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Broken contract : the autobiographical performance or producing 'self' in the act of writing a life

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BROKEN CONTRACT: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PERFORMANCE

or

Producing 'self' in the act of writing a life

by

Joshua Leo Sofaer

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth
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or

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Taking as its starting point the definition of autobiography proposed by Philippe Lejeune in his essay 'The Autobiographical Contract', this study uses performance-based research to instigate a number of theoretical propositions which aim to test the boundaries of what is understood as autobiography. While the area under investigation is tightly focussed on the margins of autobiographical practices, examples and case studies range across literature (including J. M. Barrie, Marcel Proust and W. G. Sebald), performance practice (including Marina Abramovic, Tim Etchells and Zhu Yu), popular culture (including Blind Date, Michael Jackson and Marilyn Monroe) and philosophy (including Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida).

The main body of the study is divided into three chapters, each of which deals with a separate instance of resistance to Lejeune's definition. Chapter 1: **Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood** uses an archaeological methodology to determine a model for an autobiography of infancy. Chapter 2: **Namesake** investigates how personal proper names signify beyond their referent. Chapter 3: **The Crystal Ball** explores the potential for an autobiography of the future. In each case the conventions of the rules outlined in 'The Autobiographical Contract' are challenged.

The thesis does not aim to redefine autobiography in terms of a new (or better) set of rules but rather exploits the ontological slippage which is inherent in the autobiographical subject. Lejeune's definition is used (as he himself suggests in his essay) as a subject for study in itself: as a departure point.

This thesis proposes that 'the *contract*' which Lejeune defines is in many instances 'the *performance*' of autobiography – *the autobiographical performance* – the way in which 'self' is produced in the performance of writing a life; that autobiography is manifest through an enactment rather than bound by an agreement. It is a cultural performance.

The autobiographical performance asks us to engage, as writers and readers, as creators and interpreters, with the open-endedness which is at the heart of the meaning of performance itself: as process.

Performance is also that which gives rise to the methodology, structure and case studies in the thesis. Each of the three chapters take their name and their point of inception from a performance project. While performance practice is not the dominant subject under investigation, it is, more fundamentally, the way into each of the chapters of this study. It is performance which provides the framework and leads to the selected case studies. Performance is thus an epistemology in and of itself but also acts as the precursor to other kinds of knowledge. *The autobiographical performance*, which is the performance of the autobiographical act, is therefore proposed as one example of the way in which performance operates (not simply as cultural performance for an audience of spectators, but including and often more importantly, organisational performance, technological performance and linguistic performance).

Writing about the autobiographical subject necessarily includes the writing self. It is the investigation of *my* childhood, *my* name and *my* future, which leads to a wider discourse on the relationship of the writing self to these particular areas of research. In this way the writing always returns to the process of writing itself, to the writer's 'stake'. It is these narratives which give rise to a multiplicity of texts, sources which range from literary classics to contemporary cultural phenomena.

Contents

List of Contents	p.5
List of Illustrations	p.7
Acknowledgements	p.12
Author's Declaration	p.14
Introduction: The Title Explained (word count: 5,515)	p.16
What is the contract that has been broken?	p.17
What is autobiography?	p.19
What is performance?	p.22
What is the function of the key terms?	p.24
What is the relationship between writing and performance?	p.27
What are the sources employed in this study?	p.29
What is the imperative of <i>the autobiographical performance</i> ?	p.32
Chapter 1: Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood (word count: 21,295)	p.34
Research Tool 1: <i>The Soft Trowel</i>	p.44
Research Tool 2: <i>Aerial Evidence</i>	p.52
Research Tool 3: <i>The Thing Which Makes Itself Known</i>	p.61
Research Tool 4: <i>Object Biography</i>	p.69
Research Tool 5: <i>Father/Baby Optical Adjusters</i>	p.80
Research Tool 6: <i>Fort/Da Mother Doll</i>	p.87
Research Tool 7: <i>Aeroplane Spoon</i>	p.93

Chapter 2: Namesake (word count: 25,489)	p.100
1. Naming Ceremony: <i>In The Name Of The Father</i>	p.106
2. Nametag: <i>Meaning</i>	p.114
3. Name Test: <i>Affect</i>	p.123
4. Namesake: <i>Identical Other</i>	p.132
5. Nameless: <i>No Name</i>	p.146
6. Not In My Name: <i>Author</i>	p.159
7. Ineffable Name: <i>God</i>	p.167
Chapter 3: The Crystal Ball (word count: 21,483)	p.174
1. Optometrist: <i>Rod Dale</i>	p.179
2. Face Reader: <i>Maura Bright</i>	p.193
3. Financial Advisor: <i>Alan Dickinson-Quelch</i>	p.200
4. Vice President of Age Concern: <i>Tom Hoyes</i>	p.206
5. Psychic Life Scientist: <i>Julia Laverne</i>	p.217
6. Career Psychologist: <i>Julie Unite</i>	p.226
7. Artist and Illustrator: <i>Robin Whitmore</i>	p.235
Afterwords (word count: 1,926)	p.241
Appendix 1: List of Associated Research Outcomes	p.248
Appendix 2: Performance Flyers	p.250
Appendix 3: Printed Articles	p.252
Appendix 4: Namesake: The Story of a Name CD Documentation	p.254
Bibliography	p.256

Fig. 1 Aerial Evidence, October 20, 1971 Cambridge

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Fig. 2 The Soft Trowel

Author's photograph

Fig. 3 The Toy Trunk (i)

Author's photograph

Fig. 4 The Toy Trunk (ii)

Author's photograph

Fig. 5 The Toy Trunk (iii)

Author's photograph

Fig. 6 The Soft Trowel in

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Author's photograph

Fig. 7 Archaeologist Joanna Sofaer Derevenski fails to dig with the Soft Trowel

Author's photograph

Fig. 8 Beatrice and Joanna Sofaer c.1972

Photograph: Jeffrey Sofaer

Fig. 9 Aerial Evidence, October 20, 1971 Cambridge

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Fig. 10 Aerial Evidence in

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Author's photograph

Fig. 11 The Thing Which Makes Itself Known

Author's photograph

Fig. 12 The Thing Which Makes Itself Known disturbing sleep patterns (i)

Author's photograph

Fig. 13 The Thing Which Makes Itself Known disturbing sleep patterns (ii)

Author's photograph

Fig. 14 The Thing Which Makes Itself Known in

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Author's photograph

Fig. 15 The Object Biography

Author's photograph

Fig. 16 The Circumcision Table

Photograph: Beatrice Sofaer

Fig. 17 Sister and Mother in bed, Jerusalem c.1981

Author's photograph

Fig. 18 Two pillowcases

Author's photograph

Fig. 19 The Object Biography in

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Author's photograph

Fig. 20 The Father/Baby Optical Adjusters

Author's photograph

Fig. 21 The bathroom photograph

Photograph: Jeffrey Sofaer

Fig. 22 Bathroom digital recreation: general view

Archaeological Illustrator: John Swogger

Fig. 23 Bathroom photograph 2000

Photograph: Joanna Sofaer Derevenski

Fig. 24 Bathroom digital recreation: mother view

Archaeological Illustrator: John Swogger

Fig. 25 Bathroom digital recreation: daughter view

Archaeological Illustrator: John Swogger

Fig. 26 Bathroom digital recreation: baby view

Archaeological Illustrator: John Swogger

Fig. 27 Bathroom digital recreation: father/photographer view

Archaeological Illustrator: John Swogger

Fig. 28 Bathroom digital recreation: blurred baby view

Archaeological Illustrator: John Swogger

Fig. 29 Joanna Sofaer Derevenski wearing the Father/Baby Optical Adjusters

Author's photograph

Fig. 30 Joshua Sofaer wearing the Father/Baby Optical Adjusters

Photograph: Joanna Sofaer Derevenski

Fig. 31 The Father/Baby Optical Adjusters in

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Author's photograph

Fig. 32 The Fort/Da Mother Doll

Author's photograph

Fig. 33 Joshua Sofaer with The Fort/Da Mother Doll (i)

Author's photograph

Fig. 34 Joshua Sofaer with The Fort/Da Mother Doll (ii)

Author's photograph

Fig. 35 Joshua Sofaer with The Fort/Da Mother Doll (iii)

Author's photograph

Fig. 36 Joshua Sofaer with The Fort/Da Mother Doll (iv)

Author's photograph

Fig. 37 Joshua Sofaer with The Fort/Da Mother Doll (v)

Author's photograph

Fig. 38 Joshua Sofaer with The Fort/Da Mother Doll (vi)

Author's photograph

Fig. 39 Joshua Sofaer with The Fort/Da Mother Doll (vii)

Author's photograph

Fig. 40 The Fort/Da Mother Doll in

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Author's photograph

Fig. 41 The Aeroplane Spoon

Author's photograph

Fig. 42 Joshua Sofaer being fed with the Aeroplane Spoon

Author's photograph

Fig. 43 'Your hand under his arm, your wrists supporting his head'

Illustration by Dorothea Fox from *Baby and Child Care* by Benjamin Spock, illus.

by Dorothea Fox (London: Bodley Head, 1969)

Fig. 44 The bathroom photograph

Photograph: Jeffrey Sofaer

Fig. 45 The Aeroplane Spoon in

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Author's photograph

Fig. 46 Sofaer General Merchants and Commission Agents,

Rangoon, Burma c.1908

Carlsberg Archive: Copyright Reserved

Fig. 47 Joshua Sofaer UK and Joshua Sofaer USA

Photograph: Charlie Pulford

Fig. 48 The Crystal Ball

Author's photograph

Fig. 49 Rod Dale

Author's photograph

Fig. 50 The Title Page of Chapman's *Odyssey* c.1614

Fig. 51 Advertising Flyer for Second Sight

Sharon Neill: Copyright Reserved

Fig. 52 Derek Jarman: Diary Entry 12 May 1991

Courtesy Keith Collins: Copyright The Estate of Derek Jarman

Fig. 53 Derek Jarman: Diary Entry 2 December 1993

Courtesy Keith Collins: Copyright The Estate of Derek Jarman

Fig. 54 Maura Bright

Author's photograph

Fig. 55 Robert Mapplethorpe Self Portrait 1988

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Fig. 56 Robert Mapplethorpe Self Portrait 1978

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Fig. 57 Alison Jackson 'Marilyn' 2003

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Fig. 58 Alison Jackson 'Diana & Dodi' 2003

Alison Jackson: Copyright Reserved

Fig. 59 Alan Dickinson-Quelch

Author's photograph

Fig. 60 Tom Hoyes

Author's photograph

Fig. 61 Julia Laverne

Author's photograph

Fig. 62 Julie Unite

Author's photograph

Fig. 63 Robin Whitmore

Author's photograph

Fig. 64 Where would you like to be in ten years time?

Illustration by Robin Whitmore

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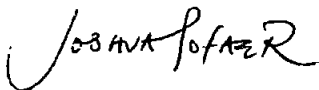
Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

The study was financed with the aid of funding from Nottingham Trent University from 2000 to 2002 and latterly by three successive fee bursaries from Dartington College of Arts.

The research has provided opportunities for outcomes separate from this thesis, manifest in performances, conferences and publications. A full list of these can be found in Appendix 1.

While the full body of this text, excluding clearly indicated quotations, is the author's own, acknowledgement should be made of the contribution by Dr Joanna Sofaer Derevenski to the research project which led to the first chapter of this study. The benefit from this research has been jointly felt. Dr Sofaer Derevenski has presented her findings separately to the archaeology community. The joint research process itself is outlined in the introduction to the chapter and all quotes from her are directly referenced.

Signed: 

Dated: 28 . 02 . 2005

Anything is an autobiography but this was a conversation.

Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*.

Introduction: The Title Explained

Autobiography is not a guessing game.
Philippe Lejeune¹

...the more the genre gets written about, the less
agreement there seems to be on what it properly includes.
William Spengeman²

We cannot tolerate the ambiguity of human existence,
and we thus provide ourselves with icons of experience and reality.
Mary Evans³

What is the contract that has been broken?

The contract which has, according to the title of this study, been broken, is the contract proposed by Philippe Lejeune in his essay 'The Autobiographical Contract', published in English translation in 1982⁴.

In this essay, which offers an ontology of autobiography, Lejeune defines the genre as follows:

...a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focussing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality.⁵

Lejeune goes on to break down this definition into four different conditions:

1. Linguistic form: (a) narrative; (b) prose

¹ Philippe Lejeune 'The Autobiographical Contract' in *French Literary Theory Today* ed. by Tzvetan Todorov, trans. by R. Carter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) p.202. Excerpted from the French original *Le pacte autobiographique* by Philippe Lejeune (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1975).

² William Spengeman, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (London: Yale University Press, 1980) p.xi

³ Mary Evans, *Missing Persons: The impossibility of auto/biography* (London: Routledge, 1999) p.143

⁴ The French original, which Lejeune first had published in 1975, refers not to a contract – un contrat – but rather to a pact – un pacte – and is excerpted from a book of the same name: *Le pacte autobiographique*. The entire book remains unpublished in English. It is divided into three sections: 1. Le pacte ('Le pacte autobiographique', which is the section translated), 2. Lecture (essays on Rousseau, Gide, Sartre and Leiris), and 3. Histoire ('Autobiographie et histoire littéraire'). While both in English and in French the contract/contrat and the pact/pacte are forms of agreement, the contract/contrat has the added expectation of a covenant with legal effects. In other words it could be argued that the force and emphasis of the English 'contract' overburdens the intention of the French 'pacte'. It must be admitted then (from the start) that the title of this study is based on a rather infelicitous translation from French into English. But while it would be possible to argue that one can not break a contract that has not been signed, whether or not Lejeune invokes a friendly pact or a full-scale legal contract, his definition of autobiography remains consistent. It is that definition which produces the resistance in this study.

⁵ Lejeune p.193

2. Subject treated: individual life, personal history
3. Situation of the author: author (whose name designates a real person) and narrator are identical.
4. Position of the narrator: (a) narrator and protagonist are identical; (b) narration is retrospectively oriented.⁶

According to Lejeune, two of these conditions are a matter of "all or nothing", which means that they must be fulfilled in order for the writing in question to be considered autobiography. They are conditions (3) and (4a), in other words that the author and the narrator are identical and that the narrator and the protagonist are identical⁷.

This gives rise to what Lejeune proposes as the *autobiographical contract*:

The autobiographical contract is the affirmation in the text of this identity [of the author, narrator and protagonist], referring in the last resort to the *name* of the author on the cover.⁸

Lejeune is insistent that the name on the cover of the text should also refer to the narrator and protagonist of the content (which, note, implies there will be a name, a cover and a text).⁹

It is the conventions of these rules and their contractual obligation that this study wishes to explore, with reference to three specific areas: infancy, the personal proper name, and the future.

If, as according to Lejeune's general definition, an autobiography is an account of the creator's "own existence", which focuses on their "individual life" and "in particular on the development" of their personality, what might an autobiography of early childhood be? If infancy precedes the establishment of the prefrontal lobe and our access to long-term memory, how do we account for the development of our personality at this fundamental

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Straight away we can identify examples to the contrary. *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* by Gertrude Stein contravenes both of these conditions.

⁸ Lejeune p.202

⁹ For a detailed account of paratextual matters, see *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* by Gerard Genette, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

stage? Chapter 1: **Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood** explores the possibility of an autobiography of infancy.

If, as according to Lejeune's contract, the name is the crucial operator in the manufacture of an autobiography, the "last resort" of its ontology, what does that name contribute, how does it signify, and what happens if it is not present? Chapter 2: **Namesake** explores the affects of the personal proper name in relation to the writing self.

If, as according to Lejeune's conditions, the narration of an autobiography must be "retrospectively oriented" then what might an autobiography of the future be? Lejeune does allow some flexibility in his general conditions, for genres he describes as "close to autobiography" (and thus implied as *not*, or separate from, autobiography). The exceptions are listed as follows, with the rule they contravene in brackets:

...memoirs: (2); biography: (4a); first person novel: (3); autobiographical poem: (1b); diary: (4b); self-portrait or essay: (1a and 4b).

So diary writing and the self-portrait or essay are given as examples of almost-but-not-quite autobiography that contravene the 4b rule. They are forms of writing in which the author narrator may describe not just the past – what has happened to them – but also the present – what *is* happening to them, what they feel, what they want. Lejeune highlights these exceptions to the "retrospectively oriented" 4b rule because they exist as genres at the margins of autobiography. But even these examples, which allow for a present tense as well as a past tense, exclude, or at least neglect, the possibility of a future tense. Chapter 3: **The Crystal Ball** explores the potential for an autobiography of the future.

What is autobiography?

Of all the genres of literature, autobiography has to be the most contested. In the history of literary criticism it is a relatively new study and while it has been recuperated, it is rarely

given an elevated status in the literary hierarchy. Often it is interpreted (and created) with an associated discipline, lumped in with therapeutic, psychoanalytic, social anthropological, or historical perspectives. It is accorded a status where its merit is frequently non-artistic.

The problem of defining autobiography remains as unsettled today as it was in the first critical analyses of the genre, which can be traced back to Georges Gusdorf's article 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' first published in French in 1956¹⁰, Roy Pascal's book *Design and Truth in Autobiography* of 1960, Philippe Lejeune's 1971 publication *L'autobiographie en France* which was adapted to become *Le pacte autobiographique* four years later, and *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* by Elizabeth Bruss published in 1976. The emergence of autobiography as a topic for literary studies has been traced by James Olney in his edited volume of 1980 *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* and particularly in his own essay as part of the volume 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction'¹¹. As Olney demonstrates, part of the problem of establishing a series of rules by which we can identify the genre of autobiography, is that the writers of autobiographies have no rule systems in which to work:

...there are no rules or formal requirements binding the prospective autobiographer – no restraints, no necessary models, no obligatory observances gradually shaped out of a long developing tradition and imposed by that tradition on the individual talent who would translate a life into writing.¹²

This lack of rules or requirements for autobiographers has not stopped critics retrospectively defining the genre through rule systems. Lejeune is not the only one to do

¹⁰ Georges Gusdorf, 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' trans. by James Olney in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 28-48. Originally published in French as 'Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie' in 1956

¹¹ For a very comprehensive bibliography of early critical studies of autobiography see 'The Study of Autobiography: A Bibliographical Essay' in Spengeman. This seventy-five page bibliography is not exhaustive but certainly gives all key texts associated with the genre up until the essay's publication in 1980.

¹² James Olney, 'Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction' in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* ed. by James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) p.3

this. Though not as precise in her boundaries as Lejeune, Elizabeth Bruss sets out a system of three rules with various clauses and sub-clauses, which similarly to her French colleague, argue for the consistent identity between the author, narrator and protagonist ("source and subject matter") and for the "truth-value" in the text, both in terms of its creation by the author and its reception by the reader¹³. But even Bruss needs to admit (although she does so in parenthesis) that:

The rules of autobiography are after all such that we can read any text symptomatically, and even delight in our ability to see what an author busily engaged in his task cannot.¹⁴

In other words, whether or not a writer sets out to write an autobiography, whatever it is that makes that writing autobiographical, it is betrayed by the relationship between the author and their text.

The problem of forming a definition of autobiography is that it always seems possible to find examples which do not correspond to the definition but that we nevertheless read as autobiographical, or conversely which do correspond to the larger part of the definition but fit more happily into another genre. On the one hand theorists claim that autobiography is *impossible* ('The search for the 'real' person is doomed to disappointment, for the two very good reasons that no 'real' person actually exists, and cannot be contained, let alone represented, in print'¹⁵) and on the other that *everything* is autobiography, inasmuch as it issues from the life of its creator, not least because the writing itself creates the life¹⁶. In other words, as Gusdorf wrote in his seminal article, 'it is itself a meaning in the life'¹⁷.

¹³ See Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976) pp.8, 10-11

¹⁴ Ibid. p.20

¹⁵ Evans p.138. As early as 1960 Roy Pascal wrote: 'I do not think one can evade the conclusion that the supreme task of autobiography is not fulfilled in modern autobiography.' Roy Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (London: Grand Publishing, Inc., 1960) p.12

¹⁶ This is not just the case for writing. As Barry Schwabsky observes: 'Whereas a Modernist like Barnett Newman could claim, "We are making [our work] out of ourselves," today's painters might with more justice say, "We make ourselves out of our work".' Barry Schwabsky, *Vitamin P* (London: Phaidon Press, 2002) p.7

¹⁷ Gusdorf in Olney p.43

It is not the purpose of this study to support or deny the relevance or accuracy of any of these understandings of what autobiography is, nor even to interrogate them in any detail. Part of the efficacy of working with the autobiographical subject is precisely the ontological slippage which defines it. The reductive 'fixing' of that subject is the last ambition of a project which hopes to explore its potential. Rather the centre is used to explore the boundaries and limits; Lejeune's definition is used as a point from which to shoot an arrow to see where it might land.

Perhaps the most useful definition of autobiography for the purposes of this study is that from the root – self (autos), life (bios), writing (graphie) – although there are times when the other writes rather than the self, times when it is death that is the subject rather than life, and times when the text is an image rather than writing¹⁸.

This study explores (and perhaps to a degree presumes) *the autobiographical performance* rather than *the autobiographical contract*; that autobiography is manifest through an enactment rather than bound by an agreement.

What is performance?

As Jon McKenzie convincingly argues in his general theory of performance *Perform or Else*, performance is to contemporary society what discipline was to that of the nineteenth century. From the global ramifications of party and nation politics to the esoteric world of live art, from the tragic spectacular of international terrorism to the undergraduate drama student, from the stock-market to soap-opera, from high performance drugs to performance studies – 'performance' is *the* modus operandi of contemporary culture. It seems now that there is *only* performance.

¹⁸ The use of the word 'text' in this context is thus intended to stretch beyond the written document to encompass other forms of creation and include for example, film, theatre, television and the visual arts. See Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text' in *Image Music Text* by Roland Barthes (London: Fontana Press, 1977).

McKenzie identifies three major paradigms of performance in his study¹⁹:

Performance Management: the organisational performance of economic power evaluated in terms of profit and loss.

Performance Studies: the cultural performance of tradition and transformation embodied in the living moment.

Techno-Performance: the technological performance of the stuff that surrounds us from air fresheners to eyeliners, but with a specific focus on computer technologies.

The autobiographical performance necessarily meets all three of these performance paradigms.

Autobiography's organisational performance is marked by its commercial popularity. Sales of autobiography titles are at their highest recorded levels. In 2002 in the UK alone, a revenue of £54,134,320 was earned from sales of 5,670,959 units. Sales of autobiography titles represent 5% of the market sales and 3.9% of its volume, making it the fifth most valuable book category after fiction, children's literature, mind-body-spirit, and travel²⁰.

Autobiography's cultural performance lies in its recording of embodied moments of a life but also more specifically, as this study aims to attest, autobiography as cultural performance. In other words the creation and reception of autobiography as a form of performed cultural production. This has particular focus in this study where the impetus for the areas of investigation is performance practice itself. As is described below, it is performance research which activates the discussion of what *the autobiographical*

¹⁹ He identifies others, referring in passing to, for example, linguistic and philosophical performances. He necessarily draws on these other paradigms in his general discussion.

²⁰ See Jeremy Neate and Sarah Percival eds, *Book Sales Yearbook: The Year in Detail* (London: Bookseller Publications / Nielsen BookScan, 2003)

performance might be. It is thus that the cultural performance is both form and content; both methodology and subject.

Autobiography's technological performance is exemplified by its many modes of production, including online blogs²¹, performance practices, the printed page, visual arts, body adornment, the domestic environment, plastic surgery, to highlight but a few. These are all modes of production which are reliant on effective technological performances.

Alongside these three paradigms additional mention must be made of the linguistic performance, exemplified by J. L. Austin's work on the performative utterance. Here the written or spoken word constitutes an action – a performance – rather than simply describing it. In the complex relationship between lived experience and the autobiographical text, the word as action plays central stage in the investigations of this study.

What is the function of the key terms?

Even within the discipline of Performance Studies (let alone across the disciplines of Cultural Studies, Philosophy and Linguistics) there is a diversity in the semantic application of the key vocabulary: performance, performative and performativity. A brief look at the usage in three contemporaneous texts exemplifies this diversity.

In *The Radical In Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*, Baz Kershaw identifies 'performance' as something that is opposed to theatre – something that does not come with the teleological restrictions of that tradition – something outside the black box but that is nevertheless a genre of cultural production.

²¹ A 'blog' is a web log, that is an online diary or journal.

The 'performative' for Kershaw is something that is of, or pertains to, performance. It is employed as an adjective to invest the noun with qualities that we would associate with the putting on of certain kinds of performance trope. An example:

So modern democracies [...] may be described with some accuracy as *performative democracies* in order to indicate how fully they rely upon various types of performance for the maintenance of their political processes and social structures.²²

In *Performing the Body / Performing the Text* however, the editors Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson, identify the 'performative' as a noun itself. It marks a methodology which need not necessarily be connected with performance at all.

The notion of the performative highlights the open-endedness of interpretation, which must thus be understood as a *process* rather than an act with a final goal, and acknowledges the ways in which the circuits of desire and pleasure are at play in the complex web of relations among artists, patrons, collectors, and both specialized and non-specialized viewers.²³

The 'performative' in this context is not then about the theatrical notion of putting something on – of choice – but rather a process of reading and understanding. It is a gestural and interpretive schema that takes place in language, a schema that is an increasingly prevalent mode of study in the humanities and issues from J. L. Austin's work on the performative utterance.

The 'performance' here is still the act – the 'deeds done'²⁴ as Peggy Phelan has said, but this action is not limited or restricted by the boundaries of genre or cultural production – certainly not (necessarily) theatrical in intention, and rather very possibly simply an every day gesture.

²² Baz Kershaw, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (London: Routledge, 1999) p.13

²³ Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson eds, *Performing the Body: Performing the Text* (London: Routledge, 1999) p.1

²⁴ 'After Mourning Sex: Peggy Phelan in conversation with Irit Rogoff' in Henry Rogers and David Burrows eds, *Making a Scene* (Birmingham: ARTicle Press, 2001) p.133

In *Performing the Unnameable: An Anthology of Australian Performance Texts*, the editors James Allen and Karen Pearlman use the term 'performance' in place of what might otherwise be termed experimental theatre. In their forward they write:

We decided, with some regret, not to deal with performance art, performance poetry or sound art. Instead the book would focus on performance works most often presented in theatres and of a set duration.²⁵

This understanding of performance is not consistent with the others even from a formal understanding of genre, where the whole point of performance is that it takes place outside the theatre space.

I do not argue for a right or wrong and especially not for a singular definition; rather this study embraces this semantic slippage which is symptomatic of the hybridisation of what have been historically understood as the separate disciplines of Theatre, Visual Art and Writing, which now come together in Performance Studies. Everything can be a 'performance' – so performance acts as an umbrella term for a variety of cultural practices and ways of thinking.

The 'performance' of *the autobiographical performance* then, necessarily engages all these potential meanings. But while the performance in question may be a staged event in a black box theatre space, it is more likely that it references the 'open-endedness of interpretation', 'as a *process*, rather than an act with a final goal', to re-quote Jones and Stephenson.

The autobiographical performance asks us to engage, as writers and readers, as creators and interpreters, with this open-endedness, an open-endedness which is at the heart of the meaning of performance itself.

²⁵ James Allen and Karen Pearlman eds, *Performing the Unnameable: An Anthology of Australian Performance Texts* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1999) p.xiv

The relationship between performance practice and *this* text should also be introduced. Each chapter of this study has been conceived through, with or as a result of, a performance work.

What is the relationship between writing and performance?

Over the last decade much has been made of the 'coming together' – the interdependency – of theory and practice, especially in the institutions which teach and research art, design, performance and drama. This approach, which has struggled for a name, seems to issue from a false premise²⁶. At a cultural moment when everything from fashion to philosophy is founded on concept and idea it is surely a misnomer to separate out (in order to bring together) the 'theory' and 'practice' of the creation of art which is increasingly based in thought and argument. There is no practice without theory; there is no theory without practice. The position that practice without theory is 'craft' becomes redundant in light of the theoretical propositions posed by contemporary design practices (architecture, product, graphic, fashion etc.) which are now at the forefront of critical thinking. Of course it is as easy to find works that are 'empty' of theoretical content, as it is to talk up the same works in terms of their theoretical imperative. The quality of theory is not the point – rather it is its potential.

Perhaps after all this is an argument of terminology. The reactionary art college or drama student who proclaims that they want nothing to do with theory would no doubt never-the-less affirm an interest in principles of form, structure and aesthetics.

Too often the written word has been a metonym for theory, while all other languages – of the body, of the brush, of the camera, of the stage – have delineated practice. As one slice of the academy calls for the bringing together of 'theory' and 'practice', another highlights the impossible boundaries of fiction and the ontological instability of writing. This

²⁶ Some of the offerings include: 'praxis', 'studio theory', 'contextual studies', 'practice based research' and 'performance research'.

is evidenced in the pragmatics of bookshop layout, where you might have to search through 'philosophy', 'cultural studies', 'biography', or 'fiction' sections before you find the title you are looking for²⁷. Writing is no longer considered as the sole proprietor of theoretical communication (if ever it was). Writing itself is identified as an arts practice.

There is certainly a difference between rummaging through an archive before sitting at a computer terminal tippy-tapping away (is this supposed to be theory?) and rummaging through a record collection before jumping up and down in front of a mirror in a rehearsal space (is this supposed to be practice?). But there is also a difference between jumping up and down in a rehearsal space and marking a blank canvas with your paint brush. The (essential) differences of outcome need not mean that the creator's intention or the reader's experience of the text is marked by a concomitant differential. Surely, as with genetic difference within and between race, there is a greater percentage of variation *within* genre than *between* genre. This isn't to pour the whole of cultural output into one huge melting pot and cry 'it's all the same stuff' but the desire to bring theory and practice together, as if they were separate things that needed to be grafted in some kind of cultural miscegenation, denies the possibility that they were always already part of the same thing.

The academy's emphasis of bringing together 'theory' and 'practice' (which in fact acts to separate the two out) is less about a forward thinking pedagogy and more about acknowledging its own difficulty in knowing how to deal with (evaluate, assess, archive and laud) work which does not comply with academic convention; which is not to dispute the necessary difficulties of a research project which aims to use writing and performance together for the same goals²⁸.

²⁷ This is the problem Roland Barthes identified in relation to Georges Bataille. See Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text'.

²⁸ Projects which are making the case for 'performance research' include PARIP (Practice as Research in Performance) based at Bristol University and ResCen (Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts) based at Middlesex University. Both projects identify the need to clarify the academy's position in assessing practice based research, specifically within the context of doctoral research.

Each of the three chapters which form the body of this study take their name and their point of inception from a performance project²⁹. In each case the relationship between performance and writing is negotiated in a slightly different way.

Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood (which forms Chapter 1) was a performance-lecture in Cambridge University's Mill Lane Lecture Rooms as part of National Science week and an installation at The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge, both in March 2001. **Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood** used an archaeological model to investigate the possibility of an autobiography of infancy. The content of the performance and the installation led directly to a series of theoretical propositions. While the outcomes of the performance elements were necessarily underpinned by theoretical imperatives and an 'academic' research process, the writing which forms the first chapter of this study was entirely contingent on the product of performance. The relationship was directly causal.

Namesake: The Story of a Name (which forms Chapter 2) was a live performance with soundscape in collaboration with the composer Jonathan Cooper presented at The Jewish Museum, Home and The Swiss Church, all in London in May 2004. **Namesake: The Story of a Name** addressed the power of personal proper names to affect transformation and took as its seed a visit to my namesake, Joshua Sofaer. The development of the performance and the development of the critical writing happened alongside each other. The research for both performance and writing came from the same archives and methodologies. The resulting outcomes – performance and writing – find themselves reliant on each other; the writing quotes the performance and the performance quotes the writing. The relationship was symbiotic.

The Crystal Ball (which forms Chapter 3) was a performance at the ICA in June 2002 produced with the support of a commission via Arts Council England. **The Crystal Ball**

²⁹ See Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

was an experimental theatre piece in which members of the audience had their futures predicted by a panel of experts. While the performance predictions led to a series of written investigations, these investigations were not concerned with the subject of the predictions themselves. In other words the performance proposed a series of possibilities from which individual strands were selected. The relationship was indirectly causal.

In all three chapters the relationship between performance and writing is purposefully tentative, experimental and may at times seem arbitrary. The possible routes of investigation were often endless. I have to acknowledge, to quote Beckett: 'There are many ways in which the thing I am trying in vain to say may be tried in vain to be said.'³⁰

Writing about autobiography I am necessarily writing my own autobiography. This is exemplified not only by the fact that this project has been written into my life over the protracted period of its development but also by the use of autobiographical case studies³¹. It is the investigation of *my* childhood, *my* name and *my* future which leads to a wider discourse on the relationship of the writing self to these particular areas of research. In this way the writing always returns to the process of writing itself, to my 'stake'. I make no apology for the inclusion of my own narratives. It is these narratives which give rise to a multiplicity of texts, sources which range from literary classics to contemporary cultural phenomena.

The move from the autobiographical to the collective – the *demobiographical* (to offer a neologism) – maintains threads from *this* writing subject. The focus is therefore often on the social performance of body types gendered as 'boy' or 'man', sexualised as 'queer', brought into social space as 'Jew'.

What are the sources employed in this study?

³⁰ Samuel Beckett, *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder Publishers, 1999) p.123

³¹ A development not only of the project itself but also of my style, proficiency and understanding of what it is that is being made in this writing.

The variety of texts which are used to interrogate the areas under discussion are not limited to any single archive, genre or form. What they are not, or rarely, are 'books' which conform to Lejeune's classic definition, found in the 'Autobiography' section of a bookshop. They have been selected to answer the needs of the specific proposition in question and therefore include approaches which range across Autobiography, Performance Studies, Literary Criticism, Art History, Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Linguistics and Archaeology.

These discourses necessarily always already interrelate. Academic departments (and the writings which issue from them) which 'specialise' in any of these areas, offer investigation, comment and analysis on the others.

The concern that such a general and non-specific methodological approach results in thin analysis is answered by the need to test the scope of the conceptual premise: that of *the autobiographical performance*.

Most of the sources are western, late Twentieth Century or early Twenty-first Century. One major exception to this general rule and the only text which runs through all chapters of the study is Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Proust's novel is not a specific focus of the thesis but rather embodies its general themes. While Proust's book is not an autobiography *per se* (a proposition which is discussed at some length on several occasions in the course of this study) it *is* the account of an autobiographer. Proust's narrator is writing his life. Proust's narrative follows the life of a writer coming to the moment of writing. This apprenticeship is configured through themes which directly correspond to those of concern here. Firstly, the narrator's difficulty in accessing his own point of origin, the life he has led before the time he can remember – his infancy – is configured through the extended 'digression' from his own life to that of Charles Swann. Swann's narrative pre-figures that of the narrator, but also introduces it, for Swann's

narrative is both concurrent with, and a metonym for, the narrator's own birth and early childhood. Secondly, *A la recherche du temps perdu* is preoccupied with the potential and affect of the proper name. This is configured not only by the teasing which takes place in regard to the personal proper name of the narrator, which is and is never quite 'Marcel', but also in the way in which names, even down to the very titles of the separate books which form the entire work, activate discourses on meaning, subjectivity and being. Thirdly, while ostensibly *A la recherche du temps perdu* appears to be about the past – temps perdu – its whole orientation is towards the future. This is the narrative of someone who ends at the point of beginning, whose life is spent looking forward not only to the future moment of writing but also towards posterity and what a future beyond life can bring. *A la recherche du temps perdu* is then, a recurrent and underlying source for this study.

The three chapters loosely follow the narrative of an autobiography, from birth to death, from infancy to the future, each section containing seven sections, like the days of a week³². While they can be read independently³³, cumulatively they hope to offer a perspective on some of the ways in which self is enacted, specifically (though not exclusively) through writing practices.

What is the imperative of *the autobiographical performance*?

When Philippe Lejeune writes that '[a]utobiography is not a guessing game' he asks us to understand autobiography as a genre which is formed by the boundaries of his definition. This study argues that while autobiography is not a guessing game, it can not be confined to those boundaries. It may not be a guessing game but it can often necessitate detective work.

³² The number 7 has been described as God's perfect number. The Old Testament is littered with allusions to the holy number seven.

³³ Some portions of the text have been published independently in draft form. See Appendix 3.

When William Spengeman writes that '...the more the genre gets written about, the less agreement there seems to be on what it properly includes,' he focuses on the academy's disagreement over the boundaries of autobiography. This study exploits that disagreement, not in order to push the boundaries further (in order to include more) but rather to test its limits and limitations.

When Mary Evans writes that '[w]e cannot tolerate the ambiguity of human existence, and we thus provide ourselves with icons of experience and reality,' she highlights the general desire for an autobiographical subject which the reader can identify as being a 'true' representation of that subject, but she simultaneously argues that no such truth ever exists. It is between the perception of that truth and the text which promotes it, that this study, and *the autobiographical performance*, lies.

Chapter 1: Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood



Fig. 1: *Aerial Evidence, October 20, 1971 Cambridge*

Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood: *Introduction*

Those years of my earliest childhood are no longer a part of myself; they are external to me; I can learn nothing of them save – as we learn things that happened before we were born – from the accounts given me by other people.

Marcel Proust³⁴

I was born on the 1st August 1972 in Mill Road Maternity Hospital in Cambridge. My elder sister Joanna was about to have her second birthday. By September 1973 our family had left for Edinburgh.

Supported by an Eastern Arts Year of the Artist grant, my sister, archaeologist Joanna Sofaer Derevenski, and I, went back to Cambridge in the summer of 2000 to explore the city, the places of our childhood, the places we were before we can remember, and used the practices of archaeology to see if it was possible to understand the forgotten past. The research found its initial outcomes in a performance lecture in Cambridge University's Mill Lane Lecture Rooms as part of National Science week and an installation at The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge. Both revolved around a series of seven specifically engineered 'research tools', which did not work in a material sense but rather activated a conceptual figure, or series of thoughts, that had arisen from various pathways of the research process.

The imperatives of our research, which came together for Disinter/est, related to our own areas of enquiry. For Joanna, whose academic interests are in the role of children within the archaeological record, the project was an heuristic device, used to test not only the boundaries of archaeological method but also to think through the implications of a contemporary archaeological exploration for a prehistoric one. For myself, the stake was in thinking through the possibilities of a developed methodological approach – in this case

³⁴ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* Vols 1-6 trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996) Vol.3 p.5

archaeology – as a way of expanding the possibilities of writing and as an alternative method for understanding the construction and deconstruction of subjectivity.

Infancy escapes the conventions of the autobiographic task. It is a mysterious era that is both of ourselves and of other and thus lends itself to a rethinking of the relationship between self and autobiography. Traditionally, autobiography necessitates an experiential narrative, one that is predicated on introspection: the recounting of incidents, the recalling of memories. In tracing the 'auto' of infancy we necessarily have to negotiate an understanding that runs counter to this established *modus operandi*. Archaeology was pertinent for this task not only because it engaged a 'family collaboration' but because it deals with material remains. My hope was to use materiality, rather than the well trodden path of psychic drives, to think through infancy.

In her sociological study of the genres of auto/biography, Mary Evans observes and laments the refusal of many auto/biographers to deal with the importance of childhood:

...childhood is given almost no discussion and, more significantly, allowed no influence on adult personality or behaviour. The refusal of childhood (and with it, of course, the implicit refusal of the most radical development in understanding in the twentieth century which is psychoanalysis) is so striking a feature of auto/biography that it should – but seldom does – invite comment. Indeed, comment is scarcely sufficient to denote the misrepresentation that this facet of conventional auto/biography amounts to; it might be more appropriate to suggest that in this general refusal lies not just a problematic literary convention but a dominant cultural fault.³⁵

Evans' observation may well be accurate, but the writers of auto/biography face a unique difficulty in tracking infant life: who has access to the world inhabited by the infant? All potential answers seem fraught with difficulty. There is a perversity in the configuration of the years of infancy, at once identified as (the most) crucial time of development and yet at the same time outside the possibility of either mature cognitive articulated experience on the part of the child during the time of infancy, or of adult memory in hindsight. It simply

³⁵ Mary Evans, *Missing Persons: The impossibility of auto/biography* (London: Routledge, 1999) p.135

is not the case to say that we can access our early childhood with the same kinds of hindsight formulation that we would our later childhood, adolescence or young adult life. The left inferior prefrontal lobe that is required for long term memory is undeveloped in infants, under the age of three. The elaborate encoding required for classifying and remembering complex events cannot occur in the infant's brain. The brains of infants and very young children are only capable of storing some fragmented memories. This isn't to propose that memories of later life are 'true' or 'factual' but rather to point out the structural difference in the understanding of our own infancy and of our adulthood. The prevalence of psychoanalysis in this regard is one of necessity, not of choice. Psychoanalysis identifies a gap in the market.

Evans places emphasis on the psychoanalytic possibilities of auto/biography which are negated by the refusal of the discussion of childhood. But psychoanalysis positions the adult's infant life through a certain set of standardised negotiations, often predicated on loss. As Adam Phillips observes:

...the child [has become] someone for whom something essential is missing, or lost, or destroyed; the unified image in the mirror, the potential wealth and solace of the mother, the father's entitlement, the parent's sexual relationship.³⁶

The preoccupation psychoanalysis has with loss, on behalf of the child, is perhaps its way of coping with the loss of infant memory. One way or another, it has resulted in a generic conception of the 'autobiography' of early childhood in terms of psychoanalytic tropes. The prevalence of psychoanalysis for the understanding of childhood closes down, rather than expands, potential meaning. Indeed psychoanalysis is only one way to think through infancy. There are many accounts, especially in life-writing, where the issue of infancy – of remembering or not remembering – becomes the fundamental turning point for the configuration and understanding of self. In their respective autobiographically based works Yukio Mishima, Georges Perec and Marcel Proust acknowledge the problem of not having

³⁶ Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) p.20

possession of the knowledge of their own infancy³⁷. This not knowing highlights the continually deferred sense of the 'self-identity' which is their pursuit. What they do then, is to acknowledge that impossibility and to find literary strategies which enable them to think through the possibilities infancy might yield.

In his autobiography, *Confessions of a Mask* written when he was only twenty-five, Yukio Mishima opens with an account of how he believed that he could remember the moment of his own birth.

For many years I claimed that I could remember things seen at the time of my own birth.³⁸

Mishima records how his elders were bemused by this youthful assertion and decide that it is a prank to get them to talk about his conception. Discussing sex is the last thing the boy would want to do with his family; rather he genuinely believes he has a memory of the gleam of light on '...the brim of the basin in which I had received my first bath'.

Mishima himself goes on to refute the potential accuracy of such a memory, not through any physiological data on infant cognition, but rather through a temporal assertion: 'The strongest disproof of this memory was the fact that I had been born, not in the daytime, but at nine in the evening: There could have been no streaming sunlight.' He continues by allowing himself to protest that the gleam of light could have been caused by an electric lamp. Whether or not Mishima maintains his childhood belief that he could remember his own birth is never explicitly resolved (although we are encouraged to presume he would no longer attest to the veracity of the memory) but Mishima uses this *memory of a memory* as a way of introducing the two main themes of his work: the development of his sexuality and the conflation in his mind of fantasy and reality. *Confessions of a Mask* is a

³⁷ It should be noted, especially in the case of Marcel Proust that the problem of accessing the life of the infant self is not necessarily an *autobiographical* problem but rather an argument made by the narrator. The relationship between Proust and his narrator is explored in further detail in Section 4 of this chapter, and again in Chapter 2: Namesake, Section 6: Not In My Name: *Author*

³⁸ Yukio Mishima, *Confessions of a Mask* trans. by Meredith Weatherby (London: Panther, 1972) p.7

rite of passage, an account of how a young man came to identify himself; how he arrived at the moment of writing. Mishima prefigures the core concerns of his identity through the account of his birth. The 'stuff' of his infancy allows for a literary conceit which hints at a developmental signification without stating it as empirically accurate.

In *W or The Memories of Childhood* Georges Perec takes it for granted that people do not remember the early years of their life.

I don't know where the break is in the threads that tie me to my childhood. Like everyone else, or almost everyone, I had a father and a mother, a potty, a cot, a rattle, and, later on, a bicycle which apparently I never mounted without screaming with terror at the mere thought that someone might try to raise or even remove the two small side-wheels which kept me stable. Like everyone else, I have forgotten everything about the earliest years of my existence.³⁹

Perec's text, which sits uncomfortably in either the fiction or biography sections of the bookshop⁴⁰ intersperses the biographical accounts of his life – how and why he came to the moment of writing – with fictionalised accounts of the terrifying island state of 'W'. For Perec, whose parents are dead, fiction must fill the space of the oral account offered of an infant life. The fiction offsets the life-narrative by showing that an invented account can do just as much as a remembered one in telling us how a subjectivity was formulated. Indeed Perec makes this explicit within the life-narrative account as well.

My two earliest memories are not entirely implausible, even though, obviously, the many variations and imaginary details I have added in telling of them – in speech or in writing – have altered them greatly, if not completely distorted them.⁴¹

Perec seems to acknowledge that what matters is not so much the facts as the falsehoods people believe. Similarly, this writing – Disinter/est – is not about some kind of ontological search to dig up the autobiography of our early childhood, or even the impossibility of it, but rather a methodological process of experimentation; to see what happens when

³⁹ George Perec, *W or The Memory of Childhood* trans. by David Bellos (London: The Harvill Press, 1996) p.12

⁴⁰ It was, incidentally, in biography.

⁴¹ Perec p.13

archaeology meets contemporary infancy. It is about writing a history, not about unearthing it.

As indicated by the quotation which introduces this chapter, the narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu* remembers nothing of his early childhood, save what he is told by others. Access to early childhood is conflated with the time *prior* to birth – one learns about infancy ‘as we learned things that happened before we were born’. For Proust’s narrator, coming into long term memory is given the equivalence of birth itself. The impasse in accessing the early years results in an intriguing literary device. The first two parts of the giant work – ‘Combray’ and ‘Swann in Love’ – describe events before the narrator was born, of the life of Charles Swann. The trials of Swann not only prefigure and anticipate those of the narrator but they stand in for a personal account of the-self-as-infant. The stated aim is to give an impression as to the world in which the narrator was born. To find self through another.

...I pass from the Swann whom I knew later and more intimately to this early Swann – this early Swann in whom I can distinguish the charming mistakes of my youth, and who in fact is less like his successor than he is like the other people I knew at the time, as though one's life were a picture gallery in which all the portraits of any one period had a marked family likeness, a similar tonality....⁴²

Swann is a metonym for the narrator's early childhood. He becomes it. He is the answer to the search for lost time. But the impossibility of the narrator (rather than Proust) ever ‘really’ knowing what Swann’s thoughts and feelings were is a constant reminder of the fictional premise of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. No matter how much Proust and his narrator Marcel may overlap and collide, the seminal introduction of Swann, forces a continual realisation of the fictionalisation of the narrative.

In the published collection of articles that were written for The Observer newspaper, *Before I say Goodbye* and which trace the stages of her dying from breast cancer, email

⁴² Proust Vol.1 p.21

accounts between Ruth Picardie and her close friends have also been included. One of Picardie's understandable preoccupations is that her young twins, both two years old, will not remember her in later life. Carrie Turk writes to her:

...I have done some reflection on the issue of J[oe] & L[ola]'s memories of you. I am not saying this to make you feel better. But I think they will remember you. Firstly, I remember before I was 2 – I have memories that nobody would ever have bothered suggesting to me because of their complete banality. Jude, believe it or not, remembers having her nappy changed! So it is possible to have memories from early life (and surely, that's what hypnotherapists rely on).⁴³

While there is some evidence for scattered and fragmented memories from infancy, this quite clearly *is* an attempt to make a desperate friend 'feel better', despite protestations to the contrary. As Picardie's husband writes in an attempt to defend himself to detractors who question the fact that he brought his children to see the dead body of their mother...

