2020

Bodycloth in Performance Art

Raven, Natalie Louise

UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH

Bodycloth in Performance Art

by

Natalie Louise Raven

BA (hons), MA

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Humanities and Performing Arts

June 2020

Acknowledgements

This project would not have come to completion without the care, support, and guidance of the following people.

My deepest thanks and gratitude.

To my Mum, Alison Raven. Thank you for continuing to love and support me through everything life throws. You have always believed in my abilities, and encouraged me in my ambitions. I am slowly starting to realise them.

To Sue March, my A level English Literature tutor who first nurtured me in my writing. Thank you for introducing me to Carol Ann Duffy's *The Worlds Wife.* Salome stays with me.

To Helena Goldwater, for encouraging me to pursue artistic ventures and moulding me into a quietly considered artist. Thank you for your humour, for *circuit*, for introducing me to performance art and my favourite feminist literature.

To Alissa Clarke, for expanding and deepening my knowledge of feminism, for such warmth and generosity of spirit, and unwavering dedication to your research and your students.

To Victor Ladron De Guevara, for your calm yet rigorous critique, your positive reassurance, and reminders to make time to practice.

To Roberta Mock, for showing as much interest and enthusiasm for textiles in performance art as me. Your generous mentoring, guidance, and support has made completion of this doctorate possible. Thank you for continuing to push me in my understandings of performance.

To my academic teachers and mentors: Lucy Spowart, Davina Kirkpatrick, Kayla Parker, Anya Lewin, Phil Smith, Liz Wells, Ruth Way, Dominic Johnson, Sarah Gilligan, Elinor Parsons, Diana Damian Martin, Roger Clegg, Rosie Garton, Judy Preston, and Sarah McAdam.

To my family, the Ravens and the Chamberlains: Mum, Alex, Nanna Dianne, Gary, Grandad Barry, Dad, Sandra, Melissa, Erin-Mae, Jack, Grandpa Lew, Nanna Kate, my aunties, uncles, and cousins.

To my friends and peers: Beth Richards, Steven Paige, Katherine Owens, Chris Green, Núria Bonet, Helen Billinghurst, Ben Wiedel-Kaufmann, Amble Skuse, Mo Cohen, Clare Thornton, Carly Seller, Ruth Bourne, Natasha Williams-Gough, Holly Brining, Jessica Moore, Kathryn Addis, Katie Phillips, Samantha Lockwood-Lee, Ro Hardaker, David and Lily Clarkson, Jessica Kedziora, Freya Danson-Hatcher, Joanna Partridge, Klara Lucznik, James Bettany, and Jason O'Donovan.

To all the artists, photographers, institutions, and producers who I have worked with, and who have helped gain permissions for images to appear in this work.

To my employers and colleagues at Karen Millen, Rowbury Gallery, the University of Plymouth, Plymouth College of Art, and the University of St Mark and St John

To my funders at the University of Plymouth for my Humanities, Music and Performing Arts doctoral studentship.

To my cat, Tammy – the chunkiest of muffins

Finally, to Dagmar Schwitzgebel
my dear friend, inspiration, and artistic collaborator.

"Church of Performance Fucks the Patriarchy"

Figure A.1. Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2015) *Drooling Nuns*

Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee. Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment. This study was financed with the aid of a studentship form the *Humanities, Music, and Performing Arts Centre for Research, University of Plymouth.*

Publication and public presentation of creative research outputs:

Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2020) *(I'll Never Be) Maria Magdalena.* Church of Performance [Online digital video, 5:58 minutes] Available at: https://vimeo.com/428646583

Davina Kirkpatrick, Rochyne Delaney McNulty, Shelley Owens, Natalie Raven, Dagmar Schwitzgebel, and Carly Seller (2018) *Women, Textile, and Landscape* [Photographic print on mount board] [Theatre and Performance Research Association (TAPRA) gallery, University of Exeter]

Davina Kirkpatrick, Rochyne Delaney McNulty, Shelley Owens, Natalie Raven, Dagmar Schwitzgebel, and Carly Seller (2018) *Fabric, Fluidity, and Performance Art: Research and Development Documentation* [Digital video, 8.06 minutes on loop] [Theatre and Performance Research Association (TAPRA) gallery, University of Exeter]. Available at: https://vimeo.com/284934272

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Research Presentations:

Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2020) *Art History, Adornment, and Agency in The Ascension of Esther* at Critical Costume, Oslo National Academy of the Arts

Natalie Raven (2019) *Staging Bodies in Situ: Artistic Responses to Working with/in Landscape* at Theatre and Performance Research Association (TAPRA) conference, University of Exeter

Natalie Raven (2019) *Pregnancy <standing in the chasm> Abortion* at The Lived Female Body in Performance symposium, University of Leeds.

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Natalie Raven (2017) *Magic, Witchcraft, Ritual: Getting Down to Earth* at On the Moors conference, University of Plymouth

Natalie Raven (2016) *Academia and the Aldi Carrier Bag: survival strategies for the piss poor* at Buzzcut Festival, Pearce Institute Glasgow

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Natalie Raven (2015) *Interpreting Ono* for Performance.Presence.Experience research group, University of Plymouth

Natalie Raven (2015) *Spill 2014: Adorning the Body* at Critical Costume, Allto University Finland

Word count of main body of thesis: 55, 702

Signed: Natalie Raven

Date: 20 June 2020

Bodycloth in Performance Art

Natalie Louise Raven

Abstract

Bodycloth is a term coined to describe a third entity which emerges when the boundaries between body and cloth (as separate elements) collapse. This artistic research thesis analyses a variety of inter-relations between body and cloth, as well as various modes of adornment and utilisations in order to understand the performance, experience, and presence of *bodycloth* in performance art. Drawing upon a wide range of contemporary and historical examples of textiles represented in relation to the body in art history – including as sculpture, painting, dance, tableau vivant and performance art – the main method of this research investigation is the production and execution of live performance. That is, it is primarily through artworks that I choreograph myself that I investigate body and cloth (also referred to interchangeably as fabric or textile) as material and cultural phenomenon, excavating and reflecting upon the embodied knowledge and processes as a maker using textiles in search of *bodycloth*. Taking a feminist approach, I contextualise my research in relation to other artists such as Yoko Ono, ORLAN, Cindy Sherman, Ana Mendieta, and Marina Abramović alongside critical feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Laura Mulvey, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler.

Early chapters examine semiotic processes, whereby textiles in relation to the body are staged and framed in terms of their meaning-making capabilities in performance art. The thesis then shifts from considering how cloth and body operate meaningfully in performance, to the cultural implications and revelations which arise as a result, especially those related to the re-presentation of identity and gendered religious practice. In later chapters, I discuss how my performance research attempts to destabilise binary assumptions which uphold and sit within the mechanics of patriarchal power. As a whole, the thesis demonstrates how body and cloth can form part of a resistant feminist methodology revolving around re-presentations of women and womanhood, offering a tool for fluid self-stylisation. In addition, the emergence of *bodycloth* realised through processes of 'indwelling' and 'sensorial play' opens up an emancipatory third space existing beside/beyond the realm of representation. Alongside this written element of the thesis, a live performance forms part of my submission as a whole. Details of this performance are shared in the conclusion.

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CC.10	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – kicking* Photography by Beth Richards Copyright author's own.
CC.11	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – pulling* Photography by Beth Richards Copyright author's own.
CC.12	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – draping* Photography by Beth Richards Copyright author's own.
CC.13	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – tying* Photography by Beth Richards Copyright author's own.
CC.14	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – reigning in* Photography by Beth Richards Copyright author's own.
CC.15	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – twist* Photography by Beth Richards Copyright author's own.
CC.16	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – s curve* Photography by Beth Richards Copyright author's own.
CC.17	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – quad of limbs* Photography by Beth Richards Copyright author's own.
CC.18	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – contorted inversion* Photography by Beth Richards

	Copyright author's own.
CC.19	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – folding* Photography by Beth Richards Copyright author's own.
CC.20	Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther – floating* Photography by Beth Richards Copyright author's own.

Prelude

"It's in your blood, Natalie"

– (Nanna) Diane Chamberlain, 2018.

Figure P.1 Alison Raven (2018) *Nanna Selling Material on the Market in the 1970s*

1996

South Leicestershire, England UK

I'm 11. I've gone to live with Nanna Dianne as Mum has been hospitalised. Alex is living with Grandad Barry, and although I'll never admit it, I miss living with my brother.

It's Saturday, 5.45am. Nanna knocks on the door and brings me a hot cup of tea to help wake me up. I get dressed, heave myself up into the passenger seat of her van, and drive down the motorway to Loughborough. Classic FM rattles through speakers.

We park up and begin to unload. I help to open up a child's playpen, which Nanna uses to stand up all the long, tall rolls of poly-cotton. She smiles as she tells me that it used to be mine.

Waste not want not.

Make do and mend.

Figure P.2. Alison Raven (2018) *Nanna Selling Material on the Market in the 1990s*

There are two tiers to the stall. On top go the expensive fabrics; silks and such. They are pinned with pegs to a piece of stretched string, draped in display of their beauty. On the bottom, a strange blend of felt and fluff and fuzz; low priced and unpopular.

I'm tired. During lunchtime rush, amongst cheaper plush, I snuggle down to sleep by my Nanna's feet in my makeshift-bottom-bunk bed. Soothing smells waft under nose as an array of synthetics caress my skin.

Submerged within,

I slowly drift

Away.

It's Sunday. I'm bored. As Nanna watches TV, I creep into the kitchen and pick up a golden key, its glimmering shine long since gone. I walk to the garage door, put the key into the lock, turn, and quietly let myself in.

Figure P.3. Alison Raven (2018) *Nanna's Garage*

Vast and in awe, fabrics fall to the floor, oozing, spilling, tipping out and over the edge.

Rapunzel.

Delving into a giant bag of off-cuts, I choose a veil. And a cape. And a floor length ball gown. And a voice pops into my head to remind me

"stop touching everything Natalie, you'll get muddy paw prints on it".

The paradox of pleasure; one teaches a child to suppress and restrain their desires, before embarking on an adult journey in search of legitimising them.

Again.

Setting out the Stall:

Introduction

"What is it you do again, Duckie?" [Nanna shuffles around the mid-brown occasional table to set down two sugary teas, served in fading green, brown and beige floral stoneware mugs that are strategically placed upon unravelling rattan coasters]

"Well, it's kind of hard to explain..." [Looks up, searching for inspiration] "Basically I move around, usually with some cloth, in silence. It's quite dark. Sort of like dance, but not quite."

[Tilts head] "And you're all naked?"

[Grins] "Yeah."

"Ooooh! All those people looking at your bits."

[Both laugh]

"Yeah, but it doesn't really bother me anymore. You get used to it."

"So, sort of like Isadora Duncan?"

[Pause, a slow smile of recognition] "Yes, exactly like Isadora Duncan."

Starting Points

Isadora Duncan (1877-1927)[1] was a dancer: an American-born 'avant-garde... anti-traditional artist' who showed work most prolifically in Europe and the Soviet Union during the early twentieth century (Needham 1996: 333). Duncan is often described as a revolutionary, with Daly (2002) and Beaven (2012) regarding her distinctive practice influential on the evolution of 'modern' dance.

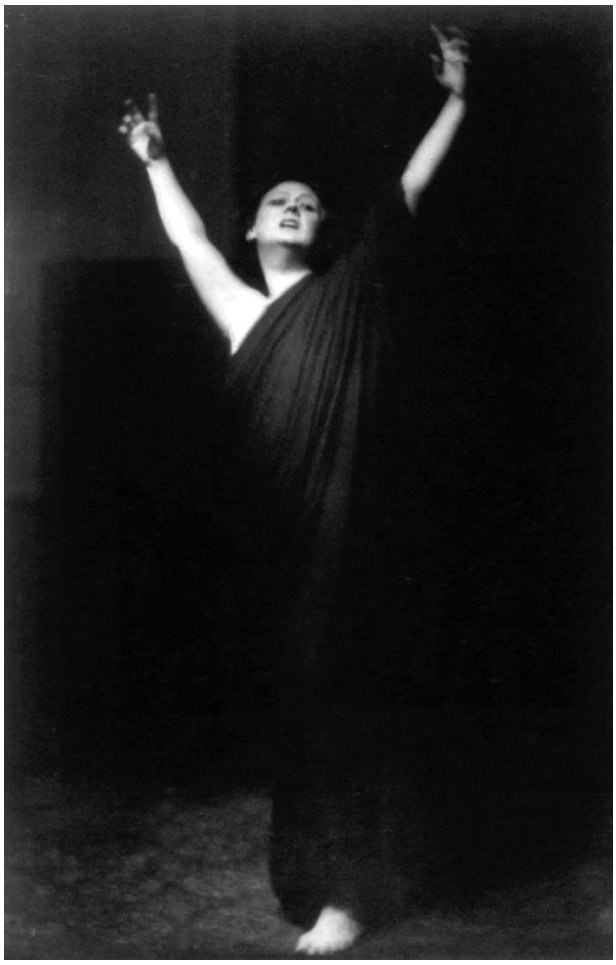


Figure I.1. Arnold Genthe (c.1918) *Duncan performing barefoot during her 1915–1918 American tour*

[1] Daly (2002), Duncan (2013/1927) and Rosemont (1993) give 1877-1927 as the dates of Duncan's life, however Huxley and Witts (2002) suggest she was born a year later, in 1878.

Duncan's work set itself apart from the more traditional forms of dance practice in that she clearly rejected the types of costume practice that led to the physical subjugation of the female body. For example, in traditional ballet, female dancers wore (and still do wear) ballet blocks[2] when working en pointe. These shoes are a primary part of a female ballet dancer's costume and demanded the wearer move in a particular way (to note, male counterparts wore no such shoes). Ballet blocks elongate the dancer's leg, providing a long and lean female body aesthetic, which is sought after in this particular dance practice.

This desirable visual image of the female body comes at a price, notably the painful malformation of the female dancers' feet and toes. Duncan acknowledges this as the 'deformation' of the female body through 'incorrect dress and incorrect movement' (Duncan, 2002/1928: 172). As well as adopting a less stiff and technically precise dancing style, Duncan also fashioned a type of costume that neither constricted nor constrained the movement of her body (See Figure I.1). Duncan wore no shoes, stockings or bra, and adorned herself with a 'little white tunic' (Acocella in Duncan 2013/1927: x) that enabled a more fluid, free forming and physically expressive bodily movement. To this end, Lincoln Kristen credits her with having had 'powerful influence on the reform of theatrical costume' (cited in Needham, 1996: 338).

Duncan's costume in many ways acts as a tangible manifestation of the ideas she was exploring in *The Dancer of the Future* (2002/1928). In this text, she expresses a desire for humankind to progress toward a conscious state of undress, perceiving the unclothed, naked human body as being closer to nature and an 'harmonious expression of his [*sic*] spiritual being' (2002/1928: 171). Duncan saw nudity as providing the freedom to express a certain type of unrestricted,

[2] Ballet blocks are a type of ballet shoe, which are constructed with a wooden block inserted at the end of the toes. Dancers point their feet, standing on their toes, on top of these blocks of wood.

natural movement free from garbed restriction. This desire to free the body of material confinement was met with unease. Joan Acocella notes that observers of Duncan's dance felt her revealing (and let's not forget, simultaneously concealing) attire to be 'scandalous' (2013: x). The inference that Duncan's outfit was in some way crude illuminates social attitudes toward how the female body should be dressed at that time, with outward disfavour used as a strategy to discourage this type of adornment practice.

Negative responses to Duncan's performance in relation to nudity and use of flowing attire are illuminating. These comments reveal social regulation of the female body, assigning negative judgements to clothing practices that stray from those of the dominant culture. It shows how society restricts the ways in which the female body can be displayed (both physically and metaphorically in terms of decency) and advocates disgust at what might be considered an unruly, fleshy female body on display. Duncan's manifesto alongside her rejection of dominant adornment practices, signposts toward examinations made in this thesis around the use of loose and flowing textiles as forms and methods of adornment in contemporary performance art. It is the framing of the female body in performance as a strategy for resistance, a direct challenge to restrictive social structures, and a confrontation of culturally inscribed regulation of the female body. Where Duncan dared to tread, I aim follow.

Introduction Overview

In this introduction, there are several sections which are intended to aid the reader in orientating their way through the thesis. In order to map out the contexts in which I am working, you will find literature and practitioner reviews, definitions of key terms, and discussions around ecologies of performance making in which the practice research artworks I produce are located

within. Contemporary discussions around scenography and attentive states are shared, signposting toward some of the fields of research the project is situated, alongside reflections on a personal history of working with textiles in performance. The particular methodological approach I take is described, as is my use of performance writing which is woven throughout the text(tile).

Aims and Research Questions

I have two research aims; my first is *to explore the material, aesthetic, ideological and cultural relationships between body and cloth in performance art.* It is intended that this aim will move me toward exploring what body, cloth, and *bodycloth* (as third entity) *are,* as physical and conceptual entities. My second research aim is *to interrogate the inter-relations and/or inter-articulations of body, cloth, and bodycloth in performance art.* This research aim moves me to investigate what these entities *do*. Together it is hoped that they will guide me in understanding the presence of body, cloth, and *bodycloth* in performance art on both practical and philosophical levels.

Alongside these aims, three research questions guide me in my research investigations. My first one is *what is/are the historical relationship/s between women and textiles?* This question requires me to undertake historical research, with the intention that it will inform an understanding of the ways in which we have come to understand the presence of women and textiles in art. My second asks the question *what semiotic and/or phenomenological encounters emerge when body and cloth are situated in performance art?* This research question requires that I reflect upon creative processes I undertake when working with cloth in relation to my body in cultivating artworks, as well as in the works of others who use textiles in body-based

performance work. My final question asks *what strategies are available to express a woman's/women's lived experience materially, symbolically, and metaphorically through the use/s of adornment in performance art*? This question (along with my first) focuses the research project on gendered relationship/s to what is worn on the body, and consequences thereof. This speaks to the feminist approach I take in performance making (explained further along in my introduction), and responds to the woman's[3] body I have and which I will use to conduct my practice research experiments. My methodology section situated further along in my introduction explains the ways in which I will set about responding to these research questions.

Defining Terms

Performance Art

Duncan was operating within dance territories, and there are distinct similarities between her movement works and contemporary performance art. 'Performance art' is 'created through actions performed by the artist or other participants' according to Tate Organisation, which also suggests that it affords 'live-ness, physical movement and impermanence' as an alternative to 'the static permanence of painting and sculpture' (Tate, 2019). The genealogy of performance art emerged from Fine Art (sculptural, pictorial) traditions, into a mode of artistic presentation located within the visual arts. Indeed, one of the key aspects in understanding it as a medium, is its positioning 'as part of the visual art world' (Tate, 2019). Aesthetic consideration is a dominant feature in the production of performance art and its operation in the visual domain, although of course due to the nature of performance presentations unfolding in time and space

[3] Reflections on womanhood and my own sexed and gendered body, are shared throughout the thesis.

there are multiple other aspects which contribute towards its meaning making. Meaning making in performance art is examined further in the main body of the thesis.

In her forward to *Performance: Live Art from 1909 to the present*, RoseLee Goldberg likens the 'history of performance' to the 'history of theatre' in that it can only be accessed via its documentation post event (1979: 6). Importantly Goldberg differentiates between performance and theatre. Typically, the conventions of theatre align with modes of *representation*, with characterisation and the performance of something or someone else, whereas performance can be understood as the *presentation* of a performer to an audience such as: an athlete at a sports event; an aerialist in a circus; or a performance artist in a studio. To expand, performance artists typically make non-representational performance, presenting themselves and/or their participants to an audience in the unfolding of an artwork, rather than engage in modes of characterisation or pretence. Although considered non-representational, aspects of their performance might well represent ideas or concepts via visual means. For the purpose of this thesis, performance art is defined as a non-representational mode of performance, whereby the artwork is presented and performed by an artist (or participants) to an audience, with a focus on visual aspects in its method of delivery and communication.

Bodycloth

Because there is a lack of shared and specific terminology to fully express my area of enquiry, I propose a working term and definition. This thesis examines what I am calling *bodycloth*. This term is used to describe a third entity emerging, when the boundaries between body and cloth (as separate elements) collapse. In order to arrive at this definition, the thesis charts my journey analysing a variety of inter-relations between body and cloth, as well as modes of adornment and utilisations. Cloth (also referred to interchangeably as fabric or textile) is

understood as a length of material (which can be varied in composition, colour and texture), whose shape has not been manually altered to fit a certain form. It excludes tailored items of dress or clothing, but can include material that is actively formed into clothing (by acts of wrapping, binding or shrouding, for example). My literature review, which is located further along in this introduction, shares research that has been conducted to date in relation to textile, art, and performance.

Textiles and Attentive States

Figure I.2. Steven Paige (2017) *Rachel Hann in conversation at TaPRA conference Salford, 2017*

In 2017 I attended the Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA) annual conference hosted by the University of Salford. During group discussion at the end of panel presentations, Rachel Hann came to the front of the space and laid a scarf out flat upon the

floor (see figure I.2). She spoke of being particularly interested in what renders something attentive – a stage or scene upon it perhaps – suggesting that we might think of attentive states in terms of multiple geographies aligning, and in relationship to one another. I understood *attentive* in the context of the conversation to mean an attentive state of being in witnessing performance - caused by multiple geographies working in tandem to capture attention.

Figure I.3. Steven Paige (2017) *Rachel Hann lifting textile upwards, in conversation at TaPRA conference Salford, 2017*

Pinching the centre of the scarf, Hann slowly lifted the textile (see figure I.3). I watched as the edges of the scarf began to trace the floor, drawing inwards and upwards. Hann used this action as a visual metaphor for ideas she began to simultaneously discuss. She describes theatre as a kind of intervention, one which occurs in the displacing of shape (this is emphasised by the changing shape of the rectangular scarf rising upward from the floor). The stage is a space

which, during performance, pulls upon the geographies around it rendering them different. Slowly lowering the textile back down to the floor, Hann offers that post live performance, those geographies slowly relax back into a 'normal' shape. However, she points out that the shape of things when relaxed back, are not *quite* the same as they were before (the scarf having been lowered back down to the floor, was dishevelled). Things change. Newly formed memories have been made, and new relations with that place have occurred. Attentive states, the taking up of space as a political act, and the execution of performance as an attempt to affect social change are all examined in this thesis.

The multiple geographies Hann describes are outlined by Joslin McKinney and Phillip Butterworth in *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography* (2009: 4). Scenography is 'the manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment' achieved via the manoeuvring of 'architectonic structures, light, projected images, sound, costume and performance objects or props' they state (McKinney and Butterworth, 2009: 4). My research project takes a broadly scenographic approach, in that there is a careful and sensitive consideration of space and environment bound up in my method of performance making, affecting its creation in the choreographic[4] process. My focus on cloth in performance art is specific to methods and modes of adornment in relation/response to the performing body, and I also consider the presence of textiles in performance and effects on the performance environment in a wider context.

Returning to Hann's use of scarf for a moment, I also recognise uses of textile as a visual metaphor in the work of others engaged in performance art. In *A Divine Trauma* (2012), Nicola Hunter situates her body within the frame of the performance, alongside a long length of shiny white material and white lilies (studying documentary photographs, these appear to be *Lilium*

4. I explain my use of the term choreography in Chapter Two.

Candidum aka the *Madonna lily,* [RHS, 2019]) which are pierced across her nude body (see figure I.4). In the performance, Hunter unfurls the textile across the floor of the performance space, which then becomes a runway upon which to walk. Slowly, Hunter walks across the clean, white textile and removes the pierced lilies from her body, dropping them onto the fabric as she goes. Blood slowly seeps from her pierced skin, dribbling downward and imprinting itself onto the material below. Arriving at the end of the textile, Hunter picks up the corners and pierces them to her hips. She then exits the performance space.

Figure I.4. Nicola Hunter (2012) *A Divine Trauma*

Observing Hunter's performance acts, I interpret the textile pierced to her hips as a symbolic reference to marriage, considering the length of fabric being dragged behind her a bridal train. Adding to this reading, the blood which seeps out of her body could link to the breaking of the hymen as the virgin bride transitions to become sexually active as a wife, and then mother. The use of Madonna lilies is significant: they are a symbol of chastity and virtue signalling the Virgin Mary's purity, whilst in a modern context they are flowers most often associated with death and funerals. This leads me toward considering that Hunter is examining socio-cultural roles assigned to women, via her own body and its materiality within a visual performance art discourse. These discourses are bound up in religious symbolism and iconography which became a feature of my own practice research performance, examined in various chapters throughout the thesis.

Hunter drags the material, along with its needles and lilies behind her. The physical weight of this pulls at the piercings which hold the textile to the flesh at her hips. I interpret this as a metaphor for the emotional weight and burden that womankind must bear in relation to their socio-cultural standing within a patriarchal society.

A Personal History of Working with Textiles in Performance

Figure I.5. Joanna Partridge and Natalie Raven (2012) *Other Women.*

In 2011 I collaborated with performance artist Joanna Partridge under the company name *Deux Oiseaux* on a duet titled *Other Women* (2011), performed at De Montfort University and *circuit* festival of performance. In the performance, Joanna and I set about testing relational boundaries between our bodies in and around the performance space. I recall during rehearsal that I drew the long black theatre curtains around the entirety of the space to envelope it.[5] I began to play around with these vast lengths of weighty material: allowing my body to fall into the fabric, pushing it forwards with my arms whilst walking outwards into the centre of the space, and standing on a plinth draping the hefty textile across my body in a sculptural fashion (see figure I.5). Although unaware at the time, looking back I see that I was beginning to experiment and

5. I probe this particular process in depth in Chapter Two.

explore re-presentation/s of women and womanhood in performance, utilising my own body and its relationships to textile. Following this particular trajectory, my thesis weaves it way through a series of performance works whereby my body is situated in the frame of the performance in relation to textiles, sharing what they have revealed. Performance experiments conducted as doctoral research are outlined in the table in the 'Research Methodology' section below, in response to the following research questions driving this thesis.

Research methodology

My research project utilises a *practice research* methodology, whereby it is through practical experimentation that new knowledge is both generated and disseminated. In light of this, a live performance was submitted alongside this written thesis, disseminating and embodying ideas and knowledge generated through the research process. Details of this performance can be found in the conclusion.

The primary research method is to cultivate performances designed to be experienced live. Drawing on Robin Nelson's triangular dynamic model for research, encompassing 'practitioner knowledge'; 'critical reflection'; and 'conceptual framework' (Nelson, 2006: 17), I utilize my own skills as a performance artist (practitioner knowledge) to reflect on the embodied knowledges and processes that I go through as a maker (critical reflection), particularly in relation to my investigations into body, cloth, and *bodycloth*. I take a feminist approach, drawing on, responding to, and extending ideas put forward by Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Laura Mulvey, and Judith Butler through my performance experiments with textiles (conceptual framework).

My particular practice research methodology embraces shifts in the perspectives from which I speak/write, and also design and respond to my performance experiments. In early chapters I seek to understand how the body (my own, and that of other artists) is read and interpreted in performance art. This is as a result of wanting to understand if and to what extent responses to the staged body in performance art can be controlled, responding to the contemporary adage 'my body my rules'. In later chapters, this shifts toward the making of artworks which seek strategies for self-empowerment, rather than for the purpose of analysing others readings, shifting analyses from the semiotic, to the phenomenological. As the arc of the research project unfolds - having been through a period of reflection on my own performance making and choreographic processes - I move to consider the work of other artists from an 'insider' perspective. I adopt a communal 'I' at times in my performance writing, used to express the ways in which I empathically encounter the artworks of others as an artist, with shared experience in presenting live performance to an audience.

Table of Practice Research

Title	Date/Place	Form	Where discussed in thesis
Body&cloth	November 2015, Plymouth University UK	Solo live performance to audience	Chapter Two
emending eve	June 2016, Black Mountain North Carolina, USA	Collaborative performance to camera	Chapter Three
la sainte trinité	November 2016, Spill Festival of Performance Ipswich UK, and University of Plymouth UK	Collaborative live performance to audience	Chapter Five
Protruding the Veil	October 2017, Tate Britain, UK	Solo live performance presented within group showing to audience	Chapter Three
sa réécriture [re-writing her]	June 2016 De Montfort University, UK	Solo live performance to audience	Chapter Four
The Ascension of Esther	November 2019 St Saviours Hall, Plymouth UK	Collaborative live performance to audience	Conclusion
The Ties That Bind	June 2016, Black Mountain North Carolina, USA	Solo performance to camera	Chapter Three
Veiled Visions	June 2016, Black Mountain North Carolina, USA	Solo performance to camera	Chapter Three

Figure I.6. Table of Practice Research

Documentation of all my practice research experiments (including the live performance which will be shown as part of my viva as previously discussed) are shared visually via the use of

photographs situated throughout this thesis, as well via use of descriptive performance writing.[6] I chose to do this over sharing audio-visual materials, as I perceive such mediums do not represent live performance work in its best light. Some of my experiments utilise performance-to-camera techniques, whereby the photograph is the artwork itself, not a document of a live performance. This will be specified where necessary.

Ecologies of Performance Making

There are multiple threads producing the fabric of my practice research. My reading of Hunter's performance offered earlier in my introduction, is an example of the feminist approach I take in conducting my research, shaping the making of, and my critical responses to, performance art. I observe systems and structures that I exist within, witnessing and experiencing imbalances of power, social injustice, and inequality.

Elaine Aston discusses the emergence of body-based performance and its links to feminist theatre making in the *Handbook of Feminist Theatre Practice* (1999). She explains that the emergence of 'counter spectacle' street protests against Miss World pageants in the 1960s and 1970s were 'embryonic of body-centred critique[s] of gender representation that subsequently, was to dominate feminist theatre, theory, and practice in the 1980's' (1999: 5). My own body-based performance works emerge from this tradition, in its resistance to the objectification of women's bodies and rejection of normative beauty standards. Further to this, Aston explains how feminist practitioners 'wanted to explore other theatrical forms and acting styles to represent their experiences, themes, or subjects' (1999: 7). The uptake and prevalence of

6. An explanation of my use of performance writing is shared further along in this introduction.

performance art as a mode of expression by feminist artists is largely due to the non-representational nature of this form of performance. It aligns with feminist strategies for presentation, in the centring of live bodies and lived experience.

In terms of feminist approaches to performance making, Aston explains how positioning 'patriarchy at the heart of inequality between men and women' led to the 'prioritising [of] experiences peculiar to women: birthing, mothering, menstruating' (1999: 9). Indeed, my own performance work emerges out of such lineage as I share and perform aspects of my own lived experience and materiality. Aston reveals in the quotation above how women's experience was typically understood and represented in terms of cis-gendered experience. My thesis explores and examines broader aspects of womanhood, attempting to think beyond cis-gendered heteronormativity.

Practitioner Review

As part of this doctoral project, I have researched a range of performance art pieces whether live or via documentary video or photograph. In the body of my thesis, I discuss artworks by Yoko Ono, Ana Mendieta, Cindy Sherman, Ro Hardaker, and ORLAN. In this review section, I bring additional images of performance together to illustrate the various relationships between body and cloth and how they function in performance art. To date, these performances have not been analysed in relation to the methods artists use in working with cloth in relation to bodies. Although the focus of analysis in my thesis is almost exclusively centred around women artists, I chose to include works by some male performance artists here, as it offers insight into the potentials of using textiles in conjunction with the body, for all artists.

Figure I.7. Franko B (2003) *I Miss You*

Franko B's *I Miss You* (2003) was performed at the Tate Modern in the expansive Turbine Hall space (see figure I.7). The artist walked along a long length of cloth in a state of undress covered in white body paint, whilst bleeding from his veins opened up by a cannula in each arm. Set up like the catwalk of a fashion show, Franko B's crimson blood dripped onto the cloth beneath him. The textile became stained, transforming its clinical, white surface. Franko B's work is a staged example of the ways in which bodies are objectified according to the conventions of a fashion show, as well as offering an observation on the ways in which the materiality of an abject body imprints itself both on and in the fabric materiality of textile to which it relates.

Figure I.8. La Ribot (2001) *Another Bloody Mary*

La Ribot performed 'Another Bloody Mary' (2001) as part of her *Still Distinguished* series at South London Gallery, England UK (see figure I.8). In it, the artist gathers a range of red items including linens, and carefully places them across the floor of the performance space. La Ribot stands up, puts on a pair of green shoes and a blonde wig, before clipping a blonde hair piece to the pubic hair covering her labia. The artist then sits down with her legs in a split position, shoes skew-whiff. The red material provides visual cues for the representation of blood cascading from between her legs. This is an example of the ways in which colour in and of

fabric plays its part in visual expression, in this case a comment on the experience of menstruation or rape.

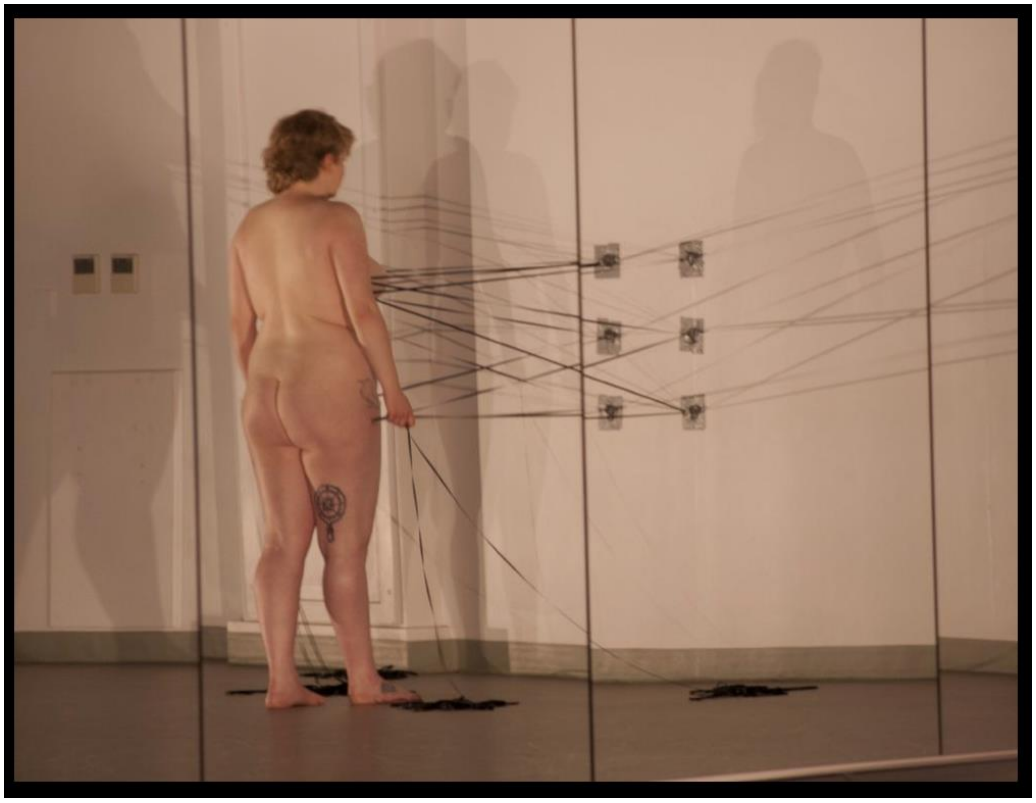


Figure I.9. Holly Brining (2012) *Tied*

I witnessed artist Holly Brining perform *Tied* (2012) at 'circuit' festival hosted by Leicester's De Montfort University in 2012 (see figure I.9). Brining was pierced at points across the side of her body, with black ribbon looping backwards and forwards through these piercings and hooks placed in-front of her on the wall of the performance space. Slowly, the artist walked backwards. Long lengths of ribbon gently swayed in shadow, as an uplit Brining and her woven mesh creation began to grow in size. Brining's work is an example of the ways in which textile (in this case, ribbon) is used to extend the presence of the female body in space, via fabric

connected to her body growing in length, and multiple shadows cast becoming visibly larger, looming overhead.

Use of material as a means to extend the presence of a performer in space was equally present in Helena Goldwater's *Funnel of Love* (2011, see figure C1.10) which I witnessed live in London at Café Gallery as part of Archipelago exhibition. Goldwater's six-week performance installation compromised 'a sequinned column, floor to ceiling…[with] hair emerging from the base extend[ing] itself across the gallery floor and into other spaces' (Goldwater, 2019). For large parts of the performance Goldwater was enveloped within the glittering fabric tube, partially emerging at points, and sometimes squirting milk. The tall tubular textile in the work forms part of Goldwater's material adornment (matching the red sequinned dress so often seen in her performance pieces), which worked to extend her physical presence in the space, vertically. *Funnel of Love* illuminates the curious absent [from view] presence of a performer hidden from their audience behind (in this case, within) textiles, as well as artistically framing bodily materiality, material revelation, and concealment.

Figure I.10 . Helena Goldwater (2011) *Funnel of Love*

In 2014, I attended SPILL festival of performance, where I witnessed jamie lewis hadley's performance *WE WILL OUTLIVE THE BLOOD YOU BLEED* (2014, see figure I.11). Hadley enters the performance space which was a raised platform with four vertical neon lights and a tall stainless steel fan placed upstage centre. Hadley walks into the performance space, holding a rectangle of white textile and a staple gun. Holding his right arm outstretched in front, he meticulously positions the textile to fall neatly in a straight line down his forearm. He brings

the gun upward towards his arm, before stapling through multiple fabrics of textile and skin, linking the two. Hadley holds his arm up to the fan which begins to blow air across the space.

Figure I.11 . jamie lewis hadley (2014) *WE WILL OUTLIVE THE BLOOD YOU BLEED*

Writing on the performance for SPILL festival, I explained how 'the fluttering white flag moving in front of the fan' operated as 'a symbol of surrender' before questioning

> Who exactly was the surrendering party?
>
> Who was in retreat?
>
> Was it Hadley, surrendering himself to his audience, bleeding for us, hanging the bloodied cloth before us, removing himself from the frame as a considered act of retreat?

> Or was it us, his audience, surrendering ourselves to a position of complicity as we sit, stand, kneel and gaze upon this bleeding body and its bloodied remains, flickering in the wind? (Raven, 2014).

WE WILL OUTLIVE THE BLOOD YOU BLEED (2014) shows how textile operates symbolically when situated in the frame of a performance. In this case, when placed in situ with the body and a fan, it became symbolic of 'surrender', prompting various readings, such as mine above as an audience member. Aspects of interpretation and meaning making in performance art are examined throughout this thesis.

Figure I.12. hancock&kelly (2011) *l_land*

In 2011, hancock&kelly (performance duo Traci Kelly and Richard Hancock) undertook a site-specific performance on the island of Herdla, surrounded by the Norwegian fjords (see figure I.12). Standing on the edges of the banks, the artists appear tied together with ripped textiles wrapped around their heads. On the artist's website, Kelly explains the action taking place in the performance:

> without vision and open to the elements traci kelly and richard hancock hold each other to account. small movements and adjustments threaten them with a watery demise. a lifeline threads between, challenging the notion of distinct bodies. they must pay attention to their own position to safeguard the other. one false move and... (Kelly, 2019. Punctuation replicated from original).

