a useful resource for teachers, students and makers of performance in a firmly pragmatic way. Ideas for starting points from which to make gender-aware work are presented throughout the text. For example, Aston and Harris describe Split Britches' notion of making a 'personal inventory' to help focus on the moment and use 'what they are feeling, seeing, smelling or thinking about at that moment [...] eventually focussing on something in the space that

"reminded us of something else" which we then took as a writing exercise' (111). This technique reminds the practitioner to use what is there, immediate and available to create work: a simple idea that is easy to lose sight of in the fog of trying to produce material for performance. *Performance Practice and Process* is supported by an archival website that includes images, film footage and practice exemplars that enable it to go 'beyond text' itself and greatly facilitates its usefulness as a resource.

Aston and Harris discuss performance poet, SuAndi's strategies of adjusting her set according to the particular context and audience that she finds herself in each time she performs and of 'making an entrance.' They cite SuAndi as saying 'I like to sit at the back of the room and work out what is going on' (71), highlighting her flexibility and an improvisatory approach to the performance material. Again, in relation to SuAndi, Aston and Harris state that 'part of SuAndi's "art" lies in "shaping" the performance *as a whole*' (72, emphasis in original). They also explore SuAndi's strategy of blurring the boundaries between poet, poem, character and performance. She 'segues into the poem usually without marking the transition and sometimes without an immediately perceptible change of tone' (72). According to Aston and Harris, this boundary-blurring 'questions assumptions about the ability to "read" identity either from appearances or through "categories"' (73). The strategy arose from a desire to *perform* her poetry rather than simply read it out. Aston and Harris cite SuAndi as saying, 'so that just became my technique in performance and [...] when you realise that that's what you're doing, you begin to craft that technique. So that's my whole idea that you lead into it, so that the journey begins from the moment I begin my set' (72, omission in original). This is a fundamentally important piece of advice for makers of performance work, and one that all of the practitioners

in the book allude to - that the formulation of relevant techniques emerges from the *doing* of performance.

Aston and Harris also highlight Vayu Naidu's strategy of using a form of context-responsive improvisation. Naidu, a storyteller, is cited as engaging with 'Brechtian notions of '*breaking the fourth wall through story telling*'' (141, emphasis in original) inspired by her observation of the ability of storytellers to incorporate audience responses (such as the flash of a camera) into their performance, apparently seamlessly (141). During her workshop, Naidu explained that 'absolutely core to her art is [...] a "relish for language"' (143) and she highlighted the accessibility of this art form by establishing through demonstration that 'for this genre of practice, all that is really required is a "*storyteller and a listener*"' (143, emphasis in original). Aston and Harris find that, in a similar way to SuAndi, Naidu's performance demonstration revealed that her performance style moulds to the specific context and audience with whom she is engaging but with an 'even greater degree of improvisation' (143). They quote Naidu as saying 'you may have an idea that this is the story you could be performing but once you have come into the lit space, you make eye contact with your audience, and the storyteller has to [...] be completely liberated at that moment, be a composer at the same time' (143, omission in original).

In examples such as these, and throughout Aston and Harris's project, the themes of collaboration and autobiography emerge, providing a blueprint that could be taken as a potentially limiting notion of "best practice" for performance methods, themes and processes. Wisely, however, in their conclusion, Aston and Harris refrain from creating a grand narrative of women's performance practice, although, they do reflect on the potential for networks of community that can emerge through the creation of work in 'radical and political frameworks' (177). As evidence they cite the

workshop experience and the 'temporary communities' that sprang up as a result of the project (187). This echoes the experience of the practitioners themselves who, even if solo artists, all use a creative partner to support them in their work. Intriguingly, Aston and Harris themselves have often worked in partnership academically and this may be one source of their interest in the notion of collaborative working. Or it may be that collaborative ways of working are more potentially available to resistant outcomes.

The concluding chapter reveals the individual reflections of Gerry and Elaine, in contrast with the united authorial voice of the preceding chapters. However the notion of a multi-vocality runs through the work. Aston and Harris state that,

> undertaking the 'Women's Writing for Performance' project has been a collaborative process from beginning to end: between artists and participants in the workshops, between participants in the different workshop groups, with the project administrator [...] and between ourselves in facilitating and researching the programme [...] ultimately we have not tried to "perform" this work as one voice, but have "created" a textured rather than seamless narrative. (16-17)

They indicate that this interconnectedness between [women] practitioners 'in the interests of imagining, making and changing' (183) is a political and potentially radical and transformative act. All of the practitioners that Aston and Harris encounter see the necessarily collaborative nature of their work as being the most fulfilling aspect of making. *Performance Practice and Process* highlights a need for more cross-disciplinary and cross-practitioner collaboration and support, and raises questions about the emphasis that could be placed on collaborative performance making over the notion of the artist as discrete entity in education and in funding paradigms. Ultimately, attention to this aspect of making poses challenges to the Cartesian hierarchical binary and may explain the resistant potential of these practitioners' performance output.