...the truth, in any case, is that Joe and Lola are almost certainly too young to retain any direct memory of the room in the hospice where Hilary and the hospice nurses had laid Ruth out.⁴⁴

Matt Seaton's defence of a parental decision simultaneously and accidentally confirms the certainty which denies the children direct experiential memory of their mother – dead or alive. Here the problem of infant memory becomes one of a desperate need for imprinting the knowledge of a mother in memory, a mother who will not be present except *in memoriam* as they grow.

The brief outline of these examples of how infant memory configures itself through these texts is intended to introduce ways in which the problem of self writing self, can, or can not account for the years of early childhood. In all the accounts (even in the Picardie) there is a necessary oscillation between fact and fantasy, between knowing and not knowing, between biography and fiction. Disinter/est takes on board this problem with a

⁴³ Carrie Turk. Email to Ruth Picardie in *Before I Say Goodbye* by Ruth Picardie (London: Penguin, 1998) p.52

⁴⁴ Matt Seaton 'After Words' in Picardie p.115

methodological approach to the past which deals specifically with times outside or beyond memory: archaeology.

Within the context of the printed page, the performance and the installation, that were the initial outcomes of Disinter/est, become a textual, graphic and photographic arrangement. Here the performance script has undergone a certain amount of editing – a recontextualisation involving the addition and re-examination of material. Inevitably some of the script has been edited out, and negotiations of performance and installation lost on these pages, but the process of reconfiguring and rethinking a performance as printed matter (rather than purely the recording of an event that has been) has opened up avenues of thought hitherto unconsidered.

The process of editing became the next stage of the research process. To recap: a working methodological hypothesis (the auto of infancy explored archaeologically) led to fieldwork (being in Cambridge) which gave rise to a body of data (the 'archaeological' research) which was subsequently interpreted by arts practice (the performance and installation configured around the seven 'research tools'). Editing the performance script becomes the next attempt to make sense of the material under discussion, exploring potential meanings beyond the end results of a singular research process. It is in this process of editing that further research had to be made and that further layers of meaning have been dug out.

This gave rise to an exponential expansion of the text. What lies ahead then, is a short description of each research tool, its imperative and the archaeological model which was its inception. (The archaeological models are italicized. They are edited extracts of Joanna Sofaer Derevenski's writings from the performance text.) This is then followed by a more extensive note – a working through beyond the boundaries initially encompassed by the research. It is here, in the 'notes', that the possibilities of text allow for a methodology that is unworkable in a performance or an installation.

'Note 1' considers the possibilities for a model of productive failure; a space of methodological collapse and disappointment that yields pragmatic and conceptual opportunities *because*, rather than despite, its failure. 'Note 2' seeks an alternative to the conventional understanding of 'origin' by embracing the notion of an invented or fantasy genealogy as pin-pointed in a spacio-graphic representation of history. 'Note 3' questions the power dynamic in the parent-child relationship and offers consideration on how that relationship might be retroactively performed and documented. 'Note 4' posits the concept of a 'splintered biography' as a way of considering the impossibility of any totalising auto/biography. 'Note 5' questions the possibility of an ontological understanding of infant experience as configured through sight and memory. 'Note 6' situates the canon of psychoanalysis against the family anecdote and performance practice in an attempt to acknowledge the interrelating vectors which are at stake in infant and adult play. Finally, 'Note 7' offers an example of how everyday action and interaction follows preset 'performance' scripts.

As with the following two chapters, while the focus is tight in terms of the source-point (in this case configured by the provocation: *What is an autobiography of our early childhood?*) the examples, possibilities and propositions are eclectic and wide-ranging. These disparate examples converge at a point which brings together the possibilities of the writing self.

Research Tool 1: *The Soft Trowel*



Fig. 2: *The Soft Trowel*

The Soft Trowel – a trowel that can not do its job – is a tribute to failure. The failure of archaeological methodology to disinter the Cambridge years. Of course it also references this specific area of interest – childhood – being as it is wipe-cleanable PVC in attractive bright colours with no sharp edges.

The soft trowel also acts as a metaphor for the specific spaces that had to be dug for Disinter/est. Whereas archaeology traditionally digs in rubbish pits (what has been discarded or thrown away) here it was in the toy trunk (what has been kept safe and preserved) that the archaeological stratigraphy and detailed statistical evaluation took place. Here again, however, was a search marked by failure. The laborious process of analysing the toy chest and the resulting data did not speak of a past childhood life, but rather of an adult taxonomy of items worth retaining for the future.



Figs. 3, 4 & 5: *The Toy Trunk*

Archaeological Model 1

The discipline of archaeology is closely identified with the trowel as the instrument or tool that yields up the secrets of the earth. It epitomises excavation, the activity perhaps associated with archaeology above all others. The Soft Trowel acts as a metaphor for archaeology in terms of what archaeological interpretation is. This is not to imply that archaeology is in any way a blunt instrument – a 'soft option' – for students who study it at university. Rather, in contrast to physics or chemistry, the so called 'hard' sciences, archaeology with its interest in human behaviour, the regular and irregular, the cross-cultural and the culturally variable and perhaps even esoteric, is closer to the 'soft' social sciences. In other words, the archaeological process is one of interpretation rather than explanation.

Note 1

During the research process, Disinter/est attempted to apply an archaeological methodology – as far as possible – to the three year period 1971-1973 that was spent in Cambridge. This approach was embarked upon in the knowledge that it would most probably collapse. The boundaries of archaeological method were indeed challenged, or

at least had to confront and engage with the disciplines of social anthropology, oral history and psychology. There was also a necessary negotiation of the pleasures and problems of working with family as both co-researcher and research subject. An archaeological methodology is flexible to a degree, but no matter how receptive we might be to disciplinary slippage, eventually there came a time when what we were doing was no longer archaeology (in terms of its teleological application) or rather, that archaeology no longer served our purpose.

It was in the moments where archaeology failed – at the point of collapse – that a productive engagement in this destabilisation allowed for an expansion of potential meanings for the area under study. Failure was productive. An engagement with the productive potential of methodological collapse.

What does it mean to succeed in failure? Is there a model for a forced or forgone failure which is nevertheless a procedure of productive engagement?

In my search for a precedent – a way of understanding what this might be – I stumbled (there just doesn't seem to be a more appropriate word here) upon notions of productive failure which surround The Great Wall of China. The Great Wall of China is a series of physical remains around which oscillate various different discourses and methodologies including history, archaeology, legend, literature and tourism. It is a massive intercultural material deposit over which there is considerable contestation. It attracts a plethora of interpretive schema which it nevertheless escapes.

The short story *The Great Wall of China* by Franz Kafka was never meant to be published. It was the failure of his executor Max Brod to carry out the instructions of the testament that has resulted in its publication. This failure, Walter Benjamin argues, was always one that was anticipated. 'Kafka presumably had to entrust his posthumous papers to

someone who would not want to do his will.⁴⁵ A forgone productive failure, contributing to the corpus of Kafka's work.

This 'productive failure' which is external to the diegesis, mirrors that within it. *The Great Wall of China* is a series of parables, and parables within parables which deal with the failure of different methodologies – of military strategy, of geography, of national communication – but nevertheless paradoxically produce a desired effect.

The narrator identifies himself as a builder of the wall. His account commences with a description of its 'piecemeal construction', a method which went against its aim.

After all the wall was intended, as was universally proclaimed and known, to be a protection against the peoples of the north. But how can a wall protect if it is not a continuous structure?⁴⁶

This theme of 'inexpedient methods', continues on various levels of the narrative. In the case of the wall construction itself, the narrator is forced to come to the "strange conclusion" that "the command willed something inexpedient"; which is to say that they embarked purposefully on a project that they knew was bound for failure; that failure was courted and somehow seen as productive. It is not until the end of the story that this failure is understood as "one of the greatest unifying influences among our people", that the perpetual threat from outside, which the wall was supposed to counter but the piecemeal construction exacerbates, with its gaps and geographical inconsistencies, neutralises alterity *within* the community. And yet even this productive failure is destabilised by the parable within the parable. There is the account of the Emperor's death bed message that can never be delivered because the messenger will be met by an endless journey "through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he get to the end of them" let alone the city, let alone the country. There will always be another court, another stair, another palace. This fable within the fable ruptures the possibility of a

⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999) p.137

⁴⁶ Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis and Other Stories* (London: Vintage Classics, 1999) p.67

unified community protected by the wall, by articulating internal strife. In this way Kafka's metaphor for productive failure itself fails, and it is through this kind of double failure that a literary resolution is attained. Benjamin observes this failure as the binding thread of Kafka's work.

One is tempted to say: once he was certain of eventual failure, everything worked out for him *en route* as in a dream.⁴⁷

This ultimate failure within the diegesis now refers back to an external productive failure in its political and social intent. As Ewa Ponowska Ziarek has written:

This failure not only destroys the possibility of grounding the exemplary meaning of the text in the common ways of speaking but also exposes the violence inherent in that kind of grounding. Thus, for Kafka as for Benjamin, it is the ghostly beauty of failure that disrupts the aestheticization of politics and enables a turn towards the politicization of aesthetics.⁴⁸

Another incarnation of the beauty of failure at The Great Wall of China can be found in the work by artists Marina Abramovic and Ulay, who walked from either end to meet each other in the middle. The walk, which commenced in March 1988, had been fraught with problems from the moment of its conception. It took them over eight years and a massive amount of bureaucratic negotiation and compromise before they could embark on the piece, negotiations which proliferated during the walk itself. Restricted by the Chinese authorities from walking through certain areas of national security and others of dangerous terrain, Ulay identified the practical manifestation of the walk as failing its initial aim: "It had been impossible to carry out the pure concept."⁴⁹ Not only was there no consistent wall to walk, but they had hoped to walk alone, yet they were forced to be accompanied; they had hoped to camp on or beside the wall, yet they were forced to use hotels and guesthouses.

⁴⁷ Benjamin p.143

⁴⁸ Ewa Ponowska Ziarek, *The Rhetoric of Failure: Deconstruction of Skepticism, Reinvention of Modernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) p.150

⁴⁹ There are many accounts of this walk. All direct quotes are from the artists and are taken as reported by Cynthia Carr in 'A Great Wall' in *On Edge: Performance at the end of the Twentieth Century* by Cynthia Carr (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993) unless otherwise indicated.

Greater still was the failure of the relationship between the two that had given rise to the piece in the first place. Initially called *The Lovers* the piece had been conceived of as “the apotheosis of romantic love” with the possibility that they might even get married at the end of the walk. But after years of a working collaboration and love relationship Marina and Ulay split less than a year before the walk was due to take place. This threw the conceptual basis of the project into disarray; the failure of the relationship seemed to signal the failure of the project.

Before [there] was this strong emotional link, so walking towards each other has this impact... almost epic story of two lovers getting together after suffering. Then that fact went away. I was confronted with just bare Wall and me. I had to rearrange my motivation. Then I always remember this sentence of John Cage saying, when I throw the I Ching, the answers I like less are the answers [from which] I learn the most.

I am glad we didn't cancel the piece because we needed a certain form of ending. Really this huge distance we walk towards each other where actually we do not meet happily, but we will just end – it's very human in a way. It's more dramatic than having this romantic story of lovers. Because in the end you are really alone, whatever you do.

Abramovic's retroactive reconfiguring of the conceptual foundations of the piece is a model of productive failure. Embarking on the walk in the knowledge that the original aim has collapsed both in terms of its conceptual foundation (love) and its practical exemplification (the walk – the wall) nevertheless produces the condition to “learn the most”, even if her understanding of the project resolves itself (if only for that moment) in a nihilistic aphorism “in the end you are really alone”.

Often Abramovic and Ulay's work has been about the anticipation of collapse – of failure – where the body is pushed to a boundary from which it can continue no further. It is in that space of collapse that a productive sense of corporal engagement is established. Whether or not she had read Kafka's story is unclear, but at one of the most stressful moments of the walk, when she has run out of water and is physically exhausted, Abramovic is reported to have said to a visiting journalist “Kafka is good literature here”. This statement

acknowledges the beauty of failure and how that might become a productive force. The collapse of methodology, the failure of intent, opens up the possibility of meaning.

Encountering The Great Wall of China on the terms of these literary and artistic productions leaves open the question of the wall itself. What is The Great Wall of China? Despite its ubiquitous fame as a wonder of the man-made world it is difficult to find a sustained investigation into its make-up beyond that of the encyclopaedia insert or the tourism brochure. An exception is Arthur Waldron's study *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth*. Through extensive readings of first hand sources and by accessing the physical remains, Waldron has come to understand the Wall in terms of what he calls 'historical myth'. The shock about The Great Wall of China is that there is no great wall at all, at least not in the way that it has been conceived and promulgated by both China and the West, 'as having a unified history and a single purpose'.

The Great Wall of China, it turns out, is a fascinating vision, and one not surprisingly deeply imbedded in learned and popular imaginations, in both China and the west. Yet at the root of the commonly accepted idea of the Wall lie some fundamental misunderstandings. The *reality is quite different from the vision*, and the whole topic is in need of comprehensive revision.⁵⁰

[my emphasis]

What Waldron identifies are the ways in which legend, literature, folklore, tourism, orientalism, and Chinese national identity have in effect failed the 'truth' of the wall. The convergence of these diverse cultural discourses have conspired to create a vision of The Great Wall of China for their own propagandist purposes. Rather, the Wall is a series of walls that were built in different geographical areas in different eras, with differing strategic imperatives.

Waldron has relied predominantly on extensive written documentation for his study but he acknowledges that this methodological approach will also ultimately collapse.

⁵⁰ Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p.4

But the written record has definite limits, and in the Chinese case the kinds of cartographic and archaeological work that have made it possible for students of comparable topics in the west to fill in its omissions and resolve its inconsistencies have not yet been carried out.⁵¹

The methodological approaches of cartography and archaeology that could provide a closer understanding of the Wall have not yet been applied. So for both the wall itself, 'useless militarily even when it was first built' which 'symbolised the failure of Ch'in rule, the way the emperor had failed' and the methodology employed to understand it, failure is encountered time and time again⁵². The Great Wall of China has proliferated diverse significations and meanings in historiographic, and contemporary discourses. In many cases these seem to evince meaning through an embodiment of productive failure.



Fig. 6: *The Soft Trowel in
The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge*

The Soft Trowel, a pastiche of the digging instrument so caught up with archaeology, is useless as an implement for scraping back the soil. Like the objects of prehistory that the trowel unearths and are then made sacred, so too The Soft Trowel needs to be treated with care, handled with gloves, displayed in the controlled conditions of a glass vitrine. That which was merely the tool used to disinter riches from the earth becomes itself the object of the gaze. So too the archaeological methodology used to disinter the Cambridge years becomes itself a model under study – that of productive failure.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid. p.195



Fig. 7: Archaeologist Joanna Sofaer Derevenski fails to dig with the Soft Trowel



Fig. 8: A precedent for the interest in digging. Beatrice Sofaer inducts her daughter Joanna into the use of the spade c.1972

Joanna's staged attempts to dig with The Soft Trowel perhaps evince her skepticism at the working possibilities of the task set. The sandcastle she builds under supervision aged twenty-two months seems to strangely forecast this problem; a castle built only to collapse under the weight of the incoming tide. Of course success and failure are always, and only ever, context specific – one person's success is still another's failure⁵³. Maybe it is the fear of failure which produces the impetus to embark upon a project which is bound for failure – a construction which makes failure success – which can not fail, because from the outset failure is courted: strange paradox. And perhaps that is what productive failure is: an exemplar of paradox. In this context The Soft Trowel is a literary device which highlights the productive structural impossibility of the task set.

⁵³ Tim Etchells (Forced Entertainment) and Matthew Goulsh (Goat Island) set up the Institute of Failure in 2002. Existing as a website and through occasional live presentations, the Institute of Failure is 'situated on the ungraspable border between deadpan irony and high seriousness' to document, study and theorise failure as it occurs in human endeavor. Has it been successful? Judge for yourself at <http://www.insitute-of-failure.com/> (The pleasurable paradox of an Institute of Failure is that it surely can not fail; its failure is its success.)

Research Tool 2: Aerial Evidence



Fig. 9: Aerial Evidence

Aerial Evidence is an aerial photograph that was taken on 20th October 1971 at about mid-day. The arrow indicates the house owned by the Sofaer family on the outskirts of Cambridge. As the photographer pressed the cable release, Joanna Sofaer, a 14 month old infant, was probably playing with her toys having just watched the 11.00 screening of Playschool's pets day on BBC2. Who knows what happened later that evening, but 40 weeks on, her younger brother Joshua was born.

Archaeological Model 2

Aerial photography is a particularly important aspect of archaeological prospection and recording. In contrast to a site drawing, it is a genre in which the material world is recorded as an instant. More specifically, it is the idea of an encapsulated moment, not simply in the sense of a moment frozen in time, but a moment of interpretation – of realizing that there is something of value to be recorded. This is a very similar notion to one with which many archaeologists are familiar, that of 'interpretation at the trowel's edge', the constant thinking about what one is digging when one is excavating⁵⁴. In other words, the constant need to make decisions about what to uncover and to record as part of a process where one cannot wind the clock back. In the case of the photograph, however, this notion of moment becomes even more acutely rendered.

Note 2

This photograph acts as a quasi record of my conception, which must have taken place, probably in this house, within a week of this photograph being taken. This image is then, the first in a bio-chronology (my bio-chronology) it marks an origin (my origin).

The Cambridge University Aerial Photography unit took a photograph in 1971 with a particular agenda, probably to document the continued expansion of Addenbrooks hospital. Looking at it today somehow the yearning to discover my roots is momentarily

⁵⁴ See I. Hodder, *The Archaeological Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999)

answered. And this is not just about attempting to uncover the moment of my conception (what my father called the 'ultimate narcissism'). When I showed this photograph with its date to a friend of mine their face lit up. "Oh!" they proclaimed "the 20th October 1971. That was three days after I was born." There is a general desire to fix oneself in, and to, the past.

The desire to unearth one's origin in the form of tracing ancestors has become 'one of today's fastest growing interests', spawning numerous research services and trans-global internet databases⁵⁵. The Western obsession with the individual, their identity and personal history is also evidenced by the explosion in the genres of memoir and biography, from David Beckham's life in pictures *My World*, to the glut of 'fly-on-the-wall' and video diary television programmes.

The language of identity employs many indices: race, ethnicity, disability, religion, sexuality, class, the list goes on. One of the fundamental indices is national allegiance, in which the demand of nationalist identity requires that we choose an affiliation at the expense of others. Even the language of the liberal West which tries to smooth over difference through the agenda of multiculturalism, finds itself provoking a spurious search for an 'authentic' personal history as a backlash to setting an agenda which effaces difference by claiming that we are all made similar by our otherness. Indeed while multiculturalism insists on reducing difference to sameness, it paradoxically recognizes the need for positive discrimination of the under represented, which implies that difference does exist after all.

It is no surprise then, that the only two questions the host of the television game show *Blind Date*, Cilla Black, asks the contestants, are "what is your name?" and "where do you come from?" as if the answers to these two questions were going to prove something; that the complex, multifarious layers that formulate our identities and make us a potentially

⁵⁵ Windsor Ancestry Research publicity brochure.

better or worse date are going to be condensed into the answers. And yet it will not do to remain either nameless or dislocated (that is without a location)⁵⁶. People want to know. Just as someone appears a stranger *until* we know their name, so too, where they are from seems fundamental to their identity and therefore to our ability to communicate with them.

The question 'where do you come from?' presupposes, or at least demands, a single, unique point of origin. Not only is this impossible for many individuals⁵⁷ but in Amin Maalouf's terms, has resulted in much violent international and sectarian hatred:

...those who cannot accept their own diversity may be among the most virulent of those prepared to kill for the sake of identity, attacking those who embody that part of themselves which they would like to see forgotten.⁵⁸

People often ask me where I am from - or even worse say "What are you because you look Italian or Greek or something?" And I'll say "Do you mean where was I born?" – and thinking they're going to hear something that will compound the mental stereotype they have formed of me they say "Yeah" and I'll reply "Cambridge" in my smartest establishment accent. And then they say "No, but originally".

"Well" I say, "in the Bible there is an account of how when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Jerusalem in the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim, (we're talking about 586 BCE here) after slaughtering a massive amount of the population, he brought the 'king and his officers', which is to say the Royal household, back to Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar brought back all the treasures from the temple in Jerusalem with him and it seems that he flirted with Judaism for a while (although he ended his life mentally unbalanced thinking he was a wild animal). Anyway my forefathers were part of that Royal household.

⁵⁶ Namelessness is explored in Chapter 2: Namesake, Section 5: Nameless: *No Name*.

⁵⁷ 'What makes me myself rather than anyone else is the fact that I am poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions.' Amin Maalouf, *On Identity* trans. by Barbara Bray (London: The Harvill Press, 2000) p.3

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.31

So then my ancestors stayed and prospered (give or take an exodus or two) in what became Persia and later a part of the Turkish Empire – Baghdad – now part of Iraq (as if you hadn't heard!), and when my great-grandfather was 10 years old in 1877, my great-great-grandfather left Baghdad for Rangoon, the Capital of Burma as a kind of economic entrepreneur. Anyway that was where my grand-father was born – as a British Citizen because it was part of the Empire. When his father died my grand-father, a young teenager, left Burma with some of his relatives for Calcutta in India, to live with other relatives; and incidentally that is where he met my grandmother who was also his first cousin once removed. Her father was in fact born in Aleppo in Syria and I'm not entirely sure how he ended up in India. Anyway they came to the UK in the 1930's, and my Dad was born in London.

That is on my father's side.

My Mother's side is a bit more complicated, I don't know as much about it, and it does depend on who you ask, but her family came from Eastern Europe, well probably they went to Eastern Europe some time in the fifteenth or sixteenth century from Germany where they settled in the second half of the first millennium sometime (it's difficult to be exact). Anyway, her paternal grandfather was born in 1880 in Gashmanka a town somewhere in Russia, but moved to Dankera in the province of Kurland near Riga, in Latvia. He decided to emigrate to the USA for a better life, so he got on a boat to New York. When it docked on the Irish coast en route on the 22nd October 1904 he thought he was already there, so he got off. Her maternal grandfather was born in Vilkomer, now renamed Ukmerge, north-west of Vilnius in Lithuania. He lied about his age (we don't know why) and travelled to Germany (we don't know why). Somehow he ended up in Belfast. My mother's father was born in Dublin and her mother was born in Belfast; she was born in Dublin and came to England when she was 17 to train as a nurse. I was born

in Cambridge, but we moved to Edinburgh when I was one year old, and that was where I went to school."

And when I've finished this brief introduction a common response will be, "Oh, but you don't have a Scottish accent".⁵⁹

The paternal part of this 'personal history' which starts in the Biblical exodus from Jerusalem to Babylon under the conquering army of Nebuchadnezzar is a story of princes and slaves. My father's father would half jokingly, half seriously, tell us that we were descended from Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego – the rather self-righteous noblemen exiled from Jerusalem, who were given provinces of the Babylonian Empire to rule by Nebuchadnezzar in recognition of their wisdom and valour.

My grandfather is not alone in this assertion of a royal ancestry. There is a general claim of Iraqi Jews that they share this direct heritage.

The Jews of Babylonia for centuries could boast of having in their midst the leading family of Israel which could trace its pedigree to King David. These descendents of the ancient kings of Judah were known by the name of Rashe Galuyyoth, that is, the Heads of the Exile or Exilarchs.⁶⁰

Recent examination of the historical and archaeological records indicate, however, that the Jews of late Ottoman Baghdad were a conglomerate of migrants fleeing persecution in Persia, Kurdistan and Syria. It is also interesting to note that the Davidic family of ancient

⁵⁹ This section of text answering the question 'Where are you from?' was used in the introduction to the performance 'Namesake: The Story of a Name', the performance which gave rise to the research outlined in Chapter 2: Namesake. See also Appendix 1. This drawn out response to the question 'where are you from?' has got me into trouble. I was stunned when introduced to a lecturer from a different university department to be asked where I was from. Rather irritated by what I took to be a rather ridiculous question given the circumstances I launched into the above monologue only to realise half way through it that actually all he wanted to know was which course I was working on.

⁶⁰ David Solomon Sassoon, *A History of the Jews of Baghdad* (Letchworth: Acuin Press, 1949) p.16. Also of interest in terms of trying to promulgate the idea of an Exilarch ancestry is the magazine of Babylonian Jewry *The Scribe* which is archived online at <http://www.dangoor.com/scribe.html>

Judea – the Exhilararchs – who it seems did hold prerogatives and power in the first millennium ACE, were replaced by a social structure based on wealth in the second.

Symbols of status dovetailed with occupations and material standing. At the same time we hear little of kin ties, the major element of social organization in premodern societies. In contrast to the numerous indications of class differentiation in late Ottoman Baghdad, evidence that kinship was potent in public life is scarce.⁶¹

The ancestry claimed by my grandfather would seem to stumble here on two accounts: the multi-cultural nature of Baghdadi Jews in the nineteenth century and the shift of power away from heritage and genealogy, to wealth.

Whether or not he was descended from Biblical Kings (and here it is perhaps worth noting that for many Babylonian Jews the 'myth' is a solid part of a historical identity formation), my grandfather's assertion of blue blood (which after all was perhaps merely 'play') was less emphatically stated than his assertion of Englishness, and his belief that he was truly assimilated into British life. In the unpublished memoirs of his early childhood he states, for instance:

I was born in Rangoon at the time when the sun never set on the British Empire. Queen Victoria had died but three years earlier. Britain's greatness shone with brilliant splendour, and the Pax Britannica spread over us like a benign umbrella. It gave us comfort and stability, and it fostered the conviction that God was in his heaven, and all was right in the world.⁶²

In her analysis of Jewish identity in early twentieth century Burma, Ruth Fredman Cernea, who draws upon these memoirs, highlights the problematic of a displaced identity for diasporic Jews living under British occupation.

The families carried British passports and therefore lived as though their future belonged to Europe, even though their past was Middle Eastern and their present Asian. [...] Burma was never truly [their] home; [their]

⁶¹ Sholomo Doshen and Walter Zenner *Jews among Muslims: Communities in the Precolonial Middle East* (London: Macmillan, 1996) p.196

⁶² Ellis Sofaer, *Gaya: His Childhood* (London: Unpublished Memoir, 1987) p.1

home existed within the international community of Burma and specifically within an England [they] had never visited.⁶³

My grandfather's idealised view of the British colonialists and their culture, is not only evidenced time and time again in his memoirs but also in my living memory of him.

Describing the surrounds of his childhood home, he states:

Opposite the house was the Gymkhana Club, where the worthy gentlemen who carried the burden of Empire went for relaxation and company.⁶⁴

What are effaced from such descriptions are the clearly documented instances of exclusion to the Jewish Englishmen-in-exile. Jews were not allowed entry to the Gymkhana Club my grandfather extols, they were denied equality in education, restricted from high ranks in British governmental institutions and prevented from the offer of commission in the army. As Cernea points out, despite his outstanding record at the English Diocesan School, my grandfather's brother Abraham was passed over for the recommendation that would guarantee him a place at Oxford. One can only surmise that the British Colonial community in early twentieth century Burma, especially those in the Gymkhana Club, would have laughed in the face of my grandfather's conviction that he was an Englishman.

There are many examples of an identity which is formulated on the construction of an assumed or invented heritage and ancestry; from Sir John Soane's rise from suburban builder's mate to master architect and his wholesale purchase of an aristocratic lineage complete with 'personalised' coat of arms, to the aunt of M. de Charlus, Mme. Villeparisis from *A la recherche du temps perdu* who has picture dealers manufacture new aristocratic portraits to fill up the gallery walls of her empty ancestry⁶⁵.

⁶³ Ruth Fredman Cernea, 'Promised Lands and Domestic Arguments: The Conditions of Jewish Identity in Burma' in *Studies of Indian Jewish Identity* ed. by Nathan Katz (New Dehli: Manohar Press, 1995) p.163

⁶⁴ Sofaer p.8

⁶⁵ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* Vols 1-6 trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996) Vol.3 p.337

Such fantasy inventions need not even be actively sought. They can also be a case of mistaken identity. If I am not in the mood to give the purposely rather facetious biblical response to the question "What are you because you look Italian or Greek or something?", I sometimes simply reply "Italian" just for ease. The questioner is entirely satisfied. They have possession over the truth they were seeking. This is something which Lawrence Mass experiences in terms of his own self-hating anti-Semitism .

Though we were identifiably American, Andy and I relished those times when we thought we were passing as Italian. Andy had a widow's peak of black hair, which he darkened with Grecian Formula, giving him a swarthier mien, and I had often been told I looked Italian or Mediterranean. Andy was just having fun, but I took it seriously. I used to boast about the time, on a subsequent trip to Italy, that an Italian businessman on the Settebello, the luxury high-speed train that travels between Milan and Rome, commented on my American shoes and decided I was an Italian who had lived in America. Fifteen years later I began to notice that my pride in looking Italian often involved a preconscious wish not to look Jewish.⁶⁶

No matter how far back you can trace your family tree, the answer to the question "where do you come from?" can never be answered completely, for it simply takes the gaze of another to radically shift any heritage you might consider to be your own, or to allow you to shun that you choose to reject.

The family tree maps time spatially. The aerial photograph maps space as an instant of time. But the family tree also maps space – the geography of migrant journeys; Aerial Evidence also maps time – the time etched in the landscape. For the narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, as for the archaeologist, material space has the possibility of revealing time.

...all this made the church for me something entirely different from the rest of the town: an edifice occupying, so to speak, a four-dimensional space – the name of the fourth being Time – extending through the centuries its ancient nave, which bay after bay, chapel after chapel, seemed to stretch across and conquer not merely a few yards of soil, but each successive epoch from which it emerged triumphant....⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Lawrence D. Mass, *The Jewish Wagnerite* (London: Cassell, 1994) p.25

⁶⁷ Proust Vol.1 p.70



Fig. 10: *Aerial Evidence* in
The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Aerial Evidence liberates the indeterminacy and impossibility of origin, by disrupting the conventional understanding of lineage as historico-biological genealogy, and rather cites it in a psycho-geographical imagining.

Research Tool 3:
The Thing Which Makes Itself Known



Fig. 11: *The Thing Which Makes Itself Known*

The Thing Which Makes Itself Known materializes the now invisible infant. When activated it emits a random series of affects which act in parallel to those of the child. It is a small self-contained fortified machine bristling with disruptive forces summarised as follows:

- The Thing Which Makes Itself Known vibrates aggressively and indiscriminately for periods of up to two minutes.
- The alluring and strokable fur of its upper body dissembles the violent red underbelly which is covered with defensive erectile spines or studs which when projected could cause irritation and even minor laceration.
- The red hide is distinctively streaked with sharp white markings to endear it to those with a sentimental or nostalgic inclination.
- Protected by the bulge of the abdomen is a channel which will utter a high-pitched piercing cry characteristically expressing pain, alarm, fear and anger when the owner is least expecting it, and for no apparent or discernable reason other than that it is programmed to do so.
- In its efforts to demand consideration a spherical dilation at the end of an organ at the top of the body emits a charge of light.
- From the mouth opening in the head projects a hollow cylindrical flexible body, long in proportion to its diameter, which conveys liquid or fluid through a spitting action. This fluid which is spat forth will often result in a necessary changing of clothes for those in the immediate vicinity.

Reminiscent of the toy which is given to a child to stimulate it, The Thing Which Makes Itself Known reminds the adult how a child demands to be stimulated. A suggested use for The Thing Which Makes Itself Known is to place it on the pillow beside you when you are preparing for bed. Its random activation will disturb your sleep patterns and remind you of the fundamental ways in which infants affect space, time and routine.



Fig. 12 & 13: *The random activation of The Thing Which Makes Itself Known disturbing sleep patterns.*

Archaeological Model 3

Among the potential contributions that the study of children might make to archaeology, is an exploration of social interaction and cultural production. The important commonalities of child experience, such as the acquisition of a common understanding about the physical nature of the world, or the learning of social norms and cultural practices, bind societies together. Children are social agents, both in the production of new futures and the reproduction of past traditions and knowledge.

The infant is also active in controlling adult behaviour; it is vulnerable and constantly demands the attention of the adult in its need for food, by crying in the night or by the production of body fluids. The adult is thus controlled by the child and the actions performed by the adult are mediated through material culture, for example changing a nappy. Conversely, the child is controlled and regulated by the adult who can prescribe or proscribe forms of behaviour or set times for feeding, sleeping etc..

Note 3

The Thing Which Makes Itself Known is born at the intersection of an archaeological methodology which seeks to stake claim to the importance of childhood within the understanding of prehistoric societies and an arts practice which wants to better understand the way in which an infant-self might actively control its environment.

The Thing Which Makes Itself Known resembles the toy given to the child and is also a metaphor for that child; it configures two separate but complementary demands:

- (i) a re-evaluation of the performance of the child within the family unit, and
 - (ii) a re-evaluation of the way in which performance itself operates.
- (i) The Thing Which Makes Itself Known insists that the understanding of the infant as a passive member of the family unit, a sponge who responds, consumes and learns, negates the complex ways in which power relations operate.

Michel Foucault observes that the discourse on sexuality in the West which accompanies the policing of desire is understood in terms of power binaries: the state and the subject, the doctor and the patient, the psychiatrist and the pervert, the adult and the adolescent, the parent and the child. In all these instances Foucault notices an identical structure in the relation of power.

To the formal homogeneity of power in these various instances corresponds the general form of submission in the one who is constrained by it – whether the individual in question is the subject opposite the monarch, the citizen opposite the state, the child opposite the parent, or the disciple opposite the master. A legislative power on one side, and an obedient subject on the other.⁶⁸

This forms the basis of an argument which identifies an activator of power who demands their will of a recipient. In the case of the parent-child relationship, this is one of observation, regulation, inculcation and prescription.

...the body of the child, under surveillance, surrounded in his cradle, his bed, or his room by an entire watch-crew of parents, nurses, servants, educators, and doctors, all attentive to the least manifestations of his sex, has constituted, particularly since the eighteenth century, another "local centre" of power-knowledge.⁶⁹

This argument is undoubtedly accurate but nevertheless does not account for the way in which the legislator is constrained and directed by the very act of legislation. They are made subject by the issuing of their own instruction. The exercising of the power of authority is necessarily subject to that authority, both in terms of the rules of engagement they set out and that they must react to (in other words they must *respond to*) those whom they legislate. This is not to infer that those with power use it with equanimity but rather to indicate that even if they are to contravene the rules they have set in place, the very act of contravention is one that can only take place in reaction to the rules themselves⁷⁰.

The dynamic of power-relations is then, one of reciprocity rather than an active/passive binary. This is particularly marked in language and especially the language which relates information around identity. The essentialist identity politics of the second half of the twentieth century, both personal and political (the civil rights movement, women's

⁶⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990) p.85

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.98

⁷⁰ In this regard it might be useful to consider more explicit legislative bodies than the family unit and how they are subject to their own authority. The death of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent enquiry into racism in the UK Police Force revealed the appalling miscarriages of justice that can result from a power wielding authority which does not abide by its own rules.

liberation, lesbian and gay rights) has now been (at least partially) replaced by a politic which utilises the very language of oppression ('nigger', 'queer' etc.) as a discourse of empowerment. It no longer makes sense to argue that these appellations ('nigger', 'queer' etc.) are simply oppressive, as their meaning and affect is entirely context specific⁷¹.

Foucault demonstrates such a switch of power relations – or rather a radical reassessment of the nature of the active/passive dynamic – in situations where the behaviour of the child is seen as a manifestation of adult sexuality; in other words the child is the evidence that is held up in the examination of the adult.

...whereas to begin with the child's sexuality had been problematized within the relationship established between doctor and parents (in the form of advice, or recommendations to keep the child under observation, or warnings of future dangers), ultimately it was in the relationship of the psychiatrist to the child that the sexuality of adults themselves was called into question.⁷²

The child's body thus calls the adult to account⁷³. The same is true for situations far more prosaic than those which imply sexual abuse. Psychoanalysis is one of many social discourses which lays the blame of psychological damage at the door of parenting. In this way the child (even the adult child) is held as evidence for the success or failure of parents. Here the wielding of the power of the family unit is put on trial.

By rematerializing the infant-that-was, *The Thing Which Makes Itself Known* reminds us that the performance of power in the family unit is not simply a relationship between legislative authority and obedient subject.

⁷¹ One might also consider the infelicitous nature of the language of sexuality itself, especially in sexual practices which exist outside the accepted heteronormative endpoint of procreation – top, bottom, active, passive – and the failure of this vocabulary to signify in practical terms in the field of play, thus spawning further definitions – passive aggressive, versatile etc. – which desperately try to compensate for the inability of language to cope with the subtleties and incongruities of deployed sexuality. See Judith Butler *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁷² Foucault p.99

⁷³ The child is also a literal manifestation of adult sexuality in that it evidences that procreation has taken place. Depending on the circumstances and the social infrastructure into which a child is born, this may evidence a healthy, social acceptability (for example, within the bounds of marriage) or the breaking of a criminal code (for example, rape).

(ii) The Thing Which Makes Itself Known reminds us of the toys given to children which engage them in the performance of a certain script.

The pre-computer toys, baby-dolls which urinated and conditioned little girls with a maternal 'instinct', the mini-DIY tools given to boys to encourage them to work just like Daddy, these toys which Roland Barthes describes as 'a microcosm of adult life' have now been replaced by computer devices which have been programmed to simulate the needs of animals and babies, in turn programming the child 'owner' with the button pressing skills to nurture them.

...faced with this world of faithful and complicated objects, the child can only identify himself as the owner, as user, never as creator; he does not invent the world, he uses it: there are, prepared for him, actions without adventure, without wonder, without joy. He is turned into a little stay-at-home householder who does not even have to invent the mainsprings of adult causality; they are supplied to him ready-made: he has only to help himself, he is never allowed to discover anything from start to finish.⁷⁴

In this way children are encouraged to perform to a predetermined script. Historically the emphasis of the script has been highly gendered (until very recently many high street retailers would have separate sections for boys and girls toys). The Thing Which Makes Itself Known is a metaphor for this 'play script'. It is the documentation of the live act which it engages. It enunciates the problem of the live act and its documentation. Through a metonymic gesture, it retroactively replaces the infant, allowing the now adult-of-the-infant-that-was to recast the scene of their infancy.

The debates in the live art sector over the last decade seem to have circulated around documentation and dissemination – in other words what happens when the performance is over.

⁷⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993) p.54

Peggy Phelan in her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* makes this point succinctly:

Performance's life is only in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance.⁷⁵

Phelan's definition of the ontology of performance as that which 'becomes itself through disappearance' does not invalidate the potential of performance documentation, but rather positions it as something other than performance itself. This secure ontological notion has been contested through practices which oscillate between performance and other disciplines. Phelan herself cites the activities of Sophie Calle as an example of a practice which resists easy classification.

Taking this a step further, such practices challenge the possibility of classifications themselves. When Roland Barthes designates the space of the text as one of "play" as opposed to the self-contained work, the notion of classification immediately becomes problematic: 'If the Text poses problems of classification, this is because it always involves a certain experience of limits'⁷⁶. These limits are often treacherous in the context of performance practices and their documentation, where the easy conclusion is that the 'performance' is the live event and that anything subsequent is something 'other'. This stratification of genre is often based on the preconception that the performance itself is the original – the true.

The understanding that witnessing live performance somehow gives us greater access to the 'truth' of that work is something that has been directly contested. Amelia Jones in her book *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, ponders ways in which a work is accessed.

⁷⁵ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) p.146

⁷⁶ Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977) p.157

Having direct physical contact with an artist who pulls a scroll from her vaginal canal does not ensure "knowledge" of her (as an individual and/or artist and/or work of art) any more than does looking at a film or picture of this activity, or looking at a painting that was made as a result of such an action.⁷⁷

By affecting an equalisation of worth in different acts of witnessing, Jones liberates the spectator from the pressure of *being there* in our contemporary culture which is continually having to negotiate through representations. This is something that Phelan has noted as an unavoidable, specifically in relation to death, when considering how our understanding of the trauma of survivors of the holocaust is mediated through secondary sources.

As second and third generation survivors know so well, the living witnesses to the theatres of death staged by the Nazis are now dying. The event will soon be able to be known and remembered only through second-order witnessing, through the agency of representations – from films, CD-ROMs, museums, and other public memorials.⁷⁸

The unrepeatable performance of death can only be experienced through documentation⁷⁹. As our collective need to collate, record and preserve fills the archives, museums and libraries, the specific problems faced by practitioners of live art and performance to adequately and representatively document their work is thrust to the fore of their practice.

Given this current obsession with documentation and the refusal of many artists who make live work to show performance pieces as documentation, it is not surprising that practitioners who would identify themselves as 'live' or 'performance' artists are now making work which deals directly with documentation as performance⁸⁰.

⁷⁷ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) p.33

⁷⁸ Peggy Phelan, 'Performance and Death: Ronald Reagan' *Cultural Values* Vol.3 No.1 (1998), 100-122 (p.122)

⁷⁹ Performance and death are explored in detail in Chapter 3: *The Crystal Ball*, Section 5: Psychic Life Scientist: *Julia Laverne*

⁸⁰ Recent works in the UK include Peter Richards's 'Performance Lucida' series where the act of photographing performance art 'recreations' becomes the performance itself, or Hayley Newman's 'Connotations', a series of photographs of fictional performances. For a more sustained analysis of Peter Richards's 'Performance Lucida' series see: Joshua Sofaer, 'Conflict of Interest: Performance as a Spectator Sport' *Performance Research* 5.1 (2000), 120-125



Fig. 14: *The Thing Which Makes Itself Known in
The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge*

As this writing reconfigures some of the interests and ideas of a performance event that is now long past, so too *The Thing Which Makes Itself Known* negotiates this discourse by documenting, in absentia, and long after the event, the affective force of the infant child. *The Thing Which Makes Itself Known* is both documentation and performance, documentation as performance, the performance of the disruptive power of the infant.

Research Tool 4: *Object Biography*



Fig. 15: *The Object Biography*

The Object Biography attempts to track the life of the pillowcase that was laid out on the table with other objects, ready for the celebration and enactment of Joshua Sofaer's circumcision in the family home of 1972.



Fig. 16: *The table laid out with objects ready for the celebration and enactment of Joshua Sofaer's circumcision in the family home of 1972*

Oral histories and photographic evidence suggest that the pillowcase was purchased by Beatrice Davis as she was then, before she got married. Working at the John Hopkins University Hospital in Baltimore in the USA on a placement for three months in 1966 and anticipating her upcoming marriage later that year, she went to The Hecht Company, a 'general store', and purchased two matching pillowcases. They were, by all comparisons quite innovative in decoration for bed linen. The precise history prior to their arrival on the shelves of The Hecht Company can only be surmised. They were bought and brought as votives to a married life. A compressed survey outlines the following geo-chronology for the pillowcase:

Baltimore, USA – Edinburgh, Scotland (house #1) – Washington DC, USA – Cambridge, England (house #1) – Cambridge, England (house #2 – circumcision) – Edinburgh, Scotland (house #2) – Jerusalem, Israel – Leeds, England – Lewes, England – Cambridge, England (the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Downing Street).

Archaeological Model 4

Objects, like people, have social lives. An object can move from one social or geographical context to another and, in this movement, it can acquire different and shifting meanings as it moves across social or geographical boundaries. In recent years, archaeologists have become interested in documenting these changing meanings of individual artifacts and have called them 'object biographies'. As with any personal

*biography, the biographies of objects are mixtures of both deliberate change and accident; incidents that only make sense in hindsight*⁸¹.

Note 4

Wedding photographs very rarely depict the wedding. They are traditionally set up (often taking considerably longer than the ceremony) in the gardens adjacent, or the hall next door. The event the photograph ostensibly purports to record, and the photograph itself, are separated out. The photograph of my circumcision follows this rule of ceremony; the act of ritual, the event itself, is never recorded. It is hinted at, anticipated, articulated through conjecture but as with the problem archaeology encounters of not seeing the event itself and having to adumbrate it through the surrounding material evidence, here photography images circumstances but not *the* event. There are photographs of the baby, photographs of guests, the buffet even the artefacts needed to enact the ritual – but none of the ceremony itself. That the covenant of flesh was given, is evidenced through my living body.

Staring into these photographs taken on my eighth day, the objects on the table prepared in advance from a list of instructions, like the delicacies laid out on plates for the buffet on the other side of the room, I am struck by things that I recognise – a dish (I remember growing up with the picture on it), the 'circumcision table' (later to become a work desk in my childhood bedroom), the cloth on the dining-table (I have it now), and the pillow case (I smell my parents bed, as unable to sleep I patter over to their room, aged three and four; I see my mother's hair spread out).

Searching through my own 'collection' of photographs for other evidence in the life of this pillowcase, I come across what I have been looking for. A snap I took in Jerusalem in around 1981, slightly out of focus, of my mother and my younger sister in bed together, resting on the very same pillowcase.⁸²

⁸¹ See for instance L. Peers, 'Many tender ties: the shifting contexts and meanings of the S BLACK bag' *World Archaeology* Vol.31 No.2 (1999), 288-302 and A. Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁸² Strange justice that the pillow case which cradled the infant and bore witness to the father's promise at the moment of ritual, was present at the fulfillment of that promise: 'If I forget thee, O



Fig. 17: *Sister and Mother in bed.*
Jerusalem c.1981

The intractable problems the archaeologist faces when attempting to determine the subjectivity of prehistoric women and men and the necessary reliance on the interpretation of surrounding material evidence, leads to the concept of the object biography. In a post-Freudian society where such overwhelming emphasis is placed on psychic motivations and drives, despite the increasing material suffocation of capitalism, to rethink the materiality of the object in terms of the life it has led, is one that may lend us a useful model for thinking about subjectivity itself.

The identity of the object, especially the personal object or souvenir, is usually configured in relation to the user or owner. As Susan Stewart observes:

The souvenir of [this] type is intimately mapped against the life history of an individual; it tends to be found in connection with rites of passage (birth, initiation, marriage and death) as the material sign of an abstract referent: transformation of status.⁸³

This is the case with the pillowcase which was bought to bring to a married life. The connection accounts for its survival. The accepted narrative of the pillowcase follows the life-associations, which is to say the memories, of its primary user. Like the heirloom,

Jerusalem, / Let my right hand forget her cunning. / Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, / If I remember thee not; / If I set not Jerusalem / Above my chiefest joy'. Psalm 137: 5-6, traditionally said by the father just before the circumcision.

⁸³ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984) p.139

which finds its history formed by the history of its passing between owner, from generation to generation, the pillowcase finds its significance restricted to the heads that remember resting on it.

The function of the heirloom is to weave, quite literally by means of narrative, a significance of blood relation at the expense of a larger view of history and causality.⁸⁴

Not only is the 'life' of the object effaced by that of the owner, but the object only signifies in terms of the memories (real or invented) of that owner.

There is no continuous identity between these objects and their referents. Only the act of memory constitutes their resemblance.⁸⁵

But while the life of the object often moves alongside that of its owner, it has a separate narrative. Of course the basic geographical narrative of the pillowcase as outlined in the opening of this section does not even begin to account for the conversations that will have taken place resting on the pillowcase, the pillow-fights it will have taken part in, the amount of times it will have been washed, or the millions of bedbugs that it will have been host to. More importantly perhaps, being a pillowcase this particular object also captures a different world, the world of the unconscious, the world of the dream, worlds which can never be known.