In this performance, a single length of textile is used to withhold the vision of the performing bodies. Textile forms a visual link between them, whilst also aiding in the narrative of precarity unfolding in the performance due to the responses of textile (loosening off, becoming taut), and the subtle movements of the artists on the precipice of immersion into icy waters.

Similarly, artist Hellen Burrough used aspects of binding and wrapping in her performance of *Achillia* (2013, see figure I.13). Witnessing Burrough's performance at The Island in Bristol, I reflected on what I observed in the performance for a review published by *Total Theatre* magazine:

> The performer entered, half clothed in a long white gown which trailed the floor.... Milk began to bleed upwards into the fabric as faint drops of crimson blood spotted the robe, hinting at an underlying injury. Slowly, and with conviction, she bound her wrists. (Raven, 2016)

There are two significant aspects to Burrough's performance which are relevant in consideration of textiles in performance art. One is the wrapping of the body; in this case, it is her wrists. In my interpretation, this act signified the concealment of a self-inflicted injury (typically this is represented in Western visual cultures by the cutting of skin at the wrist). Additionally, I perceived an inference of fighting in the artist choosing to bind her wrists, as this is a typical act of preparation in support of the hands and wrists in combat or professional fighting.

Figure I.13. Hellen Burrough (2013) *Achillia*

The second is the ways in which the fabric used in the performance soaks up liquid; in this case, milk and blood. Burrough's textiles absorbed liquid elements into the fabric of the material, contributing toward the creation of a visual narrative for the audience – for example, the hint of an underlying injury. In observing this, I began to build up a mental picture of what might lie beneath physically and temporally.

Figure I.14. Carly Seller (2018) *Skin*

The permeability and infusion of textile is something explored by Plymouth-based artist Carly Seller in her 'materia medica' series. *Skin* (2018, see figure I.14) is a performance to camera piece by Seller developed during a residential retreat for artists engaged with textiles and performance that I ran in Cornwall, entitled *Making at Maker Heights: Fabric, Fluidity, and*

Performance Art. The performance utilised muslin which the artist had pre-dyed with 'foraged red clover, ox-eye daisies and nettle, with chamomile' (Seller, 2019). Encased within the muslin and framed by the landscape captured in the lens of the camera, Seller slowly moves around enveloped within the textile. A speckled skin forms across her own.

As I had experienced working with Seller's textiles in a similar way to the artist in *Skin*, I am able to discuss some of the embodied experiences which she may also have encountered. Herbal infusions waft under nose, as dry, prickling grass pokes flesh under the weight of a writhing body. Seller's work explores landscape (as physical space offering a visual backdrop, and source of plant materials to forage), textile, and the body.

Undertaking this practitioner review has brought to light a paradox which I attempt to disentangle in the thesis; I find representational aspects present in an arts practice which I identify as primarily presentational and non-representational. For example, in jamie lewis hadley's *WE WILL OUTLIVE THE BLOOD YOU BLEED* (2014), I recognise that the ways in which the artist used textiles (as previously discussed) symbolically represented *surrender* to me in my interpretation. I did not perceive that hadley was attempting to mimetically portray a representational character who was surrendering in the artwork; rather, there were visual cues or markers presented by the artist which worked to symbolically *represent* this. Aspects of symbolic representation and its function in meaning-making processes in performance art are examined in the thesis, with this particular nuanced observation very usefully framing research that follows in the substantive text.

Literature Review: Body, Cloth, and New Materialism

Although *bodycloth* is a term I have coined myself, I have sought to find writers who explore the relationships between the body and cloth, even if they have not explicitly acknowledged they were doing so. What became apparent was that key texts focused predominantly on either body or cloth;[7] few explored what I see as the complex and fascinating relationship between the two. In addition, literature produced exploring the emergent paradigm of new materialism supports me in understanding the relationships between humans (and their bodies) and non-humans (and textiles).

Elizabeth Wilson's *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (1985; revised and updated in 2003) is a seminal text in field of fashion studies. Wilson's book explores the 'multi-faceted nature of dress and its ambiguities', with chapters discussing the contextual and industrial histories of fashion, as well as the socio-cultural implications of dress (1985/2003: vii). Wilson also covers a wide range of socio-cultural and ideological topics and approaches related to dress such as feminism, gender, and identity. Wilson's text has had huge influence on many titles published subsequently, and is regarded as pioneering in the field.

Although the relevance of Wilson's text to my research topic is limited, she does begin to draw out certain related elements. In Chapter Two, 'The History of Fashion', Wilson offers a historical-contextual overview of dress, beginning with the observation that 'throughout the classical period ... both Greeks and Romans wore draped garments' (2003 [1985]: 17) as a form of clothing used in the everyday. Wilson explains that distinctions in dress between humans

7. I had to widen my search field to include an analysis of texts which reflected on the relationship between body and clothing, dress, costume and adornment, as a specific focus on cloth in relation to the body does not seem to have been addressed by scholars thus far.

were not based on a gendered male/female binary, but instead between the draped/sewn; the draped was sought after, whilst the sewn was considered a 'badge of the barbarian' (1985/2003: 17). Wilson reports evidence that eyed needles have been unearthed on Palaeolithic sites, which pre-date the classical period. This means that the choice to adorn and drape the body with cloth was *considered,* and not a result of the non-invention of tailoring implements (Wilson, 1985/2003: 17). Draped adornments were, arguably, used for their aesthetic properties.

According to Kate Sopher, the influence of classical Greek philosopher Plato on traditional Western philosophical thought is prevalent. In her essay, 'Dress Needs: Reflections on the Clothed Body, Selfhood and Consumption', Sopher argues that there is a philosophical neglect of clothing, and that it is the result of a Platonic prioritisation of the mental, rational and spiritual over the corporeal, material and sensual (2000: 15). Sopher equates this to an understanding that what was considered distinctive about being human was the possession of a mind and soul, rather than any sort of embodied experience. The body therefore, is rejected in Platonist understandings of human experience. The rejection of the body here is also connected to what was previously discussed in Wilson's text: the favouring of the draped over the sewn. By adorning the body with draped, loose material, the individual can be seen as attempting to disguise the contours of the body, and metaphorically rid itself of its fleshy form in favour of abstract, immaterial and spiritual pursuits.

As for the Greeks and Romans of the classical period, clothing has continued to articulate social and cultural ideologies to the present day. Bodily dress and the adornment of humans is as much a feature of contemporary society's cultural assembly as it was millennia ago. Joanne Entwistle explains in *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory* that

dress is a basic fact of social life, and no culture leaves the body unadorned (2000: 6). Dress is both a personal and social act, albeit a hegemonic, culturally inscribed one.

The Fashioned Body (2000) is helpful to the nature of my enquiry due to Entwistle's definition of terms. The author usefully navigates the difference between the studies of dress (as meanings given to particular practices of clothing and adornment), and fashion (as a system, idea, or aesthetic). Using Entwistle's distinctions, textiles in performance art can be considered both an exercise of adornment, and a symbolically laden and aesthetic practice, transcending dress/fashion distinctions. Indeed, Entwistle herself transcends such distinctions by focusing on the body, which she sees as providing a fundamental link between dress and fashion. Through dress and clothing practices, she highlights how 'fashion becomes embodied' (2000: 4).

In Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro's book *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body* (1998), they draw on ideas put forward by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1995/1977) in order to explain how society regulates the body through dress, arguing that it can become docile through acts of clothing. Warwick and Cavallaro offer examples of how uniform is oppressive, illuminating how the bodies of people deemed criminal or insane in nineteenth and early twentieth century institutions were denied the ability to choose their own clothes and were forced into wearing a uniform which denied self-determination via dress (1998: 75).

Warwick and Cavallaro offer other types of regulated and uniformed bodies: the dress of armies and the police force, for example, sets them apart from the masses and proffers them as agents of hierarchical power (1998: 76). The religious habiliment of nuns and priests is highlighted in

reference to their subjection to God, by way of the subjugation of the flesh in wearing loose, draped garments. Warwick and Cavallaro suggest that robes of the pious are worn in order to purge the body of its abject, fleshy self, and instead aim to fill the body's void with clean, spiritual power (1998: 77). This clearly links back to previous comments on classical Greece, and the pursuit of the philosophical over the material. The use of draped garments (in a traditional Western sense) is a personal, yet socio-cultural act which is used to disguise what is seen as an improper body. In Chapters Two and Four, I explain how the use of textiles as draped garments in performance art actually works in *accentuating* and *enhancing* the living, breathing body beneath.

Mildred Constantine and Laurel Reuter's *Whole Cloth* (1997) is a consideration of cloth through the lens of the visual arts. The book surveys a wide range of art works which engage with cloth, but engagement is not in-depth as with each new paragraph, a new art work and/or artist is introduced. As a US publication, there is a definite lean toward discussing American artists. Overall, the book gives more of an impression of the ways in which cloth has featured in the work of artists, rather than providing rigorous analyses of the works, and what they might reveal about American culture.

In their chapter entitled 'Metaphor and Symbol', Constantine and Reuter describe some of the ways in which materials (and by extension, cloth) are representative. For example, they argue that Joseph Beuys uses felt and fat as expanding metaphors: fat for spirituality, felt for warmth and the harbouring of energy (1997: 47). The artist uses a substance through which he crafts the work, but this product is also symbolic and/or metaphoric of something greater than the

physical artwork alone. Constantine and Reuter explain how in Beuys' case, the materials he uses are for the purpose of expressing a private mythology (1997: 47).

As well as highlighting the various symbols and metaphors associated with cloth, Constantine and Reuter's *Whole Cloth* interestingly considers some of the ways in which cloth is theatrical. In their chapter 'From Swag to Scrim', the authors assert that '*cloth is theatre'* (Constantine and Reuter 1997: 177, emphasis in original). They relate cloth explicitly to the staging of theatrical work in space, with the use of the proscenium curtain introducing a performance. Further, they suggest that the revelation of the stage and the partitioning of the curtain is a dramatic act, going on to highlight how a European mime group called Mummenschanz played on the suspense and dramatization of this act (Constantine and Reuter 1997: 77). As noted previously, the presence of textiles in traditional Western performance spaces (such as long black theatre curtains in studios) are explored in Chapter Two.

Warwick and Cavallaro's *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body* (1998) discusses similar themes to those explored in *Whole Cloth* such as the symbolism and metaphor of material, doing so in a more rigorous way. They argue that masks, veils, and other similarly screening garments (such as cloth) highlight the problematic nature of the relationships between surface and depth, dress and body. The authors assert that it is problematic to render dress deceptive (as a mode of hiding some sort of hidden, deeper truth) and seek to challenge this perception. They argue that in fact the adoption of a mask (or screening garment) may in fact *reveal by concealing*, and that a subject's identity might well be revealed by external manifestations (1998: 135). It must be mentioned here how closely related this exploration of surface/depth/identity is to the *performative*; a term used to articulate the performance and presentation of self and identity in the everyday outlined by Judith Butler in her publication

Gender Trouble (Butler, 1990). Examinations of identity, performance, the presentation of self, and the representation of women and womanhood in relation to textile are examined in depth in Chapter Five of this thesis

Warwick and Cavallaro suggest that the body is symbolic in 'multi-accentual and polymorphous' ways (1998: 5). Despite a very clear and academic writing style, the text is rather poetic, referring to the elusion of the body by the allusion of language. They elucidate how the body is interior and exterior, surface and depth, self and social. The body is a boundary and not a boundary, both concrete and fluid. The body represents the self and the non-self, the proper and the improper, the abject. The body is erotic and desirable, sacred and pure, active, docile and subject to (an-other). The body is architectural, a mannequin, a shell, and a frame, both empty and full. Warwick and Cavallaro's writing style links very clearly to explorations of a/the poetic body via *écriture feminine* (feminine writing), championed by Hélène Cixous in *The Newly Born Woman* (1986/1975). Cixous' work is threaded into the body of my thesis as I, like Warwick and Cavallaro, attempt to articulate the complexities of the body, and embodied experience.

Gen Doy's *Drapery: Classicism and Barbarism in Visual Culture* (2002) focuses on the use of drapery within the visual arts, but with some direct references to cloth and its utilisation. The term 'drapery', Doy asserts, was traditionally used to mean 'cloth transformed into art' (2002: 10). In Chapter Two, 'Commodification, Cloth and Drapery', Doy describes cloth in relation to clothing. She draws attention to the ways in which clothes are considered a second skin, and refers to psychoanalytical writings on the subject (2002). Doy highlights how the body is considered inferior to the cloth that covers it, as clothing is part of a larger cultural discourse. Interestingly however, Doy articulates a sense of lack that is felt when clothing is viewed

without the body; 'clothing' she states 'seems...purposeless' (2002: 61). She argues that the body animates its adornment, and clothing by itself seems most redundant.

Chapter Four 'The Fold: Baroque and Postmodern Draperies' of Gen Doy's book provides a philosophical enquiry of cloth, whilst also looking at the use of drapery in the performing arts. Doy usefully explains how Nietzsche attempted to dismantle the philosophy of truth, wishing to collapse depth and surface, appearance and reality (2002: 152-153). An interrogation of *surface*, rather than what might mysteriously lie beneath, is proffered here yet again; 'behind the drapery and skin of Greek statues, there is nothing' (2002: 153).

Doy also draws attention to the work of performance artist ORLAN. As a case study of an artist who has examined the body and its relationships to textiles,, it is a useful piece of writing for my thesis. Charting several of ORLAN's performances, Doy suggests the artist adorns with cloth as an act of transformation. ORLAN, Doy argues, becomes a baroque saint, a stripper, a whore, and a love goddess via her adornment and discarding of cloth (2002: 168). ORLAN's playful acts of veiling and retreat also allude to ecclesial practices examined in Chapter Five of this thesis, which in turn heightens the awareness that this may be considered a rejection of Western religious observation. Doy states that one of ORLAN's aims is

> to re-present perceptions or 'disguises' of woman as constructions of social and religious ideology, which can then be reactivated and transcended...along with public viewing. The disrobing of the woman's body is a cultural event or performance around which cluster many meanings (2002: 168).

Via insights drawn from ORLAN's artworks, Doy states that cloth has the ability to suggest, allude and hint as well as transform, render and change. This fluidity and the transformational

properties of cloth are explored in the final chapter of this thesis, drawing from my own practice research.

In 'The New Materialism and Sexual Difference', Gill Jagger explains how recent scholarship within feminist theory has moved toward 'new materialism' in response to the canon of 'materialism rooted in Marxism' (2015: 321). Marxist approaches to the study of materialism has dominated research in the humanities for decades, and as a result 'neglected the materiality of matter' (2015: 321). In the article, Jagger explains how new materialism poses a critique of Judith Butler's theory of the body (examined in Chapter Five of the thesis), as it is considered lacking in providing an 'adequate role for the materiality of the physical body in the process of its materialisation' (2015: 321). This is especially pertinent considering the topic of enquiry for this thesis, examining the performing body and its relationship to textiles. 'A concern with the agency of matter' is what Jagger argues is of primary concern to new materialists, and it is this concern which underpins my exploration of choreographic process outlined Chapter Five (2015: 321). Through this research, I attempt to bridge some of the gaps between materialism, materiality, and the body in feminist discourse, both intellectually and materially via cloth.

In *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description* (2011), Tim Ingold reminds his readers that 'human beings swim in an ocean of materials' (2011: 104). Concurring with Gill Jagger, he suggests scholars 'take a step back, from the materiality of objects to the properties of materials', cautioning that materials indeed seem to have 'gone missing' from materialist scholarship (2011: 91). Of most relevance to this research project is his writing in Part I: 'Materials Against Materiality'. Ingold draws attention to the work of artist and craftsperson Stephanie Bunn, explaining how in searching through anthropological texts, Bunn could not find "anything corresponding to the 'bit she did': the working with materials that lay

at the heart of her own practice as a maker" (2011: 92). This highlights an historical lack of attention to artist's encounters working with materials. Ingold asks 'could not such engagement – working practically with materials – offer anthropology, too, a more powerful procedure of discovery than an approach bent on the abstract analysis of things already made?' (2011: 92). Through the course of this thesis, I draw attention to and reflect upon my encounters with material (in this case, lengths of cloth and my own body), describing processes and phenomenological experience from the perspective of artist maker.

In the introduction to *Costume in Performance: Materiality, Culture, and the Body*, Donatella Barbieri usefully explains that as well as being a site for contemporary artistic experimentation, costume has traditionally operated as a means of defining social interactions and individuality. It articulates, she argues, 'infinitely complex human nature through material and form' (2017: xxii). This is achieved, Barbieri argues, through performed presentations to an audience which provide 'direct, visual, and embodied connection' (2017: xxii). It is the presence of the *costumed* which 'draws attention to the performers corporeal and material here-and-now' (2017: xxii). Here, Barbieri draws attention to aspects of presence and connectivity in live performance - that is, between the performer and audience - and the role costume has as material agent functioning as marker for the *aliveness* of the performer.

Of relevance to the topic of body, cloth and *bodycloth* in performance art, Barbieri teases out some of the nuanced relationships between material and human materiality. She contextualises the histories of avant-garde performance involving drapes and veils[8]: 'If the decorated flesh became the costume, then veils, scarves and drapes became an extension of both gesture and

[8] Draped cloth and veiling practices in performance are explored in Chapters Three and Five of this thesis.

of skin' (2017: xxiv). Barbieri also explains how the history of tableau vivant[9] played a role in paving the way for successive cultural movements in performance (for example, Rational Dress Reform and the Natural Movement), and touches on the work of Isadora Duncan (2017: 121-123), who was introduced at the beginning of this thesis. The author moves on to discuss 'Skirt-dancers' of the 19th century who 'subverted and extended' cumbersome Victorian skirts to create 'dynamic, spatial phenomenon of swirling fabric' (2017: 125) and Loie Fuller's 'all-enveloping costumes' which were used in her famous Serpentine Dances (2017: 126). Reflecting on Fuller's performance, Barbieri describes how the 'floating fabrics' compromising her costume extended the artist's gestures in the performance, explaining how 'generous fluidity of the fabric' along with energetic movements produced 'cascading sculptures of white silk' which worked in transforming her (2017: 126).[10]

Barbieri also analyses Martha Graham's *Lamentation* (1930). In this performance, Graham choreographs a dancer enclosed within a long tube of stretch fabric, jutting, pushing, and pressing the body up, out, and against textile in motion. For Barbieri, the performance was an 'embodiment of grief' - alluded towards by the title, of course - which 'exposed the void created inside the merging of body and costume' (2017: 128). The author goes on to argue that at moments it seemed as if the performers body was 'lacerating its own skin, trapped in the hollowness of its form, created in a costume/body interplay' (2017: 128). It is curious that Barbieri uses language such as 'hollow' and 'void' to describe the unification of body and costume in Graham's work. I question whether this is a conceptual void or a literal one, or possibly both. Here I glimpse that which I am investigating: *bodycloth,* as the co-presence of

[9] Tableau vivant is an art form further examined in Chapter Four of this thesis.
[10] The transformation of self in performance through use of textiles is explored in Chapter Five of this thesis.

performer and textile entering territories which are potentially novel, unchartered, liminal, fluctuating, and/or collaborative.

Performance writing

Throughout my thesis, I employ performance writing as a means to share memories or articulate some of the embodied, conscious, and subconscious thoughts and experiences I encounter as both an artist and an observer of art. Ric Allsop explains that the term 'performance writing' holds within it the tensions between 'writing and its performance, performance and its writing' (1999: 77). I see my performance writing doing both: I write to capture some of the moments, movements, or sensations of performance, consequently understanding that my writing when read performs for the reader in the mind. A poetic writing style is adopted as a way of capturing a *sense* or *impression* of something experienced which is intangible, or to express something non-singular or fixed. The plurality of such language allows me to share in some of the multiplicity and complexity of performance encounters, and the richness of experience.

My performance writing is woven throughout this thesis, and is indented and italicised to accommodate the reader in their reading, with an understanding that during those moments they will encounter a shift in time, or tone of voice, or position from which I speak. Approaching my performance writing, the reader is invited to pause, take a breath, and allow threads to weave new tapestries in the mind.

Chapter One

A Semiotic Approach Toward Understanding Textiles in Performance Art, Through Acts of Witnessing

From the position of audience member, this chapter investigates textiles, the body, and their potential meanings in performance art. It examines the ways in which fabrics and materials are used and utilised by artists Yoko Ono and Ro Hardaker, interpreted by myself as witness to both a live piece of work, and performance documentation. Taking a primarily semiotic approach, I identify how textiles operate as a signifying unit producing symbolic and metaphoric meanings. As there is no pre-existing literature on the semiotics of performance art, I draw on research conducted in the field of theatre semiotics in order to try and understand what is happening when I interpret witnessing textiles in relation to the body in performance art. I apply a semiotic theatre model to a piece of performance art to help me to trace nuanced distinctions between the two.

Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*: What's it all about?

Figure. C1.1. Yoko Ono (1964) *Cut Piece*

In 1965 at the Carnegie Recital Hall in New York, Yoko Ono performed *Cut Piece*[11] (see figure C1.1). I begin my investigations by undertaking formal analysis of this particular performance, as it is an early example of female body-based performance art and sets the precedent for later contemporary works. The performance acts as a stark comment on the cultural, social, and

[11] Yoko Ono also performed *Cut Piece* in 1964 at the Yamaichi Concert Hall in Kyoto, Japan where the still image of Ono shared in this thesis (figure C1.1) was taken.

ideological positioning of women, achieved via a series of complex inter-relations between bodies, objects, and textile. I conduct an exercise whereby I note down all the observations I make whilst witnessing its performance documentation, before reflecting on how this leads me towards making interpretations of the performance. This is intended to forward a general understanding of how textiles in relation to the body meaningfully operate in performance art.

Witnessing Cut Piece

There is a difference between witnessing and responding to a live performance, and reacting to representational documentation of it. The footage of *Cut Piece* I watched is a digital replica, of analogue documentary footage, of an ephemeral event. In my analysis, I am responding to something mediated which in comparison to live work feels stagnant, distant, over there, not here. It feels *past it*; *it* being the present moment in which the performance takes place, at that time, in that space, over there.

A moment

Long

Gone.

I noticed when observing *Cut Piece* via online documentary video footage, that the medium through which it was captured cultivated meaning in my reception of the work. The camera operator choosing to zoom in at a particular moment led to a tighter and more focused attention on what was being closed in on. What appeared in these shots became more significant; they

were given a closer attention to detail, and thus became more meaningful. My interpretations of the performance were, in part, cultivated by the camera's lens via the operator's hand.

Analysing documentary video footage also lacks the ability to consider all the other attributes that make up an holistic understanding of a live performance; I cannot witness what happens outside of the frame I am offered.

> *I cannot touch the performer, cannot take those gleaming scissors and look into Ono's eyes as I cut her clothing. I cannot smell the wooden flooring or watch long blacks*[12] *sway as audience members waft past. I cannot listen to audience chitter chatter, or feel charged, nervous energies surrounding me. I cannot see the camera operator moving about the space, acting as prompt for people to 'play up'. I cannot stop the performance, I cannot tell people that what they are doing feels wrong. I cannot challenge objectification, or question hierarchical positioning stripping a human of their dignity, acknowledging that I link clothing with civilisation, concealment with comfort.*

I am stuck in the present, trying to comprehend what has happened in the past.

Live performance affords audience members the freedom to engage more fully with an art work from their own particular perspective. Live witnessing opens up the possibility to experience all sensorial aspects of a performance that unfold in time and space which might, or might not, generate meaning. This is what is lost when analysing documentary material. Linking back to McKinney and Butterworth's (2009) work outlined in my introduction which explains the various components which can be altered in the arrangement of scenography in performance,

12. 'Blacks' are the technical term for long black curtains found in traditional theatre spaces.

there is a distinct inability for components such as sound (lost when not picked up by the audio boom on camera), or architectonic structures (the performance site, space, and architectural features) to be witnessed, experienced, or observed outside of the frame of the camera.

Observing performance documentation of *Cut Piece* shared online via YouTube.com, I note down what became present to me in my watching:

> *X marks the spot. Black flickering on grey, falling, bleached, flash, white, smears, black flys, bit, bob, murmurs of unseen voices, black, white, swirls, curls, letters? Begin.*
> *Zoom out, a man, knelt before two arms and a foot. Fiddling.*
> *Reveal. Ono. Knelt.*
> *Black, smart.*
> *Scissors. Snip. All the way up. All the way up. All the way up. Snip.*
> *Zoom in. Solemn. Blink. Blink. Blink. Poise.*
> *Scissors, neck, snip.*
> *Glistening eyes. Look up. Save me.*
> *Fishnets, sex.*
> *Stomach, skin, snip.*
> *Zoom in, Scissors, sparkle, slender wrists, curved fingers, delicate.*
> *He looks over and smiles.*
> *Camera moves.*
> *Its number one. Male.*
> *Behind, back, glossy hair.*
> *Space, bodies, audience.*
> *Sound is lost, its feels worse now.*
> *Sweep around, snip.*
> *Scissors, pointing. Expectation, in wait.*
> *Footsteps*
> *Passive, an object. Others, working on her.*
> *Laughing.*

Encircle, laughing, vultures, vile.

(zoom in) Solemn.

They clap. Anger rising.

Butcher. Swans off.

Squeaky floorboards.

Onlookers.

Low cut. Not quite brave enough, sir.

Still. Breathe

Taking me from behind.

A gift! A scroll. Emotions rise, breathing quickens. (whisper) What does it say?

Butchering me from behind.

Poignant.

Emotions rise. I'm an object. They don't see me.

I sit in tatters.

What do they see when they look at me? Sparkling tears, glisten like diamonds catching the light. I'm on the edge.

I breathe.

Laughing. Clapping. Proud, of what they have done to me.

Second hit.

Number two.

Knelt over me, suffocating.

Silence.

Reveal.

(laughing) Very delicate, this might take some time.

I look around for the approval of the group. I will cut off her top. I will cut off her top and show how far I am willing to take this. I will prove how delightfully daring I am.

Laughing

He'll get carried away.

The white man, smiles.

I bite my lip. He doesn't see me. This is difficult. I am vulnerable. My eyes search for help that will never come.

He cuts my clothes

He cuts me here (hold hand over my heart).
I don't want to reveal my breasts.
clip ends

The things I viewed within the frame of the performance documentation were signs or symbols, including Ono. In this regard, Ono becomes a signifying unit to be read, and I recognise that I am objectifying her in this process. However, alongside this I also empathetically and reflexively consider what it feels like to be in her position within the performance, 'putting myself in her shoes' so to speak. Ono's performance therefore also draws attention to aspects of her own subjectivity and lived experience, through the act of staging of her own body within the frame of the artwork.

My interpretation of *Cut Piece*

> *Dressed in black*[13] *attire that reflects the sombre and powerfully poignant performance event, Ono kneels passively on the floor of the performance space and stares mournfully ahead, in silence. Audience members queue up and, one by one, cut off a piece of her clothing until her naked form is exposed. Documentary footage shows tears in her eyes as she suffers the indignity of objectification; her humanity both literally and metaphorically stripped away.*

Reflecting on the paragraph above, I realise that I offer an interpretation of Ono in her performance using specific adjectives to describe what I thought I witnessed: 'passive',

13. I am analyzing Ono's work via documentary video footage that has been shot on black and white film. I cannot be certain her attire was black although it appears so in the footage.

'mournful', 'sombre'. Considering the process I undertook when watching documentary footage, I can see that I made assumptions based on my reading of formal attributes. For example, I saw various items (a female body, clothes, scissors) and actions (kneeling, cutting, tearing-up). There were specific characteristics that these items and actions had, both on their own and in relation to one another, that generated meaning for me. For example, Ono is dressed in black. Black tends to be associated with darkness, despair, and death in literary and visual contexts.[14] I assumed therefore, that Ono's black attire was symbolic of some form of dark despondency, which set the tone of the performance for me and laid the ground for interpretation. My understanding of Ono and what is being expressed in her performance of *Cut Piece* (via witnessing documentary footage) is achieved by my interpretation of signs and symbols in a semiotic process.

Understanding Semiotics

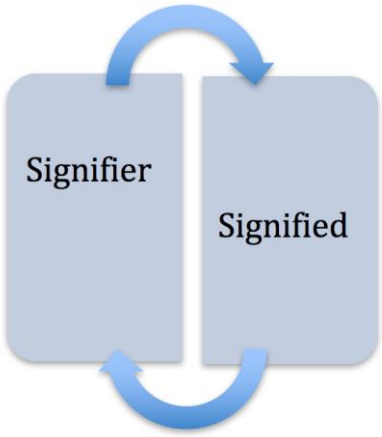


Figure. C1.2. Recreation of Ferdinand de Saussure's dyadic model of sign-system

[14] I acknowledge how problematic this interpretation is, understanding that historical connotations in literary and visual culture linking *black* to negative associations with melancholia uphold the mechanics of racial hierarchies, discrimination, and prejudice in society.

Published in 1916, Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* proposed a new area of enquiry into 'what constitutes signs, [and] what laws govern them' (Saussure, 1959: 16). This area of research was to be called Semiology, and Saussure explained it as 'a science that studies the life of signs within society' (1959: 16). In his text, Saussure outlined a dyadic model for how sign-systems operate (see figure. C1.2). From a linguistic perspective, Saussure explains that a sign is understood via a process of signification, the result of a 'two-sided psychological entity' (1959: 66). Signifier refers to the form the sign takes, and signified is the concept it represents. To offer Daniel Chandler's example of a sign: when looking into a shop window, we see a board that says 'open'. The signifier is the word open, and the signified is the concept that you can enter the shop, as it is open for business (Chandler, 2015).

Working at around the same time as Saussure in the United States, Charles S. Peirce was developing his own triptych model of the sign, referring to his work as Semiotics. In the Peirce model (see figure. C1.3.), three points are significant in the process of understanding a sign (Peirce, 1964/2001: 10)

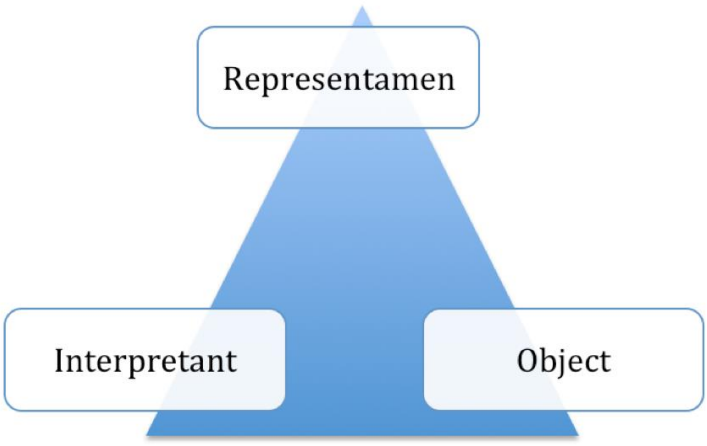


Figure. C1.3. Charles S. Peirce's triptych model of sign-systems

Peirce's model is similar to Saussure's in that his proposed representamen/interpretant relationship is like that of signifier/signified – i.e. the representamen refers to the form the sign takes (such as the word 'open' in the previous example), and the interpretant is the concept or idea generated in the mind by that sign (i.e. that the shop was open for business). Peirce extends this two-way model by making reference to the object to which the sign is referring. The object might be a physical item or action, which is implied by an understanding of the representamen and interpretant. It is worth noting that the notion of the interpretant is slightly different to Saussure's signified: the interpretant is an *extension* of the representamen (signifier) *created in the mind of the person receiving the sign* (Chandler, 2015). Peirce's model rather more explicitly acknowledges sign-systems as a cognitive activity, specifically referring to human agency in the process.

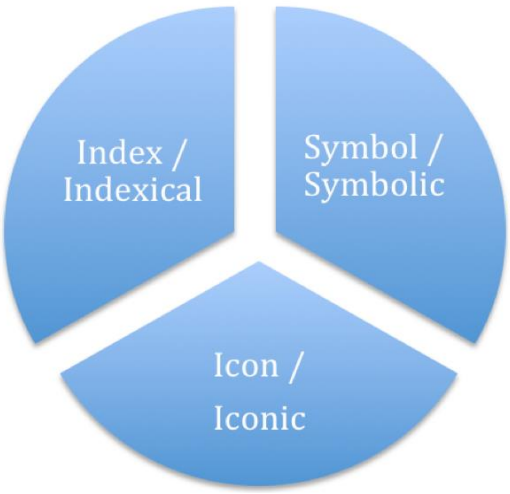


Figure C1.4. Charles S. Peirce's fundamental division of signs.

One of the most well-known and cited models for categorising signs in the study of Semiotics is Peirce's trichotomy of index / icon / symbol (see figure C1.4.). The form of an indexical sign

is directly related to the concept of the sign – that is, an arrow which points left is directly related to the concept that you should move to the left. An iconic sign resembles or imitates what is being signified, such as a portrait or a cartoon. A symbolic sign is arbitrary and does not resemble what is signified e.g. a flag. Its symbolic relationship must be learnt.

When applying these distinctions directly to objects or items that might be found within the frame of a performance, an iconic sign could be an actor who resembles a character in a play; an indexical sign might be the sound of a knock at the door to signal someone's off-stage presence; and a symbolic sign might be a hung picture of a dove on set, which might infer peace. This categorization of signs seems clear and simple and is perhaps a useful way of beginning to think about the different types of signs and their functionality in performance. However, writing in response to the use of Peirce's classification in the study of theatre semiotics, Elaine Aston and George Savona remind us that 'theatrical signs are characterized by overlap and complexity' and warn that it would be reductive to always seek some sort of concrete classification (1991: 6). Emphasizing this, Keir Elam suggests it is unwise to fall into 'naïve absolutism' in applying such categories (1980: 22). An analysis of signs and sign-systems should be sensitive to the fact they operate in fluid, contradictory and multiple ways. Such is the 'polysemic nature' of signs in performance (Aston and Savona, 1991: 99).

Returning to Ono's *Cut Piece*, Aston and Savona's and Elam's warnings prove true: My interpretations of Ono are made in response to a variety of signs which inter-relate and shape my readings of the performance. Ono's forlorn facial expression and glistening tears display melancholy. Her lowly bodily position knelt on the floor, and the slow deconstruction of her clothing with the scissors allude to passivity and submission, which have negative connotations. Signs work in tandem, building up a comprehensible picture.

For instance, *Re.act.feminism's* review of *Cut Piece* frames Ono's performance in terms of a female staging of submission. They suggest that the 'intimate encounter between the artist and the audience becomes a symbol of (female) passivity and vulnerability' (*Re.act.feminism*, 2016). This sense of subordination and passivity being a negative trait is something I recognise as being culturally and contemporarily specific; in other cultures, and at other times in history, female passivity is/was encouraged. Ono embodies and performs patriarchal hierarchies, through acts and non-acts. She is the body through which imbalances and inequalities of power are played out and manifest; to see, to touch, to feel. In this way, *Cut Piece* serves to highlight the uncomfortable nature of patriarchy, which inevitably leads to the objectification and de-humanisation of women.[15]

Ono: Body and Textiles

There are aspects of Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* which help me to understand the ways in which textiles operate in performance art. Ono's clothing begins to disintegrate during the performance. Although long lengths of textile are not present, there *are* pieces of material and remnants of fabric no longer a part of an original tailored garment. The reoccurrence of audience members cutting her garment displays a slow process of disintegration, with the production and integration of rags newly appearing in the performance space. In this case, I begin to understand the ways in which the materiality of textile has the ability to operate in performance. It can be torn and cut, and audience members can participate in responding to materials.

15. Patriarchal hierarchies and representations of such in feminist performance art are further examined in Chapters Three and Five.

There are also symbolic aspects. Ono frames herself centrally in her performance, with actions taking place in, around, and through her body. She uses the physical positioning of her own body as a representation of, or metaphor for, the positioning of women in patriarchal society – she is lowly, kneeling down. The use of black fabrics in particular, and their effects on my interpretation of Ono in the performance show how particular coloured textiles can work symbolically in building up a reading of the performance. Analyses of *Cut Piece* has helped me to begin to understand the ways in which women's lived experience can be represented materially, symbolically, and metaphorically through the use/s of adornment in performance art, responding to my research question on this topic.

Semiotics and Performance Art

There are tensions which arise when considering Ono's work through a semiotic lens. Historically, avant-garde artists whose performance work emerged in the 1960s aimed to be 'reflexive, presentational' in an attempt to shift away from 'dominant text-based theatre' (Shepherd and Wallis, 2004: 83). If artists such as Ono were attempting to shift away from theatre toward non-representational and visual performance, how might this affect processes of signification and meaning making in performance? Furthermore, what are the distinctions between the semiotic aspects of performance art, and that of theatre?

Contextualising Theatre Semiotics

During the 1930s, The Prague School explained the theatrical sign 'as a two-faced entity linking a material vehicle or *signifier* with a mental concept or *signified*' (Elam 1980: 6, emphasis in

original). Jan Mukarovsky (1976/1934) moved to consider the work of art (the holistic performance) as a semiotic unit whereby the totality of what appears within the frame of the performance acts as a macro-sign or macro-signifier, whose signified is the aesthetic object which resides in the minds of the audience. Everything in the frame is considered in reference to the totality of the experience.

Aston and Savona explain how researchers moved forward in attempting to categorise the multitude of signs being produced in theatre, in order to understand how their signification resulted in the meaningful interpretation of performance. They offer the reader a table visualising a series of sign-systems for semiotic classification in Theatre analysis (1991: 105, see figure. C1.5.). Their table is based on Tadeusz Kowzan's research, who specified that there were thirteen sign-systems in operation in live theatre performance (1968), including word; tone; mime; gesture; movement; make-up; hairstyle; costume; properties; settings; lighting; music; and sound effects.

<table>
<tr><td>Word</td><td rowspan="2">Spoken Text</td><td rowspan="5">Actor</td><td>Auditive signs</td><td>Time</td><td>Auditive signs (actor)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tone</td><td rowspan="6">Visual signs</td><td rowspan="3">Space and time</td><td rowspan="4">Visual signs (actor)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mime</td><td rowspan="3">Expression of the body</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gesture</td></tr>
<tr><td>Movement</td></tr>
<tr><td>Make-up</td><td rowspan="3">Actors external appearance</td><td rowspan="2">Space</td></tr>
<tr><td>Hair-style</td></tr>
<tr><td>Costume</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Properties</td><td rowspan="3">Appearance of the stage</td><td rowspan="4">Outside the actor</td><td>Space and time</td><td>Visual signs (outside the actor)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Settings</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lighting</td></tr>
<tr><td>Music</td><td rowspan="2">Inarticulate sounds</td><td>Auditive signs</td><td>Time</td><td>Auditive signs (outside the actor)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sound effects</td></tr>
</table>

Figure C1.5. Tadeusz Kowzan's table of sign-systems for semiotic classification in theatre analysis

In order to envisage how semiotic sign-systems operate in the process of signification in performance art, I apply Kowzan's theatrical model to my reading of Ro Hardaker's *Plough Your Own Furrow* (2014, see figure C1.6). I do this by working my way through sign-systems, articulating how I envisage Hardaker's work operating semiotically, drawing attention to findings, problems, and/or disparities. Joanne Entwistle warns that using structuralist models (such as semiotics) poses a danger of 'textualiz[ing] everything', resulting in the 'bracket[ing] off of real live bodies' (2000: 69). In response to such challenges, I move forward with the intention of allowing nuanced distinctions between art forms to emerge and unravel rigid structures. Equally, I am mindful to honour the artist, artwork, and richness of experience offered for analysis, rather than pigeonholing and the advancement of reductive measures.