American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance by John Bell

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 292 pp. (hardback)

Alissa Mello (Royal Holloway, University of London)

John Bell's recent publication is a densely written, deeply researched collection of essays that investigates the development of puppet theatre and performing objects in the United States and argues for a reconsideration of material in performance and the performing object. The work draws on a wide range of disciplines and examples. These include theatre history, social and political theory, advertising and mechanization, popular culture, and anthropology. Throughout, Bell pushes against the limits of what puppet theatre and the material world in performance are.

Bell begins with a brief presentation of key concerns in contemporary puppet theatre scholarship and outlines two definitions of a puppet, one from Detroit puppeteer, Paul McPharlin, the other from folklorist and linguistic scholar, Frank Proschan. He then summarizes key concepts such as reception theory, and explores philosophical concerns, giving the reader an understanding of Bell's own theoretical underpinning. This analysis leads to his definition of puppet modernism as 'object performance forms in the company of newer techniques' (8).

Chapter two is an analysis of John Stevens' *Sioux War Panorama*, which toured the American Midwest in the 1860s and 1870s. Bell emphasizes the colonialist agenda behind the show and positions the performance of the panorama (a type of picture performance accompanied by narrative and/or musical accompaniment) within the white settler's expansionist movement. In contrast, chapter three investigates the Zuni Shalako puppet tradition through the ethnographic writings of Matilda Coxe

Stevenson and Frank Cushing. Bell uses their research to highlight the fantasies of an exotic other within the US context, and to engage with a festival tradition that emerges from US soil. Further, he draws a link between the Shalako tradition and a 1960s 'reappraisal of "primitive" culture' (48) that influenced the work of artists such as Peter Schumann and Godfrey Reggio.

The historical core of Bell's analysis and theoretical proposal is detailed in the following five chapters, in which he locates the 'birth of the American puppeteer' (49) and the emergence of US puppet modernism in 'The Little Theater Movement,' political protest, and marketing. 'The Little Theater Movement,' 'a radical effort to create noncommercial, community "art theater,"' developed in the early twentieth century and was inspired by the late nineteenth century art theatre movements in Europe. Bell traces the history and influences from the East Coast to the Mid-West through the work of German American artist Tony Sarg in New York City to the 'first successful little theater' started by Ellen Van Volkenburg in Chicago. This movement, he argues, was both the training ground for future puppet theatre artists, and the moment from which puppetry 'established itself as an American art form' (70). Following 'The Little Theater Movement,' Bell historically locates the use of puppets for political protest both on the streets and in the theatre. Although what is and is not a puppet is often contested even within the world of puppet theatre, Bell begins to blur the limits of definition by including large parade puppets, performing signs used in protests in the 1930s, and popular imagery such as the balloons in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. He concludes this section noting that puppetry, through the Little Theater Movement, had reached 'all areas of high and low culture' (137), and arguing that this was most visible at the 1939 World's Fair, which employed a vast array of puppets, performing objects, and technology in various exhibition halls.

In the book's later chapters, Bell moves to the second half of the twentieth century and into the worlds of media, popular culture, 'Kustom Kulture' (which refers to the art of customizing cars in the US), and the work of Bread and Puppet, concluding with an essay on materials. His chapter on 'Performing Objects, Special Effects' traces the dramatic advances in visual media we have seen in film, television, and computer technology in the last 150 years. 'Automobile Performance and Kustom Kulture' further extends Bell's definition of performing objects, as his analysis of the role of cars in identity formation and expression in the US addresses street and popular culture. In 'Beyond the Cold War,' Bell uses a number of the ideas that he developed in earlier chapters to inform his analysis of the work of Bread and Puppet. He draws on the history of puppetry as it has been used in political protest and in the community to analyse two projects: *Mr. Budhoo's Letter of Resignation from the IMF*, an indoor production, and Peter Schumann's use of street parades for political and social demonstration. Bell concludes the book with an essay on materials, old and new, recycled and not, natural and manufactured, in which he argues that material choices reflect social, political, and/or cultural philosophies of artists.