The pillowcase biography splinters the rather linear archaeological and sociological understanding of the object biography, which considers objects being handed down from person to person, and turns it into a process that has many points of contact at any given moment. In other words, we have one object in contact with many biographies, rather than an object with any singular, easily describable history. This splintering of object histories by seeing them as simultaneously linked to many people and many other objects has implications for what we mean by a notion of context and the extent to which the multiple

⁸⁴ Ibid. p.137

⁸⁵ Ibid.: p.145

meanings of objects are not just archaeologically or sociologically inaccessible, but even conceptually impossible, in the sense that they are constrained by our capacity for mental processing. One might also say something similar about personal biographies, in that the lives of each and every person are interwoven with the lives of others, and original understandings of biography in terms of what one might call a 'life-course trajectory' also become splintered through the situation of the individual in a web of relationships.

Hence a notion: the splintered biography. The splintered biography acknowledges and expands on Mary Evans' assertion of the impossibility of auto/biography: 'The search for the 'real' person is doomed to disappointment, for the two very good reasons that no 'real' person actually exists, and cannot be contained, let alone represented, in print.'⁸⁶ The splintered biography not only highlights the impossibility of tracing, remembering or accounting for the 'everything' that might formulate a subject and their life-narrative – an obvious point perhaps – it also highlights the infinite and circular performativity in the act of articulating an auto/biographic narrative, where the retelling of a life becomes part of that life and therefore part of the telling. Truly performative in J. L. Austin's terms, because the articulation becomes action; and also conceptually infinite, for as the retelling becomes the stuff of life-narrative, so in turn that telling is told. Writing auto/biography is auto/biography.

The pillowcase biography highlights a double impossibility of auto/biography: as the site of the circumcision it represents the impossibility of representing the infant self which is outside memory; as the site of the resting head it represents the world of the unconscious or semiconscious into which we travel in every sleeping hour.

It is this semiconscious world of sleep that opens *A la recherche du temps perdu* and it is a theme that laces its way through to the end.

⁸⁶ Mary Evans, *Missing Persons: The impossibility of auto/biography* (London: Routledge, 1999) p.138

When a man is asleep, he has in a circle around him the chain of the hours, the sequence of the years, the order of the heavenly bodies. Instinctively he consults them when he awakes, and in an instant reads off his own position on the earth's surface and the time that has elapsed during his slumbers....⁸⁷

In other words, the world of sleep opens up freedoms and experiences outside consciousness and more importantly outside time, that dissolve into redeployed time on waking. For Proust's *protagonist*, for whom memory is the very *raison d'être* – and the man who has to imprison his beloved Albertine in order that she not escape his conscious understanding, in order that he can know, and write, her every movement – sleep is a double bind. On one hand it is what he craves desperately for nourishment and relief, and on the other it forces him into a hated 'not-knowing'.

We do not include the pleasures we enjoy in sleep in the inventory of the pleasures we have experienced in the course of our existence. To take only the most grossly sensual of them all, which of us, on waking has not felt a certain irritation at having experienced in his sleep a pleasure which, if he is anxious not to tire himself, he is not, once he is awake, at liberty to repeat indefinitely during that day. It seems a positive waste. We have had pleasure in another life which is not ours. If we enter up in a budget the pains and pleasures of dreams (which generally vanish soon enough after our waking), it is not in the current account of everyday life.⁸⁸

A crass example perhaps, but one nevertheless that brings home the splintering of the world of sleep: 'another life which is not ours'. Indeed the *protagonist* of *A la recherche du temps perdu* acts as a splintering mechanism for the subjectivity of its author. Literature (arts practice in general) allows for the possibility of inter-relating what we understand as fact and fiction. Marcel Proust splinters his own biography in the life of his protagonist. And then again; post-structuralism has revealed that as we encounter arts practice, such accounts are further splintered through that act of encounter.⁸⁹ This model of 'reader as author' is pushed to a limit in Jacqueline Rose's novel *Albertine*. The novel retells the events of *A la recherche du temps perdu* that revolve around Albertine, from her point of

⁸⁷ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* Vols 1-6 trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996) Vol.1 p.3

⁸⁸ Ibid. Vol.4 p.442

⁸⁹ See for instance Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* trans. by Richard Howard (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), especially Chapter 2 'From Work to Text'.

view, and from those of her friend Andrée Bouvet. This is not simply a fictional offshoot of Proust's fictionalised account of his own experiences. Rose includes 'factual' biographic detail of Proust's life that Proust himself does not offer in his novel, giving for instance the central location of the narrative as the apartment in Boulevard Malesherbes, which was Proust's family home. Rose takes for her narrative one splinter out of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. She proliferates her encounter with Proust by following one of its pathways.

On the inside jacket cover we are told that the work 'stands on its own, needing no knowledge of the original'. Undoubtedly this marketing strategy which attempts to be all inclusive has some basis in the projected experience of readers – *Albertine* is a story which can be read on its own terms – but having 'knowledge of the original', without which *Albertine* would not exist, situates Rose's 'novel' as a refreshingly ontologically insecure interpretation and reinterpretation of the thoughts and events that pervade *A la recherche du temps perdu*. What is offered is not only a reverse positioning of selected events which occur in the Proust, but a psychoanalytic perspective on both the characters and their author. *Albertine* is simultaneously a novel, textual analysis, literary conceit and psychoanalytic case study. Part of Rose's political impetus seems to be about inverting the assumptions that might result from a cursory reading of Albertine's position as captive to the obsessions and neuroses of the protagonist of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. ('So there is a fine irony in the fact that, superficially at least, you might conclude that it is he who has trapped me.'⁹⁰) The Albertine of Proust, who appears so much a projection of the protagonist's world view, is given a voice of her own.

Inside this house, I have felt safe for the first time. To begin with at least, when we returned to the city, it was like being on a train, destination chosen, ticket purchased, sitting in my seat with nothing more to decide. This is not one of the trains of my childhood. I am on my own. What I love about these journeys is being taken somewhere by someone you never have to see, who knows absolutely nothing about why you were there. And if they have no clue as to your final destination when you leave them, even less can they envisage – for it is of absolutely no interest – what might, for the duration of the journey during which you rely on them so totally, be going on inside your mind. A little contract to

⁹⁰ Rose, Jacqueline, *Albertine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001) p.13

which neither of the parties have signed. I will enclose you in this space, carry you in this cradle, even rock you to sleep, and then put you down without protest or remark, where and when you choose. And the dreams that you dream all the while are strictly none of my affair.⁹¹

But of course the protagonist of *A la recherche du temps perdu* wishes to capture every gesture, every action, and were it possible, every thought and every dream of Albertine. He feverishly wants to be able to write the auto/biography that Mary Evans cites as impossible because this is the only way he can prove to himself that she does (or doesn't) love him. He imprisons Albertine in order that he may write her biography. By giving Albertine a voice and a thinking mind, Rose confounds what was always already an impossible desire for Proust's protagonist: the fact that he would never be able to possess Albertine's thoughts. ('A jealous man never sees – perhaps I should have told him – that his greatest rivals are not a woman's other lovers, who after all make room for him and who come and go as she, and they, may please, but her other companions of the night, who always arrive when they are least welcome and crowd every last corner of her mind.'⁹²) By intervening in the narrative world of *A la recherche du temps perdu* while maintaining its narrative curve, Rose offers a model for a twice splintered subjectivity: she exposes (or rather creates) the thoughts of Albertine which have been inaccessible to the male protagonist, in the process of reworking Marcel Proust's novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* as the novel *Albertine*. In this sense *Albertine* is inter-textual and self-reflexive, for it articulates within its pages the splintering action that it makes by its very existence.

In a literary mirror to Proust's famous passage which tells how the protagonist first spies Albertine on the Balbec beach, Rose's Albertine articulates the same events from her point of view. This simple literary device – a retelling from a different perspective where the observer becomes the observed ('For days on end he stared'⁹³) – highlights the obvious but easily forgotten, way in which 'different' life-narratives are necessarily interwoven, while remaining separate. This reworking also points outside itself and

⁹¹ Ibid. p.113

⁹² Ibid. p.145

⁹³ Ibid. p.8

introduces the phantasmatic realm of the author's own biography. One never escapes the world of the author when reading their novel.

I thought – as you do when you read a very long book – how am I going to live without this? So I devised ways of not living without it.⁹⁴

Albertine is thus intimately caught up in the biography of Jacqueline Rose and Jacqueline Rose in *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

Proust's magnum opus has inspired many artists in general terms but has also spawned plenty of specific artistic interpretations and re-workings in all forms of genre⁹⁵. This intertextuality between arts practices parallels the way in which human biographies splinter at the point of encountering the 'other', but also exemplifies the way subjectivities are splintered through arts practice itself.

My own relationship with *A la recherche du temps perdu*, its author Marcel Proust and the famous scene in which the protagonist spies Albertine on the beach at Balbec, is necessarily understood (as all things are) in relation to the narrative of my own life. I myself have travelled to Cabourg, the Normandy town on which Proust and later Rose, based Balbec. I have stood on the esplanade of Le Grand-Hôtel (now named Promenade Marcel Proust) and gazed over the sand to the sea, placing Albertine on the shore of my mind.

The grains of sand on Balbec beach, Marcel Proust, Jacqueline Rose, Albertine, Cabourg and me; we all become one splintered mass of interconnected and irreconcilable interrelating vectors, circulating around space, time, event and text.

⁹⁴ Jacqueline Rose quoted in Frances Williams, 'Out and Proust: Jacqueline Rose on reworking Albertine' *Time Out* 24-31 October 2001, p.114

⁹⁵ These include many films, most recently *Time Regained* by Raul Ruiz and *La Captive* by Chantal Akerman; artworks, including themed shows such as *Art & Memory: Contemporary Painters in Search of Marcel Proust* at the Francis Kyle Gallery in London spring 2000 and the somewhat larger *Marcel Proust: l'écriture et les arts* at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris at around the same time; a self-help book by Alain de Botton titled *How Proust Can Change Your Life*; the novel *In The Absence of Men* by Philippe Besson and of course *Albertine* by Jacqueline Rose; and countless works of non-fiction including literary essays, criticism and biography ad infinitum.

But that which I observe as irreconcilable (too much, too many) others have sought to clarify. There are models of literature which attempt to write it all: literally every action and every thought. Nicholson Baker's novel *Room Temperature* transcribes all the thoughts that enter the mind of the protagonist as he feeds his baby daughter her afternoon bottle. The stream of consciousness of Baker's protagonist separates off the outside world from the internal musings of his mind. This, he believes, can offer back the whole of one's life.

I certainly believed, rocking my daughter on this Wednesday afternoon, that with a little concentration one's whole life could be reconstructed from any single twenty-minute period randomly or almost randomly selected; that is, that there was enough content in that single confined sequence of thoughts and events and the setting that gave rise to them to make connections that would proliferate backward until potentially every item of autobiographical interest – every pet theory, minor observation, significant moment of shame or happiness – could be at least glancingly covered; but you had to expect that a version of your past arrived at in this way would exhibit [...] certain telltale differences of emphasis from the past you would recount if you proceeded serially, beginning with "I was born on January 5th, 1957," and letting each moment give birth naturally to the next. The particular cell you started from colored your entire reaction.⁹⁶

In the acknowledgement of the 'telltale differences' that would inhabit such an intention, the infinite possibilities of uncontainable life narratives is made clear. A biography simply has just too many points of reference for it to ever be written. Interestingly enough, it is writing itself which presents both the possibility and impossibility of Baker's project. What escapes his account is the moment of writing itself, as if the printed page was created by some kind of concomitant computer print-out automatically generated by the thoughts themselves. The reader is left to wonder how (on earth) Baker could remember such detailed actions and thoughts in order to write them down later, or, if he was writing them as he was experiencing them, why he does not mention the process itself⁹⁷. The moment of writing is effaced from the task to write 'everything', leaving the writing incomplete; a successful literary conceit but a philosophical failure.

⁹⁶ Nicholson Baker, *Room Temperature* (London: Granta Books, 1984 repr. 1990) p.41

⁹⁷ The same thing proves true in Kenneth Goldsmith's *Fidget* which is an attempt to write down every moment made during thirteen hours on 16 June 1997 but fails to acknowledge how the record of these actions was itself manufactured.



Fig. 18: *Two pillowcases*

The object biography of the pillowcase awaiting my circumcision highlights the way in which life-narratives are infinitely splintering off, branching out, possibly beyond our reach but certainly impossible to contain. Indeed, the object of this biography is itself subject to a similar instability, and impossibility, for in truth there are two such pillowcases, and there is no way of telling which one it was that was on the table in the photograph. So the object biography must conjoin the biography of two objects; two objects which have had separate histories which I can not separate out. Through this not-knowing, the splintered biography is splintered yet again.



Fig. 19: The Object Biography in
The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge

Research Tool 5: *Father/Baby Optical Adjusters*



Fig. 20: *The Father/Baby Optical Adjusters*

The Father/Baby Optical Adjusters are an old pair of glasses belonging to Jeffrey Sofaer (the father) into which have been inserted lensticular lenses: bulbous, circular and highly charged, blurring the vision of all but the most extremely deficient eyesights.

While physically affecting the sight of those that wear them, in reminiscence of the blurred immature physiology of infant vision, the Father/Baby Optical Adjusters also act as a symbolic referent which reinstates the hidden position of the father/photographer within the domestic scene of the family snapshot.

A photograph taken in the family bathroom; mother and daughter wash the newly born son. Peering into this scene from the perspective of the hidden photographer twenty-eight and a half years after it was taken, the adult gaze effaces the childhood experience.



Fig. 21: *The Bathroom Photograph*



Fig. 22: Bathroom recreation by John Swogger: general view

Disinter/est commissioned archaeological illustrator John Swogger to create a virtual version of the bathroom scene in an attempt to experience, or re-experience, the different viewpoints of those people in the room at the instant the photograph was taken. The recreation begins by including the photographer, which, without concrete evidence, was presumed to be the father. Putting him back in the picture (literally) completes the domestic scene that is otherwise only partial.

Archaeological Model 5

Phenomenological approaches suggest that we can reach interpretations through bodily experience. In other words, that by experiencing the world through the body we gain insights into experience itself. It has had a significant impact on a number of well-known British archaeologists in the early 1990's to present and has been particularly influential in

terms of exploring landscape and monumental architecture⁹⁸. Such explorations seek to identify how the body encountered space in the past, although it has also been much critiqued within the discipline and remains controversial.

Note 5

In an article on the differences between film and photography, 'Photography and Fetish', Christian Metz says of the photographic subject: 'The person who has been photographed, not the total person, is dead, dead for having been seen'⁹⁹. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes augments this argument when he describes the being in the photograph as having 'become Total Image, which is to say, Death in person'¹⁰⁰. The body in photographic representation that Metz and Barthes configure as dead, is analogous to the archaeological body that is literally dead. Looking at photographs of our infant selves is like looking at a dead self and there is a strange vertiginous instability in hailing the subject in the domestic family snapshot as being oneself.

This instability is particularly marked if there is an inability to attribute the time in question to any recollection. This is always the case with early childhood, as infancy predates memory¹⁰¹. Looking at self in a photograph of which you have no recollection about the circumstances of its creation is not restricted to early childhood and of course we have many experiences in life for which we have no voluntary memory – perhaps *most* of our experiences we do not remember. The indexical materiality of the photograph promises so much remedy on this score, and yet it acts as proof rather than as trigger.

The Photograph does not call up the past (nothing Proustian in a photograph). The effect it produces upon me is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed.¹⁰²

The photograph highlights a point of fact. The Proustian effect, of which Barthes considers there to be 'nothing' in the photograph, is that of involuntary memory. Involuntary memory

⁹⁸ See B. Bender, *Stonehenge: Making Space* (Oxford: Berg, 1993)

⁹⁹ Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish' *October* No.34 Fall (1985), 81-90 (p.84)

¹⁰⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993) p.14

¹⁰¹ Although as we have seen in the case of Yukio Mishima, some people say that they can remember their own birth.

¹⁰² Barthes p.82

is held in the materiality of an object (which again the photograph seems to promise) – a madeleine, a church bell, a cobbled street.

The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling.¹⁰³

This sentence, which precedes the famous account of the madeleine, identifies Proust's understanding of the power of material culture to conduct time. Unlike voluntary memory where the past exists within and as the present, an involuntary memory, as Deleuze summarises, 'appears as it could not be experienced: not in reality, but in its truth; not in its external and contingent relations, but in its internalized difference, in its essence'¹⁰⁴.

The tea soaked madeleine which Proust's *protagonist* brings to his lips does not recall, in the present, an experience he had in Combray in the past; rather the taste of the madeleine *is* Combray, it contains it, so that the past is inseparable from the present.

The bathroom photograph denies both voluntary and involuntary access to past memories. It is outside conscious memory, it eludes it; that is for the adult-that-was-infant. The photograph becomes something else – a record of an event that happened – almost as if to someone else. Perhaps there is a clue in this 'someone else'. Instead of pursuing the hopeless attempt to understand the image in term of one's own past experience, rather see oneself through the eyes of another. To pick up again from Metz and Barthes, if the body in the photograph is dead, then necessarily the eyes of the living body which gaze into those of the image must belong to someone else¹⁰⁵. If this 'someone else' is the transformed but same self then the process becomes one of self-reflection, in which assessments are made as to the value of the self-image in relation to self-identity. The 'look at me then, look at me now'.

¹⁰³ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* Vols 1-6 trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996) Vol.1 p.51

¹⁰⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000) p.61

¹⁰⁵ One is not dead before one is alive.

What does it mean to momentarily inhabit the eyes of another; to achieve self-knowledge through the identification with others?



Fig. 23: Bathroom photograph 2000

In the first stages of love we tend to check our appearance more often than we would usually do. This is surely not simply a question of struggling to control our self-image but also an attempt to see if we can identify ourselves as we are (to be) seen through the beloved's eyes.

If she had seen me, what could I have represented to her? From the depths of what universe did she discern me?¹⁰⁶

A la recherche du temps perdu is littered with such references, where Swann and here the narrator, detective and captor of their beloved respectively, attempt to discern how they are viewed by the object of their own attention. It is a labour that does not yield fruit, not for Swann, the narrator, or the reader. Oddette and Albertine remain flat projections of the protagonist's world view and ironically it is in the search for the 'truth' of their beloved's feelings that both Swann and the narrator come to realise that they are not (or rather, no longer) in love themselves: ('To think that I've wasted years of my life, that I've longed to die, that I've experienced my greatest love, for a woman who didn't appeal to me, who

¹⁰⁶ Proust Vol.2 p.432

wasn't even my type!"¹⁰⁷). So through the attempt at configuring self through other, an alternative (more accurate – more truthful?) understanding of one's own desire is attained.

The virtual recreation of the various viewpoints in the bathroom photograph extend this attempt to see self through the gaze of the other, by literally offering up their vision. Seeing through the eyes of the mother and the sister forces contemplation of the domestic filial and sibling relations – in this case typically gendered for 1970's Britain – bathing and learning how to bathe the baby. But this only goes to confirm what we already think we know from the photograph itself. As in Swann and the narrator's endless attempts to understand what their beloved think, the virtual mother/daughter recreations highlight spatial dynamics but not personal thought processes.



Bathroom recreations by John Swogger
Fig. 24: Mother view



Fig. 25: Daughter view



Fig. 26: Baby view



Fig. 27: Father /
photographer view



Fig. 28: Bathroom recreation by John Swogger:
blurred baby view

So then to the self: the blurred baby perspective which highlights the non-individuated world-view of the neonate and the photographic documentation from which it was (re)created. At one specular edge we have the father's view, that is the bathroom

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Vol.1 p.460

photograph that we can look at now, of an event we know to have taken place in that particular space (to the extent that we can ever know anything) and at another there is the recreation of what we understand as the blurred baby-view, the cognition that is not known, that can only be guessed at and never really be understood¹⁰⁸. It is perhaps in the space *between* these two frames of vision that we can settle the curiosity about the domestic moment encapsulated in the bathroom photograph.

In attempting to describe her experience following the death of her father when she was seven years old – knowing that events took place despite the almost total gap in her memory – Kate Love has articulated a model for experience itself.

...this gap-space (knowing and yet not knowing) which, strangely, and quite startlingly, I now also recognise might not be unlike a new and possibly more adequate interpretation of experience itself.¹⁰⁹

This model rejects the reading of experience as purely sensate, or on the other hand held entirely in language – that is understood – and places experience at the limit of understanding, as both 'undergoing and interpreting simultaneously'¹¹⁰.

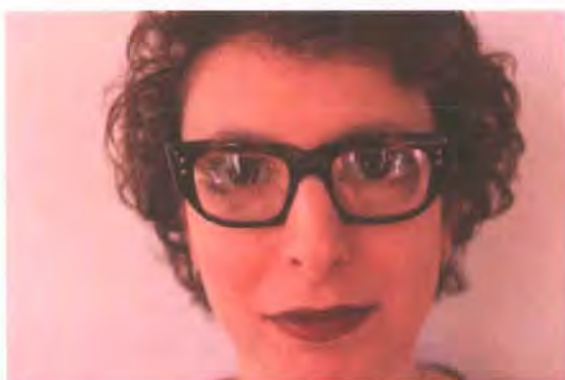


Fig. 29: Joanna Sofaer Derevenski wearing *The Father/Baby Optical Adjusters*



Fig. 30: Joshua Sofaer wearing *The Father/Baby Optical Adjusters*

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 3: The Crystal Ball, Section 1: Optometrist: *Rod Dale* for a further exploration of a blurring vision towards blindness in relation to the last writings and works of artist and filmmaker Derek Jarman.

¹⁰⁹ Kate Love, 'Experience Preferred' in *Experience* ed. by Kate Love (London: Loose-leaf, 2000)

p.2
¹¹⁰ Ibid. p.7

By wearing The Father/Baby Optical Adjusters – to see a blur, as the infant does – is to acknowledge that this blurring, this not quite in focus, is not only an appropriate model for the recreation of infant experience, but is also all one can hope for in the adult attempt to disinter the infant self.

Configured as such, the bathroom image of the infant self is not physiognomic but rather a site for the contestation of personal experience. The blurred recreation of infant vision becomes a metaphor for the attempted reclaiming of the experience of that moment.



Fig. 31: *The Father/Baby Optical Adjusters in The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge*

Research Tool 6: *Fort/Da Mother Doll*



Fig. 32: *The Fort/Da Mother Doll*

The Fort/Da Mother Doll is a doll modelled on the infant's mother. The doll incorporates locks of the mother's hair which had been growing during the years in question; the hair the infant child gazed at, smelt and caressed.

The Fort/Da Mother Doll allows the now-adult-of-the-infant-that-was to infantilise their mother and explicitly replay the separation trauma observed by Freud in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' discarding and reclaiming in therapeutic frenzy.



Figs. 33 – 39: Joshua Sofaer replays the separation trauma with The Fort/Da Mother Doll

Archaeological Model 6

From an archaeological perspective, given the time depth and cultural variability with which archaeology deals, the use of psychoanalytic models for human behaviour needs to be treated with caution. It seems risky, to say the least, to employ a paradigm developed in the very specific context of the sexually repressed atmosphere of early 20th century Vienna as a universal principle of human development. The acceptance of Freudian doctrine implies, among other things, the prioritisation of a set of very particular constructions of sex, gender and age that may, or may not, have been of significance to past people and which are themselves highly contested in contemporary society.

Note 6

Freud famously observes a young child (the child we know to be his grandson Ernst aged one and a half) throw into his curtained cot a cotton reel, or spool, on a string. With the throwing gesture the child shouts out an "o-o-o-o" sound which Freud relates to the German word 'fort' meaning 'gone'. The child then pulls back the cotton reel using the

string, grasping it with a gleeful 'a-a-a-a' which Freud relates to the German word "da" meaning 'here'.

He elucidates:

The interpretation of the game then became obvious. It was related to the child's great cultural achievement – the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. He compensated himself for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach.¹¹¹

He later offers an alternative explanation:

But still another interpretation may be attempted. Throwing away the object so that it was 'gone' might satisfy an impulse of the child's, which was suppressed in his actual life, to revenge himself on his mother for going away from him. In that case it would have a defiant meaning: 'All right, then, go away! I don't need you. I'm sending you away myself.'¹¹²

As Derrida observes, it is this section of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' that is 'the one often retained in the exoteric, and occasionally the esoteric, space of psychoanalysis as one of the most important, and even decisive, chapters of the essay'¹¹³. The pervasive application of this kind of psychoanalytic universal – Ernst as all children – offers the autobiographer a template for their childhood activity – but it is not one that could be easily 'proved'. The story of the spool has become internalised by psychoanalysis to such a degree that one imagines the observer of a given child to anticipate a fort/da; 'discovering' the game despite a lack of evidence. And even if predetermination can be ruled out (but how will you see it unless you are looking for it, and if you are looking for it then you will know about it) then such a search would stumble on the insecurities of observation and memory. The question of the potential of such an autobiographic moment is not going to be answered by asking those who cared for us as a young child if we compulsively discarded and sought out our toys.

¹¹¹ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Standard Edition Vol.18 (London: Vintage, 2001) p.15

¹¹² Ibid. p.16

¹¹³ Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card* trans. by Alan Bass (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) p.294

For Disinter/est, which seeks to explore infancy autobiographically using archaeology, such psychoanalytic readings, while restrictive by their omnipresence (as Derrida says of the spool argument, 'this legend, is already too legendary, overburdened, obliterated'¹¹⁴) can be a useful way of starting to think about childhood activity within the domestic space.

Having attempted to reject psychoanalytic models for the interpretation of childhood, it is necessary to acknowledge that working at such close quarters with family on family, inevitably the processes themselves become ones of 'working through'. The literal digging was perhaps not as impactful as the psychic digging.

As part of the research process we asked each of the/our parents, who have been separated for many years, to complete a questionnaire. Most of the questions were devised in order to be able to clarify factual information about the time in question.

Question number 28, in a section titled 'Questions relating to childhood activity' was as follows: 'What was a typical day for Joshua during this time?'. Here follows the/our father's response.

Breastfed for several months. Some of the time playing with Joanna, mum and dad, or in baby bouncer (suspended beside the swing in the bedroom), and most of the rest lying gurgling in his cot, surrounded by stimulating coloured mobiles, squeeze toys and musical boxes. Also out for walks in push chair. Mummy used to play a game with Joshua that I didn't approve of, showing him some exciting object (which he immediately took interest in), bringing it temptingly close, and then taking it away, laughing, repeating this several times.

This game the/my mother allegedly used to play with me enacts in reverse that which Freud identifies as being of great developmental importance in the relationship between mother and child. In this instance the fort/da becomes a da/fort.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.298

While she maintained that she had no recollection of such a game, confronted with this anecdote the/my mother would not deny (indeed emphatically refused to deny) that such a game took place. Without specifying what she thought they were, she was however, quick to refute the "implications" and "insinuations" of the anecdote. So what are the implications and insinuations of this da/fort game?

According to Freud the spool the child discards (o-o-o-o) only to reclaim (a-a-a-a) in repetitious gesture, is a symbolic representation of the mother; throwing it away and reclaiming it could be both a coping strategy for her departure and return and/or a mechanism of revenge on the same account.

By the same logic the exciting object with which the mother tempts her son (a-a-a-a) only to take it away (o-o-o-o) repeating this several times, is a metonym for him himself; revealing it and removing it could be both her coping strategy in recognition of the infant's fragile mortality (potentially 'here' and then 'gone') and her responsibility therein and/or equally a mechanism of revenge for the demands that mortality and vulnerability place on her. Either way this marks out an arena of possible conflict for the child, where the mother is the person who both supplies and denies access to love/himself/exciting objects. This is a paradoxical pattern which is often played out in all love relationships where the person who has the power to alleviate hurt or unhappiness is the very person who caused it.

Such speculative psychoanalytic interpretations of a mother's play with her son (by her son) seem over-speculative and not particularly useful (despite the multifarious applications such an interpretation might offer to an adult mother/son relationship). The motivation of this writing is not that of trying to unlock the hidden secrets of the drives of the parent/child dyad. Rather it is in unpacking the structural inter-relation between the canonical text (psychoanalytic theory), the biographical account (the/my father's anecdote) and arts practice (the making and staging of The Fort/Da Mother Doll).

In 'To Speculate – On Freud', speculation is both the occasion of Derrida's reading of, and to note what Freud himself does in, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. A speculation to and from, forth and back, like the spool itself. Derrida reads 'Beyond...' in terms of what he calls the 'auto-bio-thanato-hetero-graphic scene of writing'¹¹⁵. This neologism references the elaborate set of concerns that Derrida brings out of the fort/da argument, establishing not so much the biographical trace of its author, but the scene in which Freud writes. This encompasses doubt, mourning, jealousy and guilt which 'entrap speculation'. Through this deconstructive/constructive schema, Derrida observes the possibility for 'a new theoretical and practical charter for any possible autobiography.'¹¹⁶ This charter is founded in writing itself, and Derrida's stake is to discern (to name) what it is that is happening in Freud's repetition through writing, of the argument that he makes about the fort/da.

Thus is confirmed the abyssal "overlapping" that I proposed above: of the object or the content of *Beyond...*, of what Freud is supposedly writing, describing, analyzing, questioning, treating, etc., and, on the other hand, the system of his writing gestures, the scene of writing that he is playing or that plays itself. With him, without him, by him, or all at once. This is the same "complete game" of the *fort/da*. Freud does with (without) the object of his text exactly what Ernst does with (without) his spool.¹¹⁷

Freud reveals himself autobiographically through his observational writing – the observer is always caught up with the observed.

...the speculating grandfather, in describing or recalling this or that, recalls *himself*.¹¹⁸

The creation and staging of The Fort/Da Mother Doll is also an overt repetition which becomes the scene for *this* writing. Playing with the doll repeats Ernst's gesture and potentially all of our own childhood gestures and inverts (and avenges?) the da/fort game the/my mother played with her son/me. This time-map of past action to present echoes Bergson's thesis in *Matter and Memory* – the repetition of the past in the present as being

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p.336

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p.322

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p.320

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p.321

the present – past as present. Throwing The Fort/Da Mother Doll away and getting it back, is an action of performance in the present which refers to the past – conjures it – repeats it – but nevertheless does not become it. It is the past lived as present. Further, it is through an attempted re-staging of the past that one *becomes* present. It is also performative in J. L. Austin's sense, in that it is through language that the action takes place – for while the event has been staged (for the sake of the photographic demonstration) the action really exists in its being told. For Derrida it is also in the act of telling, in the 'scene of writing' that 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' becomes autobiography.



Fig. 40: *The Fort/Da Mother Doll in The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge*

Derrida's deconstruction of Freud's observational account of the fort/da also forces an inquiry into the relationship between the mother and father of the da/fort anecdote. The detached quasi-scientific manner with which the/my father recalls this incident ('...bringing it temptingly close, and then taking it away, laughing, repeating this several times') does not simply seem to be a gendered response to an uncomfortable memory – it also questions his reaction at the time he refers to, betraying his stasis and paralysis to effect a change to a situation that he 'didn't approve of'. The accusation based in his recollection incriminates his own position within the domestic scene.

Research Tool 7: Aeroplane Spoon



Fig. 42: *The Aeroplane Spoon*

The Aeroplane Spoon is a conjunction of a childhood toy and a childhood feeding implement. It is both a utilitarian and a symbolic object. Its utilitarian properties are clear; it feeds the young child. The Aeroplane Spoon plays the aeroplane game for reluctant palettes.



Fig. 43: *Joshua Sofaer being fed with The Aeroplane Spoon*

Symbolically it references both language and ritual. The child that is born with a silver spoon in their mouth is the child who is born with advantage. To be 'spoon-fed' is to devolve responsibility to another.

Archaeological Model 7

In mediating accepted norms of social life, objects simultaneously control and regulate behaviour. The object becomes part of a cycle of repetition and reproduction. It becomes a participant in repeated actions in which the behaviour of people, through their interaction with the object, is disciplined and exposed. In the case of the child-adult relationship where the young child is dependent on the adult, this regulation is two-way.

The need for food is a key element of the dependency / control relationship between child and carer, where the provision of food is enacted through ritualised eating practices in which both parties participate in particular roles¹¹⁹. Food is both a gift and a power game where pleasure, provision, coercion and demand are intertwined. The role of food in the performance of ritual is, of course, a repeated theme within the anthropological and archaeological literature, especially in terms of feasting, but by considering ritual as reiteration rather than exception, the sacred and the profane, the ordinary and the extraordinary are collapsed.

¹¹⁹ See D. Lupton, *Food, the Body and the Self* (London: Sage, 1996)

Note 7

The Aeroplane Spoon is the prop in the interactive feeding performance between parent and child. How are these diurnal performances learnt?

In the questionnaire that we asked our parents to complete, we requested information on where they sought guidance on child rearing¹²⁰. Both parents clearly state that regular use was made of Dr. Spock's manual *Baby and Child Care*: "we consulted him all the time," our mother wrote.

Dr. Spock was an American Paediatrician who first published his child rearing manual in 1946, under the title *The Commonsense Book of Baby and Child Care*. In subsequent years the book sold over fifty million copies, was translated into more than thirty languages and to date is the best selling book in the world after the bible¹²¹. Given that millions upon millions of children have been raised under the auspices of his guidance, the impact of Benjamin Spock on the lives and lifestyles of those born in the west in the second half of the twentieth century should not be underestimated. Dr. Spock's manual acts as a performance script for the interaction of millions of parents and children. At the time of his death in 1998 aged 94, Spock's influence on Western child rearing was recognised by President Clinton's statement, released by the White House:

Hillary and I were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Dr. Benjamin Spock. For half a century, Dr. Spock guided parents across the country and around the world in their most important job – raising their children.¹²²

I was keen to find out the content of this multi-million seller. Flicking through a copy of the book, I was struck by one of the illustrations by Dorothea Fox in the section 'The Bath' in the chapter 'Daily Care'. The illustration of mother bathing the baby, with the caption 'Your

¹²⁰ This questionnaire was mentioned above in relation to the Fort/Da Mother Doll and the daily routine of the household children.

¹²¹ See Lynn Bloom, *Doctor Spock: Biography of a Conservative Radical* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1972)

¹²² Excerpt from statement by President Clinton from White House Daily Briefing 16 March 1998. See Mike McCurry, 'White House Daily Briefing March 16, 1998' (1998) < <http://usembassy-australia.state.gov/hyper/WF980316/epf101.htm> > [accessed 12 August 2001]

hand under his arm, your wrist supporting his head' bore a remarkable similarity to the photograph taken by my father of my mother washing me – the bathroom photograph of Research Tool 5. There was something which appeared highly staged in this repetition of the Fox illustration, both in terms of the action itself – the wrist supporting the head as the baby is bathed – and the mise-en-scene of the image – the angle of the gaze, the position of the key players. The bathroom photograph here becomes a performance still of the bathing ritual, evidence that the piece was staged according to the script, as the author intended.



Your hand under his arm, your wrist supporting his head

Fig. 43: 'Your hand under his arm, your wrist supporting his head' by Dorothea Fox



Fig. 44: *The Bathroom Photograph*

The everyday as performance is not something unique to the raising of children, and of course it would be possible to read practically all actions of daily life as interpretations of pre-set performance scripts.

In his analysis of social reality, configured as a series of frames of reference, Erving Goffman defines the relationship between the individual and the performance of the everyday as the 'person-role formula':

...whenever an individual participates in an episode of activity, a distinction will be drawn between what is called the person, individual, or player, namely he who participates, and the particular role, capacity, or function he realizes during that participation. And a connection between these two elements will be understood. In short, there will be a *person-role formula*. The nature of a particular frame will, of course, be linked to

the nature of the person-role formula it sustains. One can never expect complete freedom between individual and role and never complete constraint. But no matter where on this continuum a particular formula is located, the formula itself will express the sense in which the framed activity is geared into the continuing world.¹²³

In this way we are always both ourselves and the roles we play. The terms on which we are read by others oscillates between person and role, but often focuses on role:

Interestingly, in everyday affairs, one is not always aware of a particular individual's part in life, that is, his biography, awareness often focusing more on the role he performs in some particular connection – political, domestic, or whatever.¹²⁴

With regard to parenting it is useful to think of how the child, even the adult child, sees its parents precisely on these terms, which is to say as 'mother' and 'father' (with the concomitant expectations of their performance that such roles inevitably bring) rather than as 'people' in their own right. The child understands the parent in relation to themselves.

The role of 'mother' particularly, occupies a position of performative expectation where the compulsory heteronormative matrix – gendered as 'mother' – is enforced. The mother's role has been defined (and redefined) from culture to culture and epoch to epoch; it has nevertheless, been defined.

After the publication in 1990 of her seminal book critiquing compulsory heterosexuality, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler spent considerable space in subsequent essays refuting a misreading of her argument that gender was somehow radical choice. The misreading of *Gender Trouble* stemmed from Butler's example of drag as a way of critiquing the 'naturalness' of gender, and misunderstood the performance of the gendered body as one which was optional. In an interview with Artforum in 1992, Butler says:

¹²³ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience* (London: Penguin, 1974) p.269

¹²⁴ Ibid. p.129

...my whole point was that the very formation of subjects, the very formation of persons, *presupposes* gender in a certain way – that gender is not to be chosen and that “performativity” is not radical choice and it’s not voluntarism. [...] Performativity has to do with repetition, very often with the repetition of oppressive and painful gender norms to force them to resignify. This is not freedom....¹²⁵

The performance of gender, of which motherhood must surely be the ultimate representation, is one where women are asked to play particular roles in order to enforce certain ‘norms’. Motherhood demands that the woman produces her child not only biologically but also socially¹²⁶. Her performance gives rise to that of the child.

The stage on which the performance of motherhood plays is shifting. As the artist Barbara Kruger comments:

I think that the hallucination of an ideal family is becoming more and more difficult to perpetrate. People can no longer believe it....¹²⁷

The suspension of disbelief in the family theatre no longer carries its force¹²⁸. And it is in the family unit that Butler sees the most progressive subversion of compulsory heterosexuality. In discussing the documentary film *Paris is Burning* by Jennie Livingstone, a film which documents the dance form ‘voguing’ in the New York underground drag scene, it is not so much the performance of gender which Butler finds subversive (which merely mimes the heteronormative model) but rather the performance of family: mothers and children:

...the subversive part of what [Livingston’s film] documents, for me, is in the “house” structure, where there are “mothers” and “children,” and new

¹²⁵ Judith Butler, ‘The Body You Want: Liz Kotz Interviews Judith Butler’ *Artforum* November 1992, 82-89 p.84

¹²⁶ For detailed arguments on the social construction of motherhood and childrearing see Donna Bassin and Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan eds., *Representations of Motherhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (London: Yale University Press, 1996) and Patrice Di Quinzio, *The Impossibility of Motherhood* (London: Routledge, 1999)

¹²⁷ Therese Lichtenstein, ‘Images of the Maternal: An interview with Barbara Kruger’ in Donna Bassin and Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan eds., *Representations of Motherhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) p.199

¹²⁸ It is perhaps a measure of my mother’s own exhaustion from this performance, that she left her three young children in 1983 to the care of their father.

kinship systems, which *do* mime older nuclear-family kinship arrangements but also displace them, and radically *recontextualize* them in a way that constitutes a rethinking of kinship, or that turns kinship into a notion of extended community – one whose future forms can't be fully predicted. What is a "house"? A "house" is the people you "walk" with. I love that that's a house.¹²⁹

But in 1972 in the Sofaer family house, no such shift from the performance script was envisaged, and the reference manual was firmly rooted in Dr. Spock. What is so striking about Dr. Spock's text is the way it overtly encourages performance on the part of the parent. The first chapter of *Baby and Child Care* is titled 'The Parent's Part', as if parenting was literally a role or character to be studied and subsequently enacted. This actor/character methodology is extended even to encompass a performance of the child itself by the parent, as in, for instance, this account of why urging a child to eat is unreasonable and likely to cause problems.

Put yourself in the child's place for a minute. To get in the mood, think back to the last time you weren't very hungry. Perhaps it was a muggy day, or you were worried, or you had a stomach upset. (The child with a feeding problem feels that way most of the time.) Now imagine that a nervous giantess is sitting beside you, watching every mouthful. You have eaten a little of the foods that appeal to you most and have put your fork down, feeling quite full. But she looks worried and says, "You haven't touched your turnips." You explain that you don't want any, but she doesn't seem to understand how you feel, acts as if you are being bad on purpose. When she says you can't get up from the table until you've cleaned your plate, you try a bit of turnip, but it makes you feel slightly sick. She scoops up a tablespoonful and pokes it at your mouth, which makes you retch.¹³⁰

The parent is thus asked to act not only in the role of parent but also as the child they parent.

The Aeroplane Spoon sits at the intersection between parent and child. It evidences the parents' empathetic acting ability. It is the prop the parent uses having inhabited the mind and body of their child. The Aeroplane Spoon makes eating fun, because a parent knows what it is like to retch.

¹²⁹ Butler p.84

¹³⁰ Benjamin McLane Spock, *Baby and Child Care* illust. by Dorothea Fox (London: Bodley Head, 1969) p.449

It is interesting to note the rather saccharine eulogy provided for Dr. Spock in his biography by Lynn Bloom.

Often, as Dr. Spock captures the essence of intimate parent-child relationships, he appears to be inside the parents' mind – and the child's – simultaneously....¹³¹

Spock writes the script by a kind of double-act in the role of the parent and the child.



Fig. 45: *The Aeroplane Spoon*
in *The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge*

¹³¹ Bloom p.16



Fig. 46: Sofaer General Merchants and Commission Agents, Rangoon, Burma c.1908

'... the proper name is only ever supposed
to refer and not to mean.'

Julian Wolfreys¹³²

Travelling up the Finchley Road in North London, soon after I had arrived in the capital in the early nineties, my eye stopped on a shop front which read: Jews for Jesus. It is possible that I had heard of the organisation before, but the fact that here there was a concrete registration of this seeming contradiction struck me. I crossed the road and gazed into the window. There were a few ceremonial objects used in the Jewish household – I seem to remember a Hanukkiah, the eight branched candelabra used during the festival of Hanukkah – and a Seder plate, used at the Passover meal. There were also a selection of books, often with a graphic incorporating both a star of David and a crucifix. I was a bit perplexed. I wrote down the telephone contact number clearly printed on the window and went on my way.

A couple of days later I phoned up the number and asked the person at the other end, "what is Jews for Jesus?". After a lucid but almost blunt reply ("We are Jews who believe that Jesus was the Messiah,") I could practically hear the pen poised over the paper ready to take down my contact details in preparation for my indoctrination. When I announced (and spelt) my name – Joshua Sofaer – there was an awkward silence. It was the kind of silence that comes when someone thinks that they misheard, or that you are taking them for a ride, but then realise that no, you really are telling the truth. "Oh," came the eventual reply, "you know there is another Joshua Sofaer in New York who is very involved with Jews for Jesus."

The call finishes and I am left feeling uneasy. There is another me (at least one other). But not only that, he is an active member of what I take to be a weird Messianic cult. Oh dear.

¹³² Julian Wolfreys, *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998) p.17



Fig. 47: Joshua Sofaer & Joshua Sofaer

A la recherche du temps perdu is saturated with the importance and reverberations of proper names. The narrator identifies, with a shudder, the affect of the namesake:

We are afraid of being confused with them, and forestall the mistake by a grimace of disgust when anyone refers to them in our hearing. When we read our own name, as borne by them, in the newspaper, they seem to have usurped it. The transgressions of other members of the social organism are a matter of indifference to us. We lay the burden of them the more heavily upon our namesakes.¹³³

The film-maker Alan Berliner and the comedian Dave Gorman have both made work in which they have tried to contact and bring together as many other people in the world as they can who also share their name. In doing so they have observed the vertiginous warped mirror of confronting a namesake; but in both cases the endpoint of the project has been at the moment of confrontation.

In May 2002 I went to visit Joshua Sofaer USA, the New York based evangelist in his early thirties, a full-time proselytizing 'Jewish believer' who preaches for the acceptance of Jesus, as a member of the Messianic Judeo-Christian organisation Jews for Jesus.

¹³³ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* Vols 1-6 trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996) Vol.3 p.425

By spending time with another Joshua Sofaer and recording our conversations, I hoped to better understand how names function. Observing the similarities and differences in our attitudes and understanding of what it meant to be in the world as 'Joshua Sofaer' – both exactly the same and completely different – a wider picture evolved.

In May 2004, two years after my initial visit to Joshua Sofaer¹³⁴, I presented *Namesake: The Story of a Name*, a live performance with soundscape in collaboration with the composer Jonathan Cooper at three venues in London. They were: The Jewish Museum (the London Museum of Jewish Life), Home (an art gallery and performance space based inside a family house in Camberwell and noted for its commitment to live art practices), and The Swiss Church in London (which has a growing programme of cross-cultural and intercultural arts activities). Each of these three venues and their audiences, the Jewish venue and audience, the Art venue and audience, and the Christian venue and audience, contributed to the resonances of the piece, the underlying message of which, was the need for tolerance through religious and national exchange in the current climate of tense international relations. These concerns were filtered through the telling of the story of my meeting with my namesake, and our understanding of the meanings of our name.

The personal proper name designates its referent. We hail another with their name and we respond to our own name being called. But even the fact of this trip alone, that it was made at all, forces the conclusion that names are not simply designators but activators which affect, alter, produce and even dictate life narratives. The personal proper name offers a proliferation of significations outside and beyond its referent.

The problem of the name is one that has long been acknowledged. Plato's *Cratylus* is a Socratic dialogue dedicated entirely to the subject and concludes with a provocation to Western socio-linguistic and philosophical thought: '...it's one thing to be a name and

¹³⁴ I went to see him a second time and to record further interviews in January 2004.

another to be the thing it names.¹³⁵ As early as the Fourth Century BCE the designator and the referent were being separated.

In the post-Warholian cultural climate the name has become *the* vessel which holds and enunciates what contemporary culture holds at its zenith: the celebrity. This chapter explores the personal proper name within the context of writing and performance, looking at ways in which the name is enunciated by – and itself enunciates – autobiography.

Section 1, Naming Ceremony: *In The Name Of The Father* notes the potential of a name to span the life narrative of the named, from before birth and beyond death and explores the debt novelist Philip Roth pays to the name of the father. Section 2, Nametag: *Meaning* observes the ways in which personal proper names signify beyond (and before) the referent, with specific reference to the way in which names activate desires in Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Section 3, Name Test: *Affect* considers the way in which particular names affect life narratives, with a focus on Edward Said's struggle with his name, as configured in his memoir *Out of Place*. The central section, Section 4, Namesake: *Identical Other* considers what might be at stake in the existence of more than one person with the same name; particular reference is made to Edgar Allan Poe's short story *William Wilson* and the impact of mechanical reproduction on identity formulation. Section 5, Nameless: *No Name* is an extended analysis of what it might mean to be without a name, tracking through literary, filmic and sociological examples. In Section 6, Not In My Name: *Author* the issue of the printed author's name in the peritext of a published work is examined with specific reference to the author-narrator-protagonist relationship in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* and is mapped against Roland Barthes' comments on diary and journal writing. The final section, Section 7, Ineffable Name: *God* discusses the Tetragrammaton, the most holy personal name of God and relates it to the figure of the first writer: the Hebrew *sofaer*, or scribe.

¹³⁵ Plato *Cratylus* trans. by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998) p.78

Each section commences with a quotation from my namesake Joshua Sofaer, a quotation which was recorded in interviews in New York in either May 2002 or January 2004 and was played back as part of the performance piece *Namesake: The Story of a Name*. Either directly or indirectly, these quotations have offered me a provocation towards the proposition explored in each section.

Do I get off on the antagonism and the rejection? On a selfish level yes, it's all about me and how I can be one-upping my Dad and how I can be one-upping the Jewish community, and oh all these Rabbis, they're not smart enough. But you know what? That's not how it works.