Applying a Semiotic Theatre Model to an Analysis of Performance Art

Figure C1.6. Ro Hardaker (2014) *Plough Your Own Furrow* I

Witnessing Plough Your Own Furrow

A 7-hour durational performance takes place in a derelict police station in Ipswich. A bureaucratic, bland, open-plan corridor space complete with checkered flooring, severe strip lighting and unnoticed notice boards stands in stark contrast to the simple, elemental feel of the performance, devoid of technological wizardry or rehearsed theatricality.

Within the frame stands a lithe Ro Hardaker, pale skinned. Their body becomes progressively ruddier as it intricately connects, responds, and relates to materials; a dance of cloth, petroleum jelly, and grass.

Hair curls, wet and loose, bouncing across face and shoulders. Bundling, bounding, shrouding, and draping
Continually.

They work the space and materials within it, shifting landscape, enduring in process, embodying the futility of existence. Smells of hay swirl under noses; body tenses, waiting for the watery itching to begin. Skin reddens, raw. Faint sounds appear from soft bundlings of grass, whilst uncomfortable squelches of petroleum jelly ooze through fingers. A gentle quietness, pierced, by sudden slaps of cloth on skin.
Sighs of exhaustion and exertion whisper in the air, charging space.

Hardaker is a labourer, a peasant.

Wait, a Christian icon, a disciple.

No, a Classical sculpture.

Without uttering a word, it feels as though they are saying something incredibly profound.

Analysing my performance writing above, I am reminded that there was no speech in *Plough Your Own Furrow*, no linguistic forms of expression. Therefore, if I was to complete Kowzan's model outlining the signs produced in Hardaker's work according to 'word' and 'tone' (which have been specifically designated as relating to spoken text), the columns would be blank. However, in the closing sentence of my performance writing I state that ‘without uttering a word, it feels as though they [Hardaker] are saying something incredibly profound’. I therefore received meaningful information from the performance in ways which 'speak' to me in non-verbal ways that I labelled 'profound', a descriptor of the 'tone' of the work. I could argue that there are elements of Hardaker's work that generate meaning in relation to 'word' and 'tone', but that would depend on the removal of designating those categories as related to spoken text.

I was also prompted by Kowzan’s table to classify what Hardaker was wearing as 'costume'. I am not sure that I can necessarily specify that Hardaker 'wore' the materials they were working; that seems to imply that they were somehow dressed. Rather, the artist positioned, draped, tied, and bound cloth around their body in a variety of ways whilst incorporating grass and petroleum jelly, bundling armfuls of both inside loops of textile resulting in the (at some points colossal) alteration and distortion of body-shape. At this moment, I sense that I am beginning to encounter a third entity emerge as I look on: *bodycloth*. Hardakers body - in typical human form - begins to transform and transition into something else, something sort-of-non-human,

yet fashioned on and around the human body, through the artist's interactions with cloth and other materials.[16] I describe this process of material relation as 'a dance', to express how acts of adornment were undertaken by the artist as non-static, moving, evolving, emergent.

Both Rachel Hann (2017) and Aoife Monks (2010) draw attention to a lack of critical interrogation surrounding 'costume'. In *The Actor in Costume*, Monks offers that much theatre analysis surrounding costume rests on the traditional assumption that it functions as a 'supportive role in creating a character' (2010: 9). This makes it difficult for me to categorise Hardaker's adornment as 'costume', as the artist was not acting, nor attempting to cultivate a character in a traditional theatrical sense. What also strikes me here is the lack of space in Kowzan's model to discuss signification produced by the artist's body – for example their physique, stature, or genitalia. I see that there is a conventional difference here; in contrast to theatre where actors generally wear clothes on stage to support in the representation of a character, performance artists often use nudity in an attempt to step away from such modes of representation and theatrical characterisation.

Indeed, it is important to note the role Hardaker's physical body played in my interpretative response to the performance. Hardaker has a condition called psoriasis, which causes the skin to become red and flaky (NHS, 2018). As the performance unfolded and their body came into contact with grass, their skin reacted and became visibly red and inflamed. 'Skin reddens, raw,' I write. The aggressive change in skin colour became a signifier of allergy, itchiness, and pain. The use of the word 'raw' in my interpretation is linked to my imagining of skin being scratched away, breaking down to expose ruddy, bloody flesh beneath.

[16] *Bodycloth* as a third entity is examined further along in Chapter 5 and in the Conclusion to this thesis.

Reflecting on a perceived allergic reaction being experienced by the artist, an empathetic bodily response arose within myself. I became acutely aware of my own body, my own skin, and the sensations I was experiencing in the performance space itself. ‘Smells of hay swirl under noses; body tenses, waiting for watery itching to begin’ I wrote; I sat nervously in anticipation of an allergic reaction of my own (I have hayfever). At points in the performance I also felt emotional discomfort, in the sense that I felt I had become a voyeur observing someone else’s pain, complicit in their suffering. Of course, I realise that during the performance I had no way of actually knowing if the red marks on the artist's skin itched or caused pain and so I contacted Hardaker to ask if indeed it was as painful and itchy as I had imagined. Hardaker replied that their skin ‘was always uncomfortable’ from both ‘physical pain’ and a ‘feeling of unease’ surrounding its appearance (Ro Hardaker, personal communication, 17 May 2018). On further reflection, they suggest that ‘yes, it was painful, but not incredibly so’ and offered that many audience members had reacted with claims that they too felt the performance was incredibly painful for the artist (Ro Hardaker, personal communication, 17 May 2018). This reveals that external signification, produced by an artist's body, might not necessarily correlate to the internal feelings and sensations felt by the artist themselves. This disjuncture between audience perception of signs regarding physical experience and the artist’s lived experience in actuality, highlights the potential for audience members to misconstrue external signifiers as assumed internal states of being for a performer.[17]

Kowzan groups 'mime', 'gesture' and 'movement' together, designating them as the sign-systems related to the 'expression of the body'. It is difficult to categorise Hardaker’s work in relation to each of these categories, as definition relies on distinguishing between a variety of

17. Such disparities are explored further along in Chapter Five of this thesis.

physicalities being undertaken by the artist which blurs such distinction. For example, at one point in the performance Hardaker cocooned themselves inside a bundle of cloth and grass. 'Movement' might be identified in the artist walking around the space, using their arms and hands to lift, bundle, and place materials in such a way as to construct this nest type structure, positioning their body inside. The 'Gesture' of the body appears in the ways in which the artist curled themselves up into a ball, knees to chin, in an attempt to shield themselves away from view. The irony of this action reveals itself when the transparency of cloth (which had come into contact with the petroleum jelly becoming sheer), reveals the artist despite their best efforts to conceal from view. I do not think that 'Mime' was performed by the artist.

Conventional issues surrounding terminologies crop up here. Kowzan uses the term 'actor' to describe the performing person in his classification of sign-system; I have yet to meet a performance artist who describes themselves as an actor, or what they do as acting. In her article 'Radicalism and the Theatre in Genealogies of Live Art' (2009), Beth Hoffman describes the desire by experimental performance artists to 'rupture and break' apart from a type of theatre which denotes a 'particular kind of text-based, literary, proscenium-framed practice' which is, typically, the realm of actors and acting (2009: 98). Although Hardaker was not acting, nor attempting to engage in some sort of process of theatrical characterisation, their work did move me toward perceiving them as someone else, representing someone other than or in addition to the person who was stood before me: ‘Hardaker is a labourer, a peasant. Wait, a Christian Icon, a disciple. No, a Classical sculpture,’ I explain in my performance writing.

Gen Doy's assessment of textile describes 'the vision of drapery as a relatively unchanging signifier of wealth, nobility, taste, and religiosity' (2002: 20). Perhaps, therefore, it is the presence of draped textile in the performance which prompts me toward the identification of

Hardaker as a Christian icon. Yet, I also interpret them as a peasant, related I believe to their use of textile rather than tailored clothing in the performance, under the impression that clothing had disintegrated into lengths of rag. This interpretation also occurs due to the distressed appearance of the fabric, stained green by the grass, pulled, stretched, and strained out of shape (see figure C1.7).

Figure C1.7. Ro Hardaker (2014) *Plough Your Own Furrow II*

As Doy suggests, the presence of drapery as a signifier of religiosity is evidenced by my interpretation of Hardaker as a Christian icon. However, due to the unfolding of the live performance in time and space, this interpretation changes when other signifiers come into play, or, changes occur to the signifiers already present. Aston and Savona remind us that live performance 'draw[s] on a number of sign- systems which do not operate in a linear mode but in complex and simultaneously operating networks unfolding in time and space' (1991: 99). In

a traditional piece of theatre, the complex sign-systems which Aston and Savona describe seem to be working together in forming a generally *cohesive* and *recognizable* character, identifiable by an audience. This was not the case with Hardaker in *Plough Your Own Furrow*, and I find that this is due, in part, to the poetic form of arts practice they adopted. My interpretations evolved based on the accumulation of signs produced via materials appearing in relation to the artist's body in the performance, which worked to shift my perceptions of the artist in the artwork.

In *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980) Keir Elam offers an explanation for the processes of codification in performance, which sheds some light on how poetic forms of performance operate. He explains that there are two distinct operations functioning in the generation of meaning. 'System' is the name given to the internal 'syntactic' rules that govern the selection and combination of signs and signals (1980: 49). 'Code,' he explains, 'is what allows a unit from the semantic system (a signified) to be attached to a unit from the syntactic system... it is an ensemble of correlational rules governing the formation of sign-relationships' (1980: 50). In performance, an audience member subconsciously understands the correlational rules that make up the code, in order to understand and take meaning. There is a vast range of correlational rules engaged with in performance, and in effect 'all the codes operative in society are potential factors in the theatre' (1980: 50).

Elam asks 'how do we begin to distinguish the general cultural codes through which we make sense of our lives from the particular theatrical and dramatic norms at work?' (1980: 52). Indeed, how do we differentiate between the codes we read and understand from our experiential daily social intercourse, to those we understand when witnessing a performance

event? Elam's answer lies in an acknowledgement of a secondary set of regulative rules or 'subcodes' that are particular to dramatic and theatrical performance (1980: 53).

Base codes are the cultural norms, the patterns of rule we experience and understand in the everyday. Subcodes are produced by process of 'overcoding', which is where a secondary rule or set of rules arises in order to 'regulate a particular application of the base rules' (1980: 53). Elam offers 'stylistic maxims or etiquette systems' as examples of overcoding. 'Undercoding' is a term used to describe the process by which new rules emerge, 'the formulation of rough and approximate norms' in order to characterise a moment or a movement that is not yet fully understood (1980: 55). Undercoding exists in the moments where we might observe something but struggle to articulate precisely what it is. This might be due to an ignorance of the specific conventional rules in force within the performance, or simply because such rules scarcely exist. Labelling a performance 'experimental' or 'avant-garde' likely means it has been undercoded (Elam, 1980: 53).

One of the more nuanced aspects of semiotics is connotation, or, 'signs of signs' (Elam 1980: 10). Signs become connotative when there is more than one way in which the signifier can be understood. The signification produced by a sign depends on the perspective an audience takes in approaching the performance, alongside the context in which the sign appears in relation to all the other signs in the frame. Elam explains that performances are governed by a 'denotation-connotation dialectic' whereby everything in the frame of a performance is determined by a 'constantly shifting network of primary and secondary meanings' (1980: 11). A sign-vehicle can offer *n* number of second-order connotative meanings, and has an extremely large generative capacity, resulting in 'semantic ambiguity' (Elam, 1980: 11).

In light of Elam's work, poetic forms of performance art can be understood as actively connotative by way of undercoding. This mode of performance typically rejects adherence to normative, traditional base codes governing the production of meaning in performance, which is exemplified at various points in my analysis of *Plough Your Own Furrow* which resisted categorisation. The use of undercoding might be considered a methodology for the production of poetic performance, that which is symbolic, ambiguous, and offers an array of connotative meaning.

Updating Kowzan's Model to Better Reflect Meaning Making Processes in Performance Art

<table>
<tr><td>Word</td><td rowspan="2">Spoken Text</td><td rowspan="8">Artist</td><td rowspan="2">Auditive signs</td><td rowspan="2">Time</td><td rowspan="2">Auditive signs (artist)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tone</td></tr>
<tr><td>Movement</td><td rowspan="3">Expression of the body</td><td rowspan="10">Visual signs</td><td rowspan="3">Space and time</td><td rowspan="4">Visual signs (artist)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mime</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gesture</td></tr>
<tr><td>Make-up</td><td rowspan="4">Artists external appearance</td><td rowspan="2">Space</td></tr>
<tr><td>Hair-style</td></tr>
<tr><td>Adornment</td><td rowspan="3">Space and time</td><td>Auditive and visual signs (artist)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Body</td></tr>
<tr><td>Properties</td><td rowspan="3">Appearance of the environment</td><td rowspan="4">Outside the artist</td><td>Visual signs (outside the artist)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Settings</td></tr>
<tr><td>Lighting</td></tr>
<tr><td>Music</td><td rowspan="2">Inarticulate sounds</td><td rowspan="2">Auditive signs</td><td rowspan="2">Time</td><td rowspan="2">Auditive signs (outside the artist)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sound effects</td></tr>
</table>

Figure C1.8. An updated model for meaning making in performance art.

In order to better understand how meaning is produced in performance art, I updated Kowzan's model in order to fit such analyses (See figure C1.8). I changed the term *actor* to *artist* in all cases. I felt that this better incorporates those who work in both non-representational and representational modes of performance, and is equally inclusive in terms of disciplinary approaches such as Fine and Visual Arts, Theatre, Performance, and Dance studies. I changed *stage* to *environment* in the understanding that many contemporary works of art do not take place in conventional theatre settings upon a stage, which Hardaker's work illuminates. I changed *costume* to *adornment* – as explained in my introduction, this is to better reflect that artists may be embellishing or ornamenting the body in an artwork, rather than wearing items of clothing which the term *costume* traditionally assumes. I added *body* as a category. As highlighted in my reading of *Plough Your Own Furrow,* aspects of the present body became a significant feature in my readings and interpretations of the work.

Looking back on my performance writing, I note how 'faint sounds appear from soft bundling of grass, whilst uncomfortable squelches of petroleum jelly ooze through fingers'. These images and sounds were produced by a mixture of movements, and motions, and materials murmuring in simultaneous response. At this point in the performance, the artist was actively producing visual (bundled, sculptural forms) and audible (sighs, squelches) signification via the presence and use of material agents. In light of this, I updated the model to show that in the sign-systems of *adornment* and *body,* signification is produced via auditive and visual signs produced by the artist (reading left to right, this appears in the final column).

In light of my updated semiotic model for sign system in performance art, I understand that when positioning textiles in relation to the body in performance, signification is located within the *adornment* and *body* sign-systems. Referring back on my updated model (see figure C1.8),

reading left to right across *adornment* and *body* rows, I see that these elements are further connected to: the artists external appearance; the presence of the artist themselves; visual signs; signs unfolding in space and time; and auditive and visual signs produced by the artist. Analysing Hardaker's *Plough Your Own Furrow* has led me in understanding that processes of signification for textiles when appearing with the body in performance - and its related sign-systems (*body* and *adornment*) - equates to a focus on the *co-presence* of a live performing body and textiles, as well as inter-relational acts.

Conclusion

Ono and Hardaker's artwork situated in dialogue with the work of those who have researched the semiotic aspects of live performance, has enabled me to understand the systems by which textiles in relation to the performing body operate semiotically, from the position of audience member. Analysing Ono's *Cut Piece* offered insight into how items, objects, and bodies present within the frame of a performance create meaning for an audience in the reception of the work, in that they operate as signs and symbols which lead to interpretations. This was how I came to conclude that Ono's work was expressing something sombre and melancholic. Although my interpretations of the work aligns with a review by *Re.act.feminism*, I have come to understand that interpretations are personal, cultural, and temporally specific. I am unsure whether Ono intended her audience to perceive the performance in the ways it has been received, observing it (as contemporary scholars, critics, and reviewers have done) at a distance of over 50 years, through mediated audio-video performance documentation, from different cultural backgrounds, located in different contexts.

The use theatre semiotics as an aid by which to understand interpretative processes in performance art, brings identification of differences in convention to light. Using a semiotic theatre model as a framework through which to analyse Ro Hardaker's *Plough Your Own Furrow* for example, highlights a lack of consideration as to the performers 'body' and how it operates in processes of signification in traditional theatre scholarship. My re-configured semiotic model offers space for this, whilst at the same time offers a framework for critically analysing meaningful aspects of performance art. One of the key aspects which came to light through my research in this chapter, was finding and sharing the particular semiotic process through which poetic forms of performance art take shape. This form of performance is actively connotative by way of undercoding, whereby the performance material generated does not draw on those base codes which afford normative cultural codification. Meanings therefore become ambiguous, and poetic.

Chapter Two

Cloth in Performance Making

Having worked my way through semiotic theories and considered the ways in which signification operates in the witnessing of body and cloth in performance art from the position of an audience member, I turn toward a practical examination of performance making processes which utilise it from the position of artist maker. I draw on Roberta Mock's model for understanding processes of performance making offered in *Performing Processes: Creating Live Performance* (2000, see figure C2.1).

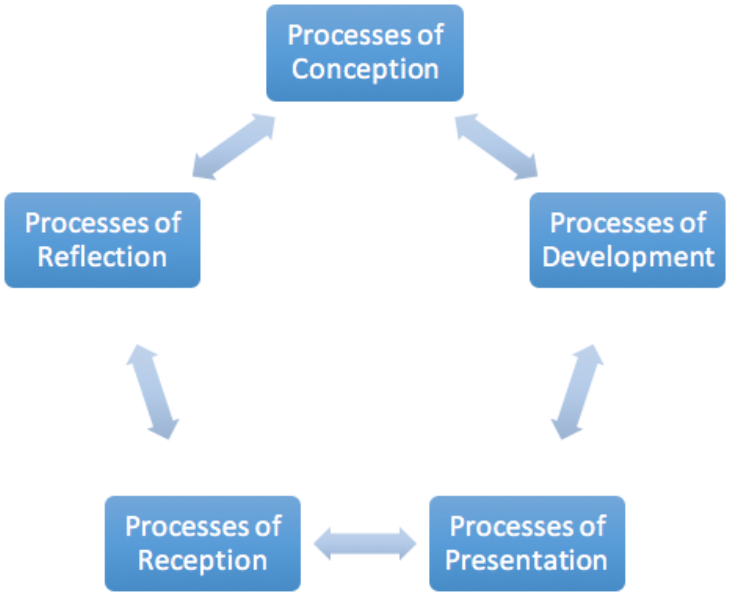


Figure C2.1. Roberta Mock's model signalling the processes of live performance

Mock's visualisation outlines five different types of process, labelled *conception, development, presentation, reception* and *reflection*. These are the five processual elements 'fundamental to

the creation of performance' (Mock, 2000: 5). Using this model as a framework through which to discuss body, cloth and aspects thereof in performance making, I start by sharing my aims (conception) for the making of my performance *Body&cloth* (2016) which this chapter focuses on. I move toward describing my choreographic process (development), before sharing what I learnt through the live performance (presentation). Finally, I collate audience responses (reception), before analysing audience feedback data (reflection). At all five parts, I consider how body and cloth function in performance art from the position of the artist. I am seeking to understand the ways in which it is operational *in practice*, and what the implications for this are in relation to how body and cloth operate meaningfully in performance art.

Practice Research Experiment: *Body&cloth*

Body&cloth: Processes of Conception

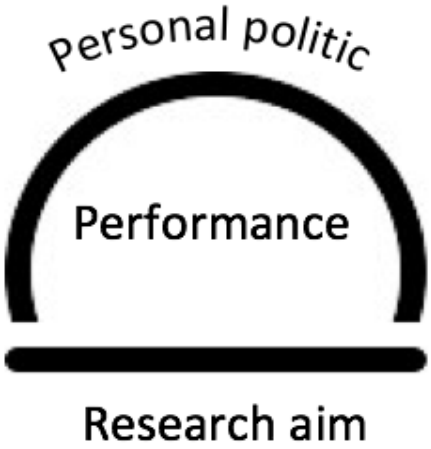


Figure C2.2. Visualisation for cultivating performance as political artist with intended research aims and/or research questions underpinning practical enquiry.

In order to create a piece of performance, I need a premise; a reason for cultivating it to draw upon in the studio, guiding me through its creation. The construction of the performance discussed in this chapter was different from others I had developed in the past, and I recognise this is because *the purpose of the work was different*. As a woman who takes a feminist approach in crafting her work, the purpose for making work is usually for distinct personal political expression. Knowing what it is that I want to express, helps me in understanding what it is that I am trying to 'say' (symbolically, metaphorically, and literally) through performance. The intention behind the construction of *Body&cloth* was to practically assess the ways in which body and cloth – i.e. body inter-relating and/or inter- articulating with cloth – operates in performance art. This was a practical venture, not a political one. To overcome this seeming disparity between how I craft work (related to my personal politics) and the functional need for this performance to examine semiotic processes in performance, I developed a method of performance-making that enabled me to move forward doing both. As exemplified in figure C2.2, underpinning the performance was an awareness that I was choreographing something in direct response to my research aims, but overarching this, I was able to draw upon my own idiosyncratic style, bound up in my personal politic.

A note on Choreography

It is important to distinguish why I use the term choreography (rather than devising for example) to describe my making process, despite not making formal ‘dance’ works. As Deirdre Hendon and Jane Milling articulate in *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (2006), the term devising describes a 'set of practices for making theatre' (2006: 3). I recognise that my own practice actively shifts away from traditional conventions of theatre, and being typically movement-based and visually driven it is better suited to the technical terminologies of dance.

'Choreography,' Carol Brown argues, 'situates the moving body in time and space' (2010: 58). It is 'a negotiation with the patterns your body is thinking' (2010: 27) according to Jonathan Burrows, who also describes it as a process of getting 'the right things in the right order' (2010: 116). These quotations by Brown and Burrows resonate with my own performance making processes, and I am keenly aware of which ways I situate and/or position and gesticulate with my body in time and space. Positioning movements, and additionally considering the *images* that my movements create, is very much at the heart of how I develop a piece of performance art which unfolds live.

The use of the term *unfold* to describe the movement of a live performance is curious, in that as a maker my process of creation whilst this unfolding takes place is one of *weaving*. Linking back to my first chapter, I understand that the unfolding of signs in time and space generates signification and meaningful experience for my audience. The chronological order of signs as they unfold has the transformative ability to confuse, challenge or contradict what came before. Knowing this, I am careful about which images and movements are to be undertaken and in what order, as I begin to weave the 'right' picture, emerging at the 'right' time according to my own artistic vision for the work. I come to realise that this is embodied knowledge – generated through my experiences training as a performer and witnessing performance as an audience member – of how to shape and craft a piece of performance with a narrative curve[18], so that, again, the performance has been woven satisfactorily and *the right things come in the right order*.

[18] 'Narrative curve' is a term used to describe the use of story arcs (primarily created via the unfolding of images in my own work) in performance. As the performance unfolds, it builds towards a revelation, contradiction, or challenge somehow, responding to what had previously appeared.

Choosing Materials

As a practitioner who has been making artworks utilising textiles in performance art for many years, I have become accustomed to the various properties of woven materials and fabrics, and how they operate in relation to the body. For this particular practice research experiment, I chose to use a long length of off-white muslin.

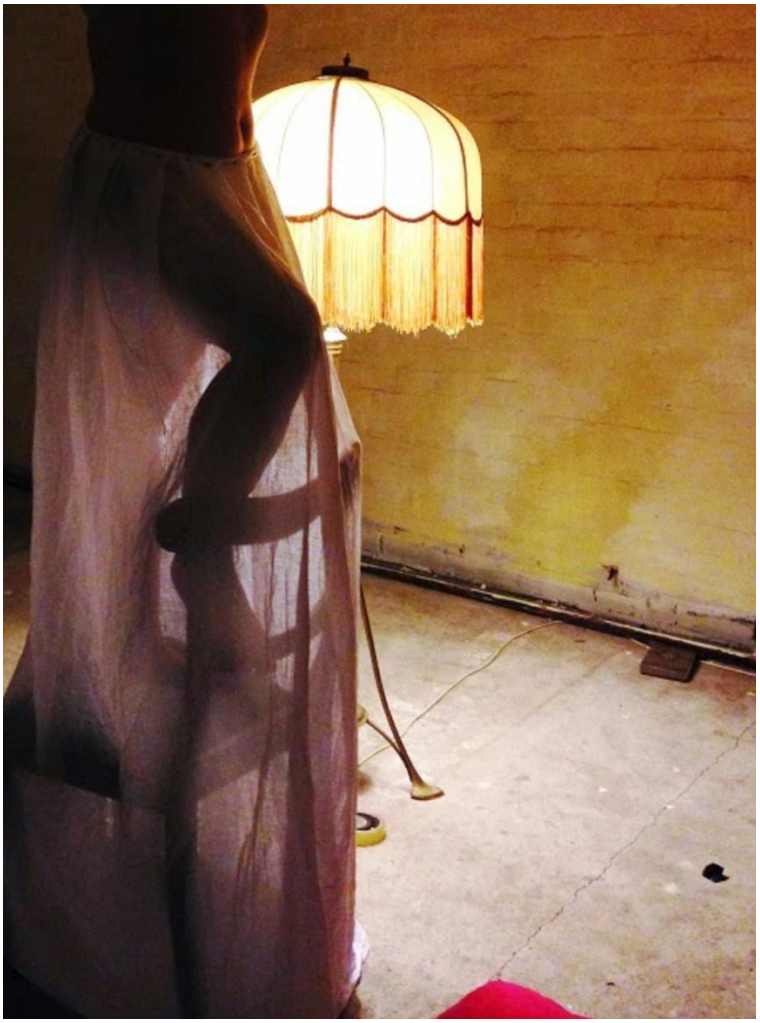


Figure. C2.3. Natalie Raven (2014) *Easy Rider*

In *Other Women* (2012, see figure I.5), I found that the weight of 'blacks' I used to adorn myself with was highly restrictive of my physical movement, whilst in *Easy Rider* (2014, see figure C2.3), the white muslin used was light enough to move freely in, whilst its sheer, transparent quality when lit enabled me to explore the relationships between revelation and concealment. Using muslin would therefore enable me to discover the potentials of physical movement in relation to cloth, which suits my own body-based practice drawing on both dance and yoga technique, whilst further experimenting with sheerness and transparency.

I chose to stage and present my body in this performance without clothing, or any other form of adornment in addition to the textiles I worked with. I did this as I felt it would enable me to get right to the heart of working with the body and cloth, probing its functionlity in performance art in an 'uncluttered' way. The presence of the unclothed body in performance art is commonplace (see Franko B, La Ribot, Nicola Hunter, Holly Brining, and Helen Burrough's work outlined in my thesis introduction). Linking back to the semiotic aspects of performance art outlined in my first chapter, I see this as a form of overcoding within the context of this method of performance: it is a conventional trait of the form.

The unclothed body, and distinctions between it being considered naked or nude, is explored by Lynda Nead in *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*. Nead explains that traditionally in art history (in reference to Kenneth Clarke [1993/1956]) 'the transformation from the naked to the nude is...the shift from the actual to the ideal' (1992: 13). The naked is referring to a real-life body, the nude an idealised version of this via artistic representation. Nead explains that 'the nude, according to Clarke's formulation, is the body "clothed" in art, the body in representation', reminding us that if this be the case, then 'the naked must represent the body in advance of its aesthetic transformation' (1992: 14). Reflecting on my own body

when positioned in the frame of my performance, it is both naked – in the sense that I am presenting a real body which is not mediated via pictorial depictions – yet also nude in the understanding that I/it/my body is entering a meaningful landscape of representation.

Nead argues that Clarke builds up a picture of a naked/nude dichotomy, which is indicative of a history of binary dualisms through which patriarchal hierarchies are built.[19] Speaking in semiotic terms, she suggests this is due to an understanding that 'the naked describes the body outside of cultural representation: it is the denotative term to the connotation of the nude' (1992: 14). Drawing on this understanding of the naked and the nude, I begin to see how my own practices blur boundaries in such binary thinking, working to undermine the foundations upon which sexed and gendered inequality rests.[20] I consider that within my performance art pieces, my body is both naked *and* nude. My body is naked, present, and denotative of real bodies with real human experience, whilst at the same time it is nude, representational, and connotative prompting an array of meanings.

***Body&cloth*: Processes of Development**

> *I'm in a rehearsal studio. It is large and rectangular in shape. Overhead is an industrial lighting rig, below a pale, wooden, sprung floor. There are various entrances and exits, signage, chairs, tables, projectors, a bulky lighting and audio deck, a long mirrored wall with balance beam, floor to ceiling windows across the rear wall and heavy full-length 'blacks', that is, black theatre curtains.*

[19] Binaries and their presence in the mechanics of patriarchal hierarchy are explored further along in Chapters Three and Five.
[20] Such sexed and gendered inequalities are examined in Chapters three and Five.

In the development of a piece of performance art, I immediately acknowledge the spatial aspects of my performance territory and set about to create a suitable working environment. I heave the heavy, long blacks across the perimeters. I use them as a de-cluttering agent, ridding the frame of *distracting signifiers*. It becomes apparent that the creation of this environment is as a result of a very specific understanding of the semiotic considerations of space. I understand that the properties and features of a performance environment will generate meaning within the frame of a performance, and so I must make considered choices as an artist.

Whilst heaving the hefty blacks, I glanced up noting that the curtain tracks run the entire perimeter of the room. In the process of using the blacks as a de-cluttering agent, I began to realise how these heavy, enveloping masses hung in dialogue with the nature of my practical enquiry;

> *I will be increasing the visual and physical presence of material in space.*
>
> *This will heighten my audience's awareness of fabric and textiles in the performance.*

I stopped at the mirrored wall and decided that I should leave this exposed, so that I could watch myself in my choreographic process (see figure C2.4).

Figure C2.4. Natalie Raven (2015) *Body&cloth Rehearsal Image*

I slowly slip off my clothes.

I am naked.

I stand before myself in a mirror holding a long length of white muslin.

I take a deep breath.

Pause

I watch myself straining, stretching, and shrouding, balancing, bundling and binding.

I watch myself running, jumping, and leaning,

stroking, swaying, and posing.

Images appear, and I become mindfully lost in a process of becoming.

I~eye in the choreographic process

I embody a complex internal/external positioning in my choreographic process. To quote Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis in *Drama/Theatre/Performance*, my '"I" also has an "eye"' (2004: 238). I understand that my *I* is my body, my being, my feelings, emotions, and sensations, whilst my *eye* is my gaze, my look, my observation of the visual. I was moving around the space, I was playing with cloth, moving, acting, doing.

But *eye* was simultaneously watching myself.

There were moments when body and cloth worked in enabling me to look like others:

Eye look like a boxer

Eye look like Jesus

Here *eye* observe myself in the construction of an identity or persona. *Eye* observe who *eye* perceive I am becoming.

There were moments when body and cloth worked in cultivating an evocative look:

This looks sensual

This looks tense

Here *eye* am observing the totality of the image, and am describing how I perceive it effectively looks.

Eye was asking:

How does this look?

How will this be read?

How will this be interpreted?

It is in these moments that *eye* objectify myself, my body and its adornment within the frame of performance. I understand here that my *eye* is semiotically attuned.

At the same time that I come to perceive my objectivity, I become aware of my own subjectivity, my *I*, my internal, felt experiences.

There were moments when body and cloth shaped my physical, somatic experience:

I am lightheaded

I am tired

There were moments when it cultivated an evocative sensation:

This feels pleasurable

This feels painful

There were moments when I recognised an emotive response:

I feel strong

I feel angry

It is in these moments that *I* recognise my subjectivity, the feelings, emotions and sensations that my body encounters in relation to cloth within the frame of performance. My *I* is phenomenological.

In their article 'Toward a Workshop in Theatre Phenomenology', Daniel Johnston usefully defines phenomenology as

> the philosophical study of phenomena--how the world shows itself to conscious experience. More commonly when invoked in the humanities and

> social sciences, the term is used to emphasize our embodied encounter with the world in contrast to a conception of mind separate from matter (2018: 2).

Here, the author extends an understanding of phenomenology to incorporate aspects of its use in the arts, specifically as a framework through which to understand our embodied, sensorial encounters with the world. Reflecting on observations made above in my choreographic processes, I see that there is an object/subject, or, semiotic/phenomenological process which occurs in tandem, simultaneously working to generate meaning and experience for myself as an artist which is consequently used to select and revise material in the development of performance. It is important to note that *I am not consciously aware in the moment of construction, that I am undertaking any of the types of things I have attempted to describe above.* I do not consciously separate out my objective and/or subjective responses in the ways I have attempted to articulate: these thoughts, feelings and sensations do not appear singularly, nor separately, nor in any particular order, but arise as and when they are experienced.

Semantics in the Generation of Performance

Kier Elam usefully distinguishes between semiotic signs and semantic meanings in performance, stating that 'signs and signals' operating as 'signal-information' in the semiotic landscape act as 'a source of semantic information... connot[ing] a range of meanings' (2002/1980: 37). Semiotic signs provide a vehicle for processes of signification to take place. Semantics are the meaningful interpretations which are produced via the reception of such signs. Jiří Veltruský describes theatre as 'a distinctive sematic system' with its own characteristic way of relating the 'significant to the signifé' – that is, the signifier with what it signifies (Veltruský in Drozd, 2016: 84). Specific to theatre, which typically incorporates the

bodies of live performers, Veltruský argues that it is 'the actor [who] is key to the semantics of the theatre... the stage figure created by the actor is both a sign and a non-sign, that is, a living person whose reality cannot be reduced to what is relevant to the figure as a sign' (2016: 84). Here, Veltruský argues that the actor – and by extension the performing body – is central to processes of semantic meaning making in performance. The actor in theatre performance cultivates a 'stage figure' or character, whose presence in the performance produces signs in the processes of representational characterisation. However, the performer themselves is also present in this staged representation, a real-life, non-representational being.

Linking Nead's work probing naked/nude dichotomies surrounding the figurative body in art history to Veltruský's work on the sign/non-sign of the actor's body in the theatre, it is possible to draw some conclusions. Earlier I discussed how the presence of my body in a piece of performance art when undressed, is both naked and nude, or in semiotic terms, a sign (nude, representational) and a non-sign (naked, presentational). I notice conventional distinctions, which help me to further understand the ways in which performance art differs from traditional theatre. Although an actor's body in the theatre operates as both a sign and a non-sign, the non-sign or non-representational aspects of the performer via their presence in space is 'hidden' within the representational operations of this type of performance. In contrast to this, the performance artist's body in live performance is a present, presentational non-sign, in that there is no attempt by the artist to produce a representational 'stage figure' concealed behind a 'veil' of representation. The performing body in performance art is a presentational non-sign, which in the processes of semiotic reception becomes a representational entity, producing semantic meaning for audience reception.

I now turn toward an examination of the semantic aspects of body and cloth in performance art. In understanding the types of meaning/s generated by its presence, I can begin to respond to many of my aims and research questions surrounding aspects of women's lived experience, strategies for expression, and relationship/s with and toward textiles. To begin with, I was playing with the colour of the muslin I was working with, which acted as a prompt for semantic meaning. This is similar to the ways in which both La Ribot (featured in my Practitioner Review) and Yoko Ono (in Chapter One) were working in relation to the colour of fabrics used in their performances.[21] For my performance of *Body&cloth* (2015), I had a keen understanding of the semantic meanings related symbolically to the white colour of muslin I was working; virtue, purity, and cleanliness. When placing the white textile across, over, or around my body, I too became laden with such labels. The textile began to transform me, and I began to consider the ways in which I wanted to be transformed by the textile.

During my choreographic 'play-time', I worked my way through positioning myself in a series of ways, producing a series of images. I lay down upon the floor and pulled the length of cloth over my entire body, so that I was fully submerged beneath it. It felt as though I was becoming (or perhaps, challenging) Jesus, with the textile situated above me becoming the Turin Shroud.[22] I did not get the sense that I was actually *representing* Jesus, more that I was drawing on the iconography associated with depictions of His death in art history. Rather than denoting Jesus, I was connoting death through a staging of myself in ways which I knew had recognisable (and in this case, shared) meaning. I was generating material here via use of iconographic signifiers, which had the potential to be semiotically codified by my audience.

[21] I probe colours of fabrics and their symbolic meanings in Chapter Five.
[22] Further analysis on Bodycloth and its relationship to religion and shrouding appear in Chapters Four and Five.

Here, I see that my choreographic and performance making process is one which is shared, between myself and an imagined audience in the future.

Reflecting on why I chose to present connotations of death in the performance, I see that this links to my feminist perspectives and perceptions. Hélène Cixous explains how ‘logocentrism subjects thought – all concepts, codes, and values – to a binary system, related to “The” couple, man/woman’ whereby 'she' is associated with 'passivity' and is subjugated in response to his 'activity... progress' (1986/1975: 64). Poetically, Cixous states that 'death is always at work' through such oppositional couplings, which become destructive in the processes of self-identity during which people are trying to make sense of, and find their positionings within, such a system (1986/1975: 64).

Connotations of death achieved via my positioning under a length of cloth embody how I come to understand both the destructive consequences of binary systems, and the allegorical spiritual death of women existing within such systems which perpetually supress and repress her. She is

Always the lesser

Always the lack

Always looked down upon

Subject to

Subjected to

Oppression, repression, control, shame, harassment, and abuse

#Metoo

Pausing for a moment to think on this scenario post-performance (referring back to Mock's model, a process of reflection), a slipperiness[23] appears in the processes of expression and reception in this performance. Although my audience are likely to read 'death' via my shrouding in the performance, they are relatively unlikely to link this to the feminist politics I understood it to be emerging from and embodying (unless approaching the performance with a particular ideological perspective closely resembling my own, which might enable them to 'read-into' it in intended ways, but does not guarantee it will be codified in the same way; intended interpretation is slippery, certainly not an absolute). Linking back to what I expressed at the beginning of this chapter, whereby it was important for me to understand what it was I was trying to express and communicate to an audience as a political artist, my strategy of using allusion to metaphorically reference feminist political narratives was a strategical failure. However, I have since come to understand that the feminist political compulsions driving me in the making of my artworks are an important driving force – always present and by my side in the rehearsal studio – directing me in my processes of creation, selection, and revision in the creation of performance.