In *American Puppet Modernism*, Bell presents a wide-ranging history of puppets and performing objects within a US socio-political context, contributing new insight into, and detailed analysis of, their roles in US society and theatre history. He simultaneously investigates and re-thinks the role of material objects on stage and in popular culture. Although the language is occasionally challenging to decipher, these essays are often theoretically provocative. While Bell re-thinks the limits of the material world in performance, I found myself asking: what are the limits of calling or naming something a puppet? And as Bell expands definitions of material in

performance and puppets, what, if any, is the difference between a puppet, performing object, and material in performance?

Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston by Anthea Kraut

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, xiv + 304pp (paperback)

Sarahleigh Castelyn (University of East London)

Choreographing the Folk: The Dance Stagings of Zora Neale Hurston aims to 'contribute to what Susan Manning has termed the "new intercultural historiography of American dance," a correction to the long-standing tendency in dance studies to segregate dance traditions according to race and genre [and location]' (13). Underlying Anthea Kraut's study of Hurston is her 'interest in "invisiblized" histories, to borrow Brenda Dixon Gottschild's term for the systematic omission of the Africanist influences on American performances' (x). Kraut's text is in dialogue with previous American dance analyses by Susan Manning, Gottschild, and Mark Franko, and through it she aims to make Hurston's role and legacy in American dance visible.

Consequently, Kraut and the above-mentioned dance academics make visible the 'racial hybridity of American dance' (13), and indirectly parallel President Barack Obama's inaugural speech in which he referred to America's 'patchwork heritage as a strength' (20 Jan 2009). *Choreographing the Folk* is suitable for those working in dance studies, performance studies, folk studies, race studies, and African-American studies. It might also be of interest to those in other fields, such as anthropology and ethnography, which are concerned with making visible the 'invisibilized' histories of not only African, but also Latin-American, Asian and other marginalised groups.

Kraut's introduction, 'Rediscovering Hurston's Embodied Representations of the Folk' outlines her central research question: '[w]hy did performances by Hurston and the Bahamian dancers pique the interest of such an assortment of artists, and why is so little known today about these productions?' (3). To answer this, Kraut focuses on six areas: commercialisation, choreography, production, embodiment, interpretation and re-staging, and the role race plays in dance collaborations. Each of these areas is addressed and explored in one of the work's six chapters, and the monograph concludes with a coda on Hurston's Choreographic Legacy. Kraut's writing style is methodical, and at times, a little laborious, as she works through Hurston's relationship with her wealthy patron Charlotte Osgood Mason and Alain Leroy Locke of the Harlem Renaissance. However, as a result of this writing style, the reader accompanies Kraut on her research quest as she carefully uncovers and makes visible the role Hurston played in black folk dance in the 1930s.

Chapter one, 'Commercialization and the Folk,' explores Hurston's desire to stage authentic 'black' folk culture on the commercial stage. The staging of the Fire Dance and the role Hurston played in its production forms the main focus in the following chapter 'Choreography and the Folk.' In 'Producing the Great Day', Kraut investigates Mason's patronage of Hurston, and how the performance arena offered Hurston an opportunity to enact agency and thereby embody authorship in the producing of the *Great Day* programme. In the performance of the *Great Day*, Hurston drew on the kinaesthetic knowledge of her audience, demonstrated the relationship between labour and cultural production, and used the theatrical arena to put forward her model of black diasporic solidarity (144). Hence, in the subsequent chapter, 'Hurston's Embodied Theory of Folk', Kraut argues that it was in performance, not writing, that Hurston was able to be far 'subtler and more assertive'

(133) in advancing her theory of the folk. In chapter five, ' Interpreting the Fire Dance,' primitivism and its association with 'blackness' is investigated, and in chapter six, 'Black Authenticity, White Artistry,' Kraut demonstrates how 'the proliferation of Hurston's stage version of the Fire Dance coincided with the erasure of her choreographic role in its production' (211).

Kraut examines how Hurston's revues 'force one to confront the ways in which she [Hurston] was simultaneously critical of and complicit' in the commercialized representations of black culture' (xi). This results in Kraut highlighting how recent the term choreographer is, as 'in the 1920s and 1930s, terminology like "arranged," "staged," and "directed" was much more commonly used to recognize dance artists working on the theatrical stage' (53). Kraut maintains that labelling Hurston as choreographer of the Fire Dance does not diminish the contributions made by the Bahamian dancers. Throughout her chapter on 'Choreography and the Folk,' Kraut demonstrates how calling Hurston a choreographer, examining the uses and meanings of the term 'choreographer,' and arguing that 'classifying Hurston as such – or at least, as a co-choreographer […] forces us to attend to her calculated and labor-intensive orchestration of dancing bodies in time and space' (89).