I think probably as I was younger, one of the things that I did that wasn't right, is that I used my faith to skirt some real issues of anger that I had with my Dad and the rest of my family and in some cases I'm working on it and it's going well and in some cases I've still got a way to go.

Joshua Sofaer, New York

1. Naming Ceremony: *In The Name Of The Father*

When Mr. N. N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say that, for if the name ceased to have meaning it would make no sense to say 'Mr. N. N. is dead.'

Ludwig Wittgenstein¹³⁶

While there are many practical affects which would prevent it (amnesias, alterations, violations) the personal proper name has the potential to span the length of a life. Naming as narrative. The UK is common with many other countries in making it a legal obligation to register the name of a newly born child. In England you have forty-two days from birth to indicate the names in which you intend to raise the child. The state has its reasons for wanting to log births and deaths, for knowing the size and distribution of its population. Beyond this legal requirement, religion positions the act of naming as the covenant between the new born child and God. In the Jewish and Christian traditions this takes place in the *brit milah* (the circumcision) and in the baptism respectively. Even non-believers convene secular naming ceremonies as a way of bringing their offspring into social space. It would be considered a legal, religious and social travesty for a child to be without a name.

In most cases, the name, or at least the family name, precedes birth. The name is predetermined. One carries the family name before one is born. Any subsequent birth

¹³⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) §40

name is also 'given', it is not a matter of choice; similarly after death the name continues to operate outside one's own control.

In Jewish tradition birth and death are connected through the act of naming. Naming is a form of memorial and bequest and it becomes crucial whether one is named after the living or the dead. Ashkenazim (historically Eastern European Jews) name after deceased relatives only; in case of divine confusion between two living destinies. Sephardim (historically Middle Eastern, Spanish and Arabic Jews) name after living relatives as well; it is considered as a form of honour.

In biblical times however, it was unthinkable that two people (living or dead) could have the same name if they belonged to the same society:

...people believed that to give the name of one living person to another would transfer his being, his individuality, to the other person, with the result that the one from whom the name is taken must cease to exist.

And the same consideration would prevent people from naming after deceased relatives or ancestors. To give the child the name of a departed ancestor – according to the Biblical evidence – would destroy and obliterate the soul and the remembrance of the departed and cause his soul to forsake its peaceful abode in heaven. This may explain why names are not repeated in the Biblical period. It was impossible for two persons belonging to the same family or group to have the same name.¹³⁷

The personal proper name as configured here is an absolute and eternal identity, fundamental to the course of a life narrative and beyond; not just for life, but forever. It is to be preciously guarded and respected and is intrinsic not only to earthly identity but to the eternal soul as well.

Naming is powerful stuff, and in an attempt to divert what was sometimes seen as the negative destiny encapsulated in the name, name changing was commonly employed (and in some circles still is) in order that a gravely ill person may avoid the Angel of Death.

¹³⁷ Ben Zion C. Kaganoff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and their History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) p.97

Jews visualized the celestial administration as conducted in much the same bureaucratic fashion as a mundane government. God distributes His decrees among various angels and spirits for execution. The angels follow their orders to the letter, never deviating; they go only by names and addresses. And if they come to the given address and, looking there for a person with a certain name, do not find such a person, they report back that they could not find him. The matter is dropped and the verdict is destroyed.¹³⁸

Once again, the name is a matter of life and death. Changing your name to save your life; identifying yourself through your name.

As Philippe Lejeune points out, in infancy the personal proper name is also the one with which we first articulate ourselves:

The individual person and his discourse are connected to each other through the personal name, even before they are connected by the first person, as is shown by the facts of language acquisition in children. The infant speaks of himself in the third person, using his own name, long before he comes to understand that he too can use the first person. Later, each of us will call himself 'I' in speaking; but for everyone this 'I' will designate a particular name, which he will always be able to utter.¹³⁹

The first point of self-identification, is through the personal proper name in the third person. It takes time to get to the moment of 'I'. This infantile form of self-appellation prefigures a later literary trope. Ironically many autobiographical writers try to escape the use of 'I' by referring to themselves in the third person; this marks a return to the time of language acquisition¹⁴⁰.

This moment of language acquisition in which the self names self, is outside memory and predates the establishment of the prefrontal lobe and our capacity for remembering. The way we acknowledge the process of ourselves as *becoming* through naming is most often through nicknames, name-calling, pet names or the taking on of another's name.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p.102

¹³⁹ Philippe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Contract' in *French Literary Theory Today* ed. by Tzvetan Todorov, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) p.199

¹⁴⁰ A marked case of this would be Gertrude Stein's autobiography *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* in which the 'I' is put in the voice of Alice, and Gertrude Stein is only ever referred to in the third person.

'...in the development of the individual, acquiring his own name is doubtless as important a milestone as the 'mirror stage'. This acquisition occurs at a moment inaccessible to memory, or to autobiography, which can speak only of those second and inverted baptisms which consist, for a child, in the accusations which freeze him in a role by means of a label: 'thief', for Genet, 'Yid', for Albert Cohen.'¹⁴¹

We can bear witness to our becoming in these personal but non-proper names (which are sometimes sacred and sometimes painful) but we can not bear witness to the first time we are called or use our personal proper name.

In fitting parallel, we are also not witness to the employment of our name after our death (this is baring the all seeing heavenly eye which many may wish to give the dead – only time will tell). As the Wittgenstein quotation which opens this section attests, our name functions semantically beyond that of our body. Julian Wolfreys corroborates this point when he writes:

...the proper name operates improperly in that it can still operate in the subject's absence or even after the subject's death. My name, which is supposedly properly mine can be written or uttered after my death, and is not dependent on my being or my presence. The proper name, then, performs in accordance with a semantic function which is not proper to it.¹⁴²

In this way – in a state pre-birth, in infancy, death or even simply absence – our name is not always ours. Autobiographic writing is, in part, about taking control of the name, writing to understand how one became named and often to disinherit the baggage that the name brings with it.

The novelist Philip Roth has written two overtly autobiographical works: *The Facts* and *Patrimony*. Published just three years apart, both books resound with preoccupations about the author's personal proper name and death. The preface of *The Facts*, Roth's tentative and partially unwilling autobiography, commences with a childhood memory of

¹⁴¹ Lejeune p.210

¹⁴² Julian Wolfreys, *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998) p.18

his father's near fatal frailty after an appendix operation¹⁴³. Roth's preoccupation with the image of a sick and emasculated father is expanded in detail in *Patrimony*, which follows the dying and eventual death of Roth's father.

The death of the father is bound up with the legacy of the family name. Roth signs himself 'Roth', discarding his first name, both books are dedicated to other Roths – *The Facts* to his brother, *Patrimony* to 'our family, the living and the dead' – and Roth makes it clear that he configures his identity as a writer as 'Roth': a name which he has made renowned through the publication of his writings. Caught up in this is a conventional filial love anxiety at fulfilling the father's legacy: living up to the family name. Roth's two names 'Philip' and 'Roth' belong separately to each of his parents. 'Philip' belongs to his mother: it is the name of her dead father ('the unnameable animal me bearing her dead father's name'¹⁴⁴) and he takes the place of his mother's father for his mother. 'Roth' however, is of the father, it is *prima facie* his first identity, 'even for the writer I would become'¹⁴⁵.

To be at all is to be her Philip, but in the embroilment with the buffeting world, my history still takes its spin from beginning as his Roth.¹⁴⁶

The grammar here 'as his Roth', points both to his identity as progeny (his father's son) and the legacy of the name (the next Roth), a legacy which is both personal (the family) and public (the writer). The two are never far apart. To be his son is to write in his name¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴³ 'Unwilling' because he precedes and concludes the book with long *apologia* for his foray into overtly autobiographical writing.

¹⁴⁴ Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989) p.18

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p.19

¹⁴⁷ Roth conceives the origin of the point of inscription as coming from his father. He does not deny a matrilineal origin ("To be at all is to be her Philip") but his professional name, his writer's name, comes from the father. From the start then, Roth figures writing as highly gendered. In the discussion that follows *I run with this*, though not without the knowledge that this elides the woman at the point of origin of inscription. As will become apparent as the discussion progresses to the matter of shaving – the father/son ritual – this gendered relation becomes excessive, almost to the point of becoming camp. There is a presumed deconstruction at work here. For an interesting counterpoint to Roth's point of origin see Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* trans. by Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 1997) p.197, where Cixous identifies the death of her father as the point at which she becomes him: 'I had to carry out a mutilating mutation of identity. As the eldest of the family, I was obliged in many circumstances to become my father....'. This obligation is, however, configured as a debt to her mother, for 'the

The Facts commences with an open letter to Nathan Zukerman, one of Roth's fictional (though many suggest autobiographically based) characters, in which Roth gives his reasons for writing an autobiographical text. Roth writes to Zukerman about his recovery from a mental breakdown, a period of physical illness and about writing as a therapeutic process of relearning self.

In order to recover what I had lost I had to go back to the moment of origin.¹⁴⁸

He also writes in order to make sense of his relationship with his father.

...to hearten me as I come closer and closer and closer to an eighty-six-year-old father viewing the end of life as a thing as near to his face as the mirror he shaves in....¹⁴⁹

The metaphor for approaching death is configured here as the shaving mirror held inches away from the face. The reflection peering back as a reminder of one's own mortality. This metaphor Roth employs, of shaving as the death of his father, prefigures (perhaps consciously) the far more literal association of shaving and death in *Patrimony*, published three years later.

Patrimony traces the dying and death of his father; in it Roth recounts how he forwent his entitlement to his father's estate (in favour of his brother and his brother's children) and that the only item he wished to keep was his grandfather's shaving mug.

The mug was pale blue porcelain; a delicate floral design enclosed a wide white panel at the front, and inside the panel the name "S. Roth" and the date "1912" were inscribed in faded gold Gothic lettering. The mug was our one family heirloom as far as I knew, aside from a handful of antique snapshots the only thing tangible that anyone cared to save from the immigrant years in Newark.¹⁵⁰

honour of my mother'. Cixous points to the absence (rather than the presence) of her father as the point of inscription, in service to the mother.

¹⁴⁸ Philip Roth, *The Facts: A Novelist's Autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989) p.5

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p.8

¹⁵⁰ Philip Roth, *Patrimony: A True Story* (London: Vintage, 1999) p.27

The mug is made precious through the fragile legible inscription of the personal proper name "S. Roth". This shaving mug recurs throughout *Patrimony* and it is as if Roth's preoccupation with it – with having it – as his *sole* inheritance, is his desire to inherit and take control of the family name itself. This is what the title refers to, his patrimony, literally what he inherits: the name and the mug.

The shaving mug inscribed "S. Roth" had seemed to free my grandfather – if only momentarily, if only for those few minutes he quietly sat being shaved in the barber's chair late on a Friday afternoon – from the dour exigencies that had trapped him and that, I imagined, accounted for his austere, uncommunicative nature. His mug emitted the aura of an archaeological find, an artefact signalling an unexpected level of cultural refinement, an astonishing superfluity in an otherwise cramped and obstructed existence – in our ordinary little Newark bathroom, it had the impact on me of a Greek vase depicting the mythic origins of the race.¹⁵¹

By owning the origins, he owns the right to the name. This is the "moment of origin" that Roth seeks through the process of autobiographic writing in *The Facts* – his reason for writing at all – the shaving mug with the family name bequeathed to him in *Patrimony*.

Shaving is, as Mark Simpson points out in *Male Impersonators*, '...the last non-religious masculine initiation ceremony in the Western world. Certainly it is the only one intimately involving fathers....'¹⁵² Simpson goes even further than this to parallel shaving with the act of circumcision, that is the sacrificial covenant between a father and God, a sacrifice of flesh:

The very expression 'clean cut' connotes a ritual wounding such as circumcision (itself a symbolic castration, a sign of the Law of the Father). The idea of civilization is itself suggested by shaving: not just the initiation into manhood but also the triumph of order over chaos, artifice over nature.¹⁵³

Shaving, father, death: the name. The shaving mug represents the father/son relationship and its embodiment in ritual and social order; it represents the death of his father and acts

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p.28

¹⁵² Mark Simpson, *Male Impersonators* (London: Cassell, 1994) p.110

¹⁵³ Ibid. p.111

as a metaphor for the fragility of life and the immanence of death; it represents legacy both as an heirloom and by its inscription which bares the family name. Shaving is also a latent metaphor for the act of writing itself; as Simpson hints, shaving – as writing – is the triumph of order over chaos. Roth's preoccupations: the family name and the death of his father, come together in the process of writing itself, a process which must necessarily pay a debt to the name he bares and the father who gave it.

I don't believe it was an accident that my name is Joshua Sofaer, that my name is Joshua, that it means salvation and it's a Jewish name and all of these things. Whether it was God or not, now I can say I really value that, and there is meaning that I can ascribe to those things that is significant. My name fits what I am doing.

Joshua Sofaer, New York

2. Nametag: *Meaning*

...the proper name [...] has other than indicative functions. It is more than a gesture, a finger pointed at someone; it is, to a certain extent, the equivalent of a description.

Michel Foucault¹⁵⁴

Start with a joke:

Uncle George spots a nice looking gal in a bar, goes up and starts small talk. Seeing that she doesn't back off he asks her name.

"Carmen," she replies.

That's a nice name," he says, warming up the conversation, "Who named you, your mother?"

"No, I named myself," she answers.

"Oh, that's interesting. Why Carmen?"

"Because I like cars, and I like men," she says, looking directly into his eyes, "What's your name?"

"Beerfuck."

Uncle George changes his name, on Carmen's terms, in order to give it meaning beyond the referent (himself). The joke operates because Uncle George takes on board Carmen's rule system in order to make a pass at her. 'Carmen' is both Carmen's self-designated name and an indication of her stated desire. 'Beerfuck' is a temporarily assumed name and the counter-revelation of Uncle George's desire in a linguistic mirroring.

There is a long discourse in the philosophy of language which seeks to determine to what extent the meaning of most linguistic proper names are their referents¹⁵⁵, whether or not

¹⁵⁴ Michel Foucault 'What Is an Author?' in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern, A Reader* ed. by Sean Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) p.233

¹⁵⁵ As propounded by John Stuart Mill. See John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works: System of Logic* ed. by J. M. Robson (London: Routledge, 1996)

they are descriptive¹⁵⁶ or if they are rigid designators¹⁵⁷. The imperative of such discussions seeks to explore the interrelations of language systems but often without accounting for diurnal application and usage. While it is outside the scope of this research to explain or explore these discourses in any serious detail, it might be useful to start by scrutinizing one of the classic logical arguments.

In *Naming and Necessity* Saul Kripke argues that names are rigid designators, in other words that they rigidly designate their referent in all possible worlds. The example that Kripke gives is that of the "heavenly body" Hesperus, which would still be Hesperus even if it had not been in the particular place that it was when it was first named¹⁵⁸. He expands on this argument in discussion of the name 'Hitler' as follows:

Hitler might have spent all his days in quiet in Linz. In that case we would not say that then this man would not have been Hitler, for we use the name 'Hitler' just as the name of that man, even in describing other possible worlds. (This is the notion which I called a *rigid designator* in the previous talk.) Suppose we do decide to pick out the reference of 'Hitler', as the man who succeeded in having more Jews killed than anyone else managed to do in history. That is the way we pick out the reference of the name; but in another counterfactual situation where someone else would have gained this discredit, we wouldn't say that in that case that other man would have been Hitler. If Hitler had never come to power, Hitler would not have had the property which I am supposing we use to fix the reference of his name.¹⁵⁹

Kripke's argument is logical, but it is also circular (Hitler is Hitler) and while the philosophical application is sound, it does not account for the way in which names

¹⁵⁶ See for example Plato *Cratylus* trans. by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998)

¹⁵⁷ See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972; repr. 2002) and Scott Soames, *Beyond Rigidity: The unfinished semantic agenda of 'Naming and necessity'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Outlined in brief below.

¹⁵⁸ 'When the mythical agent first saw Hesperus, he may well have fixed his reference by saying, 'I shall use "Hesperus" as a name of the heavenly body appearing in yonder position in the sky.' He then fixed the reference of 'Hesperus' by its apparent celestial position. Does it follow that it is part of the *meaning* of the name that Hesperus has such and such a position at the time in question? Surely not: if Hesperus had been hit earlier by a comet, it might have been visible at a different position at that time. In such a counterfactual situation we would say that Hesperus would not have occupied that position, but not that Hesperus would not have been Hesperus. The reason is that 'Hesperus' rigidly designates a certain heavenly body and 'the body in yonder position' does not – a different body, or no body might have been in that position, but no other body might have been Hesperus (though another body, not Hesperus, might have been *called* 'Hesperus'). Indeed, as I have said, I will hold that names are always rigid designators.' Kripke p.57

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p.74

circulate in time and space. 'Hitler' is an interesting case when considering the wider semantic reverberations of the proper name.

Hitler's name was 'Hitler' by chance. There is much debate as to why his father changed the family name from Schicklgruber (Alois Hitler's (that is Adolph's father's) mother's maiden name) thirteen years before his son Adolph was born, but what it eventually ended up as (H-i-t-l-e-r) was a chance blunder by the notary who, when 'legitimizing' (literally making un-illegitimate) the records of Alois' birth, recorded the spoken name 'Hiedler' (the name of Alois Schicklgruber's foster and possibly natural father) as 'Hitler'¹⁶⁰. It would be pure speculation to suggest that had the family name remained Schicklgruber, Twentieth Century European history might have taken a different tack; but just as it would be naïve to make such a proposition, it would be similarly naïve to rule it out completely. If one accepts that naming is to some degree destiny (as proposed in the following section of this chapter) then the proposition begins to look less remote. As Ian Kershaw points out in his highly detailed biography of Hitler, which opens with a protracted historical account of Hitler's name change:

Adolph can be believed when he said that nothing his father had done pleased him so much as to drop the coarsely rustic name of Schicklgruber. Certainly, 'Heil Schicklgruber' would have sounded an unlikely salutation to a national hero.¹⁶¹

Unlikely enough to change history? We shall never know¹⁶².

So while Kripke may be right that 'Hitler' could, counterfactually, rigidly designate a man who spent all his years quiet in Linz, it doesn't. Similarly if Hitler had not been called 'Hitler' but some other name, like 'Schicklgruber', perhaps he would not have been the man who succeeded in having more Jews killed than anyone else managed to do in history. 'Hitler' then, does not rigidly designate Hitler in all possible worlds, because it

¹⁶⁰ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936 Hubris* (London: Penguin, 2001) p.5

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.3

¹⁶² The point here (made by Kershaw and implied by Hitler) is that 'Schicklgruber' is a sonic signifier; it sounds peculiar.

does not reference Hitler in the world where Hitler is called Schicklgruber; that is to say if the name, rather than the man, had not existed.

'Hitler' signifies beyond the individual Hitler, in far more 'concrete' ways than this counterfactual historical revisionism. Despite the protestations of some linguists who discount the lexical meaning of proper names, even if they propose that names do have meaning beyond their referents ('one should not confuse the absence of lexical meaning in a name with total lack of meaning'¹⁶³) 'Hitler' does have a dictionary definition.

Hitler [Adolf *Hitler* (1889 – 1945), leader of the Nazi Party and Chancellor of the German Reich. Cf. *Führer*.] 1. Used *attrib.* and in *possess.* with ref. to Hitler's rule or personal characteristics. M20. 2. A tyrannical ruler or leader; a dictatorial person freq. in *little Hitler*). M20
Hitler moustache/Hitler salute/Hitler Youth...
Hitlerian a. of, pertaining to, or characteristic of Hitler...¹⁶⁴

The dictionary offers a definition associated with the key qualities or properties of the individual whose name it employs (it does so for Hitler as it does for many personal proper names including Proust, Thatcher and recently even Delia Smith). While it is the properties of the person in question, rather than the person per se, that is referenced in this definition, the fact that a dictionary definition exists for a personal proper name highlights the possibilities of a personal proper name to do more than simply rigidly designate its referent.

It might be useful then to consider the personal proper name as a *fluid activator* in addition to being a rigid designator. 'Fluid activator' references the ways in which personal, social, historical and lexical meanings position our understanding of personal proper names for particular people at particular times.

¹⁶³ Stephen Wilson, *The Means of Naming: A social and cultural history of personal naming in Western Europe* (London: UCL Press, 1998) p.xi

¹⁶⁴ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

In Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* the names of people and places function in precisely this way. Names in the novel are primarily evocative templates for the narrator and only secondarily rigidly designate a particular person or place.

Both Gilles Deleuze and Michael Ragussis in their respective studies of Proust have described names as kinds of holding vessels. For Deleuze this vessel takes the form of a "half open case"¹⁶⁵ or a "box"¹⁶⁶, for Ragussis it is in the form of an "envelope"¹⁶⁷. In all instances what is being described is the operation of the name as not simply a trigger to associated thoughts and feelings but rather the name as container for a series of desires.

One of the consistent themes throughout *A la recherche du temps perdu* is that of disappointment. The disappointment of love, of self, of family, of country; the continual mismatch of outcome to expectation. This experience of disappointment is often configured around the name of a place or person. In the first instance the narrator configures this around place. As Ragussis points out, '...the child expects to see the pleasure of the name some day realised in the place.'¹⁶⁸ For the narrator the key place names are Balbec and Venice, where the loading of expectation as contained in the name can never be realised in his actual experience of the town or city. (This is similar to the common collective experience and expectations of the cities New York and Paris; the former is so 'known' through repeated representation, especially in film, that the experience seems somehow unexceptional, and the latter carries such singular expectations of romantic and erotic completion which it can barely sustain.) It is easy to understand the way in which place names might signify because they easily become tropes of their key characteristics. It is not so clear how personal proper names would carry such weight.

¹⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000) p.117

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p.118

¹⁶⁷ Michael Ragussis, *Acts of Naming: The Family Plot in Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) p.200

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p.199

For the narrator, who, on hearing it uttered, finds the name 'Mme Guermites' brings to him a wealth of expectation and desire, meeting the woman proves disjointed and incommensurate.

...the mystery of her name, since I did not find it in her person when I saw her leave the house in the morning on foot, or in the afternoon in her carriage.¹⁶⁹

This would seem to invert the logical conventions of person to name signification. We meet a person, we are told their name, we attach the name to the person. Here the person falls short of the 'meaning' of the name.

...I did not succeed in integrating into the living woman the name Guermites, in thinking of her as Mme de Guermites.¹⁷⁰

And it is this lack of successful integration which occupies the narrator for much of his search. As Deleuze points out, '...the narrator's activity consists in *explicating*, that is unfolding, developing a content incommensurable with the container.'¹⁷¹ And once this disappointment has been acknowledged, and the name-holder becomes known to the narrator, the name itself becomes unsatisfactory as a signifier.

...in this single Duchesse de Guermites, so many different women superimpose themselves, each one vanishing as soon as the next had acquired sufficient consistency. Words do not change their meanings as much in centuries as names do for us in the space of a few years.¹⁷²

This pattern – the name bringing with it a meaning which can not be found in the named and the named becoming known only to invalidate the name – is one that is repeated for all three of the central female protagonists during *A la recherche du temps perdu*: Gilberte Swann, Oriane the Duchesse de Guermites and Albertine Simonet. The conundrum of the name is particularly marked when there is an added erotic attachment for the narrator.

¹⁶⁹ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* Vols 1-6 trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996) Vol.3 p.24

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Deleuze p.117

¹⁷² Proust Vol.3 p.615

Indeed with Gilberte, the power of 'Gilberte Swann' is not sustainable in her presence, for she can not support the illusion of her name.

Thus was wafted to my ears the name of Gilberte.... ..uttered across the heads of the stocks and jasmines, pungent and cool as the drops which fell from the green watering-pipe; impregnating and irradiating the zone of pure air through which it had passed – and which it set apart and isolated with the mystery of the life of her whom its syllables designated to the happy beings who lived and walked and travelled in her company; unfolding beneath the arch of the pink hawthorn, at the height of my shoulder, the quintessence of their familiarity – so exquisitely painful to myself – with her and with the unknown world of her existence into which I should never penetrate.¹⁷³

With such expectations, of course when he does “penetrate” into the “world of her existence” he can only be disappointed; such promise is bound to fall foul. As Ragussis points out: ‘...the beloved object seems a belated appendage to the erotic name; the name precedes the person by making her possible as the beloved.’¹⁷⁴

In the case of Albertine, the narrator observes the inadequacy of both his own and her name as signifiers of the multi-faceted identities they describe.

I ought to give a different name to each of the selves who subsequently thought about Albertine; I ought still more to give a different name to each of the Albertines who appeared before me, never the same, like those seas – called by me simply and for the sake of convenience “the sea” ...¹⁷⁵

This statement presupposes a necessary descriptive quality to the personal proper name; that they do not simply designate the named person, but rather also describe who and what they are. The intensity of this description, which in the case of 'Gilberte' haunts the narrator, becomes torture in the case of 'Albertine'.

As for Albertine herself, she scarcely existed in me save under the form of her name, which, but for certain rare moments of respite when I

¹⁷³ Proust Vol.1 p.169

¹⁷⁴ Ragussis p.205

¹⁷⁵ Proust Vol.2 p.610

awoke, came and engraved itself upon my brain and continued incessantly to do so.¹⁷⁶

The name of the departed lover is repeatedly inscribed on the brain in a continual gesture reminiscent of the torture endured by Tityus in the *Odyssey*, in which a vulture tears at his liver, which is renewed only to be torn again.

For Proust the operation of the name is bound up with what it signifies *before* it designates. Names activate a series of connections, manifest desires, and produce affects which sit outside the rigid designation of the referent. Deleuze sums this up beautifully:

Names themselves have a content inseparable from the qualities of their syllables and from the free associations in which they participate. But precisely because we cannot open the box without projecting this entire associated content upon the real person or place, conversely, obligatory and entirely different associations imposed by the mediocrity of the person or the place will distort and dissolve the first series and create, this time, a gap between content and container. In all aspects of this first figure of the Search, then, the inadequation, the incommensurability of the content is manifested: *it is either a lost content*, which we regain in the splendour of an essence resuscitating an earlier self, *or an emptied content*, which brings the self to its death, *or a separated content*, which casts us into an inevitable disappointment. [...] Names, persons, and things are crammed with a content that fills them to bursting; and not only are we present at this "dynamiting" of the containers by the contents, but at the explosion of the contents themselves that, unfolded, explicated, do not form a unique figure, but heterogeneous, fragmented truths still more in conflict among themselves than in agreement.¹⁷⁷

The Proust examples exemplify and textualise the fluid way in which personal proper names activate experiences beyond the rigid designation of the named. This is not a second order bi-product of associated characteristics to the named, but rather first order meaning as contained by the name itself.

That names mean outside and before their referent, is exemplified at its most basic in gender, sex and ethnic signification. When James Morris underwent his sex realignment,

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. Vol.5 p.492

¹⁷⁷ Deleuze p.122

the negotiation of his name to hers, was very much part of the rite of passage into forming a more satisfactory identity.

I took a new Christian name by statutory declaration, adopting after long discussion and experiment the still androgynous Jan, not because I wished to straddle the sexes, but because I thought it would make the change of habit less abrupt for my relatives and friends (and perhaps I thought, too, at the back of my mind, that if I failed to succeed in my new persona I could somehow retreat into the old).¹⁷⁸

James becoming Jan acknowledges the cultural significations of the name in terms of gender and sex attribution. Jan chooses her name to somehow *soften the blow* of her new becoming, but also in recognition of a potential in the name for “retreat”. The name ‘Jan’ here becomes a safe haven, a security measure – full of promise for a future identity – yet with a built in clause should the plan go awry.

When Wittgenstein poses the question: ‘Has the name “Moses” got a fixed and unequivocal use for me in all possible cases?’¹⁷⁹ – to which the answer is clearly ‘no’ – he opens up the possibility for a complex interrelation, a fluid and active set of operations, manifest in the name. It is in recognition of this that Carmen and Uncle George are able to battle with each other on the field of flirtation.

¹⁷⁸ Jan Morris, *Conundrum* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974) p.114

¹⁷⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) §79

I wanted the stuff that Jesus was talking about and I knew that it was going to be a shock. I came back to the United States and my family really – I realised that what I did was I crossed a line. My younger brothers, all of a sudden were enrolled in Jewish Day School, my Dad started getting quite a lot of pressure from his family. Then it really started to kick in: what does it mean to be a Sofaer and to believe in Jesus?

Joshua Sofaer, New York

3. Name Test: Affect

My daddy left home when I was three
And he didn't leave much to Ma and me
Just this old guitar and an empty bottle of booze.
Now, I don't blame him cause he run and hid
But the meanest thing that he ever did
Was before he left, he went and named me "Sue."

Shel Silverstein¹⁸⁰

One of the fundamental checks when selecting a name for a child is the school yard test. Is the name vulnerable to twisted nicknames or bully abuse? Even the state takes an active interest in the appropriate naming of children. France has a particularly restrictive history of what are considered suitable names. In 1972, the year that I was named, a three-judge court in Melun near Paris ruled that Gérard and Paulette Trognon could not bestow their family name (meaning 'stump' or 'butt-end') on their three-year-old adoptive son Philippe, remarking that it would be "un handicap"¹⁸¹. Clearly for the court, the idea of a slightly odd name was worse for a child than possessing a name that was not the same as his father's. Whatever the moral or legal case (and more recently a German citizen was prevented by law from calling his son Osama Bin Laden) the point is clear: the names we have affect the way we are treated and beyond that, possibly the whole of our lives.

In the Johnny Cash song *A Boy Named Sue*, lyrics by Shel Silverstein, the first verse describes how an absconding father names his son 'Sue' [see above]. The narrative of the song follows Sue, who makes it his mission to find and kill his father for giving him a name

¹⁸⁰ *A Boy Named Sue*. Johnny Cash and Shel Silverstein. Evil Eye Music. 1969

¹⁸¹ Anonymous, 'France: The Surname Game' *Time Magazine* 11 September 1972, 14-15 (p.15)

which has caused him such humiliation and trauma. When Sue meets his Dad, they have a bit of a brawl, and then father turns to son:

...he said: "Son, this world is rough
And if a man's gonna make it, he's gotta be tough
And I knew I wouldn't be there to help ya along.
So I give ya that name and I said goodbye
I knew you'd have to get tough or die
And it's the name that helped to make you strong."¹⁸²

When Sue hears this explanation he has to acknowledge that what his father says is true. His name has made him what he is and has given him the wherewithal to face the particular challenges that his life has presented.

Naming, in J. L. Austin's terms, is an explicit performative¹⁸³. To name a child ("I name you Joshua") is to perform an action through the utterance. The personal proper name is given in an act of performance and maintains this performative quality. In Plato's *Cratylus* Socrates makes a similar point:

...if speaking or saying is a sort of action, one that is about things, isn't using names also a sort of action?¹⁸⁴

Well certainly for Althusser it was. To call out a name, or merely to use it, is to make someone turn around, to bring them into the social space, to hail them as a subject.¹⁸⁵

Naming highlights the importance of language to society by clearly showing that the body outside language (that is the body which remains without reference) is excluded from the social space.

Names are also actions in a far more implicit way than through the act of naming or calling out a name. People's names can have a crucial affect on their lives and people change

¹⁸² *A Boy Named Sue*

¹⁸³ See for example J. L. Austin, *How to do things with words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) p.32

¹⁸⁴ Plato *Cratylus* trans. by C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998) p.8

¹⁸⁵ See Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971)

their name in calculation of the power of that affect. Even in ancient Greece naming was used in a deterministic way, to try and carve out a future life:

...many [names] are given in the hope that they will prove appropriate, such as 'Eutychides' ('Son-of-good-fortune'), 'Sosias' ('Saviour'), 'Theophilus' ('God-beloved'), and many others.¹⁸⁶

This is something that has continued in almost all cultures up to the present and it is ubiquitous to see prospective parents pouring over a naming dictionary to see the lexical implications of short-listed names. In the West, this contemporary caution is based in a religious mysticism which no longer has the grip it once held.

A name, it was believed, not only determines a person's character, but also his fate. Certain names bring good fortune, others bad.¹⁸⁷

Such beliefs were not only part of a folklore associated with religious culture, but part of the fabric of religious belief. In Judaism, in the Midrash, a hermeneutic text which acts as a commentary on the bible, the advice is clear:

One should examine names carefully in order to give his son a name that is worthy, so that the son may become a righteous person, for sometimes the name is a contributing factor for good as for evil.¹⁸⁸

Names then, are literally one's destiny.

Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet are forced to carry the burden of their family names. The tragedy of these star-crossed lovers is configured around the impossibility of the joining of each of their names. 'Tis but thy name that is my enemy,' Juliet says to herself, 'What's in a name?'¹⁸⁹. Well, all too much. It is the conflict of their names, the chance of their names, which brings them to their untimely death. It is naming that opens their lover's discourse and naming which kills them.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p.25

¹⁸⁷ Ben Zion C. Kaganoff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and their History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) p.111

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in Kaganoff p.112

¹⁸⁹ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (New York: Signet Classics, 1963) Act II Scene II

In our lives, we live our names; our names offer us a path that would be closed to us with a different name. This is not about destiny. It is not to say, by any means, that we have no choice over the direction our life might take, but simply that those choices are often made through our name. In an essay titled 'Vocation' Rowan Williams relates the story of Rabbi Yehuda Lowe ben Bezalel's dream. Rabbi Yehuda dreams that he has died and was brought before the throne of heaven. The angel tells him to wait and listen as the names of all those who are allowed entrance to the kingdom of heaven are read out. He listens, but he does not hear his name...

...and he wept bitterly and cried out against the angel. And the angel said, 'I have called your name.' Rabbi Yehuda said, 'I did not hear it.' And the angel said, 'In the book are written the names of all men and women who have ever lived on earth, for every soul is an inheritor of the kingdom. But many come here who have never heard their true name on the lips of man or angel. They have lived believing that they know their names; and do not hear their names as their own. They do not recognise that it is for them that the gates of the kingdom have opened. So they must wait here until they hear their names and know them.'¹⁹⁰

Rabbi Yehuda wakes up and, lying prostrate on the ground prays that he will hear his own true name before he dies.

In this story is encapsulated the idea that one's 'true' name is one's vocation; that the name is the calling and that the life's search is to find one's name. This idea separates out a 'given' name and a 'true' name as part of its religious conviction but it nevertheless also tracks usefully into thinking about how one might find one's vocation in a secular name. Edward Said's memoir *Out of Place* is an account of how the writer's personal proper name 'Edward Said' gave him a particular life narrative, but it also becomes his writing: his reason to write. Here we see a direct correlation between the name and autobiography; the name literally becomes the writing of one's life.

¹⁹⁰ Rowan Williams, *Open to Judgement: Sermons and Addresses* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2001) p.177

In this account of Said's youth, adolescence and young adult life spent in Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon and America, there is a repeated testimony of the personal proper name as the site of social, political and domestic conflict. It is the name that opens the memoir and the name that reappears throughout, often in double quotation marks, as if to signal the appellation as belonging to someone else.

There was always something wrong with how I was invented [...] it took me about fifty years to become accustomed to, or, more exactly, to feel less uncomfortable with, "Edward," a foolishly English name yoked forcibly to the unmistakably Arabic name Said. True my mother told me that I had been named Edward after the Prince of Wales, who cut so fine a figure in 1935, the year of my birth, and Said was the name of various uncles and cousins. But the rationale of my name broke down both when I discovered no grandparents called Said and when I tried to connect my fancy English name with its Arabic partner. For years, and depending on the exact circumstances, I would rush past "Edward" and emphasize "Said"; at other times I would do the reverse, or connect these two to each other so quickly that neither would be clear. The one thing I could not tolerate, but very often would have to endure, was the disbelieving, and hence undermining, reaction: Edward? Said?¹⁹¹

The disbelief here is crucial. As Judith Butler points out in *Excitable Speech* even hate name calling has the paradoxical virtue of haling the subject, that is, of interpellation: 'Being called a name is also one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language'¹⁹². But if one's name is not believed the subject is not validated or interpellated. In other words, having a name which is subject to abuse, is perhaps better than having a name which does not semantically register at all.

Said commences his account by acknowledging the way in which the domestic scene is constructed: 'All families invent their parents and children, give each of them a story, character, fate and even a language'¹⁹³. And it is the parents that are responsible for his proper name, and consequently the dislocation of his social identity. These are indeed the themes of his memoir, the conflict of his name, and the conflict with his parents. More often than not they are the same. Indeed part of the conflict with his parents is based in

¹⁹¹ Edward Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta Books, 1999) p.3

¹⁹² Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997) p.2

¹⁹³ Said p.3

the knowledge that they have issued him with certain trials through the very act of naming him. As Judith Butler points out:

One is, as it were, brought into social location and time through being named. And one is dependent upon another for one's name, for the designation that is supposed to confer singularity.¹⁹⁴

The conferring of singularity which Butler highlights is the system of nomenclature which differentiates between 'you' and 'I', and which affords us the possibility to be hailed into social space. But singularity also implies unity, and it is this unity which Said feels denied. This impossibility of unity is not simply made evident by the lack of a singular cultural derivation for 'Edward' and 'Said' but the lack of any derivation at all.

...my father was known as Wadie Ibrahim. I still do not know where "Said" came from.¹⁹⁵

Said does not only see his name as incongruous and untenable but also without origin and paternity. This isolation of the name is matched against the names of his peers:

I was perfectly aware of how their names were just *right*, and their clothes and accents and associations were totally different from my own.¹⁹⁶

Feelings of dislocation are exacerbated through a comparison with other names which are perceived as more coherent, unified and semantically viable.

Said's self-alienation from his own name is configured around "Edward's" socially imposed identity, as set against his struggling self. The double inverted commas which often surround his name, put his name in another's voice and give that other voice responsibility for its usage (single inverted commas would set the name apart without putting the name in another's voice). It is as if he wishes to distance himself from his own name because of the powerful affects it sets in motion, affects which he is desperate to escape. In an

¹⁹⁴ Butler p.14

¹⁹⁵ Said p.7

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p.42

account of a childhood brawl Said represents the struggle with the name as a physical endeavour.

I felt I had been defeated in a sense because "Edward" had given up, he had let go and was now dominated by someone who should have dominated him. Strangely, though, there was another self beginning to surge inside me, just as "Edward" had passed and was now a prisoner of Claude Braucart, so this new self came from some region inside myself that I knew existed but could only rarely have access to. My body, instead of remaining supine and abject underneath Braucart, began to push up against him, first disengaging arms, then pounding his chest and head until he was forced to defend himself, loose his grip on me, and finally roll over sideways as I got up and continued pummeling him.¹⁹⁷

The schoolboy fight is not just between Braucart and Said but also between "Edward" and Edward. 'I' must wrestle the personal proper name for emancipation. It is as if the name has been standing in for the subject – a kind of social synecdoche – and only an incredible physical effort will uproot it. This sense of battling between the public affective name and the private self is the journey of the memoir. A crucial moment in this journey is the discovery of art and literature:

What I wove and reweave in my mind took place between the trivial surface reality and a deeper level of awareness of another life of beautiful, interrelated parts – parts of ideas, passages of literature and music, history, personal memory, daily observation – nourished not by the "Edward" whose making my family, teachers, and mentors contributed to, but my inner, far less compliant and private self, who could read, think, and even write independent of "Edward." [...] It was something private and apart that gave me strength when "Edward" seemed to be failing.¹⁹⁸

Referring to his name in the third person, Said identifies both the trap of the social self as configured through the name, and his desire to escape it. This is not so much about an ontologically stable self which has been effaced or made vulnerable through a misnomer, but rather to acknowledge that the name carries affects which the named subject wishes to and can, escape. Said wishes to find a position from which he can act independently of his own name.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p.89

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. p.165

The text is littered with these third person references to “Edward” or “Edward Said”, where the nomenclature is public, painful, restrictive, damaging and to be escaped. Towards the end of the memoir, reflecting back on the writing of the memoir itself, Said refers to the process of writing in relation to his cancer diagnosis and the subsequent treatment.

As one of the main responses to my illness I found in this book a new kind of challenge – not just a new kind of wakefulness but a project about as far from my professional and political life as it was possible for me to go.

The underlying motifs for me have been the emergence of a second self buried for a very long time beneath a surface of often expertly acquired and wielded social characteristics belonging to the self my parents tried to construct, the “Edward” I speak of intermittently, and how an extraordinarily increasing number of departures have unsettled my life from its earliest beginnings.¹⁹⁹

Here the problem of the name is directly paralleled with blame directed towards the parents and the trauma of geographical dislocation (perhaps after all then, not so removed from Said’s professional and political imperative as he would have us believe)²⁰⁰. In naming the child the parents created a performance-script which he has spent the course of his life – and of the memoir – trying to escape. It comes as no surprise then, that when Said forms his own love attachments, he configures the beloved as identifying him outside the confines of his name:

She seemed to speak directly to that underground part of my identity I had long held for myself, not the “Ed” or “Edward” I had been assigned, but the other self I was always aware of but was unable easily or immediately to reach.²⁰¹

Of course we all hope to be loved beyond the social, beyond the assigned, beyond that which is given and understood, but the fact that Said articulates his love attachment in

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p.217

²⁰⁰ I am aware that by focusing on Said’s memoir – his life – rather than on his socio-political writings – his life’s work – I am in danger of denying the urgency of his political imperative. The dichotomy embodied in his name however – Edward Said – is emblematic of his struggle to reconcile (Middle) East and West.

²⁰¹ Said. p.218

these terms highlights the extent of the negative affects he has felt result from his given identity.

In the last pages of the memoir however, Said has to acknowledge that while painful, the set of circumstances that were set in motion by his enforced separation from his family and the manual of performance set in motion by his name, have ultimately made him what he is.

...the more I think about it, the more I believe [my father] thought the only hope for me as a man was in fact to be cut off from my family. My search for freedom, for the self beneath or obscured by "Edward," could only have begun because of that rupture, so I have come to think of it as fortunate, despite the loneliness and unhappiness I experienced for so long.²⁰²

This resolution brings Said to the point of acceptance with his name – his life – and gives us his writing, his memoir *Out of Place*.

²⁰² Ibid. p.294

The truth is that you can probably understand me far more than you think you can. And hopefully as you and I continue to relate to each other, you will. Yeah, there are different, very strongly held passionate views that you and I hold that don't necessarily jive with each other, but that's ok. From my perspective, and I would imagine you are the same, I don't need you to agree with me.

Joshua Sofaer, New York

4. **Namesake: *Identical Other***

One cannot help having a slightly disagreeable feeling when one comes across one's own name in a stranger. Recently I was very sharply aware of it when a *Herr S. Freud* presented himself to me in my consulting hour.

Sigmund Freud²⁰³

It can be bad luck to have a namesake. It can be a matter of life and death. For Deepak Patel it was fatal. Admitted to Northwick Park Hospital in London on 24th April 2001 and diagnosed with meningococcal septicaemia, his life saving medicine was given to somebody else with the same name²⁰⁴. He died.

Deepak was neglected for a namesake; he was passed over in favour of a non-identical identical. This is the nightmarish stuff of Kafka made real; the horror of mistaken identity; deselected or selected by accident.

The fear of being falsely accused is something we all live with. One of the strongest arguments against the death penalty is that the wrong person might be convicted. This fear is not restricted to the weight of the law. As Ben Zion Kaganoff discovered:

It was a widespread folk belief among Jews during the Middle Ages that, confronted with two individuals of the same name, the ministering angels were as likely as not to choose the wrong one. Therefore, some maintained that several families with a common name should not reside in one dwelling. People went so far as to avoid entering the home of a

²⁰³ Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* Standard Edition Vol. 6 (London: Vantage, 2001) p.25

²⁰⁴ Sharon van Guens, 'Patient died after drugs were given to namesake' *The Evening Standard*, 1 November 2001, p.9

sick person who bore their name, lest the Angel of Death arrive during the visit and take the wrong soul.²⁰⁵

This 'folk belief' is a superstitious recontextualisation of the fear of false accusation, manifest in a conception of the administrative order of heaven. However far from other belief systems it may be, this kind of conviction identifies the threat to one's 'individuality' that is made by the presence of a namesake.

What is at stake in the namesake? Edgar Allan Poe's short-story *William Wilson* is the tale of the title character's conflict with his namesake. Ostensibly *William Wilson* is Wilson's deathbed confession of his lifelong struggle against the dogged interference of his namesake – William Wilson – who follows him from Preparatory School to Eton to Oxford and beyond, mimicking him, bringing him down and exposing him. The story ends with Wilson's account of the 'last eventful scene of the drama' in which he finally challenges his namesake to a duel and murders him²⁰⁶.

But right from the epigraph, Poe indicates that Wilson's namesake is allegorical. Underneath the title, the caption reads:

What say of it? what say of CONSCIENCE grim,
That spectre in my path?²⁰⁷

Wilson's namesake is his own conscience, which plagues him throughout the narrative of the story, and throughout his life; he makes his appearances conveniently just at the moments when Wilson is in the process of committing a crime against *his own* moral code. The epigraph makes it clear enough that the namesake is a metaphor, but there are repeated clues within the text.

²⁰⁵ Ben Zion C. Kaganoff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and their History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) p.112

²⁰⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, *Visions of Poe* ed. by Simon Marsden (Exeter: Webb & Bower) p.34

²⁰⁷ Attributed to Chamberlain's *Pharronida*. [This is disputed. See Daniel Hoffman, *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1998) p. 212]. Poe. p.24

...I might, to-day, have been a better, and thus a happier man, had I less frequently rejected the counsels embodied in those meaning whispers which I then but too cordially hated and too bitterly despised.²⁰⁸

William Wilson's namesake is his better self, his conscience, which doggedly follows him around, checking and commenting on his actions: a conscience which he finally destroys.

In *William Wilson*, Poe employs the use of a literary namesake. It would be easy then, to understand *William Wilson* as simply a parable: the namesake as a literary conceit. Even within the narrative world of the story however, both name and namesake are presented as an invention, as being self-willed.

Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation.²⁰⁹

and again later:

In this narrative I have therefore designated myself as William Wilson, – a fictitious title not very dissimilar to the real.²¹⁰

As Daniel Hoffman points out:

The chosen disguise reveals that its bearer is, in his own view, self-begotten: he is William Wilson, William son of his own *Will*. He has, that is, willed himself into being – willed the self we meet, the one that survives its murder of its double.²¹¹

The name is, in and of itself, a namesake, doubled and then quadrupled. *William Wilson* and his namesake *William Wilson* – the four wills, the force of will. The namesake is acknowledged as a fake, as the creator of its own fiction. This fabrication forces the question of the identity of William Wilson. Who, in fact, is he?

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p.28

²⁰⁹ Ibid. p.24

²¹⁰ Ibid. p.25

²¹¹ Hoffman p.209

Poe tempts us to a conclusion with the inclusion of several 'obvious' autobiographical references. For a start, Wilson shares a birthdate not only with his namesake, but also with his author. Poe was born on 19th January 1813, so was Wilson²¹². Poe went to Preparatory School at Dr Bransby's, so did Wilson. Poe had to leave the University of West Virginia because of misadventures in gambling; Wilson must leave Oxford for the same reason²¹³.

William Wilson thus becomes a literary namesake for his author Edgar Allan Poe. A namesake in all but name. That 'William Wilson' is not the 'real' name of the character, even within the narrative, is made possible by the text itself and allows for our indulgence that *William Wilson* is an autobiography of its author – or at least an autobiography of the author's struggle with his conscience.

In this context *William Wilson* is less a literary conceit than the struggle to represent self in writing; an acknowledgement of the self that is other – existing solely as a namesake – in the published name of the author. Borges acknowledges the fictive autobiographical doppelganger of the writer in 'Borges and I'.