When positioned on the floor in my 'death' pose fully concealed by cloth, I noticed that the textile resting on my face was gently flickering just above my nose, as breath exhaled through my nostrils. Although blind to this in the moment, I knew that my chest would be rising and falling to the rhythm of my lungs expanding and contrasting as they took in air. The quietness and stillness of my body in its 'death' was juxtaposed by my present aliveness, highlighted through subtle movements and motions I could not cease to undertake. It appeared that my

[23] I use the terms *slippery*, *slipperiness*, and *slippage* in this chapter to describe the presence of or potential for; elusive interpretations; interpretations which are not fixed or rigid; missed readings; interpretations taking place which only partially encompass what was intended.

aliveness was inadvertently brought in to view in this act, due to the concealment of my body with cloth: the fabric was working to emphasise my lived presence in space.

A similar recognition occurred for me in witnessing the live performance work of Adam Electric in *The Machine Legends* (2014) at Spill Festival of Performance in Ipswich (see figure C2.5).

Figure C2.5 Adam Electric (2014) *The Machine Legends*

Walking into a hushed performance space, I am greeted by a tall, off-white latex cube. Silence in space is punctured by a sudden gasp for air. Sealed

inside the cuboid sculpture forming a vacuum, the performer slowly sucks the air out. The cube begins to shrink with breath.

Slowly, Electric's body appears.

As the silhouette of Electric's body reveals itself with each extracting breath, the latex which begins to constrict around him becomes as a second skin, shielding and suffocating. In observing Electric's performance, I am drawn to the contours of his body. I notice all the intricate features of his skeletal form, especially around the hands, knuckles, fingers and wrists – and yet his body is completely disguised by latex.

Adam Electric presenting his body in a sculptural way led me to become increasingly aware that what I see in front of me is not made of marble or stone, but is a living, breathing being. The materiality of the body is brought sharply into focus:

He is in front of me, and he cannot breathe.

The artist seems to have drawn a closer attention to his body via use of latex as a method of concealment, than if he had simply presented himself undressed and unadorned before me. I see similarities with my own findings in working with cloth in my performance making process: It is the use of fabric in order to conceal the body, which paradoxically enhances and heightens an awareness of the living breathing body underneath.

***Body&cloth*: Processes of Presentation**

Body&cloth (2015) took place in a studio space in the Roland Levinsky building at the University of Plymouth in February 2015. I performed to an audience of postgraduate students and staff in the department of Dance, Theatre and Performance. My performance was made up

of a series of images that I had created using my body and cloth. The score of the performance was as follows:

Still image.

Pause.

Slow transition into a different

Still image.

Pause.

Slow transition into different

Still image.

Pause.

And so on until the performance was completed. I used pauses – moments of stillness in my performance – as a way in which to draw my audience's attention toward the aspects of body and cloth I was framing and presenting. The aim was to allow time for in-depth critical reflection to take place, to offer space in which to read, consider, and contemplate the images being presented. Later, I would be offering my audience an anonymous questionnaire to complete, seeking to identify the ways in which body and cloth were interpreted in this performance.[24]

Slam.

Doors open

Audience enter and chatter.

Front and centre I am draped in white cloth.

I look toward them as they enter,

Catching an eye

24. The results of this questionnaire are discussed further along in this chapter.

I wait.

Pause.

I am a lady

In waiting.

As my audience pour into the space they flit between uncomfortably glancing over at me, and looking for a place to sit, stand, or kneel in order to observe. There are no seats, no designated conventional objects to perch upon and rest in shadow.

As my audience arrive, I look at them as they glance over at me and work out where to position themselves in the performance space. My use of eye contact is adopted as a strategy to reject any sort of passive objectification of myself in my performance, considering it a method by which to declare my own subjectivity. It is used to remind my audience that although I am staged and framed in this performance space, and although I am inviting a critical consideration of my body bound up in what is being researched, I am, first and foremost, a human being. I am a woman with feminist intentions seeking to address the subjugation of women in patriarchal societies, responding suitably in kind. As previously articulated, there is, again, some slipperiness here; the intentions behind my use of eye contact might not have translated to an audience, the re-claimation of my own subjectivity and personal assertion of power in that act might not be recognised.

Looking, gazing, and watching became an important aspect in the performance of *Body&cloth*, a feature which I had no real awareness of in rehearsal. At one moment in the performance, I stood facing the mirrored wall. Ends of cloth had been tied together at the back of my neck, its long length draping downwards across the front of my body (see figure C2.6).

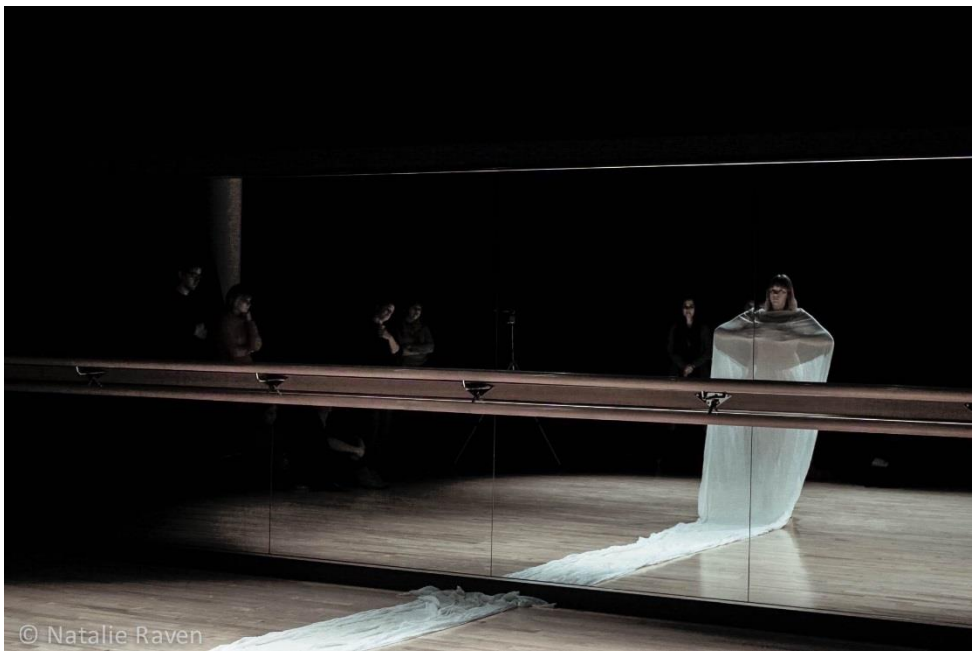


Figure C2.6 Natalie Raven (2015) *Body&cloth – tracing skin*

Looking at myself

In a mirrored realm

I slowly caress skin with gentle fingertips.

Erotic, subtle yet gentle.

Soft, ticklish,

Pleasurable.

Reflected eyes gaze up at me and

I watch

Being watched

Watching myself.

My audience is situated in different positions in the space. Each member has a different viewpoint in witnessing this act, each with its own complex viewing angles and perspectives. Some people are positioned off to the side of me: these people can see what I am doing by looking at my live body in front of them. At the same time, many turn their heads toward the

image of my reflection, and watch what I am doing. Those sat directly behind me could only see my naked/nude body from behind, elbows slowly moving downward. They miss the signification brought about by the caressing of my genitalia, and are left out of this moment of semantic meaning making. Different perspectives in witnessing the performance, provide different forms of signification, which results in different types of semantic meaning.

The act of slowly stroking my body beneath a length of cloth in this moment reveals the ways in which body and cloth can aid in a complex visual allegory of female sexuality. The staging of my own self pleasure is somewhat concealed behind the textile which adorns me. This concealing act operates as a metaphor for the ways in which female sexuality is concealed, considered taboo, and is repressed and suppressed by a society which privileges virtues such as chastity and modesty in women.[25] The properties of the lightweight muslin under bright theatrical lights make it appear transparent. This concealment is therefore simultaneously subverted by the translucence of the material. Here, I worked to embody societal expectations of women's sexuality, whilst simultaneously resisting the perpetuation of such messages. As previously discussed in this chapter, the presence of fabric across the body worked in drawing a greater attention to what lay beneath, and in turn a greater attention toward my acts of resistance.

***Body&cloth*: Processes of Reception**

In order to find out how body and cloth operated in the reception of my live performance, I gathered data from audience members who shared interpretations of the work. I put together a feedback form which asked audience members to respond to the following:

25. The foundations upon which such virtues exist are examined in Chapter Three.

Please select a moment from the performance. Describe it:

What do you think that moment was about?

Please write down three adjectives to describe how that moment made you feel.

I chose these statements, as they were framed loosely enough to allow audience members the space to offer more descriptive responses to the work. This would hopefully lead to more descriptors of the work that I could then codify and analyse.

Of note here, is feedback that I received on the reception of my performance from an audience member aside from the formal questionnaire. They approached me and asked what had led me to staging a piece of performance-to-camera work.[26] This took me by surprise, as I had never considered the performance in such a way. I saw that I was showing a live performance to an audience, which was being documented. They explained that during the performance, the moments that I had paused in an image, were captured by my documenter Steven Paige. At those moments due to the relative quietness and stillness of the performance, my audience began to notice the shutter of the camera 'click' as Paige pressed the button to capture the image. This brought the process of photographic capture into the semiotic frame of the performance, my audience recognising that my being 'shot' by the camera was part of an intended narrative which had woven itself into their interpretation. This interpretation of the work was completely unaccounted for by myself in rehearsal. This reinforces my understandings and awareness of considering scenographic aspects in performance - that, in live performance the multiple geographies which create the totality of the performance (including in this case the presence of a camera and the sounds which it creates) work to shape the reception and experience of it.

26. I examine performance-to-camera practices in Chapters Three and Four.

In conversation with Paige about the performance-to-camera interpretation of the work, he agreed that static moments in the performance "felt like an invitation to take an image" (Steven Paige, personal communication, February 2015). Paige sensed that the still images presented in the performance were set up in such a way as to lend itself to being captured by the camera's lens. It appears therefore that my moments of stillness in the performance had worked in inviting a targeted consideration of the visual presentations of body and cloth.

***Body&cloth*: Processes of Reflection**

The data collected from audience feedback is presented as a table in the Appendix to this thesis. I began by coding my qualitative data in relation to the following categories:

1. Performance Description (responses by audience members which described the performance).
2. Performance Action (responses by audience members which described what actions took place in the performance).
3. Sign, Symbol, Metaphor (what signs, symbols, or metaphors were described by audience members in their observations of the performance).
4. Audience Affect (what affective encounters were felt and described by audience members).
5. Performer's Outcome (what outcomes audience members perceived the performer to be experiencing)
6. Wider Critical Interpretation (what interpretations of the performance emerged which referenced concepts, topics, or themes outside of the performance).

The six collective topics above are what emerged through analysing audience feedback data, and mapping trends. Below are some of the findings which have emerged as a result from my data collection.

Body, Cloth, and the Maternal

Figure C2.7 Natalie Raven (2015) *Body&cloth – motherhood*

One of the moments in the performance which was particularly commented upon in feedback, was what I would describe as the 'maternal' scene. At this point in the performance, my naked body is posed with a bundled piece of cloth held to my bosom; I gently move the cloth up and down in my arms, whilst looking down upon it, smiling (see figure C2.7). I understood as the artist cultivating the image that I was staging tropes of motherhood. I am aware that a bundle of cloth is identifiable as a baby, as infants are swaddled in blankets for comfort and warmth. Equally, the positioning of the cloth bundle close to my exposed breast would be easily associated with breastfeeding. The gentle rocking of the bundle is akin to movements used to

pacify children, whilst the attentive gaze and warm facial expressions directed toward the bundle re-presents the type of positive tenderness and stereotypical maternal exchange perpetuated in contemporary society. These acts and positionings all work to signify motherhood in my staging. It was achieved as a result of the awareness that textiles are used in the rearing and caretaking of children in my culture, along with knowledge of how motherhood is represented in visual culture.

Returning to the data I collected from audience members witnessing the work (see table in appendix), members of my audience who chose to reflect upon this particular image did indeed interpret me as a mother, the bundle of material my 'cloth child'. There were specific uses of language in their feedback which illuminated the types of socio-cultural associations and stereotypes of motherhood and childrearing. Audience member 5 suggests that I *cradled* the cloth, an adjective that implies comfort, soothing, and gentle protection. Audience member 6 commented on this moment, suggesting I was portraying 'precious maternity'. Interestingly, they also regarded me as the Virgin Mary.

Body, Cloth, and Suffering

Figure C2.8 Natalie Raven (2015) *Body&cloth – gagging*

As well as audience encounters of the performance which yielded positive descriptors in their feedback, there were negative ones too. In one scene in *Body&cloth* (2015), one end of the cloth is tied tightly to a barre in the studio, whilst the other is looped together and held together with a safety pin (see figure C2.8). I situated my body towards the looped end of the textile, placing the cloth across my mouth. With the cloth across my body at this point, I stood on my tip toes and shifted my weight forward so that the cloth pulled taught against my face and I was being held, suspended by material in space. My hands hung softly by my side, allowing this suspension to take place. I closed my eyes and breathed steadily.

In rehearsal I had created this image with the intention for it to represent female strength and resilience, in tolerating aspects of suffering within a patriarchal system. I am gagged (used to represent a metaphorical lack of agency), enduring the gagging of myself with strength and

poise, balanced on the cusp of a fall. Bound up in this visual metaphor was an understanding that the cloth was oppressive force upon my female body. Cloth came to symbolise patriarchy, which my body strained against. This particular moment in the performance was the one which more than half of my audience members (6 out of 11) chose to reflect upon in their feedback, with some nuanced results.

Participant 1 described the fabric as being 'like a gag' in this moment. The use of the word 'like' leads me to believe that this participant was unsure how to render the cloth – it was *like* a gag, not a gag in and of itself. Perhaps they were unsure as to whether the gagging action was 'real' - that is, presentational and actually gagging me. Perhaps they considered that I was staging a representation of a gag which wasn't *actually* gagging me. Perhaps because I chose to position myself in such a way as to gag myself, they considered it representational by way of me 'showing' a gagging action, rather than 'being' gagged at another's hands. These various possibilities show the complexity of a performed action that is presentational and 'real' (in the sense that I *was* actually gagged), but situated within the semiotic and semantic landscape of performance which rendered what was present, representational.

Participant 1 went on to interpret this particular formation of body and cloth as symbolic of 'the pressure and tension of being a woman', whilst participant 3 suggests that it was a metaphor for the 'dominance of others on female bodies'. Participant 7 suggests that this moment was symbolic of a 'struggle', 'humiliation' and the 'body [of a] woman in crisis'. In these moments, I can conclude that my intended expression was received in the ways I had hoped. However, this was not always the case.

Whilst participant 7 received my intended expression of female struggle in relation to the notion of suffering and humiliation, they actually moved to refer to the gag as a 'bit', a type of horse tack placed in the mouth of the animal in order for the rider to control its movement and behaviour. As a result of this interpretation, I seem to become representative of an animal; a horse. This reading is also acknowledged by participant 9, who states 'you are a horse'. I had no intention of such a reading. Here again, I find slippage. Linking back to my findings in Chapter One, I understand that because I was creating a performance using visual metaphors in order to present ideas and express criticisms to an audience – and doing so via images which were undercoded (i.e. it is uncommon to witness a naked/nude woman held unsteadily by a piece of textile positioned across the mouth, tied to a barre) – connotation was employed with multiple meanings being produced.

Body and Cloth in the Cultivation of Affect

Figure C2.9 Natalie Raven (2015) *Body&cloth – asphyxiation*

As well as aspiring to embody and express messages about women and womanhood in *Body&cloth* to my audience, I also wanted certain feelings to be felt. After gagging myself with the cloth as outlined previously, I transitioned into asphyxiating myself by placing the cloth around my neck, straining against it (see figure C2.9). Breathing became laboured, and my face reddened. As above, this image was meant as a further representation of women suffering within patriarchal systems. However, in presenting this image, I had further intentions behind its staging: I wanted to cultivate a negative affective response in my audience – that is, not only for them to witness an *image* of suffering, but to experience uncomfortable feelings as a result of such witnessing.[27] Audience members 3, 9 and 10 commented on this moment, and analysing their responses enables me to decipher whether my intended affective response was successful.

My questionnaire asked audience members to write down three adjectives to describe how they felt in the moment they had chosen to describe. Audience members discussing the moment of asphyxiation in my performance stated this they felt *sadness, vulnerability*, and *panic*, with feelings of *fragility,* and l*oss*. In this regard, use of body and cloth (in the form of textile asphyxiating my body) in the performance enabled me as the artist using it, to draw out an intended affective state in audience members. Of course, my audience's affective responses were recorded at the end of the performance, when images and moments preceding and succeeding had unfolded. I question whether such feelings and affective responses would have been the same if presented in isolation. Might other significations taking place at different times in the performance affect their memory of, and affective experience remembered to have been felt, at that precise moment of witnessing? Did, for example, my gagging with cloth *in addition* to my asphyxiation with cloth change, or enhance their memory of affective states in response to that particular moment? I also question whether the negative affective states described were

[27] Affect and affective responses in performance are explored in Chapter Three

the consequence of a personal trigger within audience members in light of their own lived experience, or arose due to an empathetic response in feeling concern for me as the performer being asphyxiated.

There were also affective responses articulated by my audience that I did not foresee. These include feelings of *relief* (which I assume came when I stopped asphyxiating), and a feeling of being *removed* (Participant 4). They also shared that they felt *alone*, and *corrected* in response to my asphyxiation. I wondered if their sense of removal was perhaps a distancing response to experiencing negative affect (if that is what was experienced). In any case, this shows me that even though my intention is to produce a certain feeling or emotion within my audience in the reception of the work, I cannot fully control how someone will respond.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the role of body and cloth from the perspective of the artist working to produce and execute a piece of performance art. Using Mock's five-part model for understanding processes of performance making was especially useful as a framework through which to shape the chapter and its analyses; it prompted me to focus on the different elements compromising the performance making process. I shared how personal political motivations for the creation of performance drive me, and the difficulty I found in being asked to produce a piece of performance which simply answered a research question. In light of this, I offered my own model for conducting artistic research projects as a political artist.

Rehearsing in the studio, I came to realise an oscillating semiotic/phenomenological encounter for myself as an artist in the moment of creation, considering both how I look and how I feel. Furthermore (and in alignment with my own political feminist motivations) I considered how

the images I was creating would make my audience feel. This began to extend my understandings and considerations of performance beyond the semiotic. Within the making process I recognised the ease with which I slipped into re-presenting aspects of the maternal, in light of the cultural correlation between textiles and child-rearing. This was linked to the archetypal mother figure of the Virgin Mary in audience feedback.

Using my body and cloth allowed me to position myself in ways which I understood were metaphoric for the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society; I did this through the act of gagging with textile as an example. I understood this had the potential to create a negative affective response in my audience, which it did. What I did not foresee in the performed staging of this act, were the slippages I found in audience interpretation: members considered I was referring to a horse. Multiple slippages throughout this chapter reinforce my understanding that poetic forms of performance which work with symbolism and connotation will provide and array of meanings and unaccounted for interpretations. In addition, I further recognise that as an artist I am unable to control the reception of such artworks.

Chapter Three

Cloth, Religion, and Re-Presentation of Sexed and Gendered Bodies

The findings of my practice-research discussed in the previous chapter reveal how the staged presentation of body and cloth in a piece of performance art included interpretations of the maternal, with semantic understandings relating to stereotypes of mothers as *tender* and *caring.* Further still, the specific significations of body and cloth which worked in producing the reception of myself as a mother figure also led to the recognition of a religious deity and archetypal figure surpassing my own: The Virgin Mary. This chapter examines the relationships between the staging of body, cloth, and its connection to the representation and re-presentation of biblical character and sexed bodies.[28] It traces the development of four practical experiments I undertook during two artistic residencies in the UK and USA which probed the use of body and cloth in religious practice and in representations of women in religious art. I reflect on what these experiments taught me about the sexed body and its relationship to textiles, religion, and hierarchies of power.

28. I use the phrase re-presentation to distinguish between the re-showing or re-staging of something (an image for example) in a non-representational format, from traditional forms of representation whereby one seeks to transform into a character in a theatrical sense.

Underpinning the development and understanding of ourselves as a collective of human beings in Western society, is binary categorisation as either male or female. One of the ways in which this categorisation is recently justified is through sexed biological distinctions founded on XY (male) and XX (female) chromosomes. A variety of chromosome variation exists outside of this two-tier standardisation; XXY also known as 'Klinefelter Syndrome' is one example (Anhalt and Neely, 1996: 162). Variations of human chromosome that sit outside of XX and XY are referred to as 'abnormalities' (Anhalt and Neely, 1996: 162). The use of language and labelling used by scientists to describe chromosomic variation such as *syndrome* or *abnormality* is problematic, in that it situates XY and XX as the inherently normative standard by which all variation is (negatively) judged. This understanding and categorisation of humans into two distinct sexes forms the basis of a binary system.[29]

Hélène Cixous discusses this phenomenon and its consequences in *The Newly Born Woman* (1986/1975). She describes the ways in which binary logos 'carries us, beneath all its figures, wherever discourse is organised' (1986/1975: 63). This is illuminated in the previous paragraph when we consider the ways in which scientists have approached and understood chromosomic variation, made explicit through their use of language which works toward upholding a binary model. Cixous explains that binary models utilise a 'double braid' which works 'through opposition' (1986/1975: 63). In the first instance, male and female are categorised separately according to biological sex. Secondly and simultaneously, they are considered oppositional. This oppositional element works to reinforce difference, separation, and estrangement, generating space between the sexes which upholds and maintains binary systems of operation.

29. Germaine Greer in her text *The Female Eunuch* (2012/1970) discusses chromosomic distinction between the sexes to highlight binary systems, but labels these biological distinctions *gendered* rather than *sexed* as we would understand it today.

Cixous further explains that within a patriarchal system, binary opposition between the sexes is 'hierarchical' (1986/1975: 64). She explores the ways in which this hierarchical binary is manifest, using a series of paired words which when observed together, show how these oppositional doubles work in upholding assumptions about the two sexes:

Activity/passivity

Sun/Moon

Culture/Nature

Day/Night

Father/Mother

Head/Heart

Intelligible/Palpable

Logos/Pathos (Cixous, 1986/1975: 63, layout of text replicated from original).

When reflecting on the specific words that Cixous uses to describe man and the semantic meanings they offer, such as activity (to activate, to move) or sun (bright and fiery), an impression is formed that men are the trailblazers of the sexes, the ones who move things forward, who farm progression. In opposition to this, words associated with women tell a different tale: passivity (docile, indifferent) or moon (dark, dreamy). Words and their culturally inscribed meanings work together in both constructing and reinforcing an understanding of the traits and qualities of a certain biological sex.

Worth noting in Cixous' pairings is that words associated with man appear first, whilst words associated with woman come second. This placement of words in the couplings is a visual metaphor for what Sherry B. Ortner describes as the 'secondary status' of women in society

(1974: 67). In her article 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' Ortner probes 'biological determinism' in relation to arguments in favour of male dominance in a patriarchal binary system. Through an anthropological lens, she outlines the argument that according to biological determinists, there is 'something genetically inherent' in men that makes them the 'naturally dominant sex' (1974: 71). Contrary to this, the 'something' that is inherent in men is lacking in women, and so as a result leads them toward being the naturally subordinate sex (1974: 71). Ortner suggests that this approach toward understanding biological sex as causation for the 'universal devaluation of women' has failed in its rationale, and that biological difference when used in the assignment of superior/inferior hierarchical positioning of the sexes is a result of 'culturally defined value systems' (1974: 71). As Hélène Cixous' articulates, these values are present and imbedded throughout 'literature, philosophy, criticism, [and] centuries of representation and reflection' (1986/1975: 63). Arguments by Ortner and Cixous (published in 1974 and 1975 respectively) remain relevant to my thesis despite being produced 45 years ago, as cultural constructions of women and their position within society still linger to this day. Their writing articulates the causation of challenges which continue to affect me, shaping my own lived experience in contemporary Britain. It is precisely what I am responding to, in and through my research.

Patriarchy, Christianity, and Women's Place

Linking patriarchal systems to religious belief, Cixous laments 'masculine dreams of God the father issuing from himself... no mother then,' which she explains reflects the torment of men desired to be at the origin, to bring all things 'back to the father' (1986/1975: 65). The rooting of a masculine God as central to the paternal reproductions of humankind *in His image*, results in the 'subordination of the feminine to the masculine order, which gives the appearance of

being the condition for the machinery's [the operations of a society founded on Christian traditions] functioning' (1986/1975: 65).

In *This Sex Which is Not One*, Luce Irigaray posits that the organisation of patriarchy is based on a 'symbolic system' which dutifully honours 'the proper name: the name of the father, the name of God' (1985/1977: 173). Speaking of the systems in operation as a result of such religious structuring, Irigaray notes that 'as soon as the father-man...had marked his products [wife and children] with his name...social exploitation occurred.... [A]ll the social regimes of "History" are based upon the exploitation of... women' (1985/1977: 173). As both Irigaray and Cixous signpost here, there is a fundamental Christian ideology present and at work in the sustainment and operation of patriarchal dominion. With this in mind, I began to practically explore – via my body and cloth – the ways in which Christianity influences sexed hierarchies and their reification through gendered stylisations and artistic representation.

Practice Research Experiment: *Veiled Visions*

Body and Cloth in Black Mountain

In June 2016, I flew to North Carolina in the USA in order to attend Black Mountain School which offered a two-week artistic residency located at YMCA (Young Man's Christian Association) Blue Ridge Assembly. Blue Ridge is the same Christian Association camp in North Carolina which housed the influential Black Mountain College between 1933 and 1957, whose renowned alumni include John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauchenburg. Visiting North Carolina, I felt cultural differences hit me almost immediately: every other building appeared to be a place of Christian worship. Religion seemed to be big business here.

Blue Ridge Assembly reflects this dominant Christian American culture in the landscape and environment of its grounds. The site was sourced by Dr. Willis D. Weatherford Sr in 1906, who aimed to 'challenge college students through conferences provided by the YMCA' (Blue Ridge Assembly, 2016). The site comprises a 'sprawling 1200 acres' of land, the intention of which is to 'recapture the joy of interpersonal relationships in the wonder of God's creation' (Blue Ridge Assembly, 2016). Higher education, philosophical, and Christian spiritual enquiry is woven deep into the histories of the site. This was startlingly (and most excitingly as an artist) revealed in the spaces that had been cultivated:

Wandering down steep, pebbled paths

Alone

It is dusk.

Dappled light plays upon the scene

Branches lean

Enveloping me

In an emerald canopy.

A gap emerges.

Unsure and uncertain, tentatively approaching

Double dares to transgress.

A vision.

Awe

Awakens.

Ahead, an amphitheatre set into the side of a mountain.

Centre stage; a crucifix

Figure C3.1. Natalie Raven (2016) *Blue Ridge Assembly Amphitheatre*

Body, Cloth, Affect, and Site-Responsive Performance Making

My emotive response when encountering the amphitheatre for the first time led me to wander back down to that space again, and again. Empty seats surrounding me designed to house hundreds in congregation, left me feeling incredibly alone. I sat staring at the crucifix. I could not get past focusing on the 20-foot torture device positioned up-stage and centre, could not move beyond this present reminder of death. I began to feel vulnerable, contemplating my own mortality, knowing that I was in a country with high profile shootings and gun related deaths. It was during my time at Black Mountain that the Orlando nightclub shootings took place: A

security guard walked into Pulse nightclub (an inclusive gay establishment) with a loaded gun and shot dead 49 people (BBC, 2016). As a group of predominantly queer artists undertaking the residency at Black Mountain (myself included), the loss of community was felt. Whilst my mind explored aspects of death, my skin bore goose pricks as soft breezes wafted by, drawing my attention back toward my body and its presence in space. I began to take note of my surroundings:

Rich greens,

Gentle rustling of leaves,

Low-level creaks of bark and branch as winds breeze by.

Overwhelmed with emotion, swirls of glassy tears filled my eyes. It felt strange to be alive, here, living through this.

I started to consider the effects of the amphitheatre upon me, and the ways in which this space was designed to make me feel a certain way. Discussing the role of affect in architecture and the inhabiting of space, Peter Kraftl and Peter Adey explain how 'affect presents itself socially as something that is pushing, pulling, or lifting us to feel, think, or act', something which they argue can equally be understood as 'the property of relations, of interactions, of events' (2008: 215). In those terms, affect is something which is experienced in the inhabiting of a space; it is an experience which causes an energetic thrust (push, pull, lift) resulting in the movement (emotionally, physically, consciously) of the inhabitant as a result of their presence in, and relations to, that space. The amphitheatre at Blue Ridge affected me in numerous ways – I felt awe-inspired at the vastness and beauty of the wooded canopy surrounding me, and moved to tears in the quiet contemplation of pain and suffering considered as a result of the presence of a crucifix and contemporary context in America which I was living through. Furthermore, I was moved to act in response to the site and its orchestrations of space, artistically.

Knowing that I wanted to spend time at Black Mountain experimenting and forwarding my understandings of body and cloth in performance art, on various occasions that I visited the amphitheatre I took along with me a long length of off-white calico that had been donated to the school by a local resident.

Cream cloth cuts across the emerald spectacle; attention is drawn. Nervously, I disrupt space, transgressing sacred sites and its spirits.

I perform.

To camera.

And curious unseen eyes.

Compelled,

I open up the cloth which is tucked under my arm and place it upon my head as a veil.

I am the Madonna.

It begins to rain.

Fitting.

A clear sheet of Perspex is held up and so begins a long, drawn out stare

Catching glimpses.

Droplets of rain trickle down,

like tears.

Tears

Of women chastised, judged, and subordinated.

A torture device

Reflects this.

Fitting.

Figure C3.2. Natalie Raven (2016) *Veiled Visions*

I open up the camera application on my smart phone.

I tap the screen to turn on the front facing camera, and enter 'selfie' mode.

I hold my right arm out long and straight, cradling the phone in my right hand.

My fore finger hovers over the bottom volume button on the left hand side of the phone, poised in wait. When I press it, it'll take my photo.

I hold the clear Perspex in my left hand up and alongside my face – I am taking a head and shoulder shot as that is all I am able to capture in the frame.

I observe myself in the screen of the camera, moving and shifting whilst sat on a bench in response to what I can see in the frame.

I attempt to capture the reflection of the crucifix in the Perspex, alongside my veiled image.

Time marches on.

The Perspex becomes heavier and heavier as my arms attempt to hold it up high.

My fingers become numb in the wet weather. They slip and slide across the sleek plastic as I simultaneously seek position.

Elements align.

Pause.

I rest in this image.

In the process of becoming within the image, I am looking down at myself in the viewfinder. I see that this is not what I wish to present of myself in this image – I look passive.

At the last moment - being careful not throw off the reflections I have painstakingly arranged - I lift my gaze and stare into the lens of the camera.

Click.

I lift my gaze and stare out of the frame and into the eyes of my audience.

I assert my subjectivity

As Subject.

Reflecting on *Veiled Visions*, Cloth, and Sexed Religious Practices

One of the very first things that I did when beginning to experiment with textiles in the amphitheatre at Black Mountain, was place the material upon my head as a veil. Reflecting on where this impulse to veil emerged from, I understood that many women followers of religion wear veils, and I intuitively adopted this practice to stage myself. Although most modern female followers of Christianity in the United Kingdom and United States do not veil, it *is* a traditional Christian practice. Biblical scripture states that 'every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonours her head' (1 Corinthians 11:5). This stands in direct contrast to what it conditions for men: 'Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonours his head' (1 Corinthians 11:4). In light of this, women should veil, men should not. Veiling can therefore be considered a sexed religious practice. It is the placement of material in relation to the body – the head – which outwardly distinguishes sex. Here, the presence of body and cloth works in the construction and presentation of a devoutly religious sexed woman.

Figure C3.3. Sassoferrato (c.1650) *The Virgin in Prayer*

My understanding of veiling as a Christian religious practice is primarily due to its presence in representations of women in Christian religious art.[30] For example, Sassoferrato's *The Virgin in Prayer* (c.1650, see figure C3.3) is a painting of a solemn looking Virgin Mother with her head bowed and hands pressed gently together in a prayer position. In her doctoral thesis *Collective Memory, Women's Identity and the Church* (2014), Jo Anna Elise Brown argues that visual images of the Virgin Mary operate as an 'extremely powerful mechanism

[30] I am aware that most images depicting Christian religious figures were developed in a Catholic tradition. It is these art historical images in the cultural domain which shape my understanding of women and their positioning in religious orders in praise of an Abrahamic God.

by which the institutional Church influences and shapes societal collective memory about women's identity' (2014: 99). She adds that it is founded upon images which represent Mary as a 'submissive, quiet, obedient woman' (2014: 99). Brown argues that it is the prevalent use of *images* of Mary which transmits this cultural understanding of women as the subordinate sex, rather than through traditional religious education or service – in other words, that societal perceptions of women's identity may be cultivated and perpetuated via the use of figurative images. If representations of Mary can shape a collective understanding of women's identity and thus position them as submissive, quiet, and obedient, then we must look to these images in order to find out the specific ways in which the religious iconography of Mary professes this message and, for the purposes of this thesis, if/how body and cloth is present and represented in such cases.

Figure C3.4. Fra Angelico *(c.*1430) *The Madonna of Humility*

In c.1430, Fra Angelico painted *The Madonna of Humility*, an image of the Virgin Mary with her son Jesus enveloped by two angels who hold up an elaborately decorated textile as backdrop (see figure C3.4). The title of the work describes the content of the image and suggests how it might be interpreted, whilst simultaneously 'Madonna of humility' refers to a canon of images which depict the Virgin Mother with her child, seated low down on the floor or on a cushion/low chair. Here we begin to identify the ways in which the positioning of the figurative body in a visual image comes to represent acts or states of being.

In Angelico's *The Madonna of Humility*, Mary is situated low down close to the floor. The physical placement of her body in this position suggests that we are to regard her as showing humility by situating herself close to the ground in this manner. This assumption rests on the understanding that superiority is associated with upward trajectories and that which is above, whilst inferiority and subordination is related to that which is beneath. The placement might also be considered a metaphor for the position of women in a patriarchal society in the ways that Brown suggests. There is an uncomfortable complexity arising out Mary's positioning in this image, if we begin to question who positions her in such ways, and who or toward whom this humility is being expressed. Is Mary herself humble? Is it she that is choosing to emulate this quality that resides within herself? Or, has she been placed into such positions via patriarchal dominion, and what is in fact being revered here is a humble acceptance and complicity in her own subordination? The former is an act of self-expression, the latter an act of relational oppression. Is Mary subject, or subject to, God?

Textiles and their use in the representation of women in Christian religious art have been analysed in relation to contemporary performance art by Pamela Turton-Turner (2012). Turton-Turner begins with an analysis Jean Fouquet's *Virgin and Child* (c. 1452, see figure c3.5) which forms part of the Melun Diptych.

Figure C3.5. Jean Fouquet (c. 1452) *Virgin and Child*

In her essay, she states that Mary's arms are positioned wide in order to 'unravel her opulent drapery, and reveal the sacred breast' (2012: 3). Here, it is the exposure of the breast and association with breast feeding which signifies motherhood. This can be linked back to findings in Chapter Two, whereby the exposure of my breast in relation to what appeared to be a bundled child, led to an interpretation of the Virgin Mother.

Fouquet's use of draped material frames and exhibits the breast, which becomes a focal point between the parting of the subject's robes. Turton-Turner argues that such images of draped textile conjure impressions of luxury, and in this case, drapery works to build up the understanding of Mary's 'high renaissance status' (2012: 3). This observation concurs with Gen Doy's assessment of draped fabrics discussed in Chapter One, which suggested that it operated as a signifier of taste, religiosity, and nobility (2002: 20). It is the presence of draped textile in Fouquet's painting which leads observers toward the identification of Mary as an attractive, high-status religious icon.

On the topic of women's concealment in Christian religious art, Madeline H. Caviness, in her text *Visualising Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy* (2001), states that it was historically perceived that a 'heavily draped idealized figure of the virgin-mother, may alleviate anxieties about female sex' (2001: 2). Caviness argues that, historically, dense concealments of the body by excesses of fabric were used as a means to shift focus away from the body itself, its libido, desires, and sexuality. Fouquet's painting depicts the Virgin's body predominantly covered, and there is a large presence of draped textile in the painting. In light of Caviness' work, it may be assumed that this was partly used in an attempt to shift focus away from women's sexuality. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the presence of fabrics covering and concealing the body paradoxically draws a greater attention towards it than if it was unadorned. It seems (to me in any case), that the opposite occurs – that is, Mary's body is sexualized as a result of the apparent suppression of its sexuality. This also has something to do with the peculiar proportions of her body in this image.

Turton-Turner points out that the use of the Virgin's *attire* in Fouquet's image amplifies a bodily ideal; her 'slender torso' is emphasised by a 'breathtakingly tight bodice' creating a 'peculiar physiognomy [which] is exaggerated' (2012: 3). By Turton-Turner's admission, the contortion of the Virgin's body which seems to be aided by her clothing into a lithe ideal is *peculiar* and *exaggerated.* There is a theatricality bound up in the image, an extra-ordinariness created by Mary's costume.

Fouquet's image does not reflect the anatomical reality of a woman; rather, it depicts a hyper-inflated version of a woman which accentuates the socio-cultural ideal form for women: 'svelte' and 'elegant' (Turton-Turner, 2012: 3). Existing with a slighter body inevitably takes up less space, and when considering the positioning of women within a patriarchal society, this seems rather apt. Fouquet's Mary reaffirms Joanna Elise Brown's argument outlined earlier in this chapter, which posits that images of Mary transmit cultural understandings of women. In this case, Mary operates as a signifying vehicle through which ideals surrounding womanhood and the construction of the body are presented to observers in order to adulate and assimilate.

Turton-Turner compares Jean Fouquet's *Virgin and Child* with performance artist Cindy Sherman's *Untitled #216* (1989, see Figure C3.6). She explores differences between the two artworks, arguing that Sherman's portrayal of herself representing Mary is ‘'tawdry”...[and] seemingly clumsy’ in contrast to the 'delicacy' of Fouquet's original (2002: 4). This, she argues, is an 'example of subversive feminist art' (Turton-Turner, 2002: 3).

C3.6. Cindy Sherman (1989) *Untitled #216*
[Chromogenic colour print, 94 x 63 inches / 238.8 x 160 cm]
Image reproduced courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

The subversive quality of Sherman's work resides in its 'ridiculous and menacing' re-configuration of Fouquet's original (Turton-Turner, 2002: 4). The exaggerated representation

of a woman's body by Fouquet is inflated even further and to great comic effect. The 'bizarre prosthetic' that Sherman uses mimics the Virgin's anatomically incorrect breasts in Fouquet's work, which acts in highlighting its absurdity (Turton-Turner, 2002: 4). I am able to link what Sherman presents in *Untitled #216* (1989) to specific feminist subversive strategies put forward by Luce Irigaray in *The Sex Which is Not One* (1985/1977). Sherman's work embodies what Irigaray describes as 'mimicry', which is 'an interim strategy' for existing within a patriarchal system, whereby a 'woman deliberately assumes the feminine style and posture assigned to her... in order to uncover the mechanisms' which seek to exploit (1985/1977: 220).