Although Kraut's focus is on American dance, this strategy of making visible marginalized dance performances, dancers, and choreographers is also of benefit to the study of global dance forms which have migrated across the world and continue to do so due to globalization and transnationalism.

Kraut reminds the reader that,

> the telling I offer is based on the archival traces that only fractionally capture the movements and meanings of a group of bodies who wrestled with how to represent black folk dance in the 1930s. Reading and interpreting the presence

> of these bodies despite and through the archive's absences, I hope to demonstrate that what is discernible through the dark glass of history is unquestionably worth knowing. (17)

Kraut successfully achieves this aim, and throughout her meticulous and well-researched monograph, she reveals the archival traces of dancing bodies. She strategically makes these dancing bodies present by populating her text both literally and visually with bodies. In the appendix, there is a 'Chronology of Known Performances of Hurston and the Bahamian Dancers' (223 – 225) and a list of the 'Known Members of the Bahamian Dancers between 1932 and 1936' (227). Bodies are in existence in a variety of visual documentation, such as a photograph from the *Chicago Daily News* (1934) of Hurston's *Singing Steel* cast members with Ballroom dance icon Irene Castle (203), a collection of photographs of Hurston demonstrating the Crow Dance (75), and a reproduced image of The Fire Dance Programme (1939) (54). In the 'Introduction,' Kraut emphasizes that 'written documents do directly relay some corporeal information' (16), and so, too, does her monograph on Zora Neale Hurston and the stagings of the Bahamian Fire Dance.

Kraut's text serves as a call for dance studies to re-consider and question any hierarchy of certain dance forms such as ballet and western contemporary dance over popular dance forms like street, or global dance forms with their roots in African or Southern Asia. Rather, dance studies should stress the variety of movement styles, and, like Huston, invite audiences 'to discern both the differences and the correlations between [not only] black diasporic vernacular dances' (153) but all forms of movement, thus celebrating the diversity of this art form.

'Tell her to be careful:' Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza* at The Royal Court Theatre

Kate Leader

In the brightly lit theatre, two lines of performers proceed in single file up the far aisles towards the stage, amongst the hubbub of a chattering audience. The stage itself is almost bare, with only a table and chairs placed in the centre. Some actors move towards the table; the others line up against the walls. With a flash, the house goes dark and light illuminates the table.

> Tell her it's a game
> Tell her it's serious

So begins *Seven Jewish Children* at the Royal Court Theatre. Just as the opening of the play plunges the audience immediately into the middle of a debate, so the entire experience of the production feels as though one is catching a fraction of something much bigger and that one has missed much of what went before. This sense of the transitory permeates the production: in the dialogue that is, in fact, a series of mid-arguments, and in the staging which is minimal and deliberately low-key. Churchill's opening stage directions state that '*[t]he lines can be shared out in any way you like among those characters. The characters are different in each small scene as the time* [is] *different. They may be played by any number of actors.*' The rapid shifts in time and place are signified solely through an interchange of actors and a flash of light.

Yet what is deliberately utilitarian and modest in Dominic Cooke's production is hugely ambitious in authorial intention as Churchill's play outlines a history of modern Israel from the Holocaust up until the most recent events in Gaza. This is done through seven short scenes, each depicting a Jewish Israeli family debating how to explain events in modern Jewish history, such as the Holocaust, the foundation of Israel, and the 6 day war to a little girl we never see. The production asks difficult

questions: how do you explain war, violence, fear and hatred to a child? The non-specific characters, interchangeable faces and minimal props lend the production a strongly allegorical feeling. What might be *a* Jewish Israeli family becomes the representative for *all* Jewish Israeli families, just as the absent child represents all children.

It is this vexed question of representation that moves the play into muddier waters. How, in a play, do you do justice to the complexity of the situation of Israel and Gaza? And, most strikingly of all, how do you do so in less than 10 minutes?