The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to. I walk through the streets of Buenos Aires and stop for a moment, perhaps mechanically now, to look at the arch of an entrance hall and the grillwork on the gate; I know of Borges from the mail and see his name on a list of professors or in a biographical dictionary. I like hourglasses, maps, eighteenth-century typography, the taste of coffee and the prose of Stevenson; he shares these preferences, but in a vain way that turns them into the attributes of an actor. It would be an exaggeration to say that ours is a hostile relationship; I live, let myself go on living, so that Borges may contrive his literature, and this literature justifies me.²¹⁴

²¹² Or in its first printing 1811. 'Poe kept moving his birthdate forward, in successive magazine biographies, in order to seem younger than he was. So, it appears did William Wilson.' Hoffman p.210. The fact that Poe went to the trouble of altering his character's birthdate alongside his own stresses the importance of the autobiographic reference.

²¹³ Even the briefest biography of Poe will give these details. See for instance Hoffman p. 210.

²¹⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, 'Borges and I' in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern, A Reader* ed. by SeAn Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) p.339

In this context, Poe's story of a namesake (one which is eerily contemporary in its formulation and the complexity with which it approaches the relationship of an author's life to that of his fiction) usefully articulates the struggle of self-judgement.

Poe's short-story *William Wilson* is his progeny, verified by the published attribution 'by Edgar Allan Poe'. This mechanical reproduction of his name – his printed namesake – articulates his life (his life's work, his work as his life).

To read about oneself, to write about oneself, to see one's name printed and reprinted, to hear one's name in conversation, is often to read or write or hear as if it was the name of another. In this context – the context post industrial revolution – our personal proper name becomes our namesake in written and spoken language. Mechanical reproduction – printing, photography, film – offers us the same kind of estrangement that we feel when we look in a mirror: it is both us and not us.

The mechanical reproduction of our name (a kind of printed namesake) validates us as subjects. Just as the verbal appellation hails us into the social space, even if (as Judith Butler has observed²¹⁵) that appellation is based in hate speech, so too *seeing ones name in print*, be it praise or slander, accords us the status of social subject. For the narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu* the publication of his article in *Le Figaro* newspaper allows him to read himself within a social context wider than his immediate self or surroundings. This evaluation rotates specifically around the reproduction of his name in print.

I saw at the same hour my thought – or at least, failing my thought for those who were incapable of understanding it, the repetition of my name and as it were an embellished evocation of my person – shine on countless people, colour their own thoughts in an auroral light which filled me with more strength and triumphant joy than the multiple dawn which at that moment was blushing at every window.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997)

²¹⁶ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* Vols 1-6 trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996) Vol.5 p.652

The narrator is caught up not with the success (or more pertinently for this particular narrator, the failure) of his writing, but rather the literal fact of its multiplication.

I made up my mind to send Françoise out to buy more copies – in order to give them to my friends, I would tell her, but in reality to feel at first hand the miracle of the multiplication of my thought and to read, as though I were another person who had just opened the *Figaro*, the same sentences in another copy.²¹⁷

The narrator's desire to read "as though I were another person" his own article – his own name – is his desire to witness first hand his existence in social space. Again the analogy of the mirror is useful: we look in the mirror to check that we look OK, but also to check that we still exist.

The narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu* separates himself from his printed namesake, a namesake whose printed presence then validates his own existence. But while there are two namesakes in this model – the name of the narrator and the printed name – there is only one corporeal body. The self-validation offered by the name in print is problematised as soon as the uniqueness of the name is lost. The acknowledgement of a namesake – a corporeal other with identical nomenclature – invalidates, or at least destabilises, the referential function of the personal proper name through the multiplication of the referent. Put simply: it is no longer necessarily clear to whom the name refers.

This is something that the comedian Dave Gorman the and filmmaker Alan Berliner have both played within their respective works about their namesakes: *Are You Dave Gorman?* and *The Sweetest Sound*. Both Gorman and Berliner go about collecting as many namesakes as they possibly can, using all the contemporary technical search resources open to them (the internet, email, postal directories etc.).

For Gorman, the task of collecting Dave Gormans originates in a bet with his friend and eventual collaborator Danny Wallace. Danny drunkenly bets his mate that he will never

²¹⁷ Ibid. p.653

meet another Dave Gorman and that there probably aren't many more in the world anyway. Dave sets about proving him wrong. What starts at first as a laddish jaunt turns into an obsession, becomes a television series on BBC2 and eventually a book²¹⁸. Fifty-four Dave Gormans later, Wallace agrees that his mate has won the bet.

The script of the television series and the book are littered with references to the accumulative nature of the project. Gorman is only interested in racking up the Dave Gormans to prove a point. The imperative rotates around a notion of 'pride'.

How was Dave treating it now? Self-discovery? A search for identity? To feel he wasn't alone in the world? That there were others out there with something fundamental in common with him?

Bollocks.

He was doing it to prove me wrong.²¹⁹ [Danny Wallace]

There is a wilful rejection of any attempt to understand what might be at stake in the project beyond the bet.

Although they offered us exceptional hospitality, we were men on a mission, and we couldn't stop for long. We had more Dave Gormans to find today, and a very tight schedule to keep.²²⁰ [Danny Wallace]

But what starts as a project pursued for its absurdly obsessive comic value ends up problematising the easy correspondence between a signifier and its identity that Gorman had once felt:

Before all this started I was Dave Gorman. Now, I was only *a* Dave Gorman. Those two words that had once defined me now merely defined a subset to which I belonged. I was one of many. [...] What did Dave Gorman do? Anything. Who was Dave Gorman? Anyone. Where did Dave Gorman live? Anywhere. My name meant everything and nothing.²²¹

²¹⁸ All quotations are taken from the book rather than the television series, which to a large extent repeats the television script.

²¹⁹ *Are You Dave Gorman?* is co-written by Dave Gorman and his friend and collaborator Danny Wallace. This quote is from Danny Wallace. Dave Gorman and Danny Wallace, *Are you Dave Gorman?* (London: Ebury Press, 2001) p.126

²²⁰ Danny Wallace. Gorman p.222

²²¹ Dave Gorman. Gorman p.304

The journey which Gorman undertakes to assert his will and power – that he was right – ends up (albeit within the comic narrative) by robbing him of his self assurance.

Berliner starts at the conceptual point that Gorman concludes. His imperative is one of existential questioning: 'What can they be doing with *my* name? Are they better Alan Berliners than I am?', will 'the other Alan Berliners look more like Alan Berliner than I do?', 'Who knows if my life would have been different if I'd had another name'²²².

Berliner's film is autobiography, psycho-philosophy and social history. He matches his personal story with a questioning of the ontology of personal proper names (though in a peripheral way) and an investigation into the form and context of names within North American culture. The film revolves around a dinner party he holds for the twelve other Alan Berliners that he has contacted (or Allan, Allan, Allen or Alain Berliners). He asks them questions about their likes and dislikes, habits and activities in a comedic, pseudo-scientific, perhaps disingenuous attempt to find commonalities relating to 'Alan Berliner'.

But whereas Gorman starts with a banality – a bet – and ends up questioning the currency of his personal nomenclature, Berliner, having started with such questions, concludes with the disappointment of the banal.

So if you're feeling a little let down because you expected some big revelation from my dinner party, imagine how I feel. All that preparation and anticipation... and for what? I still have to share my name with them. I'm probably still going to be mistaken for them. And it seems I'm destined to be the real Alan Berliner in my mind only. But please, don't think of my experiment as a total failure.

Berliner hopes for an epiphanic understanding of the condition of the namesake but the actuality falls short of his expectations.

²²² All quotes transcribed from the film *The Sweetest Sound* Dir. Alan Berliner. Cine-Matrix. 2001

Although he never overtly states his imperative in such terms, Berliner hints at the initial source of his enquiry being rooted in a direct confusion between himself and one particular of his namesakes; what he describes as the "ultimate embarrassment": the confusion between himself and another Alan Berliner, another filmmaker.

A few years ago someone with my name made a film called *Ma Vie en Rose*. The critics loved it. I loved it too. That's when everyone hailed my debut as a feature film director. No one ever did bother to ask why I would suddenly start making films in French. There might even be a few people watching right now who think this is one of his films, or that I'm him or that he's me.

Later on in the film alluding through the voiceover with some irony, to that particular Alan Berliner in shot:

That's the other filmmaker, the one in black. He even looks more like a filmmaker than I do.

Perhaps the search and research for all the other Alan Berliners in the world ("I can't stop thinking of them as the competition") is less about trying to establish his own identity as the 'genuine' Alan Berliner, and more about trying to dilute the cultural power and recognition of his most famous namesake: the other filmmaker, the Alan Berliner who has been critically acclaimed for his larger scale, bigger budget feature²²³.

For Gorman and Berliner, both of who are making their respective works at the *fin de siècle* – a time of massive public interest in personal history and family heritage – the acknowledgement of the multiple existence of their name problematises what is for all of us, the contested and fractured space of identity recognition. The familiar becomes unfamiliar; the unfamiliar becomes familiar. As Hillel Schwartz comments in his extended study of 'copies', *The Culture of the Copy*:

²²³ Perhaps after all, just as the name speaks more of the namer than the named, I betray more about myself than Alan Berliner by this comment.

Powerful stuff, these namesakes, despite our insistence that individuals make their own waves in the world. Given a culture that reveres originals yet trusts that copies will more than do them justice, the blessing of a name is inadequate to its burden.²²⁴

The multiplication of the personal proper name forces us to question those attributes contemporary western society holds close: individuality, self-determinism and difference.

In his much quoted 1936 essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Walter Benjamin argues that the form of production of the artwork radically affects its aura²²⁵. Benjamin defines aura as the "historical testimony", the "authority", something tied to "presence" and yet also with a 'unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be.' For Benjamin, mechanical reproduction marks the destruction of the aura of an artwork but he also sees this destruction as 'a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art'. Aura, as Benjamin sees it, cannot be reproduced. Andy Warhol might ultimately agree with Benjamin that aura is present in the historical testimony of the object but for Warhol, mechanical reproduction is crucial to the cultural comprehension of aura, insomuch as it is mechanical reproduction (print, photography, television, film) which goes to hype the 'authentic original'. This is true not only for artworks but for people as well.

Some company recently was interested in buying my "aura." They didn't want my product. They kept saying, "We want your aura." I never figured out what they wanted. But they were willing to pay a lot for it. So then I thought that if somebody was willing to pay that much for it, I should try to figure out what it is.

I think "aura" is something that only somebody else can see, and they only see as much of it as they want to. It's all in the other person's eyes. You can only see an aura on people you don't know very well or don't know at all. I was having dinner the other night with everybody from my office. The kids at the office treat me like dirt, because they know me and they see me every day. But then there was this nice friend that somebody had brought along who had never met me, and this kid could hardly believe that he was having dinner with me! Everybody else was seeing me, but he was seeing my "aura".²²⁶

²²⁴ Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone Books, 1996) p.338

²²⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations* by Walter Benjamin, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 211-244

²²⁶ Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (Florida: Harvest, 1975) p.77

Warhol separates seeing and knowing and temporality as the key factors that affect aura. To know someone (well) is to negate the possibility of seeing their aura. Aura for Warhol is eradicated through familiarity²²⁷. What goes to create aura however is not so much the not seeing, as the seeing but not knowing. And this kind of seeing without knowing is what mechanical reproduction through mass media offers. This is, after all, how celebrity is created.

What happens to aura and the authentication of the original when there is a namesake; not a reproduced copy, but another authentic original? Benjamin says that there is no point in asking for the authentication of the original of an artwork that is designed for reproduction:

From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics.²²⁸

Following this argument through, it makes no sense to ask who is the authentic Dave Gorman, Alan Berliner or Joshua Sofaer. All subjects with the same name have equal authority to authentication and it is perhaps this that is the most destabilising aspect of the namesake in a culture which places such importance on 'individuality'.

And yet there are desperate attempts within the artworld to authenticate particular photographic prints, often for reasons of commerce. Through limited editions, the inclusion of the artist's signature, the quality of the paper, there is a hierarchy which is often couched in terms of the original and its copy.

Sherrie Levine's photographic practice of directly appropriating existing images – literally photographing a photograph without any transformations or additions – not only goes to

²²⁷ Familiarity is not the same as exposure. Familiarity depreciates aura but exposure through reproduction is the food of celebrity. Familiarity enables a knowledge not acquired through exposure.

²²⁸ Benjamin p.218

question who the creator of the image is, but also further complicates Benjamin's statement that there is no authentic print²²⁹.

So while the philosophical basis of Benjamin's argument follows through for both photography and the personal proper name, the lived experience is one which is contested in both instances.

Celebrity culture might tell us something about the way in which the contemporary west views the interchange of naming and mechanical reproduction. This takes us to Benjamin's second statement in the above quotation: that when authenticity ceases to be applicable, the function of art is reversed from ritual to politics. It is the de-politicisation of mass media and what Jacqueline Rose calls the "murderous"²³⁰ culture of celebrity that has re-reversed the equation and brought ritual into the culture of reproduction. Fans who chant "there's only one David Beckham" to José Fernandez Diaz's *Guantanamera* are not trying to claim that there is only one person in the world who has, or has the right to that personal proper name, but rather they are making a desperate attempt to authenticate the particular David Beckham that they revere. It is almost as if the phrase "there is only one David Beckham" tries to negate the very possibility that there might in fact be many people with that name. Ironically it is the reproductive industry – mass media – that gives Beckham his status as authentic original. As Ellis Cashmore points out:

...the national media ensured that the name "Beckham" made its impress on the public consciousness. Widespread interest in, and consumption of what many took to be, a "wonder goal" guaranteed Beckham an audience.²³¹

The link here between mass media – the reproductive machinery – and the aura of the authentic original David Beckham is one of cause and effect. No media, no aura. Indeed

²²⁹ For a discussion of Sherrie Levine's practice see Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1993), especially 126-148 'Appropriating Appropriation'.

²³⁰ Jacqueline Rose in conversation with Marina Warner, South Bank Talks, The Purcell Room, 28-01-03. Rose described the culture of celebrity as "murderous" because it sets up celebrities only in order that they should later be shot-down.

²³¹ Ellis Cashmore, *Beckham* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002) p.20

Cashmore takes this one step further by asking us to consider that the forms of reproduction are in fact the only David Beckham that there is:

...is there actually anything apart from the Beckham served up on our tv screens and in print?²³²

The religious attention of the 'fans' who devote themselves to the Beckham cult, worship the aura which emanates from the icon. It is no surprise that this is the word we use to describe those players who have reached the zenith of celebrity – icon – a word that is both authentic embodiment (the one and only David Beckham) and reproduction (the printed and televised image) simultaneously.

Celebrity is a useful tool for gauging what is at stake in the namesake because of its preoccupation with singularity and uniqueness. The ultimate in celebrity recognition is that of single name signifier.

Single name fame is probably the zenith of global celebrity. Elvis, Marilyn, Pelé, Jesus: they exist at a level somewhere above the usual layer of celebs where the mention of one word provokes instant recognition.²³³

Single name fame is the zenith of global celebrity – the thing contemporary western society rates so highly – because it is a sign of recognition and success. Part of the cachet of the single name fame is the risk it takes in reproduction. There are many fewer Marilyn Monroes than there are Marylins. By existing as a single name celebrity you raise the stakes by asking people to identify the signifier 'Marilyn' with the particular Marilyn: a film actress Marilyn Monroe whose major output was in Hollywood comedy in the 1950's. If the single name celebrity can survive the namesake test then they are perceived as having 'made it'.

²³² Ibid p.44

²³³ Ibid p.43

Having a namesake then, is a threat, because it forces the questions 'do we know who you are referring to?' and 'am I known as an individual?'.

Perhaps the metaphorical model that Poe articulates in *William Wilson* is actually the most adequate to describe the literal namesake too. The namesake becomes our social conscience, always there to remind us that our 'individuality' is a fragile construct ready to shatter at the calling of another who shares our name.

I don't think homosexuality is right in God's eyes. Because there are passages in the bible that clearly identify homosexuality with sin and abomination and idolatry and all that kind of stuff. I also don't think it is on a different level in God's eyes than a lot of other things that people do that are wrong. And as much as I don't like the 'inside outside' discussion, do you understand what I mean when I say that? ...that there's an 'us and a them', an 'inside and an outside', the 'saved and the damned', I don't like that, but you know, there is a part of it that's also just there.

Joshua Sofaer, New York

5. Nameless: No Name

...physical presence does not suffice to characterize the utterer; there is not full presence without naming.

Philippe Lejeune²³⁴

Naming is power. The withholding of a name or the theft of a name is to wield power. The absence of a name is to be subject to power.

On the UK television game show 'Blind Date' hostess Cilla Black asks two questions of every 'anonymous' contestant, in the form: "Tell us your name and where you come from?".²³⁵ Given the complex, multifarious layers which formulate our identities and make us a potentially better or worse date, these two, rather dull questions seem inadequate. And yet, it will not do to remain nameless.

Cruising for action in a nightclub the simple attainment of a name is seen in itself as a success. It is a certain kind of intimacy, of knowledge. Indeed conversing with a stranger, the moment where you come to a formal introduction ("I am X by the way") is a conversational landmark that goes well beyond the information that is actually being shared.

²³⁴ Philippe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Contract' in *French Literary Theory Today* ed. by Tzvetan Todorov, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) p.199

²³⁵ Also mentioned in Chapter 1: *Disinterest: Digging Up Our Childhood*, Research Tool 2: *Aerial Evidence* in relation to points of origin.

Names are our indices, our entrance into the world. As Wittgenstein remarks about the most basic systems of signification, '...naming something is like attaching a label to a thing,' and without that label we cease to be²³⁶.

What are the repercussions of namelessness? The first chapter of Maxine Hong Kingston's memoir *The Woman Warrior* is titled 'No Name Woman'. The no name woman is an unnamed aunt who refuses to reveal the name of her lover (or rapist – we are never quite sure) and who commits infanticide and then suicide, rather than succumb to a life-sentence as a social outcast.

She kept the man's name to herself throughout her labour and dying; she did not accuse him that he be punished with her. To save her inseminator's name she gave a silent birth.²³⁷

It is unclear whether it is love or pride that prevents no name woman from naming the father of her child – but the repercussions are clear – her fertility is her death warrant; his anonymity saves him. The social order of the name (upholding the family name, living up to one's name, preserving one's good name) is contravened through the act of procreation. No name woman holds silent. She will not name names and as a consequence is robbed of her own.

Don't tell anyone you had an aunt. Your father does not want to hear her name. She has never been born.²³⁸

The withholding of the name of an aunt by the family (a name Hong Kingston has never known) is an attempt to eradicate her body (even her dead body), to deny her existence, to revise history, to make it as if 'she has never been born'. The internal family conflict presents itself through the struggle over naming.

²³⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) §15

²³⁷ Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (London: Picador, 1981) p.18

²³⁸ *Ibid.* p.21

Despite the power of not naming (withholding the name of her inseminator) that no name woman wields, she is still subject to a social order which robs her of her name. This is sexual oppression in the name of the name. She is cast out and robbed of her name because she fell pregnant before her name was given away in the act of marriage, the act where she would assume a different name.

The sexual politic of the name is a very real contemporary issue for many women. Marriage, divorce, parenthood are all areas of contest, where the withholding, giving or assumption of a name has wide reverberations. Advice is plentiful. An online resource, www.hitched.co.uk, offers no less than nine methodologies for the naming of a newly married couple, from the wife hyphenating her birth name with her husband's name, to both parties selecting a shared new name. The norm however, is still for the wife to lose her name and take that of her husband.

This is pretty much the tradition, everyone's used to it. Some people see it as a sexist tradition smacking of patriarchal property. Some see this as the easiest way to go. Some people really like the symbolism of the whole family having the same name. Some women don't like the idea of losing their own identity.²³⁹

It is however only relatively recently that a woman's choice has been of any relevance at all. The axiomatic sacrifice of the family name to the married daughter's husband (Mrs Michael Brown, in her husband's name, Mrs *Jane* Brown being, traditionally at least, the divorced or widowed wife of Mr Michael Brown) was not so much the issue to the father, as was the daughter-wife who perpetuates the race only by risking the name. As Derrida offers (in parenthesis) in a discussion of 'Freud's Legacy', the daughter child is caught up in a conundrum between a childless stability of the name, or a married motherhood without it (this was nineteenth century Vienna after all):

...I leave it to you to follow this factor up to and including all of those women about whom it is difficult to know whether they have maintained

²³⁹ Anonymous, 'Name changing options' *Wedding Planning Advice*
<<http://www.hitched.co.uk/plan/advice/namechange.asp>> [accessed 3 January 2002]

the movement without the name or lost the movement in order to maintain, in that they have maintained, the name....²⁴⁰

Daughter children, childless children, the name is lost. Or so it was. But the social order which positions the woman's body as patriarchal property works in many ways and the withholding of a name, that for no name woman was a way of wiping out all traces of her body, can conversely go to force our attention onto the body in gynaecological detail.

The character Marilyn Monroe plays in *The Seven Year Itch* is not given a name.

Throughout the film she is referred to as "girl" or as "she". Monroe then, from the outset is identified by her sex. This is in direct contrast to the male protagonist played by Tom Ewell who is always referred to as "Mr Sherman" or "Richard".

The withholding of a name for the female protagonist in *The Seven Year Itch* undeniably encourages the (male) spectator to fixate on her as 'pure body', as a fantasy body (as opposed to a character or individual with drives and desires). But this lack of name also allows for a major element in the fantasy enabled by the film: that the "girl" is Marilyn Monroe. By not naming the character, the audience can more readily identify her with the actress who plays her. It is not just any blonde who moves into the Kaufmann's apartment – it is the authentic platinum – Marilyn²⁴¹.

After inviting her down for a drink, Sherman muses: "Lovely girl too, probably a model or an actress or something". This scene, which follows that of the departure of Sherman's wife for the summer, is the first of many in which the spectator is encouraged to implicitly understand the female protagonist as Marilyn Monroe.

The film is laced with intertextualities which are constant reminders to the audience that they are looking at Marilyn Monroe – Marilyn Monroe's body – and the fantasy of Marilyn

²⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card* trans. by Alan Bass (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) p.302

²⁴¹ Of course Marilyn Monroe is always already 'Marilyn' which is why people go to the movie in the first place. This proved problematic for the actress Ms Monroe, who was never given the credibility to play anyone but herself.

Monroe renting the upstairs apartment for the summer. Indeed the "girl" comes to New York for the summer in order to appear on television, in direct parallel to Monroe coming to New York for the summer to shoot the film. The "girl" appears on television to promote Dazzledent toothpaste, just as Monroe appeared in many television and print advertising promotions in the 1950's, from shampoo to shoes; a contemporary audience will have been well aware of this²⁴².

There are also continual references in the film to an "artistic picture" that "girl" has posed for in U.S. Camera. This refers to the nude photograph Monroe posed for in the *Golden Dreams* calendar. Although the *Golden Dreams* calendar was published in 1949 (six years before the film was released) it was reprinted in 1952, and again and again after Monroe's fame was established. Monroe survived the scandal this nude pin-up might have caused by openly admitting to it; by stating that there was "nothing wrong" with appearing naked. This faux-naive tone, ignorant of the possible social ramifications, is the one taken by "girl" in *The Seven Year Itch* about the photograph in U.S. Camera, which she openly displays to Richard Sherman. In an interview about the *Golden Dreams* photograph, Monroe said: "My hair was long then"²⁴³ and this is exactly what "girl" says in *The Seven Year Itch*: "My hair was a little bit longer then". The spectator is allowed to strip "girl" naked because s/he has already seen Monroe nude in *Golden Dreams*.

These intertextualities culminate at the end of the film when one of the subordinate characters, Tom MacKenzie, comes to the Sherman apartment:

RICHARD: I can explain everything, the stairs, the cinnamon toast, the blonde in the kitchen.

TOM: Now wait a minute Dickie boy, lets just take it easy; what blonde in the kitchen?

RICHARD: Wouldn't you like to know. Maybe it's Marilyn Monroe.

²⁴² For a full list of the items Monroe advertised see *The Unabridged Marilyn* by Neal Hitchens and Randall Riese (London: Corgi Books, 1988) p.6.

²⁴³ As quoted in an interview with Ms Mosby, 13 March 1952. See Hitchens and Riese p.71.

The joke works because the spectator knows (even if the characters don't) that it *is* Marilyn Monroe, and they have been encouraged to see her as herself throughout the film.

The withholding of the name of the central female protagonist in *The Seven Year Itch* has a double purpose. It shifts the attention of the spectator on to the sexuality, and thus sexual promise, of the character. The character is depersonalised in order that the body becomes sexualised. Stripped of a name, stripped of her clothes. It also allows that body to be infiltrated by the actress that plays her. Monroe as the 'girl'; "girl" as Marilyn.

Monroe is here presented as 'pure body', and as if to echo and complement this, another 'character' with no name is given a brief celluloid moment in *The Seven Year Itch*. "Girl" and Sherman leave the cinema after their first quasi-date which leads up to the sexual climax of the film: the famous skirt scene. As they do so the camera pans up to show the film hoarding of the feature that they have just seen. It is *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. The creature can be seen rising, gigantic, black, covered in an armour of scales, clutching a blonde woman in a white bathing suit. Discussing the film with Sherman, "girl" describes "creature" as "not all bad" and rather someone who just needs to be "loved and needed and wanted". Through this dialogue "girl" replaces the white bathing suit clad body in the hoarding with her own (she too only ever wears white in the film²⁴⁴). The creature – pure animal – stands in for the male sex drive, as an object of identification for the (male) spectator, reinforcing the accessible possibility of "girl's" body. The withholding of the name (or in this case simply its non-existence) allows for this identification to be made. The (male) spectator inserts their own name into the nameless space of the creature.

Girl with no name, Girl Power, Girl and Louise. In Deborah Levy's novel *Billy and Girl*, a contemporary fairytale on the pavements of London in which two kids are searching for their mother, the central female protagonist both has and has not a proper name.

²⁴⁴ The only exception being when she appears as a figment of Sherman's imagination.

I don't know why my mother called me Girl.

Sometimes I think she was just too lazy or too depressed to bother calling me by my proper name, Louise. So there are two of me: one is named, the other unnamed. Louise is a secret. No one knows about the Louise part of me. Girl stuck and that's how it's always been. Louise is England's invisible citizen and when I read statistics about how many people live in this country, I always add one more: Louise.²⁴⁵

Levy's 'Girl' has a split personality and the oscillation between being named and not being named hints not only at a latent schizophrenia but also to the victimisation by a mother. The oscillation between namelessness and being named which Girl/Louise inhabits, marks an oscillation between danger and safety, between the wild excesses of an *enfant terrible* and socialisation. For Girl, her namelessness articulates her social exclusion, deprivation and abandonment. For these three women – no name woman, the "girl", and Girl – it is not that they have not been named or that they do not have a name but rather that their name is hidden, disregarded or abandoned. The resulting state of namelessness in which they are positioned makes them subject to a patriarchal power in which they find their bodies – that is their physical bodies – disenfranchised and out of their own control. Nameless to subjugation; or, like no name woman's inseminator, nameless for salvation.

W. G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* is the search of the title character for his name. 'Austerlitz' reverberates throughout the novel as the name of the central character – that is his birth name – the name of his unmarried mother (as we later discover), as the name of the station in Paris which adjoins the new Bibliothèque de France which was built on the site of the collected plundered property of Jews during Nazi occupation, as the name of the Moravian village which was the site of a Napoleonic battle to which the central character assumes some affiliation, as the name Fred Astaire was born with, as the name of the man Kafka mentions in his diary that was called in to perform the circumcision of his nephew, as the name of a woman – Laura Austerlitz – who testifies in 1966 about crimes committed in a rice mill in Trieste, and, of course, as the name of the novel written by W. G. Sebald.

²⁴⁵ Deborah Levy, *Billy and Girl* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997) p.12

Throughout the novel the narrator of *Austerlitz* refers to the central character by name with uncommon frequency: 'said Austerlitz', 'continued Austerlitz' etc.. This literary trope – the repetition of the name – further loads 'Austerlitz' and its potential reverberations which haunt the novel and haunt the central character's journey of discovery.

Austerlitz grows up as Dafydd Elias, fostered (as we discover) by a Welsh farmer and his wife in the period of Nazi occupation in Europe. The revelation to Austerlitz of his 'real' name – Austerlitz – has a cataclysmic effect on his life in which the realisation of his prior namelessness forces him to appropriate feelings of dislocation and mis-identity. Austerlitz makes it clear that, as far as he is concerned, he was left without a name before his true birth name is revealed to him.

I have never known who I really was. From where I stand now, of course, I can see that my name alone, and the fact that it was kept from me until my fifteenth year, ought to have put me on the track of my origins, but it has also become clear to me of late why an agency greater than or superior to my own capacity for thought, which circumspectly directs operations somewhere in my brain, has always preserved me from my own secret, systematically preventing me from drawing the obvious conclusions and embarking on the inquiries they would have suggested to me.²⁴⁶

In response to his headmaster's explanation that he must write his 'real' name – Jacques Austerlitz – on the forthcoming examination papers, the fifteen year old boy replies politely: "Excuse me, sir, but what does it mean?"²⁴⁷ *What is the etymological derivation of Austerlitz?* is the question the child is ostensibly asking, but it is the more profound existential question of identity, the reason, *what does it mean to learn my name for the first time at the age of fifteen?* that pervades the novel. The child represses the implications and demands of his new found name until adulthood. Seeing a young boy of about the age he was when he was fostered, Austerlitz is hit by a rush of suicidal anxiety:

²⁴⁶ W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* trans. by Anthea Bell (London: Penguin Books, 2002) p.60

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.96

...a terrible weariness overcame me at the idea that I had never really been alive, or was only now being born, almost on the eve of my death.²⁴⁸

Living without his name is, for Austerlitz, as if he had never been born. This recalls the state of the unnamed child who has, as yet, not been brought into the social space of naming. In Jewish tradition the *brit milah* (covenant of circumcision) marks the boy child's entrance into the social space and he remains nameless until that ceremony has been performed.

Here, the carrier of the covenanted status (the father) is instructed to pass on the covenanted condition to his male heir. Until that time, the boy does not even have a name, which he receives only upon successful conclusion of the covenantal operation. Sociologically speaking, as a Jew, the boy is not even present until the moment of the *brit milah*.²⁴⁹

Naming marks the entrance into social order. It is accorded the highest possible status; given at the moment of the sacrificial bond with God. To be deprived of a name is to be deprived sociality but also to be deprived of God. Taking on board his name, Austerlitz must take on board its implications, of the fact that it was discarded, of its heritage. He must all of a sudden understand himself as a victim. (As Lawrence Mass comments in his memoir *Confessions of a Jewish Wagnerite*, a memoir which acknowledges and expiates the author's struggle with his own self-anti-Semitism: 'It's anti-Semitism, not Israel or any institutional orthodoxy, that defines being Jewish for most of the world'²⁵⁰. It is his implicit acknowledgement of this that forces Austerlitz to consider his origins, his fate, and that of his birth parents in occupied Czechoslovakia.) This realisation brings him close to death; a death that he was saved from as a child. Giving him back his name is almost to give him back his former fate.

The identity of the European Jew in the first half of the twentieth century is one that is fraught with a struggle over naming (hiding one's name, disguising one's name, changing

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p.194

²⁴⁹ Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998) p.82

²⁵⁰ Lawrence D. Mass, *The Jewish Wagnerite* (London: Cassell, 1994) p.247

one's name, being betrayed by one's name, a number instead of a name). In *W or The Memory of Childhood* Georges Perec describes the long journey of how his family surname, the Hebrew 'Peretz' was *de-Jewed*, in what he identifies as '...the concealment of my Jewish background through my patronym...' ²⁵¹. In the Third Reich the 'Jewish name' was a matter of life and death, and as if to emphasise this the punctilious Aryan authorities gave all Jewish males the middle name 'Israel' ²⁵².

Being nameless can save your life. "My name is Nobody" Odysseus tells the human-eating Cyclops, Polyphemus in *The Odyssey* ²⁵³. Tricked and blinded, the giant calls upon his neighbours to take revenge on his aggressor.

"What on earth is wrong with you, Polyphemus? Why must you disturb the peaceful night and spoil our sleep with all this shouting? Is a robber driving off your sheep, or is somebody trying by treachery or violence to kill you?"

Out of the cave came Polyphemus' great voice in reply: "O my friends, it's Nobody's treachery, no[body's] violence, that is doing me to death."

"Well then," they answered, in a way that settled the matter, "if nobody is assaulting you in your solitude, you must be sick." ²⁵⁴

Odysseus escapes the island of the Cyclops unharmed, with the larger proportion of his company intact, by assuming a state of namelessness. Sailing away, he shouts back to the shore to Polyphemus: "...your eye was put out by Odysseus, Sacker of Cities, son of Laertes, who lives in Ithaca." ²⁵⁵ At a safe distance, the proper personal proper name is given with full force in order to compound the victory.

For Austerlitz the shift between namelessness and name is not so felicitous. He searches for his lost name in the Karmelitska – the Prague state archives – a name he does not remember but rather has subsequently learnt. His discoveries take him eventually to Theresiendstadt, the forced and policed ghetto for Eastern European Jews during the first

²⁵¹ George Perec, *W or The Memory of Childhood* trans. by David Bellos (London: The Harvill Press, 1996) p.36

²⁵² Philip Roth, *Patrimony: A True Story* (London: Vintage, 1999) p.213

²⁵³ Homer *The Odyssey* trans. by E.V. Rieu (London: Penguin, 1946) p.149

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.150

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.153

half of the 1940's in which Austerlitz understands his mother to have been sent. Through the voice of Austerlitz, Sebald forms a single sentence which lasts over eleven pages and describes the appalling conditions of the place.

...carrying in their luggage all manner of personal items and mementoes which could be of no conceivable use in the life that awaited them in the ghetto, often arriving already ravaged in body and spirit, no longer in their right minds, delirious, frequently unable to remember their own names....²⁵⁶

There is horror at the thought of forgetting one's own name, which seems abject, in its distance from our cognisant standpoint, in anything but the infant or senile. To forget one's name is to lose one's identity. Nameless through trauma, nameless through forgetting, nameless through repression.

Freud might have had much to say about the forgetting of one's own name through the horror of trauma had he lived to make sense of the travesties of the Third Reich. As it is, the forgetting of proper names – a temporary namelessness as constituted by another – forms a major part of his thesis in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Of course, most of us are nameless to most people most of the time. Contemporary celebrity marks a journey out of the usual state of namelessness (getting one's name known). But within the circle of names that we do know – celebrity or otherwise – Freud highlights our tendency to let them go.

The process that should lead to the reproduction of the missing name has been so to speak *displaced* and has therefore led to an incorrect substitute. My hypothesis is that this displacement is not left to the arbitrary psychical choice but follows paths which can be predicted and which conform to laws. In other words, I suspect that the name or names which are substituted are connected in a discoverable way with the missing name: and I hope, if I am successful in demonstrating this connection, to proceed to throw light on the circumstances in which names are forgotten.²⁵⁷

and

²⁵⁶ Sebald p.335

²⁵⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* Standard Edition Vol. 6 (London: Vantage, 2001) p.2

We shall, I think, have stated the facts with sufficient caution if we affirm:
*By the side of simple cases where proper names are forgotten there is a type of forgetting which is motivated by repression.*²⁵⁸

In many ways Freud's hypothesis about the forgetting of proper names being motivated by repression seems axiomatic to us. The common usage phrase 'how Freudian' is applied especially to the paramnesia (false recollection) in relation to the proper name, and attests to our acceptance of the principle it describes.

We can extrapolate from this that proper names are fundamental in psychic make-up, but also more crucially that they are a border between the conscious social world and the unconscious. Similar to the process of dreaming, though often much more publicly, the forgetting or paramnesia of proper names betrays unconscious thought.

Just as analysis can examine dream-content to determine the unconscious and repressed dream-thoughts, so too it can examine the forgetting or paramnesia of proper names in a similar way. The motivation towards the repression might be multifarious. Freud lists many examples, concluding that '...personal, family and professional complexes...' are the most common²⁵⁹.

The forgetting of the names of others – constituting their temporary namelessness – betrays our own insecurities, anxieties, jealousies, likes and dislikes. Here the name not only positions itself at the forefront of identity, a bridge between the individual and the social, but also between the conscious and the unconscious. Betrayed into namelessness.

But to be in the temporary state of namelessness might also constitute a state of aggrandisement. Literary anonymity, as Genette points out can be a sly device of celebrity spin.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. p.7

²⁵⁹ Ibid. p.40

[Walter] Scott, great literary strategist that he was, had discovered that his incognito, by arousing curiosity, was contributing to the success of his books. In the incognito, he would say after the fact, he also found deeper satisfaction, thinking himself (like some Italian actor) a better writer when disguised... and believing that a true novelistic vocation is inseparable from a certain proclivity for suddenly disappearing, that is, in short, for clandestineness.²⁶⁰

To choose to withhold the name today (to remain nameless) is perhaps the most provocative of all states of namelessness in a culture of testimony, surveillance and undercover journalism. When 'privacy' is contested in courts of law and issues of 'public interest' are promulgated at the sacrifice of individual choice, to remain nameless is a state few can achieve.

²⁶⁰ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.43

My name is Joshua Sofaer and I am thirty-four years old. I live in New York City with my wife Annette and two children Eleana (who is five) and Talia (who is three). I work here with Jews for Jesus as a missionary. I direct our Youth and Children's work for the New York area and the North East part of the United States and... I don't know what else you want me to say.

Joshua Sofaer, New York

6. Not In My Name: *Author*

The deep subject of autobiography
is the proper name.

Philippe Lejeune²⁶¹

The narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu* spends the duration of the multi-volume novel approaching the moment of writing itself. It is really only in the last pages of the writing that he begins to write. Coming to writing is a kind of epiphany for the narrator:

How much more worth living did it appear to me now, now that I seemed to see that this life that we live in half-darkness can be illumined, this life that at every moment we distort can be restored to its true pristine shape, that a life, in short, can be realised within the confines of a book!²⁶²

The book offers some sort of 'true' version of events which otherwise people and memory 'distort'. Much has been made of Proust's own dedication to the process of writing (as opposed to that of his narrator). The image, and it appears much of the reality, is of a man shut up in his cork lined bedroom asleep during the day and madly scribbling away during the night for years on end²⁶³. Proust's life was his book and his book is his life²⁶⁴.

²⁶¹ Philippe Lejeune 'The Autobiographical Contract' in *French Literary Theory Today* ed. by Tzvetan Todorov, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) p.209

²⁶² Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* Vols 1-6 trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996) Vol.6 p.431

²⁶³ See for example George D. Painter, *Marcel Proust: A Biography* (London: Pimlico Press, 1996) and Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust: A Life* trans. by Euan Cameron (London: Viking, 2000)

²⁶⁴ This line of thought is expanded in Chapter 3 The Crystal Ball, Section 6: Career Psychologist: *Julie Unite*.

There is a large body of interpretive analysis which seeks to make sense of the relationship between the author (Marcel Proust), the narrator (the writing voice of *A la recherche du temps perdu*) and the protagonist (the man whose life experiences are recounted, and who very occasionally is referred to as 'Marcel'). Part of the reason for the wealth of discussion of this particular aspect of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is the ontological instability of these three voices. In his essay 'The Autobiographical Contract'²⁶⁵, Philippe Lejeune articulates the problem thus:

...on the one hand, there is no clear indication of the fictional contract at the beginning of the book, and in fact numerous readers have mistakenly identified the author Proust with the narrator; furthermore, it is true that the narrator-protagonist has no name – except on just one occasion, where, in a single utterance, the possibility is offered of giving the narrator the same first name as the author (we can attribute this utterance only to the author, for how can a fictitious narrator know the name of his author?), and in this manner we are informed that the author is not the narrator. This strange intrusion of the author functions simultaneously as a fictional contract and as an autobiographical clue, and situates the text in some ambiguous intermediate region.²⁶⁶

The 'one occasion' which Lejeune refers to (in a footnote) is the following:

Then she would find her tongue and say: "My –" or "My darling –" followed by my Christian name, which, if we give the narrator the same name as the author of this book, would be "My Marcel," or "My darling Marcel."²⁶⁷

Certainly the 'if' here is crucial and Lejeune is right to note that this 'if' produces a fictional contract which simultaneously hints at an autobiographical clue. But Lejeune is in fact wrong to say that Proust refers to his narrator-protagonist only once by name. At a moment of extreme emotional anxiety about his lover's potential infidelities the narrator-protagonist receives the following letter from her:

²⁶⁵ The essay separates out the 'autobiographical contract' (the affirmation in the text between the identity of the author and the protagonist) the 'fictional contract' (the "overt practice of non-identity" or the "attestation of fictivity") and the 'referential contract' (texts which convey information about a 'reality' which is subject to verification).

²⁶⁶ Lejeune p.205

²⁶⁷ Proust Vol.5 p.76

"My darling dear Marcel, I return less quickly than this cyclist, whose bike I should like to borrow in order to be with you sooner. How could you imagine that I might be angry or that I could enjoy anything better than to be with you? It will be nice to go out, just the two of us together; it would be nicer still if we never went out except together. The ideas you get into your head! What a Marcel! What a Marcel! Always and ever your Albertine."²⁶⁸

This tantalising, potentially autobiographical leakage again pressures the question: what is the operation of the personal proper name of the author-narrator-protagonist in *A la recherche du temps perdu*? What is Marcel? What is Marcel? In this instance however, there is no deconstruction as in Lejeune's example. It is straightforward. The protagonist is Marcel.

Over six hundred pages earlier than the above leak, Proust plays with the triadic author-narrator-protagonist relationship by a momentary enunciation in the voice of a potential reader. The context is one where (typically, over the course of several pages) the narrator-protagonist attempts to recall the name of a woman whom he knows reasonably well.

"All this," the reader will remark, "tells us nothing as to the lady's failure to oblige; but since you have made so long a digression, allow me, dear author, to waste another moment of your time by telling you that it is a pity that, young as you were (or as your hero was, if he isn't you), you had already so feeble a memory that you could not remember the name of a lady whom you knew quite well." It is indeed a pity, dear reader. [...] An unfailing memory is not a very powerful incentive to the study of the phenomena of memory."²⁶⁹

The 'reader's' parenthesis "or as your hero was, if he isn't you" again purposefully plays with the slippage between self and other, fact and fiction; but here the emphasis is the reverse of that in Lejeune's example. At first it is an autobiographical contract ("you" as directed to both the author and narrator-protagonist) and only secondarily a fictional contract ("or as your hero was, if he isn't you"). More importantly however, it declares absurd the desire to know *to what extent* the narrator is the author at all. Put, by Proust in

²⁶⁸ Ibid. Vol.5 p.172

²⁶⁹ Ibid. Vol.4 p.59

parentheses, this slippage is tantalising but nevertheless also purposefully throwaway. It is particularly piquant that this unsettling of the name of the author-narrator-protagonist should be at a point in the narrative that centres around a discourse on the forgetting of personal proper names. It is the operation of the personal proper name, in language, in writing, in memory, that concerns Proust, as well as the specific contents, meanings and affects of particular names; but it is nevertheless unimportant what a particular name might be, except perhaps in the terms of a literary conceit: the similarities and differences between the names of the author-narrator-protagonist. The function of the text is not to reveal the author, but rather the reader, and this is something that the narrator (as *an* author – rather than Proust, *the* author of *A la recherche du temps perdu*) articulates in the last pages of the book.

I thought of those who would read it as “my” readers. For it seemed to me that they would not be “my” readers but the readers of their own selves, my book being merely a sort of magnifying glass like those which the optician at Combray used to offer his customers – it would be my book, but with its help I would furnish them with the means of reading what lay inside themselves.²⁷⁰

This understanding – which predates post-structuralist theory by half a century – positions the reader as author, a circumstance in which the autobiographical elements belong to those reading.

There is however a single instance during *A la recherche du temps perdu* in which Proust steps outside the world of the narrative to absolutely attest to the importance of a particular personal proper name:

In this book in which there is not a single incident which is not fictitious, not a single character who is a real person in disguise, in which everything has been invented by me in accordance with the requirements of my theme, I owe it to the credit of my country to say that only the millionaire cousins of Françoise who came out of retirement to help their niece when she was left without support, only they are real people who exist. And persuaded as I am that I shall not offend their modesty, for the reason that they will never read this book, it is both with

²⁷⁰ Ibid. Vol.6 p.432

childish pleasure and with a profound emotion that, being unable to record the names of so many others who undoubtedly acted in the same way, to all of whom France owes her survival, I transcribe here the real name of this family: they are called – and what name could be more French? – Larivière.²⁷¹

Here not only does Proust attest to the fictitious nature of his work (paradoxically by the use of a factual element) but he articulates the one reason for using a 'real' name: acknowledgement to posterity. The Larivière family make it into *A la recherche du temps perdu* undisguised because their generosity has earned their name a place in posterity.

So what then is the status of the narrator-protagonist with no name, or a name which is only alluded to on two separate occasions in this vast work, one of which is openly contested and thrown into doubt? Michael Ragussis considers the names of the other characters as synecdoche for the name of the narrator-protagonist:

The narrator who remains nameless through so much of the *Recherche* takes his name, so to speak, from the names of others. It is in this sense that the narrative of one's life is inscribed through the names of others, through the qualification and partial eclipse of "I"....²⁷²

This is a very productive way of thinking about how personal proper names function. We incorporate the names of others as our own identity. (This is literally manifest in a prosaic way by the assumption of the name of a spouse at marriage.) In this view, the conglomeration of the personal proper names throughout *A la recherche du temps perdu* become the name of the narrator.

Gilles Deleuze extends this incorporation beyond the proper name. In his book on Proust, *Proust and Signs* he ends with a brilliant description of the narrator as a body without organs, spider like, who weaves the search as a web, creating and incorporating his characters for himself.

²⁷¹ Ibid. Vol.6 p.191

²⁷² Michael Ragussis, *Acts of Naming: The Family Plot in Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) p.206

Strange plasticity of the narrator: it is this spider-body of the narrator, the spy, the policeman, the jealous lover, the interpreter – the madman – the universal schizophrenic who will send out toward Charlus the paranoiac, another thread toward Albertine the erotomaniac, in order to make them so many marionettes of his own delirium, so many intensive powers of his organless body, so many profiles of his own madness.²⁷³

For Deleuze it makes no sense to ask who the narrator is or what relation he has to the author. There is “less of a narrator than a machine of the Search”²⁷⁴ for Deleuze. This machine incorporates all its characters as substance for the narrator’s identity.

But while Ragussis and Deleuze offer conceptual-literary solutions to the problem of the narrator-protagonist, the issue of Marcel Proust’s relationship to his narrator-protagonist, spider or otherwise, is left hanging. Perhaps this is inevitable. All writing written under a personal proper name (and perhaps even writing which masquerades under an author’s name) is subsumed as autobiographical. Which is to say, even the most overt fiction is of the ‘self’ that wrote it, no matter what distance the author might seek from the articulated fact or sentiment.

In his analysis of the paratextual elements of the authored text, Gerard Genette coins the term ‘onymity’ to describe the giving of one’s own name, the attribution of one’s legal name, at the front of the peritext.

[I shall] coin the term *onymity*. As always, the most ordinary state is the one that, from habit, has never received a name, and the need to give it one responds to the describer’s wish to rescue it from this deceptive ordinariness. After all, to sign a work with one’s real name is a choice like any other, and nothing authorizes us to regard this choice as insignificant.