This informs an understanding of my subconscious decision-making in *Veiled Visions* (2016). In my performance writing – which described the feelings which arose in the processes of veiling and becoming (via the visual staging of myself as) Mary in the amphitheatre – there was a sense that I was *disrupting*, *transgressing* intended Christian celebration on this site. I was mimicking Mary. I deliberately positioned and assembled textiles upon myself which drew on the visual iconography of Mary and her representations in Christian religious art. In addition to drawing on the signification of Mary, *Veiled Visions* side-stepped a faithful representation of the Madonna. In contrast to Sherman who achieved resistance via deliberately gaudy mimesis, my resistance was achieved via additions which I inserted into the frame of the image. For example, the Perspex introduced a reflected crucifix which, for me, acted as a visual metaphor for the suffering of women in a patriarchal system. Furthermore, the insertion of my open gaze toward the audience through the camera's lens acted as a method through which I could assert my own subjectivity. The addition therefore of Pespex (which brought in a reflection of the crucifix), raindrops, and the use of an open gaze aided me in complicating the image, seeking to deny reassertions of the historical positioning of women manifest through Mary and her iconography.

Judith Butler has argued that the possibility for 'transformation' lies in the process of 'a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style' (1988: 520). In this light, I consider *Veiled Visions* transformational in the sense that my own restaging as Mary is achieved through a different sort of repeating. As highlighted earlier on in this chapter, Brown states that images of Mary transmit cultural understandings of women as the subordinate sex. Drawing on this and understanding that images have the power to transmit knowledge, the different techniques and styles of mimetic repetition discussed here by myself and Cindy Sherman arguably have the power to transform and bring to light alternative perspectives and understandings of women, via subversive re-stagings.

Practice Research Experiment: *The Ties That Bind*

Beautifying and Horrifying at Black Mountain

I had had a difficult time on my residency at Black Mountain; I was rather intimidated by cultural differences between myself and the majority American group who seemed loud and aggressive in their communications, in contrast to what I was used to at home in the UK. The tensions which I felt inside me began to reveal themselves in my creative outputs.

Sat on a porch
Air is heavy as
Electricity charges space.

Winds blow

Whistling through

Trees.

Waiting for rains to pour

Fabric bounces on the balustrade

A delightful dance.

Feeling angry

Clutching Calico

Threads are pulled.

Crinkling and

Ruching and

Destroying warp and weft

A wry smile.

Textile pinched taught

Crisp sounds

Tear

Piercing the peace

And quiet.

Unassuming acts of protest.

My experiments whilst sat of the porch of our artist lodge at Blue Ridge Assembly revolved around acts of destruction and deconstruction. Damage to the textile became a way through which my negative emotional state was channelled. Looking back on this work and its development post production of *Veiled Visions*, I see that these experiments were an extension of the ways in which I sought to reject the proposed 'sanctity', 'modesty', and 'virtue' of womanhood I felt were being placed upon me under duress in this environment. These values were initially drawn out in my performance-to-camera work in the amphitheatre, discussed earlier in this chapter. My practice-research experiments became a strategy for reclamation, a way for me to embody my own resistance, embracing what I understood to be a socio-cultural Christian distaste at my fleshy, sexual, desiring body. Acts of tearing became a metaphor for my own attempt at ripping apart socio-cultural perceptions of womanhood.

I became enamoured with the sound of tearing textiles – it was loud, sharp, crisp, and cut across landscape; I was taking up space. It brought back childhood memories of my Nanna Diane tearing lengths of material in preparation for market, folding and wrapping it carefully over flat, grey, rectangular cardboard lengths – an ever-present feature of my youth. I wondered what to do with all of the thin lengths of material left over from my tearing at the fabric. Wearing shorts at the time due to the North Carolina heat, my legs became the site of experimentation.

Figure C3.7. Natalie Raven (2016) *The Ties That Bind [R&D] I*

I tied strips of textile around my thighs, finishing off the knots with bows (see figure C3.7). The tightness of the textile made my flesh speckle and bulge against the constrictions of cloth: gluttonous, excessive, and sinful. I enjoyed the juxtaposition between the beautifying bows and the perception of 'grotesqueness' in exposing my dimpled flesh. At once, this is an image drawing on normative correlations between girls and bows, who usually wear them in order to decorate long hair when it is tied back. Simultaneously, this beautification stands in contrast to the presence of bulging flesh which is generally concealed by women in an attempt to attain a

smooth, idealized female form. The image therefore holds conflicting signifiers produced by body and cloth, which operates as a means to both beautify and horrify. Textiles positioned in this way enable me to both mimic (through beautification) and resist (via the 'horror' of bulging of flesh) socio-cultural strictures which regulate women and shape their presentations of womanhood.

After tying myself up with bows I squeezed my thighs, pushing my muscles taught against the circumference of the fabric. Although this internal physical act was not easily visible through the lens of the camera, doing so reinforced my understanding that I was *being* resistant, whether or not others could witness this resistance in the image I was creating. This moment drew me away somewhat from semiotic and semantic considerations in the creative process, toward consideration of my own affective experience as the artist in development of the work.[31] It was just as important for me to experience *feeling* and *being* resistant through such acts, rather than simply present or represent resistance for others to witness and interpret.

[31] This is explored in Chapter Five

Figure C3.8. Natalie Raven (2016) *The Ties That Bind [R&D] II*

I untied the bows and knots across my thighs, and let contorted swirls of fabric cluster at my feet (see Figure C3.8). Upon my skin, reddened imprints of calico which had cut into my skin marked my flesh. Once the textile had been removed, traces of its presence on my skin acted as a visual revelation for my own internal experience pushing muscles against the restrictive fabric. The marks on my skin acted as an external referent for an internal experience.[32]

32. The relationship between interior sensation and exterior manifestation in performance is explored in Chapter Five.

The restrictions placed upon my body and the marking of my skin led me toward considering the ways in which women's bodies have historically been restricted, deformed and contorted through interaction with textiles. In her essay '"Fighting the Corsetless Evil": Shaping Corsets and Culture, 1900-1930', Jill Fields explains how nineteenth century fashions saw 'virtually all...women' in the US wear corsets. Fields explains how corsetry with its 'Victorian moral sensibilities... symbolically and literally restricted women's mobility in both private and public spheres' (1999: 355). Here, Fields makes the link between restrictions placed upon women's bodies via structured garments, such as the corset, and the systematic restrictions placed upon them more broadly in society at that time. The restrictions placed upon my body via the tying of cloth across my thigh in the photograph *The Ties That Bind [R&D] II* (figure C3.8) operates in the same way that corsetry did on the waists of women living during the Victorian age: textiles restrict movement and become metaphoric for the ways in which women are restricted in patriarchal societies. In this case, body and cloth works to visually manifest and symbolically reveal the mechanics of oppression.

The final performance-to-camera image *The Ties That Bind* (2016) was developed as a result of these preliminary experiments, and after a trip to Asheville to visit the Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Centre where I spent time in the archives. Upon meeting Lydia See, the museum's Development and Outreach officer, I asked if she could point me in the direction of a female performance artist who attended Black Mountain, as most of its celebrated alumni are male. She suggested Katherine Litz.

Figure C3.9
Hazel Larson Archer (c.1953) *Katherine Litz in Dining Hall* [digital image of photograph] Available from: https://www.icaboston.org/events/polly-motley-performs-katherine-litz's-glyph [accessed 10.04.2019]
Keyword search: Hazel Larson Archer; Katherine Litz in Dining Hall; Photograph; 1953
Image available to view online only.

The image of Litz dancing in the dining hall was taken by Hazel Larsen Archer who studied alongside Litz at Back Mountain College (see figure C3.9). Litz appears to be wearing a corset or girdle, along with a high-necked blouse, long sleeves, and long skirt. The photograph of Litz was taken in the 1950s, when contemporary women's fashion had evolved into something quite different to how she was dressed and presenting herself in the image.

Rachel-Jean Firchau explains how in the 1910s, women wore 'flattering day dresses with high necks', with a softer silhouette replacing the 'dramatic S-shaped waists' of preceding fashion styles (2015: 1, see figure C3.10 - outfit on left). Trends were edging toward a more 'androgynous style, most likely as a result of... the women's suffrage movement' (2015: 1). The shape and style of Litz's garment is reminiscent of such early twentieth century clothing made popular by women of the suffragette movement, which leads me to concur that she was linking herself in the artwork to politicised women's movements from the more recent past. She did this via dressing herself in costume which has come to represent this era of political action.

Figure C3.10. Alden O'Brien (2013) *Trio of outfits at the Daughters of the American Revolution Museum*
Ownership of costume: Fashion Archives & Museum of Shippensburg University.

What struck me most about Litz dancing in Larson Archer's photograph (see figure C3.9) was the shadowy outline of her thighs through the skirt. White, ghostly darts and folds captured in the fabric accentuated her movements in the still image, lines that are repeated in the wooden door, decking, and balustrade. It was the presence of textile in relation to her body in the still image which captured the sense of her movements. Without the textile swaying backward and folding against her thigh as her leg moved forward through the air, it could have been assumed that she was posing her leg in a static position in order to be captured by the camera. Here, I see that body and cloth works in affording the visualization of movement in a static image, via the ways in which fabric interacts with the moving human body.

Figure C3.11. Natalie Raven (2016) *The Ties That Bind*

During the residency at Black Mountain, my peers and I produced a daily journal which included reviews and features of artworks in development on campus. Along with the final photographic image I produced for *The Ties That Bind* (2016, see figure C3.11), I wrote a poem

which articulated some of the ideas which had been swirling around, prompting me in my making:

How does it feel to dance, freely

In the present

Moment

In

Space

And time

Evaporating

Unconscious to the conscious

Self.

How does it feel to dance, freely

Without restriction and restraint?

How does it feel to dance, freely

Resisting

Knotty, constraining, contorted, controls

Bound

Tied tight, tighter, tightened as stretched, speckled flesh spills

Over

Unruly

An unruly body, straining against

Systematic oppression

is real.

Hysterical.

Flowing,,,fluid,,,

An excess of form

Re-strained.

Dance freely on His grave

Laugh hard as salted tears stream down

Ruddy cheeks

And

Quench my thirst for

Liberty.

My poem exposes the ways in which the constrictions imposed on my body operated as a metaphor for the ways in which I feel restrained socio-culturally, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Reflecting on my writing in this poem, I see that I came to regard movement and dance was a way through which I might attain a sense of freedom and liberty in such a society.

Practice Research Experiment: *emending eve*

Collaborative Transgressions in *emending eve.*

During my time at Black Mountain I also worked collaboratively to develop a series of photographs entitled *emending eve* (2016) with Kim Varnadoe, which were subsequently exhibited at the Elberson Fine Arts Centre at Salem College USA, March 2017. At twilight one balmy evening, Varnadoe and I snuck into a secluded thicket by a babbling brook on campus. I took off all my clothes, and began to tear up some of the calico I had been working with again. This time, I bound strips across my entire body. Varnadoe quietly took photographs of me as I was positioning the textiles upon my body.

Figure C3.12 Natalie Raven and Kim Varnadoe (2016) *emending eve I*
Figure C3.13 Natalie Raven and Kim Varnadoe (2016) *emending eve II*

Figure C3.14 Natalie Raven and Kim Varnadoe (2016) *emending eve III*
Figure C3.15 Natalie Raven and Kim Varnadoe (2016) *emending eve IV*

Figure C3.16 Natalie Raven and Kim Varnadoe (2016) *emending eve V*
Figure C3.17 Natalie Raven and Kim Varnadoe (2016) *emending eve VI*

Figure C3.18 Natalie Raven and Kim Varnadoe (2016) *emending eve VII*
Figure C3.19 Natalie Raven and Kim Varnadoe (2016) *emending eve VIII*

Figure C3.20 Natalie Raven and Kim Varnadoe (2016) *emending eve IX*

It was the cover of darkness which allowed me to undress and begin to play with cloth in this space. Similar to previous ways in which I used strips of textile tied across my body, I again urged fleshy parts of my body bulge. There were different forms of resistance in this case. In *Body&cloth* (2015), discussed in Chapter Two, my nudity took place in a conventional performance space that frequently hosts performances of the explicit body. In this environment, knowing that this land was sculpted in the spirit of Christian fellowship and education – and understanding that such Christian teachings favoured modesty and humility in women – my nudity was suffused with the spirit of naughtiness and transgression. I considered myself an unruly woman, and I knew that this unruliness would be frowned upon by those following the Christian faith I was sharing space with. There were many different Christian groups visiting YMCA Blue Ridge at the time our residency was taking place.

The history of Christian treatment of unruly women, or, women who do not conform to religious dogma which perpetuates the subordinate positioning of women within a fundamentally patriarchal system, is explored by Fred Pelka in ‘The "Women's Holocaust"' (1992). Writing on the history of European witchhunts across the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, Pelka explains how those labelled witches (approximately 85% of whom were women according to his estimate) were 'tortured to death' (1992: 7). 'The history of witchhunts,' he states, is 'primarily a history of the oppression of women' resulting from, in part, the desire of 'Christian urban elites to supress mother-goddess traditions' (1992: 7). The torture and death of women in the early modern period was a Christian sport, with the labelling of women as witches a useful strategy to keep them in compliance as 'chattells of fathers, husbands, or brothers... docile, obedient, and above all uncomplaining' (1992: 7). Women who dared, or attempted, to resist such socio-cultural positioning were threatened with the label of witch, and subsequent death.

Linking to the title of my performance-to-camera experiment, Pelka states that 'Women were commonly described as "The daughters of Eve", the moral and intellectual inferiors of men, sexually depraved, [and] continuously dissatisfied' (1992: 7). That being the daughter of Eve is considered an insult is as a result of Eve committing original sin. The story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis follows that Eve disobeyed God by eating fruit from *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* after being tricked to do so by a serpent. Adam followed suit in eating the fruits of the tree, which promptly resulted in the fall of man, expulsion from the garden of Eden, and prevention of immortality by God. Eve is considered the mother of humanity, whose fault it was to be sentenced to pain in childbirth, and a life of sorrow and subordination beneath her husband.

My photographic series *emending eve* (2016) was made in response to the biblical story of Eve. I examined the relationships between innocence and shame, constriction and freedom, concealment and revelation. The series follows my journey beginning with the binding of my body in the woods (see figures C3.12 and C3.13), to the suppression of my vision (see figure C3.15). Although arising from a material engagement with strips of textile, on reflection I come to see that the act of blindfolding myself operates a visual metaphor for my experience of religious ideologies, which kept me blind, naïve, and fearful of my own body and its sexuality.

Through this work I realised new ways to work with my body and cloth. Strips of textile across the body worked in creating a blindfold, along with strips across my breasts which worked to bind my chest (see figures C3.15 and C3.16). Chest binding has connotations historically associated with cross dressing, androgyny, and more recently, trans-male identity. Then there was my use of binding across the thighs, which held my legs closed together. This has

connotations of chastity, of a woman 'keeping her legs shut' to deny penetration. Images in the series *emending eve* chart the various restrictions placed upon my body. It was a slow process navigating my way through the thicket in such a way, finding myself barefoot in a stream.

At the end of the nine photographs comprising the series, I am bent forward with my arms overhead swinging loosely, my hair swishing through the air (see figure C3.20). I chose to position this image at the end of the series as it appeared different from the others: there was movement present, *progression*. The unrestrained, almost childlike swinging of my arms felt like a joyous escape from all of the restrictions placed upon me, and wider still, women in patriarchal societies. *emending eve* was my way of attempting to emend a history of women's restriction, a way through which I sought to visualise liberty and emancipation, in spite of cultural, Christian constraints I felt regulating me and my behaviours at Blue Ridge Assembly.

Reflecting on my residency at Black Mountain, I see how comfortable and confident I felt in drawing on the history of Christian religious art, appropriating images and/or staging myself in resistant or subversive ways. I perceive that this is because I grew up as a Christian, attending a Church of England primary school – I felt as though I had license to criticize the ideologies which shaped my thoughts, behaviours, and understandings of myself and my identity growing up. I had a very different experience in undertaking an artistic residency which explored Islam, in London 2017.

Practice Research Experiment: *Protruding the Veil*

Approaching Islam through Performance

In October 2017, I took part in a Live Art Development Agency (LADA) workshop entitled *Approaches to Embodied Islam*, led by Sara Zaltash in London, UK. Over the course of three days, participants (including myself) engaged with and responded to various aspects of Islamic culture and practice, one of which was to attend Friday prayers at London Central Mosque. Ahead of this, Zaltash sent an email explaining what would be required of us in terms of dress code in attending the mosque. The mosque website asks that visitors 'dress modestly', noting that 'women... should wear a headscarf' when visiting the 'male prayer hall' (East London Mosque, 2018). I noted the ways in which the instructions on the website categorised bodies and spaces. Women were instructed to wear a veil – an outward, visual display of a sexed body. This is discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to my work in *Veiled Visions* (2016); Islam, like Christianity, proposes the veiling of women. Further to this, the prayer hall was designated a male only space. Those veiled in the group were led upstairs to engage in prayers in a separate, segregated space, behind a brown Perspex plastic barrier. Men were praying below in the main hall, unseen by the women.

Figure C3.21 Natalie Raven (2017) *Self-portrait in Hijab I*

Before arriving at East London Mosque, myself and fellow workshop participants congregated in Regents Park to prepare. Tara Fatehi kindly took the time to position the scarf I had brought with me into a hijab, so that I would be suitably veiled upon entering (figure C3.21). Fatehi draped the front-middle of the cloth over my head, allowing one edge of the material to frame the outline of my face. The two ends of the fabric which hung down either side were crossed across my neck and wrapped across my shoulders. Before walking through central London with a veil on, I was anxious and self-conscious that people would perceive me a devout

religious follower, and would become hostile toward me. This feeling was due to the political debates surrounding the wearing of headscarves in the UK. In 2006 government minister Jack Straw 'publicly questioned the wearing of the full veil, seeing it as a psychological and practical barrier to good race relations, and a mark of segregation' (Field, 2007: 460). Over a decade later, a report in The Guardian reveals that post Brexit referendum, ‘ethnic minorities in Britain are facing rising and increasingly overt racism, with levels of discrimination and abuse continuing to grow’ (Robert Booth, 2019). Public relations in Britain midst the context of this political cultural climate, was tense.

The fears I had surrounding the wearing of a headscarf were unfounded. People walking past me did not seem interested in what I was doing or wearing, whilst the presence of a veil on my head actually made me feel quite comfortable – as though the outside world was operating elsewhere, shielded from the world. I wondered if this was because my vision was partially obstructed by the scarf at the sides of my face, or perhaps due to the comforting sensations of textile upon my skin. Textiles have often provided comfort and security for me as a child, as outlined in the prelude to this thesis.

Approaching the gates at East London Mosque, surrounded by Muslim women, I became acutely focused on what I was wearing:

> *Black skinny jeans with a black zip-up jacket brazenly baring Biblical artwork printed on the sleeve. Relentlessly red retro matte MAC outlining cupids bow. Tightly cropped lilac peeks out under long blonde tresses.*

I felt a bit too ‘alternative’ in this space, a bit too bold in my attire. My red painted lips felt like a beacon signifying some sort of promiscuity, whilst the Christian biblical print on my black jacket seemed rather objectionable. My clothing seemed to be somewhat of a concern

to others too. Elder women in the mosque gently took my arm and brought me inside, handing me a long, well-worn pink tunic. It reminded me of the many times I had forgotten to bring my PE kit into school, ending up wearing some other's left behind clothing. It was explained to me that because I was wearing a top and jeans, my back might become exposed when keeling down on the floor to pray, which would be a sign of disrespect to Allah. The tunic was to make sure I was covered at all times, in the undertaking of all movements.

Textiles in the Tate

The workshop led by Zaltash included group discussion with Naima Khan of the Inclusive Mosque Initiative, observation of Rumi recitals and Whirling Dervish performance at The Study Society, alongside a variety of practical activity exploring both the vocalisation and physical technique of Islamic worship. It was based in a studio at Tate Britain, where at the end of this three day experience we were to share performance work with the public.

Figure C3.22 Natalie Raven (2017) *Self-portrait in Hijab II*

During the workshop, Fatehi showed me different ways in which I could wear a hijab (see figure C3.22 in comparison to figure C3.21), and brought in different parts of a niqab and burqa allowing me to handle and experience wearing different types of adornment across my head and face.

Figures L-R
Figure C3.23 Natalie Raven (2017) *Self-portrait in Niqab*
Figure C3.24 Natalie Raven (2017) *Self-portrait in Burqa*

The niqab mask was made of a stiff type of felt, and when worn completely obscured the features of my face. It was brightly coloured and elaborately decorated, and wearing it I felt a sense of theatricality, as though it was made and worn to be noticed and observed. This stood in stark contrast to the plain, dark coloured burqua which was soft, floaty, and very comfortable (the top layer veil which would conceal the eyes has been folded backwards). In wearing these items upon my face, I had the same sensations as when wearing the hijab earlier – I was hidden and unseen, in a safe, psychological territory of my own that others were not able to penetrate or invade.

In developing the performance which was to be shown to the public, there were issues of unease raised by myself and a few of the other white, non-Muslim participants in the group. Why were *we* being invited to perform at Tate Britain, the bastion of privilege and 'home of British art from 1500 to the present day' (Tate, 2019)? Why not Muslim artists taking up space in the Tate? Concerns were shared surrounding what was perceived to be a distasteful perpetuation of empire and colonial privilege and appropriation. Although attempts were made to alleviate fears via kind words of reassurance, difficulties persisted. The workshop was an open and inclusive space in which to explore our own performed responses to the practices of Islam, however it did not feel okay to accept the invitation to pick and choose aspects of an embodied religious practice I had no previous knowledge or spiritual understanding of. In contrast to the ease with which I felt able to appropriate Christian religious images to work with, this felt difficult and disrespectful.

Figure C3.25 Natalie Raven (2017) *Protruding The Veil*

Concern regarding these issues resulted in the development of new ways in which to work with textiles in performance. It did not seem appropriate for me to veil in the performance: I felt as though that action would be considered a shallow imitation of a meaningful Islamic religious practice, displaying disrespect. *Protruding the Veil* (2017, see figure C3.25) became an experiment in how to actively resist imitating religious actions, whilst still using textiles keenly bound up in sexed veiling practices.

I carefully placed a long length of material in a semi-circle fanning out from against a wall in the performance space. In the middle of the semi-circle was an empty space in which I situated my body. Instead of placing the material across my head, I lay down flat upon the floor in a corner of the room and lifted my legs up high, vertically against the wall. The scarf which I had previously used as a veil in attendance at East London Mosque was draped across my feet, hanging downward towards my face as my head rested on the ground. When I had managed to position the fringed edge of the scarf so that it hovered just above my head, I tilted my head backwards to quietly observe what was happening elsewhere in the performance space, resting in this image.

In advance of the workshop I had brought with me a bag of safety pins, knowing that I wished to work with textiles and may need to pin them. I opened up each pin so that the sharp piercing edge was exposed from behind the safety latch, and preceded to put them all in my mouth, slowly. It was painful at moments, feeling the pointed edges press against the flesh inside my mouth. I began to dribble a little, in light of having to keep my mouth opened wide so that pins did not pierce. My jaw ached, terribly. This act was, again, a visual metaphor for my feeling that it was neither safe, nor ethical to be using aspects of a religious faith which I had no knowledge of for my own means in a performance. It was not my place to be speaking (in this

instance, meaning to express or communicate) here. *Protruding the Veil* (2017) emerged as a result of some very uneasy feelings and difficult negotiations resulting from the desire to be culturally and morally sensitive. I found through this encounter that turning attention toward my own difficulties in engaging with the subject material, and allowing space for these internal conflicts to rise up and externally materialise, was a way in which to continue participation.

Conclusion

This chapter explores the relationships between religion and re-presentations of the sexed body, through the presence and use of cloth as a form of adornment. I began by focusing on the foundations upon which binary social orders and sexed biological distinctions arise, in order to uncover the means by which we come to understand women and their positioning in society. I exposed the ways in which Christianity as patriarchal religious order – and the historical artefacts produced in its honour – work to shape ideologies and cultural perceptions of women in society. Jo Anna Elise Brown's research explains how such religious ideals about women are communicated via artistic images and artefacts.

Contextualising artistic work in this area, Cindy Sherman adopted a mimetic process in *Untitled #216* where she re-staged Jean Fouquet's *Virgin and Child.* This was related to Irigaray's writing on *mimicry*, understood to be the process of deliberately adopting a feminine style to highlight gendered roles and hierarchical problems which arise as a result in a patriarchal system. Analysis of Hazel Larson Archer's photograph of Katherine Litz dancing at Black Mountain revealed how the artist used costume in order to make visual links to historical political feminist movements (i.e. the suffragette movement). Of main interest was

the way in which Litz' movement was captured in the still photographic image, via folds and darts which appeared in the fabric of her skirt as her leg moved upward. This reveals how textiles can support the representation of movement in a static visual medium.

From this research informed starting point, I began to practically respond to what I found were the Christian ideals for women embodied in its religious art cannon: humble, tender, passive, and slight. *Veiled Visions* saw me resist passivity via use of an open gaze looking directly into the lens of the camera, whilst *The Ties That Bind* and *emending eve* saw me actively bulge my flesh as a way to reject the slender ideal. I concluded that veiling was a sexed religious practice, whereby the use of a veil visibly distinguished the religious following and sex of the person. Although happy enough to challenge aspects of Christianity I found problematic via the use of veiling due to my own upbringing as a Christian, I did not feel comfortable doing so when invited to approach embodied aspects of Islamic spiritual practice. Creating performance material which was personally symbolic (allowing internal conflicts to externally manifest) through the positioning of textiles upon my body without veiling, meant that I avoided adopting mimetic religious practices of a faith not studied by myself, for the purpose of my own artistic gain.

Chapter Four

Liveness, Stillness, and Sculptural Bodies in Performance Art

In previous chapters, relationships between photography and live performance began to emerge, in particular the liveness of bodies in presentations of performance art, the absent presence of live bodies in performance-to-camera works, and moments of liveness captured in a static photographic medium. In Chapter One, I described Ro Hardaker's *Plough Your Own Furrow* as a sculptural, poetic piece of performance, whilst in Chapter Two I shared that during the documentation of *Body&cloth* an audience member spoke to be about regarding the work as a piece of performance-to-camera (due to the sound of the cameras 'click' in capturing performance documentation). In Chapter Three I analysed my own solo and collaborative performance-to-camera works *Veiled Visions*, *The Ties That Bind*, and *emending eve* during an artistic residency in North Carolina, as well as remarked on the liveness I found present in Hazel Larson Archer's photograph of Katherine Litz.

This chapter traces the various strands which when woven together form the genealogy of performance art in a sculptural vein, such as performance-to-camera, tableau vivant, and living sculpture. All of these practices can be found to incorporate aspects of stillness in the production of the artwork. Following critical reflection on some of the historical methods by

which sculptural bodies have been staged with cloth, I detail aspects of liveness and stillness emergent in my own performance experiment *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* (2016), cultivated in direct response to an existing piece of figurative sculpture. The aim of the practice research experiment is to investigate which strategies are available to better express women's lived experience via uses of textile in live performance, in comparison to traditional object-based sculpture

Theatre, Sculpture and Live Bodies

Figure C4.1
Gilbert & George (1975) *The Red Sculpture* [digital image of performance documentation]
Available from: https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/gilbert-george/gilbert-george-major-exhibition-room-guide/gilbert-5 [accessed 10.03.2018]
Keyword search: Gilbert & George; The Red Sculpture; Performance; 1975
Image available to view online only.

In 1986, Silvio Gaggi published 'Sculpture, Theatre and Art Performance: Notes on the Convergence of the Arts' in which he critically reflected on certain avant-garde artistic practices, considering their various formal and conventional distinctions in an attempt to map the field. In the article, he draws attention to Gilbert & George's *The Red Sculpture* (1975, see Figure C4.1) in which the performers dressed in their trademark suits and ties, dyed their hands and faces red and proceeded to move like 'meticulous, wide-eyed somnambulists' i.e. sleepwalkers, according to reviewer Anthony Hadca-Guest (1976:1). Gaggi attempts to decipher whether the work is a piece of theatre or sculpture by asking if it was a 'theatrical work that lasted for 90 minutes or... a sculptural work that was on display for 90 minutes?' (1986: 48).

The implication arising from Gaggi's analysis of *Red Sculpture* is that theatre is something that 'lasts', whilst sculpture is something which is 'displayed'. Conventional distinctions are being articulated here, whereby Gaggi understands that theatrical work is set-timed, whereas sculptural work is exhibited and can be observed without typical temporal constraints of live work, for the duration of the exhibition. Considering *Red Sculpture* in relation to the passage of time in a theatrical sense, reflects what others have noted in examinations of performance. In the introduction to *Performing Processes* (2000), Roberta Mock gives a definition of both 'performance' and 'live performance' offering temporal consideration in light of both. "'Performance' in its broadest sense" argues Mock 'is the (re)presentation or documentation of a series of events which may, or may not, still be in the process of occurring' (2000: 3). 'Live performance' on the other hand

> is still happening and still has to happen. It includes the potential for change in its every moment of delivery through the dialectical processes which need to be experienced (to lesser or greater extents) − via, for example, the body of the performer, the physical context of its venue, the relationship with the audience − in order to make it 'whole'. When it is 'finished', it reverts back to (mere?) 'performance', its trace documented (even in memory) and recalled by other means (Mock, 2000: 3).

Mock's model allows us to respond to Gaggi's probing of what exactly was occurring in *Red Sculpture*; it was a live performance which lasted 90 minutes. The live event had *the potential change in its every moment of delivery*, the *a/liveness* of it arising due to the framing of living, breathing bodies. Post showing, the artwork transforms from 'live performance' to

'performance' living on through documentation, which is what Gaggi himself responds to in the article.

The sculptural elements of the artwork noted by Gaggi appear due to the incredibly slow, *almost* static use of movement by Gilbert and George. This points to one of the fundamental differences between object-based and living sculpture utilising live bodies; a live body is not, and cannot ever be, entirely static and still. Alongside the removal of theatrical devices such as characterisation and the unfolding of a narrative in the traditional sense, Gilbert and George's work shifts toward a form of presentational living sculpture on display. The intentional inertia of the artists invites the audience to engage with the visual presentation of their bodies, observing them as one might a piece of exhibited object-based sculpture, from all angles, paying attention to their external detail.

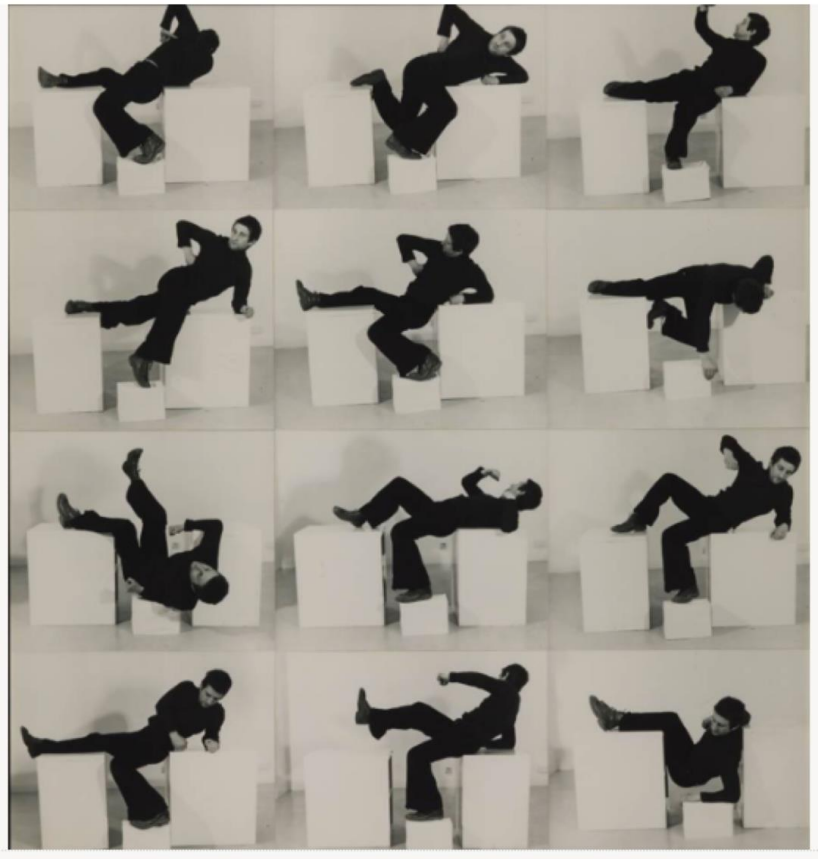


Figure C4.2. Bruce McLean (1971) *Pose Work for Plinths I*

Bruce McLean is a Scottish artist who studied in the Sculpture department at Saint Martin's School of Art (now Central Saint Martins) in the late 1960s. In an interview with Jon Wood in 2008, McLean reflects on their experimental art works; '[I] made live sculptures... running sculptures, standing sculptures, sitting sculptures, sculptures using myself as the medium' (Wood and McLean, 2008: 117). This is evident in works such as *Pose Work for Plinths I* (1971, see Figure C4.2) whereby the artist used their own body as a living art object, positioning it on top of plinths traditionally reserved to display static sculptural art objects.

By situating themselves within the frame of their artwork and using themselves as the medium, McLean opens the door to explorations of the living body newly framed as a sculptural article. McLean considers the body as 'form moving through space' (Wood and McLean, 2008: 117) which very clearly situates the living body in this particular context within a Fine Art tradition; body is form.

Photography, Cloth, and Death

Figure C4.3. Ana Mendieta (1973) *Untitled*

The artist's body framed as living sculpture was also explored by Ana Mendieta in the 1970s. In *Untitled* (1973, see Figure C4.3), Mendieta lay down on the concrete floor of a hotel roof in Mexico, draping a white bedsheet over the entire length of her body. Hans Breder, the collaborator in the construction of the image, preceded to splatter blood across the white sheets that covered her body, concluding by placing an animal heart upon her chest. In a review of the work exhibited at The Haywood Gallery in 2013, Ashton Chandler describes the curatorial decision to group selected Mendieta works together (including *Untitled* [1973]) to form a 'blood-drenched series' (2013: 1). Chandler explains how Mendieta took inspiration from 'Afro-Cuban ritualistic Santería practices' (2013: 1). Followers of the faith – which emerged out of

the slave trade in Cuba – 'sacrifice animals... in order to build and maintain a personal relationship with the spirit' (BBC, 2009). Animal sacrifice as part of the customs and practices of Santería is not something I was aware of when first observing *Untitled*, and as a result prevented me from being able to meaningfully link to this visual reference in the work. This reinforces what was highlighted in previous chapters, whereby symbolic processes of signification take place via learnt associations between the signifier and what is signified.

In approaching the work myself, I was startled by the vivid contrast in colour between the bright, crimson blood, streaked across the crisp white linen. Moreover, I regarded it as a portrayal of brutality, violence, and death. The use of bedsheets similar to those found in hotels, coupled with its staging in the geographical context of a hotel roof, also suggested a dark, sexual aspect at play. This interpretation aligns with broader artistic themes explored by the artist, notably sexual assault and abuses of power represented in work such as *Untitled (Rape Scene)* (1973) whereby the artist uses her own body to visually depict the aftermath of rape.

Delving deeper into how I came to realise my interpretation, I see a variety of rationale emerge. Firstly, the positioning of the body in a certain way (lying down) in relation to the linen which is placed in a particular manner (covering the entire length of the body) seems to communicate that the artist, Mendieta, is representationally dead. Lying flat beneath the sheet (which becomes a death shroud in the visual metaphor), the artist presents as a corpse. This is an example of body and cloth working as transformational agents; the act of shrouding the body with cloth leads me toward interpreting the body presented, dead. Cloth aids the artist in representations of death.

Secondly, the presence of blood in the image suggests that an injury has taken place; an incident has occurred which has caused blood to seep out of wounds that have penetrated the body causing its death. The volume of blood present – coupled with the dramatic way in which it has been energetically splattered and strewn across the space – would suggest that a very brutal act of violence has taken place. This is an exaggerated scene of brutality rather than a realistic portrayal of how blood would pool and seep out of the body when injured. Most tellingly, the pools of blood collect on the *exterior* of the fabric; its presence could not have come from an injury which had occurred to the corpse beneath, and similarly, the fibrous heart is displayed on top of the fabric, upon the corpse. Here, the nature of the textile is telling a story; the linen that has been used has a tight weave, and so is fluid resistant. This is how I can tell that the blood present has not seeped upward through the fabric of the textile from Mendieta below, but has been thrown onto her after her shrouding has taken place, collecting on top of the fabric between her shins.

It is the presence of textiles within *Untitled* (1973) which drew me toward considering aspects of liveness. This was realised through my own understandings of the properties and materiality of textile in contact with fluids, which were present at the time in which the photograph was taken. The presence of fabric also drew me toward imagining the actions and sensations occurring in that place, and at that time; the coldness of concrete touching skin in contrast to the softness of linen lining the nose; the dull thuds of blood falling like enlarged raindrops on an umbrella held overhead; the weight of wet animal heart, clinging clammy cloth to the chest. Complexly, even though I am drawn to consider liveness, the movements, moments, and sensation involved in the staging of the work, the residual photographic format heightens a sense of stasis and death; Mendieta is forever inert, fixed as corpse, captured in a photographic death.

In *On Photography* (1979), Susan Sontag explores relationships between photography and death, describing processes of photography as a sort of 'soft murder' (1979: 15). Taking someone's photograph 'turns people in to objects that can be symbolically possessed', whereby the subject *of* the photograph becomes an object *in* the picture, to be observed, held, and owned by others (Sontag, 1979: 14). In the case of artistic photography, in addition to issues of ownership (which in a capitalist society is fundamental within an arts market), symbolic readings of the subject as object take place in observing what appears in the image. This is highlighted not least by my own observations of Mendieta in the image; the process of formal analysis I undertook rendered Mendieta a visual object in the image. However, my analysis also included consideration of Mendieta as subject, recognising the phenomenological, sensorial experiences she may have encountered in the production of the image.

Tableau Vivant, Obscenity, and *to-be-looked-at-ness*

Mary Megan Chapman provides a useful definition of tableau vivant, firstly reminding the reader that the French word *tableaux vivants* means 'living pictures', going on the explain that the practice 'denoted figures posed, silent and immobile, for twenty or thirty seconds, in imitation of well-known works of art or dramatic scenes from history and literature' (1992: 2). According to Chapman's definition, tableau vivant is a form of performance in which figures are silently posed on stage in the image of famous cultural artifacts, including representations found in Fine Art history.[33] There is therefore a type of referential relationship occurring,

[33] The re-staging of art historical works in live performance is examined further along in this Chapter.

between what is being presented to a live audience and what it is intending to imitate in cultural history, in this type of performance.