As is evident from its length, *Seven Jewish Children* is not an ordinary play in its conception or production. Rather it is a piece of reactive theatre that was written in direct response to the situation in Gaza with the intention of promoting and raising money for the charity Medical Aid for Palestinians (for which there were collection points and leaflets throughout the theatre). That the piece is reactive is made explicit by Churchill herself when she points out: 'I wrote it last week; by this week I was arranging it with the Royal Court; it's now being cast; rehearsals are next week; and we perform it on 6 February' (Brown, 2008). Churchill went on to say: 'It came out of feeling strongly about what's happening in Gaza – it's a way of helping the people there. Everyone knows about Gaza, everyone is upset about it, and this play is something they could come to. It's a political event, not just a theatre event.'

Churchill's comments draw attention to one of two major misgivings I had about this production. Firstly, there is the danger of the deliberately reactive: the naïveté that can characterize this kind of 'political theatre.' Her sweeping comment 'everyone is upset about it' suggests a uniformity of political belief between performance makers and audience that can arguably lead to what one *Times* critic, at his most vitriolic, called 'the enclosed, fetid, smug, self-congratulating and entirely

irrelevant little world of contemporary political theatre' (Hart, 2009). In this case, the framing of the production leaves no doubt as to what we are all meant to feel upon witnessing the play. This in itself is not surprising in a piece of theatre specifically designed to raise funds for people in need.

However, in keeping with the play's brevity and the desire to write to a specific *end*, Churchill's choice of the allegorical lends itself to potentially reductive characterisations and simplifications of intentions. Indeed, in its tracing of important episodes in Israeli history, *Seven Jewish Children* is somewhat akin to the travelling medieval morality plays where biblical stories were retold with didactic intention. Good and evil are painted in explicit terms to maximise the impact of the moral message within the time constraint, leading to the possibility of stereotyping. This is evident at the end of *Seven Jewish Children* where the deft, intelligent and complex dialogue that marks Churchill's work gives way in the last scene to a long single outburst from a character. In this speech Churchill's Jews transform from victims to cartoon monster perpetrators:

> tell her I don't care if the world hates us, tell her we're better haters, tell her we're chosen people, tell her I look at one of their children covered in blood and what do I feel? tell her all I feel is happy it's not her.

The second troubling aspect of the production relates to *agency*. Performance scholar Baz Kershaw noted, when writing about the politics of performance, that 'we must move beyond formalist analysis – which treats theatre as if it were independent of its social and political environment – and consider performance as a cultural construct and a means of cultural production' (Kershaw 5). In this statement, Kershaw is drawing attention not only to a rejection of the concept of theatre as somehow apolitical, but also to the importance of a degree of reflexivity in performance making. In other words, it is not only about what performance makers want to say, but also

from where they are saying it: their own cultural positioning. It is this lack of reflexivity, the pretence that theatre and theatre practitioners are somehow 'outside' and able to make impartial political commentary that risks being mistaken and even, at times, offensive or patronising.

Churchill's decision to speak *for* Jews exclusively and to give no voice to the Palestinians arguably perpetuates the dichotomous relationship of perpetrator and victim. As seen in the above, this leads to language that is at times stereotyped and also to a degree 'others' the Palestinians who are unseen and unheard victims, an uncomfortable positioning that carries the traces of colonialism.

Let me be clear: it is not the job of the performance scholar to make a pronunciation on the definitive 'meaning' of a live performance. As many prominent writers have argued at length, trying to pin down the 'intention' of a performance ignores the complexity of signifiers and the equally important role of reception involved in meaning-making. Marvin Carlson expressed it in his definitive work, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*: '[p]erformance by its nature resists conclusions, just as it resists the sort of definitions, boundaries, and limits so useful to traditional academic writing and academic structures' (Carlson 207).

Indeed, while it may be easy to highlight difficulties with this piece in close textual examination, paying attention to non-text-based signs yields a richer interpretation. At its most affective, *Seven Jewish Children* is about the constant desire for – and absence of – home and safety. This insecurity is aided by the distinct military theme that runs through *Seven Jewish Children*: the actors trudge in lines onto the stage and line up against the walls like soldiers. Whilst the scenes are ostensibly about a family, they gather in a bare, militant place. There is no separation of family and war: rather, there is a conflation of the two as what might be a kitchen

table becomes a war command. Their home is not a 'home,' it is a bomb shelter: a collective refuge from the threat outside.

As security is always absent in this play, so is war ever present. The actors' World War II style clothing is a physical manifestation of the Holocaust, rooted into the body of the survivors and the future generations, inescapable, ever-present. As the scenes escalate towards the contemporary, the clothes tie the characters to the past and a modern Jewish identity forged in the darkest circumstances imaginable.

Seven Jewish Children suggests that a safe home – for Israeli Jews and for Palestinians – is just like the beloved child, always out of sight.

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