Onymity is sometimes motivated by something stronger or less neutral than, say, the absence of a desire to give oneself a pseudonym, as is evident when someone who is already famous produces a book that will perhaps be successful precisely because of his previously established fame. The name then is no longer a straightforward statement of identity (“The author’s name is So-and-So”); it is, instead, the way to put an identity, or rather a “personality,” as the media call it, at the service of the book....²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000) p.182

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p.181

²⁷⁵ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.40

Beyond the utilisation of a known name for commercial gain, the use of one's own name (as opposed to a pseudonym or false attribution) is about acknowledging the thing in the world as one's own: taking ownership and responsibility. In this sense, the putting of one's name to a text is to position it in the world as part of oneself. This is not about the adequacy of the representation of self in a particular cultural product. Even the most self-referential and potentially revealing of writing – the journal or diary – is not necessarily an 'adequate' representation of that self. Reflecting on his diary entries in an essay titled 'Deliberation', Roland Barthes recognises the ease with which the diary writes itself: that there is no need to worry about what to write because it necessarily must issue from immediate experience. He notes however, with some discomfort, what follows:

Then comes the second phase, very soon after the first (for instance, if I reread today what I wrote yesterday), and it makes a bad impression: the text doesn't hold up, like some sort of delicate foodstuff which "turns," spoils, becomes unappetizing from one day to the next; I note with discouragement the artifice of "sincerity," the artistic mediocrity of the "spontaneous", worse still: I am disgusted and irritated to find a "pose" I certainly hadn't intended: in a journal situation, and precisely because it doesn't "work" – doesn't get transformed by the action of work – *I is a poseur*: a matter of effect, not of intention, the whole difficulty of literature is here.²⁷⁶

Barthes rejects the possibility of overtly self-referential diary writing because, ironically, it does not adequately represent himself. It is not the writing itself which is inadequate, but it's relation to the author. But what Barthes can not escape is the escape itself. The writing in 'Deliberation' is in itself a form of autobiography. As Linda Anderson points out: 'Autobiography survives its reconfiguring by poststructuralism, by absorbing and acknowledging self-critique'²⁷⁷. It is Barthes' self-critique which ultimately becomes his writing, becomes himself as attested by the attribution of his personal proper name in the peritext.

²⁷⁶ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* trans. by Richard Howard (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) p.359

²⁷⁷ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001) p.74

What these examples seek to prove, is that no matter how accurate, factual or otherwise writing may or may not be, the printing of the author's name on the title page acknowledges the work as part of their life. While neither Proust's magnum opus nor Barthes' short deliberation are strictly speaking autobiographical in terms of their position on the bookshop shelf, they necessarily *become them* (as they begot them) through the personal proper name²⁷⁸: autobiography; self writing self.

²⁷⁸ It is perhaps fear of this commitment, above all else, that has resulted in so many different authors selecting a pseudonym as the public expression of the author's name.

In the New Testament when Jesus was, you know, going toe to toe with the Rabbis, he would go toe to toe with the Rabbis, but he would also go toe to toe with the scribes and the priests. And if I am around a Christian, especially if I'm with a pastor, he'll say, 'What's your name?' and I'll say 'Sofaer,' and he'll say, 'Is it French?' and I'll say, 'No, it's Hebrew,' and I'll say, 'It means scribe. The scribes and the priests in the Bible, those are distant relatives'. Those were the ones that Jesus was, in a sense, speaking against.

Joshua Sofaer, New York

7. Ineffable Name: God

'God' – does it describe God as the unique divine being or is it a name of God?

Saul Kripke²⁷⁹

There are many gods with many names. The monotheistic Judeo-Christian-Islamic God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob also has many names. In Islam, 'Allah' (which simply means 'God' in Arabic) has at least ninety-nine names. In Christianity, Jesus is God named on Earth. In Judaism, God is credited with the mystical number of seventy names; the most holy of these is the Tetragrammaton represented by the Hebrew letters Yod – Heh – Vav – Heh (יהוה) and transliterated in the four letters YHWH (or sometimes JHWH). This is the name that God reveals to Moses at Horeb in the burning bush episode:

Then Moses said to God, 'If I go to the Israelites and tell them that the God of their forefathers has sent me to them, and they ask me his name, what shall I say?' God answered, 'I AM; that is who I am. Tell them that I AM has sent you to them.' And God said further, 'You must tell the Israelites this, that it is JEHOVAH the God of their forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, who has sent you to them. This is my name for ever; this is my title in every generation.'²⁸⁰

Moses asks God his name, and as if to counter this impertinence God replies 'I am; that is who I am', which has also been translated as 'I will be what I will be'. God then follows this by giving Moses his proper name, which has been translated here as Jehovah. 'Jehovah'

²⁷⁹ Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972; repr. 2002) p.26

²⁸⁰ Exodus Chapter 3, Verses 13-16

is the widely accepted mis-translation (widely used and widely thought incorrect) from the Hebrew letters Yod – Heh – Vav – Heh. The Hebrew Scriptures – the *Tenach* – were written without vowels, but the ancient Hebrews would have been aware what these letters signified and how they should be pronounced. While theologians and historians agree that the name would have been widely heard and used in ancient times, subsequent prohibitions against the misuse of the proper name of God (יהוה / Yod – Heh – Vav – Hey / YHVH) through Rabbinical teachings, meant the name stopped being uttered, and the title *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי) meaning Lord, was said in its place. Later Christians, who refused the prohibitions of usage, inserted the vowels from *Adonai* into the consonants of the Tetragrammaton YHVH and ended up with Jehovah. There is no reason at all to presume that those vowels used in *Adonai*, should be the ones that were used in the original pronunciation of the most holy name of God, and while there is little general agreement on how the name should be pronounced (or should not be pronounced, as misuse is forbidden) a compromise consensus has arrived at *Yahweh* in the Roman Alphabet as the personal proper name of God, and many English bibles give this in place of Jehovah.

The most holy name of God, sometimes known as the Tetragrammaton, sometimes known as the unutterable name, sometimes known as the ineffable name, is then, doubly ineffable. It is ineffable (too great to be expressed in words, unutterable, indefinable, indescribable) firstly through ignorance – we do not know exactly what it is – and secondarily through prohibition – we are forbidden from using it. This leads to the illogical condition in which it is forbidden to utter (or write) the unknowable.

There are two prohibitions with regard to mentioning the Divine Name. One is in utterance, the other is in writing, and in both the *Din*²⁸¹ appears to be perfectly clear. In so far as the prohibition of the utterance of the Divine Name is concerned, it is limited in the Talmud²⁸² solely to the Tetragrammaton, the Ineffable Name, which was uttered only once a year by the High Priest in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Jewish law

²⁸² The main collection of Jewish oral tradition which interprets the Torah.

²⁸³ Louis Rabinowitz, 'On the Names of God' *Jewish Chronicle* 10 April 1970, p.7

There is nothing in the Torah²⁸⁴ itself which prohibits the utterance of the name of God. It occurs in these writings many times and it is likely that the name was pronounced as part of daily services in the ancient temple in Jerusalem. The Mishna²⁸⁵ confirms that there was no prohibition against pronouncing the Tetragrammaton but by the time of the Talmud some rabbis asserted that anyone who pronounced the most holy name of God should be put to death, and would have no place in the World to Come, and that a substitute, *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי) or simply *Ha-Shem* (הַשֵּׁם) – literally ‘the name’ – should be used instead.

It is this prohibition that has led to ignorance of the ‘correct’ pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton and to the absurdist situation where God-fearing Jews do not pronounce a word they do not know how to pronounce. Consequently purposeful mispronunciations include wildly different linguistic formulations as a form of protection against accidental use of the forbidden utterance. Such ‘caution’ against verbal misuse does not arise from ‘God-given law’ but rather later rabbinical interpretation. The prohibition against *writing* the name of God arises however, directly from Deuteronomy. As God is giving the Israelites instructions for the establishment of the promised land, the command is given to “blot out” the name of the gods of idolatrous religions and in contrast to do the opposite for God’s name.

There are statutes and laws that you shall be careful to observe in the land which the Lord the God of your fathers is giving you to occupy as long as you live on earth. You shall demolish all the sanctuaries where the nations whose place you are taking worship their gods, on mountain-tops and hills and under every spreading tree. You shall put down their altars and break their sacred pillars, burn their sacred poles and hack down the idols of their gods and thus blot out the name of them from that place.

You shall not follow such practices in the worship of the Lord your God, but you shall resort to the place which the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to receive his Name that it may dwell there.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, sometimes called the Pentateuch.

²⁸⁵ An early collection of Jewish oral tradition on which the Talmud was based.

²⁸⁶ Deuteronomy Chapter 12, Verses 1-5

In each case here “the Lord your God” is an English transfiguration of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. From this rabbis have inferred that Jews are commanded not to destroy, erase or deface the holy name of God; many take it as a cue that *any* name of God should not be destroyed. Talmudic discussions endlessly negotiate the boundaries of this law.

Both *Shakh*, *Yoreh De'ah* 179:11, and R[abbi] Akiva Eger, *Yoreh De'ah* 276:9, state definitively that the name of God occurring in languages other than Hebrew is regarded as a cognomen and hence the prohibition with reference to erasure does not apply.²⁸⁷

But some interpretations of this law prohibiting the destruction of the name of God are taken to such an extreme, that even the most everyday of greetings become incorporated in its terms.

R[abbi] Yonatan Eibenschutz, *Urim ve-Tumim* 27:2, and R[abbi] Ya'akov of Lissa, *Netivot ha-Mishpat* 27:2, maintain that reverence must also be accorded to written occurrences of the Divine Name, whether in Hebrew or in the vernacular. Both scholars decried even the use of the French *adieu* (the root meaning of which is “with God”) in written communications because of the dishonour of the Divine Name resulting from careless disposal of such correspondence.²⁸⁸

A common way to avoid such careless disposal is to always write any name of God with an ellipsis – God becomes G-d. As Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz noted in an article in the London Jewish Chronicle in 1970 ‘...in recent years there has developed a veritable explosive fertility in extending the prohibitions’²⁸⁹ to include even vernacular words which contain the letters of names of God:

A combination of all these stringencies suggests giddy possibilities. If, despite the emphatic decision of Shabbetai Cohen, the rule is to be applied to the Divine Name in the vernacular; if to it one adds the latest development regarding every combination which accidentally occurs in a word as equally proscribed; if we take into consideration the refinement with regard to shalom²⁹⁰, we shall be constrained to express ourselves in English as follows:

²⁸⁷ J. David Bleich, *Contemporary Halakhic Problems* (New York: KTVA Publishing Inc. Yeshiva University Press, 1977) p.204

²⁸⁸ Ibid. p.205

²⁸⁹ Rabinowitz p.7

²⁹⁰ The word ‘shalom’ means ‘peace’ in Hebrew, and is one of the names of God; it is used in modern Hebrew as an equivalent greeting to ‘hello’ and ‘goodbye’ in English. If the prohibition were

"In my garden in G-dalming,
I have some lovely g-detia growing.
I often go down there when
I want some peac-."²⁹¹

By many peoples standards, including Rabbi Rabinowitz, this is a *reductio ad absurdum* of a single prohibition against the destruction of the most holy name of God. But whatever level of stringency an individual chooses to accept, the general rule remains in place, especially around the Tetragrammaton: the name of God must not be used lightly, if used at all.

It is not the intention to enter here into a theological debate, or even to offer a quasi-psychological generalisation of why certain people have chosen to interpret the writings of the Torah in this way. As Griselda Pollock has written in a discussion on the literary use of biblical names:

We are not here arguing theology. Rather, taking a cue from both psychoanalysis and deconstruction, we are reading in the founding texts of western culture the legends and mythologies by which subjectivity is symbolically represented and in turn in relation to which it is constituted.²⁹²

The concern here is not so much to interpret the interpretations but rather to follow through and to see how the prohibition against mentioning the Divine Name might impact on a process of living and writing. A first order 'impact' would be this writing itself. The refusal of the prohibition within this text acknowledges the writer's ambivalence of such strictures (though the writing itself respects them through an acknowledgement)²⁹³.

to extend to the word 'shalom' it would become blasphemous, in practical terms, to say 'hello' and 'goodbye'!

²⁹¹ Rabinowitz p.7

²⁹² Griselda Pollock, 'Gleaning in history of coming after/behind the reapers: the feminine, the stranger and the matrix in the work and theory of Brach Lichtenberg Ettinger' in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts* ed. by Griselda Pollock (London: Routledge, 1996) p.267

²⁹³ But what actually does this text refuse when there is no intention that it should be destroyed? It is the erasure of the name, not its writing, which is forbidden. It would be possible to keep all drafts and copies carefully, though not without some effort. Here the issue of the responsibility of a writer for their work becomes strangely critical. No longer is it possible, within the strictures of Talmudic law that is, to 'publish and be done', as each copy has the potential for a fateful disrespect of God with dire consequences.

The breaking of the prohibition within this text has a peculiar personal resonance, because the connection between the most holy name of God, the autobiography of man, and writing itself, is to be found in the vocation of the *sofaer*²⁹⁴. The *sofaer* (סופר), is the scribe: the one who has the duty to write the Torah and thus the most holy name of God.

The *sofaer* plays a central role in Jewish society and culture. It is only the *sofaer* who can write or restore the *sefer torah*²⁹⁵, *tefillin*²⁹⁶, and *mezuzah*²⁹⁷. It is the reading of this writing that is central to Jewish religious practice.

The life of the *sofaer* (now as always) rotates around the repeated writing of the same texts, to the same degree of accuracy, under the same strict laws which govern such actions. It may take many years to write just one complete Torah. As the *sofaer* Eric Ray points out, these laws of writing culminate in the writing of the Tetragrammaton, the most holy name of God.

Writing God's name is the most important part of writing a Torah. When a sof[a]er writes God's name there are lots of special preparations. On a day when I am going to write God's name I go to the mikveh²⁹⁸. [...]

To write God's name I use a special quill that has never been used to write any other words. I mark my Ha-Shem²⁹⁹ quills by leaving part of the feathers on one side. I remove all the feathers from my regular quills. To write God's name I use a special bottle of ink, which is used only to write God's name. No pens except my Ha-Shem quills have ever touched it.

Every day I say a brakhah³⁰⁰ before I start writing the Torah. When I write God's name I must say another brakhah.³⁰¹

²⁹⁴ A note on the spelling of 'sofaer'. The process of writing Hebrew words in the Roman alphabet is one of transliteration and opinions vary widely as to the correct way to transliterate different words. Although a direct transliteration of the Hebrew סופר meaning scribe, would be sofaer, sofair or sophair (each of which has a legitimate phonetic and orthographic basis) the spelling 'sofer' has come into common usage in the West as the word for scribe. This is predominantly due to German and Yiddish pronunciation of the word, which with a Germanic accent would take the stress from the 'ae' – sofaer – and put it on the 'o' – sofer. All of these different spellings occur as surnames (though none with any frequency). The spelling 'sofaer' points, with almost entire certainty, to a single family that originated in Baghdad. In the following text I choose to use my family spelling, which is phonetically accurate. It is, after all, my text.

²⁹⁵ The single most holy object in Judaism, written under strict laws, on animal parchment using specific writing implements.

²⁹⁶ Two leather boxes containing passages from the Torah which are used when praying.

²⁹⁷ Written prayers attached to the doorposts of Jewish homes.

²⁹⁸ Sacred purifying pool.

²⁹⁹ Literally 'the name' – a metonym for God's name (see above).

³⁰⁰ Prayer

³⁰¹ Eric Ray, *Sofer: The Story of a Torah Scroll* (Los Angeles: Torah Aura Productions, 1999) p.28

For the *sofaer*, writing the name of God orders life *in extremis*. It is the act of writing which dictates diurnal existence. The *sofaer* marks the absolute intersection of life and writing. Inspired, living and writing by and for God. Writing begets writing.

The *sofaer* prefigures other scribes, scriveners and copyists who subsequently become a constellation of literary figures which include: Melville's Bartleby, Gogol's Akakii Akakievich, Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin and Flaubert's Bouvard and Pécuchet³⁰². Each of these characters is caught by the act of writing. For Giorgio Agamben they embody pure potentiality.

...just as the layer of sensitive wax is suddenly grazed by the scribe's stylus, so the potentiality of thought, which in itself is nothing, allows for the act of intelligence to take place.³⁰³

The writer (*sofaer*) begets the writer (scrivener) begets the writer (Melville, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Flaubert) begets the writer (Bartleby, Akakievich, Myshkin, Bouvard and Pécuchet). The *sofaer* is the first writer, the writer of the law, the writer of The Name.

For my part, this writing (this very writing – this performance) of my name, in service to the name (the name of the father, my father) enacts an embodiment of my name (my autobiography) that of a script which I perform (which I nevertheless choose to perform) a performance which might well cause my *sofaer* ancestors (and God?) to shudder.

³⁰² From the respective short stories and novels *Bartleby*, *The Overcoat*, *The Idiot*, and *Bouvard and Pécuchet*

³⁰³ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (California: Stanford University Press, 1999) p.245

Chapter 3: The Crystal Ball



Fig. 48: *The Crystal Ball*

The Crystal Ball: *Introduction*

My horoscope, cast by a neighborhood astrologer when I was a week-old-infant, predicted that I would be a writer, that I would win some prizes, that I would cross "the black waters" of oceans and make my home among aliens. Brought up in a culture that places its faith in horoscopes, it never occurred to me to doubt it.

Bharati Mukherjee³⁰⁴

We are obsessed with the future. We are almost as obsessed with the future as we are with the past. While the therapy driven culture of the West maintains its grip on the past in its dependency on psychoanalysis, origins, and roots, our entire life, from potty training to politics, is geared towards that which is to come. Science identifies the future as the very reason for life (the urge towards procreation, the survival of the fittest), Art offers the future as its prize (the audience, the legacy), and Religion holds up the future as a stick to whip us with (eternal blessedness or eternal damnation). Whether or not we believe the future to be predetermined by a higher order, or negotiated by free will and chance encounter, the 'problem' of the future is that while it is very easy to predict, it is difficult to rely on.

What might an autobiography of the future be?

According to Philippe Lejeune an autobiography must be a 'retrospective' narrative, 'produced by a real person concerning his own existence'³⁰⁵. But if an autobiography is to be 'retrospectively oriented' the totality of a life will never be written.

What is the future of the life that is writing?

³⁰⁴ Bharati Mukherjee, 'A Four-Hundred-Year-Old-Woman' in *Critical Fictions: The Politics of Imaginative Writing* Dia Center for the Arts, Discussions in Contemporary Culture Number 7 ed. by Philomena Mariani (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991) p.24

³⁰⁵ Philippe Lejeune, 'The Autobiographical Contract' in *French Literary Theory Today* ed. by Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982) p.193

If the 'bio' – the life – of autobiography is to be taken seriously, then recognition must be made of the life that continues beyond the writing. Perhaps this makes all autobiography impossible, or at least always partial: an autobiography *up until* the writing of the autobiography.

But how do we write our own future?

In an attempt to try and answer this question, or at least to raise it, in June 2002, and with the support of a 'Nightbird' commission from Duckie via Arts Council England, I produced *The Crystal Ball* at the ICA in London³⁰⁶.

The Crystal Ball was an experimental theatre piece in which members of the audience had their futures predicted by a panel of experts. Those who foretold the future were: Rod Dale, an optometrist; Maura Bright, a face reader; Alan Dickinson-Quelch, a financial advisor; Tom Hoyes, an expert on ageing; Julia Laverne a psychic life scientist; Julie Unite, a career psychologist; and Robin Whitmore, an illustrator.

Greeted by a hostess who accompanied them on their journey between each of the booths in which the experts were housed, audience members spent twelve minutes in one to one conversation with each of the experts in turn. At the end of each individual session, the expert gave the hostess a piece of paper outlining their guest's prediction, which the hostess kept safe until the end of the performance, handing over the assembled collection in a cardboard wallet, with the valediction: "This is your future, I hope you enjoy it!"³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ 'Nightbird' is the title given to theatre company Duckie's biannual series of 'experimental' and 'risk taking' audience interactive events.

³⁰⁷ *The Crystal Ball* ran for two days with four performances each day and a total of seven people per show as 'full' audience members (many more came to watch, find out what was happening, and to see the hostesses perform their dance routine at the change over from one prediction to the next). A total of fifty-six people had their futures presented to them.

The reactions were varied. Everyone that I spoke to found the experiences affecting in some sense or another. Some found a strong need to talk about their experience in detail – others felt very private about it.

While the numbers were limited, *The Crystal Ball* sold out completely two weeks in advance and there was clearly something in the idea which had an appeal: seven predictions in an hour and a half for £10.

This elaborate theatrical construction allowed (or perhaps was simply an excuse for) my own future to be written; it gave me seven predictions with which to work. Each of these seven predictions has conceived a proposition or an area of discussion, configured below as a 'note' following a description of each expert's task and the prediction they made.

Arising from Rod Dale's prediction of the deterioration of my sight, 'Note 1' tracks the relationship between the archetype of the blind seer or prophet who sees the future, and the person whose future is blind. The latter case focuses on the last diaries of the artist and filmmaker Derek Jarman, who writes blind about losing his sight. 'Note 2' follows on from the prediction by Maura Bright, who is a Face Reader; it considers the photographic portrait as the locus for identifying the future of the sitter, from physiognomic understandings of the human face which abounded at the origins of photography, to contemporary arts practices which use photographic portraits to create futures for their sitters. Alan Dickinson Quelch's prediction that my chance of a stable financial future lies in property, provokes a discussion in 'Note 3' on the understanding that contemporary performance fails to enter into the commodified world of the art market and then considers ways in which performance has attempted to contradict this understanding; it considers the possibility that performance practice might engender property as a stable financial future by looking at the performance space Home, which is based inside a family house. Tom Hoyes is Vice President of Age Concern and his prediction about my capacity to cope with the effects of ageing leads to 'Note 4' in which the common resistance to aging is explored by examining Michael Jackson's preoccupation with J. M. Barrie's character Peter Pan. 'Note 5' picks up on Julia Laverne's prediction about life beyond death and considers the way in which selected contemporary performance practitioners have chosen to stage death. Julie Unite is a Career Psychologist and her prediction about my capacity to actualise career goals leads to 'Note 6', an analysis of way in which the narrator of *A la*

It became clear in discussion afterwards that many people who booked tickets did so despite never having considered or consented to having their 'fortune' told outside the context of an artwork – on the pier or in horoscopes for example – and that it had been quite shocking to them to be confronted with a future that they had neither considered nor anticipated discovering.

recherche du temps perdu writes towards the moment of writing, that is towards his vocation; a parallel analysis considers the mythology surrounding the writing practice of the author Marcel Proust. The final note, 'Note 7' follows on from the prediction made by Illustrator, Robin Whitmore. Here the onus on what the future should be is directed back to me with the questions: 'Where would you like to be in ten years time? What would you like to be doing?' and are then actualised in a visual representation. This final prediction forces consideration of how we motivate ourselves towards our future with reference to Herman Melville's *Bartleby*.

In all of these 'notes' the focus is on exploring the relationship between autobiographical drives or narratives and the way in which they are performed *in* and/or *for* the future.

1. **Optometrist: Rod Dale**

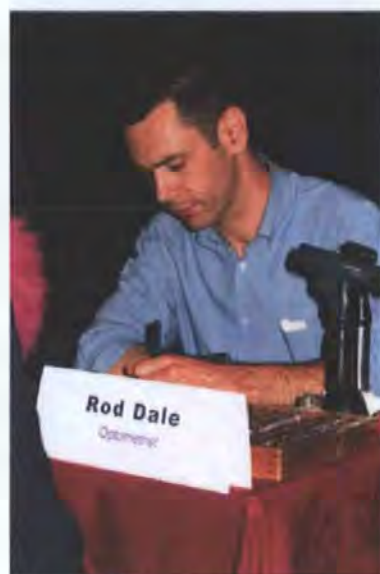


Fig. 49: Rod Dale

Rod Dale is an optometrist who predicted the future of my vision. He shone a light into my eyes, looked at the optical nerve and tested my near and distance vision using lenses of varying strengths.

Prediction 1

Your left eye is slightly oval, it is not completely spherical. This is an imperfection but is nevertheless normal. You have a sixty percent chance of requiring reading spectacles from the age of forty. Given the longevity of your family it is likely that you will live over eighty-five and there is a seventy-one percent chance that you will contract a visually impairing cataract. Most cataracts are treatable. If, as is likely, you go on to live over ninety, the chances of age related macular degeneration, or AMD, the outcome of which is debilitating loss of vital central or detailed vision, resulting in eventual blindness, is about one in eight.

Note 1

Blindness and the future are linked in two separate but complementary sets of circumstance:

- (i) the archetype or trope of the blind seer or prophet who sees the future, and
- (ii) the person whose future is blind, both 'unseen' (that is withheld and unknown) and 'unseeing' (that is without the capacity to see).

Both of these figures – sets of circumstance – inter-relations – are manifest by, and contingent on, performance, writing and documentation.

(i) Blindness has long been associated with an understanding of a sight beyond the ocular, found in the archetype of the blind seer or prophet. The 'father' of this literary historical tradition is Tiresias, whose ability to see into the future was given to him as a kind of recompense for the removal of his sight³⁰⁸.

Since antiquity, 'not seeing' is directly linked to the capacity for precognition and prophesy. Ruth Padel writes:

Darkness is where we are most likely to encounter gods. And where we meet their prophets. Caves are associated with prophecy in the Greek world, as elsewhere. Zeus's prophetic oracle was associated with the darkness of shadowy trees. The Greek seer is characteristically 'dark'. The name of the *Iliad's* Greek seer, Calchas, means 'Dark.' Seers often work from a *muchos*, 'recess,' or are blind. Blindness is linked to prophecy in the myth of Teiresias, the Theban seer, and many others.

Fundamental to Greek ideas of prophecy, and of the mind, is the idea that knowledge can be found in, and from, darkness. In tragedy, and the myths it explores, alternative ways of seeing may be (but need not be) 'truer' than normal vision.³⁰⁹

This classical tradition was later picked up by Christianity where Jesus of Nazareth restores sight to the blind at the moment of their comprehension of the 'truth' of God, that is, they see with greater vision than sight can provide and are therefore provided with sight.

I make no attempt to offer an analysis of the drives, the psychic motivations, that underpin the trope of this reciprocity – the gift of prophesy for the taking of sight – I hope merely to acknowledge its prevalence.

³⁰⁸ The two main versions of how Tiresias lost his sight can be summarised as follows: (a) He saw Athena bathing; since his mother was her friend, she did not cause his death, but blinded him and gave him the power of prophesy by way of compensation. (b) He one day saw snakes coupling and struck them with his stick, whereat he became a woman; later the same thing happened again and he turned into a man. Being asked by Zeus and Hera to settle a dispute as to which sex had more pleasure of love, he decided for the female; Hera was angry and blinded him, but Zeus recompensed him by giving him long life and the power of prophesy. [See The Oxford Classical Dictionary] Tiresias goes on to prophesy the future and his prophesies often rotate around acts of seeing; for instance, that Narcissus will live as long as he does not see himself. [See Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self Portrait and Other Ruins* trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) p.17]

³⁰⁹ Ruth Padel, *In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) p.72/3

Homer, a storyteller of Tiresias, is himself pictured as blind. This is the way that western culture has chosen to depict and understand the author of the texts fundamental to its canon: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

In his study of the classical epic tradition Robert Lamberton puts forward the case that Homer himself would have been understood in the classical world as a kind of prophet, that '...Homer was a divine sage with revealed knowledge of the fate of souls and the structure of reality, and that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are mystical allegories yielding information of this sort if properly read.'³¹⁰

Part of the evidence that Lamberton draws on, toward this conclusion, are the accepted autobiographical references within the two epic poems. These intertextual self-portraits have been noted in commentaries for centuries. They include characterisations in the form of Phemius and the blind Demodocus, who are both depicted as bards. There are also stylistic devices which contribute to Lamberton's thesis. The bards within the narrative world are accorded the epithet 'divine'; they, like the voice of the narrator, frequently call upon supernatural aid to transmit the relevant information, in exact parallel to the way in which the seers call upon supernatural aid to transmit their prophecies. The authorial voice also predicts what will happen ahead of the description of the events themselves, as if to emphasize the vast knowledge of the past, present and future which the narrator possesses in comparison with the characters of the narrative.

The extent to which Homer is seen as a prophet himself is exemplified in the renaissance conflation of Homer with Tiresias. As Lamberton is at lengths to point out, the much reprinted title page of Chapman's *Odyssey* [see illustration] depicts the figure of Homer in the storyline of Tiresias. The author becomes his character. Lamberton further examines the antecedents for this renaissance hybrid with references ranging from Plato to Dante.

³¹⁰ Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) p.2

What remains is an image in which Homer is surrounded by a legion of poets paying him homage, while simultaneously depicting Tiresias surrounded by the ghosts of the underworld where he remains in possession of all knowledge: past, present and future. To quote Lamberton: 'The head, with blind eyes turned to heaven, illustrates a tradition... Homer's blindness [is] a metaphor for transcendent vision.'³¹¹



Fig. 50: The Title Page of Chapman's Odyssey (c.1614)



Fig. 51: Advertising Flyer for Second Sight (2003)

Recent incarnations of blind seers include the Irish medium Sharon Neill, whose 'show'³¹² is touring the UK at the time of writing. Neill claims to have the ability to communicate with those people who have 'passed over', that is, from the living to the dead.

The trope of the blind seer who sees more than the seeing, is so culturally engrained, that it has its own vocabulary, a fact which is evidenced by the title of Sharon Neill's show: 'Second Sight'.

There is a sense in which Neill's ability to see beyond sight is set up by the lineage she follows – a kind of predetermined performance script – in which blindness is intrinsic to the possibility of a sight beyond sight. It is no surprise that the flyer and poster campaign for Sharon Neill's show is significantly similar to the image of Homer as Tiresias [see

³¹¹ Ibid. p.8
³¹² Her term, not mine.

illustration]: her blind eyes turned to heaven as a metaphor for transcendent vision. Homer performs Tiresias; Neill performs Homer performing Tiresias.

There is something in this image – particularly it being a posed photograph – of the blind medium advertising her 'show', that triggers a complex set of responses. Our moment of privilege over her is to see the image of her as she herself can not. What is the consequence of this one-sided sight, this gaze on the self-portrait of the blind seer?

In his homage to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the poet Andrew Marvell compares Milton with Tiresias:

Whence couldst thou words of such a compass find?
Whence furnish such a vast expanse of mind?
Just heaven thee, like Tiresias, to requite,
Rewards with prophecy the loss of sight.³¹³

As Derrida comments:

Marvell compared his friend Milton to Tiresias. The poet of *Samson Agonistes* would have received blindness as a blessing, a prize, a reward, a divine 'requital,' the gift of poetic and political clairvoyance, the chance for prophecy. There is nothing marvellous or astonishing in this: Marvell believed he knew that in losing his sight man does not lose his eyes. On the contrary. Only then does man begin to *think* the eyes.³¹⁴

It is, perhaps, our desire to understand natural order in terms of 'requital', of checks and balances, that encourages us to (always already?) accept the blind as possessing a special gift. Derrida reads Marvell's understanding of Milton's blindness as that which forces consideration of the visual. Language which becomes visual; words of extraordinary compass. As Derrida remarks elsewhere, the blind woman or man is an 'archivist of visibility', for they attest to the power and potential of sight³¹⁵.

³¹³ Andrew Marvell, 'On Mr. Milton's "Paradise Lost"' in *The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 1986) p.192

³¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self Portrait and Other Ruins* trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) p.128

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.20

During the course of her show Neill often refers to matter in visual detail, passing messages from the dead which include colours and patterns normally reserved for comprehension by the sighted eye. Neill is *delivering* these messages, not creating them (or so we are asked to believe) and those which contain visual information, not only that the messenger could not possibly have seen but also could not ever have the *possibility* of seeing, contribute to the performance of their authenticity³¹⁶.

Neill makes her blindness visual; she sees through it. We are left to ponder: maybe Neill can see the image of the advertisement for her own 'show', and our seeming privilege and encouraged voyeurism is, perhaps, a bit short-sighted.

And the future? Sharon Neill does not really claim to see into the future, although often her 'communications' offer advice and knowledge for the future. Rather she deals with the other present, the spiritual present of the other world. Her Second Sight is not to foretell, in any other way than to claim that that future, after death, is a present reality. She describes herself as the "channel" and the "switchboard" for that reality, rather than as a prophet. What she hopes to bring is reassurance that 'passing over' is not an ending and that mortals are watched by their beloved dead. This is the collective future of the spirit world, a generic prophesy.

So while the visual imagery advertising Neill's show calls upon our collective cultural history dating back to the antiquity of Tiresias, her abilities have their antecedents in a different context.

The practices of contacting the dead, of seeing into 'other' worlds, of reading the future, have separate (and connected) histories world-wide, but the coupling 'Second Sight'

³¹⁶ I do not use the word 'performance' here to indicate that the messages are not authentic (though personally I happen to believe they are not) but rather in consideration of the way in which 'authenticity' is itself manifest.

comes from the Gaelic term '*an-da-shealladh*' which implies 'the two sights': the first being vision of the sensual world, the second of the spiritual³¹⁷.

In his 1951 study *Second Sight: Its History and Origin*, Lewis Spence convincingly argues that Second Sight 'had its beginnings in the Highlands of Scotland in a primitive priesthood associated with ancestral worship, and originated in a very definite intention to maintain a close association with the dead and distinguished guardians of the tribe.'³¹⁸ Through a remarkable number of case studies, Spence explores the relationship between Celtic folklore and instances of Second Sight not only in Scotland but also in Ireland, Wales and the Isle of Man.

This Celtic history, which sets the precedent for the Irish medium Sharon Neill, attracted national interest in the UK from the Seventeenth Century on and gathered pace with the emergence of the popular press, a spate of pseudo-sciences and an interest in the occult. Samuel Johnson, who toured the Western Islands of Scotland in 1773 partly in order to find out if he could attest to the accuracy of the folklore, comes back convinced and publishes. (Interestingly enough, his travelling companion James Boswell forms a different opinion.)

This 'Second Sight' became corrupted into a magic show with the same name as early as 1784 when the Italian conjurer Pinetti performed an elaborate guessing game as part of his show at the Haymarket Theatre in London. Fifty or so years later 'Second Sight' was the title of the sell out tour of the performer Robert Houdin and his later imitator Robert Heller. They took the folklore and made it a performance reality. In his exposé of 1880 *Second Sight Explained*, Washington Bishop describes and uncovers the workings of this magic act.

³¹⁷ See Lewis Spence, *Second Sight: Its History and Origin* (London: Rider & Co., 1951) p.15 and W. H. W. Sabine, *Second Sight in Daily Life* (New York: Coward-McCann Inc., 1949) p.203

³¹⁸ Spence p.xi

He explains that in 'Second Sight' there are two performers. One who roams the audience, picking out or highlighting something or rather for general attention which they must then 'psychically' convey and another, the unseeing clairvoyant partner on stage, who must speak back to the audience what has been selected. (The performer in the audience happens upon a lady's brooch, asks their assistant what they hold in their hand and the clairvoyant describes it.) Bishop outlines in exorbitant detail the series of word associations and sound suggestions through which the performers communicate.

It is interesting to note the way in which Bishop describes the clairvoyant:

The Clairvoyant is usually a young lady, interesting in manner and dejected in appearance, as if distressed by some constant strain upon the nervous system. The Clairvoyant also presents an appearance of passive submission, as if in fear of some powerful controlling influence and, even when possessed of robust vigour, she assumes a general air of having no will of her own, and, of exceeding timidity. The Clairvoyant is blindfolded completely.³¹⁹

It would seem then, that Sharon Neill also has a lineage in Nineteenth Century theatrical spectacle.

From Tiresias at the shores of memory, to Sharon Neill at the Felixtowe Spa Pavilion (where she is showing next week) the figure of the blind seer or prophet connects a 'performance present' with a future life.

In all of the instances mentioned here, writing, like the future itself, is somehow deferred. Homer does not write, he works with an oral tradition; it is for posterity to write him. Milton writes his major works through an amanuensis; he speaks *before* his words are written. Robert Houdin's undocumented performance code is left to be deciphered by a proto-journalistic exposé. Sharon Neill's prediction-come-communications are passed on

³¹⁹ Washington Irving Bishop, *Second Sight Explained: A complete exposition of clairvoyance or second sight, as exhibited by the late Robert Houdin and Robert Heller, showing how they supposed the phenomena may be produced* (Edinburgh: John Menzies, 1880) p.8

without the need for any mark on paper at all and are left to be written down by their recipient, at whim, some time in the future.

Of course the blind and the blindfolded *do* write; do physically put pen to paper.

(ii) The person whose future is blind – the *going blind* that Rod Dale has predicted (the *possibility* of) – also has its tropes and archetypes. The 'notion' of the onset of blindness with old age is a lived reality that we meet, if not personally, then through our friends, family and associates. This future of encroaching blindness puts into play a number of scripts of its own: the manual which instructs you on the pragmatics of blindness, the prescription that orders you a palliative, the case notes which discuss your ability to cope. These scripts come into use with necessary regularity.

The inevitable possibility of eventual blindness is played out in allegory from Oedipus on. As Freud remarks in his study of 'the uncanny' (*das unheimliche*, literally the 'unhomely'):

We know from psycho-analytic experience that the fear of damaging or losing one's eyes is a terrible one in children. Many adults retain their apprehensiveness in this respect, and no physical injury is so much dreaded by them as an injury to the eye. [...] A study of dreams, phantasies and myths has taught us that anxiety about one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is often enough a substitute for the dread of being castrated.³²⁰

While even Freud admits to the possibility that the anxiety of going blind would in itself produce fear, he insists that the anticipation of violence against the eye is not just that of a horror of losing sight but is also metonymic of a fear of an attack on sexual capacity³²¹.

For the last year and a half of his life, the artist, filmmaker and writer Derek Jarman was blind. His body was wracked due to AIDS and one of the many infections that had to be

³²⁰ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* Standard Edition Vol. 17 (London: Vantage, 2001) p.231

³²¹ Freud's subject here is implicitly gendered. The concept that the fear of blindness is a metonym for the fear of castration refers specifically to the male body and consequently patriarchal power. While this gendered subject is concerned therefore with a male case study, at the expense of the female body, this exclusivity problematises the theory itself.

fought was CMV or Cytomegalovirus. About fifty percent of the general population and ninety percent of people with HIV carry CMV³²². If healthy, the immune system can keep this virus in check, if weak, it will start to attack the body. The most common illness caused by CMV is retinitis, the death of cells in the retinas, which quickly causes blindness unless treated.

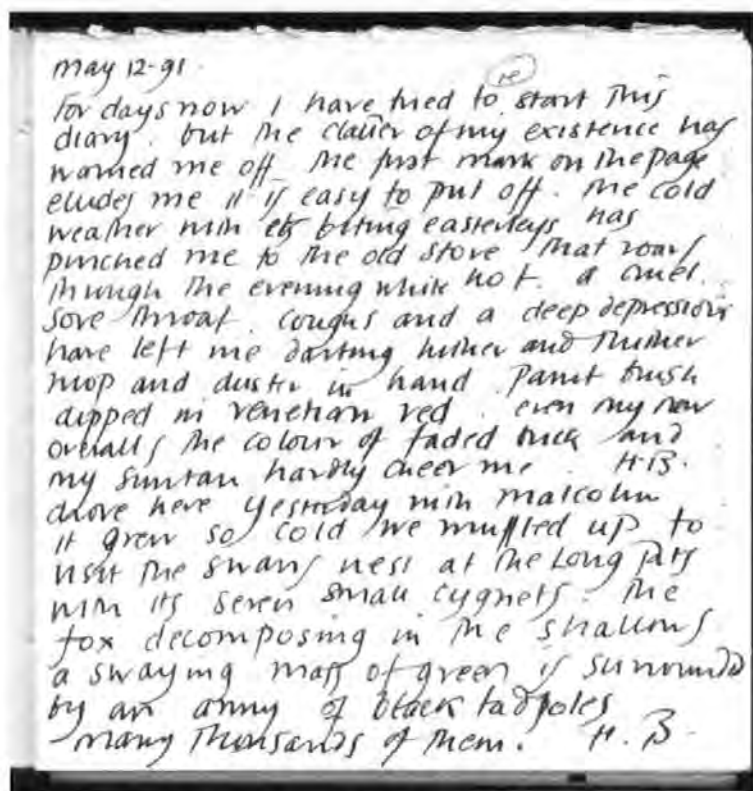


Fig. 52: Derek Jarman: Diary Entry 12 May 1991

In the last diaries there is an understandable preoccupation with the onset of blindness and also, interestingly in relation to Freud's bringing together the fear of blindness and castration, Jarman records the falling off of his sexual capacity. This is an autobiography of the dying. The artist made blind; the sexual made impotent. Jarman had known the prognosis.

Ah well, it's two years since the foundations tremored. Evil eyes. I can't imagine going blind. Maybe that was the terrible premonition read in my hand all those years ago by Umberto Tirelli in Rome.³²³

³²² See Anonymous, 'Cytomegalovirus (CMV)' AIDS.ORG <<http://www.aids.org/factSheets/504-Cytomegalovirus-CMV.html>> [accessed 12 September 2003]

³²³ Derek Jarman, *Smiling in Slow Motion* (London: Vintage, 2000) Monday 10 August 1992

This “ah well” of resignation is typical of his seeming acceptance of blindness. Blindness has been “on the cards”³²⁴, and Jarman professes, “I resign myself to my fate, even blind fate”³²⁵. This pun on his ‘blind fate’ (fate that unseeing, marked him to be blinded) is consistent with a number of word plays in the diaries where the inter-relation between arts practice, life and writing, is understood through a blindness that is at times metaphorical, at times literal, and occasionally both.

While “...the pen splutters”³²⁶ *before* there is any problem in seeing, the way the pen does splutter for the sighted who can not see clearly to find the right words, he later “...run[s] out of words as the line blurs on the page.”³²⁷ This is a transferred epithet, where the blurring of his vision is enunciated by the appearance of the blurring of the mark on the paper.

Jarman’s blindness becomes his pathway to death – to a blind forever – as his “diary...”, his life, “...slips into the dark.”³²⁸ Blindness becomes the metaphor for approaching death.

...the CMV blots out even more of the weak winter day, so I am living in a twilight, perhaps I should say *my* twilight.³²⁹

The closing of his vision, the closing of his life. This relationship between his health and his writing is not just descriptive or literary, it is also very pragmatic. There are stretches of time with no entries, followed by an explanation of a period of illness (or medication) that was particularly strenuous.

“I’ve noticed,” he writes, “that the length of my diary entries reflects the state of my health.”³³⁰

³²⁴ Ibid. Tuesday 11 August 1992

³²⁵ Ibid. Wednesday 12 August 1992

³²⁶ Ibid. Thursday 6 February 1992

³²⁷ Ibid. Thursday 24 September 1992

³²⁸ Ibid. Thursday 29 October 1992

³²⁹ Ibid. Wednesday 3 February 1993

³³⁰ Ibid. Friday 22 May 1992

But blindness does not stop him writing. He likes to write in the dark. "I can write quite legibly in the dark,"³³¹ he writes. And he does; he writes in the dark. "Writing blind now,"³³² he writes. And he does; he writes blind.

The 'now' of this "writing blind now" is key. Much of Jarman's diary writing is not reflective or ponderous but describes what is happening at the moment he puts pen to paper.

Jarman records the absolute present of the moment of writing. ("My stinging eyedrops are in and the ward is turning to a blur."³³³) In doing so, does Jarman record his experiences unadulterated or transform them through a mediation? ("The little black floaters swirl around and make me dizzy."³³⁴) Maybe it is more helpful to think of Jarman *performing* his experiences, for himself, to his diary. Performance, as has often been noted, exists only in the moment of its enactment. In writing in the moment of the moment, Jarman's words become performative: they are actions which perform him.

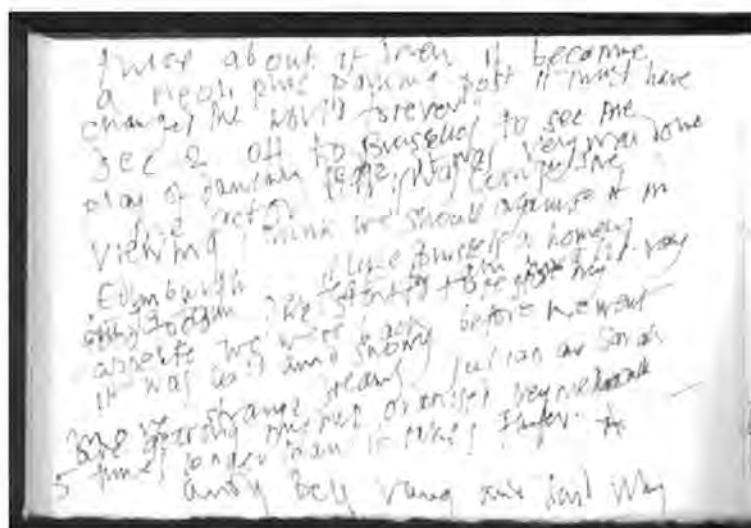


Fig. 53: Derek Jarman: Diary Entry 2 December 1993

Writing blind, about the onset of blindness at the moment of writing, reveals that the performance is, for Jarman, what it is about. It is the experience of writing itself, of putting pen to paper, which becomes the purpose to write. He can not, after all, see to *read* what

³³¹ Ibid. Monday 24 August 1992

³³² Ibid. Tuesday 22 September 1992

³³³ Ibid. Thursday 10 September 1992

³³⁴ Ibid.

he has written. This is not diary writing as record. Although clearly he writes for publication and several volumes of his diaries had already been published before these last were written, if he had wished solely, or even predominantly, to record his life for posterity, he could have chosen other, more practical methods of recording such as sound recording. Indeed Jarman does spend a considerable amount of time in his last years giving interviews about his life to journalists and academics and also to his biographer. *His* writing is not about a self-reflexive process, it is not writing about writing, it is rather, writing as a state of being; a performative state; documentation as performance. This is the artist writing.

The publication of the diary, which is after all what enables you and me to read it, is not its first outing. Like the performance photograph, the diary is a kind of performance documentation; something other than the performance (the life) but reliant on it. It also becomes another performance. Jarman used his last diaries as the script of his last film: *Blue*.

Blue is a rich multi-layered audio track of music, city, hospital and domestic sounds, and text, which follows moments of Jarman's illness and his blindness, set against a single cobalt blue projection throughout the seventy-five minute duration; the only variation in tone and texture come from the scratches on the film or dust caught in the projector, or what we ourselves manage to see there in our own mind's eye.

Those moments of diary writing, which are of the moment of writing the absolute present, are the sections of *Blue* which work seamlessly in the diegesis, that is, the narrative world of the film. In the context of the film, the first person present, is reanimated as speaking: the *I am in this moment*. Diary writing, in this context (of fine art film) moves away from personal musings and becomes a narrative world.

The single visual blue of the film not only insists that the audience create their own images, it also documents the world of the blind. As Jorge Luis Borges, another writer who went blind, recorded:

People generally imagine the blind as enclosed in a black world. [...] One of the colours that the blind – or at least this blind man – do *not* see is black. [...] I, who was accustomed to sleeping in total darkness, was bothered for a long time at having to sleep in this world of mist, in the greenish or bluish mist, vaguely luminous which is the world of the blind. I wanted to lie down in darkness.³³⁵

I read Jarman's last diaries, published posthumously six years after his death and seven years after the premier of *Blue*. I read them initially in order to try and elucidate the film, to see if there were any similar passages or writing, to think about the diary as a script. What was so striking was that large portions of the film script are lifted, unedited from the diaries. It was not the diary which became useful to understand the film, but the film which elucidated the diary. The seemingly obvious point that the film script of the diary makes the private public, makes a performance out of the journal, became problematic. The performance that seemed to matter was Jarman's own: that is, himself, produced by the writing of his immediate present; the act of writing as a performance, a documentation as performance which in turn became a film performance, itself the documentation of a blind life towards death.