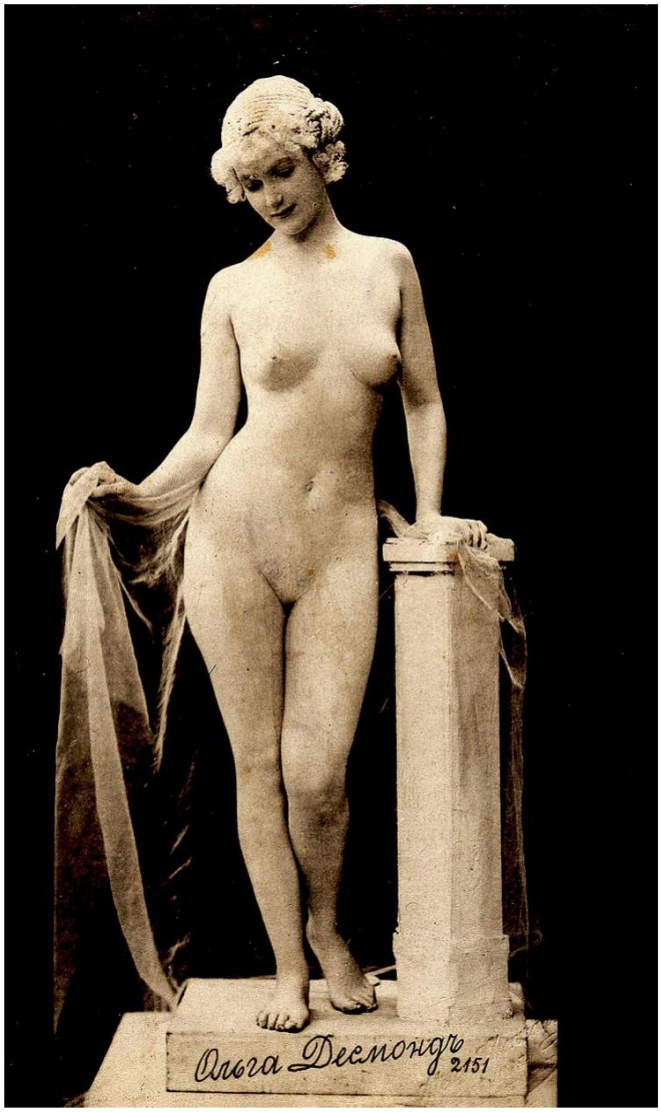


Figure C4.4. Olga Desmond (c.1908) *Nude with Drapery and Pedestal*

Proto forms of tableau vivant began to emerge via avant-garde dance practices, notably through the artistic works of artists such as Olga Desmond (see Figures C4.4 and C4.5). In *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935* (1997), Karl Toepher

argues that Desmond's work 'blur[s] distinctions between dance and posed tableaux' as he struggles to fathom whether photographic images of Desmond document a performance, or function as a mode of performance themselves (1997: 27). Today we would understand Desmond's work to be a form of performance-to-camera, which might well have also involved aspects of dance movement in the processes of creation. This highlights how artists such as Desmond did not allow disciplinary bounds to constrain their creative endeavours.

Images of Desmond show her standing upon a white plinth, nude, but for a sheer piece of material hanging draped behind her body (see figure C4.4). As outlined earlier through my analysis of Mclean's *Pose Work for Plinths I* (see figure C4.2), the presence of a plinth draws specifically on the conventions of sculpture, framing the live body as sculptural. Additionally, the presence of transparent textile in the image implies that it was not intended to conceal her body. Instead, it works in the construction of a 'statuesque' figure, one which adopts 'classical Greek poses' (Toepher, 1997: 27). Desmond's body is nude and painted white, which gives the impression she is attempting to appear marble like. The posturing of her body in a certain way, positioned in, around, or on-top of a plinth with a piece of textile draped across and around her figure, alludes to classical Greek sculpture.

Figure C4.5. Olga Desmond (c.1908) *Tableau Vivant by Olga Desmond and Adolf Salge*

Toepher also draws attention to an 'extremely rare' feature of Desmond's work: the presence of a nude female body 'in partnership with a nearly nude male' (1997: 27, see Figure C4.5). Teopher suggests that the rarity of such photographs might be due to the fear of 'obscenity prosecution' which would certainly have caused some trepidation (1997: 27). Worthy of note in the image of Desmond and Salge (see Figure C4.5) is how their bodies are staged differently with textile. Desmond again is stood with some sort of sheer fabric loosely draped and gently folding across her genitalia. In contrast, Salge has a precisely folded and straight edged textile

concealing his; a type of loin cloth, although it appears to be made out of more than one piece of material.

Moving forward chronologically to mainstream forms of tableau vivant, 1930s London saw the emergence of the 'Windmill Girl'; a performing female nude who appeared on stage at the Windmill Theatre posed in tableaux vivants (Tracy C. Davis, 1989: 323). Jill Millard Shapiro reflects on her time working as a dancer at the Windmill Theatre in a BBC documentary produced by Lucy Burns. In S*ixties Soho's Dancing Nudes*, Shapiro states that "one of the most important things" her audience came to see at the Windmill Theatre, was the tableau vivant, or "nude poses" (Shapiro in Burns, 2017). When in a nude pose, women would have to hold still for around twelve minutes (rather longer than previously mentioned by Chapman).

The rationale for displaying static nude poses as opposed to moving ones, was to circumvent obscenity laws. These laws prevented nude moving bodies from being shown on a British stage (Burns, 2017). The argument used to evade such laws was that a static live body was akin to a static figurative art object depicting nude women housed in art galleries. Indeed, Davis states 'the factor that protected the Windmill from prosecution was that the living tableau were *pictures*, frozen in space' (1989: 332). It seems here that the objectification of women takes on a most literal form, in that their still presence in the performance not only *referred* to an historical artefact or picture, but that they themselves became pictorial objects to be viewed. Davis goes on to argue that the Windmill Girls use of tableau vivant was 'nude in the Venetian sense', which reinforces the understanding that this type of performance is necessarily derivative (of Venetian painting and sculpture), and at the same time legitimises the appearance

of the nude performer as they were portraying the beauty of ‘academic art embodying elevated concepts’ (Davis, 1989: 323).[34]

The use of tableau is also a technique used by stage actors in order to draw attention to visual aspects of the performance according to Shira D. Epstein, who explains that it is used in order to resist the naturalistic flow of an unfolding story-based narrative in conventional theatre performance. Epstein explains that tableau allows 'still (no movement) visual images [to be created by actors] with their bodies' (2006: 60). Static bodies on stage draw attention to the visual intricacies of what is being presented, due to their supposed stillness which arrests the viewer. Linking back to my early work on semiotics in performance, this may be due in part to the reduced number of sign-systems in operation during moments of tableau. All sign-systems relating to movement and audio aspects of the performance are withheld, which in turn focuses greater attention toward visual aspects still in play.

The production, staging, and reception of live performance in the form of living sculpture, performance-to-camera, and tableau vivant all feature inert and/or inanimate bodies. These bodies bring forth a sense of '*to-be-looked-at-nes*s'; a term put forward by Laura Mulvey (1975: 62, emphasis in original). In her original text which critiques the stylisation of women in cinema, Mulvey explains how a ‘determining male gaze’ influences the appearance of female figures on screen (1975: 62). She explains that women take on a ‘traditional exhibitionist role’, in which their appearance is ‘coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness’* (1975: 62). Mulvey’s use of *to-be-looked-at-ness* describes negative aspects of womens staging, for the distinct purpose of male heterosexual gratification.

[34] Sculpture and the embodiment of narrative is examined further along on this chapter. Sculpture and its relationship to elevated (spiritual) concepts is examined in Chapter Five.

Adopting Mulvey's term and applying it to Olga Desmond's *Tableau Vivant by Olga Desmond and Adolf Salge* (c.1908, see figure C5.4), Desmond does indeed appear to be positioned in a way as to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness.* I interpret this due to the coy tilting of her head, and fingertips appearing to twirl through hair, framing her face. As the director of her own artwork, Desmond's self-styled erotic positioning (coupled with the look towards her audience through the lens of the camera, and the appearance of what I interpret as a rather knowing smile) lead to me to conclude her *to-be-looked-at-ness* is both intentional and playful. The artists smile seems to allude to knowledge of her own sexual attractiveness, especially when appearing in the frame with her male counterpart Adolf Sage. I interpret the work as a staged illumination of heterosexual relations between two parties: Sage as the desiring male, Desmond the desired female who is both playing the role of the desirable female, and externally referencing knowledge of her own desirability (via turn towards the camera, and smile).

Although the term *to-be-looked-at-ness* is used and understood in a particular way by Mulvey as detailed above, I also recognise a desire by performance artists (including myself) *to-be-looked-at*. Artists choosing to stage themselves and their bodies front and centre in an artwork invite observations of them within their performance presentations. As Mulvey teases out in her own definitions of the phrase, there is an exhibitionism involved in *to-be-looked-at-ness*, in the staging oneself in ways which are intended to draw attention. I see this being particularly present when staging inert and/or inanimate bodies, where this sense of *to-be-looked-at-ness* is really brought to the fore, and the visual images being presented invite acute observation.

This correlates with my experience in witnessing Adam Electric's *The Machine Legends* discussed in Chapter Two, whereby the *to-be-looked-at* nature of Electric in the performance

was created via the restraint of movement, motivating me to focus attention on the formal, visual aspects. Understandings of *to-be-looked-at-ness* are being moved forward here, incorporating both Mulvey's original description of the ways in which women are styled in order to fulfill culturally dominant heterosexual erotic male desires, whilst at the same time understanding that within feminist performance art in particular, staging bodies with an invitation that they are *to-be-looked-at* is a useful strategy to centre narratives on, in, and around women's lives and lived experience. Performance works which incorporate aspects of stillness and inertia (such as tableau vivant) invite more detailed acts of looking, due to the reduced number of sign-systems in operation as previously stated.

Practice Research Experiment: *sa réécriture [re-writing her]*

Approaching Sculpture

I performed *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* (2016) at De Montfort University's 'Borderlines' conference held in the PACE (Performing Arts Centre for Excellence) Building in Leicester, June 2016. In response to my research aims and questions, I was exploring how and whether the process of appropriating a static, sculptural, figurative image of a woman draped in cloth and re-staging it live, might act as a strategy for expressing women's lived experience, as well as how historical artworks might inform live performance practices. For this particular experiment, I began with a title for the performance which I felt encapsulated my intentions for the work: *sa réécriture [re-writing her]*. The word 'Her' implies and includes various layers:

the female subject of the art historical sculpture I re-stage; myself as a female artist; as well as female sex and gender more broadly in Western culture.[35]

Figure C4.6. Antonio Canova (1809) *Repentant Mary Magdalene*

The French title *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* was also a direct reference to Hélène Cixous' concept of *écriture feminine*. For Cixous, *écriture feminine* is an invitation for women to 'come

35. The presentation of gendered self in performance is explored in further detail in Chapter Five.

to language' – a language of the body – inscribed in a 'woman's style' (1976/1975: 882). 'Patriarchal social-economic systems have kept women at a distance from their own bodies' explains Anu Aneja, who on the topic of *écriture feminine* explains that the language of a phallocentric order speaks 'about the female body but will not let it speak (for) itself' (1992: 17). By situating my own body in the frame of my performance, I 'write…[my]self', taking up space so that my 'body must be heard' (Cixous, 1976/1975: 880). I understood *écriture féminie* in this light to be a strategy for centring narratives around women and their lived experience, from a woman's perspective.

Early in my creative process, I decided to respond to Antonio Canova's sculpture *Repentant Mary Magdalene* (1809, see figure C4.6). I felt that Canova's use of cloth relative to the female body was revealing, both literally and metaphorically. I would be working in response to photographic documentation of the sculpture, rather than the sculpture itself which is housed abroad. I do consider that this had an impact on the ways in which I was creatively engaged. Thinking back to my experience in Black Mountain shared in Chapter Three, the affective response I encountered in witnessing the crucifix in the amphitheatre had had a profound emotional effect on me, and the artworks I produced. In the case of Canova's sculpture, I was responding to a two-dimensional digital image observed on a computer screen, which I did find caused me to make errors in my subsequent re-staging detailed further along in this chapter.

One of the more curious aspects found in observing images of Canova's sculpture, was the conscious substitution I made in my mind; the static, inert female figure was transformed into a living one. My practical exploration and staging of my body with cloth began with the question "what happens next?"

Textiles in the Representation of Female Sexuality and Sin

In Antonio Canova's sculpture, Mary Magdalene is represented in a state of partial undress; nearly nude, but for a single piece of cloth positioned precariously across the bosom (see figure C4.6). Literal, impending revelations are proposed by the artist in positioning cloth which appears to rest unsteadily across the breasts and, in imagining the liveness of the static object, I visualise the cloth readily falling down to expose the chest. This is perhaps due to my disciplinary training and approach toward the sculptural object, which prompts thinking about temporal and gravitational effects.

Of course such revelations will never take place for Mary in Canova's sculpture, due to the form, material and function of the sculpture. However, the specific way in which textiles have been placed upon the subject's body does raise the level of anticipation for slippage and bodily revelation.[36] I see this expectancy arising from Canova's choice to depict uncut, untailored cloth, as opposed to other forms of clothing practice used to adorn the body. It has loosely flowing qualities, which invites imagined movements and slippages. The looseness of the textile represented by Canova also appears to be a visual metaphor for the subject being ‘loose’, or having loose morals in accordance with traditional Christian values which demonise sexual behaviours in women outside wedlock.

The textile placed across Magdalene is tied to her body with rope just under the bust, before cascading downward between the thighs. The drapes and folds of cloth move the gaze downwards toward opened legs, drawing attention to what is supposedly concealed beneath:

36 This was also raised in relation to Isadora Duncan's use of costume in her movement practice, in the introduction to this thesis.

her genitalia. In depicting this, Canova draws my attention toward Magdalene's sexual organs, which leads me to consider her sexuality and in turn his representation of socio-cultural attitudes toward female sexuality embodied in the sculpture. Magdalene is sexualised, and is in repentance. Difficult feelings arose within me in my interpretations of Canova's work, which I understood to be simultaneously sexualising and shaming Mary for the sin of her own sexuality. This led me toward considering how I might work with an existing narrative embodied within a piece of static sculpture i.e. the socio-cultural (and in this case, religious) shaming of women and their sexuality, and move it forward through live performance work. I wanted to pose a challenge to what I considered deeply problematic and culturally regressive perspectives on women's sexuality.

Looking at

Magdalene cultivated by Canova

I feel sad.

I understand, understood Magdalene as prostitute although

I do not know how I know this.

A 'fallen woman'

Fallen

Where? From where?

Fallen, to her knees.

Lowly.

Lowly, knelt, in repentance.

She looks tempting. A temptress, tempting me to imagine

Her breasts.

Suggestions of slippages, simultaneously sincere.

But

She's static, and crafted by another's hands.

His hands.

How can I revise?

How can I re-vision

Her?

My performance writing, produced in response to documentary images depicting *Repentant Mary Magdalene* (1809), speaks of a complex double bind occurring in Canova's representation of Magdalene. The line 'suggestions of slippages, simultaneously sincere' illuminates how the sculptural figure is sexually suggestive *and* lowly submissive. Linking back to matters of obscenity surrounding presentations of the nude female body outlined in this chapter, Mary's position located on the cusp of revelation via the specific positioning of the textile upon the breasts (and understanding Christian attitudes toward female sexuality), situates her as a character verging on the obscene. Simultaneously, her physical positioning complicates the supposed indecency of her almost-nude appearance. Magdalene is knelt down on a plinth with a soft, forlorn expression on her face, head bowed, arms resting on thighs, palms open and facing upward – a physical gesture signifying penitence which is further intimated by the title of the work itself.

There is complex inter-articulation between what Mary's gesticulating body tells me, and what the positioning of the cloth elucidates. Writing of the contradictory nature of Canova's sculpture in the canon of Christian religious art, Christopher M. S. Johns too observes 'dualities' in the work, describing them as 'intense Catholic piety and erotic appeal' (2013: 16). Canova's

sculpture holds both readings simultaneously in a complex representation of female experience, and is emblematic of the problematic ways in which the female body and aspects of its sexuality is regulated by a religious social order.

One of the lines in my performance writing above reads:

> *I understand, understood Magdalene as prostitute although*
>
> *I do not know how I know this.*

The use of 'understand, understood' in the text reveals the shifts in my understanding of Mary Magdalene through the process of my research enquiry. I had understood Magdalene to be the prostitute follower of Jesus who is cast in the role of sinner in the bible. The reason I was unsure of how I knew this, was that the narrative of Magdalene as the 'repentant prostitute' had been absorbed into my consciousness via cultural myths and artefacts (Rollo-Koster, 2002: 109). These include art historical religious images exemplified by Canova's sculpture, and by writers who reify her as a 'penitent prostitute' in Christian gospels (Johns, 2013: 15). This is a further example of the ways in which religious images communicate ideas and messages about women, which shape the behaviours of inhabitants within a culture as previously outlined via Jo Anna Elise Brown's research discussed in Chapter Three.

The demonization of Mary Magdalene seems to have emerged via an historical interpretation of a scenario unfolding in the gospel of Luke. An unnamed 'woman of the city, who was a sinner' anointed Christ's feet (Luke 7:37, ESV). During his reign between 590 – 604, Pope Gregory I[37] cast Mary Magdalene in that role (Farmer, 2011: 300). He suggested that it was Magdalene being referred to in that scene, the sinner inferred to have had multiple sexual

37. Pope Gregory I is also known as Saint Gregory the Great.

partners outside of wedlock and was therefore a sinner. Pope Gregory I's implication that Magdalene was a prostitute has been 'implicitly rejected' in recent theological debates, but the impression of her as a fallen woman still sticks (Farmer, 2011: 300). This is illuminated explicitly via Canova's nineteenth century sculpture.

Reclaiming Women's Representation

The continued subjugation of the (in this case, figurative) female body by male artists and writers continues to be a source of frustration, and functions as clear rationale for cultivating artworks which attempt to expose and subvert such approaches to representations of women and womanhood. Christopher M. S. Johns uses a particular kind of language when discussing Magdalene's image in Canova's sculpture. He engages in a process of positive celebration and/or negative degradation according to value judgements assigned by level/s of attractiveness. For example, he describes Magdalene as having 'fleshy thighs', 'soft, rounded shoulders... soft wisps of hair', 'smooth cheeks and parted lips' (2013: 15). Magdalene is, by the author’s admission, an 'alluring adolescent' (2013: 16). The use of adjectives such as soft, smooth and fleshy to describe the physical attributes that Johns finds alluring reinforces the notion that a youthful female body is to be celebrated.

Figure C4.7. Donatello (c.1455) *Penitent Magdalene*

Contrast this with Johns' description of Magdalene in Donatello's *Penitent Magdalen*e (c. 1455) who he labels a 'desiccated, scary hag' (2013: 16). Johns' use of negative adjectives to describe an aged female body suggests that it is something to be feared. This illuminates a male perspective in approaching both sculptures of Magdalene. When comparing Johns' perspective to that of a female author, some interesting differences emerge. Martha Levine Dunkelman, in her article 'Donatello's Mary Magdalen: A Model of Courage and Survival', argues that the sculpture illustrates 'a great deal of strength and endurance', and is representative of 'continuing physical and emotional tenacity in the face of adversity' (2006: 10). Dunkelman steps away

from using adjectives to describe the sculptural figure in terms of its formal attractiveness; rather, she uses language to reinforce positive aspects of character, such as strength and endurance. Dunkleman's choice of these particular words reinforces the understanding that women who exist within patriarchal systems must endure and withstand the inequalities, injustice, and socio-cultural positioning as subservient.

Comparing Johns' and Dunkelman's responses to Magdalene's representation highlights the ways in which differently gendered authors respond to works of art in diverse ways, based on their own experience, perspective, and position. My own feminist ideological positioning guides me in my attempt to re-work representations of women which maintain and reproduce patriarchal systems, instead aiming to 're-write her' based on values I wish to present and promote. In my re-staging of Canova's sculpture, these values included self-determination, self-confidence, and self-acceptance. These are values I work hard to realise within myself, despite my own lived experience in a society which regularly attempts to diminish them.

Responsive Processes in Choreography

The process of crafting *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* was developed in part, due to the compulsion to resolve what was anticipated by the immobility of Canova's sculpture. I wanted to explore the revelation, the resolution, the release of my own suspense produced by the placement of the cloth across the body. I began experimenting by placing different types of fabrics upon my body, in order to select the cloth which best held itself across my breasts, and draped down between my thighs in as similar way as possible to the cloth upon Magdalene in Canova's sculpture. The best fit for this was poly-cotton as it had a tighter and more rigid weave compared to linen or muslin, yet was able to drape with a fluid motion that created the same

type of folds. I chose an off-white colour in an attempt to colour match the marble in the original. I entered the studio, took off my clothes, and knelt down naked in front of the studio mirrors. Beside me was the poly-cotton I had purchased from Plymouth market, and a plastic skull.

I first noticed how difficult it was for the poly-cotton to perch upon the lower part of my breasts in the same way that it does in Canova's sculpture. The sculpture is non-realistic in its portrayal of this, as in reality when textile is placed so loosely at that point on the breasts it slips down and reveals them entirely. When observing the sculpture in detail, I noted a piece of rope loosely tied below the bust. I wondered if using something to tie beneath the bust would help the textile hold up. Not having any rope with me in the studio, I tore off a piece of poly-cotton and tied it loosely around. It did not do anything to support holding up the textile. After various attempts, I found that the only possible way for the material to stay positioned across the lower part of my breasts was to pull the fabric taught so that it strained against my breasts, which held it into position. I used a safety pin to aid me. This changed how the textile looked on my body, and gave the impression of chest binding. I noticed how my breasts also looked lifted and rounder. I felt that this moved me further away from the type of anticipatory slippage of cloth in Canova's sculpture that I wanted to recreate, and was left disappointed.

After positioning myself into a 'not-quite' recreation of Magdalene in the sculpture, I began to consider how I could revise the visual implications of the sculpture. I wondered how I might be able to shift the image so that my audience took a different meaning from the one originally implied. The skull was placed next to my knees, toward my right hand side. I had asked myself why Canova had included a skull in his original, and discovered that the presence of a skull in artistic representations of Magdalene forms part of her visual iconography. It is thought the

skull represents '"the transitory nature of life on Earth" and the "useless vanity of earthly things"' (Ferguson in Rigolot, 1994: 60). Not knowing this at the time I was working in the studio, I began to perceive the skull as emblematic of Canova: the male artist present who cultivated the image, but was dead. Wider still, the skull became a symbol of the decrepit patriarchal social order I continue to exist within, whose grip I wanted to loosen as I stepped forward and situated myself into the frame of the performance. Not unrelated, I also saw the skull as the heavenly Father figure, due to the heightened religious context.

Figure C4.8 Natalie Raven (2016) *sa réécriture [re-writing her] – tearing textile*

I wanted to uncover my body somehow, to produce the revelation denied in Canova's sculpture. I tried different ways in rehearsal; unpinning the cloth at the back, untying the knot, teasing and pulling the cloth downward, lifting it above my head. In the end, I decided to slowly tear the cloth from my body (see Figure C4.8). One of the features of poly-cotton is its ability to be torn in a way that I find satisfying; it tears straight across following the weave of the textile, and makes a very definite and audible tearing sound. This 'fit' the performance, as the tearing

sounds amplified my actions in tearing the cloth from my body, and in turn became emblematic of my own desire to tear down passive and subordinate representations of women.[3839]

In Canova's original sculpture, Mary is sat upon a marble plinth, and I too wanted to situate myself upon a pedestal. In advance of my live performance, I sourced a large wooden pallet from a builder's merchant upon which to kneel and perform (see Figure C4.8). In using this I was drawing on traditional conventions of sculpture – that is, a plinth which is used to elevate the height (and artistic status) of the sculptural object. At the same time, the wooden pallet-as-plinth offered me a defined performance or stage area in a theatrical sense.

Interacting with a Live Audience

Entering the PACE studio at De Montfort University I dressed the performance space as usual by enveloping it with long theatre blacks, cleansing the semiotic palette (this act and rationale behind it is described in Chapter Two). I placed the wooden pallet toward the corner of the room, with blacks close behind framing me as I knelt down; this created a corner stage platform, with my audience facing me end-on.

Looking down

They enter.

Clip clop footsteps on wooden floors

Amongst chattering of

People taking position.

38 Tearing of textiles was examined previously in Chapter Three, during my R&D experimentations for *The Ties That Bind* (2016).

39 The rationale for tearing of textiles in *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* (2016) is explained further along in this chapter.

Zip.

Cough.

The hush descends.

"Slow down, Natalie,

Regulate. Control. Breathe".

Quiet.

Still

But racing heartbeats

Thud, thud, thud

In my ear.

"Slow down, Natalie,

Regulate. Control. Breathe".

Looking down,

Cloth quivers quicken,

Dancing with adrenaline.

Figure C4.9 Natalie Raven (2016) *sa réécriture [re-writing her] – repentance pose, head bowed*

I remember, with great clarity, a moment of difficulty occurring at the beginning of my performance as I knelt in position. As usual, I felt the typical surge of adrenaline rushing through my body (a physiological experience occurring whenever I perform to a live audience). I became very present and aware of this occurring within me, as when looking down upon myself I saw the textile which was covering by body jump, flicker, and quiver to the movement of my heart pumping beneath my skin. The external cloth seemed to exaggerate the internal workings of my body, which I interpreted to be a signifier of nervousness. Wanting to present myself as a strong, controlled, and powerful female performer, I began in my attempts to control my breathing, knowing that this would result in the lowering of both my heartrate and signification of anxiety.

"Slow down, Natalie,

Regulate. Control. Breathe".

I held myself in my starting position for an extended period of time. Linking back to earlier discussions on sculpture and tableau vivant, I understood that extending silence and (relative) stillness in performance would allow my audience to rest upon what I was visually presenting, offering time and space to critically consider. In much the same way that Adam Electric's restricted breath work in *The Machine Legends* drew my attention toward his mortality as discussed in Chapter Two, holding my body in position and allowing myself to simply breathe was an attempt to present my own aliveness. I wanted to labour the point that I was not a sculpture made of marble or stone, but a living body on display. Stillness seemed to become a strategy through which I might draw attention to my finite existence.

On watching documentary audio-visual footage of *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* (2016), I note that during the unfolding of my performance I began to exaggerate my own breathing, although I did not intend to do this starting out. I recall in the midst of the performance becoming concerned that my audience might be bored due to the inertia of what was being presented and taking place. This concern emerged due to my sense that I needed to 'entertain' my audience somehow, in a theatrical sense. Watching myself exaggerate my breathing appears to look ham, amateurish and naïve, and I am disappointed that I was unable to hold space for longer and have faith in the image/s I was presenting.

Process of Re-writing Her

Figure C4.9 Natalie Raven (2016) *sa réécriture [re-writing her] - repentance pose, head bowed*
Figure C4.10 Natalie Raven (2016) *sa réécriture [re-writing her] - repentance pose, open gaze*

Figure C4.8 Natalie Raven (2016) *sa réécriture [re-writing her] - tearing textile*
Figure C4.11 Natalie Raven (2016) *sa réécriture [re-writing her] - shedded textile, upward gaze*

Documentary images of *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* (see figures C4.8 – C4.11) are digital photographs outlining the sequence of events which unfolded in the live performance. They detail the ways in which I attempted to progress narratives surrounding Mary Magdalene, beginning with positioning myself in the image of Mary in Canova's sculpture (see figure C4.9 in comparison to Canova's original in C4.6). s

Immediately I notice a glaring error in my re-staging; I had placed the skull to the right-hand side of my body as I sat on the plinth. The skull is actually placed to the left of Mary in the sculpture. I perceive that I made this error due to observing documentary photographs of Canova's sculpture, where the skull appears on the right-hand side when viewing images of the sculpture. As suggested earlier, I question whether this error would have occurred if responding to the original three-dimensional sculpture: I would have had the opportunity to walk around and witness it from all sides and perspectives., rather than via two-dimensional photographic images.

In documentary image *sa réécriture [re-writing her] - repentance pose, open gaze* (see figure C4.10), I have raised my gaze and begin to look at each audience member dead in the eye. In the same way that I chose to look down the lens of a camera in *Veiled Visions* (2016), this was my way of asserting my own subjectivity. By looking into the eyes of my audience members, I consider that they will experience an affective emotional response (in ways that I, myself experience) in being confronted by a performing subject who looks back. I have come to consider use of direct eye contact in performance (utilised in *Easy Rider* [2014], *Veiled Visions* [2016], and *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* [2016]) to be a useful tool for the assertion of my own subjectivity in performance. My use of an open gaze and direct eye contact in *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* was a way in which to reject the passivity and humility of Magdalene embodied in the original sculpture, beginning to present an alternative image of a woman not ashamed or afraid to look back.

Moving forward chronologically in the performance after my use of direct eye contact, I began to repeatedly tear the textile from my body in small strips (see figure C4.8). Small incisions

were pre-cut into the edge of the textile, so that I could cleanly tear it from my body without fumbling (sometimes it is difficult to start a tear in a length of textile if it is tightly woven). After tearing the textile from my body, I placed it across and ontop of the skull which was sat beside me on the plinth. In this particular performance, I had come to understand textiles as representing the fabric of society within which I exist, historically crafted by patriarchal threads deeply woven. This worked similarly to the ways in which I understood textiles in Nicola Hunter's *A Divine Trauma* (2012) to be metaphoric for the weighing down of women within a patriarchal society, as outlined in the introduction to this thesis. The act of tearing fabric in my performance was a symbolic act in which I attempted to tear down problematic systems and structures, the causation of which had produced a male crafted representation of Mary Magdalene which was at the same time erotically posed (indeed embodying Mulvey's *to-be-looked-at-nes),* and simultaneously positioned in repentance for the sin of sexuality.

In the final act of *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* (2016, see figure C4.11), the textile which had been repeatedly torn away from my body lay down upon the skull, engulfing it. I quietly stood up tall with my hands on my hips, and again looked out across the performance space and into the eyes of my audience in direct address. Afterward, I slowly tilted my head backwards and gazed up towards the sky holding position for a few moments, before walking behind the curtains and exiting the space. Undertaking these acts had various symbolic meanings for me. Firstly, the weight of patriarchal dominance and oppressive control symbolically bound up in the textile which had been adorning my body, was removed. The conceptually weighty fabric had been handed back over to the emblematic male figure (in the form of a skull), sat at my feet. I rejected its (patriarchy's) presence and oppression of me and my body. Secondly, I was stood up tall, completely nude. This act was a rejection of the repentant physical positioning

that Mary had been placed in, whilst at the same time the shedding of the textile (used by Canova to eroticise Magdalene) was a rejection of tittivating the male gaze. Finally, I considered that placing my hands upon my hips presented a strong, defiant stance, as did my use of an open gaze. Looking upwards toward the ceiling was done in reference to looking back at that Christian male 'God' figure, a way for me to acknowledge that

"I see the subjugation of women done in 'Your' honour"

and I am pushing back.

Conclusion

Defining 'performance' utilising Mock's (2000) model allowed me to answer some of the questions which Gaggi raised in response to Gilbert and George's *Red Sculpture* (1976). Mock's model shines a light on the temporal elements which define 'live performance', and allows us to understand how audiences can access the 'performance' via documentary images, in exactly the same ways that I/we have engaged in the performance of *Red Sculpture* (1976) via images shared in this thesis.

Examining the artistic history of sculptural bodies in performance which incorporate bodies and textiles moved me toward analysing a variety of artistic processes and practices, such as live performance in the style of Desmond's tableau vivant, and performance-to-camera via the art of Mendieta. I was also able to draw out some nuanced observations in response to Mock's definitions of performance, as when observing Ana Mendieta's *Untitled 1973* image (which would be categorised as 'performance') I experienced a definite 'liveness' in the static image.

This 'liveness' was cultivated in direct response to the materiality of the fabric Mendieta's body was shrouded with, alongside the blood which interrelated with both textile and body. My perception of Mendieta's intentions and lived experience in cultivating the artwork would remain unknown to me, as the artist has since passed. In order to understand what it is like to stage a sculptural body (my own), I therefore set about developing *sa réécriture [re-writing her]*. It allowed me to fill gaps in knowledge, by describing the experience of performing as a sculptural subject. Up until this point in the chapter, analyses had only examined the ways in which other artists such as Mendieta had used their bodies in their work, from the position of audience observer.

Through analysis of *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* I describe various processes occurring in the evolution of the work, from approaching a piece of sculpture, to how I set about devising through a responsive process, to what occurred during my interactions with a live audience. Knelt on the plinth, I experienced both a compulsion to exaggerate and rush through movements in order to 'entertain' observers, and the adrenaline fuelled quickening of my breath and heartrate. Textiles draped over my chest drew attention to my heart racing, externally referencing my internal physiological experience sat in front of an audience. In the moment, I perceived this would be interpreted as nervousness. Wanting to step away from representations of women as nervous, fragile, or weak, I focused on regulating my body in the performance in order to reduce my heartrate and appear calm and strong. I question why it was so important for me to do this. What are my perceptions of women? Why did I, in that moment, consider that any external reference to nervousness be considered weakness, and why did I relate that directly to my presence as a woman? How *do* I, in-fact, perceive women, and myself as a woman? In what ways have I come to understand womanhood?

Chapter Five

Fabrication, Resistance, and Transformation in *la sainte trinité*

For the longest time, I perceived myself lacking in the department of culturally preferred femininity (petite, passive, slight), standing shy of 6 feet tall carrying a broad and muscular build.

My understanding of self as woman was that I was not a very good one.

This conclusion came as a result of my comparative attractiveness to others in accordance with beauty standards proffered via mass media marketing.

And my inability to shrink myself.

The focus of this chapter is on how body and cloth might be used as part of strategies for resistance, self-actualisation and transformation. The limited confines and perceptions of women and womanhood which are typically associated with the feminine in a patriarchal binary system, left me feeling at odds with myself in a society which expected my inactivity

and passivity. I was born into a strong body, with some rather spirited energy desperate to push me forward in achieving ambitions. I understood such personal qualities to be inherently masculine, and as a result often suppressed and hid my desires so as to be more attractive to the opposite sex (considering myself heterosexual at that time, and buying into the myth that my value as a woman was measured exclusively by my attractiveness to a man).

Judith Butler argues that gender is constructed via a 'stylization of the body' (1988: 519) which is to say, the way the body is fashioned facilitates the manifestation of a person's gendered identity. Butler uses the terms 'performative' and 'performativity' to describe a gendered enactment of self through behaviours and 'sustained set[s] of acts' in an everyday sense, in contrast to performed characters or representations of the non-self in conventional theatre, for example (2006/1990: xv). This differentiation when considered through the disciplinary lens of performance studies and in relationship to performance art, moved me toward considering links between gendered performativity and the presentational act of self and one's identity in performance art. The ability to stage presentational acts (whether gendered or other) in a piece of performance enables the artist to express aspects of their own life and lived experience.

Butler describes gendered presentation as a form 'fabrication', due to the ways in which it is produced and presented 'on the surface of the body... manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs' (2006/1990: 185). Linking back to my research on semiotic processes in performance art in Chapter One, these corporeal signs are a part *of* the body, and generated *through* its adornment and embellishment. In the model I developed outlining systems for meaning making in performance art (figure C1.8), the third 'Artist' column draws attention to all of the sign-systems listed in the first column which are generated by the artist’s body. Corporeal signs are generated via 'Spoken text' (what someone says and how they say it), the

'Expression of the body' (including movements, mime, and gestures), and the 'Artist's external appearance' which incorporates their make-up, hair-style, adornment, and stature of the body itself. These signifying aspects fabricate a gendered identity.

The word fabrication raises, for many, negative connotations revolving around the supposed inauthenticity of that which is manufactured and therefore *not real*. Woven deep into the fabric of cis-gendered hetero-normativity is an understanding that a woman's gendered identity aligns with her sexed body, along with assumptions toward her heterosexual desire for men. These socio-culturally crafted understandings have formed in response to binary systems of classification – e.g. male/female; man/woman; culture/nature etc. – as outlined in Chapter Three of this thesis. This oppositional system forms the basis upon which society understands and has constructed itself. Cis-gendered presentations of self are therefore considered *normal* and *real* due to the socio-cultural assumption that there is an essential female self, waiting to materialise and manifest itself as a 'feminine' woman which works to maintain patriarchal binary systems and hetero-normative social functioning.

Related to Butler's work on the issue of fabrication and identity, Colin Kidd explains how many contemporary historians understand identities to be 'cultural fabrications, which can be imagined, appropriated or chosen', acknowledging that critics have pointed out that although in this regard identity is considered 'artificial', it is still an 'authentic facet of the human experience' (1999: 4). What Butler and Kidd both acknowledge in their writing is that identity, although constructed and shaped by the socio-cultural systems and structures within which humans exist, is an identity experienced, present, and presented *through the body*; a fabrication materially embodied through form.

This chapter revolves around my practice research experiment *la sainte trinité* (2016) which employed the specific, fabricated, corporeal sign-systems discussed above. The *performance* to an audience in this piece as my performed self– which moves away from traditional, conservative, or normative representations of women and womanhood – reflects my increasingly multifaceted, complex, and fluid understanding and embracing of gender *as performative*. The chapter discusses how, through the creation and sharing of new images of myself as a woman in performance, I attempt to re-envision aspects of womanhood, newly materialised through my own body and cloth. To contextualise, I observe the work of artist ORLAN who offers a clear example for the potential of using cloth in relation to the body in *Strip-tease Occasionnel à l'aide des Draps du Trousseau* (1975). Within the semiotic process of symbolic signification, the associations between signifier and signified must be learnt; herein, I believe, lies a space in which women artists can begin to formulate new associations, constructing images which rely upon but also challenge or resist normative symbolic signification. This operates as a resistant method for challenging the re-enforcement of traditional understandings of women which have been reinforced through 'centuries of representation', as discussed via Cixous' writing shared in Chapter Three (1986/1975: 63).

Practice Research Experiment: *la sainte trinité*

Research and Development Phase: Names and Titles

Où est-elle?

Où est-elle?

C'est ici

la sainte trinité

The Holy Trinity.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Virgin, the Mother, and the Whore.

The research and development phase for *la sainte trinité* (2016) began with an exploration of the tryptic and triad. Illuminated in my performance writing shared above are the connections which began to emerge through my critical thinking. I understood the Christian Holy Trinity as God composed of three entities: 'the Father...the Son... and the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19, ESV). I began to make comparisons between this aspect of religious belief – i.e. God as the triple divine – and the triad of socially constructed women's roles described by Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985/1977). Irigaray argues that within the cultural economics of patriarchal dominion, women are assigned value according to the social roles '*imposed'* on them: '*Mother, virgin, prostitute*' (1985/1977: 186, emphasis in original). Irigaray coins the phrase 'women-as-commodities' to describe the process of dividing and categorising women in terms of their 'usefulness and exchange value' within such systems (1985/1977: 176).

As *mother*, women's 'natural value' is generated in/through her labour in 'maternity, child-rearing, and domestic maintenance' (Irigaray, 1985/1977: 185). The production of offspring provided by a mother proves 'essential to its [patriarchy's] (re)production' as a social order, with children becoming 'legal tender' when 'marked with the name of the father' (1985/1977: 185). This is what brings *mother* most value in such a system.

The role of *virgin* is 'pure exchange value', according to Irigaray, who explains that she is 'nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men' (1985/1977: 186). The

virgin, who is owned by her father, is exchanged with another man who thus becomes her husband. Once 'deflowered', she is entrapped as 'private property... [and] removed from exchange amongst men' (1985/1977: 186). Irigaray states that the *virgin* should be considered 'a simple envelope veiling what is really at stake in social exchange', which is both a wonderful metaphor for a hymen concealing entry to the vagina, and a reminder that fundamentally it is the 'desire' of men which is at stake, and upon which this entire social order is built (1985/1977: 177).

The *prostitute* is unusual, in that her value is not derived from her private ownership by a man, but is instead consequent of her 'usage' (1985/1977: 186). Irigaray explains that the prostitute is 'explicitly condemned' yet 'implicitly tolerated', no doubt because she provides a service to men which is in demand (1985/1977: 186). The prostitute's body is valuable 'because it has already been used', and in some cases 'the more it has served, the more it is worth' due to presumed superior sexual knowledge (1985/1977: 186).

Although Irigaray's writing on women's role might appear to be limiting and dated in view of today's diversity of womanhood and social positioning, her text is most useful for understanding historical methods of women's oppression in a patriarchal system. What is key to remember, is that the triad of roles Irigaray focuses on are primarily symbolic or archetypal.[40] Understanding how these roles work (and have traditionally done so) in influencing our perceptions of women and womanood is very useful in uncovering historical methods of subjugation. Residual (and often normalised) methods of controlling and situating women in contemporary society via acts of shaming sexualised behaviour (i.e. slut-shaming), and perceiving maternal qualities and domestic prowess as something essential and inherent to

[40] An explanation of archetype is offered later on in this chapter.

women, can be traced to back to traits embodied in symbolic and archetypal roles. Understanding this, we can begin to uncover, display, question, resist, and challenge socio-culturally crafted ideas about women and their place in society. This became one of my primary concerns in the development of *la saint trinité* (2016).

The title, *la sainte trinité*, was chosen early on in the developmental process, which aided me in keeping focus on the contradictions and/or binary oppositions emergent in comparing and contrasting the triad God with Irigaray's social roles of women. La Sainte Trinité is the French translation of The Holy Trinity, in honour of the French feminist texts to which I am responding. I chose not to capitalise the title of this performance, for the same reasons as *emending eve* (2016); it was a way to move away from naming traditions in the 'proper' grammatical sense, and to reject patriarchal lineage *in the name of the Father*, in direct response to Irigaray's work on the role of *mother*.

Breasts, Material, and Mimicry in Re-Staging Images of Womanhood

ORLAN's *Strip-tease Occasionnel à l'aide des Draps du Trousseau* (1975, see figure C5.1) demonstrates how an artist can embody the social roles Irigaray describes in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985/1977), via uses of cloth within a visual art discourse. ORLAN's performance-to-camera artwork comprises eighteen photographic images presented together in a series, depicting an array of visual representations of womanhood. She uses her own trousseau sheets in this series: 'gifts my mother prepared for my marriage' (ORLAN in Willsher, 2016). In choosing to drape trousseau sheets upon herself in this way, ORLAN rejects their traditional use as the linens upon which to consummate a marriage, marking the transition from virgin to wife. ORLAN's work can be considered subversive in light of the ways in which she resists the

traditional usage of such linens, and as a rejection of the traditional religious practice of marriage and the positioning of women within such ceremonies.

Figure C5.1 ORLAN (1975) *Strip-tease Occasionnel à l'aide des Draps du Trousseau*
Image reproduced with kind permission of DACS

Irigaray outlines the problematic nature of religious rituals such as marriage in her chapter titled 'Women on the Market' in *This Sex Which is Not One*, whereby 'women-commodities' are traded in their passing 'from one man to another' (1977/1985: 171). The trading (‘giving away’) and exchange of women by one man (the father) to another (the husband), links back to the use value of women in accordance with their social roles as *virgins, mothers,* or *prostitutes*. Institutional rituals such a marriage preserve and perpetuate the commodification of women.

Figure C5.2 ORLAN (1975) *Strip-tease Occasionnel à l'aide des Draps du Trousseau* [Detail of second image in series]
Image reproduced with kind permission of DACS

Drawing attention to the second image (reading from top left to right) in ORLAN's photographic series (figure C5.2), we can see the artist recreating an image of motherhood based on typical representations in Western art history. Compare this image to the personification of Charity in Ercole Ferrata and Dominico Guidi's *Tomb of Clement IX* (c. 1675 – 1680, figure C5.3). The *Tomb of Clement IX* is a sculpture in the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, the largest Catholic Marian church in Rome. In both visual images depicting women (photographic and sculptural in this case), their bodies are veiled and engulfed by an excess of fabric, which as discussed in previous chapters, connotes religiosity, high status and wealth. Each woman exposes their right breast in order to nurture an infant child.

Figure C5.3. Ercole Ferrata and Dominico Guidi (c. 1675 - 1680) *Tomb of Clement IX* [Detail of charity]

We do find some subtle differences between the two artworks, which might point toward some of the differing intentions of the artists in their creations. ORLAN cradles a swaddled 'cloth baby' to her chest, alluding to the nurturing of a child. ORLAN's depiction is dependent on her audience understanding visual cues which link a bundle of cloth, with the swaddling of a child. Building upon this, the physical placement and cradling of the bundled cloth up toward her

exposed chest reinforces the interpretation of ORLAN as a mother, and we are invited to understand she is feeding the swathed infant cloth baby with her breast. I interpret ORLAN in this image as representing Mother Mary and her infant child Jesus. The presence of cloth enables this interpretation, via the specific ways in which it is positioned upon and held in relation to the artist's body. This relates to what I was found through the my performance of *Body&cloth* (2015) in Chapter Two, whereby the prevalence of textiles used in child-rearing in European culture leads to significations of motherhood in visual culture.

Ferrata and Guidi's sculpture of Charity by contrast, depicts the female subject with an infant child present and on display. On first viewing the sculpture and being ignorant to the fact that the sculpture was a personification of charity, I had assumed it was depicting the same Mother/Jesus figure as ORLAN. Researching the sculpture in more detail, I turned toward examining the history of artistic representation surrounding Charity. I found that she (Charity is typically a female personification) is often depicted as a 'lactating wet nurse alighted [with] the care of foundlings' (Bullen Presciutti, 2016: 140). Diana Bullen Presciutti explains that in 'iconographic formulations [such as Charity], breastfeeding is positioned as a charitable act, with the woman giving freely of her milk in order to nourish either her own child, or others' (2016: 140). In this case, we find women's bodies used as a visual emblem of benevolence, giving, and the nurturing of others. This evidences historical understandings of women as the more charitable sex, and reveals the symbolic foundations upon which culturally generated stereotypes of women as self-sacrificing and giving of others, are based.

In Ferrata and Guidi's sculpture, Charity's right breast is exposed, with her erect nipple held between her fingers in presentation for the infant to suckle. Her left breast is concealed by her robes. The exposure of Charity's right breast is done so only in direct relation to a clear act of

breast feeding. In this case, it appears acceptable to expose the breast when it is used to charitably breastfeed. If not, the breast is concealed, as in this case. In contrast to this, both ORLAN's right and left breasts are exposed, with the draped fabrics hung across her body loosely lying open baring her chest. The exposure of her left breast, which has not been allocated breastfeeding purposes, directly affects my interpretation. I begin to question whether it is appropriate to simply or primarily situate ORLAN as *mother* through art historical tropes.

I question whether ORLAN's chest exposure in *Strip-tease Occasionnel à l'aide des Draps du Trousseau* is a presentation of the artists own sexuality, understanding here that I am linking the outward presentation of breasts to the internal desires of a woman and her sexuality. Curiously, I *also* begin to question the sexuality of the woman who I understand is being represented in the image: the Virgin Mary. It leads me towards questioning tropes of women's sexuality, and the rigid non-sexual virgin motherhood ideal she represents. The Virgin Mother appears to segregate motherhood from sexuality, and in this case identifies a venerated mother role as being a non-sexual one. Considering the work of ORLAN in the context which she was working - that is, during 1970s France where prominent French Feminist texts were emerging –ORLAN's open gown and exposed breasts might be interpreted as a resistant statement in response to conservative ideals surrounding womanhood. ORLAN herself acknowledges that she uses her body 'to express the history of art' (ORLAN in Willsher, 2016) which clearly includes that history’s symbolic representation of women.

Figure C5.4 ORLAN (1975) *Strip-tease Occasionnel à l'aide des Draps du Trousseau*
[Detail of twelfth image in series]
Image reproduced with kind permission of DACS

It is the presentation of images in a series that allows ORLAN to both express the history of art, and comment upon such expressions in her re-stagings. For example, the transition from what I interpret as the Virgin Mother in the first few images, to the bare chested and hair tossing woman we find in the twelfth (figure C5.4) enables ORLAN to present a more complex and multifaceted image of womanhood, rather than something singular, fixed, or rigid. Linking back to Irigaray's work exploring the three social roles imposed on women, I can assign the various roles *of mother, virgin*, and *prostitute* to ORLAN in her visual presentations. *Mother* is

embodied in her early images where she appears as the Madonna (see figure C5.2), achieved via her use of draped material and bundled cloth child to the bosom. The role of *prostitute* is embodied in the twelfth image (figure C5.4) via a vivacious and unrestrained presentation of a partially nude body which freely reveals the breasts (which are sexualised in this interpretation). The textile in this image appears to fall loosely, which aligns with my previous findings on the presence of loosely draped textiles in the representation of the supposedly 'loose' Mary Magdalene in Canova's sculpture, discussed in Chapter Four.

Figure C5.5 ORLAN (1975) *Strip-tease Occasionnel à l'aide des Draps du Trousseau*
[Detail of seventeenth image in series]
Image reproduced with kind permission of DACS

In contrast to this, the seventeenth image in the series displays ORLAN in a mostly nude pose, yet the artist is positioning her hands in a way which attempts to conceal her genitalia (figure C5.5). This suggests that she is embodying the *virgin* role through the attempt to retain modesty via concealment, and deny the observer access to viewing her sexualised organs (breasts and vulva). The seventeenth image is also, of course, a direct reference to Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (c.1486) reaffirming ORLAN's statement that she is expressing the history of art.

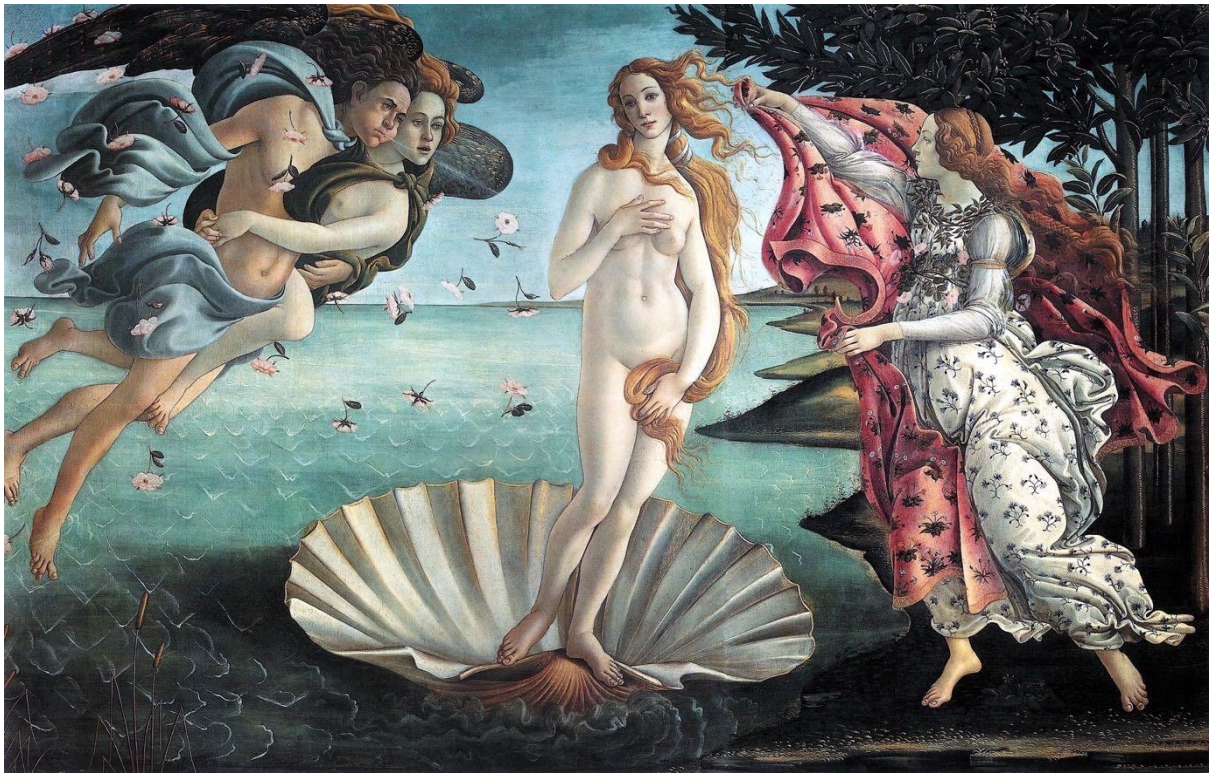


Figure C5.6 Botticelli (c. 1486) *The Birth of Venus*

ORLAN's transient persona in *Strip-tease Occasionnel à l'aide des Draps du Trousseau* complexly embodies the social roles of virgin, mother, and prostitute, through appearing as recognisable figures such as Madonna, Charity, and Venus - that is, as the figures of women depicted through sculpture or painting as exemplified throughout this thesis. These archetypes

exist as personification (Charity), deity (Venus), or saint (the Madonna), with ORLAN transforming into and transitioning between them all, simply by using her body and a length of textile. ORLAN's transformations with cloth demonstrate how key textiles are to women's representation and the iconography thereof in the visual arts. The lightweight, flexible composition of this particular textile (linen trousseau sheets), affords the artist the ability to cultivate a broad range of archetypal images in a most fluid and transient way, forming, shaping, and draping the cloth in various ways upon the body. In light of this, body and cloth (in the form of a lightweight textile) is a useful tool for women artists wanting to express the complexities of their own lived experience.

ORLAN's positioning of her body in the artwork also forms part of a feminist methodology, as it leads to complex critical discourses around women's lived experience prompted by its significance. This affirms Elaine Aston's work, outlined in my introduction, which describes the primacy of women's bodies in women's theatre-making as a strategy for subverting the dominance of *his* lived experience shared throughout *his-story*.

Emergent Transitions via Empathetic Responses to Cloth in the Creative Choreographic Process

Figure C5.7 Natalie Raven (2016) *la sainte trinité – Asphyxiation*

Standing in the middle of the performance space

Reddened, and freshly asphyxiated

Cloth once pulled taught at the neck falls to the floor

Figure C5.8 Natalie Raven (2016) *la sainte trinité – Snaking through Textile, with Dagmar*

Arms snake through lengths of textile as a new self

Bursts

Through

And cloth slithers down spine

The creation of *la sainte trinité* (2016) took on much of the same choreographic process as *Body&cloth* (2015) outlined in Chapter Two; I worked in a mirrored studio space, observing myself playing with a long length of white muslin. In addition to this reflexive process with mirrors, another body was present and introduced into the rehearsal space: my 'Church of Performance' artistic collaborator Dagmar Schwitzgebel (who is referred to on a first name basis throughout this thesis). Initially, Dagmar came into rehearsals with the intention of supporting me in the development of a solo practice research performance, acting as a critical eye and offering feedback from an audience member's perspective. However, it became

quickly apparent that due to the level of risk involved in my choice to explore both piercing and asphyxiation in this performance (choices explained further along in this chapter), I would need an assistant with me for its live showing. Further along in the rehearsal process, Dagmar became not simply an assistant, but a performer whose presence was central to the unfolding of the visual narrative in time and space.

The performance featured slow transitions and movements in ‘sculptural form’, which I found created the same sense of 'to-be-looked-at-ness' I explored in Chapter Four. Restraint of movement was intended to focus attention on the formal, visual aspects of the performance. In images documenting the live performance, I am standing up and bending forward, with my arms and head pushing through a loop of textile (see figure C5.8). The cloth had just been used to asphyxiate myself moments before (see figure C5.7), and had fallen to the floor on either side of my head as I let go.

Weeks earlier, I had stood in the exact same position in front of the mirrored
wall in the rehearsal studio, cloth draped around neck.
Weeks earlier I had had to work out
“What next?”

What arose was an invitation to move my body in such a way that would slowly roll the cloth down the back of body. I manipulated my arms and head through the centre of the looped textile, and pushed my torso outwards and upwards, letting the cloth slither down my back towards my waist.

Pulling with might
To make self slight
Tied up tight

Like a corset

As the cloth rested across my back at the waist, I stood up tall grabbing the lengths of textile at both sides and brought them together to tie a knot. I pulled the knot as tightly as I could, feeling the insides of my body make way for the textile, whilst experiencing some difficulty in breathing. As my performance writing above describes, I chose to tie the cloth across my waist extremely tightly, so that my body appeared odd looking and surreal. Jean Fouquet's *Virgin and Child* (1452, see figure C3.5) came to mind whilst I was undertaking this action. The strangeness of Fouquet's idealized female body shape had left an impression on me, and I wanted to make reference to the historical restrictions of women's bodies via clothing processes such as corsetry (previously explored in this thesis in Chapter Three), but doing so in such a way as to provide an *allusion* rather than use a literal corset. This links back to findings in my first chapter: I am undercoding as a method through which to develop a more poetic form of performance art, allowing symbolic and more ambiguous meanings to emerge.

After loosening off the textile which had been tied around my waist, lengths of textile hung down at both sides of my body and crossed in front of me. Again, I felt an invitation. This time it was to step through the textile and cross it across the lower half of my body (see figure C5.9). I proceeded to bind my body with the textiles across the lower half of my body, tying the fabric as tightly as I could as I went along. At this point the cloth took on the look and feel of rope, and although I was not aware of it at the time, I later recognised reference being made to Shibari; a Japanese term used in modern Western contexts to describe aesthetic acts of binding and tying the body with rope (Jaderope, 2019).

Figure C5.9 Natalie Raven (2016) *la sainte trinité –Binding Body, with Dagmar*

Cloth crosses hips and thighs, drawing together, tied tight, shut,

sealed, secure.

Chaste.

Figure C5.10 Natalie Raven (2016) *la sainte trinité – Pose with Tied Thighs, Dagmar Stood*

Tying the cloth around my hips and thighs had very specific connotations for me. I understood that by binding my legs together I was alluding to chastity, adopting the role of *virgin*. I was representing a body which was constrained by virtue and cleanliness, one that refused sexual penetration. This allusion was further emphasised by the colour of the muslin used:

White.

Snowwhite.

Clean. Crisp. Clinical. Pure.

As the textile pulled tightly around my thighs and buttocks, my flesh began to bulge and spill over the edges of the cloth cutting into my skin. I observed that this drew attention to the layers of muscle, and flesh, and fat which constitute my body. As well as representing virtue via the closing together of my thighs, I simultaneously presented a body unashamed of its own stature, one that does not aspire to look typically feminine: *slender, sleek, slim.* This staging of the 'grotesque' female body in live performance is an extension of what I was exploring in my performance to camera *The Ties That Bind,* discussed in Chapter Three.

From asphyxiation, to waist tying, to the binding of my thighs, my performance unfolded based on transitions from image, to image, to image. What is key here are the invitations I felt in response to the cloth in generating this performance: the invitation to snake my arms through the looped textile, the invitation to step through the crossed fabric. In rehearsal, I was working *in response* to the long length of white muslin in the studio, in response to the ways it fell upon my body, the ways I could move in relation to it, and how that prompted certain actions from me. This practice research performance opened up new ways in which I was working with textiles. In *Body&cloth* (2015), I felt that I was mastering the cloth, placing and positioning it

in ways that I chose, whilst in *la sainte trinité* (2016) I began listening to the quiet invitations the textile offered.

Joslin McKinney draws attention to the work of Michael Polanyi and his notion of 'indwelling' in relation to her practice research examining kinaesthetic empathy and scenography. McKinney explains 'indwelling' as a type of 'reciprocal relationship between the body and the object; at the same time as we are using our body to attend to objects, we notice the effect of these objects on our body' (2012: 7). Applying McKinney's work to an understanding of how textile operated in the production of *la sainte trinité* (2016), I see how the material I used became an active player in the dramaturgical process due to the ways in which it acted and responded to my body, and vice versa. The resonance between body and cloth led the development of the performance in terms of the movements, images, and transitions that unfolded in time and space. Working in such ways can be considered a feminist approach to performance making, insomuch that 'indwelling' offers a non-hierarchical approach to working with others, inclusive of the non-human. The reciprocity between body and object also leads to new encounters and emergent possibilities: in these moments of mutuality, *bodycloth* as a third entity begins to emerge via the choreographic process.[41] As an artist, I dwell in a creative space, a liminal place of possibility, between and within, the two.

Colour, Placement, and Positioning in Depictions of Deity in *la sainte trinité*

Due to the increasing focus on Christian religious art that had been emerging over the course of this research project (in recognition of the abundance of textile used in such artworks), along with my intention for this performance to explore aspects of Christian symbolism and archetype

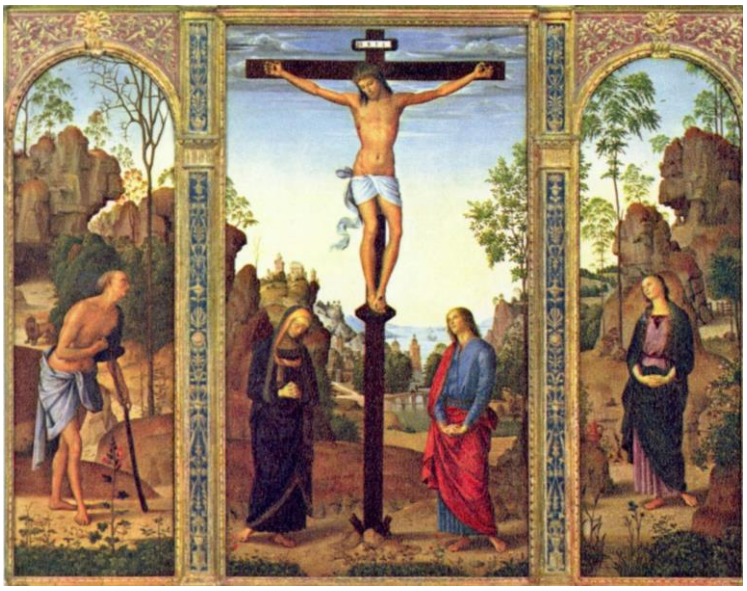
[41] *Bodycloth* as a third entity is examined further in the conclusion to this thesis.

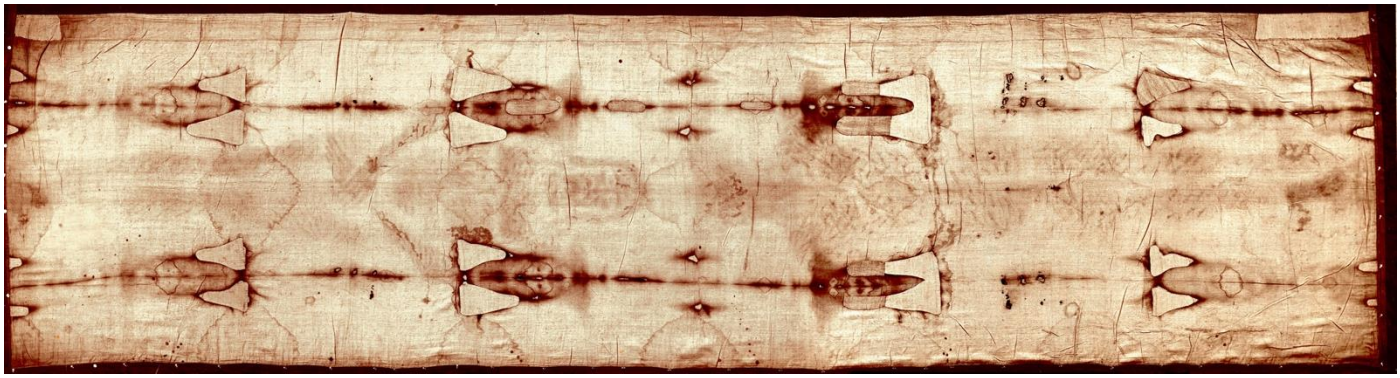
in relation to women's social roles, Dagmar and I made very specific choices about the colour of textiles we wanted to work with. In doing so, we were weaving symbolic meanings into our presentations of self and performed identities, via visual cues in the artwork. For example, Dagmar chose to drape herself in a single length of blue poly cotton worn as a rudimentary garment (see figure C5.11).

Figure C5.11 Natalie Raven (2016) *Dagmar Wearing Royal Blue*

Her head is pushed through a horizontal tear at the centre, hanging down either side of her like a tunic. Tied at her waist is a thin length of white cord. The specific shade of blue that Dagmar wears aligns with the plethora of artistic representation of Mother Mary previously outlined in this thesis, such as Sassoferrato's *The Virgin in Prayer* (figure C3.3) Angelico's *The Madonna of Humility* (figure C3.4), and Fouquet's *Virgin and Child* (figure C3.5). This particular choice of colour symbolically references Mary, and invites our audience to interpret Dagmar's performed identity in the performance. As discussed in previous chapters, our use of symbolic

reference would only be understood by an audience member if they have a prior learnt knowledge of the relationship between the colour blue and its use in the iconography of the Virgin Mary. Whilst understanding that some of our audience members might not pick up on this reference or indeed any of the others we made in the performance, the intention was to offer an invitation to make symbolic connections. We understood that our use of symbol and the adoption of a poetic performance style by way of semiotic under-coding would allow the space for multiplicity, and fluid non-fixed interpretations of our performing bodies and what they were both representing and re-presenting.





Figures L-R
C5.12. Andrea Mantegna (c. 1500) *Christ as the Suffering Redeemer*
C5.13 Pietro Perugino (c. 1485) *Crucifixion with Mary and Saint John Evangelist, and Saint Mary Magdalene*.
C5.14. Giuseppe Enrie (1931*) Shroud of Turin* (Christian sources date textile c. 30 AD; Radiocarbon dating 13th-14th century).

In the same way that Dagmar wore blue in order to reference Mary in the performance, I wore white in reference to Jesus as depicted in Andrea Mantegna's *Christ as the Suffering Redeemer* (c. 1500, see figure C5.12) and Pietro Perugino's *Crucifixion with Mary and Saint John Evangelist, and Saint Mary Magdalene* (c. 1485, see figure C5.13). At the opening of the performance, I am laid down flat upon the floor covered in a long length of white muslin (visible in figure C5.20). This referenced the death and resurrection of Jesus, with the cloth placed upon my body as emblematic of the Turin Shroud (see figure C5.14). The story that the shroud bears the face of God's Son is also referred to later on in the performance, when my own blood is imprinted into the fabric of the textile, bleeding into its warp and weft. In addition to white fabric being used to represent Jesus in the performance, the white colour of the cloth also signalled a virgin persona, as virtue and purity are symbolically connoted by the colour white.

It was not the colour of textile alone that allowed Dagmar and I to make symbolic links to Christian deities in *la sainte trinité* (2016). The ways in which our bodies interacted with and/or were positioned in relation to one another made reference to the positioning of bodies in Christian art history. In the same way that I re-staged Canova's sculpture of Mary Magdalene for my performance, *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* discussed in Chapter Four, Dagmar and I position ourselves like Mary and Jesus in Michelangelo's *Pieta* (c. 1499, see figure C5.16).

Figure C5.15. Natalie Raven (2016) *la sainte trinité – Dagmar Lifting and Cradling*
Figure C5.16 Michelangelo (c.1499) *Pieta*

Comparing the image of Dagmar and I in our live performance (see figure C5.15) to Michelangelo's *Pieta* (figure C5.16), in both cases one figure is positioned above and behind the other, cradling a lifeless body. We drew on the specific positioning of bodies in historical

Christian religious sculpture and re-enacted them, using textiles along with our own live bodies within our performance to emphasise the presence of Christian ideologies on our bodies, identify formations, and performance-making.

Michelangelo's *Pieta* is cast of marble, which means that the lifeless body of Christ depicted in the image is inevitably locked in silence and stillness for as long as the sculpture remains existing in this form. By contrast, in our live restaging of this sculpture my body cannot cease movement as my heart continues to pump blood throughout my body moving my veins, and my chest rises and falls with each breath. Additionally, and something which also came to light in my performance of *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* (2016) outlined in Chapter Four, was the use of live performance as the method through which to both re-stage and consequently transform still images, as it affords shifts, changes, and challenges in response to traditional understandings of women and womanhood embodied within the original art historical object.

The actions and visual imagery that emerged create a variety of complex relationships between us as figures. If considering Dagmar as the Virgin and myself as Jesus, this scene depicts a mother/son caretaking relationship. As Dagmar and I were not attempting to fully embody the roles of Mary and Jesus, rather, externally reference *some* of the visual symbols associated with their iconography, this reading is insufficient; we have not immersed ourselves in a process of representational characterisation, and cannot be faithfully understood as such. Instead, Dagmar and I presented what we would describe as non-binary, gender-fluid[42] beings, displaying gestures of care, support, and trust between the two of us in the performance. In this case, we

[42] The term 'non-binary' in relation to gender identity is used to describe those who do not present as either man or woman within heteronormative binary understandings. 'Gender-fluid' describes those whose gender identity is not fixed or rigid, but evolves, shifts, and changes.

attempt to circumvent denotative signification which would traditionally be used to classify or label performers in the semiotic aesthetic field, resisting easy slippages into the codification of ourselves in a singular, fixed, or rigidly gendered way.

One of the ways in which we presented as fluid and non-binary, was via the shaving of our heads. Dagmar wore a partially shaved hairstyle exposed in the performance, which posed a challenge to traditional art historical representations of good Christian women who wear veils. Similarly, almost all representations of Jesus depict him with long, below-the-shoulder length hair (see figures C5.12 and C5.13). My visual presentation of Him through my own performing body therefore, was not wholly accurate art historically. I came to understand my shaved head as a visual reference to those masculine traits I consider a part of my own identity as a woman – a performative experience of self not rooted in tropes of cis-gendered femininity traditionally associated with women. This rests on the assumption that shorter hair styles (including head shaving) are traditionally styled by men in modern Western society,[43] and that cis-gendered males are the more masculine beings.

Wearing a tightly shaved hairstyle was one of the ways in which I aimed to sever exclusive ties between masculinity and males, incorporating contemporary normative signs of masculinity as part of my own identity as a woman. In doing so I wished to resist the heteronormative gender binary, and expand socio-cultural understandings of what it means to be, and present as a woman. In a similarly resistant vein, Aeriel A. Ashlee, Bianca Zamora, and Shamika N. Karikari use the term 'womxn' in their academic work 'as a symbol of resistance to move beyond a monolithic, white-dominant, cisgender, man-centered understanding of

[43] Shorter hair styles are of course not always worn by men, and in more recent contemporary history hair styles worn by all sexes have become far more diverse. I am drawing on cultural stereotypes of men in my staging of self here.

"womxnhood" and move toward a more inclusive and empowered meaning' (2017: 102). The term *womxn* understood in this context absolutely describes the type of ideological positioning Dagmar and I take, with use of the term understood to describe the gender fluid womxnhood I seek to embody, embrace, and express to my audience through performance, incorporating a more diverse lived experience.[44]

Linking back to Chapter One in which I found evidence of a specific semiotic process of under-coding in contemporary poetic performance art, we intended that our self-presentations would represent non-fixed and unstable identities which leave space for a myriad of assumptions and allusions to be made. By using allusion and connotation in the performance, there is a 'not-quite-knowingness' in how to read and interpret Dagmar and I which enable us to pose challenges.

The Live Performance of *la sainte trinité*

Assuming the Position: The Warrior Archetype

> *It is 1975.*
> *Hélène Cixous describes how 'women will either be wiped out or heated to the highest, most violent white-hot fire'* (1986/1975: 95).
> *It is 2018.*
> *Van Badham speaks of a 'rage that's as hot and thick as lava'* (2018:1).

[44] Moving forward in the thesis, I will incorporate this new terminology.

I performed *la sainte trinité* twice. It premiered at *SPILL Festival of Performance* in Ipswich in October 2016, and was subsequently performed at the University of Plymouth on 9th November 2016. The performance took place during a period of heightened political drama which was making headlines across the world. On the 9 November I woke up to the news that Republican candidate Donald Trump was to become the 45th president of the United States of America. He was running against the first womxn to run for President, the Democrat candidate, Hillary Clinton.

Much of the controversy surrounding Trump's win in the presidential race was due to the fact that he had succeeded despite openly and boastfully admitting to performing sexually violating acts against women, as reported in the press in the run up to election day. These acts were performed upon women without consent, without consideration of the welfare of the violated party, and without fear of consequence or reprisal. In a 2005 audio recording obtained by the *Washington Post* and subsequently transcribed by Penn Bullock of the *New York Times*, Trump boasted. 'And when you're a star, they let you do it. … Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything' (Trump quoted in NYT, 2016). Responding to public outcry regarding his attitude in the audio recordings, Trump apologized and explained that he was engaging in 'locker room banter' (Trump quoted in Fisher, 2017). By this admission, locker room banter involves jovial discussions around the degradation of women, and illuminates how normalised hierarchies of power and systems of abuse toward women are long established with patriarchal regimes. Trump succeeded in openly exposing the normalised quiet mechanics of men's dominion over women.

And so on the morning of 9 November as news broke of a Trump presidency, Dagmar and I woke up with *rage, a white-hot fire* within causing an energetic bubbling up inside our bodies and expelling forth into our performance of *la sainte trinité.*

Figure C5.17 Natalie Raven (2016) *la sainte trinité – Warrior Pose, with Dagmar*

As well as styling my body in certain ways in *la sainte trinité* to explore my own performative gendered identity, and employing semiotic symbols which both aligned with and alluded to Christian deities via art historical portrayal, I also adopted certain physical positioning which arose from my performer training with yoga. On the topic of yoga, tai chi and Feldenkrais in performer training, Maria Kapsali suggests that their use 'is to prepare the actor...in terms of their resources (movement, breath, voice, stamina)...[and] personal development' (2013: 76). As a result of such training, Kapsali states that the performer will have amongst other things, 'a strong on-stage presence' (2013: 76). The control of my own body and its strong physical positioning (both in terms of presenting muscular strength in the ability to hold deep seated squats and lunges, as well as through the embodiment of archetypal figures known for their

strength) emerged as a result of my training, and produced (from my own perspective at least), a strong presence in the performance. Yoga training provided me with a repertoire of movements that I drew upon in the rehearsal room, appearing in my final performance.

Yogic positioning embodies, amongst other things, archetypes. According to Jungian psychology, archetypes are 'primordial imprints' that all humans resonate with, as they are inherited and instinctually understood as a species (Whitney, 2018: 294). Louise Whitney argues that, whilst 'archetypal images may change culturally', their imprinting within our conscious occurs 'prior to environmentally dependent cognitive development or formulations of representation' (2018: 294). This is key, as I have found that cultural representations of archetypes have historically been gendered.

At one moment in *la sainte trinité* (2016), I moved into warrior pose (see figure C5.17), embodying the archetype of the warrior through this positioning of my body. Rod Boothroyd describes the archetype of the warrior as having 'male energy, an energy which is all about taking action in the world, about getting things done' (2018: 1). He highlights how the archetypal warrior has been culturally related to male dynamism and progress. My movement into warrior position and visual embodiment of the warrior archetype formed part of my continued resistance to tropes of female passivity; it was my way of extending socially crafted limitations of cis-gendered womxnhood. My presentation of the warrior through my female body felt like a very important political positioning to undertake, in light of the political contexts in which this particular performance was occurring i.e. the Trump win, what that might mean for women living under his governance, and what it revealed about attitudes towards women in a wider social context.

The revision (or, re-visioning) of archetype is a process that has been useful to others in artistic feminist pursuits. In her thesis exploring contemporary feminist clown practices, Margaret Irving describes a process of 'revision' [in her case, the revision of myths] which allowed the 'archetype… to speak' (2012: 217). The rejection of culturally learnt representations and socially crafted understandings of the warrior in the West as male, and re-presenting the archetype through a female body which 'fight[s]' and 'takes action in the world', allows impulses associated with such archetypes to speak and materialise through a a variety of bodies and genders (Boothroyd, 2018: 1). Channelling the warrior through my staged body was a way for me to externally visualise, for my audience, the type of combatant, warrior energy that I seek in order to continue fighting deeply ingrained and unjust systems designed to disempower women. Fighting, struggle, and strength are all narrative themes which were woven into performance material for this piece.

Body, Cloth, and Materiality

Figure C5.18.
Marina Abramović (1975) *Lips of Thomas* [digital image of performance documentation]
Available from: https://imma.ie/collection/lips-of-thomas/
Keyword search: Marina Abramović; Lips of Thomas; Performance; 1975
Image available online only

Marina Abramović performed *Lips of Thomas* (1975, see figure C5.18) – a 2-hour durational piece – at the Krinzinger Gallery in Innsbruck, 1975. The performance score for the artwork written by Abramović reveals the following actions took place:

'I slowly drink 1 liter [sic] of red wine out of a crystal glass.

I break the glass with my right hand.

I cut a five pointed star on my stomach with a razor blade' (Biesenbach, 2010: 196, layout replicated from original).

Erika Fischer-Lichte reflects on the performance, claiming that it worked to redefine understandings of semiotic aesthetics, through emerging relationships between 'the *materiality* and the *semioticity'* of the performance's elements (2008: 17). Fischer-Lichte explains how 'spectators physical reactions [to the performance] were a direct result of their perception of Abramović's actions...not the possible meanings that those actions may carry' (2008: 18). When Abramović sliced the star into her skin, the 'materiality of her actions dominated their semiotic attributes' to suggest that the physical cutting of the flesh and the responses it generated in audience members overshadowed any type of semiotic interpretation which the act may symbolise, i.e. state violence (2008: 18).