³³⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, *Seven Nights* trans. by Eliot Weinberger (London: Faber and Faber, 1984) p.107

2. Face Reader: *Maura Bright*



Fig. 54: *Maura Bright*

Maura Bright is a Face Reader who predicted future challenges and opportunities. Using the ancient Chinese art of Face Reading she read the overall shape of my face and then each of the main features in turn: ears, eyebrows, eyes, nose and mouth.

Prediction 2

Everything is on your doorstep. Your most challenging feature is your digestion. Your low set ears indicate more will come to you in later life. You are mentally creative and follow projects through from start to finish. Your nose indicates that you have a good capacity for sense of self in the future. Your mouth indicates you are, and will be, a crisp communicator. Your forties will be a very productive decade but do not invest between the ages of forty-nine and fifty-one. The balance of your future health lies in your kidneys.

Note 2

The precedent for reading someone's future from their face is not as obscure as it may at first appear. Language itself defers to the face as the primary locus for the communication of signification. Social anthropologists, life coaches, speech writers, behavioural psychologists, all give varying figures for the percentage of communication which is non-verbal, ranging from fifty-five percent to ninety-five percent, but the general point is clear: what we say carries less import than how we say it, carries less import than what our body (and especially our face) is doing 'as we say it how we say it'. The face is like a book, wherein we may read the author's autobiography³³⁶.

³³⁶ An average breakdown goes something like this: 55% non-verbal communication, 38% from the way the articulation is made (which is in some sense non-verbal) and 9% from the words themselves. See Edward J. Barks, 'How Important Are Non Verbal Signals?' *Barks Communications* (2003) <<http://www.barkscomm.com/personaltrainer/PT00060.asp>> [accessed 10 March 2004]

The cultural medium for recording the face is the portrait. The portrait has consistently been caught up with the future, as in for instance in the state portrait (which is used to secure the future through dynastic marriages and the dissemination of the image of authority), in the commemorative portrait (which acknowledges the past and holds it for the future), and in portraits which anticipate the future (in which, for example, the depiction of children, either literally or symbolically, points to a time ahead).

Before the invention and use of photography, painted or sculpted portraits were considered as 'direct substitutes for their sitters'³³⁷. With the invention of photography, painted or sculpted portraits become 'art' and photographic representations become analogous with the authority accorded to scientific investigation. Even today, despite the discourses surrounding new media and digital manipulation, the 'identity photograph' is still that which singles out one human being from another, most commonly sited in the passport. Until DNA finger-printing can be harnessed in an easy to use format, photography looks likely to remain as the form which holds the authority of the individual in law.

Photography arrived at a cultural moment which was preoccupied with the relationship between the 'face' and the 'soul' and was quickly co-opted in service of this investigation.

As Joanna Woodall acknowledges in her historiography of the portrait:

Throughout the nineteenth century, the authority of the depicted likeness as a representation of the sitter's identity was often guaranteed by recourse to the science of physiognomy. Physiognomic treatises provided systems whereby a person's character could be deduced from his (and less commonly her) external appearance. Such systems had existed since antiquity, but in the late eighteenth century they acquired a more empirical basis and renewed popularity.³³⁸

³³⁷ Joanna Woodall ed., *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) p.3

³³⁸ *Ibid.* p.6

The application of this newfound science was felt nowhere as strongly as in 'anthropological' photography where classifications of human types – from 'race' to 'idiocy' – became incorporated by the Victorian obsession with collecting and labelling.

Taking their cue from the eighteenth century work of physiognomists Franz Joseph Gall and Johann Caspar Lavater, in which physical characteristics of the face and head were interpreted as corresponding to related character traits, photography was used to measure physical manifestations of behaviour, especially with regard to criminals.

The main purpose of this form of classification was to identify recidivists – that is, people who were likely to re-offend – in the future. The classification of criminal types was employed as a preventative measure: that is, by reading the future propensity for criminal action, of a 'criminal' type, in their face. Thus the American doctor Eugene Talbot argued that 'criminals form a variety of the human family quite distinct from law-abiding men.'³³⁹

Photography, in its nascent years, was considered a crude form of representation, but an accurate one nevertheless. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's moral tale of 1851 *The House of the Seven Gables*, one of the central characters is the daguerreotypist Holgrave³⁴⁰. The novel is littered with references to the face, and the relationship between the dissimulating face and the underlying character of its owner. It is only photography which reveals the true nature of the individual in question; in this case it is Judge Pyncheon:

Now, the remarkable point is, that the original wears, to the world's eye – and, for aught I know, to his most intimate friends – an exceedingly pleasant countenance, indicative of benevolence, openness of heart, sunny good humor, and other praiseworthy qualities of that cast. The sun, as you see, tells quite another story, and will not be coaxed out of it, after half-a-dozen patient attempts on my part. Here we have the man, sly, subtle, hard, imperious, and, withal, cold as ice. Look at that eye!

³³⁹ Quoted in *Photography: A Cultural History* by Mary Warner Marien (London: Laurence King, 2002) p.227

³⁴⁰ The daguerreotype was an early photographic process, developed in France in the 1820s by Louis Daguerre (1789-1851) and widely popular in mid-nineteenth century America.

Would you like to be at its mercy? At that mouth! Could it ever smile?
And yet, if you could only see the benign smile of the original.³⁴¹

As the narrative hurtles to its conclusion it is the photographic likeness which proves accurate. It was the prediction of the photographic image made through the reading of Judge Pyncheon's face which can be seen retrospectively to have announced his future crime.

This physiognomic prediction is not only enabled by photography but reliant on it; the photograph of the face reveals what the face alone can not. In *Camera Lucida*, the author's search for the ontology of photography, a search which is preoccupied by finding an adequate representation of his dead mother's face, Roland Barthes identifies the way in which photography casts the future retroactively.

Barthes identifies the 'studium' as the content, the subject matter of the photograph, and the 'punctum' as the detail which "pricks" – affects – the spectator. But Barthes also identifies the photograph's second *punctum* as Time.

In 1865, young Lewis Payne tried to assassinate Secretary of State W. H. Seward. Alexander Gardener photographed him in his cell, where he was waiting to be hanged. The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be and this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, *over a catastrophe which has already occurred*. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.³⁴²

The *this will be and this has been* relies on information provided outside the frame of the photograph, in this case, that Lewis Payne was hanged the day after the photograph was taken. In this way, photographs always present the future to us (as the past).

³⁴¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.92

³⁴² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993) p.96

The much discussed photographic self-portraits of Robert Mapplethorpe make this *anterior future* explicit³⁴³. The *Self-Portrait* of 1988 explicitly invites the spectator to consider the photographer-subject's death. Mapplethorpe faces the camera, his head floating in a black space, clutching a walking-stick, the handle of which is a carved skull. The relationship between the human head and the skull is clear: time will transform one to the other. In the *Self-Portrait* of 1978, ten years earlier, Mapplethorpe can be seen in leather chaps and waistcoat, bending away from lens, a bullwhip protruding from his anus. Mapplethorpe positions himself as the devil, a wry 'two fingers' to his detractors who proclaim his future damnation as a result of his present lifestyle.



Fig. 55: Robert Mapplethorpe Self Portrait (1988)



Fig. 56: Robert Mapplethorpe Self Portrait (1978)

In light of Mapplethorpe's much publicised death from an AIDS related illness in 1989, these photographs illustrate the way in which the future unfolds in the photographic self-portrait. At the time he took the 1988 *Self-Portrait* Mapplethorpe was anticipating his death, which was to come the following year. Looking at this photograph we perceive the "that is dead and that is going to die" which Barthes articulates³⁴⁴. But if the 1988 *Self-Portrait* portends Mapplethorpe's own mortality, the 1978 *Self-Portrait* which exposes the photographer's desire, foreshadows what was then, the undiscovered link between unsafe gay sex and AIDS. Mapplethorpe seems to be saying – *I am damned in your eyes but damned through choice, the devil's life of sexual pleasure is mine* – but Mapplethorpe's

³⁴³ See for instance Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Wendy Steiner, *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in an age of fundamentalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995)

³⁴⁴ Barthes p.96

owning of his 'deviance' in contravention of the mores of the 1970's is devoid of the tragedy that we now know. Looking back at this photograph it is not the deviance which registers so much as the ignorance. The playful allusion to eternal damnation, the pact with the devil, retroactively predicts a future in which the body is subject not to divine retribution, but to corporeal decay, a decay which Mapplethorpe now knows in the self-portrait taken a decade later³⁴⁵.

The understanding of the future found in the face of the photograph in these terms, is one where biographical knowledge intervenes to re-inscribe a prediction onto the photograph; that is knowledge of what *happened*. The photographs of artist Alison Jackson, which employ the use of 'lookalikes', operate in the space of what did *not* happen. The majority of these images ask us to imagine well known faces occupied in activities that we would normally not see: David Beckham prancing around in a girl's thong, Queen Elizabeth on the lavatory, Tony Blair doing the limbo, Mick Jagger doing the ironing. In all these cases the meaning of the photograph rests on the spectator's understanding of a double referent: that is both the direct referent which is the lookalike, and the indirect (but primary) referent which is the celebrity who is looked like. We are asked to imagine that what we are looking at could have happened, could *be* happening, but in the knowledge that it did *not* happen by the primary referent in this instance. Signification is not dependent on the authority of the referent but rather on its *likeness* to the referent. Whether or not it *really is* the Queen who is on the lavatory in the picture is only relevant for semiotics; the effect is that we are asked to imagine Her Majesty taking a dump.

In a few of the photographs this '*what might have been, what might be*' is thrown into a different perspective by the depiction of a scenario that clearly did not, nor could not have happened. In her portraits of both Marilyn Monroe and Diana, Princess of Wales with Dodi Al Fayed, Jackson chooses to photograph the celebrity lookalikes with children the

³⁴⁵ When AIDS was first classified, religious intolerance proclaimed the 'gay disease' was divine retribution for the carnal sin of homosexuality. While this argument may still maintain some force in some sections of society, mainstream religious institutions have distanced themselves from this viewpoint.

celebrities never had. Marilyn died childless, Diana and Dodi died without a shared child. All three died young. By imagining and imaging a future in which Marilyn was a mother and Diana and Dodi had a bi-racial baby, Jackson depicts an impossible future, a *this was not, this could not be*. But the impossibility of these images is not to dismiss them purely as fiction, rather it highlights what *could have been* and thus reflects on our collective mortality. Ultimately these photographs seem to be about death.

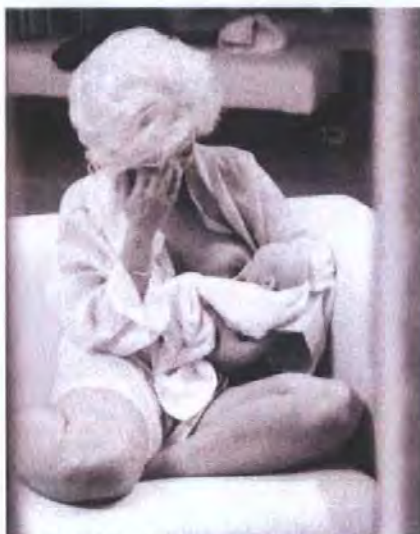


Fig. 57: Alison Jackson Marilyn (2003)



Fig. 58: Alison Jackson Diana & Dodi (2003)

In all of these examples: the literal reading of the face of the criminal type, the retroactive reading of the photographic face through time, and the photographic face of the non-existent child, the future is configured by the face of the subject, but is also necessarily contingent on the photograph itself. The photograph does not simply allow the reading to take place without the presence of its subject but more crucially, it is the authority which mediates and controls the meaning. It is only in the photograph that Judge Pyncheon's true identity is disclosed; it is only in the photograph that the retroactive production of Mapplethorpe's future can be determined; it is only in the photograph that we can witness Diana and Dodi's child. In contradistinction, Maura Bright's reading of my future from my face is negotiated in my presence and only time will lend it authority.

3. Financial Advisor: Alan Dickinson-Quelch



Fig. 59:
Alan Dickinson-Quelch

Alan Dickinson-Quelch is a Financial Consultant who predicted my financial future. He asked me a series of questions relating to debt, income, assets and savings and based his prediction on my answers.

Prediction 3

From what you have told me I can not foresee any major problems. The most important thing is that you have a good attitude to debt. You are your own man. You don't have any dependents and no one is dependent on you. It is good you are building up your savings in order to buy your rented property from the council. This is a wonderful opportunity and you shouldn't let it go. You should take a risk, even if you end up having to sell it. You may not have another opportunity to buy property in London. You should be able to get a mortgage, and property is your chance of a stable financial future.

Note 3

Debt and property, savings and investments; paying it off, reaping the interest: finances articulate our future in a more predictable way than many other aspects of our life. To paraphrase Derrida, the future is predictable, the unpredictable is the unexpected encounter with 'the other'³⁴⁶. There are financial scandals, pensions which collapse, investments which fall through as the housing market swells to bursting, but on the whole, western capitalism is based on the generation of wealth through a market economy. In this market, property has proved itself to be one of the most stable investments – as safe as houses.

³⁴⁶ Derrida. Dir. Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman. Jane Doe Films. 2003

Intellectual value is not determined by the market in the same way. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the art market, where at one end of the scale you have Van Gogh's portrait of Doctor Gachet being sold in under three minutes for \$82.5 million to the Japanese paper tycoon Ryoei Saito and on the other a contemporary performance artwork which makes negative equity and can only exist with support of the state. The problem here is not that paintings can reach such astronomical sums (although this may in itself be shocking) but that the variability of financial value may be perceived as being in direct relation to intellectual value. This issue became a matter of national discussion in the UK in January of 2004 in regard to the governments proposals for top-up fees in the university sector. The issue for many was not that the fees were going to be introduced but that potential variability in fees would create a false hierarchy of universities as well as the subject areas they teach and research.

Increasingly the mass cultural market seeks the lowest common denominator necessary to attract the greatest number of people. This is the way to maximise profits. This need not logically lead to poorer quality output (though the proliferation of 'makeover' or 'fly-on-the-wall' television programmes in the last five years which follow an unadventurous and repeated format may evidence that it has). It remains the case however, that some forms of cultural production cannot survive inside the market. Pierre Bourdieu takes a more anti-capitalist view of the relation between intellectual value and the market:

To the extent that, *grosso modo*, the value of works is negatively correlated with the size of their market, cultural businesses can only exist and subsist thanks to public funds. [...] We cannot leave cultural production to the risks of the marketplace or the whims of a wealthy patron.³⁴⁷

For many forms of cultural production it is not so much their lack of popularity (although 'difficulty' and 'resistance to entertainment' may be fundamental to their conception) but their structural resistance to commodification by market forces, that necessitates their reliance on subsidy. This subsidy need not only be provided by the state as Bourdieu

³⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu and Hans Haacke, *Free Exchange* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995) p.69

suggests; indeed many artists choose to subsidise their practice through other employment. Forms of cultural production which resist commodification by the market include site-specific installations which operate as one-off events, and especially performance. As Peggy Phelan observes:

Performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive. It is this quality which makes performance the runt of the litter of contemporary art. Performance clogs the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary for the circulation of capital.³⁴⁸

...and yet there are many examples of performance being co-opted into the market place.

(a) Sponsorship

Sponsorship is the exchange of financial capital for symbolic capital. You give the money in order to be reflected by the event. A recent example of this would be the Tate Egg Live series of live arts events on the South Bank in London³⁴⁹. As Bourdieu reasons however, 'censorship is exerted through money' and this is particularly the case where those associating themselves with an event are backing it financially³⁵⁰.

(b) Ticketing

Undoubtedly the most common way in which performance enters the market is through charging an audience to 'witness' it. But while it is the case that long-running West End theatre will make profit over time, generally speaking contemporary performance work will be subsidised well over and above the takings from the box office.

(c) Performance Skill

Performance sells its skills to those who want to buy. Here performance is a tool, a transferable skill which has applications in different contexts. The performance maker Richard Layzell worked for several years with the computer software company AIT. He made interventions within the company headquarters and ran workshops with staff. He

³⁴⁸ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) p.148

³⁴⁹ See <<http://www.tateandegglive.com>> [accessed 5 February 2004]

³⁵⁰ Bourdieu and Haacke p.70

was paid for his services at industry rate. The benefits were felt by both staff and managers. The company lost only 12% of staff per annum set against a national average of 25% in this high employee turnover sector³⁵¹.

(d) Stocks & Shares

Rare, but the model exists. David Bowie floated himself on the stock exchange.

(e) Documentations & Traces

For contemporary performance makers frustrated with their inability to sell, an increasingly prevalent way of entering the market is to save the performance trace or produce documentation resulting from the performance and to sell that. There are many examples of this, from Rebecca Horn's body sculptures to Franko B's blood paintings. While these objects are not performances in their own right, they rely on the performance in order to find their market³⁵². This was taken to a secondary level by Hayley Newman in 'Connotations', a series of performance photographs and accompanying texts which were fictions; they document performances which never took place.

(f) Performance 'For Sale'

The performance maker La Ribot, sick of the fact that she couldn't sell her work in the same way as her visual art peers, devised the notion of the 'Distinguished Proprietor'. You can 'buy' her performances which are sold as works of art, each at \$1000 or £600. As a 'Distinguished Proprietor' you will have your name printed whenever the piece's title is announced and you can attend any of its expositions world-wide, free of charge. This contract is a reworking of old models of patronage but a successful one nevertheless. This is however, the exception that proves the rule. Performances are not bought or sold – certainly not the way you might buy and sell a painting³⁵³.

³⁵¹ Anonymous, 'Computer workers reap the benefit' *BBC News Online* (2000) <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/743992.stm>> [accessed 5 March 2002]

³⁵² Arguments have been made to the contrary; see for instance Joshua Sofaer 'Conflict of Interest: Performance as a Spectator Sport' *Performance Research* 5.1 (2000), 120-125

³⁵³ This point on La Ribot is rehearsed by the author in the Introduction to *Research in Process* ed. by Manick Govinda and David Hughes (Nottingham: Live Art Magazine / Artsadmin, 2000)

In all of these cases the circulation of capital is reliant on the act of performance, but not one of them answers Alan Dickinson-Quelch's prediction that the (or rather, my) stable financial future is in property. Is there a model by which contemporary performance can be seen to engender property as a stable financial future? The answer might lie at Home.

Launched in December 1998, Home is an 'arts organisation' based inside the family house of artist and curator Laura Godfrey Isaacs. There are many curators who use their home as a gallery³⁵⁴ but few where there is full 'integration of art into all living spaces' so that the domestic context remains entirely intact³⁵⁵.

Home states that one of its missions is to regularly stage new live art and performance work in London. In fact, Home is the only venue in London that has been consistently committed to the presentation of contemporary performance work over the last five years³⁵⁶.

While the domestic context is integral to Home's remit, that context is created through a default. Many keen gallerists simply can not afford the overheads of a London space and therefore 'fall back' on their domestic environment, and while Home embraces the site in which it finds itself, Godfrey-Isaacs is in the process of setting up a venue outside of her living space to avoid the understandable conflicts that arise from permitting and charging people to enter her home³⁵⁷.

³⁵⁴ For instance, just down the road from Home, is Danielle Arnaud at 123 Kennington Road

³⁵⁵ Laura Godfrey Isaacs, 'The Organisation' *Home* (1998) <<http://www.lgihome.co.uk>> [accessed 5 April 2002]. This website has an archive of past exhibitions and performances.

³⁵⁶ It is a poor reflection of London's commitment to performance work, especially since the departure of Lois Keidan and Catherine Ugwu from the ICA, that the only space to be regularly showing contemporary performance is founded on the commitment of one individual to open up their private home. In many respects contemporary performance as embodied by the umbrella term 'live art' has not been stronger than at present, especially since the formulation of the Live Art Development Agency in January 1999, but the work often has to negotiate venues with other agenda.

³⁵⁷ Home's second space is due to open in Rishangles, Suffolk in spring 2005. Information about Home's remit and intentions is based on conversations with Laura Godfrey-Isaacs.

The historical model of the home as space for performance and discussion is the 'salon', which is also the title of the holding form for Home's regular performance events. But whereas the historical model was of patronage (by the rich of the poor) Home attracts public subsidy, commercial sponsorship and box-office takings. In this model the personal investment in one's home is reaped as fine art capital, and fine art capital – as embodied by contemporary performance – brings money into the home. Performance invests in property³⁵⁸. This is the theatre of market forces.

³⁵⁸ There are other performance makers whose work leads directly to the enhancement of their property. Ernst Fischer is a London based performance maker whose 'Living Room Theatre' has defaulted in providing structural and decorative improvements to his home beyond the moment of performance. "I always try to get something from a performance," Fischer remarked to me in conversation, "last time it was a coffee-table".

4. Vice President of Age Concern: Tom Hoyes

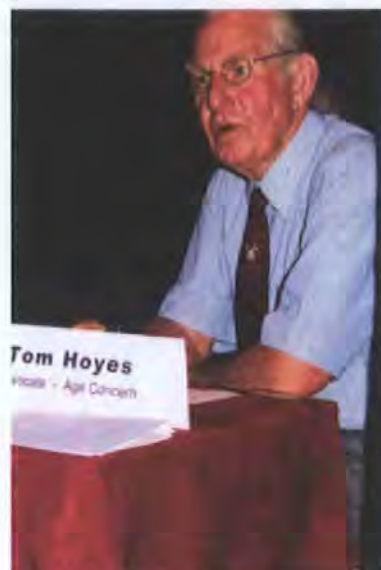


Fig. 60: Tom Hoyes

Tom Hoyes is the Vice President of Age Concern England and an expert on sex for the over seventies, who forecast my life in old age. He posed a series of provocative questions which encouraged a discussion about the effects of aging.

Prediction 4

I'm seventy-three and I'm going to live to one hundred; you're twenty-nine and going to live to two hundred. Now there are all sorts of problems that this creates: financially, sexually, and for your long term health. You have to be aware that changes are going to impose themselves on you. You seem to be aware of the future, but have not formulated any plan. The time you spend with your ninety-year-old grandmother should give you some indication of what is in store for you and should make you feel reasonably confident about what is to come.

Note 4

Today, Friday January 16, 2004 Michael Jackson is arraigned to answer an indictment: seven charges of child abuse – “lewd act upon a child” – and two of giving alcohol to a minor – “administering an intoxicating agent”³⁵⁹. This is not the first time that Jackson has faced such charges, nor that the media circus surrounds these allegations. Whatever the outcome of the case, which may not reach trial for over a year, if indeed it ever does reach trial, we will perhaps never really know the veracity of the allegations, or what actually took place between Jackson and his complainant, John Doe. Without wanting to detract from these very real and serious charges, it is not the aim of this section of writing to determine what case there is to be answered, but rather to try and understand something of Michael Jackson's relation with childhood and children, and his stated (and embodied)

³⁵⁹ Thomas W. Sneddon, 'Felony Complaint' *County of Santa Barbara District Attorney* (2003) <<http://www.countyofsb.org/da/press.asp>> [accessed 1 December 2003]

resistance to getting older. This is not about trying to uncover the psychological motivations for his behaviour (behaviour which is difficult to determine as it is mediated so heavily by the media) nor, to reiterate, to prove the allegations of child molestation as true or false. Rather, it focuses on how Jackson's self-selected public image, tracks an 'association' with the character Peter Pan created by J. M. Barrie. The relationship between Jackson, Peter Pan and J. M. Barrie is both proclaimed by Jackson himself and manifest by his body and his surroundings. This relationship is both structural (they mirror each other) and performative (Jackson performs, and is performed by, Barrie and Peter Pan).

The main source that I will draw upon as evidence for Jackson's preoccupation with Peter Pan is his interview with Martin Bashir which was broadcast in February 2003. In this interview Jackson corroborates many of the widely publicised biographical anecdotes of his life: that he spends his enormous wealth with the ease and taste of a child, that he is sexually naïve, that he was abused by his father, that he missed out on any substantial normal childhood experiences. For example:

Jackson: I remember precisely going to Motown Studios to record, and right across the street from the studio was a park and I could hear the roar of, you know, the lower league team, and they were playing soccer and football and volleyball and they were playing baseball. And I remember a lot of the time looking back and really hiding my face and crying. I wanted to play sometimes and I couldn't because I had to go to the studio.³⁶⁰

This quote, is itself, from the mouth of Peter Pan, for "oh! how he longed to play as other children play...."³⁶¹

Michael Jackson has been performing since he was five years old. He recorded his first single at the age of eight. When he was a child his performance maturity gave rise to the remark that he was 'ten going on forty-two', today, at forty-five, surrounded by children and childhood toys, the inverse is more frequently applied.

³⁶⁰ *Living with Michael Jackson* Interview by Martin Bashir. ITV. 3 February 2003

³⁶¹ J. M. Barrie 'The Little White Bird' in *Farewell Miss Julie Logan: A JM Barrie Omnibus* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Press, 2000) p.106

In the ITV interview, Bashir questions Jackson on his interest in Peter Pan and the fact that he has named his home, a three-thousand acre ranch north of Los Angeles, complete with full-scale fair-ground, after the island where Peter Pan lives, 'Neverland':

Bashir: The inspiration for Neverland – Peter Pan – why is Peter Pan a figure of such interest and inspiration to you?

Jackson: Because Peter Pan, to me, represents something that's very special in my heart. You know, it represents youth, childhood, never growing up, magic, flying, everything I think that children and wonderment and magic – what it's all about – and to me I just have never ever grown out of loving that or thinking that its very special.

Bashir: Do you identify with him?

Jackson: Totally.

Bashir: You don't want to grow up?

Jackson: No. I am Peter Pan.

What does it mean for Michael Jackson to say he *is* Peter Pan?

There is no single text called *Peter Pan*, nor for that matter a text which is the 'original' or 'authoritative' version. The character was a creation by J. M. Barrie in his 'playtime' with the boys of the Llewelyn Davies family whom he met in Kensington Gardens and who years later, on the death of their parents, he was ultimately to adopt³⁶². At first the character of Peter was based on the newest arrival to the Llewelyn Davies family – Peter – but soon the character outgrew his namesake and this original context.

In 1902, Barrie published *The Little White Bird*, a novel for adults about the narrator's story-telling relationship with a boy, David. This novel contained a few chapters about Peter Pan, the boy who never grew up. These were extracted and later formed the children's stories *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter and Wendy*. On a parallel,

³⁶² For biographical detail on J. M. Barrie and his relationship with the Llewelyn Davies family see Andrew Birkin, *JM Barrie and the Lost Boys* (London: Yale University Press, 2003) and Andrew Birkin, 'The Llewelyn Davies Family' *J. M. Barrie* (2003) <http://www.jmbarrie.co.uk/df_index.html> [accessed 5 January 2004]

yet separate, writing tack, Barrie wrote the play-text, which was first produced in 1904 but was revised continually and only finally published in 1928. Subsequently both the play-text and the story have been adapted and re-adapted by authors all over the world and the most popular stage version of recent years is itself an adaptation by John Caird and Trevor Nunn, which acknowledges in the introduction that it has “included a lot of new material” based on the Barrie archive and that this has resulted in “significant alterations”³⁶³. The character Peter Pan is not entirely consistent, starting off as a baby and ending up as a pre-adolescent boy, his adventures, as his person, shift and develop with time. Peter Pan is a concept, rather than a single character of a novel or a play.

In *The Little White Bird*, the narrative follows two parallel strands. The first is the narrator’s creative act – the telling of the story, the writing of the book – which is enunciated from the beginning in the telling of the whole story to the boy David, and ends with the delivery of the book itself. The second is the mother’s creative act – the making of children – which begins with the David’s birth story and ends with her delivery of a second child.

In all these aspects the relationship between the narrator, the child and the child’s parents is seen as one of conflict and symbiosis. Conflict because the narrator wants full ‘possession’ of the child, as surrogate father against the birth-parents; symbiosis because the narrator has no subject or creative partner without the child or his parents. In *The Little White Bird* the narrator describes the symbiosis thus:

I ought to mention here that the following is our way with a story: First I tell it to him, and then he tells it to me, the understanding being that it is quite a different story; and then I retell it with his additions, and so we go on until no one could say whether it is more his story or mine.³⁶⁴

Such was Barrie’s relationship with the Llewelyn Davies family. The characters and adventures which Barrie creates are developed with the Llewelyn Davies children, not

³⁶³ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* ed. by John Caird and Trevor Nunn (London: Methuen, 1997) p.viii

³⁶⁴ J. M. Barrie ‘The Little White Bird’ in *Farewell Miss Julie Logan: A JM Barrie Omnibus* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Press, 2000) p.100

just for them because they are present but literally *with* their input. Here not only do the characters, events, and narratives stem from an autobiographic imperative but even the development of their creation is incorporated by the creation itself.

Jackson too, proclaims that his inspiration comes from children:

Jackson: I think what they get from me, I get from them. I've said it many times: my greatest inspiration comes from kids. Every song I write, every dance I do, the poetry I write, it is all inspired from that level of innocence, that consciousness of purity and children have that. I see God in the face of children, and um, man, I just love being around that all the time.

The autobiographical nature of *The Little White Bird* has been widely noted, 'so much so that [Barrie's] work has often been seen as little more than a revelation of his complicated personality'³⁶⁵; the narrative events mirror those in Barrie's relationship with the Llewelyn Davies family but also, as his biographer Andrew Birkin convincingly argues, the character of Peter Pan is, or becomes, a reflection of Barrie's fears and desires of childhood.

Barrie's elder brother David died aged 13. This left his mother distraught and Barrie with feelings of low self-esteem, adult responsibility and the sense that he could not fill the position of his mother's favourite. This rupture in his early childhood left Barrie with both a lifelong sense of the loss of childhood but also an exacerbated taste for childhood. As Barrie records in the biography of his mother *Margaret Ogilvy*:

The horror of my boyhood was that I knew a time would come when I also must give up the games, and how it was to be done I saw not (this agony still returns to me in dreams, when I catch myself playing marbles, and look on with cold displeasure); I felt that I must continue playing in secret.³⁶⁶

Sociologically, 'growing up', especially from boy to man, is a big deal. The transition is traumatic. As Germaine Greer points out in her study *The Boy*:

³⁶⁵ Andrew Nash in his introduction to *Farewell Miss Julie Logan: A JM Barrie Omnibus* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Press, 2000) p.vii/viii

³⁶⁶ Quoted in Andrew Birkin, *J. M. Barrie and the Lost Boys* (London: Yale University Press, 2003) p.7

The rites of passage from boyhood to manhood may be as simple and as painless as shaving the boy's head, dressing him in a saffron robe and sending him to live as a monk for a year, as is done in some Buddhist societies. Other cultures require a series of painful and dangerous rituals that enact the destruction of the boy before he can be reborn as a man.³⁶⁷

The infliction of pain on adolescent men may seem extreme, but the coming of age, even in the 'liberal' west, involves the assumption of responsibilities, social and political.

As long as the boy is a boy, behaviours that would dishonour the head of a family are acceptable and even becoming.³⁶⁸

Once the transition has been made it is no longer acceptable for the man to act like a boy. But Peter Pan (and Barrie, and Jackson) does not want to grow up:

'I just want always to be a boy and to have fun.'³⁶⁹

He ran away from home in fear of manhood and rejects any chance of 'normal' socialisation when the opportunity arises to be adopted by Mr and Mrs Darling:

'Would you send me to school?' he inquired craftily.

'Yes.'

'And then to an office?'

'I suppose so.'

'Soon I should be a man?'

'Very soon.'

'I don't want to go to school and learn solemn things,' he told her passionately. 'I don't want to be a man. O Wendy's mother, if I was to wake up and feel there was a beard!'³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Greer continues: 'The Barabeg of East Africa inflict a series of deep cuts across the boy's forehead that lay bare the bone. The Native American Luiseños of southern California stake the initiate out on an anthill. The Poro of Sierra Leone first circumcise the boy, then push him face down on the ground and cut deep gashes in his back with a razor; these are said to be the marks made by the fangs of the Poro spirit who eats up the boy so that the man may live. At puberty the Masai boy is circumcised; for eight to twelve months thereafter he must wear white face paint and dress in black. He is then ready to become a *moran* and join his age-set living in the bush, raiding settlements for cattle to build up their herds. Before he can be accepted as a man, the *moran* must kill a lion single-handed. As a *moran* he is encouraged to bedizen himself with beads and other ornaments; he may wear his hair long and elaborately braided or modelled into fantastic shapes with red ochre.' Germain Greer, *The Boy* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001) p.13/14

³⁶⁸ Ibid. p.29

³⁶⁹ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* ed. by John Caird and Trevor Nunn (London: Methuen, 1997) p.104

This desire for boyhood is common enough in adult men. In the 1980's, psychologist Dan Kiley produced a guide to what he termed 'The Peter Pan Syndrome'.

The book is styled as a self-help manual for "victims" and their "wives" to deal with the key manifestations of the illness: irresponsibility, anxiety, loneliness, sex role conflict, narcissism, chauvinism, social impotence and despondency. The book opens with the chapter 'Do You Know This Man-Child?' and moves on to 'The Adult PPS Victim: A Test' which offers the reader a scoring system to determine if they have the illness or not.

The book is heterosexist and aimed at a very particular kind of man, which may account for its demise after an initial burst of popularity. It does, however, figure Peter Pan's antics as something to be cautious and worried about, rather than harmless fun to be rejoiced in, which is the commonly held 'panto' assumption. Peter Pan's desire for eternal youth and the rejection of adult responsibilities is identified here as a social pathology.

Peter Pan, the boy who refuses to grow up is both Barrie's brother David who could not grow up because he died in childhood and Barrie's own longing for a second childhood – his refusal of the normal requirements of adult life. Peter Pan is also the child that Barrie never had. In one of the most revealing statements about his creation, in the programme for the Paris production of 1908, Barrie wrote:

Of Peter himself you must make what you will. Perhaps he was a little boy who died young, and this is how the author conceived his subsequent adventures. Perhaps he was a boy who was never born at all – a boy whom some people longed for, but who never came.³⁷¹

Peter Pan is also not quite boy. Across Barrie's accounts of the Pan adventures, it is written that before all boys and girls become boys and girls, they start out as birds. Peter

³⁷⁰ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens & Peter and Wendy* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1999) p.217

³⁷¹ Quoted in J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* ed. by John Caird and Trevor Nunn (London: Methuen, 1997) p.xi

is not exactly a bird, nor quite human; he is "Betwixt-and-between"³⁷². This is a device which enables both Barrie and the narrator to maintain creative control over the birth of children within the narrative (that is his artistic control) but it also strips human conception of its necessarily sexualised premise. (Michael Jackson relates the desexualised conception of his own child through artificial insemination during the Bashir interview.)

The relationship between reality and fantasy lies at the heart of *The Little White Bird* and the other Pan adventures. This relationship works on the level of the authorial narrative, which is to say the way in which the narrator slips in and out of fantasies, setting up illusions only to destroy them, involving himself in a narrative fiction only to pull himself back to reality; but is also embodied by Peter Pan himself:

The difference between him and the other boys at such a time was that they knew it was make-believe, while to him make-believe and true were exactly the same thing.³⁷³

...and again...

Make-believe was so real to him that during a meal of it you could see him getting rounder.³⁷⁴

The collapsing together of fantasy and reality and the inability to recognise the difference between them, is manifest in Jackson's responses to questions posed by Martin Bashir. Not only does he laugh as Bashir questions him about death – "I would like to live forever," – he also categorically refuses to admit to having any plastic surgery except "two" operations on his nose, despite the fact that his face has radically altered shape as well as colour over the last twenty years:

Jackson: Come on. None of it's true. None of it's true. It's BS. They made it up. They lie. They don't want to give me credit for anything.³⁷⁵

³⁷² J. M. Barrie 'The Little White Bird' in *Farewell Miss Julie Logan: A JM Barrie Omnibus* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Press, 2000) p.104

³⁷³ J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens & Peter and Wendy* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1999) p.128

³⁷⁴ Ibid. p.135

The implication of this overt denial – that his physical body is *worth* credit – demonstrates Jackson's belief that his body manifests some kind of intrinsic value, and I would argue that this is in direct relationship to the image of Peter Pan. Jackson rewrites his body as a kind of Disney-fied Peter Pan, the white pixie boy who never grows up; he redraws himself, literally repaints himself, as Peter Pan.

When Michael Jackson says: 'I am Peter Pan' he stakes his belief that he embodies Barrie's fictional character. This embodiment is physical and conceptual. Jackson not only carves out his body to become Peter Pan but he lives in 'Neverland' surrounded by full-scale reproductions of the characters from the Disney film. Jackson lives in a giant stage-set, purposefully blurring the boundaries between the adult world of responsibility and the fantasy world of childhood. Jackson, like Peter, refuses the responsibilities of adulthood, craves the company of children and proclaims his intention for never-ending fun.

But as Peter Pan is a manifestation of Barrie's fears, desires and personal histories, so too Jackson takes on Barrie when he takes on Peter Pan. Nowhere does this mirroring appear more stark than in Jackson's welcoming of children into his bed. The scandal which ensued after the Martin Bashir interview, revolved, in the main, around Jackson's admission that he shared his bed (or at least his bedroom) with children³⁷⁵. The media outcry, which included calls for Jackson's own children to be taken into care, resulted from a general incomprehension that such activities could be innocent and that they therefore were harmful to the children involved. Again, it is not my intention to comment on the rights or wrongs of this behaviour, not least because the precise nature of what happened

³⁷⁵ There has been much documentation and speculation on Jackson's facial reconstruction. See for instance: Rahni, 'A Photographic History of Michael Jackson's Face' *Anomalies Unlimited* (2001) <<http://www.anomalies-unlimited.com/Jackson.html>> [accessed 19 January 2004]

³⁷⁶ A decade before the Bashir interview, when facing allegations of child molestation in 1993, Jackson had admitted to letting children sleep with him in his bed. This statement is qualified in the Bashir interview, with Michael saying that he sleeps on the floor when children take his bed. What Jackson intimates is that when he has 'kids' over to stay, it is similar to the kinds of sleepover that he didn't have when he was a child. These 'innocent' sleepovers are contrasted with Jackson recalling that when he was a child singer on tour, he was put in the same room as his brother, and that his brother would be engaging in casual sex with a groupie, while Michael was supposed to be asleep.

is so unclear. However, it is surely no coincidence that the key scene in the narrative of *The Little White Bird* turns on exactly the same action. The chapter opens:

David and I had a tremendous adventure. It was this – he passed the night with me.³⁷⁷

...and reaches its culmination thus:

'What can it be, David?'
'I don't take up very much room,' the far-away voice said.
'Why, David,' said I, sitting up, 'do you want to come into my bed?'
'Mother said I wasn't to want it unless you wanted it first,' he squeaked.
'It is what I have been wanting all the time,' said I, and then without more ado the little white figure rose and flung itself at me. For the rest of the night he lay on me and across me, and sometimes his feet were at the bottom of the bed and sometimes on the pillow, but he always retained possession of my finger, and occasionally he woke me to say that he was sleeping with me.'³⁷⁸

Although latterly Barrie's reputation has been entangled with allegations of paedophilia, allegations categorically denied by the Llewelyn Davies boys, at the time this was written the adult-child sleepover was accepted as an act of innocent platonic parental love. Even in this context however, purity is at the limit of acceptability.

It is difficult not to see Jackson's fixation with Peter Pan and Barrie's oeuvres caught up with this. Jackson manifests Barrie's desire. Barrie's text is Jackson's script. It is well publicised that Jackson has read 'everything that J. M. Barrie ever wrote'. It is as if Jackson finds his license in the world of fiction.

The irony of Jackson's stated embodiment of this fictional character, is that Peter Pan's eternal youth and his inability to grow up, derive from his premature death. Peter Pan is a living death, and the way to get to Neverland is to die. In the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, where child mortality was such that twenty-five percent of children did not survive beyond five years, an epoch where Barrie's own brother was locked in the

³⁷⁷ J. M. Barrie 'The Little White Bird' in *Farewell Miss Julie Logan: A JM Barrie Omnibus* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Press, 2000) p.154

³⁷⁸ Ibid. p.157

memories of the family as a thirteen year old boy because of his premature death, Peter Pan is a representation of the sinister and the tragic, rather than the youthful or the immortal. Peter Pan is not about a child's desire to stay young, but the adult's desire for the child; the vicarious understanding of the world through the eyes of the child, the mourning at the loss of childhood. As Jacqueline Rose summarises in her study of Peter Pan:

Childhood persists – this is the opposite, note, from the reductive idea of a regression to childhood most often associated with Freud. It persists as something which we endlessly rework in an attempt to build an image of our own history. When we think about childhood, it is above all our investment in doing so which counts.³⁷⁹

That investment may be different from person to person but it is an investment which plays centre-stage for Michael Jackson. Employing a fiction as the motivational force for the future of his life-performance, Jackson has internalised J. M. Barrie's creation to the degree that he can state: 'I am Peter Pan'.

³⁷⁹ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) p.12

5. **Psychic Life Scientist: *Julia Laverne***



Fig. 61: *Julia Laverne*

Julia Laverne is a Psychic Life Scientist who predicted aspects of my future life (and beyond life). Using palm-reading and tarot, she answered specific questions and gave general advice about my future.

Prediction 5

You are a deep thinking individual with writing abilities and would be fabulous in show business. You have psychic ability and are good at delegation but you lack confidence. You have poor circulation. Your club thumbs mean that you are blunt and offend people unwittingly. Your double girdle of Venus shows that you are emotionally fickle. You are protective in love. Your life path is about being a pioneer, forging new territory and making something out of it. An early family rift still affects you and you constantly feel you need to please your mother. You should try to escape this. You hope for "nothingness" after death and you get your desire.

Note 5

Of all the seven predictions made to me in *The Crystal Ball*, that of Julia Laverne was the only one which dealt with a future beyond life itself. Death is always already the future.

The unwritten end of every autobiography is death; the once in a lifetime event that the autobiographer can never write, for even an account of dying that looks towards death, is not an account of death itself.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud proposes the notion of the *death instinct* (or *death drive*) which supersedes the *pleasure principle* as the primary purpose of life.

Quoting Schopenhauer, Freud comes to the conclusion that 'death is the "true result and to that extent the purpose of life", while the sexual instinct is the embodiment of the will to

live.³⁸⁰ Paralleling the biological model of corporeal decay, Freud understands that '*the aim of all life is death*' and thus arises 'the paradoxical situation that the living organism struggles most energetically against events (dangers, in fact) which might help it to attain its life's aim rapidly – by a kind of short-circuit.'³⁸¹

This short-circuit is, of course, manifest by those who choose to engineer death by their own hand, but it is also flirted with and provoked by arts practices which stage death.

Performance is always about death. The life of performance *is* the life of performance; it exists only in the moment of its enactment. As Peggy Phelan has observed, performance becomes itself through disappearance:

The enactment of invocation and disappearance undertaken by performance and theatre is precisely the drama of corporeality itself.³⁸²

The aim of all life is death; the aim of all performance is disappearance.

Live performance is also always about failure; the possibility that something could go wrong at any moment. Our collective need to witness something happening in space and time is our need to face the risk of failure; this is what Adam Phillips calls "spectacle as vicarious risk"³⁸³. The ultimate risk is death; the ultimate failure of the living body (and also its ultimate aim) is death.

Just as performance needs an audience to achieve meaning, so too, as Phelan points out, does death.

³⁸⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Standard Edition Vol.18 (London: Vintage, 2001) p.50

³⁸¹ Ibid. p.38/39

³⁸² Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997) p.4

³⁸³ Adam Phillips, *Houdini's Box: On the Arts of Escape* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) p.45

Death is an act that can only achieve meaning in and through the observation of the other, the spectator-witness.³⁸⁴

Disappearance, failure, witness: the constituents of performance mark it for death.

Perhaps more than any other 'subject', death – or 'mortality' – has preoccupied arts practices from Ancient Greek tragedy to the present day. Death is the 'single most reified once in a lifetime experience', the leveler of the playing field, the ultimate assurance³⁸⁵.

For the magician and the illusionist the performance is about cheating death.

'The easiest way to attract a crowd', Houdini wrote, 'is to let it be known that at a given time and a given place someone is going to attempt something that in the event of failure will mean sudden death.'³⁸⁶

Harry Houdini sets up scenarios in which death is courted, even provoked. David Blaine buries himself alive, freezes himself, starves himself – acts which *have* killed people, things we do to corpses³⁸⁷. Derren Brown plays Russian Roulette live on Channel 4 television, a loaded gun at his temple and pulls the trigger³⁸⁸. They all cheat death.

'Magician' and 'Illusionist' are misnomers for the perpetrators of these stunts. Or are they? Do these men cheat death or cheat us? This question is perhaps the one intended to remain unanswered.

But whereas the magician and the illusionist leave their self-inflicted trial untouched and unharmed, the live artist uses (and abuses) their body to the degree that the trace of the performance remains a scar. Derren Brown pulls the trigger and cheats death, but Chris

³⁸⁴ Peggy Phelan 'Andy Warhol: Performances of Death in America' in *Performing the Body: Performing the Text* ed. by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson eds (London: Routledge, 1999), 223-236 (p.229)

³⁸⁵ Peggy Phelan, 'Performance and Death: Ronald Reagan' *Cultural Values* Vol. 3 No.1 (1998), 100-122 (p.107)

³⁸⁶ Quoted in Adam Phillips, *Houdini's Box: On the Arts of Escape* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) p.16

³⁸⁷ See David Blaine, *Mysterious Stranger* (London: Channel 4 Books, 2003)

³⁸⁸ *Russian Roulette* Derren Browne. Channel 4 Television. 9 October 2003

Burden is shot. In 1971 Burden asks his friend to shoot him at the F Space in Santa Ana, California. The bullet 'blew away a large piece of flesh' in Burden's arm³⁸⁹. He is shot and survives.

In *Rhythm 0*, performed in Naples in 1974, Marina Abramovic laid out objects on a table in the gallery, including a pen, scissors, chains, an axe, and a loaded pistol. The rules of the piece stipulated that there were seventy-two objects on a table that any member of the audience could use on Abramovic as they wanted, for a period of six hours. Her clothes are removed, her hair is cut, her skin is slashed, and a fight breaks out among gallery goers when one member of the public wants to shoot her³⁹⁰. She sits impassive. She exposes her body to the aggression and desire of the other and survives.

Franko B cuts into his body, allowing the inside out. In *I Miss You!* performed at Tate Modern in London in 2003, Franko B parades along a canvas catwalk. His painted white body is bleeding, leaving bloodstained footprints behind as traces. He bleeds and survives.

These bodies are resurrected; they meet death for their audience and come back to life. While generous of body, such performances in which the artist chooses to suffer for us, also suggest the messianic; they imbue the suffering body with a redemptive possibility *not* open to many who face such trials outside the context of art practice.

Art practices maintain a degree of control over death within the safe boundaries of 'genre' that is otherwise impossible. Nowhere is this more redolent than in fiction. The authors of novels, plays, television and film dramas, all choose when to kill off their characters. Examples are legion, a fact which Tim Etchells exploits in his performance text *Taxonomy: Death Stories*, which is simply a list of different kinds of stories about death:

³⁸⁹ RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988) p.159

³⁹⁰ See Marina Abramovic, *Marina Abramovic* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 2002) p.30

... stories of perfect death
stories of absurd death
suicide stories
stories of faked death
stories of corpses which must be hidden
stories which focus on the materiality of corpses
stories of last words, wishes, writings
stories of mass death
stories of horrible deaths
murder stories
foretelling, premonitions or foreknowledge of death
stories in which the dead show signs of life
stories about the discovery of corpses
stories of communicating with the dead
and of communications from the dead
stories in which the living are taken to the borders of death
stories about controlling death
stories involving what people see, experience or do when temporarily
'dead'³⁹¹ (etc. etc.)

In all of these stories to which Etchells alludes, the writer controls death by making it happen. The writer performs death by scripting it.

The dead themselves perform. In our mediatised world of rewind and fast-forward we see the dead perform again and again. The television journalist is the Dr Frankenstein of our age. Played out before us are the victims of murderers, muggers, rapists; of fires and floods; of the battlefield and of terrorism.

We have entered an epoch where the staging of an individual death has dramatic reverberations for world relations. In the form of the suicide bomber, the spectacular staging of death manifests a knowledge of mediatised culture and an anticipation of how that death will be played and replayed on televisions around the world. Typically the performer in this spectacle of terror looks forward to a death in which the glory of that staging earns immortal bliss.

This televisual replaying always keeps us a step removed from the action, but our collective desire to meet face to face with the bodies of the dead, in the otherwise

³⁹¹ These are a selection of subheadings which are then elaborated at some length. See *Taxonomy: Death Stories* by Tim Etchells. Artist's Collection. 2002

sanitized and mediated West, is evidenced by the 13.5 million people who have so far queued up to see Gunther von Hagen's *Body Worlds: The Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies*, which is the most successful touring exhibition ever³⁹². The most popular gallery show in the world is not of Impressionist paintings but of cadavers.

Von Hagen has invented a technique which he calls 'plastination' which enables him to preserve dissected corpses in intricate anatomical detail. These he displays as both medical specimens (diseased organs, developmental growths, the workings of capillaries etc.) and 'artistic' display (an anatomical separation of a man riding an anatomical separation of a horse, a muscles-only basketball player, a flayed man who carries his own skin etc.).

These anatomical models are created in Dalian, China in what Von Hagen has termed 'Plastination City'. He claims that China offers him the work force and the resources he needs to build up his collection, but this geographic location has also led to accusations of illegal trading in human remains. Such accusations mean that Von Hagen is at lengths to appear 'above board' in his recruitment of cadavers and there are international recruitment days for interested donors.

Life, or rather death, is cheap in China. Even conservative readings of population trends indicate that by 2020 China will have many millions of bachelors – some figures as high as forty-million – as parents abort girl fetuses, maltreat, or murder their girl children³⁹³. The one child only policy, recently relaxed in rural areas, has lead to a son/daughter hierarchy. The preference for the boy-child has lead to a massive increase in prostitution and a general complacency in understanding human life as disposable.

³⁹² See <<http://www.bodyworlds.com>> [accessed 6 April 2004]

³⁹³ These figures were given by Li Weixiong of China's national advisory population committee and reported by Justin McCurry and Rebecca Alison '40 million bachelors and no women... the birth of a new problem for China' *The Guardian* 9 March 2004 p.14

It is no surprise then, that much of the work of contemporary Chinese artists should not only focus on 'mortality' but should directly employ human remains as the medium of the work. This is the materializing of death.

Artist Sun Yuan created an installation of a giant Doric column; peering at the gallery label it becomes clear that the pillar is made of human fat. The reverberations of this materialization – the body as architecture – are perhaps lost in an ethical aporia: whose bodies are these? Where did they come from?

Even more extreme in his use of the human body is Zhu Yu, in a series of works from 2000-2003³⁹⁴. In *Pocket Theology* an amputated human arm dangles from the ceiling of the gallery space clutching a rope; in *Brains Manufacture* Yu minces up human brain in a morgue, bottles it, and places it on the shelf of a supermarket; in *Eat Man* he can be seen having a dinner of stir fried vegetables and dead human baby. Regardless of the quality of the work (work which is made possible in a country where you can buy the dead for a few Yuan) this use of the material of the corpse, stages death as material culture. The future elides the past, death elides life, through a radical process of recontextualisation.

More troubling still is Zhu Yu's work *Sacrifice*, in which the artist documents his financial negotiation with a prostitute to carry his child, which is aborted at four or five months and which he then feeds to his dog. The artwork, which exists as a DVD documentation, opens in an enclosed space in which there is a table; on the table is a dog; next to the dog is a white plate on which can clearly be seen a well developed human foetus. Yu presents the plate to his dog; the dog refuses (dogs don't eat human) and Yu then paints his aborted child with honey in order to try and make it more palatable, chopping it up in smaller pieces until the dog will eat it. The controlled violence of this imagery is without redemption. The documentation then retrospectively presents hidden camera shots in which Yu can be seen negotiating with a series of prostitutes as he explains his intentions.

³⁹⁴ See *Sacrifice*. Zhu Yu. Artist's DVD. The Live Art Development Agency Archive 2002 and *Collected Images*. Zhu Yu. Artist's DVD. The Live Art Development Agency Archive 2002.

The bottom line is financial rather than ethical; so many months will cost so much money. It is difficult to know how to approach such work, to find a locus of meaning for such a performance in which death is manifest so starkly. In this act of controlled paternal infanticide, Yu perpetrates death as performance. This is post-human performance.

To return to *Beyond*. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud alludes to the preoccupation of arts practices with death:

...the artistic play and artistic imitation carried out by adults, which ... are aimed at an audience, do not spare the spectators (for instance, in tragedy) the most painful experiences and can yet be felt by them as highly enjoyable. [...] The consideration of these cases and situations, which have a yield of pleasure as their final outcome ... are of no use for *our* purposes, since they presuppose the existence and dominance of the pleasure principle; they give no evidence of the operation of tendencies *beyond* the pleasure principle, that is, of tendencies more primitive than it and independent of it.³⁹⁵

Perhaps this refusal to use 'the staging of death' as evidence of the operation of the *death instinct*, can be understood to recuperate 'the staging of death' as life affirming. The staging of death affirms life precisely because it is not death. Maybe this is what is so difficult to reconcile in Zhu Yu's *Sacrifice*: the child does not overcome; it really is dead.

cheating death
surviving death
controlling death
materializing death
perpetrating death

Performance and death are intertwined: death is the future of performance; performance is the future of death. How might such examples contribute to our understanding of an autobiography of the future? Can we even understand these performances as autobiographical?

In discussing the work of the artist, Marina Abramovic has written:

³⁹⁵ Freud p.17

The more problematic your childhood is, the better artist you get. I don't know if it's true for some artists, but for me it was very true. I had a really difficult childhood and I think that artists always get the most inspiration and their own material from their own history, from the kind of situations they really live in.³⁹⁶

This is a problematic generalisation, which conforms to the trope of the angst ridden 'artistic temperament'; artists must be allowed to make art for many different reasons, at the same time as acknowledging that all cultural production is in some sense autobiographical, even if only as a result of what is edited in and out. Whatever their motivation, and whether or not Abramovic is right that "most inspiration" is autobiographical, the work produced becomes the life. It is difficult to imagine an autobiography that would not include being shot or engineering the abortion of one's own child, when these things happened.

As Phelan proposes, '...it may well be that theatre and performance respond to a psychic need to rehearse for loss, and especially for death.'³⁹⁷ The performances which stage death not only prepare us for the death of another – a ritualized preparatory mourning – they also teach us how to die.

³⁹⁶ Marina Abramovic, *Marina Abramovic* (Milano: Edizioni Charta, 2002) p.27

³⁹⁷ Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London: Routledge, 1997) p.3

6. Career Psychologist: Julie Unite



Fig. 62: Julie Unite

Julie Unite is a Career Psychologist who highlighted pitfalls and possibilities that I will face on my future career path and offered me advice on how to tackle them. She predicted my psychological capacity to actualise career goals.

Prediction 6

You are spoilt because the work that you do is fulfilling and you enjoy doing it. You say you want to move out of the artworld and into the mainstream, if so, you need to start learning how to talk the businessman's language. If you want to be called on by the mainstream you will have to make a name for yourself. The artworld is safe for you because you know it. If you want to move on from it then you have to break the barriers that you have put up and take a risk into the unknown. You've got to think outside your box and look at your end goal. Only then will you realise your aims.

Note 6

To paraphrase Alexander Garcia Duttmann: the problem for writers who read Proust is the temptation to try and write *like* Proust; what a writer *should* get from Proust, is simply the need to write.³⁹⁸

As mentioned before, the relationship between Proust and the narrator of his *Search* is one of complementarity and difference³⁹⁹. The difficulty arises with the (in)appropriateness of asking to what extent the work is autobiographical. For both Proust and his narrator however there is at least one identical: writing *per se*, is what is urgent.

³⁹⁸ International Roundtable: New Perspectives on Proust – Institut Français, London, 28th February 2003

³⁹⁹ See Chapter 2: Namesake – Section 6 'Not in My Name: Author'

Like the writer Marcel Proust, the narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is engaged in the act of writing. The dynamic of this writing in time, oscillates between the present moment of writing, the memory of a past, the memory of a past memory (also involuntary memory), and the memory of a past which looks to the future moment of writing.

In this way the narrator is writing about a past but nevertheless always writing towards the future; the future which is the present moment of writing. The past only exists in service to the future. As Gilles Deleuze writes:

[H]owever important its role, memory intervenes only as the means of an apprenticeship that transcends recollection both by its goals and by its principles. The Search is oriented to the future, not to the past.⁴⁰⁰

As Deleuze configures it, the Search describes an apprenticeship:

Proust's work is not oriented to the past and the discoveries of memory, but to the future and the progress of an apprenticeship. What is important is that the hero does not know certain things at the start, gradually learns them, and finally receives an ultimate revelation.⁴⁰¹

This apprenticeship (an apprenticeship being initiatory training in preparation for a future career) is that of the writer; not the *learning* to write, but the having something to say.

A la recherche du temps perdu traces the writer-narrator's movement towards writing. This movement is configured as a narrative journey towards the commencement of writing. His *longing* to be a writer; his *lack of qualification* and *self doubt* in his writing ability; a *doubt in literature itself* and its transformative potential; *delay* and *deferral* from writing; the feeling that *time is wasted* and *time is running out* to do the work that has to be done. To give some idea of the stature of this movement over the course of the Search, it is necessary to quote at some length:

⁴⁰⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000) p.4

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. p.26

The narrator is longing 'someday to become a writer'⁴⁰², for a 'literary career'⁴⁰³, in the hope of becoming a 'famous author'⁴⁰⁴. This ambition is obstructed from the start by his father 'refusing even to dignify it with the title career'⁴⁰⁵. The narrator is wracked by doubt, thinking that he has a 'lack of qualification'⁴⁰⁶, that he would 'never have any talent'⁴⁰⁷, that his 'imagination and sensibility had weakened'⁴⁰⁸, that he had a 'lack of talent for literature'⁴⁰⁹, that he 'had no gift for literature'⁴¹⁰. He says, 'If ever I thought of myself as a poet, I know now that I am not one,'⁴¹¹ and even more dramatically, 'I possessed the proof that I was useless'⁴¹². Paradoxically, such enunciations of self-doubt increase towards the end of the multi-volume work; the narrator articulates his uselessness as a writer only two-hundred-and-fifty pages before the end of a three-thousand page work of writing!

Coupled with this *self*-doubt, is a doubt of literature: 'Until now, I had concluded only that I had no gift for writing; now M. de Norpois took away from me even the desire to write.'⁴¹³ This is a world in which 'literature [...] had no very profound truths to reveal'⁴¹⁴ and in which the narrator not only chastises himself but also raises 'objections against literature'⁴¹⁵ itself. He remarks on 'the vanity, the falsehood of literature'⁴¹⁶, and convinces himself 'that literature could no longer give [him] any joy whatever'⁴¹⁷.

This doubt in his own ability and doubt in the power of literature, manifests itself in a delay in the process or act of writing. The narrator records that 'scarcely had I sat down at my

⁴⁰² Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* Vols 1-6 trans. by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, revised by D. J. Enright (London: Vintage, 1996) Vol.1 p.207

⁴⁰³ Ibid. p.213

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. Vol.2 p.11

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid. Vol.1 p.213

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. p.12

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid. Vol.6 p.2

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. p.22

⁴¹⁰ Ibid. p.39

⁴¹¹ Ibid. p.202

⁴¹² Ibid. p.216

⁴¹³ Ibid. Vol.2 p.26

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. Vol.6 p.22

⁴¹⁵ Ibid. p.33

⁴¹⁶ Ibid. p.202

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. p.216

desk than I would get up'⁴¹⁸; he records his intention 'to enjoy working, as soon as I was well'⁴¹⁹, declaring his frustration, after one-thousand-three-hundred pages of the work: 'If only I had been able to start writing!'⁴²⁰. This deferral is a consistent theme of the Search: 'I promised Albertine that, if I did not go out with her, I would settle down to work. But...'⁴²¹. The 'but' says it all.

The narrator's memory of the frustration at his incapability to start writing is matched by his memory of the 'wasted years'⁴²² through which he is *yet* to pass in the course of his narrative. He is pressed by the urgency that time is running out:

When I reflected that [the] trees – pear-trees, apple-trees, tamarisks – would outlive me, I seemed to be receiving from them a silent counsel to set myself to work at last, before the hour of eternal rest had yet struck.⁴²³

It is only two-thousand-seven-hundred-and-fifty pages into *A la recherche du temps perdu*, as the work builds towards its climactic end (and thus the commencement of writing) that the narrator can finally disregard these concerns. Tripping up on a paving-stone on the way to dine with the Duchesse de Guermantes, he finally gets a grip of what his intellectual subject is:

Just as at the moment when I tasted the Madeleine, all anxiety about the future, all intellectual doubts had disappeared, so now those that a few seconds ago had assailed me on the subject of the reality of my literary gifts, the reality even of literature, were removed as if by magic.⁴²⁴

The discovery which makes 'death a matter of indifference'⁴²⁵ to the narrator is that of involuntary memory, the essential past as captured in the present moment.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. Vol.2 p.178

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. p.449

⁴²⁰ Ibid. Vol.3 p.166

⁴²¹ Ibid. Vol.4 p.85

⁴²² Ibid. Vol.3 p.459

⁴²³ Ibid. Vol.4 p.476

⁴²⁴ Ibid. Vol.6 p.217

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

And I understood that all these materials for a work of literature were simply my past life. [...] And thus my whole life up to the present day might and yet might not have been summed up under the title: A Vocation.⁴²⁶

The 'and yet might not have been' which sits almost in parenthesis here, shows the fragility of the discovery he has made. The possibility of *becoming a writer* of *doing the job* of *finding a vocation* is presented as a precarious future to which the road is tortuous. And yet the beauty of the Search is that already at the beginning, when the narrator is an adolescent within the context of the narrative, he has shown *through the writing* how he will become a writer, in the future. He writes not only of the struggle to write but makes it his truth.

Like his narrator, Proust works towards the moment of writing. In the 1908 'carnets', Proust's surviving notebooks, which have been published in facsimile, a scribble reads:

Peut-être dois-je bénir | ma mauvaise santé, qui m' | a appris, par le lest
de la | fatigue, l'immobilité, le | silence, la possibilité de | travailler. Les
avertisse | ments de mort. Bientôt tu || ne pourras plus dire tout cela. | La
paresse ou le doute ou | l'impuissance se réfugiant | dans l'incertitude
sur la forme | d'art. Faut-il en faire | un roman, une étude philosophi-
que, suis-je romancier?

Perhaps I should bless my ill health, which has given me, through the weight of tiredness, immobility, silence, the possibility of working. The warning signs of death. Soon you won't be able to say all this. Laziness or doubt or helplessness hide the uncertainty of the form the artwork will take. Should one make of it a novel, a philosophical essay, am I a novelist?⁴²⁷

It is clear then that in 1908, before Proust embarked upon the writing of his major work, that while he had his vocation (that of writing) and his subject (the materials of his past life), he did not yet know what form the work would take. 'Am I a novelist?' begs the question of what form (of writing) Proust should employ. Roland Barthes carefully proposes the "moment décisif" in October 1909, which is to say that *before* Proust

⁴²⁶ Ibid. p.258

⁴²⁷ Marcel Proust, *Le carnet de 1908 établie et présenté par Philip Kolb* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) 10 v° / 11 p.60-61. I am grateful to Caroline Bergvall for pointing out this note to me and also for her translation of the French.

embarked upon his work he had planned the entire structure⁴²⁸. This is backed up by Proust's use of both sequential and prospective notebooks to draft his narrative. As the major biographer of Proust, Jean-Yves Tadié remarks:

[W]hile Proust was writing these sequential notebooks, his ideas were being developed in other notebooks that consisted of fragments to be used in the later parts of the narrative: while it is true that some notebooks containing sketches and others containing the fair copy were written simultaneously, they did not, of course, deal with the same parts of the novel, because the approach was always prospective and looking to the future.⁴²⁹

Proust's performance of writing, his diurnal (or as it happens, nocturnal) behaviour, have become as much part of his mythology as the work itself; perhaps in the context of a popular discourse which *hasn't* read *A la recherche du temps perdu*, even more so.

The narrator ends his novel at the moment when he begins to write it. If we wish to know how it was written we must turn to the author. One of the most compelling accounts of the writing of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is that of Proust's maid and confidante Céleste Albaret, who after half a century of silence following her 'master's' death, recorded a long series of taped interviews which were transcribed and edited by Georges Belmont and published under the title *Monsieur Proust* in 1973. In reading Albaret's account of the eight years she spent in the service of 'M. Proust' we read the account of a dedicated and deeply respectful intimate who had unique access to his writing process. As André Aciman writes in the Forward to the 2003 reprint:

In the end, she gave to his readers a Proust whom Proust had labored a lifetime to create, to perfect, to invent.⁴³⁰

But to ask if Albaret's account is 'factually accurate' or not, is to miss the point. It may be possible, as in a court of law, to corroborate or disprove certain parts of what she calls her

⁴²⁸ Roland Barthes, *La Préparation Du Roman I et II: Notes de cours et séminaires au Collège de France* (Paris: Seuil / Imec, 2003) p.154

⁴²⁹ Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust: A Life* trans. by Euan Cameron (London: Viking, 2000) p.534

⁴³⁰ Céleste Albaret, *Monsieur Proust* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003) p.xii

“testament”⁴³¹ but for the most part, as Tadié attests, she is the *only* source we have ‘alone before history, just as she was alone before Proust’⁴³², certainly for the most reclusive final years of his life. Her account *becomes* Proust, regardless of its factual accuracy.

Monsieur Proust traces the writer-master’s movement towards the completion of writing. This movement is configured as a harrowing journey towards death. The recurrent themes are the *sacrifice* of all other activity to the order of writing; the *duty* to the task of writing; *obsession* with the task, fear and panic at the possibility of leaving it incomplete; writing as the reason for living, literally the *raison d’être*. To quote again in some detail:

As articulated by Albaret, ‘M. Proust’ sacrificed everything to his artistic goal. He ‘shut himself up for the sake of his work’⁴³³, his ‘great sacrifice for his work’⁴³⁴ was his life itself, ‘his devotion to the work to which he’d completely sacrificed his health’⁴³⁵. Proust is presented as a stoic:

What loneliness! And what strength of mind to have chosen it, and,
having chosen it, to have endured it!⁴³⁶

Writing appears in this context as a duty. ‘To finish his book – that is all that mattered now’⁴³⁷. Albaret paraphrases Proust as saying: ‘I am married to my work. All that matters is my writing,’⁴³⁸ and this marriage is not one of pleasure but rather of endurance. Albaret makes a point of saying that Proust never wrote ‘for the mere pleasure of writing or expressing an emotion’⁴³⁹.

⁴³¹ Ibid. p.344

⁴³² Tadié p.776

⁴³³ Albaret p.44

⁴³⁴ Ibid. p.50

⁴³⁵ Ibid. p.80

⁴³⁶ Ibid. p.172

⁴³⁷ Ibid. p.45

⁴³⁸ Ibid. p.173

⁴³⁹ Ibid. p.200

The fear of falling short of this duty is expressed in terms of an obsession to complete and a panic at the prospect of failure. Albaret identifies the writing as an 'obsession'⁴⁴⁰ that 'was like a fever in him'⁴⁴¹. Writing here is pathologised as an illness.

...during all those years, there couldn't have been one day when at some moment or other there wasn't some sign of his fear that he might not be able to finish what he had started.⁴⁴²

And if he did fail to finish what he had started there was the understanding that he would have 'sacrificed everything, for nothing'⁴⁴³. 'The only thing he feared was dying before he had finished his work.'⁴⁴⁴

Paradoxically, given that so many people have chosen to see Proust's obsession with writing his *Search* as the thing which killed him, including Albaret (and according to her, Proust's brother Robert⁴⁴⁵), writing is nevertheless identified as the thing which gave Proust a reason to live, literally which kept him alive.

It is the writing that 'kept him going'⁴⁴⁶, because 'he lived only for his work'⁴⁴⁷ and he keeps the flame of his life 'alight only for his work'⁴⁴⁸. In the end 'he gave his life for it'⁴⁴⁹.

According to Albaret, when Proust wrote '*Fin*' at the end of his manuscript he summoned her to his room:

He laughed like a boy who has played a trick on someone.

"Well, my dear Céleste, I shall tell you. It is great news. Last night I wrote 'The End'."

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. p.45

⁴⁴¹ Ibid. p.334

⁴⁴² Ibid. p.333

⁴⁴³ Ibid. p.334

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. p.67

⁴⁴⁵ Albaret paraphrases Professor Robert Proust thus: 'My brother could have lived longer if he'd been willing to live the same way as everyone else. But he chose what he did, and he chose it for the sake of his work. All we can do is bow our heads.' Albaret p.50

⁴⁴⁶ Albaret p.66

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid. p.267

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. p.332

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid. p.331

And then he added smiling, and with that light in his eyes: "Now I can die". [...] "Now my work can be published. I shan't have given my life in vain."⁴⁵⁰

The end of the writing, the end of the book, the end of the life. A vocation which leads towards death. The moment of completion of the writing is the moment of mortal death, death which gives way to posthumous fame and the future life of the creation: *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid. p.337

7. Artist and Illustrator: Robin Whitmore

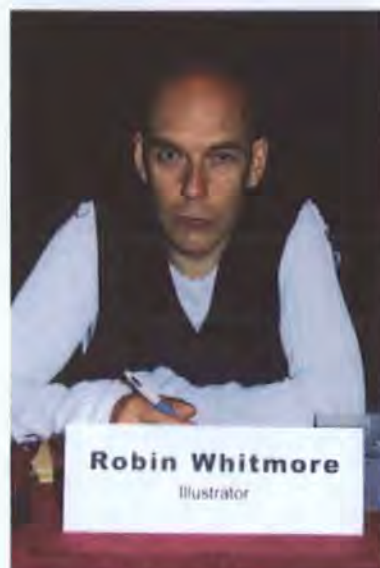


Fig. 63: Robin Whitmore

Robin Whitmore is an Artist and Illustrator who drew my future. He asked me to describe a place or activity that I would ideally (though not completely unrealistically) like to inhabit in ten years time. He drew as I described my vision and an illustration emerged.

Prediction 7

It is a purpose built house, on the river in East London. The house was built by my lover. It is very large, equivalent to two large town houses. It is four stories, rectangular, wider than it is tall. It is a plain, modernist design and has a roof garden. It is all glass, so you can see inside when the lights are on and the blinds are up. There is a large 'ball room' on the ground floor. I live there with my lover and my lover's sister who is also the mother of my children. We have a boy and a girl; they are twins. We have lots of parties and events there. There is a big garden running down to the river. I sleep right at the top. There is a spiral staircase.

Note 7

The final prediction in *The Crystal Ball* is different from those which it follows. The first six 'experts' apply a skill, method or science to read the body or the mind of the client and provide an interpretive schema. The seventh 'expert' also applies a skill – illustration – but the onus of the prediction is left with the client themselves.

Where would you like to be in ten years time? What would you like to be doing? It is as simple as that. You say what you want and Robin Whitmore draws your future and you can see it there in front of you. This is a model for a self-defined future made pictorial reality; the transformation of words into image and from image to the future.



Fig. 64: Robin Whitmore *Where would you like to be in ten years time?* (2002)

The transition which Robin Whitmore enacts, from words to pictures, is necessarily reliant on the future proposed by its subject, in my case this quasi-modernist embankment house built by 'my builder-boyfriend'. Reading back my stated desire for the future I am turned-off by the banality of my choice. It crosses my mind to change the prediction, to try and recoup the future. This is, after all, the final section of the final section of this document. Surely it is better to end with something that is more conducive to academic interrogation. The future I offered in the past is one that this present future rejects as crass, as an embarrassment.

My bad impression of the future I once described, is reminiscent of the spoiling Roland Barthes observes on rereading his diary, which he notes in his essay 'Deliberation'. This is the text which 'doesn't hold up', which becomes 'unappetizing from one day to the next'⁴⁵¹.

The diary records the past for the future, and while Barthes may be disgusted at his own artifice of sincerity, artistic mediocrity, the 'pose' of the journal situation, Robin Whitmore asks something else; not to record the present, but the future.

⁴⁵¹ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* trans. by Richard Howard (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989) p.359. Previously discussed in Chapter 2: Namesake, Section 6. Not In My Name: Author

The diary entry which does deal with the future is the appointment diary; what Tony Godfrey rather dismissively calls 'mere sub-headings for the future'⁴⁵². But these sub-headings do more than merely allocate time, they often ask us to visualise the 'dates' ahead as we work towards them.

The artist Jonathan Monk has created a series of text works which simply give a place, date and time. Meeting #13 reads:

A la Tour Eiffel, le 13 Octobre 2008 à midi⁴⁵³

The text, which is provided in an envelope (ready to send) serves as invitation to an appointment, in the future. We are left to imagine – to visualise – what might happen at the Eiffel Tower at midday on 13th October 2008 and who might be there. Monk cleverly asks us to visualise the future without fixing what that future is.

Maybe what really turns me off from the future described to Robin Whitmore is that it gives too much (of myself) away. This is what Paul Allen calls 'the artless confessional mode', a mode in which the personal is left untransformed⁴⁵⁴. There are many examples of people apologizing for the inclusion of the autobiographical. For instance in *Memoirs of the Blind*, Jacques Derrida writes: '...you will excuse me for beginning so very close to myself' as if the autobiographical could somehow rob him of critical acumen; or at the least he acknowledges that he is aware of the possibility of such an accusation being made⁴⁵⁵.

In opposition to the premise of this study and the stated intention in its opening remarks, I also find myself, in these final passages, having to apologise for the autobiographical. It seems then, at the end, that I am hoisted by my own petard, by the methodology I have

⁴⁵² Tony Godfrey, 'Diaries, or why I can't write them' in *Diary* ed. by Margot Heller (Manchester: Cornerhouse, 2000) 125-135 (p.125)

⁴⁵³ Meeting #13 was co-published by Book Works, London and Yvon Lambert, Paris in 2000 and is printed offset in an edition of 10,000. It has no cover and a concertina format 8pp., folded to 10mm.

⁴⁵⁴ Paul Allen ed., *Art, Not Chance: Nine Artist's Diaries* (London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2001) p.8

⁴⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self Portrait and Other Ruins* trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) p.3

engaged. Put simply: I would prefer not to associate myself with the future that I once chose.

'I would prefer not to' is the repeated answer of Bartleby, Herman Melville's character from the short-story of the same name. Like me, Bartleby is a scrivener – a *sofaer* – a writer, a copyist, a scribe⁴⁵⁶. Unlike me, his *logic of preference*, a negativism without outright refusal, leads to a complete withdrawal of the (auto)biographical reference⁴⁵⁷. Bartleby's *preference* is to withhold biographical information:

'Will you tell me, Bartleby, where were you born?'
'I would prefer not to.'
'Will you tell me *anything* about yourself?'
'I would prefer not to.'⁴⁵⁸

This *preference* which, as has been pointed out by readers before, is not an overt refusal, places Bartleby outside social convention and expectation. It is this which passively empowers Bartleby in opposition to the will of his employer. By way of default, it also highlights the way in which the (auto)biographical reference is at the heart of social convention and expectation. Anything beyond a fleeting social engagement is accompanied by some kind of personal history.

In his essay 'Bartleby; or, The Formula', Gilles Deleuze argues that while Bartleby's phrase 'I would prefer not to' is grammatically and syntactically correct, it has the affect of being *agrammatical*, that 'it has an anomalous ring to it'⁴⁵⁹. Linguistically its affect is neither constative nor performative; it neither describes something nor performs an action.

A word always presupposes other words that can replace it, complete it, or form alternatives with it: it is on this condition that language is distributed in such a way as to designate things, states of things and actions, according

⁴⁵⁶ See Chapter 2: Namesake, section 7, Ineffable Name: *God* for a detailed discussion of the *sofaer* as scribe and scrivener.

⁴⁵⁷ The phrase '*logic of preference*' is used by Gilles Deleuze in 'Bartleby; or, The Formula', in *Essays Critical and Clinical* by Gilles Deleuze trans. by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso, 1998).

⁴⁵⁸ Herman Melville, *Bartleby* (London: Penguin, 1995) p.24

⁴⁵⁹ Deleuze p.69

to a set of objective, explicit conventions. But perhaps there are also other implicit and subjective conventions, other types of reference or presupposition. In speaking, I do not simply indicate things and actions; I also commit acts that assure a relation with the interlocutor, in keeping with our respective situations: I command, I interrogate, I promise, I ask, I emit "speech acts." Speech acts are self-referential (I command by saying "I order you..."), while constative propositions refer to other things and other words. It is this double system of references that Bartleby ravages.⁴⁶⁰

Bartleby's *logic of preference* places his speech not only at the limit of social convention but also at the limit of understanding.

'I would prefer not to.'
'You *will* not?'
'I *prefer* not.'⁴⁶¹

While Bartleby's negative preference is manifest in the response to his employer's commands to run errands, to reveal biographical information, to quit the premises, and to eat, the core of his negative preference is his preference not to write.

'Why, how now? what next?' exclaimed I, 'do no more writing?'
'No more.'
'And what is the reason?'
'Do you not see the reason yourself?' he indifferently replied.⁴⁶²

The reason – that he would prefer not to – while comic, ostensibly robs Bartleby of his vocation and thus his identity; he is after all, a scribe who has stopped writing. But as Giorgio Agamben argues, it is paradoxically the arresting of his vocation which offers its potential and identifies its power.

As a scribe who has stopped writing, Bartleby is the extreme figure of the Nothing from which all creation derives; and at the same time, he constitutes the most implacable vindication of this Nothing as pure, absolute potentiality. The scrivener has become the writing tablet; he is now nothing other than his white sheet.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid. p.73

⁴⁶¹ Melville p.17

⁴⁶² Ibid. p.27

⁴⁶³ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (California: Stanford University Press, 1999) p.254

Writing, like creation itself, issues from nothing. Bartleby's immobility, his silence, his putting down of the pen, performs him. An autobiography is made up as much from its empty pages as from its printed words.

In the factual-fiction *Bartleby & Co.* by Enrique Vila-Matas, the narrator of the story, a Barcelona office clerk named Marcelo, has been unable to write; 'I became a Bartleby' he records⁴⁶⁴. In an attempt to regain his writing ability he sets out to search through literature for other possible Bartlebys who have refused writing. Marcelo forms an inventory of (both real and invented) writers who have met this negative impulse. It is through writing the account of this No that Marcelo's future as a *writer* is restored but also that *writing itself* has a future.

Only from the negative impulse, from the labyrinth of the No, can the writing of the future appear.⁴⁶⁵

The prediction I gave to Robin which he then actualised is a raw and exposing autobiographical future which I would prefer not to have given. Writing could give me back the future; all I need to do is to alter the words, to rewrite the autobiography, to turn back time and rewrite the future of the text. I prefer not to.

⁴⁶⁴ Enrique Vila-Matas, *Bartleby & Co.* trans. by Jonathan Dunne (London: The Harvill Press, 2004)

p.3

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

Afterwords

*What comes after the future?
What comes after autobiography?
What happens when you stop performing?
What happens when you stop writing?*

Autobiography is both impossible and all-encompassing. Impossible because the life can not be written in its entirety, all-encompassing because it includes everything, even beyond the moment of writing itself.

The future which is offered by Bartleby's preference not to write may be recuperated by Giorgio Agamben as the moment of pure potentiality, but within the narrative world of the short-story *Bartleby*, it leads only to the scrivener's death⁴⁸⁶. It is in death that self is revealed to the world; that the self which refused autobiographical reference in life is determined. The cessation of writing heralds death, which paradoxically offers up an autobiography. Bartleby's autobiography is his silence, his negative preference. It is left to the lawyer-narrator, so shaken by his employee's death, to act as the amanuensis.

Two other Nineteenth Century protagonists reveal their autobiography at the point of death, literally in that moment. Dorian Gray and Dr Jekyll whose lives are spent in the refusal of autobiographical reference, in order to dissemble who or what they are, find their lives explicated (in Gray's case by accident and in Jekyll's through intention) as they themselves bring their life to an end.

Dorian stabs the monstrous painting which has carried the representational weight of his sinful life. In doing so he not only kills himself, he also breaks the spell which has given him eternal youth and transmogrifies the image of sin which the painting has kept secret, onto his body.

⁴⁸⁶ This is a direct continuation from the line of thought explored in Chapter 3: The Crystal Ball, Section 7: Robin Whitmore: *Illustrator*.

When they entered they found, hanging upon the wall, a splendid portrait of their master as they had seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was.⁴⁶⁷

In his attempt to kill his conscience Dorian Gray betrays his secret life. Gray's cadaver is his autobiography. The picture which held his life and told his story is now written on his body.

Dr Jekyll refuses to acknowledge the beast within ('He, I say – I can not say, I'⁴⁶⁸). In his embodiment as Hyde the world can 'read Satan's signature' on his face⁴⁶⁹. Jekyll dies twice, once as himself and again as Hyde.

Will Hyde die upon the scaffold? or will he find the courage to release himself at the last moment? God knows; I am careless; this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself. Here then, as I lay down my pen and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Henry Jekyll to an end.⁴⁷⁰

Having written his confession and laid down his pen Jekyll is taken over by Hyde forever. Jekyll's written statement and Hyde's corpse collectively reveal a life kept secret. As Dorian's corpse reveals his life, so too Hyde's corpse reveals Jekyll's. In death, Hyde is Jekyll's autobiography. As Philippe Lejeune suggests, autobiography is not a 'guessing game'⁴⁷¹. It may however require detective work.

But these fictional characters who leave their autobiography behind on their death are reliant on their fiction and their author for both their life and their death. Death is not the panacea of autobiography; death may arrest the writing subject but it does not complete an autobiography.

⁴⁶⁷ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin, 1949 repr. 1985) p.264. Closing words.

⁴⁶⁸ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 repr. 1991) p.73

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. p.19

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid. p.76. Closing words.

⁴⁷¹ See the opening remarks of this study in the Introduction.

Above all else, this study testifies to the performance of the autobiographical trace left by the author once they have put down their pen. As the protagonist of *Bartleby & Co.* records:

...every writer must be forgotten almost as soon as they have stopped writing, because the page has been lost, has literally flown away, has entered a context of different situations and sentiments, answers questions put by other men, which its author could not even have imagined.⁴⁷²

But the writer is only forgotten to the degree of their intentionality. After the performance, after autobiography, it performs you. The text performs the author. There is no smooth consistency in this operation, no assurance of intention. The text is left to be interpreted by the other. This is *the autobiographical performance*.

As he refutes the autobiographical content of his writing, Hanif Kureshi implicitly offers a value judgement on the genre: that it is a 'reduced' form of literature. His annoyance stems from his inability to control the reception of his writing once he has published.

It annoys me to have my own work reduced to autobiography – often, writing isn't a reflection of experience so much as a substitute for it.⁴⁷³

The writer who denies the autobiographical referent may do so not just simply because they are worried that the autobiographical label robs their craft of its skill (wary of the accusation that they merely record their experiences rather than creating new ones) but also because they do not wish to expose themselves to a 'truth reference'. Kureshi does not wish to be judged as a man but as a writer. But his argument is self-defeating. If writing becomes life, then that writing is necessarily autobiographical. This study has explored that necessity in the guise of *the autobiographical performance*.

⁴⁷² Enrique Vila-Matas, *Bartleby & Co.* trans. by Jonathan Dunne (London: The Harvill Press, 2004) p.19

⁴⁷³ Hanif Kureshi, 'Fast & Loose' *Time Out* 25 August-1 September 2004 p.7

In Chapter 1: **Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood**, a joint research project between a sister and a brother, an archaeologist and an artist, gave way to a performance and installation which in turn demanded a series of propositions about how we access our infant life. The process of this research, working with the co-subject of study and utilising their particular area of expertise – archaeology – was methodologically highly productive. This cross-disciplinary approach which worked in and between two areas of professional practice, came together in a collective concern about infant experience but also a shared personal history. A degree of happenstance enabled the specifics, not least that sister and brother had different skill sets and knowledge bases to bring to shared concerns. There was a symbiosis in this method which went beyond the confines or relevance of this study and has potential for application in the future. Of particular importance here were the developments made in the documentation of a process, the incorporation of the personal and pictorial archive and the determination of a strategy to disseminate findings. The 'research tools' which were invented for this purpose acted as a bridge between the processes of collaborative research, performance practice and the academic and conceptual writings of this study. **Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood** hopes to offer not only some insights into the possibility of an autobiography of infancy but also a methodological approach to epistemology.

In Chapter 2: **Namesake**, the encounter with an identical other, someone who shared exactly the same name but led a very different kind of life, produced both a performance and an academic investigation which grew together and drew on each other. Here too, the role played happenstance – that the other Joshua Sofaer was who he was and was willing to co-operate in the project – allowed the methodology to develop. Within this area of investigation, which found its outcomes separately in performance practice and academic writing, there is a continual balance that needs to be struck between the case study of the author's name and the wider conceptual propositions made. There is here an implicit acknowledgement of the role of the author, in discussion of the autobiographical subject. **Namesake** hopes to offer not only some insights into the range of references, activations

and meanings of the personal proper name but also a model for the development of performance research and the possibilities for multiple outputs from a single research strand. **Namesake** therefore hopes to respond to some of the concerns of the academy about the interrelation of theory and practice by embodying serious academic investigation alongside performance practice⁴⁷⁴.

In Chapter 3: **The Crystal Ball**, an experimental theatre piece in which members of the audience had their futures predicted by a panel of experts, offered seven predictions which acted as pathways towards the configuration of a possible autobiography of the future. While the performance here was completely separate from the text which it later conceived, performance acted as a catalyst to writing. Not writing *about* performance but writing *from* performance. Here the performance event was both an endpoint in itself and the research core of the writing. More than the previous two chapters in which the performance was made with the writing in mind, or simultaneously to it, the writing of the third chapter in particular offers a model for writing, in which performance is an endpoint of only one particular research outcome. As the academy continues to develop its relationship with professional arts practice it is hoped that this model will have further application. The event which was **The Crystal Ball** brought together seven different experts and their correspondent disciplines which performance practice filtered and the writing of the third chapter of this study exploited. Such cross-fertilisation of discipline would have been impossible in the writing if it had not been established by the performance.

The use of performance as the way into each of the chapters of this study has provided a framework which reflects its concerns. It has also taught me that performance is not only a form of knowledge in and of itself but also acts as a precursor to other kinds of knowledge.

⁴⁷⁴ CD documentation of the performance **Namesake: The Story of a Name** can be found in Appendix 4.

What this methodology allows (or perhaps forces) is for a range and diversity of primary sources which otherwise would not have been engaged by the study. This approach has been pursued at the expense of any in-depth investigation into a single work, artist, author or archive but provides a potential framework for *the autobiographical performance*.

Perhaps after all the predominant concern of this study is its investigations into the methodological possibilities of performance practice, and secondarily its testing of the boundaries of autobiography. The terms in which *the autobiographical performance* were first determined in this study – as the performance of the autobiographical act – need now to be rethought as including the autobiographical imperative of performance. This leads to a new area of investigation which lies ahead of this study, the motivational force of creativity, and the question: why do artists create?

The range of autobiographical practices explored in this study leave the genre of autobiography displaced. Lejeune's definition (as with all definitions) has been relatively easy to deconstruct. But the efficacy of Lejeune's proposition of *the autobiographical contract* lies not only in its usefulness as a method for classification of texts themselves and our understanding of them, but rather precisely as a provocation to both the writer and the reader to determine texts which sit uncomfortably, or even outside, its boundaries. Labels and definitions offer both stability and a point of reaction.

Appendix 1

Associated Research Outcomes

Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood

- Performance: Mill Lane Lecture Rooms, Cambridge University, 24 March 2001
- Installation: Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Downing Street, Cambridge, 17 March – 5 May 2001
- Conference Paper: *Texts of Testimony: Autobiography, Life-Story Narratives and the Public Sphere*, Centre for Literature and Cultural History, Liverpool John Moores University, 23 – 25 August 2001
- Conference Paper: *Biographies and Space: Placing the Subject in Art and Architecture*, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London, 28 March 2003
- Public Lecture: Turku Academy, Turku, Finland, 17 December 2001
- Refereed Article: 'Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood' *Performance Research* 7.1 'On Editing' (2002) 45-56

Namesake

- Performance: The Jewish Museum, London, 13 May 2004
- Performance: Home, London, 14 May 2004.
- Performance: The Swiss Church, London, 15 May 2004
- Conference Paper: *Writing in the Context of Fine Art*, Tate Britain, 15 November 2003

The Crystal Ball

- Performance: The ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts) London 29 – 30 June 2002
- Conference Paper: *Caught in the Act: Performance Art and Representation*, Tate Liverpool, 29 November 2003
- Seminar Paper: *Partly Writing 3: Expanded Literacies and Writing Arts*, Centre for Cultural Poetics, University of Southampton, 28 – 29 February 2004
- Refereed Article: 'The Crystal Ball' *Performance Research* 9.2 'On the Page' (2004) 118-131

Appendix 2

Performance Flyers

The enclosures which follow are the advertising flyers for the public performance projects which conceived each of the main chapters of this study:

Disinter/est: Digging Up Our Childhood

Namesake: The Story of a Name

The Crystal Ball

Joshua Sofaer: The Crystal Ball

The Future YOU

The Crystal Ball is an event that forecasts the lives of the audience that attend. Presented as a sequence of one-to-one interactions, participants will have their destiny revealed through professional consultations.

Experts set up stall to predict the future YOU in a series of snapshots compiled on site and presented to each participant before they leave as *This Is Your Life To Come*. A troupe of sequinned ballroom dancers greet each guest and shadow their journey from one prediction booth to the next. Working as a spectacle for onlookers and a fortune telling for participants, *The Crystal Ball* puts your future in the picture. All consultations will be given in strict confidence.

It's Robert Wilson meets Mystic Meg. It's Pina Bausch at a Spiritualist Meeting. It's Miss High Leg Kick and Nostradamus at a Careers Fair... *It's The Future*.

Starring: Psychic Life Scientist Julia Laverne, Optometrist Rod Dale, Career Psychologist Julie Unite, Face Readers Maura Bright and Teresa Dane, Independent Financial Advisor Alan Dickinson-Quelch, Illustrator Robin Whitmore, with Dancers Miss High Leg Kick, Abigail Davies, Polly Wiltshire, Keiko Akamatsu, Helen Plewis, Valérie Renay, Sheila Ghelani. Choreographed by Maxine Doyle.

Saturday 29 & Sunday 30 June · ICA · The Mall · London SW1

- ☐ Consultations are priced at £10/£9/£8 each and last 90 mins.
- ☐ Bookings taken for sessions at 2pm, 4pm, 6pm and 8pm
- ☐ Advance reservations: ICA box office on 020 7930 3647.
- ☐ Non participatory viewing **FREE** with ICA day membership.

Postcard by JADED

Frompton's[®]
OPTICIANS

about
FACES



NIGHTBIRD **DEMOLISH**
THE THEATRE

Luckie Spring/Summer Collection 200



Disinterest

Digging Up Our Childhood

Artist Joshua Sofaer

Archaeologist Joanna Sofaer Derevenski

On the 1st August 1972 Joshua Sofaer was born in Mill Road Maternity Hospital in Cambridge. His elder sister Joanna was about to have her second birthday. By September 1973 the family had left for Edinburgh.

In this research project Disinter/est, brother and sister met in Cambridge to explore the city, the places of their childhood, the places they were before they can remember, and have used the practices of archaeology to see if it is possible to understand the forgotten past.

"Those years of my earliest childhood are no longer a part of myself; they are external to me; I can learn nothing of them save - as we learn things that happened before we were born - from the accounts given me by other people."

Marcel Proust, In Search of Lost Time, Volume 3

Autobiography necessitates an experiential narrative, one that is predicated on introspection. The prevalence of psychoanalytic models for the understanding of infancy have resulted in a generic conception of the 'autobiography' of early childhood in terms of psychoanalytic tropes. As infancy precedes established long term memory, we can not access our own history with the same kinds of hindsight formulation that we would our later childhood, adolescence or young adult life. This mysterious era that is both of ourselves and of other lends itself to a rethinking of the relationship between self and autobiography. In tracing the 'auto' of infancy we necessarily have to negotiate an understanding that runs counter to traditions.

Archaeologists are interested in investigating the material world and using it to explore the past. This project challenges us to consider how different people view the objects that surround them in different ways, both at a single point in time and as changing individuals over time, in a setting that is on one hand familiar, yet on the other, incredibly distant. From an archaeological perspective, the infant child (ourselves) that we have been using as the subject of our case study belongs to a period of life analogous to prehistory. It is a time about which we remember nothing. It is an investigation of the self as other - a metaphor for archaeology as a whole.

During the research, the boundaries of archaeological method were inevitably challenged, or at least had to confront and engage with the disciplines of social anthropology, oral history and psychology. There was also a necessary negotiation of the pleasures and problems of working with family as both co-researcher and research subject. The process has been incredibly provocative, not only pushing the traditional boundaries of subject specialisms, but bringing together a sister and a brother in a social and working relationship they would otherwise never have encountered.

Performative Lecture
discussing the outcomes of our research
Saturday 24th March 2001, 7.00 p.m.

Mill Lane Lecture Theatre 1,
Mill Lane, Cambridge.
Entrance is FREE

Display of 'Seven Research Tools'
Saturday 17th March to Saturday 5th May 2001
Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology
Downing Street, Cambridge.
Tuesday - Saturday 2.00 - 4.30 p.m.
Entrance is FREE



eastofenglandarts



Image on obverse: Research Tool 2 - 'Aerial Evidence'

Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs: Copyright Reserved

For more information please contact: joshua.sofaer@gmx.net 020 7820 9147



This aerial photograph was taken on 20th October 1971 at about mid-day. The circle indicates the house owned by the Sofaer family on the outskirts of Cambridge. As the photographer pressed the cable release, Joanna Sofaer, a 14 month old infant, was probably playing with her toys having just watched the 11.00 screening of *Playschool's* pets day on BBC2. Who knows what happened later that evening, but 40 weeks on, her younger brother Joshua was born.





Namesake

the story of a name

by Joshua Sofaer

a live performance with soundscape
in collaboration with composer Jonathan Cooper

Joshua Sofaer is an artist and writer living in London

Joshua Sofaer is a full-time proselytizing missionary with Jews for Jesus in New York City.

This is the story of what happened when they met

They met to see if they had anything in common except for their name.

Part documentary, part autobiography, **Namesake** is at times humorous and at times provocative. It asks us to imagine what our lives would have been if our parents had called us something else instead

The Jewish Museum

Thursday 13th May, 2004 at 7.30pm

Raymond Burton House
129-131 Albert Street, London NW1
Box Office: 020 7284 1997

Home

Friday 14th May, 2004 at 8pm

1A Flodden Road, London SE5
Box Office: 07957 565 336 or lgihome@aol.com

Swiss Church in London

Saturday 15th May, 2004 at 7.30pm

79 Endell Street, London WC2H
Box Office: 020 7836 1418

All tickets £5 Pre-booking advised at all venues but is essential
at The Jewish Museum and Home



Reverse image:
Sofaer General Merchants
and Commission Agents,
Rangoon, Burma c. 1908

The following enclosure is an audio CD documentation of the performance

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