Audience responses described by Fischer-Lichte are self-reflexive; observers imagine 'pain on their own bodies' at the sight of Abramović's blood (2008: 18). This affirms what was found in Chapter One, whereby observing Hardaker's increasingly reddening skin caused my own uncomfortably. In the case of body based art where the human subject is centrally framed, acts undertaken by an artist upon their own body produce self-reflexive responses in observers, which overshadow wider interpretations of the artist in the artwork 'beyond their self-referentiality' during the live event (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 18). In comparison, when observing static images which compromise a performance's documentation, there is time and space in which to critically consider symbolic and referential aspects of the artwork which might not have come to mind whilst witnessing the live work.

In similar ways to Abramović detailed above, I too played with aspects of my own materiality in *la sainte trinité* (2016). The presence of my own blood in the performance had the dual purpose of attempting to cultivate an affective response in my audience (similar to what is outlined by Fischer-Lichte above), and at the same time reference wider aspects of my own

lived experience. In one of the opening scenarios in *la sainte trinité* (2016), Dagmar carefully tends to me by placing her forearms across the top of my head and pressing down into my scalp (see figure C5.19). Slowly and with conviction, she pulls out the needles which crown my head, one by one, re-piercing them through the royal blue textile adorning her body. Blood seeps out of the pierced holes in my forehead, dripping down my face and onto my chest below.

Figure C5.19 Natalie Raven (2016) *la sainte trinité – Dagmar Removing Needles, Blood Spills*

The needles piercing my forehead were placed there in reference to Jesus' crown of thorns worn at His crucifixion.

> *'An excellent wife is the crown of her husband'*
>
> *(Proverbs 12:4, ESV).*

I crown myself

With needles.

My body my rules.

I bleed, I suffer, suffrage, suff-rage,

Rage, enduring mortal patriarchy

Strength, strength, and enduring resilience

A martyr for the cause.

The archetypal hero, Jesus Christ

Womxn in the image of Jesus Christ

A blurry being.

At the same time, the piercing and staging of my bleeding body was a presentation of my own corporeal materiality - the presence of blood symbolic of monthly menstruation which was such a big part of my own experience of corporeal shame growing up a cis-gendered womxn.[45] In addition, the piercing of my forehead and subsequent bleeding was an external visual representation of my own suffering as a womxn existing within a culture whose systems continue to suppress me, my ambitions, and desires. Contextually speaking, the presence of Trump and his well-documented treatment of women in contemporary cultural consciousness led me to consider this action ever more necessary and relevant at the time. There is an multi layering occurring here, via referential allusion to Jesus, the representation of my own (and by extension, womxn's) suffering within a patriarchal social order, and the presentation of myself

[45] I acknowledge that not all women menstruate. Here I am speaking about my own individual experience of womxnhood.

as a living, bleeding body, both symbolic and literal. As Fischer-Lichte cautions in previous paragraphs, it is uncertain that these intended referential aspects of the performance were effectively communicated via my staged bleeding.

The Pleasure/Pain Dichotomy

> *Blood slowly, steadily, seeps down my face. Tightness across my forehead, released.*
> *So fucking pleasurable.*
> *It trickles, tickles down, like warm olive oil, slightly salting my tongue.*
> *Look, here, at my leaking, bleeding, bloody body, staged front and centre.*

One of the more curious aspects of bleeding in performance, and something which I had not prepared for in preparation of the live event, was how pleasurable the sensation of bleeding was for me as it was occurring. I had not encountered the volume of pressure felt across my forehead from multiple piercings before, having not rehearsed with so many in advance of the performance. A feeling of sweet release came with their removal by Dagmar, as she pulled them from my flesh. I then became enamoured by the warm sensations of liquid as it began to trickle down my nose and fall off my eyelashes. As shared in my performance writing above, after slowly seeping downward to the corners of my lips, blood entered my mouth and made its salty presence known.

In feedback I received post performance, one of my audience members commented that they felt agitated and repulsed at the sight of my blood, and had assumed I had been in pain due to its presence. This discomfort is what Julia Kristeva describes as *abjection*, a feeling of 'nausea… [or] balk' at those 'body fluids' which must be extracted from oneself 'so that I [you,

me, we] might live' (1982: 3). Kristeva's theory of abjection is inherently gendered, insomuch that it emerges as a result of our individual psychosexual attempts 'to release the hold of the maternal entity' so that the subject (I, You) can realise oneself as an individual being (1982: 13). Relating back to the connotative Virgin/Jesus narrative entwined between Dagmar and I in our re-staging of *Pieta*, the release of my blood at Dagmar's hands can be considered a symbolic act of maternal release (an act doubly weighted for me, considering the sensations of relief at the release of tension caused by the needles at my forehead expressed earlier on).

Evaluating Kristeva's concept of the abject, Dino Franco Felluga explains that the abject is 'necessary since is teaches us how to set up boundaries… between self and other… human and animal' (2015: 326). There are multiple connections, separations, and disruptions of boundaries occurring in the abject moment blood spills from my forehead; there is a separation of blood which becomes removed from within my body as it flows outward, as well as distance and separation between myself and others within the performance space (both in terms of physical space, and the differing of roles i.e. performer/audience). However, connections emerge disrupting the boundaries between self and other (myself and my audience), as an emotive response rises within observers as they witness the work. Blood as the abject marker in *la sainte trinité* worked as a disrupter, marking 'what I [and my fellow humans in the performance space] permanently thrust aside in order to live' (Kristeva, 1982: 3). *My* use of blood drew attention to *our* collective liveness.

The negative affective response experienced by this audience member was something I had intended via the staging of this act, attempting to symbolically represent difficulties experienced by womxn through the witnessing of something I perceived would be uncomfortable or uneasy to watch. However, there was a clear disjuncture between what I was

externally presenting, and the internal feelings of pleasure I encountered within the image. This affirms what I discuss in Chapter One in witnessing Ro Hardaker's *Plough Your Own Furrow*, whereby the artist's body reddened in the midst of their performance as it came into contact with grass inflaming their psoriasis. Just as I had observed the reddening of Hardaker's skin as a marker for an internal sensation of discomfort, my audience member observed my external bleeding as a marker of my own internal feelings of pain, which was not the case.

Figure C5.20 Natalie Raven (2016) *la sainte trinité – Dagmar Dances Shrouding Textile with Fan*

> *Muslin, slowly pulled over my skin, pauses, resting softly, adhering to my face; cold, wet, and sticky. I rest, breathe. I am alone, shrouded, in a moment with myself. Soft breezes send muslin flicking, flapping, and floating, a delicate dance across my décolletage.*
>
> *So fucking pleasurable.*

Another example of disjuncture between external manifestation and internal states of being and sensations of pleasure in performance, related specifically to my use of body and cloth in the shrouding scene in *la sainte trinité* (2016). Dagmar lifts and positions the textile which was laid flat upon my body, up and in front of an industrial metal fan blowing air in the performance space (see figure C5.20). I remained lying down on the floor quite still, as cool air breezed over my naked body causing the textile to gently dance above me, flicking up and down on top of the entire length of my body, caressing my skin. As exemplified in my performance writing, internally I was experiencing a high degree of pleasure and at the same time, felt a sense of comfort in being cocooned by the textile as it danced overhead, shielding me from my audience and the external world around me. This links back to my experience of wearing a hijab as outlined in Chapter Three, whereby the presence of textile shielding my view separated me from the external world, which brought much comfort. Externally, my audience watched as textile flickered over my body, and blood spots began to appear marking the cloth (see figure C5.21). There were no external referents to my internal, pleasurable state of being.

Figure C5.21 Natalie Raven (2016) *la sainte trinité – Blood Spots on Shroud*

Two things became very apparent to me post-performance, when sitting with and closely observing the textile I had used to perform with. Firstly, there was a change in the appearance of the cloth: bloodied imprints spotted the once clean textile (see figure C5.21). The nature of muslin which I had used in the performance has an open weave, which allowed fluids escaping my body to permeate the knit and imbed within. The cloth in this case acted as a vessel which continues to carry the traces of the blood that has left my body and has entered a new one: the body of the textile. Cloth acts as a documentary archive within which the traces of my physical interactions with the cloth reside. I am present in my corporeal absence, through the attendance of encrusted fluids.

Figures L-R
Figure C5.22 Natalie Raven (2016) Textile post performance of *la sainte trinité I*
Figure C5.23 Natalie Raven (2016) Textile post performance of *la sainte trinité II*

Secondly, the structure of the cloth itself had changed. Observing the blood spots on the textile, I noticed how woven threads forming the fabric of the textile were no longer linear, but contorted and misshapen (see figure C5.22). The nature of the textile in this particular instance (contorted, misshapen) became a metaphor for ways in which to understand *la sainte trinité* as a feminist performance piece. Returning to Rachel Hann's observations on the disruptive nature of live performance shared in the introduction to this thesis, the cloth highlights that even when things slowly relax back to normal post-performance they are not *quite* as was. Neither was my textile: performed interactions with my body had forever changed the materiality of the fabric.

Conclusion: Strategies for Emancipation

Emancipating myself from within the limiting confines of a patriarchal culture, is something I continuously seek. Performance art is an artistic method through which I can safely stage myself in imagined ways, in ways that I choose (understanding that outside designated performance spaces it is more difficult, threatening, and unsafe to radically materialise and manifest oneself outside heteronormative and legislative limitations). Reflecting on the performance of *la sainte trinité* in ongoing conversations with Dagmar, one of the significant aspects we experienced was the sense of status and power we felt channelled within both of us in the performance, in that space. Probing the rationale for this, we found that drawing on visual symbols associated with the iconography of Christian deities such as the Virgin and God's Son, enable us to tap into the cultural stature and reverence awarded to them. Using cloth in relation to the body proved central to this, as the prevalence of textiles in Christian religious art is what allows us to tap into the veneration bestowed on such icons. Simultaneously, our non-faithful

and non-binary re-presentation works as a means to resist the repressive ideals they embody and perpetuate.

la sainte trinité provided me with ingredients for what I would describe as a 'fluid feminist poetic', a practice which incorporates both an empathetic approach to working with textile, and a way of presenting a plural, multifaceted identity through acts of adornment. It adopts a mimetic methodology in order to re-construct images, whilst simultaneously de-constructing its ability to fix and regulate in the mechanics upholding patriarchal dominion. It also draws on the symbolism of Christian iconography in an attempt to ascend women's status from that of the subordinate. It moves, quietly, transiently, in the radical transformative space of performance. Non-fixed. Non-simplified. Non-reductive.

> *Whilst working as agents of the symbolic and iconographic we move away somewhat from the real and the grounded, and yet in the same breath, the blood that seeps from my forehead brings us firmly back down to Earth, as my abject materiality comes into view.*
> *Both real, and ethereal.*

Conclusion

> It can take shape again… childhood experiences of a world populated by animate things rather than passive objects (Jane Bennett, 2010: vii).

In the preface to *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*, Jane Bennett describes a process of estrangement whereby continual repetition of a spoken word leads to its evolution into a nonsense sound with peculiar resonance. In the space created by such alienation of meaning, 'vital materiality can begin to take shape' (2010: vii). Bennett suggests that these spaces already exist, in childhood, where playful encounters reveal the potentialities and possibilities of items, objects, materials, and matter. As adults, we re-encounter such spaces when acknowledging the 'vitality' and 'capacity of things' (2010: viii).

Writing this thesis has led me to acknowledge the vibrancy of matter. In my own case, it is with textiles used in a performance making processes. Thinking right back to those playful childhood encounters I shared in the prelude to this thesis - whirling and twirling with reams of textiles in Nanna's garage - I understand how I revisit these same psychological and embodied spaces, shifting to enter states of play and into curious encounters with materials in my processes of performance making. It was with this same approach that I, in collaboration with my colleague Dagmar Schwitzgebel, crafted *The Ascension of Esther* (2019).

The Ascension of Esther: Practical Element of Thesis

As outlined in my introduction, there is a practical component to this thesis submitted alongside the written document. It takes the form of a live performance documented via photographic images. This performance is fundamental in terms of presenting, sharing, and revealing knowledge generated through the research project. Through the research journey, I learnt that my own process for the production of performance emerges from a series of similar starting points: responding to a political text or situation; the staging of my own body in the frame of an artwork with textiles; performing in a non-conventional performance site or space. I started with location.

Scouting for a venue for this performance led me to St Saviours Hall on Lambhay Hill, overlooking the sea beside Plymouth's historic Barbican. The hall was built in the 1880s to serve as a Sunday school to the former Anglican church which was subsequently destroyed by WWII bombs. Considering the Christian religious threads woven throughout the thesis, this seemed a good fit. Tenancy of St Saviours was taken over by Robert Lenkiewicz (1941-2002) in the 1990s, who repurposed the building to use as an artist studio (RobertLenkiewicz.org, 2019). Lenkiewicz was a prolific painter during his lifetime, his artworks appearing more popular with buyers than art critics according to interviewees in the hour-long documentary *Robert Lenkiewicz: Demon or Delight* (Sayers, 1996). He was well-known in Plymouth, with many local to the Barbican area still aware of his artworks almost 20 years after his death.[46] Discussion of Lenkiewicz does tend to centre on presumed promiscuity in his personal life. "I am not an unhinged necrophilliac littering the city with children" he states with a smile during

[46] I currently work in Plymouth's Barbican area, and can testify to local customers I interact with knowing of Lenkiewicz and his artworks.

his public lecture at the Theatre Royal in Plymouth, April 1996, with a nod towards his reputation in the city (Lenkiewicz in Sayers, 1996).

Lenkiewicz conducts what he describes as "sociological enquiry reports… [which are] large scale, highly subjective, [and] presented visually" (Lenkiewicz in Sayers, 1996). Topics range from death, old age, mental handicap [*sic*], and jealousy, to orgasm, suicide, and sexual behaviour. It is in his 'Sexual Behaviour' series that the artist depicts nude women, often represented in intimate encounters with the artist himself. These paintings appear to objectify women and their bodies, positioned, styled, and staged by Lenkiewicz himself - the male artist - in much the same ways as Canova, Fouquet, and Sassoferrato as previously discussed in this thesis. Pictorial representations of women by Lenkiewicz formed the politicized artistic landscape in which Dagmar and I would be working.

We began with an image.

Figure CC.1 Robert Lenkiewicz (1941-2002*) Study of Esther // Painter with Women St Anthony Theme*

Figure CC.1 is a digital image of a painting by Lenkiewicz which became the springboard for the development of *The Ascension of Esther* (2019), choreographed and performed on location at St Saviours Hall. The woman in the image is assumed to be called Esther. She is depicted sat in a wide, open legged position, perched upon something low down and close to the ground pushing folded legs up high. Swathes of draped red material cascade downward from neck to waist, before stretching horizontally, curving between protruding knees. A strip of white fabric fans out to frame the neck and shoulders, whilst sheets simultaneously scatter at feet. Hands are placed behind the back, and hair falls loose hiding the face. Dagmar and I worked to reimagine her representation by Lenkiewicz, starting with a re-staging of her image in the painting (see figure CC.3 in comparison to CC.1). Dagmar - channelling Lenkiewicz - embodied patriarchal hierarchical dynamics played out via her physical positioning and staging

of my passive womxn's body as Esther (see figure CC.2), and the high vertical position taken up upon a viewing platform. She looked down upon me: her (as his) creation (see figure CC.4).

Figures L-R
Figure CC.2 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019*) The Ascension of Esther - lenkiewicz creates*
Figure CC.3 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019*) The Ascension of Esther - as esther*
Figure CC.4 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019*) The Ascension of Esther - lenkiewicz observes esther*

Re-staging Images: Resistance and Self-Empowerment

The re-staging of images as a strategy for patriarchal resistance and female self-empowerment came to light at various points in the thesis. In Chapter Three, I analysed Cindy Sherman's *Untitled #216* (1989), a staged photograph produced by the artist re-creating Jean Fouquet's painting *Virgin and Child* (c. 1452). Sherman's comedic re-staging of Fouquet's figurative Virgin through use of her own womxn's body adorned with rudimentary prosthesis, emphasised the ridiculousness of Fouquet's original. Considered through the lens of Luce Irigaray and her work on mimicry, re-stagings are able to draw attention to the mechanics of patriarchal dominion through the deliberate (and, in this case, hyper exaggerated) adoption of a feminine style. Exposing the ways in which structural, hierarchical dynamics play out through gendered stylisation and postulation leads toward a recognition of what must be challenged and changed in seeking social justice and equality for womxn.

Themes of self-empowerment and emancipation emerge in Chapter Five, via the performance of *la sainte trinité* (2016). It examined connotative and symbolic aspects of body and cloth in performance art, found to be particularly useful as a strategy for womxn's empowerment through allusion to Christian deity. Specific uses of body and cloth in these instances connote high status and religiosity via its drapery. Their presence in performed stagings of venerated religious figures and archetypes allows artists to cultivate a sense of personal empowerment. Drawing on visual symbols associated with the iconography of Christian deities enables artists to tap into the cultural stature and reverence bestowed upon them, for their own benefit.

One of the potential issues surrounding the use of Christian iconography and the re-staging of its imagery in performance is the resilience of its mythologies, and residual power of its

structures. This arose through the performance of *The Ascension of Esther*. In one act, Dagmar and I enter a brightly lit section of the space revealed by the opening of partition doors (see figure CC.5).

Figure CC.5 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019*) The Ascension of Esther - the reveal*

We performed inside, under, and on top of a wobbly, dark-wooden ladder with worn hinges and thin roped sides. Dagmar ascends the ladder laden with an antique coal bucket filled with water, subsequently pouring liquids upon me from a height as I lay down on the floor below (see figures CC.6; CC.7; CC.9). Following this action - which at times caused me to choke as water gushed down my wind pipe - I get up, slowly ascend the staircase, and pause in a static image at the top of the ladder (see figure CC.8.).

Figures L-R
Figure CC.6 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019*) The Ascension of Esther - view from above*
Figure CC.7 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019*) The Ascension of Esther - pouring*
Figure CC.8 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019*) The Ascension of Esther - ascension*
Figure CC.9 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019*) The Ascension of Esther - splash*

Audience feedback on this particular scene revealed that it was possible to read these performed actions as a restatement of Christian structures (for example, the use of bright ethereal light, a priestly figure, and the assumption of angelic form). These actions however were intended to portray the resilience of womxn existing within a patriarchal social structure, and having to withstand the bearing down of humiliating and oppressive forces. These forces were made visual by the patriarchal figure administering the flow of water downward, choking me, seeking to deny my voice whilst operating as a metaphor for the lack of agency that womxn have within such a system. There is, therefore, a danger in reifying aspects of the very structures sought to be undermined using such a strategy.

Despite this, I would argue that the re-staging of art historical Christian images in *The Ascension of Esther* was able to highlight how the use of allusion might operate a mode of resistance. Once referential images are realised and art historical icons embodied, problematic assumptions bound up in surrounding narratives can be subverted. In the case of *la sainte trinité*, subversions were achieved via a rejection of the binarized gendered ideals that religious figures traditionally embody and visually disseminate, via specific non-faithful re-presentations and non-binary appearance of performers. In *sa réécriture [re-writing her]* (2016), this was exemplified via a process of re-staging sculpture, which allows performers to insert themselves into dialogues arising from the original. Consequently, artists can resist, subvert, and emend problematic implications via performed transformations of self.

Fluidity

The primary theme of the findings of this research project is fluidity. The transformative experiences that were encountered in producing and performing *la sainte trinité*, and *sa*

réécriture [re-writing her] were due to the particular nature of the artistic medium being used: live performance. There is an inherent fluidity present in live performance: it affords the ability to transform images in its unfolding in time and space. It allows fluctuations, transitions, the capacity to (re)fabricate oneself. It is this temporal movement which allows transitions and transformations of re-stagings to take place, permitting resistant capabilities to take shape.

Throughout the thesis, I find evidence to show it is the co-presence of body and cloth which both exemplifies and accommodates such fluid transitions and transformations to take place. Uncut, untailored, unsolidified properties of cloth allow for multiple performative presentations of self to form, which worked to resist cis-gendered assumptions in the performance of *la sainte trinité*. Indeed, rather than a tailored piece of clothing which suggests a very specific way of being worn, there is a transformative quality to cloth; it can be used to veil, shroud, gag, cloak, drape, tie, strangle, whip, clothe, bind, and blind. It affords fluid motion, transience, *slow flow*, in and out of movements and meanings. My performance of *Body&cloth* (2015) shared in Chapter Two revealed the variety and multitude of ways in which cloth can be placed and positioned upon the body, and the variation of ways in which these formations can be interpreted by an audience (data shared in codification table, see appendix).

The ability to transition between different sequences of action in a performance, and in addition transform the performed (and performative) image of oneself via lengths of textile, were embodied and shared in *The Ascension of Esther.*

White muslin hangs from tall steps

Thrashing wildly

As rage-filled legs kick repeatedly

Sending unruly swirls of fabric flying

Figures L-R
Figure CC.10 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - kicking*
Figure CC.11 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - pulling*
Figure CC.12 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - draping*
Figure CC.13 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - tying*

Figure CC.14 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - reigning in*

Descending, textile is stretched across space, draping loosely upon skin.

Standing, wrapped tightly across hips and waist forms

A pencil skirt, of sorts.

She picks up the reigns and

Catches as she falls

Body swaying

Upwards, balanced, falling forwards and yanked back

Upwards, balanced, falling forwards and yanked back

Upwards, balanced, falling forwards and yanked back

Upwards.

Pause.

This particular section of the performance sees shifts in: physical positioning of the artists (Dagmar and I); proximity in relation to other bodies and objects (both performers, audience members, and scenic props); stylisations of performing bodies (via changes in posture, and adornments with textiles); uses and functions of textile (from a swirling mass of fabric being energetically kicked (figure CC.10), to draping across the body (figure CC.12), to forming a type of rudimentary garment (figure CC.13), to providing 'reigns' used in order to keep the artist (myself) from falling to the floor (figure CC.14)). It is these shifting transitions and transformations offered by the presence of textiles in live body-based performance art, which situate fluidity and aspects thereof central to my research findings.

The Affect of Live Performance

In the introduction to this thesis, I described performance art as a non-representational mode of performance, suggesting that performance artists seek to resist and avoid engagement with the type of performed pretence or characterisation processes traditionally used by actors in theatre. At the same time, I recognised that there may well be aspects of a piece of performance art that come to represent ideas or concepts and, in this sense, the artwork would be operating representationally. In response to this, woven throughout the thesis are considerations toward the semiotic aspects of performance art and its meaning making processes, in an attempt to better comprehend the nuance and challenges associated with this particular mode of performance in these terms.

The issue with this, as pointed out by Erika Fischer-Lichte in review of Marina Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* (1975) is that in witnessing performance art whereby an artist undertakes carnal acts, the materiality of that performer's physical, present body takes precedence over what semiotic meanings might be attributed to that act by an audience. Through the arc of the research project, I come to find that approaching an understanding of performance art in terms of representation and non-representation is difficult and limiting when not considered in relation to affects and phenomenological aspects of lived experience in the production, presentation, and reception of an artwork.

In her article 'Where's the Passion? Or, Feelings are Facts, and Forms', author Annalaura Alifuoco considers how the 'practices, strategies, and aesthetics' which induce affects in performance are in fact 'formal compositions *of* affects', to suggest that not only does performance induce affective pulls and pushes in those present at its unfolding, but that the formal elements compromising a performance are compositions of affects themselves (2020: 1). This rings true when considering my own experiences of performance making shared in the thesis. In Chapter Two I described the making process of *Body&cloth* (2015), where - stood in a mirrored studio - I watched myself moving around and generating images with a length of muslin, responding to how I looked *and felt* stood in posed images. In Chapter Five I described choreographic making processes involved in the production of *la sainte trinité* (2016). In this instance, I found myself responding directly to affective push, pulls, and thrusts appearing in the form of 'invitations' whilst 'indwelling' with textiles in rehearsal. Affective draws certainly appear in performance making processes for me, as an artist.

There are also considerations toward the affects of audiences when generating performance material. The bleeding scene in *la sainte trinité* (2016) was developed with the dual intention

of queering Christian religious art and resisting heteronormative binary systems and ideals it seeks to propagate, whilst at the same time staged with an understanding that corporeal abject images typically cause uncomfortable affective responses in audiences. Here there was a preconceived understanding of how something might affectively feel for an audience to witness, which influenced why it was selected to be staged and framed.

Audience affect and affective encounters were also described from my own perspective as an audience member in witnessing performance art works. In Chapter One I describe observing Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* (1965) performance documentation, explaining the ways in which I found audio-visual materials mediated me from the live performance, disallowing me totality of experience. This produced negative affects in me as an audience member, born out of a frustration that I was limited by the framing of the camera's lens. I had no grasp of the architectural features of Carnegie Hall; no smells of furniture; creaks of floorboards; or whispers of audience members in attendance. Affective responses to live presentations of performance art were revealed through my descriptions of Ro Hardaker's work in the same chapter, noting how the smell of grass led me to feel physiological discomfort due to my own allergies, something which would not have come to light if I had not witnessed the performance live.

In Chapter Three I started to became aware of how my own emotional state of being during the artistic residency at Black Mountain prompted me in the making of *Veiled Visions* (2016). In the artwork I responded to affects produced in me by the contemporary political climate in America at that time, alongside the landscape at YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly which incorporated an expansive amphitheatre enclosed by giant, lusciously leaved trees wafting breezes across my skin. *Oh, and that looming 20-foot crucifix*. It was through this artistic

process that I became much more aware of my own state of being, and affective pulls upon myself, not only what I could generate in others.

These various experiences of affect and affective response in the witnessing and presenting of performance were brought together in the production of *The Ascension of Esther*. The performance embodied: a period of development and rehearsal, where Dagmar and I entered the performance space and generated material based on our affective encounters with the site, its histories, props, objects, textiles, and each other; a mindful structuring of the ways in which performance was to unfold in time and space, empathetically considering the ways in which transitions and revelations effect meaning making and potential affective responses in audiences; space within which to stage moments of non-rehearsed 'indwelling' with textiles, framing a live affective encounter. It was through the performing of these non-rehearsed moments of liveness that I understood *bodycloth* to materialise and take shape.

Realising Bodycloth

Reflecting on this journey of research, I newly recognise glimpses of bodycloth as third entity emerging throughout. Helena Goldwater's performance *Funnel of Love* (2011) sees the artist enveloped within a tall, glittering column of red sequins. Goldwater's presence in the performance does not appear in traditional human form; rather, via surreal, sculptural, comedic milky squirts and emergent hairy entrails signposting toward aspects of corporeal materiality. Martha Graham's performance *Lamentation* (1930) stages a dancer enclosed within a long piece of tubular textile made of stretch fabric. Movement artists are choreographed to push their bodies outwards against the tensions of the hollowed textile. The envelopment of the performer within leads to novel, non-human shapes dancing through space. Use of cloth to

envelope, conceal, and change the appearance of the performing body is equally explored by Carly Seller in *Skin* (2018) and Ro Hardaker in *Plough Your Own Furrow* (2014). Their artworks lead me to comprehend sculptural transformations which are *of* human, but not *as* human; non-human, yet fashioned in, on and around the human body.

Similar instances emerged in *The Ascension of Esther*. At the beginning of the performance I am sat in a static re-staging of Lenkiewicz' Esther painting (see figures CC. 3 and CC. 4). Dagmar has draped me in red poly-cotton. This fabric is tightly woven, becoming far more rigid and taught against my limbs when stretched in comparison to the muslin I had used in previous performances. As the performance unfolds, I begin to move and emerge out of the image of Esther. I lift the fabric, at the same time contorting and twisting my body into various shapes and formations. Odd forms came to light: a disorienting combination of human features and textile (see figures CC.15 and CC.16). I had blocked out space for this performed section, choosing to keep it unrehearsed. This was unlike other live performance presentations I had undertaken previously and which appear in this thesis: those were all generated somewhat in advance and went through a period of rehearsal. Here I was allowing myself a playful freedom to explore the textiles I was working with live, indwelling within.

The Red Cloth Sequence

Figure CC.15 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - twist*
Figure CC.16 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - s curve*

I transform into something other. Something else. Something sort-of human, of human descent, but not as human wholly formed.

Torso and legs twist out of puffed up textiles as

'S' curves of outstretched arms drape red cloth cut-across the waist

Of a headless shape (see figures CC.15; CC.16).

Figure CC.17 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - quad of limbs*
Figure CC.18 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - contorted inversion*

Figure CC.19 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - folding*
Figure CC.20 Natalie Raven and Dagmar Schwitzgebel (2019) *The Ascension of Esther - floating*

Quads and duos jut:

Push, prod, and protrude.

Encased within, stretching out

Rolled, lifted, and twisted.

Balancing rolls of flesh,

Framed red (see figures CC.17; CC.18; CC.19; CC.20)

Lost in a process of listening

Feeling and sensing.

Allowing what comes from within to be

To be, with

Textile.

Holding, balancing, and breathing

With.

The 'red cloth sequence' within *The Ascension of Esther* - described above via use of performance writing - offered me creative space for possibilities and potentialities of body and cloth to take precedent, live, in front of an audience. Highlighted previously in Chapter Five in response to my performance making processes involved in the production of *la sainte trinité*, Joslin McKinney's work on 'indwelling' provides a language through which to articulate the playful reciprocities occurring between body and cloth in this sequence, drawing me towards *listening* to textiles, rather than *mastering* them. Indwelling in *The Ascension of Esther* allowed materials to 'speak', inviting non-hierarchical, fluid, back-and-forth motions inside a liminal space between the two. As boundaries collapse an emancipatory third space appears, where poetic forms of performance emerge once more. Only this time, I understand its appearance in

terms broader than semiotic processes of undercoding, recognising its presence beyond, or perhaps beside, the realms of representation. It is under the conditions of fluid interaction between body and cloth that *bodycloth* as third entity appears. Experiential knowledge gained via the production and presentation of *The Ascension of Esther* worked to deepen my understandings of *bodycloth*, and shapes my definitions thereof. At once, the performance both documents my research journey, and disseminates its findings.

In the language of Bennett whose words open up this conclusion, I newly recognise the vibrancy of textiles and their affective capacity to move and sway me, via sensory, attentive, phenomenological encounters. Moments in the performance duly transport me back to those childhood experiences indwelling with textiles in Nanna's garage, where intimate encounters with cloth are shaped by my own sensitivity, sensuality, and corporeal desire.

On Womxn and Womxnhood

Early on in my research process I was faced with the issue of how to conduct and centre research around the reclamation and celebration of my own womxn's body. I did not want to create artworks which felt exclusionary to the many different types of womxn there are, playing right into the type of biological determinism I sought to resist. At the same time, I recognise commonalities based on the positioning of womxn within hegemonic patriarchal structures, which is evident, for instance, in the Western art historical canon. The celebration of my own womxnhood was a stride towards self-empowerment, and an invitation for other womxn artists to take up space in the dismantling of systems and structures which work to weaken all womxn.

Early chapters explored aspects of womxnhood from a clearly cis-gendered position, reflecting how I understood my own womxnhood and lived experience at the time. On a corporeal level, discussions centred on motherhood, maternity, and menstruation, although I realise not all womxn are mothers, maternal, or menstruate. On a systematic level, I expressed how social inequalities affect the lives of all womxn existing within a patriarchal culture, acknowledging here that these oppressions are experienced to a greater or lesser extent based on the intersecting systems of power discriminating against them. As I move forward through to later chapters, my understanding of womxn broadens in alignment with my engagement with literature (particularly Judith Butler and writing on fabrication and transformation) and further reflection on my own gendered performative and performed presentations of self.

Negotiating Appropriation and Reclamation

Something I found myself continuously confronted by at various points in my research, was the need for sensitive negotiations in working with cultural practices and artefacts. As a child, I was both christened and educated in a Church of England primary school. Although no longer a practising Christian, culturally I am one. There are certain aspects of the Christian religion that still resonate with me; typically, Christian religious art and its iconography which continue to saturate galleries and museums throughout Europe.

Because of my immersion and lived experience within a traditionally Christian country, I find that I have a very clear understanding of how the influence of Christianity had shaped my ideological perspective on the world. Through the acquisition of new knowledge and introspective reflection, I come to recognise the problematic ways in which womxn are positioned within a Christian religious framework. Problematizing Christianity by drawing on

the iconography of its art objects and re-staging them in resistant or subversive ways has led me to the following question: am I conducting cultural appropriation via my use of Christian iconography, if I myself am not a practising Christian? Certainly growing up living in a Christian landscape where, as a child, our school encouraged the veiling of little girls in dressing-up as Mary for the school nativity, I did feel a sense of ownership over the use of such practices. They have been used to shape my ideological positioning and the ways in which I had come to live my life and understand my own identity.

It was a different case when undertaking a workshop at Tate Britain, which aimed to explore embodied aspects of the Islamic faith (Chapter Three). In the context of this workshop – which included the presentation of a public performance – the practice of veiling (which I do not undertake myself), felt unethical. Having no embodied or spiritual understanding of the Islamic faith, it seemed to me that the invitation to pick and choose aspects I liked, purely for my own artistic means, would be cultural appropriation. Resisting the call to do just that, I instead set about to develop works which expressed my internal, personal conflict.

I have a different perspective when questioning the ethics of using yoga (a traditional hindu practice) in performance. As outlined in Chapter Five, the training of actors for performance has included the teaching of yoga techniques for many years, and it too has become a part of my own. Commitment to my own training has led me to undertake group classes, whilst it is more common (and cost-effective) for me to quietly practice at home using an app on my smart phone. Because I have been training with yoga, my lived experience working with it as a practice allows me to hope that I respectfully work with it. Training has developed embodied knowledge in the form of muscle memory, which is carried with me when entering a performance.

One particular position in yoga which seems to keenly resonate with my body and its physicality, is the Warrior (specifically Warrior I, also known as Virabhadrasana I). Warrior pose takes the form of a deep-seated lunge, with arms held high (see figure C5.17). I find it very comfortable to sit in Warrior I, with my thighs and core muscles working to hold position and keep balance. It feels as though it 'fits'. In *la sainte trinité* (2016) I adopted the Warrior position and purposefully staged it through my own womxn's body as a means to reclaim it from culturally maintained male centric representations, allowing traits embodied within the archetype to speak through me, as a womxn.

Audiences for this Thesis

This thesis offers a new term: *bodycloth*. It is hoped that this will be useful for practitioners working with textiles and the body in artistic endeavour to better express and understand their area of creativity, and equally those interested in the scholarship of textiles and the body in artistic and cultural practice.

Those interested in feminist art-making can find information about which strategies are available (and have historically been adopted) by womxn performance artists, such as mimicry or the use of visual metaphor to express aspects of lived experience. My model for political art makers wanting to conduct practice research (Chapter Two) will be helpful to those seeking a way through into research territories. Scholars interested in the study of semiotics in performance (particularly body-based works and performance art) will find a re-configured model for semiotic analysis useful for study. Equally, scenographers interested in performance art may find the reconfigured semiotic model useful in specifying which components generate

the production of meaning within the landscape of performance. The thesis also offers such scholars further understanding of the ways in which artists might approach working in a performance space, with a particular sensitivity to spatial and environmental aspects.

Those working practically with textiles will discover a wide variety of ways in which fabrics can (or have the potential to) operate and function in an artwork, particularly live work where the material properties of light-weight textile offers both freedom of movement and the bringing forth of themes around fluidity. Textile theorists, or those interested in sex and gender studies will gain insight into culturally and temporally specific ties between womxn and textiles.

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Artwork

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APPENDIX

Audience Feedback Data Table

	Performance Description	Performance Action	Sign, Symbol, Metaphor	Audience Affect	Performers Outcome	Wider Critical Interpretation
1	you had the fabric across your mouth	[you were] balancing on your toes using the tension of the rope to counterbalance	'the pressure and tension of being a woman'	Inquisitive		
1			Gag	Sad		
1				Understanding		
2	View of front and chest was obstructed by the bar across the mirror	Feeling the body beneath the cloth	"Cloth as extension of the skin"	Torn	Body awareness	
2	Seated on the floor I could only see your exposed back clearly and the lower half of your back	you moved it [the cloth] away from yourself	"escaping ones own body"	Exposed	Familiarisation of your own skin	
2				Vulnerable		
3		The cloth was around your neck and you were walking against it	power	I wanted to run up and release you from the white cloth		"power / overpowering / struggle and dominance of others on female bodies"
3		you were struggling for breath	Overpowering	Panic		

3			Struggle	Fragile		
3			"dominance of others on female bodies"	Scared		
4	Cloth in mouth, tied to bar	Stood on tip-toes	Flying	Removed		
4	Cloth taught		Restrained	Corrected		
4			‘tied to reality'			
4			Freedom	Alone		
5		You cradled the cloth in your arms	Kind of like holding a baby	Fragile		
5			Holding an imaginary new born child	Feminine		
5			The child	Lost		
5			'beginning of life and the transformation into a woman'			
5			"the woman"			
5			The naked woman and the naked new born			
6		You hold the bundled cloth	baby	Relieved		Performance 'undercut a normalised image of motherhood, an instead offered an over-the-edge-femininity which clearly resisted the stereotype of the Virgin Mary or the Holy Mother'
6		Tiptoeing, drop it, and raise your arms	Motherhood	Curious		
6			Maternity	Intrigued		
6			Virgin Mary			
6			Holy Mother			
6			'Precious maternity'			
6			"over-the-edge femininity"			

7	Cloth between the teeth	Straining at the bit (cloth).	Bit (horses)	Crisis		
7	Body strong		Struggle	Humiliation		
7	Body taught		Humiliation	Depreciation		
7	Having to fight		Body of woman in crisis			
7	Body subject to this treatment		Straining at the bit; horse' is a metaphor for 'having to fight...humiliation'.			
7			Having to fight			
8	In form	Body rising	Marbling	Empty		
8	A Lazarus quality to the narrative	Silent	Stone	Still		
8		Suffocation	Ascendance	Deadly		
8			Reverse death			
8			Cord			
8			Spiritual			
8			'ascendance.. Or being caught between two planes of existence'			
8			Fabric as a cord' is a metaphor for [something] 'spiritual'			
8			William Blake			
9	The white is behind you	You asphyxiated with the material	"You are a horse"	Scary		"Fine line between feeling special and be[ing] a victim"
9			Beauty	Unexpected		"tension between the beauty and the suffering"
9			Suffering	Fragile		
9			victim			
9			Selling dreams			
9			Mirage			
10	painful	You walked forward with the cloth in your mouth then transferred it to	statue	Intrigued		

		be around your neck and walked forward again				
10	ugly	You moved the cloth to be around your neck	super hero	Curious		
10	beautiful	As you walked forward the cloth started to restrict your movement and your breathing	self harming	Beautiful		
10	You were "testing out what it would be like to hang yourself"			Ugly		
10				"As you walked forward and the cloth started to restrict your movement and your breathing it looked ugly and painful...This was the biggest jump in aesthetics and it unnerved me".		
11	You were sitting on the floor, facing mirror. Legs also facing mirror.		ectoplasm	Satisfied		I think it was 'about' your body, its(?) tension(?) how it worked with the fabric that was carefully placed for visual impact.
11	White material was folded over you and stretched out to the mirror.		erotic	Balanced		
11	The end of the material was in your mouth		tension	Slightly disturbed (gaggy)		